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Cambridge's literary scene

It's 2025 – and History is more
hotly contested now than ever

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the joys of a year abroad



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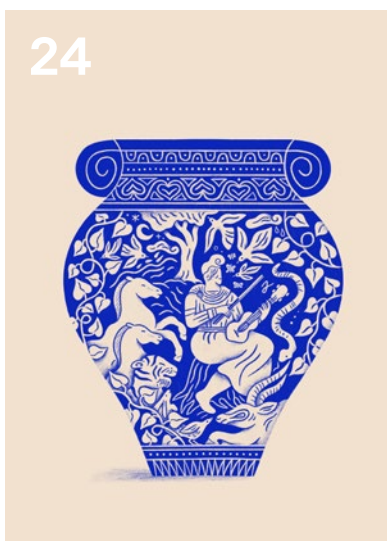
Ahana Banerji by Amy Moss

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Welcome to the Lent edition of CAM.

Cambridge has been teaching History for 300 years. In that time, historians have changed their minds on everything from what the Romans did for us to how dark the Dark Ages really were. But far from coming to a settled position, History in 2025 is more hotly contested than it has ever been. We find out why on page 24.

Meanwhile, there's no question that photosynthesis is one of the most incredible chemical reactions on Earth – but what if we could tap into the energy conversion and use it to create a plant solar panel? On page 18, we speak to the scientists who reckon that one day plants could power the planet. And on page 32 we find out whether the UK needs a written Constitution.

Finally, whether published in The Mays, on stage at the ADC or entered for one of the many College prizes, student writing in Cambridge remains a lively and dynamic force. Meet some of its stars on page 12.

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)



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Inbox

My room your room

✉ What a great interview (My room your room, Miriam Margolyes, CAM 103). During my time with the Newnham Development Office, every single visit or email from 'MM' was an utter delight – so full of energy and mischief. Long may that continue!

Joanna Cooney

✉ I would have loved to have Miriam visit me in my College room! (Different Colleges but...) I have always enjoyed this feature – the finest regular section of the magazine to me.

Christopher Rourke (Wolfson 1998)

✉ I enjoy reading CAM and find it very stimulating. However, one brief comment: I was dismayed to see the language from Miriam Margolyes. Is it really necessary to include the 'F' word in a publication aimed at alumni of such a fine and prestigious university? Being a 'national treasure' should not bestow the right to use foul language in every setting.

John Westwood (Clare 1974)

✉ Miriam Margolyes' memories of Newnham – "We would gather, put on the fire and make cocoa..." – reminded me of my mother's memories (Morwenna Lyne, Newnham 1927). As I remember, cocoa had a special place in her memories. It is the

quality of the talk and the feeling of communion, when everything was new and exciting and to be explored, that one remembers – though in my case, it was instant coffee, not cocoa!

Nicholas Bielby (Downing 1958)

Dementia

✉ Glad to receive latest issue of CAM. The article featuring Professor Carol Brayne concerning dementia (Good memories: a life dedicated to the mind, CAM 102) is of particular interest. The opening statement of the final paragraph says: "We know how to reduce the probability of developing dementia over the life course...", but nothing is cited. Perhaps the next issue will enlarge upon that statement?

Paul W (St John's 1961)

Editor's note: Good point! We hope to return to this subject in due course.

The Whipple

✉ The article on the blue plaque commemorating the discovery of DNA (Museo, CAM 103) reminded me that I was, and still am, a member of that "posse of Rosalind Franklin fans" – though, as you can see, not one of the anonymous ones referred to. I was therefore delighted to read of the recent succession of "adjustments" to the blue plaque outside The Eagle. As an undergraduate reading

Natural Sciences – which included X-ray diffraction photography and analysis at the Cavendish – I met Jim Watson through my school friend Robin Holliday (Emmanuel 1952). Watson and Crick's first stab at interpreting the molecular structure of DNA from their Cavendish photographs had concluded that it was a single helix, but it was common knowledge in Cambridge that Rosalind had come up from London for the day to show them why that was wrong. Watson always acknowledged that her now famous X-ray photograph sent to him and Crick without her knowledge by Maurice Wilkins was the crucial evidence that eventually enabled them to identify the structure as a double helix. Nevertheless neither he nor Crick made any reference to her in their Nobel prize acceptance speeches, after Franklin had died from ovarian cancer; Wilkins did but even his was a somewhat indifferent comment on her contribution. Although Watson did not mention her in his speech, he did say that he had suggested to the Karolinska Institute that they should consider making an exception to the rule in her case that Nobel Prizes are not awarded posthumously. He also gave her full credit in his book *The Double Helix* published in the US in 1968.

Seymour Redstone (Downing 1953)

Neurodiversity

✉ While I was enjoying a moment of peace reading the latest issue CAM, the theme of neurodiversity came foremost to my mind. Not only is it currently a 'hot topic', there are arguably a lot of people at Cambridge who show traits of being neurodiverse, or perhaps neuro-extraordinary – who wants to be typical anyway? I have a particular interest in the subject since my children were diagnosed with ADHD in lockdown, and as part of the process so were my wife and I. My diagnosis was missed due to being an academic high achiever, but I've been musing on a couple of things related to the Cambridge experience. Firstly, Cambridge seems uniquely well set up for ADHD people – its high stimulation environment, the collegiate system giving strong social connections, offloading of mundane tasks and cross-disciplinary interaction, and the supervision system offering high accountability tailored learning. And secondly, there seems plenty of anecdotal evidence of neurodiversity – particularly ADHD and autism – being associated with high performance, but not so much published research? I'd be interested to hear if others have a view?

Tim (Downing 1998)



300 new PhDs

New programme launched by Trinity College and the University to support research in the sciences and humanities.

cam.ac.uk/phd-funding



Research

Major new School to tackle biggest global public policy challenges

A flagship new public policy school will open this Autumn, developing practical solutions to urgent policy problems – from tech disruption and climate damage to the effects of inequality.

The Bennett School of Public Policy, established with support from the Peter Bennett Foundation, will prioritise research into two of the biggest policy challenges facing the UK and much of the world: the adoption of artificial intelligence, and the economic revival of post-industrial regions. The School's leadership say it will overcome policy and academic silos to help foster a generation of tech-savvy and socially aware policymakers.

"Today's challenges, from effective uses of AI to reviving towns and regions, demand solutions that reflect expertise across disciplines and sectors," says its co-director Professor Dame Diane Coyle.

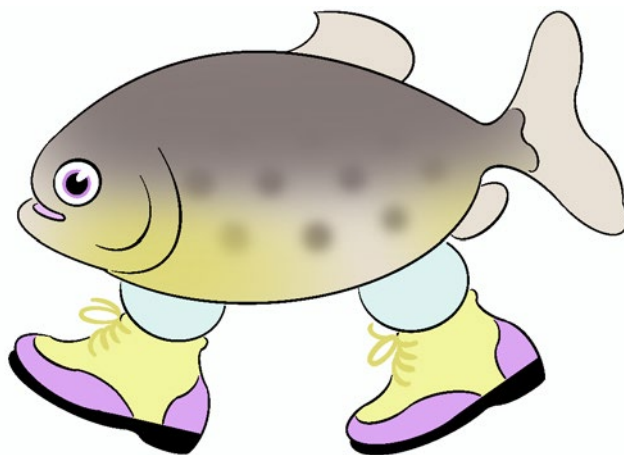
The Bennett School is launching a new Master's course in Digital Policy. In this pioneering programme, policy professionals from around the world will be trained by leading Cambridge economists, political scientists, business and manufacturing experts, and machine-learning engineers – all on a single course.

"We aim to train government thinkers committed to advancing good growth, who can set the policy agenda for a rapidly changing world," adds fellow co-director Professor Michael Kenny (above, with Coyle). "We will work with people doing things out in the world, from international business to local government. Our teaching will be fused to a dynamic research engine – the Bennett Institute for Public Policy – so that those who train here can touch the policy impact we are already having."

Sustainability

Brazilian company Suzano has donated an initial £10m to set up the Suzano Scholars Fund at Jesus College, supporting Brazilian nationals studying for a postgraduate degree connected to the environment, ecology and conservation. The company will also support academics at the Conservation Research Institute to explore the interaction between human and natural systems in areas such as biodiversity and climate change.

cam.ac.uk/suzano



Deconstructed

Cell mapping project will change the way we understand our bodies

The Human Cell Atlas, an incredibly ambitious scientific project, will map the complete molecular fingerprint of the human body's 37 trillion cells.

It's the brainchild of Professor Sarah Teichmann, based at the Stem Cell Institute, and Dr Aviv Regev, Executive Vice President at Genentech.

Three-minute Tripos

ROBOTICS HOLDS THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING BIOMECHANICS IN EXTINCT ANIMALS. DISCUSS.

In the beginning, there were fish.

And the fish became us, and they did grow legs, and brains, and walk upon all the lands of the Earth, O Lord?

No. Not immediately. There were... stages.

And what were those stages, O Lord?

Look, it's tiring enough being omnipotent and omnipresent without having to be ChatGPT as well.

Sorry.

One moment everything is without form, and then suddenly all these things are wriggling around the face of the waters and sprouting limbs and suchlike.

And I suppose it must have still been dark on that particular day, O Lord?

Quite. Also, some of the fossils are missing. I can't remember where we put them. Luckily I have humans to work out that kind of thing for me.

Humans? Really?

They're quite clever sometimes. Like Dr Michael Ishida from the Department of Engineering. His team want to know how the pectoral and pelvic fins of ancient fish evolved.

So how is this human going to shed light on this most mysterious of your workings, O Lord?

Well, they can't put little legs on living fish to see how they walk, and there's not much information from the fossils they've got. So they are building walking fish robots.

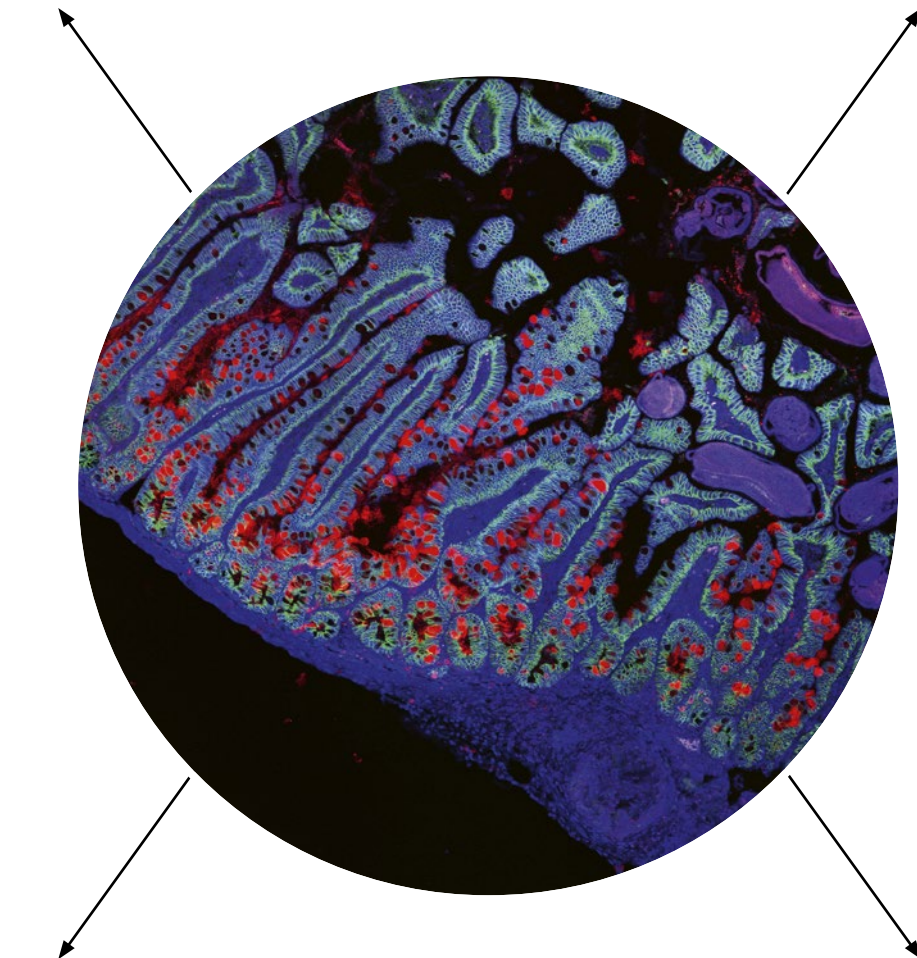
And will these robots also grow legs, and brains, and walk upon all the lands of the Earth, O Lord?

