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theatre?**
pg. 28

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dancing**
pg. 23

No.920
Friday 2nd February 2024
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Student Newspaper since 1947

VARSITY

Balliol battered: John's athletes punished after Oxford frenzy

**Sports teams face community
service after urinating on the
floor and smashing a bar
on Oxford swap**

DANIEL HILTON ▲

Eleanor Mann
Senior News Editor

St John's College's sports teams have amassed over 130 hours of community service for their behaviour at a sports day swap with Oxford last term, which reportedly involved verbal abuse, and urine and beer funnelling.

The men's football team, known as the 'Poulets', and the mixed croquet team were given 120 hours and 12 hours respectively by the College Dean, Dr Nick Friedman, last week (24/01) for their misbehaviour while visiting sister college, Balliol, for a weekend of sports and socialising in Michaelmas.

Recorded on Oxford's CCTV, Johnians were seen battering the grounds, allegedly trashing Balliol College's bar, leaving mud, broken glass, and urine in the changing rooms. *Varsity* was told that a member of the opposite team was even called a "midget".

In an email addressed to the men's and mixed teams' captains, Friedman asked the captains to "attend an urgent meeting with the Dean".

Friedman had been contacted by the Domestic Bursar of Balliol, who expressed his "upset at the condition in which St John's sports teams left the changing rooms," he said.

Friedman included a list of allegations made by Balliol: "The men's changing room was reportedly left 'trashed' with large amounts of rubbish, including broken glass, all over the floor. It appeared that someone had urinated on the changing room floor. Rubbish was also left on the pitch, which our students were asked to clean up but didn't."

"Some of our men's team verbally abused the Balliol football team, and in general showed little to no respect for Balliol's facilities or people. The security staff reported our students drinking beer through funnels, and then sliding on beer spilt on the floor," the email continued.

"The majority of the cleaning up was done by Balliol students, who were horrified to discover the situation in the early hours of Sunday morning," Balliol also alleged.

Continued on page 2 ►

V Week 1

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

Editorial

The observation that Cambridge is not a level playing field is by no means a novel one. On page nine of this week's print edition we report that it is substantially more difficult for women to get Blues awards in football than men. Where female players have to be selected for the Varsity match, be placed in the starting XI, and have their entire team place in the top four of the league to earn their Blue, their male counterparts merely need to participate in a match against Oxford.

This tainted image of the beautiful game in Cambridge is reflected across the nation and the world. Last summer saw the Spanish FA, and its chief, Luis Rubiales, embroiled in a sexism scandal. A further report last summer also showed that discrimination against women working in football is on the rise, and that 82% of women in football have faced sexism or sexual harassment. In recent weeks, it's hard to open Twitter without seeing a retired male footballer resorting to sexism to attempt to retain a credible career and a 'coveted' spot on GB News. The institutional barriers against women in football are clear, and football is not the only example of where national inequalities can be found on a

smaller scale at University.

While the game itself might take place on a level playing field, Cambridge often is not. Other stories in this print edition discuss the inequality present in our university, with an investigation (page 9) showing that some students have had to take full days off studying to go against University dictats and work jobs just to make ends meet. This is a story mirrored across colleges, with Sidney yet again being under the spotlight for their repeatedly poor access arrangements.

Colleges should take note of Girton's example, where they have measures in place to construct a new level playing field by freezing their rent for new students and operating a rent bursary for those who it most, deducting £20 a week from their college bill. A Varsity investigation last year found that Girton had the highest rent in Cambridge, but this week's news shows that positive change is possible when pressure is applied. While it is rightfully frustrating that our university suffers from many of the same inequalities as the rest of the country, it's heartening to see that change is able to be made, even if it is dismally slow.

Michael Hennessey & Daniel Hilton

Editors-in-chief, Lent 2024

Students to sweep floors after Oxford sports day

Continued from front page

Captains of the teams have been allowed to decide who has to serve the community service. This decision has been praised by Johnnians as it is believed that the main perpetrators will assume the majority of the hours, without team members implicating each other. Equally, it could mean that certain individuals get a disproportionate amount of hours.

A source told Varsity that the collective punishment will be "labour of some form", likely "sweeping New Court". A date has not been set for the unspeci-

fied punishment, since the sports teams are now in the process of appealing the Dean's decision.

Fellow Johnnians seem to have rallied around their sports teams, taking to the College's Facebook confessions page, Bridge of Highs, to offer their support.

One confession stated: "Collective punishment is actually a joke, get your appeals in boys, we're taking this to Poulet Court."

Another admiringly posted: "Is it just me or are the croquet team irresistible after getting Community Service, I love a Tory bad boy."

Even those not involved in the Balliol

affair were supportive, with one source telling Varsity: "Collective punishment is peak. Someone should tell Oxford that snitches get stitches."

A spokeswoman for St John's told Varsity: "Members of St John's are expected to abide by the code of conduct which is detailed in the Student Handbook. Anyone who does not meet those expectations may be subject to the College's disciplinary process which is available online."

The Poulets and the John's Croquet Team declined to comment.

Don faces backlash for criticising gender pronoun 'zealots'

Tommy Castellani
Deputy News Editor

A Clare don who labelled people who use they/them pronouns "zealots" during a chapel sermon has faced criticism from students attending the Eucharist.

Students were left "offended" by the "hurtful and damaging" comments about gender pronouns.

Professor Douglas Hedley said at the service: "English is being increasingly reduced by those zealots who want for example to remove references to male and female pronouns, yet these are in the thrall of the prison house view of language."

Professor Hedley, a Divinity fellow at Clare College, used his sermon to decry: "Staffordshire policemen are being banned from using the word policeman because it might incite sexism."

"But this is a completely erroneous view of language, which anyone who understands the beloved disciples' prologue will realise," he told the college chapel.

Students spoke to Hedley and the College Dean after the service to complain about the "hurtful" comments.

James Kitchingman, a member of Clare choir, told Varsity that "the sermon's worrying tangent was a subject of conversation following the service among choir members who felt similarly offended by Hedley's assertions."

"His point represented a somewhat archaic view of inclusivity and belonging, a particular shame given the podium afforded to him in chapel," Kitchingman said.

"One is expected to provide guidance on Bible passages, not accuse those who wish to modernise the language of the Bible as uncompromising fanatics," he added.

Emma Caroe, another Clare chorister, told Varsity: "Expressing theological and scholarly convictions in a sermon is one



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thing; presenting a pointed and antagonistic attack in relation to an already marginalised group of people is another."

"Such exclusionary comments are incredibly hurtful and damaging, especially in the College context where Christianity is the only religion to be institutionalised in the way that it is, and where the chapel explicitly sets out to be a place for people of all faiths and none," she said.

"Far from stoking division and judgement, Jesus' message and life was one of radical inclusivity and chapels ought to be a similarly open, respectful, and inclusive spaces," she added.

Another student told Varsity that they spoke to Hedley after the event to express their "unhappiness" with the sermon.

The student who confronted Hedley said the Divinity don was insistent on his "disapproval of the use of singular they/them pronouns".

They said the "College chapel should

be a space where everyone feels comfortable" and stressed that the services are "normally a positive atmosphere," though they felt this service was "an exception".

Last term, Professor Hedley called for a portrait of Charles Cornwallis, Clare alumnus and Governor-General of British colonial rule, to be re-hung in the College Hall.

Private committee minutes seen by Varsity show Hedley wanted to reinstate the painting of the colonialist to "safeguard college heritage".

The professor was linked to Republican billionaire Peter Thiel in a 2021 investigation by the Byline Times, among other controversial Cambridge academics. These included the government's new free speech tsar Arif Ahmed and National Conservatism Conference organiser James Orr.

Clare College and Professor Hedley were contacted for comment.

IN THE PAPER

News



Silent but deadly
Medic student leaves skull in Sidney Library (PAGE 7)

Music



Rodrigo rout?
We predict the outcome of Sunday's Grammy awards (PAGE 26)

Features



Port of call
The acts of kindness that make Cambridge's porters special (PAGE 13)

Comment



Are access schemes a box-ticking exercise?

Matthew Taylor asks if schemes designed to make Cambridge affordable for all are just a performance.....Page 14



Pembroke needs to start taking allergies seriously

Hannah Mawardi urges colleges to take action to protect students with food allergies.....Page 15

Homerton apologises for posting ‘offensive’ Chinese-language signs

Jinqian Li
News Correspondent

Homerton has apologised for “offensive and discriminatory” messaging after staff left public notices around the College written in only Mandarin.

Multiple Chinese students complained to the College and met with Simon Woolley, Homerton’s Principal, and senior staff, before Woolley sent a notice to all students offering an “unequivocal apology to all students, and in particular students of Chinese descent, for what occurred”.

One of the signs, which Woolley said were posted “around exits and in public conveniences,” read, in Mandarin: “Please throw the toilet paper into the toilets, and other rubbish into the bin.”

Students took to Chinese social media site Little Red Book to voice their anger, with one post, which notched 6,000 likes, alleging: “This is blatant racism from our college.”

“Assuming that it was done by a Chi-

nese person (native Mandarin speaker) and therefore should be written in Chinese is itself a form of racial discrimination. All students can understand English; Cambridge has high English language requirements for admission and it is the official language within the school,” the post continued.

Another popular Little Red Book post stated that the incidents left them “shocked and disheartened”, saying renowned institutions such as Cambridge “should create an inclusive and friendly environment for all students and staff.”

They felt “a lack of inclusivity” in the single-language signs, adding: “This could also be construed as racial discrimination.”

The social media discourse on the signs also noted that fluids from soluble toilet paper safely flush in some regions, while elsewhere clogged pipes necessitate bins.

In an email response to complaining students, Caroline Bobb-Semple, Head of Conference & Events, wrote: “Firstly,



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let me apologise most sincerely for any offence this notice has caused to yourself and any other students within college. This was absolutely not our intention & all signs have now been swiftly removed. We understand the way this sign has been interpreted.”

“By way of background, we had first put up a sign in English language about the matter of toilet paper to address an issue we were having with some conference clients, however the issue persisted, therefore a subsequent sign was requested for clarification. There was no intention to assume any group, community or nationality is predisposed to the behaviours we wanted to address,” she wrote.

The College’s response further enraged students, with one Little Red Book post stating: “They posted first in English then switched to Chinese when issues persisted. Are they suggesting we don’t understand English? This action singles out native Chinese speakers.”

Following this, Lester Holloway, the

College’s Head of Communications, emailed some students to arrange a meeting with the Principal, adding that senior leaders took the matter “extremely seriously”.

Lord Woolley’s message, emailed to all Homerton students on Wednesday (31/01), said: “Whilst I accept that there was no intention to cause offence, the perceived or deliberate targeting of any community in this way is offensive and discriminatory.”

“To be absolutely clear it is deeply wrong to make negative assumptions about any one group or community,” he said.

Lord Woolley told *Varsity*: “I apologise unreservedly to all students, and in particular students of Chinese descent, for the offence caused. I will be introducing new protocols to ensure this does not happen again.”

“At Homerton, we want to celebrate our rich diversity, not least because it helps all our students to belong, thrive and excel academically,” he added.

In bed with Big Oil? SU Postgrad President defends petroleum past

Tommy Castellani & Sam Hudson
Deputy News Editor & News Correspondent

Vareesh Pratap, SU Postgraduate President, voted for a motion that said working with the fossil fuel industry runs contrary to the University’s mission despite being an ex-manager at an oil company.

Pratap was a manager at India’s second-largest oil and gas company but omitted the name of his former employer from his manifesto, *Varsity* can reveal.

As Postgraduate President, Pratap supported a motion that claimed working with the fossil industry “runs contrary to the University’s mission statement”.

Pratap worked for nearly five years at Bharat Petroleum, where he progressed to hold the position of manager, before becoming an SU sabbatical officer.

Last term, the SU voted to renew a motion to “Cut all ties between Cambridge University and the fossil fuel industry.” Pratap told *Varsity* he voted in favour of the motion.

The motion claimed “climate breakdown is one of the biggest ethical issues of our generation” and accused fossil fuel companies of being “directly responsible”, noting that “just 100 companies are responsible for 71% of global carbon emissions”.

The motion read: “Supporting, investing, or working with the fossil fuel industry in any way runs contrary to the University’s mission statement of

‘concern for sustainability and the relationship with the environment.’”

Cutting all ties with the fossil fuel industry is said to be a “moral imperative” and a “crucial step to taking tangible action to tackle climate breakdown”.

In his role as SU PG President, Pratap’s responsibilities include representing students’ concerns on the Cambridge Zero management committee and organising a Green careers fair which fossil fuel companies are not allowed to attend.

One former JCR President told *Varsity*: “Given the SU’s goal of severing ties with the fossil fuel industry - goals they’ve reaffirmed even while this officer has been in post - it is hugely hypocritical that he spent several years working for a large oil firm.”

“How can students trust him to campaign to sever ties, especially in the Careers Service, with the same industry he chose to work in?” they continued.

When campaigning to become SU President, Pratap disclosed in his manifesto that he worked as a “manager at a Fortune 500 company”, but he did not reveal the company’s full name.

None of the priorities he listed in his manifesto mentioned the climate crisis.

Pratap told *Varsity*: “The manifesto has a word limit, so one is inevitably compelled to omit some information. Details about my employment and volunteer work have been publicly available on my LinkedIn account.”

“As severing all ties between Cambridge University and the fossil fuel industry was already a mandated policy by the Student Council of SU back then, the



▲ FELIX ARMSTRONG

other issues adversely impacting student experiences at Cambridge were appropriately included in the manifesto,” he continued.

When asked about whether his employment history reduces his credibility to lobby the University to cut ties with the fossil fuel industry, Pratap said: “No one should harbour apprehensions re-

garding my previous employment with an energy company, situated in a developing country in the global south, which is, of course, at a distinct stage in terms of energy security compared to developed nations.”

“My association with them, rescinded approximately 32 months ago and a substantial 16 months prior to my enrolment

at this university, should not be misconstrued as contradictory to the mission of the university or any motions passed by the SU,” he continued.

The University Council will debate a grace this month proposing a moratorium on new funded collaborations with fossil fuel companies.

News

King's provost discusses media distrust in Gaza war

Sebastian Topan & Wilf Vall
Deputy News Editor & News Correspondent

A panel of war-reporting journalists has stressed the level of "distrust" and "Western bias" in media coverage of the Israel-Palestine war at an event at King's College.

In the first "Conversations at King's" of 2024, (28/01), chaired by King's provost, Gillian Tett, a panel of journalists 'from Washington DC to Tel Aviv' were invited to speak on 'Truth in a time of war: can we believe the media reporting on the Middle East?'

Tett, who witnessed the Tajikistani Civil War before embarking on her career in journalism, opened the event by conducting an audience-poll, asking attendees who trusts the media a lot. Asking for a show of hands, none were raised.

Director of the Shomrim Centre of Media and Democracy, Alona Vinograd, stated how "obvious" its has recently become that the "media is the enemy of the people", referring to populist attitudes towards war-reporting.

Fellow panellist Daniella Peled, managing director of 'Institute for War & Peace Reporting', told listeners: "In the context of conflict...the line between journalism and activism by necessity

blurs".

Asked specifically on the media coverage of the scenes in Gaza, Peled added she had "never seen a conflict with a greater level of disinformation".

Senior fellow of the Harvard Kennedy School and journalist of 50-years covering the Middle East, Rami Khouri, stated the media is either "directly or indirectly controlled by the government" in most of the "Arab world", adding to the distrust of the media.

Khouri, a Jordanian-Palestinian national, pointed to Western media having a "structural bias" which "keeps showing up in reporting". "The point of engaging with people is...to understand the conflict from both sides", he continued.

Questioned on possible solutions, the Al-Jazeera reporter added the best way to "improve the reporting" is to "expose the journalists on the issues...on a more regular basis".

Peled noted "being impartial" is not "such a thing" and that "balance [in reporting] is the highest ideal we can strive for".

The 'Committee to Protect Journalists' (CPJ) reported that as of January 31, 2024, investigations showed at least 85 journalists and media workers were among the more than 27,000 killed since the war began on October 7.

'Mead-drinking chaos' at ASNaC black tie dinner

Wilf Vall
News Correspondent

The annual ASNaC society black tie dinner was punctuated with a presidential toast from the ASNaC mead horn this Saturday (27/01), marking the group's long standing love affair with the ancient honeyed beverage.

Members of the society also enjoy a 10% discount on all mead from Cambridge Wine Merchants, and can purchase "drink mead and study ASNaC" themed merchandise through the society website.

Society mead policy is coordinated by George Ellison, officer for mead provision. Ellison, a self proclaimed "sesh gremlin", is responsible for ensuring "there is plenty of mead at BTB (black tie dinner)".

Ellison has also taken up responsibility of brewing his own mead for the society, with committee minutes noting that he had "bought honey for the purpose of homemade mead" last year.

Mead is also used to initiate new members, who drink from the mead horn at The Castle pub or alternatively on top of Castle Mound.



▲ ASNaC SOCIETY

One ASNaC society member and keen mead-drinker told *Varsity* that mead drinking was "even more of a spiritual experience than getting wine drunk".

One former member praised the society as "a great bunch of people who like the same things you do and a department society that uses a mead-horn in its initiation rite".

Beyond mead-drinking, the society also enjoys other archaic social events such as sword fights on Castle Mound and St Chad's Day themed pub crawls.

ASNaC Society told *Varsity*: "The ASNaC black tie dinner is a staple in our year and it's always amazing fun to chat and share a glass of mead with everyone, from fellow students across the years to alumni and lecturers. It was such an honour to stand with nine of the previous society presidents, including some of my lectures and closest friends, and drink from the ceremonial ASNaC mead horn as is tradition, even if I was left with quite a lot to down at the end!"



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Girton freezes rent amid rising cost of living

Sebastian Delgado Suarez
News Correspondent

Girton College will freeze rents for new students in an effort to alleviate rising costs of living for the 2024-2025 academic year.

Rents at Girton are charged at the same level for the duration of a student's undergraduate course. This year, matriculating students in 2024 will be charged the same rent as students who matriculated in 2023.

The College will also halve its required contribution from those living out of college. This contribution will be waived for veterinary or medical students, who are typically situated away from college. This makes Girton the first and only college to do this.

A campaign to make these changes started over a year and half ago, and involved collecting data from the other 31 colleges, writing a letter to the City Council, and meeting with college leadership.

Prior to the rent freeze, in 2022-2023, a *Varsity* investigation ranked Girton in first place for the most costly rent charges. The College then shifted from having the most expensive undergraduate accommodation to occupying fourth place. It also fell from first to seventh place for most expensive postgraduate accommodation.

Girton also became the second least costly college for students receiving a bursary scheme. Last year, Girton's rental increase of 6% was two percentage points lower than the median across all colleges.

Girton operates an undergraduate rent bursary scheme which reduces rent by £20 per week. This is applied automatically to undergraduate students who are in receipt of Cambridge Bursary Scheme funding, which applies to around one-third of undergraduate students at Girton.

On 26 January, the MCR's newsletter revealed that the effort for a rent freeze took "militantly ... put[ting] pressure on the college".

The newsletter also acknowledges that "there was never a time College didn't want to help us, it was always a question of financial viability and to where best place student support efforts".

Jye Smallwood, MCR secretary at Girton, told *Varsity*: "I think this is a big win for Girton students whether they live in college or out — especially given that we pay the highest rents of any Cambridge college."

He added: "Both the rent freeze and contribution rate reduction are a testament to the tireless work of our past and current J/MCR committee members."



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But as much as it was cause for celebration, the rent freeze also brought with it confusion. Another PhD student at the College, for example, told *Varsity* they were uncertain about whether the rent freeze would apply to them as they will be away on field work. This student found the lack of details "upsetting", since some internal grants from their faculty "don't cover accommodation and food because during fieldwork we shouldn't have to pay rent" in Cambridge.

The rent freeze for new students will last for the duration of their courses. At the start of 2025, the College will set the level of rent for the 2025 cohort after "a detailed review of inflation, living costs and the College's own financial position". The College have noted that their 5 year plan assumes a provisional increase of 3% in 2025. If this increase were to happen, it would not affect existing students, only new students who matriculate in 2025.

