Cambridge Alumni Magazine
Issue 76 – Michaelmas 2015

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Welcome to the Michaelmas edition of CAM. Michael Bywater has been thinking hard about thinking. On page 10 he argues that we should take the construction of connection – passive thinking – a great deal more seriously. Elsewhere, on page 26, Claire Tomalin discusses the joys of skinny dipping and Patricia Duncker remembers a Cambridge February so cold that a visit to the UL was as much about heat retention as studiousness.

Next year marks the 200th anniversary of the Fitzwilliam Museum. The Museum is essentially a collection of collections, which got us wondering: what is it about the object that, even in a digital world, holds such allure? On page 20 Dr Mary Laven discusses what personal objects – relics, jewellery, bedspreads – can tell us about the thingness of things.

Talking of the physical world, on page 32, Professor Melinda Duer explains why the structure of bone has far-reaching implications and on page 14 we revisit the frankly epic coach trip undertaken by 39 students in 1965. On page 13 we report on the launch of a new fundraising campaign to support Cambridge.

Finally, you may notice that CAM has acquired a fresh new look. On this, and all other matters, I look forward to your thoughts.

Mira Katbamna (Caius 1995)
1926, expresses surprise that Doyle should have been invited to “lecture scientists” at Cambridge on psychical research. Several leading Cambridge scholars, such as Henry Sidgwick, Frederic Myers and Edmund Gurney, had been pioneers in establishing psychical research as a subject for serious, rigorous study, founding the British Society for Psychical Research in 1882, of which Conan Doyle was an early member. This Society is still active and thriving today and Cambridge personnel have contributed over the years to many of its most significant investigations. So an open-minded attitude to the subject is just what one would hope for in a Cambridge scientific society. Roger Straughan (Peterhouse 1960)

Spooky evidence
As an ex-forensic scientist with 33 years’ experience, the illustration of an evidence bag on the front cover of CAM 75 immediately caught my attention. I note that the blue backing tape covering the adhesive strip of bag number U0670909 had not been removed, meaning that the bag was unsealed. None of the bags were labelled to show their contents, from where the contents had been recovered and by whom, and none had been signed to show additional persons who may have handled the bags. Thus, the “chain of custody” had been broken. I fear that such lack of demonstration of correct procedures would be likely to render any evidence contained within the bags inadmissible in a court of law or, at the very least, lead to extremely close scrutiny as to the reliability of the evidence. Michael Merryweather (Peterhouse 1972)

Cambridge soundtrack
I’ve just had my first skim through the current issue of CAM. Finding that the wonderful Art Themen was sharing his Cambridge soundtrack has more than made my day – it has cheered up the whole week! Simon Fell (Fitzwilliam 1978)

Jazzing at the Rex
Art Themen’s Cambridge soundtrack interview evoked many fond memories of University jazz in the 1950s. Contemporaries will remember that in the early 1950s the University band played first in a school hall in Newmarket Road, before moving to the Union cellars, and for the big gigs the Rex Ballroom, adjoining the famous Cinema, which is, as Art points out, alas no more. Geoff Morris (Jesus 1954)

Star-crossed lovers?
May I draw your attention to two rather widely separated passages in CAM 75? Their wide separation might explain why no editorial matchmaking has been reported. On page 10: “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.” On page 47: “Judith Musker-Turner… Queens’… [from] Aberystwyth… took up kayaking… ‘I did my first whitewater on the River Tywi in mid-Wales’. If Matt were enterprises, he could perhaps acquire a kayak and paddle past Queens’. May the stars be aligned. Neil Tennant (Clare 1968)

Chalked up
Reading Ken Warner’s letter (CAM 75) I was reminded of my first day in Cambridge. I walked past a message scrawled in chalk on a corner near the bottom of Downing Street: “Coffee in Bill’s”. If I thought about it at all, I must have assumed it would fade away in time. But it didn’t. People went over it in bolder handwriting, different coloured chalk. By the time I left, it was considerably more prominent than on that first day. I never fulfilled my intention of returning to that spot to see if it had been engraved into the wall or upgraded to a brass plaque. Frank Trethewey (St Catharine’s 1964)

Crossword comedown
One of the objectives of CAM is to explain the groundbreaking and, sometimes, mind-boggling activities that go on in the University. It achieves this with elegance and economy, never leaving me with a sense of the inadequacy of my own accomplishments and my limits of understanding. Why then does the magazine host the hardest crossword in the known universe? I am already humiliated as I fail to grasp the instructions. At least you put it at the end, when I’ve read the rest. Richard Harris (Christ’s 1972)
EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY

“All the best science in the world, without translation into policy, really is of no practical value in the world of tomorrow.”

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, has signed a memorandum of understanding with the European Commission’s in-house science service, the JCR.

RESEARCH

Strangled galaxies

What is galactic death?
There are two kinds of galaxies – live ones, that are rich in the gases needed to produce new stars, and dead ones, which aren’t. Once a galaxy stops producing new stars, it dies.

Why do galaxies die?
Two possible causes: slow strangulation, as the essential star-forming gases coming into the galaxy are slowly cut off, or sudden death as an unknown force sucks those gases out.

What’s the evidence?
Researchers used data from the Sloan Digital Sky Survey to analyse metal levels in more than 26,000 average-sized galaxies. Those metal levels show the rate of star formation – if it’s steady and then peters out, that’s slow strangulation as opposed to sudden death.

Who did the research?
Researchers from Cambridge and the Royal Observatory, Edinburgh collaborated on the paper. The lead author was Dr Yingjie Peng of the Cavendish Laboratory and the Kavli Institute of Cosmology.

What’s next?
“This is the first conclusive evidence that galaxies are being strangled to death,” said Dr Peng. “Next is figuring out what’s causing it. We know the cause of death, but we don’t yet know who the murderer is.”
Researchers at the Cambridge Centre for Risk Studies (part of the Cambridge Judge Business School) have found that the world’s cities are at risk from natural or man-made disasters – in the next decade – to the tune of $4.6 trillion in economic output.

VICE-CHANCELLOR

Annual address

In his 1 October address, the Vice-Chancellor focused on partnership and philanthropy. Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz told the Senate House that the University’s ability to build connections to the wider world was key to making “a difference to the world of tomorrow for the benefit of all”. He emphasised the strength of its ties with the city, region and industry and commended pan-University research collaborations.

The Vice-Chancellor said philanthropic funding was essential to reinforcing academic freedom by removing the constraints of political and economic change. “Put simply, we can achieve more with the support, passion and vision of our donors than we can on our own.”

alumni.cam.ac.uk/go10

PHILANTHPY

Irrationality, rationalised

Forget the old textbook notion of the rational consumer. The irrational consumer is where it is at – which is why Cambridge is setting up a new institute to examine how people really make decisions and respond to their economic and social environment.

The El-Erian Institute for Human Behaviour and Economic policy will draw on expertise from neuroscience and psychology as well as economics, finance and behavioural science, and is the result of a $25m gift to the University and Queens’ College from Jamie Walters and Mohamed A El-Erian.

The gift will also fund studentships, research and a professorship.

To find out more about the campaign see page 13 or visit cam.ac.uk/YoursCambridge.
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Fitzwilliam  Girton  Gonville and Caius  Homerton
Jesus  King’s  Lucy Cavendish  Magdalene
Newnham  Pembroke  Peterhouse  Queens’
Ridley Hall  Selwyn  Sidney Sussex  St. Catharine’s
St. John’s  Trinity  Trinity Hall  Westminster

Trinity - Great Court
Selwyn - Old Court
Homerton - The South Front and Hall
Downing - The North Range
Caius - View from King’s Parade
Christ’s - The Great Gate
Magdalene - River Court from Quayside
Queens’ Walnut Tree Court and the Chapel
Darwin - The Dining Hall, Hermitage and Old Granary
Sidney Sussex - View from Sidney Street
Pedestrians look right. And then left. It all depends on the translation.

*Dr James Clackson* is University Reader in Comparative Philology, Chair of the Faculty Board of Classics and a Fellow of Jesus College.

I’m late in on Monday, having taken time deciding the right colour for our kitchen. I am colour-blind and most shades look vaguely off-white to me, but my wife assures me that I have chosen pink. By the time I arrive at the Faculty, Nigel, our administrator, has already made tea. Today, we are looking at examiners’ reports: 50 pages of detailed comments and criticism following last term’s Tripos. Nigel only started full-time in Classics in September, and is amused by our continued insistence on providing both numbers and a string of Greek letters followed by pluses and minuses in the markbook. We briefly debate whether to abolish alphabetical marking, but decide not to as it can help class borderline candidates. Moreover, any proposal to outlaw β+++ and α/γ will lead to a lengthy and inconclusive discussion at the Faculty Board.

I am lecturing on one of my favourite courses this term, bilingualism in the Ancient Roman world. Since a lot of the evidence we deal with is in the form of short texts, often inscribed into stone or metal, I start the course with modern examples of writing in two languages. The students always enjoy the road sign where the Welsh text says: “The translator’s office is closed: please send your request again next week”, but my favourite is “Pedestrians Look Right / Cerddwyr Edrychwch I’r Chwith” – perfectly good Welsh, but meaning “Pedestrians Look Left”.

