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No.912
Friday 21st April 2023
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The Independent
Student Newspaper since 1947

VARSITY

Revealed: Big Oil's teaching deal shelved

Erik Olsson
Senior News Editor

The chemical engineering department has "paused" a scheme which gave oil companies a say over the academic content of its courses in exchange for money, a freedom of information request (FOI) has revealed.

As paying members of the department's so-called "teaching consortium", oil companies such as BP, Shell and ExxonMobil were able to "assist with teaching" and "provide input" on the contents of the chemical engineering course in return for funding.

According to the FOI, the teaching consortium has now been "paused" and all memberships have "lapsed" amid departmental concerns over "the external political environment".

During Lent term, the chemical engineering department was subject to vandalism from the activist group "This Is Not a Drill".

In response to the decision to pause the scheme, a representative

for the department of chemical engineering and biotechnology told *Varsity*: "We are committed to providing a syllabus to our students that is fully in line with our overall department commitment to generate impact in sustainability and healthcare. As a result, we are revising both syllabus and corporate engagement strategy".

Under the arrangement, the chemical engineering department also gave oil companies on the consortium priority access to its undergraduates, claiming on its website that "this leads to more opportunities for recruitment of Cambridge chemical engineering students".

Set up in 1999, the teaching consortium had been strengthening links between the department and industry for 23 years until it was put under review this academic year. Healthcare company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) as well as Swedish tech manufacturer ABB have also been members.

The chemical engineering depart-

ment has a long history of collaboration with the fossil fuel industry. Having helped found the department in 1945, Shell continue to fund a professorship in the company's name. ExxonMobil holds a lecture every year for chemical engineering students on safety and business.

News of the department's decision comes in anticipation of the University's report into the future of its fossil fuel funding. The report is set to be published in Easter term. Following its publication, academics will vote

on whether to end all funding relationships with fossil fuel companies.

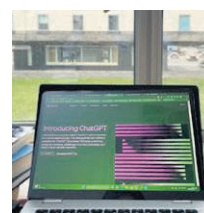
The old consortium will likely be replaced with a new "teaching and research consortium". The terms and conditions of this reformed scheme are under discussion. The FOI states: "T&C's for this will be available once internal discussions have been concluded".

BP and ExxonMobil have been approached for comment. Shell declined to comment.

Local elections
Meet the students
standing for Council
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The results are in!
How are
Cambridge
students using AI?
News Page 3 ▶



**The Queen comes
to King's**
Season 6 of *The
Crown* spotted
filming in college
News Page 6 ▶



Varsity Editorial Week 1

“Cambridge is full of scientists, printing presses, theatre groups and all I need is the guts to write about them....perhaps I’ll try out for Varsity next term”- Sylvia Plath (1956)

Interested in writing for Varsity?

Join our writers’ group on Facebook!



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Editorial

What has student journalism taught us?

‘Varsity is run by a network of elite journalists’ is the (rather problematic) mythology that has surrounded this paper since we joined as Freshers in 2020.

Being faceless is a part of our job as we are fated to only be known by the familiar bylines above breaking news stories. But a side effect of this is that the reality of the inner workings of the media industry is obscured, leading some to imaginative conclusions about the figure of the ‘journalist’ and, in our case, those behind Cambridge’s student newspaper.

Fascists, snowflakes, pro-establishment, anti-establishment, tankies, traitors, leftists, Tories, pretentious and stupid; just a few compliments regularly paid to our team at this paper. But the reality is far from this paradoxical misunderstanding of the imagined Varsity ‘deep state’.

There’s something particularly comical about reading Camfesses claiming you’re part of the establishment from under your till at your minimum wage job. If we are part of said establishment, I’d urge them to get in contact and sweep me away from my zero hour job I’ve juggled with trying to do a degree and launching a career.

If you’ve ever seen the Varsity team handing out copies of our print edi-

tions, we hope this realisation has hit you, that this mythologised group of powerful individuals is actually a straggle of hard-working students across the university from a plethora of backgrounds, *learning* to be journalists.

Instead of being omnipotent, the Varsity team is sometimes limited in what we’re able to achieve. Journalists’ ability to truly speak truth to power is too often impeded by limits on free speech. Stories holding powerful people to account can disappear if they have the ability to fight back with an expensive lawyer. Stories will be difficult to publish when threats from major institutions around the university scare off journalists and their sources.

Next time a Varsity journalist asks you on Sidgwick if you’d like a copy of the paper they’ve spent 40 hours working on, maybe don’t scoff at the phrase ‘independent journalism’. Instead, the Cambridge community should realise this is not only a public good, but a privilege.

Want to know more about this straggle of journalists? Join us! We joined Varsity in our first couple of years, and it’s the best decision we’ve made during our degrees.



Meg Byrom & Famke Veenstra-Ashmore – Editors, Lent 2023

It’s punting season. Tell us your nightmare stories...



“Went for a romantic punt with my boyfriend. Tourists mocked his skilled & it ended in a row”

“Pole got stuck in the mud and our boat hit another knocking a passenger into the Cam”

“We lost the paddle and had to pay over £100 in compensation”

“Went drunk punting with a section editor who volunteered to steer. Surprisingly, alcohol doesn’t improve your punting abilities and we bounced from one side of the river bank to the other down the cam before the editor fell in for the first time after crashing into John’s. Later that evening, he turned up at the pub still quite wet. Apparently he fell in once more after trying to get off the punt.”

“I go to Queens’ so summer = getting abuse from tourists in punts season. I have grown to enjoy being a zoo animal whilst trying to revise at this point.”

“My dad’s ribs broke!! A punting boat rode into him from the side and crushed his ribs lol”

“Got cat-called while punting. Normally I would run away, but sadly my punting abilities weren’t up to scratch. I had to just stand still as they went past”

Exclusive: Almost half of Cambridge students have used ChatGPT to complete university work

Michael Hennessey
Senior News Editor

Almost half of Cambridge students have used ChatGPT to help to complete their university studies, an exclusive *Varsity* survey has revealed.

In a self-selecting online survey completed by over 400 students, 47.3% of students admitted that they had recruited the assistance of ChatGPT, or other similar AI chatbots, since they first emerged at the end of last year. Over a fifth of students that have utilised the new tool said they use it “often” or “always” when producing their work.

The use of ChatGPT was more common among STEM students, where 53% used chatbots compared to a 43% rate among Cambridge’s humanities students.

ChatGPT is an AI program capable of producing responses which can be indistinguishable from those of a human — including academic pieces of work.

Almost a fifth of respondents have used ChatGPT producing assessed work for their degree, such as coursework. A greater proportion of participants (38.5%) in the survey said they either had already, or plan to, use AI chatbots to help with their revision in the lead up to exams this Easter Term.

Over three quarters of students that have used ChatGPT to complete University work said that they found it useful. One STEM student described it as “the equivalent to dropping one of your cleverer mates a message and asking them for help”.

Other students disagreed that the

new technology is useful, with students telling *Varsity* “it analyses poems like a five year old” and that it has “no understanding of texts beyond the most superficial possible readings”. Another student agreed, saying that “it really showed me how valuable our degrees actually are ... ChatGPT has very little critical thinking”.

A far smaller proportion of students who will take online exams this year, 7.3%, admitted that they plan to use it during their exams. Current University rules state that, although the University “recognises that artificially intelligent chatbots ... are new tools being used across the world”, the University “has strict guidelines on student conduct and academic integrity. These stress that students must be the authors of their own work”.

The University also says: “Content produced by AI platforms, such as ChatGPT, does not represent the student’s own original work so would be considered a form of academic misconduct to be dealt with under the University’s disciplinary procedures. The University has issued guidance to departments to help address concerns about risks to the integrity of assessments”.

Earlier this year, before the University’s policy was clarified, *Varsity* exclusively revealed that Cambridge’s provice-chancellor for education had said that a ChatGPT ban was not “sensible” because “we have to recognise that this is a new tool that is available”. *Varsity*’s new survey has shown that over two thirds of students agree with the provice-chancellor’s earlier comments and

have said that they do not think the University should ban the chatbot.

One student said they think “it should be banned from writing essays but not from helping to understand material”. Another student agreed, saying that “banning it is pointless, and the university should focus more on teaching well rather than relying on students not to use the tools at hand”. Another student said the chatbot does not need banning because students who use it “will simply be lowering the quality of their work in a clearly identifiable manner”.

However, many other students strongly believed that the University should clamp down further on the chatbot, with one student claiming that there is a “big risk that it will perpetuate fake science”. Another student went further, telling *Varsity* in the survey: “I hate everything about ChatGPT. I hate its implications for creativity. I think it is a soulless, dangerous piece of machinery that will damage the integrity of academia. I detest it and think it should be banned”.

Other students claimed that the chatbot “has been immensely helpful in my revision explaining the answers in a way better way than professors can”. Another undergraduate said they would not need to use ChatGPT if the dons in their department “just did their job”.

Students also revealed to *Varsity* that ChatGPT is already being integrated into course content at the University, with one student saying that they had used a “ChatGPT-written sonnet as part of a supervision in English to analyse the idea of ‘authenticity’”.

Representatives of the University have



▲ Almost a fifth of respondents used ChatGPT to produce assessed work for their degree (VARSITY)

told *Varsity* that they are “engaged with internal and external experts to understand the potential benefits and risks associated with the use of AI in the delivery of education, and in student approaches to learning”.

One student also said they had been told by a supervisor to get sample exam answers from ChatGPT because “that’s basically the best that you could be expected to write in the exam”. Another student said that the senior tutor of their college “seems pretty fine with it”.

Despite the University’s promise to enforce restrictions on AI as part of their rules against plagiarism, only one student admitted to *Varsity* that they had

ever been caught by University staff for using ChatGPT.

Many other students said that they had never used AI chatbots because they were “too scared” and “find it mildly terrifying that so many other people do”.

Several students said they have used ChatGPT to receive mental health advice, with one student anonymously disclosing that they use it “when I’m having a breakdown over essays” but say that they have “never used it for work purposes”. Another student claimed they had “used it to create a crisis plan for my depressed friend. It was 10x more helpful than the college therapist”.

Do not throw Holi paint on Saint Edmund, Hindu students told



▲ Hindu students were told off by the College’s CR president after getting paint on the statue of the college saint during Holi (VARSITY)

Erik Olsson
Senior News Editor

Hindu students at St Edmund’s College were told off by the College’s combination room (CR) president, on the request of a senior college officer, for getting paint on the statue of the college saint during the Holi festival.

In a statement addressed to the student body on Facebook, the CR president urged those who had thrown powdered paint at the statue of Saint Edmund of Abingdon, a prominent 13th century Catholic and the College’s patron saint, to be “mindful of the objects and spaces belonging to different faiths”.

He wrote: “I was deeply saddened to learn that the statue of Saint Edmund of Abingdon was plastered with colouring during the recent Holi festival ... I send my wholehearted apologies to our Catholic friends and colleagues. I’m sure we will all be mindful to avoid this happening again in the future”.

The CR president apologised to Catholic members of the college on the request of a senior college officer who had raised “serious concerns”. The announcement was also approved by the college chaplain.

St. Edmund’s College told *Varsity*: “From time to time the college asks the CR to post information on their

closed Facebook group as this is an efficient way of communicating to students”.

While the CR president recognised that “there was no malicious motive”, he encouraged students to reflect on the community’s shared values of respect and tolerance. He said: “Let us be a force for unity and continue cultivating our understanding of each other’s beliefs”.

Celebrating the triumph of light over darkness, Holi is a Hindu festival during which observers throw powdered colouring at each other. One student on the College’s Facebook confession page pointed out that this paint is in fact “a sign of respect, love and symbol of good faith”.

They said: “It was extremely well-intentioned and does not represent a lack of respect. St Edmund is a symbol of the College for all students, not just a catholic symbol”.

The CR president also attracted criticism for speaking on the behalf of all students when he had reportedly not consulted either Catholic or Hindu students. One St Edmund’s student told *Varsity*: “Reactions to the statement show that Catholic students didn’t find the gesture offensive, and a predisposed statement put out without consulting students or colleagues is both unhelpful and divisive ... The CR President’s job is to represent

the concerns of the student body to the Officers of the College, but this president has chosen to do the reverse”.

In a statement, the CR told *Varsity*: “A senior college officer requested a message from the CR President addressing the situation. The college chaplain approved a statement, which was posted to our college CR Facebook page.”

“Holi is the festival of colour celebrating rebirth, love, and springtime. Students gathered to share this colour with the statue of St. Edmund outside the chapel, intending only well wishes and to champion diversity. They may not have considered the significance that the statue has to the Catholic community and how this could have come across as disrespectful. The students and organizers involved cleaned the statue and offered sincere apologies to the chaplain, and the issue was thereby resolved. The conversation was accepting, kind, and apologetic for all parties.”

“We remain proud that St. Edmund’s is one of the most religiously and culturally diverse colleges at Cambridge. We are continuously working towards fostering a harmonious community for our students”.

News

Seven Cambridge students stand

Michael Hennessey
Senior News Editor

Campaigning has got under way for the councillor elections for Cambridge City Council that will take place as part of the local elections on Thursday 4th May.

14 of the 42 council seats will be contested in the election, with three of the elections taking place in wards with a large student presence - in the Castle, Market and Newnham wards. Labour currently have control of the Council, holding 29 seats compared to 9 for the Liberal Democrats, three for the Green Party and one independent councillor.

Students can no longer register to vote, as the deadline passed this Monday (17/04). For the first time, voters will also need identification in order to exercise their voting rights. Passports and driving licences are the two most commonly accepted forms of ID. The number of accepted forms of ID is especially restricted for young people and students - as bus passes and old age Oyster cards are among the additional forms of identification that will be accepted for older people.

Voters can still apply for free for a Voter Authority Certificate if they do not have a passport or driving licence - the

deadline to apply in time for the local elections is next Tuesday (25/04).

Seven current Cambridge students (profiled, right) are standing in the local election. Chang Liu, Archie McCann and Anthony Martinelli are standing for the Liberal Democrats. Liu is standing in Newnham ward - home to many students who live west of King's Parade, including King's and Selwyn colleges. Martinelli is standing in Market ward in central Cambridge, which also has a high student population including Corpus Christi and Downing colleges. McCann will stand in Cherry Hinton ward.

Three students are also standing for the Green Party. Dan Kittmer and Esmé Hennessey will both contest Castle ward - which is home to students from Churchill, Fitzwilliam and Murray Edwards colleges. Joshua Morris-Blake will represent the Greens in Petersfield ward.

The Cambridge Union's president, James Appiah, is also standing for the Conservative Party in the Market ward.

Last year, Sam Carling became the only Cambridge student to be elected onto the council in recent years, when he ran as a member of the Labour Party in West Chesterton ward.

James Appiah did not respond to Varsity's request for comment.



Esmé Hennessey
Green Party
Castle Ward

Green councillors present the only credible path to a sustainable Cambridge, prepared to challenge the endless pro-growth status quo of the Labour council in favour of prioritising people and our environment. Greens are not governed by the party whip, and so are not forced to vote along party lines on issues which may be detrimental to our city. I want to join our Green councillors in finding concrete solutions to the pollution in the vulnerable river Cam, divesting Council funds, and prioritising our environment and wellbeing; a green day that isn't just for the recycling of old ideas.



Chang Liu
Liberal Democrats
Newnham Ward

Like so many young people, I feel let down. While the Tories wreck our country, the Labour Party act as a rubber stamp to everything they do - abstaining on Trans Rights, Voter-ID and the SpyCops Bill. Cambridge Labour voted down solutions to tackle mould in council homes; let bike theft get out of control. The average age of a local councillor is 60, so I'm not surprised that young people are unrepresented. I will fight for our priorities like tackling the housing, climate and cost of living crisis. So if you're dismayed at the state of politics, use this election to send a message.



Dan Kittmer
Green Party
Castle Ward

The City Council is currently pursuing an agenda of endless economic growth, which only the Greens are standing up against. Listening to residents on doorsteps, there's huge concern that many in Cambridge are being left behind. On the City Council, I want to reconnect people with their representatives, especially marginalised communities and students. Greens are working hard for Cambridge, from better bike lanes and street lighting to bringing a "conversion therapy" ban to the council. I want to help sure Greens to continue delivering for Cambridge and strengthen the voice of young people on the council.

Apply to be the next President of the Varsity Society

Applications are now open for election to the office of President of VarSoc, the Varsity Student Society. The President is responsible for running our student society, organising social events for the team and will play a major role in the selection of the paper's Editors in the next academic year.

Any current member of the Society may stand for election. They must be proposed by a person who is, or has been, Editor or Deputy Editor of the paper and seconded by another member of Section Editor or higher status.

Please email president@varsity.co.uk to apply, for further information.

Nominations close at 5pm 11th June 2023. The election will be held the following week.

www.varsity.co.uk



Could you be the next Editor of Varsity?

Applications to be *Varsity's* Editor for Michaelmas 2022 will open shortly open. Please keep an eye on our website for further information on how to apply.

You will lead a team producing online content from your handover in early September and also produce regular print editions throughout full term. No previous experience at *Varsity* is required for the role. All students who are passionate about journalism and news reporting, have clear a editorial vision for the newspaper, a high level of expertise with Adobe InDesign and an eye for layout and design are encouraged to apply.

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

The deadline for applications is midday, Wednesday 7th June 2023. Interviews will take place on the morning of Monday 12th June 2023.

in local elections



Anthony Martinelli
 Liberal Democrats
 Market Ward

I'm standing for election in Market Ward, which includes many of the city centre colleges, because I believe Cambridge can be a global power for good and local government is critical to making this happen. I'm currently finishing my PhD at Caius having completed medical school here a few years ago and I represented Market as a councillor from 2018-21. I helped push the Council to declare a climate emergency and campaigned on rough sleeping, building affordable housing and air pollution. I will work to ensure student priorities are not overlooked by the City Council and hope I can win your support!



Joshua Morris-Blake
 Green Party
 Petersfield Ward

The Green Party have been challenging the business-as-usual approach of the Labour-dominated city council, working hard on behalf of students and residents through the cost of living crisis and pushing the council to go further in tackling the climate and nature crises. If elected in Petersfield, I want to prioritise creating a fair and green transport system, building more zero-carbon, affordable housing in the city by expanding the council's retrofitting scheme. In Petersfield, the Green Party are best placed to hold the council to account, stand up for our most vulnerable residents and build a fairer, greener city.



Archie McCann
 Liberal Democrats
 Cherry Hinton Ward

Cambridge Liberal Democrats are pushing for a fairer, greener, and more liberal city. We all proudly stand up for trans rights, for refugees, for unpaid carers, for renters, for students, for victims of racism, and for anybody who hasn't been given a fair deal. I'm running for election to make sure that the people who are so often unrepresented get a voice, and to push the City Council to do what's right for Cambridge on the basics: to build more homes and speed up repairs to council homes, to improve public transport, keep public toilets open and help rough sleepers.

Jesus medics dinner goes poorly

Ella McCartney
 News correspondent

Jesus College has punished medic students for getting too drunk at their subject dinner, in a move that has sparked charges of "hypocrisy" after unlimited wine refills were allegedly provided to attendees. At the Jesus medics' dinner, an annual event held at the end of Lent term, widespread binge drinking left students unwell, with some vomiting in the dining hall. Academics also reportedly took part in the heavy drinking, with two medic students having to walk a supervisor home. The events of the dinner resulted in widespread rumours that the College Dean requested offending medics be reviewed for their fitness to practice – a claim that the College has refuted. Members of the Jesus community condemned the College's behaviour, calling it "hypocritical" to blame students, as drinks were regularly refilled and staff also took part in the drinking. Speaking to *Varsity*, a spokesperson of Jesus College described the event as 'a private medics' dinner offering limited complimentary



▲ Widespread binge drinking left students unwell, with some vomiting in the dining hall (TIMUR RAKHIMOV)

drinks", where "a small number of guests behaved poorly... no one required medical attention". The spokesperson noted that individuals had "met with the appropriate Director of Studies or the Dean of College" and that "final year medical students ran a teaching session". However, they also stated that the session was "mandatory for all preclinical students", and that "there has been no College communication to students about fitness to practice".

