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What prompts a society to change its mind on the big issues, to make the previously unacceptable the norm? CAM asks five leading academics to consider the question.

The Cambridge Union Society is celebrating its 200th birthday. We investigate a long – and sometimes dramatic – history.

We all know that the rational consumer is a fiction. So what does drive our economic behaviour? Dr Benedetto De Martino says the answer lies in our theory of mind.

When Sir Arthur Conan Doyle addressed the John Ray Society in the Michaelmas Term of 1926, he had science on his mind. The science of spirits.

Home movies offer fascinating insights into the lives of those in front of, and behind, the camera, particularly if it’s rare footage of a 1935 Raj picnic in the hills of Allahabad.
Editor’s letter

Welcome to the Easter edition of CAM.

In just the last few days Cambridge has changed. A carnival spirit invades the most unlikely places and students seem exuberant, giddy – all the things that represent the very opposite of the discipline and rationality required to prepare for and then sit Finals.

Outside the exam room of course, few of us are wholly rational. And when it comes to that most irrational activity – consumption – we are even less rational than usual. So what does drive our economic behaviour? Acquisitiveness? Competition for status? On page 24, cognitive neuroscientist Dr Benedetto De Martino says that the answer – rather unexpectedly – lies in our theory of mind.

Irrationality of another kind is addressed on page 28. In 1926, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of perhaps the most rational character in fiction, came to St Catharine’s to address a group of assembled scientists on the evidence for Spiritualism. Were they convinced? Dr Michael Hurley uncovers Cambridge’s response to ectoplasm, spirits and fairies.

Elsewhere, on page 12, we discover what prompts a society to change its collective mind on the big issues and on page 34 Dr Kevin Greenbank discusses the role of archival film in the history of the Raj.

Finally, this year marks the 200th anniversary of the Cambridge Union Society, where rational – and not so rational debate – has held sway for two centuries. On page 18, we investigate its long – and sometimes dramatic – history.

Mira Katbamna
(Caius 1995)

Your letters

Pulling together

I was pleased to receive CAM 74. However the article ‘Pulling together’ contains the following inaccuracy: “The fixture fell into abeyance until it was revived by a pair of engineering students in 1964, but not everyone at the University was ready to hail its return. The captain of Selwyn Boat Club wrote to CUWBC: ‘I personally do not approve of women rowing at all. It is a ghastly sight, an anatomical impossibility and physiologically dangerous.’” I was captain of Selwyn Boat Club in 1963–1964. I did not write that letter, nor did I identify with its sentiments. Indeed I feel that in 2012 the British Olympic men’s crews could have learnt much from the British women.

Martin Brown (Selwyn 1960)

I joined the Newnham and Girton Boat Club when I arrived at Newnham in the autumn of 1941. In my second year I became a cox. The only race we rowed against Oxford, as far as I can remember, took place at Reading, where we stayed overnight. We bought blue scarves for ourselves for this occasion, whether legitimately or not, and I acquired some kind of cap as well.

Barbara Kay (nee Hopkins) (Newnham 1941)

I rowed for one year from October 1954. At that time there were 16 girls plus the cox, so we had two boats. At the beginning of every term we had a basic medical – heart, lungs and hernias. I always wonder what the doctor thought when faced with 16 scantily clad girls!

Pamela Pentelow (née Chick) (Newnham 1954)

Infinity

Thanks for your wonderful publication. In CAM 74’s article on maths, the sum on the board “1+2+3+4+…” should really equal -1/12, a negative number. Perhaps this explains why the infinite sign has collapsed from the ceiling!

Pierre Jouet (Emmanuel 2004)

The best

Thank you for a celebration of poetry in your recent issue. I enjoyed seeing the Clare Chapel ceiling as reflected in a mirror at the feet of student Millie Brierley, her mind seeming to race and heart to beat faster, as she evidently enjoys the opportunity of describing the sense of place, privilege and, even, belonging that is familiar to anybody who has stood to listen, expectantly, in a setting so beautiful. I like the way you have amusingly and thought-provokingly established spatial and emotional connections in the dialogue involving fellows and students, past and present.

Barnaby Lockyer (Emmanuel 1974)
Don’s diary

Dr John Richer is University Reader and Director of Undergraduate Teaching in Physics

Hares and Hounds

At one time the Boundary Run was a unique race: 25 miles over a mixture of farm tracks, field edges, footpaths and a bit of road. Then marathon fever hit Britain, and in 1982 it was decided to change it to a standard marathon distance, all on road. As a rather average cross-country runner, I amazed myself with fifth place in the 1980 Boundary Run on the old route. In 1982, I refused to even enter the race [because] “The road to injury is paved” – Adam Chase.

Anthony Kay (Clare 1979)

More food

Not necessarily student, not necessarily supper, but somehow very indicative of academic-life priorities: a very long time ago, I picked up a piece of paper from the stairs at the Department of Engineering. On it was a neatly written shopping list: Weetabix, grapefruit, whisky, beer.

Ken Warner (Clare 1987)

Poet’s field guide

With reference to Robert Macfarlane’s illuminating article, I entirely sympathize with his contemporary students prefixing Cambridge’s Baltic weather with “an unrepeatable intensifier”. Cycling up Regent Street without gloves into a freezing January headwind some 35 years ago, I could have done with all the intensifiers money could buy.

Justin Milward (Queens’ 1976)

Living here in Alberta, with Saskatchewan and Manitoba to the east, Robert Macfarlane’s addition of “horizontigo” had some appeal in the lands of endless flat horizons.

Andrew H Brown (St. John’s 1960)

Evening runs along the river sustain me through the Lent term. After a day of meetings with research colleagues, supervising undergraduates, or working with the physics teaching team, I cycle home, catch up quickly with family life, pull on my running shoes and head torch, and set out for the lock.

I’ve been running these paths since 1984, when I arrived in Cambridge from Bradford. Three decades, three degrees and three Colleges later, I still love them. The Cambridge Half Marathon at the end of term provides extra motivation to keep the mileage high even in the foulest of winter weather.

My research base is the Battcock Centre for Experimental Astrophysics, where I meet with PhD students, one about to submit his thesis. We discuss his latest results from the James Clerk Maxwell Telescope in Hawaii which transmits detailed images and microwave spectra of molecular gas clouds in our galaxy directly to our computers in Cambridge.

Our goal is to understand the detailed physics of star formation – how these clouds collapse to form new generations of stars and planets – and so find answers regarding the origin of our own solar system.

My student has done an outstanding job: his analysis has detected many new chains of protostars embedded in gaseous filaments, and his results challenge some of the existing theories of how these filaments form and are kept in force balance.

After lunch, I head to the teaching office in the Cavendish Laboratory, where I am Director of Undergraduate Teaching. Nearly 1,000 students over four years take our courses: physics is thriving in Cambridge. I’m proud to lead our Tripos: our goal is to offer an outstanding education to some of the brightest students in the country. I meet with Helen to discuss the day’s teaching issues: her fantastic organisational skills, good judgment, and good humour keep the whole teaching programme rolling like a well-oiled machine.

Later afternoon sees me cycling to Downing for a couple of supervisions. It’s Part IB quantum mechanics this term, a course it is hard to tire of teaching – it completely transforms a physicist’s view of how the world works. I have good students and I’m confident they’ll succeed at our course, and I hope they will look back on it as a worthwhile experience.

It’s then a short ride home. My run, first past The Fort St George, the narrow boats, to Stourbridge Common and Fen Ditton, has changed a little in 30 years. New flats crowd the river by the former gas works and regional college, but once on the Common, all is as it ever was: under the railway bridge, I make my way across Ditton Meadows, lovely and peaceful with the added colour of rowers at all times of day and night.

The view to Fen Ditton church has changed little in three decades, in sharp contrast to the city whose building boom proceeds at an energising pace. At the Cavendish, I have had a series of meetings during the term with architects who are planning a new laboratory, “Cavendish III”. We desperately need a laboratory fit for the 21st century, and it’s exciting to be involved with planning a new page in our future: what do we actually need to deliver a high quality teaching, learning and research environment? Though excitement and optimism reign, we know we need to raise a huge amount of money to realise this dream. But our future as a research and teaching department requires this investment and we are all working to make it become a reality.

I fall ill a week before the half marathon, and struggle through the penultimate week of supervisions. But on the day of the race, I run anyway, giving up hope of a fast time for the simple pleasure of running through Cambridge in the sunshine. Though minutes off my best, I enjoy the race.

The final week of Lent term is a blitz of meetings, perhaps the most important of which is with Physics student representatives. Their feedback on our teaching is frank, no holds barred, and demands to be listened to. We do, with bated breath.

The overall picture is a good one, but a few courses need attention and we discuss what we can do to improve them. Physics is a demanding subject and our students work very hard to achieve amazing results: our teaching can never be perfect, but my colleagues endeavour to offer a well-rounded, inspiring and challenging education that will prepare them for many different careers.
Ho cares about the boat race result? Not us. Not when, in April, Cambridge became the indisputable champion of the BBC’s University Challenge – thanks to a storming performance from Caius.

Medic Anthony Martinelli captained his team (law student Ted Loveday, historian Michael Taylor and natsci Jeremy Warner) to a decisive win with 255 points compared to Magdalen College Oxford’s 105 points.

The team’s win comes on the heels of last year’s victory by Trinity over Somerville College, Oxford.

Loveday was the stand-out star, gathering praise across social media for his quick-fire answers, with the hashtag #allyouneedisloveday trending (alongside mentions of his cream cable-knit sweater).

Despite taking less than three seconds to name the ancient Greek term for an expression found only once in literature (Hapax legomenon), Loveday downplayed his success. “Like pretty much everybody, when I first started watching University Challenge I’d be thrilled if I got one answer right in a whole episode,” he said. “I know some of the questions on the show can seem fairly intimidating and highbrow. But there’s no magic secret to it – all the answers will be on Wikipedia somewhere. If you find a question daunting, look it up online. Then next time it comes up, it won’t be daunting any more.”

Kettle’s Yard redevelopment

Kettle’s Yard, the University’s modern and contemporary art gallery, closes this month as work begins on its redevelopment.

The £9m project includes a four-floor education wing, two remodelled galleries and a café. While the house will remain untouched, the gallery has decided to close the site completely for the safety of the collection.

During the building works, which are due to last around two years, Kettle’s Yard plans to display collections at the Fitzwilliam Museum and the Jerwood Gallery in Hastings.

A spokesperson from the gallery said of the plans, designed by Jamie Fobert Architects: “The project will transform our work with children, young people and community groups, allow us to curate exhibitions with major artists from around the world and display 20th and 21st century art in the best conditions.”

kettlesyard.co.uk
Dig deep enough anywhere in Cambridge and you are bound to hit an older layer of the city.

This is what happened when work got underway on the transformation of the Old Divinity School on St John’s Street, and archaeologists stumbled across one of Britain’s largest medieval hospital cemeteries.

The complete skeletal remains of more than 400 medieval burials were uncovered, along with disarticulated and fragmentary remains of what could be as many as 1,000 more people.

The bodies, which mostly date from a period spanning the 13th to 15th centuries, were burials from the medieval Hospital of St John the Evangelist which stood opposite the graveyard until 1511, and from which St John’s College takes its name.

The number of remains discovered was far more than the archaeological team, led by Craig Cessford of the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, had expected. The find sheds significant new light on life and death in medieval Cambridge.

The cemetery had gravel paths and a water well, suggesting that much like today’s cemeteries, it was a place for people to visit their deceased loved ones. The vast majority of burials took place without coffins, many even without shrouds, suggesting the cemetery was primarily used to serve the poor.

The discovery was made during the refurbishment of the Victorian building owned by St John’s between 2010 and 2012, but was only made public this year when it was published in an archaeological journal.

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New building for Judge

The Cambridge Judge Business School (CJBS) is to start work on a new building on Tennis Court Road, following a £13m gift to the University from the Monument Trust. The new centre, to be named after Simon Sainsbury, will provide CJBS with world-class business, education and conference facilities and will house its academic community under one roof.