Wednesday lunchtime is the weekly Greek in Italy project meeting. We have a grant from the AHRC to look at the impact of Greek on the languages of ancient Italy. Today we are going over notes and photos from our excursion last July (in an almost unbearable heatwave). The highlight was a cave near the Straits of Otranto in Puglia, its walls covered in graffiti written in Latin, Greek and Messapic (the ancient language of the area). These are carved haphazardly on top of one another, but we have made progress in working out what they say: normally travellers promising offerings to the gods if they return safe from the sea-crossing. Exciting for our project is the finding that sometimes the writers mix up their Greek and Latin endings on the words.

Later in the week, I have a rare chance to enjoy High Table lunch at College – I am chairing the Research Fellowship committee meeting straight afterwards. More than 200 people have applied for two four-year positions, and we are trying to agree on the final six whose work will be sent to external readers. How do you compare across a range of disciplines, especially when every third student seems to be described as “my best pupil ever” by one referee? We decide to select those candidates who can successfully explain the topic of their research and why it matters. Unable to agree on the final two, we decide to send out eight dossiers to readers. Since the meeting runs on, I am late for my 4pm supervision, but I manage to appease the students with tea and biscuits (pocketed from the selection provided at our committee meeting).

On Friday, I have to go to London for a meeting of the Council of the Philological Society. I only just make the train after I spend too long talking with Emily from the University fundraising team, and then looking for a place to leave my bike at the redesigned Cambridge Station. Emily and I are planning a party at next year’s performance of the Cambridge Greek Play (a double bill of Sophocles’s *Antigone* and a cut-down version of Aristophanes’s sex-strike comedy *Lysistrata*), and we wonder whether the guests will have time to enjoy a buffet beforehand, or if it is better just to do interval drinks. After the mad rush to get there, the meeting in London is relaxed.

The Philological Society holds its meetings on the same afternoon as a talk from a distinguished linguist, with a good spread of sandwiches and cake in the interval. This helps me to make up my mind about the Greek Play entertainment: good food always compensates for any travelling inconvenience. I get back home in time to appreciate our repainted kitchen – even I can see now that it is very pink.
36R, Churchill

Christopher Frayling (Churchill 1965) talks horror movies, Russian cinema and modernism with third-year chemist Alexandru Paraschiv.

"I was the modernity that got me," says Professor Sir Christopher Frayling, enjoying the view from room 36R, Churchill College. "There's an Anglepoise lamp! There's a Scandinavian-looking chair! There's a terrazzo marble window seat, a projecting bay window, wooden floors! It all felt incredibly new. Fifty years later, it still does."

Back in 1965, the trees outside that projecting bay window were just saplings. Frayling arrived at Churchill, the newest of all the Cambridge colleges (it had only received its Royal Charter five years previously), and spent his first year in lodgings on Arbury Road in North Cambridge, as there wasn’t yet enough accommodation for all the students. In his second year, he moved into 36R, and stayed there for two years. Alexandru Paraschiv, the room’s current occupant, is about to leave for the summer, which is why his bookcase is empty.

"I do have lots of books, though," he assures Frayling. "Chemistry books. And I try to keep an open mind about culture. I like Russian literature, for example."

Unsurprisingly, Frayling knows his Russian films. "In my first year there was a season of Russian movies at the Arts Cinema off Market Square," he remembers. "They had the Russian Hamlet and the Russian Lear, and lots of Dostoyevsky movies and lots of movies from the 20s – Earth, Battleship Potemkin.

I did a crash course in Russian cinema in my first year. And I developed my interest in horror movies while I was in Cambridge. It was all very unrespectable. Respectable people studied mainstream literature, and the great tradition. And realism."

Unsurprisingly for the man credited with spearheading the study of popular culture – Spaghetti westerns, Hammer horror – Frayling had movie posters on his wall. "I think I had Dr No. And a poster for Billy Budd, a film based on a Herman Melville story. This place looked like the foyer of a down-market cinema. I was very untidy. I felt a bit guilty because modern architecture looks wonderful if everything is kept tidy. I'm afraid I was a sprawl merchant."

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very untidy. I felt a bit guilty because, like a lot of modern architecture, it looks wonderful if everything is kept tidy. If you have sprawl everywhere it looks terrible. I’m afraid I was a sprawl merchant.”

Frayling runs his hand fondly over the marble window seat, which doubles as a heater. “Churchill had central heating, which was such a luxury in those days. Though I never quite knew what to use that window seat for. Do you put things on it? Or do you sit on it? A lot of people put radios on it and made it into a sort of huge coffee table. But I was never sure you should put a radio on the central heating.”

Churchill sits away from the clamour of central Cambridge. Is that an advantage or a disadvantage? “It feels quite far away,” says Paraschiv. “But I like that feeling. There are fewer tourists. I can get more work done.” And Frayling says that far from being removed, Churchill – with its Robin Day chairs, Lucienne Day fabrics and Barbara Hepworth, Bernard Meadows and Henry Moore sculptures – was actually the hub of a new world.

“Churchill was the heart of contemporary art in Cambridge,” he says. “There was no contemporary art gallery in Cambridge – Kettle’s Yard only took you up to the 1920s. So Churchill was a new centre of gravity. Living in this environment made me much more in tune with contemporary art. Dissolve to 20 years later, I’m at the RCA, and these people like Bernard Meadows and Henry Moore, whose works surrounded me as a student, were my colleagues. I knew them all. It planted seeds.”

Professor Sir Christopher Frayling (Churchill 1965) is an historian, critic and award-winning broadcaster. He was knighted in 2001 for services to art and design education. Alexandru Paraschiv is a third-year chemistry student, originally from Bucharest. He is planning to visit Transylvania next summer. “It’s actually a really nice place,” he says.

To see the film of Christopher’s trip back to Churchill, visit alumni.cam.ac.uk/mryr.

**IN NUMBERS**

**JAMIE ROBERTS**

Rugby union fans are hoping to see the Welsh star play for the Light Blues in the Varsity Match.

- **12** Playing Number
  The number inside centre Jamie wears for Harlequins, Wales, The Lions and... Cambridge.

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**SNAPSHOT**

Image by Daniel Espinoza (Sidney Sussex 2005).
To find out more about PhoCUS, the University’s photography society, please visit phocus.org.uk
Thinking about thinking could drive you round the bend.

*(Michael Bywater* *(Corpus 1972)*) ponders his internal lunatic.

Thinking with no goal in mind has a bad reputation. It comes under the same heading as daydreaming, woolgathering, and, worse still, too much imagination. For those who would make their mark on the world, it is a mug’s game.

But what a wonderful game it is. A game with no rules, no mud, no opponents, no competition. A pure indulgence, quite unproductive. Nobody got rich by thinking. The physical world is unmoved; Shakespeare’s Bolingbroke, ever the stolid realist, was right to ask: “Who can hold a fire in his hand | By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?”

*I mean, specifically, thinking. Not publishing its results, or solving problems, not generating models or theorems or solving crimes or investigating why things blow up, fall down, sink, crash or vanish (which I taught for many years). Just... thinking. The secular equivalent of the mystic in his hermit’s cell. Thinking as its own reward.*

“What happened to hats? Who wrote the *De Defectibus* and why did Gabler say he was an organ builder when he wasn’t? Was there a Mr Haribo? And why do Herbin 1670 inks have a coppery sheen?”

Composed of index tabs and fluorescent highlighters, marginalia, interlineations, snatches of song, lines from poems, theorems and lemmata, overheard gossip and unhearsaedd soliloquies, a creature dedicated, whether we want it or not, to the sole purpose of generating connections, marvels, improbabilities and puns, and “so incluse | Infinite riches in a little room”.

I can’t imagine being without that largely autonomous process of building an endless network of interconnections which grows exponentially as the years pass, simply for its own sake. That little room becomes a palace of infinite varieties, suffused with the golden thinking of the brain, generating thought as blithely as the sun generates light, or prime ministers lie.

This wandering thoughtfulness (so much more fun than the current cult of mindfulness, better known perhaps as mindemptiness) is also the mainspring of all creativity, wit and understanding. It’s a magical experience to teach people that they’re allowed to let their minds freewheel, and only then need they question carefully the messages it sends up from the depths. The results range from August Kekulé’s dream of a ring of snakes, tails in each other’s mouths, which led to his model of the benzene ring, to a comedian’s jokes; from Cantor’s multiple infinities to Donne’s spider love in *Twicknam Garden*, “which transubstantiates all”.

Inspiration jumps into being (the final coiling of the leaping spring happening out of sight) when the careful, linear consciousness isn’t watching; only afterwards is it the mind’s turn. Information is merely the feedstock for our effortless and endlessly linked hypertext, fuelling the moment of amazement which brings the world into the light.

And then it stops. The network dies with each of us. The web of connections sparking between neurons winks out in an instant, the thoughts are gone in that last blink of the eye. But while we are thinking, what a ride. What a world of wonders.
There is always a ceilidh scheduled somewhere at Cambridge. From Freshers’ Week events to 10 May Balls this year, some of them two at a time, Cambridge University Ceilidh Band (CUCB) provides the soundtrack as people skip, gallop, thread the needle, link arms and spin.

Pronounced ‘kaylee’, a ceilidh involves dancing to traditional Irish and Scottish music. No prior experience is needed to join CUCB, because, “If you can’t keep up, you just do what you can,” says Harriet Meredith (Caius).

