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No.939
Friday 14th November 2025
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EXCLUSIVE

Chancellor: free speech top priority



Ben Curtis and Charlie Rowan
Editors-in-Chief

Lord Smith, the new Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, has said he will place the defence of free speech at the centre of his role, in an exclusive and wide-ranging interview with *Varsity*.

Elected in a close contest in July, Smith told *Varsity* that there have been "occasions when Cambridge has hit the national press over particular freedom of speech issues". He said his "number one" priority is "the defence of academic freedom and freedom of speech".

While maintaining his commitment to freedom of speech, the Chancellor defended the University's decision to seek injunctions on protestors over the last year.

Although he acknowledged the University should "enable and encourage protests," the Chancellor insisted that Cambridge had "been right to seek very specific injunctions to protect the ability of all students to be able to take exams".

Alongside freedom of speech, the Chancellor outlined his other priorities. They include "championing [...] Cambridge as a centre for innovation and

a catalyst for growth," as well as "enabling the colleges and the University to work more closely and collaboratively together".

Lord Smith also stressed the need to "make even further progress on widening participation" and make Cambridge a "welcoming and inclusive place" for any prospective student.

This statement comes amid the launch of the Cambridge University Society of Women (CUSW), an organisation criticised as "transphobic" by other student groups due to its criteria for membership, which is restricted to

those designated as women at birth.

Asked about the ongoing debate surrounding women's only spaces, the Chancellor said that "there is an important ability [sic] for women to be able to feel safe in spaces that are designated for them".

However, he also said that the University must ensure transgender students "have spaces available to them as well" and trans people must have their needs "genuinely met".

When pressed on the issue, the Chan

Continued on page 3 ►

Cambridge splashes £400k on protest lawyers

● Russell Group spent over
£1.3m on legal advice

● Uni heads claim legal
orders do not restrict protest
freedoms

● Cambridge currently holds
a 12-month injunction on
protests

Wilf Vall

Associate Editor

The University of Cambridge and its colleges has spent over £400,000 on legal action to restrict protest on its sites – the most of any university in the UK.

The central University, along with Trinity College and St John's College, paid law firms £402,868 to help tackle encampments on their sites according to freedom of information requests. This included obtaining high court injunctions to ban protests at the University's head offices and College sites, a move that was labelled an "authoritarian reflex" by a senior academic.

Universities across the country spent almost £1.4 million on legal advice to tackle encampments, with elite Russell Group institutions making up the vast majority of the spend.

Cambridge currently holds a 12-month injunction against all protests on its Old Schools site, which hosts graduations and the University's administrative offices, and Greenwich House, its financial centre.

The sites had been subject to multiple encampments over 2024 and 2025, with

Continued on page 3 ►

V Michaelmas, Week 6

Editors' Note

Cambridge constantly seeks to shape its self-image. Some stories slot neatly into this construction, others complicate it. What matters, unfortunately for the University, is what *Varsity* puts on its front page.

In this edition, our front page stories are marked by contrast (p.1). In an exclusive interview, the first in 800 years, with the newly-elected Chancellor, Lord Smith, he outlined his priorities for the University. Top of his list is "the defence" of "free speech". Alongside this in-depth conversation sits our latest investigation into the University's injunction spending, where we reveal that Cambridge and its constituent colleges splashed over £400,000 on lawyers to restrict encampments on their sites. The dissonance between public commitments to free expression and the reality of legal action is stark.

Beyond this charged debate, we pressed the Chan-

cellor on the latest developments in student life. Smith was reticent about the new Cambridge University Society of Women (CUSW) and their presence within Cambridge and national papers. He acknowledged both sides of the discourse, but urged students to "humanise and personalise" discussions of transgender people.

We also analysed the cash behind the controversy, revealing that CUSW had received over £13,000 in donations, including £3,000 from the Russian-born billionaire Alex Gerko, who has previously shown no public interest in Cambridge life (p.5). Cambridge is not immune from a wider, national culture war.

On the lighter side of student life, we have bread being thrown from student windows (p.7), and a dive into colleges raking in hundreds of thousands in Hollywood money (p.9). One man who knows how to see the funny side is *Peep Show* star and Rob-

inson alum Robert Webb, who reflects on his experiences of stardom, from rejection at the ADC to the enduring success of Mitchell and Webb (p.10).

Meanwhile, in *Vulture*, sparks fly (and fizzle out) in Lifestyle, where we follow up on a double date organised by our *Varsity* match-makers. (p.20). For your dose of 90s feminist punk, our Fashion team explore the Riot Grrrl aesthetic and argue for its return (p.22). Alternatively, in the aftermath of a hectic Week 5, our Arts team encourage a slower pace of life following a visit to a Medwards exhibition on the importance of rest (p.24).

Whatever made you pick up the paper, we hope it offers enough relief to keep you going through the final stretch of term.

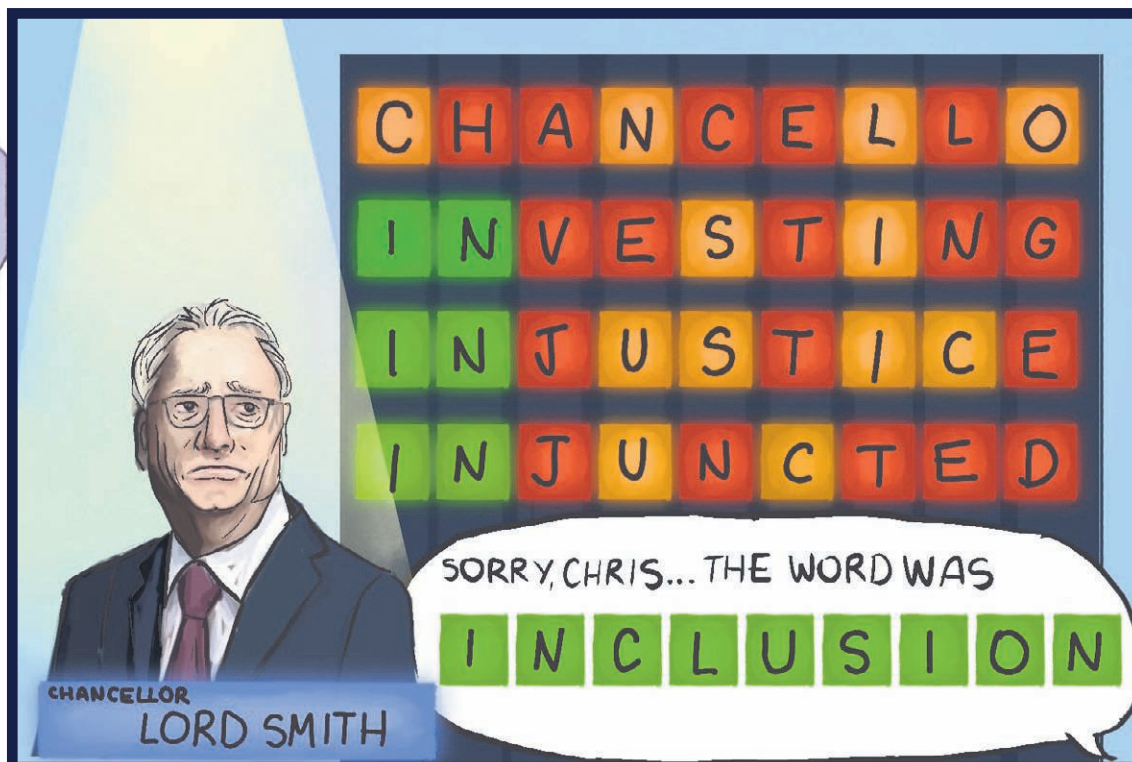


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MICHAELMAS 2025



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Chancellor defends use of injunctions

- Lord Smith urges colleagues to consider divestment report ‘carefully’
- He wants to ‘humanise and personalise’ discourse surrounding trans students
- In first message to students, Smith tells them to ‘hold fast to [their] beliefs’

◀ Continued from front page

cellor seemed hesitant to commit to a University stance. While acknowledging that the University should remind the organisation “of the importance of inclusivity and welcome,” he told *Varsity* that “it’s not up to the University to tell the people who are creating this society what they should be doing”.

Asked about the tone of the discourse surrounding trans students in Cambridge, Smith seemed disappointed, and stressed the need to “humanise and personalise” the debate. He said that “we are talking about individual human beings here, frequently going through a really difficult and challenging period of their life, and our job has to be to support them”.

Yet the Chancellor’s commitment to free speech remains unshakeable. He mentions the philosophy professor Kathleen Stock, an academic who left the University of Sussex in 2021 after being criticised for her views on gender identity. “I disagree strongly with much of what Kathleen Stock has to say,” he told *Varsity*, “but I would defend her right

to say it”.

In Smith’s view, academic freedom has to be “the bottom line”. He rejects “kowtowing to anyone [...] trying to determine what a professor can or can’t research”. This comes amid the news that academics at Sheffield Hallam University were reportedly intimidated and pressured by Chinese officials.

Smith doesn’t want to cut ties with China, arguing that the University “can’t simply refuse to have anything to do” with “an increasingly important part of the current world,” but argues that “we need to get the balance right”.

This freedom of expression, he insists, should also extend to students. Once again, he reaffirms and reinforces his commitment to “protests that don’t provide [...] disruption”. Yet this “very strong” support, he views, is consistent with the University’s costly use of injunctions to limit protest on its property, and some college-owned land.

A *Varsity* investigation has revealed the high spending involved with this action, as Trinity College, St John’s College, and the central University spent over £400,000 on law firms to help

tackle encampments on their sites. This spending is especially controversial in light of the Board of Scrutiny’s report, which warned that Cambridge’s financial position “remains of concern”.

The report projected a deficit of £39 million for the academic year 2025-26, albeit lower than in previous years due to controversial spending cuts – which *Varsity* has reported will deepen after a miscalculation over the rate of inflation. While the Chancellor accepted that “the University’s finances are facing challenges,” he was keen to stress the nationwide picture.

Smith told *Varsity* that “this is something affecting higher education across the country”. *The Guardian* estimates that up to 10,000 jobs could be lost across the sector amid restructuring, and the Chancellor seemed eager to address the entrenched problems. He said he is “limbering up” to argue with the UK government.

“If [the government] are serious about wanting to promote economic growth, universities are a key part of that,” he urges. Smith envisions a bargain, whereby universities can “ramp up their abil-

ity to stimulate growth and educate the future generation of creative people in return for better funding of universities”.

Smith acknowledges Cambridge’s unique position and ability to challenge the government and influence national debate. Yet when asked about the University’s recent commitment to partial divestment from arms industries, the Chancellor is more circumspect. “It is not a simple issue,” he says, and it is “up to the University Council to consider the Virgo report as carefully as they possibly can”. Smith is keen to stress that “it is not my place to tell them what to do”.

However, the Chancellor doesn’t hesitate when expressing his disappointment in the University’s alleged sustainability failings. The Board of Scrutiny claimed that the University is giving “the impression that sustainability is no longer a priority”. As a former chairman of the Environment Agency, it is not surprising that Smith feels the University’s sustainability objectives are “really important”. He directly urges his colleagues, who take the decisions, to “hold fast to the sustainability objectives that they have, and the progress to net

zero” which he wants to see “as rapidly as possible”.

His conviction on this subject seems clear. While Smith admits his role is “primarily ceremonial,” and lacks the “direct decision making” of previous roles in government; he’s assured of the Chancellor’s potential to “nudge, persuade, and steer” debate and decisions within the University. Whatever decisions he steers, however he wields his influence, students will feel the effects.

The new Chancellor makes clear his message to these students: he tells them to “hold fast to your beliefs”. Smith urges them to “be determined in what you study here, and what you go on to do in the world, to make a difference”.

As to the difference he hopes to make during his tenure, Smith chuckles at the mention of his legacy in a job he began only a few months ago. “I would hope that by the time I depart as Chancellor, Cambridge will be a thriving, innovative, and inclusive University, and that I may have been able to play a little bit of a part in ensuring that it gets there”.

Uni biggest injunction spenders in the country

◀ Continued from front page

Cambridge for Palestine (C4P) occupying the Senate House lawn in summer 2024 to put pressure on the University to cut ties with arms companies.

The encampments were eventually disbanded after the University agreed to review all of their arms investments with a student working group.

C4P then occupied Greenwich House and the Senate House in late 2024 after they accused the University of backtracking on their promises to divest from companies associated with Israel.

The findings of the working group were published last month, recommending the University to divest from all companies involved in the production of weapons illegal in the UK.

The injunctions were only obtained after a lengthy legal battle, with an original

request for a 5-year ban on pro-Palestine protests at the sites in February being rejected by the High Court. Mr Justice Fordham, the judge on the case, instead issued a 48 hour injunction to prevent disruption to graduations occurring that week.

But the University would later be granted a 12 month injunction on all protests at the sites in July, following a string of hearings.

Trinity and St John’s requested injunctions following occupations by C4P on their sites in May, with the group again accusing the University of “watering down” their commitment to divest from arms.

The Colleges obtained temporary injunctions within 48 hours of the occupations, and were later granted a 12 month protest ban.

Magdalene College also obtained an injunction against protesters following an encampment flotilla occupied their riverside court in June. However, the College refused to disclose the amount they spent on legal fees, claiming that doing so would harm their “commercial interests”.

Both Trinity and John’s originally claimed that disclosing their spending would endanger their ability to negotiate future legal services but eventually conceded that publishing figures was in the public interest.

The use of injunctions to tackle encampments has been widely criticised by Cambridge’s academics, with Professor Jason Scott Warren, a member of University Council, labelling them “repressive authoritarianism”.

Scott Warren is currently leading a campaign to prevent the University from pursuing

legal action against protesters, with a motion to limit the ability of the University to pursue injunctions without approval from its governing body being voted on November 24th.

£230,000

How much the encampments reportedly cost the University in additional security, cleaning, and NDOs

Cambridge has consistently denied any allegations that their injunctions limit freedom to protest, with a University spokesperson telling *Varsity* they “have sought injunctions to protect the right of our students to graduate and for staff to carry out their work. It does not restrict the important right to legal protest. There are many ways protests can take place and voices can be heard”.

The original applications for injunctions also claimed that encampments cost the University “at least £230,000” in additional security, cleaning the sites, and pursuing non-disclosure orders against protesters who accessed confidential documents in Greenwich house.

The costly legal battles also come at a time of significant stress for Cambridge’s finances, after they were forced to make 5% cuts across all departments to tackle a funding deficit of over £50 million.

Across the country, Queen Mary’s University of London and Cardiff University boasted the second and third highest spends on protest lawyers, racking up fees of £246,513 and £190,600 respec-

tively.

Multiple high-profile Universities that pursued injunctions also rejected requests for information. Among those was the University of London, who claimed that disclosing their legal spend would “provide impetus for further inaccurate public and media commentary” on their legal action.

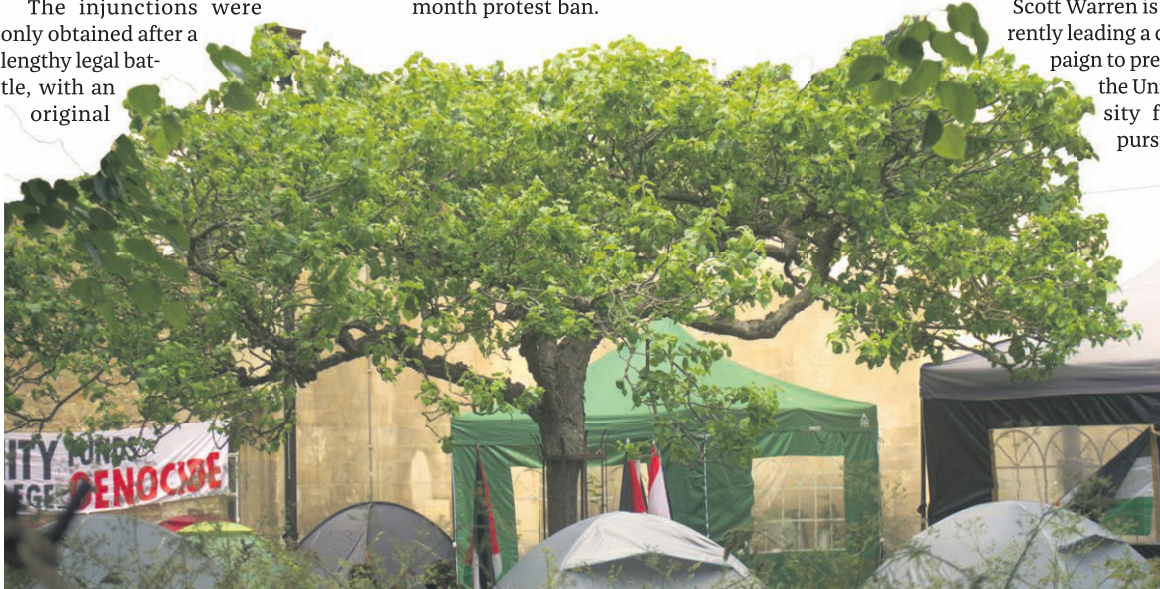
This also comes following OfS guidelines on tackling protests advised against “sweeping” protests bans on campus.

The guidelines lay out the “practicable steps” universities should take to ensure legal free speech among staff and students, and how complaints about breaches of free speech should be dealt with.

This included suggesting that legal injunctions could be used to protect specific sites used for graduations from protests. The advice warned against stricter measures, such as a 12-month ban on pro-Palestine protests on the lawn and university spaces within a 400 yard radius.

A spokesperson for the OfS told *Varsity*: “Freedom of speech includes the right to peaceful protest within the law. This right is fundamental, but it does not extend to unlawful expressions of support for terrorism or proscribed organisations.

“Our guidance also recognises that institutions may need to regulate the time, place, and manner of protests or demonstrations. It is for universities to decide how to provide themselves with assurances their actions are in line with their free speech requirements, including when it may be appropriate to seek legal advice,” they continued.



◀ WILF VALL

Uni drops CFO amid instability Trinity master steps down

Charlie Rowan
Editor-in-Chief

The University of Cambridge has cancelled the appointment of its new Chief Financial Officer (CFO), citing the “need to maintain stability” during a period of “ongoing transitions” at the top of the institution.

In an update released on “senior leadership positions” on Tuesday (11/11), the University confirmed that Rita Akushie – announced in September as the next CFO – will no longer take up the role.

The reversal comes as Cambridge grapples with mounting financial pressure.

In its statement, the University said: “Following recent changes and ongoing transitions, the University has decided not to proceed with the appointment of a new Chief Financial Officer at this time. This decision reflects the need to maintain stability and continuity in our leadership team and is in no way a reflection on the successful candidate.

“As a result, and with considerable regret, we confirm that Rita Akushie will not now be joining the University as our new CFO. We and Rita had been looking forward to her joining us, and we are very grateful to Rita for her engagement in this process.”

The University added that Anthony Odgers, the current CFO, has “kindly agreed to continue in his role to help guide the University through this period of change”.

Cambridge stressed that the decision

comes amid a series of departures in senior administrative posts, including a prolonged absence in the Registry’s office.

“Interim arrangements are now in place to cover for the Registry’s prolonged period away from the office,” the statement continued. “These roles are key to providing strategic and operational stability and leadership to the University, and we would like to assure you that organisational resilience will continue to be of the highest priority.”

In a blog post, the 21 Group said: “Despite the delicate wording, this has ‘expensive disaster’ written all over it.

“Walking away from a contract like that can’t have come cheap. It likely cost the University very serious money, perhaps six or seven figures. The only reason to take such an expensive step would be if continuing with the appointment posed an even greater risk.”

The blog also cited one of its commenters, who said: “The new reporting lines effectively sidelined the Registry, it could even amount to a claim of constructive dismissal. That might explain why the University abruptly reversed course – better to pay off one contract than risk a much bigger legal and governance crisis.”

Akushie was due to join in December 2025 from the University of London, where she has served since 2020 as Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Finance and Operations).

A chartered accountant with experience across higher education, housing and the charity sector, Akushie also

chairs the Audit Committee of HICL Infrastructure plc, a FTSE 250 investment fund managing £3bn in assets internationally.

She had been expected to lead Cambridge’s Finance Division and sponsor its ‘Finance Transformation Programme’, reporting directly to the Vice-Chancellor.

In September, Deborah Prentice, the Vice-Chancellor, said: “I am delighted to welcome Rita as our new Chief Financial Officer. She impressed the interview panel with her vast experience, particularly in finance transformation, her passion for higher education, and her commitment to inclusive leadership.”

Meanwhile, Akushie said: “Joining the University of Cambridge is a tremendous honour. I am inspired by the opportunity to lead a transformative finance agenda that supports the University’s long-term strategic ambitions. I look forward to working collaboratively across the University to build a finance function that is modern, transparent, and aligned with Cambridge’s world-leading mission.”

The University has not indicated when it will restart the recruitment process for a new CFO. Odgers had been scheduled to step down on 31 December 2025.

As *Varsity* reported last month, the University is to implement deeper spending cuts than originally planned after miscalculating the rate of inflation in its two-year financial plans.

This came a year after the University racked up a heavy deficit.

The University of Cambridge and Rita Akushie were contacted for comment.

Wilf Vall

Associate Editor

Dame Sally Davies, master of Trinity College, will step down from the role next year, *Varsity* can reveal.

Dame Sally, who was appointed master in 2019, will officially end her tenure in October 2026. She was the first female master of Trinity College, having previously served as the UK’s chief medical officer.

Professor Davies’ departure comes a year after she caused significant controversy by telling students that Trinity College had “no interest” in cutting ties from arms companies, after it was reported that the College had voted to divest months earlier in 2024.

