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Psychedelic-assisted
therapies
pg.16

Sylvia Plath's
Cambridge

pg.20

Opening up the
Classical world to all
pg.15

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VARSITY

Hockey havoc

**Maria Eduarda Paixao and
Anuk Weerawardana**
News Correspondent and
Senior News Editor

The Cambridge University Hockey Club (CUHC) has been fined £300 in damages following a smash-up at a social in a curry restaurant. The incident was deemed to be “unacceptable behaviour” by a club member, and allegedly left the team lucky to escape criminal repercussions.

In a WhatsApp message sent to the hockey club’s group chat, a member of CUHC blasted the team for their actions, stating that the incident could “have been very bad for our reputation, this could have escalated into criminal damages”.

They added: “Last night’s behaviour was simply unacceptable, especially in a venue that is not ours [...] We need to have some pride in our reputation.”

Following a “long chat” with the owner of Curry King the team agreed to pay a total of £300 in damages in order to cover for the mess caused. This could have supposedly escalated into criminal charges, according to the message, but did not as both the club and the restaurant’s owner reached an accord.

The Club is set to return to the site for their next social, in spite of the damages caused by the team’s raucous behaviour. This was agreed on the condition that the team was willing to abide to the “basic standards,” expected of them.

“As I’m sure most of you will know, we are still booked into Curry King on the 16th, and they are happy for us to come,” the text message read.

The group were also urged to take “some pride in our reputation,” which a club member feared could have been “seriously damaged” by the incident.

Every member of the hockey club was subsequently charged £2.61 to pay for the total damages alleged by The Curry King meaning that at least 114 individuals were called upon to take ‘collective responsibility,’ for the incident. However, *Varsity* understands that a minority of students were involved in misbehaviour at the social.

CUHC is the University’s largest

Continued on page 3 ▶

Athletes lucky to escape criminal repercussions after curry house carnage

▲ WILF VALL

Inside ● Inside the Cambridge ‘cult’ pg.9 ● Behind the scenes at CUCFS pg.24 ● A love letter to the girls pg.22 ●

V Lent, Week 3

Editorial

The 'town vs. gown' divide is a cliché of Cambridge life, yet our front page reveals that, at times, students here run the risk of proving this rule. Cambridge students are often lambasted for our arrogant, dismissive behaviour towards others; stories like this remind us that this reputation can be warranted.

This is not the only example of division within the Cambridge bubble; while the collegiate system is part of the University's unique charm, its fragmented structure can delay progress and cohesion in University-wide decisions. Attempts to move forward with climate initiatives are halted by differences of opinion between colleges (pg.5), while investigations into gender pay gaps (pg.3) and redundancy packages (pg.6) reveal the disparities that can be caused by such a de-centralised system. These inequalities plague everyday student life, dictating the meals we can cook and the grants we have access to (pg.13).

Students and the University frequently clash, with the University's decision to explore options limiting the locations for student protest (pg.7)

reflecting the tense and often fraught atmosphere within the institution. This tension extends into student politics, with some questioning how developments in national party politics will play out in Cambridge (pg.12).

Despite these differences, attempts are being made to unify our often atomised system. By endeavouring to join collegiate feminist societies together to finally create a united feminist front in Cambridge (pg.14), and to enable students from all backgrounds to access Classics degrees at the University (pg.15), efforts to bring Cambridge into the modern day should be celebrated.

Pioneering research into the potential benefits of psychedelic-assisted

therapies (pg.16) and the role of the University Charity Fashion Show (pg.24) remind us why Cambridge is still considered a 'world-leading' institution. This diverse and exciting environment fosters creativity that will extend beyond our university years, with Sylvia Plath's time here still shaping poetry to-day (pg.20).

When surrounded by such an overwhelming city of conflict, culture, and creativity, sometimes it is best to take a moment to ground ourselves.

When we're at our

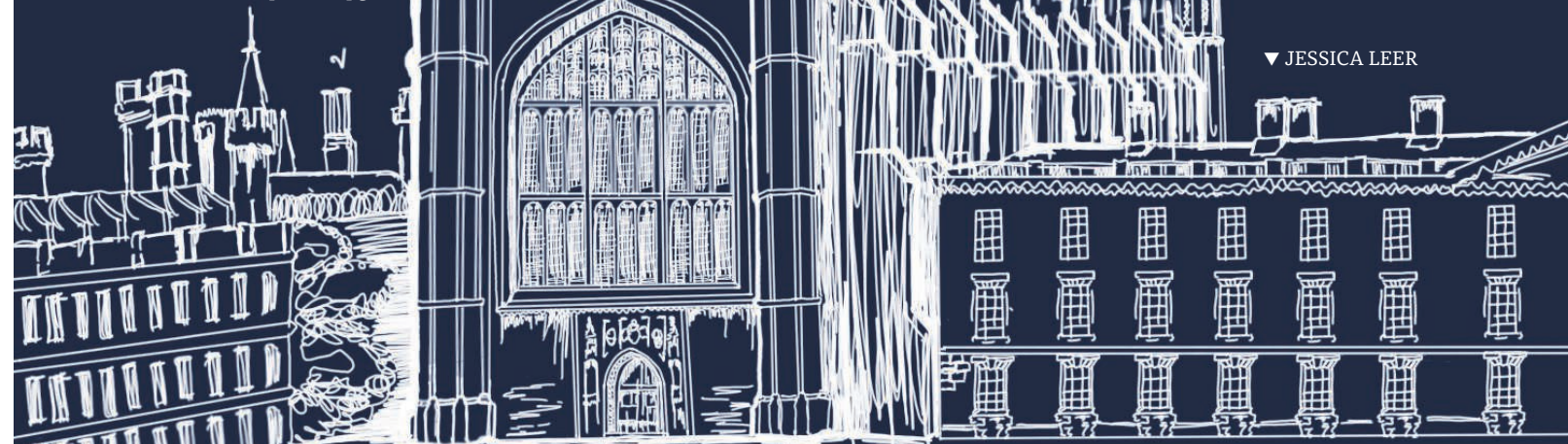
lowest, a simple cup of tea with friends (pg.22), a concert that immerses us in our favourite artist (pg.26), or watching our (now) local team (pg.31), can provide a welcome distraction from Cambridge's business. We hope this edition of *Varsity* offers some much-needed escapism and food for thought.



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



Artistic agonies

In response to 'Grand designs and mangled ideas in Bloody Poetry' (29/01/2025)

Dear Varsity,

Your reviewer says, "it's hard to care about who has betrayed whom when everyone seems so selfish anyway." Perhaps, prior to judgement, a reviewer might note such information (like in the provided Director's Note in the ADC Programme) that this is, in fact, the aim of Brenton's play.

Naturally, my objection to this is deeply biased, and is, perhaps, therefore entirely trivial! One can hardly expect a reviewer to truly engage with a piece of art to consider pre-researching its intentions and subject. However, as this lack of care for vision and intention is symptomatic of far, far too many reviews here in this city, I believe it is an important point to raise for future qualitative advancement.

Sophia Orr
Pembroke, English

Dietary duels

In response to 'Veganism shouldn't be about perfection' (27/01/2025)

Dear Varsity

I am delighted that Elsie McDowell supports vegan and vegetarian diets. Unfortunately, I found her conclusions dissatisfying. I agree that vegans should be tactical in our advocacy, but so long as we believe that the slaughter of billions of animals worldwide is an abomination, we cannot be complacent about falling short. Just as to take the sixth commandment seriously means never committing murder, to take veganism seriously means obeying it to the letter. So yes, encourage others to do what they can; but don't suggest that any avoidable participation in this monstrosity can ever be 'good enough.'

Magnus Hole
Selwyn, HSPS

Degrees are an investment

In response to 'Only 4% of creative arts students from working-class backgrounds, report says' (24/01/2025)

Dear Varsity

Choice may be at play here. The employment prospects after graduation may be a contributing factor for the lack of

working-class representation in artistic subjects. Working-class students graduate with more debt after university than their middle-class counterparts. Paired with the fact that artistic subjects pay poorly compared to other humanities subjects, working-class students are conceivably making an economic choice based on a return for investment. Consequently, the low level of working-class students in art subjects such as Music may be due to a lack of economically viable career prospects. Even among foundation-year students, a majority appear to hope to progress onto subjects such as HSPS and law.

Adaeze Onwuelo
St Edmund's, Foundation year

Grammar school gripes

In response to 'Grammar schools, Oxbridge, and The History Boys' (28/01/2025)

Dear Varsity,

The suggestion that criticisms of selection are, in fact, very 'human.' No, not all grammars send loads of kids to Oxbridge and, yes, their pupils should feel proud if they get in. However, grammars are the preserve of the middle-class and the

evidence suggests they add no educational value. The nature of selection, too, means they reject 75% of kids. This core argument is very human: we shouldn't tell tens of thousands of eleven-year-olds that they're not good enough each October. Nor should we lead grammar school kids to exclusively define their worth by their grades, as happens too often.

Jack Deasley
Homerton, MPhil student

Promote post-uni prospects

In response to 'Universities need fewer students' (29/01/25)

Dear Varsity

Mr Reid suggests that university degrees are "failing to provide (students) with much career enhancement". According to the latest (2023) ONS figures graduates retain a significant advantage in employment, salary and lifetime earnings over non graduates. This advantage would be greater were the UK better at creating graduate level jobs.

Professor Chris Hackley
Royal Holloway University of London

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Club set to return to trashed restaurant



▲ EVE MCEWEN

Continued from front page

mixed sports club, with around 90 players, relying on an annual subscription of £290 from its members to cover costs such as transportation, umpiring and coaching. The hockey club has full club socials normally every other week, according to its University website page.

Curry King is a restaurant located in Central Cambridge on Bridge Street. It has been described as “excellent,” and having “very well flavoured” dishes by reviewers on the Facebook group Cambridge Curry Community.

The site where the restaurant is based has historically been subject to bad behaviour. The Bombay Brasserie, another restaurant that was previously located at the site, faced an “unusually high rate of damage,” with an average of 20 to 30 glasses broken on per night, according to previous *Varsity* coverage.

In 2008, students were barred from bringing their own wine into the two restaurants. “There is too much mess

around, too much noise. I don’t want students to ruin our restaurant anymore,” said Giasb Uddin, manager of the Bombay Brasserie.

The Bombay Brasserie’s Cambridge branch has since been dissolved; shutting down in 2011.

This incident comes after Corpus Christi College banned all undergraduates from formals for two weeks following “unacceptable behaviour” last week. An email sent by the Dean of College, Andrew Sanger, specifically referred to “large amounts of vomit on the floor and in the shower” as well as “faeces on the floor and in the bin”.

Following the incident, the Corpus JCR “Chunder Blunder Funder,” a fund which he said “exists for scenarios like this to compensate cleaning staff,” along with the individuals responsible for the mess to write a letter of apology to the staff.

Curry King and Cambridge University Hockey Club were contacted for comment.

Uni re-opens arms negotiations with students

Wilf Vall

Editor-in-Chief

The University of Cambridge has allowed pro-Palestinian students to re-join negotiations on arms divestment, on the condition they do not set up another encampment.

The working group for arms divestment, which was set up in July last year, will re-admit two student representatives to be present in negotiations following a vote at University Council last week (27/01).

This comes after the students were removed from the group following activist group Cambridge for Palestine’s (C4P) occupation of Senate House Lawn and Greenwich House last term.

Two students will be allowed to sit on the group, returning to its original structure. However, C4P alleges this

figure is four fewer than students than were intended to be in the group when it was set up. This came under criticism from the group, who accused the University of “breaking their agreement” with students on arms divestment. The University denies this accusation.

The new agreement is also contingent on pro-Palestinian students not engaging in further occupations of University property. C4P declined to confirm whether they would rule out future occupations.

The working group was formed after the University agreed to review its arms investments, on the basis that pro-Palestinian students who had set up an encampment on King’s Parade dispersed.

The encampment was first set up outside King’s College by C4P in May, calling

on the University to disclose its holdings in companies associated with Israel, and to subsequently divest from them.

C4P vacated the site after the University’s offer but later set up new encampments on Senate House Lawn and Greenwich House, the University’s financial centre. The group claimed to have “shut down the financial heart” of the University in their occupation of Greenwich House, and labelled the site “a new liberated zone for Palestine”.

The occupation of Senate House lawn forced the University to move post-graduate graduations to Great St Mary’s Church, in order to “minimise the risk of disruption, and to ensure the safety of all” those attending graduations.

These actions led the University to remove students from the working group, along with threatening the occupying students with legal action and suspensions from the University. Commenting on this, the University’s Principal Administrative Officer deemed the occupation “unacceptable,” adding that it “disrupts University life for our students and staff”.

C4P slammed this decision in a statement in response, claiming that the University had responded to attempts to negotiate with “intimidation and imminent punishment”.

A spokesperson for the University of Cambridge said: “Any claim that the University is trying to restrict protest is ridiculous. There are many ways protests can take place and voices can be heard, but the actions we are taking will protect the right of other members of our community to graduate and for staff to carry out their work.”



▲ AMI KHAWAJA

Gender pay gap 22% wider for central University academics than in colleges

Charlie Rowan

Deputy News Editor

The gender pay gap among Cambridge academics is 22.63% wider in the central University than in its colleges, according to Freedom of Information requests.

As of October 2024, female academics in 19 responding colleges earn, on mean annual average, 10.32% more than their male counterparts, with 15 colleges reporting higher pay for women.

In contrast, the central University has a gender pay gap unfavourable for female academics. Female academics earn an average salary of £69,798.76, compared to £79,593.24 for men – a 12.31% disparity. This reflects a 22.63% overall pay gap divide between central University departments and the colleges.

Among the central University’s six academic schools, the School of Humanities and Social Sciences recorded the highest gender pay gap (unfavourable to women) at 11.66%, followed by the School of Technology at 10.35% and the School of Physical Sciences at 7.66%. Meanwhile, the School of Biological Sciences had the smallest gap at 5.18%.

Most colleges recorded pay gaps with female academics earning more than men. Gonville and Caius had the largest at 39.5%, followed by Magdalene (34.26%), Queens (24.58%), and Emmanuel (24.40%). Four colleges reported pay



▲ HANNAH MAWARDI

gaps favouring men: Darwin (14.01%), Girton (5.30%), Clare (3.67%), and Pembroke (0.35%).

Colleges used different criteria for defining and reporting academic roles, unlike the central University’s more fixed positions. Some included research fellows, tutors, and deans, while others distinguished between full-time and part-time roles.

Reporting also varied regarding college assistant professors and directors of studies. Some colleges excluded directors of studies, as they are usually paid per student rather than receiving a fixed salary, unless they also hold assistant

professor roles. Where 12 colleges declined to provide data, they cited either a lack of records or too few collegiately employed academics to report meaningful statistics.

A spokesperson for the University College Union (UCU) said: “The UCU has campaigned for many years to eradicate the gender pay gap, along with other forms of unequal pay. Institutional sexism is deeply embedded in Cambridge, not only in basic pay but in other areas such as so-called market-pay supplements (where men were granted 73.5 percent of the total value of these awards in 2022-3).”

“Women are more likely to be in lower-

paid roles, difficulties in accessing affordable childcare disproportionately affects them, which often impacts promotion chances and feeds in pension gaps. The University needs to do much more to address these problems,” they continued.

Nowsha Farha, the Students’ Union’s Women’s Officer, told *Varsity* that she is “committed and dedicated to advocating for transparency and meaningful action to address the stark contrast between the pay structures across Colleges, Department and Central University Systems. This has been a subject of discussion at the General Board Meeting.”

According to the University’s annual Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity (EDI) reports, the gender pay gap in the central academic University has narrowed by 7.29% since 2017.

In 2023, the University drew up a global Gender Pay Gap Action Plan which committed to measures such as “diversifying recruitment, promoting flexible working options, levelling roles and advertising them with pay ranges to increase transparency, and expanding our gender pay gap reporting in the locations where we have the numbers of employees to make such reporting meaningful.”

Despite this, a November report

from the Higher Education Policy Institute found that women are less likely than men to achieve first-class degrees at Oxbridge than at other universities due to “combative and confrontational” teaching styles, examination-based assessments, and a lack of female representation.

According to the report, at Cambridge, Theology had the largest first-class degree attainment gap on average at Cambridge over the last decade, with a 20.6 percentage difference, followed by Mathematics (20.1%) and Archaeology (15.7%).

That same month, *Varsity* reported that white Cambridge academics are paid almost 6% more than BME colleagues as of October 2024, marking the third consecutive year that the ethnic pay gap across all staff had increased.

A Cambridge spokesperson stated: “The University is committed to tackling gender disparity and advancing Equality Diversity and Inclusion. A detailed analysis of the University’s gender pay gap is being conducted to identify key causes and interventions required to close it.”

“The main contributing factor within the University is that the distribution of people in different positions is not balanced, rather than people in the same positions being paid differently. This core issue is something we are working to address,” they added.

News

Cambridge sees growing income from international fees amid £53m deficit

Felix Armstrong
Associate Editor

Cambridge's tuition fee income from overseas students has grown by nearly £100 million in recent years, while its income from UK students is falling.

This comes after *Varsity* revealed that the University is facing a £53 million deficit and "flying blind" financially.

Cambridge's gross tuition fee income has increased by £69.9 million over the past five academic years, reaching £359 million in 2023-24, according to data obtained via a Freedom of Information (FOI) request.

The University's income from international student fees, which are significantly higher than those for UK students, has increased by £97 million during this period.

Income from home students, in comparison, has decreased by £27 million during this period, according to FOI data.

£285

The amount home tuition fees will rise next academic year in England

Cambridge's fees for overseas students have increased consistently over recent years. While international tuition



▲ LOUIS ASHWORTH

fees vary by course, the mean fee has increased from £28,588 to £37,037 between the academic years 2019-20 and 2023-24.

Nick Hillman, director of the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), says that these figures "reflect what's going on across the UK higher education sector in general, which is that public money is being held down."

Tuition fees in England have been capped since 2017. Last November, the

education secretary announced that the maximum annual fee will rise by £285 for universities. The Welsh government has announced an equivalent increase. Fees for home students in Northern Ireland are much lower and are zero in Scotland.

Cambridge, and other top universities, are "expected to act more entrepreneurially [to] find more of their own sources of income," Hillman said, including by "trying to obtain more money from abroad".

But, Hillman believes that this results in fewer places at top universities being available to UK students. "It's getting harder to get into Cambridge because more places go to international students," he said.

£97m

The increase in revenue from international student fees over the last five academic years

In an FOI response, Cambridge said that Brexit may have contributed to the sharp increase in international fee income, and comparative drop in home fee income, which occurred in 2021-22. Since this academic year, EU students have been charged international fees at UK universities, whereas they had previously been entitled to lower "home" fees.

Hillman, however, believes that the impacts of Brexit are "a bit of a red herring". Cambridge "always" recruits "far more non-EU international students than EU international students," he claimed.

Cambridge's intake of EU students has dropped in recent years, compared with rising admissions of students from China, Singapore, and Hong Kong – the

University's three largest cohorts of overseas students.

In the 2019 admissions cycle, EU students accounted for 36% of Cambridge's overseas admissions. By 2023, this proportion had dropped to 18%. Also in 2023, China, Singapore, and Hong Kong accounted for 56% of the University's total overseas admissions.

Sarah Anderson, president of Cambridge's Students' Union, said that Cambridge "must consider widening participation and the impact of tuition fees on [its] ability to attract the brightest students regardless of background".

The SU "will always lobby the University to increase the financial support available to both home and international students," she said.

A spokesperson for the University said: "The University provides a range of support which includes one of the most generous bursary packages in the UK. The Cambridge Bursary Scheme makes over £10 million of funding available every year and offers support of up to £3,500 a year for full-time undergraduate students whose household income is less than £62,215 a year."

"We also have a Financial Assistance Fund that offers support for students experiencing unforeseen financial difficulties. Recently we increased the amount available to any one individual from that fund to reflect the cost-of-living crisis."

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Four colleges snub Uni's eco-banking drive

Anuk Weerawardana and Hugh Jones
Senior News editors

Four Cambridge colleges have failed to join a University of Cambridge climate initiative which was launched last year and aims to stop the financing fossil fuel expansion.

The initiative - led by the Banking Engagement Forum (BEF), a committee of the collegiate University - aims to create a market for cash products which do not contribute to the financing of fossil fuel expansion.

Cash products are financial instruments which enable investors to earn a return on their savings, without taking on too much market risk or losing the ability to easily access the funds.

27

The number of colleges that have signed up to the sustainable finance initiative

According to the details of the initiative, each participating institution could invest up to several hundred million pounds in these products.

Out of Cambridge's 31 Colleges, Murray Edwards, Lucy Cavendish, Homerton, and Trinity Hall have not signed the climate bill.

This comes after Trinity Hall's JCR

voted to move away from Barclay's due to "ethical concerns" over the bank's investments, in a move backed by the College's junior bursar.

The 27 Cambridge colleges that have signed up to the initiative have put request for proposals (RfP) from banks and financial institutions that don't contribute to the financing of fossil fuel expansion. This includes cash products such as deposits and money market funds.

Money market funds pool investors' savings to buy short term debt, giving companies or governments easy access to money in exchange for interest. Deposits give financial institutions, like banks, access to money which they can use to make loans. In return, depositors are paid interest, which will be at a higher rate if they agree not to ask for their money back for a minimum period.

In total, 72 higher education institutions are signatories to the RfP which advocates exploring a switch to methods of banking "whose primary market financing and engagement activities align with the International Energy Agency's (IEA) Net Zero Emissions (NZE) scenario". The proposal is also in line with emissions reduction targets laid out in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s Sixth Assessment Report.

The RfP also urges funding towards the construction of renewable resources to accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels - particularly in areas where finance inhibits this transition, such as

low-income countries.

The institutions especially want to avoid financing companies that are making new coal- and gas-fired power plants in countries which are a part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).



Trinity Hall is among the four colleges that have not signed up to the scheme

▲ MARTHA SHAWYER

Anthony Odgers, the University's Chief Financial Officer said: "What we and our partners are focussed on with this mandate is finding financial services products that do not contribute to the expansion of fossil fuels - in particular, new coal - and gas-fired plants which

lock in demand for decades."