Meredith plays piano and bass guitar, but took up the mandolin, after a friend’s birthday party provided her first foray into ceilidh dancing. Her involvement in CUCB makes her one of 60 CUCB performers who take part over a year, playing instruments including flutes, recorders, tin whistles and a harp.

“The majority aren’t music students, but they are very serious musicians,” Meredith says. “We’ve got some incredible players. It’s a chance to play with really good musicians who are very skilful at doing what they love – and it’s a chance to really have fun.”

There are different levels of involvement. “You can just turn up for a couple of rehearsals whenever you’re free, or you can sign up for all the gigs and go on tour,” Meredith points out. Rather than having a fixed set list, the caller – whose job it is to shout out the dance steps – suggests which pieces to play.

Rehearsals usually last for a couple of hours, after which everyone decamps to the pub. With such a community feel, it’s not surprising that some members have found romance. “We have had a few marriages and the joke is that we’re waiting on a ceilidh band baby.”

The University’s Ceilidh Band are very serious about music, dancing and having a laugh. Anne Wollenberg reports.

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12 CAM 76 | MICHAELMAS 2015

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The University has launched a new £2bn fundraising campaign that will enable major research into areas including dementia and mental health, clean energy sources, biodiversity loss and preserving cultural heritage.

More than 30,000 donors have already given to their College, many of them motivated by a desire to recognise the impact Cambridge had on their lives – and a desire to ensure that future generations will benefit from similar experiences.

One such is Mohamed El-Erian, former CEO of Pimco and co-chair of the campaign. “My experience at Cambridge has shaped my entire life since – it has been the main driver of my professional development – and for good reason. Cambridge taught me not just what, but how, to think – as it has done so for countless others for more than 800 years,” he said.

The campaign’s theme, Dear World… Yours, Cambridge, focuses on Cambridge’s impact on the world. Over the third weekend in October, the city was transformed by banners and posters (a small selection are pictured below) that reflected on the contribution that Cambridge has made to the world – and that the world has made to Cambridge.

The University and Colleges announced that they have already raised more than £538m towards the £2bn target. The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, said: “Philanthropy is vital to the future of Cambridge: it underpins our ambition by allowing us the space to innovate, free from the constraints of political and economic change. In addition, I want to see Cambridge rise to the world’s many challenges in energy, food, healthcare, education and inequality. Philanthropy is uniquely placed to enable the new ways of working and partnerships with NGOs and industry that can see us make a powerful contribution in these critical areas.”

If you would like to support Cambridge, please visit your College website or find out more at cam.ac.uk/YoursCambridge.
On 31 July 1965, the first Commonwealth Expedition – Comex – pulled out of Ostend ferry port in a convoy of five coaches. On board one of the coaches were 39 students from Cambridge University and the then-unaffiliated Homerton College (the other four vehicles represented the Universities of Cardiff, Edinburgh, London and Oxford). Ahead lay a road trip to India via Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan – and an unforeseen stopover in an active war zone.

Simply getting to the point of departure was an arduous journey. A slew of last-minute problems had been overcome. Five coach chassis were donated by Ford after an arrangement with Bedford trucks fell through. Two-way radios were supplied by Pye of Cambridge. The expedition’s original underwriters dropped out. Within 24 hours, a new deal was made with agricultural motor firm Massey-Ferguson to ensure that the coaches would be bought back after the expedition, meaning that Comex would be financially responsible only for their depreciation value.

A final list of 39 students from Cambridge had been chosen, with men outnumbering women by a ratio of around...
Those selected to be drivers, mechanics and radio operators, and to fill other critical roles, all needed to be trained. Lionel Gregory – a retired lieutenant colonel in the British Army and the organiser of Comex – pulled in a favour and they were swiftly dispatched to RAF Catterick, the RAF Regiment’s base at the time.

Those who knew Gregory – a man who had already done a recce along the Comex route in a Triumph 2000 – were unsurprised that he was able to pull this together. “I think we all loved him,” says John Harding (Emmanuel 1963). “He was a delightful British eccentric – something of a pukka sahib – but you could warm to people like that who have a vision and think that problems are there to be surmounted. I’m sure we made fun of him a little behind his back, but nobody doubted he would get us through.”

John Bibby (Queens’ 1963) was among the first to sign up for the Commonwealth youth festival plans in 1964. “[Gregory] was what one might call an imperialist, though an imperialist of the British Commonwealth tradition,” Bibby recalls. “He had known Jawaharlal Nehru in person, and was continually saying what Nehru would have thought about this or that.”

The expedition had lofty goals. Dr Ruth Craggs (KCL), an expert in decolonisation and the modern Commonwealth, has written: “Comex drew on optimistic narratives about the possibilities of the Commonwealth as an antidote to the perceived problems of race and declining values in Britain and the modern world. It attempted to produce enlightened Commonwealth citizens and support multiracial understanding through international travel.”

However, many participants had more prosaic reasons for joining up. Chris Lyle (St John’s 1963) had intended to spend the long vac working in North America, but after booking flights, he heard that his job offer had fallen through. He says: “I was despairing of having a reasonable summer holiday when there appeared a short notice with the heading ‘India for £30’. No further details were given.”

After a panel interview, he was surprised to find himself on the list of acceptances. “I found later that this wasn’t terribly startling,” he says. “The committee had found that...
I was an aspiring engineer and had assumed I knew all about the inside of a diesel engine. I was the chief and only mechanic for the Cambridge group!

Other applicants were attracted by Comex's cultural programme. At each stop, performances would be mounted for the benefit of the hosts – in most cases a local university. The Welsh coach had a choir; the Scots had folk dancers and pipers. Cambridge put on plays, revues and excerpts from larger dramatic works, as Richard Field (Fitzwilliam 1963) recalls. "As far as the Cambridge contribution to international cultural exchange was concerned, our duties were with Shakespeare, specifically Othello, and Oscar Wilde, specifically Earnest."

After departure from London, the convoy made its way across Europe without major incident – and the coaches proved more than roadworthy, in large measure thanks to the preparations made by Cambridge engineering students. These included Tony Ericson (Emmanuel 1962), who was recruited as a driver.

"Absolutely every single fastener had been checked with a torque wrench against the factory spec," he says. "This was a very time-consuming and dirty task, but our extra effort on vehicle preparation really paid off in the extraordinary reliability we enjoyed on the journey."

A cultural misunderstanding at Budapest University led to some friction and Gregory being presented with a bill for the hospitality that had been proffered. With this still unpaid, there were problems at the crossing into Yugoslavia, and a certain amount of Kalashnikov rattling by border guards. But in Turkey, where Comex visited the Universities of Istanbul and Ankara, the expedition faced its first serious threat.

"A cholera epidemic in the Middle East very nearly stopped progress beyond Turkey," wrote Gregory in Crying Drums, his account of the first four Comex expeditions. "Patience, a large number of re-vaccinations and fresh documentation provided the solution."

Milder ailments affected almost everyone. A protocol was established whereby a shout of "Boggo!" would bring the coach screeching to a stop, and the afflicted passenger would be immediately furnished with a shovel and other necessaries on their way to the door. But the Catterick training ensured there were comparatively few cases of more serious illness, with meticulous hygiene observed in food preparation and especially water treatment – something that sticks in the mind of many. "The taste was basically swimming baths tinted with Dettol," says Ericson.

Comex received a warm welcome throughout the Middle East, and the students were granted a degree of access that would be unthinkable just a few years later. Visits were made to Amman, Jericho, the Dead Sea and Jerusalem, at the time still under Jordanian rule. The convoy was admitted to Iran, according to Gregory's memoirs, "with the minimum of formality", and enjoyed "an unsurpassed programme in Tehran."
While there, a telegram arrived from the Pakistani government permitting the Comex students who were Indian nationals to transit the country – a concession that would gain much greater significance in the light of future events.

“We were so naive as we went through places like Syria, Iraq and Jordan,” remembers Lyle. “We had no real understanding of the geopolitics of the time. In Tehran, we were hosted by [expedition sponsors] Massey Ferguson and the University, and I remember students saying – before the Shah came down, of course – that it was time for a revolution.”

The route from Iran to Pakistan, along a desert highway, tested the coaches’ suspension to the maximum. The frontier itself had none of today’s security measures. Lyle says: “We were driving on the right hand of the road, and in the middle of the desert was a sign saying: ‘You are now entering Pakistan: please drive on the left.’”

Pakistan was also the scene of a serious accident. Field was at the rear, singing St Patrick’s Breastplate with another actor in the group. He says: “A huge, brightly coloured and decorated lorry came hurtling down a very sharp bend astride the road. I can picture it more clearly than the food I was offered last night. The lorry scraped all the way down the side of the coach, taking with it most of [my fellow actor’s] forearm in the way a chicken drumstick is cut up. The lorry didn’t stop.”

Bibby was on shift as coach leader. He says: “I saw it coming and thought, ‘That looks a bit close.’ Then it went past and there was a rumpus from the back. One guy had had his arm badly damaged and another had a lot of glass in his eyes. I said, ‘Everybody off the coach except for the nurses,’ and they came up with what first aid we had.”

The group waited in 40-degree heat for a taxi to a local hospital. Field went along with it, returning a few days later, after the injured student was flown home.

