



Varsity

No.933
Friday 7th March 2025
varsity.co.uk

The Independent
Student Newspaper since 1947

Sophie Denny
Editor-in-Chief

The University's General Board has decided not to pause admissions to its Veterinary Medicine course after students, staff, and trade unions staged a rally outside Senate House to 'Save the Vet School' on Tuesday (04/03).

The General Board decided to continue admitting vet students for the 2027/28 academic year, despite the course's accreditation being at risk after it failed to meet 50 out of 77 of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' (RCVS) standards.

The decision was reached in a General Board meeting on Wednesday afternoon (05/03). Professor Paul Freeman, Principal Clinical Neurologist at the Department of Veterinary Medicine, told *Varsity* that "On the face of it that is very good news."

However, he explained that he "would like to see more detail of what the General Board has actually said. What staff at QVSH [The Queen's Veterinary School Hospital] really need to hear is that the University is willing to support the continued teaching of veterinary students through a high quality research based referral hospital, and that this is a realistic possibility here at Cambridge."

"Without that assurance the uncertainty remains for many staff at the hospital following the interim report to the General Board in November. I am however at least confident we will regain full accreditation from the RCVS in September following this decision given the work being undertaken at the QVSH," he continued.

The RCVS graded the course with "conditional accreditation" in November 2024, with the course running the risk of losing its accreditation entirely unless the Department improves by the RCVS's next visit in September 2025.

As a result, students in the middle of their degrees face the possibility of being transferred to other universities or alternative private clinical providers to see out their clinical studies.

Sarah Murphy and Emily Moon, co-presidents of the Cambridge University Veterinary Society (CUVS), told *Varsity*: "We are really pleased about yesterday's decision not to pause admissions for the veterinary course and hope the Univer-



sity's future decisions continue in the same spirit of supporting the Vet School. The only way to go forth is as a united front, not least with the Royal College accreditation visit incoming in September."

They expressed their appreciation for "the ongoing support and dedication of the Vet School staff," alongside the campaign organisers "whose efforts have been invaluable and are clearly reflected

in the outcome". They also noted that they "appreciate the support from the BVA [British Veterinary Association] and feel reassured by their recent statement".

A spokesperson for the University said: "We can confirm that admissions to Veterinary Medicine for 2026 entry will proceed as planned. The University

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Selwyn formal hit with plant-based protest

Students disrupted a formal hall

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How big is the Cambridge bubble?

Varsity investigates how cantabs view their city

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V Lent, Week 7

Editorial

Cambridge is at a crossroads. Financial stresses, changing landscapes, and uncertain political futures leave our historic institution with question marks hanging over its future. In a time of such uncertainty, it is encouraging to see Veterinary Medicine students fighting for their futures (front page) after institutional neglect from the University. Student campaigns are often the driver of change, be it for better living conditions (pg.3) or environmental policies (pg.5); it is encouraging to see that this tradition is alive and well in Cambridge.

Across the University, students and staff alike are taking up the task of bringing Cambridge into the modern day. Efforts to make our faculties more diverse (pg.14) stand to enrich our education as students, and cheaper May Ball alternatives (pg.12) make sure that the best bits of this University can be accessible to all. Cambridge is a place that should offer the opportunity for artistry from all angles, with explorations of mental health on stage (pg.28) building a more tolerant and inclusive environment which will help the artistic talent

housed here flourish.

As we approach International Women's Day, it is important to reflect on how women's position in Cambridge – and the wider world – has changed in recent years alongside the institution's modernisation, charting the misogyny they have overcome (pg.18) and the differing ways to engage in modern-day feminism (pg.12). Championing the efforts of women in Cambridge, such as student singer-songwriters (pg.26) remains an important way to ensure that women's contribution to our community is not forgotten.

The period of flux experienced across the University is accompanied by a time of changing seasons, with warmer weather ushering in a welcome break from

the 'bleak midwinter' (pg.23). Yet as the seasons roll on, for some students this means their time at Cambridge is coming to a close. Amid the tumultuous emotions of third year (pg.22), it's important to soak in every last ounce of the 'Cambridge experience'. Be it exploring alternative stagings of Shakespeare on stage (pg.30), the University's vibrant art exhibition scene (pg.21), or inclusive sports societies (pg.31), Cambridge offers us the ability to engage in a multitude of activities which will soon disappear post-graduation.

While making this newspaper, we've been

greeted by warmer days each morning, melting away any seasonal gloom. With the end of term now very much in sight, we're reminded that it can help to sit outside, take a break, and soak in the relaxing sunshine. While exams may be looming in the distance, it's important to treasure the little moments of bliss this often manic University offers us.



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

Chapel challenge

In response to 'How to breathe new life into Cambridge's chapels' (19/02/2025)

Dear Varsity,

Your article distorts the purpose of college chapels. Chapels aim to bring the college together, but only for the corporate offering of Divine Service. They have and can be used for secular activities or for interfaith activity, but any non-Christian use is and must remain secondary and ancillary to the raison d'être of a college chapel, which is to worship the Christian God.

Jeffrey Fong
Girton, Alumnus

Lecture love

In response to 'Is attending your lectures really worth it?' (26/02/2025)

Dear Varsity,

Regarding English lectures: perhaps because the article refers to Trinity and John's students (a rare sight in lectures; maybe they have additional support with reading or more guidance in supervisions?), the writer is under the illusion that all Englings find lectures unnecessary. Lectures are often helpful and stimulating in giving me essay

inspiration, as I'm sure other regular attendees find. The decentralised system does sometimes make lectures infuriating when they're on last week's essay topic, but surely attending lectures to add to your supervision reading will only boost your understanding of texts and contexts for exams/dissertations?

Amy Richardson
Lucy Cavendish, English

Lecture Lamentation

In response to 'Is attending your lectures really worth it?' (26/02/2025)

Dear Varsity,

All those years ago, I remember most lecturers being boring and the efficacy and efficiency of the lecture very low in contributing to my academic development.

It was far more effective to read lectures which had been written down.

The most effective way of learning for me was in small seminars with a subject specialist in which we could learn and discuss latest developments in our chosen field and read and discuss people's essays on the subjects they had chosen in agreement with the teacher.

I learnt a lot by researching and col-

lecting material in my essays and then receiving friendly criticism and comment on them from fellow students and staff who I respected.

In retirement I have derived great benefit from "virtual" attendance at online lectures and zoom meetings of particular relevance, put out to the public on YouTube and Zoom from reputable Universities and by, for example, "The Cathedral Theology Network" organised by Chichester Cathedral.

Seminars, not lectures, any day!

Timothy Jackson
University of Southampton graduate

Architectural digest

In response to 'Cambridge's ivory towers and great gates' (21/02/2025)

Dear Varsity,

I feel like the article really falls flat in what exactly it's trying to argue – the tagline is that the writer is discussing that "Cambridge's ancient architecture can feel like it would rather keep some students out than let them in," but her consensus is the opposite. She successfully explores the paradox between old and new in a polarising space where we would rather keep the status quo than change. But she does very little

to explore the negative impacts of this "town and gown divide" riddled in our architecture. The article was well written but misses the mark.

Niamh Cafferty
Clare, Law

Ode to Ovid

In response to 'Why we should teach Latin in state schools' (27/02/2025)

Dear Varsity,

I was lucky enough to study Latin at my comprehensive school. This had three advantages, in my view: 1) You learn about grammar, which helps with studying any language. 2) The vocabulary provides a guide to the meaning of many words in modern English and, of course, the Romance languages. 3) If mastered, it gives access to ancient, medieval and other writing in the original text. These days, though, we must also consider the added benefit of learning something about Ancient Roman history. For example, Donald Trump's rise to power and governing style vs. those of Julius Caesar.

Janet Lesley
Alumna

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

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Uni criticised over lack of ‘reasonable processes’

Continued from front page

recognises the progress being made by the department on its accreditation plan.”

The General Board gave the Veterinary Department “around four weeks” to outline a plan to address accreditation concerns in November 2024, which the Department is now raising as a matter of concern to the University’s Council.

A Notice submitted by 86 members of Regent House on 4 March questioned “reasonable processes” within the University regarding the length of time it has taken for the General Board’s Veterinary School Review Group to produce a report following its

ment in May 2023.

The Notice asked whether it was “reasonable for the General Board to ask the Department to develop an alternative option for clinical course delivery within four weeks when its own Review Group has, so far, taken over 20 months to report”.

The Department’s report was expected to include “external assurance by early March 2025 that there was no likelihood of a terminal accreditation decision following the RCVS visit in September 2025, and that all RCVS recommendations could be appropriately addressed.”

Yet the recent Notice questioned why the General Board asked “for an external assurance of accreditation from the Department, when that is in essence an impossible condition”.

tion to meet six months before the RCVS return visit”.

The BVA has also called for an “urgent meeting” with the University over the Vet School’s future, noting the “crucial role” that the Cambridge Vet School plays in “producing a healthy pipeline” of veterinary professionals.

Dr. Elizabeth Mullineaux, president of the BVA stated: “The ongoing uncertainty around the future of Cambridge will be hugely concerning for students, alumni and staff, as well as the wider veterinary profession.”

Responding to the General Board’s decision not to pause admissions, representatives from Unite the Union told *Varsity*: “It is a welcoming indication that the threat of closure is averted for the time being. It is an initial win for the staff and students who came together to challenge University management’s threats to the future of their jobs and education.”

In a joint statement, the Students’ Union undergraduate president Sarah Anderson and the access, education, and participation officer Katie Clarke said: “We were delighted to support the General Board’s decision not to pause VetMed admissions for 2027. We’ve heard repeatedly from stu-

dents about the value of the vet course at this University, and how demoralising a pause could have been to the brilliant staff who have already been working so hard to address the concerns of the RCVS.”

“This decision shows real confidence in the Department, its staff, and its students, and demonstrates that by working together, students can make their voices heard at the highest levels of the University. Our thanks again to everyone who signed the open letter and attended the rallies on Tuesday and Wednesday,” they continued.

Last week, multiple trade unions issued an open letter urging the University “not to pause Undergraduate admissions” and to focus on “financial investment in facilities and staffing”. The letter suggested that “the University’s lack of clear communication [...] has left many students concerned about the implications for their future employability”.

According to the letter, the potential actions of transferring students to another institution for their clinical years, fulfilling teaching requirements through partnerships with external “private sector” providers, or closing admissions to the Veterinary Medicine course to new entrants from 2026 “put over 160 jobs at risk, creating tremendous stress for staff and extreme anxiety for hundreds of current and future students”.

While admissions will no longer be paused, concerns remain about the Department’s future longevity, with repre-

sentatives from Unite the Union telling *Varsity* that “the threat of privatisation and outsourcing still looms over the staff,” explaining that “there is more work to do in response to the RCVS’s recommendation”.

At the rally on Tuesday, one staff member told *Varsity* that an assessment conducted by the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE), who also accredited the University’s vet course last week revealed a “stark” contrast between that report, and the RCVS’s.

This separate report recognised the improvements that have already been made and “commended” the Vet School on “many of the things that were not really understood by the RCVS recently”.

This comes after suggestions that the University is prioritising “profit-seeking” over education, with a joint statement released by the trade unions University of Cambridge Unite the Union, Unison University of Cambridge, and University of Cambridge UCU stating: “Any University aiming to provide academic excellence should never be organised around profit-seeking principles, especially related to the privatisation of teaching provision through outsourcing to external providers.”

In November, it was revealed that the Veterinary Medicine course is running at an unsustainable “recurrent deficit of more than £1M” amid a projected overall deficit of £53 million for the University in 2023/4.



▲ EVE MCEWEN

Caius students threaten legal action over ‘uninhabitable’ accommodation

Anuk Weerawardana

Senior News Editor

Students of Gonville and Caius College have threatened legal action after a roof caved in on the G & H St Michael’s accommodation site.

Following a series of concerns over construction work occurring on the accommodation block, students have addressed an open letter to the College calling their living conditions “uninhabitable, unsafe, and entirely unsuitable for study or daily life”.

The open letter has made a series of demands, including but not limited to: demanding that the College take action to suspend the building works until welfare protections are in place, requesting additional rent reductions that reflect the “months of disruption,” and complying with the Equality Act 2010 by offering reasonable adjustments for disabled students affected by the noise and disruption.

The letter makes note that if the College fails to respond within seven working days, or if an adequate resolution is not reached, the matter will be taken to the University’s central administration, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, and external legal representation.

“The College is at serious risk of legal liability and reputational damage if it does not take swift and meaningful action,” the letter reads.

Construction work on the site began in August last year when the College was given a government grant to install Air



Source Heat Pumps (ASHPs) as part of a decarbonisation project.

The project involved building a scaffold tower as a safety precaution before re-roofing G & H St Michael’s and placing architectural screening around the ASHPs.

According to an email sent by the College’s accommodation manager, the works affected students in a total of 21 rooms.

The students in these rooms were initially offered a 10% rent reduction to compensate for any disturbances and contractors were instructed to limit their working hours to 9am to 5pm on weekdays, excluding Easter term where no construction would take place.

In November (18/11), work began on

the scaffolding tower with plans to begin the re-roofing process in January this year.

However, a series of issues occurred between these dates. Two days after the confirmation of the scaffolding plans (20/11), an email was sent to students explaining the shower on the ground floor of the accommodation block had been disabled, with water pouring into the walkway below the building.

Students were then told via email that the water supply to G & H St Michael’s would be cut off for a period of five days, from 16 December to 20 December. Tenants were also instructed to “move rooms” for a temporary period of time.

One student at Caius told *Varsity*: “I have been consistently disappointed

with Caius’ accommodation – the extreme yearly rent increases do not reflect the standards that they uphold, and unfortunately, this new development is not surprising.”

Re-roofing work officially commenced on 10 February, with the College’s accommodation manager stating that “work will not start before 9am and will be over by 3:30pm each day”.

However, *Varsity* understands that work on the project started before the allocated time of 9am. One student complained to the College that “The level of noise was significant, as if the project was taking place within my room itself.”

They added: “Given that we were not informed about this project before balloting for our rooms, I think it is especially unfair for the work to begin outside the agreed hours, as this only compounds disruption.”

The letter addressed to College also makes note of the noise, claiming that recorded levels were “consistently between 95-105 decibels, far exceeding the safe exposure limit of 80-85 decibels”.

Following this complaint, the College’s accommodation manager admitted that “The level of noise was far beyond that which we had anticipated,” noting that the “initial work exposed a concrete roof structure which had not previously been apparent”.

The College followed by requesting the contractor to cease work until 17 February. In an email to Gonville and Caius’ JCR housing officer, the College said: “This innovative project requires a level of disruption and the work to

the roof needs to continue to avoid any potential effect on your exam preparations.”

“We apologise for the disruption you have experienced and will continue to incur,” it continued.

The College then offered affected students a rent rebate for the remainder of Lent Term from 17 Feb to 23 March. But, in the letter addressed to the College, students stated that the rent rebate for the period of construction “does not negate the months of severe disruption and unlivable conditions that students have been subjected to”.

It added: “A financial concession does not compensate for the psychological, academic, and physical toll of being subjected to relentless noise, structural damage, and an unsafe living environment, nor does it absolve the College of its responsibility to provide accommodation that is fit for purpose.”

Following the offer of a rent rebate, a section of the ceiling of G & H St Michael’s caved in, with another hole appearing in a student’s room. *Varsity* understands that both holes have since been fixed.

A Gonville & Caius College spokesperson said: “We have apologised to the affected students and, in mitigation, given a full rent rebate for five weeks of Lent Term or offered alternative accommodation. We have also instructed contractors to work during reduced day-time hours as far as is feasibly possible. Affected students are encouraged to speak to their Tutor, the Senior Tutor or the Domestic Bursar about their concerns.”

News

Pro-Palestine student groups attack 'punitive security culture' of counter-terrorist committee

Felix Armstrong
Associate Editor

Pro-Palestine students have claimed that Cambridge deploys a "punitive security culture" in response to protest, amid rising numbers of investigations by the University's counter-terrorism and freedom of speech committee.

Cambridge for Palestine (C4P) claims that the increase in cases considered by this Committee correlates with a spike in pro-Palestine protest at the University which began last year.

Cambridge's Committee on Prevent and Freedom of Speech is charged with ensuring that the University meets its "obligations" to the Prevent counter-terrorism scheme and the higher education freedom of speech act.

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

In the last academic year, 2023/24, eight cases were considered by the Committee, according to a *Varsity* freedom of information request. The Committee had made eight investigations in total across the four academic years prior. One of these cases, made in 2021/22, was escalated to the Prevent scheme.

C4P told *Varsity* that the Committee's investigations "fit into a broader pattern of policing and weaponisation of bureau-

cracy against pro-Palestine organising."

The increase in cases considered by the Committee "correlates with increasing student mobilisation for Palestinian liberation and aligns directly with the punitive security culture the University has been cultivating as a response to this," the group said.

At the beginning of the 2023/24 academic year, multiple large demonstrations were held in Cambridge in protest against the University's response to the October 7 attacks. Later in the year, C4P established a pro-Palestine encampment on King's Parade, calling on the University to cut ties with Israel.

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The amount of cases considered by the Cambridge Committee on Prevent in 2023/24

In the four years prior to 2023/24, the Committee had investigated seven students and one member of staff, according to a freedom of information request. In 2023/24, the Committee considered the cases of two students, one staff member, and five events.

C4P also criticised the wider use of the Prevent scheme, which they said "upholds a racist security culture that targets people of colour, working class, and primarily Muslim communities,



▲ AMI KHAWAJA

manufacturing a pretext for policing and censorship, often disproportionately around Palestine."

In November, students tabled a Student Union motion claiming that the University's adoption of Prevent "restricts" free speech and the right to protest.

Members of Cambridge's Amnesty International society claimed that the scheme "prevents freedom of assembly, acts as a tool of student surveillance, and unfairly targets Muslim demographics."

Cambridge SU's BME officer Maroof Rafique, who supported the campaign against Prevent, told *Varsity*: "Prevent has long been criticised for disproportionately targeting racialised and Muslim students, fostering a climate of surveillance and suspicion rather than safety and support."

"There must be full transparency regarding the referrals [to the committee], with clear assurances that the University is not using Prevent to suppress legitimate free expression, including advocacy for Palestinian rights. We stand firmly against any attempts to criminalise peaceful protest or student activism," he said.

Last month, *The Guardian* reported that UK universities were encouraged to adopt "heavy handed" US-style security measures in response to pro-Palestine protests.

Up to 113 students and staff have faced disciplinary investigation due to their involvement in such protests across at least 28 UK universities, according to freedom of information requests by Liberty Investigates and Sky News.

Also in February, Cambridge applied for a legal injunction to prevent pro-Pal-

estine protesters from demonstrating on key University sites. A High Court judge granted the University a short-term injunction to cover last weekend's graduation ceremonies, but rejected the University's request for a five-year order.

Ahead of the judgement Gina Romero, the UN's special rapporteur on freedom of association and peaceful assembly, wrote to vice-chancellor Prentice, urging her to abandon the injunction.

The planned five-year measure "violates the principle of nondiscrimination and content neutrality that are part of the international standards for the protection of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association," Romero wrote.

A spokesperson for the University said: "It is wrong and misleading to claim that these figures indicate a 'punitive security culture' at the University. They are in fact evidence of the opposite. The Referral Group of the Committee on Prevent and Freedom of Speech considers all concerns brought to its attention by students and staff."

"In the past five years only one concern has resulted in the referral of an individual to Prevent and no events have been cancelled or refused on Prevent-related grounds. The University is fully committed to freedom of speech and the right to protest within the law," they continued.



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Students stage plant-based protest at Selwyn formal



FARON SMITH

Charlie Rowan
Deputy News Editor

A group of student activists interrupted a Selwyn College formal dinner on Tuesday night (04/03), urging the College to make a transition towards “sustainable plant-based catering”.

Students, in association with Plant-Based Cambridge, dropped a banner in the centre of the traditional formal hall with the words “meat + dairy = climate crisis,” all written in capital letters.

Addressing the dinner guests, one activist said: “Selwyn College is ranked the lowest [Cambridge] college in sustainability by the Climate League of Oxford and Cambridge and have not engaged in university sustainable catering guidelines.”

“We’re here demanding that Selwyn

and other colleges increase their proportion of plant-based catering in order to address the climate and nature crises,” they continued.

Another campaigner said: “The University and its colleges are failing the planet, failing their students and failing the community. In this year’s ranking by the Climate League of Oxford and Cambridge, not a single college scored more than 50%, with Selwyn coming last at 6.9%.”

“Students, particularly in Selwyn, are calling on the colleges to practice what they teach. They need to step up, they need to own up to their failings, step up to take effective environmental action, and build a just future for all,” they added.

According to Plant-Based Cambridge, Selwyn is one of only a handful of col-

leges not to have signed up to CamEATS ZERO, the University’s sustainable food initiative launched in 2024 to “increase the proportion of plant-based meals” served in colleges.

This college-focused initiative came after the Cambridge Students’ Union (SU) voted to support 100% plant-based catering in the University Catering Services cafes in 2023.

After ranking bottom of the Climate League of Oxford and Cambridge in October, the College bashed the table as “complete nonsense,” claiming that it was “one of the pioneers of divestment from fossil fuels”.

Not all cases of student activism at formal halls have been in favour of plant-based food. In November, one student at a strictly all-vegan formal at Trinity College arrived prepared with an entire pack of cocktail sausages. He proceeded to pour sausages into his vegan main and made a speech about “wokeness,” telling the other guests he was taking a stand for the right to eat what he pleases.

This protest is the latest in a series of climate-related demonstrations in Cambridge. In November, protesters from Extinction Rebellion and the Organisation for Radical Cambridge Activists (ORCA) gathered outside Senate House to protest against oil company SLB’s connections to the University.

Selwyn College was contacted for comment.

Eddie’s splurged £106k converting student accom into Master’s VIP suite

Hugh Jones
Senior News Editor

St Edmund’s College spent £106,000 on the conversion of Benet House, which used to house student accommodation, into lodgings for the master and spaces for the College to host VIPs.

The money for the development was raised from donations “for improvements to the College estate and improving the student experience provision,” according to St Edmund’s accounts.

Before the development, Benet House contained seven student bedrooms, a number of offices, and the College’s SCR. It now contains the master’s accommodation and office, as well as three hospitality rooms and two VIP guest rooms, which are intended for development activities, *Varsity* understands.

According to a video posted on the College’s YouTube channel, the development office is responsible for alumni relations and fundraising.

The College’s total donation income in the last financial year was £543 000, almost 20% of which went on the Benet House project.

The loss of seven student rooms to the development has been offset by the College’s recovery of the two bedroom flat which previously served as the master’s accommodation.

St Edmund’s has previously come un-

der fire for prioritising corporate guests over students, after medics were moved out of their rooms during exams to house conference attendees in 2023.

The College justified the move by claiming the costs of their “services and infrastructure” often exceed their income. They went on to state that to maintain a “sustainable budget,” it had to use accommodation over the summer to generate income.

This decision was slammed by medicine students at the time, with one claiming that this impacted their “ability to study and stress levels” during exams.

The College also reclaimed 44 rooms which it had previously sublet to Darwin College, and 72 rooms from Lucy Cavendish College.

A spokesperson for St Edmund’s College said: “The College receives philanthropic donations for a range of projects and initiatives including estate development. The redevelopment of Benet House was paid for in part by restricted donations from the College’s Estate Development Fund and pre-existing maintenance budget.”

“Benet House provides essential accommodation for the Master and new rooms for development activities. This development was timed to coincide with over 100 new bedrooms becoming available to St Edmund’s students,” they continued.