Although responsible investment has become increasingly mainstream in equities investing, it is not yet widespread in debt markets. Debt markets provide a large majority of the capital for companies constructing new fossil fuel power stations or exploring new reserves.

It is due to this reason that the institutions who have signed the RfP have focused on banks and the bond market as the primary sources of external financing for fossil fuel expansion.

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

Providing that the University of Cambridge is able to find a suitable provider of bank deposits and/or money market funds, it would look to publicise its actions and the identity of its providers.

So far, 23 proposals have been received after the first round of RfPs and six institutions have been accepted as meeting the objectives of the RfP.

Murray Edwards College, Lucy Cavendish College, Homerton College, and Trinity Hall were contacted for comment.

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News

Cambridge redundancy spending surges

The School of Humanities and Social Sciences has recorded the highest total of redundancy costs since 2018

Charlie Rowan

Deputy News Editor

Cambridge recorded its highest recent spending on central University redundancy packages in 2024, according to Freedom of Information requests.

Between December 2023 and 2024, the University spent £78,263 on staff

severance pay, almost five times the £16,848 spent in the previous year (2022-23). The number of redundancies also rose sharply to 23, more than double the 2018-2023 average of 9.2.

These figures refer only to the central University and not to individual colleges.

The University also recorded the total

reasons for redundancies since 2018: 55 staff left due to the limit of tenure, four concluded their appointments after completing training programs, two staff members left as part of restructuring-

£78,263

The amount of money spent by the University on staff severance pay between December 2023 and 2024

related redundancies, and one casual worker departed. In seven cases, the reasons for departure were not specified.

According to a recent *Times Higher Education* report, of the 103 UK universities to have posted financial accounts so far this year with relevant figures, £210 million was spent on compensation for loss of office last year. This was a 67% increase on the £126 million figure for the same institutions in 2022-23.

The *Financial Times* also reported that Cambridge reportedly spent a total of £4.5 million on compensation in the 2023-24 academic year, the fourth high-

est of all the Russell Group universities.

Professor Wyn Evans, head of the 21Group and member of the University's Board of Scrutiny, told *Varsity*: "An academic with 20 years service to the University may get a redundancy payment that is smaller than the annual personal travel expenses of a member of the senior management team."

"There's a huge divide not just between the top and bottom of the University, but also between the top and the middle," Evans added.

This comes after it was reported that Cambridge's vice-chancellor Deborah Prentice was the highest paid vice-chancellor in the Russell Group in 2023-24, taking in an estimated salary and benefits package of £577,000.

Severance pay has varied significantly across the University's academic departments in recent years. Since 2018, the School of the Humanities and Social Sciences has recorded the highest total redundancy costs at £67,336, followed by the School of the Biological Sciences (£38,297), the School of Arts and Humanities (£33,445), and the School of Clinical Medicine (£32,721).

Having only spent £2,448 over the pre-

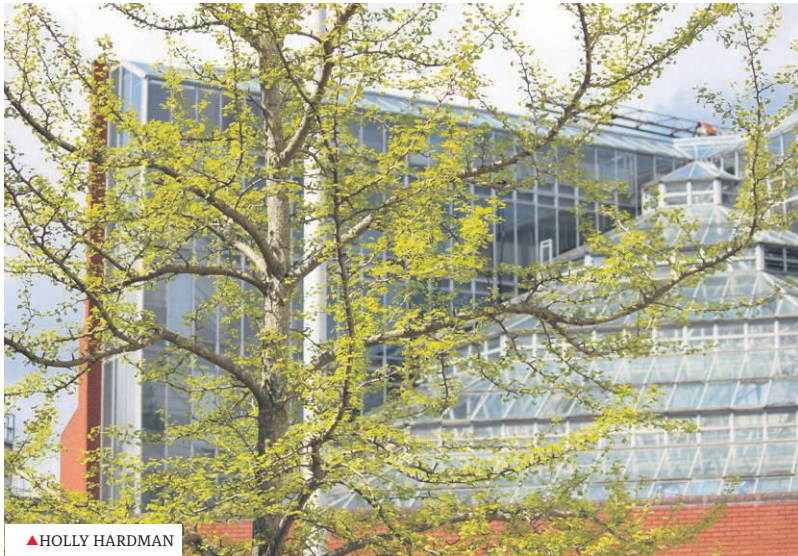
23

The number of redundancies recorded between December 2023 and 2024

vious five years, the School of Technology saw a sharp increase in severance spending in 2024, paying out £22,505. Meanwhile, the School of the Physical Sciences spent the least, at a total of £2,176.

This surge in end-of-tenure severance spending comes after a report by the Cambridge University and College Union (UCU) last June found two thirds of researchers at Cambridge are employed on a fixed-term basis.

Responding to the report at the time, the University stated they had "reviewed staff working on fixed-term contracts in 2020/21, resulting in about 300 staff moving to open-ended contracts. A further project is underway, working with the trade unions to review the use of fixed-term contracts at the University and the associated guidance."



▲ HOLLY HARDMAN

Selwyn's 'scurrilous' College magazine relaunched

Faron Smith

News Correspondent

Selwyn is relaunching its College magazine, *Kiwi*, after a break of nearly a decade.

It is being relaunched under the editorship of two third-year students, Emily Heatherington and Hugh McDowell.

Having previously been the University's longest running student magazine, *Kiwi* fizzled out in the mid-2010s, with the last known edition being published in 2016.

With its name likely a reference to George Augustus Selwyn, the college's namesake and first Anglican Bishop of New Zealand, the magazine was first published in 1982 and quickly established itself at the heart of College life.

With physical editions being published three times a term, the magazine was the primary source of College news long before confessions pages were in existence.

According to Heatherington, the magazine used to feature long-form articles, a regular 'Auntie Kiwi' section, contributions from Gus (the college cat), digs at the Bursar, and, at one point, parodic renditions of classic poetry that were created by "cornering some terrified English students".

Student drawn cartoons would also regularly appear, as well as coverage of College politics, including mentions of former JCR presidents Wes Streeting (now health secretary) and Ben Gliniecki (now general secretary of the Revolutionary Communist Party).

Additionally, special editions would be published throughout the year, including a Freshers' guide in the first week of Michaelmas, a leavers' guide



▲ FARON SMITH

in Easter, and occasional alumni editions, which would see former writers reunite to reminisce and, often, mock each other.

After a conversation with an alum sparked McDowell and Heatherington's interest in the magazine, they hope to publish the revived *Kiwi*'s first edition later in Lent, and say they hope to recapture the original's "anti-establishment tone". This reportedly saw it repeatedly described as "scurrilous" by both fellows and former students.

A post on the College's confession page calling for submissions described the magazine as "Sometimes satirical, sometimes serious, always the greatest piece of journalistic work produced by Selwyn students".

Contributors will once again be drawn from the whole student body, and although the first edition is to be published online, the duo hope to later be able to return to print editions.

Uni exploring legal options to limit areas for student occupations

Maria Eduarda Paixao

News Correspondent

The University of Cambridge is exploring legal options to limit areas for student occupations, according to a statement published on 3 February.

In a statement by Ms Emma Rampton on behalf of the University Registry the University is "currently exploring legal options that will protect certain limited areas of the University, including the Senate House and Senate House Yard."

This comes after the "graduation of more than 500 students was disrupted" by the Pro-Palestinian occupation late last year.

Rampton commented that this occupation affected graduating students and placed "stress on the University and College staff involved in the organising and running the Congregation ceremonies".

After this event, the University received complaints from colleges, students, and guests.

The statement also named the "occupation of one of our University buildings," where "occupiers gained access to confidential material about research and staff," as another reason for exploring legal action.

These limited areas will be protected under this new legal action so that in the case of future occupations, the University "can hold the Congregations that our students and their families expect."

Rampton still stressed the University's recognition of the importance of "freedom of speech within the law" and the "right of peaceful protest



▲ TAMAMI ONO

within the law".

In effect, this new legal action means that "where laws and/or University regulations are broken, each case must be handled fairly and responsibly through established University procedures."

At this moment it is still unclear what form of legal punishment those breaking University regulations would face.

Last term, students occupied Senate House Lawn and Greenwich House, the University's financial centre, after C4P alleged that the University was "breaking its agreement" on arms divestment negotiations.

C4P previously occupied King's Parade and Senate House lawn, calling on the University to cut ties with arms companies associated with the war in Gaza.

The protesters occupied the site outside King's Parade for 100 days, before reaching an agreement with the Univer-

sity to establish a working group to review the University's arms investments.

The University has also seen multiple occupations of its sites by other activist groups. In 2018, 25 students occupied Greenwich House in an attempt pressure the University into cutting ties with fossil fuels investments.

Students have also targeted non-University buildings, with activists staging a "die-in" protest in Cambridge's Barclays branch in a protest against the bank's investments in arms and fossil fuels industries.

A spokesperson from the University of Cambridge, said: "This action does not restrict the important right to legal protest. There are many ways protests can take place and voices heard, but it does protect the right of other members of our community to graduate and for staff to carry out their work."

Cambridge criticised after ‘third class’ performance in climate rankings

Hugh Jones

Senior News Editor

Cambridge has been criticised for its performance in a sustainability league table compiled by People & Planet, a student activist network.

The ranking saw Cambridge drop 38 places in the table, to 110 out of 149. The University scored 37.2% overall, a score derived from a weighted average of various sustainability, environmental, and ethical metrics.

This included a score of 0% in the environmental auditing category, 12.5% in carbon reduction, and 14% in the ethical careers category.

These results saw Cambridge placed in the second lowest division of the league, with its performance graded Third Class. The only lower category was ‘Failed’.

Cambridge ranked second lowest out of all Russell Group universities, with only Glasgow doing worse. Oxford came 64th, scraping a 2.i. The University of Bedfordshire topped the table, with a score of 80.7% overall, and full marks for environmental auditing and water reduction.

Professor Jason Scott-Warren, a fellow of Gonville & Caius College and a University Council member said: “While the University would doubtless want to question the details of this broad-brush



assessment, our actions on sustainability have tended to be a case of far too little, far too late.”

He continued: “The underlying assumption is that business can continue much as usual in a climate emergency, a delusion that will sooner or later come back to bite us.”

Cambridge Climate Justice, a student activist group, also criticised the University’s performance. They contrasted the University’s research into sustainability with its practice, saying: “While Cambridge academics research the devastating effects of climate change, the University’s sustainable policies continue to lag behind national standards.”

They also drew attention to the University’s poor performance in the ethical careers criterion, and criticised the presence of arms and fossil fuel companies at careers fairs.

CCJ said: “It is simply not right for a University which has such potential to create change for the better to squander it by giving these companies the platform to recruit students.”

The sustainability league table is produced annually by People & Planet. It uses data which is self-reported by universities on their websites, as data published by the Higher Educational Statistics Agency.

The University of Cambridge was contacted for comment.

Comment: ‘Any target that cannot bind the colleges will never go far enough’

Elsie McDowell

Seeing Cambridge score poorly on climate action should come as a surprise to no one. Climate action challenges the very foundations of the collegiate system. Officially, the University has committed to reaching Net Zero by 2048. However, this only covers the “operational estate,” which does not include any colleges. In 2024, the central University’s endowment was worth just over £2 billion, as was Trinity’s alone. The colleges’ collective emissions from just their investments will dwarf that of the “operational estate,” so any target that cannot bind the colleges will never go far enough.

Indeed, anyone who has followed the Climate League of Oxford and Cambridge (CLOC) will know full well just how widely climate action varies between colleges. Jesus, the College that topped the league, has a far more ambitious net zero target of 2030 than the several colleges that do not have a publically available target at all. The

smaller-scale nature of changemaking on a college level can make it easier to target climate policies, but even where this is successful, good practice is very rarely shared or repeated between colleges.

The University’s climate action is unambitious and slow. People & Planet’s University League is not the first investigation to reveal this, nor will it be the last. Given its influence as an institution, Cambridge has the scope to be a leader in a fair transition to a lower carbon future. Yet, University politics continues to limit Cambridge’s climate action to a level far below what it can and should reach. The collegiate system is a centuries-old source of Oxbridge pride that will not change overnight. However, the time has come for the University and its colleges to recognise that their role in averting the climate crisis is more important than their individual autonomy.



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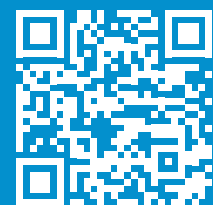
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News

Uni researchers win awards

University researchers were honoured at the Cambridge Awards for Research Impact and Engagement this week. Formerly called the Vice-Chancellor's Award, the event is held annually to highlight exceptional achievement, innovation and creativity in research with important economic, social and cultural potential. Researchers from Cambridge received awards for topics including helping to inoculate the public against misinformation and dealing with air pollution in rapidly urbanising African cities.

Row, row, row your boat ... across the Atlantic!

Zara Lachlan, a 21-year-old from Cambridge has become the youngest person and first woman to row solo and unsupported from Europe to South America. The Loughborough student started her journey from Lagos, Portugal on October 27 last year and reached French Guiana 97 days later. This was just 19 hours short of the solo row speed record for the journey. Lachlan reflected that she "enjoyed every single day, even the really tough ones."

Ex-Varsity writer's filmmaking debut

The King is set to collaborate with Amazon on a documentary, described by the King's Foundation as a "landmark film". An insider at the foundation commented that the "one-off documentary" will showcase the Trinity alumnus' "philosophy of Harmony, and the work it has in turn inspired around the world to build sustainable communities and transform lives." The foundation encourages a comprehensive approach to environmental issues.

Cam leads global innovation

The University has been named as the leading UK university for global innovation in a new report by analytics firm Clarivate. The report considers the key role of research in shaping global industrial innovation and societal impact. Professor Deborah Prentice, Cambridge's vice-chancellor, commented that "Cambridge has a thriving community of spin-outs, start-ups and partnerships that demonstrates how academia and industry can work together to transform ideas into real-world impact."

Around town



Lili Fairclough delivers the local Cambridge news

Mill Road drivers beware!

Motorists who now ignore the bus gate restrictions on Mill Road will now be issued warning notices. This is the next stage in the phased approach to the bus gate's introduction, with fines for flouting the rules set to begin in March. Construction on the bus gate finished in November 2024, but until this week, motorists who violated the regulations have only been given informal warnings. Cllr Neil Chailer has said that this staged approach to the new regulations will "allow extra time for people to adjust". In this final warning period before fines are introduced, the Council also hopes to find and contact people whose vehicles should be exempt to the new restrictions, who will need to register online.

Cambridge trains in the crosshairs

British Transport Police have reported that a number of trains are damaged as a result of having 'projectiles' thrown at them. The incidents took place between Cambridge and Cambridge North stations on Sunday evening, and Govia Thameslink Railway has said that disruption to regional services continued into Monday. A search of the area by the British Transport Police yielded no suspects, but inquiries are ongoing.

This comes after *The Telegraph* reported that trains running between Cambridge and Cambridge North have been shot at in recent weekends.

Council cover-up?

The Liberal Democrats, who form the opposition in the Cambridge Council, have accused Labour of covering up the decision to cancel the 2025 Cambridge Folk Festival. They have been asking for a special scrutiny committee to examine the reasons for the festival's cancellation, and were told that they would have to wait until 6 March. Cllr Cheney Payne alleged that this 'slow walking' was an attempt by the Labour-run council to kick the issue into the weeds "in the hope that people lose interest". The folk festival is not the only music event to be cancelled in Cambridge recently. In December the annual Strawberry Fair announced it would not be taking place in 2025.



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Effective(?) Altruism: inside the Cambridge 'cult'

Varsity investigates Effective Altruism's influence on Cambridge and its students

Nick James

Investigations Lead

Varsity has investigated the amount of money and influence that Effective Altruism (EA) has in Cambridge after allegations that the movement has at times acted like a "cult".

Since 2022, EA has had a large presence in Cambridge after spending \$200,000 to "build and grow the EA ecosystem in Cambridge." Antonio Azvedo, the community manager at EA Cambridge, explained, "The value proposition of a university group is that during university people are thinking about their careers [...] and how they're going to use their talents to impact the world in one way or another."

He continued: "Cambridge in particular, has a lot of talented students and a lot of people who are actually motivated by these world problems."

EA is a broad, global movement that "is focused on finding ways of doing good that actually work," according to

\$200,000

The amount given to "build and grow the EA ecosystem in Cambridge"

their website. It has a wide variety of affiliated groups and individuals that research the most effective ways of maximising good while also acting as a practical community that discusses the best ways to apply their research. Much of their work revolves around optimising resources to prevent tropical diseases, factory farming, and long-term existential risks. However, Varsity's investigation has also found that a considerable amount of money is spent on community building and outreach, including at universities.

EA was subject to significant press scrutiny at the end of 2022 after Sam Bankman-Fried - then a figurehead of the movement - was charged with defrauding FTX customers. Following this, EA saw a drop in donations, but in 2024 EA Funds still paid out over \$10 million worldwide to charities and EA-affiliated groups.

The \$200,000 grant to EA Cambridge was allocated for building an ecosystem in Cambridge, including staff and student recruitment efforts, as well as hiring out the Meridian Office on Sidney Street: a modern, spacious and well-equipped space. Part of EA's recent recruitment drive has included freshers' fair stalls, leaving leaflets in college pigeon holes, and email newsletters.

Varsity found that some Cambridge students were drawn to the movement before university, enticed by the Leaf summer courses, which are financed by EA Funds. The program is aimed at students aged 16-18 who are considered to have promising future careers.

The course began in 2021 and offered an all-expenses paid week at Lady Margaret Hall in Oxford, including a £40 budget per student for a restaurant meal each evening. The course consisted of classes and discussions where students were taught about effective altruism.

The Leaf program was given \$560,000

in 2022 by EA Funds to support the course for multiple years, though much of this funding did not go towards residential programmes. Since 2024, all Leaf courses have been moved online.

When the course was residential, a large proportion of its students were from elite schools or learned about the opportunities through well-connected people. Many students from these cohorts are now at Oxford and Cambridge where they hold some of the most influential positions in student politics and journalism.

Varsity has spoken to some of the Cambridge students who were on the 2022 residential course, most of whom enjoyed their time there, many of whom raised concerns about the way it was run. One student said the money offered "all seem[ed] a bit too good to be true".

Some were concerned that EA was acting like a cult. One told Varsity: "Leaf is only really the tip of the iceberg; it was the opportunities that came after it that made me feel like EA is a cult. Realising how much of EA's budget goes into 'community building' (i.e., expanding EA) was shocking."

Another from the 2022 Leaf cohort who subsequently went to an EA conference was told sarcastically that "You're joining a cult" by a more senior member of the conference. It quickly became clear that "it's a criticism in EA that everyone is aware of and makes jokes about."

There were also concerns about the content of the course, including the "glorification" of Sam Bankman-Fried during the 2022 camp, one of EA's biggest donors at the time. Whole sessions were dedicated to learning more about the then-billionaire, who was charged a few months later for fraud.

Though there were no public allegations against Bankman-Fried at the time of the 2022 camp, many students who were part of that cohort still felt uncomfortable about how he was portrayed, with one student telling Varsity he was portrayed "like a God".

The broad concerns raised by Varsity's investigation are not new, and have been discussed by academics writing against EA since the movement gained traction. One of the movement's most prominent



▲ PUBLIC DOMAIN

critic is Professor Alice Cray, a former visiting fellow at Oxford's All Souls College, who described EA to Varsity as: "A false image of what ethics is, but also one that jibes with our culture in fundamental ways and has materially hugely damaging effects."

Cray began writing against EA as a letter to her Oxford students who she saw were being convinced by their ideas. What concerned her most was that "It's among the nicest, most committed, most sincere students I know who get pulled [into the movement]."

She also told Varsity that people have confided in her that they have "lost their children to a cult" in reference to EA, and is aware of other academics who have had similar experiences.

Not everyone Varsity spoke to agreed with these negative characterisations of EA. One student who is part of EA Cambridge described it as "Open, scientific [and] non-confrontational". He disagreed with portrayals of EA as a cult "because it is so open" and "very approachable".

He concluded: "I don't know how they could do any better [...] to avoid these problems without giving up on the projects entirely, which isn't worth it."

Varsity also found that recent positive steps have been made across EA-affiliated groups since Bankman-Fried was charged. The Leaf courses have undergone significant changes since late 2023 to make them more cost-effective and accessible by holding them online rather than in Oxford. Content surrounding Bankman-Fried is now far more critical and used as a cautionary tale of the problems of over-maximisation, according to one insider.

Varsity also looked at the grants EA gives to groups in Cambridge that are not focused on community building, many of which are doing important and positive work. This includes \$130,000 given by EA Funds to Cambridge's alternative protein field-building efforts. The project aims to find and promote new sources of protein that are less costly than traditional, meat-based options.

Mariel Alem Fonseca, President of the Cambridge University Alt Protein Project, told Varsity how grateful she was for the support that EA has given the project, and reiterated the importance of her project in improving food security, "reducing the environmental impact of our food

supply chains" and "Reduc[ing] so many millions of animals dying [...] by bringing these new alternatives."

A spokesperson for EA Cambridge told Varsity: "Like any organisation focused on doing good, we're always looking at how we can be more cost-effective. The resources we've invested, including our space, help us run impactful programmes. We [...] try to make smart choices about where our money goes."

When asked for comment, a spokesperson for Leaf told Varsity: "Traditional education systems often fail to provide structured pathways, mentorship, and community for students to explore how they can make a meaningful positive impact on the biggest problems facing our world. The incentives and encouragement for academically exceptional and altruistic teens are all about demonstrating their intelligence and getting into college and prestigious, high-paying careers rather than making use of their skills to help others."

A spokesperson for the Centre for EA said: "Many graduates of the world's most prestigious universities default to certain careers or paths without really considering the alternatives or how their careers can help others. This seems like a misallocation of resources on a societal

\$560,000

The amount given to the Leaf courses by EA Funds

level. The world would be a healthier, happier, safer place if many more talented people focused their careers on fixing the world's biggest problems."