“It was baking hot and I remember an overwhelming need to do something that might ease his condition,” he says. “I had a silly straw hat which I waved over his face to cool him down. Next morning I asked him what he ›
remembered of the drive to the hospital and he said, ‘Not much, apart from some silly fool waving something over my face – that was bloody irritating.’”

Comex passed through Pakistan just a week before the country launched Operation Grand Slam, the offensive against India’s Jammu and Kashmir region that would make full-scale war between the two powers a near-inevitability. Again, there was little appreciation of the situation.

“The atmosphere was a bit weird,” says Ericson. “Basically, we didn’t notice that while we were in Pakistan, the country mobilised. That was a real triumph of intelligence; no one in the whole of Comex spotted it. We even turned up at one university and they were all mysteriously ‘on holiday’.”

The expedition reached India on 30 August, exactly on schedule. From the border, Comex made for Delhi University, where the groups were billeted with Indian students. From there, coaches went their separate ways to convey the Comex message to universities all over India. Cambridge were bound for Calcutta via Allahabad, and it was here they learnt that hostilities with Pakistan had escalated into open war.

“We had arrived at the university where we had a great big reception,” says Ericson. “Literally in the middle of the evening, we heard, and the room froze. That was the first we and our hosts knew of it.”

The expedition reconvened in Delhi. Shimla, once the summer capital of colonial India, was next on the itinerary. This was now within the war zone, but Gregory was unabashed. Special dispensation for travel was swiftly obtained from the Indian Home Ministry, and Comex was even offered an unscheduled train to Shimla so that the coaches would not have to negotiate the steep mountain roads. The students were provided with accommodation at the Rashtrapati Niwas, the palatial former Viceroyal Lodge.

However, by the time the party returned to Humayun’s Tomb in Delhi, which had taken on the role of Comex field headquarters, a grim reality took hold. “We were now in a war zone with no prospect of being able to return home overland,” says John Harding. “We were also effectively bankrupt – the finances of the expedition depended on
our selling the coaches when we returned to England. Our expedition had become a major foreign policy headache.”

While Gregory negotiated a way out with the Indian Government and British High Commission, Comex’s predicament made the front pages of The Times of India and the The Indian Express. Within days, the students were swamped with invitations to stay in family homes until repatriation could be arranged.

Some of the billets were very cushy indeed. Ericson soon found himself living in a corporate-hospitality bungalow with servants, and entertained by captains of industry – one of whom offered the use of his car, a classic Studebaker Starliner Coupé. “It was bonkers,” he says. “Absolutely not the real world. I had two-and-six in my pocket by this stage, and there’s this millionaire saying, ‘Have my Studebaker!’”

Richard Field was taken in by a fellow Fitzwilliam alumnus. “I was billeted out with this youngish bachelor who was keen to introduce me to the delights of Delhi. One afternoon, his bedroom door opened and he emerged with a very beautiful woman. Introducing me to her with gracious and elegant formality, he asked, ‘Mr Richard, would you like to borrow this delightful lady for an hour or two?’ I declined as politely as I could.”

Eventually, the Tourist Department of the Indian Government agreed to buy the Comex coaches after an exemption to the usual import duties was secured. A Boeing 707 was chartered to take the expedition home, leaving on 4 October – the date that the expedition was originally scheduled to return.

Over the next 15 years, Gregory organised eight further Commonwealth Expeditions. Many of its participants brought back changed attitudes to Britain’s colonial heritage, including John Harding.

“I very distinctly remember meeting a group of Indian students after one supper and talking about the Raj,” he says. “My family was partly a Raj family, and in my rather innocent way I was defending them. Of course, the Indian students were quite reasonably banging on about all the drawbacks of imperialism and arrogance. I thought to myself, ‘Wait a minute, am I right to defend this?’ That was an important moment in my intellectual maturity.”
To celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Fitzwilliam, Dr Mary Laven, Museum Syndic, examines the role domestic and devotional objects play in Renaissance life and why the very thingness of things gives them power.

PAINTINGS JOËL PENKMAN

A FEW GOOD THINGS
Rosaries, crucifixes, figurines of saints, pilgrim souvenirs, devotional jewellery, stoupas and sprinklers, printed prayer books and Madonnas wrought in every medium: these are just some of the devotional objects that filled the Italian home in the 15th and 16th centuries. Long before the era of factories and mass-production, artisans’ workshops churned out religious commodities to suit every budget; these were in turn snapped up by Renaissance shoppers, in an economy that favoured consumption. Together with colleagues working on a project funded by the European Research Council, my goal is to understand the meaning of these religious things to their owners and their power to transform and sanctify the home.

Sometimes the power of an object is only revealed when you hold it in your hand – a unique pleasure of curating an exhibition at the Fitzwilliam. But only a small proportion of the objects that we are interested in have been preserved. Those few have usually survived because they are prized by connoisseurs and deemed to have financial value on the art market. They inevitably skew our focus towards elite things of ongoing monetary worth. Occasionally, a church collection includes more humdrum, ordinary items, such as rosaries made of cheap glass beads or rosewood. Even more rarely the object’s life history survives alongside the object itself. Last year, we were delighted to chance upon a rare example of an agnus dei – a small disc of wax impressed with the Lamb of God – minted in Rome in the 16th century and perfectly preserved for four hundred years at Lyford Grange, in rural Oxfordshire. Its owner was the English Jesuit, Edmund Campion, who was arrested at the house – a recusant hideout – in 1581. Rediscovered in the attic in 1599, the agnus dei now belongs to Campion Hall in Oxford.

But there are other ways of unearthing old objects and, as a historian, it’s natural for me to turn to archival sources. Fortunately for our project, Renaissance Italians were obsessive record-keepers. And the archives for our project, Renaissance Italians were turn to archival sources. Fortunately to me to understand the meaning of these objects, one of the post-doctoral researchers carefully described and itemised by the scribe: embroidered table cloths, lace-trimmed sheets, dozens of white chemises – the essential washable undergarments that were the foundation of every outfit for men and women.

I can’t quite think of an equivalent of these lists in today’s goods diet. When you rent a furnished house, you will be presented with an inventory that will include sofas and TV sets alongside teaspoons. But it won’t include personal items like jewellery or underwear.

We’ve recently updated our house insurance records to include new computers and bikes, but our clothes and duvets just get bundled together in the category of ‘other’. In our disposable culture, shop-bought linen or off-the-peg garments carry insufficient value to warrant itemisation, whereas in the Renaissance textiles were a way of storing capital. Inventories from this period are distinguished by their capaciousness and detail; they give a complete picture of the possessions that mattered to their owner. Here the list of valuables routinely starts with the bed and its extensive paraphernalia of drapes, covers, mattresses, sheets, bolsters and cushions. The importance of this item of furniture to a prosperous marriage is stated loud and clear. But if fertility is emphasised at the beginning of the lists, sanctity is key at the end. The contents of the trousseau nearly always culminate in small items of devotional significance: rosaries, agnus dei and coral necklaces. These last might have looked very pretty around a young bride’s neck (they often feature in Renaissance portraits) but they were also laden with symbolism, the red beads evoking Christ’s spilt blood.

In our quest for Renaissance devotional objects, one of the post-doctoral researchers on our team comes up with an inspired idea: she sets out to trace the comings and goings of religious things in the registers of pawned goods. In Renaissance Italy, the Franciscans set up charitable pawn banks in many cities, as a means of supporting the poor while simultaneously circumventing the laws against usury (and putting Jewish moneylenders out of business). Those who had fallen on hard times flocked to these banks in order to take out small loans; as security they left whatever items of value they had at their disposal. Families would often pawn their warmest clothes and bed covers in the summer, only to come back and reclaim them in the winter months. Our attention is at once drawn to the high number of sheets (one new, the other used), two pairs of trestles (the traditional foundation for a bed), four planks to go on top of them, an old mattress, an embroidered bedspread, two pairs of sheets (one new, the other used), four women’s chemises, numerous other items of clothing and – happily for my research – a silver rosary. The careful redistribution of personal possessions was a central aspect of the experience of death, much less evident today (you will look in vain in my will for mention of any specific objects).

The movement of goods was also fundamental to the rituals of marriage. Looking through marriage contracts from 15th and 16th-century Puglia I begin to see a pattern to religious items in the bride’s trousseau. Here the list of valuables routinely starts with the bed and its extensive paraphernalia of drapes, covers, mattresses, sheets, bolsters and cushions. The importance of this item of furniture to a prosperous marriage is stated loud and clear. But if fertility is emphasised at the beginning of the lists, sanctity is key at the end. The contents of the trousseau nearly always culminate in small items of devotional significance: rosaries, agnus dei and coral necklaces. These last might have looked very pretty around a young bride’s neck (they often feature in Renaissance portraits) but they were also laden with symbolism, the red beads evoking Christ’s spilt blood.

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of rosaries, little crosses and strings of coral that were pawned by men and women in urgent need of cash. These appear amid secular items: a pair of fine sheets, a gold ring and a small cross, for example, all pawned for eight florins by one Donna Ottavia Martia in 1593. Equally striking is the fact that these same hard-pressed individuals so often came back to redeem their devotional trinkets. (Donna Ottavia returned in 1597). We can follow these goods from the left-hand page (where the pawned items were registered) to the right (where their restitution was recorded) and sometimes backwards and forwards several more times. I’m reminded of how my mother told me that her grandmother, living in East London between the wars, repeatedly pawned her wedding ring (often replacing it with a thinner band) but was always desperate to buy it back whenever she had sufficient funds. Such histories tell us of the emotional pull of things.

