

# Selwyn

The magazine  
for alumni and friends  
of Selwyn College,  
Cambridge



# 2022

Issue 29 Summer 2022

## A Cambridge Summer - at last







Editorial

It's not exactly news. Students having lunch together in Hall and socialising in the college gardens and working collaboratively in the library are what we would regard as business as usual - but it is the novelty of this all being possible again after two years of the pandemic which made us choose our cover photo. It's part of a photographic essay on Selwyn this summer which you can see on pages 8 and 9 of this edition of our magazine.

But there is plenty of real news too. We begin with three articles about Selwynites who have been at the centre of global events, and the first is our fellow Jessica Gardner's account of the biggest story in the university's history as measured by the impact it made worldwide across a multitude of different platforms. It was quite a thing for the University Library to announce that it had lost one of its greatest treasures, but the happy ending more than justifies the decision to launch a public appeal.

The two subsequent pieces show the grimmer side of 2022. We have watched with horror the devastation of Ukraine after the Russian invasion, and our alumnus Francis Scarr was in Moscow when the tanks rolled into the neighbouring state. Francis's work for BBC Monitoring has generated a number of scoops about the way the Kremlin is thinking, and it is all the more striking that his scrutiny of Russian television is based on learning the language from scratch when he came to Selwyn. I have been impressed by seeing someone I knew as a recent undergraduate now giving his analysis on BBC Television to an attentive John Simpson.

Then there is politics and Partygate. Many of the revelations on activities at Downing Street came from the Mirror group of newspapers, and one of the most senior figures there - editing the Sunday Mirror and the People - is Selwyn alumna Gemma Aldridge. When we spotted her appointment, there was some surprise that she had gone from studying Modern Languages here to one of the top jobs on the tabloids; but she explains how it happened in another fascinating feature.

Later in the magazine, and well away from the 'breaking news', we relax with other Selwynites who share their passions with us. Hugh Laurie tells us why he wanted to direct the adaptation for television of an Agatha Christie novel, with the added bonus that he came here last summer to record the choir's contribution to the soundtrack. And Mark Vanhoenacker offers us a gentle landing in an account of his journey from Grange Road to the flight deck of a Boeing 787.

There are briefings, too, on the latest college developments. We now have a schools liaison officer in Yorkshire, which is pleasing to Bradfordians like me and fulfils a vital college purpose - as Joe Stanley explains on page 22. We also invite you to meet more of our fellows, including the new chaplain; and there is a lovely reminiscence about Selwyn's history from my distinguished predecessor Sir David Harrison.

So we have insights into the past as well as the present, and we hope they add up to some enjoyable



summer reading - with a reminder of just how special this college and its people are.

Roger Mosey, *Master*

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**Development & Alumni Office Team**  
Development Director  
Mike Nicholson  
(development-director@sel.cam.ac.uk)  
Major Gifts and Legacy Manager  
Sam Davis (sjdd2@cam.ac.uk)  
Senior Development Officer  
Susannah Clarke (sc2135@cam.ac.uk)  
Alumni & Events Manager  
Shona Winnard (smw59@cam.ac.uk)  
Magazine Editor  
Christine McDonald (cmm95@cam.ac.uk)

The Old Library  
Selwyn College, Grange Road  
Cambridge CB3 9DQ  
T: +44 (0)1223 335843  
E: alumni-office@sel.cam.ac.uk  
www.selwynalumni.com

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SELWYN COLLEGE

140 years



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SELWYN IN THE NEWS

GLOBAL APPEAL

# Return of Darwin's notebooks

The last thing Jess Gardner expected when she became the University Librarian was to be at the centre of one of the biggest news stories the University has generated. She tells us the inside story.

You doubtless have heard about the disappearance over twenty years ago of two Charles Darwin notebooks and their mysterious safe return just a few weeks ago.

Many of you will share the sense of heartbreak I experienced not long after joining the University in 2017, when I learnt the two notebooks, one containing Darwin's iconic tree of life sketch, were missing from the collection.

For many years, previous University Librarians believed that the notebooks had been misplaced in the vast storerooms and collections of Cambridge University Library. Despite a number of searches over the intervening years, they remained undiscovered.

But I felt a new approach was essential, and determined I would leave no stone (or book) unturned in my quest for the safe return of the notebooks. We began a new phase of forensic searching of target storage areas. At the same time I reached out for guidance from national experts in cultural theft and recovery. This led to my conclusion that the notebooks had most likely

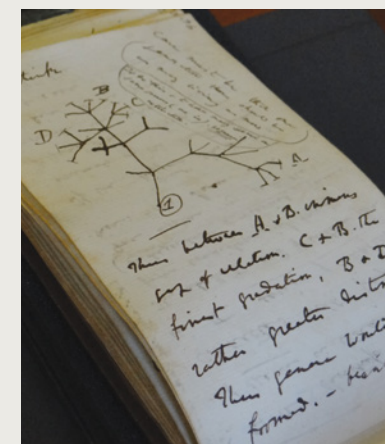
been stolen. The idea for a public appeal began to take shape.

Stories of success shared by the art and antiquities experts at the Metropolitan Police gave me heart; yet there were serious risks that had to be weighed and considered. Getting the tone right when we asked the public for help was vital, and that informed the decision in the media plan to approach the BBC - factual, trusted, global reach - for a potential exclusive.

I knew I would have to be the face of the appeal. This was my job and my decision, ultimately, as head of the Cambridge University Library, and I felt the weight and responsibility of a tradition going back over 600 years. It took months to prepare to go live with the appeal.

We filmed with the BBC arts correspondent in a magnificent book-lined room in the Library which houses a bust of Charles Darwin, and somehow his presence gave me strength.

Darwin's 'Tree of Life' sketch



Notebooks B and C.  
Inset: University Librarian  
Jess Gardner



In November 2020 the University launched the appeal. By 6am a team of us were in the Library, with the BBC exclusive running and the phonedlines ringing with requests for interviews. The response was tremendous. I can't thank the public enough. The story went round the world appearing in over 2,600 media outlets. It wasn't easy to be in the public eye; it's not what librarians train for... but I was never more sure it was the right thing to do. The appeal attracted lots of messages and everything relevant was passed to the police. Over time all went quiet... until an early spring day in March 2022.

The missing notebooks were returned anonymously to a public corridor in the University Library, outside my office. They were left in a bright pink gift bag, containing the original archive box (empty) and a large brown plain envelope on which a message had been typed, 'Librarian / Happy Easter / X'.

It's hard to contain, even now, the sense of excitement - and trepidation - on opening that parcel. Inside the envelope was a tightly wrapped clingfilmed parcel, through which we could see the aged leather covers and labels for Notebook B

and Notebook C, for which we had been looking for over two decades.

You can imagine the nerve-racking few days waiting for police permission to unwrap the package - a task that finally fell to the head of the Library's Conservation Studio, with the steadiest hands. It was the first time I'd ever seen the famous tree of life sketch in Darwin's own hand, and that moment will stay with me for life.

We went through four stages of authentication with different specialists - from archivist to academic to antiquarian book trade - and every single page of the notebooks were scrupulously checked.

To tell the world what happened, we again filmed an exclusive with the BBC. This time I couldn't stop smiling. The day the story broke is a blur. Interviews with 'The Times', 'BBC Breakfast', 'New York Times', 'Sydney Morning Herald' and so many others rolled into one another. Everyone wanted to share the good news, and the remarkable return of the notebooks featured in double the number of headlines to the original appeal: over 6,400 media outlets. The public appeal had worked.

There are mysteries still to be solved, and I know it is tempting to speculate. It's a live police investigation, of course, but everyone on social media has a theory, from the notebooks having been lost in time with Bill and Ted to a conspiracy of finches...

But the notebooks are home and safe and exactly where they should be so future generations can enjoy them, and like me, feel part of Darwin's story.

I am so grateful to everyone who helped, and to the friendship of the Selwyn community throughout.

To say thank you, the notebooks will be on display for the public to enjoy (under very strict security conditions) from July in the Library's forthcoming exhibition, 'Darwin in Conversation'.

'Darwin in Conversation - The endlessly curious life and letters of Charles Darwin' is open to the public from 9 July to 4 December 2022, in the Milstein Exhibition Centre, Cambridge University Library. 09.00-18.30 Monday-Friday and 09.00-16.30 Saturdays (closed Sundays). Free and open to all.



SELWYN IN THE NEWS WAR IN EUROPE

# Russia invades Ukraine

**There was shock and outrage when Russia launched its attack on Ukraine early in 2022. It is a war that has had appalling consequences for the people of Ukraine with a refugee crisis and devastation across much of the country. When the conflict broke out, Selwyn alumnus Francis Scarr (SE 2013) was in Moscow working for BBC Monitoring - which follows the Russian state media and analyses how the war is being reported. Francis had to leave Moscow after restrictions on the foreign media were introduced, but he continues to appear on BBC television.**



**Above:** After leaving Moscow Francis has frequently appeared on BBC television and radio to explain the latest developments in the crisis.

**Right and opposite page:** State TV has enormous sway over public opinion in Russia and has wholeheartedly backed the war.

As Russia continued to mass troops and armour on Ukraine's border over the winter, one question from friends kept on appearing on my phone: "What is Putin up to?" With Moscow now being accused of war crimes on an almost daily basis, it pains me to admit that I waded the question away time and time again. Like all the other journalists I knew in Moscow, I was convinced the Russian president was just rattling his sabre. All he wanted, we agreed, was to force the West to budge on security demands he had made back in December.

I'd been living in the Russian capital since 2018, working for BBC Monitoring, a division of the UK's public broadcaster responsible for keeping an eye on the world's media. One of my tasks is to spend hours submerged in the alternative reality of state TV, where Russia is the victim of Western aggression and is bravely defending the sovereignty that Vladimir Putin re-established after the 1990s, when the country was humiliatingly brought to its knees.

Daytime viewing on Russia's main channels is dominated by so-called political talk shows, but they're far from 'Question Time'. They almost never discuss events in Russia, instead focusing on its "enemies" - Ukraine, the US, and often the UK. Until the war began, each panel would feature token Russian "liberals" and Ukrainians - though of course never any real opposition figures - who provided a façade of genuine debate.

These panellists were the target of loaded questions and interruptions from the presenters, and even had the volume of their mics turned down so that they could

be outshouted.

As Western officials warned of an imminent invasion in mid-February, an editor in London asked me if the typical rhetoric had been ratcheted up. "No," I replied assuredly. Even as western media and politicians insisted that Russian tanks would roll into Ukraine imminently, Russian state TV continued to laugh it all off.

After one such forecasted invasion date came and went, a prominent talk show host joked that Russia's troops had "treacherously overslept".

Almost four years of exposure to the constant flow of lies, conspiracy theories and cynicism of Russian state media has made it impossible for me to trust anything I hear from its presenters and talking heads. Despite this, on the ground in Moscow, nothing had changed at all. I felt no sense of a country being mobilised for war with its neighbour.

But on 21 February, I felt a change in the wind. For days Putin's spokesman had been rubbishing rumours of Russian plans to recognise the two Russian-backed proxy states in eastern Ukraine, the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics. But that afternoon state TV reported that the president would make a televised address later in the day. After walking home from work in the February chill, I made sure to tune in.

