June 2017
Wed 21 Lunch with Jonathon Reeve

Lunch with Jonathon Reeve, Wednesday 21 June

Is Australia ready for Amazon?

The confirmation that Amazon will launch physical retail operations in Australia has been the biggest business story of the year. Retail is already going through a period of disruptive change, and Amazon’s launch is set to cause a further shift.

Author and consultant Jonathon Reeve will outline Amazon’s likely strategy and the impact on three different groups – consumers, existing retailers, and workers.

Jonathon’s talk is one that everyone can follow, not only those with a background in business and finance. He will also explain the latest thinking about ‘digital disruption’ to help you understand the dramatic changes affecting almost every business sector.

Jonathon Reeve (www.jonathanreeve.com.au) has worked in retail businesses on three continents for over fifteen years, and was part of the team that developed the operating model for Tesco, a global pioneer of online grocery retail.

Jonathon now consults on retail strategy and last-mile fulfilment. His recent book, Retail’s Last Mile: Why Online Shopping Will Exceed Our Wildest Predictions, explores the disruption of traditional retail by online shopping.

Jonathon read Economics at Cambridge’s newest undergraduate college, Robinson (1991–94) and also holds an MBA with distinction from INSEAD.

This lunch will take place at the Savage Club in Bank Place 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, 19 June, 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.

Later in the year

Global Cambridge in Melbourne, Tuesday 25 July

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 Ellis 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

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 Prof. Adrian Mouritz, Wednesday 17 May

Adrian began his talk in an unusual, but much appreciated, fashion by reminiscing on his time at Cambridge at Jesus College. He chose Jesus because the Master was Sir Alan Cottrell, a noted metallurgist who had previously served as Vice Chancellor and as Scientific Adviser to the Government.

Adrian then went on to discuss what’s driving the future of aircraft technologies:
- lighter, less polluting & cheaper aircraft
- green aircraft fuels
- quieter aircraft
- unmanned aerial vehicles (drones)
- stealthy ‘invisible’ aircraft
- smart & self-healing aircraft

Predicting the future of the aerospace industry is a bit like gambling: occasionally you get it right but more often you’re wrong. As evidence of this he quoted the (in)famous statement by Lord Kelvin in 1885, ‘Heavier-than-air flying machines are impossible.’

The main driver of the aircraft industry is that people want cheaper airfares, and not necessarily faster, more comfortable aircraft. In the past 30 years, costs per air mile have fallen from 32c to 15c (in 2011 USD). There is a very long lead time for completely new aircraft. The first Airbus A380 was delivered in 2007, but the demand for such an aircraft was identified in 1991!

Lightness has mainly been achieved by the introduction of carbon fibre composites, which began in the mid-1970s. Today’s Dreamliner is made of 50% of these composite materials.

Fuels make up 40% of the operating cost of aircraft, yet modern airplanes use only 20% of the fuel per seat used by the first commercial jetliner in the late 1950s, the Comet, due to numerous factors including engine efficiency. A major effort is being made to blend bio-derived fuels from high oil-bearing plants such as canola and soy beans with conventional petroleum-based jet fuels.

Hydrogen-fuelled aircraft are a thing of the not-too-distant future.

Noise is generated from all parts of the plane, not just the engines, which only generate 50% of the noise. The Boeing 707 generated 115dB whereas the Boeing 787 still generates 85dB. Further developments include continuous descent instead of the stepped descent where thrust is required at each horizontal level.

Drones are much in the news and uses include: remote sensing; transport; search and rescue; reconnaissance and precision military strikes. Development of biologically inspired drones using flapping wings is underway.

Stealth aircraft are designed with different, rather angular, surfaces and paint that absorbs radar beams so effectively that a large bomber aircraft appears to the radar system as a large bird.

The health of the aircraft can now be monitored very closely while in the air. This includes its structural integrity as well as the engines and other systems. Controllers on the ground can advise whether problems are serious or not and also make preparation for repairs to be carried out as soon as the plane has landed. Work is also beginning on mechanisms that allow faults to be self-repaired in flight, rather in the same way as the human body heals a small cut in the finger. All these developments make flying safer and reduce maintenance costs.

During a lively question time Adrian expressed the view that supersonic commercial transport would not be viable for at least 30 years. He also explained that there is a lot of first class aeronautical research carried out in Australia.

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.

Cambridge holds top spot in university league table

The University of Cambridge tightened its hold on the top spot of the Guardian’s league table of
UK universities, clinging onto first place for the seventh year running, and increasing the number of subject tables it leads to 13. Although Loughborough surged seven places this year to enter the top 10 at fourth place, there was scant change overall from last year’s rankings, with Oxford and St Andrews remaining in second and third place, respectively.

While Cambridge retained its perfect score of 100, its lead over Oxford narrowed, with Cambridge ahead by just 1.9 points, compared with 4.6 last year. But the subject tables also saw Cambridge overtaking Oxford in engineering to move into second place, with Imperial College London retaining the top spot. Cambridge once again scored relatively poorly for course satisfaction, finishing down eight places this year in 44th place. Oxford scored higher in the same metric, but fell a remarkable 29 spots to come in 35th place.

A university spokesman told Varsity ‘these ranking, like all the others, reflect the fact that the University of Cambridge is among a small group of the most respected and influential higher education institutions in the world.’ These figures follow recent announcements by the Complete University Guide and QS, ranking Cambridge as the best university in the UK. Cambridge puts in consistent showing in QS World Rankings

The methodology employed in the tables is noted for its focus on student experience, and uses a weighting system that minimises courses with small numbers of students and excludes quality of research altogether. Minor changes were made this year to how entry standards and results from the NSS were processed, to improve accuracy and fairness. The Guardian ranks universities nationally based on official data gathered by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and National Student Survey (NSS), according to their student-to-staff ratio; spending per student; average entry tariff; graduate career prospects; a ‘value-added’ score system comparing entry qualifications with final scores; and finalist satisfaction with course, teaching, and feedback.