Regius professors

Professor Michael Cates FRS, FRSE, a theoretical physicist who is a world leader in the study of soft matter, has been elected the 19th holder of the Lucasian Professorship of Mathematics, succeeding Professor Michael Green. Professor Cates will take up the Lucasian Professorship on 1 July 2015.

Professor Ian McFarland has been appointed Regius Professor of Divinity.

Professor McFarland’s research focuses on Christology, theological anthropology and the doctrine of creation. He will take up his post this autumn.
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Honorary degrees

Honorary degrees have been conferred on eight individuals. They are: Sir John Eliot Gardiner, conductor; Neil MacGregor, art historian and museum director; Sir James Mirrlees, economist; Baroness Julia Neuberger, rabbi and medical ethicist; Judge Hisashi Owada, judge and diplomat; Sir Michael Rawlins, physician and pharmacologist; Dame Paula Rego, artist; Professor Judith Jarvis Thomson, philosopher.

Sir John Eliot Gardiner

HE Power List 2015

Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz was ranked 15 in the Higher Education Power List 2015. Compiled by an independent panel of HE experts, the list identifies the top 50 movers and shakers in English higher education.

New alumni groups

Our global network of alumni continues to grow with the establishment of four new groups. Alumni in Queensland wishing to connect should contact Philip Pope (Darwin 1996) of the Cambridge Society of Queensland on philip.pope@qru.com.au. In Hong Kong, the Oxbridge Women’s Network welcomes queries to Amy Russell (Downing 2004), on amy.russell@twfhk.org. In Kenya, contact Martin Atela (Peterhouse 2007) for more details about the Cambridge Society of Kenya on m.atelah@gmail.com. Meanwhile, contact Warren Hochfeld (Trinity Hall 2008) to learn about the Cambridge, Global Pharma and Biotech group on wahoch@gmail.com.

E: contact@alumni.cam.ac.uk
T: +44 (0)1223 332288
W: alumni.cam.ac.uk

Explore the Canyonlands of the US or stargaze in Chile on two new trips created for the 2016 Cambridge Alumni Travel Programme.

Professor Paul Barrett of the Natural History Museum, and President of the Paleontographical Society, will lead the tour though Utah and Wyoming with stops including the spectacular Dinosaur National Monument in Colorado.

Professor Roger Davies of the University of Oxford will share the thrill of astronomy with alumni in Chile, on a trip that includes an excursion to the spectacular Moon Valley near San Pedro de Atacama. He will also take the group to the world-famous Paranal Observatory.

All alumni travel programme tours offer a unique opportunity for you to travel with like-minded alumni. A donation is made to the University for every booking and Cambridge has received more than £1.1m since the programme was set up 23 years ago. Details of the trips can be found on our website, or in our brochure Unbound.

alumni.cam.ac.uk/travel

CAMCard holders are eligible for a 10% discount on online course fees at the University’s Institute for Continuing Education (ICE) when booking online. For more details go to alumni.cam.ac.uk/benefits.
Alumni Festival
25–27 September 2015

It all began with 200 alumni converging on Cambridge for a weekend of lectures, events and tours.

It was 1991. Mary Beard spoke about classics, culture and the future, the late Professor Laurie Hall explained the technology behind magnetic resonance imaging, while Dr Geoff Harcourt asked “Is Keynes Dead?” Stephen Cleobury conducted a scratch performance of Brahms Requiem with a 50–strong alumni choir and several University departments' museums threw open their doors for exclusive tours.

Twenty five years later, the Alumni Festival may have changed its name and grown five-fold, but it continues to build on the winning formula established back then: sharing cutting-edge University thinking with alumni and keeping them connected to Cambridge.

In this anniversary year, the programme is as eclectic, invigorating and exciting as ever. Highlights include the philosopher Huw Price in conversation with entrepreneur Hermann Hauser, Google DeepMind co-founder Demis Hassabis and Girton psychologist Lucy Cheke on non-human intelligence.

The president of Murray Edwards (New Hall) Dame Barbara Stocking will discuss the world’s reaction to the Ebola outbreak, while at the Cambridge Judge Business School, Professor Dame Sandra Dawson and a panel of Judge faculty members will discuss sustainability, social enterprise and consumer search behaviour.

For those fed up with passwords, Dr Frank Stajano will reveal how his Pico project plans to liberate us from the tyranny of remembering numerous strings of letters and numbers.

Elsewhere Dr Stephen Cave, the author of The Quest to Live Forever and How It Drives Civilisation will ponder life, death and civilisation.

As always, events such as Come and Sing, tours of Colleges and departmental visits form a vital part of the programme. This year the Churchill Archives Centre will once again open its doors to alumni, while staff at the University Library will take visitors behind the scenes at the Digital Content Unit where manuscripts and rare books are digitised.

And in the 200th anniversary year of the Union, we reintroduce the Alumni Festival Union debate, with opportunities for alumni to watch student debaters show off their verbal skills.

Our programme goes online on 11 June and booking opens on 25 June. Find out more at alumni.cam.ac.uk/festival15

Remember festivals past?
Send us your photos.

We’d love to hear your memories and see your photos of festivals past. Email us at: events@alumni.cam.ac.uk
Other events

A Damned Serious Business
University Library, May-September 2015

This exhibition draws on the rich and varied collections of the University Library to highlight written records, maps and book arts relating to the Battle of Waterloo, in the year of its 200th anniversary, and the era in which it played so decisive a part.

Watercolour – Elements of Nature
Fitzwilliam Museum
June-September 2015

Explore the museum’s world-leading collection of watercolours, spanning landscapes, portrait miniatures and flower drawings by masters including Samuel Palmer and Paul Cézanne.
fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

Target rifle varsity
Bisley Camp
17 July 2015

Cheer on the Light Blues in the Chancellor’s Challenge Plate, the annual target rifle match against Oxford, founded in 1862.
cura.soc.srcf.net

Open Cambridge
Cambridge
11-13 September 2015

Cambridge unlocks its secrets and welcomes visitors through the doors of some of its most beautiful and intriguing places over one special weekend. The programme is published in July.
open.cam.ac.uk

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DIARY
EASTER TERM
Mel Giedroyc (Trinity 1987) is a TV presenter, comedian and actress. She is co-presenter with Sue Perkins of the Great British Bake Off, and has performed in and written for numerous comedy shows including French and Saunders, Blessed, Miranda and The Vicar of Dibley.

Matt Rees is a first-year history student. Originally from Aberdare in South Wales, he says that he has yet to meet another Welsh person in his year at Cambridge. “Though I'm sure they must exist,” he concedes.

“Matt! You're sleeping in my bed!” whoops Mel Giedroyc as she swoops into B3 Angel Court, Trinity, current home of first year historian Matt Rees. “Isn’t it narrow! And the duvets are still so narrow! Oh my God, I can’t believe how everything is so… the same.” Even the ancient three-bar electric heater is still there, although now it sports a MAY CONTAIN ASBESTOS sticker. “I used to try to make toast on that. Bit of bread on a fork. Never succeeded, of course. I just thought it was the sort of thing that students were supposed to do.”

The room looks out onto Trinity Street, packed with bars and cafes. The noise level certainly hasn’t reduced since Giedroyc arrived in 1987 for the first year of her French and Italian language and literature degree. Indeed, along with the usual student staples – books, laptop, sliced bread – Rees keeps in a good supply of earplugs. Two entire boxes worth, in fact. “I’ve got a thing about noise,” he says with a sigh.
“I’m a bit square, really. I’m usually in bed by midnight and the noise from the street means it really is a struggle to get to sleep sometimes,” Giedroyc looks at him sympathetically. “I don’t think I would have been a very good neighbour to you, Matt. I would have been making you plug away, every night.”

They probably wouldn’t have met over meals, either. “I’m really not into the massive Harry Potter-style rooms,” says Rees. “They just make me uncomfortable. I’ve never really experienced anything like it before. I go in and just have a piece of toast surrounded by all these pictures in this massive hall, and I’m just thinking: ‘Why am I eating toast here?’”

Whereas Giedroyc confesses that she is in fact, “a bit theatrical. And slightly camp. So for me, I loved it. I loved the Henry VIII portraiture, the panelling, the ludicrous pomp and ritual of it.”

She spies a change. “That chair is new! For my first year, I had this friend, Rob, lovely guy. He was thrown out of Trinity for something. He lived in a house about two miles away. So every night at about 2am, I’d get the little stone on the window. It would be Rob, outside, a bit worse for wear. And he would sleep on the chair. Almost every night.

There was nothing going on, of course…”

Rees doesn’t go in for ample room decoration. Apart from the detailed history revision notes covering his bulletin board, there’s little to hide the magnolia walls, unlike in Giedroyc’s day. “I had a poster of Neneh Cherry over there. And a big one of Lech Wałęsa.” Why? “My ancestry! Polish-Lithuanian. I thought: let’s bring some Solidarity. OK, Solidarity was lost gone by this point but I thought it would be a nice retro thing,” she remembers. “And there were a few pretentious nods to my degree. There was probably a Fellini. Just to say, you know, I am actually here doing a degree. I may not actually seem like I am. But I am.”

Although she enjoyed her degree, Giedroyc admits that study wasn’t her top priority – the main reason she wanted to come to Cambridge was to join Footlights. “I just remember a lot of laughs,” she says. “It sounds very trite and clichéd, but a lot of laughter, boozing, late nights and untoward behaviour. There was a lot of arsing about, which I think was all right in the late ’80s. I don’t know whether you can do that now.

I get the impression that more is required of you, as a student, now. Is that right?”

“A lot’s expected of you,” agrees Rees. “They expect seven study hours a day, about 40 hours a week. So they give you the Sunday off. I don’t do seven hours a day.”


To see the film of Mel’s trip back to Trinity visit alumni.cam.ac.uk/mryr or use the code below.

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**The best... scene in Cambridge**

Tess Davidson is reading History at King’s.

I have always found live theatre captivating: that sense of pervading trepidation, the eerie stillness backstage, the frenetic energy contained within a shared moment. I have therefore often wondered where best to sit.

This is no simple decision. Where will I best feel total immersion? Be completely at one with the actor and their words? Over the years, I have approached the exercise with increasing and intense application. Sitting in the middle means direct eye contact… yet from the side I give myself a better chance to appreciate the staging.

Going undercover, by means of appointment to the production team, means a seat backstage, where I can watch the enraptured faces and body movements of a cast high on the adrenaline of their character. But is this the best position? Some nights I tire of the efforts of the stars, and long instead for the genuine characters of the audience, each with their own respective plotline, played out in the theatre of their lives. Some nights, I wander away from the wings.

And so I came to find the best scene in the house. The ADC Theatre is a cacophony of visual and audible experience. The dramatic bellowing of lines in the dressing room, the frantic cries of a technician from onstage all come together to create a chaotic assault on the senses. Yet tucked away, directly over the stage and under the rafters, is an enclave known only to those lucky enough to be part of a production crew: the counterweights.

Here, peeping over the edge of the set, is a chance to see what theatre truly is. Hearing only the words of the cast wafting up towards the roof, you look away from the stage and out to a sea of focused expressions. This is where the real performance is taking place. Some cry, others laugh. Many furrow their brow in intense concentration. Sometimes you can see the reaction of the character’s traits and actions in their eyes. Everywhere you look, you identify a theme. It is sitting up here, surrounded only by words, that I realise theatre is not about connecting with the actor, it is about forging a link with the audience, through the lens of our own private dramas. A play within a play.
Next year, most of the babies born in the UK will be born into families where the parents are not married. This fact would not just shock our grandparents, but be utterly unthinkable. As recently as 1979 nearly 90% of all new parents were married – but at some point, over a relatively short period, what was an extraordinary, outlandish thought has become the norm.