As he began to speak, one thing struck me instantly. What was supposedly a spontaneous reaction to a recent escalation of fighting in eastern Ukraine had clearly been on the back burner for months. For the best part of an hour, he launched a fiery diatribe from his desk in the Kremlin, appearing visibly angry as he railed against Ukraine's "neander-

thal and neo-Nazi" government policies.

Since the autumn NATO's eastwards expansion had - at least publicly - been the target of his ire. But it was clear to me that evening that his visceral hatred had a much more specific target - Ukraine's very right to exist. "Ukraine has never actually had stable traditions of real statehood," he seethed, adding that the country had been "placed under external control."

In hindsight, it feels like Putin's ultimate objective had been staring me in the face ever since I began watching Russian state TV in 2018. In fact, it began in 2014, when Ukraine's pro-European revolution saw the country turn westwards. Russia responded by annexing the Crimean peninsula, subsequently bringing upon itself a raft of economic sanctions from the West.

I was only in my second term at Selwyn then, still getting to grips with the Russian language's verbs of motion and struggling my way through Mikhail Lermontov's 19th century novel 'A Hero of Our Time'. I hadn't even heard of Vladimir Solovyov or Olga Skabeyeva, two of the Kremlin's mouthpieces who are both now under Western sanctions. The demonisation of one nation in the eyes of another doesn't happen overnight. Russian rhetoric about Ukrainian "Nazis" may be new to most people in the UK, but it is an old trope that has been amplified by Russian state media since 2014.

Since then, on Russian TV screens, Ukrainians have been depicted as inferior at best and sub-human at worst. 'Surely they have access to other sources of news?', you might find yourself asking at this point. 'It's not North Korea, after all.'

The country did indeed have



**“ On Russian TV screens, Ukrainians have been depicted as inferior at best and sub-human at worst. ”**

a lively landscape of independent websites and investigative outlets, as well as a handful of broadcasters that refused to toe the Kremlin's line. But since the war started, the state has cracked down hard on any dissent, introducing draconian legislation as well as blocking or banning websites and social media platforms.

Even if Russians are not convinced that MI6 was responsible for atrocities in Bucha and Kramatorsk (as I've heard many times on TV), over several years they have been conditioned to think that the Ukrainian "Nazis" had it coming.

I was of course devastated to leave Moscow at 24 hours' notice in early March, abandoning the friends I had made, my newfound passion for cross-country skiing, and the diverse range of eateries representing many of Russia's 200 or so ethnic groups.

But after a few disorientating days back in the UK, my thoughts turned elsewhere. Back in Moscow, male friends feared they would be called up to serve in the Kremlin's senseless war. So far, Putin is yet to play the mobilisation card, but even so, many friends find themselves becoming "traitors" in the eyes of their government. And of course I was concerned for colleagues in Kyiv, some of whom were spending the first nights of the war sheltering underground from the Kremlin's missiles. After hearing reports of Russian strikes on northeastern Ukraine, I sent a message to an acquaintance I had met while backpacking through Ukraine in 2018 to ask if she was safe. "We're in Kharkiv," she replied, "and we're just praying that it ends."

Follow Francis Scarr on Twitter @francis\_scarr





SELWYN IN THE NEWS EDITOR'S VIEW



still remember so clearly the first time I saw Selwyn College. It was during that magical twilight hour that falls on a bitterly cold afternoon in Lent Term. Rectangles of yellow lamplight flickered on, one at a time, from the ivy-clad walls of Old Court as the sound of Evensong drifted out of the chapel doors and dusk gave way to darkness.

To a sceptical 16-year old – there only because the Student Union’s Shadowing Scheme had promised two days off school to A-level pupils from ‘access cold spots’ – it was unexpectedly, almost disappointingly, magical.

“I don’t really think Cambridge is for me,” I’d told my two mentors as we’d crunched along the gravel path from The Sidgwick Site. But my immunity to Selwyn’s special atmosphere wasn’t as strong as I’d wagered.

Less than two years later, I was treading the same gravel path to lectures at the MML faculty. The students I’d shadowed had become – and remain – my friends and I was on the same JCR committee I’d watched host hustings in the college bar during my stay. The Fellow who’d let me sit in on a supervision about the poetry of Heinrich Heine was now supervising me, and Evensong was the sound-

track for my new friends and I as we arrived at the bar for pre-Formal Hall drinks.

That irresistible draw to a place was an incredible feeling, the like of which I didn’t experience again until a full decade later, when I first entered the newsroom of the ‘Sunday Mirror’.

As I emerged by escalator at the mouth of Canary Wharf tube station and looked up at One Canada Square before my first day as a reporter, it was in similar, cold, crisp weather. I remember counting up the bright yellow squares of the windows on the South Colonnade until I reached 22 – the floor where the newsroom then was.

But this time, it was with total certainty that inside was where I belonged. Since graduating from Selwyn I’d paid my dues. A year working in a motorway service station and then a call centre were followed by several years scraping by on terrible money in entry-level reporting jobs, despite having completed the well-respected, post-graduate journalism course at City University.

While my friends were mostly on well-paid trainee schemes at law firms and investment banks, I was on little more than minimum wage, lucky to take the box room in a string of run-down but full-of-fun South London house shares with fellow Selwynites.

I covered court cases and did ‘death knocks’ for a press agency – exactly what it sounds like: knocking on the doors of people whose family members had been killed, often in horrific circumstances. I even penned a column for a women’s magazine called ‘The Sex Spy’, which required me to witness things in the dungeons of Soho that were way beyond my pay grade.

But all along, I’d been drawn to the ‘Mirror’. It was the paper I grew up with, it reflected my values, my politics and my belief that journalism should be accessible to all, hold power to account and give voice to those who have no other platform.

On my third time of asking, then Editor of the ‘Sunday Mirror’ Alison Phillips finally said “yes” and gave me a job. The advice from my previous boss, who had worked in the same newsroom was simple: “Now, you say ‘yes’ to everything.” So that became the mantra.

Can you find cocaine at Wimbledon? Yes. Can you get an interview with Boris Johnson? Yes.

What about his mistress? Always yes. Saying that little word got me some wonderful jobs. I went to Cape Town for the 25th anniversary of Nelson Mandela’s prison release to track down and reunite his inner circle from the iconic image of him leaving the prison gates on Freedom Day. I worked undercover for months to expose an online paedophile ring and outed poney witch doctors charging vulnerable cancer victims thousands for quack cures. When one World Cup came around, I busted a counterfeit goods racket operating from a hidden warehouse in the shadow of Strangeways Prison. There were terror attacks, mass shootings in the US and elections, all in a day’s work.

“  
The more serious the news event, the more important it became for me to get it right and to give voice to those it affected.  
”

And there were lighter jobs too – interviewing TV stars and working on the amazing Pride of Britain Awards. Soon I was the one asking the questions and willing reporters to answer in the affirmative as I was quickly promoted to work on the features desk.

My promotion to an editing role was a baptism of fire but I loved it and in due course, I was named Head of Features in the hot summer of 2017 which lurched from one tragedy to the next. It started with the tragic Manchester Arena bombing, followed by the London Bridge terror attack and then the Grenfell Tower disaster. The more serious the news event, the more important it became for me to get it right and to

give voice to those it affected.

As I worked up the ranks, I realised the end game for me was always going to be editing. I wanted to be the one driving the agenda and deciding what deserved to be on the front page or the homepage of the website.

So, I was delighted a year ago after two years deputising, to be appointed the Editor not only of the ‘Sunday Mirror’ but its sister title, ‘The People’. I never imagined it would happen so quickly, but it’s been up there with going to Selwyn as one of the best experiences of my life.

Prince Philip died a few weeks after I took over and since then it’s been non-stop. A successful Euros campaign, a Prime Ministerial wedding and a Royal baby – and of course the second half of the pandemic.

In December, the ‘Sunday Mirror’ was the first paper to print a photograph of Boris Johnson at a party in Downing Street, during lockdown – something I’m incredibly proud of. And of course, as Putin’s war rages in Ukraine, there is no let-up in the importance of delivering the news.

They say editing is a lonely job and in some ways that’s true. You’re surrounded by people in a noisy newsroom but when it comes to pushing the button on a story or deciding on a front page image, the decisions are yours alone.

It’s in those tricky moments, I think, that those magical years at Selwyn serve me best. People are often shocked to hear I studied languages and comment on the fact I don’t use my degree at all in my job, but I beg to differ.

When I sit in news conference, make impactful decisions (for right or for wrong), have to think quickly and critically, I’m using the skills I honed in supervisions in the Tower Room on a Friday morning with Dr Tilby after a night of Formal Hall and then Cindy’s.

And after we go to print at night and there’s no going back from a tough news day, it’s often my old Selwynites I turn to, to go for a drink or for some banter on our WhatsApp group. Because the other thing Selwyn taught me was the value of enduring friendships...and the power of a good glass of wine.

Follow Gemma Aldridge on Twitter @MirrorGemma



One of the defining political stories of recent months has been Partygate: the consequences of rule-breaking in Downing Street during the lockdown. A number of key developments in the affair were broken by the Mirror group of newspapers, where Selwyn alumna Gemma Aldridge (SE 2002) is editor of the Sunday Mirror and the People. Here she explains how she went from Grange Road to the modern version of Fleet Street.

# From Selwyn bar to Partygate



PHOTO STORY

# Back to normal

Photographs by Martin Bond

Summer is particularly special in Cambridge. There are exams, it's true; but there are also the long days of sunshine, the punting trips on the river, and the outdoor drinks with friends - before the excitement of May Week and the creation of memories that will last a lifetime.

All this was disrupted by the pandemic. The Easter term of 2020 saw the college closed for most students and our operations moved online. The summer of 2021 was definitely better, with most students back in residence - but many meetings were outside-only and they were limited to small numbers. There were no May Balls anywhere in the city.

So specially for this magazine, we asked the photographer Martin Bond to capture something simple but wonderful: the fact that Easter term 2022 has been entirely normal, with students free to enjoy themselves (as well as working, of course) and

with all the pleasures of Cambridge available to them. Selwyn's Hall has been packed - indeed, the queues for brunch have been a talking point - and the gardens have hosted impromptu picnics. Elsewhere on the site, the new Bartlam Library has offered an airy retreat when revision is needed, with friendly faces nearby.

It has been time to breathe again; to enjoy what we have missed; and to realise how much it means to be together again.





**Introducing three more Selwyn Fellows: the new Chaplain and Dean of Chapel, Reverend Dr Arabella Milbank Robinson; Professor Grant Stewart - a surgeon specialising in kidney cancer and Dr Vicky Young - a lecturer in Japanese literature and culture.**

# Meet the Fellowship

## Reverend Dr Arabella Milbank Robinson

College Position:  
Chaplain & Dean of Chapel

**You come from a family that combines the academic with the theological and religious - so was that always a direction in which you yourself wanted to travel?** The first ambition I remember having was to be an astronaut! I suppose I've kept that aspiration towards discovery of the heavens in a different form. Where I am now may look like an obvious place to have ended up with parents who are a lay academic theologian and a priest-theologian, but in some ways that background has made it a more difficult calling to forge, and balance to find, in my own right. But you are right to say that I am fortunate enough to have been born into a family where life's biggest questions were always on the table. The language and shape of theology always seemed to provide the most interesting and beautiful responses to the joys and pains of the world I was discovering.

