BIN BROOK

AUTUMN 2025

ROBINSON COLLEGE
CAMBRIDGE

CONTENTS

Editor | Sophie Clarke

BIN BROOK ROBINSON COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

Welcome

This issue of Bin Brook focuses on Education. It is, of course, a central subject for the College. Teaching, and creating the best possible conditions for learning, are the core of what we are here for. They are shaping our plans for the future too.

In this issue, you will hear from a very wide range of Robinson people, who share knowledge and experiences from all corners of the academic and educational world. I should like to thank all of them. They include new Fellows or Senior Members of the College, such as Dr Emma Cooper, Dr Tom Crawford and Dr Naomi Deakin; or longer-standing colleagues like Dr Andrew Sharkey, who retires this year from the role of Director of Studies for Medicine after 18 years at Robinson. Also in this issue, our Senior Tutor, Dr Scott Annett, looks at our recent achievements in nurturing early-career academic talent and improving participation, as well as our plans to invest in new thinking and innovation in learning. Professor Bartomeu Monserrat, himself an innovative YouTuber, reflects on his journey from PhD candidate to Fellow. Dr Lizzi Rawlinson-Mills, in a wonderful exchange with one of her own recent students, Wahida Seisay, explores education as a Tripos subject offering unique personal and academic development.

Professor Krista Kesselring reflects on her time with us as a Baxandall Visiting Fellow.

There are also fascinating contributions from four alumni, Professor Ambrose Field, Sheila Duffy, Alastair Ingall and Tricia Moss. They each write inspiringly about their changing lives, and the conditions for learning.

As the Senior Tutor writes, at Robinson we are enthusiastically strengthening our teaching: across disciplines, with increased flexibility, and fostering collaboration across and beyond Tripos subjects. Our philanthropic supporters have allowed us to invest in education and learning in recent years. We know we can do much more. With your help we can become an educational front-runner at Cambridge.

Sir Richard Heaton KCB
Warden

Design: Cameron | camerongraphics@btconnect.com

NEWS IN BRIEF

PROFESSOR RACHEL OLIVER AWARDED OBE FOR SERVICES TO MATERIALS ENGINEERING

Rachel is a materials engineer, inventor, spinout founder and Fellow in Materials Science at Robinson. She is also Director of the Cambridge Centre for Gallium Nitride and Co-Founder and Chief Scientific Officer for Porotech.

On receiving her OBE, Rachel said: "I hope to encourage more people to get involved in semiconductors in the UK. This is a crucial time, as the semiconductor ecosystem is rising to meet some of the most pressing challenges of our era — including climate change, energy efficiency, global connectivity, and technological security." ■

PROFESSOR JOANNA PAGE BECOMES FELLOW OF THE BRITISH ACADEMY

Joanna is Director of Studies in MML at Robinson and Director of CRASSH (Centre of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities).

Joanna said 'It is a huge honour to be elected a Fellow of the British Academy. Alongside my Latin Americanist colleagues in the University, I would also like to thank Fellows, staff and students at Robinson, where I have been extremely fortunate to be part of such an inspiring, collaborative, and supportive community.'. ■

SPORTING ACHIEVEMENTS

Congratulations to all Robinson students who competed in a range of high-profile sporting events across the year - from rowing to powerlifting. Highlights include:

- **Robinson/Selwyn Rugby Team** (Slobinson) capped off an excellent season by winning the College Rugby Bowl 2025.
- **Theo Hatcher and Louis De Neve** (both Natural Sciences, 2021) each won their races in The Boat Race.
- **Robinson Cricket Team** defeated Magdalene/Trinity Hall and Jesus College on Finals Day and taking home the Cricket Cuppers Trophy.
- **Shubang Nagalotimath** (Medicine, 2020) represented Team GB at the World University Powerlifting Championships in Turkey.
- PhD student **Caroline Kienast Von Einem** (Med Science, 2021), alongside her teammates on Cambridge W2, secured victory over Oxford in Varsity Volleyball.
- PhD student **Jin Seok Lee** (Pathology, 2021) won (as the 1st pair) the Real Tennis Inter University Doubles Final.
- **Rebecca Keetley** (Natural Sciences, 2022), Women's Blues Captain of the Cambridge University Swimming and Water Polo Club (CUSWPC), competed in the Varsity Channel Relay 2025 – a closely contested race won by Oxford by just 15 minutes.

Robinson College Boat Club held a special boat-naming ceremony to unveil a brand-new Filippi, named Steve Fuller in honour of a true Robinson rowing legend and his exceptional contributions—not only to the club but to the sport as a whole.

Robinson College Chapel Choir released a filmed performance of *Be Still*, a beautiful anthem by award-winning composer Mary Offer. You can view it on the Robinson College YouTube Channel. ■

FOCUS ON **EDUCATION**

BUILDING A VIBRANT ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

GUEST INTRODUCTION

DR SCOTT ANNETT, FELLOW IN ENGLISH AND SENIOR TUTOR

As the landscape of higher education changes rapidly, Robinson remains committed to upholding academic excellence by fostering a thriving intellectual community for both students and academics.

Within the undergraduate population, and thanks to a significant collective effort involving academics, staff and students, we have made considerable progress in our widening participation activities, which can be measured in admissions statistics, the academic outcomes of students as they progress through their degrees, and of course the enthusiasm with which those same students engage in College life.

At the same time, roughly 25% of each undergraduate cohort are international students, demonstrating the extent to which Robinson continues to attract many of the most talented young people from around the world. Over the last two academic years, we have been delighted to launch new initiatives intended to encourage such applicants, including the New Capital Bursaries and the William Waite Scholarship, both of which are intended to assist students from the EU.

Amongst our postgraduate population, we also support students from extraordinarily varied backgrounds and with diverse research interests, ranging from fulltime students engaged in MPhil or PhD research, through to part-time students reading for degrees such as Social Innovation, Sustainability Leadership, and International Relations.

INNOVATING LEARNING

At the heart of our work is a recognition of the unique advantages and pressures of the collegiate system. While the College is charged with delivering undergraduate teaching, it exists in a complex partnership with university departments, which oversee lectures, practicals, and examinations. This dual responsibility requires careful attention to Cambridge's 'Tripos' examination requirements and supervision norms but it also calls for deeper reflection on the role of the College in supporting academic engagement.

Looking to the future, we are working toward appointing a Director for Innovation in Learning, with responsibility for developing a centre focused on educational support. We believe that this new hub would marry traditional academic rigour with cutting-edge technology, such as better understanding the potential of AI within education, or harnessing virtual reality for skills-based training in subjects like medicine, engineering, and archaeology. This centre would not only enhance learning but also help to set Robinson apart to both prospective students and donors, staking its claim as a forward-thinking institution.

Such developments would be intended to complement the activities of the current Wellbeing team, which has worked extremely hard alongside our undergraduate and postgraduate tutors to ensure that all students have access to the help that they need, when they need it. Recent work on neurodiversity and autism have yielded extremely positive results for both students and academic staff as the needs of students are better understood and addressed within the framework of their specific degrees. This landscape is one of the most rapidly evolving within Higher Education and, at Robinson, we are determined to be at the forefront of both excellent practice and innovation.

FOSTERING TEACHING AND RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

Central to any college's academic life are the teachers who guide and inspire students. At Robinson, we are fortunate to be able to rely on the expertise and experience of our University Teaching Officers (UTOs), complimented by a team of College Teaching Officers (CTOs) and early career researchers.

In the last twelve months, we have been delighted to appoint Dr Ankit Kumar (Engineering), Dr Tom Crawford (Mathematics) and Dr Orsolya Petocz (History and Modern Languages), the latter two of which have been able to join the College thanks to generous donations from our alumni. We are confident that these inspiring early career academics will add dynamism to the teaching and research that takes place within Robinson.