Caleb Parikh, Project Lead at EA Funds, said: "Many talented young people would, if given the option, choose to use their careers to help others, but too often they instead find themselves unintentionally pulled into the well-trod pipeline from top universities to financially lucrative professions."

"Supporting the organisations that help build peer networks to empower students to learn about their high-impact options can be tremendously cost-effective," Parikh continued.

All students were kept anonymous as part of this investigation.

University watch



Lili Fairclough rounds up student news from around the country

Cardiff faces cuts

Cardiff University is facing a funding shortfall which has resulted in plans to cut 400 full-time jobs. Under money-saving proposals, subjects such as Music, Theology, and Modern Languages are at risk of cuts, according to the BBC. Mergers are also under consideration, which would result in Chemistry, Earth Sciences, and Physics being merged to create the School of Natural Sciences. The University's nursing school is also at risk of closure. The Cardiff University UCU has described the measures as "cruel and unnecessary", while the University's vice-chancellor, Professor Wendy Larner, has said that the university would become "untenable" were they not to be taken.

Bristol ditches swim tests

After 17 years, Bristol University has announced that it will stop using the forced swim test: an experiment whereby rats or mice are placed into containers of water, with no way of escaping, in order to better understand neurobiological responses to stress. The test is often used in the field of antidepressant research. The University has previously faced protests against the method, including by animal rights group PETA, which says that its campaign against Bristol's use of the test has been ongoing for nearly five years. The University had also faced opposition from the Student's Union (SU), which passed a motion to ban the practice in November 2024.

Newcastle mulls India campus

Newcastle University is considering opening a new campus in India. The University, which is facing a £35 million shortfall, is reportedly in the "very early stages" of establishing "education partnerships" in India. Newcastle UCU representative Professor Matt Perry, said the university's management team is "out of touch". Perry says members of staff were left "horrified" by the plans for expansion, while they were "[facing] the uncertainty of threatened redundancies". According to the Local Democracy Reporting Service, the university is currently looking to reduce its salary bill by £20 million: the equivalent of 300 jobs.



▲ AMIKA PIPLAPURE

Interviews

Holocaust survivor Dr. Martin Stern on the importance of remembering history

Abigail Liew and **Vienna Kwan** speak to the former doctor on the 80th anniversary of the Auschwitz Liberation

Having only arrived in Cambridge “a few minutes” before speaking to us, Dr. Martin Stern immediately explains the importance of continuing conversations about the Holocaust: “It’s important to keep drawing attention to this horror which occurred in the middle of Europe.” He emphasises the importance of remembering history as part of his Holocaust Memorial Lecture at the Cambridge Union marking the 80th anniversary of the Auschwitz Liberation.

Born in Holland in 1938, Stern’s parents had fled to the Netherlands as German law prohibited his non-Jewish mother from marrying his Jewish father. He was arrested aged five and survived camps at Westerbork and Theresienstadt. After being released, he was sent from family to family, becoming a British citizen aged 16 before studying Medicine at Oxford. He worked as a hospital doctor in Leicester, retiring from the NHS in 2002. Now, Stern dedicates his time to sharing his experience growing up.

His concern for continuing conversations about the Holocaust is a central thread throughout our conversation; remembering history is “absolutely essential.” He notes how genocide is not a distanced, unimaginable event, but something that could and does happen everywhere. Indeed, the Holocaust “occurred in the middle of Europe [...] in a country which regarded itself as the most civilised country.” Remembering the Holocaust is significant – not just because it was a pivotal moment in history, but also because Memorial Day represents something more than the Holocaust. It calls attention to the many genocides which continue to occur across the world, which “most people don’t even know about.”

According to Stern, “massive ignorance” and distortion of history continue to affect the general public’s understanding of genocide, with events often being misrepresented. In turn, he wishes to use his own experiences to raise awareness. “Every year scholars discover new things about the Holocaust which we did not

know before,” he says, restating the need for continued research into this tragedy. His over-arching message is that Memorial Day “is not all about Jews, it is about the human race,” underlining how this is something that affects us all.

Stern gave up working as a doctor in 2002, one year earlier than the official retirement age, as, in his opinion, the working conditions in the National Health Service “were going wrong” and “not worthy of a year’s more salary.” When asked whether he went into the medical field because of his childhood experiences, he explains that there are two reasons for everything you do – “the noble reason and the real reason.” He explains the noble reason to be growing up, “in the household of my uncle, who was an exceptionally good doctor and told amazing stories over the dinner table, which were an incentive.” However, the real reason was being shown a figure of what one could earn as a biological scientist and what one could earn as a doctor, and realising he couldn’t “raise a family” with the salary of a biological scientist – a central motivation for Stern. “In the end the thing that really drove me and motivated me was curiosity,” he concludes.

Discussing how his life experiences affected his faith, he mentions that growing up, his parents were “proud atheists.” As a result, he was “not aware of any manifestation of religion” until after WWII. Following this, he was brought up Christian, then abandoned Christianity in his university years. He stepped into his first synagogue in decades in his fifties, and has followed the Jewish faith ever since.

Expanding on his interest in psychology, Stern examines humans’ capacity to harm each other. He sheds light on how humanity has always had a track record of murder,

“*Memorial Day “is not all about Jews, it is about the human race”*”

with the percentage of murder increasing the further back we go in history: “If you dig up prehistoric bones, a forensic pathologist will tell you that more of those people were killed by human action than in any known historical period, including periods of terrible war.”

Stern asserts that understanding the behaviours and motivations behind the propagators of war is crucial. He highlights that a “knowledge of the sciences related to human behaviour, psychology, neuroscience, sociology, anthropology, criminology” needs to be integrated into our understanding of the Holocaust. Pushing for further research in this area, he states that “80 years is a very important time to re-examine and reassess” the Holocaust – we need to incorporate deeper research which seeks to merge history with psy-

chology in order to understand “whether there is more we can do” to prevent any recurrences.

Alluding to his interest in human psychology, he says, “simplistic thinking [is still] all around us,” which is why there is still so much intolerance in society. “We are still the same primitive biological creatures with limited brains,” he argues, and it is in our nature to “indulge in the sport of jumping to conclusions,” judging those who aren’t like us.

Despite this, Stern is hopeful for humanity’s future, viewing civilisation as a “constant process.” “I see civilisation as a verb rather than an act,” he explains, painting today’s world in an optimistic light, and citing technological advancements, medical developments, and liberal principles as emblematic of our progress. Looking ahead, Stern concludes by noting how it is the youth of today who will see and enact change: “Young people ask me whether I have hope, what I think of the future. And I tell them, I don’t have a future. I can’t wait. But I know who’s going to wait: you.”



Tell us about yourself

I’m Iona, a third year HSPS student at Medwards, and co-president of the Medwards Garden Party.

How is the revitalisation of the Garden Party going?

It’s going well! We’ve done everything we can to revitalise it – we’ve identified the problems from last year, which was predominantly low ticket sales, and we’ve got a different ticketing strategy in place. We tried to have more competitions with the student body, and for our launch party we lit up the dome as a planetarium. Everyone could come and stargaze, and we projected a video that launched the theme on the dome. It’s been really fun doing these creative ideas to encourage people to get more involved because we don’t want it to be cancelled again. That would be really annoying and embarrassing at this point.

What was the theme inspiration?

Since first year I’ve been saying I wanted to do ‘Medwards in space’. I remember googling Medwards when I applied and I was like, “that’s a spaceship. I’m going to live in spaceship,” but we thought ‘Medwards in space’ is a bit broad, perhaps a bit too silly. Previous Medwards themes have been quite story-based, so we thought we’d do something a little more conceptual, maybe a bit cooler. So we went for ‘solar eclipse’.

What are you looking forward to most?

Selling tickets! I am really excited, but I guess it’s kind of crunch time now, so it’s a bit nerve-wracking as well.

How do you feel about students prioritising more ‘prestigious’, older May Week events?

I really can’t criticise that, because that’s literally what I’m doing as well with my friends. However, I think the price difference between one of the old May balls and a garden party is so vast that it’s almost not even worth comparing the two. If you’re going to John’s May Ball, general release is £285, whereas if you’re a Medwards student the Garden Party is £50, or £45 if you don’t want to drink alcohol. While neither of those sums is a negligible amount, it’s possible to do both if you wanted to. There’s no pressure. There’s a little bit of pressure to come to Medwards, but not that much...

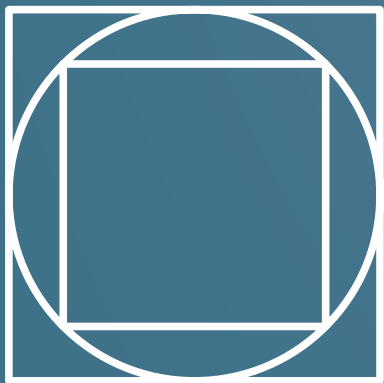
Are you hopeful that the weather will hold up?

I think it’s going to be a bright, sunny day from start to end. However, if it’s not, we do have a wet weather contingency plan, so never fear.

– SOPHIE DENNY



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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The news reads like satire, but the joke's on us

Trump's inauguration speech was, unsurprisingly, surreal. "I was saved by God to make America great again". With those words, Donald J. Trump kicked off his second term, sounding like a cross between Kevin Spacey and Homelander: A narcissistic sycophant believing himself to be the pre-ordained saviour of the nation. But as the applause and jeers settled, one thing became clear. Trump 2.0 isn't just about governing - he's about performing. In this era of political absurdity, the biggest question isn't what he'll do next, but where the line between satire and reality lies.

Within 30 minutes of Trump's inauguration, the White House website brandished some new changes. Immediately, you are thrust into a 30-second long video of Trump, with all the fighter jets, American flags, and eagles you could imagine. Three words underscore the page: "America is Back".

The hallmark of the land of the free, the US constitution, has always been clearly accessible on the White House website. Now, at the time of writing, you will be greeted with: 404 page not found. This admission, however, is only the tip of the iceberg for a revitalised Trump.

Look no further than one of his first Executive Orders as the 47th President of the United States. Claiming to defend women from "gender ideology and extremism" and "restoring biological truth," the US government now officially defines a male as "a person belonging, at conception, to the sex that produces the small reproductive cell". I may be no doctor, but surely that means everyone is a woman? Trump may have accidentally found a solution to gender equality.

From the White House website's unapologetic facelift to executive orders that feel more like SNL skits, Trump's second term is confusing governance with spectacle.

Yet, admittedly, I do love political satire. In the bureaucratic misery of it all, comedy does have an important place in giving a cold, sobering aspect of social life warmth. It can be a way to engage people oftentimes disaffected from politics, giving them a space to come together. This can, and has, brought together people in times of great polarisation. *Spitting Image* took the 1980s and 90s by storm in Britain, creating memorable caricatures of senior political figures from Gorbachev to Thatcher.

For all their wacky faces, however, there was a point to be made, a social commentary that had an overarching message. It may have been absurd, but its messaging served a purpose. That purpose was illuminating the injustices of reality for what they are - plainly and hilariously. The satire we are watching unfold in front of our eyes holds some of these qualities, but I truly cannot see a punchline. No meta-commentary or unique angle on politics, just spectacle.

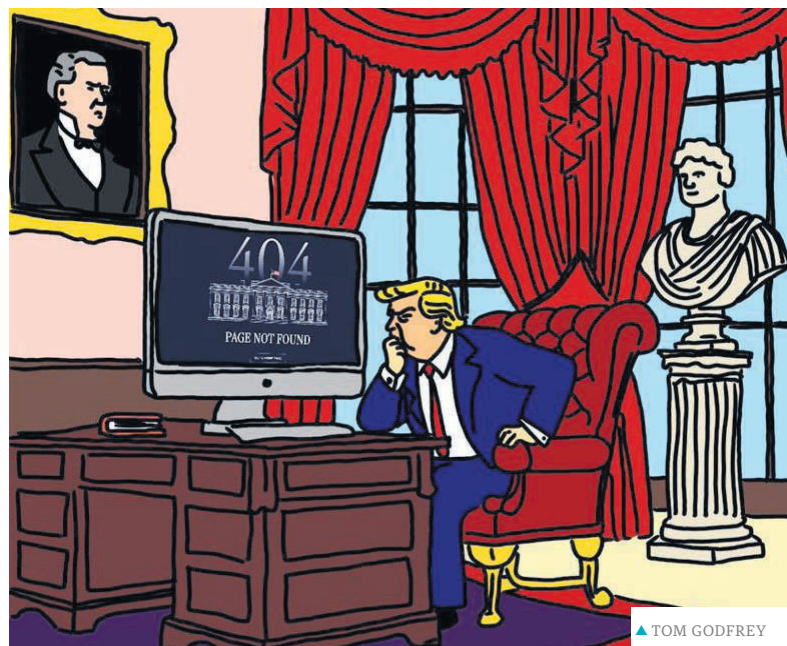
Political absurdity has become so normalized that comedians are left scrambling to outdo the ridiculousness of real life events. You can't mock what's already a mockery, leaving satire in the unenviable position of competing with

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Reality
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eleven

the 24 hour news cycle for shock value. But maybe the reason politics feels like satire is because satire, at its core, holds up a distorted mirror to society, exaggerating flaws for comedic effect. And right now, reality itself feels like it's been cranked up to eleven.

Outside of the USA, the far-right German AfD Party recently claimed Hitler was a communist on a talk with Elon Musk hosted on his platform, X. This is an act of blatant nonsensical historical revisionism, one that comes amid the Party's push towards remigration (technical code for racially motivated mass deportation schemes). The shock factor of their most wild actions distract from the AfD's broader agenda, the systematic erosion of democratic norms, and the implementation of xenophobic policies cloaked in bureaucratic jargon. By fixating public discourse on outrageous distortions of history, the AfD deflects attention from the slow normalization of extremist rhetoric, repackaged in sanitized language to make radical measures, such as 'remigration,' seem palatable.

The direction politics has been headed for a while now is towards a realisation that reality has become satire. This didn't start with Trump - representative democracy always demands an element of performance. When this performance translates into a darker underbelly of politics, however, the parody begins to sour. More than just the exaggerated, distinctive gestures of the charismatic leader, policy has transfigured into a shell of what it can be. Politics has and can be transformative, tangibly improving people's lives. If we continue down this rabbit hole, however, we might not see light at the other side.



Luca Chandler



Student politics is at a crossroads

If you Google "how do I join," the first thing to come up is "how do I join the Reform party". Currently, Reform UK boasts 185,496 members: more than the Conservative Party. While Labour remains the party with the most members, Reform's electoral success among young people in 2024 cannot be ignored. Farage himself has commented on the youth of his party's membership, raising questions on the future survival of the two-party system. Looking at Cambridge, I ask if the Labour and Conservative clubs are equipped to deal with and have responded to the rise in protest politics presented by parties like Reform. Is student politics still fit for purpose?

As an executive member of Cambridge University Labour Club (CULC), the country's oldest and largest university Labour club, I would argue that party politics continues to thrive, and the space for left wing student politics is wide. Pints and policy, CULC's cornerstone Friday night event, is consistently packed with nearly a hundred turning up regularly, discussing issues from nuclear war to the London-centrism of Labour.

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It is clear
that the
students
of this
University
remain
interested
and
involved
with
party politics

Debates are wide ranging, with officers such as the LGBTQ+ officer and women and non-binary officer there to encourage speakers of all backgrounds. In my opinion, the result is a lively, challenging, but respectful debate.

My fellow committee members share my concerns over increasing youth participation in right wing politics, Ben Cartwright, co-chair, reflected that other student parties are isolated in the student scene. He claims that students are broadly left wing, and that CUCA existed as an isolated space for controversial, provocative tendencies. When it comes to the threat from issue-based politics, Cartwright pointed out that Labour party membership of course comes hand in hand with activism and other issues but it is not exclusive, and CULC really is a space for accessing those wider issues. Overall, my somewhat biased assessment of the Cambridge Labour Club was positive: membership is high, debate is productive, and the student body seems broadly left wing here in Cambridge.

To better get to grips with the issue, I decided to embark on the harrowing experience of attending port and policy,

Cambridge University Conservative Association's (CUCA) social event. As a passionate member of the Labour club, I was under no impression that the event would become a new favourite in my calendar, nor that I would be able to remain fully unbiased. However, I went with an open mind, not sure what to expect. This flew out the window as my mouth dropped in horror at the level of offence a group of only thirty-ish individuals, predominantly men, could cause so quickly. I was met with off-colour jokes at a time of intense worldwide political division and fears around the rise of the far-right.

The final vote on the failure of multiculturalism sailed through, and the sterility and emptiness of the room stood in stark contrast to Labour's lively pints and policy. While there is no Cambridge University Reform Club, it disturbingly became clear to me that space is still made within CUCA for inflammatory and reactionary sentiments hidden behind the guise of 'political debate'. CUCA, mirroring the national Conservative Party, is drifting further right to bridge the gap created by the emergence of Reform UK. Never one to refuse a drink, even I felt

the need to decline the port offered to me by one of many men in a shirt and chinos, deciding that to sip their port was to accept views of the embarrassingly sparse room of individuals so terribly concerned with immigration into the UK.

It is clear that the students of this University remain interested and involved with party politics. Cambridge University's Labour Club doesn't seem overly threatened by the emergence of right wing protest politics nationally, with a committed body of student members and a predominantly left wing student population. Cambridge University's Conservative Association has responded very differently. Key debates about immigration are stoked at their socials, encouraging offensive responses alongside intolerant rhetoric and calls for a return to 'British values,' whatever those might be. The club seems to have shifted further right to absorb Reform party sentiment, reflecting the shift of the Conservative Party nationally, and to dissipate challenges from their opposition. I hope, for the sake of our student body, this goes no further.

Martha Lucas



It's time to change travel grants

Martha Rayner

When I first heard most Cambridge colleges had travel grants I was in awe: who doesn't love free money, and what better way to return to the places I loved in my year out now that I had the financial means? However, after dreaming up plans of sipping out of coconuts with my crisp dollar bills from Cambridge in Cambodia, the ever present environmental guilt started to creep in.

Normally I detest the idea of flying (a principle thinly wavering over the past year as, self-reproaching, I stepped onto long haul flights), but the idea of being given money to do so had briefly created a 'free pass' in my head.

With the risk of stating the obvious, air travel should not be a decision taken lightly; according to estimations by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy a long-haul flight produces equivalent impacts to 102g of CO₂ per passenger each kilometre. Even optimistic predictions suggest the aviation sector's impact will double by 2050. It is imperative Cambridge curbs its own emissions; travel grants enable unethical travel decisions, actions that will later form the travel habits of graduates, who are more likely to go on to be part of the frequent flyers of tomorrow.

An investigation by *Varsity* found that over the last academic year, five colleges spent in excess of £100,000 awarding travel grants. While equal opportunity to travel should be available regardless of financial situation, there is a certain irony that money is being claimed to expand students' "understanding of the world" when in reality Cambridge students can choose to embody the epitome of privilege: causing vast emissions volunteer-

“When the benefit to the participant is seen to outweigh the actual impact of the carbon intensive travel, the environment will always lose out

ing abroad in the name of social good.

In many instances, this stems from deeply self-serving requirements students must fulfil for funds, conforming to comical stereotypes of 'finding yourself' through its focus on individual exploration. Many funds, such as The Gladstone Memorial Trust for example, emphasise they are unlikely to fund projects "when the main aim is subsidy to the local community rather than independent travel by the applicant". Similarly, it is difficult to argue that Selwyn's Medical Mission Fund for Christian medical missionary trips, or Johns' C W Brasher fund preferencing those travelling to

"wilder" parts of the world are not predicated on the applicant's own beliefs and desires.

It is not in the spirit of "understanding the world" to visit communities within our own self-centered bubble of personal 'growth'. Students may return having felt they completed the funds' aims of gaining "maturity," but it is singularly naive to abstract oneself from the real world impact of those actions. The prioritisation of individual journeys at times falls into the 'white saviour' mentality, whereby the participant's own feelings become the focus of participation with members of a community. This detached philosophy sheds light on how the environment is also easily disregarded; when the benefit to the participant is seen to outweigh the actual impact of the carbon intensive travel, the environment will always lose out.

Many of these trusts are centuries old, lacking today's knowledge of the current dire state of the climate. As for a solution, I do not argue that colleges should pay out less. If anything, it might be the opposite: If colleges can afford to cash out large sums then they can make further commitments to rewarding students for ethical travels. Weighting should be placed on the environmental impact and ethical considerations of an application. Some

positive action has already been taken. The University set targets for reducing business travel emissions by 25% against 2014/15 levels by 2024/25 in its 2018 Carbon Reduction Strategy. Under the adopted carbon offsetting policy, staff and students are "strongly encouraged" to offset emissions associated with their travel.

However, the 2019 Environmental Sustainability Report showed no progress on reducing emissions from flights to the previous year, and post-Covid targets have not been met. Offsetting, a practice already under scrutiny for being ineffectual at reversing effects of air travel, is currently only voluntary. Some research funding, such as the Wellcome travel fund, covers the additional cost incurred for environmental travel or provides an allowance for offsetting. However, many funds do not have the same consideration.

Surely, the University could employ more self-awareness than a few forgotten sentences encouraging students to consider the environment. The plurality in Cambridge's college system means more substantial initiatives, such as Kings' sustainable travel policy which commits to providing additional funding for sustainable transport, are not widespread. In absence of an enforceable centralised framework provided by the University, different colleges provide varying levels of commitment.

Without adequate financial motivation, the planet will continue to be sidelined. Now, feeling stuck choosing between staying local and guiltily leaning into the 'gap yah' stereotype, I continue to remind myself that we can all do better, starting with travel grants.



It's pay-to-win for health and life skills at Cambridge

Max La Bouchardiere

As Jess Gotterson investigated last month, one's experience in Cambridge's accommodation can be subpar to put it lightly, depending on college and luck in a random ballot. Many student accommodations lack basic cooking facilities. If ovens and fridge-freezers are a fanciful pipe dream, hobs can feel like gold dust. Criticisms of Cambridge's anachronistic housing arrangements are fairly ubiquitous: most of us are in some way short-changed by buildings so historic that the modernity of Eduroam can't break through its walls. However, what these criticisms typically focus on is luck. "It is down to luck that some of us are 'blessed' with the marvels of cooking innovation, while others hopelessly cook pasta with a standard-issue kettle."

