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# VARSITY

## Colleges urged to show compassion over Covid-19 guidelines

William Hunter  
Deputy News Editor

A motion was proposed during a Student Council meeting on Monday night (09/11) "in favour of Fair Enforcement of College Codes of Conduct in the Covid-19 Context".

The motion was proposed by Chloe Newbold, the Cambridge Students' Union (SU) Women's Officer, and seconded by Alice Gilderdale, SU Welfare Officer.

The motion comes at a critical moment as Cambridge joins the nation in entering a second lockdown, expected to last at least until December 2nd, and colleges set out their own internal enforcement policies to ensure students stick to the guidelines.

The SU has noted that "There is significant variation in the approaches taken by the 31 colleges towards the enforcement of Covid-19 discipline guidelines' with some colleges adopting far more punitive measures than others."

The SU highlighted that "These punitive measures include threats to remove students' access to housing", which the motion contends would disproportionately affect those without stable or safe home environments and overseas stu-

dents.

The motion also notes that these threats have led to increased anxiety among students and the creation of a "culture of blame" which has led to "members of the community testing positive for Covid-19 being ostracised for assumed breaching of behavioural guidelines."

King's and Downing have even gone so far as to implement a fine based enforcement system meaning that students found to have broken guidelines face financial punishments. The motion contests that this system disproportionately affects those from less privileged backgrounds and may allow wealthy students to break the guidelines without facing severe consequences.

The motion also raises the ongoing issue of students who experience sexual abuse or misconduct while in breach of lockdown guidelines. No college has yet made it clear what the disciplinary procedure will be for students who make a report while in breach of guidelines but there is a growing concern that the punitive approach taken by some col-

Continued on page 2 ►

Covid-19  
Watch

47

positive symptomatic cases

23

positive asymptomatic cases

4.6k

total number of students screened



▲ The motion called on colleges to fairly enforce "Codes of Conduct in the Covid-19 context" (LUCAS MADDALENA)

## University formally adopts the IHRA definition of antisemitism

Gaby Vides  
Senior News Editor

The University of Cambridge has adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition on antisemitism in full.

The adoption of the definition was agreed upon at a General Board meeting on November 4th.

A University statement describes the IHRA definition as "a useful tool for understanding how antisemitism manifests

itself in our society. It will be used as a test to establish whether behaviour that is in breach of the University's rules is anti-Semitic."

The IHRA definition, a one-paragraph summary of antisemitism with 11 examples, was written in 2016 and has since been adopted by a number of institutions including the UK government.

The IHRA defines antisemitism as a "certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations

of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

Examples given of contemporary antisemitism under the IHRA definition include "holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel" and "applying double standards by requiring of it [Israel] behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation."

The University has also included clarifications "to ensure that freedom of speech is maintained in the context of discourse about Israel and Palestine, without allowing antisemitism to permeate any debate", as the University details is recommended by the Home Affairs Select Committee.

The clarifications are: "It is not anti-Semitic to criticise the government of Israel, without additional evidence to suggest anti-Semitic intent" and "It is not anti-Semitic to hold the Israeli

government to the same standards as other liberal democracies, or to take a particular interest in the Israeli government's policies or actions, without additional evidence to suggest anti-Semitic intent."

Joel Rosen, External Affairs Officer for Cambridge University's Jewish Society (CUJS), detailed in a press release CUJS's support of the University's decision, particularly referencing the inclu-

Continued on page 3 ►

## News

## EDITORIAL

## Living through history

Whether it is the Christmas bells that you can hear ringing in the distance, or the news of the vaccine that has made you hopeful about the future: the past two weeks have brought with them monumental change. Week 5 has silently come and gone, as under the current circumstances cherishing your last charity shop trip before lockdown seems more important than the essay or worksheet that is due. Perhaps this has made us value the prosaic moments in the day – walking through crowded markets, having dinner in a restaurant or drinking a cappuccino in a café, rather than the instant coffee in your room.

Beyond this, these last few days have strengthened our understanding of ourselves situated in world as a whole, rather than the UK, or even more specifically, Cambridge. With Biden and Harris taking on the leadership of the USA, and a national lockdown across various countries in Europe, we become increasingly aware of what it means to live in a globalised society. Besides analysing the effect of the national lockdown on Cambridge (News, page 6) we therefore push you to look beyond your microcosm at phenomena with global consequences, such as the minority votes in the American election (Opinion, page 13)

This issue we wanted to highlight the world around us, from taking a glimpse at the memory of a very special summer in Paris (Arts, page 26), to recollections of experiencing Japanese Noh theatre first hand (Theatre, page 28). With nostalgia for travel in a present of forced domesticity you may question what 'home' really means (Features, page 12) or alternatively you might decide to escape into the past – perhaps fusing it with the present by revisiting John Lennon and his legacy (Music, 22).

If the world seems like too big of a place to comprehend right now, settle down with a piece written by someone just like you, living where you are, experiencing what you are experiencing. That might mean gathering tips on isolation survival (Features, 10), or critically examining national politics (Opinion, page 14). You do you.

Isabel Sebode x

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# Cambridge JCRs boost welfare initiatives during second lockdown

**Diana Stoyanova & Cameron White**  
**Deputy News Editors**  
**Alexander Shtyrov**  
**News Correspondent**

Since England went into lockdown last Thursday (05/11), JCRs have started a number of initiatives to support student welfare and create a spirit of community despite the lockdown..

During an open meeting with the Vice Chancellor on Monday (10/11), Stephen Toope confirmed that measures are being taken across the Collegiate University to look after student wellbeing

Multiple JCRs are putting on events to maintain college spirit. For example, Murray Edwards will be running events throughout the rest of the term, including a week 5 “pamper evening”, vegan cookery classes with the Murray Edwards chefs and a college-wide Secret Santa.

The Medwards JCR has also taken to social media and created an infographic on their instagram for “Lockdown Lean Ons” “which includes places for students to seek support”.

Medwards JCR President, Freya Watson, told *Varsity* that the Committee has also put out two surveys asking for feedback on the College’s lockdown measures and social distancing guidelines, which have been presented to College Council and will be used to “vouch for student welfare weekly to the Senior Tutor”.

The JCR are also using online platforms to remind students about the welfare options available to them and they plan to distribute “Self Care Tips” with ideas such as film recommendations and room decorating tricks

When asked about the College’s response to the lockdown, Watson told *Varsity* that she has been “in constant communication with College staff throughout this period”. She further noted that “the frequency of meetings between the JCR and college staff mean any upcoming issues from students are dealt with in a timely manner.”

In a similar vein to Murray Edwards, St Catharine’s will also be running a ‘Cook-Along’ event, which will involve preparing and distributing food to every College household that signs up to the scheme free of charge. Students will cook

along while watching a livestream event hosted by the Catering Operator and the JCR President, Rory Cockshaw.

Cockshaw described the ‘Cook-Along’ as a fun way to “teach [students] crucial cooking skills in the admittedly limited cooking facilities provided by most first-year Catz accommodation.”

Another unique initiative created by the St Catharine’s JCR Committee will be the ‘Catz Lockdown Charity Challenge’, affectionately known as “#AWheely-LongWay”, in which students who sign up will be able to walk, run, cycle and erg a combined total of 3,500 miles - the approximate distance from the college’s Main Court to Sana’a, the capital of Yemen.

Money raised from the event will go towards their JustGiving fundraiser for CARE International’s Yemen Appeal, in order to not “only [...] connect Catz to the wider world [...] but [...] encourage our students to go outside, stay active, and socialise by walking or running in pairs.” Cockshaw added: “having a purpose outside of oneself and staying active are crucial for welfare”.

On the importance of welfare, the Clare College JCR will be running Instagram story takeovers on their main account twice a week so that committee members share a ‘Day in my life: Welfare Edition’. Clare’s JCR will also be re-releasing a welfare document, which was created over the summer, to support College members who may be suffering to come to terms with the new set of circumstances created by the lockdown.

Like St Catharine’s, Clare Hall is also running a ‘Cook-Along’ event in order to “help give the sense of sharing a meal together”, according to the college’s Graduate Student Body President.

They have also adapted to the new state of lockdown by maintaining a Discord server on which students can communicate and play virtual board games, alongside a host of “no- and low-contact events that have been held since March, aimed at maintaining a sense of student community and social connectedness” such as pub quizzes, coffee chats, and ‘drink-and-draws’. In a similar fashion to which Clare Hall are using Discord to retain a sense of community, Darwin College Students’ Association (DCSA) making use of a Teams channel so that

any of the College’s societies or sports clubs have a forum on which members can meet online.

The DCSA is also “working with other mature colleges on a Blind Date Fridays scheme so Darwinians can socialize beyond the college boundaries”. Meanwhile St Catharine’s JCR are organising one-on-one blind dates with other colleges, such as Lucy Cavendish, next week.

Other JCRs have been encouraging students to participate in creative activities, with “a very popular recent T-shirt making event” being held at Selwyn, and an “art and photography competition” at Clare.

Events place an emphasis on “whole-some welfare initiatives”, says Tomos Wood, president of Queens’ JCR.

“Our welfare officers, Leoni Boyle and Damola Odeyemi, produced a brand new welfare timetable as soon as the lockdown was announced, with five events a week,” explained Harriet Hards, president of Emmanuel College Students’ Union (ECSU).

“This includes online yoga and Zumba classes, an online welfare drop-in hour each week and Netflix Parties.”

JCRs have not found it difficult to liaise with their College leadership, according to student representatives.

Ludvig Brekke, president of the Trinity College Students’ Union (TCSU), said: “The TCSU maintains a very strong, co-operative relationship with the College leadership.”

“It is a difficult tightrope to walk, but by working together, the TCSU and the College are doing all we can to look after the students’ physical and mental well-being.”

The president of Queens’ JCR also noted that “never before have the senior officers and JCR and MCR committees worked so closely.”

Even with the welfare efforts of Colleges and JCRs, “the rest of term will pose many more challenges”, according to the president of ECSU, but she remains optimistic.

“I’m really proud of the way that ECSU has responded to the changing situation and the solidarity and compassion that has been shown so far. [...] I’m confident that we will all work very hard to support students during this difficult time.”

“We are asking that colleges live up to their insitutional responsibility”

and transparent with students at a time of heightened anxiety across the University. Uncertainty around punitive enforcement will increase the likelihood that students will engage in covert rule breakages, and will therefore fear coming forward to report harms committed during breaches of guidelines.”

“We are asking that the colleges live up to their institutional responsibility to provide a safe environment for all students, treating them as adults who wish to behave in a way that protects fellow members of the community. A focus on student well-being and community must be at the centre of our response to the pandemic.”

A spokesperson for the University has told *Varsity* that “The University and colleges are putting a huge amount of effort

into supporting students, helping them to understand and observe national public health guidance, and keeping them as safe as possible at what is understandably a difficult time”.

The spokesperson went on to say that “the pandemic does not alter the University’s commitment to ensuring a culture free from sexual misconduct and abusive behaviour” and stated that “students reporting sexual misconduct will not face punishment for breaching COVID-19 restrictions.”

The motion was noted on Monday’s Student Council but will be voted on in the next session of Council on November 23rd.

*King’s and Downing College have been contacted for comment.*

► Continued from front page

sion of “all eleven examples specified by the IHRA.”

He continued: “We trust that this announcement endows colleges, faculties and departments with the clarity and confidence to take robust action to safeguard Jewish students and we will seek further details on how this decision will be implemented.”

“No Jewish student or member of staff should face the degrading indignity of Antisemitism be it through coded tropes or explicit abuse. CUJS will work with allies across the collegiate university and beyond to challenge prejudice, support victims and fearlessly advocate on their behalf.”

Following the University’s adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism, Cambridge Students’ Union passed an emergency motion during Monday’s (09/11) student council to support the adoption of the IHRA definition.

The motion notes that CUJS and the National Union of Jewish Students both support “this decision and believe that the IHRA definition of antisemitism is the best mechanism for safeguarding Jewish students from prejudice”, and

that the SU “in line with the Macpherson principle” believe “it is for Jewish students to determine what does and does not constitute antisemitism.”

The SU further note their belief that “it is hurtful and wrong to diminish or deny the lived experiences of Jewish students” and that they “should join the growing number of universities and student unions in the UK to protect their Jewish students”. The motion also resolved that the SU will “hold the University to account in implementing a zero-tolerance approach to Antisemitism, using the IHRA definition and all eleven examples.”

Ben Margolis, the SU’s undergraduate president, detailed to *Varsity* the SU’s current engagement in “formulating a comprehensive and practically workable definition of racism to adopt in our By-Laws, which sets out our Code of Conduct.”

He continues to stress that the SU will work to “ensure that this definition is grounded in individual students’ lived experiences and reflects the diversity of minority groups and backgrounds that are represented in our membership, we will be working in collaboration with student societies and clubs - including CUJS - as well as SU Campaigns to hear

their views on how best the SU can safeguard its membership”.

The IHRA definition has been a source of much controversy over the last few years, only last month Education Secretary Gavin Williamson wrote to vice-chancellors warning them that he would act if “the overwhelming majority” of universities did not adopt the IHRA definition of anti-semitism by the end of the year.

Williamson added that recent freedom of information (FOI) requests by the Union of Jewish Students (UJS) which showed that only 29 out of 133 universities had adopted the IHRA definition, with a further 80 institutions having no current plans to do so was “frankly disturbing”.

Williamson wrote in his letter to the vice-chancellors: “The repugnant belief that antisemitism is somehow a less serious or more acceptable form of racism has taken insidious hold in some parts of British society, and I am quite clear that universities must play their part in rooting out this attitude and demonstrating that antisemitism is abhorrent.”

In regard to the responses from their FOIs, the UJS highlight the imperative of adopting the IHRA definition of antisemitism, particularly when consid-

ering that “antisemitic incidents at UK universities rose by 38% year-on-year in the first six months of 2020.”

They continued: “We have seen multiple examples of antisemitism being dismissed by universities who refuse to adopt this definition. When the definition is not used, it gives the power to those investigating, most often academic staff from the same department, to decide what they believe constitutes antisemitism.”

At the time that Williamson sent his letter to vice-chancellors a Cambridge University spokesperson told *The Jewish Chronicle* that “any behaviour that would fall within the IHRA definition would be covered by the University’s current Rules of Behaviour.” However, the spokesperson did emphasise that “the University keeps its Rules of Behaviour under review and therefore, will continue to monitor its approach.”

Following Cambridge’s adoption of the IHRA definition, UJS released a statement expressing thanks to “all those involved who have been instrumental in achieving this step. The adoption of the IHRA definition will go a long way in ensuring Jewish students are safeguarded from antisemitism on their campus.”

## NEWS

### How is Cambridge reacting to a second lockdown?

Page 6 ►

## FEATURES

### Disordered Eating: Food in Isolation

Page 11 ►

## OPINION

### The US Democratic Party must stop taking minority votes for granted



▲ (JETTYYIMAGES/DREWANGERER)

Page 13 ►

## SCIENCE

### The first COVID-19 ‘human challenge’ trials may take place in the UK by the start of 2021



▲ (BICANSKI, PIXNIO)

Page 15 ►

## VIOLET

### An unlikely year abroad

Page 30 ►

# Cambridge responds to US election



▲ Protesters gathered in Cambridge in September 2019 to demonstrate against Trump’s planned state visit to the UK (LOUIS ASHWORTH)

**Gaby Vides**  
Senior News Editor

Students at the University of Cambridge reacted to the declaration of Joe Biden as the 46th President of the United States (US) last Saturday night (07/11) following a frantic few days of counting ballots.

Biden won a record number of votes, totaling over 75 million surpassing the previous record held by Barack Obama while Trump won over 70 million votes.

Biden’s victory was secured by flipping key swing states, including Michigan, Wisconsin and, most importantly, Pennsylvania, which provided the 20 votes Biden needed to reach the 270 threshold.

Isabelle, a POLIS MPhil student at Trinity from Boston, detailed to *Varsity* the importance of the election: “The stakes of the election are hard to overstate. President Trump’s first term in office was marked by four years in which the president dismantled democratic norms in the United States, tarnished

our country’s international image, and fundamentally threatened the rights, lives, and human dignity of people who call the US home.”

She continued to stress that Trump’s views on climate change, Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter are “not only flawed, but dangerous. We couldn’t afford another four years of his hateful rhetoric and fundamentally misguided policies—and neither can the rest of the globe.”

Nate, a Politics PhD student at Kings, also recognised that the “global implications [of the election] are important”.

“The absence of US leadership under Trump has catalyzed these fractures and a return of US normalcy can prove a path forward in building more robust institutions, organizations and norms.”

Isabelle stressed: “Biden’s win will not resolve all of the problems and injustices in the US, but it will signal a rejection of Trump’s hateful attitudes and a turn toward decency and rationality.”

Similarly on the importance of the election and voting, Ben Schaffer, who has returned to his home near New

York after completing a History MA at Emmanuel, emphasised that “this was probably the most important election in recent American history...Many of us thought that 2016 was a done deal for Secretary Clinton and woke up devastated after that election, so there was a real sense of obligation and hard work around voting this year.”

Meanwhile, Nate told *Varsity* he was relieved Biden won after the “roller coaster [of] waiting for results”. Although Nate feels Biden “represents a return to stability that didn’t exist with Trump”, he still cautioned that “Biden is not necessarily the utopian ideal politician”.

Nate’s words against any feeling of complacency now that Biden has been elected, rang particularly true considering the tone of Trump’s departure. Many individuals *Varsity* spoke to indicated their alarm at Trump’s baseless election fraud claims, including saying that “If you count the legal votes I win”. He further falsely referred to legally-cast mail ballots as illegitimate.

Trump has been widely condemned for these unsubstantiated claims, including a false declaration of his victory while millions of votes were still being counted.

Hayley, a third year Linguistics student at Homerton, described the election as “ominous”, particularly in regard to “Trump’s false claims”. She highlighted that “the potential worst case scenarios of Trump not conceding show a terrifying insight into the state of America’s democratic gaps. It goes without saying that the electoral college system has once again demonstrated itself to be deeply problematic and outdated.”

Hayley further detailed her worries about the polarisation and current fragmentations within American politics, identifying that “Biden’s lack of a landslide victory reveals the deep political divide in America today, that shows no sign of resolving soon, and which will continue to cause problems beyond the outcome of the election.”

However, Benjamin Studbaker, a PhD

student researching economic inequality and democratic theory, told *Varsity* that while “there has been a lot of worrying about authoritarianism” in reality “the president has alienated his officers, intelligence officials, and civil servants. He does not poll well with ground troops. There is no support in the federal bureaucracy for Trump to become a Caesar figure, and most rank and file Republican voters are still strongly committed to the constitution.”

He continued: “On the whole, this election is less significant than most people think—the winner will be mired in gridlock and will continue to face the institutional roadblocks that have increasingly stymied presidents for many years.”

The presidency was not the only election which took place last Tuesday (03/11), the entirety of the House and a third of the Senate were also up for re-election. Democrats held onto the House, while it appears that the Republicans will narrowly hold onto the Senate.