In our digital age, we might have expected ‘stuff’ to have receded from our lives. On the contrary, a new empire of things has opened up to us, and we are ever more covetous of the shiny gizmos that clutter our houses, our offices, our briefcases, our handbags and our mental space.

These things place us at the mercy of the material, as becomes clear when a cup of coffee spills over a laptop or a smart phone drops into the loo. The sense of shock felt on such occasions reminds us of how deeply things are embedded in our lives; below the level of conscious awareness, we are sustained and nourished by a host of objects.

Things provide comfort, security, familiarity and joy; they organise our lives, project our identities, mediate our relationships and protect us from the world’s sharp corners. It’s clear that their value goes far beyond their financial worth. And yet, for a historian, especially one whose subjects are long dead, it’s sometimes difficult to tease out the different threads of meaning – spiritual, social, economic, symbolic – invested in an object. Perhaps we need to stand back and acknowledge that things are not merely empty receptacles, waiting to be filled with human significance. Their power lies to some extent in their very materiality: a string of coral beads, smooth and translucent around a pale neck.

Dr Mary Laven is Reader in Early Modern History and a Syndic of the Fitzwilliam Museum.
Were you up with the rowers, keen to catch the sunrise over the Cam? Or happiest in the College bar at midnight? Five Cambridge writers give us their best of times.

PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID RYLE
TIME
9AM, LENT TERM
Patricia Duncker (Newnham 1970), novelist
The time of day and the season I loved best in Cambridge were winter mornings, early in the day, when the mist lurked on the Cam. Expensive electric heating, which was all that we had in our student flat, proved ruinous; so we drank coffee with our coats on and pedalled away to the library as rapidly as we could.

In those days I lived on the other side of Midsummer Common, so the first part of the journey involved negotiating a windy blast across barren space before slinking into town, clinging to damp brick walls and ducking umbrellas. The unswept leaves, heaped treacherous in the gutters, stuck to my boots and my bicycle wheels. I remember the headlamps still glowing as cars queued at the lights, and the bright shop windows filled with books and clothes for thin women.

Day never seemed to break on those mornings. A murky glimmer in the sky or a distant whitening across the Fens remained the only signs of daylight coming. The cold, which crept out of the river, never lifted from the streets. I used to pause on the humpbacked bridge, balanced on my pedals, to look down the river, and sometimes my woollen gloves stuck to the frost on the railings, coming away wet. That bitter Cambridge winter cold always tasted of damp.

The UL loomed up beyond the hedges and the leafless trees like a great ship moored alongside the Backs, every porthole ablaze with light. Here is the Rare Books Room, waiting in bright sepulchral quiet, and my pile of two hundred-year-old German books, some on Inter-Library Loan, with long pink tongues of paper threaded through them, piled before my usual seat. A day of reading, warmth and calm: journey’s end and my reward.

11.15AM, EASTER TERM
Matthew Champion, academic
In Cambridge, Easter is a day, three days, a feast, a holiday, a term, a season. As an historian of time, Easter confronts me with the startling variety of possible experiences of time. Easter is a time that no one can quite seem to grasp: is it a Western myth that gives us tenuous meaning in the midst of time’s random flow? Could it be a shattering reordering of history and irruption of eternity into time? Or perhaps Easter is an insignificant blip in humanity’s progress to a time freed from an illusory God?

Whatever our answers, Easter is a moment to think again about what time means to us and why. Following the controversial logic of the Western system of calculating Easter, Easter Sunday falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after the Spring equinox. According to the Venerable Bede, this time plots the narrative of Christ’s resurrection onto the natural triumph of light over darkness. Certainly to an Australian like me, unused to the long, cold, dark, misty Cambridge winter, the triumph of light over darkness is worth celebrating.

As I walk through St John’s on an Easter morning, I pass a gash of daffodils on the green lawn. Germans call them Osterglocken, and it is easy to imagine them adding their voices to Cambridge’s other bells – the bell of King’s Chapel sounding out across the Backs for a Sunday morning service. And there are the chestnut trees with buds like wet beetles. In King’s Chapel, I can see the best view in Cambridge: framed by the great arched west door, I look out into the new Spring sunshine, and a sky washed by a sudden shower.

Dr Matthew Champion is a research fellow at St Catharine’s.
NOON, EASTER TERM
Frank King (Magdalene 1961), academic
For sundial enthusiasts, the three most important times of day are sunrise, noon and sunset. Of these, noon is the most rewarding; this is when the sun is at its highest point, crossing the local meridian – the instant of superior solar transit.
Cambridge is replete with magnificent sundials and, for the highest-grade free entertainment, a clear sky at noon is all that is required. Such moments are particularly to be savoured when the sun shines on a new sundial at noon for the first time and the dial indicates 12 o’clock just when it should. It is terribly disappointing if a cloud obscures the sun at the crucial moment!
The new sundial on the south end of the Rosalind Franklin Building of Newnham College (in Newnham Walk) is unusual in indicating 6pm at noon. This dial shows ancient “unequal hours” which divide the daylight period from sunrise to sunset into 12 parts. If the indicated time is 5pm, then you know that five-twelfths of the daylight period has elapsed; 6pm indicates halfway through the day, which is noon.
The divisions are still called hours but their length is over 80 modern minutes in high summer and less than 40 minutes in the depths of winter. It is fascinating to study the shadow around noon. In winter it sweeps past the 6pm line at twice the speed that it does in summer and yet no moving parts are involved, except the Earth itself.
Consequently, this Englishman is delighted to go out in the midday sun – but only if he can be near a Cambridge sundial.

Frank King is the chairman of the British Sundial Society and a Fellow at Churchill.

6PM, MICHAELMAS TERM
Mark Vanhoenacker (Selwyn 1996), pilot and author
Like all pilots, I’ve known many cities, and each has a time of day that suits it best – and in Cambridge it’s dusk.
Dusk when I’m cycling west down Silver Street after a supervision, dusk when I walk down the steps of the University Library, dusk when emerging from Evensong. No question, there’s a romanticism to the fall of night – when the city’s walls and towers draw their clear outlines against the first stars of the fading sky, and lights flicker on in windows cut from stone. But the twilit nostalgia may have a more mundane explanation.
Twilight lasts longer at more extreme latitudes, and Cambridge, some 700 miles closer to the pole than the New England town in which I grew up, is not only the oldest, but also the northernmost place I’ve ever lived (as it is for nearly every other American who studies here, excepting certain Alaskans). I first saw the city just after the autumn equinox, when the hours of daylight diminish at their fastest rate of the year. In my formative weeks in Cambridge, dusk came earlier and earlier, and then it lingered for hours.
On several occasions during my student years I returned to the city in winter, jet-lagged after a visit home to the US. With no early meetings planned, I had no reason to force myself onto local time. I would stay up until two, three, four in the morning, studying, or talking with friends. Then I would sleep until the afternoon, missing breakfast and lunch in Hall. For weeks on end then – as now, in my memory – dusk was the best and only light in Cambridge.
Skyfaring by Mark Vanhoenacker is published by Chatto & Windus.
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9PM, MICHAELMAS AND EASTERN TERMS
Claire Tomalin (Newnham 1951), author

In December 1950 I came to be interviewed at Newnham. It was a long journey, and night had already fallen when the train reached Cambridge. I took a taxi and found the corridors of Newnham full of talkative young women amongst whom I was led to the furthest of the halls, and shown into a large room with an empty fireplace.

Alone, I went to the wide window and peered out. The freezing night air had cast a purple spell over trees, lawns, steps and shrubs, and I could just make out shadowy buildings and faint lines of light across the gardens. I opened the window and leaned out into the colder darkness, and felt myself fall in love with Cambridge, with the Newnham gardens, with the monastic simplicity of the place, the promise of a room in which to work. An unforgettable moment in my life.

Summer nights, too, have their joys in Cambridge. In July 1986 I went with my future husband, Michael Frayn, to a dinner in his old college, Emmanuel, where the Master was then Derek Brewer, a Chaucer scholar of distinction, and a most charming man. We enjoyed our dinner among some young and entertaining Fellows and their wives. It was a sultry evening and I knew that there was a swimming pool in the Fellows’ garden. “What about a swim?” I suggested. “What about swimming costumes?” asked someone. “Well, it’s dark outside.”

The dinner was ending and a group formed to take a walk. Once in the Fellows’ garden it became irresistible to take off our clothes in the darkness and slide into the deliciously cold water. As we swam we realised that a benign and fully clothed figure had appeared beside the pool: it was the Master, giving us his blessing.
When Professor Melinda Duer rescued Rio the horse, her research into the structure of bones became personal.

Nobody knows exactly what happened to Rio the horse to fill him with such raging fury against anything that entered his field. He chased walkers, trampled dogs, slammed himself against fences. But he did not just damage them – he damaged himself. It seemed as if he broke a leg every time. Rio’s rescuer, Melinda Duer, Professor of Biological and Biomedical Chemistry, wondered why. What made his bones so prone to breaking? She was sure it was a stupid question with an obvious answer, so she asked her friend, equine vet Dr Rachel Murray (Robinson 1984). “Every time Rio gets touched, he gets a leg fracture,” she said. “Why?” Murray laughed and said: “If I knew that, we’d both be rich.”

