



QUOD

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RUGBY SCHOOL

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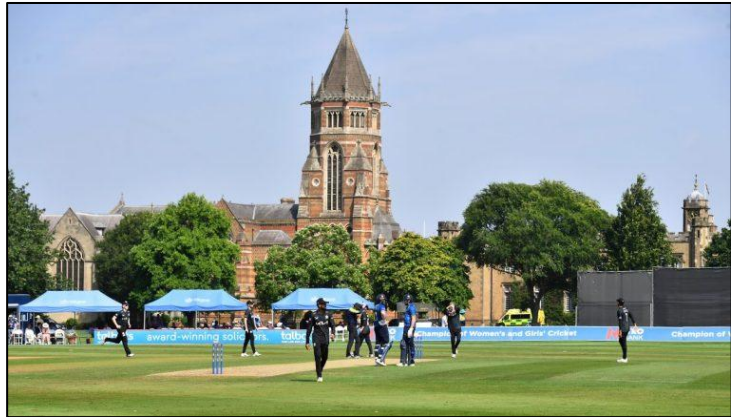
Amy Zhang



BATting FOR EQUALITY: THE GROWING PRESENCE
OF GIRLS IN CRICKET
TATIANA GABLE

Cricket, often hailed as the "gentleman's game," has long been a cherished pastime and a professional pursuit for many. However, in recent years, the sport has seen a surge in participation and interest among women and girls, breaking gender stereotypes and reshaping perceptions.

In primary school during the summer term, it was common practice that while the boys were taught the technical ins and outs of cricket, we girls were usually handed rounders bats and told to have a go. Now, don't get me wrong—young me was definitely partial to a game of rounders: as I'm sure many girls can relate to, the games were filled with laughter, friendly competition, and the occasional dramatic dive. However, I always wondered, while looking over to the field where the boys played, 'Why aren't we being taught cricket as well?'



It was only in Year 7, when I joined my second school, that cricket was introduced to me. When I heard from my friends that we would be taught cricket in the summer term, I remember thinking, 'Girls are taught cricket, too?' It felt strange - strange because I had never really considered myself playing cricket. I had always thought of it as a 'boys sport'.

When summer arrived, I won't lie, I was a little nervous. My friends had been learning cricket for four years before I joined, so they were far more experienced, and I felt out of my usual rounders-playing depth. I remember my first time kitting up: strapping on the pads, sticking a metal helmet on, and lugging around a wooden bat. It all felt unfamiliar and quite different from what I was used to. Yet, to my surprise, I found myself really enjoying cricket. Although my limited experience meant I wasn't as skilled as the other girls in my year, I made a real effort to throw myself into it. I took cricket lessons, attended the weekly school cricket club, and even bought a bat of my own.

Fast forward to now, I no longer play cricket, but I do sometimes wonder: if I had started earlier, would anything have come of it? Probably not ... but it's a thought.

My encounter with cricket is limited and rather insignificant, especially compared to the cricketers we have at our school. Amu Surenkumar is Rugby's current prodigy, being so dedicated to the sport that we barely see her at School! She is quite literally playing cricket 24/7. For the first half of the term, Amu was away catching a nice tan on the cricket pitches of Malaysia. She has already made waves in the world of cricket, carving out a path to even greater success. But what sparked her journey? Was it the influence of friends and family? Did her school—perhaps more supportive of young female cricketers than mine—pave the way? Or was it a passion that struck by pure chance? I was eager to dive into Amu's childhood and uncover the story behind her love for cricket.

Amu reflected on how her introduction to cricket was deeply rooted in her family. She fondly recalled one of her earliest memories, saying, "When I was about six, we were playing cricket in the corridor of my house with my dad - that's where it started."

Interestingly, much like my own experience, her school didn't play a significant role in sparking her initial passion. She explained that a girls' cricket team only surfaced much later in her school years."/



Maia Bouchier and Mr Powell

didn't play school cricket until Year 5, when I started playing in the boys' teams. It wasn't until Year 8 or 9 that I finally got the chance to play with the girls." It feels shocking that, for years, she had to train and compete exclusively with boys before being given the opportunity to play alongside other girls. When I asked her about it, she simply shrugged and said, "My school only had boys' teams, they didn't really have a girls' team."