Isabelle is “disheartened by the fact that the Democrats will not take control of the Senate, because that means that even if Biden wins, there will still be partisan gridlock that will make it hard for him to push forward his agenda.”

Benjamin similarly stressed that “It’s clear that the winner [of the presidency] will lack support in congress, no matter which one of them wins. This means that very little is likely to be accomplished during the next presidential term. The winner will take much of the blame for this institutional problem.”

Despite the tension surrounding the election Hayley is hopeful that Biden’s victory will “mark the beginning of the end of 4 years which have been frankly painful to watch, and hopefully the beginning of rights and dignity being restored for millions of Americans.”

“Both parties have reckoning to do in the next two years before the midterms”, Nate told *Varsity*, with questions on “how the US will deal with race and class” being “importantly” brought into focus.

## News

# Student representatives speak up about online learning

**Sam Crawley**  
News Correspondent  
**Iona Flemming**  
News Correspondent  
**Cameron White**  
Deputy News Editor

This term a majority of subjects have implemented provisions to move most or all of their teaching online in the wake of Covid-19. *Varsity* spoke to both students and student representatives to find out how well teaching has functioned so far this term.

Student representatives for Land Economy, Economics, HSPS, ASNaC, English and Music all made clear to *Varsity* that lectures are being delivered online. Daniel Quigley, the student rep for Music told *Varsity* that their Faculty is offering “some blended lectures and seminars, which are hosted in West Road concert hall, as well as on Zoom” so that students who wish to attend in person may do so.

Some subjects have continued in-person supervisions, at the discretion of both the supervisor and the student. These are conducted in accordance with guidelines on social distancing. Andrew Osipov, the student rep for HSPS explained to *Varsity* that he is personally still attending face-to-face supervisions because he believes that it “creates a more meaningful interaction and experience”.

Indeed, some students seem to be disappointed with their Departments lack

of face-to-face teaching. Eliza Griffiths, the representative for Land Economy, told *Varsity* that “If anything some students would prefer more supervisions to be in person”.

Some students have also had big increases in the size of their supervisions this term. “In October we got a message saying that they’ve had to increase group sizes in everything to around 4 people in each supervision,” one student told *Varsity*. “They increased the group size course to 7 or 8 people, complimented by pre-recorded example classes.” Compared to supervision groups of two in previous years, the student commented that “it’s a big increase in group size... I know the department have tried their best in difficult times but it still feels like a big step away from the small group teaching that the university sells itself on.”

Libraries have also made adjustments to the new situation, introducing new click-and-collect systems. Additionally, many key texts are being offered online and reading lists are being adjusted to accommodate those with limited access to physical books.

Miles Hawksley, student representative for Anglo-Saxon Norse and Celtic (ASNaC) explained how students had also helped in this effort by “collating all lecture notes, essays, lecture material and relevant reading material in a large online cache designed to be available to all ASNaC students and intended in particular to support freshers.”

Online provision of resources has

meant that most of the student representatives understand that the experience of isolating students to be fairly positive. Andrew Osipov told us that “the largest burden has been the effect on their social lives ... However, for those already accustomed to studying in their rooms during normal term time it has been quite normal.”

“The only inconveniences so far have been if a college has difficulty with delivering food and supplies to the student,” he continues “or if the student is accustomed to working in different environments ... so I imagine that if students are used to working in the library or a café during the day that this would be disruptive, but not detrimental as most students are being much more cautious about covid anyway and I see fewer people in the library than usual.”

The student representative for English, Zachary Aw, who has himself been in isolation, echoed these sentiments, saying that self-isolating students “do not feel any significant disadvantages: English is generally a very self-guided course, and having all lectures recorded ensures that there is little to no disparity between students confined to their rooms or otherwise.”

Aw said that the provision of online lectures “allow(s) a lot more freedom.” He continued: “The Faculty have been releasing lectures following the schedule by which they would have been delivered in person originally, so some structure is preserved.”

Farid Aletomeh, the subject rep for Economics, agreed with Aw telling *Varsity* that the implementation of pre-recorded lectures has resulted in “a massive boost in the efficiency of work and flexibility”.

“For some students these (online lectures) have been great because, ironically, students have wanted recorded lectures for years”, Osipov said. “The pandemic has, in a way, given a silver-lining to the situation by forcing the faculty to put lectures online... [students] can now more flexibly choose when they watch lectures, including being able to speed-up slow-speaking lecturers or pausing throughout to take more detailed notes which would’ve previously been missed.”

In contrast none of the ASNaC classes “are pre-recorded and all lectures and classes are delivered live”, Hawksley told *Varsity*.

However, while praising the increase in flexibility, students have noted communicative issues with these pre-recorded lectures.

“There is no standardised system of captioning for every lecture, and some lectures are completely without captions”, Aw told *Varsity*. “The Faculty has stated that this is due to issues with automatic captioning software being unable to properly discern between different accents/Middle English and so on.”

Outside of the academics, “many students [have said] that in-person lectures had been a great way to meet new

people doing the same course”, Aw told *Varsity*. “The English Faculty Building is also open only for library use, so its social spaces are unavailable.”

Quigley agreed, saying “A fair amount of freshers are struggling to make friends, but for the higher years it’s not such a huge issue.” He added that “the varying internet qualities are [also] pretty noticeable in Zoom and Teams calls.”

Students have also noted that one of the biggest challenges this term is the “loss of departmental social events and spaces”, according to Hawksley. “Our beloved common room and our weekly pub meetings are now limited or off limits and this makes welcoming new students and building new relationships hard. Online contact is efficient and a great alternative that we’re lucky to have, but nothing beats laughing over a cup of tea in the department kitchen or getting to know new faces at ASNaC lunch.”

“Apart from the loss of a community feeling amongst students due to not being able to attend in-person lectures and feeling less connected through online teaching, communication has largely remained the same”, Aw told *Varsity*, “as students already communicated quite widely online and even more comically now, over Zoom or Facebook Messenger chat during live teaching sessions.”

Most Faculties have not put specific pastoral support in place for students struggling with the new reality of online teaching. Many Directors of Studies have

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provided this support, such as those for ASNaC, which “have been essential in supporting students with applying for remote study conditions and checking in with individuals to ensure they are settling and coping with the unusual situation”, Hawksley told *Varsity*. “Students feel they can approach staff easily for assistance, as well as to confidently raise any issues. Staff response to email communication has been prompt and thorough in all instances.”

“Overall those students who have always been really involved and passionate with their subject have continued to stay interested and motivated at this level,” Osipov told *Varsity*, “whilst I anticipate that it has been slightly harder for those in self-isolation to stay motivated due to having less of an in-person social life (which can help to balance individual studying).”

Many students in isolation did not feel that their time isolating put them at a disadvantage. “I went into isolation on the first day of the academic term - not the best way to start a year - and was initially apprehensive about how work and learning would continue,” 2nd year Medicine student Rob Cooper told *Varsity*. “However it soon became apparent that with most of the medic content online, and with supervisors having planned for this eventuality already, there was no need to worry. Work and supervisions almost carried on as normal - if anything not being able to leave the house meant I could stay on top of everything at the start of the year and not get behind.”

“Equally when it came to support from college and the faculty, I felt like

most things had been taken into account. I could have books delivered from the library if needs be, and I had the contact details of any lecturer if I had any questions. For me, two weeks of isolation wasn't too bad a thing at all, being in a house with a load of mates meant it wasn't a bad experience and I didn't feel sidelined or neglected at any point.”

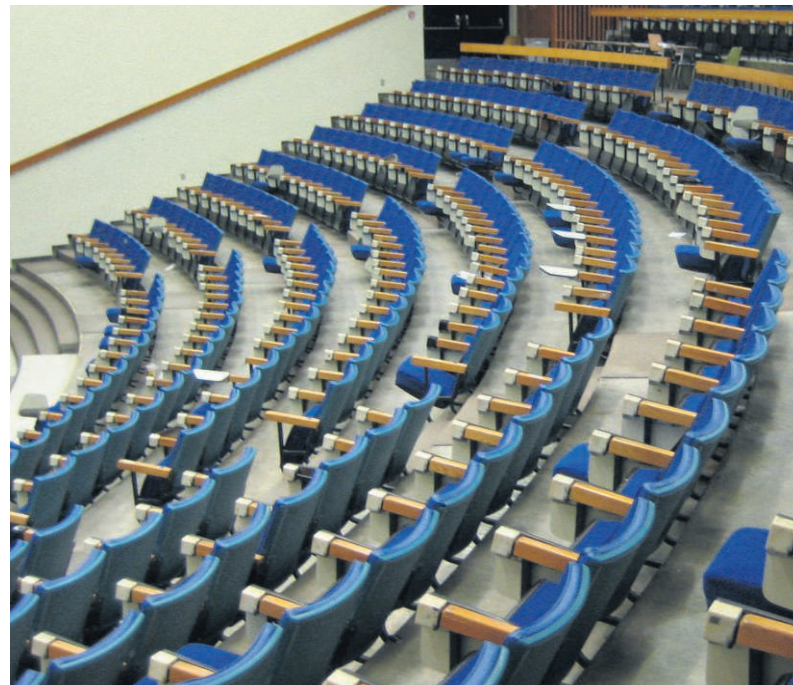
Another student who had spent time in isolation told *Varsity* that their experience was not seriously different from outside of isolation. “The History Faculty

were doing most things online anyway and most libraries have been very helpful when it comes to getting books (e.g. letting friends pick them up)”, one History student said. “One of my papers, which is normally taught in seminars of 16, has been split into two groups of 8 by the convener in order to make online seminars better resemble the conversational style of in person ones.”

“Ultimately many students seem to have adapted fairly well, given the circumstances,” Aw told *Varsity*.

#### ▼ Lectures across Cambridge will remain online for the rest of the year

(THEONLYSILENTBOB/WIKIMEDIA)



### GREEN FESTIVITY Cambridge Zero Climate Change Festival 2020

Cambridge Zero, in collaboration with the Cambridge University Press, launched its very first climate festival on 6th November. With a number of talks, seminars and fun games, the festival's aim is to shed light on the most urgent climate issues. The festival programme of live and on-demand events will cover the themes of Energy Transitions, Zero Carbon Transport, Finance, Adaptation & Resilience, Nature and Green Recovery. All of the festival programme's sessions are free to join and will be recorded.

### PRIMAL INSTINCT Monstrous mating mongooses

A research team led by the University of Cambridge and University of Exeter has found that female banded mongooses incite violent fights when it comes to finding an unrelated mate and then mate with enemy males amidst the chaos they have created. The revelation of this “exploitative leadership” could help “to explain why intergroup violence is so costly in this species compared to other animals” as “the mortality costs involved are similar to those seen in a handful of the most warlike mammals, including lions, chimpanzees - and of course humans.”

### CYBER SECURE Bots employed to protect Vatican library collections

In 2012 the Vatican Apostolic Library digitised its precious resources to improve the accessibility of its collections. However, the now-digital collection has been targeted by around 100 cyber threats a month. The library has resorted to a modern solution in order to protect its ancient array of literary treasures, turning to Darktrace, a company launched by mathematicians from the University of Cambridge, for AI security. In the reality of a rapidly-progressing digital age, ancient intelligence has to be protected by the genius of the future.

### THE KEY TO SUCCESS The science behind Game of Thrones' success

Scientists from across five UK universities, including the University of Cambridge, came together to unfold the scientific backbone of the series' success. The research has shown that it is due, not only to the show's fantasy, but also to the characters' relatability. The characters reflect human behaviours with great accuracy, encouraging the viewer to bond with them. Other researchers revealed that, despite there being over 2000 names in the original books, viewers only have to keep track of around 150 characters, the same number of people the average human brain is capable of computing.



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Application deadline: 31 October 2020

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## News

# How is Cambridge reacting to the second lockdown?



▲ Unlike the first nationwide lockdown, Universities, including Cambridge, are now remaining open (LUCAS MADDALENA)

**Christopher Dorrell**  
Senior News Editor

The country has now been in lockdown for a week after the Government's new rules were imposed last Thursday (5/11).

Unlike the previous lockdown, universities and other educational institutions have been permitted to stay open. In fact, students were instructed to stay in their university accommodation in a letter sent by Michelle Donelan, Minister of State for Universities.

Between the government's announcement of lockdown on Saturday 31st and its imposition the following Thursday, many students were left in a state of confusion regarding whether or not they would be allowed to return home.

Stories proliferated of the University using 'ancient rules' to force students into staying at University.

Students at Jesus, for example, received an email in which the Senior Tutor said "Full-time students are required to keep terms of residence in Cambridge in order to be awarded their degrees."

"In order to keep residence, you need to live within the University's precincts during term time."

This is in reference to the University's residency rules which require undergraduate students to live within 3 miles of St Mary's Church and postgraduates within 10 miles during term time.

The email continued: "If you do not have the College's permission to study remotely, you will not be allowed to progress to the next year of your course or to receive your degree if you are a finalist."

The demand to stay at Cambridge caused particular concern for international students who launched an open letter last Tuesday (03/11). So far the open letter has received 440 signatures.

The principal demand in the open letter was that "All students must be given the option to study remotely for Michaelmas and Lent term without further justification."

The open letter said "The University of Cambridge has adapted remarkably by moving all lectures and a significant number of practicals and supervisions online. There are a considerable number of students with zero or few in-person contact hours in Michaelmas. We therefore surmise that a quality Cambridge education does not hinge on in-person learning."

More specifically the open letter demanded that applications for remote learning "be granted with immediate effect, without need for medical reasons or other documentation (that may be impossible to obtain in time), to allow international students to return home before Thursday's restrictions prevent or greatly reduce flights."

What made the situation more complex was a lack of clarity in the way the legislation, government advice and university advice interacted. In the short space of time between the announcement of lockdown and its enforcement

it has proven difficult to determine what was acceptable according to the different guidelines.

Department for Education advice for international students states that "If an international student chooses to return home, ultimately it is for them to decide whether they do so. However, students planning to travel should adhere to PHE advice while in the UK to ensure they are travelling safely. Students should not travel if they have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) or are part of a household group which is self-isolating."

However, Senior Pro-Vice Chancellor of Education Graham Virgo said, in an open meeting on Monday, that the "statement in the guidance which identified that international students can leave if they wish to" was based on the condition that their return continued to follow Foreign Office guidance. "We saw clarification from the Department of Education that students should not travel during the lockdown period."

One international student, who was able to return home before lockdown was enforced, said to *Varsity*: "It seemed to me that the college administration didn't understand the position and the worries of international students. Despite the fact that all lectures and supervisions are organized online so we are able to do our work from home, they were very strict when it came to seeking permission to leave. Therefore it seemed to me that they didn't understand our position. I would be happy to see more understanding and compassion from our college in the future."

The rules ensuring that students stay in Cambridge are in operation across every College. However, many Colleges, including Jesus, have made it very clear that if there are compelling reasons why a student should be allowed to return home then this will be considered.

Sonita Alleyne, Master of Jesus, sent an email in which she clarified to stu-

dents that "if there is a physical or mental health reason for you to leave College to study remotely between now and the end of term, then please contact the Senior Tutor who will explain the process to you. If there is a medical reason, you do not have to have left by November 5."

Similarly King's sent an email to their students saying "students will not be forced to stay, or to leave. College would like to encourage students to stay if possible – as far as we know, business will continue as usual in college and in faculties. However, if you would like to go home for any reason, please contact your director of studies and your tutor as soon as possible. Don't feel compelled to stay if your mental health and/or your studies will suffer. In any case, please don't leave without notifying college."

Indeed, across the Colleges the policy has been strikingly similar: all students must remain in college and any exceptions should be judged on a case-by-case basis.

This was made clear in Monday's (09/11) open meeting in which the panelists, Vice-Chancellor Stephen Toope, Graham Virgo, Senior Tutor of Corpus Christi Dr Marina Frasca-Spada, and Master of Selwyn Roger Mosey, repeatedly emphasised that exceptions would be judged on a case-by-case basis.

Roger Mosey and Dr Marina Frasca-Spada both suggested that, having had conversations with students in their respective colleges, the majority of students were glad to be able to stay at Cambridge. Dr Frasca-Spada said that in Corpus there "is a very small number" of people who want remote learning and she has spoken to those at other colleges who similarly have found that people are "very happy" to be in College.

Cambridge Student Union (CSU), however, told *Varsity* that the University's current policy "is out of touch with student opinion, as is demonstrated in the survey data collected by the International Students' Campaign for their Open Letter and the support for the aims of our #DemandSafeCambridge Campaign at SU Council."

"Throughout the term, we (CSU) have been advocating for there to be maximum flexibility of choice for students over whether they choose to remain in Cambridge or leave to study remotely, with adequate provisions made to support students in either case."

"Allowing for each student to make a reasoned decision about what is the safest option for them recognises that each student's personal circumstances are different. We will continue pushing for the University to adopt a more flexible approach to living and studying which recognises that it is students themselves who know what is best for them", they finished telling *Varsity*.

However, despite pressure, it seems unlikely that the University will change its policy regarding residency rules for the rest of this term.

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## News

# Cambridge City Council promises continued support for rough sleepers during second lockdown

Amy Howell  
News Correspondent

Cambridge City Council has committed to support Cambridge's homeless during

the second lockdown, promising accommodation, an extended outreach service and physical and mental health support, until April 2021.

In March, 140 people were able to

isolate in emergency accommodation, including council properties and empty college accommodation. Since then, 76 have been moved to long-term housing and 60 remain in emergency accom-

modation.

The council detailed in a press release to *Varsity* that they are "ensuring that all of the support services available earlier in the year remain in place during the

second lockdown" including access to washing facilities, food, and health support, alongside face coverings and hand sanitisers.

Councillor Richard Johnson, Executive Councillor for Housing, said in the press release: "Now we are in a second lockdown we remain focused on working with local charities, faith groups and volunteers to provide accommodation for those who had been living on the streets. If someone is in need we are here to help them with their housing situation and support any health or personal issues they may have."

This announcement comes as the charity Shelter called for a revival of the 'Everyone In' policy from the first lockdown, which provided accommodation to the UK's 15,000 rough sleepers and, according to a UCL study, saved tens of thousands of people from being infected with Covid-19. Chris Wood, Assistant Director of Research at Shelter, reinforced that "no one should fall through the cracks this winter."

An open letter published by doctors and campaigners across the country had warned the government in October of the high death toll that may follow without this policy being reinstated.

In March, King's College responded to the council's guarantee of housing for all rough sleepers by allowing 20 rooms in their Bene't Street Hostel to be used until August, since no students were living in this accommodation at the time.

Although, with this accommodation currently in use by students, the same offering cannot be made during this second lockdown. A spokesperson for the Cambridge Homeless Outreach Programme (CHOP), which aims to 'break down the divide between the student and homeless communities in Cambridge,' told *Varsity* that "given the resources of the University and colleges, it is disappointing that these resources are not being used."