During the same meeting with students, she also stated that she “regrets” setting up a £250,000 relief fund for students affected by Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine as it had “set a precedent” for how universities would respond to other conflicts.

The College established the fund and decided to divest from Russian companies in 2022. Davies said publicly at the time that she was proud to be “offering concrete assistance to those in need”.

However, when pressed on why Palestinian

students were not receiving the same support, Davies claimed that the decision to cut ties from Russia was inappropriate.

Trinity is the richest of all of Oxford and Cambridge’s Colleges, with an endowment of over £2 billion.

Their endowment includes investments in several arms companies, including Elbit Systems, which produces drones and land-based equipment used by the Israeli army.

Dame Sally started her career in the NHS as a consultant haematologist for 30 years before joining the civil service. She was also NHS Director General of Research and Development.

More recently, Davies has overseen the establishment of a £50 million PhD fund to attract the “brightest minds” in the world to Cambridge as part of a collaboration between Trinity and the central University.

A new master will be appointed in the coming year, with applications closing in December.

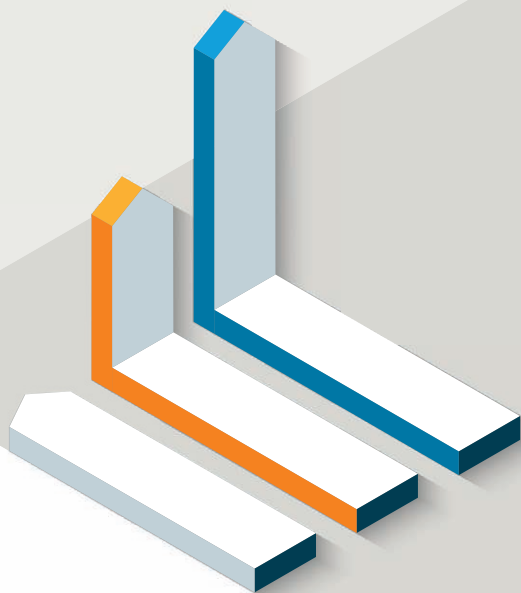
As one of Cambridge’s ‘royal colleges’ the new master will be officially appointed by the monarch at the recommendation of the College. This will be the first time that King Charles III – a Trinity alumni and former *Varsity* writer – has appointed a master for his former College.

◀ ROYAL SOCIETY
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CUSW receives £13k in donations

- Russian-born billionaire Alex Gerko donated £3000 to the new women's society
- *Daily Mail* columnist and Michael Gove's ex-wife Sarah Vine donated £50
- Free Speech Union, who supported Cofnas, also offered financial support to the group

Calum Murray and Georgie Midlemiss

Deputy Editor and Senior News Editor

The Cambridge University Society for Women (CUSW), the first student group at the University of Cambridge which intends to limit its membership to those assigned "female at birth", has received £13,810 in donations according to its GoFundMe page.

This comes almost three weeks after the society was founded by three students, with its initial announcement attracting considerable national media attention, as well as words of support from a number of public figures.

The society has previously been accused by the Cambridge University Labour Club of promoting "transphobic rhetoric under the guise of free speech". In an interview, *The Telegraph* claimed that the society's three founders – Pres-

ident Maeve Halligan, Treasurer Thea Sewell, and Secretary Serena Worley – had been "branded 'TERFs' and shunned by peers".

The list of donors includes a number of public figures, including Alex Gerko, Russian-born billionaire and Britain's 20th richest man, who donated £3,000.

Lucinda Platt, a Professor of Social Policy and Sociology at LSE, donated £500 to the society. In 2023, Platt contributed to guidance issued by campaign group Sex Matters on collecting data on biological sex.

She told *Varsity* "as a Cambridge alumna with a lifelong commitment to women's rights, I'm pleased to support an organisation that has women's concerns at its heart."

Daily Mail columnist, and Michael Gove's ex-wife, Sarah

Vine donated £50, telling *Varsity*, "if the society has been established by current students, one assumes they feel there is some kind of need for it. I am always supportive of women's organisations."

Alongside receiving large donations from a number of notable individuals who lack ties to the university, the society's supporters appear to be dominated not by current students, but by university alumni.

There has been no evidence of the group having a strong support base among current students.

In an Instagram post by the society last Sunday (01/11), they claimed to have received 20 membership applications from students, and 60 applications from alumni to join the group of 'affiliated alumnae', as membership is restricted to current students.

This stands in contrast to a statement from Gerko to *Varsity*, commenting on his donation, "I believe in sex-based rights, a view shared by the majority of Cambridge students and the vast majority of the UK population. Good luck to CUSW, which will provide a forum for those views." Gerko did not cite any sources for this statistic he provided to *Varsity*.

Alongside the GoFundMe, the society

has received support from the membership organisation the Free Speech Union (FSU). The organisation supported "race-realist" Cambridge professor Nathan Cofnas against criticisms over his research, which claimed that in a meritocracy the number of black professors at Harvard would fall to almost zero.

Its Founder and General Secretary Toby Young informed *Varsity* that it was in receipt of the organisation's Ian Mactaggart Programme, which provides student societies with up to £1,500 per term. The programme claims to "foster a culture of open debate, independent thinking and free expression among young people in the UK, especially students."

In 2021, a flurry of students resigned from university free speech campaigns linked with the FSU. Students at Bristol's Free Speech Society (BFSS) wrote: "We were led to believe that [the group] was independent from external organisations, particularly the one that most of us are concerned about, the FSU."

Speaking in a personal capacity, president of the BFSS Harry Walker had said: "Organisations like the FSU are just perpetuating a culture war." At the time, an FSU Director said, "I have always been

very open about the FSU's involvement and sponsorship", while Young declined to comment.

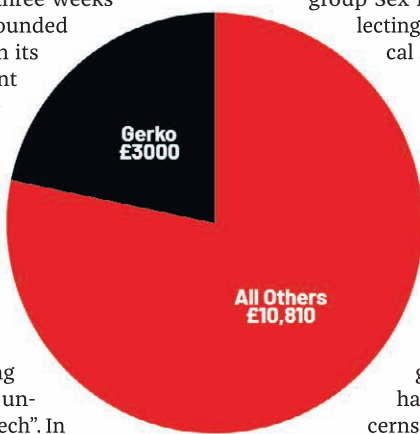
Halligan, speaking on behalf of the society, claimed that the FSU was a "non-partisan organisation". "We are proud to be receiving a grant from an organisation that clearly and effectively champions freedom of speech in our society," she added.

Halligan said the donations would go towards public events, publicity, and campaign materials for charities, and "a big part of why some people have donated" was to provide funds to defend against any potential legal action.

She continued: "The Gofundme page was a way to make sure that, right at the start, donations were public and visible."

"People expressed verbally that they were really happy about the society's launch, with some referencing how women have had to defend their rights over and over again throughout history."

"The CUSW is not politically aligned and we have supporters from across the political spectrum, including many who are avowedly left of centre. We are proud to have received both a small number of larger sums and many smaller donations."





New Year's Eve at The Gonville

Black Tie Event

Join us for a glittering Black Tie evening as we bid farewell to the year and welcome 2026 in true Gonville style. Begin the night with a complimentary glass of Champagne before taking your seat in Gonville Kitchen for a five-course feast, thoughtfully crafted with seasonal flair and the finest local ingredients.

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News

Home Office denies visa to graduating PhD student

Dr Reem Abbas, from Saudi Arabia, described the decision to block her in-person graduation as ‘devastating’

Georgie Middlemiss

Senior News Editor

The Home Office has denied a PhD student's visa application to attend their graduation ceremony at Cambridge University, *Varsity* can reveal.

Despite intercession by both Cambridge MP Daniel Zeichner and Jesus College, the denial was confirmed in late October.

Dr. Reem Abbas, who studied both an MPhil and PhD in Modern and Contemporary Literature at the University of Cambridge, described the decision,

which left her unable to officially graduate in-person, as “devastating”.

She told *Varsity*: “It was all the more devastating to discover that this country – the one in which I lived for five years to read for my MPhil. and PhD at the University of Cambridge – would only ever see me as an alien. A high-risk. A potential asylee.”

Abbas was forced to leave Cambridge before finishing her PhD, in September 2024, faced with “pressing caring responsibilities back home,” and submitted her final thesis in November from her home in Saudi Arabia.

After sending her application for a short stay tourist visa to attend her graduation ceremony in early September of this year, Abbas received the decision by the Home Office to reject the application on the 26th September.

A spokesperson for Jesus College told *Varsity*: “Jesus College supported Dr Reem Abbas in her application and appeal; we share Reem’s disappointment that she could not attend her graduation in person.”

Abbas has now lost the opportunity to graduate in-person, and has officially had her degree conferred in absence. As per University policy, once a degree has been confirmed in absence it cannot be conferred in person.

While the Home Office provided multiple reasons for its decision, Abbas claims the “real reason why it was rejected” was her nationality.

She is from Yemen, but was born and raised in Saudi Arabia and has no immediate family remaining in Yemen or ties to the country.

Abbas alleges the Home Office denied her application on the basis of being from Yemen, out of concern she may have attempted to remain in the UK following the graduation and claim asylum. She emphasised: “For all intents and purposes, Saudi is my home. It is where my nuclear family has lived for three generations.”

Intervention from both Cambridge MP Daniel Zeichner and Jesus College in support of her application was ultimately unsuccessful. Zeichner noted on the rejection: “I recognise that visa decisions can involve complex considerations, but it is always sad to hear of the disappointment of those affected.”

Left furious at the decision, she emphasised the various evidential documents she provided that all, in her words, “prove that I have strong ties, obligations, and aspirations to return to and remain in Saudi”.

The rejection letter referenced that she has no family remaining in her home country, stating “I am not satisfied that your ties in your country of residence are such that they would encourage you to leave should you be granted entry into the UK.”

She mourned her inability to formally end her time at Cambridge, both to celebrate and say goodbye but also to pay heed to the city she had spent five years in.

She reflected: “I will not be able to see the people who made my life in Cambridge as beautiful and memorable as it was. I will not be able to thank my supervisors in person. I will not be able to walk along the river Cam, to feed its swans or watch its ducks waddle into water as the sun fades into early evening. I will not have the opportunity to visit the libraries in which I spent the

better part of five years.”

This is not the first time Abbas has experienced visa application rejections from the Home Office, another suggestion that her nationality was behind the recurring rejections.

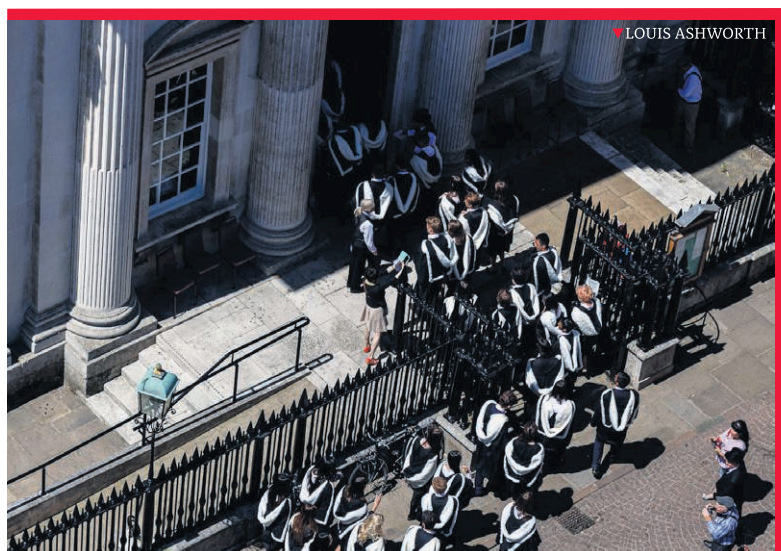
In 2017, the Office rejected her application both for an ERASMUS exchange programme and an International Summer School in Scotland. Both times, as in this year, they gave the rationale behind this decision the concern that she may attempt to remain in the UK after the trip.

Cambridge MP, Daniel Zeichner, told *Varsity*: “I was very sorry to learn that Dr Reem Abbas was unable to attend her graduation ceremony at the University of Cambridge. Having completed her PhD here, I understand her deep disappointment in being unable to celebrate this achievement with her peers and supervisors.”

“While I am unable to comment on the specific details of the case, I can confirm that I made representations to the Home Office on Dr Abbas’s behalf; however, the original outcome was upheld.”

“I recognise that visa decisions can involve complex considerations, but it is always sad to hear of the disappointment of those affected,” he continued.

The Home Office was contacted for comment.



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Selwyn questions cultural dress at formals

Faron Smith
 Senior News Editor

Selwyn College officials have expressed concern about a motion by students to allow cultural wear to be worn at formals, *Varsity* understands.

At a JCR meeting on the 26th October, a member of the committee proposed that the college should further clarify whether cultural wear is allowed to be worn at formals, with the current guidelines being unclear.

According to the college's website, it is deemed to be "important that standards of behaviour and dress at such an event must remain suitable to the occasion," with the "Butler or supervisor in charge of the event [...] empowered to rule on the suitability of attire before sanctioning entry".

The dress code makes no mention of cultural dress, with men required to wear a "jacket and tie," with an "equivalent level of formality" for women. As at other colleges, gowns must be worn at all times.

The following week's meeting minutes recorded that the college had expressed "reservations" about the change, following a Stewards Committee meeting that had taken place on the 4th.

According to the minutes, fellows and staff expressed concern that some individuals would use the change as a "loophole" to wear inappropriate clothing.

There was further concern that Hall Staff would be made responsible for determining what should be classed as

"appropriate cultural wear".

While it is unclear exactly where the concerns come from, the Steward's Committee, which governs the college's catering, consists of 8 members of staff, alongside representatives from the JCR and MCR.

It is understood that the process of making the change has been restarted, and the JCR is optimistic that the motion will go through.

Students at the college have been broadly supportive of the proposed change, with one describing the controversy as "another case of archaic Cambridge traditions being put over real life. It should be basically a non-issue and yet they seem to want to fight tooth and nail over some fabric".

Another student said: "I think it's ridiculous that some in the college don't want to allow cultural wear at formals – people should be allowed to wear something they feel comfortable in for formals, and we should want to celebrate our diversity in college rather than hide it."

Earlier this year, a Selwyn formal dinner was interrupted for another reason: climate activists protested the lack of plant-based menus at the College. Jason Scott Warren, a professor at the University, said at the time that "we need to get out of the meat-and-two-veg rut and begin to discover more sustainable options".

Dress code for formal halls already differs broadly from college to college. Downing makes allowances for cultural

wear, stating that "a collarless shirt may be worn without a tie as part of cultural dress". Meanwhile, Caius is famous for its loose dress code, only stipulating that students must wear gowns over their clothes.

In 2015, St Catharine's changed its 800-year dress code at formal dinners to allow women to wear suits.

A spokesperson for the College confirmed that no decision has yet been made yet on whether to allow cultural wear at formals.



▼ FARON SMITH

A matter of loaf and death

Alexander Brian
 Deputy News Editor

The Head Porter of Magdalene College has issued a warning to students after a piece of bread was thrown onto the roof of Basing House accommodation.

"Unfortunately, a loaf of bread has now been thrown out of a window," wrote the porter in an email sent to all residents of the accommodation at the beginning of this week. "This behaviour is completely unacceptable."

The accompanying image in the email shows not a loaf, but half a bun perched on the edge of a flat part of the roof next to the wall.

"Throwing food or any objects from windows poses serious risks," the email continued. According to the porter, these include "hygiene issues" as well as "damages and costs".

The Head Porter explained that "food waste attracts pests and creates unsanitary conditions," before adding that throwing objects "can damage property and lead to expensive repairs".

The email also suggested that the flying bread could pose a "safety hazard" as "falling items can injure someone below".

This is not the first time the Head Porter has contacted students regarding the inappropriate propulsion of objects. His email references a "previous message regarding items being thrown from gyp rooms".

One Magdalene student, who lives

in a different accommodation block, reacted: "From the outside, it does seem a bit excessive to send an email talking about safety hazards over a loaf of bread, plus, in the picture they provide, it looks more like half a bun anyways."

Basing House is located above Prezzo on the opposite side of the river to most of Magdalene College. For whatever reason, the accommodation has become a locus for roof-based indiscipline.

On VE Day (08/05), some of the previous batch of residents climbed onto the roof of Basing House and left the message "RIP Basing Bomber," in reference to an inside joke about a mystery student's unfortunate toilet habits.

Reacting to this latest incident on Magdfess, an anonymous confessions page for College members, one post announced: "move over Basing Bomber, welcome Basing Breader".

Magdalene is by no means immune from mysterious misbehaviour.

In 2024, a sacred painting depicting the Virgin Mary and Jesus was stolen from Magdalene College Chapel.

Meanwhile, a *Varsity* investigation in 2024 found that Magdalene students were among the most likely in Cambridge to be fined for not meeting College rules. These included not showing up to tutor meetings at the start of term and failing to fill out a form confirming they have kept term.

In 2022, the Magdalene JCR President was ousted in a no-confidence vote due to multiple allegations of "misconduct".

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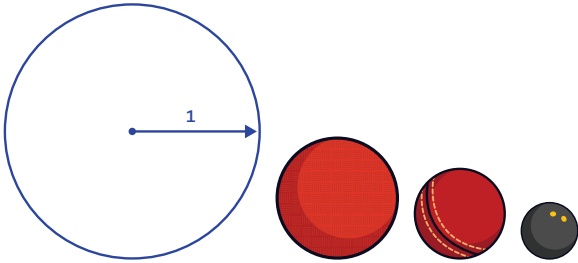
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News in brief

James Watson dies, 97

James Dewey Watson, who alongside Francis Crick uncovered the structure of DNA in 1953, has died aged 97 after a brief illness. *Varsity* was the first newspaper to report the discovery, made at Cambridge's Cavendish Laboratory. The Chicago-born scientist died on 6th November after a brief illness. He will be remembered for his major contribution to biology, recipient of a Nobel prize in 1962, but also several controversies in his later life. These include views about genetic differences in intelligence between races, and dismissing the vital role Rosalind Franklin played in his and Crick's discovery.

Cantab resigns as BBC chief

Selwyn alum Tim Davie resigned as Director General of the BBC on Sunday (8/11). Deborah Turness also stepped down from her role as Head of News. Their resignations followed the leaking of an internal BBC memo by *The Telegraph*. This document claimed that BBC Panorama edited together sections of Trump's speech on January 6th 2021 to make it look like the US President explicitly incited the Capitol riots that afternoon. Davie said of his decision: "Overall the BBC is delivering well, but there have been some mistakes made and as director general I have to take ultimate responsibility."

Alumni dominate book award

Cambridge alumni are responsible for four of the 15 titles shortlisted for the 2025 Waterstones Book of the Year. These include Natasha Brown's satirical novel *Universality*; R.F. Kuang's *Katabasis*, a fantasy about the hellishness of academia; *Craftland* by James Fox, which explores Britain's vanishing traditional skills; and David Attenborough's latest book *Ocean*, with Colin Butfield. Waterstones' head of books said: "There is something for every reading need: from motivational nourishment to pure escapism, via fantastical quests and jump-scares." The winner will be announced on 27 November.

Rare orchid rescued

The Cambridge University Botanic Gardens have rescued a rare orchid from the brink of extinction. Since 2008, they have been working with Plantlife and Kew Gardens to reintroduce Fen Orchids (*Liparis loeselii*) across the UK. In 2010, the species was only found in three sites in East Anglia and one in Wales. The main reason for its decline was habitat loss resulting from the drainage or abandonment of fens. 15 years later, Fen Orchards have been recorded at seven sites in England and three across Wales. This marks the first time the species has successfully been cultivated in Great Britain.

Around town



Maria Eduarda Paixão delivers the Cambridge news

E-bike phone thieves strike across Cambridge

Police are investigating nine incidents of mobile phone theft that occurred over this last week between Saturday (08/11) and Monday (10/11). The areas targeted included Newmarket Road, Trumpington Road, Jesus Lane, Parker's Piece, Midsummer Common, Emmanuel Street, Christ's Pieces, and near Cambridge North Station. Inspector Shawn Emms commented advising residents to "where possible, also keep your phone out of sight when not in use and be cautious when using your phone in public." In an email to Colleges about potential phone snatches, the local police explained that "these bikes travel very fast and are silent so victim's can be completely unaware of their presence until their phone has been snatched out of their hand".

Remembrance memorials

Both the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Cambridge will attend events marking Remembrance and Armistice Day this Sunday (15/11). In the morning, the Mayor will meet veterans before a parade to the Hills Road war memorial, followed by a commemorative service with wreath-laying. An annual service at Great St Mary's Church will be broadcast from 10:30 a.m. on Cambridge Radio. Services will pause at 11 a.m. for the national two-minute silence. Mayor Pounds commented, "It is 80 years since VE day when we remembered the end of conflict in Europe after the Second World War and VJ day which marked the end of WW2 conflict in the Far East. This year, we also remembered the people of Nagasaki and Hiroshima whose cities were devastated by atomic bombs".

Mill Road closed for at least next two weeks

Mill Road will be closed for a minimum of the next two weeks as construction is underway to fix a collapsed sewer. The works began last Tuesday (11/11) and are estimated to continue until at least 28th November. Access to Mill Road will only be allowed for emergency vehicles. An Anglian Water spokesperson commented: "We're sorry for any traffic disruption", and "in order to keep road users, pedestrians and our team safe while we work, we have needed to close the road with emergency access only".



