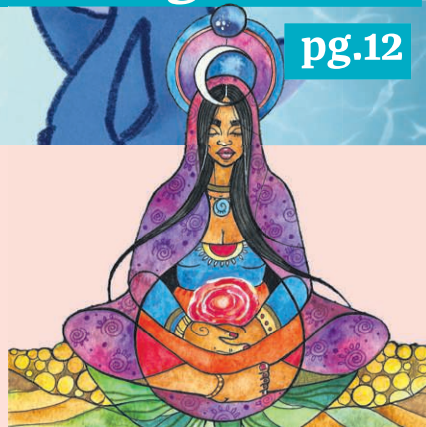


FREE
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Standing up to sharking culture

pg.12

Meet the lecturer
destigmatising
periods
pg.10



Starting the New Year with a bang

pg.24

No.930
Friday 24th January 2025
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The Independent
Student Newspaper since 1947

VARSlTY

Uni 'fails to address' 'state-sponsored' death threats



- College accused of 'being negligent'
- Student believes messages came from military
- Open letter calls for 'immediate action'

Charlie Rowan

Deputy News Editor

A Cambridge PhD student and campaigner has accused the University of failing to take adequate action to protect him from the Pakistani secret service, who he alleges have threatened him over his criticism of "human rights abuses".

Roshaan Khattak was sent a message on X by a newly-created account on 21 December which contained threats against him and his family.

Sent from a profile named 'Ali Ahmed,' it read: "You should know that staying away from criticising our military in foreign parliaments, online seminars, international platforms, and UN would ensure the safety of your family."

"Have mercy on them. Your cousin can only be released then. Hope you will consider. Don't forget even Cambridge and UK is not safe. For them they can get anywhere, Sweden, Germany, Canada... Don't be stupid," the message continued.

Khattak claims the message was sent by an agent of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), telling *Varsity*: "The account's behaviour and content reflect a pattern consistent with ISI tactics rather than that of an overly zealous supporter."

"The specific threats, their timing, and the calculated methods - including indirect warnings via my contacts in Pakistan - mirror the strategies the ISI employs to intimidate and silence critics abroad," he continued.

Khattak reported the message to the police, but was told: "the perceived threat is not enough to raise a crime of malicious communications."

He has also accused the University of "not taking the threat seriously".

Khattak said his College's adminis-

tration "declined" to meet him "despite receiving over 15 requests. On four occasions, they initially agreed to a meeting but cancelled at the last minute."

"I don't believe the College is taking the threat seriously. I think they are being negligent even after human rights organisations have written to them about the severity of the threat."

A spokesperson for the College said: "The College is and has been taking all steps toward resolving the situation, including ongoing conversation with the student."

Upon hearing this response, Khattak claimed that the College has "completely stopped responding to my emails and concerns." He believes that the police's unwillingness to act is a result of his College "trying to downplay the threat to the police to cover up their own negligence".

In an open letter to vice-chancellor Deborah Prentice, students expressed "deep concern over the lack of action" on the issue calling on the University to act quickly to "ensure his safety and set a precedent of standing firmly against such oppressive practices."

In late November, Khattak had arranged an online solidarity conference over the "enforced disappearance" of his cousin, Idris Khattak, in Pakistan.

Idris Khattak, a former researcher with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, was sentenced to 14 years in prison for "espionage" by a military court in Pakistan in 2021. The UN special rapporteur has called for his release.

"After the conference, a friend in Pakistan was asked to deliver a chilling message for me to 'shut up or face risks,'" Roshaan Khattak said.

Continued on page 3 ▶

Uni cracks down on AI

There have been three cases of AI academic misconduct

News Page 7 ▶

45% of students drink regularly

Varsity investigates Cantabs' drinking habits

Investigations Page 9 ▶

V Lent, Week 1

Editorial

Cambridge is an institution that appears timeless. When we arrive we are told stories of students who walked the same corridors as we did hundreds of years ago, and are reminded of our University's constant presence in history. It is an unexpected shock when we are reminded of Cambridge's fragility; from government threats towards students (pg.1), or a funding crisis in higher education (pg.6), this University is not as immortal as tour guides and punters tell tourists. When the future can appear so unpredictable, with the University still working out how to modernise in the face of AI (pg.5), falling numbers of EU students since Brexit (pg.4), and questions around its status as a world-leading institution (pg.13), it is important to consider the role this institution holds in the present day. It is encouraging to see that the student body is taking up this mantle, exploring thought-provoking topics in their letters to *Varsity* (pg.2).

Despite this fragility, we are reminded of all that makes our time in Cambridge so precious: the people around us. Be it college bops supporting charities (pg.6), students volunteering for refugees in Calais (pg.14), or lecturers ending period stigma (pg.10), this newspaper contains plenty of reminders of the compassionate and ambitious community we are a part of. This compassion continues beyond our time here, with alumni making sure no one in the sporting world is left behind (pg.31).

Although the University's history does make it vulnerable to change, we must remember to appreciate the ancient city we make our temporary home. From stained glass

windows (pg.21) to the mementos we gather throughout our university days (pg.23), our time at Cambridge is something we will look back on fondly in years to come.

The memories we make here, agonising over self-audition tapes (pg.28), bonding over music (pg.26), and experiencing films from all over the world (pg.27),

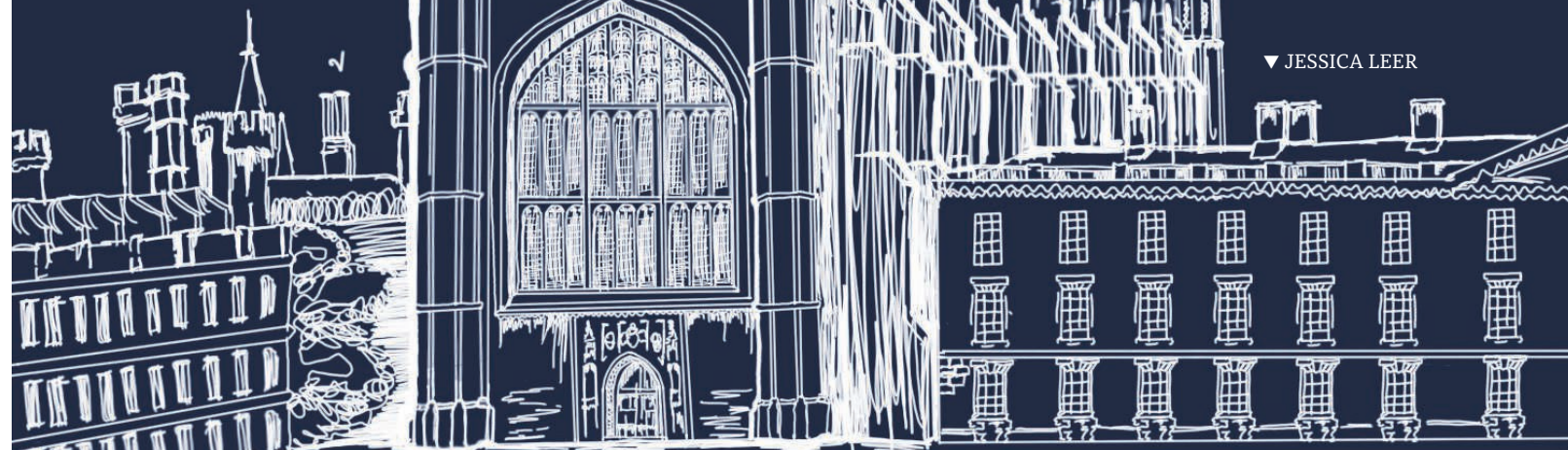
will endure beyond fears about the University's fragility, preserving these precious days within Cambridge's ancient past.



Sophie Denny & Wilf Vall Editors-in-Chief

LENT 2025

▼ JESSICA LEER



Letters to the Editors

Want to share your thoughts on an article? Send us a letter to letters@varsity.co.uk



Selling out is necessary

In response to 'Tolerating anti-intellectualism supports the career-ification of University' (01/01/2025)

Dear *Varsity*,

Max La Bouchardiere opposes the recent 'career-ification' of universities. This is a noble opinion, but it is wholly incorrect. Universities have always been career production lines. It is not a recent phenomenon. The earliest universities produced lawyers, theologians, doctors, and translators. And universities must remain career production lines. The 'real world' funds universities. The current system would be unsustainable without accountability and without clear benefits for its patrons. It would crumble.

Douglas Page
Magdelene, History

Veterinary woes

In response to 'Vet students could be sent packing' (29/11/24)

Dear *Varsity*,

This headline caused a lot of distress to vet students, particularly pre-

clinical vets. It was stressful enough after a previous varsity article about the vet school was published to *The Guardian* and subsequently picked up by other national newspapers, and this made a bad situation worse with some vet school staff being left in tears. It would have been better written if the focus was on the vet students themselves and if they were consulted on the article before it was published.

Amber Heal
Newnham, Veterinary Medicine

Custard cream conundrums

In response to 'Varsity's 2025 'ins and outs' (09/01/25)

Dear *Varsity*,

I Enjoyed your Mainsbury's custard creams as out, in the 2025 'in and outs' Article. In fact, I think I wrote the Camfess which initially exposed this outrage... In my view, there are two different custard cream factories in this country with two different recipes. Sainsbury's has recently followed the disturbing trend of Aldi and Lidl in switching from Factory A (the good custard cream recipe) to Factory

B, (the new recipe which has too much biscuit and not enough cream). The last remaining holdout of Factory A appears to be Tesco, and I would suggest fellow purveyors of Custard Creams go there, but seemingly only in their larger packs of Custard Creams.

Alex Myall
Robinson, History and Politics

Scribing squabbles

In response to 'The case for handwritten exams' (10/01/25)

Dear *Varsity*,

Although your article on handwritten vs typed exams raised some interesting points, I think its recommendations were compromised by poor research. You mention it is harder to cheat in handwritten exams, citing an article which makes no reference to whether the exam was handwritten. You additionally mention the 'university' moved to Inspira and this caused chaos in the English exams, notably omitting the fact that this has been used in several STEM subjects for several years without incident. Finally,

you use preservation of handwriting skills as a pro, not stating why these skills are still useful in the world.

Euan Worth
Queens', Computer Science

Protect exam integrity

In response to 'Law student set to sue Cambridge after failing PhD' (15/01/25)

Dear *Varsity*,

Meagher (the student suing Cambridge) himself claims he is "less able than other candidates of the same ability to produce a PhD thesis." This statement is false—if he cannot produce a thesis, he is not of the same ability. Standardised assessments ensure credibility, to do otherwise undermines any value. True fairness creates environments where everyone can excel, not by compromising standards. Reducing standards due to disability is itself ableist and patronising. For all our sakes, and the value of our degrees, his case should be laughed out of court.

Emma Munday
Queens', Engineering

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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

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Uni not taking threats ‘seriously’

Continued from front page

That month, Khattak, whose Cambridge doctorate is in human rights, was asked to draft a bill in the UK Parliament on transnational repression by Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell. He received this threat three days after completing the draft.

Having worked alongside human rights lawyer Clive Stafford Smith on multiple cases of transnational repression in 2024, Khattak noted an “alarming trend” of alleged “state-sponsored” attacks on Pakistani exiles abroad.

In 2020, Karima Baloch, a Pakistani human rights activist and government critic, was found dead in Canada. Earlier that year, Sajid Hussain Baloch, a journalist who wrote about human rights violations in Balochistan, was found dead in a river in Sweden.

Khattak stated: “These incidents, combined with previous challenges and death threats towards me – including detentions and interrogations while filming in Balochistan and a targeted theft during my investigation of Sajid Hussain Baloch’s assassination in Sweden – have raised concerns about my safety.”

Khattak, who is in exile and without a fixed address, was nominated for the Best Student Film Academy Award and the BAFTA Student Award in 2022 for his documentary film, *State of Dissent*.

The film tells the story of his two activist friends who ran a famous blog known for satire of the Pakistani military. One day, he alleges they “disappeared and were brutally tortured by the army in a bid to silence them”.

According to its description, the film details “what it was like inside Pakistan’s notorious and secret torture cells, how the two bounced back and now continue their defiant activism in exile while be-



▲ LOUIS ASHWORTH

Amnesty Society Cambridge have called for immediate action from the University, having previously campaigned for a student allegedly murdered by Egyptian officials due to suspicions he was a spy

ing exposed to assassination attempts even abroad.”

Amnesty Society Cambridge shared Khattak’s story on Instagram, stating: “We demand immediate action from the Vice-Chancellor, Cambridge Administration and Cambridge Police to ensure Roshaan’s safety before it’s too late. We also demand an external investigation to look into the negligence and mishandling by the college.”

Peter Tatchell, a human rights campaigner advising Khattak on the situation, said: “I am deeply concerned about the security situation involving [...] Roshaan Khattak. He is at serious risk of terrorist violence by agents of the Pakistan state, who have targeted critics and human rights defenders like him in the UK and across Europe.

“His concerns and precautions are not at all excessive [...] Roshaan has been leading efforts to hold the perpetrators

accountable; provoking the ire of Pakistan’s ISI,” Tatchell continued.

Daniel Zeichner, MP for Cambridge, said: “I am aware of the case involving Mr Khattak and am deeply concerned to hear of the issues they have raised.”

Before receiving this recent threat, Khattak had communicated concerns over a lack of safety protocols for dissidents with his College over the summer, but said they “didn’t do anything.”

A spokesperson from Cambridgeshire Constabulary said: “We were contacted on 21 October with reports of malicious communications in Cambridge.

“Officers contacted the victim and the matter was investigated, but there was insufficient evidence to identify those involved.”

The Pakistan High Commission and the University of Cambridge were contacted for comment.

SU backs controversial marking boycott proposals

Felix Armstrong
Associate Editor

The Cambridge Students’ Union (SU) sabbatical officers have backed a contentious set of policies designed to mitigate future marking boycotts, which would allow students to graduate with exams unmarked.

Ahead of an upcoming vote on the proposals, the SU undergraduate president, alongside other SU officers, signed a statement in favour of the measures.

The statement claims that Cambridge’s lack of rules to protect its students from marking boycotts places them at a “distinct disadvantage” compared to their peers at other top universities, leaving Cambridge vulnerable to “significant reputational damage”.

The vote was tabled by biostatistics lecturer Dr William Astle, who claimed that students are “being treated as consumers”.

His motion came after the University tabled a set of policies designed to mitigate the impact of future marking boycotts, following severe strike disruption in summer 2023.

The proposed motion removes the section of the proposals which would supposedly allow students to graduate with exams unmarked. This amended set of proposals will now be voted on by staff.

The SU-backed comments were published in a series of “fly-sheets” circulated ahead of the vote among staff, signalling their signatories’ views on a particular issue.

One fly-sheet in favour of amending the proposals argues that allowing students to graduate before receiving their grades would “diminish the aca-

demic credibility of the University and the academic credibility of its degrees”.

The statement, signed by 32 staff members, also claims that Cambridge’s proposals were produced due to “pressure” from the Office for Students.

Another fly-sheet claims that Cambridge would risk its “academic integrity,” were it to allow students to graduate with unmarked exams.

The SU-backed statement, however, claims that the University’s original proposals “explicitly uphold academic standards while prioritising the protection of student interests”.

This fly-sheet, also signed by multiple staff, students, and JCR presidents, emphasised that 2023’s marking boycott left students in “limbo - unable to continue their studies, proceed with visa applications, and missing job opportunities”.

32

The number of staff who signed a flysheet in favour of amending the proposals

The SU told *Varsity* that the sabbatical officers acted “in a personal capacity, but need to be noted as student representatives according to the University’s fly-sheet process”.

They continued: “Our policy on strikes, as set at the first council of Michaelmas, is that we will continue supporting UCU’s fight for better and fairer working conditions and pay, and provide educational and welfare support to students during the strikes.”

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

Alleged spy received ‘outstanding achievement’ award at Churchill

Varsity News

An alleged Chinese spy received an award at a prize-giving ceremony hosted at Churchill College in 2019.

An invitation shared by the Cambridge Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA-CAM) shows that Yang Tengbo, who was banned from entering the UK in 2023, attended the ninth edition of the ‘Chinese People’s List’ awards, or ‘Most Achieved Chinese Awards’ (MACA), on 25 October 2019.

An article published by the event organisers says that Tengbo received a prize for “outstanding achievement” at the ceremony, of which CSSA-CAM, a group which supports Chinese academics in Cambridge, was named a “co-organiser”.

In December, the businessman was identified as the alleged Chinese spy, previously known as “H6,” whose appeal over the Home Office’s decision to ban him from entering the UK had been rejected. No allegations had been made against Tengbo at the time of the ceremony. He denies all allegations.

According to the invitation shared by CSSA-CAM, the ceremony at Churchill was attended by a variety of public fig-

ures.

Among these figures was the late businesswoman Barbara Judge, then-widow of Paul Judge, a major benefactor of the Cambridge Judge Business School.

MACA’s website states that Tengbo won the “Chinese People’s List’s Outstanding Achievement Award”. A photograph from the event appears to show Tengbo being presented the prize by Judge, next to whom he can be seen sitting in the audience in a separate photograph. Both Tengbo and Judge were directors of clothing company B&H Enterprise at the time, according to Companies House.

There is no indication that CSSA-CAM or any of the other individuals or organisations were aware of, or complicit in, any wrong-doing.

London Mayor-backed growth agency London & Partners was listed on a post seemingly shared by the MACA organisers as having provided “support” to the ceremony.

A spokesperson for L&P told *Varsity* that a then-employee of the agency, Laura Xu, was a prize-giver at the event, adding that her attendance was “part of business as usual networking activity undertaken by our inward investment

managers”. The agency did not support the event in any official capacity, they added.

They explained that Xu, who was previously an Account Manager at Huawei Technologies and, according to her LinkedIn, is currently the Global Head of Public Affairs at OPPO, also hosted a meeting “for some members” of the MACA delegation at the L&P offices in the week after the MACA event, seeking to “promote London as a business destination”.

The spokesperson stated L&P did not support the event in any capacity “other than one of our employees being an attendee and presenter of an award at the event,” add-

ing that the agency is not aware of any “official agreement” that would have permitted L&P to be named on social media as a supporter of MACA.

L&P is not aware of any other employees having attended the ceremony, and says it has not supported any other events organised by the Chinese People’s List or MACA.

Churchill College told *Varsity* that the event was booked by a third party through the College’s commercial

conferencing business. A spokesperson explained: “External events use the College as a venue but are not administered or run by the College.”

The spokesperson said that neither the Chinese People’s List nor MACA have used Churchill as a venue for any other events, adding that CSSA-CAM was not involved in reserving the venue.

According to the BBC, UK authorities have alleged that Tengbo was “frequently connected to officials connected with the Chinese state” and had “sometimes deliberately obscured his links” to the Chinese government, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and the United Front Work Department (UFW). While a tribunal ruled that there was not an “abundance” of evidence against Tengbo, it was considered “sufficient” to justify MI5’s designation of him as a security risk.

Tengbo, founder of consultancy firm Hampton Group International and founder-partner of the Chinese branch of Prince Andrew’s entrepreneurial scheme Pitch@Palace, has stated that he has no links to anyone involved in Chinese politics, has never been a member of the CCP, and has never worked on behalf of the UFW.

All relevant parties were contacted for comment.



▲ LI-XIAN CHOONG

News

52% fewer EU students accepted since Brexit

Colleges demand fees of over £10,000 from international students

Kezia Douglass
News Correspondent

There has been a 52% decrease in the number of EU undergraduates accepted to Cambridge since Brexit, *Varsity* analysis of admissions data shows.

In the pre-Brexit period (2016-2020), an average of 311 EU students were enrolled onto undergraduate courses at Cambridge per academic year. This dropped to an average of just 149 students in the three years following the UK's exit from the EU (2021-2023).

In the academic year 2021/22, the home fee status of EU students was removed, forcing them to start paying the same, higher fees as other, non-EU international students studying in the UK.

That year, 170 undergrads from EU countries enrolled at Cambridge, compared to 312 in 2019/20 and 245 in 2020/21. The number of EU students accepted to Cambridge in more recent years shows no sign of a return to pre-Brexit levels.

A Cambridge University Scandinavian Society spokesperson told *Varsity* that there had been a noticeable drop in the number of Scandinavian undergraduates. They said: "It's very clear that the implementation of international fees has discouraged EU students from applying."

They also recalled that they had met many high school students while carrying out outreach work in Denmark, who had been keen to study at univer-



▲ LOUIS ASHWORTH

sities like Cambridge, but "tended to be put off by the financial burden and lack of funding." Instead, they said, Danish students were more likely to consider postgraduate study here after finishing their undergraduate degree at home.

Although both Labour and the Conservatives shut down proposals for a UK-EU youth mobility scheme last year, recent reports suggest that the Labour government is looking at a modified version of the scheme which would allow more European students to come to the UK without a return to freedom of movement.

However, Jamie Arrowsmith, head of Universities UK International told Research Professional News that a scheme offering "unrestricted access to full undergraduate programmes, on the same terms as domestic students" could be "difficult for the government to agree to" given the financial state of the UK's higher education sector.

Many British universities are in financial deficit due to a prolonged freeze on the fees they can charge home students. As a result, many rely on international students' high fees to cross-subsidise domestic students.

In addition to having to pay international fees, EU students without settled or pre-settled status in the UK no longer have access to tuition fee loans or maintenance loans. First-year student Johanna Trejtnar, who is Czech, said that, without going through "very competitive processes for private scholarships," studying in the UK is now "completely inaccessible" to most Czech students.

While some of her friends were forced to turn down offers to study at top UK universities because they were unable to fund them, Trejtnar "was lucky to get a scholarship from the Cambridge Trust" which opened its scholarships to international students for the first time this year. "Only 10% of accepted students get this scholarship; if I hadn't gotten it, I would not have been able to come to Cambridge," she said.

Since Brexit, some European countries have also reduced or cut financial support for undergraduates studying in the UK. Previously German scholarships supported undergraduates with "€10,000 per year for university fees and a living cost stipend on top," meaning it cost no more to study at Cambridge than at a German university, but now "scholarships only fund postgraduate studies in the UK," a Cambridge University German Society spokesperson told *Varsity*.

"While I knew German undergrads, who started studying in the UK before Brexit and were fully funded by scholar-

ships, the German undergrads I know now either have pre-settled status or are entirely self-funded," they continued.

Several students also cited college fees as another cost making financing an undergraduate degree at Cambridge increasingly difficult.

While home students only pay a government-regulated tuition fee, international students are required to pay a college fee on top of their course-dependent tuition fee. These fees currently range between £10,017 per year at Darwin and £13,950 per year at Murray Edwards.

UK students, including those at the

149

The average number of EU students accepted each year since 2021

University, have also faced reduced opportunities to study in the EU since Brexit. The Turing Scheme, a replacement for the Erasmus+ Scheme, is intended to provide financial support for students working or studying abroad. However, some students at Cambridge have been unable to gain access to funding.

The University of Cambridge was contacted for comment.

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KK KELSEY KERRIDGE



University creates 'AI' category for academic misconduct after rise in cases

Charlie Rowan

Deputy News Editor

Cambridge recorded its first cases of academic misconduct involving artificial intelligence (AI) in 2024, Freedom of Information requests reveal.

Between 25 November 2023 and 24 November 2024, examiners referred 49 cases of exam cheating to the Office of Student Conduct, Complaints, and Appeals (OSCCA), the University's central disciplinary body. Of these, three were linked to AI - the first time such cases have been formally recorded.

The data also shows an increase in overall academic misconduct cases in recent years. Between 2019 and 2023, the number of upheld cases ranged from four to 19 annually. However, the figure jumped to 33 in 2024, following changes to the Student Disciplinary Procedure in October 2023.