That said my family will tell you I was always contrary, argumentative and bullish rather than a passive recipient of their views! At a tender age I made a solemn blood-vow with my best friend that we would grow up to 'save the world'. From then on I had to find ways to bring together my nerdy scholarly side with that deeply-rooted desire to make a difference.



Reverend  
Dr Arabella Milbank  
Robinson

**We noticed that you and your husband James were married by Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, who is your godfather. So you seem always to have had strong Church of England connections?** My mother, father and Rowan were friends in Cambridge in the 1970s, when they were all still in their 20s. A family friend recently gave me long-haired photographs of them all in a Westcott House production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream!* When Rowan and Jane became my godparents Rowan had just moved from being Dean of Clare to take up a chair in theology at Oxford. I remember visiting them at Christ Church when I was a small girl, being shown pictures of dodos and getting him and Lewis Carroll, the real and the fictional Oxford thoroughly mixed



**It is a huge delight of mine to be working with those who are right at the start of their lives and loves**



up. I join with so many in my love for and admiration of Rowan in his public embodiment of holiness, and as an increasingly rare example of a theologically brilliant shepherd of the Church.

**You had some contrasting experiences in your schooling - Nottinghamshire and the United States?**

Yes! And before that St Alban's R.C. Primary School, Cambridge, so you cannot imagine the culture shock... I had a proper US Middle and High School education, with cheerleaders, an American football team, jocks, nerds, and drama class drop-outs.

**Your academic specialism became medievalism - what was it that attracted you to that time?**

My first degree at New College, Oxford was in English and French, which included studying Old French and Anglo-Norman, and a paper in Medieval Scottish Literature. It's a time that draws you in through all that endures, that can still be touched and seen - like medieval cathedrals and vellum manuscripts. And everything that's been lost, destroyed, reviled or forgotten - through actual iconoclasm but also like the meaning of a particular marginal illumination or lyric image. And I had this legacy of my knowledge of the stories and ideas of Christianity which unlocked some of it.

**You spent quite a lot of time in the academic world, so was it quite a contrast to go to the role of a priest in a small town in Lincolnshire?**

We've spent seven very formative years in Lincolnshire, in Grantham where my husband (who is also a priest) had his training post and our time in Louth. My husband's family go back as saddlers in this very rural county for several generations. At first I was amazed to find that in many respects the Archers is a piece of closely observed social realism...! It is one of the privileges of priesthood that you grow to love the people and place you serve very much. I have found immense riches of character and culture in the Wolds market town of Louth, and my time there has formed me in love and service. I think I am returning to the academic world much better able to serve it than when I left it.

**Why did you then decide to apply to be dean of chapel here?**

I'd begun to discern chaplaincy might be right for me, a natural fit for my combination of more academic and priestly 'halves'. But it was only when

I read the Selwyn job description that I actually felt excited for the first time. It evoked wonderfully what the role and niche of Dean and Chaplain here might be. In many ways what I will hope to do here won't be so different from what I do as a parish priest: be as present as I possibly can be to the whole community, serving a people and a place in whatever ways are asked of me. But Cambridge, and Selwyn, are genuinely special and distinct. And it is a huge delight of mine to be working with those who are right at the start of their lives and loves, helping a whole learning generation to fully discern who they are and could be as people.

**What will your personal style will be?**

In Hugh I have a wonderful predecessor to emulate! It is instinctive in me to be quite responsive and empathetic, and that's also what priesthood is about. We 'rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep'. That said, I have had great fun so far as I've begun to get to know the college, and joy is a Christian virtue. So I hope I'll have a joyful style! You'll have to keep me to that.

**If you could define success, what is it you'd like to achieve at the college in the coming years?**

I would like to have justly won the trust of the college community. Insofar as it is possible, I'd like no member of it, staff, student or Fellow, to feel they had no-one to talk to. And, in a college that takes just pride in its approach to academic access, I'd like to have matched that with spiritual access. I want us to be a college where everyone, no matter their background, finds through the chapel and chaplain opportunities to explore questions proper to faith and belief.

## Professor Grant Stewart

College Position:  
Assistant Dean, College Lecturer in  
Medicine  
University Department:  
Department of Surgery  
University Position:  
Professor of Surgical Oncology  
Subject: Cancer Surgery  
Research interests:  
Early identification and optimisation  
of the management of initially localised  
kidney cancer

**The name suggests a Scottish background? Give us a couple of headlines about your early life.**

Yes, it does not get much more Scottish than Grant Duncan Stewart! My parents are both Scots from the Perthshire area. Apparently we are descendants of the Flesher Stewarts of Blair Atholl rather than the Royal line... I was brought up in Lytham St Anne's (aka posh Blackpool) as my father took a job as a Consultant Rheumatologist at Blackpool Victoria Hospital, from what I can tell so that he could play golf at Royal Lytham and St. Anne's Golf Club. At school I was labelled as a Scot, but when I moved to medical school in Edinburgh, they just saw me another Sassenach trying to be Scottish; I lack the accent you see...

**At what point did you become interested in a medical career?**

I was sensationally average in every respect until about 13 years of age when I realised that through hard work and persistence I could be good at something and that something was running. I went from the last pick at football or rugby to being the best in the county at 800m and cross country. I applied the same ethos to my school work and was amazed to find myself towards the top of the year. My father was a doctor but he gave pills to patients to make them feel better, and that did not interest me. But when he showed me X-rays I recall asking who put the hip replacement in, and that seemed the interesting part to me. I spent some time with a friend of his who was a general surgeon, and I loved spending all day in theatre watching him use his hands to cure patients. It seemed fun working with a big team from diverse backgrounds.

**And did you always see yourself as ending up as a surgeon?**

Well, I really wanted to be a pilot. But when I failed the Ishihara test plate for colour blindness and asked what that meant, I was told, 'not much, you just cannot do certain jobs like a pilot'; I was devastated. But yes, following these experiences of going to theatre I wanted to go into medicine to be a surgeon. Surprisingly I managed to get a last minute place to study medicine at the University of Edinburgh (Cambridge would not have me). I recall the dean of the medical school asking the 200 medical freshers on our first day who wanted to be a GP, a physician, etc. When he got to 'who wants to be a surgeon' half the year put their hands up. This was a low moment, because I felt I had no chance. But by the end of six years at medical school only five of



Professor Grant Stewart



**I am leading the campaign for a second surgical robot at Addenbrookes Hospital**



us made it into Basic Surgical Training in Edinburgh, and I was one of the five.

**Your main specialism is kidney cancer. It must be tough - dealing with people who are potentially seriously ill, and guiding them through their treatment?** I find I have to detach myself from the emotion of it. But occasionally it can break through and hit you. For me that is usually when I have a very young patient who despite everyone's best efforts does not survive the cancer. It is an honour to be a key person in people's lives during some of the most difficult moments. But it is fantastic to see patients back in clinic after they have recovered from surgery and they are back to their normal lives with the cancer fully removed; their thanks and often hugs keep the team going.

**You have an interest too in the opportunities of robotic technology. Are you expecting a transformation in what can be done, or is it all incremental?** Being able to offer minimal access (keyhole) surgery to patients using the surgical robot has been one of the key developments during my career. It has been great to be able to see patients going home within 24 hours of major surgery compared with the 3-5 day hospital stay when I only had open surgery with a large wound to offer to patients. I am leading the campaign for a second surgical robot at Addenbrooke's Hospital and am hopeful that this will allow many other surgical specialities to offer similar surgery to their patients with a range of different diseases. Developments are made incrementally as at each stage safety and outcomes for patients needs to be assessed.



(continued from previous page)

**If you're doing all this crucial work - why did you also want to become a Fellow at Selwyn?**

I have always felt that being part of a college was an integral component of life as an academic at Cambridge University. So I was delighted when after becoming Professor of Surgical Oncology, I was approached by Selwyn to consider becoming a Fellow. Being a Fellow has substantially enriched my life due to the consistent interactions with the students enabling me to help their development. There are also wonderful discussions with other fellows who are International experts in a wide range of topics and enlightened leadership willing to make innovative developments such as purchasing an Anatomage table.

**Away from work, you love sport - and run long distances, which isn't exactly taking a relaxing option?**

I love sport, it is the most important of unimportant things! My Twitter tag line is 'Once an athlete, now a runner'.

## Dr Vicky Young

**Subject: Japanese Studies**  
**University Position: Kawashima Lecturer in Japanese Literature and Culture**  
**University Department: Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies**  
**Research interests: Modern and contemporary Japanese literature; Okinawan studies; writing by minorities in Japan; post-colonial studies; feminist criticism; translation theory**

**Anyone who's met you, or seen you on our admissions video, will detect a hint of a north-east accent. So we're assuming you're from the proper north of England?**

That's right! I grew up in Hexham, Northumberland. I'm self-conscious that my accent is much diluted these days thanks to living in Cambridge and Japan, but to my relief it comes screaming back when I go back North or call my mum.

**At what point in your younger life did you think that Cambridge might be an option for you?**

I remember being around six years old and the Oxford-Cambridge boat race was on television. I asked my dad,

what are "Oxford" and "Cambridge" and he responded that they are the top two universities in the country. I don't recall what I thought a university was - I was the first in my family to progress to higher education - but my immediate response was that "Cambridge sounded better." Then, at sixteen, my high-school choir went on a tour around Denmark and we spent the night in Cambridge to break the journey from Hexham to the ferry terminal at Harwich. I fell in love with the architecture and the atmosphere, and made up my mind that night to apply.

**And why Japanese? People who don't know it will assume it's a ferociously difficult language to learn - let alone achieve fluency.**

At first it was the writing. This sounds very nerdy, but I was always fascinated by the connection between text and speech - why do we pronounce a letter 'a' as we do? Japanese looks beautiful, of course, but as an A-level maths student I was most excited because it offered a different logic. Japanese grammar is very challenging and one never stops needing to learn vocabulary, but it's not impossible, and it is so rewarding to be mid-flow in conversation with friends and colleagues, or to reach the end of a novel.

**There was a time in your life when your academic work and your home area came together - when you were working for Nissan. Tell us about that.**

In the final months of writing up my PhD thesis I was teaching a few hours per week at Newcastle University when I learned that the Nissan car battery plant in Sunderland was seeking interpreters to support a visit

Dr Vicky Young



© Jeff Overs

“

**I was always fascinated by the connection between text and speech - why do we pronounce a letter 'a' as we do?**

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by Japanese engineers. The technical vocabulary was so different to what I had learned through reading fiction. It was also very hard to hear people because we were all wearing masks, hoods that covered our ears, and had to compete with the sounds of robots and machinery inside the factory. However, the team made me incredibly welcome. The best part was that I gained confidence in tackling unfamiliar situations.

**What was it that brought you back to academic life?**

My contract at Nissan was fixed term and at the end I did contemplate trying to find more work in interpreting because I enjoyed it so much. However, I also recognised that I wanted to return to academia and honour those people who had supported me throughout my PhD. I took up a Teaching Fellow position at Newcastle in February 2017 then came to my current post in Cambridge in September that year. I sometimes miss the idea of "clocking off" - that doesn't really happen as an academic and undergraduate tutor - but I am passionate about my research and teaching and feel extremely privileged to lead the life that I lead.