> "UNDERSTANDING THAT OUTSTANDING TEACHING AND CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH GO HAND-IN-HAND, WE HAVE BEEN STRIVING TO ADD NEW VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES TO THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY THROUGH OUR VISITING BAXANDALL FELLOWSHIPS. INDEED, THE KIND OF INTERDISCIPLINARY CONVERSATIONS AND COLLABORATIONS THAT ARE MADE POSSIBLE WITHIN A COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT REMAIN A KEY POINT OF FOCUS WITHIN ROBINSON, AS WE SEEK TO ASSIST OUR FELLOWS IN THEIR RESEARCH AND TO BETTER FACILITATE INTEGRATION OF OUR POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS WITHIN THE BROADER RESEARCH CONTEXT"

As an example, in October 2024 we were delighted to launch the Dr Teresa Tiffert Research Innovation Awards, which are intended to foster academic inquisitiveness amongst postgraduate students working in Medicine and the Biosciences. The most recent winner of this award was Aniket Dembi, who is working on deep learning models for clinical predictions, including glucose forecasting in diabetes and pneumonia detection from X-rays.

FACING THE FUTURE

As Robinson looks towards its 50th year, the College is acutely aware of the need to foster a supportive and inspiring environment, full of opportunities through which individual members of the College can engage with, and learn from, peers and colleagues. With your help, and drawing on our history of doing things differently, we remain committed to welcoming, supporting, and inspiring the next generation of scholars and teachers, for whom college life will be both an anchor and a springboard. ■

ENHANCING THE STUDY OF MEDICINE AT ROBINSON COLLEGE

DR ANDREW SHARKEY, FELLOW IN PRE-CLINICAL MEDICINE AND DIRECTOR OF STUDIES

When I first took up my role at Robinson 18 years ago, the Cambridge course, with its rigorous grounding in biomedical science, often felt worlds away from the realities of working on the wards. Students, understandably, questioned the direct relevance of their undergraduate studies to clinical practice. However, as many discovered during their clinical years, the foundational science proved invaluable in their diagnoses and clinical reasoning. "Now I get why we learned all this stuff," became a common refrain.

> “ ROBINSON COLLEGE HAS BEEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN PRECLINICAL AND CLINICAL LEARNING... ”

We were among the first Colleges to pilot Integrated Biomedical Problem Solving (IBiPS), an initiative developed at the Clinical School by Dr Richard Darnton and Dr Rachel Wakelin. At the start of each term, IBiPS introduces students to carefully curated clinical cases which align with the biomedical science they will study over the rest of term. Using a facilitator-based model, students develop ideas about possible diagnosis and are then able to keep a look out for relevant material from the biomedical science lectures, that might be relevant and help them to develop a firm diagnosis. At the end of the term, students review their initial clinical reasoning for the case. They identify the relevant learning points from the course material and develop a treatment plan, guided by the facilitators who are all GPs.

Robinson also introduced Clinical Case Days, led by Dr Naomi Deakin, one of our former Robinson medics (2008), now a qualified doctor. Complementing IBiPS, these sessions bring together Robinson clinical medics (years 4, 5 and 6) to teach the Robinson undergraduate medics (years 1, 2 and 3) at Addenbrooke's Hospital. Our clinical medics select suitable cases of their own to present and often enlist current patients for the undergrads to meet. This adds huge 'real life' value to this experience. The year 1-3 students spend the day up at the hospital, meeting the patients, discussing the cases and being led through the clinical reasoning, diagnosis and clinical management by the year 4-6 medics. Like the IBiPS course, the idea is to help link the bioscience lecture material with 'real' clinical cases and to help the student medics begin to develop their clinical reasoning and understand how to engage with patients. Conversely, this gives the clinical medics experience of teaching and leading group supervisions. It also strengthens links between the Robinson clinical and pre-clinical cohorts.

> “ IN ADDITION TO DEVELOPING THESE NEW, PRACTICAL, HANDS-ON LEARNING ACTIVITIES, WE ARE ALSO BEGINNING TO UTILISE VR TECHNOLOGY AND ARTIFICIAL MODELS WITHIN OUR LEARNING PROGRAMME ”

As such, although we mostly teach via traditional in-person dissection methods, the new **Anatomage system**, accessible through Dr Stuart Eves at Selwyn College, offers a useful virtual tool for anatomy learning and dissection for our freshers at the start of term before we turn to traditional methods in the Dissection Room at the Anatomy Department. In addition to this, the **Clinical Skills Unit** at Addenbrooke's provides all our students with hands-on experience using artificial models to practice essential procedures like inserting cannulas and performing CPR. The college has also equipped a Medical and Veterinary Student Resource Room to provide a dedicated study space for students to work and learn together. This is heavily used - particularly during exam terms.

Many undergraduate medics want to use the summer vacation to develop their laboratory or clinical skills. Robinson is delighted to be able to support this in a variety of ways. This provision has been enormously enhanced by the recent establishment of the Dr Alex Yui Hui Studentships in Medicine. These enable up to three pre-clinical students each year to participate in summer research projects or internships at the end of years 1-3.

Teaching and supervising our medics at Robinson has been an enormous pleasure and privilege.

As I prepare for my retirement, I feel a huge sense of pride in the accomplishments of our Robinson medics and news of their continued successes and achievements. None of this would be possible without our dedicated and talented group of supervisors who provide so much support and inspiration to our students. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge their critical role in helping our Robinson medics become the best possible doctors they can be. I look forward to spending much valued time with my grandchildren and continuing my research into early placental development and preeclampsia.

Find out more about Dr Sharkey's research here:
www.trophoblast.cam.ac.uk/people/andrew-sharkey ■

MEDICAL RESEARCH AND RACING

DR NAOMI DEAKIN, SENIOR MEMBER (TEACHING)

I vividly recall my undergraduate interviews for medicine at Robinson - a reassuring “general” interview with Dr Chris Warner and two rigorous scientific interviews with panels of Robinson Fellows. In the first, I met Dr Andrew Sharkey and Prof Peter Hutchinson; during the second I met Dr Teresa Tiffert. I'm lucky that all these individuals continue to contribute to my professional development, and greatly enjoy their company over shared SCR lunches and High Table at Formal Hall.

> “ DURING MY UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES AT ROBINSON, I DEVELOPED A KEEN INTEREST IN NEUROSCIENCE AND NEURODEVELOPMENT, THOROUGHLY ENJOYING THE DIVERSITY OF OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED ”

> THE BREADTH OF OPPORTUNITY I'VE ENCOUNTERED WHILST STUDYING MEDICINE AT ROBINSON HAS BEEN PHENOMENAL AND IT'S MY AMBITION TO PROVIDE ALL CURRENT AND FUTURE STUDENTS WITH AN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE THAT EXCEEDS IT.

I also began to supervise undergraduate students at Robinson and St Catherine's, supporting my interest in reproductive biology. This was encouraged by Dr Sharkey who kindly facilitated Long Vacation research projects at Yale (2010) and Montreal (2011). Subsequently, I was lucky to combine my research interests with travel and lived for short periods in Malawi and Sydney.

In parallel, I collaborated with Prof Peter Hutchinson for my Stage 3 Student Selected Component, "cleaning" data for his 10-year surgical randomised controlled trial, rescueICP (subsequently published in the New England Journal of Medicine). We quickly discovered a shared interest in motorsport and soon I was observing medical cover at Silverstone circuit, home of the British Formula 1 Grand Prix. In 2012, I completed a 9-month research project (largely at weekends and during evenings), analysing competitive racing incidents. As a result, medical provision was changed at this iconic racing circuit, and I continue to engage with medical audit for the on-site medical centre. After I graduated from Robinson with my MB BChir degrees, I moved to Scotland to complete the Academic Foundation programme, securing key rotations in Plastic Surgery/Emergency Medicine, Neonatology and Obstetrics & Gynaecology.

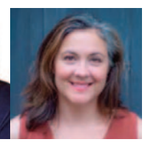
Thanks to Prof Hutchinson (who was, and remains, the event Chief Medical Officer), I fuelled my motorsport passion with attendance at the British Formula 1 Grand Prix in 2012. Thereafter, I became a regular annual Observer to the 100-strong Medical Team. I also assisted The British Touring Car Association (TOCA) with their programme of baseline and post-injury neurocognitive testing, later becoming their "Concussion Fellow". In 2018, I moved back to Cambridge as a Junior Neurotrauma Fellow in the Department of Neurosurgery at Addenbrooke's Hospital and was preparing an application for my PhD...with Prof Hutchinson at Robinson!