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Illustration by Richard Briggs



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John's rakes in £110k in movie moolah

Meanwhile, Queens' cashed in £10k from eight shoots, while Tit Hall earned £8k

Faron Smith

Senior News Editor

St John's College has earned more than £112,000 by renting out its grounds for movie sets, over ten times the amount cashed in by other colleges.

Through Freedom of Information requests, *Varsity* has analysed the amount earned by 19 colleges from commercial filming projects, although several of these reported having had no projects filmed since the start of last year.

John's earned a total of £112,750 since the start of 2024, with three projects being shot on the college's grounds in that time.

While the College did not reveal what the projects were, there have been several high-profile projects that have taken place in the college setting in the last year.

Among these is *Prime Target*, an Apple TV+ series, which premiered in January 2025 and follows the adventures of a fictional Cambridge Maths student who becomes entangled in an international espionage plot.

According to the College's Instagram account, filming for the series took place in August 2023, outside the period investigated, but shooting returned for additional scenes in 2024. The show's trailer opens with an aerial shot of the city, before showing clips of star Leo Woodall walking through St John's College's First Court, and cycling through its gardens.

In its 2023-24 accounts, the College made note of the high amount taken in by commercial filming, describing film-

ing as one of the "most significant factors" in its income increasing from £47.1 million in 2023 to £53.5 million in 2024.

While the College's post about its role in *Prime Target* did mention that some students "were lucky enough to get jobs on set," a John's student said: "I've never been stopped by filming; the College seems to do it primarily out of term time, which means that I'm neither interrupted nor have the opportunity to have a cameo in some random TV show."

The student continued: "If it is raising money for the college, I see no issue with it. Particularly since the dean seems very careful to ensure there are no issues with students."

"Universities and Colleges are in the depths of a financial crisis. St John's, being one of the most beautiful colleges, should get more money and support when there are scant options for further funding."

£112,750

How much John's earned from three commercial shoots since the start of 2024

The College's earnings stand in sharp contrast to those declared by other colleges in the same period, few of which breached five figures.

The second College declaring the second-highest income was Queens', who declared an income of £10,000 from 8

different commercial projects.

Queens' featured significantly in the BBC drama *Ludwig*, starring Peterhouse alumnus David Mitchell. Alongside Queens', filming took place once again at John's, as well as at the University Library.

A second series has already been commissioned of the show, with filming taking place on Trinity Lane and All Saints' Passage.

While Queens' made the second-highest formal declaration of income, it is likely that Jesus received more from commercial filming projects.

In response to the request for information, the College stated that there had been "two occasions since January 2024 when the College has been used as a location for a major TV/Film production," without specifying a specific fee received.

However, the College's filming policy states that fees for large-scale filming projects start at a minimum of £6,500 per day, meaning that it will have earned at least £13,000 from the two projects to have taken place.

Among the colleges that declined to reveal their income from filming was Selwyn, although the College did confirm that 6 projects had taken place on its grounds. Among these is *After the Hunt*, which premiered in October and stars Julia Roberts as professor at Yale University.

In Selwyn's Annual Report, bursar Jennifer Phillips mentioned the "high-profile filming" that took place in the College during the summer of 2024,

noting that "after weeks of intensive preparation, the shoot itself lasted only a few hours".

The majority of the other colleges to respond to the request reported not having received any income from commercial filming, with the exceptions of Trinity Hall, which earned £8,000, and Clare College, which declared £450.

£6500

How much Queens' charge as a minimum fee for large-scale projects

Despite not receiving any income from filming, Sidney Sussex revealed that permission had been granted for 11 events to film in the college, more than any other college.

Filming at the University of Cambridge is nothing new, with both the University and its colleges having been repeatedly featured in film and TV for decades. Perhaps most famously, *The Theory of Everything*, for which star Eddie Redmayne won an Academy Award, was shot largely at St John's, as it traced the life of theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking.

Meanwhile, in the 1980s, *Maurice* was shot in King's College, based on the E.M. Forster book of the same name. The film won three awards at the Venice Film Festival, and was nominated for an Oscar.

University watch



Georgie Middlemiss rounds up student news from across the country

Mandelson resigns as honorary Oxford fellow

Lord Peter Mandelson has resigned from his role as honorary fellow at St. Catherine's College at the University of Oxford, where he studied as an undergraduate, following revelations in September that Mandelson had failed to disclose the extent of his close relationship with convicted sex-offender Jeffrey Epstein. "Lord Mandelson informed St Catherine's College that he has decided to step back from public life. The college has accepted his resignation as an honorary fellow", St. Catherine's official statement read. This follows Mandelson, who ran for Chancellor of Oxford University in 2024, being fired from his role as UK Ambassador to the US in September.

Nottingham slashes language and music courses

The University of Nottingham has announced the suspension of all modern language and music courses for new applicants to the University, among other slashed courses, in a bid to cut costs. Current students on the courses will continue to be supported, emphasised a university spokesperson. Charlie Blair, a German and Russian student who started a petition against the change, said, "Everybody is so passionate about their course and then to just be cut off like that, saying you're not important, we don't value you, I think it's really wrong." 16 courses will be suspended in total, also including nursing and theology. The University and College Union (UCU) branch of Nottingham University opposed the courses cut.

UCU strike over job cuts

Staff at both Lancaster University and Sheffield Hallam University have gone on strike over job losses, among other concerns. Sheffield Hallam members of the University and College Union (UCU) claimed around 1,000 staff had lost jobs over the past two years, and Lancaster University has signposted their aim to cut 400 full-time jobs to save costs. A spokesman for Lancaster University UCU told the BBC they believe that "around one in four staff are up for the chop". A spokesperson for Sheffield Hallam said the university would "continue to seek to avoid compulsory redundancies where possible".

Week in Pictures



▲ Plant sale at New Museums Site



▲ Varsity's Editors-in-Chiefs in conversation with the Chancellor



▲ Christmas light have hit King's Parade



▲ Ukrainian vigil on King's Parade

Photos by Zoe Green, Ruying Yang, Isaac Ohringer, Charlie Rowan

Interviews

Of Robinson's small but esteemed list of famous alumni, Robert Webb is arguably top bill – and certainly less controversial than its red brick facade. At the beginning of my first year, it seemed everyone had read his 2016 memoir *How Not to be a Boy*, hoping to glean which rooms he'd stayed in: H1, 4 Adams, and a house on Mill Lane, for those curious. Though Webb fondly recalls his time at Cambridge, it was when reading old diary entries to write his memoir that he realised, "I spent a really quite large fraction of my life really f*cking miserable".

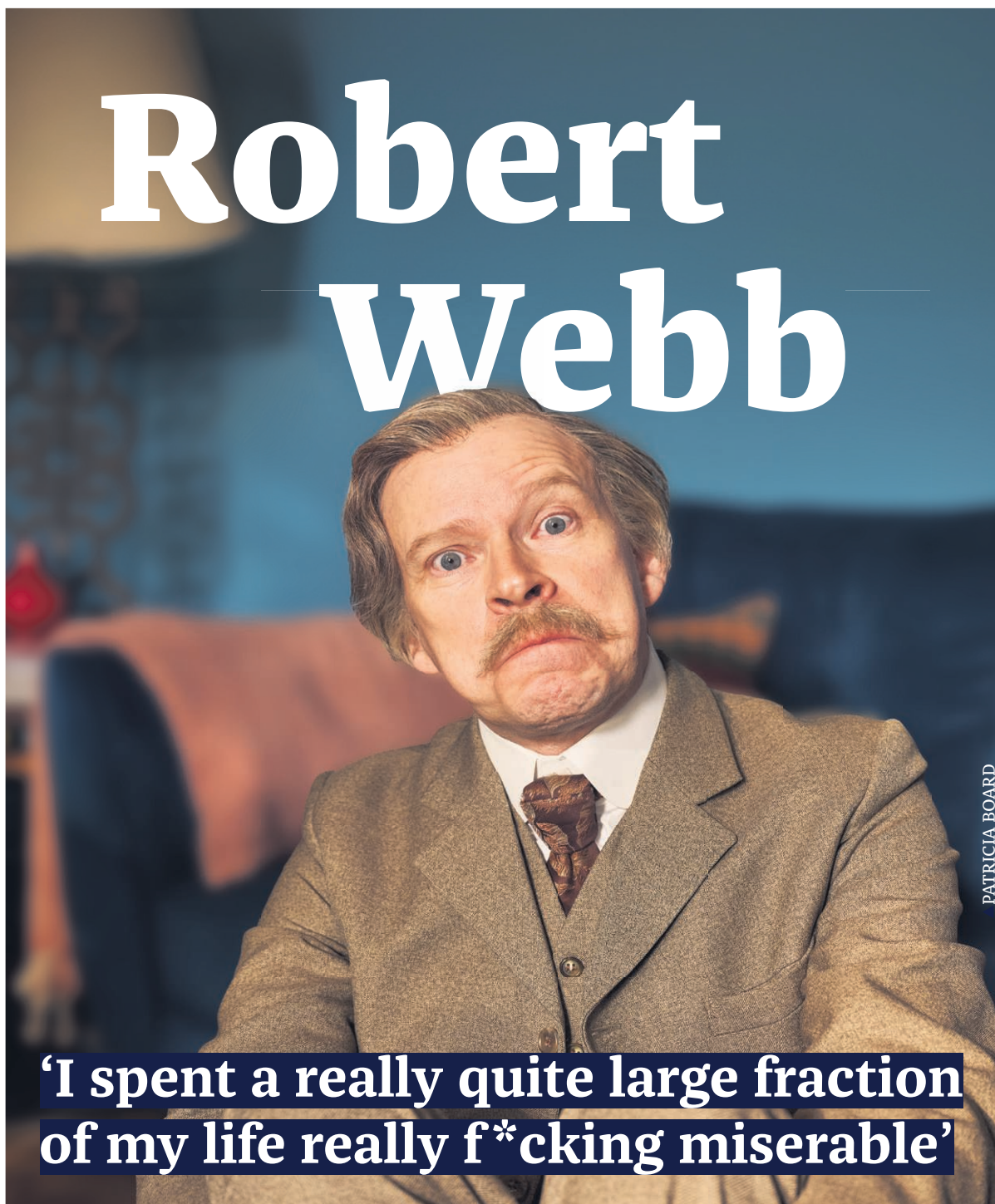
Webb puts a lot of this down to the neurosis of being in your early 20s: "The privilege of being young," he tells me, "is that you've got absolutely no sense of perspective. A lot of things are happening for the first time, and there has never been anything so wonderful as falling in love, and there has never been anything so heartbreaking as being dumped". These extremes were an integral part of his student experience, and he reflects upon them fondly, concluding that: "as far as three years of one's life go, it was pretty hard to beat".

“Getting there was just everything. So I remain amazingly grateful that it all worked out

When he matriculated in 1992, Webb was single-minded and "hell-bent on becoming a Footlight". But his path was far from straightforward; after his mother's death during sixth form, he was forced to take a year out to re-sit his A-levels, deferring his Cambridge offer. Though he's careful to deny there being "tears behind the mask," he confides that: "I think what losing mum did – because one immediately starts looking for silver linings – is it kind of emboldened me [...] I think I slightly lost my mind, and that's kind of necessary when you're determined to do something so unbelievably unlikely".

"Unlikely" for Webb wasn't just a successful career in comedy, but being admitted into Cambridge in the first place. We speak a little about his experience applying as a first-generation university student, a process that felt "impossible". "I mean, it was everything. Getting there was just everything. So I remain amazingly grateful that it all worked out". Although his journey to Cambridge was complicated, the friendships and opportunities his time at Robinson gave him were unparalleled; from sketch shows to successful sitcoms, his work (eventually) paid off.

Yet, despite his experience writing sketches at school, Webb was rejected from every Footlights show he auditioned for in his



PATRICIA BOARD

first year at Cambridge. He laughs as he tells me that "I was absolutely outraged when I wasn't cast. I was so full of myself and, quite frankly, wasn't lacking in ego or self-belief". Though he's forgiven the committee for not casting him in the panto – "you needed to be able to sing" – Webb admits that he's "still bitter" for not getting a part in the Spring Revue... though some would argue that's for the better.

Sometimes it seems there's unjust animosity towards student comics, and I ask Webb if the same was the case when he was a Footlight. As it turns out, quite the opposite: "There was nothing really scathing until Edinburgh, when *The Scotsman* got a hold of us – traditionally they just really f*cking hated us [...]"

I remember one

review opened with: 'they've got horrible middle class names like Matt and Claire' – Matt's from the f*cking Bible!". Yet he admits that, even in Mitchell and Webb's student heyday, there was a sense that the troupe had gone downhill. He assures me that "there's never been a Footlight show that wasn't a terrible and pathetic shadow of what Footlights used to be [...]" and no doubt *Peep Show* was used as a stick to beat you round the face and neck. That's how Footlights works [...] but you go and see if there's someone like David Mitchell there – and would you believe it, David Mitchell himself was there!"

Our conversation comes a month after the release of his latest sketch show, *Mitchell and Webb are Not Helping*, which marks the duo's return to TV after a 15-year break. I'm curious to hear why they've chosen to stage their comeback now, and Webb confides that: "as it turns out, we spent 15 years politely waiting to be asked". The offer came out of the blue, following a dinner between Jesse Armstrong and Channel 4's Chief Content Creator, Ian Katz. When Katz let slip that he'd love to see the pair reunite, Armstrong replied: "Well, I'm sure if you asked Rob and David, they'd

be receptive to the idea". So, Webb tells me: "he did, and we were. And like most good things on TV, you've got Jesse Armstrong to thank".

“He's 'still bitter' for not getting a part in the Spring Revue

The show doesn't shy away from the fact its stars are ageing and jokes about aging – including an entire sketch about Googling 'Robert Webb dead' – abound. I ask Webb whether they feel this has offered them a new perspective, and he assures that it's "a lot less pressure. I think it would be strange if we didn't acknowledge that we're entering the, uh, autumn radiance of our years [...] we've got less to prove." Being able to write and perform his own material has been a real treat for Webb, and though he's more than happy to act in other people's sitcoms, he's appreciated the return to form.

When we get onto his collaboration with David Mitchell, Webb appears delighted to be working side-by-side with his old friend again. He tells me that:

"This series is the most heavily Mitchell and Webb-written show since the first series of the BBC show in 2006". Back then, he says: "We took it for granted [...] whereas now we've got a bit of perspective. I go over to my best friend's house and try to make him laugh for three hours and that's a hell of a way to make a living".

“Like most good things on TV, you've got Jesse Armstrong to thank

Inevitably, our conversation veers back to *Peep Show*, though Webb assures me that: "I like *Peep Show*, it's fine!". Regarding its popularity on platforms like TikTok, I ask why he thinks the show is still resonating with young people. "I get to be very modest about *Peep Show* because I didn't write it," he says. "I think it taps into everybody's insecurities: that they're not part of the mainstream, that we're always going to be in our weird little puddle, isolated from the cosmic party that is going on elsewhere [...]" The question of the show is: 'Is it going to be OK?' and I think that's a very personal question for young people. As it is, there's just enough hope that maybe Jez will make it as a musician and Mark will get together with Dobby, and maybe it's going to be alright". When it comes to a reboot, Webb is adamant that it just wouldn't work: "If you come back and they're 53 and they're still living with someone they don't want to live with and they're still not fulfilled romantically or professionally, well, the jury's back in, and you f*cked it. The show would just be so sad".

Mitchell and Webb are Not Helping features the return of some familiar faces, the highlight being fellow Footlight Olivia Colman as a detective. Since the end of *Peep Show*, she's gone on to win an Oscar, an Emmy, and several Golden Globes. "It's strange," Webb confesses, "because it's that distorting thing fame does [...] on the one hand, you're talking to Colly, and then suddenly you remember this is the person you've seen on various red carpets in various unbelievably glamorous locations and you go, f*ck, it's Olivia Colman! But [working with her] was lovely, it was just like old times".

The show has also offered Webb the opportunity to work with a new cast, which has been "absolutely lovely". Though the ensemble is a little younger than the show's stars, Webb assures me that "we don't spend the whole time going on about VHS tapes and days before the internet". His advice to young comedians? "If you've got something to offer, and you've got evidence of that, then you just need to keep going. If you have no evidence, then maybe they're right and you shouldn't be doing it [...] but if you think you're funny, definitely keep going" – he puts a heavy emphasis on "if".

While things were left uncertain for Mark and Jez, when I ask what's next for Webb, he seems to have things worked out. "I'm just living my life. I'll go for a run, I'll do some reading. I go to the shops and cook tea and we'll all watch TV together. You know, it's not a bad life".

– DAISY BATES
VULTURE EDITOR



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Cambridge's very own *Man of Steel*

Dhruv Shenai talks to Cambridge professor Howard Stone about the future of the UK steel industry

Walking along the Morfa beach in Wales, the sun sinking behind the clouds, you turn to face the peaceful city of Port Talbot. Towering in the foreground is the Port Talbot Steelworks. For the past 70 years, this has been a centre for UK Steel production. Now, its future is on the line, with the last blast furnace falling silent in 2024.

But this apparent loss gives a unique opportunity to Cambridge's materials science department. Howard Stone is the Tata Steel Professor of Metallurgy – a role endowed by Tata Steel, the Indian multinational company which owns the Port Talbot plant. He is investigating the science behind high-recycled-content steel, which could finally enable a cleaner, more competitive steel industry in Port Talbot and the rest of the UK.

“It all comes down to Tata Steel's initiative to upgrade their plant to electric arc furnaces

It all comes down to Tata Steel's initiative to upgrade their plant to electric arc furnaces. These furnaces specialise in recycled steel and could make the UK produce sustainable steel. However, the science behind high-performance recycled-steel remains unknown, which is where Howard comes in.

I was intrigued by the significant interest a foreign company was showing in British steel, and so naturally the first question I posed to Stone was: “Why are

Tata investing in UK steel?”

“You don't spend £750 million on a whim.” This £750 million, added to a £500 million grant from the Government, is the total investment from Tata Steel on Port Talbot. “Scrap steel has become a global issue. The demand for arc furnaces will only increase. This one-and-a-quarter billion pound investment will secure Port Talbot's future.”

Currently, the steel industry contributes 14% of the UK's manufacturing greenhouse gas emissions and around 2.8% of energy-related CO₂ emissions. The Tata Steel initiative is aligned with a vision of reducing the emissions of the industry by up to 90% by 2050, with an estimated 50 million tonnes of direct emissions reductions in the next decade by the plant alone.

The UK serves only 0.4% of the global steel market, so it simply cannot outproduce other countries. By finding a way to recycle scrap steel, we can make the steel we produce more environmentally friendly, and therefore more appealing. Currently, the UK exports approximately 8 million

tonnes of scrap steel annually for other countries to recycle, incurring additional transport costs and emissions. It is time to try something new.

“It's one of the most exciting times to be a metallurgist. A once in a generation opportunity to redefine the way that steel is made in this country while still meeting the demands of the country.” Though the money and energy are in the right place, is the science?

The electric arc furnaces primarily take in recycled steel. However, the more you recycle steel, the more impurities like copper and tin accumulate, which catastrophically ruin the properties of the steel. “Car bodies, food packaging [...] the tolerance for residual elements in these uses are very tight. But if we want to be efficient, we can't just avoid the nasty materials, you have to use all of the scrap,” says Howard.

For Howard, that means being pragmatic. By defining clear grades of steel quality, he hopes to match their properties to their ingredients

and processing route, and therefore provide the recipes for companies to produce the right quality steel with the highest amount of scrap.

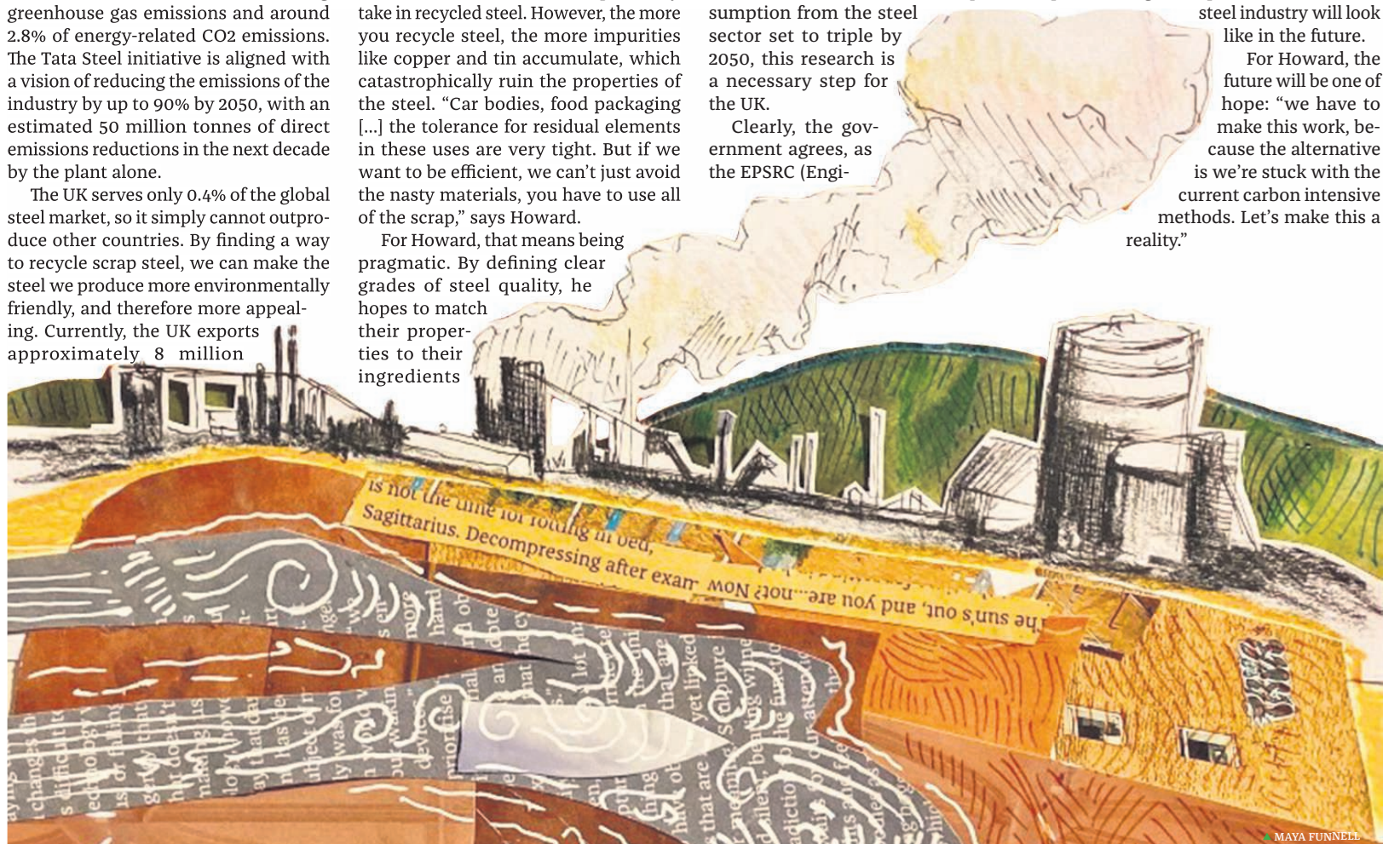
This relies on open-source data, aggregating the right information into something like a rule book. Unfortunately, steel metallurgy is incredibly complex and the science behind how combinations of dilute impurities affect the properties of steel is not well known. However, with the scrap consumption from the steel sector set to triple by 2050, this research is a necessary step for the UK.