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Summer Intern 2024



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News

Espress-no! Harvey's at risk of closure

The coffee house's expenses have become unsustainable, according to a statement by campaigners

Lili Fairclough

Deputy News Editor

Harvey's Coffee House has launched a campaign to remain open, after high rent rates left the café in peril. In a post shared on Harvey's Instagram account on Sunday (02/03), it was announced that the café may close its doors at the end of the 2024-5 academic year.

The post said that the café had become financially unsustainable, citing rising costs and urged students to "Help us save Harvey's coffee house".

They pointed to the rent of the site as the most significant cause of financial concern, indicating that they would not be able to survive without lower rent.

It also mentioned the cost of wages as a source of financial stress, saying that all employees are paid a minimum of £18 per hour.

The shop prides itself on sourcing all of its goods locally in order to support businesses in the region.

The café opened in 2022 on the Harvey Court site for Gonville and Caius College. It was announced as a major win for Caius students, who have been campaigning for an undergraduate



▲ FARIS QURESHI

café for years.

The coffee house has been incredibly popular for Caians and other students alike, with its location at Sidgwick making it a popular haunt for many humanities students. In a recent *Varsity* article, it was ranked as the best option for a Sidgwick lunch, scoring 9/10 from the reviewer.

One student told *Varsity* that: "The café has completely revitalised the space and I think it's a really incredible café. It's my favourite café in Cambridge. I will always go there when I'm in Cambridge over the holidays. During my intermission year, I wielded my Harvey's tote bag with big pride." "As quite an anxious person. It's al-

ways really lovely going in there and being able to speak to everyone. It's a really comfortable space, to take a break from the library or to sit and study with a damn good coffee." they continued.

The post garnered lots of attention from students, with non-Caius societies such as Newnham Psychology Society posting the graphic on their stories.

The decision to potentially close the coffee house has been criticised by Caius students, with one saying that "I'm annoyed at the College that they would up the rent because they know as well as we do that that space would just be left empty without the café."

"I think the College benefits a lot from it because they can use as an example to prospective students of how fun and how nice the College is," they continued.

Another student, who describes themselves as a Harvey's lover, stated: "This is devastating news. With the downfall of Harvey's would come the downfall of Sidgwick Site. Harvey's has remained my go-to procrastination station since first year.

"I am not sure how I, or my degree,

will ever recover from this painful loss," they continued.

The post has now been removed from the Coffee House's Instagram page. However, hours before the post went down, the group also uploaded a statement on their story thanking students for an "outpouring of support" for the institution.

This news comes after Caius was also criticised over its treatment of a separate tenant, Wilfred's sweet shop, last year.

The shop was shut down recently, after Wilfred's did not exercise their right to renew the lease.

This decision was disputed by the owner of the shop, who claimed that he "sent impassioned pleas to both the bursar and the Master of the college to reopen negotiations".

At the time a Caius spokesperson noted that "the tenant had a statutory right to a new lease but did not exercise it. We hope Wilfred's finds alternative premises."

A spokesperson for Gonville & Caius College said: "We do not comment on commercial relationships. Harvey's Coffee House is valued by the College and wider community."

Robinson May Ball rejects hundreds of workers for more 'inclusive' event

Elizabeth Bratton

Deputy News Editor

Robinson May Ball's committee has rejected hundreds of worker applications after announcing that the event would go ahead as a "mega bop" instead of a full May Ball.

An email sent to over 400 rejected applicants on Tuesday (04/03) stated that, as a result of the May Ball committee's decision to proceed with a "more inclusive and accessible event than previous years," the May Ball committee had decided "against taking on the same quantity of staff as previous years".

Applicants were told that the committee "sadly [had] no option" but to not take their applications further, with the committee signing off: "With deep regret".

The application process consisted of a Google Form contain-

ing questions such as "Why do you want to work for Robinson 2025?", "Please list any relevant previous experiences relevant to your chosen role," and "What skills or qualities do you have that will make you a good fit for this role?". Students were also asked whether they were planning or hoping to work at any other May balls.

According to the May Ball job descriptions, half-on/half-off workers were to pay a refundable deposit of £120.

Set-up and clear-up workers were to be paid between £11.50 and £13.00 depending on their age, while all senior positions were to be paid £14.00 an hour.

The news comes after Downing May Ball revealed in an Instagram post on Monday (03/03) that Robinson students would be able to access discounted tickets at £196, which is the same price for non-Downing students and their guests.

The caption read:

"We're happy to announce that we're doing a REDUCED ticket price for Robinson [s]tudents! There are a limited number of these tickets available, so snap them up before they go." As of Wednesday (05/03), there were still tickets available for Robinson students wanting to attend the Downing May Ball.

Robinson announced last week that its May Ball would be replaced by a less expensive mega bop. Robinson students were informed of this change after applications for student workers had already opened, a launch party had taken place, and after the 'Film Noir' theme had been revealed.

There had been significant speculation that the Robinson May Ball was encountering significant financial challenges, with last year's committee reportedly working with a reduced budget.

Robinson May Ball Committee was contacted for comment

Uni splashed over £12 million on journal subscriptions

Charlie Rowan

Deputy News Editor

Cambridge University has spent more than most UK universities on academic journal subscriptions over the past four financial years, according to Freedom of Information requests.

Between 2019/20 and 2022/23, the University paid £12.6M to seven major commercial publishers: Elsevier, Wiley, Taylor & Francis, Springer, Sage, Oxford University Press (OUP), and Cambridge University Press (CUP). This was the highest expenditure among 21 UK universities that provided data.

Cambridge's spending was more than seven times that of Oxford (£1.77M) and remained well above Leeds (£8.99M) and Manchester (£8.6M), the next highest-spending institutions.

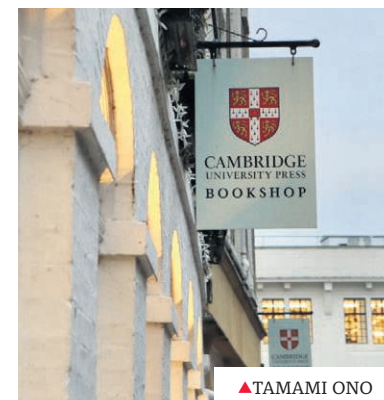
Despite the London School of Economics (LSE) being the highest-ranked university in recent rankings, it recorded the twentieth-highest expenditure at £1,215,946.

Unlike some other universities in the dataset, Cambridge's figures include non-journal-related payments to these publishers. However, its journal expenditure remains substantial.

The largest share of Cambridge's spending went to Elsevier (£3.86M), followed closely by its own publishing subsidiary, CUP, at £3.85M.

Elsevier has faced criticism for its high subscription costs, with institutions such as the University of California and MIT cutting ties over pricing disputes.

CUP is a constituent part of the University, acting as a non-school institution, and is governed by a syndicate of 18 senior members of the University of



▲ TAMAMI ONO

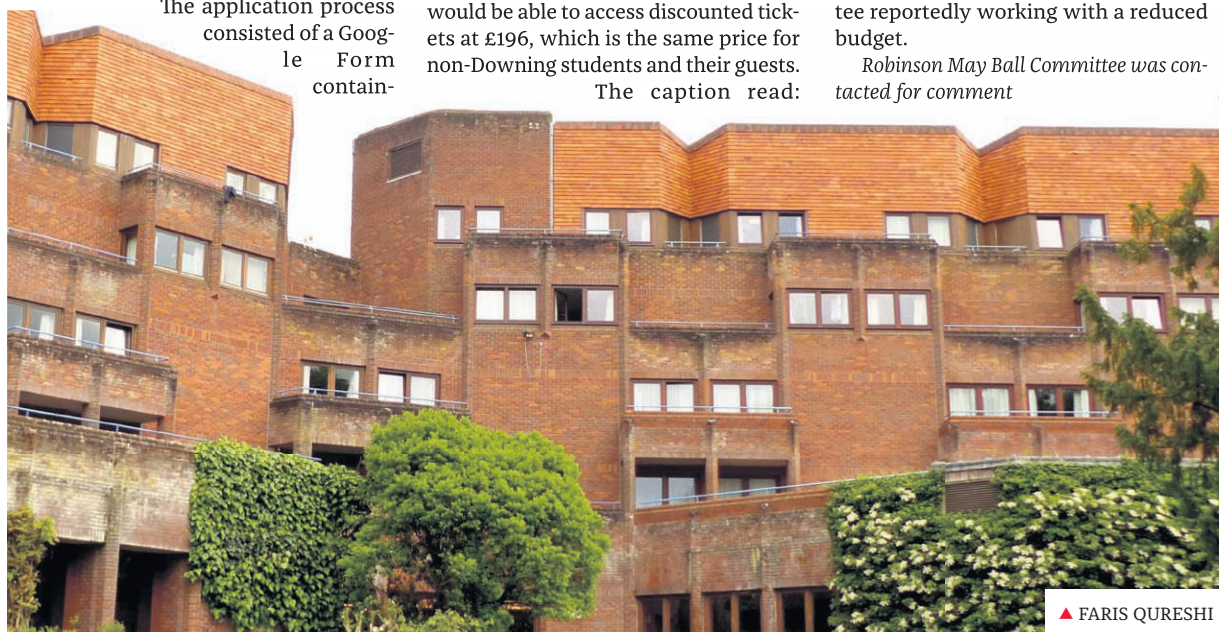
Cambridge.

This comes at a time of financial strain for the University. In October, Cambridge's Board of Scrutiny projected a £53M deficit for 2023/24, citing a "lack of budgetary control". That said, the University's journal-related expenditure declined in 2023, the most recent recorded year, to £2.08M from £4.15M the previous year.

The high costs of academic publishing have been a growing point of contention within the sector. Some major publishers have recorded profit margins of up to 40%, prompting criticism from some groups of academics who have argued they are "bleeding universities dry."

In 2020, over 2,500 UK university staff called for an investigation into the pricing of academic e-books, describing the situation as a "scandal".

In response, the push for open-access publishing has gained traction. Initiatives such as the Open Library of Humanities, founded in 2015, have sought to provide "diamond open access" journals, which eliminate costs for both readers and authors.



▲ FARIS QURESHI

Students and activists clash with Cambs MP over arms exports

Wilf Vall

Editor-in-Chief

Local activists and students clashed with Cambridge's MP over UK arms exports during a meeting with Cambridge Stop The War (CSTW).

The group had previously launched an open letter campaign calling on Daniel Zeichner to "address the genocide in Gaza" including the UK government's role in "perpetuating these atrocities". Following this campaign, the MP agreed to meet with the CSTW to discuss their concerns.

The letter was signed by multiple groups in Cambridge, including Cambridge University Palestine Solidarity Society, Cambridge University Islamic Society, and Downing Islamic Society.

During the meeting the group criticised Zeichner for a lack of action over arms exports to Israel, stating that he, along with Westminster as a whole, had been "debating things over and over again, but no hard actions".

The meeting then ended abruptly, with the MP signalling that the call had gone on for 20 minutes while one of group members spoke calling on the MP

to "acknowledge that there is a genocide taking place in Gaza and the West Bank".

Following the call, CSTW put out a statement that Zeichner "deflected" and "refused to condemn Israel's war crimes" or "admit his government continues to arm Israel".

Daniel Zeichner is the Labour MP for Cambridge, and has been an MP continually since 7 May 2015. He currently holds the Government post of Minister of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Daniel Zeichner told *Varsity*: "I welcomed the opportunity to meet with constituents at a virtual meeting last Friday to hear their concerns about Gaza. I remain strongly committed to a just and lasting peace based on a negotiated two-state solution, with a sovereign Palestinian state alongside a safe and secure Israel."

"The humanitarian situation in Gaza is catastrophic, and the UK must continue pushing for increased aid access and medical support. I will continue to advocate for urgent humanitarian relief and a long-term pathway to peace."



▲ CHRIS MCANDREW HTTPS://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/3.0/

Selwyn bridging course hangs in the balance

Faron Smith

News Correspondent

The future of Selwyn College's bridging course is under review due to the upcoming conclusion of the programme through which it received funding.

The course, which ran for the first time in September 2024, involves a week-long residential in Selwyn, as well as online support in the weeks leading up to the start of term.

It provides a mix of social and academic elements, such as mock supervisions and one-on-one meetings with academic staff to develop technical and general academic skills needed for a degree, as well as a formal at the end of the week.

The bridging course is funded by the

Widening Participation and Induction Fund (WPIF) of the Isaac Newton Trust, a charity founded by Trinity College in 1988, who continue to support it through periodic donations.

Established in 2022 with a donation of £1.3 million from Trinity College, the WPIF currently makes up to £50,000 available to colleges each year, for programmes aimed at reaching out to disadvantaged prospective applicants and their families. However, with the fund being expected to end in September of this year, programmes which currently rely on its funding will need to look elsewhere.

Already confirmed to run for a second year this autumn, Selwyn's bridging course has proved popular among its

alumni, who are currently in their first year of study. In a comment for *Varsity*, the College's JCR accessibility officers noted that both of them had participated in the programme and found it very successful, and had contributed to their membership of the JCR this year.

Another previous participant said that the course "broke down misconceptions about Cambridge," and that mock supervisions "deconstructed the fear I had of having an actual supervision".

However, the College has confirmed that the future of the programme is being questioned, with discussions being had over whether the effectiveness of the course justifies the cost of organising it, emphasising the importance of its funding being sustainable.

Dr Tom Smith, admissions tutor for arts and social sciences at the College said: "We were broadly pleased with our pilot bridging course at Selwyn. Feedback from participants suggests that they found it very helpful in building both academic and social confidence ahead of the academic year, and in dispelling some negative preconceptions about Cambridge."

A spokesperson for Selwyn College said: "Selwyn is one of the most successful colleges in Cambridge for widening participation. We have very high numbers of students from state schools and we exceed all the official targets for diverse backgrounds while we are also top of the academic league table for good honours. The bridging course is a successful addition to that proud record."



▲ FARON SMITH

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News

From lab coats to lion cages

Ma Ya, a Master's graduate from the University of Cambridge in Veterinary science, gave up a high-paying job at a biopharmaceutical company to work as a zookeeper at Shanghai Zoo. Many have expressed surprise at the allegedly unconventional decision, but Ma described how her job at the zoo has made her "healthier" due to the active environment. It is unclear whether Ma's decision was affected by recent uncertainty around the Vet School.

Way up North

Three Cambridge colleges (Corpus Christi, Jesus, and King's) teamed up with colleges from Oxford University to co-host an outreach event in the North-East of England to encourage more applications from the area. Over 160 students from across the North-East met at the Hancock Museum in Newcastle-upon-Tyne to learn about the application process and studying at either Cambridge or Oxford.

Brewing up the theory of gravity

Sir Isaac Newton wrote his theory of gravity using a home-made ink in which beer was an essential ingredient, a study in the Royal Society's journal *Notes and Records* has revealed. The paper revealed that one of his ink recipes included a quart of "strong beer or ale," making an ink that would "endure many years". The study also shows how he enjoyed beer as a drink. So don't let anyone tell you that a pint can't help you study!

The lost tomb

University researchers have recently uncovered the first royal tomb to be found since the discovery of King Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922. The tomb, uncovered by Dr Judith Bunbury, a Fellow and Senior Tutor at Wolfson College, has been confirmed to be the lost tomb of the pharaoh Thutmose II. Speaking on the discovery, Dr Bunbury said: "There was a sense of 'this is it'. The next day we had a big feast and roasted a goat."

Around town



Charlie Rown delivers the local Cambridge news

Cambridge South Station pushed back

The opening of Cambridge South railway station has been pushed back to 2026, having been expected to open this year. Network Rail has blamed the delay on Cambridge's re-signalling project and East Coast Main Line timetable changes, which is not expected to be completed before the end of 2025. Cambridge South building began in January 2023, after it was given the go-ahead by the Secretary of State for Transport in December 2022. A letter to stakeholders outlining the delay stated that construction is "progressing well".

2025 Festival programme announced

The programme for the Cambridge Festival 2025, taking place from 19 March to 4 April, has been announced. The festival is an annual collaboration between the University of Cambridge and Anglia Ruskin University offering a range of expert-led talks, exhibitions, and interactive activities across various disciplines. This year, they include Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter on uncertainty (2 April), Dr Harry Cliff on the Cavendish Laboratory's scientific contributions (27 March), and discussions on Arthurian legends and Merlin. Other topics cover medieval medicine, the history of fascism, and colonial partitions. Family-friendly events include a Michael Rosen performance, an Earth sciences fair, and a partial solar eclipse watch.

Vandals reignite Mill Road bus bridge gate

The controversy over vehicle restrictions on Cambridge's Mill Road Bridge has been reignited after vandals defaced the ANPR cameras used to monitor the traffic. The bridge has been the focus of lengthy debate, with local councils seeking to restrict motor traffic to improve safety and reduce congestion. Opponents have argued the measures harm businesses and push traffic onto surrounding streets. Enforcement fines for unauthorized vehicles were set to begin soon, but the latest vandalism has intensified discussions. The Cambridge Resident Action Group staged a protest last week, and with local elections approaching, the issue remains a key point of contention in city politics.



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How big is the 'Cambridge bubble'?

Varsity surveys University of Cambridge students to understand their view of the size of the city

Haley Zimmerman
Investigations Correspondent

The average 'Cambridge bubble' has an area of just 1.8 km², a Varsity survey and statistical analysis found. The centre point of the average bubble lies to the west of King's Parade, and the bubble stops before the West Cambridge campus, as well as Girton and Homerton colleges. The survey also found that 62% of respondents were "not at all" or "slightly" aware of local politics or civic issues, and that 50% wish they were more connected to the town.

Survey respondents were asked to sketch a radius around the part of Cambridge they traverse in a typical term-time week. Varsity analysed the standard deviation of the results in order to find how far from the centre of the bubble students tend to stray.

91%

Of students surveyed said that are not involved in non-University societies

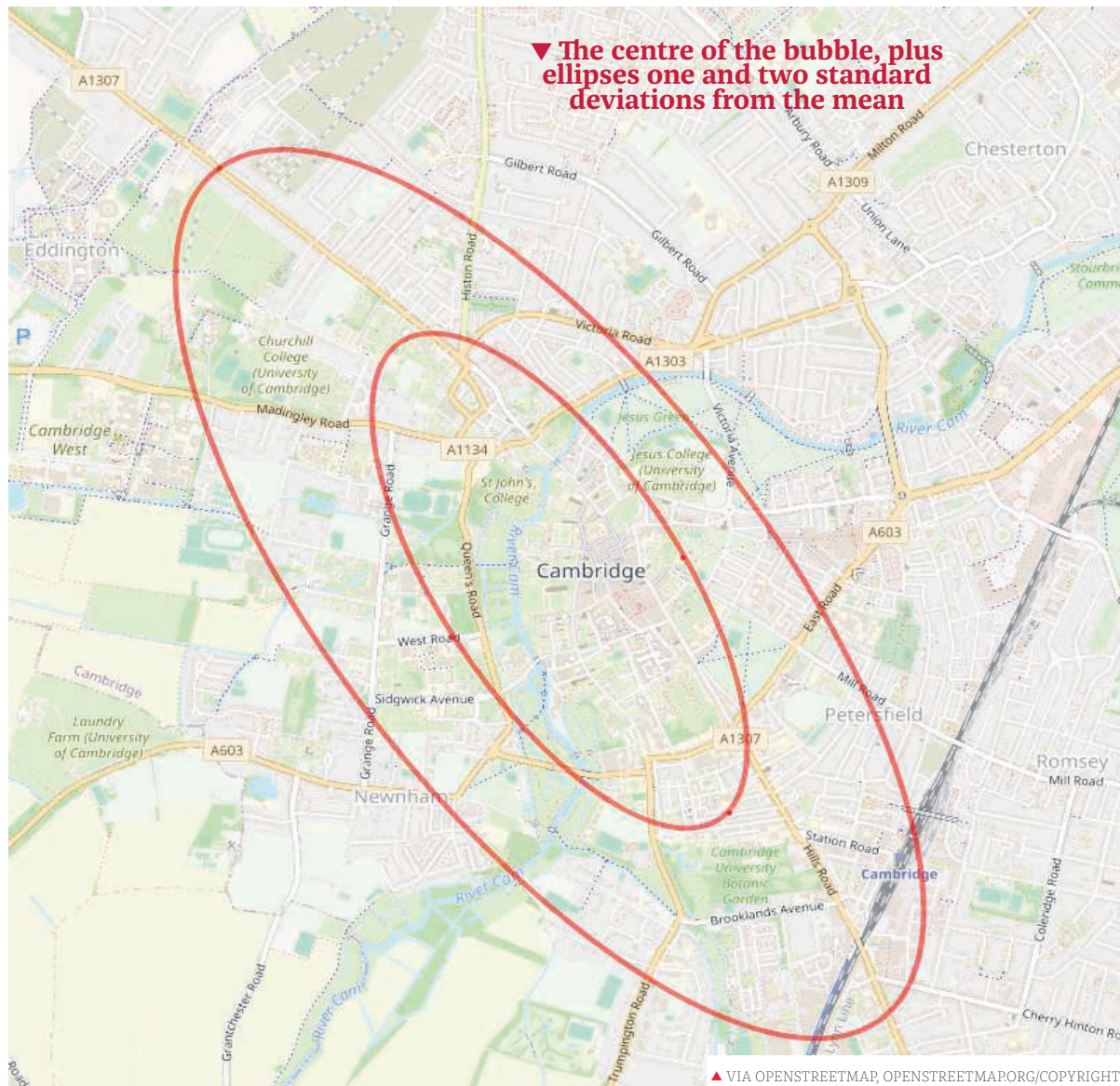
50%

Of students surveyed expressed a wish to be more involved in the town

The analysis found that the mean centre of the bubble lay over the green at Clare College and that a one standard deviation from that mean extended to Murray Edwards College in the north and past Downing College in the south – but missed Sidgwick Site and the colleges to its west. Extending the bubble to two standard deviations captured Sidgwick, Jesus Green, and most colleges, but still missed Girton, Wolfson and Homerton.

The area of the single standard deviation bubble was 1.8 km². Cambridge, the city, spans 41 km² – indicating that University students spend their weeks in about 4% of the city.

The survey also found



▲ VIA OPENSTREETMAP, OPENSTREETMAP.ORG/COPYRIGHT

that the Cambridge bubble lived up to expectations – about 65% of respondents agreed that the division between the University and the town was as they anticipated before matriculating, while about 29% described it as more divided than expected.

About 91% of respondents reported that they are not involved in non-University societies, such as volunteering, in Cambridge. Half of respondents expressed a wish to be more involved in the town.

In interviews with Varsity, students expressed that the college system and their daily commutes have a large impact on the shape and size of their bubbles.

For one second-year student at Murray Edwards, her College's distance from the centre of the bubble was a positive when she applied. She told Varsity that, in addition to frequenting the Sainsbury's at Eddington, she likes to venture east to Asda and Hobbycraft. "It's a really nice walk and

just the sight of a random business park and lots of cars gives me an oddly comforting sense of being at home," she said.

Meanwhile, a first-year student at Girton told Varsity that his College's remote location gives him a sense of two bubbles – one at university, one in college: "Girton doesn't separate us from 'real' Cambridge – it gives us the best of both worlds," he said.

"We can spend the day in the heart of the University, fully immersed in the bubble, yet when we head back up Huntingdon Road, we return to a warm, close-knit community of our own," he added.

Other students noted that they also feel moments of connection to greater Cambridge during their daily routines.

A third-year student at Pembroke commented that while her actual geographic bubble is small – spanning Trumpington Street, Pembroke College, and Sidgwick Site – she feels that her time spent commuting between those locations makes her feel more connected to the town.

