

FREE
Take a
copy

Jeremy Corbyn
on the future
of the left p.10



My big fat
(real) college
wedding p.20



And the rest
is drag! p.22



No.936
Friday 3rd October 2025
varsity.co.uk

VARSITY

Uni forgives alleged racist don



▲ NATHAN COFNAS / CHANGES MADE

Wilf Vall
Associate Editor

The University of Cambridge will take no disciplinary action against former fellow Nathan Cofnas, after he was accused of “abhorrent racism” for controversial blog posts last year.

An internal investigation into Dr. Cofnas’ comments was launched in 2024, after 58 students made formal complaints accusing the philosophy academic of discrimination against black students.

However, the University’s disciplinary body has dismissed all 58 com-

plaints, claiming that the blog posts did not amount to discrimination or harassment.

In the blog – titled “A Guide for the Hereditarian Revolution” – Cofnas claimed that race was linked to academic ability. He went on to argue that under a true meritocracy, black people would “disappear from almost all high-profile positions outside of sports and entertainment” and that the number of black professors at Harvard would “approach zero”.

He also advocated for the preservation of “racial distinctions” in society, stating that there “must be some barriers set up

between races in order for each one to express its own unique genius”.

The blog posts sparked a widespread student campaign calling for Cofnas’ firing – including a petition that amassed over 1,200 signatures and a protest outside the philosophy faculty.

The University’s investigation considered whether the comments in the blog could have contravened their freedom of speech policies, as complainants alleged they encouraged others to discriminate against black staff and students, and could have created a hostile environment for them on the grounds of race.

However, the investigation concluded this would only be the case if Cofnas’ comments were judged to count as harassment or discrimination, which they believed was not the case. The report also claimed that the ideas presented in the blog as a whole were an acceptable expression of academic freedom.

Investigators stated that while students “undoubtedly experienced distress and upset after reading the blog,” their complaints focused on “the ideas communicated in the blog with which

Continued on page 3 ►

Uni rescued its Gazan students early

● Students flown to
Ireland in Aug before FCDO
announcement

● Both won places in Feb, but
blocked by visa rules

● Studying for a year in
Dublin, before Cambridge

Ben Curtis and Charlie Rowan
Editors-in-Chief

Two Cambridge offer-holders trapped in Gaza were evacuated to safety by the University weeks before the UK government announced any route for Palestinian scholars, after months of behind-the-scenes work.

Malak Hani and Ahmed Abutabaq crossed into Jordan on 28 August and were flown to Dublin, following direct intervention from senior Cambridge figures and cooperation with the Irish government and Trinity College Dublin (TCD). Although both had secured highly competitive places in February, UK visa rules made it impossible for them to leave Gaza for months.

Both are now beginning a year of study at TCD before transferring to Cambridge. Malak’s scholarship to read History and Politics at Downing College has been deferred to 2026, as she begins a foundation year in Dublin, while Ahmed has started an MSc as Cambridge works to enable his postgraduate entry next year at Darwin College.

Prof Bhaskar Vira, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education said: “We are delighted that both Malak and Ahmed were evacuated safely out of Gaza and are grateful to our colleagues at Trinity College Dublin who worked tirelessly to facilitate this.

Continued on page 3 ►

V Michaelmas, Week 0

Editors' Note

The first week back in Cambridge is always a whirlwind. Whether you are a fresher unpacking your room for the first time, or even the most practised returning student, there is barely a moment to breathe. *Varsity* is here to help make sense of it all.

Across this issue, you will find a University and a student body in a state of flux. On our front page (p.1), the heartwarming inside story of how the University evacuated its Gazan offer-holders stands alongside the news that the University has cleared a self-proclaimed 'race-realist' ex-fellow of wrongdoing. Cambridge may be keenly aware of its social responsibilities, yet there remains much work to be done. This is only further evidenced by the rise in the number of students turned away from hardship funding (p.5).

It is not just the central University that

remains entrenched in its old habits. Across colleges, disparities remain. Our data-led investigation (p.9) reveals that the richest colleges in Cambridge, such as Trinity and St John's, have raised their rents the most in recent years.

Beyond the news, this issue showcases student life at its most energetic, diverse and responsive: some are debating whether the future of our studies can be enhanced by ChatGPT (p.12-13); some are launching new political and cultural societies (p.14); and some are even getting married (p.20).

It is all too easy to forget, however, those individuals who are central to the student experience, but typically go unnoticed. Our new, regular feature 'Humans of Cambridge' (p.15) aims to spotlight the colourful stories of chefs, librarians, and many others who keep Cambridge's wheels turning.

Across *Vulture*, you will find the lowdown

on Cambridge's cultural scene, whether you aim to balance your studies with the stage (p.28) or merely be a grateful spectator (p.26/p.30). For any questions that remain unanswered, you will find our new Agony Aunt with some words of Freshers' Week wisdom (p.22). Throughout the paper, students have produced work that's playful, original, and, often, a bit unexpected.

So, whether you are here for the news, the crossword, or just a welcome distraction from your Week One readings, we are sure you will find something in these pages worth your time.



Ben Curtis & Charlie Rowan Editors-in-Chief

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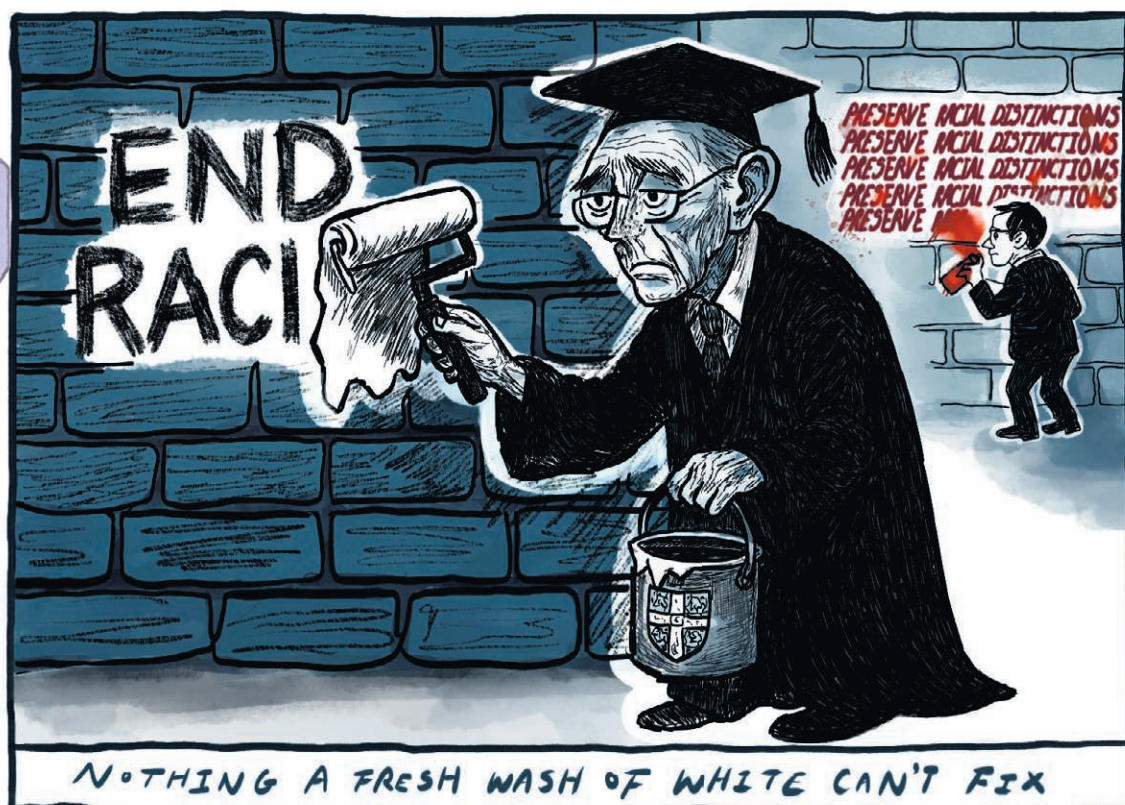
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THE PORTER



Comments acceptable under controversial free speech code

Continued from front page

the complainants found fundamentally objectionable,” which themselves “represented lawful free speech”.

This decision has been slammed by the Cambridge SU Liberation and Welfare Officer, who told *Varsity*: “Cambridge University’s decision to preserve Nathan Cofnas’ freedom of speech, despite the significant psychological harm his views have caused Black heritage students, demonstrates a failure to show its duty of care to marginalised students”.

“As a representative body for students, the SU recognises the importance of freedom of speech. However, no academic should be permitted to question the lack of merit in cohorts of students’ or professor’s positions at an elite institution on the basis of race,” she continued.

The investigation was guided by the University’s controversial freedom of speech policy, which was adopted last year in spite of the legislation it was based on being suspended by the new Labour government.

The policy is designed to allow academics to express “controversial or unpopular opinions within the law, without fear of intolerance or discrimination”. This commitment includes ensuring academics are not “adversely affected” in their careers for holding controversial views.

Cofnas was appointed in 2022 as a Leverhulme Trust early career fellow – a three-year research post – and was affiliated with Emmanuel College. He supervised students at Wolfson, St John’s, and St Catharine’s College.

The philosophy academic describes his views as “race realism” which he claimed to be “the scientifically correct position”. This school of thought claims genetics have a significant role in determining human characteristics, such as intelligence.

Varsity understands that Cofnas departed the University following the completion of his 3-year term, and that the researcher has no plans to continue at Cambridge.

Emmanuel College held a ‘town hall’

meeting to discuss the fellow’s employment, during which, Homerton College principal Simon Woolley – the first black male head of an Oxbridge College – labelled Cofnas’ views as “abhorrent racism”.

The decision not to discipline Cofnas comes in spite of Emmanuel College cutting ties with the Leverhulme Trust fellow, claiming that his blog posts were deemed to be “a rejection of diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI),” that was incompatible with the College’s “core values and mission”.

It also follows Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education Bhaskar Vira stating in a meeting held by the Philosophy faculty that he believed the early-career fellow “crossed a line” when it comes to concerns for freedom of speech.

After Emmanuel cut ties with Cofnas, 14 academics, including five from Cambridge, wrote a letter to *The Times* calling on the college to reinstate him, claiming there was nothing to investigate in relation to his controversial views.

One of the academics who signed the

letter was Peter Singer, one of the world’s leading philosophers of animal ethics.

In their investigation findings, the University claimed that choosing not to discipline Cofnas did not affect their commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Following his departure from Emmanuel, Cofnas sued the college, claiming that their “own rules make it clear that they did not have the authority to dismiss me”.

He claimed that student campaigns for his removal had made it dangerous for him to walk down the street after flyers featuring his face were placed around Cambridge.

The academic has also alleged that he regularly faces discrimination within academic circles, stating that he was “not able to get into a single philosophy PhD programme in the United States” due to his “controversial interests”.

In a statement posted on their website, The University of Cambridge said “Dr Nathan Cofnas published a blog which provoked considerable controversy and

prompted a significant number of complaints which the University, as his employer, was duty bound to investigate.

A rigorous inquiry concluded that his published views, while seen by many as offensive, did not breach the law and did not contravene University regulations designed to uphold free speech,” they concluded.

“The University is committed to addressing racism, discrimination and harassment, and strives to be a welcoming place to people from all backgrounds. At the same time, the University must secure and promote freedom of speech and provide an environment for open and sometimes robust debate.”

“This can be a difficult path to navigate, particularly when arguments, while remaining within the law, cause deep offence. All members of our community are encouraged to exercise their rights to freedom of speech, including to challenge ideas or theories they disagree with,” they added.

Nathan Cofnas declined to comment.

‘There’s no choice: either you die or you leave’

The inside story of two offer-holders coming to Cambridge from a warzone

Continued from front page

“These talented students have overcome unimaginable challenges and we wish them all the best as they embark on their studies [...] We look forward to seeing them here soon,” Vira continued.

Meanwhile, Dr Kamran Yunus, Director of Admissions at Downing College, stated: “Working with Malak and Ahmed has really made me realise the importance of academic institutions and their role in bridging across borders to offer bright talented students opportunities that can change their lives.

“What the University of Cambridge has done by working with institutions such as Trinity College Dublin is part of establishing a blueprint for what academic institutions need to do, to collaborate with each other to support students in regions of conflict.”

Dr Emma Stokes, Vice President for Global Engagement at TCD, stated: “We have been delighted to welcome our latest cohort of students from Gaza and we are extremely relieved that they have been able to leave Gaza safely.

“The students’ commitment to education and their commitment to travel at this time is absolutely remarkable[...] and this has been an incredibly collaborative sectoral effort, working closely and positively with multiple government departments,” Stokes continued.

When Malak went to sit her Cambridge interview, she was walking two kilometres across Gaza City under evacuation orders, carrying a solar-charged battery on her back to power the WiFi router at a friend’s house.

“They were bombing everyone who was walking, so it was a warning sign that you should go on,” she told *Varsity*. “But I really wanted to go to the interview, I really wanted to seize this opportunity and I went. It was a really beautiful interview – I felt like I was having a discussion with my friends, not professors. And yeah, I got in!”

Ahmed added that amid the conflict it “seemed impossible” to “apply to one of the world’s most prestigious universities [...] But everything begins simply – by asking. I spent hours and days understanding every field in the application. I won’t even mention the hours I sat outside just to download one video because there was only internet in the street.”

The breakthrough in August came after months of frustration. UK immigration rules required students to provide biometric data in person, but Gaza’s visa centre has been shut due to the conflict since 2023. With border crossings sealed, the nearest centres in Egypt and Jordan were unreachable.

“It was like a loop,” Malak explained. “You cannot get a visa without leaving, and you cannot leave without a visa.”

By April this year, senior members of the University were aware of this case and over the coming months there was growing pressure from several figures across the University. This included direct appeals to Government ministers including by PVCs and heads of Colleges such as Graham Virgo (Downing) and Lord Simon Woolley (Homerton). Concurrently, there was regular contact with the Irish government and senior colleagues at TCD.

In late July there was renewed urgency and Malak’s case was publicised extensively in the media to help increase pressure on the government, with pieces in the *Sunday Times*, *Telegraph*, *Channel 4 News*, and BBC’s *Today* programme. Cambridge Students’ Union (SU) also wrote an open letter to Prime Minister Keir Starmer and senior ministers demanding “government intervention”.

“These students have obtained extraordinarily competitive offers and demonstrated huge academic potential, only to be denied the ability to take up their places by a legal technicality entirely within your control,” the letter warned. “Devastatingly, some students have already been killed while waiting



for their visas to leave Gaza.”

Yet, the British government did not take action to evacuate any UK university offer-holders stuck in Gaza until September, when the then Foreign Secretary confirmed that 40 scholarship-holders would be allowed to travel with biometric checks deferred.

Weeks before, the University, along with Malak and Ahmed, decided not to wait, but to go through another route. In late August (28/08), Malak and Ahmed were evacuated to Dublin via Jordan, enabled by the Irish Government and TCD. Representatives from Cambridge and their Colleges joined Trinity staff to greet them on arrival.

Malak said: “When the opportunity came for my evacuation to Ireland, I just seized it, because it’s a matter of death or being alive. I said to myself, ‘if I manage to leave, I can just go [to Cambridge] next year’.”

Ahmed described his own relief at leaving: “My departure from Gaza through the Irish route came at exactly the right time. Honestly, what exhausted me most were the dreams I had every night before leaving Gaza: being killed or injured.

“I was close to death four times after

receiving my unconditional offer – twice in a place called Zikim while waiting for aid trucks, once in Nitsarim, and once while trying to withdraw cash because we couldn’t buy anything without converting our money into cash. Even if I hadn’t left, I think I was very close to being killed [...] I don’t know how I would have continued my life if I had been injured or lost the opportunity after all this effort,” he reflected.

For Malak, the evacuation marked the end of months of fear. “I’ve been displaced more than ten times... After a month, my house got bombed... If I go to my house now, there is no evidence of any existing building that used to be there,” she said. Her family remain in a tent in southern Gaza.

While awaiting a decision, Malak spent months teaching displaced children English, Arabic, and maths in makeshift classes.

In this time, Malak wrote a letter to staff and students at Cambridge who had been advocating for her thanking them for “making my Cambridge dream feel possible again”.

“Since the war began in 2023, my future has often felt like a dream dissolving in front of me,” she wrote. “I graduated

high school in July 2023 as the second-highest-ranking student in the Palestinian Territories, with a GPA of 99.4%. My parents and everyone around me were proud, and I believed I was only at the beginning of a long journey full of potential.

“However, my dreams, with the beginning of the war, began to shrink until they became all about filling – filling my stomach with flour and canned food, waiting in crowded lines to fill buckets with water, and searching for news that could fill my heart with hope instead of despair.” She added: “Only God knows how much I endured to keep my soul alive in those application essays and that interview.”

Her letter closed with a plea: “I hope this suffering is not in vain... Because all I want is the chance to be tested not by graceful suffering, but by the things I love: Education.”

Asked why she wants to study History and Politics, she said: “We Gazans are always represented in two ways: some people represent us as heroes; some people represent us as terrorists. We’re not heroes, we’re not terrorists – we’re just humans. We want to live a decent life. So I want to study history and politics to be the diplomat that is yelling at people and saying, ‘Hey, we’re humans!’”

She says she is most excited by something small: “The only thing I keep thinking about is going through Trinity Lane at Cambridge, because it’s my favourite place. I don’t know why! It reminds me of one of my favourite movies – *Oppenheimer* – and also *Harry Potter*, it gives me the same aesthetic.”

Her message is to other Gazan students: “I hope that every student in Gaza will just get the opportunities they deserve. They deserve schools, they deserve education, and they deserve to experience Trinity Lane.”

News

King's to form first-ever women's choir

Ben Shorter

News Correspondent

King's College is set to organise an all-female choir for the first time in its history, *Varsity* understands.

This follows years of frustration over limited opportunities for female choral scholars at the College and reflects shifting attitudes in Cambridge's wider chapel music traditions.

The choir, which is yet to be formally announced by the College, will likely form in 2026 and comprise existing members of the College's mixed-voice choir, King's Voices.

In an email sent to members of King's Voices and seen by *Varsity*, a job selection committee confirmed the appointment of Owen Elsley as permanent Assistant Director of Music.

to members of seen by *Varsity* committee pointment the new

The email confirmed that Elsley, alongside being in charge of "developing skills and repertoire with King's Voices," will be tasked with "opening up new opportunities for women's singing with the new female ensemble".

The College's advert for the role likewise emphasised that a key duty would be "to pursue the development of an all-female chamber group comprising a selection of current members of King's Voices, active in repertoire and performance outside and beyond the [existing] Chapel services".

This new choir will become the third ensemble formally run by King's, after the founding of King's College Choir in 1441 and King's Voices in 1997.

While the King's Women and Marginalised Genders (KWMG) choir has existed since 2022, it was student-founded and student-run; this new group will be the first all-female choir established by the College itself.

Evelyn Nagy, an alto in King's Voices, celebrated the news: "The men get their own choir – it's about time the women do too! The creation of the new choir is definitely a good thing, especially since the additional training will benefit King's Voices.

"Though I find being in the mixed choir deeply fulfilling, so don't feel a pressing need to start a women-only group, I can see how creating one

could be beneficial more broadly. I'm excited to see where it goes," they added.

KWMG co-founder and recent graduate Lucy Gabb was more critical: "The decision to found the new choir has coincided with the College's refusal to provide any funding for KWMG now that the two founders are graduated.

"KWMG was founded because its founders did not feel they were welcomed as female singers in King's, and by not supporting the continuation of KWMG, which is centred on inclusivity, the College is taping over, not facing up to, these issues. Ultimately, women and girls must be allowed into King's College Choir, and it's really disappointing that, rather than making real change, King's is continuing to uphold elitist, selective traditions with the creation of this new choir."

In November, *Varsity* reported on female choral scholars' frustration over the lack of investment into opportunities for them.

One source at the time described King's Voices as a "pity prize for women," while another claimed "King's lull women into a lie that they can be women choral scholars".

Elsley's other main role will be to direct King's Voices. More than a year ago, King's set up a Working Group on College Choirs to review the future of its ensembles. Proposed in March 2024 by the Dean of Chapel and the Director of Music, the group was formed after a meeting with King's Voices members in

which female singers expressed frustration at unequal opportunities in College choral life.