Clearly, the government agrees, as the EPSRC (Engi-

neering and Physical Sciences Research Council) decided to work with Tata and the University to fund research with Howard. With his new team, he hopes he can find ways to be smarter about steel production.

In the short term, Port Talbot's shutdown has disrupted the local community. Around 2800 workers were made redundant last year. Though Tata insists that 5000 jobs will be preserved with the new plant, it begs the question of what the steel industry will look like in the future.

For Howard, the future will be one of hope: “we have to make this work, because the alternative is we're stuck with the current carbon intensive methods. Let's make this a reality.”



Dhruv Shenai gives a run-down on some of the latest scientific research

The secrets of the Pillars of Creation

The Pillars of Creation, lying deep in the Eagle Nebula, are a set of three gigantic columns of cosmic dust and gas, like a golden hand reaching out into the cosmic abyss. But beyond their striking appearance, these clouds are of intense interest to astronomers. In a study published in *Nature*, scientists have used data from the JWST to locate 264 candidate young stellar objects – far more than previous studies suggested. It indicates that star formation in the pillars over the past million years has been far more active than originally thought. With these new observations, researchers hope

to better understand how and why new stars form in the pillars, as well as the influence of nearby massive stars on the star formation process.

Is antibody there? Thymus regeneration in mice

The thymus is an organ located in the upper chest that governs our immune system by producing T-cells, our natural defenders against disease. However, it is one of the fastest-aging organs in the body, shrinking soon after puberty. This makes it a vital target for regenerative medicine, particularly after chemotherapy or stem cell transplants.

Last week, scientists published a groundbreaking strategy for thymus repair. By giving mice a specific type of thymic cell soon after a stem cell transplant, they were able to restore immune function. It pins a previously unrecognised population of cells, marked by a protein called periostin (Postn+), as the key to this effect.

The Postn+ cells were previously known to release a chemical signal called Ccl19, which seems to be critical to the mechanism of regeneration. The new work shows that these cells act as beacons, attracting T-cell precursors (effectively baby T-cells) from the bone

marrow to the thymus. So, when the researchers reintroduced these Postn+ cells into mice with a damaged thymus, it was remarkable to observe that the cells successfully integrated with the organ and restarted T-cell production. They also noted that the mice had improved vaccine response after the treatment, which is a great sign for future therapies.

The research has opened up the poignant question: – what is Ccl19's role in thymus repair? If researchers can find the mechanism behind that, the discovery could lead to cell-based therapies aimed at rejuvenating the human immune system – one of the most important challenges for regenerative medicine in the 21st century.

New germanium superconductor discovered

Scientists in Queensland, Australia, have developed a method to produce germanium superconducting films. The result is a stable, readily available material that can be used in quantum computing chips.

With a superconducting temperature of -270°C, meaning it only displays the correct properties under this temperature, the material is ruled out for

general commercial use (the lowest temperature possible is -273°C, or 0K). However, it could be the perfect material for quantum computers which operate at this temperature.

“With a superconducting temperature of -270°C

The group did it by flooding the germanium with another element, in this case gallium, to encourage the formation of the superconducting thin film. The group then sandwiched this material with germanium and silicon semiconducting layers to form a device, which offers the advantage of utilising both superconducting and semiconducting effects. This technique is known as ‘molecular-beam epitaxy’.

The major breakthrough here is the method, as it could be the key to making other materials like superconducting silicon or diamond, bringing

researchers closer to practical, scalable quantum technologies.

What do you remember, Mickey?

Our memories are some of our closest held possessions, but how and where do we store them safely? For the first time, scientists have found that by altering the activity of a single gene located in neurons, a group of mice's ability to recall a memory was affected. Since the alteration was performed epigenetically, where chemicals temporarily mute the expression of the gene, this effect was reversible.

The group used a CRISPR-based epigenetic technique (a gene modification method) to alter the expression of a gene known as Arc, which regulates the activity of synapses. The researchers targeted this gene specifically within engram cells. This strengthens the evidence that these cells control memory and learning processes in the brain. The Munich-based group turned the promoter up or down, effectively changing the mice's ability to recall memories.

The results clearly show that gene expression helps regulate our memories' formation and maintenance, and it begs the question of what more we can find out about engram cells.

A biological defence of clubbing

Kalina Poydovska explores the scientific roots of being a Revs final boss

The music is deafening, the crowds are sweaty, yet students invariably clock in for their weekly shift at Revs.

It has been suggested that dancing in a group benefits the brain's social function. Dance literally helps you to get on the same wavelength as your friends. This seems a genuine neuroscientific phenomenon – brain wave oscillations can sync up between people, aiding communication. The phenomenon where rhythmic stimuli (like sounds) can align people's physiological processes is called 'entrainment'. Bass may play a particularly important role in tuning your brain's representation of the beat. Therefore, the music associated with clubbing may help you to develop valuable social connections.

Engaging in this communal rhythmic behaviour may take us back to our hunter-gatherer roots. The 'hive hypothesis' claims that engaging in synchronised group movements and losing your sense of self is important for psychological flourishing.

This raises the question: why do we not just dance like this outside of clubs? Maybe because it is not socially acceptable to bop around awkwardly in a circle, unless it's dark, crowded, and everyone around you is doing it too. Booming music builds a sense of

excitement, perhaps because loud sounds activate parts of the brainstem (called the reticular formation) that keep us awake and alert. It has also been suggested that as we accumulate more positive experiences to do with clubbing, we associate these enjoyable feelings with the club environment, meaning we are further conditioned to enjoy and seek out loud music.

The excitement might begin hours before you even reach the dance floor. Dopamine is often described as the brain's 'reward' chemical, but counterintuitively, dopamine levels peak in anticipation of a reward rather than when something pleasurable actually happens. The

high starts during the getting ready ritual – outfits, makeup, and Spotify playlists are all cues that remind your brain of the coming experience. This predictive dopamine surge explains why the pres can feel better than the club itself – though paradoxically, they might not feel quite so good without the promise of what comes after.

Although not integral to the clubbing experience, it is interesting to ask: why do we drink? Intoxication increases activity in 'reward circuits' (including the ventral striatum, where dopamine is released), which promotes pleasurable feelings. Al-

cohol further appears to decrease activity in brain regions associated with fear responses. The brain starts using more inhibitory (rather than excitatory) neurotransmitters, reducing anxiety – explaining why a night at Revs might feel like the perfect antidote to an essay crisis.

Of course, limiting your threat-detection abilities can be dangerous as well as liberating. The more confident you feel, the more dangerous drunk VOI-ing becomes. And as anyone who has spent time in the Mash bathrooms can

probably attest, reduced inhibition also results in a tendency to overshare.

When you finally make it back to your accommodation, the alcohol (and likely tiredness from the late night) may help you swiftly sink into slumber. One study found that alcohol increases slow-wave sleep, which is the deepest stage of non-REM sleep, thought to be important for functions like memory consolidation and clearing waste from the brain. Higher doses of alcohol may interfere with REM sleep, however, robbing you of your dreams and a clear head

Alcohol may contribute to bonding on a societal level. Recent research reported that alcohol consumption is associated with complex social hierarchies in non-industrial societies. The authors suggest that it reinforces political power, provides a labour incentive, and strengthens group identity. It has even been suggested that the desire to make alcohol drove the shift from hunting and gathering to agriculture. Clearly, alcohol seems a potent motivator for group activity.

Not all aspects of clubbing may be good for you, but at least your enjoyment of it is biologically defensible. You could even see it as a way to connect with your ancestral instincts – perhaps a more creative way to justify that night out to your supervisor.



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Please direct questions to the VarSoc President at president@varsity.co.uk or the Editors at editor@varsity.co.uk

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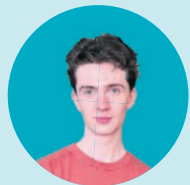
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Comment

Should Cambridge have a Reform society?



Jasper Burnside

In having conversations with politico friends, it is always striking the paucity of understanding as to why someone would vote for Reform. While I wouldn't because of the fundamental reprehensibility of their policy, and the vituperative nonsense they spew, the reasons people vote for Reform are dangerously understandable.

When one leaves London and the Home Counties, it becomes clear that this country and our systems work only for the few. The opportunity for almost everyone else has fallen precipitously, as towns have begun to rot, plagued by economic collapse, brain drain, and a spiralling cost of living, leaving many bereft of any feeling of progress. These are not Reform talking points; they are what people feel in their bones, a waking moment of fear about their futures. When you feel there's no place left for you, no party that you can trust, you must choose differently – not out of blind optimism, but in the conviction that something might yet change. This support is not some sudden or even confused thought, but a rational conclusion after years of feeling neglected and left behind.

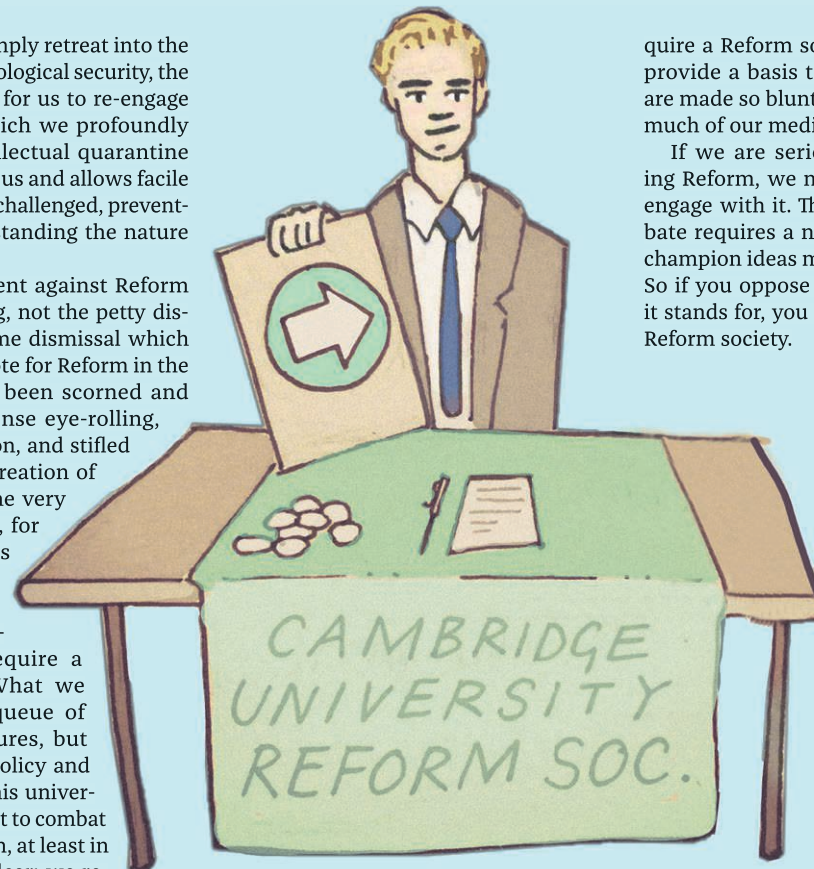
This bubble in which we study, and its profound disconnection from the rest of the country, is a dangerous luxury. Easy

“This bubble in which we study [...] is a dangerous luxury

as it would be to simply retreat into the happy homes of ideological security, the paramount need is for us to re-engage with that with which we profoundly disagree. This intellectual quarantine does a disservice to us and allows facile arguments to go unchallenged, preventing us from understanding the nature of its appeal.

The best argument against Reform is actually engaging, not the petty dismissal. It is the same dismissal which has led people to vote for Reform in the first place, having been scorned and alienated. The intense eye-rolling, casual sophistication, and stifled contempt for the creation of such a society is the very same distaste that, for many people, leads them to support Reform.

Indeed, it is precisely why we require a Reform society. What we require is not a queue of clamorous caricatures, but an articulation of policy and ideas by peers at this university. If you truly want to combat Reform, the solution, at least in this university, is clear: we re-



quire a Reform society, something to provide a basis to arguments which are made so bluntly and poorly across much of our media.

If we are serious about countering Reform, we must embrace it and engage with it. This long-overdue debate requires a new society that can champion ideas many find repugnant. So if you oppose Reform and all that it stands for, you must support a new Reform society.

Anti-trans societies won't make women safer



Olive Watt

I was unsurprised to hear that the decision had been made to create the Cambridge University Society of Women (CUSW). Since coming out as a lesbian five years ago, I have witnessed increasing anti-LGBT+ and particularly anti-trans sentiment being directed at my community. It brings me immense sadness that this hatred now has a home in our student community – that it can fester and be fed in a space that many use as a refuge.

CUSW has been set up as a single-sex space and claims to advocate for “adult human beings belonging to the female sex class”. The issue that most concerns the women who founded the society is the very existence of a tiny minority of the population: trans people.

The blog post used to launch the society makes for bleak reading. In it, the society's founder states “I want women who think they're men to join this society [...] I don't think they actually wish they were men. I think it's actually because they wish they weren't women”. This is a worrying endorsement of the very logics that underpin conversion therapy practices.

The section titled ‘Newnham, the Women's College for Men’ was particularly jarring. In it, Newnham College is referred to as a “transition pipeline”. One of the society's founders claims that “the majority of lesbians who arrive as freshers [...] will be some flavour of trans or non-binary within a year,” a process that she argues is accompanied by a “clear decline in mental wellbeing”. Aside from a strange and misguided attempt to pathologise trans people, these claims are so far removed from the reality of life for queer people at Newnham.

Newnham's queer community is vibrant. I know this because I served as Newnham's JCR LGBT+ officer for a

“I have lived the consequences of this hatred

year after experiencing institutionalised homophobia and transphobia at school. Newnham has a thriving queer and trans community because generations of Newnham students have co-created an environment in which people can be curious about their identities, have the security to explore it, and can be supported by other students who share their experiences. For many people like me, university is our first experience of an education or living environment that is safe. I pity anyone who is so full of hatred that they see this space and attempt to demonise it.

I have lived the consequences of this hatred. Earlier this year, I was sexually assaulted at an LGBT+ bop at another college. While the University reporting processes for sexual violence are retraumatising, convoluted, and ineffective, CUSW have decided to focus their energy on spotlighting the ‘issue’ of trans inclusion at Cambridge. I was not assaulted by one of the many trans women in attendance that night. I was not assaulted in the gender-neutral toilets. I was not assaulted by a man who

‘dressed up as a woman’ to get to me. 91% of people prosecuted for sexual offences are cisgender men over the age of 18; they do not need the ‘cover’ of transness to perpetrate violence against women. I was sexually assaulted by a cisgender, male student wearing his university sports club tie and college scarf in a room full of people.

Anti-trans rhetoric is fuelling the anti-queer hostility which means that cisgender, heterosexual men (like the one who assaulted me) think it is acceptable to intrude on and perpetrate violence within queer spaces. The violence of my assault is not isolated. My trans and gender non-conforming friends and I have been subjected to repeated homophobic and transphobic language, physical violence, and intimidation in public while out in Cambridge. The framing of anti-trans hatred as in the interests of women and lesbians is false. As a survivor and an “adult human being belonging to the female sex class,” let me make this clear: CUSW's rhetoric only exacerbates the danger I face in public.

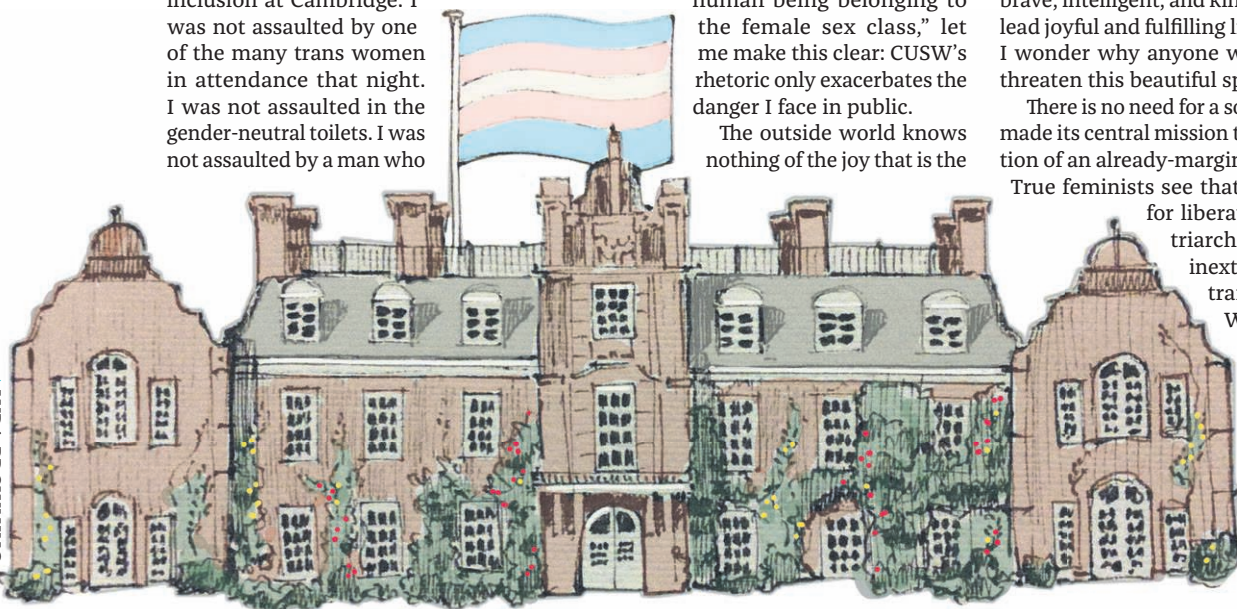
The outside world knows nothing of the joy that is the

queer community at Newnham. When I think of Newnham's trans+ community I think of life and laughter. I think of my best friend who brought me flowers and ice cream the day after I was assaulted. I think of my college children and how I got to see them grow and flourish in this space. I think of how we have gathered to paint signs for protests. I think of how we have danced in the college bar, and shared dinners in the buttery, and bonded over drinks in our bedrooms. I think of our library and of the books I have borrowed from it that have opened my eyes to the true diversity of human experience. I think of the people who have taught me lessons about myself and the world. I think of the art that people have created at welfare events, of the bad singing at karaoke nights, and the captivating theatre at Butch Soc cabaret nights. Above all, I think of the witty, brave, intelligent, and kind people who lead joyful and fulfilling lives here, and I wonder why anyone would try and threaten this beautiful space.

There is no need for a society that has made its central mission the demonisation of an already-marginalised group. True feminists see that our struggle for liberation from patri-archal violence is

inextricably tied to trans liberation. We would all benefit from a safer world. Hatred does not deserve a platform; the joy of our trans+ community does.

▲LYRA BROWNING



Jasper Finlay Burnside and Duncan Paterson clash over whether the University's student politics scene would be enriched by a Reform presence



It might be strange to start off a head-to-head by agreeing with the other person, but Jasper does have a fair point: a Reform society would probably contribute positively to the political discourse going on in the student body at the moment, at least to the extent of it as an example of what not to do and what not to say. But if that is the case, why is there not one already? It's not like Cambridge students are alien to creating problematic societies recently...

I think that, on a fundamental level, one of the reasons why there hasn't been formed yet is simply because its founders would know the nature of the Pandora's Box that they would be opening. Following a party line as volatile and vitriolic as Reform's could lay them open to all sorts of accusations, and it wouldn't work very well as a political society if they had to disavow Nigel Farage every time he blames the UK's problems on immigrants, or calls young people propagators of woke ideology. The average Cambridge student, what he might

“It's not like Cambridge students are averse to creating problematic societies...”

call the “wokerati” but what a normal person would call a well-rounded and considerate individual, is the type of person who is often on the receiving end of his hatred and wouldn't exactly give the founders a large support base to choose from.