Luck is certainly a factor, but money predominates. Money determines whether we flourish into healthy, self-sufficient adults, or whether we remain frozen in limbo at the age of eighteen, with the same life skills and pre-packaged diet with which we might have entered the University.

In my year and a term as an undergraduate at Cambridge, I've benefited from bursaries and my college's Hardship Fund. These have helped alleviate my financial anxieties surrounding rent

payments even on my lower band rooms, and for them I am grateful. Still, I've found myself living on the same staircase in King's College both years around. This was not luck. I was fortunate to preside over my year's accommodation ballot – and after the incoming third years, I had free rein to choose which accommodation I would live in. Yet, for those of us from less affluent backgrounds, the free choice and equality that presupposes a random ballot is illusory. While your hand may unfortunately be forced into picking a less desirable room one year, if you can pay you can always escape the hovel when you are top of the ballot the year after. The inability to cook, to be healthy, and to develop vital life skills becomes a dreary blip on your journey as a young adult. For those like myself, it does not matter whether we are at the top or bottom of a random ballot: we live in the same incommensurable places regardless. As a result, we make do for our whole time at Cambridge with under-equipped 'gyp' rooms, substandard health, a lack of communal spaces, and generally tiny living areas. These materialise the estrangement one might feel from a lower socio-economic background at Cambridge.

The underbelly of the pay-to-win system is left alienated, facing disadvantages that encroach on academic life more broadly. Without basic, modern facilities, we are made disciples of our college's butteries. When that proves an



“For those of us from less affluent backgrounds, the free choice and equality that presupposes a random ballot is illusory

expensive option, it is easy to opt for inexpensive, processed microwave food. Feeling sluggish and malnourished, on top of feeling isolated and individualised, working becomes harder. As a result, it is unsurprising when academic grades suffer, which those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to face. Socio-economic disparities underscore all aspects of quotidian life, and the dissemination of them through the University's accommodation system must not be ignored.

Certainly, this is no different from wider society. Our colleges systemically hindering life skills and good physical and mental health for those from less privileged classes is a microcosm of our economic system. Everything is, of course, pay-to-win. However, our affluent colleges masquerade behind notions of equality and enact half-measures to the point where we discuss accommodation disparities through luck and chance. The random ballot is quickly replacing the 'scholar's ballot' as a purportedly equal and fair solution. Demonstrably, if a college's cheaper rooms are substantially ill-equipped and entrap those from lower socio-economic backgrounds for

all their years of study, this is in no way a fair system either. King's College goes further than most by trying to rectify this with a "low rent band guarantee". This is typically for those on the bursary. It means that if you are placed randomly at the bottom of the accommodation ballot and only expensive accommodation is left available, King's ensures you only have to pay the middle rent band. This is a positive first step, however it relies on you being near enough to the bottom of a random ballot and that all cheap accommodation gets selected first. In my experience, neither has happened – the cheap accommodation was left last.

So, what is to be done? It's nearly impossible for historic colleges to modernise their infrastructure. Allowing personal cooking equipment might be one intermediary solution, yet my staircase was formally warned and asked to remove such. Private renting? Cambridge is reportedly the third-most expensive city in the UK for private renting outside of London. In my case, develop medical grounds exacerbated by poor accommodation and hope you can 'special ballot' into slightly more reasonable accommodation your final year. The pay-to-win system at Cambridge is present, and it's a real tragedy indeed.



Features

Inside Gender Agenda: the re-birth of feminism in Cambridge

After the SU's divorce from the women's campaign

Jess Gotterson speaks to the people behind Gender Agenda

Unlike most other universities Cambridge lacks a university-wide feminist society, due to the Students' Union (SU) cutting ties with so-called 'liberation' campaigns. Instead, Cambridge's feminist efforts are fragmented across several inactive college societies, without enough members to survive. Seeking to fill this gap is Gender Agenda, Cambridge's women's campaign reborn, as a new, independently funded society.

Rosie Freeman, co-president and a former women's officer at the SU, first joined the women's campaign in her first year, alongside Erin Maccabe, its treasurer. At the time, it consisted of just five members. It has since grown into the political and ambitious feminist society it is today, with Madeleine Baber, who initially worked separately on the *Gender Agenda Zine* joining as arts and publicity officer and co-president respectively, and Lauren Sayers joining as events coordinator last year. They recently won the Best Specialist Publication in the South East Region at the Student Publication Awards.

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Cambridge thrives on the allure of progression

When asked how she would define feminism, Elise said, “There are fluctuations and debates on what it means, so giving a coherent definition is difficult.” Their constitution has expanded to campaign against patriarchy in all its forms. “We enjoy the idea that it can be more than just a women's club, and try to make it as inclusive as possible,” they said. They want it to be “a space where men can also submit their work if they want to,” producing “a malleable reflection of what students want [to be] represented.”

Rosie also stressed that their role needs to “facilitate discussion and criticism of ourselves [...] we need to be comfortable with other people challenging us.”

We discussed the prevalence of misogyny at Cambridge, a university built on patriarchal foundations, from the gendered academic award gap to the harassment of women at St John's on the tenth anniversary of admitting women. Rosie recalled being told to “use a more masculine voice” in a supervision, continuing, “I was unaware of it [misogyny at Cambridge] all in my first year [...] being a women's officer really makes you realise the issues at play and the necessity of student activism.” The women's campaign archives illuminate the parallels 40 years on as the same issues repeat themselves.

Rosie explained that the women's campaign was created “with the aim to be representative and inclusive [...] within the centrally organised SU.” The SU's decision to “kick them out” has forced Gender Agenda to undergo a massive transformation.

The financial impact of this divorce has been significant, leaving WomCam in debt and unable to fund travel for valuable guest speakers, relying on a limited £350 grant per term, despite reassurances that they would continue to receive the same amount of money as they had under the SU. Madeleine said,

“For a society that has existed within their walls since the 1980s, to then refer to us as a start-up, felt like a massive disrespect.”

Given just one month to rewrite a constitution, fund the

zine, make a bank account and find a senior treasurer in order to facilitate the rebirth of the society, individual members have been left £200 out of pocket.

Elise claimed that the SU “fundamentally misunderstood the concept of support, we would like to be collaborative, to debate and discuss this and come up with compromises,” but even after Elise and Rosie visited the SU for an in-person discussion, they were told to just “email any questions.”

Discussing the SU's decision, Rosie said that by “outsourcing representation liberation and by moving it outside of the SU,” they were “no longer accountable for the fact it does not exist”. There is a strong sense of institutional inertia, with Lauren claiming that there is a general sense of apathy among students towards the SU. Elise added, “Cambridge thrives on the allure of progression [...] you don't want to change, you just want to look like you're changing.”

Not only this, but they are unable to access their own intellectual property, still waiting for a legal handover of their archives. Rosie said, “Our intention is to move this powerful archive from the '80s to the communal space of a library so that it can be used for personal dissertations and research projects.” She continued, “We are informed by history, by the strategies and the decisions that were made, and we don't just exist in a contemporary vacuum.”

However, every cloud has a silver lining. Madeleine said, “We never fully liked that we weren't allowed to be overtly political, now, it has become more than just a representative space for women, but an activist project.” Following a data breach, a government review of the SU showed that “being in the charitable structure of the SU was restricting the possibility of student activ-

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Ambition is central to activism

ism.” Rosie said that “an activist tries to unsettle the comfortable, and charity law really likes the comfortable.”

The group claim that WomCam's efforts were stifled under the SU, unable to appeal to political parties, alter graphics, logos or titles without trustee permission. After spending the summer making “a space for the SU to thrive and connect with their students better,” the group complained of how one of the only significant emails WomCam received was one requesting that they change the logo on a guide to Abortion Care in Cambridge “because it didn't go with the branding of the SU”.

Gender Agenda now needs the help of the student body. Through initiatives like the ‘Feminist Files’ podcast, annual general meetings, the Reclaim the Night March and Vigil, Reclaim the Club nights, poetry workshops, film screenings and Zine Art Nights, they seek to create space for students to contribute.

This has included a number of partnerships with other campaigns, forming a broader network of activism to help bring about meaningful change. This has included work with STAR, a

student action for refugees group and the End Sexual Violence Campaign. They compiled an easily accessible resource on college assault policies for anyone in a position of distress. Madeleine said Gender Agenda

takes campaigns such as this “under our wing [...] they support us and we support them.”

Providing a platform for feminism-related events in Cambridge, they run panels, such as their upcoming collaboration with the Cambridge Psychology Society, and aim for a termly debate. Lauren explained, “It's not me who has decided to put on these events; anyone in Cambridge can come to us and say they want to put on this event and we get loads of messages every week asking us to support events, campaigns and discussions and we will.”

Therefore, in terms of funding, Lauren said, “It's not just us who get the money, it's every student who wants to be involved.” Their committee is expanding, with a welfare officer and outreach and representation officer added in recent months. Madeleine said, “We are at a critical juncture, beginning a new chapter, and so we want people to be able to ask to be a part of it.” Rosie said, “Feminism is about collectivism, not individualism, and facilitating student activism beyond the committee itself.”

Rosie concluded, “I'd love for people to reach out after this article because the more people we have, the more power we have as a campaign.” “After attending our free events, we really rely on the support the students give back to us by attending our launch party and buying our zine,” Madeleine said. One of Gender Agenda's goals is to extend their outreach programme, to ideally include a women's officer at each college. In Rosie's words, “ambition is central to activism.”



Opening up the ancient world to all

Calum Murray discusses the lack of Classics education at state schools; speaking with students and academics about how Classics can move out of elite circles, and be more inclusive

“It was something that I was never taught at school.” Second year classicist Yasmin attended a state school, something which is true for just half of her classics cohort. Most of these state-educated classicists will have enrolled on the four-year course – on the three-year course, for which an A-level in Latin is needed, just over 40% will have attended a state school. This puts Classics among the most independent-school dominated subjects at Cambridge. At the heart of this is the fact that 65% of independent schools offer Latin GCSE, compared to just 9% of state schools. In the words of Durham Classics professor Arlene Holmes-Henderson, “that doesn’t seem fair”.

Holmes-Henderson forms part of a group of classicists committed to ensuring their beloved subject may be studied by all, not just the clever and wealthy. Lorna Robinson, director of the Oxford-based charity the Iris Project, which seeks to spread the teaching of Classics to state schools, spelled out her motivation saying, “it [Classics] is really interesting.” She continues, “I’ve been studying Classics for a long time now, but barely a month will go by where I don’t encounter something and relate it to Classics in some way.”

Caroline Bristow, director of the Education Faculty’s Cambridge School Classics Project, says “what I think is really important is a broad curriculum,” and that “what you tend to find is that students who cannot find subjects that resonate with them get turned off across the board.”

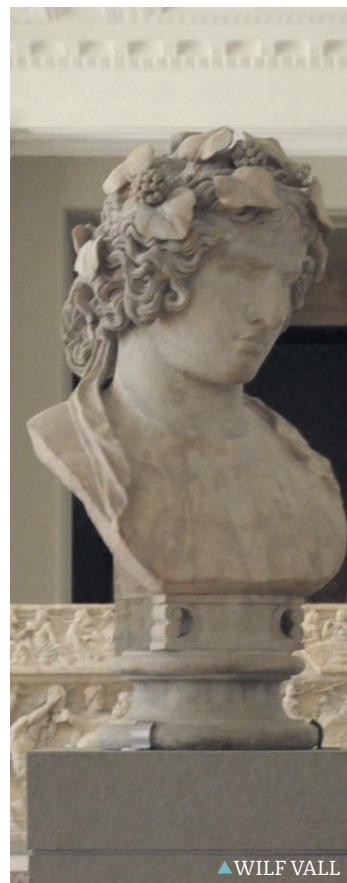
“65% of independent schools offer Latin GCSE, compared to just 9% of state schools

Putting aside arguments about the inherent utility of studying Classics, there is a social justice issue at play here, where students at independent schools have access to a broader curriculum. Potential Classics enthusiasts at state schools, of which Bristow was adamant there were many, are being deprived of the opportunity to find their future passion.

Part of the reason why Briggs and

Robinson were so sure that many state schoolers, if given the chance, would find something interesting to explore in Classics was the subject’s inherent breadth. Eleanor, a second year classicist at Clare, said “it [Classics] is examining a very specific society, but it holistically examines the society.” Through the multifaceted nature of the discipline, Robinson thought that there were many “relatable” aspects for students to discover. She gave the example of Catullus’ poetry, saying “he wrote these really delightful poems about, you know, inviting a friend around for dinner and being really excited about it.”

The picture painted here is in opposition to the stereotypes perpetuated by the uninitiated of a discipline devoted to the translation of dry, dated texts. Briggs felt that this sentiment stemmed from the historic narrowness of Classics syllabuses. She says, “people often talk about widening our discipline, widening the content. I actually think that’s not quite right. What we’re doing is putting back the stuff that got left out.” She continues, “a really good example of this is LGBTQ content. Gay people existed in the ancient world, we’ve just chosen not to put them into the materials.” Her work aims to see Classics used to talk about a broader array of



▲ WILF VALL

themes, like sex and relationships, on which there is much relevant material, but material which, historically, has been understudied. Yasmin points out how ubiquitous references to the ancient world were in popular culture, saying “Freud didn’t call the Oedipus complex the Oedipus complex just because it was an old Greek word which made him sound clever as a doctor.”

Widening Classics means moving beyond a focus on texts and teaching Latin. Material culture has a significant role to play here – Lorna says “not everybody finds texts accessible or engaging [...] but most people can find some kind of joy and interest in holding an object that comes from ancient Rome and ancient Greece.” Cambridge proves a centre for this: Arlene says, “I think we’re really spoiled by material culture, so museums have got a really important role to play here and the Cambridge Museum of Classical Archaeology is a fantastic example where innovative pedagogies take place.”

Classics as a discipline is horribly undiverse, and Yasmin and Eleanor recognised how off-putting this could be to people like them. Classics, Yasmin says, “should be destigmatised as a subject.”

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Science

Meet the Cambridge researchers exploring psychedelic-assisted therapies

Ruby Jackson speaks to the psychiatrist researching psychedelics' therapeutic potential



Bibi Boyce breaks down the most recent scientific discoveries

Black holes can feed themselves

Research completed by a team in Santiago, Chile has demonstrated that outbursts from supermassive black holes cool gas, which then “feeds” the black hole. Using data from NASA’s Chandra X-Ray observatory and Very Large Telescope, they were able to study the relationship between these outbursts and the filaments of gas which fuel the black holes.

Active galactic nuclei (AGN) are bright regions in the centre of galaxies which are powered by a supermassive black hole (over 100,000 times the mass of the Sun) as it feeds on the surrounding material in its accretion disc. This is a large collection of hot matter orbiting the black hole, similar to Saturn’s rings only on a much larger scale. Some accretion discs produce high energy jets which emit plasma, the state above gas, where it is so hot (6,000-10,000°C) that atoms lose electrons and become ionised. When these jets are particularly powerful this is known as an outburst.

According to the model researched, these outbursts provide hot plasma which then cools to form narrow filaments: long thin streams of gas that connect galaxy clusters, forming a cosmic web. They lead back into black holes, sending material onto the accretion disc. When mass falls into the black hole, it loses a huge amount of potential energy which is then emitted by the black hole via an outburst, which provides plasma to repeat the cycle. Essentially, as NASA has said, black holes can ‘cook for themselves’.

The team in Chile, led by Valeria Olivares, validated this model by confirming the prediction that there is a relationship between the brightness of the filaments of hot and warm gas in the centres of galaxy clusters. This specific result has also been observed in the tails of jellyfish galaxies, so called after the way their gas is dragged out behind them as they move through space. This similarity is unexpected

and implies a common process, providing us with valuable information about star formation as well as black holes.

Alligators could help mitigate climate change

American alligators have a significant impact on the carbon cycle in their native ecosystems, as shown by a team at Southeastern Louisiana University through soil analysis.

The carbon cycle describes how carbon is stored in the earth, and how it transfers between the atmosphere, biosphere (flora and fauna), ocean, and ground. Understanding the carbon cycle and how human activity disrupts it are essential for being able to mitigate climate change. For example, carbon dioxide can dissolve into the ocean. This solubility decreases as the ocean warms, releasing carbon dioxide. Increasing the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere contributes to the greenhouse effect, warming the earth and the ocean further - leading to more carbon dioxide being released.

Apex predators sit at the top of the food chain and regulate the abundance and behaviour of herbivores and bioturbators (organisms that move soil or sediment). It was observed that in wetland ecosystems across North America, especially mangroves, there is a positive correlation between alligator demography and tidally-influenced carbon sequestration (i.e. carbon held out of the atmosphere in coastal regions). Similar trends have been observed between the brown bear and the nitrogen cycle.

This adds another aspect to the impending pressures of climate change. Increased temperatures and rapidly changing habitats disturb the restorative balance previously present in the wetlands, as well as in other biomes. In doing so, it prevents them from sequestering carbon dioxide. This could accelerate the effects of climate change, showing a similar pattern of positive feedback as in the warming of the ocean.

The healing power of psychedelic compounds has been recognised by many cultures for a large part of human history, from indigenous groups’ use of ayahuasca in the Western Amazon to peyote and mescaline’s role in Native American rituals. A new wave of research over the last 30 years has begun to investigate their potential for unlocking new psychological therapies. I spoke to Dr. Liliana Galindo about what these compounds could mean for the future of psychiatry.

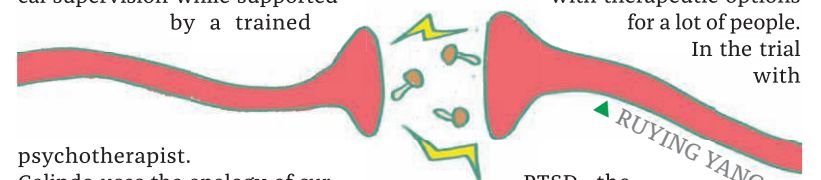
“These substances create the ideal conditions for mapping out new neural pathways

The Cambridge affiliated assistant professor and consultant psychiatrist is Principal Investigator of the Cambridge Psychedelic Research group. She is leading two clinical trials investigating the therapeutic potential of empathogens and neuroplastogens, bringing studies of this nature to Cambridge for the first time. One of the studies includes participants with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition for which there is a dearth of treatment options. The only medications for PTSD at the moment are selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) antidepressants, such as sertraline (Zoloft) and fluoxetine (Prozac). These do help some patients, but generally only offer some symptomatic relief, Galindo tells me. “They might help to reduce some of the anxiety, some of the insomnia” often experienced by PTSD sufferers, but “it is not treating the root [...] the trauma that is behind.”

The other option is psychological intervention: therapies such as EMDR (eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing) and CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy), which focus on reprocessing traumatic memories. But these aren’t suitable for everyone. “For many people, any work with their trauma is so triggering that they can’t allow [themselves] to do it. Some people might not remember or recall the trauma, because it’s something that comes with a lot of pain.”

While estimates vary widely, only a limited number of people with severe PTSD experience a marked improvement. The story is similar for other mental illnesses. Around 30% of those suffering from depression can be classed as ‘treatment-resistant,’ meaning they do not show any response to at least two forms of treatment. Therapeutic options are limited by the paucity of medication available. Due to slow innovation in psychiatric pharmacology, the vast majority of psychiatric medications available today are descended from drugs that were developed over 50 years ago, with few modifications since.

This urgent need to expand the menu of treatment options is one reason researchers are so keen to explore psychedelic and empathogen-assisted therapy (PAT), where people receive a controlled amount of a psychoactive drug in a safe clinical environment, under medical supervision while supported



psychotherapist.

Galindo uses the analogy of surgery to explain the principle behind PAT: “When you have a physical trauma, you use an anaesthetic that will allow the surgeon to have a few hours where the person doesn’t feel the same pain. What these psychoactive substances [empathogens] are giving you is a period of hours [...] that will allow the person to revisit and re-process their trauma with a different perspective.” Treatment with PAT has shown almost unbelievable promise in clinical trials.

There are many proposed mechanisms by which psychedelics offer this protective effect. Their utility in reprocessing traumatic memories may in part be due to the cognitive flexibility they offer. Rigid thought patterns underlie many of the symptoms of mental illness, from the cyclical negative rumination of depression and anxiety to the rigid patterns of thoughts and behaviour common to addiction, eating disorders and obsessive compulsive disorder. Psychedelics belong to a class of compounds called neuroplastogens, which support the growth and regeneration of nerve cells to increase neuroplasticity (the ability of the nervous system to reorganise itself). Essentially, these substances create the ideal conditions for rewiring these rigid thought patterns.

There are many stages to the intervention. The dosing sessions, where people actually receive the drug under clinical supervision, could involve up to eight hours

of assisted therapy. “That means you need to have [...] doctors, they are with a psychotherapist supporting them [...] plus the research nurses that are monitoring their vital signs.” The drug is only one part of the intervention. “Before this dosing session, they have a preparatory session with a trained therapist, as well as sessions afterwards, to integrate the different experiences they had.” Participants are also screened beforehand to confirm they’re eligible to be part of the study.

Under UK law, all psychedelics are classified under Schedule 1, the strictest category of regulation. Application for a Home Office licence (the permit necessary for any research involving a Schedule 1 drug) is a complex, thorough, and often lengthy process. However, Galindo tells me the waiting is made easier by the knowledge they’re researching “something that could come at the end with therapeutic options for a lot of people. In the trial with

PTSD, the participants that are joining [...] have been symptomatic for years, they cannot work [...] cannot [...] because they are so affected by these symptoms.”

Many in the field feel this regulation is perhaps too stringent, and compromises innovation. A 2022 letter from The Royal College of Psychiatrists called for the removal of psychedelic drugs from Schedule 1 to facilitate research, pointing to countries such as Australia and parts of the US, where some psychedelics are already approved for therapeutic use. “We need to explore [...] how could the UK legislation adapt at the same pace [as] the science.”

