

BIN BROOK

 ROBINSON COLLEGE
CAMBRIDGE

Engineering special

Featured alumni from construction, navigation, design and more

My Robinson

Growing together, Fellow in Spanish shares her story to "Middle Earth"

Page to the Stage

The creative journey of two popular English and Music students

From Maths to Audio

Alumni receive government funding to progress AI music innovation

BBC Short Story Awards

Donor contribution enables prestigious literary collaboration



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We are always delighted to hear from anyone who has a Robinson-related story to tell. If you would like to contribute an article to *Bin Brook*, please email: development-office@robinson.cam.ac.uk

Welcome



Welcome to Bin Brook. The focus for this edition is engineering, in all its forms and disciplines. It's long been a core Tripos at Robinson, and it is inspiring to read reflections from former students, as well as from our current Director of Studies. The paths taken by our engineering alumni, and the problems they are elegantly addressing, are fascinatingly varied.

You will also read news and reports from College, and from many members of the Robinson community across the UK and far beyond. This Bin Brook celebrates sport, creativity and community. Several of this year's finalists have interviewed alumni (Faith Falayi talks to Abigail Dean) or have themselves been interviewed (Max Mason, Ben Cole). Thank you, to all our contributors. And as well as the notices recorded in the following pages, I would like to pay tribute to the five alumni who stood for Parliament in July (representing three different parties), and to the three who were elected: Pam Cox MP (Colchester), Mark Ferguson MP (Gateshead Central and Whickham) and Laura Kyrke-Smith MP (Aylesbury).

I am writing this foreword in the first week of September. The College has been relatively empty these past few days – though the work to repair and improve the place continues in all seasons. One of the pleasures of the annual cycle is the privilege of welcoming into College a new cohort of undergraduate and postgraduate students, now just a few short weeks away. Another is the twice-yearly reunion dinners we host in Hall each March and September. If you are going to be at one of the forthcoming occasions, I look forward to meeting you. But if it's not your year-group's turn, or if reunion dinners are not quite your thing, please feel free to visit Robinson less formally at any time. Take a walk in the gardens, have a break at the Red Brick café, enjoy a meal here. If you're planning a trip, do let me or the development office know, and one of us will meet you if we can, and welcome you back to your College.

Richard

Sir Richard Heaton KCB
Warden



FRONT COVER:
Stelios Thrasyvoulou, pictured at the Louvre Museum Abu Dhabi. A Jean Nouvel design capturing the ray of light concept through the dome. Depending on the time of day and season it gives a different effect.

NEWS in brief

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE ROBINSON COLLEGE HEAD PORTERS

Mr David Reynolds (pictured left) retired in April as our Head Porter after five years with the College. Prior to his time at Robinson, he spent 37 years on Britain's railways, leaving as the Chief Signalling Inspector and a Royal Train Operations Inspector. The College extends our heartfelt gratitude to David for his years of service and commitment to the College.

We welcomed Mr Neil Wilson (pictured right), our new Head Porter, who came to Robinson from Downing College where he was Deputy Head Porter. Prior to that Neil served in the Cambridgeshire Police for 30 years, including 22 years as a Dog Handler.

In the same week, we were delighted to welcome back our previous Head Porter Mr Colin Barnes (pictured centre) who retired in May 2019 after 16 years in the role. Before Robinson, he was a Police Chief Inspector. ■



SPORTS SUCCESS FROM THE LENT TERM AND THE EASTER TERM



Phoebe Barker



Jamie Fardale

Robinson College has seen remarkable athletic achievements since the start of the year, particularly in Rugby.

In March, the Cambridge Rugby Union Blues, which included Robinson students Hetta Friend (Medicine, 2018), Jamie Fardale (Sustainability Leadership, 2022, as pictured below), Thomas Petty (Health, Medicine and Society, 2023), Charles Hancock (Geographical Tripos, 2021), Max Harvey (Natural Sciences, 2021), and Henry Francis (Mathematics, 2023), notably triumphed over Oxford in both men and women's Varsity matches. In another significant victory, Robinson student Kiron Austin (PGCE Mathematics, 2023) led an incredible comeback in the Men's Blues Varsity Fencing, taking the team from a 20-10 deficit to a 23-22 win.

The College has also been successful in cross country and football. Phoebe Barker (Veterinary Sciences, 2018, as pictured above), impressively finished 9th in the Women's Long Course at the World University Cross Country Championship in Oman, contributing to the GB Students Women's Team's win of the Overall Team Gold. In the 150th Varsity Football match, Makafui Avevor (Engineering, 2021) made his debut in the Blues Varsity match.

In April, the College's sailing team, including Robinson student Gordon Cogan Sivarajan (Natural Sciences, 2020), secured first place at the open BUSA Team Racing Championships at Grafham Water Sailing Club. This series of victories underscores Robinson College's strong athletic performance since the beginning of the year.

This series of victories underscores Robinson College's strong athletic performance since the beginning of the year. ■

MY ROBINSON REBECCA FELL



Robinson will soon celebrate its fiftieth birthday. In this vein, I will cast aside etiquette and the bias of the nineteenth century (my own chosen period of Spanish history and culture). Oscar Wilde once famously said “One should never trust a woman who tells one her real age. A woman who would tell one that would tell one anything.” (!) So take my words here with a pinch of salt!

By the time you read them, I too will be on the brink of turning 50, so unbeknown to one another, Robinson College and I have grown up together: 1980s Britain under Margaret Thatcher, the unmistakable optimism of 1980s music (despite its angsty lyrics). And like Robinson, I am also very familiar with 1980s architecture and design: my father was an interior designer using 1980s materials to amazing effect in offices, boardrooms, restaurants and a host of other spaces. I had no idea that by working at Robinson I would in a sense be coming home. Our building’s interior is in many ways as familiar to me as my childhood!

My experience of Robinson has evolved, as with any new environment. From the visual and superficial to the savoury (how could it not? Our food! The RBC) and to the auditory, to something far deeper, more intense and much more important. My office is the one beneath the flagpole looking down onto Front Court. The glorious tones of our Chapel Choir often float up on the ether to serenade me. And, as I look right out of the window of my eyrie office into College, along the rooftiles of Long Court, perhaps somewhat strangely Robinson’s structure looks Roman to me; our building’s roofline has connotations of the Roman forum. Remember the forum was the centrepiece of Roman society, the location of important cultural (intellectual, judiciary, and academic), social, political and religious activities. To me, architecturally, educationally, and beautifully, Robinson blends the modern with the historic.

When I arrived as a Fellow in Robinson, I only had Churchill College to compare it to (and Clare where I had completed my undergraduate and postgraduate degrees). Jokingly to Paul, then my fiancé and now my husband, I referred to Churchill as “Rivendell” and Robinson as “Middle Earth”. Please don’t think I am being disparaging of Robinson here and let me explain. Remember Robinson and I are coming of age together! Churchill was all green space, and Barbara Hepworth statues, very post-war, very 1950s. Robinson was 1980s redbrick and warmth. And, if you are in any doubt, I am completely in love with my brick turret as I call the ivory tower by the Porters Lodge, where my office resides.

To extend my metaphors further, my experience of academia until Robinson felt like one of “elven” mystery, and of a lingering feeling of

Cambridge imposter syndrome, so to speak. Having begun my PhD at Clare (returning to the University of Cambridge after an 18-year career at Deloitte), I finally completed it while teaching at Churchill. The outcome of my first viva in June 2019 had been a 12-month structural rewrite during the pandemic. I both passed my second viva and secured my Robinson post in the month of September 2021. As the Master of Churchill, Professor Dame Athene McDonald (a fellow here at Robinson for many years) told me after that second viva, I had become a living example of “There’s success in failure.” Athene also told me that I’d love Robinson, and I would feel right at home here. She was right!

Which brings me back to Robinson and Middle Earth. Remember the Tolkien journey begins and ends in Middle Earth, after an experience of deep fellowship. At Robinson, I have genuinely felt myself to be a fully-fledged academic, and I have experienced a deep sense of fellowship for the first time, of community. I won’t use the word “family”; I spend a lot of time explaining its troublesome etymological origins to students of Franco’s dictatorship: the family of the head of the Household in Roman times (the “pater familias”) included his wife, children and slaves! That is, family represented subservience. This is so not what my Robinson has been and is about. I have encountered no stuffiness, and no hierarchy here, only openness, curiosity, friendship, integrity, kindness and excellence.

I am a linguist. Lucky to attend a primary school (which sadly no longer exists) that taught French and Latin from the age of 6, meaning making in different languages is a lifelong love, as is living abroad. No matter where I go, however, it has always been about the people. And this is my most important point: they may not be aware of it, but Robinson’s people have made a huge difference to me. From friendship to sagacious advice (on the need, or not, to convert my book from a 3-into 4-legged table or stool, metaphorically speaking), to teaching me how to examine, to boxing therapy. In the face of my struggle to tackle the opacity of literary theory, after 18 years as a finance professorial, one fellow kindly observed, “But Becky, it’s meant to be difficult; that’s the point. It’s to make people think.” Which resulted in a major breakthrough. I am so grateful.

Finally, faced with writing this piece, I reflected on the sounds of Robinson College, beyond the Chapel Choir. And I heard laughter. And laughter is such a tonic, in the face of challenges (essays, intense term-time timetables, exams, newly acquired stepchildren struggling with the world of the 21st-century). From the Warden’s grin to the good-humoured folk in the RBC as I ask for yet another decaf mocha, to the jokiness of my fellow Fellows decompressing over lunch in the SCR, and to the buzz and excitement of our Tuesday and Friday Formal Halls, Robinson is a very special place. I am blessed to be here. ■

FOCUS ON **ENGINEERING**



GUEST INTRODUCTION

JOSSY SAYIR

I am Director of Studies (DoS) in Engineering at Robinson College, a task I share with Andreas Georgiou. I am also an Associate Teaching Professor at the Department of

Engineering, where I teach courses and labs in information engineering. I joined the college in 2014 and took up the role of DoS shortly thereafter. Before I joined, I held a research post at the university for 5 years, previous to which I worked 1½ years for Motorola Telecommunications in Tel Aviv and 9 years at a telecoms research centre in Vienna. I grew up in Switzerland and did my undergraduate degree and PhD at ETH Zürich.