This is not the only example. From women’s emancipation to the Civil Rights movement, from the acceptance of gay marriage to the decline in churchgoing, radical, extreme and socially unthinkable ideas and behaviours reach a tipping point after which enough of us believe it is acceptable to make it “safe” for our fellow humans to follow in our stead. And we do this even though – and this is the crucial bit – no one has told us to.

But how does it happen? Legendary psychologist, Philip Zimbardo, whose shocking 1971 Stanford prison experiment revealed the psychological effects of being an inmate or a guard, postulated that, “without realising it, we often behave in ways that confirm the beliefs others have about us. These subjective beliefs can create new realities for us and become who others think we are”. More recent research has found that one specific area of the brain – the lateral orbitofrontal cortex – reacts particularly strongly to social influence and therefore is crucial to our ability and desire to conform. CAM asked leading Cambridge thinkers to ponder the phenomenon of the “social tipping point”.

Words Peter Taylor Whiffen
Illustrations Smith

THE TURNING TIDE

What prompts a society to change its mind on fundamental issues, to make the previously unacceptable the norm? CAM asks five leading academics to consider the question.
Britain, Africa and West Indies are in a relationship.
1760 • Comment • Like

Bristol and Liverpool like this.

William Wilberforce has added Sugar, Cotton and Tobacco to his Interests.
1788 • Like

London Abolitionists posted a new image.
1788 • Like

Thomas Clarkson This image speaks to me in a language which is at once intelligible and irresistible. 😊
1788 • Like

HoC OMG! This is sooooooooooooo last century!
1807 • Like

HoC has created an event Let's vote!
1807 • Like

William Wilberforce Yehhhhh! LOL! Honk if you love Jesus!
1807 • Like

HoC Hey guys that was fun! Let's do it again!
1833 • Like

JMW Turner I'm inspired! Just finished a whopper – got a snappy title for it too... ‘Slavers Throwing overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhon coming on’
1840 • Like

Confederate States Whateeevveeeerrr! Anyway, outside your cotton-pickin’ jurisdiction here!
1850 • Like

Abraham Lincoln Er...guys, I think we need to have a chat...
1860 • Like

Chicken George likes this.

Airlines Anyone know where we can get a copy of that seating plan?
2000 • Like
A quick mass conversion to a new belief may simply be a primitive instinct for survival. A recent history that backs this up is the story of the Urapmin, an ethnic group of about 400 primitive people in a remote area of Papua New Guinea. After hundreds of years of following their own ritualistic pagan religion, they, suddenly, in 1977, all converted to Charismatic Christianity.

A key factor was the arrival of Westerners to nearby regions, and young Urapmin men encountered these people when they went out of their community to find work. But such a quick, wholesale ‘shutting down’ of a religion by an entire community is an extremely bold and unusual thing to do.

So why did it happen? The Urapmin don’t believe it was a collective act at all, but that they all converted individually by each, separately, encountering the Holy Spirit. They are sincerely convinced of this – but I wonder if a more fundamental instinct was at play.

The Urapmin, which had for so long held an important status in the country, had in the previous few years been watching Western influences pervading neighbouring regions. Australians came in, built an airstrip, began trading and galvanising the local mining communities. After being ‘number one’ the Urapmin suddenly were watching everyone else generate a cash economy that they, as remote and traditional as they were, could play no part in. They lost their social position.

But all that changed when they converted to Christianity – they became the specialists, they sent pastors out to the mining towns’ squatter settlements – and they got their status back. Their traditional belief system disappeared because they no longer saw the realisation of its goals as their paramount concern. That was replaced by their cultural, instinctive, unspoken need to get their status back. It wasn’t a cynical act – far from it – but it certainly worked and enabled them to thrive again.

The great philosopher Thomas Paine wrote: "It is not in numbers, but in unity, that our great strength lies.” The behaviour of certain bacteria evidences this – and suggests they certainly know when ‘the tide turns’.

Pecto-bacteria appear instinctively to be able to practise “quorum sensing” – that is, to know when they have gathered in sufficient numbers to successfully carry out an attack.

This strain, which used to be called *erwinia*, hangs around potato plants and kills them by rotting cellulose and tectic. You’ve probably seen this process with potatoes in your kitchen. However, talking anthropocentrically, the plant recognises this attack – blackleg and soft rot disease – and sets up its defences. So the bacteria do not attack individually but wait for reinforcements, by creating and diffusing signalling molecules into the environment to monitor the relative strength of cell population density – and then only start to make enzymes when that cell population gets to a minimum collective level they know will be effective. When the density is high enough, the enzymes all switch on at the same time to establish sufficient collective virulence.

That is fascinating enough, but it has recently been discovered that the bacteria that kill the plant also ‘gang up’ and simultaneously make carbapenem antibiotics. Their enzymes rot the potato but that will also provide food for other bacteria – so this carbapenem is created to kill their rivals.

And there’s another extraordinary twist. Within the bacteria there evolve ‘cheaters’ – they are actually called that – which get the benefit of the quorum sensing without doing any of the work to send out the signals. Now some scientists are working in the belief that this bacterial communication system may even have a mechanism to ‘weed out’ these ‘cheaters’.

As for human implications, there are indications that quorum-sensing signals enable the bacterium *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* to colonise the lungs by ‘calling in the reinforcements’ to establish themselves as biofilms – structured communities producing enzymes capable of greater immunity from antibiotics.

Scientists are therefore now working to produce analogue molecules that are quorum-sensing inhibitors – they do not destroy the bacteria but just effect the signalling molecules. But as plants and humans are constantly evolving to try to shore up their defences, so too is bacteria quorum sensing, in a bid to stay ahead in producing pathogens. It is like a molecular arms race.

Of course, none of the quorum sensing is a conscious act by the bacteria, but a chemical reaction. But it still brings to mind the words of Niccolò Machiavelli: “No enterprise is more likely to succeed than one concealed from the enemy until it is ripe for execution.”
Olympe de Gouges: Equal rights for sisters! YEH!!!!

Mary Wollstonecraft: likes this.

Men: We can't go for that. Nooooooo. No can do!

Female Emancipation: has five new friends.

J.S. Mill: C'mon guys, get with the programme!

HoC: Hohohohahahahahahah!

David Lloyd George: has added Home Insurance to his Interests.

Emily Davison: I'm done with fannying about!

Emmeline Pankhurst: has created an event Let's get arrested!

Europe: has updated its profile image.

HoC: Heh girls! Like our new poster? What d'ya think? Fancy giving us guys a hand here?

Female Emancipation: Sure but....
Red alert for the Sumatran tiger. Fauna & Flora International launches emergency appeal in response to 600% increase in poaching threat. Please respond as soon as you can.

One of the Sumatran tiger’s final strongholds is under threat from a massive increase in poaching. Action is needed now

- £83,131 is needed to help us fund more rangers and step up action against the poachers in Kerinci Seblat National Park.
- This is one of the final strongholds of the incredibly rare Sumatran tiger, a place where the battle to save the Sumatran tiger will be won or lost.
- FFI’s work here could be all that stands between the Sumatran tiger and extinction.

A 600% increase in snares laid since 2011 has put FFI’s anti poaching team on red alert. Habitat loss has already pushed the Sumatran tiger to the brink of extinction but now poachers have stepped up their efforts to snare these magnificent cats.

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) has put out an urgent call to the global community to save the last Sumatran tigers currently existing in the wild – and specifically to employ more rangers. There are now only around 500 Sumatran tigers left.

FFI is urgently seeking funds to step up their crucial conservation programme in Kerinci Seblat National Park, Sumatra, Indonesia. In order to safeguard the future existence of these magnificent creatures, it is vital that more rangers are employed Right now, the Sumatran tiger faces a number of very serious threats, which are putting their very survival in jeopardy. And, sadly, they are all manmade threats.

Poaching is a constant danger for the elusive Sumatran tiger – and now poachers have substantially stepped up their efforts. Hunters make good money from the tiger’s beautiful skin and demand is constantly growing. Also, its bones are illegally exported to use as ingredients in traditional Asian medicines.

What is really worrying now is that poachers have increased the number of tiger snares laid by 600% since 2011 and this year snares found have been at almost record levels.

This is against a backdrop of a very serious loss of habitat. In the last ten to 15 years, natural forest cover in Sumatra has been slashed by almost a staggering 40%. Now there is a new emerging threat in 2014, discovered by tiger patrols – the growth of illegal coffee plantations in Kerinci Seblat National Park.

These majestic forest dwellers have been designated as Critically Endangered on the UCN Red List, making the Sumatran tiger one of the most endangered tiger subspecies on the planet. This is a rating reserved for animals that face an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.

Latest surveys have indicated that there may now be as few as 500 existing in the wild. Kerinci Seblat National Park is one of the last places on Earth where they can still be found.

Today, 170 tigers live in and around Kerinci Seblat National Park – the largest known population of tigers anywhere in Sumatra. Since 2007 the number of tigers in the park has stabilised and begun to slowly grow – largely thanks to the vital work of FFI’s Tiger Protection and Conservation Programme. However, now the upsurge in poaching puts these gains under threat.

Debbie Martyr, FFI Team Leader of the Kerinci Tiger Project in Sumatra, says: “So far this year our ranger teams walked almost 1100 miles on forest patrols in and bordering the national park and destroyed more than 60 active tiger snares – an increase of 600% since 2011. That is why we need to step up our patrol regime.”

Tiger populations are dreadfully fragile. If FFI cannot recruit more rangers to protect the tigers against the increased efforts of the poachers all our good work could be undone.

For all of these reasons, it’s now absolutely vital that we increase our patrols to protect tigers from poachers – and work towards greater protection for their delicate habitat.

If we’re going to save the Critically Endangered Sumatran tiger from complete extinction, it’s vital that we have the means to take action now.

FFI must raise £83,131. To do that, the charity is calling on readers to make an urgent contribution today.

“If you value the natural world – if you think it should be protected for its own sake as well as humanity’s – then please support Fauna & Flora International.”

Sir David Attenborough, OM FRS
Fauna & Flora International vice-president

Please respond as soon as you can, to help safeguard the future survival of the last few remaining wild Sumatran tigers.

Together, we can save the Sumatran tiger from extinction – but only if we take action immediately.

To take action for the Sumatran tiger please go to www.FFISumatranTiger.org or cut the coupon.

If the coupon to the bottom right is missing, please send your cheque (payable to FFI) to FREEPOST RRGH-GBGG-CAGG, Fauna & Flora International, Sumatran Tiger Appeal, Jupiter House, Station Road, Cambridge, CB1 2JD as soon as you can.

Stop press - Poachers kill Tiger in Kerinci

“We know this tiger, a large male. To see it reduced from a beautiful wild animal to a pile of meat and guts made us all very angry.”

Yoon Drista, Tiger Protection Team, Kerinci Seblat

Fauna & Flora International, founded in 1961, was the world’s first international conservation organisation. Today it works across the globe, with over 140 projects in more than 40 countries. It has a strong history of finding creative solutions to conservation problems and of working with local communities. FFI is supported by the most eminent scientists and members of the conservation movement.

Dear readers: Fauna & Flora International (FFI) has launched an emergency appeal to raise £83,131 to save the Critically Endangered Sumatran tiger. These items are vital to help save the remaining Sumatran tigers from extinction.

£5,212 could help fund new rangers posts and buy essential equipment – rucksacks, uniforms, cooking equipment, field radios and compasses.

£2,500 could buy a pick-up van to help a patrol move around quickly to prevent poaching.

£400 could buy camping equipment and boots.

£72 could buy first aid kits to treat injured rangers whilst out on patrol.

£32 could help buy a field radio, essential to getting extra help if poachers are spotted.

Donations large or small will help save the Critically Endangered Sumatran tiger from the 600% upsurge in the poaching threat.

Cut the coupon below and return it to FFI, together with your gift, to help save the Critically Endangered Sumatran Tiger. Alternatively, go to www.FFISumatranTiger.org. Thank you.