When contacted for comment, Girton College said: "It is a strategic priority for Girton to make college accommodation more affordable for its students. After two years of increasing our rents below inflation, the College's improving financial position will now allow us to take the further step of holding rent for the 2024 cohort at the level of the 2023 co-

hort. Girton's approach to rent charges also means that what a student pays in their first year does not change over the life of their course, with a guarantee of no annual increase for individual students.

"Postgraduate rents are also being held in 2024, with a series of discounts available based on tenancy lengths and continuing from previous Girton study."

"With further investments underway to improve the quality of facilities on our large site, including refurbishments to rooms and the transformation of the College's main central court into a beautiful outdoor living space, Girton is making progress against its strategic objective of offering an outstanding student experience at a more affordable cost."

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News

Around town



Arwen Godingen
Deputy News Editor

Grafton Makeover

Plans for a multi-million pound regeneration of Cambridge's Grafton Centre are on track for approval. The proposal involves converting a significant area of the Grafton into laboratory and office spaces for science and technology businesses, along with renovating the western end for an enhanced shopping experience. The redesign includes removing part of the centre's roof to create a new public square surrounded by shops and cafes. The project addresses the decline of the Grafton Centre as a retail destination. A decision by the city council to pursue the development plans is expected in February 2024.

Goodbye Wagamama!

Wagamama bade farewell to its 17-year presence in Cambridge's city centre on St Andrew's Street, as it was forced to close due to their landlord's redevelopment plans for the site. A spokesperson for the restaurant expressed disappointment at the news, but they remain optimistic about finding a new venue in Cambridge and promise to "be back serving [their] famous katsu curry very soon". Despite the closure, the Wagamama family remains close with other nearby locations at Cambridge Leisure Park.

Cambridgeshire Authority told off by ministers

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority faces renewed scrutiny as ministers issued a second warning expressing concerns about its "culture" and "effective partnership working", BBC Cambridgeshire reports. The authority oversees public transport, adult skills, and economic growth. Despite recognising progress, the government insists on sustained efforts for organisational and cultural change. The notice follows a 12-month warning in January 2023 due to governance weaknesses. Mayor Nik Johnson, current mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and head of the authority's board, was asked to apologise and undertake training following a breach of conduct. The Department for Levelling Up stresses the need for effective collaboration and ongoing improvements in the Combined Authority.

Trinity Hall JCR to ditch Barclays bank over 'ethical' concerns

Wilf Vall
News Correspondent

Trinity Hall JCR are planning to ditch Barclays as their banking partner, due to concerns around the bank's ethical and environmental record.

The move comes amid reports that the University is considering cutting its 200-year-old ties with Barclays in favour of "financial products that do not finance fossil fuel expansion".

There has also been significant student pressure on the university to cut ties with the bank, with many students joining a career boycott last December over their environmental record.

This was followed by a "die-in" protest in Barclays' Cambridge branch over its investment in Israel's operations in Gaza.

Barclays currently manages over £200 million of the University's assets, but is facing replacement as its invest-

ment in fossil fuels is out of line with the University's commitment to divest its £3.5bn endowment from all direct and indirect investments in fossil fuels by 2030.

Speaking to Varsity about the change, the treasurer of Trinity Hall JCR said that he was "happy to confirm that myself and one of our JCR Green & Ethics Officers, have over the past few months been investigating alternatives to Barclays, with the aim of transferring the JCR's account to a more ethical provider".

Trinity Hall appear very receptive so far, and I'm hoping the move will be initiated and completed by my successor," he continued.

This change has also been supported by Trinity Hall Junior Bursar, Glen Sharp, who told Varsity: "The JCR Bank Account is with Barclays and I am currently supporting them move to a different bank as their customer service for societies is very poor."



▲ FELIX ARMSTRONG

Sidney 'forced' disabled student into private accommodation

Romilly Norfolk
Deputy Editor

A Sidney Sussex student has claimed that the college has failed to provide accommodation suitable to their medical needs since they matriculated, and has called trying to achieve accessibility a "draining" process.

The student has repeatedly moved in and out of private and college accommodation, and was described by College staff as "making a poor excuse of busy people's time".

The student told Varsity that since they began their degree, in October 2022, the college has not provided adequately accessible accommodation, despite them providing a Student Support Document (SSD).

They felt "forced" into private accommodation, where they experienced stalking and harassment from one of their housemates. Upon asking to return to college accommodation, Sidney were reluctant to offer a solution, the student said.

Sidney has since provided college accommodation, but the student told Varsity that this still does not fit their needs, and that the length of the lease is unclear. The room is so inadequate the student has had to resort to "crashing" with their friends, which has meant they've had to repeatedly rearrange supervisions, they said.

When the student first began at Sidney Sussex, they were assigned an inaccessible room despite submitting a Student Support Document (SSD) in August.

The college failed to upload the SSD to their system until mid October after the student chased the matter. This meant they also could not access lecture recordings, alongside not having an accessible

room.

The student suffers from mobility issues which means they can't walk long distances and struggle with stairs, as well as suffering from visual impairment. They also have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) which means they can only eat food prepared in a certain way, making kitchen facilities a necessity for them.

The student claims the room they were living in during Michaelmas 2022 made them "so physically sick that (they) lost 10kg by week 6".

They were moved to a more accessible room in Lent 2023, after inquiring about a college transfer due to their access issues. However, after the student's wallet was robbed during a fire drill in College, they struggled to afford food for a month. The student says the College never replied to their inquiries about the robbery.

Sidney Sussex offers emergency funding of up to £200 to students in extenuating circumstances, which the student inquired about after this situation. Despite the college agreeing to supply the money and the student sending their bank details to Sidney's Student Finance Manager, they never received the money.

The student was told they could stay in college accommodation over the summer as they are unable to return home during breaks. They moved into an offsite house during the break, which they claim was not accessible.

The student was only arranged to stay in the house until July, after which they were going into private accommodation which they had arranged to live in for the next academic year. However, this arrangement fell through at the last minute, which the College did not deem to be extenuating circumstances. This left the student effectively homeless.

They managed to find alternative private accommodation for the summer but at great financial cost. This was after being offered a room in Sidney's pre-ballot, but the student told Varsity that none of the three options given to them suited their needs.

The student moved into a different private accommodation in Cambridge for the current academic year. However, they suffered harassment and stalking from one of their housemates in this accommodation, who went as far as to steal their post. The situation became so serious the student went to the police about the matter.

They claimed to Varsity they reported it to their tutor but were told they had given up their right to be housed by the college that year after moving into private accommodation.

They no longer felt safe enough to eat and sleep in their home and resorted to moving out, whilst still paying rent. The student told Varsity they slept on the JCR sofa and park benches in Sidney's gardens.

They also didn't have access to a kitchen so had to eat out for most meals which was both expensive and made the student very ill.

Over Christmas, the situation still hadn't been resolved and the student slept on a table in Sidney's library and the JCR.

The student has had to resort to a public appeal via their social media to find places to stay. They have been spending a few nights at a time in their friend's rooms whilst trying to find alternative accommodation, having had to move most of their supervisions online due to this situation.

The student has told Varsity that the

pastoral support during this entire period has been poor and they feel as though "College didn't show any sympathy towards the situation" and they were just a "passive presence" whilst the student was expected to sort everything out.

In emails to the student seen by Varsity, Sidney's Senior Tutor, Max Beber, described the student's conduct throughout the situation as "not acceptable behaviour", accusing them of "making a poor excuse of busy people's time" and describing their behaviour as "neither courteous, nor professional".

They also claim that they were discouraged from contacting Varsity in pastoral meetings about their accommodation situation.

The student told Varsity that the whole situation has been "emotionally difficult" and has felt at times that they are "just causing an annoyance".

They commended Sidney's JCR, which has been "really helpful" and "wanted to help with the little resources they have". However, the College is unable to discuss the situations of individual students with the JCR, despite the student feeling that "they could be used as a case study for College's failings," they said.

This is not the first time Sidney Sussex has been accused of poor accessibility. A Varsity investigation in February last year revealed several situations in which disabled students were not treated well, with them claiming the College acted in breach of the Equality Act. A later article in September reported the College's court battle over access disputes with a student.

Sidney Sussex College told Varsity: "The College does not consider it appropriate to comment on matters related to individual students."

Shakeup to STEM admissions

Cameron McIntyre
News Correspondent

Cambridge is set to overhaul STEM admissions tests in collaboration with Imperial College, London, entailing a hike in entry fees for certain applicants.

The two universities announced last week that prospective undergraduates for most STEM courses will be required to take new types of admissions tests for the 2024/25 cycle.

Cambridge and Imperial are set to write the new tests in partnership with assessment service firm Pearson VUE, replacing Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing (CAAT) after it effectively ceased operations at the end of 2023.

CAAT first announced the changes in November 2022, citing the current tests are “operationally unsustainable” due to their “significant complexity” and the goal of delivering tests which are affordable to students and higher education institutions.

The new computer-based tests will be taken at Pearson VUE test centres, with Mike Nicholas, Director of Recruitment, Admissions and Participation at Cambridge explaining this takes the “burden off teachers and schools” to act as test centres.

The changes concern applicants for Medicine, who will be required to take

the University Clinical Aptitude Test (UCAT) instead of the BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT).

The new format consists of a 2-hour series of multiple choice questions split into 5 categories, removing the 30-minute essay response from the BMAT.

Applicants for Engineering, Natural Sciences, Chemical Engineering and Biotechnology, and Veterinary Medicine will also sit the joint Engineering and Science Admissions Test (ESAT) rather than the Natural Sciences Admissions Assessment (NSAA) and the Engineering Admissions Assessment (ENGAA).

The format is set to change from two 60-minute sections to three 40-minute multiple choice sections.

The ESAT will also introduce new entry fees, with domestic applicants having to pay £75 while the cost for international applicants is £130. Previously, Cambridge did not charge applicants to enter the ENGAA and NSAA.

Nicholas has defended the new fees, stating that: “It is important that cost is not a barrier to participation, and the model we are using for the fee waivers has been successfully used for other admissions tests supported by Pearson.”

The fee waivers will be available for UK-based applicants eligible for free school meals.

Silent but deadly: skull left in Sidney library

Priya Watkinson
News Correspondent

A skull was found on a desk last week in the Sidney Sussex library, where it had been accidentally left by a medic using it for educational purposes.

All students at the College, famous for holding the skull of Oliver Cromwell in its chapel, received an email from the librarian asking: “If you left, erm, a *skull in a plastic bag* on the First Floor, please let me know.”

The librarian expressed concern about the safekeeping of the skull, explaining in their email: “I found it precariously close to the edge of a desk this morning, and took it into the Library Office for safe keeping.”

They spoke to *Varsity* about their surprise: “I saw a plastic bag at the edge of a table, and when I looked inside, instead of a pencil case or a water bottle, I saw a carefully labelled artificial skull.”

“There was no chance it was Cromwell’s skull (although there was a time when that skull rather got passed around) as that is now safely buried somewhere near the plaque in our ante-chapel.”

Oliver Cromwell’s skull was buried in a secret location in the College chapel

in March 1660, after disappearing from Westminster Hall in the 1680s.

The student owner, who asked to remain anonymous, told *Varsity* that the placement was entirely accidental: “I only just picked it up from my college mum, it was in a plastic bag I didn’t even realise I’d left it there in the library.”

“I did not hear of anyone seeing it, he found it pretty quickly after I left it.” The librarian agreed: “I believe the artificial skull had been on the desk overnight, and I doubt anyone would have noticed it.”

The skull, which the student is “not 100% sure” is a model but is “pretty sure”, said it is viewed by medics as entirely standard: “We just see it as a learning tool, in the same way you would use flashcards ... you pass it on through your [college] parents.”

The librarian agreed: “It turned out to belong to a medical student, so it was no more remarkable than an MML student leaving behind a dictionary, and not a welfare issue. Such study aids have been left in the library before.”

The skull scare comes as the University’s Museum of Zoology has opened a new exhibition displaying rare exploded Victorian skulls, curated by Professor Jason Head.



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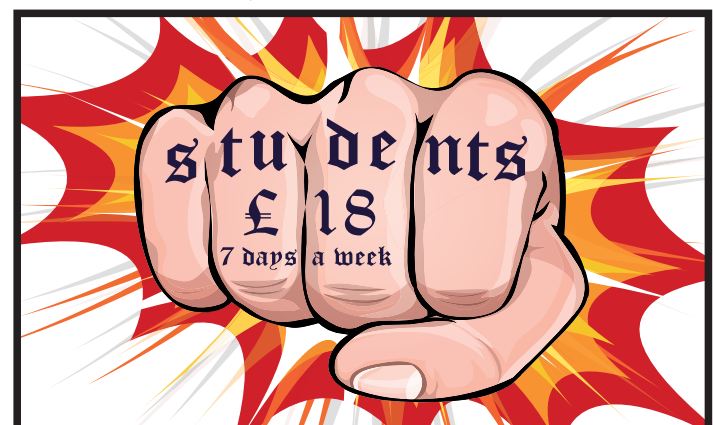
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News

Lucy Cav gets Oxford sister

Until now, Lucy Cavendish was the only Cambridge college that did not have a sister college at Oxford. However, the College has recently twinned with Regent's Park College, an Oxford college that specialises in Arts and Humanities subjects. This is the latest in a series of changes brought about by this year's JCR, including introducing free prescriptions for students and reopening Lucy's old bar, Nautilus.

Cambridge crowned happiest place to live

Cambridge has been crowned the happiest place to live and work in the UK, according to a recent report. Analysing over 100,000 anonymous employer reviews, the study considered factors such as overall job satisfaction, career opportunities, and work-life balance. Cambridge scored an average satisfaction rating of 3.91 out of five, well above the national average of 3.79. Other cities in the top ten include Brighton, Bristol, and Newcastle.

Ed fac professor gets ITV diversity job

Professor Jason Arday has been appointed to the ITV's Cultural Advisory Council. In 2023 the Education and Sociology professor became the youngest Black academic to become a professor at the University of Cambridge, and the sixth Black professor in the University's history. The council advises ITV's diversity acceleration plan. Arday has previously claimed to want to prove that "anything is possible" and that the lack of representation in academia is a "stain on the sector".

Christ's College's snail salad

A snail was found in a serving of cauliflower at Christ's College last Michaelmas. The Christ's student said: "I was just about to dig into my cauliflower when I saw it." The size of a finger nail, the dark coloured snail was tucked into a fold within the vegetable. Expecting a serving of warmly cooked cauliflower that Christ's upper hall offers, the unexpected guest came as quite a surprise to the student.

University watch

Patrick Dolan rounds up student news from around the country

Brexit blip

In the latest episode of *University Challenge*, both Trinity College, Cambridge, and the Open University teams claimed that the UK is still in the EU. Host Amol Rajan, taken aback by the blunder, asked them to name two countries in both the EU and the Commonwealth. Both teams incorrectly named the UK. The incident has been labelled a "classic moment" for the quiz show, with viewers expressing a mix of amusement and concern over this apparent forgetfulness regarding Brexit.

Bath bomb

Aditya Verma, a student at the University of Bath, is facing trial in Madrid for accusations of public disorder after sending a Snapchat message joking about "blowing up a flight" en route to Menorca with friends in July 2022. The message, which stated: "On my way to blow up the plane (I'm a member of the Taliban)," led to UK security services alerting Spanish authorities. Verma, defending himself in a Madrid court, claimed it was intended as a joke among friends and not to cause public distress. Verma may face a hefty fine of €22,500 if found guilty. The verdict is expected in the coming days.

A fiver a day keeps Oxford VC away

Professor Irene Tracey, vice-chancellor of the University of Oxford and recipient of a £542,000 annual salary, has suggested that university graduates should donate to their university regularly, "even if it's just £5". She emphasises the financial needs of universities and encourages support to prevent them from "falling to pieces". The University of Oxford, with assets over £1.7 billion and individual college endowments totaling £6.4 billion, received £222 million in public donations in the last year.

UK unis deny domestic student displacement

British universities have rejected claims that domestic students are being displaced by international applicants, suggesting that such reports are "mendacious" and misrepresent the situation. University leaders have refuted the allegations that overseas students are admitted with lower entry requirements. They have also disputed claims that domestic students are losing places, citing data showing record numbers of UK residents enrolled in undergraduate degree courses in 2021-22, while the number of non-UK students decreased compared to the previous year.



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Students forced to take days off course to work amid cost of living crisis

Ella McCartney
Investigations Editor

Cambridge students are forced to take full days off their course to work part-time jobs, in a bid to finance their degree amid a cost of living crisis, a *Varsity* investigation has revealed.

Last month, the government announced that the maximum maintenance loan for students in England for the 2024/5 academic year will rise by 2.5% to match forecasted inflation.

This has been criticised by some, who note that inflation has risen above forecasted rates in recent years.

The Russell Group, of which Cambridge University is a member, have said that students on the maximum maintenance have suffered a real term cut of £2,000 since 2020.

A second-year student at Gonville & Caius College told *Varsity* that, despite living in the cheapest Caius accommodation, she is unable to “make ends meet”.

As a result, she was “forced” to spend the week leading up to their rent payment working daily, totalling around thirty hours in seven days.

“All the money I do earn has gone on rent or food. The increase to the price of the latter means I am often unable to afford my food shop unless I have worked that day and I have had to forgo breakfast the entirety of this term,” she said.

“My academic performance has been severely affected. To maintain a living in Cambridge, I have to take entire days off academic studies to work – I no longer feel like a student, but a woman with a nearly full-time job who reads for a bit of fun,” she said.

Her current budget has meant that she “lives paycheck to paycheck,” she said.

She also told *Varsity*: “I have contacted my college for support and as of yet have had no response.”

The National Union of Students’ survey of 6,600 students found that 96% of students are cutting back on spending, with 92% saying that it has affected their mental health.

The Office for National Statistics also reported in 2023 that of the 68% of students surveyed who receive a student loan, 58% said it did not cover living costs, and 25% said it only just covered living costs.

A student at Emmanuel College told *Varsity*: “I’m especially struggling with the fact that the price of everything has gone up. I’m forced to choose between buying basic essentials and I sometimes have to skip meals because of how expensive everything is.”

“Me and my friends have started sharing most of our food to make it cheaper overall and I definitely do not have a balanced diet these days,” they said.

Another student detailed the impact the cost-of-living crisis has had on their mental health: “I’m not getting the mental health support I need from the University and the cost of therapy has gone up because of the cost-of-living crisis which has made everything more difficult for me.”

“I’ve thought about asking the University for financial help, but I don’t really have confidence that they can help,” they said.

For the academic year 2023/24, the maximum maintenance loan in England has been raised by 2.8%, whereas it was increased by 40% in Northern Ireland, 11.1% in Scotland and 9.4% in Wales for students in the greatest financial difficulty.

Part of the maximum maintenance loan is a non-repayable grant in some of these devolved regions, whereas the fund must be paid back in England.

The maximum income threshold required to access the largest maintenance loan is £25,000, despite widespread calls

to raise the figure to £35,000.

The Russell Group said: “Once again, we are disappointed to see that there has been no move to correct the maintenance loan shortfall suffered by students in recent years. Inflation may now be slowing down, but today’s announcement fails to address the deficit that has been created across the last three years.”