A few weeks ago, I hosted Baby S and parents for a tour of the college. Baby S's mum was a former Pembroke student I'd supervised in her 3rd year before I joined Robinson. We ended our tour in Flat 4, the flat that has been used for Engineering supervisions and interviews for decades, where I treated Baby S's parents to my signature cappuccino pulled on an E61 ECM Mechanika (for the coffee geeks amongst you...) To my surprise, Baby S's dad revealed that he'd been a Robinson Engineering student in the same year as his wife, and that he'd spent many years being taught by John Williams and others in Flat 4. I have been so engaged in college engineering education over the past 10 years that I had come to think of myself as "Mister Robinson-Engineering". I'm embarrassed to admit that the thought that many students graduated before I joined came as a shock. Please read the rest of this article as a letter to you, engineering alumni whom I have yet to meet!

What has changed since you graduated? My coffee machine is a novelty... I start every supervision by taking coffee orders and delivering espressos and cappuccinos. Many familiar things remain. John Williams who was a DoS supervisor to many of you remains a huge presence in College. I could never have become the DoS I am without his help and guidance over the past 10 years. We have a strong team of Fellows and associates, including Geb Jones teaching electronics, Athina Markaki who coordinates engineering admissions, Mohammed Elshafie teaching structures, Nedunchezian Swaminathan with James Massey teaching thermofluids and maths. To round it up, a well liked external supervisor Joe Stallard teaches materials and our very own Alex Grafton, former undergraduate, graduate, and now postdoctoral research associate, teaches information and maths.

The pandemic has taken a toll. The students who started in 2020 and graduated this year were particularly affected, starting university life unable to socialise, only meeting during online supervisions. Students who had made Robinson their home before the pandemic fought through it bravely, switching to new ways of learning, teaming together and helping each other out. We were lucky that Robinson remained one of the most supportive colleges, allowing those unable to return home to remain in College and enabling new ways of teaching to minimise the educational loss for all students. We learned a lot by adapting our teaching to the pandemic conditions and some of the changes we made improved the learning experience and remain in place today.

Another tradition that began during the pandemic is the yearly "pizza party" in my garden, started when colleges were reluctant to allow gatherings but the legal framework permitted outdoor parties in private gardens. This year has seen the 4th edition and I am proud to report that two talented Robinson students, Pamposh Mam (3rd year) and Mete Hergul (4th year), baked 80 wood-fired pizzas for the engineering students of Robinson and Newnham Colleges as well as a few recent alumni.

Overall, Robinson engineering is going from strength to strength. We have students actively engaged in the Full Blue Racing society, in the newly founded Riviera Racing society, and in a wealth of other engineering-related societies and projects. Our students have averaged rankings significantly above the 50th percentile in tripos examinations over the past few years. I put this down to a nurturing friendly environment that supports and encourages students. Happy students do better!

I would like a closer relation with alumni. If you pass through Cambridge, please get in touch! Coffee is always on offer in Flat 4 and you'd be welcome to join the pizza party. If you plan to attend formal dinners at Robinson, let me know and I'll make a special effort in the wine selection as I double up as the College wine steward. It would be great to organise meetings of students and alumni with a view to helping with career planning, advice on internships, or supporting any grand projects our students may be considering. If you are willing and able to participate, please get in touch! ■



FOCUS ON **ENGINEERING**

Louvre Aerial



Zayed University



One Zaabeel



STELIOS THRASYVOULOU ACCOMPLISHMENT

Stelios Thrasyvoulou (Engineering, 1994) is founder and part of the Executive Management of SPECON Group that specialises in MEP (Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing) turnkey works, who have completed landmark projects in the UAE and the wider MENA region. The company's projects include the Louvre Museum in Abu Dhabi, the Royal Atlantis the Palm in Dubai, a Proton Therapy Centre in Riyadh, and the One Zaa'abeel in Dubai, featuring the world's largest cantilever.

I am honoured to be given this wonderful opportunity to talk about my professional life after my years at Robinson College.

I studied Engineering at Cambridge University between 1994 and 1998. In my third year of the Engineering Tripos I opted for Mechanical Engineering and in the fourth and final year Thermodynamics and Fluid Mechanics, spending considerable time at the Whittle Lab. Studying Engineering provided me with strategic problem solving and analytical thinking skills that formed the foundations of my career. Following an 8-year stint in the City of London in the late 1990's and early 2000's, I followed my engineering dream and moved to Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates where I was one of the Founders of an engineering and construction group. The company is called SPECON LLC and specialises in Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing (MEP) and Energy & Power turnkey projects. We have a strong inhouse engineering team undertaking turnkey design and build projects. At peak the company operated in 6 countries, with 5000+ employees. Part of our scope of works includes specialised systems such as Building Management Systems (BMS), Audio-Visual (AV), Lighting Control Systems (LCS), Security, Fire Alarm, Solar Systems and Fire Fighting. My company is also licenced to undertake Medium-High Voltage (MV/HV) transmission and distribution works and renewable energy such as solar power and geothermal. I have been privileged to have worked on some of the most prestigious and iconic projects in the Middle East region such as the Louvre Museum in Abu Dhabi, Paris Sorbonne and Zayed Universities in Abu Dhabi, the Royal Atlantis Hotel and Residences on the Palm in Dubai, the One Za'abeel Towers (featuring the world's largest cantilever), a replica of the Amazon rain forest, floating villas, a state of the art hospital in Abu Dhabi and the only Proton Therapy Centre in Riyadh. During the last 15 years we as a group have successfully executed USD 4 billion of projects including 14 commercial and residential towers, 12 luxury hotels, 2 universities, 2 museums, 3 hospitals and 4 infrastructure projects.

What differentiated us from our competitors was our emphasis and investment in a strong engineering team with deep-rooted knowledge of fundamentals with

attention to detail and a zero-tolerance policy on health, safety, design and quality. I attribute this discipline to a large extent to the solid engineering foundations I gained at Cambridge University.

I have been fortunate to have lived through times with an impressive technological uptake in the field of engineering with enhanced construction delivery tools at our possession such as tablets and smart-phones, Building Information Modeling (BIM), modular and prefabrication techniques, 4-D cad design and virtual reality visuals. I look forward to the next decade with the inevitable introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) especially in design, engineering calculations and simulations, planning, quantity surveying, BIM and more impactfully in our MEP ecosystem control systems. Exciting times lie ahead of us and, in this respect, I look forward to further developing my learning curve and continuing my journey in the field of engineering that commenced on a rainy day back in October 1994 at the entrance of our very own Robinson College! ■



Atlantis-The-Royal-Resort-Residences

SARAH BINHAM REFLECTION



Sarah Binham (Engineering: Electrical and Information Sciences, 1998) has over 20 years' experience as a patent attorney. She became a partner in private practice in 2012 and was one of the founding partners of Slingsby Partners LLP in 2013. She has recently set-up her own firm to practice as a freelance attorney.

I remember one of my relatives asking when I first thought about an engineering degree: "Engineering? What will you do with that?". Having just attended my 25-year reunion dinner now feels like a good time to answer her question.

Engineering is the most utilitarian of subjects. Cambridge Engineering Department is filled with wave tanks and engines, aerofoils, and oscilloscopes. I remember the smell: a mix of oil, metal, and concrete. I might occasionally have noticed beauty in the pistons and propellers, and felt wonder at serried ranks of transistors clicking on and off at imaginable speed, but for the most part, life was resolutely practical. We built robots and learned about bridges. We wrestled steam tables and programmed computers. We drew cogs. We filtered signals. But most of all we did maths. My calculator was my permanent companion. In the end, I just needed more words. I abandoned my school-day dreams of designing F1 cars or working for NASA and joined the peculiar legal niche of the Patent Attorney.

I was happy wearing my suit, turning telecommunications innovations into legal arguments, seemingly having left the hard edges of engineering far behind me. But that was never true. I used my engineering knowledge every day. I rarely come across an invention where I don't have at least a basic working knowledge of its technical field, which is a testament to the sheer volume of information that Cambridge hammered into us. Of course, that intensity didn't come

without cost. When life is pressured, I still dream that I have an upcoming exam I haven't prepared for. On the upside, Cambridge left me well-equipped for a deadline-driven profession. In my job, however tight the time scale is, I'm confident that I can at least produce something. That is a distinct improvement from the old university fear of turning over an exam paper and being unable to produce anything.

A less tangible quality, which I think has left a lasting imprint on my career, is the entrepreneurial spirit that permeated the Engineering Department. It was the last years of the dot-com boom and the Cambridge Cluster was well-established. Fellow students, brimming with ideas and optimism, eagerly anticipated following the start-up path. I never expected to be among them, and yet, after a decade working for one company, I found myself setting up a new patent firm with a group of colleagues. Another decade on, I find myself branching off again, this time as a freelance. Writing this article has made me look back and think, for the first time: maybe some of that entrepreneurial spirit rubbed off.

So I didn't become an engineer. But the analytical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork skills that my degree drilled into me have formed the bedrock of my career. I'm immeasurably grateful to my younger self for having studied engineering, and actually slightly awestruck that I ever managed it. ■

KK CHAN ADAPTABILITY



KK Chan (Electrical and Information Sciences, 1986) has a strong educational background, including degrees from Cambridge, London and Tsinghua universities. KK's career spans leadership roles in major energy and investment firms. His expertise in business development, operations, and corporate finance led to significant achievements, including turning around non-performing assets and winning the 'Corporate Developer of the Year' award for his company.

When I chose engineering to study, I knew electronics was what I intended to pursue simply because it was an important element of future technology advancement. After my BA, I carried on to a PhD in thin film semiconductor technologies. I am really glad I did it because not only did I become an expert in my field of study but I was well trained to think and solve problems.