Under the revised rules, all academic misconduct cases must be reported to OSCCA, including those resolved within departments. Previously, only cases requiring formal investigation were reported centrally, contributing to the rise in recorded incidents.

These new cases of AI-related cheating in assessments come amid growing concerns about the use of generative AI models such as ChatGPT in education.

Last year, the Human, Social, and Political Sciences (HSPS) Faculty announced handwritten exams would replace online assessments for first and second-year Sociology and Anthropology students, citing a rise in AI use in exams.

Dr Andrew Sanchez, Chair of the HSPS Tripos Management Committee, commented: "This decision responds to concerns around the use of AI in online examinations and follows discussion within the HSPS Faculty and Tripos Management Committee last academic year. Throughout this process, the feedback of student members of the Tripos Management Committee has been sought, and those members have been briefed on any changes."

A 2023 *Varsity* survey found that nearly half of Cambridge students had used AI for university work, with almost a fifth using it for assessed tasks like coursework. The University prohibits the use of AI in assessed work, classifying it as academic misconduct, but guidance for non-assessed work varies by department.

In March 2024, the HSPS Faculty issued an open letter urging students not to use generative AI, warning it could "rob you of the opportunity to learn." They emphasised that presenting AI-generated text as one's own would constitute academic misconduct.

English students were told in Lent 2023 that AI could assist with tasks such as "sketching a bibliography" or "early stages of the research process," provided it was done under supervisor guidance. Some first-year engineering students were also advised they could use ChatGPT to structure coursework.

In February 2023, Cambridge's pro-vice-chancellor for education, Bhaskar Vira, told *Varsity* that a ChatGPT ban was not "sensible" because "we have to recognise that this is a new tool that is available."

That same year, Dr. Vaughan Connolly and Dr. Steve Watson from the Faculty of Education hosted a Q&A titled "ChatGPT (we need to talk)" on the Cambridge website. Watson warned that while "universities and schools must protect academic integrity," over-regulation risks making institutions "unresponsive to change" as AI is widely adopted.

A University spokesperson said: "The University has strict guidelines on student conduct and academic integrity. These stress that students must be the authors of their own work.

"Content produced by AI platforms does not represent the student's own original work so would be considered a form of academic misconduct to be dealt with under the University's disciplinary procedures," they added.

Comment: 'AI can help foster a creative student cohort, not suppress it'

Luca Chandler

The revelation that Cambridge recorded its first cases of AI-related academic misconduct is a pivotal moment in higher education. While concerns about AI's impact on academic integrity are valid, this debate also raises deeper questions about how we define authorship and originality in a world where the line between human cognition and AI are increasingly blurred. If knowledge production is no longer solely an individual endeavour but a collaborative process between human and machine, should our definitions of authorship evolve accordingly?

Rather than relying on punitive measures, Cambridge should explore frameworks that integrate AI use into academic practice transparently and ethically. The response from various faculties suggests the institution is still grappling with these questions. While the HSPS Faculty warns that AI use may rob students of the opportunity to learn, the English and Engineering faculties have outlined ways AI might be a legitimate aid in research and

structuring coursework.

AI is not going away, as I am sure both these faculties would agree. Perhaps a more productive approach would involve equipping students with the critical skills necessary to engage with AI responsibly. Just as academic institutions adapted to new technologies like the internet, so too must they reconsider how AI fits within the evolving academic landscape. Instead of viewing AI as an existential threat to academic integrity, we should ask how to incorporate it into learning in ways that preserve intellectual rigor while recognising the changing nature of knowledge creation.

The cases of AI-related misconduct are signals of a broader transformation in how we conceptualize originality. AI can help foster a creative student cohort, not suppress it. Rather than resisting this shift, Cambridge should lead the way in shaping ethical, yet innovative and intellectually enriching engagements with AI.



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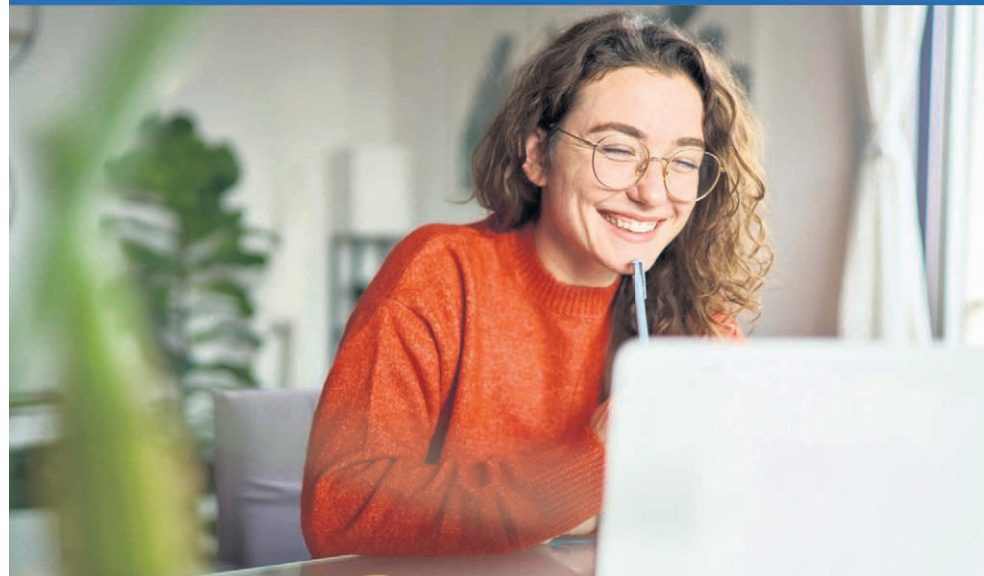
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News

Cam scientists ask government to save labs

Felix Armstrong
Associate Editor

Cambridge academics have called on the University and the government to save a number of research units which could be forced to close due to axed funding.

153 Cambridge academics and researchers were among the 608 signatories of an open letter calling on the government to save a series of research units funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC).

The MRC says that it had provided

“focused investments” to these units as part of its mission “to support research and training with the aim of maintaining and improving human health”.

These units “have long and distinguished histories (some going back over 100 years), and have been responsible for many seminal developments in their respective fields,” the letter says.

But, the MRC has axed the existing funding network which supported these units. Research units previously supported by the MRC must now apply to a new funding system for “Centres of Research Excellence” (CoREs).

Cambridge is home to six MRC units, which carry out leading research on areas including epidemiology, toxicology, and brain sciences.

Among the Cambridge-based signatories of the open letter is Martin Rees, former president of the Royal Society and current Astronomer Royal. Rees was the Master of Trinity College from 2004 to 2012. The letter was also signed by two Nobel Prize-winning scientists.

The letter was addressed to Patrick Vallance, the minister for science, and shared with prime minister Keir Starmer. Concern over the future of these labs had caused the issue to be debated in Parliament in October.

Jo Grady, general secretary of the University and College Union (UCU), who have backed the letter, said that the MRC’s decision to drop unit funding was made “behind closed doors”.

A number of Cambridge researchers have previously expressed their concerns about the future of the University’s MRC units.

During an official University “discussion” which took place last year, a researcher at the biostatistics research unit, drew attention to the role played by the unit during the Covid-19 pandemic, when researchers provided statistical modelling for Public Health England.

The researcher called for Cambridge

to intervene by providing the units with the extra funding required: “There will be an historical stain on the University if Units with such a rich academic culture close because of institutional inertia.”

Duncan Astle, another researcher at one of Cambridge’s units, claimed that “livelihoods and careers” would be impacted, were Cambridge’s MRC units to be closed.

“These are places of tremendous interdisciplinary creativity that have provided a training ground for generations of world-leading scientists, and vital research infrastructure that has become essential to the success of the wider University,” Astle said.

The open letter warned that the widespread closure of MRC research units would “have a detrimental effect on the entire medical research sector in this country”.

Responding to academics’ concerns last year, the University Council conceded that it “is not possible” for Cambridge to “absorb” the cost of running these research units, given “the seriousness of the Academic University’s financial position”.

Last year, *Varsity* revealed that the University projected a £53 million deficit for the 2023/24 academic year, and is “flying blind” financially.

A spokesperson for the University of

Cambridge told *Varsity*: “The MRC’s move away from the Unit funding model represents a significant change for our MRC Units. The University has set up a project board to support the six Cambridge Units and their staff with the transition to MRC Centres of Research Excellence (CoRE) funding and/or other funding streams.”

“We are working closely with the Unit directors and programme leaders on academic strategy, and ways that Unit activity can be transitioned into existing University department structures,” they said.

Patrick Chinnery, executive chair of the MRC, told *Varsity*: “Following two reviews from 2019 to 2021, the Medical Research Council has changed how it invests in long-term research within its units and centres to adapt to the changing needs and opportunities in health research and maximise impact from public funds.”

“We recognise that replacing our unit model with the new MRC CoRE model will be challenging for many unit staff. The MRC remains committed to working closely with the employers, the Universities, to support their staff, so that they are best able to manage the transition onto other funding mechanisms, including MRC CoRE and programme grants, and alternative employment arrangements,” he continued.



▲ MAGNUS MANSKE VIA [HTTPS://COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKI/FILE:MEDICAL_RESEARCH_COUNCIL_CENTRE_CAMBRIDGE.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Medical_Research_Council_Centre_Cambridge.JPG)

Ex-PVC splashed over £5k on expenses

Wilf Vall
Editor-in-Chief

Former pro-vice chancellor David Cardwell spent over £5,000 on expenses in the last academic year, including £2,224.78 on hotels.

Cardwell, who served as pro-vice chancellor for strategy and planning until July last year, claimed £5,179 on expenses “in relation to his role” as pro-vice chancellor. His claims made up 65% of all those made by members of the University leadership.

He received a remuneration package of at least £165,000, according to the University’s latest reporting.

This comes at a time of financial pressure for Cambridge, after it was revealed that the University had run up a £53 million deficit with “no clear understanding” how.

Cardwell’s largest claims came from hotels and accommodation, followed by £901.42 on “subsistence” and £448 on “hospitality and entertainment expenses”.

Cardwell is currently a professor of Superconducting Engineering and fellow at Fitzwilliam College. He is also a fellow of the Royal College of Engineering after being elected to the institution in 2012..

Other than Cardwell a significant proportion of expenses claimed went towards vice-chancellor Deborah Prentice’s relocation, who received £2,535 for her move from Princeton after taking up her post 2023.

This comes after Prentice was named the highest paid Russell Group vice-chancellor, receiving a salary and benefits package worth £577,000 for her first year.

The expenses of university leaders are facing significant scrutiny nationwide,

with vice-chancellors spending almost £1 million on foreign trips alone over the past three years.

Among those who made significant claims was Irene Tracey, vice-chancellor of the University of Oxford, who spent almost £4,000 on 25 airport transfers and £16,000 on international visits.

Shortly after her appointment, Tracey described the funding of higher education as “perilous” and called for a “root and branch, whole-scale review” of government subsidisation.

This revelation came in the face of a growing crisis in University finances, with 75% of universities predicted to run a budget deficit in 2025-26. The government has raised tuition fees to £9,535 a year in response, with multiple UK universities including Cambridge backing the move.

In response to this, the Cambridge Students’ Union told *Varsity* they are “concerned” that the fee rise will create “another barrier for students from low income backgrounds”.

Tuition fees are now projected to exceed £10,000 by 2029, according to reporting by *The Financial Times*. An announcement that fees will continue to grow with inflation is expected to appear in the government’s upcoming spending review.

A spokesperson for the University of Cambridge said: “Cambridge is a world-leading university, and a vital part of the roles of the Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellors is representing the University at national and international events, and meeting partners and donors to secure funding and opportunities that benefit our students, staff, and research. Cambridge is committed to ensuring that all business expenses are justified and in accordance with University policies.”

College ents raise money for Clarrisa's Campaign for Cambridge Hearts

Neve Wilson
News Correspondent

A number of college entertainments (‘ents’) teams have started using ticketing platform Youni to sell event tickets after the app announced it would donate all commission from sales to Clarissa’s Campaign for Cambridge Hearts.

Clarissa’s Campaign raises money and awareness for student ECG heart screenings through charity Cardiac Risk in the Young in memory of French and Italian student Clarissa Nicholls, who would have graduated last year.

Clarissa passed away due to an undiagnosed heart condition, arrhythmogenic cardiomyopathy, during her year abroad in May 2023.

The Campaign continues to grow and has now partnered with Youni, a

university community and events app which integrates Cambridge’s events, extracurricular activities and societies.

Clarissa’s Campaign is now receiving ticket commissions from the platform and putting on its own events.

This includes collaborating with Youni and 14 college JCRs to organise ‘Mind and Body’, a successful art exhibition and late night DJ event with Slipped Disc on 19 January. The event sold over 170 tickets and raised more than £1,300 for the Campaign.

A large number of colleges, including Lucy Cavendish, Murray Edwards, Emmanuel, and Trinity Hall, have also pledged to sell bops and other college and university-wide events through Youni.

Esther Magedera, Co-President of Clarissa’s Campaign, told *Varsity*: “See-

ing Cambridge come together for a charity to keep us all healthy is so unbelievably rewarding. And a big part of what the campaign has been up to at the moment is working with Youni, who are generously donating their booking fees from every ticketed Cambridge event to the Campaign.”

A member of the Trinity Hall ents committee, who are participating in the scheme, told *Varsity*: “This scheme is especially pertinent to us as students of Clarissa’s College, and one that we are incredibly proud to be participating in. It’s such an important initiative for all Cambridge students, and we are glad to be able to help out in any way we can.”

The Campaign is also raising money this year by teaming up with May Ball and June Event committees. Among the colleges pledging to donate ticket commissions or poster sales to the campaign are Trinity, Peterhouse, and Trinity Hall.

Clarissa’s Campaign has now raised more than £60,000 in total donations since the Campaign was launched.

After a successful first set of heart screening days in October 2024, the Campaign has organised a second set of screening days at the Cambridge University Sports Centre for 25 and 26 January 2025. The screening days are fully booked but there is an active waiting list for students who were unable to get a place at these screenings.

With future events in the pipeline to raise money and awareness, the Campaign ultimately aims to give every Cambridge student the opportunity to access free heart screenings.

In a previous interview, the Clarissa’s Campaign team told *Varsity* how they intended to “make a massive noise,” about the Campaign, claiming that “Money isn’t a problem for Cambridge – we just need to show them we’re worth investing in.”



▲ CLARRISSA'S CAMPAIGN

Axed Corpus sports day swap returns

Evie Selby
Deputy News Editor
The annual Corpus Challenge is set to return on 23 February, following its cancellation last year.

Each year, students from Corpus Christi Cambridge compete against those from Corpus Christi Oxford in various sporting events. The challenge has been an annual tradition since 1997.

However, the 2024 Corpus Challenge was cancelled due to student misbehaviour during the 2023 event.

The Oxford students pillaged Corpus Cambridge's JCR, stealing pool cues, light bulbs and a box of items which included a key photo of Boris Johnson's son, Theodore Apollo. They failed in an attempt to take a water fountain.

JCR Harley Summers, president of the JCR, described the "chaos" of 2023 which involved the Cambridge College's Bene't the Bear being "hung, drawn and quartered" by Oxford students.

Corpus Challenge is labelled by the Cambridge College's JCR

website as "one of the most fun days of the year" that is intended to remain a "light-hearted event" despite the rivalry.

It involves students competing in various sporting challenges, including hockey, football, lacrosse, and netball, as well as bar sports such as pool and darts. There have also been non-sporting competitions including pharmacology challenges and a legal moot.

The cancellation last year led to a "re-imagining" of the tradition, with Corpus JCR and MCR competing against each other. This year's reinstated challenge will take place in Corpus Christi College Oxford.

Corpus's JCR president said: "The JCR is pretty excited about the event returning after temporary ban. We are hoping that we can put the past behind us."

Summers acknowledged the events of 2023, in which Bene't the Bear was "viciously obliterated". However, "he will be making a cheerful return to Oxford; so, if we can return home with him (in one piece) holding the Corpus Cup, that would be a dream."

Alex Lee, Corpus Cambridge's JCR sports and society officer commented: "Now that everyone is aware that stealing could lead to the event being cancelled again, I am certain that there won't be any repeats of 2023. It would be a travesty for future cohorts of Corpus students to miss out on the Corpus Challenge as we did last year."

Speaking on last year's JCR and MCR event, Summers added that Corpus Cambridge JCR is "thankful to our Sports and Socs Officers for arranging the event and are proud of the revolutionaries who hung on to the tradition last year amidst the ban, raising £4k for Gaza."

Arts degrees dominated by elite private schools

Anuk Weerawardana
Senior News Editor

Over half of those studying an arts-related degree at Cambridge University are from "upper-middle-class origins," with only four percent hailing from working-class backgrounds, according to a report by the Sutton Trust.

The report states that Cambridge, tied with the University of Bath, has the lowest proportion of working class backgrounds compared to other UK universities, with the University of Oxford coming second at five percent. The University of Bristol and Manchester follow closely with five and seven percent respectively.

Cambridge also has the highest percentage of private school student intake for their creative courses, at 40%.

High-profile figures in arts industries such as television, film and music are more likely to have attended private school than the rest of the population - 31% compared to seven percent. 86% of classical musicians have attended university, and from this 12% had attended either Cambridge or Oxford.

Over half of Cambridge's music students are from upper-middle-class origins, the report states.

The report also highlights the benefits of university for potential actors, stating that 64% of BAFTA nominated actors in TV and film attended university - nine

percent attended Oxbridge.

Nick Harrison, CEO of the Sutton Trust, said: "It's a tragedy that young people from working class backgrounds are the least likely to study creative arts degrees, or break into the creative professions."

He added: "These sectors bear the hallmarks of being elitist - those from upper-middle-class backgrounds, and the privately-educated are significantly over-represented."

4%

The percentage of students studying an arts-related degree at Cambridge who come from a working-class background

A spokesperson for the University of Cambridge said: "The collegiate University has taken steps to widen access to our Arts and Humanities courses through the introduction of the Foundation Year in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. This is a relatively new initiative, and as the participating cohorts are yet to graduate it would not have featured in the Sutton Trust's research on proactive steps that are being taken to address under-representation in the arts and creative industries".



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News

Dark academia hits the backs

A Cambridge graduate, Kate Van der Borgh, has penned a “dark academia” novel set in a fictional Cambridge college. *And He Shall Appear*, Van der Borgh’s debut novel, draws on her own experiences of feeling like an outsider while at the University. The story revolves around a northern, working-class narrator navigating the privilege and exclusivity of a fictional Cambridge college while falling under the spell of a charismatic but sinister student.

From Senate House to Second Lady

As JD Vance was inaugurated as vice-president of the United States on Monday (20/01), his wife Usha Vance – a Cambridge graduate – became the Second Lady. Vance received an undergraduate degree at Yale University and a master of philosophy in early modern history at Clare College through the Gates Cambridge scholarship. Born in San Diego to Indian immigrant parents, she is the first Asian American and Hindu in the role.

Billionaire boys club

A new study has ranked the University of Cambridge as the UK university most likely to produce billionaires. QR Code Generator examined which universities were attended by the 23 UK-based billionaires on the 2024 Forbes World Billionaire list who went to a UK university for all or part of their undergraduate education. Three went to Cambridge: Andrew Currie, John Reece, and Mark Coombs. With a combined net worth of £9.8 billion, they ensured Oxford was kept in second place.

University museums shop shuts its doors

The University of Cambridge Museums shop on King’s Parade closed its doors for the final time last Wednesday (15/01) after ten years in business. According to the *Cambridge Independent*, no staff are losing their jobs and they are instead being relocated to the other museum shops – in the Fitzwilliam Museum, the University Museum Of Zoology and the Botanic Garden. A candle company is thought to be taking over the premises.

Around town



Evie Selby delivers the local Cambridge news

Row over plan to send Cambridge waste to Northern Ireland

A council has heard calls to defer a recycling contract that would result in Cambridgeshire waste being sent to a recycling plant in Newry, Northern Ireland. The new contract is set to begin in March and would cost over £2.2million in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire in 2025-26. It would result in the amount of waste being recycled increasing from 80% to 99%. However, there have been calls for delay until key data on the environmental impact are available for public consideration. Liberal Democrat Councillor Olaf Hauk complained, “You could hardly find a spot further away from Waterbeach within the UK.”

Dedicated cancer hospital set to be built in Cambridge

The government has declared that work to establish a dedicated cancer hospital in Cambridge could begin this year. The Cambridge Cancer Research Hospital is planned to be built between 2025 and 2030 and will be located on the biomedical campus. Blueprints have shown that the hospital will have 77 single rooms for patients. South Cambridgeshire MP Pippa Heylings has commented that she was “hugely relieved” following the announcement. The hospital will combine research and expertise from Addenbrooke’s Hospital, Cancer Research UK’s Cambridge centre, and the University of Cambridge.

Mandatory wheelchair training for Cambridge taxi drivers

Taxi drivers in Cambridge will now need to complete compulsory training about how to safely put wheelchair users into their taxis. The policy aims to give people confidence that drivers will be able to safely load and transport wheelchair users. Cambridge City Councillor Gerri Bird has described this as a welcome policy change and that it would be helpful for wheelchair users to be involved in the training.



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Illustration by Richard Briggs



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Punting for pints: Cambridge students drinking more despite national trends

Varsity survey shows that while students are drinking more, they're less likely to be hitting the clubs this Lent

Eleanor Dougan & Nick James
Investigations Leads

A Varsity survey has found that Cambridge students are drinking more than they used to, with almost half drinking several times a week, and just one in eight not drinking at all.

Varsity's survey highlights that rates of student drinking have increased since a 2017 survey conducted by the University, which found that nearly three in ten students did not drink while one in four regularly drank to get drunk.

The results also show that Cambridge students drink more than the national average for Gen Z, of whom one quarter are teetotal, according to a 2024 survey by Drinkaware.

85%

The percentage of Cambridge students who have never taken class A drugs

90%

The percentage of 16 to 24 year olds nationally who have never taken lass A drugs

Varsity's survey also found that two in three students have never taken Class B drugs, while 85% have never taken Class A drugs.

This was also higher than the national average according to an ONS survey which found that 90% of those aged 16 to 24 had never taken Class A drugs and just over a quarter had smoked cannabis.

Over half of the students surveyed by Varsity reported an increase in alcohol and drug use in Cambridge during term time. Just ten percent reported a

decrease during term time, and when asked about their reasons for this, several students cited the "Cambridge workload."

One student remarked: "I think sometimes Cambridge students feel a need to overcompensate at social occasions to counterbalance the amount of time they spend working."

Another commented that "Cambridge is such an easy place to become addicted to substances" due to its "pressure cooker" environment and the "implicit peer pressure to go out."

Many students in the survey explained that they have recently tried to cut down on drinking or smoking, reflecting national trends of Gen Z as the 'sober curious' generation.