The lack of opportunities for girls in cricket at prep school level has been a persistent issue across many institutions, where the focus has traditionally been on boys' sports. As a result, girls' cricket has often been overlooked, leaving a significant gap in support for female athletes. For many young girls like Amu, this has meant having to fight for a spot on boys' teams or, in some cases, being excluded from playing altogether. Thankfully, Amu was able to join an out-of-school club at the age of 8, but for many others, the idea of girls' cricket wasn't even on their radar. Fortunately, in recent years, attitudes towards cricket have begun to shift.

Amu and I discussed this. *"It's definitely growing at a rapid pace. You can see that in franchise and professional cricket with more money being invested and increased publicity. The more media attention it attracts, the more the game will grow and inspire more girls to play."* This growing exposure seems to be working, as, according to the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), *'Women's and girls' cricket at a recreational level has seen a 22% increase in the number of women's and girls' teams.'*

I also asked Amu about her journey to Rugby and what made her consider the switch from her previous school. She spoke about Rugby's esteemed reputation for top-quality sports, as well as the previous athletes who had attended the school: *"Obviously, I had heard about Maia Bouchier and Jacob Ethel [an England Test cricketer] who had come here previously."*

Maia Bouchier attended Rugby School from 2012 to 2017, where she became the first girl to play in the School's 1st XI cricket team. Her performances at school level caught the attention of county selectors, leading to her selection for the Middlesex Under-15 County squad. Bouchier made her county debut for Middlesex in 2014, later becoming their top run-scorer in the 2018 Championship. She moved to Hampshire in 2019, where she continued to thrive, leading the team's Twenty20 Cup run charts. Her success extended to the Southern Vipers, playing a key role in their Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy victories in 2020 and 2021. She also gained valuable experience overseas, playing for Auckland and the Melbourne Stars in Australia's Women's Big Bash League.

On the international stage, Bouchier made her England T20I debut against New Zealand on September 4, 2021. Since then, she has featured in 39 matches, scoring a total 645 runs! Her ODI debut came on September 9, 2023, achieving an impressive average of 52.37, including two centuries and a career-best 123. Her Test debut in December 2024 against South Africa was equally memorable, as she scored a brilliant 126 in her first innings.

Bouchier is cementing her place as a key player for England. Off the field, she is also making a difference, using her platform as an EcoAthletes Champion to advocate for environmental sustainability. As her career continues to grow and develop, she is definitely a name to watch out for in women's cricket.



Someone who was particularly involved in Maia Bouchier's time at Rugby is the Director of Cricket, and Housemaster of Cotton, Mr Powell, who captained Warwickshire between 2001 and 2003, and who also oversaw Jacob Bethell's meteoric rise. He played a significant role in Maia's cricket development, closely observing her progress. I managed to secure an interview with him. He explained that Maia, who lived only a quarter of a mile from Lord's cricket ground, was immersed in cricket from a young age, that her father was '*a mad keen cricketer*' and her three older brothers, who attended Eton, were also heavily involved in the sport. At Rugby, Maia flourished.

Mr Powell told me, "*We didn't actually have girls' cricket officially then - girls' cricket only kicked off the year she left.*" Astonishingly, Maia '*played the last two years of 1st team cricket for the boys,*' which Mr Powell believes '*accelerated her learning and development of the game.*'

Curious about the growth of girls' cricket, I asked Mr Powell what he saw as the biggest factor behind its rise. "*The biggest change is that girls are now playing cricket in prep schools. The access for 7 and 8 year-old girls is there now. The opportunities in clubs, counties, franchises, and The Hundred have transformed the women's game.*" In previous years, Rugby had to amalgamate year groups to form girls' teams, but Mr Powell noted that this, 2025, is the first year they have been able to put out a strong F Block team.

"*Maia was a lone figure,*" he stated, but now, she is an inspiration to all girls who hear her story and see what she has achieved. Nationwide, the sport is being promoted more than ever. Change is happening, and the future of girls' cricket looks bright!

