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## Cambridge's beekeeping societies

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## Snow White is rotten right to the core



pg.28

No.929  
Friday 29th November 2024  
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The Independent  
Student Newspaper since 1947

# VARSITY

## C4P: 'We're back'

Pro-Palestine activist group  
pledge more disruption after  
encampments return



## Vet students could be sent packing

**Sophie Denny and Felix Armstrong**  
Senior News Editor and Associate  
Editor

Veterinary medicine students could be transferred to other universities to complete their clinical studies amid concerns that the course may be stripped of its accreditation.

In a letter sent from Academic Secretary Dr Michael Glover to Professor Mark Holmes, Head of the Department of Veterinary Medicine on November 14, it was revealed that "the current business plan for the delivery of clinical services was not viable and that the recurrent deficit of more than £1M could not be sustained".

An interim report from the review group convened in 2023 suggested a "major investment in clinical and teaching facilities" would be needed from the University to develop a sustainable model for veterinary education, but that "the University cannot make that commitment at this time".

Due to this, the report suggested that the clinical elements of the VetMB course could be delivered via external partnerships. This would mean that students might be transferred to a different university for the final three years of their degree after receiving their BA from Cambridge as part of "an articulation agreement with another Veterinary School".

Another suggestion included estab-

lishing "partnerships with private sector external clinical service providers" to enable students to complete their clinical training years. However, the General Board has not yet been able to assess the viability of these other delivery options for clinical experience.

**50**

The number of standards that the course failed to meet, out of 77

**£1,000,000**

The current deficit faced by the department

The letter also stated that "the General Board has given consideration to the possibility of closing the VetMB course to new entrants from 2026," with a separate email sent to admissions tutors on Monday (25/11) informing them that "a decision has been taken that no deferred offers should be made for entry in 2026".

The proposed changes would still "require an extended period of teaching on current students," during which time the University would remain committed to providing clinical training.

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## 6% BME pay gap

The pay has now increased for the third consecutive year

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## Ending the spiking silence

Varsity investigates how Cambridge is tackling the crisis

Features Page 14 ▶



## V Michaelmas, Week 6

# Editorial

Whether this is your first Michaelmas or your last, you're likely to find a little bit of yourself reflecting on all the things you did or didn't do, the moments you loved, those you regretted, and part of you might even wish you could do it all over again. End of term is always bittersweet, even more so for us in our final year, as the looming threat of adult life draws ever closer.

We find ourselves mourning the loss we anticipate once we no longer have the honour of putting together a paper with a team of creative, hard-working and diligent students, and for a readership that we deeply care about. But speaking to an Editor of *Varsity* from the days when InDesign was a distant dream, we're reminded that the end of our editorship is a sign of the continuing legacy of *Varsity*.

We write often in our editorials about trying to serve our readers, and offer them truths about this city and University that might otherwise have gone uncovered. We also want to acknowledge, though, that we ourselves owe a

huge debt to this paper. The legacy that previous Editors have left us, whether recent or from decades back, is something which will stay with us forever; we're reminded of our participation in a large community of people who have worked to bring the stories that matter to the students and residents of Cambridge. We're reminded of the power of this journalistic community.

*Varsity* allows us to represent what we believe in, and do our very best to represent the student body too. Our role is often a challenging one; being Editor of *Varsity* is synonymous with long hours, constantly extended to do lists, and, once every two weeks, a startlingly adrena-

line-fuelled rush to send off a paper by 6pm. We'll miss editing this paper more than we can say, no matter how proud (and a little relieved) we are to pass it on. It's okay to feel conflicted at endings, so if Michaelmas' end brings about mixed feelings for you, then hold tightly to those parts of it that make it so hard to let it go. Cambridge blesses us with the most incred-

ible opportunities and experiences, and just because they all must end, it doesn't mean that we can't take the people and memories with us, whatever we choose to do next.



## Alice Mainwood & Grace Cobb Editors-in-Chief

MICHAELMAS 2024

▼ JESSICA LEER

## Week in Pictures



▲ Emily Dickinson event at Clare chapel



▲ Snow White Christmas panto at the ADC



▲ Late at Kettle's Yard



▲ 'Christmas in Cambridge' on Parker's Piece



▲ Students occupy Greenwich House



▲ Clare-O: Clairo tribute event at Clare Cellars

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

◀ Photos: Leo Kang, Chris Wordsworth, courtesy of Kettle's Yard, Holly Hardman, Felix Armstrong, and Ezra Izer.

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# Pro-Palestine protesters pledge more disruption

**Wilf Vall, Anuk Weerawardana & Hannah Gillott**  
Senior News Editor, Deputy News Editor & Associate Editor

Pro-Palestinian students are threatening to disrupt graduations this weekend after a new encampment was set up on Senate House Lawn earlier this week.

Cambridge for Palestine (C4P) held a rally outside Senate House and the Old Schools faculty yesterday (28/11) as part of a national day of workplace action.

Students were joined by the University and Colleges Union (UCU), alongside representatives from the National Education Union, and the Unite union.

During yesterday's event, one member of C4P said they will disrupt graduations this weekend if the University does not agree to their demands. They claimed it would be justified and in honour of "all the Palestinian students" the University's complicity in "genocide" had affected.

This comes after the group occupied Senate House lawn on Wednesday, claiming that they would not leave until the University answered their demands to re-establish the original working group, disclose their investments in arms companies, and drop the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

Student members of C4P also occupied Greenwich House, a University administrative building, last Friday (22/11), in an attempt to disrupt the financial management of the institution.

C4P have also stressed the need for "public accountability in the form of an open hall" between Cambridge's Investment Management team, administrators, and additional members of the University community to make "meaningful steps towards divestment".

The group previously disrupted general admission graduations in June this year after occupying Senate House lawn, leading to the ceremonies being moved to Downing College.

Michael Aberton, President of the Cambridge UCU branch joined students in criticising the University students in criticising the University, stating that he was "livid, and disgusted that we have to stand out again [...] and that students are having to occupy again".

Protesters later marched from Great St Mary's to Sidgwick Site, Cambridge's campus for humanities, where increased University security was positioned. The march was followed by a teach-in at Little Hall in Sidgwick Site.

During teach-in, an academic from the University of Gaza spoke on Cambridge's role in the "scholasticide" in Gaza, commenting on the destruction of all 12 universities in Gaza following attacks from the Israeli military. He claimed that "as a leading university in the world" Cambridge needed to "take action against the genocide".

He explained that Cambridge does not "need to bring people here," instead



▲ TAMAMI ONO  
Students occupy Senate House

urging the University to "support the resilience and steadfastness of the academics and the students in Gaza".

A student from Trinity College also spoke at the teach-in. He stated that the College is "complicit" in the "Israeli bombardment of Gaza". "It's been rather shocking how slow the progress is [and the] apathy that the College Council has shown," he added.

He also criticised the College's relationship with Elbit Systems, a company which produces 85% of the drones and land-based equipment used by the Israeli military, which he claimed "are used to bomb houses, murder children, women, and men".

Support from the UCU comes after the group issued a statement in support of Cambridge for Palestine's demands earlier this week. The statement claimed that Cambridge was "profiting from war crimes and genocide" and called on the University to cut ties with companies associate with Israel.

The UCU also called on the University

to "reinstate the 12-person task force" that was originally established over the summer as a part of a promised arms review.

The University had agreed to review their policy on arms investments this summer following months of pressure from C4P, including an encampment outside King's College.

This encampment was first set up in May, calling on the University to disclose its holdings in companies associated with Israel and to subsequently divest from them. C4P had stated they would not leave the site until their demands were met.

Following an agreement with the University, the encampment disbanded on the basis that the University would set up a student-led taskforce to aid in reviewing investments, that would conclude its work by.

However, the University has since been accused of "watering down" the proposals, after they delayed the review's findings until the end of the academic year, and allegedly changed the structure of the taskforce to only have two students.

# BME academics face pay gap of almost 6%

- BME academics earn £4,282 less, on average
- The pay gap has now increased for the third consecutive year
- UCU: this is an 'urgent scandal'

**Charlie Rowan**  
News correspondent

There is a mean annual salary gap of 5.67% between black and minority ethnic (BME) and white academics at Cambridge, as of October 2024.

Freedom of Information requests reveal that, on average, BME academics annually earned £71,733.75, compared to £76,015.79 taken home by their white colleagues.

This comes as universities are facing increasing pressure to tackle ethnic pay gaps across the higher education sector, following a report that claimed the institutions "perpetuate institutional racism".

A spokesperson for the Cambridge University and College Union (UCU) told *Varsity* that race and pay gaps are "a scandal which needs urgent attention" and that "the race pay gap overall is likely to be much worse than these figures suggest as the vast majority of BAME staff at the University are concentrated [...] in the lowest paid roles," being non-academic jobs.

According to the University's most recent annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) report for 2022-23, published on 31 March 2024, there was a 5.33% hourly ethnic pay gap across all staff, rather than just academics. This marked the third consecutive year that the ethnic pay gap across all staff had increased, from 2.9% in 2020-21 and 4.3% in 2021-22.

These reports also highlight an unequal distribution of bonuses between BME employees and their white colleagues. In 2022-23, 83.6% of white staff received a bonus, compared to only 71.0% of non-white employees.

Maroof Rafique, the Students' Union's BME Officer condemned this gap, stating that it was "concerning yet unsurprising, given Cambridge University's tokenistic approach to EDI initiatives [...] showing that BME staff are disproportionately disadvantaged compared to their white counterparts".

"These widening gaps, mirrored in disparities in student awards, underscore systemic inequities that require urgent and robust action. For too long, these disparities have been mischaracterized as anomalies rather than structural failings rooted in unconscious biases, inequitable hiring, and a culture that marginalises BME individuals. Cambridge must go beyond performative gestures and implement measurable strategies, beginning with decolonising hiring practice," he continued.

Rafique is currently working on a

decolonisation report, which aims to confront Cambridge's "deep-rooted complicity in the legacies of colonialism," by "ensuring that decolonisation is embedded in every aspect of University life".

In the most recent EDI report, the University said "the figures remain low" and that "some fluctuation year on year is expected, as the composition of our workforce changes."

The University further stated that it is "committed to the principles of equal pay for work of equal value, freedom from discrimination, and recognition and reward of the University's staff as its greatest assets."

In 2023, the University drew up a Gender Pay Gap Action Plan which committed to measures such as diversifying recruitment, promoting flexible working options and advertising jobs with pay ranges. There is currently no equivalent plan to address the ethnic pay gap.

This news comes two years after the *Daily Mail* reported that two-thirds of Russell Group universities have paid BME staff less than their white peers.

A government report from 2023 sought to explain the different reasons for ethnic pay gaps: "Lower pay among a particular ethnic group may be because that group disproportionately applies for lower-paid, more junior positions in an organisation."

"On the other hand, it could be because the company does not provide adequate progression opportunities for people from that ethnic group."

In October, a black Cambridge scholar sued the university for discrimination, claiming that he wasn't shortlisted for a job interview because of his skin colour.

A spokesperson for the University of Cambridge told *Varsity*: "The annual Ethnicity Pay Gap for the Academic University, published every year as part of our Equality and Diversity Information Report, includes all staff employed at the University of Cambridge, not only academic positions. The pay gaps reported in the Equality and Diversity Information Report adhere to statutory requirements and use the calculation methodology based on hourly pay as outlined on the government's website."

"Therefore, the figures obtained via the Freedom of Information request may not accurately reflect the Ethnicity Pay Gap published for the Academic University. The University continues to work on ways to eliminate ethnicity pay gaps, including attracting, recruiting and welcoming a more diverse workforce, and enhancing career development," they said.



## News

# Veterinary course has failed 50 standards



▲ EVE MCEWEN

Continued from front page

However, the letter does acknowledge that this would “clearly be challenging to deliver”.

This comes after Holmes, alongside Prof Jon Simons, the acting Head of Biological Sciences, told *Varsity*: “We will do everything we can reasonably do to support students to complete their course and receive full accreditation.”

They said: “The department has been

acting on the recommendations since being informed in the summer and this work will now be accelerated.”

The Veterinary School has been asked to provide a response to Dr Glover’s letter in the form of a “letter of intent” for the General Board to consider at its meeting on the 18th of December”.

This letter of intent should “outline a commitment to take forward work to develop an alternative option for clinical course delivery in partnership with

one or more other clinical providers, or to indicate that this effort will not be pursued.”

Acknowledging the short time frame given to respond to the letter, Glover explained that “the Board is anxious to bring clarity to the way forward as soon as possible.” However, on Monday, the Students’ Union president said that improvements to the course are yet to be made because “everything in Cambridge moves at a snail’s pace”.

An email sent to veterinary students on Monday (25/11) revealed that the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) had graded the course with “conditional accreditation”. Unless the department improves by the RCVS’s next visit in September 2025, it runs the risk of losing its accreditation entirely.

The course failed to meet 50 of the RCVS’ 77 accreditation standards, although the regulator did note “strong research led and clinical teaching” and “excellent students”.

Holmes told students this week: “We will do everything which we reasonably can to avoid that eventuality, as well as put appropriate mitigations in place for your education if it did.” He

also wrote: “Our immediate concern is for your welfare”.

News of the department’s £1 million deficit comes after the Cambridge’s board of scrutiny projected that the University’s overall deficit for 2023/24 will stand at £53 million. There is “no clear understanding of what has happened or why,” the internal watchdog said.

This report cited evidence of “a lack of budgetary control” at Cambridge, warning that this projected deficit suggested “structural” problems in the University’s finances.

Cambridge has been informed that they must make cuts to spending, with the University telling *The Telegraph*: “The focus of reducing costs will be on finding efficiencies and reducing duplication across our operations to allow funds to invest to maintain our position as a world leading university.”

A spokesperson for the University of Cambridge told *Varsity*: “As part of this process of improving standards, the University has also conducted its own review which explores all viable options. The Department is developing a strategy for implementing the changes needed.”

## Caius will not fly Transgender Pride flag

Jack Lawrence  
News Correspondent

Students at Gonville & Caius College failed to pass a vote to fly the Transgender Pride flag by four votes, following controversy over the issue in recent years.

Students voted to fly the Progress Pride flag, the Tibetan flag, and the national flags of Wales, and the Republic of Ireland. But, not enough students voted to approve the flying of the Transgender Pride flag.

Caius flag day votes, which were adopted by the College in 2022, allow Gonville and Caius Student Union (GCSU) members and MCR members to vote for flags to be flown for the day. Nominated flags must be approved by at least one third of voters.

Students did vote to approve the flying of the Progress Pride flag. The Progress Pride flag represents “the diverse identities within the LGBTQ+ community,” including transgender individuals.

Caius has previously come under criticism for their fellows’ controversial decision not to fly the Pride flag in 2022. They later backtracked on this decision after an open letter from the GCSU garnered the signatures of hundreds of students and staff, including the senior tutor.

Gonville and Caius College and the GCSU were contacted for comment.

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# Uni and Jesus partner with company accused of environmental crimes

**Charlie Rowan and Elizabeth Bratton**  
News Correspondents

Jesus College and the University of Cambridge have announced a partnership with Brazilian biomaterials company Suzano, despite the firm being accused of mistreatment of indigenous communities and environmental greenwashing.

According to a statement from Jesus College, the Suzano Scholars Fund will be used to “support education and research into areas including the conservation of biodiversity, enhancing business sustainability, and the restoration of natural habitats in Brazil and beyond”.

The fund is made up of a £10 million donation that will be split with £7.85 million to Jesus College and £2.15 million to the University of Cambridge.

The funding will be offered to postgraduate Brazilian nationals studying Cambridge degrees related to “the environment, ecology and conservation”, alongside academics at the University’s Conservation Research Institute.

Suzano is the largest paper manufacturer in Latin America and is reportedly facing up to 262 civil and environmental legal proceedings. Indigenous communities in Brazil have accused the company of land grabbing, water contamination, and pesticide-related harm,

among other social and environmental grievances.

According to the Family Farm Workers Union (SINTRAF) in Anapurus, North-Eastern Brazil, around 70% of the land acquired by Suzano originates from land grabbing. The company owns over a million hectares of eucalyptus plantations across Brazil and reportedly plans to double that in the next decade.

The company rejects these claims, and claims that its practices of planting new trees provides net benefits in terms of biodiversity and climate change.

Members of one “quilombo” — a word used to describe communities which were originally formed by African people who escaped slavery — in the Southern Brazilian region of Volta Miúda have said that Suzano’s plantations have led to lower groundwater levels in their territory, with agrochemicals polluting their waterways.

Suzano also plans to build a new road in the region, which community members argue will destroy their traditional paths and gathering sites.

One community member told DW in 2023: “Suzano commits environmental racism. It disregards and disrespects the history of our people, our black ancestry and the suffering we carry and experience. They are ignoring us. Our right to be consulted has been violated.”



▲ LUCAS MADDALENA

An article published by *Mongabay* earlier this year also detailed allegations that quilombo community members in the region of Sapê do Norte had suffered medical problems because of “toxic crop dusting” by Suzano.

Members of this community reported physical sensations, such as itching, stomach issues, and headaches as a result of the pesticides. One resident’s retina was reportedly detached after the “poison” landed in her eye.

A report published by the *Alert Against the Green Desert* network also showed that Suzano emits approximately 4 million tonnes of CO2 on an annual basis, which is more than the annual carbon emissions of 32 countries.

Aracruz Celulose S.A., a manufacturer acquired by Suzano in 2009, has also been accused of dictatorship-era human rights abuses against indigenous groups. Before its arrival in Sapê do Norte, approximately 12,000 quilombola families lived there. Now, this is less than 2,000.

Environmental group Organisation of Radical Cambridge Activists (ORCA), have accused Jesus and the University of greenwashing over the partnership, stating that they are “horrified to hear that the university is entering into yet another toxic partnership.”

“The Landless Workers Movement (MST) and Indigenous People have re-

sisted Suzano in Brazil for over a decade, and we stand with them against this harmful, greenwashing company,” the group continued.

Jesus has faced other allegations of greenwashing, following a talk held on 19 November, called “In the Business of Conservation.” The talk was run by a former member of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), a current Executive Director at the WWF, and a biodiversity consultant.

Following the event, ORCA accused Jesus College of being “complicit in WWF’s violent colonial conservation project” who they claim use “a violent colonial form of conservation that involves removing traditional stewards of the land”.

A spokesperson for Jesus College said: “Suzano’s £10 million donation to Jesus College and the University of Cambridge underwent thorough due diligence by both organisations.”

“The gift will be used to further the education of Brazilian nationals studying for a postgraduate degree connected to the environment, sustainability, ecology and conservation, and to support education and research into areas including the conservation of biodiversity, enhancing business sustainability, and the restoration of natural habitats in Brazil and beyond.”



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## News

# Cambridge uses Prevent to 'restrict' pro-Palestine protest, say students

**Felix Armstrong**  
Associate Editor

Student campaigners have claimed that the counter-terrorist Prevent scheme is used to "restrict" pro-Palestine protest in Cambridge.

The University's Amnesty International society tabled a motion at this week's Students' Union (SU) student council meeting to voice concerns that the scheme leads to "violations" of free speech and the right to protest.

Prevent is a national counter-terrorism program which legally requires public bodies, including schools and universities, to report people who may turn to extremist activity.

The motion claims that the scheme "prevents freedom of assembly, acts as a tool of student surveillance, and unfairly targets Muslim demographics".

The group argued that "in recent times, Prevent has restricted student activism, especially pro-Palestine activity".

They added: "At the University of Cambridge, this has included aggressive responses from colleges, the cancellation of events, and the policing of events". The campaigners, speaking at the SU meeting, claimed that colleges have used the scheme to cancel and police student events. They also said that

Prevent enables colleges to be "aggressive" towards political societies.

The proposers of the motion quoted an Amnesty International report which claims that people "have been referred to Prevent for expressing non-violent beliefs".

"Such referrals interfere with rights to freedom of expression and thought," the report states.

The student council motion was tabled by the SU's BME officer, Maroof Rafique. He told *Varsity* that the campaign plans to educate students on the "implications" of the scheme.

Rafique said: "The Prevent strategy has been widely criticized for its discriminatory impact, particularly on Muslim communities, and for stifling free expression."

Regarding pro-Palestine protests, he added: "There have been instances where expressions of solidarity have led to Prevent referrals, raising concerns about the policy's impact on legitimate political activism and freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly."

"The Cambridge SU BME Campaign has expressed solidarity with Palestinian protests and has called on the University to divest from arms companies," he said.

The Amnesty report also claims that the scheme led to "interventions in public events, often stifling discussions on

topics like Islamophobia and Palestine."