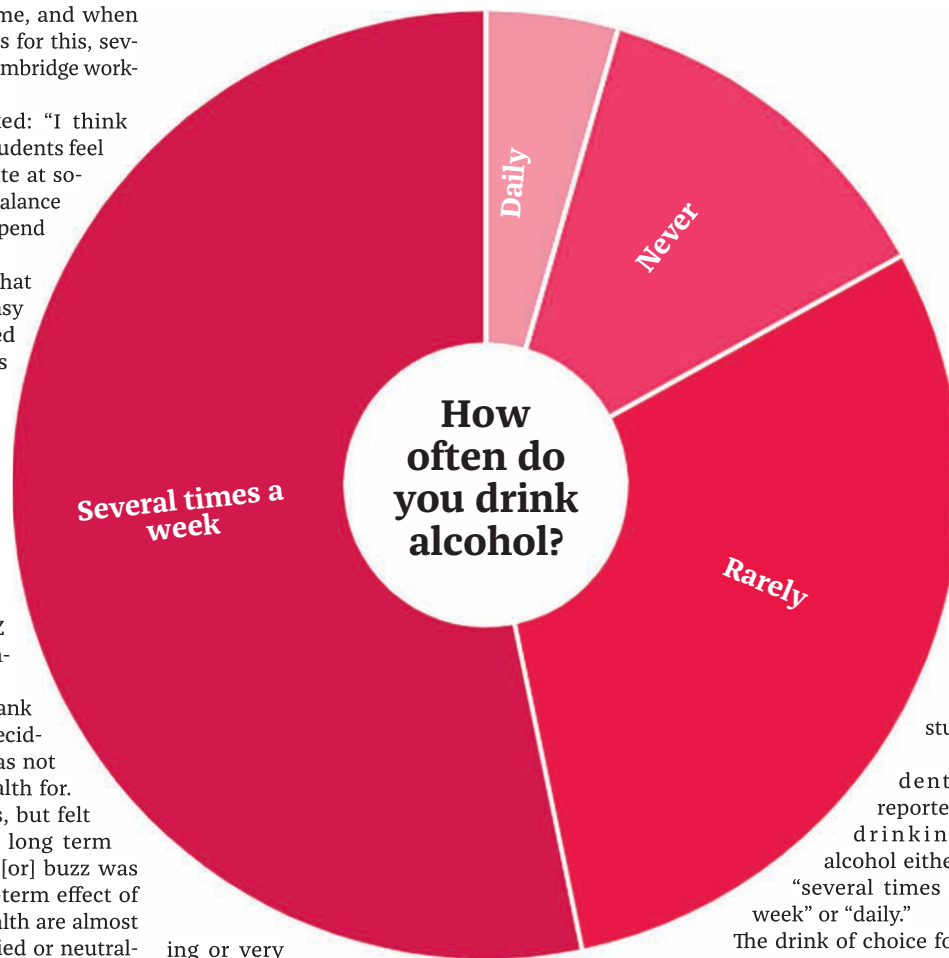
One student said, "I drank daily in sixth form and decided that the mild buzz was not worth damaging my health for. I have smoked cannabis, but felt similarly - there's zero long term gain involved, the high [or] buzz was negligible, and the long-term effect of drugs and alcohol on health are almost always either understudied or neutral-to-negative."

There was a noticeable divide in the drinking habits of humanities and STEM students, with humanities students (particularly Theology and History) more consistently disclosing frequent drinking and clubbing.

In comparison, for Engineering, Computer Science, and Natural Sciences, students recorded either never drink-

ing or very frequent drinking, with little in between.

Some trends in drinking habits were also observed across the different colleges, with all the commuting Girton and Homerton students surveyed reporting that they drink alcohol either "sometimes" or "several times a week." Other colleges which reported high levels of drinking include Jesus, Pembroke, and Kings where



students reported drinking alcohol either "several times a week" or "daily."

The drink of choice for three in ten Cambridge students was spirit and a mixer. Around 20% of students preferred beer or wine, and only one student preferred whisky.

The most popular occasion for drinking alcohol was being at the pub, closely followed by clubbing and trips to a college bar. Other situations which called for drinking included "bedrotting," "I am lock in," and "reading Foucault".

In contrast to the high drinking rates, more than half of Cambridge students revealed that they rarely go clubbing or on nights out, with only one in three disclosing that they go out several times a week.

20%

The percentage of Cambridge students who go clubbing several times a week

In response to these results, Michael Bryce, the founder of Nightlife Cambridge, told Varsity that "the drop in students drinking to get drunk is a positive sign," since "it shows a move towards more mindful drinking and probably reflects a broader cultural change in how young people socialise."

He also commented: "While it's clear that a lot of students aren't regular clubbers, the fact that 20% still go several times a week is encouraging in what is a pretty tough climate for late night hospitality venues at the moment. It suggests there's still demand, but it's becoming more niche, so the challenge for nightlife in Cambridge is how we create something that draws in those who rarely go while keeping the regulars coming back."

University watch



Lili Fairclough rounds up student news from around the country

The bill is back

The government is moving forward with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act, passed in 2023 under the Conservatives. The act will allow the Office for Students to fine universities if they fail in their obligation to uphold free speech. The law was initially paused by education secretary Bridget Phillipson in July, in response to concerns that the existing Act would protect hate speech and expose cash-strapped universities to legal action. The revived act will come with changes, however, as Labour aims to ensure that minority groups are protected and to remove the provision for people to sue universities who they believe have not upheld freedom of speech.

Sunak's new gigs

Former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is taking up two new positions at his alma maters: the Universities of Oxford and Stanford. He is joining the Blavatnik School of Government at Oxford, becoming a member of its "world leaders circle". Oxford's chancellor Lord Hague said that Sunak will be a "huge asset" to the school, adding, "I have no doubt his insights will inspire the next generation of leaders who are starting their journey here at Oxford." Sunak is also becoming a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford. The Institution's director, Condoleezza Rice said that Sunak's "extensive policy and global experience will enrich our fellowship and help to define important policies moving forward". Sunak follows in the footsteps of many former prime ministers who have gone on to work with universities, including Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

Exeter in Egypt

The University of Exeter, in a deal with Ain Shams University, will be opening an outpost in Cairo to teach both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. It will become the first Russell Group university with a branch in Africa. Egypt's Minister of Higher Education, Mohamed Ayman Ashour, praised the commitment to "preparing future generations for success in an increasingly interconnected world". It is hoped that the arrangement will facilitate student exchanges and industry and research collaboration.



▲ SHELLEY YANG

Interviews

Céline-Marie Vidal: 'Most women are uncomfortable talking about their cycles in front of men'

Charlie Rowan meets the Cambridge lecturer destigmatising the menstrual cycle

The menstrual cycle has been preoccupying one Cambridge geography lecturer. "If we're not in relationship with this natural rhythm of the body, then the body falls apart," Céline-Marie Vidal says. A volcanologist by day at Fitzwilliam College, Vidal has also become a qualified 'menstruality mentor,' a yoga instructor, and a period-painting artist.

Yet, for Vidal, menstruality – defined as the "life process of menarche, the menstrual cycle, menopause, and the mature years" – is not detached from this academic work. Instead, both ventures tie into a broader worldview. "What connects them is the same aspiration to reconnect to cyclical wisdom [...] the life force that makes us live and breathe," she says. "I teach the Earth, right? The nature of the Earth is cyclical – it creates, it destroys. What I'm really trying to do is to create spaces for women to reconnect to that cyclical rule of the whole of creation."

This year, Vidal wrote a children's book that presents understanding the menstrual cycle as the "key" to life. *The Temple's Secret*, illustrated by Trinidadian artist Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné, is a bold way of educating young girls – she says "above the age of six or seven" – about their periods. Indeed, an excerpt from Vidal's website employs metaphors of "temples" to describe the female genitals and "red rivers" to symbolise period blood.

"You carry a temple inside of you. It is small but magical. It is delicate but powerful. It holds the secret of creation. The key of Life. You can feel this Temple inside. All the way down into your belly," the book, yet to be published, reads. "Someday, when enough women listen to the sacred song of the temple, humans will find balance with nature again."

Although she does not want to put anyone off by a "graphic" approach, Vidal finds it necessary to be direct with kids about menstruality awareness. "I'm not a children's educator, I have no skills there, but I am a human, I have nieces [...] When I had my first period, I was told I have to wear Tampax and I couldn't

play sports. For me, it felt like a curse. The point of the book is to tell young girls it is not a curse, it is a way of initiating them to be a woman in this world."

Since 2023, Vidal has been a qualified 'menstruality instructor' with menstruality organisation Redschool. She regularly hosts 'Menstrual Cycle Awareness' workshops in Fitzwilliam College for both staff and students, and launched a three-part 2024-25 workshop series in early December. In these workshops, Vidal teaches participants to "track their cycle" with a chart on how they feel, and then, three months later, revisits these charts to observe patterns. Alongside this, she hosts women's circles that are more focused on "discussion and self-care".

"I've noticed how much of a need there is for these women's circles and workshops. For mental

health issues, to start with, they change everything. There are very few spaces where women can gather and talk about these things. It is great for men to be educated about it [menstruality], but most women are uncomfortable talking about their cycles in front of men."

Vidal notes the reception among these circles in Cambridge has been positive. "There has been good attendance, the College has been very supportive, and people have said this information has changed how they see things. This [student] generation has been very open." This month, a Cambridge University Menstrual Health Society was set up by students, attesting to student's openness.

Last March, Vidal organised a paid 'Spring Equinox' menstruality circle in Fitzwilliam, pledging entry proceeds to a Palestinian charity in protest of Israel's war in Gaza. Although the event was canceled "due to numbers," the invitation read: "In honoring the [period] blood through a c-knowledge and

“*I am convinced that there is war in this world because we are at war with our inner selves***”**

celebration of its significance, we heal the war within our very self."

"It was a circle to make peace; I am convinced that there is war in this world because we are at war with our inner selves. It might sound very woo-woo to say it like that but we are constantly fighting off against our bodies," Vidal says. "The way we use vocabulary about our own bodies supports this. For instance, with viruses, we are seen as fighting them off. The reason why we're fighting anything is we're always considering ourselves disconnected [...] from our families, the Earth, everything."

"From the moment we recognise that feminine wisdom in the body, we can repair everything in the world, the climate, everything that is not functioning right now."

Vidal is clearly unafraid of confronting taboos head-on. She has even produced several paintings made with her own period blood, with one being exhibited at the Cambridge Guildhall in November. One of these pieces was captioned on her Instagram with: "The only blood that should be shed is the original blood. The blood that runs down our temple every moon. Honoring the blood is like a prayer, a reclamation of who we are in the flesh and where we come from."

She reflects, "Everyone is uncomfortable with it. I don't want to provoke, but just to invite reflection that menstrual blood is not something dirty." Period.



Tell us about yourself

Saoirse Exton, a first year HSPS student at King's.

What inspires your activism?

My Instagram bio says that I am a climate justice activist, which is true, but slightly different now that I'm at Cambridge. To paraphrase Audre Lorde, there is no such thing as a single-issue because we don't live single-issue lives. I believe that climate justice means a better world for everyone in it. It means reparations for climate damages, it means the end of economic exploitation of 'developing' nations, it means collectively owned energy, community-based development in the hands of the people. It means valuing welfare over profit, valuing the essential intertextuality of global cultures, rather than the homogenisation of one profit-obsessed culture. It means listening once more to the land, revitalising biodiversity alongside native and indigenous languages, learning to live alongside ecology. Absolute climate justice may be impossible to achieve, but it is this image of utopia that keeps me orientated towards what I believe.

Tell us about your work with the UN

I was selected for the UN Secretary General's Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change in 2022. Being completely honest, I don't see the UN as extremely useful for efforts associated with tangible change-making. In fact, it has operated as an opposite to movements of decolonisation and attempts to secure human rights for decades. In terms of the climate crisis, despite the genuine initiative that the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change has taken to bring together nations on one single issue, conferences like COP29 continually fail everyone except for fossil-fuel companies. This is not to say that activists like myself should entirely abandon the UN, but it cannot be our only target. To trust in the UN is to trust in a slow-moving bureaucratic process that fails to legislate for the entirety of the globe.

How can people get involved in political activism?

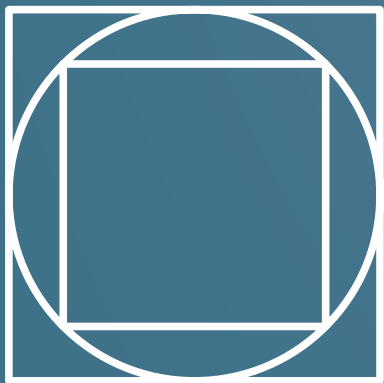
The first and most simple thing anyone can do is to register to vote. Other than this, it is important to find local campaign groups. Changes on an international scale are rarely if ever wrought by individuals. Rather, they are the collection of small, anonymous actions, brought about by groups fighting for their communities. And, sometimes, direct action is vital to change-making.

– MARIAM AL-BADRY



▲ DANIELLE BOODOO-FORTUNÉ

PREDICT TO WIN



If the area of the outside square is 100cm^2 , what is the area of the inside square?

What percentage of respondents successfully solved this?



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Rosie Roberts

It's not sharking, it's harrassment

At 18, you are technically an adult. But no matter how grown up you feel, during the first year of university most students are still teenagers who have never lived away from home. Living in a new place, going out as often as you want, and drinking as much as possible makes first year the ultimate bonding experience, everyone stuck in the same very hungover boat.

Despite most people's nostalgic memory of first year, every UK university seems to have an issue with sharking, when older students target freshers to sleep with, enjoying taking advantage of drunk, naïve teenagers. There's very little anyone can do to fix this problem, as generally these older people are just other undergrads doing it informally. Cambridge, however, systemically enables predatory age gap relationships and creates a culture of sharking unlike anywhere else.

Everyone has a horror story about a student and their supervisor, lecturer, coach, or even DoS, yet Cambridge still partially allows sexual relationships between students and staff. Rules prohibiting staff with "direct responsibilities" for students from having sexual relation-

ships with students only came into effect in June 2024 in a bid to prevent student exploitation. However, just this term a *Varsity* report showed that multiple members of staff accused of sexual misconduct were allowed to keep their jobs. At a university where close academic relationships are created with staff via our unusual supervision system, we should be more rigorous than other universities about student safety, not less.

The same problem filters through every part of Cambridge life, from sports clubs to societies. Drinking socs may not be above board with the University but remain a staple of college life. While the premise of a society where you have to drink yourself into oblivion to get in should be bad enough, the insane initiations and selection criteria make some of these societies genuinely sinister. There is a well-

“*Everyone has a horror story about a student and their supervisor*”

known culture of recruiting younger students based on appearance, particularly older boys choosing the fresher girls they fancy the most.

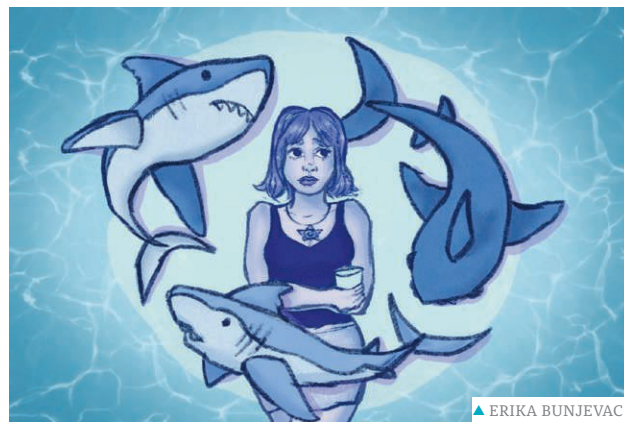
Once freshers are in the society, socials and nights out inevitably get a bit creepy. Handcuffing male and female students to one another, drinking games that pressure young people into uncomfortable situations or revealing their sexual histories, and horrible initiations are not just common, but totally normalised. By making these societies illegal they are far harder to hold to account

on a university-wide level, and drinking soc 'welfare' officers are hardly a rigorous check on exploitation.

One of the strange by-products of the college system is that post- and undergraduates often end up living side by side, sharing socie-

ties, eating together, and even living in the same flats. Suddenly, the age gap between a fresher and a third year appears tame compared to dating a thirty year old MPhil-er. It's usually a positive thing that we have so much contact with postgrads at Cambridge, but it can enable relationships that never would have been possible at other universities where there is a greater separation of age groups.

I know this sounds like an overreaction to normal Cambridge things, but we're being naïve if we don't acknowledge that our current culture puts young female students in harm's way. The 2018 National Union of Students' 'Hidden Marks' study showed that over two thirds of female students have experienced some kind of harassment at university, something that is no shock to any of the women here. Calling it by a silly name and making it into a joke gaslights victims of sexual harassment, or more serious issues like assault, that what happened to them is something to laugh at and forget. The first step to start taking this problem seriously is to stop calling it sharking and call it what it is — sexual coercion, peer pressure, and harassment.



▲ ERIKA BUNJEVAC



Eloise Thompson

The new History tripos is a step in the right direction

In Michaelmas 2022, the History Faculty launched its new tripos, which hadn't been given a makeover since the 1960s. Among its novelties was the possibility to stray away from the classic fields of British and European history, with the creation of new papers focused on so-called "decentralised histories". The vast majority of papers have retained their British and European focus, but this was a step in the right direction.

As a fresher, I chose to study one of these 'new' papers called 'The Global South from 1750 to the present day'. First year papers are meant to be broad; some, like 'the Twentieth Century World' cover whole centuries, while others such as 'Ancient and Medieval States' cover an entire millenium. The Global South paper is not necessarily unique in its chronological broadness, but the vastness of the geographical area it covered and the similarity that this attributed to the different regions it was concerned with struck me as problematic.

The 'Global South' was coined by French economist Alfred Sauvy in the 1950s to refer to the development gap between most countries in the Northern hemisphere and those in the Southern hemisphere. To my surprise, in our initial lectures, the very first thing we were told was how problematic this term was. Using a single, all-encompassing term to refer to hundreds of different countries

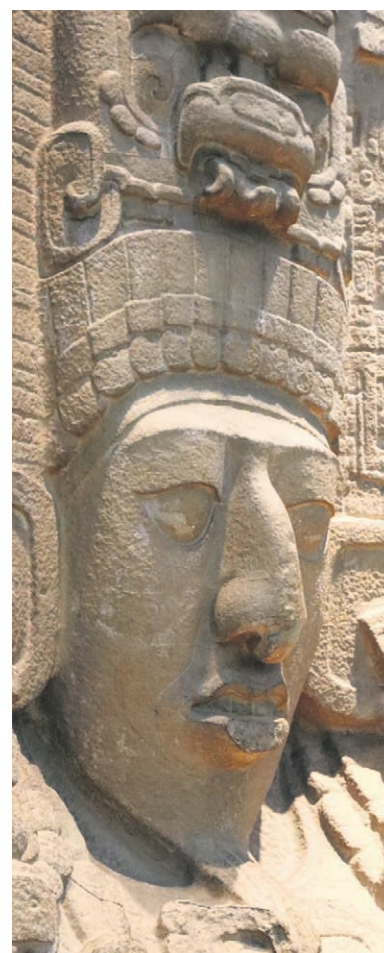
“*The very first thing we were told was how problematic this term 'Global South' was*”

all characterised by a singular culture, language, and history but also by different wealth and development levels supposes homogeneity where it does not exist. It undermines these countries' identities through the lens of an imperialist Western world.

Of course, calling the paper 'The Global South' sounds better than calling it 'The Third World' or 'The Developing World,' but don't these all lead to the same prejudice? They are all arbitrary terms carrying a heavy political load. I know I was not the only one in that lecture to wonder why, if the term was so problematic, it was used to describe the course.

The course itself confirmed the problematic use of the term 'Global South'. Although it claims to cover the entirety of 'The Global South', it focused 'only' on Africa and (what is now) India. This was questionable in two ways. First of all, it neglects other regions of the so-called 'Global South,' namely South America and other regions of Asia. To avoid using any problematic term, especially if the course is only focused on specific areas, maybe it could have simply been named 'Africa and India from 1750 to present day'.

Most importantly, our essays and supervisions tasks were centred on the comparison between Africa and India. Ironically, we were learning in those same supervisions how Indian subjects were considered by British colonial officers



▲ TAMAMI ONO

to be more 'civilised' than African ones, all the while being asked to compare an entire continent (approximately nine times bigger than India), with one singular country.

The outline is therefore simultaneously homogenising the 'Global South' and Africa itself. I am not suggesting that there is no point in comparing and contrasting the different forms taken by British colonialism in these regions. On the contrary, I found comparison often made concepts and events easier to understand. However, comparing India and Africa often poses the risk both of blurring the latter's vastness, and therefore the diversity of its colonial history. It also undermines South Asia's cultural richness because of its smaller size and more uniform administration by the British government.

That being said, the course is immensely interesting, and, like all other outline papers in first year, serves mostly as an introduction to a certain area and period of history. Proof of an effort by the faculty to 'decolonise' itself, it makes new kinds of histories available to first years so that they can pursue these subjects more in depth later on in their course. However, its construction goes to show how much progress needs to be made in the making of African history papers, something which is made all the more urgent by the discovery of countless African artefacts held by the university since the days of colonisation.

Why uni rankings don't add up



Johana Trejtnar

As a Cambridge applicant, I scoured the internet for information about my potential future university. Rankings were especially exciting: concrete, objective, and gave universities measurable prestige. Coming from the Czech Republic where the top university is listed between 401 and 500 in *The Times Higher Education* rankings, the quantifiable prestige of foreign universities gave them an exciting ring.

After studying at Cambridge for a term, I still inadvertently feel proud when seeing it rank so highly. But the longer I spend here, the more I question whether rankings do more harm than good. This October, *The Times* published its annual University ranking, with Cambridge coming fifth worldwide for a second year running. The University rejoiced, saying that it was pleased to place so highly. But surely, the strengths and weaknesses of universities cannot be as easily compared as such rankings make out.

Recently, rankings have come under scrutiny in a report by a UN Independent Expert Group, which criticised them for being non-transparent, sloppy, and sometimes even invalid. They said that rankings are biased towards the English language, certain types of research, and STEM subjects. Even quantifiable categories, like amounts of academic citations, are not as straightforward as they seem. One small university in Germany – Bielefeld University – jumped from place 250 to 166 in *THE* rankings in a single year: not due to any structural changes, or massive improvements, but thanks to one single academic collaboration involving a large amount of academic citations. Does that mean that the university is really 90 points ‘better’?

Rankings measure all universities with the same metrics without taking into account their available resources, historic privilege, and diverse social, eco-

“But the longer I spend here, the more I question whether rankings do more harm than good”

omic, and political contexts. And they measure universities in categories like employability and ratio of international to national students – neither of which have any impact over the education universities offer.

One of the reasons why rankings carry so much weight is because top universities constantly promote them. The world’s leading academic institutions, which normally act as safeguards of fact and objectivity, embrace rankings when they succeed, giving them academic pseudo-validity. Every year, Cambridge picks out the rankings that assess it favourably, splashing them all over its social media.

While they have their benefits – especially to members of high placed institutions like Cambridge – rankings are especially disadvantageous to lower status universities: schools which are much more likely to be home to high achieving students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The real world impacts of rank-

ings are far from dismissible. Recently, the UK announced a new High Potential Individual visa programme, making it considerably easier for graduates of 42 listed world universities to move to the UK. The programme assumes that these graduates’ ‘potential’ is higher than that of students from other institutions. How were these 42 institutions picked? For their rankings.

Rankings also give ‘top’ universities a justification for their false sense of superiority. We don’t read rankings just to compare to compare Oxford and Cambridge: the real reason rankings have their guaranteed place in Oxbridge circles is because they give a seemingly scientific reason to look down on other institutions.