"IS IT EVER RIGHT TO MAKE SLAVES OF OTHERS AGAINST THEIR WILL"

- Peter Peckard, 1788

PETER PECKARD MEMORIAL PRIZE

Essay or equivalent on human exploitation and the actions needed to eliminate it. Collective entries and work produced for undergraduate degrees welcomed.

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Rachel, Product Supply Start-Up Leader, Gillette and Old Spice



Alumnus of Pembroke College



News

‘Grossly unfair’: Student forced to drop out following technical difficulties with exams

Beth Doherty
News correspondent

A student who got firsts in all other papers was refused permission to proceed with their studies following technical difficulties in the submission of an online exam, *Varsity* has learned.

The student, who was at Jesus College studying MML until this January, shared their experience with *Varsity*. During May Week 2022, after completing exams, they were told that the files for their last two exams could not be accessed. By the time they could access the files, it was too late.

The student sat all eight of their exams. During the exam period, they were experiencing issues with their laptop battery which meant it always had to be plugged in and, when exams were over, they decided to get it fixed. However, due to an apparent glitch, the files of their last two exams were not accessible by the Faculty. The student told *Varsity* that they uploaded them correctly and received a TurnItIn receipt. The Faculty asked for the exam scripts, but by this point the student had submitted the laptop for repair and could not access the files.

The student stated that they told the

Faculty that their laptop was being fixed, and gave the name of the person fixing it. Following this, the student first applied to the Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals (OSCCA) for an exam review before results had been released. Once they had their laptop back, they also sent on the scripts of the two exams. The metadata was verified to have been from the relevant exam dates.

The student scored a first in all other papers, and as such would have still passed even with a 0 in both papers. OSCCA drew the student’s attention to Section A.4 within the Guide to Examinations which stated that failure to upload exam scripts would result in a 0 mark. Rather than a 0 mark being given in line with this, however, which would have enabled the student to progress, an exam review was refused and they did not have standing to progress.

As such, they applied to the Exams and Mitigation Committee (EAMC) for permission to progress. The student, who is of Turkish descent, told *Varsity* that the business fixing their laptop was also run by people of Turkish descent. The EAMC then suggested to the student that the person who owned the business, who had a similar name to the student’s father, was in fact the student’s father. It stated in correspondence seen by *Varsity*,



▲ A spokesperson for Jesus College said they cannot comment on individual cases (ROSIE BRADBURY)

“whilst it is not confirmed that they are the same person, it is coincidental.” This was despite the knowledge that the student was estranged, and had been living in college accommodation full-time during the vacation period.

Correspondence to the student repeatedly questioned why the student had not gotten their laptop fixed at an Apple store, despite the student’s concerns about cost as an independent student. The EAMC then refused permission to progress, which the student appealed.

During the appeal process, the student was permitted to continue with their studies and studied in Michaelmas 2022. However, they received a decision in January 2023 stating that OSCCA had denied the appeal as the reasons were not “grave or medical” and as such the

student could not continue with their studies at Cambridge. The appeal was “persuaded” that the person fixing the student’s laptop was not their father.

However, the exam allowance of permission to progress was still refused with no explanation of why a 0 mark could not instead be given. The student was then asked to withdraw from studies, and given a 10 week period to move out of college accommodation.

In the run up to exams, the student had also experienced bereavement as well as significant struggles with mental health, which their college was aware of. They had previously explored possible intermission with the College. However, as an estranged student they would not have been able to return home.

In an email seen by *Varsity*, the student also received a promise from a senior member of college administration that they would not be kicked out if they failed their exams. As a result, the student had decided to sit their exams.

The student is now looking for a job and exploring their future paths. However, they told *Varsity* that they were concerned that this could happen to another student, and that they were extremely disappointed with how Jesus College, their Faculty, OSCCA and the EAMC had all handled the situation. They stated

that there were clear failings in the approach to welfare and exam mitigations, and that it felt grossly unfair to be kicked out due to what they saw as essentially a technical difficulty.

Criticism has previously been levied at the University’s processes for focusing purely on the exam period itself, rather than what a student might have experienced earlier in the year, and for failing to understand the realities of physical and mental health.

When contacted for comment, a spokesperson for Jesus College told *Varsity* that while they “cannot comment on individual cases”, the “College works swiftly and closely with students who need to make applications” to the EAMC, offering “extensive pastoral and practical support” through the application and appeals process.

A Jesus College spokesperson said: “We cannot comment on individual cases, but the College works swiftly and closely with students who need to make applications to the Extenuating Circumstances and Assessment Mitigation Committee (EAMC). We offer extensive pastoral and practical support to students throughout an application and, if necessary, in any appeal process.”

Homerton students asked to prove religion

Nabiha Ahmed
News correspondent

A test of faith has been asked of Homerton students by their College, who request written proof of religion when students make faith-based requests for accommodation.

When requesting a fridge in their room on religious grounds, Homerton students are asked to provide a letter of support from a member of a religious institution. Similar rules apply for those asking the college to provide them with a personal fridge, and for students purchasing their own appliance.

Varsity understands that Homerton is the only Cambridge college to request proof of religion for faith-based needs.

One affected student said: “It was very strange. I’ve never been asked to prove my faith before.”

The student did not challenge the college’s request, and told *Varsity*: “I didn’t show any resistance because I was new. So, I wasn’t accustomed to how the University operates.”

Student B said the request was a “weird thing to ask” but acknowledged that they “get why college do”.

Another student provided the College with adequate proof but the College did not provide them with a fridge for their

room. “They still didn’t get me a fridge as they promised, giving other excuses and so I just left it,” claims the student.

“This was a major issue before since the college did not provide any halal options,” said the student, who requested the fridge in their first year. Since then, the student says “there has been progress” as the college more regularly provides Halal food for normal meals and for formals upon request.

Another Muslim student, however, described the limited kitchen facilities at Homerton as “a joke” particularly for students of faith. The student, who bought their own fridge for faith reasons, also told *Varsity*: “for a college that doesn’t have ovens nor freezers, asking for one shouldn’t have to be such a hassle. It’s a joke that we need to provide it.”

Students requesting fridges on medical and mental health grounds are also asked for supporting documents. “To be fair to college, they even ask those who need it for medication for proof. So it isn’t a discriminatory process,” one student told *Varsity*.

Other students, however, do not share the same sentiment. “This issue should have been raised earlier, especially by the affected people,” one said. “But it’s better late than never”.

Homerton College did not reply to a request for comment.

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Cambridge drops publishing fees for low-income countries

Ritika Singhal
News correspondent

Cambridge University Press (CUP) is to drop open-access publishing fees for academics in low and middle income countries.

Academics across 5000 institutions from 107 countries will be able to publish without a paywall in 400 journals covered under the Cambridge Open Equity Initiative. The scheme also extends to independent scholars in these countries.

The initiative, set to launch in July, is meant “to support authors in low- and middle-income countries who wish to publish their research open access but do not have access to funding.”

CUP is seeking support for the initiative from institutional partners, such as major university libraries, to make it sustainable.

Currently, without fee waivers, journals charge around \$2000 or \$3000 in article processing charges. Several institutions - primarily in high-income countries - have ‘transformative agreements’ which allow academics at these institutions to avoid this charge, disadvantaging scholars in low and middle income countries.

Academics in low and middle income countries who are denied the larger audience of open access publishing therefore

face their work being cited less often, which can be a factor in hiring and promotion decisions.

Earlier this year, CUP announced that more than half of its research papers are published open access and that the vast majority will be published open access by 2025.

Mandy Hill, the managing director of academic publishing at CUP, said it was necessary to “publish[ing] the best research, wherever it comes from.”

Hill recognised the importance of diversity among academic authors but she signalled that the initiative was about much more than that. “The problem is not simply about diversity among authors - critical as that is to the intellectual lifeblood of academia. We risk missing out on vital contributions to everything from mental health to clean energy from academics in low- and middle-income countries. Researchers in such countries played critical roles in understanding development economics and democratisation, the emergence of stem cell technology and sequencing the Omicron variant of Covid-19”.

Hills mentions that the initiative won’t be sustainable unless it receives sufficient external support and finds it risky. However, she said that CUP “have to try - and the global scholarly community will benefit as we do so.”

Con don pays back government cash

Suchir Salhan
News correspondent

An ex-Cambridge academic and convicted fraudster has paid £1 million to the taxpayer after using a green energy scheme to swindle the Government and fund a lavish lifestyle.

Dr Ehsan Abdi-Jalebi lost his fellowship at Churchill College after syphoning off funding grants worth a total of £2.5 million. Abdi-Jalebi used his PhD students’ bank accounts and other falsified documents to receive payments. He then transferred this money to his personal accounts to lease a Maserati sports car and to rent property in the UK and Iran.

The National Crime Agency reported earlier this week that the fraudster has now returned embezzled funds after an extended investigation into his finances.

The legal saga was first sparked when Abdi-Jalebi attempted to travel from Heathrow to Tehran in 2015 with a Thorntons Continental chocolate box filled with £100,000 in cash, resulting in his arrest. The stolen grant funding has now been repaid to the taxpayer.

As *Varsity* previously reported, the former Engineering Fellow was the founder of Wind Technologies, a company that received funding from the Department for Energy and Climate Change, the EU and Innovate UK. Abdi-Jalebi lied on

the grant applications and used affiliate companies to duplicate applications.

Abdi-Jalebi claimed the money was being spent on a secret cutting-edge wind turbine in Iran. He failed to produce any evidence for this project.

In his 2018 sentencing, Judge Martin Beddoe dismissed Abdi-Jalebi’s claims that the money was used to build the machine in Iran as “simple fiction”. He had withdrawn more than £820,000 in cash over four years and took more than £1.5 million to Dubai and Iran for personal use.

Abdi-Jalebi admitted 13 counts of forgery. He was ordered to repay the funds or face seven years in prison.

The Crown Prosecution Service and the National Crime Agency’s pursuit of Abdi-Jalebi’s foreign assets has culminated in the recovery of £988,411 to the UK exchequer and a further £60,000 from a house sale in Trumpington this week.

Cynthia Caiquo from the CPS said: “Jalebi stole government money, which was intended to provide green energy and help improve the environment. Through our work with international jurisdictions we were able to secure the repatriation of £1m, which has now been returned to fund future projects.”

Netflix's The Crown comes to Cambridge

Bella Shorrock
Deputy News Editor

Royalty came to Cambridge this week (17/04) as filming for *The Crown* season six took over King’s College. The college was closed to tourists as the final instalment of the hit royal drama filmed the wedding of Trinity College alumnus Prince Charles and Camilla in the King’s dining hall.

Varsity understands that several King’s students were extras in the scene. Some students shared photos on social media of the production and actors involved, including Dominic West in his role as Charles, Prince of Wales. Not all students were positive about the filming - one King’s student told *Varsity* that, while the production was exciting, they assumed the College had “been paid a ton of money”; money that could be used to mitigate rent costs amid the ongoing rent strike. The new episodes of *The Crown* are expected to be released at the end of this year.





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News

Crikey - Crocs!

Fifty saltwater crocs have been recorded as being held captive in the Cambridge area. Research by campaign group Born Free has shown that households in Cambridge also hold five Nile crocodiles and three savannah cats. These owners are licensed by the government to hold dangerous animals. The full survey found that 3,951 dangerous wild animals are held nationally.

Graduate challenges Rees-Mogg

Rory Cockshaw, recent Catz graduate and campaigner for vegan charity Viva!, garnered attention online for debating Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg on GB News. The debate went ahead after *Varsity* exclusively revealed Darwin May Ball's exclusively plant-based menu. Rory challenged the Tory MP on land use, food equity and the sustainability of our current food system.

Lucy Cav new access programme

Lucy Cavendish College has extended its academic enrichment programme, an initiative aimed at helping students from comprehensive schools apply to Oxbridge. The college has now rolled out the programme in 180 schools. It consists of sessions in how to make a competitive application. Lucy Cav is the first college in Cambridge to admit a more than 90% comprehensive-educated cohort.

Police show up to just half of burglaries

A recent report has revealed that only half of burglaries in Cambridgeshire are attended to by the police. This has emerged after national debate over the 45,000 incidents that went unattended across the country last year. The Liberal Democrats said more neighbourhood policing is needed, arguing the current situation is an indictment on the Conservative party's record on crime.



▲ FAMKE VEENSTRA-ASHMORE

University watch

Eric Williams brings you the top student stories from the other place(s)

Sheffield looks for life on Jupiter's moons

Sheffield University researchers are working with the European Space Agency on a mission to find extraterrestrial life on Jupiter's moons.

The Jupiter Icy Moons Explorer, aka 'Juice', launched last week accompanied by a "radio and plasma wave instrument" developed by the Sheffield researchers.

Juice is set for an eight year journey in deep space before orbiting Jupiter's largest moon, Ganymede, which is thought to have oceans beneath its icy surfaces. The spacecraft will be the first to ever orbit a moon other than our own.

Oxford malaria vaccine approved by Ghana

Ghana has become the first country in the world to approve Oxford University's new R21/Matrix-M vaccine for malaria.

Oxford's vaccine has been found to be 77% effective at preventing malaria - the first time the WHO's aim of 75% efficacy has been reached.

It is the first time a major vaccine has been approved first by an African country - a historic moment reportedly made possible by major efforts by Ghanaian regulators in the aftermath of COVID-19 to not be left "last in queue."

York student charged for egging the King

Patrick Thelwell, a York University student, has been found guilty of "threatening behaviour" under the Public Order Act for the crime of throwing an egg at Charles III last November after the King's accession to the throne.

Thelwell has been ordered to do a 12 month community order, 100 hours of unpaid work, and pay £600 in court costs.

In a post on Twitter ahead of the verdict, Patrick said: "I will not apologize for standing against the institutions of monarchy and the genocidal British state."



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The Cambridge engineer keeping Ukraine warm, one window at a time

Harry Blakiston Houston's ingenious windows make war-damaged houses habitable again. Now, he's got his sights on insulating the whole of Ukraine

Chris Patel

When Russian forces leave a Ukrainian city or town, life there is forever changed. They leave huge craters in the roads, landmines in the long grass, and millions of broken windows. After Biotechnology PhD student Harry Blakiston Houston learned about the latter, he knew he could help. His solution? Inventing a new type of window that can take a near-freezing room and make it warm and comfortable. In just a few months, he's installed 2,000 of them across Ukraine.

Harry paused his studies at Hughes Hall last December to travel to Ukraine with a small team of engineers, and they were shocked by the living conditions they found there. Harry tells me that the Ukrainians they have been helping "have basically nothing left", and that they try to keep warm in any way they

can, replacing bomb-shattered windows with shower curtains, or jamming teddy bears into bullet holes in a futile attempt to stop the wind whistling through.

"There was an old woman in Mykolaiv, in southern Ukraine, who had been sleeping in her bathtub for two months because it was the warmest place in her house," Harry recounts. But after he installed his innovative windows, "the house was immediately warmer and lighter", allowing the elderly woman to return to "some kind of normality". That's when the team first realised, "We're on to something here."

“Part of Putin's war is about trying to make people in Ukraine cold and miserable

Harry's four-layered windows use readily available materials — polyethylene, PVC piping, pipe insulation and duct tape — and are simple to build and install. Harry points out that while "glass shatters" and "wood splinters and doesn't let light in", his windows don't shatter when hit by shockwaves, and cost just £12 each to build. "There is nothing else available today that does as good a job as what we've got." Through ads on local Facebook groups in Ukraine, social media channels, radio publicity and even lists of affected areas written by the Ukrainian government itself, Harry and the team

can quickly find the homes that need their windows the most, and make them habitable again.

"Part of Putin's war is about trying to make people in Ukraine cold and miserable [...] It's about breaking their resolve to actually continue defending themselves." Insulate Ukraine are fighting this tactic on the ground, and with a clear goal in mind. "We intend to have hubs across Ukraine from where we can replace any shattered window with our solution within 24 hours by simply providing the required equipment." By the end of the year they aim to install 50,000 windows in liberated areas — an intimidating target which they can't meet without help.

Harry reveals, "we have our eyes on corporate partners [...] to insulate entire cities, entire villages, entire towns." Individual donations, like the £500 donation from Queen's College JCR, help buy the building materials; Insulate Ukraine have raised nearly \$100,000 so far. Even if they meet their target of 50,000 windows, there are an estimated 10 million windows in liberated areas of Ukraine that need fixing. But Harry is singularly motivated to get the job done.

For Harry, this project stems from "an interest in tinkering" that comes not from his Biotechnology studies, but from his upbringing on a farm in Northern Ireland. Harry has always tried to find ways to apply his skills in the real world; he took a break from his undergraduate degree at Bristol to develop a "privacy-first phone app". Harry is also motivated by his faith. He regularly takes time to pray for the

Ukrainian people he helps — for him, faith provides "a compass for life."

We often think of Cambridge University as a bubble, and this certainly has some truth to it. But with St Catharine's student Nikolai Nizalov operating supply drones on the Ukrainian border, and Danny Mykhaylyuk (also St. Catharine's) sending thousands of pounds of equipment to Ukraine, Harry is not the only Cambridge student who has stepped far outside the safety of the university to help Ukrainians in need.

Harry and the team keep a journal of their experiences, and, above all else, the human connections they have made are what stand out through their writing. They have met countless mothers who have lost sons to the war and yet

“We want to insulate entire cities, entire villages, entire towns

continue to play the role of mother to everyone they can. In the journal, Harry recounts meeting one woman, Dasha, whose flat had an air temperature of 0°C before he replaced her windows. He writes, "It is difficult to comprehend the emotional lift one would feel when a stranger turns up and makes one feel physically warmer and cared for. As Dasha showed us out, she thanked us, wiping away tears from her eyes."



LL IMAGES COURTESY OF INSULATE UKRAINE

Features

Are non-male drinking societies any better?

Drinking societies are seen to be posh, male and ‘predatory,’ but are the alternatives for women and non-binary people ‘pretty awful’ too?

Alice Stephens

In Michaelmas, a *Varsity* article about the activities of Downing’s all-male drinking society got picked up by *The Times*. Following on from similar exposés in the past, the coverage centred around the treatment of women by these groups. In this instance, a porter at Downing had discovered letters in the pidges of female freshers ‘deemed attractive’ by the male members, inviting them to a swap with the theme ‘Anything But Clothes’.

It shouldn’t take a sociology student (me) to explain why that’s inappropriate. Apparently, the Master of Downing, Alan Bookbinder, didn’t need one either. He sent an email around the whole College reiterating the ban on drinking societies, attacking their exclusive nature. His focus was on the entitled misogyny of the invitation, and yet another example of toxic masculinity. The main concern of national media, *Camfess* and *Varsity* comment sections was the same. But I happened to know that the women and non-binary drinking society at Downing had sent a similar letter to male freshers, which hadn’t been discovered.

“**I just like to have fun. There’s nothing wrong with that**

Of course, these things don’t happen in a vacuum. There are systemic power configurations that mean certain individuals and groups hold more power in certain settings, and that render their actions towards less powerful groups uniquely harmful. In this case, a group of men identifying ‘attractive’ women to invite to an event ties into a long, long history of men judging women and non-binary people according to a restrictive standard of female beauty

in a manner which divides and degrades.