After my PhD, unlike many of my peers, I decided to try something different: investment banking. I wanted to see what would happen if I applied my skills into the financial markets. I was so glad that I got an exciting job in Asia and learnt so much about the financial world. In investment banking, my job was usually about problem solving such as raising capital for companies, financial restructuring,

merger & acquisition, etc. My approach was to collect data, analyse it, come up with different options, choose the best solution, and execute it. This process was exactly the same as what I did in my PhD and my vigorous training at Cambridge helped me perform such tasks efficiently and effectively. The knowledge from my engineering courses was also very useful in my job because of the insights into technology development which were applicable to many clients.

After investment banking, I have worked in several different industries including real estate, renewable energy, sustainability, venture capital, art collection. Whatever I am doing, I am very thankful to my study in Engineering as it trained my mind to learn and work on new things. ■

FOCUS ON **ENGINEERING**



Getting ready to commence survey operations off the Falkland Islands



PAUL HANNA NAVIGATION /ˌnavɪˈgeɪʃn/

Paul Hanna (Engineering, 1983) took a PhD in Engineering Surveying and Space Geodesy (Nottingham) and has spent his career living abroad working within the global energy sector. His roles have included technology development, operational management, human resources and general commercial leadership within large multi-nationals. A qualified chartered director, Paul is back in the UK focusing on corporate governance as well as business support consultancy within the energy sector.

My career has revolved around two key interests – being at sea and navigation, and the science (and art) of getting around and knowing where you are.

Many Cambridge engineers will have had a taster of surveying from mapping Coe Fen (the meadowland behind the Engineering Department) in their first

year; I continued with a term of astro surveying on the Baker Building's roof top in my final year.

I took a PHD in inertial navigation investigating applications of military hardware to the field of pipeline pigging. Pig bladders were reportedly used



Scan to view:
Living Daylights.

in Roman days to clean aqueducts and pigging remains very important as a technique to keep our oil, gas, water and waste pipelines free of debris and blockages as well as enabling periodic monitoring to detect potential future pipe breakages. My research investigated improving pig navigation since they often travel for hours on end (sometimes extending to days) and frequently get lost! A more entertaining (and ridiculous) application of pipeline pigging can be seen in the film, *The Living Daylights*.

Post-research, I've worked in the energy sector mainly on locating hydrocarbons deposited well beneath the seabed. This form of surveying (more formally termed reflection seismology) uses large ships (typically the size of a small cross channel ferry) to tow the business end about 10 metres below the sea surface. We deploy an array of sensitive recording equipment over a kilometer wide by 10 kilometers long (a distance from Hyde Park to Canary Wharf!) to record echoes reflected from the various rock interfaces below the seabed. Sophisticated algorithms then allow a visual section of the rock strata to be developed. Some of the hydrocarbon reservoirs we delineate might be fairly close to the seabed and in shallow water (perhaps 50m) and others could be in water depths of a couple of thousand meters and then a further similar depth below the seabed. Survey ships move forwards and backwards covering the area of interest for a period of typically 2 or 3 months and are often referred to as the largest man-made moving objects on the planet. Safety and environmental protection are paramount since we need to avoid entanglements with the other users of our oceans.

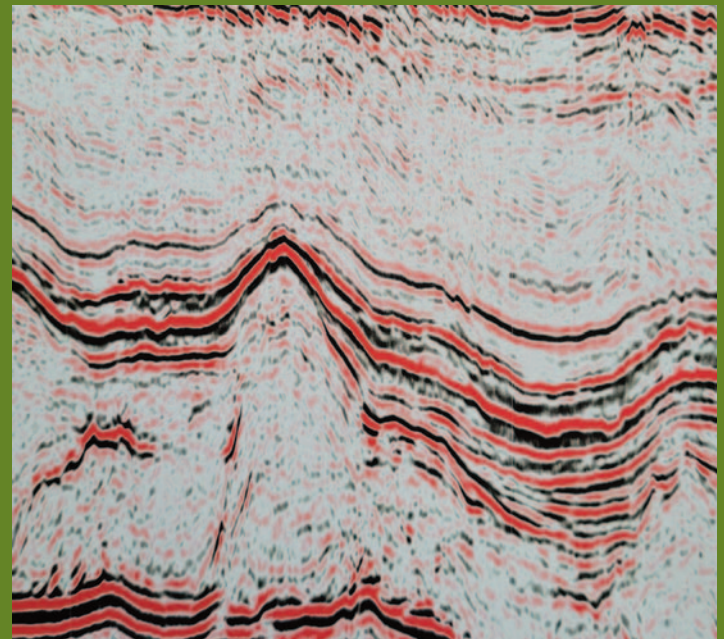
In the early years I held a number of navigation engineering and operational roles before transitioning to leadership positions. I've lived abroad for the best part of 30 years as part of a very mobile and diverse multicultural workforce and have spent periods working in some 50 countries – of which the majority are definitely not tourist destinations; at times challenging but always interesting.

In 2008 I was invited to join a fledgling Dubai-based start-up as one of their founder executives with the lofty ambition of raising the financing for, and then constructing, a fleet of deep sea survey ships. Having only really worked for an employer of 150,000 employees, the transition to a team of fewer than 10 was quite a change. But it was a good move and on the strength of a well-written business plan within a short space of time we'd raised well over a billion US dollars and started construction in the dockyards. During this period our Robinson Director of Studies Professor John Williams visited our ship building in Dubai and was fascinated by the scale of activities.

Nowadays my focus is on improving corporate governance through some non-exec activities and I regularly assist organisations within the energy sector with business consultancy support and executive team coaching. Navigation remains a keen interest and I have been a trustee of our professional body, the



Recording equipment being towed behind a survey ship



A seismic section which allows interpreters to identify hydrocarbon reserves

Royal Institute of Navigation, for some years. At the start of my career, the navigation mindset focussed mainly on marine and aviation applications –

it has now become much broader to include cognitive navigation where great research efforts are underway to better detect neurodegenerative conditions such as Alzheimer's (which inhibits personal navigation) as well as researching animal navigation of which we still know so little of. And there are whole new worlds of autonomous vehicle navigation (drones, driverless cars, ships & planes) and the introduction of lunar-based navigation systems as we take more concrete steps to explore beyond our planet.

My career was never planned nor even contemplated – it just somehow developed from those early days in Robinson. ■

FOCUS ON **ENGINEERING**

EDWARD GOODWIN **VERSATILITY**

Edward Goodwin (Electrical and Information Sciences, 1995) went on to study industrial design at the Royal College of Art after Robinson. He met his business partner there and together they set up their product design consultancy, Goodwin Hartshorn, in 2002. Edward's consultancy designs many types of products from loudspeakers to surgical instruments, and sanitaryware to kitchen utensils, working with fledgling start-ups to established multinationals.

When I was at school, I was unsure whether I should study engineering or physics at university. My physics teacher asked me: "Do you like to take things apart?". "Yes" I said. "And do you like to put them back together again" he questioned. "Erm, yes!" I replied. "Ok, well that's easy then, you should study engineering". And so that's what I did. But truth be told, I think what I really wanted to be was a product designer. Actually, that's not true. I wanted to be an architect, but my uncle (an architect) had told me it was a dreadful idea and to think again.

I studied engineering at Robinson from 1995-1999, specialising in EIST (Electrical and Information Sciences). Prior to Robinson I completed a year-in-industry, working in submerged optical telecommunications. It was pretty esoteric stuff but actually I loved it, and my thoughts of product design were pushed to the back of my mind. I loved the engineering, and I was fortunate enough to be sponsored by the same company. I would go back each summer to gain more experience and learn more about how to use optical amplification to send ever more data across oceans to strengthen and speed up the backbone of the internet. However, the more I went back during the holidays, the more I realised that being

part of a company of 200,000 people wasn't for me. And it made me start to think again about product design and about a course I'd heard about at the Royal College of Art that took engineers and turned them into product design engineers.

Studying at the RCA was not like Cambridge. There was none of the engineering rigour, the impossible 'examples papers' and the two-a-penny geniuses to aspire to. The RCA seemed to be about putting in the hours and slogging through the design exercises, about searching for all the things wrong with something and trying to work out how to make them better. Where I'd been concentrating on squeezing signal-to-noise ratio out of optical amplifiers, at the RCA I explored the tangle: a better dental mirror, an environmentally friendlier surgical scalpel, improved packaging. So much less engineering and much more about challenging assumptions and thinking differently. In comparison with studying engineering in Cambridge, it became clear quite early on that the RCA wasn't so much about learning from the lecturers but more about learning from the other students and from experimenting.



It was at the RCA that I met my business partner, Richard, and that changed everything. We set up our eponymous consultancy in 2002 and have been going strong ever since. We've designed everything from loudspeakers and headphones to sanitaryware and surgical instruments, from juice extractors and kitchen utensils to rucksacks and spirometers!

When I was contacted to write something for *Bin Brook* about where engineering has taken me since my time at Robinson, I was tempted to say 'not far' as I'm a product designer. However, the more I considered the question, the more it became clear the extent to which engineering plays an integral role in the work we do. Richard, who studied engineering science at Oxford, was much more sensible than me by specialising in mechanical engineering. I never have the opportunity to use my experience in submerged optical amplifiers or laying out silicon structures for an integrated circuit – and a good thing too! Firstly, I've forgotten it all and secondly, it's probably two decades out of date now. However, the wonder of the Cambridge (and Oxford) course is the years of general engineering you study. The underpinning there has been invaluable to me. We are routinely involved in structural analysis, material selection, manufacturing engineering and issues of heating/cooling. We also have to liaise with engineers across a range of disciplines, be that clients or manufacturing partners. So engineering is integral to what we do.