"I feel connected to Cambridge when I'm riding my bike between school and my accommodation," she said. "I like watching the people on the sidewalk. Some are walking their dogs, others are carrying groceries, and many are just going home like me [...] I like seeing a wider variety of people during commut-

ing hours."

In response to the finding that the area of the single standard deviation bubble does not extend to Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), whose main campus is just off Parker's Piece, one student from ARU told Varsity that: "I don't know how to feel about that. I mean I agree we are a 20 minute walk away, but was that [...] meant as an insult?"

They said that they have "noticed a few Cambridge students have a prejudice against ARU students," and agreed that University of Cambridge students should broaden their horizons: "There are so many great independents on Mill Road and over the bridge, and it's so quiet. I prefer it to central Cambridge."

Giving further comments on the survey's result, Peter Kruger, a local resident and active member of the community, told Varsity: "Having viewed this bubble from the outside most of my life, my perception of it as one of a walled city means that what goes on inside the walls is a mystery."

"Cambridge [and the University] have been shaped by over 700 years of history and have developed one with the other but on separate paths," he added. "While we all occupy the same space we still remain in our separate worlds."

University watch



Elizabeth Bratton rounds up student news from around the country

Over 10,000 university jobs at risk, UCU says

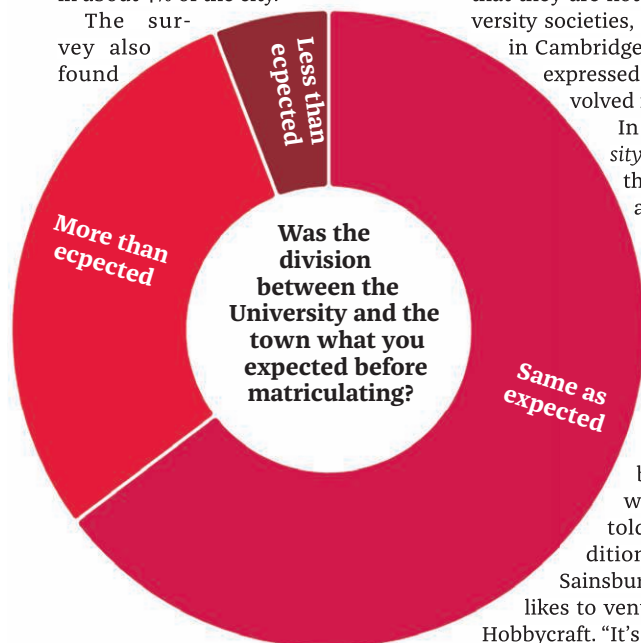
The University and College Union has issued a statement claiming that over 10,000 university employees could lose their jobs this academic year. The Union says that university employers have already announced 5,631 job cuts this year, with several other universities asking staff to quit without specifying how much they need to reduce their staffing budget by. The UCU says the university sector has "announced over £238m of cuts and declared deficits of at least £30m".

Exeter to head NHS carbon footprint hub

The University of Exeter will be responsible for heading a research hub dedicated to helping the NHS reduce its carbon footprint. The £6.5m hub will work with an array of UK organisations, with the goal of making the NHS more sustainable and helping the service to reach its net-zero target by 2045. The director of the centre, Ed Wilson, said: "We'll be looking at a patient's journey through the NHS and social care, finding where the carbon hotspots are and seeing what we can do to make them carbon neutral," according to the BBC. Wilson added: "This isn't just about reducing travel and unnecessary waste but about helping the NHS."

81-year-old student at Worcester University graduates

Wendy Hill, an 81-year-old student graduated on Tuesday (04/03) after completing a Master's at Worcester University. She said: "My message to other mature people who feel the need to achieve something academically is go to an Open Day and talk to people – students and tutors – who will welcome you and advise you." She said: "I am very proud of myself. Hill's research focuses on Alice Elgar, wife of composer Edward Elgar, and is set to be published in the Elgar Society Journal. Her research stemmed from a desire to know more about Alice "as a person" and her belief that Alice "deserved more acknowledgement and recognition". Hill was Honorary Secretary of the Elgar Society from 1996 to 2006 and is currently Chairman of the West Midlands Branch of the Elgar Society.



Interviews

Hong Kong democracy activist on the cost of speaking out

Charlie Rowan talks to Nathan Law about human rights activism and having a 1M HKD bounty on his head

Few people have a £100,000 bounty on their head. Even fewer face it with Nathan Law's quiet composure – reflective, humble, almost resigned to the weight of his circumstances.

"I'm fairly typical," he insists. "I never wanted to be a politician." Yet Law has become one of Hong Kong's most prominent pro-democracy voices. Now living in exile in the UK, he first rose to prominence in 2014 as a student leader during the Umbrella Movement, a mass student protest against Beijing's reforms to strip Hong Kong of its promised political autonomy by ensuring its leaders remained loyal to the Chinese state.

"Growing up, my family told me to never get involved in politics and never mess with the Chinese [Communist] Party." But as president of the Lingnan University Students' Union, he found himself thrust into leadership. "I was in a place where I had to take leadership. It was both extremely difficult and extremely empowering. For a rookie like me, it was a really overwhelming experience. There were moments where I was hesitant [about having this position] but I had to make a snap decision to stay and carry on."

At 23, Law became the youngest-ever legislator in Hong Kong's Legislative Council, only to be disqualified and jailed for his activism a year later. "The pathway to politics seemed locked – they didn't just bar you; they made it clear that if you ran again, you'd be disqualified."

After his release, he stepped away from politics, returning to his studies and even exploring other careers including playwriting. "I had to learn to let go, to stop obsessing myself over these terrible things happening in politics and to just live a normal life until I was recharged," Law says. "I have retreated from front-line politics many times – because of my mental health condition, because of threats and pressure."

When Beijing imposed the National Security Law in July 2020, he knew he had no choice but to flee. He was granted political asylum in the UK in 2021, but others weren't as fortunate, with fellow activists Joshua Wong

“I was in a place where I had to take leadership. It was both extremely difficult and extremely empowering

and Ivan Lam remaining behind bars. Meanwhile, in Hong Kong, Law's face still lingers, plastered on wanted posters across ports and railway stations, a reminder of the price he has paid for speaking out.

"A lot of my friends and family members were harassed in Hong Kong," he says. Fearing collective punishment – something he notes has "increased in recent years" – he has been forced to cut ties with loved ones to keep them safe.

Exile has brought both freedom and limita-

tions. "I've already accepted my influence will be fading. Politics is local, and social movements are driven by those directly facing oppression." Still, Law continues to advocate, writing, speaking, and amplifying voices from Hong Kong. "The only way to keep yourself grounded when you are constantly giving is to think and write some more until I get new insights."

The bounty on Law's head, issued in July 2023 at HK\$1 million for "secession and collusion," also restricts travel and career opportunities. "I want to be resilient, but sometimes I'm not." His activism, he suggests, is a balancing act. "I see activism like the dynamics of playing a rubber band. If you go too far, the rubber band will break. If you go too slowly, then you're unable to generate enough momentum."

This balancing act, he recognises, is one that UK universities must also undergo when addressing Chinese state influence. "It's a very delicate balance, especially when the financial situation of UK universities is not good. There's no one-size-fits-all solution. But universities should be transparent," he says.

Last month, it was reported that Cambridge received between £12 million and £19m from Chinese entities between 2020 and 2024. A week later, it was found that a CCP-linked businessman from Hong Kong donated "up to £4.9m" to the University.

For Law, one thing is even more important: Chinese students studying abroad should not have to live in fear. "One thing I'm quite pissed off about is many Chinese students don't enjoy freedom of speech in universities because of some accepted open secrets – that an extended body of the Chinese state will spy or monitor them."

He recalls a student from Shanghai who wanted to attend his talk

at Yale but feared repercussions. "That trouble could be visa issues or even his family's safety in China if he was spotted. The idea of them [students] being afraid is real, and it puts a lot of pressure on them; they can no longer speak freely, even though they are in a country that supports academic freedom."

Beyond campuses, he is wary of shifting global politics. "The political dynamics are always changing, and we have recently seen the warming up of UK-China relations under the Labour government," he notes. "I think analysts find this strange and weird, as the regime is using the UK as a platform to warm up relations with Europe while alienating ties with the US to achieve its goals."

“If Hong Kong being free can eclipse what I've accomplished, that would be awesome

Within this context, Law remains realistic about the future of Hong Kong. "I'm not convinced Hong Kong will be free in five years, even ten years, but I hope," he says. Yet hope, for him, is not passive – it is a commitment to continue fighting, even from exile. "If Hong Kong being free can eclipse what I've accomplished, that would be awesome because so many others are doing incredible things."

"I don't want to be known as a rebel who did his best but still failed." Instead, he envisions a future where activism is no longer necessary, where Hong Kong's freedom speaks louder than any individual name. "I want my legacy to be invisible."



Tell us about yourself

Sammy McDonald [current Union President], St. John's, 3rd year, History.

What's one thing you've changed your mind about recently?

While I'll never change my mind on my convictions, I hope this year to be more open to listening to other perspectives and getting myself beyond a left-liberal bubble in my news consumption – much of the ability of the political left to survive depends on it.

What advice would you give to someone who would like to try public speaking but lacks the confidence?

Have courage in yourself. I see a lack of confidence in people who are told, implicitly and explicitly throughout their life, that they somehow have less of a right to be heard and to be an active citizen than others because of their background or beliefs. The Union at its heart is a liberal experiment, founded in an idealistic wave of backlash to post-Napoleon censorship. I know so many people who have been so reticent in giving a speech, but delivered amazing, heartfelt and passionate addresses, far more so than people for whom it comes easily. Have confidence in yourself and give it a go.

What are your top three memories of the Union throughout your time here?

My first debate on Energy Nationalisation is certainly one – it was a terrifying experience in Week Three, but very fun! It went viral on TikTok, which was a bizarre way to start my university life. Speaking alongside Nathan Law and Rahima Mahmut in my second year, who described how many of her relatives were victims of ethnic cleansing by the CCP, was also an experience that will stay with me forever. Third would be the event with Sam Altman in Autumn 2023.

If your presidency could only achieve one thing, what would you like it to be?

My number one hope is to make sure Union elections are robustly competitive, and the culture is more open, less insular and less factional than when I first entered, that everyone feels like they can run for office in the Union regardless of friendships.

What's next for you?

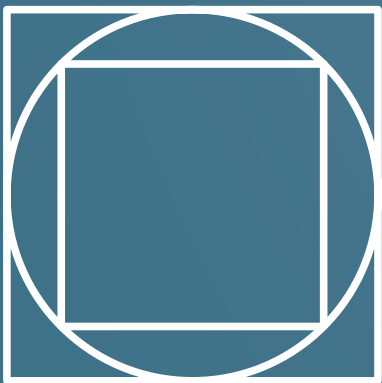
I have applied for a Master's to study Anglo-German relations in the run up to the First World War here, but yet to hear anything yet! Beyond that, still very much undecided.

— VARUN RAVIKUMAR



▶ LAUREN HERD

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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Why I'm not a girlboss

It's easier than ever to be a girlboss these days. Internships offering young women the opportunity to enter the corporate world, or technology, or law, are widespread in 2025. Feminist societies and initiatives also often appear achievement-oriented. Don't get me wrong: it's great that you can go to a women's only gym hour or running club, or aspire to be a woman in STEM or business. But a focus on self-improvement within feminism risks entrapment within the fallacies of the 'girlboss' trope, in which being an empowered woman becomes synonymous with careerist ambition and material success. It implies that to be sensitive, or content not being a leader or a pioneer, or to hold more traditionally 'feminine' aspirations such as being a mother or a wife, is incompatible

with feminism. It endorses perpetually bettering ourselves to fit societal conceptions of success, rather than making peace with who we are.

Preparing to study History at university, I noticed the encroachment of the girlboss trope into the biographies of historical women, where the label is teleologically applied to female historical figures at the cost of their complexity. Of course, strong and innovative historical women deserve our attention, but it always frustrated me that we don't expect widely studied historical men to be 'inspirational' in the same way. Ultimately, Tsarina Alexandra of Russia was essentially the only female historical figure mentioned in my personal statement. Alexandra interested me, I think, because she was the antithesis of the

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girlboss. She managed to simultaneously embody pretty much every sexist trope I can think of: the hysterical mother, the Lady Macbeth wife, even the lewd adulterer, if you take Boney M's word for it. Alexandra certainly wouldn't qualify as a girlboss. But her reputation as a woman whose sheer hysteria brought down an empire has a great deal to teach us about how we view womanhood.

I recently went to a lecture about historical biographies, where Beatrice Webb was used as the case study. Webb was a pioneering social scientist dedicated to the eradication of poverty in Britain, who, along with her husband Sidney Webb, is best remembered for founding the LSE and the *New Statesman*. She also wrote three million words worth of diaries. In these, she discussed her political and intellectual interests, but also, at great length, her ill-fated affair with the liberal politician Joseph Chamberlain. Despite her outward appearance of girlboss empowerment, the countless emotionally-charged pages agonising over her enduring unrequited love for Chamberlain were, in Webb's own words, “wanting in dignity and nicety of feeling.” Through her own writing, Webb emerges as both intelligent and deeply emotional, progressive yet assured of male superiority, a model partner, and also someone who described her husband as having a “tiny tadpole body”. These may not be the words of a girlboss, but, to my mind, they don't undermine Webb's status as a pioneering woman. They just make her human.

Perhaps I empathise with Webb because, according to the parameters the term sets, I'm not a girlboss either. On a superficial level, I suppose I could fit the bill. I'm at a prestigious male-

dominated college, where I churn out essays on weighty topics, like Machiavelli and Stalinist ideology. I have spoken to important people with the appearance of confidence, and was even featured on a 30 Under 30 list of young women in Scotland, and dubbed “inspirational” on Twitter.

But the girlboss veneer does not do justice to the version of me that gets upset about Stalinism and children's rights, and who is insecure in supervisions and while giving speeches. And that's the valiant side of it. The real anti-girlboss within me has been known to become more hysterical over boys than I'd care to admit, and has spent more hours analysing Taylor Swift lyrics than the *Discourses on Livy*. Does this render me incompatible with empowerment?

I wonder if the girlboss trope has more to answer for than we realise. After all, could the characterisation of female strength as coldness be part of the reason why we are so reluctant to elect women? Could the alienation women like me feel from the demands of this trope be part of the reason why only 34% of British women identify as feminists? And if the benchmark of success is traditionally masculine stoicism and the ruthless pursuit of ambition, what hope is there for men to break free of toxic masculinity?

So no, I'm not a girlboss. Maybe it's because I'm just too emotional for it, or maybe it's because I want to be more than a masculine vision of success as determined by wealth and status. I want to be strong, but I am also fundamentally sensitive. But I don't see why these need to be antithetical. Empowered womanhood should not come at the cost of our humanity.



NIAMH CAFFERTY



Are May Balls worth their budget?

It's a Monday afternoon at 3pm, and I'm in the library, glued to my laptop. To an unsuspecting passer-by I am engrossed in my supo reading, but the fact I'm concentrating this hard means I cannot possibly be working. With the panicked assistance of a 12-person group chat, I'm trying, through sheer force of will, to fix the glitches in John's May Ball ticketing platform.

After miraculously surviving the ticket queue and battling thousands of my fellow students for the glory of giving one of the richest colleges in Cambridge £275, I started to wonder where my money was going. I went to Jesus May Ball as a fresher, costing me £70 less and offering a pretty perfect night (that I'm still not convinced John's can top, even with a bigger budget). Now, as a member of my College's Garden Party committee, I'm curious how much money it really requires for people to have a good night, and if the sheer amount bigger May Balls

are spending can ever be justified.

In 2015 a *Varsity* investigation showed that Trinity May Ball “cost an eye-watering £286,000 excluding VAT,” an absurd amount that can only have increased in the last ten years. They spent £44,000 on just entertainment, and £12,000 on fireworks alone. Only last week Robinson has had to cancel their May Ball due to low ticket sales and the cost of putting on an event. Trinity's budget sounds insane, and when we hear these figures we do have a moment of horror, but as a community we write off the amount big name May Balls cost as a part of the experience, a necessary evil to enable the ‘Cambridge experience’. For a College refusing to divest from arms companies to line its own pockets, surely they could stop pouring money down the drain every summer and reduce their yearly May Ball budget a little?

And is any of this money strictly necessary to give us the night we want? I'm

on the Murray Edwards Garden Party Committee this year, and with a fraction of Trinity's budget (17% for those wondering) and none of its prestige we've managed to plan a party with everything students (or at least I) really want: cheap tickets, unlimited food and alcohol, live music. No, it's not the same experience as John's or Trinity, and no one is claiming that it is. But it has made me question whether these colleges are throwing money away excessively while smaller May events meticulously budget.

Bigger colleges are flaunting their wealth every year while university becomes increasingly expensive, with Cambridge somehow voting to increase the cost of a degree. It's hard to reconcile how the University can claim to need more money and simultaneously pay thousands of pounds for a state-of-the-art drone show or security to prevent break-ins. Somehow the burden of paying for it all falls on the student, cough-

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ing up more and more money for accommodation, tuition fees, and, maybe frivolously, for May Ball tickets.

They're a definite luxury, but one that feels near essential when you're surrounded by people talking about the long list of May Week events they're going to. If you listen to some people, you virtually haven't been to Cambridge if you haven't been to John's or Trinity, you have to go to your own college event, and somehow you need new clothes for all of it to get the optimal pictures. People end up feeling excluded from their peers for no reason – if these colleges have the money to spare, then surely more of it should be spent increasing the number of accessible general release tickets.

We might be thanking God that we got the privilege of giving a college hundreds of pounds that might go to buying fancy entry wristbands, but it might be time to start questioning if they're worth the cost.

Daisy Stewart Henderson

Rosie Roberts



Martha Rayner

Bring back unsexy activism

Activism is facing a dilemma. Sticking it to the man is regarded as high in fashion, and yet the necessary steps to get there are frequently met with derision, or to put it cheesily veering close to what Regina George would term “social suicide”.

After seeing one person too many shout “fuck the government” and “climate action now” at a protest, only to immediately leave their litter on the side of a pavement, I have a certain frustration at performativity surrounding social movements. I fully support pressing for institutional reform, but a ‘hands-off’ approach to the smaller actions in our daily lives and the administrative work behind social change makes activism ring hollow. We cannot have one without the other, but we should combine ongoing efforts to sustain systemic pressure with the smaller but still valuable tasks that are often overlooked. Think making small but regular donations or volunteering time to a cause.

The biggest threat facing activism is not the typical barrage of abuse from the right accusing it of being a tree-hugging wokerati turning kids into vegan critical race theorists. Instead, it is from well-meaning ‘politically correct’ individuals who see activism as a worthy cause, but think it is simply ‘a bit too much’ to do the heavy-lifting themselves.

We are all too familiar with the typical activist ‘tropes’: crazy vigilantes, good-for-nothings, champagne socialists. Many also look for the mythic place somewhere

“Simple’ is not why we should get involved with activism

in between these stereotypes: a blend of social justice and a tactful level of grace, easily captured in photos of people holding banners that could adorn the cover of *Grazia*. Trying to reach this ‘ideal’ results in either a phony approximation of reality, or inevitable burnout when it doesn’t match our expectations.

Pigeonholing what social change looks like defines activism within a narrow scope as something that is

either effortless or ‘other’, which both hinders progress and alienates those outside this ‘acceptable’ norm, forgetting intersectionality. Constructing activism as purely heroic and spur-of-the-moment makes it all the easier to tear down – and doesn’t acknowledge the leg work that is undeniably behind every social movement. While creating an imaginary opposition of a faceless bureaucrat may appear a mobilising force, it crucially ignores the fact we often have to play by, or at least understand, these systems to get things done.

In a city with such inspiring figures, so much of the approach to social change in Cambridge seems lackluster. I have felt this within my own efforts, too; perhaps this stems from the fact that Cambridge activism often feels too bureaucratic, too inaccessible to be compatible with this imagined ideal. Perhaps this was the reason why the outgoing JCR at my college, Queens’, had zero applications on the closing day of executive election nominations.

But even at a collegiate level there is so much opportunity to get involved in a way that is more grounded and sustaining. The online world which youth activism is often exclusively associated with is fickle and not predisposed to being a reliable basis for social movements. Seeing social justice get put aside for ‘old money’ and ‘clean’ aesthetics is no coincidence. The loss of bold, unashamed expression online in favour of muted palettes carries with it assumptions of domesticity and whiteness that are

brazenly displayed with the ‘trad wife’ trend, and other more subtly encroaching political affiliations. Online media is increasingly entangled with popularised right wing discourse, signalling we cannot take this territory as a given.

Despite this, there are still groups carving out the space for genuine activism, from Cambridge Climate Justice and Cambridge for Palestine’s tireless efforts for divestment, Streetbite’s daily schedule of handing out food and hot drinks for unhoused people, to the CambCrag convoys distributing vital resources for refugees.

Community organising principles strike the balance between competing ideas of progress: both the hyper individual everyday actions, and the tendency to relegate issues to a governmental level. As Rob Hopkins puts it: “If we wait for governments, it will be too late. If we act as individuals, it will be too little. But if we act as communities, it might just be enough, and it might just be in time.” This process is not simple, which can be off-putting, but ‘simple’ is not why we should get involved with activism.

Trying to maintain an unachievable aesthetic to activism will be at the expense of important incremental change. Honouring the humble committee meeting or signing a petition may not bring a rush of adrenaline, but is important nonetheless. Turn up for the protest, and turn up for the rest too. Ultimately this community will be more rewarding than the flash-in-the-pan approach. It is time we embrace and combine all sides of social movements, and bring back ‘unsexy activism’.



Duncan Paterson

Weekly essays don’t do justice to important topics

An intrinsic part of my English degree, and humanities degrees in general, is constantly grappling with huge concepts like colonialism, systemic racism or misogyny. My second year dissertation, for instance, is about the destruction of the Black male body in African American literature, and just last week I was comparing the origins of feminist writing with modern day perceptions of sex work. As part of my course, I regularly attempt to articulate, interrogate and do justice to subjects which have plagued certain cultures for centuries, and which continue to resonate with us today, all packaged neatly into a 2,500 word essay. This boxing up of buzzwords into pretty sentences, as well as the increasingly casual nature with which such terms are being thrown around essays and lecture halls, are symptoms of a tension at the heart of all humanities degrees; between the student, and the weight of the subjects that they are writing about.

Of course, phenomena like racism and misogyny are not theoretical academic concepts. We must remember that for many, they are everyday experiences. Part of the reason for their inclusion in university curricula is to increase awareness and education, and therefore combat the advances of prejudice. But when students are asked to churn out an essay once or twice a week attempting to encapsulate the weight of this lived experience, such concepts lose their significance. The moral alarm bells that should be ringing whenever one reads about topics such as colonialism fade into the general mental noise generated by workload stress and are drowned out by the constant Cam-

bridge pressure to produce quantity, not quality, essays. Saying that Cambridge students work a lot is not a revolutionary statement, but it takes on a new pertinence when these are the topics being studied. Statistics about racialised policing in the United States or reports on conflicts like in Israel-Palestine should not be considered only as a useful word filler for essays. Instead, attempts should be made to understand the gravity of the concepts that such words represent.

Undoubtedly, this is much easier said than done. One of my friends described how colonialism has become a buzzword in their lectures, drained of its meaning by a dull academic. However, universities can’t go around exposing students to real-life examples in order to press home the reality. As well as inevitably running into content warnings, academia runs the risk of fetishising the suffering of others, seizing with subconscious glee at the devastation of some of humanity’s worst practices because they present the student with an easy way out of their essay conundrum. We experience a type of compassion fatigue, where the increasing exposure to human suffering leads to a

“Colonialism has become a buzzword in lectures, drained of its meaning by a dull academic

decrease in empathy. Morality is numbed to a constant bombardment with descriptions of horrible events. The first-hand trauma of the victims of history is lost behind the words of an article or vanished into a Word document. It is particularly disconcerting and uncomfortable to see a big green tick and a “Good point!” from your supervisor next to your analysis of police brutality.

