Global Cambridge in Melbourne, Tuesday 25 July 6–8pm

In place of our usual lunch, meet up with fellow alumni and immerse yourself in the University's world-leading research at Global Cambridge in Melbourne. Open to alumni and guests. This event will be hosted by Professor Eilís Ferran, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Institutional and International Relations at the State Library of Victoria at 179 La Trobe Street. After a panel discussion about climate change, you'll have the opportunity to ask questions of our speakers and then join your fellow Cantabrigians for a drinks reception. This event will be free of charge. Booking is required – to book go to https://www.alumni.cam.ac.uk/events/global-cambridge-events-for-alumni/global-cambridge-in-melbourne

There are already more than 100 bookings so don’t delay. There is only room for 150.

Later in the year

Annual Dinner, Friday 15 September

We are pleased to announce that the Rev Dr Jeremy Morris, Master of Trinity Hall, will be our guest of honour at this year’s annual dinner, to be held in the usual venue. A reception for Trinity Hall alumni with the Master will precede the dinner. We are indebted to His Honour Justice Tony Pagone and Mr Patrick Moore for offering to host these two events.

Diary dates

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Last month

Lunch with Jonathan Reeve, Wednesday 21 June

There was a large attendance at this very topical event, which involved keen audience interaction from the start. Almost all of those present had shopped online in the past month and about 30% had shopped online with Amazon. Jonathan drew an analogy with Kodak, now defunct, who actually held the patent for the first digital camera but didn’t apply the knowledge. The secret of marketing is understanding what the customer really wants and then meeting that need. To quote an example: does the person looking for a ¼” drill bit really want the drill bit or do they want a ¼” hole? [Ed. Funny that a man working in the 21st century used feet and inches as an example!] The 20th century model had: manufacturers, distributors, stores then customers. Amazon seeks to eliminate both distributor and store by delivering direct to customer from the manufacturer. Surveys show that 95% of people don’t like going to supermarkets. Jonathan talked of a kitchen electronic device that the customer told every time they realised they were running out of something or were menu planning. This device (already available) then draws up a shopping list. The next development step is for the device to transmit its shopping list direct to Amazon without further human intervention.

Amazon will start by offering a wide range of established lines with which the shopper is familiar. It also offers home brands. The tricks of the trade for a regular battery purchaser runs as follows:

1. Purchaser buys Duracell batteries in supermarket.
2. Purchaser migrates to Amazon and buys Duracell batteries from habit.
3. After a few iterations, Amazon tries to entice purchased to its home brand battery by offering a hefty discount on home brand batteries.
4. After a few repeat home-brand battery orders, the discount disappears.

Those of our readers blessed with hearing aids will know that the device warns you shortly before the battery ‘expires’. In the (not too distant) future, imagine that the hearing aid, TV remote etc all tell the Amazon device as well; said device orders new batteries; batteries arrive even before you are aware that you will shortly need them. I emphasise the ‘not too distant’ part of the previous sentence.

Those familiar with martial arts will know that there are grades of belt from white, through yellow, green, blue and red to black. Amazon are at black belt standard for online shopping, compared with the average Australian online retailer’s green belt standard. Most Australian online stores have grafted online shopping onto their conventional stores, which is a convenient way to start. But Amazon have started as simply an online marketer. At present, conventional stores make money; multi-format (store + online facility) do not and purely online companies do not. But this will change in the next few years, although Amazon is not expecting to make a profit for another five years at least. Since it is the first US company to have its shares valued at over $1000 this may give you an insight into US investment thinking.

There followed a very lively question time on a wide range of topics. Jobs in Amazon are pretty boring and repetitive. In the hierarchy of Australian stores in descending order of price and width of product offering we would find IGA, followed by Coles and Woolworths, Aldi and finally Costco. In Jonathan’s view Amazon would aim to position itself just below Coles and Woolworths, Amazon are likely to concentrate their distribution centres in Sydney and Melbourne; residents of other cities could still order online but delivery will be much slower.

Your scribe posed a question on whether Amazon was aimed more at the ‘male type of shopper’ (who know exactly what he wants before entering the store) which was disallowed by the voices (the forces of political correctness). It is sad to see the suppression of free speech emerging in our society in ‘the land of a fair go’.

Commercials
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.

University’s £1 billion development begins to take shape
The first stage of building at Eddington – Cambridge’s brand new, £350 million suburb – has been completed. Swiles Court, which has 325 en-suite rooms purpose built for graduate students, is being leased to Girton College.