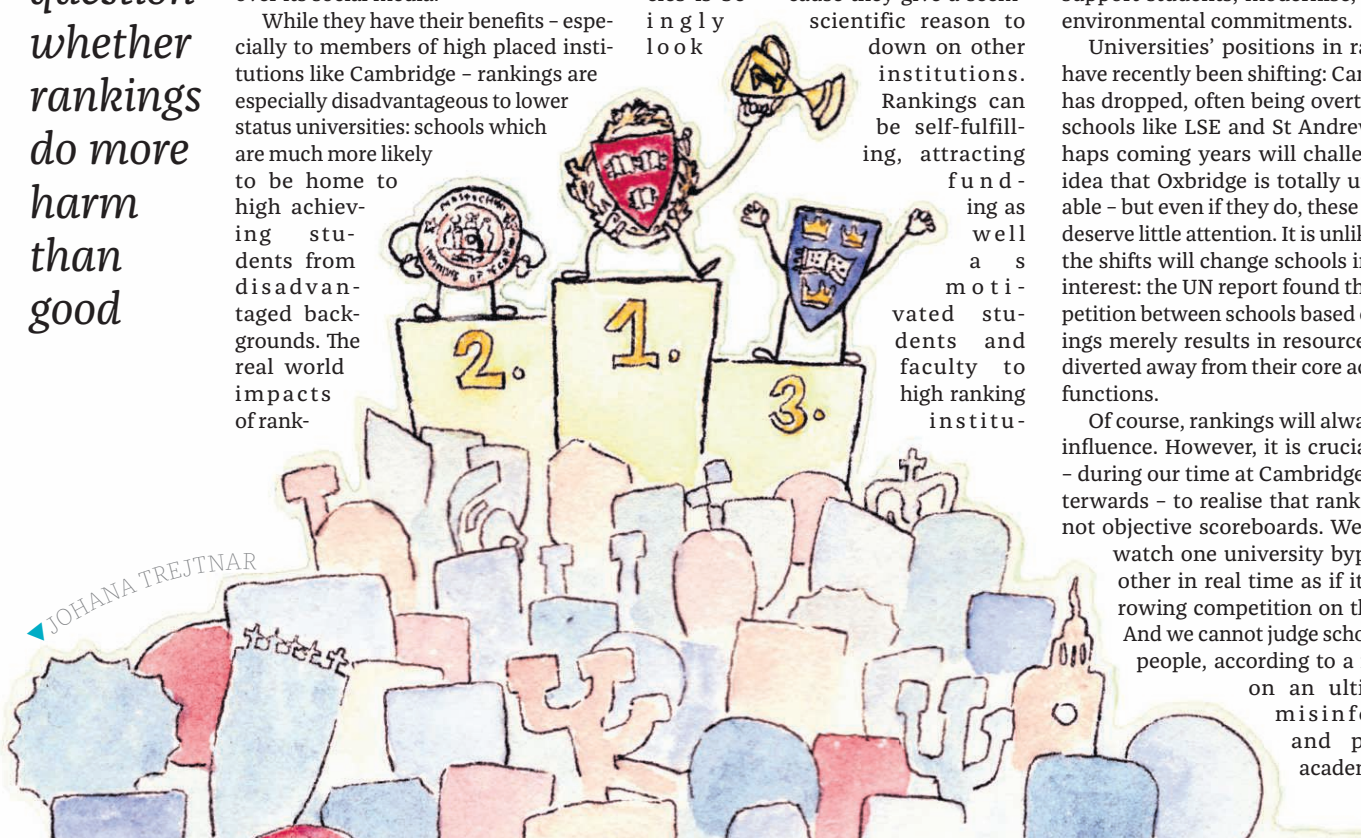
Rankings can be self-fulfilling, attracting funding as well as motivated students and faculty to high ranking institutions.

tions. Still, there is something wrong about knowing that no matter who we are, graduating from Cambridge will give us prestige that few other schools in the world can offer.

On an institutional level, rankings remove incentive for top ranked universities to improve. Since universities in most countries are highly dependent on student tuition, the institutions’ main goal is to attract potential applicants. High ranking institutions’ reputations are so strong that there will always be an influx of students wishing to study there. This removes competition that could motivate schools to improve: to support students, modernise, or keep environmental commitments.

Universities’ positions in rankings have recently been shifting: Cambridge has dropped, often being overtaken by schools like LSE and St Andrews. Perhaps coming years will challenge the idea that Oxbridge is totally untouchable – but even if they do, these debates deserve little attention. It is unlikely that the shifts will change schools in public interest: the UN report found that competition between schools based on rankings merely results in resources being diverted away from their core academic functions.

Of course, rankings will always have influence. However, it is crucial for us – during our time at Cambridge and afterwards – to realise that rankings are not objective scoreboards. We cannot watch one university bypass another in real time as if it were a rowing competition on the Cam. And we cannot judge schools, and people, according to a number on an ultimately misinformed and pseudo-academic list.



JOHANA TREJTNAR

In praise of part-time jobs



Daisy Stuart Henderson

When I tell friends and family that Cambridge students aren’t allowed to work during term time, I tend to be met with the same gasp, followed by murmurs about privilege. This worsens when I explain that many also forgo unglamorous student summer jobs in favour of lofty internships, which have become nigh-on-ubiquitous among the more ambitious and career-oriented of us. I trot out the usual explanations for the University’s policy, but can’t help but feel that those who have never worked a day in their lives (excluding Spring Weeks, of course) may have missed out on a different kind of privilege.

I got my first job, in a café at the top of my street, in no small part because my dog was very fond of the ‘pupcakes’ that they would generously give her whenever she poked her snout through their door. Owing to Rosie’s networking skills, I was offered a job making coffees and serving customers. I was sixteen and, inconveniently for a customer-facing role, lacking in confidence.

Conversations were an integral part of the job; the café served as a community hub, and many of our regulars were older and perhaps vulnerable to loneliness. My boss’s husband Stephen, in particular, provided stories on everything from history and politics to his experiences as a nurse in busy Glasgow hospitals during the pandemic, which I would never have

heard had we not worked together. He even reads my *Varsity* articles to this day! Two years worth of weekends spent talking to customers helped me to reach a place of readiness to move out and start university, despite the fact that many of their paths in life were drastically different from the one I was embarking on.

About a year later, I started coaching taekwondo, and was swiftly sent to teach the littlest kids. My newfound appreciation for parents appeared instantaneously: keeping tabs on a group of five and six-year-olds is no mean feat. But, a couple of weeks later, I opted to stay with the youngest group when offered the more sedate older children. During a period consumed by the pressure of applying to Cambridge and other stresses, an hour of trying to keep little kids from kicking each other, which wholly prevented me from thinking about anything else, was immensely beneficial.

This summer, while some of my peers were entering shining corporate offices to partake in well-remunerated internships, I spent five weeks working at a summer camp for twelve to sixteen-year-olds from all over the world in Cambridge. Mentioning this age group to people tended to invoke one reaction: “You’re brave!”

Ultimately, I returned

home with unexpectedly touching anecdotes rather than horror stories. When taking a group of young teenagers on a trip to the Imperial War Museum’s Holocaust Galleries, my anxiety quickly gave way to admiration for their maturity and empathy. The string of questions a fourteen-year-old girl asked me as I checked that she was in her room for bedtime, including but not limited to “Have you ever been in a nightclub?”, “Do you pay tax?” and “Does it get easier to deal with things when you get older?” stayed with me long after I said goodnight to her. I got to know a group of high school teachers from the US, had a surprisingly wholesome dinner at Shake Shack with a bunch of teenage boys, and shared many thought-provoking conversations with a young girl

“My co-workers and customers have repeatedly proven to me that, generally, people are pretty good”

staying on my staircase on topics ranging from Brexit to the experience of girlhood. Admittedly, I had my downbeat moments, when I felt the urge to pack up and go home to my Mum. But being surrounded by children thousands of miles away from their families put this into sharp perspective, and forced me to grow up a little.

Glitzy internships they were not, but in a profoundly uncorporate manner, these jobs taught me to serve others. My co-workers and customers have repeatedly proven to me that generally, people are pretty good, often at times when I most needed this reminder. What I may not have gained in LinkedIn clout was made up for by other lessons for the future. Working with children caused me to consider whether I might want to be a mother one day. My admitted luck in having good bosses has given me models to emulate if I ever find myself in a management position. And getting to know a wide range of people preemptively provided a much needed antidote to the Cambridge bubble that I will carry with me.

So, I can’t help but consider myself privileged in comparison to Cambridge students who have never had a part-time job. Let pay grade and prestige be damned and try the most mundane job imaginable; you never know what you will learn from it.



JESSICA LEER

Features

Cambridge's Calais volunteers

Georgie Middlemiss meets the students travelling to Calais to volunteer with Cambridge Convoy Refugee Action Group

The cold struck her the most. For Lauren, while she was shivering under her hostel blanket, “all I could think about was the fact there are people squatting in warehouses.” Every month, Cambridge Convoy Refugee Action Group (CamCrag) takes convoys of people and supplies over the channel to assist other NGOs working in Calais. They leave late Friday evening and are back by Sunday night. At the height of the Calais Jungle, it was home to roughly 10,000. Since the Jungle’s destruction by the French government in 2016, numbers have dropped, but Calais has remained home to many refugees seeking to cross the channel to the U.K. Now, roughly

700 refugees are living in various squats throughout the city, but their situation is in no way better. Volunteers with CamCrag range from students to University staff and people living in the wider Cambridgeshire area, who ride the Eurotunnel to Calais to provide urgently needed manpower for a weekend.

“I didn’t even know that was something people could do,” remarked Lauren about the short-stay volunteering convoy. Lauren, a third-year HSPS student at Homerton, has been on three convoys now, and Natasha, a third-year historian at Pembroke, went for her first time this October. Both went out of curiosity as much as a desire to help. Natasha is “keen to work on humanitarian work” and so went partly just “to see what it was like in Calais.” Through Instagram, they filled out a Google Form to apply — the charity paid for travel and most food, they just had to pay around £40 for their hostel accommodation.

Catherine, chair of the charity’s Executive Committee, tells me how “we are one of the only few left” out of groups running shorter volunteer convoys. Now, with the global refugee crisis only worsening, and media attention easily drawn elsewhere, numbers in Calais are “so low and so stretched”. Organisations are increasingly shutting their Calais programmes, like Choose Love closing Calais funding in 2021 and Collective Aid ending Calais operations only this December. CamCrag also runs donation

drives and fundraisers. Last February, the grounds and the hall below the spire of St Giles’ Church down St Andrew’s Street were studded with people sleeping under the flapping fabric of tents for the group’s annual fundraising sleepout. This year, it’s on the 8 February, along with their Winter Fair.

Out of a large warehouse, a variety of NGOs, such as Care for Calais and Roots, run different operations to support refugees in Calais. CamCrag offers help wherever needed. Upon arriving, Natasha recalls they first did a litter-pick in the surroundings of a squat. She tells me how the previous Jungle had its own waste-disposal systems, but the Calais council no longer run these for the present refugee camps. “Because of this, the refugees have no way to dispose of things, they are expected to just live in their waste.”

Within three hours, they had filled 306 bin bags. The overwhelming smell stayed in their memory, and both Lauren and Natasha paused for a moment to consider how they felt guilty at their disgust at the conditions. For them, the dirt was only short-term: “We are going to leave here and have a shower.” “How dare I find this so disgusting?” reflected Lauren. Other tasks were easier. They drizzled chocolate onto flapjacks with Refugee Community Kitchen in the main warehouse — “That was fun, I like cooking,” reflected Natasha. The close care taken to the cooking stuck out to Lauren, she pointed out to me that the kitchen “not only wants to make food but wants to make good food.” In general, she noted that the group places importance on maintaining the dignity of refugees, checking donations carefully, and giving people choices during distributions: “Oh, I’d really like a pink tent.” Lauren also sized shoes and clothes to replace inaccurate high-street labelling. She checked sleeping bags and tied them up to be distributed. “It was nice that you had little tasks to get done,” Natasha told me. She would be told to clean a crate and “I can do that”.

“*The impression from both was that the lack of government support for refugees in Calais was glaringly apparent*”



TOM WALSTON

One day, they cleaned out an old wash centre for the refugee camps. Plastered across the walls of the wash centre were drawings of refugee children, an insight into who the people stuck in Calais are; “a little glimpse of their stories.” Lauren looked through the drawings of children: their parents and their dogs at home, or the streaking red, white, and black stripes of the Sudan flag. Seeing in person the real human experiences of people trying to escape to safety was emotionally tough. “The litter pick was hard,” shared Natasha, “I thought that I knew what I was going into, and then I was shocked.”

Small moments of community stayed replaying in her mind. She remembers how people were playing football outside the camp; reminding her that “football is a universal language.” During a coffee break mid-clean, Natasha and Lauren spoke with refugees who had come out to join the litter pick. Most were men from Sudan, hoping to get to the U.K. either to join family or to make money so family could then follow. The impression from both was that the lack of government support for refugees in Calais was glaringly apparent. The wash centre was once used by refugees themselves, not just to clean their clothes but as a community hub. After the council ruled it unsafe, they were barred from it such that now volunteer groups have to take their washing for them, and despite attempts to fix the building’s safety elements, from the council “the whole operation was stalled,” noted Lauren.

I was initially doubtful about the utility of inexperienced volunteers offer-

ing only a weekend of immediate help. Natasha similarly was initially “sceptical.” But physical manpower is critical for these operations. In particular, many of the long-term volunteers Natasha spoke with while there reported feeling “very tired and demotivated,” making “short bursts of people” indispensable. The short-stay means volunteers can manage it around student work-load, or professional work life. Both Lauren and Natasha reported that managing work around the experience was possible, and if anything the brief escape from Cambridge life was welcome. “We are in this crazy bubble,” commented Lauren, emphasising the importance of “getting out of things, doing something bigger than yourself and that supposes.” Eating dinner out in Calais with everyone on the final night, “gossiping” and chatting with people who aren’t just from the University, made the trip feel a social one too.

When telling people about the volunteer convoy they were going on, most hadn’t heard of it. “A lot of my friends were like “Oh wow,” laughed Natasha, as she pointed out that going away for two days doesn’t need to be “a big thing.” “Sometimes people need to take volunteer work off the pedestal and just do it,” she tells me. Both acknowledged the trip is undeniably a commitment: Lauren noted that it took longer than the weekend alone for her as she often returned with a cold to recover from. But she reflected on the very intellectual approach Cambridge left-wing circles tend to take, when actually “someone has to be doing the work, so why not me?”

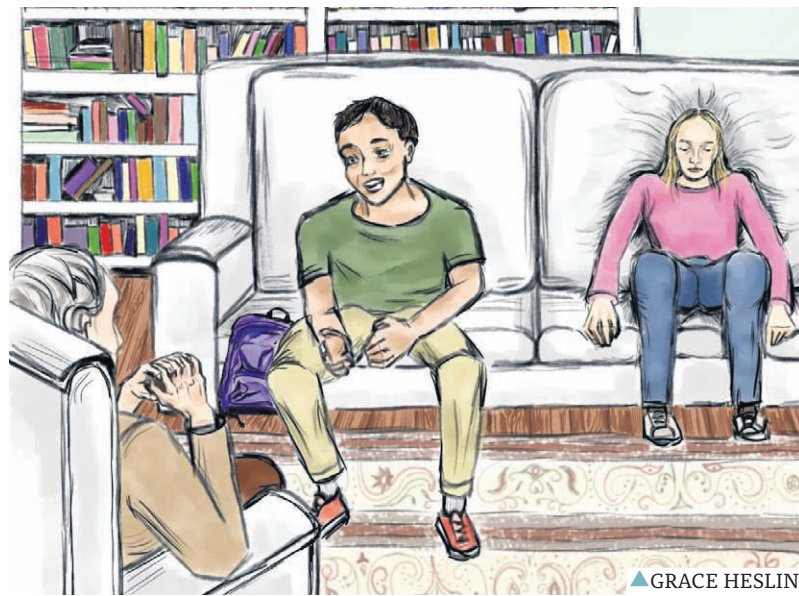
“*I thought that I knew what I was going into, and then I was shocked*”



HANNAH GILLOTT

Decoding Cambridge's traditions

Willow Nugent investigates how colleges are trying to break down class barriers in Cambridge



▲GRACE HESLIN

“I googled what a Chaucer was and practised saying Nietzsche

versation but visually, too. Speaking to second-year student Peter, he told me about attending formals wearing “cheap hand-me-down boots” that are “really scuffed and stand out.” His noticeably unfitted suit, which he got for ten pounds at the charity shop, “definitely conveys a certain otherness.”

This “secret language” poses social and academic challenges for working-class students at Cambridge due to its unique supervision system. These discussion-based sessions can be daunting for those lacking experience. Private schools, with smaller class sizes and teaching styles similar to supervisions, better prepare their students. However, working-class students often have no experience with this format.

Peter felt prepared for supervision due to the help of a sixth-form teacher who attended Oxford and advised him on “how he was supposed to act” during supervisions. In contrast, Abigail, a first-year student, attended a college that did not support her with her application. She said supervisions were “a very different way of teaching,” continuing, “I’ve had to unlearn the idea that disagreeing with someone means you’re being disrespectful.”

I spoke with Aruba Bibi, who was class act officer at Sidney Sussex last year. She recognised that “For many, it is common to feel very intimidated when it comes to things like language skills needed to hold conversations with academics or the correct etiquette for formals.” She said the solution does not lie in “radically changing these traditions,” continuing, “I think there needs to be a conscious effort made by colleges to think about the Cambridge traditions and how to introduce them to students.”

Addressing the challenges faced by working-class students is not an easy or quick fix. However, a good starting point is to change the assumption that all students begin their time at Cambridge with a clear understanding of how to navigate its social and academic customs.

One way to address this disparity is to open up a dialogue about the working-class experience at Cambridge. Dr David

Clifford of Homerton College aimed to do this in 2023 with his symposium, “Overcoming Class Barriers.” He said, “I was aware of a considerable degree of low self-esteem, imposter syndrome, students feeling like they weren’t belonging. And I wanted students at the university together to better understand that they absolutely were not alone.” He continued, “[it] was a way of saying, you know what, there’s actually lots and lots of academics here who come from backgrounds like yours.”

He stressed the importance of not just providing support to students who are currently at the university but also working on outreach to students who may not traditionally apply to Cambridge. In 2022, students who had received free school meals comprised 9.5% of the student body, compared to the sector average of 18.4%. The solution is twofold: getting more working-class students into Cambridge to ensure that being working-class no longer feels at odds with the university’s culture and making current students feel able to navigate the university’s landscape despite not having the same cultural capital as other students.

Peter reflected: “There’s just so much unexplained; I’m still learning things now.” As Abigail put it, “The unwritten rules need to be, like, written down somewhere.”

“For my first few formals, I remember having to whisper to the person next to me, “Which order do you use the cutlery?” [...] Everyone else seemed to know automatically.” When Abigail first arrived in Cambridge, she knew it would be a daunting experience, but she didn’t realise just how unique the university’s traditions were. “I knew Cambridge was a prestigious university,

but I didn’t know the ins and outs.”

The value of cultural capital becomes clear for working-class freshers navigating conversations. In between learning new names and faces during my induction week, I googled what a Chaucer was and practised saying Nietzsche.

The phrase “secret language” routinely appears in conversations about how it feels to be working-class at Cambridge. This sense of “not being made for Cambridge” isn’t just encoded in con-

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Science



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

Solar probe touches the sun

On Christmas Eve, a spacecraft launched by NASA on a mission to “touch the Sun” reached closer to the star than ever before.

It’s hoped that the probe will provide information about the origin and evolution of solar wind, a stream of electrically charged particles released by the Sun. As the solar wind streams outwards, it drags the Sun’s magnetic field with it. The charged particles follow the spiralled magnetic field lines as they burst out from the Sun, creating plasma waves that can be ‘heard’ by the probe.

It’s possible that the probe’s rapid speed (692,000 kilometres per hour during its closest approach, the fastest any human made object has ever travelled) could allow for the observation of relativistic effects in the spacecraft’s trajectory.

The data collected could be used to help forecast changes in the space environment and space weather that will affect life and technology on Earth in future, and to learn more about the workings of stars across the universe, which could aid in the search for other habitable worlds.

Loneliness affects protein levels

New research suggests that loneliness and social isolation cause changes in the levels of some blood proteins that could increase the risk of disease.

Researchers at the University of Cambridge conducted a protein-wide association study (PWAS) using data from UK Biobank, a health database holding detailed information on half a million volunteers. Information from more than 42,000 participants was analysed for the levels of nearly 3,000 plasma proteins in an attempt to characterise the protein “signatures” of social isolation and loneliness.

After adjusting for potential confounding factors such as socioeconomic status and ethnicity, the study found that there were 175 proteins associated with isolation, and 36 with loneliness. The researchers then used a technique called “Mendelian randomisation” to determine the direction of this relationship: whether the correlation was because the proteins were increasing the risk of loneliness, or vice versa.

They found that the proteins did not seem to cause loneliness, but these factors did influence the levels of five of the proteins.

These proteins have roles in inflammation, the immune system and metabolic function, helping to crystallise the mechanisms by which social relationships can influence physical health. Identifying these changes in protein levels could also offer potential drug targets for the treatment of the health risks associated with loneliness in future.

How mice make memories

Studying neural activity in mice has shown that the brain may avoid rewriting old memories with new ones by processing the two types of memory in distinct phases of sleep.

During sleep, recently acquired memories like events of the preceding day are replayed in the hippocampus in preparation for long-term storage. However, this happens alongside the reactivation of more long-term memories, meaning scientists have long wondered how the brain avoids the phenomenon of “catastrophic forgetting”, where old memories are overwritten with new ones.

Researchers tracked the sleep of mice by measuring their pupil size, finding that during one of the deep phases of sleep, their pupils shrink and then return to their original sizes repeatedly. They used a technique called “optogenetics,” where light is used to control the electrical activity of genetically engineered neurons in the brain, to suppress neural firing during either the small pupil or large pupil stages of sleep.

The scientists found that the mice forgot recently acquired memories, such as the location of a hidden reward in a maze, when brain activity was suppressed during the small pupil stage. When the large pupil stage was interrupted, more established memories were forgotten. This suggests that older memories were processed during the large pupil stage, while newer memories were being incorporated in the small pupil stage.

Catastrophic forgetting affects artificial neural networks (algorithms modelled on the brain that are involved in many AI tools), so understanding how the brain avoids this phenomenon may help in developing AI models that can avoid it too.

Past their sell-by date?

Teymour Taj explores the weird and wonderful history of calendars

As 2025 rolled in, amid the cheers and the popping of prosecco, you may have been wondering why January is the first month of the year, or why years have twelve months. Admittedly, as the clock struck midnight, I was not exactly in a state to be pondering deep questions about the world. However, after waking up bleary-eyed and stepping outside on a biting cold New Year’s Day, I did ask myself, “Why does the year have to begin in the depths of winter?”

“This difference may seem tiny, but it corresponds to a difference of about 11 minutes per day

A little bit of history

Today, the calendar most used around the globe is the Gregorian calendar. Many cultures retain their own calendars, but these are mostly used only for a few purposes, such as marking religious festivals. The Gregorian calendar is a modification of the earlier Julian calendar, which as the name suggests was proposed by Roman dictator Julius Caesar. The problem with Caesar’s calendar was that it assumed an average year length of 365.25 days, when in fact the actual length of the solar year is 365.242 days. This difference may seem tiny, but it corresponds to a difference of about 11 minutes per day.

At the time of Pope Gregory XIII’s re-

form in 1582, the dates of the equinoxes were off by ten days.

The Gregorian calendar changed the rules for when leap years occur to correct the difference. You may be familiar with the rule that every year divisible by four is a leap year. However, there is a caveat to this – years which are divisible by 100 but not 400 are not leap years! This means that 1700, 1800 and 1900 were not leap years, whereas 2000 was.

Interestingly, the idea of 29 February as a leap day is quite modern, since it used to be that 24 February was counted twice. Overall, this leads to an average year length of 365.2425 days, reducing the drift to 11 seconds per year. Great work, Gregory!

As for why January is the first month of the year, we must look earlier in history to the pre-Caesar Roman calendar. The year used to begin in spring with the month of March and continued until December, so there were only ten months. The months followed the cycles of the Moon, beginning and ending with the new moon. Due to double counting of new moon days, this led to six months of 31 days, and four months of 30 days. The winter was completely ignored initially since farmers couldn’t plant during this season so it had no relevance to the agricultural cycle. However, this calendar was later reformed by King Numa Pompilius and January and February were added to the beginning of the year, covering the winter.

The calendar was still out of whack with the

seasons since the number of days was too small, so sometimes random ‘intercalary months’ were added to correct it. This ended when the Julian calendar was adopted in 45 BC, giving the months and the year their familiar numbers of days.

