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## Menna Rawlings

Queens' first  
female president  
p.10



## Debate on the dancefloor

p.22



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Friday 28th November 2025  
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The Independent  
Student Newspaper since 1947

# VARSITY



## Govt warned Uni over PalSoc speaker event

● Journalist called Oct 7 a 'great day' ● DfE counter-terror unit flagged concerns ● Event cancelled in Oct

**Charlie Rowan and Wilf Vall**

Editor-in-Chief and Associate Editor  
The Department for Education's (DfE) counter-terror team contacted the University of Cambridge to "raise concerns" about a student event featuring a Palestinian journalist who called the October 7 attacks a "great day," documents obtained by *Varsity* show.

The event, which was organised by the Cambridge University Palestine Solidarity Society (PalSoc), was due to host Palestinian journalist Abubaker

Abed at Newnham College to speak about "journalism, Gaza, and the role of action in shaping narratives".

However, after it emerged that Abed had posted tweets celebrating proscribed terror group Hamas's attacks on October 7th, 2023, PalSoc cancelled the event.

Now, internal documents seen by *Varsity* reveal that the DfE flagged the event under their counter-terror protocols, and contacted the University to "raise concerns".

*Varsity* understands that the event or-

ganisers were not contacted by government officials prior to its cancellation.

At the University's Prevent Committee meeting, where the DfE's communications were discussed, unnamed attendees expressed concerns about the potential for officials to intervene in "lawful free speech" on campus.

The committee is charged with ensuring that the University meets its "obligations" to the Prevent counter-terrorism scheme and the Higher Education Freedom of Speech Act.

Members of the committee also point-

ed to previous allegations from Prevent officials "that the higher education sector was under-referring individuals to Prevent," though these concerns had since been quelled.

Prior to the meeting, Abed, who left Gaza in April 2024 and now lives in the UK, referred to members of Hamas, a proscribed organisation in the UK, as part of the "resistance" or as "resistance fighters" and called the October 7th massacre a "great day" on X - formerly

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## Uni registers controversial Women's Soc

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## V Michaelmas, Week 6

### Editors' Note

Like all good student newspapers, this print went down to the very wire. We were just three hours from our final send-off when the University's Junior Proctors registered the controversial new Women's Society (p.3). At the same time, developments around colleges withdrawing support for the transgender-inclusive football league (p.3) continued right up to the last, as did an update on the future of the Vet School (p.6). These stories – alongside our two other major pieces, the government's intervention in a Palestinian speaker event (p.1) and the latest delay to the University's divestment vote (p.4) – kept us firmly on our toes.

Rather than burying these updates in the following pages, we decided to spotlight all five on the front page. Indeed, this front page captures almost all of the key issues that have been shaping student life these last few terms.

Yet, *Varsity* is more than its news coverage; it is also a place to celebrate Cambridge life. In our interview with former French ambassador Dame Menna Rawlings, we hear about her pioneering journey to become the first female president of Queens' College (p.10). Likewise in our fortnightly print fixture, Humans of Cambridge, we hear more from the people who keep this University going, with an insight into college bedders (p.13).

In *Vulture*, you will find all your Bridgemas questions answered. From our gift-giving guide (p.21) to our alternative holiday playlist (p.26), the festive season has not passed us by. We even take the time to meet the student grinchers, who simply refuse to join in the Christmas fun (p.20). Anticipating editorial complaints about an event still a month away, we also feature a fashion shoot (p.22) and food reviews (p.20) to make sure we don't go overboard.

As we sign off from our editorship, we wanted to take a moment to reflect; it has been a real privilege to have edited *Varsity* this Michaelmas. This paper is a wonderful thing, and the following pages are a testament to our central vision: independently scrutinising University life in our news coverage, while leaving space to celebrate the colourful stories in between.

But we also wanted to say thank you to you, the *Varsity* reader, for keeping student journalism thriving, helping us keep the University communications team on its toes, and for giving us a distraction from our dreaded weekly essays. We cannot wait to see where *Varsity* goes next.



## Ben Curtis & Charlie Rowan Editors-in-Chief

MICHAELMAS 2025



**EDITORS** Ben Curtis & Charlie Rowan  
[editor@varsity.co.uk](mailto:editor@varsity.co.uk)

**DEPUTY EDITORS** Kezia Douglass & Calum Murray  
[deputyeditor@varsity.co.uk](mailto:deputyeditor@varsity.co.uk)

**VULTURE EDITORS** Daisy Bates & Ellie Buckley  
[magazine@varsity.co.uk](mailto:magazine@varsity.co.uk)

**NEWS** Georgie Middlemiss & Faron Smith (Senior); Alex Brian, Bethinn Feely, Max La Bouchardiere & Maria Eduarda Paixão (Deputy)  
[news@varsity.co.uk](mailto:news@varsity.co.uk)

**COMMENT** April O'Neill, Duncan Paterson & Daisy Stewart Henderson  
[opinion@varsity.co.uk](mailto:opinion@varsity.co.uk)

**FEATURES** Olivia Goodman & Emma Tenzler  
[features@varsity.co.uk](mailto:features@varsity.co.uk)

**INTERVIEWS** Mariam Al-Badry, Tara Buxton & Wilf Vall  
[interviews@varsity.co.uk](mailto:interviews@varsity.co.uk)

**SCIENCE** Bibi Boyce & Ruby Jackson  
[science@varsity.co.uk](mailto:science@varsity.co.uk)

**SPORT** Joss Hedde-Bacon & Ben Lubitsh  
[sport@varsity.co.uk](mailto:sport@varsity.co.uk)

**LIFESTYLE** Jess Gotterson & Gabrielle Saraway  
[lifestyle@varsity.co.uk](mailto:lifestyle@varsity.co.uk)

**ARTS** Emily Cushion & Ryan Vowles  
[arts@varsity.co.uk](mailto:arts@varsity.co.uk)

**FASHION** Mary Anna Im & Flossie Bullion  
[fashion@varsity.co.uk](mailto:fashion@varsity.co.uk)

**FASHION SHOOT CO-ORDINATOR** Chloe Jacob

**FILM & TV** Amanda Ljungberg & Julia Ongking  
[filmandtv@varsity.co.uk](mailto:filmandtv@varsity.co.uk)

**MUSIC** Daisy Cooper & Seun Ige  
[music@varsity.co.uk](mailto:music@varsity.co.uk)

**THEATRE** Kaitlyn Butterly, Daniel Kamaluddin & Josh Pritchard  
[theatre@varsity.co.uk](mailto:theatre@varsity.co.uk)

**PHOTOGRAPHY EDITORS** Amika Piplapure & Ruyang Yang

**ILLUSTRATIONS EDITORS** Lyra Browning & Iris Chapman

**CHIEF SUB-EDITOR** Saphia Arshad  
[subeditor@varsity.co.uk](mailto:subeditor@varsity.co.uk)

**ASSOCIATE EDITORS** Ben Birch, Sophie Ennis, Alice Mainwood, Wilf Vall, Anuk Weerawardana  
[associate@varsity.co.uk](mailto:associate@varsity.co.uk)

**BUSINESS MANAGER** Mark Curtis  
[business@varsity.co.uk](mailto:business@varsity.co.uk)

**VARSOC PRESIDENT** Wilf Vall  
[president@varsity.co.uk](mailto:president@varsity.co.uk)

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# THE PORTER





# ‘Rare’ Prevent intervention

◀ Continued from front page

Twitter.

“O God, be pleased with our resisters and martyrs and loved ones, and be pleased with those who raised our heads and restored our dignity on that great day,” he wrote in Arabic. “O God, have mercy on our people and their heroic families, and compensate them for their sacrifices.”

The Times raised the tweets with the Society, whose spokesperson stated that following “a conversation with university staff involved in procuring and booking this event, and in line with their due diligence policies regarding speaker events, the event is cancelled as it stands”.

Abed told The Times that “decontextualising” his statements should be avoided. He said: “The tweet you refer to was a prayer, not a ‘celebration’ of violence. It expressed mourning and solidarity with Palestinians.”

“At no point have I celebrated the killing of civilians or condoned attacks on non-combatants ... My reference to ‘resistance’ reflects the internationally recognised right of an occupied people to resist military occupation, as affirmed under international law and not support for any particular armed group or act of violence.”

The DfE’s intervention has been

slammed by a senior academic who sits on University Council, telling Varsity: “The presence of the Prevent programme is inherently antithetical to freedom of speech in Universities. As an academic, the idea that a government programme could be observing my work makes the very principle of free thought near-impossible.”

“The University’s willingness to bend over backwards for so-called ‘counter-terror’ initiatives, while refusing to discipline a scientific racist, demonstrates how their free speech initiatives are little more than an attempt to pander to dominant anti-intellectual ideology”.

Varsity understands that, prior to the cancellation of the event, the University and Newnham had been exploring “potential mitigations” to ensure the event could go ahead within the bounds of lawful free speech.

The Prevent Committee noted that “imposing mitigation measures on any proposed event was very rare, as was the DfE’s intervention in this instance, and that permission for events to proceed was almost never withheld.”

Cambridge’s Prevent committee made eight investigations in the previous academic year, the most in recent times – with activists from Cambridge for Palestine claiming that the rise was linked to increased pro-Palestine activism.

The Prevent scheme as a whole has previously come under fire from student campaigners, who claimed the programme was used to “restrict” pro-Palestine protesters last year.

Students from Cambridge University Amnesty society published a motion that the Prevent program, as a whole, “violates some of our most fundamental human rights and espouses racist, Islamophobic and disablist rhetoric”.

The campaigners, speaking at an SU council meeting, claimed that colleges have used the scheme to cancel and police student events. They also said that Prevent enables colleges to be “aggressive” towards political societies.

The proposers of the motion quoted an Amnesty International report which claims that people “have been referred to Prevent for expressing non-violent beliefs”.

These findings also follow the University’s free speech policy coming under significant scrutiny in recent months, after they made the controversial decision not to discipline “race realist” fellow Nathan Cofnas.

Cofnas sparked controversy after he argued for the “preservation of racial distinctions” and claimed that the number of black Harvard academics “would approach zero” in a true meritocracy in a 2024 blog post.

The University launched an investi-

gation into Cofnas’ comments after 58 students reported them for racial discrimination. But, following a year-long process, the University stated that Cofnas’ comments represented lawful free speech, triggering outcry from the student body.

In a recent interview with Varsity, Lord Smith, the new chancellor, said his “number one priority” is the defence of free speech and academic freedom. Describing free expression as “the bottom line,” he urged colleagues against “kowtowing to anyone [...] trying to determine what a professor can or can’t research”.

Cambridge’s free speech policy has also undergone significant changes in recent years, as a consequence of the Higher Education Freedom of Speech Act introduced last year.

The University originally revised its freedom of speech policy to reflect the provisions of the draft act, proposed by the outgoing Conservative government. This included provisions to allow academics to express “controversial or unpopular opinions within the law, without fear of intolerance or discrimination”.

When the new Labour government took power, Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson chose to suspend the bill – but Cambridge still decided to enact the policy in its previous form.

## Uni registers Women’s Soc amid backlash

Faron Smith

Senior News Editor

The Cambridge University Society of Women (CUSW) has formally registered with the University of Cambridge, almost a month after launching.

In a post on the society’s Instagram yesterday (27/11), the group announced that it “received confirmation from the Junior Proctor that our society is now officially registered with the University of Cambridge”.

Registration with the University is distinct from registering with the Students’ Union, which the group’s founders had initially signalled as their intention.

Registration with the University requires the society to have the endorsement of a Senior Treasurer, who must be a fellow. Anita Bunyan, a MML professor and fellow of Gonville and Caius College has been made the society’s Senior Treasurer, Varsity understands.

She stated: “I support the right of junior members of the University to establish a single-sex Society of Women. There is clearly a demand among students for such a group. Young women at the University of Cambridge have their own aspirations, histories and needs and a right to assemble, if they wish, on a single-sex basis without fear of denunciation, intimidation or disruption.”

“I am honoured to have been invited to act as Senior Treasurer of the Society. We are most grateful to the University for confirming the official registration of the Society today.”

The announcement follows the group’s launch at the end of October, becoming the first society at the University to limit its membership to those assigned “female at birth”.

The launch sparked a strong backlash from students, including a statement from Cambridge University Labour Club (CULC), describing the group as “transphobic”.

Additionally, Girton College’s FemSoc stated: “Transgender and gender-queer individuals have been and will continue to be crucial to our cause as feminists,” in a statement endorsed by Gender Agenda, as well as several other FemSocs and LGBTQ officers.

Founder Maeve Halligan said: “A number of students have made their more negative feelings towards CUSW clear from our launch exactly one month ago (27/10). While we acknowledge that these students absolutely have a right to make their opinions clear, there is no reason why CUSW should not exist as a student society like any other.”

“The right to free speech and freedom of association should be a central part of any university [...] We are proud that, now we are officially registered with the University of Cambridge, we can co-exist legitimately and civilly with the wide range of other student societies here. We thank the Proctors’ Office for registering us and we are excited to plan our next events, some of which will be open to the public, for the Lent term.”

The University of Cambridge has been contacted for comment.

# Captains to vote on trans inclusion

Georgie Middlemiss

Senior News Editor

Women’s and non-binary college football captains are set to vote next week on whether to exclude trans players, following colleges officially cutting all support for the current interim league.

The current Intercollegiate League was established as an interim measure, while captains sought further consultation on new Football Association (FA) guidance regarding transgender and non-binary eligibility.

Following a meeting on Saturday (22/11) of multiple senior college officials, colleges declared an ‘intercollegiate consensus’ which stated colleges were cutting all support for the current league.

This stated colleges would only support their women’s football teams going forward if they re-established an official league, which is required to be affiliated with the University Sports Centre and follow national guidance on gender divisions.

Varsity spoke to captains and players, who all expressed concern about the impact the ongoing uncertainty was having on student welfare and team culture.

Lara, captain of CUAFC, told Varsity that “there has been a disappointing lack of consideration by the colleges for the trans and queer community of Cambridge – and at the same time a very distinct focus on legal risks.”

Inter-college matches have continued this term in the informal Intercollegiate League which is not affiliated with the University Sports Service, while Cambridge University Amateur Football League (CUAFL) suspended the previous women’s league.

The long-delayed decision on a new league follows the University’s Director of Sport advising earlier this term that

the CUAFL must adhere to new FA guidance on trans and non-binary eligibility. This stated players must be “biological females” to compete in women’s divisions.

Martine, captain of Sidney Sussex women’s FC, spoke with Varsity about hopes for the new league, stating the “whole idea is we want it to make it as inclusive as possible even within the clearly discriminatory new guidelines”.

On Monday (24/11) evening, a meeting of women’s college captains took place which concluded that the current informal Intercollegiate League will likely need to be disbanded and a new official league, affiliated with the University Sports Centre, would be re-established.

A vote is hoped to be held next week, as the discussions concluded, on whether the gender divisions of the new league will be ‘mixed’ or women’s-only (according to the FA’s trans-exclusive definition).

Another college women’s team captain told Varsity, “everyone just wants to play football, but also everyone wants to get it right”.

Some colleges, notably St John’s and King’s, had already cut recognition of their women’s football teams prior to Saturday’s meeting. This included banning the team from playing on college sports grounds, meaning some of the league matches this term had to be played on non-college grounds including Jesus Green.

In a joint statement, St John’s and King’s said: “Our Colleges remain committed to supporting all students and ensuring that sport is accessible and inclusive. All sporting activity undertaken in a College’s name or on

its grounds must be conducted in line with the law and the regulations set by each sport’s national governing body. This approach is in line with the University’s recent guidance.”

“Within this context, we have remained in close dialogue with our women’s football team throughout the term. Funding for women’s football has not been reduced, and our pitches remain available. Competitive fixtures can only take place on College grounds where the sport structure operates within the relevant national governing-body provisions.”

Lara noted that the current league was always intended as an “interim solution,” but that they were pushed to a decision, noting “colleges saying we will not let you use our grounds is an incentive to make active steps towards getting stuff set up”.

The joint statement of college officials also advised the teams that, without college support, individual members would be legally liable for the team.

The statement noted: “Without College recognition or support (or University recognition or support), any unaffiliated asso-

ciation would in law be regarded as an “unincorporated members’ association” with the individual members taking on significant legal and personal risk, both individually and collectively.”

In an official league, the University would be liable for any legal action taken against the league or individual teams.

One college captain noted, “I’m very unsure about the whole situation” and that “it’s an issue that I don’t think anyone’s really got a solution for”.

Another player highlighted captains’ steadfast commitment, noting that “despite the confusion matches are still going ahead each week and there still seems to be a culture of inclusion”.

Multiple captains reported receiving communication from College Senior Tutors offering guidance on the situation, with many offering their support and help. However, Lara found “there’s been no super active reach out of setting up support”.

Varsity understands multiple captains have expressed intentions to boycott the league if a vote results in a trans-exclusive women’s league under FA guidance.

Discussions around the structure of a potential ‘mixed’ league agreed all genders would be able to play, but that no man who has played in a CUAFC men’s team, or the men’s college football league, would be eligible.

The statement from college officials reads: “The intercollegiate consensus is that where women’s football is being played in the College’s name and/or on the College’s grounds, it should be organised and played within the parameters set by the sport’s governing body.”

The University of Cambridge was contacted for comment.



▲ AMIKA PIPLAPURE



# Arms divestment vote delayed

The vote, supposed to have taken place on Monday, will take place in February's University Council meeting

**Charlie Rowan**  
Editor-in-Chief

The University of Cambridge has pushed back a crucial vote on the extent to which it should divest from arms companies, after members of its senior policy-making body failed to agree on a decision.

A decision had been expected at Monday's meeting of the University Council – which includes the Vice-Chancellor, Heads of Houses, and elected members – where councillors discussed the findings of the Working Group on Investment's report, published in October.

However, *Varsity* understands that the vote has now been postponed until the next Council meeting in early February, after several undecided councillors requested further information about the University's existing financial exposure to the defence sector.

Set up in July 2024, the Working Group on Investment was tasked with examining Cambridge's ties to the arms industry through its £4.2bn Cambridge University Endowment Fund (CUF), which is managed separately but wholly owned by the University.

Last month, the Council approved the report's central recommendation for Cambridge to divest from "any company which manufactures weapons illegal under UK law," including chemical, biological, and cluster munitions. This

marked the first time the University had excluded investments on the basis of arms production.

But the report stopped short of recommending divestment from manufacturers of "conventional weapons" – those not classified as nuclear, biological or chemical – noting that CUEF's current exposure to such companies is already below 1% of the fund.

However, the report stopped short of recommending divestment from companies involved in manufacturing "conventional weapons" – those used in standard combat operations and not classified as nuclear, biological, or chemical. According to the report, Cambridge's current exposure to such companies is already below 1% of its total investments.

The report set out three possible routes for the Council to take at a future meeting.

Briefing notes for Monday's meeting, seen by *Varsity*, show that the first option was to make no new restrictions on investments in conventional weapons manufacturers, arguing that it would be inappropriate to limit such exposure "during a period of increasing risk to the security of the United Kingdom and its allies". Under this approach, the University would simply monitor the endowment's exposure and, if it ever exceeded 1%, publish a transparency report detailing all relevant companies.

A second option proposed a formal 1%

"carve-out," committing Cambridge to "minimise investment" in these companies in line with the University's values and wider ethical considerations. This would require keeping exposure below 1% at all times and "as low as possible" without jeopardising the endowment's financial returns.

The third and most far-reaching option was for Cambridge to conclude that it "should not invest in any company which manufactures any weapons," on "ethical" grounds, with a phased timeline that would lead ultimately to full divestment.

This is not the first time Cambridge has pushed back a decision related to arms divestment. The Working Group's review had initially been scheduled for completion in Michaelmas 2024, after the University pledged – in a statement urging students to end the pro-Palestine encampment – that it would work "rapidly" and "reach initial positions by the end of term".

Instead, the review, chaired by Downing Master Dr Graham Virgo, only concluded in July 2025.

A spokesperson for the University of Cambridge said: "Members of Council had a very constructive discussion that reflected views on all sides. A further discussion will take place at a Council meeting next term."

A spokesperson for Cambridge for Palestine (C4P), told *Varsity*: "This delay

is disgraceful, Palestinians can't afford to wait any longer for this University to make philosophical observations about its investment in the tools used to commit genocide."

Meanwhile, Richard Penty, Head of the University's School of Technology, told *Varsity*: "Against the backdrop of current global events and heightened risks to UK national security, the Working Group has made sensible recommendations that Council has endorsed."

## £4.2bn

**The amount held in the Cambridge University Endowment Fund (CUF)**

"National security is an increasingly critical consideration for Cambridge, and our investment policy should reflect both our responsibilities as a leading institution and the government's position, for instance as set out in the Defence Industrial Strategy."

"Given the significance of this decision in the national context, Council is right to take the necessary time to weigh the options carefully. As the University's trustees, they must balance financial sustainability, our ethical stance, and our role in supporting the UK's security and economy. Aligning our investment policy with the principles already agreed

for research – preserving academic freedom to work with defence companies while setting clear expectations on controversial weapons – will ensure consistency and clarity at a time of intense public and governmental scrutiny," Penty added.

Professor Jason Scott Warren, who sits on the Council, told *Varsity*: "Divestment from fossil fuels has been a long and painful process. Now the proposal to divest from weapons manufacture is encountering significant resistance, from those who see it as an affront to national security and to our research engagement with national security. I hope that the University can be persuaded to adopt a more ethical position in this area."