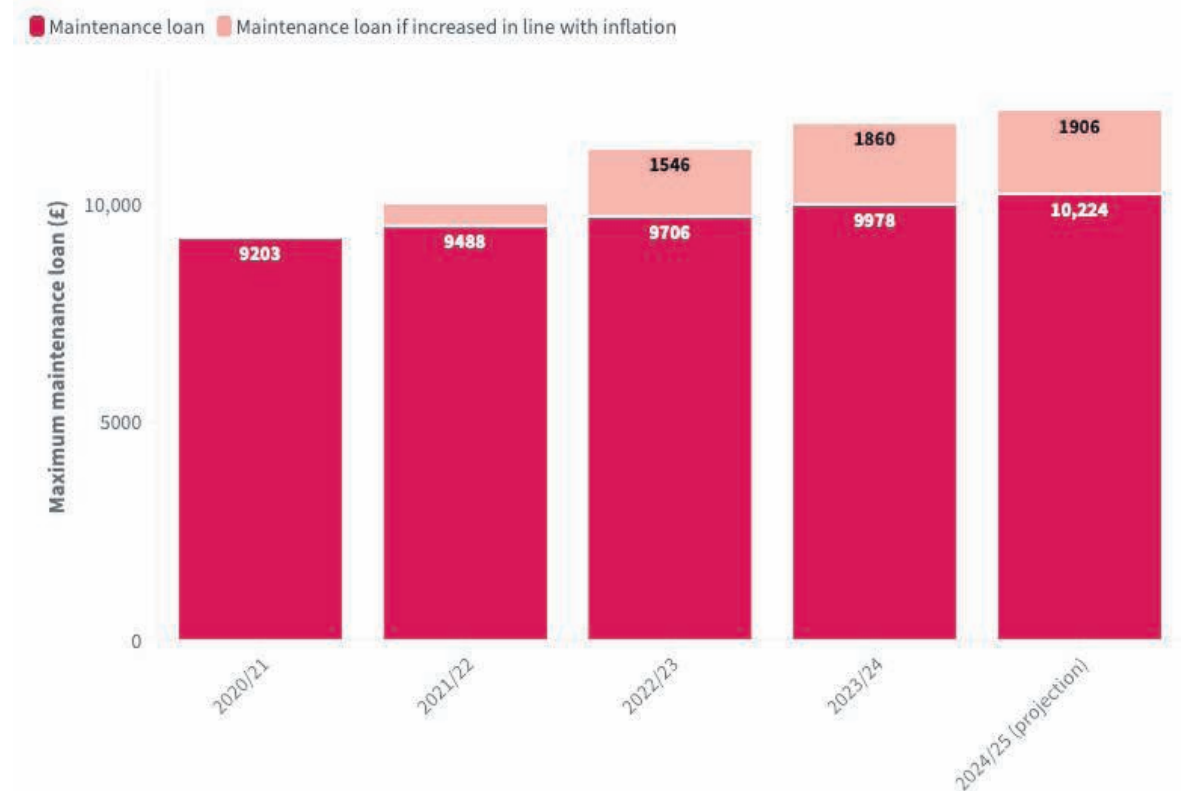
Their spokesperson appealed to the government to help universities address this shortfall: “The hardest hit will be the most disadvantaged students, who are at risk of dropping out due to financial pressures,” they said.

A Cambridge University spokesperson told *Varsity*: “We understand how the cost of living is affecting many of our students and we have a range of support available, in particular the Cambridge Bursary Scheme – under which approximately £10m of funding can be accessed every year – and hardship funding which equates to a further £4.5m of support.”

“The University’s Student Support website also includes advice on how to access a range of wellbeing support at Cambridge, including what to do if students have financial concerns. We encourage any student who is struggling

with the cost of living to speak to their College and access support,” they said.

Dr Andrew Spencer, Gonville & Caius’ Senior Tutor, also said: “Any Caius student in hardship should speak to their Tutor or myself. Students can visit the Education and Tutorial Office at any time to seek advice, raise any concern or to speak to me. The Tutors meet every fortnight to discuss financial assistance and other grants and have supported significant numbers of students this year in need of financial assistance.”



Source: <https://wonkhe.com/wonk-corner/student-support-in-england-is-being-cut-again-in-real-terms/> Wonk HE

Women must work harder to earn football Blue, says captain

Kit Roberts
News Correspondent

Cambridge’s female football players face more difficult requirements to achieve a Blue, says the team’s captain.

To receive a Blue, the highest award available to student sportspeople at Cambridge, members of the University’s men’s football team (CUAFC) must be chosen to participate in the Varsity match against Oxford, even if they serve as substitute players and play only a brief period during the entire game.

For female players, however, securing a Blue requires not only being selected for the Varsity match but also being part of the starting XI, along with the whole team placing top four in the league.

This means that if a starting player



▲ JONNY COFFEY

was injured in the first few minutes of the game and then replaced by a substitute who plays for the remaining duration, the substitute would not qualify for a Full Blue.

Abbie Hastie, captain of CUAFC’s women’s team, told *Varsity*: “How can it be right that it’s easier for men’s footballers to get a Blue than women’s footballers? The women’s Blues Committee hides behind the existence of separate committees and needs to step up and ensure equality.”

Cambridge’s female football team reached the national cup final last year and earned the Ospreys Club of the Year title last season.

The rationale for the discrepancies in Blue attainment lies in the higher number of male players trying for a place on the Varsity team and playing football

overall, which creates a perceived higher level of competitiveness, say officials.

Scott Annett, senior member overseeing both the men’s and women’s Blues committees, told *Varsity* that, given the difference in participation numbers, it might not always be logical for “the same standards to be applied automatically to both groups”.

One member of the CUAFC women’s team, however, drew attention to the societal challenges faced by female football, telling *Varsity* that female players often suffer from a “lack of role models”, which the men’s team generally have in abundance.

Cai La Trobe-Roberts, Blues Captain for CUAFC Men’s Committee, told *Varsity* that these differences in acquiring a Blue in Cambridge Association Football “feel incredibly unfair on the women”.

The Blues Committee have acknowledged that they are aware of the differences between the two teams, emphasising that the two are run by separate committees, who decide the Blues standards independently of one another.

Although many Cambridge sports clubs are beginning to unify committees, such as the Rugby Union Football Club, this is not always the case.

The Blues Committee also stated that they were reviewing the structure of the committee, which might lead to reform in the future. The two are run by separate committees, who decide the Blues standards independently of one another.

The Blues Committee has said that they were reviewing the structure of the committee, which might lead to reform in the future.

Interviews

How Seán Hewitt writes the books he wished for as a child

Sana Soomro interviews the Cambridge alumnus to discuss the inspirations for his poetry and his memories of student life

“You begin with no idea of the book,” the winner of the prestigious Laurel prize tells me, “you begin with just one or two poems.” Coming to Cambridge for a reading of his second poetry book, *Rapture’s Road*, after the immense success of his first one, I sit down with Seán Hewitt on a freezing Wednesday afternoon at Gail’s, wondering what the process of writing a book of poetry is like. “For this book I had about 300 pages of just notes and ideas”, he tells me. After a while he looked at his notes, realised what he was writing about and then pared it down into a book. “This book took me about four years, not full time, but it has been in my head for that long.”

As a Cambridge graduate, I ask Hewitt what it feels like to be back. “It does seem strange coming back. I can kind of see my younger self walking around. I feel a bit nostalgic.” The 2023-elected fellow of the Royal Society of Literature remembers his time at Cambridge as being very busy: “I didn’t get much sleep,” he tells me, “but I also really liked the romance of it. Girton has an orchard, so I spent a lot of my time outside, just reading in the lovely gardens.”

“I think for me poetry is kind of isolated, because it seems to come from the time when I am on my own,” Hewitt

explains when I ask him about the common theme of isolation in his work. “Poetry, or at least my poetry, is an eye speaking, and so that eye is always on its own.” Hewitt’s first poetry book, *Tongues*

“I can kind of see my younger self walking around. I feel a bit nostalgic

of Fire, was named book of the year by numerous newspapers including *The Guardian* and *The Irish Times*. He reveals that the process of writing both books was very different: “When I wrote the first poetry book, I didn’t really think of it as a book almost ever, because you don’t expect that you will ever be published and that people will read it or that it would get sold in shops. Whereas for this one, I knew it was going to be published and that people would read it, so I felt a sense of being listened to, which made

me self-conscious in a different way.”

Hewitt’s works explore themes of mental health, queer identity and heartbreak, with *The Sunday Times* referring to his work as “poetry that will stand the test of time.” After graduating Hewitt struggled to find a job and ended up going to South America. There, he met his first long term boyfriend and moved to Sweden. Hewitt’s memoir, *All Down Darkness Wide*, which won the Rooney prize, is based on the time his life took a darker turn when his boyfriend suffered with a mental health crisis and suicide ideation. Both his memoir and his first poetry book, *Tongues of Fire*, are based on his life, but he says, “I think now I am quite interested in writing less personal things and more imaginative things.”

Some of Hewitt’s newest works include *300,000 Kisses: Tales of Queer Love From The Ancient World*, an anthology of queer Greek and Roman stories that celebrate homosexual love, in collaboration with illustrator Luke Edward Hall. “It has become quite important for me to write books that I wish I could have read when I was younger,” Hewitt reflects. “*300,000 Kisses* for me was that book. I think it would have made quite a difference for me if I had read that book when I was a teenager.”

“I want this book to feel like a fantasy poem for the reader. I have always loved reading poetry that seems to take me somewhere else,” Hewitt tells me. “My first book was very much based on the experiences that I had had. This book

is set in an imagined landscape, a bit like the landscape I know around in Dublin, Ireland.” The book is written as a dream in which Hewitt meets new people and wanders through the natural world. It’s also about climate change: “My first collection was also a lot about the natural world and with this one I felt like it was important to address the crisis the natural world is under.” His debut novel *Open, Heaven*, coming out in 2025, follows the romance of two 16-year-olds in a village

in the north of England. “I am looking forward to it, it is almost done and I am just doing the final edits for it.”

I ask Hewitt for his advice to the aspiring writers here at Cambridge. “Try to get in your personality and the way you see the world in your poems because you can never predict what can happen in the world that might make your book popular, you can never predict what the market publishing decides is cool this year. The only thing that you can do is keep writing things that you know best and hope people see that.” There is lots of pressure on Cambridge students to have figured out their career before they graduate, and he wishes that he’d been less focused on his career while studying: “Some of the most interesting people I have met began in one job, changed to another job and then became something entirely different. So let life be viable for you and open-ended.”



Amy Munro-Faure on Cambridge Zero's fight against climate change

Sophie Denny and **Amelie Bromnick** report on the organisation at the forefront of the mission to educate the youth on how to combat the climate crisis

Amy Munro-Faure is head of education and student engagement at Cambridge Zero, the organisation at the heart of the University’s mission to combat climate change. It’s a global challenge, but their aims are simple: research, education and collaboration. Cognisant of just how “interdisciplinary” the fight against climate change is, Munro-Faure explains how they attempt to support collaborations between the “cutting-edge expertise” across the University to support transformative research and real change.

In her personal role, Munro-Faure is focused on transporting this knowledge throughout the education system. For example, the organisation recently worked with Cambridge University Press to review the OCR Geog-

raphy GCSE curriculum to add some more climate-centred content. From a wider perspective, she recognises the role Cambridge Zero plays in exploring the “unique things that we can do that really make sure [the University] can do the most to fight the climate crisis.” Yet she is keen to point out that Cambridge is an “experimental university”, and so we “don’t always get it right”.

Having engaged in this kind of work since she graduated from Cambridge with a degree in Natural Sciences, Munro-Faure says that she has “drawn inspiration from students at Cambridge” and feels “enormously privileged” to now be working with them “at the start of their careers”. She has been lucky enough to

meet many other inspirational figures, including Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland, who introduced the organisation’s Youth Engagement project at COP28 this past December.

The ActNowFilm project featured 30 young climate leaders from across the globe in conversation surrounding what we can do to combat the climate crisis. Munro-Faure says that it’s so important to get “young voices to the table”, and speaks of the “renewed sense of urgency” behind the ideas driving youth engagement. Meanwhile, she tells me of the “conflict of interest” inherent in staging a climate conversation in Dubai, an economy so fundamentally reliant on oil. This “tension” was present throughout, and her dissatisfaction at the outcome of the COP28 agreement is felt. “In the next decade, we need to transition five times faster than we have in any previous decade. That agreement does not do that”; we “clearly need to go much, much further, much, much faster”.

“There is always hope” though, Munro-Faure believes. The students she works with are a tes-

tament to this; that is “the extraordinary thing” about the University, she tells me – it is “packed full of people at the start of their careers, ready to make this happen”.

“It’s so important to get young people’s voices to the table

The organisation itself runs a number of initiatives that students can get involved in. The Green Careers Festival, running from 29 January, will feature a number of panels staging career opportunities centred around the climate challenge. Furthermore, the organisation runs the Future Leader Programme, a summer

placement opportunity sending students on climate-focused missions. Any society at the University can also apply for the organisation’s Student Societies’ Fund, centred on promoting climate consciousness across the University.

As the conversation comes to an end, Munro-Faure says that although it “can look quite scary”, she has “great faith in the drive and creativity and vision of so many of the people”. While it’s important to make lifestyle changes, we must “always keep the focus on the systemic, rather than pushing the responsibility onto the individuals”. She remains optimistic, and although the world “is going to be different”, with organisations like Cambridge Zero and the drive of young people like the students she works with, she remains hopeful that we will be able to “live as well as we can”. Ultimately, it’s about “making the most of the time” we have at Cambridge, and doing what we can to fill our armouries in the systemic battle against climate change.



◀ CAMBRIDGE ZERO



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Features

Universally Challenged Cambridge students' worst essay feedback

Jude Crawley

“Within all beings there is the seed of perfection. However, compassion is required in order to activate that seed which is inherent in our hearts and minds...” the 14th Dalai Lama said... and the Oxbridge professors listened. At the heart of this world-beating education is the principle of compassionate, constructive criticism. The supervision format is the prime, pedagogical opportunity to pull apart your work, find the flaws and stick it back together in a safe environment. Inevitably, as a humanities student, not all your essays are going to be the best one. In fact, it's a comparative impossibility. Some will be close to perfect, others not so much. But feedback is given in the spirit of Dalai Lama-inspired compassion aiming to bring out the best in students... mostly.

Every now and again, students produce work which is seriously and concerningly sub-par. And every now and again, professors run out of their compassion and feel the overwhelming urge to be uncontrollably and brutally honest. Thanks to some very kind contributions of Cambridge students, here at Varsity, we have gathered some of the finest, most eloquently brutal comments left on student essays.

We start off with a rather panicked English professor who found themselves unwooed by the incompetence of a first year supervision essay on mediaeval romance. They simply wrote:

“ARGH DELETE DELETE”

“Feedback is given in the spirit of Dalai Lama-inspired compassion

Next up, we turn to a politics professor who was distinctly unimpressed with the writing style of one first year's thoughts on Weber. So unimpressed in fact, he was not sure university was for the aforementioned (now diagnosed dyslexic) fresher:

“You need help with your English writing. It is not adequate for university-level writing.”

Staying on the theme of style, a geographer submitted a piece of feedback given on their first year exam. Luckily, the first year doesn't count for ambling Geographers.

“A somewhat naive, pedestrian, hesitant writing style”

Unfortunately second year does count for Geographers, which was a horrible realisation for the anonymous student who received this on their exam:

“This is borderline unacceptable”

“When you have ten essays in eight weeks, word count is the name of the game

When you have ten essays in eight weeks, word count is the aim of the game. Churn up words until you hit that magical 2,000 number, press submit and never look back. Or maybe just try and sneak under the 2,000 word boundary as one HSPS fresher bravely attempted. Their supervisor reflected on this choice, writing:

“Some people write with sufficient concision that they can pack into their 1,500 words what others need 2,000+ to say. But they are unusual, and I am not sure that you are one of them.”

Rumour has it that occasionally, just occasionally, STEM students are asked to write essays. But don't fret, their essays are allowed to include pretty drawings. Unfortunately these drawings are meant to be contributory towards the essay topic at hand, as one first year NatSci discovered upon receiving feedback:

“Does this diagram help answer the question? Like at all?”

It is a truth universally acknowledged that an English degree is really really hard. Sometimes, as an Engling, it can be a struggle. This particular Engling however was pretty confident on this essay. Unfortunately, their supervisor was a bit more sceptical.

“I can tell you struggled this week”

A second year lawyer also suffered from over-assertiveness, only this time by allegedly making claims which were not substantiated by the actual law. Their supervisor responded:

“This is not doing law. This is reading tea leaves”

The crème de la crème of compassionate supervision feedback however, goes to an Oxford history tutor who delivered this devastating, but admirably theatrical piece of feedback on a tute essay.

He crossed out every word of the essay other than the word ‘wrong’, circled it, and wrote: “this is the only thing that's right in this whole essay”.

Clubbing in Ayushman Mukherjee explores some of the

It's easy to think of a medieval student as a faceless, prudish, future clergyman – devoted to nothing but God and the pursuit of knowledge. But for as long as there have been students, they have been searching for ever-more creative ways to kill time. A letter from 1220, addressed from a father to his son studying at Oxford, reads: “I have recently discovered that you live dissolutely and slothfully, preferring license to restraint and play to work, and strumming a guitar while the others are at their studies.” Some four centuries later, in 1660, James Duport – a fellow at Trinity – advises freshers that they ought to avoid football, for it is a “rude, boisterous exercise, and fitter for Clownes than for Schollers.” One can only imagine the look on his face after a quick tour of the Sports Fair.

Since those early days, students have come together in tribes of shared weirdness. The earliest student socie-

“A pub where Samuel Pepys may have 'drank pretty hard' in 1660, and upon which now sits an Anthropologie

ties at Cambridge were probably modest affairs given the size of the early modern University, with fewer than 200 matriculations per year by the 18th century. As a result, most have since disappeared without a trace. But from what little records remain, we can piece together what life may have looked like for an undergraduate in the Georgian era.

The Westminster Club, a club for alumni of the eponymous public school in London, was founded sometime before 1750. I say “before”, because the little we know of the club arises from the account of its likely demise, published by Thomas Francklin (then regius professor of Greek and club chair). On November 17th, 1750, 46 members, all dressed in purple, met at the Three Tuns Tavern at the corner of the Market Square (a pub where Samuel Pepys may have “drank pretty hard” in 1660, and upon which now sits an Anthropologie), celebrating the commemoration of the school's foundress, Queen Elizabeth I. At 11pm – moments before the group was about to disperse – the meeting was abruptly interrupted by James Brown, the University's senior proctor. Brown



had a particularly negative reputation amongst undergraduates for carrying a “great stick in his hand to frighten (the boys) home from their play.” In what amounts to the 18th-century equivalent of getting portered, he had waited until precisely 11 o'clock for new regulations against the meetings of clubs to take effect.

The hot words that ensued impelled the vice-chancellor to hold a court session on November 24th, which was met with a “large attendance of undergraduates” who were “overwhelmingly in sympathy with the culprits”. By the conclusion of proceedings on the 27th, the furore had grown to such a degree that the vice chancellor declared that he would expel “on the spot anyone that should give the least disturbance.”

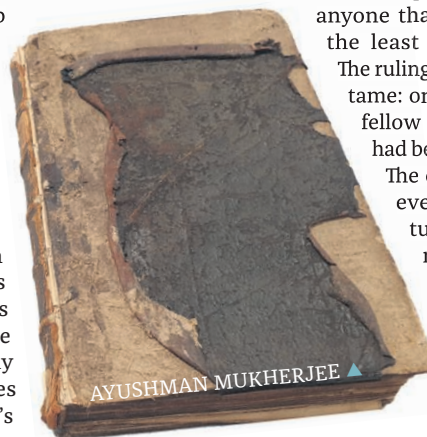
The ruling was relatively tame: only one man, a fellow at Trinity Hall, had been suspended. The case did, however, easily capture the imagination of the University. As appeals developed over the course of the following year, pamphlets

were printed with satirical squibs, and student groups formed to rally supporters of the Westminster Club. It would not be until June 1752 that peace was restored, following arbitration by the archbishop of Canterbury, bishop of London, and lord chief justice – in what may have been slight overkill.

“No member shall reveal any of the secrets of the Club, sub. penalty of 5 shillings

Whilst we have little idea as to the actual goings-on of the Westminster Club, we do have particularly detailed records of another club that met at the Three Tuns several decades earlier: the Zodiac Club. The Manuscripts Reading Room at the University Library holds a treasure trove of some of the club's most important documents – the most revealing of which is the society's club-book.