One possible answer, but not necessarily a solution to this difficult situation, is for the student to actively engage in the matter surrounding their essay subject, in an attempt to understand as closely as possible the lived experience of those being read about. However, there must be an acknowledgement that co-exists with this search, that complete empathy for that lived experience is pretty much impossible. This gap cannot be traversed, and to attempt to do so is to reduce and undermine. The people

that were the sources and inspiration of so much that we read at university are in danger of being trapped within the two-dimensional space of the article, the page in the book, the PowerPoint slide in the lecture (I also recognise the irony in criticising such practices in a 700-word *Varsity* Comment article...).

As such, one of the great paradoxes of undergraduate education is this impossible reconciliation between a student’s weekly essay and the enormous subject matter they are attempting to control. In the end, students must not be blamed, and efficiency must not be mistaken for flippancy. Navigating such difficult topics with sensitivity under such intense workload is one of the skills we develop as undergraduates, and is vital not only to our academic, but also our personal and social development as a whole.



AMIKI PIPLAPURE

Features

Who's in the room and why? Faculty diversity matters

Ria Patel traces the racial makeup of Cambridge's academic staff, and reflects on why faculty diversity is so important



The demographic composition of academic staff plays a crucial role in shaping the teaching environment, particularly in humanities disciplines. At Cambridge, where white male academics remain predominant, this affects the perspectives, methodologies, and experiences of students, particularly those from under-represented backgrounds. While academic credentials may be strong, a lack of diversity can limit the scope of discussions, negatively affect students' sense of belonging and confidence, and continue to marginalise and undervalue staff from underrepresented backgrounds. While demographic diversity includes a range of intersectional layers, from class and gender, this article focuses on ethnicity and race.

Cambridge's recruitment processes emphasise traditional academic excellence while often overlooking the value of diverse personal experiences, teaching styles, and perspectives. While diversity is an institutional goal, disparities persist. Cambridge University's 2021-2022 Equality and Diversity Information Report (published March 2023) provides statistics and insight into the matter. White applicants continue to experience structural advantages in academic hiring, with 55.2% of applications leading to 78.1% of offers, translating to a 10.2% success rate. In contrast, BAME applicants, who made up 44.8% of applications, secured only 21.9% of offers, with a significantly lower success rate of 3.6%. Black applicants, in particular, had the lowest success rate at just 2.6%.

While the proportion of BAME professors has increased from 7.1% in 2016 to 9.4% in 2022, progress remains slow and uneven. Asian academics form the ma-

jority within this category, while Black academics remain critically underrepresented at 0.4%. White staff continue to dominate senior roles, shaping hiring and promotion dynamics. Disaggregated data highlights that subgroups such as Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi academics face even greater exclusion. Viewing BAME as a singular category obscures these deeper inequalities. The goal should not be merely proportional equity among BAME groups, but a significant overall increase in representation at all academic levels.

Reflecting on the need for students and staff from a wider range of backgrounds, History fellow Somak Biswas feels that "a well-coordinated affirmative action programme is overdue," citing the Royal Historical Society's promising work on dealing with racism and recruitment as an example of such. He raises the importance of seeing "BAME staff members valued for their intellectual contributions and engaged with as equals." Somak says, "diversity is not just one thing," stressing that "it needs to be intersectional, and cognisant of a wide range of differences."

Students' personal experiences further underscore the tangible impact of faculty demography on their academic lives. One student of colour, Jada, tells me: "In my nearly three years of being a History and Politics student at Cambridge, I've had only two lecturers who were people of colour. This is particularly striking considering the modules I've taken." For instance, a module centred on African history and politics. When applying to Cambridge, she was aware of the lack of diversity among staff and students but assumed her choice of more global, African-centred, and less Eurocentric modules would mean hearing from more scholars of colour.

"I stopped feeling like just another student and became the Black student in the room"

She shares that "what makes this even more surprising is that many of the reading lists for these courses are filled with works by scholars of colour. So, it's not a matter of a lack of qualified experts in these fields." For example, in a module on Burundian Rwanda, which Jada very much enjoyed, she "couldn't

help but wonder what additional nuance might have been brought to discussions if I had been taught by someone from Burundi or Rwanda."

In a lecture on Marcus Garvey and the experiences of Black Americans in Jim Crow, Jada had no issue with the fact that the lecturer was white, as he was well-versed in the topic and handled it with care. However, she recalls feeling uncomfortable due to constant subtle glances from both the lecturer and students, who seemed to be "checking to make sure I wasn't uncomfortable." She explains that "I stopped feeling like just another student and became the Black student in the room," noting that the lecturer's attempts to overcompensate for their whiteness inadvertently emphasised the racial dynamic further.

Another student of colour, Lily, describes how faculty responses vary, citing the controversy surrounding Nathan Cofnas in the Philosophy department, where student and faculty protests led to open discussions. But these well-meaning efforts shouldn't distract from the lack of demographic diversity in faculties, being an issue in its own right. The absence of racially diverse representation among University fellows directly impacts student confidence and shapes their overall experience.

Lily described feeling heightened imposter syndrome due to the absence of Faculty members from similar backgrounds. She notes that speaking in seminars can be intimidating, as students from privileged backgrounds often appear immune to criticism, whereas minority students may fear being perceived as unqualified or admitted through diversity quotas. In discussion of the impact of staff demographic composition on students' sense of belonging, Somak's "sense is that students of colour might feel more confident speaking up in presence of staff colour." Actioning of advance disclaimers and warnings, which are simple and easy to im-

plement, would be a key introduction for when faculties cover periphrastic material on race and empire.

"Demographic diversity is inseparable from intellectual rigor"

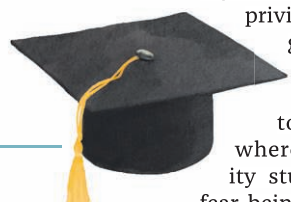
Demographic diversity is inseparable from intellectual rigour. Somak's approach to teaching racially sensitive material is rooted in intellectual curiosity and critical engagement. He emphasises that students' unique backgrounds provide invaluable insights, and should be integrated into academic discourse. His seminars are designed to allow students to draw

from their personal experiences while engaging critically with historical discourse. The goal is to encourage students to argue, differ, and discuss in ways that are respectful yet intellectually challenging, turning tensions into opportunities for deeper understanding.

In my own experience as a student of colour, I've also experienced teaching done well (or perhaps I should say normally). For example, while working on my dissertation about Ugandan Asians, a topic deeply intertwined with my own family's history and racial identity, it never even crossed my mind to feel anxious or aware of the teaching demographic as my supervisor handled the topic with such normalcy and balance. He was aware of and sensitive to the issues at hand without making them feel like a massive, drawn-out ordeal. Instead of over-accentuating the racial aspect, he treated it as a natural and valid academic pursuit, allowing discussions to flow in a way that felt both intellectually engaging and personally affirming.

Good teaching isn't about overcompensating for racial differences, nor about pretending they don't exist. It's about being well-tuned to these issues while fostering an environment where they don't define the interaction. When done right, it just feels *normal* – which, in itself, is what makes it so effective.

Diversity in academia isn't just about filling necessary quotas – it's about enriching intellectual discourse and valuing BAME staff. As Somak reflects, "there is great pedagogic and intellectual value in diversity, if done carefully." Humanities thrive on a multiplicity of perspectives, and Cambridge's lack of staff diversity limits both teaching and the student experience. Addressing these disparities requires structural change, institutional commitment, and a recognition of the value that diverse, intersectional backgrounds bring to academia. It is not necessarily always about replacing distinguished and well-qualified white male academics, but to create space for a more diverse demographic and perspectives. Only by breaking systemic barriers can universities create a truly inclusive and representative intellectual environment.



How can East-West Rail turn Oxbridge into the UK's very own 'silicon fen'?

Calum Murray discusses what the new line will mean for the city

With construction under-way for a new rail line between Oxford and Cambridge, dubbed East-West rail, attention is increasingly being paid to the potential for the creation of an economic growth corridor along the route. The Chancellor, in a speech in January, claimed that connecting the university cities could create "Europe's Silicon Valley." Research suggests that an Oxford-Cambridge growth corridor, known as the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, could add £78 billion to the British economy.

Proponents have claimed that the development would benefit not only the cities themselves but the areas in between. Milton Keynes and Bedford lie on the proposed route and vast amounts housing is expected to accompany the line's construction. Alistair Lomax, the director of the Arc Universities Group, said "the ability to

share and transfer skills across the whole nation is embedded in the institutional makeup [of the growth corridor]."

"The area has the potential to form a 'supercluster'

For Lomax, the area had the potential to form a "supercluster," as a product of a number of fast-growing industries. These include the life sciences, spearheaded by AstraZeneca in Cambridge, the burgeoning space industry centered around business parks in Harwell and Westcott, and sports technology, including the headquarters of several Formula One teams. The universities in the area – Oxford and Cambridge, but also Oxford Brookes, Cranfield, Bedford, and Anglia Ruskin – would act, he said, as an "enabler" for "the dynamism in the relationships between [different industries

and higher education institutions]."

The railway is so central to these plans for growth because it plans to tackle one of the key supply-side constraints limiting fast-growing Oxford and Cambridge – the fact that, as cities of around 150,000 people, they are not big enough to allow businesses to flourish. Will Gallagher, the CEO of the company tasked with building the line, said: "One of the big things businesses say to us is, we don't get easy enough access to a broad enough pool of people to come and work in our businesses and that will, over time, slow down that rate of growth."

He claimed that the railway would bring "between 200 and 300,000 people within commuting distance of Cambridge." Accompanying the increased connectivity, are plans for major house building along the route. One such development is proposed around Tempsford, in Bedfordshire, currently a small village where a new railway station will be built. Current Bedfordshire County Council plans are proposing 7,000 new homes and a

new science, technology, and business park at Tempsford. Some have called for even more extensive development in the area – with the think-tank UK DayOne suggesting that homes for up to 350,000 people be built there.

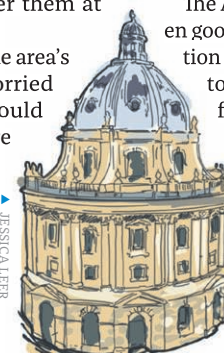
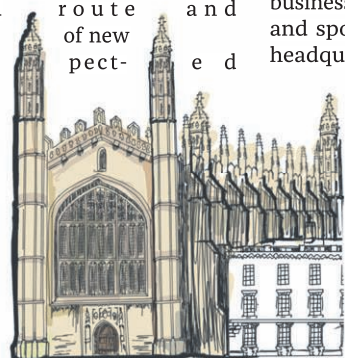
This kind of large-scale development, however, has attracted pushback from groups concerned about environmental degradation and pressure on local services and utilities. Adam Zerny, the chair of Mid Bedfordshire District Council, who sits as an independent, said, "many of those who live around here do so for the peace, quiet, and beautiful countryside so I can't blame those that have moved to a village from being uncomfortable about the threat of major development hanging over them at present."

As well as threatening the area's rural character, Zerny worried that new development could lack sufficient infrastructure accompanying it, saying: "For too long, government rules have meant large scale building has taken place without sufficient recognition that the

people who live there will need facilities appropriate to lead a fulfilling life."

The railway, too, has been met with criticism over its environmental consequences. In a draft response to its recent consultation, Cambridgeshire County Council expressed concern over "catastrophic impacts" on bat populations in the Eversden and Wimpole conservation areas, arguing that "habitat loss and impacts associated with the EWR scheme will further exacerbate fragmentation and result in losses to wildlife sites, habitat, and species." Gallagher, however, claimed that the project was "not taking any ancient woodland." He said, "East West Rail is actually committed to delivering 10% biodiversity net gain."

The Arc, for Lomax, is "the UK's golden goose," an area of significant innovation and economic growth that ought to be harnessed to the fullest. Infrastructure will play a key role in this, as the East-West rail line enables commuting and cooperation across the region, and new housing and industrial zones crop up around it. Such development, however, will not be without backlash.



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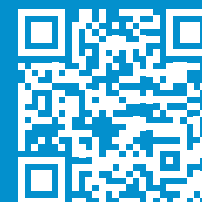
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Science

Have chromosomes cracked the case?

Ezra Izer discusses the genetic analysis that has supposedly identified Jack the Ripper



Ruby Jackson keeps you up-to-date with the latest scientific studies

Using solar energy for carbon capture

Cambridge researchers have developed a solar-powered reactor that can capture carbon dioxide to generate sustainable fuel. The reactor uses a bed of solid silica-amine which soaks up CO₂ at night. During the day, a semiconductor powder can absorb UV radiation from sunlight to convert the carbon dioxide into 'syngas,' a mixture of carbon monoxide and hydrogen that can be used for the production of many different fuels and chemicals.

Direct air capture (DAC) of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is a promising technology for combating the climate crisis. However, so far its use has been limited, as it is energy-intensive and does not produce any valuable products. In addition, the CO₂ captured using DAC so far has been stored underground, but it's not clear what the long term impact of this could be. In contrast, the solar-powered reactor is far cheaper, using light rather than high temperatures or pressures to capture CO₂.

Quantum computers could be years away

Microsoft has created a chip that it believes could be used to build the first quantum computers. The firm's 'Majorana 1' chip is powered by the world's first topological superconductor, or 'topoconductor,' which can create a new state of matter: not solid, liquid or gas but a topological state, which until recently had only been theorised. The chip uses indium arsenide to produce new quantum particles called Majoranas, which have unique properties which a technical fellow at Microsoft has said mean quantum computing could be possible within "years, not decades".

Quantum computers use quantum mechanics to mathematically map the behaviour of nature, enabling

them to solve technical and societal problems that today's computers, which use classical physics, are unable to calculate accurately. For example, quantum machines might be able to calculate the properties of the substances that would be required to break down microplastics into valuable byproducts, or how enzymes could be used in agriculture to more efficiently produce food in harsh climates.

Screen time makes you short-sighted

A meta-analysis of 45 studies including more than 300,000 people has shown that increasing time spent looking at screens is associated with an increased risk of myopia.

The prevalence of myopia, or short-sightedness is rising, with scientists suggesting that by 2050 nearly half the world's population could be short-sighted. So far a clear cause for this has not been established, although it's been suggested that focusing on close up objects for long periods, such as when using a screen, is the culprit.

The researchers conducted a meta-analysis, a method that uses statistical techniques to combine the results of different studies for more reliable results, and found there was a strong association between time spent on screens and risk of becoming short-sighted. The relationship was S-shaped, suggesting there was a safe level of screen exposure (less than one hour per day), but the risk of myopia then increased dramatically with every additional hour of screen time.

The researchers noted they could not be sure this correlation indicated a causal relationship, and acknowledged it could be down to other factors such as time spent outside. However, the study brings us a step closer to understanding how this condition.

If my time at Cambridge has taught me anything, it's that there's a particular comfort in returning to the arms of old fascinations. Despite my academic pivot towards the drier terrain of POLIS papers in my third year, History – twitching, macabre, and irresistibly pumped with blood – remains my first love, sadomasochistic matron that she is. It was the subject that captured my childhood's attention. Nothing quite epitomises that enduring allure like the chilling – both figuratively and literally cold – unsolved case of Jack the Ripper. Only now, I'm obliged to reluctantly put a question mark after the 10th word in that sentence.

I remember, with unsettling clarity, the hours spent in Year 8 History – dramatically alternating at my desk between fainting and fixating, as the smartboard carouselled between grainy depictions of the Ripper's victims in varying states of intactness. As my classmates dissected each crime with a fervour that, in hindsight, definitely should've raised more safeguarding concerns, I was preoccupied with committing each variation of intestinal location to memory. Between this, and the frankly unhealthy codependency I developed with *Buzzfeed Unsolved's* Shane Madej down the road, I spent an inordinate amount of time convinced that Francis Tumblety (of flamboyant American quack doctor fame, for the inundated) was the true architect of the terror. So it's safe to say I was a little pissed when those bastards only went and solved it.

Indeed, over a century later, scientists appear to have accomplished what legions of amateur sleuths and true crime podcasters could not: they've unmasked Jack the Ripper. A recent forensic breakthrough has rekindled global fascination with the case, pointing, with unnerving precision, to Polish immigrant Aaron Kosminski as the likely perpetrator. If you'll

forgive my crude Sidge-wick-aded explanation, the process behind this revelation hinges on mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) analysis, a technique particularly suited for historical cases due to the higher copy number and resilience of mtDNA compared to nuclear DNA. Researchers extracted genetic material from a shawl, allegedly belonging to Catherine Eddowes – one of the Ripper's canonical five victims – using advanced polymerase chain reaction (PCR) methods to amplify even the smallest fragments of preserved DNA. The resulting sequences were then compared to known genetic markers from living descendants of both Eddowes and Kosminski, yielding what has been described as a 'conclusive' match.

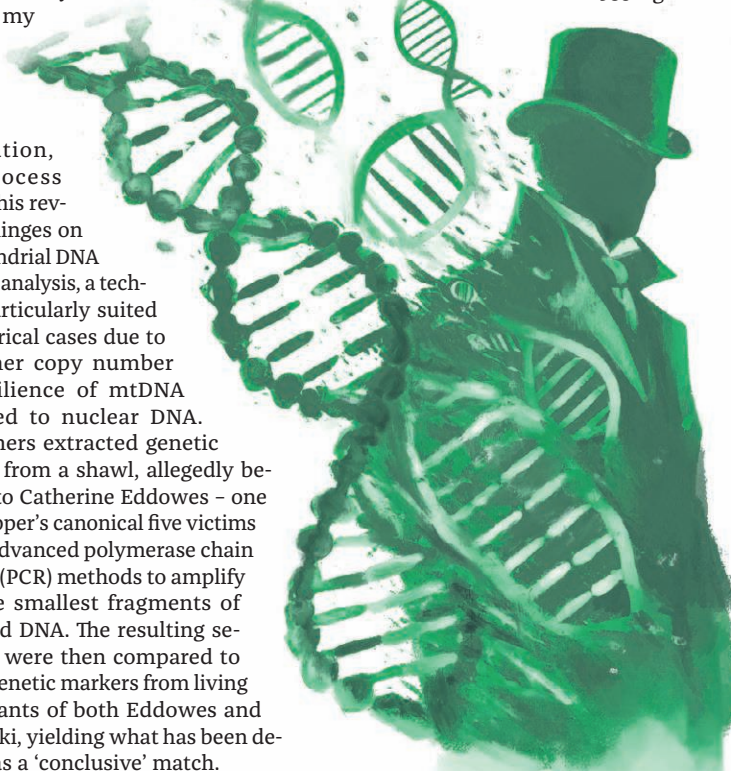
Russell Edwards, the indefatigable researcher behind this morbid quest for absolution, asserts that the genetic evidence is statistically significant, suggesting that the probability of such a match occurring by chance is exceedingly low. The methodology involved stringent contamination controls, including negative controls to ensure no extraneous DNA influenced the results.

“Scientific advancements not only recalibrate historical narratives but actively restore justice

Presently, descendants of the victims are advocating for an official inquest to formally name Kosminski as the killer. For many, this revelation signifies not just historical closure but long overdue justice for the poor women whose lives have been relegated to footnotes in criminology papers and the odd subredit comment section.

On the surface, this discovery appears to mark a watershed moment in historical forensics, seemingly offering a resolution to one of history's most notorious unsolved mysteries. Yet, as with all inquiries involving the Ripper, this narrative is inextricably layered with complexities that challenge our understanding of how science can retrospectively influence historical discourse. This isn't the first instance where modern forensic methodologies have sought to resolve historical enigmas.

The 1935 Jigsaw



Murders, for example, revolutionised forensic investigation by employing innovative techniques such as craniofacial superimposition and forensic odontology, which were instrumental in securing the conviction of Dr Buck Ruxton for the brutal murders of his wife and housemaid.

More recently, the exoneration of Anthony Wright through short tandem repeat (STR) DNA profiling underscores how scientific advancements not only recalibrate historical narratives but actively restore justice. This case spotlights how the integration of forensic techniques, particularly next-generation sequencing (NGS) technologies, can reveal previously inaccessible layers of genetic information, reconstituting both legal and historical interpretations.

However, the supposed finality offered by forensic evidence often proves elusive. The provenance of the shawl under scrutiny remains mired in controversy; critics have raised valid concerns about potential DNA contamination over the course of more than a century. Given that modern PCR techniques can amplify even trace levels of contaminant DNA, ensuring sample integrity in historical artefacts demands extreme rigour: an area where this case arguably falls short. Compounding these doubts is the absence of peer-reviewed scientific validation, which remains a critical benchmark for establishing credibility within the forensic community.

Beyond the technical challenges, ethical considerations loom large. While descendants of the victims may find solace in conclusively naming their relative's assailant, the living family of Kosminski could bear the burden of inherited stigma, an unintended consequence of assigning historical guilt posthumously. This intersection between scientific investigation and inherited legacy raises important ethical questions: does the drive to provide historical closure for some justify the risk of imposing an unwanted association on others, whose only link is a common ancestry?

What emerges from this case is a profound tango between scientific precision and historical context. Historians excavate motive, cultural environment, and societal influence, while forensic scientists provide empirical anchors through methodologies such as mitochondrial haplotyping and allele frequency analysis. Together, they construct a richer, more intricate tapestry – one where objective data and subjective narrative inform each other in equal measure.

For me, Jack the Ripper transcends mere unsolved mystery status; it represents the convergence of scientific innovation and historical curiosity that initially fuelled my fascination with the past. Even as the torrid romance between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown consumes the brunt of my intellectual energy nowadays, the chilling allure of forensic discovery remains. It serves as a reminder that history, persists as that same unresolved dialogue between fact and interpretation that struck me when I was small.

▲ EZRA IZER

Science

Heresy or heritage?: Dr. Grace Lin and Dr. Felicia Sunaryo on practicing Traditional Chinese Medicine

Yi Sum Yue speaks to two practitioners about its growing popularity, and controversy

What are the most common cases you see in your Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) patients?

Dr. Sunaryo: As a specialist in pulmonary health, I frequently treat conditions such as chronic cough, flu, asthma, and COPD. Additionally, I address lifestyle-related issues that are increasingly common today, including insomnia, neck/back/lower back pain, and digestive problems.

Dr. Lin: In my experience, a lot of mixed breed rescue dogs have anxiety issues. We can use acupuncture to balance the heart by looking at Chi or a blood deficiency. Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM) gives us a lot more options when it comes to internal medicine, especially in liver and kidney problems. For example, we see a lot of cats with hepatic lipidosis and jaundice. Generally, they are stressed and anxious, which usually means liver chi stagnation. We use Chinese medicine to help promote chi flow to calm the cat.



▲ DR. GRACE LIN

Are there possible setbacks in the integration of Western and traditional Chinese medicine?

Dr. Sunaryo: While the integration of Western medicine and TCM is generally beneficial, I believe potential setbacks can arise depending on the specific case. A notable example is the combination of blood-activating Western medications, such as aspirin (commonly used for heart conditions), with huó xuè huà yǔ (blood-invigorating and stasis-removing herbs) in TCM. This highlights the importance of using TCM under the guidance of a qualified practitioner who can adjust dosages and ensure safe integration with Western treatments.

Dr. Lin: Not really, and there are no major setbacks. Usually, you can combine both medicines in your treatment plan. If the patient has a sensitive

stomach there may be an occasional GI [gastrointestinal] effect, but this is far less common than western medicine.