One of my favourite quotes from my interview with Mr Powell is this: "*Once you know people have achieved something before you, and that the pathway is there, then you know it's possible. When human beings know something is possible, it inspires them.*" As I conclude, I realise that, while I may not have pursued cricket professionally, my brief encounter with the game left an impact. It taught me the importance of stepping outside my comfort-zone and embracing new opportunities, even when they seem intimidating. More importantly, it reinforced my belief in the need for change in how we introduce sports to young girls. Cricket, once seen as a 'boys' sport', is slowly but surely evolving. Schools, clubs, and governing bodies are working towards making it more inclusive, ensuring that young girls today don't have to wonder, as I did, 'Why do only boys get to play cricket?'

RACHEL REVEES' BUDGET: THE REALITY IN RUGBY?

CAROLINE SCHMITZ-VALCKENBERG

By now, most of us have heard about Rachel Reeves 2025 Budget. Whether this might have been through our Politics or Economics teachers linking their teaching to the current news, or family dinner conversation we don't want to get involved in, it is hard to be unaware of the recent changes. However, few of us actually understand the budget and what it means for the upcoming year. While I can't pretend to have some sort of insider information, or key understanding, I'm going to try to explain it briefly and simply.

The UK budget is the government's plan for how it will collect and spend money over the next year. It includes things like taxes, public services (healthcare and schools), and funding for different projects. Every year, the current government (now The Labour Party) releases an Autumn Statement in October or November and a Spring Budget in March.



In 2024, on the 30th of October, Rachel Reeves, the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, walked out of 11 Downing Street, holding up a red box- just as tradition dictates. Winston Churchill had established another tradition in the early 20th century by reportedly swirling a brandy during his speech, starting a long line of Chancellors who fancied a bit of a drink with difficult announcements. To the disappointment of some, our current Shadow Chancellor, continued the streak of tradition-breaker, started by George Brown, who much preferred a refreshing glass of water.

In this year's budget, there are several new policies that will strongly affect small businesses. Are you looking at, at some point soon, the chance of starting your own business? You're advised to pay attention to the Chancellor's dramatic changes.

Firstly, the National Living Wage will increase to £12.21 per hour for adults (a 6.7% rise). This is, in theory, a sympathetic and happily liberal, 'progressive' move, but it also, possibly, means that any given business will not be able to employ as many people as they used to, as it will be too expensive.

Secondly, Employer National Insurance Contribution (NIC) Rate rose from 13.8% to 15%; also, the threshold from £9,100 earnings to £5,000. NIC is a tax paid by employers and employees in the UK to fund things such as the NHS, state pensions, and unemployment support. This makes employing people even more expensive and will be money that the employee will never even see.

Thirdly, the Business Rates Relief - a discount on the tax businesses pay for using a building - has decreased to 40% from 75%. While, of course, the 75% rate relief was only meant as temporary

support measure to help recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the effect of its abolition will be felt.

These three changes now mean that an employee working on minimum wage will now cost £6,156.85 more per year for the employer but will only receive £1,622.40 more himself/herself.

A small business can have up to 50 employees, but most small businesses have around 9 employees. This means that these businesses will be paying £55,411.68 more a year, while the employee would only be receiving £14,601.60 of that money.



Moji and his brother, Sam

Keeping up?

Reading this on a piece of paper, everything, no doubt, seems distant and far-away. So, let's speak to someone whose everyday life has been strongly impacted by this.

Meet Moji.

Moji owns Caffé Vita in Rugby, which is at the top of the high street, on the corner where you turn left to go to Asda. He manages two cafés, one here and one in Leamington, with his brother, Sam.

I'm sure lots of us have walked past Caffé Vita and peeked in through the glass window, observing the pensioners slowly sipping their *lattes* whilst Dr Sutcliffe peacefully does his marking. But most of us have only strolled past Caffé Vita on our way to Maccies, glancing it fleetingly on our left, and have never actually set foot inside. I strongly recommend you change this and try the hot chocolate or a simple *espresso* (for those feeling more mature and aesthetically sophisticated).