The Zodiac Club was so called due to the number of members being limited to 12, each of whom was assigned one of the 12 signs of the Zodiac. By 1728, the



the 1700s

University's 18th century clubs and societies



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club's membership had expanded to 18 – with the six new members assigned the six planets as signs. The presidency of the club was to rotate according to each members' sign, and the club was to meet three times per sign – meeting at quarter past eight at the Three Tuns, and dispersing at 10 o'clock. These meetings continued until at least 1742.

What might these men have discussed? The ongoing Wars of the Austrian Succession? Shared harsh opinions on Robert Walpole, Britain's first *de facto* prime minister? Unfortunately, we have no idea: the very first article of the club's constitution commits all members to secrecy. However, one of the expressed purposes of the club was to “recommend one that is member... of the Club, against all other candidates” to any “preferment either in or out of the University,” – that is, mutual help in securing positions of power. I have at least a few soon-to-be unemployed friends who may have appreciated such an arrangement.

I must admit that, by this point, I was simultaneously impressed and disappointed. On the one hand, it was perhaps somewhat comforting to hear that the students of the past were no less hedonistic than the students of today. But on the other hand, I couldn't help but feel slightly let down. I had originally dug into the University archives in hopes

of finding some charming historical curiosity – for instance, a long-forgotten Cambridge University Powdered Wig Society. Instead, I was met with something disturbingly familiar: a bunch of plastered Hooray Henrys relying on the old boys' network for support. Was this really the state of the University at the time it had spawned Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Byron? Where were all the creatives – the 18th century thespians and the musos? What about the Union hacks and Blues sportsmen? In other words, where were all the people who made Cambridge Cambridge?



I must admit – by this point, I was in equal parts impressed and disappointed

My questions were soon to be answered in the form of a diary. Spencer Penrice was a fresher at Trinity Hall in 1736. Dying of smallpox just three years later, his greatest legacy was the detailed account he left behind

of his first year at Cambridge. I spoke with Kate Foxton, who had previously spent a summer in the Trinity Hall Archives, to better understand what student societies may have been like as Penrice experienced them. Kate has already produced a particularly detailed account of Penrice's diary, but the highlights are fascinating. In some ways, Penrice was a man of his time. He is known to have frequented some spectacles about town that might not have passed the rigorous health and safety standards of today – such as the hanging of prisoners on Castle Hill, and bull-baiting on Parker's Piece. In other ways, however, he is relatable. There is some account of intercollegiate sport, as he mentions playing bowls at the “Queens Bowling Green” (of which all that remains today is an avenue of trees on the east bank of the river). He also mentions having attended a debate at Trinity on the “restoration of K: Charles 2nd,” where he notes that one speaker was “as vehement against Cromwell as Tully against Cataline & he praised Charles ye 2nd as much as he praised Caesar.” It sounds like he may have stumbled into a time machine and found himself in CUCA.

Interestingly, Penrice mentions that he is involved with the college Music Club. This is probably not the Trinity Hall Music Society of today – which was founded in the 1920s. However, another college music society claims descent from even before the days of Penrice. And, if its existence has been uninterrupted, may be the oldest existing student society at the University (and perhaps the world).

Christ's College Music Society claims to have been founded, in some form or the other, in 1710. According to Dr. David R. M. Irving, musicologist and former Christ's fellow, the earliest mention we have of a “music club” at the college is from the diary of German traveller and book-collector Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach. Uffenbach's account is one of a thriving student society – though he remains quite the critic, writing that “*When we had spent an hour here, Dr. Ferrari came for us, and took us to the Music club, in Christ's college. This music meeting is held generally every week. There are no professional musicians there, but simply bachelors, masters and doctors of music, who perform. It is surprising, as they make such ado about music, and even create professors and doctors of music, that still this nation achieves scarcely anything in it... And so too this music, both vocal and instrumental, was very poor.*” Uffenbach later describes how his party is ridiculed for asking for “Cheese College” instead of “Caius College”, so I certainly wouldn't consider his review authoritative.

The 18th-century undergraduate probably wasn't so different from us, after all. They were no less athletic, no less musical, and certainly no less alcoholic. But whatever change there has been, it has largely been change for the better. For while we have lost the hangings on Castle Hill, we have gained Tiddlywinks.

Port of call

Stories from Cambridge's porters

Isabella Steinmeyer

Cambridge porters are a lot like fairy godmothers. They have magic wands (master keys), can conjure carriages (order taxis to plodge) and ensure you will not stay at the ball (staircase party) past midnight (10:30pm if your neighbours are the wicked step-sisters). My fairy godmother's name is Jeremy. One week into first year, my fire alarm malfunctioned and went off five times in 24-hours, once at 5am. Being named the culprit, and having to do a walk of shame in front of a building's worth of tutting, half-asleep second and third years was a career-ender. Then Jeremy stepped in, and after I assured him I had no incense or fairy lights, he told everyone it wasn't my fault. He then whispered: “If anyone gives you shit for this, come straight to me”. Since then, Jeremy has remained an ally in tough times: he listens to my workload woes, has saved me when I've locked myself out numerous times and checks in on how I'm doing. “Getting portered” usually means prematurely ended parties, afters' cut-short, and makes exam-time feel like you're living in *A Quiet Place*. But porters go above and beyond to make us feel comfortable and safe. In recognition of their service, I spoke to some Cantabs who felt their porters deserved a shout-out.

Porter or Pest Control?

At Christ's the porters also serve as pest control. A friend suffered a “near death experience” when he thought he heard something moving in the next room. He emailed the porters at 1:27am, asking “if it is an animal, how should I proceed?”. The porters rushed to the rescue, armed with torches, and concluded that it was, in fact, the radiator. Still, their immediate response to an email titled “Room Noises” and willingness to hunt down the alleged “bird or something”, proves Steve Backshall-rivalling bravery.

Cycling Samaritan

A student at Caius went to the porters to report that her bike had been stolen. She said “I was just chatting to the porters saying it was annoying but what can you do?”. One of the porters, Dave, overheard and said he had a spare bike at home. A couple of evenings later, Dave brought the bike in his car, and gave it to her. The student still

uses the bike and is very grateful she didn't have to spend £80 on a new one.

Parcel Force

The Churchill porters support enterprise. A friend asked the porters for some tape for her Depop parcel, but when she tried wrapping it, “it was so tragic” that one porter became Santa's-little-helper and did it for her. With Cantabs not allowed to get jobs, the porters oil the wheels of the Depop machine.

Knitting Night Porter

At Clare, one porter used to pass his night shifts by knitting hats for students. Apparently, “you gave him your name and your college, and he would knit you a hat in your college colours”. Taking the time to keep Cantabs warm with personalised merch (and without the Ryder & Amies price tag) is a testament to the incredible kindness of Cambridge porters.

Netball Nightingale

Having taken a bad fall on the netball court, a student went to the St John's porters “in hysterics”. As well as first aid, one porter gave her a hug. Though initially she'd said she was fine, and put on a brave face, the embrace was “very appreciated”, and the porter's warmth was a welcome contrast to the stuffy cold-bloodedness of some tweedy academics.

The Porters system at Cambridge is invaluable. While friends at other unis can have house parties until 5am, they will never know the joys of a post-club debrief with a 50-something ex-army man. Porters are the first defence against throngs of tourists, will call you a taxi home from anywhere in the city and provide a uni wide lost-property network. They are a constant, the likes of which is rarely found during the 8-week wind tunnel of term. Remember, next time you pass through plodge, to thank your porters, the Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Backbone of our university.



LOUIS ASHWORTH ▲

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Matthew Taylor
is a second-year
Biological Natural
Sciences student at
Pembroke College

Broadening access or an exercise in box-ticking?

Last Easter term, amid the chaos of exam preparation and C Sunday debauchery, Pembroke's catering team found itself at the centre of a controversy that was swiftly swept under the rug. A hungry Pembroke student, in their quest for satiety, was to be greeted by a strange new dinner option – the “Access Meal”. The premise of the menu item was to provide students with a main and two sides at an affordable discounted price. But, something didn't feel quite right and it wasn't just the portion of grated cheese that constituted a side on pasta night. The community consensus was summarised by one anonymous submission to Pembroke's version of Camfess: “it is pretty laughable that including two sides is considered as an access move”. Just as abruptly as it had been introduced, the Access Meal was lost to history, and rebranded the “Student Special”.

Today, the Student Special costs 70 pence less than the vegan option with two sides: it's a welcome discount and, as they (Tesco) say, every little helps. No one is above a meal deal and this particular saving was only ever an issue when it was branded with the word “access”. In Pembroke catering's bid to appear inclusive, they unwittingly acknowledged that their food might otherwise not be fairly priced. The rebranding of the meal

demonstrated that its provision had been performative: a business decision masquerading as a helping hand.

Just a few months later the Cambridge theatre scene set out to engage in a meta-performance of its own. A ticket to the ADC doesn't come cheap but the creation of a student bursary discount seemed to recognise this. Unfortunately, that's all the initiative offered – the appearance of inclusivity. The 10% discount available to students who acquired a written signature from their tutor and dropped it off at the ADC box office could hardly be described as a saving at all. It was as though the ADC had decided to do the bare minimum to say they were trying to make student theatre affordable. I'm pleased to say the discount has since been raised from 10% to 25%, but it should not have required backlash for the ADC to see that paying £10.35 for an £11.50 ticket wasn't the great access move they thought it was.

It is worth noting that the Cambridge bursary scheme is an incredibly generous form of financial assistance. While the schemes and provisions that are placed under the access umbrella often feel offensive in their performance, nothing can be said to denigrate the tangible good that the bursary scheme is doing to make this city entrenched in inequalities a fairer place.

It was this generosity that was emphasised to me in a series of emails from Pembroke's development office last summer. The bursary scheme is provided in large part thanks to the assistance of wealthy alumni, and the office wanted us recipients to recognise this in a letter of appreciation. The issue was that their initial plea suggested our receiving the bursary was conditional on this letter being written. One student, again via anonymous submission, expressed being “uncomfortable” with the expectation that they would “divulge lots of personal information”. This was a fair complaint; access schemes should be about levelling the playing field. When they require a student to “grovel”, or self-identify as someone in need of the initiative (say, by purchasing an Access Meal) in a public setting, that undermines the intention that should be behind them. This confusion over the motivations behind accessibility initiatives is all too apparent to those working on them for the right reasons. Speaking to one undergraduate access officer, I heard of the difficulties holding “colleges to account”. Often, they told me, access schemes at a college level amount to “box-ticking exercises in the interests of the College [rather than] the participants”.

Of course, a different access scheme has also recently made University news

– the Union's “double digit” membership for students with a household income of less than £25,000, priced at £90 rather than the usual £230. It is quite telling that one of the best examples of significant financial assistance that exists at this university is one which makes access to a glorified member's club more affordable than it would normally be, but still costs nearly a hundred quid. I'm inclined to argue that the number of students this reduction applies to will be so small as to be inconsequential but if we are facing a toss up between schemes for many with inconsequential effects (like the ADC's original proposal) or schemes with a narrower focus that at least make a difference for those who are eligible, then I'm in favour of the latter.

It's a shame we are having to debate (pun intended) which of these two strategies is preferable, but that's where we seem to be. Ultimately, the term ‘access’ comes with a lot of confusion and I worry that its appropriation in many instances will detract from the good of programmes making a real difference. The motion I am putting forward is this: this house believes the University and its associated institutions need to think harder about its access schemes ... and at the very least, learn that a discount in the region of a pound doesn't count as one.

“
A business
decision
masquer-
ading as
a helping
hand
”



Lauren Bird
is a first-year
HSPS student at
Homerton College

Labour must mobilise the student vote

The student vote has become an oxymoron in current politics. Keir Starmer's New New Labour must persuade an overeducated and underemployed generation that Labour is more than just ‘not the Tories’. With their main opposition caught (literally) pants-down so many times since their election, Labour need to take advantage of their lead in the polls and start actively standing up for students, a disillusioned, low-turnout demographic alienated by the Conservatives' ‘war on woke’. Starmer's reliance on votes from Labour's newfound middle-class supporters leaves him vulnerable. He must now reach for the support of a group which could be mobilised well, if given the incentive.

Students have long complained that public policy has to reflect our needs and opinions, rather than the views of age 65+ Daily Mail readers. But the increasing Tory obstacles to student voting have pushed us out of political relevance. Short of reducing student loan debts, here's how Keir can capitalise on Tory slip-ups, and give students the incentive we need to vote Labour – or even at all.

Firstly, Labour must commit to democratic reform to make students a bigger voting group. Instead of voicing their frustrations with students for not voting, Labour must recognise and reverse the Tory obstacle course in place which

actually stops most of us from voting. From barring colleges and universities from registering their students, to ageist clampdowns on voter ID and Cameron's policy preventing families from registering their whole household, it is not apathy but Tory actions that cause the underrepresentation of the student vote.

Suppressing the vote of what should be the most politically engaged and informed demographic – students – has taken almost twelve years of Tory rule to enact. Worse, the Conservative party's long tenure in government means their deliberate voter suppression tactics have gone under the radar, forgotten in the midst of juicier scandals (think pigs, secretaries, 300 mile trips to the eye doctor). Low turnout among students allows the right-wing to portray us as lazy, disengaged, and naive. So far, Labour are watching on.

Secondly, Labour must nationalise transport, and encourage considerate anti-car policy. It goes without question that students are the most climate-change aware demographic. Our age means we will likely face the worst consequences of global warming in our lifetimes, and our collective frustration has seen us resorting to throwing orange paint at buildings to get the government's attention.

Starmer must renationalise public transport, including rail, bus and subway networks, and make a genuine commitment to reduce transport fares for students. Surely in a climate crisis, prioritising public transport should be encouraged? Our current public transport systems are broken, essentially encouraging car ownership by providing no realistic alternative. My own journey from Cambridge to Newcastle takes 4 hours 30 minutes by car, but when I took the train, technical issues and strikes meant it took over 8 hours. This is not uncommon.

But if Starmer really wants to discourage car ownership and build a greener Britain for the future, he needs to invest in zero-emission transport too. Creating new bike lanes in university cities could improve health, bank accounts and air quality too: it's not just Oxbridge students who deserve to reap the benefits of cycling as transport.

Thirdly, Labour must commit to NHS mental health reforms – ones which will actively benefit us, too. All of us know the NHS' mental health services need reform. University students facing the mental health crisis need to be involved in the conversation too.

Labour's current set of 2024 pledges see them promise to ‘treat mental health as seriously as physical health and ensure genuine parity of esteem’. But how

is that realistic in a system where the waiting time for a hospital bed is often over 10 hours, where waiting lists commonly go on for years, and where emergency rooms are forced to prioritise the seriously unwell or dying? The current setup, reliant on outsourcing cripplingly expensive private agency work to survive, is in no position to tackle the problem.

Community-led responses have seen more success, including in Cambridge. As A&E is often not an option for those with mental health, Cambridge's Sanctuary provides a volunteer-led crisis response team. It is free to use and provides somewhere for people experiencing suicidal thoughts to go and be comforted and listened to. This is the type of genuinely effective grassroots community service that Starmer needs to start implementing or funding. It allows for a personalised and simple service for local residents and Cambridge students indiscriminately, and releases strain from emergency services.

More young adults than ever have a degree-level education, a development which Blair's New Labour can be thanked for. Now it lies with Starmer to emulate his idol, and address the issues faced by students today. In return, he could tap into an overlooked voting goldmine.



“
Starmer
could tap
into an
overlooked
voting gold-
mine
”

Matthew Taylor

Lauren Bird



Hannah Mawardi is a third-year Classics student at Pembroke College

Pembroke repeatedly gave me sesame. Let's start taking allergies seriously

Time and time again, Pembroke College reassured me that the catering department takes allergies seriously. Yet, there I sat in A&E, dressed in my heels and gown, feeling absurdly overdressed for the hospital waiting room. “How could this have happened again?” I questioned, after being served sesame at formal hall for the third year in a row.

The night went like this: I was initially served a meat dish, despite pre-ordering a pescatarian meal. After asking for the vegetarian option instead, I routinely checked the ingredients. No sesame, or so I was confidently told. One spoonful later, something wasn't right. Itchy lips, dry mouth, and panic set in all too quick. I quickly asked the server: “Is there tahini in this?”. For those unaware, as catering seemed to be, tahini is a sauce made from ground sesame. Without hesitation, I stabbed an epipen into my thigh. It wasn't long before I realised that my suspicions were correct. The candlelit dining hall was soon replaced with a sterile ambulance and the flawless china plates were swapped out for cardboard sick bowls.

I later discovered that an error had occurred meaning catering received the wrong dietary information. As a result, they hadn't prepared a sesame-free, pescatarian meal. More than a month has passed and I'm still none the wiser on what caused this fatal error. Nor has there been any explanation about why catering were seemingly clueless that the tahini

“There is no guarantee that it won't be fatal for a student”



contained sesame. Yes, mistakes happen. But this wasn't the first time. In 2021, at my very first formal, I was served bread containing sesame. In 2022, I was served tahini yoghurt.

I'm not the only one either. Following the latest incident, I spoke with other Pembroke students who experienced similar issues with catering. One student — allergic to dairy, eggs and nuts — said they were seriously ill after being served the wrong meal. “[Catering] didn't apologise at all. And no changes were implemented” they said. It's especially disappointing given that Pembroke's catering department was awarded its Allergen Accreditation in 2015, and is described as being a “great facility that meets the needs of students with allergies exceptionally well”.

Allergic reactions can be life-threatening if they escalate into anaphylaxis.

In the past twenty years, hospital admissions for food-related anaphylaxis more than doubled to 5,013 in 2022/23, up from 1,971 in 2002/3. It's only a matter of time before catering's luck runs out. If situations like mine happen again, there is no guarantee that it won't be fatal for a student.

Think of Natasha Ednan-Laperouse, 15, who died in 2016, after eating an artichoke, olive and tapenade baguette from Pret-a-Manger, containing unlabelled sesame.

Pret-a-Manger had 9 sesame incidents the year before. Last year, Georgina Mansergh, 24, died after a Dorset pub served her a mushroom risotto containing tahini. The master's student had previously only suffered mild reactions such as tingly lips or vomiting. Georgina's tragic death hit home for me. I too have only ever suffered mild reactions and frankly underestimated their seriousness. If I had eaten the whole plate at the formal, things may have been very different.

In recent years, more has been done to improve the lives of those living with allergies. Natasha's Law now requires all ingredients to be listed on all food products. The current campaign for Owen's Law hopes to make allergy information compulsory on the face of menus, named after Owen Carey, 18, who died in 2017, after eating a chicken burger containing buttermilk.

A new allergy communication app, Shivlet, has recently been developed, in memory of Shiv Mistry, 18, who died in 2022, after drinking a cocktail containing milk. Pasidu Perera, a Pembroke student, is working alongside Shiv's parents to build the app, which can translate 19 allergens into 136 languages. “Our vision is to hopefully get this compatible for other apps which distribute food, like Upay for formals, or food deliveries, so that there's a standardised way of communicating allergies online” he said.

Pembroke's allergen-free serving station in trough is an example of where the catering department succeeds. Nevertheless, there are still ways which Pembroke can make life easier for allergy sufferers, such as updating the formal hall's menu

design so that allergens are displayed fully.

For allergy sufferers, checking ingredients is a habitual part of daily life. Removing the opportunity to read allergen lists can remove our sense of control over what we are eating. Pembroke already provides this sort of menu for ordinary dinner service, so this would be a simple but significant change.

Commenting on the idea, one Pembroke student said: “Agree 100000% — when places have this I feel SO much more comfortable and safe. Other troughs have it too”. Jesus College's formal hall menu sets an example for this design. Inspiration can also be taken from Fitzwilliam College, a joint-winner of the FreeFrom Eating Out Award in 2015, who use an impressive online Saffron System, which displays the allergen and nutrition information for all their buttery dishes, in a clear, tick-box format.

Allergic reactions shouldn't be something which allergy sufferers should have to ‘get used to’ and they certainly shouldn't be caused by the college trusted to keep us safe. For the sake of its current and future students, Pembroke must take action now to ensure this doesn't happen again. We shouldn't wait until a student suffers from anaphylaxis to start seeing change.