As Jasper points out, when dialogue dies, so does fair and stable political representation; when the two ends of the political spectrum sever ties, the right falls into an ever-deepening spiral of echo chambers. Blind and deaf, they lash out and the resultant chaos is quite self-evidently displayed. However, his argument that we should welcome them to the table rests on the assumption that a Reform society would want to have a space at all. For a party line that displays so much contempt for other political affiliations, it is hard to believe that their young followers might buck the trend and engage in amiable discourse with their fellow politically-inclined students.

While generalised characteristics of

the average Reform student might be the butt of a few jokes, playing with stereotypes is the weapon of the right, not the centre or left-leaning student. As such, when Jasper talks about the caricatures, and the distaste they create that drives people into the arms of Reform, I think he touches on a valuable point about the alienating danger that they represent, but it wouldn't be like we'd be making the first aggressive move; Reform UK's policy is built on



weaponising stereotypes. Healthy dialogue works in theory, when your opponent doesn't make a living out of twisting words and images to their own political agenda.

As such, although attitudes like those championed by Reform shouldn't be left to fester in anonymity and should be publicly exposed, platforming them is the wrong way to go about such an endeavour.



Duncan Paterson

Gunning for grad jobs? Slow down



I've always associated autumn with trying to find cosiness and cheer in life to distract me from colder, longer nights. It's the time for drinking hot chocolate, having feel-good movie nights with housemates, and seeking out any room in my medieval College with decent central heating. It's also – if you're unfortunate enough to be a finalist – a time when the question “What are you thinking of doing next year” creeps into sentences and destroys the sense of optimism you had spent a whole day cultivating.

There's no point dressing it up. 2025 is a really shit year to be graduating. The graduate market is the worst it's been since records began. A mix of economic gloom and AI replacing entry-level jobs means that a degree from the most employable university in the country feels more like a one-way ticket to unemployment right now. Even if you are lucky enough to receive that fated email that doesn't open with: “We regret to inform you...”, don't get too excited about your future in corporate heaven. Chances are you'll be working longer hours than the devil for a company that'd rival him in an immorality competition – all for a wage that'll just about cover the commute to Canary Wharf.

And don't think you can keep your conscience clean by opting for a master's either. With cuts to scholarships across the board, you either need come from generational wealth or commit the heist of the century to be able to afford post-grad fees. Even then, there's no guarantee of a steady job at the end of that road, just another cliff edge with instability and debt at the bottom.

So is there any hope? Should we all just drop out, retrain as a barista, and accept our fate? Well I think that maybe, just maybe, we all need to take some

“Should we all just drop out, retrain as a barista, and accept our fate?”

deep breaths and slow down a little. Even when the economy wasn't on life support, graduate life wasn't as straightforward as: get a degree, get a job, move to Surrey with your partner and children. The fact is that employment has never been totally linear. Not getting that one consultancy grad scheme you definitely really cared about doesn't condemn you to never moving out of your parents place. Most people don't stay in the same career their whole lives, and those who do probably had to retrain because they too made the mistake of doing a sociology degree.

And don't forget, you're still doing that degree. We're lucky enough to study at one of the best universities in the Country in one of its prettiest cities, in what are supposed to be ‘the best years of our lives’. Ask yourself, ‘what are you going to nostalgise about in the future?’ Will it be all the amazing nights you spent with your friends avoiding responsibilities? Will it be getting the once-in-a-lifetime experience of being taught and lectured by genuinely world-leading academics in a field you do, deep down, genuinely care about. Or will it be that time you had a nervous breakdown staring at a cover letter that recruiters probably won't read. It might seem obvious when I spell it out like that, but Cambridge is so fast-moving that it's easy to fixate on the compounding stress and mania of it all. So don't feel guilty about experiencing all the social events and extra-curriculars

that make Cambridge so fun – anyone who calls them a waste of time is just boring. Even as I'm writing this article, I probably should be finishing my application to the latest no-hoper journalism grad scheme, but I don't regret my decision in the slightest.

Maybe I will be one of the very lucky few who end up getting a job with half-decent pay that I genuinely enjoy when I graduate. If that is the case, then feel free to complain and roll your eyes at the inevitably self-agrandising LinkedIn post that comes with it. But I won't be ashamed if it works out differently. I won't chalk my time up to Cambridge as a failure because I left without a job. I will have enjoyed my degree, made friends for life, and gained

genuinely useful skills that will serve me well in a future career – even if I don't know what that is yet.

It is okay to be able to say you don't have a plan for next year. Finding the right thing might take time, and that's normal. And I can guarantee that in ten years time, you won't be sitting in the pub still hung up on how much better life might have been if you just got that investment banking job.



Wilf Vall

Features

The state of student debate since Charlie Kirk

Francesca Evans speaks to the Union debaters about free speech and political violence

When students lined up to debate American far-right commentator Charlie Kirk in May, the event quickly went viral. Just four months later, news broke of Kirk's death, a moment that reignited global conversations about political division, free speech, and the importance of public debate. I spoke to students who faced Kirk in the Union's despatch box about what it means to uphold open dialogue in our digital age, especially in engaging with those whose views you fundamentally oppose.

The packed Union chamber had a fiery atmosphere. Damsith Wimalasena from Lucy Cavendish College was one among the several students who stepped up to the lectern and faced Charlie Kirk. On his motivation to debate Kirk, Wimalasena commented that, "someone must challenge ideas, especially the ones we disagree with. Silence isn't a strategy."

For ARU graduate James Loveridge, taking part was a way to show that "disagreement doesn't have to be hostile." He believed that political violence "is not a sign that we need less debate: we need more."

Graduate Rudi Ellis-Jones, who also debated Kirk in Cambridge, added that the focus should not just be on Kirk himself, but on the wider picture: "We should reflect on all of those lives and what it says about the world we live in, rather than focus on division."

Wimalasena outlined that free speech is "the ability to express difficult or unpopular opinions without being immediately villainised." Unfortunately, since

the debate, the Sri Lankan student has been on the receiving end of online racist abuse. The attention online has made him care "less about noise and more about purpose." With the debate going viral on social media, his video received more than 40 million views online.

“

Political violence 'is not a sign that we need less debate: we need more'

Media coverage and online discourse undeniably exposes debate in a way that can put pressure on free speech, yet the Kirk debaters I spoke to argued that it "means what we say matters more." Fitzwilliam student Tilly Middlehurst has seen an explosion in her following since the debate, with her Instagram promoting the importance of debate as political action.

An Instagram post, which some deemed offensive, recently led to Oxford Union president-elect George Abaraonye receiving a no-confidence vote. The Oxford Union "unequivocally condemn[ed] the reported words and sentiments." However, the Union was also "deeply concerned" by the subsequent racial abuse and threats he received, which

undermined the bastion of free speech the Union champions. Middlehurst commented on an Instagram post, appalled by "some of the most vile racist attacks I have ever witnessed online" that Abaraonye was subjected to.

All interviewees reflected on how the digital era has reshaped and threatened free speech. Archie Mackintosh, from Jesus College, pointed to the anonymity of the internet, which allows people to "spread hate and disinformation with no fear of social consequence." In the online space where algorithms continually reinforce echo chambers of belief, he warned of "increasing political polarisation." Trinity Hall student Kai Bevan shared a similar concern, noting that with the rise of AI, "ideas, particularly 'bad ideas', spread more quickly than ever." In such a climate, public debate feels vital. As Ellis-Jones aptly put it: "Debate holds people to account in an age where accountability is an option, not a requirement."

Debate is a necessary standard in society and something that should be upheld in Cambridge. But in an age of 'cancel culture', what does free speech really look like in student life? Wimalasena believed that students continue to be interested in debate. But some remain silent, "not because they don't care, but because they don't want to deal with the consequences of saying something

'wrong.'"

Bevan, however, is not concerned about being cancelled. He explained that "any view I hold, I believe I can rationally justify. I am also open to changing my mind about every single opinion I have given sufficient evidence." Ellis-Jones added that "if the majority of students use their freedom of speech to argue against you - that's not being cancelled, that's freedom of speech, and that's life." Ultimately, Mackintosh reminded us that, "if you think you're correct, you don't win people over by silencing opposition. You win them by meeting them with grace, humility, and respect."

Political events, like the death of Kirk, inevitably leave society re-examining age-old questions of dissent and free speech. Wimalasena hoped it would "teach us some boundaries, between disagreement and dehumanisation." Loveridge added that while some students hold back from sharing their views, "university should be a place where people can speak openly and learn through disagreement." It is now more essential than ever to engage in open, meaningful discussion, both within universities and beyond. As Mackintosh summed up: debate is "not just a nice to have it. It's a must."



RUDI ELLIS-JONES

Humans of Cambridge: College Nurses

Annie Rainbow spotlights the vital role college nurses play in supporting students' physical wellbeing

On Wednesday afternoons, a group gathers in the Fitzwilliam's light-filled gallery, charcoal smudges on their fingers. They enjoy art and creating together without the expectation of talent. On Monday evenings, students roll out yoga mats, the hum of central Cambridge soundtracking their poses. They stretch and, most importantly, they breathe. On Tuesdays, students can sit down and enjoy crocheting with a mug of tea, and are given the space to simply watch the steam dance with the sun. Each activity is run and supported by a college nurse; the unsung champions of student wellbeing at the University.

Across Cambridge, college nurses form a quiet but essential backbone of student life: part GP, part counsellor, part surrogate parent. Almost every college employs a nurse, normally part of a larger wellbeing team. They are highly trained and deeply passionate about providing students with the tools and time to care for themselves. After working in Pembroke for eighteen years, Jan Brighting recalled the pressure of caring for such diverse issues: "I have lost sleep at night that I may have made the wrong decision."

"I wanted to be really visible and accessible," Jan told me. When describing her wellbeing initiatives her care is so apparent that you feel warmer in her presence. While all college nurses are no-nonsense about student confidentiality, Jan did not feel stuck in the bound-

aries of her work and home life, "my students know my grandchild, they've done easter egg hunts for him!" On her Fitzwilliam art project, she wanted to highlight to students that "we're equals, we all have problems." Trust is incredibly important to her role, "I don't want to pathologize or infantilise students," she told me.

“

Part GP, part counsellor, part surrogate parent

Joining Pembroke after a wide-ranging career, once being an addiction counsellor as well as a qualified teacher in a prison, Jan claimed that "you need to have a broad experience, you cannot have a young [college] nurse." To be a college nurse, you must be immensely well qualified. Aside from having professional development reviews every three years,

you are constantly getting feedback from both staff and students, in order to stay qualified.

Rachael Arkle sees around eight hundred students throughout the academic year at Kings, not including those she sees during breaks. When listing her background, including (but not limited to) time in neurosurgery, A&E, and occupational health, somehow her three degrees are not the most impressive part. She advocates for students through different initiatives, including yoga, wellbeing workshops and talks, benefiting from "the support of the college behind" her. The community, though, feels like her college's biggest strength. Whether with the gardening or housekeeping teams, being surrounded by "staff that really care" helps her feel motivated.

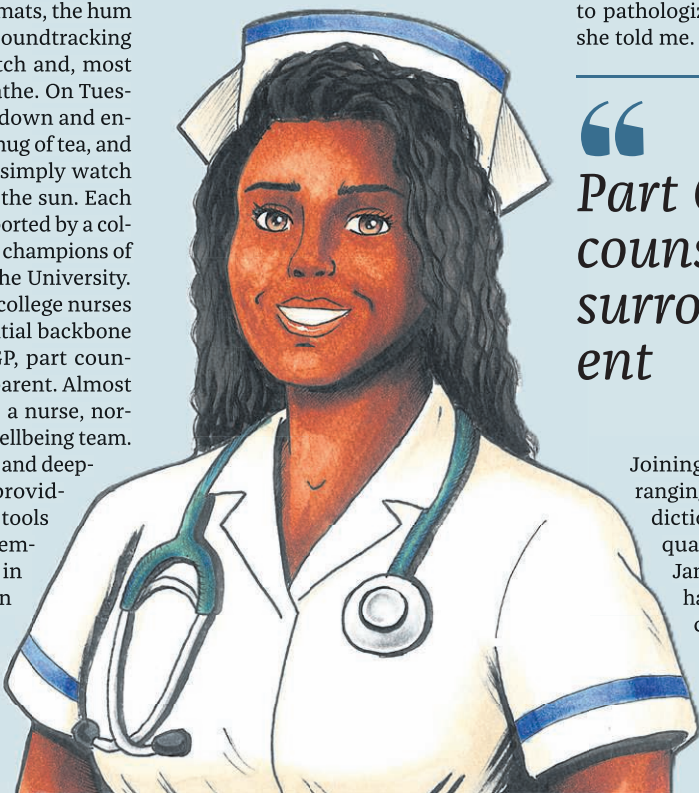
Lucy Turnell gets into Selwyn college at 8:30am, already aware of the incident reports from overnight. She prepares herself for meetings, appointments, and any wellbeing initiatives scheduled for that day. With eight to ten students per day, appointments either twenty or forty-five minutes, she can feel the weight of the topics discussed. To ground herself she enjoys "walking through grounds and seeking a college community in its setting; it stabilises me." She told me that "not a day goes by when I don't look out the window and think how lucky I am," not just to be in such a beautiful place, but just to be with such a lovely student group. It is the students, and her bonds

with them, that is most valuable for her.

"I really do invest in them," she admitted, enjoying "feeling like you're helping people" as well as truly bonding with them. In fact, "at the end of Easter term, watching them all graduate" made her feel as though she was a surrogate parent, leaving her "in floods of tears."

Her room is a vibrant haze of plants, so vividly green that you feel your lungs sigh in relief as you enter. She described gifting students the "babies" that her plants propagate, as part of her 'adopt a plant' scheme. As epitomised in her 'clangers' anagram for wellbeing, Lucy believed that the evolution of the collegiate nurse role is about teaching wellbeing. She said that she wanted "to work more closely with students [...] rather than deliver a program, I would like to enable a program." Ultimately, she sought to encourage proactive steps for health education beyond university.

Their positions are fast-paced and complex but ultimately rewarding. Jan, on the cusp of leaving her role, reflected that "this place gave me hope". Rachael reported feeling "very empowered in my role," and Lucy affirmed that the college nurse is "a very fulfilling job." With all their attention on student advocacy, college nurses truly are the beating heart of the college community.



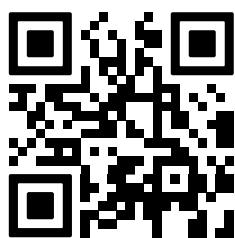
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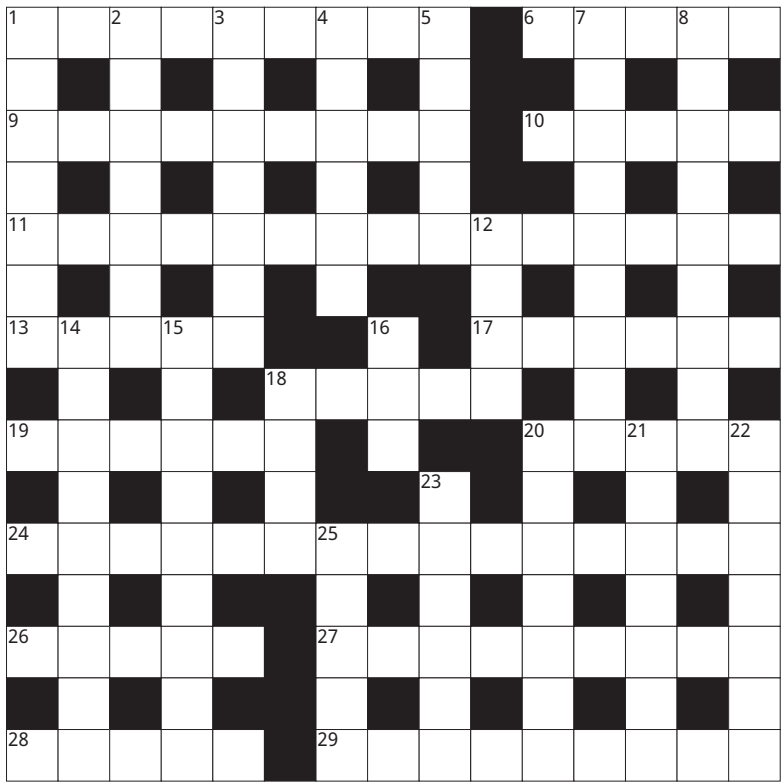
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The Smoking Area

Crossword by Cheggers



CRYPTIC:

ACROSS

- 1 Plant for vehicle country (9)
- 6 Gas destroys organ (5)
- 9 Downgraded, for example in faulty treadle (9)
- 10 Steady pressure inside Belgian city (5)
- 11 From the start princeliest haft was ruined (2,3,5,5)
- 13 Inspect gold and start to develop it (5)
- 17 Tolkien character suffers penultimate loss in Spanish region (6)
- 18 Turn over stupendous interior (5)
- 19 Postman starts to relax over new customer (6)
- 20 Hunks initially start tidying under direct supervision (5)
- 24 Busted, as a paint thief might be (6,3-6)
- 26 Rock breaks leash (5)
- 27 Startle and disappear without Henry in gale (9)
- 28 Embellish love after finally changing direction (5)
- 29 Revises messy edginess after Romeo (9)

QUICK (same answers):

ACROSS

- 1 US state (9)
- 6 Organs of an animal (5)
- 9 Naturally occurring mineral (9)
- 10 Alcoholic drink (5)
- 11 Shift in power source (15)
- 13 Protective garment (5)
- 17 Skulk (6)
- 18 Curry (5)
- 19 Scattered (6)
- 20 Bundle (5)
- 24 Process of ordering by letter (15)
- 26 Middle Eastern country (5)
- 27 Torment (9)
- 28 Short musical composition (5)
- 29 Informal (9)

DOWN

- 1 As croci break in Mediterranean island (7)
- 2 Associated trader rises up over treatment at first (7)
- 3 Smash up gem in relative increase (7)
- 4 Polar dweller hides timber at first – understand?
- 5 Poem in both North and South intersections (5)
- 7 Revolting pellet ran all over the place (9)
- 8 Congest spoilt vow record (9)
- 12 Reportedly dragged animal (4)
- 14 A Spanish degree? She would without shame! (9)
- 15 Unusual and against the rules (9)
- 16 Cantaloupe appears around vegetable (3)
- 18 Come together without energy quantity (4)
- 20 Fake answer from healers (7)
- 21 Revoking downfall (7)
- 22 Sorrow ends broken in special forces (7)
- 23 Confused and burdened after losing chief (6)
- 25 Message received backwards in obscure gorge (5)

DOWN

- 1 Activist and politician (7)
- 2 Ballistic (7)
- 3 English football team (7)
- 4 Egyptian god (6)
- 5 Language (5)
- 7 Silver sea-dweller (9)
- 8 Nearby galaxy (9)
- 12 Sweet drink (4)
- 14 Slightly sparkling (9)
- 15 Caught (9)
- 16 Ball (3)
- 18 Protrusion (4)
- 21 Aristocratic (7)
- 22 English actress, Emerald _____ (7)
- 23 Groom-to-be (6)
- 25 Supplementary (5)

Sudoku

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

Midatlantic miniature by Goober

1	2	3	4	5
6				
7				
8				
	9			

ACROSS

- 1 Low grade dirt mixed with earth (5)
- 6 Sending around greeting in the year of southern capital (5)
- 7 Help an Irish saint (5)
- 8 Call over the phone and squeeze (5)
- 9 Two German regiments with attitude (4)

DOWN

- 1 Warm up? What gives? (4)
- 2 Hotel goes on television for keratinous growths (5)
- 3 Girl represented in penguin diagram (5)
- 4 Some horses chewing oranges, for example, gone missing (5)
- 5 Sounds like a bell when good interrupts harsh noise (5)

Quicky quiz

- What is the only country that fulfils both of these criteria: a population of under two million and a mountain higher than 7000 metres?
- In anatomy, what eight-letter adjective refers to the 12 individual vertebrae from the bottom of the neck to the lowest pair of ribs, constituting the longest section of the spine? It is derived from the biological term for the section of the body between the neck and the abdomen.
- First published in 1945, the short story *Edward’s Day Out* was the first of what series, now a global multimedia franchise?
- Since 1986, Cheddar cheese has not enjoyed a Protected Designation of Origin (PDO). Which variety of cheddar outside England was granted Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) in 2013?
- From Sanskrit meaning ‘to split’, what short word is used across the cuisines of South Asia in two senses: as a general term for dried lentils, peas, or other pulses, and by extension, as a general term for soups or stews made from such pulses?

▼ Iris Chapman



Student activism

Varsity’s archivist *Iris Mamier* explores the history of student activism and divestment campaigns

Cambridge students recently voted in an SU referendum in favour of ending the University’s investments and collaborations with “institutions involved in occupation and weapons manufacture”. In light of this result, I have delved into Varsity’s archives to trace the history of student activism in Cambridge and the various divestment campaigns over the years.

The Cambridge University Endowment Fund (CUF) has been described as one of the largest in Europe. However, I found surprisingly little evidence in the archives of students targeting the University’s investment portfolio before the 2000s. A 1981 article details the presence of not only 300+ students, but also the Cambridge Students’ Union (CSU) president Nick Alexander, marching with a CSU banner, in the CND rally to “Stop the bomb”.

Apartheid in South Africa became a focal point soon after. In May 1982, visiting South African Ambassador Marais Steyn “nearly came to a sticky end when three eggs were hurled at him,” while students chanted: “What do we want? An end to Apartheid!”