Moji is an Iranian entrepreneur: he studied marine telecommunication back in Iran, but, when he moved to England, started working in hospitality. He very much enjoyed his job, worked hard, and saved up. In October 2013, he opened his first café, Caffé Vita in Rugby. At first, he had to work even harder, often seven days of the week. Now, as well as owning two cafes, he is involved in the property market, renting a few houses.

When asked if he thought 2013 to be a good time to start a business, he had mixed feelings. Firstly, he thought there to be "not that much competition" back then with there being few small cafes in the town centre. The relative low number of cafes meant that many people, he recalled, did not believe his planned café would be a success and he received "a lot of negative feedback" before opening. People would stop by to tell him, "You're gonna lose your money". Discouraging, right?

He persevered: Caffé Vita opened and flourished. On the opening day, he was positively surprised, making a "few hundred pounds". Since then, he has been busy building up a clientele of regulars. He

stresses this customer base as the “most important” aspect of his business and calls it “the base” of any success.

Let’s return to our budget. Moji has had to fight inflation, with the price of his coffee beans increasing by 20% (though he has kept the price of his coffee essentially the same – a large, tasty *cappuccino* is less than £3).



Most of his regular consumers are pensioners so would not be able to afford a price increase.

He is no fan of Rachel Reeves’ budget.

While all his employees are hard-working individuals, he will have to cut down their working time, as he, somehow, must try to fill the gap that the current economic conditions are creating.

So how has the government been supporting small business owners such as Moji through this crisis?

They've promised £250 million in funding for small businesses to help them take out loans, and Moji knows that £5 million pounds is being distributed to small businesses in Rugby. To access some of this money, the government asked business owners to fill out an application form. Normal process, you might think.

However, this was a 20 pages application asking for an incredible amount of detailed information: “How many staff you have and had, how much they get paid, how much income the café generates, how much is the turnover ...” and a detailed plan: “what do you want to do with the money?”. This took Moji “several hours to fill out” ... with help! He put the application through ... and, a couple of weeks later, they told him he wasn’t available for that fund.

So, there was an attractive promise, but the red tape was daunting and no valid reason was given why his reasonable-sounding application did not succeed. Was this a smoke-and-mirrors exercise to suggest government help which was unlikely ever to materialize?

Many business owners must be in Moji’s position. Has the government, claiming to want economic growth, helped them, or actually created even more barriers for them by introducing the three changes I raised at the start: an increase in the minimum wage; the rise in employer contribution to National Insurance; the cutting of Business Rates relief? The jury is out, people will agree or disagree according to ideological perspectives and personal experience, but for one, Moji is highly sceptical. And concerned.

In conclusion, speaking with Moji was an eye-opening and personal experience which went beyond just learning about business. His dedication to Caffé Vita is evident in the way he speaks about his customers and his café, which feels more like a community space than just a business. Moji’s resilience and generosity left a lasting impression on me, especially as he remains committed to his work despite the challenges small businesses face, and I felt grateful for the coffee he generously offered myself and Dr Sutcliffe during the interview and the time he gave up to share his perspective. Whatever different views one might have about Rachel Reeves’ budget, Moji’s journey, from Iran to Rugby, starting up and maintaining two cafes in two different locations, is a reminder of the importance of the hard work and dedication needed to make a business thrive.



JORDAN STRYDOM: OUR SOUTH AFRICAN
RUGBY STAR
JAMIE COWAN

Jordan, a fellow Michell man, who many may know as the XV captain 24-25, joined Rugby as an 'import' for both rugby and cricket in 2023. A man of distinguished skill bat in hand, as well as a lethal eye for the posts, he tells me about how life in South Africa differs to that of the UK. Jordan can be characterised by his annoyingly good charm around school as well as impeccable (again, annoyingly impressive) politeness, leading to an engagingly modest approach towards all facets of school life.