The accommodation complex, designed by award-winning architects RH Partnership, has a 24 hour porters’ lodge, a general meeting area, quiet study area, laundry facilities and shared kitchen and sitting rooms.

Swirles Court residents will also have access to three landscaped gardens which draw inspiration from traditional courts in Cambridge colleges. Designed to be ‘an exemplar of sustainability’, the complex has innovative features such as solar shading screens to prevent overheating in summer and perforated window surrounds to allow natural ventilation.

Experts have described it as a ‘milestone’ in the development of the new community at Eddington, which is set to open fully by the end of the year. As well as student accommodation, phase one includes 700 ‘affordable’ homes for University staff and 450 homes available to buy on the open market.

The sustainable urban community will also feature green spaces and a ‘market square’ with local amenities, including a 21,000 square foot branch of Sainsbury’s which is set to provide 150 new jobs for local people. There will also be a new community centre and performing arts centre in Eddington, called the Storey’s Field Centre.

Named after astronomer, mathematician and physicist Sir Arthur Eddington, the North West Cambridge development is located in the triangle between Madingley Road, Huntingdon Road and the M11.

Once completed, the entire North West Cambridge development will provide 3,000 new
homes, 2,000 rooms for postgraduate students, and 100,000 square metres of research space.

Half of the homes will be reserved for University and College staff, with rents capped at 30% of net salaries for postdoctoral researchers and other key academics. The University plans to sell the other half in order to recoup costs.

The main aim of the development is to encourage researchers to choose Cambridge over other competing universities, particularly those in the United States.

Despite still being the highest-ranked UK university, this year Cambridge came fifth in the QS World University Rankings, behind four US institutions.

Cambridge’s acute housing crisis has proven to be an increasing obstacle for recruitment and retention at the University, as other universities offer academics more attractive financial benefits.

Since the financial crisis, house prices in the city have risen by 86 per cent, higher than anywhere outside London. The new development forms part of the University’s strategy to combat the problem.

As well as housing, shops and a primary school, the development will also feature a nursery, a doctors’ surgery and several sports pitches.

The development has a strong sustainable focus, and features a site-wide drainage system and the largest rainwater harvesting network in the country, formed from specially created lakes and lagoons. Buildings will benefit from a special heating system, a communal underground waste and recycling network, which eliminates the need for individual wheelie bins. Residents will be encouraged to grow their own food in purpose-built allotments.

The site will be connected to Cambridge city centre through new cycle paths, and each resident will have access to secure indoor cycle storage.

Like Cambridge, May Balls are financially exclusive

My friends and I were talking about the slightly uncomfortable wastage of spraying people after exams – after all, you’re pretty much pouring champagne on the ground. ‘But then’, someone quipped, ‘isn’t that just what a May Ball is?’

While this may not be strictly accurate, the image bears an alarming resemblance to my albeit hazy memories of May Balls last year. As our conversation progressed, one friend recounted how at one particular ball, there were no bins – the expectation was that you would simply drop your finished food and drink on the ground, as there were staff employed purely to litter-pick synchronously. Anecdotes like this are ten-a-penny as May Balls seek each year to outdo their own record in terms of size, cost, scale and excess. Thus, the question arises: are May Balls unjustified excess or just a bit of well-deserved fun?

The obvious primary issue with May Balls is their financial exclusivity. With double dining tickets for Trinity and Magdalene costing £530 and £460 respectively, the dent in one’s finances is somewhat harder to stomach than the ‘sumptuous banquet’ on offer. It’s best not to dwell on exactly what one could buy for that money, but the general consensus is that it falls somewhere between a small holiday and a large pet. I went to Rome for a week last year on the money I’d failed to spend on a Jesus ticket. My friend remarked that our college’s drinks budget is larger than her dad’s salary.

Consistently described in tabloids as ‘the highlight of the social season’, whatever that means, we should spare a thought for those who can’t afford to go. When richer colleges offer summer travel grants for all manner of feebly justified gallivanting, and even the Cambridge Union condescends to give reduced membership rates to students on bursaries, it seems odd that May Balls market themselves as wholly indifferent to the financial constraints of being a student.