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I want to help save the remaining 500 Sumatran tigers today, with a donation of £

Title
Forename
Surname
Address
Postcode
Email
Phone No
I enclose a cheque payable to Fauna & Flora International OR I wish to pay by credit/debit card
Type of card: Visa/Access/Mastercard/Maestro/MASTERCARD (write as appropriate)
Card No:
Date:
Start Date:
Expiry Date:
Issue Number:
3 digit security code:
(Mastercard only)
Last three digits next to the signature
Please note: If Fauna & Flora International receives in excess of £83,131 from this appeal, excess will be sent to another project they feel is most needed.

Please return to: Sumatran Tiger Appeal, FREEPOST RRRH-GBGG-CAGG, Fauna & Flora International, Jupiter House, Station Road, Cambridge, CB1 2JD.

You can call 01223 431991 to donate now. Or go to www.FFISumatranTiger.org to donate online.

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When the tide does turn it is because people have found a way of explaining change in a way that broadly transforms

THE PSYCHOLOGIST
Professor John Rust
Director of Research in the Department of Psychology and Director of the Psychometrics Centre

The tide turns as opinions and beliefs gather pace when people interact with each other. The Dynamic Social Impact Theory (Latané, 1981) determines that people can be the “sources or targets of social influence” dependent on the status of those trying to persuade us, how many there are and how recently they tried to do it.

The status of those influencing us played a big part in society changing its attitudes towards homosexuality. As more and more people came out, it was soon apparent that gay people were not like some remote religious cult – they were the man down the street or the woman across the road, people we said “hello” to. Everyone knows someone, or of someone, who is gay. When we as a society realised that, that’s when attitudes began to shift.

We do tend to be unwilling as individuals to go against mass opinion and say something is wrong. Role models are key – especially if they are people with whom we can personally identify. As soon as popular role models embrace a particular view, everyone feels safer to say the same thing. That can be the trigger point when the numbers shoot up.

THE SOCIOLOGIST
Dr Manali Desai
Lecturer in Sociology, Department of Sociology

Much of our behaviour stems from our tendency to divide the world into people we can trust and those we cannot. Fear plays a key role in our collective decision-making and therefore could potentially have an effect on how and when the tide turns.

Firstly, we have a fear of being judged and ostracised, which inevitably makes most of us want to conform to views and ideas supported by those around us. In extreme cases we have a fear of violence so we align ourselves accordingly, and this can effect a great shift in our collective thinking and behaviour. Research shows that in the Rwandan civil war, people were more ambivalent than perhaps one would expect about violent acts. Bystanders would not intervene out of fear for their own safety.

And even in more stable environments, fear is still a factor in our natural decision-making. Part of the reason smaller parties gather momentum is because we as individuals all have everyday anxieties about our lives, our jobs, our debts – and when mainstream parties seem to lack a narrative, the strident, confident approach of a party like UKIP can lend it credence.

But even when such emotions are not present, the tide can turn quite easily because humans are naturally susceptible to new ideas – there is a lot of fluidity and ambivalence. We may believe we, as a collective group, hold strong views but social transformation happens because we are not as committed as we think we are. Humans withhold part of themselves – they are not firmly gripped on to ideas.

That said, I do think we might be making too much of the idea that things change radically. And extremists and extreme ideas are in the minority. To explain the transformation of society you need to explain new ways of belonging. When the tide does turn it is because people have found a way of explaining change in a way that broadly transforms, and broadly conceivably.

THE HISTORIAN
Dr Jon Lawrence
Reader in Modern British History, Emmanuel College

Throughout history, as long as someone sows a seed of doubt, there is the potential for it to grow and gather momentum. And ultimately there comes a point when the tide turns and our behaviour as a group seems to suddenly change – although the seeds that created that change may have been sown a long time ago and taken root over years.

The perceived change in Britain’s churchgoing habits is an example of this. Although it had been in decline for a long time – the numbers actually started to go down just before the First World War – in the 1950s Britain was still a very Christian society and most people expected the rights of the church to be respected. But that changed in the mid-1960s, thanks, ironically, to the church leaders themselves.

It accelerated when the Anglican hierarchy began to express views about how to combat the threat of what they called the “secular society”. Most famously, a 1963 book Honest To God by the Bishop Of Woolwich, Rt Rev John Robinson, suggested “modern secular man” needed a “secular theology”.

The problem was that the leading clerics were tackling an encroaching secularity that was not necessarily there – but in discussing it they were feeding the debate and fuelling doubt. And because the clerics themselves were asking questions, it made it easier for Joe Bloggs to question received wisdom. Giving voice to those doubts allows people to break free of conformity.
The Cambridge Union Society’s 200th birthday celebrations – as with so much in its history – have been anything but understated. At February’s bicentennial debate, big beasts Ken Clarke and Michael Howard spoke on the same side, while the Union’s first two female Presidents – since ennobled as Baroness Mallalieu and Baroness Hayman – faced each other across the chamber. Ex-Presidents Sir Peter Bazalgette, Vince Cable and Norman Lamont were among the other grandees to accept the invitation to return.

It is a reminder that the Union has never existed in a vacuum. Its ability to attract the world’s most interesting and influential has ensured that events in the debating chamber have enjoyed coverage and influence far beyond Cambridge’s city bounds.

The Society was formed in 1815 from a union of two or three earlier debating associations. Accounts vary of the exact circumstances, but a blackballing scandal at one of the ancestor clubs seems to have been key. The new Union Society first convened in a room at the Red Lion Inn in Petty Cury, and in 1866 moved into its current home, designed by Alfred Waterhouse.

Since then, critics of the Union have often painted it as a redoubt of stuffy conservatism with a reluctance to move with the times. This is somewhat unfair, argues Stephen Parkinson (Emmanuel 2001) – a former President and the author of *Arena of Ambition: A History of the Cambridge Union*.
“The Union has actually been very progressive,” he says. “It had its first Jewish President in 1850, six years before the University granted Jewish students their degree. It elected its first non-white President in 1882, and was ahead of the rest of the University and Colleges in admitting women [in 1963] and electing a female President [Ann Mallalieu, in 1967].”

Along the way, the Union has tackled all manner of threats to its existence, from Luftwaffe raids to fire to being absorbed into a more conventional Student Union. But no threat has recurred so frequently as that of not being able to balance the books.

Indeed, taking on ultimate responsibility for the Union’s finances at the age of 20 or 21 is not for the timid, as Ed Stourton (Trinity 1976) discovered in Lent 1979. He says: “When I was President, you were technically the chief executive of the whole thing, which was absolutely terrifying – and of course it was always going into debt. The thing that sticks negatively in the mind is that awful sinking feeling when you get the call the day before a big debate and your star guest says, ‘I’m afraid I can’t come.’ My best memories are actually not from my presidency, but from debates. Once you’re President, you just preside. You don’t make speeches any more.”

Parkinson says: “Maintaining financial independence is vital – the Union is within the University but not part of it. Sometimes this is a challenge: for example, it was the only building connected with the University to be directly hit by the Luftwaffe, and had to raise the funds to rebuild that and get itself back on an even keel. The bombing claimed the life of Stanley Brown who had been its chief clerk, and had worked at the society for nearly 40 years. He died seven months later from the trauma of trying to rescue the building on that night.”

That blaze in 1942 is not the only one to have devastated the Union buildings. Just 10 days into his 1975 presidency, and with a debate featuring Denis Healey, Geoffrey Howe and Harold Macmillan already announced, Bazalgette (Fitzwilliam 1973) faced his own baptism of fire. He recalls: “Someone came up to me at a May Week party and said, ‘The roof has just burnt off your place.’ There were people there, trying to carry smoke-damaged carpets and things drenched in water out of the building. It was a complete catastrophe. That would have been in June and I had arranged for the debate to be televised in October.”

Worse yet, a period of high inflation had left the ruined debating chamber severely underinsured it appeared. “We were told that we were going to get only 60% of the cost paid by the insurers, and it was hundreds of thousands of pounds – the equivalent of millions today. I was making things up as I went along, but I went down to Westminster and convened a meeting of some former presidents.

“One was Christopher Norman-Butler, who has since passed away. He was a banker and said that he would have a word with the chairman of Norwich Union. I don’t know if I believed him at the time, but he was as good as his word it seemed. A few weeks later Norwich Union countermanded the instructions of the local insurance office and said they’d pay the lot.”

On occasion, political machinations at the Union have broken through to become the subject of national or even international news. In 1962, Brian Pollitt (King’s 1959) became the Union’s first Communist President. At a time when Cold War tensions were ratcheted to their tightest, the possibility of a Communist Union President was big news. Only three years earlier, John Nott had been the eighth successive Cambridge University Conservative Association (CUCA) member to take the reins at the Union.

“There was a Conservative bloc,” says Pollitt. “CUCA had an organic relationship with the Union because that was traditionally the path for those aspiring to prominence in later political life. They rose within CUCA and simultaneously within the Union Society, and it was very common for them to proceed to being chairman of CUCA to becoming President or whatever in the Union Society.

“You had this mysterious reptile, known as the ‘CUCA crocodile’, which could mobilise Conservative-voting troops within the Union to vote for people they supported, or not vote for people they opposed. There was no comparable tie with the Socialist Society or the Labour Club.”

Pollitt first stood for the presidency in 1961 against Barry Augenbraun (St John’s 1960), a vociferous anti-communist from

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<td>Sir Jonathan Frederick Pollock and Henry Bickersteth are born: they will found the Society along with Sir Edward Hall Alders.</td>
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<td>A drunken brawl between three small College debating societies results, so legend goes, in the ‘Cambridge Union Society’.</td>
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<td>The Union moves into its current home, designed by Sir Alfred Waterhouse, on Bridge Street in the centre of Cambridge.</td>
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<td>The building section that now contains the John Maynard Keynes library is added.</td>
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New York, ensuring interest on both sides of the Atlantic. A BBC television crew was present to witness Pollitt’s narrow defeat. That election was later declared void because Augenbraun was deemed to have flouted the Union’s ban on canvassing, and Pollitt withdrew his own candidacy.

Media attention was yet greater for his successful run at the presidency two terms later, with ITN reporters covering the handover from Lord Howard. Interest had been stoked by one of the most notorious episodes in Union history. On the eve of his election, Pollitt had been badly beaten up by a group of assailants in his rooms at King’s, forcing him to take his Finals in the College sanatorium. The attackers have never been identified. Pollitt recalls a contemporary describing his time in charge, which included such innovations as the rejection of formal wear and gowns at House debates, as “the revolutionary government”.

In the following decades, an organised opposition to the Union emerged. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Cambridge Organisation of Labour Students and the broader University Left movement encouraged a student boycott of the Society. In 1986, Tom Shakespeare (Pembroke 1984) was charged with coordinating the campaign.

He says: “The Union Society Boycott Campaign had a page in the student handbook and a stall at the Freshers’ Fair, and we did leafleting. The reasoning was that it was seen to be expensive to join and elitist – all the black-tie dinners and public school-style debating. There was also felt to be a confusion in some freshers’ minds between the Union Society and the Student Union. We wanted to make clear that the Student Union was free and was the democratic voice of students, and that they could participate in debates and activities outside the Union.”

Some speakers in the Union term card could be relied upon to provoke a protest. Shakespeare says: “We objected to people like Enoch Powell and Harvey Proctor. In retrospect, I’m not sure I would now do those protests. I believe in free speech and I’m not sure we can deny people a platform if they are speaking within the law – so if the aim of the protest is to close down debate, I don’t think that’s...
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legitimate. But certainly people like Enoch Powell had said racist and inflammatory things, and I think it was right to turn up and say, ‘Look, we don’t agree with you’.

This question, of whether controversial speakers should be engaged in debate at all, has caused more consternation and upset than any other. The National Union of Students and many of its affiliated unions adhere to a “no platform” policy that bans certain organisations and individuals from speaking – in particular, those deemed to hold fascist or racist views.