Sort of. Once they've built the robots, they'll perform experiments on them to infer how they might have moved. After that, we'll just have to see how it goes.

Such ingenuity, O Lord.

Quite. Now, where did I put that complete spinosaurus skeleton?

cam.ac.uk/fish-robots



More than 3,600 scientists worldwide – including more than 70 at Cambridge – are using genomic technology to examine individual cells in detail.

So far, the discoveries have provided new insights into everything from the brain and the immune system to hormonal signalling – with more to come.



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Eye

on

the

ball

Juggling your commitments means something completely different for this group.

WORDS LUCY JOLIN

PHOTOGRAPHY ADAM LAWRENCE

As if juggling wasn't tricky enough a skill to master, the Cambridge University Jugglers' Association (CUJA) has found the perfect way to up the ante: combining it with surely the most Cambridge of all pastimes.

Juggle Punting, which takes place in Easter Term after exams have finished, sees CUJA members passing clubs or other props between moving punts as they make their way up and down the Cam.

"The fun of it is just the chaos if someone drops a club and you have to navigate around to fish it out," says CUJA secretary and former president James Cozens (Selwyn 2018). "You have several people juggling and the whole thing's moving around, so the person punting along has to be really careful. We've had some very funny moments of people nearly falling in."

The event is a great way of showcasing what CUJA is all about: silliness, fun and, if you're ready to put the time and effort in, some truly impressive circus skills. But, stresses Cozens, the society is very much open to all. "There is a huge range of skill level," he says. "We run three-ball workshops, where maybe 60 per cent of people have never juggled before. Three balls is very accessible."

One highlight of the year is the annual Camvention, one of the UK's biggest juggling conventions, held in collaboration with the Cambridge Community Circus. The group also performs at May Balls, runs welfare workshops across the university and hosts a 'fire night' featuring – you guessed it – fire spinning and juggling.

But it's not just juggling. CUJA's weekly sessions – held outdoors in the charming environs of Jesus Green in good weather – are an extravaganza of plate spinning, unicycling, poi,

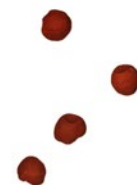
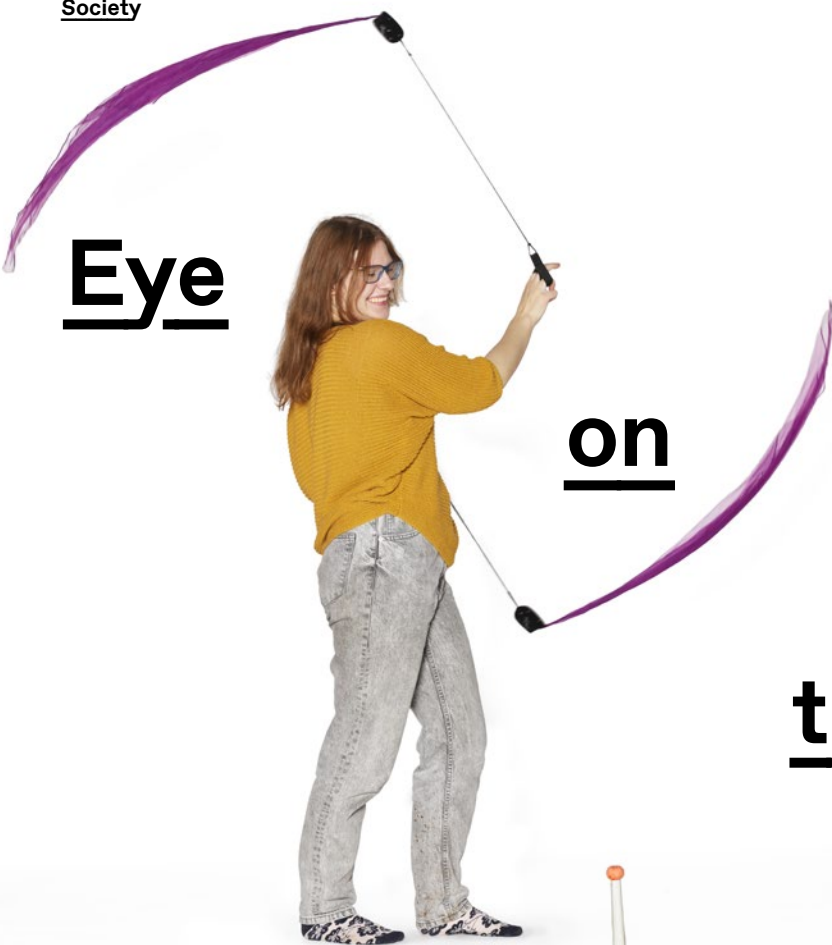
diablo and more. Cozens, who holds the Guinness World Record for the most objects juggled while riding a unicycle (seven balls, for 16.77 seconds, in case you're wondering), along with some of the other more experienced members of the society, enjoys sharing tips and tricks with newbies through a variety of weekly workshops. "It's a very fun and relaxed atmosphere," he says.

While juggling and circus skills are currently a fairly niche pastime, that might not be the case for much longer, with potential inclusion in the Olympics on the horizon, following a long campaign from the World Juggling Federation. Today, juggling on Jesus Green... tomorrow, possible Olympic Gold.

cuja.soc.srccf.net



Above: James Cozens, Selwyn, PhD Machine Learning; Sandra Liwanowska, Trinity, PhD History and Philosophy of Science; and Adrian Goldwaser, Sidney Sussex, PhD Machine Learning.



U2 Bodley's Court, King's

Work. Socialising. Hobbies. Lots of hobbies. Comedian and podcaster Phil Wang and economist George Bland discuss the art of balancing your Cambridge life.

WORDS LUCY JOLIN PHOTOGRAPHY JOE MCGORTY



When the comedian Phil Wang (King's 2008) arrives, he feels like he's in a film. A heartwarming one, he hastens to add. "I just bumped into my College dad, James Taylor!" he announces. "He was in the year above me, and now he's a lecturer in the Department of Engineering – and he was pushing a pram with his daughter in it. It was just like a scene in a movie showing that time has passed..."

Wang says he's surprised how nice it is to be back. "I do often think I owe Cambridge everything. I would not have the career I've had – or the confidence – if it weren't for Cambridge." And he's happy to see that U2 is still unchanged: unsurprisingly so, as it's the kind of Cambridge room that prospective students (and tourists) dream about, with high ceilings, Gothic windows, exquisite Court view and a bonus bedroom.

Right now, the room bears unmistakable signs of current inhabitant George Bland's glittering Varsity rugby career, from the Blues blazer on the back of his chair to the pair of mud-caked rugby boots propping open the aforementioned Gothic windows. The rugby field is not so far from the stand-up stage, they agree. "It's the dopamine rush: the thrill of the pressure – that if you make a mistake, it will be horrible," says Wang.

Bland nods enthusiastically. "I love having that pressure. That's the reason you train on a Monday night on the back pitches when it's pouring down. It all becomes worth it when you get to play in front of a few thousand people and the pressure's on. Especially playing in something like the Varsity match, which I've grown up watching."

The room is a little lacking in decoration, however, apart from two landscape paintings

of mysterious origin – "My neighbour gave them to me; I'm not sure what they're of" – and roughly 20,000 photos featuring Bland and his girlfriend. "I have to confess that my girlfriend printed them off for me," he says. "That is why she features in 95 per cent of them. It's not just a shrine dedicated to her."

While Bland enjoys dinner parties in U2 – "Well, Chinese takeaway and a few beers" – Wang needed it to be more of a haven. "I don't think I've ever had many people here. I guess you could call me an introvert. I did a lot of theatre and comedy which took all my social energy. The last thing I wanted to do was have people in my room as well. And I liked that in this room, you're in the corner. You get the view but you're secluded."

It wasn't just his social energy that Wang needed to replenish. Along with his Footlights career (and eventual presidency), plus his

My advice to the person I was? Calm down, it'll be all right. And have a couple of people over. At least once. Just so you can say you did

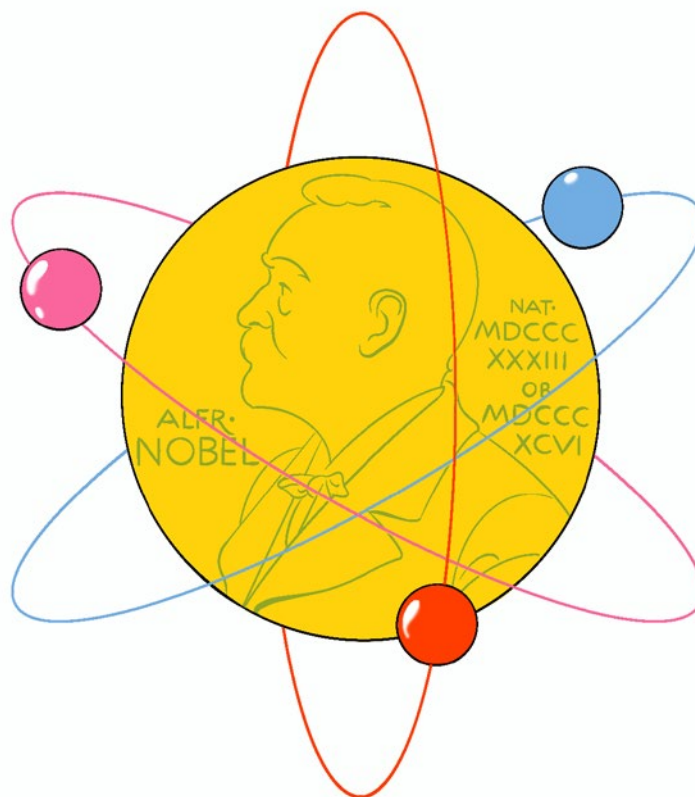


burgeoning stand-up career, he was also studying Engineering. That meant doing shows until midnight, then being in the lab for 9am the next day – not to mention “week-long shifts” in the library and at his desk in U2. “I tried not to take the view for granted, but it was hard when I spent six hours a day at this desk looking at it. Now I’m back I can see that it is, in fact, brilliant, as is the architecture, which I just got used to ignoring.”

Finding the balance, they both agree, is tricky: Bland says that his rugby-plus-Economics schedule is “manageable. Once you get on top of things, you’ve just got to stay on top.” When Wang arrived, he joined King’s Voices, then tried out rowing, then football – along with the comedy, the drama... and the engineering. “By the end of the first term, I thought I had to leave. I was breaking down. Then Rob, a fellow engineer, said to me: ‘Why don’t you just quit some of this stuff?’ It was a revelation. And after that, I was fine.”