The report, published in July, is titled: "This is the thought police: the Prevent duty and its chilling effects on human rights."

Amnesty claims that Prevent results in "students and staff self-censoring" on campus, citing a report by the government's Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) which claims that "fear and confusion" over the remit of Prevent "was a factor limiting free speech on campus".

The report also includes a case study about Cambridge, describing a Palestine Society event on the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement in 2017. Dr Ruba Salih was removed as the event's chair by the University's Prevent Referral Group.

But, according to the report, the University later apologised to Dr Salih, saying that their decision "evoked strong and understandable concerns within our own community and beyond relating to academic freedom".

Cambridge SU already opposes Prevent, according to a policy titled "students not suspects". This resolution claims that the scheme "has been used to create an expansive surveillance architecture to spy on the public and to police dissent".

"The implementation of the Prevent Duty not only isolates Muslim students but undermines the civil liberties of other groups such as environmental, political and humanitarian activists," the SU policy says.

Last month, the daughter of murdered MP David Amess claimed that the Prevent scheme is not "fit for purpose".

Amnesty Society's comments came following months of pro-Palestine protest at Cambridge. On Wednesday, student group Cambridge for Palestine (C4P) re-occupied Senate House lawn, calling for student involvement in an ongoing review of arms investments.

A spokesperson for the University of Cambridge said: "The University firmly supports its students' rights to freedom of speech and protest, all within the law. The University places great importance on balancing its legal obligations under the Prevent duty with its commitment to protecting freedom of speech and academic freedom."

*The Home Office was contacted for comment.*



▲ AMI KHAWAJA

Cambridge for Palestine (C4P) has been active in Cambridge since May, when the student group set up its first encampment on King's Parade.

# Staff revolt as Uni plans to allow students to graduate with unmarked exams



▲ LOUIS ASHWORTH

**Felix Armstrong**  
Associate Editor

Over 50 staff are staging a revolt over Cambridge's plans to mitigate future marking boycotts, over concerns that the University views students as "consumers".

Following a review of its exam ordinances, the University proposed changes which it hoped would soften the impact of future marking boycotts. But, 54 academic and admin staff have signed a motion which calls for a vote on some of these recommendations.

Dr William Astle, a biostatistics lecturer and membership secretary of the Cambridge UCU, tabled the motion over concerns that new measures would allow students to graduate with their exams unmarked.

The University's review of exams comes after last year's Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB), in which members of the University and College Union (UCU) refused to assess student work at 145 UK education institutions.

The strike action, taken during a dispute over staff pay, left students in "limbo" according to an open letter signed by 1,400 Cambridge students.

On Monday, University council, Cambridge's executive decision-making body, decided to put Astle's proposed changes to the recommendations to a vote among staff.

Dr Astle told *Varsity*: "The Council and General Board have proposed to change the University's exam regulations to allow students to graduate before their exams have been classified."

"They have done this under pressure

from the Office for Students, which views students as consumers," claimed Astle. The Office for Students (OfS) is the independent body which regulates higher education in England.

He also claimed that the recommendations should have automatically been put to a staff vote, because they are "equivalent to a temporary measure" which was rejected by voting staff in 2023.

But, a member of Christ's College wrote that they support allowing students to graduate unmarked, because it eases "students' isolation" and improves the student "experience".

When the temporary measure was proposed last year, multiple staff raised concerns that the plans could put the University in breach of its registration with the OfS.

Writing in response to these new recommendations, Gillian Evans, a philosopher and Cambridge Emeritus Fellow, stated that, in 2023, the OfS was alerted of a possible breach of its regulations as a result of the proposed MAB mitigations.

This rule requires universities to "operate in accordance with [their] governing documents".

In its response to staff comments, University council revealed that the OfS has "taken an active interest in the progress of this review". *Varsity* reached out to the OfS, who confirmed their interest in the review.

*The University of Cambridge and the Office for Students were contacted for comment.*

**Comment: "The marketisation of higher education should not mean we settle for less"**  
*Matthew Taylor*

For better or worse (worse), this University understands itself to be a business. The marketisation of higher education is by no means a problem unique to Cambridge but its manifestation here is often rather uncomfortable, perhaps because there is such little attempt to conceal it. On the cover of this newspaper, you will find a story about a course at risk of shutting down in large part because it is unprofitable. If you flick to the back, an uncertain future for a full-Blue sport is outlined, a consequence of the fact that the University would rather pay £600,000 to local councils than build a swimming pool which would benefit town and gown alike but cost them money to run. Of course, two weeks ago *Varsity* broke the news of Trinity backtracking on its divestment promise, a move at odds with the desires of staff and students across the University and that seems painfully out of touch, especially when its endowment is reported to be over £2bn. Time and time again, Cambridge is telling us that it cares more about its bottom line than its community, and it seems to be on the precipice of giving up any notion of pretending otherwise.

The Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB) last year was supposed to be bad. Staff came together across the country to say that the conditions of academic institutions had reached a crisis point. To soften the impact of future boycotts is to take a step in the wrong direction; communicating a disinterest in the lived experiences of our community.

The present threats to the higher education sector in this country are serious and I do not think anyone would wish to deny that. At Cambridge, though, we are lucky – there is money enough for the delivery of research, teaching and the nurturing of our wonderful community. Any attempt at convincing us otherwise feels like how I imagine it felt to watch *The Royal Family* documentary in 1969 as Prince Phillip attempted to convince the nation that the richest family in the country were struggling to make ends meet. Many of us come here after attending state comprehensives which are almost by definition underfunded. Being here is undoubtedly incredibly rewarding and affords us many opportunities. For that I am endlessly grateful, but that does not mean we should settle for less than what this University is capable of.



# Students slam down over autism talk

Lili Fairclough  
News Correspondent

Students have criticised Professor Simon Baron-Cohen's "binary presentation of autistic and neurotypical people" following a talk on autism.

During the talk, hosted by Trinity and Newnham psychology societies last week, Baron-Cohen discussed an autistic adult, saying: "Those who know him say he is more like a four-year-old in terms of his cognitive development."

At the beginning of the talk, the professor emphasised the "really important concept" of neurodiversity, quoting Temple Grandin's "I am different, not less" slogan.

However, one psychological and behavioural sciences student said: "I'm not sure the sentiment of 'different not less' was maintained throughout."

Another student said that "his ideas are presented as so binary, like a false dichotomy, and this misrepresentation is so damaging".

Other students complimented the talk, saying it was "engaging and well-done".

Baron-Cohen is head of the University's Autism Research Centre.

He discussed how the 'Systemizing Mechanism' found in autistic people enabled "generative invention" throughout human history. The poster advertising

the talk said that society owes a "huge debt to autistic people for the contribution that their genes have played".

Baron-Cohen is known for his Spectrum 10k project, which asked 10,000 autistic people and their families to submit DNA samples for testing. He has faced criticism for his work from Stop Spectrum 10k, who were set up to challenge his work, claiming there is a "historic mistrust" of the researcher within academic and autism advocacy circles.

Baron-Cohen dismissed claims that his research could be used for eugenic purposes, saying that eugenics is "part of the past".

Professor Baron-Cohen said: "I am committed to the view that autism is both a disability and a difference, but that autistic people should be treated as equal, not less, and we should always strive to promote inclusion and reduce stigma towards autistic people."

"We are aware that some autistic people are not enthusiastic about genetics research, whilst others are very supportive of it. This reflects the diversity of views among any community, including the autism community," he added.

Baron-Cohen also said: "None of our results are binary. They show overlapping bell curves between autistic and non-autistic people."

Newnham Psychology Society and Trinity Psychology Society were contacted for comment.

# Revision! At the rave

Wilf Vall  
Senior News Editor

Cambridge hosted a rave based revision session on West Hub last night (28/11), in an attempt to "revitalise creativity, boost productivity, and balance work with fun".

The rave consisted of five 25-minute study sessions, each followed by an exhilarating ten-minute silent disco, with students alternating between locking in on essays and letting loose on the dancefloor.

This was employed to channel Pomodoro revision techniques, which break work into intervals, typically 25 minutes in length, in order to ensure individuals do not get exhausted by working periods.

Utilising dance and electro music is a break away from Pomodoro orthodoxy, which typically relies on a low-tech approach. The original Pomodoro technique employed an analog kitchen timer to split time into working and relaxing sections, rather than using a rave.

The event was incredibly popular with students, being sold out shortly after tickets became available.

An advert for the event claimed that the rave would "revitalise creativity, boost productivity, and balance work with fun" and in doing so aid students in their working through the benefits of dance.

The event was then capped off with an hour of straight raving between 7.30 and 8.30 pm, to allow students to blow off steam and celebrate the conclusion of an essay crisis.

One student, who attended the rave, told *Varsity* that they hoped it would alleviate their workload concerns, stating that they believed the "raw power of EDM will charge me through my essay crisis".

"When I'm in the absolute trenches of Chaucer I just feel like I'll be able to better channel my creative prowess with a boogie break every now and then. In my mind there's no better way to address the workload crisis than incorporating all the best aspects of MASH into my revision".

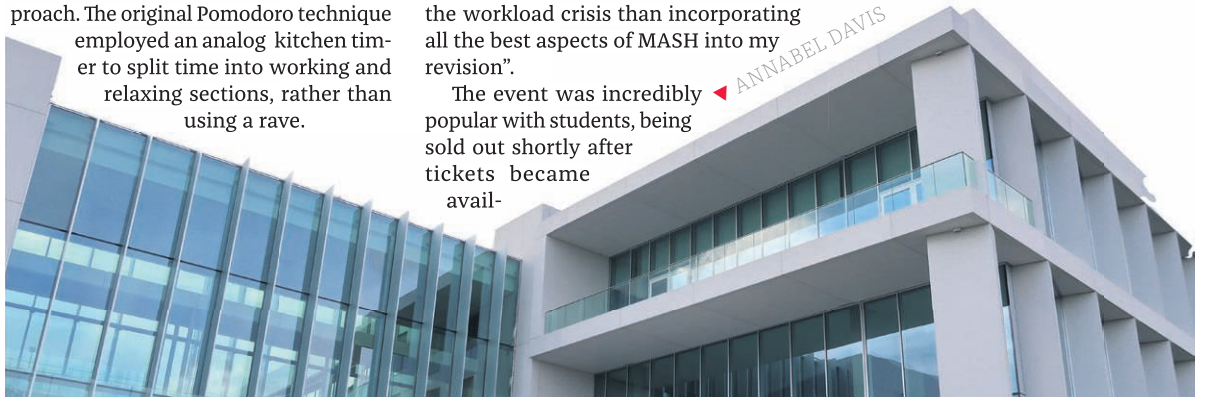
The event was incredibly popular with students, being sold out shortly after tickets became available.

able. It took place in the East Rooms of the University's West Hub, which is the centre of the West Cambridge innovation site.

This comes at a time when Cambridge is looking into ways to revolutionise their teaching, after they were found to have an issue with the University council and general board acknowledging a "culture of overwork" at Cambridge in July 2024.

Following this, the University's watchdog called for the institution to take action and offer more than just "warm words" in the face of excessive workloads.

A spokesperson for the University of Cambridge told *Varsity*: "This is a one-off event combining the popular Pomodoro study technique with a bit of end-of-term fun."



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# News

## Hannah Fry to join Maths faculty

Professor Hannah Fry, award-winning science presenter, will be joining Cambridge as the first Professor of the Public Understanding of Mathematics in January. Fry, who has hosted popular science programmes including the *Secret Genius of Modern Life*, has said she is “really looking forward to joining the Cambridge community”. “It’s so exciting to be in an environment where every single person you speak to is working on something absolutely fascinating,” she said.

## Singing librarian finds fame

Everyone knows there is just one rule when it comes to libraries: no talking. But what about singing? Lara Harris, a postgraduate student at Cambridge has gone viral on TikTok for posting her singing announcements to customers. “I thought it would be funny if at closing time, instead of making the normal announcements, I sang it,” Harris told the BBC. The postgrad student, who hopes to become a musician, wasn’t expecting such a huge reaction, “but people seem to love them,” she said.

## Newton’s wealth ‘intimately connected’ with slavery

Sir Isaac Newton had close personal financial ties to the transatlantic slave trade, a new book has claimed. The Cambridge alumnus’ theory of gravity revolutionised science, but his personal wealth came from “gold from Brazil mined by enslaved peoples,” the book’s author, Nat Dyer, told *The Guardian*. After leaving the University in 1696, Newton took up a job at The Royal Mint, where he spent nearly three decades and amassed great personal wealth.

## Troubled water puts environment ‘at risk’

Cambridge is in deep water, environmental regulators have warned, after raising serious concerns about Cambridge Water’s ability to meet local demand. Three environmental regulators have sent a joint letter to the company calling for “immediate action” to make sure that demand is met without causing environmental damage. Some of the concerns highlighted included a worry that Cambridge Water is putting the environment “at risk,” as well as failing to meet goals around reducing leakage.

## Around town



### Evie Selby delivers the local Cambridge news

#### It’s ‘Christmas in Cambridge’ time!

Parker’s Piece has been transformed into the North Pole for Christmas for all to experience some festive joy. The mini Christmas village includes ice skating (for those brave students willing to risk embarrassment in front of their friends), a Christmas market, plenty of food and drink, festive games and an illuminated observation wheel. The village is replete with all the classic festive decorations including trees, fairy lights and baubles. If you’re lucky, you may spot a bearded man in a red hat too! ‘Christmas in Cambridge’ will be in place until January 5th and is open seven days a week.

#### Mayoral candidate promises promotion of light rail for Cambridge

Former Conservative MP Paul Bristow has promised to promote light rail and rule out congestion charges for Cambridge after he was chosen as the Conservative candidate for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough mayoral election. The election is due to take place next year. Bristow represented Peterborough for the Conservative party from 2019 before losing his seat to Andrew Pakes for Labour in July. Bristow told the *Cambridge Independent*: “What we’re going to do is get Cambridgeshire moving.” “This is a package that will deliver for people,” he said. In August, the ‘Isaac Newton’ light rail line was forecasted to cost £700m.

#### City centre car park reopens

On 26 November, a new Cambridge city centre car and cycle park opened after the site experienced a major redevelopment, reports *BBC Cambridgeshire*. The new facility, located on Park Street, has replaced the former car park in the area which has been closed since January 2022. The new site includes 223 underground car parking spaces and secure parking locations for 239 bicycles, 10 oversized bicycles and 20 motorcycles. The Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources at Cambridge City Council stated that “The opening of Park Street represents a real milestone for the council.”



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## University watch



### Evie Selby rounds up student news from around the country

#### Nottingham accused of 'reverse-engineering' slavery links

An aristocratic family has claimed that Nottingham University have been "reverse engineering" historic connections to slavery, following a report stating the university profited from the connections. The report stated that the 7th Duke of Portland received 'social capital' from his slave-owning ancestor. The Duke's ancestors helped to found the university and was one of the most significant benefactors. The Duke died in 1977 and relatives have claimed there is no evidence of any inheritance of wealth as a result of slavery in their branch of the family. The family have been patrons of Nottingham University since its establishment in 1881.

#### William Hague made Oxford Chancellor

William Hague, Lord of Richmond, has been named as the new chancellor for the University of Oxford. The former Conservative party leader defeated four rivals to gain the position. Only 24,900 out of Oxford's estimated 350,000 eligible voters cast ballots. Hague becomes the 160th holder of the position, 800 years after it was first filled. Hague studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Magdalen College, matriculating in 1979. He will serve a ten-year term as the titular head of the University and will support Professor Irene Tracey, the vice-chancellor for Oxford.

#### Leicester announces £8 million job cuts

The University of Leicester has announced that it will be undergoing job cuts in order to save £8 million a year. There has been no stated figure for how many roles this will equate to. This news, which comes along with a freeze on replacing staff that have left the university, has received significant criticism from the University and College Union (UCU). The UCU has expressed concern about the "stresses and strains on the whole university community" as a result. University of Leicester staff were informed via email that compulsory redundancies could not be ruled out as a possibility.

# John's budgeted £1m for male-dominated choir while abolishing mixed group

**Omar Burhanuddin**  
Investigations Editor

The mixed-gender St John's Voices (SJV) was axed last year despite the College budgeting nearly £1 million for its male-dominated choir, *Varsity* can reveal.

In the 2023-24 academic year, St John's College spent £972,288 on its College Choir (SJCC). By contrast, the recently disbanded SJV received only £48,516.

**£972,288**

The total cost of St John's College Choir 2023-24

**£48,516**

The total cost of St John's Voices 2023-24

SJV was axed in March, after the College decided to redirect the "significant resources" spent on the choir to "new opportunities" in the College's musical community. Despite this financial reasoning, this investigation finds that the College was spending over 20 times more on its College choir than on the SJV.

Funding disparities between the SJV and SJCC have widened since 2022-23 when the College spent over 17 times more on the SJCC.

While the SJCC began admitting women and girls as full members in 2022, it is still male-dominated as the choir does not permit women to join as sopranos. There are currently only three women in the choir.

A successor choir to SJV, called the Cambridge University Schola Cantorum, was launched last month. The new choir includes former members of SJV, along with singers from other colleges, with the group claiming it will be a "truly University-wide ensemble".

The *Varsity* investigation also revealed large disparities between the funding for college choirs.

At just shy of £1,000,000, SJCC received the greatest amount of funding. Trinity, Clare and Christ's all spent over £100,000 on their choirs, when tour expenditure is accounted for.

By contrast, St Edmund's College Choir received just £150 in collegiate funding during the last academic year. Robinson College Choir was not allocated a budget, but instead received funding for its tour to Milan through contributions from donors and choir members themselves.

Some colleges, such as Jesus, do not separate their choir and chapel maintenance budgets. As a consequence, it is not possible to identify how much was spent on the individual choir alone.

In addition to regular chapel services, Cambridge college choirs frequently undertake tours, both nationally and internationally. The expenditure for these trips can be covered through a variety of means, such as contributions from colleges and choir members themselves,

as well as alumni gifts and concert ticket sales.

A tour by the Christ's College Choir to New Zealand in July 2024 cost £61,147.61 overall. Tours by the Trinity College Choir to Switzerland and France and Clare College Choir to the United States cost over £40,000 and £30,000 respectively.

The funding disparities between different choirs can have a financial impact on their members. While some college choirs do not seek contributions from their members for tours, this is not the case for all. Choir members at Christ's, for example, were each asked to contribute £600 for their tour to New Zealand some of which were met by College bursaries.

Some choir members expressed frustration at these inequalities. A member of the St Catharine's College Choir told *Varsity* that "it is frustrating to hear that there's such financial disparities

between different college choirs.

"We rehearse on average four times a week, which I think is a much larger commitment than what people expect a 'lesser known' college choir to have," the choir member continued.

**£150**

The budget for St Edmund's College Choir 2023-24

A member of the Downing College Choir echoed these sentiments, telling *Varsity* that "Downing feels smaller and more broke than other choirs, which was most apparent when we went to Magdalene for a formal this term after doing a joint evensong. The Magdalene choir got the formal for free, but the Downing choir paid."

This investigation comes after female choral scholars at King's criticised their College for a lack of investment in the mixed-gender King's Voices choir, compared to the all-male King's College Choir.

While King's College Choir singers can receive £70 per concert, £300 per studio recording session, and are provided with free long-term accommodation at King's, singers at the King's Voices perform without compensation. Frustration at these imbalances has led some women to leave the King's Voices.

*The budget for the Christ's College Choir includes funding from students.*

*A full list of figures were not obtained for Peterhouse, Trinity Hall, and Churchill, Corpus Christi, Fitzwilliam, Jesus and King's Colleges.*

*Downing and St John's Colleges were contacted for comment.*

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## Interviews

## STUDENT HUSTLER TO CORPORATE BOSS

# BBC Director General Tim Davie on the media giant's future

**Isabella Dowden** speaks to the BBC's head on the challenges of navigating a rapidly changing media landscape and his surprising stint as a student nightclub owner

As job titles go, 'Director General' is undeniably formidable. Sitting opposite me in a parlour room at the Union is Tim Davie, the seventeenth Director General of the BBC. A long-standing champion of a free press, a beacon of impartiality, and a tool of soft power, the BBC is also a magnet for controversy, perpetually entangled in debates over its funding, its content, and its politics. However, relaxed and charismatic, if Davie feels the extraordinary weight of responsibility that comes with holding one of the most scrutinised but privileged media jobs in Britain – and, by extension, the world – he certainly does not let it show.