I was the first doctor (and woman) awarded the Sid Watkins Scholarship in 2018. This competitive research position with the Global Institute for Motor Sport Safety was part-funded by the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) and FIA Foundation, who subsequently fully-funded my motorsport concussion PhD project in the Department of Clinical Neurosciences at the University of Cambridge. During an incredible 4 years, I travelled the UK with TOCA and internationally with Aston Martin Racing, being part of the Le Mans and World Endurance Championship winning teams in 2020.

Delighted with "no corrections" following my PhD viva in 2022, I completed the JCR-MCR-SCR set and joined Robinson SCR as a Senior Member (Teaching) in 2023. It is an honour to work and teach alongside many exceptional Robinson teachers and Robinson's support of our Pre-/Clinical Linker Days over the past two years has been vital. I was particularly honoured to support the launch of the Dr Teresa Tiffert Research Innovation Awards in October 2024; she was my supervisor for 1 year, my tutor for 9 years and has been my friend for more than a decade and a half. What a community we have at Robinson!

I continue to practice medicine at the weekly Cambridge Sports Concussion Clinic at Addenbrooke's Hospital (one of only two such NHS-funded services in the UK) which I co-founded with Prof Hutchinson. Our service is truly multi-disciplinary; we collaborate with colleagues in paediatric neurosurgery, clinical neuropsychology, neurorehabilitation, vestibular physiotherapy and sports medicine. These clinics have proved popular with Robinson undergraduate medical students, who often observe and then assist with our ongoing research. This opportunity provides an invaluable insight into the termly Pre-/Clinical Linker sessions which we hope to continue beyond 2025. ■

THE READING PEDAGOGIES OF EQUITY PROJECT



DR EMMA COOPER,
FELLOW IN EDUCATION AT ROBINSON,
AND **PROFESSOR RACHEL HEYDON,**
WESTERN UNIVERSITY, CANADA

Although academic reading is a fundamental requirement for successful participation in higher education with far-reaching implications for equity, supporting equity within academic reading has received little practical and research attention. To generate knowledge to support equity outcomes, including enhanced instructional supports for students, The Reading Pedagogies of Equity Project (R-PEP) - led by Professor Rachel Heydon at Western University in Canada - was created. Phase one has uncovered the numerous junctures in university teaching where equity can be enabled and/or constrained during academic reading engagements. R-PEP created a professional learning program for university instructors to explore within their real time teaching, strategies for strengthening academic reading pedagogies. Participants in this phase of the study were invited to examine academic reading texts and materials from their teaching alongside researchers and collaborators, to reflect on their own experiences, knowledge and understanding, especially in relation to equity – for example, how the choice of texts might help or hinder learners.

Early findings showed that reading is often taken for granted in teacher education programmes and needs more focused support in both curriculum and teaching. To address this, a new joint study between Canada and England (including Robinson College and the wider University of Cambridge) has been planned. This new research will explore the reading expectations placed on future teachers and what these mean for fair and inclusive teaching practices.

Collaboration is key to the success of this project. We intend to engage with a diverse range of stakeholders to drive meaningful change – especially in the pursuit of social justice. Working across regions will allow researchers to compare how local policies, political climates, and professional standards shape reading practices in teacher education. It is hoped that these international partnerships bring varied perspectives that highlight how geography, identity, and experience influence how learners develop critical literacies – skills that go beyond understanding a text to questioning its deeper messages and assumptions.

To meet the aims of this research, the project will follow teacher education students during the normal course of a week of studies—through interviews, observations, and collecting materials – to better understand the academic reading demands of their daily lives, how they engage with reading and what opportunities exist for developing critical academic literacy. The ultimate goal is to generate new knowledge about how academic reading can support equity in teacher education. Researchers will explore the kinds of texts students come in contact with, what the context asks them to do with these texts, how they make sense of them, how reading connects to social justice, and how local rules and histories (like colonial contexts) influence these practices. ■

> THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE OBTAINED VIA THIS RESEARCH, IT IS HOPED THAT WE MAY WIDEN PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES, DISRUPTING EXCLUSIONARY PRACTICES OF THE PAST AND EFFECTIVELY OPENING UP TEACHER EDUCATION TO ALL

FROM PHD STUDENT TO FELLOW

PROFESSOR BARTOMEU MONSERRAT, FELLOW IN MATERIALS SCIENCE AND METALLURGY

When I arrived at Robinson College in 2011 to begin my PhD in Physics, I didn't expect my teaching journey to start so quickly. But that very first year, I was asked to supervise first-year undergraduate Physics students. I found the experience both challenging and energising. Helping students navigate the intensity of their first year and watching their confidence and independence grow was immensely rewarding. One of my very first supervisees went on to complete a PhD in the Theory of Condensed Matter Group at the Cavendish Laboratory.

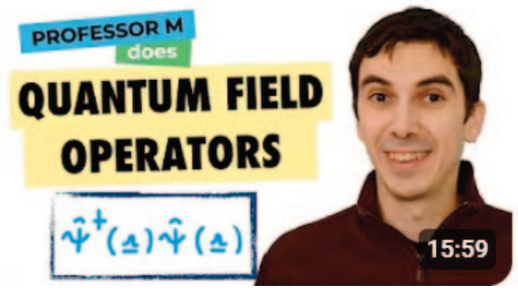
> "SEEING STUDENTS FLOURISH AND FOLLOW THEIR OWN ACADEMIC PATHS HAS REMAINED ONE OF THE MOST SATISFYING PARTS OF MY WORK"

That supervision experience also planted the seed for what would become a long-standing interest in educational innovation. Robinson provided an environment where I felt trusted to experiment, even within the traditional framework of Cambridge teaching. That openness and support continued throughout my time at the College: first as a PhD student, then as the Henslow Research Fellow, and now as a Fellow of the College, a role I have held since being appointed to a faculty position in 2020 at the University.

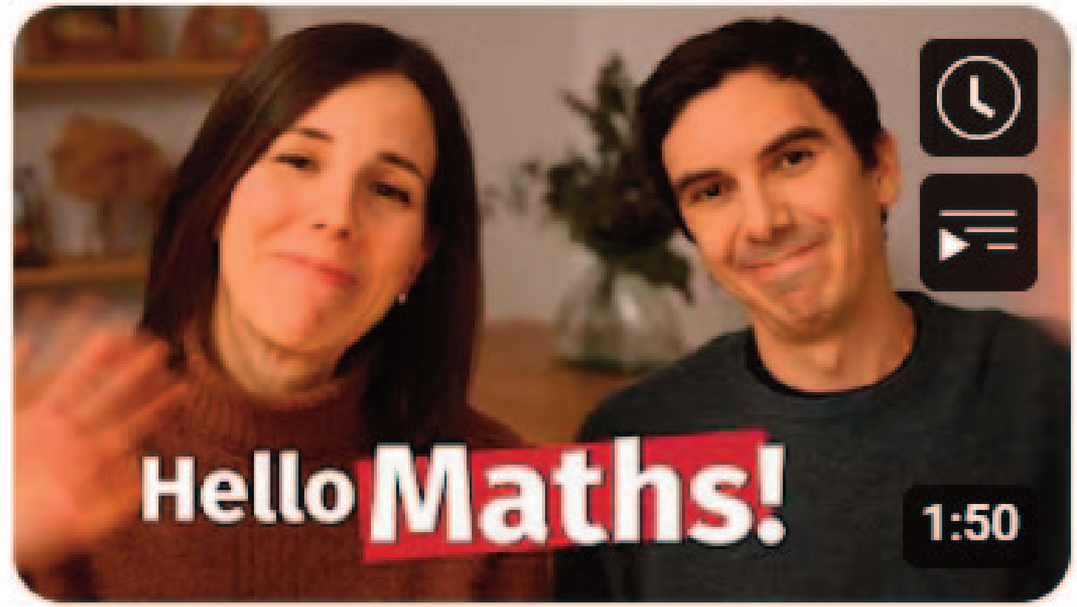
Robinson has been my academic home for well over a decade, and it continues to shape how I teach, research, and think about education at Cambridge and beyond. That mutual growth, being supported while also being trusted to challenge and change, has defined my relationship with the College. It is exactly that combination of openness and grounding that makes Robinson so special. This kind of reciprocal development is not just a personal experience, it is something deeply embedded in the College's identity, and what makes it such a genuine and forward-looking academic community.