Last month, Cambridge SU held a student referendum on whether it should campaign to end University investments and collaborations with institutions involved in "occupation and weapons manufacture". Students voted overwhelmingly in favour, albeit on a low turnout.

Meanwhile, earlier this year, King's College became the first college to commit to complete divestment from arms companies.

In July, *Varsity* reported that Dr Colm Durkan, head of the Department of Engineering, allegedly said that divestment from companies in the arms industry would pose an "existential" threat to the department and the wider University.

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# Downing may turn accom into term-time BnB

**Alessia Fietta**  
News Correspondent

Downing College has proposed controversial new plans to turn a first-year accommodation building into a year-round B&B hotel, *Varsity* can reveal.

The change, which may take effect as early as the start of Michaelmas term next year, would reserve the accommodation in Howard Lodge building primarily for conference attendees, alongside some international students on placements at Downing, all year round.

Varsity understands this comes as an attempt to tackle the College's financial deficit, estimated at approximately £1.5 million annually, while trying to minimise student costs and avoid cuts to facilities.

External guest rooms are currently available to book in Downing, advertising itself as a “different kind of B&B” on its conference and events website.

However, *Varsity* understands this change would result in Howard Lodge accommodation becoming B&B accommodation also during term-time, forcing first-year undergraduates to be moved to alternative accommodation.

Similarly, Howard Building and Howard Theatre are currently available to book for conferences and events, as part of the College's conference business which is expected to generate £2.5 million in revenue over the next year.

The plans have been a topic of much controversy among many students,

particularly the worry that external guests will live alongside students in College during term-time.

One Downing student told *Varsity*: “Students should always be the priority at Cambridge. We worked so hard to get here and it feels confusing that conference revenue is being prioritised over student comfort.”

They continued, "If the proposition is that more students move into the Singer Building, then why can't the conference attendees stay there, and students remain in Howard Lodge?"

Downing JCR minutes from an open meeting earlier this month (10/11) feature "discussion of plans to turn Howard Lodge into a Conference/B&B Hotel".

The minutes suggested that alternative accommodation for first-years, to replace Howard Lodge, may include new rooms in K staircase, the Singer Building (currently for postgraduate students), as well as rooms above the Cuba Libre restaurant on Regent Street, which are yet to be completed.

ed.

At the meeting, students voiced concerns that the College would feel less safe. Proposals were even made to cordon off Howard Lodge altogether.

Multiple questions were asked at the meeting about the plans, including about whether guests would have access to student facilities like the dining hall and whether they would be required to sign a code of conduct on arrival.

Students asked why guests could not stay in the College's Lensfield Road properties or in the soon-to-be-built rooms above Cuba Libre instead.

The College's deficit, driven by inflation affecting the Living Wage, National Insurance and utilities alongside frozen undergraduate tuition fees, is already being addressed through the College's conference business.

It has also

been partly softened by Downing's investment in its International Summer Schools programme, though these measures alone have proven insufficient in post-COVID economic conditions.

Downing College is widely recognised by Cambridge students for its high-quality student accommodation, and Howard Lodge is a prime example of this, each room featuring a double bed and en-suite facilities.

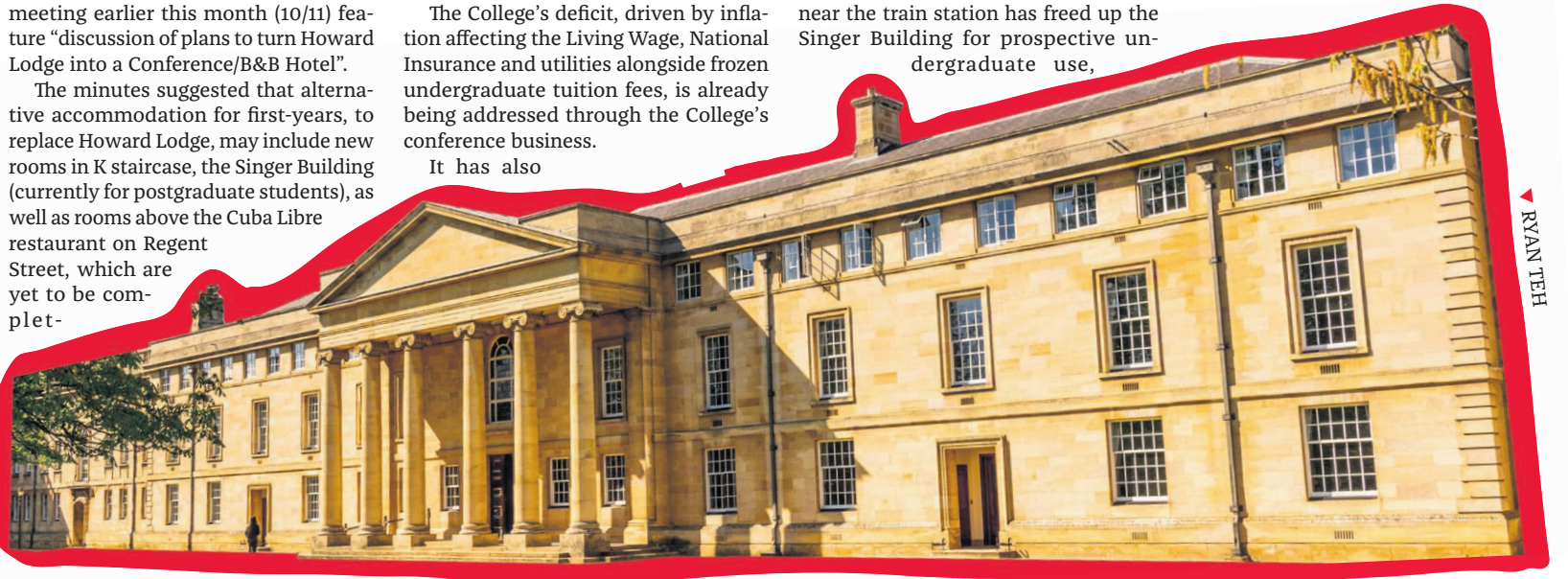
The plan forms one part of the College's broader efforts to expand and reconfigure its accommodation. The addition of 60 new postgraduate rooms near the train station has freed up the Singer Building for prospective undergraduate use,

while construction is underway above Cuba Libre to create 27 new student rooms.

Looking ahead, the Vice Master of Downing has announced potential plans to build a Singer 2 and Singer 3, and even to redevelop Mandela House, currently housing Council offices, or the Royal Cambridge Hotel.

The total cost of all of these building projects would amount to £40 million, to be funded through a combination of donations and loans.

Downing College has been contacted for comment.



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# News

## University Centre in limbo

**Faron Smith**  
Senior News Editor

The future of the University Centre is now uncertain, after the University's policy-making board proposed to rescind its status as a central organisation for fellows and postgraduates.

The University Centre building, known to many as the site of the Cambridge Students' Union (SU), occupies a prominent site in the centre of the city, alongside the River Cam.

Originally, the building was constructed in 1967 to provide a

central home for postgraduate students and fellows who were not affiliated with a specific college. The building was originally home to meeting and conference rooms, as well as recreational facilities.

Prior to the Covid pandemic, the building had also hosted central catering facilities provided and subsidised by the university, which have since been moved to the West Hub. Additionally, the ground floor hosted a bar, which has now closed.

Nearly 60 years after its opening, the University Council has concluded that the 1960s building is in need of serious refurbishment, with its mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems

"beyond end of life," and needing to be replaced if the building is to continue to be used.

The expected cost of these repairs is further increased by the need to replace the current gas-fired boilers with

environmentally friendly options. The University has previously committed to reaching net zero carbon emissions by 2048.

Given these costs, the project is seen as being unaffordable for the next 10 to 15 years, by which time the building will be more than 70 years old, with key components long beyond their intended lifespan.

In 2024, the University conducted a consultation process to decide the future of the building, following its eventual redevelopment. As a result of this consultation, over 80% of respondents voted that the building should become a mixed use space, similar to the current West Hub building.

The West Hub opened in 2022 following a £40 million building project, and contains a shop, cafe, and a bar.

In the meantime, the University Council has proposed to make more active use of the building. The former bar area is to be assigned to the Newcomers and Visiting Scholars organisation, with other parts of the building being given over to an Occupational Health hub and IdeaSpace, which describes itself as a "community of founders and entrepreneurs".

The plans seem to put and end to the prospect of the University Centre being used as a central social hub for students and staff, the lack of which has been a traditional complaint of students with college bars largely only open to students and their guests.

## Vet school survives

**Neve Wilson**  
News Correspondent

Cambridge's School of Veterinary Medicine has been granted accreditation for another twelve months, provided it makes progress toward the requirements for full accreditation.

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) announced on Tuesday (25/11) that Cambridge University's Department of Veterinary Medicine could keep its current "conditional accreditation". The RCVS made this decision on the basis that the vet school had already made significant progress, and expectations that progress will continue "at pace".

Kitty, third-year student of veterinary medicine at Robinson, said, "the progress that has been made since the 2024 seems very promising" but that "a few of us are feeling a bit worried that we haven't gotten full accreditation from the recent visit".

This follows an RCVS investigation in November last year which revealed that Cambridge's vet school failed to meet 50 out of 77 of the RCVS' standards for veterinary medicine courses.

In Tuesday's announcement, the RCVS says that only 20 of the 55 original recommendations, made in November for the course to remain accredited, are still outstanding. The school now has until next October, RCVS' next visit, to make further progress.

Kitty noted that her and most vet students currently feel "kind of powerless"


in a "quite scary" situation, where "students feel there's nothing we can really do so we just have to leave it to the vet school and trust that they are doing the best they can".

Among the variety of issues the RCVS found with Cambridge's vet school in 2024 included accusing the school of overlooking racism on work placements, and that the school's large animal isolation facility was not "fit for purpose". In response, the vet school dean, Dr Mark Holmes, said major improvements would require a "sustainable process of course-wide quality assurance and approval rather than just ticking off a to-do list of actions".

Despite this, Cambridge ranked first on the Guardian's 2026 UK vet school league table, scoring 100 out of 100.

In response to the latest update, a RCVS spokesperson said, "We appreciate the considerable efforts and hard work that the staff team within the veterinary department at Cambridge University have put into rectifying many of the issues identified in the 2024 accreditation event."

"However, as the report shows, there are still several outstanding areas of concern [...] we have collaborated with Cambridge on putting together an action plan and timeline for meeting the 20 remaining recommendations and we hope that it will continue on its current trajectory towards meeting the RCVS accreditation standards."



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# Donations drop amid financial pressure

**Ben Curtis**  
Editor-in-Chief

Cambridge University has seen a significant drop in donations in the last 12 months. The decline comes a year after the University chose to temporarily refuse donations from fossil fuel companies.

The University maintains that Cambridge remains “a robust institution” in “strong financial shape”.

A redacted University financial report, obtained by *Varsity*, reveals that Cambridge received £107.3 million in donations in 2025, a significant drop compared to £150.2 million last year. *Varsity* understands that a one-off donation by Dell for the Dawn AI supercomputer led to “unusually high” totals for 2024.

These falling donations came alongside stagnant home fee income and a drop in endowment gains, although income from international students continued to grow. However an internal PwC report, seen by *Varsity*, identified that reliance on international fees is the number one risk for the University sector.

These losses coincide with wider financial pressures facing the University. In 2024, Cambridge ran a deficit of approximately £53 million, as an internal report claimed “there [was] no clear understanding of what has happened”. While the University reduced the projected deficit for next year to £39 million, *Varsity* reported that Cambridge

will enforce a further 4% cut to departmental budgets across 2025-26.

It is not the first time that donations have caused a headache for the University’s finances, as Cambridge reneged on their temporary commitment to refuse fossil fuel donations. They began accepting such donations on the condition that they were “for a large gift, or equivalent value for a research collaboration (usually several million pounds) which could not be obtained elsewhere”.

The recent report also found that “due to the University’s intense teaching model, a large amount of money is lost teaching home students”. Cambridge received approximately £124.9 million in income from full-time home students, a slight increase on the 2024 income of £119.4 million.

**£42.9m**

The amount by which donations fell from 2024 to 2025

Yet this year’s figure represents an overall drop of 8.4% in home student income over the last five years, falling from £136.4 million in 2020.

Alongside falling home fee income, the report found that “endowment income is forecast to fall in 2024/25”. The gains on the University’s investments are expected to drop by approximately

5% in the coming year.

Many UK universities depend on high international fees to cross-subsidise home students. The report says that there are “comparatively fewer international students [at Cambridge] than some other leading UK Universities”.

Yet the new Chancellor, Lord Smith of Finsbury, welcomed the “golden opportunity” for Cambridge to attract international students in the wake of US President Donald Trump’s restriction on foreign students.

He told *The Times* in May that Cambridge “should be rolling out the red carpet for the best and brightest in the world,” yet the University has faced challenges attracting international students.

*Varsity* analysis conducted in January showed that since Brexit there has been a 52% decrease in the number of EU undergraduates accepted to Cambridge. Concurrently, research carried out by PwC showed that sustained reliance on international student fees threatens the “financial sustainability” of leading universities.

When asked by *Varsity* about the University’s budgetary health and continued pressures, the new chancellor admitted that “[Cambridge’s] finances are facing challenges”. He stressed that similar challenges are “affecting higher education across the country”.

**8.4%**

The drop in home student income over the last five years

A University spokesperson told *Varsity* that: “The University continues to be in strong financial shape – despite the challenges facing the UK higher education sector as a whole – and is fortunate to have multiple income streams, most significantly its endowment, support from donors and other benefactors, and the surplus income from Cambridge University Press and Assessment. These are resources most other universities simply do not have.”

“Cambridge has subsidised undergraduate teaching for many years, and because of the resource-intensive nature of the small-group teaching model relies on its diverse income streams to offset the costs of this. As with other institutions, our costs have risen in recent years due to inflation.”

“The University of Cambridge remains a robust institution and sits at the heart of the ‘Cambridge cluster’, powering world-leading research, driving a thriving ecosystem of hundreds of spinout and start-up companies,” they continued.

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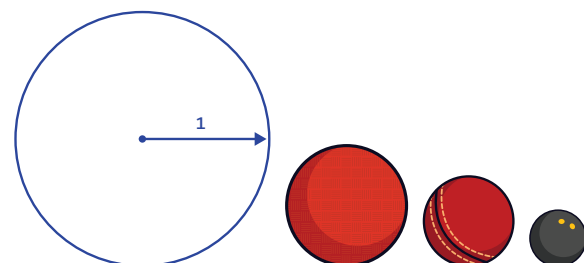
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# News in brief

## Word of the Year

Cambridge Dictionary has chosen “parasocial” to be its 2025 Word of the Year. The word was selected to spotlight a growing interest into the one-sided bonds people can form with celebrities, online influencers, fictional characters, and AI systems. Cambridge University Press declared that a rising interest in these relationships defined the year. Psychologist Simone Schnall called parasocial “the perfect” choice, noting that these digital connections are now fundamental to society. Coined in 1956 to describe viewers’ bonds with TV personalities, the term has had a spike in dictionary look-ups this past year.

## Fossil fieldwork

Researchers at Cambridge University have identified the earliest evidence of an internal “GPS” in an animal. The evidence was found in 97-million-year-old magnetic fossils buried in ancient sea-floor sediments. These giant ‘magneto-fossils,’ shaped like needles, can detect the direction and strength of Earth’s magnetic field. Using advanced 3D imaging, scientists uncovered a stable vortex-like magnetic structure for navigation. The discovery shows animals have used magnetoreception for at least 97 million years and narrows the search for the animal that made them, thought to possibly be ancient eels.

## Publishing panic

Over half of published novelists fear AI may replace their work, a report by Cambridge researchers has revealed. 59% believe their writing has been used, without their consent, to train large language models. Surveying 332 UK novelists, Cambridge Minderoo Centre for Technology and Democracy found many reported losses in income and expected further decline as AI-generated books take over the market. While a third of authors said they use AI for basic tasks, most strongly opposed it having any role in creative writing, and called for transparency, informed consent, and fair licensing.

## Panto no-show

Loyal readers may notice the absence of the annual ADC panto review in this print edition. Unfortunately, the ADC has banned *Varsity* from attending the show, for fear they may receive a bad review. Our theatre reviewer responded by refunding the earplugs and blindfold bought in preparation for the 2-hour torture fest, and making a tasty pasta with the not-yet rotten tomatoes they planned to throw at the cast. *Varsity* also understands the ADC plans to launch their own review pamphlet, *Panto Pravda*, with reviewers forced to remove numbers one to four from their keyboards if they wish to contribute.

## Around town



### Max La Bouchardiere delivers the Cambridge news

#### Council worker fired over fraud

A council employee has been dismissed after failures in fraud-prevention checks allowed £93,000 in public funds to be wrongly paid out by Cambridgeshire County Council. The officer claimed to have verified a transport supplier’s new bank details by phone, but an internal investigation found the supplier had not called. Fraudsters had accessed a supplier’s email and also used “spoofed email addresses” to request the change, with four payments made before the scam was discovered in May. The council has reported the case to Cambridgeshire Police and introduced stricter verification measures.

#### Not ‘u’

A community in South Australia has accidentally honoured Cambourne, Cambridgeshire, instead of Camborne, Cornwall, after unveiling a commemorative sundial engraved with the wrong name and the Cambridgeshire town’s coordinates. The black stone sundial, created by members of the Moonta Lions Club to celebrate their historic mining links, contained an extra “u” and the latitude and longitude of Cambourne. Councillors in Camborne called the sundial “beautiful” but highlighted that residents are protective of the town’s identity, noting the possibility of “kickback” if put on public display. Mayor James Ball said the mix-up may need a polite correction during future exchanges between the two communities.

#### Busway safety fears

Concerns over the safety of a proposed Cambourne-Cambridge busway have been raised during the final submissions of a two-month public inquiry. The £200m scheme, developed by the Greater Cambridge Partnership, would create an 8.6 mile guided route to cut congestion and meet increased demand. Local farmer, Rob Sadler, warned that the design reflects another existing busway in Cambridgeshire, where three people died between 2015 and 2021. Environmental charities urged ministers to reject the plan due to the ecological and landscape impact. Cambridgeshire County Council, however, argued the route is essential for reliable transport to support the region’s growth.



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## University watch



### Maria Eduarda Paixão rounds up student news from across the country

#### Convict on campus

Students at Warwick University arrived home to find evidence an intruder was “squatting” in their accommodation block’s storeroom, prompting Community Safety at Warwick University to issue a warning on unauthorised entry to accommodations. The students found a prison ID card, a duvet, food waste, discarded razors, and cigarettes amongst other items in the storeroom. A University spokesperson commented: “The safety of the students living here, and our Warwick community is our top priority, and Warwickshire Police have informed us that the person is not a danger to others”. The intruder has not yet been found.

#### Alumni attachments

The University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University have recently united to offer alumni tuition fee discounts at both institutions, applicable to graduates from either of the two. In a move to promote collaboration between universities, this is the first time offer of benefits to alumni across separate institutions in the UK. The 10% fee discount will be offered to all graduates from September 2026 onwards. This initiative marks the first offer of benefits to alumni across separate institutions in the UK. The Vice-Chancellor at Manchester Met, Malcom Press, commented: “We are committed to continuing this journey together and are actively exploring new opportunities to collaborate”.

#### AI investment

The University of Bristol is set to develop a multi-million pound new data storage facility in West England, in line with the Government’s recently announced AI for Science Strategy. Similarly to the British Library, the new National AI Data Facility will house the UK’s most valuable large-scale datasets, making them accessible to researchers nationwide. According to the University, the new facility will allow Bristol’s supercomputer, Isambard-AI, which claims to be the strongest university-based supercomputer in the world, to “interact seamlessly with data across multiple sites”. Vice-Chancellor Evelyn Welch stated: “We support the announcement of the AI for Science Strategy and are pleased to be a key part of this.”

# Uni cuts mature outreach funding

Ell Heeps and Faron Smith  
News Correspondent and  
Senior News Editor

The University of Cambridge has cut funding previously allocated for mature student outreach, as part of a broader series of spending cuts.

Cambridge has three mature colleges, Wolfson, Hughes Hall, and St Edmund’s, which are among the poorest in the University. Additionally, two colleges, Darwin and Clare Hall, only accept postgraduate students but do not have formal restrictions on age.

Together, the three mature colleges run an annual residential programme, Cambridge 21+, for prospective mature students. The programme is described by Hughes Hall as being designed for “Home fee status students,” who have not previously attended university.

Taking place online and in person over the course of several months, the programme was described by one student as being “entirely University funded,” with participants not paying any fees.

However, the University has now decided to pull the funding that makes the scheme possible.

Alongside the flagship Cambridge 21+ programme, Hughes Hall’s outreach work has recently included a residential for students from Foundation Education colleges in East Anglia.

Foundation Education colleges offer courses for students without A-levels, offering a chance to access higher education.

The programme involved taster lectures and supervisions in the humanities and social sciences.

Varsity understands that Hughes Hall does not fund its outreach efforts itself, with Trinity College supporting it with additional funding for a second programme.

One student at Hughes Hall, who receives a bursary, raised fears that the loss of funding could lead colleges to focus on recruiting international students, who pay higher fees.

“To me, by doing this, mature colleges end up focusing more on international students older than 21, which bring in more profit, rather than trying to increase the domestic pool,” the student said.