**Tell us about your research, and what you're planning to publish.**

I am finishing up the manuscript for my first book, which is about contemporary Japanese literature and translation. Many of us read translated literature as a window into another world - Japan exists, and books allow us to peer inside. That perspective is important, but I am also interested in the roles that literature plays in creating our image of Japan, and how that image can distort or what it neglects. For example, I am especially interested in Japanese-language fiction by Okinawan and ethnic Korean writers that we don't readily associate with the dominant vision of Japanese literature. These texts can seem more difficult to translate into English because they use multiple scripts and promote different ideas to the mainstream, but they are also central to the wider story of Japanese literature.

**Your favourite thing about Selwyn?**

Selwyn has a phenomenal sense of community. I have seen so many wonderful examples of everyone pulling together and we really do root for one another. I should also give a shout out to the Breakfast Club, which is where a small number of us - Fellows and students - turn up for breakfast in Hall at 8am.

## STAFF PROFILE: SALLY BIRD

# Feasts & Formals

**We're very lucky at Selwyn to have staff who've been with us for decades, and who provide the experience alongside the excitement of the new recruits. Sally Bird is currently acting as our head of catering - after working for more than three decades in the college kitchens.**

I have been here 32 years, so I've seen many people come and go - including four bursars, four masters, three head chefs and three catering managers. That's also a lot of feasts, graduations - and more than 800 formal halls.

I grew up in Cambridge with my parents and sisters, and my mother worked for Cambridge County Council as a catering manager. She organised the supply and delivery of meals to the elderly in Cambridgeshire in conjunction with the Womens Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS) of which she was also a volunteer. My father had his own carpet cleaning business for over 50 years, and he was a contractor to many of the colleges in Cambridge, including Selwyn. He worked in the masters' lodge when Professor Chadwick was in residence and Rev Sweet was chaplain. He has fond memories of both. Now I am interim head of catering here - which is hardly believable when I failed my home economics class in secondary school.

I arrived at the college in the spring of 1989 working as a part time student while at Cambridge College of Arts & Technology, before gaining my qualifications and joining full time later that year. I worked in the kitchens honing my skills in the pastry section for several years. In the kitchen at the time we would feed roughly 150 people for lunch and fewer for dinner; and there would only be two choices on the counter and the only special

diet was a vegetarian. These days the numbers have doubled and so have the choices, with many more now being plant based.

I moved through the ranks over the years taking management courses along the way, going out to other places working as an agency chef in my spare time to gain experience, until reaching the head chef position a few years ago when the opportunity arose. The catering department is a great place to work: it can be very hard but at the same time very rewarding. When you get home at the end of day and your feet

“

**I am interim head of catering here - which is hardly believable when I failed my home economics class in secondary school.**

”

are reminding you you've done 20,000 steps on, say, a graduation day, the sense of pride you feel at delivering such an event for so many people takes over and you'd do it all again. It's only possible because of the great team we have, from the conference office staff who work so hard to deal with the organisation of events, the storeman purchasing and taking the deliveries, the front of house and bar team for their immaculate service at events. And, of course, I have a soft spot for the team in the kitchen who have accumulated over 100 years' experience between them. They all work so hard to make a dining experience memorable.

Both the college and the people keep you coming back for more. Every day presents a different challenge, whether we're fixing burst water pipes on the day of big alumni events, returning 432 boxes of burgers when someone put the product code in the quantity box (guilty! that one gave me nightmares) or the time we disposed of some out of date



© Jeff Overs

baking powder in a kitchen bin. It grows! When you add wet food waste to any baking powder, there's no stopping it...

Now I find myself sitting in the seat of head of catering the challenges are varied and definitely more of them. It's the kind of job where it's never done: there's always something that needs planning or preparing. Food is integral to life and therefore I never really switch off from the job.

On a personal level, these days at home it's just me and my cats - 18 year old tortoiseshell Spritza and my 10 year old black cat Charlie, after the recent loss of my partner of 27 years. After a long day in college there's nothing I like more than cuddling up on the sofa with them and a cuppa! Maybe a bit of *Great British Menu* or *Masterchef*.

I love to travel, with the USA being a weakness for me. I also love going to the theatre and will travel almost anywhere for a decent concert or festival.

My Selwyn family have supported me through all ups and downs which we all encounter during a lifetime, for which I am deeply appreciative and feel that my position allows me to repay this to any member of my team who may require similar support.

I was on an interview panel recently and the candidates were asked what they knew about Selwyn. The best answer I received in a long time was that during their research it always came up that we are the friendliest college. I am proud to be a part of that.



# Hughdunnit

Actor, musician and Honorary Fellow Hugh Laurie (SE 1978) recently adapted, directed and acted in Agatha Christie's classic whodunnit 'Why Didn't They Ask Evans?' for BritBox. He tells us why the writer has thrilled him since he was a boy.

This article previously appeared in the *Times* in April 2022, and is reproduced here with Hugh Laurie's permission.

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Photograph by Robert Vignasky

This is a mighty strange time to be launching an adaptation of an Agatha Christie story into the world. I haven't done it at any other time, so I can't reliably compare, but this feels like shouting "badminton?" in the middle of a house fire. Although I haven't done that either, so this is all guesswork.

Never mind. We are where we are, as a wise but not especially helpful person once said. Here are the bald facts. I've adapted Agatha Christie's 1934 novel *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* into three hour-long episodes for BritBox. More importantly, I've persuaded a distinguished cast of actors, led by Will Poulter and Lucy Boynton, to appear in it. I directed it, in the broad sense of being present while it fell down the stairs, and I play one of the parts. Let this serve as my written confession.

Now to the question of motive. Why Agatha Christie? Why now, why again, why ever? Haven't we had enough of footprints in rosebeds and bitter almonds and bloodstained egg whisks? More specifically, why Why? (After two years in each other's company, we're on first-name terms.)

The short answer is that *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* is a belter of a story that contains characters I fell in love with as a callow youth, and still love as a callow old man. Perhaps that's enough. If you have business to attend to on other pages, you should move on. If not, let me expand.

Agatha Christie wrote a lot of stories: 66 detective novels and more than 100 short stories, of which she has sold two billion copies. That's more than there were human beings on earth when she published *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* in 1920. The only statistic that comes close is the number of articles that have been written since then, seeking to explain the 'enduring fascination' of Agatha Christie. Not all the explanations came from admirers. In *The Simple Art of Murder* Raymond Chandler made some sharp remarks about the English crime-writing school in general and Agatha Christie in particular, which shook me. I loved both Chandler and Christie, so this was like listening to my parents argue. (Not that mine did that very often. I had a lucky childhood, which I suspect Chandler didn't.)

The nub of his complaint was against the genteel, parlour-game nature of the English tradition, in which effete amateurs are forever outwitting the bumbling fools at Scotland Yard. He seems to have disliked Dorothy L Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey intensely, and was menacing about AA Milne's Anthony Gillingham, hero of *The Red House Mystery*: "I shudder to think of what the boys down at the homicide bureau in my city would do to him." That "boys" lets you know that Chandler was one of them; in the league of men for whom "hard" is a high compliment. Hard-headed, hard-drinking, hard-bitten and, commonest of all in the description of Chandler's school (which, incidentally, was Dulwich College), hard-boiled.

Well no, Agatha Christie was not one of the boys, and her stories are not hard in the same sense. There are not many punches thrown, not much bourbon drunk, not many snub-nosed .38s jammed into kidneys. Christie's soft-boiled domain was of the more typically female kind as it obtained in her lifetime; the interior, the domestic, the millpond surface where even a water boatman's sneeze can catch the eye. But the containment – boat, train, island, snowbound manor – is more or less the point. Without lines there can be no tennis. You're just hitting balls for the dog.

But why should a detective story resemble a game at all? When did murder become something to be toyed with for the sake of amusement? There are no board games based on rape or torture, as far as I know. No one's selling country house assault and battery weekends. How did murder become a currency of entertainment, uncoupled from its ghastly reality in the same way – and, oddly, at the same time – that our actual currency uncoupled from the gold standard? (I've just discovered that there's a Canadian TV show called *Murder, She Baked* – I'm still processing.)



Production stills from 'Why Didn't They Ask Evans?'

The answer, of course, is that murder allows for mystery. Victims of lesser crimes can testify, whereas the dead body needs an avenging detective to make the world right. And once you have a detective, the readers are deputised, pitting their own little grey cells against the master.

Edgar Allan Poe is thought to have come up with the first named detective, C Auguste Dupin, in 1841, and Arthur Conan Doyle ran with the idea further and more successfully than anyone over the turn of the century and beyond. I once played Sherlock Holmes in a corporate training film (sadly no, the tapes were lost in a flood) and had to be fitted with the regulation ulster and deerstalker at a costume house in north London. The costumier told me that in the 40 years he'd worked there, they hadn't had a single day without at least one Sherlock Holmes being out on the road somewhere in the world. That's going it a bit.

In her autobiography Christie was candid about her debt to Conan Doyle in the construction of Hercule Poirot: "I was still writing in the Sherlock Holmes tradition – eccentric detective, stooge assistant, with a Lestrade-type Scotland Yard detective, Inspector Japp."

But by the time Conan Doyle was, quite literally, away with the fairies, Christie was perfecting the art of the murder mystery, with the sort of cunning you might find in those Japanese himitsu bako puzzles. (Or, rather, not

**'The central puzzle of the novel is so beautiful, so exquisitely revealed, that I can at any time of the day or night make myself shiver by recalling it.'**

find, such is the cunning.) The plots reveal themselves layer by layer in the style made popular by onions – except that beneath the first layer you might find an orange, and beneath that a baseball, and beneath that a monkey's fist and so on all the way to the chewy nougat centre. She was, as Billy Wilder once said, "full of surprises". Wilder, who directed the 1957 version of *Witness for the Prosecution*, conceded that Christie's dialogue was not a match for Chandler's (was anybody's?), but also said: "For every hundred great dialogue writers, there's one great constructionist. And Agatha Christie plotted like an angel." Wilder, I don't need to tell you, is the highest authority on such matters.

Let's imagine that there are two kinds of crime writer: the stylist invents characters, then searches for a plot that will show them to advantage; the constructionist invents a plot, then searches for characters who can execute it. Chandler was of the first kind, Christie the second. As Chandler admitted, "any approach to perfection demands a combination of qualities not found in the same mind".

Except that in *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* I believe Christie does approach something like perfection. Near enough to see the lights, at any rate. The central puzzle of the novel is so beautiful, so exquisitely revealed, that I can at any time of the day or night make myself shiver by recalling it.

But there is also beauty in these characters,



# The soundtrack to murder

**“Dear Ms MacDonald. We spoke briefly at a recent college feast, at which I babbled my admiration for the glorious sound of the Chapel Choir. The occasion stayed with me, and has prompted a thought I'd like to lay before you.”**

The thought laid before me comprised an invitation for the choir to provide music for a new Agatha Christie adaptation, written, directed, and starred in by the author of this communication—none other than Hugh Laurie. The novel in question, ‘Why didn’t they ask Evans?’, is set in a village in North Wales. The protagonist is (rather improbably) the organist at the local church, where his father is the vicar. There are various scenes which required a choir and an organist, and Hugh’s connection with Selwyn pointed to us as the obvious choice to fill these roles.

