

Advantage, Cambridge: Emma Garrison & Vatsal Kabra

In-flight goal : Panda (Belle) Chatdokmaiprai & Xuantong (Sam) Bai

On the nose: Chai Hao Chiu, Tyler Myers, & Jumi Kim

A perfect ten: Aimee Paull & Sophie Bhatt

Lighting the lamp: Alice Beardmore & Jack Murphy

Ippon gachi: Ross McKenzie & Cassia Taylor



GO!!!

In the ruck: [Tom Massingham](#) & [Luke Peters](#)

Kikentai no ichi: [Sarah Kaneen](#), [Ciadh Takahashi](#) & [Alex Rutter](#)

Head of the river: [Helena Olandi](#), [Josh Moore](#), [Gemma King](#) & [Noam Mouelle](#)

Bust-a-move: [Imisiayo Alake](#), [Erin Hayes](#) & [Ellis Liao](#)



CAM

Photo finishers: [Ben Massey](#), [Pelumi Babalola](#), [Yashasvi Raj](#) & [Katy Shaw](#)

Sensational syncopation : [Hana Iza Kim](#), [Frankie Arnold](#) & [Jessica Trinder](#)

Perfect serve : [Milly Kotecha](#) & [Aniket Bhanushali](#)

Carving serious powder: [Jakub Nowrotek](#) & [Nicolo Smith](#)



GO!!!



Welcome to the Lent edition of CAM.

One river. Four and a bit miles. And 20 minutes of some of the most intense competition in the world. But while the Boat Races* might be our most famous clash with the Dark Blues, they are by no means the most fierce. Yes, the rugby lads and lasses are quite intimidating, but for real sporting rivalry? Go see Varsity cheerleading. Or Varsity powerlifting. Or (and this is where the real competition is) Varsity wine tasting. Because while not every Varsity match attracts the world's media, every single one revels in tradition, rivalry... and a lot of fun. So join us on page 20 to cheer on the Light Blues.

Everyone knows that it's tough for new grads this year, and everyone seems to have a reason, from the rise of AI recruiters through to a lack of entry level jobs. But what's really going on, and how is it impacting Cambridge alumni? On page 13 we talk to economists, students and the Careers Service to find out.

Elsewhere, on page 28, we find out how AI is creating its own visual culture, and on page 34, Professor Shruti Kapila presents her insights on Indian political thought.

On these topics – and on all things Cambridge – we look forward to your contribution to the debate, online at magazine.alumni.cam.ac.uk, by post and email or on social media.

Mira Katbamna
(Caius 1995)

*Just putting it out there: we usually win.



CAM online

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Letters may be edited for length. Please mark your email 'For publication'.

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Inbox

Cast in stone

✉ Your article about sculptural plaster casts, such as those at the Museum of Classical Archaeology, is correct to highlight the issue of authenticity (Cast-offs, CAM 106). A number of ancient originals have, sadly, suffered from vandalism and theft through the depredations of 'collectors' in later centuries, rendering plaster copies an essential source of authentic details. In a cast gallery, the reconstruction of original painted colours can offer a startling experience for those modern viewers conditioned to white marble purity.

David Wills (Wolfson 1992)

Aussies rule

✉ Fascinating to read of the long history of Cambridge Australian Rules Football (CAM 106). Wikipedia's Varsity match results has a lacuna between 1954 and 1983. In November 1971, however, in my first term, I received, out of the blue, an invitation to a training session. Never having played, I attended with six other Australians and played the next week against Oxford. Besides us seven Australians, the Cambridge team comprised various British students plus non students from London's Australian heartland of Earl's Court, aka Kangaroo Valley.

My diary says I enjoyed the game, almost scored once and made one mark (whatever that means). It is silent on the score and winners, perhaps because I had no idea. For some reason, I received no further invitations.

Alastair Bates (Trinity 1971)

On the tip of my tongue

✉ I note Andrew Noble's observation (CAM 106) that Cambridge is a rare leading European institution in that it does not require knowledge of a foreign language from applicants. The ability to study languages at school is one which is geographically and socially uneven, likely more so than on the continent. Making a second language compulsory for applicants at present might have the insidious effect of making Cambridge less accessible, and narrowing access to the same excellence which more stringent standards would seek to enhance.

Dominic Weir (Girton 2015)

✉ I very much agree that young people should learn foreign languages at school, but I'm pretty sure any entry requirement for a compulsory foreign language could be circumvented. The real problem in UK schools today is that students are not taught French or German, or chemistry or physics. They are taught how

to pass examinations in French or German, or chemistry or physics – how to jump through hoops, just as I was taught Latin some 60 years ago.

Peter Borrows (Peterhouse 1960)

✉ I am surprised by Andrew Noble's comments, but then I come across modern university graduates who are completely monoglot. Way back when, most universities, including Cambridge, required an O-Level in a modern language, and most colleges expected O-Level Latin as well. I'm a scientist and arrived with two modern languages – French, in which I was proficient, and Russian, less so. Latin, despite its reputation for fatal effect remembered in a little ditty, has proved to be useful too. Languages are fascinating – although Gàidhlig is hard!

John Heathcote (Queens' 1973)

✉ The advent of comprehensive schooling, while a well-intentioned scheme, proved to be a disaster for education in general and languages in particular, with too many pupils failing language exams either through lack of interest or available teachers, or because they found them too difficult. Instead of trying to rectify that sad state of affairs, the Labour government's decree in 2004 that pupils need no longer study languages

ultimately saw Cambridge drop its language matriculation requirement (in 2008) in order to admit talented students who, for one reason or another, had never studied a foreign language at school.

Richard Holroyd (St John's 1968)

Indigenous foundations

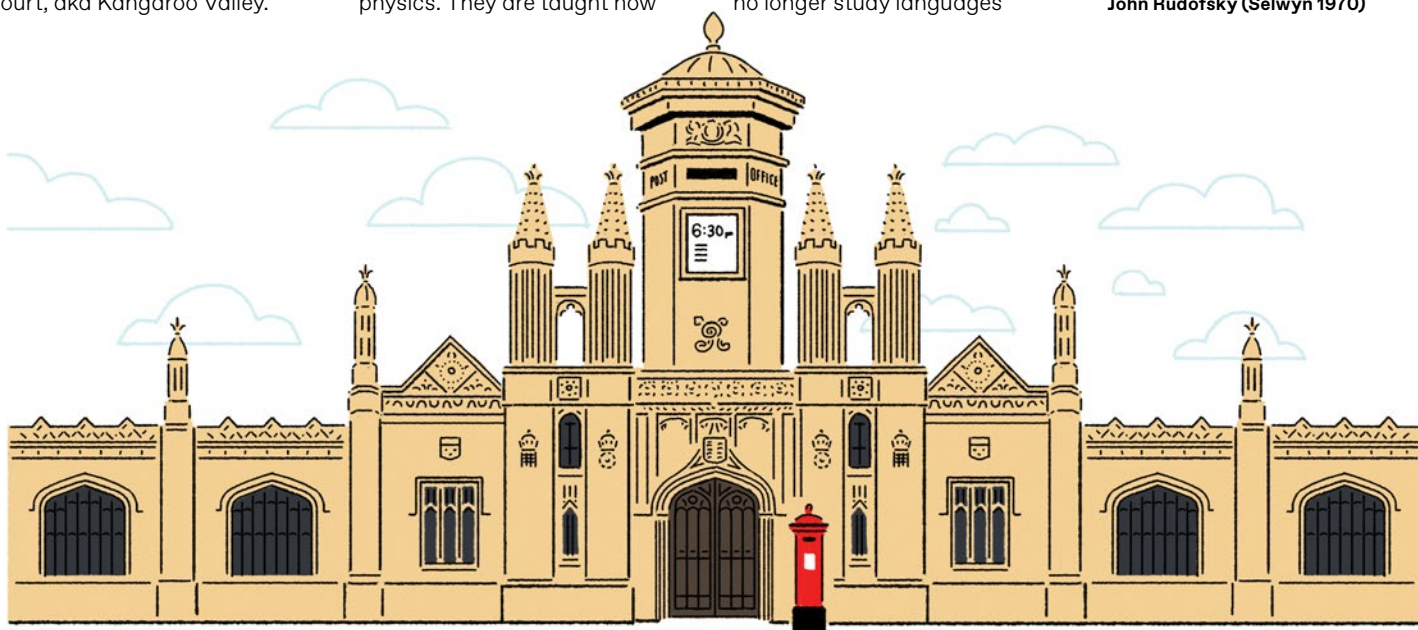
✉ Thank you for the interesting anthropological article and photographs (Dream State, CAM 106) concerning the Shuar of the Ecuadorian/Peruvian Amazon region. It made fascinating reading. I maintain that having a degree in the social structure and functioning of Indigenous communities provided me with the best possible foundation, not only for working in the NHS, but also for holding office (as a lay reader) in the Church of England!

Michael Foster (Fitzwilliam 1965)

So, farewell then, The Gardenia

✉ So sorry to read of the closure of The Gardenia Restaurant (CAM 106). We went there every week for a late meal after running The Musketeers youth club on the far side of town. Chicken livers with rice and chips was a favourite. They knew their customers – I left my distinctive long red scarf there once and they had it ready for me the following week.

John Rudofsky (Selwyn 1970)



x6 increase in Cambridge's supercomputing capacity as a result of a £36m government investment for AI research resource.

cam.ac.uk/mag107/six



Research

New process to shorten lab-to-clinic development directly benefits patients

Turning a discovery made in a lab into a regulated device that can be tested with patients is one of the biggest bottlenecks in UK medical research. But now, a new institute will bring together engineers, clinicians and manufacturers to get those innovative devices to patients sooner.

The Institute for Biomedical Innovation (IBI) – which is the only one of its kind in the UK – will transform the University's Nanoscience Centre on the Cambridge West site into a specialised facility that can take new medical technology from proof of concept towards clinically usable products.

It will fill a crucial gap identified by a series of studies from the Department of Engineering last year, which tracked how early stage medical technologies are developed into real-world clinical devices. One critical element was missing: the

ability to prototype medical equipment properly, with patients and regulation in mind.

The IBI aims to change that by offering facilities that will enable medical devices to be developed in ISO-certified environments – a requirement for technologies destined for use with patients.

"If we can shorten the journey from lab to clinic, that can have an enormous impact, and make a real difference to people's lives," says Professor George Malliaras from Cambridge's Department of Engineering, who will serve as Director of the IBI.

The University has committed staff, space and existing equipment to get the IBI started. But further investment is needed, and it is now seeking support from industry, government and philanthropists to realise its full potential.

biomedinnovation.cam.ac.uk

Philanthropy

The new Childers Professorship of Irish History, established with a £3.6m gift from the Government of Ireland, marks a renewed commitment to deepening the study of Irish history at Cambridge. The post will provide academic leadership in the field, support graduate students and enhance research on Ireland's historical and contemporary role in the world.

cam.ac.uk/mag107/cpi

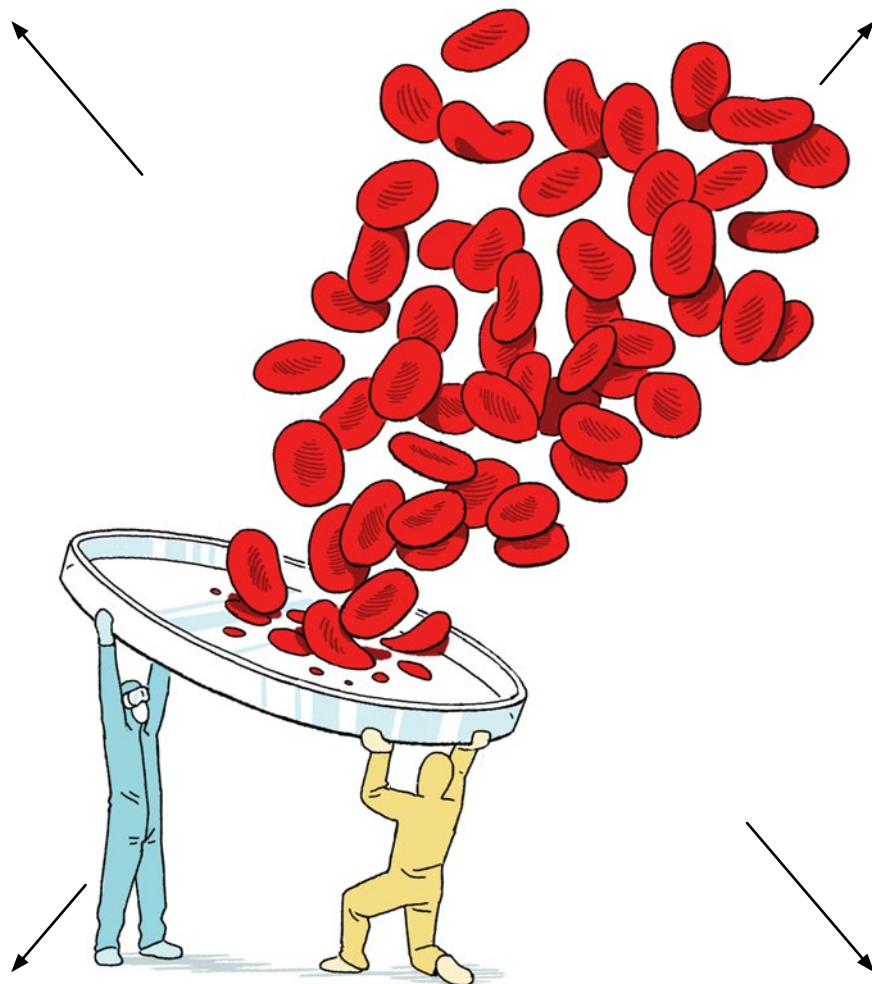


Deconstructed

Lab-grown blood cells enable huge step towards regenerative therapies

Gurdon Institute researchers at the University of Cambridge have found a way to produce lab-grown human blood cells that mimics the process in natural embryos.