Although I was not an undergraduate at Cambridge, I quickly came to appreciate the distinctive power of the supervision system. It offers a level of individualised engagement that is rare in higher education: the ability to tailor discussions to a student's specific background, interests, and challenges. That kind of flexibility is especially valuable in a subject like quantum mechanics, which is conceptually abstract and mathematically demanding, and which I have taught for years. Students come to it with diverse strengths, some with a strong grasp of the maths, others with more physical intuition, and being able to adapt teaching accordingly makes a real difference.

Digital resources can extend this personalised approach far beyond the supervision room. Over time, I began developing online materials to supplement and enhance student learning. These resources eventually evolved into something larger: my YouTube channel - Professor M Does Science (youtube.com/@ProfessorMDoesScience). This started as a supplement to flipped-classroom teaching, where students watch short video lectures in advance and use class time for interactive discussions and problem solving. I began making concise, focused videos on key quantum mechanics topics to help my students prepare. But the material resonated far beyond Cambridge. The channel now reaches learners around the world with over 25,000 active students and over 1,000 views per day.



The content ranges from fundamental concepts like wavefunctions and the uncertainty principle to more advanced topics, including the quantum origins of chemistry and the behaviour of materials at the atomic scale. It's been remarkable to see how far this content travels: I have now taught more students online than I could ever hope to reach through traditional teaching over a 35+ year career. The experience has highlighted for me the extraordinary potential of digital platforms to widen access and complement in-person learning.



LINKING RESEARCH AND TEACHING

My teaching is closely intertwined with my research, which focuses on using high-performance computing to solve the equations of quantum mechanics to understand and design complex materials. I lead a team of around 15 postdocs, PhD students, and master's students in developing computational models that predict the properties of new materials long before they are made in the lab. These materials include superconductors, semiconductors, and topological materials, with potential applications ranging from solar cells and LEDs to low-power electronic devices that could help meet future energy demands.

We work closely with a range of industrial and governmental partners, including Samsung, Rolls Royce, and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority. These collaborations ensure that our theoretical models can help inform real-world technologies, guiding the design of materials for specific needs.

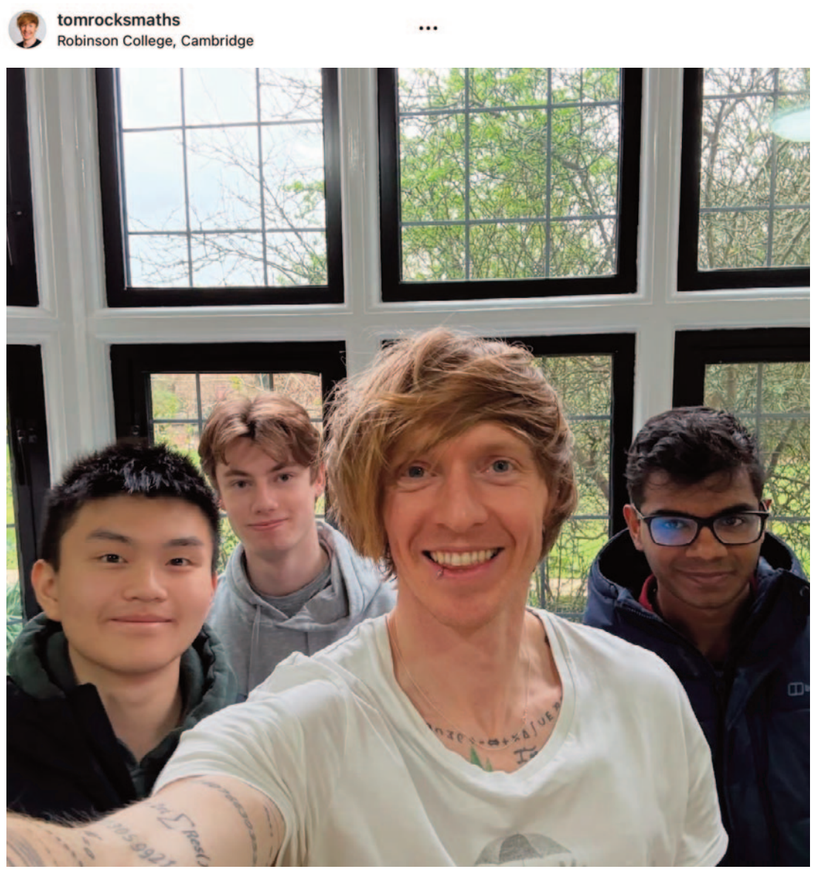
One of the most satisfying aspects of my role is helping students connect what they are learning in quantum mechanics lectures to the research we're doing at the cutting edge of the field. Being able to show that the same mathematical tools they are studying underpin the design of next-generation materials helps make the subject come alive and often inspires students to pursue research themselves, be it in academia or industry.

The pace of change in education is accelerating. Digital platforms, open-access resources, and emerging tools like AI agents are transforming how students engage with content. I have seen first-hand how technology can offer flexibility and personalisation that complements traditional teaching. But these tools must serve good pedagogy. At their best, they extend access, reinforce understanding, and foster curiosity.

In September, I began a new role as a Vice-Chancellor's Fellow, working directly with senior university leadership on educational innovation and development. My focus will be on exploring how Cambridge – across Departments, Faculties, Colleges, and the wider ecosystem – can take a leading role in shaping the future of higher education. I am particularly excited about how Colleges like Robinson, which already pioneer student-focused and adaptive education, can help lead this effort. Robinson has always supported new thinking about teaching, and I look forward to working with the College to share and develop innovative models that could benefit the wider University community.

From PhD student to Fellow, my entire academic journey at Cambridge has been anchored at Robinson. It's the place where I first stood in front of a whiteboard trying to explain a tricky bit of quantum mechanics, and it is where I was first encouraged to experiment, to try new approaches to learning and teaching. That same spirit of curiosity, trust, and community continues to guide my work, whether I am supervising a student, writing code for a quantum simulation, or scripting the next video lesson for the channel.

Education is changing, but the core values I learned at Robinson remain just as relevant. Effective teaching is about responsiveness, connection, and discovery. Innovation helps us bring those values to more people, more meaningfully, and more sustainably. ■



MATHS BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT

Q&A WITH DR TOM CRAWFORD, FELLOW IN APPLIED MATHEMATICS

Tom Crawford is a Mathematician at the University of Cambridge and the University of Oxford. He is a Fellow in Applied Mathematics at Robinson College. At Oxford University, he is Public Engagement Lead for Continuing Education and is Fellow by Special Election at St Edmund Hall. Tom also runs the award-winning Tom Rocks Maths website and associated social media profiles on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube @tomrocksmaths (where he recently passed over 25 million views on the platform). Tom took time out from his busy schedule to answer our questions for Bin Brook

Q: Who has been the greatest influence on your teaching style and why?

Tom: I'm not sure I can narrow down to one individual - I think I have taken lots of tips and ideas from a range of different people over the years. In terms of formal teaching, I think my approach here follows that of my tutors from my undergraduate days at Oxford. There were two professors, Charles Batty and Paul Tod, who would ensure that before leaving you would know how to answer every question on a problem set. It sometimes meant that the tutorials felt a little rushed - particularly when it came to proofs in first year pure courses for me - but I found that I could always write up full solutions after each tutorial using my notes. I try to use this approach myself now when holding supervisions at Robinson.

Regarding my online teaching style, I think this is a mix of other communicators that I've interacted with over the years, plus some lessons from my PhD supervisor, Paul Linden. Working with Paul not only helped to refine my abilities as an academic, but it also helped to shape myself as a person. His laid back and relaxed attitude, whilst also caring deeply about his students and their work, really showed me the type of mentor I wanted to be. Someone that is friendly, open and approachable, but also passionate about their work. Combining this with traits of other YouTubers that I enjoy watching - for example the comedy of Matt Parker, the enthusiasm of James Grime, and the deep knowledge of Grant Sanderson, has evolved into the teaching style I use online today.

Q: You regularly reach millions through your Tom Rocks Maths website, via social media including your YouTube channel, as well as your time on Maths Corner on Channel 4's Countdown. Has this experience of bringing maths to the masses informed/enhanced your in-person teaching methods and vice-versa?