This rigorous regulation is partly historical. Following the War on Drugs, the use of psychedelics in research was outlawed, first nationally in the US, then globally via the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances. In 1991, the first approval for psychedelic research since the 1970s was granted, rekindling interest in the subject and kickstarting a second wave of clinical trials: the so-called ‘psychedelic renaissance’. The encouraging evidence that emerged from this new wave of research meant psychedelics are increasingly being seen as a viable option for UK medical research.

This year, Galindo’s group will begin two other trials to investigate the potential of psilocybin, one for generalised anxiety disorder and the other for treatment-resistant depression, and will be hosting their first Cambridge Psychedelic Research Day on 12 March.

“The part that is beautiful, and promising, is that we really haven’t had many new treatments in psychiatry for a long time. And here we have a hope that we might be able to change a paradigm.”



▲ LAURA MARSHALL

Does Chinese acupuncture have a place in modern medicine?

Yi Sum Yue explores the culture and controversy of Traditional Chinese Medicine

Growing up loving science, I felt comfort in the explainable. The rigorous methodologies and evidence behind modern science followed a logical pathway of reasoning. Now, studying Veterinary Medicine at Cambridge, I understand the weight of the science that roots diagnoses and treatment in evidence and fact. However, I have developed a greater appreciation of accepting the unknown as I grow older.

Being a Cantonese Singaporean, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has always been in my life. TCM, and by extension Chinese acupuncture, along with other cultural medical practices, exists within realms that science can't fully comprehend. Despite this, its practice is growing in popularity, and the integration of TCM into a more holistic healthcare system is becoming more prevalent.

Chinese acupuncture is an ancient medical technique for relieving pain, curing disease, and improving general health. It is based on the foundation of TCM, which stems from the Chinese philoso-

phy of yin and yang. These two forces oppose each other in all living organisms and can cause imbalance and disease. Imbalance results in the obstruction of qi, or life force, which flows through twelve meridians or pathways in the body. Each is associated with a major visceral organ and a functional body system. Chinese acupuncture inserts thin metal needles on precise points along the meridians of the body known as acupoints. This affects the distribution of yin and yang for qi to flow freely and harmoniously.

One of the problems Western medicine and science has with understanding TCM is its methodology and how the treatment it prescribes works. TCM practitioners focus on restoring balance in the body, rather than targeting disease and observing symptoms and signs with modern diagnostic tools. Therefore, it may not identify the disease but is effective in managing diseases or health conditions which are not restricted to specific, identifiable processes. This can in-

clude stress-related disorders, chronic fatigue, or digestive dysfunctions. In the world of research papers, this can lead to vague methodologies.

Among many, a common use of acupuncture is to relieve chronic pain by acting on the central nervous system. Acupuncture alters the metabolism of neurotransmitters involved in pathways to the brain. For instance, electrical acupuncture stimulation at specific acupoints causes the inhibition of substance P and glutamate release, which are key compounds involved in signalling pain. Additionally, acupuncture has been proven to stimulate structures in the brain and release natural pain relievers known as endorphins and enkephalins.

This concept can even be applied to that time of the month: acupuncture has been proven to alleviate menstrual cramps. In a study, women were randomly allocated into two groups: a control with no treatment, and a study where only acupuncture was given as a form of pain relief. Results showed a significant reduction in pain severity, muscle cramps,

and systemic symptoms compared to the control group, and have also been replicated in further studies.

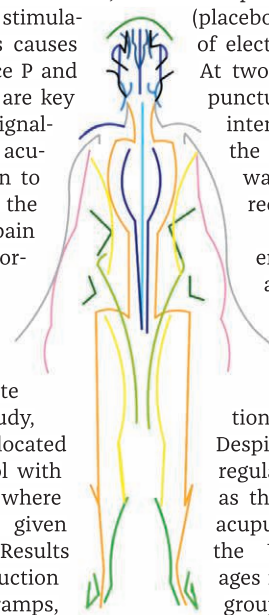
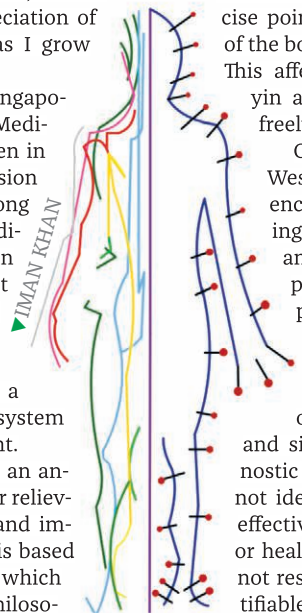
Auricular acupuncture has been proven to aid in cancer pain relief. In a study conducted by a French hospital, subjects were divided into three groups: one group had two courses of acupuncture, and two placebo groups had acupuncture away from acupoints (placebo points with no measure of electrical changes in the skin). At two months of auricular acupuncture, results showed pain intensity decreased by 36% in the study group, while there was little change for patients receiving placebo.

The combination of Western medicine and TCM is still an emerging field, and more large-scale randomized controlled trials will give a clearer picture of the potential or limitations of acupuncture and TCM. Despite this, it is not under global regulation, with countries such as the United States regulating acupuncture with the FDA, while the UK government encourages registration with voluntary groups such as the British Acu-

“Acupuncture has been proven to stimulate structures in the brain and release natural pain relievers

puncture Council. Although when practiced correctly it's painless and has few side effects, it's important to always check certification and ensure TCM practitioners have proper licensing.

Overall, it is evident that Chinese acupuncture has a significant impact on some aspects of patient care. However, exploration into its application in other fields such as depression and anxiety has yet to be substantiated by sufficient Western medical research. To be clear, I am not challenging Western medicine, but I am challenging you to be more open to the potential of integrating cultural medicinal practices such as TCM to create a more comprehensive healthcare system.



VARSIY 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

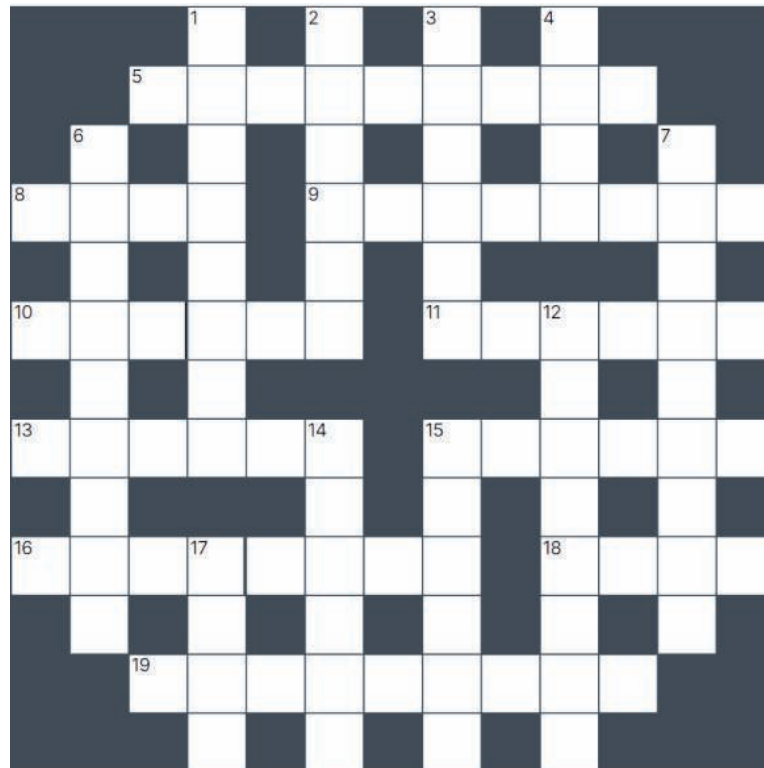
More details about how to submit can be found at <https://www.themaysanthology.co.uk/submissions/>

The Smoking Area

Sudoku

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

Crossword



Crossword Clues

Quick

ACROSS:

- 5 What shepherds and influencers have (9)
- 8 Measures in seconds, minutes, hours and eternity! (4)
- 9 According to their song, REM were losing this in 1991 (8)
- 10 You'll see this as the final music plays in music, films, and books (3,3)
- 11 Source of movement (6)
- 13 Hanya Yanagihara's job (6)
- 15 What is tested by research (6)
- 16 Tchaikovsky ballet (1895) (4,4)
- 18 Boy born at Christmas? (4)
- 19 Firms which sell their products in other countries (9)

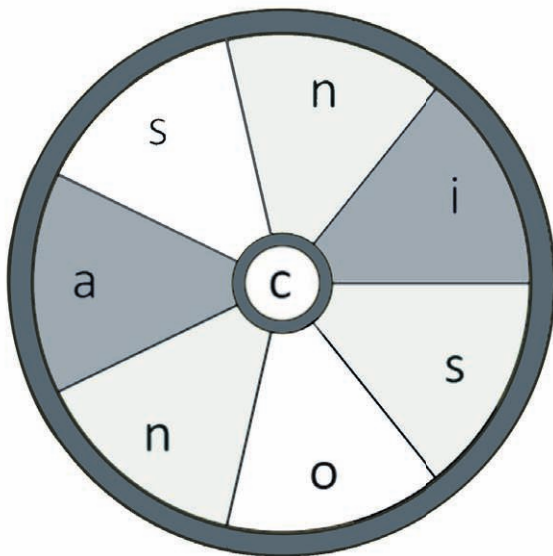
DOWN:

- 1 Self contained section of a piece of music (8)
- 2 The great king who died in 899 (6)
- 3 Symbolic religious number (e.g. number of apostles) (6)
- 4, marry, avoid? (4)
- 6 A sword taken from its sheath is this (9)
- 7 195 in the world, of which the UK has four (9)
- 12 People who collect the dropped pieces of corn (8)
- 14 According to Voltaire, faith consists in believing when it is beyond the power of to believe (6)
- 15 XX (6)
- 17 A high street shop you might visit after this one? (4)

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.



"Come back when you've got the right type of gown on!"

ANSWERS TO PUZZLES ON
INSTAGRAM @VARSITYCAMBRIDGE
PUZZLES BY SOPHOCLES

Vintage
Varsity

SPECIAL EDITION READ

Be my (Varsity)
Valentine?

Resident Varsity Archivist Lily O'Sullivan turns to the archives for romantic advice

As Valentine's Day approaches each year, *Varsity* writers have always been keen to remind readers that Cambridge is, in fact, a city of love. In 2004, it was even claimed that "conclusive evidence" proved that the university was "sexier than ever". While *Vintage Varsity's* search through the archives has found no such confirmation, the last 70 years have shown that the trials and tribulations of finding love in Cambridge are nothing new.

Many articles published in the run up to February 14 were keen to dole out romantic advice, presumably due to the unquestionable wisdom of *Varsity* writers on such matters. Six decades ago, it was helpfully pointed out to a female audience in an article called "The art of love" that "men don't like clever women ... so you need to be very charming and immodest to be forgiven," before suggesting they strive to appear "just that little bit more stupid than they are." Noted. In 1964, *Varsity* investigated the

scourge of Valentine's Day cards that contained "sick jokes" including such witticisms as "if you don't like my looks - we could always turn out the lights." The root cause of such cruel humour was attributed to both the male fear of "yielding to emotion" and increasing gender equality damaging the "image of femininity," making it almost impossible for Valentine's messages to show "love and gentleness towards the fallibility of women". The answer? Female readers were urged to follow a "new Victorian approach to their relationship with the male section of the University".

More practical guidance was offered in the noughties, yet still perhaps of varying degrees of quality. Readers were directed to cook "steak marinated in vodka" for their lucky Valentine - an example of culinary brilliance accompanied by a near naked photoshoot of the Blues water polo team in the Jesus College library. Advice for the 'lads' in-

cluded pearls such as "DON'T compliment her too much" and "DON'T call her too soon" in 2004. If all else failed, one article from 1996 proposed an ideal destination for anyone finding themselves alone at this time of year - "South Wing, fifth floor, at the far end" of the University Library. Apparently in "the tower of love" students were after more than just the complete works of Milton, and a "cursory glance over a book" was a surefire way to express such intent.

Varsity also provided methods of anonymous flirting, acting as a print precursor to Crushbridge. 'Lurve Lines' allowed hopeful singles to donate to RAG to have their romantic confessions printed. Contributions from the nineties range from the poetic "sod the Physics, let's get physical" to the sardonic "your loss Pete, not mine". There was also the 'Date of the Week' column, a students' chance to date "Cambridge's most eligible singletons," complete with short

biographies including the helpful "how to pull me" section. Before the age of seeing half of your cohort on Hinge, *Varsity* reported on the successes of the website 'Romance.ucam.org,' which saw 10,000 registered users send coded Valentine's messages to their admirees.

Varsity has never shied from reporting on the scandals that accompany Cantabs' romantic endeavours. In 1954, the paper broke the news of Girton college's decision to temporarily suspend four girls "for having men in their rooms at a late hour," conceding that it would have been "quite impossible" for the powers that be to let such behaviour go unpunished. Fast forward to 2008, and one sensibly anonymous interviewee had more of a confession to make: "once I had sex with a guy on the dancefloor of Cindy's. I think everyone else thought we were just rigger lads pretending, but we really were at it." What a romantic city indeed.



▼ NIAMH CAFFERTY

vulture.

Sylvia Plath's Cambridge

Emily Cushion recounts stories from Plath's time at Cambridge, reflecting on the pragmatism of her university writing

Ted Hughes once suggested that his romance with Sylvia Plath dominated his university years, forthrightly beginning a poem with the line "Cambridge was our Courtship". To assume Plath felt the same is a wild misjudgement. Upon her arrival to the town in October 1955, Plath wrote to her mother: "I must make my own Cambridge," a simple statement cementing her true intentions for this new chapter in her life. Indeed, the potential of Cambridge seems boundless for Plath, following the "acute depressions" she experienced while studying at Smith College in Massachusetts beforehand. Optimism permeates her letters: "I feel that after I put down roots here, I shall be happier than ever before, since a kind of golden promise hovers in the air along the Cam and in the quaint crooked streets." This early epistolical poeticization of the town acts as a precursor for the pieces Plath would go on to write and later publish about her time in Cambridge.

In what is perhaps her most famous poem about Cambridge, 'Watercolor of Grantchester Meadows', Plath disassociates herself from those who are too wrapped up in their own lives to notice the beauty of their surroundings:

"the students stroll or sit,
Hands laced, in a moony indolence of love -
Black-gowned, but unaware
How in such mild air
The owl shall stoop from his turret, the rat cry out."

For many, the infamous Cambridge gown has become a superiority symbol, something Plath usurps in revealing how physically shrouding yourself in a cloak of intellectualism does not detract from

inner "indolence" and self-preoccupation. Cambridge inevitably feels enveloped by academia, superseding all other aspects of the place. In picking out tiny and seemingly insignificant details, down to "each thumb-sized bird," Plath effortlessly separates herself from those who are "unaware" that there is more to Cambridge than its University, inviting her reader to do the same.

Despite being astonished that "the ratio here is

"Oh." Though Plath herself evidently didn't consider it a particular achievement, we must acknowledge that she arrived at Cambridge just seven years after women were deemed eligible to obtain a degree, and less than a century after they were permitted to study here at all. Thus, she represents one of the first and most influential of the University's female students, refusing

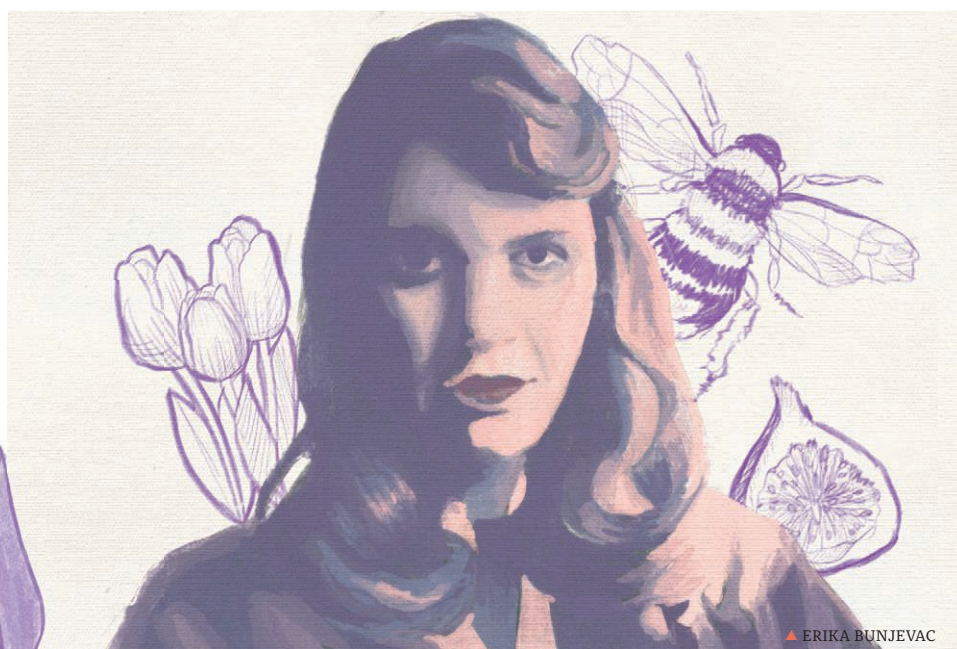
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Plath deemed the constant rhetoric on the difficulties of being a female student tiresome

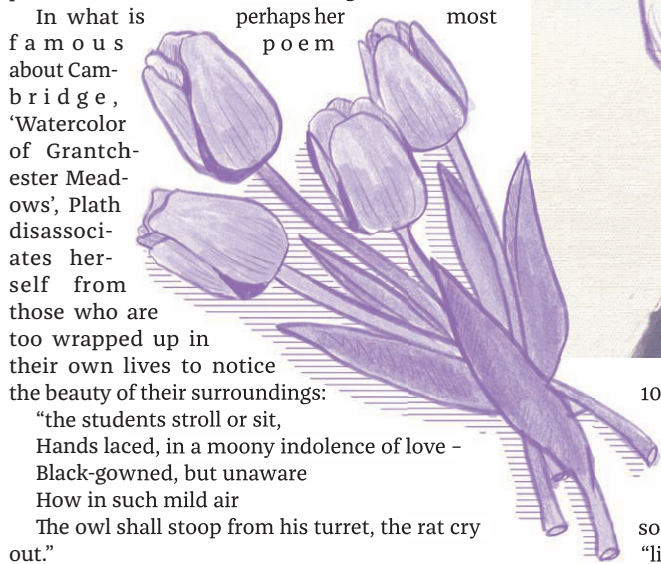
poetry, acting in the ADC, writing May Week fashion guides, modelling for for *Varsity*, and altogether changing the history of the University as it stood, but she was equally homesick, lonely and apprehensive, feel-

ings that are likely familiar to all of us.

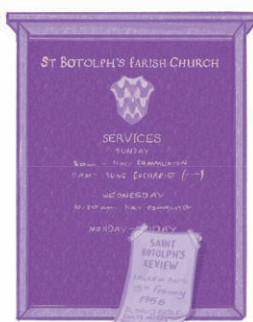
Plath herself admitted that "I always have to digest experience first, before re-forming it," something that I hope can speak to many about the necessity of giving ourselves the breathing room to reflect, instead of constantly striving for perfection (though I know this will be difficult for some of you). There is a certain poetry in the mundanity of daily life, even in a place as unpredictable and bewildering as Cambridge. I take great delight in the unseen and supposedly boring details of Plath's time here: "I had fried potatoes and bacon and buttered brown toast and two cups of coffee this morning; my favourite breakfast." Perhaps we would all benefit from skipping a 9am once in a while to indulge in hall breakfast... you can always email your lecturer and say that Sylvia Plath implored you to do so.



▲ ERIKA BUNJEVAC



10 men to each woman!", Plath deemed the constant rhetoric on the difficulties of being a female student tiresome. She comments on "listening to the most incredibly pained conversation: 'I always thought they expected girls to do worse than boys at things, you know.' 'What?' 'Worse than boys.'



to view her gender as a limitation despite the University's extensively misogynistic history.

While it may feel impossible for the average Cambridge student to reach the status that Plath did over her time here (yes, I mean me), we can at least take comfort in sharing an experience with such a revered and acclaimed literary figure. Yes, she may have been publishing her own

THE AGONIES



▲ JESSICA LEER

EVE CONNOR

Dear Joe,

In the time it has taken me to reply to you, Donald Trump has been re-elected as President of the United States, I graced the Continent, you directed *Dancing at Lughnasa* at the ADC (terrific; I brewed the tea), 2024 ended, and I was damnably DMed this Instagram Reel by a third-party. I guess that makes me a lousy letter-writer.

The Netherlands was beautiful and very clean. There was no litter on the streets. In Leiden, the flower boxes along the canals were full and blooming, and after we took the twenty-minute train journey into Amsterdam, we were shocked to find identical flower boxes containing identical flowers - pink-purple and white. That is a level of synergy the UK cannot comprehend. Their museums were also foreign: an exhibition titled *Seduction* (followed by *Death*) at the Naturalis Biodiversity Center

included a minigame in which two space hoppers became sperm cells racing to fertilise the egg. Parents and children idled alongside corkscrew duck vaginas with gentle, unruffled curiosity. In Belgium, children explored the crumbling walls of the Gravensteen, a Medieval castle in Ghent that has totally disregarded the concept of the guard rail, without breaking their necks. How many safety emails would this spur in England? Perhaps they complain in Ghent too, I don't know. If they do, the Gravensteen has not listened.

For all its genitalia, the Naturalis Biodiversity Museum moved me more than I anticipated. The interconnectedness of the universe will do that to you! In the penultimate moment of the experience, you are asked to place your hand on a dark surface. A million pinpricks of light burst over your skin, flowing out from your fingertips over the wall in front of you, reconfiguring into a deer, a beetle, a mushroom, a star, and finally into the entire solar system. If you ever took the patronus quiz on Pottermore, it's a bit like that. The particles, the stuff of being, culminate in a

“

Confuse two things often enough and they collapse

'Seeing with the eyes of love': Sarah Allbrook and plein air painting

RYAN VOWLES

Why are Monet's paintings of his garden at Giverny so beautiful to us? Is it technical skill alone that makes Constable's pictures of Suffolk so powerful? These artists often worked outdoors, depicting landscapes to which they felt connected. When we see a painting of a familiar place, or a familiar object, a great painter makes us think, "I had never noticed how beautiful that street, those hills, that bridge could be." I believe the role of the artist is to remind us of beauty, not to create it, and that the quality of great landscape painting derives from the artist's connection to and love for the subject. As William Blake said, the artist should "see Heaven in a wild flower" and should teach us to see in the same way.

