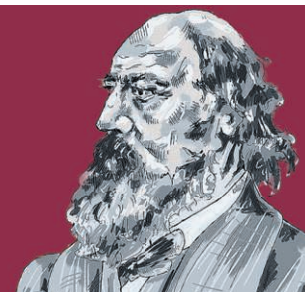


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**Celebrity Traitors star
Nick Mohammed
on laughter p.10**



**Inside Tennyson's
Cambridge p.24**



**It's not my fault
I was followed
home p.14**



No.937
Friday 17th October 2025
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The Independent
Student Newspaper since 1947

VARSITY

Colleges fall short on student housing

- Five colleges could not supply for over 100 applicants
- 37% of Hughes Hall applicants denied accom
- Average Cambridge monthly rent is £1763

Bela Davidson
News Correspondent

Five colleges at the University of Cambridge have fallen short in accommodation supply for more than 100 students, with eight having over 100 students living out of college in 2023/24 and 2024/25, a *Varsity* investigation has found.

According to Freedom of Information requests, St. Edmunds, Hughes Hall and Wolfson had the highest rates of accommodation rejection.

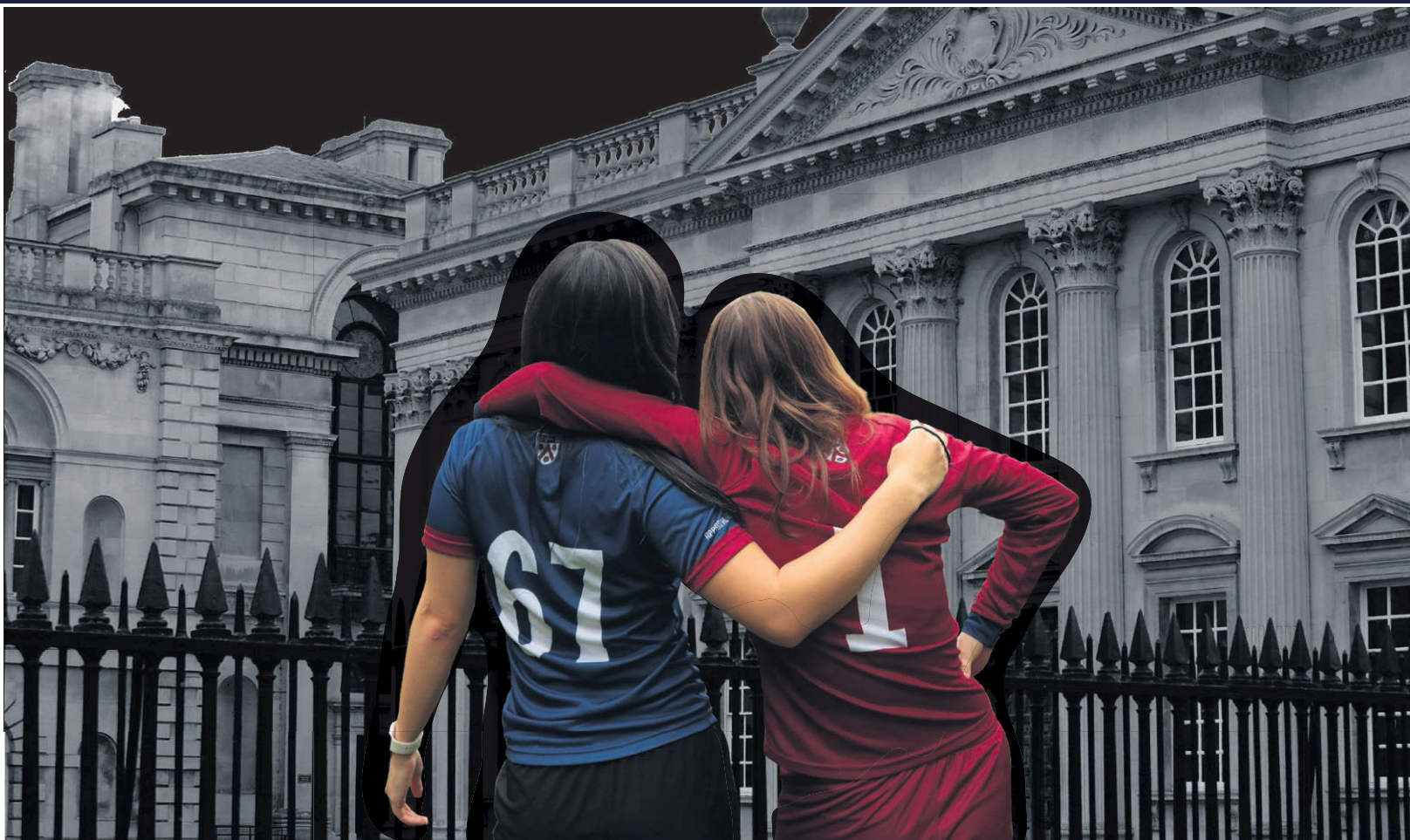
Colleges were asked to provide statistics for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years on how many full-time students lived in college accommodation, how many requested this, and how many did not receive places.

Of the 21 colleges that supplied data, ten said they do not keep records of how many full-time students live outside of college accommodation, while 11 provided statistics.

At Churchill, in both years, 103 students lived off-site. Meanwhile, at Christ's, 42 students were rejected from accommodation in 2023/24, and 21 the following year. However, 183 Christ's students lived off-site in 2023/24 and 137 in 2024/25.

Hughes Hall, one of the colleges with the highest rates of rejection, said that 136 lived outside college in 2023 and 141 in 2024. They added that 30% of applicants were denied college accommodation in 2023, rising to 37% in 2024.

Continued on page 3 ►



Footy captains' fury at trans ban

Maddie Harding and Alexander Brian
News Correspondent & Deputy News Editor

Several women's and non-binary college football captains have expressed concerns about plans to ban college football teams from fielding transgender and non-binary players, in advance of the new football season.

The change comes in the wake of new guidance by the Football Association (FA) which states that players must be "biological females" in order to compete at a college level.

However, the changes have been criticised by those involved in the college game, with former Jesus captain Lara

Branston describing it as a threat to a "vital queer-inclusionary community".

The acting Vice Captain of the Clare team said she was "disgusted" by the changes, while the Captain of the Caius-Catz-Hughes team stressed that "it's not right". The college league, Branston argued, "is defined by its inclusion."

Varsity understands that club captains raised their objections at a meeting last Thursday (9/10), which was attended by university sports staff. At the meeting, several captains pushed back against an email sent by the University's Director of Sport, Mark Brian, on the 30th of September, which advised clubs to "adhere to the regulations of national governing bodies".

Cambridge's Deputy Director of Sport, Karen Pearce, told captains that, while inclusivity was a top priority, the University had a responsibility to abide by the law, as do students organising sports competitions.

She added that governing bodies, like the FA, provide a framework for compliance with the law. Failure to follow FA guidance would heighten the risk of a legal case being brought against the club, given that CUWAF is responsible for adhering to the law, and is liable for all players on the pitch.

Varsity understands that the University has been receiving expert advice from an outsourced legal team on this issue.

Captains discussed changing the

league from women's to mixed to ensure trans inclusion. Several captains expressed support for reworking and renaming the league, and they are set to vote on the issue before the start of the new season.

Branston, who is also the Women's Blues captain, voiced her support for the proposal, arguing that "the anxieties around including trans players are not felt by the college captains".

Branston praised the university sports staff for their efforts to maintain an inclusive environment despite the law changes, but added that "trans inclusion in these spaces is very important

Continued on page 3 ►

V Michaelmas, Week 2

Editors' Note

As we enter Week 2, it is clear that Cambridge has returned to its familiar rhythm. The calm before Michaelmas has long since faded, replaced by the usual rush of deadlines, freshers' flu (what is in the air this year?), and an ever-crowded calendar of events. Across these pages, Varsity's team has begun to make sense of a term already in full swing.

On our front page (p.1), stories of student frustration sit side-by-side. College football captains have resisted the decision to ban transgender athletes from competing, while our investigation into the supply of postgraduate accommodation reveals widespread concerns about colleges falling short in their duty of care to students.

Elsewhere in news, Caius' accommodation (p.4) continues to crumble for some unlucky students, we reveal that sports club fees are almost

six times higher than at Oxford, and our long read on the Foundation Year programme (p.9) – three years after its initial cohort – weighs both its promises and its limits. Taken together, these stories reflect a university still somewhat uneven, with students actively questioning how to make it better.

Beyond news, we hear how the student body is finding its voice this term. For some, this is manifesting in the usual creative ways: students are turning to theatre (p.28), music (p.26), and filmmaking (p.27). However, for others, this voice is slightly more unusual. In features, we hear how a broader national trend of increased religiosity among young people, known as the 'quiet revival', is coming to Cambridge.

Meanwhile, in our interview with Celebrity Traitors star Nick Mohammed (p.10), we hear how Cambridge shaped the comic he is today – a reminder of how lasting this place's influ-

ence can be. Lord Tennyson, whose Cambridge years we revisit in Arts (p.24), felt much the same nearly two centuries earlier. Set against the backdrop of student action, these reflections speak to the same idea: that Cambridge is scarcely static. We, the students, make it – and, in turn, it remakes us.

So as you comb through these pages, be keenly aware of the University you find yourself in. These early Michaelmas nights will keep becoming darker and the deadlines will keep falling quicker, but think of those, famous or not, who have shared your experiences, and been re-shaped by them. Michaelmas term has only just begun, but Cambridge is already in motion.

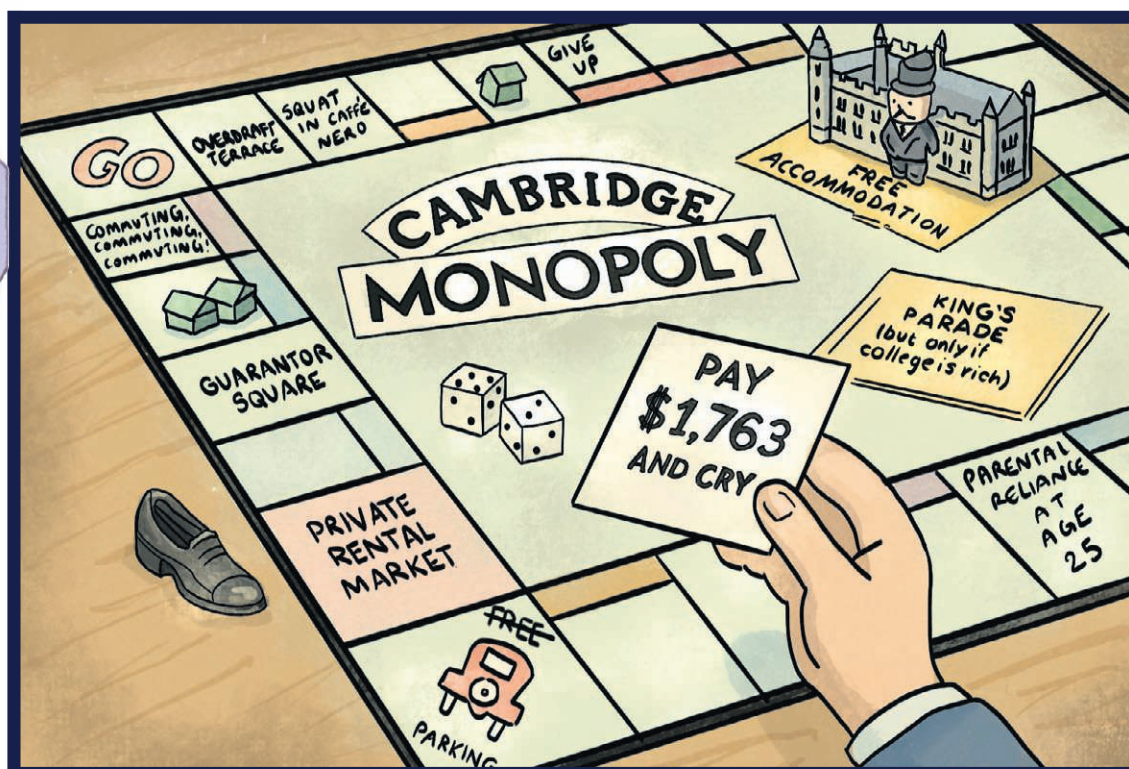


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MICHAELMAS 2025



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Students pushed into costly private rentals

Continued from front page

One Hughes Hall PGCE student shared that they were placed 120th on a waitlist and had to turn to private rentals, paying more than £100 more per month than the College’s cheapest option.

This contrasts with Cambridge’s wealthiest colleges. Kings College told *Varsity* that it had “enough accommodation to accommodate all our full-time students,” implying none lived outside college in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

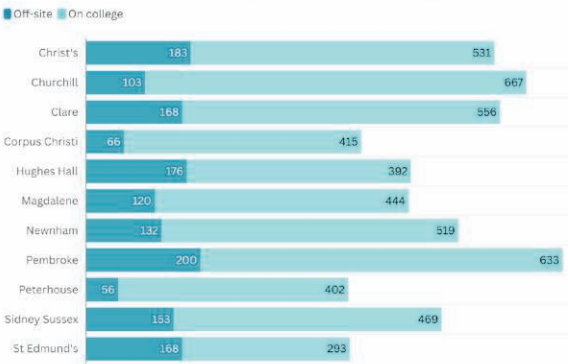
These graphs do not include data from colleges that did not keep records of the requested information or did not respond to the FOI request.

Queens’ is not included in the graphs because the college does not hold data on students living outside of college. However, Queens’ told *Varsity* that 106 student applicants were not accepted into accommodation in 2023/24 and 126 in 2024/25.

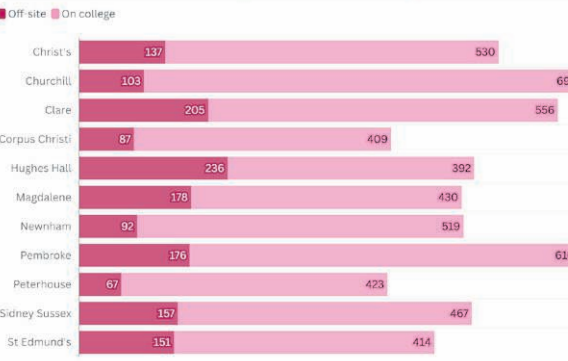
A spokesperson for Queens’ added: “accommodation is guaranteed to all undergraduate students for three years, but they can choose to live off-site. The figures quoted in this article largely relate to postgraduate students, but also includes some fourth-year students and undergraduates who have chosen not to reside in college accommodation.”

Ranked in the middle of Cambridge colleges by wealth, Magdalene reported that 120 students lived out of college in

Full-time students living on and off college - 2023/24



Full-time students living on and off college - 2024/25



2023/24 and 178 in 2024/25. Newnham said 132 full-time students lived off-site in 2023, and 92 in 2024: about 20% of its student body.

This investigation follows an email

to incoming Newnham post-graduates, stating the college had “run out of rooms for 2025-26”. Students were directed to housing charities such as Shelter and to other colleges, including King’s and Corpus Christi.

Newnham told *Varsity*: “For many years some postgraduate students at Newnham have had to seek private rented accommodation, an issue common to most colleges. We have worked with our MCR to compile information to help postgraduates to find private accommodation. This included a link to Shelter’s advice

on dealing with private sector landlords (recommended by a postgraduate student), along with Students’ Union advice and a link to the University of Cambridge’s accommodation support

service.”

Along with Wolfson and Hughes Hall, St. Edmunds is among the highest for rates of rejection. In 2023/24, St. Edmunds rejected 168 students from accommodation, making up 36.4% of applicants. In 2024/25, 151 students were rejected, making up 26.7%.

In 2024/25, the number of applicants accepted into accommodation at St. Edmunds increased from 293 to 414.

Wolfson did not respond to *Varsity*’s FOI request. However, in a recent housing proposal, public records showed 231 students were denied accommodation in 2023/24, and 179 in 2024/25. The housing proposal to convert local residence into college accommodation was rejected by Cambridge City Council.

One first-year Wolfson PhD student shared they were told no accommodation spaces remained before they submitted an application. They added that the private rental market is “terrible”, citing constant competition for viewing and problems finding a guarantor.

Meanwhile, postgraduate students at Gonville & Caius also criticised the disorderly nature of their recent accommodation process.

A Caius postgraduate student told *Varsity*: “The accommodation situation this year at Caius was very disorganised and a stressful ordeal for all involved. The vast majority of post-grads, myself included, did not find out where they were living until days before they were due

to move in, with some being told at the last minute that Caius didn’t have room for them. The most stressful thing was the lack of communication we received about our accommodation.”

According to a 2025 Cambridge City Council report, average rent in the city was £1,763 per month – up 8% since March 2024, and 27% in five years. This is over £400 above the national average.

Students have said high rents and guarantor requirements made it especially difficult for international postgraduates. One Wolfson student said lacking a UK guarantor nearly prevented them from moving to Cambridge.

Private rentals in Cambridgeshire frequently require a guarantor. To qualify as a guarantor, an individual typically requires a good credit score and sufficient income, as determined by the landlord. The guarantor must live in the UK, and may also be required to be a UK property owner.

A 2024 University report said international students made up 19.4% of undergraduates and 53.2% of postgraduates. At Churchill, Hughes Hall, Newnham and Wolfson, international students were the majority of postgraduates.

A Gonville & Caius College spokesperson said: “We have apologised to students affected by problems associated with accommodation before the start of the academic year. The issues are being addressed to aim to avoid a repeat in future.”

Ban ‘undermines the spirit of the league’

Continued from front page

“on a welfare level for trans people and their livelihoods”.

“Of course people want to be competitive, and teams want to win, but because of the nature of these teams being extremely mixed ability, what is important is playing a game of football, not who’s playing,” she continued, “the whole point of college leagues is that everyone has a good time and feels included”.

This comes after a Supreme Court ruling in April, which determined that “protected” single-sex spaces must be reserved for women as defined by their “biological” gender. The judgement also stated that transgender men could be excluded from women’s spaces because of their “masculine appearance”.

Cambridge SU condemned the ruling at the time, writing: “Trans, non-binary and gender-non-conforming people have always existed and will always exist, and their identities are valid irrespective of any court ruling.”

Regarding the question of sport, the SU stated that it wanted “intercollegiate sport to continue to honour self-ID, keeping participation in sports open to as many people as possible”.

The 25/26 Captain of the University Women’s Football Second team said, “In my opinion, college sport should be an inclusive and welcoming space for everyone [...] I’m very disappointed that there are discussions about excluding trans people from participating.”

However, in order to abide by the law, the Cambridge University Women’s Association Football League (CUWAFI) has updated its constitution in line with new FA guidance. These regulations state that “transgender women will no longer be able to play in women’s football in England”.

Reflecting this change, the revised CUWAFI constitution states that “only biological females (i.e. those born with ovaries) may play in open age Matches and Competitions that are reserved for women”.

Individuals who have “begun the use of or [...] used testosterone as part of gender related treatment,” are also ineligible to compete in the women’s college league “until four years have passed since their last use”.

A Newbroke team member said “This is a shift from the previous constitution, which claimed “for transgender and non-binary players, players are able to choose which league they would feel comfortable playing in”.

The change is also in contrast to the response of the Joint Blues Committee – which regulates the “Blues” status of sports clubs and eligibility for varsity matches – when the FA rules were announced. Committee President Tads Ciercierski-Holmes told *Varsity* in June that he retained his belief in “promoting participation in every way possible for trans students”.

Concretely, this meant continuing the Committee’s existing policy of supporting “transgender and non-binary athletes participating in University sport

on behalf of the gender with which they identify”. The ultimate decision about each athlete, however, has always rested with the Director of Sport at Cambridge.

At the time, Ciercierski-Holmes recognised that a changing legal situation could scupper his plans for transgender inclusion.

The FA is not the only sports association to bar transgender women from women’s sports. The Scottish Football Association, England Netball, and the England and Wales Cricket Board have all done the same.

The Supreme Court case that provoked these changes was brought by gender-critical advocacy group For Women Scotland after the Scottish government issued statutory guidance stating that the definitions of “man” and “woman” in the Equality Act included those who had legally transitioned.

The judges found that the terms in the Act referred only to “biological sex”, the definition of which they “assumed to be self-explanatory and to require no further explanation”. The ruling did not alter the Gender Recognition Act or transgender discrimination protections.

In response to the judgement, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) released interim guidance on how it should be interpreted.

This guidance stated that transgender people should be restricted from groups and facilities matching their gender but could also be barred from those matching their sex. While transgender people should not be left without facilities, the



▲NEWBROKE FC

EHRC argued, only providing mixed services could constitute discrimination against women.

After receiving backlash, the EHRC launched an extended public consultation. The completed guidance has not yet been released to the public or MPs.

When asked about the ruling in August, Cambridge University Sport said: “Whilst we await the guidance from the Equality of Human Rights Commission (EHRC), we continue to support our students, staff and community users, ensuring access to toilet, washing and changing spaces for mixed sex users, in addition to our single sex changing room areas.

“The sports service fully supports all our student participants in sport and a review of our policies will take place, to ensure we meet the finalised

EHRC guidance.”

A statement from the University’s Sports Committee on student participation in competitive sports stated:

“University Sports clubs and societies are responsible for their own operations, including decisions on eligibility and access of trans athletes to training, events and participation in competitive leagues. This is currently an area in which the interpretation of the law, and applicable guidance, is developing quickly. Clubs and societies are advised to follow the approach and criteria used by the relevant National Governing Body (NGB) when considering trans inclusion, and to align their policies to support access to relevant leagues (e.g. BUCS, local/regional/national competitions and any competition that the club or society organises, including college competitions).”

News

SU to vote on NUS exit

Faron Smith
Senior News Editor

The Cambridge SU (SU) is to offer students the opportunity to vote on whether to remain affiliated with the National Union of Students (NUS UK), in a referendum set to take place between the 27th and 30th October.

NUS UK is the campaigning body of the NUS, the national representative of university and college students across the UK. A separate charity organisation (NUS Charity) provides support services for student unions. The vote is on whether to disaffiliate with NUS UK, not NUS Charity. The SU has been affiliated since forming in 2020 out of

a merger between the undergraduate and postgraduate student unions.

However, NUS UK has come under increasing pressure in recent months from Student Unions nationwide and other student groups across the country, due to it having not taken a stance on Israel's campaign in Gaza.

In July, over 210 student officers, societies, and student groups published an open letter directed to the Board of Directors of the NUS, calling for it to take action. Among the demands of the group, which included postgraduate president Augustin Denis, were calls for the NUS to condemn a "plausible genocide" in Gaza, as well as Israel's "occupation of Palestinian territories". The letter also called for the NUS to "rescind the IHRA definition of antisemitism," which it describes as conflating "anti-Zionism with anti-semitism".

In addition to the disaffiliation referendum, the SU will also ask students whether it should "campaign to end university investments and collaborations with

institutions involved in occupation and weapons manufacture".

The question of divestment was a key one during February's SU election, with both the undergraduate and postgraduate presidents having campaigned on platforms promising to call for divestment. It also manifested as a key issue for student group Cambridge for Palestine (C4P) which has held regular rallies calling for the university and colleges to divest. C4P endorsed a series of candidates in this year's election, including postgraduate president Denis.

The announced referendum on NUS UK membership is not the first time that Cambridge students have considered disaffiliation motions. The last time was in 2016, when the then Cambridge University Students' Union (CUSU) voted by a margin of 52% to 47% to remain affiliated, with slightly more than 1% of students voting to abstain.

However, the 2016 referendum was triggered by the election of a controversial NUS President whom some students considered to have made antisemitic remarks. A slate of other universities, including Oxford, Newcastle, and Warwick, held votes at the same time.

In contrast, while July's open letter claimed to have signatures from "more than 55 campuses," SUs at other universities are not known to be considering similar referenda.

A vote to disaffiliate would mark a shift from Cambridge's past, as Cambridge students have produced four past presidents of the organisation.