As an overachieving student, Wang says, he thought he had to do everything. “But if I had to give any advice to the person I was, I’d say: ‘Calm down. It’ll be all right. And maybe have a couple of people over. At least once. Just so you can say you did.’”

George Bland is a second-year Economics student and was part of the victorious 2025 Cambridge Varsity team. Phil Wang is a comedian, podcaster and writer.



Nobel Prize

Cambridge scientists win Nobel Prizes

Congratulations to three alumni who have been awarded science’s highest honours.

Sir Demis Hassabis (Queens’ 1994) and Dr John Jumper (St Edmund’s 2007) have jointly won the 2024 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for developing an AI model that solves a 50-year-old problem: predicting the complex structures of proteins.

Their model, AlphaFold2, has now been accessed by more than two million people from almost every country in the world. So far it has been used for everything from understanding antibiotic resistance better to investigating enzymes that can decompose plastic – with more scientific applications to come.

And Geoffrey Hinton (King’s 1967) – known as the ‘Godfather of AI’ – has been awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics jointly with John Hopfield of Princeton University.

Hinton invented a method that can autonomously find properties in data, and perform tasks such as identifying specific elements in pictures. Their prize was given for their “foundational discoveries and inventions that enable machine learning with artificial neural networks”.

The three are among the 125 Cambridge affiliates to have received Nobel Prizes.

In brief

WELCOMING HANNAH FRY

A warm welcome to mathematician and bestselling author Professor Hannah Fry, Cambridge’s first Professor of the Public Understanding of Mathematics. Fry won the Christopher Zeeman Medal for promoting mathematics in 2018 and the Royal Society David Attenborough Award in 2024, and is the President of the Institute of Mathematics and its Applications.

WORLD-LEADING INTENSITY

Cambridge is the most intensive science and technological cluster in the world, says the Global Innovation Index – for the third consecutive year. It found that the Cambridge cluster filed 6,379 Patent Cooperation Treaty patent applications and published 35,000 scientific articles, both per one million inhabitants, over the past five years.

FUNDING FOR PhD STUDENTS

A donation of £3.5m from computer technology company Arm means that 15 PhD students will now be able to drive the next generation of computing systems at the Computer Architecture and Semiconductor Design Centre. The first three students will start this year, with three students following each year for the next four years.

ILLUSTRATION: MASHA KRASNOVA-SHABAEVA

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Platypus matters

Surprise discovery reveals a physical link to one of science's most significant findings – and validates the theory of evolution.

WORDS JO CAIRD

PHOTOGRAPHY JACQUELINE GARGET

Five years ago, the discovery of a small box of specimens in a storage room at the University Museum of Zoology seemed insignificant. But to Assistant Director Jack Ashby (right), it couldn't have been more significant – a direct link to a moment around 150 years before that changed the course of scientific thinking.

The box contained young echidna and platypus specimens at various stages of development, part of a collection made in 1883 by the Scottish embryologist William Hay Caldwell (Caius 1877). He had been sent to Australia to prove the existence of egg-laying mammals. And when Caldwell, with the assistance of Indigenous Australians, succeeded in his task, he created quite a stir.

"Caldwell's specimens were important because of the implication they had for the theories of evolution," says Ashby. "They disprove the theory that all mammals give birth to live young, and support the theory of evolution, the idea that one animal group is capable of changing into another, something that many 19th-century scientists refuted."

Caldwell himself was "slightly irritated" by the link to the debate raging around evolution, and was interested in the embryology of these mammals in its own right. He considered discussion of its implications for evolutionary theory a distraction, which perhaps explains why his specimens were not prized in the way that, say, Darwin's were. Caldwell kept hold of them after his return to Cambridge from Australia and, when he left academia in 1893, the specimens were transferred to the University's anatomy department.

The collection – seemingly split up, and with some specimens even dissected by other scientists – was transferred once again in the 1980s and 90s, this time to the University Museum of Zoology. At the time, the Curator Adrian Friday added a note



that they may represent Caldwell's missing specimens, but their historical significance is only now being fully recognised, having been investigated by Ashby during research for a project on the colonial histories of Australian mammal collections in Cambridge.

"We've got two million specimens and we can't keep up with how quickly new examples come in. You need the right person to have the right focus at the right time to document them," he says. Thankfully, Ashby is that person, and Caldwell's work – alongside that of the 150 unnamed Indigenous Australians

paid to collect the echidnas and platypuses – is now getting the attention it deserves.

"It's one thing to read the 19th-century announcements that platypuses and echidnas actually lay eggs," says Ashby. "But to have the physical specimens here, tying us back to that discovery almost 150 years ago, is pretty amazing. There are so many stories that these objects can tell."

Jack Ashby's book, *Platypus Matters: The Extraordinary Story of Australian Mammals*, is out now.

THE WRITE STUFF

Poems. Plays. Short stories. Novels, all sorts. Whether published in *The Mays*, on stage at the ADC or entered for one of the many College prizes, student writing in Cambridge fizzes with energy and experimentation. How could we resist?

WORDS LUCY JOLIN ILLUSTRATIONS AMY MOSS

When Joe Wright arrived at Magdalene to study English two years ago, he was surprised to find there was no poetry society in a College with such a rich literary history. So he founded his own. “I had no real objective in mind, and thought about three people would turn up,” he remembers. “I spent most of my first year wandering around asking people: ‘Do you want to come to a poetry society?’”

Since then, the Magdalene Poetry Society has grown to the point that Wright is now booking guest speakers – the most recent being Katrina Porteous, whose latest collection has just been shortlisted for the TS Eliot Prize – and holding weekly gatherings.

Wright says there is something magical about sitting in the Great Hall at Magdalene, listening to each other’s work – someone might have scribbled a joke poem 10 minutes earlier; another might bring an experimental work they’ve been perfecting for months. Everyone is welcome, no matter how much writing they’ve done, and nobody ever quite knows what turn the night is going to take. “The way these poems speak to each other in the session, in ways you don’t expect, is really fun,” says Wright. “I never know where things will take us.”

Of course, the Magdalene Poetry Society is just one of the many clubs, societies, publications, open-mic nights and informal groups that make up Cambridge’s writing scene. It’s an astonishingly rich ecosystem, deeply rooted in history – “Whenever I turn the corner in Cambridge, I feel like

I’m bumping into someone else’s poem,” says Wright – and incredibly modern, with publications like *The Mays* and *Notes* showcasing the very best of new writing at the University.

In fact, being able to work on an actual, physical publication is hugely important for new writers, agree Famke Veenstra-Ashmore (Caius 2020) and English student Leo Kang (Clare, Third Year). The pair were the 2023/24 editors of *The Mays* – an annual anthology of the best new short stories, poetry, art and creative photography produced by students of Cambridge and Oxford, previously guest edited by an array of household names, including Kate Bush and Nick Cave, and currently edited by Sienna Black (Pembroke 2022).

The Mays is an entirely independent, student-led publication, enabling students to get experience in editing, writing, design and marketing. “I don’t know how many opportunities there are to make your own book as a student, have your name on the cover and with a proper ISBN number on the back,” says Veenstra-Ashmore. “It’s just a brilliant way of getting lots of people involved in doing an autonomous project where we have full creative oversight.”

It’s also a public record of creative work with real legacy, giving editors and writers the freedom to push boundaries. “We didn’t go in with any set model of what a submission should look like, or impose a theme,” says Kang. “We were looking for pieces that spoke to us on their own terms, that were saying something new and exciting in a creative way.” ›



Leaving Tongues

—
Ahana Banerji

You wrap my fingers in the leaves, wintergreen,
twisting psalms between loose teeth.

Bound, I swear to something sharp
as my father's nose, your mother's mouth.

You harvest my handship
before the bruising of the midrib,

as the kingfisher breaks
his bill on a bone-eared stone.

Minnows scarper upstream, no longer monarchs.
Beneath our casuarina tree, you are

deadheading asphodels. We watch
white tongues curdle by our feet.

Ahana Banerji, Magdalene
at The Iris Cafe, Newnham,
Sidgwick Avenue

This poem was first published
in *The White Review* after I was
shortlisted for their Poet's Prize
in 2022. "Our casuarina tree"
is a reference to a poem by Toru
Dutt, a Bengali poet and translator.
Dutt's poetry worked as a brilliant
access point to writing about the
complexities of communication.



Finding those spaces in the University is your lifeblood. I think if you are a creative person, you need that. You feed off that so, so much. And it feeds your academic work as well, because it enables your brain to work in more fluid, non-structured ways

The submissions were full of surprises: poems and stories about loss and landscape, about finding a photograph of your father in the attic. There were jumping Frenchmen in 19th-century Maine, historical diseases, a whale in a school pond, a bone creature that eats people, and the experience of running into poetry legend Simon Armitage outside Sainsbury's. "That's why creative projects like this are valuable, because they surprise and unsettle us in a good way," says Kang. "They challenge our perceptions of who we are and how we communicate that to other people."

And, of course, publications like these can be a jumping-off point for something bigger: the writing career of Zadie Smith (King's 1994) was launched when an agent saw her story *Mrs Begum's Son* and the *Private Tutor* in *The Mays* 1997 edition. And writer Imani Thompson (Lucy Cavendish 2019) – a huge fan of Smith – had two short stories published in *The Mays* during her first year. "It was the first time I had seen myself in print, which was incredibly exciting," she remembers.

Thompson, too, took inspiration from the creativity around her. "That's one of the most amazing things about Cambridge. You are surrounded by creative people, and nobody is weird about it. I know friends who have gone to schools where they're super creative, but it wasn't really seen as the cool thing to do, so you're kind of shy about it. It's great not to feel shy, because everyone just wants to do stuff and is kind of nerdy in their keenness."

But along with providing a place to hone her craft, Cambridge has also proved a rich source of material. In November, The Borough Press won a fiercely fought 10-way auction for Thompson's "blistering and addictive" debut novel, *Honey*, to be published next year. Her protagonist Yrsa is tired: of her PhD; of the undergraduates she teaches; and of the useless men in her

world. When she flicks a bee into one such man's San Pellegrino, she has no idea what she's starting. But that one half-accidental murder awakens a taste for more – and suddenly Yrsa is alive. "My agent wanted more Cambridge!" says Thompson. "So I thought yes, let's have Trinity College, the formals, the balls. It was a very fun setting."

Thompson says the sense of shared creativity was instrumental in developing her craft. "Finding those spaces in the University is your lifeblood. I think if you are a creative person, you need that. You feed off that so, so much. And it feeds your academic work as well, because it enables your brain to work in more fluid, non-structured ways."

Sara Collins's bestselling debut novel, *The Confessions of Frannie Langton*, has had the kind of success most writers can only dream of. It won the 2019 Costa First Novel Award, and Collins adapted it for TV in 2022 – "a rich, compelling story that keeps tight hold of its plot," said Lucy Mangan in *The Guardian*. But it was initially noticed when she submitted the first three chapters to the Lucy Cavendish Prize.

"That was hugely instrumental," remembers Collins (Master's in Creative Writing, ICE 2015). "My agent was a judge that year on the Prize. Following the shortlisting, she invited me to a meeting and offered me representation. The novel was only partial at that stage, and she worked with me for the next two years to finish it, giving excellent editorial feedback. We submitted it in 2018 and got a publishing contract with Viking after some quite competitive offers."