When I look back, I wonder what my physics teacher would have said if I'd have spilled the beans and told him that, really, I wanted to be a product designer. I hope his answer would have been the same. Because, as a product designer, I think the best thing you can study first is engineering. ■



FOCUS ON STUDENTS

Giovanni Pontiero, (1932–1996)



FROM STAGE TO PAGE:

MAX MASON AND BEN COLE'S CREATIVE JOURNEY AT ROBINSON

Both Max Mason (English, 2021) and Ben Cole (Music, 2021) have made significant contributions to the Cambridge theatre scene. This has included individual works, such as Max's directing the opera *Semele*, and Ben's music work as an organ scholar. Where they have most shone is in their talent for collaboration and creative synergy; they worked together on a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which Max directed, and Ben composed music for, and this work culminated in an entirely original musical *Field of Folk*. Finishing their last term at Robinson, they're both genuinely sad to leave College, but excited for what the future holds.

Q: Let's go back before Robinson College when you were at Sixth Form college: what made you come to Cambridge?

Max: I went to a private school that catered to lots of different kinds of interests. We had a zoo and a dance school on the same site. It was an incredible school, but not very good at getting many Russell Group university places. I applied to Cambridge because I had an unusual interest in books, a deep passion. I also did Performing Arts at school and was a drama scholar. I chose

Robinson because one of my literary heroes, John Milton, went to a very young college, and that shaped the kind of writer he became.

Ben: I don't have a beautiful story like Max. As an organist, it was always about whether I would go for the organ scholarship program. When I was 15, I remember a meeting with my house master who said he envisioned me becoming an organ scholar at Cambridge. That was the moment I thought I could do it. I spoke to others who suggested I might get more conducting

opportunities at a smaller college. Robinson was my second choice, and it has been a great experience working with the choir here.

Q: How was the first year at Robinson for you both?

Max: I was pleasantly surprised by the community in my subject, English. It was very conversational, open, and community-oriented, which was different from the isolated ivory tower image I had. We were very lucky in Robinson to have such a large cohort of English scholars with a huge range of intellectual interests. It made studying English at Robinson a real community experience.

Ben: You don't really understand what a college is like until you live in it. The college didn't give off typical college vibes, which was interesting. Navigating the Cambridge culture without feeling the need to be embedded in it was fun. Also, the café was my favourite part. I loved the café.

Q: How did you two meet?

Max: We met through subject drinks and Ben was one of the first people I spoke to at university. We also both participated in the choir. Our first collaboration was in the first year when I wanted to rescue the Maria Björnson Theatre open-air stage in Robinson Gardens. We did *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Ben composed the music for it, which was the first production we fully collaborated on.

Ben: Yeah, it was a really fun project. I had always been interested in theatre, and when Max suggested it, I was immediately on board.

Q: So, theatre was a natural fit for you both?

Ben: I spent a lot of time at school doing piano and organ studies. In my final year, I was asked to play for a production of *The Producers* and I had a lot of fun. I had also participated in a few minor plays before then. When Max said he had a musical idea, I was immediately excited.

Q: What other projects did you work on together?

Max: After *A Midsummer Night's Dream* we wrote our first full show together called *Foresight*. It's a musical about the renowned translator Giovanni Pontiero who has been diagnosed with AIDS. His sole ambition is to translate the last great work of Portuguese novelist Saramago, a blistering dystopia called *Blindness*. Whilst Pontiero himself loses his sight, the question of his life's work hangs in the balance: will he be able to finish his translation before the time runs out? We had a great team working with us. We continued to collaborate on various theatre projects throughout our time at Robinson.

Ben: Yes, and each project was a learning experience. We grew as artists and as collaborators. It was a fantastic journey.



With friend Jamie Ellis (*Music*, 2021) left, Max Mason and Ben Cole

Q: What were some of the challenges you faced while working on these projects?

Max: One of the biggest challenges was balancing our academic work with our theatre projects. Cambridge is demanding, and finding the time to dedicate to our productions was tough. But we were passionate about it, so we made it work.

Ben: Another challenge was the logistics of staging productions, especially in unconventional spaces like the Robinson Gardens. But those challenges also made the projects more rewarding when we saw everything come together.

Q: What was the most rewarding part of your collaborations?

Max: For me, it was seeing our ideas come to life and the audience's reactions. There's something incredibly fulfilling about creating something from scratch and having it resonate with people.

Ben: I agree. Also, the camaraderie and the sense of community we built with our cast and crew were very rewarding. It was like creating a little family with each project.

Q: And what's next for you both after College?

Max: We're looking forward to whatever comes next, but theatre and music will remain a big part of our lives. We're exploring various opportunities and are excited about the future.

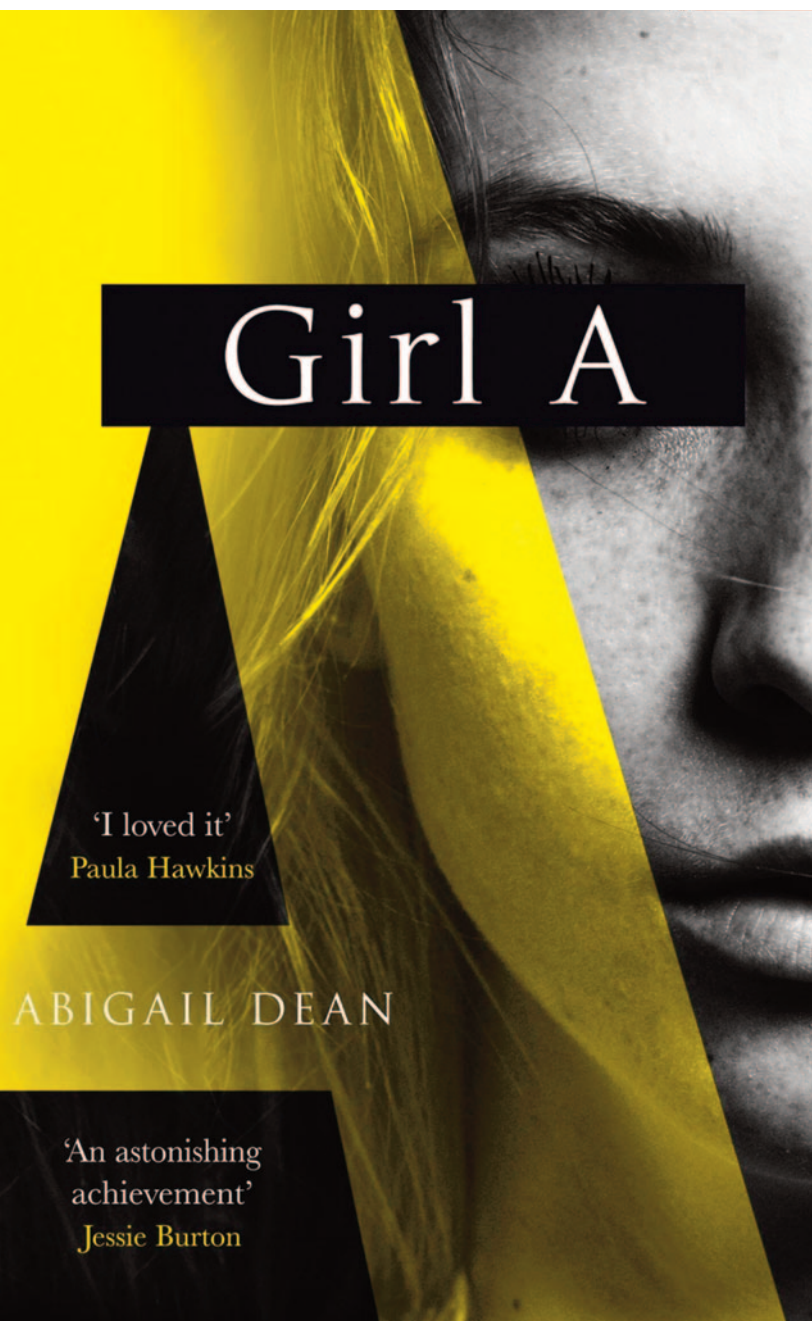
Ben: Absolutely. We're excited for the future but also sad to be leaving this chapter behind. We plan to continue working together on theatre and music projects, wherever that may take us. ■



Abigail Dean

STUDENT TO BESTSELLER:

A CONVERSATION WITH ABIGAIL DEAN



When I was given the opportunity to chat to best-selling author, Abigail Dean (English, 2008), I jumped at the chance. We sat down in the Robinson Red Brick Café which brought back a flood of memories for returning alumna, Abigail. Having studied English at Robinson, she remarks on how much and how little the place has changed.

Many years and two published novels later, much has also changed in Abigail's life beyond Robinson. I kick off our conversation by asking about her writing journey – how does one go from reading English to writing bestsellers? Abigail's love for writing, however, predates her university days. She has wanted to write a novel since she was “a teeny-tiny kid”, she tells me. She inherited her passion for books from her parents who were both English teachers, so growing up “there were lots of books in the house!” Abigail remembers how she would “write little novels and staple pages together in my own little imaginary publishing house” as a child. As a teenager, she was “writing all the time”, fanfictions mostly. “A standard millennial,” she says, laughing, “What kind of fanfictions?”, I want to know. “Mostly, about Final Fantasy VII” she admits.

But a turning point came when she was 16 or 17 years old and entered the first chapters of a novel into a Waterstones writing competition. She didn't win she recalls, “but I was shortlisted! And it was an adult competition”. Abigail remembers it being the first time anyone ever acknowledged her writing, and the first time she felt there could be any commercial possibility for her work.

However, beginning her years of study at Cambridge, Abigail admits she stopped writing creatively so much. “I was focused on studying literature rather than necessarily writing myself”. She confesses she found the Cambridge writing scene quite daunting, leading her to shy away from sharing her work. “I was very introverted”, she says. While she doesn't regret it, looking back, Abigail reflects that “it's better to share – if you don't provide your opinions, then nobody will be able to engage with them.”

Stepping entirely away from books, Abigail's time at Robinson was followed by years of working as a lawyer. “I had to get a job,” she says. “So, I just didn't really write for quite a few years. It was only when I was coming up to my 30th birthday and I was very, very miserable in a law firm, working hideous hours with huge amounts of pressure that one day, I decided I'm not doing this for the next ten years”.