The process uses human stem cells to create embryo-like structures that replicate aspects of early human development – including the production of blood stem cells.



These structures – called haematoids – could aid our understanding of early blood formation, simulate blood disorders like leukaemia and produce blood stem cells for transplants.

And the stem cells used to create hematoids can be created from any cell in the body – opening up the possibility of ‘personalised’ blood production.

Two-minute Tripos

THE BLACK DEATH IN EUROPE WAS CAUSED BY THE FALLOUT FROM VOLCANIC ERUPTIONS. DISCUSS

Hey, Rattus rattus with the short tail! Why, it's Rattus rattus with the long tail! Haven't seen you around the marketplace for a while!

Must say the bowels of this grain ship make a nice change from scrounging scraps in the Sea of Azov's fleshpots.

All the wheat you can eat! Fleas are a bit annoying, though. Can't wait till they jump off me and onto a human, ha ha ha.

So where are we headed?

Off to Genoa, I hear. My cousin Rattus rattus with the missing toe went out last year. He's in waste disposal. Though aren't we all, ha ha ha. Do you know him? I'm afraid I don't.

Lovely chap. Most of the family are there now. Apparently the Great Ash Cloud from the Mountain of Fire has made all the crops fail. Terrible weather it's been for years now. Very untypical.

My pal Rattus norvegicus with the mange says you can tell what the weather's been like over past years by looking at the rings in trees. Quite extraordinary.

How very fascinating. Perhaps one day our intelligence as a species will be recognised! Anyway, to avoid famine all the Italian merchants are buying grain from the Mongols of the Golden Horde. And giving us a free ride!

Nothing like great big fields full of the finest grain to turn a horde into a trusted trading partner, eh?

Personally, I'm all for the glories of globalisation! Now we've established a touchpoint in Genoa, we can cement links all over the country. It's a wonderful opportunity to foster a new and mutually advantageous partnership between rats and humans.

That's the kind of positive attitude we rats need as we prepare for the challenges that await us in 1348. What could possibly go wrong? Ouch! Bloody fleas!

cam.ac.uk/mag107/bde



OXFORD AND
CAMBRIDGE
— CLUB —



Welcome to your Club

For nearly 200 years alumni have chosen to take up membership of a spacious and elegant private club in the heart of London. The Oxford and Cambridge Club in Pall Mall is the perfect place to meet for a drink, entertain friends and colleagues in magnificent surroundings, play squash, take a break, host a party or just find a quiet corner to prepare for a meeting. A thriving social scene, sports facilities, a lively calendar of events including talks, tastings, dinners and balls, an exceptionally well-stocked library, extensive wine cellars and more than 40 bedrooms mean our members use their club for recreation, relaxation and business - and now you can too.

For details on membership or a tour of the Club house on Pall Mall,
please visit www.oxfordandcambridgeclub.co.uk or call 020 7321 5110

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Life's a pitch?

For the Independent Football Regulator, heritage is about kits, badges and stadiums. Postgrad researcher Joshua Bland (Department of Archaeology) reckons it's protecting the wrong things.

INTERVIEW **PETER WATTS**

ILLUSTRATION **MICHAEL KIRKHAM**



The new Independent Football Regulator (IFR), which assumed its full powers in December, has been described by its chief executive Richard Monks as a “new era for football governance”. Its aim is to protect and promote clubs’ financial sustainability, make provision for the distribution of revenue received by organisers of football competitions, and safeguard the heritage of English football.

Because I come from a heritage studies background, it’s this last element that I find particularly fascinating, and where I think we need to think more deeply. In IFR terms, heritage is about protecting physical things such as kits, badges and stadiums. However, I believe football heritage is about much more than physical manifestation. It’s about inter-generational tradition and chains of continuity. We need to focus on protecting those.

Heritage allows us to explore why football means so much to so many people, and a recent project I carried out focused on three radically different clubs in the north-east: Newcastle United, Grimsby Town and Horden Community Welfare FC. There are many ways to engage with the game, but the traditional supporter sets the cultural tenor, and that’s where I began. Even if they don’t have an actual financial stake in the club, there’s an

awful lot of stress, sacrifice and emotional labour that goes into football supporting. Morally, supporters feel the club is ‘theirs’.

Certain elements stand out from my research. One is that football supporters at all levels experience football through the lens of community. They feel they are in a community of supporters with a series of shared behaviours and traditions, and that’s what makes the community real.

Then there’s identity. In Newcastle, football has replaced industry as a means to define what it is to be a Geordie. Whereas locals have traditionally looked to the city’s manufacturing industries to forge a sense of self, in the absence of Newcastle’s industrial base, the football club has emerged as the space where locals can establish and perform their sense of civic identity and local pride. In Grimsby, the stands at Blundell Park have replaced the old community spaces and social bonds once provided by the fishing industry.

But Horden Community Welfare is perhaps the most extreme example. Horden was a pit village of 15,000 that now has a population of 7,000. The loss of the pit threatened an entire way of life. Social protocols, cultural norms and duties of care to a wider community collapsed. But the football club keeps alive that community-focused practical consciousness. The club is fan owned and operates like

a social co-operative with after-school training and partnerships with food banks and mental health charities. It’s one of a series of ad hoc institutions that provide a sense of civic infrastructure in Horden.

In all these cases, football provides a thread between lives and generations; it offers continuity against a broader context of discontinuity caused by deindustrialisation. Modern football was created in the industrial period, and there is a powerful story of a town born for industry with the football club remaining after that industry falls away.

Football provides a sense of cultural resilience and security – the meaning of football comes from that continuity. When I talk about continuity, it’s not a benign thing that simply exists. Fans work at it and add layers of meaning. It is deliberate, and that’s what makes it meaningful. A fan is happy if their team is winning but their sense of heritage is just as important.

This gives policymakers a powerful vocabulary for talking about what football does. Fundamentally, football support is performative, with the ritual of putting on the club shirt, gathering in pubs and stadiums and singing together. That’s where the badges and kits take on salience. It’s not a mistake to talk about those things as heritage, but it is a mistake to reduce heritage to those things. ●

Wish you could delve deeper into your travel destinations?

Travel with fellow alumni and satisfy your thirst for learning with an expert academic guide.

From Oman to Italy, discover more of the world beyond the guidebook with the Alumni Travel Programme.

alumni.cam.ac.uk/travel



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GRAD UPDATE



Things are tough right now for new grads — even Cambridge ones. Is it the impact of AI? And how are the Careers Service — and our newest alumni — responding?

WORDS CHRIS STOKEL-WALKER



JOB



A

few months after graduating with a First, Finley Brighton (Caius 2022) opened yet another rejection email – and realised he had lost count. “I think I probably applied for about 200 jobs, mostly in publishing,” he says. “Most people I know are struggling.”

Brighton is far from alone. Scroll any social media feed or talk to friends and family and you’ll find similar stories, often featuring recent graduates from every university across the country: hundreds of applications, silence from recruiters, bruising multistage assessments and wisecracking trolls suggesting grads should have trained as plumbers instead.

So what is really going on in the graduate employment market? Is this a historically bad moment to leave university, or a familiar downturn amplified through AI anxiety and the shiny veneer of social media? And what – realistically – can today’s graduates do to navigate it?

Graduate unemployment is less than half that of all 16–24 year olds

14%

Unemployment rate for all 16–24 year-olds.

6%

Unemployment rate for grads aged 16–24.

What’s next for UK graduates? 2022/23

Full-time employment

59%

Further study

15%

Part-time employment

12%

Volunteering etc

8%

Unemployed

6%

A tough market but not cataclysmic

Diane Coyle, Bennett Professor of Public Policy, has watched multiple generations graduate into recession and recovery. She says the current slowdown is serious, but not unprecedented. “The early 80s and early 90s were much worse,” she explains – while recognising that is small succour to those struggling to get onto the job ladder. “We had really steep recessions in the UK then, and so for those cohorts, that was a very tough time,” she adds.

Today’s graduates are instead entering an economy that is not crashing so much as stuck in second gear. The single percentage point economic growth we’re seeing now is much less than historical averages, she says, and it’s a picture shown globally, too. “I think businesses generally are just quite cautious and waiting to see what happens before they commit to the long-term relationship of hiring and training somebody.”

I think businesses generally are just quite cautious and waiting to see what happens before they commit to the long-term relationship of hiring and training somebody

Graham Philpott, Head of Careers at the University Careers Service, is also realistic. “I think we’re seeing a very normal jobs market for flat economic conditions,” he says. “There’s absolutely nothing unusual about the jobs market at the moment, though there’s an awful lot of bad news about it.” What is different is the whirl of debate about why things are bad – including the impact of AI and how that could change the workplace. “We know things are going to change,” says Philpott. “We’re not sure exactly how it’s going to change, and that’s the abnormality at the moment.” ›

Cambridge grad job postings 2022/23

10,448

Cambridge grad job postings 2023/24

12,509

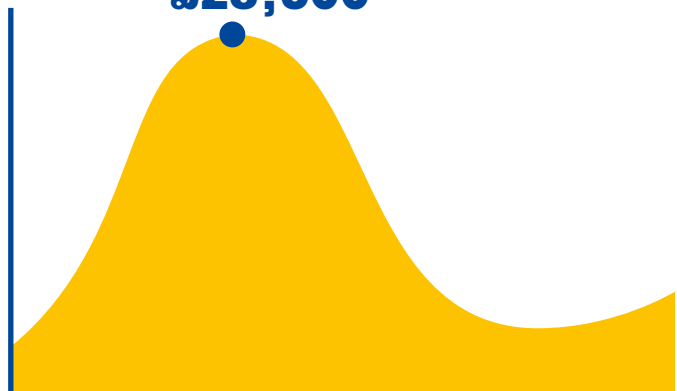
Cambridge grad job postings 2024/25

11,681

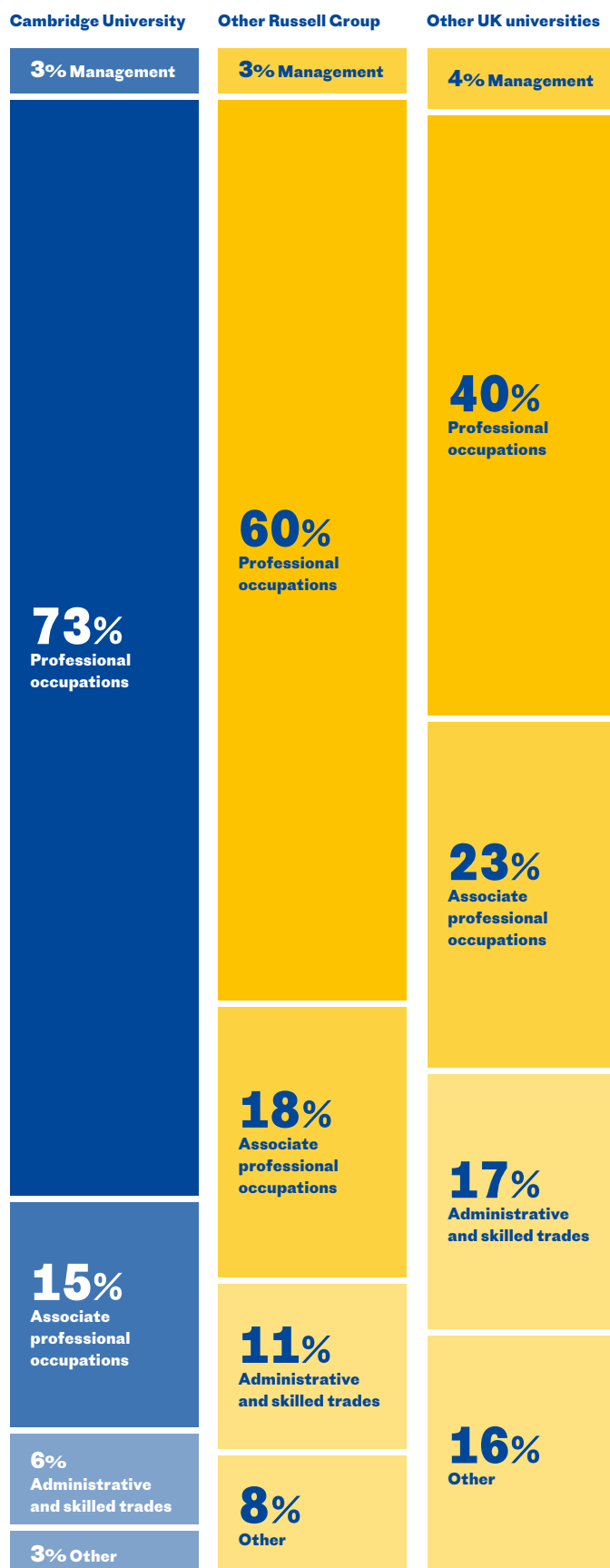
What do they earn?