Caius' accom woes continue

Georgie Middlemiss
Senior News Editor

Gonville & Caius students prepare to draft a second open letter after uproar over "building site" accommodation, as they face "unbelievably disruptive" levels of noise that render rooms close to uninhabitable during the day.

St Michael's Court is currently undergoing renovations as part of the College's decarbonisation project, which will install air source heat pumps onto college roofs.

Maddie, a Caius student, said "The noise in Mikes is unbelievably disruptive, making it impossible to concentrate or work".

Another student told *Varsity* about the "loud banging starting as early as 7:45". "It feels like I'm paying for a place to sleep, since my room is unusable during the day," they continued.

This is not the first time concerns have been raised, as it follows a previous open letter sent in March about the building works in St Michael's Court. At the time, students condemned it as "uninhabitable, unsafe, and entirely unsuitable for study or daily life".

Now, students are preparing a second open letter to pressure Caius for change.

According to students, the College briefed the student body prior to the accommodation ballot about the fact there may be "some noise" in the court, and offered a 10% rent reduction to accommodate this. However, students criticised the unclear communication,

with one stating "the problem isn't just the building work, but the way Caius have handled it."

When students requested an increased rent reduction to reflect the level of disruption, the College stated they were unable to help in this regard, and students were forwarded on to the Gonville & Caius Student Union (GCSU) to try and initiate a further reduction.

Student rooms are also accessed frequently by builders as part of the works.

The College told students scaffolding would be removed from October 6th, and would mostly be gone by early November. However, students report most of the scaffolding currently remains.

In an email sent to students living in the accommodation, the Caius Domestic Bursar wrote: "If the noise is a nuisance, please do make use of the study space available in the Library, the Old Courts café, or the communal spaces in the Aston Webb Building".

One student reported having a hole in his roof for a short period, as the glass in a skylight in his room was cut out and covered with a wooden plank.

A Gonville & Caius College spokesperson told *Varsity*: "We are delighted with the refurbishment of the Aston Webb Building at A to F St Michael's Court. The building has been modernised while retaining period features to improve the student experience. The roof work is two months ahead of schedule, and we hope any minor disruption caused is mitigated by the early conclusion of the project."



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How much does *your* college master earn?

Charlie Rowan

Editor-in-Chief

The annual income of a Cambridge college master can vary by more than £80,000, with some earning little more than £50,000, while others are listed in pay bands above £130,000, *Varsity* has found.

Freedom of Information requests and college accounts can reveal the salaries of Heads of House at 19 undergraduate colleges in the last two years.

The lowest disclosed was Selwyn's master, on £51,780, while, at the upper

end, several masters appeared in pay brackets of £120,000-£130,000 or higher.

Clare's master, for example, was recorded in the June 2024 accounts as either in the £130,000-£140,000 or £160,000-£170,000 remuneration band, though the College, despite being approached for comment, did not clarify which.

Meanwhile, Peterhouse reported a salary total of between £117,994 and £132,669, Trinity Hall placed its master in the £120,000-£130,000 range, and Robinson's Warden received £110,000-£130,000.

£80,000

The difference in salary between the most and the least paid college masters

Girton's mistress earned between £110,000 and £125,000, excluding national insurance contributions and other benefits, according to the College.

Trinity, which has the largest endowment of any Oxbridge college at over £2 billion according to 2023 accounts, also ranked in the middle of the upper tier, with its master on £118,211.

At the other end of the scale, Corpus Christi's master earned £56,405, only slightly higher than Selwyn. Magdalene and Churchill's Heads of House both fell in the £60,000-£70,000 bracket.

Several colleges clustered around the £100,000-£110,000 mark, including Sidney Sussex, Jesus, Emmanuel and Christ's. Newnham's Principal (£109,850), Homerton's Principal (£110,000-£120,000), and Pembroke's master (£112,900) also fell within this band.

The figures come from a mixture of sources: the latest college accounts (mostly for the year ending June 2024), FOI data (as of August 2025), and communications from individual colleges.

Some colleges reported precise salaries, others only pay bands, while several declined to disclose data at all.

Approaches to including salary benefits such as accommodation, pension contributions, and National Insurance also varied, depending on whether masters were categorised as full-time or part-time employees. Direct comparisons must therefore be treated with caution.

In 2018, a similar *Varsity* investigation uncovered wide disparities in Heads of House pay, with salaries ranging from £31,000 at Fitzwilliam to nearly £93,000 at Robinson.

At the time, most masters earned under £80,000, with only three breaking the £90,000 mark. Since then, the top salaries have risen significantly, keeping pace with – and in some cases outstripping – inflation.

In addition to salaries, many Heads of House receive expenses covering enter-

£51,780

The lowest salary disclosed to *Varsity* - received by the master of Selwyn

tainment, accommodation, and travel.

While some Heads of House, at colleges such as Newnham, Queens', and Christ's, chose not to claim expenses,

Freedom of Information requests show that others claimed more substantial sums.

Homerton's Principal recorded the largest set of reimbursements, with around £15,000 spent on travel in a single year, alongside £2,000 for accommodation and smaller amounts for

£15,000

The amount claimed by Homerton's Principal in one year for travel expenses

hospitality, subsistence, and professional services.

St John's master also disclosed a sizeable total of £12,959 in expenses, including almost £11,000 on overseas trips to Hong Kong, Singapore, Ireland, and the United States.

Meanwhile, Corpus Christi's master claimed £7,816 across a broad range of categories, including nearly £800 on books, £164 on "cleaning," £661 on "entertainment," and £106 on flowers.

Girton College, Clare College, Selwyn College, Trinity College, and Corpus Christi College were all contacted for comment.



▲ Faris Qureshi



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News

SU scraps campaign for 100% veganism

Wilf Vall

Associate Editor

The Cambridge Students' Union (SU) has scrapped their controversial campaign for 100% vegan catering, deciding to prioritise more "important" sustainability issues.

A motion advocating for a transition to 100% plant-based food in University Cafe was originally passed in 2023, in an attempt to support a "fairer University". The policy was up for renewal in a meeting of the SU council earlier this week, but the organisation chose to drop it.

The policy will now be scaled back to campaign for 75% plant-based catering across the University.

In justifying their decision to scrap the policy, the SU's executive committee – a body made up of sabbatical officers and other student representatives – stated there were concerns over accessibility with the policy. They also claimed that the SU should focus on "what is important to work on," amid a "change in circumstances".

This comes amid a drop in enthusiasm for veganism across the country with consumer insights platform GWI revealing that the number of people identifying as vegan dropped by 215% in the UK between 2022-2024.

The original policy previously attracted criticism from the SU's disability campaign, who urged students to vote it down. They said the food provided at the



▲ WILF VALL

SU should be "as broad as possible," for people who have autism, sensory issues, or eating disorders, and this would be endangered by going 100% plant-based.

Further criticisms were offered by then-SU president Fergus Kirman, who claimed that the nutritional rules were "probably not supported by the majority of people we are supposed to serve".

Despite this, the policy was passed by one vote.

The drive towards a 100% plant-based menu was supported by Plant-Based Cambridge, a student-led climate campaign calling for the University of Cambridge to follow its own scientific

research and transition to 100% plant-based catering.

Varsity understands that Plant Based Cambridge were not briefed on the planned changes before the vote.

Plant-Based Cambridge is part of the wider Plant-Based Universities campaign, who are pushing for their universities and student unions to adopt fully plant-based catering, and has offshoots at more than 40 institutions.

There have also been a number of plant-based protests across Cambridge colleges. Last term, protesters from Plant-Based Cambridge disrupted a Selwyn College formal, urging the col-

lege to make a transition towards "sustainable plant-based catering".

The protesters dropped a banner in the centre of the traditional formal hall with the words "meat + dairy = climate crisis," all written in capital letters.

They also criticised Selwyn for ranking bottom in sustainability by the Climate League of Oxford and Cambridge, a metric their former Master labelled "rubbish" after their poor placement.

The decision to scrap the commitment is a blow to their campaign, following a string of high-profile successes cutting back meat consumption across Cambridge.

Plant-Based Cambridge said that it "continues to work with stakeholders at all levels of the university to implement this transition [to plant-based catering] in a just and accessible way".

In 2016 Cambridge launched a campaign to reduce emissions by removing beef and lamb from menus across dining venues. Two years later, colleges agreed to extend the policy to their dining halls. The policy was credited with causing a 33 per cent reduction in carbon emissions from food by the university.

Following this, Magdalene College escalated their beef with meat, and now only serves red meat once a week. The more radical approach came after student demands for action, according to its catering manager Vincent Howard.

In a drive to reduce the carbon footprint at St John's College, beef dishes are

listed beneath plant-based alternatives and have a surcharge.

Multiple colleges have also introduced a "meat free Monday" policy, offering only vegetarian options on a Monday.

The University Library's tea rooms also agreed to stop serving lamb and beef in 2022, and phased out single use plastics.

Some May Balls joined the plant-based drive too, with Darwin's annual Ball having offered only plant-based options since 2022 – labelling their event the "greenest Ball yet". When explaining their decision, the May Ball Presidents cited earlier SU policies supporting a plant based catering on campus.

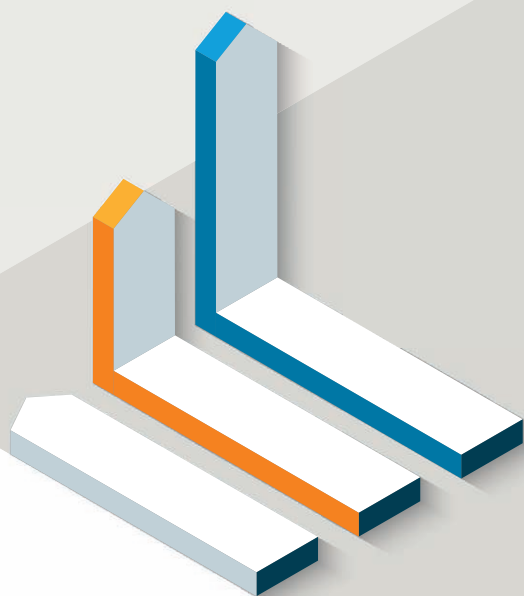
The move was deeply controversial at the time, attracting criticism from former Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg. The event organisers also acknowledged that some students were disappointed by the change, after complaints on social media that they found out about the menu only after buying their tickets, which cost over £200.

The policy also affected catering at the SU council meetings. The SU used to offer attendees pizza, but swapped to soup and bread as part of the plant-based drive in 2024, alongside the then-President's belief that "no one likes vegan cheese".

Cambridge SU was contacted for comment.

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Cantabs face costly sports fees



▲ LAURENTHO 31 VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Lydia Bearne

News Correspondent

Varsity research has found that Cambridge sport club fees can be up to six times higher than at Oxford

Students have said that these rising costs are pushing them out of University sports clubs. Cambridge students face membership fees of up to £560 a year to join University sports clubs – six times the cost of the same sport at Oxford.

Cambridge University Swimming and Water Polo Club charges £560 for Blues-level swimming and £390 for water polo. Oxford's equivalent charges £90 a year for swimmers, and offers tiered membership for those training less frequently.

Oxford funds sports facilities centrally, while Cambridge's system places more costs directly on students. At Cambridge, clubs are run independently, competing for limited termly grants from the Club Funding Committee and relying on subscriptions.

By contrast, Oxford offers a yearly £280 "Active Fusion" pass, covering gyms, a pool, an athletics track, and racket courts. Most Oxford clubs then add only small fees, such as a £3.50 levy for the University Triathlon Club.

Cambridge University's *Support Cambridge* platform stated: "clubs have had to increase student subscription fees by an average of 68% over the last 8 years". The rise is linked to reduced funding streams,

including centralised grants.

The University has introduced schemes to ease costs such as the 'Give It a Go' programme, which offers 32 free sessions a week this term. It also claims to have offered its highest-ever level of financial support for sports clubs in 2024-25.

Despite these initiatives, estimated average membership fees at Cambridge (£121) are more than double those at Oxford (£58).

Students told *Varsity* that costs remain a barrier. Matthew Leech, a former member of the Gymnastics Club, said: "Gymnastics society was a big part of my second year at Cambridge, providing relief from the workload and a social network. However, this year, I've been forced to make the decision to no longer be a part of the society, because the membership fees are so expensive. It's a huge loss."

The University's *Sport & Academic Performance Report* said: "Sport and physical activity can provide an effective release from academic studies, improve mental health and give students the opportunity to develop valuable social and support networks."

Students warned that financial barriers could prevent participation and the benefits of sport, particularly for those struggling to adjust to university life or facing mental health challenges.

The University of Cambridge Sports Centre was contacted for comment.

Uni celebrates Nobel Prize success

Sarah Aaliyah Kleinmoedig

News Correspondent

Cambridge alumnus, John Clarke, has been jointly awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics alongside Michel H. Devoret and John M. Martinis for their discovery of macroscopic quantum mechanical tunneling and energy quantisation in an electric circuit.

Clarke, who attended Christ College, read Natural Sciences and later moved to Darwin College for his PhD which he completed in 1968 at the Cavendish laboratory. His research is based on the theory, design and applications of superconducting quantum inference devices (SQUIDs), which are ultrasensitive detectors of magnetic flux.

The Master of Christ College, Simon McDonald, commented "John Clarke was born in Cambridge and did not stray far when choosing his university. We are immensely proud of his achievements; the Nobel Prize for Physics crowns his illustrious career."

In 1984 and 1985, Clarke, along with Devoret and Martinis, conducted experiments using a superconducting electronic circuit. The circuit featured Josephson junctions—superconductors separated by a thin layer of non-conductive material. When current flowed

through the circuit, the charged particles behaved as a single, unified particle spread across the entire system.

This macroscopic particle-like system starts in a zero-voltage state where current flows without resistance, trapped as if behind a barrier. The system escapes this zero-voltage state through quantum tunnelling, revealing its quantum nature. The transition is detected by the emergence of a voltage, confirming behavior predicted by quantum mechanics.

Professor Deborah Prentice, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, said: "Congratulations to Cambridge alumnus Professor Clarke on being jointly awarded this year's Nobel Prize in Physics for his research into quantum mechanical tunnelling."

Kitagawa, Richard Robson, and Omar Yaghi, who jointly won the Chemistry Nobel Prize for developing metal-organic frameworks (MOFs). These are a new form of molecular architecture with highly porous structures. Since their discovery, MOFs have been used in applications like carbon capture, water harvesting, and environmental cleanup.

The Nobel Prize for Economics was awarded to Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion, and Peter Howitt for their work on creative destruction.

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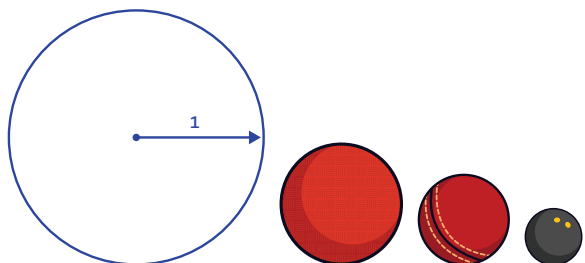
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Assume you have a circular enclosure with radius 1 to put away each type of ball.
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The cricket ball has a radius of $\frac{1}{8}$.
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How many cricket balls?
How many squash balls?

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News in brief

Flop to the future

The University Library has launched 'Future Nostalgia', a project to recover data trapped on ageing floppy disks before they vanish. The initiative began on 09/10 with a 'Copy that Floppy' session inviting the public to uncover files. Archivists hope to preserve information from the Library's collections, including Stephen Hawking's archive. Led by the Library's digital preservation team, the project uses specialised tools to recover data from obsolete formats and create suitable methods for disk restoration. Future Nostalgia aims to share its findings with other institutions facing the loss of digital history.

Beard bruises Blues

CURUFC has criticised Dame Mary Beard's claim that the University is "smarter" without "thick, white" rugby players. Speaking at Cheltenham Literature Festival, the classicist said Cambridge had been "transformed for the better" since it was no longer a "posh, male enclave". In a statement, the Club called the comments "disappointing," highlighting that Cambridge's admissions process is fair and based on academic potential. It cited a 2019 University report showing that student athletes performed as well as other undergraduates, adding that sport remains a "vital part" of Cambridge life.

String theory

Dr Paul Wingfield, a composer and Director of Studies in Music at Trinity College, Cambridge has authenticated a violin once owned by Albert Einstein. Wingfield, 63, began researching Einstein's musical life while writing his drama Einstein's Violin. After the play's run in April, an auctioneer contacted him for help verifying a violin believed to have belonged to the physicist. He confirmed its authenticity by matching an inscription, 'Lina', to Einstein's handwriting, as well as comparing hand X-rays. The 1894 Zunterer violin sold last week for £860,000, nearly triple its estimate.

Freshers' bosh

British social media personality "Big John" Fisher visited Cambridge on 07/10, starting at Smashburger on Hills Road before heading to the Freshers' Fair. Videos showed queues extending around Cambridge Place, across from Hills Road Co-Op, as he handed out "House Smash" burgers and promoted the store's student discount. The visit formed part of his October world tour, which includes stops in York, Birmingham, Sydney, and Perth. Posting afterwards (08/10), Big John said it was "a great day in Cambridge meeting the freshers," involving "so many respectful young people".



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Around town



Bethinn Feely delivers news from around Cambridge

Cambridge to become the home of England's first cycle street

30 weeks of work have begun on Adams Road near the University Athletics Track and Robinson College to create England's first ever cycle street. Work began on Monday (13/10). The road is one of the most frequently cycled routes in Cambridge, used by around 3,000 cyclists at peak times. The project is part of the Greater Cambridge Partnerships (GCP) Comberton Greenway. It aims to create safer travel for cyclists and promote environmentally conscious living. A section of the road is already blocked off to drivers and cyclists for works to be undertaken, with some restrictions about where people may park their cars. However, the pathway remains accessible, and many pedestrians and cyclists are still using the unrestricted areas of the road and path.

The Red Hen Project leads a fire walk fundraiser

On Monday 20 October, The Red Hen Project will host a charity event wherein supporters will be able to take part in the challenge of walking barefoot across fire. The organisers state that the goal of the challenge is to raise crucial funds for children in Cambridge who need them to thrive at home, in school, and in their communities. Supporters, trustees, and staff plan to make the walk a powerful analogy for the resilience of these children and their families. External organisations like local sports teams or groups are encouraged to take part. The event is also seeking an overall sponsor.

Sidney Sussex College grants approval for 55-meter mural

The large public art installation will be erected on King's Street between 9-18 February 2026 as part of the Cambridge Arts Festival. Funded by Cambridge BID in partnership with the street art collective Graffwerk, the mural will be completed with the aim of brightening the street. It will be in place for an initial 12 months, although this period could be extended. Applications for Cambridge-based artists to express interest in contributing to the project are currently open until November 7. The selected artists will work collaboratively to produce a work focused on local stories and heritage, combined with the undercurrent of contemporary culture.

Foundation Year, three years on

- On average, 60% of students progress onto a BA
- Intermission rates decreased from 17% to 10% in recent cohort
- Students praise programme but suggest work still to be done

Georgie Middlemiss and Kezia Douglass

Senior News Editor and Deputy Editor

A *Varsity* investigation into the recently-established Foundation Year Course finds students were largely confident in the success of the course, which intends to balance out educational disadvantages in a year-long pre-degree course.

However, while students praised the “intellectually stimulating” nature of the course, they also raised concerns about “disorganised” pastoral support and “unfair” assessment for progressing to a BA degree course.

Describing itself as a “stepping stone” to studying at Cambridge, the Foundation Year in Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences was established in 2022 as a pre-degree multidisciplinary course to prepare students who have experienced educational disadvantage to study at Cambridge.

Data acquired by *Varsity* through Freedom of Information requests reveals that 60% of students, on average, progress onto a Cambridge BA.

However, there has been a steep decline in the proportion of students continuing on to a Cambridge BA after the first year, from 34/47 (72%) in 22-23 to 20/42 (48%) in the 23-24 cohort.

Varsity also spoke with multiple students to understand their experiences of the programme, and if they felt the course succeeded in its aim of addressing educational disadvantage.

Nio, a 23/24 Foundation student and now a first-year at Sidney Sussex, said, “For me, it definitely succeeded”. Freddie, a 22/23 student, agreed, “I felt that I had ‘gaps’ in my knowledge and cultural capital before coming here, due to circumstances beyond my control. I felt that the course filled these gaps and opened new avenues I hadn’t previously been aware of.”

However, students reported that entering college and university life, particularly following the challenging experiences or educational disadvantages that many on the course faced, was not easy.

Another student from the 22/23 cohort told *Varsity* that the lack of pastoral support was “a bit ridiculous

lous [...] given that they were bringing in people from disadvantaged backgrounds, some who had been disadvantaged because of illness or mental health issues”. They added: “people are just told to intermit, rather than actually helping them

48%

The proportion of the 2023/24 cohort who continued studies, a sharp decline from the previous year

deal with it.”

A 24/25 student commented the Department “tried their best to support us,” but that it was “really college-dependent how well you were looked after, pastorally and academically” and “all a bit disorganised,” or required students themselves to reach out.

However experiences varied, as another student noted contrastingly that both their DoS and college tutor were “very attentive”.

The sense that students developed rigorous methods of academic research, and built their self-confidence, was clear.

A student from the 23/24 year found the course helped him develop both academic and practical skills for further study, leaving him feeling especially prepared for BA study. He told *Varsity*: “I felt it supplied me with various academic skills – such as essay-writing, researching, and time-management – that I

treasure while on tripos.”

Now having just finished his first year of tripos, he commented, “I’ve felt more able to draw from different disciplines when writing essays”.

Alongside a decline in the portion of students continuing at Cambridge, data acquired by *Varsity* shows that in all three years a number of students intermitted or withdrew.

In the first three years following the course’s establishment in 2022, data accessed by *Varsity* revealed that 20% intermitted or withdrew in the first cohort, and 17% in the second, dropping to 10% in the most recent cohort.

The data evidences the number of students intermitting or withdrawing is decreasing, which may suggest the course is becoming more accessible as it continues from its inception.

Freddie stated, he “wouldn’t necessarily put intermitting and withdrawing down to the course itself, but just that university itself isn’t for everyone”.

But he also felt the academic intensity of the course could have been more clearly advertised, as he found there hadn’t been much information about the course’s content and make-up, and suggested students may have been surprised by the high workload.

Another student suggested the intermission rates are down to inadequate pastoral support. They told *Varsity*, “I’ve heard [...] rather than giving people sufficient pastoral and academic support,

people are just told to intermit, rather than actually helping them deal with it.”

Meanwhile, the need for more centralisation of the course was also evident in regard to the assessment for students to continue.

The 24/25 Foundation Year Subject Representative told *Varsity*: “I think it is unfair that a student’s college can lead to a significant change in a student’s chances of progression. Some colleges have let students progress with grades under 60%, where other colleges have barred progression for students who achieved 64% even with extenuating circumstances.”

In response, a University spokesperson told *Varsity*: “Colleges consider students who achieve 60-64% on a case-by-case basis”.

Rather than applying for a Cambridge BA through the standard UCAS application process, Foundation Year students are made offers through a separate assessment process during the year, conditional, according to the department website and students, on achieving a score of 65% or above in the Foundation course.

The portion of students achieving the lowest grades, of 60 or below, on the course, has risen from 12% (6) in the 22/23 year to 36% (15) in 23/24 and 43% (20) in 24/25, alongside higher portions of the cohort completing the year and sitting the final exams.

The most popular course students continued onto was HSPS by far, with both cohorts featuring students progressing onto over ten different degree courses.

A University spokesperson told *Varsity*: “The Cambridge Foundation Year was developed to support progression to Cambridge or other highly competitive courses and universities for UK students who have experienced significant disruption and/or disadvantage in their education.

“It does not guarantee a pathway to study at Cambridge, but over the years since it launched, the teaching and assessment of the programme has adapted to ensure it provides the best inclusive approach to education we can offer without compromising the academic standards required to support students to move beyond the Certificate successfully.