Though students were excluded from the Working Group itself, the KCSU voted in April this year to support its recommendations of creating a permanent Assistant Director of Music and establishing a new women's choir alongside King's Voices.

A choral scholar told *Varsity* in November that the equipment was "falling apart" and that "the room allocated for KV rehearsals has notoriously poor acoustics".

Now, several members of King's Voices told *Varsity* that they viewed the creation of a permanent Assistant Director of Music also as an investment into securing the continuation of King's mixed-voice choir.

According to multiple sources, Elsley will likely take up his position in Lent term, when the current interim Assistant Director of Music, Ralph Woodward, is set to step down. However, the exact date of the handover is unconfirmed.

Elsley's background includes extensive experience conducting, composing, and singing, including with the King's College Choir. During his Master's studies, which he completed in 2020, he was a choral scholar and then lay clerk at the choir.

The future of King's Voices had been under question since St John's dissolved its equivalent mixed-voice choir in March 2024, despite spending almost £1

million on its main choir that academic year. King's and St John's are traditionally viewed as having Cambridge's most prominent college choirs.

Some students have argued in recent years that funding gaps between traditionally "elite" and "second-grade" choirs are increasingly unjustified. In May, King's College announced that it had raised £5 million in donations for the men's choir over the last seven years.

One female member of King's Voices welcomed Elsley's appointment, describing singing in the Chapel as "hugely rewarding" and sharing her view that "the situation doesn't need to be changed; everyone enjoys their time here".

Rich Mandal, president of King's College Music Society and a tenor in King's Voices, also celebrated the news: "KV is a unique and special part of the music scene in Cambridge. Ralph did a great job at making the choir more inclusive while maintaining its excellent standard, and we're all very grateful for his tenure.

"With the future of KV appearing uncertain since the dissolution of St John's Voices, it's great to see College committing to keeping it alive with the creation of this permanent position. Owen is a great fit for the role and I look forward to working with him to support musical activities across the College," Mandal continued.

King's College was contacted for comment.



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Applications for mid-August 2026 intake are now open.

Rise in students turned away from hardship fund

Max La Bouchardiere
Deputy News Editor

The University of Cambridge's Financial Assistance Fund is becoming increasingly inaccessible to students, with undergraduate rejections to the fund more than doubling in 2023/24, a *Varsity* investigation has found.

The fund grants awards of up to £3,000 to students facing "unforeseen financial difficulties," defined as ones which "could not have been otherwise predicted," provided they meet a set of eligibility criteria.

Freedom of Information Requests show the University rejected 59% of applications last year (2023/24), a sharp rise from 2022/23 when only 25% were rejected, and triple the portion of applications rejected in 2021/22 (13%).

59%

Percentage of students rejected from the Financial Assistance Fund in 2023-24

Alongside this, the criteria for accepted applications to the fund has narrowed, and students have also condemned the "stressful" application process.

In 2023/24, 162 undergraduates applied to the fund, with five withdrawing before receiving an outcome. Out of

the 157, 64 were successful and 93 were rejected. In the previous year (2022/23), 292 applied for aid of whom 11 withdrew, 211 were successful, and only 70 were rejected.

This data represents a severe drop in the accessibility of hardship funding compared to previous years. In 2020/21, fewer than 8% of applications were rejected.

Previously known as the Hardship Fund, students apply with the support of their college, up to six weeks before the completion of course requirements.

In some cases, applications were denied when students were referred to other funding sources, or the required supporting statements from the students' college or department were absent.

Students also raised concerns to *Varsity* about the process of applying for the fund, which, according to one student, "caused [them] significant stress".

The student noted the "extensive criteria" of the application seemed "actively trying to disqualify applicants from funding," stating the process "was overwhelming at an already difficult time".

The University lists an "Eligibility Criteria" on the website of the fund, specifically outlining those for whom "financial assistance will not be provided". This includes those who "have not made adequate financial provision prior to starting their studies," and students with situations that "could reasonably be foreseen".

This list of invalid reasons for funding

has increased over the past two years, further narrowing the possible grounds for securing funding.

£2,500

The maximum amount provided by the fund in 2023-24, down from £3,500

The cost-of-living crisis is no longer a valid "sole reason" for funding applications, due to it being considered "not an unforeseen circumstance".

The maximum amount provided by the fund dropped from £3,500 in 2022/23 to £2,500 in 2023/24. Out of the 64 awards made to undergraduates in 2023/24, the University made 12 full awards of £2,500 and in the previous year (2022/23), out of the 211 awards the University made, similarly 12 full awards of £3,500 were made, despite a far larger number of awards made.

Another reason for the decline in awards made was the Uni's decision to instead provide a higher number of large awards. In the 2022/23 documents, the University explained: "The maximum award was exceptionally increased from £2,000 to £3,500 to acknowledge the impact of the Cost of Living crisis on students."

While in 2022/23 the cost of living crisis was the most common stated

reason for financial difficulties among undergraduates, family circumstances has since become the most common explanation.

For postgraduate students, the likelihood of rejection to the fund also rose sharply, mirroring the significant increase in undergraduate rejections. In 2023/24, 68.57% of postgraduate applicants were rejected to the Postgraduate Financial Assistance Fund, compared with 38.94% in 2022/23.

Lucy Cavendish and Trinity Hall both had the highest number of undergraduate applicants to the fund, with 20 each in 2023/24.

A student also criticised the University's emailed suggestion to recipients of financial aid to trial online platform Blackbullion, designed to "support better money management".

To access the platform, recipients of University financial support are asked ten questions.

These include whether they "know how to create and manage a personal budget," and what they would do with a £1,000 payment.

One student emailed about Blackbullion told *Varsity* that this created an "implicit suggestion" that "students on financial aid cannot manage their money as well as others," because it "places responsibility on disadvantaged students for financial insecurity which is likely not their fault".

The University was contacted for comment. *Varsity* excluded withdrawn applications from its calculations, which measure rejections by the sum total of awards and rejections.





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News

BBC sinks Boat Race coverage

Ben Curtis
Editor-in-Chief

The BBC has decided not to broadcast the annual Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race, with Channel 4 agreeing a five-year deal to take over coverage.

This comes as BBC insiders told *The Telegraph* that Alex Kay-Jelski, Director of BBC Sport, showed “very little enthusiasm” for the rowing event while negotiating, allegedly viewing the event as “elitist”.

The BBC has rejected this claim, telling *Varsity* that the decision was taken only after concerns surrounding returns on investment.

However, a source close to talks told *The Telegraph* that “the head of sport showed very little enthusiasm, believing that a showcase for London, the

UK and two of our top universities is elitist”.

BBC Sport has previously funded the entire broadcasting operation of the Boat Race, and has seen production costs increase as live viewership has reportedly declined.

In April, a peak audience of 2.82 million people tuned in to watch Cambridge complete a clean sweep, winning their third consecutive men’s title and an eighth consecutive women’s title.

The corporation first broadcast the race on radio in 1927, including the first televised edition in 1938. Thereon, the BBC maintained its production for almost a century, as ITV briefly held the rights from 2005 to 2009.

Channel 4 reportedly moved quickly to secure TV rights, as Paul Andrews, the broadcaster’s Head of Sport told *CityAM* that the Boat Race is a “national event, watched by millions of people”.

He continued: “It is so much more broader than Oxford versus Cambridge. People are just used to watching what is an

unbelievable event. It is a free party for London, costs nothing to watch and it’s something that is quintessentially British.”

According to a Nielsen Sports & Entertainment Independent Economic Impact Report completed in 2024, the Boat Race brings in close to £15 million to the local London economy. An estimated 250,000 people watched from the river bank in 2025.

Asked about taking over from the BBC, Andrews stated: “We’re a public service broadcaster and to be able to grab one of the stalwarts of the sporting calendar is really exciting.

“The BBC did a really good job for years and it has remained really popular. What we can bring is a fresh set of eyes – it is a new event for us and when Channel 4 gets behind something we can bring a fresh perspective to it. “There’s lots of things we’re looking at while not getting rid of the viewer who really loves it. It is a slight tonal shift and new energy,” he added.

A spokesperson for the BBC told *Varsity*: “The BBC has been proud to broadcast the Boat Race over many years. Our decision not to continue reflects the difficult choices we need to make to ensure we deliver the best value for audiences with the money that we have.

“We are pleased the Boat Race will remain available free-to-air and wish all involved in the event every success for the future,” they added.

Land Economy renamed

Georgie Middlemiss
Senior News Editor

The Land Economy Department is to change the name of its BA in Land Economy to ‘Environment, Law, and Economics’ from October 2027, despite students condemning the new title as “not very accurate”.

While current students will still graduate with the degree title ‘Land Economy,’ from October 2027 all students matriculating onto the course will have the new name on their degree certificates. The content and structure of the degree will remain identical.

The new name emphasises the multifaceted nature of the course, capturing “the three key components of the Land Economy undergraduate degree,” according to the department which noted the three topics had previously been used as a ‘subtitle’ for the BA.

The Department told *Varsity* the change was motivated by a desire to have “a new title that offered a better summary of the degree to anyone who was uninitiated with the Department’s research and teaching.”

In selecting the new title, the Department consulted students and staff, sending all students a survey. The name change has since been officially approved by the University’s General Board.

Varsity spoke to multiple Land Economy students who were all in agreement that the present name was “outdated,”

but were critical of the new ‘Environment, Law, and Economics’ title chosen.

Dan, a third-year Land Economy student at Pembroke, told *Varsity*: “While I am glad it is changing names, everyone is really annoyed they are putting environment first as it doesn’t represent the majority of the degree.”

Multiple students felt the new name didn’t reflect the course’s wide-ranging contents.

Izzy, a third-year student at St Johns, argued the new title “still struggles to capture the nature of the degree”.

Another student emphasised the “piecemeal” nature of the course, which combines “a really wide variety of things but they’re uber-specific”.

While not necessarily accurate, students reflected that “having buzz words like ‘Environment’ might mean more people come across the course”.

The ‘Land Economy’ name developed out of ‘Estate Management’ courses aimed at landlords in the early 20th century.

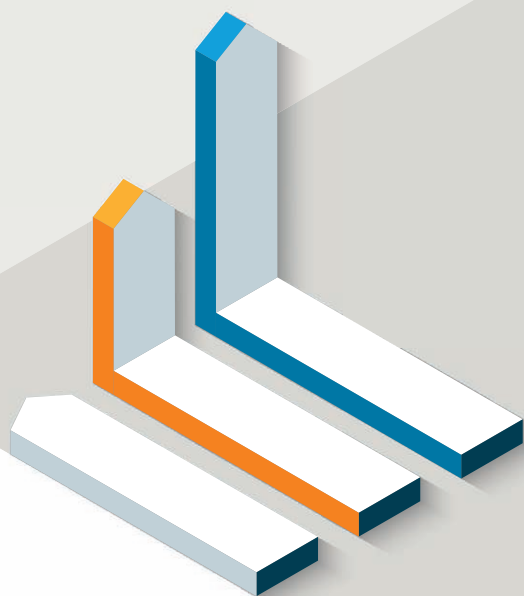
In response to student criticisms, the Land Economy Department told *Varsity*: “The name encapsulates the core areas covered in the degree – environment refers not only to the natural environment but also to the built and urban environments which are a central part of our work. This has been the tagline explaining our degree for a number of years as it is the best explanation of its content.”



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Doctors accuse CUH of censorship on Gaza

Wilf Vall

Associate Editor

Cambridge University Hospitals (CUH) has come under fire for allegedly censoring staff online, after doctors penned an open letter criticising the trust's stance on the war in Gaza.

Multiple messages in internal CUH Facebook groups, discussing the open letter and the British Medical Association's (BMA) motion to protect workers' right to speak out without fear of sanction, were deleted.

When questioned on why the posts were deleted, CUH management told a doctor that the group was not a place for "political posts". A CUH spokesperson said that they provide a "variety of channels where staff are encouraged to provide feedback and raise concerns".

The open letter was launched on 19th August, following a meeting between doctors and the Trust's management discussing the war in Gaza six months earlier. It accused the trust of "a persistent culture of censorship," claiming that posts relating to Gaza had been removed from CUH forums. After the letter was published, a Facebook post promoting it was also deleted.

Campaigners also called on CUH to clarify its position on the rollout of the NHS' new data collection tool - the Federated Data Platform - which is produced by controversial American tech firm Palantir.

The FDP is currently being introduced in CUH hospitals, as part of a nationwide scheme introduced and recommended by NHS England. This comes in spite of widespread criticism from healthcare workers over the decision to work with Palantir due to their ties to the Israeli military.

The letter also questioned how Palantir would use the data, claiming that partnering with the tech firm "raises fears of inappropriate data sharing and surveillance of communities," and is "incompatible with the core values of the NHS".

Collaborating with Palantir has also attracted criticism from the BMA, which passed a motion at its annual meeting urging the NHS to cut ties with American companies - calling Palantir "an unacceptable choice of partner".

NHS officials claim that Palantir would not share any patient's data, and that contracts for the FDP include strict confidentiality policies.

A Palantir spokesperson said the allegation "fundamentally misunderstands both our platform and business model".

Doctors at CUH are also calling on the trust to review their association with pharmaceutical companies allegedly complicit in "potential [...] violations of international law". This included Teva, an Israeli pharmaceutical company and the largest generic drug manufacturer in the world.

A doctor who signed the open letter called for CUH to cut ties with Palantir and Teva. They alleged: "The NHS's Federated Data Platform (FDP), awarded to Palantir, represents a dangerous step towards outsourcing public data to corporations with an extremely chequered record."

"Centralising health records can improve patient care, but not when controlled by an American software company that consistently uses data and artificial intelligence as instruments of control and warfare."

"Teva has a long, well-established record of corruption, bribery of American and European government officials, market manipulation and price-fixing, while providing steadfast support to the Israeli military and profiting from apartheid," they continued.

This criticism comes after Teva was fined €462.6 million by the European Commission for antitrust violations. The pharmaceutical giant was also forced by the US Department of Justice in 2016 to pay \$283 million for bribing government officials in Russia, Ukraine, and Mexico.

A spokesperson for CUH told Varsity: "We are one of 130 NHS Trusts to have followed the NHS England recommendation to sign up to the NHS Federated Data Platform. We are working with our Integrated Care Board to use Optica to enable medically fit patients to return home more quickly."



"CUH actively promotes an open and transparent culture which is essential to improving the care we provide. We have a variety of channels where staff are encouraged to provide feedback and raise concerns, including our confidential Freedom to Speak Up programme."

A spokesperson for Palantir told Varsity: "Palantir software, through the Federated Data Platform, is helping to improve patient care. Results so far include 75,000 additional procedures in theatres and an average 17% reduction in delay days for long stay patients."

"While we are proud of these results, we recognise that the privilege of serv-

ing the NHS rightly comes with scrutiny. It is important that such scrutiny deals in facts and, sadly, this letter is riddled with inaccuracies.

"The allegation that we would 'force healthcare workers to hand over patients' data to corporations' fundamentally misunderstands both our platform and business model. Palantir is a data processor, not a data owner. It would be illegal - not to mention technically impossible. Nor is Palantir involved in any predictive policing work anywhere in the world, as a matter of company policy."

Teva was contacted for comment.

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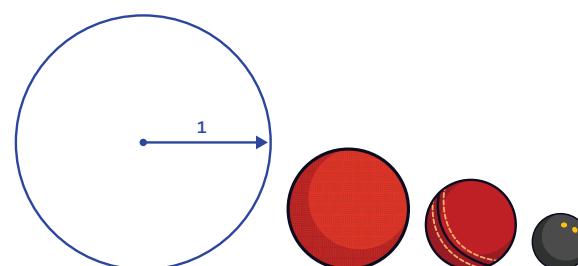
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How many cricket balls?
How many squash balls?

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News in brief

Researchers find MS breakthrough

A Cambridge study has found that, by using a combination of the common diabetes drug metformin and the antihistamine clemastine, the protective coating around nerves damaged by multiple sclerosis can be repaired. According to Cambridge University researchers, this finding takes them a step closer to stopping the progression of multiple sclerosis. Dr Nick Cuniffe, lecturer in Neurology at Cambridge, said his instinct “is that we are on the brink of a new class of treatments to stop MS progression”.

Bonnie Blue goes down on Revs

Infamous adult star Bonnie Blue was spotted in Revolution last Wednesday (24/09) by students, who told *Varsity* the bar was facilitating a “meet and greet” style event, where students “took selfies” with the porn actress. A spokesperson for Revolution told *Varsity*: “We would like to clarify that the individual in question entered the bar as a customer, there were no arrangements made with her or her team. Any interactions that took place were not part of a scheduled or endorsed event.”

Baits Bites Lock works underway

Repair work is now underway at the Baits Bite Lock in Cambridge, and the Lock is expected to open in approximately 16 weeks, bringing the overall closure period to 20 months. It closed initially in May last year following a survey carried out by Conservators of the River Cam which revealed structural issues with the lock island. According to a spokesperson for the Conservators this “project is focused on reinforcing and securing the lock island to ensure its long-term resilience and safety”.

Why does Cambridge always win?

A panel discussion at St Edmund's College has explored why Cambridge is so successful in sporting events against Oxford. Entitled ‘Beyond the Win: The Transformative Power of Sports’, the panel discussed what ‘success’ means in sports and the role of Cambridge sporting ‘culture’ in helping them achieve recent victories over Oxford. The panel featured multiple former Cambridge athletes including Olympic rower Richard Phelps, and former CURUFC men's captain Fergus Hughes.

Around town



Max La Bouchardiere delivers news from around Cambridge

Football pitch vandalised twice in three weeks

A Cambridgeshire youth football club had its pitch vandalised for the second time last Saturday (27/09). Tyre tracks were left across the field, “rendering parts of the pitch unusable for the local teams”, according to a police spokesperson. The incident took place weeks after vehicles were first driven onto the field earlier last month (09/09). Littleport Rangers said the second incident happened shortly after its under-7s played their first game on the recently repaired surface. The first round of damage cost roughly £400 in soil and grass seed, with volunteers spending hours restoring the pitch. Police confirmed they were investigating both incidents.

Council blocks wine bar licence on Mill Road

Cambridge City Council has refused to grant an alcohol licence for a proposed wine bar at the corner of Devonshire Road and Mill Road. Police and health officials raised concerns about the “unclear” plans for The C Bar. Proposed by Golden Direction Property Limited, the company describes it as a wine bar, but drawings showed a spa, steam room, massage rooms, restaurant spaces and hotel beds. Police licensing officer, PC Clare Metcalfe, said the “poor quality” application lacked information and failed to explain what the business entailed. The committee rejected the bid on 15 September.

Town and Gown 10k to close Cambridge roads

Cambridge's annual Bidwells “Town and Gown” 10k race will close roads across the city centre on Sunday (05/10), as runners raise money for Muscular Dystrophy UK. Victoria Avenue will shut from 5:30am until noon, with King's Parade, Trinity Street, Trumpington Street and others set to reopen once the final runners pass. Starting and finishing in Midsummer Common, the 10k route moves past historic colleges and along the River Cam. A 3k junior race begins at 9:15am, followed by the main run, for those over 16, at 10am.



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Rich colleges raise rents most

- St John's and Trinity in top three for rent hikes since 2021
- Despite £800m purse, John's raised rents 12.4% over inflation
- Students described the hikes as 'absurd' and a 'real shame'

Charlie Rowan
Editor-in-Chief

St John's College has increased student rents more steeply than any other Cambridge college over the past four years, despite sitting on a near-£800 million endowment, *Varsity* can reveal.

Freedom of Information requests show that the College's median annual undergraduate rent rose by a compounded 40.2% between 2020/21 and 2024/25 – significantly greater than the UK inflation rate of 27.8% over the same period.

Only two other colleges of the 24 that gave data raised rents above inflation: Corpus Christi (33.3%) and Trinity (29.7%), the latter of which has an endowment of over £2 billion, more than any Oxbridge college.

By contrast, most colleges kept rises far below inflation, measured as of June each year from 2021-2025, with the median cumulative increase across Cambridge just 21.88%.

Some colleges, such as Girton (13.3%) and Magdalene (14.6%), kept hikes around half the national rate.

John's has the University's second-largest endowment at £798m, according to College accounts from 2023-24, behind Trinity.