The Cambridge Union has generally cleaved to an opposing view, and its roster of speakers has often been controversial. Oliver Mosley, a second year at St John’s, Director of Communications for the Union’s bicentenary and President-elect, says: “We don’t take a view on speakers, so we will host anyone and everyone, as long as they are interesting to our members. Marine Le Pen, for example – whatever you think of her – has ideas that are interesting to engage with or attack. We do face challenges, because at any one time there will be at least one society at Cambridge that disagrees with the speaker that’s coming to the Union.”

Debbie Newman (Fitzwilliam 1998) recalls that around the time of her presidency in 2001, arguments raged over whether to invite the disgraced historian and Holocaust sceptic David Irving. (A different committee would include him in the Easter 2003 term card, resulting in widespread protest, but the invitation was withdrawn.)

She says: “In that situation it becomes about safety and Cambridgeshire Police has to get involved, and that’s when it tends to get into the national press. Everyone has an opinion about that divide: whether you’re giving a platform for dangerous views or you’re allowing full and democratic debate and allowing people to make up their own minds about what they hear.

“I think the Union does provide this opportunity for the airing of controversial debate, which allows ideas to be effectively rubbished in public; in other places they’re deemed too dangerous to be heard.”

While controversial speakers have been a regular bugbear for progressives, a frequent complaint of more conservative Union alumni has been that serious debate has been edged out by more frivolous material. The past 25 years have seen celebrities such as Tara Palmer-Tomkinson, Jim Bowen, Katie Price and Pamela Anderson grace the chamber, securing column inches in the diary columns and provoking the odd letter of disapprobation from old members.

Parkinson’s history of the Union points out that it has always had a flippant, waggish side and that light-hearted debates are as old as the Society itself. But for some ex-officers, recollections of Cambridge humour can now elicit a groan or two. “It’s cringe-making to think of the so-called ‘funny debates’, says Stourton. “I remember there was one favourite motion which was ‘A drink before and a cigarette afterwards are the three best things in life,’ which we all thought was howlingly funny, clever and sophisticated.”

Bazalgette returned to the Union in the 1990s as a trustee, and has since accepted several invitations to speak. At one occasion, he was surprised to be reunited with one of his own witticisms from 1974. “Someone stood up and made a joke that I had coined myself,” he says. “It’s not even devastatingly funny – it was about people from Magdalene having plus-four trousers and minus-four IQ points. So I don’t think things have changed too much.”

Despite the odd instance of cross-generational plagiarism, he believes the Union’s core mission is as relevant and important as ever.

“If it was just a club for trading jokes, it would be pretty depressing in many ways. But individuals’ ability to speak in public is a critical asset, particularly in the modern media age. Being able to articulate in public, and coherently, what you believe in: without putting too fine a point on it, that’s a vital part of the act of leadership.”

The Cambridge Union 200th Anniversary Debate will take place at Middle Temple Hall, London, on 26 September. The event is open to all Cambridge alumni and members of the public. For more information, go to 2015.cus.org

1999
During the Kosovo crisis, representatives from the Kosovo Liberation Army, the Serbian Government and the UNHCR come together at the Union.

2001
First live-streamed debate: Stephen Fry and DJ Kissy Sell Out discuss: ‘This House believes that classical music is irrelevant to today’s youth.’

2011

2013
The Union enters a three-year sponsorship deal with Deloitte.

2015
The Union celebrates 200 years of free speech and the art of debating.
Bubble vision

We all know that the rational consumer is a fiction. So what does drive our economic behaviour? Dr Benedetto De Martino says the answer lies in our theory of mind.

Words Lucy Jolin
Photograph Marcus Ginns

What drives a person to pay three years’ worth of wages for a tulip bulb, £1.2m for a shoebox in Chelsea, or their life savings for a 64-digit computer-generated number called a Bitcoin? Greed? Mass hysteria? Plain stupidity? Or something more complex? Bubbles – in the price of anything from bulbs to Bitcoins – have long fascinated and infuriated economists. They appear with depressing regularity, and when they pop, they leave a trail of economic and human misery in their wake. Yet we still have no explanation as to why they happen. Which is why cognitive neuroscientist and neuroeconomist, Dr Benedetto De Martino, principal investigator at the Brain Decision Modelling Laboratory, is taking a rather different approach.

De Martino’s standard fourth-floor office seems an unlikely location for cutting-edge behavioural science, but there are a few clues: the incomprehensible scrawls on the whiteboard; a china Victorian phrenology head; Peter Bernstein’s study of risk, Against the Gods, jostling with William J. Baumol’s solid Economics: Principles and Policy. On his desk sits a huge computer, dizzying amounts of data arrayed across its screen. It is these numbers – taken from thousands of brain scans – that are at the heart of De Martino’s investigations.

Why we act as we do in a bubble isn’t about logic, or rational and irrational behaviour, as traditional economics would have us believe – humans aren’t fully rational. Rather, it’s about what cognitive scientists call ‘theory of mind’: the ability to understand other people’s intentions. Most of us have it: not having it is a significant marker for autistic spectrum disorder. In many contexts, having theory of mind is a huge advantage – it enables you to put yourself in someone else’s shoes. But in the context of an emerging bubble, theory of mind could
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well be the reason why we fail to realise what’s really going on – until it’s too late.

“People have a very strong tendency to attach intention to anything,” De Martino points out. “Not just about humans, either. We anthropomorphise. We say the gods were angry and that is why the weather is bad. We talk about the market ‘panicking’. So we end up seeing intention where there is no intention. We see a price going up, and we start to think: maybe the other people know more than I do, I should buy.”

So everyone is following each other because they think others know more – but actually, as the screenwriter William Goldman wrote about predicting box office hits, nobody knows anything.

“We are trying to get inference from other minds, even if there aren’t other minds there – just noise,” continues De Martino.

“And that is a good example of how difficult it is to define what exactly is rational and what is not rational. For example, we showed that in the context of financial bubbles, having theory of mind makes you worse. It makes you take bad decisions and lose money as a consequence. But in another financial context, having theory of mind improves your performance.”

Indeed, a 2010 study on insider trading by Antoine Brunquiat, Steven Quartz and Peter Bossaerts found that when people were trading in markets with insiders (individuals with access to non-public information about a company) those with theory of mind were very able to pick up on the signs that something untoward was happening in the markets. Their ability to read the intentions of others was a plus.

Understanding how value is represented in the brain is also pivotal to understanding this kind of economic decision-making and that, De Martino says, is one of neuroeconomics’ biggest leaps forward.

“Have you heard the phrase ‘it’s like comparing apples and oranges?’” he asks. “Well, this is probably one of the most stupid sentences you can say. We compare oranges and apples all the time. You go to the supermarket and you choose between meat or fish.” People actually conflate two kinds of decisions, he points out. One is perceptual: is this piece of fish larger than that piece? In this case, you need to compare the same types. But the most interesting decisions are value-based decisions, in which your brain has its own common currency that allows you to compare things.

 “[This currency is] very flexible and subjective, and it depends on your own internal state. There is a region in the brain, in the prefrontal cortex, just between your eyebrows, that allows you to compute those abstract values,” said De Martino. “Say I love ’80s pop and I hate heavy metal: that area will be more active when I choose to listen to ’80s pop. But if I like heavy metal, that area will be active when I choose to listen to metal.”

During his bubble research, De Martino found that this same brain region became highly active in traders who were the most keen to ride on the bubble. They were keen to buy above an asset’s full fat.

As De Martino readily admits, you can’t test people on their theory of mind or their understanding of value before you allow them to trade — and, indeed, many bubbles are fuelled by those outside the original, specialist market, such as the recent Bitcoin craze. But what you can do, he says, is start to understand what mechanisms are driving that behaviour. In other words, if you know why someone is doing something, you can think about what action you might take to change what he or she is doing. People take part in bubbles for different reasons. Some are cynical, knowing that the bubble will eventually pop and they carefully plan their exit. Others genuinely believe that the bubble is not a bubble and it will never pop. Very different kinds of interventions might be required for the former than for the latter. This kind of thinking is already being translated into action in the real world: it feeds into the ‘nudge theory’ pioneered by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein in their 2008 book, Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness, which in turn was a direct influence on the setting up of the Behavioural Insights team, first launched as part of the Cabinet Office.

De Martino arrived in Cambridge last year as the Sir Henry Dale Fellow (Royal Society and Wellcome Trust). His work is underpinned, he says, by a deep desire to get away from “black and white thinking” and dig deeper into the complexities of the human mind. It’s why he chose to specialise in neuroeconomics, pioneered by his Wellcome mentor Professor Daniel Kahneman, author of the bestseller Thinking Fast and Slow, and the winner of the Nobel Prize for Economic Sciences in 2002. (“He told me that he never took an economics class in his life,” says De Martino. “It’s pretty cool that you can get the Nobel Memorial Prize for a subject you’ve never studied.”). Kahneman, together with his colleague the late Amos Tversky, were among the first to use empirical evidence to challenge the assumption of rationality dominant in classical economic theory. Their work was pivotal to the birth of neuroeconomics, a new discipline that combines psychology, new imaging technology and economic concepts in order to find new ways of understanding human behaviour. This new, young discipline has not been without its detractors.

“People think it’s all about bits of the brain lighting up,” De Martino says. “But that is a profound misunderstanding of our goals. Finding different areas that light up — that was early neuroimaging, almost like phrenology. But how do the different parts of the brain work together to control complex behaviour? What are the neural dynamics of these computations? That’s what we are interested in. For example, economic theory will tell you that it doesn’t really matter how I frame the question. You should make your decision based on the benefit that you get. But we have studied the neurobiology of nudging — the fact people are incredibly susceptible to frames.” He gives the example of a dieter picking up a 70% fat-free yogurt. “Great, you think, and you buy it. Now, imagine the same snack was advertised as 30% full fat. It’s exactly the same percentage of fat. You understand that. But you’re probably not going to buy it. Sometimes what you’re saying doesn’t matter — it’s the context around it. We are now starting to understand how this contextual information is represented by the brain and how it shapes our daily choice.”

De Martino’s team are now investigating another less than rational human trait: confidence. It is a strange concept, he says, and one that everyone believes they know how to define but is a lot more complex when you look below the surface. De Martino is investigating its link with uncertainty, combining complex brain imaging technology with Bayesian probability — the idea, derived from the work of Thomas Bayes, the 18th-century Presbyterian minister with a passion for mathematics, that when you make a decision, you always have a prior belief. This, in turn, is shaped by sensory evidence, creating a ‘posterior’ belief.

What really matters in that process, he says, is the uncertainty.

“If your prior belief is very uncertain, any information I get from you is going to drive that belief. But if you have a very strong prejudice, you need to give me way more information to change my prior belief. For example, I am Italian. I am very precise and I am always punctual. But people have a prior belief that Italians are always late. So people will want way more evidence to change their prior belief because they have much more certainty about that prior belief.”

Research is still in its early stages, but De Martino is confident — in its most basic sense — that exciting ideas will emerge. “What I want is to build a model of the human brain that shows how we really are,” he says. “Not an ideal standard of rationality.”
SHERLOCK HOLMES was a Cambridge man. Apparently, he read Natural Sciences. The stories that record his adventures don’t state this directly, but readers have made their own deductions. There are clues. Not enough to make a definitive case, perhaps; but quite enough for fans to enjoy a field day of speculation. Some have even gone so far as to identify his particular College (Sidney Sussex, according to Dorothy L Sayers).

Holmes’s creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, was not a Cambridge man. Nor was he a scientist. But on 1 November 1926, he travelled to Cambridge to lecture scientists, at St Catharine’s John Ray Society. The whole event must seem thoroughly bizarre to us today. Although Conan Doyle was not without scientific training – he had studied medicine at Edinburgh and had practised as a doctor for a short time too – by the date of his visit to Cambridge, he had long since given up medicine. His international reputation rested not on science, but on his achievements as a teller of tales, as a writer of fantasy and fiction.

