



July 2018

Wed 18 Lunch with Richard Iron

Our ever-changing Society

The demographics of our society are changing. We are excited to have a new cohort of young people who will keep CamSoc Victoria going strong for decades. We are pleased to see that we have a proportionately higher number of young women joining our ranks, mirroring the change that Cambridge itself has seen.

With this in mind, and galvanised by feedback from our members and stakeholders, your committee is undertaking a thorough review of the formats, venues and costs of our functions to provide an offering that is attractive to all our members, regardless of their career stage, gender, field of study, or generation. We all have much to learn from each other.

Within the next few months we will conduct a survey of all interested alumni to make sure that our functions fulfil our mission to foster relationships between alumni and encourage continuous learning through interesting and stimulating functions that appeal to all our members. If you'd like your voice heard, please make sure we have an up to date email address so we can send you a confidential questionnaire.

Lunch with Richard Iron CMG OBE, Wednesday 18 July

African wars

We are now well used to war in the Middle East and South-West Asia. Despite the complexities of Islamist extremism, there has been much in-depth analysis and practical experience gained of conflict in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan; we think we largely understand it.

Despite the focus on extremism and the Middle East, however, Africa remains the world's most violent continent and it is from here that the majority of the world's refugees originate.

Ongoing crises in the Central African Republic (CAR), Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Burundi have coincided with a dramatic rise in refugees and asylum seekers across the continent. Sub-Saharan Africa alone hosts more than 26 per cent of the world's refugee population.

Yet our understanding of the dynamics of African conflict is patchy at best; at worst, we are vulnerable to assumptions about war that have emerged from our Middle East experience but are completely inapplicable in Africa.

We are delighted to welcome Richard Iron to discuss why war in Africa is unique, and different from elsewhere; and how understanding these dynamics can enable policy makers and practitioners to develop the appropriate strategies to address growing conflict and tension on the continent.

Richard read Engineering at Trinity Hall from 1977-1980. He served for 37 years in the British Army, largely spent on operations in Northern Ireland, the Falkland Islands, the Balkans and Iraq. Subsequently leading the development of British Army doctrine, he was responsible for the analysis of the Iraq War. Later, Richard became the Defence Fellow at the University of Oxford and worked for the Chief of Defence Staff on developing the UK Ministry of Defence's capacity to think and work strategically. After leaving the Army in 2012, he led the operation to provide security to the remaining US presence in Iraq. Until moving to Australia in early 2016 he was Chief Executive Officer of Equilibrium-Global, an international strategic consultancy based in

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London. He continues to be a visiting fellow at the University of Oxford and has written and lectured widely on doctrine, military history and counter-insurgency. He was lead editor of the book *British Generals in Blair's Wars* and is currently writing a history of the Sierra Leone war from an African perspective.

This lunch will take place at the Savage Club at 12 noon for 12.30pm. The Club is at 12 Bank Place (off Collins Street) in the City. Cost is \$55 including drinks. All guests are most welcome; the more the better. Would you please advise Peter Baines at lunches@cambridgesociety.org.au or on 9820 2334 by latest Monday noon, 16 July, if you will be coming (and dietary requirements). Those emailing their intention to attend should ring Peter to confirm if they receive no email confirmation from him within 24 hours of booking.

Diary dates

15 Aug	Lunch with Prof. Allan Fels AO
7 Sep	Annual Dinner with Chloe Munro AO
17 Oct	Lunch with Jim Bowler
21 Nov	Lunch with Caroline Forrest

Last month

**Lunch with Bill Birch AM,
Wednesday 20 June**

There are three main types of volcanoes in Victoria: shield volcanoes, scoria cone volcanoes and maar volcanoes. All are caused by molten magma welling to the surface. In shield volcanoes the lava oozes out, as we are seeing in Hawaii at present, and flows to cover large areas of land. In cone volcanoes explosions occur as lava explodes and produces pyroclastic flows of ash and cinder which result in the traditional conical structure. Maar volcanoes occur where the lava meets extensive groundwater and the resultant explosion produces a large shallow crater. There are about 800 volcanic sites in Western Victoria and across into SE of South Australia in the Mt Gambier region. These cover all three types, with many sites showing combinations of the three distinct types (ie a shield volcano forming within the maar crater in subsequent eruptions). The greatest concentration of volcanic cones is found north of Ballarat, which probably explains why 20% of the audience came from Ballarat. The largest scoria cone

volcano in Victoria is Mt Elephant, near Derrinallum. Maar volcanoes are predominant in the southern region of the state between Colac and Warnambool, the most well known being the Blue Lake at Mt Gambier. A typical shield volcano can be seen at Mt Napier, just south of Hamilton, although this has a superimposed scoria cone.