Tom: Without a doubt. When crafting content for social media, I try to think about the best way to explain the topic to a random person I might meet at the pub. This often means distilling the concept down into its simplest form and using analogies that people can relate to. Plus, trying to make it as entertaining and memorable as possible!

I think all of these techniques translate perfectly to teaching. I want to be able to help my students understand the topic, which usually means starting at the core concepts and building up. If they are struggling to grasp the meaning or significance of a result, then being able to reframe it through an analogy can often help. And I want them to remember the key ideas of a course when it comes to exams so telling stories or referencing pop culture when discussing a subject helps it to stay in their head.

Q: Are there any Maths topics that you struggled with at school/College? If so, how did you overcome these difficulties?

Tom: I really did not get on well with Linear Algebra as an undergraduate. It was my least favourite topic and ended up being the lowest mark in any of my university exams. As a student, I think I just accepted it as something that I didn't enjoy, but needed to do, and so just got through it - much like marking hundreds of exam scripts now!

But this all changed once I started teaching. As the old saying goes, "you don't really understand something until you can teach it" and having to relearn first year Linear Algebra ahead of teaching it to cover for a colleague, was when it all began to click. It's now one of my favourite subjects to teach because of the universality of the concepts - I regularly reference how a certain result or theorem is used in Quantum Theory, or Statistics, or even Mathematical Biology, and I think knowing this has really helped me to overcome my initial dislike for the subject.

Q: Are there any emerging trends or tools in maths education – whether tech-based, interdisciplinary, or otherwise - that you are you most excited about and why?

Tom: I'm involved in a lot of exciting initiatives about awarding university level credits to students around the world taking online courses. I think the future of education is in partnerships between traditional educational institutions, such as universities, and online platforms creating high quality courses that can be taken anywhere in the world. The role of the university is to ensure the quality of the course content and that assessment procedures remain robust, whilst the online platforms provide access to the material globally. A great example of this is the CS50 Introductory Computer Science course from Harvard which has now been taken by over 6 million students. I've been working with the team for the past 18 months to create a UK-focussed version which will be endorsed by universities in the UK. It's currently available at Oxford and hopefully will be coming to Cambridge in the not-so-distant future - watch this space!

Q: What do you anticipate will be the hottest topics/discoveries in maths in the near future and how could they help us with in real life?

Tom: It's hard to look past the six unsolved Millennium Problems - announced in the year 2000 as the greatest unsolved problems in mathematics, each with a $1-million prize (originally there were seven, but one - the Poincare Conjecture - has since been solved).

The problems were selected not because their solutions would have any impact on real-life, but because they were notoriously difficult. However, given the fundamental nature of many of them in terms of how they relate to our understanding of the universe, I think a solution to almost any of them would have far-reaching consequences in both the mathematical, and real, world. ■

EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY

June 2025 marked the graduation of Robinson's first cohort of Pegasus Scholars who have achieved great success across a wide range of subjects including Law, Human Social Political Sciences, English, History and Education. Among those to flourish under the Pegasus Bridging Programme, has been Wahida Seisay (Education, 2022), Dr Lizzi Rawlinson-Mills, Fellow in English and Director of Studies (DoS) for Education tells us more…

I was elected to the Fellowship in February 2020, but what with the pandemic and a baby arriving in July of that year, I didn't get my official Admission of Fellows ceremony and celebration until a year later. That meant that when we interviewed Wahida Seisay in 2021, I still felt quite new to Robinson, and very fresh in the role as Education DoS. Wahida's time at Cambridge has been an education for both of us.

Education is a broad field, and the Tripos offers amazing flexibility for students to find their own areas of interest and specialism. They are introduced to the disciplines of sociology, psychology, arts and creativities; they engage with the history and philosophy of education and its diverse contexts and frameworks, with local and global policies and policy-making, and with broader socio-political questions of social justice, international development, and peace.

It was clear from the outset what kind of path Wahida would pick for herself through this terrain. At interview, while she talked knowledgably about her A level subjects – Economics, Religious Studies, and English Literature – she really came to life when describing her experiences with Theatre Peckham and her passion for the empowerment of young Black creatives in, and through, the arts, talking eloquently about a right of access to culture for everybody.

Wahida was in the first cohort of Pegasus Scholars, Robinson's programme designed to support those from less advantaged backgrounds to make a strong start to their time at Cambridge. As Wahida has told me, starting at Cambridge can be daunting both academically and socially, and Pegasus ensured that she didn't feel completely in the dark when the year officially began, as well as providing a solid group of college friends.

She certainly hit the ground running, although I'm not sure Pegasus can take the credit for that. Michaelmas 2022 had hardly started when Wahida got her first huge theatre gig, being selected to direct the ADC Freshers' Play 2022 (Blue Stockings, by Jessica Swale). Wahida told me that this was a "transformative" experience – her first experience of directing anything at such a large scale, and the birth of her Cambridge Theatre journey. That journey continued throughout Wahida's undergraduate career, with further high-profile directing roles including the Marlowe Players' BME Shakespeare in 2022 (Twelfth Night) and 2023 (Anthony and Cleopatra). These productions reflect Wahida's commitment to making spaces for Black creatives in theatre. She speaks insightfully about why representation is so difficult to achieve, including stigmas about access, sustainability and security which create anxiety among some households, on top of a lack of resources. Wahida has made it her personal mission to help dispel these stigmas, seeking to "infiltrate spaces not only physically but also with our stories and experiences once we are amongst these spaces". Part of her answer to this has been to hone her craft as a playwright during her time at Cambridge.

Wahida's theatre work has not all been "extra-curricular"; the Tripos has long been a place where theatre and the arts are practised and interrogated. In her second year, Wahida selected the Theatre, Text and Production paper, which demands an original play as part of the coursework. This gave Wahida an academic deadline (and the support of a supervisor) to do work that she wanted to do anyway. In her third year, she was once again able to select a paper which allowed her to reflect critically on her own experiences, analysing the micro industry that is Cambridge Theatre for her Performance, Education and Society paper in light of research.

Wahida brings her personal experiences together with an academic understanding of the barriers faced by people of colour in UK arts spaces. In response, Wahida has created @HerWorld.UK, an online networking space for Black female creatives in the UK, inspiring others with her example of seizing opportunities, building networks, applying for funding and other support, and persevering when faced with setbacks. She is now pursuing an internship at an Arts agency, following the staging of her play, Symptom of Life, at The Cockpit Theatre as part of The Camden Fringe 2025.

What have I learned from Wahida? In her words: "be committed to something. Be too busy, with the things that interest you." Many stressed-out students tell me they're too overloaded to enjoy their studies, and too busy with work to take on anything additional. Wahida's experience has been that being committed to an extra-curricular you care about gives you a structure, as well as some perspective.

PEGASUS SCHOLAR SOARS TO THE STAGE

Fresh from her success at The Camden Fringe 2025, Wahida Seisay shares her experiences at Robinson and her exciting next steps…

Q: What were the benefits of taking the Education Tripos at Robinson?

Wahida: A key highlight was constantly being able to mould the course around my personal interests. It never felt too rigid or fixed and therefore
I was able to discover more about things I was already interested in but through alternative lenses. An example of this was my recent coursework for our Play, Imagination and Creativity Paper. I was able to use my dance background to design a product which would test whether creativity could be enhanced and this helped me to further research the psychological and social aspects of dance which I had not previously studied. Being able to include my passions within my degree made the entire experience much more enjoyable and rewarding.

Q: What other opportunities were you able to explore?

Wahida: The main opportunities that I explored whilst at Cambridge were Directing within Cambridge Theatre and undertaking Access and Outreach work via the Cambridge University African-Caribbean Society (CUACS). Directing in Cambridge Theatre solidified my passion as an aspiring director and helped me build so many other skills (organisational, leadership) that I can use and apply in any future roles.

My role as Access Officer for the CUACS helped me to discover a passion for access and outreach. Being able to see the importance of representation in real time and speaking to students who I could genuinely relate to was so rewarding and fulfilling. I am certain that my passion for access is something that I want to continue building on in the future to help provide representation for those who lack it.

Q: How did you balance your roles as writer and director of your play, Symptom of Life?

Wahida: Symptom of Life was created as part of my second-year coursework. I'd always had an interest in writing but never saw it as the right time to begin so I used this assignment to force me out of that comfort zone and encourage me to get something written.