How, then, had he come to be invited to speak to the John Ray Society? It would, on the face of it, have made more sense for him to address the College’s literary sodality, the Shirley Society. Had there simply been a mistake? G K Chesterton’s advice to aspiring journalists was “to write an article for the Sporting Times and one for the Church Times and put them in the wrong envelopes”, because: “What is really the matter with almost every paper, is that it is much too full of things suitable to the paper.” It is tempting to imagine that the Presidents of the John Ray and Shirley Societies had jointly arrived at a similar conclusion.

I like to imagine a scene where, heady with mischief after some formal hall, the appointed representatives of these Societies decided to switch the invitations for their respective speakers between them, deliberately putting them into the wrong envelopes.

But no, when Conan Doyle pitched up at the John Ray Society, he was certainly expected. Indeed, his arrival must have been hotly anticipated, for it swelled attendance at the Society far beyond anything seen since its foundation two years earlier. 'The Economic

PHANTOM EVIDENCE

When Sir Arthur Conan Doyle addressed the John Ray Society in the Michaelmas Term of 1926, he had science on his mind. The science of spirits. Dr Michael Hurley explains what happened next.

Photographs Marcus Ginns

Importance of Nitrogen and Methods Employed in its Fixation', 'Ancient Methods of Surgery', 'The Tabacco Habit', 'Arctic Exploration', 'Notes vs. Noises', 'X-Rays', 'Beer', 'Bricks', 'Ticks': these talks, among many others, drew healthy crowds in the 1920s, typically of around 20 or 30 people. A few meetings saw higher numbers, such as Dr FAE Crew's lecture on 'Sex Determination', for which (according to the Society's minute book) “about 70 were packed into the room”. But Conan Doyle's visit was so popular that it couldn't even be held in the normal venue, the JCR. Instead, with “about 230 members and friends” clamouring for a seat that day, the Society had to convene in the College Hall.

It is no surprise that people thronged to hear Conan Doyle; he was by that time a major celebrity. But the topic of his talk compounds, rather than clarifies, the mystery of why he had been invited to speak in the first place. He did not talk about literature – there had been no mix up of envelopes – but the subject of the talk he gave nonetheless seems closer to science fiction than to science. His topic was 'Spiritualism', and he began with "a brief description of ectoplasm", which he presented as the material basis for all psychic phenomena. Explaining how ectoplasm is exuded from the bodies of mediums and later reabsorbed into them, he showed a number of slides illustrating the mucilaginous substance in all its manifestations, "from beautiful women to mere vaporous masses". For good measure, he also threw in some spirit photographs.

I have long been interested in Conan Doyle, and especially in how the creator of a paragon of logical deduction could, in the later part of his life, come to champion supernatural phenomenon, even advocating the existence of fairies at the end of the garden. It is all the more curious when one considers that Conan Doyle's great friend, and the world's greatest magician, Harry Houdini, spent the later part of his life doing precisely the opposite – exposing mediums – which he was better placed to do than most people, because of his knowledge of conjuring (he published a wonderful book on the subject called Miracle Mongers and their Methods).

Conan Doyle's life leading up to his conversion to Spiritualism hints at how he came to hold his improbable beliefs. Before he was a professed Spiritualist, he was a professed Materialist; and before that, he was a Catholic. There is a chain of connection between these apparently incompatible positions. Schooled by Jesuits at Stonyhurst College, he came to think that religion and science were at odds with each other. That was by no means the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church appears to have driven him to reject religion entirely. Not in the sense that he lapsed into apathy or agnosticism. Indifference and indecision were not in his nature; rather, the pendulum swung full course, and he put his faith in what he took to be the rival authority of knowledge offered by science. “When I finished my medical education in 1882,” he recalled, “I found myself, like many young medical men, a convinced Materialist. We were under the influence of men like Professor Huxley, Herbert Spencer, Darwin...”

Many years later, he recanted once more. Conan Doyle's experiences at Stonyhurst no doubt left an indelible mark on his imagination. (I should know, I was a schoolboy there myself). But while Holmes fans have noted that, for instance, Baskerville Hall was modelled on the buildings at Stonyhurst, and that Conan Doyle named Holmes's nemesis, Moriarty, after a fellow pupil, it may be that his schooling affected him also in rather more elusive ways. Specifically, it may be that his Catholicism stayed with him just enough to draw him back, at the last, from a lifetime of Materialism – by the proverbial "twitch upon the thread".

In the final paragraph of an article he wrote for Strand Magazine in 1921, he nicely summarises what he came to regard as the impoverished purview of late-19th century science. The article is on 'The Evidence for Fairies', which seems absurd from the outset. But his coda note usefully suggests why he might wish to even entertain such apparent silliness. "Victorian science would have left the world hard and clean and bare, like a landscape on the moon," he writes, "but this science is in truth but a little light in the darkness, and outside that limited circle of definite knowledge we see the loom and shadow of gigantic and fantastic possibilities around us, throwing themselves continually across our consciousness in such ways that it is difficult to ignore them."

Having first rejected religion in favour of science, then, he would ultimately return to believe that there are indeed more things in heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in positivist philosophy. But he had not, in his own view, come full circle. He figured his enlightenment instead as a fusing of religion with Materialism. Spiritualism was, he claimed, a "science of religion"; it forsakes mystical rituals, and trades instead in material stuff. The very trappings that, to us, most obviously discredit Spiritualism – the goo from ghosts, the overexposed photographs, the tenebrous noises erupting in séances – were the very things Conan Doyle used to authenticate its truth: "We are a Materialist generation," he explained in another lecture on Spiritualism, "and the great force beyond appeals to us through material things."

So what did Cambridge make of Conan Doyle's expatiations on spirits and séances? Did his lecture bring the John Ray Society into disrepute, by making a mockery of rigorous proof and rationality? It is hard to imagine Sherlock Holmes standing for it. “The world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply” was how he dispatched the suggestion of supernatural causes in The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire. Holmes is not merely dismissive of the supernatural on this particular occasion; he rejects the idea of supernatural powers in general, and on principle. “I take it, in the first place, that neither of us is prepared to admit diabolical intrusions into the affairs of men,” he corralled Watson in The Adventure of the Devil's Foot. “Let us begin by ruling that entirely out of our minds.”
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But the reaction of the Society's President was quite different: far from expressing impatient, *a priori* objections, he welcomed Conan Doyle's address as “a great honour”. Was Conan Doyle merely being humoured by his hosts, or indeed being offered up as the unwitting object of humour? The minute book gives an inkling of how his talk was received: “All must have been convinced of the lecturer’s sincerity if not of the truth of his theories.” Although it strains towards politeness, that sentence also risks tipping into sarcasm. Sincerity is set against, rather than beside, truth. That all must have been convinced of Conan Doyle’s sincerity seems to imply that none could have been by the truth of what he actually had to say. Sincerity becomes a euphemism for ‘deluded’.

The minute book also records that, “His lecture lasted over an hour and a half and never once did his audience lose interest”. But even that sentiment shies from full-throated praise, since it is, of course, perfectly possible to be gripped by the spectacle of a lecture without concluding that its argument is, in the end, coherent or credible.

That Conan Doyle’s sortie into Spiritualism did not turn the heads of Cambridge’s bright young things is perhaps reassuring. But his visit suggests something more interesting about the academic climate of Cambridge in the 1920s than that its urbane undergraduates could not be gulled by tales of table-rapping and ectoplasmic excretions.

However unconvincing his ‘material’ proofs of Spiritualism might seem, he did at least come bearing proofs. Which makes much more sense of why scientists should choose to give his views an airing. Conan Doyle’s conversion to Spiritualism came at a time, moreover, when science was also reimagining its own disciplinary boundaries. The year of his graduation from medical school, 1882, was also the same year in which The Society for Psychical Research was founded. And by the early 20th century, science had, through its own advances, taken significant strides in challenging a straightforwardly material view of the world.

Conan Doyle would not have been invited to talk to Cambridge scientists about spirits a few decades earlier; nor could he have been a few decades later. His visit pinpoints an extraordinary moment in the University’s intellectual history, in which it opened itself up to the occult. Far from demeaning Cambridge science by his visit to St Catharine’s, the occasion of his lecture suggests the admirable, and indeed emulable, open-mindedness of a culture of enquiry at Cambridge that was confident enough, as well as sceptical enough, to venture beyond its “limited circle of definite knowledge”.

Dr Michael Hurley is Lecturer in English and Fellow of St Catharine’s.
The home movie offers fascinating insights into the lives of those in front of, and behind, the camera, as rare footage of a 1935 Raj picnic shows.

NAKED LUNCH

For most people, owning a mobile phone also means owning a video camera. There is no cost at all in sharing with others the scenes you film, thanks to YouTube and other such sites, so you can film nearly everything you do. In 1935, this was not the case. A cine film camera was expensive, film was not cheap and developing it was particularly pricey. You could not waste hours of expensive film waiting for your cat to do something funny, your baby to belch hilariously or some stranger’s dog to chase deer across a national park. People filming home movies had, therefore, to be more selective about what they filmed. There is as much difference between one of these films and most YouTube clips as there is between a letter written in 1935 and the majority of the emails you have sent recently.

As the archivist of the Centre of South Asian Studies’ Collection, I am effectively responsible for a set of home movies which, when analysed, bears great resemblance to the sort of documents historians, anthropologists and others working in the arts, humanities and social sciences have relied on for many years. Some, like newspapers, document significant events. In our own collections, for example, we have film of the funeral of Lord Brabourne (Gradwell 1), footage of the aftermath of the Quetta earthquake of 1935 (Berridge 4), a train derailed by pro-independence activists in c.1938 (Berridge 5) and two very harrowing films of the catastrophic results of the mass migrations that followed Partition in 1947 (Williams 1 and 2) as well as footage of refugees arriving in Lahore in the same period (Burtt 3 and 7). Others, a bit like official documents, show the working of the Empire, the ways in which the infrastructure of the Raj was built, such as the building of the railways (Berridge 1), or the vast canal systems of the North-West (Stokes 12 and 13).

Some of the films are similar in tone to the letters in our paper archive – made to be sent home so that people could show those back in the UK what their new life was like, such as the first few films of the Hunter Collection, which are actually filmed to look like a letter inviting viewers on a holiday to India and showing them what they will see when they arrive. And some show, often accidentally, the lives of Indian people (Banks 5), as well as the lives of the British who ran the Imperial system – the garden parties (Meiklejohn 8), hunting/horse-riding (Banks 2) social gatherings and sports, and also more personal, domestic scenes in which we are shown the homes and gardens of British India (Stokes 3).

Words Dr Kevin Greenbank
Stills montage Steve Rawlings
The Collection is perhaps most interesting, though, when the films reveal something unintended by the film-maker, enabling an insight into the situation in which the film was made or into the mindset of the person holding the camera. The writer of a letter, diary or government document is able to exercise absolute control of the narrative that is presented, but this is not always the case in a film, as those being filmed can act in ways that tell us more about the context in which the document was created.

Two examples jump out at me – one is a flippant example of what films can reveal, the other asks some interesting and important questions about social attitudes and about what a British woman is willing to have her audience see when viewing the films she made, or about what is acceptable in certain social settings.

The two films come from the Kendall Collection and both are, somewhat unusually, made by a woman, Lady Kendall, who was the wife of a judge in Allahabad. Kendall I shows mainly domestic scenes: the garden being tended, a children’s party, people walking in the family garden. Towards the end there is footage of a wedding. These scenes are interspersed with footage of Indian agricultural workers operating an irrigation system. This juxtaposition is, in itself, interesting.