Duer looked through the literature and found that Murray was right. Whether animals or humans, nobody seemed to know why some bones are weaker than others. So Duer made it her business to find out – and, 10 years later, she believes her team have found the answer. Using a complex combination of techniques, including nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy, X-ray diffraction, and computer modelling and imaging, they have discovered that at a molecular level, bone mineral – which makes up the majority of bone – consists of layers. Layers upon nanoscopic layers of flat bone mineral crystals of calcium phosphate, trapping further gooey layers of water and citrate molecules between them. “It’s like glass plates with water and tiny ball bearings – the citrate molecules – in between,” says Duer. “Or millefeuille, with perfect, frictionless cream.”

Bones underpin everything we do, both literally and figuratively. We can’t walk without a spine, or breathe without a ribcage. Our language has evolved to recognise the importance of bones: we strive to get down to the “bare bones” of an issue, we “put flesh on the bones” of an idea. When our internal support system breaks, cracks, slips or softens, the consequences are catastrophic. They’re also common: osteoporosis, where the struts that make up a bone’s structure become fragile and therefore more liable to break, affects more than three million people in the UK alone. Hip fractures cost the NHS around £1.9bn a year. That’s just the cost of the hospital stay and doesn’t even include the social support needed afterwards. More people die from musculoskeletal disorders than of cancer.

So bone is a complex, yet vital, material. But the answer to Duer’s original “stupid question” about why some bones are weaker than others is both far more complex and potentially far more wide-ranging than it might first seem. To understand why, you need to know more about citrate molecules. This is how the process works: normal cell metabolism processes cause citrate molecules to arrive within the bone tissue. They have a dual role: the first is to deliver calcium phosphate to the bone’s calcium phosphate
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crystals. The molecules can get into the fine mesh that is bone tissue, make their delivery, and, if the tissue is healthy, they can’t get out. That’s where their second essential role comes in – forming layers to keep those calcium phosphate crystals apart, separate and so consequently able to move. This movement under pressure allows bones to have their extraordinary flexibility and strength: they are natural shock absorbers.

A new way of looking at human tissue
When this system works correctly, it works brilliantly. But sometimes it goes wrong, and that is when bones become fragile. Unhealthy bone tissue, whether damaged by trauma or just the natural ageing process, has holes in the mesh – holes big enough for the citrate molecules to escape once they’ve delivered their calcium phosphate. Without those layers of citrate molecules keeping them apart, the calcium phosphate crystals fuse together. They become bigger, with less flexibility and give – leading to weaker bones which are more likely to break.

This is all new territory. As Duer points out, when she posed her original question there were many theories, but ultimately, few conclusions about what ultimately causes bone weakness. “There are a huge number of studies out there, but more contradictions than answers. Maybe it was the lack of a mineral, too much of a mineral, maybe the mineral crystals were too big, maybe they were too small... but they weren’t doing anything wrong. Bone is just so difficult to study – so complex, so heterogeneous. It changes over time. Both the molecular level structure and the microscopic level structure matter. And the interplay of all those different structures and the molecules come together to make even bigger structures which tell us more about bigger structures, and all of those structures matter, too.”

Consequently, like the bones themselves, Duer’s work could now underpin a whole new way of looking at human tissue, by investigating tissue behaviour on a molecular level. Building on the tissue study techniques that her team pioneered, Duer now wants to answer one of the biggest questions of our time, and one that impacts a huge range of conditions from dementia to cancer: what makes human tissue work as it does? A tissue, in general, is made up of collagen and other proteins, on to which cells stick to form new tissue, she explains. How does a new bone cell, for example, know that it’s a bone cell and not a muscle cell? We know that the collagen and the other molecules in the tissue give it signals. But we don’t know what those signals are, or why they give them. And those signals don’t always have positive effects. Altered molecular structures can signal to cancer cells to move to other tissues, or to shut down brain cells when they sense the formation of plaque. Duer’s team are about to publish a study which has found similarities between bone formation and calcification of the arteries, which can lead to stroke and heart attack – the biggest cause of death in the developed world.

There’s no clue to the complexity of Duer’s work in her office. A former laboratory, it’s high ceilinged, bare and business-like, with only a large, round, bog-standard wood-veneer table standing out. It’s at this table, she says, that she’s had her most fulfilling times; swapping ideas with computer modellers, physicists, biologists, medics, and materials specialists, all of whom were involved in her decade-long quest for answers.

“The best ideas are when I say to one of my biological collaborators: why does this happen?” she says. “And they go ‘Oh, that’s a good question, never thought about that, I don’t know.’ It’s true of every discipline that you’re trained in a particular way, that this is how things are. I’m like that with chemistry. But when you bring different disciplines together, the people from outside those core disciplines are going to ask stupid questions – and every now and again someone will say: ‘Hmmm. We never questioned that. Perhaps we should.’”

Another wacky question: sugar
Duer’s longing to ask the big questions started at Sir James Smith’s School, a small comprehensive school in North Cornwall and her science teacher, Ron Trevithick, a relative of Richard Trevithick, inventor of the steam engine. With Trevithick, there were no stupid questions and no boundaries: he encouraged Duer to apply to Cambridge, where she studied natural sciences at Emmanuel. She was the first in her family to go to university. Her parents both left school at 15, worked their way up, and encouraged her to do things differently. Carl Sagan’s groundbreaking science TV series, Cosmos, was a turning point for her.

“I enjoyed what I stupidly thought was the deterministic nature of science at that time – the fact that there was always an answer,” she remembers. “But he said a lot about what was known and then in the same breath described what wasn’t known. It was just obvious to a teenager that there was more that wasn’t known than what was. As I went on in science, I realised that yes, there was always an answer, but it wasn’t always obvious what it was – and there was always another question, and then another, on and on.”

Alongside her work on tissue, Duer is working on a three-year study funded by the Medical Research Foundation investigating another “wacky question” that occurred to her: does eating too much sugar damage cells? Early indications seem to suggest that it doesn’t just kill them, it causes them to die rather horribly, leaving what Duer unashamedly describes as “toxic, horrible and yucky” bits of chemically damaged DNA floating around in the tissue. These could do untold damage and hold the clue to the causes of osteoporosis and osteoarthritis.

“This is what gets me out of bed in the morning right now,” she says. “Finding out how tissues really work, on a molecular level. Ultimately, for things like cancer, I think a better way of treating it, rather than trying to kill every cancer cell, would be to change the tissue. Change what’s around it so that the tissue itself is telling cancer cells: ‘Don’t behave like a cancer cell’ or ‘Just do nothing’. At the very least, don’t tell other cells to misbehave or die. We’re just getting into that, in that we’ve realised the specific questions we need to be asking. It’s so exciting.

“I have learned a lot in the past 10 years but I am still so ignorant that I am going to keep on asking stupid questions. Because we don’t know the answers.”

Early indications suggest that too much sugar causes cells to die horriby, leaving bits of damaged DNA floating around
It is hard to say when Mum was first affected by dementia. She had trouble remembering some people’s names. She was less confident going out and about and making decisions. She argued more with me and Dad.
But Mum was fit and active, endlessly interested in people and great company.

Then, last summer, things changed. She was agitated, angry, called an ambulance three times in a week. The GP telephoned to tell me she wanted to section Mum, but by the time she was admitted to hospital, she was delirious.

What I had thought were the signs of worsening dementia were the result of a urinary tract infection. Its assault on an aged and unwell brain were catastrophic, and there was no way back. After six weeks in hospital, Mum could no longer walk or stand. Coaxing her to eat even tiny morsels of foods she had once found irresistible was impossible. Three months, one live-in carer and two nursing homes later, she died.

Today, I wonder: where is the hope, rather than hype? When will we have better treatments? And in the meantime, how can we better care for people with dementia – and their families?

As a science journalist based in Cambridge, I speak to the University’s dementia research community regularly. I wanted to know what they – the fundamental scientists, the clinicians, the epidemiologists – thought about the future for dementia care.

I start with Chris Dobson, Professor of Chemical and Structural Biology at the Centre for Misfolding Diseases, who works on the fundamental science underlying Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s. I interviewed Chris four years ago. Then he was circumspect about when work in the lab would translate into practical treatments for patients; today, he’s excited. Curing dementias remains a very challenging long term goal, he says, but we are much closer to effective treatments.

Over the past 10 years, Professor Dobson’s team has been examining what happens when proteins – the complex molecules that do most of the work in our cells – fail to fold into the correct shape. Misfolded proteins can’t function properly. Instead, they form toxic clumps or aggregates that underlie many diseases from Alzheimer’s to diabetes.

Two things excite him most. The first is that we now understand protein misfolding well enough to search for molecules that can interrupt the aggregation process. The second is that several of the molecules that seem to do this effectively in the lab in model organisms such as nematodes are drugs already licensed for other diseases.

“We’ve realised that if you understand the basic mechanisms, then you can be rational about designing molecules that will be therapeutic,” he says. “The research suggests that mechanistically, it is these aggregation processes that are the crucial issue, and if we can interrupt those we’re in a strong position. And if we can repurpose drugs, developing new therapies should be faster.”