Conversely, doesn’t it take away agency to completely let non-male drinking societies off the hook? If drinking society culture in Cambridge is as patriarchal as they say, how do women and non-binary people justify their involvement? It might be true that non-male drinking societies are better behaved and more inclusive than their more infamous counterparts – or, that assumption might itself be rooted in misogyny. To find out, I spoke to people across Cambridge from all sides of this very old divide.

The first person I spoke to was Amy, a member of Medwards’ drinking society. She seemed to have an answer readily prepared. “People make way too much fuss about this,” she complained: “I think drinking socs have been blown up into this huge serious issue, when really it’s just a bunch of undergrads making friends, going out and wearing silly outfits.” Has Amy, who identifies as a feminist, ever felt her values compromised by her membership? She laughed. “I like to have fun. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

The next person I spoke to is a member of Downing’s Orchids, a women and non-binary drinking society with an unusual history. The Orchids, according to people I’ve spoken to and my own late-night trawling of *Varsity*’s archives, used to be one of the most toxic and exclusive societies of the lot. But, in late 2020, it underwent a reformation to become completely open access, running events on a first-come, first-served basis with a no-pressure policy on alcohol. Bella, an Orchids member who “never drinks more than one or two units at an event” said she always felt welcomed and included, and that the presidents had taken care to organise games that didn’t exert pressure on anyone to drink heavily.

Bella also made an interesting point about unequal levels of pressure. “The men’s societies have never responded to criticism about inclusivity, from student journalists or

otherwise. They don’t care. Women and non-binary societies at least try.”

A former member of another college’s women and non-binary drinking society, Naomi, thought that drinking societies, by nature, could not be inclusive or progressive. While we were talking, she got out her phone and showed me the Instagram page of her former society. “Look,” she said, scrolling down through the years: “It’s, like, fifteen of the same person.” She wasn’t wrong – although this was a society that had been ‘inclusive’ for several years, the membership was limited to white, conventionally attractive girls.

Naomi told me some more about her experience. “My friend and I were pretty much the only people of colour at the introductory event. I had fun, but as soon as we started going to swaps it was very quickly apparent that drinking society culture is a white space in Cambridge. I left pretty quickly, and I don’t feel like my social life has suffered at all.” I asked her if she thought women and non-binary societies were doing anything better than the men’s. “The all-male ones are worse,” she said, thoughtfully “but to say the women’s ones are inclusive is going too far.”

Several of Naomi’s friends agreed with her. Alina, who is still a member, said that it was the sexualised aspect of drinking society swaps that hindered claims to inclusivity. “I’m not straight or white, and the swaps are only ever with all-male societies. They’re basically set up like mating rituals, to be honest. So, Western patriarchal beauty standards and heteronormativity are obviously going to come into it, no matter how inclusive the women and non-binary drinking socs try to be.”

Oliver, who identifies as non-binary, told me about their experience in a mixed college. “I had friends in the older years who were in the all-male drinking society, but I was only invited to the women’s one. I wasn’t bothered because I’d have chosen it anyway, but I did think it was interesting

that most non-binary people and gay men choose not to join men’s drinking societies.”

Parker, a member of the men’s drinking society at Oliver’s college, said that

“**The all-male ones are worse. But to say the women’s ones are inclusive is going too far**

he asked the gay and non-binary prospective members whether they’d like to be part of the men’s society, but that they usually chose the women’s. One of my NatSci friends later informed me that male homosocial bonding is generally predicated on performing a certain ‘hegemonic’ standard of masculinity, which excludes those who don’t engage in that performance. That would explain why men’s societies tend to be more exclusive, and why women and non-binary inclusive societies who they go on swaps with become self-selecting according to a restrictive standard of patriarchal beauty.

But, that all seems a bit reductive. Parker tells me a story about an interaction between one of his friends and a women’s drinking society this year. “They were ranking our members according to how attractive they were, and then they all got bad pictures of the guy they decided was least attractive and made him their phone screen background. That was completely of their own accord – it wasn’t as if we asked them to do that at a swap or anything. I don’t think he was supposed to find out, but he did. I thought it was pretty awful.”

The last person I spoke to was Ella, a graduate of Pembroke who regrets her former involvement in a drinking society. “I think people are trying, but it’s not enough. Whatever your stance is on drinking societies, you can’t argue that having a more diverse membership magically makes them inclusive spaces.”

All student names have been changed

The Drinking Soc: a *Varsity* history



2013: Bulldogs put in the doghouse

At the Churchill Bulldogs’ 2013 iteration of their flagship fresher event “Sinister Swap,” female freshers were made to line up for a bra-unhooking competition (carried out by male attendees). The event was held at the Pitt Club, and several girls were reportedly taken home in a semi-conscious state by society members. The event was banned by the college the following year.



2014: ‘Get involved, get keen and smash’

In 2014, *Varsity* revealed screenshots from a Selwyn drinking society groupchat, in which members ‘rated’ women they had slept with, describing various women as “cavernous,” “heinous,” “effervescent,” or “naughty.” That same year, in a leaked email, the Emmanuel Lions’ presidents encouraged members to “get involved, get keen and smash it (/the girls).” The email also stated that the list of organised swaps was liable to change as “more may be added subject to demand (i.e. female demand for Emmanuel penis).”



2015: Fresher set on fire during initiation

In 2022, Clare College’s drinking society accidentally set a fresher on fire during initiation. Said fresher was covered in flammable liquid and tasked with putting out a lit toilet roll tucked into his shorts by running into the wind. In the process, he caught fire and ended up hospitalised. Society members were encouraged to donate to a charity for burn victims but received no other punishment.

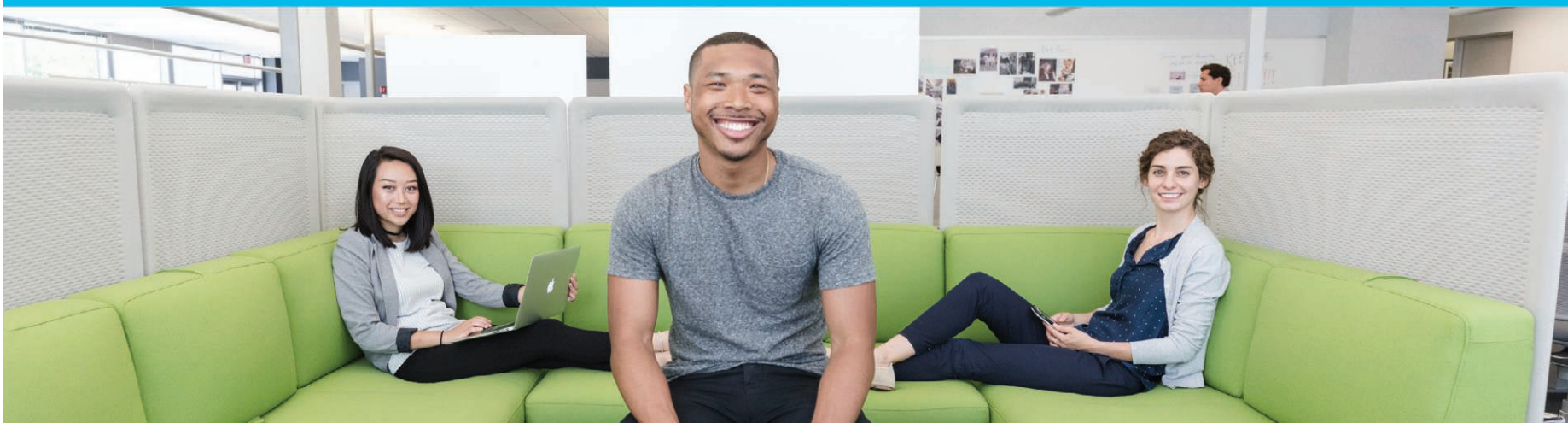


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▲ Cartoon by Hannah Castle



Famke Veenstra-Ashmore

Student journos should let their stories speak for themselves

Famke debates the role of student journalism in her outgoing editorial

Newspapers, especially ones run by students, have a duty to be exciting [...] Their purpose is to provoke and shock,' claimed a previous Editor in his out-going comment piece. I certainly don't reject the premise that student journalism should be exciting – or even a little provocative where effective. But I find my cynicism growing when this is labelled a duty.

Are there any duties which we're required to perform as student journalists? Claiming to defy authority rings hollow when in practice that means borrowing from the tabloid playbook. It might get us a few more clicks, or a couple of national bylines, but should this be the main motivator behind our paper's reportage?

As we so often append to our promotional material, *Varsity* remains one of the only independent student papers in

the UK. Detached from student unions, universities, or giant corporate structures, we are afforded a level of freedom unheard of in the vast majority of media outlets. And whilst what happens in the various recesses of Cambridge is not of interest to everyone, the city's culture and climate has unrivalled influence on intellectual circles, social-issues of the day, and even our politics and government. It seems to me a missed opportunity if we occupy ourselves with a self-induced challenge to authority.

That's not to say that we should avoid the basic practice of holding the University and its institutions to account. We certainly haven't shied away from challenging authority this term. Our first splash exposed a data leak in the SU, accusations of ballot tampering in the Cambridge Union were uncovered, and most recently, proposals on University legislation found themselves interrogated. This has all been done, however, not with a sense of duty to provoke and

excite, but rather to increase public access to stories which would otherwise fly under the radar.

Accountability is about exposing failures and assigning responsibility, and is often the first-step in bringing about change. Influencing positive change is extremely exciting, and for me, much more exciting than shocking readers or challenging them with ideas they might find uncomfortable. If uncomfortable means controversial, it's hard to justify that all these ideas deserve to be heard. Controversy should be reported on, not deliberately created.

I'd argue, then, that our role, not duty, is to undertake thorough and honest reporting, which focuses on the facts as well as the reading experience. There's a fine line between making a headline 'sexy' (as my co-Editor describes it) and distorting sensitive narratives. An aggressive front page scoop should earn its aggression – I offer this term's example, 'Sidney Shame', as deserving of

its headline.

What many readers do not realise is that the student workforce of *Varsity* is entirely volunteer-run. There is no financial incentive, no guarantee of a job by the end of it. Given how many hours I've spent in our office, this began to feel a little disheartening three prints down the line. But as I sat in on a news meeting the next day, I was swiftly reminded that this commitment is rewarded by being able to work on a paper which can be as experimental and ambitious

Controversy should be reported on by papers – not deliberately created.

as the team wishes.

Within this freedom is the opportunity to make mistakes or perform underwhelmingly – an inevitable part of

the learning process. As we often have to remind readers, we are not trained journalists. We don't have the support network, money, or resources of Robert Downey Jr. in *Zodiac*. Occasionally an editorial will be hastily typed-up with 15 minutes to spare. Sometimes, we recycle the same stock image taken by *Varsity* veteran Louis Ashworth years ago. Very rarely, factual errors slip through – but all this combines into what I have found to be a practical and profound learning experience.

I agree that students deserve a paper willing to challenge authority rather than legitimise it, and have enjoyed seeing *Varsity* evolve into a distinct and bold, yet unabashedly student-centric paper. This term's team has carefully curated stories which have both raised eyebrows and served an essential function without compromising on truth and sensitivity. But at no point have I felt a duty to frame our articles in a provocative way. Good stories speak for themselves.

Comment

Head to head: Should Cambridge go Vegan?

Clarissa Salmon and Sam Hudson clash on the SU's recent motion to make all uni catering vegan



The recent motion passed by the Cambridge Student Union to support a campaign to make University Catering Services fully plant-based has sparked much controversy. The debates around the decision have centred around the scale of the initiative. 'It's just five cafes', i.e. you can live with it, can also be read as 'it's just five cafes', i.e. how will the measure be impactful. Frankly, this reductive dialogue avoids the real issues at stake in this motion. These five cafes are staples of student life and will affect the student population. The green gains of the initiative are similarly non-negotiable: veganism is the single biggest way to reduce your individual environmental impact. The reason that students are getting so up in arms about this motion is that it removes scope for individual decision making. While this might sound spookily authoritarian, it is precisely what we need.

When environmental decisions are placed at the door of individuals, those who make carbon conscious choices lose out. Since meat and dairy are the norm in our catering services, plant-based customers are often offered disappointing options low in protein or variety. This in turn reinforces stereotypes that plant-based diets are bland or innutritious.

Opting for a plant-based menu will force our University to develop tastier and more varied vegan food options, empowering students to seriously consider climate conscious meals outside of the cafeteria. Plant-based eating is just as balanced and nourishing as meat and dairy when prepared with nutrition in mind: our catering services should reward rather than punish environmentally conscious consumers.

Fundamentally, intervening in individual decision making is often a necessary step as we face our man-made climate crisis. Take single use plastic as an example: when plastic bags are free, the consumer will opt for them. When top-down regulations are imposed, such as a 5p bag charge, we change our behaviour.

However, this is not to ignore the potentially harmful impact of this motion on people with dietary requirements or eating disorders. Dietary requirements

can be accommodated by the University Catering Services, but the SU need to step up for the latter group. The SU should consult relevant advisory bodies and students with eating disorders before implementing the motion, then provide affected students with guidance and support afterwards.

Everyone deserves a right to food that will nourish them. However, veganism does not equal restriction. As it stands, vegan students with eating disorders are adversely affected by UCS' poor provisions. Plant-based catering should be about adding, not taking away. There's scope here to provide fake meat for familiarity but also, excitingly, to introduce students to new foods. This is an opportunity for Cambridge to destigmatise veganism, reduce our environmental impact and diversify food options. As long as it's executed sensitively, I'm in favour.



▲ANNA WEBB



As radical as the SU think they might be, our diets have served as ideological battlegrounds for millennia. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the Italian Futurist, released a cookbook in 1932 in his peculiar attempt to create a new, virile race of Italians. Within the book he cast scorn on the lethargic pasta-munching habit of his fellow Mediterraneans, advocating for the total abolition of pasta across his homeland. This dietary advice was quite convenient given Mussolini's lack of success in the ongoing "Battle for Wheat" - an autarkic propaganda campaign supported by the Futurists. Strangely, Italians did not heed Marinetti's recipes for phallic meat sculptures, and have thankfully stuck with pasta to this day.

We are quite right to mock Marinetti and his eccentric pasta prohibition. But they are both no less illogical than claiming, as the motion which passed did, that our mental health would somehow be "hugely boosted" by forcing vegan grub on us all.

Fundamentally, regardless of what you think about veganism, the root issue with this motion comes down to a question of democracy and liberalism, and to whether you believe in either.

From the reaction the motion has generated, it is clear that only a tiny mi-

nority of students actually support what the SU is doing. Even among those who are vegan, the motion is controversial. So it is utterly bizarre that representatives of the SU - an organisation which is meant to represent students and their interest - chose to pass this motion.

Those in favour of the motion argue that it is for the greater good. But deciding what is good for students while totally ignoring their own opinions flagrantly disregards the democratic principles on which the SU is meant to operate.

“The SU should leverage free choice

So what this debate really represents is a wider debate about how we should approach climate issues. In their vulgar, utilitarian reasoning, the motion and its supporters have fed the narrative that liberal democracy is an obstacle to necessary change. Not only is this narrative untrue, but it is dangerous.

Throughout its history, authoritarians such as Marinetti have always found excuses to overrule liberal democracy. Yet each and every time democracy has shown itself to be more resilient than its cynical naysayers.

Instead of denying it, the SU should leverage free choice to its advantage. While a ban on animal products will deter many students from even eating at university catering sites, simply subsidising and lowering the cost of plant-based foods relative to their alternatives is likely to be a far more successful way to reduce consumption of animal products.



Asha Kaur Birdi

Imposter syndrome is far from a new phenomenon in Cambridge. Self-doubt and wondering what fraudulence you committed to get here is a quintessential part of the experience. Even if you happen to be one of the lucky few blessed with an abundant supply of serotonin and self-esteem, everyone has had that one existential supervision that made them re-evaluate their life as they knew it.

Whenever I bring up my Mike Ross-esque sense of personal illegitimacy, I am reminded that expectations are extraordinarily high here, the culture is competitive and I shouldn't be so hard on myself. I earned my place. I am met with reassurance and told to stifle the gut instinct that sometimes screams "you should not be here!" But what if I am the imposter? Are we all just too scared to admit it?

The more I reflect on my first two terms at Cambridge, the more I cannot help but feel that historical truth may lie at the unforgiving heart of my imposter syndrome. It is no secret that the Uni-

The other kind of imposter syndrome

Feeling like a fraud doesn't always stem from an inferiority complex

iversity sought to serve privileged interests from its inception - and the legacy of this framework that upheld a white, upper-class elite is still felt today. Even though huge strides have been made to improve diversity on all fronts, the phantoms of class inequality, prejudice and racism continue to lurk these halls. I am reminded that the percentage of private school pupils admitted in 2021 was quadruple the proportion of the national population which they constitute. Analysis found that, as recently as 2019, Cambridge accepted more Etonians than

“The ghosts of the past are not easily shaken off

black male students.

For me however, the sense of being an imposter is not just about academics. It manifests in questions about which - capital S - School you went to; in May Ball tickets which cost the same as a

small holiday; in uneasy stares and awkward silences when race gets brought up. Beyond just admissions statistics, the ghosts of the past are not so easily shaken off. Sometimes, I am all too aware that I am taking up space at an institution that was never for me.

I cannot speak for every marginalised student, nor do I aim to, but I feel as though there is a distinctive binary that students from traditionally under-represented backgrounds must navigate at places like this. Your first option is to embrace the "imposter" and make room for yourself in well-established, white-dominated spaces - whether that be a sports team, drinking soc, the Union or even this paper. The second is to set up spaces of your own that affirm the belonging of people like you.

Let me give you a real-world example. I decided to go with the first option when I joined Varsity, a place where I felt like almost no-one looked like me. While it has been one of the most fruitful experiences of my time at Cambridge (and I would encourage everyone to give it a go!), sometimes I was overcome with

the sense that, at any given moment, someone would out me as the fraud I was; that my writing would in some way confirm the belief that people like me don't belong in spaces like this. I braved the unease, and I am (mostly) happy I did.

On the other hand, Tia-Renee, a friend and fellow Caian, rejected the first option in order to save herself the discomfort and self-explanation that inevitably comes with "infiltrating". Some may see this as self-inflicted restriction, but is it not understandable to want to protect yourself in a place with such a long history of exclusion? We are not, after all, obligated to wrestle with the phantoms of the past. Instead, she opted to co-found The Black Artist's society, a space for "black heritage creatives in Cambridge to collaborate, network and have their work showcased" in defiance of a perceived lack of opportunity for representation in the Cambridge creative scene. Nevertheless, this too comes with its challenges, particularly that of starting something afresh.

There is no one-size-fits-all solu-

tion to counter feelings of inferiority or fraudulence for minority students at Cambridge but I don't think we should be so quick to shut down expressions of

“Class inequality, prejudice and racism continue to haunt these halls

"imposter syndrome" as complete fiction. Rather, I think we could all gain something from understanding the history that first othered us as "imposters" and the present-day manifestations of this culture. Whether students from disadvantaged backgrounds choose to take or make space, I am proud of the steps being taken to challenge outdated systems within the University. I hope we keep making our voices heard, because everyone benefits from inclusivity; the world is a better place when we all feel safe and welcome.

Comment



Gwenno Robinson

It's the start of October 2021 and my hands are trembling as I type. I'm frantically texting my mum, my dad and two friends from home to let them know I'm sat opposite Michael Kohn.

In case your Monday nights aren't punctuated with the opening music of University Challenge, Michael Kohn is something of a University Challenge legend. He's up there with giants like Monkman, Loveday and Rout.

Kohn was the captain of Imperial College London in Season 50, and wowed audiences with his impressive breadth of knowledge spanning maths, literature and jazz. Much to my excitement, he decided to study for a masters at Pembroke College, Cambridge in 2021.