A spokesperson for CHOP also said that, "If colleges adopted a policy of allowing students to leave, particularly international students who are anxious to not be stuck in Cambridge, there would be greater scope to free up accommodation as they did in April." They have called for the colleges, as "richer institutions in Cambridge, [to] come up with solutions to help the homeless communities."

A building that was previously used as student accommodation in the North of the city will be used as emergency housing until the end of March. The building, according to a spokesperson of the council, is "large enough to allow us to locate support services actually in the building itself...it means we can work much more intensively with the people we are supporting."

It has since been revealed by Cambridge Live that "hundreds of families could be made homeless" as the eviction ban which was in place earlier this year has not been renewed. As a result, there may be far higher demand for Council housing than there is available.

In January, Cambridge was revealed to be the UK's most unequal city; with the lowest 20% of earners accounting for just 2% of the city's generated income, suggesting that many residents of Cambridge will experience financial anxiety, and potentially fears of eviction and homelessness, over the coming months.

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# Statue of slave trade investor could be moved from Old Schools site



▲ Potrait of Tobias Rustat (ATtribution 4.0 International CC BY 4.0)

**Christopher Dorrell**  
Senior News Correspondent

The University is considering removing a small statue of Tobias Rustat after the Legacies of Enslavement enquiry found links between him and the slave trade. Rustat was a 17th Century courtier with investments in the Royal Africa Company, the company responsible for shipping more slaves from Africa to America during the period of the slave trade than any other institution.

Although Rustat was already very wealthy from his career in the court, his wealth increased further through his engagement with the Royal African Company. The donations he gave to the University, and other institutions around the county, came while he was receiving dividends from the Royal Africa Company.

Rustat gave the University Library its first endowment of £1000 in 1667 to buy “the choicest and most useful” books. Many of the books bought with his benefaction are emblazoned with his coat of arms.

Vice-Chancellor Stephen Toope asked the Legacies of Enslavement enquiry for recommendations on the future of the statue as part of the University’s wider attempt to learn about the University’s

complicity, both financial and intellectual, in the transatlantic slave trade.

The statue, put up in the 19th Century, overlooks West Court at the Old Schools, which was the original site of the Library.

Although no decision has been made, the University states that “preliminary enquiries are being made about the process for removing the statue from the exterior of a Grade 1 listed building.”

Alongside the Legacies of Enslavement enquiry’s considerations into the statue, the University Library is also critically engaging with the Rustat Fund, which generates about £5000 a year.

A University statement details that: “The Library is currently determining how income from this Rustat Fund might be remodelled (and renamed) in order to support active research into the slave trade and its legacies.”

“For the 2020-21 financial year, income from the Fund will be spent on resources about the transatlantic slave trade and about the Black diaspora. Possible purchases will be identified collaboratively by library staff and researchers and final decisions will be taken by the Library’s Decolonisation Working Group.”

Dr Jessica Gardner, Cambridge University Librarian, said: “The devastation caused by the Atlantic slave trade continues to affect millions of people globally

to this day. We cannot effectively demonstrate solidarity with our black colleagues and students at Cambridge – and with others around the world – without first examining and understanding how we as an institution have benefitted from the proceeds of slavery.

“As well as asking the Inquiry to look into the Rustat benefaction, we also want to determine, with the critical help of our colleagues from the BAME community at Cambridge, how the income generated by this historic donation is best dispersed going forward.”

The University’s announcement of its investigations into Rustat’s legacy comes shortly after Jesus announced that it would seek to move Rustat’s memorial from the College chapel.

More broadly Jesus will remove any memorial to Rustat where he is explicitly celebrated rather than simply commemorated.

Rustat was a benefactor to many Oxbridge colleges, including both St John’s Oxford and St John’s Cambridge, as part of his wider aim of supporting Royalism and the Church of England after the Restoration.

Being “unmarried, with few household responsibilities” he was able to donate extensively to St Paul’s Cathedral, Chelsea Hospital and St John’s Hospital.



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# Features

## TikTok, Tea and Core Training: Isolation Survival Tactics

As part of our *Quarantine Journals* series, **Matilda Head** shares how her household coped during two weeks of isolation

**15** days, 360 hours, 21,600 minutes – a lot could be achieved in that time. You could go to the moon and back twice, climb Mount Kilimanjaro, fly around the world roughly eight times, or if you are a member of my ground floor flat, you could stay in your room and achieve very little.

My lockdown situation was fairly unconventional; when we were given the order to isolate, there had only been one positive case in my staircase of about 45 students, yet the whole staircase was put under strict isolation measures. As you can imagine, we weren't best pleased, and the first few days of our isolation were spent grumpy and complaining.

Rest assured, we were all eating humble pie when multiple positive tests started popping up a few days later. With positive cases on our floor, the length of our lockdown was extended and morale was at an all-time low. I am very pessimistic and constantly expect the worst case scenario; I started to believe that we could end up in up to a month of lockdown. So, panicking that I wouldn't go outdoors for the rest of Michaelmas, I called my sister, and received a rather poignant piece of advice: this was a unique situation that would likely never happen again, so we had to make the most of it and create our own fun while shut indoors.

I won't pretend that I suddenly



▲ “being locked inside for 15 days became a great bonding experience”  
(MATILDA HEAD)

jumped into action planning fun activities; I struggled throughout the 15-day period, but framing it positively is helpful when all you can do in a day is sit glaring at the people walking freely right outside your window. I have a fair few things to thank for getting me through isolation, but the most valuable commodity has to have been tea, of which I must have drunk gallons. As someone who is generally pretty poor at self-care, something as simple as making a warm drink acts as an effective self-soothing

mechanism, no matter the issue at hand. It also gave myself and my flatmates an excuse to procrastinate and socialise, as you really can't turn down an offer of tea, especially when you know it will probably involve an hour-long chat in the corridor where we had moved our coffee tables and chairs.

Fortunately, I was able to be around members of my household that had tested negative, so I didn't have to struggle with being completely isolated. If I had been stuck in my room, I would

have craved even masked chats from meters away. As it was, my flatmates really helped to make my isolation as enjoyable as possible, and I found that being locked inside for 15 days became a great bonding experience!

Other coping mechanisms during this period included playing a lot of catch, and even a cricket game, in the corridor (in case someone from College reads this, I promise we were careful and didn't damage anything). We weren't allowed to go outside during our isolation, so we were going pretty stir crazy. In an attempt to get a bit of exercise, one of my friends led core sessions each evening. I really don't have the words to express just how much I hate exercise, but the effect that it would have on my mood was huge. It felt good to know that I'd got moving and done something healthy for my body. In fact, the core sessions have since continued, so I can happily say that I've developed a new and useful habit thanks to lockdown.

Not only did exercise help my mood, but my sleep pattern. You're not moving much when you can't leave your flat – one of my friends' iPhone pedometer tracked only 15 steps in a whole day during lockdown – so you don't end up feeling tired by the time you get into bed; doing some daily exercise definitely helped me in that sense.

In my case, 15 days of confinement led to something I never thought I'd do: making TikToks. In a weird turn of

events, the highlight of my lockdown was our 'TikTok weekend'. In an attempt to make time go faster my friend suggested that we should get all our work done by the weekend. Then, we could have a whole weekend free to harness our slow descent into madness, have some drinks, and make some TikToks. Despite the next-morning embarrassment, setting this goal and having something to look forward to was an extremely good way to pass the time. Plus, I now have a video of myself and two guys re-enacting the Glee 'Say a Little Prayer' dance in case I ever need a laugh.

As we move forward with the National Lockdown, I can be confidently optimistic that with more tea, exercise, and maybe TikToks – but that depends on alcohol consumption level – it won't be nearly as bad as I had expected. I'm also thoroughly looking forward to our plans (including a 'Floor-mal' and Bridgemas Dinner) and grateful that this odd time has actually resulted in new friends and a cautious enjoyment of exercise.

Whilst I am being optimistic, it's important to acknowledge that isolation is tough; you might not be climbing a mountain or flying around the world, but getting through lockdown is an achievement. If you are finding it particularly hard, reach out to someone. Even if you're by yourself, you're not alone and whether it's your neighbour, Tutor, or a Welfare Officer, there are plenty of people around to help.

## Has COVID-19 changed the way I see China?

After two months teaching in China in 2018, **Harry Taunton** considers his experiences in relation to COVID-19

**W**hen we picture ourselves in a foreign country – one we have not visited – the space we imagine is built from a combination of memories of past holidays and projections of an expected reality. The latter is itself a holey Jenga tower made up of things we have seen or heard about this new destination: documentary footage, photographs, anecdotes and rumour. Those who have not ventured to China before might well have a perception of it that is constructed in a similar way, but now with the added brushstroke of the coronavirus.

Spending two months in one small corner of China does not make me an authority on the country; and any 'reality' to which I claim to be privy will count only as another of those secondary accounts that constitute the architecture of any unvisited and imagined place. Nevertheless, what I hope to offer is a perspective which might serve to remind us that a nation is the sum of all its parts, not just one. Against the backdrop of COVID-19, I remember my time in China and ask whether I see it any differently because of the virus.

For seven weeks in summer 2018, I taught at a school in Shantou, Guang-

dong (south-eastern China). When I arrived, it did not look very much like any school I had imagined – it seemed more like a multi-story cinema on a busy road. The others who had flown out to earn their TEFL certificates were friendly and welcoming: some, like me, had come from Cambridge, some from other UK universities, whilst most had come from all over the world. We taught on the first floor and lived together in shared rooms on the second floor.

The accommodation was simple but relatively comfortable. That said, for a couple of nights in August I was forced to vacate the room I was sharing with four others when a dead rat was discovered in the ceiling near the air vent. What we had thought to be an extreme case of halitosis turned out to be an acrid fog with a very different source. The sinister game of 'whodunit' we had each been playing was over.

The very mention of this incident will no doubt have brought grimaces to faces expecting no less from a country where something as animal-related as COVID-19 originated. But is a house party full of bodies potentially carrying a deadly disease any less unsettling and disgusting? The dominos may have been nudged in one market in China, but has

the global reaction been sufficiently self-aware to stop them from falling?

My teaching timetable was filled mostly by a class of 18 to 20-year-olds. They had all chosen English names for themselves which I eventually learned. I was provided with material (articles, dialogues and pictures from a textbook) for our two-hour classes which we would go through together: learning the new vocabulary and grammar; role-playing the different scenarios in the pictures; or practising writing and pronunciation. Slowly but surely, I built a relationship with the students: what had started as a quiet group became an enthusiastic bunch of friendly and willing students.

I occasionally went off-script. One afternoon, as a treat, I showed them Rowan Atkinson's 'nervous trainee priest' scene from *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. They recognised Mr Bean's face immediately and laughed along with the help of the Mandarin subtitles. What I had forgotten was that this scene was soon followed by newlyweds Bernard and Lydia hilariously celebrating their marriage in a dark room with Hugh Grant's character hiding in a cupboard! The students all found this very amusing, but a week or so later I received a

gentle rap on the knuckles from my Chinese teaching supervisor, informing me that such 'love scenes' were not appropriate in their country. Noted.

One particular student told me that he was planning on studying at Nottingham University that autumn. I often wonder how he enjoyed it. Chinese students in Cambridge and beyond have suffered from racism since the outbreak of the pandemic. This is a reaction fuelled by ignorance and frustration at the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. The guilty party focus their knee-jerk unpleasantness and blinkered reactionism on the nearest available object relatable to the virus' origin. When I think of this young man and all the kids we taught that summer, such ignorance leaves a bitter taste in the mouth.

Once I had completed my 7 weeks of teaching in Shantou, we, the teachers, headed eight hours north to Yangshuo, Guilin – a place known for its beautiful mountainous scenery. On one outing, a friend and I hired mopeds and rode them along cliff-edges and down teeth-clatteringly rocky roads to the spot near the Li River which is used as the background art for the 20-yuan note. This week was one of the best I

spent that summer.

I, then, journeyed to Hong Kong to spend a few days sightseeing before my flight home. Upon my return home, I fell ill for a fortnight, bedridden with a viral infection brought on by the smog of the metropolis. While I am presently in no rush – nor any position – to return to Hong Kong, this in no way tainted my trip. The colour and clarity of the memories I have from the whole two-month experience itself are not dulled by this grey sojourn in my sick bed. Has the effect of COVID-19, which is inextricably linked now to China, had any such dulling effect? No. I remember a bright, hot, lively, foreign country with a modern urban society and beautiful rural scenery: daunting, funny, confusing, enlightening and filled with people whose outlook on the world was really not so different from my own.

Prevailing Western narratives concerning COVID-19 and China do not share this view, though. Be it accusations of statistics manipulation or labelling it 'The China Virus', the long-term effects on international East-West relations will be frayed more by misconceptions, misnomers and myopia than by bodily injury.

# Disordered Eating: Food in Isolation

*“I wish there was free accessible therapy, mandatory mental health talks and so much more”* writes **Theola Ojo**

Coming to Cambridge was supposed to be my fresh start: in fact it was my incentive and ultimatum to recover in the first place. In the initial weeks Cambridge was a clean slate as I was trusted to exercise freely, people didn't tip-toe around me because of what I ate or refused to eat, and I could bond with people over food. It was during the moments when me and my household were cramped in the corridor eating mediocre hall food and chatting throughout the evening that I thought “recovery is so worth it”. I no longer felt like the sugar-free, refined-oil free, white-carb free, joy-free anorexic weirdo but someone who could be fully present in friendships and academic work. Even though living in halls can evoke comparison to those thinner or eating less than me, and despite the occasional fatphobic comment, I felt completely secure. Normal, in fact.

This security was quickly undone when I went into household isolation and our accommodation block went into lockdown. Mental health, especially disordered relationships with food, is one of the biggest issues of isolation as people are faced with a scarcity or abundance of food; moving less, disrupted routines and the absence of surveillance from others. Paradoxically, mental health in lockdown is also the big “elephant in the room” unaddressed by universities. For instance, the tragic death of Finn Kitson in his university halls at Manchester University, which was brought on by severe anxiety. During our isolation we received a few optional welfare zoom calls and check-in emails, but mental health at university during lockdown is just not being talked about or addressed enough. I wish there were free accessible therapy, mandatory mental health talks and so much more.

Just like the first national lockdown in March, comments along the lines of “I'm going to get so fat in isolation” resurfaced. The fact that Homerton college initially didn't serve breakfast (this was later resolved) and my determination to continue exercising in the morning even if the gym was closed proved disastrous. I couldn't follow the meal plan meant to keep me on track and old compulsions linking movement to calorie-burning, rather than improving mood and energy, returned. Once I ordered groceries, I swung between periods of bingeing and struggling with restriction again, thinking that the latter would resolve the former.

And anyway, who would notice or care? I could try recovery again later. Each minute of every day was filled with some disordered behaviour instead of doing work. Friends, family, academia and hobbies began to fade into the background again. I knew that life could be so vibrant when I chose to live it properly, but when trapped in your room you forget about late night pizza with music blaring in the background; catching up with a friend over coffee and all the other joys that food freedom entails. This was only compounded by the loneliness everyone experiences in isolation. Looking back, it seems crazy to me how simply being in my room for two weeks could reverse many months of progress. Progress which helped me get discharged from therapy and replaced a world of black-and-white food rules with one bursting with colour.

After coming out of isolation I realised the unsustainability of restriction and



“*I knew that life could be so vibrant when I chose to live it properly, but when trapped in your room you forget about late night pizza with music blaring in the background*”

returned to my routine. As a result, I found balance with food and movement again. In a positive light, going through self-isolation made me stronger as I had to ask myself: is unrestricted eating only for when I can go to the gym? What ways should I use to cope with stress? Most importantly, it taught me that the security I feel in recovery is not to be taken for granted. It is a continual work-in-progress.

I understand that not everyone will have had an eating disorder, but I do believe that everyone has experienced or will experience disordered eating and problems with internalising the lies that diet culture tells us. Hence the importance of speaking up about food. Everyone going into self-isolation or our national lockdown should know that even at complete rest we need to nourish our brains and bodies; restrictions don't solve anxieties and it's okay if you don't want to do home workouts because movement should be joyful. Above all, gaining weight in quarantine, or ever, isn't bad. It is only the negative connotations surrounding weight gain in our fatphobic society that is.

However, speaking up alone is not the solution. Talk must translate into action. I hope that the Homerton Rent Strike's first demand: “Increased investment in student mental health support” is met within my college and uni-wide. I encourage anyone who feels their relationship with food and exercise worsen during self-isolation to seek help from their college, the university's counselling services or external helplines and websites. Even if it doesn't seem “bad” enough. There is no “bad enough” when it comes to disordered eating: no-one deserves anything less than full freedom.

*If you are affected by any of the content of this article, B-eat Eating disorders provides useful information and resources, as well as a helpline at 0808 801 0677. The Students' Union Advice Service provides a more comprehensive list of support resources.*

▲ **“Looking back, it seems crazy to me how simply being in my room for two weeks could reverse many months of progress”** (ROD LONG)

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## Features

# A reflection on the meaning of “home”

*“You want to go where everybody knows your name”: moving, grieving, and the dynamism of the concept of “home”*

Eanna Ferguson

**M**y relationship has ended. My grandmother has, very sadly, passed on. The COVID situation is worsening day by day, and ennui is setting in at a considerable pace. This period has undoubtedly been difficult, but I have managed to find some solace in introspection, in considering the notion of home. Should you have been misled by the title, this is not a scrupulous analysis of the seminal classic *Cheers*, but rather captures the sentiment I have found myself trying to deconstruct and reconstruct these past few months.

Admittedly, I have always been a bit disdainful of traditional ideas of home. This can probably be put down to bitterness: I left my birthplace of Manchester at a young age, without really understanding why, and was profoundly affected by the abruptness and unwelcome novelty of it all. I moved to Ireland, continued my education in schools no nicer than my old one, dipped in and out of friendships and ended up feeling pretty dejected. I always saw my house as a temporary fix that I would leave at the earliest opportunity.

And, eventually, I did. I ended up going to a boarding school (a brilliant,

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laissez-faire one at that) in South East England and, at the time, absolutely loved it. I found a pattern of life that suited me, found people who matched my eclecticism, evolved intellectually and learned how to manage the odd bout of depression. When COVID unceremoniously yanked me from the life I, by and large, truly enjoyed and deposited me back to my family home in Dublin, I could only think of getting back as soon as I could.

When the time came to revisit my old school, however, the result was nightmarish. Its surroundings had become a ghost town. The perennial haze of cigarette smoke and coffee steam from our usual café haunt had dissipated, there was no chatter, no buzz, no Fleetwood Mac emanating from the windows of common rooms. My friends who were international boarders weren't around, and my few remaining friends seemed as dispirited by the whole affair as I did. This proved too much for me to take; so much so that, after only three days, I felt compelled to swiftly leave. I didn't want this new atmosphere to taint my otherwise happy memories of a home held and lost.

Stranger still, I felt myself long for



► “I have managed to find solace in considering the notion of home.”  
(B-SPOQUE)

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Ireland. This was inconceivable to me; surely the point of all my endeavours up until then was to get away? I think some combination of my increased maturity and the experience of being locked down there totally changed my perspective. I wanted to feel safe, comfortable and, indeed, go where people knew my name.