I recently had the pleasure of meeting the local artist Sarah Allbrook in her studio. Her paintings make immediate the beauty of this city, of the fens, the Cam, and the common greens. Allbrook works *en plein air*, which means to paint outdoors within the landscape. Pioneered by Constable, this method of landscape painting came to prominence with the invention of the sealed paint tube. For Allbrook, plein air is "trying to capture a fleeting moment, or a beautiful view [...] something that you think is worth recording." Her work is produced quickly, in direct response to nature, as she told me "the light you want to paint, the exciting light, is very short-lived." Just as Monet "desired to paint the air which surrounds the bridge, [...] the beauty of the air in which these objects are located," her approach is about atmosphere rather than form. This

method, as was practised by Sargent and Van Gogh, is about immediacy, direct response, and intense observation.

Plein air is also about connection to place. Speaking of clichéd subjects such as King's Chapel, Allbrook told me that she "didn't go to the University, and so feels they're a bit touristy, [she] doesn't have a connection with those places so much. [Her] connection with Cambridge is as a city, and especially the rivers and the green spaces." As art moved outdoors from the studio, so too did

“

Her approach is about atmosphere rather than form

the subjects of Western art shift from the Greek myths and royal portraits to the fields, cottages, and streets of Europe. Beauty, which according to Kathleen Raine is "the real aspect of things when seen aright and with the eyes of love," was found and portrayed in everyday places by those artists who inhabited and loved them.

Allbrook grew up in the countryside, and feels most connected to rural subjects. Trees and water give her "more freedom, whereas complicated architecture means you can't be as loose." Allbrook depicts the rural quality of Cambridge. For her, plein air is the most emotive form of landscape "because you're responding to the weather and the day and the scene and the people passing [...] On a relaxing day your painting is going to reflect that, but then on a cold and freezing winter day you're going to produce something different, maybe more rapid."

A quality of landscape, most famously exaggerated by Monet, is the uniqueness of each moment and the transience of light. In his words, "a landscape does not exist in its own right, since its appearance changes at every moment." In his 25 repeated depictions of his neighbour's hay-stacks, as in his 250 paintings of waterlilies, Monet described the

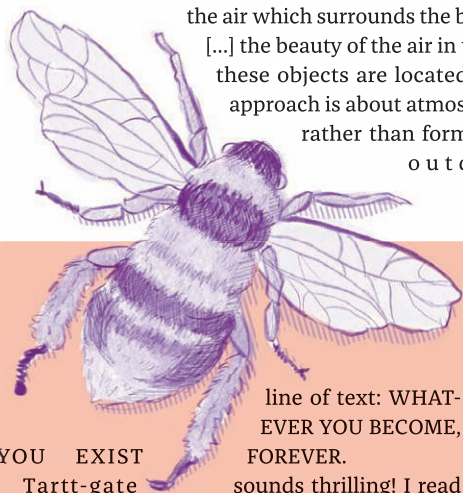
relationship between that which is constant - the objects and the earth - and that which is dynamic: light, air, and weather. This idea is essential, that the artist depicts the moment and not the place. "For the scenes that I might choose to go back on," says Allbrook, "it's because I've seen that scene on a different day and I've seen the way the light is."

Many of us will have cycled past Sarah Allbrook, or seen others out painting in the city. People often come up to her and comment "Did you do that just now?" "You must be very cold," and "That looks relaxing", which she has learnt to enjoy.

"It's not relaxing at all really," she told me. Instead, she paints for the satisfaction, and to appreciate nature.

"You appreciate the place more deeply; you notice subtle things. If I'm with someone who isn't an artist, they won't notice all the things that I'm noticing, and I might point out the colour in the sky or the light through the leaves, something that they would just walk past. Quite often, when people see me out there they stop and remark at my painting. They look at the view differently, it makes them *look* at the view." As is the role of the artist, Allbrook reminds us of beauty; sunlight dappled on Jesus Green, Magdalene lawn reflected in the Cam, and the yellow of a winter sky at dusk over the town. She feels

the purpose of her work is "to make people notice things and appreciate their surroundings." Likewise, Monet's connection to his garden, and Constable's to Suffolk, charged their work with a profound love of place. By intense observation, by noticing the play of light and nuance of colour, we can begin to see the world as the artists do. Plein air painting, for me, is about learning to see the world "aright and with the eyes of love" and teaching others to do the same.



line of text: WHAT-
EVER YOU BECOME,
FOREVER.

YOU EXIST
Tartt-gate sounds thrilling! I read
*The Secret His-
tory* during A-levels - I
understand it is our editor's favourite book - and
after your letter, I wish I'd listened along as well. I
enjoyed it on the whole, although Henry Winter is
the sort of character who should never cross my
path after a couple of J2Os. I remember my ani-
mosity surprised me because I can and have put
up with some literary rotters, including more than
a dozen murderers. What was it about Henry that
rankled? In the end, I believe he was incapable of
daftness. He was also unloyal and serious without
earnestness. That's three strikes. Only Julian was
worse - for being named Julian.

Or maybe I was merely bitter on behalf of the,
as you write, "nasal/asthmatic character, Bunny."

Last Easter, my childhood asthma returned in a
chest infection that choked me when I coughed.
When the choking didn't stop, my mother ordered
me to book a doctor's appointment, and after
several rapid proddings, I was forwarded to the
pharmacy to collect an inhaler in a paper bag. Tech-
nology has revolutionised since my day. Shaped
like an Actimel bottle, the new Turbohaler dumps
the pump for a twist-and-suck model, less tac-
tile but better at delivering more drugs into your
lungs. It worked. Moreover, my affliction gifted
me a community: since learning my friend is also
asthmatic, we have started referring to our lungs
as naughty but loveable children. When a wheeze
tears through our laughter, we exchange blushing,
conspiratorial smiles. "Oh, these lungs," I chuckle.
She places a hand on her chest. "I know," she mur-
murs. We understand each other.

I am struggling to think of a comparison with
asthma in literature, but the music video for Fon-
taines D.C.'s 'Starburster' features an inhaler and
a neon green shell suit. Gasps end-stop the lines
of the chorus, inhalations without release. Talking

to *Rolling Stone*, lead singer Grian Chatten said he
wrote the song "after a panic attack in a London
tube station." Joe, no offence to your city, but I can
empathise. My friend coughed up actual black goop
after his first ride on the Northern line.

How are you getting on with the John Ashberry
dissertation? How goes the Ashberry-ing? I look at
photographs of him and I imagine a blueberry - no,
a blackberry - and Wikipedia tells me the leaves of the
rowan tree are so repeatedly confused with the
ash, it also became known as the 'mountain-ash.'
Confuse two things often enough and they collapse.
The rowan tree's fruit is small and red, the real Ash-
berry. Are you reading anything special to open the
New Year? I wonder if you aimed to finish a book
right on the last day of 2024, or whether you took
the same read across the chronological threshold
with you. The first book of 2025 is portentous. I
have chosen *Despised and Rejected* by Rose Allatini.

Belatedly,
Eve



▲ RYAN VOWLES



A love letter to the girls

Dear the girls,

I'm ashamed to admit it, but I am a former 'pick-me' girl. Although I was a child, it's never too early, or late, to take accountability for our actions. I used to take pride in not being like other girls, and the most defining moment of this phase was in year three, when I did the unthinkable: I rejected One Direction. I insisted I wasn't like the other girls in my class, in that I like boybands and was therefore superior, noticeable even at the grand age of eight. How embarrassing! I used to play football (badly), rather than make up dances to the latest Little Mix song, because I wanted to stand out. Somehow, an eight-year-old clicked onto the fact that we 'needed' male validation and patriarchal approval. Thank fuck I changed.

There's no pinpointing when exactly this occurred. Perhaps more embarrassingly, there was a slight trace of 'pick-me' in sixth form, when I lacked the strong girl group everyone else seemed to be a part of. Groups that dated back to early primary or formed through the familial dynasties of Jesmond seemed impenetrable to the bursary kid, so I settled on the conclusion that maybe female friendships just weren't for me. How wrong I was!

Girls' schools aren't the right environment for everyone, even if their students tend to excel academically in comparison to mixed education. But it still didn't put me off from applying

to Medwards, which really taught me the magic of female friendships. Through the friendships with the women around me, I realised I was exactly like other girls. Though the bare-brick walls of Medwards dominate the living space, this greyscale does not reflect the vibrant atmosphere of communal kitchens and bedrooms with doors that are seemingly never locked. It doesn't matter what you need or want, living with women has shown me how selfless and kind friendships can be. Tampons, tops, condoms, and cooking utensils are circulated around in almost a barter-economy fashion; whatever you need, someone will have it and offer it without hesitation.

The most love I've felt has never come from a guy, or even my family: it's always been from my girls. The love you feel from your friends after a break-up far exceeds the love you ever felt in a relationship; I've never felt that way before.

because of how small the number on my jeans was, or because I skipped breakfast. In my friendships, I felt judged because of my poor life choices? Absolutely, but it's far more meaningful to be held accountable for your messy actions than for your friends to let harmful behaviour slide. Even if I'm self-flagellating over (often drunken) mistakes, they're the first to comfort me, see sense, and even find the funny side of matters.

I have never understood the type that women aren't funny. Men are as good at making women finish as they are at making them laugh. Giggles, hysterical tears, and witch cackles are all common

forms of laughter, sounds that echo through the shared kitchen at all hours of the day. It is the ability to discuss everything and anything. It doesn't matter if we've discussed the same situation 50 times or if we're disclosing new information, there's always something to say.



Only with the girls can you discuss Hinge dates, the social, economic, and political state of the world, and sex probably all in the same sentence. But comfortable silence is always a good marker of friendship; it's rarely awkward if you're good enough friends.

For the past two years, I've been far more excited about Galentine's traditions than Valentine's Day. This year is no exception. The love and adoration I have for my Medwards girls is something I'll hold close for years to come. With graduation suddenly seeming a lot closer than it's ever felt before, the best thing to come from Cambridge hasn't been the degree (sorry dear History Faculty), or the extracurriculars that take up space on my CV, it has really been the friends I've made along the way. I know how my friends take their coffee, their comfort meals, the first sign of them having a bad day, and what their go-to at the pub is. Though I am blessed in all the friendships I have, it's the Medwards girls of whom I am particularly fond. On that note, maybe I'll get the first round tonight.

Love,
Jess
xoxo

Changing our focus on vision boards

Nicole Banas argues that vision boards should not glamorise the goal, but help us to appreciate the process

In the liminal space between the end of the year and the start of the new one, social media is ablaze with one thing: the ‘new you’. An age-old partner to commodification culture, we are inundated with tips, tricks, and hacks to become smarter, slimmer, prettier, healthier, stronger, better. This year, however, I stumbled upon a new medium, shunning the ever-abandoned lists of resolutions. The vision board, introduced to me by a flood of aesthetically-pleasing TikToks, combines obsessive Pinterest usage with the theme of personal renewal through creative collage-making.

The urge to open Canva was too hard to resist. The vision board puts power in the creator’s hands; you select the exact image you’ll imitate, curate the aesthetics you’ll follow, crop, cut, and kill the aspects you dislike. It’s an empowering activity. Suddenly, my body, my personality, and my academics became putty in my hands, flexible and moldable into the exact shapes I wanted them to be. I could become *everything* and *anything* I wanted.

The art of visualising, or manifestation, is for some a useful



▶ EZRA IZER

tool for hope and self-growth. Nevertheless, I think that the attractive spell of the vision board and methods like it fail *because* of how alluring they are. The underlying force which attracts us to these visions undermines their actual

worth: the magic. “Magical thinking” is the belief that one’s thoughts or feelings by themselves can bring about real effects in the world. If I *will* it hard enough, I will arrive at what I want. The vision board displays what I desire, right in front of me. And it can too easily fall prey to staying just an illusory display.

I don’t believe this is the case for everyone. The discipline and work ethic of Cambridge student life certainly helps to embed a more work-oriented attitude. Even still, research shows that this method can be more harmful than motivating. In one study, researchers at the University of California asked one group of students to visualise themselves *getting* a great grade in an exam, and then asked another group to visualise themselves actually *studying* for an exam. The students who visualised themselves getting good grades scored

“

The vision board puts power in the creator’s hands

lower on the test than those who visualised themselves studying, who ultimately put more time into preparing for the test. There are multiple studies that show athletes, students, and musicians perform worse when they visualise success, instead of the actual steps to succeed.

This is because the endorphin rush of the vision board operates by presenting to you what you want as if you already have it. When you put a picture of the “glass skin” you crave on your vision board, your brain reacts as if it already exists, giving you a relaxation response. The power of ‘the vision,’ therefore, is not enough to make dreams turn into reality, and there are several pitfalls to it being used as a motivation technique.

It is also important to recognise that it is easier for certain people to imagine a perfect vision of their future self when not dragged down by present

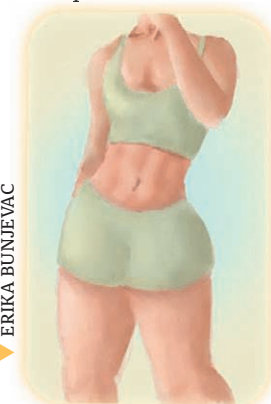
day struggles. Some of us can’t envision the ‘new me’ of next year when we’re worried about next week.

Ultimately, for manifestation and vision boarding to truly work, the visionary aspect is not the part to focus on.

Its magic is appealing because it does the job, but without effort from us; realities are harder. Transformation does not occur with a flick of the wrist, and some things will forever stubbornly remain out of our power. Focus instead on the processes, the



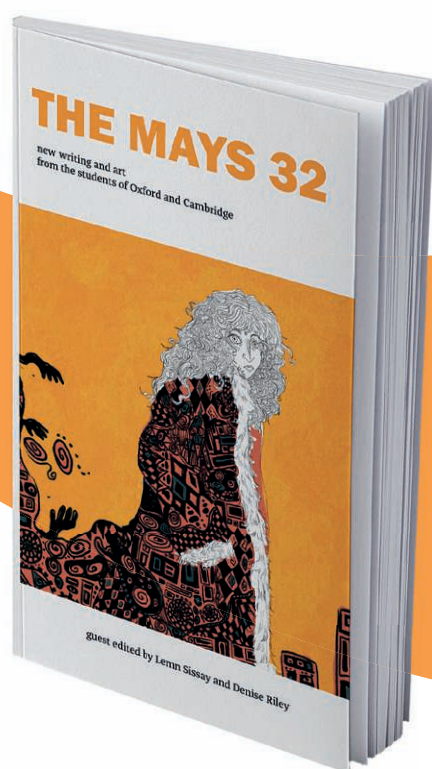
tangible actions you need to make in order to move towards a goal. Be motivated by the work you put into getting there. Be prepared to fail. Acknowledge that to get something, you may have to struggle. Only movement, not thinking, is capable of taking you to new places in the New Year.



▶ ERIKA BUNJEVAC

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Fashion

Behind the scenes at Cambridge University Charity Fashion Show

Grace Cobb talks to this year's creative team about themes, magazines, and appealing to Cambridge students

With so much fashion inspiration now fed to us via our screens, it's easy to forget how much the industry has been shaped by the force of the fashion magazine. Yet while most of us are no longer grabbing a copy of *Vogue* during our morning rush, this year's Cambridge University Charity Fashion Show (CUCFS) is determined to make us rethink our perceptions of the most famous publications worldwide. Inviting us to step into their pages to "rewrite the narrative" of *Vogue*, *GQ*, *Cosmos*, *Rolling Stone* and *National Geographic*, president Nathan Osareme Odiase and vice-president Samawia Asim promise to reframe how we read fashion history by taking us 'Beyond the Cover' with this year's theme.

At the concept's core is the hope that it will broaden the show's appeal beyond its obvious audience. "It relates to every student somehow," Samawia

tells me, as her friends studying Zoology PhDs have been excited for the *National Geographic* walk months in advance. Trawling through magazines to see how "they've impacted the way we view fashion," the music, makeup, and outfits for each walk are curated to incorporate this influence, from *Vogue*'s iconic '60s fits to the groundbreaking photography featured in *Cosmos* and *National Geographic*. "That's what CUCFS does, it brings to life the ideas and the publications that have shaped the way we perceive the world," Samwia declares - and while it will be "complex" to translate nature photography into a series of catwalk outfits, she assures me that they're up for the challenge.

For Nathan, this diversity of appeal is central to CUCFS' mission this year: "Fashion is about an exteriorisation of identity. And we want everyone who walks out on that day to feel like they have



seen themselves in one of the looks." His goal is to ensure that, irrespective of your "cultural or your personal interest, or gender, or your orientation, when you come for the show, you can feel very welcome." Samawia adds that this is where the "rewrite the narrative" motto comes in; their aim is to transform the rigid reputation of each publication into outfits which every student can relate to. This variety extends beyond its theme; Samawia reveals how their designs range from graduate projects to freshly curated pieces, showcasing designers from as far as Vietnam alongside featuring, closer to home, students from Durham, Anglia Ruskin, and Cambridge University.

While tackling the varied content of each publication presents a challenge - with copies of *Vogue* displaying everything from haute-couture to street style - Samawia promises that each magazine will serve as a creative springboard, rather than being flattened into a single stereotype. "People might think that *Rolling Stone* is just pop-culture punk, but it's more than that. We're bringing together different styles, and we're fitting it all into *Rolling Stone*." But while spotlighting some of the most well-known publications, the show still prioritises platforming small designers. "It's very important to showcase that these designers are emerging, and I think we want them to say that the charity fashion show in Cambridge was



Fashion

where they got their start,” Nathan tells me. The plan to launch a zine documenting the designers and their pieces provides another chance for their “professional and creative growth,” and an opportunity to contribute their own narrative to the long legacy of fashion publications.

This mission of connecting with a larger audience extends to the city itself. “Our main aim is not just to bring forward our pieces, but to bring forward the Cambridge culture, and the colleges, and the beautiful architecture that Cambridge has itself,” Samawia tells me. Aware that their audience stretches beyond the local area, with visitors from across the country attending the show, she acknowledges the responsibility they have as “the only Cambridge fashion show,” and plans to “maximise [...] the history that Cambridge provides us so easily.” Stressing that “the show is just beyond the day,” Nathan is looking far beyond 2025 in his vision for CUCFS. From pre-show shoots to backstage social media coverage, their promotion portfolio is designed to



History will be made when CUCFS’ models walk through the Union halls in March

“exude the elegance and class from the Cambridge community” to an international audience for years to come, constructing a legacy which the society can “as a foundation to build a stronger brand”.

As we turn to the charities CUCFS is collaborating with this year – BEAT, Pink Week, Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination, and Sew Positive – it’s clear that this brand remains rooted in the society’s core values. Nathan explains the need to choose charities “connected to a diverse range of key issues within the fashion industry,” from body image and breast cancer to creativity and sustainability. Supporting



BEAT for the second year running was a choice driven by a sense of “continuity and foundation” – and a homage to the previous President Jude, who was “incredibly passionate” about the cause. Nathan’s hope is to ensure everyone in CUCFS “feels like there’s a charity that speaks to them in one way or another.” Working with Pink Week has expanded the possibilities of collaboration beyond their expectations; several models “are also Pink Week reps,” Samawia reveals, “and they’ve done a lot of fundraising, and they’re really passionate about not just the theme, but the charity that they’re working towards.”

While Nathan has ticked off his goal of making CUCFS a constitutionally registered society and is already looking ahead to the legacy he’ll leave behind, the immediate task of pulling off this year’s show remains yet to be completed. It’s hard to not be overwhelmed by Samawia’s to-do list: “calling designers, arranging meetings with designers [...] and then sorting the Union, which is the venue where we’re doing the fashion show.” Yet she assures me it’s been well worth the hard work: “We’ve reached out to so many audiences [...] We have a huge team. We have everything in place. And I love being part of the society,” she grins, impressively confident about the position the committee are in as they creep closer to the date of the show. With Nathan in his fifth and final year, and Samawia halfway through a nine-month Master’s, they’re driven to make the most of their limited time to make an impact on the Cambridge fashion scene. The day of this year’s catwalk is yet to arrive, yet the people behind it are already thinking about its influence for years to come; and it’s this attitude that makes me believe them when they promise that “history will be made” when their models walk through the Union halls in March.

Fashion Shoot Coordinator: Holly Hardman

Photographers: Niamh Cafferty, Amika Piplapure, Joanne Yau

Models: Verity Arden, Alice Briscoe, Emma Dawes, Lili Fehertoi-Nagy, Alice Lashua, Lena Tybura, Valerie Zhan, Ayaan Mahmood, Boris Irish, Kareish Rajkanna, Stephen Fajemilusi, Edward Xu

Finding melody in monotony

Giulia Reche-Danese explores our modern relationship with music and how to cope with 'doomlistening'

Something terrible happened to me over the break – something that would end up having a radical impact on my everyday life. Possibly even my worst nightmare: I lost my headphones. And precisely because it seemed like such a big deal at first, it might have been for the better.

After the initial despair, and even anger, came the reflection. I realised I'd grown more and more dependent on them throughout my first term here, as a result of living alone for the first time. Nothing was forcing me to strike up a conversation while eating dinner alone in my room, and the few contact hours of my degree left me with whole days to fill with walks from library to library.

Thinking back, I should have realised something was off when I found myself grabbing my headphones for the ten-second commute from my room to the shared kitchen. But why? I wasn't hurting anyone, was I? So why did it feel terribly wrong?

The problem seems to have two layers. First, I was using music to keep my mind busy, as a way of numbing my thoughts. Secondly, since music had become a strategy for escaping my problems, I was treating it as a means rather than an end in itself. Such an act somehow seems a vulgar way to treat art; I wondered if using a song in this purely practical way, instead of appreciating the beauty that lies within it, is to desecrate it.