The competition of University Challenge goes well beyond the TV screen. Each week, "Swansea, Robinson" (Dad), "Bangor, Williams" (Mam) and I ("Pembroke, Robinson") battle it out, usually with minimal success.

The BBC's own University Challenge

Does the national broadcaster have an Oxbridge obsession?

The show has recently been subject to a series of complaints in the latest debacle regarding the BBC's adherence to its impartiality rules. At the end of March, the BBC was accused of breaking its impartiality rules by "rigging" the popular show University Challenge in favour of Oxford and Cambridge.

Frank Coffield, an emeritus professor of education at University College London, criticised the BBC for hiding the true extent of its Oxbridge bias after his freedom of information request to reveal how many Oxbridge teams have featured on the show was denied.

Coffield's complaints centre around how each of the Oxbridge colleges are allowed to compete in the programme

The real "University Challenge" for the BBC is in recruitment

despite having as few as 300 students, while much larger civic universities such as Manchester and Birmingham, with around 40,000 students, are allowed only one entry each.

In his view, the show's format treats "all other universities in the UK apart from Oxbridge as second class ... the bal-

ance is grotesque, inequitable and indefensible." Coffield has since urged the National Union of Students to boycott the competition in protest.

The BBC defended the format of the show, arguing that all higher education institutions which deliver courses at the level of bachelor's degree or equivalent are welcome to apply, stating that the show is "not limited to Oxbridge colleges" but includes around "300 colleges of further and higher education across the UK".

Complaints about the programme's format are not new. In 1975, back when the programme was on ITV, a team from Manchester University staged a protest in the final round of the show against Downing College, Cambridge. They answered "Che Guevara", "Karl Marx", "Trotsky", or "Lenin" to every question in a bid to make the show unbroadcastable and so bring attention to the Oxbridge bias of the show.

Nearly 50 years on, their argument still stands. Across the show's 51 finals to date, only 11 have been between non-Oxbridge institutions, most recently last year when Imperial College London went head-to-head with the University of Reading. In this year's series, eight of the 28 teams are Oxbridge colleges.

The format of University Challenge is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes

to the BBC's so-called "Oxbridge bias". When Amol Rajan joins the show later this year, all three of the programme's

Of finals to date, only 11 have been Oxbridge-free

presenters will all have been Cambridge-educated. A quick Google search tells me that ten out of the past 14 Director-Generals have been educated at Oxbridge, including the two most recent, Tim Davie and Tony Hall.

Only a few weeks ago, the BBC dedicated over three hours of coverage on a mainstream channel for the annual Oxford v Cambridge boat race. The Boat Race has been broadcasted on the BBC for over 80 years, and it's the only University-level sporting event which receives national coverage.

The real "University Challenge" for the BBC is in recruitment. In 2020, Davie recognised how "socio-economic diversity, different types of people, different voices" was a "big issue" for the BBC. Davie pledged to recruit staff from wider backgrounds than Oxbridge, in a bid to "modernise" the over 100-year-old corporation.

The BBC's most recent diversity & inclusion plan sets out the corporation's commitment to create an organisation which "reflects more accurately the society we serve". The report details a "50:20:12" plan, aiming to have a staff body and leadership with a gender balance, with at least 20% from BAME backgrounds, and 12% with disabilities.

The plan also claims that the BBC "plans to build our socio-economic diversity" – but fails to include socio-economic background within its targets, as nearly 50% of staff at the BBC have chosen not to declare their background.

The rule that the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge enter individually on University Challenge dates back to 1962, when the programme was first devised.

In the past 60 years since then, the BBC has come a long way in diversifying its output and workforce. The archaic format of University Challenge needs to change if it is to align with the BBC's commitments to diversity.

The BBC needs to be more transparent in how it selects teams for the show, and, on a broader level, in how it selects graduates to join its workforce. In the words of Jeremy Paxman: "Come on, let's have an answer. Let's have it please."



Jasper Maughan

In February 2022, just as I was confirming my course choices at Moscow State University, Russian troops amassed at the Ukrainian border. This exchange program was axed almost overnight. The year that has elapsed since then has been a remarkable time to be a student of Slavonic studies. Despite being less than halfway through the degree, my cohort was swiftly forced to confront whether our course of study was defensible. It may sound dramatic to think of a simple supervision or seminar in these terms, but we really did have to call into question whether dedicating our studies to the history, culture and language of a so-called 'terror state' could be justified. In the week of the invasion, I can recall the stony silence in a Russian language class, when our teacher asked point-blank if we even wanted the lesson to go ahead.

At the same time, I was also studying Ukrainian and every lecture and supervision facilitated the study of a distinct and

Studying Russian in the wake of war

The invasion of Ukraine should be a turning point for Russian studies

fascinating nation and culture, which the Kremlin would have us believe simply do not exist in their own right. Unable to go to Moscow, I initially ended up at the University of Vienna, where I attended Ukrainian language classes. My teacher explained that after the outbreak of war she had refused to continue teaching Russian. Following the bombing of Dnipro in early January, she even vowed to never speak Russian again.

Such reactions are hardly unwarranted in the face of such extreme violence and brutality, and it is no wonder that students and staff in Slavonic studies in Cambridge were faced with an immediate re-think. Most striking has been the development of a new decolonising approach to Russian studies. The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, which

spread over land to adjacent territory, often don't spring to mind first when we think of Empire. Whereas French studies long ago made the transition to Francophone studies and incorporated African and Caribbean cultures into the field in a more major way, the same cannot be said for Russian. A Russian degree was (until about five minutes ago) very much a 'Russia' degree, although its speakers are found in the Baltic states, Belarus, Moldova, the Caucasus, Central Asia and of course Ukraine. The Soviet doctrine of Russification foisted the language of Moscow upon hundreds of millions across a vast territory, but since then has simply become a fact of life.

We might still wonder whether we should condemn a language for the twisted actions of a government, or

even a nation. In the past, the Russian language was undoubtedly weaponised by Moscow and its status often remains fraught, but that is not to say that it has not to some extent been claimed and amalgamated in a positive and productive way. For me, this complicated postcolonial dynamic in fact warrants the study of Russian. Moreover, understanding Russia's past and present is unquestionably crucial to promoting peace and co-operation today throughout the former Soviet Union.

I am writing this article from Astana, Kazakhstan, a city where almost everyone speaks both Russian and Kazakh, in typical post-Soviet style. Astana simply means 'capital' in Kazakh and its futuristic skyline has sprung from the steppe in the last few decades, purpose-built for a newly independent nation. However, it still illustrates the diverse influences on the country; the view from one side of my flat is a Stalinist-esque high rise, but face the other way and you see the shining golden domes of a mosque. The people that I interact with on a daily basis don't use Russian because they do or don't support the Kremlin, it is simply part of how they live. In fact, I am told that it is commonplace here in Astana to drop Russian words into Kazakh speech. Various students have gleefully told me that cursing is far more enjoyable in Russian. This is an almost completely

bilingual city and after several months I have encountered exactly *one*

My exchange program was axed almost overnight

local who couldn't speak Russian. It's fascinating to be here and learn about a completely new Russophone culture, one so far removed from the Kyivan Rus, Pushkin or the canals of St Petersburg. If I remember correctly, Kazakhstan was mentioned precisely once in my studies thus far in Cambridge, in the context of a mass Soviet agricultural project which devastated the country and unleashed a brutal famine. The lecture then swiftly returned to events firmly on the other side of the Urals.

This year a whole cohort of Russian students is discovering the true diversity of the Russophone world. If we return to Cambridge with an enthusiasm to speak Russian and to study not its culture, but its *cultures* and their complex intersections, then despite the truly terrible trigger for this change, this strikes me as one of the few upsides.



▲ Astana, Kazakhstan (Jasper Maughan)

Interviews

YouTuber Memeulous: ‘I’m better off not showing my face’

Aoife O’Driscoll speaks to content creator Memeulous about his first public appearance, the videos he’s most proud of, and the pressure to reveal his identity

The name ‘Memeulous’ is well-known on YouTube — a content creator who has amassed over 4.5 million subscribers on his main channel, and 1.1 million on his second channel. However, for years none of his large following knew as much as his real name. Even now, only his first name, George, is known — all other personal information remains a mystery. One of the biggest talking points of the online sphere is its emphasis on appearances, yet this is something which Memeulous has never encountered. As a ‘faceless’ content creator, he has created his image with his trademark hat, sunglasses, and black and white bandana, leaving no part of his actual face visible.

True to form, this is what Memeulous is wearing when I meet him, right before his event at the Cambridge Union. On top of his signature look, he has

also donned a waistcoat and Cambridge gown — clearly choosing to fully immerse himself in his surroundings. The over-the-top outfit may have just been for fun, but it serves to remind me that the occasion marks a significant moment in the YouTuber’s career — it is his first ever public appearance. With that in mind, I ask why he chose to accept the invite to the Union, after many years of remaining behind the screen. “It’s just a bit of an honour to be invited to speak,” he tells me. “When they messaged me, I looked at their YouTube channel [where they had] people like Stephen Fry, and I was like, ‘Why have they invited me?’

But I just thought it would be a cool thing to do.”

Known primarily for his commentary videos focused around online culture, Memeulous has amassed a large following

ing over his many years in the channel, and continues to entertain viewers with his humour and acute observations. He often produces videos in collaboration with other popular content creators, and reveals that he is most proud of The Eboys podcast, which he launched with fellow YouTubers WillNE, James Marriott and ImAllexx at the start of lockdown —

“There’s obviously going to be a certain level of curiosity

“they’re some of the only videos that I go back to and watch to this day.”

It is impossible to avoid the elephant in the room — his identity. Even when sitting directly opposite him, I am unable to make out any part of his face; this is someone who has mastered the art of remaining a mystery. I ask him how he feels about people inquiring about his identity, and whether he has ever felt a pressure to show his face. He pauses for a moment before responding: “I feel like there’s obviously going to be a certain level of curiosity, and it’d be a bit weird if I was like ‘That’s making me feel un-

comfortable, you can’t be curious about that,’ because I guess it’s natural to be curious.” He amends this by adding that “some people try and take it too far [...] they’ll go out of their way to make you feel uncomfortable. But it’s very rare.”

But would he ever actually reveal his identity? “A couple of years ago, it was something I was genuinely considering [...] because I just felt as though it would maybe help in some way.” However, he has since had a change of heart — he thinks that “it wouldn’t really make a difference. And if anything, I feel as though I’m better off like this, not showing my face.” It seems as though the closest his audience will get to seeing his face is his ‘eye reveal’, done to commemorate reaching 4 million subscribers in 2020.

Seeing what has happened to other ‘faceless’ content creators, it is clear why Memeulous has decided to remain anonymous. Recently, the YouTuber and Twitch streamer Dream chose to reveal his identity, and received an overwhelming response online, the majority of which was not positive. Memeulous takes a moment to reflect on this reaction, and the relationship that viewers seem to have with online creators. He puts forward that Dream is “just a normal looking guy,” but argues that “even if he was the most attractive man in the world, he would have

got a lot of backlash just for the way he looks, he hid it for so long.” Memeulous also mentions that he and other faceless creators were brought into the conversation when this was happening, with

“If you put yourself out on the internet, you’ve got to expect some backlash

many saying that the negative reaction to Dream’s appearance would make them not want to reveal their identities either. However, he is quick to dispel these ideas: “It’s not really because of that [...] if you put yourself out on the internet, you’ve got to expect some level of [backlash].”

It’s clear that Memeulous has found a niche that works for him. Within a space that is often characterised by its superficiality, he has gone against the grain by choosing to hide his face and has found success nonetheless, proving that sometimes in social media, appearances really aren’t everything.



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Interviews



The extraordinary life of Farrukh Dhondy

From first-generation immigrant at Cambridge, to Black Panther, to Channel 4 exec, the Pembroke alumnus shares his story

Chris Patel

“E.M. Forster said: ‘I write to win the respect of people I respect.’ George Orwell said: ‘I write because I want to know what I think.[...] I started wanting to write because I couldn’t play football, cricket, hockey or boxing.’ But don’t feel too bad for Pembroke alumnus Farrukh Dhondy, because he’s done just about everything else. From first-generation immigrant at Cambridge, to socialist activist, to Channel 4 executive, Dhondy has been on both sides of the establishment. He has always used his position to challenge race and class divisions.

These days, Dhondy has countless novels, plays and television scripts to his name, but he had to shelve his writing dreams in order to emigrate from India to England. “The only reason one could get out of India on a scholarship was to do something that would lead to either science, engineering, or a profession.” Dhondy completed a Natural Sciences degree at Pembroke in 2 years, then switched to English, doing 3 supervisions a week in his summer holidays to catch up. Pembroke was the place to study English in the Sixties — every aspiring author wanted Ted Hughes’ former room, and the late critic and broadcaster Clive James would “sit around in hall and pontificate about every damn thing.”

According to Dhondy, sixty years ago there were no second-generation immigrants in Cambridge. None of the non-white students were British-born, so, with their homes halfway around the world, Dhondy and other international students stuck together. They were “kicked out of college for the holidays [...] so we were put into wherever we could find digs. So I was living in an attic in

Fitzwilliam Street.”

Dhondy’s “socialist leanings” determined his next move — the Atomic Energy Commission of India offered him a job, but as “Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister at the time, was making an atomic bomb” he chose to teach instead, while working as a freelance journalist. Dhondy soon recognised that in schools, “the way the black kids were treated was not right.”

“Each year was divided into ten divisions, so the third year was 3-1, 3-2, 3-3, 3-4, 3-5 ... and then 3X and 3Y, for all the kids who they said had misbehaved in the other classes [...] And it was all whites in the top and all blacks in the bottom.” Despite saying that he didn’t really experience racism at Cambridge, throughout our interview, Dhondy drops

In schools the way black kids were treated was not right

clues that show how deeply racism was embedded in English society. He studied for a Master’s degree in Leicester, during which time his local pub was “The Pack Horse” and all too matter-of-factly, Dhondy says, “of course they called it The P*ki Horse”.

Dhondy’s socialist leanings and awareness of racial injustice led him join to the British Black Panthers. He quickly mentions that, unlike America’s Black Panther Party, the BBP was nonviolent, and only “gave itself that name to attract young blacks and Asians.” Dhondy also belonged to the Bengali Housing

Action Group, helping South Asian immigrants avoid eviction. Despite not using violence, Dhondy became the target of violence when his flat was firebombed.

The bomber, who was never caught, attacked four other black and South Asian houses that night, and Dhondy’s flat, he explains, was bombed because it was above a Black Panther bookshop. “I woke up choking, and I thought someone was putting a pillow on my face. There was nothing there, just smoke.” Mercifully, Dhondy escaped with only cuts on his legs from the glass of his exploded window.

Dhondy identifies clear parallels between the black British experience and the British Asian experience: “the kind of discrimination one used to face in the access to professional jobs, for instance. The resistance and the battles that we fought have resulted in both blacks and Asians getting access to the meritocracy.” He jokes, “the simplest examples are Rishi Sunak, Suella Braverman, Priti Patel, for God’s sake, Kwasi Kwarteng — I’m not proud of that.”

Later, Dhondy worked for Channel 4, and soon became their Commissioning Editor. “Channel 4 was given a remit by Parliament to do things that nobody else had done before,” namely, multicultural programming. Dhondy wrote for Black on Black, a news programme aiming to counteract the largely negative news coverage of black people. He also wrote sitcoms such as No Problem!, featuring a Jamaican family, and Tandoori Nights, set in an Indian restaurant.

Even in this enlightened climate, Dhondy faced obstacles. Dhondy believed that, for black and Asian communities to “join the national conversation”, they had to be represented by journalists who belonged to their communities. He

set up a documentary programme called The Bandung File, and included esteemed journalists on his team, but until he introduced white executive producers, Chan-

Channel 4 was given a remit by Parliament to do things that nobody else had done before

nel 4 wouldn’t give the green light.

Socialism and antiracism course through Dhondy’s veins, but he also argues that, for television audiences, there’s a time and a place. “A television audience doesn’t want to listen to lectures — why should they?” to Dhondy, the best television strikes the balance between message and entertainment. “If you’re writing a sitcom, write in the situation, with some bloody com in it!”



▲ Dhondy was a key member of the British Black Panthers (WIKIMEDIACOMMONS)

Pursuing peace with CURAP

Lois Kildea

“If the society you want to join doesn’t yet exist, you can set it up” is a university open day cliché. But do many of us actually pay heed to this advice, and how does one go about establishing a new society ex nihilo? These are the questions I posed via Zoom to Sienna James, an Art Historian who, last summer, founded Cambridge University Research Association for Peace (CURAP) — “the university’s first student-led issue-specific think tank”.

The natural starting point for our conversation is why Sienna chose to set up a new society dedicated to peacebuilding. She explains that the idea to start CURAP arose following a shift in her career aspirations, “was motivated not by a job but by a cause.” Sienna attended “an event hosted by the Rose Castle Foundation” — a charitable organisation specialising in peacebuilding between Abrahamic faiths— where she watched a documentary about women from Muslim and Jewish communities in America coming together to “speak about their differences.” Sienna remembers leaving and feeling “like there’s something that I should be doing here.”

One of her aims in launching CURAP was to produce something tangible, like “a paper within a year” and in Michaelmas 2022, this is what the recently formed committee of seventeen or so students, from an array of disciplines and at different academic stages, set out to do.

As publication day approaches, I ask Sienna about her experience of leading a team. She recalls feeling nervous before the first focus group and wondering “who’s going to turn up” on this “rainy” November evening in the middle of term. As it happened, those who signed up turned up, and the conversation ran on beyond the scheduled finish time. People seemed to “really care... they weren’t just hanging around but wanted to be there and express their views.” For Sienna and other committee members who were present, it was satisfying to watch participants’ confidence increase and recognise that their contributions were valuable.

Sienna considers one of CURAP’s most interesting findings to be the phenomenon of students “atoning” for “wealth and privilege” and other aspects of their background. She describes it as “absolutely fascinating” and adds, “I wasn’t expecting it at all, but it came up as a recurring theme.” Another memorable moment was when one participant began to outline a ‘fake feminist’ figure, recognised instantly by her fellow participants, which Sienna thought “was kind of hilarious, but [...] worryingly [so]”.

Given Sienna is soon to graduate, we close by considering CURAP’s future. Her hope is that one of the second years on committee will assume her role as president, and that new members will join. If not, however, Sienna is unfazed, telling me, “I’m also happy with it being a one-year project [because] I think the right amount of people have been involved to make it worthwhile.”

Read the full article online.

Cambridge Students INSPIRE in Research Showcases

Is CamFess Classist? **Alex Berry** and **Suchir Salhan** find out more about student research conferences

Alex Berry and Suchir Salhan

At leading academic institutions like Cambridge, it's not just the academics who are doing important research. Many students undertake research projects during their degrees or over the holidays, with many of these having the potential to have lasting benefits in their respective fields of research. It's safe to say that we weren't aware of just how many opportunities there are available to students. Therefore, we set out to learn about two student research conferences that have been taking place over the Easter vac.

Suchir: Is CamFess classist?

I've spent both my summers in Uni

“**Cambridge students are not necessarily good at talking about class**

doing research. I found that it's a great way to work closely with leading academics in your field on some interesting projects (and, perhaps, even spark

an interest in a new research direction) while gaining valuable experience.

I spoke to third-year linguist Romany Amber, who is fresh off presenting their research on Classism in CamFess at the ULAB Linguistics Student Conference. The project was sparked by Romany's experience as Christ's JCR Access Officer for a few years and an internship in the College admissions office.

“Camfess as a platform is cool and interesting, and is a place where wealth and social class come up a lot, in discussions around Cambridge culture, bursaries, May Balls, formals etc.”

“Cambridge's reputation as a staunchly middle/upper-class culture is something that comes up a lot as a concern for working-class students – the way Oxbridge is talked about in the media upholds this idea and I've seen how this puts people off applying.”