One of the two student egg-throwers who was arrested and charged under the Public Disorder Act was CSU Executive member, Dave Kitson. Emma JCR also later passed a motion of censure against their Senior Tutor, Dr Baker, for allowing the visit to happen on college property.

Divestment campaigns came to the fore in the 2010s, particularly concerning fossil fuel industries, as the CSU put pressure on the University to reduce its carbon footprint. In 2013, Varsity criticised the links of various colleges to companies such as BP, Exxon Mobile, and Lukoil. Not only, students argued, was Cambridge uniquely positioned to “make a social and political statement,” but the contribution of their yearly tuition fees to the CUEF gave them the right to say: “I am a stakeholder”.

However, such campaigns faced opposition. In the same edition, a comment article was published in defence of Cambridge’s investment in “big oil,” arguing that Cambridge could push for higher environmental standards more effectively from within. “Of course these companies are not perfect,” the writer conceded, “Exxon continues to question global warming.” Nevertheless, at least in 2012 it donated over \$200 million to charity, they argued.

A decade later, the University is set to divest from fossil fuels entirely by 2030, a move followed by universities with even larger endowments such as Harvard. Next week, the University’s governing body will vote on whether to divest from arms companies; it is clear that student activism has had tangible consequences over the years.

i PREDiCT A RIOT

(GRRRL
REVIVAL!)



A Cambridge double date...

Welcome back to **Varsity Blind Dates**, where hopeful student singles put their faith in our trusty matchmakers – and you could be next!

Rajesh

So, you met at the Eagle. Was it nerve-wracking walking up to three people?

Not really, that kind of thing doesn't give me anxiety.

I think a lot of people would find that scenario intimidating.

Overthinkers.

Did it feel like more of a group hang-out or two separate dates?

Separate, thankfully. I'd thought a group chat with two random sets of friends would be weird.

Did it take much to get the conversation going with Carly?

No, everything was pretty smooth. Obviously, we started with the basics and moved onto deeper topics but, in general, it wasn't hard to keep it going.

What sort of deeper topics?

Like, controversial current debates.

Did you guys have the same opinions?

We could agree to disagree.

How diplomatic of you. Did you have much else in common?

No.

How would you describe her?

Really nice, kind, and gets my humour.

In what way?

Well, I made some pretty risky jokes and she took them quite well.

Had you decided at that point you didn't have much to lose by making jokes?

No, I would have done it either way.

Were you sure of the vibe between you guys from the get-go?

For me, I guess – but for her, I don't know.

I definitely enjoyed it! But I don't think I'll be seeing her again.

Did you go anywhere afterwards?

After the pub we went to see fireworks, they were over by the time we got there though.

That's a shame.

I've seen enough at the Trin May Balls.

How did the night end then?

We just exchanged Instagrams and went back to our colleges.

So, what would the night be on a scale from one to ten?

An eight. Regardless of what she says, I had fun.

Carly

So, why did you sign up?

I figured it would be a fun thing to do in my final year!

And how was it having Meredith with you?

It was so nice – I mean, the debrief on the walk back...

What were your first impressions of Rajesh?

It was exciting to see him.

He was good-looking and I didn't recognise him, which was a relief!

How did it go from there?

He was definitely confident, so that helped – I don't think there was a single awkward pause throughout the date. We'd already gotten drinks when he arrived though, so he just proceeded to drink like six glasses of tap water.

But it was pretty easy conversationally, at least?

Well, we didn't have too much in common but he's an interesting guy.

I heard he made some risky jokes, how did they land?

He had some pretty contentious takes on gender – I hoped in jest!

Oof. How would you describe him?

Approachable, interesting, accomplished.

How did you feel about the match in general?

I was super confident about it going in – I had a good feeling! – but ultimately it was more platonic.

Did it take you long to figure out the vibe?

It was over the course of the evening, but it was pretty clear by the end.

How did the night come to a finish?

Well, Rajesh suggested leaving the pub – he still hadn't gotten a drink at that point – so he seemed pretty eager to leave.

And what would you rate the night from one to ten?

As a hangout, a nine. As a date, a six.

Meredith



What made you sign up?

Well, it was Carly's idea. But just to meet someone and see.

Did you get along with Chris?

Well, he was very good at asking me questions, and I was very good less

at answering them! I was good at asking them back though. I feel like he learned a lot more about me than I did him.

How would you describe him?

He's lovely, he came across as really nice and was actually trying to get to know me.

What was the best thing about him?

Well, he's interested in animals, so that was a positive. Any other definitive green flags?

The fact he's doing economics but doesn't want to go into finance!

What impression do you think he got of you?

Hopefully positive! I'm hoping he at least found

my talking entertaining.

Do you think you had better chemistry than Carly and Rajesh?

Yeah? I have no idea what he thought of me, honestly. We both had a good time, I think, but I don't know on what level.

Was it romantic for you?

Maybe! I had a good time.

Were you wanting it to go on longer?

Yeah, I would've stayed. When we neared Trinity, Rajesh was like "okay, goodbye then!" and Chris went with him.

Bit of an abrupt ending then?

A little bit. I think he just didn't want to abandon his friend.

Do you have any intention of reaching out?

I actually sent him a message last night, and he replied.

What did you say?

Just that I'd had a lovely evening and that maybe I'd talk less next time...

So, you're leaving the door open?

Yeah.

So, on a scale from one to ten it would be...

A solid seven.

Chris

What were your first impressions?

She seemed very nice.

Was conversation easy?

Mostly I probably asked too many questions. She was very passionate about rowing so she talked about rowing a lot, but it was cool that she's passionate.

Did you have any joint interests?

We didn't have any interests super in common. We spoke about music but she doesn't really listen to it, for example.

Any particular green flags from her?

She volunteers at all of these animal places over the summer, which is very cool!

Any particular icks?

Well, she's very interested in rowing – it's not necessarily an ick! But it's a very defining characteristic.

I'm getting the impression that it wasn't a perfect match?

I think if I was wanting to be with someone long-term I'd want them to have similar ideas for the future – like, she loved living by the coast, and I don't know if I'd

want that. So, nothing about her specifically!

Have you been in contact since?

We actually both had a rowing event today so she wished me luck, which was nice.

Any mention of going out again?

Not at the moment.

She told me she hinted at it...

Um... I hadn't realised that. I'm completely oblivious!

So, you're not taking it further?

It'd be really nice to be her friend, but I'm not actively searching for anything right now.

How did you guys leave things at the end?

We went on to Midsummer Common to see the fireworks, which was a nice opportunity to talk to everyone.

I hear you didn't actually see any fireworks?

Yeah, we missed them.

Ironic, given the lack of fireworks between you guys...

Not a massive firework show, yeah. But she was lovely!

So, on a scale from one to ten, what would you give the night?

A six?

(All names anonymised)

Rajesh and Carly

DAISY COOPER

Chris and Meredith

Noodle soup for the soul

Finn Costello O'Reilly is here with a recipe to quell the winter blues

The approach of winter is often accompanied by a feeling of loss. Light, warmth, and colour start to diminish. A collective retreat indoors begins. You'd be forgiven for feeling that the world has lost some vitality. For me, in this weather, food is the antidote, and there is surely no food more iconic or more apt for providing warmth than a rich, sturdy bowl of soup. So, here is a ramen-inspired, salty and umami rich noodle soup to get you through the winter months.

Ingredients:

Tare

- Smooth peanut butter – 3tbsp
- Miso paste – 2tbsp
- Soy sauce (light or all purpose) – 3tbsp
- Rice vinegar – 0.5tbsp (sub with apple cider or white wine vinegar)
- Chilli oil/chili crisp – 0.5-1.5 tbsp (depending on spice tolerance)

Soup base

- Mushroom – 300-500g, thinly sliced (shiitake, oyster, enoki, or even chestnut/button will work great)
- Garlic – five or six cloves, minced
- Ginger – thumb sized piece, minced
- Water or chicken/veg stock – ~1-1.5L
- Noodles – 400g pack

Toppings:

- Boiled egg – 1 per person, sliced in half.
- Pak choi – separated into leaves
- Spring onion – 3 or 4, sliced
- Chilli oil/chili crisp – drizzled

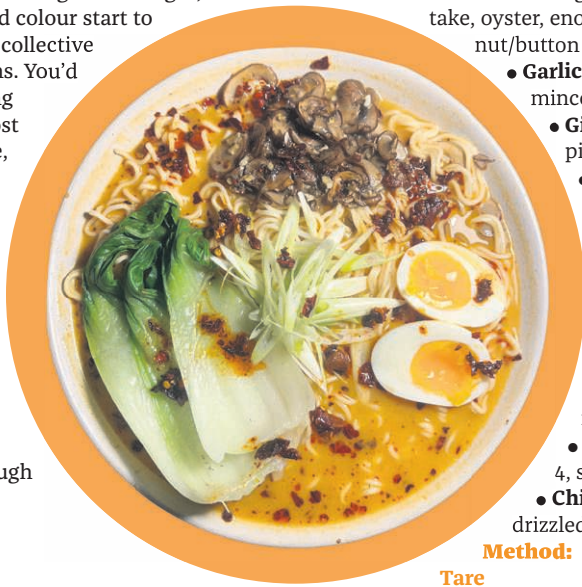
Method:

Tare

- Mix all of the tare ingredients together in a bowl. It should be similar to the texture of wet sand.

Soup base

- Heat 1tbsp of vegetable oil in a high sided saucepan or wok (needs to fit 1-2L of water) over medium-high heat, add the chopped



mushrooms on a medium heat for ten mins, or until their water has reduced. This is when they have significantly **reduced in volume**, become a deep **brown**, and the boiling sound has become more of a **sizzling** sound.

“For me, in this weather, food is the antidote

- Add garlic and ginger and fry for one minute, stirring constantly.

- Add the chicken broth, stir and set to the side, or place on a low heat (you'll need to make sure it's boiling before serving, though).

Toppings – one pan!

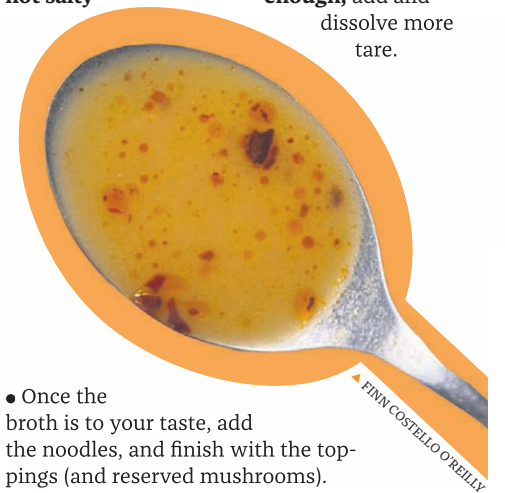
- While the mushrooms are frying, fill a saucepan with boiling water (enough to cover as many noodles as you have), and bring to a gentle simmer.
- Gently lower eggs in (one per person) and remove after six minutes. Put these in a bowl of cold (or iced if you can be bothered) water and set aside. Peel off the shells when you have a spare moment.
- To the same water, add noodles and increase the heat to a more vigorous boil.
- One minute before the noodles have finished

cooking (check packet instructions for this), add the pak choi.

- After one minute, remove noodles and pak choi and quickly rinse with cold water to stop cooking. Set aside until time to serve.

Assembly

- Place 1tbsp of tare into the base of a bowl.
- Add soup base, **making sure it is boiling** when you add it. Stir to dissolve.
- Taste and consider the salt level. If it is **too salty**, adjust by adding more broth/water. If it is **not salty enough**, add and dissolve more tare.



- Once the broth is to your taste, add the noodles, and finish with the toppings (and reserved mushrooms).

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Fashion



“

Riot Grrrl is more than a genre – it's a political movement



Mary Anna Im explores the punk fashion behind Riot Grrrl feminism

In 1976, the London punk zine *Sniffin' Glue* declared: “Punks are not girls.”

The punk era saw the rise of several iconic bands such as The Sex Pistols, The Clash, and The Ramones – to name a few – but they all had one thing in common: they were all male. Riot Grrrl began as a demand for a safe and inclusive space for women within the fractured punk scene.

Before the success of its music, the Riot Grrrl movement took shape through physical media to spread its message. It was in *Bikini Kill's* publications that terms such as ‘girl power’ were coined. Tobi Vail, a key figure in the creation of the *Bikini Kill* fanzine, wrote: “I feel completely left out of the realm of everything that is so important to me ... and I know that this is partly because punk rock is for and by boys”.

This frustration fuelled Tobi Vail and Kathleen Hanna's dissemination of their zine, which would later evolve into one of the foremost Riot Grrrl bands, *Bikini Kill* – a four-piece band fronted by Hanna and originating from the Pacific Northwest scene in the early 1990s. At gigs, Hanna would call “all girls to the front” – initially a safety measure to prevent women from being trampled in mosh pits, but also a phrase emblematic of the movement's agenda: to allow women to occupy the highest spot of visibility. Men could be in the room, but they could never dominate it.

At the centre of the Riot Grrrl movement was its distinct fashion. In the '90s, Riot Grrrl fashion was inspired by punk rock style, while reclaiming girlishness, incorporating unabashedly feminine elements such as pigtails, baby tees, sequins, and hearts. It embraced the ‘Grrrl’ part of its title – rooted in the idea that women often felt most empowered when they were girls, before their identities became shaped by expectations and beauty standards.

I spoke to one particularly active Riot Grrrl band, described as “vanguards of the genre's new wave”.

Talking to the lead singer of t@b grrrl, Gigi Barwald, about the fashion of Riot Grrrl today and the movement's current state, it

became clear that Riot Grrrl is certainly not dead; its relevance has only multiplied with digital forms of messaging and music.

I asked how Riot Grrrl fashion does or does not impact Barwald's style choices and the visual presentation of t@b grrrl. Barwald described the band's merch as rooted in the DIY ethos that was so central to the original movement. The merch incorporates key features of punk fashion – plaid, denim, safety pins, and bold colours – but Barwald emphasised that Riot Grrrl is not bound by a dress code: “I think it's important to recognise that not everybody looks the same. There's no staple for how a Riot Grrrl needs to dress.”

There has, however, been a clear evolution in Riot Grrrl fashion since the '90s. Barwald gives one example of how “in the '90s, girls were writing ‘grrrl’ on their wrists, but now I'm seeing patches and jewellery with ‘grrrl’ on it”. She continues, “I think the point of Riot Grrrl is to be political; it's more than just a genre or form of style – it's a political movement.” She points to one particular t@b grrrl song, ‘so what’, that speaks to this enduring connection: “I talk about dressing however you want ... you just have to be authentic to yourself and own it.”

Inevitably, Kathleen Hanna is mentioned in our conversation. Barwald praises her, particularly admiring how Hanna empowered herself through stage outfits “to further a political message ... like that iconic outfit where she's not wearing any pants – showing how you can look, but you can't touch.” Barwald recalls how, at their first gig at a fraternity house, she only wore underwear and wrote ‘grrrl’ across her chest as “an homage to Kathleen [Hanna]”.

I notice that our conversation – and indeed the movement – seems firmly planted in American soil. Beyond America, can Riot Grrrl resonate with people in smaller cities like Cambridge? “I think [Riot Grrrl] does resonate with people not only in the States, for sure ... the major notions of what we're talking about can be taken in by everyone,” Barwald responds. “Riot Grrrl 2025 is a place for anyone who's not a cis-het man to have space in the music scene – to play, to enjoy, to experience.” And surely, we need that space in 2025 more than ever.



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Arts

When did you last do nothing?

Ella Howard
contemplates the importance of rest at a Medwards exhibition

Can you remember when you last did nothing? This question, poised by Helen Cammock in her 2020 piece of the same title, seems to encapsulate the gentle challenge that is at the heart of 'The Sleepers' exhibition. Curated by Laura Mosely and free to visit in Murray Edwards College until February, this small exhibition explores the articulation – and artistic representation – of sleep and rest.

In Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* (1510), the first known reclining nude, a female figure lies on a sumptuous bed of fabric, breasts bared in a fantasy of male desire. Through this painting, Giorgione catalyses a tradition of masculine voyeurism; from Klimt's fascination with the sleeping woman to Picasso's *Man Looking at a Sleeping Woman*, the sleeping feminine has historically been an erotic figure of sensual passivity. Mosely's exhibition, however, marks an important shift in focus, as her selection of 12 female artists aims to display work made by women on their own terms. As the writing on the wall suggests, "scenes of rest have long been a generative motif for women artists, helping them to articulate complex and differing experiences of family, health and work".

Tucked away in a forgotten corridor and immersed in the soft undulations of light and sound from the water outside, the restful space of the exhibition is a mirror of its subject. All alone on my visit, the almost-silence was the perfect backdrop for contemplation. And so, bereft of distractions, as I so rarely am, I was easily absorbed into the tranquil world of the exhibition – a multimedia land-

scape populated by both oil paintings and embroidered quilts.

Hanging large in the corridor is *Legally Stev* (2024), by Bambou Gili. A vivid splash of colour on the white walls, the piece depicts a blue-toned figure lying on the bed, expressionlessly gazing at a phone while the green woodland looms, ignored, in the background. Time is indistinguishable, the atmosphere liminal. At once otherworldly and painfully familiar, the painting – according to its placard – "encourages us to think about how, for many, technology and rest have become intertwined". Indeed, as the often used phrase 'doomscrolling' indicates, our obsession

with social media is often more draining than reviving.

Yet it is *Seawind* (1995) by Kate Montgomery that best catches my eye. There is something mediaeval about the piece of tempera on wood, perhaps in the mosaic-like patterns or reflective shine; it seems hard to believe that it was created merely 30 years ago. A woman sits in prayer-like contemplation, gazing upwards in a reverie. The room is empty except for a

media represented in *Legally Stev*. The painting, however, is undoubtedly a product of its modern time: Montgomery attempts to "wrestle the image

“The sleeping feminine has historically been an erotic figure of sensual passivity

of the resting woman away from male artists", reimagining the traditional eroticism as a representation of her own motherhood. For the mother, such moments of interrupted thought are few and far between, ever more valuable by result

There is no denying that the exhibition is rather small, taking no longer than 15 minutes to study each artist in detail. While each piece certainly has its elements of interest, I did find some to be less stimulating than others: Ann Dowker's *Karina by the Window*, for example. Although for me the exhibition was just a little too tiny to justify the half-hour walk, for those in or around Murray Edwards, 'The Sleepers' is a great (and free!) way to dip your toe into the Cambridge art scene. Whether you want to challenge your patriar-

chal notions of sleep, find new female artists, or even just spend ten minutes in silent contemplation, the exhibit is certainly worth a visit. After all, standing in front of Cammock's green canvas, I cannot, I realise, remember when I last did nothing.



Varsity's autumnal

Emily Cushion (Arts editor) – *Circe*

Having burned through *Song of Achilles* in an evening as a teenager, I had high hopes for *Circe* – hopes that were exceeded by Miller's incredible re-telling of the *Odyssey* that takes the epic and makes it novel. While *Odysseus* certainly features, it is *Circe*, the exiled sorceress daughter of god Helios and nymph Perse, whose perspective the story is told from. Miller's retelling of Homer is one full of magic, motherhood, and murder (much like all good Greek myths). Her ability to revolutionise the way we understand mythology while harbouring such an extensive knowledge of the classics is truly refreshing. Miller has been working on another mythical retelling since 2021, this time of Persephone's story. While this could still be a while coming – *Song of Achilles* took 10 years to write – I can't wait to see how

Miller takes a myth that has become so popularised on social media (I know you've seen the questionable pomegranate poetry), and turns it into a novel as beautiful as *Circe*.

Sophie Smout (Arts writer) – *Mr Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore*

Mr Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore is one of my favourite books. Blending technology with a reverence for print, we follow a laid-off tech worker who ends up working night shifts in a dreary San Francisco bookstore. But behind the dusty bestsellers lies a quiet owner and a handful of mysterious patrons who run in at all hours for the next cryptic, leather-bound book from the ridiculously high shelves. A blend of fantasy and realism (Google plays a larger role than you expect, but so does the fictional font Gerritszoon), the cosy bookish mystery opens the door to a world of cryptology while asking the reader about what it means to be truly remembered and loved. Despite the chaos of Michaelmas, Robin Sloan's 2012 novel reminds me that reading should be an enjoyable experience, rather than just one of the chores that come with writing an essay.

Mia Apfel (Arts writer) – *Ethan Frome*

Set against the stark, snow-trodden landscape of New England, Wharton's austere novella darkens with the coming winter. The embers of domestic warmth glow, but all affection is inevitably extinguished by chilling tragedy. Human connection and communication becomes hardened under years of repressed feeling. Characterised as a man of reticence and Gothic gloom, Ethan Frome, Wharton's titular protagonist, is frozen in a state of moral dilemma. Fraught with the psychological torture of forbidden love, action becomes impeded. Ethan's final choice between head and heart can only reveal an unfortunate fate. Discomfort and deformity must prevail.

reading list



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JO UNDERHILL

St George's Cross read through Lucan

Sydney Heintz reflects on how flags can symbolise – and problematise – sense of identity

Emblems are battlegrounds of meaning. I was reminded of this when the controversy surrounding St George's Cross went viral on news outlets last month, provoked by increasing tension over the immigration crisis and support for Reform leader Nigel Farage. The Cross of St George dates back to the Crusades and was originally used as the ensign of the Republic of Genoa later adopted by a military alliance in the pre-Reformation Holy Roman Empire. After the union of Scotland and England in 1603, it was combined with the Scottish St Andrew's Cross to produce the modern-day Union Jack. Synonymous with national pride, naval power (Dunkirk), and of course, football, it was only until recently that its symbol was one behind which a majority of the British population stood. What interested me, therefore, was why civil unrest should take this particular form, and what it was about flags, and their symbols, that could be weaponised so effectively in service of opposing political ideology.