“
It is a very handy tool to get to know the animal”

There has been debate over whether TCM is safe due to the lack of scientific reasoning and evidence behind it. What are your thoughts on this?

Dr. Lin: There have been far more research and even double blinded studies published in Western veterinary journals than we realise. For example, the acupuncture point ST36 or zú sǎn lǐ was stimulated, and significant endorphin release was observed, aiding pain management. I think more studies are on the way, but I believe getting very good therapeutic and clinical outcomes says a lot more about TCVM.

As more research is being carried out in the field of TCM, how do you see

the future of medicine and patient care changing in response to this?

Dr. Sunaryo: In the future, the integration of TCM and Western medicine could lead to more comprehensive and personalized patient care. Whether it is Western or Chinese medicine [...] it is a very handy tool to get to know the animal.”

Dr. Lin: I believe it is similar to human medicine - we are becoming more aware of yǎng shēn (taking care of one's body). It's more than just taking antibiotics when you are sick. A lot of my clients are asking for less antibiotics or steroids as they are more concerned of the side effects of Western medicine. The more research and awareness, the more comfortable we are to use Chinese medicine.



▲ DR. FELICIA SUNARYO

As both a Western and TCM practitioner, do you find there is any conflict between the two systems?

Dr. Lin: I think I see more synergy rather than conflict. In both practices it is essential to take good histories. Palpations are also important in TCVM, so whenever I start palpating I am actually doing both practices. How you interpret it is up to your judgment, and you need to kind of switch between practices, but the result is usually the same.

Sometimes the animal won't tell you their feelings because their owner has been away. But if you are using Chinese medicine, you can identify that it has liver chi stagnation; its tongue is redder in the area representing the liver. Then you can ask what the owner has done lately because the animal is not impressed. Then the owner may say “oh I have been away,” or “I have a new boyfriend, and the boyfriend hates the cat” and that makes TCVM very revealing.

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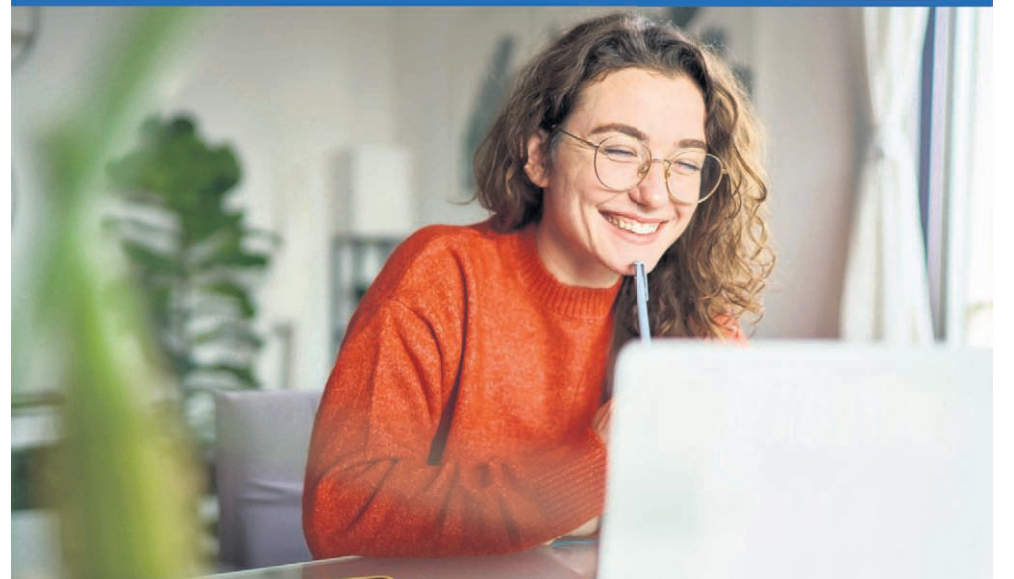
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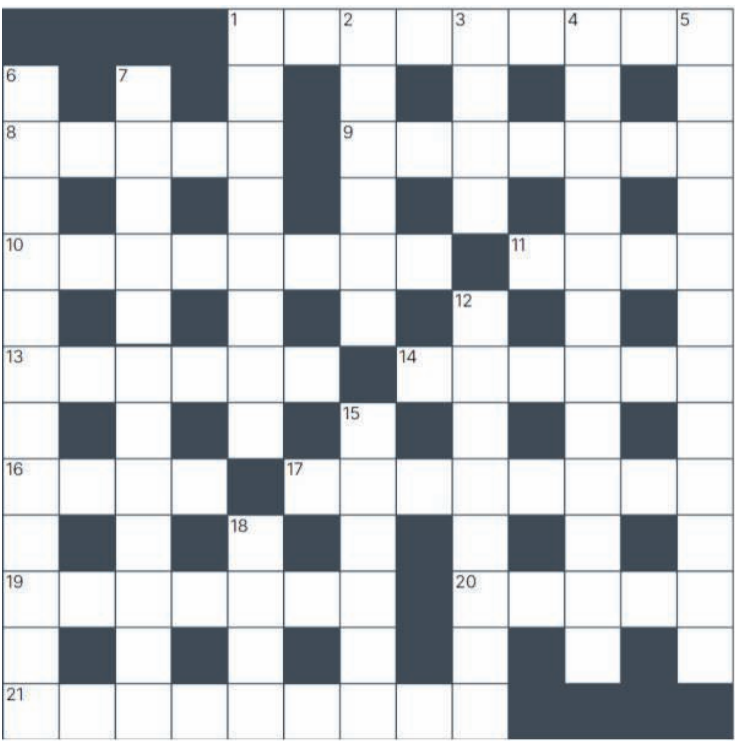
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The Smoking Area

Crossword



Sudoku

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

Crossword Clues

Quick:

ACROSS

- 1 Post which may be equivalent to Dean, Master, or Principal in some colleges (9)
- 8 Scent (5)
- 9 Unreligious (7)
- 10 Gave a basic description of (8)
- 11 Ethnic group predominantly in South-Eastern Nigeria (4)
- 13 McLaren’s ‘papaya’ in any other context (6)
- 14 Critical (6)
- 16 Country 60% covered by rainforest (4)
- 17 Occupant of Azkaban (8)
- 19 Stirred up (7)
- 20 1977 Broadway Musical about the eponymous orphan (5)
- 21 Where Benedictines tend to live (9)

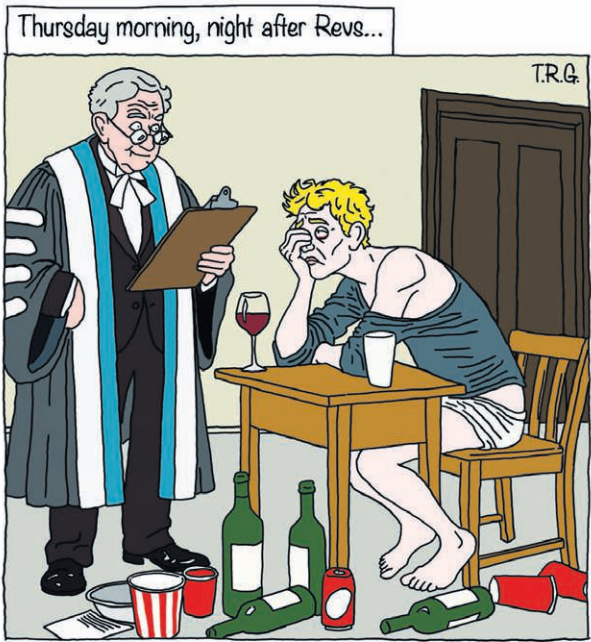
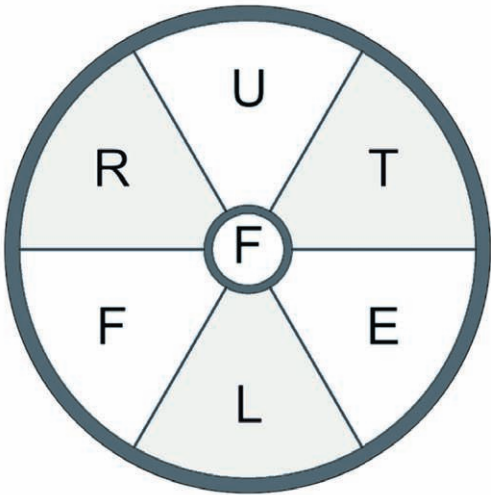
DOWN

- 1 Oatmeal, in British English (8)
- 2 Sunday after Palm Sunday (6)
- 3 Symptom of scabies (4)
- 4 Edifying (12)
- 5 Engine power booster (12)
- 6 Property of objects or words meaning of the same shape (12)
- 7 Nationality of Magdalene fellow who was both 1a and 17a (5,7)
- 12 Section of a textbook (8)
- 15 Mathematical, say (6)
- 18 Asa Butterfield in Sex Education (4)

ANSWERS TO PUZZLES ON
INSTAGRAM @VARSITYCAMBRIDGE
PUZZLES BY SOPHOCLES

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 try-hard; 18 words perfect.



“The University has decided that supervisions will now be done from students’ rooms.”



Charting women’s introduction into Cambridge

Resident Varsity Archivist **Anna Herbert** investigates the experiences of women in Cambridge through the years

When *Varsity* was established in its current form in 1947, women’s existence in Cambridge was marginal, informal, and insecure. It was not until 1948 that the first Cambridge degree was granted to a woman, after previous proposals several decades earlier had been rejected, accompanied by violent protest. The awarding of an honorary degree to Her Majesty the Queen marked the “triumphant culmination” of “seventy years of bitter struggle for equality.” The Queen’s special message to the women of Cambridge suggests, however, that there was still an uphill struggle for them to assert their academic legitimacy. The Queen highlighted that attending Cambridge could add “the grace of a well-trained mind” to a woman’s “natural” “gentleness, ready sympathy,” and “an instinctive love of the young, weak, and the suffering”. Women’s position at the University may have been formalised, but it was still heavily gendered.

The true marker of women’s formal entry to the University was reported by *Varsity* just a week later, when a Girton student became the first female undergraduate to be “prorogued” after being caught not wearing a gown after dark. Valida Turner was quoted saying: “It

was worth six-and-eightpence to make University history.” She was the first to succeed in acquiring a “historic progging,” beating the competition evident in the “frequent reports of attempts by Newnham and Girton women to attract the attention of the Proctors”.

Varsity’s historic attitude towards and portrayal of women has reflected the antiquated misogyny inseparable from Cambridge’s past. The ‘Girl of the Week’ column that frequented *Varsity* prints saw women being spotlighted for their “feminine” qualities. One ‘Girl of the Week’ in 1963 was selected due to being “extremely charming” and the most “beautiful Icelandic girl in Cambridge”. Another column, ‘Woman’s Angle,’ provided readers with a weekly insight into the fashions of the late 1940s. While women entered Cambridge pursuing intellectual improvement, they were unable to escape the rigid societal standards of femininity.

The ‘Women’s’ page of *Varsity* papers of the ‘60s saw weekly recipes, no doubt to encourage female students’ continued domesticity. In 1949, “Domestic science” at Newnham was labelled “the essential study which no student escapes”. One article complained that the College took

“advantage of the fact its members are all women” in expecting them “to do the housework,” while they still had “just as much work to get through as the men”. Women may have formally gained the same status as men in the University, but their experience was by no means one of equality.

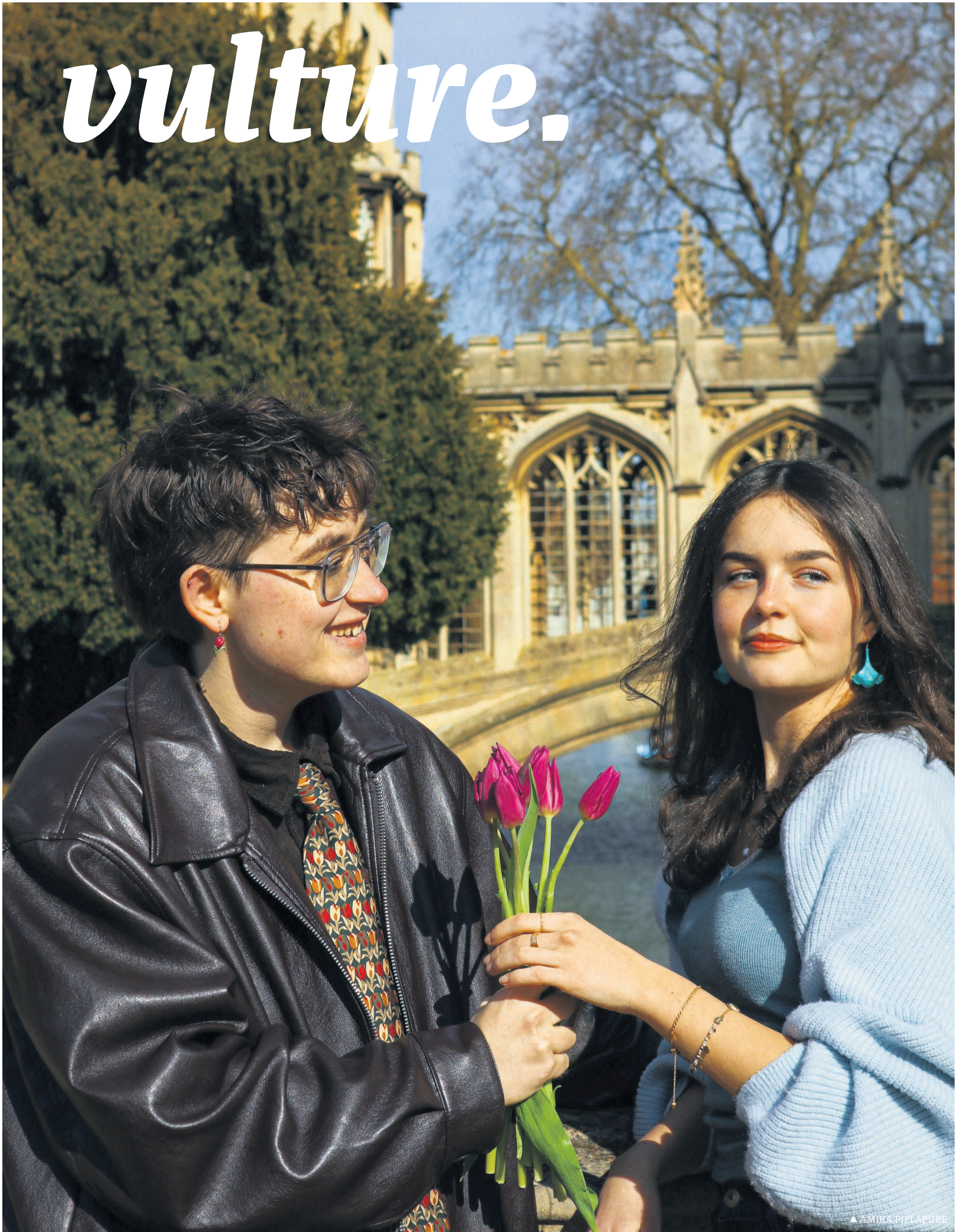
The Union existed as a stronghold for the continuation of male domination in the University. In 1955, *Varsity* reported on the creation of the Cambridge University Women’s Union in response to the Union’s persistent exclusion of women. The first debate, “That Women’s Place is in this House,” left the House “equally divided,” only passing in favour on the President’s casting vote. Eight years later, women were finally admitted as Union members. The backlash against women’s inclusion culminated in a Trinity historian proposing to form a ‘Misogynist Society’ as an “active pressure group,” with the aim to change women from “intellectual robots into very human and natural fountains of warmth and joy”.

By the latter half of the 20th century, the women’s colleges had established themselves as strongholds of women’s education. But the further expansion of the female student body could only come

through the emergence of co-education and co-residence. The introduction of women was a slow and fractured process, encapsulated by endless *Varsity* reports on the possibility of various colleges admitting women. In 1973, a *Varsity* article titled “Gentlemen do their business in private” highlighted the deep-rooted barriers to co-residence. Queens’ were revealed to be resistant to introducing women due to fears it would “stop Cripps,” a key College benefactor, “from paying up” to fund the College’s extension. The College’s President also acknowledged that “the old Queensmen” were “strongly against the admission of women”.

The *Varsity* archives paint two distinct pictures of women’s progress within the University. On one hand, the newspaper is rife with misogyny, both in reports of Cambridge’s resistance to women’s full inclusion, but also in the casual bigotry of articles and columns of the past. Yet, in between these exist articles representing hope and progress, as women were, albeit slowly, able to establish themselves in the University and legitimise their existence within the student body of Cambridge.

vulture.



Arts

Contemplating Hopper from Cambridge

Sanaer Madden explores the similarity between the solitude of Edward Hopper's paintings and the strangeness of Cambridge's scenery

You're sitting in a dimly lit room at 11pm, staring into the abyss, questioning all your life decisions. Student in a haven't-started-the-reading-9am-deadline conundrum or protagonist of an Edward Hopper painting? It's hard to tell. Cinematic, lonely, and beautiful: the inimitable Edward Hopper explores human existence with an intense honesty through his melancholic oil paintings. In his surreal scenes of human life, Hopper's paintbrush is possessed with a dreamlike quality. His work is like a glimpse of a dream that you can't quite remember. Or like watching an entire film in a single frame, hence why he has been an inspiration for filmmakers such as David Lynch, Ridley Scott, and Alfred Hitchcock. There are countless ways to digest Hoppers oeuvre, yet, in all his works, a strong sense of intrusion lingers. Hopper is keen to highlight that we are an outsider looking in. His paintings awaken the senses – a protruding sense of silence, we wonder what the room smells like or how cold the air is. We, as the viewer, know we shouldn't really be there, but we don't feel unwelcome. In fact, we are completely ignored. The perspective Hopper gives us does not feel voyeuristic, but simply observational.

Sometimes when I'm sitting at a dark desk in the middle of a bookshelf, with no idea which level of the UL I'm on, I feel somewhat like an Edward Hopper character. The infinite corridors of the University Library exist between a beautiful Hopper oil painting and a scene from *The Shining*. Combinations of shadowy book cases, warm bulbs hidden in cream lamps, and blue natural light streaming through the intermittent windows remind me of the warm and cool ambiguity within Hopper's body of work. Many locations in Cambridge evoke something dreamlike and Hopperesque. Walking down Free School Lane at night,

“Hopper's paintbrush is possessed with a dreamlike quality



DAISY COOPER

lit only by orange-tinged street lights. Leaving the library at midnight after endless hours, to see colourfully stained-glass windows punctuating a pitch-black night sky through tired eyes.

Pockets of rich colour peeking through the darkness of the night is a quintessential Hopper quality. I see this emulated everywhere in contemporary media, for example almost all of Richard Hawley's album covers look like live-action Hopper

paintings. His lyrics echo ideas of isolation which are ever-present in Hopper's compositions. In *Coles Corner*, Hawley sings "I'm going downtown where there's people, my loneliness hangs in the air. No one there real waiting for me. No smile, no flower, no air." If Hopper's characters could talk, I believe they'd speak in Hawley's lyrics.

His portraits often display individuals totally entranced by their individual activities or conversely engrossed in nothingness. *Soir Bleu* is a particular favourite of mine, as it illustrates what it feels like to pursue any new creative endeavour. In all seriousness, this work is certainly an anomaly as Hopper does not often visually emphasise the feeling of otherness and alienation so patently. This work's clown protagonist sits at an outdoor bar amongst a mixed group of well-dressed, well-to-do socialites, and working men. An obvious metaphor for being an outsider, Hopper takes it a step further by mirroring the exact pose, proportions, and angle of the clown to the man on the left sitting on a different table, compositionally separated by the pillar between them – maybe this mirrors a life the clown figure could have had? Or perhaps the clown is a physical manifestation of the man's inner self?

The multi-figural compositions provoke even more questions than the singular portraits, as there is an overwhelming sense of tension and silence within them. In some ways it reminds me of the dynamics of a library, each person getting on with their own tasks yet we all share a combined quietness. Hopper's world is different to our own because of his injection of bold, brash colours – everything looks smoother, visually pleasing, and makes the monotony of everyday life more palatable. Hopper makes the mundane beautiful. When overwhelmed by academic stress, exhaustion, and endless assignments, take a walk around Cambridge at night, and remind yourself what a dreamlike place we are in. Don't let the beautiful feel mundane.



PUBLIC DOMAIN



Ben Birch and Madelaine C

'The Old Vicarage, Grantchester'

... wo
In Grantchester,
—Some, it may be
With Nature there,
And clever modern
A Faun a-peeping t
And felt the Classi
To glimpse a Nai
Or hear the Goat
... But these are thi
I only know th
Day long and watch
And, flower-lulled
Hear the cool lap
Until the centuries b
In Grantchester, in

Rupert Brooke

It's rare that I go to Grantchester but the times I have been I can feel my breathing slow, and my eyes adjust. It is said that there is an underground passage which runs from the meadows to King's College; it is said that a fiddler disappeared down this passage and was never seen again; it is said that Byron swam in the pools by the meadows; none of this crosses my mind when I find myself in Grantchester. Usually, I notice that, rather than the voices of tour guides in punts, I can hear the babble of the river's water running, slowly. I notice that, rather than the staggering over cobbles, I can feel the softness of the ground underfoot. I notice the quiet and the calm. Orwell hated the poem. He called it "something worse than worthless but as an illustration of what the thinking middle-class young of that period felt it is a valuable document." I happen to think it's quite good. Not only is it a startlingly lucid poem of place, but it is also a welcome sigh of relief at leaving Cambridge.

– BEN BIRCH

Echolocate: A triumph of connection

Eve Connor visits the *Echolocate* exhibition at Queens', and reflects on how we on art finds itself through others

▼ JESSICA LEER



ark pick Rupert Brooke's poem
'Grantchester' up off the bookshelf

ould I were
in Grantchester!
, can get in touch
or Earth, or such.
n men have seen
through the green,
cs were not dead,
ad's reedy head,
-foot piping low:
ngs I do not know.
at you may lie
the Cambridge sky,
in sleepy grass,
se of hours pass,
lend and blur
Grantchester. . . .

, 'The Old Vicarage, Grantchester' (1912)

It's a critical convention, at least for sceptics, to say that the pastoral privileges a wilful unconsciousness, a turning-away. In this formulation the idyll means escape. Brooke's poem was written in Berlin, just a few years before WWI, and it's full of these eye-rolling inheritances. But it's also clear about its separation from these open fields. There's an uneasiness, gurgling just under the surface; the River Cam smells "thrilling-sweet and rotten." Brooke has a way with complicated tides; as the poem swells it often recedes. My favourite part is where nighttime "wakes a vague unpunctual star, / A slipped Hesper." Brooke probably means that the star has been smacked a bit for its tardiness. I like to think, though, that he intends the adjective "slippery," but as it twinkles it slips from both view and grammatical case. In Berlin, that kind of freedom seems unavailable, so Brooke finds it in verse. I'm looking forward to my next walk down, when the weather's better.

— MADELAINE CLARKE

"Love From Your New-Old Friend"
Nostalgic lined school paper
to miffy envelopes
hung from ceiling & stitched together, ingenious presentation ... sway as people go by

No, not a poem, but my first notes from the private view of *Echolocate*, the accomplished new exhibition at Queens' Fitzpatrick Hall, curated by Yuki Holley and Tom Gibson.

Reading from the catalogue – a beautiful object in and of itself, with something of El Lissitzky about the cover design – *Echolocate* presents "a series of exchanges between strangers in Cambridge and twenty in Glasgow, who connected through the simple yet profound act of writing letters." These letters are, as I have noted, "hung from the ceiling & stitched together," but also photocopied, folded into paper aeroplanes, and spread across the wall leading up the staircase. They moor the exhibition, though they are far from its endpoint: interspersed are paintings, sculptures, performances, and oodles of visual art created by the correspondents in response to their experiences. Downstairs in the Black Box Studio, poetry and dance runs to a rotating crowd.