“We are proud that the support and expertise that Foundation Year students receive has resulted in a completion rate of 97%, which compares extremely favourably with other foundation years.”

University watch



Alex Brian rounds up student news from across the country

UK universities to open campuses in India

14 university Vice Chancellors accompanied Keir Starmer to India on his official visit last week. While in Mumbai, the prime minister announced that more UK universities would open campuses in India, adding £50 million to the British economy. Lancaster and Surrey were given approval, while others are already in development. York, Aberdeen, and Queen’s University Belfast are expected to open campuses as early as next year. Starmer said: “I’m delighted that more Indian students will be able to benefit from a world-class British education in the near future – strengthening the ties between our two countries while pumping millions back into our economy and supporting jobs at home.”

UCU says 12,000 university jobs cut last year

Universities cut over 12,000 jobs last year, according to new analysis by the University and Colleges Union (UCU). General secretary Jo Grady said staff were “demoralised, exhausted and furious” and that students were being “undervalued and poorly served”. Later this month, UCU members will vote on potential UK-wide strike action. Several branches, including Sheffield and Dundee, have already approved isolated strikes. This comes after universities offered a 1.4% pay rise this summer, which they acknowledged “does not reflect the true value employers place on staff” but is the “only prudent option” given the financial problems facing the sector.

Student chats monitored on behalf of arms companies

Loughborough, Heriot-Watt, and Glasgow told arms companies they would monitor student social media accounts and group chats in emails obtained by *The Guardian* and *Liberty Investigates*. Companies including Rolls-Royce, Raytheon, and BAE asked universities to check for protest activity before careers fairs they were attending. A Loughborough spokesperson responded that, while they occasionally observe the feeds of activist groups, “we do not surveil students’ social media”. HWU denied accessing group chats, while the other parties declined to comment. Careers fairs across the UK have faced protests against companies with alleged ties to the Gaza War. Last week, Cambridge for Palestine protested outside a careers fair.



Interviews

If *Taskmaster* and *Celebrity Traitors* have not yet familiarised you with Nick Mohammed, let me jog your memory. We're part-way through the BAFTAs 2024, and a man in an ombre sequinned suit roller skates onto the stage. His three minutes of character comedy go down like marmite. The camera zooms in on a bemused Emma Stone; the audience's intermittent laughter accompanies Mohammed's high-pitched Yorkshire accent. Later, *The Independent* reports that viewers cringed at the skit, while *The Daily Mail* characterises spectators as "furious". Responses were divided, however, with one Youtube commenter hailing the performance "the only part of the BAFTAs worth watching".

During our conversation, Mohammed brings up this "monstrously terrifying" experience of his own accord. He remembers receiving the phone call that offered him the gig: "I was aware that it probably wasn't going to go down that well – it's too weird! I'm not famous enough for that audience to go, 'Oh, this is Nick Mohammed doing Mr Swallow'". But, at the same time, "there was no way [he] was going to turn them down!" Mr Swallow, Mohammed's camp and energetic character, was born in the Cambridge Footlights. Based on an English teacher from Mohammed's secondary school, he made his debut at the Corpus Playroom.

“
The Footlights made me realise that it might be possible to have a career in the arts

"It was a Smoker where I first performed as Swallow," Mohammed reminisces. The *Ted Lasso* actor started pursuing comedy seriously while studying for a PhD in Seismology at Magdalene College. His debut as Swallow felt authentic, he remembers: "I definitely knew that I enjoyed performing with that kind of attitude, but I would never have anticipated that I'd still be doing it now!".

It became clear that Swallow was the character that "got the most reaction from an audience" during his time with the Footlights and when performing at the Edinburgh Fringe. "The Footlights made me realise that it might be possible to have a career in the arts, partly because I was surrounded by other like-minded people, partly because of the longstanding history of others having succeeded before you – it was a privileged position to be in, frankly". Beforehand, the comedian was geared towards a career in academia or geophysics, but Cambridge's theatre culture "ignited a fire" in Mohammed, who had previously worked as a magician throughout his time at Durham University.

'Mr Swallow, Show Pony', Mohammed's current tour, riffs off of the beloved Swallow, and reviewers have complimented its more vulnerable, even autobiographical angle. "I'm getting older and becoming more reflective," he notes, "but I've always thought there was something interesting in talking about the origin of the character". The tour, coming to the Corn Exchange this October, enters "new territory," he says: "I can talk about my – Nick Mohammed's

Nick Mohammed

The *Ted Lasso* star speaks to Tara Buxton about Cambridge and comedy

▲ DAVID VINTINER

– experiences as a comedian, but as Mr Swallow". For this self-referential comedy to function, he describes that "you don't want the mask to slip too soon, but there's something fun about dropping the fourth wall, then building it back up, then dropping it again".

“
Live is where my heart is

Mohammed is a jack of many trades. The writer, actor, and stand-up comic is best known for playing Nate in the Apple TV comedy series *Ted Lasso*, but he doesn't hesitate when I ask which type of comedy he prefers. "Live is where my heart is – it was my first love. There's something about the immediacy between you as a performer and the audience". That said, he reiterates that he's "fortunate to be able to bounce between" televised and live comedy, and recalls playing Nate with fondness. To start with, he "felt really comfortable in knowing what to do to make that character funny". During the first season, his directors allowed him to "just have fun playing the character," sometimes encouraging a "slapstick" approach. Candidly, Mohammed remarks that in later seasons, "the emotional side was the stuff that I struggled with – it wasn't

in my wheelhouse". His character's dramatic arc "sort of took the comedy out of it," but despite the difficulty of the role, he "relished in the challenge".

More recently, Mohammed starred as a social outcast in the action comedy *Deep Cover* alongside Bryce Dallas Howard and Orlando Bloom. "To do a leading role in a film – I'd never experienced anything like it! You've got all these toys and the stunts and these cameras". Speaking to Mohammed feels more like chatting to a theatrically-inclined friend than an award-winning actor. He exudes liveliness like a kid in a sweet shop; it's as if he's somehow still shocked at his career path.

Mohammed's character in *Deep Cover* struggles to understand workplace banter, and he plays him so well that it's almost painful. His opening scenes make your toes curl with second-hand embarrassment. The Prime TV special tells the story of three amateur improv comedians going undercover. Pretending to be bad at improv comedy was a struggle, Mohammed confesses – "it's like, how do you do that when you know the rules of improvisation already?" Nevertheless, "you still have to understand where the comedy beats lie, even when playing someone who's not funny," he tells me. Some of his stand-up flops have informed this technique: "I know what it feels like to do something enthusiastically on stage and it not quite hit the mark that you want it to".

But resilience is a key feature of this line of work, Mohammed reiterates.

"You're never going to be the best thing right at the start. It's easy to think that you're not good enough if you didn't get an audition, didn't get the reviews you wanted, didn't get the audience you wanted". He's asked for advice often, he tells me, and stresses that it's not plain-sailing, even for him: "the last four castings I did, I haven't got! I have to believe that I will get one at some point; you've got to remain positive and remember that it's difficult, notoriously difficult, this industry."

“
I know what it feels like to do something enthusiastically on stage and it not quite hit the mark

Alongside stand-up comedy and TV acting, Mohammed has also tried his hand at script writing. *Intelligence*, the Sky Series created by Mohammed in which he stars alongside David Schwimmer, was more laborious to write than a Mr Swallow show, the comic tells me.

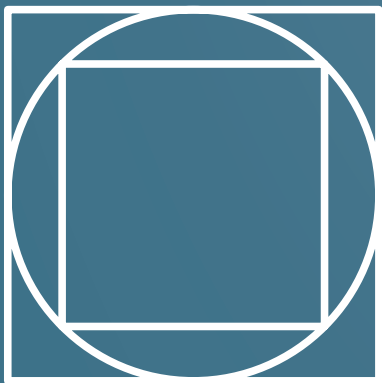
"With TV writing, I really struggle with seeing the overall structures of the plot, whereas with live stuff, there's nobody in charge of me doing it – if I want to stop I can just stop! TV writing feels a little bit more like homework sometimes," he chuckles. Backpedaling slightly, he praises the process as "fulfilling" and "rewarding," but ultimately he feels that this "linear" writing style isn't where his talents lie. His creative process with live material is more jumbled: "you can play with the parts a bit – you end up piecing them together like a puzzle".

Mohammed's calm and collected wisdom compliments his more erratic passion. I ask him about the Edinburgh Fringe after our allotted interview time is up, and he waxes lyrical about the festival for another five minutes. "I adooore it," he says; "I try to go up with the family every year". He mentions his wife Becca and his three children frequently. We'd rescheduled our conversation so that he could collect his eldest after a school trip, and during, he answers the phone to confirm pick-up arrangements with Becca. He's apologetic yet uncompromising, a buoyantly polite character that is simultaneously self-assured.

You get the sense that Mohammed throws himself into every venture wholeheartedly, almost regardless of its reception. Even when recounting those eventful BAFTAs that caused him to momentarily question whether he'd "completely scuppered" his career, he's firm – "I'd do it again in a heartbeat".



PREDICT TO WIN



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

What percentage of respondents successfully solved this?



Features

Is Cambridge undergoing a religious revival?

Emma Tenzler asks whether large numbers of young people really are turning towards Christianity

“What, on Earth, is God doing?” The pastor’s pun elicits a few chuckles from the packed church. It is the Tuesday of Fresher’s Week at Holy Trinity Church’s weekly student night, and about eighty undergraduates have come to listen to the address. Fresher’s Week has always been a time of uncertainty and anxiety, and the pastor offers a simple, timeless solution: “God, through Jesus, is always with you [...] He is a companion to you, and so is this space.”

This message has seemed to resonate with a growing number of young people. A report published by the Bible Society earlier this year reported that churchgoing amongst 18-24 year olds has jumped from 4% in 2018 to 16% in 2024, a phenomenon that several major news outlets have termed the “quiet revival”.

“Everytime I went to a service I’d feel something that I didn’t feel anywhere else,” confessed Erika, who is studying for an Mphil in theology. Erika’s conversion from a “very convicted Dawkins-esque atheist raised in a mostly atheist household” began here at Cambridge, while studying for an undergraduate degree in Theology. Dragged along to church by a friend in Fresher’s week, she found herself coming back to church services, while “intellectually engaging with the (Christian) ideas on a deeper level” through her degree. After a year, she had decided that “this is like a really convincing way to live your life.”

“Every time I went to a service I’d feel something that I didn’t feel anywhere else

Many religious students recount similar experiences of choosing their faith, and choosing it late. Elijah, a second year English student at Jesus college, said, “I grew up in a Christian family, so all my life I’ve been going to church, but it was probably just over two years ago that I really took my family’s faith for myself.”

Elijah believes increasing numbers of students are making the same choice. “I’ve spoken to so many people at uni who like, a year ago or so, just felt like ‘I really need to read the Bible’ [...] and became Christians.” His church, Holy Trinity Church, recently bought a new building to accommodate the increasing numbers of the faithful and the faith-curious. “People are, every Sunday, just walking in off the street saying ‘what’s going on here? I want to be a part of it’ and

sticking around.”

Sat in a quiet office next to a court that used to be a cloister, the Reverend Dr Crockford, Dean of Jesus College Chapel, told a similar story of a curiosity-fuelled engagement with the faith. Because “many students haven’t experienced religion before,” he believes they approach it with a “new sense of curiosity and readiness to explore something that’s unfamiliar and beguiling and wonderful and strange in the way that a lot of things are at Cambridge.”

Father Keane, the Catholic Chaplain to the University, echoed this sentiment. Noting that the Catholic Chaplaincy of Cambridge, Fisher House, also seems to have more students “who are at least exploring Christianity,” he argued that “this is because university creates a new space for thinking and exploring.”

Freed from the baggage of previous generations, religion seems to have become, for some, an object of genuine curiosity and a viable solution to problems both simple and existential. For Rev’d Crockford, the college chapel offers students, among other things, a respite from the pressures of Cambridge: “It’s one of the opportunities to put your phone away and be uncontactable [...] and it’s where your brain learns to disengage and be able to think bigger things.”

He addressed the broader role played by faith within an increasingly atomised society. At a time where public spaces are disappearing, with the number of local youth centres having fallen by 53% between 2011-12 and 2022-23, as reported by the National Youth Agency, religion and its institutions are “shouldering a lot of the work of keeping a community together.”

Finding clear words for the current situation, he painted a bittersweet picture: “your pub and your post office are gone, but hopefully you might have your church left.”

In a college context, the Rev’d Crockford recognised the appeal held by chapels as communal places for many stu-

dents irrespective of their faith, or lack thereof. “We noticed that this is what makes what we do make sense. We’re there to foster that community and belonging, which comes with a pastoral care, sometimes a very gentle one.”

“Your pub and your post office are gone, but hopefully you might have your church left

As we neared the end of our conversation, he described the first drinks reception following evensong held after months of Covid lockdown. “It was a summer, I can remember it very vividly. You had to book to attend the evensong, and wear your face mask and you couldn’t sit near anyone else. But we were finally allowed to be in groups of six outside drinking a glass of wine. And the sense of buzz and thrill and belonging was incredibly special.”

For Elijah, belief in God provided him with a “sense of identity grounded in Him and a community”. Pointing to the feelings of loneliness and anxiety felt by many young people, he sees the “revival” as “almost a response to the mental health crisis we’re having.”

“Not in that Christianity solves

this, but people have been feeling anxious and depressed, and then are coming to church, and feeling so much better because as we’ve learned more about who God is we’ve learned more [about] who we are.”

Nitha, a second year Law student at Jesus College, explained how embracing her family’s Catholic faith as a teenager gave her “an integral support system in her life”. She continued by pointing to general trends in politics and economics as a central explanation for the turn to religion by young people: “I think politics and the economic stability of a country definitely contributes to what the religious spectrum looks like.”

The perceived growth in youth religiosity has also given rise to concerns that it may be increasingly dominated by nationalist and far-right forces. Nitha revealed how several young boys in her highschool, “as they radicalised politically and became more rightwing at the same time also became Christian [...] because there is that traditional aspect to it that appeals to them.”

In the same vein, the Rev’d Crockford noted how “people in other ministries are seeing, whether it’s related to the rise in Christian nationalism on the streets that we’ve seen lately, an interest from young men in reengaging and rooting themselves in particular expressions of Christianity.”

Expressing his concern about the “misappropriation of Christian imagery

and purported identity in the recent few months” he believes college chapels have a role to play in countering this trend: “One of the gifts of college chapels is that our job is to be a deliberately open and inclusive stance of Christian faith. Sometimes that involves dismantling the alternative narratives of what the Christian faith involves. You can’t avoid politics in religion.”

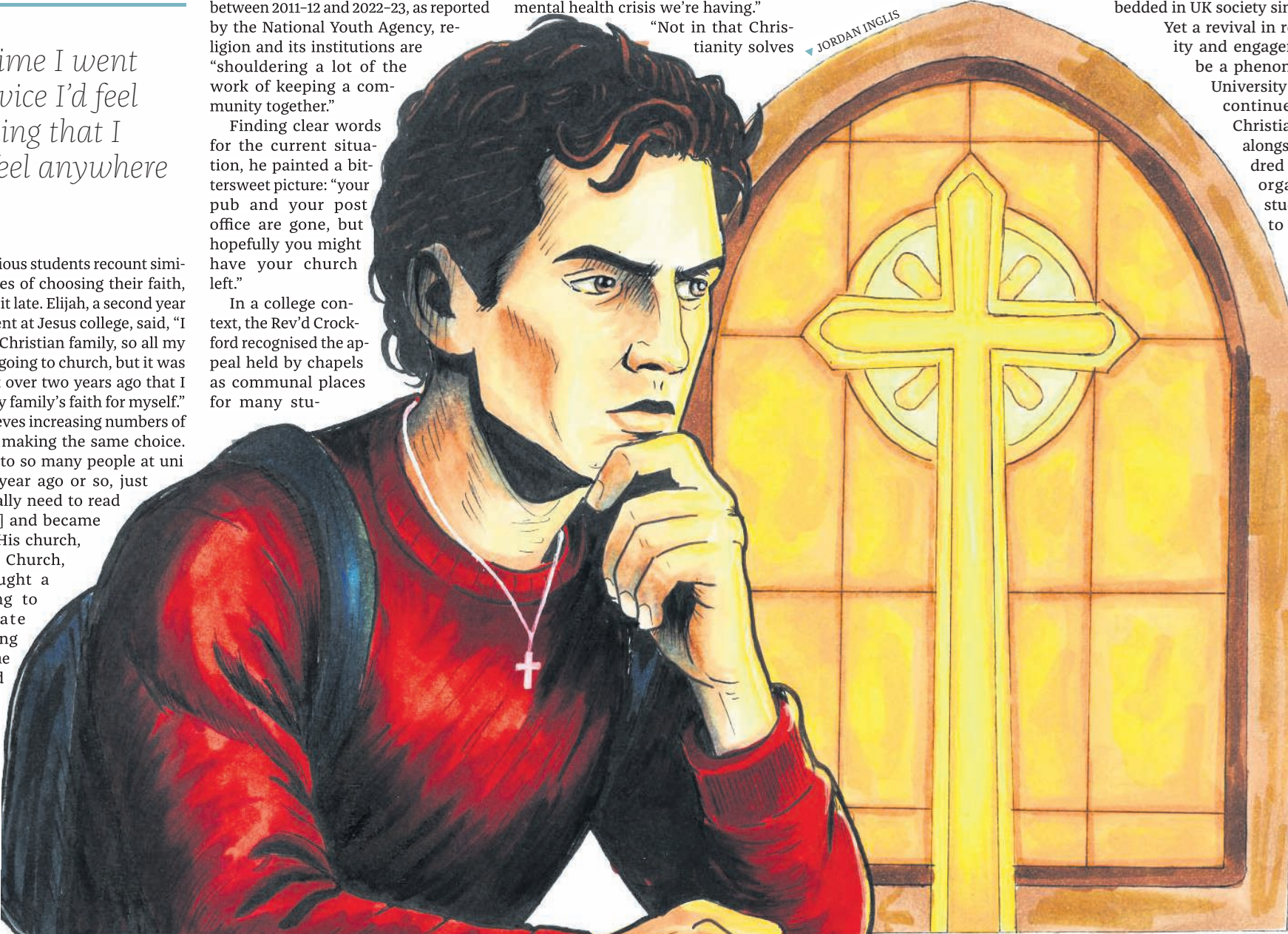
Curiosity, community and respite are the key drivers, yet Rev’d Crockford wondered “does this always cash up into signed up committed Christian faith?”

“The sense of buzz and thrill and belonging was incredibly special

Callum Brown, Emeritus Professor for History at Glasgow University and a specialist in the history of Christianity, did not think so. Calling for “caution in the statistical analysis of religious trends,” he referred to the “slow-burn return to post-Covid normalcy” as the explanation for recent figures. Claiming that “church going remains substantially lower than it was in 2019” his conclusion is definite. There is, he argued, “no reversal of the secularisation trend that has been embedded in UK society since the 1960s”.

Yet a revival in religious curiosity and engagement seems to be a phenomenon felt at a University where religion continues to flourish. Christian groups exist alongside over a hundred other religious organisations, as students continue to seek answers to the central questions of our time.

Finishing the service at Holy Trinity, the pastor skips to the end of the Gospel of Matthew, beyond the resurrection. There, Jesus says, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Perhaps that’s the quiet part of revival – people looking for a guide in uncertain times, recognising that faith can be part of the answer, and finding it right where it always has been.



Humans of Cambridge: the many hats of a Porter

Beth Lee speaks to the powerhouses behind the desk whose work keeps colleges and students going

During your first few weeks as Cambridge students, you'll often encounter situations like losing a key or card, needing a taxi, searching for directions, or craving a cup of tea and a chat to ease homesickness. The heroes who assist in these moments will always be our fantastic Porters. Porters are gatekeepers, first-aiders, security guards, wellbeing officers, receptionists, wranglers, tourist information officials, police officers, and fire wardens. Perhaps best of all, they are proper grown-ups and, for students who have just entered adulthood, this is certainly a comfort.

Sarah, who works at Homerton and has been a porter for twelve years, called herself a "student wrangler," and explained that this is not an exaggeration: the most challenging part of the job is "getting covered in and cleaning up other people's vomit."

Students are not the only species that Sarah wrangles with. She described that, "something about the job that was not on the job description is dealing with wildlife: pigeons in rooms, muntjacs stuck in railings, picking up angry peregrine chicks. Squirrels have zero chill". I was recently emailed about someone that had been seen chasing a fox on the college grounds.

Porters are prone to herding tourists too, especially in the central colleges. Foot traffic flows outside the Porter's Lodge at Emmanuel College, where one porter described helping members of the public who have fallen over outside. These are the rainbow colours of the job – a range of tasks touching all aspects of the community.

Customers include my own mother, who called the porters to send out a search party when I took too long to reply to a text; a High Court judge, broken out of the bathroom by a porter, "smashing the door in, only to discover nothing wrong with the lock!"; and "three visitors at night near our grounds and gardens, all wearing balaclavas and one holding a two-foot crowbar". And, of course, an active avian community: Sarah reported "lots of birds in rooms".

All have had a broad range of life experiences, which have helped equip them for any situation. I spoke to a former bar-worker at Downing, a retail Christmas temp-turned-manager and factory-owner at Homerton, a cruise-ship theatre technician at Christ's, and two porters from Emmanuel who started in different departments of the college. At Churchill College, Sandie told me that, "before becoming a Porter, I worked 20 years as a Teaching Assistant in Primary Schools and before that, 20 years in Royal Mail." The range of backgrounds and previous of careers among college porters is seen as a positive, with Sarah

expressing that the "diverse range of experience and personality [...] is good for the Plodge and the students".

"They all have had a broad range of life experiences, which have helped equip them for any situation"

Ask a porter for help and watch the swivel-chair slide as they consult a colleague behind the scenes. The Plodge runs on teamwork: "We constantly rely on each other, and sharing of information is paramount. We are a team!" said Sean. Before becoming a Homerton Porter, he ran his own construction business for over 35 years. Encouraged by his Police officer daughter, he became a porter following the pandemic and described the job as "very fulfilling".

For Cambridge students, the Porter's Lodge is an institution, but the changes of modern life break through. The most significant difference Sarah has noticed in her time on the job is the improvement in student welfare. She praised her college,

Homerton, which is "particularly good with a dedicated Wellbeing team". Likewise, a Porter at Christ's College reflected on the "shift towards more mental health aspects of the job [...] dealing with students' mental wellbeing rather than just their physical wellbeing". For Sean, the biggest change has been technology, but "the basics of the job have remained the same".

For both Sean and Sarah, the best part of being a porter is helping the students in any way they can.

When asked what he loves most about being a porter, Martyn Saunders, from Selwyn College, said, "It's the variety for me. One minute you have a fire alarm test and the next you are helping a student tie a bow tie." At the same college, Deputy Head Porter, Lee Scott, said, "It is seeing people flourish and being part of that journey. We are always here and always available".

"We all pride ourselves on being there in any way we can to support our students in what can be stressful and challenging times for them. We love to see them flourish!" said Sean. One Emmanuel Porter highlighted that the most unexpected part of the job was "how emotional graduation day can be [...] we really try to get to know students".

Sarah said that the "best part of being a porter, apart from biscuits, is forming friendships with students and having a chat".



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Comment

Talia Jacobs shares her experience of victim blaming and online discourse

▲ AMIKA PIPLAPURE

It's not my fault I was followed home

On the night of July 9th, I was followed and harassed by a man I'd first seen beside a parked car, minutes from home, just outside Newnham College.

My pursuer was roughly in his 60s. He was wearing a blue cotton t-shirt, the kind with buttons up at the collar. He was sober, lucid, somehow perfectly normal: someone's dad, or uncle, maybe somebody's grandfather. When he told me he'd been there hours, waiting, I remember wondering if he'd a wife somewhere, someone who might wait up for him, question where he was, what he was doing. How stupid, telling my friends not to worry, I'd be home in two minutes, safe and sound from strange men who go bump in the night and won't be deterred by gates slammed shut before them...