When approached for comment, a spokesperson for Pembroke college said: “Our duty of care to our students prevents us from discussing incidents concerning communication of their private medical circumstances”.



Will McLaughlin is a second-year English student at Robinson College

SU meetings are just too boring

It's 6.30 pm, and I'm sitting in the abandoned exam hall turned SU lair that is the Cormack Room on the second floor of the SU building. The first Student Council meeting of Lent 2024 is about to begin. I'm feeling good, not only because I'm stuffing my face with complimentary Domino's pizza, but also because there are finally enough eligible representatives present to actually vote. The reason I'd chosen to make a pilgrimage to this bastion of university politics was that the last two meetings (Michaelmas 3 and Michaelmas 4) had failed to reach quorum and therefore couldn't pass a motion. The lack of turnout, as well as the reported free food, just required investigation. By approximately 8.30 pm, however, I had discovered the problem. Despite the enthusiasm the SU reps displayed, the good humour with which they delivered their updates, and the well-informed and plentiful debate on pressing student issues, one unfortunate fact remained: the meetings are just really (really) boring.

The meeting began with the expected cascade of bureaucracy: the reps ask for objections to the agenda, a hand is raised to quibble with some small detail, the microphone is passed and quibble conferred, said quibble is accepted by the chair and the agenda is updated. Then came the request for the approval of the

minutes of the previous meeting, a different, equally annoying hand is raised to quibble, the microphone is passed to them, they quibble, and on it goes.

Eventually, this tedious quibble-based routine comes to an end and the updates from the sabbatical officers begin. The “sabbs” were genuinely lively and engaging. Fergus (the SU president) was a great speaker, dropping in a few jokes, getting the crowd involved, and keeping his tone lively, but his enthusiasm did little to mask the unfortunate reality that the material is painfully dull. The process of making change in Cambridge will largely be one of compiling reports, presenting them to University officials in meetings, and then writing up the results of those meetings. Important? Yes. But thrilling for the viewing public? Not so much.

After these reports were over, however, debates began and the meeting was positively transformed. No longer was the audience a passive observer, and members of the JCRs spoke their minds and weighed in on the motions that the SU proposed. In this particular meeting, much of the talk revolved around a proposal to end the ban on part-time jobs for students, and one after the other, students stood up and weighed in with differing points of view, potential abuses of the policy, and effects on students in different situations.

It feels almost strange saying this about a student-politics meeting, but it was a joy to behold. Not only was every speaker well-informed, but they were passionate, articulate and respectful. I felt like I was watching a game of tennis: not only was my head changing direction towards each speaker, but also my mind: as each brought new information and perspectives, they pulled me successively back and forth to their point of view.

Once these debates were over and the voting began to take place, I was all the more frustrated by the lack of turnout in previous meetings. SU officers, as well as JCR reps, put in so much time and work into furthering student needs, and genuinely care about the welfare of those they stand for. But because of the low turnouts, motions have not even been voted on in months. So, is it the fault of students for not turning up? Of course not. As a lowly humanities student, I happen to do a degree where I can go to a two-hour SU meeting for a laugh and carry on like nothing happened. I have it on good authority, though, that time is incredibly valuable for Cambridge students when you have labs to attend, problem sheets to fill in, or Mechano to construct (I assume that's what engineers do). When every spare moment in Cambridge counts, dedicating 120 minutes of your evening to suffering through

officer updates must be an even more painful prospect.

My fix for the SU meetings? A very simple rule. If the information can be relayed in an email, don't say it in the meeting. We're looking to trim about an hour from the meeting to keep turn-out high, so this would mean some pretty radical cuts. The agenda already keeps students up to date with the SU officers, so I have no clue why they waste our time giving meeting attendees the second run-down. If people have problems with the agenda or minutes, I see no problem with quibbling electronically beforehand (so I don't have to listen).

Ultimately, the unique power of the SU meetings is that it facilitates people going back and forth, a really effective form of discussion because of just how enthusiastic and knowledgeable our students and SU staff are. But with attention spans dwindling, and the lack of time in the Cambridge-student schedule, we need to aim lower with the time frame and focus only on that. TikToks are out of reach I understand, but a feature-film duration is surely beyond the pale. If you want to attract students consistently, keep it simple: meetings should be for debate around motions and voting on motions. Oh, and keep it up with the pizza.

“The last two meetings...failed to meet quorum”

Will McLaughlin

Science

The strange death of the intrepid explorer

Sam Hudson considers how modern-day exploration has come to be such a farce

May Week of 2023 was the most amusing of my life thus far. The catastrophic implosions of both the Titan submersible and a Union presidency provided ample entertainment for us sadists on Cambridge Twitter.

Of course, it has been quite usual for politicians to have ignominious downfalls. But explorers have avoided this treatment, at least until recently. Earhart, Mallory, Shackleton, Livingstone, and Captain Cook were all viewed as heroes in the traditional canon despite their untimely deaths. It would suffice to say that the five aboard the Titan were not canonised in this tradition, despite the insistence of OceanGate – the company which made the Titan – that all aboard were “true explorers”. Twitter’s reaction seemed to be one of overwhelming derision rather than respectful mourning. My suggestion to replace Pembroke’s nautilus-themed May Ball with a six-hour candlelit vigil was not taken seriously by anyone but the *Daily Mail*, whose hunt for actual outrage left them clutching at straws.

Today’s explorers are viewed at best as quixotic playboys and at worst as opulent narcissists. Hamish Harding, a Pembroke alumni, billionaire, and unfortunate occupant of the Titan, certainly fits within the former category. Having made his fortune in both IT consulting and trading private jets, Harding’s achievements include a trip to space on Jeff Bezos’s “Blue Origin” rocket, a dive to the Mariana Trench (the deepest point on Earth), and establishing the first regular private jet service to Antarctica.

Caviar and blinis (I imagine) aboard a Gulfstream jet make a contrast to Roald Amundsen and his desperate entourage eating their sleigh dogs, it is true, but it is interesting to consider how modern-day exploration came to be such a farce. It is not as if the exploration of the past was immune from the extravagant class privilege we see today. Ernest Shackleton came from a wealthy, landowning, Anglo-Irish background. His arch-rival, Robert Scott, was born a member of the naval aristocracy. George Mallory was privately educated at Winchester and an acquaintance of the Bloomsbury group.

Going back further, Alexander von Humboldt was the son of a Prussian court chamberlain. Though there have been notable exceptions, exploration has largely been a rich man’s game, even through its golden age in the public imagination.

Some may argue that today’s explorers contribute little to science compared to their forebears, and they would be right. It goes without saying that a first can only ever happen once. Achieving ever-more obscure “firsts” or beating records by ever-diminishing amounts can only contribute so much. In OceanGate’s case, we’ve learned (not that it was even necessary) that the “first deep-sea submersible to use a carbon fibre construction”

should almost certainly be the last. Stockton Rush, the CEO of OceanGate and captain of the Titan during the ill-fated voyage, was warned numerous times that the safety of his submersible was dubious. Alas, he did not listen.

It is, of course, all too easy to take potshots at Rush. He certainly deserves it, but it has already been done so many times before it would be lazy to indulge in it. His bullheadedness could have been considered bravery – rather than a terminal flaw – if only he were born a century or two earlier. Where would we all be if everyone had just listened to the received wisdom for all eternity? Most

likely cowering at the sight of an eclipse in some squalid hole.

My more controversial contention here is that Rush, Harding and the other crewmates were indeed the “true explorers” that OceanGate insisted they

“
Today’s explorers are viewed at best as quixotic playboys and at worst as opulent narcissists

were. They, bar the tragic inclusion of 19-year-old Suleman Dawood, fit very much within the stereotypical profile of historical explorers as largely wealthy and almost entirely male. Their lack of commonsense and glut of irresponsibility are shared with many of the greats.

And so there was a sixth fatality aboard the Titan: that of the general concept of an “explorer”. The practical, romantic necessity of exploration has been emphatically obsoleted by modern science. There was absolutely no need for Rush to test whether a carbon fibre hull was viable. Our mastery of the laws of nature meant that material scientists and engineers knew long in advance it was not safe at the pressures demanded. The very desire to become something which cannot exist in the modern-day killed the crew of the Titan.

The intrepid explorer seems to have died twice: the first time as farce, the second as tragedy. The farce is obvious, the tragedy maybe less so. Is it not, after all, something to be celebrated that we have reached a point where science need not be put to the test by those who are too headstrong for their own good? Quite possibly. But exploration captured the public imagination in a way that modern science never can. And if anything will kill the modern scientist, it will not be their own brave stupidity but sheer boredom.

Research Roundup

Live fast, die young – this Aussie marsupial commits mass suicide after sacrificing sleep for sex

Though it may sound like the ideal night out to some, you would not want to be a male *Antechinus*. Research published last week showed that male *Antechinus*, a small genus of marsupial, similar in appearance to a mouse, swap sleep for sex during the mating season ultimately ending in the “synchronous deaths of all males at the end of their only mating season”. It is not known what exactly leads to this mass death, but it is thought to be a combination of environmental triggers and the suppression of the immune system caused by the high levels of corticosteroids released by testosterone during the mating season.

Researchers also compared oxalic acid levels – an indicator of sleep deprivation – in male and female *Antechinus* before and after the mating season. Measured levels declined in both across the mating season but were much lower in males due to their... hyperactivity. It is thought the *Antechinus*’ extreme horniness is due to evolutionary pressures resulting from their short lifespan. Getting only one shot at mating, they have to shoot it. In contrast to the unfortunate males, female *Antechinus* usually survive the raunchy romp and live for at least a year longer. While a few lucky males make it through the mating season alive, they are rendered sterile by processes not yet understood. At least they had fun while it lasted...

SLIM Jim – Japanese moon lander wriggles out of sticky situation

After facing a mission-threatening hitch, a Japanese lunar lander has been able to resume its mission. The “Slim” probe had smashed the record for lunar precision, landing within 100m of its target area (20/01). But after its solar cells failed to generate any electricity, many feared the mission would end prematurely. Pictures taken from a small robotic rover carried by the lander showed that the probe had landed belly-first, making it impossible to orient its solar panels correctly. Though Slim’s battery was hibernated, there was hope that the moon’s orbit may carry the probe’s solar cells back into the sunlight. This has now indeed happened and Slim has been able to continue its mission analysing olivine rocks on the lunar surface. Olivine rocks are believed to have been formed early in the development of planets and so can help scientists better understand how the moon was formed.

‘Everything you do, you do it for the future generations’

Sophie Denny speaks to Dr Shaun Fitzgerald and Dr Antoinette Nestor about their work at the Centre for Climate Repair, COP28 and the future of the climate crisis

On 13 December 2023, COP28 closed with a landmark agreement said to mark the “beginning of the end” for fossil fuels. Dr Shaun Fitzgerald, director of the Centre for Climate Repair in Cambridge, acknowledges that this is “a momentous change”, but reminds me that “it’s taken nigh on 30 years to state the blindingly obvious”. Both he and Dr Antoinette Nestor, the centre’s engagement manager, are keen to note the achievement of bringing “the people and the countries that are oil producing into the conversation”, yet there is still much work to be done.

The centre was founded to develop “an integrated, holistic strategy”, tackling the root cause of climate change by coordinating research efforts and “navigat[ing] different pathways” to everyone else. Fitzgerald believes this success comes “from bottom up”. “Political systems are failing us, but I am an eternal optimist, and I don’t think people are failing us.” This approach is what drew Nestor to the campaign,

wanting to bring these topics into the everyday so that “people can engage and understand what is happening and why climate repair is important”.

The term ‘climate repair’ is a significant one. While reducing carbon emissions is important, we also need to focus on actively repairing the climate by removing existing emissions from the atmosphere. Emissions reduction is “critically necessary, but not sufficient to stave off the worst effects of climate change”, with the greenhouse gases released until we reach net zero worsening the harmful “insulating blanket” we have already created. “We’ve got to bend the curve on greenhouse gas levels, not just the rate at which we are emitting carbon dioxide.” The need for action is acute, with Fitzgerald recalling a speech from the UN Ambassador for the islands of Palau: “One or two metres of sea level rise for my people is not a case of losing a bit of beach. There is no country left.” “It’s much more than a little bit of beach loss. It’s actually a whole people, a whole way of life,” Nestor adds, telling me that

a one-metre rise in sea levels is estimated to cost Bangladesh 20% of its landmass. Climate change is impacting more than just weather systems; it is threatening to destroy entire cultures.

This is why it is vital that we are not “wasting resources on projects that will never see the light of day”. One of the centre’s aims is to refreeze the ice caps, working on research that “could make a real difference, certainly within a period of five years”. Every option has its pros and cons, leading Fitzgerald to believe that “a basket approach is likely going to be the one that society needs to consider”. This will only be achieved through collaboration, something both Fitzgerald and Nestor are optimistic about following their attendance at COP28. It was a “unique experience”, Nestor notes, likening the pass to get into the conference to “the golden ticket” from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. “Having them [COPs] in person really creates that synergy moment that you cannot really have if they were online,” she says, with Fitzgerald recalling the “open, frank, uncomfortable

conversations” they were able to have.

These conferences are vital for countries to come together, share knowledge, tackle legal questions and plan for the future. “It’s beholden on us to develop a knowledge base, so that the next generation are not then just left with a blank piece of paper,” Fitzgerald explains. “We are here for good, for the betterment of the world and the betterment of each other [...] I do think we will rise to this challenge.” Nestor shares his optimism: “I would say you cannot be pessimistic [...] everything you do, you do it for the future generations.”

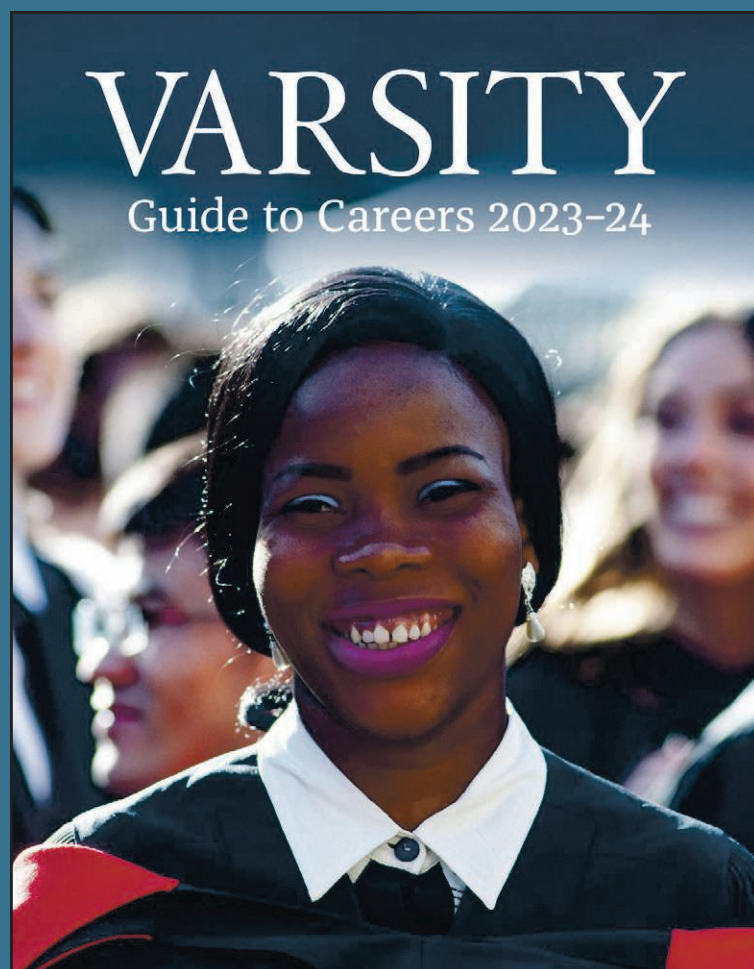
The importance of the youth has been a recurring theme throughout our conversation, with Fitzgerald believing the older generation “have spectacularly failed”. Both are driven by the possibility of being asked: “What did you do? You could have done something and you didn’t do it,” hence

their focus on creating a lasting legacy that can be continued by the youth of today. Nestor reinforces that students’ voices need to be heard: “They can make a difference, no matter what area they work [in], because climate repair is not just science, it’s very broad.” They are emphatic in stating that “everyone can make a difference”. Perhaps we just need to ask ourselves: “What did you do?”



DR ANTOINETTE NESTOR ▲

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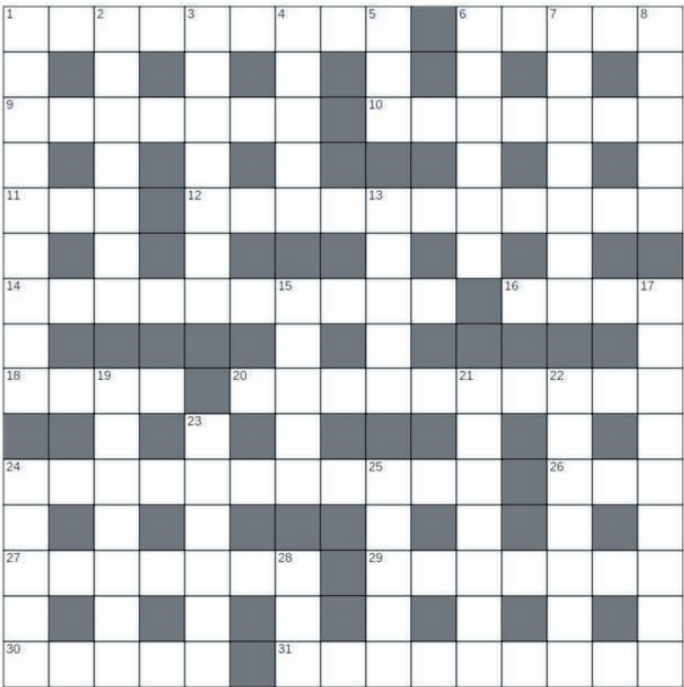
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The Smoking Area

Varsity Crossword



Quick by Tiro

- Across**
1 Modern heating devices (4,5)
6 A Royal family (5)
9 Sort of taxi (7)
10 Capital city (7)
11 Delivery company (3)
12 What some dons have (11)
14 Dairy product (4,6)
16 'Rapidly, if you can' (4)
18 Meaty sauce (4)
20 Sort of sweet (4)
24 Signing up to (11)
26 Fail (3)
27 Have one's job taken away (4,3)
29 Modified (7)
30 Indian city area (5)
31 Where you live (9)
- Down**
1 Fast food item (9)
2 Memory loss (7)
3 An ocean (7)
4 Girl's name (5)
5 Like a wallflower (3)
6 Launch forward (6)
7 Splits up (7)
8 1st, 2nd, etc. in Tripos maybe (5)
13 90s band (5)
15 Digital text images (5)
17 Game bird (9)
19 An angel in Christianity (7)
21 Ready to defend (2,5)
22 City in the North (7)
23 Sea creatures (6)
24 Leafy meal (5)
25 Touchscreen devices (5)
28 Natural protection from the cold (3)

Cryptic by Bombe

- Across**
1 Drop instance that distinguishes god from God (5,4)
6 Aggravation from Dangerspoons (5)
9 City where one can still find much Georgian Architecture? (7)
10 Rework odes lacking opening with Nick, an author (7)
11 A small quiet snake (3)
12 Out of sorts? Add anything, any-time. (5,3,3)
14 Feverish denier takes test...curious (10)
16 Sad student-athlete (4)
18 Prolonged conversation for Cambridge leader that was found inside cow (4)
20 Supo on the up after big bottle of champagne: greatest work ever done! (6,4)
24 Naked small mother is the least we can ask for (4,7)
26 Causing pain, we hear a lion's shout (3)
27 Nothing on following light satire (7)
29 In my opinion, this is how Romans began to count? (1,3,3)
30 Jewel shelf concealed in Pembroke (5)
31 Moving past those quickly (4,5)
- Down**
1 Deadliness from Tit Hall mauling Ely extremists (9)
2 Dog hurt domesticated animal (7)
3 King Charles the Third finishing sovereign. About to begin, then his mother... (7)
4 ...getting old, starts to announce guidelines about alcohol (5)
5 Demise found in Cavendish (3)
6 Stress pronunciation (6)
7 Tear into Jelly Monster from Beowulf (7)
8 Not what it was, starts to reveal Union speaker: Taylor...'yay?' (5)
13 Inbetweeners airing between 10 and 12 (5)
15 Spring in Mediterranean country (5)
17 In the other place, he leers cunningly with...woes oddly (9)
19 Woman and Man: a sweet thing (7)
21 Weird Mathmo puts on mass to become gigantic (7)
22 People involved in cuppers on Saturday (7)
23 Hairless remedy (6)
24 How to win at Limbo Down Under? (5)
25 Permanently damages male taking AMES so it's said (5)
28 Quick sleep from half dose of Napalm (3)

ANSWERS TO PUZZLES ON INSTAGRAM @VARSITYCAMBRIDGE
TWO CROSSWORDS ARE SET INTO THE SAME GRID – ONE QUICK, ONE CRYPTIC.
THEY HAVE DIFFERENT CLUES AND DIFFERENT ANSWERS.
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1988's two-wheeled submarines

By Amelia Platt

Walking around Cambridge, I'm always struck by the improbable number of bikes (and the improbable ways in which they're parked).