What astonishes is the breadth of the creative responses. Each participant from the University of Cambridge and Glasgow School of Arts wrote under a pseudonym in the hope that anonymity could, at least to begin with, prioritise their "shared humanity" over "differences in culture, class, and geography" (again from the catalogue). Iris May (or 'May') sets the exhibition's standard with an MDF sculpture of conjoined human forms, *Possibly Body* (2025), slotted together and painted in oiled blues. A remarkable piece, it suggests a style immediately recognisable a short way down the corridor in *Papermates* (2024), wherein two other figures, this time represented in black and red, are cut from smooth card; without an obvious frame, the stippled texture of the gallery wall merges with the work. The conversation continues.

Careful use of colour innovates how light operates in *Before Nightfall* (2025) by Jessica Song ('Ursula'). Reduced at a distance to pinpricks of green, orange, and pink, Song's painted figures persist against the setting sun and their charcoal background. I am charmed by the geese to the left of the picture and the skinny trees stretching for the top margin, poked through with the windows of houses. Anybody familiar

with Cambridge will recognise the setting as Parker's Piece. However, they might be surprised to re-encounter the scene from a new perspective.

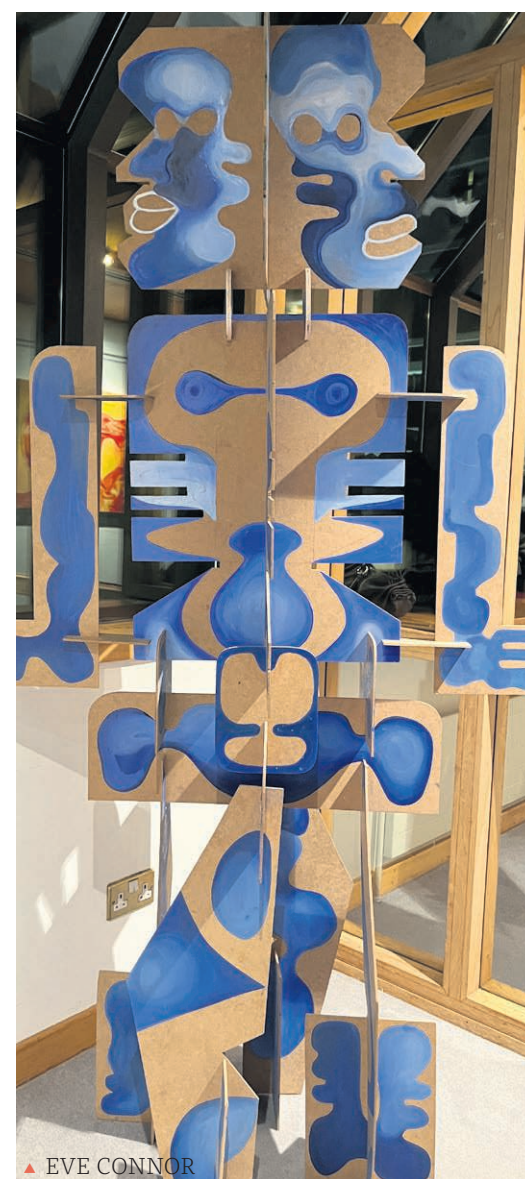
Such is the power of the exhibition: Cecilia Baldauf-Clark ('Sip') caught my attention with the college on an envelope, *Untitled* (2025), and again as I admired a linocut of a child's head in one of the dangling letter-displays. I did not connect the linocut with Baldauf-Clark until I spied the note below signed 'Sip'. It finished: 'This is one of my favourite things I've made, / Please look after her!' Here and everywhere at *Echolocate* was the joy of encounter and re-encounter among the documents of first meetings, the inception of in-jokes, hellos, goodbyes, and see-you-next-times.

I must have done twenty of the Hall for ing around al occasions, I slipped down the corridor in order to revisit *An Olive and an Otter* (2025) by Malak Naseem ('Olive'; 'Otter' is the pseudonym for Izzy Wilkinson). Paper sculpture and embroidery, Naseem's piece features two boxes strung together

like a tin-can phone. A singular thread, snipped as though over-handled, falls downwards: poignant, lightweight, a stroke of affective genius. Onlookers distort the shadows doubling the threads. *Self Portrait* (2024) by Miki Derdun ('Ant') embodies *Echolocate*'s subjectivity: the piece alters depending on when you encounter Derdun's video montage broadcast on the box television (I caught both a black-and-white silent film and an 'Amazing Phil' YouTube video). It speaks to the breadth of identity, as much about what goes on playing in private as what is witnessed by others.

Snatches of conversation from the passing crowd resemble the fragments of text on the participants' letters. In the Black Box Studio, Agnes Little ('Lord') sat at a desk, blindfolded, charting a pen across a roll of paper.

On my next visit the studio, the roll was still there, but Little had transformed into Nene Obiajuru ('Salt'), reading poetry under a pinkish spotlight. Life goes on. My conversation with Grace Ren, the artist behind *Still, Life – Arcana* (2024), a digital collage of redesigned tarot cards, spanned cor-



▲ EVE CONNOR

porate design, nineteenth-century sailors' busks, conceptual art, Russian nesting dolls, and the cows at Coe Fen. Looking again at Ren's work on my phone screen, I am drawn to different cards. How could I have missed the dangling telephone on 'The Hanged Man'? Ren believes that her viewers participate in the ecosystem of her artwork. The same is true for the exhibition. We choose where to settle our attention. Echoes, located.

Echolocate is a beautiful and original exhibition. I commend Holley and Gibson for the trust they have placed in the artists and their space, allowing them to speak together with minimal interference. The participants of *Echolocate* entered each other's lives, like all of us do, mid-way through the action. The resulting view is simultaneously personal and generative, worthy of celebration.

▲ EZRA IZER

Notebook: rolling in the deep of third year

As the end of her third and final year approaches, **Sophie Denny** dwells on the importance of making the most of Cambridge while we're still here

Third year: the time when saying "it's nearly over" is either horrifying, relieving, or (most likely) both. Each time I sit down to write this article, my thoughts have changed drastically from the previous attempt – when these attempts are only separated by a matter of hours, it's fair to say that nothing quite prepares you for the emotional rollercoaster that is Lent term of third year. My friends and I joke about the need for a welfare warning at the start of third year, but seriously, a heads-up would have been nice.



from feeling like you've got this (whatever 'this' is) one minute to drowning in a spiral of existential dread the next can be somewhat derailing. I'm aware this may sound overdramatic, but emotions in excess really do typify the third year experience, as the following ramble will no doubt reveal.

During our start-of-term meeting, after rattling off this term's to-do list, my DoS gently reminded me to try and enjoy my final eight weeks of learning. Yet in the haze of balancing supo essays with dissertation writing, job applications, and writing Master's personal statements, the term quickly becomes defined by counting down how many essays you have left, and how long it will be until you can definitively answer the "So, what are your plans for next year?" question. Actually enjoying your lectures and the texts you're working on quickly falls to the bottom of the to-do list.

Yet as the weeks roll on and this number of essays gradually reduces, the realisation that you've only got four essays to go moves from being relieving to bittersweet. After finishing my penultimate supo essay for one of my papers, I was hit by an unexpected wave of sadness. Maybe it was the mix of slow pop love songs Spotify decided I had to listen to that evening, but pressing the full stop key came with the mildly terrifying awareness that the familiar routine of the past three years would soon be coming to an end. The fact that the essay was on a topic that formed the heart of my personal statement obviously did not help matters, providing ample opportunity to reflect on

this full-circle moment and sending me into a spiral of over-romanticisation while Adele played in the background.

“ I was sent into a spiral of over-romanticisation while Adele played in the background

It was then that I remembered I do actually like my degree – a fact easily forgotten while we're here. The thought that reading and writing about books would no longer form the bulk of my daily work was deeply disorientating. Unlike my previous dreams of a time when I could just read books for fun, I found myself researching Master's courses – I guess they're called a panic Master's for a reason, right?

Having missed the boat for a Cambridge Master's, this idea diminished somewhat, leading me to the conclusion that, while I love my subject, perhaps my desire to continue studying was actually a desire to linger here for a while longer. After years of work to achieve the dream of studying at Cambridge, the thought of it coming to an end brings about an overwhelming mixture of sadness, fear, pride, and concern about whether I've truly 'made the most' of it. Of course, this will all seem insignificant in a matter of years, but the intensity of these terms means that the pressure to squeeze everything in can also squeeze the enjoyment out. Everything becomes a negotiation or a sacrifice, and you find yourself weighing up the

importance of making memories, doing your degree, and maybe getting some sleep in there, too.

The good thing is that it's not too late. We still have two weeks of Lent to go and, minus the (minor) inconvenience of next term's (somewhat) important exams, there's still time to tick off any lingering desires from your Cambridge bucket list. While it will most likely be even harder to enjoy next term, it's also even more important to attempt to punt to Grantchester, to try out that new Jack's flavour, or to go to formal just because, purely so the library air doesn't make you go completely insane. Plus, the added knowledge that we get a whole extra week of Cambridge to ourselves before we have to graduate and become *proper* adults slightly cushions the Lent term overwhelm.

I'm aware that I may be deluding myself, and that I'll probably change my mind in an hour or two, but for now, remind yourself that while it may be nearly over, it's not over yet. Although it doesn't feel like like it, four months is still quite a long time (ish). But maybe, for your own sake as well as your friends', try to fight against the internal countdown and the anticipatory sentimentality (rich advice, I know). You're still here – there'll be plenty of time for that later.

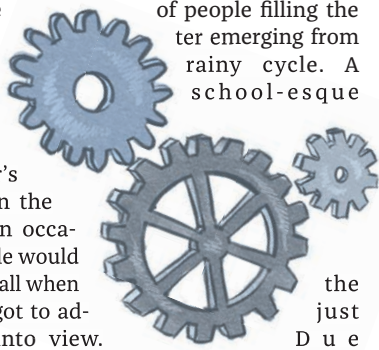
And another word of advice: do NOT under any circumstances decide that third year is the perfect time to rewatch *Gilmore Girls*. Seeing Rory apply for her dream job, get rejected, graduate, and leave home will all suddenly be a bit too close for comfort... trust me, you only need to experience all that once.

Trial and Error: A day in the life of an engineer

Salome Gakwaya abandons the English Faculty and tries being an engineer for a day

Like many humanities students, I roll out of bed at questionable hours, spend late nights frantically finishing essays, and largely make up my schedule as I go along. Meanwhile, my engineer flatmate seems to live in a parallel universe of structure and terrifyingly early mornings. Having observed this radical thing called routine, I decided it was high time for me to scale the mysterious walls of the Engineering Department and finally settle the debate: Are engineers *actually* better than us?

I like to think of myself as a bit of an early bird. But any idea of being a morning person was swiftly disproven with a 7:30am wake-up on a gloomy Friday morning. The first lecture was on mechanics (rotational dynamics...?). The hall was busier than I'd ever witnessed compared to the sparsely populated 9ams of Sidge lecture block, with the noise of people filling the seats after emerging from a cold and rainy cycle. A primary-projector displayed the lecturer's workings on the wall, and an occasional whistle would echo in the hall when lecturer forgot to add the notes into view.



to my flatmate's recently broken finger, I became her scribe; I desperately tried to make sense of what I was writing down while trying to dig up long-forgotten scraps from my A-Level Maths. Emerging from that lecture I was already mentally exhausted, but the day had only just begun.

Next came the probability lecture. By this point, I'm pretty sure everyone, including the lecturer, was secretly wishing they could be somewhere else. So, I did what any self-respecting humanities student would do: I settled in for a silent episode of *The Mentalist* to stay awake. Just when I thought my brain might short-circuit, it was finally time for a sweet treat break. We headed up a few floors to the canteen, where I decided to treat myself to a panini. The cheese had a strange smell, but I convinced myself it was just my imagination. It wasn't, but hungry from all the puzzling out I'd done so far, I ate it anyway. After a quick catch-up with the other Catz engineers about upcoming supervisions (and the amount of work that they'd be drowning in next week), I was given a tour of the department. From labs that looked like they belonged on a hidden floor of *Severance* to shadowy basement hallways where we collected old lecture worksheets, it became clear that the engineering department receives far more funding than any building on Sidge. Frankly, it was like walking through a high-tech fortress.

With two hours to spare, my engineer flatmate and I made our way to a cocoon-like study space in the Dyson Building. While I caught up on some read-

ing (which mostly involved scrolling without reading) and watched a movie for an upcoming supervision (to any engineers reading this, I swear this counts as work); my companion, determined to be productive, started working on her engineering examples papers. At some point, I may have stopped pretending to study and just marvelled at how organized her life was, like a well-oiled machine.

The break was lovely but far too short; before I could even begin to question my life choices, we were back in the lecture hall for Information Engineering, where someone spoke, for what felt like an eternity, about something called Fourier Transforms. By the time the lecture started, my eyelids were beginning to feel heavy and drift downwards (I may or may not have dozed off mid-lecture), but don't worry, I woke up in time for the grand finale: the Structures lecture. This was the only lecture where something actually

happened – a guest speaker came on stage we had demonstrated a live construction of a house bomb (no engineers were harmed in the process), and even

watched a video.

Finally, it was time to go home! I shuffled out of the lecture hall, feeling tired, hungry, and oddly appreciative of my chaotic humanities schedule. After a late lunch, to make up for the tragedy that was the cheese panini, I retired to my room for a nap while my flatmate, who seemed to run on some kind of perpetual energy source, went off to meet friends. I took a deep breath,



slipped off my engineer skin, and slipped back into my natural state: slightly disorganized, a little behind on essays, but embracing my Engling self.

After the bleak midwinter

Claire Ding reminds us of the little things to help us through the grey days

When I think about spring, the word 'change' immediately comes to mind. The days are gradually longer, flowers begin to bloom, and the season itself aligns with the new year period – a time of reflection, fresh starts, and let's be honest, a desperate attempt to revive our motivation.

In all fairness, I completely understand how hard it is to feel optimistic about spring when January offers nothing but relentless rain, biting winds and deadlines piling up, like the laundry that you meant to do last week. But this Lent term, I am choosing to embrace the energy of spring even while winter lingers on. So, here are a few things that have been helping me to navigate the midwinter slump that I can recommend.

Buy yourself a plant or a bouquet of flowers

Not only do they make your room look more aesthetic, which is never a bad thing, but watching them

grow day by day can be surprisingly uplifting. The purple tulips on my window sill have been great visual reminders of spring's approach. Plus, watering them gives me a small but tangible sense of control, which is very needed when Cambridge life can feel so overwhelming and chaotic.

Go outside

Even when you don't feel like it – go outside! I know – it's cold, sunlight is rare, and the idea of leaving somewhere with central heating seems ridiculous. But stepping outside, even for a short walk, can make all the difference. Last Lent term, one of my favourite weekend escapes from town was a morning trip to Grantchester; trust me, breathing in fresh air, and stopping for a coffee at the Orchard Tea Garden made it worth the effort. For those in the middle of an essay crisis or drowning in problem sheets, a quick stroll by the

River Cam works too. Watching ducks, swans or tourists struggling to punt makes a great study break, bonus points if it is from the unrivalled view point of the Trinity Hall wall.

The delights of the indoors

If you cannot handle the cold, don't worry – I have the perfect place for you: Kettle's Yard. It might seem unusual to seek out nature within the walls of an art gallery, but hear me out! Besides stunning art pieces, Jim and Helen Ede collected many natural objects

including pebbles, shells and seeds. My favourite is the bridge area, which houses the conservatory. Especially at sunset, bathed in golden light streaming through two large

windows, the conservatory, lush with greenery, feels truly magical, the perfect antidote for those Winter blues.

Simple delights

Two things that keep me going during midwinter and are pretty much instant mood boosters: sugar and sunlight. Evening baking sessions or brewing a fruity tea are great small acts of self-care, especially when the weather feels a little bit too bleak for going out. When the sun

does make an appearance, I take full advantage – whether it is going for a walk or just standing outside the library for a few minutes between study sessions. On gloomier days, I trick my body into believing I'm getting some sunlight by relying on Vitamin D tablets, but often a sweet treat and some sunshine will suffice in breaking the winter slump.

For me, embracing midwinter is not about setting unrealistic goals or planning a total life overhaul. It's about finding small things that make the winter days more bearable, and giving myself reminders that spring will arrive soon. Maybe that means changing your phone wallpaper to something that screams spring or taking a moment to appreciate that sunrise is creeping earlier each morning. As I write this, I glance over my shoulder – the morning sun is peeking through my window and I can feel that spring is on its way.



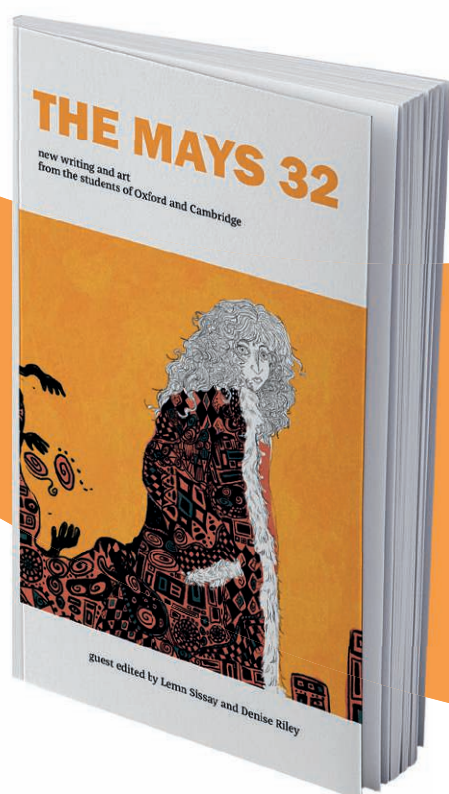
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Fashion

Head over heels for hats

Mae Auckland argues for the resurgence of hats and the creative possibilities they hold

One of the most heartbreaking phrases of the fashion world is “I’m just not a hat person” – second only perhaps to “Isn’t Vinted just old stuff?”, but that’s for another article. Such an utterance would almost never be heard in the early 20th century – a utopian age for headwear where both men and women alike donned an impressive range of bowler hats, flat caps, fedoras, and pill-boxes, as well as various others with increasingly strange names. What would old Hollywood be without Hepburn’s oversized black sun hat in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* or Sinatra’s iconic trilby? Originally created for functionality, hats later became linked to profession, and thus social status. In fact, hat-wearing was such an essential part of dressing in the pre-WWII era that it would have been considered embarrassing to leave one’s home without your signature cloche, beret or pork-pie hat.

So why now is it such a momentous occasion to sport one? Today hats are (for the most part) seen only at the races, raves and military revivals – prompting us to ask “What killed the casual hat?”.

There exists a number of very sad reasons for the gradual disappearance of the millinery craze, one being the move to more casual

dress- ing pio- neered by the young post-WWII, and another being the resurgence of voluminous up-dos in the 1960s (which would’ve made a flat cap... well, not flat).

However, the hat has not been lost forever. Since WWII there have been various revivals: the Kangol hat came with the hip-hop craze of the 1990s, the bucket hat (love them or hate them) came bursting onto the rave scene in the 2000s, and the recent beret come-back brings with it a focus on a certain European chic.

Locally speaking, a recent production at the Corpus Playroom giving hats the spotlight they deserve is *Far Away*, written originally in 2000 by

Carol Churchill and today directed by Enya Crowley. For the performance, a plethora of outlandish hats were commissioned and created by Crowley’s talented costuming team. The hats on display are incred-

ibly striking, with an unconventional mixture of textures, shapes, and dimensions. They are united by one common theme – an inherent absurdity.

I was fortunate enough to speak with Crowley in order to gain more insight into this novel labour of love. They began by explaining that the concept of the hats was actually written into the play itself,

and in fact key to the messages of distraction that the work confronts. However, the creative brief was – well, brief – with stage directions simply calling for headwear that is “even more enormous and preposterous”. This then left Crowley with the freedom I’m sure all directors dream of – as they advised the costuming crew to “go crazy”.

Such a battle cry gave way to an impressive collection of pieces with momentous visual impact: one in particular appearing onstage was an austere skeletal wire construction, mimicking a bird cage which even featured a miniature songbird suspended inside. Another was a

tiered hat reminiscent of a wedding cake, which gradually built up as the act progressed.

Others were displayed in an eye-catching video projected onto the back of the stage. The sequence featured various striking interpretations of headwear paraded in front of a brutalist background. The designs ranged from

a dinosaur looking skullcap emblazoned with “I’M

THE BOSS,” to a comically oversized pirate hat plastered with Union Jacks in a Vivienne Westwood-esque frenzy. In my conversation with Crowley, the favourite appeared to be a gothic black cowboy hat, featuring a high heeled shoe dripped with candle wax, almost calling to the signature melted wax head decorations of the genius designer Leigh Bowery.

The curation of these wearable works of art is an important one. In keeping with the production’s themes of climate crisis, it was important to Crowley to ensure that this didacticism translated into their eco-friendly creative process. During the interview they detailed the various second hand sources of materials used

for posters; antique lampshade to create (you guessed that’s equally brilliant as it is hilarious; and old



Fashion



wire containers used for the folklorically whimsical daffodil hat.

Crowley went on to describe the enjoyment in ‘foraging’ (a term any charity shop or kilo sale warrior knows all too well) for engaging stimuli that would give fascination and allure to these pieces. This second hand DIY spirit is something that all fashion fans should embrace when scouting for their next ensemble. For example, interesting fabric offcuts can be easily turned into patchwork applique for denim, and with a little knowhow old posters or magazines can become fabric transfers.

Despite the obvious novelty of such hats and, indeed, my excitement upon seeing the medium of headwear utilised in such an ingenious manner, it prompted me to ask “Why hats?”

Crowley informed me that Churchill chose to harness hats within the narrative due to how impactful they can be as a visual medium. It’s

precisely because of this impact that I always suggest anyone looking to feel put-together and all round chic to try one out. Sure to make an occasion out of any errand, hats grab attention, giving the impression that the wearer is

fashion conscious, confident in their sense of style (even if you’re not) and keen to stand out from the crowd. Just find the style that makes you feel fab.

As I marvelled at the colourful amalgamations of textures, wire, satin, paper, natural motifs, and so much more, Crowley reminded me of the irony of such a reaction. In fact, upon having the opportunity to see the performance, I realised the function of the hats within the narrative primarily as distractions designed to capture our intrigue.

In today’s world, it’s certain that hats exist to fascinate, embellish, and make an outfit just that bit more unique. So following *Far Away*, here’s to a Cambridge hat revival (perhaps without the killer deer).



Fashion Shoot Coordinator: Holly Hardman

Photographer: Amika Piplapure

Models: Joanne Yau, Abi Beton, Enya Crowley, Emily Shellet, Sami Firdose

Hat designers: Joanne Yau, Clotilde Dumont, Abi Beton, Olivia Pearson, Lizzie Caird, Chloe Jacob, Helen Lyster

Local hero: Sam Fender in Newcastle and beyond

Jessica Spearman reviews Sam Fender's *People Watching*, from Cambridge and Newcastle

It's rare to come across a Geordie who hasn't heard of Sam Fender, but it's even rarer to meet one who dislikes the singer, and it's clear why. His first two albums, *Hypersonic Missiles* and *Seventeen Going Under* cemented his well-deserved place as a 21st century music legend. Perhaps the most striking part of his music is his lyrical commitment to exploring the world at large whilst never straying from his home in North Shields.