After 10 years, I could finally say I truly felt at home in Dublin. Looking back, though we were always comparing it to days of yore where we weren't constantly fussing about how many metres away from each other we were, we managed to have some good fun over those four months. My old friends and I reconnected in a meaningful way, as did my family, and I appreciated the beauty of the city more than I had ever allowed myself to. This made coming to Cambridge in search of a new and markedly different home challenging.

As for my relationship, I found its breakdown comparable to the sadness of losing a home. There were lingering feelings of grief, of instability. I was always vehemently against commitment, but when I found myself in this situation and in love, much of my previous cool cynicism evaporated. I felt I had a kind of home in this other person. Whether you appreciate the sentiment or feel it positively reeks of codependency, ultimately, feeling such unity with someone in a time characterised by uncertainty creates an unexpected joy - a sense of home.

The grief I have felt over my grandmother's death has been a similar experi-

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ence. She was a big part of my home life in Manchester, and her loss feels as if another chunk of that previous iteration of 'home' has disintegrated.

All of this comes with a generous dose of perspective; this is an account of my experience alone, and I cannot imagine the serious upset of those forced to leave their homes due to political unrest or other dangerous situations and the toll this takes on every aspect of their lives and mental health (especially during a pandemic). Perspective and due reverence are certainly required when examining my own situation.

What is the takeaway from all of this? I'm not sure, but I think that is precisely the point. Uncertainty, though it would seem incongruous, comes with the territory. Ultimately, home is a limited term for a much broader physical and emotional concept, and is not always static, nor limited to provenance or location. Indeed, more could be said about the equally amorphous concept of a home within oneself, to find one example. But what I have come to appreciate is that some of the 'homes' we cultivate in our lives, physical or interpersonal, are steadfast, and others, whether naturally or unnaturally, get disassembled over time.

Coping with this unique kind of grief and the sizeable change to one's emotional literacy it incurs is a new experience. Not an especially easy one, but one that has made me particularly grateful for the new home taking shape here in Cambridge.

# Opinion

## The US Democratic Party must stop taking minority votes for granted

Following an unforgettable US presidential election, [Ashna Ahmad](#) cautions that the Democrats risk losing support amongst ethnic minorities unless change is enacted over the next four years



(GETTY IMAGES / DREW ANGERER)

**Y**ou would have been forgiven for assuming – as many pollsters and commentators did – that Joe Biden’s Democratic Party had a fairly easy task. Americans went to the polls amidst the world’s worst coronavirus outbreak, under a president who consistently downplayed the risk of the virus and baselessly asserted that the country was “rounding a corner” as cases climbed higher and higher. In the face of inflamed racial tensions, Trump displayed a similarly flippant attitude, selectively condemning violent acts while showing no desire to behave as a unifying force.

While the pandemic continues to ravage the US, and while 61% of Americans worry about the prospect of a civil war, surely what voters want most is a steady hand. Biden arguably filled this role. A tried and tested, moderate Democrat with a reputation for “working across the aisle” and a knack for changing his key stances with the times, Biden’s pledge to ‘return the country to normalcy’ should surely have resonated with anyone tired of Trump’s bombastic, divisive style, especially with working class people of colour, who have been disproportionately affected both by the pandemic and its economic fallout, and by the eruption in racial tensions.

And yet, the polls were wrong again. The Democrats’ hopes of a landslide were dashed early on, giving way to a nail-bitingly close race beset by legal challenges from the Trump campaign. Even now that Biden has conclusively won the election, it is clear that this was not the spectacular rebuke to Trumpism which the Democrats were dreaming of. Trump proved resilient in such Democratic targets as Florida and North Carolina, and the nearly 71 million people who voted for him – some 9 million more than in 2016 – are not going anywhere. Come 2024, if voters do not feel that the Biden administration has helped to heal the deep fissures in American society, some variant of a Trumpist Republican party may well sail back into power – propelled, as in 2016, by the discontent of the ‘left behind.’ The Democrats’ position is far from secure.

With an ethnic minority electorate steadily increasing in size, the Biden campaign could have a great deal of confidence from the knowledge that they had black and Latino votes ‘in the bag’ – except they didn’t. Trump won a greater proportion of non-white voters than any Republican in the last 60 years. In swing states, it was Trump’s gains amongst non-white working class voters that made him competitive – even

while he actually lost votes from his previous core demographics. Trump’s 20-point erosion of the Democratic lead in Miami-Dade, pivotal to his retention of Florida, was owed in large part to the Cuban community, who backed him by a 13-point margin. Aware that the young black and Hispanic electorates are increasingly competitive, the Trump campaign has made efforts to appeal to them, through the Black Voices for Trump coalition and other initiatives. FiveThirtyEight suggests that these efforts have borne fruit.

Why exactly has this happened? Many minority voters resent being lumped together as a monolith. Biden’s clumsy remark that “if you have a problem figuring out whether you’re for me or for Trump, you ain’t black” (for which he later apologised) epitomises the assumption that minority voters who do not support Biden’s party don’t know what’s best for them; it is patronising and dismissive of all the nuanced concerns ethnic minority voters have about supporting the Democrats. A party claiming to promote racial justice should not treat minority voters who have reservations about them as if they do not understand what’s in their own interests.

This error is even more concerning

given the immense diversity of minority voters’ opinions. To many of these voters, Trump’s stances on immigration and law and order are not immediately inherently objectionable. One focus group study published in the *New York Times* found that a typically Trumpist message on immigration and law and order (which made reference to “illegal immigration from places overrun with drugs and criminal gangs” and “fully funding the police, so our communities are not threatened by people who refuse to follow our laws”) was rated as “convincing” by around 3 in 5 white and black respondents, and an even higher proportion of Latinos. While many Latinos support making avenues to US citizenship easier, some also want to improve border security and dissuade migrants from crossing illegally – and may not associate these policy proposals with racism. Minorities’ views on the matter should not be assumed any more than white voters’ are.

Trump enjoyed a relatively strong reputation for economic management before the pandemic, having taken credit for very low unemployment rates and higher average disposable incomes until March this year. This record was a central part of the Trump campaign’s pitch to minorities: on Trump’s campaign

website, a Black Voices for Trump representative touts the “3 million new jobs” and “500,000 additional black-owned businesses” created under Trump’s first term, and the ‘Platinum Plan for Black Americans’ promises to “increase access to capital, fuel Black owned businesses [and] cut taxes.” One black Trump voter told *Vox* that “I got a higher pay rate, the highest I’ve ever been paid before. So I definitely think I want to stick with this president, because my money’s looking a little better.”

However questionable you find Trump’s claims, it is telling that his economic, outcome-driven approach found some success. It suggests that some minority communities in the US care about results, not rhetoric. Taking positions on immigration and crime which are less associated with racist attitudes is not enough – especially for the minority voters who do not feel that previous Democratic administrations have helped them. To avoid losing any more minority votes in 2024, Joe Biden and his party must show that they can go beyond empty slogans and performative activism, and proactively persuade minority communities that they can deliver sustainable prosperity and security.

## Opinion

## Why free school meals is a political choice

Jed Asetoma

Earlier this week, I read with incredulity a tweet from Robert Peston claiming Boris Johnson's government was "more Castro than Castro" – yet another establishment journalist attempting to equate any form of government action with socialism. The voting down of a bill to ensure 1m vulnerable children are fed by 322 Tory MPs tells a different story. Such an action underlines the neo-Thatcherite social Darwinism at the heart of this government: an ugly individualist doctrine that the state shouldn't feed those who cannot feed themselves.

Tory MP Ben Bradley agreed that free schools meals would mean "cash direct to crack den[s] and brothel[s]" while former ERG chair Steve Baker suggested that free school meals would "destroy the currency". Both are equally ridiculous points barely masking the contempt that the party has for the poor of this country. They are particularly incredulous claims to make considering that this same government spent £522m encouraging the public to dine out in the middle of a pandemic. Their comments are made to seem even more callous and hypocritical when it is considered that the British public spends £57,000 each week subsidising the food and drink in Parliament for MPs. For context, MPs are paid £79,648 each year, a figure that is set to rise by 3.1% following a vote in March.

The Tory government that has administered devastating welfare cuts and

under whom the number of foodbanks has risen almost 4000% are seeking to paint poverty as an issue of personal moral character rather than one rooted in political decision-making. This is the essence of conservatism; cut support to the most vulnerable in society and blame the poor for the social outcomes of these decisions. 4.2 million children live in relative poverty and 2.5 million in food insecure households, to which the Conservative response is, "if only poor people didn't spend their money on alcohol and drugs, perhaps then they'd be able to feed their children". The free school meals debate is but the latest iteration of what has been a continuous ten-year assault on the fabric of our society. The fact that feeding the most vulnerable children in our society is even an issue for debate illustrates the extent to which the party of government has been able to shift our attitudes towards poverty and welfare over the course of the past decade. The need for Marcus Rashford to organise companies and local councils to provide food for children in this country, while objectively a good thing, underlines the sinister way in which essential functions of the state are being indirectly outsourced and privatised. What are a government or taxes for if not to ensure that every child in this country is being fed?

What the government is planning is particularly atrocious because it is punishing children: a societal group who clearly cannot impact their financial

situation. But surely it isn't too radical to say that everyone deserves to eat and deserves a decent standard of living, regardless of age or employment status. Controversial as it might be to say, poverty shouldn't only be a priority when there are children involved or when we are in the midst of a pandemic. The argument being implicitly made by the government, however, is a Victorian one of the deserving and undeserving poor, a desire to divide the working-class into a respectable section that worked and a lazy feckless group made poor because of their own lack of moral fibre. This doesn't happen in a vacuum however and the proliferation of various TV programmes focusing on those deemed 'benefits scroungers' underlines how we have come to associate laziness with poverty. This amongst other things has helped to cement harmful stereotypes that divide working-class people and manufacture consent for policies such as the tightening of benefits and the defunding of social programmes. We have been conditioned to feel resentment rather than compassion when faced with the social manifestations of the fact that 14m people in the UK are deemed to live in relative poverty.

This latest atrocity should come as no surprise. The re-election of the Conservative Party in December 2019 with the greatest number of seats since Thatcher will undoubtedly see the class warfare and cruelty of the coalition years intensified. Whilst the last few months of gov-

“What are government or taxes for if not to ensure that every child in this country is being fed?”

ernment have been anomalous due to the measures being taken to fight the pandemic and save the economy, this vote on free school meals has indicated that a return to business as usual isn't too far away. Whilst last December's election was dubbed the Brexit election; the onset of the pandemic soon after and this absolute travesty surrounding free school meals has illustrated that politics is quite literally a question of who lives and who dies, who eats and who starves.



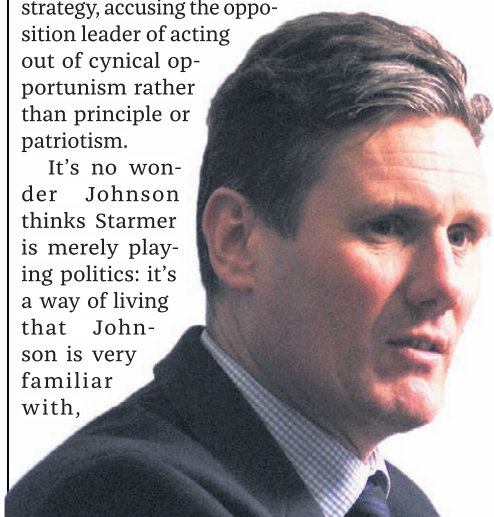
(DC CENTRAL KITCHEN)

## Dithering and delay - the lockdown that came too late

Lara Brown

On the 13th of October Keir Starmer implored Boris to implement a short 'circuit breaker' lockdown to get the virus back under control. He highlighted that local restrictions were proving ineffective: in 19 of the 20 areas that have faced local restrictions for over two months, cases have gone up, not down. Starmer's suggestion was a two to three-week lockdown to coincide with half-term, thus minimising disruption and limiting the increased infection risk caused by the school holidays. Of course, at PMQs Johnson scoffed at this suggestion. A second lockdown, he claimed, would be a 'disaster'. The Prime Minister backed his tiered approach, ignoring the evidence-based criticism that it simply wasn't working. He told Starmer to fall in line and 'cooperate' with the current strategy, accusing the opposition leader of acting out of cynical opportunism rather than principle or patriotism.

It's no wonder Johnson thinks Starmer is merely playing politics: it's a way of living that Johnson is very familiar with,



“The Prime Minister backed his tiered approach, ignoring the evidence-based criticism that it simply wasn't working”

having played that role all his life. The Prime Minister rose to power on the back of opportunism and can't imagine why Sir Keir would act out of anything but self-interest. It made no difference to the Prime Minister that SAGE had published guidance on the 21st September calling for an immediate lockdown in attempts to avoid 'a very large epidemic with catastrophic consequences'. He dismissed the idea because it came from Starmer; he could conceive of Starmer's suggestion only as a cynical attempt to undermine the government.

And yet, on Halloween, Johnson stood up and addressed the nation, declaring that he had no choice but to implement a second lockdown. Delayed by two hours, he declared a lockdown identical to the one Sir Keir requested. Just as Sir Keir suggested, restaurants, bars, and gyms would remain closed; just like Sir Keir's lockdown, school's would remain open. The twist? This lockdown would be four weeks, not two - and that's by far the most conservative estimate. Recent speculation has suggested we may be locked down for much longer with limited improvement to the R number. Hospitals are now on the brink of entirely exceeding capacity, with some parts of the south-west due to run out of beds in the next two weeks. Once again the government has ignored crucial advice. They've reacted rather than acted. They've played politics and refused to make unpopular decisions and as a result, the nation is suffering.

The amateur and unclear presentation insisted that it was only now that the data warranted a second lockdown, al-

lowing Johnson to claim that this is not a 'U-Turn' and that Starmer was still wrong to call for a 'circuit-breaker' when he did. At this time of national crisis, Johnson's immediate priority was once again saving face. The tone of the Prime Minister's speech on Saturday was that of a parent that desperately wants to be your friend. Johnson has spent so long promising to avoid the 'misery' of lockdown. He's spent months scoffing at those calling for drastic measures to reduce the R number and now he's backed into a corner facing an R number of 1.1-3 and a growth rate between 2 and 4%. He spent three weeks dithering and delaying, refusing to implement tough and unpopular lockdown measures. As a consequence, hospitals are now overwhelmed and the economy faces a longer than necessary lockdown. This bleak tragedy is made all the worse when one considers the hundreds of excess deaths over the next few weeks, both from Covid and from untreated medical complaints that hospitals have lost the capacity to diagnose.

Despite his brags that we are testing more than any other country in Europe this lockdown has been rendered inevitable by the utter failure of the test and trace system. Again, Sir Keir was right to push Johnson to move the system into the hands of local authorities who understand the landscape of their area and have a better capacity to contact people. Test and trace is where our Covid response lives and dies. Ultimately, testing ought to be valued as far, far less important. An

Imperial College study has found that were a proper test and trace solution to be deployed, we might be able to reduce the R number by 26%. The system was over-centralised from the start. The government's over-reliance on private firms has led to only 37% of the necessary people being identified. Finally, the government have conceded to Starmer's Labour, admitting that 'local cities and regions should be given help to do more'. Maybe if this decision had been taken earlier, and more concrete support had been given to local authorities, we wouldn't be on the precipice of spiralling case rates and a second national lockdown. Covid will most likely not be over by Christmas. The wealth of scientific data does not suggest there will be a vaccine soon. Johnson needs to cross the party divide and accept advice from labour.

His focus shouldn't be ridiculing Sir Keir at every opportunity. Instead, he needs to put politics aside and listen to the experts.



# Science

## The first COVID-19 'human challenge' trials may take place in the UK by the start of 2021

As developments in the race to find a solution to the pandemic appear at an increasing rate, **Eleanor Dunstone** considers the benefits and concerns surrounding one of our options



▲ Speed is clearly important when seeking a vaccine for COVID-19 - human challenge trials may offer the solution. (BICANSKI, PIXNIO)

The UK plans to run the world's first COVID-19 'human challenge' trial to assess the efficacy of possible vaccine candidates.

On the 20th of October it was announced that the UK government will invest £33.6 million to fund the studies, which will be conducted in partnership with Imperial College London, viral challenge study expert hVIVO, and the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust. Rapidly rising case numbers have led to the announcement of a second lockdown in the UK, emphasising the need for effective measures to counter the spread of the virus and protect the population. If final ethical approval is granted, these trials have the potential to dramatically accelerate vaccine research. However, some scientists have concerns about the value of this research and the ethical implications.

Human challenge trials typically involve deliberately infecting young, healthy volunteers with a disease-causing agent to assess how well vaccines or drugs work to prevent the disease or reduce its symptoms. This is done in a laboratory environment, with 24-hour medical attention and observation by scientists to check for side effects and to deal with any medical problems. These trials are well-established in other diseases, with influenza challenge trials dating back to 1937.

Scientists plan to infect small groups of 18-30 year olds, who have no known underlying health conditions, with SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19), by spraying droplets containing laboratory-produced virus into their nose. Their first task is to find the lowest possible dose of SARS-CoV-2 that can reliably cause infection, followed by trials

to see how effective different vaccines are at preventing COVID-19. These studies are due to start in January 2021, with results expected by May.

The major benefit of these trials is that they could reduce the time it takes to approve an effective COVID-19 vaccine. Current phase III vaccine trials rely on some of their many thousands of volunteers being naturally exposed to the virus in order for them to assess if the vaccine is better at preventing infection than a placebo. It can take many months for enough infections to occur naturally to be sure that the vaccine is making a difference. Challenge trials can speed up this process by exposing a much smaller number of participants to the virus soon after vaccination, potentially providing results in a number of weeks. Given that there have been well over 1 million deaths globally due to COVID-19 since the start of the year, accelerating vaccine approval by months could save a huge number of lives.

However, some scientists doubt the value of these trials. An important criticism is that the trials will only tell us if the vaccines are effective in a small number of young and healthy people, not the elderly, immunocompromised and chronically ill people who are most at risk. Despite this, they could provide a faster way of screening which vaccine candidates are likely to be effective and safe, before investing time and money in testing them in other demographics.

As with all clinical studies in the UK, the proposed trials will be carefully considered by ethics committees before the research begins. A particular ethical concern for COVID-19 challenge trials is that there are currently few successful treatments for the disease, which has

higher mortality rates than other diseases previously investigated using this kind of trial, such as influenza. Once volunteers show signs of infection they will be given the anti-viral drug remdesivir, but the latest research has disagreed on whether this drug has a meaningful effect on the progression of the disease, with no research at all done on patients at early-stages of infection.

The study organisers have said the trial will be paused if a participant becomes severely ill, but their expectation is that most won't even get any symptoms. Young, healthy people have a very low risk of complications, but we can't completely rule out the possibility of participants having pre-existing conditions that they are unaware of. Despite these good odds, there have been many cases of young, otherwise healthy people sadly dying due to COVID-19.