Average salary
of a graduate
after 15 months

£28,500



The Cambridge effect: graduate outcomes by employment type 2022/23



Life at the sharp end

For another recent graduate from St Catharine's, now working as a fundraising assistant, the shift from degree to job hunt was abrupt, and she soon realised that an entry level job was no longer what she thought it was. "You get the sense that the qualifications needed for an entry level job have increased because of the amount of demand that there is for those roles," she says.

The biggest challenge was during the early parts of the application process, the point where many employers now implement situational judgment stages. These are designed to root out large swathes of jobseekers for roles that have hundreds of applicants. "But it means you don't have your CV being looked at by an actual person," she says. "It was particularly demoralising to feel that I wasn't being able to represent myself."

History and politics grad Manisha Riley (King's 2021) had a similar experience after Cambridge. Following time spent travelling, she targeted public sector and charity roles outside London. "I really tried to plan it out, tried to personalise my applications," Riley says. "A lot of time and effort went into those applications, but I wasn't even getting offered interviews."

And the hurdles seem to multiply as would-be employers put in place processes to try and tackle a rising number of applicants using AI to apply en masse for jobs. "Over the period, application processes became more and more demanding," she recalls. One graduate scheme required a personal statement, a video submission, an online interview and a full-day assessment centre session with a prepared presentation. Even then, she didn't get the job. A subsequent application, for a role as a communications assistant, was happily successful.

I really tried to plan it out, to personalise my applications, a lot of time and effort went into them, but I wasn't even getting offered interviews

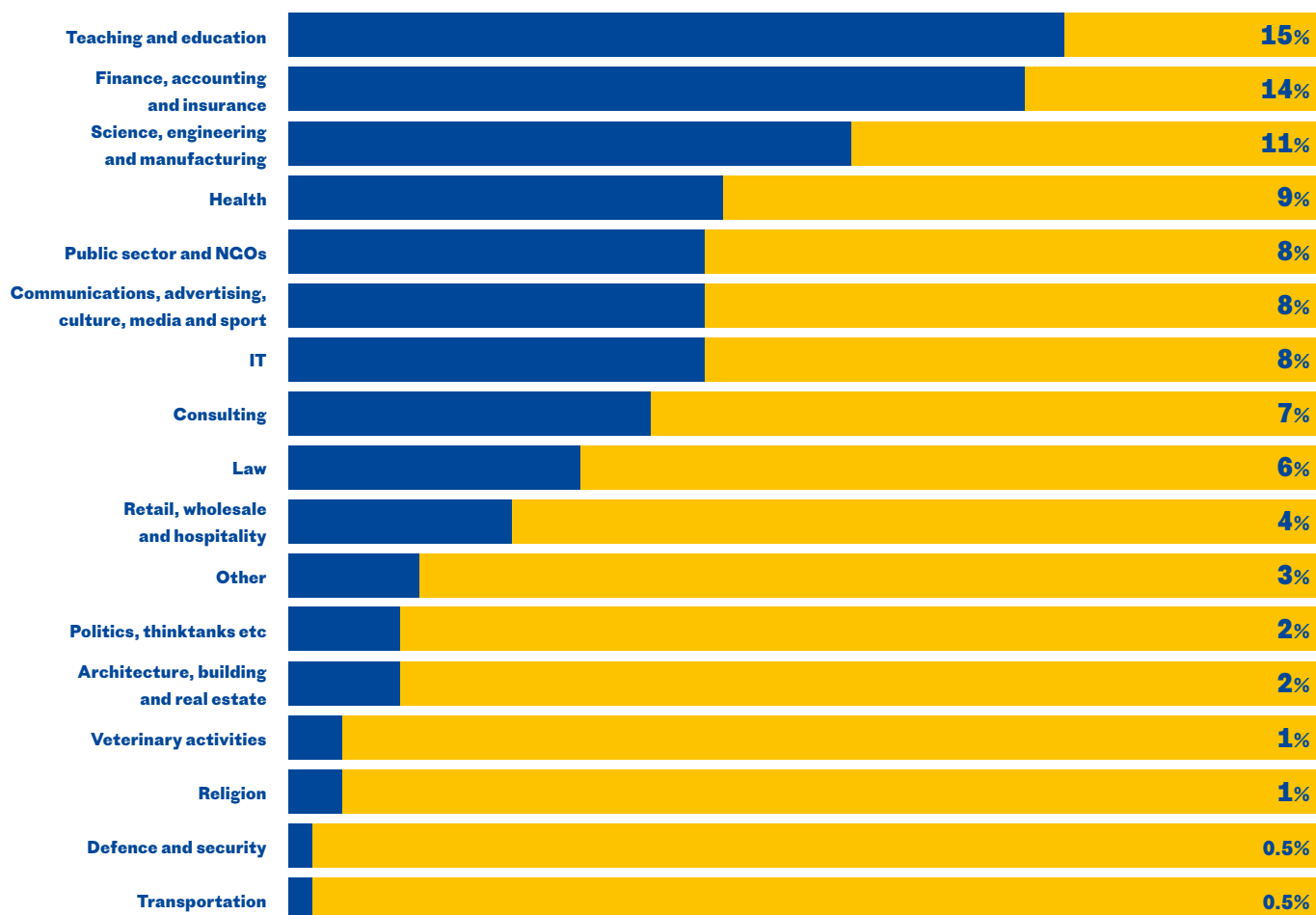
For Brighton, the silence was its own verdict. "It's pretty disheartening, because I think I just didn't hear anything back from most of them," he says. When he requested feedback, companies would say they couldn't provide any because of the high volume of applicants. "So you don't even really know where you can improve." >

**Salary advantage among recent graduates
over non-graduates of the same age**

+25%

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION

Where next? Cambridge graduate destinations 2017-2023



SOURCE: HESA GRADUATE OUTCOMES 2025

AI, bots and the new gatekeepers

Rigorous testing and assessment centres have long been part of the milkround process, but today, automated scoring, AI-driven screening and online tests are now a routine part of graduate recruitment. “The way you get jobs has transformed so much for the worse,” says Coyle, “and AI is clearly making it worse still.” In her view, AI isn’t coming for jobs on a large scale yet, but it is reshaping how candidates get them – hence the request for Riley to submit a video. “I don’t think it’s to test what you actually have to say,” Riley explains. “It’s just to check that you’re not a bot.”

International graduates face an additional layer of difficulty. “The UK job market right now is in quite a state of distress,” says Micheal Akintunde

38 2005/06

It’s never been the case that you shape your whole life with decisions that are taken now. I know people do worry that if they don’t get the job they want right now they’ll be doomed for the rest of their lives. But that’s absolutely not the case

15 months after graduation, what percentage are in grad level employment or further studies?

85%

Graduate level employment 2018/19

86%

Graduate level employment 2019/20

82%

Graduate level employment 2020/21

81%

Graduate level employment 2021/22

79%

Graduate level employment 2022/23

(Wolfson 2023), now development officer at Caius, who completed an MPhil in African Studies in 2024. “The core issue is ‘relevant experience’. Combine that with visa limits and culture shock and the challenge is stark. It has all the ingredients for disaster.”

Postgraduate international students, Akintunde points out, have very little time to secure a role. “Usually for postgrads, you’re just doing nine months, so you really have to focus on how best to position yourself.” Akintunde credits a short, paid internship at his current organisation for helping him secure a role, and urges others to think more broadly about where to get a job. “People should start looking beyond the UK. If you’ve got a Cambridge degree, it’s one of the biggest assets in the world.”

But for some Cambridge graduates, it’s hard to separate the economics of graduate hiring from the psychological shock of leaving the city itself. “If I’m honest, I found the whole process really affected my mental health,” says Riley. “When you’ve worked so hard for your degree, what gets you through it is knowing that it will lead to future success, and it will set you up for life. So when you graduate and realise you’re not using your degree – or even basic skillsets of critical thinking, creative thinking and time management – it’s so demoralising. You start asking yourself what it was all for.”

Coyle has some reassurance for those who don’t immediately walk into the ideal – or any – job. “It’s never been the case that you shape your whole life with decisions that are taken now,” she explains. “I know people do worry that if they don’t get the job they want right now, they’ll be doomed for the rest of their lives. But that’s absolutely not the case.”

She also points out that economic downturns and jobseeking struggles tend to be cyclical. “And those cycles tend to be a few years at most,” she explains. “There’s also the longer-term trend of an ageing population, and so a lot of people like me will be retiring in the next decade, and that will mean that demand for younger workers will structurally increase.”

Average number of applications
per job vacancy advertised

2022/23

86

2023/24

140

140

2024/25

What actually helps

If the system is tough and not about to be transformed overnight, what practical steps can graduates take? Akintunde argues that internships, volunteering and any practical work are crucial, not just for CVs but for interviews themselves. “There are specific questions that you could only answer if you have experienced it first hand,” he says. “If you’ve not actually put yourself out there, there’s no way you can find the example.”

Riley came to a similar conclusion. “I would say that experience is valued over anything else,” she says. “But that doesn’t mean a brilliant previous job or the most amazing internship ever. Experience can come in so many different forms.” Volunteering helped her get experience in a job market where hiring was a rarity.

But it’s still important not to turn your undergraduate years into a constant job hunting exercise. “I wouldn’t want to tell people that they need to be forward planning from day one of their degree in order to get a job,” says Riley, “as that’s likely to fundamentally change the student experience for the worse.”

Alumni have a unique part to play: participating in mentoring schemes, offering internships and providing genuinely entry level roles for the next generation of Cambridge grads

Which is why the bottom line, says Philpott, has to be: don’t panic. “What tends to happen is that people don’t really think through what they’ve got to offer and what to apply for, so they start applying for things that they don’t really understand and wouldn’t be right for.”

The Careers Service helps with narrowing choices, offering online resources, employer contacts and one-to-one advice for both students and alumni. And those alumni have a unique role to play, he says, offering internships and genuinely entry level roles or by signing up to mentoring schemes. Doing that may just help ensure that today’s difficult market is a phase – not a fate – for the next generation of Cambridge grads. ©

Looking for help with your career or to support other alumni and students? Sign up with the Careers Service for networking opportunities and more: careers.cam.ac.uk/careers-support-alumni

SOURCE: HESA GRADUATE OUTCOMES 2025



GO, LIGHT BLUES, GO!!!

Make no mistake: when it comes to sporting rivalry, the Boat Races ain't got nothing on powerlifting. Or cheerleading. Or wine tasting. Because while not every Varsity match attracts the world's media, every single one revels in tradition, rivalry... and a lot of fun.

WORDS **PETER WATTS** PHOTOGRAPHY **ADAM LAWRENCE**



It's early morning of the Varsity ski race 2024. Not a single run has been completed but, as the skiers nervously assemble at the top of the slopes, it's clear that Cambridge already have the upper hand. For waiting for them at the bottom of the course is evidence of the most brazen act of superiority: the letters "GDBO" have been sprayed in huge blue text against the white snow at the finish line. Under cover of night, someone has appropriated the blue spray used to mark out the course and left their not-so-subtle message: "God Damn Bloody Oxford". One nil to Cambridge, before a single skier has even left the gate.