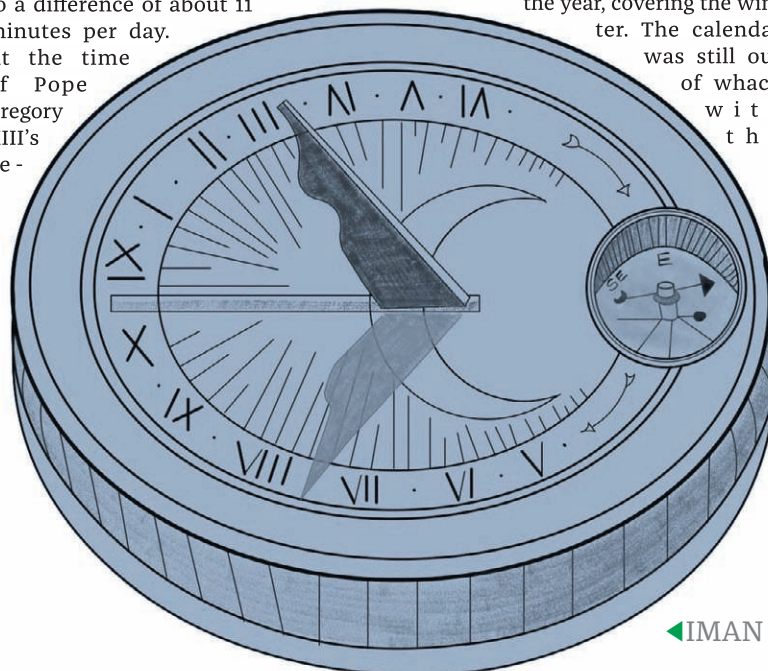
Not all calendars follow the solar year like the Gregorian calendar does – some are lunar calendars, such as the Islamic calendar, which has 354 or 355 days depending on the year. It has 12 months, each lasting one lunar cycle or 29 days. It is one of very few examples of a pure lunar calendar, since it doesn’t have any modifications like intercalary months to correct the drift of the seasons. Calendars which make this correction are called *lunisolar*, such as the Chinese traditional calendar.

Getting things astronomically wrong

A day is commonly defined as the time taken for the Earth to make a complete 360-degree rotation, in the same way the hour hand would make its way around a clock face every 12 hours. However, this is not as straightforward as you might think. Things are complicated by the fact that the Earth orbits the Sun. If we pretended the Sun wasn’t there and compared its rotation to the very distant so-called ‘fixed stars’ in the sky, one day would be 23 hours and 56 minutes long. This is known as a *sidereal* day. In fact, the Earth has to rotate about 361 degrees in order to ‘catch up’ from its orbital movement and face the Sun straight-on again the next day, giving us our *synodic* day of 24 hours.

Similarly, a sidereal year can be defined using the ‘fixed stars’ as a reference, giving a result that is slightly *longer* than our solar year. This is because the solar year needs the Sun to return to the same position in the sky at the beginning and end of the year. Earth’s axis of rotation itself is moving around; think of a spinning top once it starts to slow down. This gives the planet a little helping hand and makes it face the Sun about 20 minutes earlier than it otherwise would, making the solar year 20 minutes shorter than the sidereal year.

So next time you look out onto yet another cold and dreary New Year’s Day, you know who to blame for this predicament – the second king of Ancient Rome.



◀ IMAN KHAN

Pride without prejudice in the animal kingdom

Charlie Owen explores what the animal kingdom can teach us about gender and sexuality

Soaked to the bone from the cycle ride over, I entered the Museum of Zoology with a curious mind. As a Bio NatSci, I am a regular visitor to the museum, so the pickled fish and taxidermy birds are all too familiar to me. However, today I was preparing to view the specimens through a whole new lens: I was to embark on the Museum's LGBTQ+ Bridging Binaries Tour.

Our tour guide, a vivacious volunteer, was clear in the message of the tour from the start - same-sex sexual behaviours in the animal kingdom are common, they are certainly not unnatural, and they are much more than a biological anomaly. But, throughout the tour, I noticed something closer to home - the animal kingdom provides strong arguments against the false 'biology' that is used as anti-queer and misogynistic rhetoric.

With just a glance at the animal kingdom, we can see the extent of these same-sex sexual behaviours and their extraordinary diversity. In Bruce Bagemihl's groundbreaking book, *Biological Exuberance*, he outlined examples of over 450 species that exhibit these behaviours. From sheep to swans to dolphins, same-sex behaviours seem to have sprouted on many branches of the animal tree. In fact, not only are they common, but in some species, these behaviours can be more common than with members

of the opposite sex. In giraffes, over 90% of sexual behaviours are between two males (a lot of neck). Similarly, bonobos are the epitome of sexual liberation, freely having sexual relationships

regardless of their partner's sex. These examples seem to be in friction with the long-held view that same-sex behaviours are an anomaly without a purpose - if these same-sex behaviours are the 'default' then it seems they must have a purpose.

Further to this, studies of macaques not only found that the majority of males are behaviourally bisexual, but also that variation in this same-sex activity was heritable. This provides evidence that these same-sex behaviours have evolved, suggesting that this behaviour has provided social benefits. Although it can be misleading to apply this to homosexuality in humans, this idea that some of our

closest relatives may have adaptively evolved same-sex behaviours could provide proof that these behaviours are

more than just an evolutionary anomaly.

Meanwhile, the

mainstream view of gender in animals hardly seems to have changed from the Darwinian one. This is generally the case in which 'aggressive' males fight with each other to mate with as many 'coy' and 'choosy' females as possible.

However, as new perspectives and data emerge, this idea of promiscuous males and coy females is seemingly becoming extinct. One animal that challenges this view is the beloved meerkat, which has a maternal hierarchy. The dominant meerkat at the top of this hierarchy will suppress other females from reproducing, even killing the offspring of other females to ensure the care of her own offspring is prioritised. For a male to become dominant among the males and thus be able to mate with the dominant female, he must be accepted by her, otherwise, he will be deposed - dominant females have absolute power over the group.

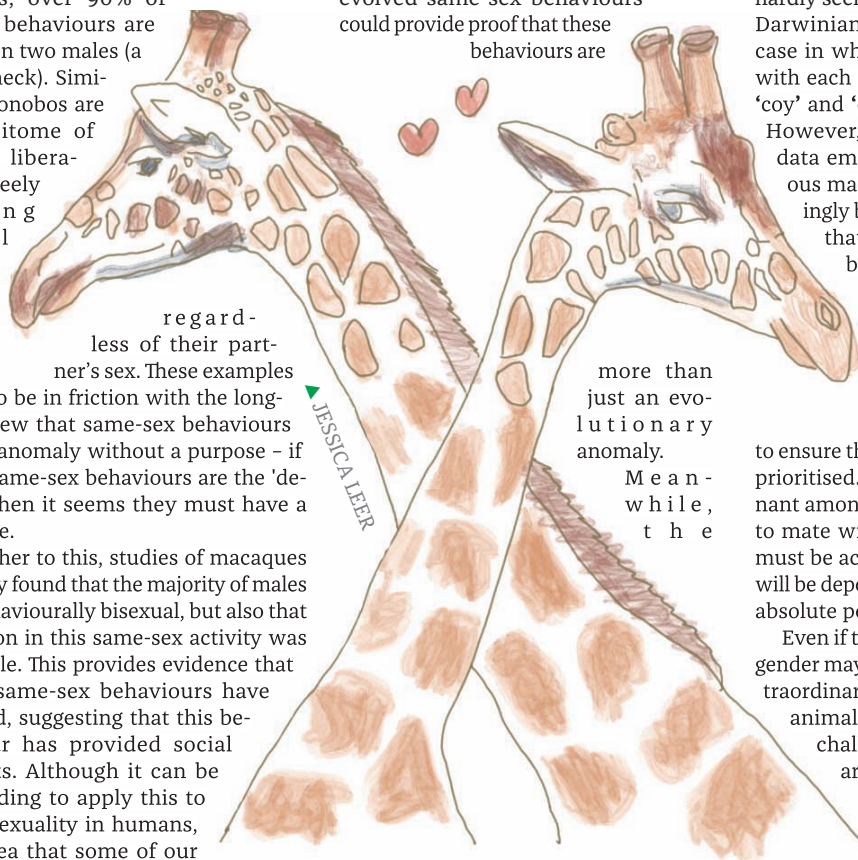
Even if the culturally complex idea of gender may not apply to animals, the extraordinary diversity of sex roles in the animal kingdom presents a strong challenge to the idea that patriarchal gender roles in humans have a biological foundation.

It seems that the sexual roles of animals that were

“Bonobos are the epitome of sexual liberation”

based on Victorian sex values are as dead as Darwin himself.

If you ever hear the arguments that being gay is “unnatural” or that the patriarchy is part of our “biological destiny”, remember that you can reclaim biology and arm yourself with your knowledge of same-sex behaviours in giraffes or the dominance of female meerkats. As we have more queer and feminist perspectives on the natural world, new ways of looking at animals are uncovered that were previously in the shadows. Inclusivity isn't just good for us, it's good for science. Diverse perspectives can help us understand the animal kingdom, but the animal kingdom can also help us understand ourselves and our identities within the tree of life ... or is it more of a rainbow?



VARSlTY THE VARSITY TRUST

If suitable candidates present themselves, the Trustees intend to make awards to students about to graduate, or who are recent graduates, from either the University of Cambridge or ARU who intend to undertake approved training in journalism for 2025/2026.

Trust awards will be tailored to individual circumstances but are normally intended to make a significant contribution to the fees for the training concerned.

The maximum award to any individual will be £5K.

For further information and how to apply visit: www.varsity.co.uk/trust

The Mays is an annual anthology celebrating the best student art and writing from Oxford and Cambridge university. Now in its 33rd year, we are delighted to announce that

submissions are open

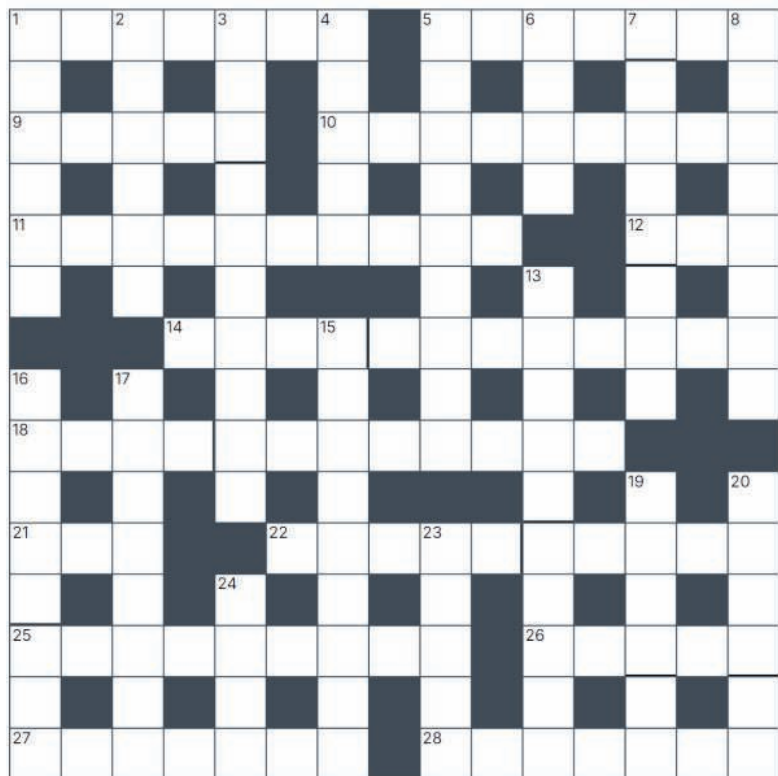


until 25th February

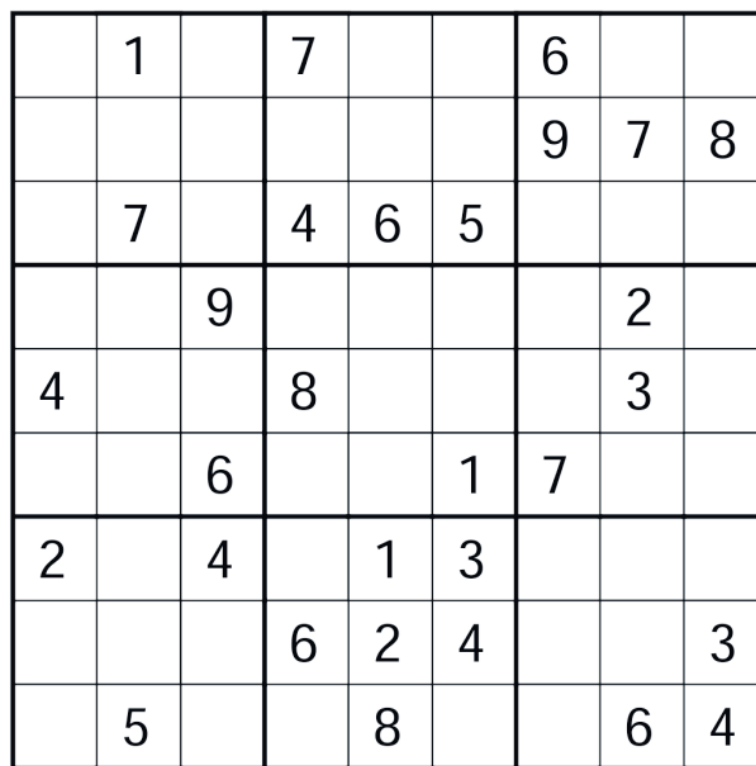
More details about how to submit can be found at <https://www.themaysanthology.co.uk/submissions/>

The Smoking Area

Crossword



Sudoku



Quick:

ACROSS

- 1 Seeley's subject (7)
- 5 Artemis, Apollo etc. (7)
- 9 Fast (5)
- 10 What morticians do (9)
- 11 Morose (10)
- 12 Day annually celebrated in Ely in May (3)
- 14 Pictorial representations of algorithms (4,8)
- 18 Medics who don't operate on animals? (4,8)
- 21 Just one of Taylor's many (3)
- 22 Capital of Ethiopia (5,5)
- 25 Related to the lungs (9)
- 26 Emma Roberts to Julia Roberts (5)
- 27 Great Yarmouth's county (7)
- 28 Landlocked African country (7)

DOWN

- 1 Female spaces in Muslim households (6)
- 2 Lithe (6)
- 3 Bede's language (3,7)
- 4 What is wasted on the young (5)
- 5 Proust's iconic sponge cake (9)
- 6 Labourer (4)
- 7 "It is probable..." (1,4,3)
- 8 De trop (8)
- 13 Advice specialists (5,5)
- 15 International loan purveyor (5,4)
- 16 Trinidadian instrument, originally (5,3)
- 17 A supermarket, for example (8)
- 19 Become successful (4,2)
- 20 Get by (4,2)
- 23 Keats' 'To Autumn' for example (5)
- 24 She sings! O no! (4)

Cryptic:

ACROSS

- 1 Gateway plan to lose weight is unfinished. It's a life changing decision. (2,2,3)
- 5 A spider's home is upturned by irritation, putting together a spell (7)
- 9 Takes the goods by turning over the chair (5)
- 10 Gymnastics pose - agile dad has ten (9)
- 11 Identical car made with boron on mirror (6,4)
- 12 Royalty comes off short when it comes to blood relations (3)
- 14 Nations lose leader after firm politician makes playlist (12)
- 18 Romanian orthodoxy initially mixed up insistence and prayer (12)
- 21 She had enough room at first... (3)
- 22 Female, always quiet with desire, shows great excitement (5,5)
- 25 Whodunnit on the radio follows Cuban leader's attraction (9)
- 26 Lost in Essex? It shows the ways out (5)
- 27 Present judge and jury finally go off (7)
- 28 Christians' empty threats include armed robbery. (7)

DOWN

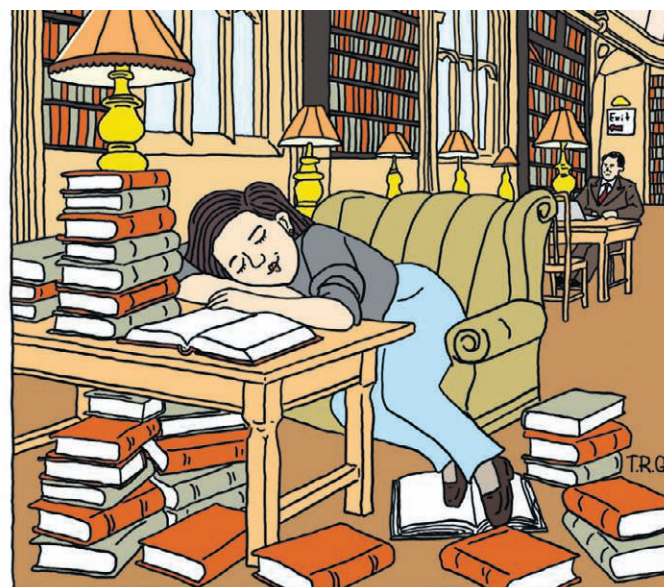
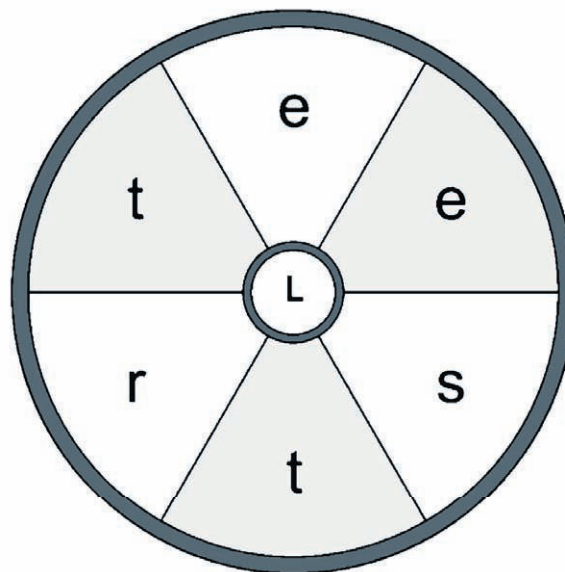
- 1 To remove nits is delicate, a tonne being ripped out (6)
- 2 Do up at this place will cause some nasty smells (6)
- 3 Having left ours, after-party fades (10)
- 4 Whilst we get hiccups we feel a strong moral impulse (5)
- 5 Slender folk from Eastern Europe put pulse first (9)
- 6 Eric knows best? (4)
- 7 Finally got American Henry together with Juno, say praise to the Lord! (5,3)
- 8 Do it first in honest mixup, enjoying the pleasures of life (8)
- 13 The air makes volatile atom round (10)
- 15 A gift given lovingly is heartless now (9)
- 16 Drink given after patching in error (8)
- 17 The most angry, holy person is Hemingway (8)
- 19 Without direction, confused priest undresses (6)
- 20 The half-sister theory (6)
- 23 In North Africa, for example, with a year part-time (5)
- 24 Converted file into a long sentence (4)

ANSWERS TO PUZZLES ON
INSTAGRAM @VARSITYCAMBRIDGE
PUZZLES BY SOPHOCLES
CRYPTIC CROSSWORD BY CORELLI

Word Wheel

Create as many words possible with the letters in the word wheel, minimum 3 letters. You can only use each letter once and every word must contain the letter in the centre of the wheel.

10 words: good; 14 words: impressive; 17 words: try-hard; 22 words: perfect.



At this point, paying rent for a college room seems pointless...

Vintage
Varsity

JESSICA LEER



Resident Varsity Archivist **Lily O'Sullivan** reflects on how the SU has made *Varsity* headlines over the years

Founded in 1971, Cambridge's Student's Union has never spent much time away from the *Varsity* limelight. In the last year alone, the SU had stories ranging from Vareesh Pratap's hunger strike, to the CEO's resignation last November after a six month tenure. As a new term is set to bring a fresh round of elections, *Vintage Varsity* looks back at the more memorable SU stories of past decades.

Wes Streeting may be best known as health secretary, but his face graced the front page in 2004 after being elected CUSU president. Staring into the camera, surprised at his win by "a mere twenty-two votes," Streeting's front page shot seems to hint at his future career - and future close calls. As a *Varsity* interview noted, his 2015 MP election was cinched by just 589 votes. If Streeting is to run for election again, we can only hope we are spared some of his promotional tactics; supporters dressed with "Wes for Pres" stickers across their chests and bottoms" were seen canvassing Cambridge clubs the night before elections.

Two years earlier, student politics caught the attention of national newspapers including *The Guardian* due to SU president Paul Lewis' "rather nice set of cheekbones". This led to the "battle of the Oxbridge hunks" against Oxford's Will Straw. When questioned whether his election would bring similar levels of swooning, Streeting perhaps accurately dismissed the possibility of the "cult of the Wesident".

The SU has also graced *Varsity* for some more unflattering reasons. With the headline "CUSU in crisis" appearing blazoned across covers from 2006 and 2015, it hasn't always been plain sailing. The rocky relationship between the SU and colleges is also woven throughout *Varsity's* archives. Many referenda deciding whether colleges would disaffiliate from the SU were held in the years following Brexit, leading to such catchy political portmanteaus as "Pexit" and "Quexit".

Colleges and their JCRs expressed concerns in various ways, with a Fitz student expressing their disdain, telling CUSU to "put that in your pipe and smoke it". A 2016 article on the relative benefits of SU affiliation weighed up the advantages and disadvantages of membership, while reminding readers that whatever their affiliation status, they could rest assured that their college supply of condoms would remain stocked.

While the last year of the SU may seem to have brought more stories and scandals than ever, looking through the *Varsity* archives suggests this is nothing new. With a new series of campaigns, manifestos, and elections to look forward to, we can only wait and see how the SU will hit the headlines in 2025.

vulture.



‘So much beautiful time’: Olivia Gatwood and healing with poetry

Reflecting on her first year at Cambridge, **Jen Price** credits the poet who helped get her through it

I spent my first year at Cambridge doing what Olivia Gatwood’s mother would call “being very fazed”. Nothing had prepared me for the events of my first Michaelmas, so I spent my first Lent oscillating between passive despair and all-encompassing rage.

In pubs across the city I met girls who heard my college and asked: “Do you know this guy?” I responded to this by retelling the event like a funny story, dropping in little jokes along the way. In hindsight, appearing unfazed required more effort than it would have taken to just run away and hide.

“

It became safe to admit that acting strong doesn’t necessarily make things bearable

However, my tough girl act, inspired by the first section of Gatwood’s ‘Alternate Universe in Which I Am Unfazed by the Men Who Do Not Love Me,’ struck me as the only way out. I am 19, “and have never cried”. I have, alas, tried to heal the wounds caused by people I once called “the worst men on earth” by turning to even worse men.

Gatwood writes: “The boy says I am not marriage material and I put gravel in his pepper grinder”. My boy agrees that I am not marriage material, going as far as to call me a whore in our college dining room. But the villain in my story doesn’t have a pepper grinder, as his accommodation has the small kitchenettes that riddle central Cambridge accommodation. This is a poor justification for the fact that instead of responding like Gatwood’s protagonist, I



▲ JESSICA LEER

simply allowed it.

Other lines cut even deeper: “The boy doesn’t ask if he can choke me so I pretend to die while he is doing it”. In Easter, the boy forgets his strength and briefly cuts off my airways. I live, make excuses for his behaviour and move on.

Taking ‘Alternate Universe’ line by line, it strikes me that my experiences and reactions are far from unique. This makes me angrier, and when Gatwood threatens to “slaughter a goat in his living room,” I want to call her and tell her that this isn’t dramatic enough. Despite my best efforts, I am very fazed. And the richness of Gatwood’s writing and

performance is such that even now I hear that line and briefly think of elaborate plots I could carry out.