I would like to believe I did everything right, to acknowledge that I was alone for mere minutes, that I was sober, sensible, smart in my decisions. Yes, my path was secluded, fenced-in on either side – as were the other routes available; this was the shortest. The entire walk was some five-hundred-feet, roughly the length of King's Parade. And I did what you do in these situations, once safe and secure; I locked the doors and windows, drew the curtains; I told my housemates, reported it to the police.

Most immediately, however, I called the college porters, who were kind and empathetic and tried to help me feel safe. What followed was a college-wide email containing such statements as "most inappropriate behaviours (or worse) are perpetrated when we allow the conditions for it." Beyond this came debates waged on the Facebook page Camfess, ranging from supportive outrage accusing college of victim-blaming, to anonymous defences which, however well-intentioned, only accused me of a reckless stupidity deserving public reprimand. When friends alerted me to what was erupting online, I wasn't particularly surprised. I'd received the public email, along with a private one which I'm sure

would add a veritable gallon of fuel to the fires of Camfess debates if I chose to share it. It's routine; victims are demanded to reveal how they'd incited the violence done upon them. Or else mocked for the hypervigilance they're expected to maintain.

No, I can't say I was much surprised when presented with that onslaught of anonymous, patronising, rather brutal commentary. I certainly didn't expect, however, the strangeness of my experience, anonymous though my name may have been, becoming the grounds for widespread debate; arguments waged online, conversations overheard in the Iris café. Once someone mentioned it to me without realising I was the very topic of their conversation. Online, I noticed staff members reacting to various comments.

“

Victims are demanded to reveal how they'd incited the violence done upon them

It's a distinctly strange thing to be spoken about by people who don't know they're speaking about you, people who don't know that you are listening. If anything, the barrage of Camfess posts, all pointing to my own experience (dare I write my own victimhood?) made me peculiarly cognisant to the ease with which people discuss scenarios they know next-to-nothing about with the pompous grandeur of expert opinion. How little of what happened was made public, how massive people's unabated opinions! One particularly enlightened commenter thought it astoundingly brilliant to equate my walk home with his ill-advised travels to dangerous regions overseas. "The situation is actu-

ally surprisingly analogous," he insisted, when someone came to the aid of myself and all the other surely reckless women who deign leave their bedrooms, missing the point that the road I live on is not a civil warzone.

Indeed, such situations are not abstract guessing games where generic advice fixes all, but particular and exacting situations which, fundamentally, you who read this knows nothing about. Harassment occurs in daylight, in busy, bustling places; all too often, no stranger dares intervene.

At Cambridge alone, I've been catcalled innumerable times, once badly harassed in broad daylight, surrounded by passers-by who quickly looked away. I don't share this for pity – these are everyday occurrences, so prevalent they barely warrant remark. A staggering 97% of women aged 18-24 have experienced public sexual harassment, according to a 2021 UN Women UK investigation, with only a miniscule 4% of victims coming forward.

And it's no different at Cambridge. A report by *Varsity* and the CUSU found that nearly 8 in 10 female students had experienced sexual harassment here, yet over 85% never reported the incidents, frequently citing fears of not being believed, or of being blamed.

That impulse which has us scrutinise victim over predator is not incidental. Just last year, the University introduced a policy on student-staff relationships, which, while ostensibly intended to address power imbalances, officially warned students against behaviour "that could be interpreted as flirtatious" – as if abuse stems from students too friendly, too naïve, not the adults deliberately pursuing baby-faced 18-year-olds. Cambridge has quite shockingly reinforced the logic that keeps so many silent. Their message is clear: whatever happened, it was probably your fault.

I don't know why I feel the need to set the record straight. I can't imagine any of the anonymous commenters know me. Really, I hate the idea of strangers tearing my decisions apart to fuel notions that one creates the conditions of someone else's aggression. I refuse the abstraction of their arguments, much as they deny

me my particularity. I cannot digest the torn-apart fragments they make of that night into a recognisable whole. Henceforth, I want to deal in nothing but particularity, the exact dimensions of my own experience.

But I know what I'm doing here – it's undeniable. I attempt to absolve myself of blame, despite that little voice imperatively refuting such questions in situations with obvious perpetrators. I say I did everything right, but perhaps some right decisions are more right than others. Maybe I didn't do everything right, maybe, in my own terms of particularity, I should've taken another route, insisted someone walk me home, or, as some might have it, not leave the house past sunset at all, some vampire in reverse.

So when I ask myself if I did anything wrong, it feels like I'm demanding proof of morality or immorality. The constant noise around it seems something of a punishment, as though I'd committed some terrible crime for which every action necessitates cross-examination. But I know where such punitive thinking leads us; when we ask if victims did everything right, we declare that those who didn't, deserve what they got. When we shame miniscule imperfections, we deem innocent actions punishable, discourage reporting, strip ourselves of basic understanding.

Crucially, when we praise victimised women for 'doing everything right', we imply that there's someone out there more deserving of blame, shame, fear, violence. Laura Bates questions whether we'd grieve less those victims drunk, high, soliciting – those who defy the 'perfect victim' image. I wonder what statements Cambridge would make if indeed I had been drunk, stumbling, far-from-home, if the games of victim-blaming would remain had I been directly on college grounds and not fifty-steps from them, if I'd been followed in broad daylight, if, god forbid, I hadn't gotten away. In this case at least, the public opinion of a worrying proportion of the staff and student population has made itself undeniably clear.

Welfare workshops are broken

Daisy Stewart Henderson and Duncan Paterson clash over how to fix this Freshers' Week staple



Daisy Stewart Henderson

Some memories are shared by most who have survived Freshers' at Cambridge. The squeaky, giddy awkwardness of the first college bop, the muted terror of the first supervision, the candlelit awe of Matriculation Dinner, hoping never to be asked what where you're from and what you study again by the end of it...

One thing I struggle to recall, though, is my college's welfare workshops. I believe at least a couple of them clashed with other introductory talks I had to go to. Consequently, the ones I was at tended to be sparsely attended, which seems to be a trend across colleges year-on-year.

It's not that the purpose of welfare workshops isn't important. When faced with a bunch of 18-year-olds at the beginning of adulthood, representing a range of backgrounds and experiences, you could go as far as to say that colleges are obligated to convey core values surrounding respect and welfare to them. But if this is an obligation, welfare workshops represent a shirking of responsibility.

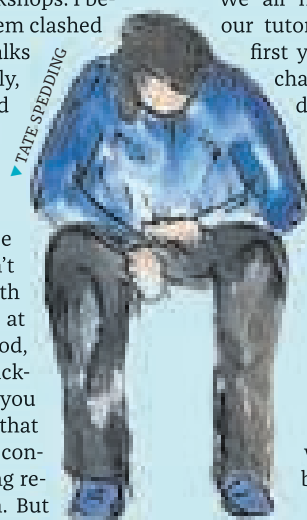
As a fresher, I was impressed with the wealth of pastoral support available as a product of the college system. It's unique, after all, to have access to a tutor, a director of studies, chaplains, counselling services, on hand and available to a cohort far smaller than most

secondary schools. But why aren't colleges making use of these resources to convey the messages of welfare workshops in a more individualised manner, delivered by an experienced adult as opposed to a fellow university student faced with the difficult task of conveying sensitive messages to big groups of freshers who are about the same age as them.

We all meet one-on-one with our tutors at the beginning of first year. At my college, the chaplains have started doing the same thing.

These are wonderful opportunities to promote welfare in a very personalised way. Messages about respect and college values can be relayed in a way which suits the individual, in a direct conversation, rather than a one-size-fits-all workshop where it's easy to sit back and disengage.

One of the most special, and unusual, things about Cambridge is the fact that the college system enables staff to really know their students. So why are colleges passing the buck to students to deliver welfare workshops, which could so easily be embedded into systems that already exist; and work?



Duncan Paterson

I don't remember my Freshers' Week that well, but the thing that did stand out to me were the welfare workshops; precisely because they were so bad. A few students from the JCR awkwardly delivering welfare and consent talks to freshers only a year younger, sitting in the same place those committee members had been only a year before. No one was happy; not the freshers, told how to behave by people barely more experienced than them, nor the JCR members delivering workshops they weren't confident on, let alone formally trained for.

College leadership must have been pleased though, right? Here was demonstrable evidence that they had delivered on guidelines passed down to them from University disciplinary bodies. Instructions on how to behave with basic human decency neatly bound up in a bureaucratic tick-box exercise.

Daisy argues that colleges are passing the buck with welfare workshops, and I do agree – initially. However, if you talk to any college's head of welfare, they know deep down that workshops don't work, but rather indicate a deeper problem: they don't help people struggling with mental health issues, they don't stop instances of sexual assault and when bad things happen, the mechanism that should allow college to come down like a ton of bricks on the perpetrator rarely pulls

through.

And this is not meant to be a dig at the students roped into running these workshops; they were asked to deliver something, and they did. The dig is at the thing they are delivering. Welfare workshops rarely function as they ought to. It would benefit students more to get rid of this farce, rather than attempt to integrate it into another welfare system. They are more for the protection of the college than they are for the victim.

Welfare workshops appear to follow the ethos of 'prevention rather than cure', educating students rather than waiting until incidents happen. But who has ever come out of a welfare workshop with a radically shifted mindset? As ever, it boils down to a societal culture, systemic issues that won't be solved any time soon. Some argue that workshops are the first rung on the ladder towards a cultural shift, but to me, it feels more like a continuation of reliance on dysfunctional systems.

So whose responsibility is it? Undoubtedly, blame lies with the perpetrator, but where does it start? This is the million-dollar question, and as the mental health and sexual assault incidents continue to rise, it is up to the people who take on the duty of care, whether that be colleges, welfare teams, or University legislators, to find an answer.



Where's the money for 'Mickey Mouse'?



April O'Neill

When I saw the headline that maintenance grants were making a comeback I was thrilled. Finally! A Labour policy not dressed up in Thatcherite cosplay. Although I won't feel the benefits given its anticipated return by 2029 (the government's taking a leaf out of Netflix's book it seems), I was encouraged to see a positive, tangential step towards breaking down the steep barriers for lower-income students, especially when our own University is turning more and more students away from its Financial Assistance Fund.

But then I read the fine print. These grants will only apply to those studying selected courses – courses that support Labour's industrial strategy to 'renew Britain'. Safe to say, as an English student, my confidence was knocked. What can I bring to an industrial site? A hard hat and a copy of *Jude the Obscure*? Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are now supposedly being encouraged to make their university choices based on genuine passion and ambition rather than financial anxiety, but god forbid those interests aren't Python or pie charts. Always dreamed of studying AS-NAC? No, pointless. Be useful and train as a doctor instead.

This ethos is one, I think, Cambridge implicitly echoes. Look at the graduate and internship fair: there were enough tech and financial consulting companies to make me question whether I was in

the Student Services Centre or a cheap Canary Wharf cosplay. Creative careers get little more than the odd webinar which, even with the cultural capital of a Cambridge degree, doesn't really encourage disadvantaged students that following their passions can materialise into a supportive foundation for their futures. The message we're left with is 'join the Civil Service! Or do...nothing?'

Such attitudes do nothing for social mobility. Every degree not deemed a priority by the government (or not equally advertised as 'employable' by our universities) will simply be translated to a waste of time. Not a priority equates to not getting a job. And so we are stuck in the same bitter spiral: the humanities (the irrelevant, shunned, 'Mickey Mouse degrees') remain firmly in the grasp of the elite. Working-class students are scared away from pursuing the arts because there is no clear vocation promised at the end of their degree nor will they receive any extra funding to help them through it (except maybe a college grant which most prospective students don't even know about unless they apply and get in). Yes, of course it is good that action is being taken so that the poorest students do not graduate with the highest debts, but this selective approach to equalising access to higher education is really just a policy enactment of that 'your next job could be in cyber' ad.

I am tired of this message that working-class students must do vocational

courses. I know we need people in STEM. I know the NHS is understaffed. But why can't we also pursue our intellectual curiosities? Why is that becoming a freedom for just a privileged few? The comments I have received about studying English, even from Cambridge students who you think would know better (what is this university but a geek commune), telling me I'm going to be a barista (which only confirms their own snobbery – anyway I think I'd make a mean mocha so there) or a teacher (a highly respectable and important job, oh no!), perpetuates that such courses should only be for certain people. Those with money to burn, not money to make.

If the humanities don't make it onto this 'priority' list, and it sure doesn't seem like they will, the only people studying them will be those who can afford it. I love English but I do find myself clinging to the shiny Cambridge degree label to justify my choices, to justify my degree's worth: yeah it might be unemployable but this is Cambridge so it's different I swear! But an institution shouldn't define a discipline. Students should be free to study any course anywhere with the help and encouragement to do so. It irks me that every politician and their nan did a PPE degree for free growing up, but are now shaking their heads and tutting at young people who deign to follow in their footsteps. Why don't you go back to university and become an engineer?

“It irks me that every politician and their nan did a PPE degree for free growing up”

The maintenance grant shouldn't operate on a give and take basis. Working-class students should have the freedom to study any degree without overt stress about funding themselves during their course and the debt they'll face after. If anything, they need more access to the arts. Where are the working-class Classicists in Cambridge? Or History of Art students? Let's show that these disciplines are accessible and worthwhile rather than keeping them behind opaque gallery displays of classist snobbery.

The government needs a diverse graduate workforce if it wants to renew Britain. Prioritising and bankrolling STEM alone will not achieve that. Humanities students are taught a unique set of skills in their own right – critical thinking, communication, how society works and how we can deal with its challenges – and these provide much-needed balance and benefits. Only a select privileged few will be equipped and encouraged to do that if the government keeps to this course of action, studying the humanities at Cambridge will seem something unachievable and useless, locked behind a paywall. That doesn't look like levelling the playing field to me. Dangling financial incentives over disadvantaged students' heads only limits their choices and fosters more division; until the government rolls out maintenance grants for all students on any course who need it they are simply taking us one step forward and three steps back.

Science

Should you miss your 9am lecture?

Milena Aarts makes the case for skipping the 9am for the sake of a few extra hours of sleep

The dreaded ring of the alarm you set only four hours ago after returning from Wednesday Revs may be familiar to many of you. In that groggy state of sleep paired with a splitting headache, you might wonder whether you should do the right thing and go to your 9am, or sleep for a few more precious hours. The odd all-nighter might not do too much harm, but research suggests that sleep deprivation, whether a result of Cambridge's wonderful nightlife or too many late nights spent at the library, may impair your cognitive performance.

“Repeatedly missing out on those eight hours will leave you zoning out for days to come

It will come as no surprise that lack of sleep affects your ability to pay attention. A study by David Dinges split participants into groups that slept zero, four, six and eight hours and re-

corded the number of times they failed to respond to a stimulus. This 'lapse' of attention was attributed to microsleeps, experienced by individuals that are chronically sleep-deprived, during which the participant starts to close their eyes and their senses are temporarily paralysed.

Interestingly, the results showed that the reaction times of individuals that had slept six hours each night for ten days were as impaired as those who had not slept for 24 hours straight. Even after three nights of recovery sleep, their performance did not return to the baseline established by their performance after eight hours of sleep every night. Therefore, repeat-

edly missing out on those eight hours may leave you drifting to sleep at the back of the lecture theatre, or zoning out for days to come.

Lack of sleep may also impair your ability to consolidate knowledge into your long-term memory. This was shown in a study led by Matthew Walker which asked a group of well-slept individuals and a group of sleep-deprived individuals to learn new facts. After both groups

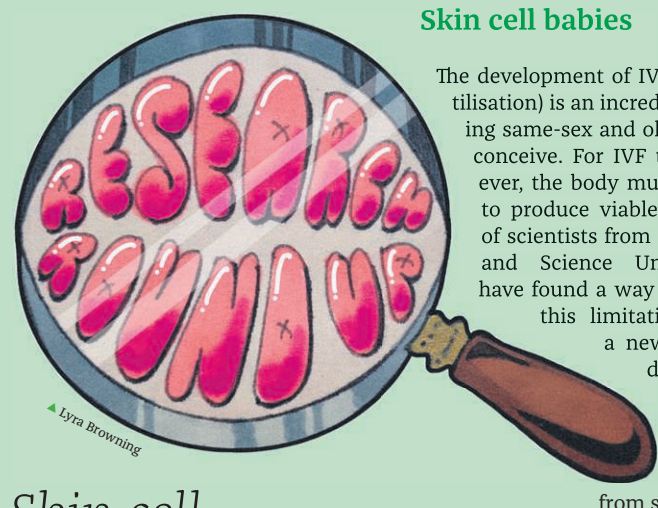
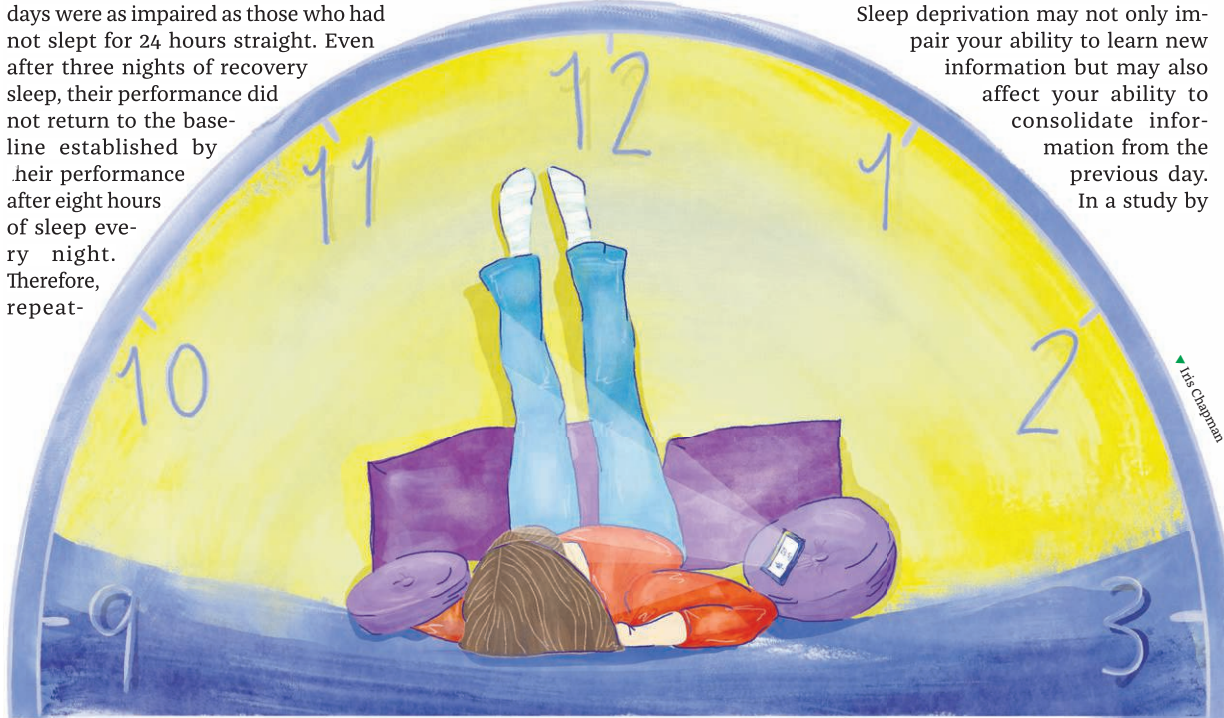
received two nights of good sleep, they were both given a test based on the taught facts and it was found that the performance of the sleep-deprived group was 19% lower. Furthermore, MRI scans, which allow localised brain activity to be visualised, showed that in the sleep-deprived group there was no significant learning activity found in the hippocampus, which is the part of the brain where new memories are stored.

Sleep deprivation may not only impair your ability to learn new information but may also affect your ability to consolidate information from the previous day. In a study by

Robert Stickgold at Harvard University, both well-slept and sleep-deprived participants were led through a visual memory task. The results showed that individuals who hadn't slept showed no improvement in memory consolidation unlike the well-slept participants. So, if you feel like everything goes in one ear and out the other, it might be worthwhile to sleep a little longer.

Do you often feel like you have gotten out of the wrong side of bed? Research also suggests that a lack of sleep can make you more prone to mood swings. During sleep, the pre-frontal cortex – responsible for logical reasoning and decision-making – inhibits another part of the brain called the amygdala, which processes strong negative emotions. Without sleep, the amygdala shows over a 60% amplification in emotional reactivity. Additionally, the striatum – responsible for reward processing – becomes hyperactive. Without sleep, the regulation of the emotion centres in the brain are disrupted, potentially leading to poor decision-making and a difficulty to balance strong emotions. Perhaps your supervision partner wasn't more annoying than usual, and you ought to do the question sheets before 2am.

A lack of sleep leads to attention deficits, a struggle to stick things to memory and difficulty regulating emotions – a recipe for disaster. So, instead of going to your 9am, in the long run it might actually prove worthwhile to have a lie in.



Skin cell babies and organic solar panels: *Kalina Poydovska* presents some of the latest scientific developments

Skin cell babies

The development of IVF (in-vitro fertilisation) is an incredible feat, helping same-sex and older couples to conceive. For IVF to work, however, the body must still be able to produce viable eggs. A team of scientists from Oregon Health and Science University may have found a way to circumvent this limitation, designing a new form of cell division called 'mitomeiosis' to effectively create egg cells from skin cells.

Essentially, a donor egg cell has its nucleus (the part of the cell containing its genetic material, in the form of DNA) removed and replaced with a skin cell nucleus. To do this, the mismatch in chromosome numbers must be addressed. Eggs have 23 chromosomes, pairing with 23 from sperm to form a complete organism. Since skin cells have 46 chromosomes, the two sets of genetic material were previously not interchangeable.

To understand how this novel technique works, some context on normal fertilisation is required. Immature egg cells are stored in the ovaries, frozen partway through the cell division process. They contain double the normal amount of genetic material; each of the 46 chromosomes has been copied. Each month, one egg cell resumes cell division (a process known as 'meiosis'), dividing this genetic material between

two new cells. Cell division pauses again at the stage called 'metaphase II'. After fertilisation, the egg completes meiosis, splitting once more to produce a mature egg cell. This cell has 23 chromosomes, which can combine with the sperm cell's 23 chromosomes to form a complete set of genetic material that will later develop into an embryo.

Mitomeiosis takes advantage of this process, persuading skin cells to discard half of their chromosomes. The skin-cell nucleus is transferred to pre-fertilisation egg cells stuck in metaphase II. A drug called a cyclin-dependent kinase inhibitor is needed to push the new cell into the next stage of division. Hence the egg cell's normal mechanisms discard half of the skin cell's chromosomes, just as they would have done naturally.

“This opens up the possibility that male skin cells could be reprogrammed into egg cells

When the new cells were fertilised, however, less than 10% developed into early-stage embryos suitable for IVF. Chromosomes paired up randomly,

producing incorrect combinations. Also, genetic information is normally shuffled between paired chromosomes to create new patterns in the offspring – this phenomenon was absent, which limits genetic diversity. The procedure seems far from ready for clinical use.

Nevertheless, these advances could bring even greater flexibility to IVF, broadening the range of cells that could be used as sources of genetic material. Much like the Polyjuice Potion in Harry Potter, a single skin cell might be sufficient to recreate someone's likeness. This also opens up the possibility that male skin cells could be reprogrammed into egg cells: perhaps Zeus birthing Athena from his head is not so fantastical after all.

A radical reimagining of solar panels

Cambridge researchers have demonstrated a way to use organic, rather than inorganic, materials for solar cells, which was previously thought unlikely. This could allow for the development of sleeker, more cost-efficient solar panels.