In other words, this mindless way of listening to music could be seen as both harmful to me and disrespectful to the music. According to Theodor Adorno's *On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening*, neither of these things were my fault; the true culprit is the music itself, or rather the world around us, which only seems able to pro-

duce music that has this effect on us. At the end of the day, if artists are creating by commission, rather than by vocation, it follows that music is a product and no longer a work of art. This explains why we engage with it as such and go even further than that, overlooking the value or significance of songs and using them as an escape.

So, is saying that we listen to music to cope with sadness merely an analogue for covering up the exhaustion of existing in a capitalist world? Adorno would say that light music "inhabits the pockets of silence that develop between people moulded by anxiety, work and undemanding docility [...] it is perceived purely as background." Definitely couldn't be me...

Although, after all, it's not unlikely that today's ever-duller reality generates a need for escapism, as our hectic train of life would deem the idea of listening to music while doing nothing else alarmingly unproductive. In that sense, music seems to

have become an extension of doomscrolling – a slightly less extreme version that is compatible with most of our daily activities and ensures that when we are able to break free from it, we never fully escape a numbing brain fog.

There seems to be something a little too easy about this depressing vision of the world. In other words, the fact that my angsty 14-year-old

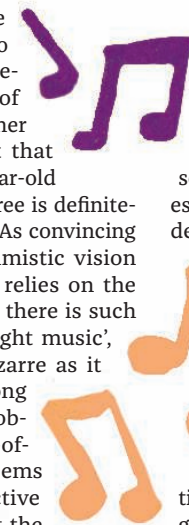
self would agree is definitely a red flag. As convincing as this pessimistic vision might be, it relies on the premise that there is such a thing as 'light music', which is bizarre as it implies a song has a fixed, objective, matter-of-fact value. It seems slightly reductive to factor out the subjective listening experience when assessing the value of a song. The context surrounding this experience is often what brings out its transcendental value.

Even the expression itself is problematic, im-

plying that certain kinds of music are 'heavier' than others, as if the artistic value and depth of some songs outweighed that of others. But doesn't meaning and artistic value lose all of its charm and mystery, arguably their very reason for existing, if we start thinking of them as quantifiable?

To challenge this even further, resorting to music as a coping mechanism because we struggle to deal with the dullness of the world around us certainly is a symptom of a strange reality. But that being said, it seems harsh to judge someone for seeking comfort in music in order to escape the negativity of their own thoughts. I can definitely think of worse ways to cope. Besides, isn't there a certain poetic beauty in the fact that what we resort to in order to survive such a daunting context is, ultimately, art?

I think we would be incredibly daft to consider all of today's music merely 'doomlistening,' as Adorno suggests, when there seems to lie such a profound healing power within it. Perhaps this relatively new way of listening to music in the background while doing other activities has allowed it to literally become our companion. Perhaps that is an even more beautiful way to engage with it. By relying on music in times of need, it is as if we've become friends with our comfort songs. So, let's not burn our headphones so soon. Despite the admittedly dystopic setting, there's something inherently fascinating about what they've allowed us to do: to engage with art so deeply that we are able to call it a friend with whom we can wile a w a y our day.



▶ GEMMA SWEENEY

Going to concerts solo, not alone

Kiran Davies argues the real joy of a concert is the friends we make along the way

It was 56 years ago in January that The Beatles played their final ever show. In the seven years prior, they revolutionised modern music and crafted a legacy which remains unrivalled to this day. One member, though, never stopped going – still playing live and pushing boundaries over half a century later.

Just three days before Paul McCartney took to the stage for his second night in Manchester, I decided to check Ticketmaster one more time, hoping to snag one of the tickets that had passed me by upon their original release. This time, however, unlike my previous attempts, I was shown a ticket immediately and bought it without hesitation – without any consideration for logistics, and without any texts to fellow fans of the Fab Four.

Taking to the stage without a support act, the octogenarian Beatle played a three-hour set spanning the entire length and breadth of his career. Fan favourites and deep cuts were scattered amongst his catalogue of smash hits, no song deserving of a hurried toilet break or to be spent queuing for a £9 Asahi. Even his slightly more marmite recent work prompted loving sing-alongs from the audience, who he held in the palm of his hand throughout. Beginning with 'Can't Buy Me Love' to a raucous reaction from the crowd, he played non-stop from then on – sometimes solo, sometimes with his band, and in one particular highlight, duetting with a virtual John Lennon. Turned away from the onlookers, it felt like the entire arena was intruding upon a private moment between the most influential partnership in modern music.

What made this such a special night wasn't just the fact I spent three hours in the company of a Beatle. It was going on my own. Until this last year, I'd always seen concerts as a primarily social event, and who we were seeing came second to the socialising that went before and after. My most treasured memories of most concerts are the drinks on the tram into Manchester, the post-gig burgers, and the shouted conversations between sets. However, having gone to a few concerts alone this year, my perspective has changed. Going solo opens the door to a wholly different experience, with the opportunity to meet people you'd normally pay little notice to.

Sat next to me to see Paul McCartney was Tony, an 80-year-old Beatles superfan, who, in the two hours before the lights dimmed and the show began, regaled me with his various encounters with The Beatles, from Paul singing 'Happy Birthday' to his mother-in-law, to visiting his gran who lived on Menlove Avenue, just doors down from John Lennon's childhood home. Singing and shadow drumming along to every song, Tony became a friend for the evening. Although it was his fourth time seeing McCartney (and having seen The Beatles in their pomp) his enthusiasm was undimmed, his excitement rivalling mine, a Beatles first-timer. It's these experiences that make concerts so special: thousands of people bound by one common love, nothing coming between themselves and the music. They manage to be both deeply individual pursuits and the most communal activities. No moment embodied this sentiment more than the rapturous response to the opening refrain of 'Hey Jude,' as the entire arena rose to their feet, all accompanying McCartney for a thousand different reasons, everyone connected to the song in their own unique way.

At any concert, football match, or theatre trip, you're bound to meet somebody whose passion for whatever you've found yourself watching is unparalleled, and will paint your experience in a different light, leaving you with a refreshed appreciation for shared experiences and their power. Although that may well be the last time I see a Beatle perform in the flesh, what I'll primarily take from that night is the importance – and the fun – of going solo.



▶ DAISY COOPER



Our Var-lentines playlist

Love is in the air – which means (for some people, at least) love songs must be on the aux as well. In the last-minute rush to buy chocolates, flowers, or something more imaginative, it's all too easy to forget the tunes you need to set the mood. Luckily, *Varsity* is here to rescue your day and keep you in the good books.

If it's joy you're after – the excitement of a new relationship – then give Frankie Valli's timeless 'Can't Take My Eyes Off You' a go, or perhaps Herb Alpert & The Tijuana Brass' 'This Guy's in Love with You'. Those big choruses are joined by the similarly punchy 'Stuck on the Puzzle' by Arctic Monkeys frontman Alex Turner.

Perhaps you're feeling a bit more reflective and want something low-key; if so, Paul McCartney's gentle and tender 'Calico Skies' might be more to your taste, along with Neil Young's brilliant 'Harvest Moon'. These warm songs are joined by the luxurious 'Misty Blue' by Dorothy Moore and Ella Fitzgerald's equally smooth 'My Funny Valentine'.

This is merely a snapshot of *Varsity*'s selection, and however your Valentine's Day may look, the *Varsity* music team has the perfect accompaniment with our 'Var-lentines' playlist.

You'll find it here:



Beast Games: A dystopic showcase of precarity

Ezra Izer confronts the ethical horrors of Mr Beast's scrollable television show

Returning home for vacation, I was greeted by a surreal carnival engineered by the viral content gods. My 12-year-old brother, remote in hand and entirely unfazed by my homecoming, had commandeered the television. Onscreen, contestants in identical tracksuits flung themselves through obstacle courses seemingly designed by unmedicated AI. The set sprawled in shiny, synthetic grandeur, underscored by a singular promise: \$5 million to whoever outlasted the gauntlet of ludicrous challenges. The appearance of my personal nemesis, Jimmy Donaldson, cemented my suspicions – it was *Beast Games*, in all its candy-coated glory. I sat down.

At first, it resembled the lovechild of *Total Wipeout* and something extraterrestrial, dipped in the claymation realm of *Mio Mao*. But, as I watched, the facade of parody dissolved, revealing a sincere artefact of our times. Wealth dangled as a golden carrot while contestants surrendered dignity, comfort, and reason. Bright colours and frenetic editing smoothed over the discomfort of watching people contort themselves – physically and emotionally – for survival. It wasn't satirical to its own excessiveness; it was an earnest reflection of a culture thriving on pageantry, where human strife is rendered in HD for the scrolling masses.

Beast Games, streaming on Amazon Prime Video, is the latest brainchild of MrBeast. The YouTuber-turned-ghost-kitchen-freighter-turned-media-mogul has made a fortune engineering virality: high-stakes challenges, ostentatious giveaways, and philanthropic stunts designed for maximum impact. With a record-shattering \$100 million budget, *Beast Games* takes his formula to its most bloated form yet: 1,000 contestants battling punishing trials for a chance at the jackpot, interspersed with shots of its ringleader atop piles of money with offensively white trainers.

If this premise feels familiar, it's because *Beast Games* debuted practically in lockstep with *Squid Game*'s much-anticipated second season, inviting comparisons that write themselves. Both shows

revolve around individuals driven to extremes by desperation, enduring horrors for a life-changing payout. But where *Squid Game* forces viewers to confront systemic inequalities, *Beast Games* bull-dozes past any commentative nuance. For all its grandiosity, it offers little beyond it. Watching them side by side feels like seeing clothes tailored for dystopian critique hanging limp on a hollow frame of corporate-sponsored celebration.

The show's challenges are staged with a pathological commitment to the dramatic. Contestants engage in tyrannical acts of self-preservation, ranging from competitive potato-sacking to hide-and-seek with Navy Seals, all to earn their lodgings in the elusive 'Beast City'. While these events appear seamless onscreen, contestants describe a messier reality: gruelling hours in extreme weather, little access to food or water, and injuries galore. More troubling are allegations of sexual harassment, now part of multiple lawsuits, which indicate *Beast Games*' ethos of life-changing "generational wealth" conceal something darker. Beneath its dazzling branding lies an industry that prioritises production over welfare.

The show's discomfort is heightened by its sponsorship from Mon-

eyLion, a fintech company notorious for payday loans and predatory lending. A series claiming to offer financial freedom, backed by a brand profiting from economic insecurity, feels less ironic than inevitable. This partnership encapsulates *Beast Games*' premise, commodifying the forces driving contestants to many a crying montage set to classical music. Unlike *Squid Game*, which critiques capitalist stratification, *Beast Games* cloaks its exploitative roots in compensatory optimism. Its glossy exterior demands audience complicity, encouraging uncritical cheering while glossing over the conditions enabling its production. The sponsorship doesn't undermine the show's message, it complements it, merging a neon lit colosseum with corporate opportunism. Together, they glorify the same mechanisms of division that contestants are desperate to escape.

And yet, for all its flaws, *Beast Games* is unshakably compelling. There's a primal thrill in watching people push limits, and the contestants – an odd mix of influenc-

ers, thrill-seekers, and financially strapped hopefuls – bring raw humanity to the chaos. Many seem acutely aware that even failure could lead to a win. Viral fame often trumps monetary reward today, and losing spectacularly might earn more followers than quietly succeeding. The show shamelessly feeds this logic, offering participants not just a chance at \$5 million but an invitation to become content themselves.

“

It resembled the lovechild of *Total Wipeout* and something extraterrestrial

Donaldson's career is one built on acts of generosity so large they verge on absurdity – donating cars, building homes, planting forests – but always with the caveat that each act serves as something worth clicking onto. Unlike *Survivor* or *The Amazing Race*, which framed competition within arcs of strategy or growth, Donaldson's games discard storytelling. Everything is framed through the motor of monetisation, optimised for overstimulated audiences, their attention bouncing from one aggrandised challenge to the next. The first episode was even removed from copyright to encourage co-streaming, amplifying its reach across platforms.

By the time my brother turned off the TV, leaving me to process the insanity I'd just witnessed, I couldn't decide whether I was captivated, unsettled, or resigned to both. *Beast Games* is, without question, a mirror to its era: enamoured with wealth, spectacle, and monetised desperation. It's dystopia masquerading as prime-time entertainment – repellent yet impossible to ignore.

For now, if only to keep an eye on Jimmy's whereabouts, I'll keep watching. Reluctantly, of course.



Global Frames: China

As we welcome in the Lunar New Year, and with it the promise of fresh beginnings and the celebration of rich traditions, it's the perfect time to explore some of the finest films from China. The nation's cinema is as vast and varied as the country itself, offering a captivating array of storytelling. From epic historical dramas to intimate depictions of family dynamics, the Chinese film industry has long been a cultural beacon. Here's a curated list of films that showcase the depth of Chinese filmmaking. Whether you're a cinephile or a newcomer to Chinese cinema, these films are a great place to start.

Raise the Red Lantern (1991)

Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern* is a visually stunning and emotionally charged exploration of power, tradition, and gender within a rigidly patriarchal society. Set in 1920s China, the film follows Songlian (Gong Li), a young woman who becomes the fourth wife of a wealthy and powerful man. The story unfolds as she navigates the intense competition and jealousy between the wives, each vying for the favour of their husband and privileges that come with it. The film's striking cinematography, especially its use of colour – like the red lanterns which symbolise each wife's position in the household – underscores the oppressiveness of the environment in which Songlian finds herself, and her descent into madness is both heartbreaking and chilling. *Raise the Red Lantern* received widespread critical

acclaim, winning the Silver Lion at Venice and an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language Film. It's a key work in China's Fifth Generation cinema, ranking on *The New York Times*'s 1,000 greatest films and the BBC's 100 best foreign language films. Directed by iconic director Zhang Yimou, it explores gender and societal issues and cements his reputation as a master filmmaker. While his later films like *Hero* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) are also powerhouses of Chinese cinema, *Red Lantern* remains one of his most intimate and profound works.

The Blue Kite (1993)

Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Blue Kite* is a politically daring film which takes viewers on a journey through the turbulent history of Maoist China. Told from the perspective of a young boy named Tietou, the film explores the personal impact of major political events, including the Chinese War, the Great Leap Forward (a social and economic social campaign), and the Cultural Revolution. Through the young boy's eyes, the film deftly weaves together the shifting political landscape and the havoc it wreaks on family. *The Blue Kite* was controversial for its unflinching

portrayal of the Cultural Revolution, so much so that it was originally banned in China upon release. Despite this, the film became a critical success on the international stage – selected at Cannes and Sundance Film Festivals. It serves as both a historical document and an exploration of human resilience in the face of adversity.

In the Mood for Love (2000)

Set against the vibrant yet melancholic backdrop of 1960s Hong Kong, Kar-wai's *In the Mood For Love* is a film that transcends time and place to capture the universal feeling of unspoken longing and missed opportunities. The film follows two neighbours, played by Tony Leung Chiu-wai and Maggie Cheung, who discover that their spouses are having an affair with each other. Over time, they form a deep, unspoken emotional bond, yet neither ever acts on their feelings as they struggle with both their own moral codes and the cultural expectations surrounding their behaviour. The film is an exquisite study of restraint, desire, and the passage of time, framed by some of the most beautiful cinematography ever put to film. Wong Kar-wai's signature style – non-linear storytelling, lush visuals, and a deeply atmospheric soundtrack – complements the film's exploration of the inner lives of its characters, creating an immersive and haunting experience. *In the Mood for Love* is a quintessential work in Hong Kong

cinema and, more broadly, in Chinese-language cinema. Its exploration of love and isolation resonated with global audiences and earned the film widespread acclaim, including Hong Kong Film Awards for both leading actors, cementing it as one of the most iconic films of the early 21st century.

A Touch of Sin (2013)

Jia Zhangke is widely regarded as one of China's most acclaimed filmmakers, known for his poignant, realist portrayals of contemporary Chinese society and his exploration of themes such as modernisation, social alienation, and the human cost of rapid change. *A Touch of Sin* follows four interconnected stories, each of which highlight deep inequality, corruption, and powerlessness. Each segment follows a character driven to violence by societal pressures: the first segment focuses on a migrant worker confronting police corruption, the next on a young woman in a mining town facing patriarchy and violence, then on a man seeking justice against a corrupt employer, and, finally, someone driven to violence by societal injustices. The film's style is marked by Jia Zhangke's signature realism, with long takes, deliberate pacing, and stark cinematography that emphasise the emotional distance and isolation of the characters. Together, the characters serve as a reflection of the frustration and isolation felt in a materialistic, modern society.

- MADDIE ROBERTSON

Theatre**Footlights out! Is Camdram fading?**

Reflecting on her Camdram experiences, **Millie Wooler** asks if the Cambridge theatre scene is all its cracked up to be...

Imagine this: It's 2013. You have just watched real children weep over the (feigned) death of a real kitten on stage. Now, flames lick the manger of the barn in which the majority of the play you have been watching is set. It's thrilling – remarkable. And the most impressive part? This whole play has been staged by Keighley Musical Theatre Company, an amateur dramatic group from West Yorkshire celebrating its centenary.

Whistle Down the Wind is perhaps not part of the classic line-up of musicals on your must-see list, but when performed properly, it astounds. Overshadowed by Andrew Lloyd Webber's more famous creations – *Cats*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Joseph and his Technicolour Dreamcoat*, just to name a handful – it is sadly only remembered as the play that gave Boyzone their number one hit 'No Matter What'. It is not as spectacular as *Joseph* – there is no great 'chandelier scene' as in *Phantom*, but its appeal lies in its depictions of the innocence of childhood faith. It is a simple play (comparatively), but one that resonates. Call me privileged to have seen something this good, but this production proved the power of amateur performance.

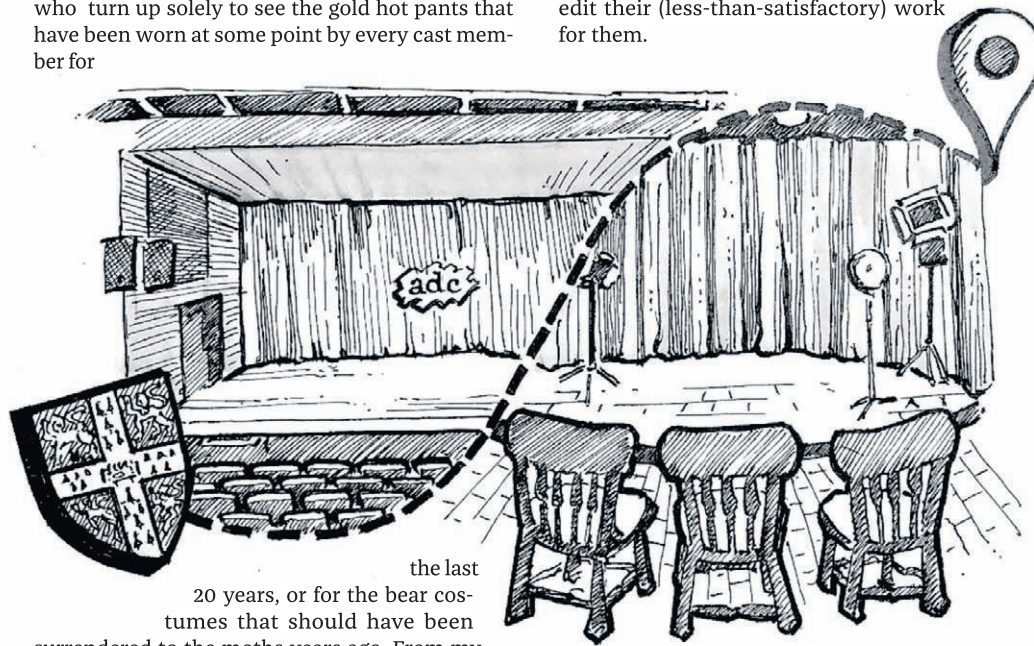
It feels futile to even attempt to list the number of actors who have passed through the ancient halls of Cambridge University. No-one could ever challenge the prestige of Ian McKellen, Emma Thompson, or similar A-list stars. Coming to Cambridge, I expected to be seeing the next McKellens on the stage before me. But, so far, I am yet to experience a performance that can challenge what I have seen in amateur productions across the country.

Student and amateur performances have their different strengths, as well as those which should be consistent across both. Cambridge's vibrant cultural atmosphere seems to allow for a flourishing of student-written drama and a demand for a wider variety of established plays, but casts often

seem to pale in comparison to the energy of similar amateur dramatists elsewhere.

One thing for which I must applaud Cambridge theatre is that it never falls back on the gimmick of being 'so bad it's good'. There are pantomimes across the country which subsist only on the audiences who turn up solely to see the gold hot pants that have been worn at some point by every cast member for

engaged the audience through a deeply ingrained passion for the subject matter. This was not a play about just anything that might pull an audience: it has a message. I myself have had to work with several less than exemplary scripts written by directors who rely upon their casts to edit their (less-than-satisfactory) work for them.



the last 20 years, or for the bear costumes that should have been surrendered to the moths years ago. From my experience, when student theatre goes for comedy, the audience is usually laughing in the right places.

Furthermore, student-written scripts can be infinitely superior to several of the director-written scripts that I have encountered in certain amateur dramatic productions. For example, *Negotiating With the Dead* showed keen potential in its playwright Amie Brian. Certainly, the play was original and

Cambridge theatre is also significantly more ambitious than local productions tend to be. In the interest of ensuring an audience, the same plays tend to crop up again and again. *Whistle Down the Wind* has been performed in at least Keighley, Cleckheaton, Harrogate, and Whitby, and is set to return to Todmorden later this year – five revivals in the last 12 years between

North and West Yorkshire alone. Even professional theatres tend to stick to the same shows – *Blood Brothers* crops up like clockwork at the Alhambra in Bradford.