Once permission from college had been agreed, there were lengthy negotiation of dates, contracts, logistics, timing, risk assessments, Covid protocols, and so on. On a sunny Saturday in May, the production team, including Hugh Laurie, arrived in college for a three-hour session, to record the audio for two hymns, Mendelssohn’s ‘Wedding March’, Bach’s ‘Prelude in B minor



Sarah MacDonald and Alfie.

(BWV 544)’, and a 1908 music-hall song ‘All the nice girls love a sailor’.

The two hymns, ‘O! lesu mawr, rho d’anian bur’ (O Jesus, let thy Spirit bless) and ‘Ti dymunwn fyw’ (I’ll walk beside you), were both to be sung in Welsh – fortuitously, one of our alto choral exhibitioners is a native-speaker. ‘Ti dymunwn fyw’ is commonly sung by a boy treble, so I made an arrangement of it for Alfie, 12-year-old Ely Cathedral chorister. ‘All the nice girls love a sailor’ is a rather bawdy and unreconstructed number which is referred to throughout the show by various characters.

Our choral version of it, in my post-modern arrangement which combines madrigal, part-song, and barbershop, closes the final episode of the series, provides an intentionally light ending to the dark tale.

Michael Stephens-Jones, Percy Young Senior Organ Scholar, had to follow very particular performance directions. The Bach is played by a sinister character called Mr Angel, who is suspected of murdering several people—this was perhaps the only time Michael has been asked to play the organ “in the manner of a contract-killer”. Mendelssohn’s Wedding March is played by Gladys, an elderly spinster who deputises from time to time for the vicar’s son. Michael was charged with playing it enthusiastically but badly, and he did a spectacular job, despite being a prize-winning Fellow of the Royal College of Organists. Hugh and I were in hysterics in the chapel as Michael played, and I’m rather surprised that isn’t audible in the final edit!

Some months later, we were bussed down to the filming location in Surrey to mime to our own recordings. We brought our cassocks and surplices (which the production team insisted on calling “costumes”) and enjoyed the glamour of hair-and-makeup before our scenes. I’d had my hair cut just a week before, which made me very

unpopular with the historically-assiduous stylist. Rather than a quick French-braid, she had to give me a 1930s “finger wave” which took ages, and required a disproportionate number of bobby-pins to hold it in place. Ely chorister Alfie (whose voice had changed by the time of the filming, so it was a good thing we were miming) receives pride of place at the beginning of episode 2, with me peering over his right shoulder.

‘Why Didn’t They Ask Evans?’ was released on BritBox a year later. It was fascinating to see how Hugh (a fine musician himself) integrated his imaginative music choices (including our contributions) into the programme. It’s a terrific mini-series—watch it if you can!

Members of Selwyn Choir watch as Bobby Jones (played by Will Poulter) plays the organ.



Lara Mayo

which brings me to the central confession: Frankie Derwent was my first crush. How old was I? Well, everyone likes to boast about how young they were when they read a particular thing, and I don’t see why I should get left behind – let’s say I was 18 months old when I read the novel and I fell instantly, madly, in love. In my toddler’s brain, Frankie combined Amelia Earhart, Lucille Ball, Lara Croft and Dorothy Parker. She could drink you under the table, climb a drainpipe in heels, clear a five-bar gate side-saddle and risk everything she had on a jack high. I was besotted. Bobby Jones, straight arrow to Frankie’s bent longbow, was therefore the man I wanted to be. As a couple I found them irresistible, and I like to think Christie did too.

Here’s my theory about *Why Didn’t They Ask Evans?*. I have no evidence to support it – nor am I looking for any, because it’s too good to be

spoil by facts – but it’s the idea that sustained me through the process of adapting the story.

In 1933 Dashiell Hammett, then headmaster of the hard-boiled school, published *The Thin Man* in the women’s magazine *Redbook*. It subsequently published Christie’s N or M?, and I doubt very much that she would have let an issue go by unread.

Hammett’s story was immediately adapted into a film, with the incomparable William Powell and Myrna Loy as Nick and Nora Charles, and gave rise to five sequels of gently declining quality. It was one of the first big franchises, and I loved it to pieces. To pieces, I tell you.

As a lad I had all the standard emblems of rebellion on my bedroom wall: Dennis Hopper, James Dean, Marlon Brando, that female tennis player with the itchy arse; but they were all, I now realise, dragging their feet at the threshold of adulthood. Nick and Nora were the first

characters I ever saw who made adulthood sexy; a state not to be dreaded or postponed, but charged into with relish. This was not Boy Meets Girl, but Man Already Knows Woman. I choose to believe that Agatha Christie read *The Thin Man* and thought: “I like this. I’m going to park Poirot for a while . . . shush, Barry, let me finish . . . I’m going to do something with *The Thin Man* spirit to it, but with a Japanese puzzle at its centre.” And I think she pulled it off. Of course there are longueurs (thank God, or what would an adapter do?) and an occasional wonky sentence that Chandler could have picked apart, but none of that matters. In *Why Didn’t They Ask Evans?*, Christie brings the constructionist and the stylist, the prose and the passion, the hard and the soft, under one roof.

As to whether we pulled off the pulling off, you will, of course, be the judge. You know how you like your eggs.

# Flights down memory lane



© Nick Marsh

**Mark Vanhoenacker (SE 1996), studied for an MPhil in History at Selwyn before becoming a commercial pilot. He now flies the Boeing 787 to some of the largest cities on Earth, but also finds time to indulge his passion for writing.**

Since I was a young kid, I’d dreamed of becoming a pilot, not a writer. And so, as I neared the end of my journey to Cambridge on an autumn morning in 1996, and the 747 I’d boarded in darkness in New York the evening before descended over the gleaming curves of the Thames, I put the cap on my ballpoint pen, closed my diary, and pressed my face to the oval window.

My arrival in the UK wasn’t otherwise auspicious. After I reached immigration, I was directed to a chilly, windowless side room where a middle-aged nurse in a starched, bright-white uniform – decades on, it’s her image that will come to mind first whenever I encounter the word ‘matronly’ – stood behind her shiny metal desk and asked me to remove everything but my pants.

After a chilly but otherwise routine check for tuberculosis – the aged X-ray machine reminded me worryingly of those scrapyards magnets that can lift cars; but, more heart-warmingly, the nurse, when I asked what would happen were I discovered to be infected, replied ‘Then we shall treat you, of course!’ – I got dressed, collected my bags and walked through a long tunnel to find the coach to Cambridge.

I had come to Cambridge to complete a two-year postgraduate fellowship in African history. Even as I pursued this, however, my old dream of becoming a pilot continued.

After finishing my MPhil and an additional year of research – travelling to Nairobi, I

realised the aerial journey was nearly as meaningful to me as the destination – I left Cambridge determined to find a way to fly. In 2001, I enrolled on a cadet pilot course at an airfield north of Oxford, and in 2003 I joined British Airways. I now fly the Boeing 787 Dreamliner to some of the largest cities on Earth.

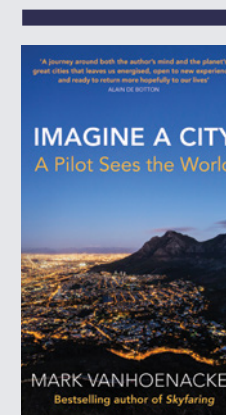
In those first Cambridge days, a set of friendships formed among the residents of 29 and 31 Grange Road. And a quarter of a century later, six of us still form my closest group of friends. We eat, hang out, explore and travel together as often as we can. For convenience we might say that it’s time for a Grange Road dinner, and we all understand

that the address now refers to people rather than a place. Two of us, Seeta and Ben, married each other, and their daughters are my goddaughters. Helen, another Grange Roader, is the godmother of those girls, and surely, we like to say, that makes her my god-wife. It’s a joke that my husband, an honorary Grange Roader of longstanding, doesn’t seem to mind.

Years ago, when I first told the Grange Road gang of my plans to become a pilot, I don’t think any of them were surprised. But Helen gave me a look of good-natured scepticism and said: ‘Sure, you’ll like being a pilot. But you’re going to write, too.’

At the time, it was a strange thing to say – I’d always loved writing, especially letters and diaries, but at the time I’d never expressed any interest in publishing anything. But sure enough, in the late noughties, I wrote my first articles for several US and UK publications. I published a book, *Skyfaring*, in 2015. In 2019 I started a column for the *Financial Times*.

Helen’s words returned to me again last year, as I was trying to finish my new book,



The cover of Mark’s latest book ‘Imagine a City’.

*Imagine a City: A Pilot Sees the World*. The book is a love letter to the world of cities I’ve come to know as a pilot, and a meditation on what cities meant to me long ago when I was an awkward kid in a small place. The grind of editing and fact-checking the text was getting to me (whenever a paragraph grew particularly tough, the academic world I’d so consciously turned from would come to mind), and I wasn’t the only Grange Roader in need of a break, so a few of us decided to spend a long day together in Cambridge.

We started by showing one of my goddaughters the centre of the city and then, after a leisurely lunch, we crossed the river and made our way west to Selwyn. We marvelled at the smart new buildings that have arisen since the late 1990s and walked through the gardens and tried the door to the chapel.

Then we walked out through the main gate and turned south. It was a warm day, and, as we paused in front of the pair of houses where so much of the rest of my life began, we heard animated voices and what sounded like a party coming from the gardens behind 31 Grange Road.

I suggested we walk around and introduce ourselves. But I wasn’t sure how to express what the houses had once meant to us, or to begin to list all the good things that had started there. My friends must have felt the same, because as we passed under the window of one of our former rooms we slowed, looked at each other, and stopped. ‘Maybe we shouldn’t intrude,’ Seeta said, and I realised I wasn’t the only one struck by a sudden, teenage sense of awkwardness. ‘We’ll come another time,’ I said with relief. ‘And we’ll bring photos from some of our own parties here, and a bottle. Still unseen, we turned back to the street.

If you’d like to contact Mark, you can email him via his website: [markvanhoenacker.com](http://markvanhoenacker.com) or on Twitter @markv747.





**The college is celebrating 140 years since its foundation in 1882. Remarkably, Sir David Harrison has been associated with Selwyn for more than half that time. He joined as an undergraduate in 1950, and went on to become a fellow, then senior tutor - and finally the master. Now 92 years old, he looks back on the Selwyn he has known and loved.**

# Witness to half our history

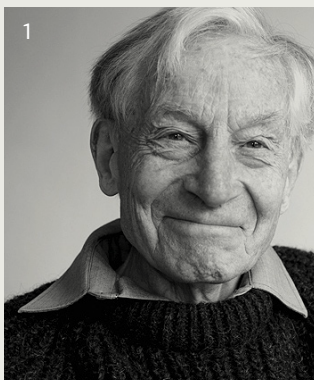


SELWYN COLLEGE  
140 years

I arrived at Selwyn in October 1950 with my ration book. I was fortunate in being allocated a room on A staircase; one of only two staircases that had hot and cold running water with rooms elsewhere receiving their hot water by jug. To take a bath, you had to go to the bath house located near the present kitchen. Hard-living it may seem today but in 1950 nearly all the Selwyn undergraduate entry had just come from at least a year of National Service.