"The rivalry is very real," says fourth year engineer and Ski Club co-president Jakub Nowrotek (Peterhouse), who has just taken part in his fourth Varsity. "When you stand at the top of the slope, it's authentic. You feel the tension. But at the bottom, we celebrate together. The rivalry is as real as the friendship – though the friendship is probably more important."

Because Varsity means more than just the Boat Races, football, rugby or cricket. There are Varsities in dozens

of other sports and pastimes, from baseball to clay pigeon shooting, and many have a rich history of their own. (The skiing contest, for instance, began in 1922 – making it the oldest team skiing race in history.)

There has been a Varsity wine tasting contest since 1953, and while Varsity cheerleading, powerlifting and e-sports are relatively new additions to the fixture list, the desire to beat Oxford is no less intense. "As long as we beat Oxford, I'm happy," says second year land economist Giselle Robinson-Boutin (Caius), the current president of Cambridge Lions Cheerleaders. "We came second in the Nationals but because we beat Oxford in a landslide it cheered us up."

The cheerleading team train twice a week and for four hours every other Saturday, working on routines, perfecting choreography and practising complex acrobatics – known in the trade as "stunting". An ultra-physical sport that draws on the skills of both dancers and gymnasts, cheerleading has recently acquired Blues status – something that leads ›



It allows people to have their first taste of true rivalry – a rivalry that existed before I was even born. That’s why it is so fraught

to intra-Cambridge competition at Freshers’ Fair as the different teams try to draw the best new talent.

“We attract a lot of gymnasts and there’s also a Dance Society Varsity, so some of our team do both,” says Robinson-Boutin. “That can be a bit of an issue: the dance team get quite a scare when they see us chucking their ballerinas about during our routines.”

The Oxford Sirens cheerleading team were beaten handsomely last year. “We’d hired some quite good coaches with national experience, while Oxford only had student

coaches,” explains Robinson-Boutin. “That really put them at a disadvantage when it came to competition. They didn’t perform at their best and weren’t too happy.”

It was a similar tale at last year’s blind wine tasting at Vintners’ Hall in the City of London – the highlight of the University wine tasting calendar – when Cambridge secured an against-the-odds victory. While the Cambridge team hugged each other and screamed with delight, one judge was heard to comment: “Oxford, it seems you have a lot of homework to do.” Ouch!

The wine tasting contest is one of the most tense of all Varsity competitions, with teams of seven competing in the huge hall. Each contestant is given a flight of six white wines followed by six reds, then asked to ascertain grape variety, region, sub-district and vintage. The teams operate against the clock, in complete silence, locked eye to eye with their foe. This is worse than any exam. “You can’t talk to your teammates, so the only sound is liquid swirling,



people scribbling their notes and glasses clinking,” explains Heqing Huang (Caius), in her final year of a Sociology PhD.

The wine tasting team trains twice weekly with their coach (a former student), using their “bible” – a wine tasting guide written by Cambridge alumni and Masters of Wine explaining how to identify different grapes. Before the Varsity contest they are reminded to maintain their usual routine: no spicy food the night before and definitely no new brands of toothpaste. Preparations are completed on the train to London with a swig of wine.

“On the way, the coach will grab a high-acid wine from M&S to cleanse our palate,” says Huang. “If wine is the first thing you taste in the morning it will make you salivate and then everything will taste acidic – you don’t want that as it will interfere with your taste for the contest.”

If wine isn’t your thing, you could always retreat back to the slopes – there are no glasses clinking on the Varsity ski trip, as Cambridge exercise an alcohol ban in the week

of the competition to maintain peak fitness. After a few days of skiing from dawn to dusk, 36 skiers – 18 men and 18 women – compete in the Varsity races, watched by hundreds.

“It’s very competitive,” says third year land economist Sam Hinton (Trinity Hall). “During term we have specific fitness and conditioning sessions with specialists who understand the physicality of skiing. We also go to the nearest indoor ski centre, in Milton Keynes. The core of our activities are the socials, the pre-season trip in September to Switzerland and then preparations for Varsity.”

While Varsity skiing has been going for more than 100 years, Varsity e-sports is only in its 12th iteration – Cambridge currently lead their rivals seven to five. Training takes the form of regular matches in two student eSports leagues – the National Students eSports and University eSports Masters – while the big competition takes place in Easter, often at the Red Bull Gaming Sphere in Hackney, East London. Teams usually compete in five ›



games: Counterstrike, League of Legends, Rocket League, Valorant and Overwatch. It's quite a production.

"We have commentators for every game, one from Oxford and one from Cambridge, and we sometimes have a host who will hype games up and introduce the players," says Gustav Conradie (Churchill), who is in his second year of a Maths PhD and is a previous president of the Digital Gaming Society. "We definitely like to win, but it's reasonably friendly. There is no rage quitting, but maybe a bit of banging on the table when people lose."

So while there may be a Varsity for everyone, it's also not unusual to compete in more than one event. As well as demonstrating his prowess on the slopes, Nowrotek has taken part in Varsity volleyball and beach volleyball; Hinton was a member of the side that took on Oxford at rugby threes; while his colleague Huang has defeated Oxford at kendo – a Japanese martial art using bamboo – and a one-off Varsity boat race for Chinese students.

"Oxford v Cambridge is the pinnacle of sport at a university level," says Varsity powerlifter and final year medic Shubang Nagalotimath (Robinson). "It allows people to have their first taste of true rivalry – a rivalry that existed before I was even born. That's why it is so fraught. These two universities often attract a very competitive type of person; we revel in the rivalry as it is absolutely historic. It's something that motivates you, and as powerlifting is now a full Blue sport, we take it very seriously."

Navigating the balance between healthy competition and something a little fiercer isn't always easy. Following the Oxford Sirens' disappointment, Robinson-Boutin has reached out to her cheerleading counterpart at Oxford to organise a Varsity dinner between the two teams, hoping to build bridges based on a shared love of the sport.

There's definitely a friendliness between the powerlifters, while Huang says there is good camaraderie across the divide among kendo enthusiasts and the Chinese rowing teams.



While the Cambridge team hugged each other and screamed with delight, one judge was heard to comment: “Oxford, it seems you have a lot of homework to do.” Ouch!

But wine tasting is a different matter. “We have one goal every year: to beat Oxford,” Huang says. “It is intense. Unlike the other sports I participate in, we don’t share a cordial relationship, and we don’t celebrate with them afterwards.”

Perhaps that’s because of what’s at stake. Most Varsity matches have a cup or plate for the victors to get their hands on, but the winners of the wine tasting event get bottles of vintage champagne to take home – and a trip to Épernay in France courtesy of sponsor Pol Roger, which organises

a Varsities final against the winners of other Varsity contests (including Edinburgh versus St Andrews). That’s quite a prize.

But even if the only trophy is bragging rights, it remains a massive motivation. “With any Varsity, you carry on your shoulders the hundreds of years of competition between the two universities, and the knowledge that thousands of people have stood in the same position,” says Hinton.

“We have been skiing against each other for more than 100 years, and you feel that energy and that tradition. It instils a level of hatred towards Oxford – but only when you are competing. At the top of the slope, you believe they are the worst thing ever. But then when you get to the bottom and the adrenaline subsides you remember that, actually, they are really nice people.” ☺

Singing the light blue fantastic: Our thanks to members of just some of Cambridge’s 264 clubs and societies for coming together to help celebrate the lives of Cambridge Blues.



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— BY IHG —

PROMPT: A PHOTOGRAPH OF A BEAUTIFUL

We are in the
northern hemisphere
here - this is where
AI locates beauty

EYES
WIDE
SHUT

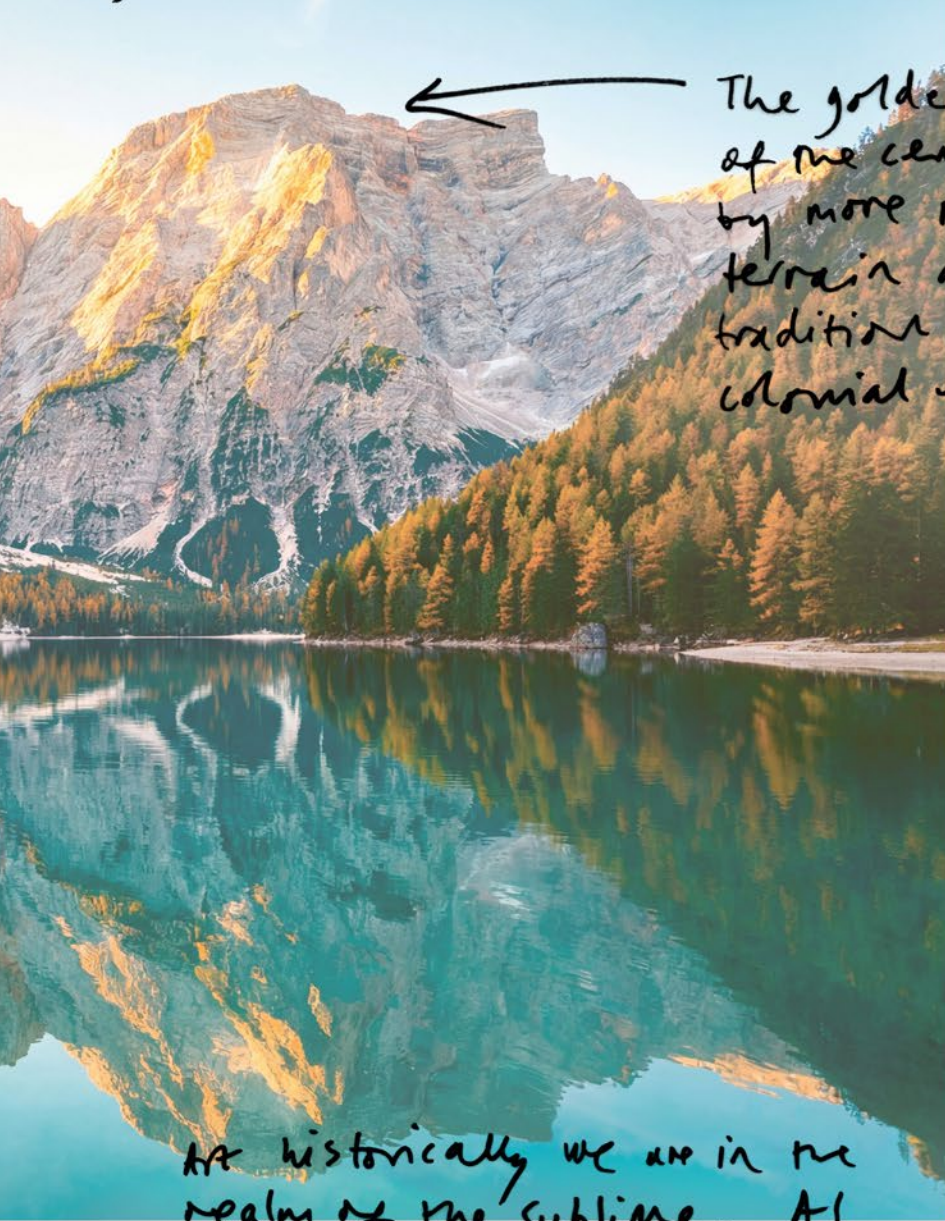
The type of boat seems
ill-fitted to the environment.
This is the sort of boat
you might see on the can!

Why aren't
they wearing
hats?

The clothes are very
odd, and don't seem
appropriate for the
mountain setting.
This beige coat would
seem more at home
on a UK high street.

Think you can tell the difference between
an AI photo and a 'real' one? Twelve months ago,
yes. But now? Maybe not, but there are giveaways.
That's because AI imagery has its own visual culture
- one that will develop and, in time, influence not just
human-made imagery, but the physical world, too.

LAKE, SUITABLE FOR PUBLICATION IN A GLOSSY MAGAZINE.



← The golden light, the white mass of the central mountain, flanked by more rugged or forested terrain draws on an 18th century tradition of artists accompanying colonial explorers.

Art historically we are in the realm of the sublime... It looks 18th century painting!

It's 2002, you take a photograph using your new digital camera: a lake near you, all deep colours and vast, empty skies. You post this picture on DPChallenge, a new website where digital photography enthusiasts can rate each other's images. Everyone loves your photo. You take a few more. Then you get into something else. You forget about DP Challenge.

But the internet never forgets.