On paper, Davie's role is to oversee the creative, operational, editorial leadership of the BBC. As for what this means in practice, he breaks it down into two main roles: CEO of the organisation, and Editor-in-Chief of its content. "You can over-complicate my job," he explains. "At the end of the day, the BBC is all about content. It's about the news stories we report. It's the dramas we produce. It's the factual programming. My job is to keep the standard of those things incredibly high."

The ability to juggle competing responsibilities is something Davie honed during his student days at Cambridge. He read English at Selwyn College, graduating in 1989. The first in his family to go to University, Davie overall reflects on his time at Cambridge with gratitude and humility. "I just thought it was an incredible privilege to be here. I was one of those kids who walked around thinking 'I'm so lucky.'" While he admits he "wasn't top in the class", he speaks warmly of the opportunities that Cambridge afforded him: As it happens, it appears Davie was something of an *omni-hack*, "hustling away doing all kinds of things".

Alongside being social secretary of the well-loved Selwyn Snow Ball, he was also president of his JCR – "the one and only time I've ever been elected by popular mandate!", he quips. It was also during these years that Davie's business-savvy attitude took root, albeit in an unexpected – and slightly unorthodox – setting: "I had a very good friend who was really into music, and we ended up forming a nightclub," he reveals. Sultan's was housed in the base-

ment of a restaurant in the city centre, becoming known for its "very early house music – we're talking in the 1980s here!". Davie fondly recalls the enterprise's modest success: "We used to take home a bag of cash at the end of a good evening. We did get student grants at the time, but let's just say that made life a little easier!" Perhaps it is little wonder that Davie was recruited by Procter & Gamble as a marketing trainee while still a student, setting him on a path that would eventually lead to the boardrooms of global business at PepsiCo, and in 2020, the helm of the BBC.

Davie's personality – his normality, even – is almost disarming. But make no mistake: his relaxed demeanour is underpinned by a fierce drive, clear ambition, and razor-sharp attention to detail. He selectively chooses his moments to unleash this during his Union Q&A, critically but calmly dismantling audience challenges on issues such as BBC Verify, changes to long-running programmes such as *Newsnight*, and accusations of political bias stemming from his unsuccessful bids as a Conservative council candidate in 1993 and 1994. He applies the same measured approach as we turn to discuss the challenges facing the BBC today.

One such challenge is how to navigate a modern media landscape characterised by social media and streaming services. "It's an amazing thing," he reflects. "When I was at Cambridge, I had no mobile phone, no email, and the BBC had two out of four available TV channels." But while some have concerns about the BBC's relevance in the future, Davie is strikingly optimistic about adapting to the

times. "We need to make sure that we are out in TikTok and YouTube [...] rather than assuming you're definitely going to come and sit down in a chair and watch an hour's television news at the end of an evening," he says. "I've got a story I want to tell, but I don't want to force it onto you in one particular way. I'm less concerned about the medium; I'm more concerned about the message."

Easily destroyed but not easily generated, trust is vital for the functioning of the BBC. Upholding the BBC's reputation of truth and impartiality has always been a challenge, but it has become much more difficult in the age of online echo chambers and filter bubbles. Again, rather than diminishing the BBC's place, Davie views this as a sign that its voice is even more important than before. "[People] don't just want polarised media. They don't just want people shouting lies at each other. Yeah, they might have fun watching those clips, but at some point, the BBC can provide a safe space where people know we have clear editorial standards." He reveals that during July's general election, BBC Verify received unprecedented levels of

traffic to its website, which he argues is evidence of people asking

“The BBC can provide a safe space where people know we have clear editorial standards”

“what are the actual facts?”

However, the BBC's fact-checkers are up against an ever-intensifying onslaught of fake news, disinformation, and 'cognitive warfare'. "We're in an age where there are very serious threats to democracy," Davie warns. "Seventy-five percent of the world does not have a free press. We are seeing state actors spending hundreds of millions of pounds trying to affect how you think." Against this backdrop, Davie sees the BBC's independence as a vital safeguard. "One of the amazing things about the BBC is that it's independent of government, and we can ask politicians tough questions. Everyone is accountable to the public." That accountability, he stresses, includes himself: "My own staff in the newsroom can interrogate me, and I think that's incredibly important."

Davie has recently called for increased funding for the BBC's World Service, in order to counter the rise of propaganda by malign powers. "I can't ask the UK population to fund our 42 language services forever. We need funding to do it. It needs investment. And I think it's really important [for] the UK Government [to] invest in what we stand for as a country around the world, which is free speech and the ability to find truth – that is what strong journalism is." I cannot help but notice his reflections echo those of legendary Watergate journalist Carl Bernstein, who famously described the virtue of journalism as searching for "the best obtainable version of the truth."

The BBC's first Director General, John Reith, laid the foundation for the Corporation with the enduring 'Reithian values' of "inform, educate, and entertain." These principles remain at the heart of the BBC's mission. If Tim Davie were to define his own guiding ethos, however, it might be "ferocity" – a quality he consistently champions as vital for pursuing truth and steering the BBC through the complexities of the modern media landscape. His ability to embody that resolve will not only shape his legacy but also determine the BBC's relevance in a rapidly evolving world.







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## Drinking socs will never be inclusive

As a woman of colour at the University of Cambridge, I've been asked, to my surprise, to join a drinking society. Being at Lucy Cavendish means that it is not as intense, and I haven't heard any horror stories in comparison to the older colleges. However, every single time, I politely decline. I've come to the realisation that these institutions are fundamentally incapable of providing the genuine sisterhood and support they claim to offer.

The core problem lies in the very nature of these exclusive clubs. The process of who makes it into the society is inherently problematic. And it's no coincidence that these "select" groups almost always align with the dominant, privileged demographic - white, middle-class, privately educated individuals. To be fair, there are individuals within these societies who are not that, and come from more diverse backgrounds and attempt to challenge the status quo. The issue lies in the fact that the core foundation of these institutions is fundamentally rotten. Despite how well-intentioned one's efforts are, the deeply-entrenched structures and exclusive mentalities cannot be overcome through isolated actions alone. No matter how many black, working-class, or otherwise marginalised women these societies invite to join their ranks, the systemic issues will persist.

Sesame, a notorious venue on Hills Road, has become emblematic of these deeply problematic social dynamics. Here, interactions are not spontaneous or genuine but engineered to create uncomfortable, performative experiences. One of my friends has told me how one of the events is handcuffing women to men - sexualising women's participation and reducing complex hu-

man relationships to heteronormative performance pieces. I often hear that people dread these events, highlighting a fundamental disconnect between the societies' self-perceptions and the lived experiences of their members. What is presented as social bonding and 'girlie fun' is in reality a structured environment that fundamentally compromises personal dignity and safety. The narrative surrounding drinking societies needs a radical reimagining, and the main way to do that is to denormalise this culture.

These drinking societies are not just exclusive in terms of socioeconomic and racial backgrounds, but also in their adherence to narrow, heteronormative ideals. Queer, transgender, and non-binary individuals often find themselves on the margins, with little to no representation or space for their experiences and identities. They are simply not a space for anyone who does not fit the mould of the quintessential "St Paul's girl".

There are so many things at Cambridge to offer that do not include interacting with societies that have historically excluded people of colour, or those from a disadvantaged background. A recent find of mine is Cambridge Dance, a monthly-ish dance night which is probably the best night out in Cambridge. I eagerly await the next one, however the point being made here is that there are so many amazing, empowering nights out that do not revolve around doing weird fines and being chained up to a boy.

Though Cambridge may not rival the nightlife of Bristol or Manchester, we have so many thoughtfully curated events open to everyone. When people defend drinking societies, part of the appeal likely lies in the sense of belonging they create. And I understand that appeal; I, too, felt a sense of validation

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The core  
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at being invited to one of their events. Even if I haven't completely shaken off the fear of missing out, that sense of affirmation resonates. These societies feed on the desire for social recognition - a feeling that is undeniably powerful, but one that can also be fulfilled in inclusive, welcoming spaces.

What frustrates me most is when people see these issues clearly yet continue to participate. This is the weakest form of activism: wanting change without embodying it. Criticising a system while showing up each week undermines any real allyship.

Until these drinking societies are willing to confront the deeply rooted biases and power structures that underpin their very existence, any attempts at inclusiv-

ity will ring hollow. They may be able to point to a few "diverse" members, but the reality is that these individuals are often expected to assimilate and conform to the dominant culture, rather than being truly embraced and empowered.

I've come to the realisation that my vision of sisterhood is fundamentally at odds with the exclusive nature of these drinking societies. The swaps are quite regressive in my opinion. Being tied to a man and encouraged to get with someone is far deeper than 'just a bit of fun'. So, when I'm invited to join a drinking society, I will continue say no. I want more people to do the same, considering the implications before accepting an invite.



▼ RUYING YANG

Fatima Zahra Yusuf



## What we're not taught: how to get a job

When I tell people that I do Management Tripos, the median reaction is some mixture of morbid curiosity and pity. The modal question is "Why?"

The short answer is "to get a job". In my final year studying English, while doing the Tragedy paper and muddling along with my dissertation, I applied for the usual handful of jobs (hello Fast Track my old friend), got the usual 100% rejection rate, and began the usual panic.

In the end, I found myself slouching towards unemployment, and would have met that fate if I had not made my last-minute handbrake turn towards business school.

My question is: why is this trajectory so normal? Most of my recent graduate friends are either doing a Master's, or not sure what they are doing. They do not appear to be an unrepresentative sample. According to High Fliers Research, fewer than one in three of those graduating

“  
Where  
was this  
lecture  
when I  
was a  
fresher?

from British universities last year did so with job offers.

There are plenty of factors one can blame for this, but there is one in particular I want to dwell on: Cambridge doesn't do enough to help us find employment.

At the start of this year, I attended a lecture by the careers service at the business school, as a compulsory part of my course. It was full of useful gobets, but what stood out to me was just how many opportunities I had missed without knowing they existed. Then I thought, where was this lecture when I was a fresher, not a fourth-year on borrowed time?

Most colleges and faculties are desperate to help their students excel in their studies. Yet it is almost University policy to allow naive undergraduates to potter unprepared into the graduate job market.

It would be unfair to allege that the University as a whole is indifferent to students' prospects. Our careers service

is, in my experience, excellent - which only makes it more egregious that students are not shoved more aggressively in their direction.

Nor can academics be blamed for not understanding a job market that they almost by definition did not enter. I am not alleging malice. The University does try, the careers service is good and my tutors and DoS have always been nothing but kind and supportive, and have taken an interest in my future career. No one is to blame.

Yet still, student after student graduates into unemployment. It is tempting to think that the job market sorts them into the right box in the end. I fear that the result of not telling students the truth - that they need to start thinking about their careers at 18 - is a waste of the potential which an education here is supposed to cultivate.

So what should Cambridge do differently? I have three ideas.

First, every subject should get a lec-

ture from the careers service in Michaelmas each year, explaining the graduate job process and offering specific advice according to subject and year.

Second, tutors should be given careers-focused training. They should warn students that a vague plan to go into '[insert relevant ludicrously competitive industry here]' is unlikely to succeed without immense effort.

Third, academics should drop any animosity they feel towards private sector employment. One of the more pernicious consequences of the view that "selling out" is shameful is that it discourages students from taking their employment prospects seriously until it is too late.

Cambridge's motto is "hinc lucem et pocula sacra" - from here, light and sacred draughts. Cambridge should remember that mission, not simply to create educated people, but to send them out into the world and thus, hopefully, make it brighter.

Hugh Jones





Sam Martin

# I'm from Canada: Britain should learn from our mistakes on assisted dying

Today (29/11), Labour MP Kim Leadbeater will introduce a bill in the House of Commons to legalise assisted dying for terminally ill people. In her defence of the coming bill, Leadbeater writes that “We should give people facing the most unbearable end to their life a choice about what that end is like.”

Predictably, all hell is now breaking loose. Those on either side of the issue are being called puritans, fearmongers, and fools, but the most bitter insults from the anti-assisted dying crowd claim that pro-assisted dying groups are leading the UK down the “Canadian path.”

As a Canadian, I've been watching this debate with a sense of doom. It's been bad back home: since introducing medical assistance in dying (MAiD) for terminally ill people in 2016, Canada's been systematically expanding its eligibility criteria. Last month, the Associated Press reported that many MAiD deaths could be attributed to poverty and mental illness. One woman with a disability who requested a wheelchair ramp for her house said she was offered MAiD

“A woman who requested a wheelchair ramp said she was offered assisted suicide instead

instead. Another man, who had experienced housing insecurity, cancelled his assisted death after his rent was successfully crowdfunded. While most MAiD cases still involve those suffering from terminal illnesses, it is a fact that Canadians with nonterminal conditions have sought medically assisted death because of socioeconomic reasons. This is a problem for advocates of assisted dying. Assisted dying can have legitimate and limited medical use, but it does not represent unconditional and unambiguous progress: it can also provide cover for ableism and exacerbate class inequalities in deadly ways. Canada is the sorry proof of this.

Canada's plan to expand MAiD eligibility to those solely living with mental illness, set to come into effect in March 2024, was delayed until 2027 amid warnings from healthcare professionals. In August, a group called Dying with Dignity filed an application in an Ontario Court claiming that the government of Canada was, in this delay, being discriminatory. This line of argument is particularly concerning to me, and I have seen

it reflected in the UK despite frequent assurances that the UK's eligibility will not expand beyond the scope of terminal illness. We must resist this framing: just because mental illness is as real, or valid, as physical illness, does not mean that they have equivalent causes, effects, or ‘cures’. I fear that the rote repetition of “mental health is real health” among those who use that slogan to expand eligibility criteria in the Canadian mode is a pretence for a movement that seeks to further ostracise and harm those with disabilities, rather than a genuinely progressive stance.

The assisted dying ‘debate’ is dominated by bad-faith advocacy groups, who often have links to historical eugenics movements on the one hand and misogynistic, anti-abortion, religious fundamentalism on the other. An incredible amount of money is being spent to produce reports that trickle into editorial columns that invariably adopt the slogans of other struggles for and against bodily autonomy. Mired in a semantic swamp of our own making, we are now struggling to make policy decisions with

clear heads. The conversation around Canada's dying policy is particularly bleak: an article in *The Wall Street Journal*, subtly titled ‘Welcome to Canada, the Doctor Will Kill You Now’, uncritically parrots a study from an organisation called the Ethics and Public Policy Centre. This vague, neutral-seeming name masks a deeply conservative attitude, and links to anti-abortion movements in the United States.

The UK must throw off its draconian prohibitions on assisted dying. However, to dismiss concerns about the creeping influences of class and ableism, demonstrated in Canada's system, as baseless could have grievous consequences. At the very least, we must develop a new lexicon of dying here – a lexicon that sheds loaded language grafted on from other struggles for bodily autonomy. If we don't, we risk, at best, repeating Canada's circular and muddled moral debate. At worst, we risk acceding to the accusations that assisted dying is not just a necessary medical provision but a classist, quasi-eugenicist movement lying in wait.



Maria Eduarda Paixao

# Hundreds of miles away – but feeling closer to home

A friend recently told me that being at Cambridge feels like a strange eight-week gap from her ‘real life’ back in Spain. It is a curious feeling being far away from your home country. As international students, we often talk about the ways we compromise to conform to the norms set by British culture: perhaps we change our accents, start calling fries ‘chips’ and chips ‘crisps’, slowly pick up British slang and, because of the burgeoning reality-TV culture, learn who Dani Dyer is. The paradox often left undiscussed is how many of us feel closer to our culture while being geographically so far away from what we once called home.

In Brazil we have this saying “*sai do Brasil, mas o Brasil não sai de mim*”: ‘I left Brazil, but Brazil has not left me’. Typically jested after a family member returns from travelling abroad – when you leave Brazil,

you become more Brazilian. I suspect this saying applies to all international students to some degree. Personally, I feel like I keep hammering on about Brazil to everyone I meet. It almost feels performative. The saying never proved truer: ‘you only know you truly love something, when it's gone’. I had never given Brazil this much thought before I left. Simple gestures like giving people two kisses as greetings were natural, and having a ‘*cafézinho da tarde*’ was a long-standing tradition. This is the beauty of different cultures, each with their own traditions and customs, but, for international students far from their cultural comfort zones, this engenders an internal conflict. The question becomes, do I mute my former self to ‘fit in’ or do I become a louder version?

Maybe it's a result of our feelings of alienation, not fully understanding certain English customs. Like a ‘*tatu-bola*’ we hide in our shells, not in the sense of being shy but rather shielding ourselves from partaking in certain English practices in fear of losing a piece of our culture; of becoming ‘*gringo*’. It might be silly but I, for one, refuse to eat beans on toast no matter how good it supposedly is. In a bid to still maintain our connection with home we overcompensate, mentioning *our* country every five seconds, clinging on to a past which is no longer coherent with our present.

This rings true for national students too, when you go home it is no longer the

same place you left. You're not the same person that left it. For international students, some of us cope by becoming louder versions of ourselves; more Brazilian, more Colombian, more Spanish or Indian. Clinging

to the familiarity of our home culture in fear of accidentally changing too much and feeling alien when we finally go back for the Christmas break.

The other route we can take in this social minefield is turning down the dial, muting our former selves to conform. As international students we adhere to the actions previously explained, changing accents, using British slang and so forth. In exchange, we make friends and socialise with

“The bitter-sweet fact is that we'll

never fully culturally assimilate, but that is the beauty of it

other students. Yet college students are not the only ones that mute themselves to conform. The recent US elections are an extreme case of this

where, as per Richard Luscombe in *The Guardian*, Trump's victory was largely fuelled by support from Latino and Hispanic voters, primarily men. A significant factor in this was that Latinos in the US feel some shame towards their heritage, distancing themselves

from it, under the guise of being worried about slackened border controls and the ‘bad’ Latinos coming to the US. There is a controversial psychological phenomenon for this, ‘the mutt complex’, which takes on a racial dimension, delineating how countries in Latin America feel their cultures and histories are less than the ‘West’. So, they mute their heritage and culture to appeal to the cultural hegemony they are inserted in. This is, therefore, not a mere college experience – it's universal. Alternatively, perhaps the other side of the dial, of constantly explaining how things are back at home, is a way of representing our underrepresented countries in a positive light.

How should international students manoeuvre through this complex cultural landscape? The only way is to embrace the bittersweet fact that we'll never fully culturally assimilate, but that is the beauty of it. It means we'll never truly feel so far from home. At the same time, we cannot be afraid to adapt new customs to our own: we will not be the same people we were when we got here, culturally speaking. Even if that means becoming a little more ‘*gringo*’. If we still maintain our links to our homes (inevitably we will by making the sacrosanct journey home at the end of term), we should not be afraid of change, nor should we be of not completely fitting in.

◀ MARIA EDUARDA PAIXAO





## ENDING THE SPIKING SILENCE

## ‘The more we know, the more we can deal with the situation’

When spiking numbers soared post-COVID in Autumn 2021, students in Cambridge and across the UK with fears of new needle-spiking methods took action by boycotting their local nightclubs. Today, discussion of the issue in Cambridge and the wider media has died down. This doesn't mean spiking has stopped happening. A Cambridge University Students' Union (CUSU) survey carried out in Michaelmas 2023 found that 23% of students had been victims of spiking and 70% either had been a victim, witnessed a spiking incident, or knew someone who was spiked. Defined as giving extra alcohol, or prescription or illegal drugs, to someone "without their knowledge or permission", spiking is a prosecutable crime for which people can be imprisoned for up to ten years. I spoke to students who have been spiked in Cambridge, as well as those trying to tackle the issue.

Olivia was enjoying a post-Revs Taco Bell with her friends when she accepted a free vape from a girl. Her friends watched as she "started convulsing"; their reactions "were like what the hell". Stringing an arm over each of her friends' shoulders, they carried her home. Carmen was geared up for a big night out with her friends when she started displaying symptoms of being overly drunk - struggling to stand and unable to control herself. For both Olivia and Carmen, there were "clear tell-tale signs", such as their eyes rolling back, and Carmen was unresponsive. The symptoms, typically very similar to those of being extremely drunk, are difficult to recognise, particularly when awareness of the issue is limited. If placed in a similar situation now, Olivia still doubts spiking would be her first assumption. After taking her to a nearby college, Carmen's friends attempted to look after her, trying to contact the porters' lodge for help only to be told they were busy dealing with another separate incident. Lola, too, criticised her porters' lodge, suggesting they "tend not to take you seriously" and simply assume a student is drunk. Although not always effective, according to Olivia, the extent of "localised forms of help" in Cambridge is still something to be grateful for, meaning immediate support points are generally available.