The college in the early 1950s was careful with money: the college prospectus I received ran to two small pages, mainly devoted to College Regulations, but nevertheless it carefully recited the phrase 'Cheques are payable to the Bursar' no less than three times. Unknown to undergraduates in the early 1950s of course, the Fellows were spending a good deal of their time drafting new statutes to replace those based on a Victorian charter. The master at the time, Dr Telfer, was far from keen on fundamental change; and he most particularly valued the formal links Selwyn had with the Church of England. To the extent that he arranged a transfer of an undergraduate from Selwyn to Fitzwilliam when the man concerned became a Roman Catholic. Owen Chadwick was the last master to be elected under the old statutes but by the time he arrived in 1956 the amendment was in place, making Selwyn constitutionally the same as all other colleges. This change opened the door for the University to elect Owen as Vice-Chancellor in 1969.

Selwyn in the early 1950s felt itself to be rather 'on the edge' of the rest of the university. The college's annual records for the 1930s devote an extraordinary amount of space to the fine exploits of the Boat Club as if to say 'we may be on the edge but we are there on the river'. There were no university buildings in Sidgwick Avenue; it was the Corpus cricket ground complete with pavilion. However, from the 1950s onwards no fewer



1. Owen Chadwick.
2. May Ball, 1948.
3. Model for Cripps Court development.
4. 2000 - showing Prince Philip plans for the development of the college.
5. 1976 - Jean Chothia - first female Fellow.
6. Women's rowing team including Fiona Morrison and Kate Buckley.



than eight colleges arrived in West Cambridge: Wolfson, Clare Hall, Robinson, Lucy Cavendish, St. Edmund's, Murray Edwards, Fitzwilliam and Churchill. Selwyn was no longer 'on the edge'.

Post-war reconstruction meant that material for new-build was in very short supply in the 1950s and, for universities in general; new-build only became possible from the 1960s, with the Selwyn example being Cripps Court. The college's undergraduate population grew by 60% post-war and by the late 1950s, the college housed about 100 of its undergraduates in lodgings in Cambridge. Thanks much to the foresight of the then Bursar, Percy Spear, the college gradually acquired the leaseholds of several large Victorian and Edwardian villas in Grange Road, Cranmer Road and West Road - eventually 14 properties all of which, with some modification, made attractive accommodation. Moreover, it permitted the college to provide a hostel for the growing number of its postgraduates. The college gradually acquired the freeholds of these properties.

The Fellowship was also growing, from 14 in 1950 to 35 in 1970, much in response to increasing teaching needs. The intellectual life of the college also broadened, certainly in Music but also due to the influence of William Brock (American History) and James Winny (English). The university also encouraged the growth in college Fellowships so that there was a reasonable chance of those appointed to university posts would find college homes. Indeed the original purpose of the University Centre on Granta Place was to provide social space for members of the university's staff who were not attached to any college. At this time Selwyn, with Emmanuel, began the process of offering admission on the basis of A level performance rather than via a college examination. It was not a particularly radical step in that all other universities, save Oxford, ran their admissions in this way. This change nevertheless soon had a beneficial effect on both the number and quality of our entry.

Cambridge was then of course a very masculine place and by the 1970s it was clear that a reasonable provision of Cambridge courses for women could not be provided simply by adding to the number of colleges for women only. This process had in fact begun in 1954 when New Hall (later Murray Edwards) had been founded on the site now occupied by Darwin College. Debates therefore began in many men's colleges on the admission of women; and in 1972 Clare, King's and Churchill admitted both men and women for the first time. Selwyn watched these changes very carefully; indeed to the extent that all questions or concerns, however small, received attention. For example, one Fellow suggested to me that we probably could not afford to admit women because surely they would want long mirrors. I rang the senior tutor of Clare for their experience and received the answer: 'yes they do, but so do the men'. The question of long mirrors in Selwyn never surfaced again. The Governing Body duly agreed the necessary change of statute with one vote against, but no resignation. 36 women arrived at the college in 1976 and Jean Chothia was elected as our first woman Fellow. We needed to remember the wider Selwyn constituency, all men of course, some with strong attachments to the college's sporting tradition. We were however fortunate because in the first intake came Fiona Morrison who in due time became president of the Cambridge University Women's Boat Club. No Selwyn man - in 90 years - had reached that place in the University Men's Boat Club.

By the mid-1970s Selwyn was not so far from what it is today. But then Ann's Court was yet to come.



# Old Library redevelopment



ANNIVERSARY APPEAL

140 years | 1882–2022



Thanks to generous support from alumni and friends, the much-loved old library has been given a new lease of life as part of Selwyn's 140th anniversary appeal. While the new Bartlam Library in Ann's Court has

provided wonderful, modern facilities for our students, it did raise the question over how best to use the old library. An imaginative transformation has taken place over the past 12 months – largely paid for by alumni and friends – providing the college with a range of new facilities, some of which are unique amongst Cambridge colleges. Together they will provide a new level of provision for our students, staff, alumni and conference guests.

Images by  
Clare Banks Photography



Top right: Archives and rare books. Above: Alumni & Development Office. Right: Alumni Parlour – Selwyn is the first Cambridge college to provide a dedicated space for its alumni.

## Archives & Rare Books

Tucked away for many years in the attics above the kitchens, the college's growing collection of archives, rare books and special collections has now been provided with an accessible and spacious new home in the Old Library. For the first time, all archive materials and rare books will be stored together and conserved in a climate-controlled environment. A display space has been allocated for temporary exhibitions that will be open to college members, alumni and others to visit.



## Study Centre

Four seminar rooms – two with a shared folding wall that allows the creation of one larger space – will be invaluable for students requiring supervisions and group study facilities. In the vacations they will further enhance the college's conference business.

## Alumni Parlour & Development Office

The upper floor has a cosy and comfortable alumni parlour, where some of the original library shelving has been retained, allowing us start collecting books by alumni – the Alumni Book Depository. Alumni and friends are more than welcome to drop by to have a cup of tea or coffee, to use the space as a meeting point, or to chat with members of the development team.



## Medics & Vets Resources Room

A brand new facility for Selwyn; a resource room specifically for medical and veterinary students. In addition to the collection of skeletons and 3D models, Selwyn is the first Cambridge college to have a state-of-the-art 'Anatomege Table' for our students to learn new skills. This table uses augmented reality (AR) to give students access to virtual models of human and animal anatomies. Selwyn's Medic and Vet students use use innovative technologies to dissect virtual cadavers. Our Director of Studies in Veterinary Medicine Dr Stuart Eves explains.

'Anatomy never changes – right?'. This is said within both human and animal medical circles. True enough



it is arguably a subject where there has been little new to report in hundreds of years. What is generally considered the core text in medicine, 'Gray's Anatomy', is now in its 42nd edition but even the earliest remains serviceable.

Teaching anatomy is of course of paramount importance to the medical professions, both human and animal orientated. The subject may not advance, but we have become increasingly aware of the progress in technology that would benefit delivery of structured information. Essentially, in teaching anatomy educators are describing a 3D map but with the challenge of terminology almost entirely new to our first-year students.

Even once these early concepts are

mastered, it is a world comprising layers of detail and interactions. The traditional methods of teaching the subject fall into two different camps – the framework of regional anatomy where we highlight the relationships between structures, or a systems-based approach which focuses on components with a shared function or role (such as the nervous system). The strength of either approach often comes from the skillset of the educator, something we have undoubtedly been blessed with in both the medical and veterinary fields for many years with Dr Robert Whitaker and Dr David Chivers being within the Fellowship at Selwyn.

With the development of the Selwyn Old Library building into a study centre, and the opportunity



and supervisors of Selwyn the opportunity to combine these with the latest advances in technology.

The Anatomage technology is a touchscreen table that allows for 'virtual dissection' of preloaded human and animal models. Three-dimensional images, built from CT scans, give access to a range of virtual humans and animals with a degree of accuracy to 0.2mm. The technology allows for examination of levels of detail which can be removed, but also crucially reapplied – allowing for 'reverse dissection' where layers can be built up over underlying structures. This allows for the study of structures in relation to one another, while everything remains in situ and undamaged regardless of the number of times it is removed and reapplied. The system shows the flexibility in teaching we envisage – covering

both animal and human anatomy, intuitive use and the ability to highlight and save sections. We believe there will be great benefits in the use of the table in structured teaching sessions, such as supervisions, but also in the development of self-directed and peer-to-peer learning. In light of this, we have taken advice from institutions using the Anatomage technology as their primary source of anatomy demonstration and identified the need to develop specific resources to allow our students to make the most of the system and not be overawed by the detail it offers. Thus, the aim is to provide pre-prepared directions for dissections, saved and annotated images, quizzes on sections and practice exams modelled on those used in Tripos.

## Our Appeal goes on...

The 140th Anniversary Appeal will continue until the end of the year and we're now concentrating on raising funds for the Three Hostels project, which will offer our graduate students some of the most energy efficient and environmentally-friendly accommodation to be found anywhere in the city. Your support of this project would be much appreciated.

Please contact our Senior Development Officer Susannah Clarke, for further details. Telephone +44 (0)1223 763937 or email her at: [development@sel.cam.ac.uk](mailto:development@sel.cam.ac.uk).







OUTREACH Amelia Grigg (left) and Joe Stanley

## No need to worry about your accent

**Reflecting our commitment to finding students from all across the United Kingdom, and paying attention to areas where there might have been under-representation, our school outreach programme now has two schools liaison officers. Joe Stanley based in Yorkshire tells us more.**

I work with schools and colleges across Selwyn's link area of West Yorkshire to widen access to Cambridge. I'm from Rotherham in South Yorkshire - where I still live - and I went to my local comprehensive, and I had free school meals at school. I'd never really considered university until my history teacher suggested that I attend the 'area links' scheme run by Homerton College. I got to meet a 'real' historian for the first time

### Thank you to alumni

Selwyn's outreach programme is totally supported by donations from alumni. This allows us not only to employ two full time schools liaison officers - Joe Stanley in Yorkshire, and Cambridge-based Amelia Grigg - but also covers the travel, accommodation and catering costs of schools and pupils visiting Selwyn: and for Selwyn Fellows and students to visit different schools in West Yorkshire and elsewhere. Amongst others, we are particularly grateful to three alumni: **John Bamford** (SE 1962); **Andrew Barnes** (SE 1978) and **Alison Davis** (SE 1981) and for their generous help. If you would also like to contribute to this important programme, please contact the Development Director, Mike Nicholson [mgn24@cam.ac.uk](mailto:mgn24@cam.ac.uk) who would be pleased to hear from you.

which I thought was really "cool". I studied History at the University of Durham where I was taught by a really inspirational lecturer called Dr Alex Barber. Once I completed my PGCE in Secondary History at Fitzwilliam College I followed Alex's advice and applied for a PhD and, to my shock, I was awarded a full scholarship. I completed my PhD in 2020. I've no doubt that it was the area links scheme that ignited my passion for studying the past at a high level.