Another concern is the prospect of 'long COVID' - a phenomenon experienced by 1 in 10 infected people, where symptoms last for three weeks or more, sometimes continuing for months. Experts have warned that even mild cases may cause lasting damage to internal organs, and there is currently no way to predict who will recover quickly and who will be affected long-term.

Despite this, many believe that the level of risk is justified. The trials have been compared to altruistic kidney donations, which have a comparable risk of death to participation in a COVID-19 challenge trial. These procedures are considered ethically acceptable, despite saving only one life. In an interview with *Nature*, director of the Center for Population-Level Bioethics at Rutgers University Nir Eyal said "We [...] let humans volunteer to do risky things all the time. We let people, for example, volunteer to be

emergency medical services during this period. That significantly elevates their risk of getting infected. But it's also very important."

Though potential risks of the trial will be communicated clearly to participants, some are concerned that the payment on offer raises the possibility for exploitation of low-income people. The trial organisers have not yet disclosed the amount participants will be paid, but influenza challenge trials in the UK can pay up to £3,750. Given that many people are finding themselves under extraordinary financial pressure due to the impact of the pandemic, there are concerns that some may volunteer for financial reasons without fully considering the risks. The recent announcement of a second lockdown in the UK has led many to fear further job losses as economic recovery from the initial lockdown grinds to a

halt, putting more people in financial distress.

Over 38,000 people from 166 countries have indicated that they are interested in volunteering on 1daysooner.org, a website advocating for the benefits of COVID-19 challenge trials. Interestingly, many quotes from these volunteers suggest that they are not motivated by the money, with one USA resident saying: "the potential benefit to global public health and economic recovery that could come from a challenge trial is far greater than any personal risk to me."

This is a pivotal but controversial development in COVID-19 research, with the potential to provide vital insights into vaccines and treatments. If granted full approval, the study is expected to begin in early 2021, with further information on participant recruitment and study design to be published soon.

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## Interviews

# “We are in the white heat of change”: an interview with Heidi Safia Mirza

*Juliette Guéron-Gabrielle speaks to UCL professor Heidi Safia Mirza about the power of young people, the revolutionnary potential of queering society and the path to decolonizing institutions*

**F**ist held high, Professor Heidi Safia Mirza ended our zoom call by mandating young people to “smash the patriarchy – it is still here!”. Even over Zoom, her enthusiasm and smile were infectious.

UCL professor Mirza became known for her landmark study of Caribbean girls in secondary education called *Young, Female and Black*. To conduct her study, she went back to her old school. There, she theorized the “backdoor entry” young Caribbean women used to get into University despite being awarded insufficient grades to enter higher education the traditional way.

*Young, Female and Black* was inspired by her own experience of arriving from the Caribbean at sixteen and going to school in Brixton, where she encountered “very overt racism”. “The book is about how the girls navigated the racism in the system – the awarding gap.” Mirza found they followed college courses or vocational training to enter University, regardless of this “awarding gap”. “I found that, when they arrived at University, they were often older – because they had to use the backdoor entries”.

Mirza linked the young women’s will to achieve higher education against the odds to a “resilience” passed down from the time of slavery, where “women were not allowed to have families”. “They were inde-

“Caribbean girls had to use the backdoor entry into University”

◀ **Photography of Heidi for an exhibit featuring 35 Black female professors** (BILL KNIGHT)



▲ “Mirza is confident the ‘decolonize’ movement is going to succeed” (IAFORMEDIA)

ent women, single mothers”. As such, Brixton Caribbean girls at the time “saw themselves as career women” whereas “white girls saw themselves as set to get married”.

Mirza – that I interviewed on Zoom from the Cambridge Union’s chamber – also touched on the meaning of decolonizing higher education and places like the Cambridge Union. “Institutions are not neutral spaces”, she insisted. “Even the way the seats are laid out [in the Union]... it is not neutral. It belongs to the period of the Enlightenment. A time where people sat in staggered rows on leather seats to look at the object they were studying. Decolonizing is changing those spaces”.

Mirza, in her earlier speech at the Cambridge Union’s Race debate, had highlighted the need for the Union to become a more inclusive space. “The skills the Union values are not neutral skills. Crushing your adversary with words. It is the survival of the fittest. It is skills taught at private English schools. The Union is structured around a very masculine set of rules.”

Mirza is confident the ‘decolonize’ movement is going to succeed, and institutions are broadly going to become more inclusive with time. She links this to young people. When I tell her I hope to see this politically active united front of young people soon, she tells me

“The Caribbean girls saw themselves very much as career women, on the contrary to white-girls”

it already exists. “Young people... They are mad as hell. They did it. They pulled down the statues.”

Mirza spoke with confidence. “Young people are an irresistible force. Just sheer numbers, intelligence... you are the most highly educated ever on the planet. You have social media, you can talk to each other across walls... The government is scared of young people. Who knows, there might be a rebellion!”

Mirza’s fervent spirit was communicative. Our conversation felt like a small escape from months of dreary COVID reports and various lockdowns.

“The more fragmented and neoliberal our world gets, the more we hold out to our specific identities”, Mirza stated. But she thinks movements such as Black Lives Matter or the decolonize movement can bridge such divisions.

On the present time and the rise of virtual interaction, she said it “can make a sense of reality difficult”. And the “name and shaming” have to be “sorted out”. But overall, she believes social media has the power to organize activism. It offers a fresh tool of resistance against established forms of power.

In our conversation, Mirza spoke extensively about feminism. Her book *Black, British and Feminism* was one of the first academic publications on intersectionality in the UK. She says that when she began talking about black

feminism in the 1970s, “I was talking in a cold dark room. Today, this is no longer the case”.

Mirza described sexism and heteropatriarchy as “chameleon” like. “They change their form, but they don’t go.” Traditional patterns of interaction adapt to modern innovations like social media, or to new situations like lockdown: “social media is a new form of communication. But is still very sexist, very much based on ‘oh, show me your body’, or ‘are you up for grabs’”.

According to Mirza, today’s feminist movement needs to address “the same problems I was seeing 40 years ago”. Namely, achieving careers as well as domestic inequality. “I read recently that women are going to become the main breadwinners in the family in the UK. Things are changing. Women are going to be a force to be reckoned with”.

She believes the feminist movement is helped by the revolutionary potential of queerness: “queering society is currently the most powerful threat to the heteropatriarchy.” People can escape “binary definitions” of themselves.

Mirza said that on such themes as sexuality, knowledge, or means of communication, “we are in the white heat of change”.

“Keep a diary of the current time”, she advised. “It will be gold dust in thirty years”.





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## Interviews

# Lockdown Innovations 2: An app to empower freelancers, a magazine to empower Northerners

In the second installment of the series 'Our New World', *Ewan Woods* and *Alice LC* speak to two undergraduates about their lockdown initiatives and innovations

As we enter our second lockdown, the first seems like a distant memory. But as the UK and countries around the world battle fiercely to get the coronavirus under control, some Cambridge students were able to put their creative minds to work and innovate brilliantly amid these uncertain times.

For James Lloyd, a fourth year at Queens' and his multi-collegiate team, Hector (Fitzwilliam), Ilakya (Magdalene) and Ella (Trinity Hall) it was the opportunity to begin working on Genchi.

"Lockdown gave us the chance to do most of our market research" says Hector, with the break in time allowing for the whole team to pursue the development of the app.

Genchi, a name derived from a Japanese manufacturing term meaning "go and see", was born out of a perceived need for freelancing experience in Cambridge. It hopes to fill this gap and connect enthusiastic freelancers and students, whether it be for one time work such as creating new logos, or long-term positions within societies.

For James and the team, the vision they developed for the app was clear. "We as a group decided on a mission, what we're doing and what we care about. The thing we decided on was that we wanted to empower people to make their own impact, and by providing them with opportunities people can make that impact, and have real influence over a project".

"I think something that we realised" Hector mentioned "was that there wasn't a central platform for societies, they were going through word of mouth and other contacts, and it was quite hard to get a reply. And on the other side of things, people wanted to find other opportunities, but they weren't able to do it within their own schedule."

The app took three months to develop, with both James and Ilakya heading the development as first-time coders. "We had been talking about this for almost a year now, with lockdown giving us that opportunity to fill that gap in the market".

The initial soft launch of the app in July allowed for any difficulties in the system to be ironed out, whilst letting interest in Genchi slowly build. In its current state, Genchi has accumulated

a user base of over 400 people since its launch, with the app hosting all kinds of jobs opportunities, whether it be tutorials for PowerPoint plug-ins, society events officers or requesting a portrait of housemates for the wall (yes really!).

The app itself has clear potential for growth. Graphic design work for charities was one of the first listings on the app, and other new Cambridge developments like 'Genie', the snack based delivery service, have also made listings for work on Genchi, showing a clear future for the app outside of positions in university societies too.

But for Frankie and Antonia, two second-year undergraduates at Clare, lockdown presented the chance to develop something entirely different: 'SINK' - a Northern left-wing magazine. A first issue has already seen released, while the second issue is just about to come out.

They speak about their work with contagious enthusiasm, and their passion behind the project is clear.

"We are very excited about the cultural aspect of the magazine, which gives politics an artistic dimension. The magazine is overall more fluid in its creativity, it incorporates poetry, artwork, prose," says Frankie. They note how the magazine was inspired by one of its current editor's Rita's online magazine from school, 'Petty Bourgeoisie', which aimed to uplift Northern voices too.

"This time, we also had more tools in our hands: at university, we developed a wider range of connections, which subsequently enabled a broader reach. We want to represent the North as diverse as it is," they say.

"We noticed that there was a lack of opportunities in the North, as seen for example in schools. The impression of this observation was further reinforced when arriving in Cambridge," says Antonia. "The magazine is a way to help people access a skill and an experience... as many opportunities as there are in the North, from my personal experience, there would never have been an opportunity for me to contribute to a magazine like SINK."

"Having this exposure can have a lasting impact in people's lives," she adds.

"It is important to have a magazine that is rooted in and empowers Northern voices," says Frankie. "It is not some-



▲ James (left) and his team developed an app during lockdown, Frankie (right) helped set up a new magazine (JAMES LLOYD / SINK)

“There is a diversity of experiences in the North which have to be explored”

voices,” says Frankie. “It is not something that we had in our experiences and this impression was reinforced when coming to Cambridge.”

“There is a diversity of experiences in the North which have to be explored,” they add.

The magazine has a uniquely minimalist aesthetic, which Antonia says came from Northern realist and industrial aesthetics. “We drew a lot from the aesthetic of prominent Northern creators such as Shelagh Delaney and groups such as the ‘angry young men. We also looked at Kitchen Sink Realism, which is where we got our name from”.

“Some elements of the aesthetic just came along progressively, notably through the high number of submitted artwork,” says Frankie. “A lot of it was about playing around with colors and fonts and getting constant opinions. We did not necessarily have a clear vision of what we wanted it to look like.”

The magazine is entirely self-funded, and fifty percent of profits go to African Rainbow Family, which works to support LGBT+ people of colour and immigrants. “We sold the magazine for a price that we thought to be accessible but that would also ensure that we keep afloat,” says Antonia.

The theme of the first issue was ‘passion’ and Frankie argues one of the central themes was masculinity. “As a trans man, I feel like there are hardened conceptions of masculinity so I would like to provide an insight into a queer experience of masculinity,” they say.

“I envision it as something that can be intimate, it is important to provide a space for men to explore their masculinity through a personal lens”. The second issue, on the other hand, will spotlight love, sex and the body. “It will revolve a

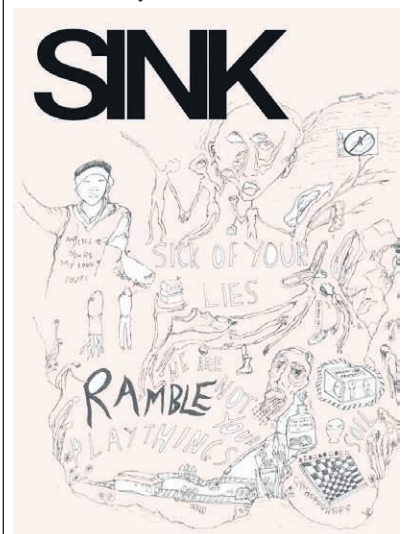
lot around the personal and attempts to provide an understanding of how politics extremely affect us on an individual level,” says Frankie.

But dealing with difficult themes such as intimacy can be very sensitive, something Antonia is very aware of.

“I think it can be a difficult thing for anyone to tackle intimate issues so we did not want them to dig into experiences of trauma. Instead, it was more about using a creative process to move through something and generate renewal,” she says. “We believe in a more positive approach in which people can address the issues they have had and we want to host a diversity of experiences.”

Ultimately, she says, “knowing the people you are giving your work to allows more accessibility. We do not want to be just a publication but also a community”.

“We wanted to empower people to make their own impact... and have real influence over a project”



▲ SINK's first front cover



▲ James, Ilakya, Ella and Hector launched Genchi in July. The app's interface is seen here (GENCHI)

# Vulture

## ►LIFESTYLE

ASK VULTURE • 21

## ►FILM&TV

REBECCA REVIEW - I

DON'T BELIEVE IN

GHOSTS • 23

## ►ARTS

THE SPIRIT OF SHAKE-  
SPEARE & COMPANY • 24

## ►THEATRE

AUDITIONING AND IN-  
EQUALITY • 29

Illustration by  
Yan Shi



# Lifestyle

## The Art of Streetwalking

**James Critchley** who started to wander the streets of his home-city in the evenings during the lock-down, shares how his neighbors' cat encouraged him to not necessarily ignore the 'useless'



▲ "My neighbour's cat is somewhat overfamiliar. One night, after my standoffish resistance to her adamant purring broke down, I complied in following her path." (LEONI BOYLE)

The Japanese artist Akasegawa Genpei was an observant streetwalker. In the early 1980s, he conceived a brand of art known as 'Hyperart Thomasson', which championed the artistic merit of curiously 'useless' architectural oddities. The movement is named after a high-profile sporting failure, Gary Thomasson, whose record move to the baseball team the Yomiuri Giants was nothing short of catastrophic (and saw him swiftly relegated to a redundant position spectating from the sidelines). Akasegawa's philosophy is one that is attentive to the puzzling mysteries of 'redundancy' in the urban landscape. It is particularly interested in those strangely opaque features of our surroundings whose function is not immediately transparent—the sort of object that resists immediate classification yet insists upon further investigation. The example that stimulated Akasegawa's imagination was a staircase in Tokyo that led to nowhere; the steps were well maintained and the handrail polished, but at the top of the stairs the climber was faced by an unbudging concrete wall. Curious, no?

It is such playful moments of befuddlement that illuminate our existence. Even more so in these times of monotonous days and restricted living. I took great pleasure during lockdown in wandering the streets of my home city at night, alone, and soaking in the richly perplexing eccentricities of the hive of activity that occurs, unceasing, while we are ordinarily looking the other way.

My neighbour's cat is somewhat overfamiliar. One night, after my standoffish resistance to her

adamant purring broke down, I complied in following her path. My feline tour-guide led me through streets and alleys that I was previously utterly unaware of. Although but minutes from where I lived, these winding avenues felt like thrillingly strange new pastures for exploration. At the height of the evening's rambling, I pursued the cat as she ascended a disused fire escape; a riled voice in my head admonished me for even entertaining the idea of following her example. However, I conceded, and at the metal stairs' pinnacle, I was met by a stunning view of the city. Its deep orange lights glowed in the hazy dusk with a renewed freshness. My curiosity had won out. There is an entire realm of experience—a hidden, pulsing vitality—that we widely ignore in our pursuit of all things productive.

Life is so often consumed by things that claim perfection. Too often we are judged by a standard that values profitable conformity above liberating individuality; and such a growing demand for every element of our lives to be 'useful' has worrying implications for the future. Funding for the arts is being cut; and increasingly students are choosing subjects for their 'employability'—their 'usefulness'. Such a relentless focus on being 'valuable' to society is a product of the commodification of education; because we are forced into 'paying' for something, there is a pressure to 'buy' a 'product' that society tells you will be 'profitable' for a long time afterwards. The language of business leaves little room for the pursuit of curiosity. Given that our

generation is widely expected to have to work well into our seventies, such a model seems unsustainable. Following the monotonous, plodding path of productivity surely is a narrow way of experiencing the world. Yes, without a shadow of a doubt, people must have a purpose in life; we must do something that contributes to society, but this must not be at the expense of allowing oneself to flourish in the pursuit of things that are outliers, that defy the grim disciplinarians of usefulness and efficiency. Curiosity, the ability to shift perspectives and be unafraid of freely pursuing the unusual, will be crucial as humanity faces up to an uncertain future, where even something as foundational as the continued habitability of the earth is under question. The willingness to be unconstrained by convention, to be intrigued by the idiosyncratic aspects of the world that so greatly bound Akasegawa's attention, is part of such an effort to broaden our capacity for empathy and creativity.

Virginia Woolf is renowned for her neologisms. Her coinage, 'irreticence', in particular, comes to mind in explaining the value of exploring the more outré aspects of life—of actually following up on that niggling instinct of curiosity so often numbed by the urgent need to follow the shoal during day-to-day living. Perhaps, as we emerge from the spectre of confinement and repetition, we will find more time for 'irreticence'; perhaps we will be able to see and craft the world with a fresher, more curious, gaze.

### Lifestyle's guide to being ghosted

#### Do:

- Distract yourself
- Think about the situation logically: do you want to be close to someone who (a) does not value clear communication and (b) could not see you as a friend if they are no longer interested in a relationship?
- Treat yourself (with your favourite meals, favourite TV)

#### Don't:

- Think worse of yourself - whose opinion of you do you value more: theirs or yours?
- Think every future relationship is doomed to end in ghosting. This is not true
- Stop looking after yourself (stopping exercising, sleeping enough, eating well)

# Ask Vulture

## How do I stop feeling lonely when single?

**Ines Magre** talks about the importance of working on yourself, deepening friendships, and being happy on your own

I've been single for a few months now, and I'm not desperate to get into a new relationship, but sometimes I feel so lonely. What should I do?

It's that awkward stage after a breakup when you're over them, but not quite over the warmth that the relationship brought you. Queue sad songs, looking back at old photos, and then the realisation hits that actually you quite enjoy being single again – maybe you just need to navigate the 'on your own' part.

A sudden disappearance of tokens of affection and the safety net of having that one person to go to can make you feel like you've been plunged into a dark hole. Rejoice! There are 7.8 billion people on Earth, more realistically 21,000 students at Cambridge, and if you're feeling less outgoing, an average of 160 students in the same year in your college (give or take, I'm not a Mathmo). This should act as a reminder that plenty of people can take over the function your partner fulfilled, in filling your free time; all that time you spent with them can now be reinvested into meaningful friendships you put on the back burner during your relationship. You might think friendships can't replace a partner, but channelling energy into pre-existing bonds, or connecting to new people, might open

your eyes to countless opportunities, adventures and mind-bending conversations that you would never have had had you spent all this time with one person.