To answer this question, I'd like to go back to the first century Roman poet Lucan, made famous by his epic *De Bello Civili* ('The Civil War'). The *Pharsalia* (as it is commonly referred to) tells the story of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, culminating in the Battle of Pharsalus in Northern Greece. I write of Lucan because, like the headlines, the *Pharsalia* is full of flags: the first horror of civil war is that *signa contra signa feruntur* ('standards face standards'). Later, when Caesar attempts to raise the *aquila* (the Roman eagle) of the legion at Ariminum, it trembles and resists being moved. One of

the final images we are left with in the fragmentary tenth book is of standards briefly appearing over the Nile as Caesar continues his campaign: flags, for Lucan, both begin and end civil war.

“What once marked cohesion becomes a grotesque spectacle of division

Traditionally, each legion had only one *aquila*, carried by the *aquilifer* (the standard-bearer), and to lose the *aquila* in battle was considered a catastrophic disgrace; meanwhile, capturing an enemy's *aquila* meant victory. In Lucan, however, identical *aquila* face one another, thereby collapsing visual differentiation between one's own camp and the opposition: as he declares at the poem's outset, “when standards that once had faced the foe are brought to oppose each other, Rome's strength turns against herself” (trans. Susan Braund). What once marked cohesion becomes a grotesque spectacle of division. Something similar, I would argue, is happening to the Cross of St George: reclaimed by immigrant communities, commodified in fashion,

or challenged when waved by far-right groups, the flag is constantly re-signified and resisted, and in doing so stages a crisis of meaning. As Lucan shows, the first sign of societal collapse is in the fracturing of shared symbolic language, shared identity.

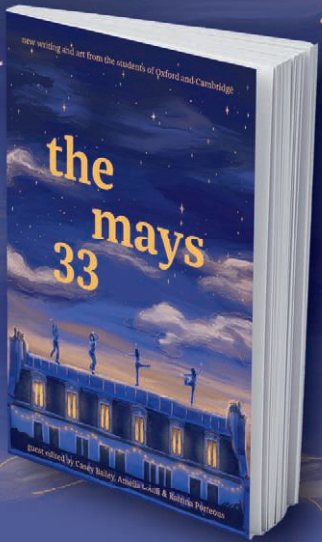
In the *Pharsalia*, the sight of mirrored standards annihilates the very possibility of an external enemy: Rome's aggression, finding no outlet abroad, consumes itself. Civil war becomes a form of self-recognition and self-definition. The same mechanism is now at work in the UK, where the flag that once demarcated the island from the world is turned inward, repurposed to police the boundaries of 'Britishness' itself. Indeed, the anxiety that animates debates over St George's Cross or the Union Jack is not simply about immigration, but about the instability of national identity in an age when the symbols that once guaranteed belonging have lost their authority. In a 2012 survey, only around 30% of respondents thought the flag representative of modern and diverse Britain, with a worrying three in five to two thirds associating it with the British Empire. This erosion of consensus about the flag's symbolic associations has become a locus for competing political narratives – imperial, insular, multicultural, and post-

national – none of which can wholly contain the others. In both Lucan's case and ours, the emblem's instability is symptomatic of a deeper fracture: a polity uncertain whether its flag might still faithfully capture the identity it claims to represent.

When Caesar's and Pompey's armies advance towards each other in the climactic seventh book, Lucan writes that the standards could hardly be torn up from the ground: “adrip with tears, only as far as Thessaly did they belong to Rome and to the state”. In other words, only this far could the war continue to masquerade as political. At Thessaly, the standards cross (like Rome itself) from the realm of public representation to the private site of warring imperial interests between Caesar and Pompey, resigning themselves (albeit reluctantly) to autocratic intrigue. It is a bleak outlook on Rome, and the Neronian emperors it eventually gave birth to. Today, of course, we are faced with a polarized leadership of our own, and flags which point to a Britain unsure of what – or who – it includes. Whether we turn on each other, or whether we learn to live as one, depends on our recognising a shared civic space larger than any one faction or flag. Only then, as Lucan writes, can we *tranquilli vivere* (live in peace).



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Even out your evensongs

Isabel Lee and Seun Ige reveal Cambridge's most underrated evensongs

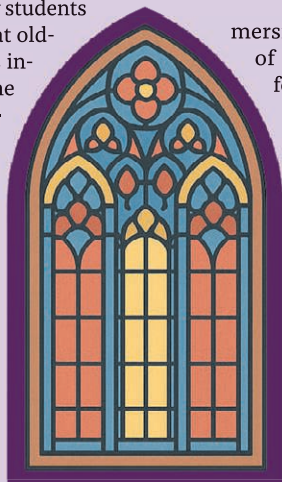
Evensong in Cambridge, especially in the legendary chapels of Kings' and St John's, remain a celebrated tradition. Yet the broader choral evensong tradition quietly thrives in college chapels across the city. Away from the usual crowds and touristy activity, colleges like Magdalene, Peterhouse, and Fitzwilliam provide musical experiences remarkable for their warmth, history and sense of surprise.

Today, evensong services are all too easy to miss in the rhythm of university life. Many students and residents see them as somewhat old-fashioned or overly formal, perhaps influenced by the cassocks worn by the choir and a structured liturgical format, or imagine that these services are reserved for a narrow segment of the community. However, those who do participate often discover that evensong offers a uniquely welcoming environment and a restorative pause outside of academic and social demands.

Magdalene

Magdalene's evensong is "short, soothing, and gently theatrical," ideal for winding down on a Sunday night or as a perfect lead-in to a formal dinner. The chapel, built in the 1470s for Benedictine monks, immerses worshippers in rows of candlelit stalls, storied memorials and dappled stained glass. The chapel is small but gloriously ornate, so each service feels intimate (even giving us a bit of drama at times). Like extras from *The Crown* once described; each aspect of Magdalene's evensong works together to heighten im-

“*One of Cambridge's most welcoming – and unexpectedly rewarding – hidden rituals*”



mersion. The close arrangement of choir and congregation fosters an immediate and deeply engaging musical experience, while the presence of brass commemorations offer historical resonance. The service allows the tradition and formality of choral robes and ritual to coexist with a genuine sense of camaraderie. Many describe entering this chapel as like stepping into

“a timeless hushed theatre,” where contemplation and community are balanced. Visitors are often encouraged to engage in physical acts of ritual, such as lighting candles themselves. For those in search of a tranquil experience or a chance for peaceful introspection, Magdalene's evensong offers one of Cambridge's most memorable and persistently underrated atmospheres.

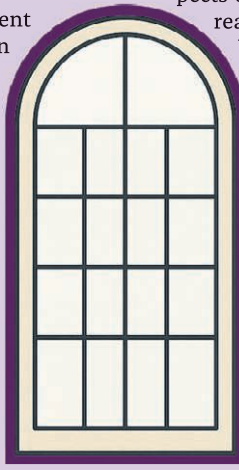
Fitzwilliam

I began serving as chapel warden at Fitz a couple of weeks into starting life here, and it has been rewarding to both attend the services and help out behind the scenes. Fitz stands out for its modernity, its location slightly removed from town (though not *that* far), and something that may not be widely known across the Cambridge community: the motif of ship-like design throughout the college.

Some of the most interesting architectural aspects of the college are in chapel, and were realised by John MacCormac. The building has a crypt, intended to represent the “under-

world,” while the main chapel space represents an “inhabited world”. The chapel space feels especially so, thanks to the expansive windows behind the altar, which look out to the College's wonderful gardens.

The flexible layout allows the congregation to sit closer together than in many older colleges, creating a sense of community. The choir is



positioned nearby, making the music feel engaging. The brick construction absorbs sound effectively, giving the acoustics clarity without excessive reverberation. Everything in the chapel is movable, so the chairs can be arranged in different ways, allowing the space to function for a variety of purposes beyond worship.

Peterhouse

Walking into Peterhouse Chapel, there is no attempt at grandeur – just stained glass and a striking sense of calm, under the glow of candlelight. Peterhouse evensong is described as “charming, small and delightful, almost jewellery-box-like,” and offers a moment for pause rather than spectacle. Services here are “a spur-of-the-moment spiritual adventure” where rarely more than a handful of attendees are present in the most genuine sense.

The liturgical format makes for a short and well-paced service, and it is also wonderful to hear higher woman voices mixed with the mens, creating a different sound to the traditional male dominated choral arrangement. After the final ‘Amen’, the chaplain often lingers to chat, and everyone seems to leave feeling like they've been among family, not strangers.

These services offer a rare opportunity for tranquillity and reflection within the routine of the city. Some of the youngest and best singers perform in evocative spaces that often escape notice. Unlike larger scale evensongs, a small college evensong invites personal connection and there is unique immediacy where you aren't lost in

a crowd, so each note feels closer. These services are intentionally inclusive, with no expectation to follow the prayers or hymns. Even for those who are not religious, attending these services can be a source of genuine belonging. An evensong from a small college is surely one of Cambridge's most welcoming – and unexpectedly rewarding – hidden rituals.



Midterm metal

Caitlin Newman's playlist is the cure to your Week 5 blues



Time and time again, rock and metal have been wrongly associated with doom and gloom. Sure, misery has found its rightful home in the heavier genres, but it's not the only end of the emotional spectrum that hard rock knows how to cover. The fire and fury of metal can provide the energy needed to overcome the challenges that Week 5 throws our way. However, even if you don't want to wallow, metal can still provide the answer; sub-genres like bimbocore and rave metal centre around tongue-in-cheek self-empowerment and fun, providing the perfect distraction needed to keep the seasonal sadness at bay. This playlist covers everything you'll need for the week, so here are my personal favourites from the selection, from deeply meaningful to simply mosh-friendly.

'Unstoppable' – Skindred

We open with an immediate thrashing of both guitars and metal stereotypes. This track features on Welsh reggae metal band Skindred's most recent LP *Smile*, an album full of genre-bending, fun-loving metal goodness. When it gets hard to drag yourself to your faculty library, *Unstoppable* provides undeniable energy straight from the opening beat. The lyrical boost comes with equal immediacy; the first verse boldly and unequivocally reminds us that “anything they throw at [us, we're] gonna get through it”. The persistent vitality of this track takes me

back to when I saw Skindred live, a performance brimming with the same energy. Frontman Benji Webbe made a concerted effort to engage with the audience in full with a level of authentic charisma that continues to inspire me in my day-to-day. Especially in Week 5, I think we could all benefit from being a bit more Benji.

'Might Love Myself' – Beartooth

When imposter syndrome is at its most rife, listening to this track can feel radical, even uncomfortable at first. If you're stuck in a true emotional rut, start by ignoring the lyrical themes; Caleb Shomo's vocal has a powerful depth, gradually building up over this track's rousing melodies before sprinkling in the most satisfying riffs. There's even one in the second chorus that he celebrates with a “woo!” of child-like wonder. It's at this moment during my first listen of this track where a switch flicked. It's hard to ignore a message of self-celebration when it's so clearly exemplified; if Caleb Shomo can interrupt a song to honour his vocal skills, then I think we too have the right to stop, take a breather and acknowledge our own achievements from time to time. Once this lands, you start to sense this track's radicalism. It's a strong statement that can be hard to give yourself the permission to say, but, if you are making progress in the areas of your life that matter to you, then why shouldn't you let yourself feel good?

'We Got The Moves' – Electric Callboy

Once I'm done crying over the profundity of some of Beartooth's lyrics, I like to engage in a 180-degree tonal shift to make sure I don't have an existential crisis alongside the essay ones. Enter rave metal. Rave metal underscores the melodic and lyrical conventions of the club with instrumentals fit for the pit. There's something especially iconic about hearing classic fry screams and guitar shreds over

a techno-heavy bass before a seamless transition into a bop-friendly chorus and a laddish cheering section fit for any college sports social.

“*In the words of Limp Bizkit, you've just got to keep on rollin', baby*”

'Problem' – Set It Off

For those wondering, this is indeed a rendition of the mid-2010s pop banger by Ariana Grande and Iggy Azalea, one of many incredible (and incredibly cheesy) rock covers borne by the Punk Goes Pop series. As much as I love metal, it has to be said that pop lyricists sometimes have a better handle on subtle, less emotionally charged self-empowerment. However, Set It Off add a satisfying level of menace to this version that proves extremely cathartic in times of stress. The familiarity of a pop cover may benefit anyone newer to rock and metal. A sense of comfort may be exactly what you need, and this refreshing take on a nostalgic hit can provide exactly that.

Week 5 is a talking point for a reason. You've been in the Cambridge term for long enough to start feeling the effects, but not quite long enough to see Christmas at the other end of the tunnel. But the worst of it is only here for this week, and will go by quickly. In the words of Limp Bizkit, you've just got to keep on rollin', baby.



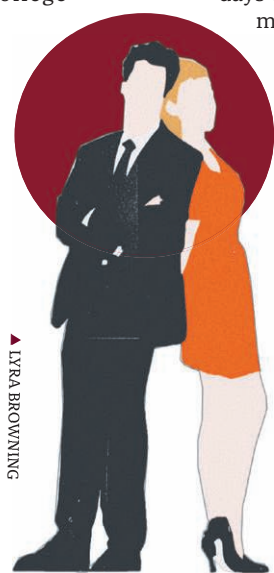
Kicking and Screaming's graduation anxiety

Ethan Daws reflects on Baumbach's campus film ahead of his newest release

Graduation. It's coming. For all of us. Something so dreadful it doesn't even bear thinking about, at least not during Michaelmas. When it eventually happens, what will become of those of us left without a comfortable grad job? What cruel fate is awaiting once the bliss of our student days becomes a distant memory?

These questions are as pertinent today as they were 30 years ago, when Noah Baumbach, whose latest feature Jay Kelly opens later this month, released his debut film, *Kicking and Screaming* (1995). It follows a group of friends clinging on to their college days as they struggle to

move on with their lives in the year after graduation. They live in a house in their old college town, and spend all their time at the same bar, in the same clubs, and on the same campus. For anyone seeking a comprehensive guide of what not to do after university, or a glimpse into what our parents' student days might have looked like, this is essential viewing.



▲ LYRA BROWNING

Grover (Josh Hamilton), a talented aspiring novelist who hasn't written anything since graduating, spends the year pining after his ex-girlfriend Jane (Olivia d'Abo) who has left for a year abroad, while refusing to answer any of her messages. Max (Chris Eigeman) exemplifies the group's debilitating pessimism with frequent one-liners equally witty and despairing. Otis (Carlos Jacott), who was set to depart for graduate school in Milwaukee until bailing out at the airport, is plagued by social awkwardness so debilitating that he would rather swallow food in his beer than ask for a new one. Skippy (Jason Wiles), meanwhile, lives vicariously through his still-at-college girlfriend Miami (Parker Posey).

Despite how pathetic these characters are, there's something enviable, even aspirational, in their 90s slacker lifestyle. Sure, they all dress effortlessly well – even Otis' pyjama top with a tie and blazer would draw admiring looks on Sidgwick Site – but the modern appeal of *Kicking and Screaming's* world goes beyond its visual style. In one moment, the characters gather round the television for several seconds to see whether a grease stain in a detergent advert will be successfully removed – would our generation have the attention span to watch this without 2x speed? Friends test each other on trivia, and debate the correct answers rather than turning to Google's AI summary. The jukebox at the bar, the video rental store; so many of the ways that time is passed in the film would be made impossible by modern technology and algorithms. In an age where everything seems so readily accessible, watching these tragic characters come up with creative and intentional ways to fill their days is somewhat inspiring. Do we yearn for the way people used to be bored?

Kicking and Screaming is a film of conversations, usually between the same friends, and usually for no purpose other than to pass the time. It's typical of a style associated with the 90s, one epitomised by *Seinfeld*, "the show about nothing", where coffee shops and dive bars are the settings for witty dialogue and endless riffing. The film revels in awareness of its own futility; Grover's writing in class is criticised by Jane for depicting characters who "spend all their time discussing the least important things." This self-effacing nod from Baumbach is made even less subtle by the character he plays, Danny, whose chief contribution is posing conundrums like "Would you rather f*ck a cow or lose your mother?"

There's a naivety in the film's aimlessness that is distinct to the culture of the 90s. A generation of men too young to remember the Vietnam War, living in pre 9/11 America, muse that they "wish [they] were just going off to war" rather than have to endure the horrors of a comfortable transition to adulthood. Afforded nearly every privilege and opportunity, they squander them: Grover is offered a flat in New York and an internship at *The New Yorker*



by his father, but won't even return his message. They seem to be aware of just how good they have it, but this only makes their wasteful inactivity all the more depressing.

“For anyone seeking a guide of what not to do after university [...] this is essential viewing

Eventually, something has to give, as this self-induced paralysis cannot go on forever. As Grover puts it: "Despite my intense efforts to do nothing, things happen anyway." Back at the airport a year later, Otis is finally heading to graduate school and Max has applied for a job at the University and is looking to move in with his girlfriend. Prompted by his friends' progress, in a speech worthy of the best 90's rom-coms, Grover begs the airport receptionist to get him on the next flight to Prague to visit Jane. In this portal of new beginnings, they have defeated their self-destructive impotence and should inspire us all to do the same, not to waste our lives after graduation in the depths of self pity. When this moment of triumph is broken as Grover doesn't have his passport, the receptionist's reply is the mantra that will comfort us procrastinators at the worst of our post-uni inertia: "You can always go tomorrow".

Kirsten Tan's journey through film

Abigail Liew speaks to the Singapore-born filmmaker on her career in Asia and beyond

Singapore-born, New York-based filmmaker Kirsten Tan is known for creating films that contemplate what it means to be human. From growing up in Singapore to spending time in South Korea, Thailand, and New York, Tan's journey has shaped both her identity and her art.

Born and raised in Singapore, filmmaker Kirsten Tan recalls "always feeling a little stifled [and] a little suffocated" by the "socio-cultural rhythms of the city". As she puts it, "when I was a student, I knew I wanted to leave". Tan has been a cinephile for as long as she can remember. "I knew from a very young age that I wanted to make films," she said, describing herself as being "addicted to cinema as a medium". Film became her window to the world: "through cinema I understood culture, understood history, understood life". Yet in Singapore, she found no "valid path forward" in pursuing film as a career, and no older filmmakers to emulate.

After studying literature at the National University of Singapore and film at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Tan embarked on a year-long residency in South Korea, an experience that marked a pivotal shift both personally and professionally. The solitude of living abroad gave her a sense of self-determination, free from familial or societal expectations. "As an artist, it's important to understand what solitude feels like," she reflected, recalling the strange mix of liberation and unease in being "semi-terrified" by the feeling that if she disappeared one day, "no one would even know".

South Korea expanded her cinematic horizons. "Learning about Korean cinema was great when I was living there because there were just so many great Korean filmmakers," she said. For the first

time, she was publicly recognised as a filmmaker – "this is Kirsten Tan, the filmmaker" – a validation that allowed her to fully embrace that identity.

“Through cinema I understood culture, understood history, understood life

Following South Korea, Tan spent several years in Thailand, attracted to what she describes as the "looseness of living" and freedom from rigid social codes, before pursuing an MFA at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. She has remained in New York since, though her projects continue to take her around the world. "Everywhere I've lived has changed me a bit as a human, and therefore as a filmmaker," she reflected.

For Tan, "ideas literally come from everywhere". The challenge is not in thinking of them but "knowing which to follow".

Her films often contemplate existential questions: "What does it mean to be alive? What does it mean to be human?". She describes her work as "humanist" and "socially engaged," and notes that her queer identity has deepened her affinity for outsider stories. "Because of my queerness, I have always just naturally resonated with outsiders and outsider stories," she explained.

Tan is currently working on a film, *Crocodile Rock*, which explores queer culture in 1990s Singapore and delves into the story of the city's longest-running lesbian bar. She first learned of it after the 2022 repeal of Section 377A, a colonial-era law that criminalised sex between men. She notes her

surprise at how older queer women knew of the bar well, yet it was unheard of in her generation. "In certain generations above me, they were just so used to erasing themselves and their stories, and not talking about it outside the community," she observed. "As a result, there are a lot of

gaps in Singaporean queer narratives that still have to be bridged".

The film explores not only the hidden world of lesbian bar culture but also how queer women of that era perceived themselves. Some distributed condoms during the HIV/AIDS crisis, acts that read as advocacy today but which they never labelled as activism. "For them, it was just something they did," Tan explained. By weaving these generational shifts into the narrative, *Crocodile Rock* is both historically rooted and deeply personal. It seeks to preserve queer memory while interrogating how identity and visibility evolve across eras.

“What does it mean to be alive? What does it mean to be human?”

At the heart of Tan's practice lies a simple hope: that her films help audiences feel their own lives more deeply. "Maybe certain experiences that have happened in my films are reflected in their own lives, such that they feel maybe a little less lonely," she said. For her, cinema's power is its ability to create shared experiences. "It's almost like a mirror effect – if someone you know has experienced a certain thing already, then you feel less lonely," she reflected. "Films can do that".



▲ LYRA BROWNING

Theatre

Varsity theatre meets college theatre

Eleanor Baldwin speaks to Martha Alexander and Thomas Gladstone...