A typical day for me starts with replying to emails from teachers across West Yorkshire. These are often about me coming to their school to deliver a session to their most able students. The most popular session that I run is an 'Introduction to Cambridge'. This covers how the University works, how colleges fit into the University, the different courses on offer, and what student life is like. For older students (Y11-Y12s) I run a 'super-curricular' workshop, which focusses on what Dr Beauregard, Dr Eves and Dr Smith - the Selwyn admissions team - are looking for in a potential Cambridge student. Sometimes I'll create a tailor-made presentation if a school asks for it, such as 'What is the Biological Natural Sciences course like?', or 'Affording Cambridge', for instance. I always emphasise that the University of Cambridge offers the most generous bursary schemes for students from low-income households out of any university in the UK; I know first-hand that money worries are a real concern for students from lower-income backgrounds. I'm very passionate about challenging well-entrenched views that Cambridge is a University only for 'posh people'. In early May I visited a school in Pontefract and the teacher asked me to tell his students that we're not interested in their accent, or how they dress, or how much money they have. He had already told them this, but they didn't believe him, so he wanted them to hear it 'from the horse's mouth'!

Another part of my job is organising visits of West Yorkshire schools to Selwyn. We can offer schools and colleges either a day visit or an overnight stay; both are proving very popular. The pandemic has meant that schools haven't been able to visit for two years, so many young people have missed

out on experiencing what Selwyn is actually like. Showing them photos of the college is all well and good, but there's no substitute for an in-person visit, and demand has, I'm pleased to say, been insatiable. In mid-June there's a different school from West Yorkshire visiting every day! A typical day visit involves a talk from the admissions tutors, lunch in hall, a Q&A with current undergraduates, a walking tour of college, and then free time in town. When students come for an overnight stay, we add team/confidence-building activities, a scavenger hunt or a quiz, and a visit to a museum, library or archive. It's great to see how willing our undergraduates are to get involved with access events. When Greenhead College (Huddersfield) visited Selwyn in April, we had over ten volunteers which made the Q&A event work really well. It's fantastic that we've got such a dedicated cohort of student ambassadors. Having current students at outreach events is really important because it shows to students from West Yorkshire that studying Cambridge is well within their reach.

I'm very much looking forward to the Summer School for Year 12 State School students. Amelia Grigg, my Cambridge-based colleague, and I have been working hard over the past few weeks, with the support of the admissions tutors and admissions officer Stephanie Pym, to get the in-person Summer Schools up and running after a two year hiatus. There's seven summer schools running this year across late June and early July and I'm really looking forward to all of them. I hope that we'll recruit a significant number of participants from West Yorkshire. It's a great opportunity for Year 12s to experience lectures and supervisions and I'm hoping that we get a large number of applications from students who are currently underrepresented at Cambridge. I think Summer Schools are a wonderful opportunity to showcase the University and to get students from non-traditional backgrounds excited about studying here. The best-case outcome for me would be that students leave the Summer Schools this summer, apply in October, and we see them the following year as undergraduates!

### SELWYN SPORT

## Two new eights keep Selwyn afloat

**Selwyn has a strong rowing heritage, and the boat club has remained a prevalent feature of the college over the years. The largest sporting society in college, with around 70 members at any given time, the boat club is unique in that the vast majority of participants first learn the sport after arriving at university. It is thanks to the incredible generosity of alumni, facilitated by the Friends of Selwyn College Boat Club, that the boat club is able to remain competitive yet affordable for students from a range of backgrounds. Hal Mutton (SE 2018) explains.**

This April, the boat club was particularly delighted to officially welcome into service new boats for the 1st women's and men's crews, named for the late Ann Dobson and Dave Matthews respectively. New racing boats are a significant expense, which in practice can only be afforded as a result of large donations from generous benefactors.

The positive impact of this investment cannot be overstated, providing funding for coaching, equipment and competition entries, beyond the obvious benefit of the improved performance of the top crews. After boats were recycled down to lower crews, the entire membership of the boat club experienced an improvement in the standard of equipment they were using. The new equipment is far less likely to break, leading



**Above:** The women's crew take to the river to launch the Ann D. **Below left:** Friends of Selwyn College Boat Club with the new 1st women's eight - named after the late Ann Dobson.

keep the boat club afloat. Moreover, regularly replacing the top boats, and recycling the lower boats down between crews, ensures that Selwyn rowers, who might not otherwise have an opportunity to try the sport, have access to quality equipment and can compete against other top rowing colleges.

to reduced cost, both financially and in lost training time associated with damage. In the event of damage, replacement parts are far easier to obtain than in the case of old equipment produced by defunct manufacturers.

With these benefits being provided to Selwyn rowers, and strong performances in competitions throughout the year, the future of the boat club appears bright. However, in order to ensure that the current success continues, it is crucial that the Friends of the Boat Club can afford to continue to replace older equipment on a regular basis. Establishing a consistent cycle of equipment use and replacement is a far more cost-effective long-term strategy than holding onto the existing fleet until it is on its very last legs, at which point multiple emergency purchases would be required to

If you would like to support the boat club, you can become a member of the Friends of SCBC, or make a one-off donation through the college development office, or by completing a donation form and ticking the Boat Club box to allocate the funds. Alternatively, you can contact the Friends of SCBC chairman Brian Hornsby at [brianjhornsby@gmail.com](mailto:brianjhornsby@gmail.com). All donations are greatly appreciated.





**Aiming to conserve biological diversity and ecosystems by putting conservation science into practice are two Selwyn women: Selwyn Fellow Dr Lynn Dicks and Masters student Florencia Chiapero – both are determined to make a significant impact as conservationists in South America and beyond.**



Turk's hat cacti *Melocactus* sp.

## Wildlife in the white forest of Northeast Brazil



**Selwyn's Fellow Dr Lynn Dicks is assistant professor in Animal Ecology in the Zoology Department at the university and is passionate about entomology, agriculture, evidence-based conservation.**

When I talk about wildlife in Brazil, most people think of the Amazon rainforest, with its immense trees, huge diversity of plants and animals, and deep tropical green-ness. In reality, Brazil is a massive country with many different ecosystems, each with its own unique and special community of plants and animals.

For the past four years, I have been working in a lesser-known ecosystem called the 'Caatinga', in the northeast. This is a dry scrubby tropical forest, where temperatures soar close to 40°C for much of the year. Caatinga (pronounced 'cachinga') means 'white forest' in the native language, because the vegetation appears dead, leafless and ashen pale most of the time. In amongst the white, there are incredibly beautiful cacti. Some

are statuesque, many-branched and tree-like, resembling the candelabra trees of southern Africa. Others are round and squat, developing over many years a red 'hat' of previous flowers – some call them 'Turk's cap' cacti, for obvious reasons. Then, for two or three magnificent months, it rains almost every day, and the Caatinga turns green and lush, with a profusion of flowers and insects. This ecosystem is one of the world's most biologically diverse dryland systems. Almost a third of its plant species are endemic, found nowhere else on Earth. It holds the singular honour of being entirely Brazilian. Unlike other ecosystems in Brazil, it is not found in any other South American country; all the Caatinga Caatinga species belong, entirely, to Brazil.

Sadly, like most of the world's wild habitats, the Caatinga is threatened by expansion of agriculture. Close to 10% of its area has been lost since 1990, mostly converted to agriculture, and the rate of loss is increasing. In the São Francisco River Valley, around the twin cities of Petrolina and Juazeiro, there is plenty of irrigation water from the dammed river and most farms grow grapes and mangos. Their productivity is immense, because grapes produce two harvests a year in these conditions. The area is one of the poorest regions of Brazil, and the local economy is benefiting greatly from rapid development of export markets, sending their gloriously sweet fruits around the world, including to the UK.

Our project, 'Sustainable Fruit Farming in the Caatinga (SUFICA)', was funded for its combination of research and overseas development under the Newton Fund, and co-funded by the Government of Chile. We have been working directly with a major international fruit supplier, Primafruit Ltd. Ten farms from across the São Francisco River Valley joined the project, all selling grapes to UK supermarkets. If you buy grapes of Brazilian origin, they were very likely grown in this area.

During the project, despite major Covid-related setbacks, our team of researchers from Brazil and Chile have collected extensive datasets on birds, mammals, reptiles, insects and soil quality in the partner farms. We have discussed with farmers how they might improve biodiversity without compromising

on productivity, and conducted pilot experiments to test the effectiveness of two practices that they chose – cover crops beneath the grape vines, and perches to encourage birds of prey.

We have documented a huge diversity of wild species living in and around the farms, including globally threatened mammals such as the Northern Tiger Cat (known locally as 'Gato de Mato'), and bird species found nowhere else but the Caatinga, like the Cactus parakeet and the Caatinga cachalote. We can see from our data that some species use both the farmed areas and the native vegetation, while others are restricted to the natural habitat, avoiding farmland altogether. Either way, the fates of these species lie not just in the hands of farmers in Brazil, but also in the hands of everyone around the world who chooses to sell, or buy, their produce.

Our SUFICA partner farms are proud of their wildlife. The good news is that the global food industry, through projects like ours, is sending a signal to farmers that international markets also value their wildlife and want to see it protected. However, we do not yet know what is needed to secure the species' futures in the face of expanding agriculture, or if that is even possible. There is so much work still to do. At the end of the SUFICA project, we have only an initial snapshot of which species are found there. We do not know how they are doing over time. The Northern Tiger Cat population could be dwindling, threatened by diseases from domestic dogs (also seen by our camera traps) and without enough native vegetation to support its population; or it could be thriving. Detailed, long-term monitoring and conservation work are needed, and this must be led locally, supported within Brazil.

Through the MPhil in Conservation Leadership, Cambridge University and Selwyn College are making an important contribution to this effort, training people from around the world in conservation science, management and leadership, and building a global network of professionals who can support each other in the challenging years ahead, as we all work out how to live on this planet without destroying its wonderful treasures.

## Masters in Conservation Leadership

FLORENCIA CHIAPERO (SE 2021)



**MPhil student Florencia Chiapero is delighted to have been offered 'The John and Angela' Masters in Conservation Leadership bursary, enabling her to carry out her studies here at Selwyn College.**

As a conservation biologist, I worked in different contexts in Argentina, from studying the behaviour of zoo-housed lesser anteaters to searching for grebes and Andean cats in Patagonia. I have a strong background in biological research, but it is said that leadership should be the main attribute of a conservation biologist. Knowing this, I believe there is no better opportunity for someone eager to make a significant impact in conservation than taking part in the MPhil in Conservation Leadership at the University of Cambridge. Seriously, it is an incredible opportunity for any conservationist no matter their level or age.

Through my experience, I knew that effective conservation needs two things: leadership and an interdisciplinary perspective, so I was looking for a postgraduate degree to get these skills. I found this Masters some years ago, and I was drawn by two key features that provide a truly interdisciplinary perspective throughout the course. Firstly, it is delivered in partnership with conservation organisations of the Cambridge Conservation Initiative, which gives me access to world-leading conservation practitioners and researchers. From experts in marine conservation and endangered species to specialized fundraisers that emphasize the importance of philanthropy for supporting conservation projects and political ecologists studying the power dynamics within conservation. For me, this is an exceptional opportunity to learn how these partners and organisations face today's conservation challenges. Secondly, the conservation movement brings together people from various backgrounds: biologists, educators, politicians, anthropologists, economists, geologists, lawyers, communicators... Successful conservation outcomes result from the joint effort of these passionate conservationists from different academic and cultural backgrounds and mind-sets. So, for me, one of the most enriching characteristics of this Masters is the diversity of students in each cohort. As you can see, the interdisciplinary environment developed throughout all the courses is the main reason I wanted to study this Masters.