As Professor Dobson hints, Cambridge’s dementia research community is growing in size and strength. For this piece, I spoke to Professor John O’Brien about his work on biomarkers (ways of identifying the pathology of dementia earlier than at autopsy) and about new UK clinical trials in dementia, including a study of amlodipine (a high blood pressure medicine) in vascular dementia. I spoke to Professor David Rubinsztein about the new Alzheimer’s Research UK Drug Discovery Institute, whose researchers will be able to bridge the gap between academia and industry, and about his own research on making cells better at disposing of aggregated proteins.

I spoke to Professor Carol Brayne about what her epidemiological studies reveal about the impact of education and preventive health measures on dementia rates, and to Dr Stephen Barclay, whose research and teaching on palliative care will help GPs provide better end-of-life care. They gave me some comfort that, in the future, doctors may have more to offer people with dementia.

But what about the patients who are being diagnosed today? I meet clinician Professor Roger Barker in an exam room at the Centre for Brain Repair. Next to a couch and scales sits a colourful, plastic model of the brain, which I guess he uses to explain things to his patients and their families. Barker has worked on Parkinson’s and Huntington’s diseases for the
past 20 years and is intimately acquainted with dementia. His father was developing an early dementia when he died and the vast majority of people with Parkinson’s and Huntington’s will develop dementia. “After Alzheimer’s Disease, Parkinson’s is the second commonest cause of dementia in the UK,” he says, “and the thing patients fear the most.”

Yet Barker believes that when it comes to improving care, talking to carers and giving patients and their families more information are key. “Families need to know what’s likely to happen, and how to cope with things when they go awry,” he says. “People need to know more about infections. The nature of dementias is that they get slowly worse; if they get suddenly worse, something else has happened and the commonest thing is an infection. That’s what I tell my patients.”

His words are hard to hear, because with more information, I might have made different decisions. Most were made in haste or in crisis, and – apart from one brief discharge meeting at the hospital – without help from experts. I wish Mum’s doctor had been more like Roger Barker. Or Professor James Rowe, who wears a yellow lanyard that says ‘dementia champion’, and has just been appointed to Cambridge’s new chair in cognitive neurology (aka dementia).

Rowe works in the Herchel Smith Building, which houses researchers from Neurology and Psychiatry, the MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit plus NHS memory clinics. “This building represents the best integration of psychiatry and neurology when it comes to the brain and the mind, and how that translates into dementia and dementia care,” he says.

“My research relates to the impact of these illnesses on people – how they think, how they behave, how they manage. I’m interested in how you can treat symptoms and identify changes in people’s bodies and brains even before they get unwell,” Rowe says. “If we could identify and alter the course in that window of opportunity you’d radically alter the outcome of dementia for many people.”

None of the researchers I speak to talk yet in terms of cure. However, halting or slowing the disease early enough would have a similar...
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Córdoba, the Mezquita, steel engraving c. 1850.

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effect because most dementias are slowly progressive diseases of the brain. “In those who we believe the change is already under way, if we could slow those changes, push their dementia back by 20 or 30 years, then for that family we’d be close to solving the problem,” he says.

Rowe, like the others, thinks delaying the disease is a realistic goal, and that Cambridge will play a key role. There is a critical mass of world-class researchers here and major investment in facilities like the new PET-MRI machine and a new ultra-high field MRI – one of the strongest scanners in the world. “It’s making junior researchers excited about dementia research; that’s totally different from 10 or 15 years ago. It’s now a priority area for people from many backgrounds: typical disciplines like neurology, psychiatry and psychology, but also computing, informatics and engineering,” he says.

Good for researchers and patients too is the high rate of patient participation. Around 80 per cent of patients are involved in dementia studies at Cambridge. “That’s phenomenal,” says Rowe. “It’s part of the active engagement between clinicians, patients and their families, and it gives people a way of taking charge of their illness, rather than being tossed to the four winds by it.”

But until science and drug trials deliver better therapies, how can people with dementia – and their carers – get better care? Part of the answer must lie in reintegrating health and social care. But part lies in more research on dementia care, so my final conversation is with Dr Eneida Mioshi. Born and brought up in Brazil, where she trained as an occupational therapist and worked in geriatrics, she came to Cambridge to do a PhD on frontotemporal dementia.

People with different dementias may struggle with the same everyday tasks, such as cooking – but the reasons they struggle vary according to the disease. “This matters because otherwise we can’t teach the family – or change the environment – to address the tasks they need help with,” Mioshi explains. Working with patients in Australia, Japan and Brazil, she has adapted an intensive, 15-week carers’ programme to equip them with tools to tackle the problems more effectively.

“Carers learn what they can change and improve, and what they can’t alter and therefore need to accept,” she says. Mioshi is now working on a four-year project on functional ability and says that the research is crucially for families, because until better therapies arrive, they still have to manage.

Managing is hard. While a great deal more investment is needed – for every six cancer researchers, only one is working on dementia – Cambridge’s dementia researchers gave me more hope about the therapies there will be in 10 or 20 years’ time. They showed me what good dementia care could look like. And they impressed me with their compassion and commitment. As Professor Dobson says: “Once people start to put their minds and techniques to this, then one can be optimistic that things can develop rapidly. We need to plug into these developments to enable progress to be as fast as possible.”

The images of Claire Allen on these pages appear with the kind permission of her family. Becky is donating her fee for this article to the Alzheimer’s Society and Marie Curie.

CLAIRE MIRIAM ALLEN
Claire Miriam Allen (née Plaut) was born in Berlin in 1925, escaping to England with her parents in 1938 – the rest of her family were murdered in concentration camps. Colourful and unconventional, she spent much of the war in Oxford as an art student where she became friends with Philip Larkin – she is thought to have been the inspiration for the character of Katherine in A Girl in Winter. Miriam died in 2014, leaving behind her husband John, daughter Becky and many friends.
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I can’t be gloomy watching the world go by on the river

*Eleanor Olcott* is an HSPS second year at Magdalene.

Everyone needs a place to decelerate, a place to reflect – a reality checkpoint. For me, that place is the wall that rises directly out of the river at the back of Trinity Hall. Perched on top of the wall, I can see punters and ducks gliding through the water at a leisurely pace, the thick algae responding to their every movement.

I overhear snippets of information being fed to tourists on punting tours: “On the right is Trinity Hall College, which originally housed monks during their studies.” Despite having only been here for a few hours, the tourists already know more about the city and the revered buildings within it than I do.

They glance up at us, languishing on the wall, and then go back to the guide’s explanation. The punter points at Clare Fellows’ Garden, which is invariably greeted with murmurs of approval. It also prompts me to shift my own gaze to the garden: this view will surely remain in my mind long after I’ve left my student days behind.

These punters are exposed to many different kinds of students sitting on the wall. There are people indulgently puffing away on a cigarette, enjoying a quick respite from Jerwood Library, which looms imposingly to the right. Some come here to laugh with friends, or chuckle quietly at the struggle of fellow comrades, failing to cycle up the steep incline of Garret Hostel Lane bridge.

Despite remnants of bird droppings lining the wall upon which we sit, the location could not be more idyllic. It is a place to forget the transient issue of my latest essay deadline. A place where the city and its university gather me in, gather in, indeed, the visitors I spied on from my elevated position atop the wall. Heading back into the library, I find myself returning to my books with a renewed sense of purpose.
Lies, damned lies and some seriously good statistics

CAM browses the bookshelf of Dr Sophie Van Der Zee, researcher in the Security Group of the Computer Lab.

THE (HONEST) TRUTH ABOUT DISHONESTY: HOW WE LIE TO EVERYONE – ESPECIALLY OURSELVES
BY DAN ARIELY
This book helped me realise that we can all develop tunnel vision, even if we try not to. Like me, Professor Ariely is interested in dishonesty, but we work in completely separate fields: he is a behavioural economist and I’m a psychologist. What happened to Darwin’s finches, which evolved differently on different islands, is what happens to academic disciplines. For example, in behavioural economics researchers think outside “my box” because they aren’t in that box. I love that. That’s how I came up with the idea of organising Decepticon – the first interdisciplinary deception conference – in Cambridge this year. It attracted more than 150 people, from practitioners to police, including Ariely. And it’s his book that opened my eyes to the need to look beyond my own field.

DETECTING LIES AND DECEIT: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LYING AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE
BY ALDERT VRIJ
Professor Vrij is probably the biggest name in lie detection research, and this book was my bible. I am very interested in non-verbal behaviour. At the beginning of my PhD I wanted to look at non-verbal cues to deception: if someone is lying, how do they change their behaviour?
This book basically told me it was a bad idea. Lots of people had looked at it and found that there is no one ‘Pinocchio’s nose’, no single thing that liars do which truth-tellers don’t.
However, all the studies on non-verbal behaviour in this book involved manual coding – taping interviews, playing them back, and coding what you see. I’ve spent months of my life coding. It’s time-consuming and quite subjective.
So I started measuring movement with the motion capture equipment they use in Hollywood for special effects and animation. Body sensors let you quantify every movement during an interview. It creates a rich data set and it’s no longer subjective.
I came back with this dubstep vibe, playing to two people in King’s Cellar

George FitzGerald (St John’s 2003)

STREET ART LONDON
BY FRANK, FRANK ‘STEAM 156’ MALT
Street art is really underrated. It’s controversial too. In my work, I try to innovate, to look at different disciplines and methodologies. For me, street art is the artistic version of this.

Personally, I love making life prettier and better for people and many street artists want to do that. It’s a way of putting a smile on people’s faces when they walk down the street.