In 2012, researchers scrape DPChallenge. They're interested in teaching computers about what images look the best. They take 250,000 images, including your lake photo. They analyse the most popular photos to understand the characteristics they share. What do most-liked images look like? "Landscapes of wildly saturated skies or moody, high-contrast black and

white feature heavily, as do animals – but virtually no people," says Dr Leonardo Impett, Assistant Professor of Digital Humanities, whose speciality is machine learning in arts and culture.

Another 10 years and several algorithms later, this dataset that contains your lake image – along with thousands more photos the AI considers 'pretty' – is part of the dataset used to train something called Stable Diffusion, the most widely used AI image generator. Now your lake image is all AI lakes, everywhere. It has become the standard, because an AI image is basically a bias engine, says Eryk Salvaggio, Gates Scholar PhD student at Cambridge Digital Humanities, whose current work examines how archival pictures are recontextualised through AI image generation.

"Generative AI is designed to find and produce the most common representation of an idea," he says. "There is a misconception that the proportions of a dataset are equal to the world's proportions. But when we generate 100 images of the same thing, they'll cluster around the most common representation in the dataset, not a rational distribution of what's in the dataset."

And that matters, because DPChallenge – besides being a fascinating snapshot of what websites looked like in 2002, as it hasn't ever significantly changed its design – is exceptional among image datasets, because members can share their location and biographical details. That is how we know that most of these images were – and still are – created by middle-aged men from the US. Not for the first time, it is their aesthetic preferences that now inform the world's aesthetic preferences. "And, to be fair, it's not their fault," says Impett. "They never asked to form everyone's AI slop. But these datasets have long memories. They're ghosts. They have afterlives."

Today, the ghosts of images past haunt us everywhere we go online – both when we create images using AI and when we look at those images. In our world of such infinite variety, why are all AI generated buildings glass and steel palaces? Why do all the coffee shops have too many plants? Why do all the women look like a slightly off version of Kate Middleton? There is a simple answer: because they are all trained on the same images.

"There is a misconception that these images are trained on all the images of the world," says Salvaggio. "But they are not. They are initially trained on around five billion images and they are not necessarily artworks. They can be photographs of products, scraped from Amazon, for example. Then when you make a request – 'office building' or 'coffee shop' – that narrows the selection down to between 5,000 to 400,000. That sounds like a lot, but it's a lot less than five billion." And that subset is chosen because these are the images on the internet that the most people have liked. This has its own issues. > >

People aren't thinking critically about what it means to make pictures with this tool, or how this tool is making those pictures

PROMPT: A PHOTOGRAPH OF CONTEMPORARY

It's interesting that the prompt was for an office - but this looks a lot more like a cafe. It shows how we are in a deeply commercial logic of imagery here.

Wow - these people all look very similar!

So what does this AI visual culture - homogenous, bland, stereotypical, untrustworthy - mean for the real world? That's where digital humanities comes in. "In the digital humanities, we're always engaged in a critique of our digital tools and their limits, and that's what's missing from generative AI discourse," says Salvaggio. "There has been uncritical adoption: 'Oh, this thing can make pictures. Now we'll use it to make pictures.' People aren't thinking critically about what it means to make pictures with this tool, or how this tool is making those pictures."

And what happens when an AI image generator starts using the biased photos it has generated to create new images? Then the bias could become supercharged, says Salvaggio. "Generative AI will not find new patterns if you're training it on its reproductions of previously identified patterns. It could reinforce bias in not just a technical but also a social way, if it's just reproducing the sort of people, views and objects that the original dataset represents."

Of course, a key threat is visual misinformation. It's one thing to generate yet another boring image of a lake, but how should we respond, for example, to AI-generated images of war or famine? Emmanuel Iduma is a PhD Gates Scholar at Cambridge Digital Humanities, studying the photography of two conflicts in Nigeria, the Biafran War and the Boko Haram insurgency. He uses digital methods to explore how images of these conflicts affect how the African continent is perceived.

"We need to reflect on how actual photographs of conflict - or other horrific events - have had impacts that go beyond the moment that the photos were taken," he says. "Photographs of any conflict affect how we think about that place. When

AI is drawing on the frictionless depictions made by architects rather than our built reality

images are combined to create a single image, to homogenise them based on certain typologies, no distinction is made between one place and another."

And no two wars are the same, he says - which is why the work of war photographers is still vital. "The reason people generally have any kind of meaningful response through photographs or images is because there is some connection with the truth function of that image. When we turn to AI to reflect or represent core elements of the human experience, it degrades what is conveyed in photographs, which is essentially human and truthful."

But while the risk of misinformation is real, it's not new. Indeed, photography itself is not without ethical issues. "That's the nature of the medium. Whenever you

point a camera at something, you're always excluding something else," he says. "It has always been easy to create misinformation through images. And in fact, we still see people taking older non-AI images and affixing new captions to them, to create the illusion that something new has happened."

The real challenge with AI pictures, he believes, is the sheer scale. "You can produce millions of images. So instead of saying: 'There was an explosion', you say: 'Look at all these photos of that explosion.' How do we adapt to that scale, where it's not a matter of one thing being wrong, but something wrong everywhere you look?"

We also need to look beyond the images themselves and focus on the technology that drives them, says Impett. Facebook is awash with AI slop videos, but not because

Everything is very neat!



OFFICE LIFE, SUITABLE FOR PUBLICATION IN A GLOSSY MAGAZINE.



*For me this exercise demonstrates the importance of the discipline of art history as a means to encourage visual literacy.

Dr Inga Fraser

is Senior Curator at Kettle's Yard and Co-Director of Cambridge Visual Culture, exploring the intersections of modern art, emerging media and broader visual cultures.

Meta wants to replace Hollywood or big advertising agencies, he believes. It's even more sinister than that.

"The tech companies openly admit that these tools are not to help your local furniture shop make cheaper adverts. It's to train robots to work in warehouses, or clean kitchens – replacing low-paid workers in rich countries. AI systems need many, many goes at doing a particular thing. You can't just show a robot a dirty kitchen once. It needs to move around, interact. You need, say, a million dirty kitchens, or a video simulator of a million dirty kitchens. This is not my fringe conspiracy theory, by the way. This is absolutely what the big tech companies are saying they are doing."

And, of course, these videos have also been trained on limited sets of images

– which could bring a whole new set of problems. Impett cites the Platonic Representation Hypothesis: the theory that all AI models are gradually becoming more similar in their behaviour. "Having video generation models trained on images that make something alluring and perfect might become a technical challenge. How will a robot that's been trained how to act in a perfect kitchen react when faced with a kitchen in the real world? I'm highly sceptical of the idea that AI models are converging to some deeper truth, but the overall observation – that the convergence is happening – is interesting."

So where do we go from here? "I do believe that people want to see photographs of experiences that people have had or places that they've been, or see art that humans >

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25 June

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Maggi Hambling
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Callum Innes
Chantal Joffe
Richard Long
David Nash
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Celia Paul
Lucie Rie
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PROMPT: A PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT OF AN ART HISTORIAN FROM CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY AT WORK, SUITABLE FOR PUBLICATION IN A GLOSSY MAGAZINE.



✓ It's Mary Beard! But of course it's not. It's interesting that it produced an actual person with a public persona, but this is a use of her likeness that is quite apart from that. A primary concern here is consent. I would not want my image to circulate in this way.

For the record, this is not how art historians handle artefacts!

The tweed! The magnifying glass! It's a parody.

have made," says Salvaggio. "They want to participate in a human conversation through art and writing and music. They don't just necessarily want this kind of... wallpaper."

If AI art somehow comes to a point where it can transcend the wallpaper, it will be because it is carrying a unique fingerprint of a human being who's making it, he says. But that's a hard thing to create, simply because of how these systems are designed.

"I think the current way these tools are built strips out the human touch. Because I use AI in art, in ways that show these limits, I do think you can engage with them critically, and reveal the biases and politics

embedded in the machines. But I have to work against the interface to do that, where the emphasis is on 'produce, produce, produce' as much as you possibly can. Make a thousand pictures. Make 100 songs. I think people are going to get very tired of that very quickly."

Then it will be time for a new tool, he says: one that enables a way of making that expresses something other than a common denominator or an average – a tool that centres human expression and draws from an ethical dataset.

"It would have to be a real tool, rather than a content stream. That would be

a radical departure from what we have now. There might be a real space of opportunity there. It is possible but it is not what's being prioritised." Until that time comes, if we want to create something entirely new, it seems the old ways may be the best: stop looking at pictures dreamed up by a machine, and search your own imagination instead. ☺

If you would like to support future research in Cambridge Digital Humanities, please contact Kara.Rann@admin.cam.ac.uk or visit cam.ac.uk/give-cdh

WANT TO KNOW THE FUTURE? LOOK TO INDIA



Finding the world a confusing place? Already consulted Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Bagehot and Marx? Meet Professor Shruti Kapila, who has brought Indian political thought to Cambridge – and with it, new insights into the political phenomenon of our age.

WORDS VICTORIA JAMES PHOTOGRAPHY HARSHA VADLAMANI

We've always seen the west as the crucible of political ideas, but in this global century I think India offers the most insightful space to examine where planetary and global life is going," says Shruti Kapila, Professor of History and Politics. "What it shows may not always be positive, but it allows us to see the scale of the challenge."

India, Kapila says, is paradigmatic for understanding both modernity and the nature of the nation state. "India was the first country to be decolonised, from the British Empire, since America," she points out. "But India didn't go down the communist or dictatorship route. Nor did it follow a liberalism that was supposedly 'bequeathed' by the British Empire. Instead, Indians produced an entirely new vocabulary around questions of the state, of violence, and of religion – and that is fascinating and hugely important."

Kapila was brought up in Chandigarh, a post-Independence planned city in north-west India. "Chandigarh was commissioned by India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru (Trinity 1907), as a vision of what peace could look like after years of bloodshed," she says. "My parents moved there as part of that dream and part of the work of nation building."

"India had always historically bucked the European trend, which is to say that it did not form its nationality on the basis of a single language or a single religion. And that first generation of modern nation builders was very clear that India was going to instruct the world in this kind of unity in diversity."

The national stories of this new India, she says, are not simply the outcome of European histories. "They were produced by major political struggle over more than a century. The Indian National Congress (INC) party [founded in 1885] was the first explicitly anticolonialist political party in the world." It provided, says Kapila, significant inspiration for the global civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s.

"Think of Mandela and Martin Luther King. The INC of Gandhi's time created massive innovation both in mobilisation techniques, such as civil disobedience and in political language. That had a domino effect across other Asian and African colonised nations. The result was a non-aligned movement that created a bloc of nations standing apart from the new 'imperial' divisions of a world run by the Americans and the Soviet Union."

Kapila's graduation from Panjab University in Chandigarh was followed in the late 1990s by a Master's in History at India's top-ranked Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi. "It seems like another time now," she says. "It was a moment when optimism around globalisation was very high. Knowledge should never have boundaries, but it was especially true at that time when I was coming up for graduate work. There was an openness, a buzz of ideas. You felt like you were part of a major global moment, a celebration of human possibilities." Kapila went first to London for a doctorate, then to Oxford, followed by Tufts in Massachusetts before arriving in Cambridge 15 years ago.

It was at just that moment, with the explosion of digital communication and the financial crisis of 2008, that the dream of globalisation began to sour. "There was fatigue. The last positive embers of globalisation were dying," Kapila recalls. "Finally, it all came crashing down. High globalisation had produced prosperity, but also a kind of intimacy that is competitive and antagonistic, and an anger against established elites." ›



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CAPITAL AT RISK.

But while analysis of the failure of globalisation often centres on discussion of Brexit or Trump's America, in fact these trends showed up early and acutely in Indian politics. "With Modi's installation as Prime Minister in 2014 you see a revolt against liberal metropolitan ideas that goes on to be replicated in other major democracies. Or with politicians' growing refusal of mediation by editorial media, and instead speaking straight to the electorate. We've seen a global arc of anger at liberal values, and that it happened in India's mass democracy was the first indicator that this anger wasn't simply restricted to non-democratic countries such as Russia. It shows us this phenomenon isn't simply authoritarianism, it's the loss of liberal ideas and their power to persuade."