After writing the play, I realised that I wanted to take it further and incorporate my directing skills to bring it to life so I pitched it to the ADC and it was programmed at the Corpus Playroom. When writing, I knew I wanted to include my passions about philosophy and life's bigger questions as well as addressing the unique experiences of young, Black women.

Q: What impact did the Pegasus Bridging Programme have on your time at Robinson?

Wahida: The Pegasus Scheme was very helpful, particularly from a social aspect. Being able to arrive at College early and make new friends was something I greatly appreciated, and its effect still shows today because some of my closest friends from College were also on the programme.

Coming to a place like Cambridge can be daunting both academically and socially but Pegasus was such a holistic programme that it helped me to feel more confident when the year officially began. Being able to deliver such an effective programme in just three weeks speaks volumes as to how well it was curated and delivered.

Q: Now that you have completed your studies at Robinson, what's next for you?

Wahida: With support from Robinson's Student Opportunities Fund, Symptom Of Life recently played at The Cockpit Theatre, as part of the Camden Fringe Festival 2025. Being able to show my play in my home city of London was a massive achievement for me and it will hopefully open doors to many more opportunities.

My goal is to continue to build my craft as a director, particularly for stage, and work on stories that are new and liberating for unrepresented voices. I also want to continue working on access and outreach initiatives within schools, showing students that creative careers are sustainable and achievable. I also want to continue to build my company, HerWorld.UK which is a multifaceted production company focused on the betterment and support of Black women within the creative industries.

Find out more about @HerWorld.UK on Instagram and LinkedIn. ■

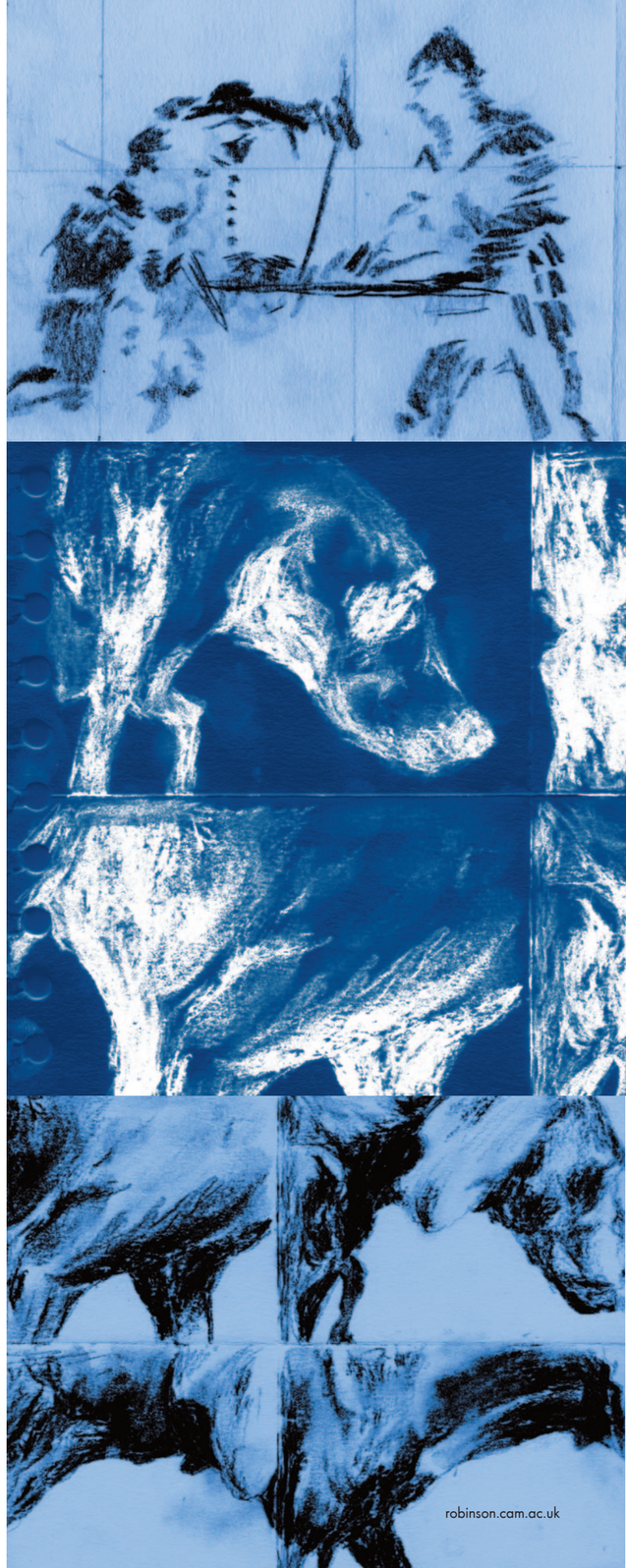
Robinson Art Festival is a celebration of creativity in the College and beyond. Planned and delivered by our own students, with oversight from the College's Visual Arts and Design Committee, this year's programme of artistic events included visiting speakers, life drawing sessions, craft makers' events, film screenings, and events exploring identity and creativity. The Festival culminated in a public art exhibition in College, showing a variety of work, including textiles, animation, painting and sculpture. Among the highlights of this year's entries was an animated short film by Freddie Dobbs (English Tripos, 2021) who explains more:

I had the pleasure of projecting my short film Blue Things upon the chapel walls at the Robinson Art Festival this year. The film is a work of animation, consisting of hundreds of hand-drawn illustrations. Resisting a linear narrative, the film is closer in structure to a poem - a sequence of separate images connected by their visual and tonal similarities.

Blue Things manifests my academic interests in the intersection of poetry and film which I explored in my undergraduate dissertation on the 'montage poetics' of Beat poetry and film. I was largely influenced by Derek Jarman's experimental work *Blue*. A single still shot of the colour blue, Jarman's film is a poetic document of his experience of AIDS-related illness, with the film's visuals representing the artist's partial blindness. Though Jarman's diaristic discussion of AIDS is integral to his work, for the purposes of my own piece I was focused on his poetic musings of colour. Akin to cinematic montage, the colour blue is a tapestry in Jarman's film in which all manner of disparate elements are woven together: the hospital's blue IV 'drip', the 'blue jeans' of his partner and the 'blue heat haze' of summers past.

I hence set out to create my own visual poem: a tapestry of personal associations of the colour blue. With its mass of drawn frames and the inherent messiness of a hand drawn style, I see the film as a sort of flotsam and jetsam of pop-cultural references and personal memories: a close-up of David Bowie's blue eye shadow in the music video for *Life on Mars*, the lips of Samuel Beckett's *Not I* and the stuttering movements of a childhood mechanical toy robot to name just a few of the film's images.

Having just graduated with a distinction in the MPhil in Film and Screen Studies at Cambridge, I am continuing to build my portfolio in hand drawn animation in the hopes of pursuing a career in such. My ongoing personal project is a short film about greyhound racing; however, I am excited to be maintaining my connection to the university as I am currently working on a commission to be projected as part of a theatrical production this coming academic year. Updates of my work are regularly posted on my Instagram account **@fdobbsfilm.** ■



THE BAXANDALL FELLOWSHIP

PROFESSOR KRISTA KESSELRING, DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY, CANADA

Professor Krista Kesselring visited Robinson as a Baxandall Fellow in the Lent and Easter terms of 2025. Usually based in the History Department at Dalhousie University in Canada, she teaches early modern English history. Her research typically examines how people used law to mediate changing social and political relationships over time; much of her recent work has focused on the Court of Star Chamber. The new research that was the centre of her work at Robinson – and the subject of her public Baxandall Lecture, given in March 2025 – drew on Star Chamber records to examine the role of the jury in English witch trials.

As noted in my Baxandall Lecture *The Jury, the Witch and the Shadow of Doubt: Witchcraft on Trial in Early Modern England*, even though hundreds of people – mostly women – were executed for crimes related to witchcraft in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, hundreds more suspects went free. Juries discharged or acquitted a high proportion of people accused of using witchcraft to cause harm, even at the peak of the so-called 'witch hunting' era in England's history. How can we explain this high acquittal rate and what might we learn from it? Historians of witchcraft have previously pointed to peculiarities of proof and procedure to explain England's distinctive patterns of prosecution: the absence of judicial torture and inquisitorial process helped keep numbers of executions lower in England than in some other countries. My work examined the role of another distinctive element of English criminal procedure: the jury, and more particularly, the grand jury.