“It’s a shame because domestic mature students are often forgotten about and can experience a more challenging path to university. It really begs the question on how the university perceives mature colleges, are they run for profit or are they institutions of higher education?”

Another Hughes student emphasised the need for Cambridge to have “a community that has a wide variety of experiences and opinions”.

She continued, “Sometimes these universities feel inaccessible and cutting funding that goes towards marketing especially for mature students just exacerbates the idea that it’s inaccessible.”

The decision to slash funding for mature student outreach follows the publication in 2024 of the University’s most recent Access and Participation Plan (APP), covering admission years 2025-2026 through to 2028-2029.

Unlike previous plans, the latest APP does not include students from the state-maintained sector or mature students in its list of groups at risk of reduced access to Cambridge.

The University produces an APP eve-

ry five years, agreed to by the colleges, that outlines the University’s strategy for creating equality of opportunity in access to higher education.

In line with the Office for Students’ latest report on access and participation in higher education, which informs the University’s APP, state-educated students and mature students are not being treated by the University as specific groups that should be targeted in order to maintain equality of opportunity.

Following the publication of the new plan, Cambridge has seen admissions of state school students fall for two consecutive years.

In 2024, 71% of that year’s Cambridge matriculants came from state schools, and 29% from fee-paying schools. By comparison, just 7% of the broader UK population attended a fee-paying school.

That figure represented the continuation of a trend that began in 2023, when the percentage of students educated at state schools dropped for the first time in over a decade.

Classics, Music, and Theology, Religion and Philosophy of Religion were

among the subjects that saw the highest number of privately-educated students.

After the University announced their plans to scrap the target, Varsity revealed that over 300 private schools had benefited from a scheme designed to benefit those attending schools with low Oxbridge attainment, including King Charles’ old school, Gordonstoun.

The small number of offers made for undergraduate degrees by the mature colleges makes it difficult to gauge from official statistics how many of their students come from the state sector. However, many British mature students come to University through non-traditional backgrounds.

In comparison, Trinity saw the lowest proportion of state school offer-holders at 54.5%, while St John’s and Clare followed at 61.8%.

A University spokesperson told Varsity: “The University has had to cut the money given to the Mature Student Promotions budget held by the Student Recruitment and Marketing Team as part of a broader review of expenditure. The University will continue to work to support the mature Colleges with the recruitment of undergraduate and post-

graduate students.”

The cuts come after Varsity revealed that an error in the way that the University calculated inflation means that institution-wide spending cuts, initially set at a flat rate of 5% across 2024-25 and 2025-26, will have to be deepened in order to keep up with inflation.

Given 1% cuts were implemented in 2024-25, cuts of over 4% will be implemented this academic year.

Concerns have been raised by the University Board of Scrutiny that the cuts represent a “blunt instrument,” failing to account for the differing circumstances of each School or Department.

The University’s financial struggles have been compounded by turbulence in senior leadership positions, after the University cancelled the appointment of its new Chief Financial Officer Rita Akushie earlier in November. At the time, the University said this was to “maintain stability and continuity” in its leadership team.

This also comes after Varsity revealed that scores of students and postgraduate and mature Colleges had been forced into private rentals, due to housing shortages.

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# Interviews

In a room bedecked with portraits of men, I sit down with Dame Menna Rawlings, Queens' College's first female president. Despite being founded by two women – Margaret of Anjou in 1448 and Elizabeth Woodville in 1465 – the College has never seen a woman in such high office until now. Rawlings describes her presidency as “completing the circle,” which raises pointed questions about the history and future of diversity at Cambridge.

“  
*Like a lot of young women, I lacked confidence*

An esteemed diplomat, Rawlings joined the Foreign Office in 1989 and served as ambassador to France from 2021, before taking up her current position in the President's Lodge at Queens' College.

Reflecting on her early education, she notes that, “like a lot of young women, I lacked a lot of confidence”. Raised somewhat on the M1, back and forth between London and Wales, Rawlings was educated at her local comprehensive. She discovered an aptitude and eagerness for academics, which led her to study international relations at the London School of Economics. Rawlings describes her university experience as “brilliant” although slightly haunted by a sense of alienation – a feeling that “really affected my ability to find a voice”.

This sentiment seemed to linger, something she refers to as “the paralysis of perfectionism”. She wrestled with it for the most part of her early career. “It wasn't until my early 30s that I really started to believe that I could be successful in my career, and be my authentic self”. From these “shaky, unsure beginnings,” she began a 36-year diplomatic career which concluded in her appointment as the first female ambassador to France.

Rawlings has repeatedly found herself the ‘first’ woman in major institutions long built and shaped by men. I ask her how she feels about being in this ‘pioneering’ role. She admits that “part of me really loves it... but it can be quite tiring”; the novelty of female leadership entails a spotlight which attracts increased public scrutiny. When appointed ambassador to France in 2021 during a period of strained Anglo-French relations, her daughter warned her: “Mum, they've given you a glass cliff...” Rawlings remembers her saying, “you'll fall off and then everyone will say that you've failed”. Rawlings believes that structural challenges still exist, not through overt sexism, but perpetrated by subtle, deeply embedded expectations. She draws attention to the perpetrators on social media, observing that women suffer from trolling and hate-mongering most often. Nevertheless, she insists that stepping into these roles is critical to building the resilience that is pioneering, “not just for women but for everyone who feels different”.

Our conversation turns to the value of role models: “If you can't see it, you can't be it”. Rawlings places particular emphasis on the weight of this visible presence “not just for women but for men to see that these are opportunities for their girlfriends, partners, sisters,

in a way that was probably denied to their parent's generation”. Sometimes the “second, third or fourth woman in that role is more important” than the pioneer to “consolidate” the permanence of change, she argues; “at some point, I hope I won't always have to be the first”.

One of the most striking inequalities in the Foreign Office, only abolished in 1973, required female diplomats to resign upon marriage, Rawlings recalls. She draws a parallel to Queens', where women were only admitted in 1980. The new president is keen to discuss her personal balance between her working roles and motherhood, recollecting that when she was around 18, her own mother remarked, “I wonder if you're going to be a career woman or a mum.” Rawlings remembers thinking that she wanted to be both. The fact that this is now possible is one of the most significant social shifts she has seen in her lifetime. Rawlings attributes these “breakthroughs” to the supportive communities that these institutions foster; certainly a response to their inherently discriminatory frameworks. She refers to some of the political “backlash” splintering from the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion agenda, insisting that “having the strength in numbers is really important”. It is equally crucial to see “women being successful in their own authentic way,” she stresses: “They're not just doing jobs like men would do them, [...] we are able to show what female leadership really looks like.”

I ask Rawlings about how her reflections translate to her time in Cambridge, particularly in light of Queens' male-dominated past. “It's very easy to be critical of the past, but I don't think it's terribly productive,” she tells me. As she tells me about her “full circle analogy,” she explains humorously that she mirrors the path of a woman who also arrived from France, Queens' founder Margaret of Anjou, to take up a leadership role here.

“  
*There's something about the inevitability of these buildings feeling very male*

You could say that Rawlings has taken on the presidential post as it was originally conceived in full fashion, in contrast to the men who have merely held the fort in the meantime. For Rawlings, her presidency is a “springboard for change” to build a resilient community both in Queens' College and across Cambridge.

We return to the portraits around us. She observes that “there's something about the inevitability of these buildings feeling very male” because they have historically been built and steered by men, and survive in the shadow of that past. Rawlings points to efforts, such as those at Trinity College under Sally Davies, to make women's contributions and achievements more noticeable. Celebrating women is not only imperative



but it must be visible, to “counteract the weight of history,” Rawlings stresses. She applies this to other forms of diversity too, citing a postgraduate scholarship named after Alexander Crummell, a formerly enslaved black American student and abolitionist who graduated from the college in 1853. His portraits that decorate the College walls serve as a visual reminder of his achievements.

As a diplomat, I question whether she ever felt a tension between her personal identity and the government she served. Rawlings, who has worked under every administration from Thatcher to the current Labour government, acknowledges the challenge and states that she felt friction: “There are times when you can feel quite distant.” She insists that, as a civil servant, these feelings must take “second place”. “A moral ground for diplomacy”

“  
*It's very easy to be critical of the past*

is imperative, she argues. “It is a duty to take a longer view,” and be “proud of the country I represent; for all its ‘warts,’ it still has so much to be proud of.”

This outlook has shaped her time at Cambridge, too. She states that some of her own prejudices upon arriving have been “dissolved quite successfully,” which she attributes to the strong community that thrives within the archaic

walls of Cambridge.

When asked what advice she would give to young women, Rawlings recalls some advice she once received from the Foreign Office's Women's Association: “Know yourself, be yourself, back yourself.” This phrase, she says, captures the journey that took her more than a decade. She stresses that women should have the confidence and power to exist as their authentic selves, and to not allow the self-critique that has become all too common to hold them back. Rawlings insists that women have to bring “a bit of sparkle” to demanding roles.

Rawlings may be the first female president, but she hopes she won't be the last.

– SCARLETT O'DONNELL  
INTERVIEWS WRITER





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## Features

# The rise of Cambridge's Palestinian activism

## Sasha Djuric-Fraser traces the roots of Cantab engagement with Palestine

Cambridge students have long engaged with the Palestinian cause. “The horror we feel against the genocide in Gaza isn’t just a student issue. It’s a human issue,” a spokesperson from Cambridge For Palestine (C4P) emphasised when asked about the background of the movement. Only this week, the University Council delayed a vote on whether to divest. In this context, *Varsity* traces the historic roots of Cambridge’s activist movement.

Before 2000, student engagement with Palestine was a limited, even academic, exercise. During both the 1967 Six Day War and the First Palestinian Intifada in December 1987, discussion and debate were the primary focus of activism. A plea submitted by a student in February 1988 to the comment section of *Varsity* seems characteristic: “The strong (must) take care of the weak and needy”.

A Cambridge University Palestine Society has existed since at least 2006, with its level of support increasing dramatically: in 2006, it registered just 17 members.

Yet the 2008-9 Gaza War marked a turning point. For a week in January 2009, more than 100 Cambridge students occupied the Law Faculty, demanding aid for Gaza universities, scholarships for Palestinian students, University divestment from the arms trade, and a University-issued statement condemning what they saw as the blockade of Gaza and Israel’s presence in Gaza and the West Bank. Forced to abandon the Law Faculty protest by the threat of a court injunction, the encampment’s results were modest.

That year, the University agreed to endorse a statement by Universities UK calling for an end to the Gaza conflict and confirming a commitment to the right to education. The Registry also issued a reminder of existing donation opportunities to areas experiencing conflict to faculties. However, the University made no direct donations to the UN-RWA Gaza Appeal. Calls for divestment were met only with a restatement of the University’s existing Statement of Investment Responsibility. No scholarship provisions were made for Palestinian students.



Student Mark Wolfson dubbed the participants ‘Rah Rah Revolutionaries’

In 2009, 60 academics signed an open letter to the Vice-Chancellor, praising the “initiative taken by Cambridge University students in asking this University to respond to the recent humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza”.

Yet the inclusion of yoga and spoken word poetry in the Law Faculty encampment’s timetable, as well as frequent sightings of smoke breaks and trips to Sainsbury’s, undermined perceptions of its integrity. In a January print edition of *Varsity*, student Mark Wolfson dubbed the participants “Rah Rah Revolution-

aries”. A CUSU motion supporting the occupation of the Law Faculty was defeated on the sixth day of the protest.

Student activism continued through the Cambridge University Palestine Solidarity Society (PalSoc), which remains the leading student-only organisation for Palestine in Cambridge. In the decade before 2023, PalSoc organised screenings of Palestinian films and documentaries. In 2014, the society promoted a University-wide arms divestment campaign.

“While the society has existed long before 2023, in a sad, but positive as well, twist of fate, many more students joined the movement, became aware, and wanted a space to channel their grievances,” a PalSoc spokesperson said.

In the immediate aftermath of the 2023 conflict’s outbreak, PalSoc continued arranging film screenings, protests, and fundraisers for charities providing medical aid for Palestinians, and put pressure on the University to divest from the arms industry through lecture walk-outs and sit-ins.

The spokesperson emphasised the importance of co-operation with other activist groups at Cambridge: “We’re a student society [...] but we recognise that Palestine liberation activism requires collaboration with the grassroots [...] A lot of our students come for three to six years and then leave, but we want our impact as students to be long-lasting.”

Since 2024, PalSoc have worked alongside Cambridge for Palestine (C4P), a student-led coalition of students, University staff, and local Cambridge residents whose stated aim is to stand “against the University of Cambridge’s complicity in apartheid and genocide”. During Freshers’ Week in 2024, PalSoc put out a ‘coalition timetable’ of events, together with C4P and local groups such as Cambridge Jews for Justice in Palestine. This initiative expanded this academic year to online posting of ‘coalition calendars’, highlighting various events organised by each group: “We see it as our purpose to make students aware of things that they can be doing in the community based on how committed they want to be.”

The coalition grew out of the encampment on Kings Parade, which began on the 2nd of May 2024. C4P was formed at the beginning of the encampment, which was also supported by PalSoc and Cambridge Jews for Justice. Chief among the demands of the protesters were that Cambridge University disclose and divest from its alleged investments in companies associated with Israel.

A C4P spokesperson said: “The encampment was a literal amalgamation of several groups who are against the genocide of the Palestinian people. In particular, we aimed to expose our university’s deep complicity in the genocide.”

“Our local community was absolutely indispensable in running our movement. The food, tents, traps and everything in between were mainly provided by them.”

C4P have been much more of a presence in Cambridge than the short-lived 2009 protest. A University Working Group on Divestments was established

in July 2024. The University issued a statement on 1 August 2024, stating that “review processes relating to responsible investments and research relationships” would take

to graduate and for staff to carry out their work”. Asked about the protest movement more generally, a University spokesperson stated that “the University firmly supports our stu-

dent’s right to freedom of speech and protest within the law”.

Nonetheless, protests provided the background to institutional change.

Following a report from the Working Group, the University Council voted in October this year to divest from companies investing in weapons abroad that are illegal in the UK. Although the University has not yet agreed to cut ties with companies involved in conventional weapons manufacture, C4P described the Working Group as a “direct concession to our movement’s power”. According to them, it “proves that Cambridge has the power to act morally if it chooses to”.



Divestment campaigns have since spread to several colleges

Divestment campaigns have since spread to several colleges. In May 2025, the Governing Body of King’s College agreed to adopt an investment policy that amounted to divestment from arms companies. Queens’ for Palestine (Q4P), estab-

lished in June 2024, pushed for a JCR referendum to create a collegiate workgroup on arms divestment – the motion passed successfully in November this year.

“I think what the referendum and the sit-in showed is that there are a significant number of people in Queens who care about this issue and who are willing to show up and use their voices and things to support the issue,” a member of Q4P told me. “It’s been very empowering and very fulfilling in a way that sometimes student activism cannot feel in Cambridge.”

The resurgence of the movement has also generated frustration from within the Cambridge academic community. Matthew H. Kramer, a Fellow at Churchill College, who opposed the 2009 protest, equally condemned the May-August 2024 encampment as “prolonged and disruptive acts of trespass”.

Despite this academic anger, in June 2024, the Student’s Union (SU) voted to support the King’s Parade encampment and its demands for disclosure and divestment. Moreover, in a SU referendum which closed in late October this year, 84% of the 4,000 student voters agreed to “end university investments and collaborations with institutions involved in occupation and weapons manufacture.”

Clearly, student activism for Palestine has come a long way since the 1960s. Sporadic discussion has evolved into a more organised protest movement, providing an important backdrop to institutional change. As the PalSoc spokesperson explained, student activists are not going away: “they would feel a sort of dissonance if they continued life as normal”.

LYRA BROWNING

place rapidly during Michaelmas term 2024 – the encampment disbanded that month.

The University’s amendments to the terms of the Working Group, including reduced student representation and delays to the review process, triggered further C4P encampments in November and December 2024 and May and June 2025. In response, the University was granted a 12-month legal injunction prohibiting protest on sites including Senate House Yard and Greenwich House in a High Court ruling in July 2025. When questioned about the injunction, the University referred to a previous statement on its desire “to protect the right of our students



# Humans of Cambridge: college housekeepers

Thea Grant speaks to housekeeping and maintenance teams about care and comfort

It is the coldest day of term so far, but sitting in the housekeeping office at Murray Edwards College, coffee in hand, I am toasty warm. Sitting across from me are Kerrie Farrow, the Housekeeping Manager, and Natasa Hart, one of three Housekeeping Supervisors. Kerrie is six months into her time at Murray Edwards, having previously worked at Trinity College for five years, and Natasa has been here for nearly three years, previously working at both King's and Gonville and Caius colleges. Between them, they have a wealth of experience in Cambridge college housekeeping departments – and a lot of insights to share.

Both previously worked in different industries before gravitating towards Cambridge colleges. Kerrie worked in hospitality and reflected on the differences between a hotel and a college. She said that there were, “[in hotels] people coming in and out; you didn’t get to know the clientele, whereas when you’re in colleges you get to know the students and see the growth as they go up the years”.

Natasa had previously worked as a “nurse assistant,” explaining, “I tend to go back to colleges, I can’t say because it’s easy, but it has a very friendly vibe and you’re amongst young, smart people.” Both of them noted the camaraderie between staff members in the college. Kerrie agreed that, “it’s a com-



▼ DASHNA TENDITNA

fort when you’re at a university and all of the different departments sometimes get together – it becomes like a unit.”

Michelle Dinning, the Assistant Housekeeping Manager at Hughes Hall, spoke about her experience when she “started more than 20 years ago.” Like Kerrie and Natasa, Michelle had previously worked other jobs. She “started as a part-time cleaner working 25 hours and have worked my way up to be Assistant Housekeeping Manager.”

She too felt a strong community spirit

at her college, and reflected on the beginning of her time at Hughes Hall: “There were only seven of us originally, plus a Housekeeper and a Domestic bursar; and today, we need 14 housekeepers, two supervisors, me, and our Manager, Tomasz, to keep on top of it all. There were so few of us – it really was like a family. I suppose it still is – just a bigger one!”

Housekeeping involves logistical challenges, with flexibility and compassion key. Natasa noted that, “housekeeping isn’t an easy job – it’s more than just

“

*Both of them note the camaraderie between staff members*

cleaning, and it is one of the departments sometimes that is the most overlooked.” Especially in exam season, housekeeping staff try to work around student schedules. Kerrie told me that, “in the exam period, it’s slightly different because obviously we don’t want to disturb the students or cause distress, so we try to avoid certain things like hoovering and cleaning certain days and areas”.

One HML student at Murray Edwards College said, “I would say that the team are incredibly friendly. They always smile and say hello. They are almost always up for a chat and it’s nice to have a good rapport with someone who works so hard to keep your communal spaces clean and tidy every day.”

Care for students also often extends beyond logistical matters, with Kerrie adding that “housekeeping isn’t just about cleaning, it’s also taking care of students, [and] checking welfare.” The relationships that students develop with housekeepers can make them a first point

of contact for welfare considerations; when asked about a particularly impactful moment in their job, the housekeeping team at Murray Edwards concurred, “We found Covid hard as interactions in college life took a step back,” showing how important good relationships between housekeeping and students can be in staving off isolation in university life.

Sometimes, these bonds go beyond a chat or check-in: Paul Parrish, Maintenance Manager of Hughes Hall, told me about one particular student who “still donates money to the college every year since he left to pay for staff cakes at our weekly coffee mornings. I think it’s his way of making up for any trouble he caused!” Kerrie also recalled how, when she worked at Trinity College, her team “used to go and see the students off [at graduation] and you could see the students looking for their cleaners, bed-makers.”

With the festivities of Bridgemas approaching, and students getting ready to depart back home, the housekeeping and maintenance teams remind us of how lucky students are to have such a supportive network of people who make Cambridge feel like a home-from-home. Paul tells us: “My office is full of Christmas cards, photos and postcards from so many brilliant people. I’d never have met them if it weren’t for Hughes Hall.”

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## Comment

# Cambridge is woke – that’s no bad thing



Calum Murray

As an HSPS student, I have spent almost three years at Cambridge studying what my friends humorously like to refer to as “utter woke nonsense”. The phrase, falsely attributed to Sean Dyche, is a favourite of right-wing politicians. Nigel Farage likens it to a “virus,” while Kemi Badenoch has self-described her views as “anti-woke”.

Universities have come under fire for their apparent harbouring of woke sentiment (whatever that’s supposed to mean) in rhetoric which blames left-wing cancel culture for the denial of the free expression of both academics and students. Cambridge has been deeply embroiled in these debates, with defenders of both ‘race-realist’ philosophy fellow Nathan Cofnas and the Cambridge University Society of Women complaining that views which do not align with the left-wing mainstream are being unfairly persecuted.

The figures around student perceptions of free speech paint a very different picture. 80% of students feel they are free to express their views at university, while 70% agree that academics are free to express theirs. There is a pervasive sense among the self-victimised supporters of supposedly persecuted political beliefs that they are speaking for a silent majority of students forced to keep quiet by social pressure. Britain’s 20th richest man, and Cambridge University Society of Women donor Alex Gerko, claimed, with no evidence to back him up, that a belief in “sex-based rights” was “a view shared by the majority of Cambridge students”. If a majority of Cambridge students really do share this view, why have none of them expressed it – why are the Women’s Society’s membership

“The problem here is polarisation, rather than left-wing ideology

numbers failing to keep pace with the conspicuous flow of donations from outside sources?