Someone else you might have neglected whilst in a relationship is yourself. The physical presence of another person might have made you feel less, but it's easy to have fallen into the trap of losing yourself in the process. Now is the opportunity to focus on you. What do you actually like doing? Is there a creative outlet you've always wanted to try? Have you explored your own music taste? Take yourself on a date! Dedicate an evening to yourself and pick up a book – why not try Lane Moore's *How to be alone* for some inspiration? Learning to enjoy your own company will, over time, help you understand that being alone doesn't have to be lonely. A partner often acts as a mask to inner loneliness – Cambridge can be a lonely place even when surrounded by people – if you feel isolated because of your workload, or because of distance from home, a relationship is not going to help. Set aside time to call your family, go out with friends and prioritise self care and mental health.

You could also consider dating casually. Again, this may only be a temporary fix, but turn it to your advantage by seeing it as personal growth to

understanding your wants and needs in a relationship. Being single gives you the distance to see past red flags and things you settled for, helping you redefine your wishes and boundaries for a new

relationship. Last but not least – have fun! Your friends in relationships are probably dying with envy at your newfound freedom, enjoy it!



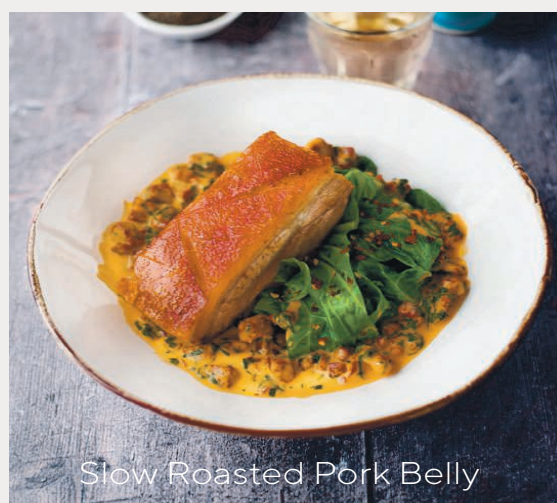
▲ "A partner often acts as a mask to inner lonelinessare going for a picnic." (LEONI BOYLE)

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# Music

## John Lennon and the Strength of Simplicity

In commemoration of his 80th Birthday, **Scarlett Dargan** reflects on John Lennon's powerful musical legacy and evaluates some of his greatest hits

Being unable to put your feelings into words is a frustrating feeling, and one of the main reasons we turn to art. What was so special about John Lennon was his ability to express in profoundly simple words things the rest of us can only feel. Through his lyrics, Lennon tackled extensive themes, from the complexity of raw human emotion to his developing commitment to pacifism. He articulated these themes with a beauty, vulnerability, and a poetic effortlessness that no other musician can emulate. Below are four landmarks of Lennon's artistic journey, which demonstrate

“

*He articulated with a beauty, vulnerability, and a poetic effortlessness*

”

his power to delicately simplify the world even when it seems unfathomably scary and chaotic.

### ‘Help!’

The Beatles' fifth LP opens with Lennon's desperate plea: “Help! I need somebody”. Immediately, ‘Help’ marks a shift in Lennon's song-writing; light-hearted musings about teenage love-affairs surrender to increased emotional vulnerability, as Lennon grapples with worldwide fame. Whilst the song is primarily about Lennon's struggle with becoming, as he controversially described, “more popular than Jesus”, perhaps his desire to “get my feet back on the ground” was not entirely ill-placed. The song is relatable as it nostalgically glances back to a time of juvenile carelessness, a time when “I never needed anybody's help in any way”. The jaunty melody, harking back to the freedoms of

“

*The jaunty melody harks back to freedoms of childhood*

”

childhood, juxtaposes with the lyrics (loaded with the weight of adult responsibility). When Lennon desperately asks “Won't you please, please help me?” we all know the feeling – a desire to briefly escape from the obligations

of adulthood, and to re-experience some of our youthful recklessness.

### ‘All You Need is Love’

The Beatles' manager, Brian Epstein, described ‘All You Need is Love’ as “an inspired song... The nice thing is that it cannot be misinterpreted. It is a clear message saying that love is everything.” The track was written for the international *One World* television broadcast, with Lennon purposefully crafting the lyrics using simplistic language which expresses a universalist agenda of global peace that transcends national barriers.

As the Cold War turned ‘hot’ in Vietnam, the track is incredibly

you need is love.” An oversimplification, perhaps, but Lennon's musing reminds us that at a time when ideological rivalry created, quite literally, a divided world, a human need for love unites us all.

### ‘Imagine’

One morning in 1971, Lennon sat down at his piano and wrote a love song that extended far wider than even his previous triumphs; a love-song for the entire human race, and perhaps the most beautiful revolutionary anthem ever written. Released at the height of the anti-war movement of the early-70s, the track was an expression of what many

peace and unity within a global community exhausted by conflict, singing: “You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one” – and he certainly wasn't, with former US president Jimmy Carter stating that across the 125 countries he had visited, ‘Imagine’ was “used almost equally with national anthems”. ‘Imagine’, Lennon doesn't command but merely asks, and the world did.

### ‘Happy Xmas (War is Over)’

In December 1969, billboards appeared overnight in 12 major cities. In black and white, they stated, “WAR IS OVER! If You Want It.” Two years later, those simple words reappeared in Lennon's Christmas anthem. Demonstrating the endurance of his wonderfully cynical Liverpoolian humour, Lennon claimed he wrote the track as he was “sick of ‘White Christmas’”. Yet, in a rather more powerful statement, an increasingly political Lennon sings of the power of human unification, urging the listener “if you want it” you can end global conflict. And could there be a more poignant way to exemplify the inhumanity of

“

*An increasingly political Lennon sings of the power of human unification*

”

war than a children's choir singing that the best Christmas gift the world could desire is that “war is over”? This contrast of the innocence of childhood with the depravity of a war the global community was increasingly seeing as unwinnable, is completed with the humble holiday optimism for the coming year – “Let's hope it's a good one/ Without any fear.”

Lennon was many things: a lyrical genius, a radical activist, frustratingly contradictory, and undeniably enigmatic. Above all, he was an artist, and as an artist he described his task: “to try and express what we all feel. Not to tell people how to feel. Not as a preacher, not as a leader, but as a reflection of us all.” Lennon's unparalleled ability to simply articulate raw human emotion allows his music to transcend national, political and generational divides; it is through this simplicity that Lennon became not just the voice of a generation, but the voice of us all.

profound in Lennon's condemnation of those efforts to enforce ideological systems and ‘save’ countries by military intervention, arguing: “There's no one you can save that can't be saved”. As global conflicts wore on and political leaders grappled with globally divisive problems, Lennon believed that he had the answer, and not only that, but “It's easy” – “All

people desired, but only Lennon could express with such striking simplicity. His suggestions of a world with “no religion”, “no heaven”, and “no countries” are intrinsically radical, yet the end result is as simple as a lullaby, a commanding ode to human togetherness. Lennon reflected the longing for



# Film & TV

## Rebecca review — I don't believe in ghosts

Ben Wheatley's latest Netflix adaptation of Du Maurier's *Rebecca* is as underwhelming as it was unnecessary, writes **Ben Philipps**

I don't understand Ben Wheatley's Netflix adaptation of *Rebecca*. The original novel by Daphne du Maurier is a masterpiece of pulsating melodrama. Opening at a random page, I learn how 'the rain and the rivulet mingled with one another, and the liquid note of the black bird fell upon the damp air in harmony with them both'. This is a representative sample of du Maurier's unrepentantly over-the-top prose – prose which just barely keeps up with the even more absurdly overwrought plot. It's one of the most purely pleasurable novels I've ever read, putting any soap opera to shame.

“James spends most of the film's latter half sobbing while her on-screen husband stands in various drawing-rooms like an especially immobile cupboard”

Meanwhile, this new film is inexplicably, and cosmically, boring. Wheatley's two-hour-Instagram-reel-of-a-movie stars Lily James as the unnamed protagonist and Armie Hammer as Maxim de Winter, the brooding, tortured, old-money type with whom she falls desperately in love. Hammer is six and a half feet tall, about 30 years old (Maxim is supposedly 42), and only intermittently capable of doing an English accent (annoyingly, he struggles most of all with the quite prominent word 'beautiful'). James spends most of the film's latter half sobbing and hyperventilating while her on-screen husband stands scowling in various drawing-rooms like an especially immobile cupboard.

But my beef with this film goes deeper than these snarky comments. The structure of *Rebecca*, for all its gleefully purple prose, is dark and complex. Mrs Danvers, played by Kristin Scott Thomas, the steely, black-clad housekeeper who doubles as the film's only enjoyable performance, is one of the most intriguing and tragic queer figures in pre-contemporary 'popular' fiction. She is passionately and obsessively in love with the titular Rebecca, the deceased first Mrs. de Winter; she's, at once, a brilliant gothic villain and strangely fragile, a wounded image of grief.

Equally, the nervy protagonist is a woman struggling to fit into a world in which she feels she doesn't belong. The spectre of Jane Eyre presides over the novel's surprisingly subtle exploration of a repressive, exclusionist class structure. These issues are ripe for thoughtful re-examination in the 21st century



▲ Lily James stars as Mrs. De Winter in Ben Wheatley's adaptation of *Rebecca* (TWITTER/ARRIRENTAL)

– what's changed? What hasn't? The story of two women crushed and turned against one another by a rigid social order is the sort of thing that Netflix (and other production companies) should be investing time and money into. It's a shame that these questions are dealt with so sporadically and so clunkily. In one wince-inducing moment, Danvers declares that 'she lived her life as she pleased, my Rebecca. No wonder a man had to kill her'. You can imagine how proud the three (three!) screenwriters were of that one.

These kinds of insults to the audience's in-

“Most egregious of all is the slapdash way Manderley itself is configured”

telligence are everywhere. The whole point of the story is the way in which Rebecca seems to haunt Manderley, the ancestral de Winter home: a supernatural aura is everywhere present but crucially nowhere stated. But this is apparently an ambiguity too far: 'I don't believe in ghosts', says Lily James, predictably in tears. When she explains to Maxim near the beginning that her employment as a lady's companion nets her £90 a year, she hastens to tell him that she knows 'it's not a lot for you, but it's a lot for me'. This does not

really count as doing social commentary.

Most egregious of all is the slapdash way Manderley itself is configured. The house is probably the main character of the novel: secret rooms, locked doors, echoing stone passages are all motifs which lend it its wonderfully spooky claustrophobia. The film, for some reason, used eight different stately homes to stand in for Manderley's interior and grounds. This weird flex from Netflix is a disaster for atmosphere and continuity. Sometimes Manderley is a grand Tudor pile, all wood panels and chequered flooring; then we burst through a door into a blatantly Georgian room in an obviously different house. Oddest of all is Rebecca's bedroom, which is transparently, surreally modern, with grey carpeting and icy polish, like something in a plutocrat's London penthouse

Why does Netflix insist on producing,

at vast expense, these dismal and forgettable films? They all look fantastic, for sure, shiny and polished and full of gorgeous well-dressed people, like a Burberry advert lasting a 120 minutes. But there is absolutely nothing beneath the surface.

The final line of du Maurier's novel reads: 'And the ashes blew towards us with the salt wind from the sea'. Evocative, morbid, ridiculous—perfect. The final line of this new and extravagantly pointless film, delivered in breathy voiceover during one last gratuitous (and yet still totally sanitised) sex scene, tells us that James' character has finally discovered 'the one thing worth walking through flames for: love'. To quote Maxim's senile grandmother (who appears once, halfway through, and is never heard of again): 'what have you done with Rebecca?'

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# Fashion

## Something old, something new: corsets for the 21st century

*Varsity Fashion* talks to Cambridge student Flora Sharp about her incredible custom-made corset designs.



▲ FLORA SHARP FOR VARSITY

**F**lora Sharp (or @floramaeart on Instagram) is part-time second year History of Art student, part-time corset extraordinaire. This week, we caught up with her to talk all things fabric, feminism, and flair.

**Varsity:** This is an incredible and ambitious creative project, when and how did you start it?

**Flora:** I had wanted to take up sewing for years, but it was only during lockdown that I decided that this was the perfect time to get into it. In April, I saw a tutorial on Pinterest showing how you can use zip-ties as corset boning which was much simpler than I would ever have thought and I loved the idea! I borrowed my mum's sewing machine and gave it a go, trying to work out the rough measurements of a pattern that might fit me. Even though my first attempt was pretty shabby to say the least, it gave me the confidence to start experimenting with my own patterns and shapes. Over April and May, I was working on developing designs almost every day until I got the patterns just right, which was challenging, but so fun. It was only in June that I really started to think about making corsets for other people, and I began selling corsets as a way of raising money for bail funds in the US in support of BLM protests, and donated all profits to these causes. During June and July, I made over thirty corsets in total, which made such a difference to my technique, but also my ambition with what I could do with this hobby.

**V:** Why corsets?

**F:** My mum has really inspired my love of historical dress, as she collected lots of antique clothing when she was my age, which include some

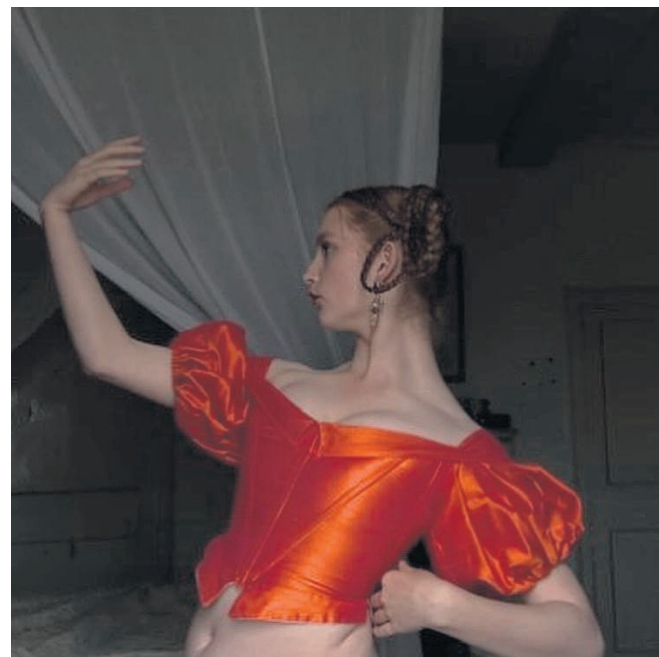
Victorian corsets. She first showed me her collection when I was sixteen, and I remember being so in awe of how beautiful and elegant they were, and feeling amazing when I tried them on. I think they're just so effortlessly beautiful, and I personally feel so confident when I wear one. I guess because they're so dramatically different from every-day clothing, they feel like such a special thing to wear. Historically, they were so constrictive and oppressive for women, and this is something I wanted to change in my designs. I wanted to make corsets which are comfortable and allow you to be mobile, which zip-ties are great for, as they are plastic and very bendable in comparison with corsets from

*I love knowing that I have given new life to something that was previously a curtain or a cushion cover*

the nineteenth century, for example, which would use very rigid whalebone. I also wanted to be able to customise a corset design which was more casual and could be dressed down and worn with jeans, or dressed up with a big dress to look more dramatic. By making my own corsets, I could choose the length, style, size and fabric of the item, translating historical designs into current tastes. So for me, the idea of corsets came from my own fascination with them for years, but also my wanting to alter them to incorporate a modern influence.

**V:** How would you describe the aesthetic of your designs and items?

**F:** Many of my corset designs are dictated by the fabrics I'm using, as I like to use second-hand material, and see what I think would work well as a design from there. A lot of my fabrics are given to me by my grandmother, particularly a lot of William Morris fabric, as she has always loved his designs and has collected a lot throughout her life. So when I use these fabrics, there is definitely an element of sentimentality in my designs because of her. I love knowing that I have given new life to something that was previously a curtain or a cushion cover, and that the fabric is getting new use as a corset. Because of the nature of my second-hand material, it's hard to pinpoint one common aesthetic that summarises every corset I make. However, I think the shapes of the corsets themselves all have a certain aesthetic of being fashionable and wearable yet still adhering to the spirit of historical dress. I like to keep some traditional corset features such as a laced back, structured boning, eyelet holes, and a V-shape hemline, but still modernise the design in some ways. I have cropped the traditional length of the corset which would go down to the hips, so it instead sits on the waist and essentially acts more like a top than a bustier. I also wanted to be able to



▲ FLORA SHARP FOR VARSITY

incorporate interesting fabrics which you don't see in historical designs, such as velvets, woven fabrics, taffeta, or denim. I also think that my personal style really influences the aesthetics of my designs. I rec-

*I don't use a lot of lace, or 'feminine' colour palettes*

ognised, when seeing corsets in books, films or even on more recent runways, that they almost always lend themselves to feminine styling, and I wanted to make corsets which were edgier and could be more androgynous. Therefore, I don't use a lot of lace, or 'feminine' colour palettes. Instead, I like choosing fabrics which I think will look effective as a striking corset, rather than to specifically choose a 'feminine corset aesthetic'. I love knowing that I can wear a black denim corset with some black baggy jeans and still feel as empowered as when I am wearing one of my mum's Victorian corsets with a skirt and blouse.

**V:** To what extent does art history influence your designs?

**F:** Because of my introduction to corsets through my mum's antique collection, my interest in corsets is rooted in a fascination with fashion history. I adore looking through patterns from eighteenth and nineteenth century corsets specifically, as there are endless designs and patterns for corsets, many of which are so inventive! Mandy Barrington's book *Stays and Corsets: Historical Pat-*



▲ FLORA SHARP FOR VARSITY

terns Translated for the Modern Body is great - it gives a very comprehensive survey of historical patterns and diagrams, from the early eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century, but it also translates these historical patterns into measurements which the modern reader can attempt. I was inspired by the incorporation of straps in a design from 1776, and took this method into my own work, where straps come over the shoulder from the back and attach to the neckline at either side, using cord which matches the lacing at the back, to tie the whole design together. Not only is this a practical addition to my own design as it makes the corset top feel more secure, but it also reinforced my ambition to combine historical corset features with modern, wearable adaptations. I have recently also collaborated with my friend, Sophie Beckingham, on a series of art-inspired painted corset designs. I create a white corset in a thick, canvas-like material, and she paints scenes inspired by artists or art historical movements using a combination of acrylics, liquitex sealant and oils. So far, we have made three: one inspired by Turner, one by Monet, and one by both Caravaggio and Gentileschi, and are currently working on new commissions, including one inspired by Cézanne and Nash. This has been such an exciting project in incorporating art into my corsets, and collaborating with a very talented friend.

**V:** Where else do you find inspiration?

**F:** I can't talk about my inspiration without mentioning Vivienne Westwood - her corsets are so iconic, and unbelievably beautiful, but I also love her approach to corsetry, and think it aligns well with my own feelings about them. She incorporated corsets into a punk aesthetic, reimagining them as a symbol of female power rather than constraint, and empowering women through clothing which was previously an undergarment, but was now a part of high fashion. But I am also inspired by many smaller creators on Instagram, such as Rosie Evans (@artosie on Instagram), who makes one-off corsets out of vintage material and second-hand textiles, and Aimee Belle Johnson (@immorallondon on Instagram), who takes historical corset patterns and adds modern twists in satin ruched busts and jewelled trimmings.