Cambridge students seem to seek a bit more variety. Perhaps it is the relative cheapness of the tickets that encourages us to try something new, but directors seem to be rather braver in selecting their material. Last term's *Intruder / Home*, two masterpieces of Belgian symbolism, absolutely stunned with their unsettling, eerie atmosphere. But, more than anything, their appeal was in their freshness.

However, all of this holds less importance when considering standout performances from actors. I'm not here to criticise the actors of Cambridge theatre: there are some assured talents who will always appear and please. But as an organism, the casts can be somewhat patchy. Two or three actors – and not necessarily the main ones – can steal a show and carry it along. In contrast, the 2023 Shipley Little Theatre's production of *Billy Liar* was blessed by a cast of spare-time actors who took on the challenge of a play with such an iconic film version with commendable precision.

We may blame the Cambridge workload for performances which aren't as fully fleshed out as they had the potential to be, the short terms for the lack of time to construct deeper camaraderie between cast members, but that simultaneously denies the pressures on other amateur actors. Amateur productions are often the second concern of those involved, after work or education, but they offer an outlet to escape from the everyday that is vital to the wellbeing of actors, crews and audiences alike.

We can never demand perfection from live theatre – professional or amateur. But when small-town productions are convincing, can't we expect something even more from an institution with such a renowned theatre scene?

Top tips for student writers

Struggling with playwright's block? Fear not, **Josh Pritchard** is here to save the day

Consider the last time you felt inspired to write something creative. Then, try to remember what prompted this feeling. It might have been an image, a concept, or question; many writers refer to this as 'the first spark' of their creative process.

What's often neglected, however, is how as soon as this initial 'spark' appears, it quickly vanishes of its own accord. Having worked with many student playwrights, and been lucky enough to have written a few plays of my own, I've found this unfortunate experience to be some-

what universal: one writer I worked with broke down in tears because nothing was coming to mind after three and a half hours of rigorous brainstorming. Creative stagnation can, of course, arise from a variety of issues – burnout and stress among them – but there are still plenty of ways to combat it. Here are a few of my recommendations below.

Firstly, you've got to establish your creative foundation. The 'first spark' for one of my plays stemmed from watching Bill Nighy's excellent performance in David Hare's *Skylight*. The condescension of the successful, miserly senior towards his former partner Kyra seemed like a great template to explore other forms of patronisation between loved ones. What if the two characters were, instead of lovers, a parent and child? Immediately, a scene sprung to my head: a celebrity father realises his daughter has gone off the rails at her university – after he has just praised her relentlessly on a talk show.

This worked well as a basis, not only because it provided plenty of real life examples to draw upon, but it was also potent enough to generate ideas about the play's wider narrative and characters. It also was a good starting block to return to in the event where I overwrought my thinking, reached a dead end and

had to start all over again – which did end up happening. Repeatedly. Watching a variety of art, both theatrical and otherwise, will always help generate ideas; the trick is to interrogate the idea until you come across a sediment that you find dramatically interesting. In other words, it's a game of trial and error.

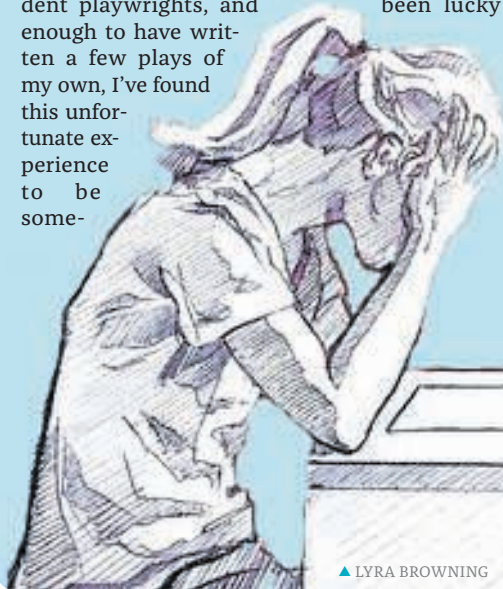
“**The unfortunate truth is that making art is always going to be messy**”

If you want to try a more structured approach, though, there are some exercises you can try. A favourite of mine is 'character interrogation'. Start by compiling a list of random personal questions (lists are available online!), then answer them how you think a particular character would. Nothing is set in stone, but as a great teacher of mine once said: "No writing is wasted writing." Speaking of which, try 'freewriting'. It's nice and simple: write down your first spark, and then keep writing for five to ten minutes, without removing your pen from the page. The two possible outcomes are either (1) you end up with something hilariously nonsensical, or (2) you might just come up with something that's

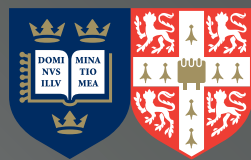
useful and actually makes sense! Either way, you haven't wasted your time.

Another way to expand upon an idea is by plain and simple eavesdropping – or, as my primary school teacher called it, 'magpie-ing.' When you're in a public space, try to listen out for a line or interaction that sparks your interest, and note down anything unusual or unexpected. It doesn't even have to be someone else's conversation – my first play, called *One Man Duet*, had a scene that basically transcribed a conversation I'd had in class once. There is quite literally an entire genre of performance called 'verbatim theatre'. Regardless of what genre you're writing in, though, audiences recognise and appreciate authentic dialogue, and it gives you a collection of fun, out-of-context quotes that can immediately become fodder for banter.

I should note that everyone's creative process is, fundamentally, different. What works for me isn't necessarily going to work for you. I know some writers who rarely struggle with creative stagnation, and others who produce so many ideas they can't choose which one to pursue. The unfortunate truth is that making art is always going to be messy. If all else fails, reach out. There are plenty of excellent writers' groups in Cambridge, but if that's a bit scary just ask friends what they think, and trust that whatever inspired you will inspire them too. Trust in your process, and if this project doesn't work, don't worry – eventually, one will.



▲ LYRA BROWNING



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Theatre

CUMTS: 24 hours in the ADC!

Chloe Chapman-Deas spends a whirlwind day with the high-flying Cambridge Musical Theatre Society

After scrolling through Camdram vacancies mindlessly during the New Year, hoping by some miracle I would stumble across an action-packed, semi-professional, but low-commitment opening, I managed to find *The 24 Hour Musical*, run by the Cambridge Musical Theatre Society (CUMTS). All the hard work that would normally eat up months of time, squished effectively into a short 24 hours – right before term starts! It was a perfect opportunity to finally get involved with the theatre scene but still maintain plausible deniability that my work would get done. I quickly and eagerly sent off my self-tape to the creative team behind the show.

Upon arriving at the ADC Theatre, I somehow managed to find my way to the bar after being horrifically lost on how to enter the building. I was quickly directed to my designated group for the project consisting of other performers, a director, composer, and writer. Suddenly I found myself, amongst crowds of unfamiliar, lively theatre kids raising their ‘ya ya yas’. Unlike how many may assume, the musical does *not* last the whole 24 hours. However, each group was tasked with writing and performing one musical number in accordance with a given theme – each of which would be ordered logically by the creative team towards the end of the project. This year’s theme was revealed dramatically after a hasty drumroll ... airports!

Immediately, my group buckled down and attacked this strategically. By strategically, I mean we frantically shouted every possible idea that came to

“ I found myself among crowds of unfamiliar, lively theatre kids

mind – our poor lyricist and composer scribbled in panic trying to note down anything of substance. In passing the time and attempting to have some semblance of a conversation, I mentioned my tendency to slip into accents. Somehow, we ended up with the concept of a group of travellers ending up in the wrong airport, in the wrong country – attempting to reach Austria, they find themselves in Australia. Due to my regretful demonstration of an Australian accent, definitely leaving something to be desired, my role was the outlier: an Australian superfan that had somehow tricked the group into arriving at the wrong destination for the purpose of tourism. Certainly not something you see everyday. Finally, the time came for the actors and directors to sleep, all while our composers and writers stayed up to hauntingly late hours of the night, attempting to mould our ridiculous ideas into somewhat plausible stories that were short enough, and entertaining enough, for one musical number.

The next day was unsurprisingly an absolute blur. I forgot that just because the workload of the musical had been significantly decreased, the anxiety and fear of forgetting lines and doing a

step wrong is also horrifically condensed to a concerning magnitude. Our team did an amazing job with the production of the song though: beautiful harmonies and melodies seemed to magically appear in a Google Drive at 9am. This, along with a written apology for what we were about to endure while learning this kooky song. This is not to mention the challenge of blocking. Our director, having heard the song at the same time as us, wracked her brain the best she could to really bring to life the chaos of the piece, all while we attempted to learn at least the basic tune of our solo lines. There was definitely an abundance going on at once, and I’m sure the theatre could have been described as a bee hive for the entirety of the day – the tunes of contrasting and varying numbers melded in the air and crowded corridors. Towards the end of the rehearsal period, we gathered at the stage to learn the lines, as well as the melody and blocking of the opening and closing numbers. The essay was looking really good right about then.

Arriving for the real show, after a shocking tech run where everything that could have possibly gone wrong, went wrong, I dressed as Australian as I could possibly achieve – a beige cowboy hat. Backstage, huddled in one quaint dressing room, we performed pre-show warmups that definitely broke the sound barriers of something somewhere, and would send shivers down any introvert’s spine. This however did nothing for my nerves. My words, melodies, and choreography had disappeared completely from my mind with panic, and all I could seem to do was

mumble to myself frantically in a terrible Australian accent backstage. This definitely affected the number, as we jumbled around each other while attempting to reach some clarity of where we were in the music for the entirety. At least we remembered the absurd and slightly unsettling humanoid-plane choreography in the closing number. It was certainly a bumpy ride, but thank god we landed safely.



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Cambridge Football Club and University: United in Endeavour?

Joss Heddle-Bacon speaks to Cambridge United CEO Alex Tunbridge



Three kilometres of physical distance separate the city centre from the Cledara Abbey Stadium, but you could be forgiven for feeling they were worlds apart. Long gone are the dreaming spires, the gaggles of selfie-snapping tourists, and verdant collegiate lawns. Situated next to a retail park, Cambridge United's endearingly ramshackle home lies in the city's most deprived ward, where life expectancy for a male is a staggering eleven years lower than in Cambridge's more privileged areas.

“It's about having a mindset that it's one city

Despite the apparent polarities between the cosy privilege of the University and the Abbey Ward, or world leading academia and League One football, the University of Cambridge and the city's premier sports team stand increasingly united. In October 2023, the two institutions announced a strategic partnership, and as Cambridge United CEO Alex Tunbridge is keen to tell me: “The football club is really invested into engaging with the University, engaging with its colleges.” His words certainly don't ring hollow either, with students being privy to a plethora of opportunities since the joint endeavour was agreed; whether it's engaging with four eminent voices on the writing of football through the ongoing Footnotes series, or volunteering with the Cambridge United Foundation, whose sports-based community and inequality initiatives reach over 10,000 local people. This March, the Cle-

dara Abbey Stadium will once again play host to the focal point of the light blues' footballing calendar, offering players the thrill of competing in an elite setting, after over 2,000 students attended last year's Varsity fixture.

The partnership's fruitful beginnings defy the insular yet deeply rooted notion of a 'town and gown' divide in Cambridge. Although the purported rift has historical precedent in football, thanks to an infamous 16th century fracas during a 'town versus gown' match which took a bloody twist, Cambridge United's CEO was unequivocal that he sees no such division. “I think it's about having a mindset that it's one city,” said Tunbridge, adding, “Our perspective in the last few years has been that we've got some fantastic institutions in the city. Let's go and open our doors. Let's create these partnerships.” Perhaps those whose mentalities remain within the narrow confines of the University bubble could take wisdom from the football club's refreshingly open outlook, encapsulated by the top brass's unwavering principle that, “We say to all of our players and staff [...] there are all different sides to the city. Go and experience all of it [...] because it's what makes the city so special.”

With Cambridge United currently undergoing a brand overhaul, the University's place within the club's identity has, quite literally, come to the fore. Over the summer of 2024, the club held a wide-reaching consultation over its image, toying between three alternatives for their would-be crest - including a 'book and ball' design. Cambridge University has left a defining mark upon various arenas, and sport is no exception. In Alex's words, “[The book and ball identity] is a reference to the rules of association football being formed by Cambridge students.” Ultimately, the design lost out to its rivals, however the 'book and ball' will form one of the club's eight sub-identities, alongside the academia-inspired 'bookmark.’

While the University's looming shad-

“We see students as a key demographic

ow must undoubtedly pose challenges for the city's other institutions at times, its scholarly excellence has undoubtedly imbued the Cambridge name with international prestige. Wrexham FC may have their Hollywood sparkle, but few other League One clubs can boast of a name that commands attention in overseas markets like Cambridge does. As Alex tells me, “It's certainly been within our thoughts as we've gone through the re-brand process. Definitely. I think you will see us be more targeted towards international audiences once we've rebranded.”

The beating heart of the beautiful game will forever be its fans, so it's unsurprising that one of the strategic partnership's core missions was for Cambridge United to tap into the city's considerable student population. “We see students as a key demographic,” Alex acknowledged, stating, “We're trying to be adaptive and create an experience that suits students.” Currently, the club targets Tuesday fixtures, marketed as a 10-pound-a-ticket student night, to engage a group that often finds itself both time and cash-poor.

Aspirations aside, reaching the city's university demographic isn't without its obstacles. Unlike Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge University has notoriously short terms, and students' itinerant nature leaves Alex to concede, “It can provide challenges. It's different to lots of other university towns, most certainly.”

Student attitudes towards the football club also appear to be lagging behind. A football supporter's group is conspicuously absent from the University's glut of societies. Even institutions with elitist reputations such as Durham, or academic stalwarts like Bath and Warwick, have societies that cheer on local sides, many of whom dwell in the doldrums of the sixth tier. Additionally, in a recent survey of Cambridge University students, less than 25% of respondents affirmed a “medium” or “strong” attachment to the city's football club, while the majority felt “very little to no attachment.” A mere 19% knew the division Cambridge United play in and the manager's name.

There is still a way to go for students to wholeheartedly embrace Cambridge United - but with the club's open-armed attitude, alongside the fruits already born out of the University's relationship with the football team, you can see why Alex is confident of “a really bright future ahead for both the organizations.”



Barney Blackburn talks to Women's Race Captain, Sannah Zaman

Why cycling?

I love being outdoors, and cycling is a sport where you can snack throughout training, which is an added bonus! Road racing is super exciting, and I get to travel to lots of different countries which is always an incredible experience.

What does being Women's Race Captain involve?

I'm mostly in charge of BUCS and Varsity races - selecting teams, organising travel and logistics, as well as convincing people to sign up for hill climbs in the cold and rain! I love being at competitions with CUCC as everyone keeps morale super high, and we get to celebrate each other's successes.

How did last term go for the club, and yourself as an individual?

We had a successful Michaelmas with podium finishes in both I was happy with my second place at BUCS Hill Climb but definitely a little bittersweet being just 0.5 seconds behind the winner.

Do you have any pre-race superstitions?

I always add a big spoonful of Nutella into my oats, and consume a lot of jelly babies, before a competition. It's definitely not the healthiest but I like to believe it makes me go faster! Also, the aero socks go on hours before the race so that I'm in the racing mindset.

Where do you tend to cycle when you are away from Cambridge?

Kent! The best place to train, though I might be biased. There are plenty of climbs, and it's very scenic.

How do you manage to balance your elite sports performance with a Cambridge workload?

I keep training volume very low

during term to avoid getting burnt out. Less is more! I find I don't have time to recover if I try to increase the hours while I have a big workload. At university, I mostly stick to short interval sessions and the gym, and then I make use of our long holidays to get endurance hours in.

Where is the coolest place you've cycled?

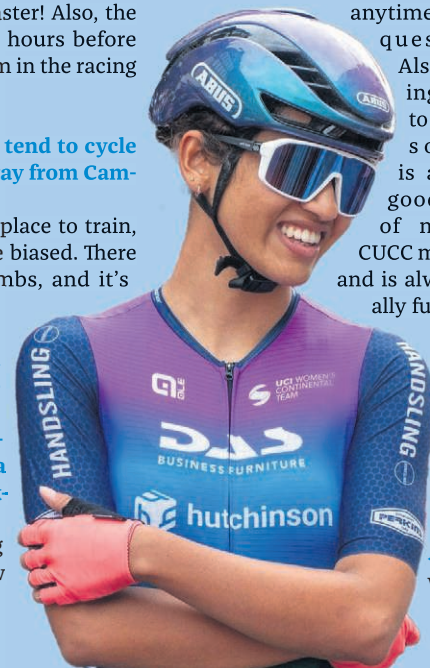
One would be Poland where I did an international stage race with my external team; it was really beautiful and the stages were point-to-point, so we got to see a lot of the Polish countryside. The world tour race I did last year in the west of France was also very memorable. The atmosphere was insane, and the crowds were huge!

What are your predictions for the rest of the season?

Hopefully, we will have some more CUCC wins and podiums! We have a lot of strong time trialists so I believe we can get some good results at these events.

How can those interested in doing more cycling at Cambridge get involved with the club?

Join our club rides on the weekend! There are rides for a range of speeds and distances, so there is something for all abilities. There are also women-only rides run weekly by our lovely women's officer. The committee are all super friendly, so you can email or message us anytime to ask questions. Also, coming along to the club socials is a really good way of meeting CUCC members and is always really fun.



◀ CAVAN WALKER

Sport

Captain's Corner

pg. 31



United in more than name?

pg. 31



BRISTOL COMEBACK

CRUSHES BLUES



CAMBRIDGE 2

BRISTOL 3

▲ LI XIAN-CHOONG

Barney Blackburn Sports Editor

Despite building a deserved 2-1 lead over an accomplished Bristol University side, Cambridge's late collapse last Wednesday saw them crash out of the National Trophy. After Deniz Ozer's strike put the Blues in front midway through the second half, Cambridge failed to hold on to their lead, squandering two goals to Bristol in lightning fashion and succumbing to a heartbreaking 3-2 loss.

Cambridge will certainly feel hard done by looking at the final score, as throughout the second period they frequently threatened to add to their one goal lead. The combination game between Ozer, striker Cai La Trobe-Roberts, and substitute Asa Campbell was constantly probing, yet a brief lapse in concentration - where the Blues allowed two big Bristol chances in the space of just as many minutes - would ultimately seal their fate.

The first 45 were a fairly tentative affair. La Trobe-Roberts' opening goal, a jabbed finish into the top right, was quickly cancelled out by a Bristol re-tort lashed past Aram Sarkissian's out-

stretched gloves. With the score level at 1-1 for the majority of the first half, Bristol was too often afforded space in the final third, with the visitors entering the break, the side was more likely to push for victory.

In the first period, Cambridge lacked complete self-assurance on the ball, characterised by instances of defensive miscommunication at the back. Goalkeeper Sarkissian handled Bristol's attacks with aplomb, however, while a backline featuring Oliver Johnson, Patrick Brownlow, Josh Hickingbotham, and Tristan Martin grew into the game, ensuring that Bristol were only ever privy to half chances when they surged forwards. Brownlow, commanding in the challenge and imperious in the air, stood out until the final whistle.

The first half culminated with an improved final five minutes from the home team, highlighted by the Blues producing a flurry of gilt-edged chances. Josiah Riley, subbed off at half-time, was instrumental in feeding Cambridge's nippy right winger Aaron Kay, who was unfortunate to see two of his chances saved in a matter of minutes by the away side's goalkeeper just before the interval.

Whether it was bustling midfielder Jesse Tapnack's introduction at the break, or a rousing team talk from coach Tom Blatch, Cambridge began to demonstrate more confidence on the ball in the second 45. La Trobe-Roberts proved to be a constant thorn in Bristol's side, combining acceleration and hold-up play that tested the Bristol backline. Campbell's introduction, replacing the tricky Aaron Mehmood, added a fresh dynamic to Cambridge's versatile attack. The Midlands Tier 1 joint top scorer was a workhorse both up and down the line and provided an accomplished assist to Ozer as Cambridge regained the lead. Ozer's magnificent touch past a Bristol defender and placed effort into the bottom left corner gave Cambridge a well deserved advantage.

After a nerve-wracking start to the second half, Ozer's finessed finish released the shackles from Blatch's side. The swagger the squad gained was evident, with players such as Johnson and Tapnack demonstrating their technical acumen on the ball. Another swerving yet saved effort from Ozer was topped minutes later by a thunderous strike from captain Reece Linney, who un-

leashed the ball from distance, heeding shouts of 'shoot' from the sidelines only to see his missile shatter off the crossbar and awkwardly bounce down onto the goalmouth.

Cambridge's sideline contingent protested that the ball had crossed the line, but their grievances would be amplified when just minutes later they found their side inexplicably down 3-2. With the sound of Linney's bullet still echoing around Queens' pitches, Bristol's number eight was afforded ample time on the ball on the edge of the Cambridge box, and obliged by stroking home a surprise leveler past Sarkissian. As if lulled to sleep, Cambridge then failed to clear the ball effectively soon after the restart, gifting Bristol a glancing header from a looping cross. With the ball in Sarkissian's net once again, Bristol were up 3-2, and the Blues were stunned.

Momentum is often pivotal in sport, and this sudden pendulum swing demonstrated an unexpected turnaround in Bristol's fortunes. Blatch swiftly called his players in for an emergency huddle before the restart, emphasising the energy and drive that the Blues would require if they wanted to. As Cambridge had dem-

onstrated earlier, Bristol soon reaped the mental rewards that arrive with taking a lead in football, as they unearthed the composure to ping the ball around with confidence, playing keep-ball from an increasingly anxious Cambridge side.

With not long left, Blatch sent on Harry Antill to partner La Trobe-Roberts up top, the number nine immediately making his presence known by winning headers, something the Blues had consistently struggled with against a bulkier Bristol side. The above headline was very nearly rewritten after goalkeeper Sarkissian, of all people, saw his headed effort denied from a last-ditch Cambridge corner, but the final whistle that followed cemented what would be a brutal loss for Cambridge.

The loss means that Cambridge can now focus their attention on the league, with games against Loughborough's second and then third team up next for the Light Blues. The Bristol squad, undoubtedly accompanied on their drive home by a wry smile, will move on to play Cardiff University in the Trophy's quarter final stage as they aim to reach the semi finals for the second time in three years.