Quitting her job, Abigail took three months over the summer dedicated to “just writing” half of what would eventually become *Girl A*, her debut novel. “It was a real privilege to have that time”, Abigail tells me. “I think it was because I hadn’t written with any consistency for so long, it felt almost like the floodgates opening!”

The psychological thriller, which was an instant feature on the Sunday Times and New York Times Bestsellers list, follows protagonist Lex Gracie who escapes and frees her six brothers and sisters from her parents’ religious cult, only to be forced to return to her childhood home after the death of her mother many years later. “It’s quite intense!”, Abigail laughs.

She describes the novel as life-changing, its success fulfilling her dream of being able to write full-time. On top of this, *Girl A* is on track to being adapted for the screen. “I can’t say too much about it, but a TV production is underway”. It’s an exciting prospect, one that Abigail finds extremely liberating as a writer, watching her work come to life in an entirely new way.

In March this year, her second thriller, *Day One* was also published. Delving into the world of conspiracy theories, the novel follows two characters, Marty and Trent, the former a victim of a terrorist attack and the latter insisting the attack never happened at all.

Hearing about the novels, I ask Abigail what draws her to this genre. She tells me she’s interested in what “happens to people in extreme situations, how they behave and whether relationships are stronger or weaker after a terrible thing happens.”

“I don’t think I’m the sort of writer who is so interested in the violence or atrocity itself, but more what that does to people afterwards”, she continued. Using news stories as an example, Abigail explains that she wants to lift and look beneath the headlines at the actual humans, asking about “what you don’t always see reported”.

From their behaviour to their complex motives, it’s clear that characters take centre stage in Abigail’s work. When I ask whether her characters are based on real people, she reassuringly replies, “Absolutely not!”

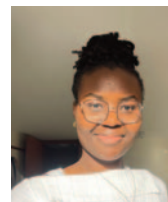
The intersection between reality and fiction manifests itself in Abigail’s belief that “very few people in life think they’re the villain,” and she brings this to her novels. “I try to think that there are terrible acts but very few actually terrible people. It’s mostly just people who are making some terrible error.” She adds, “I think that helps give real empathy to characters.”

As our time draws to a close, I finish our interview by asking Abigail the question I’ve wanted to ask all along: “Why do you write?” She takes some time to think about it. “I can only go back to how reading makes me feel,” she says. She remembers how, as a child, she yearned to “get inside a book, for it to be real”, describing the moment when a novel “really moves you or makes you laugh” as “almost a kind of magic.”

She says, “As a writer, I think that having readers connect with your characters in that way – to be moved by them, despise them, adore them, or to feel a great sympathy for them – is just so wonderful and beautiful. That’s what literature has given to me over many, many years. And I’ve just always thought – if you can do that – that’s just so cool!”

I also hope to write in the future and speaking to Abigail, who believes that her love for writing and books is “probably just as simple as that”, is nothing short of inspiring. As a finalist, it’s incredible to hear about all Abigail’s been able to achieve, especially considering how we’ve both found a start at Robinson. “I love this place,” she tells me. “It’s always lovely to be back!”

Before she leaves, I ask if I can take a photograph of her sat across from me in the Red Brick Café. It’s a reminder of where her journey from student to writer began all those years ago and hopefully where mine is just beginning. ■



BY FAITH FALAYI
(English, 2021)

FOCUS ON STUDENTS



BASIL WOODS' MATHEMATICAL INNOVATION JOURNEY, FROM CAMBRIDGE TO AI

Basil Woods and Vipul Thakurdesai (both Mathematics, 2013) are the Co-Founders of AudioStrip, an AI-powered web tool for musicians and DJs that isolates vocals from instrumentals in any song. Initially starting AudioStrip as a side project, their efforts gained significant traction when a Reddit post brought widespread attention to the platform. Under their leadership, AudioStrip has grown to attract 350,000 unique users and thousands of paying customers, making it a prominent tool in the music industry. Recently, AudioStrip was awarded part of the Government's £1million 'AI in the Music Industry' Innovate UK Fund, recognising their innovation. We interviewed Basil to talk with him about this exciting news.

Q: Congratulations on the recent funding. Can I get a bit of background on you and Robinson and how it all started?

Basil: Yeah, I've always really enjoyed maths and seemed to be quite good at it. I always wanted to challenge myself, so I tried to get accepted into Cambridge to give myself the biggest challenge possible.

Q: Where do you think that drive to challenge yourself comes from?

Basil: My parents, I think. They worked very hard, and from primary school, my mum would give me extra maths books to do outside of school. That really helped me enjoy it more and push myself further. Even in high school, I found myself wanting to do more maths on my own, reading books in my free time and exploring concepts on Wikipedia.

Q: Is it about problem-solving that drives you?

Basil: Yes, a large element of it is problem-solving. I enjoy the process of

thinking about a problem for a long time, not knowing how to approach it initially, and then gradually coming up with different ideas. It's rewarding when you finally understand and solve the problem.

Q: Why did you choose Cambridge and Robinson?

Basil: Cambridge has the best maths course in the country, if not the world. Robinson was recommended to me by someone from my school who had gone there and really enjoyed it. She told me how nice it was, and it seemed like a good choice.

Q: How did you find your time at Cambridge and Robinson?

Basil: Robinson was a very friendly college. The course was very hard, but overall, I enjoyed it. I'm still in touch with many people I met there. It was challenging, but the supportive environment at College helped a lot.



Graduation 2013



Basil Woods



Vipul Thakurdesai

Q: What did you do after graduating?

Basil: Most of my career has been in machine learning and AI. I started as a data scientist at an Education Tech start-up, and later at Faculty AI, working on various AI projects.

At the Education Tech start-up, we built an AI model to predict whether a student would pass or fail their course within a few months of starting. It was integrated into dashboards for support teams to prioritise students who needed help the most. At Faculty AI, we worked with the NHS on a tool to predict bed capacity based on patient data, which was particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Q: So now you're full-time at AudioStrip? What motivated you to start your own company?

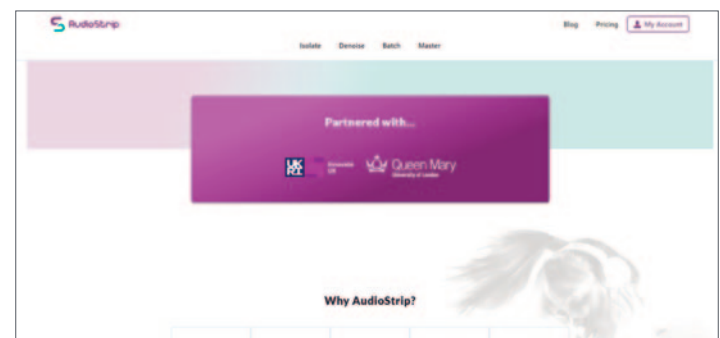
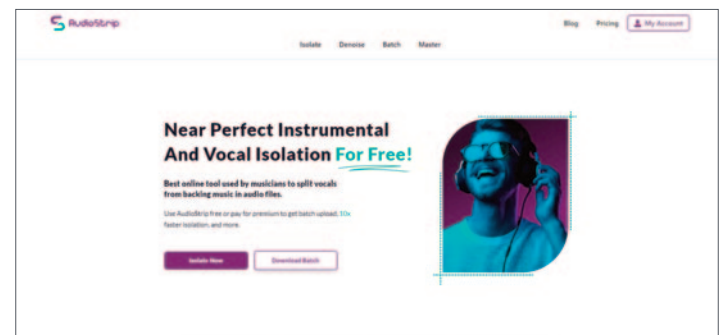
Basil: Yes, I am. The start-up environments I've worked in have been great for learning different aspects of running a business, which made starting my own company easier. Being in a start-up environment allowed me to wear multiple hats and learn from different departments like marketing and sales. I've always been interested in creating something of my own. The experience I've gained from working in various start-ups gave me the confidence and skills needed to start AudioStrip. The idea of solving real-world problems and making an impact is very motivating.

Q: Congratulations again on the funding. How does it feel to reach this milestone?

Basil: It's exciting. The journey has been challenging, but the funding is a great validation of our work and vision. It allows us to scale our efforts and bring our product to a wider audience.

Q: Did taking breaks and stepping away from problems help you in your work?

Basil: Absolutely. Stepping away from a problem and giving myself space to think has always been a useful tool. Often, the solution comes to me when I'm not actively thinking about it, like when I'm on a walk. This approach has been beneficial in both my studies and professional work.



Q: What advice would you give to someone looking to follow a similar path?

Basil: I'd say don't be afraid to challenge yourself and take on difficult problems. Also, take the time to understand different aspects of a business, especially if you're interested in starting your own company. The experience you gain from working in different roles can be invaluable. ■



BBC RADIO 4 NATIONAL SHORT STORY AWARDS

The generous contribution of a donor has paved the way for Robinson College to be part of an enriching partnership between the University of Cambridge and the BBC on the National Short Story Award and Young Writers Award. The National Short Story Award is widely regarded as the most prestigious accolade for short stories nationally.



Many readers will have enjoyed listening to the shortlisted stories, some by major writers and others by exciting new voices, broadcast on Radio 4 each September (and available on BBC Sounds). The Young Writers Award,

meanwhile, showcases the astonishing work of writers aged 14-18, and reaches an enormous and diverse audience when they are broadcast on Radio 1. The BBC have been running the Awards in collaboration with the University since 2018, with contributions coming from the Faculties of English and Education, the School of Arts and Humanities, the School of the Humanities and the Social Sciences, the University Library, the Fitzwilliam Museum, and the Institute of Continuing Education. For the 2024-26 iteration of this prestigious partnership, the group of Cambridge stakeholders is expanding to include two colleges – Robinson and Downing – in order to develop the ways in which the partnership impacts our students.

One of the immediate benefits of this partnership to Robinson is the opportunity it affords the College to host visiting shortlisted young writers, who win a Cambridge Experience Day in September, just before the winners are announced, during which they meet current students, enjoy creative writing workshops at the Fitz or the UL, and learn from English and Education academics. This serves as an important outreach opportunity; many former shortlisted students comment that their experience day inspired or cemented their intention to apply to Cambridge.