Normal solar cells are made from two types of inorganic silicon semiconductor, materials that conduct electricity only under certain, typically extreme, conditions, called n-type and p-type, joined at a critical junction. An electric field naturally forms there, acting as a one-way street for electrons. When sunlight reaches this junction, energy from light particles (photons) 'knocks' electrons from silicon atoms, freeing them and leaving 'holes' where they used to be.

The electric field ushers the electrons

and holes to different sides of the cell, building a potential difference: one side becomes negatively charged with extra electrons and the other positively charged with holes. When the two sides are connected by a wire, electrons travel down the wire to balance out the difference in charge. This movement of electrons is a current, and thus energy from sunlight can be converted into electricity.

Rather than relying on two types of inorganic silicon and the junction between them, the scientists used only one organic semiconductor, called P3TTM (triphenyl-substituted TTM). Each molecule of this material has an electron that is unpaired and can more easily be transferred to other molecules, making it a 'radical'.

When light hits the material, the unpaired electron from one molecule can jump to a neighbouring molecule. The original molecule gains a positive charge, since it has lost a negative electron, whereas the second molecule gains the electron and becomes negative. Positive and negative ions can either immediately recombine to emit light, or separate into free charges, generating current much like conventional solar cells.

Importantly, nearly all of the charge generated was successfully collected. This 'close-to-unity charge collection' is unprecedented for organic semiconductors, illustrating that they do have practical potential.

The single-material design is simpler, more flexible, and could enable the development of solar cells which are lighter and cheaper to manufacture.

The students making science accessible to all

Ruby Jackson speaks with Cambridge Hands-On Science, the group inspiring the next generation of scientists

“We can show children that science isn't a 'boring' subject". This is the aim of Cambridge Hands-On Science, better known as CHaOS, a student-run outreach group that organises volunteer-led science demonstration workshops for children.

Having grown out of the Cambridge Student Science Week group set up in 1998, CHaOS has expanded considerably since their origins. They run events throughout the year, the highlight of these being their summer roadshow. For seven weeks in July and August, a group of volunteers tours the country, visiting schools, libraries, festivals, museums and scout jamborees to demonstrate their experiments, which range from cantilever bridges to cuddly microbes.

Those I spoke to were hugely passionate about demonstrating, with many commenting that taking part in CHaOS has changed how they engage with their subject. Physics PhD student and secretary John said that demonstrating "has taught me to look deeper: I can memorise the equation, but [can I] derive it from more common-sense arguments?"

For co-president Isobel, volunteering has offered a way to engage with science at a different pace. "[CHaOS] reminded me that I really like science, and it can

be exciting [...] it was like a breath of fresh air."

Jeovana, a veterinary medicine student, whose first summer roadshow was this year, enjoyed her experience so much it has led her to consider a career in teaching. While challenging – "you have to think of how to answer in a way that they might understand" – demonstrating has offered her valuable skills too, "especially in a career [in which] you have to try to change a very complicated science subject to a simple thing to tell your client".

For many, the most rewarding part is seeing the impact they are having on the children. Safety Officer Jessica told me that making pH indicator using red cabbage was one of her favourite experiments. "Seeing the kids' faces when you add the indicator to lemon juice and it turns bright pink and they're so excited about it [...] that's a really fun one."

This avid enthusiasm was something I noticed myself when demonstrating for CHaOS. John told me, "If a kid's interested they will just talk to you for ages [...] they don't have all the preconceptions that school might provide."

"A kid in secondary school might think 'oh, that's the class with all the equations'" CHaOS aims to dispel the preconceptions children might have surrounding science.

The summer roadshow is crucial in ensuring this work can extend as far as possible, bringing hands-on science to children who might otherwise not have

“A group of volunteers tours the country to demonstrate their experiments, which range from cantilever bridges to cuddly microbes

been exposed to it. Jessica recalled: "One of the schools we went to this year, the teacher was saying that some of the kids had never left the village [...] we could bring exciting science to them." Jeovana said, "The kids and parents who tend to go to [public events] already have an interest in science [...] doing outreach in primary schools especially gives them that exposure."

CHaOS events are subsidised by external sponsors, making them free for

the schools they visit. John explained, "we try to visit schools with a higher-than-average percentage of children entitled to free school meals for more effective outreach. Seeing the whole class allows us to chat to the kids who might not already have an interest in science, ask for science kits for their birthdays, or go on trips to museums."

Isobel said "You get to talk to kids who don't think they're made for maths, or they're not a sciencey person."

The change in the children's perception of science is illustrated by the 'draw a scientist' activity the group runs before and after events. Jessica recalled that initially, "You see a lot of scientists with crazy hair doing explosions and they all call their scientists geniuses, and often scary or old."

Then we get drawings that look more like the demonstrators. Sometimes you can match them up to individual demonstrators [...] and they're much more likely to describe the scientists as kind and hardworking."

Everyone I spoke to said doing CHaOS alongside their degree had been one of the best parts of their experience at Cambridge.

John, who has been part of the group since his first year, told me, "I'm pretty sure, four years ago, I was pretty bad at explaining things. But it's the people I met during CHaOS that helped me become a better volunteer, better explainer, and a better scientist [...] I think that's why I stuck with CHaOS for so long."



THE MAYS



We are currently seeking to appoint a student Editor-in-Chief for The Mays.

Now in its 34th year, The Mays is a book of the best of new student poetry, short stories, creative photography and art from the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford.

The Mays is credited with launching Zadie Smith's career. The publication has featured a wide range of high-profile guest editors over the years, including Kate Bush, Stephen Fry, Arlo Parks, Rupri Kaur, Nick Cave, Patti Smith, Jarvis Cocker, Ted Hughes and Oscar Murillo.

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The application deadline is 6pm, Friday 31st October 2025

www.themaysanthology.co.uk

(Student submissions for art, poetry, short stories etc will open during Lent 2026)



The Ultra-Violet Catastrophe or a Storm in a Tea Cup

Einstein's Other Blunder

Heisenberg, The Salieri of Physics

Atomic Circus: Jumps and Spins

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Fed up with the tired old orthodoxy of quantum mechanics: particle-wave duality, the uncertainty principle, entanglement or spooky action at a distance, spin, the standard model, many non-existent particles – the list could go on.

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Could the UVC be solved using vector calculus? Was Heisenberg jealous of his rival Schrödinger? Is there sleight of hand at play in some experiments? Is the imaginary number $\sqrt{-1}$ real after all? Is a

quantum computer possible?

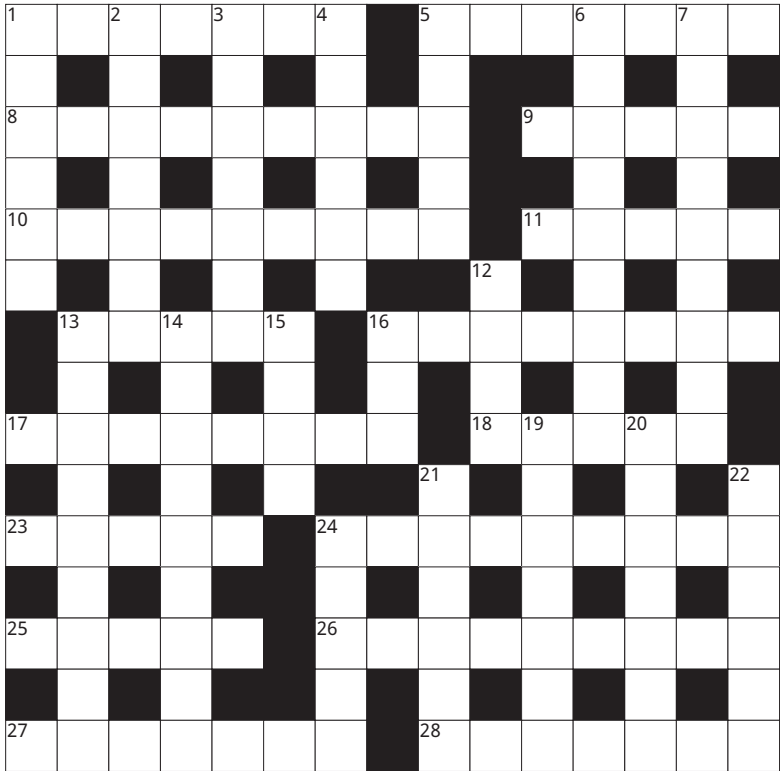
These and many more questions are tackled head on, in well researched heresy against the Schoolmen of the 21st century.

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

The Smoking Area

Crossword by Cheggers



CRYPTIC:

ACROSS

- 1 An expert in endless pain offers cure (7)
- 5 Return call in girl's misbelief (7)
- 8 Slender pleasure without heads for attention (9)
- 9 Cracks greeting in public agency (5)
- 10 Toilsome article in pansy is broken (9)
- 11 Write no chapters around prophet (5)
- 13 Hide the Spanish in my French fruit (5)
- 16 Consider losing German for free (8)
- 17 Unwrap speck, pork, pinot and cheese (8)
- 18 Fly around new detection system (5)
- 23 City diminishes without walls (5)
- 24 Fighter is apparently pleased to have consumed her (9)
- 25 Flip ball in front of Illinois grill (5)
- 26 Central in monster failure (9)
- 27 Collected dame messily grabs fool (7)
- 28 Figure's battered go on Nan! (9)

DOWN

- 1 European shine (6)
- 2 Smetana ruins greeting (7)
- 3 Music style plays badly in company (7)
- 4 Fisherman is lost in fury (6)
- 5 Failure not lost in town's bed (5)
- 6 Opera at home after her long shift (9)
- 7 Component of calcium and mashed apricot (9)
- 12 Be rising and rubbish dwindles (4)
- 13 Swirl merlots around after mum (9)
- 14 Ship sinker piles up in toilets (5,4)
- 15 Headless hunter falls in crime film (4)
- 16 Sign for zero gravity bricks (4)
- 19 Entertaining without starting Charlie Weasley's letter (7)
- 20 Vocal piece has parts on guitar inside (3,4)
- 21 Prisoner hides girl's weapon (6)
- 22 Endlessly annoying dish (6)
- 24 Injecting nitrogen into matrix is hard work (5)

QUICK (same answers):

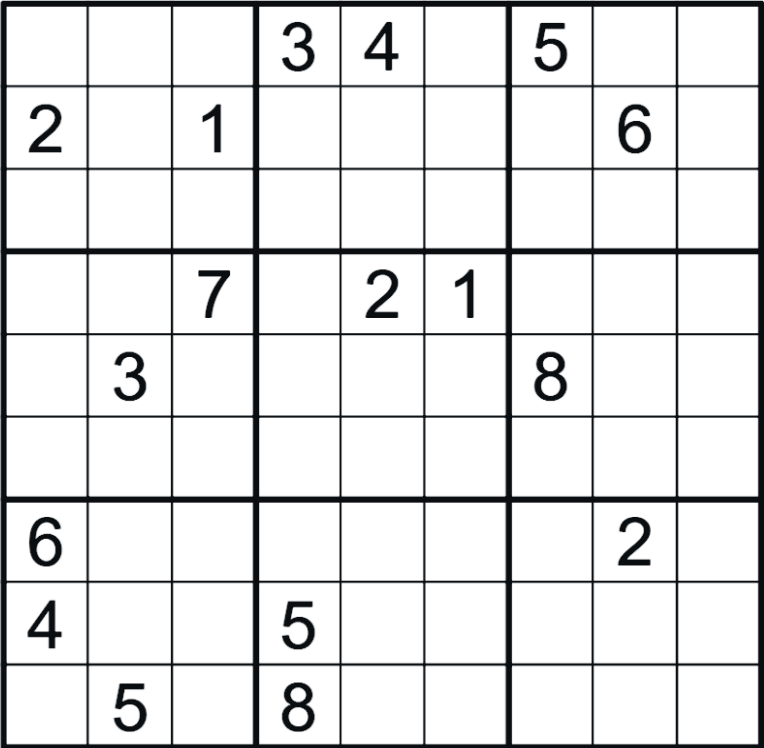
ACROSS

- 1 Poisonous element (7)
- 5 US city (7)
- 8 Stirrers (9)
- 9 Synthetic fibre (5)
- 10 Became more intense (9)
- 11 Discharge (5)
- 13 Swords (5)
- 16 Unit for potential difference (8)
- 17 Assistant (8)
- 18 Jabs (5)
- 23 Oscillate (5)
- 24 Dystopian (9)
- 25 Item of jewellery (5)
- 26 Administrator (9)
- 27 Avoiding interaction with others (7)
- 28 Runaways (8)

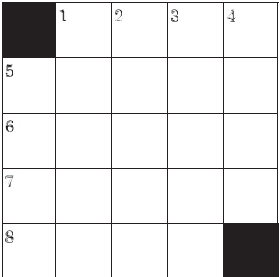
DOWN

- 1 Behind a ship (6)
- 2 Short meeting (5-2)
- 3 Roman god of the sea (7)
- 4 Without friendliness (6)
- 5 Treated (5)
- 6 European capital (9)
- 7 Having two equal sides (9)
- 12 Trim (4)
- 13 Mountainous flower (9)
- 14 Irregular (9)
- 15 Type of wrestling (4)
- 16 Relations (3)
- 19 Virginia Woolf novel (7)
- 20 Territory ruled by an emir (7)
- 21 Broad strip (6)
- 22 Gathers (6)
- 24 Oxford college (5)

Sudoku



Midatlantic Miniature by Goober



ACROSS

- 1 State what you did when chased. (4)
- 5 English popstar drinking German beer (5)
- 6 Covenants in Paul's first book in the bible (5)
- 7 Imitates an owl circling hunt (5)
- 8 Extensions of natural stratigraphy, primarily (4)

DOWN

- 1 State what you are when not chaste. (5)
- 2 Surveillance recording and rolling (5)
- 3 Some choral scholars making different vowel (5)
- 4 Sent off home (4)
- 5 Feature of churches and home on speaker (4)

Quicky Quiz

1. Eating ice-cream and listening to Mozart are two activities, famously documented to be have been beloved by which physicist?

2. In 1955, Swiss engineer George de Mestral patented what new fastening material he had invented, derived from burdock seeds?

3. Which Northern Irish settlement was most recently awarded city status, in 2022?

4. The Byrds' 1965 hit Turn! Turn! Turn! was based on a poem from which book of the Bible?

5. Of what disease did King George III die in 1820?

▼ Iris Chapman



The spy who (once) loved me

Varsity's Archivist [Iris Marnier](#) explores secret service recruitment at Cambridge over the years

Is the love affair between Cambridge and espionage dead? Watch a James Bond film from the 1960s, and you'll realise how starkly different the image of the 'spy' is today. The secret agent, swanning about in his tailored suits, charming the doorman, and sneaking into balls appears eerily like the old stereotype of a Cambridge student - one produced by overconfidence and an expensive education. I sifted through the Varsity archives to see whether the Cambridge spy is a historical myth or a present reality.

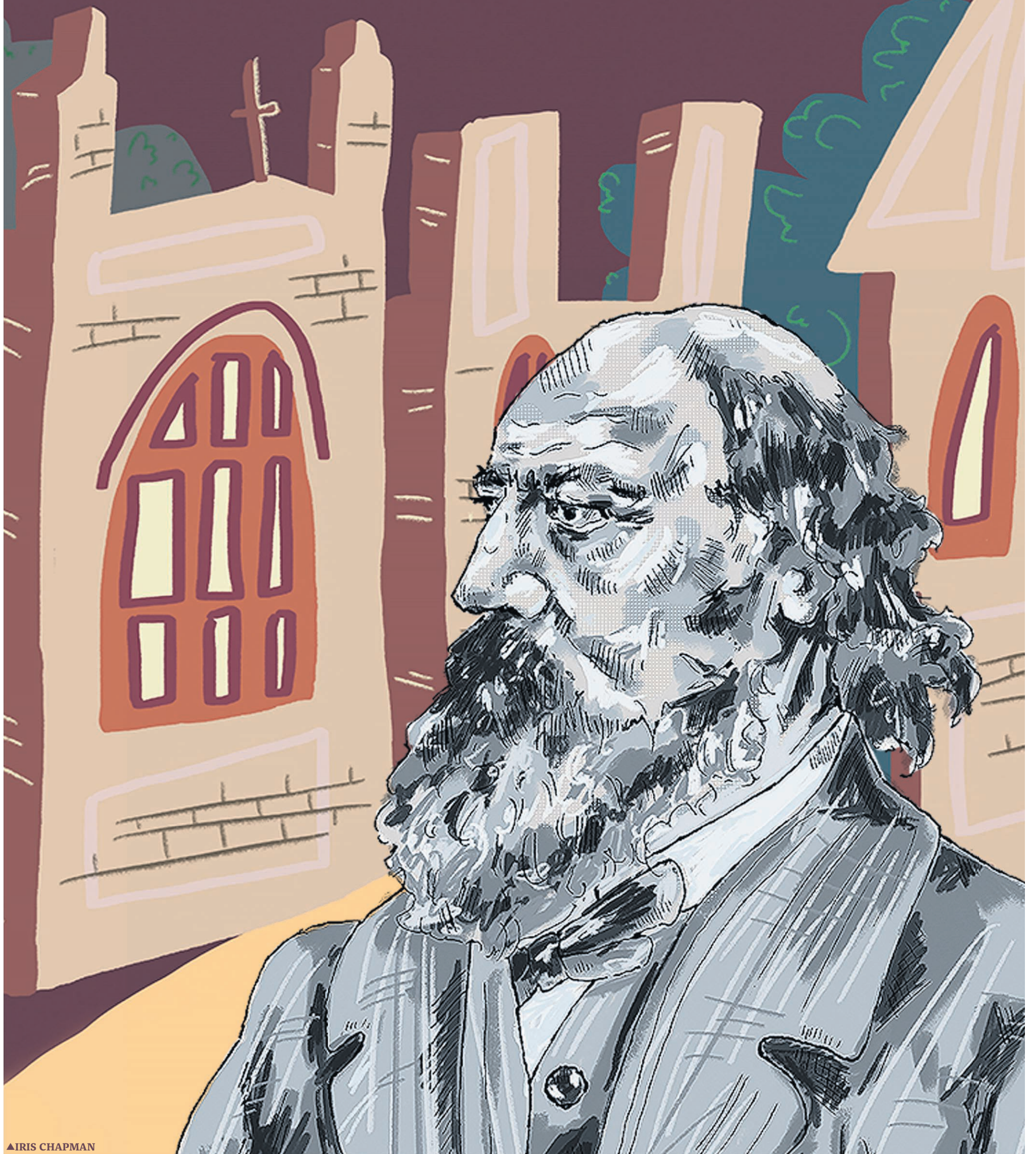
Cambridge was historically an MI6 recruitment hub, with each college rumoured to have its own 'talent-spotter'. The exception to this rule, the story goes, was Trinity after its infamous alumni - the 'Cambridge Five' - were exposed in the 1980s as having spied for the Soviet Union during the Cold War. A Varsity issue from 1981 describes the men as "The heart of the Cambridge spy ring" beginning in the 1930s, with Anthony Blunt (a fellow at Trinity) the talent spotter and recruiter.

In 2022, the BBC reported that the age of the 'tap on the shoulder' was long gone. No time of death was given, but in 2003 a Varsity article detailing the appointment of MI6 chief Sir Richard Dearlove as the new Pembroke Master, suggested that recruitment at Cambridge had declined in the previous two decades. That year, the Home Office stated that "those who serve the public, should represent who they protect," and online recruitment drives today are evidence of this continuing trend. Equally, Cambridge today no longer seeks only to educate the upper echelons of society.

Part of the romanticisation of the 'tap on the shoulder' perhaps speaks to a nostalgia for elitism in Cambridge. Just as the Cambridge Five were members of 'The Apostles,' private members' groups are still present in Cambridge life.

Last Lent, discussion on this topic was reanimated by the appointment of Pembroke alumna, Blaise Metreweli, as Head of MI6. At a recent subject drinks, a former supervisor of Metreweli's told me how she had received a call from 'higher-ups' asking for anecdotes about the student she taught 25 years ago. It appears the old adage "it's not what you know, but who you know" may still ring true. In 2003, Varsity concluded that "despite the new openness [in recruitment], the fast-track way into the Service is still undoubtedly by trusted personal recommendation". So, while your name is unlikely to be found in a wax-sealed envelope anymore, any budding spies may still gain from sucking up to their supervisors.

vulture.



My third year bucket list

It's time to start ticking things off, says Holly Hardman

As we enter the final year of our degrees, my friends and I have realised that our carefully curated lists of things to do and see before we leave Cambridge have been left relatively uncrossed. At the start of your undergraduate degree, three years seems like so much time, but when you're suddenly entering your seventh eight-week term, you quickly realise time is running out. I've come to realise that all the things I said I'd get round to one day got forgotten. Well, this year is about making up for lost time and finally completing what I like to call my third year bucket list.



▲ Daisy Cooper

Dinner plans

Call it Stockholm Syndrome, but over my two years here, I've grown to love the comfort of the college butchery. However, as socially appeal-

ing (and as kind to the student budget) as it may be, I've realised Cambridge does have other options. The food available outside college gates is arguably, well, better. While we've all forked out a small fortune for a sweet treat from Fitzbillies, or worshipped the cheesy chips at Gardie's (RIP) after a night out, there's a lot more out there. Top of my list is the Chinese restaurant just across the street from my college, which everyone but me seems to have tried. Maybe I'm too loyal to my home takeaway, but I think it's because it's just too close, and I felt it was inevitable that I'd go at some point. This year? I'll finally take the plunge.

Becoming cultured

Cambridge is home to some of the world's (arguably) best minds, but many fail to take in the city's wider cultural offerings. This might be my Art A-level talking, but there are few activities more likely to make you feel cultured than visiting an art gallery. Whether you're there to read every single information plaque, to sketch some of your favourite pieces, or simply to take it all in, the feel-



A library crawl

Unfortunately, third year remains one centralised around the large-looming final boss of exams. HSPSers are (debatable) blessed in second year by a 100% weighting on third year, something which now seems a lot less fun than it did before. So, while I endeavour to strike the perfect work-life balance this year, I'm won't pretend that a lot of my time won't be spent reading. This doesn't have to put an end to the bucket list because, as ashamed as I am to admit it, there's still a long list of libraries I'm yet to visit. Only studying in your college library may seem boring, but I'm blessed to have a pretty beautiful one, and, with it so close, it's hard not to settle for creature comforts. My point remains, though; this year, I want to push the boat out a little. You may even catch me in my subject library – a sight as yet unseen. The UL, though? Never.



Go out on the town

Maybe I'm showing my age, but a Rumboogie isn't exactly my idea of a dream night out anymore. And this isn't me calling out those people who still dance to Mariah Carey every week – we all need to let off steam somewhere. But for the times when my friends and I want something a little different, we've started keeping an eye out for places we can drink and dance without hordes of freshers. Unfortunately, this will likely mean forking out a little, because as much as we love La Raza's free entry, the drink prices more than make up for it. Speaking of overpriced drinks – one of my top priorities this year is finally completing the Cambridge Nine Pub Crawl. The city has more than its fair share of watering holes, and by no means should you limit yourself to these nine, but the promise of a free t-shirt at the end is more than enough to convince me to crawl.

While I'm sure there's a lot missing from mine, the third year bucket list is something that you have to make your own. Regardless of your priorities, we're all just trying to make the most of our time here. Besides, no one knows what else you have left to do in this city apart from you – I just hope I've provided some inspiration. And don't worry, even if you don't get it all ticked off this year, there's always a panic Masters!

Table for Ittou

Far beneath the madding crowd of King's Parade is a charming cubbyhole. With an entrance like a vertical matchbox, Ittou Noodle Bar is easy to miss, and, despite being students at King's directly opposite, Ed and I both took over a year to give it a second look: perhaps the lamppost out front obscured it from view. With this in mind, it seems to be a shoo-in for the now-clichéd status of 'hidden gem', but with queues commonplace, its existence is an open secret at most. Ittou has built up something of a cult-status in the Cambridge food scene, delivering delicious East Asian cuisine. Its opening times of 12-8pm make it unsuitable for a late-night dining spot, so we arrived bright and early at 6pm on a Friday.