But along with nurturing writers aiming for commercial success, the Cambridge scene also welcomes the experimental. "It allows writers the freedom to push the boundaries – and that's important," says English student Ahana Banerji (Magdalene, Third Year), already an award-winning poet >



Killhope Cross

—

Joe Wright



He found me on Killhope Cross, clinging
to the quivering tightrope air

in a heap by my bike and the small stone cross
stuck squat in the verge, like the hook

of a line between the unimaginable
space above, and the docile fells

rolling out below. He pulled up
and as the door opened

I nearly said I loved him. Instead
he gave me water, and a smile.

There was a few minutes of breath-
catching, we were two kites

tied to the same pivot, meeting
between gusts in that strange

hurry of things we knew were yet
to come, the contours

separating gently into valleys, wind
buffeting words along

to one year later. Untied
from each other, we crossed.

He texts me that he drives up there
sometimes. I write

these lines to pull him just a little closer.

**Joe Wright, Magdalene
at The Locker, 54 King Street**

I often cycle over the Pennines,
and love thinking about maps
and contours. *Killhope Cross*
came about as I wondered how
contour lines might relate to the
lines of the poem – what lines
keep people together. It was
a joy to have it published in
The Mays last year!

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Hill
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Prospectus

—

Leo Kang

But mizzle, bitten thing. What's mine is now yours. Be somehow
more moonish (there are mitigations on the milk glass). I am no
longer mincing this wet matter, this marsh pearl we once reason-
ably could have called memory, long ago, and in another country.



Notes is fundamentally just a weird little zine, but one of the reasons it's managed to maintain itself for so long is because people are interested in the weirdness

Leo Kang, Clare
at Harvey's Coffee House,
Harvey Court, West Road

This poem was published by the *Oxford Review of Books* this Spring. It was inspired by some of Denise Riley's shorter lyrics, which feel tough and sinewy to me. I like to have fun with sound in a poem – I think meaning can emerge from a rattling around of sound!

and also editor of Cambridge zine *Notes*. "*Notes* is fundamentally just a weird little zine, but one of the reasons it's managed to maintain itself for so long is because people are interested in the weirdness. One of the founders said that they always wanted to look at 'weird form with a capital F'. I don't know what that means! But it's quite nice to not know what that means because it opens it up to people being weird with poetry. And I think poetry should be weirder a lot of the time."

Alongside the 'weird', of course, the environment creates some pivotal moments. "I remember a reading at Pembroke, organised by Mina Gorji, with Bhanu Kapil, Mona Arshi and Mary Jean Chan, who is the current Judith E Wilson Poetry Fellow at the Cambridge Faculty of English," says Banerji. "It was so powerful

to see three women and non-binary people of colour just completely dominate the panel. The fact that people of colour were dominating this poetry panel because they didn't need to speak from a place of minority was an incredibly formative moment for me."

From poetry and plays to novels and short stories, from beloved classical works to modern fiction, the Cambridge student writing scene is constantly in flux: growing, changing, thriving and, most importantly of all, inspiring.

"What people would describe as 'a scene' is critical and is something you can carry with you throughout your career," says Collins. "I think the most important thing in writing – apart from discipline – is community. The support, feedback and encouragement of your peers is essential." ©

Photosynthesis is a superpower. But what if we could take this ability to store light energy – the most abundant energy source on Earth – and use it directly? Is clean, photosynthesis-based plant power on the horizon?

WORDS **ABI MILLAR** PHOTOGRAPHY **MARCUS GINNS**

Take some carbon dioxide and throw in a little water. Add sunlight and chlorophyll. What do you get? Oxygen, sugar... and the key to life on Earth. Photosynthesis is the plant superpower, and this ability to convert light energy – the most abundant energy source on Earth – into chemicals is what keeps us humans alive. But what if we could develop a hack that allows us to siphon off some energy from this process? Are clean energy systems that rewire photosynthesis actually such an improbable idea?

Dr Jenny Zhang, an assistant professor in the Yusuf Hamied Department of Chemistry, doesn't think so. Her lab is working on rewiring photosynthesis, which involves hacking into plants' natural electronic circuitries and diverting the flow of electrons to an electrode. These electrons could then be used to create useful chemicals and generate electricity. "While photosynthesis is used in a really roundabout way to make biofuels from sugar, we wanted to take that energy early on and use it more directly, to make other chemicals that are more useful for everyday life," Zhang explains.

Given that energy consumption is at the heart of the climate crisis, finding ways to meet our growing demand for energy, chemicals and materials without pumping out still more carbon is crucial. Photosynthesis – in algae, cyanobacteria and plants – is not only an impressive reaction, it's also an antidote to pollution. If our fuel sources worked the same way as plants – taking in carbon dioxide and emitting oxygen as a waste product – we wouldn't be contending with a climate crisis.

"Photosynthesis provides the energy for 99 per cent of life on Earth," says Zhang, who grew up in China and Australia. "It's a process that takes light energy and stores it in molecules, more densely than in technologies such as batteries. These molecules can be transported and can release the energy later on. If we can work with nature to manipulate the electrons, then maybe we can use them as a way of generating clean energy."

The concept of artificial photosynthesis was first proposed as early as 1912, when a forward-thinking Italian chemist, Giacomo Ciamician, suggested that fossil fuel use was unsustainable and that plant chemistry might provide a better alternative. The message took a while to catch on. But since the 1980s, attempts to create 'artificial leaves' have been well underway.

While some of these projects rely solely on lab-created technologies, Zhang's lab, spanning everything from engineering and synthetic biology to electrochemistry, aims to harness the ingenuity that already exists within the natural world. Thanks to major ›





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research grants from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council and European Research Council (ERC), it is working on biohybrid devices that blend man-made materials with biological catalysts – living cells. After all, the enzymes within living systems have evolved over billions of years precisely to enable photosynthesis. And when retained in their natural environment, all kinds of mechanisms come into play to ensure they're repaired and sustained.

Already, collaborators of Zhang, Christopher Howe and his team have created several prototype systems that deliver bioelectricity to power microprocessors and low-power devices. Together they are now exploring the basic science behind photosynthesis, by wiring up membranes and cells to electrodes. In doing so, they can measure the electrons being emitted – a process known as exoelectrogenesis – to build up a picture of the overall health of the cell.

"Lots of people have studied the movement of electrons through enzymes, but we're applying it directly to living photosynthetic organisms to get really analytical about what's going on and how electrons are passing through networks of enzymes within the organisms," says Zhang. "And we don't focus solely on studying the biology or the electrode materials. Rather than working in silos, we are studying the exchange of electrons collaboratively and from a holistic perspective."

Supported by the ERC grant, Zhang plans to take this research to the next level. She wants to develop better biohybrid systems, by taking the best cells and the best electrodes, discovering which work well together, and refining that process over successive iterations. As she puts it: "It's like the way you would breed a racehorse."

There's a huge incentive for doing so: photosynthesis is a complex process, and many of the underlying mechanisms remain poorly understood. How do protein networks control the sunlight that enters the cell? How do cells protect themselves from light damage while harvesting what they need? We don't entirely know. ›

Enough sunlight lands on the Earth's surface every hour to meet our energy demands for a year – yet we're nowhere near being able to harness its full potential



Most of our industrial processes rely on fossil fuel infrastructure, to the detriment of the biosphere. Biohybrid approaches, such as the one being pursued by Zhang's team, could one day provide a much cleaner alternative, harnessing sunlight to produce complex chemicals, pharmaceuticals, fertilisers and, of course, clean fuels

It's also surprisingly inefficient – less than one per cent of the sunlight that lands on a plant ends up being converted into chemical energy. The goal for any artificial photosynthesis project would be to improve that efficiency, effectively rewiring photosynthesis to serve our ends.

“One unanswered question is: how do photosynthetic organisms deal with all of the energy they're absorbing from the sun?” says Zhang. “How do they make sure it goes to the right place? Sometimes there is excess energy that the cells can't deal with, which can cause all sorts of harm and unexpected consequences for the organisms.”

Learning more about this process would not only be useful for renewable energy projects; it could also be used to improve crop yields. It could even help us understand the mechanisms behind things such as coral bleaching, which occurs when corals are stressed out by changing environmental conditions.

“Corals have micro-algae living inside them that perform photosynthesis and produce sugars,” says Loris Marcel, a PhD student in the Zhang lab. “Coral bleaching is simply the expulsion of these algae from corals. We've discovered that these algae can produce electrical currents, and if you measure these currents, you can get a lot of information about what's happening in the cells – a bit like an ECG of the heart.”

A further, and somewhat unexpected, area of application could be anti-fouling – preventing bacteria from colonising surfaces where they're not wanted. As the thinking goes: if you can develop good interfaces between bacteria and man-made materials, you should have all the information you need to design the opposite.

“In some cases, we also want to get rid of problematic cells attached to surfaces,” says Zhang. “For instance, when you have medical implants that get taken over by communities of bacteria, we can apply our knowledge about interfaces to counter that.”

But perhaps the biggest dream for researchers working within this field is the promise of a sea change within manufacturing. Right now, most of our industrial processes rely on fossil fuel infrastructure, to the detriment of the biosphere. Biohybrid approaches, such as the one being pursued by Zhang's team, could one day provide a much cleaner alternative, harnessing sunlight to produce complex chemicals, pharmaceuticals, fertilisers and, of course, clean fuels.

“One of the powers of using living organisms is that they can do all these complex chemical and biochemical processes which are really hard to do outside of a living organism,” says Dr Evan Wroe, a postdoctoral researcher in Zhang's lab. “So if we can engineer them to produce whatever we need, then we could suddenly have a whole new industrial process.”

Some of these grander ambitions may take a while to become a reality, as there is a lag between achieving proof of concept in the lab and making a difference at an industrial scale. That said, the team has already developed small prototypes that can derive renewable energy from cyanobacteria more efficiently and directly than via traditional bioenergy routes. They are excited to continue this line of enquiry and see where it leads. For Zhang's part, the thrill lies in the basic science as much as it does in the real-world potential: she loves to shine a light on areas that are currently shrouded in mystery.

“We're already discovering things that we didn't anticipate when we started,” she says. “I'm obviously hoping that we can broaden our repertoire of renewable energy technologies, as well as applying our knowledge to fields like agriculture and anti-fouling. But I'm really hoping that we get more of those unexpected delights, and delve further into the unknown unknowns.”

Every hour, enough sunlight lands on the Earth's surface to meet our energy demands for a year, yet we're nowhere near being able to harness its full potential. While our existing solar cells can capture and convert it, they can't store that electricity for later use. “Things like solar cells are fantastic for performing light absorption,” says Zhang. “But biology offers the best catalysts out there. They help you make very complex molecules very selectively, in ways we can't replicate in the lab.” By harnessing and adapting Nature's greatest lessons, she hopes a revolution in energy generation could be within our grasp. ©

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A
HISTORY
OF
HISTORY
•



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WORDS
VICTORIA JAMES
ILLUSTRATIONS
MARK CONLAN
•

Cambridge has been teaching History for 300 years. In that time, historians have changed their minds on everything from what the Romans did for us to how dark the Dark Ages really were. So why is History more hotly contested now than ever?

“EVERYTHING humans do is in history,” says Regius Professor of History Chris Clark. “It’s like the largest imaginable novel, the richest treasure house of human material you could possibly ask for.” And history as a field of human inquiry is as old as, well, history itself. Its written beginnings lie among Ancient Egyptian records of the pharaohs, the analyses of Herodotus and Thucydides, the lively narratives of China’s ‘Grand Historian’ Sima Qian. In 1724, History became a formal subject of study at Cambridge with the founding by King George I of the University’s Regius Professorship, held by Clark for the past decade.