Financial exclusivity aside, May Balls face also the heavy charge of social exclusion, as a single white-tie clad moment has the power to stick two fingers up at the achievements of Access work which takes place throughout the year. Hypocrisy is rife in our conduct here – in CUSU, JCRs and minorities’ campaigns, we happily preach against using language which excludes or alienates particular groups, yet May Balls bandy around with their own esoteric vocabulary and codes of behaviour. While one could argue that this sense of exclusivity is necessary to the business model, perhaps to secure prestigious sponsors or attract suitably wealthy patrons for the VIP tickets, glimpsing through recent tabloid press coverage of the Balls reveals some pretty grim tendencies when it comes to Access.

Firstly, you’ll notice the alarming lack of diversity in the photo-articles. Reluctant as I am to accuse Daily Mail photographers of mis-demeanour, it strikes one as odd that every student at Cambridge is female and white. What’s
more, the students photographed are frequently described as ‘wealthy’, with one article happily transferring the epithet from ‘posh frocks’ to ‘posh students’ within the space of the headline and lead. With impressions such as this directly contradicting the message that Cambridge is open to students of all backgrounds, and reaching far more potential applicants than residents and opens days ever could, it is indisputable that May Balls stand for both social and financial exclusivity.

Cambridge is unashamedly intellectually and academically exclusive. However, what seems to happen here is that one form of exclusivity latches itself onto another. If anything, May Balls should draw our attention to the ways in which so-called intellectual exclusivity is bound up in social and financial factors.

Balls aren’t a waste of time – nobody could pretend to be too busy to spare a night – but they’re certainly a waste of money. Organised and commercialised fun can never beat spontaneity, and the best nights in Cambridge aren’t necessarily those with the biggest events budgets or smartest dress codes. In May Balls, pseudo-hedonism and college Snapchat filters mask social and financial exclusivity to disastrous consequence. So yes, May Balls are unjustified excess – but isn’t that an accusation we should be levying at Cambridge as a whole?

It’s a myth that hard work is all you need to succeed

Sir Alan Sugar, while far from being the first person I would label as a ‘hero’, is someone I liked as a kid: a funny old guy who humiliated posh idiots on national television. More recently, his habitual mocking of Piers Morgan (or ‘Piersy’ as he so gleefully refers to him) on Twitter has been a source of great entertainment during my exam-term procrastination breaks. But in the run-up to last week’s general election Lord Sugar was at his keyboard again, this time with Corbyn voters in his sightline. Calling upon his working class roots, he asked voters to trust in him as an ‘east end boy done good by honest graft’, advising them to avoid voting Corbyn for the ‘good of the country’.

While a whole other article might be dedicated to this tweet’s breed of patronising rhetoric, what irritated me perhaps even more was Sugar tapping into the unhelpful mantra so frequently espoused by successful people of his generation: work hard enough, and anything is possible.

It rears its head every time another ‘thinkpiece’ complains about the laziness of millennials, in spite of us being the first generation to experience unpaid work as the norm. It is cited to young black Americans in reference to Barack Obama’s political success, and by the fictional CEO in the BBC’s recent drama Clique, who calls for ‘alpha female’ recruits ‘done with whining’ and placing blame for gender inequality at the feet of women themselves. What Lord Sugar said was not untrue, but what he failed to acknowledge was both the relative uniqueness of his position, and the dwindling likelihood of the upward mobility he achieved in the context of today’s climate.

Under the Conservative government whom Sugar has advocated, child poverty has soared and inequality worsened, as the gap between rich and poor becomes ever-wider. Social mobility is simply harder today than it used to be, with students from disadvantaged backgrounds less likely to do well in school than their wealthier peers. It is unfair and disingenuous to suggest that the only thing standing in the way of success for working class, ethnic minority and LGBTQ+ people is their work ethic. By doing so, one effaces structural problems and issues entirely, acting as though a working class woman of colour is presented with exactly the same opportunities in life as those presented to a white privately educated man. While this level of equality is something many aspire to, it’d be absurd to pretend that it already exists.

Yet this is precisely what comments like Lord Sugar’s imply to young people especially, to whom much of his anti-Corbyn sentiment is directed. Yes, hard work and determination is almost always integral to success, but it is baffling to me that those like Sugar can so readily ignore or dispel the various, complex roadblocks that crop up on the way to it. The recent dramatisation of the Rotherham abuse scandal, for instance, showed nothing if not the contempt and disdain with which the working class teenagers involved were treated by local authority figures; dismissed as delinquent child prostitutes unworthy of help.

While discrimination like this still thrives, it is not enough to ask why they, the victims, are not doing enough; encouraging ‘hard graft’ must be paired with an understanding and will to rectify the structural issues that make that ‘graft’ much harder for some than others.