After the initially daunting queue whittled down, we were shown from the stairwell past the open kitchen into one of two main dining areas. The walls in Ittou are adorned with Japanese art, as well as a curious abundance of mirrors (seriously, 50% of the wall of the main dining area are reflections of the other). Even if this house of mirrors style decor creates an impression of size, from the phone box sized stairwell to the cloistered dining area, space is not a luxury that Ittou boasts much of. However, the cosiness is central to its unique charm. This is complemented by its service: direct and efficient, with a casual politeness that puts you at ease. Where so many restaurants clamour to feel rustic and relaxed, Ittou thrives in being unpretentiously and unconsciously so.

Onto the most important thing remained: the food. Its menu shows a wide East Asian influence, offering dishes that are predominantly

Japanese,

with

Korean

and

Thai

influences. Though, it also has as an unfortunately Western disclaimer: 'NO ADDED MSG'. MSG has enjoyed somewhat of a boom in popularity this decade – pushing back against outdated myths surrounding its effects – and is prevalent in East Asian cuisine.

That Ittou explicitly states the lack of 'added' (note that many ingredients used by the restaurant likely already include natural MSG) appears a little unusual.

We ordered three things: pork tonkotsu ramen and beef bibimbap for mains, with tori karaage on the side – all of which arrived together and were happily passed back and forth between us.

First off, one of Ittou's most-renowned dishes – their pork tonkotsu ramen. Chashu pork sat in a bath of a creamy pork broth, filled with egg noodles and a soy-sauce marinated ramen egg. The dish was as dreamy as it sounds. As ramen goes, tonkotsu is not packed full of aromatics, allowing the delivery of a flavour of singular clarity and richness, derived from the slow boiling of pork bones. This is compounded by a

silky finish that coats the mouth, leaving the pork's intense richness to linger. The chashu pork itself was a delight, with a healthy portion size. The chefs at Ittou have perfected the art of chashu – the pork is able to maintain its structure when picked up by chopsticks but simultaneously surrenders itself to dissolution when eaten. The noodles themselves were more than just a vessel for the broth's flavour; they had a welcome bite to them.

Dish score = 9

Beef bibimbap is a traditional Korean dish: a blend of sticky rice, beef, vegetables and a chilli sauce – all topped with a runny fried egg. Simple ingredients, executed to a high standard. The beef was the star of this dish. Perfectly velvety and thinly sliced, it melted on the tongue, and carried a balance of spice, salt, and tanginess from the gochujang marinade. However, we would have preferred there to be more of it on the plate. The hot clay pot bowls the bibimbap was served in resulted in a lovely crisp to the bottom layer of rice and added a nuttiness to the dish. Another minor criticism were the vegetables: kimchi, picked cucumber, and carrot. While tasty on their own, the dish as a whole would have benefitted with a more intense acidity from these to cut through the heat and salt of the gochujang-based chilli sauce.

Dish score = 7.5

On the side, the tori karaage – a form of Japanese fried chicken thigh achieves a The meat brined fried. rather than breast, Ittou real depth of flavour in this dish. had clearly been marinated and before being coated and double-fried. The chicken itself was deliciously seasoned, with the longed-for salt and umami flavour delivered in spades by soy sauce in the marinade. The starch in the coating crisped up nicely, although by the end of the meal, the crunch had started to fade. The chicken was served with a spiced mayonnaise – the perfect condiment accompaniment. The mayo's light heat cleanly cut through the chicken's richness. **Dish score = 8**

Overall scores:

Atmosphere = 9

Food = 8.5

Value = 7

In conclusion, a visit to Ittou is harmonious from start to finish. There is complete congruence between the lowkey service, tasteful decor, and hearty, flavoursome food. Your socks are unlikely to be blown off, but in Cambridge, that is sometimes the last thing you need.



▲ Finn Costello O'Reilly



'Something old' in Romilly Norfolk's room

Loveday Cookson reflects on Space Invaders past

The title of this article is unusually appropriate, not just in its contents but the circumstances that surround it. At this juncture I must confess that this is not a recent interview – in fact, Romilly doesn't even live in this room anymore. By now it will have been reassigned, at least once, if not twice, emptied and re-filled with a new iteration of occupant, one whose decor decisions will not echo Romilly's. This interview has haunted my to-do list for the better part of a year, buried beneath the growing burden of third year and the sprawling expanse of the after. But to look back through the lens of everything contained within being "something old," this space positions itself in a broader history, with the fabric of Romilly's room built on inheritances, built on "something old".

While finding a steady bedrock in the material and artistic gifts of her family, Romilly does not shy away from a powerful self-assertion as a geographer in the prominent flag collection that forms the focal point of her room. As she says: "I'm a geographer. You'd never have guessed". Connecting with her name, she has the flag of Norfolk Island, while Eswatini and Kiribati earn their keep through aesthetic delight, and frequent mention in lectures.

Carved out like geographical borders, the various corners of her pinboard wave the flags for the beautiful facets that compose Romilly's life. Compartmentalised into family, football, home, and music, it takes on the same discrete perimeters that Cambridge creates, the division into terms, and years, parts of the tripos, colleges, home, and university, here and there. They all co-exist in all of us, crowding up against each other, occasionally daring to overlap. Romilly's family section has grown to include photos of her college wives, welcomed into the fold of family through the unique bonds this place breeds.

Keen readers of *Varsity* will know of Romilly's

From the Foo Fighters to Bruno Mars and Circa Waves, her collection evidences evenings with her family.

Academics and family coincide in the poster of Mount Etna that adorns her wall, marking a day's truancy in year 10 to scale the volcano with her dad.

Nearly every item that adorns the many surfaces of the mid-century modern furniture is a gift from family. The quilt made by Romilly's grandmother, Shirley Norfolk, lays sprawled across the college-standard arm chair, bringing a colourful touch of home that nets in the many colours of her space.

A shell houses the many pieces of jewellery Romilly has been gifted, although, she confesses: "most of my jewellery is not a circle". Part of the beauty of these items is these im-

mas; the tinsel tangibly transforms a university room into an extension of home. The mid-century modern style even speaks to the 70s dream her parents realised in the eBay sourced orange furniture of their own house. Romilly explains that: "I don't really buy decorations for my room because they feel like nice, but they can also have a story". The stories are often her family's, but also her own, with a tote bag collection termed "one of the best tote bounties ever seen in Cambridge". The soapstone Buddha statue, which she moved from her grandmother's bathroom to her own room, is dusted regularly and placed at eye height so it always catches her

natic, animal enthusiast and a hot mess". While nothing about her room suggests mess, everything else is embodied throughout: a

Varsity laptop sticker, many pictures of Brentford FC, and a flag collection unrivalled by anyone bar the UN.

Romilly's room, as well as this article, is "something old," something that has sat in more than one place, manifested in several iterations, and is now due a change hands to someone new. Her room is a catalogue of her loved ones, interests, and the love shared between the many places and people she calls home.

Everything in here will now be somewhere new, but alongside these spaces, they will soon become "something old".



▲ Loveday Cookson

perfections, moulding to the form of other peoples' hands, holding the shape of all the previous owners, all of her loved ones who'd worn it before. Her grandmother, an avid rhino lover, is honoured by Romilly's rhino ring, even if it does snag on everything she wears. Furnishing her room consisted mainly of raiding her mum's pottery collection, alongside a canvas of Taylor Swift lyrics and several of her mother's paintings. Romilly keeps a piece of tinsel from home as her mum was born three days after Christ-

eye. The gentle eclecticism is embraced by Romilly, who notes you can be: "Deputy Editor, proud geographer, football fa-



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“Everything in life is just a *Varsity* article

extensive experience in live music, writing about her summers spent at Rock in Rio because, as she mentions: "Everything in life is just a *Varsity* article. You just do things and you go, I'll do it for *Varsity*". But more than that, music connects her to her dad who works concert lighting. This materialises across her room in a collection of set lists Romilly has accrued through years of attendance, and occasionally playing guinea pig for tech run-throughs.

Fashion

Sidgwick Invaders: what are people wearing to lectures this Autumn?

Flossie Bullion and Mary Anna Im visit Sidgwick Site to discover what students want to see this autumn

Welcome to Sidgwick Invaders – where we have taken on the humanities site, in an attempt to find and interview stylish people to gain a deeper understanding of student fashion choices. Student fashion is a frequently discussed topic, but we aim to actually discover how unsuspecting lecture-goers dress as they begin to tackle the start of an academic term. This week, we brave one of the most notorious Cambridge sites, particularly notable for its hordes of fashion-forward students: Sidgwick Site.

Just as everyone seems to have an opinion about the industrial and unforgiving architecture, everyone seems to have decided that the fashion choices of Sidgwick students are either an act of cohesive genius, or all rather unfortunately unoriginal. Whichever opinion is your persuasion, Sidgwick fashion is undeniably important to Cambridge student fashion in general. We decided that as its abundant concrete becomes decorated with colourful Autumn leaves, Sidgwick site would be an excellent place to begin our foray into finding out what students are actually wearing this autumn.



Izzy & Lara, English

We first came across Lara and Izzy, second year Englings as we patrolled around sidg. Against the concrete pillars, both of them donned fur coats on top of thick jumpers for extra warmth in the chilly October weather. Patterns were central to their outfits, with both an animal print scarf and camo trousers being the focal point of their 'fits. Large, round, red-tinted glasses drew the attention upwards, while a classic samba was worn on the feet – the perfect middle-ground between style and function for those long lecture days.

When asked about their autumnal fashion staples, the concepts they love for this season were seen within their outfits. Izzy's fashion staple this season is a bit of fur, but also a specific colour that will be implemented into the autumnal outfits.

"I've really gotten into khaki green – matching the trees, matching the foliage." Breaking free from the usual neutrals and burgundy, green is a great way to point towards autumn in your outfits; the perfect colour to memorialise the leaves at their peak as they start to fall away.

Lara's fashion staples conquer functionality as well as cuteness. "I love a chunky scarf. Always a chunky scarf with a red jumper. I also love a red jumper, it's such an autumnal colour. Also, thermal tights. I still love a skirt in autumn, but I have to get out the thermal tights." As the weather turns cooler, wrapping up in layers is definitely the key for those cold Sidg walks. But what do they not want to see this autumn? Izzy had strong opinions on a particular head accessory: "I saw a lot of ear muffs last year and I don't f*ck with earmuffs. I just feel like they get in the way." For optimal head warmth, perhaps a hat is the go-to. Lara was also opposed to a particular type of footwear: the infamous tabis, which, for those who don't know, are a type of traditional Japanese footwear with a split-toe design, separating the big toe from the other four. We can see tabis being a marmite choice of footwear this season.

Nicki, English

Under the fabulous trees in the Sidg quad, we found Nicki, adorning neutrals in dark greens, greys, and cream, complimenting the trees in their colourways. A slouchy bag was the central accessory, representing a more relaxed structure that is discordant with the Michaelmas workload. These styles of bag are a major trend this autumn: the bag allows enough space to carry the study essentials, as well being extremely versatile and not tied to a specific occasion of wear. The calf-high boots are another staple – the perfect shoe to battle the rain and to offer warmth and comfort, especially when paired with some fleece tights.

Boots and a bag were, in fact, Nicki's autumnal fashion staples. "At least calf high to thigh high leather boots, preferably with a heel. Also big bags that can fit everything you need, as industrial as possible, as many charms on it as possible." It seems this season is the perfect time to get personalising your bags, with keyrings, scarves, or charms. However, Nicki offered specifics on how to make sure you do bags right: "No Labubus! [...] No plain bags, no more Longchamps!" For Nicki, the best autumnal bag is one that sums up you, rather than following the trends.



“People yearn to see the grey concrete of Sidgwick illuminated with bright and warm colours





Isabel and Kaan, LLM

Isabel and Kaan were sporting opposite ends of the colour spectrum completely. Isabel was dressed in dark colours, primarily black, broken up by the stripes on their black and white scarf, and their translucent calf-high stockings. Kaan, meanwhile, wore an array of colours and patterns, most notable being the leopard print sambas, which they said were their autumn fashion staple. Both Isabel and Kaan were wearing most of their autumnal staples: Isabel was loving their Wrangler jacket which they “got it in Rome for 20 euros” (bargain). Their long, flowy skirt is also a go-to this season, which for Isabel is their vintage All Saint’s skirt. For headwear, Kaan advocated for bandanas as being both a style accessory and a functionality piece to combat the autumn winds and keep your hair back and in place.

In all of their style, the two had specific ideas on what they don’t want to see this season at sidg, or anywhere else for that matter. Kaan had a particular footwear in mind: “Crocs. Platform [crocs] are fine though.” Isabel had a particular disgust for a headband: “I don’t love those Minga London headbands with the cut outs.” Instead, a smaller, knitted headband should be the headwear of choice.

Gabriella, History of Art

Gabriella was notably spotted wearing functional layers to battle the cold and the rain. Brown boots complimented the brown bag being carried, with thick tights underneath. It is tights that Gabriella focused on for their autumnal fashion staple: “I’m loving colourful tights, specifically teal and red.” Tights can be used to create a playful pop of colour against neutral pieces or as part of a more vibrant, maximalist look. Tones like red and brown can compliment the natural hues of autumn, allowing wearers to embody the season. Gabriella also had another staple in mind: “A hood. I’ve realised how wonderfully it transports you back to the womb. It’s very key around

Cambridge when you don’t want to see people you know – hood on!”

Zoe, History of Art

Near Newnham, Zoe’s outfit made up of reds, oranges and browns, complimented the red brick walls. Enhanced by a green bag, thick buttons on the top and a thin, stripey scarf, Zoe confessed that their autumn fashion staple was “a nice jacket – a nice suede bomber jacket is my current favourite at the moment”. Zoe’s suede jacket has been repaired, leading them to encourage others to reuse and repair clothes – another idea to take into this autumn.

Zoe’s layers of colours are a statement to the fact that they don’t want to see “black nonchalant fits” anymore. Colour is the best way to compliment the early dark nights, after all. Zoe advocated for colour in autumnal outfits: “Everyone needs to get more bright!”

With Autumn’s arrival, people yearn to see the grey concrete of Sidgwick illuminated with bright and warm colours. Embody the trees: be green, orange, and red. Embrace dramatic outerwear like chunky scarves, long coats, and big boots to shield yourself from the Autumn cold, but beware the college puffer. Balance a practical approach to the growing cold with bold choices, as seeing unique and interesting fashion as you go about your day can provide an excellent distraction from the chilly weather and the challenging work.

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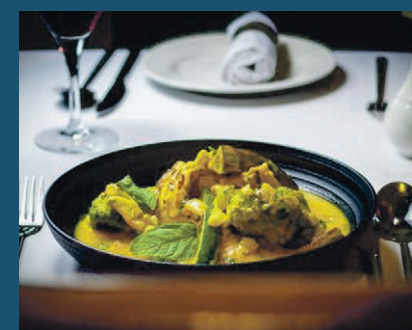
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Arts

Finding traces of Tennyson

Ellie Buckley traces a poetic journey from Lincolnshire to Cambridge

In the sleepy town of Louth, Lincolnshire, the grammar school's sports field is home to an ancient oak tree, providing the perfect spot to sit and read, or to dodge cross-country races. It only became known to me in year ten that this same tree my friends and I sat under to eat lunch, shaded from the beating sun in the summer by the canopy of branches, that Lord Alfred Tennyson sat under the oak as a student at my school, 200 years before, a time which for him was miserable and cold.

Lincolnshire, where Tennyson was born and returned to throughout his life, is full of places that the Poet Laureate, appointed in 1850, took inspiration from when writing his poems. The River Lynn, for instance, a gentle trickle which rises in the Wolds, is said to have been the inspiration for Tennyson's much loved poem 'The Brook'. One can recognise the connection through the reference to 'thirty hills', and the movement of the speaker winding 'about, and in and out'. The river, and the Lincolnshire Wolds, both move in an undulating fashion that Tennyson clearly admired and desired to highlight, with Lincolnshire being the second biggest county in the country but rather tucked away.

“Although tainted by grief, Tennyson focuses on the ‘pleasure’, or the ‘pleasant spots’ from a relationship that was birthed out of Cambridge

Although the beauty of Lincolnshire enraptured Tennyson and played a pivotal part in his depictions of the natural landscape, his time there was not the happiest. In *Tennyson and his Circle*, Lynne Truss says that what Tennyson took from his childhood was “mainly fear”. It is widely reported by those who wrote on his life that Tennyson's father, Charles, would frequently enter into drunken rages, and the young boy would run into the nearby graveyard and pray for death. Yet in all of his fear of inheriting the Tennyson ‘black blood’, Tennyson did not seem to show any instances of volatile temper, though throughout his life he was concerned about his sons inheriting such tendencies.

Yet Tennyson's father was the man who encouraged his poetic practice, with Tennyson himself declaring that his father “prophesied I should be the

Tennyson was educated at home by his father, with a focus on the classics, and full access to his father's library. Tennyson, later recalling his poetic influences as a boy, was “an enormous admirer of Byron”, and when he was 17, a collection of poems by Tennyson and his brothers was published locally. Charles further urged Tennyson to submit a poem to the competition for the Chancellor's gold medal for English verse while he was at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1829, which his poem ‘Tibuctoo’ won.

Tennyson's time in Cambridge, although short-lived, greatly influenced his later life. As a member of the Cambridge Apostles, or The Conversazione Society, which dated back to 1820, he was tasked with extra essays, which members would then gather to discuss, with a side of sardines on toast. Nikolai Endres described the society as a haven for “overt, full-blooded – almost aggressive – homosexuality,” while the mother of one Apostle, upon reading her son's private letters, accused the Society of being “a hotbed of vice”.

Tennyson, however, only had a brief tenure ending in 1830 as a result of his failure to complete an essay on ghosts, which he tore up before resigning. The Apostles saw this as an ejection rather than a resignation, with a fellow member writing that he had been turned out for being “incurably lazy” – he used to lie on the floor in meetings and would never contribute to discussions. But when the Apostles tried to make amends a year later, Tennyson refused.

Cambridge was significant to Tennyson, not only for it being where he published his first solo collection of poems, *Poems Chiefly Lyrical* in 1830, but for it also being the place where his friendship with Arthur Hallam began. The four years at Cambridge between 1827 and 1831 brought the two poets very close together. But in the spring of 1831, Tennyson's father died, forcing him to leave Cambridge and return to Lincolnshire before finishing his degree. Arthur Hallam came to stay with Tennyson during the summer, and became engaged to Tennyson's sister, bringing the friends even closer together. In 1833, while still in Lincolnshire, Tennyson published his second book of poetry, which notably included the first version of ‘The Lady of Shalott’. This volume was met with so much criticism that

Tennyson did not publish again for ten years. 1833 was also the year of Hallam's sudden death, which had profound impacts on Tennyson and inspired many of his poems. These included

‘In Memoriam A.H.H.’, published in 1850 and said to be Tennyson's magnum opus.

The speaker aims to find:

“Every pleasant spot
In which we two were wont to meet,
The field, the chamber, and the street,
For all is dark where thou art not.”

Hallam, once a Cambridge friend, became so interwoven with Tennyson's other life in Lincolnshire, that the locations of ‘field’, ‘chamber’, and ‘street’ could be applicable to either location. Hallam was not only a friend during Tennyson's time at university, but he became a friend for life, with the time at Cambridge being referred to as ‘some pleasure from thine early years’. Although tainted by grief, Tennyson focuses on the ‘pleasure’, or the ‘pleasant spots’ – the endearing memories and marks left – from a relationship that was birthed out of Cambridge.

The ending two lines draw together Tennyson's perspective on grief: ‘Tis better to have loved and lost / than never to have loved at all.’ Although Cambridge began a relationship that would end so painfully, he would rather it be that way than to have experienced those formative years without Hallam at all.

Now, as I trace the same journey that once shaped Tennyson – from the quiet fields of Lincolnshire to the stone walls of Cambridge – I feel the enduring pull of both places. Though so different in spirit, they became the twin roots of his poetry: one grounding him in the land that shaped his voice, the other in the friendship that shaped his soul. Cambridge, for Tennyson, was a place of friendship, loss, and discovery. Though he left without a degree, he departed with something far more powerful – the insight and emotion that would define him as the poet we know today.



The Arts editors discuss Wordsworth's description of his time at St John's

“Of College labours, of the Lecturer's room
All studded round, as thick as chairs could stand,
With loyal students faithful to their books,
Half-and-half idlers, hardy recusants,
And honest dunces—of important days,
Examinations, when the man was weighed
As in a balance! of excessive hopes,
Tremblings withal and commendable fears,
Small jealousies, and triumphs good or bad...”

Emily Cushion

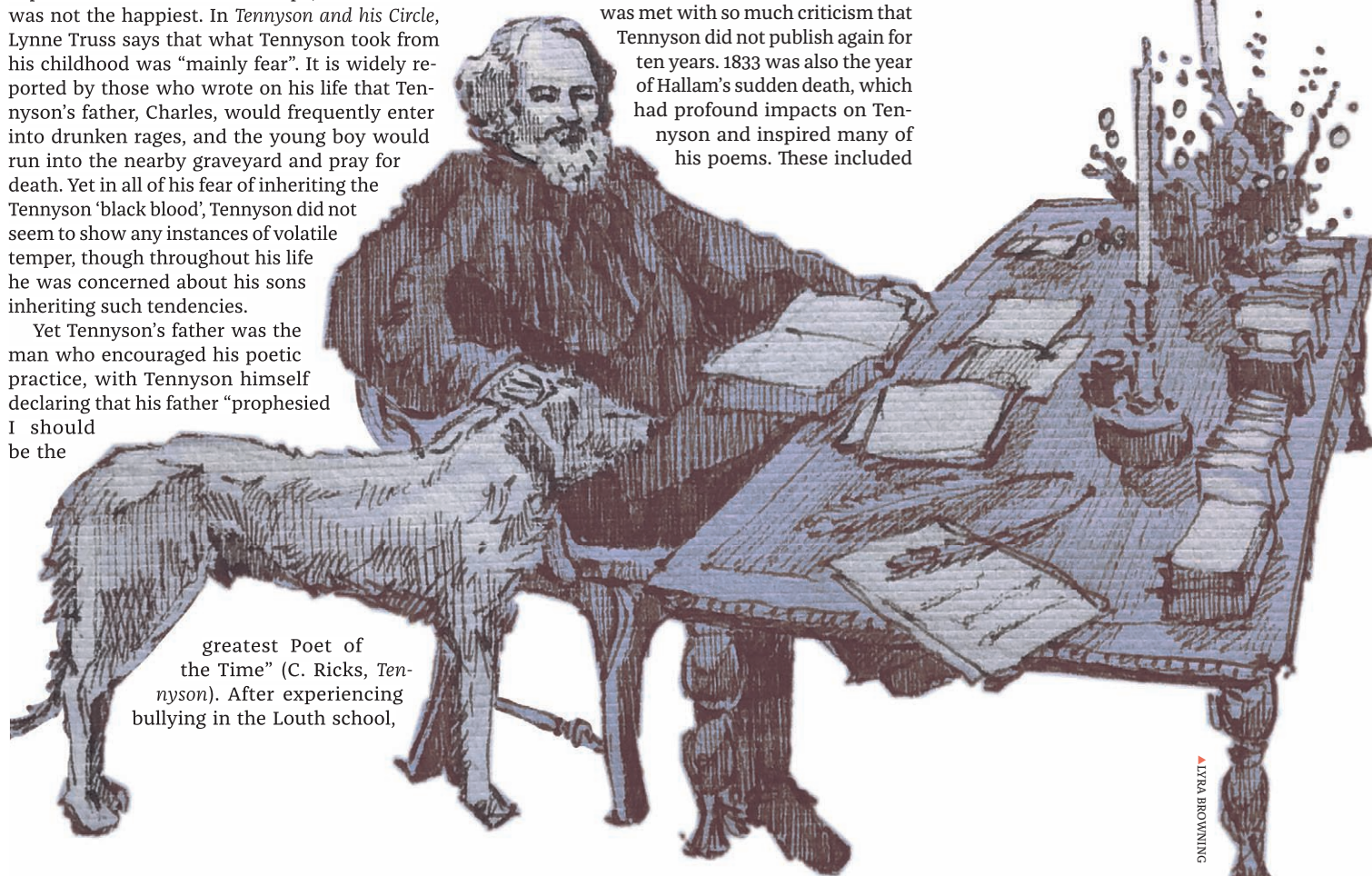
Wordsworth frames Cambridge's students as the jewels ‘studded round’ the lecture hall. Though I can't say I've ever felt particularly sparkly at a 9am, there's definitely something to be said for recognising your value, no matter how many chairs are in the room. You may identify as one of his ‘loyal students’, visiting the library at ungodly hours and getting every essay in on time, or feel more represented by the ‘Half-and-half idlers’ – I think we'd all fit in this group if we prioritised wellbeing over writing. Nevertheless, Wordsworth appreciates that there is no true ‘Cambridge student’ archetype, and I for one think we should celebrate our differences. When I'm feeling particularly locked in, I might appreciate the support of a friend who's taking the afternoon off (AKA one sensible enough to think about coursework over Christmas). ‘Residence at Cambridge’ permits us to be flawed; I'm willing to admit to harbouring ‘Small jealousies’ of my very talented friends if Wordsworth is. We often feel ‘weighed’, both against each other, and ourselves, but we must remember that we are each a precious gem in the crown of Cambridge.