Through its long existence, the process and discipline of History have been fiercely contested. Who gets to tell the stories, and whose stories are worth telling? When accounts conflict, whose do we believe? Can agreed-upon ‘history’ even exist, or is the best that can be managed a mosaic of partial ‘histories’? Historians have changed their minds on many key issues, from what the Romans did for us to how dark the Dark Ages really were. And that matters, because history forms the basis on which nations build identity, shared values and a sense of purpose.

“If you have any serious desire to understand how human societies work, you have to engage with history,” says Helen McCarthy, Professor of Modern and Contemporary British History. “And it’s also about comprehending specific aspects of the world we live in now. If you want to understand what’s behind major armed conflicts, or why certain parts of the world are more economically developed than others, or why this particular memorial is in the middle of this particular town square, you can’t really answer those questions without history.” The current Faculty Chair, Professor Mary Laven, agrees. “In today’s news we see the climate crisis, conflict in the Middle East,

the results of the recent American election,” she says. “These things don’t come out of nowhere. They all have a past.”

Not everyone, of course, is interested in telling us nuanced versions of our past. “There’s a lot of adventurous prospecting in that treasure house of history by politicians,” Clark observes. Some of this appears as much showmanship as scholarship – witness the 2014 exchange between Michael Gove, Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt (Trinity 1992) and the then London Mayor Boris Johnson upon the centenary of the First World War. Gove, the Education Secretary who had recently rewritten the national curriculum for England’s schools, claimed in a *Daily Mail* article that “left-wing academics” (he had in his sights the then Cambridge Regius Richard Evans) had fed “myths by attacking Britain’s role in the conflict”. A detailed rebuttal by Hunt, a Cambridge-trained historian, described Gove’s analysis as “crass” and “foolhardy”, prompting Johnson to protest that Hunt’s views made him “not fit to do his job”.

Today, Vladimir Putin is drawing on Russia’s past to justify his aggression in Ukraine, in a phenomenon of mass distortion that scholar Jade McGlynn has dubbed ‘historical conflation’. “This means saying: ‘What I am doing now is the same as what happened then,’” Clark explains. “Putin says: ‘I am Peter the Great fighting against the Swedes’, or: ‘This is the Great Patriotic War [of 1941-45] mark two – the Ukrainians of today are the Nazis, and we virtuous Russians are fighting against the bourgeoisie and fascists.’ It’s the manipulative deployment of bits of collective history.” >



AMPHORA DEPICTING ORPHEUS
c. 1500BCE, ATTICA, GREECE

★ What a liberty! This detail from an ancient container looks innocent enough, but... wait. Is that a violin-like instrument I see before me? Surely CAM wouldn’t replace legendary musician and renowned poet Orpheus’s traditional lyre with an instrument that wouldn’t make an appearance until some 2,000 years after his death? Or would they?

History has never been static. If it is static, that's a problem. It's important to open up more space for debate, rather than less, and not to be alarmed by the revision of history because it's always happened, often at different times in different parts of the world



CEREMONIAL SHIELD DEDICATED TO KING ARTHUR, c. 1200CE

* Fact or fiction? Here, the legendary King Arthur (believed to have lived in the 5th century) strides proudly into battle adorned with full plate armour and a coat of arms of three crowns. It's a powerful image... and one that's entirely made up, of course. The armour and coat of arms were introduced around the 12th or 13th centuries, when tales of Arthur became popular.

HISTORY is inescapably both political and politicised. Helen McCarthy has studied the institutional production of history within governments, specifically the presence of historians within the British Foreign Office since the 1920s. "They were first employed to write the history of Britain's involvement in the First World War, and to organise official documents," she says, "and they've been there ever since. What is the position of historians who are being paid by government to write the history of government? That raises interesting questions about the usefulness of historical knowledge and also the conditions under which it is produced."

But these civil servant-historians also provide historical expertise for the making of foreign policy, says McCarthy. "Whether institutionalised experts are best placed to give such a perspective, or whether our policymakers should cast their net of consulted expertise as widely as possible, there's no doubt the study of History ought to be both the antidote to, and the vaccination against, political mythmaking," Clark argues.

History as a tool for comprehending deep currents of diplomatic and military ambition is one essential role the discipline plays in our world today. But its contribution to cultural debate has become fraught in recent years, with discussion of empire and colonisation spilling out of the academy into newspaper headlines, political rhetoric and online clickbait.

"A fundamental principle of history is that we have to understand the past in its own terms," argues David Abulafia, Emeritus Professor of Mediterranean History. "Today, most of us take





this for granted, but one of the first to argue for it was former Regius Professor Quentin Skinner in his 1969 work *Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas*. At the time he was saying something rather revolutionary, and there is actually a long tradition of historians saying we have to be wary of allowing our current values to intrude into the way we look at the past. What worries me is that we've allowed that to happen on an increasing scale."

"In my view, historians are trying to assess evidence and we're trying to get as close as we can to some to some sort of truth or truths," says Emeritus Professor of French History Robert Tombs. "People sometimes say: 'There's no truth in history.' Well, maybe there's no 'truth' but there are many true things." That truth-seeking is a process Tombs fears can come under pressure from ideological beliefs. "Some historians are quite activist," he says. "But serious history is not about being counsel for the prosecution or counsel for the defence. It's to try to be accurate and balanced, and to understand that things were different 200 years ago." ›

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Where do we see one era ending and another one beginning? Twenty years from now, what will be seen as a turning point – Brexit, Covid, the global financial crisis, Trump’s re-election or something else entirely?

THE DEBATE about truth claims in history feels somewhat dated,” adds McCarthy. “Postmodern debates over the futility of searching for ‘facts’ were largely internal to the humanities and social sciences in the 1980s and 1990s, and were not something that a broader audience of people reading or listening to popular history were especially concerned with. Whereas now controversy is politicised in a way that does spill over. Although history has always been a contested practice and discipline, it has acquired heightened charge in the context of certain types of public debates.”

Sujit Sivasundaram, Professor of World History, argues that it may just be an impression that there is more debate now than there has ever been. “That may partly be visibility, as discussion takes place across all manner of media and is amplified in many ways. But History has never been static. If it is set in stone, that’s a problem. It’s important to open up more space for debate, rather than less, and not to be alarmed by the revision of history by new perspectives because it’s always happened, and is central to the lifeblood of the discipline.”

“History writing is always motivated by present concerns,” agrees Laven, whose current research explores what isn’t Italian about the Italian Renaissance, showing how foreigners and members of minority groups – whether traders, travellers, diplomats, refugees or enslaved people – contributed to its cultural achievements, and revealing how diversity was a source of creativity. “But when history is put into the service of ideological conflicts in ways that aren’t healthy, that tends to produce not terribly good history. In my view, when historians research an area, and establish a nuanced and accurate picture of what really happened, that is very constructive. It defuses the fireworks of ideological conflict.”

And McCarthy identifies an important upside to the flare-ups of controversy within the discipline in recent years. “I think a lot of these conversations are long overdue,” she says.

“They’ve forced historians to take a long, hard look at their own profession and the lack of diversity within it, in a way that women’s and gender history did in the 70s and 80s.”

Indeed, Cambridge has long been a pioneer of new approaches to what history is, how it is told, and who gets to explore it. For decades the University has been an acclaimed centre of world history, which enables it to ask big questions about global divergence or convergence, and how it’s not only the interpretations of historical events and ideas that vary by global perspectives, but also the practice of History itself. “I’m interested in taking history to places, and writing history from places, where we don’t normally centre it, such as the fringes of South Asia or Africa or in the middle of the sea,” says Sivasundaram. “It’s a dynamic time to be decentring the West in history, and young people are so interested in knowing about the wider world right now.”

As well as rethinking geographies, historians at Cambridge are rethinking chronologies.

“Where do we see one era ending and another one beginning?” asks McCarthy.

“In contemporary history, this is frequently debated. Twenty years from now, what will be seen as a turning point – Brexit, Covid, the global financial crisis, Trump’s re-election or something else entirely? Histories are always coalescing and then dispersing and then coalescing again around different priorities. It feels right now as though a lot of people are interested in environmental history, which clearly reflects something significant about the climate crisis. It’s the same with histories of empire and race. Historians want to work on the subjects that they see as important, and those subjects do change constantly.” >



PAPYRUS SCROLL WITH PLATO
C. 300BCE, ALEXANDRIA

✱ “But it must be true – I read it in the paper!” Plato may have been ahead of his time when it came to thinking and philosophy, but even this ancient Greek master of the written word would have struggled to have captured his genius in a book, as depicted here. Papyrus scrolls, yes, but the book form wouldn’t appear until several hundred years after his death.

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**OAK COFFER WITH CARVING
OF SHAKESPEARE, c. 1700CE**

* What's the best solution to writer's block? Pop the kettle on, of course. A lovely cup of tea is an Englishman's answer to any moment of crisis, but would it really have helped Shakespeare? Probably not, given that there was no tea in England before 1650, meaning that the bard, who died in 1616, would have had to have poured out a little darjeeling from beyond the grave.

RESILIENT and dynamic though History is, many fear the subject is under threat as an academic discipline. Sivasundaram is keen to make the case for the value of historical training at a time when the study of the arts is increasingly being seen as impractical. "This is a broad-ranging discipline that's changing so much and being written in new and exciting ways," he says. "And it generates a really wide range of skills around argument, evidence and analysis that enable you to go into all kinds of fields – journalism, law, finance, charities, teaching and so on."

Laven agrees. "We have more than 130 historians and more than 1,250 undergraduate and postgraduate students," she says. "They're studying history over two millennia, across the entire globe, taking many different perspectives, approaches and methods. Cambridge is so quick to innovate and places such a premium on research." The rewards of the work done here flow far beyond the University, she says. "It teaches us how claims should always be grounded in evidence, and that's a key insight everyone can benefit from."

Perhaps, though, the greatest imperatives for studying History remain the most enduring. "History confronts us with the variety of relationships between intentions and outcomes, and reminds us to have hope anyway," says Clark. "It tells us about the complexity of all human interactions and of all political institutions. And it's a reminder that we're not alone, not the first to face potentially terrible challenges, and not the first who will master those challenges – or fail to."

Ultimately, says this current holder of one of Cambridge's most venerable professorships, it is human nature to want to understand what is meaningful in present developments and what is not. "To ask how we should prepare for coming threats and opportunities, and where we might find the seeds of the future. And we don't have anywhere else to look but at our experience." ☺

And the answer is... a written Constitution?



Our current Constitution lies across multiple Acts of Parliament, but is it fit for purpose? Professor Michael Kenny identifies the weakness in the way our system works.

WORDS LUCY JOLIN PHOTOGRAPHY JULIAN ANDERSON



Back in 1819, one Colonel Fletcher sent the then Home Secretary, Viscount Sidmouth, a cartoon entitled *The British Constitution*. It depicted the Constitution as the skeleton of John Bull, the personification of England, pierced with the cruel arrows of National Debt, Lost Liberties and Officers of the Crown, among others. Alongside him lie, discarded, Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights and the Habeas Corpus Act – “The Proud Barriers to Ministerial Tyranny overthrown for the convenience and shelter of Villainous Traitors”. An exhortation reads: “Countrymen! Behold with Aching Hearts your once noble fat & jolly Kinsman, Mr Bull!”

As it turned out, reports of the British Constitution’s death were somewhat exaggerated. But more than two centuries and many constitutional crises later, should we consider retiring it? And if so, what would we replace it with? Enter the Bennett Institute for Public Policy’s landmark report on the British Constitution, the fruit of a project conducted in partnership with the Institute for Government. Spanning 18 months and calling on extensive academic, political and legal expertise and experience, plus stakeholder groups in all four parts of the UK, it seeks to answer the question: what – if anything – needs to be done to create a constitution in the UK fit for the 21st century?