One John's student told *Varsity*: "The rent increase situation at John's is getting continually worse. I would already say John's definitely attracts more privileged students and the rent prices I worry are going to further put off less-advantaged students applying and make [the College's] student body less diverse."

Another said: "The absurd rent increases have put undue stress on my family, as well as many people I know. The college made these decisions concurrent with the slashing of bursary support and has shown no remorse."

£798m

St John's College endowment, as of 2023-24

"Students who chose the college for the advertised support and subsidisation have been betrayed, and the only reason can be the mismanagement of college funds. Though the college stage 'open-meetings', questions are always dodged, and our JCR protest only weakly," they continued.

In March 2024, when John's announced they were increasing rents by 17.46% for the upcoming year, they justified this by claiming it was a consequence of "vastly increased energy bills".

The College, which implemented no rent freezes during the cost-of-living crisis, also claimed at the time that it still covers "around 50 per cent of the actual cost of student accommodation".

In order to maintain an appearance of low rents, *Varsity* revealed at the time that John's also changed the display of fees on the accommodation website from 'per term' to 'per week'.

That announcement was met with significant backlash at the time. Another John's student reported that the vast majority of John's students found out about the increases from the opening meeting, rather than a confirmation email. "It seems like they wanted the news to slip out under the radar," they told *Varsity* in 2024.

"The costs are prohibitively high which is a real shame for a college which has a bad reputation but enough money to do some real good," the student continued.

In response to *Varsity*'s investigation, a spokesperson for St. Johns said: "This academic year the average undergraduate rent at St John's will be £2,596.32 per term, an increase of just 1.86%. This is well below inflation and includes all utilities and laundry with no extra costs."

"Although recent rises were driven by steep increases in energy and staffing costs, St John's continues to provide more than £10 million a year in accommodation and catering subsidies for all undergraduates, as well as extensive financial support for our students who need it most."

17.46%

How much St John's raised rents in 2024-25 alone

"Our undergraduate room licences cover a longer period than at most Cambridge colleges – 38 consecutive weeks – so students do not need to move out during the Christmas and Easter vacations, which makes direct comparisons with other colleges inaccurate."

"This approach is regularly discussed and agreed with our JCR representatives, and we remain committed to offering a range of rooms and rental prices to suit individual needs," they continued.

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for Trinity College said: "Recently the College changed the structure of room rates and catering costs in response to student requests. Trinity continues to offer a range of accommodation at different costs, among them some of the lower rates across Cambridge."

"Meanwhile the Trinity Maintenance Grant is one of the most comprehensive support

packages available at a UK higher education institution for students from lower-income households," they continued.

Despite raising rents the least over this four-year period, Girton had charged students the highest rents, as of 2023.

£2.4bn

Trinity College endowment, more than any other Oxbridge College

That year, a *Varsity* investigation revealed that Girton charged £7,100 in 2022-23 for a 38-week lease, higher than any other college that gave data at the time.

Yet, now, the College claims that "in the last academic year, [we] charged the lowest median rent of all of those colleges which, like us, operate on a 38-week continuous tenancy basis for undergraduates".

A Girton spokesperson told *Varsity* that "Girton has strengthened its financial position considerably over recent years, enabling it to keep rent rises 'well below the rate of inflation, including a complete freeze for the 2024 cohort'."

Meanwhile, the 2023 *Varsity* investigation revealed that Homerton had the lowest rents of £4,100 for a 28-week lease. John's, despite having raised rents significantly since that investigation, was found to have one of the cheapest rents, at £4,800.

The majority of Cambridge colleges have bursaries for students who struggle most. Newnham was one of the few

colleges that reported different rent rises for those on a bursary (16.28%) and those without (19.30%).

In previous years, students at several colleges have responded to high rents and rises by going on strike.

In May 2023, around 100 students at King's College committed to going on strike, which was met with a tough response from the College. Senior figures warned at the time that striking students with outstanding debt "may ultimately not be permitted" to return to College accommodation over the summer or in Michaelmas Term.

Sidney Sussex students followed suit that same year and almost 65% of students voted for a strike. However, this was called off as students claimed they were "afraid of doing anything to anger College" and "discouraged" to participate due to the possibility of disciplinary action.

Robinson College and King's College did not supply data. Corpus Christi College was contacted for comment. Colleges gave different measures for rent, including weekly, annually, and monthly. Varsity, therefore, only chose to focus on cumulative percentage rises.

University watch



Maria Eduarda Paixão rounds up student news from across the country

The return of Maintenance grants by 2029

Before their abolition ten years ago, over half a million UK students relied on maintenance grants. Now they are returning, and will apply to "tens of thousands" from lower-income households, says Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson. The grants will prioritise courses tied to the industrial strategy and the "Labour government's wider mission to renew Britain," she added. Funding will come from a tax on international students' fees in England. Nick Hillman of the Higher Education Policy Institute said that while the return is "long overdue," the government "should not be charging international students, who often come from countries much poorer than the UK, to cover the living costs of our own home students".

Warwick Uni under fire for expensive global campaign

Warwick University has splashed the cash on a global PR push, paying for articles in *Harper's Bazaar India*, *The Times of India* and lifestyle magazine *Monocle*. Warwick's Chief Marketing and Content Officer was interviewed by *Vogue Singapore*, which typically costs between £4,900 and £24,000. This comes amid funding challenges and the redundancy of over 900 members of staff in the past five years. Warwick's student newspaper *The Boar's* Instagram poll revealed that 39% of respondents hated the rebrand, and 75% called the rebrand an ineffective use of the University's money.

Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities open in Oxford

A new centre for the Arts and Humanities, designed by leading British architects, will be inaugurated at Oxford University next week (13/10). This new cultural campus, in the centre of Oxford's Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, was funded by the largest donation in modern times made to the University. American businessman and philanthropist Stephen A. Schwarzman donated a total £185 million. The centre will unite Oxford's humanities faculties for the first time, the Institute for Ethics and AI, the Internet Institute, and the new Bodleian Humanities Library. The centre's public performance space includes the 500-seat Sohamen Concert Hall, a 250-seat theatre, among other facilities.



ILLUSTRATION BY LARA BROWNING

Interviews

Jeremy Corbyn on the future of the left

The veteran politician outlines his socialist worldview with **Mariam Al-Badry**

When Jeremy Corbyn speaks about politics, he does not begin with electoral strategy or personalities, but with ideals. He views the world through a socialist lens that makes wealth redistribution, world peace, and social justice political non-negotiables. It is a highly principled – though critics would say dogmatic – outlook that has shaped his career since he entered Parliament in 1983: from decades as a backbench rebel, to five years leading the Labour Party, and now to his latest venture outside the party he once led.

When I spoke to him in June, Your Party – the new left-wing project he would later launch with Zarah Sultana and a group of independent MPs – was still weeks away from being launched. A few months on, it has brought in hundreds of thousands of sign-ups and fuelled new student societies, including the Cambridge University Left Society (UCLS) in Cambridge, which has claimed Corbyn's support while stopping short of for-

mal affiliation. Yet alongside that momentum, the party has already shown signs of fragility. Public disagreements between Corbyn and Sultana over the direction of its leadership have so far un-

“

You have to make sure you are not corrupted by the attractions of wealth and power

dermined its potential as a dominant party on the left of British politics.

Before these strains had emerged, I asked Corbyn how he had managed to sustain his uncompromising approach to politics over decades in public life. His answer was characteristically direct: “you have to make sure you are not corrupted by the attractions of wealth and power”. This requires, he says, being consistently “accountable to the people that elected you, not to the people that were elected alongside you.”

That sense of accountability, he explained, comes through daily encounters. “I spend a great deal of time listening to ordinary people on buses and on the street [...] walking around my community listening to what people have to say.”

Corbyn argues that this approach stands in stark contrast to the behaviour of more centrist political leaders across Europe. “I watch with horror,” he declared, “the way in which Social Democratic parties across Europe [...] seem to lack any moral fibre or backbone whatsoever.” Having observed “the rise of the far right, often using violent methods,” he argued that ostensibly left-leaning parties had “gone in that direction”. This, he asserted, was why “you have Keir Starmer using the words of Enoch Powell in the 1960s against a multicultural modern Britain”. Meanwhile, parties such as “the British, French and Spanish conservatives” had likewise “gone further to the right,” having seen their “support disappearing because they’re not offering anything quite racist enough for the racists”.

While Corbyn is dismayed by this shift, it also seems to galvanise him. He has made arguments like these for decades, but here he offered them again without hesitation. “The role of the left is surely to do something different,” he said. “We must say that there is a value of human life, every identity and every person [...] we must not concede the ground.”

This emphasis on human dignity leads directly onto Corbyn's foreign policy views, an area that has often placed him at odds with other figures on the left. He is a vocal critic of NATO, arguing that it should be disbanded. That position has been criticised as “playing into the hands of anti-western dictators,” as Paul Mason wrote in *The Guardian*. Corbyn rejects that, insisting instead that “the expansion of NATO eastward” was “exploited by [Putin] to justify the [Ukraine] war.”

His proposed alternative is negotiation. “What we need now is a ceasefire,” he said firmly. “If Russia and Ukraine can come together to exchange the bodies of those killed, to exchange prisoners, to export grain” and more, “quite clearly negotiation is possible. There are lots of ways by which we can eventually bring about some kind of

long-term peace. Not everyone is going to be happy about it, but it's surely better than conscripted soldiers of Ukraine and conscripted soldiers of Russia killing each other in a kind of ‘First World War’ style of conflict.”

Behind this stance on NATO is an economic critique. “The only real winners in this war are those that make the weapons: western arms companies have done extremely well out of the rearmament of Ukraine. Ursula Von Der Leyen is developing Europe into an arms industry powerhouse. Likewise, there are enormous commercial interests in Russia, India and China that also do very well out of making weapons.”

Does such a position make him a pacifist? Corbyn rejects the label. “If we deny people a peaceful, legal route to emancipation or justice, violence inevitably follows. The principles of international law do allow for the self-defence of people,” he said, but he insists that the real goal should be to “create a system of justice which removes the necessity of a physical fight back.” Instead, he says “peace is only possible if there is justice,” a sentiment so deeply embedded in his worldview that it has formed the name of his organisation, the Peace and Justice Project.

To illustrate, he pointed to conflicts in the wider world. “People in the Amazon rainforest who are opposed to mining and logging and want to continue their sustainable way of living, their language, culture and identity [...] have faced the most unbelievable violence funded by mining and logging companies and the corrupt local police and army. When they fight back against the occupation are they wrong? No. Of course they're not wrong. It's the only option available to them.”

The same, he argued, is true in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where “communities are beset by what are essentially mining company militias trying to take away their natural resources or exploit them. They don't want to fight back against it, but it's the only option that's left to them. So the question is, who controls international justice and international law. It is constantly a battle between huge military and commercial interests and the interests of the ordinary people.”

“

We must say that there is a value of human life, every identity and every person

“It's no accident,” he continued, “that a lot of money is being put by different countries into the war in Sudan – it's a grab for land and a grab for natural resources. Likewise, the money that goes into the Democratic Republic of Congo

is about maintaining a weak central government in the Congo to better exploit its natural resources. The issues in the Middle East are also, in part, but not totally, driven by oil interests.”

“

Let's build a world of peace

Corbyn's commitment to what he views as a more just international order underpins much of his activism. He explained that he has “spent a great deal of time working with the Human Rights council of the United Nations” and “the decolonisation committee,” citing cases such as “the Western Sahara and the Chagos Islands”. He is also heavily involved with Progressive International, “a combination of trade unions, popular movements, political parties, and land rights campaigns in different parts of the world.” One of its projects, he added, has been the development of the Hague group to “stand by international law – the ICC and the ICJ judgements – in relation to the treatment of Palestinian people. This is supported by a number of governments around the world, particularly South Africa, Malaysia and Brazil.”

Closer to home, he argued that the British government is “moving in exactly the opposite direction” to international law, citing increased arms expenditure and the development of a new generation of nuclear weapons, which he said are illegal under the non-proliferation treaty. “The government is spending a great deal on building Britain into a global military organisation,” he said, recalling how the Strategic Defence Review was released. “Opposition parties weren't given a copy: they were just given a 1-2 page summary to read an hour before the statement. Yet it had been given to Britain's arms companies and industrial manufacturers several days before its publication. The government and the Ministry of Defence was more interested in making sure that BAE Systems, Rolls Royce etc, had advance sight of the thing before Members of Parliament did – a very odd sense of priorities.”

As our conversation drew to a close, Corbyn reflected. “We now have a world dominated by a very small number of incredibly wealthy people.” His answer was not to look inward, but outward, for “no one country can combat this on its own”. Instead, he envisions a “much stronger global left-wing movement than there ever has been, focusing on levels of taxation, corporate tax, closing down the tax havens, and bringing in a wealth tax in all of our societies.” Now smiling, he concludes succinctly: “let's build a world of peace”.

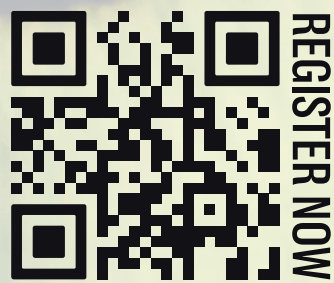
It is a vision that stretches far beyond Westminster, but for now its fortunes rest with Your Party, the fledgling organisation Corbyn has helped to set in motion. Whether it can withstand its early strains, or persuade a divided public to rally behind it, is far from certain. What is clear, though, is that Corbyn remains as unyielding – and as ambitious – as ever.



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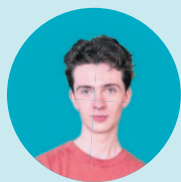
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Free ChatGPT for Cantabs?



Jasper Burnside

I am no neo-Luddite; I use AI regularly, and it is irrefutably valuable if used correctly. But if Cambridge were to follow Oxford's decision to provide ChatGPT-5 to students for free, it would mark a troubling race to the bottom. Rather than supporting students' critical thinking or those in need, we would partner with companies whose reputations are less than virtuous. This is not an upgrade, but a dire decision which should shock all of us.

Research already suggests that overreliance on AI can lobotomise the very skills that a Cambridge education is built upon: creative and critical thinking. While I am sure that most students could exercise some self-restraint, the University should not be funding or promoting something which can erode our most critical faculties and lead to sloppy work and sloppier marking. It would aid the continuation of a pattern we have already witnessed with earlier technologies; our growing inability to detach from our phones, and now AI, has steadily weakened our capacity to think deeply and engage meaningfully. Not simply endorsing, but paying for AI is like injecting it into a petri dish of poor academic habits, where it is more likely to spread and infect than to aid.

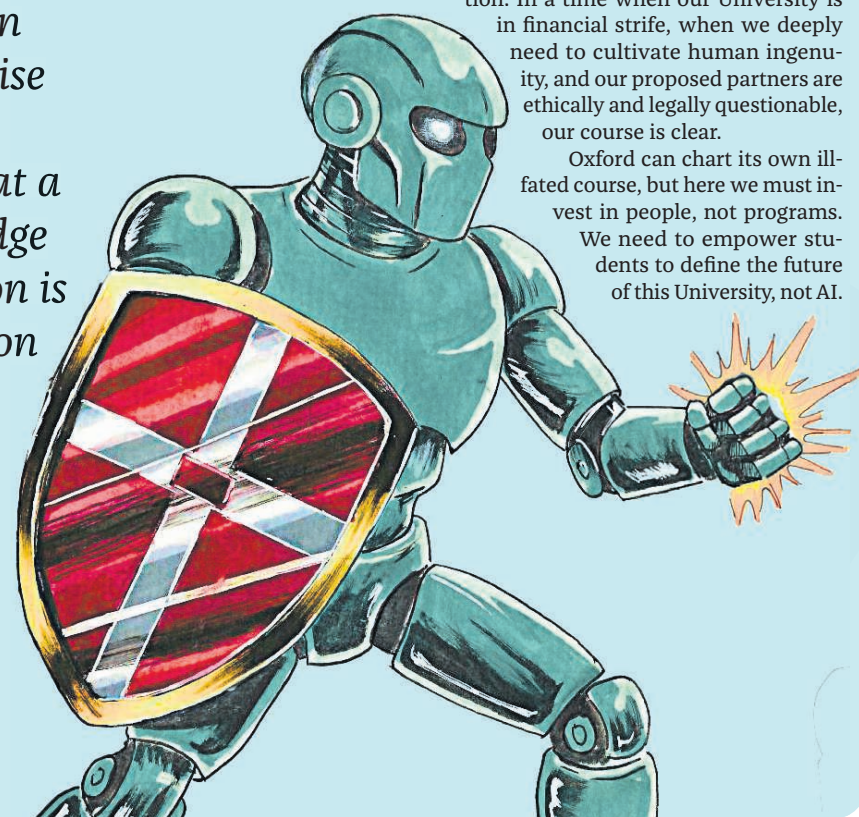
Giving AI to all students isn't a serious

attempt at levelling the playing field: it's a display of frivolous spending at a time of financial hardship. Last year, the University ran a deficit of over £50 million. How could another expense on AI possibly be justified? Rather than AI masquerading as mobility, the University could spend money on support for students with learning difficulties, on access for disadvantaged groups, library resources, or even repairs to accommodation. This spending would be more meaningful and its impact tangible for the students who actually need support. AI is not a solution for inequality; it's not even a bandage.

Finally, we need to consider the nature of such an agreement. This is more than just a financial transaction; it's a data pipeline enabling the University to hand over thousands of hours of research to companies that are infamous for their data scraping tactics, possible without the weight of imposed guardrails. Linking student accounts and the reputation of the University to any company in such an open manner risks the integrity of research, the security of our data, and potential privacy violations.

The constant demand to remain innovative is understandable in an exceptionally competitive education

“Overreliance on AI can lobotomise the very skills that a Cambridge education is built upon



environment. This, however, would be a profound misstep. Undoubtedly, AI will shape our futures, but it is not the University's role to further its adoption. In a time when our University is in financial strife, when we deeply need to cultivate human ingenuity, and our proposed partners are ethically and legally questionable, our course is clear.

Oxford can chart its own ill-fated course, but here we must invest in people, not programs.

We need to empower students to define the future of this University, not AI.

Cambridge needs a *real* Freshers' Week



April O'Neill

We've been robbed. This has been my bitter mantra these past few weeks while my social media timeline is clogged up by friends posting their fun-filled, Freshers' Week moments. My current coping mechanism is to smugly laud my superiority over them all: grow up, you're all finalists now, what are you doing at the Freshers' icebreaker night anyway, loser. But, frankly, I'm sick with envy. As I watch my friends from afar – in ridiculous outfits for that terribly themed club night, ripping off societies at the Freshers' Fair (“Yes, I would love to join Bridge Club, now where's my free pen?”) – the rose-tinted glasses I have on when I look back at my Freshers' week simply shatter. That's because we don't really have a Freshers' Week at Cambridge. We have a ‘Freshers' few days’.

Now maybe I have Channel 4's *Fresh Meat* to blame for what I thought my university experience would be like (although we do have our fair share of Jack Whitehall/JP-esque figures), and I am well aware that I made the decision to apply to Cambridge which is hardly known for its renowned social life, but I don't think we're going about things the right way. Freshers' Week is more than a mythic rite of passage for fresh-faced,

newly independent 18-year-olds – a time to get hammered and make decisions that would make your parents shudder – it is a buffer. It gives students precious time to figure out what the hell they're doing: how do I make pasta? Why are there so many buttons on the washing machine? If

I drank this much alcohol when term starts will I make it to my 9am? (No).

We have no such privilege at Cambridge. Freshers' Week, for most of us, clashes with the start of week one. One minute you're in Revs dancing sweatily with a bunch of people you just met, the next you're taking deep breaths in the UL as you try to locate the books on your reading list for that first essay. It's not that easy to bond with people,

or get your bearings with this adult business, when lectures loom over your shoulder like the Grim Reaper. Death to fun.

Cambridge terms are famously short, but Freshers' Week is a whirlwind. It's like the minute you sign your name in that matriculation book, the academic pressure kicks in. You're thrown

about from bops to books, from shots to seminars, so an already very unique environment is made to feel totally alien. But if you show signs of struggle, or slowing, you're not fit for the system. It's not hard to figure out why imposter syndrome is such an epidemic here.