Evident throughout the album is the theme of disconnect and existentialism. Fender documents this detachment from his working-class life, as a result of his meteoric rise to fame. Though I'm not a musician, in fact far from it, I do resonate with this aspect. The northern working-class background I've always had and taken immense pride in feels like it's slipping further and further away after three years of Cambridge imminently coming to a close. In a way, it's reassuring the artist who reminds you most of home also feels a similar detachment. Fender's position of being in my Spotify Wrapped for the past five years is no surprise, given his music is one of the few home comforts I'm able to enjoy in term time.

The release of the title single 'People Watching' in November 2024 was what really got me through the last few weeks of Michaelmas. Being over 200 miles from home, which feels even further in the absence of a Newcastle accent or community, I had never felt so homesick in the whole of my time at Cambridge. The song comments on experiencing grief, but also the institutional injustices within healthcare: "understaffed and overruled by callous hands." Even in a deeply emotional song, dedicated to someone he

considered a "surrogate mother," it's clear that the political and the personal are intertwined for Fender.

The transition from 'People Watching' into 'Nostalgia's Lie' is satisfying. The consecutive sequence of these two songs is fitting, given that people watching is very much an outsider's activity. To then transition this into 'Nostalgia's Lie' with the line "Can you take me back to somewhere, darling? / Where I feel safe," shows that disconnection from his 'normal' previous life and a nostalgic desire to be back in the comforts of home. In the

moments of home-

sickness when in Cambridge, this line couldn't be more true. It's difficult when you're so far from home, about to graduate, and have no idea about where you'll be in six months time. As much as you long for home, you know that no matter what, it's

never going to be the same place as your childhood.

Similarly, 'Wild Long Lie' encapsulates the feeling of being home but still feeling escapist. All of the fun you have to escape and distract yourself is temporary, as you simultaneously know you need to get out before you're stuck there forever - "think I need to leave this town before I go down." My working-class dad, the man I am proudest of in this world, has told me everyday in his broad Geordie accent that I need to 'Leave Fast' and get out

my hatred, it mutates / Posh cunt had me irate, he said, 'We're all the same.'" The experience of being talked down to is an experience most northerners here are familiar with. To subconsciously changing my accent, being told I should be grateful to be here, or that my northern status ticked a box for admissions tutors, has almost certainly given me a chip on my

shoulder.

If there's one thing Geordies are known for, it's friendliness. From growing up in what most would call a 'rough' area, the people there would give you their last, and it's this sentiment of being there for someone

that comes across in 'Something

Heavy': "So call me if you're down, I'll help you come around / The kettle on a rolling boil until it's sorted out." In my period of near-intermission and being sent home for half a term, it was my dad who kept the kettle on a rolling boil until I rejoined Cambridge. Everyone has their own baggage, it's undeniable, but the spirit of community in Newcastle is second to none.

People Watching is a masterpiece. Fender is a real example of hometown pride and comfort. Alas, this appreciation of Sam Fender is not one-sided; it's clear he also takes pride and comfort in North Shields and the North East, despite his meteoric rise to fame. His inclusion of Easington Colliery Band on 'Remember My Name,' and his prioritisation of North-East fans on his Newcastle date in December is testament to this. No matter how changed Fender feels after his climb to fame, one thing that definitely remains is his pure talent, which is certainly echoed in his new album. Regardless of whether I'm listening at home or listening in Cambridge, *People Watching* provides an extra level of Geordie comfort that seemingly only Fender can provide.



Iona Luke: rewriting Cambridge's music scene

Lauren Herd speaks to the breakout star about songwriting, the music industry, and the future

It has been around a month since we all saw our Spotify Wrapped, and from Lizzy McAlpine to Towa Bird, the past year has been the year of the songwriter. Despite finding comfort in familiarity, I am challenging myself in 2025 to discover new songs and artists to support. With Lucy Dacus' new album coming in March, and the promise of more new music from Chappell Roan, you may think your hankering for melodic guitar and experimental drum-led passages will be sated. I assure you there is one more artist you need to watch out for in 2025: Iona Luke

Iona Luke is an independent singer-songwriter who is in her final year of studying English at Magdalene College, but her journey in music started long before this. Iona started songwriting at 13 as a member of the prestigious Capital Children's Choir. This, she told me, opened up many opportunities, including performing with Rihanna at Westfield, but, most importantly, developing her own talents.

In being selected from a pool of young songwriters from this choir, she got to go to Real World Studios in Bath for a week, working with industry professionals to produce her song. As a result, Steve Osborne (U2's longtime producer) and a couple of record labels were interested, but Iona decided to focus on school.

Like many, COVID-19 and its subsequent lockdowns were transformative for Iona. Via an online cover posted with the Capital Children's Choir, she was noticed by Lana Del Rey. She honed her craft of songwriting during the pandemic, deciding to take a gap year and gig in London, before being met with either the choice of the Royal Northern College of Music or the University of Cambridge.

After listening to her two singles, 'Seventeen' and

'Violence,' it seems that this praise is entirely warranted. With powerhouse vocals and unmatched musicality, Iona is unafraid to redefine herself and be led by her artistic impulses. "Genre in itself is a made-up thing," she tells me, expressing that the only effect it has is, if an artist releases music of two different genres, it can be algorithmically detrimental to pulling in new listeners.

“There is one more artist you need to watch out for in 2025

In her songwriting, Iona manages to capture a memory or feeling which is perhaps unique to her but, such is her skill, makes it applicable to all listeners. "The best songwriting is simultaneously specific and universal," she says, highlighting that the more times you listen to a song, the more interpretations can be made, even within the same words. Iona agrees that the best kind of songwriters are the ones that can condense a large and complex concept into a single line, stating that "a picture says a thousand words." This can especially be seen in 'Violence,' which I interpreted as a song about a toxic love. In fact, Iona did not write it as such, making it intentionally applicable to many situations. "Most of my songs are not love songs," she confides, which I appreciate, as there are far more stories to be told than simply those of romance. Instead, Iona



CAITLIN MASON ▲

focuses on evoking a specific feeling and letting the listener do the rest.

Nevertheless, Iona is no stranger to impostor syndrome, comparing herself to those who are younger and doing what she does now. On a positive note, she highlights that artists like Charli XCX and Sabrina Carpenter (among others) are changing the approach labels are taking towards emerging artists.

She remarks that TikTok changed the game where, if a creator had a viral moment, they would be signed, meaning they did not think about the long game. These artists, however, have been working on their craft for years, redefining both what it means to be successful and the timeline for this success. Iona's perspective on these artists, and others that she is inspired by, has clearly influenced her approach for the better.

"Social media has been teaching me good lessons in not caring, especially in a bubble like Cambridge," she says, commenting on how her confidence has improved with practice. This has also been helpful in finding her place in the industry, where writing so many songs has, in itself, streamlined her sound. Slow and steady wins the race, with Iona joking: "I'm not in a rush to be successful. Still, I'm manifesting that critical acclaim and masses of popularity come quickly, so that I can scream 'this is not what I wanted / this is not what I need' at a live event."

This may be coming sooner than we expect, as Iona has been announced as a competitor for the Centre of Music Performance's 'Take It to the Bridge,' which will be the biggest audience she has ever performed her music for. Until then I will be avidly streaming, channelling my rage into music as the incomparable Iona Luke intended.

Delay that deadline for just *One Day*

Jaipreet Lully recommends a show which reminds us to take the end-of-term blues one day at a time

One Day (2024) is a one of a kind story. Released in February of last year, and based on David Nicholls' 2009 novel, it takes us through the lives of Emma Morley and Dexter Mayhew, charting their graduation all the way up to their mid-30s. Its main characters could not be any more dissimilar, and yet I'm sure we've all come across an iteration of them both at a certain point at Cambridge; Emma, Leeds-born, passionate in her political protest, and fiercely independent, forms an unlikely connection with Dexter, a privileged Londoner, renowned for his flirtatious and reckless nature.

“I found it beautifully refreshing to see an interracial couple displayed on screen

There are plenty of coming-of-age TV shows out there, ranging from the silly awkwardness of *The Inbetweeners* (2008) to the gloomy heartache of *Normal People* (2020). But, for me, what makes *One Day* more unique than most is its capturing of all of these coming-of-age themes, in snapshots of its characters across a long period of time. In following Emma and Dexter every year from 1988 to 2007, whether together or separate, we are able to track how each life experience has shaped them. It is not

just an exploration into two people falling in love, but it's also an ode to the decades and stages of life that we've all already experienced or may come to experience. It sparks nostalgia in a broad spectrum of generations, with music and outfits appreciated by those growing up in the 80s and the 2000s alike.

This format of time jumping is useful in many ways. We see Dexter and Emma go through periods of grief and changes in their careers and relationships. One episode in particular sticks out, which covers Dexter's emotional breakdown in the wake of his mother's illness, through scenes of quiet tension. As Dexter arrives late and hungover at his family home, to see his mother frail and resigned, delicately perched on a sunchair, we see him carry her up the stairs to rest, already struggling under the weight of a looming adulthood. In this moment, Dexter is no longer the wild and free teen, supported by the stability of a complete family and popularity amongst his peers, as seen in the first episode. *One Day* is full of these subtle yet powerful shifts. In fact, the show begins with Emma and Dexter's first encounter at their graduation ball; what seems in the moment to be a frivolous night spent debating their respective futures in the dim, smoky ambience of Emma's room becomes an integral point in their life trajectories. We are made ever aware of how quickly our lives can be uprooted, even with regards to aspects we once thought would be constant and unchanging. And yet at the same time, *One Day* also shows us how quickly life can be uplifted by positive forces.

It is equally important to note the changes made

to *One Day* as a TV adaptation. The power of Ambika Mod, a British-Asian actress, as the lead character of Emma Morley cannot be understated. I found it beautifully refreshing to see an interracial couple displayed on screen, especially a South Asian woman that I could identify with. While the show briefly touches on her South Asian identity, it is not used as the central conflict in the relationship, rather it is a subtle layer to Emma's character. In an interview, Ambika herself says, “I hope for increased representation of South Asian women onscreen lots.”



“I hope for increased representation of South Asian women onscreen lots.” *One Day* will be a symbol that you deserve to be loved [...] and you can go after what you want [...] you don't have to be just one thing.” *One Day* is special not only in for-

matting its story like a nostalgic photo album, but also in its diverse representation, in which women of colour can take up space without over-explaining their deservedness.

The moral core of *One Day* is encapsulated by a passage from *Great Expectations*, recited by Emma in a maid of honour speech:

“Imagine one selected day struck out of your life, and think how different its course would have been. Think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you but for the formation of the first link on that memorable day.”

In the depths of Lent term, as we all navigate different trajectories in our Cambridge lives, whether in our first or final year, I implore you, to watch (or rewatch) *One Day*. If you do, you'll end your procrastinating binge-watch in thoughtful ponderance, and learn to take every opportunity while you can!

Why I'm worried about the *White Lotus* effect

Amanda Ljungberg suggests the new *White Lotus* season will impact Thailand, for better or worse

For a satire on the rich and detached, does the barrage of curated new *The White Lotus* content not seem a little... ironic? Season three has begun its weekly rollout of episodes, and has brought us to a new location: Thailand. As a Thai person myself, it has been lovely to see my culture as it appears on one of the best television series on air. But something has been a little unnerving – the fact that Thailand is expecting, and HBO is wielding, the so-called ‘*White Lotus* effect.’

The Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea, where *The White Lotus* season one was filmed, reported a 425% increase in web traffic and a 386% increase in availability checks after the series was released. The Four Seasons San Domenico Palace in Sicily, where season two was filmed, was fully booked for six months after filming concluded. Now the Four Seasons Koh Samui, where season three is set, is experiencing a surge in checks and bookings. It is quite incredible how effective this anti-decadence series is at swaying decadent travel interests. At merely the announcement of Thailand as the location for season three, booking platforms reported immediate hikes in searches. Considering the fact that US searches for trips to Sicily increased by over 50% while season two was airing, it seems hardly cynical for us to conclude that, at least to some viewers, the story's critique of excess takes a backseat to the ultimate allure of it.

This is not to say that we cannot hold these two thoughts simultaneously. We can certainly acknowledge inequality while finding ourselves seduced by the privileged lifestyles which perpetuate it; this balance is to some extent what the show is built around. What's tricky here is how *The White Lotus* seduces us – season two expanded its locations, thus increasing the airtime of exclusive settings, and with season three featuring at least four hotels, we can only imagine how much time, and how many eyeballs, will be on the opportunities to indulge. Of course, season one's single-location setting was unique to COVID restrictions – but, for a subtle example, notice how the colour grading changes from season one to season two, from rather yell-

low and moody to bright, and, dare I say, almost... advertisement-like?

With such lush cinematography, such ogling at the beautiful beaches and meals and hotel suites, it is incredibly hard not to be drawn in by *The White Lotus*, which means, in real-world terms, to be drawn in by the Four Seasons. MAX announced a formal partnership with the Four Seasons ahead of season three, and is beginning to offer immersive ‘*White Lotus* experiences.’ The first of these is in the Four Seasons Westlake Village, California, offering “experiences grounded in the themes of the show's third season” such as “wellness activations.” Thailand's National Soft Power Strategy Committee has expressed its hopes that the series will help establish Thailand as a spiritual and wellness hotspot, but packaging Thai spiritual practice as a “*White Lotus* season three theme” feels exploitative. I have seen, and continue to be shocked by, poor quality ‘Thai’-themed restaurants, massages and spa treatments across the West, but for this kind

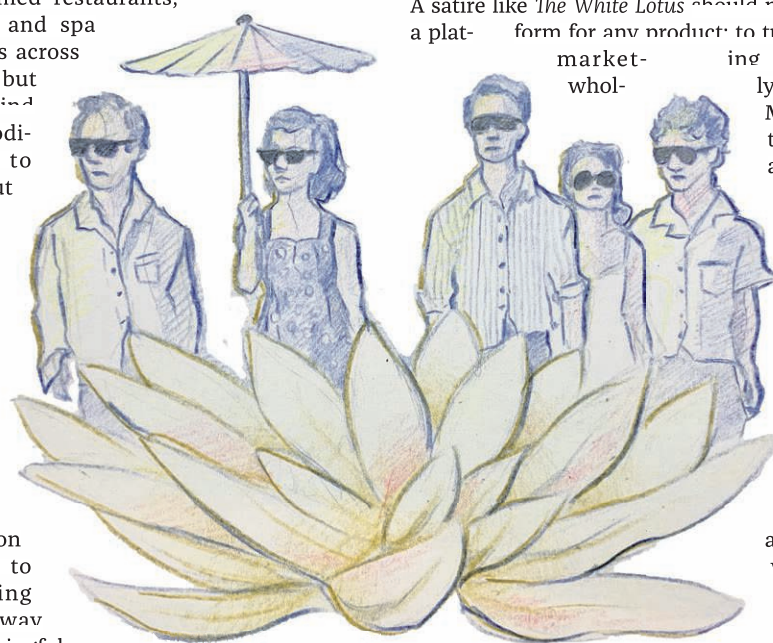
of commodification to emerge out of a show that built its audience by criticising excess and appropriation is disheartening. With each season we seem to be moving further away from meaningful

critique and towards marketability for a luxury-driven audience.

Something to consider is the fact that, regardless of how we feel about our eat-the-rich dramas becoming more fetishistic than scathing, *The White Lotus* is great for business and visibility. Thai tourism authorities spent heavily to draw producers away from Japan, offering free services and lower budget costs. As Thailand looks to build back the tourism so key to its economy, high returns are assumed on these investments, expecting a 20% increase in tourism. The words “soft power” have become inescapable in Thailand, and so it is especially interesting that Blackpink's Lisa, Thailand's most popular celebrity export, stars in the new season.

While such efforts will boost the country's profile and are undeniably beneficial for the economy, they could just as well feel shoehorned and inorganic. A satire like *The White Lotus* should not really be a platform for any product to turn it into a market-ing event feels misplaced.

Moreover, this comes at a time, and to a part of Thailand, already struggling to deal with over-nutrition – in Samui specifically, issues with access to water will be exacerbated.



“How much is *The White Lotus* deliberately feeding into capitalist fetishism?

I have been, like most people, a fan of this show, so I am a little disappointed with the mixed reception it has received. This is obviously compounded by protectiveness over my home country. It is still too early to say if the season will be a letdown, but in the rare possibility that it is, Thailand's eagerness to capitalise seems indicative of a larger, more concerning trend. How much of this is Thailand misinterpreting the show's message, and how much is it *The White Lotus* deliberately feeding into capitalist fetishism? The lines between promotion and narrative integrity blur with each brand deal – a skim through *The White Lotus*' Instagram story will bombard you with ads for all their new and exclusive collaborations. You can buy *White Lotus*-themed shoes, shirts, suitcases, chocolates, and coffee creamers. What exactly are you buying when you buy a *White Lotus*-themed product? The common thread between the seasons is the critique of the psychology of the elite, and the appeal of luxury vacations. Clearly you aren't buying a vaguely class-conscious pair of slippers. You're buying a pair of slippers that the uber-rich *White Lotus* patrons would wear; you are stepping into the literal shoes of the people that the show was made to disillusion you about.

If season two can tell us anything, with the production estimated to have brought in 32 million Euros worth of spending, Thailand, already weathering the gradual increase in post-COVID tourists, can expect booming business. With the season three premiere attracting 4.6 million viewers in the US, a 90% increase from the season two premiere, we can only wait and see how the ‘*White Lotus* Effect’ manifests this time around.

Theatre

The unseen psyche of mental illness on stage

Bethinn Feely explores how personal experiences with mental health can be instrumental to destigmatisation, but doing so can be emotionally precarious

Theatre is a powerful tool. Arguably more intimate than a film or TV show, and more immediate and dynamic than a book or play, theatre can provide a particularly absorbing experience. It lends itself to the audience and actors losing a grapple on their sense of the show as 'performance'. It is easy in a play to have moments when the line between actor and character blur – and in the arena of the drama the play's narrative becomes for a brief second overwhelmingly real.

In a medium like drama, the portrayal of mental illness on stage is complicated. Something so intensely private is placed on the extremely public elevation of the stage, whereas poetry feels private and intimate, and so might be seen as the more conventional mode of exploring mental illness. Yet, in Camdram, there seems to be a tendency to explore mental illness on stage in shows such as *Folie Circulaire*, *The Effect*, and *4.48 Psychosis*. A lot of Camdram shows seem to act more like the confessional poetry of the mid-century.

“Something so intensely private is placed on the extremely public elevation of the stage

This isn't to say that an exploration of mental health is unique to the Camdram stage. Theatre lends itself to intense subjects, and there is no lack of violence, tears, and heartbreak in the theatre world. Drama is a medium fit to deal with the extremities of human emotion and experience. Mental illness could be said to be explored in *The Bacchae* by Euripides, Shakespearean plays like *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, and relatively more recent shows like *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Death of a Salesman*. However, at the moment, the most popular theatre in the UK is musicals like *SIX*, *Wicked*, *Les Misérables*, and *Mamma Mia!* So, what is it about student theatre that results in, comparatively, so many personal

explorations of the depths and complications of mental health?

My first answer is quite obvious, the student theatre scene is smaller and gives more opportunities to new writers. In the non-student theatre world, getting a show greenlit and finding funding can be incredibly difficult to impossible. The relative accessibility of the stage in Camdram lends itself to experimentation. And if there is any topic

the destigmatisation of mental illness. Though mental illness, and mental 'wellness' practices, are less taboo than ever, there are still a lot of improvements to be made. There is a dichotomy in the perceptions of mental illnesses, while anxiety and depression are perhaps overexposed in popular culture, to the point that people still say "I'm depressed" as a minor inconvenience, and the worst aspects of these conditions are often conveniently forgotten.



“There is no point exploring mental health with the aim of de-stigmatisation if this ends up causing more harm than good

takes on a new life in the form of the actor's choices and interpretations of the script.

Often, the struggle of mental illness is also a struggle to communicate, whether it be in therapy or a seeking to be understood by popular culture. In light of this, theatre again is an odd, and extremely vulnerable, method to explore mental illness. Theatre requires a lot of communication – rather than just the writer communicating via the page to the reader, which is precarious enough and more than enables miscommunication and mistranslation. Theatre adds an extra step: writer to page, page to actor, actor to audience. There is the added dialogue with another intermediary person and the emotional labour for the actor. It is important to note that if an actor is entering the headspace of this character every day in rehearsals, it will inevitably become difficult to entirely divorce that mental state from your own.

But for the writer, allowing someone else to act out your personal experiences requires a lot of trust, and the strangeness of experiencing your world being explored on stage is not for everyone. This is extremely important to note; writers should focus on themselves and whether they feel this would be a helpful and healthy

experience for them. No five-star *Varsity* review or successful production is worth risking feelings of fear, regret, and overexposure, which could come if this is done too hastily. There is no point exploring mental health with the aim of destigmatisation if this ends up causing more harm than good.

Despite this, the exploration of mental illness to such a large extent is something uniquely available in student theatre, and these shows play a major role in destigmatisation. These productions allow an audience to sympathise with a character's situation – and by extension, those who struggle with it at large. But writing about one's mental health for a theatre show can at once empower the writer and place them in an incredibly vulnerable position. It is important to make sure that we lean more towards the former. Despite the benefits of destigmatisation, a public portrayal should not come at the cost of a writer's mental health.

which lends itself to experimentation, it's an exploration of the human mind. The manipulation of the mind, the alternative way of viewing the world, and emotional extremes allow for avant-garde sets, symbolic characters, and hyper-dramatic acting.

Capturing mental illness, rather than being unsuited to the stage, can be intensely benefited by it. A stage play can capture the 'otherworldliness' and depersonalisation of extreme mental states through the symbolic costumes and music, creating an encompassing experience which novels and poems have to work harder to achieve. Drama invokes a more immediate sympathy. When properly absorbed in a play, we inevitably feel sympathy as if the character is a real person; who, of course, in plays about mental illness, the character very easily could be based on.

I think another aspect of this topic's popularity is

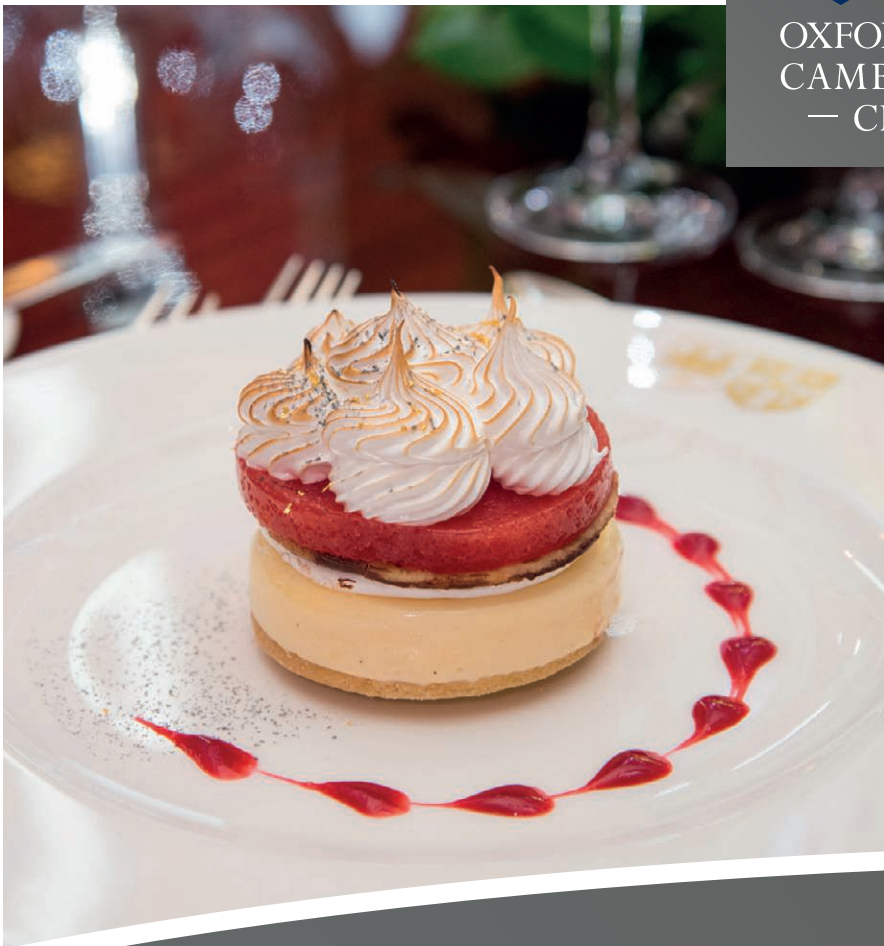
Meanwhile, other conditions like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder are still intensely stigmatised and misunderstood by most.