This is not to say that free speech at Cambridge is not under threat. Cancel culture is a very real thing, and there have been numerous examples of speakers facing protest or calls for de-platforming simply for expressing controversial opinions. The Chancellor was absolutely right to make free speech his “number one priority”.

However, what is missing from the debate is the fact that the right likes to cancel left-wing students just as much as left-wing students like to cancel the right. The criminalisation of pro-Palestine protests, which are one of the biggest examples of Cambridge students exercising their right to free speech in recent years, is advocated for by the very same voices claiming free expression at elite universities is under threat. The problem here is polarisation, rather than left-wing ideology.

The aim of anti-woke politics is to stop us talking about things its adherents do not like, and to protect its chosen torch-bearers from real debate. Moral panic over the teaching of ideas like Critical Race Theory or decolonial thought in universities is really just an attempt to silence. These are not purely ideological standpoints, but rather serious academic concepts backed up by valuable empirical research. Seeking to discredit them is the real threat to academic freedom here.

Subjects like sociology – a discipline I have studied, and found incredibly valuable for developing my own critical thought – are at the receiving end of these anti-woke attacks. In Florida, the subject was eliminated as a core course



RUBY JACKSON

in universities as it was deemed to have been “hijacked by left-wing activists,” in a case of blatant political interference in academic teaching that sets a dangerous precedent.

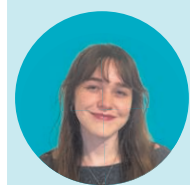
This all stinks of hypocrisy. The self-proclaimed defenders of free speech are, rather, its biggest threat. When Kemi Badenoch says she wants to end ‘rip-off’ degrees – targeting the arts and humanities, pillars of free and critical thought – a policy echoed by Reform UK, it’s hard to believe that handing higher education over to the anti-woke mob will reinvigorate freedom of speech on campus. The experience of America’s universities tells us where this kind of politics gets us, with the Trump administration freezing research funds for institutions that refuse to adhere to its political agenda.

At the heart of all of this is a grave

misuse of the term woke, at least according to its original definition. The word originated in African American communities, and was later deployed by the Black Lives Matter movement to call for awareness of social injustice. Conceived of like this, wokeness is not anti- but rather pro-free speech: it demonstrates a keenness to think critically about taken-for-granted concepts and to expose the injustices lying beneath them – to, in essence, advance inherently challenging ideas.

Woke thinking is, to my eyes, just a form of critical thinking, and it is one of things I have to thank Cambridge the most for. Cambridge’s students and academics should be allowed to be woke. Trying to deny them this right is not only anti-intellectual, it is deeply sinister.

## Should we scrap scholars’ dinners?



April O'Neill

Earlier this week I found a little card in my pigeonhole inviting me to the ‘Commemoration of the Benefactors’ dinner. A whole evening indulging in gourmet food and dessert wine? Don’t mind if I do. I mean, why not toast in thanks to the donors splashing the cash on my result; I deserve it right?

Well yes, you could argue. I worked hard. After being dragged through the trenches last year, it’s nice to have a pat on the back. But as I write this, with the swirly calligraphy on my invite welcoming me into the first-class club, I can’t help feeling that it all smacks a bit of elitism. I didn’t get this invite last year. When I opened CamSIS back in the summer of first year I saw my 2.1 and was pleased with it. Having convinced myself I had failed and would have to squat in college for the rest of time, I did far better than I thought.

Now it’s probably worth prefacing my side of this debate with the not-so-insignificant fact that I go to Christ’s. I know, I can feel you all wincing in sympathy – it’s hardly a college

“I don’t think students shouldn’t be rewarded for getting a first. It’s how we are rewarding them that concerns me

known for its lax attitude towards work. When my matriculation dinner started off with the Senior Tutor lauding Christ’s academic excellence and Tompkins Table domination (curse you Trinity), I sat there awkwardly nursing my wine and feeling more than a little out of my depth. I was happy I made it to Cambridge but now you’re telling me I have a reputation to uphold? Can we at least get to dessert first?

Christ’s, and Cambridge, love firsts. A university renowned for academic excellence, it’s hardly surprising that this is what it wants from us and what we want from it – or why else would we be here when we could, let’s be real, having a more relaxing and fun time elsewhere. But all these bells and whistles don’t sit right with me: you got 70%? Here’s £1,000, a huge room, a seven course banquet, a car, a yacht, my first born child. Oh, you got 68%? Congratulations! Here’s nothing.

When you have supervisors wincing in unwanted sympathy over a per-

fectly respectable grade, it’s jarring to then be rewarded for just a few extra marks. Throwing out these rewards – a fancy dinner, a (rather cultish) chapel service, getting to say grace at formal – entrenches the idea that a student’s worth is based on the grade they obtain. This is not only potentially damaging to students’ wellbeing, but it is problematic given the countless attainment gaps we see at Cambridge, be that gender or socioeconomic background.

Throw in the insanely disparate financial prizes colleges offer and the rewards game isn’t even a fair one. In 2023-2024, Trinity spent £215,706 on scholars’ awards – 38 times more than the £5,550 Lucy Cavendish spent. Sure this is an issue of wealthy inequality amongst Cambridge colleges, but it also means that a student who tops tripos at Lucy gets mere pennies compared to someone who scraped by at Trinity. How can you call that fair?

Add the fun little Christ’s tradition of the ‘scholars’ ballot’ into the mix, whereby getting a first gives you priority room allocation and access to certain rooms (i.e. ‘I

live in X staircase’ = newsflash! I got a first), you’re left with a sprinkle of elitist segregation within the college community. Merry Christmas.

I don’t think students shouldn’t be rewarded for getting a first. It’s how we are rewarding them that concerns me. To me, the parading of students in front of their whole college community, the private events, the special rooms are not incentives, they are pageant entries of exclusion. The money is nice, harmless even, but not until it’s fair from college to college. I believe we should celebrate all students for their academic achievements, but this isn’t me coddling you and promising that we are all special. None of us are. That’s the point. Our achievements are framed against a backdrop of markedly different social and financial contexts so this us (the special scholars) vs them (those who need to work harder) dynamic is neither a fair nor healthy culture to uphold at our already intense university. And look, you can always advertise your tripos topping performance on LinkedIn. I won’t take that away from you.



# Stop pretending you're not privileged



Daisy Hewitt

At Cambridge there are plenty of opportunities to act performatively. But there's something particularly theatrical about the way we perform class. For students attending a university with so many resources, we're remarkably hesitant to acknowledge them. We joke about being 'broke', apologise for wearing something that wasn't thrifted, and treat privilege like something that must be politely disguised behind a tote bag and a self-deprecating comment.

These performances aren't malicious. Mostly, they're a kind of social soothing – a way to avoid awkwardness when people are arriving from wildly different starting points. They create a polite ambiguity that means nobody has to declare their life story in the first five minutes of meeting someone. At a university where a sense of belonging is often precarious, this lightness helps us get by. But it also reveals something deeper: we're terrified of what class might disclose about who we are. So we perform sameness even when we know it isn't real.

And because we rarely address it directly, the topic leaks out sideways. In the pub, we argue about who is 'actually posh'. It's expressed in frantic denials, in exaggerated modesty, in long autobiographical disclaimers delivered over drinks. It's theatrical precisely because we're all avoiding the core discomfort: that class is still shaping us, whether we acknowledge it or not.

This is where luck enters the story – quietly, but decisively. I don't mind saying that luck played a massive role in my own journey here. More than not minding, I think it's essential to recognise it. For me, getting to Cambridge wasn't just about effort. It came down to timing, circumstance, and one pivotal opportunity: moving to London at 16 to

“Perhaps we could be a little more open to the idea that success is not purely self-authored”

hasn't figured out how to talk about difference without making it awkward.

But belonging built on pretence is fragile. It needs constant upkeep – constant recalibration of how we present ourselves. When the surface becomes the main story, it gets harder to show up as a full person rather than a carefully curated version.

I'm not arguing we should all dramatically unmask ourselves or confess our socioeconomic backgrounds before supervisions. Nobody wants that. But perhaps we could be a little more open to the idea that success is not purely self-authored. Luck is woven through all of it – the schools we attended, the teachers who encouraged us, the chances that appeared at the right moment, the futures we were able to imagine for ourselves.

Personally, acknowledging luck makes me feel more grounded. It makes me kinder to myself when things go wrong and feel less guilty when things go right. It helps me see others not as polished results but as people shaped by contexts I may never fully understand.

Maybe that's what Cambridge needs: not blame, not guilt, but openness. A willingness to recognise that identity, class, and belonging are complicated and that we don't have to

attend a selective sixth form. That shift expanded the world available to me at a time when I didn't fully understand how unequal access to opportunity could be.

We prefer the narrative that success is earned, linear, tidy. But life isn't tidy. Doors open for some people at just the right moment, while others never see them. Recognising this doesn't make achievements meaningless, it's simply acknowledging reality. It places us in a world with more honesty and less pressure to pretend.

The performance of class here usually comes from insecurity, not arrogance. Some people soften their privilege because they don't want to be judged. Others downplay their challenges because they don't want to stand out. Everyone is trying to fit in in an environment that

perform sameness to build community.

People will probably always joke about being broke. There will always be pub debates about who is or isn't posh. The theatre won't disappear and that's fine. A bit of performance keeps things light. But it's worth noticing the gap between the performance and the truth. Class and luck shape this place far more than a lot of us would care to admit. Pretending they don't doesn't make Cambridge fairer – it just makes it harder to talk about what's actually going on.

If we can acknowledge this without defensiveness or drama, conversations about class might feel less like a trap and more like part of understanding each other. Not a confession, not a competition, just a clearer picture of the world we're living in.



▲ ETON COLLEGE: FRANCIS AIDAN GASQUET / PUBLIC DOMAIN

## April O'Neill and Daisy Stewart Henderson debate whether scholars' rewards are elitist or empowering

When I got dressed in my gown and academic dress for the Admission of Scholars Ceremony earlier this term, I saw myself a year prior in the mirror. Petulant, disgruntled, grumbling about unfairness, emphasising to anyone who would (or was compelled) to listen that I had actually been close to getting a first.

I was right; there is a fundamental unfairness to the distribution of top marks at Cambridge, and the pomp and circumstance surrounding high achievers only amplifies this. But I was also, undeniably, a sore loser.

It's a flawed meritocracy. But isn't that what we all signed up for? You can rattle off the statistics; just under 35% of men received firsts in 2024-25 compared to just 25% of women, for example. It frustrates me immensely. But the issue with condemning Cambridge's celebration of those who receive firsts on these grounds of unfairness is that we all indict ourselves in the process. Indeed, are the University's admissions statistics much better? I'm sure that, to some degree, luck contributes to every first the University awards. But isn't it the same luck that got us here in the first place?

The incentive of the rewards schol-

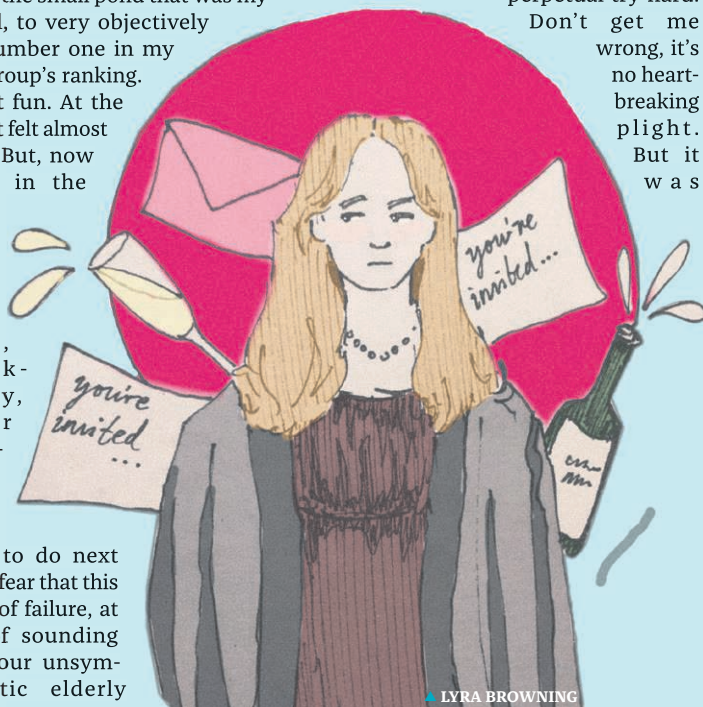
ars receive did motivate me to work harder in my second year. To be frank, I didn't deserve to go to the ceremony in my first year. It wouldn't have been good for me. I needed to 'fail', to be knocked down from number one in the small pond that was my school, to very objectively not number one in my year group's ranking.

It isn't fun. At the time, it felt almost cruel. But, now living in the purgatory that is applying, thanklessly, for everything and anything to do next year, I fear that this sense of failure, at risk of sounding like your unsympathetic elderly

relative, is just life. And at Cambridge in particular, there are benefits in learning how not to be the best.

What I didn't anticipate was that the ceremony would actually be quite poignant. At school, I was a perpetual try-hard.

Don't get me wrong, it's no heart-breaking plight. But it was



▲ LYRA BROWNING

“It's a flawed meritocracy. But isn't that what we all signed up for?”

objectively the case that working hard was rewarded with mockery, and being damnably uncool among my peers for six long years. And though it's phrased a little more carefully, I would suggest that we're not immune to this kind of ribbing at Cambridge. Pair it with a society in which the idea of pursuing academia feels like a frivolous daydream, and careerist shrewdness rather than intellectual passion is the path to wealth and status, and the way Cambridge rewards scholars appears almost radical. There isn't much else like it. It may be a hangover from a lost time, but it has a certain resonance in our modern world.

So yes, I saw myself a year ago as I got ready. But I also saw a far younger girl (a total try-hard, by the way), who couldn't have fathomed attending a candlelit ceremony in Trinity College Chapel, or signing my name into the College's scholars' book for eternity, or, to be blunt, being paid real money for being clever. It isn't even that I was modest. I simply couldn't have imagined anything like it. I've gotten lucky, and the spectacle of it all, which had grated so much the year before, reminded me to count my blessings. The pageantry of it all, experienced from both sides, actually kept me grounded.



Daisy Stewart Henderson



## Science

# Starting up and spinning out

Bibi Boyce explores Cambridge's entrepreneurial ecosystem

If you ask a STEM student what their future career plans entail, the most common answers (aside from 'I don't know') are either research, industry, or finance. However, the reality is that most STEM students will find themselves in an area that combines all three: the world of start-ups. Essentially the very early stages of a business, start-ups (and spin-outs, which use university-owned intellectual property) are the pinnacle of entrepreneurship, and this University is one of the best places to start – no matter what stage you're at.

At the Freshers' Fair in October, the Varsity table stood next to the IE (Innovation and Enterprise) Cambridge stall, an initiative out of Cambridge Enterprise. This is where I met the manager of IE Cambridge, Helen Alexander. "I think people have a misconception about what an entrepreneur is. They maybe think about Elon Musk [...] that's not what a Cambridge kind of entrepreneur looks like. It's people who have seen a real problem, and they have tried to meet that need."

After showing me around the Cambridge Enterprise building, located out on the West Cambridge campus, we got down to (discussing) business. "People just tend to come up with good ideas, and what we try and shift them towards is falling in love with the problem," says Helen. "Some of our strongest founders didn't think of themselves as 'entrepreneurial' when they started. They just saw a problem that needed solving." Some of the most successful companies in the UK were started by Cambridge alumni, such as Raspberry Pi, Wayve, and Darktrace.

While the University, through Cambridge Enterprise Ventures, has invested over £50 million into over 120 companies that have come out of the university, funding is ultimately a small aspect of the support available. IE Cambridge provides an "ideal launch pad," as Helen put it, to help students transition from academia into these multi-faceted positions. "[We] don't want these great ideas sitting in piles of academic papers, [we] want them actually being used."

Alongside Cambridge Enterprise, there are many other enterprise-focused organisations in the university. One of the more prominent is the

King's Entrepreneurship Lab (E-Lab). I sat down with Sophie Harbour, the director, as she explained how they help students across the University. Founded in 2021, the E-Lab has two main aims: to equip students with entrepreneurial skills, and to inspire students to pursue their ventures. They achieve this through the range of events and residencies that they host, spanning from workshops for pitching and tech, to hosting the founders of Hotel Chocolat, and even Will.i.am.

**“**  
*Kick down the door – don't wait for perfection*

Lots of these programmes aim to help students foster an entrepreneurial mind-set, but what about when you've got the idea? "Don't wait for it to be perfect [...] don't wait to test it further," says Ann Davison, head of the Entrepreneurship Centre at the Cambridge Judge Business School. "Entrepreneurship is about risk. Have the confidence to offer up your product or service and say 'help me take it forward' – [receive] feedback from coaches and mentors." Accelerate Cambridge is a startup 'accelerator', established by Cambridge Judge Business School, and hosts an 11-week programme that aims to empower entrepreneurs through a series of "talks, workshops, weekly coaching and biweekly mentoring and pitching". Another thing Ann emphasised was the necessary commercialisation that needs to take place in the early stages of a business: "What are you worth? What can you offer to the market? How can we make money from this? That's important – a lot of people shy away from that, but even if you're a social enterprise you still need to make money."

At the same IE expo event where I met Sophie and Ann, numerous entrepreneurs, founders, and heads of programmes spoke about what it means to be in this field. "Kick down the door – don't wait for perfection," said Devon Bailey, co-founder of BRDG The Gap, a "freelancer platform that connects skilled individuals – including students, professionals, and self-taught experts – with businesses and clients seeking their services."

I also met Sarah Broderick, co-founder of Highland Light, who have developed personal protective equipment for divers that allow them to dive up to 100 metres deep. Her main piece of advice? "Talk to someone else. Find those little things that someone else is doing in your ecosystem and start asking them questions about it [...] you'll find out more, and it helps – it makes it so it's a small little incremental step, not a big thing." Highland Light is part of the Cambridge Network, and their rebreather systems are often used by media divers. This includes the divers that discovered that sperm whales sleep vertically, instead of horizontally.

Some of the most valuable voices on student entrepreneurship are, of course, those of student entrepreneurs. A second-year chemical engineering and biotechnology student at Queens', Femi Owolade-Coombes, has been involved in entrepreneurial ventures for a decade. Femi ran workshops in South East London to help young people develop entrepreneurial skills. Two years ago he went to Brunei as a consultant, offering advice on how they can establish a stronger entrepreneurial ecosystem. "One key thing for me: a can-do attitude [...] get an idea and run with it. Recognise those blocks and barriers and overcome them." As an undergraduate, Femi is no stranger to the workload and challenges that accompany the privileges of being at Cambridge – his current projects involve working with IE Cambridge to make enterprise more accessible, and developing the ecosystem through entrepreneurial tool-kits.

Slightly frost-bitten, I sat down in Catz bar with Uliana Ronska – a third year mathmo. "I like working on random small projects, which then become not random and not small." As a Ukrainian international student, she found applying to universities outside of Ukraine difficult. So, she built a website, which has grown to a collection of over 90 stories from international students, to provide the support to successive students that she didn't have. This energy has carried on into her time in Cambridge: "I treat Cambridge in some sense as a playground [...] it's so easy to meet other people who want to do things with you." At the start of November she helped organise the largest hackathon yet at the University, and we'd had to move our meeting a day earlier because she was heading into London to volunteer at the Oxbridge AI Challenge semi-finals. "There are opportunities here – you just have to say yes to all of them."

Cambridge is brimming with incredible ideas, minds, and programmes – the support is widespread and becoming more accessible. "We should be celebrating more as a university," says Helen, "we should be proud of our alumni". Whether you've not got a clue about entrepreneurship, or you're hoping to revolutionise silicon valley, it's time to kick down the door.



## Flora Allen rounds up the recent scientific developments – from more efficient solar panels, to fossil evidence of dog and crocodile ancestors

### Cambridge semiconductors power solar tech

Researchers from the Cavendish Laboratory and the Department of Chemical Engineering and Biotechnology at the University of Cambridge have harnessed the properties of a group of materials called halide perovskites to revolutionise solar cells. This material is remarkable, absorbing more of the solar spectrum of light and providing a cheaper alternative to silicon, which is currently used. The team have developed a protocol to grow ultra-thin layers of the material, allowing the atoms to line up perfectly, which can be built into a semiconductor 'sandwich'. By alternating between 3D and 2D perovskites within the layers of the 'sandwich', researchers can tune the material and transform it into a semiconductor, by controlling the flow of electrons and holes (electrons' positively charged counterparts) through the layers. Utilising this development in the future will hopefully transform solar technology, giving rise to scalable, high-performance devices.

### Ancient jaws, paws and spores

A recent wave of fossil analyses from Cambridge and other institutions across the world have shed light and insight on the past lives of many different forms of life, from ancient fungi to early crocodiles. A 407 million-year-old plant fossil from Scotland has sparked the interest of researchers from the Natural History Museum (London), Sainsbury Laboratory (Cambridge), and Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle (Paris). The collaboration led to the discovery of a new species of fungus, which can interact with the plant to form a partnership. This symbiotic relationship helps plants take up nutrients and water and exchange metabolic compounds with the environment, suggesting these relationships could have been vital in plants' evolution to living on land, which occurred around 500 million years ago. The new techniques used to find the fungus involved advanced microscopy, which utilised the emitted light of trace organisms – fossilised evidence of an organism's behaviour, rather than the remains of the organism itself. These techniques will open up new avenues for analysing fossils in the future.