I call it 'Europe plus': you have more than 20 languages, religious diversity and the world's largest Muslim minority. This has compelled India's political thinkers, and also those working with the economy or in tech, to think about problems very differently. Its scale forces innovation

It's not the first time India has been a political bellwether for global change. Kapila's 2021 study, *Violent Fraternity: Indian Political Thought in the Global Age*, shows how leading figures such as Gandhi, philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (Trinity 1905), BR Ambedkar (jurist and the key figure in the creation of the Indian constitution), and Hindutva founder Vinayak Savarkar, should be treated as innovative political thinkers as well as influential political actors. It was, says Kapila, a study that could only have been written in Cambridge. "Indian history has been prominent in Cambridge, and the study of political thought has long been a flagship feature of scholarship here, so I felt this was the perfect place for this work."

Kapila's research has taken her beyond the academic community into mainstream journalism – and into the political sphere she chose not to pursue earlier in her career. One long-running project organised with the House of Lords was a series of facilitated conversational meetings between the highest levels of the Indian and UK governments, including policymakers and academics.

"We had sessions on digital sovereignty, media and national security," she says. "Many times, when political figures meet, they have to formulate a position or jointly sign up to something. We tend to think of them as quite instrumental and focused on the next election. But because of the nature of the polycrisis in the world today, I find leaders very receptive to ideas. It's freeing for them."

Engagement with the political class and policymakers matters, because Kapila believes India offers valuable insights not only into the past and present, but into the arc of the future as well. Key to India's instructional value is its scale. "I call it 'Europe plus'," she says. "You have more than 20 languages, religious diversity and the world's largest Muslim minority. This has compelled India's political thinkers, and also those working with the economy or in tech, to think about problems very differently. Its scale forces innovation."

These ideas will be explored in Kapila's forthcoming major work, *New India: passion and power in the world's largest democracy*, which uses India as a lens to examine the story of democracy in the past 50 years, and the nature of the relationship of democracy with power. "Among the most significant changes is in the nature of the state," she says. "India has become a complex and sophisticated digital state, and Britain, in comparison, feels decades behind."

Recognition for her work came last year in the form of a letter that lay unnoticed in Kapila's pigeonhole for 10 days. It was from the Cabinet Office, awarding her an OBE. "I only found it while waiting for someone to come into College for dinner," she recalls. "It was a total surprise, but in this turbulent age when everything can seem focused on technology, it feels like a real vindication of the centrality of the humanities and social sciences to understanding the world. And of my major theme – that India's story is central to that understanding." ©

Shruti Kapila is Professor of History and Politics and recipient of a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship.



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Strip

the

willow

Elegant and chaotic, country dancing is good for both body and brain.

WORDS MEGAN WELFORD ILLUSTRATION KATE COPELAND

As the live band strikes up the first few bars, everyone begins to move to the music, some with co-ordinated steps, many with spontaneous spins and twists that just feel right. There's an array of finery on show – everything from modern fashion to the most elaborate 18th-century ball dress – but everyone is there for one reason: to dance.

"That freshers' ceilidh from a couple of years ago was massive," says Jemima Swain (Darwin 2023), outgoing chair of The Round country dancing society. "We had more than 150 people, and it was a huge squash to fit everyone in. The energy was so fun, but people got their feet stamped on!"

Thankfully, bruised feet are usually the exception rather than the rule. The group, comprising students, alumni and locals aged 15 to 85, meet once a week for 10 well-choreographed dances, accompanied by in-house musicians, the Round Band. Pairs are made up of 'larks' to the left and 'robins' to the right, so it's gender neutral, and you change partner for each dance. "I prefer different people for different types of dancing – the Playford, for example, from Jane Austen's time, is slower and more graceful, while the contra is a US ceilidh and a bit more vigorous."

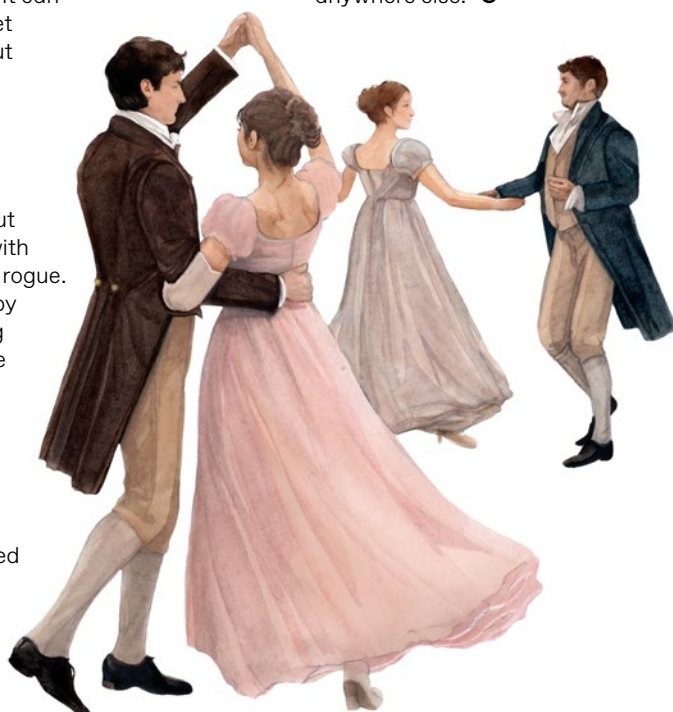
Swain admits it can all be a "bit silly", and there's an element of chaos and fun, but you use your brain more than you'd think.

"Some of the dances are very beautiful and flow to the tune – like the Sapphire Sea, danced to the tune of *Tom Kruskal's* – which is very satisfying. Then one dance moves into the next, as the music picks up. It's complicated, like a puzzle. It can be challenging and you can get bamboozled, trying to work out where you should be.

"The 'Amazed Geneticist' is a fun one, for example, where you're drawing DNA patterns on the floor. Or there's the 'Levi Jackson Rag' – it's fun but ridiculous; easy to embellish with spins, and people can go a bit rogue. I remember being at the Whitby Folk Festival last year dancing a contra with a friend from the Sheffield Ceilidh Soc, and we were trying to teach ourselves a new embellishment to add to the spins, which we finally got working on the very last time. The move is a bit tricky, but I was so proud we managed to do it at the last moment."

Making connections is key to the experience, both on and off the dancefloor. Romances have blossomed, and there have been at least

30 'Round weddings' in the 98 years the society has been running. "We are preserving – and building – traditions," says Swain. "The freedom of movement and expression is so special, and like nothing you'll find anywhere else." ©



round.soc.srcf.net

Perfection wasn't paramount – it was all about energy, vibe and what could be discovered.

Emmy-nominated composer Ruth Barrett says the inspiration for much of her work comes from experimenting in musical form during her time at Cambridge.

INTERVIEW MEGAN WELFORD PHOTOGRAPHY MEGAN TAYLOR



As Tom Hardy smoulders in ITV's *Wuthering Heights*, and Keeley Hawes plots her future as the Home Secretary in the BBC's *Bodyguard*, there's a vital extra dimension lurking in the background that's not seen – but definitely heard. And that's all down to the genius of Ruth Barrett (Caius 1997), the Emmy Award-nominated composer for film and television.

"The music I create can bring energy and propulsion, add mischief or build tension," says Barrett, who, alongside terrestrial blockbusters, scored *The Terminal List: Dark Wolf* and *The Girlfriend* for Prime Video, the latter directed by and starring Robin Wright. "It's like introducing another character."

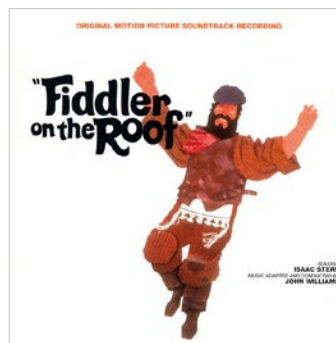
The inspiration for much of her work comes not necessarily from her music course – it was "very traditional, with nothing after 1900", she says – but from experimenting as composer, conductor or musical director on various plays and performances during her time at Cambridge. She readily admits there was an element of anarchy to some of these, but says this unofficial theatrical training still influences her work, inspiring her to new levels of experimentation and playfulness.

"At Cambridge, we were always outside of our comfort zone, flying by the seat of our pants, coming up with new sounds and new approaches," she says. "Someone would put a note in your pigeonhole asking you to be their musical director, and even if you'd never done it before, you'd just do it. Perfection was not paramount, it was the energy and the vibe, and what things could be discovered."



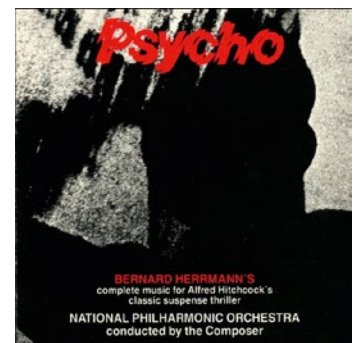
Hungarian Rock
György Ligeti, 1978

This is a mad, crazy piece with an anarchic, off-kilter energy, like a train going off the track. I picked it for a performance of *The Malcontent* at the ADC as it seemed to fit the mood of Jacobean corruption. Ligeti uses instruments in an unconventional way, and I would rope in my friends – not music students but medics or English students – to play in the pit. I remember one always played cello with his tongue sticking out. They weren't traditionally trained and were open to doing things differently, and this is something I've kept with me in the people I work with now. They're professionals, but they have different personalities.



The Bottle Dance, Fiddler on the Roof
Jerry Bock, 1964

This piece gathers momentum and becomes a drunken riot, much like our performance of it. Two friends and I co-directed the musical to perform in College on May Day. We decided to skip the matinee and just do one evening performance for maximum effect. Even the rehearsal was ridiculous – we took the scores onto a punt and got so animated acting out the scenes we all fell into the Cam. By the evening everyone was drunk – both crowd and cast. We kept crashing into each other, going at either half speed or double speed. It was a whirling dervish of a performance and this song encapsulates that.



Prelude, Psycho
Bernard Herrmann, 1960

I held a screening of the 1960 film *Psycho*, produced and directed by Alfred Hitchcock, where I removed the music and then swapped it around, to test what the effect was on the audience. It showed me that regardless of the scene, in many places it was the music that was really driving the narrative, telling you something was going to happen when nothing is happening, for example. On my course, film music wasn't considered something worthy of study, but at the same time at Cambridge there was a big culture of creativity and curiosity. If you didn't have something, you sought it out – and if you couldn't find it, you created it. >



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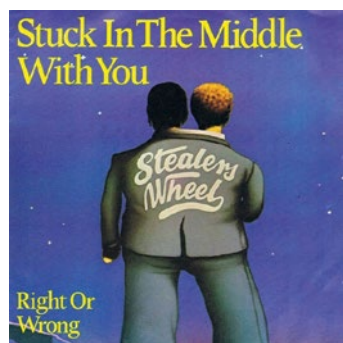
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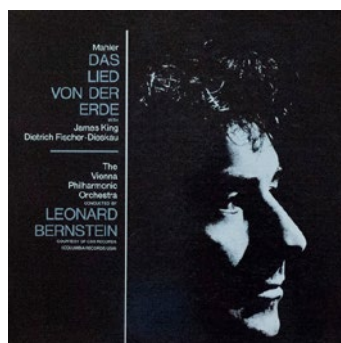
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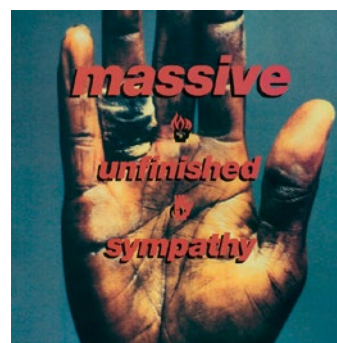
Stuck in the Middle with You
Stealers Wheel, 1972

Reservoir Dogs was just out, and this glamorisation of violence by juxtaposing it with music was a novel filmmaking technique that was very delicious at the time. I just thought: 'Wow, what an amazing technique for affecting the audience!' – the humour of it, and the thrill. It was also novel because it was a film soundtrack you actually wanted to listen to away from the film. Cambridge was an up and down place. There was a lot of pressure, and my course was quite rigid and tough. You were basically expected to write a fugue a week in your head! This song felt like a release. It took me a while to get to film and TV composing after Cambridge, but many of the seeds were sown there.



Das Lied von der Erde
Gustav Mahler, 1908

One course module I did like was this Mahler piece, an orchestral work written between 1908 and 1909 comprising six movements for two voices and orchestra. To me it's like film music – at the beginning it's quite deathly and atmospheric, and it reminds me of Morricone's music for the 1986 film *The Mission*, directed by Roland Joffé. Written when Mahler was facing death, it's tragic, and has a fragility and a poignancy to it that's very poetic. It spoke to me, like Gabriel's Oboe in *The Mission*. I love the sound of it; and it has a low hum that I used when doing the music for the TV series *Whitechapel* and *Wuthering Heights*, to help create that dark atmosphere.