It’s a big question, because the Constitution isn’t written down in a nice, neat document, but scattered throughout the attic of history: a statute here, an Act of Parliament there, a precedent that’s gone down the back of the sofa. It is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. In fact, the House of Commons Library is currently running a project to try and map it all. “I’ll be very interested to see the great range of documentation they will be looking at,” says Professor Michael Kenny, Director of the Bennett Institute for Public Policy. “It’s not an easy exercise.”

Thus far, he points out, the Constitution still – just about – works. Well, mostly. Checks and balances mean it is self-regulating to a degree. Even a government with a whopping Commons majority must still put up with different forms of scrutiny or institutional counterbalance, such as the scrutiny supplied by the House of Lords. And its flexibility has always allowed for what Kenny calls, with elegant understatement, “plenty of scope for debate and disagreement”. Nonetheless, the result of the Brexit referendum meant that, suddenly, politically rooted disagreement about big issues – such as leaving the European Union – started to throw up a whole range of constitutional questions.

Indeed, during the turmoil of the Brexit years, a popular idea was that the Constitution was held together by ‘good chaps’ – politicians almost unconsciously adhering to an unwritten, unspoken code – and that now, faced with a new breed who apparently don’t respect this code, the Constitution must necessarily crumble. Kenny disagrees. “I’m not sure that we always had ‘good chaps,’” he says (again with considerable understatement). “Actually, there are plenty of examples of politicians and governments pushing the limits and testing the boundaries of the British Constitution. Lloyd George comes to mind, and also the decision of the Thatcher government to abolish the Greater London Council in 1986.”

Instead, Kenny thinks there is an endemic weakness in the way our system of checks and balances works. “Particularly at the height of the Brexit crisis, it became obvious that these checks and ›

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This means that politicians can weaponise a particular interpretation of the Constitution and use it to advance their own objectives. Again, that's not new, but it became much more problematic in the context of Brexit

balances were not operating as they were supposed to. It looked like the balance between the executive and the legislature was being tilted too much to the executive arm. Some would say that's been happening for a long time, and I think that's a fair point. But it's certainly one weakness that has been writ large in recent years."

A second issue is the fact that constitutional legislation is akin to every other kind of legislation – and can therefore be changed pretty easily. Take the Fixed-term Parliament Act 2011, which, for the first time, set a default date for general elections in the UK. It was repealed 11 years later. "One of the problems is that in our system, it's not possible to make the process of constitutional change special or distinctive. Governments make constitutional changes the same way they'd make changes to other domestic legislation," says Kenny. "This, it seems to us, is increasingly problematic, because it leaves a legacy whereby it looks to citizens as if the political winners can change the rules of the game."

And finally, the core principles of the Constitution are increasingly unclear, with question marks over what actually counts as 'constitutional' in the British system. "This means that politicians can weaponise a particular interpretation of the Constitution and use it to advance their own objectives. Again, that's not new, but it became much more problematic in the context of Brexit."

Tidy-minded people will be vexed to know that the answer to all this does not involve a single document with bullet points. Much constitutional debate, Kenny points out, is bewitched by the idea that there is an optimal constitutional model out there: if we could just upgrade from our creaky model, it would solve all our problems. "But, paradoxically, so many different countries with very different constitutional arrangements seem to be facing the same problems. In the US, for example – which is often held up as an exemplar of a codified constitution – we have seen very deep conflicts and huge disagreements about interpretations of the constitution. It's not clear that having a codified constitution per se solves deep, underlying problems with citizen trust, lack of government performance and the declining legitimacy of democratic government."

In short, there is no silver bullet. But the Bennett report's main recommendation argues for the introduction of a new parliamentary committee on the Constitution, where no single party has the majority. "It would build on the work done at the moment by the House of Lords Constitution Committee, which I think has developed a very strong reputation as an independent voice and source of scrutiny," says Kenny. "But this would go further. We think it should have the power of scrutiny over any legislation that counts as constitutional."

Additionally, the report recommends that a small group of Acts should be recognised as constitutional and given additional protections, so they can't be repealed easily. "For instance, New Zealand, which has moved in this direction, has a requirement that two thirds of the lower house has to agree to amend a constitutional statute. We think something like that would allow for greater stability in our constitutional politics." And there is a strong case for strengthening the role and profile of the Constitution within British government. This might sound strange, Kenny says, as the British government is so closely

entwined with the traditions and ethos of the Constitution. But it's hard for people to respect something with such a nebulous and scattered nature. "So we recommend establishing a Centre for Constitutional Expertise in the Cabinet Office, and, importantly, making sure that civil servants understand their own constitutional role more clearly. The Cabinet Secretary has a key role in promoting the Constitution and making sure that ministers are given good, clear advice about whether proposals they are advancing are constitutionally proper – or not."

What impact would he like the report to have? This kind of change is hard, says Kenny. In British politics, parties tend to be interested in this area when they're in opposition and can tell a strong story about the misbehaviour or carelessness of the incumbent party. "And then, when they get into power, they don't tend to do that much. That's arguably a pattern we've seen repeated with the current government, though it's still early days." The Starmer government has, he points out, made some small changes in ethical oversight of government, such as boosting the role of the independent adviser. "But the big thing they said they would do, which so far they have not, is to introduce a commission for ethics and integrity. We wait to see what those proposals will look like, but that could be an important step forward."

Constitutional reform is unlikely to be the hot topic or big vote winner at the next election. But although it might sound very removed from the reality of our lives, the Constitution could, in fact, be a tool to address a very obvious crisis that governments across the world are facing: a crisis of trust between citizens and state. Most people didn't obsessively follow the constitutional twists and turns of Brexit, but everyone became aware of what powers governments had when the pandemic hit – and many were surprised when they realised those powers were different in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. "And I think it was a really telling moment. There is evidence that many people were genuinely shocked to discover that the devolved governments had the responsibility to introduce those rules – because devolution has been so poorly understood," says Kenny.

The British have always tended to have spasms of constitutional reform at moments of crisis, and Kenny says there is no reason to suspect that will change. The big question, of course, is what the next crisis will be. Electoral reform could make a comeback: will an increasingly fragmented electorate continue to be content with the outcomes of a voting system that favours the two main parties? Support for Scottish independence remains above 40 per cent, while Northern Ireland is still dealing with the aftermath of Brexit: could more independence referendums be on the horizon?

Or, of course, it could just be a good old-fashioned scandal. "When members of the new Labour government accepted clothes and concert tickets last year, they weren't breaking the rules," says Kenny. "But in a context where the public is increasingly sceptical of and frustrated with government, and what it delivers for them, just following the rules is not good enough. Politicians need to start thinking of the institutional reforms and culture changes that could start the difficult process of winning back public trust." ☺

To read about the new Bennett School of Public Policy, due to open this October, visit cam.ac.uk/go/policy-school-blog

ON THE RIGHT PATH

From learning to use temperamental Soviet telex systems while nursing a vodka hangover to sharing recipes with the *babushki* of Kazakhstan, the year abroad has been opening the eyes of Cambridge modern language students for years. Here are their stories from around the world in 365 days.

WORDS MEGAN WELFORD PHOTOGRAPHY MEGAN TAYLOR



When Jamie Coomarasamy (Trinity Hall 1986) was introduced to a ‘toucher-upper’ in a Moscow jazz club called the Blue Bird in 1988, he assumed he had misheard the description of the man’s job. But thankfully it was all above board – Oleg, it turned out, had the important role of removing Mikhail Gorbachev’s famous birthmark from official photos at the newspaper *Pravda*. He would also prove to play a useful part in establishing Coomarasamy’s future BBC career path.

Coomarasamy was in Moscow to spend six months studying at the Pushkin Institute, a placement as part of his degree in French and Russian at the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages and Linguistics (MMLL). During their third year, MMLL students are supported to study, teach or work in a country where people speak the language they are learning. Most are left for ever changed.

“I learned to speak the language – but not only that, I got under the skin of the country and started to understand the rhythms of life,” says Coomarasamy. “It was a tough existence, so you understood why people weren’t always smiling on the metro. People didn’t have much, but hospitality was really important. If you were at someone’s house and a bottle of vodka was opened, it had to be finished that same night. There was a trick for not falling over, though – if you hid a small piece of black bread in your mouth while you drank, it would absorb some of the alcohol.”

And while life was tough for Russians at the time, it was also full of quirks, Coomarasamy remembers.



“You could go to the opera, theatre or a musical performance at the Kremlin for next to nothing. You could get a jar of caviar for £2, but you’d have to queue for the bread to go with it. There would be rumours of watermelon at a certain supermarket, or sugar a few metro stops down. Supermarket cashiers still used an abacus, and when I got back to the UK, I noticed how big the trolleys were.”

After completing his degree, Coomarasamy returned to Moscow – thanks to a two-week tourist visa arranged by Oleg – during the August coup of 1991, “just as Boris Yeltsin was pictured standing on the tank,” he recalls. He ended up staying for two and a half years, after getting a job at the BBC Moscow office, which initially involved sending information via an unreliable Soviet telex system. “You’d fire it up and it would die. Fire, die. It took me two hours to do what you’d do with a single text today. But I was learning broadcast journalism during the biggest story on the planet!”

Dillon Mapletoft (Corpus Christi 2012), now a TV comedy writer, gained enough confidence during his year speaking Portuguese and Spanish in São Paulo and Madrid to try writing student comedy upon his return. “They say you have a different personality in a different language,” he says, “and in São Paulo I thought: ‘Maybe I can be the kind of person who doesn’t run away from things.’ My boss at the British Consulate couldn’t pronounce my name and called me Dinho, which means Tony, so I kind of was a different person!”



They say you have a different personality in a different language, and in São Paulo I thought: ‘Maybe I can be the kind of person who doesn’t run away from things’



“Cambridge was full of insanely talented and qualified people, and it had given me a kind of stage fright. But when you’re abroad, you have no choice but to jump in at the deep end, and doing that and making it work made me feel like I could sort of take the stabilisers off.”

In São Paulo, he had to find his own accommodation, and answered an online ad. “My new housemate was a recently divorced jiu-jitsu instructor who had moved out of his old place and into a cupboard Harry Potter would have been envious of,” says Mapletoft. “He could only fit a child’s bed in there, and when it arrived, it was in the shape of a sports car! We really had nothing in common: he wanted to toughen me up by taking me to his fight gym. But we sort of became friends.

“Before I went to Brazil, I’d barely travelled further than Northamptonshire. And it was a shock to arrive and see some of the starker realities of life in São Paulo – people living in storm drains and sleeping under cars. I also really stood out as this skinny European guy. So when I got to Madrid for the second part of my year, I relaxed. On my first ›

The year out gives you time to just exist. To drink tea in a yurt, share bread and tell old ladies about England. I came back with a renewed focus in what I was interested in, and a determination to prioritise myself – to enjoy work, but know it's not everything



night, a stranger hugged me in the street; I thought: 'Great!' Then I realised I'd been pickpocketed."

Professor Charles Forsdick, Drapers Professor of French at the MMLL, suggests that "language learning is incomplete without the development of intercultural agility", and Mapletoft wholeheartedly agrees. "The year abroad gives you a perspective you can only get from seeing the world," he says. "You study languages because you love them, but mainly because you want to experience that culture. You can drill yourself in grammar, but nothing compares to the challenge of living somewhere, pushing yourself every day."