Jordan went to Grey High School (not college), a state school in Port Elizabeth, the Eastern Cape, from the ripe age of three years old, up until he left to come to Rugby. Coming to Rugby was, then, quite a shock in terms of schooling, however, he describes this change as a 'necessary' one, immersing himself quite quickly into the co-ed nature of the school: it was all boys at his previous school. In South Africa, the curriculum for grades 8 and 9 (years 9, 10 and 11) is similar to the UK in the way of taking ten subjects, but it is in grade 10 and 11 where South Africa differs to the UK with sixth form education revolving around 6 subjects: Mathematics, English, Life Orientation (PSHE), and the choice between Afrikaans/Xhosa, with three other subjects being a matter of choice as well. Jordan's favourite teacher was a woman named Mrs Alberts, who taught him Afrikaans, who he liked as she was pretty 'chill', for example, she let him eat milk tarts at the back of the class. South Africa classes are a lot larger, with around 24 people per class and school days started at 8.00 a.m. and ended at 2 p.m., with sport to follow afterwards; most importantly there was no school on a Saturday, which by his tone I inferred he missed dearly: who wouldn't trade trading a lie-in for 8:25 Physics?

Coming to the UK, Jordan remembers his immediate experience as a culture-shock. This is no surprise when one compares the dreary, un-picturesque nature of St Francis Bay to the delicate natural beauty of Rugby town Centre. In terms of culture, Jordan describes South Africa as more of a happy nation, seeing the beauty of life's small things: even the act of saying hello to someone passing on the street is deemed normal in South Africa, with no-one walking in their own shell, whereas, in the UK, people would probably make a sharp exit or look at you in a suspicious manner.

In our interview, Jordan turned the tables and asked me to tell him about my experience in South Africa, when he invited myself and a number of others to visit the 'homeland' in his own words; the following came with me: Tom (The Tank) Fysh, James Conway, Jack Proctor, Luca Lowrie, Leo Robinson, Chaz Taylor, and Alfie Mitchell.

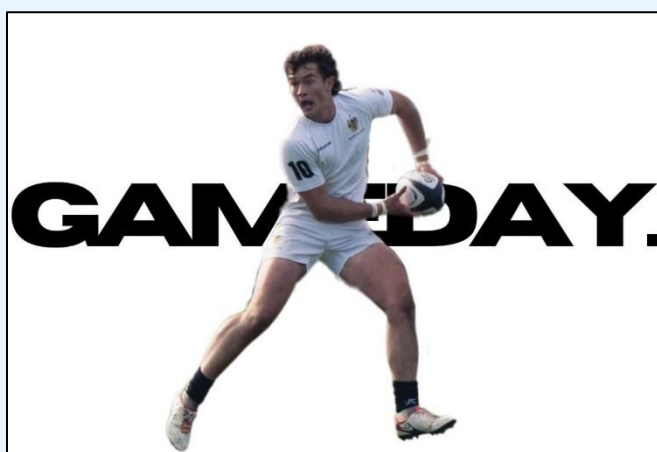
I agree with his sense of South African people being much more polite and supportive, and I remembered having a liking for so-called 'Flying Fish' (shandy) which members of UK society might not greet with open arms. Jordan describe South African people as very well mannered, addressing everyone older than oneself as 'ma'am' or 'sir', or, in the case of a family friend, calling elders 'uncle' or 'aunty' before their names. In terms of food, it is safe to say that Jordan misses it the most out of everything; "[sigh...] *It's lekker, man*". South African food revolves around red meat, with a braai as often as three times per week, using 'the mix' of salt, pepper, oregano, and thyme to enhance the taste. As well as this, the equivalent of tea and biscuits in the UK are 'rusks' in South Africa, a hard shortbread which is used to dunk in coffees in the morning, a sweet treat Jordan likes to have before p.1 maths.

On the reverse side, Jordan feels that people in South Africa tend to be 'held back' as regards asking questions, with teenagers struggling to have grown up conversations, and, instead, engaging with each other in a childish manner. He says, more generally, that South African people tend to struggle to have meaningful conversations about serious topics, and many don't really express their feelings about challenging topics, which differs dramatically to the UK. Jordan had a dramatic contrast when coming to the UK, with our House quite often debating all sort of matters (normally getting heated) to do with sports or politics.

Now, onto the topic which you *Quod* readers perhaps are most anticipating: Jordan's illustrious rugby career.