Romany found that “class is discussed on Camfess with much greater frequency than British-English Internet-users at large, although this is more true of words relating to the upper end of the social class scale: words like ‘middle-class’, ‘privileged’ and ‘posh’ were mentioned disproportionately more often than ‘working-class’ or ‘poor’.

“Camfess subverts a lot of the trends found in analyses of mass media in the UK: crucially, the posts I looked at pret-

▲ The Inspire Conference (CUSCRS)



▼ ROMANY AMBER WITH PERMISSION FOR VARSITY (CUSCRS)



ty much unanimously acknowledged class as a contemporary social divider and working-class people as a systemically disadvantaged group.

“However, the posts were very middle-class-centric and failed to examine some of the class-related underpinnings of issues they discussed. There was also a tendency to apply class-related language to issues like college disparity, which may reveal a lack of understanding of class inequality (though I discuss some other potential explanations too).

“Cambridge students are not necessarily good at talking about class, but they are actively exploring it in a far more nuanced way than a lot of British media, like the harmful depictions of working-class people as ‘lazy’ or ‘scroungers’ (think of TV shows like Benefits Street or any article in the Daily Mail...) I discuss some potential reasons for the differences between Camfess and mass media.

“I think anonymous online platforms provide a great opportunity to look at what people actually think about social issues and how they are discussed by people on the ground, rather than journalists or TV producers.

“As the ULAB Conference is specifically for undergraduates, it felt like a gentle(r) introduction to conference presenting, and a good opportunity to get some feedback on a research project I'd done over the summer last year.”

Alex: INSPIRING Research by Clinical Medics

Cambridge University Students'

“**Student research has really been a gamechanger for me**

Clinical Research Society (CUSCRS) organise the INSPIRE conference to discuss their research with leading academics and inspire other students to pursue their own research interests.

Why are labrador retrievers prone to obesity? As the first time the conference had been held since the pandemic, the best oral presentation was awarded to former Varsity Science Editor Sambhavi Sneha Kumar. She investigated the associations between specific signalling pathways and obesity in labrador retrievers, which have a genetic bottleneck due to pure breeding, by studying the effects of genetic variation in certain gene sequences on obesity. This animal model could potentially help find similar regions of genetic variation in the human genome and gain an understanding of the genetic factors that influence predisposition to obesity, and therefore possible new therapies to treat obesity in the future.

CUSCRS Co-President Michał Duchniewicz said, “We had such a good variety of presenters, with everything from molecular research up to some machine learning on prostate volume, which I found really interesting.” He was “really glad about the quality of posters we received and the oral presentations, and the judges were also very impressed...”, which is big praise given that the judg-

ing panel consisted of experienced academics and researchers.

“You'd think that Cambridge is a place in which people want to do research, but we still have to promote it and get more people involved as many of us are not that aware of what opportunities there are around us.”

Get involved in Student Research!

Suchir: Student Research has really been a game-changer for me. At the end of my first year, I got paid (pretty well!) to work as a UROP Intern (which stands for Cambridge's Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program) in the Computer Lab learning how to use some of the machine learning models that underpin ChatGPT. I'd wholeheartedly recommend UROPs to any student interested in research. Colleges can even subsidise aspects of your research, such as reducing rent while you're conducting it- which Caius did for me in my second year.

Student research can address key issues that may be overlooked by leading academics, like the thought-provoking questions Romany's research raises about the Cambridge student community. Equally, it can lay the foundations for future research projects, like the INSPIRE conference.

Alex: It can be amazing to think that your friends are conducting research that has such important potential impacts on our society, but it is also something that we should acknowledge and appreciate more.

Science

Struggling to stay focused in exam term? Here's the Science behind concentration

In exam term, just taking a moment away from the relentless demands of revision can often seem like a luxury. **Katie Jeans** unpacks some of the science behind concentration

We're hardwired to lose our concentration

The key to concentration lies in the brain's ability to identify and direct attention towards particularly task-relevant sensory stimuli, whilst filtering out less relevant background information.

Two regions in the brain control attention: crucially, there's the pre-frontal cortex (PFC), the region of the brain that we consciously choose to activate when deciding to read, paint a picture or study for an exam. There's also a region called the parietal cortex that induces a subconscious, autonomous response. It is a survival tool, keeping us safe from imminent threats.

Humans are evolutionarily hardwired to have an attention span that can be broken easily as a safety measure. In this way, our ancestors were constantly alert to any changes in the background, and always prepared to

suddenly redirect attention towards a new danger. Essential as this may have been, now it's just another obstacle that lies between you, a completed essay and a satisfied supervisor.

Daydreaming isn't so bad after all!

Although daydreaming may seem like another barrier between us and productivity, we can speculate that allowing the mind to wander has benefits. It presents the rare opportunity to escape from the busy world around us and focus on our internal thoughts, which not only boosts well-being but provides a unique creative outlet that heavily structured days don't allow. Then, when the attention comes back to the present, we can feel not only uplifted and rested but perhaps also newly inspired by novel ideas arising from the free exploration of our subconscious mind.

Daydreaming changes our focus

from the task at hand to an internal, subconscious exploration of thoughts and ideas. We don't know why the mind wanders, but we are particularly prone to it when focus is shifted away from the outside world, such as during periods of rest and when performing tasks on 'autopilot'.

Organic chemist Fredrich Kekulé claimed to have come up with the idea

that benzene was a ringed structure due to a daydream where he saw a snake eating its tail. The occasional daydream might not be so harmful to your Tripos performance after all.

Use Noise-Cancelling Headphones!

One way is to try and minimise the amount of background neuronal activity that arises from irrelevant external stimuli, which generates less work for the brain in trying to identify what is important. It may seem obvious, but for this reason, noise-cancelling headphones or 'white noise' tracks can help concentration a great deal as they block out activity around you.

What's the bigger picture?

Work on task motivation by spending some time reminding yourself of why you're doing it, including how the

outcome can fit into a bigger picture.

Motivating yourself like this can have two effects: firstly, the perception of a reward for the task drives the release of dopamine, which brings about positive feelings that help sustain focus.

Secondly, there is a neurological response to feelings of engagement and passion for the task that activates a bundle of neurons in the brainstem which boosts wakefulness. This, in turn, improves concentration, and increases your mind's ability to refresh.

So when it's a Friday afternoon and the thought of working is unappealing, to say the least, remove the distractions and take a step back to allow your mind to breathe. Come back with a new, positive outlook that lets your brain do its thing. Who knows, you may even come up with the next big discovery in your subject!



There's a diversity problem in Cambridge Science

Suchir Salhan

Cambridge consistently ranks among the best in the world for STEM subjects. In the most recent QS World Rankings, the University is the 3rd best institution for Natural Sciences and for Psychology. But these results obscure a crisis of diversity in Science education at the University.

A career column in *Nature* investigates the diversity of the PBS Tripos curriculum. Led by Lee de Wit from the Department of Psychology with PhD student Saskia Ghai and undergraduate Yan Mak, the study was prompted by the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests.

The authors found a "striking, but perhaps not surprising lack of voices from under-represented groups and regions"

Saskia Ghai and Yan Mak looked at the research papers used to teach two compulsory courses in the PBS tripos, (PBS1 and PBS3), "combing through the reading

lists" for both papers (their preliminary results can be found here). They created a massive spreadsheet with the authors' institutional affiliations, the location and demographics of the study participants for a total of 198 reading resources.

Focussing on research papers that included human and animal participants, their findings uncovered that no research paper included study participants solely from the Global South, and no article on the reading list was affiliated with institutions based in Africa, Asia or Latin America. The analysis does have its limitations, which the authors acknowledge. Their approach of classifying authors based on their institutional affiliation (using only author names or online photos) obscured "representation from ethnically diverse, gender-fluid or low socio-economic groups".

The analysis of the reading lists leads the authors to claim that "Cambridge's current teaching canon for psychology does not sufficiently represent perspectives from around the world." While the findings do reflect a broader Western bias in psychological research, the authors underlie that most members of Cambridge's Psychology department "are white and from the global north".

The study also poses the question: "How can predominantly white departments systematically measure

and honestly reflect on the diversity of their curriculums?"

"Given the University of Cambridge's own legacy of enslavement and racism, we have a lot of work to do to become a truly multicultural and inclusive space for all students," the audit concluded.

This is not an isolated problem of the PBS Tripos. Other Science departments and faculties are also grappling with diversity issues and tokenistic inclusion policies. One example that indicates a much broader issue comes from the Chemistry Department. *Varsity* was recently contacted by Lucy*, a female postdoc from the Department of Chemistry, about a talk that the department held to mark the UN International Day of Women and Girls in Science.

The talk was supposed to be about a 19th-century Chemist called Jane Marcet, who Wood recounted was at one point described by the male speaker as "the old bird."

"I find it absolutely beggars belief that in 2023, this is the best that one of the top Chemistry departments in the world is able to offer up," Lucy* told me. "I was utterly underwhelmed by this lecture, and frankly pretty furious that it was billed as a celebration of women in science. It was a waste of an opportunity. I could have written a hundred better talks".

Lucy* said that this was her "first experience of sexism in Cambridge" – other than that "Cambridge has been excellent". She added that experiences of sexism for postdocs and staff in Science departments heavily "lie in your

personal experiences with your boss".

Lucy* also noted that the talk was given by a man. "It's not down to the women to give all the talks. Why can't men give a talk about women?"

"It is not the role of a department to resolve sexism", she said. That much is clear to me. I spent the first week of the Christmas vacation last year helping out with the online interviews at Caius for

in Tripos. This move was apparently prompted to encourage more women to choose to specialise in Chemistry in Part II or Part III in the Natural Sciences Tripos, seeing as the proportion of women flatlines between 30-40%.

Lucy* says that she feels that a few members of the Department are being repeatedly "wheeled out as diversity figures."

This underlies the more serious and systematic inequalities that Cambridge is dealing with, which diversity or access initiatives will not address productively.

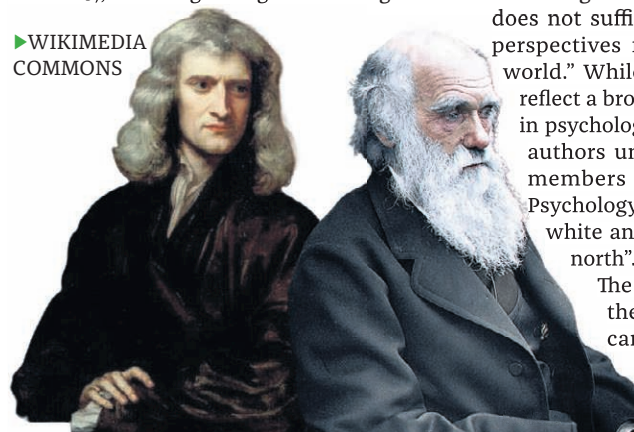
Since our conversation, I believe that a pedagogy that prioritises diverse voices from across the world, that enriches education with a catalogue of talks that genuinely and wholeheartedly address diversity issues in scientific disciplines, and that works to create a more diverse faculty are steps that the University should be taking.

It's clear that Cambridge has a long way to go to create a multicultural and inclusive space for its scientists and students.

In response to our request for comment, the Department of Chemistry said: "We are committed to improving diversity in our department and in the subject as a whole, and we believe the first step to improvement is acknowledging the situation." They indicated their receipt of the Athena Swan Silver Award as a demonstration of their commitment.

Names have been changed to protect anonymity. The authors of the Nature article, Lee de Wit and Saskia Ghai, were contacted for comment.

►WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



vulture.

Internship Chic: How to stay stylish on your summer internship



▲ DANIEL HILTON

Kathryn Austen

Like many others, my time as a student is drawing to a close. On top of a sense of loss, anguish, and existential fear, the move into the working world also brings with it the question of the working wardrobe. Again, like many others, I have found myself an internship for the summer and one which absolutely demands a 'corporate-chic please take me seriously' wardrobe. So what is internship chic? How do we maintain the individuality and freedom that we have acquired at Cambridge? And just because we

are corporate sellouts, does our wardrobe have to be?

I recently took a shopping trip with one purpose: corporate wear. I personally have always adored the silhouettes and cuts that can be found in workwear. A tailored cigarette trouser, the proportions of a perfect blazer, the satisfying line of a shift dress. Yet as the day went on I grew weary. Not just at the extortionate cost and complete inability of the clothing industry to standardise sizing (nothing new!), I was dismayed at the sheer lack of variety. If black and navy are colours that make your heart sing then I am thrilled for you because you my friend are going to have a fabulous time shopping. But for anybody looking to add some colour into

their wardrobe - good luck! A sea of greys, navies, blacks and the occasional beige met me at every store I went into. I want to make it very clear that I have nothing against neutrals. Like everything, they have their place, and as a money-deficient student, neutrals are the perfect tools for building a capsule wardrobe. However, there was a distinct lack of fun and enjoyment in the workwear available. Surely entering the corporate world should not mean that we abandon all personality and individuality? I fear my move into the workplace may be a jarring transition from the experimental and boundary-less Cambridge fashion scene.

So how can we maintain our individuality and

style in internship-chic? Colour, while difficult to find, is definitely an excellent way of injecting your wardrobe with personality. I especially love colour blocking and while suits, especially for women, are hard to find or expensive, trousers and a jacket in a matching shade is always a chic look. Pattern has not been present in recent trends, but easily brings life into workwear and can be extremely personalised. Whether it is florals, geometric or paisley, they tell people who you are. This personal flair can carry across from student fashion as well - those seventies

Continued on page 22 ►

Ghost Cam: Your guide to the supernatural Cambridge



▼ROSE DOLAN

Esther Arthurson

It's commonly acknowledged that Cambridge is a place of great suffering and unresolved trauma. If you've ever been at a 9am on a Thursday morning, you'll know exactly what haunted looks like. (In this case, haunted by tequila, regrets, and memories of sandwich-wielding Christians flanking the exit that you're pretty sure were a hallucination.)

Cambridge is a place on the edge – and I'm not referring to its temperamental student population. Cambridge as a settlement was historically situated on the face of a vast moorland, the remnants of which we can see in the Fens; the final frontier of humanity, forming a liminal space in which two worlds collide. If you scratch the surface, you can trace Cambridge's bruises back through the centuries in a constellation of unresolved pain. All of it tragic – but how much is true? That's up to you. Now, without further ado, I give you Cambridge's most haunted colleges...

Peterhouse

As the oldest Cambridge college, its spot as number one is hardly surprising. We all knew Peterhouse was a home for troubled souls. Peterhouse is known to have conducted at least



three exorcisms in its time, one of which caused such a stir that it was reported by the BBC in 1997, performed to alleviate a presence that was thought responsible for an unprecedented bout of depression amongst the residents. The college's location on the brink of the Fens – that borderland where things get... stuck – and adjacent to Little St Mary's Lane, a supernatural highway according to local ghost tour guides, makes it a particular spiritual flash-point. The lane is a regular hangout for the 'Black Shuck,' which is the polite term for 'demon dog.' If you see this particular wagging tail, you'd better get working on your bucket list, because rumour says you'll only have a year left to complete it. It goes without saying that Shucky probably wasn't a very good boy.

Corpus Christi

Corpus: home to a high percentage of Firsts, a number of disgruntled (dead) residents, and the world's most aesthetically challenged clock. Its grounds include a built-in graveyard and the oldest building in Cambridge (St Bene't's). Three spectral inhabitants are particularly infamous among porters, two of whom are the victims of a 17th Century love-story-gone-wrong. Catherine Spencer, the Master's daughter, and James Betts' clandestine fling was brought to an abrupt halt when James hid himself in a mahogany chest to avoid the discovery and wrath of her father upon his unexpected return home. Catherine came back to find her lover dead from suffocation. Heartbroken, Catherine soon followed her soulmate, leaving this mortal plane after a nervous breakdown only a few months later, and is buried in St Bene't's cemetery. The two lovers, reunited in death, can be seen smooching around College grounds, pulling behind pillars, and are fairly harmless. If you hear two sets of footsteps, you'll know you're safe. But only one and you're in trouble...

Henry Butts was Master of Corpus in the 16th-17th Century, and had to deal with its own mediaeval pandemic – although I imagine remote learning was a tad trickier back then – when the bubonic plague made its deadly visit to Cambridge in 1630. Students were evacuated, teaching suspended. Butts

volunteered to stay behind and help the sick while Corpus became a makeshift hospital for plague victims. He was completely isolated, passing his nights alone in the Master's Lodge and his days amidst the dying. A genuine hero. He took his own life once things had returned to normal, failing to turn up at Great St Mary's (his holy side hustle) to give the Easter morning sermon. Such great suffering as Butts witnessed leaves a mark on all involved – is it any wonder that such pain never quite finds its way out? Butts can be seen roaming the grounds today, identifiable through his white doctor's coat, plague mask, and his bruised, swollen neck.

King's

King's... need I say more? Or did I just achieve a one-word horror story? Cambridge is home to many eccentrics, but none quite as unusual as the memory of Mr Barrett. He is a one-man answer to why the Gibbs Building in King's is now uninhabited, used for day-time supervisions only. Barrett took his goth phase to the extreme, indulging an unhealthy interest in the occult by keeping a coffin (perhaps the ancient ancestor of the bean bag) in his room. He kept his neighbours up at night, screaming and screaming for hours on end. (Very much a case of don't ask, don't know.) But the real trouble came when one night, he suddenly stopped screaming. He was found in his coffin, smiling at the ceiling through unseeing eyes. Every year, on this anniversary, his cries can be heard once again, reverberating the entire stairwell, no doubt issued through that ghostly, smiling mouth, hence the building's prompt evacuation. The moral of this story: avoid the eccentrics.

So there you have it. Tread carefully, for you are walking on history or even graves – Midsummer Common was a mass burial ground for Black Death victims, after all. And remember to stop now and then to acknowledge that relentless ticking, that hideous clock where all things must end. And, when you do so, make sure to look behind you.

The disgustingly optimistic outlook of a soon-to-be-no-more Cambridge fresher

Alice Mainwood

And now, upon the sun's long-awaited appearance, I have of course tripped and fallen flat on my face into my annual, UV-ray induced spell of unbearable positivity and optimism. The possibility of a pretty new summer dress and a picnic (with all the trimming – sausage rolls, lemonade, and a massive allergic reaction for us hay-fever sufferers) has tanned my supervision anxiety and Easter pre-reading list into but the least of my concerns. This time of year is always a time I find myself feeling more positive. Exam term has nothing on me – the sun will fix all my problems. My sun-soaked brain, however, also always turns to reflection. And now more than any other year, I have found myself reflecting on what has been a bit of a meteorite of an academic year.

The life of a Cambridge student is something of a masterclass in time management (or more realistically, perhaps a masterclass in artfully asking for deadlines because you spent two hours in the MASH queue the night before essay-deadline-day). We are a mass gathering of chronically busy students, cramming an overinflated university workload into three eight week bouts per year.

My fresher eyes had seen nothing like it before. And I really had seen some busy schedules in my really-quite-academically-intense sixth form. I barely knew what to think. The pressure, workload, and culture that Cambridge freshers experience is certainly nothing akin to what our school friends are experiencing elsewhere.

Over the course of my first two terms here, though, I have slowly learnt how to be a Cambridge student. It's not just learning to meal plan, it's also learning how to handle your stack of deadlines and many more stacks of secondary reading, right from week 1. So, having undergone a chrysalis-like Michaelmas and Lent, my annual period of reflection has coincided beautifully with both the sun's arrival and my preparations for my final term as a Cambridge fresher.