Ryan Vowles

I've re-read this poem throughout my time here, especially during long nights in John's library, when I would retreat from my flashcards to the bookshelves and open a crumbling leather book titled ‘Memoir of Wordsworth’, in which I first discovered this work. Like Emily, I found regular comfort in knowing that even Wordsworth harboured envy and insecurity, and of course found satisfaction in his description of John's. Most of all, his experience as a fresher, coming from the countryside like myself, always pleased me. Confronted by the familiar ‘dream’, he described the ‘courts, cloisters, gowns, and doctors’ as a ‘migration strange for a stripling of the hills’ and also seems to have enjoyed plenty of ‘suppers, wine and fruit’. Later in the poem (it is very long) he goes on:

“I could not print
Ground where the grass had yielded to the steps
Of generations of illustrious men,
Unmoved. I could not always lightly pass
Through the same gateways, sleep where they
had slept,
Wake where they waked, range that inclosure
old,
That garden of great intellects, undisturbed.”

Perhaps it's pretentious, but it seems reasonable to me. Were we to be fully cognisant that Newton, Darwin, Wordsworth, Wilberforce, Byron, and Wittgenstein had passed ‘through the same gateways’ as we do, I think we would feel daunted too.



Cambridge's 'dark academia' delusion

Jessica Leer argues that the city's architecture cannot fulfil the dark academia dream

It is a well-known fact that Cambridge lives in its own bubble; talk to any student and you will know how time moves faster, how the spaces you occupy sit differently. However, we neglect to consider the effect of its buildings on this phenomenon. The city is always rampant with constant construction to maintain the picture-perfect 'Cambridge' – but at what point do we lose this 'dark academia' dream and instead find ourselves in an elitist bubble, drifting closer and closer to Huis Ten Bosch.

Despite previously being a Tumblr subculture in its own right, the 'dark academia' aesthetic rose to fame around 2020 on social media, and considered a lifestyle focused on the pursuit of knowledge and intellect. A quick search would flood you with dimly lit old libraries, overcast autumn days and, most importantly, pictures of Cambridge. Many have criticised the aesthetic for perpetuating overwork, Eurocentrism and elitism.

Visitors to Cambridge are often mystified by the architecture of the city. Just seeing King's College Chapel can consolidate applications to the university (although I personally credit the North Court of Trinity Hall for mine). But to what extent are our first perceptions of the city misguided? As an architecture student who has spent the last two years in the city, I find that a lot of the details and personality of Cambridge get lost in its devotion to historical remembrance.

We constantly repair old buildings to their former designs, and when we do push for change, it is largely hidden or rejected, like the solar panels on the top of King's College Chapel. This dishonesty

to the context of modern Cambridge is why we can never connect wholly with the city; returning home at the end of every term feels like returning to real life.

When we ignore the larger context of a place, it loses its feeling. Take Huis Ten Bosch, for instance, which was the result of a Japanese architect's love of old Dutch design. When the design was brought to Japan, it was not taken seriously and is now perceived as a theme park, losing much of the design's context. Although I respect the preservation

“

Our dark academia fantasy, dreamt up while scrolling UCAS, is not possible

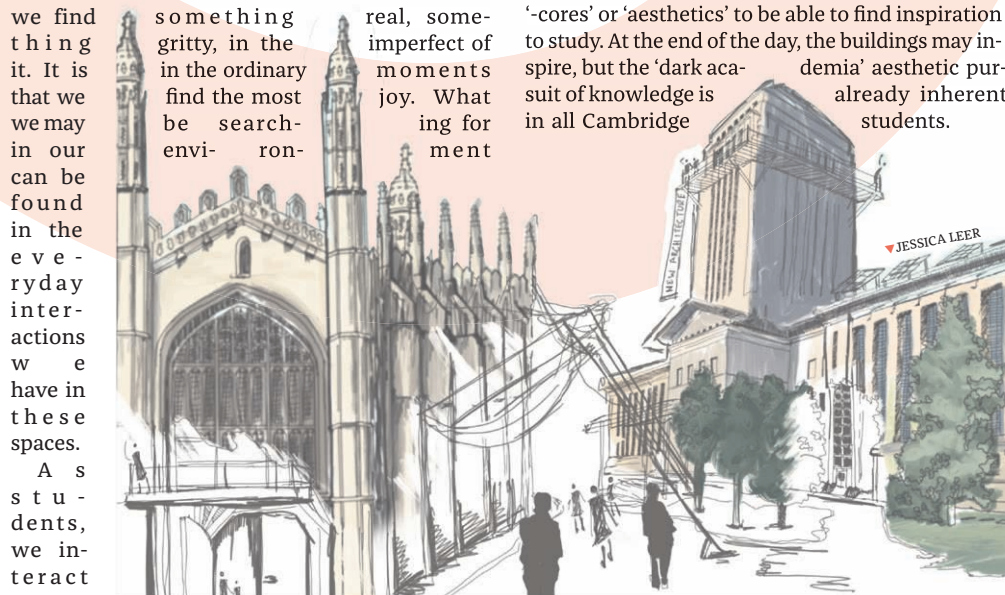
of listed buildings, how we initially view Cambridge through an aestheticised reverie soon becomes too hard to maintain.

Cambridge is a beautiful city, not just through its older buildings, but the wider context of new additions to the space. We should celebrate new uses of old spaces, like the way new shops fill older facades in the centre. There is a unique opportunity here; we should not be so hesitant to create something which incorporates both the old and the new. Currently, the city sits in a limbo through the dis-

connect between its roots and its current students. These interactions of old and new are what reflect our students the most; the contradiction of 100 laptops in a centuries-old lecture theatre creates a unique atmosphere that we do not see elsewhere.

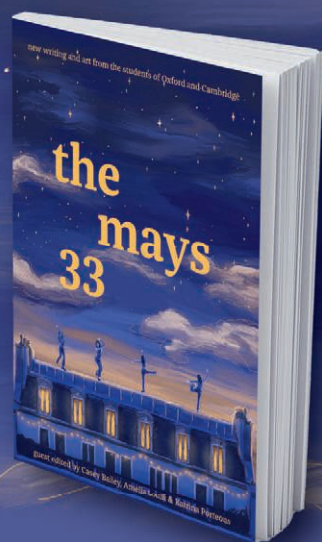
Academia is not generally aesthetic. It is not simply reading old books by candlelight in grandiose libraries, but it is also poring over contradicting online sources an hour before an essay is due, and going head-to-head in a supervision with someone who finished the reading list before term even started. Architecture is much the same: we find something gritty, in the ordinary moments find the most joy. What can be search-environment

with the city on a deeper level than most tourists or visiting school kids. As we explore the city and become fully immersed in its lifestyle, we lose that dark academia dream, not for our own faults but for the fact that our lives no longer reflect that era. We no longer write with fountain pens nor don a long trench coat (except perhaps a select few). Doing those things feels fake or rehearsed; the buildings may suit the activity, but we do not. Our dark academia fantasy, dreamt up while scrolling UCAS, is not possible. However, what is possible is a deeper connection with our academia; we don't need our 'cores' or 'aesthetics' to be able to find inspiration to study. At the end of the day, the buildings may inspire, but the 'dark academia' aesthetic pursuit of knowledge is already inherent in all Cambridge students.



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Soundtrack your day the *Varsity* way

Caitlin Newman walks you through a genre-bending timetable

When it comes to genre, we at *Varsity* know no bounds. Us audiophiles love to experiment with both evolving sounds and more traditional categories. However, there's a practical consideration here: when you're juggling a range of genres, how do you listen to them all? TikTok has borne one answer: the so-called polyJAMorous playlist trend, an endearingly cringey name coined by Swedish TikToker @fellbrink for when playlists unabashedly shift from metal to motown. It's a fun practice but sometimes you don't want the genre whiplash, and that's okay.

Instead, I'd like to suggest an alternative, particularly for new students. When you first think of Cambridge, your mind jumps to academic rigour, or perhaps the renowned collegiate traditions. The boring, everyday stuff gets forgotten. But if you're someone with eclectic taste, pairing genres with parts of your routine could make your life easier, and enhance your listening experience too.

Although the morning is one of the least musical

“Pairing genres with parts of your routine could make your life easier

parts of my day, I must confess that if I'm having a really hard time waking up, my solution is country. There's nothing like a bit of Shania Twain to start my day right; the sass of 'That Don't Impress Me Much' is the epitome of "I just got out on the right side of bed". If you're seeking more excitement, though, look no

further than Carrie Underwood's 'Church Bells', a dramatic tale of love, loss, and thrilling revenge.

Music also underpins many of our journeys between contact hours. You could have options for going to site versus returning home, or perhaps tap into separate vibes for lectures compared to supervisions. However, the most natural distinction in my eyes is pace. Did you only give yourself 10 minutes to get to Sidgewick from the city centre? Or did you take a slow, hot girl walk in the morning, but find yourself running back home to get ready for a formal that you forgot about?

For the panic walk that verges on a jog, hyperpop is the obvious answer. It's hard to be late anywhere when strutting to the thumping beats of SOPHIE's 'VYZEE' or A.G. Cook and Hannah Diamond's 'Drop FM'. The synths are satisfactorily grating in places, a much

needed wake-up after whatever drowsiness left you running this late in the first place. It will make you feel powerful, like you yourself are the 'IT girl' JADE sings of.

On those days where I do manage to be a little more organised, something soulful is the answer. WILLOW's *The 1st* feels especially appropriate for early Michaelmas. 'Warm Honey' carries a cosy romanticism; there's a rich timbre to the verses, juxtaposed with the gentle falsetto airs of the chorus. Tracks from Solange's *A Seat At The Table* have also provided comfort on many a chilly stroll, whether I'm having an existential crisis post-essay ('Cranes in the Sky') or, I'm just a bit 'Weary'.

I often find my kitchen playlists leaning towards punk: there's something cathartic about furiously chopping vegetables to Lambrini Girls' 'Company Culture,' a track driven by beating drums and Phoebe Lunny's screamed verses on misogyny in the workplace. I'm a better listener when I'm doing something with

my hands – Bob Vylan's work has landed most when I've been multitasking in the kitchen. And Vylan

“For the panic walk that verges on a jog, hyperpop is the obvious answer

writes lyrics that are deserving of full attention: 'We Live Here' recounts their experiences of racism in necessarily shocking honesty, while 'Hunger Games' explores impacts of the cost of living and provides a call to action for those suffering.

There's plenty of room for experimentation when it comes to listening habits, and perhaps my choice to stream hyperpop first thing in the morning or heavy rock during an evening activity may seem heathen-like for some. Even if I don't inspire people to wake up to the dulcet tones of 'Country Girl (Shake It For Me)', I hope to inspire such playfulness. It's hard to deny the power that different styles have to transform your mood as you pass through even the most monotonous parts of daily life.



Follow the QR code for the full playlist

Ye olde and ye new at Ye Vagabonds

Seun Ige ventures to Eddington for some Irish folk...

From the outside, the Storey's Field Centre (a multipurpose gig venue and community centre in Eddington) looked like little more than a big brick box. But, on the inside, the warm timber and soft lighting set the stage for something both tender and expansive. It was the perfect environment to be serenaded by the romantic and reflective sounds of the Irish folk duo, Ye Vagabonds.

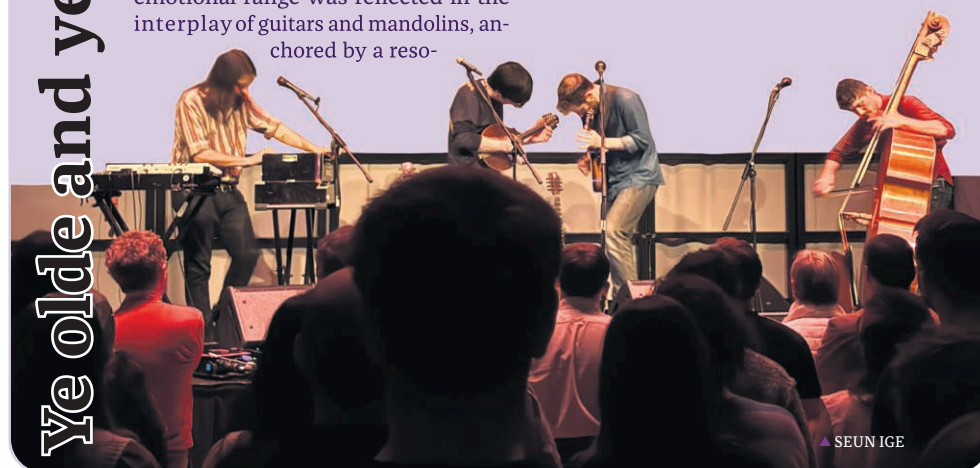
Brothers Diarmuid and Brian Mac Gloinn spoke about growing up singing traditional folk songs together, and this history unfolded naturally across the evening. Rather than telling the audience, they showed it through their curated mix of old ballads and contemporary compositions from the past decade. Their music carries joy and sorrow parcelled together, and on stage, this emotional range was reflected in the interplay of guitars and mandolins, anchored by a reso-

nant double bass and vibrational equipment that let each note linger.

Across the set, the brothers navigated vast emotional terrain, often punctuated with anecdotes that grounded the performance in everyday life. 'On Citric Road', an unreleased track chronicling encounters in their Dublin neighbourhood, Stoneybatter, alongside their forthcoming single 'Mayfly', displayed their gift for transforming the local experience into a resonance that could be felt much further.

Most of their songs thrive on the longevity of sound and unhurried lyricism, but the atmosphere shifted with their protest piece, which they dedicated to the uncertainty and suffering in the world. The music took on a sharper edge, with the metaphor of a river's changing tide reflecting the unpredictability of human events.

The set concluded with one of their most moving tracks, 'Blue Is the Eye', with the double bass holding space as the brothers' harmonies gently expanded, leaving the audience suspended in both sound and sentiment.



▲ SEUN IGE

Nurturing newbies and nepo babies

My first gig of the term marked the arrival of the much-hyped Villanelle, hosted by Alt Music Society's participation with the Punchbag university tour. Skyrocketing onto the indie scene with lead single 'Hinge', the band are set to tour accompanied at universities by one student band.

Taking to the stage first was Cool Ant who, unsurprisingly, drew the evening's biggest and most enthusiastic crowd. With a pleasant take on twee, employing the sharp guitars of Patio, and the super soft vocals of Heavenly, Cool Ant are undeniably one to watch out for this term amongst the student bands of Cambridge. Highlights of their set for me included a particularly moody 'Femme Fatale' cover and a dreamy song about the beach as (after my own heart!) half of the band's members are from the seaside.

Next up was Bino Bames of Las Vegas, as talent roster proclaimed that he's "not here to follow the rules, he's here to break them". Arguably enough, he followed every rule in the lyrical book, but with raw vocals and gentle guitars, his set was nevertheless sonically sincere and mournful. His lead single, a number called 'Cocktail Princess', opens with a sure nod to Elliott Smith's 'Between The Bars' ("drink up baby" transposed

for "speak up baby"). But I think that's where the Smith similarities stop... well, that and the serious inclusion of the lyric "I taste the melon of melancholy".

Strutting onstage to assume sneering leans into the microphones, an expectably lad-ish air overturned MASH. Initially, I mistook the bassist for our focus of the evening, as he took centre stage instead of Gene Gallagher, who opted for an obscured position on the left. He stood with an unmistakable Mancunian swagger, something you can't help grinning at. Villanelle have undeniably got the LOOK (nonchalant, where traditions of mod cut and stuck on wraparound shades prevail), and the group certainly can play their instruments. Sonically and more cohesively, I think they are still finding their way. Their guitars supersede the fuzzy vocals. But surprisingly, it took Villanelle a while to get the crowd going properly... it fell down to mosh pits invoked by the band's friends in their final two songs. It was at this point when I half-expected Liam Gallagher himself to join in.

Through and through, I find myself sneering at bands in Villanelle's position... something tells me if their music was produced by a student band, no one would bat an eyelid, let alone offer them a university tour.

... while Daisy Cooper sticks to the city for Cool Ant, Bino Bames, and Villanelle



▲ DAISY COOPER

Watersprite Director on Festival's Impact

Amanda Ljungberg interviews Maddy Gordon-Finlayson on the need for creative opportunities

Watersprite, the world's largest student film festival, is not an unfamiliar name to anyone even peripherally engaged with the Cambridge creative scene. Maddy Gordon-Finlayson, the Watersprite Film Festival Director for 2026, puts it simply for me: they are a global community of filmmakers, and people who care about filmmaking, connected by a conviction that filmmaking is, and can be, for everybody.

This is Maddy's first year on the committee. You would never expect it from how passionately and confidently she speaks. Although she is daunted to be "throwing herself in the deep end," she believes it is useful to bring a fresh pair of eyes to the 17-year old festival.

Filmmaking is technically more accessible than ever. The issue, however, is a lack of *knowledge* about that accessibility. Maddy questions the narrative that creative jobs are not financially viable (familiar ground for a humanities student). "The world will always need creatives, always need filmmakers," she tells me. She points to the success of Netflix's *Adolescence* as having generated more conversation about youth culture and the rift caused by technology than policymakers have for the past decade. "Good art brings people together," she says, filmmaking "has the potential to be accessible and universal".

Her interest and experience working in social policy, as well as ethical leadership training under the Cambridge Laidlaw Scholarship, moved her to use her talent to "do good for other people". Maddy tells me that everything – her degree, her

social work, Watersprite – is "linked... [it's] all about communicating stories, arguments, stimulating debate and discussion".

“

The world will always need creatives, always need filmmakers.

Accordingly, Maddy reiterates throughout our discussion the political stakes of film, naming Watersprite a point where "creative talent and social justice intersect". Should film ever be limited to sending a message? "What we do is inherently political because we are trying to reach disadvantaged filmmakers," Maddy says. "The world looks different to when Watersprite started." To jump the "hurdles" of AI, economic hardship and political oppression, "[we need to] show filmmakers that their talent is necessary and needed right now".

Students not introduced to film through their school curriculums must be inspired by other means. Throughout the year, Watersprite's Creative Futures Team runs screenings for secondary school students in the Cambridgeshire area. A new development this year that Maddy is especially proud of is the 'Manchester Hubs' program, a weekend workshop in November for vocational college students and those who come to film later in life.

The matter of financial accessibility is one that Maddy defends adamantly. All nominated filmmakers are invited to attend the festival in-person, with generous bursaries given towards their travel

expenses and accommodation. Across the festival weekend, attendees are free to sit in on talks and panels by exciting guests, previously including Olivia Colman and Eddie Redmayne. But how does Watersprite keep incentivising young, underprivileged creatives to produce art? Maddy says they offer prizes including camera equipment, mentorships, and chats with industry professionals. Watersprite aims to "help boost careers," with alumni going on to win awards at the BAFTAs, Sundance, and Cannes Film Festivals.

Yet despite Watersprite's hugely impressive global reach, and a record number of submissions this year (2,234 from 108 countries), the festival is, as Maddy admits, Cambridge's "best kept secret". The committee is trying to change that. But what fighting chance do festivals like Watersprite have against a larger devaluation of artistic pursuits? In the UK, Maddy tells me, creative subjects seem more adjacent than integral to public school education: "Even if you aren't creative [...] it's important to have access to creative tools to express [yourself]." Watersprite's aim is to "demystify the idea that you can't have a job in the creative industry unless you know somebody. We just want to elevate talent [...] to show that filmmaking with an ethical mission is not only essential but award-winning".

I agree that it is our responsibility, whether or not we are creatives our-

selves, to celebrate the work that Watersprite is doing, to, as Maddy articulates, "educate and inspire the next generation of talent". Even without joining the committee, Watersprite welcomes volunteer judges ("a fun job: just watch films and rate them"), as well as on-

site volunteers to organise and coordinate the events over the festival weekend. Of course, the talks and screenings are also free for all to attend.

"It is important to be positive about the future of film and creative industries," Maddy says. "You can look to our alumni filmmakers to find out how to do that: we've had documentary makers produce amazing pieces of work under very repressive political regimes; we've had animations made on an iPhone. Talent always wins out. We must elevate that talent."

Submissions are currently closed for this year's festival, but the Watersprite team regularly updates their social media and website with steps on how to get involved. The task of democratising the film industry is behemoth, but Watersprite might be one of the best places to start.



▲ SAMUEL LI

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Theatre

Blind spots: from the waves to the stage

Shan Tan-Ya asks what theatre can learn from radio drama

I have a theory – audio drama is just theatre taken to its logical extreme. Hear me out: when modern film special effects can create any conceivable illusion, why do people still watch plays? There's something about reducing the amount of sensory input, about having to exercise our imaginations, which somehow appeals to audiences. In audio drama, *everything* is implied through sound alone – there are no visuals to distract from the dialogue, delivery and soundscape. Therefore, when every pause or gasp could have plot-altering significance, listeners can focus intently on performance, and feel even more deeply connected to the characters.

At least, that's my explanation for the presence of hundreds of fans, mostly under the age of 30, who gathered one Sunday in early September at the London Podcast Festival in King's Place for a seminal event in the fandom – the 10-year anniversary reunion of the team behind hit show *Wolf 359*. For context, *Wolf 359* has been cited as one of the top 20 most influential audio dramas in the last 50 years, making it a decent case study for the genre's 'renaissance' this century. It also tops my own personal list for *Varsity* – in brief, it's a serialised comedy-action-sci-fi drama about a dysfunctional crew trapped on a mysterious space station. These rock stars of the audio drama world had flown halfway around the world from the US to meet us so naturally, I was determined to quiz them for *Varsity*.

Miraculously, given the sea of raised hands, I got to ask my question: what was one thing the creators loved about audio drama compared to other mediums? To my surprise, all the actors present, including the moderator, had something to say. While I was familiar with the joys of audio drama as

a listener, I realised that it offers opportunities outside of a ruthless mainstream try that won't give you the time unless you look exactly like 'type'. Lead actress Emma Sherr-Ziarko was told that her type was *Alien's* 'Ellen Ripley' too short to convinc-

but she was ingly pull it off on-camera or on-stage. Voicing stern Commander Minkowski was therefore her only chance to "really embrace... my Sigourney Weaver".