While it shows the lifestyle of an affluent member of British Indian society, however, it also reveals something quite simple. It is clear that this was the first film taken on a new camera. You can tell this not because of the quality of the footage, but because of the way the camera was used – the film-maker treats it like a still camera. She points it at an object or scene, captures the image and then turns it off. What this leaves is a dizzying collection of short clips, mostly lasting between one and two seconds. Even when longer scenes are filmed – the wedding at the end or the agricultural scenes, for example – these are taken in short episodes. In the whole 10 minutes of the film, there are very few times when the camera is turned on for longer than four or five seconds. It is very difficult to watch, and even harder to watch to the end without getting a headache.

It is entirely understandable, however. We are used to watching what we have filmed straight away, and if we are doing something wrong, we can correct it with our next recording. Lady Kendall had to wait until the film she was using was completely recorded and then take it to be developed. Given that she shot 10 minutes of film in sections of a few seconds at a time, it is likely that it took quite a while to fill the whole reel. After viewing it she corrects her use of the camera – if you watch the whole Collection, you will see that the shots in subsequent films gradually lengthen.

Kendall III is more complex, although it also has at its heart the problems associated with making the switch from taking photographs to shooting films. In this film, Lady Kendall shows a picnic in the hills. After showing a group of friends (and a larger group of bearers and other servants) making their way up to the picnic site, she tries to take what is essentially a photograph of the scene, composing it to suit what she wants the image to show. She does this, though, with the cine camera running.

Camera obscura
This footage appears to show Lady Kendall (from behind the camera) asking one of the party to stand in front of the Indian servant apparently to obscure him from the camera’s view. The servant steps across to the left, thus remaining firmly visible. The friend moves back across to block him again – at which point Lady Kendall stops filming.
For some reason, Lady Kendall, who has been quite happy to show servants involved in carrying picnic things up the mountain, does not wish to have this servant in shot.

This provides us with a very revealing moment – it starts 42 seconds into the film (just after footage of a tennis match and some shots of mountains), and only lasts a second. Standing behind the people, seated on their blankets and smiling and laughing through their sandwiches, is a servant in livery.

For some reason, Lady Kendall, who has been quite happy to show the servants involved in carrying the picnic things up the mountain, does not wish to have this servant in this shot, so she asks one of the party to stand and obscure him from the camera’s view. The servant initially sways slightly to his right to try and stay in the shot, but then steps across to his left, remaining firmly visible. The friend moves back across to block him again, clearly taking direction of where she should stand, at which point Lady Kendall stops filming.

This attempt to create a mise-en-scène clearly fails, but in doing so it opens up many questions and lines of enquiry. Why the servant wants to remain in the shot, where he is clearly not wanted, for example. It also suggests that there are some situations in which it is acceptable for servants to be shown in the film, and others where it is not. Why this might be is not immediately clear, but this does show that a film can helpfully shed light on social attitudes, conventions and mores in a way that a written account would not. A diary entry or letter about this picnic would have simply not mentioned the presence of the servant, obscuring him far more effectively than Lady Kendall’s friend is able to do in this short piece of footage.

The Centre of South Asian Studies’ film archive was largely collected by its remarkable first archivist, Mary Thatcher, who was commissioned in 1967 to begin a search for archival material that was otherwise in danger of being lost. Her brief was to focus on ordinary British men and women who worked in India, either in the Civil Service or its associated governmental concerns, those who lived in the Princely States, or were in the private sector, or served as missionaries or teachers. The resulting trawl of families who had returned to Britain after Independence has resulted in an archive of international importance and renown.

The Collection deals mostly with the British in India (Indian collections would generally be restored to Indian archives, rather than being kept out of the country) and includes papers, photographs and films, and an oral history collection. The unique collection of amateur cine films comprises films mostly made in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Where the archive has a film, it also normally has accompanying papers and photographs, providing a rare level of documentation and analysis.

To view the films, visit www.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/films/filmlist.html – films are archived by name of collection and number.
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Alison Traub
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Nonetheless, many people think that it is pretty unusual to give to their university. Maybe you scan the list of donors at the back of your College magazine and think: “She gives to College? Weird!” every time you spot a name you recognise.

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So when an academic wants to pursue a programme of blue-sky research, or when a College backs a student who would not otherwise have been able to study here, or when our medieval buildings are carefully restored, I think it is philanthropy – the time, talents and money of a 230,000 strong alumni body, who, of all people, understand what it is that Cambridge does and can give to the world – that helps get the right resources to the right places.

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Books

Summer reading

What will you be packing in your suitcase (or downloading onto your e-reader) this summer? CAM gathers recommendations from our panel of alumni and academics.

Words Anne Wollenberg
Illustration Victoria Ling

Gillian Tett (Clare 1986)
US managing editor, The Financial Times
A book that hasn’t had a lot of attention, but really ought to, is It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens by Danah Boyd (Yale University Press). It’s an extraordinary book that uses anthropology to understand the digital world and takes a different perspective from the normal clichéd view of teenagers and social networking. It’s very thought-provoking.

The Road to Character by David Brooks (Random House) makes the very unfashionable point that we spend so much time telling kids to improve their CVs, yet we don’t really think about their inner development as people.

Another new title I’d recommend is Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioural Economics by Richard Thaler (WW Norton), which forces us to rethink economics. It makes the very obvious point that homo economicus is not homo rational, as macroeconomics likes to think.

Roger Mosey
Master, Selwyn College
I still read more about politics than anything else. I’ve just finished Jeremy Thorpe (Little, Brown), the amazing biography by Michael Bloch. It was a long time in the gestation as it was published after Thorpe’s death. Some of the things he did are mind-blowing. The fact he was tried for conspiracy and incitement to murder is one of the greatest political stories of the 20th century. Bloch had unprecedented access and people were incredibly frank in what they told him, including Thorpe himself. I found it incredibly revelatory and a rattling good story.

I know a reasonable amount about the Roman period, but relatively little about the ancient Greeks. I’m currently reading Introducing the Ancient Greeks by Edith Hall (Bodley Head). It’s very accessible and a real eye-opener as to the endurance of the Greek civilisation, and their brilliance at synthesising the knowledge of the ancient world.

I’m also a big fan of Selwyn alumnus Robert Harris. I enjoyed the first two books in his Cicero trilogy set in Imperial Rome, Imperium and Lustrum (Arrow), and I’m really looking forward to the third, Dictator, which comes out this autumn. He’s an excellent storyteller.

Getting Out Alive: News, Sport and Politics in the BBC (Biteback) by Roger Mosey will be published in July.

Oliver Burkeman (Christ’s 1994)
Columnist for The Guardian
Boundaries of the Soul: The Practice of Jung’s Psychology by June Singer (Bantam Doubleday Dell), is a very lucid introduction and much easier than actually reading Jung. His approach highlights something that’s missing from popular psychology: the idea that our job is not to design the best life, but to ask what life is demanding of us.

Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas by Natasha Dow Schüll (Princeton University Press) is a fascinating anthropological study. It’s a mistake to think we’re free of compulsive machine use just because we happen not to be addicted to slot machines. The whole internet economy is one giant machine giving variable rewards.

I listen to audiobooks in the gym and thoroughly enjoyed The Day of the Jackal by Frederick Forsyth – read by Simon Prebble (Blackstone Audiobooks), who does a great job of invoking the writing. It describes an attempt to assassinate Charles de Gaulle. You know it’s going to fail, yet it’s a masterclass in building tension.

I’m also looking forward to reading The Moors: Lives, Landscape, Literature by William Atkins (Faber & Faber), an account of the bleak countryside we associate with Wuthering Heights and The Hound of the Baskervilles. I grew up in York, so the North York Moors and Yorkshire Dales are close to my heart.

Oliver Burkeman’s most recent book is The Antidote: Happiness for People Who Can’t Stand Positive Thinking (Canongate).

Sophie Winkleman (Trinity Hall 1998)
Actor
Voyage in the Dark by Jean Rhys (Penguin Modern Classics) is a melancholy tale of an unloved woman, but the writing is so incandescent, so luminously beautiful that it never feels depressing. The same
I marvel at the vivacity whizzing and popping beneath the dignified elegance of the writing. I still don’t know how such contrasting qualities can co-exist so beautifully.

goes for all Rhys’s novels. She is the most hypnotic writer I have ever read. She imparts her heroines’ lonely, rather seedy existences with a grace and shimmering quality that I find very beautiful.

The second would be Middlemarch by George Eliot (Wordsworth Classics). I marvel at the vivacity whizzing and popping beneath the dignified elegance of the writing. I still don’t know how such contrasting qualities can co-exist so beautifully, but Eliot mastered the art in this brilliant novel.

Waiting for the Barbarians by JM Coetzee (Vintage) is a taut, moving tale of one man’s struggle against the fear, brutality and hysterical prejudice all around him. It is shocking and tender and awe-inspiring.

Sarah LeFanu (Newnham 1971)
Biographer and broadcaster

I’m halfway through The Story of a New Name (Europa Editions), the second book in Elena Ferrante’s Neapolitan trilogy – the first is My Brilliant Friend. My daughter passed them on to me. They’re gripping, suspenseful novels about two friends growing up in poverty-stricken Naples in the 1950s and 1960s. They’re not unlike Karl Ove Knausgård’s My Struggle series (Vintage) in terms of their psychological detail and epic feel. Knausgård’s books are published as novels, but there’s been controversy about whether they’re fiction.

They’re big doorstoppers, so I read them on my Kindle.

I loved The Bees by Laline Paull (Fourth Estate) and gave it out widely at Christmas. It’s an uplifting story about a female bee who rises up against her oppressed state. It’s a cracking good read and ideal for summer holidays.

Samantha Ellis revisits and reappraises the heroines of her youth in How to Be a Heroine: Or, what I’ve learned from reading too much (Vintage). Ellis grew up in a tight-knit Irish-Jewish community in London and went to Cambridge purely because of Sylvia Plath. It’s a coming-of-age literary memoir that’s warm, witty and makes you want to rush off and re-read all the books.

Sarah LeFanu is one of the authors of Breaking Bounds: Six Newnham Lives edited by Biddy Passmore (Newnham College).

David Pickard (Corpus Christi 1979)
General Director, Glyndebourne

Alex Hoss writes brilliantly and accessibly about music in The Hest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century (Harper Perennial), a book that a lot of non-musicians have enjoyed. It’s essentially a history of music in the 20th century – I can’t think of another period when the music being composed was so diverse. It’s inevitably tied up with the dramatic history of the time and Ross is also brilliant on what it was like to be a composer in Nazi Germany, or for Shostakovich to be in Russia under Stalin.

I love reading books other people have recommended. I theatre and opera director Richard Jones introduced me to The Slaves of Solitude by Patrick Hamilton (Constable), a darkly comic novel about slightly sad characters living in a boarding house in the home counties during the Second World War. I also enjoy thrillers for light relief. I thought Simon Brett had stopped writing novels about Charles Paris, an out-of-work actor who solves mysteries, so it was a nice surprise to discover The Cinderella Killer (Creme de la Crime). They’re very entertaining and, if you work in theatre, the characters are very believable.

My other favourite pastime is cooking. Culinary Pleasures: Cookbooks and the Transformation of British Food by Nicola Humble (Faber) is a fascinating history of British food and cooking told through recipe books, from Mrs Beeton to Nigel Slater.

Dr Sarah Dillon
University Lecturer in Literature and Film

I was excited to start House of Leaves by Mark Z Danielewski (Pantheon), which has finally reached the top of my to-read pile. It’s a tremendously weird, scary, genre-defying, post-modern extravaganza of a first novel.

Michel Faber’s The Book of Strange New Things (Canongate Books) is a book that I’ve been saving for the summer. Faber is one of my favourite contemporary writers. His canon is so diverse, from ghost stories to short fiction to historical novels, and no Faber novel ever feels the same. He finished the book as his wife was dying of cancer and it’s supposed to be a deeply sad and moving read.