Student bike owners of Cambridge past and present are connected by the problem of theft. A 1964 *Varsity* article mournfully describes the nefarious ways of bike thieves who create "mutilated and paint washed cripples" that are "unrecognisable to their former owners." The writer looks wistfully forward to the "invention of special radar-controlled locks opening to the sound of the master's voice," which will end bike thievery once and for all. Another proposed invention is the "Boadicea Bike." The invention consisting of a knife on each side of the front wheel would be "invaluable for battle-axe girls

making the long trek over the flatlands of Huntingdon Road." The tongue-in-cheek tone does nothing to dispel the reference to the darker reality of women's safety in Cambridge. The most impressive instance of bike theft in the archives is visual – a photograph of a police frogman dredging a stolen bike from the Cam. According to the caption, police were surprised by the sheer number of bikes dumped in the river, with as many as 69 bikes recovered from the river in the weeks leading up to the photo.

The 1964 column ends with the writer imagining an Oxford–Cambridge bike race as the next big university event. Cycling has also been responsible for some great *Varsity* headlines, with favourites including "Saddled" and "Testing Time

for Cambridge Brakes." The winning headline must be 1951's "More Accidents Than Last Year" due to its absolute commitment to the facts and nothing else. Concerns over Cambridge cyclists' lax attitude to safety seemed to reach a peak in 1953, which saw the hosting of an exhibition titled "Better Roadmanship." Inspector Edwards is quoted (perhaps rather pointedly) by *Varsity* as saying: "We naturally hope many undergraduates will attend the exhibition."

Bikes also have the prestige of featuring on the front cover of the first *Varsity* paper available on our digital archive (Issue 524 – 2000). Fittingly, the stakes were high – the story is described as the "bike racks scandal." Controversy arose surrounding the introduction of new bike racks outside the History Faculty. Faculty staff launched a campaign to get rid of the offending racks, with one don describing them as looking like "meat hooks." Student responses were slightly more positive, with Simon Elliston Ball giving the following exclusive to *Varsity*: "I didn't even notice the bike racks."

Easy Sudoku

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

Hard Sudoku

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

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Note of clarification

In Issue #919, a Comment article (pg. 3) titled "It's rewarding privilege with privilege" contained incorrect information pertaining to the allocation of funds given to St John's College by independent schools. The article claimed that St John's gives "ex-students of elite private schools grants for being ex-students of elite private schools". St John's does not offer any grants, scholarships, or funds solely or exclusively for students who attended independent schools.

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Trial and error: morning routines are out, dance routines are in

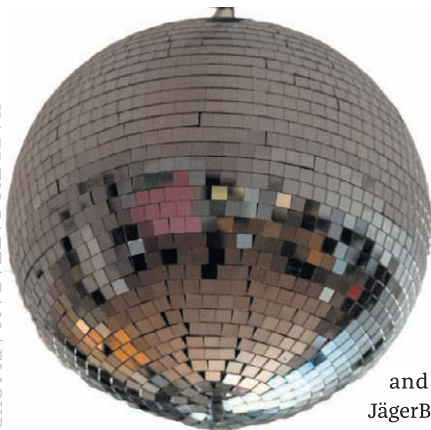
Izzy Benardout swaps jägerbomb-fuelled boogieing for something slightly more professional

Apparently, adding structure and routine to your life is a surefire way to increase productivity and overall mental wellbeing. Whether it's a morning meditation, a skincare regimen, or the dreaded scorn of a revision timetable, creating a structure to meld your days around is supposedly better for you than waking up at 11am, eating cereal out of the box and not attending lectures for three weeks (who would have thought?!). So, with the hope of shiny new Lent Term as the wind beneath my two left wings, my friend and I put our names down for CUTAZZ's beginner commercial class as our weekly 'exercise' instalment.

When I proudly told my mother that I was returning to my childhood hobby, she asked what exactly 'commercial' was. Gone were the days of tutus, kirby grips, and dubious *Dance Moms* behaviour; I was now entering the world of what I described as "a bit like street dance, but more girly!" In all honesty, I wasn't quite sure myself what 'commercial' was, but my friend assured me that I'd like it, and so I put my name down on the beautifully organised spreadsheet (I'd expect nothing less from a choreographer).

When 5:30pm on Friday rolled around, I donned my most exercise-appropriate clothing, grabbed a water bottle, and headed to Queen's College for the class. Evidently, our nervous magnetism was bringing everyone we had ever known into our orbit, as bumping into mutual friends and telling them we were on our way to a dance class elicited amusing reactions. Naturally, we are stalwarts of the Revs dance floor; yet dipping our pointed toes into the murky waters of a dance class was all new to us - and our bemused friends.

Once we had arrived at Queen's, got lost and eventually found the right place, we paid for the class and entered the room - which I will henceforth refer to as the 'studio' for the sake of professionalism. The first thing we noticed was how insanely good the vibes were - everyone was so happy! Of course, dancing to a *Grease* MegaMix after a bottle of Sainsbury's cheapest wine



and two JägerBombs brings joy, but the group's excitement for another term of dance was palpable - and reassuring. After making ourselves known to the teacher as first-timers, we quickly befriended another newbie and found our place at the back of the room, where we could happily copy the person in front and slip out the door if you needed to have a smoking-induced coughing fit (just me, not my friend).

First was the warm up, and when the first bar of Ariana Grande's new, morally ambiguous song 'yes, and?' rang out from the speaker, I heard an exclamation of "slay!" from my friend. With a 98% match Spotify Blend, my friend and I know that you cannot bust moves without good music.

Therefore, as we star-jumped, high-kneed, and lunged to the beat, the Angevin Room could have been my first-year room, where I accidentally gave regular performances to the Jesus

students living opposite my window (sorry)!

Then, the routine itself. The regulars had been learning the piece since the end of Michaelmas, yet the teacher was more than willing to recap the choreography so us newcomers could pick it up. While the routine is for CUTAZZ's upcoming show - which I will most definitely be attending - there is no pressure to participate in the showcase if you do not want to. The supportive, laid-back environment of the class stood out from the moment we entered, and it's clear that this extends to wider society.

An hour flew by, and by the end of the class, we had learnt the choreography to a verse and the chorus of one of Nicki Minaj's biggest hits. While my friend and I were by no means hitting every beat or every position, the sense of accomplishment was undoubtedly there. Firstly, attending in the first place was a big step. Trying new things halfway through your second year can feel uncomfortably reminiscent of freshers, and generally I am quite happy mousing between Sidney, Sigdwick, and Sainsbury's - so I was quietly proud of myself for going. Secondly, while many refuse to accept dance as a sport, it is most definitely exercise, and attending a class is part of my longer term plan to improve my relationship with it. As someone who was traumatised by PE at school and is generally apathetic to competition, sport was never for me. I never got that rush of endorphins that everyone talked about, the feeling that you could run forever, even when your ankles had turned to jelly and you could taste blood and regret.

Yet, as we walked back to college with a spring in our step and choreography to practise, we felt pumped-up and empowered. In fact, we both concluded that we were "ready to hit Mash" following our foray into the world of commercial dance. CUTAZZ holds classes every day of the week, and I could easily see myself becoming a regular attendee. So, if you are at a loose end one evening of the week and fancy hitting the dance floor, I could not recommend it enough.



Izzy Boogie-dout's top tips

Stay hydrated: and by that I mean, get drunk! Liquid courage is liquid gold - the best dancers carbo- and cosmo-load before the club!

Wear appropriate footwear: cutting shapes causes creases, so leave the new Air Forces at home.

Avoid techno at all costs: the finger-guns can only go so far - there is no choreographic inspiration to be found in 3 hours of 'untz untz'

Take up space: not in a 2014, 'justgirlythings', self-help way - but literally. Twirl to your heart's content, spatial awareness is a social construct.

Recipe corner



Linguine in a creamy parmesan sauce with buttery toasted breadcrumbs

by Charlotte Knorzer

Ingredients

- 1 85g linguine
- 2 egg yolks
- 4tbsp parmesan
- 2-3 sprigs thyme
- Freshly cracked black pepper to taste
- Salt
- 2 tbsp Panko breadcrumbs
- 1tbsp butter

Method

① Generously salt your water and bring to a boil, then cook pasta according to packet instructions.

② In the meantime, mix your parmesan, some freshly cracked black pepper, and both egg yolks in a large bowl.

③ Moving on to the topping, remove the leaves from the thyme sprigs and gently toast your breadcrumbs in some butter. When they have reached a golden colour, add a little salt and turn the stove off.

④ Drain your pasta and immediately add to the parmesan-egg mixture, saving a cup of pasta water. Make sure to use the bowl for this instead of adding the cheese and eggs directly to the hot pot. The yolks will curdle, leaving you with a separated sauce. Toss well until a silky sauce without lumps has formed, adding pasta water if needed.

⑤ Plate and add toasted breadcrumbs, a little more black pepper, and thyme leaves.

Notebook: time warps and tat in the bleak midwinter

Emily Lawson-Todd collects her thoughts on the quarter-life crisis, material memories, and her fears for the future

I think I'm going through a quarter-life crisis. At least, that's what I told my tutor when he asked how I was doing (prompted by the fact that my library books were so utterly overdue that the librarian sent him an email wondering whether I had died). After all, at 21, I'm the right age to be having one. Not to mention, all signs point towards it. I recently invested in a fringe (read: my friend gave me one using blunt kitchen scissors at 1am when we were both drunk), and I tried to reinvent myself as a girl who drinks herbal tea (bagged, not loose. My efforts at reinvention have their limits).

I don't think the crisis is spurred by age as much as it is spurred by how my stage in life is marked by those pre-graduation jitters. For the first time in my life, the world has unfurled itself before me, a completely blank canvas, mine for the taking. Except this is utterly terrifying to me. The world may be my oyster, but I currently have a raging allergy to seafood. I've been half-heartedly slinging my (metaphorical, I

promise) crap at the wall and seeing what sticks; grad scheme applications, master's applications. Despite absolutely hating the great outdoors, I have even considered the idea of sacking it all in and running off to the peak district to work in a Youth Hostel. I'm screaming into the void, and hoping the void will answer back with a fifteen-point plan of what to do after gripping the praelector's hand and mumbling some latin, because the alternative is too terrifying to bear.

Yet all of these ramblings are fairly impractical. Really what I should be worrying about is how I'm going to manage to tidy up my room one final time when I leave. My problem is that I absolutely love tat, which I blame on the emotional beats of Toy Story that worked a little too well on six-year old me. I even began to feel guilty about chucking tram tickets because what if they had a family? However, I'm not alone in my love for tat. I think of the V&A museum and the snuffboxes lined up in the glass cabinets, all ornately decorated, highlighting how we have always taken pride in the most menial of stuff. In a way, there is very little difference between these snuffboxes with their gilded casings and plush velvet interiors, and the pastel minimalism of Lost Marys. Even the

name Lost Mary sounds like something straight out of Lyrical Ballads – though if any Romantic was to be inclined to huffing through vapes like nobody's business, it would definitely be Byron (Coleridge is a close second, however).

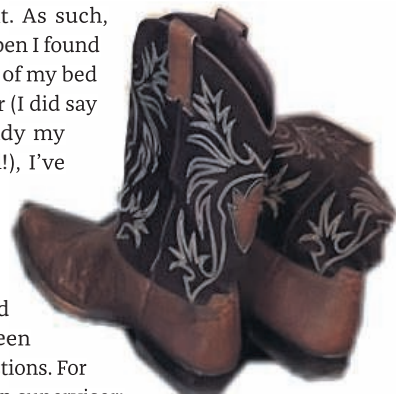
My room has also been collecting crap because I've been sick recently. Like clockwork, two weeks into every term of my time at Cambridge, I have found myself bedbound with some sort of terrible illness (the common cold, usually). Maybe it's the impending deadlines and their accompanying stresses wreaking havoc on my immune system, or maybe it's a fortnight of Cambridge tap water breaking down my weak and feeble Yorkshire-water-accustomed body, but without fail, I find myself confined to my bed like a malnourished Victorian lady.

This latest head cold has made it so my eyes can't look at any screen without giving me a thumping headache, which unfortunately has deprived me of my two greatest screen-related pleasures: watching *Real Housewives of Cheshire* and watching 30-second *Family Guy* clips with crap mobile gameplay underneath on Instagram Reels for 7 hours at a time. That leaves me with some good

old-fashioned analogue entertainment. As such, armed with a pen I found down the side of my bed covered in hair (I did say I needed to tidy my room after all!), I've been writing. My room has been collecting tat, but in my sickbed stupor, I've been collecting questions. For my dissertation supervisor:

why are there so many poems from the 1570s shaped like swords? How do ciphers work? If Sir Francis Walsingham was alive today, would he have enjoyed the daily Guardian cryptic crossword? (Maybe that last one should be left unsaid in my next supervision). For my friend three doors down: will you please buy me a pack of those Lemsip cold and flu tablets? For myself: when are you going to Hoover your carpet?

Even when I'm ill, I can't stop collecting. I've been collecting all sorts for three years; rejection emails and illnesses, photographs and friendships, formal crockery (totally legally), and most importantly, memories. I like to think that if I am going through a quarter-life crisis, then collecting – like a dad going through a mid-life crisis getting really into coin-collecting – isn't too bad of a way to express it.



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Arts

An eclectic future at Kettle's Yard

Robin Stephens reviews 'Making New Worlds: Li Yuan-chia and Friends'

A saucepan, lace curtains and plastic tomatoes are just some of the unusual works on display at the current exhibition at Kettle's Yard. 'Making New Worlds: Li Yuan-chia and Friends' provides a sample of the artworks which resulted from the studio of Li Yuan-chia in Cumbria in the seventies and eighties. Li was a Chinese artist who, after spending time in Italy, Taiwan and London, settled in Cumbria, where he bought a property and set up the LYC Museum and Art Gallery. Much like Kettle's Yard, this eclectic artists' space brought together creatives in an environment which encouraged experimentation and resulted in some fascinating artworks, many of which are on display in the exhibition.

The exhibition is presented across three rooms in the contemporary Kettle's Yard extension. Each room draws upon different themes explored at the LYC Museum. In the first room, Li's idea of the cosmic point is revealed: a concept of small things within larger systems, referring simultaneously, as the curators put it, "to a planet, or to a grain of sand". The idea of the 'cosmic point' is present in each artwork in this room, asking us to consider the formation of the world around us. Many of these cosmic works here seem to be in motion, whether



▲ ROBIN STEPHENS AND VARSITY

logical finds table, encouraging us to dig through the rest of the seventy or so objects in this busy room. There are artworks hung from floor to ceiling, recalling similar displays throughout Kettle's Yard's many, unforgettable rooms with valuable works hung perilously close to foot height. The parallels between this room and the house do not end here, as some works in this room have been taken from the house itself, including Ovidiu Maitec's 'Radar 2'—a carved piece of walnut resembling a radar antennae, uniting the natural and the technological. In fact, this whole room feels like the house, with a mass of eclectic objects displayed very much from floor to ceiling. The Edes collected natural objects such as stones and presented them with the same respect as they did a work by some of the most

logical finds table, encouraging us to dig through the rest of the seventy or so objects in this busy room. There are artworks hung from floor to ceiling, recalling similar displays throughout Kettle's Yard's many, unforgettable rooms with valuable works hung perilously close to foot height. The parallels between this room and the house do not end here, as some works in this room have been taken from the house itself, including Ovidiu Maitec's 'Radar 2'—a carved piece of walnut resembling a radar antennae, uniting the natural and the technological. In fact, this whole room feels like the house, with a mass of eclectic objects displayed very much from floor to ceiling. The Edes collected natural objects such as stones and presented them with the same respect as they did a work by some of the most

At the heart of this exhibition is a kind of opti-



▲ ROBIN STEPHENS

mism. Across the rooms, we are invited to consider a wide range of objects, all linked to both Kettle's Yard and Li's way of doing things differently. The exhibition lives up to its title, Making New Worlds, and certainly encourages us to do so too. In an age of technological anxiety and climate crisis, 'Making New Worlds' suggests a hopeful hybrid of technology and nature, as it dawns on us that the wonder of each room and display case is the unity between the two, a rare heartening gallery experience which suggests a new way forward—a new world.

Making New Worlds: Li Yuan-chia and Friends is open at Kettle's Yard until February 18th. Free entry with a CamCard.

At the heart of this exhibition is a kind of optimism

that be through electricity, or by reacting to the airflow in the room, as the many mobile-like artworks spin and sway as you move around them.



▲ ROBIN STEPHENS

At the centre of this room, Takis' 'Signal Series II' intermittently sends out pulses of light through the doorway, evoking shipping signals, or morse code; the artwork communicates with us in a language we don't fully understand.

The technological theme dissipates slightly in the second room, and is replaced by something more natural. In the middle of this room a low plinth covered in rough-looking earthen bowls and precisely arranged ceramic sticks acts almost as an archaeo-

The artwork communicates with us in a language we don't fully understand

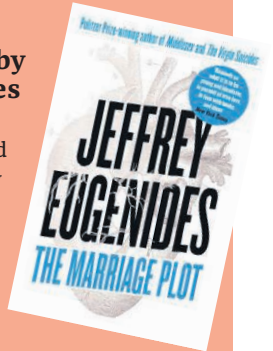
eminent artists of their time. This room similarly curates pebbles and chunks of wood and shows us the importance of nature to both the Edes and Li.

Upstairs, the exhibition moves into a more interactive room with works by contemporary artists, all replicating some kind of typical household object, but adding a hidden dimension. On a side wall, for example, a long kitchen cabinet reveals a surreal culinary world of art, including a video work projected into a frying pan. Adjacent to this, is a fascinating interactive work comprising a series of small bowls and vases, intended for visitors to leave offerings in. Providing a glimpse into the lives of those who visit Kettle's Yard through their pockets, the bowls are

Varsity's favourite reads

The Marriage Plot by Jeffrey Eugenides (2011)

For those who find graduation ominously approaching, those who find themselves in the unreceiving corner of a love triangle, or those who actually just need to find themselves, look no further. *The Marriage Plot* is a thoughtful, insightful *bildungsroman* that goes beyond campus. Some readers may take issue with the constant name-dropping of writers, philosophers, and religious figures (Eugenides is never beating the pretentious allegations), but when writing about the young and over-educated, this is exactly on brand. We're talking about 23-year-old Ivy-League graduates—pretentiousness comes with the territory. You are all Cambridge students—lean into it. - Laila Hussey, Arts Editor



Travels with Myself and Another by Martha Gellhorn (1978)

It's a shame that Gellhorn is best remembered as Ernest Hemingway's third wife. Her travel memoir proves she's so much more: a fearless reporter, inventive wordsmith, and dry wit. Above all, Gellhorn is an adventurer in the old-fashioned sense, always ready to drop everything and journey to the world's farthest reaches. Her screwball antics—from hunting submarines in the Caribbean, paddling up the Amazon, evading KGB agents in Moscow, or setting off firecrackers in a Hong Kong hotel room—make for a great escape read. But Gellhorn's memoir also has real depth: her pluck and humour in the face of hardship, her refusal to bow to authority, and her strident individualism continue to inspire. - Flóra Kiss, Arts Editor



Our Wives Under the Sea by Julia Armfield (2022)

Sometimes you just need to spend a few hours with a really beautiful book that will absolutely make you cry if you let it. *Our Wives Under the Sea* follows Leah, a woman who spent months trapped in a submarine, and her wife Miri, who is doing everything she can to bring back normality. The slow pace and rambling prose may not be what everyone is looking for, but if you just want to spend some time rotting in bed, ignoring that essay I know you have due, and enjoying some lovely words, *Our Wives* is for you. - Poppy Miller, Arts Writer



The still life genre lives on

Lucy Ansell finds traces of a forgotten art form in college formals and Instagram brunches

The still life painting genre is criminally underrated. It is also undeniably linked to the Cambridge student aesthetic. Historically regarded as the 'lowest' of the painting genres, still life is often treated as an obsolete form. But is this valuation correct? Its depictions of the 'low' and association with the 'feminine' domestic sphere led academics of the 17th century, such as Andrea Sacchi, to regard it as unsophisticated. Much to my joy, this valuation has not persisted today, with greats such as Picasso and Juan Gris producing many wonderful still lifes. Within the context of the college formals and Instagram dumps, I would like to propose there is nothing shameful about artistically arranging dinner.