This isn't to say that no attempt is made. College feps put a lot of hard work into organising an exciting, varied week for their freshers and obviously we have staple events like the SU's freshers' fair. The issue is time. If freshers arrived just a week earlier, more room could be made for more events. Importantly, there would be more independent time for students to get their bearings; a jam-packed timetable, mere days

before term gets into gear, is daunting. Everyone (freshers and those involved in running events alike) would have more room to breathe if the University committed to giving us the full week.

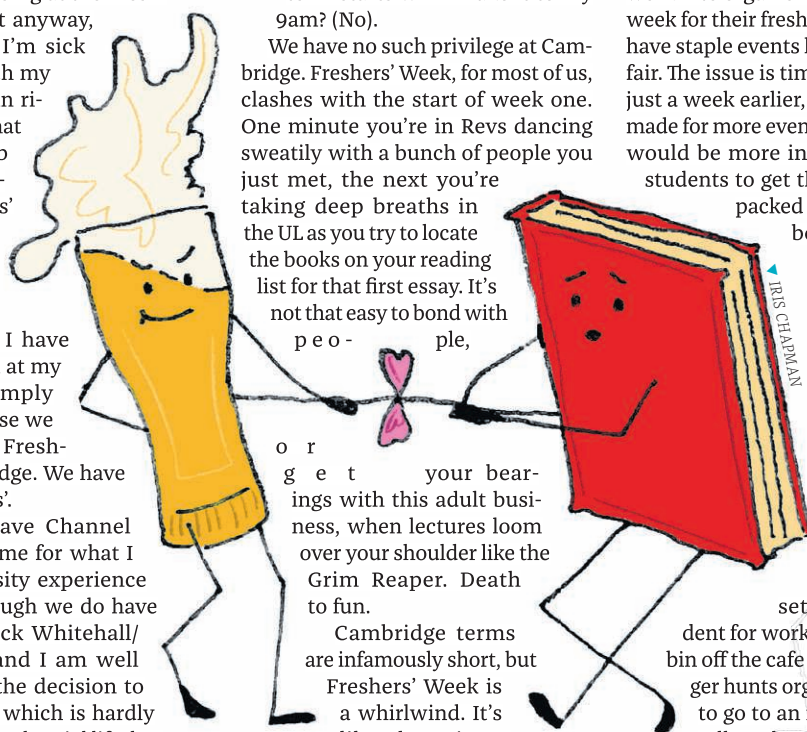
This would also set a healthier precedent for work-life balance. I had to bin off the cafe hopping and scavenger hunts organised by my college to go to an introductory subject talk and tour with my DoS (still not over it). Socialising is made secondary to the holy academic grind. But if we had an actual Freshers' Week,

“It's like the minute you sign your name in that matriculation book, the academic pressure kicks in

there would be no such clashes. There wouldn't be this implicit encouragement that you should always put work first.

Maybe my musings over Freshers' five minutes (why even bother calling it a week?) is because my time at Cambridge is running out. As an elderly third year, my perspective is shaped by existential dread as the realities of graduate life begin to draw closer. Maybe my call for more time is for myself more than anything. But this is beyond me. It would benefit all freshers to have a whole week to adjust, to discover the city, to figure out the cutlery order at formals. It might even ward off the universal phenomenon where that one best mate you made disappears into the ether, never to be seen again, once term starts. I hope he remembers me.

I don't think this extra time will make people take university less seriously either. There's hardly a culture of slacking when term gets going and those weekly deadlines start rearing their ugly heads. Cambridge may very much be ‘sink or swim’ in its mindset and practice, but I think it's worth easing the freshers' in rather than chucking them in the deep end. Cambridge will probably never provide that quintessentially British Freshers' Week experience – you know things are a little bit different when you get handed a gown alongside your room key on day one – but that doesn't mean ours should be cut short. Rather than rushing things, we should be given more time to enjoy ourselves, to soak in our achievement, to actually unpack our bags. Time will fly regardless, but still, every second counts.



With Oxford recently giving its students free ChatGPT-5, **Jasper Burnside** and **Joshua Prince** clash over whether Cambridge should follow suit

If the University of Cambridge seeks to remain a modern, forward-looking institution then yes, AI usage should not just be allowed, but encouraged. There is no better way to ensure equal participation than providing a market-leading AI tool like ChatGPT-5 free to all students. Whether you like it or not, AI usage is now commonplace within universities, but our current relationship with it remains confusing at best. There are seemingly endless AI tools available and yet a widespread lack of understanding of how they work. Sprinkle in understandable distrust of their outputs, and you have a divided society. Many supervisors or lecturers will disgrace you for even contemplating its usage, while others actively use AI as a learning tool. This results in some students who are AI literate, and others who are afraid to use it, potentially falling behind. Let's embrace AI: a strong central policy with a recommended AI tool will help all students, regardless of subject, to benefit.

Access to AI tools risks becoming yet another dividing line between the haves and the have nots. Considering that the University seeks to provide a consistent education to all students regardless of background, wealthy student's ability to pay for productiv-

“Access to AI tools risks becoming yet another dividing line between the haves and the have nots

ity boosting AI tools, will only build upon the inequalities that students arrive with. With ChatGPT subscriptions ranging from £20 to £200 a month, the University must strive to prevent this disparity from distorting academic outcomes.

Not only students would benefit from AI access: from college gardeners planning future flower beds, to alumni offices estimating event costs, the range of tasks AI can support is seemingly limitless. For researchers, the value is even greater. AI tools that can summarise research – or even curate 'living' evidence databases – could make evidence synthesis faster, cheaper and more accessible. Given that such reviews can sometimes cost upwards of £100,000, investing in these tools is essential.

AI usage is also increasing in the workplace, with many companies encouraging usage and often offering their own company specific AI tools. Being AI literate is growing in importance in the job market, but using AI responsibly is not trivial. It takes time and experience to understand when an output is to be trusted, and knowing how to write an appropriate prompt is a skill in itself. Students should have the chance to develop these skills in a safe, controlled environment, where any over-reliance

of AI only temporarily affects their own learning and progress – making university the perfect place to practice using AI responsibly.

It's reasonable to worry that encouraging AI usage will lead to its use as an answer sheet

or essay-supplier, relinquishing students from the requirement to think. But all Engineering students know that self-control is both necessary, and possible. For years, we've had access to CamCribz, a website with solutions to almost

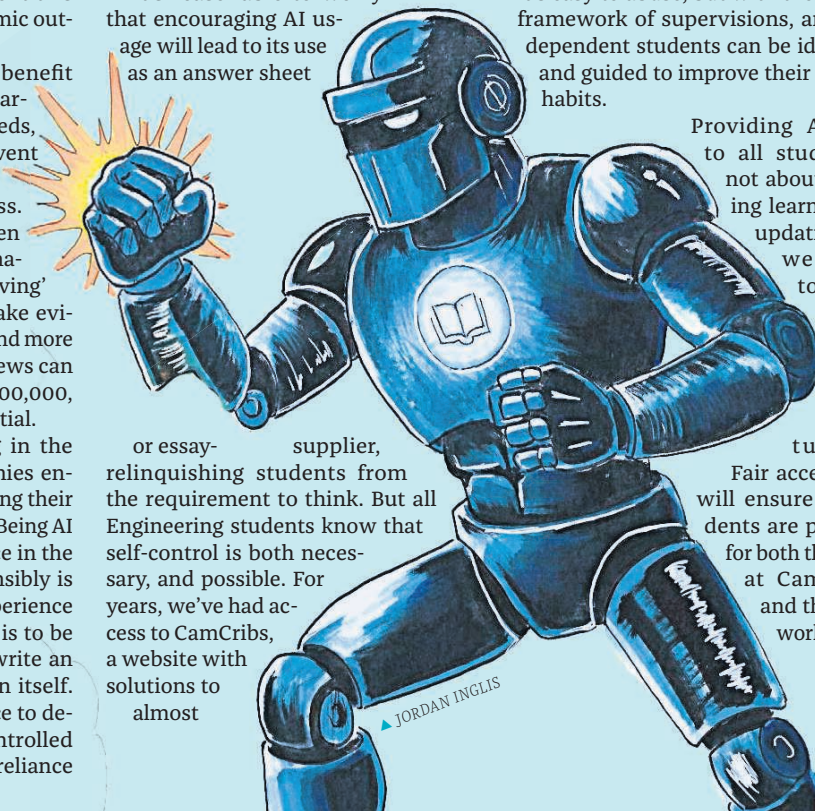
every possible supervision question. While easy to misuse, one probing question in a supervision quickly exposes over-reliance. The same applies to AI; it's easy to abuse, but with the existing framework of supervisions, any over-dependent students can be identified, and guided to improve their learning habits.

Providing AI tools to all students is not about replacing learning, but updating how we learn to reflect modern skills and opportunities.

Fair access to AI will ensure all students are prepared for both their time at Cambridge, and the wider world ahead.



Joshua Prince



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Features

The changing shape of student societies

Olivia Goodman and Emma Tenzler speak to new societies seeking to change the student experience

We return to Cambridge at a time of profound political instability and uncertainty. The fear young people feel is accelerating because of the increase in crises at home and abroad, resulting in both disillusionment and disengagement. Yet five new student initiatives in Cambridge in areas that range from politics to poetry have chosen the path of action. They seek to identify and address the prevalent issues in their respective areas, to counter disillusionment with collaborative and meaningful action.

In pursuit of political engagement – Jesus College Politics Society

Many are turning away from politics as a means to address mounting crises. As of July 2025, the Common UK think-tank found that 87% of Britons have little or no trust in politicians. The risks posed for political legitimacy by this retreat were evidenced by the last general election, which, according to the Institute for Public Policy Research, witnessed the lowest voter turnout (52%) since the introduction of universal suffrage in 1928.

While Cambridge boasts a long history of student politics, concerns about political disengagement and its implications do not stop at its historical walls. It was this that led Aiya, a second year HSPS student, to found the Jesus College Politics Society.

“One of the biggest things that we’re trying to do is foster direct engagement,” she explains to us, before pointing to the formality and distance between speaker and audience of many university events as the main barrier to this engagement.

Instead, Aiya plans to host casual drinks receptions after every event “so that people are actually able to sit with the speakers of the events and discuss with them casually”.

“They seek to identify and address prevalent issues in their respective areas, to counter disillusionment with collaborative and meaningful action”

The topics of the society’s first term of events range from the resurgence of far-right extremism to the impact of humanitarianism in the Middle East, and have been selected for their relevance, actuality, and potential to inspire action. Aiya demonstrates that “we don’t just want to bring in someone who might abstractly talk about the humanitarian effort, but rather someone who felt the brunt of that humanitarian effort and can come back and tell us concretely what they’ve experienced”.

Globalising healthcare – The University of Cambridge MedBrigades

At Cambridge, medical students are acutely aware of this need for practical action. In the international humanitarian sector, global healthcare funding has rapidly declined in recent years. In this year’s Spring Statement, PM Keir Starmer announced that future international development spending would decrease from 0.5 per cent of gross national income (GNI) to 0.3 per cent by April 2027, and other European countries are following suit. Within this context, the University of Cambridge MedBrigades was founded – “a society set up in partnership with the Global Medical Brigades which aims to gather volunteers to participate in a ‘brigade’ to one of six countries: Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Ghana, or Greece”.

Nehansa Siriwardena and Aaron D’souza, two individuals at the centre of this cause, tell us that the initiative “seeks to advocate for communities with limited to no access to healthcare and basic human needs”.

They highlight how “it’s about standing alongside people who face barriers to basic medical care and working to highlight the challenges they experience every day”.

The Cambridge MedBrigades focus on collaboration, participation, and raising enough funds to support the communities they will serve. They “aim to educate students at Cambridge about the overarching public health sector as well as introduce clinical skills with the aid of medical students currently in their clinical training too”.

They keenly stress the importance of participation, not just from medical students, but from all those who want to make a positive impact in the world.

Uncovering hidden voices – Attraverso Zine

The celebration of global communities is something close to the heart of Giulia Reche-Denese, founder and editor-in-chief of the literary zine *Attraverso*. The zine, which will publish poetry in foreign languages and English, seeks to enrich the Cambridge literary scene through poetic translation.

She illustrates that “instead of creating a space for just foreign-language poetry – deepening the divide between international or polyglot students – *Attraverso* focuses on multilingualism as a means to explore the fascinatingly mysterious nature of language, which is particularly intriguing when it comes to poetry”.

What makes this zine authentic in its approach to literature, Giulia explains, is that, “our unique premise is also a way to advocate for translation as a creative practice, rather than a utilitarian means that mistakenly attempts to create an impossibly equivalent artwork. Translation is an art form in itself”.

She continues: “By not specifying which is which, the poem and its translation have the opportunity to exist as two deeply interlinked yet independent and non hierarchically organised entities.”

Giulia envisions poetry as a force able to unite international and domestic student communities: “Realising we have more in

common than we initially thought – that communities are much more all-encompassing than we suspected – is crucial to bridge them together.”

She adds that, “small-scale publishing is people coming together for the sole sake of sharing and valorising art. It’s a beautifully near-utopian mission!”

Shaking up the Cambridge left – UCLS

The advancement of the student community is, according to its founders, central to the program of the University of Cambridge Leftist Society. UCLS, recently launched by HSPS students Aidain Clair and Rares Cocilna, aims to reshape leftist student politics and raise awareness of the University’s alleged entanglement in global issues.

Rares identifies “rising rents, insecure living conditions, and creeping immiseration, especially with the announced increase in tuition fees” as the central issue and Aidain adds that “rent rises across the board at the University remain ahead of inflation and one of the biggest forms of financial strains for working class students”. Indeed, students across the UK are struggling to meet costs of living, while Cambridge students are subjected to rents as high as 53% of the value of the maximum SFE maintenance loan.

The two proclaim: “In light of that, UCLS emerges as a space where thought and action converge, and where critique is really something that’s operative.”

The critique articulated by UCLS is two-fold – directed not just against the University’s failure to cut costs for its students and at “the commodification of



knowledge,” but at the broader implications of its alleged global entanglements. Rares alleges that Cambridge is “woven into the structures of global finance and a military industrial complex”.

The programme Rares and Aidain outline seeks to combine social action with education. From contacting homeless charities to volunteering at community kitchens and food collections, UCLS aims to counter the “sterile separation between thought and action” that they see on the left.

Talks and discussions, too, are envisioned as future events. “For us education is [...] a means of arming students with the historical and theoretical consciousness necessary to wage a struggle that is in their interest.”

Saving self-expression and social connection – Cambridge Sound

Cambridge Sound is a recently founded collaborative initiative of local artists, DJs, and bands, including Off the Record and Slipped Disc, which aims to provide students with the chance to experience an “affordable and accessible” route into a thriving nightlife culture by bridging venues with independent artists.

“UCLS aims to counter the ‘sterile separation between thought and action’ they see on the left”

Joe Garvey, one its organisers, reveals that the movement was prompted by the disappointment countless freshers felt about the culture of Cambridge clubbing.

Such complaints can be attributed to the decline of Britain’s nightlife in recent years, largely due to economic hardship, which has resulted in the loss of 400 clubs across the UK over the last five years. The Night Time Industries Association (NTIA) stresses that this decline “transcends mere economic repercussions,” because nightclubs are “vital hubs of social interaction, artistic expression, and community cohesion, making their preservation imperative”.

Joe seconds this, stating that independent venues, large numbers of which have closed down in recent years, “are more important than they’ve ever been”.

Nightclubs also face growing concerns about safety, particularly from spiking. Joe suggests that while safety is an ongoing concern for the nightlife industry, nights out run by students have the potential to be safe spaces for all partygoers: “People are there for the community.”

“I realised how strong a grip the system of JCR fresher’s wristbands and ticket reps had over incoming freshers. People were wanting something more, something better – but never got introduced to what’s really out there in their first year.” Joe, and these other society pioneers, are trying to change the ways we engage with politics, culture and nightlife as students – and add an element of variety to student life.



Humans of Cambridge: The changing life of the college chef

Ben Curtis speaks to the team at Gonville & Caius to reveal the uncharted world of college catering

Observing the kitchen at Gonville & Caius, Head Chef Lee Howell turns to me and says: “I still had my hair when I started working here!” He’s been at Caius for 22 years and counting, seen the catering programme “modernise in every way,” and is currently gearing up for another Michaelmas term. Despite a hectic schedule he describes as “a little bit of juggling,” he and Head of Catering Ricardo Soares found the time to talk through the lesser-known life of College catering.

Neither Howell nor Soares found themselves in Cambridge by chance. Before taking up his role, Soares worked in London “opening restaurants and changing how things were done,” introducing “new concepts, new ideas”. When Caius called, looking for a Director of Catering, he tells me “I didn’t know what a Cambridge college was, I didn’t know what it was about,” but what ultimately appealed was that “they wanted someone to come in and change things”.

Soares inherited equipment “first installed in the 1960s” and oversaw a “long-overdue” upgrade. He tours me round the kitchens: a stainless steel rabbit warren hidden beneath the grandeur of Caius’ wood-panelled dining hall. Soares is proud of how it’s progressed: he points out a new lift here or a more efficient oven there, his enthusiasm seemingly undiminished after eight years.

Howell has seen all of these changes through to fruition. He left school at 16 and joined Churchill College as an apprentice in their kitchens, and besides a brief period working in hotels, he tells me that he’s “been in colleges for pretty much my whole career”. At Caius he worked his way up from his first role as section chef in “the larder making sandwiches and baguettes”.

“It all sounds rather stressful, though Howell assures me ‘it’s a walk in the park, really’

You get the impression he’s rarely out of his chef whites. With a smile, he tells me it’s been “a long haul, but worth it”. In recent years they moved away from “very old fashioned” silver service, waiters serving food from trays at the table, and both Soares and Howell agree that, even in the antiquated realm of formal hall, “everything has come into the 21st Century”.

You’d be forgiven for assuming the fellowship of any college is broadly re-

sistant to change, and Soares certainly did when he first joined. For him “all the warnings [from] people” were how “[the fellows] don’t like change”. Though Soares found them to be “receptive,” and that they “embraced” what he was trying to do. It seems people just want good food, and Howell reiterates how high he has seen the standard raised: “It’s totally changed, it’s much more healthy, more balanced.”

Asked how the food used to be, Howell responds, slightly diplomatically, “it wasn’t horrible!” The food was “rich,” and “cheap and convenient,” with what Soares calls a “bit of a mismatch” between the offerings for students and fellows. Both are proud to have changed this, and remain keenly aware of the students at the heart of any college. “They’re why we’re here,” Howell tells me, and Soares is quick to add that they are “the College’s bread and butter”.

With typically six formal hall offerings a week, and a daily cafeteria service, Howell and Soares’s team of around 13 chefs and close to 40 ser-

vice staff are certainly kept busy. Undergraduates are expected to dine on 31 evenings in Full Term, and Soares tells me that “there’ll be anything

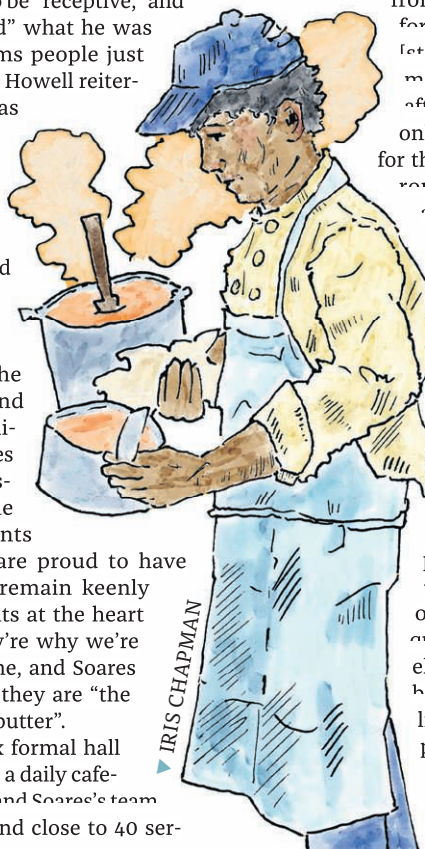
from 144 [students] for cafeteria to 190 [students] for formal hall straight afterwards” leaving only “half an hour” for the team to turnaround service. It all sounds rather stressful, though Howell laughs and assures me it’s a “walk in the park, really”.