Dating the eruptions of volcanoes is a complex task and ages are often given as a range. Eruptions in Victoria are thought to have started about 4.5 million years ago and the latest eruption was at Mt Gambier 4500 years ago. There were many eruptions in the period since aboriginal settlement and many dreamtime stories about them exist. This causes some confusion, as some of these stories relate to volcanoes that appeared long before aboriginal settlement. In total it is estimated that 1300 cubic kilometres of lava emerged from these volcanoes, covering an area of 15,000 square kilometres. Those mathematically inclined would work out that this implies a coverage of about 90 metres over the whole area.

The source of the magma in this intra-plate volcanic field is widely thought to be a hot-spot in the Earth's mantle, rather like that in Hawaii which has produced a chain of volcanoes as the plate moves over the fixed hot-spot. The complication in this area is that the plate is moving in a northerly direction but the volcanic activity developed from east (near Melbourne) to west (the Victoria/South Australia border. Perhaps, unlike under Hawaii, the hot-spot is also moving? It is thus difficult to predict where the next eruptions will occur, but it is likely that there will be further eruptions, though not in our lifetimes.

Commercials

Timor study tour

The Australian Institute of International Affairs is running a Study Tour to Timor 10-20 October 2018. It will be led by Peter McMullin, an old Timor hand. If you have any questions please contact Patrick Moore on 0414 904 765 or patrick@lisan.com.au.

If you have an offer, message or request of a personal or not-for-profit nature that you would like us to include in this section, please contact the editor at newsletter@cambridgesociety.org.au.

Snippets

We acknowledge our particular debt to Varsity and to the University News Release Service.

A tale of two cities

Rarely have I had the opportunity to visit Oxford and Cambridge within a very short period, yet this is what I have just done.

It is some 50 years since the last such comparison could be made, when I felt that Oxford overall was more interesting whilst the Backs were incomparable and nothing in Oxford could match the beauty and splendour of those views.

Since then the ugly force of tourism has blighted both cities and frankly now I would find it claustrophobic to study at either University.

However, the City of Cambridge has maintained its streets and buildings in a good condition, whereas Oxford City is now very seedy indeed around the centre and elsewhere.

Although it is very pleasant to have one's own Fellows Apartment and private garden within college when visiting, the security and vehicle restrictions within college, plus the seedy nature of Oxford city centre, plus the hordes of tourists make me question whether I would want to return.

Mass tourism has destroyed the pleasure of travel compared to 50 years ago; affluence and excessive population growth are problematic. Just like fine wine, art, cars and real estate, travel now is a status symbol. The selfie rules nearly everywhere.

Oxford is by no means alone in respect of urban deterioration; San Francisco is another example that comes to mind over the last 50 years, with crime rate increases too.

I now search out lesser known but characteristic environments to enjoy without the hordes – East Anglia so far is meeting these criteria (but don't tell anyone!).

A special challenge here for past members of Pembroke College. Is Pembroke the only Oxbridge college to have owned a significant Norman castle for centuries? Investigate the history of Framlingham Castle in Suffolk – a marvellous place to visit. 'Bloody Mary' required it to keep Lady Jane Grey's supporters, the Duke of Norfolk et al, at bay, including requisitioning cannon from ships off shore. Pembroke College owned the castle from 1636 to 1919.

by an Oxonian

What makes us human

If you've ever wondered what makes us human, you're in good company. Everyone from ancient philosophers to modern scientists have asked this in some way, and you will find just as many different answers. Cambridge's many museums, each a treasure trove of collected knowledge, may provide answers to this.

The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, presenting artefacts and artworks spanning thousands of years of human civilisation across vast geographical ranges, suggests creativity and culture could be the source of our humanity. Alternatively, the new Museum of Zoology gives a rather different picture. The sole representation of our species here is a single skeleton standing resolutely upright next to a collection of our less well-postured ape relatives. Here, it is just our morphology that sets us apart from all the others; the lonely skeleton reveals little more than that.

Humans do indeed have unique physical traits that differentiate us from closely related primates, the chimpanzees and bonobos of the *Pan* genus. We are fully bipedal, with curved spines and wide hips supporting our erect stance, while chimps tend to traverse on all fours. Where chimps are covered in hair, we are comparatively quite naked, with sweat glands taking over our role of thermoregulation. Our skulls are perhaps the most noticeably different: flattened at the front but bulging at the back, with small teeth yet a huge cranial capacity relative to body size. Despite significant underlying genetic similarities (99% shared DNA is the figure often repeated), we are distinct in a number of ways – but of course, the story doesn't end there.