Nevertheless, targeted anti-spiking initiatives from colleges are few and far between. Marielle, a third-year student at King's College, questioned why the issue is "just not talked about" and that colleges "don't really see the relevance". While co-chairing King's Affair last year, Marielle noticed the lack of anti-spiking measures among May Balls in general. She conducted a report that resulted in

securing college funding for anti-spiking provisions (reusable drink-cover scrunchies) for the Affair. After setting up an anti-spiking working group to continue the strategy, the provisions were extended to all bar events and were included in freshers' matriculation packs. Although her proposal to spread the initiative across colleges was denied, Marielle hopes having initiatives in some colleges will help raise awareness. Talking about spiking can also remove any awkwardness, stigma, or shame around it - both the incident itself and taking precautions against it. "It's cool to protect your drink," asserts Marielle. The more people do, and the more drink covers are provided as an option, the less they stand out.

Upon waking up after the incident, Olivia was left feeling "embarrassed, if anything". Ashamed that her new friends had seen her in that state and that she had willingly accepted the spiked item unaware, Marielle noted how easy it is to "gaslight yourself into thinking you are at fault". Everyone agreed that recognising that they were not to blame was the best way to move forward. Feeling "scarred" about the prospect of being drunk, Olivia took a month off drinking after the incident. Now that time has passed, she feels "detached" from it, and Carmen contrastingly felt fairly unperturbed, brushing her experience of being spiked aside as an anomaly incident.

As the three people I spoke to didn't remember anything from the night, they had to reckon with the incident in the ensuing days. Carmen felt "annoyed" upon waking up; her physically "slower", sluggish state after the incident meant she struggled to get things done. The pressurised environment of Cambridge isn't an easy one to look after yourself and properly recover in. After visiting the GP, Emma was assured she was physically okay, but in terms of how she felt mentally, there "wasn't really any care for how I was doing". She mentioned the incident to her supervisor and wasn't offered any help or show of concern, a sense that their remit was academics only. None of the people I spoke to reported being spiked to the police. Carmen's Uber driver filed a police report out of concern, and she woke up to multiple calls but didn't end up pursuing the report as she was busy and didn't feel she had the time: "I wanted to just let it go". For Olivia, reporting it to the police "didn't cross [her] mind".

A Freedom of Information request has revealed that in Cambridgeshire, an average of around 100 spiking cases are reported annually. However, reporting rates are low: DrinkAware conducted a survey which found that over 90% of vic-

tims don't contact the police as they don't see the need for it.

I spoke with the police sergeant for Cambridge City Centre, Kevin Misik, on the issue of spiking. He urged victims to report the crime, emphasising that the difficulty of identifying perpetrators shouldn't be equated with an inability to do anything about it or a pointlessness of reporting it. "The more we know, the more we can deal with the situation": identifying venue hotspots enables him to "thoroughly investigate" their approach to spiking and ensure proper safety measures and training are in place. While during the spiking crisis of 2021 "no one really knew what to do", now the sergeant feels confident most venues are doing "lots of work" on instructing staff how to properly watch out for and deal with the offence.

For both Olivia and Carmen, it was being with trusted friends that ensured their safety. The intangible nature of the offence left the people I spoke with feeling unsettled or disoriented, especially when individuals often don't remember it happening. People tend to spike in crowded, foggy settings, dark, crammed venues packed with individuals not in full capacity. Pinning down the crime is difficult: people often don't know when it happened or have any evidence to show for it. With Cambridge's intense drinking culture and the symptoms of spiking often mimicking those of heavy drunkenness, those who know your normal behaviour are far more likely to pick up on something out of the ordinary.

None of the people I spoke to recalled spiking being mentioned in Freshers' week or year-round, or any advice offered. Some colleges have brought in measures. A couple of years ago, Hughes Hall had three instances of spiking reported at their college bop, prompting the College to introduce 'awareness training' for staff on the issue. Trinity Hall has drink covers available at their bar. But these anti-spiking provisions are rare. The 2023 SU survey found that nearly two-thirds of colleges have no anti-spiking measures in place. Any support and resources that are available, Olivia suggested, could be made more visible. When I asked her if she had any advice for people, Olivia reflected: "actually tell yourself that it's not your fault". No matter what happened or how you might feel, "If everyone's telling you it, believe it".

All names of the spiking victims have been changed.

- GEORGIE MIDDLEMISS



# Honey, honey, how you keep bees...

Bee-autiful! Delve into the world of Cambridge's beekeeping societies with **Sadia Batool**

In almost every conversation I've had about beekeeping, I've received the same response: one which is both eager and inclusive of TikTok's 'Texas Beeworks'. Clearly, there exists a kind of curiosity concerning honeybees. For this reason, I've taken it upon myself to try and translate this enthusiasm from screens to general routines. So, whether you seek to celebrate or save the bees, this article should offer you greater clarity. I've spoken to three beekeepers - Sofia Dartnell, Nynke Blömer, and Theo Von Wilmowski, each president of their college beekeeping society - to learn about the benefits of beekeeping and how honeybee enthusiasts might get involved. As a member of St John's Beekeeping Society, it will come as no surprise that I too will attest to their brilliance!

St John's, Darwin, and King's are the first colleges to keep bees. They are kept on college grounds, where gardens provide them with plenty of foliage. Apiarists and gardeners are not the only ones thinking about bees. Take John's groundsman, Keith Ellis, for example. Nynke describes how he makes sure to "keep pesticide use on the playing fields closest to the apiary to an absolute minimum."

Each of these societies follows a similar schedule that

involves weekly hive inspections in the late spring and the entirety of the summer, and a harvest at the very end of the summer or the start of autumn. There may even be two harvests depending on how much honey is produced. During the harvest, we remove frames from supers (essentially boxes storing multiple frames), remove any beeswax from said frames, and place them into an extractor to be spun. Honey then trickles down to the bottom and is strained before being jarred and sold in a buttery near you.

I have unsurprisingly grown quite attached to the bees. As sentimental as it sounds, you realise just how much time and energy is required to sustain the health of a colony and produce a fair amount of honey. Having any item we want readily available at the press of a button makes attending activities that slow our perception of production particularly important. This way, we begin to understand just how valuable a singular jar of honey is. So, when asked to produce a jar of honey, we as beekeepers respond with casual amusement and notice of the next harvest in a year's time.

By now, it's obvious that the bees require an enormous amount of attention and attending regular hive inspections means that you become actively involved in maintaining their health. Sofia details how rewarding this experience is for her. Given how young each of these beekeeping societies are (none older than five years), it is essential that students become and remain interested in sustaining their health, happiness, and habitat on college grounds.

The social element of beekeeping is not to be forgotten! Sofia mentions how Darwin College runs a series of crafting events in the winter. They have so far



SADIA BATOOL

made beeswax lip balm and have even brewed their own mead. John's also runs a few equipment-building events. Regardless of the kind of events being run, I underscore Theo's point that beekeeping is ultimately an opportunity to engage with both nature and fellow honeybee enthusiasts, all while getting away from the library for at least a small portion of the week.

As for safety, attendees are expected to be in full gear around the bees and under the supervision of a committee member. If this is not enough to reassure you or quell any fears, I recommend attending the harvest in which there is no real direct interaction between attendees and bees.

If bees benefit us, college butteries and local ecosystems, then they deserve at least some consideration. We have all been accused of being swept away by the whirlwind that is Cambridge, so engaging in an activity that helps slow things down will certainly help. Consider how the friends I dragged along with me to John's summer harvest have agreed upon the activity being incredibly wholesome and collaborative. Should you feel inclined to start your own college beekeeping society, both Theo and Nynke would be delighted to expand the Cambridge Beekeeping Network!

“We can begin to understand just how valuable a singular jar of honey is



Having attended regular hive inspections for over a year and two harvests,

EMILY LAWSON-TODD

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## Science

# Seven is the magic number?

From horoscopes to leap years, **Bibi Boyce** explains how Babylonian astronomy shapes our lives today



**Ruby Jackson** gets you up to date on some of the latest scientific research

### Volcanoes on the dark side of the moon

Scientists in Beijing have analysed rock samples from a lunar mission that suggest there were once volcanoes on the dark side of the moon.

The half of the moon not visible from Earth, referred to as the lunar farside, is very different in its geology from the nearside, and has been much less extensively explored. During a 53-day-long mission earlier this year, the Chang'e 6 lander used a robotic scoop and drill to take almost 2kg of samples from the basalt planes on the moon, which are known as maria.

The researchers used a technique called Pb-Pb dating to analyse these samples, which exploits the fact that some forms of lead undergo radioactive decay over time. Calculating the ratio between the amount of radiogenic vs non-radiogenic forms of lead in a sample can therefore give information about its age.

The composition of these samples suggests that volcanism occurred on the lunar farside more than 4.2 billion years ago, and persisted for more than 1.4 billion years. Understanding more about the lunar dark side could help shed light not only on the history of the moon, but the origins of the solar system itself.

### Fat cells have a memory

Scientists have found evidence that the fat cells of obese individuals undergo long-lasting changes to their DNA that could explain why many individuals find it so difficult to maintain weight loss.

A group of researchers from Zurich performed single-nucleus RNA sequencing (snRNA-seq) in adipocytes (fat cells) from humans and mice. They found that genes were expressed differently in the adipocytes from individuals who were or had previously been obese, compared to individuals who had never been obese. The group also found that experiencing obesity caused epigenetic changes in the mouse adipocytes, meaning there were additional chemical alterations to the

DNA or the proteins around which it is stored, and that these epigenetic changes were not reversed when the mice lost weight.

The scientists believe that these differences offer a mechanism for the long-term persistence of an epigenetic "obesogenic memory". Furthermore, these differences in mouse adipocytes seemed to result in the cells growing faster and absorbing nutrients more quickly than cells from mice that had never been obese, which resulted in the formerly obese mice gaining weight more quickly. This could explain why many individuals find it so difficult to maintain weight loss (often referred to as the "yo-yo" effect).

### Photothermal chip detects diseases within 30 minutes

Engineers have developed a compact chip that can detect multiple diseases simultaneously using a technique called reverse transcriptase-loop-mediated isothermal amplification (RT-LAMP).

Currently, the technology used in many point-of-care tests (POCT) for diagnosing disease have significant downsides. Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests are highly accurate, but require expensive apparatus and skilled personnel, making them expensive and impractical in many situations. Lateral flow tests are very quick, but often compromise on sensitivity and specificity. The chip, however, developed by researchers from the Harbin Institute of Technology in China, uses a photothermal enzyme, meaning its activity can be driven by LED illumination or even sunlight focusing on the samples, making it much cheaper and more portable. The chip also detects samples within just 30 minutes, making it practical for use in healthcare settings.

The researchers demonstrated that the technology could detect hepatitis B, hepatitis C, influenza A and HIV on a single chip, with an accuracy of 95%. This could represent an exciting new technique for the instant detection of many diseases.

Ever felt like cursing whoever came up with the seven-day week? Why choose an awkward prime number that seems to lack any correlation to the average 30-day month and 12-month year? Well, look no further, as those responsible for all three of these values are identified here.

With the naked eye, five planets (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn) are visible from Earth. Combining this with the sun and the moon, you have seven celestial bodies, and ergo a seven-day week. The Babylonians believed that the night sky was the channel of communication between the heavens and the earth. In order to honour this gift, they paid very close attention to what was going on above our heads and allowed it to dictate practically everything from time-keeping to religion. Often heralded as the beginnings of true civilisation, their astronomical culture has had a significant impact on modern day-to-day life.

They took meticulous observations over extended periods which allowed them to identify emerging patterns that could benefit the whole civilisation. The sky varies on a yearly cycle, meaning certain stars would appear before seasonal weather patterns, which the Babylonians could use to determine their agricultural cycle. These celestial 'events' were seen as omens, and if the floods and dry spells could be predicted based on them, why not other things? Alongside records of the sky, smaller events such as political and social ones began to appear in the cuneiform tablets.

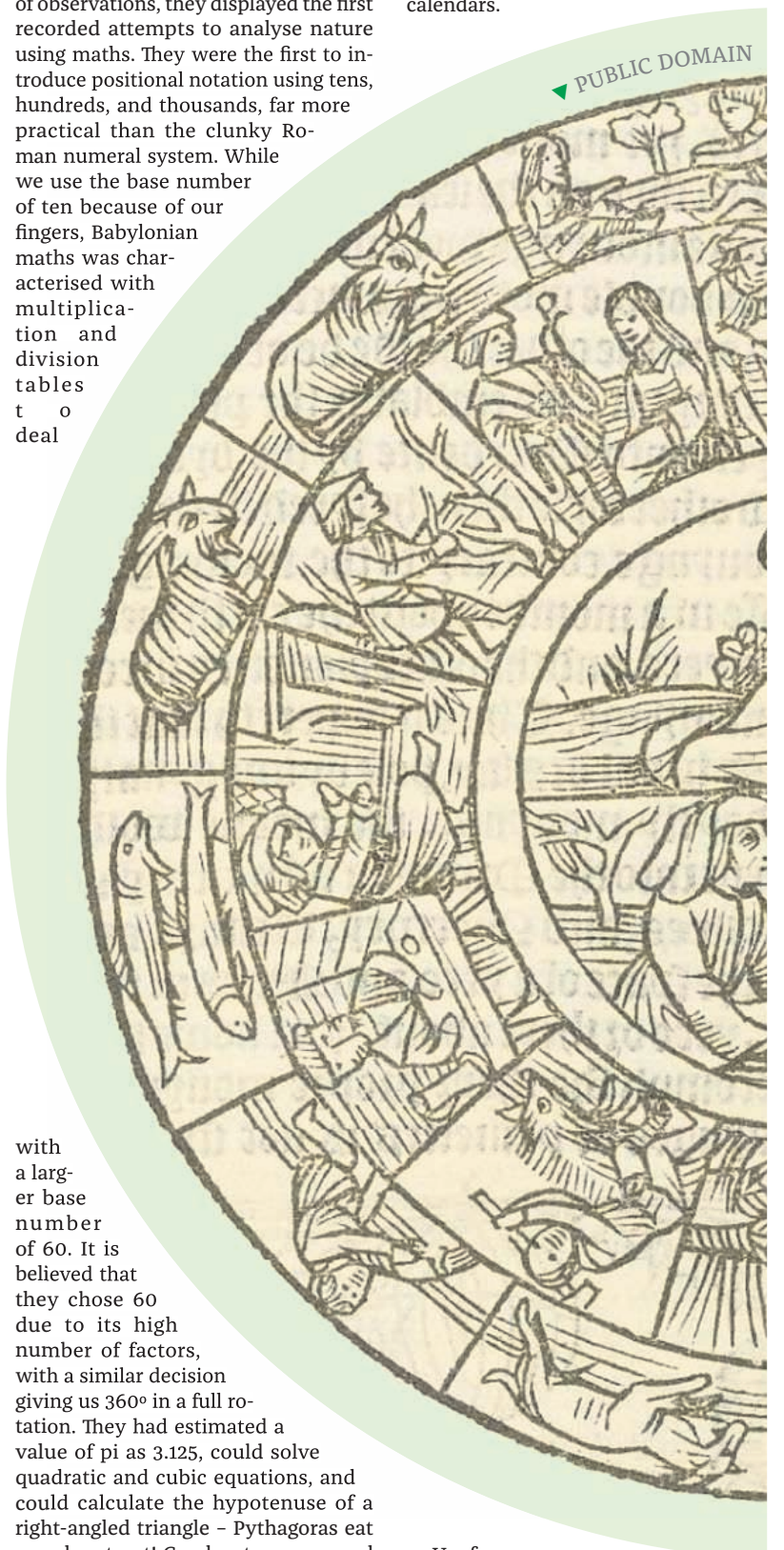
“*The Babylonians believed that the night sky was the channel of communication between the heavens and the earth*”

Taking this hypothesis to the extreme, they attempted to predict the course of their own personal lives and their personalities. Essentially, the Babylonians allowed their fates to be written and read in the stars, and hence the practice of astrology was born. In 410 BCE, the position of the planets was noted at a child's birth and the tablet reads: "things will be good for you," marking the first known horoscope. It's not a stretch to imagine a standard Babylonian horoscope probably read slightly differently to the typical modern day one - more maize, less "expect big changes in your love life". They are also responsible for not only the zodiac but also the identities of several of the signs, with Capricorn being the

earliest named and noted constellation.

Love it or hate it, our lives are unavoidably saturated with maths, and we owe several intrinsic ideas to the Babylonians. Through their extreme number of observations, they displayed the first recorded attempts to analyse nature using maths. They were the first to introduce positional notation using tens, hundreds, and thousands, far more practical than the clunky Roman numeral system. While we use the base number of ten because of our fingers, Babylonian maths was characterised with multiplication and division tables to deal

year. The study of the moon has provided us with the roughly 30-day month structure as one lunar cycle is around 29.5 days, and this influence formed the basis of both the Jewish and Christian calendars.



with a larger base number of 60. It is believed that they chose 60 due to its high number of factors, with a similar decision giving us 360° in a full rotation. They had estimated a value of pi as 3.125, could solve quadratic and cubic equations, and could calculate the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle - Pythagoras eat your heart out! Greek astronomer and mathematician Hipparchus is often credited with the invention of trigonometry, but evidence has exposed that the majority of the numbers he based his theories on came from Babylonian tablets. In conjunction with the seven-day week, we can thank the Babylonians for our whole calendar. Their choice of base number also provides us with 60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour, 24 hours in a day, and 12 months in a

Unfortunately, this did provide a 354-day year, but they reconciled this with a 13th month every three years, which operates on the same principle as our leap year.

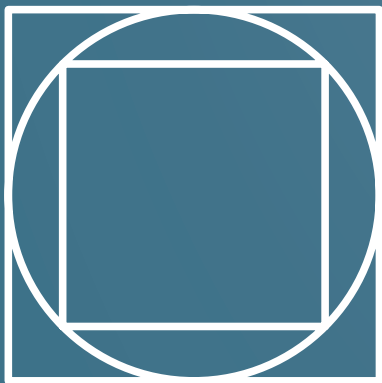
In summary, next time Mercury is in retrograde and you're stressed out about your Thursday-Wednesday because there are not enough hours in a day, you know who to blame.



# PREDICT



# TO WIN



If the area of the outside square is  $100\text{cm}^2$ , what is the area of the inside square?

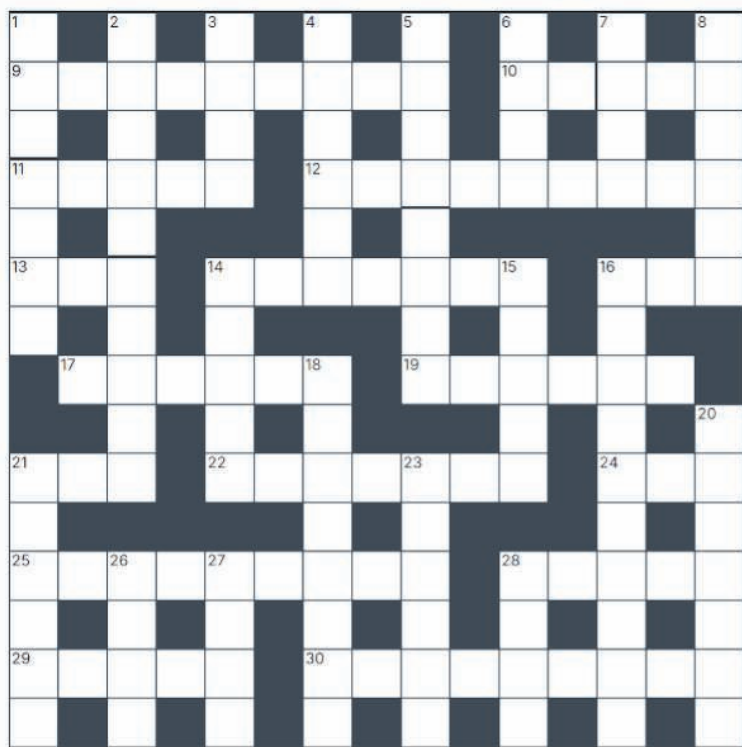
What percentage of respondents successfully solved this?