My alternate universe is the one outside of the dingy student accommodations where I hold my breath and question my self-worth. I visit charity shops with my friends, buy overpriced coffees, and cycle along the river. I sit on a bench in Jesus Green and show my best friend a performance of ‘Alternate Universe’w. This moment, forever etched into my mind, is when I stepped into my truly “unfazed” arc. My life, I think, could be full of hours spent with my friends, laughing and working through things in a cathartic way.

In the summer vacation, my GP suggested I have PTSD. And with that realisation, it became safe to admit that acting strong doesn’t necessarily make things bearable. Acts of rebellion perpetuated the issues I was seeking to resolve; healing from a friend who threatened violence because I didn’t want a relationship was unlikely to be lurking in short-lived relationships or messy hookups. When Gatwood says, “The man tells me he does not love me and he does not love me,” I should’ve perhaps considered that a man who degrades and insults me also does not love me. Devaluing the body that I guarded so ferociously in my first incident didn’t resolve that trauma – it gave rise to further incidents.

It took months of pain, but eventually I took Gatwood’s advice: “The man tells me who he is and I listen”. Whether I’m fazed or attempting to heal, my emotions are a reaction to the choices of the men I used to know. There is no poem that undoes these events. But eventually, actions that are framed as ‘self-care’ and ‘healing’ become hobbies, catch-ups, just parts of life. And this is how I know that there is a future, in this universe, where I might be unfazed.

Being fazed is part one. Part two, the ‘unfazing’ process, takes much more effort. But, as I reflect upon the poem in Michaelmas of second year, a full year since the first traumatic incident, my focus has shifted. Yes, there were moments of deep sadness, and my interactions and relationships with many people I knew in the first term have fundamentally changed as a result. But these are balanced out with hours and hours of crying and laughing with my friends as I got better. I’ve built a support network who would, if it were possible, leave hours of time upon my doorstep. When things get tough, I don’t want to slice tires or burn photos – I want to surround myself with the people I know who care for me. Even if I don’t know when things will seem normal again, it helps to remember: “I have so much beautiful time”.

A guide to Cambridge's coat of arms

RYAN VOWLES

I hurry to my lectures, on those days when I make it out of bed, under arches of roses and portcullises. I go beneath friezes of painted plaster: horned goats, forget-me-nots, patterned shields. Further down the street I might notice the fleur-de-lis cluttered on Trinity, the snakes of Caius, the University banner in the wind above the old schools. Black coats embroidered with the wheel of Catz or the Downing griffon flash past me. Overwhelmed, I look up at King’s Chapel only to find more portcullises and more roses! With distinct coats of arms, motifs, and colours associated

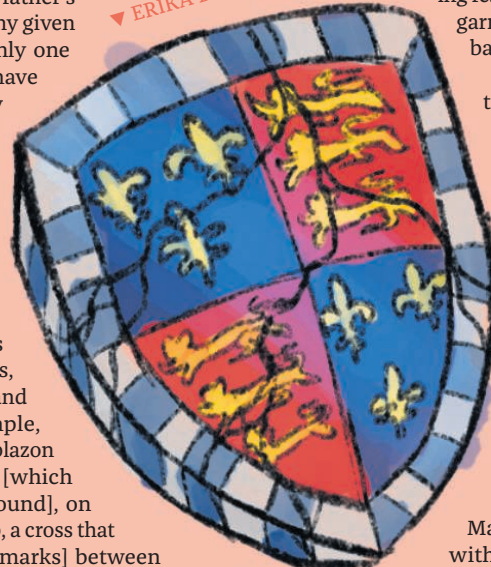


with each college, there’s a lot of symbolism to take in – and the colleges are only the tip of Cambridge’s heraldic iceberg.

Let’s start with the crucial definitions. The shield-shaped part is an escutcheon, which is often displayed alone. The word ‘crest’, which is often misused, is above the shield but is not the shield. You might have supporters on either side or a motto underneath, and the whole thing together is an achievement. You might often hear people talk about their ‘family crest’, which is a double misnomer. Coats of arms do not represent families or groups. A coat of arms belongs to one person (or town

or college). When his father dies, a son might inherit his father’s coat of arms, but at any given time it represents only one person. Once Arms have been designed, they are finally given a blazon – the deepest level of obscurity. This is a description of the design, written in a cryptic mix of old-French and English, which acts as the instructions for artists, carpenters, and, I’m sure, Ryder and Amie’s. As an example, the University arms’ blazon is as follows: gules [which means a red background], on a cross ermine [on top, a cross that is white with black marks] between four lions passant guardant [the lions are side

▼ ERIKA BUNJEVAC



on and looking at us] or [and are gold], a Bible-lying fesseways of the field, clasped and garnished of the third, the clasps in base [a horizontal bible].

In this case, the lions stand for the royal ties of the University. The ermine signifies dignity, as does the gold, and the Bible and cross denote knowledge and faith. From a single blazon, artists can produce shields and arms to many styles or preferences – for example, they can draw the Bible however they like.

Though heraldry emerged in the Middle Ages, new arms are still granted to institutions and notable people. When he was knighted, The Beatles’ producer, George Martin, chose a blue coat of arms, with a guitar-like cross band and three golden beetles. He even went so

A window into collegiate souls

Niall Quinn traces the cracks in the history of Cambridge's stained glass

If you spend enough time in (most) Cambridge colleges, you'll likely be met with stained glass at some point. Whether it be from a chapel, a dining hall, or even a JCR room, the glow of stained glass is a truly omnipresent force within this university. But what is the effect of this force upon us impressionable, zealous students? Do stained glass heraldic badges and founders fill us up with

patriotic fervour, leading us to proclaim that we would take up arms for our colleges if a college civil war broke out? Or do they induce disdain within us, provoking muttered remarks about "dead white men"?

Stained glass lends itself particularly well for answering these questions, for it is such a versatile and visually arresting art form. Its glow immediately grabs one's attention when entering a dining hall, particularly during a sunny brunch sesh. It can display figures, coats of arms, and inscriptions like portraiture, sculpture, and woodwork, with the additional benefit of being the part of a room our eyes seek out first: the window. The building is a foreign entity, while the outside world is our natural, original habitat; windows, then, provide confirmation that we are not being kidnapped from that habitat. All the more potent, therefore, are the messages stained glass communicates.

If we are to find any answers, however, we ought to throw some light on the original function(s) of stained glass within medieval England, let alone the University. This was tripartite: to uphold the social hierarchy, to beautify the space, and of course to aid devotion to God and the saints. The glorious medieval stained glass of All Saints', York, illustrates this triad

perfectly. From lauding local noblewomen and their heraldry to highlighting biblical narratives of didactic interest, the vivid glass is simultaneously egalitarian and divisive: local noblemen are portrayed as superior and more pious, yet the biblical narratives and depictions of saints are accessible to all.

A similar thematic tension runs through stained glass in collegiate Cambridge, with one crucial difference: to what extent does stained glass appropriately honour our benefactors while continuing to uphold the identity of our colleges in the present day? This uneasy dual aim hints at a broader dilemma in contemporary Cambridge life: can the 'traditional' and the 'modern' be easily reconciled? For most Cambridge colleges, of course, collegiate identity is deeply embedded in the spirit of its distant benefactors. This spirit is a literal one. As well as providing a stellar education to its students, these colleges (save Newnham, Medwards, Hughes Hall, and Wolfson) are statutorily obligated to make their college a place of religious instruction. Accordingly, much of these colleges' stained glass blends the 'secular' and the 'sacred' together. In so doing, they commemorate one of the original purposes of this University, as well as the people who made that so.

There is no superior example of this blending than the stained glass of King's College Chapel. When one enters the chapel, it is almost a foregone conclusion that one will leave with a slightly sore neck. It is impossible, or at least very testing, not to gawk at the mesmerising early sixteenth-century (excluding the West Window, which is Victorian) stained glass scenes, featuring narratives from the Old and New Testaments. If one cranes one's neck even higher, remaining careful not to get whiplash, one will find a colourful arrangement of badges, crests, initials, and symbols.

From Tudor roses and royal arms of England to "HA" initials, celebrating the marriage of Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn, this iconography vehemently celebrates the College's royal origins. But it does so while being dominated, almost upheld, by

the religious narratives below it. This duality is, of course, an artificial (and anachronistic) one. King Henry VI, who founded King's and commissioned the construction of the Chapel, would certainly not have viewed his patronage of it as a secular act. Rather, it was a means whereby Henry could ensure the reduction of the time his soul spent in Purgatory after his death.

If this duality is non-existent in medieval and early modern stained glass, it became more overt during the nineteenth century. Of course, religious identities and heritages continued to be stressed. In fact, much of the stained glass one finds around collegiate Cambridge is Victorian and achieves this. The glass of Emmanuel College Chapel, installed in 1884, rehearses a remarkably unsectarian history of the Church of England, while nonetheless commemorating its former Puritan students: such figures as the Catholic martyr Saint John Fisher appear in close proximity to such Puritan figures as John Harvard and Richard Whichcote. While an impassioned Camfessor dismissed them as "boring stained glass windows of Protestant men" (arguably not an entirely accurate assessment), the glass provides an intriguing insight into late Victorian ecclesiastical - and collegiate - commemoration. And due to its location, it does not feel overly antiquated - for now, at least.

But it is in such secular spaces as dining halls that Victorian stained glass mediates collegiate identity in a slightly different way. Let us take the glass of the Hall of Christ's College as an example. Unlike other dining halls (save maybe Peterhouse), Christ's Hall possesses a vast array of figures, rather than just puny coats of arms. Implemented in the large bay window between 1882 and 1899, it displays a vast array of individuals associated with the College over the centuries. From John Milton and Charles Darwin to Lady Margaret Beaufort and Saint John Fisher, the window is a fully-fledged shrine to the pre-1900 history of Christ's. It boasts its legacy, immortalising the College's history of academic excellence for posterity.

Stained glass' newfound ability to immortalise, however, has not proven to be particularly immortal. Amidst the Black Lives Matter-induced iconoclasm of Summer 2020,

Gonville and Caius College understandably decided to remove a stained glass panel from its Hall. By way of a 7x7 Latin square and inscription, it commemorated R.A. Fisher (1890-1962), an accomplished statistician.

But he was also Founder of the University of Cambridge Eugenics Society, of which King's alum John Maynard Keynes was also a member.

Whatever your opinion on this, it is clear that, like portraiture, stained glass is becoming an increasingly contested site of collegiate identity. This is a fascinating historical development; it speaks to our growing interest in how art does or does not represent who we are, or who we want to be. That stained glass has proven to be a site upon which this interest grows is a testament to its importance and potency as an art form - within and without the University. However it fares in collegiate settings in years to come, its outward glimmer will always force us to look within and, crucially, back.



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The vivid
glass is
simultaneously
egalitarian and
divisive

far as to have a martin (the bird) as his crest. There's a long tradition of these canting arms, where the whole thing is a visual pun. The late Queen Mother's family Bowes-Lyon have a coat of arms of bows and lions; Berlin's is a bear, which works better with the German pronunciation; and it is perhaps too easy to imagine the blazon of Edwin Forrest.

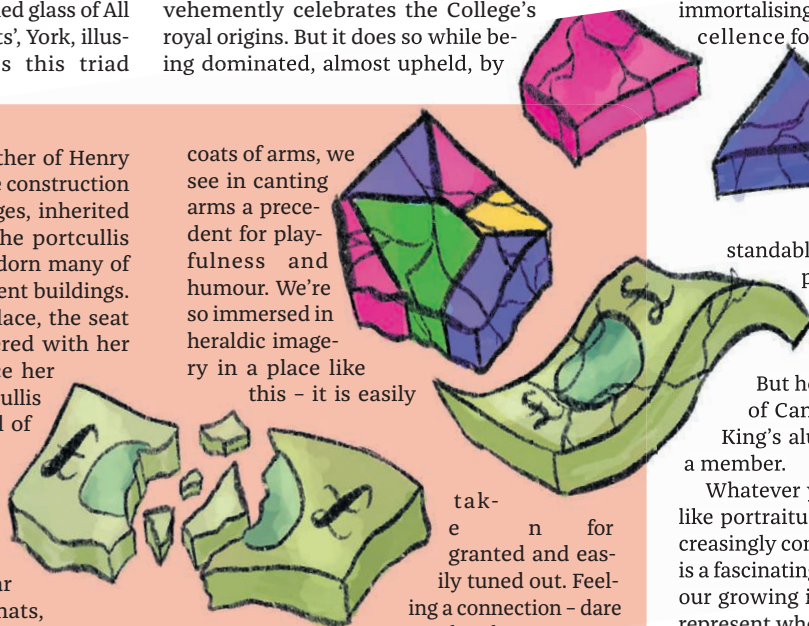
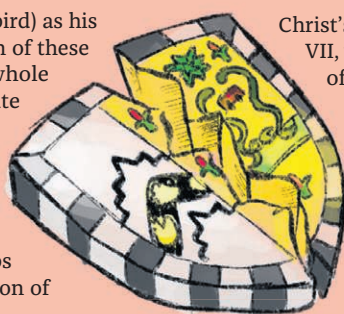
Why is the term crest so often misused, and why is it associated with families? Often, the crest or some other part of the design was taken as a badge, which might stand for an individual or, often, a family. Richard II took as his badge a White Hart (stag); the Tudors used the Tudor Rose. Badges came to adorn palaces, cathedrals, town centres, and pubs. This is the origin of Cambridge's many roses and portcullises. Lady Margaret Beaufort was founder of

Christ's and John's and the mother of Henry VII, who oversaw much of the construction of King's Chapel. Her badges, inherited from her family, were the portcullis and rose, which now adorn many of the city's most prominent buildings. Even Westminster Palace, the seat of Parliament, is covered with her badges, as it was once her son's home - the portcullis now being the symbol of Parliament.

In this University, more than in most places, heraldry maintains some relevance. How many of us wear puffer jackets, hats, and ties decorated with coats of arms? Colleges, sports clubs, societies from beekeeping to med socs, all take designs from heraldry. Although many society logos are ridiculous bastardisations of

coats of arms, we see in canting arms a precedent for playfulness and humour. We're so immersed in heraldic imagery in a place like this - it is easily

taken for granted and easily tuned out. Feeling a connection - dare I say, a loyalty - to a coat of arms is an unusual thing in the modern world, but whether we like it or not, these coats of arms continue to shape the identity of the places in which we live.



Lifestyle

Dear Auntie Jessica: muck-ups, mocktails, and mocks

Worried about the New Year or the start of the new term? Agony Aunt **Jessica Spearman** is here to solve 2025's dilemmas

In case you missed it, it's 2025. For many of us, that means 'new year, new me'. Cringe. Nonetheless, it's a time for identity crises, mistakes, and existentialism. The beginning of Lent marks a time of new academic and personal challenges (just like every other term at Cambridge, if we're being real). Not to worry! It might be a new year, new term, new you, but Auntie Jessica is still here to help you with problems, both new and old.

It's not even February and I've broken my New Year's Resolution already - how do I stop feeling guilty?

A New Year's Resolution?! I haven't dealt with anything so mundane since 2016. If I wanted to destroy my self-worth by setting unattainable and unrealistic goals, I'd have just applied to Cambridge ... oh wait, we've been there, done that and got the gown to prove it; so why continue to make yourself miserable over the guilt of missing a gym session in a tiny basement room your college tries to pass off as a 'gym,' or eating your usual greasy order from Gardies after a rambunctious Rumbogie night? Every week, I try to set myself a new goal and, even then, I fall short each and every time. No more last minute essay crises? Too late, I'm still in the library at 3am when my 2000 word essay on the Stalinist economy is due in four short hours. Stop spending money on overpriced drinks at the Pick? Too bad, all my friends are there and my student loan drops soon.

Who cares if you break your New Year's Resolution? Nobody's going to flog you in 2025, so you shouldn't go on a pious expedition of self-flagellation just because you feel guilty. Just come up with a new one, or keep going with the original one. If you're breaking your resolution, choose something more realistic. It's exactly what my friends do; they won't tell me *not* to see my ex, they'll just tell me not to see him at 1am. We can all make silly promises and vows to ourselves about only being serious candidates, both personally and academically, but when you fall off a horse, you don't lie on the floor and wait for it to trample all over you like a mouldy pile of leaves, you get back on the horse.

I've committed to Dry January but I don't know how to socialise anymore ...

I commend your dedication to preserving your health, but even more so your dedication to being social. Here's a secret little tip: you can do all of the same social activities, while being sober! Isn't that crazy? There's been many occasions where I've, somehow, stumbled into Revs or Kiki's (formally, and yet continually, known as Lola's), without a drop of alcohol in my body, not even a sneaky double vodka coke. Has it been dire? Yes. But, before you despair, that's because even when drunk, I've never really enjoyed clubbing on a Sunday night. However, a Friday Raza, or even Frash - now we're talking! Better music, less shoving, and arguably

much closer to Van of Life. At the pub, you can still enjoy the loud chatter among friends, but just with a soft drink. I often find that I can still feel giddy-drunk when stone-cold sober with my friends. Everything is funny when you're around funny people, not just when you're tipsy. If being in a



I suggest venues? restaurant, or of getting out and ing to pay an eye-pint. Cambridge is of all your supo make the most ously saving cultured, death-

drinking environment is too

much of a temptation, might gest different

Going to a cafe, a even a museum are ways socialising without need-watering amount for a full of things to do, least work, so you may as well of it, whilst simultane-money, becoming more and avoiding a ly hangover.

I've got mocks at the start of term but spent the whole holiday binge-watching Motherland - send help!

Well, well, well, if it isn't the consequences of your own actions. Despite your impeccable taste in entertainment, it hasn't helped you remember research methods, or how to solve a maths question in timed conditions. Like a Netflix suggestion page, if you enjoyed *Motherland*, might I suggest watching *Cunk on Earth*? With Diane Morgan being hilarious as always, but with slightly more material of academic value, it means you'll be entertained, whilst also learning things that might (they absolutely won't) come up in your mocks. If you get to your exam and you still don't know anything, ask a friend to set off the fire alarm, feign fainting, or just don't turn up and hope your DoS is sympathetic to whatever excuse you give. No matter how you do, you've still got time until the real thing (and hopefully you'll have learnt a valuable lesson).

I told my crush that I was a vegan to impress her but I can't even commit to a week of Veganuary - how do I get out of this?

Ghost her. There's no other way out of this. What's the alternative? You spend your life eating cauliflower steaks and tofu, drooling about the chicken quesadilla you used to wolf down following a debrief-worthy night at Mash. The thing about a diet is that you have to pick one you enjoy the most and gives you the most energy, and by the sounds of it, veganism isn't the one for you. Yeah, it might be for some, like the girl you're trying to impress, but it's alright to enjoy chicken and milk chocolate without being

an awful person. If veganism is a deal breaker for someone, I doubt it's the only deal breaker between you two. If you're feeling brave, tell her you've had an epiphany and turned back to the omnivore lifestyle. Just don't get all gym bro about it.

I'm not over my ex, and don't know how to start chatting to someone new - what do I do?

If this is my ex, please get over me. I know you're only human, but come on buddy, it's been too long, find someone else to annoy. If you are any other person on this planet, feelings are fucking rough. It's hard when the person you miss the most is the person you can't have, and probably don't want anymore either. The first thing to know is that there is no statute of limitations on your emotions, and as every therapist and good Agony Aunt knows - say it with me - healing is not linear. Don't look for the same connection you had with your ex with someone new. It doesn't matter how good it felt, it clearly didn't work out. Don't be someone you're not, it'll just be hard to keep up with a new persona AND heartbreak. Don't rush it either, you are more than enough as you are and you should give yourself time and space to know that. Oh, and if you're not clicking with someone new, maybe they're just boring.

How soon is too soon to find a Valentine?

You mean you haven't started already?! How will you possibly be able to find one as late as January? I jest, of course. If I could, I'd give you one of the many suitors on my previous roster, but this Agony Aunt doesn't believe in handouts of men (why make it easy for them?). In short, it's never too soon and it's never too late, not even on the 15th February. Yes, some deem the holiday a capitalist invention, with the prices of roses and stuffed bears tripling the week before, and while I do agree, it's not what you do for the patriarchy, it's what the patriarchy can do for you! It's a fun holiday filled with love - why would you want to deprive yourself? Find your Valentine! And here's your reminder that it doesn't matter if you're married with children (college kids still count), you still need to *ask* them to be your Valentine. If you're struggling to find one, might I suggest Varsity's Blind Date?

In need of Auntie Jessica's advice?



Send your questions here!

Notebook: The collections of a Cambridge student

Jess Smith reflects on why looking back on our time at university is just as important as looking forward into the New Year

As an obsessive documenter, the New Year is always a time to look back on everything I've done

throughout the year. Each Polaroid, receipt, and business card marks an instance that I found meaningful enough to be preserved forever, memorialised with a glue stick or a ballpoint in my annual Moleskine. However, since coming to Cambridge I've not kept on top of this practice, collecting things as I go only to shove them in a desk drawer. Although frustrating, I now find intense value in my collections sitting at home, drowning in a pile of ephemera waiting to be catalogued. Sorting through my hoarded treasure becomes a walk down memory lane: my first Jack's immortalised through a business card, the name tag that came on my gown, and most precious of all, the programme from the GADS panto, picturing our M1 rowing captain as the title character, Shrek. Clothes tags and

paper bags serve as a reminder for next term to be more careful with money, yet pictures of the clothes themselves seem to offset those sensibilities rather effectively. They are a way of looking back during a moment in the year which is so focused on looking forward.

My opening journal entry of the year is always monumental. The first page in any new notebook is a sacred thing, and I'm thankful every year for the intimidation that forces me to write in my best handwriting, allowing me to easily read these lines from January 2024: "I hope I settle well into university, enjoy my course and the people. I hope I develop more of a sense of self that doesn't rely on the people around me". It's a warming sentence to read; as I look back on all of my past years of resolutions - drinking 2 litres of water a day, consistent exercise, *finally* finishing the socks I've been knitting for seemingly the last decade - I realise that I have actually achieved what I had aimed to, and can

look back and not feel silly at the grand notions I'd had for the future. This year was born out of these year old aspirations, collecting journal entries as I do ticket stubs.

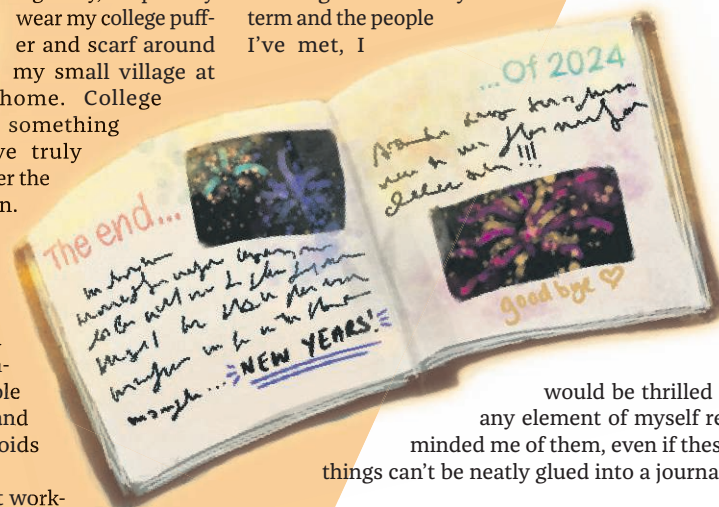
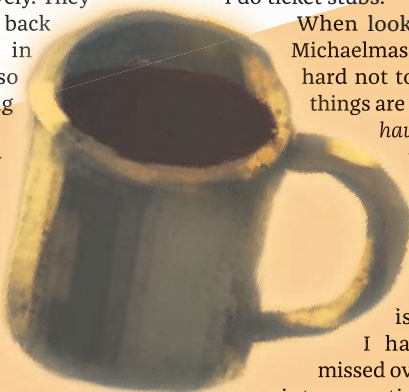
When looking back on my first Michaelmas at Cambridge, I find it hard not to feel happy with how things are compared to last year. I have settled in well to university - *too well* some might say, as I proudly wear my college puffer and scarf around my small village at home. College is something I have truly missed over the winter vacation.