None of these traits alone are particularly special. Standing on two legs is hardly new – the dinosaurs got there first. Mammalian hairlessness isn't unheard of, either – just ask the naked mole rat. Even the big brains, which confer abilities such as tool use, language and cooking, and have allowed us to become so dominant as a species, aren't even the largest to have existed. Rather, this honour belongs to our extinct cousin, *Homo Neanderthalensis*.

Neanderthals first emerged around 200,000 years ago and persisted until as recently as 30,000, overlapping significantly with our own species (the first fossils of which are dated to around the same time). When *Homo sapiens* spread from Africa to Eurasia, they found the Neanderthals already settled in, and far better adapted at that. Their

bodies were more robust and heavily muscled, with larger nasal cavities and other cold-climate specialisations, alongside the aforementioned larger brain. Ultimately, though, this seems not to have helped, as the only surviving member of the Homo genus is of course us.

Contrasting views exist of the fall of the Neanderthal and the rise of the human. Some paint it as a violent replacement, where humans outcompeted Neanderthals or actively slaughtered them. Alternatively, the extinction of Neanderthals may not have been the death of a species, but instead the gradual absorption of it into our own through interbreeding and hybridisation. The evidence for this is clear to see – the human genome contains a small amount of Neanderthal-derived DNA, between 1 and 4% in Eurasians.

From this perspective, it is not our differences that are interesting so much as our similarities. Neanderthals are known to have buried their dead, as well as caring for the elderly and infirm. They even possessed speech structures homologous to those in humans. Ultimately, human success likely was due to a combination of adaptations including mastery of fire and written communication, but these are logical progressions rather than drastic leaps – as humans, we're really not that dramatically different from Neanderthals, and indeed many of the other extinct Homo species.

Perhaps if we weren't alone in our genus, and other hominids lived alongside us, we wouldn't even feel the need to ponder such self-important, anthropocentric questions. A trip to the Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences reinforces this – pore through millennia of fossils, and you won't see a trace of humans or our immediate relatives, other than a wall display about Darwin at the far end of one corridor. In the grander sense, we really are just a drop in the ocean hardly worth mentioning – very humbling, and oddly a little comforting.

A meritocratic grammar school system would not improve social mobility

Columnist Angus Groom recently argued that with suitable reform, the grammar school system could contribute to a more 'meritocratic' education system. Given that 23% of home admissions in 2017 were from state grammar schools, despite them only educating 5% of all state school pupils, this issue is particularly relevant to Cambridge.

Coming from a state comprehensive school, I can attest that more able pupils are not challenged as

much as they could be. Limited resources and the never-ending task of controlling pupil behaviour mean teachers in comprehensives are sometimes unable to prevent more able pupils from becoming bored and frustrated. It seems inevitable that grammar schools can offer a more stimulating academic environment. Without two years in a superb state sixth form college, and encouragement from my family, I may never have considered Cambridge.

It seems likely that the insufficient challenging of able state school pupils contributes significantly to Cambridge's access problem, as an equally able student in a grammar school would have been pushed further, and is thus perhaps more likely to perform well and be admitted. Furthermore, grammar schools may exacerbate socioeconomic privilege. Groom acknowledges this: only 2.4% of grammar school pupils qualified for free school meals, compared to 8.9% of all pupils in local areas with grammar schools.

His argument suggests that meritocracy is the principle upon which an improved, fairer grammar school system could be built.

There is growing evidence that cognitive ability tests are predictive of wealth or career prospects, and there is a strong correlation between academic success and cognitive reasoning tests. So if the 11+ exam became truly 'meritocratic' (i.e. based on academic ability alone), it would undoubtedly fill grammar schools with people who score very well on tests of cognitive reasoning. But is state-sanctioned psychometric segregation of 11-year olds, whose developmental variation can be substantial, ethical? This is a vital consideration given that evidence points to grammar schools improving career prospects. Cambridge's admissions statistics show this. Even the most 'meritocratic' of grammar school systems would further stack the odds in favour of those for whom this is already the case.

People who perform less well in academic tests are every bit as worthy of support, especially given that most are likely bright young individuals with valuable skills in other areas. It is these people who are in danger of being left behind in a supposedly 'meritocratic' system, which is why I believe resources would be better spent on large state-run training institutions instead of reforming the grammar school system. Otherwise, we risk creating a sharp social divide and condemning large numbers of skilled young people to unnecessarily bleak prospects.