**V:** What is the process of making an item like?

**F:** I have a folder of patterns I've made, which are essentially shapes cut out of newspaper which I trace around when I cut my fabric pieces for a corset. For each pattern, I have a few different sizes, which I use as a starting point and then alter based on the specific measurements of the person who the corset is for. Once I have all my pieces cut out, I attach all the lining pieces together, i.e. the front piece, two back pieces and two straps, and do the same for the outer material. I then sew the lining and the outer material together, right sides together, on the top and bottom, leaving the back open at each side. This allows me to turn the whole corset the right way out, and insert and sew each piece of boning in the correct position. Finally, I can sew the backs up, add eyelet holes, lace the corset up with

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*Historically, they were so constrictive and oppressive for women, and this is something I wanted to change in my designs. I wanted to make corsets which are comfortable and allow you to be mobile*

”

cord, and add a hand-sewn label. If I have multiple orders in the same fabric, I will do multiple corsets at a time, as it saves time when doing each stage of the process. This means it can be hard to track how long one corset takes, but usually if I work on one corset from scratch, I can finish it in 3-4 hours, I'd say! It's such a rewarding process, and I love the final stages when I can see the corset coming together, especially getting to lace up the corset right



▲ FLORA SHARP FOR VARSITY

at the end - that's definitely my favourite part.

**V:** Your corsets are made to order, how does this speak to - and how has this influenced - your approach to diversity, accessibility and inclusivity in fashion?

**F:** It's so important to me to be able to make my designs as inclusive as possible - I think corsets are amazing for this reason as each one is adjustable so they are less intimidating to buy, as they fit a range of sizes already. I am constantly making new patterns, and developing different sizes which can be adapted for anyone. I found this difficult at first, as I only had myself for reference, but as I gained

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*I think the shapes of the corsets themselves all have a certain aesthetic of being fashionable and wearable yet still adhering to the spirit of historical dress*

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more practice, and more feedback, I was able to become more precise in my sizings. With fast fashion, there is such an issue already not only with limited ranges of sizings, but also with sizings themselves fluctuating between brands. Therefore, in my work I have made a conscious effort to be tentative about using specific sizings like '12' or '14' and instead I like to work with direct measurements as this is not only objective and precise, but it also removes much of the issue which comes with sizings in fast fashion brands. I want to be able to make a corset for anyone who wants one!

**V:** Do you have a favourite piece that you've



▲ FLORA SHARP FOR VARSITY

made? What makes it special?

**F:** In September, I was commissioned to make an orange taffeta corset inspired by the Galliano SS93 collection, which was such an amazing challenge as I had to make a corset from scratch, without any pattern pieces, just from inspiration photos. The Galliano collection featured lots of beautiful dramatic puffy sleeves, which I had never made before. I drew some designs, and we discussed a few alterations until we got the perfect design. I then produced two mock-ups to test out the material and the way the design sat on my body, and made a few more alterations. The final piece took me about a week of intermittent sewing to complete, and I was so proud of the result, as it really proved to me how much my sewing had improved since April, as well as my confidence. I think this was the point that I became confident enough to try more extravagant designs and generally just be more ambitious with what designs I could create!

**V:** Finally, how can readers commission an item from you?

**F:** My Instagram is @floramaeart, and I take commissions through DM. Sophie Beckingham's Instagram is @sophiebeckingham.art, we take commissions for painted art corsets through either of our DMs!



▲ FLORA SHARP FOR VARSITY

# Arts

## The spirit of Shakespeare & Company

**Tilda Butterworth** reflects on a distant summer, living in Paris' most famous bookshop



▲ Inside the tumbleweed studio TILDA BUTTERWORTH

The summer before beginning my degree at Cambridge, I was a tumbleweed at Shakespeare & Company, the famous English-language bookshop on the Left Bank in Paris. The requirements of being a tumbleweed are simple: read a book a day, help with opening and closing, work a two hour shift each day, lend a hand with weekly events, write a one page autobiography for the archive – and in return, you can sleep in the bookshop. Over 30,000 tumbleweeds have passed through since 1951 – according to its former proprietor, George Whitman, it is a “socialist utopia masquerading as a bookshop”.

I arrived in the middle of June 2019. Several long-term tumbleweeds had just left, so the three of us sleeping in the shop were entirely new to it all. We romanticised everything – the clattering of the typewriter in the street outside the window; the cryptic, longing love letters left in the books upstairs; Notre-Dame across the road, charred and clad in scaffolding. We went into raptures at the feeling of the cool tiles under our bare feet as we brushed our teeth around the miniscule sink in the library, and at the euphoric experience of falling asleep surrounded by walls of books. After a night spent drinking cheap wine by the Seine, or watching the buskers of Rue de la

Bûcherie, we'd transform the sofas into beds, whispering goodnight to Aggie the cat and the portraits of writers above the staircase. I often tossed and turned for hours, feeling like electricity was running through my veins, certain that the spirits of long-departed tumbleweeds were watching over me.

*Whitman referred to the bookshop as “a place where I can safely look upon the world's horror and beauty”*

Days passed with all the distortion of time in a dream. Throwing boxes down to the store-room and lugging chairs up from the basement for the weekly readings, sweaty and exhausted. Helping with a storytelling workshop for children. Going to the laundrette or

the creperie with a disintegrating paper bag full of coppers, after fishing euros out of the wishing well which reads ‘Feed the starving writers’. Listening to Leonard Cohen on the riverbank in the dark.

The weather was changeable, to say the least – Paris in summer feels like an alternative dimension. The bookshop was as humid as a greenhouse as tourists crowded into it. On my last night, there was a freak rainstorm which sent us running back to the shop through the empty streets of Paris, the pavements awash and the elements whirling around us. Whitman referred to the bookshop as “a place where I can safely look upon the world's horror and beauty”, and that is what I felt that night, entering the sanctuary.

Shakespeare & Company is the favourite haunt of dreamers seeking soulmates and thus, a place of constant strange serendipity. There are those who stay for hours on end and those who simply pass through, their treads wearing away the tiled floor. Every morning, while setting up the café tables in the sunlight, we met tourists, flâneurs and vagabonds. Cradling enamel mugs of black coffee, we listened to their life stories. Then there were the overly chivalrous Americans with suitcases and the disillusioned foreign students, one of whom hit me on the head with a book in a (failed)

effort to be flirtatious.

I couldn't stop marveling at how present the literary world and its history felt within the walls of the bookshop. I read the works of James Baldwin and the diaries of Anaïs Nin while sleeping where they once did. On my first night, Deborah Levy (the writer-in-residence at the time, and mother of my childhood best friend) gave me a bottle of wine and a book of essays, to thank me for helping her with her suitcase the following morning. One of the many books I read while tumbleweeding was *M Train* by Patti Smith. I devoured it in only a few hours, full of awe and wonderment. The next day, Patti posted on Instagram that she had passed the shop on a nighttime walk. It felt as though we were in the right place at the right time, and that if we stayed we always would be.

*Shakespeare & Company is the favourite haunt of dreamers seeking soulmates, and thus a place of constant strange serendipity.*

As is evident from my experience during the fortnight I was there, tumbleweeding relies on communal living, and Shakespeare & Company relies on its readers. Since the pandemic struck in March, there has been an 80% decline in sales. France's second national lockdown means that the bookshop and café (considered ‘non-essential’) will have to close again. Recently, the bookshop posted a plea to support them if you have the means, by purchasing books, gift cards and merchandise from the website.

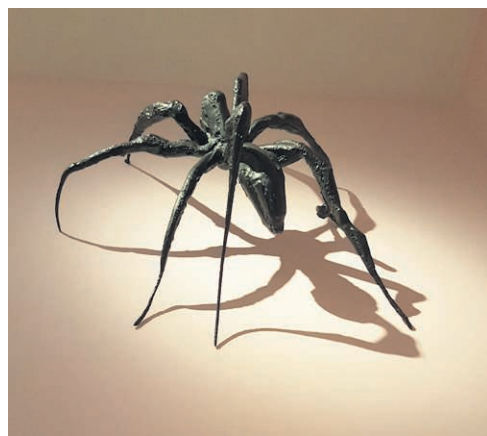
It is heartbreaking that a place founded on kind-heartedness, generosity, trust and hospitality to strangers, has been hit so hard during this global crisis; the qualities it stands for should never be considered anything other than ‘essential’. The joy of Shakespeare & Company lies in its deep history of course, but also in those who inhabit it: strangers with whom one has fleeting, meaningful encounters, the booksellers, the tumbleweeds, the baristas in the café. It is an atmosphere of complete liberation and communality; a place of happenstance where anything can and will occur. It may be an uncertain time for the bookshop now, but in the words of Hemingway, “There is never any ending to Paris... We always returned to it no matter who we were or how it was changed or with what difficulties, or ease, it could be reached.”

# Sewing and safety: Louise Bourgeois' Spiders

In her second installment, **Angharad Williams** looks at Louise Bourgeois' conceptions of parenthood, spiders, cannibalism and all

**H**ome is a theme which occurs time and time again in both literature and art. It is most often evoked in reference to the childhood home, and so it would appear that the places we grow up in stay with us well into adulthood. It is this idea that is key to understanding the work of Louise Bourgeois, an influential artist of the twentieth century, whose work often centred around themes of family and home. In particular, Bourgeois sought to use her artwork as a way of making sense of her childhood experiences. Her work offers us an insight into her understanding of home, as defined by the relationships it contained.

The theme of home is not instantly recognisable in Bourgeois' work, as she tends to approach the personal in an abstract manner; this is made clear in her 1974 piece, *Destruction of the Father*. The dramatic sculptural work features a box lined in cloth, made to look like a theatre stage. This theatrical framing gives the viewer the impression that the work depicts not real events, but ones stemming from Bourgeois' imagination. On the stage of the theatre, a series of curved shapes surround a raised platform, which appears to represent a large dining room table. Paying closer attention to the platform, it is possible to make out one large figure, which is being eaten by



▲ A source of terror, or the emblem of maternity, Bourgeois complicates our conception of the fearful arachnid ESMEE WRIGHT

several smaller ones. The setting of the scene – coupled with the name of the piece – leads the viewer to the unsettling realisation that the fantasy they are witnessing is the cannibalisation of the father by his own children.

It is not just her father that Bourgeois featured in her work; her relationship with her mother was another prominent theme. As with her father, Bourgeois does not directly depict her mother. Instead, she represents her through the use of a spider motif. This is epitomised in her 1999 work *Maman*, a towering sculpture of a mother spider visibly cradling her eggs. The eight-legged creature is a strange choice, as most people associate spiders with fear rather than love. The unusual choice is in fact a deeply personal one, which serves to acknowledge *Maman* as more than just a mother. Bourgeois' mother was an embroiderer by trade, a delicate work not unlike a spider weaving its web. Although not nearly as violent, there is an unsettling edge to the piece, reminiscent of *Destruction of the Father*. The spider's thin legs make the whole sculpture appear precarious and give it a distinctly fragile feel, not a term normally associated with a mother's love.

Even considering just two of Bourgeois' works, it is clear that home for her is a deeply fractured idea, one that is intertwined with feelings of love, but also anger and pain. For Bourgeois then, art acts as a form of therapy, which facilitates an exploration of her childhood memories. These memories in turn seem defined by the oppositional relationship Bourgeois perceived between her parents, and so *Destruction of the Father* and *Maman* can only be understood in relation to each other. The relationship between Bourgeois' parents was damaged by her father's affair with the family governess, and this event frequently ap-

pears to influence Bourgeois' art. The fragility of the mother spider can perhaps be read as a comment on the emotional distress Bourgeois watched her mother endure. In the same vein *Destruction of the Father* is not just a child's desire to regain control over the family home, but to protect their mother.

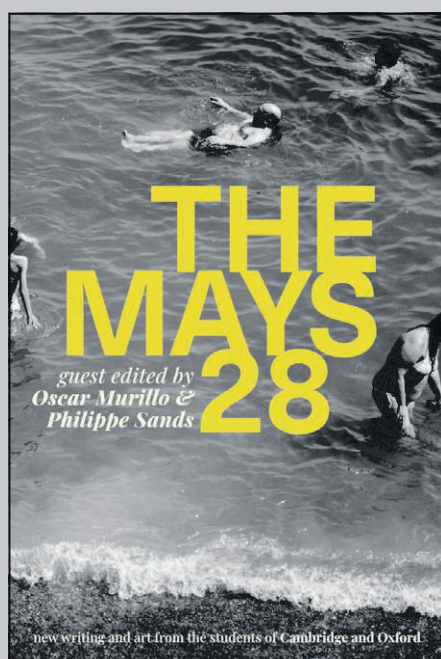
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*For Bourgeois then, art acts as a form of therapy, which facilitates an exploration of her childhood memories*

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Home in the art of Louise Bourgeois emerges not so much as a place, but as a series of relationships. Her work acts as a form of therapy which enables her to explore her childhood memories, and her subsequent feelings towards her parents – and the relationship they shared.

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# Theatre

## The Puzzle of Japanese Noh Theatre

**Margaux Emmanuel** writes about her experience of this ancient form of Japanese theatre and what Noh means to her



▲ Illustration of Noh dance scene (PICRYL.COM)

**T**okyo, November 2019: I ran through the streets of the Sendagaya district in pouring rain. Neon street signs were muffled in the dimness. Various Japanese characters were floating, reflected in large black puddles.

I was making my way to the National Noh Theatre. It was a building hidden away from the megalopolis; its architecture evokes tradition and austerity. I sneaked through Japanese men in business attire, women in kimonos, some theatre-goers queuing to have a quick bowl of soba before the performance started. In this place, far from the flashing city lights, the bustle and rush of trains, the eccentricity of Harajuku, I realized what Noh truly is: a dip into a timeless, other-worldly dimension.

I had been living in Japan for about a year

*Noh is an embodiment of the history and tradition that the Japanese are very much attached to*

and, the theatre-lover that I am, had been longing to see Noh. Considered the oldest form of theatre in the world, Noh is a part of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Herit-

age. This type of theatre is characterised by the actors' song-like voice and idiosyncratic masks; they are compelling large, pale faces - haunting, yet beautiful. These masks aren't simply used for decorative or aesthetic purpose, they are the performative aspect of Noh.

Stock characters are signalled by the difference in characteristics of the masks in Noh. The actors are tasked with imbuing the expressionless mask with personality. Once the actor has donned the mask in a ritualistic manner, the actor becomes the character. The Japanese word for "to put on" is "kaburu", yet, in discussion of these masks, "tsukeru" (to attach) is more commonly used; the mask becomes a bodily extension of the actor, the embodiment of the performance. It is also interesting to note here that the character for writing "Noh" (Nō) in Japanese is "能", which is the character used in the word Sainō (才能), meaning talent. Noh is about skill.

The setting of the Noh theatre is always the same: there is a wooden, essentially bare, curtainless stage. There are no substantial props. A pine tree, symbol of an incarnated God that the Noh performance was usually for, is always painted on the back-panel. If the stage is bare, it means that the performance isn't about performing a narrative, but is about the story the body of the actor and the mask tells. There are a number of techniques that the ac-

tor can use with this mask: he can terasu (lift the mask upwards) or kumorasu (tilt it downwards) to change its expression - to create joy or despondence. Not only are these masks materially valuable but they are symbolically priceless - pillars of a performance tradition unlike anything else in Western culture.

I entered the Noh theatre expecting that I wouldn't understand the play (I had barely enough Japanese to order a rice ball from

*There is no illusion of reality to be upheld because Noh does not strive for suspension of reality*

a shop attendant, so I was not expecting to understand 14th century Japanese. However, as I entered the theatre, I noticed screens with subtitles in modern Japanese (thankfully, in English too)). They reminded me of the screens in airplanes on long-haul flights.

Even at this first play, I could see that the audience of this play wasn't here to just be part of a live story-telling spectacle, but to witness the aesthetic and ritualistic unravelling of tradition. Although Noh is mostly

a historical or supernatural genre, it also consists of a comic interval called kyōgen. Yet, no laughs came from the Japanese audience - the woman sitting next to me simply nodded with an appreciative smile.

"If the stage is bare, it means that the performance isn't about performing a narrative, but is about the story the body of the actor and the mask tells".

Noh isn't about relatability: it's about distance and perhaps not understanding. This distance is symbolized in a very meta way with the masks themselves and the fact that the stage is curtainless, and bare. There is no illusion of reality to be upheld because Noh does not strive for suspension of reality but for the very opposite: Noh is an embodiment of the history and tradition that the Japanese are very much attached to.

It's a common idea in Western theatre that part of an actor's role (when things go wrong) is to improvise. However, Noh is about precision, every move choreographed, and heavily symbolic; it is an almost trance-like dance, where tradition is embodied, and resonates in every step. To act in Noh is the trademark of particular families - it makes the art a strict tradition, a preservation of the past. But Noh also clearly plays a significant role in the present, as a striking and affecting form of theatre.

# Auditioning and Inequality

**Isabel Burns** discusses why the Cambridge acting scene is not as 'meritocratic' as it might seem

Strange as it may sound, I actually enjoy auditioning. Reading new scripts and monologues and finding shows advertised on Facebook is thrilling. I've even recently started developing a happy dependency on the vacancy page of Camdram ... shout out to the second year showed me how to use it - you are an absolute legend.

It's not that I don't get nervous for auditions, on the contrary, I usually come out shaking. But there is something about bringing your whole self to a room, about having 3 minutes to encapsulate someone else's life which gives me an irreplicable rush.

However, last week, I made my first taped audition. I can safely say I would rather have endured the spine-chilling terror of impassive and expressionless judges than the pain of having to perform to a camera. (I now understand how students can take whole degrees in film; the grey October cloud and the incredibly unflattering lighting of my college room gave my video an amateurish feel.)

It was a challenge to resist the years of Mrs Thornton's drama training while recording. I was haunted by the image of her gesticulating at the back of the hall and telling me to 'project' as I delivered a subdued dramatic monologue to camera... my housemate would probably not have appreciated a speech about

Zeus at eleven at night.

Perhaps the most difficult part of this novel mode of auditioning was the fact that whilst filming on my phone, I could always see my own face. The amount of eyebrow movement I incorporate into performance has been a revelation.

This self-taped audition experience made me extremely self-conscious. How is an actor supposed to lose themselves in a character whilst seeing themselves act? It's easy when watching the video back to defer to the critical voice that tells you that it isn't good enough; the voice that means you never send it in.

This hyper-critical aspect of auditioning is exacerbated by the frankly intimidating nature of the Cambridge theatre scene. I can't count the number of times I have told friends I am auditioning for something and heard, 'Oh, I could *never* do that.' Although meant as a compliment, it really does speak to the dominant idea that being able to act is some kind of inherent gift.