# The Smoking Area

## Crossword



### Quick:

#### ACROSS

- 9 Artificial language with 100,000 speakers (9)
- 10 To date (2,3)
- 11 Sailboat of originally Dutch design (5)
- 12 Alternative name for the Ethiopian Empire (9)
- 13 Apparatus for lighting, say (3)
- 14 Largest city in the world in ~600-300 BC (7)
- 16 Quickly, like a \_\_\_\_\_ up a drain-pipe (3)
- 17 With 20d, Cambridge attraction, more demure than Orgasm Bridge. (6)
- 19 Federal \_\_\_\_\_ of Investigation, US agency (6)
- 21 1st and 3rd singular past tense of 'be' (3)
- 22 Possible consequence of too much wax? (7)
- 24 Christmas film starring Will Ferrell as Buddy (3)
- 25 Author of Kubla Khan (9)
- 28 Prime minister known for being 'Dishy' (5)
- 29 Controversial host of eponymous talk show (5)
- 30 Pioneer of women's education; college namesake (9)

#### DOWN

- 1 Concrete jungle (3,4)
- 2 Women known for being posh, scary etc. (5,5)
- 3 Alpha chi omega, say (4)
- 4 Continue the sentence over the line break in verse (6)
- 5 Equestrian society for Chappell Roan (4,4)
- 6 Women have 300,000 of them, on average (4)
- 7 Butt, tongue and groove, and mitre, say, in carpentry (4)
- 8 Royal family including James, Charles (6)
- 14 What one earns in Scouts (5)
- 15 What the Norwegians shout at sports events (5)
- 16 What the Varsity Editors hope to increase? (10)
- 18 Orpheus' lover (8)
- 20 See 17a (2,5)
- 21 Musical responsible for nation-

- wide green paint shortage (6)
- 23 Cut (6)
- 26 Characteristic accent (4)
- 27 Disgusting (4)
- 28 Domesticated ice (4)

### Cryptic:

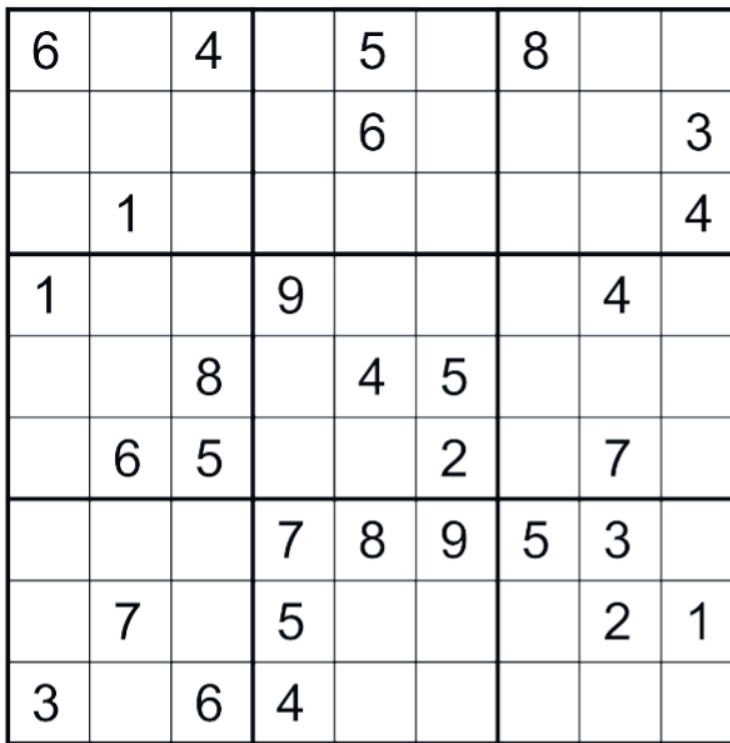
#### ACROSS

- 9 Wears the better petticoat for the suburbs? (9)
- 10 Relish in birth, it is heard 5
- 11 Whiskey, consumed by breastmilk producers, makes imbeciles 5
- 12 RAF Pilot's student had reversed after left in street (5,4)
- 13 Fullback is back! Good for 12's formation (3)
- 14 Mother and father around as late as child genius, making that 12 (7)
- 16 Vino. ? (3)
- 17 Growth sign (6)
- 19 State joke before injection (6)
- 21 Visibly embarrassed about daughter (3)
- 22 Revolutionary, with wits about him, curses... (7)
- 24 ...loud animal? (3)
- 25 What causes drink's jerking and smashing? (9)
- 28 Fruit and vegetable: half of each (5)
- 29 Tall American soldier: 6 footer! (5)
- 30 Moving boat along: this helps increase heartrate (9)

#### DOWN

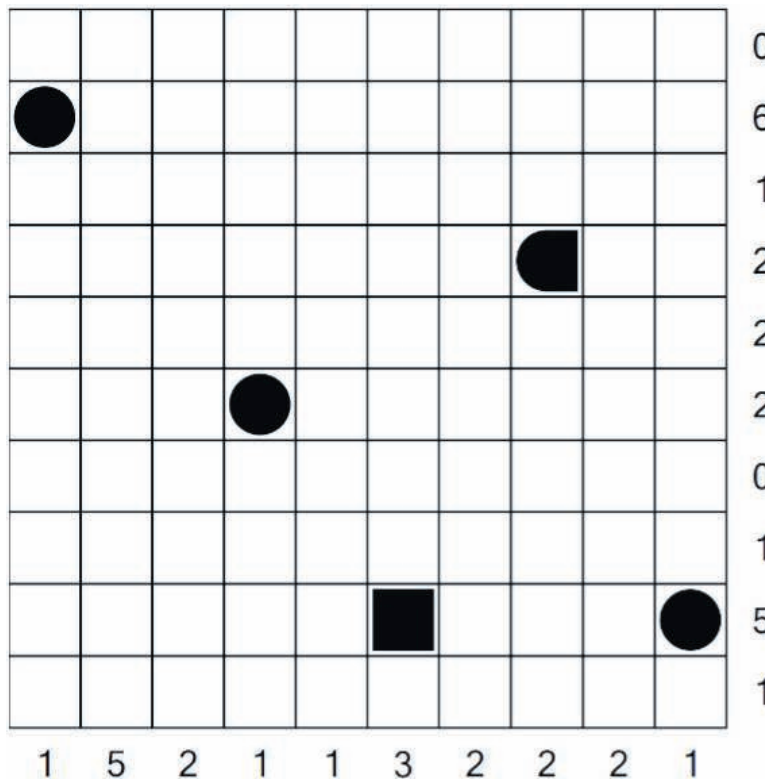
- 1 Baths are kid headquarters according to Spooner (3,4)
- 2 Brit sang Changes, and without a musical accompaniment! (6,4)
- 3 Goes off-piste, maybe starts to stumble, knee injury soon! (4)
- 4 Hadrian oddly missing, sailor returns for end of 26's boat trip (6)
- 5 Collapse when cooking dinner, maybe (8)
- 6 Toyed with: amusedly strip-ping twice (4)
- 7 Young animal last seen in Banana Republic (4)

## Sudoku



## Battleships

There is one battleship (4x1 squares), two cruisers (3x1), three destroyers (2x1), and four submarines (1 square each). The ships do not touch, not even diagonally, and the numbers indicate how many squares in each row and column are occupied by ship parts.



- 8 Angle of response (6)
- 14 Bird's large mouth devouring accountant (5)
- 15 Relatives with no husband terrify son (5)
- 16 Jeans of a Pa washed up in body of water (3,2,5)
- 18 Spin Doctor to out Iran not having Uranium (8)
- 20 Wood chopper putting unknown energy into winning (7)
- 21 Cover in school lesson, heartless compromise (6)
- 23 Interrupt and damn the French (6)
- 26 Religious figure from the east: Bud-

- dha, only in some measure (4)
- 27 What 13 does after drinking Frobscottle: not its forte, makes music and poetry, possibly (4)
- 28 Coral is piece of worship in Korea (4)

ANSWERS TO PUZZLES ON INSTAGRAM @VARSITYCAMBRIDGE  
PUZZLES BY SOPHOCLES



## Slade, santa hats, and savvy gifting

Resident Varsity Archivist **Vialli McComb** brings the wisdom of Bridgemas past to help with your festive gift-buying

Ever stayed up late to catch a glimpse of Father Christmas and been bitterly disappointed? Being the paper-chain-making roast-potato-loving finalist that I am, this is how I felt when desperately scouring the Varsity archives for mentions of Bridgemas. With Varsity only referring to Cantabrigian Christmas festivities as 'Bridgemas' following a 2010 article on 'Oxmas' (rivalry alive and well?), Varsity has been surprisingly quiet on Christmas in Cambridge over the years. Nevertheless, the archives have still proven useful in the creation of my guide to tackling gift-buying successfully.

What is almost as certain as the difficulty of gift-buying? Skint students. The 'quandry of the season' appears to be eternal: how can I give cheap yet heart-warming gifts? In 1963, Varsity bravely attempted to provide an answer to this perennial question. What was their top tip, I hear you cry? Buy your presents in the sales in January...

A tip perhaps too late for us now, so let us turn to the early 2000s for some more timely advice! In the pioneering age of Craigslist and Myspace, our forebearers were taking their first steps into the digital age, and grasped this tool to solve their wallet-woes. In order to buy the presents to impress for a price that'll make you go 'ooo', Varsity in 2004 suggested including a misspelling when searching for an item on eBay - these items will be precisely what you want with the added bonus of lower bids on the online auction. Apply this logic to Depop and you'll be as golden as the Bridgemas presents you can now afford!

But Varsity's Bridgemas reporting hasn't only been about gift buying: in 2008, they wrote about a Santa hat placed on top of the spire on the Gate of Humility at Caius, as well as a similar item gracing the Octagon of Clare Chapel. 14 years later, a similar incident was reported where a Christmas tree was tied to the front of Senate House. As an alternative festive activity, I might suggest for those that are struggling to think of what to buy your college wife (or running out of spellings following the fifth iteration of 'ralf laurent bare gumper' on Vinted as a little present for yourself), that you wrap up warm and stroll to Fen Ditton (ideally snow-covered), or people-watch with mulled wine at the wine merchants. Gift-buying is hard, but building-scaling is festive procrastination taken to another height ... literally.

If you object to the consumerism of Bridgemas, you could be swayed by the Bridgemas spirit and spread some joy through giving in a different way. In 2004, Varsity reported on a number of students (including current Health Secretary - then lead guitarist - Wes Streeting) who spent their Bridgemas rerecording tracks from Slade and Wizzard's 'Christmas 1973' for RAG and Jimmy's Night Shelter.



**vulture.**





# Lonely this Christmas: the holiday season in campus novels

Feeling nostalgic, **Felix Armstrong** examines the Christmas term in books and film

Last week I, along with the rest of grey and snowless Cambridge, watched Instagram stories in bitter jealousy as my friends from the Other Place captured snowflakes falling in a perfect flurry around the Radcliffe Camera. Once the envy had subsided, I was struck by the simultaneous warmth and cold which has always enchanted me in literary depictions of the Christmas term. While I didn't grow up idolising Oxbridge (partly in protest to being left out of a Year Seven trip to Oxford), campus novels – books set in universities or colleges – have formed an integral part of my literary taste, and their depictions of the weeks leading up to the holidays are particularly charged with the cosy charm which this genre majors on.

“

*As the Christmas term draws on, a hope of escape begins to flicker in the distance*

Christmas in campus novels is an oxymoron. This genre is so popular because of the closed, high-pressure setting it offers an author, forcing questioning, angsty teenagers to come to terms with their identities inside a suffocating, though often idyllic, microcosm. As the Christmas term draws on, a hope of escape begins to flicker in the distance. The term becomes a waiting game, as students plod on through the shortening days, refusing to nourish their growing belief that the campus isn't the whole world after all, that Christmas might come to bring them home.

I remember being struck with this feeling during the long Michaelmas of my first year, during what



must have been a heavy week five. Accompanied by a vivid mental image of a huge Christmas tree being put up in a grand dining hall, it took me days to place this feeling. It eventually came to me – *Harry Potter*. The books that I haven't touched since I was eight? The films that I smugly remind my friends I have hardly watched? The franchise which has been soured by the online belligerence of its creator? Alas.

Though I had gone to great lengths to avoid *Harry Potter* throughout my childhood, its enchanting evocation of Christmas must have slipped through. Looking back at the first book, its blend of warring warmth and coldness, of hope and apprehension still stands: “No one could wait for the holidays to start. While the Gryffindor common room and the

Great Hall had roaring fires, the drafty corridors had become icy and a bitter wind rattled the windows in the classrooms.”

With the Christmas season often comes the solidification of the literary found family, and nowhere is this more prevalent than at Hogwarts. Ron's selflessness in giving up his cosy family Christmas celebrations in order to keep Harry company, whose tumultuous home life means a return for the holidays is less than desirable, provides a sweetly juvenile warmth against the backdrop of the harsh Scottish winter. For Harry and co., Christmas in the campus novel is not so much of an oxymoron after all.

The most interesting passages of Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* come during this period in term.

Richard Papen, a working-class student, obscures his real identity to fit in with the enchanting aristocrats that make up his Classics class at an exclusive liberal arts college. When they vanish upstate for the holidays, Richard is left behind, kicked out of his dorm and onto the street. But even Tartt gives in to the spirit of the holidays, when Henry turns up out of the blue to save Richard from near death. Tartt deftly manipulates the found family trope, though, as it turns out that Henry exploits Richard's wintry loneliness to keep him in his debt.

Alexander Payne's *The Holdovers* is a love letter to being left behind. Though a campus film rather than a novel, this recent gem extracts Christmassy tenderness and charm from the found family trope. After Angus Tully realises too late that his mother isn't whisking him off from boarding school for a ski holiday after all, he builds a makeshift family Christmas with his oddball Classics teacher and the school's grief-stricken cook, set against a snow-white New England backdrop.

Serene snowy scenes are often paired with Britain's elite universities in popular culture. As happened earlier this month, our social media feeds are washed with white-dusted spires every time Oxbridge is visited by snow. This time, it was a video of a pair of foxes playing in the gothic, snow-filled quad of Magdalen College that went viral. Last week, satirist Jonathan Coe visited Heffers to promote his new Cambridge-set novel *The Proof of My Innocence*, the timing of which was no doubt motivated by the strong tie between Christmas and campus novels.

In literature, the otherworldliness of the holiday period amplifies the dislocation felt by these characters. As a silence descends and the green turns to white, these strange, often elite settings become even more alien. The privilege and history of these fictional institutions are a reflection of how our culture fetishises real-world ones. Does combining this allure with the cosiness of a Christmas scene make these spaces feel more attainable, or does it merely enhance a fantasy?

## The radical accessibility of William Morris

**T**HEA REDMILL

The first time I entered London's Victoria and Albert Museum I felt like a child seeing their presents on Christmas morning, stunned by how the ordinary world I live in was so quickly transformed into a collection of ornately decorated artefacts. Exhibit after exhibit of pre-Raphaelite beauty invited me into the world of the Arts and Crafts movement, culminating with the work of Victorian artist, William Morris. Yet, while visually marvellous, my adoration, my hagiographic stance on him, derives from the ethos of his art and ideological movement behind it.

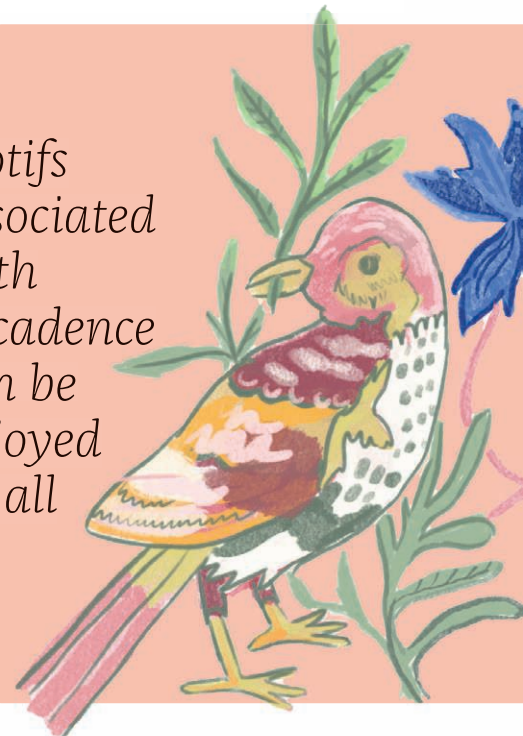
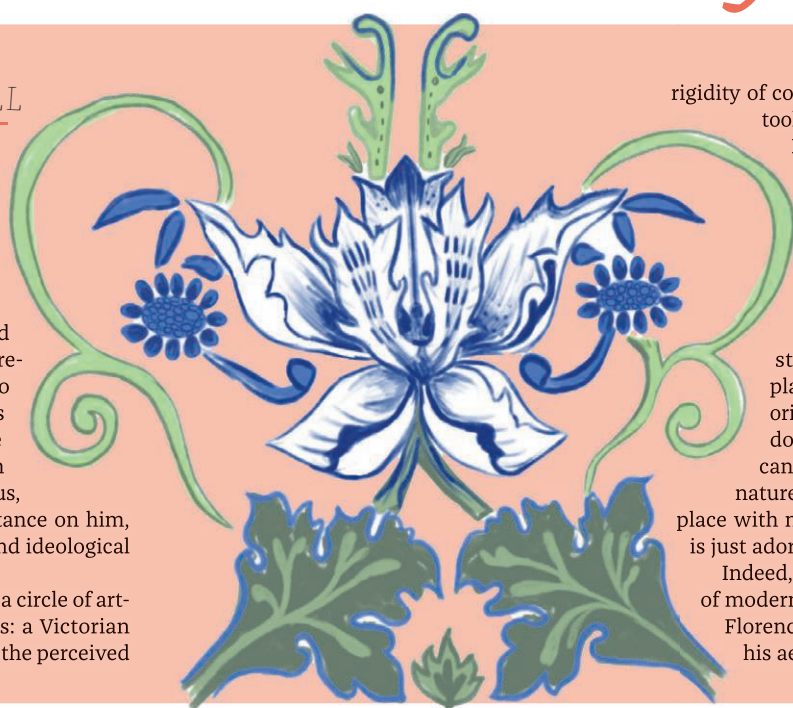
Born in 1834, Morris was part of a circle of artists known as the pre-Raphaelites: a Victorian movement which aimed to escape the perceived

rigidity of contemporary productions and instead took inspiration from the decadence of the Renaissance. Feeling a lack of creativity in the arts scene of his era, Morris sought to incorporate the natural world in his art, without needing to justify his work: he created because he loved to do so.

Strawberry Thief, one of his most iconic patterns, perfectly demonstrates this. Birds, strawberries and plants merge together to create a totally original depiction merging romantic, outdoor motifs with pattern and colour. We can see a stark contrast to the industrial nature of Victorian society. This is commonplace with most of his other works, and the V&A is just adorned with them.

Indeed, his influence can be seen in a plethora of modern examples. Bohemian celebrities like Florence and the Machine absolutely exude his aesthetic. Her iconic ginger locks spark

“  
*Motifs associated with decadence can be enjoyed by all*





# Write poems, not your essays

Your refuge from that essay deadline is just one stanza away, writes **Heather Leigh**

**I** get it – your list of due essays is longer than your arm, and writing for pleasure might have fallen very much by the wayside. But creative writing can be a refreshing counterpoint to the demands of your degree, and I am yet to be convinced that there is any situation which poetry cannot improve. From the serious to the silly, in love or in heartbreak, in joy or in grief, it is remarkable what words on a page can achieve. Poetry is personal. Poetry is political. Poetry is specific. Poetry is universal. Poetry is whatever you want it to be. Or, perhaps more accurately, poetry is whatever you need it to be. (\*pauses, gets off soapbox\*)

Seriously though, poetry is the answer. Proven to reduce stress and anxiety, provide comfort when you need it most, and with an incredible capacity to uplift, putting pen to paper is an age-old therapeutic practice.

Romantic poet John Clare and Modernist author Sylvia Plath are among the writers who used poetry to cope in difficult times, and

American poet Mary Oliver claimed that verse is a “life-cherishing force”. You may not be going through crises of quite the same scale as Clare and Plath, but you can still reap the benefits offered by a hearty dose of poetic catharsis.

Writing poetry gives you space to express yourself in the same way that journalling does, but as a distilled literary form it invites you to condense your thoughts and feelings onto the page, clarifying the essence of whatever you’re trying to process. And aside from the therapeutic advantages, writing poetry is fun, creative and a rewarding way to use your literary panache for something other than a 5,000-word dissertation.

A couple of years ago I attended a creative writing course at Ted Hughes’ old home, Lumb Bank, where I met Roy McFarlane, former Birmingham Poet Laureate and current National Canal Laureate. For him, “poetry is a safe space to be vulnerable, to be

exemplary, to be a witness, to be a voice for the voiceless and always a compass to our humanity.”