I shared my findings on a case heard in the Court of Star Chamber against a group of grand jurors accused of perjury for their refusal to indict a woman accused of murder-by-witchcraft. The unusually well documented trial of the jurors allowed a close study of the decision-making involved in bringing suspected witches to trial and in the common outcome of letting so many go free. In this case, I was able to follow the accusations of witchcraft and jury malfeasance from their emergence in rural Buckinghamshire through to the central courts at Westminster and examine them in their broader political, religious, and legal contexts. In the end, neither the woman accused of witchcraft nor the jurors who opted to believe her faced punishment. The case study shows that restraint, doubt, and decency could be shown not only by learned, elite scholars and judges but also by community members of modest or middling means, either individually as witnesses or collectively as jurors. This highlights the presence and significance of what we might characterize as a rough-and-ready 'reasonable doubt', even in the midst of fears and tensions that might push some people to deadly certainties.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr Leigh Baxandall for the generous gift that made this fellowship possible, and also the entire Robinson community. I met so many brilliant and welcoming Fellows, staff, and students at Robinson. I had the time to do a fair amount of research and to write several new articles, now submitted for publication, but I also enjoyed many chances to talk with other members of the College and the University beyond. In addition to giving my talk about witchcraft on trial, I led a workshop for a group of History PhD students and participated in an event hosted by Robinson's History Society. I also attended many seminars and lectures. I have been a very lucky beneficiary of this support and will remember my time at Robinson as a Baxandall Fellow with great fondness and gratitude. ■

ROBINSON ALUMNI SHARE THEIR CAREER PATHS

PROFESSOR AMBROSE FIELD (PGCE, 1992) IS PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR FOR GLOBAL STRATEGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF YORK.

June 2025 marked the graduation of Robinson's first cohort of Pegasus Scholars who have achieved great success across a wide range of subjects including Law, Human Social Political Sciences, English, History and Education. Among those to flourish under the Pegasus Bridging Programme, has been Wahida Seisay (Education, 2022), Dr Lizzi Rawlinson-Mills, Fellow in English and Director of Studies (DoS) for Education tells us more…

I encountered powerful ideas on my course at Robinson which are still valuable to me today. Reflecting on why this might be, I'm proud to say that the programme has had lasting value even though I do not work in the exact sector I once intended to. For me, this comes down to the presence through all the activities of critical thinking, challenge, and academic generosity. The latter isn't much talked about. The academic generosity I encountered is an approach to teaching and learning that enables students to have a distinctive voice, and to build their own work in a supportive environment. It is both good guidance and a tangible openness, making use of students to bring their thoughts and ideas to current problems, however formative they might be. And importantly, these aspects were situated in an informed, equitable, and evidence-based environment.

My daily work brings me in contact with government and diplomatic mission across the world. There have been important changes in the global outlook to education in recent years, driven in part by a rapidly changing geopolitics and increasingly domestic responses that foreground local solutions to global issues. The UK has traditionally seen trans-national education as valuable export. But it is more than that, it can act as a means to help unlock the global gridlock that the UN Human Development Report critically identified in 2024.

To achieve this, it is vital education is research informed and interdisciplinary - linked to national and regional needs and priorities. It is also vital that our educators - of all kinds - are invested in, and that they remain able to develop their disciplines. Interdisciplinary research also plays an essential role in bridging this connection between instruction and application.

Today there are plenty of means for knowledge delivery. Education is so much more than that: to resolve global gridlock we must be open to perspectives other than our own and be open to challenge. This starts from school teaching and continues right through to professional development. We must avoid an empty sense of pluralism where layers of culture are simply overlayed. It is mutual understanding and dialogue that forms the bridge, and the arts and culture have an equal role to play in engendering this dialogue as does our national effort in science and technology. Striking this balance requires careful diplomacy and enlightened stewardship.

In this respect, the team at Cambridge was inspirational. I'm deeply grateful for the work of John Finney, a transformative education leader, and Lesley Hendy - one of the most generously creative people I have encountered to this day. These academics let me submit traditional assignments in decidedly non-traditional ways, allowed me to use department facilities to create community benefit outside the course and made sure I could test out theory against the real world before coming to any conclusions.

> **“ THE VALUE OF THE UNUSUAL, CONCERN FOR PEOPLE, AND THE SUPPORT FOR INNOVATION AT ROBINSON IS SOMETHING I WON'T EASILY FORGET. ”**

I also remain deeply grateful to the late Lord Lewis, the first Warden of Robinson, for his support. As a student, I had secured a conference presentation at one of the discipline's largest events but had no personal means of getting there. 'There' was Austin, Texas. Outside of college, I was told it was perhaps "unusual" for an education student to be seeking research support funds, let alone for something so far away. That however wasn't an issue for Lord Lewis: he was simply keen to assist students on their path, whatever that might be. ■

FOCUS ON **ALUMNI**

TRICIA MOSS

(MED IN PRIMARY EDUCATION, 2017)

IS THE TRUST CURRICULUM LEAD AT THE DIOCESE OF ELY MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST (DEMAT) WHICH ENCOMPASSES 40 SCHOOLS ACROSS THE AREA.

“ MY MASTERS STUDIES AT ROBINSON FOCUSED ON EFFECTIVE READING INSTRUCTION FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS, PARTICULARLY FOR PUPILS WORKING BELOW AGE-RELATED EXPECTATIONS AT THE END OF PRIMARY ”

In my current role as Trust Curriculum Lead at The Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust, I lead, support and provide professional development to improve schools and raise pupil outcomes. Across our 40 schools, I lead on developing and embedding best practice on curriculum and assessment; creating self-sustaining professional learning communities that impact on practice and outcomes; instilling a culture of continuous professional development and impact evaluation. As a Trust, we are evidence informed, and the research skills I developed during my masters studies, particularly when writing literature reviews, have supported me well when appraising and synthesising new and established research.

It is widely reported that school budgets are extremely tight, and this is especially true for primary schools. DEMAT is one of very few large primary-only multi-academy trusts (MATs) and over half our schools are small village primaries with mixed-year group classes. As a trust, we align around our Education Principles and have shared curricula and professional development. By working together, we are able to build expertise and support each other, harnessing efficiencies of scale. Having a shared approach to teaching through direct instruction, a shared curriculum that is highly specified and carefully sequenced, and a taught behaviour curriculum, mean we have a shared language. We are able to have a laser focus on impactful teaching and pupil learning. This in turn is supporting us to close the disadvantage gap and give our pupils the best possible start. When asked why we exist, it is ‘to create the foundations to build successful futures’. Our classrooms are joyous places full of focused, articulate pupils who have a love of learning.

We also work closely with other MATs, for example The Knowledge Schools Trust and Advantage Schools, to ensure as many children as possible are getting the best possible start. I have recently written a book on leading primary English published by Bloomsbury with Sallie Stanton at Advantage Schools which is grounded in the work around English that we are doing across our schools.

Curriculum work is never done, we are constantly reviewing, honing and reflecting on the impact of our curriculum; we are relentlessly bothered about every single pupil in our trust and creating the foundations to build successful futures. My masters studies have supported me to review and synthesise research studies in conjunction with empirical evidence from our schools and expert evidence from colleagues within our trust and beyond. ■

ALASTAIR INGALL

(MANUFACTURING ENGINEERING, 1997)

IS HEADMASTER AT HOLYPORT COLLEGE, A STATE BOARDING SCHOOL IN BERKSHIRE WHICH IS PARTNERED WITH NEARBY ETON COLLEGE.

“ LEARNING AT CAMBRIDGE WAS MARKEDLY COLLABORATIVE. THE ROBINSON COMMUNITY IN PARTICULAR PROVIDED SO MUCH OPPORTUNITY TO ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER. BY THE TIME I GRADUATED FROM ROBINSON, I KNEW I LOVED THINKING ABOUT THE PROCESS BY WHICH WE LEARN AND SPENDING TIME HELPING OTHERS LEARN. EQUALLY FUN, WAS PERSUADING PEOPLE TO ‘HAVE A GO’ AND MAKE THE MOST OF OPPORTUNITIES FROM EARLY MORNING ROWING TO LATE NIGHT BOPPING ”

I did the ‘milkround’ and landed a job at the strategy consultant, Marakon Associates. A dip in business gave me an opportunity to defer my start by six months; I used the opportunity to get a temporary job teaching Maths at the Petersfield School, a comprehensive in Hampshire and test whether I ‘had what it takes to teach’. I was thrown in at the deep end with no formal training and found that on several occasions I didn’t yet have what it takes. After nearly four busy years with Marakon, I handed in my notice to start a PGCE. Twenty years on I have never once regretted joining the teaching profession: challenging and rewarding in equal measure - it’s been a wonderful journey.