I’ve got really interested in graphic novels in the last year or so. I’m currently enjoying the Y: The Last Man series by Brian K Vaughan and Pia Guerra (Vertigo Comics), in which a global pandemic kills male humans and male animals – apart from one man and his monkey, who survive. It’s of interest partly because I’m working on a project about feminist utopias and dystopias, but it’s also something I can read on the beach. I’m currently reading the seventh volume, Paper Dolls. I haven’t checked how many there are because I don’t want it to end.

Sarah Dillon presents Close Reading on BBC Radio 4’s Open Book.

Professor Richard Josza
Leigh Trapnell Professor of Quantum Physics

I tend to enjoy novels about the complexities of human situations, which can often be comical and moving at the same time. The Terrible Privacy of Maxwell Sim by Jonathan Coe (Penguin) opens with a dead man in a car with a boot full of toothbrushes. The rest of the novel details how this came about. Coe has a wonderful sense of humour and his novels are also poignantly moving.

Australian author Patrick White writes deeply direct and moving books – I’d particularly mention Hiders in the Chariot (Vintage Classics) and The Vivisector (Vintage Classics), about a fictional artist inspired by the Australian painter Sidney Nolan.

Stefan Zweig was perhaps the most celebrated author in Europe before Hitler rose to power. I particularly like The Post Office Girl (Sort Of Books), published after Zweig’s death, and Beware of Pity (Pushkin Press). His novelia Chess (Penguin Classics) is also a great example of his wonderfully engaging literary style – on an ocean cruise, a chess champion is challenged by a fellow passenger.

I read Stoner: A Novel by John Williams (Vintage Classics) after hearing Ian McEwan recommend it on BBC Radio 4 Breakfast. It’s about a farm boy who becomes an academic in mid-west America. For many of us, the most
Dr Emma Gilby
University Senior Lecturer in French
I found *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* by David Mitchell (Sceptre) in a second-hand bookshop after planning to spend the summer at Leiden University. It’s about the Dutch East India Company and the relationship between a Dutch trader and a Japanese midwife, and there’s a big theme of language barriers and things getting lost in translation. I liked it so much that I immediately read Mitchell’s *Black Swan Green* (Sceptre), about a 13-year-old boy growing up as he struggles with a stammer – another kind of language barrier.

My house is a world of magic at the moment. My daughter loves the *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* books, so I’ve been meaning to dig out and re-read *The Dark is Rising* series by Susan Cooper (Simon & Schuster). I’m also planning to read *Lila* (Virago), the third book in Marilynne Robinson’s *Gilead* trilogy. She writes beautifully about the natural world. My work often centres on the experiences of wonder or doubt or scepticism in the 17th century – Robinson writes a lot about early modern thought in her non-fiction, such as *When I Was a Child I Read Books* and *Absence of Mind* (Virago).

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### Extracurricular

#### Cambridge soundtrack

**Art Themen**

Interview: Caroline Roberts

**Art Themen (St Catharine’s 1958)**

**Bix Beiderbecke and the Wolverine Orchestra: *Jazz Me Blues***

When I came to Cambridge I was a ‘mouldy fig’ – a jazz traditionalist, and this is a quintessential example of early jazz. Bix’s style was the forerunner of the ‘cool’ type of playing exemplified by Miles Davis. There was a very good traditional jazz scene in Cambridge and I played with André Beeson and Colin Purbrook in a basement in Botolph Lane and other funny little dives. The Rex Ballroom was another favourite venue, always full of American servicemen who came in from RAF Lakenheath and RAF Alconbury at the height of the Cold War. I looked for it about 10 years ago, but it had been knocked down.

**Hank Mobley: *Soul Station***

I was introduced to this by the late Lionel Grigson (King’s 1960), who was a year behind me. It’s an important track for me as it’s blues-based and my musical career moved into the blues scene for a few years, especially as a result of Hank Mobley’s solos, which I learnt note for note. I got a Desmond in my first year so my tutor banned me from playing for a term but, according to my Heffers diary, I played just as frequently. I’d climb back into Hobson’s building in Catz through the high windows on the ground floor, which would just about take me and my saxophone case.

**Mel Tormé with the Marty Paich Dek–Tette***

Patrick Gowers (Clare 1956) was another leading light on the Cambridge jazz scene and we played his transcriptions of Paich. He and Lionel were responsible for our winning the Inter-Universities Jazz Competition four times. One year we won it playing *Lulu’s Back in Town*, a track from this album. Patrick ran the music for Footlights and we played in the pit, with Peter Cook (Pembroke 1957), John Bird (King’s 1955), Eleanor Bron (Newnham 1960), Clive James (Pembroke 1964) and David Frost (Caius 1958) on stage. One night, Dave Gelly (Downing 1958), later jazz critic of the Observer, and I, decided to razz up a bit of music, so we played it half a tone up but unfortunately added another 16 bars. We were accompanying a scene with soldiers marching, so the whole thing fell apart. Patrick gave us ‘the death ray’, the famous petrifying glare that Benny Goodman would give his musicians when they stepped out of line.

**Duke Ellington with Paul Gonsalves on saxophone, Newport Jazz Festival, 1956: *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue***

It was the last set on Saturday night and there was a curfew, but they were playing out of their skins so Ellington decided to ignore it. Paul Gonsalves really dug in and played 27 choruses. It was mind–blowingly exciting. Every tenor saxophone player wants to get out there with a big band roaring behind and play the blues. We all tried to imitate Gonsalves, but there was no way with our limited imaginations that we could emulate the great man.

**Art Themen is a jazz saxophonist and retired consultant orthopaedic surgeon. He has played with many top names, including Stan Tracey, Alexis Korner and Joe Cocker.**
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Forget the still, peaceful Cam. For whitewater kayaker Judith Musker-Turner, nothing beats the rapids and slides, boulder fields, ledge drops, sticky holes and siphons of the Upper Dart. But without a competitive bone in her body, the fourth-year Queens’ Classics student and former president of the Cambridge University Canoe Club admits to being something of a sporting anomaly.

“I’m really passionate about the sport, which is funny because I was never a sporty person before I found kayaking,” she says. “I’ve never been very coordinated and I’m not the typical build of a kayaker, so I never thought I’d be able to do it.”

Brought up in Aberystwyth, as a teenager she longed to sail. Lacking a good local sailing club, she took up kayaking instead: “I started kayaking when I was 13, but only took it seriously from the age of 16. I wasn’t fussed about it until I did my first whitewater on the River Tywi in mid-Wales. I was instantly hooked and bought my first boat a month later.”

What draws her to the extreme end of the sport is camaraderie rather than competition: “That’s what I really love about whitewater, that mix of personal achievement and team spirit – but without the competitive element.”

And there is nothing like having to put your safety in the hands of others for building a strong team. “It’s genuinely dangerous. You have to know you’re with people you can trust. You have to know your own limits and those of everyone else in the group,” she explains. “And that creates very strong bonds.”

It is a process Musker-Turner learnt the hard way – through what kayakers call a “bad swim” – in a snowy Welsh river the February before coming up to Cambridge. Going in for a drop with too little momentum, she came out of her boat. But instead of resurfacing, she recirculated underwater for 40 seconds before someone pulled her out. “At the time I wasn’t that upset. I didn’t realise it had affected me until later,” she recalls. “There was no way someone wouldn’t have got me out in time, but it knocked my confidence for a long time.”

Although whitewater is Musker-Turner’s passion, it is not all that the Cambridge University Canoe Club is about. Club members go in for canoe polo, marathon and freestyle, travelling to artificial courses at Lee Valley and Nottingham, and its more laid-back ethos combined with good coaching make it ideal for newcomers to the sport.

According to Musker-Turner: “Some universities take all their beginners, throw them down stuff and then pick up the pieces at the bottom. Our club’s not like that. If someone had done that to me as a beginner I’d have been terrified. We are kinder to people.”

And while it lacks the thrills and spills of whitewater, the waters of the Cam make it a perfect place to teach kayakers and canoeists, and for more experienced members to develop coaching skills. The club runs a beginners’ course on summer term evenings, sessions that are a popular way to unwind.

“There’s something very special about being on water, somewhere you can get away from everything else,” she says. “The stretch down to Grantchester is really lovely. It’s very quiet – apart from a few fishermen – and with a small group of paddlers on a Sunday afternoon it’s very peaceful.”

And for Musker-Turner, for the past four years it has afforded an escape from the crowded city centre as well as work. “Because I’m from mid-Wales, I struggle with the lack of privacy here. If you’ve always lived in the city you perhaps don’t understand, but that stretch of river up to Grantchester is one of the only places here where you can be without other people.”

www.cucanoe.co.uk
All entries to be received by 5 September 2015.
Send completed crosswords:
• by post to CAM 75 Prize Crossword, University of Cambridge, 1 Quayside, Bridge Street, Cambridge, CB5 8AB
• online at alumni.cam.ac.uk/crossword
• by email to cameditor@alumni.cam.ac.uk
The first correct entry drawn will receive £75 of vouchers to spend on Cambridge University Press publications and a copy of Visions of Science by James A Secord, professor of history and philosophy of science at Cambridge, an exploration of seven scientific books from the first half of the 19th century that have made a lasting impact. Two runners up will also receive £50 to spend on CUP publications. Solutions and winners will be printed in CAM 76 and posted online at alumni.cam.ac.uk/magazine on 19 September 2015.

Solution to CAM 74 Crossword
Pairs by Schadenfreude
Winner: Graham King (Jesus 1963)
Runners up: Neil Talbott (Trinity 1999) and Ben Ward (Queens’ 1996)
Special mention to Paul Peters who correctly solved his first CAM crossword after a year’s break.

INSTRUCTIONS
When the answers have been entered in the grid five entries (of lengths 8,7,7,6 and 5) will be vacant, and some will include one or two empty cells. Solvers must complete the grid as demanded by the title of a work. Each asterisked clue has a single letter misprint in its definition part. If these clues are put in normal across/down order the correct letters spell out the title of the work (minus its last word) and the originator’s last name. Across and down clues are given in alphabetical order of their answers and all final grid entries are real words or phrases.

ACROSS
1. *See over fifty on each ride (3)
2. A soldier collapsed in ditch (7)
3. A country to show success (5)
4. Sharks had seal in trouble (5)
5. Troop’s fit to move on (3)
6. Virginia’s taking out one member of the ruling party wearing war decoration (5)
7. *Crop in Indiana yet to be cut (6)
8. *Shops prosperous in appearance turned over (5)
9. We know about the law on building sites saving energy (7)
10. *Bills are dropped by design (3)
11. *Priet in the part of choir master (5)
12. *Duck feather (3)
13. Get dusty Romeo to appear in spectacle (6)
14. *Banks make an estimate of special returns (5)
15. *Antique set of edge bits initially put in safe with diamonds (6)
16. *Obama’s found time to relax (5)
17. Fish boxes filled by sailor close to port (8)

DOWN
1. Adult fish crossing lake freely? (5)
2. *Joe left the last of wine, under a litre (5)
3. *Tax cut (3)
4. *Earth supporting dog fox (4)
5. Society boy’s raised pulse (4)
6. Roman official educated by assurgent priest (5)
7. An elusive sort always changing hands (3)
8. Strengthen foreign engineers abandoned by navy (8)
9. Soldier about to participate in prescribed course (5)
10. *Huts shelter catholic men saving energy (8)
11. More than one dressing, originally naked in illuminated square (5)
12. *Eight bygone months for rampant nurse (5)
13. Indian, local one defended by married lawyer (5)
14. A disease wiping out half of European capital (4)
15. Child skirting extremely horrible puddles (6)
16. Research saving lives increases (5)
17. Gent from Barcelona put up some roof fittings for Morag (5)
18. Spot Greek character outside Troy (6)

Letter pairs spell out “There went in two and two (unto Noah) into the ark, the male and the female as God had commanded Noah” (Genesis Chapter 7 verse 9). Removed letters spell out BULL/COW, HOB/GILL, RAM/EWE, DOG/BITCH, STALLION/MARE, BUCK/DOE, BOAR/SOW.
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