Poetry brings you into a community which transcends temporal and physical distance – you’re connected with people who feel the same way you do, reminding you that you’re not alone, and you’re connected with people who feel differently to you, expanding your vision of the world. In the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth famously claims that poetry “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity,” while Wendy Cope argues that “poetry is emotion recollected in a highly emotional state”. However you go about it, your voice is just as valid as the next person’s, and you can be as playful or as philosophical as you like.

You might end up discovering a new talent, but you don’t need to be the next Shakespeare to enjoy the imaginative freedom that poetry offers. If you’re not sure how to start, or if you’re on the hunt for new inspiration, use the prompts below to get your creative juices flowing:

- Christina Rossetti’s ‘Sonnets are full of love’ voices her appreciation for her mother, weaving a “wreath of rhymes wherewith to crown [her] honoured name,” while Sienna Black’s poem ‘Self-portrait as the colours of my hometown’ (from this year’s *The Mays*) bears testament to the love she feels for her older brother. **Choose someone special in your life and use their wonderfulness to inspire your words.**
- Coined by Terrance Hayes, a ‘golden shovel’ is a verse form which spells out another poem through the

last words of each line – look at ‘We Real Cool’ and ‘The Golden Shovel’ to see how Hayes digs up and replants the words of Gwendolyn Brooks. **Create your own variation on the golden shovel form** by picking a short quote that’s meaningful to you (it could be a line of poetry, a song lyric, or a personal mantra) and writing a poem in which the last word of each line recreates this phrase.

● If you’re enjoying having a structured container to pour your poem into, **try your hand at a shape poem**, where the lines are arranged on the page to visually replicate the poetic subject. If you’re feeling adventurous you could aim for a complicated shape, as in John Hollander’s ‘Swan and Shadow’, or you can take a more experimental approach like E.E. Cummings’ ‘r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r’, where the letters are jumbled as if a grasshopper has leapt across the page.

● Feeling bougie and meta? **Create art about art** – the options are endless. You could take inspiration from a film (as Nina Mingya Powles did with her poem ‘Girl warrior, or: watching Mulan (1998) in Chinese with English subtitles’), a painting (such as Lee Stockdale’s ‘Standing in Awe at the Museum of Modern Art’) or a piece of music (as in Wendy Cope’s ‘A Green Song’ which recycles the tune of ‘Ten Green Bottles’).

● For a shorter exercise, **pick a vowel and write a poem where every word includes that vowel**. Or write a poem from the perspective of an object – what would your uni fridge say if it could talk? Or that neglected glass of water that’s been on your bedside table since 2014?

Whether you prefer to write first thing in the morning or late at night, outside in the fresh air or inside with no distractions, in a Sidge-girlie leather-bound book or on the notes app of your phone, make poetry your own. There’s no wrong way to go about it, so do as the mighty Natasha Bedingfield tells you and “release your inhibitions”. Or, as Roy McFarlane puts it: “Write your story, write what excites you, write with a freedom”.



▲ FREIDA DICKSON



▲ DAISY COOPER

a connection with Elizabeth Siddal, muse to the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, and her flowing, patterned gowns nod to Morris’ patterns.

Yet, most important to me is the political context which surrounds Morris. He freely applied his socialist views to his art despite living in an era of Victorian rigidity. He aimed to escape the stereotype that art required refined and sophisticated knowledge in order to be understood. Religious context, Latin references, and classical symbolism dominated his contemporary artistic field but Morris reacted against this with an egalitarian approach to his craft; aiming to create something that was beautiful for beauty’s sake, not to exclude others through a secret club of educated individuals.

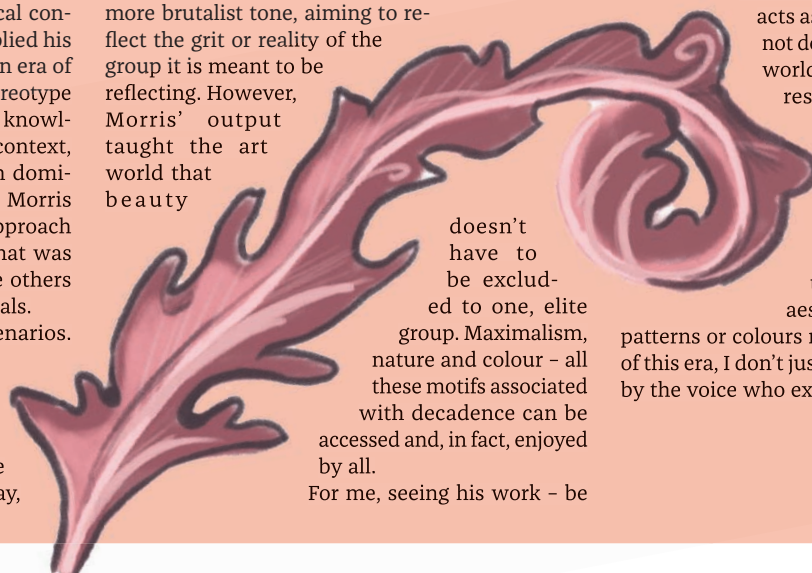
I love finding his style in everyday scenarios. His own company, Morris and Co, still produces his prints today, ‘crafting’ sofas, blinds, curtains and wallpaper – to name but a few. The idea that the work of a renowned artist can be acquired by the masses applies his vision to the modern day,

emphasising a beautiful longevity to his worldview.

What is so special is the accessible nature of his work. Often art that defies class aligns itself with a more brutalist tone, aiming to reflect the grit or reality of the group it is meant to be reflecting. However, Morris’ output taught the art world that beauty

doesn’t have to be excluded to one, elite group. Maximalism, nature and colour – all these motifs associated with decadence can be accessed and, in fact, enjoyed by all. For me, seeing his work – be

that in a museum (might I emphasise, as Morris would have wanted, one that is free to enter such as the V&A) or in a variety of homes – acts as a reminder that creativity is not designed for just one group. The world Morris envisioned does not reserve simplicity for the people and splendour for the rich. Instead, he teaches us that design is for all. Thanks to him, colour, expression, and vibrancy are not guarded off for only those elite enough to have an aesthetic. Instead, when I wear patterns or colours nodding to the effervescence of this era, I don’t just feel good, I feel empowered by the voice who extended aesthetic to all.





**Lifestyle**

# I'm dreaming of a well-advised Christmas

## Getting cold feet this Bridgemas season? Agony Aunt **Jessica Spearman** is here to ease all of your festive fears

If you're reading this, you've survived the 'week five blues' of Michaelmas term and now you get to enjoy Bridgemas, yet another culty Cambridge tradition. Who would have thought there could be any more of those in this place? While Bridgemas brings its own fun, it also brings its own mess, so here I am with all of my wisdom to save you from your terrible wrapping skills and festive blunders!

**I got someone I don't like for Secret Santa: what should I get them?**

'Tis the season for ugly Christmas jumpers, forking out for the Revs cloakroom because it's minus temperatures, and pettiness. Whoever said Christmas was the time for kindness, gratitude, and humility clearly never met a Cambridge student, with their inability to keep a good time good. Sometimes, you realise your dislike of someone is a leftover annoyance as a result of the week five blues, or some particularly damning essay feedback. Other times, they're just jarring. No judgement from me, I'm a hater to my core.

You could be the bigger person and buy them a very genuine gift of Sainsbury's cheapest wine (if they drink). This will inevitably lead to some poor life decisions and a pounding head the next day, but in the eternal words of Jojo Siwa, karma's a bitch. You could also conveniently 'forget' to get them a gift, but be wary that your mutual friends won't look too fondly on this course of action.

**How do I enjoy a Bridgemas dinner?**

Cambridge kitchens are blessed with a lack of any suitable equipment, so I don't think you'll be enjoying any food made in a gyp, least of all a Bridgemas dinner. I'd suggest booking yourself into a formal for your college's version of Bridgemas dinner. But, alas, if you're reading this now, you might have run out of time. No worries, I have you covered (don't stress, it won't be my admittedly terrible cooking!) I'd suggest making friends ASAP with someone who has a decent kitchen.

But what even is a Bridgemas dinner if not just a glorified Sunday roast? Find your nearest pub or college hall that does a roast, bring some tinsel and some friends, and there you have it! Bonus points if you stage your own nativity play, but good luck finding not one, not two, but three wise men in this city. If you get hammered, as you're supposed to at a Bridgemas dinner, then you're definitely doing it right (and won't remember the dire food situation).

**I want to go on cute festive dates in Cambridge, how do I find someone and where should we go?**

I don't know how familiar you are with the Cambridge dating scene, but it is the TRENCHES out here. Stay off Hinge, Tinder, Grindr, and any other dating app where you're dealing with people saying 'my biggest regret ... getting on Hinge'. Ick. You are also so bombarded with weird Cambridge dating rules that the challenge you have posed to me is practically impossible to navigate. Not to worry, I'm here with a solution that won't

necessitate you going back to your situationship who thought sending you in an Uber home was the pinnacle of aftercare. Grab some mistletoe and head to the library of your choice (I recommend the Marshall if you're in it for the long game). You could also do this in the club of your choice. It's fun and flirty and, if nothing else, it's a story for the (college) grandkids.

Regarding dates, I'd think about how public you want to be about things. A night in with Bailey's hot chocolate and the best Christmas film to exist (*Nativity*, duh) is cute and helps you keep the roster going. Alternatively, checking out the Christmas markets or going to a winter ball (if you're lucky enough to have the funds) could also be very festive. Just be aware of when this seasonal situationship contract is due to expire, and don't get too attached.

**I don't have the funds to buy all of my friends, family and situationships a gift this Bridgemas season**

Oh boo hoo, how hard it must be for you to have so many friends and a large enough roster to recreate the Last Supper painting. How do you cope with so much love and affection around you? Not only do I want to know how you balance the bank account, but how you balance your time. Are we not in Cambridge?!

Nevertheless, you must realise by now that having so many people around you means that the only gift you need to give this Bridgemas season is yourself! While I would recommend throwing a big party

for everyone to enjoy together, I'm not sure how your situationships would find that, although I imagine it'll be a bit like that one Spider-Man meme - you know the one. If any of them ask where their thoughtful, expensive gift is, tell them to do one. It would make the roster easier to manage too, I'm

**In the eternal words of Jojo Siwa, karma's a bitch**

sure. You could also wrap yourself in the glitteriest, most colourful

wrapping paper and let them work out what the gift is. Merry Bridgemas!

**I deeply embarrassed myself at Bridgemas karaoke with a drunken, tone-deaf rendition of 'All I Want for Christmas is You' while staring at my crush...**

If there's one thing the festive season calls for, it's karaoke. Whether you're carol singing in a choir (boring), or performing Christmas carols with your wine-drunk aunt (better), singing is the true joyful seasonal activity. It's the setting of many of my maladaptive daydreams, where I burst out singing and leave the audience thinking 'wow, I know she's so cool and smart and kind and hot, but who knew she could sing this well?!'. Well nobody did know that fun little

fact, because it's not true, and it seems like this sentiment holds true for you, too. Now, here you are, asking Auntie Jessica for any solution to ease your mulled-wine induced hangxiety.

My own guide to embarrassment is 'WWBJD?'. No, not that - get your mind out of the gutter! Ask yourself 'what would

Bridget Jones do?'. If she'd do it, then rejoice in the fact your actions are incredibly relatable to every 20-something teenage girl. If you get up at karaoke and you sing well, I'd argue that's way more embarrassing than doing it badly - I beg, just do an open mic night and leave the karaoke for those of us with no vocal ability, thank you very much! It sounds like the scene from every rom com, boom-box or karaoke, it still means the same. If they can't handle you at your drunk karaoke-worst, they don't deserve you at your LinkedIn corporate baddie-best.

**I lose the Christmas family quiz every year, how do I improve?**

If you're losing the Christmas family quiz every year, then I think Cambridge deserves the right to withhold your degree on graduation. In an intense academic environment solving international diplomacy issues in a 1500-word essay, or conducting serious experiments in the lab with a Revs-induced hangover, then surely knowing when Band Aid first released 'Do they know it's Christmas?' should be light work for you. I'd recommend binning off your end-of-term essays or problem sheets, and immersing yourself in every Christmas song while simultaneously watching every single Christmas movie, including the awful Hallmark ones too (though excluding *Die Hard*, fight me on this one).

Other revision techniques include binge-watching *The Chase*, *Tipping Point*, *Family Fortunes*, but not *University Challenge* (no prizes for how you didn't make your college team...). Worst case scenario, you memorise the answers beforehand and you'll win at last! Be advised, this will not work for your finals, I will not be held responsible for any advice you willingly take, and I will not testify on your behalf to the EAMC.



▲ HOLLY HARDMAN



# Confessions of a Cambridge influencer

**Jess Dodwell** talks juggling academia with content creation, and rejects the negative connotations around the figure of 'influencer'

Picture this: you've just moved into halls and it's your first morning in Cambridge. The 9am Freshers' week talk looms, but it's okay because you're going to make yourself a nice big bowl of Cheerios and a cup of tea which you'll probably burn your tongue on. But when you walk into the kitchen, you're greeted by not only your flatmate's dirty plates from the night before, but also ... a six inch tripod? The phone camera is angled towards a stack of pancakes, over which a random girl is pouring maple syrup, and demonstrating levels of concentration that surely aren't demanded by the task at hand.

Here's where I hold my hands up: it's me. I'm the girl who will briefly interrupt the conversation at brunch to arrange our food for the best photo; I'll also want to stop to snap a shot of the coffees we get afterwards. As an unsuspecting friend said to me at formal the other night while I was taking what I thought was a surreptitious pic of the deep-fried mozzarella balls: the phone eats first. And oh boy, it does.

Coming to Cambridge, I feel like I'm back in Year 10, hiding the secret food account I'd made to stave off insanity during lockdown.

"I'll tell people about it once I hit 1,000 followers," I remember saying to my mum, enjoying the thrill of even the *thought* of my silly little porridge bowls reaching that many people.

Well, here we are. 58,400 followers – and hundreds of breakfasts – later, I'm still sheepish about letting people know about my foodie alter-ego on Instagram. While it had become a part of my identity at secondary school, (shoutout to the Instagram explore page for exposing me to all my friends) I suddenly find myself once again navigating the secret world of incognito 'content creation'. Don't worry, I make myself cringe too.

Don't get me wrong, I've told some close friends (or been found out regardless). It's all about locating the sweet spot where you've known them long enough that you're pretty sure they'll still want to hang out even if you're 'vlogging' that day, but not too soon into the friendship that it looks like you're making it a personality trait. I never post my friends on social media, but it can be helpful to know why I'm taking so many 0.5s.

So I guess I'm now hard-launching @mindfully.jess, which is liberating, but also a bit scary. I feel

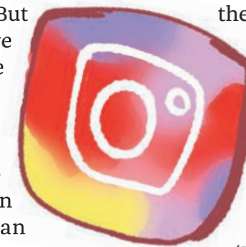
like there's something of a stigma around taking social media seriously – that you must be vain, self-obsessed, out of touch with reality. But it's only been in recent weeks that I've even started showing my face on my account. Being a recipe creator and living in student accommodation without an oven, freezer or privacy requires a never-before-seen level of resourcefulness, and given that studying at Cambridge already requires a never-before-seen level of tenacity, I've decided to make my life a bit easier and transition out of the food niche and into the lifestyle one.

Documenting my days in Cambridge has been hit-and-miss. You don't even want to know how many random clips I have on my phone of me sat in the library 'studying' (read: trying not to look like I have a double chin while I stare down at a laptop screen) or getting ready for formal, before I chicken

out of filming in public and proceed to keep my phone firmly stuffed in my pocket for the rest of the day. So unless I want to wear the same clothes every single day, or I try to make 'one hour in my life' a new trend, all of these videos are pretty much unusable.

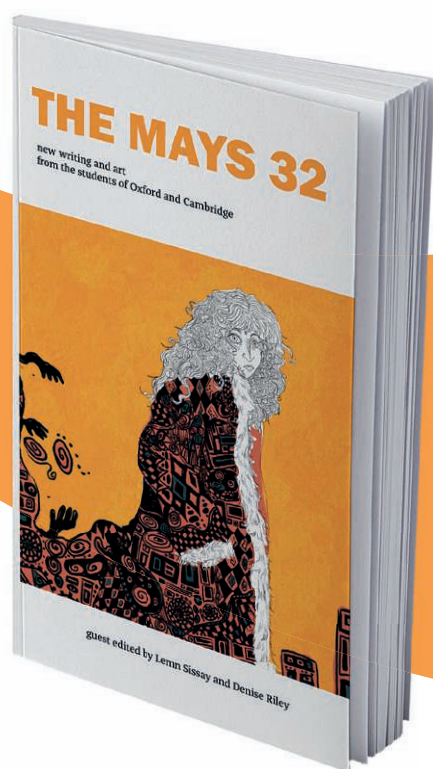
Don't worry, it's not all doom and gloom; I love documenting my life online. Cambridge makes it easy to produce aesthetic content (I owe at least 300 followers to King's Chapel), but the long hours in the library take some romanticising. Filming my days keeps me accountable and gives me time to reflect when I finally put all the clips together at the end of the night. I suddenly become attentive to the small moments that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. The crisp autumn leaves on the ground, freshly painted nails, the feeling of picking out a nice outfit and leaving your room, reusable cup from the free college stash in hand.

So if there's anyone out there reading this article who's always wanted to be like *that person* who actually has the confidence to post online, I'm here to reassure you that it's not out of reach. It's as simple as picking up your phone, starting to film – and maybe not even telling anyone until you hit 1k. Or 58k. The world really is your oyster...



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**Fashion**

# Hooked on knitwear

## Rose Beedle picks up the needle this Bridgemas season

**W**hen I learned to knit, fashion was the furthest thing from my mind. At the age of eight, knitting, as far as I was aware, was about making blankets for dolls, and uncomfortable hats for babies. My lack of patience did not help, and the thought of making something large enough to fit an (adult) human seemed completely out of reach. Fortunately for me, I had a very sensible grandmother teaching me to knit who gave me lots of breaks, meaning that I never got too frustrated with the craft.

As I began to get more comfortable with the motion of knitting, my projects slowly began to get more practical. The repetitive action of creating stitches can be very calming; after a long day staring at a screen, it feels good to create something with your hands. Perhaps that is why Generation Z have been drawn to the craft in recent years. In a sterile, digital world, knitting and crochet are wonderfully tactile; the sound of metal needles against one another, the texture and colour of each different wool, the feeling of gently pulling on your half-finished work to try and even out the stitches. It all provides a very pleasant break from the world of screens.

Cambridge is one of those lovely places where knitting in public is not uncommon. I have become quite shameless when it comes to knitting in public, often pulling out a project while alone at a cafe, or during study breaks in the library. The act of creating a garment slowly and painstakingly imbues every finished piece with an extra bit of love. With the popularity of fast-fashion knitwear, it is easy to forget how long it can take to make these

items. Creating something by hand reminds you that everything we wear at this time of year was knitted or crocheted by someone, somewhere out there in the world, whether by hand or operating a machine. And here's a not-fun fact for you - industrial crochet machines don't exist. Anything crocheted has to be made by hand. Once you add up how long it takes to make something like that, and compare how little the finished garment costs the consumer, fast fashion knitwear does not feel so Christmassy after all.

Now that we've glanced briefly at the sour sprout that is the fast fashion industry, let's get back to talking about cool clothes. For this shoot, I wanted to highlight students whose hobbies and style are intertwined, with winter being the perfect opportunity for these students to bring a range of one-of-a-kind pieces from their wardrobe and onto the streets of Cambridge.

The multicoloured scarf is one I made last year. In my ever expanding hoard of wool, I had accumulated many leftovers, so to speak, from other projects. Without much use for them, and wanting to have a bit of a clear-out, I decided to knit a scarf that incorporated all my different remnants of wool, while still remaining fairly cohesive. Luckily, a lot of my hoard was of a similar thickness; for knitting, I find narrower wool much easier to work with. For crochet I prefer thicker wool, which has the advantage of making projects much faster. Therefore, a lot of my remnants fell within one of the two size brackets. I alternated the colourful remnants with a neutral brownish-purple wool which I was gifted a few years ago, and the effect seems to have worked. It gets a lot of use at this time of year, although because I wear a lot of patterned clothing, the addi-

“  
The act of  
creating imbues  
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an extra bit of  
love



tion of a patterned scarf on top can look a bit too busy. I'm a firm believer in the rule of one pattern per outfit, except in exceptional circumstances. The addition of a scarf can be useful, however, to add something that is missing to an outfit - whether that be a pattern, a texture, or a colour contrast. In this outfit, for example, I'm wearing a lot of block colours so a patterned scarf adds a little bit of dimension to the look.