Howell has the confidence that only 22 years of experience can give you, but both point out that “the administration of [their jobs are] quite heavy”. Howell tells me that “a big part of kitchen life” is “ordering” produce, done on a daily basis, and sorting the rotas for the following

week – all while continuing to provide regular service. The work that goes into each course of a formal dinner goes, they admit, mostly unseen by students, but it doesn’t seem to faze them: “If you go out for a meal, you don’t sit there and think woah, I bet [the chef’s] had a tough week!”

Where their satisfaction does come from, though, is pretty clear. Soares enjoys the feeling of a job well done, hearing that “the food is really good and [...] telling the chefs [...] being proud of what [they] do”. And as Howell says, “we are chefs at the end of the day [...] my goal and my focus is good food on a plate”. They both enjoy the opportunities they’ve had to change things “for the better,” but retain a fondness for the unique, social “tradition” of a formal hall: “bringing people together through food is what we focus [...] on,” Soares proudly tells me.

Their roles are fast-paced and “hairly,” though not without entertainment. When asked if any moments stand out they exchange a wry smile and tell me “[We] probably shouldn’t say!” As I’m led back through the kitchen I see the team setting up to begin evening service, every surface polished to within an inch of its life. There’s no time to waste, with an Installation dinner and two four-course Matriculation formals to prepare for. Lee says “it’ll be Christmas before you know it”.



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These and many more questions are tackled head on, in well researched heresy against the Schoolmen of the 21st century.

On a more serious note, while the mathematics of particle physics may be very useful, it cannot be the last word on the fundamental ontology. Pretending otherwise causes confusion. It's time to identify what the quantum really is.

An alternative perspective by K. Strang

Science

Revolutionise your pres: here's how to turn water into wine

Beatrix Biagini uncovers the formula that will help you do freshers' week on a budget

Fed up with ring of fire? Always moaning that the Pinot Noir at the Regal is a whole pound more expensive than it is in your home town? Well perhaps a group of international physicists have the answer.

This August, *Chemistry World* reported that a team led by Gerard McCaul and Matthias Runge have turned water into wine. As a Jesuan and a NatSci, the idea immediately intrigued me – could the biblical miracle performed by the namesake of my college have a scientific explanation?

In the captivatingly-titled paper 'Tuning the terahertz response of liquids by creating polar many-body excitations', published in July this year, the group outline how they finally put their theories into practice.

They described how they applied different 'pump fields' to both water and alcohol to render the 'polaron absorbance frequency' in the 'terahertz region' the same, and hence achieve optical mimicry.

Despite both water and alcohol having fundamentally different structure and bonding, their optical properties can be manipulated so that they appear identical. The

most obvious optical property is colour, which is determined by the absorption and reflection of specific wavelengths of light. For instance, red objects reflect wavelengths corresponding to red, and absorb every other visible wavelength. These optical properties continue across the electromagnetic spectrum, outside our visible range. In the terahertz region of the spectrum, where the energy provided is 8000 times smaller than visible light, the wavelengths absorbed are determined by the liquid's polaron frequency.

Despite sounding like something out of Star Wars, a polaron is, disappointingly, far less exciting. It is simply just an electron and the distortion it causes

it – picture a ball rolling around on a trampoline, causing a dent to follow it.

“*Could the biblical miracle performed by the namesake of my college have a scientific explanation?*”

The polaron frequency is dependent on the electron concentration within the liquid, which can be controlled by using an aforementioned 'pump field'. A pump field is a laser pulse with enough energy to 'knock' electrons out of neutral solvent molecules, and thereby increasing the electron concentration. This allows the resonant frequency of polarons for both water and alcohol to be adjusted and made equal.

For a few picoseconds, and in the electromagnetic region of terahertz, water

and wine (well, not *quite* wine, but a very similar isopropyl alcohol) can be made optically identical.

So, unless you have a laser to hand and can finish your drink (which will unfortunately still taste of water) in record time, maybe don't invite yourself to a wedding banquet in Cana with high hopes anytime soon.

Having had my hopes dashed by the physicists performing the transmutation of water into wine, I turned my attention to a solution offered by chemists – don't worry, resorting to a sneaky drop of red food colouring isn't your only option.

The Royal Society of Chemistry suggests putting turmeric and washing soda in warm water to create a red 'wine' colour. Turmeric contains the compound curcumin which acts as a natural pH indicator, and supposedly provides anti-inflammatory benefits. In basic conditions (as facilitated by our washing soda) it is red, and in acidic conditions (which can be provided by vinegar) it is yellow. So, by adding vinegar, or alternatively washing soda, you can transform your drink from wine to water and water to wine as many times as you please. Admittedly, the 'water' will be an enticingly pale yellow colour, and I'd personally advise against tasting it.

All in all, if this is the best that science can offer, it doesn't seem that Chilford Hall Vineyard has anything to worry about.



Pooja Gada catches you up on some of the summer's scientific research

Mars, microbes and minerals: the clearest sign of life yet?

NASA's Perseverance rover has reportedly found a 'potential biosignature'. Formed 3.2-3.8 billion years ago, the rock sample – nicknamed Sapphire Canyon – has distinctive 'leopard spot' rings and dark 'poppy seed' flecks composed of iron-rich mineral deposits. On Earth, such minerals often form as by-products of microbes undergoing metabolic reactions. If the same metabolic reactions happened on Mars, this could be evidence of Martian life.

Data, disease and divination: the new oracle of health

Built at Cambridge's European Molecular Biology Laboratory, Delphi-2M is based on a generative pre-trained transformer (GPT) – the same model that underpins AI chatbots such as ChatGPT. By analysing past medical history and lifestyle factors – including age, sex, body mass index, tobacco use, and alcohol consumption – Delphi-2M can estimate the likelihood of developing 1,258 diseases, ranging from cancer to cardiovascular disease to immune disorders – and make predictions up to 20 years into the future.



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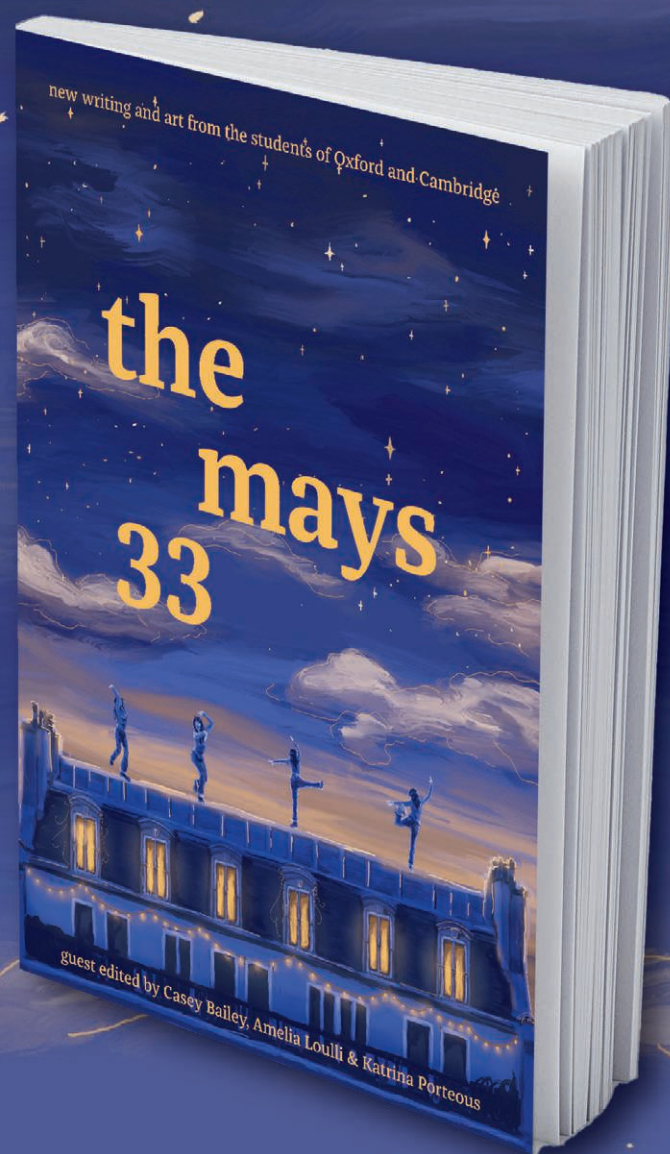
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the mays 33

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guest edited by Casey Bailey, Amelia Loulli
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The Smoking Area

Crossword

1		2		3		4		5			6	7		8
									9					
10					11									
	12							13						
14														
15							16					17		
19									20					
22		23							24					
														25
26														
28														

Quick:

ACROSS

- 1 Semi-detached girder (10)
- 6 Flour of sorts (4)
- 10 Seeped in a perhaps unpleasant manner (5)
- 11 Frankly terrible raconteur (9)
- 12 Feature of American pencil cases (6)
- 13 Prime Minister May (7)
- 15 Don't let your dog hear you say this word (6)
- 16 A necessary evil to homeowners (8)
- 19 Perish euphemistically (4,4)
- 20 Reluctant (6)
- 22 Woman of honour (6)
- 24 Like many students' bedrooms (6)
- 26 Probably ingredient at 27 (9)
- 27 Hotspot of Bene't St. (5)
- 28 Crumbs (4)
- 29 Should we grab one? (1,4,2,3)

DOWN

- 1 Lump (4)
- 2 Spanish Easterside processors(9)
- 3 Made agriculture obsolete (14)
- 4 Large monochrome part of a world map (6)
- 5 Beta particle (8)
- 7 Not quite right (5)
- 8 Cycloscope (10)
- 9 Alimentary canal (9,5)
- 17 Part of a military base (9)
- 18 System of tunnels (8)
- 21 Charming (6)
- 23Banish (5)
- 25 Clue (4)

Cryptic (same answers):

ACROSS

- 1 Can't I ever accept losing bridge? (10)
- 6 Palm fish emptying river (4)
- 10 How interesting, letter was let out! (5)
- 11 European housing deranged cutie who butchers verses (9)
- 12 One rubbing before hesitant times (6)
- 13 There's a lady (7)
- 15 Longing for state to be received (6)
- 16 Non-universal measure of death – you might need to think about taking one out soon! (8)
- 19 Drive past a road and die (4,4)
- 20 Opposed trolleyed Revs engineer visiting area (6)
- 22 She is after Emmanuel's first Middle English fellow (7)
- 24 Rather messy pantaloons features back-to-front tag (6)
- 26 Liven up lager with a slice of sausage (9)
- 27 Likely 26 server's computer component powered by AI (5)
- 28 Darn pests (4)
- 29 Delirious, ate little inside – tea scoffed – just a snack (1,4,2,3)

DOWN

- 1 Heated cold bit of dirt (4)
- 2 Entranced by rapper, Zane crams about Mary and Joseph, say (9)
- 3 Reportedly among filth had an epiphany developed (14)
- 4 Dominion politician in Gaelic Ireland (6)
- 5 One in election set right –little matter (8)
- 7 Sudden-onset minor injury in A&E (5)
- 8 Gauge of effort that may diffuse or permeate (10)
- 9 Take a liking to article concerning removal of fellow from seasonal canal system (9, 5)
- 14 Sasquatches, or what large shoes mean? (7)
- 17 Trader to look to purchase goalie (4-6)
- 18 In crypt, house-pet given something for its fur (8)
- 21 How American tourists often infuriatingly describe Cambridge is not following question (6)
- 23 Retired postman living abroad (5)
- 25 Would you like one? (4)

Sudoku

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

Cross-Atlantic Mini

1	2	3	4	5
6				
7				
8				
9				

ACROSS

- 1 One playing in the midst of factory (5)
- 6 Vocally disapproves of drink (5)
- 7 Traveller Martin uncovered from Rosetta Stone (5)
- 8 Street entertainment, it opens your heart (5)
- 9 Horse rider held iPhone backwards (5)

DOWN

- 1 Music remains humble (5)
- 2 Nero's rival cooked tacos (5)
- 3 Toast Edward lugged (5)
- 4 No place for pool disinfectant (5)
- 5 Hires torn sheets to begin with (5)

Quicky Quiz

1. Eureka, Lisbon and Meyer are all subspecies of what kind of tree?

2. In 1908, Guangxu, the penultimate Emperor of the Qing dynasty, sadly passed away. Who succeeded him, and what was his relation to Guangxu?

3. Which London-born violinist and composer was named in 2008 as Lenny Henry's 'history hero'?

4. Which symbol can represent all of the following: in physics, the ratio of any photon's energy to its frequency; in mathematics, the set of quaternions; in architecture, the total distance between the uppermost and lowermost point in a building?

5. The fictional Aldmeri Dominion is a nation in which video game series, debuting in 1994?

ANSWERS TO PUZZLES ON INSTAGRAM: @VARSITYCAMBRIDGE

QUICKY QUIZ AND CROSSWORDS BY JAFAR & GOOBER.
SUDOKU BY CHEGGERS.

▼ Iris Chapman



Varsity A Y2K welcome

Resident Varsity Archivist [Giulia Reche-Danese](#) dives into the archives to see how past Cantabs have been counselled

I was once told I have the energy of an old and wise tree. As such, allow me to offer some past wisdom to present freshers, straight from the Varsity archives.

Interestingly, guiding freshers has been a ritual for as long as freshers themselves have existed. Varsity's 2004 Fresher's Guide modestly claims: "you have to realise that all the guides you have received are, to put it simply, full of lies". They set out to offer, as an alternative, "the only guide to Freshers' week you will need".

The 2004 Freshers' issue went on giving freshers insightful advice about what to bring: "Forget the reading list, forget the books, forget your clothes. Alcohol is by far the most important thing to bring to Cambridge." Helpfully, the article also mentions that "coffee is another important thing to bring, along with cigarettes. If you don't [...] you will look out of place with your clean teeth and calm demeanour".

Guidance to new students also covers two of the freshers' week staples, which make for satisfying alliterations: the Freshers' Fair and the freshers' flu. The former is described in 2002 as "the domain of lollipops, pens, and other tacky shit". The latter is mentioned in 2003, reassuring audiences that despite the vast numbers affected there was still hope: "It seems the time for painting plague crosses on our doors has not arrived yet".

Despite all the humorous practical guidance, the most useful is that which touches on how it feels to be a fresher: 2004 described Freshers' Week as "a potage of trepidation, excitement, and profound boredom". The article urges to take some pressure off Freshers' Week, reminding the reader that they have multiple years ahead of them to make friends and drunken mistakes.

From all my research, it seems the wiser words come from the intuition of a fresher herself. In 2002, Judith writes: "I have to believe that underneath all the neuroses that go with being a fresher is the knowledge that, however nervous I may be feeling, there are others who are just as nervous as I am".

For the archivists and freshers of the future, let this be my contribution to the fresher's advice pile. At the core of the fresher experience, and its dedicated week, lies a fascinating paradox: it can be a very alienating and lonely time, despite being an inherently collective experience. Acknowledging the vulnerability and bittersweetness that comes with being a fresher is the first step in creating this new, exciting, and terrifying life for yourself.

MY BIG FAT
REAL COLLEGE WEDDING



vulture.

My big fat (real) college wedding

Jess Gotterson sits down with newlyweds Izzy and Dan, who took one Cambridge tradition to the extreme

My wife seems to slip into every story I tell. There was her romcom worthy proposal, the proper full-length wedding dress from Vinted, and her debut as my knight in shining armour when she rescued me from the floor when I say I know love your spouse of your again, about When h o m e with a in response. should have clarified! Cambridge has a strange tradition, you see..." and so it goes. But while I didn't marry my college wife, someone did.

Meet the newlyweds, two second years at Downing who, for the purposes of this article, wish to remain anonymous. My chosen pseudonyms? Izzy and Dan. They're not only happily college married, but really and truly *married*. You heard me. Their commitment to one another far exceeds the regular bounds of Cambridge's whimsical, purely platonic tradition – in fact, I almost wondered if I'd turned invisible halfway through our conversation because their eyes were permanently glued to each others' faces. But it wasn't always plain sailing; even for them, the sea was choppy along the way.

Their meet-cute is, quite frankly, just that little bit *too* cute. Let me set the scene: across Downing's crowded Halloween formal, their eyes met, struck by the realization that they had dressed in matching pirate costumes. Could their love be any more fated? Izzy, a sneaky paparazzo at heart, told me how she caught Dan on video while pretending to capture the event, collecting footage of the mystery pirate man to re-watch later.

Their next rendezvous k n o c k s those cuteness levels down a notch by bringing Revs into the picture, place where romance usually goes to die. I guess the usual drunk and uninspired efforts at flirting weren't so hopeless for this pair. By sheer fate, these star-crossed lovers lived in opposite staircases at college, leading to their reunion at pres. "She just looked so beautiful that day," Dan told me, in a way that made me want to simultaneously melt and hurl at the romance of it all. Izzy, a VIP member of the I've-fancied-Every-English-teacher-I've-ever-had club, was delighted to discover Dan was an Engling. She then promptly embarrassed him by having read more of his bookshelf than he had.

But the sudden onslaught of feelings was too frightening a prospect: "We'll call it denial," said Dan. The pair found themselves returning to Cambridge after Christmas, barely even friends following frequent arguments – of course, strong emotions bring strong explosions with them. It was Izzy who extended the first olive branch and rekindled their friendship.

Fast forward to Dan's birthday, an occasion which people typically ignored – but not Izzy. She spent the entire day celebrating with him, revolutionising his concept of birthdays forevermore. Come Izzy's birthday in February, and it was about time

he repaid the favour. Mid-term, Izzy confessed that all she *really* wished for was to be whisked away somewhere new. Cue Dan's romantic getaway to an idyllic cottage in the Cotswolds. Gentlemen, listen up. In the words of Taylor Swift: "that's how it works. That's how you get the girl." "It was the sweetest thing anyone had ever done for me," Izzy confided.

To all the avoidants out there, here's a lesson on vulnerability: one night, believing Dan was asleep, Izzy finally admitted her true feelings for him. But, plot twist, he wasn't *really* asleep. Even bigger plot twist, he panicked and couldn't say it back: "It was scary to know that someone could have so much control over you and that I could start to fall in love." The rest of the trip was then spent as awkward acquaint-

the two make art together, write love letters, and even run a blog. "Everyone is so cynical now but I truly think people can fall in love, just like that," Izzy declared, as if she were a Jane Austen heroine stood in the rain wearing a Regency bonnet. For her, grand declarations of love are something we should mourn the loss of – everything now is always planned and measured. "Why is everyone planning their wedding for five years?" Izzy questioned, deciding to plan hers in five minutes instead.

One spontaneous stumble into a picturesque village chapel later and they were married in the Cotswolds. Inspired by the freedom of irregular marriages in early Scotland, documents signing and marriage mutual consent, Izzy felt that this kind of commitment was a lot more "human" than anything paperwork could represent. Ah, bureaucracy, the real enemy of romance. Their wedding, technically an elopement, was officiated by a friend and witnessed by one bemused passer-by. They went offline on the trip and, as Izzy said: "with no phones to occupy us, what else were we supposed to do?" Personally, nothing springs to mind.

“
Maybe we should all be a bit less sensible?

I would have gotten hitched, too.

Of course, when Easter term finally arrived, they were married again in college, as per Cambridge tradition – except usually the pair aren't already husband and wife. "The more people see of us, the less they doubt" – all scepticism seems to disintegrate in the face of true love. Running away to get married might be a crazy thing to do, but maybe we should all be a bit less sensible. In a world that's obsessed with what's practical and safe, commitment and vulnerability have become something we tend to skirt around. Their biggest advice? Be vulnerable and do it for the plot.

Ever since, married life at Downing has meant charity shop dates for future house trinkets, reels that hint at acquiring

future cats and dogs, and a lot of heartfelt effort. As Dan explained, it really doesn't matter if it's not your natural love language, you should want to learn your partners in order to make them feel special. Virtually every day the two are together: "we always decide to be present [offline]." Though college life together has been a tasty morsel of

married life, they can't wait to live together after graduation. "Next, we want to sign those papers properly and celebrate with our closest friends and family." Until then, Izzy and Dan remain firmly committed to being ridiculously in love, both as college spouses and as actual husband and wife. On that note, would anyone like to take me to the Cotswolds?



Finn Costello O'Reilly's easy puttanesca makes the most of a can of chopped tomatoes

Makes 4-6 portions.