Last August, The Preston Society debuted their new Instagram page with the line: “After a period of hypersomnia since 2017, The Preston Society has awakened.” Inspired by the society’s impressive legacy, which boasts a host of talented performers like Matthew Holness and Rachel Weisz, its current co-President, Martha Alexander, teased a revival that would see a mix of theatre and comedy that coming Michaelmas term. As we move through a new academic year, Preston – Trinity Hall’s dramatic society – continues to grow, reflecting the enthusiasm within the college for such a project. Thomas Gladstone, who joins Martha this year as co-President, told me how indispensable the college’s support has been, notably from the College Master, Mary Hockaday.

This support is reflected in the society’s ambitions. Martha echoes this sentiment, noting that it’s vital for college drama societies to receive the platform they deserve, so that they might act as a bridge into the wider theatre community. Thomas tells me he wouldn’t have chosen a college without a drama society. Having worked Trinity Hall’s summer open days myself, this was a question I was



faced with a lot: “Which colleges are best for theatre?”. While Pembroke easily rolls off the tongue in answer, smaller dramatic societies like Preston are gaining momentum: a testament to the creative spirit that pulses through colleges.

Moreover, as Martha comments, there is a “lack of college drama societies doing comedy,” and Preston aims to fill this gap. By hosting smaller-scale smokers and comedy nights, they aim to provide that crucial first step into comedy: blending sketches, improv, and theatre in low-pressure settings. As they expand the society into both comedy and theatre, the pair remain committed to providing the open, inclusive environment that brought them here to begin with.

Their jovial approach to performing was best exemplified by their recent production of *Henry IV, Part 1*, performed last Easter in the Fellows’ Gardens of Trinity Hall. After such an intense academic year, these light-hearted productions are exactly what Cambridge students long for. Thomas describes the joy of working in college gardens such as these, which are just “made for theatre”. Access to these beautiful open spaces is a unique element of college societies, and both Thomas and Martha reminisce about the joy of shaping performances within such an environment.

I had begun the interview with the question, “Theatre or film?” Before coming to Cambridge, Thomas admitted he would have answered the latter. However, he praises the Cambridge theatre scene for shifting his opinion towards the former. As we close the interview, he points now to the “joy in finding something special out of every project”.

“
The Preston Society has awakened

Martha seconds this, adding that it is “never too late” to be involved. In a university so steeped in historical legacy, it is important to remember that, at the end of the day, this is all a bit of fun. Looking ahead, the pair tease a potential production of a J.B. Priestley play. Such a production, he notes, would honour both Preston’s dramatic legacy and the tradition of thought-provoking theatre. With momentum building, the Preston Drama Society has not only awakened, but is thriving.

My penultimate question: “How can we get involved” is met with a unanimous answer – “just come along”.

...while Daniel Kamaluddin cooks dinner with REDS president Cecily Chitty

It was a dark and rainy Sunday night when I met Cecily Chitty. The President of the Emmanuel College Revived Dramatic Society (REDS), we met in the unconventional interview environment of her kitchen, which was piled up with unwashed pots and pans. With the relative peace of the weekend drawing to a close, Cecily kindly traded her R and R for our interview, on the provision that she could meal prep while we chatted.

“
I love theatre that makes me feel something, that sparks my imagination

So it was while Cecily started chopping up the tomatoes for her mum’s signature sauce that our interview got under way. This is at least the second time that REDS has been revived, so I started by asking about the history of the society. “The last time that REDS was fully active,” Cecily tells me, “was February 2020 when we performed *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. So, we have been inactive for five years. I think people have tried to bring it back but it effectively got killed by COVID and the people who were in charge at the time then graduating”.

Dicing onions, Cecily explains why the society has been so on and off: “People take interest in trying to revive it, then it loses steam. It’s particularly hard to revive a theatre society because theatre is so expensive compared to

most societies. If you are not already on a model like Pembroke and Corpus, it is quite hard to start, because it’s difficult to convince the college that it’s going to be worth it”.

Just as I began to ask about how Cecily’s experience of Cambridge theatre last year has driven the re-birth of REDS, the sauce began to bubble over, and Cecily rushed to turn down the hob. Crisis averted, she tells me: “I wanted to make sure that we could try things out and feel less pressure. Take lighting, for example: it would be crazy to go straight to lighting an ADC main show. College societies give you a chance to learn the ropes. It’s a chance for people to get to grips with Cambridge theatre for the first time”.

Next, I asked about REDS’ Christmas production: “We are doing a production of *Box of Delights*, an adaptation of the classic Christmas novel by John Masefield which was made into a BBC show in the 1980s. I first saw the adaptation we are using when it was in its original production in 2017. My dad read me the book when I was a kid; I’ve always loved Christmas!”

She continued over the sound of the sizzling pan: “I love theatre that makes me feel something, that sparks something in my imagination. This show is very magical, and in terms of how you bring that to life, if it were a TV show you could now do it with CGI and it would be very literal, but the theatre is very much about imagination, and that brings the audience into it a lot more”.

Building on our earlier discussion about the difficulty of launching a college theatre society, I wondered how running a show in college differs from larger venues. “It’s very different,” Cecily told me earnestly. “A big issue is that we don’t have the kind of equip-

ment available that you would have doing a show at the ADC or at Corpus where there are lights already in the building. Whereas here there are a few lights, but we don’t know exactly what they do and we’re going to have to rent some which will be expensive. And, it is more difficult to use a space in the college that wasn’t design for theatre”.

The funding process, too, is difficult for drama societies to navigate. While washing a bruised pepper, Cecily tells me: “We’re still working it out. It’s all about keeping the momentum going because the college is so unused to having a drama society. The most expensive things are the rights to the play, which costs hundreds of pounds and the need to rent lights for three days, if not four days. There hasn’t been a truly active drama society under our current Master, so the college just isn’t used to having a theatre society”.

But the complexity of starting out has not at all dimmed Cecily’s passion for theatre and vision for REDS. REDS is set to be so much more than just its termly production: “We’ve had a social in Emma Bar. We have a play reading of *The Importance of Being Earnest* next week. Excitingly, we are collaborating with Emma Puppetry Society to bring the play to life, it is a big team effort and the wider social events are so important for that, for giving people the confidence to get involved in the society”.

After we had finished cooking, and had a kitchen chit-chat while rinsing our pans, Rosie, the society’s Secretary, came to join us before they went straight into a committee meeting. The overall impression of our stove-side chat is that Cecily and the team are driven, excited, and ready to go for their debut production later this month.

Box of Delights (22-23 November) launches with a 14:00 matinee in Emmanuel College’s Queen’s Building.





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Vulture

WHAT'S ON?

Film & TV

16 November

Ocean screening
St John's College, TBC

18 November

CUFA: Certified Copy screening
TBC

19 November

RTS Grantchester behind the scenes
panel with cast and crew
Magdalene College

20 November

The Rocky Horror Picture Show
Clare Cellars, 8pm

23 November

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid,
Arts Picturehouse, 14:00

Music

14 November

Rizzle Kicks
The Corn Exchange, 7:30pm

15 November

Hotline TNT
The Portland Arms, 7:30pm

18 November

CMAT
The Corn Exchange, 7:30pm

24 November

The Hunna
Junction, 7:00pm

26 November

Low Girl
The Portland Arms, 7:30pm

Arts

15 November

Harold Offeh: Mmm Gotta Try a Little
Harder, It Could Be Sweet
Kettle's Yard, 11:00am

20 November

Sarah Dunnant
Newnham College

21 November

Board Games Night
Waterstones, 6:00pm

22 November

Blackbirds: Georgia Conlon poetry
workshop
TBC

27 November

Museum Late: Made in Ancient Egypt
The Fitzwilliam Museum, 6:30pm

Theatre

18 November

DNA
Corpus Playroom, 9:30pm

19 November

Koda chrome
Fitzpatrick Hall, 7:30pm

19 November

CUMTS Freshers' Musical: Rush!
The ADC, 11:00pm

23 November

Weekly acting scene study group
Keynes Hall, King's College, 4:30pm

25 November

LYSISTRATA
Corpus Playroom, 7:30pm

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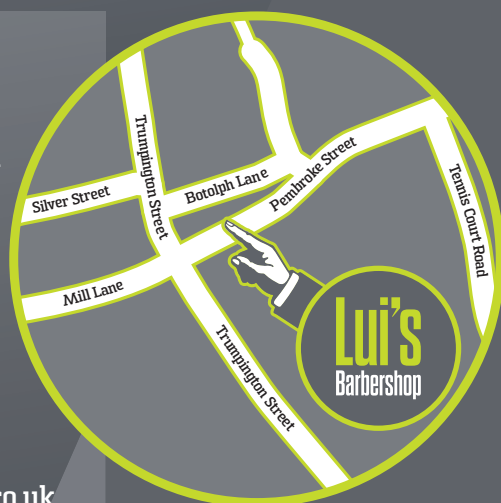
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What is a ‘real sport’ anyway?

Imani Schawsmidth weighs up student opinions on what makes for a ‘real’ sport

Sport is an everyday label that we take for granted. Rarely do we ask ourselves what makes something a sport. It is usually on the television at your local pub, or what earns you the prestige of donning a Cambridge Blue jumper so everyone knows you play it, and that you are good at it. It is one of those givens that few have tried to unpack

I remembered a jovial conversation I had with my friends upon discovering we lived on the same floor as a Tiddlywinks World Champion. We were admittedly taken aback by the unconventional nature of it all – who knew it was a competitive sport? But I realised I probably could not have justified to you why my initial reaction was one of shock rather than admiration. Was it because tiddlywinks was something new? Not really, since it has been around since the 1890s. Or had this been a wake-up call to some internalised misogyny causing me to take it less seriously? That wasn’t it either, because in my mind I already associated tiddlywinks with men – though I seem to have been mistaken here also. So what was it? I did not want to say it out loud but I knew what I was thinking: is it *really* a sport? But that’s just it: what is a ‘real’ sport anyway?

To an extent, we do have a ‘Cambridge culture’ here. Although I would not say we live in a wholly homogenous bubble, we certainly do have common ways of thinking and approaching things. Given this, I sought to deconstruct these shared assumptions by consulting the members of our sporting community.

Going into this, I assumed that the results may yield a degree of gender bias, or at least a level of preference toward male-dominated sports. Instead, unsurprisingly, I was first and foremost met with a question in response to my question: “well what do you mean by a *real* sport?” I assured my interviewees that this was not a supervision, but nonetheless it was an understandable counterpoint. In reality, the idea of a real sport is less of a typology and more so one of those shared implicit narratives that many of us are broadly familiar with or have probably grown up with, irrespective of whether we agree with it or express it out loud.

“We have a long way to go in opening up to more unconventional ideas of what makes a sport

Another example of this could be the idea of ‘fun’. Typically, we are familiar with the mainstream idea that fun at university looks like going out, and doing the things that are only socially permissible when you are 18. Many of us measure up our pastimes with this idea of what we are supposed to be doing as part

of student life, wondering if we are actually boring. In a similar vein, I think it’s safe to assume that I am not the only one who has a rough idea of what ‘real’ sports are. Football, running, and swimming are just a few of the first things that tend to come to mind. A decent metric I thought of when clarifying my investigation was: “how impressed would you be if someone told you they played this sport for Varsity?”

“What constitutes a real sport is ‘in the eye of the beholder’ – it’s a spectrum

In asking around, I was met with a collection of fairly similar responses. A Master’s student at Downing said that the bias on this matter would lean towards the more physically exertive end of the spectrum. That is, sports like rugby or wrestling garner a lot of respect because of the demand and even the danger. As the sport gets less and less physical, people will tend to veer away from classing it as one.

The discourse surrounding chess as a sport, for example, potentially points to this pattern. The same could be said for darts or snooker; those who are not invested in it as players, or watchers, often pay it little mind when listing examples of sports.

A second year Caius student told me that rugby is “objectively” a sport. When I asked him what he thought about tiddlywinks, he credited that it was certainly “detail oriented,” and “respectable,” but mentioned that it is not “physically active in the same way football is,” making it not a sport in the same sense.

A pragmatic second year at Magdalene stopped me in my tracks, expressing that what constitutes a real sport is “in the eye of the beholder” – it is a spectrum.

In conversation with a second year at Fitzwilliam, it took a bit of back-and-forth before I saw his point of view. At first he echoed a similar rhetoric: that what is seen as a real sport tends to be an endurance sport. But in digging deeper, he admitted that the commercialised elements of some sports have eclipsed the value of the sport itself.

“So when sport is more of a commodified pantomime you don’t respect it as much?” I asked. He responded: “It strips the sport of any fire and authenticity”.

My next interviewee, a second year Jesus student, shared a similar concern to me about the gendered politics behind our assumptions of which sports are to be taken more seriously. “Sports like pole, gymnastics and ice skating are underemphasised just because they’re more female-dominated. They are defi-

nately real sports.” When probed to think of what was not a sport, she informed me of the existence of e-sports. They even had their own Olympics. “It’s not typical,” she continued. “There’s not much physical activity, and therefore I personally wouldn’t consider it to be a sport,” albeit, she did add that they are definitely strategic.

“So what type of person do you associate with e-sports then?” She joked: “Not a sportsman.”

Consulting one of Cambridge’s more niche sports, I liaised with the Cambridge University Rifle Association (CURA) Secretary, Ana Vijay. She said that, for her, “a sport is anything that needs you to apply coordination skills to succeed competi-

tively in it.” Despite the fact shooting isn’t as “physically exhaustive” as other sports, the line between winning and losing is a thin line, determined by millimetres.

“If your trigger finger, eyes, and positioning

aren’t coordinated, what you think is a great shot could easily become a mediocre or bad one. Just like football teaches you to use footwork to respond to what you see and score, shooting teaches you to pull your finger back at the perfect time when your sight picture tells you to shoot.” It seems that the high stakes which come with mastering this skill contribute greatly to its status as a sport, separating it from inattentive hobbies.

My investigation yielded the expected results. It does seem that strength and physicality dominate perceptions of what makes a sport. In addition, room was made for strategy and detail, but this alone does not seem to constitute a status of ‘sport’ for most people. But there was one last opinion that I realised ought to be a part of this conversation. I had to go back to where it all began and confront the sport that begged the question in the first place: tiddlywinks.

In spoke with CUTwC (the Cambridge University Tiddlywinks Club). Petroc Vyvyan-Jones, the publicity officer, had an interesting perspective on his club’s claim to being a sport.

Having been “reliably informed by a veteran tiddlywinker [that] a prospective sport must fulfil certain criteria,” Petroc concluded that tiddlywinks satisfied them all. “Speed, manual dexterity and physical strength, usually associated with the mainstream sports of this world, are essential factors in tiddlywinks; the greatest understanding of winks strategy means little without these fundamentals. This unique combination of mental and physical attributes constitutes the difference between a casual player like me and a world champion

– likewise, it distinguishes tiddlywinks from other games, such as chess, which some mistakenly demand should be recognised as a sport.”

Informing me of the sport’s long-standing history of tournaments and personal rivalries across the world stage, I realised that my ignorance of the sport may have been more personal than general. CUTwC itself was central in propelling tiddlywinks globally, and formalising it as a sport. Its roots in Cambridge as an institution and community are far more deeply embedded than I thought.

Jovially, Petroc added that “the strongest evidence for our status as a sport, however, is our fine-tuned ability to end meetings in the closest pub for a drink, alcoholic or otherwise”. This camaraderie building activity is, in Petroc’s eyes, “perhaps the principal reason for [their] domination of Oxford’s winkers”.

I think it’s safe to say that, as a sporting community, we have a long way to go in opening up to more unconventional ideas of what makes a sport ‘real’. Personally, I enjoyed exploring my own internal biases on the subject.

I would now say my answer to the question “what is a ‘real’ sport?” is far more vague and inclusive than before. And I don’t think that’s a bad thing at all!



Continued from back page ►

What is the best and worst bit about being captain?

The best part is unlocking my competitive side to drive everyone throughout the match. I like to be very vocal on the pitch and constantly high fiving after each possession to keep the morale high. The worst bit about being captain is spamming people on WhatsApp about their availability!

How do you manage to balance sport and work?

I actually think playing sports makes it easier to balance work! It’s great to have dedicated breaks set aside, and then I can manage my time around that and complete work beforehand. It’s also a great way to completely switch your brain off, so you’re not thinking about anything academic.

What does a typical training session look like for you?

Training usually involves a warm up, followed by several drills focussing on a particular skill / tactic. Then we go into game play at the end, where we try to implement the skills we’ve been working on in the session.

Do you have any predictions for the upcoming season?

Last season we got promoted to Division 1 of the Cambridgeshire league so the matches are a lot harder, but our team is strong and we’ve already come out with some great results, so I think we will keep this up and solidify our place in this division for next year. As for Varsity, I see a win in our future...



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Ten-try TCD outclass Cambridge

Nicholas Hall reports from a a refurbished Grange Road as the Blues are beaten 64-21

Under the lights at a refurbished Grange Road, anticipation was high for the spectacle of Ireland's oldest rugby club, DUFC, taking on the Blues on Grange Road's new state-of-the-art Mumford Pitch. Trinity College Dublin had won the last few fixtures between the pair and were seeking to repeat their narrow 27-24 home victory from two years ago. On this occasion, a stop-start performance from the home side was not enough to stop the tourists, as the Dublin-based team strung together a relentless and complete display in a 64-21 thumping.

A healthy crowd including a lively Irish contingent piled in to Grange Road on the same day a new all-weather pitch was officially opened at the ground. The fireworks on the pitch, however, were from the visitors – an early lineout steal, followed with the Irish pack piling into a powerful rolling maul and crashing over the tryline from five metres out. – five

points in only the second minute. It was four minutes later when Trinity found their second try; a weaving, rolling maul forming this time on the far side of the field with the same result.

High energy and a franticness then developed, with a try-saving tackle from DUFC's O'Sullivan giving the Blues some hope they could stay in it. A penalty for hands in the ruck followed, and the unstoppable force of another rolling maul from the lineout led to Trinity's third try of the match. Their lead was 0-17 after Quirke added the extras for his second conversion of the night – with only ten minutes on the clock.

The momentum sharply swung Cambridge's way after a Trinity infringement saw them temporarily reduced when the referee gave marching orders with a yellow card. A period of sustained pressure followed from the Blues as they resolvedly ventured, for the first time, into the opposition's twenty-two.

Nate Bottomley's precisely judged cross-field grubber kick to the left-wing, looked certain to see Cambridge find their first score of the match, but the ball agonisingly slipped through Cam Martin's fingers, much to the relief of the visitors, while the Blues were left hands on heads. In the 23rd minute Cambridge eventually capitalised on their man advantage. A rolling maul, which was swiftly becoming the story of the night, saw prop Fin Edwards score, imbuing a renewed sense of hope as the difference was closed to only ten points.

Half time loomed and looked to save the home side, but it was their turn to be reduced to fourteen men after a yellow for playing the ball on the floor saw Trinity five metres out once more. The tries did not stop coming either, and once again a rolling maul extended the visitors' lead. After quickly regaining possession from a scrum on the halfway line, Trinity's Murphy superbly gathered the ball

from a piercing grubber to surge under the posts, the two Cambridge defenders only able to chase in vain. A comfortable lead of 31-7 belonged to the Irish as the whistle went for half time.

DUFC returned to the field after only a couple of minutes, as Cambridge looked to regather themselves in the changing room before rallying to make the match a closer contest. It looked momentarily like this might be the case, until the 49th minute when Trinity scored their sixth try of the match.

Both sides made a number of changes close to the hour mark to finish the match strongly, and the game's highlight for the home fans swiftly followed. Cambridge captain George Bland found a yard of space inside the Trinity half and produced a neat chip over the backline, before superbly collecting his own ball to fly over the line and make it 14-38.

Four more Trinity tries subsequently put the seal on a magnificent perfor-

mance as Cambridge could only summon one more score. The final scoreboard read 21-64, with the visitors deserved victors after a complete display of raw mauling strength, pace throughout the backline, and lineout superiority. Trinity's nous and high-conversion rate inside the Cambridge twenty-two meant they never trailed and – despite a couple of stylish Cambridge tries – the Irish always appeared to be in control.

There were positives to take from the spirited Blues' performance, at times going toe-to-toe with a classy Dublin outfit, who had won six of their eight games of this season. Cambridge's lack of game time was evident, and the side will look to grow in confidence as they turn their attention towards finishing the term strongly and a series of attractive, historic fixtures against the RAF, Army and Navy in the new year.

Captain's Corner

Ben Lubitsh catches up with Korfball captain Harriet Knights



What actually is Korfball?

Korfball is a Dutch sport, often described as a cross between basketball and netball. It's a mixed gender sport with all players taking on attacking and defending roles which makes it a lot of fun.

Is it easy for beginners to join Korfball?

Yes! Most people haven't heard of korfball before joining the society so we are completely beginner friendly, and will teach all the basics. We run sessions with "Give it a Go" on Saturday mornings which are open to everyone, and if you want to get involved further you

can drop us a message on Instagram, @camunikorfball

Who is your sporting idol?

For my first two years with CUKC, we were coached by Cambridge alumni Bethany South who no longer coaches us but still plays korfball for Cambridge City. I really look up to her as a player, especially since she captained the team while she was at Cambridge, she is amazing to watch and her competitive spirit is inspiring.

What is your best and worst sporting moment?

My best sporting moment was prob-

ably scoring the equaliser against Oxford at Varsity this year, especially since it was in Cambridge so lots of my friends and family came to watch! My worst sporting moment was playing Varsity 2024 on a twisted ankle and then going clubbing in Oxford, only to wake up and not be able to walk, and having the rest of the team carry me around all day.

Do you have any pre-match rituals?

I think a loud hands in at the start of the match and lots of high fives really sets the tone for the game.

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