Could you imagine crocodiles dropping from trees? Scientists have done just that, after discovering Australia's oldest known crocodile eggshells after decades of excavation, and have named

the fragments *Wakkaoolithus godthelpi*. The fossils were identified as belonging to a group called mekosuchine crocodiles. Research into their behaviour has led to them being nicknamed semi-arboreal 'drop crocs', which would fall from trees to surprise their prey. These crocodiles were also found to have jaws and teeth like those of dinosaurs, and microscopy analysis of the eggshells showed they nested around the edges of lakes. The researchers hope that these types of findings about the past will help secure the future of the currently endangered species.

Recent findings have also shown that our beloved four-legged pet dogs have been diverging from wolves since the Stone Age, much earlier than previously thought. The international team focused on prehistoric canine skulls across a 50,000 year period, creating 3D models of the skulls, and analysing the changing features. Dr Allowen Evin, a lead researcher from the University of Montpellier, explains, "when you see a Chihuahua – it's a wolf that's been living with humans for so long that it's been modified." Some researchers suggest that this transition began when some tamer wolves started living more closely with hunter-gatherer communities, scavenging for food, and slowly became used for different tasks, including cleaning up carcasses and warning off predators. Tragically, in most modern pets these useful talents have vanished, leaving us with pups whose primary skills involve sleeping and barking at absolutely nothing.

### Melting away Alzheimer's

A signpost of Alzheimer's is the presence of protein fibres, made from tau proteins, that form within the neurons in the brain. In healthy brains, tau helps to stabilise the machinery that passes signals through neurons; in Alzheimer's, the proteins fold incorrectly and clump together to form these fibrils. Researchers from the Tokyo Metropolitan University have studied how they could stop the fibrils forming, thus aiming to prevent the progression of Alzheimer's into the later stages. They found the precursors to these fibrils are soft clusters which form tau fibrils in a mechanism similar to crystallisation, and can be dissolved to suppress fibril growth. The group targeted the clusters by altering levels of sodium chloride and using an anticoagulant. Hopefully, this will provide a new strategy against Alzheimer's and open up a new research area for studying neurodegenerative diseases.



▲ RUBY JACKSON

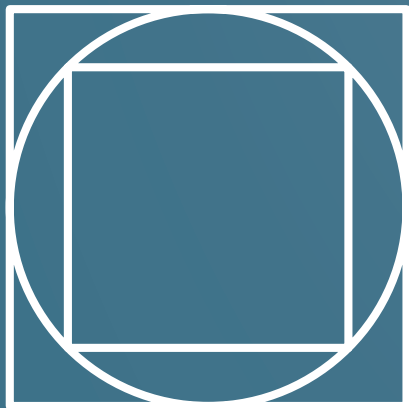


Optiver 

# PREDICT



# TO WIN



If the area of the outside square is  $100\text{cm}^2$ , what is the area of the inside square?

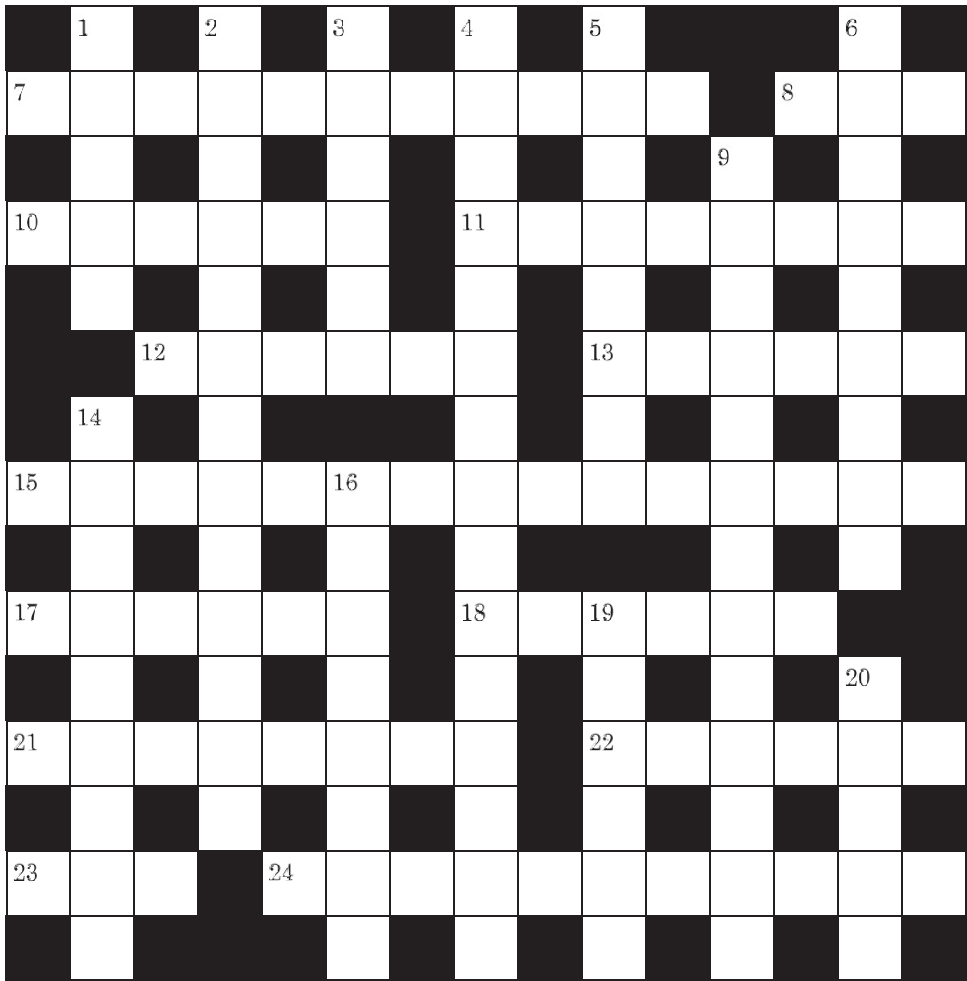
What percentage of respondents successfully solved this?





# The Smoking Area

## Crossword by Jafar

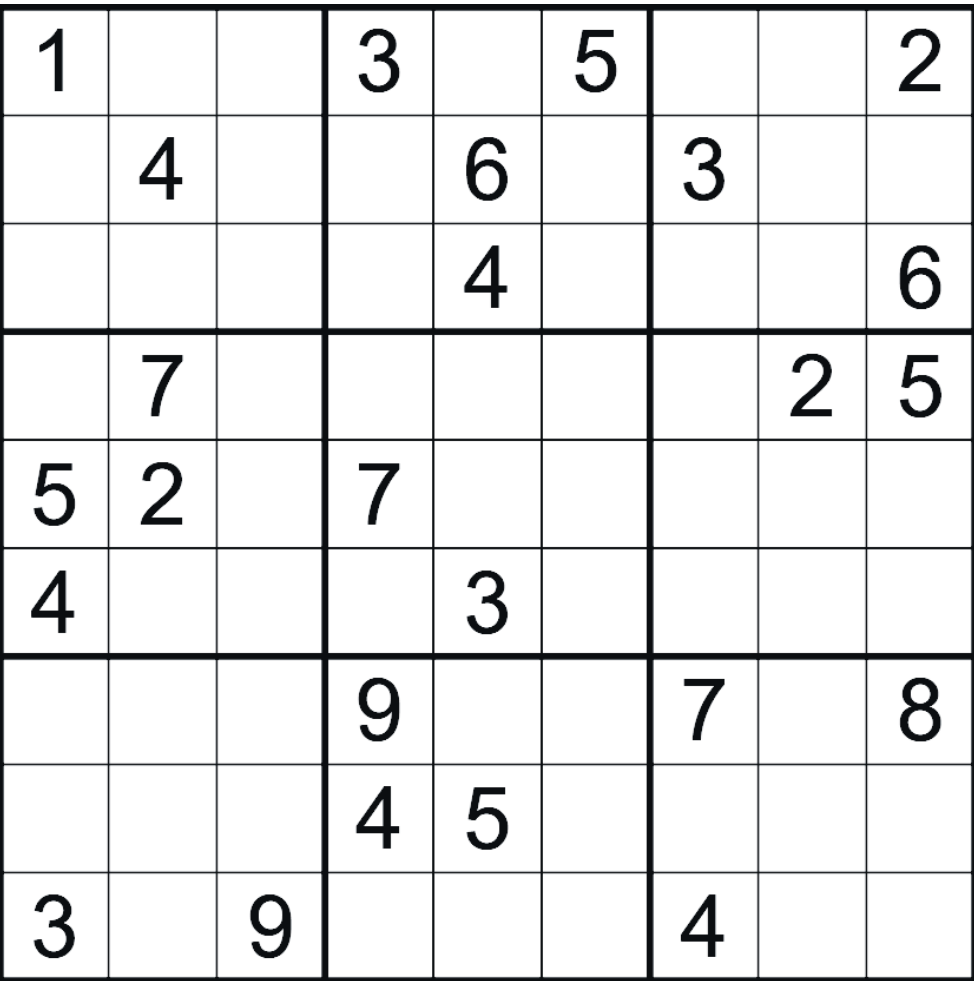


### CRYPTIC CLUES:

- Across:**  
7 Foreign claim on soil (11)  
8 Load of junk, irrespective of perspective (3)  
10 Luxury car parking in pods of small mammal (6)  
11 Spilling tea around bar in empty Cotswolds night clubs (8)  
12 Sailor, addict and violent type (6)  
13 Behold and make melody, admitting defeat (6)  
15 Frequential study modulating airs nefariously (7,8)  
17 On my right, the French tree (6)  
18 Femboy, sterile, holding card (6)
- 21 Run-down ship outside, both quiet and noisy in turbulence (8)  
22 One in support of Greek gods (6)  
23 Shout at rowers and beguile, lacking awareness at first (3)  
24 Unwin acquires disease, taking amino acid, reluctantly (11)
- Down:**
- 
- 1 Senior has to be indebted to parable protagonist (5)
- 
- 2 Affirmation in Orator bio with Corn Exchange (13)
- 
- 3 Greeting towards you and me in re-

- cess (6)  
4 Note written in bizarre, esoteric, occult contemporary music (7-8)  
5 This Abel, lately, is hiding a girl (8)  
6 Cocktail of illness supporting most of some Eastern European river (5,4)  
9 Doing a Britney Spears arrangement for churches (13)  
14 Wearing hood, vaguely sly New Yorker comes up to ecclesiastical body (4,5)  
16 Service seven cycles fr (8)  
19 Freely give (6)  
20 What to overcome when switching to a new field (5)

## Sudoku by Cheggers



### QUICK CLUES:

- Across:**  
7 Way of taking over (11)  
8 Useless thing (3)  
10 Rodent (6)  
11 Dancing restaurants (8)  
12 One cheating the system (6)  
13 Ditching (6)  
15 Branch of maths (7,8)  
17 Magic moaner (6)  
18 Type of luxury bar (6)  
21 Outline (8)  
22 Where heroes of old stand (6)  
23 Cider apple (3)  
24 Begrudgingly (11)
- Down:**  
1 Planter (5)  
2 General agreement (13)  
3 Extended break (6)  
4 New type of experimental music (7 -8)  
5 Someone 's name (8)  
6 Whiskey -based pub order (5,4)  
9 John Knox followers (13)  
14 Highest authority in Oriental Orthodoxy (4,5)  
16 Cambridge College Cultural Classic (8)  
19 Source (6)  
20 Those well brought up help lame dogs over this (5)



## Queerness in Cambridge

Resident archivist [Iris Mamier](#) explores the evolution of the queer scene in Varsity, and its collision with Cambridge's upper class gay tradition

Cambridge has a strong queer community and history, and is frequently listed (by Cambridge students anyway) as one of the best places to be gay as a student. Yet vintage depictions of the 'scene' by Varsity authors both gay and straight conceal a disdain which could hardly be described as thinly veiled. Past editions of Varsity reveal a tension between Cambridge's upper class homosexual tradition, with its emphasis on maintaining morality through discretion, and the emerging queer 'scene' in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. I searched the

Varsity archives to further explore how queer life at Cambridge has been represented as a collision of two competing ideas of what it means to be gay, and as a class struggle between town and gown. The author of 'From Our Cambridge Correspondent', Mark Weatherall, dedicates a full two pages of his book to gay life at Cambridge. "Homosexuality hardly appears in Varsity before the 1970s," he states, with the exception of an odd two week period in the aftermath of the 1958 Wolfenden report. After the Wolfenden committee advocated for the decriminalisation of homosexuality, Varsity's coverage was intensely curious about homosexuality in Cambridge - that is until the proctor's office raised objections. It calculated that there ought to be at least 320 homosexual male students at the University, and sought to deduce their character. Homosexuals were "not as rampant" as just after the war, claimed the Senior Tutor of Kings, while the Senior Tutor of Trinity Hall differentiated between two types of homosexual: the "queer gang" who were purposefully subversive and promiscuous, and the other kind whose homosexuality was connected with "extreme depression". Queerness at Cambridge tradition-

ally maintained a veneer of upper-class respectability. Even going into the 80s, Varsity declared that, "The public school and academic ethos is still prevalent in the university: it is believed that these help swell the numbers [of homosexuals]". The upper class homosexual put the "English" into "English vice". He was, very importantly, male, and was respectable despite his proclivities. The emergence of the queer scene, and its piercing of the Cambridge bubble, therefore, created a kind of moral outrage. Cambridge's vibrant 'LesBiGay' community (as it was described in early 2000s editions) should have been a source of pride, one author stated in 2002, but the participation of individuals in a scene which emphasises party and sex is detrimental to the cause and "ruins people's lives". Straight and gay authors alike called for a return to the 'upper class sensibilities' which had once rendered Cambridge's gay tradition honourable. "Homosexuality," according to a 2003 comment article, "is only attractive when it encapsulates loneliness, isolation, and long, cold holidays in autumnal Venice". Its "mistaken" surrender to the "lower classes," to the gaudy, to the counter-cultural, and to the revolutionary, renders it 'ugly'.

In Michaelmas term 1982, Varsity reported that a 'New Voice for Gays' had arrived on the scene - a gay society which was distinctly "non-scene". The Alternative Homosexual Group (or AHG) was launched by Peter Robertson as an alternative to "the commercial club scene of the 451 CLUB and the militancy of Gay Cambridge". Robertson deplored the "scene homosexuals," and "mindless promiscuity" of gay sub-culture, and with AHG sought to bring back the image of the intellectual homosexual through a culture of debate. Where Gay-Soc had complained that few homosexuals were willing to celebrate "gay pride" at the cost of social acceptance, Robertson put the burden on gay students to make themselves more palatable. "Homosexuals just don't project themselves," he said, "and if they want equality they'd better stop their juvenile abandonment". The dichotomy of the 'queer gang' gay versus the upper-class dandy was and is simply a matter of class prejudice. The scene constituted a threat to class hierarchy, and in rejecting it, gay students hoped successful class performance would render their sexuality irrelevant. If homosexuality was only

made acceptable by its upper class sensibilities, then the way in which students and 'townies' socialised together in LG-BTQ+ spaces actively blurred the Town vs Gown divide. A Varsity investigation post-Wolfenden found that homosexual Cambridge students were more likely to go to homosexual parties given by townspeople. The narrative of homosexuality's 'surrender' to the scene was one which arguably served to legitimise criticisms of homosexuality on a moral basis after its decriminalisation. No such binary truly existed. Beginning in the 80s, and appearing last in February 1988, the 'LesGay' column on Varsity's events page advertised a wide range of queer events: from discos to protests and everything in between. In November 1987, for example, Varsity advertised the following events taking place that week alone: a disco, a Lesbian & Gay Tea Party, a Lesbian social evening, a Gay men's night, and a Lesbian and Gay Campaign Planning Group. The Lesbian & Gay Tea Party implored attendees to "Bring some bikkies and a mug," before adding "Bisexual women welcome". Personally, I think we should bring that back.



# *vulture.*



**Inside** ● The gift guide that keeps on giving pg.21 ● Hardbass debate pg. 22-3 ● The first frost of winter pg.25



## Lifestyle

# Pass me the stuffing and leave me alone

## Gabrielle Saraway goes looking for Cambridge's student grinch

It's Christmas time, mistletoe and wine, 21-year-olds singing Bublé out-of-tune after too much of said wine. December is dawning, advent calendars are flying off the shelf, and the festive spirit is settling in. I adore this time of year, and looking out for the love that 'actually is all around'. However, among us walks a band of Christmas loathers: people who dislike the season, not for faith-based reasons, but rather for a lack of joy in their hearts. So, I set myself the mission of finding these mystical people. I was daunted by the task that lay ahead of me: I was a fish out of water, a Lapland elf wandering around the Financial District, but someone had to tell their story.

Ioachim, a postgrad, arrives ten minutes late to his interview (his flatmate confided that their fire alarm had gone off earlier that day and Ioachim could be heard crying out expletives through the walls). He sits down opposite me and cradles a herbal tea in his hands. From the outside, he would appear a reasonably cheerful man. I would even go so far as to say that, from a distance, he could be interpreted as having a jaunty way about him. However, after I ask him whether he considers himself a joyful man he tells me that he is only "happy two times a week". I ask him when these times are and he replies: "Monday, when I have hope for the week, but it is all gone by Wednesday". I then question him over what fuels his disdain for Christmas, and he lists off reason after reason: its over-commercialisation, the façade of happiness that people project, the "giving spirit" that seems to circulate the air, and the fact that he has to put up with people he would rather never see. I ask him what his ideal Christmas would look like and he pauses before telling me that it would be spent "with friends at a strip club". He registers my shock and assures me that, despite his disdain for the season, the establishment would be

"festively decorated". I thank him for his time and wrap up the interview.

But Ioachim is not alone in being jaded. Soon enough, another Christmas-loather emerges: my friend's father, Mark. For him, the problem with Christmas is simple: "too many people and not enough chairs". "Christmas means being inside and wanting to be outside." This surprises me as I sit wrapped up in five layers fearing

I have caught frostbite from stepping outdoors for two minutes. When I ask Mark what Christmas' redeeming quality is he says: "the break from work is universal so in January you aren't playing catch up". I note he makes no mention of his children here and so ask whether seeing them is also a redeeming quality, to

which he responds that Christmas isn't "particularly unique" for that: "it's nice to see everyone until it's not". His son then questions why he won't wear the hats

out of Christmas crackers, and he says, "I have a deep-felt aversion to ceremony." I now understand where his son gets his joie de vivre from.

For Lauren, a recent Cambridge graduate, her feelings towards the festive season are more complicated. As a child she used to love this time of year but has found with each John Lewis advert that it's drifted from something magical to something overly materialistic: "even if it's

Lily Allen singing Keane's 'Somewhere Only We Know' it's still symbolic of a company. One day we'll all be in the ground, and you can't take a macaron Labubu with you". She sighs when talking about the desire for excess the season generates, but it's when I ask her about her favourite Christmas memories that her voice softens. She talks about spending time with the people she loves and her grief for the people she's lost: "My grandfather would always make these incredible pigs in blankets. He would chop up dried apricots and

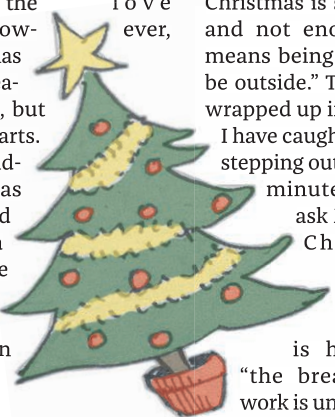
wrap them in sausage meat, and he'd always put them in tupperware just for me. Since he's passed away my mum has taken over the

mantle of cooking Christmas dinner, but she always makes pigs in blankets the exact same way".

Lauren is no Scrooge: she still finds joy in Christmas, but it's bittersweet. She acknowledges how, for those without a seat at the table, the magic of Christmas can become overshadowed by the loneliness. "It's about making someone else's Christmas more magical," she says, when I ask her what this time of year means to her.

**I was a Lapland elf wandering around the Financial District**

So, you may find yourself sitting at a table this Christmas with a group of people who would rather not be there. Look to your left and you might see a girl quietly remembering her late grandfather's recipe, and opposite there might be a nihilist with a herbal tea wishing he was at a strip club. But the joy of Christmas is being around a table with people: spending time with those you love, welcoming in those who feel neglected and isolated, and serving carrots to relatives who have the incredible gift of offending every possible demographic within 60 seconds of talking. Christmas is about making conversation with the Scrooge next to you, who professes there is no joy in anything, and then passing them the stuffing anyway, because you're at dinner, you're together, and you don't want their food to go cold.



Perched strategically on Green Street where the game trails of students, shoppers and sightseers coalesce: *Marvin's* has piqued our interest since it opened just a few months ago. We went to see whether they could live up to their bold promise of "outrageously good sandwiches".

The *Marvin's* menu was tantalising with its various options; we went for the salt beef bagel and the fish finger sandwich. They swiftly arrived, with the unfortunate caveat that they had run out of bagels, so both were served between slices of white bloomer.

Before we get stuck into the food, its presentation clarified our assessment of *Marvin's* as belonging to a

very specific trend. From 'Sensational Sandwiches' to 'Eating with Tod', social media simply loves things in bread. Millions of us scroll along a conveyor belt of food content, consuming one virtual sandwich after another. Identifying, consciously or otherwise, with this sandwich-mania puts *Marvin's* on the front foot. But, aesthetically capitalising on an established hype is one thing; delivering on the plate is another.