Two other Awards-related events enrich our literary calendar: Robinson undergraduates are invited to get involved in hosting the Awards Ceremony at BBC Broadcasting House in September, working alongside BBC colleagues to welcome guests (including writers and celebrities) to the live broadcast of Radio 4's Front Row and the subsequent celebration event. In 2023, four Robinson third-years enjoyed the opportunity to network with writers, judges and BBC staff – and their help was very much appreciated! (College members who are interested in attending or helping at next year's Awards Ceremony should get in touch with Lizzi Rawlinson-Mills). In addition, we look forward to welcoming the National Short Story Award-winner to Robinson College later in the year; last

year's Masterclass with prize-winner Naomi Wood was enjoyed by many students across the University.

The partnership also offers a place on a unique new training programme to one of the College's postgraduates. This three-year programme, developed in conjunction with the ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership, provides a valuable insight into broadcasting, institutional partnering, administrative and legal aspects of arts management. Alongside some bespoke training opportunities connected to their doctoral research, the student will attend meetings of the Awards steering group, shadow the process of recording and producing a short story for radio, and will have the opportunity to act as a paid "sifter" to support the judges' shortlisting activities. This truly sets Robinson and Downing apart as the only colleges offering specialised professional training of this kind, and we look forward to hearing about their experience from the selected student in due course.

Lizzi Rawlinson-Mills, who has been the Faculty of Education representative in this partnership since 2019, eloquently articulated the significance of the prizes at the Awards Ceremony at Broadcasting House in 2023. She emphasised the profound impact these stories have in opening our eyes to different perspectives and experiences. They offer us a glimpse of our rapidly changing world, compel us to reflect on our place within it, and inspire us to effect change.

She particularly praised the young writers who achieved the distinction of appearing on 2023's outstanding shortlist, reminding listeners that these are not the writers of the future, but the writers of today. Their work grapples with society's most pressing questions in ways that are as urgent and visionary as the stories on the adult prize shortlist. They audaciously follow the "what if" of storytelling, with voices that are assured, ambitious, and often poetic.

To sum up, the donor's contribution has a far-reaching impact. It not only bolsters the literary culture of the country and aligns with the University's mission to engage with society, but also enriches the academic and cultural experiences of current students, and provides valuable professional development opportunities for future students. ■

NEWS: ALUMNI



1981

Helen Birkbeck (MML)

"I have two more grandchildren, Jacob and Eliza, born in March and May this year. That makes six in all. Hoping some of them might consider studying at Cambridge one day!"

1983

Kathryn Collie (Law)

Kathryn has been appointed as a Deputy Lieutenant for County Antrim and is looking forward to supporting the work of the Lord Lieutenant in the County.

Paul Foy (Mathematics)

"I am largely retired but gainfully self-employed publishing a series of research/student mathematics monologues entitled 'The Formation Generated By A Finite Group' and a series of local history booklets entitled 'Origin of ...' aimed at scholars and the general public. In addition I undertake ad-hoc software development activities of both business office software and lighter social media-related software. This is after a career working as a (senior) software engineer in various areas for generally engineering Companies as both a contractor and a permanent employee.

I wish all members of the College well and hope that they can continue to meet the needs of its students and their place in an ever evolving society."

1992



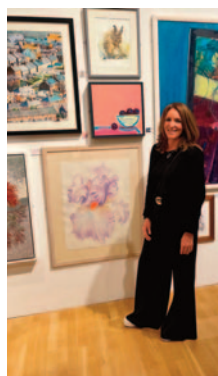
Talbot Stark (Management Studies)

"I am excited to share with you my recent studio interview in Dallas with Taryn W. Brill for my book *Elite Performance for Managers* and my Executive Coaching business,

ExecPathfinders. This fantastic event was sponsored by C-Suite Network and was attended by over one hundred Dallas Business Leaders. It was an excellent opportunity for me to speak with so many people about my passion for helping individuals transform their careers and lives. During the event, I shared my proprietary methodology, Elite Performance Pillars™, which I developed based on my 30-plus years of working in international finance, the US military, and Silicon Valley. *Elite Performance for Managers*

is the ultimate guide for any aspiring manager and shares all the key lessons I've learned throughout my career. With this book thanks to my publisher Ashley Mansour, my goal is to help readers unlock their full potential and transform their career into a dynamic journey aligned with their greatest aspirations, saving them the time and effort of trial and tribulations. Whether you're just starting out or looking to skyrocket your career, *Elite Performance for Managers* will help you cultivate the grit and determination required to become a truly elite manager and lead your team to unparalleled levels of productivity. During the event, I had the opportunity to speak with readers and sign copies of my book. It was a great pleasure to share my passion with so many tremendous business leaders in Dallas. If you haven't already, I highly recommend downloading the Audible book or purchasing a hard copy online to start your Elite Journey on Amazon."

1993



Catherine Tarry (née Pyne) (MML)

"After reading French and German I qualified as a solicitor and worked in both the City and West End firms. My news is that I have since developed a career in fine art and I have had a painting selected and is currently being exhibited in the 142nd Royal Ulster Academy of Arts Annual Exhibition in Belfast. My work, *Rest Amongst the Golden Grasses* was one of a few hundred chosen in an open call from over 2100 submitted art works. The Annual Exhibition is held in the Ulster Museum and is one of the highlights of the arts calendar and a major exhibition in both UK and Ireland."

1999



Suzanne Jacob (MML)

"So much change in the last 18 months. The little hurricane Sofia Joy blew into our lives on Jan 5th 2023 and has been in delirious motion ever since. I'm also changing career, stepping down as CEO of national domestic abuse charity SafeLives. From here I'll be working with a range of companies and organisations to support them

to be at their best. This could be with Government relations, PR, social purpose, or even overall strategic planning and development. Details on LinkedIn for anyone who'd like to know more and be in touch. Sending good wishes to everyone."

2000



Ben Jarman (Criminology)

Ben Jarman completed his PhD, based on interviews with men serving sentences of life imprisonment, at the Cambridge Institute of Criminology in May 2024. He and his wife Jo (Newham 2003) had a baby boy, Simon Geoffrey, who was born in March 2023. Ben lives in Guildford

and sends greetings to anyone from his 2000 cohort who'd remember him.

2001



Carlos Arcila Barrera (Sustainability Leadership)

"Sigma Advanced proudly celebrates the remarkable achievements of one of our esteemed alumni, Carlos Arcila Barrera (Class of 2021). As the Founder and CEO of Sigma Advanced Capital Management, Carlos has distinguished himself in the global sustainability investment community. His firm, which

emphasises investments aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has recently been honoured as a finalist in the 2024 ESG Investing Awards for "Best ESG Investment Fund: Thematic (Climate Alignment)." Moreover, Sigma Advanced has won the Best Commodity Fund at the HedgeWeek Awards 2023, marking the second consecutive win. This recognition is especially historic, as it represents the first time a Colombian-founded investment fund has achieved finalist status and won these prestigious awards. Congratulations to Carlos for his pioneering contributions to sustainable investing."

2002



Ed Parrott (Natural Sciences - Physical)

Ed Parrott and his wife Agnes are delighted to announce the birth of their son Nathan, who was born in early April. "We are now settling in well to life as a family of three at our home in Woolwich."



Fiona Slinn (English) and husband Tom welcomed Henry John Stansfield on 3 July. Alexandra is thrilled with her new baby brother. The four of them enjoy lots of walks at home in the Surrey Hills with Keith the Lagotto.

2005



Natalie Freeman (Medicine)

"Back in 2021, the College kindly included a photo of our first-born Oliver in the magazine. We've just had our second son recently and his name is Joshua Samuel Nicholls, born Saturday 11th May 2024 in Bath, weighing 7lb 4 Oz."

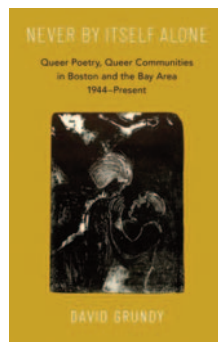
2006

Michael Albert Brown (MML)

"It feels immodest to mention the below, but I thought I would do in case it's something that would be good to share in *Bin Brook*. I have recently received these recognitions - one by a business school I lecture at, the other two by the trade bodies that represent my industries, advertising and market research:"

Bayes Business School: <https://www.research-live.com/article/news/michael-brown-awarded-bayes-business-school-fellowship/id/5122533>

Institute of Practitioners in Advertising: <https://ipa.co.uk/news/summer-honours-2023> Market Research Society: <https://www.mrs.org.uk/about/fellows>



David Grundy (Engineering)

"My second book, *Never by Itself Alone: Queer Poetry, Queer Communities in Boston and the Bay Area, 1944-Present*, appeared from Oxford University Press this spring. The book was written during a British Academy Fellowship at the University of Warwick. I am currently working on a third book, on free jazz, at Freie Universität Berlin, where I am an Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung Research Fellow."

2008



Adriana Timco (English)

"I graduated from Cambridge in 2011 and I am now a TV producer, currently working in documentaries. I wanted to let you know about a documentary film I have just finished producing, currently titled, *Hell Jumper*. The subject matter has been deeply special

and emotional to me as it is about the war in Ukraine (I was born in Moldova, and have Ukrainian roots as well), and it's about the courage and death of someone who was also a friend.

Hell Jumper is a story of love, war and courage, seen through the eyes – and the footage – of a group of volunteers saving strangers' lives in one of the most dangerous places on earth. At the heart of the film is Chris Parry (pictured) from Cornwall, who, without telling his family, decided to jump into a van and head into Ukraine. There, he became friends with a group of civilian 'evacuators' from all over the world, crowdfunding vehicles and equipment to help people escape their burning homes. Over time however, the missions grew riskier and Chris was driven deeper into the danger zone, and ultimately, into the hands of the Wagner Group. Chris and a colleague, Andrew Bagshaw, were both killed trying to save an elderly woman trapped in her home. Now, Chris' extraordinary story will be told for the first time, alongside the stories of his fellow evacuators and friends on the frontline.