Something I enjoy about knitting and crochet is the opportunity to make handmade gifts for people. Maithri, my college wife, recently received a scarf from me that I promised her for her birthday. I must acknowledge that her birthday was in February - but better late than never! Sometimes, with procrastination and delays on projects, it can be more efficient to gift someone an I.O.U. than an actual item. Maithri didn't seem

to mind, saying: "I like homemade knitwear because it gives very homely, cosy vibes. It feels very special - because they've put the effort in to knit that specifically for me. My Michaelmas fashion vibe is very much based on lots of jumpers, boots, trench coats - so it fits right in."

However, Magdalena has me beaten on the procrastination front. Her cardigan was a 2020 lockdown project which was finally completed this year. As she pointed out, "It took me less time to get a degree than finish it!". Once she was in the flow of it, though, there was no stopping her and she made a sweater vest start-to-finish within a week of completing the cardigan. Knitting and crochet works on its own timeline, and sometimes unfinished projects just need a little bit of time in the drawer before they are ready to be finished and brought to life.



# Fashion



Olive also loved the cosiness of knitwear, and stressed the importance of material in order to achieve this. For her Fair Isle fish knit scarf she turned to Norwegian wool, whereas it is the alpaca and wool blend in her brown jumper that makes it so comforting. Of the project, she said that “It was my first ever knit project, made during Lent term last year. I love the shape and it taught me so many essential techniques.” She also mentioned the fun of collecting “different skeins of yarn from yarn shops all over the UK”, and combining them for a “mismatched” look. Knitting is also more than an aesthetic pursuit; Olive noted that a “stress relief project” was especially important to her during her A-Levels.

If you’re looking to get into knitting or crochet this Christmas season, YouTube has a ton of great tutorials to get you started. You can follow step-by-step guides to make specific projects, or if you are feeling more ambitious, once you have mastered the basic techniques you can try coming up with your own designs. The important thing to remember is to be patient and give yourself breaks if you are getting frustrated. These skills take time to develop, and with a little perseverance, you’ll be knitting with the best of them.



▲ PHOTOGRAPHER: HOLLY HARDMAN  
 MODELS: ROSE BEEDLE, MAITHRI KRISHNAN,  
 MAGDALENA HOLLOWAY, OLIVE WATT

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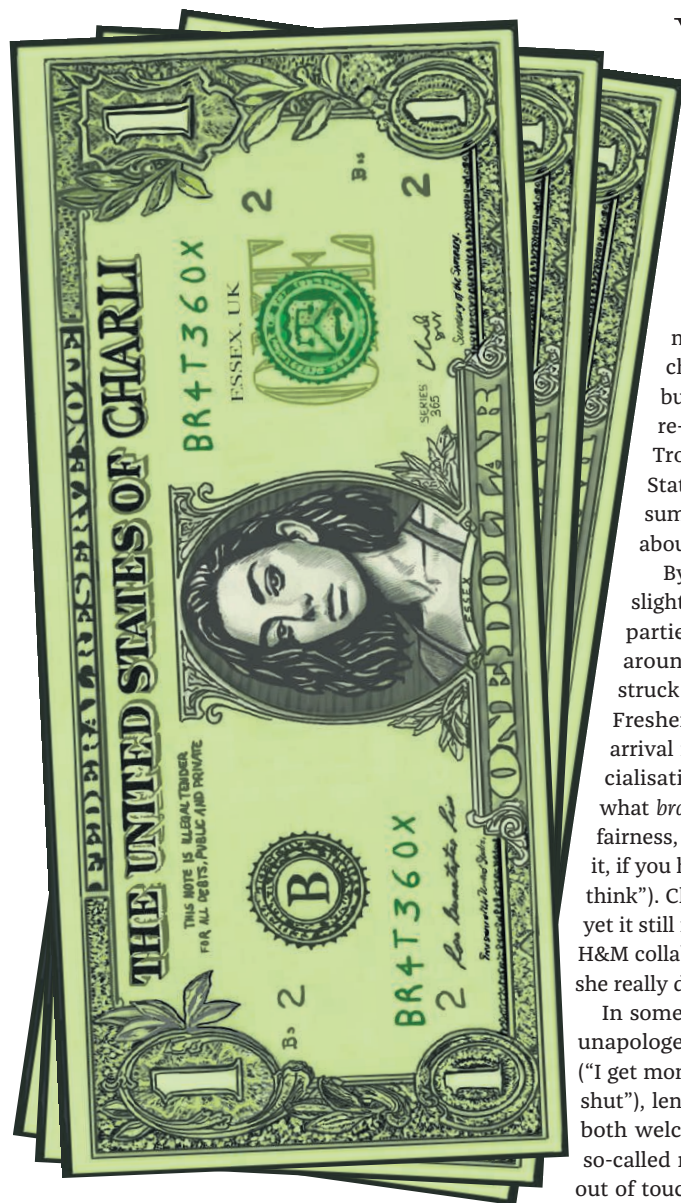
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# The single-use album: *brat* has initiated a disposable era of music

You think you just fell out of a neon-green billboard? **Aymara Huidobro-Sealey** asks whether *brat* is a lipglossed takedown of the industry, or simply another of its products



Charli XCX said it herself: “Goodbye forever, *brat* summer”, bringing to a close the party-girl summer that had the entire internet in a chokehold after the release of her album in June. A month later, yet another re-release lands in our laps as she and Troye Sivan sell out arenas across the States with their Sweat tour. So, if *brat* summer is over, why are we still hearing about it? Enter: *brat* winter?

By now, I think most of us are at least slightly wary of the deluge of *brat*-themed parties, products, and branding lurking around every corner. I was particularly struck by the overwhelmingly neon green Freshers’ week that greeted me upon my arrival in Cambridge. The general commercialisation of music these days is, I think, what *brat* represented perfectly – and, in all fairness, made no secret of (see: “If you love it, if you hate it, I don’t fucking care what you think”). Charli could hardly have been clearer, yet it still felt like a bit of a let-down when her H&M collaboration made it clear just *how* little she really does care.

In some ways, the album’s self-proclaimed unapologetic quality, through its meta lyrics (“I get money, you get mad because the bank’s shut”), lends it an introspection that seems to both welcome and defy criticism. But is this so-called reclamation of tackiness just a little out of touch for a singer boasting a net worth

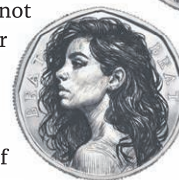
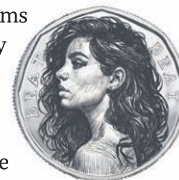
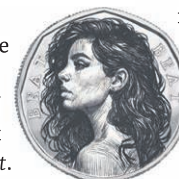
of \$10 million? However noble an artist’s intentions, it seems it’s ever a challenge to resist the allure of the high-profit, low-effort re-release. *Brat and it’s the same but...* almost feels like it could just as well have been called ‘*brat: Charli’s Version*’.

It would have been hard to miss the recent criticism levelled at Taylor Swift, namely for the periodic re-release of no fewer than 36 versions of her latest album, *The Tortured Poets Department*. This has opened up a wider conversation around the ethics of reissuing albums – not just because of its glaringly financial motivation, but also because of the way it disadvantages other artists. Many accused Taylor of monopolising the number one spot in the UK charts this June by tactically releasing a UK-exclusive version of *TPD* the same week as *brat* dropped. Charli had looked set to claim the spot before being overtaken. Though she fell victim to Taylor’s underhand chart-blocking tactics, it’s clear Charli is not above using similar methods for her own ends. Is this shamelessness a clever embodiment of the album’s hedonism? Or is it simply a perfect example of how mainstream music has become an elitist echo chamber? In other words,

is it *brat*, or is it just bratty?

And the trickle-down effects of this are no small matter either. Speaking to friends trying to make it in the music industry, I’ve noticed their biggest frustration is nearly always the amount of time they have to spend on their social media, at the expense of their actual music. Crafting the perfect, view-grabbing, algorithm-outsmarting, viral-going TikTok video was not in the job description when they decided to follow their musical dreams. And yes, pursuing a career in music, as with most creative industries, has always been hard work, and the promotional side is always, frustratingly, the factor that determines success. But the micro-trendification of music through social media in particular has made it near impossible for smaller artists to break through. It encourages a ruthless listenership that treats music as disposable, destined for the musical landfill of last year’s viral sounds.

Is there hope yet? While *brat* may not have been the harbinger of reason it initially promised in this increasingly unforgiving music industry, it certainly parodied (whether or not intentionally) the TikTokification that has the industry in its grip – even if it did so by being a prime example of it. I enjoyed it well enough as the backing track to my summer, but that’s where I think it is best left. Let us leave *brat* in 2024 and prepare ourselves for next summer’s musical phenomenon.



## The Times They Are a-Changin’: Bob Dylan’s final bow

**Natalie Tero** questions how, at 83 years old, Bob Dylan’s farewell tour raises questions about legacy, reinvention, and whether he can truly remain ‘Forever Young’ in the hearts of his fans

I was recently fortunate enough to attend a show in Nottingham as part of Bob Dylan’s most recent tour, *Rough and Rowdy Ways*. The tour lasted almost exactly three years and ended with a bang recently at the Royal Albert Hall. With Dylan now aged 83, and with no public plans for any future concerts, there has been much speculation as to whether this could, in fact, have been his final public tour.

Although I was not a big Dylan fan until recently, I was still more than excited to see such a legendary man up close and, hopefully, to hear him sing some of the classics. However, as I had begrudgingly expected, he played only a few famous songs (‘All Along the Watchtower’, ‘It’s All Over Now’, ‘Baby Blue’, and ‘It Ain’t Me Babe’, to be precise). The rest of the setlist was drawn from his newer albums – still great songs, but not exactly the rousing folk for which he is celebrated.

Even the famous songs were somewhat obscured by the performance. Long introductions and alternative arrangements made many of them almost unrecognisable at first. It became something of a

game to guess the song before the chorus revealed it (which it usually, but not always, did). In many cases, he spoke rather than sang the lyrics, so at times it felt more like a poetry reading – particularly during ‘It Ain’t Me Babe’, which was impossible to sing along with. True to form, Dylan made no introductions and said maybe five words to the audience the entire night. As a man who has had one of the most musically and culturally impactful careers in Western popular history, can we really blame him?

Of course not. The concert was incredible, even if it was a bit difficult to sing along to. But it did make me wonder: how much of my excitement was about the music, and how much of it was just to be able to say I’d been there? To see Bob Dylan in person, to hear him perform the defining songs of the 1960s, and to have a great story to tell?

I felt, somehow, that it was shallow of me to see Bob Dylan just for the sake of seeing Bob Dylan. On the way to the concert, I couldn’t deny that this was part of what excited me: to see him in real life! Someone with such a rich history! But I also knew he was old, and that neither his voice nor his play-

ing would be what they once were. As expected, his voice was deeper, even more raspy than we are used to, and often hard to understand.

Coming out of the concert, though, I felt completely different. It became about the music and how the music has changed. We aren’t in the 1960s anymore, and Dylan is an old man. The longer introductions, spoken lyrics, and unorthodox setlist seemed to reflect that perfectly. It would be disingenuous for him to play the same concert he did 60 years ago, even if he could. The songs are changing just as he is changing, and the times are changing. And it felt perfectly appropriate.

Perhaps his spoken rendition of ‘It Ain’t Me Babe’ captures this best. It feels as though Dylan is being exactly who he is, not who we want him to be. He isn’t the person we construct such glorifying images around – those are only images. He is someone else, something else.

So, the answer, my friends, is that it was all about the music. And through the music, I learned more about the man I had come to see on stage. The answer is blowing in the wind.



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# The female gaze keeps *The Holiday* fresh

Daisy Simpson gets in the Christmas spirit with praise for *The Holiday*

**T**he *Holiday* is, shockingly, not my favourite Christmas film of all time. 2000's *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*, with its unhinged central performance from Jim Carrey, anti-consumerist messaging and inappropriate humour ('Hey, honey! Our baby's here! He looks just like your boss...?'), will always occupy that spot, for better or for worse. But in recent years, I've grown to love the Nancy Meyers rom com more and more, and I've concluded that there's one salient reason why it might have overtaken *Elf* in my top three (other than Jude Law's line 'I sew and I have a cow').

*The Holiday* is a romantic comedy, and yet the storyline is dominated by so much more than just romance. The main premise is fairly simple - English Iris (Kate Winslet) and American Amanda (Cameron Diaz) are both recovering from damaging romances with philandering oafs, and deciding that they need a change of scene, they decide to trade homes over Christmas. Iris moves into Amanda's dreamlike LA mansion, Amanda into Iris's picturesque Surrey cottage, and, in acceptably predictable movie fashion, both of them find love again. But Iris's most moving and engaging relationship in the film is arguably her platonic one with Arthur, an ageing Hollywood screenwriter played to sprightly perfection by Eli Wallach. Similarly, one of Amanda's sweetest scenes involves her visiting the fairy-princess-style tent of her new paramour Graham's two small daughters. Hence, romantic love forms a significant part of the film's narrative structure, but it is by no means the only kind of affection explored onscreen, and the romantic relationships we do see develop naturally and

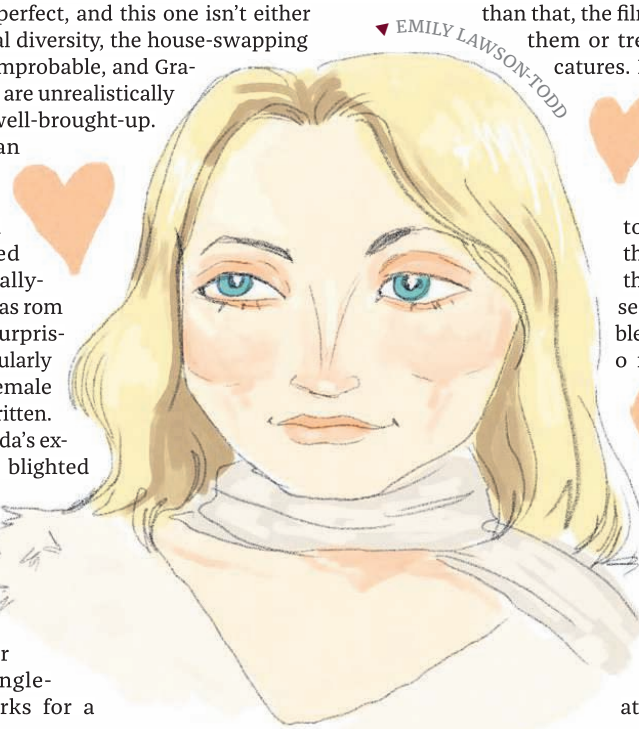
fully - we are provided with more than just longing glances and sporadic hand-brushes. Iris' friendship with mellow movie music composer Miles (Jack Black) gradually begins to deepen into attraction, while Amanda and Graham's immediate sexual involvement blossoms into mutual respect and love. No film is perfect, and this one isn't either - there's minimal diversity, the house-swapping setup is a little improbable, and Graham's daughters are unrealistically articulate and well-brought-up. But it boasts an impeccable Hans Zimmer soundtrack, and when compared to other culturally-beloved Christmas rom coms, it dates surprisingly well, particularly in the way its female characters are written.

Iris and Amanda's existences may be blighted by mediocre ex-boyfriends, but the audience has a firm grasp of who they are outside their romantic entanglements. Iris works for a

publishing office; Amanda's occupation causes her to imagine her life as a series of cornily narrated Hollywood trailers. We see them in their work environments and are given relatable scenes of them sobbing uncontrollably in oversized jumpers or yelling along tunelessly to 'Mr Brightside'. More than that, the film never patronises them or treats them as caricatures. Both are attractive and successful in their respective professional fields, yet the scriptwriters seem to understand that this doesn't preclude them from feeling insecure and undesirable inside; and neither of them are ever objectified for the sake of cheap chauvinist laughs. When we compare this to Richard Curtis's *Love Actually*, which has a glut of unfunny fat jokes targeted at Martine McCut-

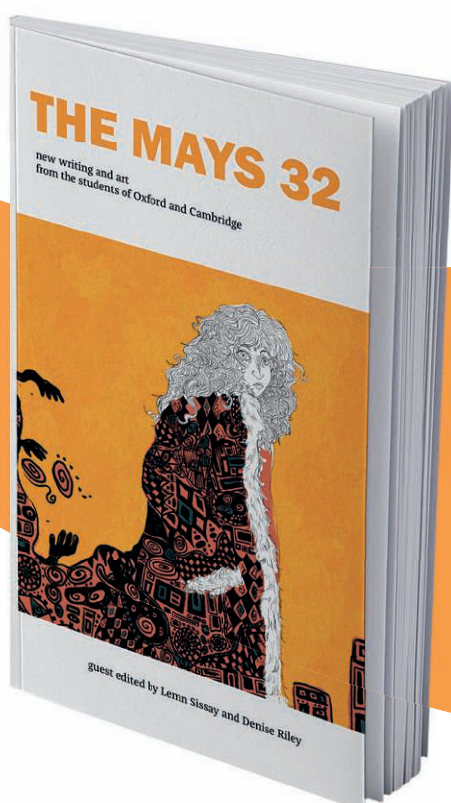
eon, pans over various actresses' bare breasts while their male counterparts remain comparably clothed, and doesn't possess a single example of adequate character writing, there seems to be one obvious explanation for why *The Holiday*, within the scope of the generally quite weird Christmas movie pantheon, is so unique in earnestly understanding its female leads - its director is female too.

Watching *Love Actually* in 2024, I was struck by how outlandishly unrealistic much of the women's dialogue is. The married Alan Rickman character has a cartoonishly seductive young secretary who spreads her legs while murmuring incoherently about secret corners in which to commit dark deeds; the Prime Minister's female assistant unflinchingly describes Natalie as having "a sizeable arse" and "huge thighs"; and four conventionally gorgeous American women inexplicably start planning an orgy with the aggressively charmless Colin Firth the second they meet him. Some have argued that these elements are deliberately exaggerated for satirical effect, because Natalie obviously isn't fat and so on; but if that was Curtis's intention, it wasn't apparent to me. And quite apart from the constant vulgarities regarding sex and body image, *Love Actually* rewards predatory and downright stalkerish behaviour as though it's romantic, while *The Holiday* rightfully punishes its resident fools and cheaters. Perhaps the key message to take away from this disparity is that more women needed to direct Christmas rom coms at that time - it might have dispelled the crass overtone of casual chauvinism that was so disturbingly prevalent in the early 2000s.



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**Theatre**

# *Snow White* is rotten right to the core ★☆☆☆☆

‘Mirror, Mirror, on the wall, who’s the worst panto of them all?’ CUADC/Footlights’ 2024 Pantomime is, says **Lauren Welsby-Riley**

Once upon a time, in a kingdom far, far away, a *Varsity* reviewer sat tucked away in the corner of the ADC theatre to review what she thought would be a fresh and funny retelling of a beloved fairytale. Did this year’s CUADC/Footlights panto deliver? Oh, no they didn’t. The writing (Lizzy Riley and Alice Roberts) was frankly uninspired and unfunny, and even the cast’s few standouts were left with nowhere to go.

Usually in this part of the review, I would lay out some context for the plot of the panto, but the show stayed disappointingly close to the original story of *Snow White*, save for the Seven Dwarfs being replaced with a rag-tag team of environmentalists – one of the show’s few wise choices. Although even this decision, which could have lent itself to some familiar references to current events (nothing about orange paint, *really?*) went nowhere.

That’s not to say that the jokes didn’t land; a loud minority of the crowd reacted to even the most mundane of lines with uproarious laughter, but given their cheers as members of the cast that they recognised began to appear, it’s not difficult to guess where their enthusiasm came from. Jokes that did have legs took so long to get to the punchline that I often forgot what they were talking about by the time they got there. Even the script’s pop culture references, usually a safe pool of resources for panto writers to draw from, were outdated and in places offensive, including a confusing jab at Amanda Holden’s appearance which would not have been out of place on my nan’s Facebook page ... eight years ago.

There was confusion throughout about who exactly the writers were expecting in the audience. Dame Trudy Wench (Marta Zalicka) was introduced as Snow White’s (Julia Da Costa) mother-figure, but Zalicka lacked the softness to really sell this, and the dropping in of occasional sexual innuendos made it hard to tell whether the panto was truly family-friendly or not. In fact, given that from a quick scan of the audience there were exactly no children present, the script probably would have benefitted from a little bit more filth to provide a welcome relief from the cringe.