The newfound optimism with which I'm viewing my academic prospects is not, of course, without a somewhat crippling fear about losing my fresher label. Whilst overwhelmingly terrifying at first, I have grown to love being new here. My invisible fresher nametag makes me feel protected from the true extent of academic pressure – a comfortable, reassuring shield, that sounds an awful lot like 'It's fine! First year doesn't count anyway!' As an English fresher, I think I'm right to be not quite so intimidated by my single exam this year than my heavily plighted lawyer and medic friends. Still, the thought of having to progress from silly little fresher to a student with *more than one* exam to revise for feels almost as intimidating as becoming a fresher in the first place.

But that's a worry to think about in eight weeks' time. For now, the sun is back, and everyone's exams are still weeks away. The freshers have grown up, and we're well on our way to becoming actual functioning students. ABBA's 'Slipping Through My Fingers' plays in the background.



Yori-gret this! A night of disappointing food at Yori

Leo Scran & Scraniel Hilton review Yori's new location on Green Street and see if it's worth the hype

Leo Kang & Daniel Hilton

The restaurant chain Yori – meaning “cook” in Korean – promises “fresh and authentic” Korean cuisine. It recently opened its second Cambridge location, landing sleekly on Green Street like a wood-panelled spaceship. With Leo still jet-lagged from a month in Korea and Daniel still stubbornly a kimchi virgin, it was time to investigate whether or not one of Cambridge’s hottest new eateries would live up to the hype.

In terms of atmosphere, we had no complaints. Cambridge is a city that closes egregiously early, so it’s nice to see Yori sticking it out till 11pm. The restaurant is always, from what we can tell, bustling with people, and the decor is crisp and classy, with marbled black tabletops and warm yellow lanterns. The doorway is also adorned with photographs of famous faces who came to visit. If Yori is good enough for the cast of *Parasite*, surely it’s good enough for us?

We started our meal with their signature boneless chicken platter. For the mammoth sum of £23 we were presented with 16 measly pieces of popcorn chicken – something you could get from any high street chicken shop for a fiver (probably with fries too). The main selling point was the

tasty Korean sauces, but the chicken itself was tough and dry, ending up more of a disappointment than Week 0 Revs and only slightly less financially draining. Result: 3/5 – avoid unless you’re using daddy’s money.



Next up was the courgette jeon (pancake) which was crispy to perfection and doughy to a tee. Leo was quoted as saying it was as good as any of the jeons he had in Korea, but where this one differed was in its £10.50 price point. For flour and a few slices of courgette, this was lamplight robbery. Result: 4/5 – very good, but you can make it in your gyp for a quid.



Throughout the meal, Daniel was sampling Korea’s national beer, Cass. Cass is perfectly fine for Leo, but it failed to impress Daniel’s seasoned Lancashire palate – he found it mostly inoffensive and declared “it’s beer for people don’t like beer”. Despite being disappointing, the beer did serve the purpose of getting rid of Daniel’s shakes, making the chopsticks infinitely easier for him to use.

When the japchae and kimchi arrived, we

realised we had hit a new culinary low. After a single bite, Leo sighed “this is the worst japchae I’ve ever had”. The noodles and beef were dully sweet, lacking in flavour and simply existing in our mouths. The kimchi was not content with simply existing and instead decided to choose hatred, obliterating us individually in mouthfuls of malicious sourness. Kimchi is, of course, supposed to be fermented – that’s what makes it so tasty. But this kimchi had progressed far past fermentation and became, in our opinion, a biological hazard. Daniel was left disoriented and scared, while Leo struggled to hold his chopsticks steady over the ominous rumbling of his ancestors turning

in their graves.

Result: 5/5 angry Leos – worse than a night at CUCA.

Yori is not a bad restaurant (hell, it’s probably one of the best in Cambridge) but it is, quite simply, disappointing. In Korea, eating is all about generosity. Tables are crammed with dishes and side dishes. Everything is shared, and

when you finish a dish, it’s refilled – the eating stops only when everyone is full. Of course, this isn’t a viable business model for a London-based restaurant chain. But with its

modest portions and highly ambitious prices, Yori fails to hit at the heart of Korean food. Next time we fancy a fun little Varsity date, we will simply go back to college and fry some pancakes.



▲ Photos by Jiali Lu

Be the next Junior Treasurer or Secretary of VarSoc

Nominations to be the Varsity Society’s (VarSoc) next Junior Treasurer and Secretary are now open.

Upon election, the positions will be held for the next academic year.

Please email president@varsity.co.uk for further information.

Nominations close at 5pm 11th June 2023. The election will be held the following week.

www.varsity.co.uk

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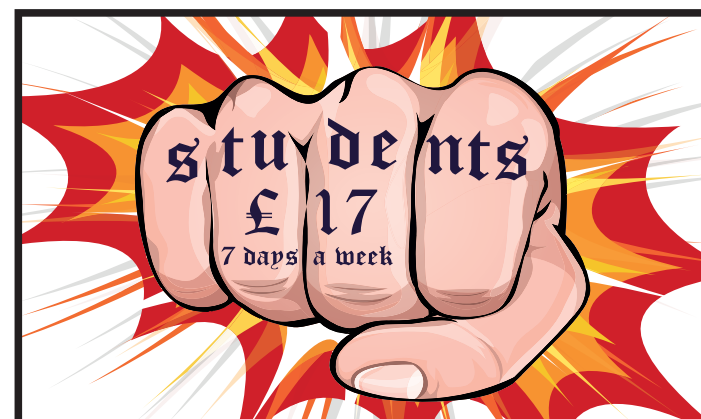
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Fashion



► continued from pg. 19

patterns that you've been sporting have a place in your professional era too!

Accessorising is also a great way to bring flair to your style. This can be anything from a lipstick, a metallic hair clip or chunky jewellery; whatever the form it will transform simple clothing combinations into unique fits. One of the most exciting aspects of current fashion trends is the variety of high-statement jewellery visible across fashion spaces. I hope to see this trend passing on into workwear as it elevates an outfit from forgettable to show-stopping. The accessories you sport on the streets of Cambridge need very little alteration for the working world. Those long coats and scarves are perfect for winter workwear and in many workplaces Doc Martens can be worn without side-eye from the CEO. This is just as well, as trying to buy work shoes, especially for women, is an exhausting and unfulfilling experience. Accept early on that shoes will either give you 50 blisters or will just be a bit ugly. Or both. Boots are great for winter, but as for summer shoes, I have much left to learn.

So does workwear have to be boring? No. There are ways of maintaining the iconic and recognisable aspects of Cambridge student fashion. And as I move onto the next stage of my life, the memories of the Sidgwick-girlie fashion scene will forever be with me.



Creative directors

Eden Keily-Thurstain
Isabel Dempsey

Photography

Daniel Hilton





(notes on)
**Corporate
camp**
Full photoshoot available online.

Models
Natasha Sauvage
Emily Lawson-Todd
Isabel Dempsey
Lucy Carter
Jessica Ingrey
Hannah Gillott

Arts

Why we should abolish the poet laureate

Leo Kang argues that poet laureates should take their cues from librarians, not the King

When Andrew Motion stepped down as poet laureate in 2009, Wendy Cope – the favourite to succeed him – made headlines when she called for the post to be abolished. “When people ask me about the next poet laureate I say: ‘I don’t know. I don’t care. It isn’t important.’”

For a poet known for her warmth and humour, it was a cold rebuff. But Cope believed that to take the post would be to betray her poetry. The “best way for a poet to serve the art”, she explained, “is to remain free to get on with writing the poems that he or she wants to write”.

Poets have always struggled to make ends meet. In the past, there was the practice of patronage, where patrons would grant poets a comfy salary in return for a bit of praise. However, to use Cope’s words, a poet serves “the art” above anything else. Patronage is at best a compromise – at worst, artistic imprisonment. In 1616, Ben Jonson – the forerunner of poet laureates – cursed the “Muse”

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To say the laureateship is outdated is putting it lightly

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that “betray’d” him to “a worthless lord”. In the 1700s, laureates were expected to write birthday odes, which would be set to music and performed for the monarch.

Today’s laureates have no official obligations, but the shadow of patronage still lingers over them. “Every time there’s been a royal birth or wedding or death in the past 10 years,” wrote Motion, “a terrible low rumble has begun in newsrooms across the country. A rumble that has soon led to people ringing me up to ask whether I’m ‘thinking of doing

something’.” Motion admitted that the tremors of this royal rumble were “very, very damaging” to his poetry. His own attempt at a birthday ode, written for Prince William’s 21st, is a spine-chilling example:

Better stand back
Here’s an age attack,
But the second in line
Is dealing with it fine.

When poets become court performers, their poetry starts to suffer. But the problem with the poet laureateship isn’t just an artistic one. When Carol Ann Duffy stepped down in 2019, Benjamin Zephaniah was one of the favourites to replace her. His response was sharp:

I have absolutely no interest in this job. I won’t work for them. They oppress me, they upset me, and they are not worthy. I write to connect with people and have never felt the need to go via the church, the state, or the monarchy to reach my

people. No money. Freedom or death.

Zephaniah, who was dubbed the “people’s laureate” by Birmingham Mail, opposed the laureateship not just as an artist but as an activist and anarchist. His writing gives voice to the Windrush, not the Windsors – being paid by the Crown would, to him, be a gross indignity.

To say the laureateship is outdated is putting it lightly. It’s a curse, compelling good poets to write bad poetry, and it’s also a stubborn stain from a bloody colonial history. Hear me out, then, when I say we should abolish it.

In Andrew Motion’s words, he had “a writing bit and a doing bit”. To reform the poet laureate, we should shift it towards the latter. Motion did write that “rap” for William’s birthday, and honestly,

he’ll just have to live with that. But he also co-founded the Poetry Archive, which consists of 20,000 recordings of poets reading their own work and is a cherished resource for poetry lovers everywhere.

More recently, Simon Armitage has begun a ten-year tour of the UK’s libraries in defiance of those trying to shut them down. I saw him when he came to Cambridge last term, reading poems set

in the South Pennines (his home, and mine too). Sitting there in the musty belly of the UL under the weight of several centuries of books, I thought of my hometown and its tiny library – of how every library, no matter the size, can be a private, precious space. In Armitage’s words, “reading from inside their physical structures feels like an act of solidarity – with books, with poetry, and with communities.”

The “doing bit” of the laureate’s job should be communal, like a library. The US poet laureate began in 1937 as the “Consultant in Poetry to the

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It should be poetry for the sake of poetry

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Library of Congress” with a role similar to a reference librarian. Though the role has since expanded, it is still rooted in education, rather than patronage. Billy Collins’ “Poetry 180” project brought a poem a day to classrooms throughout the school year. Rita Dove championed jazz, the African diaspora, and children’s poetry. Of the UK’s 21 poet laureates, 20 have been male, and all have been white. Traditionally, they served life terms, though it has since been shortened to a decade. Meanwhile, US poet laureates serve one-year terms, and past four have all been people of colour. Joy Harjo, who served until 2022, was the first Native American to hold the post. Her “Living Nations, Living Words” gave 47 Native American poets a nationwide platform.

We do need someone to stand in solidarity with poetry, but we don’t them standing on the monarchy’s shoulders. If poetry needs a face, it should be a fresh one. It should be poetry for the sake of poetry, and for the sake of people.

Emily and Famke go head-to-head on literary icon Jacqueline Wilson

I was meant to be arguing against Jacqueline Wilson in this “head-to-head” instalment. However, unlike that loud guy in your seminar, I refuse to morally debase myself just for the sake of playing devil’s advocate. Slagging off THE Jacqueline Wilson, as a 20-year-old who read literally every single one of her books, feels deeply immoral. Of course she deserves a slot in the prestigious Cambridge Literary Festival – I might’ve been more of a Mr Gum girl growing up, but you can’t deny that Jacqueline Wilson is the high priestess of children’s writing and probably the reason why so many Englings are at this uni. Her stories understood kids – they contain the same amount of melodrama and wild plotlines as any nine-year-olds imaginary Barbie soap opera, whilst also being sophisticated and poignant.

The only new take I have to add to my supposed “opponent” is that I think we need even more representation of children’s authors at big prestigious literary festivals. There’s been an uptick in children’s authors giving talks at academic institutions, such as How to Train Your Dragon author Cressida Cowell giving a talk at Homerton on 20 April (and if you want a really hot take, the books are superior to the films here, solely because the films don’t include any mention of the character “Big-Boobied Bertha”: a crying shame, really). The stories we read as children have the potential to shape us for the rest of our lives – it’s time to give children’s literature the respect it deserves! —**Emily**

Vs.

How might I defend Jacqueline Wilson’s inclusion in the profoundly prestigious Cambridge Literary Festival? I’d start by noting that children’s literature is one of the most overlooked literary genres in academia – immediately dismissed for its supposedly “childish” themes, and looked down upon. The perspectives and stories it can make accessible should not be undermined. Wilson introduced me to so many important themes and ideas that would affect my own experience growing up – complicated families, difficult friendships – and, more recently, “mature” themes like queerness. Yes, as a 21-year-old I read Love, Frankie, following a stint of work experience with Penguin. I had absolutely no shame in requesting a free copy.

That’s because I know her writing is the blueprint for how to communicate the more challenging experiences young people encounter. Children’s literature that covers what it’s actually like for children growing up in our distracted and complicated twenty-first century remain surprisingly spare. Wilson might transport these themes to Victorian Britain, but what remains important is her far-sighted focus on how it feels to

grow up, importantly, as a girl – an experience which seems to present difficulties at every corner. Wilson’s writing shows young people that they are not as alone as they feel. Growing up is scary and difficult, actually, and Wilson’s not afraid to address that. Making herself available in person is another part of its impact – I, for one, will be attending! —**Famke**



Spring review roundup

Curiosity piqued? Read the full reviews at www.varsity.co.uk/arts

Varsity's **Arts writers** give you the low-down on spring exhibitions in Cambridge

'Picturing the Invisible' – Heong Gallery

On until 23rd April

Taking as its subject the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, this luminous and demanding exhibition blends photography with the written word to interrogate the act of remembrance.

Queens' Art Festival 2023

On until 1st May 2023

The annual Queen's Art Festival always produces an exciting collection of student art united by a fresh and innovative theme, and this year was no different. Brought together by the concept of 'Bricolage' – a celebration of the artistic beauty within mundane objects – the exhibition balances nostalgic, messy collages alongside digitally-created political satires, and even invites you to collaborate with the creators once you've taken in the talent on display

The Bell Collection of British Studio Pottery – Clare Hall Porters' Lodge

Permanent exhibition

Composed of roughly 300 pieces of pottery spanning most of the 20th century, this collection ranges from mass-produced bowls to Japanese tea sets. In a gentle tide of bamboo handles and grey-blue dyes, the earthy beauty of the everyday is allowed to shine.

Spring Exhibition 2023 – Gallerie V

On until 28th May 2023

Daffodils and tulips bloom and bring vibrancy to the city, and colour splashes on the walls of Gallerie V in their new spring exhibition. Displaying a variety of explorations of the theme of "spring" through a range of

mediums and styles, the gallery gives emerging artists the space to bloom and be admired alongside the charge of beginnings and growth present in their work. Each piece reflects the brightness the new season brings to the city, collectively capturing the energy of a hopeful spring ahead.

'Islanders: The Making of the Mediterranean' – the Fitzwilliam Museum

On until 4th June

With the sound of rushing water and the washed-up debris of Mediterranean merchant ships, this exhibition demonstrates that culture is not static but a living, breathing organism.

Lucie Rie exhibition – Kettle's Yard

On until 25th June 2023

Kettle's Yard produces a delightful exhibition of the life and work of an incredible pottery artist testifying to the seriousness of devoting one's life to a craft and how the combined artistry and functionality in ceramic objects brings joy into the mundane. With both her processes and patterns inspired by geological processes, Lucy Rie is both artist and

vulcanist, and this display of this craftswoman's work is enlivened by its combined sense of ancient enchantment and distinctive modernity.

▲EMILY LAWSON-TODD

Extraordinary Objects Permanent exhibition

Just a stone's throw from Sainsbury's, this gallery is one of the most unique hidden corners of Cambridge. It is mostly an extension of director Carla Nizzola's personal collection, with a striking blend of contemporary art and natural history. The figurehead of Nizzola's collection is Tracy – a 66-million-year-old, £125,000 Triceratops skull who watches stoically over Green Street. The gallery open to the public, Wednesday to Sunday, 12–5, and has proved a favourite among tourists and students alike.



The student filmmakers waging war on political correctness

Alice Burton

Antoine Ruello answers our Zoom call from a mansion in France. The Anglia Ruskin graduate and writer/director/producer of student film *The Quiet Truth of Moneytically Correct* is working on set of the French reworking of *The Great British Bake Off* when we get the chance to talk. While in France, Antoine is also juggling the remote post-production edits of his upcoming film and preparing his application to the prestigious National Film and Television School (NFTS). Busy is perhaps an understatement, but he is relaxed and generous with his time in our morning meeting.

The synopsis of *Moneytically Correct* (a play on "politically correct", which Antoine admits he is particularly proud of) is certainly provocative. The

film follows the 'artistic freedom' of a young filmmaker being quashed by a big studio's "politically correct policy" – a story that he felt compelled to tell after watching a Marvel film which tried to be "too correct".

Our central character encounters a check-list of these politically correct hurdles – a meal isn't vegan enough, the main cast isn't diverse enough, an actor doesn't have the right "look". The film laments the suffering of art and authenticity in service of the dreaded 'bottom-line' – scared of boycotts and alienating audiences.

Antoine admits that when rounding up his crew a tough sell. He wasn't always forthcoming about the subject matter when he first approached other student

filmmakers, and would send paragraphs explaining-slash-defending himself and the concept as he asked people to sign on. Yeggi, also a producer, had worked with Antoine during their degree and was an easier "yes" – though he also briefly mentions a cinematographer who left the project due to "artistic differences" and difficulties in casting certain roles.

It's a hot-topic issue for sure, and to go to war with political correctness is a bold choice for his first production. He acknowledges this, making tentative air-quotes as he dares to call the film "brave". When I ask him who he thinks the film is for, he asserts that he is not alone, that he has encountered "lots of people who feel we're promoting diversity in the wrong way". He's aware this view isn't necessarily popular, but says he simply wants "respect if not agreement".

His concern for independent cinema is, at least, valid. Even pre-pandemic, only around half of independent films received a theatrical release, and less of those report box office earnings.

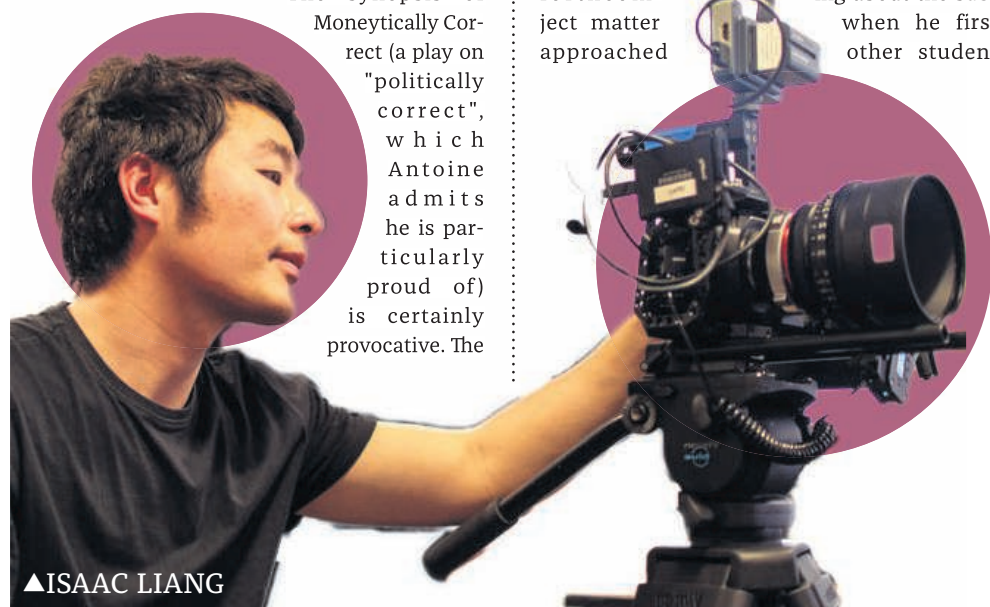
And those are the figures for feature films. For shorts like Antoine's, especially those that are student-led, funding is near-impossible to get hold of. After one of his friends was able to raise £5,000 for a film through crowd-funding, Antoine went down a similar route, and spent two weeks creating a website to ask for donations. He's honest – he didn't have much luck and ended up having to fund the

film himself.