When I refer to 'still life' I am talking about paintings of dinners, food and flowers. I can appreciate the delicate extravagance of a 17th-century Dutch banquet scene. I find Paul Cézanne's apples, which almost seem to roll outside of their canvas and into my hands, to be fuzzy, alive, and intimate. And I believe you can too.

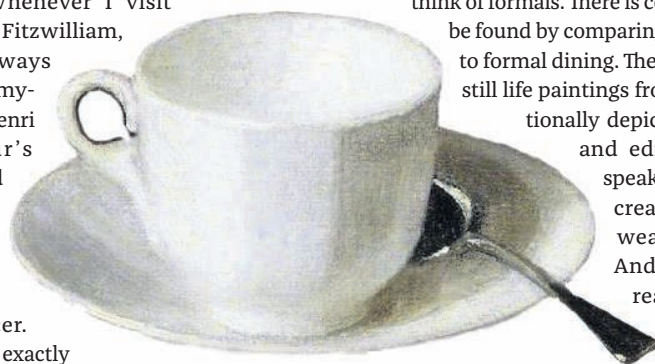
After Cézanne had created his apples with dynamic cross-hatchings, the genre of still life became permanently altered. Artists started to paint inani-

mate objects like they were vibrating or shifting. Virginia Woolf herself took note, writing that Cézanne's apples got "positively got redder & rounder & greener" the more she looked at them and suspected "some very mysterious quality of vibration in that picture". This reanimation of the still allowed artists to explore concerns over what was shifting and what was static. Claudia Tobin notes how this re-animation during the modern period affected "mode[s] of being" as well as a visual genre. It turns out the humble category of still life had a hand in shaping modern poetry, dance and sculpture.

Whenever I visit The Fitzwilliam, I always find myself drawn to Henri Fantin-Latour's 'White cup and saucer' (1864). And spoiler alert! It is just a little white cup and saucer. However, that is exactly



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THE FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM ▲

what I love about it. Still life pictures such as these draw attention to what is easily overlooked, emphasising the beauty to be found in the ordinary and the everyday. In fact, we share still lifes such as this all the time in our termly photo dumps or on BeReal. No humanities student is innocent from pretentiously glamourising their cup of coffee. Thankfully, we are in an age which supports this agenda, where the domestic sphere and cooking is no longer associated strictly with female housework or Frank boredom. It can be good, valued art. By liking my friend's snapshots, I like to think that the genre of still life encourages us to share intimate and imperfect moments with one another. It foregrounds a contemporary social connectivity.

When I think of food culture in Cambridge, I also think of formals. There is certainly a critique to be found by comparing traditional still life to formal dining. The Dutch and Flemish still life paintings from the 1600's traditionally depicted banquet meals and edible delicacies, to speak of the society's increasing urbanisation, wealth, and power. And how should we read formals alongside still lifes? Tightly woven into the fabric of the Oxbridge social aes-



▲ WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

thetic, our formals embody values of tradition, exclusivity and high-table hierarchy. In a research paper, MariaLaura Di Domenico and Nelson Phillips found the meals to be symbolic mediums which are "rites of passage and socialisation processes" for college members. It is a strange privilege for Oxbridge students to become so complacent and accustomed to weekly, three course suppers. Yet this practising for future business dinners is not so bizarre when one remembers that our ancient collegiate university was founded to predominantly educate the bureaucratic elite.

However, flaunting aristocratic values has come out of fashion in still life and might be prophetic for the Cambridge aesthetic. While I do not think formals will be abolished any time soon, perhaps in the future there will be radical changes made to the Oxbridge social ritual. But that would definitely spoil the traces of elitism, and tipsy fun of the candlelit dining experience.

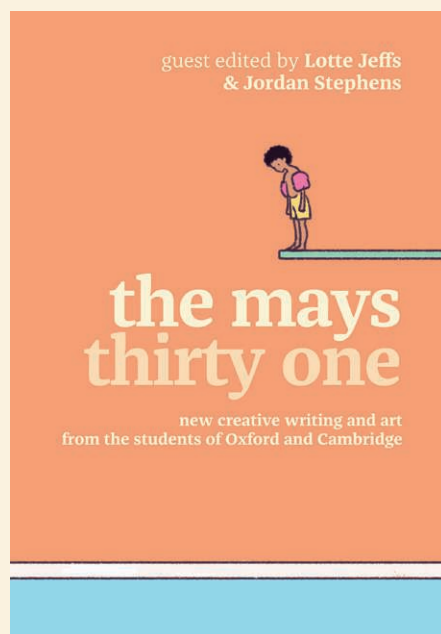
I advocate that you should go ahead and post that picture of your formal food or coffee date, to enjoy the art of still life in the student aesthetic.

GUEST EDITED BY **LOTTE JEFFS** & **JORDAN STEPHENS**



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Fashion



Let's circle back to 2004



Annia Krzoska unravels the iconic revival of 2004 fashion

With *Mean Girls* (2024) in the cinema and 2001's iconic *Murder on the Dancefloor* gracing the music charts, you'd be forgiven for confusing the mid-2020s with the mid-2000s. Today's fashion scene is no exception: the '20-Year Trend Cycle' is a well-known phenomenon, but when both 2004 and 2024's *Varsity* are discussing the perils of overlength trousers and students' love of tiny mini-skirts whilst Britney Spears' *Toxic* plays through the speakers at Revs, the similarities between the two decades become painfully apparent. *Varsity* 2004 was stylistically different from its 2024 counterpart. Instead of giving their opinions on stash, or making guides for your latest club outfits, our ancestors posed for colourful photoshoots and guided their readers on how to recreate the outfits by crediting the shops in the caption. Surprisingly, 2004 Cambridge students loved the Grafton charity shops almost as much as we do. The colour schemes in the 16 January 2004 article's presentation of the Mill Road charity shops may not have made a complete return, but some of the accessories would not be out of place in a current student's wardrobe. Perhaps we are wearing the literal same clothes as our library-dwelling predecessors. Some of my second-hand scarves look nearly identical to those showcased by the archives. Spooky.

While colourful prints had fallen slightly out of favour in the early 2020s in preference of the 'clean girl' aesthetic and minimalist capsule wardrobes, funky shirts and bright jumpers are rapidly returning. Pink chequered jumpers, layered jewellery, berets, and mini-skirts graced the page, just as they now grace King's Parade. Comparing one of the 2004 shoots to my friends' Instagram posts, the only distinguishing factor between the decades

is people's footwear. Today, we prefer to wear Dr. Martens and large boots to 2004's nude satin and round-toed flats with oddly placed straps. Shoes are surprisingly significant to the feel of an outfit, and the soft flats pictured in the articles 20 years ago definitely bring the ensembles down. Not all trends need a revival, so let's keep their eBay bidding counts at '0' and stick to the chunky boots.

The shrinking/growing of skirts has been happening in a circle since the 1800s, and even though the 1960s swore off floor-length dresses the 1970s was full of them. In 2004 and 2024, the maxi skirt and skirts "the size of a belt" share equal fame, but both decades also have a secret love for 1960s knee-length shift dresses (*Varsity* 2004 and 2023 both dedicated spreads to the 60s revival).

It's rare for a trend to die permanently. Even fluffy pink leg warmers have the potential to make a major comeback. In some ways, 2004 is an exact mirror of 2024 when it comes to fashion and media, but we have our twists when it comes to footwear and accessories. Move over chunky bracelets; it's the era of beaded crystals and knotted rainbow strings. We seem to prefer subtlety in 2024, but that's not a bad thing! 2024 is simply updating the fashion greats of the past and adapting their outfits for a new era.

Cambridge men's fashion has truly come full circle since 2004. Blazers, chunky scarves, and Converse blessed the fashion spread and, although suspenders have not made a popular return, similar outfits are seen gracing the aisles of Mainsbury's today. *Varsity*'s 'Q&A' column shared the sentiments of 2024's stylistic aims — praising simple, modern, and elegant ensembles. We still love the 1960s as a decade of fashion inspiration, but colourful print scarves seem to have taken a back seat in favour of

their crochet counterparts.

This trend cycle seems rooted in nostalgia. Most of us were raised watching *Mean Girls* (2004) on repeat, and with it back in cinemas is there any better time to fulfil our childhood dreams of dressing like Regina George? Also, with our need to reduce consumption, buying the literal same clothes as our early 2000s predecessors becomes a sustainable excuse to save money and stay fashionable. Of course, the trend cycle is a natural consequence of the limitations of design (let's be real, no one wants to dress like Sam Smith at the 2023 Brit Awards), but the early 2000s have been coming back with aggression. Notably, a lot of 2004's trends had earlier roots in the 60s and 80s. As children grow up, their adult selves need to meet the fashion goals they couldn't achieve back then.

Maybe in 20 years, *Varsity* will look back through the archives once again. 2024's trends are incredibly indebted to the past, but who knows where our lookbooks will go next? In 2048, we could be back to wearing jeans under dresses, or capri pants with trucker shorts. Fashion trends rarely die, even if they really should, so unless our clothing becomes AI-generated we should expect to see a tribute to 2024 fashion soon.

Creative director: Annia Krzoska

Photographer: Tomos Alwyn Davies

Models: Faith Cunningham, Alice Frecheville, Emily McDonagh, and Leo Kang



Music

Swift sweep or Rodrigo rout?

Sergio Niblett-Morales predicts who will be the big winner at this year's Grammy Awards

The nominations for the 66th Grammy Awards, due to take place on 5 February, have officially been released and there is a plethora of music to digest and discuss. Due to the enormous number of categories and artists, the focus of this article will be the “Big Four” categories (“Best New Artist”, “Song of the Year”, “Record of the Year” and “Album of the Year”), with brief breakdowns of the various nominees and speculations as to who will win each award.

Best New Artist

- Gracie Abrams • Fred again..
- Ice Spice • Jelly Roll
- Coco Jone • Noah Kahan
- Victoria Monét
- The War and Treaty

According to the Grammys, this category includes artists who have “achieved a breakthrough into the public consciousness and notably impacted the musical landscape.” Ice Spice, an American rapper whose popularity has risen exponentially since the success of her debut EP *Like...?* and numerous collaborations with artists such as PinkPantheress and Nicki Minaj, fits this definition perfectly. Propelled by the virality of her 2022 track ‘Munch (Feelin’ U)’ on TikTok and Twitter, Ice Spice ascended the charts and

broke into the mainstream. Fast forward to 2023 and Ice Spice is among the artists with the most top-five singles this year, including ‘Princess Diana’ with Nicki Minaj, ‘Karma’ with Taylor Swift and ‘Boy’s a liar Pt. 2’ with PinkPantheress. Evidently, she is well positioned to take home this category. A special mention should also go to Victoria Monét, who received the second highest number of nominations this year (seven, the same as Serban Ghenea and Phoebe Bridgers) for her debut RnB/soul album *Jaguar II*, and Coco Jones, who earned five nominations for her EP *What I Didn’t Tell You (Deluxe)*.

Song of the Year

The sheer amount of talent among the nominees makes this songwriting category anyone’s game. Lana Del Rey, Billie Eilish, Taylor Swift, SZA and Olivia Rodrigo are all frequently

- Record of the Year**
- Jon Batiste – ‘Worship’
 - boygenius – ‘Not Strong Enough’
 - Miley Cyrus – ‘Flowers’
 - Billie Eilish – ‘What Was I Made For? [From The Motion Picture “Barbie”]’
 - Victoria Monét – ‘On My Mama’
 - Olivia Rodrigo – ‘Vampire’
 - Taylor Swift – ‘Anti-Hero’
 - SZA – ‘Kill Bill’

ert narcissism I disguise as altruism/Like some kind of congressman?”), there is no clear front runner in this category.

It’s hard to ignore how many times Jack Antonoff appears on this list. His writing and production on Taylor Swift’s tenth album, *Midnights*, and Lana Del Rey’s ninth record, *Did You Know*

There’s A Tunnel Under Ocean Blvd, has earned

him a total of six nominations. However, the artist who has received the most nominations is SZA with nine. After the success of her sophomore album *SOS*, it would not be surprising if she won this award.

Record of the Year

“Record of the Year” is another category stacked with an incredible assortment of tracks from widely regarded artists. ‘On My Mama’, an upbeat horn-laden R&B track, deserves special attention as Monét

is the only artist on this list to have also been nominated for Best New Artist. The song has slowly been climbing the Bill-

“Big Four” categories in 2020.

Album of the Year

The last of the “Big Four”, this category encompasses albums from a diverse array of genres. For instance, Janelle Monáe’s *The Age Of Pleasure* includes the R&B/reggae single ‘Lipstick Lover’, a celebration of queer joy that is the jewel in the crown of this excellent record. After their debut album *Dirty Computer* was nominated for “Album Of The Year” in 2019, it was inevitable that their follow-up would be on the radar of the 2024 awards.

Having won “Album of the Year” in 2021, Jon Batiste also has the potential for a

- Album of the Year**
- Jon Batiste – *World Music Radio*
 - boygenius – *the record*
 - Miley Cyrus – *Endless Summer Vacation*
 - Lana Del Rey – *Did You Know That There’s A Tunnel Under Ocean Blvd*
 - Janelle Monáe – *The Age Of Pleasure*
 - Olivia Rodrigo – *GUTS*
 - Taylor Swift – *Midnights*
 - SZA – *SOS*

strong showing at this year’s awards, as does Lana Del Rey, whose failure to win “Album of the Year” for *Norman Fucking Rockwell* in 2020 was widely considered a major snub.

Of all the nominees, it is SZA who is likely to win the most awards, as *SOS* was a monumental success and spawned many chart-topping tracks.

Overall, the 2024 Grammy Awards feature countless close categories with no clear front runners. For fans and artists alike, the ceremony in February will be an unpredictable night. All that’s left to do is keep our fingers crossed for our favourite artists and wish good luck to all the nominees!



praised for their incredibly well-written songs – and for good reason. From the reflexive yet melodically genius chorus of ‘Kill Bill’ (“I might kill my ex, not the best idea”) to the poetic verses of ‘Anti-Hero’ (“Did you hear my cov-

board Hot 100, peaking at number 48, and was crucial in solidifying Monét as a force to be reckoned with in R&B.

Billie Eilish’s ballad ‘What Was I Made For?’ from *Barbie* has a strong chance of taking this category. Its melancholic lyrics (“When did it end? All the enjoyment”) and association with the box office hit could earn Eilish her eighth Grammy Award after winning all the



JUSTIN HIGUCHI / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Meet Cambridge's screenwriters

Sergio Niblett-Morales

is studying an MSt in Writing for Performance at Wolfson College with plans to become a profes-

What inspired you to pursue screenwriting?

As an undergrad pursuing novel writing, I found myself visualising my stories rather than just writing them. Often, I was imagining what they would look like on screen. Thus, I began the shift towards screenwriting by joining a society and taking an elective module dedicated to the subject.

What made you choose Cambridge's Writing for Performance course?

The chance to study mediums I had never encountered before, such as audio dramas.

What is the most important lesson you have taken away from the course?

Not to be afraid of trying new ideas and testing your creativity. I have often felt imposter syndrome during this course — and still do — but I try to remind myself that creativity is a process and imperfection is allowed.

What genres do you enjoy writing and why?

Mystery, sci-fi and fantasy because of how intellectualised they are. Fantasy and sci-fi films require massive amounts of world-building whilst mysteries need each clue to be perfectly hidden and revealed at the right time.

What projects are you currently working on?

My second-year project is a sci-fi/horror/fantasy film about a mysterious town in the woods that gets attacked by a creature. There are murders, conspiracies, queer love, car chases and lots of jump scares! It's very much in its early stages but I'm hoping it will turn into something great.

ALEX BRIAN



▲ SERGIO NIBLETT-MORALES

Hannah Collins

studied English at MurrayEdwards, created the student-run creative collective Cambridge Creatives and is now a Script Editor at Quay Street Productions.

Describe your current position at Quay Street Productions.

As a Script Editor, my job is varied and I work on multiple projects simultaneously. Recently I finished on a production called DEAD HOT, which I have been a part of since early development, helping with storylining and feeding back on drafts of episodes. During pre-production, I worked with the director and producer to bring the writer's vision to life. I was also involved in parts of the edit, checking for continuity.

What led you to become a Script Editor?

I found out about development from Nicola Shindler, who I interviewed for Cambridge Creatives, and I loved the sound of it. So I tried to secure work experience in the industry and contacted many companies. Eventually, I scored a few weeks of work experience at Quay Street before doing some freelance script and book reporting for them. After graduation, I interviewed to become a Development Editor. And the rest is history!

What was your experience of the Cambridge film and TV scene?

I probably spent more time on extracurriculars than my degree! However, my experience was definitely impacted by Covid. After two normal terms of theatre in my first year, lockdown forced me to adapt; I directed radio plays, developed a Zoom-based web series and got involved in Watersprite Fillm Festival.

Talk me through your founding of the student-run creative collective, Cambridge Creatives.

Before Covid, I discussed creating a Medwards film club with Fabienne Marshall. When lockdown cancelled all our theatre and film projects, we joined with Ele Forsdyke to form a virtual society. Using the Cambridge alumni network and social media, we reached out to creatives we admired. Having also had their projects cancelled, many of them were incredibly generous with their time.

GEORGIA FINUCANE



▲ HANNAH COLLINS

Charkia Alin

studied English before graduating in 2022 and has since written and directed a short film called The Pilgrimage.

Have you found working outside the university structure?

It's much easier to get funding inside the university. Outside, you don't have societies begging you to take their money. I self-funded The Pilgrimage, which is why it was finished so quickly. There's such limited funding and so many creatives that I would've still been waiting to hear back from them today.

How did you find translating The Pilgrimage from paper to screen?

It's scary having a vision and wanting to execute it the right way. However, the solution is collaboration, especially with the director of photography. We made a mood board with references for each scene so we knew what we wanted it to look like when it came to shooting. You must be very flexible, especially when working with a small budget, balancing your creative vision and logistical concerns.

What can people expect when starting in the film industry?

For the first couple of years, you're not going to get paid. You need to be prepared to be a dogsbody, making teas and coffees and doing odd jobs. During these early stages, you're being paid in experience, which won't pay the rent but you do learn so much just from being on set!

What's next on the horizon for you?

We've started editing The Pilgrimage, which should be released around March. I've finished the screenplay for my first feature-length film, which has been in the works since I was 17. I'm also directing - and, for the first time, acting in - another short film, which should be a great challenge for me.