Unfinished Sympathy
Massive Attack, 1991

I first heard this during freshers' week and was blown away by it. Again, it's cinematic, and those strings... oh my God. It's so emotive and harmonically scrunchy, it takes you somewhere else. And I have to confess it gives me an emotional hit – the guy who played it to me during freshers' became my secret boyfriend. I didn't want to admit I'd met someone so quickly. I'd ride my bike over Clare Bridge to Harvey Court, to his place in Caius. I'd stop on the bridge and look over the river in the moonlight and feel the thrill of its surreal beauty, as I travelled to my secret liaison. During that hinterland year, he often played that track. ☺



Being at a university so steeped in tradition almost made me fight against it. My course was very academic, so I had to look for contemporary outlets in order to satisfy my curiosity, and struggle for what interested and excited me. Everything was a discovery, and that was a great lesson

***The Terminal List: True Believer*, starring Chris Pratt, with music by Ruth Barrett, is available on Prime Video.**

This idea must die: “Disasters and hazards are natural events”

Dr Max Van Wyk de Vries and Dr Ayesha Siddiqi say the impacts of human activity need to be factored in to our understanding of supposedly ‘natural’ phenomena.

INTERVIEW **ABI MILLAR** ILLUSTRATION **GEORGE WYLESOL**

When a ridge of frozen rock and other debris fell into one of the largest glacial lakes in north-east India in 2023, the impact was devastating. A tsunami-like wave nearly 20 metres high breached the front of the lake, sending 50 million cubic metres of water – almost half the lake’s volume – downstream, and causing cascading floods that killed 55 people and washed away a massive hydropower dam.

On the face of it, this was a natural hazard that ended in disaster, but that term ‘natural’ is problematic and, we believe, needs to be refined. It’s also important to differentiate between hazards and disasters. We try to avoid using the term ‘natural disaster’ in general, as the word ‘natural’ implies a level of inevitability. Disasters are what happens when a physical event, like a landslide, intersects with certain human conditions, such as systemic inequality. Of course, it’s possible that the physical event doesn’t lead to a disaster.

The concept of a ‘natural hazard’ is a bit more complicated. We tend to think of hazards as the physical event, like the El Niño phenomenon or the South Asian monsoons. Most definitions specify that there’s no human involvement in the process. In traditional disasters research, physical scientists have tried to understand these hazards, whereas social scientists look at the human vulnerabilities that can lead to disasters.

It’s true that some natural hazards fit the original definition of the term. The process that generates most earthquakes is a geological fault deep below the surface, with little or no impact from human activity.

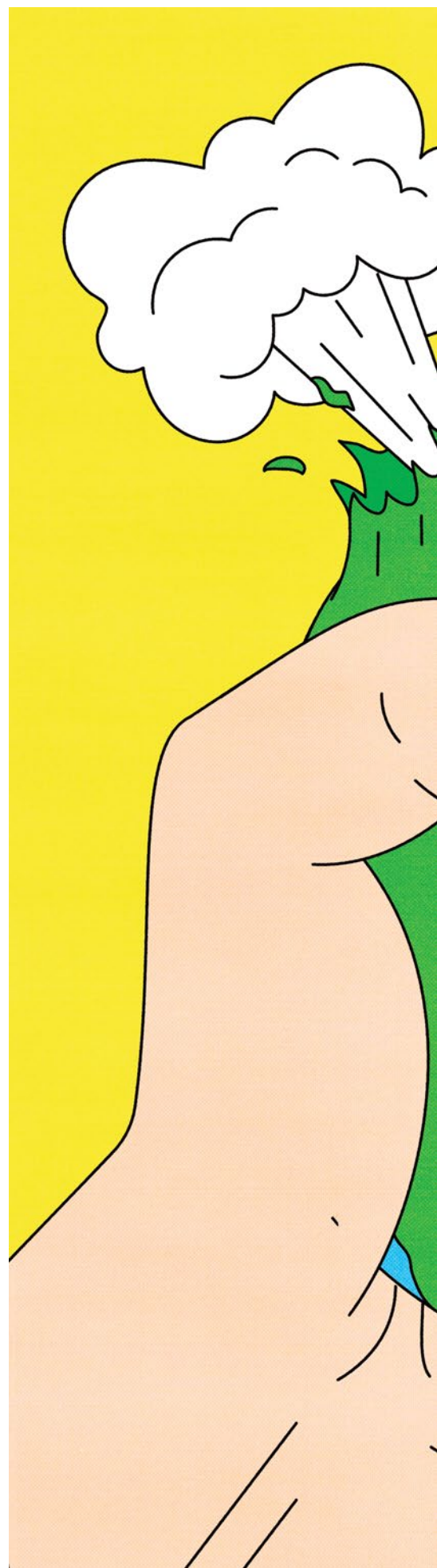
Many other hazards, however, have been modified by humans to some degree. This includes all extreme weather events, and many geological hazards as well. For instance, some earthquakes are caused by fracking, or even by the melting of ice sheets.

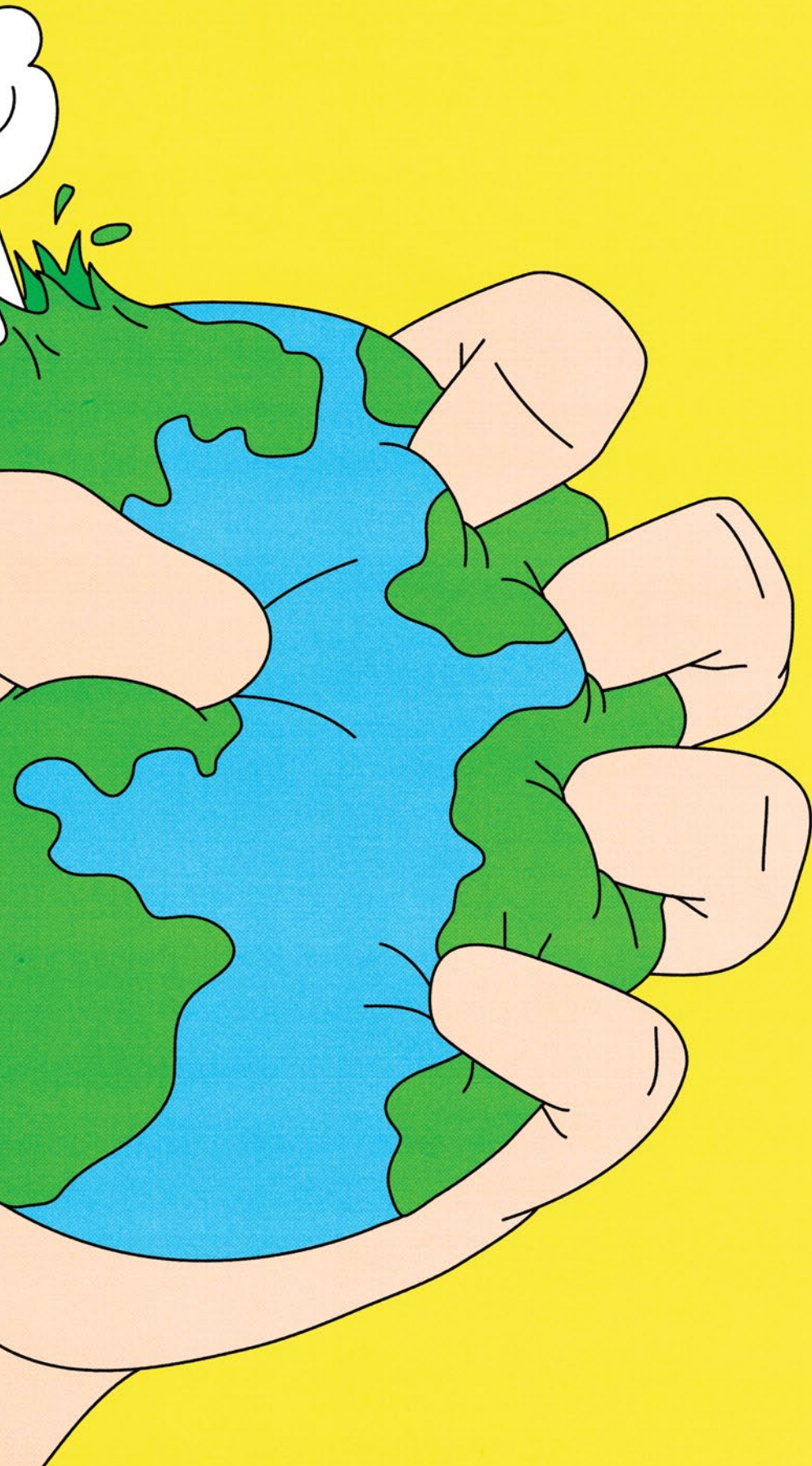
There are also times when the hazard is related to particular social dynamics. For instance, a landslide might be spurred on by particular forms of unorganised settlement – people being forced to live in places that aren’t suited for human inhabitation, for example. In most cases, it isn’t useful to draw a line between ‘natural’ and ‘human-made’, because most hazards in today’s world involve some combination of the two.

Here at Cambridge, we do a good job of bridging the gap between the classic physical science and social science approaches. We believe that all hazards are multihazards: frequently occurring together and modified by human activity. Rather than investigating hazards in isolation, we explore how they interact with each other and the way their impacts add up.

For instance, that 2023 glacial lake outburst flood wouldn’t have occurred had climatic warming not created the lake in the first place. It’s also likely that the floods would have been less severe downstream had there not been some manmade infrastructure in the valley. So there are a lot of things that humans can do to the Earth’s surface or atmosphere, which will affect the type of multihazard cascade you get.

It gets more complicated still when you consider the ways people understand





We believe that all hazards are multihazards: frequently occurring together and modified by human activity. Rather than investigating hazards in isolation, we explore the way they interact with each other and the way their impacts add up

hazards outside of a western context. Take the situation during the Pakistan floods, when a lot of people were evicted from their homes because they were living close to a natural drain. Every time it flooded, their homes were flooded, so the state said it was going to bulldoze those houses and move people elsewhere. However, it subsequently became clear the land was going to be privatised and sold to a big developer.

For people in this context, floods are not simply about water. They're also about how the state neglects them, and how the language of 'natural' hazard is used to create certain market-oriented or state-related objectives. Disasters are frequently understood through a moral lens, not just as a physical something that happens in the physical environment.

The term 'natural hazard' remains part of scientists' everyday vocabulary, and it's also used by people on the ground experiencing these things. But it should be used carefully and contextually, recognising that geological and meteorological processes can often be influenced by, or interact with, human activity.

No definition can capture everything, but any discussion of hazard and disaster must include the scale of human involvement in what was once seen as a purely physical phenomenon. Only then can we act to change policy, better understand hazards, and reduce the risk of so-called 'natural' disasters having a devastating impact. ©

Dr Max Van Wyk de Vries is Assistant Professor in Natural Hazards, and Dr Ayesha Siddiqi is Associate Professor in Human Geography. To find out how you can support this vital research, please contact Diane.Rhodes@admin.cam.ac.uk

Crick said he and Watson had discovered the helix structure. The academic community said: 'Looks promising. Now you'd better go and prove it.'

WORDS MEGAN WELFORD



The 1959 night at the Eagle pub when Francis Crick and James Watson declared they had discovered the ‘secret of life’ is the stuff of legend. But that night was not the end of something, it was just the beginning. And one man who would go on to become an intimate part of the story recalls it well.

“There was a hell of a fuss!” remembers Roger Mowll (Queens’ 1956). “Crick said he and Watson had discovered the double helix structure and the media went wild. But the academic community said: ‘That’s all very well. Looks promising. Now you’d better go and prove it.’”

A team was put together to do the hard work – obtaining high-quality crystals, X-ray photographing them and analysing the diffraction patterns by feeding them into EDSAC 2 (Electronic Delay Storage Automatic Calculator). Mowll was approached, along with his lifelong friend Roger Duffett (Peterhouse 1956).

“Roger and I had both graduated and we’d been playing tennis and swanning about before we were to start our jobs at BP, who had sponsored us,” says Mowll. “But when the head of the Cavendish Laboratory Professor Max Perutz offered us the job of proving Crick’s claim, of course we wanted to accept. And so BP agreed to give us a month’s grace.”

The first time we showed the sheets to Perutz he said: “That’s it!” Then: “Run it again!” Crick had never been in any doubt, so Roger and I just went for a beer at the pub opposite Peterhouse

The two Rogers were stationed in Crick’s office, in a Nissen hut next to the Cavendish building, where Perutz had his lab. “Crick was there but he was so confident he seemed quite uninterested in proving his discovery. Watson had gone back to the States and Dr Rosalind Franklin (Newnham 1938), who was responsible for producing the crystals we needed, had sadly died earlier that year, so we never met her.”