Luckily, reality has overcome my high expectations since, so far, my experience as a student of the MPhil in Conservation Leadership has been beyond extraordinary. I had the privilege of learning about leadership and conservation from lecturers who have years of hands-on experience in the conservation arena. We explore different topics throughout the course and we get the best-prepared lecturer for each of them, which allows us to listen to their diverse experiences and learnings. This makes the Masters unique and ground breaking. Also, the training that this Masters provides for me as a future leader in conservation is truly comprehensive: from theories in leadership to innovative approaches for conservation and even how to make the most of a media interview when communicating conservation. We are constantly encouraged to deconstruct our ideas, see the big picture, and don't take win-win solutions for granted.

Moreover, as a student of the Masters, I was able to join the Women in Conservation Leadership group, which aims to build a network to support women in leadership. I am especially looking forward to the next months when I will work on my professional placement, gaining valuable experience in partnership building towards conservation goals. Undoubtedly, the skills that I'm gaining through this Masters will help me to have a significant impact as a conservationist in South America.

Getting funding was highly important for me as for many students coming to Cambridge. Course-specific scholarships recognise the contribution of our field to global matters and are a vehicle for emerging practitioners and leaders. I selected Selwyn as my first option precisely because of the funding opportunities. Little did I know that being part of Selwyn would also be one of the highlights during my time in Cambridge, and now I can imagine no better college for me to be part of. I always dreamt about studying abroad, particularly in the United Kingdom. However, it is never easy to move over 6,800 miles from home to a country with a different culture and language, leaving family and friends behind. Fortunately, Selwyn's vibrant postgraduate community made my first weeks in Cambridge more easy and fun. It was a true joy to arrive here during pandemic times and even with all the restrictions being able to enjoy events organised by the MCR committee for us freshers to have a warm and cheerful welcome.

Now, it has been six months since I first arrived in Cambridge, and I can't wait to see what the next term holds for me. Undoubtedly, these past months helped me grow both professionally and personally, and I have big expectations for the months to come. Of course, this life-changing experience could not have been possible without the generous support of 'The John and Angela scholarship', to whom I am beyond grateful.

### Alumni-funded bursaries

**Thanks to the support of Selwyn alumni, we are currently able to offer two generously-funded bursaries for students requiring support for a place on the highly regarded MPhil in Conservation Leadership. Our thanks to Sarah and Jon Reynolds (SE 2004) and to Kelvin Chiu (SE 2005) – pictured right, for their generous help.**





# Congratulations

## Students



Raghul Parthipan (centre) and the Cambridge powerlifting team.

### Raghul Parthipan powerlifter

Raghul Parthipan (SE 2015) captained the Cambridge University Powerlifting Club to their 9th consecutive Varsity victory. He was the best overall lifter of the day, with a 230kg squat, a 140kg bench press and a 247.5kg deadlift, giving a 617.5kg total at 73.4kg bodyweight, and broke the East Midlands squat and total records in the 74kg Open class. He is currently doing a PhD where he works on using machine learning to improve climate models. Raghul is seen in the photograph holding the trophy. Congratulations!

### Ayesha Karim named as Scouts' Youth Commissioner

Congratulations to Selwyn engineering student **Ayesha Karim** (SE 2022), who has been named as the new UK Youth Commissioner by the Scouts. She'll be supporting local youth commissioners all over the country and encouraging the scouting organisation to listen to and represent the voices of young people in Scouts. She has been in the Scouts since she was 6, and now takes on this national leadership role.

Ayesha Karim



## Staff

### New College Nurse & Welfare Officer - Lucy Turnell

We welcome **Lucy Turnell** who has now taken over as college Nurse and Welfare Officer. This represents a further expansion in the nursing and welfare provision within the college. Until relatively recently, the nurse was a part-time role and during term only; and it has become full time and year-round. This is possible because of the generous benefaction of Peter and Christina Dawson. We also have, thanks to them, the Dawson Fund which provides support for students and specialist expertise on mental health.



Lucy Turnell

### Farewell to Sue Jeffries - Domus Manager

After a lifetime of service to the college, **Sue Jeffries** has decided the time is right to take retirement, and no one deserves it more than Sue. She joined Selwyn in 1988, and although she had a couple of years away at Madingley Hall in the 90s, saw the light and returned to the college in 1999 - and has been here ever since. Sue's association with the college actually goes back much further, as her mother worked here for over 30 years.

## Fellows



Janet O'Sullivan

### Janet O'Sullivan and her new book

Congratulations to **Dr Janet O'Sullivan**, Law academic and Vice-Master of Selwyn, who has published the 10th edition of her textbook on 'The Law of Contract'.

### Landmark achievement for Sarah MacDonald

**Sarah MacDonald** has been appointed University Organist. She explains: "The post dates from 1670, and over the centuries it has been held by the (male) directors of music at King's, John's, and Trinity only. The post-holder is responsible for providing music for all university occasions, including university sermons, honorary degree days, and other ceremonies, as well as overseeing the upkeep and maintenance of the university organ, the historic instrument in Great St Mary's, which is alleged to have been played by Mozart and Tchaikovsky. I am sharing the post with Sam Hayes, the director of music at GSM. Sam is in charge of events in GSM and the organ, and I am in charge of music for ceremonies in the Senate House."



Sarah MacDonald

### James Helm spreading the word

The college has elected **James Helm** as a Fellow. James is the new director of external affairs and communications for the University of Cambridge, and he is taking on responsibility for all of Cambridge's external and internal communications, public affairs and public engagement. James, a Cambridge alumnus,

is a former BBC correspondent and he was previously director of communications for the Metropolitan Police. He has also worked in Whitehall. On his appointment he said: "I'm extremely pleased and honoured to be taking up this post, and I am really looking forward to working with colleagues and helping this world-leading university to tell its brilliant story."

James Helm



## Events Diary

### 2022

Jun 28	Choir Concert, Selwyn gardens
Jul 2	1987 & 1997 Reunion
Jul 5	Choir Concert, London
Jul 9	Regular Givers' Lunch
Jul 9	Family Day
Jul 11	Choir Concert, Bristol
Jul 14	Choir concert, Winchester
Sep 3	1882 Society Lunch
Sep 7	1957 & 1962 Reunion
Sep 10	1992 & 2002 Reunion
Sep 14	1967 Reunion
Sep 24	Alumni Day, 2012 Reunion and Commemoration of Benefactors
Oct 27	MA Dining Evening
Nov 1	Oxford & Cambridge Club, London* Drinks & Talk
Dec 6	Carol Service, Selwyn
Dec 8	Carol Service, London

### 2023

Feb 9	MA Dining Evening
Mar 18	Parents' Lunch
Mar 25	1973 & 1983 Reunion
Apr 1	MA Congregation & Dinner 2016
May 12	Ramsay Murray Lecture
May 18	MA Dining Evening
May TBC	Friends of the Choir Evensong and Chapel Supper
Jun 10	Lyttelton Dinner
Jun TBC	Choir Concert, Selwyn gardens
Jul 1	1988 & 1998 Reunion
Jul 8	140th Anniversary Gala Day

Please note: all events are subject to change. Please check event details prior to booking to ensure that dates are correct. All events listed above will take place at Selwyn College unless otherwise noted, and have limited capacity. Guests are encouraged to book in good time to avoid disappointment. \* Please note that it is a rule of the Oxford & Cambridge Club that no denim or trainers should be worn and men wear a jacket and tie.

For further information about events and to book: [www.sel.cam.ac.uk/alumni/forthcoming-events](http://www.sel.cam.ac.uk/alumni/forthcoming-events) or telephone +44 (0)1223 335843.



Roger Mosey's reflections on Cambridge life.

# Extra swan for seniority?



We used to joke in the BBC about the point at which we were described by the press as a 'veteran'. It happened to one of my colleagues when he was in his forties, and he was mightily cheesed off to be called 'a veteran broadcaster' by the *Daily Mail*. I seem to remember it happening to me when I was in my fifties, which was fair enough given that by then I'd been in the corporation for 30 years. But I am now contemplating being a Cambridge veteran, even though it still feels like I've only just arrived and my tenure here hasn't yet reached nine years. The reason is that turnover of heads of house seems to have accelerated. Susan Smith, the Mistress of Girton, retires this summer after 13 years at the helm; and it's relatively recently that we said farewell to John Eatwell of Queens' (President 1997-2020) and David Yates of Robinson (Warden 2001-2021). From this autumn it will be those of us who arrived in 2013 who are the longest-serving: Mike Proctor at King's, Richard Penty at Sidney Sussex - and me. Both Professor Proctor and Professor Penty retire next summer, so if the gods preserve me: the veteran status will be nailed on by then.



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It is extraordinarily unlikely, of course, that anyone at Selwyn will ever beat the incomparable Owen Chadwick. Elected at the startlingly young age of 39, he served as Master for 27 years. He retired at the age of 67, as do almost all academics under the university and college regulations. I have been gently trying to find out whether there are any Cambridge perks attached to being the longest-serving head of house - perhaps an extra slice of Porterhouse roasted swan at a feast? - but I can find only one: the

right to be at the front of processions. For many events, we are called to march in order of our seniority; so initially I was at the back, but have now edged forward. This is the university at its Ruritanian finest, and nobody takes it too seriously - though I can't help recording that Trinity and John's and Christ's currently follow in Selwyn's wake. In Owen's day, seniority meant rather more in that vice-chancellors were selected from heads of house; and Owen led the university from 1969 to 1971. That is unthinkable now, in that our vice-chancellors are expected to have been VCs at other universities already and to be global leaders in management and fluent in strategy-speak. But there may be something to be said for the old system, which relied on selecting colleagues with a known track record, and an established love of Cambridge, rather than the labours of corporate headhunting firms.

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I kept myself busy during the tail end of the pandemic by writing a book about broadcast news. It's called *20 Things That Would Make the News Better* and it started from

a lecture I gave for Selwyn alumni in 2018 titled, less ambitiously, *10 Things That Would Make the News Better*. The expansion of the list is thanks to alumni, colleagues and friends who have chipped in with their ideas about what could make the traditional bulletins more helpful in an era of hysterical social media and damaging disinformation. It's a book that strongly supports public service broadcasting, but also examines where

it has gone wrong in recent years. Partly that has been about an agenda which is too metropolitan and which doesn't reflect enough the geographical and demographic diversity of the modern UK. This is acknowledged by Tim Davie (SE 1986) who is now director-general of the BBC, but the book throws some other challenges in his direction too - if only to keep a doughty Selwynite on his toes.

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There is competition from some colleges about proclaiming that their students can walk on the grass - thus differentiating themselves from the stuffy lot who retain "do not walk on the grass" signs. Well, at Selwyn students have always been welcome to walk on the grass anywhere except Old Court; and that is not about archaic rules but simply to stop paths being worn diagonally from the F gate to the bar. However, there have been signs of change in the Court. When the marquee was on the lawn, some tables and chairs moved outside too. We rather liked the social use of the space, and we have retained some outdoor tables near the bar. But we intend to maintain the line that socialising is better done in the lower gardens than at the foot of the hall steps - which means that the lawn is preserved for special occasions such as graduation. It could hardly be more special than this year, when we will be doing our first ceremonies with guests since 2019. So then, rightly, anything goes - and there is nothing to beat a General Admission day with the graduands lining up in front of an excited, grass-trampling Old Court crowd.

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