Essential ingredients:

- **Oil** – preferably olive, but vegetable/rapeseed won't kill you
- **Garlic** – 4-6 cloves, depending on size and personal preference, minced
- **Capers** – 2.5 tbsp, chopped
- **Olives** – each olive sliced in half. Half a jar of any type (my preference is kalamata>black>green)
- **Chopped tomatoes** – 2 tins, good quality
- **Fresh basil** – small pack, carefully chopped (if you aggressively chop the basil, it spills its flavour into the board, not the sauce)/chiffonade
- **Spaghetti/linguine** – 500g pack

Desirable extras:

- **Six anchovies** – If you just "don't like them," please give them another try. They're an absolute game changer and, once cooked, are not fishy at all!
- **Dried oregano** – 1 tsp, (or 1tbsp fresh if you're fancy)
- **Chilli flakes** – ½-1 tsp depending on preferred spice level

Method:

1. Put 2 tbsp oil in a saucepan or large frying pan/wok. On a medium/low heat, fry the garlic, chilli flakes, and anchovies for two-three minutes. Break up the anchovies. The garlic should barely be sizzling and not change much in colour.

2. Add the capers and olives to the pan, fry on the same heat for one minute.

3. Add the tinned tomatoes, oregano and ¾ of the basil, and cook on a low heat for ten-15 minutes.

4. Mix with cooked spaghetti and a ladle full of pasta water.

5. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve with the rest of the basil, and some parmesan if you have it!



ances, desperately trying to pretend one hadn't just professed their undying love for the other... until one Cam-Fess rudely interrupted Dan's hesitancy, complimenting Izzy as: "The hot Asian girl who's like five foot tall at Downing". This was the kick up the arse Dan needed to swallow his pride and apologise for the huge mistake he'd made. "Life," he said, "is way more depressing without you, and I've taken that for granted." Playing hard to get and playing it well – oh, how the tables have turned – Izzy rejected him. Briefly. But, let's be honest, grand gestures win hearts, and Dan came armed with a long list of "the tiny details I love about Izzy", home-cooked meals, and flowers at the end of lectures. Resistance was futile.

Since then, it's been a full-throttle romance –

Introducing Auntie Alice...

Agony Aunt **Alice Frecheville** is here to fight off your Freshers' Week fears!

Well hello! Despite what my youthful glow may suggest, I promise I'm not a silly fresher but, in fact, a geriatric 20 year-old. What makes me qualified to run this column? Apparently, the Lifestyle team scoured high and low to find a compulsive over-sharer who was acerbic, moderately deranged, and droll: I was evidently the perfect applicant to lower the tone. My motto as Auntie Alice shall be: "we listen and we can't judge"... within reason, at least. Returners, you are well aware that Cambridge is full of diabolical individuals; freshers, this is something you will learn. Fast. With that said, let's crack onto your concerns!

What if I do something really embarrassing when I'm drunk during Freshers' Week?

Don't fret, whatever you do, be safe in the knowledge that someone's done something worse. If you're not convinced, know that absolutely nothing can top one of my friend's mortifying experience during freshers' when, without going into the gory details, she was kicked out of a club for nearly losing her virginity in the toilet cubicles. Surprisingly, that wasn't even the low point - outside, during their post-encounter debrief, she dropped her phone and inadvertently sent it into emergency call mode. Her contact was her mother, who unfortunately picked up. Unaware that she was on the line, she went into graphic detail, and her mum heard everything. So what if you do something embarrassing? At the very least, it'll make a great story.

How big of an issue is committing collegecest or coursecest really?

In short, odds are it will happen and it's typically not a big deal at all. Colleges vary massively in size, so being forced to sit next to a deeply regrettable one-night stand in the library is far more probable at a tiny college like Peterhouse than a massive one like Trinity. At some colleges, collegecest is particularly rampant (for obvious reasons, Girton) and, at worst, it can feel like school gossip with whisperings about so-and-so seen leaving such-and-such's room. Saying that, if you hook up with somebody on the same floor of your staircase, I'm afraid you are an absolute imbecile and deserve whatever awkward encounters you have after it. On committing coursecest, again, I think it's a non-issue - you're naturally likely to meet someone like-minded and have a lecture crush. However, I would caution against committing coursecest within a very small cohort and sleeping with someone you have supervisions with at college (though it would give you company for the walk there the morning after).

Is the nightlife actually as dire people say?!

There is no denying that clubbing here is nowhere near on par with Nottingham,

London, and Leeds. I won't regurgitate the commonly recited criticism of Cambridge clubbing, but instead list a few of its pros. In defence of Cambridge's nightlife, unless you go to Girton or Homerton (in which case I'm sorry) the clubs are a rarely more than twenty minute walk away, so you won't need to shell out on Ubers. Even if the 40-year-old DJ insists on playing 'Last Christmas' in October as a single tear falls down his cheek, at least you'll be familiar with the music. MASH does serve absinthe, a fun novelty if (like me) you've too refined a palette for wank WKDs. I do genuinely rate Junction and ArcSoc nights out (which people dress up in costume for!) despite not being remotely into techno. Lastly, even if the clubbing is quite shit, there is a certain joy that witnessing sports team athletes dressed as chickens and those in white-tie at the same club night brings. You'll come to your own conclusion soon enough.

What advice would you offer to all freshers that other people might not tell us?

Ah, now this is a smart question. There are so many things I wish I had known

before I started Cambridge that you would certainly never ever find on any sort of official website. I don't have time to tell you absolutely everything (and I'm likely not allowed) but here are some carefully selected nuggets of advice.

1) Despite making it into one of the most prestigious universities in the world, it seems some students aren't yet potty-trained. Mummy and daddy might have taught them which order to use their silverware in, but not where to empty their bowels, and this shows. Not to name and shame but look to the notorious Corpus Shitter. Even when people can use toilets, they apparently forget the fabulous invention of toilet brushes or, even worse, simply forget that toilets can in fact flush! Perhaps splurging on an ensuite isn't such a terrible idea.

2) The fire alarms in your accommodation will be extra sensitive during Freshers' Week because, no offense, College literally doesn't trust you. Yes, your vape will set it off, so at least wait until a few weeks in. Candles are an obvious trigger, and even boiling your kettle can set that deafening alarm going. Proceed with caution.

3) Even if your college tells you to be registered at your home GP and a Cambridge one, this isn't true. I learnt this the hard way and if you're under shared care it can be better to stay with your home GP. You

can still go to Addenbroke's and access 999 and 111 services in Cambridge without registering at a local GP, and college nurses are on hand to deal with smaller health concerns and monitoring (e.g. blood pressure and heart rate) too.

What's the dating scene like?

It's truly luck of the draw. I genuinely hope that you will be one of those annoying people who meet the love of their life first term and proceed to have a happy, stable, and loving relationship. For the vast majority of us, the Cambridge dating scene can be rough. Want to get consistently ghosted? Try Hinge - I fondly recall setting my dating app preferences to women after accidentally going on a date with an Andrew Tate fanatic. If you're really lucky, you might even get hit on by the dodgy third years at your College bop! Alternatively, you can try your chances and go on Varsity's blind date scheme - if worst comes to worst, at least you'll have some funny lore to share at pres. And hey, if your love life does go to hell, you can always write to me about it.

Well, that's all I have time for today, but I wish all incoming freshers the best of luck for starting Cambridge. You'll need it.



▲ RUYING YANG



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Fashion

Flossie Bullion suggests that we all have a lot to learn about fashion from the history of drag and ballroom culture

And the rest is drag!



In a 1990 television appearance, world-famous drag queen RuPaul was met with incredulous laughter as she announced what would become one of her many catchphrases: “You’re born naked and the rest is drag.” Although the men in three-piece suits in this 1990 audience may have found the idea that they were in drag just as much as RuPaul fascinatingly absurd, this idea was already well-established in queer communities by early drag culture. In fact, what you may not know is that RuPaul was actually echoing the words of poet, performer, and activist Tede Mathews, who explained in the 1978 documentary *Word is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives* over a decade earlier that: “clothes, on one level, are very superficial because we’re all born naked and everything that anyone wears at any time is drag.”

Tede Mathews makes an excellent point here about the significance and superficiality of clothes, one that has been (and still is) taken for granted. Many people neglect to consider the importance of clothes – fashion is an important and unique art form that we all participate in every day, whether we’re choosing an outfit to wear to an event, or throwing some clothes on to do any mundane task. We have a lot to learn from the way drag artists approach fashion, acknowledging and making the most of its superficiality.

This idea that all fashion functions in the same way as drag has existed for as long as drag culture has, which began as we know it in the ballroom scene of the early 20th century. This was a space created by queer and transgender African American and Latinx people in which they could explore expression, competing before judges in different categories by performing, dancing, and modelling. Although a main focus of ballroom culture is performance, the modelling and pageant aspect also very closely connects it with the world of fashion. This connection continues to this day – when someone declares that they are ‘serving’ something, they are using the language of the ballroom. Many of the categories were built around the idea of ‘realness’: competitors were judged based on their ability to accurately replicate the social constructs and ideas they were satirising, such as ‘Female Figure Realness’ and ‘Male Figure Realness’. It is this simultaneous performance of, commentary on, and deconstruction of ideas of gender, race, and class that were (and continue to be) used to constrain and devalue people which lies at the heart of drag’s subversive potential. Drag mocks and celebrates identity at the same time.

However, as Tede Mathews points out, the way drag artists use fashion to both celebrate and take the piss can also apply to you and I. Personally, I remember discov-

ering this as I walked into the waiting room for my initial Cambridge interview with a full face of makeup and lashes, a pink manicure and a pink miniskirt, armed only with a handbag and my lip combo, and being met by the sight of a room full of boys in suits, desperate to serve academic realness as they typed furiously on their laptops. I credit any success I might’ve had in that interview to the confidence I gained in that moment. Since then, I have discovered the genuine benefits we can all gain by maximising the potential of the clothes we all put on every morning.

More recently, this focus on expressing individuality has grown in importance to drag. Many artists are less interested in serving realness in a gendered sense, or maintaining a family resemblance to their drag house, instead adapting the boundaries of the art form to perform and express their unique character. For many new drag artists, no longer are their drag names inherited from houses like LaBeija or Xtravaganza. Instead, they create and use their name to encapsulate their energy and

qualities as a performer and an individual – sometimes in the form of a well thought out pun. Drag queen Divine commented on the significance of the drag name when considering drag as a public expression of identity, by responding to the question of his name: “it’s *always* Glenn and it’s *always* Divine. Do you mean the character Divine or the person Divine?”

What would your drag name be? It’s a fun thing to think about.

It’s also a great way to start thinking about how you can be inspired by the way drag artists choose to perform certain parts of their identity using fashion. Just as a drag artist would dress in accordance with the name or persona they have created and the category they may be competing in, you too can think creatively about using fashion to perform aspects of

yourself in order to feel prepared for whatever challenges each day presents. Fashion is inherently social and communicative – don’t neglect this.

Maybe you’re braving your first club night at Wednesday Revs after the summer break. Maybe you’re going to the pub with your Vinted warrior, digi-cam wielding friends. Maybe all you’re doing today is attending a couple of lectures and a supervision. Before you throw on the same jeans you’ve worn all week, take a moment to think. What will make you feel the most powerful? The most comfortable? What is today’s category, and what do you want to say about it?

Every style, cut, pattern, and design of clothing makes some kind of statement. You wouldn’t just write a poem without considering what the words mean, so don’t put on an outfit without thinking about what each piece serves – how it makes you look, how it makes you feel, what it might culturally resemble, and how this fits with what you plan to achieve that day. As a drag artist would, identify the category, how you can incorporate your individuality into it, what you want to say about it, and keep that in mind as you choose your outfit.

Fashion Shoot Coordinator/Photographer: Chloe Jacob
Collage: Lyra Browning



“
The performance
of, destruction of,
and commentary
on gender lies
at the heart of
drag's subversive
potential



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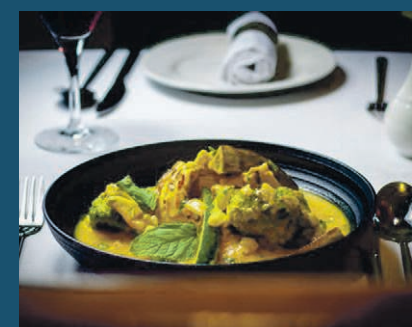
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Arts

The Fitz's first paid exhibition is worth every penny

Talking with the curator of 'Made in Ancient Egypt', **Sophie Smout** argues that the controversial fee shouldn't put you off

The exhibition is about people who don't really get a lot of attention," Helen Strudwick, the Fitzwilliam Museum's Senior Curator for the Ancient Nile Valley, told me in conversation about their upcoming exhibition, 'Made in Ancient Egypt'. "Those are the people who made the objects that we see often in museums: the people who made the furniture, the wall carvings, amazing objects ... made of faience, made of glass, made of bronze." She speaks with open enthusiasm, clearly eager for the world to see what she and her team have been working on for the last 17 months.

While the exhibition was only greenlit in March 2024, it "builds on years of research that the Fitzwilliam has been doing," with foundations laid by the museum's first keeper of Antiquities in the 1980s. Janine Bourriau was "one of the driving forces in the understanding of pottery through its material rather than just the shape". Her work complemented Alfred Lucas, conservator of the objects from the tomb of Tutankhamun. Lucas's approach, unique in the 1920s, centralised the materials and creation processes of an object. From there, the method expanded to investigate the ordinary people who made such objects: these are the focus of this exhibition.

The exhibit has caused a wave of excitement among curators and visitors alike. "Once you start pointing out: 'look, there's a fingerprint there,' they'll often respond, 'oh wow!'" which is a much more visceral connection than a cerebral one ... and that's what we want," Helen explained. Despite the interest, the exhibition has also sparked some controversy for introducing the museum's first fee for visitors, who will be charged £14.50 to view the exhibition. Even at its size, the Fitzwilliam Museum has a long-standing tradition of free entry and exhibitions. "It's been a heart-rending thing to do," confessed Helen. "We've always been proud ... that all our exhibitions are free, but it's a reality we've just got to face now, unfortunately." While general entry and temporary displays will remain free for the foreseeable future, it seems that future exhibitions will also carry a charge. "We want to do complex exhibitions like this, and, at the moment, we do. But I'm afraid that [charging] is unfortunately the way it's going to have to be." But what caused this cost, and is it worth paying on a student budget?

What first sets this exhibition apart is the scale. 'Made in Ancient Egypt' comprises three large galleries, all of which have running costs including maintaining safe temperatures, lighting, and visitor-assisting staff. Additionally, compar-

tion to her 2016 'Death on the Nile' exhibition, Helen noted that "there's now a much, much bigger team". The museum hires designers and project managers in addition to curators. Coupled with a 20% decrease in arts funding for the Cambridge area between 2017 and 2022, it seems inevitable that an exhibition of

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It seems inevitable that an exhibition of this scale needs additional support from its visitors

this scale needs additional support from its visitors.

Secondly, Helen highlighted one crucial behind-the-scenes element: transportation. "All the costs have gone up massively, [like] air freight," she explained. "Any manufacturer in this country will tell you that the cost of transporting stuff around is vastly more expensive." While most objects are from the Fitzwilliam's more than 500,000 items, further antiquities have been loaned from seven UK museums, Berlin, Leiden, and France. "Everybody's been incredibly generous," said Helen, "all the Egyptologists that I've been contacting about the exhibition have been so excited." With so many delicate objects travelling up to 1,000km, it's no wonder that there have been high transportation costs in addition to the cost of the loans themselves. Despite this, these objects are necessary to include. Speaking about a large stela from the Louvre, Helen said there are only "a handful of texts that cover anything like the same ground, so it's very much an object that is obvious to have in an exhibition like this, because it represents this person as a maker, very, very clearly". When I asked what caused the rise in costs, suggesting Brexit or Covid-19, Helen agreed. "I think both have contributed, [...] there was an enormous hike in the cost of things post-Covid immediately, and I don't think Brexit has helped either. So, all our costs have gone up."

Finally, this exhibition required cutting-edge research, wherein the conservators took "a very practical approach to understanding how objects were made by going on courses to learn," for example, bronze-making with replicas of ancient tools. Helen said: "until you've actually done it for yourself, you don't know how it works". The Fitzwilliam first used these techniques in a 2016

workshop, which one of Helen's colleagues called: "transformative to his approach to understanding each object". While this level of visitor involvement is not possible at the scale of this exhibition, the team are still encouraging visitors to get involved. "There is a family trail, which is based around saying people's names aloud ... [because] the ancient Egyptians wanted their names to live forever," as well as the opportunity for visitors to recreate ancient sketches, weave basketry, and a bow drill which you can "pull back and get a sense of the tension". Since they are so pioneering, these techniques and materials cost the museum extra time and money.

So, why pay for the exhibit instead of visiting the free Ancient Egyptian gallery? In addition to its unique focus, interactivity, and expansive loans, the exhibition excitingly avoids the historic approach. "It's very much about the materials, the people. So, we're not grouping things by era ... we're trying to avoid all that." It seems like this will make the objects more accessible to those without knowledge of Egyptian history. Furthermore, one object temporarily relocated from the gallery to the exhibition has already attracted new attention. A 4,000-year-old handprint was discovered on the base in July, and the object "is upstairs in the exhibition already, with a mirror underneath so you can see the handprint". Or, you could visit to support your fellow students: Helen credits volunteers, especially archaeology students, as a key part of the exhibition. "Anybody who's been volunteering with me has inevitably been involved ... I've just relentlessly picked people's brains," she revealed. One particular student, Hannah Eggleston, will be highlighted in the exhibition for her drawing, revealing a covered inscription. "The original and the new carving [are] in the same sort of clay ... which is extremely confusing," Helen explained, "So I got Hannah to trace over everything ... which is great, really helpful."

I find the small ticket price for this exhibition to be entirely justifiable and worthwhile. Truly, it's a wonder that the Fitzwilliam Museum has been able to keep their exhibitions free until now, considering all their growing costs. Students and young adults can get a free ticket by joining the 'Fitz list', and Helen's hope is that we use these concessions so the exhibition "can shine some light on these rather overlooked people." 'Made in Ancient Egypt' tells "a story about people who I just always felt were incredible": the makers of the objects we admire.

Made in Ancient Egypt is open at the Fitzwilliam Museum from the 3rd of October 2025 until the 12th of April 2026.



Ryan Vowles and Emily Cushion discuss the sonnet 'Michaelmas' by Malcom Guite

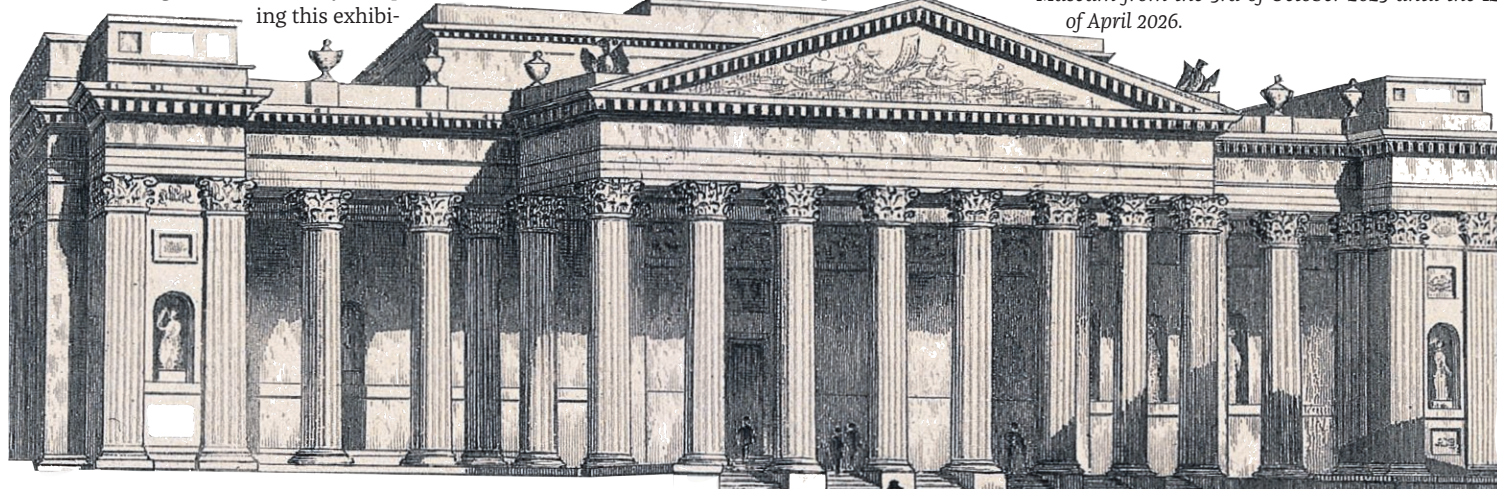
*"Michaelmas gales assail the waning year,
And Michael's scale is true, his blade is bright.
He strips dead leaves; and leaves the living clear
To flourish in the touch and reach of light.
Archangel bring your balance, help me turn
Upon this turning world with you and dance
In the Great Dance. Draw near, help me discern,
And trace the hidden grace in change and chance.
Angel of fire, Love's fierce radiance,
Drive through the deep until the steep waves part,
Undo the dragon's sinuous influence
And pierce the clotted darkness in my heart.
Unchain the child you find there, break the spell
And overthrow the tyrannies of Hell."*

Ryan

In the poem, we are first introduced to the Archangel Michael, "the great prince who protects [God's] people" (Daniel 12:1), in his role as God's warrior and judge. St. Michael, having defeated Satan in heaven, is our guardian against darkness. It's sensible then that his feast day, September 29th, comes just as winter's darkness begins to creep in. As the 'dead leaves' brown – an autumnal symbol of Satan's corruption – it is Michael who strips them away and exposes us to God's 'light'. St. Michael's war with Satan is a metaphor for the moral struggle within each of us: the clashing of our good and bad impulses. Guite's prayer, beginning in the fifth line, lays out a path to victory in this struggle. He asks for Michael, a warrior, to help him dance, to show him the silver linings in unwanted surprises, and for his inner child to be unchained. Whether we believe in the Archangel or not, Guite suggests that flexibility, gratitude, and childlike wonder are key to not only happiness, but to moral virtue.