Franklin’s lab in London made the best RNA and DNA crystals, says Mowll, “and one of her ladies brought them up to Cambridge. X-ray photos of them were taken,

and Roger and I had to sort out putting them into the computer and then collecting the results.”

First, the two Rogers measured the “shadows and intensities” – the X-ray diffraction – in the photos. They then transferred the measurements onto punch tape as a series of holes representing binary data. This was fed into the EDSAC 2, the world’s second computer.

“It was painstaking work,” says Mowll. “The computer chamber was enormous, the size of an aircraft hangar. And it was boiling hot, because it had valves, not transistors, which created a lot of heat. It took about half an hour to climb a ladder to feed the tape in, by which time you’d be sweating heavily. The computer then cranked away throughout the night, and by the morning, four sizeable sheets would have come out.

“The first time we showed the sheets to Perutz he said: ‘That’s it!’ Then: ‘Run it again!’ We did it three or four times. What came out was a series of lines and numbers which I couldn’t really decipher and which I wasn’t sure would add up to a double helix.”

The whole thing took about a month, and by the time Perutz was satisfied, it was a bit of an anticlimax. “Crick had never been in any doubt – for him, the process was barely necessary. So Roger and I just went for a beer at the Little Rose pub opposite Peterhouse. And then began the discussions over who would apply for the Nobel Prizes!”

In the end, the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine of 1962 went to Crick, Watson and Maurice Wilkins, who had worked with Franklin, “for their discoveries concerning the molecular structure of nucleic acids and its significance for information transfer in living material”. That same year, Perutz and John Kendrew won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry “for their studies of the structures of globular proteins”.

The two Rogers went on to pursue successful careers at BP, and watched in bemusement as the Bene’t Street blue plaque row unfolded a few years ago, when a graffitied plaque on the Eagle’s wall was replaced and updated to recognise the role of Franklin, Wilkins and “other scientists” in the discovery. (Indeed, it was this story in issue 103 that prompted Mowll to get in touch with CAM in the first place.) But both still get together for walks and lunches, and to reminisce about the time they helped to discover the secret of life. 🍷

**From right to left:
Roger Mowll
(Queens’ 1956) and
wife Judith, Roger
Duffett (Peterhouse
1956) and wife
Julie, with friends
at the Peterhouse
May Ball in 1959.**

Abstracted

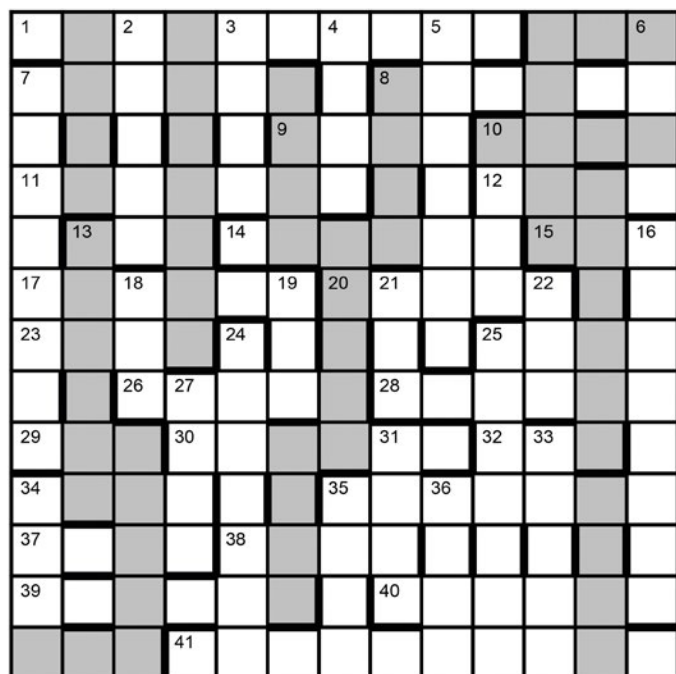
by Nimrod

The unnumbered (silvered) answers – one of two words including an abbreviation – are clued by definitions in alphabetical order of their solutions. In the correct sequence, they form a continuous chain of 64 letters in which three longer thematic entities have been interrupted by six much shorter ones, the latter having been abstracted from the definition in each of six normally numbered clues. Remaining clues are normal. Solvers must identify the nine thematic items under the grid.

One normally clued answer is an initialism. Other than proper nouns, all answers may be verified by *Chambers*, except (somewhat surprisingly) 8ac, in *Collins*.

LONGER ENTITIES

ABSTRACTED ENTITIES



Unnumbered

Brandy; Close associate; Excavation; Cleansing process; Lake; Bases; Chap; Tramp; Instigates; Tobacco; Beef cut; Hide; Sports body; Sesame.

Across

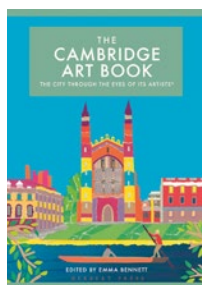
- 1 *Displaced Persons*, the author's tale? (10)
- 7 Book on Fleet Street bosses is produced (6)
- 8 Men on radio that I find amusing (6)
- 9 Floor receiving a new part of an element (4)
- 11 New edition of ribbon (7)
- 12 DIY features for assembly? (4)
- 13 Basic information of Latin square appearing in seconds (3)
- 14 Corresponding element lining empty outhouse (6)
- 15 Would you call me Napoleon's friend? (3)
- 17 Speaker's in old helmet (6)
- 20 Like a corner in which to shelter it (5)
- 23 Different conclusion from the University of London (4)
- 25 Pick up phosphorus ooze (4)
- 26 Weapon I dislike taking on cycle (5)
- 28 1-5lb weight for chocolate cakes (6)
- 29 Very British cry (3)
- 30 A good way to mature Europe (6)
- 32 New lies about Labour members (3)
- 34 NZ tribe's certainly ancient (4)
- 35 Online facility reflected mundane fact encyclopaedia contains (7)
- 37 European banker turned to God (4)
- 38 Sign – one on door of hen party? (4)
- 39 Crams receptacle, and what to do from it? (6, 2 words)
- 40 Number, not odd, following what's twelfth in series (6)
- 41 Ware estate one's divided about entering (10)

Down

- 2 From the root, exposed least colourful shrub (5)
- 3 Massive party in lift that's a shock for very old people (4)
- 4 Viz abbreviated *Bill* the Fish (4)
- 5 One departing resort, out of bounds, converting seaside town (7)
- 6 Sailed out of port (4)
- 7 Perhaps tries bar woman's keeping in college (8)
- 10 At the Fringe, see Jacobi's run axed? (4)
- 16 Forced tiddly rector out of room – reception's ruined (8, 2 words)
- 18 Serpentine creature, Andrew, briefly formerly known ____? (3)
- 19 Object GP on rounds has left Parky's assailant (3)
- 21 Are high fliers short of South Pole? (3)
- 22 Sent up on and off in comedy, Ilchester's on it (3)
- 24 Girl's heart's no longer in affair, it no longer bewitches (7)
- 25 Let sons watch? (7)
- 27 Should that be the case of items emptying bananas? (4, 2 words)
- 31 Lineage necessarily incorporates this unit (4)
- 33 Yours truly possesses an inverted mole and birthmark? (5)
- 34 Periodically pulled out his army by foot (4)
- 35 Where monster is in one's sights? (4)
- 36 Hats off to industrialist loaning Economics Block (4)

All entries to be received by 1 June 2026. Send your entry:

- **by post to:** CAM 107 Prize Crossword, University of Cambridge, 1 Quayside, Bridge Street, Cambridge CB5 8AB
- **online at:** alumni.cam.ac.uk/magazine
- **by email to:** cameditor@alumni.cam.ac.uk

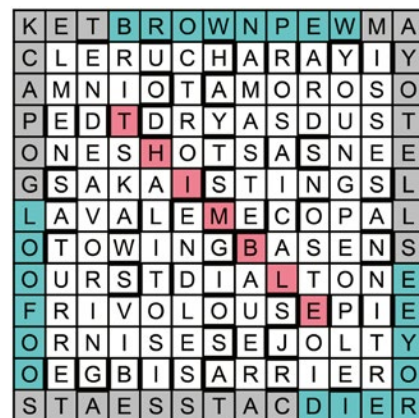


The first correct entry drawn will receive a £75 CUP book token and a copy of *The Cambridge Art Book: the city through the eyes of its artists*, an anthology of prints edited by Emma Bennett. Two runners-up will receive a £50 CUP book token. Solutions, winners and runners-up will be published in CAM 108 and online on 9 June 2026 at: alumni.cam.ac.uk/magazine

Solution to CAM 106 Crossword

Down with the Cryptic Kids

Perimeter: BROWN PEW (Blind man's buff; blip/dean/stuff); MAYO TELLS (Simon says; him/one/ass); EEYORE ID (Pin the tail on the donkey; ninth/email/onto/Eton/keg); CATS SEATS (Musical chairs; must/catch/aims); O O FOOL (Duck, duck, goose; luck/dock/loose); GO PACKET (Pass the parcel; past/theta/reel). Extra letters give OBJECT OF THE HUNT, ie THIMBLE (Hunt the thimble).



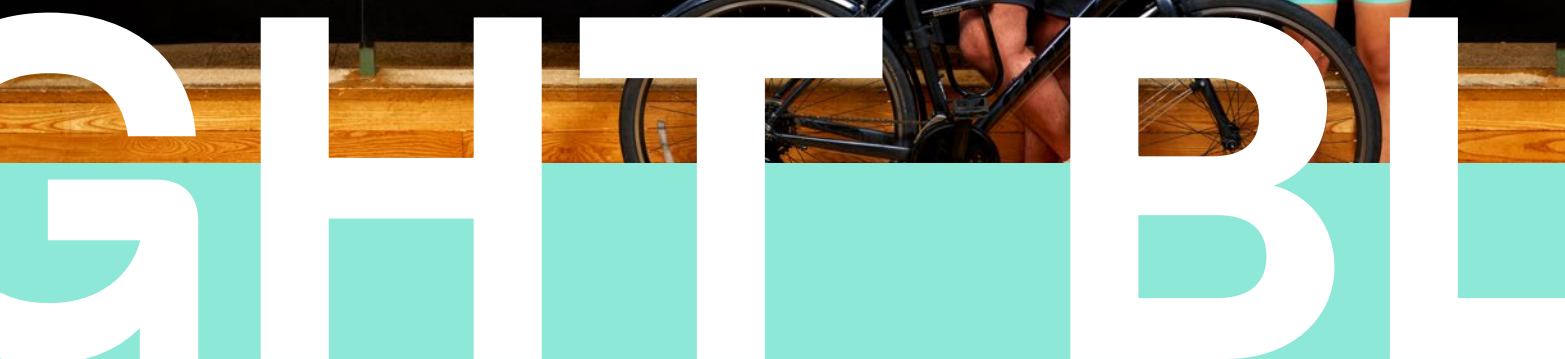
CAM 106 winner: Robert Eastwood (Trinity 1967) **Runners-up:** James Palmer (St John's 1983) and Jonathan Agg (Emmanuel 2008)

Can't touch this: [Angus Chisholm](#) & [Aniket Bhanushali](#)
Turn and burn: [Edward Kennedy](#), [Carys Ward](#) & [Freya Moody](#)
Going for the alley-oop: [Matthew Olatunji](#) & [Yiling Fan](#)
Mo ichi do: [Dani Lucini](#) & [Angela \(Chuhan\) Shang](#)
In for the final chukka: [Alva Markelius](#) & [Katie Keeley](#)
Two under par: [Ben Chumas](#) & [Chloe Edmonds](#)



GO LIC

Joe the goose: Tornike Avaliani

A person is riding a bicycle on a wooden plank path. The image is partially obscured by large, white, bold letters 'GHTBL' which are set against a teal background. The letters are positioned across the middle of the image, with the teal background appearing as a horizontal band behind them. The bicycle and rider are visible through the cutouts of the letters.

In the Blue corner: [Zac Baylis](#) & [Olivia Marshall](#)
Dominating the 'T': [Florence Gibson](#) & [Aaron Macwhater](#)
Bar's loaded: [Larry Zhang](#), [Alek Radic](#), [Jenny Lin](#) & [Asha Scott](#)
Power tip: [Peet Burmeister](#) & [Defne Abale](#)



TUES !!!