It is therefore important that art, that brilliant medium for destigmatisation and conscientious exploration, continues to explore and normalise mental illness. With student theatre we have a unique opportunity for people with first-hand experience to control the narrative, providing valuable insight through a more accurate, intimate portrayal of these conditions – contrasting the way mental illness is often used as a plot device in TV and film.

But, while this is a massive benefit and argument for portraying mental health on the stage, there is also something to say about the emotional precarity for writers who choose to explore their experiences on stage. Having someone else act out some of your most intimate thoughts cannot be an easy experience. Not only is the personal made public, but it



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The student's Bard unbarred

Millie Wooler praises student productions for thinking outside the (royal) box

Before I begin, I must make one thing clear: there is an undeniable appeal in the big-budget Shakespeare adaptations. There's just something so captivating about the aesthetic beauty of Kenneth Branagh's 1996 version of *Hamlet*, or the ambition of the BBC's adaptation of the two tetralogies in *The Hollow Crown* (2012-6). But if you want 'authenticity', these are probably not the best places to find it.

There's an argument for recreating the plays adhering to the original performance practices as much as possible, and we often see productions such as Wilson Milam's 2007 version of *Othello* embracing more traditional methods, in terms of set and staging. But even when we perform Shakespeare in our modern recreation of the Globe with what we imagine to be more accurate outfits, we fail to stick to an entirely 'authentic' template. Let's not forget that Shakespeare was writing for men and boys. Thankfully, the days of all-male professional productions have been confined to the past.

Therefore, our 'authentic' productions of Shakespeare are probably about as far from what the Bard imagined as Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo & Juliet*, but at least that was ambitious. 'Authentic' productions can sometimes, I fear, feel a bit dry.

The key to keeping Shakespeare alive is to modernise. I do not mean that we need a string of recreations of *10 Things I Hate About You*, but 'Shakespeare as Shakespeare wrote it' has been impossible since we realised that there is no master text of any of his plays. So why can't we get a bit creative?

The popularity of Brigid Lamour's *The Merchant of*

Venice 1936 really shows the power of what modernising and developing Shakespeare can do. Starring Tracy Ann Oberman as Shylock and centralising the personal struggles of her character, this production humanises Shakespeare's most problematic creation and sends an urgent message to an era facing the same divisions that caused the Battle of Cable Street nearly ninety years ago.

“ Camdram's biggest asset is its adaptations of Shakespeare plays

But even that adaptation is flashier than what was possible on any Renaissance stage. So how do we capture the spirit of Shakespeare? I think I know.

Since coming to Cambridge, I have noted that Camdram's biggest asset is its adaptations of Shakespeare plays. Maybe it's the compulsory paper on the English trips, or maybe it's the enduring spell that he casts over us, but we cannot escape his majesty. And it seems that we are quite good at recreating it.

Lent Term kicked off with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a production by the European Theatre Group, probably faced many of the same challenges as the original actors. Not least in the fact that the number of characters in a Shakespeare play can be unwieldy. Instead of a large group of Mechanics, for example, only Quince (Sameera Bowers) and Bottom (H

Sneyd) appeared on stage, with Puck (Margaret Saunderson) drafted in for the performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Rather than allowing this to encumber the play, the Mechanics' scenes were absolute gold. Furthermore, there was something of the Renaissance clown in Sneyd's performance. Although probably not as spontaneous as the popular songs sung by the likes of Will Kemp, Bottom appearing on stage singing his name to the chorus of Chappell Roan's 'HOT TO GO!' perfectly captured the spirit of the part.

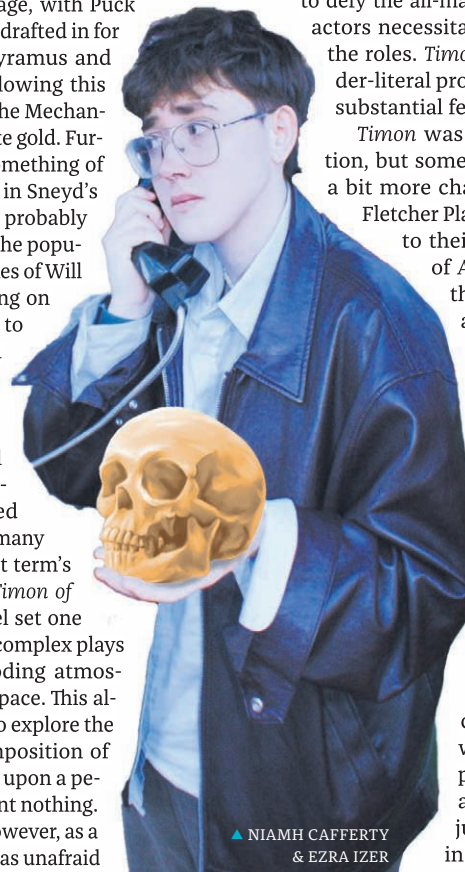
The use of the chapel as a space for performance has also forced greater creativity from many of the productions. Last term's stellar production of *Timon of Athens* at Trinity Chapel set one of Shakespeare's most complex plays within the dark, brooding atmosphere of the religious space. This allowed the performers to explore the complexities of the imposition of Judeo-Christian values upon a period in which they meant nothing.

More importantly, however, as a student production it was unafraid

to defy the all-male character list. Smaller pools of actors necessitate flexibility with the gender of the roles. *Timon* is an amazing play, but a gender-literal production has a remarkable lack of substantial female roles.

Timon was a tight, well-rehearsed production, but sometimes Cambridge theatre can be a bit more chaotic. That's something that the Fletcher Players Society managed to embrace to their advantage in their production of *As You Like It*. With something of the shambolic school production about it, this dreamy, haphazard play became an absolute triumph because of its enthusiastic cast and its clear vision.

Quite frankly, I don't think that Shakespeare would mind what we do with his plays, were he alive now. He was always experimental, and each generation's new perspective – whether in small-scale amateur productions, or grand blockbusters – resurrects the timeless themes he handles so deftly. Perhaps student theatre catches his spirit most closely, but what matters is that we keep these plays relevant and alive. More than anything, I think that he would just be glad that we've succeeded in that task for so long.



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Can spirituality find its footing in sport?

Alisha Mafaas sits down with CUISoc FC

Fuelled by tea and biscuits, I sat down with Yusuf Izahac and Ashruf Guenaoui, former and current captains of the Cambridge University Islamic Society Football Club. Having spent the evening watching Premier League matches in the Sidgwick Prayer Room, they were in the perfect mood to discuss all things faith and football.

Each Friday, after standing together in congregational prayer, the team sits over lunch to discuss the team sheet for the weekend, before reconvening at 10pm for practice at Kelsey Keridge. This tradition of 'Friday Football' has been part of the CU Islamic Society for over 15 years, which is why Yusuf knew that a formal football team would be immediately popular when it was first proposed in 2023.

Initially, he had held back from joining CUISoc FC, in favour of trying out for his college team, but soon came to terms with the barriers posed by 'lad' culture that might have prevented him from embodying the team spirit. Ashruf affirmed that drinking culture gave him little incentive to participate in college football aside from practicing the sport itself – there are tangible impacts on team dynamics if a player misses out on key moments of bonding after hours, with the risk of players becoming outsiders on their own teams. While drinking culture has its place in football, it's time to embrace alternative cultural spheres within the sport.

“Spirituality encompasses so much more than the physical act of prayer

The overlap of drinking culture with college sports has meant that for many, CUISoc provides a greater source of pride than their colleges. As such, the two captains have had no difficulty getting people involved. If anything, Ashruf has found it most challenging to divide game time between the sometimes 20 players who show up for each game.

The team has already made a cultural mark on the society itself, having recently set up a social media account (@cu_isocfc) to share their antics on Instagram. The initial idea was to simply create a time capsule full of match results, and act as a point through which others can get

easily involved. Since then, maintaining the page has become a group effort, as players and observers suggest new ideas for posts and “meme stats” – the captain himself has been singled out for the “most scandalous goal claim,” and for the highest frequency of balls lost in the box! When asked if the social media page has contributed to an improved team spirit, Ashruf agreed wholeheartedly: “It makes it more fun for us.”

Every team has a defining characteristic, whether it be through college, subject, or culture. For CUISoc FC, its religion. It would not be unreasonable to assume that worship is set aside in sporting sessions. After all, what likeness is there between standing on a prayer mat and kicking a ball?

Yusuf clarified the parameters of worship in Islam: “We don't, as Muslims, believe that [Islam] slots into one place – it diffuses through all parts of your life.” When it comes to CUISoc FC, worship manifests itself in many ways: as the players prepare to step onto the pitch, the captain reminds the team of their significant role in representing Islam through displays of good character – however trivial it may seem in the context of a football match. At half-time, they stand together in congregation to pray, in a sincere display of submission to God that (literally) grounds them, as they prepare for an exciting second half of football.

These reminders of embodying Islam are not in vain either, as Ashruf confirmed that “it changes the mentality of the game.” Tensions can run high when it comes to football, even between teammates. Comparing his experience on CUISoc FC to other teams, having played the game since he was a child, he notes that it is rare to see a player berate his teammate for a mistake. Even the biggest of mistakes become a friendly joke, with no desire to discourage one another, only to uplift with light-hearted banter.

Yusuf feels that football has even exemplified certain areas of his faith, making him more aware of the potential to nurture positive characteristics through team sport. For example, knowing that,

“It's time to embrace alternative cultural spheres within the sport

despite rivalry and competition, suppressing one's anger is a part of faith. Playing football can become an act of worship in itself; it can act as a vessel to reform one's habits.

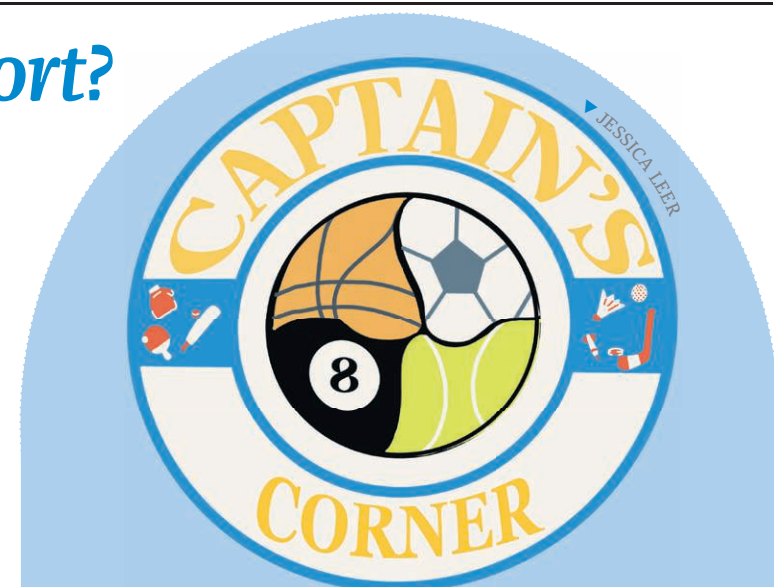
Seeing worship as something that can encompass more than standing in prayer, or being in a particular setting, is a gradual but gratifying process. Ashruf recounted the shift he experienced from initially treating the Sidgwick Prayer Room as a place exclusively for prayer to, now in his third year, one where he can also gather with friends and simply be at ease. Socialisation through religion means religion, such as that through football, evolves from being just a part of your life, to diffusing into everything you do.

Ashruf cannot help but feel pride when he sees his faith represented on the sporting stage. He recalls the pleasure he felt seeing the Moroccan men's players bow down to God after their defeat to France in the FIFA World Cup in 2022, and the respect he felt seeing players choose not to promote alcoholic products.

When players are open about their faith, both on the pitch and online, fans are gradually enlightened to how religion truly presents itself. Yusuf explained that Islamophobia is “not usually rational”; being presented with statistics is less likely to change one's opinion than having a religious friend, or football player, to positively refer to. Openness surrounding religious practices confronts elements of prejudice.

At least within the confines of Division Five in the CUAFL, it is clear that religion exists beyond the sidelines. For CUISoc FC, spirituality encompasses so much more than the physical act of prayer.

It manifests in the friendships between teammates and the respect shown towards one another, as well as in tangible reminders of representing one's faith. Now is the perfect time to follow CUISoc FC on their journey through the leagues.



Joss Heddle-Bacon talks to both Blues football captains ahead of their Varsity clash with Oxford

You thrashed Oxford 4-0 in 2023, followed by 3-0 last year. No pressure for 2025, right?

Alexia: True, but every year's Varsity is different! As captain you feel a certain sense of responsibility for the team and to keep the winning streak going, and I have full confidence in this amazing group of girls to get the third win in a row.

Have you been gathering any intel on the dark blues lately?

Reece: Not massively; we've mostly been focusing on our own games in the build up. Of course, it's always in the back of our minds, but we think we know what to expect from Oxford, and it'll be a tough, hard-fought game, as it always is.

Alexia: Oxford are newly in our league this year, so we've already played them twice, coming away with 3-2 and 2-1 wins! This was good preparation both for our tactical awareness of how they play and the mental side of this match-up, giving us a boost.

Is home advantage truly real?

Reece: It makes a massive difference, of course. Knowing that the majority of the crowd is behind you cheering you on calms the nerves.

Alexia: Absolutely. Last year's atmosphere, with over 2000 people at the Abbey, was electric – hearing and seeing many familiar faces in the crowd motivated us to play our best football and want that win even more.

Sum up the emotions of a Varsity matchday in 3 words.

Reece: Pride, Nerves, GDBO.

Alexia: Excited, determined, eager.

One to watch?

Reece: We have a lot of top-quality players all over the pitch who are capable of winning us a game at any moment. So, I couldn't possibly just pick one player to watch.

Alexia: From such a talented team, it's really difficult to choose just one. But if I had to, it's Alissa Sattentau, our striker – she's been an absolute goal machine this season. She's currently our league's top scorer, with ten goals in ten games in all competitions so far, and I'm so excited to see her tear it up at Varsity.

Most likely to start a GDBO chant?

Reece: We've got a lot of ultras in the ranks, and with a 7.45pm kick-off, the drinks will be flowing, so there will be a lot of chants started by various people.

Alexia: Last year's Eagles captain Georgia McConachie – she was the loudest voice chanting at the Abbey last year, hoping for a repeat!

Score a 90th-minute Varsity winner or top tripsos?

Reece: 90th-minute winner, of course. Not even a contest.

Alexia: Nothing beats the feeling of scoring a last-minute winner, especially in front of a home crowd.

One essential song for the after party at Kiki's?

Reece: 'Can't Hold Us,' Macklemore – being crushed under the toppling masses on the dance floor at Kikis is always fun.

Alexia: 'Freed from Desire' – quintessential football song.

(Somewhat) honest predictions?

Alexia: Expect 90 minutes of a competitive match-up. With respect to a good Oxford side, I believe we're easily coming out on top with a 3-0 win.

Reece: 2-0 win for the Light Blues.



▲ IRIS CHAPMAN

▲ CUAFC

Sport

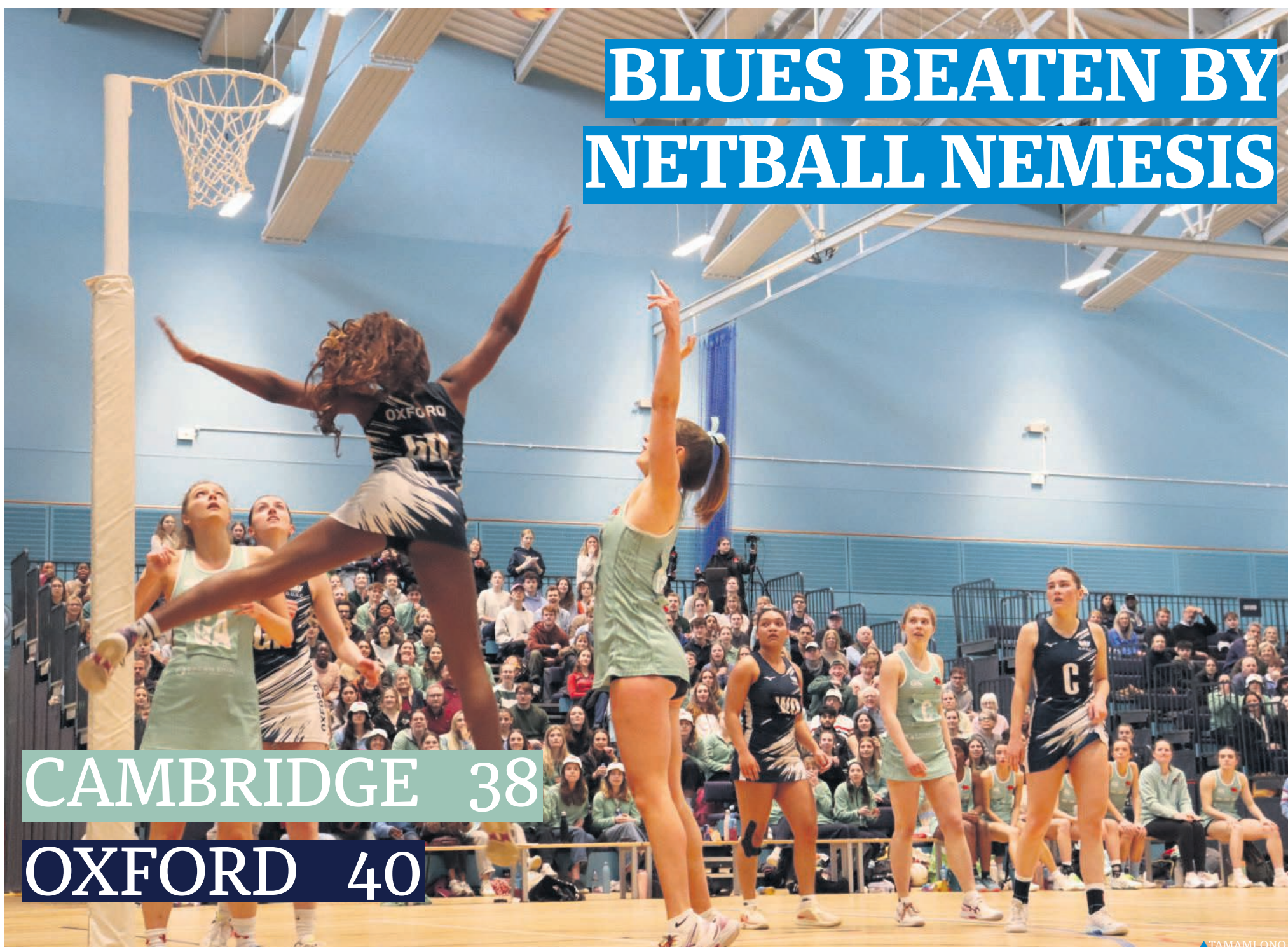
Captain's Corner
pg.31



Sport and
spirituality
pg.31



BLUES BEATEN BY NETBALL NEMESIS



CAMBRIDGE 38

OXFORD 40

▲TAMAMI ONO

Louise Crary

Sports Correspondent

Sunday 23 February saw the Cambridge Blues play out a closely contested clash against Oxford's first team, with the home side losing by a mere two points. Oxford came into the match as favourites after going almost undefeated all year, and took home a tight victory on Sunday afternoon. Despite a comparatively less successful season, the Blues did not give up a single point without a fight, and will be consoled by the performances of the rest of the club, with the Robins, Wrens, Swallows, and Jays remarkably all winning their respective games, allowing Cambridge to take home the overall win for the second year in a row.

The Blues Varsity match, which took place in front of a roaring crowd at the University Sports Centre, opened with Oxford scoring the first three points. Despite an early deficit, Cambridge

found momentum towards the middle of the first quarter and seemed to fall into a good rhythm. Standout catches from Ines Lefranc helped Cambridge to make a move against Oxford, yet even though the Blues defense fought hard against Oxford's goal shooter, blocking two shooting attempts, they couldn't quite take the lead, and wrapped up the first quarter trailing their rivals, 8-11.

When the clock started again, the game kicked into gear, with athletes flying around the court, many finding themselves in the air more often than with feet planted on the ground. Oxford enjoyed an aggressive start to the second quarter, but had trouble getting anything past goalkeeper Nat McEvoy. McEvoy's defensive excellence allowed Cambridge to score the first two goals of the second quarter, and after an impressive rebound shot, the score was even at 12-12. For the rest of the quarter, the two teams were

playing point for point, neither able to decisively pull ahead. Cambridge passed the ball with impressive coordination, yet Oxford were able to match their every move. The last few minutes of the half featured two failed shots from Cambridge, three Oxford shots stopped by the Cambridge defense, and a shot right as the buzzer sounded by Cambridge goal shooter Georgia Baker. Baker's conversion brought Cambridge to 20 points, one ahead of Oxford's 19, and was recognised by thunderous applause from the supporters in the stands.

The excitable atmosphere during the break, throughout which the Cambridge mascot led crowd chants and cheers, vanished with the start of the third quarter. Within seconds, Oxford had taken control of the ball and evened the score. The next five goals for each team were reminiscent of a real dogfight, with one Oxford player winding up on the ground, and, with the umpire blowing her whistle

every few seconds, the two teams struggled for every point. Neither side was able to gain any sort of significant lead until Oxford took a penalty shot with six minutes to go and began to pull away. Despite a flurry of athletic blocks and impressive interceptions by McEvoy and Cambridge's goal defence, Jade Popoola, Oxford soon led 29 to 25. The quarter's final tally of 31-27 was not reached without tension however, as the Cambridge supporters began to boo the umpire at the numerous decisions that didn't appear to be going their way.

The fourth quarter started favourably for Cambridge, with an Oxford miss followed by Cambridge netting the first goal. Decisive action, highlighted by Izzy Howse's prowess, helped to spark a Cantabrigian comeback, bringing the score even again at 31-31, but the resurgence didn't last long.

The Oxford defensive players moved the ball expertly despite Cambridge's

best efforts, and with seven minutes to go, the away side had regained a four-point lead, a lead that they would never relinquish. The game ended with a goal scored by Cambridge's Anita Panov, notched in the last ten seconds, but with that, the 2025 Varsity match came to a close, Oxford taking the victory 40 points to 38.

This was an intense, hard-fought match from the Cambridge women, who ensured that the game remained close throughout. It was a rough affair, too, with the second half seeing players from both teams on the ground during fights for the ball. In the end, Oxford were able to get an extra inch on the Blues with their exceptional speed and technicality. Nevertheless, everybody watching could see the passion that the Cambridge players have for their team, the sport, and each other, and with that foundation, there will surely be many Cambridge victories on the horizon.