But Sarah Stevens, the Russell Group’s head of policy, told the Guardian that though league tables provide useful information about university life to students, ‘it is hard for any university ranking to capture the full student experience that an institution provides’. Prospective students, she added, should ‘look beyond league tables to pick the course that is right for them’.

Exam interrupted after transcripts handed out to students

A Spanish exam was interrupted this afternoon when students were accidentally given copies of the transcript of a video clip to be used in the exam.

The exam, held at Lady Mitchell Hall on the Sidgwick site, assesses Spanish through Audio-Visual Media, a component of the SPB3 paper. It is sat by second-year students taking post-A-level Spanish.

The exam requires candidates to write about and answer comprehension questions on a video clip between eight and ten minutes long, which is played twice in the examination. Candidates are given two minutes before the video is first played in which to read the question paper.

Toby Ashworth, a student of French and Spanish at Gonville & Caius College who was sitting the exam, told Varsity that the issue was first identified during the two-minute reading period allotted before the exam. On opening the paper, he said, students found ‘the transcript of the whole video’, printed alongside ‘THIS IS THE TRANSCRIPT FOR EXAMINER’S USE ONLY’.

Holly Twist, a student of Spanish and Arabic at St Catharine’s College who also sat the exam, said after the error had been discovered, the exam papers and transcripts were handed back in: ‘We thought maybe the exam would be cancelled and everyone was laughing and looking at each other’.

She added that ‘people were running around’ and an invigilator made a telephone call. ‘Then they just settled on literally ripping the papers in half in front of us and handing them all back out again [with transcripts removed]. But then some people got handed the transcripts again on their own that were supposed to be in the bin instead of the papers so it was just all a bit of a mess.

Ashworth added that invigilators ‘kept screwing it up and nearly giving the transcript back’. He said that there ‘hadn’t been enough time to look at the transcript’ before the papers were collected back in.

Twist concluded: ‘Anyway then we just started the exam ten minutes late but [it] really wasn’t appreciated given everyone was obviously nervous already and it happened after the exam officially started.’

Last year, a first-year Italian exam had to be cancelled after answers were reportedly leaked online.
'Voluntourism' is just one way we’re still wedded to colonialism

It’s getting to that time of year again when everyone is looking towards summer to get them through the despair of exam season. Suddenly my emails are filling up with offers to ‘Volunteer with elephants for 10% off’ and ‘Help build a local school in Ghana’, while I hear numerous students talk excitedly about how they are going to teach English in developing countries.

Indeed, amongst university and gap year students, ‘voluntourism’ is becoming an increasingly popular addition to their travels. This seems harmless: surely teaching English to local children is a better way to spend your summer than drinking cheap vodka and listening to house music in Malia? Nonetheless, we need a more honest conversation about what these volunteers are truly contributing to these regions.

This is not meant as an attack on volunteers. In most cases I am certain that they genuinely believe they’re helping these communities. However, good intentions by themselves are never enough. To make a difference prospective volunteers either ought to have skills which would be of use to these communities, or volunteering schemes should do more to help them develop these skills before they go away. A good example is the OSCA programme, which offers fairly comprehensive training before students depart.

Yet the sad truth is that this is a rare occurrence. More disappointingly, when people speak of their volunteering it’s striking how much they talk about their own spiritual gains from the experience. Cultural differences are rarely acknowledged, either. It’s not overly difficult to learn a bit of the language of the countries volunteers visit, but you’re hard pressed to find people who actually do.

However, more often than not the issue is not with the volunteers but with the charities themselves. Many of them appear to be more business-orientated than focused on providing meaningful solutions to poverty, preferring to spend a disproportionately high level of their donations on photo-ops and advertising. Meanwhile, local people and their cultures are overwhelmingly excluded: volunteers with little or no construction experience are brought in to build houses which local builders could have done themselves. Citizens of these communities are presented as passive victims in need of support. Much greater efforts ought to be made to engage and include them in such schemes, as well as remaining respectful of local traditions, beliefs, and culture. They know a lot more about the issues they face than NGOs and volunteers, meaning the exclusion of locals only serves to hinder their community’s development.

The idea that struggling communities need Westerners to come and lift them out of poverty is a perpetuation of the centuries-old ‘White Man’s Burden’ myth, and furthers the perception of the West as the pinnacle of civilisation. In fact, not only do we need a serious conversation about what Western tourists are contributing to local communities, we need to think about what the West as a whole is contributing to these countries.

In the case of Africa, it’s hard to contemplate why the world’s richest continent in terms of natural resources has a life expectancy which is on average thirty years lower than in Western countries. As author and filmmaker Malene Bart-Williams said in her TED talk, ‘the aid is not coming from the West to Africa, but from Africa to the Western world’. The truth is that the West overwhelmingly relies on developing countries for natural resources, and preventing the development of the continent is the best way Western countries can get the cheapest price for these goods.

We can have as many volunteers going to the continent as we like but meaningful change will only occur if and when Western governments end their enforcement of their neoliberal agenda in Africa. Although Cambridge is strongly Remain, greater attention ought to be shown to the EU’s darker side, for example heavily subsidised imports that hinder the development of local industry in regions of Africa. From ‘voluntourism’ to the EU, these are all signs that the West has failed to rid itself of its colonial mindset. Not only do we need to provide more effective volunteering schemes abroad, but pressure should be put on governments to change policies at home.