**The salt beef bagel:** There is a gold standard for this. An example of a viral sensation that not only has a rich history, but actually warrants the attention – Brick Lane's beigel bake. A salt beef bagel is a question of harmony between three ingredients: acidic pickles, spicy mustard, and salty beef. The latter was the highlight. Not too fatty – as is often the case – the beef had a great salt level. Unfortunately, it was a little on the tough side. The mustard and pickles were nicely balanced, though lacked some of the desired sharpness.

The bread, from Stir Bakery, was fresh, light in the middle and clearly good quality. It was slightly brought down by overly-thick slices which rendered the crusts unenjoyable to eat. Overall, a perfectly tasty interpretation of a classic, which would have been elevated if it was actually in a bagel. Its price of £9 was on the steep side, but not ridiculous.

**Score: 6/10**

**The fish finger sandwich:** One of the nation's staples. *Marvin's* take includes two stacks of fish fingers served on a bed of lettuce, a healthy dose of tartare sauce and topped with thin chipsticks to add a crunch. At least,

## Table for two at Marvin's

Are Marvin's sandwiches the best thing since sliced bread?  
Ed and Finn find out

that's what you would hope if they actually added the potato element. A take on a fish-and-chip butty with no chips presaged the sandwich's woes. The middle third of the 'soft-crispy-soft' texture was left to limp strands of lettuce, thrown under the bus by a baffling interpretation of a fish finger. The batter was flaccid and barely clinging to the fish, which itself had the chewiness and granularity of wet sand. Though, sand, you suspect, would taste more like fresh fish. The fish fingers had all the flavour (or lack of) found in a frozen Captain Birdseye product. For £11, we expected something better.

**Score: 4/10**

Overall, we left our meal with a feeling of mild disappointment. However, while there were commendable aspects in the bread and parts of the salt beef bagel, it didn't quite deliver on these. *Marvin's* seemed to have done its makeup, but forgotten its trousers.

As we mentioned earlier, *Marvin's* is clearly aware of the importance of social media marketability. Instead, hours of consuming them in online form has led to heightened expectations that, when met with the reality of a mundane sandwich, has created a nationwide self-gaslighting session, with Cambridge falling victim most recently. The internet is trying to reinvent the basic into the extraordinary. It completely misses the point of these nostalgia-filled, freezer-space-making classics, such as the fish finger sandwich. They are formed in humility, and in that state they should remain. Sometimes, a sh\*t should remain unpolished. And if you are going to buff a turd, at least remember the chipsticks.

**Overall:**

**Food: 5/10**  
**Atmosphere: 7/10**  
**Value: 5/10**



▲ FINN COSTELLO-O'REILLY



# The gift guide that keeps on giving

Ellie Buckley reveals her present-shopping secrets to save your Christmas

As the end of November rolls around, it can only mean one thing for Cambridge. For the more experienced Cantabrigians, that answer will be clear, but for the less seasoned freshers, I won't leave you out of my, arguably, favourite Christmas tradition: Bridgemas. What's better than celebrating Christmas a month earlier than its calendar date with all of your friends within the beauty of Cambridge at autumn-cum-winter? Yet amid the excitement of Christmas arriving A WHOLE MONTH EARLY (!), it's easy to disregard the Christmas chores that still persist. That's right: presents. The bane of my notes app and Instagram reels as I save a myriad of ideas which I will never consider again. And let's not forget the pressure on the student bank account – my Santander is gearing up, ready to be pummelled.

But where, I hear you cry, can I shop for the cutest gifts for my family and friends, which are unique and don't break the bank? Well, I've curated a list of spots to get the Christmas vibes flowing, and to keep the bank account prosperous.

The first spot on my list is Soap and Clay. Located just along from Magdalene, the shop stocks the cutest art pieces, alongside homemade soap and adorable felt animals, none of which will break the bank. For parents or older relatives, soap and bath products are always a safe bet for a present, while Soap and Clay's special literature-inspired soaps like Lady Macbeth or Wuthering Heights are

the perfect gift for an Engling friend or somebody who loves to read.

“  
Don't get your  
situationship  
a present

Since we're on the topic, you can't go wrong with gifting a book (because we all need more of those, right?). Whether that's one your friend or family member has been dying to read for far too long, or one you handpick simply because it makes you think of them, a book is a surefire way to give someone a Christmas glow, and a convenient reason to avoid next term's reading list. The classic shops are Heffers and Waterstones – both offering student discounts – but if you fancy something more rogue, Bodies in the Bookshop, The Haunted Bookshop, and G.David stock a wide range with special, signed editions of some books. I have my eye on the *Alice in Wonderland* in the Haunted Bookshop window if anyone's buying. Books also present you with the perfect opportunity to elevate the present with tit-bits.

Hotel Chocolat do the yummiest six-pack chocolates which are very reasonably priced but also add a level of 'oooh-aaah' to the present that will make you gleefully proud of yourself. Or why not travel back to secondary school and accompany the book with a bath bomb from Lush? We all need some Snow Fairy now, at the end of Michaelmas, more than ever.

But the top spot for gifts for your eccentric friends is, of course, the Ark. They do the cutest jewellery – although definitely on the more expensive side – and beautiful accessories consisting of scarves, gloves, and fleece pouches, which can be transformed into potential make-up bags or pencil case, defined so by a cheeky lip gloss or set of fancy pens stashed inside like a Russian doll present. If slightly out of budget, the Ark is perfect just for gathering inspiration by window shopping – Daisy, my fellow Vulture Editor, and myself love taking walks in between setting to browse.

When you're on a budget, it's important to consider who you prioritise. If you're in a large friendship group, secret santa is an efficient way to combat costs, while giving Bridgemas an element of surprise. This prioritisation ex-

tends to the less central people in your life. Don't get your situationship a present unless you desire an awkward interaction where it turns out they haven't got you one in return. Similarly, there's no need to buy your supervisor a present (unless they've truly gone above and beyond and deserve a special thank you) – we're not in school anymore!

If you have room in your pockets to give a bit more, think of those people in college who may fly under the radar. I find giving housekeepers, maintenance, gardeners or the wellbeing teams and nurses a box of chocolates can provide a much larger thank you than the box may seem. Similarly, Dunelm runs a present-giving scheme, where you can purchase a small item for those who may be lonely this Christmas, or you can donate to charities like Jimmy's. Although it's easy to get excited about presents, Christmas is fundamentally about giving in any way you can, and knowing you've brightened up somebody else's Bridgemas, or Christmas, is a feeling no present can compare to.



◀ MAYA FUNNELL

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# Fashion



**O**n the 29th of November at the Cambridge Union, the proposition will announce the motion that Cambridge nightlife is dead. The opposition, London-based multidisciplinary collective Fetchish, accepts the challenge and will tackle the daunting task of refuting this claim. However, they will not be using speeches; the debate will take place between a line-up of excellent DJs, and the matter will be settled on the dance floor.

Sitting down to chat about the event with Fetchish's Creative Director Anastasia Kozloca, Creative Producer Zlata Mechentina, and Joanne Yau (Social Events Officer for the Union), I am fascinated to hear about the seemingly impossible plight of creating a night out in Cambridge that is actually good. Zlata tells us that Fetchish is "generally interested in subcultures and the discourse they create around themselves which includes the material, anthropology, styles, and the people, of course," and goes on: "I think the people are the most important part of any party." Stylistically, Fetchish looks to incorporate a variety of different cultural references and points of inspiration, and everything they are drawn to "comes together as an interesting hybrid, visual monster". Anastasia affirms that Fetchish has "always been really hybrid, both in kinds of discourses and also the mediums that we're choosing" – if anyone is equipped for the unusual challenge of bringing a night out to the world's oldest debating society, it is Fetchish.

From the perspective of an attendee of Fetchish events, Joanne jumps in to confirm that this ap-

**“***We encourage people to use their own fantasy and be part of the performance***”**

proach is very effective. She emphasises the theatricality of a Fetchish night, and describes that the creative space Fetchish gives to its artists allows for "a lot more creative autonomy and freedom for the artist to express themselves – and that translates to the audience feeling more comfortable in that space to express themselves, albeit dance-wise and fashion-wise". Anastasia and Zlata agree that this relationship between artist and audience is an important and reciprocal one, particularly when it comes to style and visuals. They both stress that fashion is a super important part of a good night out. "Actually I think it's surprisingly one of the most important things," Zlata comments, "we encourage people to use their own fantasy and be part of the performance." Anastasia affirms that, "It's really cool this way because I think it sparks a lot of inspiration for people to interpret it themselves and elaborate on this fantasy with their outfit choices,

or just generally agenda for the night." It is clear that this focused and nuanced approach to a night out works well, which begs the question: what is it about Cambridge that makes our nights out so lazy? What is it about a Cambridge night that refuses to inspire creative expression?

Although curating good nightlife might feel like it's a million miles from anything that happens in Cambridge, the origins of Fetchish may be far closer to our academic culture than you think. Zlata explains how Fetchish originated as a project while she was studying at UCL, and how the name came to them after reading Marx's *Communist Manifesto* and thinking "yeah, commodity fetishism, that sounds funny enough". Zlata clarifies that although they were just looking to choose a random name, the presence of politics and academia in the curation of a Fetchish event is significant – even if Anastasia and Zlata have to constantly face the questions "What do you do?" and "Do you do Fetchish" by clarifying, "Yeah I do Fetchish, but it's nothing about fetishes or kinky stuff ... most of the time."

Joanne draws on this as she explains the process of bringing a Fetchish event to the Union. I'm curious as to how the idea for the event – fittingly titled Hardbass Debate – came about, and Joanne explains: "It was when I was running for elections at the Union – one of the promises I put on my manifesto was that I'm going to bring good gigs, good music to the Union." Reaching out to Fetchish felt instinctive, "I really like this collective and I've always enjoyed their gigs in London." Together with one of the DJs at the event, Andreas Marcou,

the more experimental direction of the debate was formed: "The debate idea and conceptualisation of a debate is that it happens behind the decks and on the dancefloor. We're going to vote on the dance floor – it's very unusual if you ask me and it's the first time in forever that sort of thing has happened in the Union." She goes on to explain to us how this will affect the stylistic direction of the event, recalling that, "I was quite insistent on having the dress code as 'anything but black tie', because the Union is often quite a rigid space in terms of dress code and I would really like to bring some changes to that."

**“***The Union is often quite a rigid space in terms of dress code, and for this, I would like to change that***”**

In a city where you will frequently see suits and formal gowns in the club, it seems that the night's aesthetics will be just as excitingly new for the



Fashion

Union as its contents.

That is not to say there isn't a prominent overlap between the words of academia and clubbing or hardbass. Anastasia reflects on the first moodboard the collective created, a crazy assortment of personal pictures, stuff they found from the internet, stuff from movies, and the literary theory of Mikhail Bakhtin. She goes on to explain the importance of this eclectic initial approach: "I feel like both me and Zlata as collaborators are quite educated people - let's say - and I guess we're striving to discover our intelligence, and we're also chronically online. So I think this creates this perception of the world as a huge rhizomatic system where all the things are connected and where you can see so many patterns being traced across completely different subjects and time periods."

“Being intellectual should not preclude you from clubbing or enjoying yourself

Spotting these thought-provoking patterns is their first step in creating a Fetchish event, before eventually bringing together references from pop media and culture to "[create] a visual system that I guess will eventually be connected with the initial idea". This approach which Anastasia describes as "overanalytical" is key to a Fetchish night, and seems remarkably fitting for a university audience.

In organising Hardbass Debate for the Union, Anastasia and Zlata are bringing post-Soviet hardbass aesthetics from Eastern Europe to a notably formal Cambridge University context. The case to be made (while adorned in an Adidas tracksuit) is that being intellectual should not preclude you from clubbing and enjoying yourself - and clubbing should not preclude you from being an intellectual, either. If Anastasia and Zlata can draw so many disparate worlds together with Fetchish, so can every aspiring academic (or clubber) at Cambridge, and Hardbass Debate at the Cambridge Union is an excellent place to start.

- Flossie Bullion

*Fashion Shoot Co-Ordinator: Chloe Jacobs  
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Photos taken at The Cambridge Union*





**Arts**

# Reclaiming history: *Omai at the Fitzwilliam*

*Mia Apfel* meets with contributors to a new presentation of Reynold's masterpiece

Halfway through his tour across UK museums, Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Omai* (1776) has made the journey to Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum. In a collaborative display with the contemporary artwork of the SaVAge K'lub, this exhibition purposefully removes the long-shone spotlight from Reynold's canonical talent. Reynolds' portrait of the first Polynesian individual to visit Britain shines not as stand-alone artwork, but as a source for new, inspired creation. A past of anglicised tradition is reconciled with the cultural voices of the present.

Mai's umbilical connection to Tahiti was altered upon his journey to England in 1774. Intimately introduced into the inner circles of London's elite, Mai became an admired and esteemed figure among English celebrities of the 18th century. One sees this sense of nobility in Reynold's characterisation of him. Towering at seven feet tall, Mai is depicted as a figure of dignity and honour. He stands barefoot in adlocutio pose, left foot forward in striding motion, and hand elegantly outstretched as if on the precipice of speech. Reynolds, though working with a different medium, considered Mai as if sculpted. Inspired by the statues of Classical antiquity, particularly the Apollo Belvedere, Reynolds likens Mai to a Roman orator in his unfaltering, considered stance.

One of the finest society painters of Georgian England, and founder of the Royal Academy, Reynolds was accustomed to painting British elites from Dr Samuel Johnson to Laurence Sterne. That being the case, for Mai to have his portrait done by Reynolds was a feat of social advancement. Successfully transforming his status from 'foreigner' to noble, this one artwork demonstrates the capacity for aesthetic

and cultural production to alter the social milieu.

Yet Reynolds' depiction of Mai is not without its wash of 'exoticism'. A tropical landscape darkens behind Mai's figure; palm trees loom in the shadows, and the riverbank glimmers under

ing is this choice to set Mai against his native homeland, considering that Reynolds himself had never travelled to the Pacific Islands, and thus could have

only known its visual from indirect sources. Perhaps the painting shows an attempt to pay respect to the Pacific culture. Adorning Mai's hands are a pattern of traditional tatua (tattoo); this form of body art was, and still is, a powerful expression of identity for the Polynesian community, and the pride of this artform resonates throughout the Fitzwilliam's exhibition. The same inked patterns can be spotted in the portraits of Tahitian individuals which hang on one wall of the room.

Draped in swathes of ceremonial robe, Mai's high status takes on material signification in the form of his clothing. The heavy crease of the cloth suggests a luxurious thickness. Tied at the waist with a thick sash, and scraping the floor with wealthy length, the costume supplies Mai with a majestic

indicates it to be Tapa, a barkcloth made in the Pacific Islands and used in traditional Tahitian dress. Yet an awareness of the European ideal

is also suggestive of classical Roman toga. Reynolds' portrait, then, seems a strange conflation of opposing cultures, native and new.

The SaVAge K'lub, in their artistic response at the Fitzwilliam, have made efforts to work against Reynold's idealism of Mai. Draped from floor to ceiling on one wall of the room is the same Tapa cloth which one sees on Mai in Reynolds' portrait.

Working with traditional materials, the contemporary artists have prioritised a faithfulness to historical accuracy. Moreover, the artists showcased in the exhibition many of whom worked together on the project in Tahiti before transporting their creations to the Fitzwilliam, voice experiences from the same cultural background as Mai himself. Rosanna Raymond, a SaVAge K'lub artist, explained the need to honour the "lived experience" of the Tahitian people. Recognising how Reynolds had smoothed over Mai's heritage to satiate the visual appetite of a European viewer, the SaVAge K'lub artists turn their focus towards a pride for a continuing Tahitian existence. No space in the room is without reference to Polynesian identity. The walls are pinned with artefacts and photographs of contemporary Polynesian life, and made doilies, the phrase 'Toitū te Tiriti' (honour

the treaty), are pinned on the walls as a nod towards a new wave of activism in Māori, calling for protection of the indigenous Polynesian people. The exhibition's contemporary relevance allows historical artefacts to be dug out of the past into a politicised present. Even the wallpaper

itself has been re-covered to embrace the cultural symbolism; the room, painted red, glows with rich colour. Laid on the floor under Reynold's painting are two empty shells, almost positioned as an offering to the esteemed Mai. Collected around the room are tao'a (treasures) borrowed from the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology: wooden weapons, fans of pandanus fibre, and clubs carved with intricate silhouettes of native animals. Instruments, a bamboo nose flute and a shell trumpet, first acquired in 1769 on Captain Cook's voyage to Tahiti, are displayed.

While Mai's life-story was in many ways one of loss and difficulty, having already experienced the death of his father before arriving in England, and meeting his own death soon after returning home to Tahiti, the SaVAge K'lub show a determination to find room for celebration of his existence. Previous artistic accounts have only focused on what occurred after the departure from Tahiti which led Mai to his fame. Often disregarded are the twenty-two years of his life before he embarked on the HSM Adventure and entered European high society. Perhaps the idealism of Reynold's portrait has clouded the facts of Mai's heroic 'Adventure'. Mai's decision to travel to England was one of strategy; seeking to reclaim ancestral land and procure weapons for war, his journey was motivated by the conflict and capture which he experienced in Ra'iatea.

SaVAge K'lub reconciles this often-ignored part of history. Raymond expressed this need to prevent Mai's Polynesian past from being forgotten. Mai, she implied, has "become incidental himself" in Reynolds' portrait: a mere symbol for the noble foreigner whose individuality is irrelevant. The exhibition, as a dialogue between canonical and contemporary artists, holds a responsibility to honour not only Mai's life in England, but his home in the Polynesian Islands. Walking into 'Journeys with Mai', one enters a chronicle which comprehensively traces a Polynesian past to its present existence.

“Reynold's portrait seems a strange conflation of opposing cultures”



PUBLIC DOMAIN

Your heart is in

Or maybe you're in the right place for your heart? 'Follow your heart' is a sweet yet clichéd bit of advice that we've all heard one too many times. Perhaps that's why I started to take it literally.

I've always had more of an artistic brain than a mathematical one, preferring at school to doodle on my maths sheets rather than answer the questions. So it makes sense that, rather than seeing the Fibonacci sequence, structural configurations or other such logical patterns around me, I see hearts.

One day back in sixth form, I happened to notice a hole in a tree that looked like a heart. I thought it was charming and rather unusual, so I took a picture of it to send to a friend. Fast forward to today, and I now have a folder on my phone with over 200 pictures of 'naturally-occurring hearts', as I call them. It sounds ridiculous, but once you start to look for them, they appear everywhere.

Looking for these hearts started out as just a bit of fun, but

now it adds extra meaning into each ever-busy Cambridge day. The importance of maintaining the comfortable and the stable in the mania of Cambridge life cannot be understated, and it seems now that I don't look for the hearts so much as they look for me. This sounds like an exaggeration, but I never go out with the intention of finding heart shapes – they just appear, and I always manage to spot them. Whether it be the shape of a rock, a well-formed shadow or the bubbles in a coffee, it never fails to make me smile when a heart crops up. And that's the key part. It's easy to forget that joy can be found in the simplest of places, the smallest pockets, when we are all striving to achieve so much. Sometimes, seeing a leaf shaped like a perfect heart is achievement enough.

These hearts are also a reminder that art is everywhere if you know where to look. Capturing them in photos ensures my creativity is always just a click away. The blessing of modern technology means that I can share my photos

with friends and family, too, spreading the joy and the art around me. It's become a way of keeping connected – friends and family members will frequently send me pictures of hearts that they have found, and occasionally I will even receive a heart picture from someone I haven't spoken to in a while. It's a touching, if slightly corny, reminder that love is the undercurrent connecting us all. You'd also be surprised by how many people I've discovered that do a similar thing with a symbol that speaks to them – I've known people to have spirals, butterflies, or specific numbers that crop up for them. It just goes to show how, even in a post-truth, digital era, we look to the universe to send us signs.

So next time you're out and about, take a moment to connect with what's around you and see if you can spot any hearts – it's not as difficult as you might think. It seems that that one overplayed Christmas film has a point when it tells us that "if you look for it, I've got a sneaky feeling you'll find that love actually is all around".

- Emma Gower

the right place

ELLIE BUCKLEY



# The first Frost of the Cambridge winter

As we approach the end of Michaelmas, **Emily Cushion** braves Bridgemas with Robert Frost's poetry

Once again, Michaelmas has evaded me. Walking through Sidge recently, I noticed that the branches of the ginkgo trees were becoming bare, and lamented to my finalist friends that this is the last time we'll see those yellow leaves circling the concrete. Every year it happens: you write a few essays, and suddenly you can't walk to lectures without a coat, or hearing people discuss 'Bridgemas' plans. And it's already too late; winter is coming.

There are two types of people when it comes to reckoning with this. Number one: those who launch themselves into their studies, hoping that pro-long-ing the working day might delay the season's arrival (you can't hear carols if you spend evenings in the library instead of the chapel). And number two: those who put on

Halloween bop, I am more than happy to embrace the Cambridge winter in this second manner. My favourite way of doing so – aside from one too many mulled wines at the formal – is by ending the day with a Robert Frost poem.

Even if you don't know much about the poet, I can guarantee you'll have heard this wintry quatrain:

*"The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep."*

Written nearly a century ago, these lines from 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' have stood the test of time – a Cambridge term is just like this "lovely, dark and deep" forest:

dense and slightly scary, but beautiful all the same. And I definitely feel I have "miles to go before I sleep" when I clock in for a late library session the night before a deadline.