How experienced people are in performance, by the time they audition for a show at Cambridge, varies enormously and much of it depends on the resources that were available at school. This often means that talented, passionate actors rule themselves out because (in comparison to the other people they see

auditioning) they don't feel that they've 'done much theatre', 'done this type of theatre' or are simply '*not as good*'. The competitive streak

“  
There remains an  
inequality of access from a  
very young age  
”

in most Cambridge students is not limited to the realm of academia, and the result can be a deep-set feeling of insecurity about your talent and skill.

Auditions make no distinction between those who've had a more extensive dramatic background at school and those who've never even had the opportunity to see live theatre. There remains an inequality of access from a very young age, on which false meritocracy is being built when it comes to theatre.

More needs to be done to expand workshopping skills, build people's confidence and develop non-competitive spaces for people to explore what is becoming an increasingly rarefied and inaccessible art form. It is perfectly

possible to have had no exposure to theatre before coming to Cambridge and this needs to be accommodated for.

Nothing about trying to organise theatre in 2020 is ideal, but it will force us to innovate. Why not take advantage of what the situation can offer? We can utilise Zoom to engage people with theatre who otherwise might have been too shy or self-conscious to come to in-person workshops. We can use group-chats to discuss free live streamed productions and in doing so increase both people's exposure to theatre and their ability to meet others during lockdown.

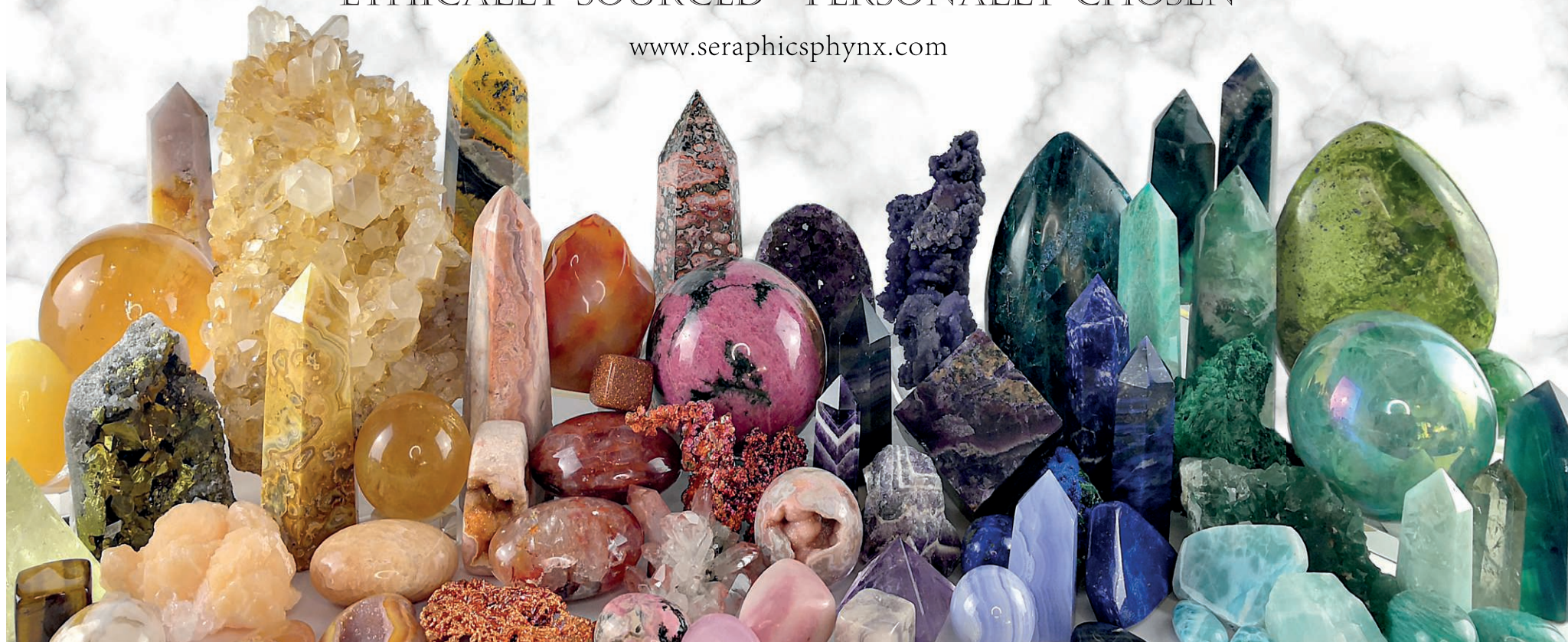
Why not make use of the empty theatres; do a behind-the-scenes, live-streamed tour of lighting and sound, production elements many people will have had no exposure to prior to Cambridge? I love the theatre's sense of closeness and community, but while we face a barrier to this, let's reach out and make the most of levelling the playing field in terms of auditions.

I love theatre. I love the slightly mad competitive element, I love how intense it is, I love how it is simultaneously very relaxed and has absolutely no chill. But we have to stop running auditions off of confidence rather than talent, and we have to accept that we're not all starting from the same place.



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# Violet

By VARSITY

## An Unlikely Year Abroad

*Anna Feest tells us all about her Year Abroad, from finding internships to her experiences of a 'light lockdown' in Germany*



▲ A scene from Anna's Year Abroad (ANNA FEEST)

I only knew about submitting a Year Abroad plan because my loving roommate told me about it – I had spent the more recent meeting searching for vans for hire. Another loving friend sitting behind me videoed this for her Insta story and it became a running joke that I was looking for a van to drive to Namibia (where German is spoken, fyi). Should I be worried about what it says about my character that people actually believed me? It wasn't helped by the fact that I did actually hire a van – two, in fact, to transport 16 rowing machines. Cambridge stereotypes alive and well.

When I submitted my Year Abroad plan back in February, I said that I was planning on studying in St Petersburg from September until Christmas, then embarking on an internship with a

▼ Left; German streets, Right; Mask restrictions in Germany (ANNA FEEST)



cool freelance magazine in Berlin for six months from January. This, as it turns out, was a bigger piece of nonsense than all my supervision essays put together. Uncertainties over Brexit got in the way of the internship and I never in fact applied to St Petersburg because first, I missed the deadline, and secondly, as we went into lockdown I had a 'life is too short' crisis and finally accepted that, well, I don't particularly enjoy Russian.

Going into March, I had approximately zero plans for my year abroad, the uncertainty of which might worry some; but when you couldn't predict even a week in advance due to a certain pandemic, I was fairly relaxed. This relaxation dipped slightly when the concept of a Virtual Year Abroad was mentioned. This doesn't even need to have jokes made about it; it is one in itself.

As borders started to open and travel became possible, a frantic search for an internship ensued. Off to Germany I went, actually feeling quite glad to be out of the country. Of course, it was hard, thinking of all my friends back in college and dealing with a new relationship – one of the best things to come out of lockdown, hi babe – but I also thought, 'the Germans have got it under control, they know what they're doing, it will be fine'. Ha. Hindsight is a wonderful thing. In fairness, I did also think 'the UK is not the place to be right now', and I stand by this, although I'm not entirely sure where is.

I love Germany. I really do. Of course, there are the highs and lows. The good bits: my German has improved, the beer is cheap and good, I've met some cool people. The not so good bits: the weather being a bit miserable, turns out it's a bit lonely when you know absolutely no one, the massive pandemic affecting literally everything we do.

I'm lucky that 'lockdown light' in Germany isn't so restrictive (I'm writing this

on a train after visiting my supo partner in another city) so I can still see the pretty buildings, even if I can't go into them. I can see one other person at a time, so we can drink away our sorrows together (this has already been done). I can't go to the gym anymore so I'm going to start running again, as while my year abroad meetings were spent on the logistics of transporting rowing machines across Cambridge I didn't imagine I'd need to do that across Europe. Quiet evenings can be spent sending yet more applications for the next work placement. And if I can't find one, maybe I will rent that van to Namibia after all.

I'm not working from home, so I haven't been faced with the choice of whether to return to the UK. Others (especially in France) have, although there hasn't been quite the exodus there was back in March. This might be something to do with being 'f\*\*\*\*g done with the whole thing' and not caring, or the fact that our Erasmus grants haven't come through yet so no one can afford the flights. While we're not getting the language exposure that year abroad is all about, or at least meant to be (cough cough virtual year abroad), maybe this will be the year that everyone gets their dissertations done early, written from the comfort of two weeks quarantine. I doubt it though; even in these unprecedented times, some things never change.

All jokes aside, it's not the year abroad that anyone imagined, and it sucks. It's tough for everyone, whether in Cambridge, abroad, or quarantining after a speedy return when new restrictions were announced. To my fellow MML students – we'll get through this. To everyone in Cambridge – so will you. (Although maybe send your MML friends a quick message, it honestly makes us feel so much better). Shit happens, we move. Or rather, we would, but only when absolutely essential and wearing a mask.



# Violet

By VARSITY

## Violet Tries: A Day in the Life of a Medieval Scholar

*Flora Bowen takes us through a typical day of a Medieval Scholar, starting out with cult medieval dish 'sop' and ending with the foregoing of Zoom in favour of letter writing*

**6am:** The bells ring out in my room, the noise rattling around my sleep-deprived skull. I get up, open the curtains, and watch matins on Youtube.

**7am:** I stare at myself in the mirror. My look is perfect, if the intended end product is 'human embodiment of a head cold'. Black under eye circles and pale skin: very chic, and today I am foregoing Max Factor – mascara seems not 'not medieval enough' – and I'm fresh out of ground lily root for foundation. Instead, I wake myself up with a dawn walk through Cambridge.

**8am:** The first meal of the day is usually for me an opportunity to down industrial quantities of organic almond butter in porridge. Although lots of sources say breakfast wasn't a very important meal, I think it would be a bad day for civil society if I skipped breakfast. There is a line in Gawain and the Green Knight that notes he eats 'sop' before a morning battle, another word for 'frumenty', a soupy, watery kind of plain porridge. If it's good enough for Gawain, it's good enough for me. Delicious moist sop.

**Morning:** Reading for Medieval French essay on 'La Fille du Comte de Ponthieu'.

Who needs Sally Rooney when you've got this 14th century classic? I listen to lyre music from the 13th century; one of our medieval French lecturers used to e-mail our group recordings. Frankly, it would be a lie to pretend that this is the first time I've used it to accompany my work. However, it would also be deeply embarrassing to admit in a student newspaper that I have a private Spotify playlist called 'Top of the Pops: the dark ages', so I'll just leave you with the recommendation that the chanting of Benedictine Monks can be usefully soothing when you have inhaled two 'productivity espressos' at 3pm on a Tuesday.

**1pm:** Buttery. Usually I have a sad solo salad for lunch, but eating in hall would have been an important part of college life as well as being the main meal of the day, so I have salmon and potatoes. This may as well be gold-plated oysters, so decadent does it feel in comparison to 'frumenty'. I am with the other 4th year MMLers in college, and we talk about the experiment; one friend, à propos of nothing, decides she can be my 'whore'. I continue eating potatoes while considering the proposition. One criticism arises: they tell me that it is historically vague

to refer to the entire 12th-16th centuries as 'back in the day'; I politely disagree.

**Afternoon:** I have a historically suitable supervision in Peterhouse. It is the oldest college in Cambridge, and my supervisor could also pass quite happily for a 13th century scholar. Gradually I am realising that living as a medieval scholar is pretty much the same as living my normal life. This does not trouble me, but I think it should.

Back in the college library I feel ashamed whenever I have to use my laptop, so I find a very peaceful video called 'ASMR: Medieval Castle Ambience' to keep me in the medieval mindset. It is a three-and-a-half-hour video set at evening in a stone-paved hall: torches flicker gently in iron wall brackets; steam rises from a pot over the roaring hearth, the faint and familiar (well, to some of us) strains of the lute plucks away in the background. I zoom out mentally and see myself alone in a tower, watching Medieval ASMR in the middle of a global pandemic. Is this living, I wonder?

**5pm:** Usually I would zoom with my boyfriend around now, but a quick glance at my books informs me that teleconferencing platforms weren't a big deal back in the day; instead, I write him a letter. He

is also part of the medieval universities club (1425), an exciting elite to be part of!

**5-7pm:** I 'work' (I think in detail about all the cracks in the paint on my wall).

**7.15pm:** Complin in Chapel is a beautiful event that I would usually miss.

**8pm:** Wine in the Eagle with a friend. The purchase of wine helps me to determine the class status of my indeterminate 'medieval' persona, as wine imported from France would have been expensive, and so drunk mainly by the upper classes. I suppose mulled wine or mead would have been a good choice, but as this day didn't involve a surgical removal of my taste-buds or sense of style, I decided against.

At the end of the day I feel calmer and more tired than usual, prob-

ably due to the lack of blue light sticking my eyelids open past midnight; when the bell chimes 10, I go to bed.

**Reflections:** If there is a moral to be taken from this experience – and I would strongly advise against you trying to find one – it would be the uncontroversial opinion that a digital detox is always a good idea. Otherwise, the day mainly consisted of feeling slightly hungry, with more religion than usual, as I realised that the medieval life is already worryingly similar to my everyday life. If you need me, I'll be in my tower away from the plague, listening to la belle douëtte, and working to four hour videos of rain falling in an animated medieval village.



▲ "I have a historically suitable supervision in Peterhouse (CUSU)



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# Sport

• **James Ingham** looks into the effect climate change is having - and will continue to have - on our favourite sports

## The changing climate of Sport



▲ "This was climate change in action." (@ROCCOCARUSO | UNSPLASH)

The second test of the England vs Pakistan series in August was one of the most notable cricket matches in recent years on English soils. Not for the excitement of the match (no Ben Stokes heroics this time) but due to sport's biggest variable: weather. Only 134.3 overs were possible (just under 30% of the total duration) with torrential rain and persistently bad light ruining any semblance of a sporting contest. English cricket watchers are accustomed to rain delays, but this was not the usual interference from a Mancunian drizzle, but the scheming of unrelenting storm clouds creating threatening scenes across the skies. Threatening scenes in August, at midday, in Southampton, England's 'sunniest' city. This was climate change in action.

With every passing season there seems to be a new weather record hitting the news in the UK, with the Met Office stating that each year there is an 11% chance of witnessing the hottest temperatures ever recorded. The summer of 2020 alone has seen one of the most significant heatwaves of the last 60 years (with temperatures exceeding 34°C for six consecutive days) combined with two of the largest storms to shake the country in 50 years in Francis and Ellen. Considering this climate trajectory, an impact on sport is inevitable. A June report by the Rapid Transition Alliance (RTA) outlines some startling new projections for climatic interference on sports, including one quarter of English Football League stadiums to expect annual flooding by 2050, and that the safety of athletes at events such as the Australian Open is at threat due to rising heat and humidity. Crucially, climate change will not only disrupt but change the nature of the sports themselves as changing conditions will affect the way that games are played.

Concerningly, the report indicates that many sports organisers remain oblivious

“A changing climate may also alter the nature of professional cricket itself”

to these threats. Sports leaders have to respond to this issue to ensure a viable future for their game, while professional teams and elite athletes must look to find ways to gain an advantage from changing conditions.

Cricket provides a glaring example; a sport dependent on the weather with umpires getting jittery at the sight of a cloud, concerned about the condition of the ball and the safety of the players involved. Since 2000, 27% of England's One Day Internationals have featured rain delays, with this rate doubling since 2011. The ferocious disruption this summer provided plenty of time for speculation about how to mitigate these issues with suggested ideas including flexible start times or reserve days to take advantage of good weather, and the use of a pink ball in Tests as a solution to bad light. Following the Southampton washout, flexible start times were temporarily introduced for the rest of the series (aided by no crowds due to coronavirus restrictions) but the ICC needs to rapidly address the feasibility of introducing this type of action on a permanent basis.

A changing climate may also alter the nature of professional cricket itself. For example, a more arid UK climate, coupled with advanced drainage to mitigate the effects of flash flooding, is likely to create drier pitches more suited to spin bowling than their traditional seam friendly conditions. Consequently, the ECB may wish to react by promoting the development of spin bowlers, an area of the English game that is striking by its paucity, or risk losing its competitive advantage on home pitches. Identifying how climate change could affect cricket and finding proactive responses could lead to long term performance benefits.

At the other end of the climate scale, winter sports are reliant on climatic conditions for their viability. The RTA report outlined that by 2050 only 12 of the previous 21 Winter Olympic host cit-

ies will be reliable locations for winter sport's showcase event. This produces a significant challenge for the International Olympic Committee (IOC) since the relatively small audience for winter sports outside of the Olympics means the quality of the once-every-4-year event is a must in maintaining popularity and revenue for the sports. To do this, serious reviews must be put in place now to identify those cities capable of hosting future games, and ensuring their infrastructure is sufficient.

Similarly to cricket, weather patterns affect the nature of the snow-sports events themselves. Warm temperatures can create slow, wet snow that is difficult for competitors to manoeuvre on, while the deteriorating quality of the ice throughout an event advantages the competitors performing first. Warming and variable conditions change the competitive nature of sports such as downhill skiing and work must be done to ensure a level playing field for all of those competing in the same event.

Although the likes of football and both codes of rugby are accustomed to persisting through inclement weather, they are not protected from the threats. In addition to the findings that 1 in 4 English football grounds will be subject to regular flooding by 2050, three matches at the 2019 Rugby Union World Cup in Japan went un-played due to the arrival of typhoon Hagibis. In the UK, many stadiums are currently unfit for these kinds of extreme weather conditions, with inadequate drainage and lack of under-soil heating limiting their capacity to deal with flash flooding and heavy snowfall. Throughout the coming 30 years, a greater number of professional matches will be postponed due to weather unless infrastructure is improved. The retractable roof on the Millennium stadium in Cardiff provides an example of action that has already been taken and could prove decisive

when tournament organisers such as World Rugby decide where to host their major events.

Meanwhile, the structure of the football season means the major games occur in late Spring and early summer, such as the FA Cup and Champions League finals. Within the European leagues, the temperature for these events is consistently rising and matches played in heat exceeding 30°C will become the norm. According to the report, once temperatures exceed 33°C there are significant physiological impacts with hand-eye co-ordination and concentration beginning to suffer. To adapt to this heat, teams may look to secure an advantage through energy conservation, with those who move the ball and retain possession the best more likely to retain energy better than those whose game is based on a high, fast press. Forward planning for global warming could present a new tactical conundrum for managers.

Climate change will impact every industry and elite sport is no different. The exact outcomes are hard to predict, depending on mitigating action throughout the 21st Century, while the examples provided here offer mere speculation into possible impacts and potential adaptations. Only time will tell the precise nature of what is to come.

Regardless, what is certain is that sports administrators must no longer regard weather as an uncontrollable variable and must consider worst-case scenarios of climate change when planning for the future. Without early intervention, the number of minutes of elite sport lost will only increase, reducing revenues and losing the interest of spectators. Meanwhile, teams and athletes must be conscious of how climate change has the ability to alter the nature of their sports and be prepared to adapt to stay competitive. Those who identify this soonest are most likely to succeed.

“Teams may look to secure an advantage through energy conservation”