Jade Cuttle (Homerton 2013) says her year in France and Siberia prepared her for her career as an arts journalist, as well as for her current doctoral research project on nature poetry. "In Paris I attended gallery openings and wrote for an arts magazine," she says. "In Siberia I was captivated by the scenery. I travelled deep into the forest to dig wildfire trails, which took a lot of courage as it was very remote. I wrote a lot of nature-inspired poetry and songs on a guitar, by the lake."

And current Russian student Victoria Connolly (Jesus Fourth Year) says she fell back in love with her degree after her year abroad in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. "For me, studying was about being efficient and pleasing people, rather than experiencing things. The year out gives you time to just exist. To drink tea in a yurt, share bread and tell *babushki* – old ladies – about England. I came back with a renewed focus in what I was interested in, and a determination to prioritise myself – to enjoy work, but know it's not everything."



I learned to speak the language – but not only that, I got under the skin of the country and started to understand the rhythms of life

She says her biggest lesson learned was how to get on with very different people. "I stayed with a family who were very kind and considerate, but culturally very conservative. So it was about figuring out how to live with others in a respectful way but also assert your own boundaries."

"The mum taught me how to cook so I could contribute to family life and help look after her mother. We cooked *borscht*, of course, a rice dish called *plov*, and dumplings known as *pelmeni*. The grandma and I loved the dumplings, so we would conspire against the mum to cook them often. I had struggled to find common ground with the mum, who was a concert violinist, but cooking let me step into her world without having to impose myself."

In Kazakhstan, Connolly shared a dorm at Astana University with two Westerners and 40 Kazakh girls. "They'd take us out with them to the mosque and we became friends. I also made a friend, Alisher, who was an interpreter at the Astana Ballet and who I've kept in touch with. He showed me backstage, and we were allowed to dance on the sprung floor."

Connolly is now sourcing and writing news stories for the BEARR Trust NGO, which works in the region, and plans to go back out when she graduates. "I couldn't possibly have known the impact my year abroad would have on me. It was like a Matryoshka doll – you'd open one layer and find something new underneath that you would never have seen or thought otherwise: hot springs, an abandoned Soviet sanatorium high in the mountains or pioneer camps for miners. All the things that exist in the world!" ☺

If you would like to help future generations of Cambridge students, regardless of their background or circumstances, to benefit from the Year Abroad experience, please contact Kara.Rann@admin.cam.ac.uk

School of thought: Greater empathy equals greater benefits for pupils

A new study shows teaching empathy has improved conduct, awareness, wellbeing and curiosity.

WORDS ANNA FIELDING

When the World Economic Forum (WEF) argued for more education focused on the development of interpersonal skills, it highlighted the key role of empathy. “The future of education lies in empowering young learners to embrace and develop their uniquely human qualities, those unlikely to ever be replaced by technology,” says the WEF in its *Defining Education 4.0* white paper.

“The science, both in terms of genetics and neuroscience, has shown that we are born with some empathy, but that it can go by the wayside as we get older,” says Dr Helen Demetriou, a chartered psychologist and Associate Professor of Psychology at the Faculty of Education. And although it is often considered innate, evidence suggests that empathy can in fact be taught, something that Demetriou has dedicated her life’s work to.

And now she has helped design and carry out a new study investigating the effects of teaching empathy to primary and secondary school pupils. Ten schools in six countries took part, with more than 900 children, aged between 5 and 18. After just one term, the results were dramatic, with measurable, positive changes in the pupils’ conduct, emotional awareness, wellbeing and curiosity about different cultures. “I think that everyone in my class has become kinder,” one student told researchers; “I’ve definitely been able to resolve more issues in the classroom and not have parents called in,” said a teacher.

“My work was in collaboration with an organisation called Empathy Studios,” says Demetriou. “They produce immersive videos that they take into schools and show children to enhance empathy awareness and practice.”



Over 10 weeks, pupils watch a series of videos depicting diverse human experiences and then participate in discussion and reflection. The study found that exposure to the videos impacted very positively on pupils and teachers in a variety of ways. “It showed an increase in their empathy knowledge and skill, but also better wellbeing, social skills, academic achievement and a decrease in antisocial behaviours, such as bullying,” says Demetriou.

To assess the impact of Empathy Studios’ work, Demetriou and the team conducted qualitative and quantitative analysis. In the latter, teachers rated students’ behaviour and characteristics on a scale of 1 to 10 before the programme began, at a halfway point and at the end of the 10-week period. The average empathy score went from 5.55 to 7, and average behaviour scores rose from 6.52 to 7.89.



The study found an increase in their empathy knowledge and skill, but also better wellbeing, social skills and academic achievement

For Demetriou, the most striking thing about the study has been feedback from people who say that gaining a greater awareness of empathy has revolutionised how they view themselves and others. “I had a hunch there would be an impact, but the data speaks for itself,” she says.

This latest research follows Demetriou’s study (Demetriou & Nicholl, 2021), where Year 7 and 9 pupils

used tools to boost empathetic thinking in their Design and Technology classes. They were studied alongside a control group who followed the standard curriculum. At the end of the school year, the intervention group’s creativity scores were 78 per cent higher than the control group. Most of that rise, the research noted, was driven through the empathy intervention.

Integrating empathetic thinking into day-to-day lessons is one of Demetriou’s hopes for the future. “To have it embedded into the curriculum – not as an add-on but truly embedded – is the ideal,” she says. “This research has shown the benefits – the social, emotional, academic and behavioural effects – so I think the more empathy training we have in the curriculum the better it will be in terms of producing more rounded people who are better equipped to succeed in the outside world.”

This idea must die: “Planting trees will solve the climate crisis”

Professor Marc Macias-Fauria says tree planting at high latitudes will accelerate, not decelerate, global warming.

INTERVIEW **PETER WATTS** ILLUSTRATION **GEORGE WYLESOL**

When it comes to planting trees to address the climate crisis, you can't have your cake and eat it – and you can't deceive the Earth. Tree planting is an important element in our attempt to address the carbon issue, but only if it's done in the right places. And while the temptation to take advantage of a warmer climate by pushing further and further north with reforestation is strong, it is not the answer.

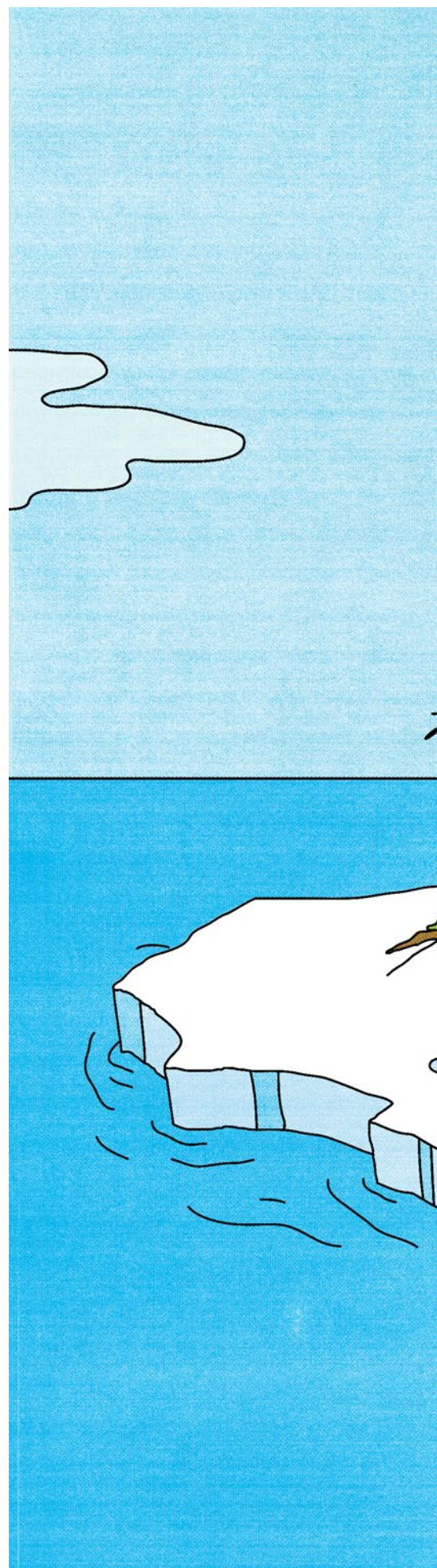
Take the Arctic. The tundra area is defined as treeless, but with global warming – and especially Arctic warming, which is heating faster than the rest of the planet – it is now possible to grow trees in the north. This is already happening in several places, with afforestation and reforestation initiatives in Greenland, Iceland and Alaska.

Needless to say, people living in these areas have the right to plant trees – for economic reasons, for example, such as wanting to reduce reliance on timber imports – but they cannot claim that planting trees will mitigate climate change, because the opposite happens. As we argue in our recent paper, led in collaboration with the University of Århus, and with the participation of several researchers from boreal and arctic institutions, planting trees in the Arctic will harm the planet.

That's because tree plantations in the high latitudes are modifying the 'albedo' of the surface of the Earth. The albedo is the amount of energy from the sun that is immediately reflected back into space. The Arctic has a lot of snow and no trees, which means that the surface is relatively smooth and very reflective, and up to 90 per cent of the sun's rays are sent straight back into space instead of being absorbed on Earth.

If you plant trees, these darken the surface of the Arctic and lower its overall albedo, so less energy is bounced back. Instead, it is trapped on the Earth's surface and in the atmosphere, contributing to global warming. The overall negative effect on the albedo is greater than the carbon sequestered by the trees, so it doesn't solve anything. It's like taking medicine for a headache that causes more headaches.

Another parameter is that the Arctic is not characterised by storing carbon in plants above ground but in the soil, which is really rich in carbon. There is more carbon in the soil of the Arctic than in all living plants on Earth. This soil is already starting to decompose as the planet gets warmer, and when it is disturbed it enhances the emission of stored carbon. No matter how careful the reforestation programme, it is inevitable that





Planting trees darkens the surface of the Arctic, lowering its overall albedo; the result is more energy remains trapped in the Earth's atmosphere

it will disturb the soil and release even more carbon into the atmosphere.

Keeping these landscapes open is a better option than turning them into forest. That supports the albedo, and it is also good for the large animals that live in the Arctic and provide food and other resources (such as fur and skins) for its indigenous populations. There is ample evidence that large herbivores affect plant communities and snow conditions in ways that result in net cooling.

The final problem is that if you plant trees in the Arctic they tend to die. There are a lot of fires and natural disturbances in the Arctic, so trees are very vulnerable and only last a few decades – not long enough to counter the negative impact from the carbon in the soil or the impact on the albedo.

Albedo, carbon release, securing traditional species and local communities: key factors when it comes to tree planting. Done thoughtfully, there are obvious benefits to successfully managing our climate challenges. But done wrong – or in the wrong places, such as the Arctic – it is not the solution, and will have the opposite effect.

Professor Marc Macias-Fauria is Professor of Physical Geography at the Scott Polar Research Institute.