I now live, with my wife Alexandra (Classics, 1997) and three children at Holyport College. It’s been a big change moving out of busy London to join this ambitious but inclusive school but we’ve been welcomed with open arms by the Holyport community. Despite the busyness of Headship, I’m still finding time to be involved in coaching sport, teaching a bit of maths and preparing some of our students for their Oxbridge interviews.

Headteachers have so many ‘plates to spin’: developing the curriculum, championing the extra-curricular, managing the finances, supporting students and parents, marketing and leading.

One of the most important roles is recruiting brilliant staff - and I am so blessed at Holyport to work with such a capable, dynamic, supportive leadership and wider staff teams. It makes all the difference.

State boarding schools are rare and unique - the government pays for the education but parents sponsor the boarding. We are hugely ambitious for our students in every aspect of their lives. We have a strong academic focus but also put a lot of emphasis on ‘joy’: the vibrant, optimistic energy that makes learning and living exciting. We know that children who are happy, flourishing and valued in school do better so ensuring that Holyport College provides a joyous education matters.

Every student has their own iPad in lessons which allows teachers to personalise the learning journey with the best possible resources to challenge and support each student. Finally, we teach kindness - our staff are kind and we expect our students to reflect that in their dealings with one another.

In summary, our approach is full of ambition, joy and kindness so our young people can really flourish in every way. ■

SHEILA DUFFY

(EDUCATION TRIPOS, 1980)

IS CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ASH SCOTLAND, A CHARITY WORKING TO BRING ABOUT A HEALTHIER SCOTLAND, FREE FROM THE HARMS OF TOBACCO AND RELATED PRODUCTS.

“I JOINED ROBINSON IN 1980 AS PART OF THE FIRST UNDERGRADUATE INTAKE, AT A TIME WHEN THE COLLEGE WAS FORMING ITS CHARACTER. IT WAS A WARM WELCOME AND AN EASY INTRODUCTION TO LIFE AT CAMBRIDGE. OUR NEWLY BUILT EN-SUITE BEDROOMS (DESIGNED TO ATTRACT CONFERENCES) WERE THE ENVY OF FRIENDS IN OTHER COLLEGES”

For two years I read through English literature from the year 1350 to the present day and absorbed a range of critical analyses. The University Library was a perfect place for focused work and tea breaks. In those first years I learned as much from late night conversations with friends about the unexpected beauty of mathematical equations, politics, beliefs, music, art, and the outer frontiers of theoretical physics - without the calculations. It was widely educational as universities should be.

I combined English Literature with Education in Part II, graduating a year after my cohort with a teaching certificate. I decided not to go straight into teaching but took a gap year, during which I travelled and did voluntary placements in Iona and in France. I then joined a small corporate video company and from there moved into broadcast television, working as a researcher/scriptwriter for four years on Channel 4 schools programmes and travelled Europe researching and filming two European schools geography series.

I changed career direction completely when moving back to Scotland. Broadcast TV was fun and intense but moving to short term contracts. I was offered a two-year post shared by the national public health agency and the health charity ASH Scotland and have worked with ASH Scotland in various roles since then, becoming Chief Executive through open recruitment in 2008.

Leading a small charity is demanding and rewarding work. ASH Scotland was founded in 1973 by RCPE to challenge tobacco industry misinformation, because the health harms of tobacco known by doctors since the 1950s were not reaching public awareness. Key figures like Professor Sir John Crofton who pioneered the multi-drug treatment for TB drove the agenda and he remained involved and inspirational when I joined the organisation.

My work is so varied. Over the past month I have finalised contract negotiations for a new office lease, presented at and co-chaired sessions at the World Conference on Tobacco Control in Dublin, supported a member of staff on long term sickness absence and been interviewed for two documentaries and one newspaper article. In the coming month I will coordinate discussions with Board and staff about our future strategic directions, work with colleagues to assemble a major funding application, and plan a cross-sectoral learning event on how best to protect the next generation from health-harming, addictive recreational products.

ASH Scotland’s purpose is unchanged but like all good narratives, it is re-imagined for the needs and challenges of the day. ■

“MY TIME AT ROBINSON GAVE ME LASTING FRIENDSHIPS, A BREADTH OF EXPERIENCE AND TRAINED ME TO THINK CLEARLY. I’M PROUD THAT THE WORK I DO HELPS SAVE LIVES AND SECURE A BETTER FUTURE FOR SCOTLAND’S COMMUNITIES”

ALUMNI EVENTS

ENTREPRENEURS NETWORK EVENT – NOV 2024

Our ever-popular Entrepreneurs event took place at Peleton’s London headquarters and focused on social entrepreneurship in the third-sector. Alumni guest speakers included: Tiara Ataii (MML, 2016) founder of SolidariTee, Francesca Brkic-Portal (Sustainability Leadership, 2017) founder and CEO of Little Origins, Dr James Doherty (Law, 2003) founder and director of Plastic-i Limited, Marcela Flores (Sustainability Leadership, 2017) CEO of Tierra Foods, and Dan Jones (Architecture, 1990) founder of Civic London. Our next Entreprenuers event will take place in February 2026, details coming soon. ■

MARCH REUNION 2025

We were delighted to welcome back alumni from 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010 to enjoy reunion drinks and dinner at College. One alumni noted ‘another Robinson success. The food was great, the atmosphere congenial and the Warden’s speech caught the ethos of the college very well’. We are looking forward to our next reunion, to be held on 27th September for our 1985, 1995, 2005 and 2015 cohorts. ■

THE WARDEN AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR’S TRIP TO HONG KONG AND SINGAPORE - APRIL 2025

The Warden and Development Director, Katharine Cantell, travelled to Hong Kong and Singapore in April. They had the opportunity to meeting Robinson alumni at drink and dinner events, held at The Tanglin Club in Singapore and The China Club in Hong Kong. Richard and Katharine shared updates from the College, highlighting new projects and recent achievements and enjoyed meeting our alumni. (Hong Kong skyline pic) ■

DONOR DAY, JUNE 2025

Our 2025 Donor Day was held on a beautiful summer’s day, with the College gardens in full bloom. Guests enjoyed welcome drinks and lunch, fascinating talks from Dr Alberto Rosello-Diez and Professor Amy Erickson, followed by performances from our music students and choir and afternoon tea. One donor said of the day, ‘we had a delightful time. The talks were very engaging, lunch was delicious and the gardens looked wonderful’. We were delighted to be joined by old friends and new and many thanks to all those who attended.

Visit our Alumni Events Page to see our upcoming event or contact the Development Team for more information: development-office@robinson.cam.ac.uk ■

SUPPORTING ROBINSON

Philanthropic giving has enabled Robinson to make meaningful progress in innovative teaching and learning. With your support, we can go even further - extending interdisciplinary learning, expanding digital skills, and widening participation – all while ensuring that every student can thrive, regardless of their background.

There are a variety of ways that you can get involved and support Robinson:

MAKE A DONATION

Regular donations from alumni and friends have a real impact, year after year. Whether monthly, quarterly, annually, or as a one-off gift, your support can help to fund bursaries, scholarships, research grants, academic prizes, and travel opportunities.

LEAVE A LEGACY

Legacy gifts have helped to endow teaching positions and create funds that support students from underrepresented backgrounds. A legacy can help to shape future generations.

VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME

Whether through mentoring, speaking at events, or offering internships, volunteering helps bridge the gap between academic study and the wider world - broadening students' horizons and ambitions.

To find out more,
visit our giving page or contact the Development Team:
development-office@robinson.cam.ac.uk

Development Office, Robinson College, Cambridge CB3 9AN

Connect with us: @robinsoncollegecambridge

www.robinson.cam.ac.uk

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