Emily

Guite playfully sways our minds from the typically unwelcome connotations of Michaelmas: returning from summer to weekly deadlines; freezing walks to 9am lectures; the bizarre notion of Christmas in autumn. Rather, he digs into what Michaelmas actually means (and no, I'm not referring to the much-anticipated return of Wednesday Revs) in his discussion of the Archangel Michael. Guite disrupts the conventional sonnet in brief moments of deviation from iambic pentameter, as if the poem's metre has been blown about by such 'gales' as it discusses (exactly how I feel walking around Sidge in October). Alongside this, Guite nurtures moments of familiarity in what is constant – regular lines, internal rhyme – suggesting that despite Michaelmas's 'clotted darkness' (the night literally being longer, or the Week Five blues), there is light to 'flourish in' (Parker's Piece Christmas market, for example). Michaelmas indeed teaches us to 'trace the hidden grace in change and chance' – to embrace what is new – and to 'unchain the child you find there' – to remember what has passed.



GEORGE BASEVI VIA WELLCOME COLLECTION / CHANGES MADE

Aeschylus in the trenches

Sydney Heintz considers how Greek tragedies can inform our current political mindsets

Like Athena's casting vote in the *Eumenides*, Aeschylus's participation in the Persian wars acquitted him of a potentially life-threatening trial of his own. Aristotle writes that he was accused of impiety for revealing an ancient cult's secrets on stage, though other accounts claim that an angry mob attempted to kill him (reason unspecified). Either way, Aeschylus recognised that the Battle of Marathon (490 BC) had served him – an Orestes in his own right – extremely well, not least because the inscription on his tombstone reads:

"Beneath this stone lies Aeschylus, son of Euphorion, the Athenian, who perished in the wheat-bearing land of Gela; of his noble prowess the grove of Marathon can speak, and the long-haired Persian knows it well."

There is no mention of his celebrated career as dramatist, nor that he lost a brother at Marathon, too. Aeschylus's tragedies therefore constitute a very peculiar sort of veteran literature: written in the trembling wake of the first electorate, the plays bear witness to a period of large-scale political upheaval in which a population becomes newly attuned to the rewiring of its inner constitutional logic. In other words, Aeschylus records nothing less than the beginnings of democracy itself: what it does to military city-states and, importantly, to their literary output.

That the immediate context of Aeschylean trag-

edy should have become so obscured over time speaks, I think, to our discomfort with texts underpinned by value systems alien to our own. To understand Aeschylus, one must abandon modern progress narratives and get to grips with Classical Age values such as *philia*, *symmachia*, and *eirēnē* – rough equivalents to friendship, formalised alliances, and peace. These terms were used to describe relationships between states as much as individuals: Athens could reach *eirēnē* with Sparta in the same way friends might after a fight. The wider political picture was therefore bound up in the very language of seemingly personalist intrigue – on the responsibility of parenthood, the nature of legacy, or the justice of revenge, to name a few. This overlap is registered in the transfer of power to Cleisthenes in 510 BC, whose reforms foregrounded the deme, or suburb, over the family unit (Aeschylus himself lived in one such suburb, the deme of Eleusis, before beginning his career in the military).

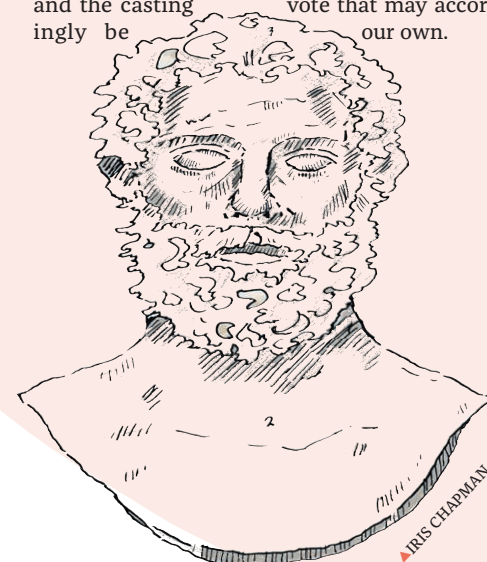
To return to our epitaph, Aeschylus casts himself not as a tragedian, but as an Athenian citizen who has witnessed the new sovereignty of the *Demos* become an inseparable part of the political system of his polis. This post-war reading of Aeschylus resurfaced in the publication of the first Loeb edition of the tragedies in 1922, wherein editor Herbert Weir Smyth looks to Aeschylus as "the only Athenian representative in literature of this age crowded with events of far-reaching importance for the city-state, [...] an age represented in war and statesmanship by such giant figures as Miltiades, Themistocles, Aris-

teides, and Cimon". That is to say, Aeschylus lives in an age of Allies and Central Powers, imperial rivalry, and wars of attrition not unlike Prometheus's regenerating liver – destabilised on all sides, the Aeschylus of the Treaty of Versailles emerges like a phantom in the firing line of Europe.

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Aeschylus trains us to understand deep internal statecraft in ways daily headlines cannot

Aeschylus is not only concerned with war, of course, though I have attempted to show that there is merit in reading him as an outcome of one, especially in a time when veteran literature could help us respond to our own Miltiades and Cimons. The Tragedy Paper at Cambridge encourages us to think in this way about the immediate political reality of figures as far apart as Euripides and Racine, Shakespeare and Ibsen, and the ways in which they do, or do not, resemble one another. More generally, it teaches us the importance of understanding fundamentally alien

societies and how their paradigms compare with ours. The Greeks did not think in terms of nation states and NATO alliances, and yet they remain relevant to our management of foreign political affairs, in the same way Smyth picked up on their affinities with inter-war Europe. Now, in the age of Putin and Trump, Aeschylus trains us to understand deep internal statecraft in ways daily headlines cannot – it depends, as it did for Orestes, on us realising our political relevance, and the casting vote that may accordingly be our own.



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The Cambridge music scene low-down

Jake Harper shares his one-stop guide to Cambridge's student music culture

Cambridge is famous for many things, from its academic prestige and famous alumni to punting and medieval architecture. But its music scene? Not so much.

Musically-inclined freshers expecting the worst need not fret. Cambridge isn't London, but it doesn't need to be. If anything, the comparatively small-scale scene allows anybody with a guitar case and a dream to get in front of engaged audiences pretty effortlessly. For a start, it's worth familiarising yourself with Cambridge's music venues.

Start off in the college bars and university venues – the best places to see and get involved with student bands. The top college bars hold regular music and bop nights with live bands and DJs, and the highlights here include Clare Cellars and the Robinson and Jesus College bars (the latter two popularly known as the RBC and JBar). Clare Cellars, and the Clare Jazz Club based there, are known for hosting regular jazz nights with talented external performers as well as student bands and artists of a variety of genres. The venue itself is an atmospheric, ambient-lit underground space located below the college chapel. You can also catch the occasional University Hip-Hop Society event here. Hidden Rooms, just down the road from Jesus college, is home to Jazzsac – the Uni's

hub for jazz – where events fill up fast, and get surprisingly rowdy. From personal experience, the Open Jam events hosted in Hidden Rooms and Cellars around freshers' week are a must-go if you're a new student looking to get right into the University's ever-growing jazz scene. King's Bunker, a fabled and elusive night of intense techno hosted in the shadowy basement of King's College each term, deserves a special mention.

Non-uni venues also offer plenty to be excited about. Over the years, The Corn Exchange has featured various big names prior to major breakthroughs; the Arctic Monkeys and Adele come to mind in particular. Amy Winehouse in fact opened her Back ToBlack tour at the venue in 2007,

and her original backing band are returning to perform a touching tribute gig this November. The genre-defying Black Country, New Road as well as country group Little Big Town have also recently

made appearances. Cambridge Junction, while frequently hosting touring acts, is best known among students for its lively Slipped Disc club nights, which stand out from any old Revs outing with a mix of house and breakbeat downstairs and harder trance styles upstairs. Post-punk fans will also be thrilled to hear Peter Hook (of Joy Division and New Order) is heading to Junction this November. Local favourites such

“*The Open Jam events hosted in Hidden Rooms and Cellars around freshers' week are a must-go*

as the Portland Arms, the Blue Moon, The Six Six, and The Grain and Hop Store are known for their regular gig nights and open mics, with The Six Six standing out for its grassroots metal

scene. The NCI centre, an old-school locals' venue, mixes folk nights with occasional experimental Crushing Death And Grief events. You can also catch the occasional jazz night over at the Geldart or Tram Depot. The brilliant Geordie Greep (formerly of Black Midi) even made an appearance at Storey's Field Centre, a small community centre in Eddington, last October.

If you prefer the symphonic swell of strings to thumping basslines, there's something for you too. The University's own West Road Concert Hall features frequent concerts from the Cambridge University Orchestra, Cambridge University Symphony Orchestra (a gripping rivalry, I

know), and Cambridge University Jazz Orchestra, often performing alongside acclaimed professional conductors and composers. Evensong services in college chapels offer a unique chance to experience world-class choral performances, and unrivalled solitude regardless of personal religious sentiment.

Between college music nights and a host of town venues, there's undoubtedly no shortage of opportunities for any student musician. That said, gigs of this type tend to fuel complaints of unoriginality and a focus on sing-along covers. This is less a symptom of a lack of creativity among student

bands, however, and more one of the nature of function gigs. If you want to be chosen – and paid! – to perform at college bops or May Balls as a student band, you cater to the desires of audiences and ents teams, not the other way around. It's all well and good to moan about a lack of innovation when you're not the one trying to keep a

drunken May Ball main stage crowd dancing and singing along. A fairer critique

is that the music scene lacks genre diversity. But who knows. If you're reading this as a fresher, maybe you could be the one to kick off an entirely new wave in the music scene. College bar nights won't know what's hit them.

▲ DAISY COOPER

Seasons of (sonic) change

The Music Team are here with the soundtrack to your Michaelmas term

With Michaelmas dawns a new season of music. Whether you're a fresher looking for songs to soundtrack your move, or a returning Cantab mooching around shops before term starts, the Music Team have you covered with a selection of autumnal tracks.

Daisy: An autumntime tune for me comes in the form of Cocteau Twins' 'Crushed', a song I discovered in the summer before first year. I had watched all of Gregg Araki's movies and was greeted in Cambridge by the small heaven of Blue Screen Soc (R.I.P) who played my favourite, *Nowhere* (1996), in their first screening of the term. Spacey and mesmerising, with those cold nights drawing in, 'Crushed' envelopes you with familiar swirling guitars. But is Liz Fraser speaking in the alien tones of your supervisor explaining Hegel to you? Who knows.

“*The punchy kick-drum beat of Riveira Bailey's 'This Weekend's Trainwreck' has helped me keep pace*

Seun: Babymorocco's 'I Wish You Would Make It Easy' captures the liminal feeling of being caught between one mood and the next. The song samples 'West End Girls' by Pet Shop Boys, a song itself that evokes urban drifting and the ambiguities of modern life. Yet here it becomes something hazier and more introspective. This creates a soundscape that feels both familiar and dislocated that could

be mirroring the in-between spaces of student life. The song's lyrics yearn for the clarity and might resonate with anyone navigating the uncertainty of a new term.

Caitlin: Autumn doesn't have to mean slowing down! The punchy kick-drum beat of Riveira Bailey's 'This Weekend's Trainwreck' has helped me keep pace on many a chilly morning power walk to Sidge. Bailey's lyrics espe-

cially spoke to me and my anxieties as a fresher, thrown into new academic and personal responsibility in what is already a challenging season.

Francis: PJ Harvey's whole album *Is This Desire?* is so autumnal. It's mystical, ghostly, harrowing, and each whispering lyric of Harvey's mythical storytelling sends a shiver

down the spine. That said, it's not short

on beauty

either:

the album

is fraught

with delicate

pastoral imagery

and female

beauty. In 'The

Wind', Harvey

evokes the audio

equivalent

of a photograph

that begins to yellow

and curl at the

edges, heavy with

memories.

Millie: Andrew Cushin's anthemic song

'Waiting for the Rain' evokes the warmth of a cosy fire on an autumnal evening. As is typical for the masterful Geordie songwriter, the catchy lyrics disguise a deeply personal struggle. It is a particular treat in Cushin's live performances, although rather patronising when it is raining at a festival.

“*Nick Drake wrote his song 'River Man' during his time as a Cambridge student*

Jake: I found out in the course of researching this that Nick Drake wrote his song 'River Man' during his time as a Cambridge student. This means he actually had the sombre waters of the autumn and winter Cam on his mind as he wrote the haunting melodies about the "river man" and "the way his river flows". I can think of no better soundtrack to the darkening of the days than this melancholic folk classic.

Harmony: 'For Sure' by American Football. The ultimate summer ending song.



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► JORDAN INGLIS

Children of Men and the Britain it foretold

Max La Bouchardiere examines the disturbing familiarity of Alfonso Cuarón's film

We are just over a year away from 2027 – the dystopian future Alfonso Cuarón imagined in *Children of Men* (2006), marked by mass infertility and authoritarianism in Britain. There were no aliens, no zombies, no AI uprisings. Unlike archetypal Hollywood apocalypses, Cuarón's metaphor of infertility demonstrates that the most likely catastrophes are both progressive and entirely human. There is no single cataclysm – only a continual slide into societal devastation. Nearly 20 years on, *Children of Men* resonates less as speculation and more as an uncomfortable diagnostic. Our failure to address worsening socio-economic issues has only drawn us closer to Cuarón's Britain.



Just as we approach two decades since the film, its narrative begins 20 years after the first cases of human sterility. At its opening, when the youngest person on Earth is killed at age 18, humanity seems resigned to a feeling of irreversibility.

Theo Faron (Clive Owen), a retired activist and the film's reluctant protagonist, initially embodies this defeatism. Despite rumours of a scientific community working to reverse infertility, Theo believes the world already "went to shit". After decades of crisis, his retreat from political action is total. Fore-casting present hopelessness, Cuarón further renders a climate of despair through familiar, darkly comic contrasts. The state distributes antidepressants and allows government-assisted suicide, yet cannabis remains a criminal offence. *Children of Men* shows that an authoritarian Britain remains committed to contradiction.

Mass infertility has irrevocably reduced the labouring class in Cuarón's Britain. Yet rather than exploit their labour power, the state's hatred of asylum seekers drives them to cages for their deportation or execution. Today, this forewarns ever-increasing violence against scapegoated minorities, intensified when governments bow to moral panics. Echoing rhetoric like "strangers" and "illegal immigrants", Cuarón shows how dehumanisation is normalised through terms like "fugees". Conversely, those like Julian (Julianne Moore) – pursuing peaceful direct action for the most systematically abused – are labelled "terrorists".

Of course, it would be incorrect to view *Children of Men* as an exact mirror of contemporary Britain. Cuarón's film must be contextualised as an incisive critique of the democratic mirage wrought by the War on Terror, the nihilism produced by a politics of exception and emergency, and the social conservatism of Blairism.

“

The untrammelled austerity of the 2010s was unforeseen by Cuarón, but captures the predicted path towards an authoritarian Britain

Yet it is Cuarón's cumulative portrayal of dystopia (via mass infertility) that reflects how our political system has failed to reverse its deep-seated issues. The untrammelled austerity of the 2010s was unforeseen by Cuarón, but captures the predicted path towards an authoritarian Britain. Under austerity's violence, the confluence of neoliberal ideology and neoconservatism became explicit. Contrary to neoliberal promises, the modern British state was not diminished – only welfare and public services. Police powers and the state remained ever empowered and supported.

At the same time, *Children of Men* suggests that, even under a more severely repressive state, billboards continue advertising, banks persist, and

global chain stores operate in front of the homeless and amid pollution. An authoritarian Britain would resemble a vassal state to capital, punctuated by rabid cultural anxieties – such as marijuana and migration – and overcompensating through securitisation.

The drift toward such a Britain has crystallised in an emboldened far right. While *Children of Men* parallels contemporary rhetoric on asylum seekers – and the horrors in Palestine are no improvement on his mirror to Abu Ghraib – Cuarón's focus on Britain's left-coded activists is the clearest sign he made it 20 years ago. Unlike the violent 'Fishes', or Theo's socio-political struggle, it is far-right extremists who mobilise today.

In this context, 20 years of infertility in *Children of Men* is not a mere plot device but a metaphorical diagnostic. The far right did not emerge overnight – it has steadily proliferated over recent decades. Enabled by a continued refusal to address growing socio-economic issues, they have offered easy (racist) solutions while seeking to amplify the repression and social retrenchment normalised under neoliberal and neoconservative rule. This makes it difficult for leftists and the working class to be the hopeful Theo Faron – and not his initial, cynical self – but Theo's eventual zeal, struggle, and refusal to capitulate are what is needed before *Children of Men* scarcely resembles fiction.

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Theatre

The ultimate guide to Cambridge theatre

Balancing theatre with your degree doesn't need to be difficult, argues **Daphne Stavride**

Being a theatre obsessive in Cambridge is like being a child let loose in a sweetshop. Especially in first year, it is all too easy to get swept up in the ADC whirlwind. I've seen – and been – the student who signs up for just one more show (spoiler alert, it's never just one more), only to find that their degree is slowly but surely becoming a side hustle. Before you know it, it's 4am and you're dismantling metrodeck with a supervision deadline looming over you. I remember how intoxicating – and overwhelming – the range of shows available felt when I first discovered

“

It's important not to let someone else's intensity become your benchmark

Camdram, Cambridge's very own amateur theatre information hub. I threw myself into everything, sometimes to my own detriment. Now, with a few Cambridge terms under my belt and some hard-earned lessons learned, I'm ready to share the simple rules I live by to help maintain a fruitful symbiosis of stage and study.

Apply for projects that actually excite you

This might sound obvious, but it's worth reminding you: only audition for shows that genuinely excite you. From Shakespeare's classics to contemporary masterpieces, the breadth of shows on offer in Cambridge theatre makes room for everyone to get involved. Make sure to ask yourself: what is it about this project that excites me? Is this role one I want to explore? When you're working on something that truly inspires you, it definitely shows and shines through to the audience. So go for shows you're truly passionate about and, hopefully, they'll make you fall in love with theatre all over again.