ABBEY REEVES



▲ CHARKIA ALIN

Review roundup

by Jamie Fardon, Georgia Finucane and Amelia Platt

Poor Things

IN CINEMAS NOW



The latest from Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos, and possibly his best yet, *Poor Things* is the climax of a career of obliqueness and idiosyncrasy – an adaptation of a novel which provided the link through which Lanthimos could combine all the aspects of his inimitable style into one kaleidoscopic fever dream. Spinning around Bella Baxter (Emma Stone), a young Victorian woman who is miraculously resurrected by a gifted and radical surgeon, *Poor Things* is an odyssey of expansion, discovery, and sexual revelry that circumnavigates its way from manic to poignant and back again, picking up every scrap of irreverent audacity as it goes.



Zone of Interest

IN CINEMAS NOW



Jonathan Glazer's *The Zone of Interest* is brutal — it is permeated by a brutality that takes shape not through any explicit portrayal of violence or cruelty, but by the very absence of violence, an unwillingness to look the evil at the film's centre dead in the eye, and instead focus on something — anything — else. A terrifying, clinical contemplation on the sadistic opportunism of humanity in the face of unspeakable atrocity, the extraordinary brilliance of *The Zone of Interest* is difficult to communicate because of the lengths to which it goes to make its every aspect so despicable. This is a film about evil, and it provokes the only emotion worth provoking when considering evil: unbridled

▲ ABCER ABC / FLIKCR

Fool Me Once

ON NETFLIX



Based on Harlan Coben's novel of the same name, *Fool Me Once* follows Maya Stern (Michelle Keegan) as she struggles to come to terms with the brutal murder of her husband. After spotting her supposedly dead husband on a nanny cam, Maya begins to investigate, leading her down a rabbit hole of wild conspiracies. Joanna Lumley's performance as Maya's filthy rich, overbearing and menacing mother-in-law is particularly good fun. To enjoy *Fool Me Once*, you need to switch off all critical faculties. Once you start to consider how improbable it all is, the whole thing falls apart. But if you can suspend your disbelief - there are twists galore, compelling performances and the chance to theorise endlessly and get it completely wrong. A perfectly serviceable binge!



The Curse

ON PARAMOUNT+



From the brilliant (but perhaps disturbed) minds of Nathan Fielder and Ben Safdie, *The Curse* offers what can only be described as the most uniquely unpleasant viewing experience available on television right now. Following a newly married pair of protagonists who are creating and co-starring in a renovation reality show that aims to virtual-signal their socio-economic consciousness, Asher (Fielder) and Whitney (Emma Stone) are morally repugnant and irredeemably narcissistic. With obscenely prolonged scenes that linger on each character's distinctive awfulness to draw out maximum cringe and discomfort, this series is a feat of scathing satire. Testament to the creators' bewildering creativity, *The Curse* is good precisely because it's dreadful.

▲ QUAY STREET PRODUCTIONS

Theatre

Do gen Z creatives 'do God'?

Michael Allan searches for faith in student theatre

Last year, I spent most Sundays in church and many of my week nights in the ADC, traversing two worlds that aren't, perhaps, all too frequently travelled between. When you think of a Cambridge Christian, you probably imagine earnestness, conservatism and a slightly terrifying glint of zealotry in the eye. A thesp, on the other hand, brings to mind extravagant, uber-confident extraverted characters (also, yes, endowed with a touch of ocular fanaticism), performing with gusto on and off the stage. Yet the more plays I attended, the less I felt I had left the thought-world of Sunday's sermon behind. Lacking the evangelistic certainty of the church service, many of these productions nevertheless seemed to draw upon the same well of religious and existential thinking.

Now, I'm not talking about your grandmother's religion. I'm talking about a distinctly heterodox, subversive, angsty and unapologetically queer religiosity that the Cambridge theatre scene seems to embrace. Take two productions by student playwright Jacinta Ngeh, performed in the last year: *Greater than Ourselves*, the story of a pious Catholic mother and her gay son, and *A Profession of Faith*, which centred on the struggle of a doctor to reconcile his faith with the detachment of his profession. Works less explicitly focused on faith, like last term's *5/11* (about the Gunpowder Plot) and Tennessee Williams' *Summer and Smoke* (grounded in a flirtation between a roguish doctor and a moralistic young woman) still revolved on a religious axis: where is the balance between personal conviction and political action? Who are the rightful judges of our behaviour? What is the correct relationship between sensuality and intellect, between freedom and honour? These are moral and spiritual questions that don't necessarily begin with God, but are always measured against an absolute ideal of the good life.

“

The more plays I attended, the less I felt I had left the thought-world of Sunday's sermon behind

This term's productions, like *The Book of Margery Kempe* and the upcoming *Macbeth* at the Round Church, continue the trend of searching for a God who seems to have disappeared yet lingers. Cambridge is not exceptional in showing these signs of a resurrected heterodox religiosity. In August 2022, *The New York Times* carried an essay headlined 'New York's Hottest Club is the Catholic Church', an exploration of a Dimes-Square-centred scene of podcasters, meme makers, chronic tweeters and aspiring writers. These influencers have channelled the gen Z neurotic conscience into a thriving subculture that takes traditional symbols of religious

iconography as tools to explore angst, guilt and our flawed, fraught attempts at love.

The symbolic imagination of this world takes Our Lady of Sorrows, a Catholic devotion to the Virgin Mary's 'seven sufferings', as a model of sacrificial love; the 'side wound of Christ', a common feature of medieval writing and art, is used to represent our personal bleedings, as well as an eroticism of submission and consumption. The Christian martyr, slain as a consequence of their resolute commitment to their lover Jesus, is made into a portrait of the situation sufferer, martyred in their unreciprocated loyalty. Pivotal inspirations behind this cultural sphere include the poet Richard Siken, whose *Litany in Which Certain Things are Crossed Out* is often quoted – "Love, for you/is larger than the usual love. It's like a religion. It's terrifying" – and the musician Mitski, whose 2012 song *Abbey* – "I was born hungry/What do I need? I was born something/What could it be?" – recently started trending again. Mitski's bewildered grasping towards an ineffable 'something' encapsulates this broader cultural movement. The creative excavation of religion is in no way creedal, or 'convicted' about any dogmatic or rationalistic approach to the nature of the universe; it stems from a disconcerted, anxious struggle to locate oneself in a world that lacks clarity or purpose. In this reli-

gious 'searching' for a place, intellectual or material, to feel reconciled within, the theatre presents itself as a natural spot.

Theatre was, after all, born out of religiosity. The great plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were all performed at the Dionysia, a splendid public festival given in honour of Dionysus. More recently, Samuel Beckett spent a lifetime exploring the inevitability of death and the oblivion of meaning in the modern world. The conjunction between faith and theatre stems naturally from the many similarities between worship and performance. The worshipper makes themselves a conduit for the Spirit's revelation, just as the performer empties themselves of their own individual idiosyncrasies

so that the character they portray can exist within them. Both worship and performance are driven by

physicality; you worship and perform with your whole body, whether by engaging in the sacraments or embodying your character. Theatrical performances and religious ceremonies are artificial simulations of an emotional pilgrimage – from scene to scene, from sin to grace – that are nevertheless experienced as real transformations. Good theatre, like good religion, exists to shock us out of complacent, passive lifestyles into heightened states of being.

“

Cambridge is not exceptional in showing these signs of a resurrected heterodox religiosity

The form itself, then, is willing; particular gen Z contributions to the conversation are the themes of hunger, desire and neglect. We are resisting a culture addicted to a 'cleverness' that is often indistinguishable from cruelty, a gen X artistry which prizes irony and cynicism above all while holding simplicity and sincerity with contempt. The 'ironic approach' has been memed into the stratosphere. Now, the cult of clever cruelty seems easy and gross; authenticity, vulnerability and the naked honesty of the confessional appear far more attractive.

This contempt for gen X cynicism also can't be understood without an awareness of the material circumstances of our lives. Against a picture of dwindling employment prospects, precarity in housing, economic insecurity, an intensification of the climate crisis and a wide disillusionment with the exploitation-ridden promise of sexual liberation, it is no surprise that young creatives are more interested in dismantling structures of wit and suspicion and rebuilding them through an artistry of love and sacrifice.

Finally, there's the fact that, having grown up alongside the internet, we're a generation who has never had to be properly bored, and so we have known constant stimulation – but only of the sort that ultimately leads to the immobilising stupor of the unending Twitter scroll. We are, as a response, ravenous not for more insubstantial junk food, but for experiences and passions that expose and engross us.

A lot of the time, I just want to feel something. Something real, honest and intense. It doesn't really matter if it's joyful or heartbreaking, as long as it hits me with the force of ten thousand bricks. The young have always been hungry, but they've rarely been so deprived of nutrition. We are seeking immediacy. Gen Z creatives aren't worshipping the transcendent deity of old-time religion, but a God that lives in the pits of our stomachs, in the breath, flesh, tears and sweat of moments of great feeling. The 'miss it and it's gone!' quality of live theatre makes it an ideal stage for the groaning of our generation's collective hunger.

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What's on

Theatre

2-3 February
The Heywood Society's *The Birthday Party* at the Corpus Playroom

2-3 February
CUADC's *The Normal Heart* at the ADC Theatre

6-10 February
Cambridge Musical Theatre Society's *Songs for a New World* at the Corpus Playroom

13-17 February
Fairview at the ADC Theatre

Music

2 February
Big Huge single release, DJ set, and listening party at Clare Cellars

5 February
Miles Kane at Junction

7 February
Leeds Conservatoire Trio gig night with Cambridge University Jazz Society at the Hidden Rooms

13 February
Corto.alto at Clare Cellars with Clare Sound

Arts

Ongoing
Women and Water Murray Edwards College

5 February
In conversation with Anna Forringer-Beal at Robinson College with Gender Agenda

10 February
Girton FemSoc Pink Week life drawing at the Old Kitchens

12-16 February
Cambridge Arts Festival at The Guildhall

Film & TV

Ongoing
All of us Strangers at the Arts Picturehouse

Poor Things at the Arts Picturehouse

Wonka at Cambridge Vue

9 February
Screening of *Do the Right Thing* at St. John's Picturehouse

11 February
Screening of *Chungking express* at St John's Picturehouse

Lifestyle

4 February
Caius FemGen Pink Week cocktail night in Caius bar

10 February
Corpus Christi open mic night

16 February
Queer open mic night with Blackbirds, Screeve, and Shirley at the Maypole

16 February
Tom Allen at Cambridge Corn Exchange

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What's On: Weeks 3 & 4

10 February
Men's and Women's
VFEAR- Athletics
Lee Valley Athletics Centre

10 February
Men's and Women's
Powerlifting Varsity
Cambridge Sports Centre

17 February
Men's and Women's
Volleyball Varsity
Iffley Road Sports Centre

17 February
Men's and Women's
Squash Varsity
RAC

Why not 'Give it a Go'?

Need to chase the Lent blues away? The University's 'Give it a Go' sessions might be the place for you, [Euan Aspin](#) reports

Feeling like you want to try getting into a new sport this year? Well then the University's 'Give it a Go' sessions are just for you.

After a successful launch at the start of this academic year, the University has decided to continue its free taster sport sessions for all students. With many having committed to doing more exercise or trying out a new sport with our new year resolutions, the Give it a Go sessions provide the perfect way to get involved in a low commitment and fun manner!

The sports on offer through this scheme range from those that will be quite familiar like badminton, volleyball and mixed netball, to less common sports like Ultimate and pickleball, all at a friendly beginner level. Most importantly, all the sessions are free, and you need none of the equipment! If you want to get involved in any sessions you can simply book them through the Cambridge Sports app available on the app store.

The University Sports Centre's commitment to continuing to support and

run these free beginners-welcome sessions represents an important growth in the sporting environment in Cambridge. The aim is to help welcome new people to get involved in sport who previously had been put off by high commitment levels, high sporting intensity or who just had never considered themselves good at sport.

This push to broaden participation and make sport more welcoming has included the addition of other University Sports initiatives such as the new social badminton, five-a-side football tournaments and squash leagues created for Lent term. Once again, the University has made these social tournaments free and open to all, in an effort to remove as many barriers to sport as possible.

Callum O'Shea, the coordinator for the Give it a Go sessions for the Cambridge University Sports team, shared with *Varsity* the plans and ambitions for this project. They commented: "In the future we would like the programme to grow, and based on the numbers of people attending so far it is clear that there

is significant demand. Obviously as the programme does grow and as people develop new skills, it is important that there are suitable 'exit routes' for the programme too, for people to continue playing and perhaps progress to a higher level away from the Give it a Go sessions. With this in mind, we have launched social badminton and squash leagues this term, and will look at increasing the quantity and quality of college sports leagues and other recreational leagues over the course of our 2023-2027 Strategy."

The hard work the University has put into extending its free sports offering to allow students to become more engaged and broaden participation should be celebrated as a step forwards. Schemes like these will hopefully continue to break down the barriers to being involved with sport while reducing traditional sport elitism.

Callum O'Shea further elaborated on the potential benefits that broadening access to sport will hopefully bring to the University: "We are working very

closely with the University and college wellbeing staff, as it is recognised across the collegiate university what a huge positive impact physical activity can have for general wellbeing. That is not to say it is a guaranteed solution for all problems, but the programme is all about having fun and making friends, and getting some exercise at the same time, and that's important as part of the overall student experience. Through the programme, we really hope to engage lots of students who would not otherwise be engaged in physical activity – the programme reduces some barriers to participation, including cost. It's important also that it provides a space where everyone is learning and developing together, and so there's much less fear of embarrassment that a beginner might have if they were playing with people who are very experienced."

All that is left to say is that if, this term, trying out a new sport and meeting new people is on your new year's agenda, perhaps it is worth going along to one of the sessions.

Rowbridge: unlocked

[Barney Watts](#) translates the language of college rowers

Every friendship group has a rower. They gave it a go in Freshers' Week, enjoyed the first term just enough to give it another go, and before you could say "Lent Bumps" they have calloused hands, spent half their student loan on stash and are neglecting both their friendships and their degree. But, for the uninitiated who are constantly forced to listen, it is often hard to know exactly what they are talking about half the time. Fear not, for we have put together a handy glossary of terms to enable you, the normal student, to understand what rowers really go on about.

'I did a bit of training over the holidays' = I did two sessions a day and sweated buckets in a gym that resembled a greenhouse in an ultimately futile effort to make it into my college's second boat.

'Look at my hands' = I'm so sexy and strong and I do more sport than you and I need you to tell me how big I am.

'You have to take it seriously, otherwise it's not fun' = I take it so seriously that I act as a mood hoover for my teammates, sucking up all good vibes. Bumps are my Olympics, and you won't take this away from me.

'I've done a bit of coaching' = I once cycled alongside my college's third boat while aggressively shouting basic advice at people just here for a good time.

'Sorry, I've got an outing in the morning' = I have a crippling fear of social interaction and the idea of spending my

night anywhere other than in my bed (fully dressed in rowing gear) and awaiting my 6am alarm is frankly terrifying.

'My theory on rowing is that ...' = I will now bore you to tears as I put forward my half-baked ideas that stand up to no scrutiny and would be disproved by anyone with even basic rowing knowledge. A normal person, however, is unable to disprove them.

'I row for Caius/Maggie' = I am a [insert expletive here].

'The socials are the best' = This is my only chance to talk about rowing in the comparative safe space of other rowers. For some reason, I keep being sat towards the end of the table, and everyone swaps places every 15 minutes to sit next to me before swapping with someone else. I'm not sure why this is, maybe I should talk to one of the social secretaries about it.

'I actually really enjoy the rowing machine' = I recently went through an incredibly toxic break-up and the pain of spending hours repeating the same motion over and over alleviates my shattered heart. That, or I am a David Goggins enthusiast.

'I'm a cox' = Short man syndrome turned into a profession. I have managed to turn my rage at the world due lack of height into anger at eight wet, cold souls on a frigid January morning.

'I'm thinking of giving up next term' = See you in a few weeks (I can't escape, help!).

Captain's Corner

Korfball co-captain [Hannah Runney](#) chats to Ed Marsh

Who is your sporting idol?

A cyclist, not a korfballer, but has to be Tadej Pogačar – he always seems to ride for pure fun which makes him likeable and exciting to watch.

Best sporting moment?

Winning the 11th-12th play-off at BUCS Nationals last year. It was one of my favourite matches I've played in as it was so close and competitive and we all played so well to end up with the win.

Why your sport?

It's the best parts of netball and basketball combined into one sport. I also really like that we're a competitive uni team while still being very chilled and friendly. Also, everyone who plays korf is guaranteed to be absolutely lovely. It's just a fact.

What is the best bit about being captain?

Working with all the lovely committee. We all get on really well, and it's a pleasure to run the club with them.

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tee. We all get on really well, and it's a pleasure to run the club with them.

Worst bit about being captain?

Organising transport to away matches. Trying to get two teams and two posts to BUCS had me very stressed ... though I am now an expert on the Cambridgeshire bus system!

Is it easy for beginners to join?

Very! Most people (including me!) had never even heard of korf before coming to uni, so lots of people start at the club as a beginner. It's also very easy to pick up, especially if you have a background in netball or basketball.

Who could a beginner contact to get involved?

Drop us a message on our Instagram @camunikorfball and we'll be happy to answer any questions.

What might a typical training session look like?

A quick warm up, some fun drills/practice in smaller groups and then plenty of time for games at the end.

When/where is training held?

Wednesday 8-10pm and Sunday 3-4pm at the Uni Sports Centre.

Who should we look out for this year?

Teo Wator and Eric Langezaal. Eric is new to Cambridge but grew up playing korf in the Netherlands – he's been teaching us a lot more than we've taught him!



▲ LUCY KIRKWOOD

Sport

'It's netball and basketball combined'

Page 31



Why not try a new sport?

Page 31

Wrens soar in BUCS League



HANNAH MAWARDI ▲

CULNC's Wrens crush de Montfort 96-10 as they continue their winning streak, **Isabelle Watts** reports

The fourth team of the Cambridge University Ladies' Netball Club (CULNC), also known as the Wrens, has had an impressive netball season so far, winning every match, usually by a significant margin. This is their first year competing in BUCS, but they are currently top of their league table (Midlands tier 7), and are guaranteed a promotion for next year. Individual players such as Jesus fresher Emma Pannett have been highlighted as doing particularly well this season with her squadmates praising that "[she] never looks tired, [and] can run for an hour".

This week's match saw the light blues

face de Montfort 3s. The Wrens started the match as they meant to go on, scoring within the first 30 seconds. Their defence pressured de Montfort's energetic players into numerous held balls, gaining valuable penalties. Although De Montfort upheld a strong attack when they had the ball, Cambridge rarely gave it away and used the height of their goal shooter and goal attack to deliver the ball straight into the shooting circle before their opposition had time to react. Goal shooter Bella Grimes buried one after another with a nearly 100% score rate in the first quarter, and this impressive standard continued throughout the entire match.

By halftime, the score was 50-5, and Cambridge continued to dominate the final two quarters. De Montfort gained some momentum in the third quarter, with plenty of interceptions and some scoring. But Cambridge came back stronger in the final quarter, picking up the pace in the final few minutes as they aimed to score 100 goals. They only narrowly missed out on this milestone due to De Montfort's impressive jumping interceptions, a testament to their consistent energy throughout the game. The match ended 96-10 in Cambridge's favour.

The light blues were satisfied with their performance after the match, with

captain Ines Shammah explaining that it was "really fun" and that they "got to experiment with different play and show some flair". Indeed, in the final quarter, Mercy Akinyele left the comfort of the shooting circle where she was originally stationed as goal keeper to have a run around at centre. Player of the match was awarded to a very well-deserving Sejal Karmarkar, who played goal defence for the first three quarters and goal keeper in the last.

Alongside their sporting success, the Wrens have become a "really close-knit team" – with Lucy Puth going so far as to describe them as "best of friends", which

would be a really sweet sentiment if it wasn't a shameless plug to their team Instagram, @yourbestfwrens. They seem to be enjoying every element of CULNC, with one exception: "We hate 7am Friday fitness."

The uninterrupted success of this season has inspired confidence for the Wrens' Varsity match in February – as Lucy Puth and Yasmin Rickaby told us: "[We have] beaten Oxford already [in BUCS], so Varsity is looking upward." We wish them the best of luck.