On these lonely Cambridge winter evenings, I turn to 'An Old Man's Winter Night' for some poetic company to alleviate my essay-induced isolation. In a poem shrouded in darkness, Frost's twinklings of light certainly shine: the "separate stars" of frost on the window; the "broken moon" to which he consigns the "icicles along the wall". What Frost chooses to illuminate here is snow; glowing in the dark is the company of the icicles and the "snow on the roof" – providing emotional warmth no matter how physically cold. Both of these are preceded by the possessive pronoun "his"; Frost's 'Old Man' takes an aspect of winter and makes it his own, something I think each of us should do in Cambridge.

My friends and I have our own – slightly dysfunctional – traditions: telling each other who we have for Secret Santa; getting covered in icing during gingerbread decorating; planning to attend but inevitably missing the light switch-on (in our defence, it's basically in early November). The speaker in Frost's 'Christmas Trees' has a different winter ritual: growing a forest of "fir balsams". Despite a stranger's attempt to buy a thousand of the trees, the speaker's refusal to sell them means his tradition survives falling into the

Christmas consumerist trap (I say this as the proud owner of an official Cambridge University bauble).

Keeping his trees firmly rooted, Frost advocates for an appreciation of winter grounded in nature. 'Dust of Snow' encapsulates this in its eight lines:

*"The way a crow  
Shook down on me  
The dust of snow  
From a hemlock tree*

*Has given my heart  
A change of mood  
And saved some part  
Of a day I had rued."*

Here, snowfall is not singly but triply bound up with nature; snow falls onto a tree, from which a crow shakes it onto the speaker. The speaker becomes embedded within the natural landscape, inspiring an emotional change as they are "dusted" with snow. And we can learn from Frost here about winter's potential to change us. Though we might not see any snow in Cambridge before the end of term, we can find solace in a trip to the botanic gardens, or watching squirrels scurry about college finding food to store for winter (just like how we stock up on Bailey's and Quality Street). These are the ways to thaw a frozen heart, just like how Frost says the crow "saved some part / Of the day I had rued." Frost reminds us of the true beauty of winter, located within its nature – through his poetry, and through his name.

**the mays 33**

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# Spotify *Un*wrapped...

Lucy Jude Grantham and Daisy Cooper expose the dreaded yearly listening habits of the average Cambridge student

It's that time of year again: whether you're jumping for joy or quaking in your boots, Spotify Wrapped season is upon us. We asked our Instagram followers to name and shame, spill the beans, and confront their inner musical demons for this article. So ... let the annual public humiliation ritual begin!

As this article's instigators, Lucy and I thought that we should air our grievances first.

**Lucy Jude, Lucy Cav:** "Spotify Wrapped is always a joy ... a joy usually tinged with shame. Minutes wise I reckon it'll sit at 50k-ish? But if it's not Bob Dylan as my top artist for the 400th year running, I've been replaced with a tasteless clone. I am sincerely praying that Morrissey doesn't make an appearance. I'm truly sorry. It's been a harrowing year."

**Daisy C, Peterhouse:** "I say BRING IT ON! My Spotify minutes are always disappointingly less than I think ... in my defence I'm one of those awful record listeners so I'll aim for an adequate 35,000 minutes. Hopefully, I'll have Cate le Bon or Andrew Bird at the top of the tree."

**Jamie, Caius:** "I've moved on to not caring about what people think of my music. The top artist game is difficult because I don't think it'll be Radiohead which is a crazy turn of events for me given they've been my top artist for five years - I think it'll probably be Charli xcx because of *Brat*. And no. I have zero fears, because all my music is unbelievably cool and awesome and unembarrassing."

**Daniel, Lucy Cav:** "I went on some random listening habits this last year including Chappell Roan and some niche Russian rock bands so the playlist will be interesting. I have no idea on specific numbers but I feel like I've listened less

this year. I think my top artist will be Kid Cudi, but I haven't been attached to any one artist in the same way that I have in previous years. Guilty pleasure is Imagine Dragons. 'Nuff said."

do... but I'm unashamed and seeing them AGAIN!" **Rob, Jesus:** "I really enjoyed Spotify Wrapped."

My listening time is probably on par with last year's 45,000, though I began outsourcing to other platforms like SoundCloud for unreleased (Frank Ocean) music. Ethel Cain had a chokehold over my summer; she may have overthrown Lana - the right person will stay."

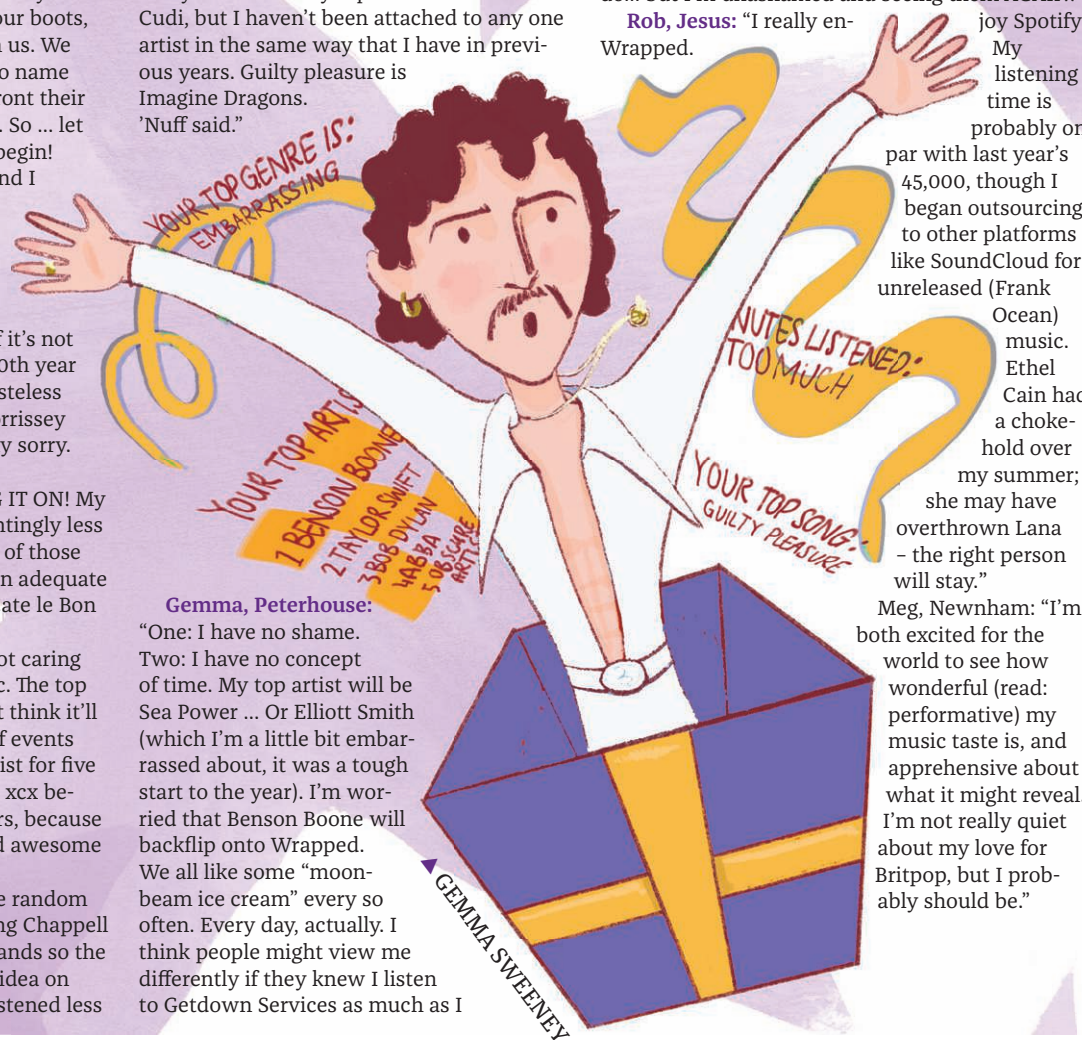
Meg, Newnham: "I'm both excited for the world to see how wonderful (read: performative) my music taste is, and apprehensive about what it might reveal. I'm not really quiet about my love for Britpop, but I probably should be."

**Daisy B, Robinson:** "I promise I'm not a performative listener but I am a little nervous that my wrapped will be skewed by frantic qualities of chill study jazz and Field Medic's 'Song I Made Up To Stop Myself From Having A Panic Attack Just Now'. Laura Marling will be my top artist, you can euthanise me if I'm wrong. I have too many guilty pleasures to count to be honest - I had a brief Meghan Trainor/Elle Goulding relapse in the Summer, but my big fear remains Glee Cast. You didn't ask but Salt-N-Pepa's 'Shoop' will be my no. 1. If it isn't, I've done 2025 wrong."

**I'm worried that Benson Boone will backflip onto Wrapped**

**Astrid, Peterhouse:** "I'm a bit nervous for Wrapped. I always turn out to be a more one sided listener than I would like to present myself as. In the end, I'm more worried about what kind of AI slop genres Spotify will throw our way this year. I like listening with intention. My top artist is tied between Ethel Cain, Jane Remover and venturing ... but I have a feeling 'Skyrim Atmospheres' (42-minute ambient track from the Skyrim soundtrack) might make it into the top five for the second time. In my defence, its great background noise. But to be cringe is to be free, so I intend to bear whatever is revealed with pride."

Well, there are certainly some intriguing answers among our friends ... and we're sure that your picks are just as jarring. Ring in advent with us and watch this space to see if their Christmas wishes come true ... in sickness and in health, for better or for worse.



## Jingle *alt* the way Seun Ige and Caitlin Newman share their alternative Christmas bangers

From soaring carols to festive classics like Elton John's 'Step Into Christmas' to Justin Bieber's seasonal bangers, you're likely familiar with the traditional holiday soundtrack. But, this Bridgemas, we want to introduce you to some tracks which shake up the Christmas canon and add an unexpected energy to the season!

**'Lonely This Christmas' - LIINES**

One common deterrent in Christmas music is their oft incessant positivity. If you naturally gravitate towards the pessimism of The Waitress's 'Christmas Wrapping', fret not - there's plenty more emo-esque Christmas tracks where that came from. Enter LIINES' 'Lonely This Christmas', a grungy take on the classic by Mud. There's something powerful in the tonal shift this rendition provides - Mud's original is perfect for a bit of heartbroken wallowing (let's hope that's not needed!), whereas LIINES delivers the same lyrics with greater frustration and spite. In the inevitable instance of burnt potatoes or someone's uncle saying something they shouldn't, the catharsis of this track can comfort us all during the throes of Christmas

chaos.

**'My Wishlist' - Lil B**

The self-proclaimed 'based God', Lil B is the pioneer of internet meme rap (and legend), and amid his ridiculously long discography lies a Christmas EP, *Mm Christmas*. His 'wish list' doesn't echo the comedic bravado or the sun soaked fantasy I was sold as a kid in 'California Boy', full of beaches and nonchalance. Lil B admits that he had actually almost forgotten his own wishlist. Instead, he pleads for unity and genuine connection with the people and environment around him. The soft synths and mellow chords make for quite a nice listen. So based, Lil B.

**'Kidnap the Sandy Claws' - Korn**

Guilty as charged, I do indeed switch into festive listening habits almost as soon as Halloween has passed. However, Korn's cover of the iconic track from *The Nightmare Before Christmas* acts as a perfect bridge between seasons. The track embodies the quintessential Korn sound, with eerily on beat drum kicks and deeply sinister industrial riffs. Yet, it's simultaneously twinged with festive whimsy - Jonathan Davis integrates the original movie antics and bickering of Lock, Shock and Barrel with his own

unique characterisation of this trio. This track may even have landed itself as one of my all-time favourite Korn numbers; in all its silliness, the alternation between various characters and attitudes gives it an engaging dynamism, perfect for a rejuvenating energy kick during the winter months.

**'Wish' - horsegiirL**

I wish more of my favourite artists who experiment with hardstyle made Christmas tunes, as it's fun when an already chaotic period is made even more high energy. The track opens with a familiar, traditional Christmas jingle, but quickly evolves into pulsing beats. Unlike some of her other tracks, this song lets us hear more of horsegiirL's voice, which matches the sense of yearning in the lyrics. It tackles the same seasonal themes as Mariah Carey or Ariana Grande, but in a way that's far more exciting. The production balances festive whimsy with horsegiirL's signature energetic flair, making it ideal for moving rather than singing along to the usual ballads.

**'12 Days of a Pop-Punk Christmas' - Jarrod Alonge**  
There's nothing realistic about the original gifts

on 'The 12 Days of Christmas' - who wants to deal with that many birds? Jarrod Alonge's options are much more alt-kid friendly, especially for those of us not-so-secretly stuck in the mid-2010s. If you're trying to get festive while simultaneously vying for a source of distraction from the cultural Christmas barrage, this track provides the best of both worlds. Delivering the original melody in the most stereotypical pop-punk whine imaginable is a cursed crossover; however, especially once Christmas starts to dominate conversation to intolerable levels, this cursed crossover is the distraction we all need.

Whether you'll be listening to tracks old or new, we hope our list shows you there's always a way to spice up your holiday playlist. Happy Bridgemas to all, and to all a good night!



Scan this code to hear the playlist in full



▲ LYRA BROWNING



# Our perspectives on Asian media

Amanda Ljungberg and Julia Ongking muse on their relationships to Asian film and TV

Amanda

To a child brought into a British curriculum and an anglicised social media landscape, the Thai films of my upbringing came to seem exotically poor. Deciding at 13 to become a *Serious Film Person*, I thought I must prioritise the Western canons.

The term 'foreign film' is itself Western, coined by the Anglophone critic writing of the innate, regional sensibilities of the distant Auteurs. I, like many who absorbed Western media without living there, formed opinions about my own country's artistic merit second-hand. To internalise

that framework was to distance myself from the accessibility of regional films gone unreviewed by Western media, and to begin to see Asian art as one great, impenetrable cloud from which only the occasional genius could emerge.

Online film spaces can offer a 'starter pack' of films which takes a deliberate effort to stray from. A film like *La Haine* remains in the online consciousness because it is brilliant, yes, but also because this is a claim to 'getting' 'world cinema'. 'World cinema' becomes just the sanctioned stuff..



ANNA CLARK/VOONTISARVI

In learning to love film (online), when Foreign Film comes as the 'next step', it struggles to establish itself as a *part of*, rather than *alternative category of*, film awareness. There remains the notion of inherent Western superiority. *La Haine* becomes a good *foreign film*, and/or kino because of its *inherently different Frenchness*.

But isn't it normal that the films shown everywhere be the most discussed? The harm is that sensibilities are becoming hegemonic. People learning from a set canon bring to their work not continuous improvements upon an inheritance of unique styles and stories but in the best case cultural remixes a la *The Good, the Bad, the Weird*, and in the worst flat, uninspired transplantations: see the countless clumsy attempts to recreate an *Avengers*. A Hollywood standard of 'bad' deprives us of films infused with genuine, authentic cultural beliefs and home-grown honesty, however unsophisticated.

I can only mourn that I didn't realise sooner that I had such a wealth of great cinema around me, all my life. I can also only feel ashamed of a childhood of internalised racism. You feel an incomparable sense of belonging in returning to and re-realising the artistry, depth, and comfort of the films from home. I am wholly in favour of people discovering a passion for film through what is popular, digestible, well-established. I recognize the 'canon' will, for a couple decades, remain largely Western. But I wish for more young people in my position to take unabashed pride in the privilege of independent discovery, and to reject any statement that treats 'foreign film' as a monolith.

Korean drama has become a global phenomenon. In 2022, South Korea exported approximately £465 million worth of television content abroad. As an Asian international student, I've found refuge in streaming K-dramas from my dorm. Yet when I return home to Manila, surrounded by the everyday sights of my childhood – jeepneys queuing on rainy days, the soybean pudding vendor's Sunday morning holler and weekly Catholic masses – I reconcile with the glaring absence of Filipino media on global platforms.

Korean dramas have performed excellently among Southeast Asian audiences through their depiction of Confucianist, family-oriented values that are typically absent from Western media. However, due to their governmental and foreign financial backing, the Korean cultural export industry outperforms many Southeast Asian productions, with higher-quality production and depictions of aspirational urban lifestyles that local industries cannot replicate.

Should Korean media continue to dominate the canon of Asian media, consequences extend from financial domination to cultural monopolisation: we risk flattening the nuances between other Asian states with deceptively similar Korean ones, erasing the unique historical, religious, and colonial roots within each Southeast Asian society. In addition, the constant exposure to hyper-development and capitalistic spending in Seoul and urban East Asian cities

contributes to a regional hierarchy of 'Asian-ness'. The effects of this are two-fold: much of the inequality and the oppressive social costs of rapid development within these states are ignored, while Southeast Asian viewers are implicitly influenced to see their own cultures as inferior. When Korean beauty standards and urban aesthetics become the aspirational default, it's easy to internalise a form of self-orientalism, judging ourselves through the lens of what global markets deem valuable.

Additionally, K-dramas cannibalise the global imagination of what Asian culture is. With Netflix's algorithm and American investment dollars determining which Asian content reaches global audiences, Western media companies hold the power to define what 'Asian' means to the world.

Asian representation has never been more visible, yet most of Asia remains unseen on the silver screen. This isn't to diminish the artistic merit behind Korean dramas, but as viewers, we each hold a responsibility to seek out regional films that broaden our understanding of Asian cinema.

Let's not settle for the singular narratives that global corporations package for profit, but make an effort to explore the rich cinematic history and tradition that Asia has to tell.



Julia

## Weekly screenings: learning a new ritual

Pam Noonpackdee reflects on a term as Cambridge University Film Association's screenings officer

The power button was broken. And with that, CUFA's dream of weekly film screenings in the comfortable TV room of Christ's College seemed to have suddenly crumbled. Perhaps out of pity for a well-fought battle, the audience of our first screening of the term kindly agreed to watch *Risky Business* (1983) on our president's laptop instead. Without a single person leaving by the end, our spirits were at least not completely destroyed.

Come second week, however, to say that we were off to a truly bad start would be an understatement. This time, not only was the TV not fixed, but the audiences proposed that we reschedule the screening instead. Left alone in that room, suffocated by the air of disappointment, the future of CUFA's inherited tradition looked bleak to me.

I was adamant that we push through; it's not just a weekly movie screening – it is a chance for people to experience the magic of film together. A magic, I believe, that cannot be felt watching a film alone. With a room full of people, laughter, gasps, screams and all spectrum of noises can truly enhance the immersive experience.

Finally, after half an hour of meddling with the projector, my prayer was answered. Our

first successful screening was 108 minutes of pure silence. Silence of reverence, perhaps? That is the most common reason people tend to compare movie viewing to a religious experience. However, especially with a more unconventional film, silence can mean many things.

“

*Watching a film together is a magic that cannot be felt watching a film alone*

The light from my doom-scrolling device was not perceptible to the others in the room, but other people seemed to be doing the same sacrilegious act. It seems that, without the commanding presence of the theatre, one feels more at ease to look away and pull themselves back from the movie, breaking its trance. I notice that this behaviour continues in our next screening of *Grand Theft Hamlet* (2024) as well. Silence – and sacrilege.

The environment itself certainly could be the thing that breaks the religious perception of movie viewing. The fact few people attend our screenings, I believe, certainly adds to the shyness in their expressions.

Perhaps, then, it is us who have failed to build a church in which this ritual could happen.

After the light comes on, everyone leaves. We have not yet managed to integrate a discussion about the film into the end of our session. But I just cannot help but think that, without sharing our thoughts and feelings about the film with each other, the whole watching experience becomes so isolated that it might defeat the purpose of a crowd screening.

Our screenings, then, are perhaps a new kind of ritual we must understand and practice at. What should be the consensus between the participants? Should phones and talking be al-



▲ GEMMA SWEENEY

lowed to create a more relaxed environment, or should the screening be taken with utmost seriousness? To be truthful, I don't have the answers yet. But I believe that there is so much potential in our small, weekly ritual. A potential to unlock the kind of experience one can never get in any other setting. Mark this as a sacred promise from us to you; learning together, we will perfect this new ritual of ours.



**Theatre**

# If theatre be the food of love...

## Then play on, says Gabrielle Kurniawan

**P**icture this: it is the summer of 2025 and I am back home from Cambridge, lying facedown on my bed. Sprawled next to me are two scripts for plays that I'll be acting in come Michaelmas, titles emblazoned in red capitals: *DIAL M FOR MURDER* and *BRASSED OFF*. Nothing exciting or dramatic has happened to me all summer.

I sense my older sister's presence by the door and lift nothing but my hand in acknowledgement.

Her, sighing, having just returned from a long day of being a doctor and saving human lives: "Are you still worried about falling in love with the actors in your play?" Yes. Yes, I was. I know it sounds stupid, but it was the truth: I was terrified that I would be unable to separate character from actor, fall madly in love with the poor boys I was to be acting out romantic relationships with, and put all of us in a very difficult position. Part of this is because I love a good love story.

Alfred Gell, a renowned anthropologist, once wrote: "Modern love would be unthinkable without fiction." We model our lives after the stories we admire, and, as such, the line between fantasy and reality can be tenuous.