It was broadcast in mid-July on BBC2 and if you are in the UK, you can find it by searching for *Hell Jumper* on the iPlayer."

2010

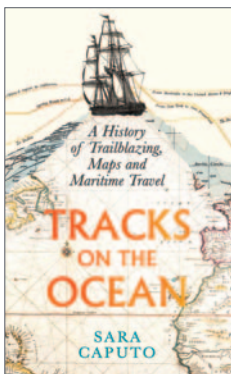


Stefan Vukotic (International Studies)

Stefan and Ana Vukotic (born Scepanovic, MPhil International Studies, Trinity Hall 2011) welcomed their daughter Katarina on 4 June 2023. Ana and Stefan also have a son, Aleksandar, born on 26 December 2017, enrolled in the Vienna International School. Since leaving Cambridge, Stefan worked for the Government of

Montenegro (2010-2017), spending some time on secondment at the Cabinet Office in Whitehall (2015), and as press officer for the European Union Delegation to Montenegro (2017). In late 2017, Stefan joined the United Nations as an international civil servant. After the initial posting in Geneva, in 2020 Stefan was assigned to Vienna where he currently works and resides with his family.

2015



Sara Caputo (History)

Dr Sara Caputo, a History Fellow at Magdalene College, has a new book entitled *Tracks on the Ocean: A History of Trailblazing, Maps and Maritime Travel*. It won the Ideas Prize and will be out with Profile Books in August and The University of Chicago Press in October. The book tells the story of how we came to represent individual journeys as lines on maps, and how this convention, originating in Renaissance

depictions of oceanic navigation, signalled a momentous transformation in Europeans' worldview. These personal trails are key to understanding the origins of surveillance and of modern notions of authorship and discovery; they also mark humanity's impact on the planet, whether in the legacy of

violence plotted by imperial endeavours or in the clouds of exhaust fumes left by ocean liners. The challenge of negotiating the supposedly 'trackless' seas profoundly shaped modernity's ways of imagining movement.



Matthew J. Price (Natural Sciences)

On December 6th, Matthew graduated with a PhD in Chemistry from the University of Birmingham, with the title "Chemical Recycling and Upcycling of Poly(ethylene) Terephthalate".

2021



Asif Hossain (Criminology)

"In February, my wife Priyanka and I joyfully welcomed our first daughter, Asiya Farhana Hossain. Her smiles have enriched our lives immensely. I work as a special constable with a Metro Vancouver police agency, applying my criminology knowledge from the Cambridge Institute of Criminology to tackle issues like mental health and substance abuse. I also teach at two colleges, including the Justice Institute of British Columbia, where

I recently supervised capstone students, four of whom won awards for their research. I was honoured with the International Alumni of Impact Award, which led to the creation of a scholarship in my name to support deserving students. In addition, I have committed to funding another \$1,000 in merit-based awards annually over the next five years. With a generous donation from the Tessa Beauchamp Foundation, we built the first basketball court at Maria Orphanage and Farhana School, named 'The Purple Court' in memory of Tessa, a celebrated young athlete who passed away from cancer at 18. This court has inspired many students to start playing basketball."

NEWS: ALUMNI EVENTS



FINANCIAL SERVICES CAREERS EVENING MONDAY 29 JANUARY 2024

Robinson College hosted a Financial Services Careers Evening, open to all Cambridge students, featuring a panel of industry experts who shared advice on challenges and opportunities in Financial Services and how to start a career in the field. The event included a drinks reception, a panel discussion with Q&A, and speed networking sessions with the panellists. ■



ENTREPRENEURS NETWORK INAUGURAL CAREER EVENING MONDAY 11 MARCH 2004

This was the first Entrepreneurs event focused on securing funding for starting entrepreneurs. It included a drinks reception, a panel discussion, speed networking and featured several industry experts. Alumni and students engaged in discussions and networking, benefiting from the insights and experiences shared by the panellists. ■



LAW DINNER 2024 WEDNESDAY 13 MARCH 2024

Dechert LLP and alumnus Gus Black (Law, 1994) hosted the Robinson College Law Dinner, attended by 25 Robinson law alumni and 19 current law students. The event included a panel discussion led by Alex Mundy with Dechert trainees. All proceeds went towards the annual Law Revision Week. ■



MARCH REUNION DINNER SATURDAY 23 MARCH 2024

We delighted in welcoming back alumni returning to celebrate their reunion from 1978, 1979, 1988, 1989, 1998, 1999, 2008 and 2009 cohorts with pre-dinner drinks followed by dinner in the Hall for over 200 guests. Celebrations continued in the College Bar well into the evening. Over 100 alumni and their guests stayed the night in College before enjoying a brunch on Sunday. ■



THE WARDEN'S TRIP TO ASIA MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE AND HONG KONG: 13, 15 AND 16 APRIL 2024

The Warden met with Robinsonians in Kuala Lumpur, and had several meetings in Singapore, where he also hosted a drinks reception at the Cambridge Centre for Advanced Research and Education. He spent a few days in Hong Kong, hosting a dinner at the China Club for 30 Robinsonians and their guests. The Warden shared the latest news from the College, spoke about its vibrant student community, and highlighted the achievements of students and academic staff. ■



PEGASUS SCHOLARS DINNER 28 MAY 2024

A Pegasus Scholars Drinks Reception and a Formal Hall Dinner were held for the innovative Pegasus Scholarship programme, introducing many scholars to the generous donors who funded the scheme. The event was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the students' achievements and to express gratitude to those who have created these opportunities. The Scholarships embody the College's ambition, spirit, and educational mission. ■

NEWS:

WELCOME/FAREWELL

FELLOWS/SENIOR MEMBERS/BYE-FELLOWS



Dr Emma Cooper joined as a Class B Fellow in Education on 1 February 2024. Emma is Assistant Professor in Literacy Education at the Faculty of Education. Her research interests include curriculum studies, multimodal literacies, and social semiotics. She is primarily interested in and motivated by contributing to research that fosters inclusive meaning making opportunities for children through the transformation of literacy curricula and pedagogies. Emma is currently involved in research projects focused on digital storytelling with biliteracy curricula (Collaborator) and academic reading pedagogies (research team member).



Dr Paula López Caballero joined as Baxandall Visiting Fellow for Easter Term 2024. Paula is a researcher at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research in the Sciences and Humanities (CEIICH) at UNAM, Mexico and a Visiting Scholar at the Centre for Latin American Studies in Cambridge. The transversal hypothesis of her research is to understand the indigenous/non-indigenous divide, not as a given but as a highly unstable and elusive boundary and as an analytical problem in its own right. She is currently preparing a new monograph, tentatively titled *Experts of Everyday Life*.



Ms Sarah Westwood left Robinson in June 2024 after seven years as Development Director. Sarah became a Fellow in September 2017 and directed the Colleges' fundraising and alumni relations strategy, and led the Development Office team. Previously, Sarah led the Development programme at Lucy Cavendish College, accelerating its fundraising endeavours and personally securing the College's biggest lifetime gift. Before joining Lucy, Sarah was at St John's College for eight years, serving throughout its successful £50 million fundraising campaign, so she has a broad experience of the Cambridge context.



Mr Saul Nassé has taken up a new appointment as Chief Executive and Keeper of the National Archives in London. Saul was an undergraduate at Robinson from 1984 to 1987. He was elected to a five-year Fellowship in 2019 while he was Group Chief Executive of Cambridge Assessment. Saul has made many valuable contributions to College in many fields, including as an elected member of Council.



Dr Daniel Knorr left Robinson on 31 July 2024. He takes up a position as Assistant Professor in the History Department at Illinois State University from August. Dan said, "I am very grateful for the welcome and support I have received from members of the College since I first arrived. I look forward to continuing to hear of the wonderful accomplishments of Robinson's Fellows, students and staff in the years to come." Dan has been a Fellow of the College since August 2021, during which time he has been Director of Studies in History (Part II).



Dr Paul Griffiths leaves Robinson on 30 September 2024. He will take up a position as Lecturer at the School of Chemistry at Bristol, joining their Atmospheric Chemistry Research Group, in January 2025. Paul has been a Fellow of the College since October 2012, first as a Class B Fellow and more recently as a Senior Research Fellow. He has been a Deputy Senior Tutor, Postgraduate Tutor, and member of the College Council. Paul said, "Obviously, the support in so many different ways from College has been invaluable. I'm sorry to leave and will truly miss my colleagues and a place that has, from the first, felt like home, but I'm looking forward to new challenges."

OBITUARIES AND TRIBUTES



Dr Steph Archer recognised for Early Detection & Diagnosis Primer Award from Cancer Research UK

Congratulations to Dr Steph Archer and her team in the Department of Psychology. Each year in England over 400,000 women are referred to breast services via

the breast cancer two-week-wait (2WW) pathway. Of these, 6% are diagnosed with cancer, while 94% are discharged. Discharged women are not informed about their future breast cancer risk, which missed a key opportunity. Conducting risk assessments during this touch-point could identify many women who might benefit from risk-reducing interventions, and they may be more likely to engage due to their recent referral. Dr Steph Archer and her team will use an Early Detection and Diagnosis Primer Award to develop a pathway integrating multifactorial Risk Assessment to enable Risk Stratification within secondary care Breast Cancer services.



Dr Jossy Sayir recognised by the 2024 Pilkington Prize

Congratulations to Fellow Dr Jossy Sayir who was awarded one of the 2024 Pilkington Prizes in recognition of his contribution to teaching excellence.

The nomination said, "Jossy's enthusiasm and his innovative teaching approaches are also reflected in student feedback, often describing his teaching as the best part of their time at our Department."