Lyrical (Iona Luke) and musical (Stan Hunt and Jake Solway) the panto completely falls flat. The orchestra’s (managed by Lily Blundell) timing was clunky, forcing the cast to jump through hoops to predict the band’s next move, and at times it seemed like there was an unfamiliarity with the music that led to difficult to listen to mistakes. The lyrics were lost behind the noise of the score, but

I gathered that most of the content was repetitive and humourless; Snow White wants to stop doing so many chores, the Queen wants to be beautiful, Prince Charming is a bit of a wet wipe – we get it. The cast was weak musically as well, with Evil Queen G r i s -

tiresome – were committed and wry at all the right times. It’s just a shame that Sweeney’s sarcastic lines about the pantomime being subpar were more true than they were funny. Sure, you can blame the rest of t h e

tifully painted scenic design, most notably the cottage-on-wheels which had been hollowed out to make room for the furniture of the Stardom Seven. It was unclear whether or not the clumsy scene changes (particularly the comically slow rolling out of the red carpet) were awkward on purpose, but they consistently drew genuine laughs from me, so credit where credit is due, regardless of intent. However it does say something about the quality of the rest of the panto that my favourite parts were when nobody was acting, speaking, singing, and the lights were off.

The pacing of the show was utterly incomprehensible. In what felt like a cruel trick, the interval came after less than 45 minutes, lulling the audience into believing that the show, although not very sweet, would at least be short. The second act went on to last more than an hour and twenty painful minutes, leaving me feeling genuinely fatigued by the end. The first act’s funniest moments came from Queen Grismerelda’s henchpeople, the Chansels, who mercilessly disappeared right when the audience needed them most – act two.

In an impossibly long ensemble number featuring the Stardom Seven – starring Funky (Kohuné Aziz-Kamara), who was inexplicably introduced to the show minutes before being written out of it again – the lights turned on the audience in a borderline hazardous move by the lighting designer (Edward De’Ath) which left my retinas maybe permanently damaged.

I’m always a little bit disappointed when a panto does not cast a drag queen in the role of the Dame, but George Dickenson as the Huntsman in a pink tutu will do, I suppose. The riotous reaction to this number would suggest that most of the audience have never actually seen a panto before and had never before been presented with the idea of a male character wearing traditionally female clothing, but if the audience had never seen a panto before that at least explains why they enjoyed this one so much.

In a particularly exciting name-drop, Queen Grismerelda asked the audience to spot the reviewer to tell them how funny they were finding the show. As valiant an effort as this was, the last 40 minutes were so dragged out that I began to feel quite claustrophobic in my little corner of the theatre, and I left so quickly they wouldn’t have been able to catch me anyway.

merel-da (Toby Trusted) providing the only truly admirable vocal performance of the evening.

The standout actors were Thomas Sweeney as Happy, and Samuel McGuinness as Creepy, who despite being given some of the most boring scenes – the multiple audition scenes grew particularly

cast’s poor acting on first night nerves, but presumably the script will still be the same tomorrow night.

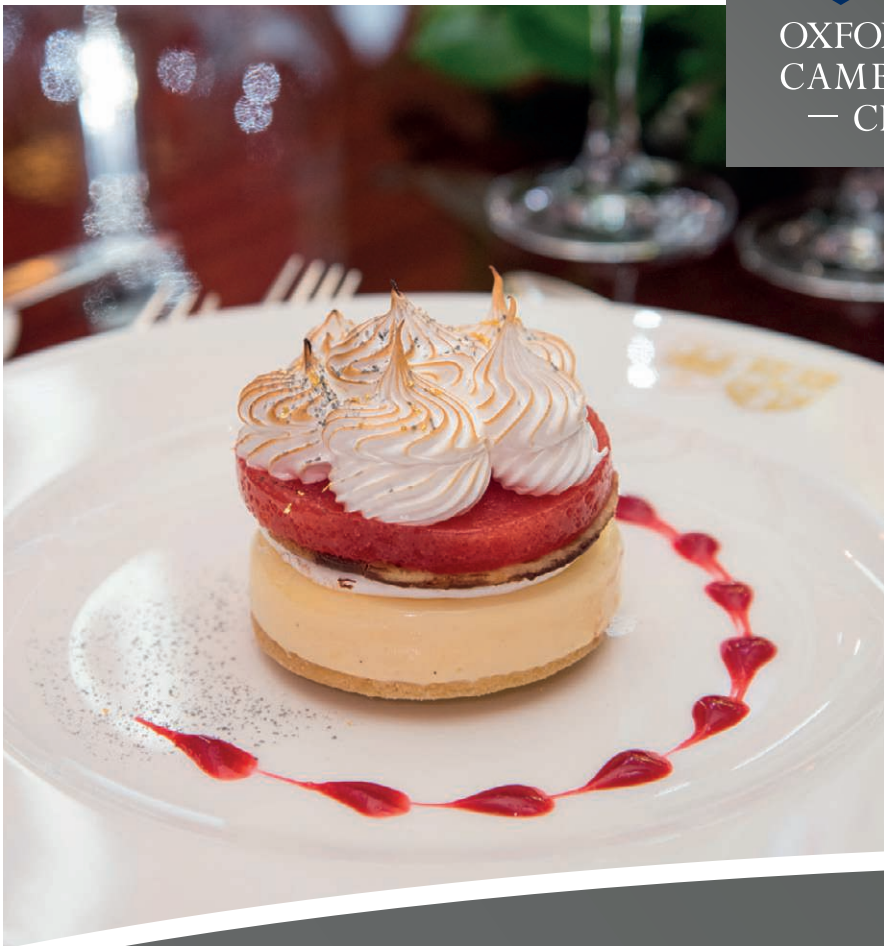
Undoubtedly the most impressive part of the pantomime was the set design. Yasmin Herron-Isa did a truly spectacular job to create a dynamic and beau-







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## Theatre

## REFLECTIONS OF A RETIRED THESPIAN

Jack Marley gets candid about taking a step back from Camdram

Everyone in Cambridge theatre is striking a balance between working hard (on their degree) and working hard (on lots of shows) ... until show week throws that balance out the window, of course. Throughout the first two years of my degree, I found myself in a constant battle of wills between my creative aspirations, the need to take every opportunity I get, the voice of my DoS that has taken residence in the back of my head, and the desire to just go and have a nap. "I just have to pass first year," I told myself, "and what's first year for if not trying stuff out, seeing what university life is all about, making friends?" I'm doing a degree where the final year is worth 100% of my result, so much the same logic applied in second year as well.

The scales sadly began to shift as my final year approached. Perhaps I'm being weak-willed in ceding to Cambridge's overbearing academic pressures, but I would quite like to get a First. My approach up to this point of fitting studies in around shows and other commitments, rather than the

reverse, evidently wasn't the wisest way to achieve that (the DoS gremlin in my mind is taking over, it seems). And so, over the summer, I decided to be boring and trade in Camdram for iDiscover.

This decision wasn't fully motivated by my academics. I have managed to tick off all the bucket list items I had heading into Cambridge theatre: I did stand-up in a Footlights smoker, directed a big Shakespeare production, acted in a Queens' May Week show, and ran the collegiate theatre society which influenced my choice of that college in the first place. Maybe this exposes me as lacking the true thespian spirit of unquenchable creative inspiration for show after show. But having done everything I wanted to, I know I'd have more regrets compromising my degree by continuing to do shows out of sheer force of habit, than I do seeing all the theatre opportunities come and go.

This isn't to say I don't miss it. The excitement (and stress) of final rehearsals, backstage anticipation, opening nights, and raucous afters can be intoxicatingly joyous. Memories from my theatre projects will be some of my fondest from my time here in years to come. Its absence has also made me aware of the sense of structure that shows gave to my term. I kept myself to a limit of one or two shows a term, usually at the middle or end. This meant each term had a broader trajectory of growing intensity towards the culmination of show week, and then the cathartic release of it all being over with the final curtain call. Each part of the process had a different energy, which created a real sense of progression from auditions, table reads, rehearsals, runs and techs in the space, to the production itself (and desperately catching up on work afterwards!).

My existence now plods along week by week - a

regular rhythm of supervisions, lectures, concerts, socials. The consistency is almost certainly good for my wellbeing, but it saddens me that weeks five and six just came and went without ceremony. This time two years ago was my first appearance on the Cambridge stage - a show I will never forget - and one year ago was my directorial debut. When Michaelmas comes to a close in a few weeks' time I suspect I'll find myself thinking, 'oh, well, that was that, I guess'.

Since hanging up my theatrical boots, I have also noticed how different my relationship with the scene is as it carries on quite happily without me. I no longer scour the Facebook page for interesting opportunities; pitching deadlines come and go without the pang of regret I used to feel when I missed them. A whole new cohort of freshers has arrived and started to get involved, none of whom I will ever work with. I now have the rather novel experience of browsing Camdram not to see who's up to what, or check that auditionees have any idea what they're doing, but just to see what's on. I go to see shows simply because they look interesting, and I have a free evening. After two years of finding myself regularly at the theatre for shows I was involved in, that were being put on by my theatre society, or to support friends, it is slightly strange to just ... spectate. It reminds me, in a very different way to when I was actively making theatre, why I love the art form. Even more joyously, I just get to rock up and enjoy the end result, rather than taking part in or running the countless hours of castings and meetings and rehearsals that led up to it. Time gainfully re-employed, I hope, on the rather different progression towards graduation day.

▲ PAUL ASHLEY

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# Water-based sports are struggling to stay afloat

**Romilly Norfolk** explores how Cambridge pool costs are harming sports clubs

The Cambridge University Swimming and Water Polo Club (CUSWPC) has been described by the men's water polo captain as in a "precarious situation". This is because the club has suffered increasing costs and less training time, only worsened by the University failing their development requirement to build a pool in the last seven years.

**“**  
*You come here and get worse at your sport*

As part of the new Eddington development, the University was asked to contribute a new pool, as the new homes would put greater pressure on existing leisure facilities. However, the University failed to build a pool in the seven years allowed since the first house

pensive to acquire in Cambridge. The treasurer of CUSWPC told *Varsity* that the club spend over £40,000 on pool time for the Blues and Seconds squads alone. This is excluding the cost of hosting Varsity, which is in the range of £8,000.

This huge cost limits the amount of pool time the club can afford, with them having to balance "affordable" membership fees with adequate training time. This is a particular issue for the Water Polo Society, whose huge transport fees limit the amount of money they can spend on training.

Training for water polo is also done in a standard swimming pool, instead of a regulation one which is deeper and doesn't have a shallow end. Players have said this detracts their training and prompts mocking from Oxford when they use the pool for Varsity fixtures.

This lack of training time takes a toll on the quality of swimmers and water polo players at the University. Callum told *Varsity* that "you come here and get worse at your sport". This is reflected

in the Varsity results of recent years, with the club suffering an across-the-board loss last year, and the gap between Cambridge and Oxford

However, the club does get a significant contribution from the University, like other sports societies. The University provides £14,000 in grant money to CUSWPC to help cover costs, this figure having increased by £3000 two years ago. This year they are also providing more support to the club, having pledged to match alumni donations, which will double the potential £3,500 they could get. There is also a new scheme in which the University is offering a 50% subsidy of all car hire costs for transport to games, however this doesn't include fuel costs. But when the club spends over 40 grand on pool time alone, this contribution is a drop in the swimming pool.

The high costs and shortage of training time has led to a dramatic decrease in new sign-ups. The president of CUSWPC, Menna Walmsley, told *Varsity* that it's "hard to sell a sport that costs so much". The club has many freshers walk away from their stand as soon as it's

revealed how much membership will cost them. The club's five-year plan also states that there's a threat of students choosing Oxford and other universities over Cambridge because of their superior swim



▼ JESSICA LEER

on the site was built, and consequently was fined £600,000 in June by the local authority.

The men's water polo captain, Callum Malcolm, told *Varsity* that the larger area of Cambridge is "in need of a pool". This is a particular issue for the water polo teams, who don't have a regulation pool anywhere in Cambridge. The team have to do a 100-mile round-trip just to their home games, which are in Northampton. This incurs great transport costs for the club, with water polo responsible for around 90% of the club's entire transport costs at over £9,000 a year.

The demand on pools in Cambridge has had an impact on the amount of pool time CUSWPC can access for their teams. In a five-year plan sent to alumni of the club, the club says pool time has halved from 2018-2023. Currently, water polo train three hours per week and the swimmers around six. This is much lower in comparison to other universities, with Oxford offering 16 hours of pool time a week.

This is because pool time is so ex-

only growing. It also limits the number of members who can receive a Blue, as it relies on swim time and few people achieve enough due to lack of training hours.

And all this ultimately comes at a huge cost to members. The average cost of membership across the entire club in 2023-24 came to £643.23 per person, with this having increased 154% in the last five years. These membership costs don't even include the cost of individual equipment such as training wear which individuals will need, nor the cost to enter competitions. This is far more than other universities in the country, with water polo fees at Oxford - who train at their university-owned pool - being £90 and as low as £60 at Liverpool.

The club is aware of this financial burden on members and that it is leading to the sport becoming inaccessible to many. But the club does hope to be able to offer subsidisation of fees for those on lower incomes, but with its current financial situation this will take time.

much money to a new sport: "Why would they pay this much to play water polo when they could pay nothing to play frisbee?"

The situation of the club has been described as "frustrating" by Callum, the men's water polo captain. He criticised the University for their priorities, pointing out "we have an indoor rowing facility before we have a pool".

The president said "the club are scraping by and have nothing to show for it", which was echoed by Callum who expressed the society is just "trying the best we can".

It's hoped that the club will be able to recoup some money this year to build stability, with the five-year plan for the club aiming to improve their quality, especially in making the club competitive against Oxford. But with costs of transport and pool time only set to increase with time, and thus the cost of membership, this will be a struggle against the tide for CUSWPC.



▼ JESSICA LEER

## Barney Blackburn talks to Eton Fives captain Jamie Levinson

**What has been your best sporting moment playing Eton Fives?**

Playing in the Varsity match in my first year was definitely my highlight. There was a great level of competition, teamwork and all in all a fantastic day out!

**When did you start to play the sport?**

I started in my early teens playing at my local sports centre. Unusually, it had public courts which gave me the opportunity to play. The majority of Eton Fives players attended private schools (it is worth noting that this is not the case in Cambridge, where most people start while at uni) so institutions like sports centres for state school students and universities like Cambridge provide an opportunity to bring diversity into the sport!

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

Without a doubt, the best bit is watching everyone, including yourself, grow as players. Experience and effort make great players so having some contribution to that process is wonderful.

**And the worst bit...?**

The worst bit has to be pestering people to make things happen. It's not nice for them or for us as captains but it has to occur to make the club run smoothly. This is narrowly followed by losing a match to Oxford.

**Is it easy for beginners to join?**

Super easy! There is no equipment required as CUEFC will provide gloves and balls. All a beginner needs to do is come along to a session at the Sports Centre on Tuesdays or Thursdays 7-9pm in term time (completely free to try!)

**What makes Eton Fives such a brilliant sport?**

There are many things that make Eton Fives great. For the game itself, it's fast paced but not super athletic (making it accessible) and has many elements of randomness and chance that really spice up the experience - all the odd shaped ledges, buttress, bricks, steps, pepper pot - it's very unique. I'd encourage a reader to search up an image of an Eton Fives court just to get an idea of the strangeness of its layout. Beyond that, another brilliant feature of the game is that there is no referee whatsoever. The players assess and judge each other's play and upholding the spirit of the game is vital to playing it correctly! This means that players are kind and understanding and less toxically competitive than other sports can often be.

**What do you think about the fact that the sport's name may put some off?**

I think it's a totally reasonable reaction, as the game is historically tied to Eton College and that is one of the most annoying parts about convincing people to try it out. However, there are plenty of reasons to look past this. For instance, rugby and squash were invented at Rugby (unsurprisingly) and Harrow Schools and don't necessarily have the same associations due to their names. Furthermore, the community of players is completely the opposite of what a non-player might expect - a major strength of the sport. Ultimately, the name puts people

off playing but I think trying it, experiencing it and meeting the community is a whole different measure of its quality!



◀ JAMIE LEVINSON



# Sport

Captain's Corner  
pg. 31



Swimming  
money troubles  
pg. 31



## BATH BATTERS BLUES

Cantab  
ASSET MANAGEMENT



# Bath trounce subpar Cambridge despite strong perseverance from Blues

Cambridge 19

Bath 41

Joss Heddle-Bacon  
Sports correspondent

Bath's attacking potency proved too much for a spirited Light Blues side who succumbed 19-41 in a scrappy, high-scoring clash. Despite being persistently out-muscled by an irrepressible Cambridge forward pack, Bath maintained the upper hand throughout courtesy of their highly skilful backs, who clinically exploited a fragile Cambridge defensive line.

After a fairly tight opening 40 minutes, a Bath scoring explosion early in the second half vanquished any remaining Cambridge victory hopes, with Abbie Lamb and Rebecca Lacy both scoring a brace of tries. Nevertheless, the afternoon was packed with positive signs for the Light Blues; after a 38-0 trouncing in the reverse fixture, they dominated possession, bullied Bath at the scrum,

and doubled their overall try tally for the season.

Having conceded 246 points in their first five matches of the season, Cambridge looked set for another tough outing when they fell behind in just the second minute. In a calamitous passage of play for the Light Blues, Bath secured a turnover from a successful counter-ruck, enabling their number 72 to breach a scattered defensive line and carry the ball almost unobstructed from deep inside her own half to the try line.

The ensuing period saw a slew of errors, which left both sides unable to capitalise on some attractive offensive moves. A seemingly unstoppable 22nd-minute run from Bath's number 8 looked certain to extend the visitors' advantage, but Izzi Millar's tackling heroics kept the scoreline static. While Bath's strengths lay in swift passing moves and their backs' creative flair, Cambridge sought to play long phases, attempting to batter a way through the visitor's resistance.

Rapid build-up play eventually provided the key to the tryline in the 34th minute - after Bath shipped the ball with pace out to the left flank, Rebecca Lacy

was able to adeptly weave her way onto the scoresheet.

Sensing that Bath were starting to brew some serious momentum, the vocal bands of Light Blue support scattered around Grange Road entered full voice. The partisan energy emanating from the stands seemed to refuel the home side, who struck back just two minutes later via an explosive burst through the line from Ali-Mae Brown, who powered past numerous defenders to make it 7-14.

Come the second half, it appeared a highly physical initial 40 minutes had taken its toll on a bruised Cambridge side; bad omens abounded from the moment Cambridge fumbled the ball straight from kick-off. Following the turnover, two hefty carries from Bath's forwards left a back peddling Cambridge helpless to Rebecca Lacy's driving run to the try line for her second score of the afternoon.

Any tension left in the contest quickly dissipated from there on, Bath's backs running amok and brutally exposing the defensive frailties that have plagued Cambridge this season. Yet another Bath try ensued in the 47th minute, swelling

their advantage to 26-7 - Abbie Lamb ripping past a series of Cambridge missed tackles in a lightning run from inside her own half.

Just a couple minutes later, in a near carbon copy of her previous try, Abbie Lamb ran almost the entire length of the pitch unscathed, her pace and power breaching the home side's defences with total ease. Bath looked to be running riot - three tries in a mere seven minutes handing them a mammoth lead over a seemingly capitulating Cambridge.

Despite the chasm that had emerged on the scoresheet, the Light Blues refused to subside, regaining confidence courtesy of their indefatigable forwards. Number 8 Ali-Mae Brown came to the fore once more, her crafty pick and go off the back of a momentous drive from a scrum broke Bath open, enabling Poppy Latimer to drive her way over the line for a 52nd-minute try.

Unfortunately for the hosts, the procession of second-half tries wasn't to end there, and within four minutes Bath reconsolidated their stranglehold over proceedings. It seemed to be Groundhog Day when Abbie Lamb zipped through

the heart of the Cambridge defence, but her charge was held up just metres from the try line. Quick hands from the Bath backs quickly shipped the ball out to the right flank, where a waiting winger notched a 12-36 lead for the visitors.

An exhilarating second half continued to seesaw wildly, with Cambridge striking back in the 67th minute with a wonderfully crafted try - building the phases, using powerful short runs to wear down a flagging Bath resolve, before Bethan Jones provided the final surge over the line. Subsequently, both teams became stuck in attacking gridlock, neither side able to fashion a further opening until the match's dying seconds, when a fluid Bath passing move culminated in their seventh try of the match. Following a second half that proved to be thrilling and chaotic in equal measure, the final score stood at 19-41; Cambridge condemned to their sixth defeat from six matches in BUCS Premier South.

While Cambridge's evident defensive vulnerability remains a concern, Wednesday's compelling performance from the Light Blues' forward pack offers hope for the remainder of the season.