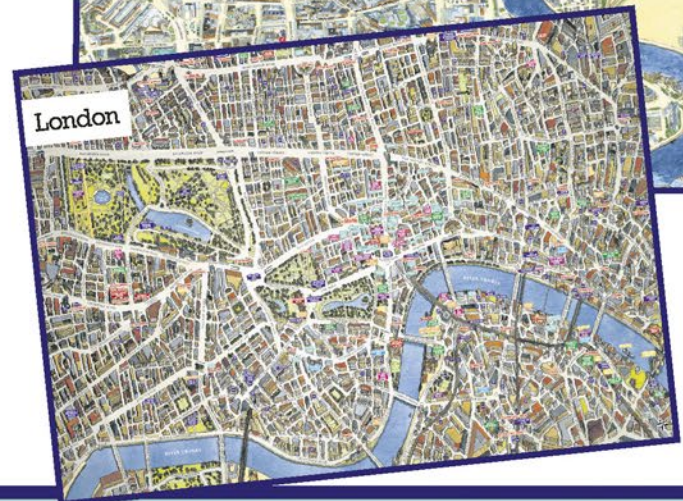
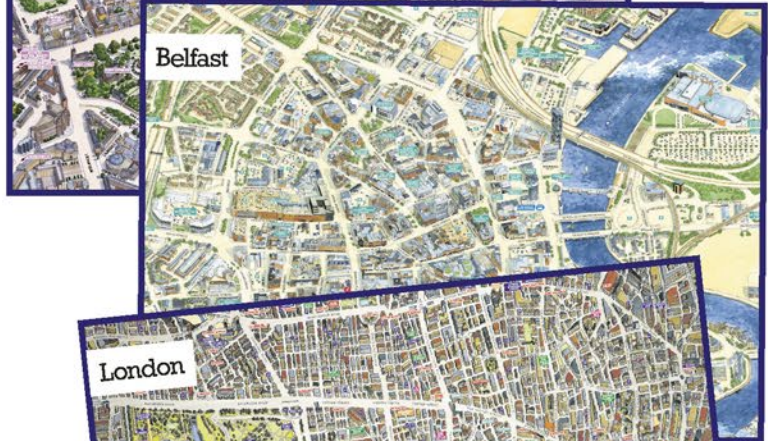
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CREATING HAPPINESS

I went to an organ concert at Selwyn and, for the first time, my body felt quiet

Linseigh Green spent much of her Master's at the Institute of Continuing Education in lockdown, but that was the least of her challenges.

INTERVIEW MEGAN WELFORD

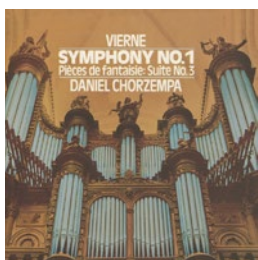


Hurry! It's Lovely Up Here **Barbra Streisand**

I love the message of this song: that when you feel sad and want to stay buried deep underground in the soil, you should come up like a plant because it's lovely up here, it's safe above ground. I started my Master's in Creative Writing at Cambridge in 2019, and it quickly moved to

Zoom because of Covid. The following couple of years had many challenges: my aunt, who I had been caring for, passed away; my parent was diagnosed with cancer; and my uncle died suddenly. I began passing out and then I was hospitalised with paralysis on the right side of my body. I was in so much pain I wanted to rip off my skin. Later, I would be diagnosed with a functional neurological disorder that was probably related to the necrotising enterocolitis I'd survived as a baby, but at the time I didn't know what was going on and I hid in my room. Strangely, the only thing I could work on was radio plays, which I had got into during lockdown – I couldn't read anything except scripts, or speak except my lines.

Cambridge is full of gorgeous, nerdy people, like an island of misfit toys. It would be quite usual for us to be at a party discussing simulation theory and the JSTOR database



Organ symphony No.1 in D minor **Louis Vierne**

During that period when I was in so much pain, I went to an organ concert at Selwyn and, for the first time, my body felt quiet. It started a bit of an obsession with organs! In July 2021, I went to Canterbury Cathedral and this piece was played

again. Again, I felt quiet and peace in my body, like the heavens were raining on my head. Two years later, haunted by the song, I wrote to Canterbury Cathedral with the date and time, and they wrote back and told me its name.



The Beauty Is **Adam Guettel and Kelli O'Hara**

In the musical *The Light in the Piazza* there's a girl called Clara, and she has a disability of some kind. The way she thinks is different to others – she has a simple, inquisitive fascination, her own beautifully unique wavelength.

A friend introduced me to one of the songs, *The Beauty Is*; she wanted me to sing it to her, and I started to understand my neurodivergence. Cambridge is full of gorgeous, nerdy people, like an island of misfit toys. It would be quite usual for us to be at a party discussing simulation theory and the JSTOR database. It wasn't weird, it was just how it was. My brain floats sometimes, I retreat into myself and people can react strangely to it. But I began to see it as a gentle coping mechanism – just my own way, and that it could be fine.



Out There **Tom Hulce and Tony Jay**

Hiding in my Cambridge bedroom in May 2021, I watched a lot of Disney films. *The Hunchback* is a human, but society projects 'monster' onto him. When your body does so many crazy things it becomes a foreign object, to be poked and prodded by doctors, and I started to relate to the Hunchback. I had always been able to ensure my disability blended in until Cambridge, but developing the neurological disorder and having to walk with a stick changed that. Instead, I learned you can be smart but still need help. My supervisor, Midge Gillies, made me prioritise my health, and Monique at the Accessibility and Disability Resource Centre made me go for a walk every day and take a picture of something beautiful. Having my brain shut down while at Cambridge could have been humiliating, but instead it shaped my philosophy. It helped me realise I could be an actor – and is the reason I do all the things I do now.

Linseigh Green is a writer, actor, singer, producer, rare disease activist and winner of Disability Champion at the Black British Theatre Awards 2024. She completed her studies at the Institute of Continuing Education in 2022.

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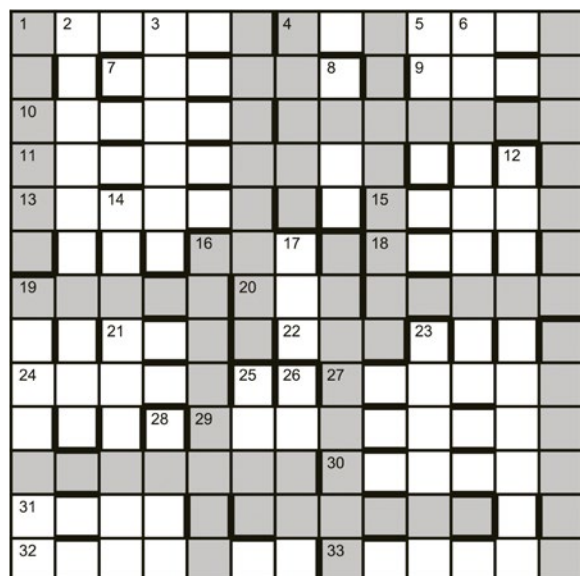

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A Leisurely Pursuit

by Nimrod

Clues for 12 of the grid's 13 thematic silvered entries consist of wordplay only; they are listed in alphabetical order of solutions, which must be fitted into the grid wherever they will fit. Solvers must find ways to connect four groups of three of these (including three non-standard phrases) from realms – one group each – of history, geography, science/nature and entertainment. Wordplay in each of the normally numbered clues leads to the answer with an extra letter not entered in the grid. In clue order, the extra letters spell a literary definition of the unclued 13th thematic entry. One answer is a prefix.



Across

- 1 Protection from sunshine glare: check inside (6)
- 4 Island to go round, then something to play on board (7, 2 words)
- 7 Jockey rode the odds-on favourite? (6)
- 9 Dilly discussed facility for wee potato (4)
- 10 Turns away from phoney resurrecting one burned at the altar (6)
- 11 Witnessing offensive channel (9)
- 13 Mineral quality is withdrawn from the gut (6)
- 15 Navy's revolutionary weapon brought to book (5)
- 16 Coalmine gallery where I feel at home (3)
- 18 Routine course taken around hill (3)
- 20 Unfortunate hole in bagpipe? (3)
- 21 Be without a vast number (3)
- 22 Exit from stage initially advised, because of Shakespeare's bear (3)
- 24 Soak Glaswegian GP and retreat (5)
- 27 Schooling of horse, say, getting through infection (6)
- 29 It's special trampling on uniform of the first soldier (9)
- 30 Not always like prior, but always like nun, nun with halo slipping (6)
- 31 Dance movement is hot! (4)
- 32 Invite Scots to inquire about special dinner guest? (7)
- 33 Adjust quantity of beer gallery will accept (6)

Thematic

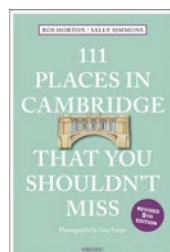
- Sounding more like the Stepney Sandboy?
- A patient that everyone can see is on the up
- 21 minus 50
- France's mistakes
- Fine plate one's inscribed
- Butter spread all over
- Essential to have shelter
- What one does in open country
- See smoke rising
- On reflection, the same answer
- Pressure put on network's function
- Red Cross carries chap to Providence?

Down

- 2 Exercising one's terrier, they navigate difficult ground (10)
- 3 Change course when leaving state summit (6)
- 5 Charity hastily put together meals (4)
- 6 Savoury dish: pipeman circulated it close to home (9)
- 8 Local barge most ill equipped for hoisting (4)
- 12 Oil of oranges Broz put in measure of spirits with water (10, 2 words)
- 14 Fox prepared for low tide (9)
- 17 Shout of approval that's very funny, most common in repartee (3)
- 19 I'm so confused about lift positions (7)
- 23 Make unfit members of convent nakedly run it (6)
- 25 Shrewd attaché harnessing some power (4)
- 26 Be threatening ape from below, skirting river (5)
- 28 Energy drained, sister's beginning to approach one of two bears (4)

All entries to be received by 2 June 2025. Send your entry:

- **by post to:** CAM 104 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 *111 Places in Cambridge That You Shouldn't Miss* by Ros Horton and Sally Simmons (Sidney Sussex 1976), with photography by Guy Snape (Jesus 1994). Two runners-up will receive a £50 CUP book token. Solutions, winners and runners-up will be published in CAM 105 and online on 17 June 2025 at: alumni.cam.ac.uk/magazine

Solution to CAM 103 Crossword

Non-conformist

Redundant letters spell RESEARCH CHEMIST, HOOKING UP AUTHOR, CHASER, RANDALL'S PARTNER, giving SIDNEY STRATTON, TOM WOLFE, THE SINNEMAN and MARTY HOPKIRK, all famous for wearing WHITE suits. The non-conformist, HARRY RAYBURN, is one of the aliases of Agatha Christie's titular *The Man in the BROWN Suit*.



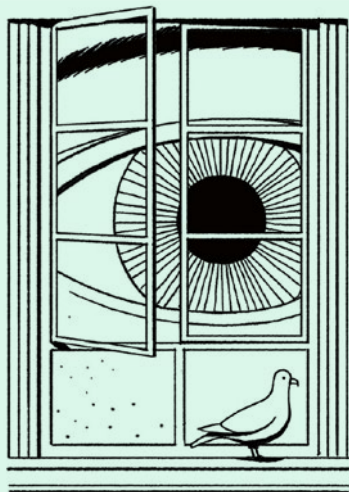
CAM 103 winner: Richard Cawkwell (Jesus 1970) **Runners-up:** Nathan Horleston (Corpus Christi 1995) and Tim Sheldon (Jesus 1974)

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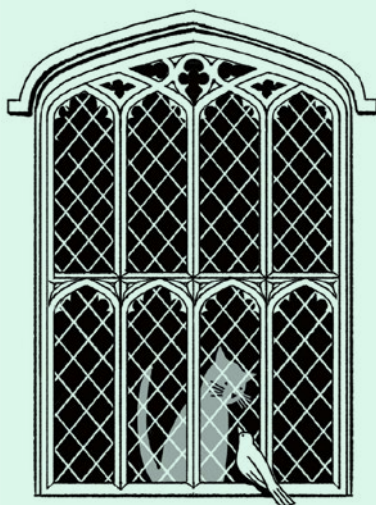


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