Grey squirrels are nothing when accustomed to black ones, country walks pale next to the Girton nature walk, and weekend mornings are nothing without brunch. The non-tangible reminders of university stand out just as much as polaroids and receipts.

It's hard to lament about work-

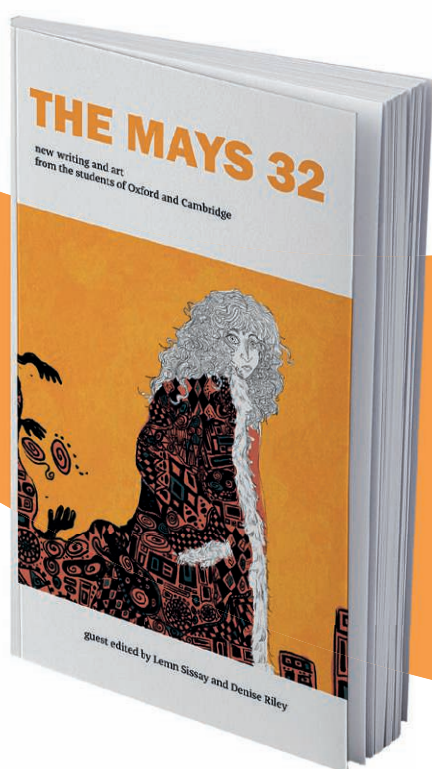
loads and deadlines when you feel so lucky to be experiencing them in such a wonderful city with such wonderful people. I am at peace with the last element of my 2024 goal being unfulfilled: "I hope I develop more of a sense of self that doesn't rely on the people around me". Looking back on my first term and the people I've met, I

would be thrilled if any element of myself reminded me of them, even if these things can't be neatly glued into a journal.



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Fashion**Starting the New Year with a bang**
Grace MacLean gives advice on how, and how not, to achieve the perfect bangs

I am no stranger to a good bang. I have had many kinds and variants. In fact, I am a bang veteran. My bangs have their own history of dysmorphia, starting at 15 when I rebelliously cut a bob with uneven curtain bangs that awkwardly framed my cheeks. Convinced myself it was a fringe, I would drag the strands across my forehead. It was objectively an ugly mess. Luckily, my fringe has changed a lot in the last four years. I almost always cut my own bangs. I don't trust anyone else to grasp my vision.

This is because recently - at the hands of a professional - my hair took a blow so lethal and so despicable that I've only just been able to overcome the trauma. It taught me a valuable lesson of strength, because, despite best efforts to reduce the eyesore of my minced fringe, I had to live with a considerable, and seriously unevenly shaped portion of my forehead being exposed for the four weeks it took to grow back to a comfortable length. I have had baby fringes on a few occasions prior to this chop, but never this short, never so short that you could nearly see what was on my mind. I have chosen to believe that this arc has made me less shallow.

My best tip for beginners, especially if your fringe is a DIY situation, is to use *actual* hair scissors and, for those with fine hair, a comb. If you don't feel like spending extra money then some sharp textile or kitchen scissors will suffice, just Do NOT use nail or stationery scissors. Section your hair, starting from your parting, and keep it as even a shape as possible. Don't chop it too short all at once: you can work your way up to your desired length, checking how it sits against your face every so often. Remember: you can always chop more, but you cannot stick it back on!

I think that Brigitte Bardot curtain bangs have smothered our creativity in the art of face-framing

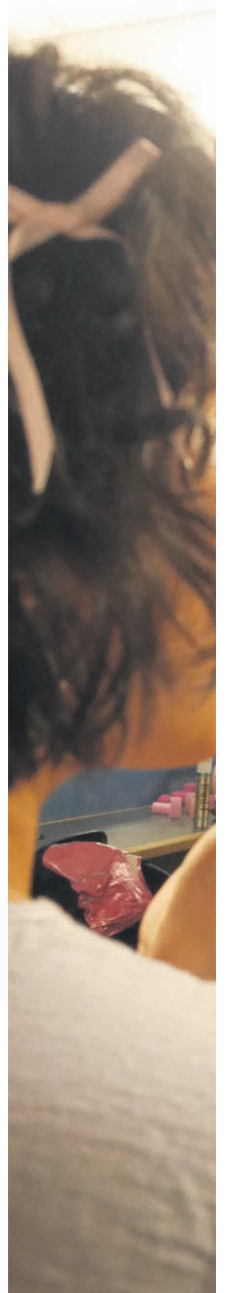


DAISY COOPER



hair. They are the vanilla ice cream of the hair world. They're a reliable and sustainable style, but we've seen them so many times before. I will say that they are a good trial run of having bangs, but I would like to encourage hair adventurers to be a bit braver when taking the leap of faith into fringe city. As we move past this chokehold that the curtain bang has had on western trends, I think the side bang deserves more love. As fun and fresh as the recent trend of microbangs has been, the side bang is more accessible than it's given credit for. It isn't a serious commitment, and can be as short as Audrey Hepburn or as long and carefree as the Olsen Twins in the 2010s. Side parts and bangs are creeping their way back into media - recently, Ariana Grande sported a side-swept fringe inspired by Hepburn at the Golden Globes. When a bit longer, they can be easily pinned to the sides. My issue with the microbang experience is that it is full time. I love not having hair in my eyes, but there are very limited styling options at a length this short.

Ultimately, it is up to personal taste. The only thing you need to have a successful bang is commitment to it. If you have a choppy fringe, make it seriously choppy. If you have curtain bangs, then make them bounce. If you want microbangs, don't be scared to reveal your forehead, your hair will grow. Just do not, I repeat, do not make a microbang choppy. Unless you have an Angelina Jolie level face card; only then maybe you could salvage it.



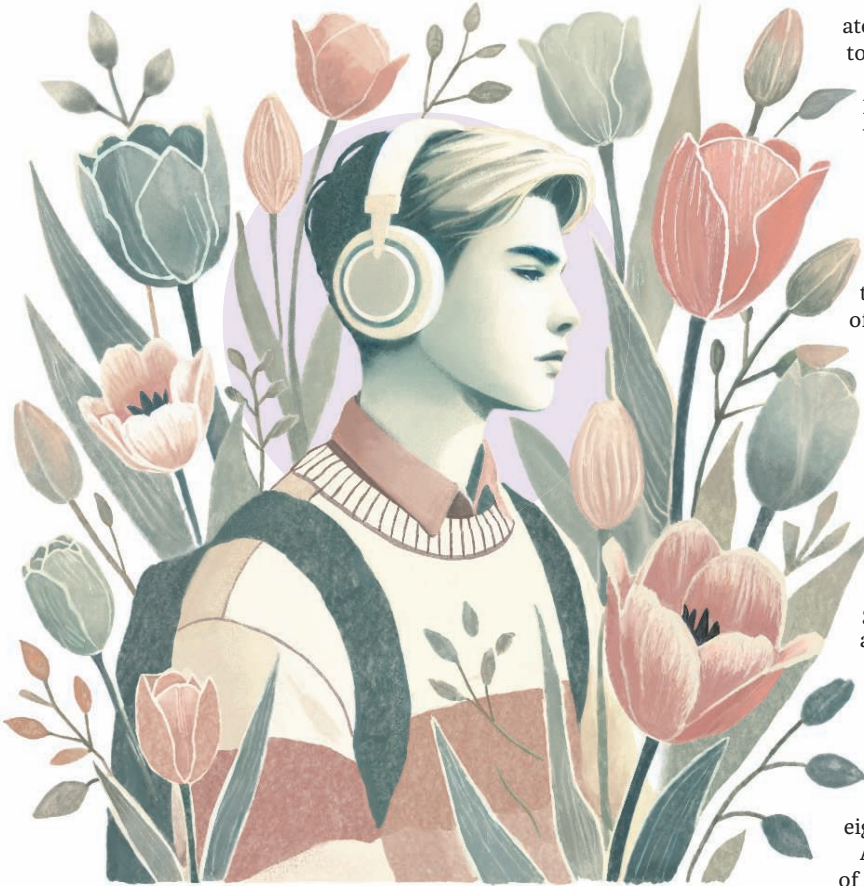
Fashion



▲ DAISY COOPER

▲ FASHION SHOOT COORDINATOR: HOLLY HARDMAN
 PHOTOGRAPHER: NIAMH CAFFERTY
 MODELS: IRISA KWOK, NELL THACKRAY, VIOLETTE
 CHEREAU, STEVIE HARDING, DOMINIKA WIATROWSKA

Varsity's Lent '25 mixtape



▲ EZRA IZER

ate some of Lent's torment.

I'll get Bob Dylan out of the way early – with *A Complete Unknown* in cinemas, it would be criminal not to celebrate one of the greatest songwriters in history. I've had this live version of 'Stuck Inside of Mobile' on repeat: it has brilliantly impenetrable lyrics, a great melody, and more than enough energy to sustain even the weariest Cambridge student for eight weeks.

Any delusions of academic re-

covery you may have need

a fittingly cocky soundtrack, and they don't come much bolder than The Stone Roses and their song 'She Bangs the Drums'. In case they don't provide enough confidence, the swaggering 'Take Five' and 'Timeless Melody' should see you through. Take those three, along with a healthy dose of 'Mambo Sun' and 'Wear Your Love Like Heaven,' and you'll be walking to lectures feeling invincible.

Although, when those delusions crumble, you'll need something warm and comforting to pick you

up. Joni Mitchell's 'You Turn Me On, I'm A Radio' never disappoints: her voice works miracles and is the perfect antidote to... well, anything really. Joni Mitchell pairs beautifully with Caoilfhionn Rose's 'Josephine,' from her criminally underrated album *Constellation*. She almost whispers her words, and to play this song is to put the world on pause for four minutes. That folksy warmth is embellished by Boz Scaggs and Van Morrison, whose songs both

“
As the saying goes:
new year, new me,
new music

build towards glorious saxophone solos. You're almost ready to swagger round Sidge once more.

When that moment does come, Kate Bush's 'Cloudbusting' is that silver lining; alongside Richie Havens' brilliant cover of 'Here Comes the Sun,' there are few surer signs that the clouds have parted and the end of term is in sight. To enjoy that moment and the relief, the fresh guitar of Richard Hawley's 'Just Like the Rain' and the brilliant melody of Nick Drake's 'Time Has Told Me' is all you need – neatly balancing those confident dreams of Lent term but warm enough to pick you up if our plans go awry.

We can't forget that Lent is the first term of 2025, and with the new year inevitably comes the desire to spice up your playlists. As the saying goes: new year, new me, new music. If you're yet to pick this year's musical niche, might I suggest something fresh and funky? The Sugarcubes, an underappreciated Icelandic band best known for lead singer Björk, balance this just right with 'Motorcrash' and 'Birthday,' two deliciously upbeat tunes sure to brighten up dreary walks to the faculty. If covers are more your thing, try Siouxsie and the Banshees'

version of 'Dear Prudence,' or The Raincoats' take on 'Lola'. Equal parts groovy and refreshing in their fun spin on classics.

For those of you recovering from a Michaelmas heartbreak, it's time to reset and refresh, and Fleet Foxes' 'Ragged Woodis' the perfect antidote. This indie folk song is sunny and jubilant – the perfect call back to yourself and a new term. Any song by Waxahatchee, particularly Lilacs from their album *Saint Cloud*, would tie in nicely, alongside Sharon Van Etten's 'Let Go' – a personal favourite of mine that you might recall from Netflix's *The Maid*.

Speaking of, how can I forget Shoop? I'm hardly the first to like 'Salt-N-Pepa,' but there's something about that song that pairs perfectly with a glorious return to Cambridge's not-so-glorious nightlife. It's a pres song that works just as well while strutting through the city, as does Lily Allen's 'Knock 'em Out' and Amy Winehouse's 'Fuck Me Pumps'. All hits that are, in my opinion, criminally underplayed.

2024 was the year of DoeChii, with her album *Alligator Bites* and accompanying 'Tiny Desk' appearance safely moving her from TikTok sound to the next big name in rap. 'DENIAL IS A RIVER' deserves its flowers as one of the most-streamed tracks from the album. Her raw reflections on her career, heartbreak, and substance issues are paired with a catchy beat that makes this a certified earworm.

So there we have it – whether you want to jazz up your 2025 Spotify Wrapped or are looking for that one song to perfect your latest playlist, *Varsity* has got you covered.

- DAISY BATES & BEN CURTIS



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An interview with the CUO's conducting scholar

Archie Glover meets with Jao-Yong Tsai to dissect Cambridge's classical music scene

Following seemingly endless carol services, midnight masses, and Christmas Day Eucharists, I finally had the time to sit down with Jao-Yong Tsai, this year's Cambridge University Orchestra (CUO) conducting scholar. I wanted to shed some light on what his role involves and expose our readers to a side of music-making not often talked about. Classical music often takes the back seat in the Cambridge musical space – a peculiar phenomenon for a city so rich with some of the UK's finest classical talent. Jao-Yong, in addition to his role within CUO, often takes on projects outside of this as a conductor, choral singer, violist, and sometime organist.

I started by asking Jao-Yong what his role as assistant conductor for CUO encompassed. He explained, "The University Orchestra works with professional guest conductors – professional musicians who come from outside the University to work with us – so before they arrive it's my job to rehearse the orchestra and lay the foundations so that when the professional arrives they can get into the real detail and the much more interesting stuff."

I followed up by asking about his thoughts on seemingly not having the opportunity to do the 'fine-tuning' necessary for a concert performance. Jao-Yong replied, "It's technically not in my job remit! But the process remains collaborative; once I have laid the foundations I will continue to talk

to the guest conductor, and depending on who it is I will often still have some musical input. There's already musical, artistic intent in that preparatory stage – it's incredibly interesting as a conductor."

Jao-Yong was involved in two CUO projects this term, with two different professional conductors. I asked how his preparation differed for each: "My process for preparing is much the same – I learn to conduct the score, I think about what would potentially cause issues with the orchestra, what will need more work, and then I'll normally have a Zoom call with the conductor or something before the project starts. The difference is the size of the orchestra and the type of repertoire we're covering. I'm not going to get into too many details of what each conductor is like to work with – just to avoid controversy!"

Of course, each conductor has their own unique style and preferences. As Jao-Yong says, "Some conductors might like to take a step back and let me conduct some of the rehearsal so they can listen to it from a distance." In contrast,

"Other conductors like to be very hands-on with the orchestra at all times and then very occasionally look back and ask, 'Does this sound ok?'"

Unlike other ensembles in the University, CUO doesn't rehearse weekly, instead preferring to have intense rehearsal sessions in the week of the concert. I was intrigued as to how Jao-Yong and the orchestra manage this rather fierce commitment. He replied, "It's a large time commitment, but it's one that we make work."

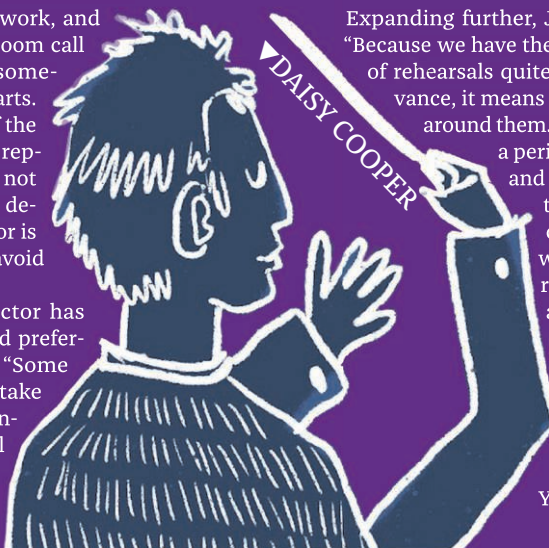
Expanding further, Jao-Yong explains: "Because we have the dates and timings of rehearsals quite a long way in advance, it means we can plan things around them. I can sort of isolate a period of about a week and a half where I will take on fewer other concerts and do my work before the current project starts and after it finishes, so that during the rehearsal periods themselves I'm at a kind of 'minimum stress'"

I asked Jao-Yong if there was

anything about conducting he would want people to know. It's perhaps an aspect of music-making that often goes overlooked and underappreciated. "Conducting is a unique thing and not something that really has a parallel. Being a conductor is this interesting balance of being a musician that's focused on themselves and their own improvement – when I'm conducting I'm trying to make my conducting as good as possible – but there's also a didactic element to it. As an assistant conductor, a lot of my job is training the orchestra to respond to things so that when the professional arrives, things happen smoothly."

I finished by asking Jao-Yong about his upcoming projects for Lent 2025. He said, "The next project coming up at the beginning of term is the combined concert between CUO, the University Symphony Chorus, and the University Chamber Choir. It'll be taking place in King's College Chapel on the 25th of January and features music from Judith Weir, Saint-Saëns, and Poulenc."

By all accounts, it promises to be a great show. Next time you find yourself at a classical concert, perhaps take a moment to reflect and appreciate the work that goes on behind the scenes – by both the orchestra and the tenacious yet oft-forgotten conductor.



The modern horror film takes itself too seriously

Exhausted by sub-par scares and thrills, Daisy Simpson asks why Gen Z are saying 'no thanks' to modern horror films

Several of my friends and family members have told me that they don't do horror films: they don't watch them, point blank. Quite simply, they don't want to be scared. Everyday life is stressful enough without having to witness anaphylactic children being decapitated by telegraph poles – a sentiment I fully understand. But the response I'm always primed to give, although I'm hardly an expert myself, is that plenty of horror films are worth watching for something *other* than the horror itself – whether it's a brilliant lead performance, memorable cinematography, or tight, engaging storytelling. The trouble is that the vast majority of the films I have in mind were made at least thirty years ago. So what is it about the modern horror pantheon that has Gen Zs wincing and mumbling 'No thanks'?

2021's *No One Gets Out Alive* is a prime example of the explanatory theory I've formulated: the modern horror filmography lacks a sense of humour. Ostensibly, it seems bizarre to argue that a genre known for eliciting screams and terrified wriggles should have an element of mirth; I would argue that it's not only possible but *vital* to introduce one, because the consequences of not doing so are dire.

Santiago Menghini's tale of a young immigrant woman, who becomes trapped in an archetypally sinister boarding house run by a pair of broad-necked brothers who plan to sacrifice her and her fellow sobbing, shrieking prisoners to a laughably unscary monster in their basement, takes itself so seriously that you can practically hear the director's erratic breathing. From the aggressively blue Tumblr-like vignette (the cinematographer clearly drank a few Red Bulls beforehand) to the generic omnipresence of 'creepy' in the sound design and the staggeringly expository dialogue ("Our dad was a real nutjob – killed our mom!"), there is not a single moment of alleviation, and this makes the viewing experience a total slog. Tragedy and comedy are, after all, two sides of the same coin – it doesn't hurt one to intro-

duce the other. That's why Hamlet wonders aloud whether the obviously human Polonius is a rat before stabbing him through the curtain.

“Everyday life is stressful enough without having to witness anaphylactic children being decapitated

Rob Reiner's 1991 film *Misery* has a terrifying premise – a paralysed writer completely at the mercy of his psychopathic 'biggest fan' – and a genuinely frightening lead performance from the talented Kathy Bates, but that doesn't stop it being funny when Annie, the serial murderer who believes that swearing is morally incorrect, exclaims "OH POO!" when something goes amiss. Humour is part of real life, and Reiner understands that the more horror resembles real life, the scarier it is. This is also what Glenn Close understands when chillingly bringing to life Alex Forrest, the bunny-boiling other woman who won't be ignored in *Fatal Attraction*. Both Annie and Alex are deplorable, yet both elicit some level of pity; they're mentally unwell, damaged, desperate for love, and totally alone.

The wifebeater-esque goons of *No One Gets Out Alive* have nowhere near this level of complexity. They're just unhappy predators who derive sadistic pleasure from feeding undocumented immigrant girls to a monster that looks like a cross between female genitalia and an avocado. It's alluded to that these men are damaged because of their homicidal father, but the screenplay hardly

scratches the surface of this assertion, and this is another casualty of the overly sombre directorial approach to modern horror: underdeveloped character writing.

An even more egregious example of this approach to directing is 2020's *The Grudge*, which also has the misfortune of being a remake. It shares many similarities with *No One Gets Out Alive*

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her kitchen

cutting

off her

own fingers

with a

carving

knife for... weeks?

Months? Like

No One Gets Out Alive, this film is

afraid to offset the depressing atmosphere of wasting and decay, and the only humour arises from how ridiculously derivative some of its scenes are. A mute, frightening child possessed by supernatural forces pushes a woman over a railing... where have I seen that in a horror film before? (Answer: *The Omen*. Duh.)

The answer to my earlier question may be simply that we need less blood and more character, less vignette and more tonal variety. Give us this, and the genre will probably be significantly less maligned by my fellow Gen Zs – because young people will simply have a better time watching.



▲ GEMMA SWEENEY

Global frames: Ireland

In recent years, Ireland has emerged as a dynamic force in global cinema. From sweeping landscapes to intimate stories, Irish filmmakers have captivated audiences worldwide with their unique voice and bold storytelling. This cultural resurgence, fuelled by a new generation of talent, has brought a wave of films that reflect both Ireland's storied past and its evolving present. This article will explore the gems of Irish film to celebrate a small but profoundly influential nation's impact on global cinema.

The Banshees of Inisherin (2022)

Set on the fictional island of Inisherin off the coast of Ireland, *The Banshees of Inisherin* is a miserably comedic story, which explores the dissolution of a friendship between two lifelong companions, Padraic (Colin Farrell) and Colm (Brendan Gleeson). What begins as a simple misunderstanding turns into an escalating feud when Colm abruptly ends their friendship without explanation, prompting Padraic to seek answers in increasingly desperate and sometimes absurd ways. The film is a meditation on isolation, personal identity, and the futility of human conflict through director Martin McDonagh's trademark blend of dark humour and poignant emotional depth. The film's stunning cinematography and sparse yet dense dialogue captures the eerie atmosphere of a remote community where everyone knows each other's business but remains



▲ PAM NOONPACKDEE

emotionally distant from each other. Farrell and Gleeson's performances were widely lauded, with Farrell receiving numerous accolades, including a Golden Globe win.

In the Name of the Father (1993)

No list of the best in Irish cinema would be complete without acknowledging the extraordinary work of Jim Sheridan. Regarded as one of the key figures of the Irish cinematic renaissance in the 1980s and '90s, and as a major influence on international filmmaking, Sheridan's work often centres on the complexities of *The Troubles*. One of his most powerful films, *In the Name of the Father* is based on the true story of Gerry Conlon, who was wrongfully convicted of an IRA bombing. The film, starring Daniel Day-Lewis, explores themes of justice, family, and the devastating effects of political conflict. It was nominated for seven BAFTA Awards and garnered worldwide attention for its bold narrative and powerful performances.

Kneecap (2024)

Kneecap is a politically charged biopic that follows the lives of the Northern Irish hip hop band of the same name, exploring how they navigate identity and politics in post-conflict Northern Ireland. The title references the brutal paramilitary practice of 'kneecapping,' which was used during *The Troubles*. The band has garnered significant attention

in recent years, partly due to their use of Irish in many of their lyrics, a momentous choice that challenges the legacy of English colonialism, which has historically sought to suppress regional languages and erase cultural identities. In blending music, culture, and social realism, the film portrays the tension between rebellion, activism, and a younger generation's search for meaning in a post-conflict society. It includes supporting appearances from Josie Walker and Michael Fassbender.