It's also a strong confirmation of the film's central thesis – the anti-political correctness film trying to preserve art over money struggles to find funding. Very meta.

Regardless, shooting went ahead and *Moneytically Correct* is due to be submitted to various film festivals. Antoine is optimistic and excited to have the end in sight. Seeing his film come to life across their many locations – including the Arts Picturehouse – is a rare experience for any student filmmaker.

He reflects on the difficulty of breaking into the film industry and building up a portfolio of work as a student. Antoine was happy that he and the rest of the crew simply "had the opportunity to do something" and is hopeful that avenues for students to make films – irrespective of their subject matter – will continue to grow.



▲ISAAC LIANG



▼ISAAC LIANG

Film & TV**'Cocaine Bear' is embarrassed of itself**

When **Heidi Atkins** pays for a ticket to see a film called *Cocaine Bear* she doesn't want to be lectured on family values, she wants to see a damn bear do some cocaine!

It would be easy to write a review about *Cocaine Bear* that comes to little more than "wow, this film is wacky!" That's certainly what the marketing team wanted people to think, and the fact that the whole film rests on a conflict between a bear and a mob-boss does lend it to that sort of absurd reception. The problem is that, for how ridiculous the premise is, *Cocaine Bear* is actually quite boring.

It is loosely based on the true story of a bear who ate a lot of cocaine. This Pablo Esco-bear (sorry, couldn't resist) died before it could get into any bear-cocaine hijinks, but Elizabeth Banks' reimagining of the story asks the question I guess we were all thinking: what if it didn't die? And what if Ray Lotta was there?

The film has three main plots with a rag-tag ensemble cast. We follow a mother who searches for her daughter who has disappeared into the woods, seemingly kidnapped by the bear. Next up, a criminal gang, searching for their cocaine who are forced to challenge the (now drug-addicted) bear to get

their coke back. The last story unleashes Ranger Liz, a woman driven by two things: destroying a group of teenagers who rob her store and shooting the cocaine bear.

What a fun and ridiculous plot. I'm sure you're asking 'how the hell could this be boring?' Well, there's a big problem with all of these plots... everyone's embarrassed of it being ridiculous. Banks skirts around these fun premises with ham-fisted conversations about friendship, loyalty and family. They're afraid of it just being a silly mid-budget B-movie.

For a film called *Cocaine Bear* to work, you have to know and love what you're making. It's never going to be *Citizen Kane* and it's never going to reframe the way its audience thinks about their mothers. The cult-classic B-movies people love—*Female Trouble*, *Killer Klowns from Outer Space*, and ninety percent of Nick Cage's work—are beloved

because the cast and crew revel in the anarchy and ridiculousness of the project.

The only part of the film that actually fits the bill is Ranger Liz. Margo Martindale is a comedic powerhouse and has never been scared to put her all into a B-movie. As Ranger Liz, she is loud, aggressive, and hilarious, performing without the embarrassed affect her co-stars adopt. She is a joy to watch on screen and the only stand-out character in the film. Martindale feels like the only part of the film that is un-embarrassed by its content, she's the only one who unequivocally commits.

Scenes without Ranger Liz are just flat. CGI bears are expensive, so it doesn't show up all that much and leaves the audience with, well, nothing! It becomes clear that Banks does not know what to do with her characters so they just aimlessly wander around. The big portions of dead space in the

movie are especially disappointing when we are given brief glimpses of a hilarious exploitation movie. The best scene in the film is arguably a chase between an open ambulance and the bear. It's amazingly well executed but it is sandwiched between scenes of a police officer walking around and two other characters who are... you guessed it... also walking around.

This 'what could have been' factor lets down *Cocaine Bear*. There are so many moments where the film almost strikes gold and gestures to an incredible blood-and-guts B-movie, but the next scene is just two guys playing twenty questions. If you're making a film called *Cocaine Bear*, you cannot be shy about it. You can't, as Banks tries to do, turn it into a film about parenthood.

There are homages to exploitation B-movies littered throughout the film but it never really embraces its roots itself, never fully commits to the insanity that the genre requires. Personally, when I pay for a ticket to see a film called *Cocaine Bear* I don't want to be lectured on family values, I want to see a damn bear do some cocaine!

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Getting a peep out of Soft Crunchy Landing

Georgie Atkinson sits down with Cambridge's most booked student band to see how they keep up their stamina



▲ TOBIA NAVA

Tucked away in a corner outside the staple Cambridge haunt of The Eagle, on a drizzly evening in March, I sat down with some of the members of Soft Crunchy Landing (SCL). There was a particular irony in Felix Asare one of the band's organisers, (also central to the Cambridge music scene and member of Quasar) choosing the crunchy snack of sweet chilli flavoured crisps whilst we were chatting. We started by discussing how SCL has established its resolute permanence on the Cambridge gigging circuit and how they provide the "crunchiest" of basslines for their audience.

If you haven't seen the Peep Show, the band takes its name from — I would urge you to find it. Happily the band also had an offshoot band — Big Suze, another delightful reference to Peep Show.

Started in the heady days of 2017, the band naturally has been through different iterations and different band members over the years. However, Jamie Scott, the band's trombonist has been there from the start. Self-described as a band, 'who

found a calling in funk', their seemingly relaxed demeanour is effervescent, which may be the result of a playing groove and funk covers. I broached the topic of the longevity of the band, and how it has managed to survive a pandemic and last for five years. Seemingly evolving from Funk to Pop covers and taking on talented indi-

The band members have stamina beyond the lung capacity needed for playing the trombone

viduals is at the heart of the band's regeneration.

The band is bursting at the seams with such talent, as seemingly most bands in Cambridge are. One of the newest members and vocalists of the band, Maya Moh (of Daniel Daley Sextet fame), recently supported Stormzy at The BRITS on the violin. Whilst the other vocalist Alice Markham is a notable singer and songwriter. Bassist Luke Smith was prompted by Felix to sheepishly note that having pottered across from the "other" place after his undergraduate degree, he has found the Cambridge music scene to be, "more creative and more chaotic", which arguably defines the university to its very core. The full line up of the band also includes Mallory Beechey on Drums, Gabriel Margolis on Keys, Finlay Waugh on Trumpet, Niklas Freund on Alto

Sax and George Withers on Tenor Sax.

Highlights for SCL have included performing before the headliner at John's May Ball last year as well as playing the Varsity Ski Trip. However, it does seem to be apparent that there is rarely an event that the band hasn't played. SCL are also going continental by playing a wedding in Germany this summer, and it might be interesting to see whether their German cover of Stevie Wonder makes it back to the U.K for Michaelmas.

Naturally the topic of perhaps the most anticipated week in the Cambridge calendar, May Week, arose. There was an unspoken and shared feeling around the table of the Herculean feat they were going to take on in June. As the most booked student band in Cambridge, it is clear that the band members have stamina beyond the lung capacity needed for playing the trombone.

A wry smile was shared between Felix and Jamie when discussing last year's May Week, naturally due to playing all days and nights of the week, it is unsurprising that by the end of the week tensions may have been a little heightened. This year SCL's May week appears to be taking on similar sentiment.

Permanence can lead a band to become a little tired and weathered, however SCL are outliers, their establishment in the Cambridge scene allows them to perform with ease and provide a good time. If you are at any May Ball, SCL are guaranteed to supply you with some jazzed and sexed up classics to keep you motivated to make it to any survivor's photo.

Varsity's Study Playlist

Deep sighing, the slightly tacky table where someone has spilled their "natural" energy drink and your finger hovering over which track to press play on. All symptoms that potentially some serious studying is about to commence. Varsity's music team offer some humble suggestions to hopefully see you through your study session.

Some more melodies to drown your sorrows in



Emmy Warr – Pornography by The Cure

This is not a study soundtrack for the faint of heart, but when you need to introduce a healthy element of fear into your revision timetable, Pornography is the album for you.

Alex Brian – Metamorphosis by Phillip Glass

Even when not studying, I prefer to let this music wash over me. Its steady rhythms, gradual evolution and soft solo piano create a calming atmosphere that is perfect for studying. The only danger is its heartrending emotions. This is not the ideal collection if you're already feeling down after a long day of revision.

Georgie Atkinson – Jungle by Jungle

Jungle's self titled debut album, (ironically) will help you cut through the thicket of copious amounts of reading. Jungle's unique blend of funk and nu-disco has happily been gracing the earth and my headphones for almost ten years. For me, the album personifies the feeling of sitting in the sun at a festival sipping on an overpriced gin and tonic — arguably where I am most at home.

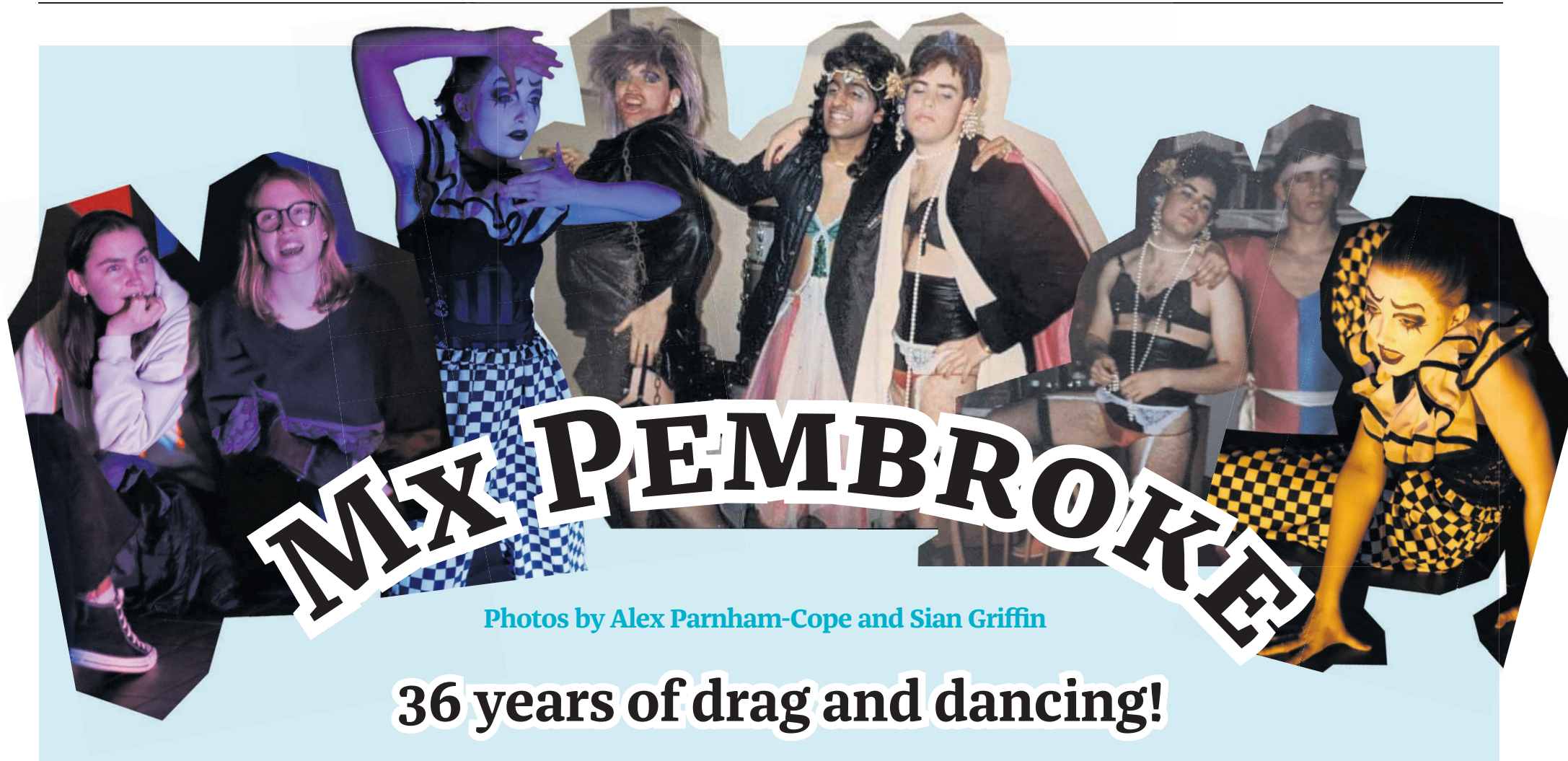


▲ WIKIMEDIA/MR. ROSSI



▲ TOBIA NAVA

Theatre



Photos by Alex Parnham-Cope and Sian Griffin

36 years of drag and dancing!

Alex Parnham-Cope investigates the mother-son Valencians who've brought pride and partying to one of Cambridge's oldest colleges

The year is 1987. Rick Astley is blasting over the record player, Thatcher dwells in Number 10, and in Pembroke College, students are suiting up in leotards and leopard print to compete in the colleges first ever drag show. Sian Griffin, a second year Medicine student at the time, bundled her film camera into Pembroke cellars to capture some iconic shots from the evening. Then decades later, her son Oscar, now studying Classics at the same college, would stumble across the pictures and resurrect the tradition. Speaking to both mother and son, Varsity investigates 36 years of glitter and glam at Pembroke, and how drag has evolved from a light-hearted party to a politically-conscious expression of community and identity.

Setting the scene, Sian Griffin explains that she matriculated in 1985 – she was part of only the second year of women admitted to Pembroke since its founding in 1347, estimating that men outnumbered women in her year six to one. In

the spring of 1987, she recalls that RAG week was marked with the college's holding a drag competition in the cellars dubbed 'Miss Pembroke', with students donning their skimpiest

penders and highest heels for a good cause.

Speaking to Sian, what is most apparent is the playful incongruity of the show. She explains that the students didn't even consider it would cause offence or eyebrow-raising among the fellows, but rather simply "thought that if people thought it was funny they would come along." The evening was presented by a compere, contestants in the parade introduced themselves and, naturally, were subjected to much hearty "audience participation".

“
Even after 36 years,
drag still retains the
power to shock and
scandalise
”

One thing that was unusual, she reflects, is that the "range of people who took part was quite unexpected, from someone you might have thought was quiet and relatively shy to a couple of more gregarious boaties", concluding that the night had a "positive impact overall" in bringing the student body together. Still, Sian generally downplayed the political significance of the night's festivities, pointing out that there wasn't a wider drag community or culture at the time: "For the participants in Miss Pembroke it was a one night only appearance!"

Like many of the best things in life, the renewed interest in the 1987 event was a happy accident. Oscar and his mum were going through old photo albums when they happened across the pictures she'd taken, which according to Oscar

were "definitely surprising", but "nice to see students putting their all into it and just having fun!"

As the current Pembroke LGBT officer, Oscar was keen to take advantage of this quirk of history and resurrect the drag competition for a new generation of Valencians, eager to don their false lashes and alarmingly towering stilettos. The event went ahead at the end of Lent term, with the organisers keen to emphasise the "amateur angle": "there were no expectations participants had to be queer or any good at it, it was just a fun night."

Indeed, this DIY, community-driven ethos was at the heart of both events, with Oscar underscoring that while he has "great respect for performers who put their all into really impressive outfits and performances", ultimately "encouraging expression and transgression of gender norms" needn't be professionalised or competitive. With tattered wigs passed between performers and the dazzling cacophony of a single set of rainbow lights blasting the walls of Pembroke cellars yet again, it's clear Pembroke has stayed true to its noisy, novice roots.

Comparing how drag has evolved as both an art form and a social spectacle, Oscar remarks that in 1987 Miss Pembroke "definitely wasn't distinctly LGBT or queer – it was just a laugh to dress up for charity." Comparatively, he explains that the rising popularity of drag in contemporary media, exemplified by shows such as RuPaul's Drag Race, has meant "the focus has shifted back to its roots in Black queer ballroom, and there is a greater focus on drag as queer expression." This keen awareness of the centrality of LGBT identities and history to drag performances is reflected in the subtle

name change, from Miss Pembroke in 1987 to Mx Pembroke in 2023.

However, the increased visibility and celebration of drag culture has been combined with renewed political attacks and legal marginalisation of LGBT groups. Reflecting on these volatile changes, Oscar observes that increased visibility of drag has unfortunately "become tied up in trans "debates", and circled back round to arguments about LGBT people not being around children, leading to situations like drag bans in the US." While there has undoubtedly been clear progress in the equality and protection of LGBT groups in the past decades, it is equally clear that drag culture remains a critical flashpoint in contemporary social and political life.

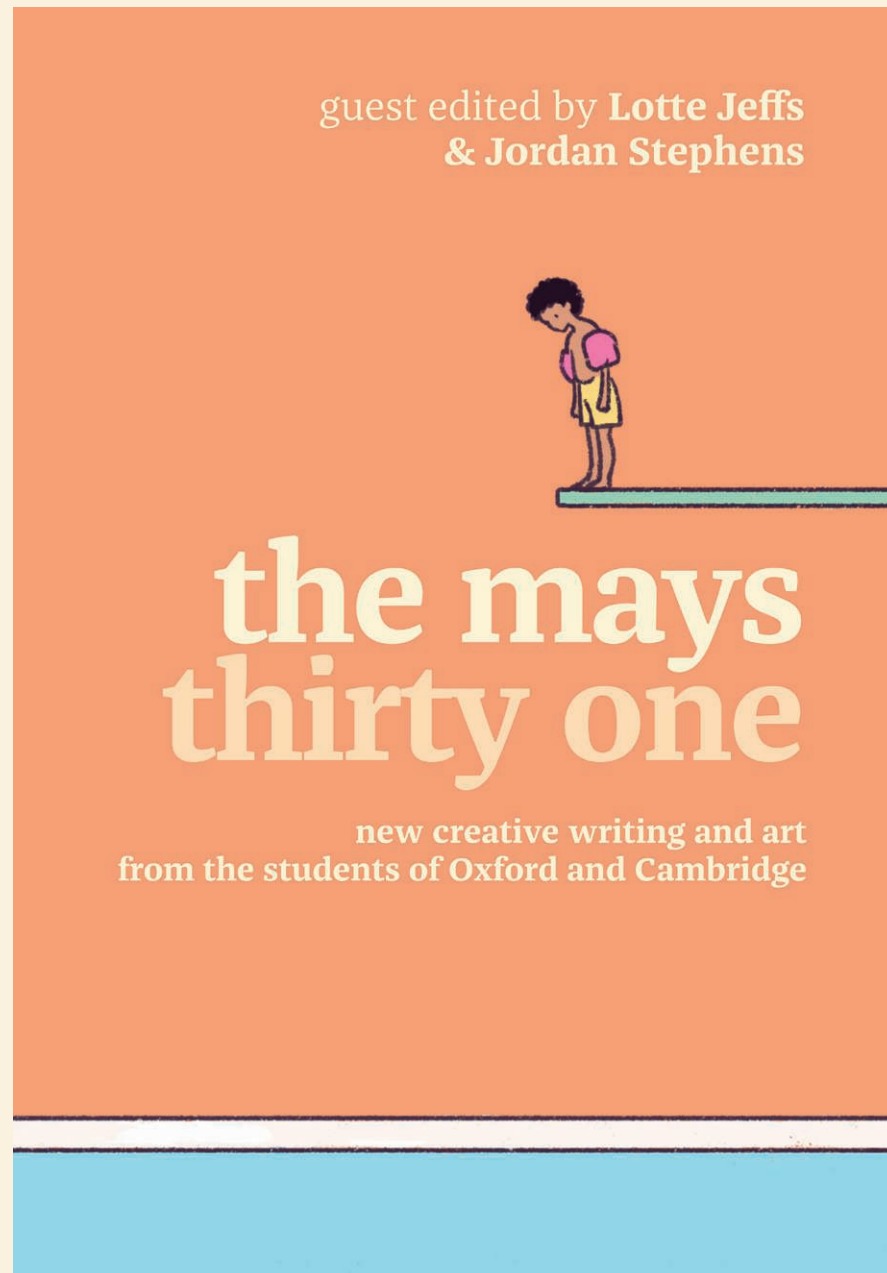
Even after 36 years, drag still retains the power to shock and scandalise, but equally to bring like-minded souls together in celebration. For Oscar drag is an "art form and method of creative expression"; an act of gender transgression simultaneously intimate and deeply political. Whether it's socially-minded performance art or just wildly tuneless karaoke, one thing's for sure: the drag artists of Pembroke know how to put on a great show.