Know your limits and stick to them

During audition season, it's likely that multiple shows from the plethora available will catch your eye. But the real key to surviving (and thriving) in Cambridge theatre is figuring out early on how much you can realistically take on. While some students come to Cambridge already set on a professional theatre career, others are driven by a simple desire to channel their creative energy towards a sociable activity. All approaches are completely

valid but it's important not to let someone else's intensity become your benchmark. With the bulk of auditions happening at the end of each term in preparation for the next, I find that even those 15 minutes you spend in the audition room can be quite stressful at first. I've found that auditioning for two or three shows per term – depending on the size of the commitment for each one – is usually a

manageable sweet spot. But only you can decide how much time and energy you're willing to give. Be honest with yourself about your capacity, and don't be afraid to say no.

Don't forget to breathe (and sleep... and eat)

Though we might not always admit it, Cambridge theatre demands a level of physical, mental, and emotional commitment which can occasionally become overwhelming. With tech days turning your calendar inside out and late-night get-outs often ending in existential

crises, it's all part of the fun – until it isn't. My advice would be to leave some time in your schedule open to recharge and hang out with people outside of rehearsals. It is easy to get carried away by what people around you are doing, but your future self will thank you for setting personal limits. And even if you do find yourself stressed out and sleep-deprived in the middle of a show week, stressed out, and sleep-deprived, remember this: the moment the curtain goes up, it'll all be worth it. After all, that is part of the magic of theatre – just make sure you don't lose sight of your wellbeing amid the razzle dazzle!

At the end of the day, an extra Camdram credit should not come at the expense of your mental health or your degree. Balancing your studies alongside theatre doesn't mean holding back, it just means choosing wisely and protecting your wellbeing. So immerse yourself in the chaotic brilliance of the theatre world, but don't forget this piece of wisdom from the fathers of theatre, the Ancient Greeks: everything in moderation.



From Birnam Wood to Boston

Daisy Bates recalls a month spent taking *Macbeth* on the road

My introduction to Cambridge student theatre was, aptly, Shakespeare. In Freshers' Week, I caught the home run of *Romeo and Juliet* upon its return from a month-long American stage tour – opportunities like this, I remember thinking, were why I applied to Cambridge. Almost two years on, I write to you from the lakeside cricket buzz of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania – sleep-deprived, covered in bug bites, and immensely grateful to be here.

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Salem saw us out with a bang when one of our witches broke her toe on a doorframe

As idyllic as my Instagram story highlights may seem, taking a show on the road is no mean feat. Travelling through approximately 12 states in 24 days and performing a show as emotionally demanding as *Macbeth* almost daily – not to mention tech, dress, and constant re-blocking – is intense. Despite this, we found that the pace of tour life encouraged us to think on our feet, and adapting to new and often challenging venues made our performances more malleable. Without the burden of restrictive staging, we had room to focus solely on our characters, resulting in a show that is – bar some incredible sound and lighting design – fundamentally reliant on its performers.

Our tour began in Massachusetts, where we arrived at a small cinema in Salem and were greeted by a slither of a stage and frustratingly

dampened acoustics. The carpeted floor meant no fake blood (and considerable carpet burns), so we re-choreographed the murder scenes to include snapped necks and clean blows to the head. It seemed every location offered a new challenge, even before our flight to Boston. During our Cambridge preview at Town and Gown, we were forced to press our ears to the stage doors to hear our

witches broke her toe on a doorframe. With just hours before opening, our director was forced to learn the entire part on the floor of a cinema that reeked of buttered popcorn. Inexplicably, the show went off without a hitch, setting the tone for a run that would face its fare share of mishaps.

Partial responsibility for this success must be given to the sheer amount of

creative. Take a lunchtime performance at a high school in Harrisburg: at the staff's behest, we performed the banquet scene to unsuspecting teenagers in the cafeteria. What really should have been a humiliation ritual felt electric, with our *Macbeth* playing into their uncomfortable laughter. He raised a toast to the audience with a milk carton stolen from a teenage girl (which she later asked him to sign), and Lady *Macbeth* exited to cries of “beat him!”

In Little Washington, Virginia, we accompanied our host to her weekly ballet class. Philip, the instructor, was full of wisdom. “Without the barre,” he told us, “you're on your own out there. You've got to rely on yourself.” With minimal set, open roads, and only the show to guide us, you really have no choice but to lean on each other. Amid the Sour Patch sugar rushes of show days and the inevitable lull of hours on the road, we developed absurd inside jokes and a bond far stronger than our six months of friendship might suggest.

My tour experience was cut short by a family emergency and an early flight home. Six members of the cast drove me eight hours to Pittsburgh airport, and drove promptly back on no sleep and mostly-empty stomachs to perform the next show in my mum's honour. CAST isn't just about performing, it's about community, whether you find it in the hosts, the audiences, or the cast members who make up our tour family – family in the loosest sense, we're still not past discussions of a CAST orgy. The Cambridge American Stage Tour is student theatre at its scrappiest, sustained by the camaraderie of its cast and crew. If you're the tentative fresher in the audience this year, get excited – this is what awaits.

Macbeth is showing at the ADC from Tuesday 7th to Saturday 11th October, at 7:45pm.



▲ GAVIN DRUMMOND

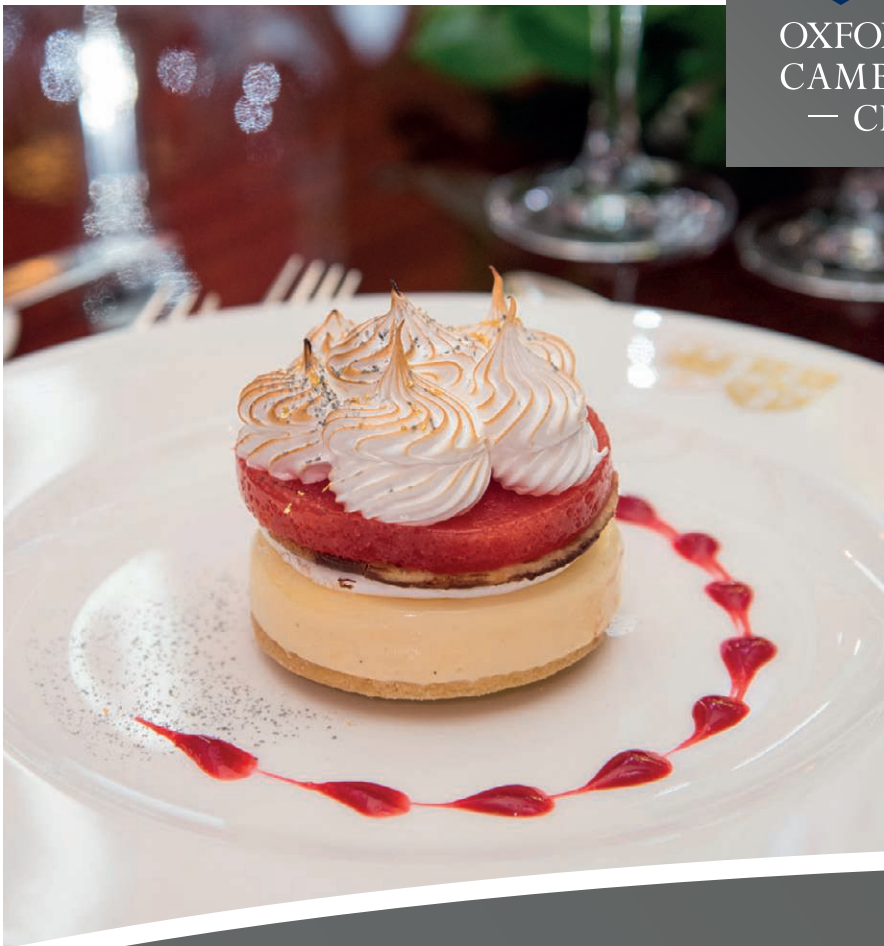
entrances over the pub's noise, and the large ballroom space at the University Arms required us to enter from behind the audience. We found tentative comfort in the disorder, and were unnerved by more straightforward spaces, like the grand auditorium at Frostburg State.

It wasn't just the venues that proved difficult: Salem saw us out with a bang when one of our

preparation we had for the run. In glaring contrast to the, at generous maximum, five weeks of rehearsals that are typical in Cambridge theatre, we received our parts back in March, and have been in on-and-off rehearsals ever since. By the end of the home run, we'll have performed to 20 audiences; we know this play front-to-back and back-to-front, and that leaves a lot of room to get



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.....WHAT'S ON?.....

Film & TV

7 October

I Swear:
Screening and Kirk Jones Q&A
The Light Cambridge, 6:30 pm

10 October

Ocean Film Festival World Tour
West Road Concert Hall, 7:30 pm

11 October

The Best of Alfred Hitchcock: Vertigo
Arts Picturehouse, 2:30 pm

13 October

Power Station directors Q&A
Arts Picturehouse, 6 pm

15 October

Cambridge Film Forum:
One Battle After Another discussion
The Alexandra Arms, 7 pm

Music

3 October – 5 October

Taylor Swift's Official Release Party
of a Showgirl
Arts Picturehouse, 8 pm

9 October

Altsoc: VILLANELLE
MASH, 7 pm

11 October

Shiny New Model Festival
Cambridge Junction, 1 pm

15 October

The Divine Comedy
Corn Exchange, 7:30 pm

15 October

The Bug Club
The Portland Arms, 8 pm

Arts

8 October

Lubaina Himid: Making Choices
Lecture by Dorothy Price
Kettle's Yard, 7 pm

8 October

An evening with Tessa Hadley
Waterstones, 6 pm

10 October

Chance Encounters: Archival
Fabulations and Feminist Art History
Kettle's Yard, 1:30 pm

11 October

Cambridge Contemporary Art:
Sara Moorhouse talk
6 Trinity Street, 2 pm

12 October

Seed Talks: Folklore & Women
Cambridge Junction, 6:30 pm

Theatre

7 October – 11 October

Cambridge American Stage Tour (CAST):
Macbeth
The ADC, 7:45 pm

8 October – 11 October

Footlights: Fragile Contents
The ADC, 11 pm

17 October

Cauldron of BATS
Queens' Black Box, 8 pm

15 October – 18 October

Tom and Tompkinson
Corpus Playroom, 9:30 pm

15 October – 18 October

1816: The Year Without A Summer
The ADC, 7 pm

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‘Cambridge healed my relationship with beach volleyball’: From the bridge to the beach

Joss Heddle-Bacon speaks to Lauren Hattaway about navigating seven time zones and zero courts

Lauren Hattaway may have grown up over 1,000 kilometres from the nearest beach, but this summer she was perfectly at ease on the golden sand of the volleyball court.

From landlocked Kansas, USA, Hattaway scored a beach volleyball scholarship in the NCAA's vaunted Division 1, before coming to Cambridge for an engineering master's. This summer, she jump served the light blues to the European Universities Beach Championships.

All the more remarkable, Lauren and her tournament partner Julianna trained on sand just once all year, and, in between qualification and the continental finals, they were separated by seven time zones.

“Swapping supervisions for Spanish sands, and the summit of European student sport

“I’ve been in Japan since my graduation last year and she was in the UK, so...”, Hattaway says with remarkable humour, having just trekked 55 hours back to the Land of the Rising Sun. “We qualified in the summer of, when even was it, 2024. And then the European Championships were one year later, in July 2025. It was kind of crazy!”

The pair’s achievements defy exaggeration; they were the only British university team to reach the Championships in Granada – swapping supervisions for Spanish sands, and the summit of European student sport. Cambridge is, after all, instantly equated with academia, and Hattaway tells me the tournament organisers were keen to milk the apparent irony: “At the opening ceremony they were like, oh they ditched the books for the court! You always get the classic introduction.”

Attempted witticisms aside, the biennial Championships are a serious deal. “They have all these people coming in,” she recalls off-handedly. “I was chatting with one of the referees. He was a line judge at the Paris Olympics.”

After a year on opposite sides of the planet, competing on such a stage would shake most athletes to the core – but to Lauren and Julianna it was a mere footnote. “There is no beach volleyball court in Cambridge. Kinda sucks,” Hattaway concedes, smiling as she reels off their adversities. “Ahead of qualification, we trained on sand only once at these artificial courts in London. That was it.”



▲LAUREN HATTAWAY

Partnership is also paramount in the sport’s two player universe, yet the light blue duo came from different volleyball worlds. “Julianna is a very skilled indoor player ... but she had scarcely played beach before; I was a full-fledged beach volleyball player. Strategically, the two sports are very, very different, so is the way that you play them,” Hattaway explains. Put more bluntly, if you take even top indoor players off sprung floors and onto the sand “they get their ass kicked”. Pair that stark assessment with a single practice session on sand, and the duo’s presence among Europe’s elite seems almost paradoxical.

But for Hattaway, success was already second nature. As an undergraduate at Florida International University she was crowned Student Athlete of the Month three times as well as Most Outstanding Mechanical Engineer, all while competing for the then-12th best college beach volleyball team in America. The catch? Hattaway literally spent the same amount of time playing sport as she did asleep: “It would end up being about four to six hours of every day, committed just to volleyball ... and I maybe slept four to six hours a night.”

Excellence also came at a human cost: “I didn’t love my volleyball time in the US. I loved the intensity ... but my situation there was not ideal in terms of how I was treated as a person,” Hattaway bravely discloses. Ironically, it was bookish Cambridge that rekindled her fondness for the sport. “It wasn’t that competitive, and sometimes it drove me a little nuts,” Hattaway laughs, “but Cambridge really healed my relationship

with volleyball. I’ve shared this with the girls and it’s brought about tears.”

While Cambridge is notorious for academic pressure, Hattaway was impervious: “My undergrad was so much harder in terms of time management, in Cambridge ... the workload was not that intense. I was like, I need to go to the gym more, this isn’t enough!”

“Hattaway spent the same amount of time playing sport as she did asleep

Beach volleyball is an easy game to romanticise – think golden sands underfoot, sun-kissed summer days – but in Britain it remains firmly on the sporting fringes, and courtless Cambridge is no exception.

“Whenever I tell people I’m a beach volleyball player, they’re always like ‘oh I want to play beach volleyball!’” Hattaway grins. “It seriously makes me think ‘man, I should go back to Cambridge and open up some beach volleyball courts’ – there will be people there all the time.” Could fantasy translate into reality? “To be honest, I think the University would have a hard time allowing sand in their facilities,” she chuckles wryly. But what’s a few loose grains to grow a sport?



Continued from back page ►

This Red Roses team have embarked upon the longest winning streak in international rugby history, going over 1,000 days without losing. Does witnessing such all-time greatness on a national level stoke flames at the grassroots?

How could it not? The legends of women’s rugby are our very own idols. They all got where they are today through grassroots pathways that girls all over the country are now learning and playing at. Some of the Red Roses even only found their way to rugby when they were undergrads at university and fancied giving another sport a go. Just like a lot of girls do at CURUFC... In all seriousness, we could have some of the next Red Roses in our midst!

Athlete turnover is especially high for the upcoming season and CURUFC is set to welcome lots of fresh faces; as a captain how do you navigate these annual squad shake-ups?

With open arms. I could not be more encouraging of rugby as a sport, and CURUFC as a community. Rugby is such an inclusive game. We need strong girls, tall girls, small girls, fast girls – all girls! The team bond that is built each year goes well beyond the pitch, and the new faces that join each year become a part of a deep-rooted CURUFC family. It’s truly special.

You were one of only eight Cambridge sports teams to compete in BUCS’s coveted Premier Division last season. What learnings will you take from the top echelon, and how has that experience fuelled ambitions for this year’s second tier campaign?

The increasing growth and investment in women’s rugby that we are witnessing comes hand in hand with rising standards and higher bars to meet across all levels of the game. I have no doubt this season will positively challenge us in so many ways, with new opponents to face, new examples to set and a determination to establish our place at the top of a new league. After a great start to our preseason, I’m looking forward to our season ahead.

As much as women’s rugby is blossoming, there are still plenty of progress to make – women’s rugby teams remain conspicuously absent from swathes of Cambridge colleges. What needs to happen now for the sport to fully flourish?

CURUFC welcomes players of all experience levels, and we have an incredible set up with excellent coaches that support the development of players across 3 entire squads throughout the year. Our Jaguars, Tigers, and Blues teams all take on The Other Place in monumental Varsity Match clashes that are an epic highlight of every year. This club has so much to offer, you’ve just got to come along and find out for yourself!



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RUYING YANG

Michaelmas match-ups

Ben Lubitsh looks ahead to the must-see fixtures the coming term holds

The nights are drawing in, the scarves are out, and deadlines are fast approaching. But before you barricade yourself in the library, remember that Michaelmas isn't just the mark of a new academic year, it signifies Cambridge sport at full tilt.

The coming weeks promise muddy scrums, squeaky courts, and enough thrilling moments to justify skipping a few study sessions to soak in what promises to be an exciting term of light blue sport. So, here are the mouth-watering BUCS fixtures to come that *Varsity* thinks are certainly worth a watch.

As winter fast approaches, the emphasis lies on the winter sports. Top of many people's agenda is blues football. Following a successful Varsity campaign for both the men and women to con-

clude last season, anticipation is high for CUAFC successes to translate into big BUCS wins. A total of 11 BUCS fixtures await the blues footballers this term, with the women facing off against Nottingham 2's, Loughborough's 2nd and 3rd team, and their old foes Oxford. The men's side will be hopeful for a deep run in the Midlands Conference Cup, having earned a bye in a bracket of tier 4 opponents.

Much like football, the cold, rainy, dark days don't stop the Rugby – in fact, they allow the fixtures to carry on in full force! The men are faced with 4 vital league games, making three away trips to start the season to Nottingham 5's, Nottingham Trent 2's, and Leicester 1's. The women's league campaign in tier 1 will be broken up by a hugely anticipated away trip to Birmingham for

the first round of the National Trophy, meaning there is much to get excited about for CURUFC fans.

It's not all about the classic winter sports this Michaelmas, though, with plenty of exciting fixtures awaiting the light blues in a variety of other sports. The men's tennis blues will be looking to dominate their division after losing out in a tight relegation battle from tier 1 last season, with both a league and Conference Cup fixture against Nottingham 5's to look forward to. The women's side enjoyed a fair amount more success last year, edging out Oxford in a remarkably close Varsity encounter and making an admirable push for promotion to the National Premier Division. Both sides therefore face a set of Michaelmas fixtures where they ought to be favourites.

If you'd prefer to watch along indoors,

the men's and women's basketball blues will play their opening round Conference Cup fixtures in the same fortnight, generating a week 5 blue's cure to get excited for in November. And if you fancy some more American sport, Cambridge host both Coventry and Anglia Ruskin in the American football 2nd tier.

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It would be a crime to miss out on them all

Longing for something a little more familiar? 12 Premier Division hockey fixtures await across the men's and women's side, creating an action-packed

schedule to enjoy throughout the entirety of term.

To end the term, we get to enjoy one of the biggest Varsity events of the year. It's without doubt that many Cambridge students have already bought their ski trip tickets in great anticipation, so make sure to break up your après sessions and slope runs with some support for Cambridge skiing!

With all the exciting fixtures ahead, it would be a crime to miss out on them all. Once more, then, I urge you – embrace the thrilling sports scene at Cambridge this term. Whether your main motivation lies with the half time pints or you're a fully fledged die hard fan, make it your mission to get out there and do your part in supporting light blue sport this Michaelmas.



Captain's Corner

Joss Heddle-Bacon speaks to Phoebe 'Jacko' Jackson, CURUFC's women's captain, amid a boom in the women's game

Women's rugby is riding a tidal wave – a recent World Rugby report found 49% of fans were won over in the past two years alone. How has this rapid growth in the global game reverberated at CURUFC?

It certainly is! Over the past few years that I've been at CURUFC, the club has welcomed more and more girls who have taken the leap into rugby. It is so exciting to watch the women's side of the club continue to grow and build on the foundations laid by the trailblazing Old

Girls back in 1988. As a club, we always remind ourselves of the barriers they faced and the challenges they overcame to enable the women's side of CURUFC to be where it is today.

As someone so invested in the sport, how has it felt to watch attendance, and television records be ripped up and rewritten by this summer's home World Cup?

Having been told I could no longer play rugby aged 8 because I couldn't continue with the boys and there was

no girls team to join, watching the surge in women's rugby has been nothing short of immense, and actually pretty emotional. When they announced the record-breaking attendance at the World Cup Final last Saturday I was in tears. I would give anything to be aged 8 playing rugby with the recognition, atmosphere and investment that is blossoming today. I am so happy for the opportunities that are becoming available for young girls now, and I hope this only continues to grow.

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