**"**I was terrified by the possibility that I would be unable to separate character from actor

Michaelmas dawned, and, to my relief, I found that falling in love with a person you act with is much more difficult than you'd think. In *Dial M for Murder*, I played Sheila a 1950s house-

wife who is secretly having an affair with a crime writer, Max Halliday. In *Brassed Off*, I played Gloria Mullins, a musician who who rekindles a relationship with an old fling from school, Andy Barrow.

It occurred to us early on that everything about *Dial M* needed to be smooth, slick, and stylish. As such, every line was analysed and each movement planned. The actor playing Max and I worked through the characters clinically: how they met, what they talked about, whether they shared cigarettes and who kept the lighter.

On the other hand, *Brassed Off* was a huge ensemble piece. We felt not only that we had much more room to improvise, but that we were burdened with the responsibility of it. As a show, it was much more instinctive than *Dial M*, and it was exhilarating to work with the actor playing Andy: I'd mess up his hair, he'd aim his tenor horn at my ear; things we'd seen the real brass band involved in the show do.

But it was the world beyond the cast that surprised me most. Each night, as I sat in the ADC

bar after the show and strangers approached me to give their congratulations, there was a strange sense of familiarity that I had never felt before. It was as if the boundary which exists when meeting new people had *disappeared*. We accord romantic relationships the greatest confidentiality and assume that romantic partners know things about each other we could not – or should not – be privy to. In early stages of dating, we offer bits of information about ourselves

actors playing romantic roles, we see a side of the person that is usually tucked away: their clumsiness on a first date, or the way their eyes follow the movement of the one they desire, and instinctively feel a level of intimacy we are primed to associate with knowledge.

**"**When we watch actors playing romantic roles, we see a side of the person that is usually tucked away

But this goes beyond the parasocial. When, as Gloria, my face heats up after being rejected by Andy and I stumble away from him in shame, the audience is watching me bring forth emotions I have felt before: times I've felt unrequited affection, times when I've endured similar mortification. As they watch me, they recall theirs. When we are moved by people on stage, we are saying: you, the performer, know this feeling, and so do I. In that moment, we are intertwined by the fact that we are part of a greater whole who try, who hurt, and who love. There is so much human connection in theatre, from audience to actor to writer to stage manager. And though, as young people, we are wont to focus on romance, it does not need to exist for there to be something truly valuable.

I will (hopefully) never be falsely accused of murder by the wonderful Amenie Groves, nor is it likely that the lovely Maddie Lock will passively aggressively question me about my involvement in a colliery band. The show remains fiction, after all. But we grow in intimacy over the make-believe. In this, there is love – for the art, for the show, and for each other.



◆ JESSICA LEER

## An ode to Panto

**D**id you know that, in the next few weeks, there will be a number of student pantomimes on the calendar? In light of this uplifting news, I would like to share my experience with pantomimes and my opinion on what makes a top-tier pantomime production.

My father works as a pianist and musical director, which means I have been dragged around the country throughout my life to watch numerous pantomimes across the Christmas season. Some were fabulously enjoyable, full of laughter and spectacle, and others were, between you and me, a bit naff. But what separates the wheat from the chaff?

Every good pantomime needs at least a sprinkle of creative imagination in the story line or character dialogue. A vast majority of pantomimes retell well-known stories and myths in a light-hearted and fun manner. Yet each production runs the risk of becoming a recreation of what can be watched on TV or read throughout the year. I recall one year watching a production of *Aladdin* which was relocated from its original Middle Eastern setting to the bustling streets of Medieval Beijing.

Thanks to this creative decision, those behind the scenes were able to explore this new setting and place the story of *Aladdin* within it, without leaving any of the fun, humour, or colour behind. This show took its audience to a whole new world, and this is exactly what Pantomime is meant to do. It must surprise, enthrall, and immerse people from all walks of life into a realm of excitement.

**"**The Pantomime has not gone anywhere

Costumes, lighting, and props can be brilliant tools to draw in an audience, and the more ridiculous and camp the better! Why not embellish the comic-relief fairy godmother with over-the-top blush and sparkling garments? If there's a cave, why not decorate it with a menacing, scarlet dragon? The possibilities are endless! And, considering the limited budget unfortunately allocated to the arts nowadays, eccentric decorations can be sufficiently compensated with wacky makeup and costume choices, which make it impossible for the audience to not

laugh along with the slapstick of the characters that don them.

The true brilliance of the pantomime, of course, lies in its ability to leave both children and adults in fits of laughter. Even though children and adults typically have vastly different senses of humour, it is crucial for a pantomime's writers to maintain a perfect balance between both. I saw the previously mentioned production of *Aladdin* in Llandudno, Wales, and the retired Welsh rugby captain Gareth Thomas starred as the Genie. Throughout the show, he made numerous witty, tongue-in-cheek references to his former career and his homosexuality, which were appreciated by the more mature members of the audience.

Though this show navigated the inevitable risk of a bored adult audience with stellar success, writers must never lose sight of panto's foundational role as a dazzling spectacle that can be enjoyed by children. After all, the pantomime is one of the greatest ways of passing the art of British

banter down to our youngest generations. You can tell if a show has failed to find a perfect comedic balance if you hear that phrase 'you'll know when you're older' whispered among the rows every time a joke is made. The humour of the pantomime comes best with a large, relentless and in-your-face presence that can be embraced by everyone. Therefore, even though it may become tedious for us adults, the cliché ploys to encourage the children to yell 'he's behind you!' or to boo and jeer at the cheesy flamboyant villain should not be excluded from a successful show.

Fortunately, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, the pantomime has not gone anywhere. We can still love and enjoy this Christmassy fusion of banter, glitz, subtle crudeness, and fun for all. So, when the curtain is lifted for the holiday season, what's stopping you from making your escape to the fantastically unique world of the panto? Its bright and bashful stories, characters and jokes will be as close as ever.

– Kai Geere





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## WHAT'S ON?

## Film &amp; TV

## 30 November

St John's Screening: *Home Alone*  
Palmerston Room, Fisher Building, St Johns College

## 2 December

CUFA: Audience Select Screening

## 3 December

World Cinema Soc Christmas Screening  
Location TBC, 7:30pm

## 5 December

*Kill Bill: the Whole Bloody Affair*  
Arts Picturehouse, 6:00pm

## 30 December

Submission deadline for Watersprite  
TV writing competition

## Music

## 28 November

Hi-Fi Society  
Clare Cellars

## 3 December

Fuzzy Lights  
The Portland Arms, 8:00pm

## 4 December

The Orchestra (For Now)  
The Portland Arms, 7:00pm

## 4 December

Old McBunker Had a Farm  
The King's Bunker, 9:00pm

## 10 December

Inspiral Carpets  
Junction, 7:00pm

## Arts

## 28 November

Cambridge Botanic Lights  
Cambridge Botanical Gardens,  
4:40pm onwards

## 29 November

Cambridge Blackbirds Poetry Society  
'Blackbirds Bring Bridgemas'  
Comedy Poetry

## 30 November

African Legacies in Cambridge Museums  
Various Museums  
2:30-4pm

## 30 November

Q&A with James McDermott  
Heong Gallery, Downing, 5-6pm

## 3 December

The Performance Art of Elaine Mitchener  
Judith E Wilson studio, 6:30pm

## Theatre

## 27-29 November

DDS Christmas Comedy Night  
Howard Theatre, Downing College,  
7:00pm

## 2 December

Dick Girtington and his squirrel  
Girton College Old Hall, 9:30pm

## 3 December

Macbeth The Panto  
Newnham Old Labs, 8:15pm

## 3 December

The Merman  
Pembroke College Auditorium, 7:30pm

## 4 December

CU Show Choir: A Night to Remember  
ADC Theatre, 11:00pm

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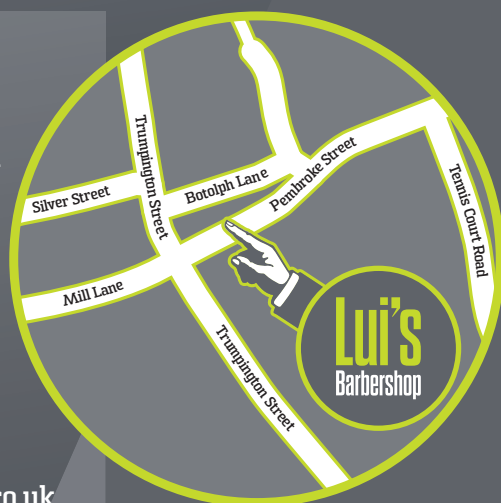
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# World champion on Bumps controversies

Joss Heddle-Bacon speaks to George Bourne about why Cambridge are better than Oxford



▼ ROW360 / THE BOAT RACE COMPANY

George Bourne thought he was going to the Olympic Games in 2024. Instead, he ended up at the University of Cambridge. Barely a year later, he was on top of the world.

In what has been a superlative 2025, weeks after graduating from one of the best universities on the planet, Bourne had a World Championship gold around his neck. His annual haul was already astonishing: a Boat Race trouncing by 5 1/2 lengths, Blades in May bumps, solo glory at Wingfield Skulls, and a clean sweep in GB's long distance trials.

Despite the sheen of recent success, the 27-year-old's row to glory has often gone against the tide. He didn't even pick up the oars until his final year of school, and had never raced in a Coxless Four until the heats of a World Championship he went on to win. And so while Cambridge's academic pressure cooker may not seem like the obvious place to rejuvenate a rowing career, for Bourne it proved to be exactly that.

"The people who run the Boat Race are worried that people come to Cambridge as a full-time rower to have a doss year, scrape their way into the seat and have a bit of fun." For Bourne, this could not be further from reality: "I couldn't have imagined that my rowing would go from where it did to where it was by the end." Ever-candid, Bourne admits: "The last year of my time at GB Rowing had been pretty tough. It was quite a big shock honestly, from February 2024 thinking I was a couple of months away from official Olympic selection, all your kit days, and suddenly it was like – you're out of the team. I needed a lift [...] and Cambridge did that for me."

The glittering run Bourne has been on since started off as a "half joke," a throwaway text that materialised into a cabinet of victories. Having forged his already late-coming career in sculling, Bourne switched to sweep rowing at Cambridge – trading two oars for one, and swapping the pressure of professionalism for a change of discipline that meant "no one expects anything". At the very outset, Bourne pinged off an "outlandish" text to a former coach, saying: "I guess my goal would be winning [the GB trials] in a single boat, and then win both in the pair, and then win the Boat Race and then win the World Champs. Wouldn't that be funny?" When he stormed to the world title this September, every part of Bourne's

pipe dream had become a triumphant reality, and his old coach replied with a surreal "Remember when you sent this?"

Cambridge's unparalleled coach and culture come up time and time again in our conversation, twin facets that have made brilliance the norm both for Bourne and light blue rowing more broadly. It's no coincidence that three of Bourne's World Championship-winning Coxless Four had gone to Cambridge. Many might see Cambridge as privileged to have the likes of Bourne in its armoury, to Bourne "the privilege was ours [...]" The culture at the Boat Club (CBC), I'd heard all about it and you think it's just a myth." The truth? "It emanates throughout the club [...] it was just epic." There is not a hint of hyperbole in Bourne's voice when he crowns Rob Baker, who heads up the men's programme, as "maybe the best coach in the world".

**“**  
*Certain aspects at Oxford “just don't really fly at Cambridge”*

Since 2018, the Championship Course has run light blue in every men's Boat Race bar one. Bow-seat Simon Baker was "seriously unwell" the night before this year's showpiece, but Bourne and co still went on to post the seventh fastest time in history. Even though "Oxford have won the recruitment battle in recent years," something – and someone – is clearly giving Cambridge the cutting edge. To Bourne, the winning ingredients are no secret: "2019 was probably the last time you would've said Cambridge would've been the favourite because of all the new intake. This year, Oxford had three Olympians and we technically had none coming in. It's what Rob Baker manages to do with either underdogs or equally matched crews to take them so far up and above."

Culture is crucial too, and certain aspects at Oxford "just don't really fly at Cambridge". Bourne reveals: "I don't mean to slander Oxford in this, but they got some great rowers in, and they didn't

really feature in any rowing tests, Erg tests, or for different reasons they weren't there for Trial Eights [...]" At Cambridge you turn up not because anyone's told you to, you don't really see anyone think they're bigger than the club or better than anyone else."

In what is "such an amateur sport," there is nothing quite like the "completely unique" Boat Race. For Bourne, glory felt "like our Andy Murray winning Wimbledon moment, because rowing's not big, but this was the moment that everyone was interested in."

Oxford and Cambridge's annual tussle on the Thames is presaged by another competition far from the water – to recruit the finest rowers they can. From the outside, it's a process shrouded in backroom mystery. But Bourne knows the inside track: "It's not so much that the universities reach out to individuals at random. People have enough links, and it will feed back to a coach that 'so and so has expressed an interest' and the coach will reach out, or [a coach] will meet someone through rowing and they'll have a conversation [...] it happens quite organically." Having plied his trade on the Cam as a nineteen-year-old novice, Bourne admits: "with the Cambridge connection, I ended up only applying here".

For those torn in between the two academic powerhouses however, it's a spicier situation. He reveals: "For someone who applied to both, you're having conversations with the two and the recruitment there becomes a bit funny. The thing I love most is this story about Rob Baker where he was talking to one guy who he knows is in conversation [with Oxford] and he says to him – 'Hey, listen. We're going to win the Boat Race. It'll be easier if we have you and harder if we don't. But ultimately, the decision is yours!'"

Last year, Bourne formed part of an embarrassment of rowing riches at Peterhouse College. In May Bumps, the college's Men's firsts were branded 'the Blue boat', boasting an Olympic gold-medallist in the stroke seat and five other Blues for good measure. Was it a coincidental coalescence of talent, or is there something particularly alluring about Peterhouse? "The first two to go there were my friends Tom George and Ollie Wynne-Griffith and they loved it. Being in the business school, it's super close to that as well. So the three of us who came

from the [GB] team – Tom Ford, James Robson, and myself – who are friends with Tom [George] and Ollie [Wynne Griffiths] all ended up in Peterhouse," Bourne discloses. "I know they enjoying having rowers at Peterhouse, and when you're a postgrad it's not that Peterhouse can offer you a space at the University, because it's not the same as an undergrad where you get a place at the college. When you then apply to your college, Peterhouse are very welcoming. It's a bit like recruitment for the University [Boat Club], when you've got people who know other people and they're asking where should we go, and someone goes 'Peterhouse is great' it's sort of like – oh we'll all go to Peterhouse as well."

As Bourne frankly concedes, Peterhouse's arsenal of rowers did "end up being a bit controversial in May Bumps". Quick to empathise, the World Champion appreciates that "there were a lot of (college) clubs who thought, oh, this isn't great. I think these things come and go in waves, and I hope they don't change Bumps rules just because good rowers end up in one college. I hope that there's a way that can be found that it's not offensive to people, and maybe people could sit there and be like 'oh, we just got bumped by Tom Ford, the Olympic champion'. But I can I can see it from both sides."

In 2024, Bourne's rowing days could have been dead in the water. "I think if I'd gone to the [Paris] Olympics, I would have retired there because I wasn't really enjoying myself in the team and hadn't been for a couple of years," he confesses. Fast forward to 2025, and the Cambridge graduate now has a Los Angeles-shaped flame burning inside him: "Having won gold this year [at the World Championships], suddenly I find myself thinking 'wouldn't it be amazing to win the Olympics in LA?'. Whereas after missing out on Paris, I was sat there like 'if I make the Olympics, it'll be the best feeling ever'. It's funny how you then get one result and think – what if we could win the whole thing?"



Continued from back page ►

## Do you have any pre-match rituals?

Watching hype YouTube edits of the sport. I also like to visualise how cool of an Instagram post I'll be able to make if I win afterwards.

## What is the best and worst bit about being captain?

The best bit is being put outside of your comfort zone. I used to find it quite scary leading training sessions and socials, but the opportunities being Captain entails really helps you grow as a person. The aura is quite nice as well. The worst bit is definitely the admin, I think I've become known for my shadmin within the committee.

## How do you manage to balance sport and work?

I'm still figuring that one out. This year is meant to be my great academic lock in, but it's still pending. I guess sport is a good outlet and training gives structure to the day.

## What does a typical training session look like for you?

1. Dread of the 15 minute cycle to Uni Sports Centre. 2. Pre session yap. 3. Optional warm up. 4. Do my exercises and then rest on Clash Royale, Instagram and TikTok. 5. Post session yap. 6. Leave to go home and make chicken and rice.

## Do you have any predictions for the upcoming season?

Hopefully not bottling our 12-year winning streak against Oxford at Varsity. A strong team performance at BUCS would be cool too!



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# Cut-throat Cambridge smash UEA

Ben Lubitsh reports as the women's basketball Blues win 86-33 in the Conference Cup

**T**he women's basketball Blues have endured a mixed bag of fairly tight affairs so far this season, with wins against the likes of Coventry and Leicester coming with disappointing results like the 4-point loss away at Loughborough earlier this month.

This week, however, all focus was on the Conference Cup, as a big clash against UEA awaited the Blues. And on this occasion, Cambridge turned up the heat in an emphatic way, earning a dominant 86-33 win against their largely stumped opponents.

Feel like setting the tone for a cup game? Take a page out of Selma Vangstein's book, who scored a fastbreak lay-up just seconds after the opening tip-off, and a quick three-pointer coming off a steal on defence. What followed was a 10-minute quarter of classy Cambridge dominance, with everyone playing their part on both sides of the ball.

The key to this early Cambridge success was defence and rebounding, with Elizabeth Neri and Faye Parker running the show on the glass and in the post. A couple of blocks from the pair and some strong presence when rebounding on both sides of the court struck fear into East Anglia's rim protectors. Not only did this limit UEA to just one bucket in the whole quarter, but it opened the floodgates for Cambridge to make it rain from behind the arc.

The confidence of this Blues side was abundantly clear, with three-point attempts coming one after the other in quick succession. Plenty were successful, yet Cambridge even managed to turn the ones that weren't into points, with aggressive offensive rebounding leading to hard-earned second chance points that continue to stack up.

East Anglia came out in the second quarter desperately trying to spark some life into their squad, with vocal

chants from the bench leading to some more inspired basketball. Yet it never truly felt like they would get back into the game, as each spell of offensive success was matched with even more scoring prowess from the Blues.

First-year guard Phoenix Sims checked into the game and made an instant impact, contributing to three scores in quick succession: a finish down low coming off an offensive rebound, a neat fastbreak assist, and a smooth mid-range jump shot. The Blues' defence then tightened up a bit, and all parts of the court were under Cambridge control for the rest of the half. It is safe to say they were cruising, as they went into their half-time huddle up 51-9.

This Blues team are notably strong starters, and they did just that when they came back out for the second half. No signs of mercy were present as Faye Parker and Adeola Amure each hit three-pointers straight out the gate, with Amure adding to her tally by banking in a mid-

range shot shortly after.

The rebounding masterclass continued, with Elizabeth Neri and Lucy Payne laughing to themselves after they each had multiple attempts at put-back lay-ups coming off of relentless attempts at second-chance points. Eventually the ball met the net, a testament to Cambridge's ability to earn their own luck throughout the evening.

As the quarter came to a close, East Anglia enjoyed a short positive spell. Some fast break opportunities were converted, but the Blues bounced back with continued domination on offence to keep the scoring gap wide as ever.

The fourth quarter starts and Cambridge, once again, come out swinging. Faye Parker added two more big blocks to her tally, one for each opening minute of the quarter, and Athena Oliver matched this defensive aggression with a steal and fastbreak layup.

East Anglia answered back with a

strong finish through contact down the other end, garnering an increasingly rare cheer from the UEA bench. Yet the excitement quickly wore off for the visitors as the free-throw to convert the play was missed and another glance up at the scoreboard revealed a 54-point gap.

To end the game, each piece of the strikingly impressive Cambridge puzzle came together. Malin Schlode got involved in the scoring action with a clean jump shot to counteract some UEA success from the free-throw line, and some nice passing moves gave Sims, Parker, and Neri some more scoring success.

As the final buzzer echoed across the University Sports Centre, it was all smiles for Cambridge. A breeze to start their cup campaign, and a well-earned return to the win column. As the winner of Birmingham vs Aston awaits in the next round, the women's Blues will be very hard to beat if they continue to match this tempo.

## Captain's Corner

Ben Lubitsh catches up with powerlifting captain Isaac Wong

**For those who don't know, what actually is powerlifting?**

Powerlifting is all about three lifts: the squat, bench press, and deadlift. The aim of the game is to lift the most across all three lifts. You usually do 2-3 competitions a year which are great fun, because it's basically a day out where months of training come to fruition on a cool platform with bright lights and a huge crowd screaming your name.

**Is it easy for beginners to join powerlifting?**

Yes! My pitch at the freshers and sports fair is that, while we're called the pow-

erlifting club, it's really just a community of gym-goers. There is absolutely no requirement to compete or lift any amount of weight, all we're looking for is enthusiasm. The bulk of our membership are people simply looking to get a bit more help with their fitness journey and find other people to go to the gym with. It's so much easier to get into the gym if you have a supportive community that can hold you to account and provide some structure and advice to your training, which is exactly what we're about.

**Who is your sporting idol?**

I quite like Khabib Nurmagomedov.

His iconic fight against McGregor showed that humility and discipline beat noisy and cocky theatrics. Style is important but that fight felt like a triumph of substance over spectacle.

**What is your best and worst sporting moment?**

Best has probably got to be that time I won British Nationals and got my Team GB call up... Worst is losing college rugby cuppers finals two years in a row to Jesus and Johns.

◀ Continued on page 31