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Theatre

The Cambridge theatre scene: is anything about this normal?

Jude Crawley interviews five drama society presidents from unis across the country to find out

Cambridge students are lucky to have such a theatrically endowed university. Theatre is everywhere in this city, from the gongs and the gowns to the bug-shaped clock. Then, there's the theatre of the stage. As a student here, the funding, scale, and opportunities for the performing arts seem unique. But just how unusual are they really? Is this normal for a university, or is it another privilege of a Cambridge education? I interviewed drama society presidents from universities across the UK: from Bristol and UCL, up to York and Edinburgh, and even our rival Oxford, to find out.

Perhaps what makes Cambridge theatre seem so remarkable is the ADC, England's oldest university playhouse. Originally 'The Hoop Coaching Inn', the dramaturgs of Cambridge have been performing, tucked away, on Park Street since 1855. Today, the ADC provides permanent access to a theatre space that is professionally managed with no hire fee. How special! Well, not quite. It turns out this is an experience unique... to Oxbridge. Oxford has two professionally managed theatres: Oxford Playhouse and The Birth and Taylor Studio.

This privilege does not extend beyond the small sphere of Oxbridge. Students at UCL and Bristol hire out venues for shows, and while some of

these spaces put the ADC to shame – UCL have two productions a year in the 550-seat Bloomsburg Theatre on the West End – costs range from £1,000 to £10,000 depending on the venue. These eye watering prices limit the number of large-scale productions that the UCL and Bristol drama societies can stage to around eight a year.

The presidents' shared frustrations about cost and flaky venues limiting the number of productions. It made me reflect on the privilege behind the age-old complaint: "There's just so much Theatre in Cambridge! It's impossible to pick."

Comparatively, York and Edinburgh are able to stage more than Bristol and UCL courtesy of venue ownership. The University of York stages 32 productions per year in a single 50-seat student-run venue, lovingly named The Drama Barn. Similarly, Edinburgh stages 40 in The Bedlam Theatre, a 90-seat venue also ran entirely by students. Having been involved in the administrative hullaballoo that is the management of a student-run theatre, I can confirm that those are some seriously impressive numbers.

Through my research, the theme of Oxbridge privilege repeatedly stood out. According to the ADC 2021-2022 report, there were 186 productions in the year, most of which were organised and performed by students. Guess who else is subjected to an overwhelming amount

of amdram? In Oxford, there are around 150 productions staged a year.

The performing arts models at the two universities do differ – in Oxford, budding thespians have to set up a production company, a functional bank account and social media branding, and their pitches to venues are far more comprehensive. Regardless, with the continual defunding of the arts, Oxbridge seems to be hoovering up an ever bigger share of amateur university drama.

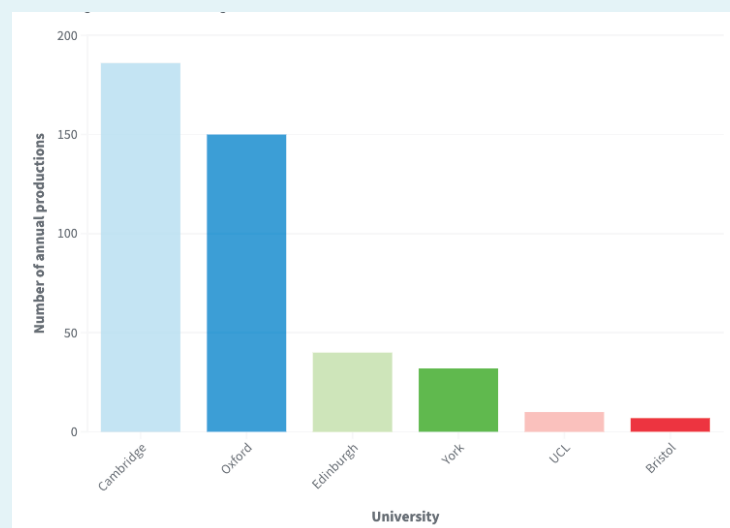
My other major takeaway from these early-morning Zoom conversations, however, were the idiosyncrasies that each drama society had developed. Much of the drama scene at UCL, for instance, is devoted to new writing evenings and festivals, perhaps unsurprising given the strength of its English courses. There is a queer writing festival, a PhD-only writing festival, and an "anybody and everybody" writing festival. While Cambridge does stage many new writing plays, and also benefits from the Howard Downing New Writing Festival, new writing doesn't seem to receive the same focus as it does in London.

Bristol and Edinburgh are the ancient Athens of drama scenes: firmly rooted in democratic values. Months before a slot, individuals pitch shows to the entire drama society. Then, after a forum, discussion members vote on the show to go forward. Quirkier still, York has a

casting system where, after the 16 shows for that term are given out and everyone has auditioned for the parts they want, all the directors sit in a room together and discuss who gets to cast who. This is to avoid any single actor being overstretched or double booked in a term. With the burnout state of some of the over-committed Cambridge thespians, this might be an idea to pinch (*cough cough* incoming CUADC committee).

From my conversations, I seem to

have proven my hypothesis: we are ridiculously spoiled in Cambridge. Shockingly, they are also ridiculously spoiled in 'the other place'. No other universities have anywhere near the same quantity of shows or funding behind them. So, next time you hear someone moaning about the evil overlords of ADC management in the bar, remind them: we are the lucky ones, really.



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‘I haven't ridden a bike for six years’: In conversation with Sir Bradley Wiggins

James Hardy
Sports Writer

It's very easy to put people on pedestals. Going into this interview, I was expecting the Bradley Wiggins of 2012 with a thin frame and sideburns. I was greeted by blue tattoos, a stocky build (from rowing) and an unvarnished but warm demeanour. The ice broke quickly. He has a bracing honesty and shared deeply personal insights over the course of our conversation. It also clearly came across that he is on a journey of self-reflection and improvement, and has been working to overcome personal issues stemming from childhood trauma and the pressures of high-octane cycling.

“My dad was a professional cyclist,” Wiggins explained as we touched on the influences that propelled his cycling career. After his parents divorced, the young Bradley had no contact with father Gary for 14 years. “My mum brought me up talking about him. She really glorified his cycling traits and how good he was – so I grew up idolising him.” Aged 12, he entered his first race and from then on “I never thought I would do anything

else.” It was clear that Wiggins does not wear the mantle of being a celebrity comfortably. “Life was never the same again after the 1st of August 2012,” he explained. “It was horrible. I couldn't prepare for what happened and I've lived with that ever since.” He spelled out how he struggled with being compared to his idols such as Miguel Induráin. Growing up: “I never considered that I would ever be able to do something like that. Part of me will never get my head round that because I'm thrust back to being a teenager and pictures of those guys on my walls.” I also sensed frustration

at being tied to his former career. “I finished cycling at 36, you get stuck in that definition of who you are for the rest of your life. I haven't ridden a bike for six years. Funny how you get tagged with that forever.” Since retirement, Wiggins notoriously said that he hated cycling, so I pushed him to clarify his comments. “It's portrayed as this big happy family but it's not. It's just a functioning machine. Everyone wants to win.” This has been intensified by huge injections of finance into the sport, meaning riders are competing for money as well as glory. “Once there's a lot of money at stake, it breeds bad blood.” Wig-

gins also expressed regret at the character traits that professional cycling honed. “You have to be selfish. Everyone else second. Your life is the centre of the world in terms of everyone else around you. Everyone should be lucky to be around you. You're so lucky to be married to Sir Bradley Wiggins. But to be honest you could be a bit of c*nt, and you are a c*nt.” Divorce and lockdown prompted a lot of soul-searching and Bradley was candid that he's addressing issues in his personal life. “I realised what a dreadful person I was when I was cycling.”

The challenging childhood and personal life that Bradley faced motivate him to be a strong role model for his children. “Cycling's not everything. I think it's more important to be a stable role model.” Raising daughter Isabella is the “priority of [his] life at the moment” and he was also immensely proud when talking about son Ben, who won gold at the European Track Championships aged 17. However, Wiggins stressed that besides cycling accolades, “[Ben] is already successful enough as a person for me.”

Wrapping up the interview, we discussed what Bradley has been doing recently and what his plans are for the

future. Having been in the cycling world for 25 years, he evidently wants to do something new. For the past six months he has been working with the NSPCC on their Speak Up campaign to tackle child abuse. “I haven't got any plans at the moment, I'm in limbo a little bit. Right

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Cycling is portrayed as this big happy family but it's not. It's just a functioning machine. Everyone wants to win.

now I'm on the look-out [for opportunities] and if nothing comes along then I'll get a proper job. I'd be quite happy stacking shelves at Tesco's or Sainsbury's.” What I enjoyed the most about interviewing Bradley was his ability to touch on sensitive issues without constraining his light-hearted and self-deprecating sense of humour.



▲ Photos by Nordin Catic

Fitz at the double? Varsity predicts Football Cuppers

Will Jesus retain the women's crown?
Can Pembroke stop Fitzwilliam's Blues?

Abbie Hastie
Sports Editor

This year's Football Cuppers competitions finish with their finals at the start of this term. For the uninitiated or unsporty, Cuppers can seem confusing. Is Cuppers a stupid Cambridge name for a cup? Is it just a university version of sports day? Is it important in any way, shape or form? The answer to all these questions is yes. Cuppers is in many ways trivial (who really cares if Tit Hall beat Churchill?) but it's also great fun, great exercise and a great spectator sport. This year's men's Cuppers final takes place on Wednesday (26/04) at Pembroke pitches between Pembroke and Fitzwilliam. Fitz are the favourites. They have won the previous six Cuppers competitions, and currently sit at the top of the Premier League table. Pembroke lie just outside the relegation zone of the Premier League on six points having beaten only Jesus and the pointless Robinson (who lie just above the whipping boys of Selwyn). However, they have put together a stellar cup run, beating Sidney, Emma, Trinity and finally Dar-



▲ Photo by Levente Kores

win in the semifinal. They also have men's Blues Captain Matt Hawthorn at the heart of the defence, who will be looking to prevent his Blues teammates Lumi Kanwei, Sonny McPherson and Asa Campbell from running riot. They will have home advantage, but given Fitz's quality and strength in depth, it will be a hard task for them to interrupt Fitz's winning run. *Varsity Prediction:* Pembroke 1- 3 Fitzwilliam

The women's Cuppers final will also take place at the start of term, between Jesus and Fitz/Corpus. Jesus are also hoping to retain their Cuppers crown from last year, and after beating the self-proclaimed “best team in the world” Peterhouse/Clare/Clare Hall in the semifinal, the final should be a stroll in the park. Fitz/Corpus present a slightly different to challenge to PCCH though. With fewer fans, but arguably better shape and structure, and a swathe of CUAFC girls, Fitz/Corpus are Jesus' best opposition for a while. Its shaping up to be quite a clash in midfield, as Fitz/Corpus' skilful pair of Nina Valenbreder and Nia Hall face off against the dynamic duo of Anna Herr and Beattie Green for Jesus. The key for Jesus may be whether they can convince Isobel Boothroyd to play for them. Boothroyd ran the show in last year's Cuppers final, but has suffered foot problems this season and may not want to risk her fitness before the Blues play their Varsity match against Oxford.

Varsity Prediction: Jesus 2- 1 Fitz/Corpus

Never underestimate a rower's cox

Abbie Hastie chats with Rowbridge heartthrob Jasper Parish about the Boat Race, Bumps and *that* decision to change line

“I was a pretty lazy kid, still am”, are not the words you expect to come out the mouth of any Blues athlete, never mind a rower. Jasper Parish is not your average Blue though. Few coxes would have made the decision to change line for cleaner water by Craven Cottage, but fewer still have two Boat Race victories (one with the women and one with the men) at the age of 19. Alongside his brother in the Blue Boat, Parish is the son of an Olympic standard rower - rowing is in his blood. Too skinny to make playing Rugby a pleasurable experience, he started rowing “at school at St Paul's in London, which is on the Boat Race Course, at about 13”. He started coxing and says it simply “worked out very well for me, I mean I've loved it ever since”. Parish's love of rowing is matched by his love for his teammates. He says that Boat Race preparations mean that “you sort of connect with people on a different level” which means you “have friendships which last a long time”. One of these friendships is with his brother Ollie, who Jasper says “it's been really fun” to row with. However, he argues that media focus on the brothers has overhyped the situation: “When we're in the boat, we're just two guys in the boat” although he concedes that their relationship means that there's “maybe a bit of extra communication ability, maybe it's a bit quicker”. The

bond between the crew is strengthened by the fact that they live together in the week before the race. Parish says that in the week before the race, “everyone's quite excited”, but that “raceday is a crazy day”.

“Last year I was very nervous,” he says, “this year was a little bit different. I felt a lot more relaxed. Maybe it was having done it before but I felt a little bit better about it and that little bit of extra calmness helps quite a lot especially in the coxing seat because I can sort of offload that to the crew a little bit”. However, this calm was interrupted by a rudder issue just before the race. The discovery of the issue was “not good at all” as problems with the boat at that stage are a crew's worse nightmare. Thankfully, the problem was “just caused by some of the BBC people [who] had put a bunch of crap in the stern of the boat” and there was nothing seriously wrong.

The race started without a hitch and it was very even in the opening stages, until the Cambridge boat dramatically changed line in search of clear water,

gaining a crucial length on Oxford in the process. I ask Parish if he knew that the move was critical when he made it: “When we first got to the end of the line of boats, which is about a minute and a half in, and we saw the waves really

picking up, that's when it first maybe came into my head that we should move over.”

“I start to make the move maybe just under two minutes in and then in the next 30 seconds basically I'm just looking over every other stroke and we're like taking a seat, a seat, a seat and then when we came out the bend I'm a bit more confident”. He was right to be, Cambridge took a length on Oxford and never gave it up.

I was interested in the psychology of coxing and what calls a cox uses to motivate and intimidate their crew in equal measure. This is dependent “not only on the kind of race but also where you are in the race” and is “always a balance, always difficult”.

Coxes were important in both Blue Boat races this year. Adulation of his cox box recording is widespread on Rowbridge (the rowers' Camfess). For our readers not acquainted with this page “JP you can do whatever you want with me” is an indicative comment.

So does he think he's made coxing cool again? “I hope so because it is really cool ... Coxing is a role which people often underestimate because you can make a big difference and often do. The best crews have great coxes and people often forget that”. As we come to the end of our interview, I ask him what his plans for the rest of this season are. Undecided on whether to race at Henley, he says “I might do Bumps” which will surely strike fear into all of Clare's rivals come June.



UB 815

GEMINI

▲ Photo by ALLMARKONE

Sport

Making
coxing cool
again
pg 31

“I realised what
a dreadful
person I was
when I was
cycling.”
pg 31



Charlotte Bardsley
Sports Writer

Cambridge women continue to conquer

Cambridge women sealed their sixth consecutive victory over Oxford, with a dominant display on the Tideway. Cambridge won the toss and elected to row on the Surrey side. At ten past three, the crew emerged, greeted by loud cheers as they marched out of the Thames Rowing Club boathouse, led by club president Caoimhe Dempsey, the only returning Blue. Oxford made an aggressive start, taking an early lead. However, this did not faze the Cambridge crew, and it was not long before they eased back level with the Dark Blues. James Trotman, coxing the Light Blues, was outwardly clear and calm with his instructions though his heart rate measured at 145 bpm, revealing that the favourites were feeling the heat. Just before Hammersmith Bridge things started to get in-

teresting. Bold coxing by Trotman led to several umpire warnings, and a collision would have meant disqualification. From that moment on Cambridge assumed control of the race, settled into a strong rhythm, and pulled away. As they passed St. Paul's School a large gap had developed between the Cambridge crew and Oxford lagging further behind. In the lead, Cambridge women were cruising at Barnes Bridge. However, a camera close up captured the pain writ large across Freya Keto's face as she powered through, demonstrating how Cambridge were still digging in deep to maintain the gap.

Cambridge crossed the finish line with a convincing four and a quarter length margin. There was a slight moment of concern as Oxford's cox Tara Slade protested over encroachment, but this was dismissed by the umpire as no contact was made. It was a combination of delight, relief, and exhaustion for the Cambridge women as they cheered, congratulated each other, and soaked up their victory. Relishing the moment, Trotman showcased impressive balance as he stood up with arms outstretched

in jubilation. Only a slight wobble when congratulating stroke Dempsey nearly saw him fall overboard.

Cambridge men reclaim the Boat Race crown

The Cambridge men's Blue Boat, buoyed by the victories of the women's Blues and both reserve boats, showed real grit and determination to ensure a Cambridge clean sweep in this year's Boat Races.

Crowds of spectators lined both sides of the river and an abundance of Oxbridge college puffer wearing students flocked to the fan parks, gathering expectantly in front of the big screens for the final race of the day. The Oxford and Cambridge crews were evenly matched, and the race was thrilling.

Oxford won the toss, choosing Surrey to put Cambridge on the Middlesex side. Drama ensued before the start, as the Cambridge boat had a rudder issue that needed some quick repairs, but the Cambridge rowers stayed calm and focused despite this pre-race disruption. Cambridge were powerful from the off, and cox Jasper

Parish almost immediately received several stern umpire warnings.

Encountering rough waves, Parish steered the boat towards the bank at Craven Cottage in search of calmer water. This was a daring and unorthodox decision since typically the aim is to keep the boat central where the deepest and fastest part of the river flows. What could have been a tactical blunder, was, thankfully for Cambridge's sake, a stroke of genius. They nudged in front, gaining a half length lead which they then capitalised on.

Approaching Hammersmith Bridge, Cambridge held the lead by a fraction of clear water. 80% of crews in front at this stage of the race win. However, this was still the Boat Race. Oxford would not let Cambridge break away and continued to chase them. Whilst Oxford made an impressive last charge attempt, it was all in vain, as the race had hinged earlier on Parish's decision which gave Cambridge the edge in this tightly fought battle.

The Cambridge men erupted in cheers of delight as they crossed the

finish line with Jasper clambering over to hug his brother Ollie. Subsequent celebrations were understandably muted out of concern for Oxford's stroke Felix Drinkall who required medical attention and was taken to hospital for checks.

It was a very good day to be a Light

This was a daring and unorthodox decision

Blue. The recent amalgamation of the clubs under the one umbrella of CUBC was the key to Cambridge domination. All crews now train together which has built a strong team dynamic, and this was evident as all four teams celebrated on the podium together. Victories in both lightweight races the previous week means that this year will go down in history as one of the best performances that Cambridge University Boat Club has ever seen.