Dr Bill Nolan received an academic promotion



Congratulations to Dr Bill Nolan who was promoted to an unestablished Teaching Professorship (Grade 11) in the Teaching and Scholarship pathway at Robinson. He made significant contributions to research, teaching, and the scientific community, earning

accolades such as the Pilkington Teaching prize in 2006. At College, he was heavily involved in the academic and pastoral support of undergraduate and graduate students, serving as Director of Studies in Natural Science since 2000, tutor from 1997 to 2010, Financial Tutor from 2002 to 2010, and Senior Tutor from 2010 to 2018. In 2018, he was appointed Director of Undergraduate Teaching. His promotion to Teaching Professor Grade 11 under the University's new Teaching and Scholarship pathway recognised the significance and impact of his teaching within the University.



DR SASKIA MURK JANSEN (1957–2024)

Dr. Saskia Murk Jansen, a former Robinson Fellow and Praelector, passed away suddenly at home on 19th February 2024. Her sudden loss was a profound shock to the College community.

Born into a Dutch family, Saskia moved to Britain and was bilingual in Dutch and English. She attended St Paul's Girls' School, Hammersmith and graduated from Newnham College, Cambridge, with a First in Modern and Medieval Languages (Dutch and Spanish). She earned her Ph.D. on the Beguines in the Middle Ages, focusing on their writings in European vernaculars.

After Newnham, Saskia became a British Academy Research Fellow at Robinson College and later served as Graduate Tutor and Praelector here. She joined the Cambridge University Development Office, becoming the first Head of Alumni Relations and Assistant Director of International Relations. Her career included significant roles such as Policy Adviser on Education to the Prime Minister's Special Adviser, focusing on science education and the Academy Schools' programme.

In 2011, Saskia became a Fellow and the Director of Development at Peterhouse, Cambridge. Her tenure saw the completion of projects such as the Whittle Building, Chapel renovations, and the establishment of endowment funds for Fellowships and Graduate Studentships. Her success in fundraising was attributed to her networking skills, persistence, and ability to develop productive relationships.

Saskia's empathy, perhaps born from personal hardships, was evident in her professional and personal life. Her mother's battle with polio and tragic death in a sailing accident influenced her deep compassion for others. As a Graduate Tutor at the College, she was known for her dedication to her students, and she and her family took in young refugees from Eritrea.

A committed Anglican, Saskia was interested in interfaith dialogue and lived her faith quietly but profoundly. Her family, including her husband John and their children, Catherine and John Matthew, were her pride and joy. She admired their kindness, compassion and determination to make the world a better place.

Saskia was also an animal lover, especially fond of horses. Her poise and calmness, whether riding or driving a carriage, were remarkable. Saskia will be remembered for her intelligence, compassion, and unwavering dedication to making the world a better place. Her sudden passing is a great loss to all who were fortunate enough to know her.



Read a personal tribute written by Saskia's dear friend, Professor Melinda Duer, on the College website by scanning this QR code.

PROFESSOR JEAN-CLAUDE THIOLIER (1945–2024)



It was a great sadness to hear of the death of Jean-Claude Thiolier on 8 March this year. Accompanied by his wife Suzanne, herself a distinguished philologist, and daughter Antonine, Jean-Claude first spent time in the College in 1989, and returned almost every year until the outbreak of Covid, and serious illness as a consequence, brought these visits to an end. He was elected a Senior Member of the College in 2009 and remained so until his death.

After taking his first degree at the Sorbonne Jean-Claude worked in Greek texts, completed by the publication of his text and translation of Plutarch's *De gloria Athenensium*, published in 1985. Long before then, however, he had taken a quite new turn with his doctoral thesis, an edition of Pierre Langtoft's *Regne d'Edouard 1^{er}*, in Anglo-Norman French verse, submitted in 1978, first published in 1989, and re-issued with additions and revisions in 2009. This is a work of the greatest interest to British historians, but presenting formidable challenges, not least in elucidating the complex relationships of the nineteen major manuscripts, and the larger context in which Langtoft wrote. Its publication coincided with Jean-Claude's move from the Sorbonne to a chair at the University of Paris XII at Créteil. His further work on Langtoft's life, work and times led to numerous articles published in both England and France. He always believed that conventional French opinion saw Anglo-Norman texts and authors as an essentially provincial, even trivial, branch of linguistic study. Certainly, he received more generous recognition in Britain, reflected in his election as a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, and by his Senior Membership of Robinson, a title he regularly included on the title pages of his later publications. His long association with Jacques Beuroy, employed by the CNRS (French National Center for Scientific Research) but based in Cambridge, and Nigel Wilkins at Corpus Christi, added to

Cambridge's attractions. In return he was tirelessly helpful and formidably efficient in guiding any member of the College through the complexities of French academic bureaucracy.

Jean-Claude and Suzanne were the most generous and thoughtful friends anyone could hope for. They made their attractive flat near the Parthenon available to visitors to Paris without stint and delighted too in entertaining them in their house at S. Hilaire-S. Mesmin near Orleans, where they spent much of their time after retirement. This they had restored and enhanced, not least by rescuing and installing a grand wooden staircase rescued from the demolition of another large house nearby, and by the creation of a private library of notable breadth and depth. His loss is deeply felt by all lucky enough to know him.

Martin Brett
Emeritus Fellow, History

RON WYNESS (1953–2024)



Photo credit: Paul Gethin

Ron was an integral part of the Robinson College maintenance team and will be deeply missed by his friends and colleagues. He joined us in 2013, moving from Churchill College where he had been working as a sub-contractor. Initially, Ron was not looking for a permanent position, but after just a month with us, he decided he liked the people and the job, and accepted a permanent contract.

Ron was passionate about gardening and often shared stories about his garden and the plants he was growing. Martyn Hawkes, a colleague, once gifted him a special rose from the Chelsea Flower Show, a Monty's Madame Alfred Carriere Rose bred in France in 1879. This rose held a place of honour in Ron's garden.

Known for his dry sense of humour, Ron often sparked debates and discussions, especially on Monday mornings when politics were a frequent topic. When it was time to start work, he would humorously say, "Oh well, better not sort everything today otherwise we will have nothing to do tomorrow."

Andy Barker remembers Ron's surprising taste in music, such as *Blinding Lights* by The Weeknd. Ron had a unique way of ending text messages with the word, "Over." Despite any challenges, he always managed to make everyone smile, earning him the affectionate nickname "Uncle Ron."

Paul Gethin recalls Ron's dedication to energy saving, often switching off every light in the College to conserve energy and reduce costs. Ron's interests spanned politics, space, Aston Martins, and Bentleys. He shared many stories about British Aerospace Engineering and fighter jets, and had a vice-like grip that ensured you stayed to hear his tales. Paul appreciated Ron's mentorship and camaraderie, remembering the laughs and May Balls they shared.

Andrew Kehoe found working with Ron both frustrating and joyful. Ron's confidence in his skills and knowledge eased the work for everyone around him. Andrew recalls a humorous moment when someone described him as "awoke," to which Ron quipped in his Scottish accent, "How can that be as he is always asleep?" Ron's jokes often had a delayed punchline that left everyone laughing.

Bill McKim fondly remembers their debates on who was more Scottish. Ron, being from Brechin, argued that he was more Scottish than Bill, who was from Glasgow. Bill still maintains that everyone knows Glasgow, but not Brechin, making him the more Scottish of the two. Ron's contributions to many projects at the College, especially in energy saving initiatives like changing the Chapel lighting and underground car-park, were invaluable. His knowledge and advice will be greatly missed.

Ron was a private, strong-willed individual, a mystery wrapped in an enigma, and a friend to many. His impact on the maintenance team and the College will not be forgotten.

ALBERT JOHN ROWELL (1929–2023)



Albert (Bert) John Rowell, Emeritus Professor of Geology at the University of Kansas and curator of invertebrate palaeontology at the KU Biodiversity Institute, passed away at home on September 28 in Lawrence, Kansas, at the age of 94.

Born in Ely, Cambridgeshire, UK, Bert graduated with a BSc in Mining

Engineering and a PhD in Geology from the University of Leeds. After two years of National Service with the Royal Corps of Engineers, he began his teaching career at the University of Nottingham in 1955. In 1967, Bert moved to the US, joining the University of Kansas as a Professor and curator. He was also a visiting scientist with the British Antarctic Survey in 1990 and a Bye-Fellow of Robinson College. He retired in 1995 after 40 years of service.

NEIL FENTON (1965–2024)



It is with great sadness that we report the unexpected passing of Dr Neil Fenton on March 9th 2024 at the age of 58. Neil was a graduate of Robinson College back in 1990 passing with a 1st class degree in Chemistry before completing a PhD in Inorganic Chemistry. After his years at Robinson, Neil became a software developer and system architect working for a number of companies based in Cambridge and London followed by

an extensive career as a project manager and delivery lead in financial services and markets. Whilst he enjoyed the technical challenges involved in the delivery of large scale financial clearing platforms and market leading utilities, he was happiest nurturing and helping his team members around the world to fulfil their potential.

His wife Joanna and children Sam and Abby will miss his kindness, wit and quirky sense of humour.

LEE KECK (1928–2024)

From Yale Divinity School:

It is with sadness that we inform you that Yale Divinity School has lost a beloved and highly influential member of our community. Internationally recognised New Testament scholar and former Dean Leander E. Keck Ph.D. died earlier this year at age 95. As a scholar and educator, he greatly influenced New Testament studies and touched a generation of students. In the words of his former student Krista Tippet, Lee was "one of the great minds of twentieth-century Biblical studies... He wove a lifetime of scholarship with a life steeped in the practical, human, and societal implications of [the] texts." Lee was a former Robinson Bye-Fellow, and used to come into Robinson for meals and chapel in more recent years, since he and his second wife Ann owned a house in Cambridge and visited yearly until about five years ago.

Keeping in touch

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If you think we may not have your current contact details please get in touch to keep in touch: www.robinson.cam.ac.uk/alumni/keep-in-touch

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Dates for the diary

27/11/2024

Entrepreneurs' Event, London

07/12/2024

Christmas Concert, Robinson College

02/03/2025

Celebration of Benefactors Service and Supper,
Robinson College

22/03/2025

Reunion and Alumni Dinner (Matriculation Years
1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010), Robinson College



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