Small Things Like These (2024)

This adaptation of Claire Keegan's short story is a quiet, introspective film about Bill Furlong (played breathtakingly by Cillian Murphy), a coal delivery man in rural Ireland in the 1980s who becomes entangled with the dark secrets of the local convent. The film is based on the abuse that occurred within the 'Magdalene Laundries,' the Irish Catholic institutions that were established as reformatories for 'fallen' women, including those who committed the crime of simply being unmarried and pregnant. It confronts themes of personal integrity and faith while offering nuance to Ireland's long-standing relationship with the Church. Overall, the film's intimate portrayal of rural Irish life, its contemplative narrative and its evocative cinematography produce a sensitive and profound portrayal of small town life.

- MADDIE ROBERTSON

Theatre

Shall I compare self-taping to the audition room?

Milly Kotecha breaks down the fear and tremulation behind the most daunting of theatre practises: the self-tape audition

Picture this: while conducting my usual scroll through Camdram vacancies, my eyes fall upon a show I'd love to audition for. Some digging later and, alas, there are no audition slots left! Panic fills my heart as I read the phrase "self-tape deadline". Okay, I still have the opportunity to audition, but now I must face the ever-daunting prospect of a self-tape. This is a (slight) dramatisation of my feelings towards tapes – I will film one if absolutely necessary, but my preference will always be an in-person audition. I know I'm not alone, either; several of my friends have expressed similar feelings.

To begin with, self-tapes don't provide actors the chance to showcase some of the vital skills directors are looking for when casting. In the audition room, you perform a piece you've prepared, perform it again with redirection, and may even perform a second, unprepared piece. Self-tapes, unless they specify multiple extracts, generally only entail one – and there are obviously no redirects. But redirection is often the most important part of the audition; it's where the director sees how well you respond to their input and how willing you are to adjust your performance. Without this, self-tapes can leave you at a disadvantage: the audition panel only gets to see one version of your performance.

Another drawback is losing the chance to demonstrate your personality – to show the panel you're someone they'd want to work with. Whether it's answering a question like, 'why do you want to be a part of this show?' or simply chatting before or after the audition, an in-person experience allows you to convey that you're fun, kind, and interesting. One director I've worked with mentioned they specifically

looked for friendly people during auditions, as the themes of the play were sensitive, and they wanted a supportive cast. This can go under the radar during a self-tape – I know I don't come across as particularly vibrant when I awkwardly film myself saying: "Hi, I'm Milly Kotecha, and I'll be auditioning with Extract 2".

at a disadvantage without someone reading in for a scene with another character? These questions have led to some chaotic circumstances: I've waylaid friends to the college games room for a larger performance space and precariously balanced my phone between my desk and bed for makeshift setups.

Reflecting on this, I wonder if my aversion towards self-tapes stems from one of my



▲ ERIKA BUNJEVAC

Lastly, there's the practical challenge of filming yourself without knowing exactly what the panel is looking for. Does a self-tape mean you're expected to have memorised the extract? Should the performance be higher quality because you can film it multiple times? Are you

earliest Camdram experiences. After a rejection, I received feedback that my performance came across as "slightly disingenuous" – a result, I suspect, of the nature of the tape itself. Since then, however, I've come to know several success stories, including a

friend who landed the lead in a show last Lent via self-tape. In fact, I write this now having secured a part in a show this term through a tape (though in fairness, all auditions were remote, as casting happened over the holidays).

“The audition panel only gets to see one version of your performance”

I guess much of what I've critiqued about self-tapes can easily be repackaged as positives. You have the chance to film again and again, watch yourself back, perfect the tape, and then send it off – a privilege not afforded in an audition room. For those who find it daunting to be scrutinised in real time, self-tapes remove you from the immediate gaze of the casting panel. And, in the whirlwind of university life, between contact hours, societies, and socialising, there's often no time to trek across town for an in-person audition (an even less appealing prospect in winter weather). Self-tapes offer complete control over your time, which became particularly useful during the end of term.

So whether they float your boat or not, if you're a fan of the Camdram vacancies page (like me), you may find yourself standing in front of your phone, giving the performance of your life ... only to realise the hardest part is yet to come: uploading the video to OneDrive and granting access to the right people because the file size is too big. Whoops.

The Camdram Diaries: using a Vinted obsession for a greater good

Julia Slawska shares her experience of converting her passion for fashion into a Camdram costume designing gig

As a fresher first experiencing the Cambridge theatre scene last term, I was in awe – and, in some ways, slightly intimidated – by the incredible standard of the productions I'd seen. Surrounded by 'actor-friends', I even briefly considered auditioning for the Lent term productions flooding onto the Camdram vacancies page in December. Eventually, I gave up on the idea, citing an unease at being perceived on stage, as well as the sheer talent I'd be up against.

Reading *Bloody Poetry's* Camdram page, however, I found myself oddly determined to get involved, despite having previously dismissed any chance of a future in theatre. The play appealed to me as an English student, but also as a vintage fashion lover. Romanticism's most chaotic figures transposed into the eighties? I was intrigued. The production role of costume designer seemed like something I might genuinely enjoy, offering a way to get into theatre without the anxiety of memorising lines or stepping out in

front of an audience. Though I'd still be perceived, this time it would be through the design choices I'd make – a prospect that excited, rather than unnerved, me.

Surprisingly, my slightly incoherent ramblings about my extensive experience as a Vinted warrior paid off. I learned I'd gotten the role just after term ended. Growing increasingly nervous about my capabilities to lead the costuming alone, I'd anticipated rejection, so I was even more grateful to learn I'd be working with another designer. Having a decade as iconic as the eighties to emulate was no small feat, but the Christmas holidays gave me some comfort. Most initial WhatsApp video meetings were attended from bed, where I nodded along as the director explained her artistic vision for each of the characters. Each actor also gave their opinion on what clothing would best represent their character, all of which was faithfully recorded onto a huge master spreadsheet. Pinterest boards initially did most of the talking, and, after modelling each character after a specific eighties

icon, we began formulating more concrete outfits.

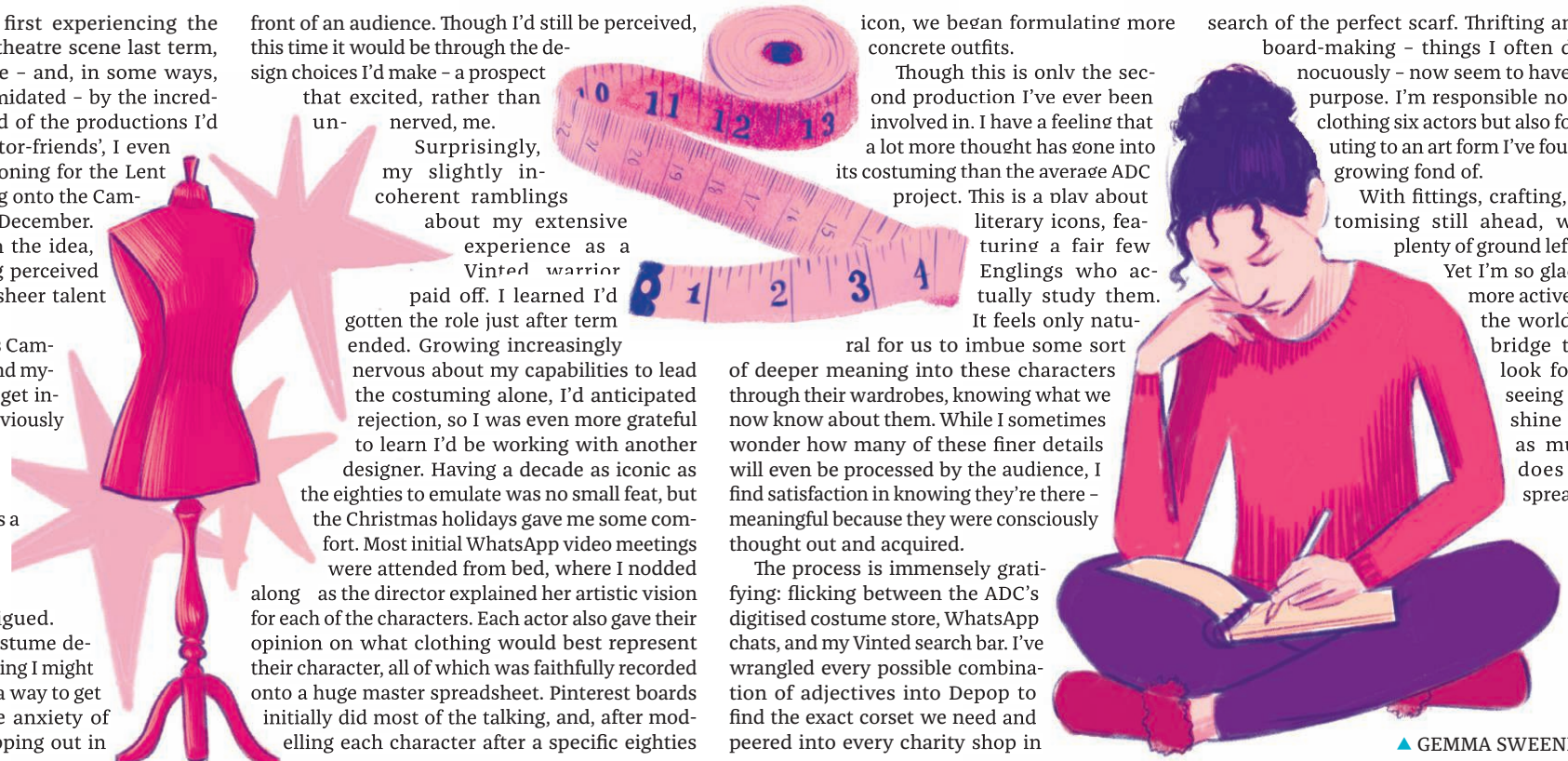
Though this is only the second production I've ever been involved in. I have a feeling that a lot more thought has gone into its costuming than the average ADC project. This is a play about literary icons, featuring a fair few Englings who actually study them. It feels only natural for us to imbue some sort of deeper meaning into these characters through their wardrobes, knowing what we now know about them. While I sometimes wonder how many of these finer details will even be processed by the audience, I find satisfaction in knowing they're there – meaningful because they were consciously thought out and acquired.

The process is immensely gratifying: flicking between the ADC's digitised costume store, WhatsApp chats, and my Vinted search bar. I've wrangled every possible combination of adjectives into Depop to find the exact corset we need and peered into every charity shop in

search of the perfect scarf. Thrifting and mood-board-making – things I often did so innocuously – now seem to have a greater purpose. I'm responsible not only for clothing six actors but also for contributing to an art form I've found myself growing fond of.

With fittings, crafting, and customising still ahead, we've got plenty of ground left to cover.

Yet I'm so glad I took a more active step into the world of Cambridge theatre. I look forward to seeing our work shine on stage as much as it does in our spreadsheets.



▲ GEMMA SWEENEY



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Vulture

WHAT'S ON?

Film & TV

25 & 26 January

The Hotel Bed: Short Film
Venue TBC, 12:00pm

2 February

IndieFlicks monthly festival
Everyman Grand Arcade, 8:00pm

28 February

Bread Theatre and Film Shortcuts Festival applications close

3 February

Cambridge University Film Association writing masterclass with Colin Ramsay
Christ's TV Room, 7:00pm

7 March – 9 March

Watersprite Film Festival
Multiple locations

Music

24 January

Daniel Daley Sextet and Girlband at Clare Jazz Club
Clare Cellars, 8:00pm

2 February

Introducing the Viennese Fortepiano, a lecture recital
Hughes Hall Pavillion, 6:00pm

5 February

Retro 80s/Taylor Swift Pomodoro revision rave
West Hub, 4:45pm

4 February

Emily Barker
The Portland Arms, 7:00pm

10 February

A Musical Afternoon at Kettle's Yard
Kettle's Yard, 2:00pm

Arts

24 January

Glasgow School of Art and the University of Cambridge: 'Echolocate'
Fitzpatrick Hall, 9:00pm

30 January

'Art, Architecture and Design at Churchill College'
Jock Collville Hall, 5:30pm

30 January

'Writing From a Place of Joy': The Mays writing workshop
Magdalene College, 7:00pm

2 February

Cambridge Review of Books, Launch event
Jesus College Bar, 8:00pm

7 February

'Lara Smithson: A Ribbon Unfurling'
The Heong Gallery, 12:00pm

Theatre

28 January

Footlights Playrooms *Smokers: Lent 2025*
Corupus Playroom, 9:30pm

28 January – 1 February

Bloody Poetry
ADC Theatre, 7:45pm

30 January – 1 February

Addenbrookes Charity Pantomime 2025: *Transplanted*
Hills Road Sixth Form College, Various times

31 January

A Cauldron of BATS
Fitzpatrick Hall, 8:00pm

31 January

CUADC Photography workshop
ADC Theatre 4:00pm

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The charity making sure nobody is left on the bench

Barney Blackburn speaks to charity founder John Willis about the future of inclusive sport

Throughout my sporting life, I have never had to worry about being unable to participate. For John Willis, a man born without fully formed arms and legs, things have been a little different.

Like many, John has an indomitable passion for the sporting world. Things become a little trickier, however, when you aren't afforded the opportunities to play the games you love. But in 2012, encouraged by his friends, John took part in a triathlon relay with two able-bodied friends, smashing the swimming leg as his trio aimed to have a blast and not come last. They accomplished both.

Of course, that lifelong sporting itch was by no means scratched - this was only the beginning. Four years later, John had a new challenge, John's 'Road2Rio' where Willis garnered national attention by participating in all 34 Olympic and Paralympic sports in the lead-up to the Olympic Games, raising thousands of pounds for his charity. From taekwondo to table tennis, the Willis proved that disability should never be a barrier to participation in sport. Nowadays, his charity puts on countless PowerHouseGames - multi-team events that celebrate inclusive and adapted sports, such as boccia and goalball.

Things were very different during Willis' childhood in the 1960s. Within the education system, pupils were pushed into special needs schools, where, as John explains, he was "taught" how to be disabled. There was no exciting future, no job prospects, and certainly no chance of taking any O-Levels (now GCSEs), which John's former headteacher made very clear. 13 O-Levels, three A-Levels, and a very necessary change of school later, Willis matriculated at Trinity Hall, Cambridge to read Law. Understandably, he's always wanted to pay his



JOHN WILLIS

At Cambridge, John played croquet for his college, but it was his experience coxing his college's boat which stood out to me. John was an invaluable member of the college crews; he picked up the sport at University and went on to cox at the Fairbairn Cup. As we discussed technological developments in inclusive sport, John was adamant that if he were to be coxing nowadays, he would not have to be physically tied to the boat as he had been. It was not this, however, that prevented him from coxing in the Lent and May Bumps.

As anyone who has ever watched the quintessential Cambridge sporting spectacle knows, Bumps can err on the dangerous side. The coxswain, who is positioned closest to an onrushing boat, is vulnerable to collisions from bow balls and flailing oars. Deemed unable to sufficiently defend himself, John was forced to withdraw from his coxing responsibilities ahead of the Cambridge college rowing calendar's most prestigious event.

At times, John reflects that it was the correct decision, especially as his crew had concerns that he would have to concede a bump earlier than other coxes. However, looking back, he suggests that a "halo" (as seen in Formula 1) implemented at the back of a boat could have been an option. What was evident from our discussion is that John is a man who now firmly believes that every sport can be modified to suit anyone: even in his office, he is surrounded by his own inclusive sports inventions.

John regaled me with fascinating stories from his time as a student at Cambridge. He received no extra time in exams until he got to his finals, and he also had a rota of Trinity Hall students volunteer to assist him in getting dressed every morning. John explained that his college was supportive, even if this support came from an incredibly restricted mindset.

The aim of Power2Inspire is to expand the horizons of people of all ages who are too often excluded from sporting activities. John and the team run their very own PowerHouseGames, which team up children from independent, state, and special needs schools alongside corporate volunteers and university sports players. In Cambridge, numer-

“Disabled people want to play sports with their non-disabled peers

ous groups have been involved, from the University rugby side to Lucy Cavendish and Gonville and Caius. This term, the Cricket Club, the Hawks and Ospreys, and Murray Edwards College will all be involved in PowerHouseGames. Whether it's sitting netball (a sport that John invented), new-age curling, or touch rugby, participation is at the crux of the event. The former Cambridge women's rugby captain remarked to John during the games that this was the first time the men's and women's sides had been treated completely equally. Clearly, inclusive sport does not just benefit disabled people.

67% of disabled people want to play sports with their non-disabled peers. In an era of obesity, loneliness and a strained NHS, John finds it mind-boggling that more money isn't being pumped into sports. As any medical expert will tell you, the best pill you can give for health, mental or physical, is exercise.

Willis believes that we must get people more engaged in their communities, now more than ever in a post-COVID-19 world. What better way than through being active? Putting on 30 PowerHouseGames, which will involve 2,000 people getting engaged in inclusive sport, is the charity's aim for 2025.

John is intent on providing opportunities and improving the lives of those around him. Power2Inspire does exactly what it says, and John Willis has embodied this mantra throughout his life. The positive impact that Willis and his work has is truly life-affirming.

“Inclusive sport does not just benefit disabled people

old headteacher a visit!

As a young sports fan, John could not play the sports he loved to watch. His parents were both high-quality hockey players, he supported his school rugby side and even became a cricket scorer, yet nobody had the imagination to help him play any of these sports. He was left to get his fix by battling his sister in croquet, holding the mallet under his left arm and swinging sideways as if it were a golf club.



Barney Blackburn talks to Lawn Tennis captain Zara Man

Who is your sporting idol?

Roger Federer has been my sporting idol from a young age, and not only because I have been forced to watch videos of his impeccable technique and footwork by all of my tennis coaches growing up!

Why tennis?

Tennis has given me some of my closest friends the highest of highs and lowest of lows. It is both the most rewarding and hardest sport you can ever play. Enduring the challenges and lessons of competitive tennis from a young age has shaped me to be the ambitious person I am today, not only in sport but also in life.

How did last term go?

W1 has had an incredibly successful term, having not lost a single BUCS fixture this year, which meant we finished joint-top of the Premier South League for the first time in Cambridge history. In our last BUCS match of Michaelmas against Exeter, we managed to achieve a 4/4 clean sweep in our singles matches allowing us to end 2024 on a high.

What are your predictions for the rest of the season?

Our next big fixture will be at the end of January where our top four Blues players will be playing against the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club (AELTC) at the Wimbledon All England Club. Following this, we have the BUCS National Cup, our annual Old Blues fixture, and, finally, Varsity. I never tend to make predictions on our fixtures as I think it gives us unnecessary pressure, but a vengeful Varsity is definitely a goal for the team!

How do you manage to balance your elite sport play with a Cambridge workload?

A very organised daily, weekly, and monthly schedule! My daily routine on a 'bad day' consists of a 5am wake up to cycle to training, which finishes at 9am, then cycling straight to back-to-back lectures, which finish at 1pm, followed by supervisions in the afternoon. Undoubtedly, this can be tough on the body and mind, especially when you still need to study more after this and be ready to do it all again the next day! However, all of us love the sport, the team, and the rewarding feeling of success which comes from our hard work. All the girls do a great job in managing the workload and the expectations of Blues tennis, but they also know when they need a rest day, which makes me very proud.

How can people get involved with tennis at Cambridge?

For complete beginners, we have 'give it a go' sessions every Saturday which are coached sessions allowing you to see if tennis is for you, alongside friends and like-minded individuals. Social tennis, coached by W1/M1 and W2/M2 players, also occurs every weekend, and caters for abilities from beginners to intermediate. We have had a huge uptake for social tennis this year, which has

been a great way for many people across the university to make friends, find players to hit with in their own time, and join social events off-court. If you are interested in getting involved with 'give it a go' or social tennis, please get in contact with Carissa (cefr3@cam.ac.uk) who is our social tennis representative.



◀ NORDIC CATIC

Sport

Captain's Corner

pg. 31



John Willis on disability in sport

pg. 31



LUNGING INTO LENT...



▲ IZZY POLES

Joss Heddle-Bacon previews a jam-packed Lent Term

With blockbuster Varsity clashes, BUCS National Championships and Cuppers knockouts looming large, Lent promises to satiate any student's sporting appetite. A fruitful Michaelmas saw 14 Cambridge BUCS teams go unbeaten and over 4,000 students get involved in college sport; opportunities for both participation and light blue glory continue to abound in 2025.

The term's undoubted centrepiece will, of course, be the Varsity fixtures. Centuries of rivalry between the nation's two academic pantheons will be played out across a swathe of sports this Lent as light blue goes toe-to-toe with dark blue once more. An obvious focal point is the illustrious rugby union Varsity matches; Cambridge achieved a memorable double in 2024, featuring a record-breaking drubbing dished out by the men's side. Set to be held on the 8 March at Saracen's 10,500-capacity StoneX Stadium, spectators praised the venue's carnival

atmosphere after the game moved away from its traditional Twickenham home last year. Other marquee fixtures taking place in the nation's capital include the hockey Blues' matches at Southgate Hockey Centre, while the squash sides will do battle at Pall Mall's Royal Automobile Club – seen as the racket sport's spiritual home.

Back in Cambridge, the University Sports Centre will play host to a bounty of Varsity clashes – ranging from Korfball to Karate, and headlined by Blues netball on the 23 February. Following a nail-biting 32-34 loss last year, Cambridge will be hoping home support can provide the point of difference in 2025. Cambridge United's Clevara Abbey Stadium is also due to welcome a sea of vociferous light blue support come 21 March, as the men's football team looks to avenge last year's penalty agony while the women's side will seek to extend their dominance having trounced Oxford in the two most recent editions of the fixture.

Although these rivalry-soaked matches may dominate the Lent sporting conscience, they are far from the term's only calendar highlights. In the BUCS arena, February sees the culmination of the league season for the eight Cambridge teams who currently compete in their sport's Premier Division. These elite eight will then have the chance to push for knockout glory in the National Championships tournaments, pitted against Britain's preeminent university sporting talent. Perhaps Cambridge's brightest victory hope burns with the women's tennis first team, who sit just a point off leaders Essex University in BUCS Premier South despite having a game in hand after a magnificent Michaelmas campaign. On the individual events side, a select crop of Cambridge athletes will be striving for selection in the European or even World Games. A chock-full schedule of events features the BUCS nationals from 14-16 February, the annual pinnacle of the student individual sports calendar.

Beyond the light-blue toting brigade, there is still plenty of eye-catching sport to be enjoyed at college level. Come Lent, crunch time truly begins in Football Cuppers as both the men's and women's quarter-finals get underway. Meanwhile, from 11-15 March, the archetypal Cambridge sport comes to the fore once more when college boats fight it out on the Cam in Lent Bumps.

Away from the heat of competition, the new term also welcomes a fresh face at the Cambridge sporting helm. Following Nick Brooking's departure last year, Mark Brian has taken over the reins as the University's director of sport, having previously enjoyed successful stints as head of sport at both Durham University and BUCS.

Lent also bears a unique treat for fans of the beautiful game. Curated by Dr Joseph Powell, the University and Cambridge United FC are launching 'Footnotes: The Writing of Football' this January, a four-part seminar series that promises to both fascinate and delight

– all completely free of charge. Spanning renowned journalists, an expert witness to a parliamentary justice committee and ethnographic investigations, these interactive events are simply not to be missed.

For students yet to find their calling in sport, the new year presents ample opportunities to get stuck into the Cambridge scene – be it joining one of the numerous clubs on the lookout for new members, getting your voice behind the light blues during a heated Varsity tussle, or following in the footsteps of the 600 students who partook in the University's 'Give it a Go' scheme last term.

A final Lent standout is the 9 March's TPP Cambridge Half Marathon. Passing through four colleges over an idyllic course, the heartwarming event manages to both bridge the 'town and gown' divide and transcend mere athletic competition – raising invaluable funds for a variety of fantastic charitable causes.