Cambridge is the wrong place for a street art fan, but I like spending time in East London and Wynwood (Miami) which is full of street art.

My favourite street artist is Mobstr. He does things with text. They are funny and witty but also challenging. I have a piece of his on canvas in my house, full of question marks. It reminds me to question things, not to stay in my comfort zone.

THE POPULAR POLICEMAN AND OTHER CASES: PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON LEGAL EVIDENCE
BY WILLEM ALBERT WAGENAAR AND HANS CRONBAG
This is the book that inspired me to do what I’m doing now.

When I was an undergraduate, I wasn’t very interested in psychology. In my second year I did an evening course – in the Netherlands they were open to the public but they also counted as course credits for students – on psychology and the courtroom. After the first lecture, I was hooked. I went up to Professor Wagenaar and said: “I want to become you, how do I do that?”

The book is about miscarriages of justice. For example, one chapter is about two friends at a climbing wall, one of whom falls and dies because his friend decides to help a girl who is climbing unsafely. He was jailed, but it wasn’t his fault – he was punished for an institutional failure, and Wagenaar served as an expert witness demonstrating this was the case.

It taught me that academics can make a difference. The practical aspects of the subject are part of what draws me to it. Psychology can save people’s lives.

HANDS
FOUR TET
When I came up to Cambridge I was really obsessed with Four Tet. He’d just put out his third album and the first track was the soundtrack to my first year hangovers. Whenever I hear that track I think “Cripps.” It is probably one of the only shreds from my life then that’s a constant, music I listened to at the time that I still listen to now.

ANTI-WAR DUB
DIGITAL MYSTIKZ
This came out in my third year, when I was living in Berlin. There, I became club-focused for the first time – this track is meant to fill the room, it’s made for a sound system. That year was a watershed in my time at Cambridge. I went away and came back with this dubstep vibe. Only a handful of people were into it, so you had to play to two people in King’s Cellar.

WITNESS (I HOPE)
ROOTS MANUVA
I DJed around Cambridge in my first and second year, playing party music – hip hop, garage, along that spectrum of what people wanted to hear. Roots Manuva was my absolute artist. He was really the only guy from the UK hip-hop scene I could find cool, rather than naive or a knock-off of US stuff. I played this track a lot, knowing that everyone would love it. I remember Roots Manuva playing in Cambridge, at the Junction. He was so stoned he forgot a lot of his lyrics, but his band was pretty cool.

DISTANT LIGHTS
BURIAL
Burial was part of the dubstep scene so I was aware of him and bought all his stuff, but I didn’t have any idea he was going be as big as he turned out to be. His music changed a lot of things for a lot of people. This was the thing that made me want to be producing seriously as he turned out to be. His music changed a lot of things for a lot of people. This was the thing that made me want to be producing seriously and making music, rather than going around playing records.

George FitzGerald is a DJ and producer. His debut album, Fading Love (Domino) is out now.
THE FUTURE OF PUBLISHING SINCE 1584

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Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz

We are used to taking the long view at Cambridge. My five-year tenure is like the blink of an eye in the University’s 806-year history. Yet in those five years, the world has changed at a dizzying rate.

We continue to live up to our mission: “to contribute to society at the highest levels of international excellence”. And we are investing in our future despite financial crises and regulatory pressures. Visitors cannot but be struck by the remarkable number of cranes around Cambridge. But buildings alone do not make a university. We continue to invest in the human bedrock on which our future will be secured – students and researchers.

Only the most resilient institutions can sustain and improve themselves in difficult times. Two things make Cambridge uniquely resilient. The first – our uncompromising focus on autonomy and excellence. The second is our ability to harness the power of partnerships.

The Collegiate University is itself a partnership – sharing responsibilities between the University and the Colleges on admissions, teaching, examination, research and pastoral care. We are also firmly embedded in local partnerships. The University of Cambridge Primary School is an outstanding example. Building work began last November. The school, the first UK primary school to be granted University Training School status by the Department for Education, is now open.

Closer partnership with key industrial partners remains essential. This summer, AstraZeneca and Cambridge announced joint schemes to support PhD scholarships and clinical lectureships. This will ensure basic research is aligned with the development of new medicines in key areas such as cardiometabolic disease, infection, oncology and neuroscience.

Our strength is as a global institution that engages with others around the world to tackle major challenges together. This term, a new cohort of postgraduates arrive in Cambridge with scholarships awarded specifically to students from Sub-Saharan Africa. These young men and women will be leaders of the future. Some may remain in Cambridge; others will return home, working with us to tackle some of the biggest political, medical and economic challenges facing Africa and the world.

But how can we build our future when the funding and support of government and other public bodies is increasingly uncertain? Our first recorded donation was in 1284. It is the foresight of our benefactors that enables us to serve society with academic excellence today.

When I first came to Cambridge in 1988, I was fortunate enough to be a Fellow at Wolfson College, which was founded and has been sustained through philanthropy. This year it celebrates its 50th anniversary and every year welcomes students from around the world, many of whom would not be there without the support of our benefactors.

Our donors are uniquely placed to allow our academics, researchers and students to follow their intellectual curiosity – something that has been at the heart of every transformative discovery in human history.

Philanthropic partnerships are transformative. We can achieve far more with the support, passion and vision of our donors than we can on our own.

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EXTRACURRICULAR CROSSWORD

CAM 76 PRIZE CROSSWORD

Victory
by Schadenfreude

ACROSS
1. Malware transactions advance across Japan (6)
5. Copyholder sick with ecstasy overcome by Spanish wine (7)
10. Trick expected to take in positive feminists (4)
12. Academicians on purpose slate a logic system’s advocate (8)
13. Executive to obtain penny increase (4)
14. The extremes of angelic Venus aroused a poet’s interest (8)
15. Pungent condiment about to be added to the old goose (7)
17. Murphy and Edmund ran for the old-timers (5)
18. An antelope in Australia turned back (4)
20. Extremely special French poetry (4)
22. Mistake made by potty eccentric (4)
23. Part of the church steeple is rebuilt retaining the same abutments (11, 2 words)
26. Unproductive old romance was most tedious (7)
28. Luminance in old square reflecting a source of mixed warmth (8, 2 words)
29. Against resistance director’s keeping way ahead (7)
31. Riches allure an Anglo-Saxon warrior (6)
35. Local on the move past Balmoral’s entrance (6)
37. Flamboyant woman going after stolid Dutch diver (7)
38. Football manoeuvre went wrong restricted by we Scots (4)

DOWNS
1. Fabulous monster and fairy in established harmony lag behind (12, 3 words)
2. Morag’s to consort with active East London grandfather (4)
3. Pay Newton during afternoon drink (4)
4. Bread went quickly after new year (4)
5. Examine popular humour (4)
6. Slow movement unchanged in the middle of preludio (5)
7. Nurse and sister keeping you in a state of boredom (6)
8. Swallows at home over church glide upwards (7)
9. Gaelic festival overwhelmed by private items of a late 20c artistic style (10)
11. European touring Benin tending to be very dress conscious (6)
16. Belittled eastern member of a Jewish fraternity (6)
19. Japanese pasta almost swelling up (4)
20. Cover large stomach (4)
21. Female in good health meeting English knight (5)
24. Covers during contest apparently succeeded (7)
25. A fellow rising forty in charge of a terminal (6)
26. Cockney perhaps left beside river carrying burden (6)
27. Cuts strikes together (6)
30. William’s chilled lake crossed by athletic fellow poets (5)
32. Capital earl invested in Hermitage? (4)
33. Ordinary women in Thailand drifting apart (3, 2 words)
34. Scotland’s remarkable upper-class major superior to sergeant perhaps (4)
36. German partner had sporting kids (3)

SOLUTION TO CAM 75 CROSSWORD GAP FILLERS BY SCHADENFREUDE


Corrections to misprints give SEND IN THE (clowns) SONDHEIM. Consequently the five initially vacant entries were to be filled by clowns (shown highlighted), creating new intersecting words or phrases.

All entries to be received by 29 January 2016
Please send completed crosswords:
- by post to CAM 76 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 The Fitzwilliam Museum: A History, commissioned by the Fitzwilliam Museum as part of its 2016 bicentenary celebrations. It traces the story of the establishment and growth of the Museum from its origins in the 1816 bequest of Richard, VII Viscount Fitzwilliam of Merrion, to the present day. Two runners-up will also receive £50 to spend on CUP publications.

Solutions and winners will be printed in CAM 77 and posted online at alumni.cam.ac.uk/magazine on 12 February 2016.

INSTRUCTIONS
Twelve answers are to be entered in reverse; their clues contain an extraneous word, the middle letters of which spell out in reverse clue order a full name. In 29 other clues the wordplay leads to the answer with an extra letter that is not entered in the grid; in clue order, they spell out some names. Having completed the grid solvers must alter five cells forming four new words and then reveal the theme by highlighting 44 cells, five of which contain a non-alphabetic character. Numbers in brackets give the lengths of grid entries.

P ALL G R A C I O S O
I D E A L S S U R E D
E L E G I S T S I I D A
R I C I N G I N S T I L
R B H L T P G K E E L S
O G E E S U M P S N E A
T L E A N T I C M E N U
P A S C H S A R U R M G
R U S T I C C O N G O U
E N E U C H I N D I T S
S C E R N E T E A S T
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