Using appearance or 'type' as casting shorthand is, of course, inherently problematic, especially for non-white actors in Western media. Even a decision as mundane as 'do you look like a barista?' becomes loaded when you consider, "Who decides who looks like a barista?", pointed out actress Cecilia Lynn-Jacobs. Lynn-Jacobs is Black, and when she first joined the show, the countless New York Downtown theatre gigs she'd acted in had repeatedly handed her either one of just two roles: 'angry Goddess' or 'prostitute' – which was "pretty demoralising". In contrast, on *Wolf 359*, she plays the charismatic but

morally complex Captain Lovelace, whose past is central to the show's mystery. At this point, the moderator, Karim Kronfli, a veteran voice actor of over 130 different shows, jumped in with another stark anecdote – "being physically the way I am [a POC], I would typically be typecast as some kind of terrorist. But in audio, I can play five different things a week".

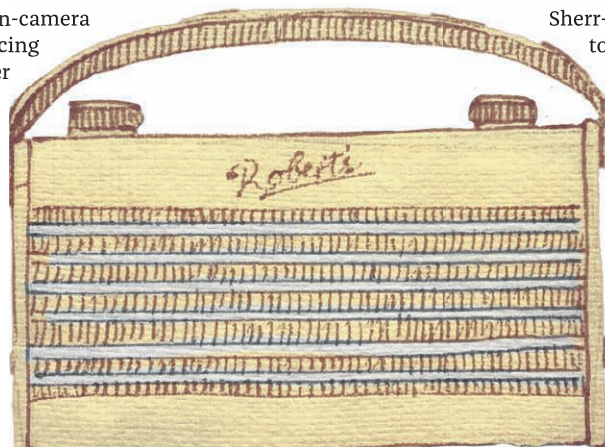
In terms of acting styles, stage-trained Sherr-Ziarko struggled at first to adapt to voice-specific techniques, but ten years later she identifies a 'similarity of process' between the disciplines. As an acting coach, she recommends audio drama to theatre students in an increasingly harsh industry because "the world opens up for what you can do and who you can play. (...) I really do think there's a correlation in skill set between theatre training and audio drama specifically". At the same time, actress Michele Agresti warned that, counterintuitively, there's not much room to hide with voice acting: "I think, as actors, the most 'transformative medium' really is live performance and being on stage...but when you get into film or recording, it's very nakedly you". Actor Scotty Shoemaker also revealed his personal voice-acting technique – as the smiling villain Cutter, he would grip a kitchen knife to record particularly menacing

speeches. "Even though nobody can see it, it will be there and they will hear it," agreed Sherr-Ziarko.

“Who decides who looks like a barista?”

There is another major difference between theatre and audio drama, which Lynn-Jacobs identified perfectly. Live theatre is inherently social, thriving on the feedback loop between performer, audience member and crowd. Audio dramas, by contrast, are "a private experience that you can take into your life, and wherever you take it into your life, it changes how the story hits too" – something I can certainly relate to. The intimacy of this experience, however, strengthens my opening theory, since, more so than audiobooks, audio drama is about "specifically creating a sonic world". As in theatre, listeners need "some onboarding to ... take in the world and build it," and through this level of engagement, bring large parts of themselves into the story.

I hope that theatre creatives can take inspiration from this unique genre of storytelling – whether that's through more adventurous sound design, voice-acting, or casting choices. You'd be surprised by the amount of suspense, heart and hilarity that can be conveyed through our ears alone.



ALYRA BROWNING

Lend me your ears... and your voices

Sophie Ennis considers the importance of regional accents when performing Shakespeare

There was much to love about Nicholas Hytner's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at London's Bridge Theatre – fabulous costumes, a playfully inventive set, and a cleverly engineered gender flip that had the audience doubled over in laughter all evening. But among these, there was one thing that stood out to me: Puck's Mancunian accent.

My ears immediately pricked up the first time he spoke; after two years in Cambridge, hweaving a northern accent in a room full of southerners sets off a Pavlovian response in me. Typically, especially when watching a comedy, this pleasant surprise tends to quickly fade into eye-rolling realisation. Regional accents are too often used as cheap humour which can undercut an otherwise intelligent and genuinely funny script. I've sat in plenty of audiences where people are in stitches over a character whose 'funny' quality is whatever comedy generic accent they've been asked to put on. However, in this production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Puck's voice felt just right: the accent did not define the character. Puck was delightfully multi-dimensional – mischievous, brazen,

chaotic, sexy, sinister, bizarre – and his voice only helped to enrich this complexity.

Unfortunately, these Complex Northern Characters are a rare breed on the Shakespearean stage. Theatre has a habit of only staging characters with regional accents as lazy stereotypes. Take, for example, the production of *Othello* I once saw, in which a Cockney Desdemona was the daughter of a gang leader and died, disappointingly, on top of a pool table in the middle of a pub. From Yorkshire nurses and Scottish villains to Geordie clowns and West Country servants, the caricatures are endless. Meanwhile,

countless leading roles are taken up by actors speaking in RP. A *Midsummer Night's Dream* is, of course, a comedy, and despite me being

pleasantly surprised by the accent diversity in the production I saw, it's unsurprising that it was this play in particular. It goes without saying that comedy is so much more than just a testing ground for new ideas, but when your audience is expecting something ridiculous, when they know it's okay to laugh, it does become easier to push boundaries and do what's unexpected. I think a

“Regional accents are too often used as cheap humour”

lot of more 'serious' theatre is reluctant to push the envelope in the same way, afraid of making audiences feel awkward or of being frowned upon for not upholding certain traditions.

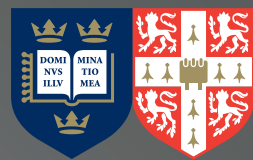
Besides, for all you Shakespeare purists out there, a stage full of actors with regional accents would actually be pretty close to the real thing: the way people spoke back in Shakespeare's day wouldn't have sounded remotely close to what we're used to hearing on stage now. Original Pronunciation (OP), the Early Modern English dialect Shakespeare would have spoken in, contains bits of pretty much every regional UK accent, as well as American and Australian. Around two-thirds of Shakespeare's sonnets contain rhymes that only work in OP – so, contrary to popular belief, his work isn't really built for being read in a 'posh' accent.

In spite of this, with the exception of *Macbeth*, it's rare, if not unheard of, to see a Shakespearean lead played by an actor with a regional accent. You might giggle at the thought of a Geordie Juliet or a Cockney Cleopatra, but only because we've been conditioned into not taking these accents seriously. This is, of course, part of a much broader socio-economic-linguistic issue. Strong accents are typically associated with the working class, and it's no coincidence that they appear less in creative spaces than more 'standard' accents. As the saying goes, life imitates art, but if art only continues to perpetuate these negative stereotypes then where does that leave working class creatives – the very small percentage who do manage to break into the arts – who just want to be taken seriously?

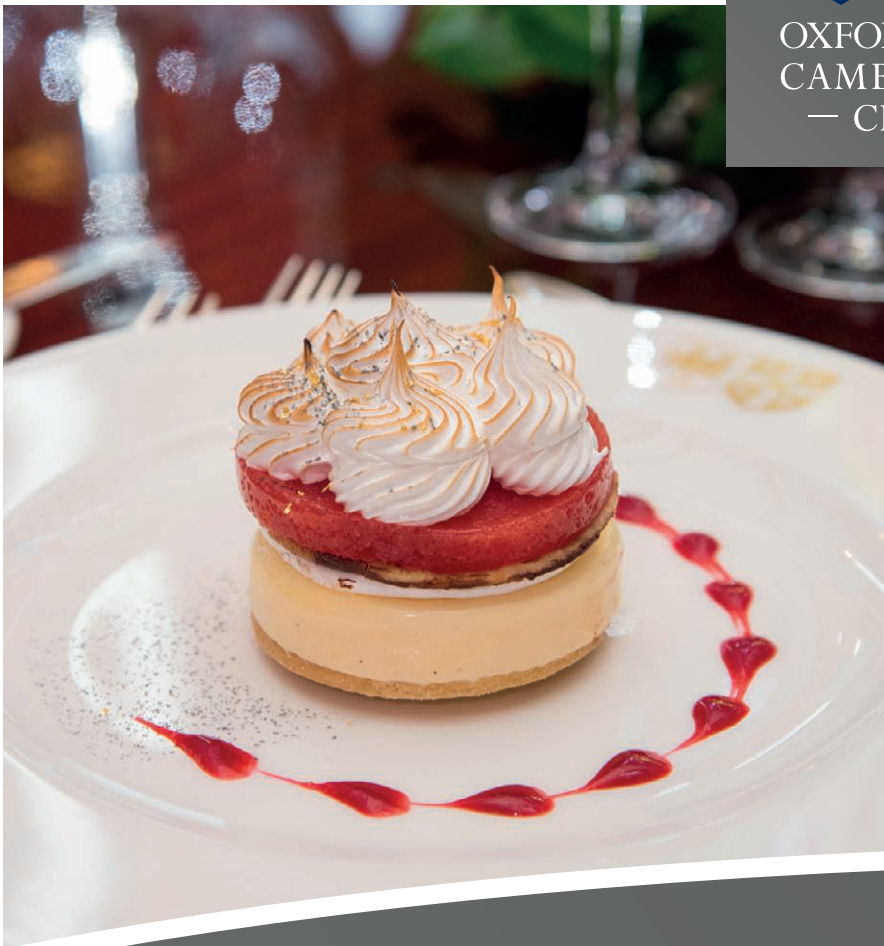
At the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I brought all this up to my friend who I'd gone to see it with. "I'm going to put on a Scouse *Hamlet*," I joked. But why should that be so radical? *Hamlet* was Danish for God's sake – there's hardly a 'right' accent for doing Shakespeare in. Regional accents shouldn't just be restricted to regional contexts, and giving leading roles to these voices opens a door to something which for many people might otherwise seem inaccessible. When a familiar voice enters the spotlight, it allows you to see yourself in their world – behind the curtain or under the lights, as a lover lost in a magical forest or a monarch ruling over their kingdom. Admittedly, *Hamlet's* madness and vengeful murder might not be the best way to challenge stereotypes, but it's a step in the right direction for now.



ALYRA BROWNING



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Film & TV

18 October

CUFA speaker event: Robert French

22 October

Spacewoman & Eileen Collins Q&A
Arts Picturehouse, 7:30pm

23 October – 2 November

Power Station director's Q&A
Arts Picturehouse, 6pm

27 October

'Dazzling World and its Myriad Temptations' by Daphne Xu
Keynes Hall, King's College 3pm

29 October

Leading Women in Spanish Film and Television Lecture
Lubbock Theatre, Peterhouse, 5:30pm

Music

25 October

Gurriers
MASH, 6:30pm

25 October

Boomtown Rats
Corn Exchange, 7:30pm

27 October

Suzanne Vega
Corn Exchange, 7:30pm

27 October

Alt Soc: Halloween Emo Bop
Portland Arms, 7:30pm

29 October

SCOTT LAVENE
Portland Arms, 7:30pm

Arts

18 October

Life Drawing Session
Buckingham Room, Magdalene College, 7-8pm

18 October

CU Prose and Poetry Society
'Sad and Atmospheric' Open Mic
Christ's College Chapel, 8pm

22 October

In Conversation with Lubaina Himid and Magda Stawarska
Kettle's Yard, 7-8:30 pm

25 October

Kettle's Yard Guided House Tour
Kettle's Yard, 11am-12pm

30 October

Waterstones Horror Fiction Panel
Waterstones, 6pm onwards

Theatre

21 October – 25 October

Ghosts
ADC Theatre, 7:45 pm

22 October

Director's Panel
ADC Theatre, 4:30-6pm

23 October – 25 October

Les Bonnes
Fitzpatrick Hall, 8pm

25 October

Mendelssohn's A Midsummer Night's Dream
West Road Concert Hall, 7:30pm

28 October – 1 November

Orlando
Corpus Playroom, 7pm

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 KELSEY KERRIDGE



Between ambition and responsibility: Cambridge United and the future of lower-league football

Max Eshelby talks to Cambridge United CEO Alex Tunbridge about the unique challenges the U's face

Lower-league football is often spoken about in terms of survival rather than success. Away from the bright lights of the Premier League, clubs like Cambridge United operate in a world where financial stability is fragile, resources are stretched, and the connection with the local community is as important as results on the pitch.

For Alex Tunbridge, the CEO of Cambridge United, steering the club through these challenges means striking a delicate balance between ambition and responsibility. In conversation with *Varsity*, he reflected on the unique pressures facing clubs in the lower echelons of the game, the impact of new regulations, and his hopes for the future of the U's. This also comes at an important time, as English football grapples with broader questions of governance and sustainability. The recent turmoil at Sheffield Wednesday and Morecambe has highlighted just how vulnerable clubs outside the top flight can be to poor financial management, sparking growing calls for reform and greater protections of football clubs.

"The biggest challenges facing lower-league clubs like Cambridge at the moment are mainly financial sustainability, competition, and keeping fans engaged," Tunbridge explained. Unlike clubs in the top-flight, Cambridge cannot rely on consistent broadcasting riches or the commercial clout of global sponsors. Instead, they depend heavily on matchday income – a revenue stream as vulnerable to poor weather as it is poor form. Rising costs, from player wages to stadium upkeep, only deepens the difficulty of keeping budgets under control. At the same time, the club faces a constant battle to hold on to talented players, who are frequently tempted away by bigger sides. The result, Tunbridge notes, is a cycle of rebuilding that often pushes clubs into "risky spending" in order to remain competitive.

“Setting up an authority isn't enough if clubs can bypass rules or if enforcement is weak

This fragility has become all too visible in recent years. Poor ownership and financial mismanagement has seen clubs like Bury and Macclesfield exit the Football League and face dissolution. Other clubs, like Hull City and Blackpool, have had high-profile struggles between supporters and their owners.

The government's response has been to establish an Independent Football Regulator, a move that Tunbridge cautiously welcomes. "A regulator could help by enforcing stricter financial rules, improving transparency, and holding owners accountable," he said, stressing the importance of protecting clubs from the mismanagement that has the potential to devastate communities. Yet Tunbridge also stressed that its success will entirely depend on how robustly the regulator is empowered to act, warning that "simply setting up an authority isn't enough if clubs can bypass rules or if enforcement is weak". For lower-league football, genuine oversight may be the difference between survival and collapse.

For Cambridge specifically, the greatest challenge lies in balancing the desire for progress with the need for stability. Tunbridge admits that there is always pressure to invest in the squad, but insists that the club's strategy is guided by restraint. "Our priority is always to run the club responsibly and avoid putting ourselves in a precarious position financially," he explained. Rather than chasing short-term success through heavy spending, the U's are committed to nurturing young talent, through strategic transfers and strengthening the club's academy infrastructure. As Tunbridge puts it: "Ambition is important, but it has to be grounded in reality."

This sober approach to financial management is all the more necessary in a landscape that is increasingly shaped by an influx of wealthy owners. Clubs like Wrexham, Salford City, and Forest Green Rovers – backed by celebrity investors with deep pockets – have brought welcome attention to the lower leagues, but they have also introduced a new imbalance. Tunbridge admitted that the financial power of these clubs has created a widening

gap with "more traditionally-run teams", which has "made the playing field less even." The risk, he argues, is that other clubs will feel compelled to overspend in order to remain competitive. The influx of investment may shine a spotlight on these leagues, but it is a novelty that perhaps threatens to distort competitiveness.

Broadcasting is another double-edged sword. The new Sky broadcasting deal, which will see more League One and Two games televised, has been hailed as a breakthrough for exposure and revenue. But for clubs and supporters alike, the reality of inconvenient kick-off times and dwindling attendances have become a cause for concern. Alex is sympathetic to these frustrations; whilst he acknowledges that the deal will provide a vital stream of revenue, he notes: "There's a genuine concern about attendances and making it harder

for fans to come to the ground." The success of the deal, in his view, will depend on whether clubs can harness the financial benefits while ensuring that matchdays remain at the heart of the supporter experience.

Looking ahead, Alex envisions a future for Cambridge United that rests both on consolidation and growth. He hopes that in the years ahead, the U's will be consistently challenging for promotion and developing a talented pipeline of young players. Just as importantly, Alex wants to see the stadium improved, the fanbase expanded, and the club's bond with the community strengthened. "Ultimately, it's about creating a club that supporters can be proud of, now and in the future and one that represents our fantastic city," he reflected.

So for Cambridge United, success is not about quick fixes or headline-grabbing signings. It is about steady progress rooted in realism, creating a club that is responsible, competitive, and engaged with its local community. The test over the next decade will be whether patience can deliver not only stability, but the kind of enduring pride that will see the stands of the Abbey Stadium filled in years to come.



Continued from back page ►

Her big ambitions as captain come off the back of a Varsity win over Oxford, a close-fought victory. "Going into the final round of matches, we were ten-eight up, and then it was 10 all and there was a doubles match playing and it went to a decider set, so whoever won that set would win the entire varsity. And we managed to win it! It was just like the best atmosphere ever, we ran on court after."

"The whole of last year, I knew I wanted to run for captain." The best ranked player at CULTC since a fresher, Hart was eager to take on another challenge, having fallen in love with tennis again after a rough period with the sport during her late teens.

“People say tennis is an individual sport, but being at CULTC, being at Cambridge, it's such a team sport.

"I got a really bad injury when I was 16 and stopped playing for two years [...] with the whole injury and not being able to play properly, I fell out of love with it a bit."

When asked what rekindled her love for the sport, Hart emphasised the team aspect of CULTC, and the friendly atmosphere of the club.

"You just become really good friends

with all of your teammates, and it's such an encouraging atmosphere [...] and it just makes you want to play more and want to be better."

We discuss the recent US Open, and Hart reveals herself to be a devout Jan-nik Sinner fan. "I like how calm and chill he is on court. I'm very much like that, I don't tend to get very loud or anything."

“She describes herself as a “very aggressive player”

Hart prefers to stay calm and collected on the court. Her stoic nature proves an asset at high-stakes tournaments, like the Varsity Matches. "I quite like pressure, I find I tend to play better under a lot of pressure." "My friends will say they can't tell if I'm winning or losing."

She describes herself, however, as a "very aggressive player". "My game is about power and hitting winners. I'm less fast around the court, I miss more balls, so I'm more about a big serve and trying to finish the point early."

Varsity success last year followed BUCS disappointment, which Hart touches on while looking towards the first league matches of the season. "CULTC blues won their league last year, but then lost in the playoffs, so didn't get promoted to the top National League."

"This year, I am determined to get us promoted," Hart avows.



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Varsity Sport

Eastern Sydney nab nailbiter

Joss Heddle-Bacon reports as Light Blues are defeated by the thinnest of margins

Australia's oldest district rugby club dramatically overcame Cambridge's second-half surge to seize a 28-29 victory. After 24 minutes of initial stalemate, the tourists unleashed a flurry of first-half tries and subsequently enjoyed the lead until the 73rd minute, when Cam Martin's stunning solo try appeared to have sealed a sensational Cambridge comeback.

Having found themselves staring down 0-17 and 14-24 deficits, the Blues spun the game on its head through their backs' creativity, silkiness, and speed, supported by an inspired and physical forward pack. A reeling Eastern Suburbs, however, were never going to surrender, and they scored a decisive try just two minutes from time to win by a single point.

It was a game defined by contrast; a Down Under-dominated opening forty minutes followed by a Light Blue renaissance. Cambridge came into the game fresh faced and feeling their way into the season, with just 5 returning Blues in the squad and one match played this au-

turn. Their Sydney-based competition, meanwhile, were on a post-season tour of England and Ireland having reached the Sydney Premiership Grand Final in August; unused squad members were swigging pints on the sidelines.

Barely 180 seconds into proceedings, Cambridge thought they had snatched the advantage, only for an awarded try to be swiftly chalked off for going into touch. Irritation quickly dissolved into danger as Eastern Sydney set about making inroads of their own, forcing the Light Blues to demonstrate impressive defensive resolve. A stifled Eastern Suburbs then sought to unlock the Light Blues with a highly aggressive kicking game, but were thwarted throughout by Cambridge's faultless handling and George Bland's brilliant counter kicks.

The Sydneysiders' sustained pressure could only be withstood for so long, and in the 24th minute the Blues' defence eventually yielded to an incisive scrum half pass, Angus Duff coolly notching the game's first score. A 7-0 lead quickly became a 12-point advantage as Eastern Suburbs' fast-moving phases and rapid

recycles fashioned an opening for Dougal Payne to batter through. Cambridge came close to landing a counterpunch through a piercing solo run excellently supported by James Murray, who was stifled metres from the line – yet it was Eastern Suburbs who went on to deal the match's third decisive blow. Having kicked a penalty into the corner, the tourists piled their backs into an all-out driving maul and bulldozed their way to a 17-0 lead.

On the cusp of half time, Eastern Suburb's territorial and scoreboard stranglehold was beginning to loom large, until Cambridge broke it in one outstanding phase. Penetrating passes off a scrum at the halfway line found the fleet-footed Nathan Bottomley, who ran home a pivotal try for the Blues. Bland's ensuing conversion deepened Cambridge's foothold in what was the final touch of the opening 40.

Those seven points soon became a springboard; Cambridge emerged from the break rejuvenated and raring to slash Eastern Suburb's lead. Time passing seemed to bolster the Blues – in only

their second game of the season – and they came to dominate possession as their backs turned up the swagger. Ben Barlow's devious dummy almost had the tourists in a tailspin, and Ben Cooke began to marshal the game through a quick-witted and formidable performance at number nine. The Blues owed their second try to his scrum half smarts; from a ruck Cooke spotted and found Ollie East's run with a razor-sharp pass, allowing the winger to whizz 30 yards to the line. After a marked momentum shift, discontent began to brew on the Eastern Suburbs bench.

The Sydneysiders responded 62 minutes in, as the tourists started to pound away at the Cambridge line through numerous forward drives, before a perfectly executed piece of creativity yielded their fourth try. A cheeky cross field kick picked out Charlie Cooper, whose fast feet secured a 24-14 advantage.

At a point where the pendulum could have so easily swung back to Eastern Suburbs, Cambridge retaliated almost instantly. Charlie Cross's booming run broke the tackle and a superb support-

ing run from Cam Martin allowed the Light Blues to secure a third try. A third successful conversion from Bland's ever-reliable boots left Cambridge trailing by just three points. The unrelenting physicality of the Blues' forwards foiled Eastern Suburb's attempted fightback.

Almost 50 minutes after falling behind, Cam Martin whipped up a moment of rugby magic to give the Light Blues a deserved lead with just six minutes remaining. The showstopping substitute picked up the ball inside his own 22, danced his way past several tackles and then stuck on the afterburners, before outwitting the final two defenders with a phenomenal kick and chase. The crowd was in raptures, and at 28-24 it was advantage Cambridge.

Some teams cower in the face of brilliance, great teams respond in kind. In the 78th minute the Sydneysiders set up an ominous rolling maul, paving the way for Henry Hyde to bludgeon over a match-winning try. Cambridge will be hurt but heartened; they gave a fantastic fightback against an icon of Australian rugby.



Captain's Corner

Calum Murray speaks to CULTC captain Ruby Hart about Varsity glory and her tennis journey

“I actually hate flying!” Hart had just returned from a team trip to Monte Carlo, overcoming a mild fear of airplanes to do so. Once she landed, however, she was in her element, playing tournaments against teams from all over Europe on the Monte Carlo country club's “amazing” clay courts.

She was less in her element at the casino in the evening, having lost the entirety of the €10 she brought with

her in one game of poker. “Gambling is not quite for me,” she laughed, though she appreciated the “really great social events” that happened on the trip.

As women's captain, Hart has a big appreciation for the social side of tennis, despite its reputation as an individual sport. “People say tennis is an individual sport, but being at CULTC, being at Cambridge, it's such a team sport. Like, you'll play doubles with all your teammates, you'll go to matches [...] and everyone's

on the side cheering you on.”

As captain, Hart is responsible for building this sense of community and team spirit. She is driven and motivated, having introduced the team's first preseason: “it's just really good to get everyone back a bit earlier, from a social aspect, but also we had training every day, with fitness as well.” “I like the responsibility of it,” she said.

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