Towards the end of Jordan's spell in South Africa, he represented the 1st XV for Grey High, playing against internationally renowned rugby schools such as Grey College, Selbourne College, and Paul Roos. He played in front of 10,000 people against Grey College (be sure to have a watch on YouTube). Jordan remembers this match to be highly anticipated, with Grey (High) doing the 'war cry', leading to a highly physical encounter with the number one ranked schoolboy team in the world (5 South Africa representative school players). To put this into perspective, here at Rugby we gather around 1,000 spectators for our main spectator event, the guest match on the last day of the Advent Term. In his last season here at Rugby, he was the top points scorer for the boys in blue, gathering 40 points, which is testament to his exceptional goal kicking technique. At Grey, Jordan tells me about how the build-up to the weekend match is completely different, with everyone buzzing for the weekend and the whole school having to watch compulsorily. Jordan remembers his first appearance for Grey distinctively, remembering by being handed his jersey by Kaiden Titus, a senior member of the team; they won the game.

UK rugby, he says, is very different compared to South African rugby: here, it is much more focused on skill-work rather than a 'smash him' mentality. Jordan started his rugby-playing career at Rugby at inside centre for the 1st XV, racking up a stunning 6 tries in his first season, an extremely impressive statistic. His South African flair and eye for ball distribution, as well as his calming mentality in the heat of a game, earned himself the position as XV captain the following season. This year, the team achieved 6 wins and he scored 8 tries, and the XV scored a notably victory against Stowe (24-20), the auld enemy.



Jordan's transfer to the UK dramatically benefitted rugby here at the School, whether it was through his motivating leadership, very sharp and accurate distribution, or his admirable tackling technique. Moreover, despite the culture shock, it is safe to say that Jordan is now a converted 'pom', a true Brit as he would love to describe himself. I guess that's not really true: the bloke doesn't stop talking about South Africa.

RESOLUTIONS AND REALITY

CLOVER COCKBURN

In my one-to-one French speaking lesson the other week, I was asked my opinion on the concept of 'New Year's Resolutions'. My opinion (said in French obviously, '*Mon avis est ...*') was deemed *controverse*.

This is my opinion: New Year's resolutions are a pointless fad.

That doesn't mean to say that I myself have never proudly announced an objectively pretentious resolution like, 'I'm going to take more time to observe nature', or 'I'm going to stop finding myself in the Rupert Brooke tuck shop at 9 pm', because, as we all know, neither of those things will materialise at my young age of 16.

After this French speaking lesson experience, I began to even question the existence of 'resolutions' because I can't really think of anyone I know who keeps their resolutions every year from January through to December. So, then, why do humans have the relentless need to improve and create new, better versions of



Georgie who has taken up knitting



Yasmin who has the resolution of ten hugs per day

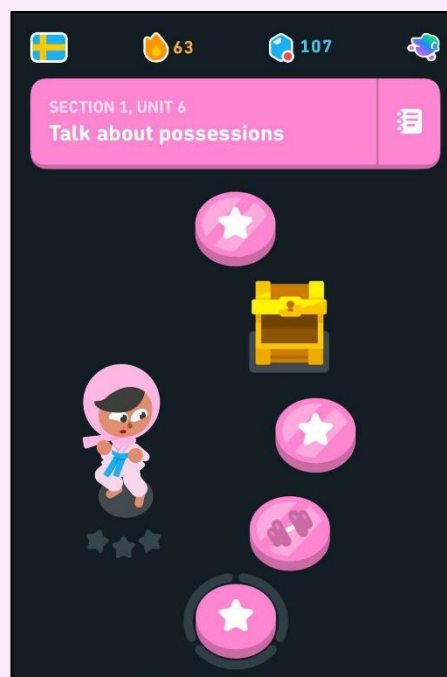
ourselves so often, when most of the time it amounts to nothing? Does this mean humanity, the whole time, is driven by both a yearning for progress and an innate sense of imperfection? If this is the case, then that points to our inherent narcissism and pessimism as a species.

But, as this is *Quod*, not a precocious theological-philosophical treatise, and I try to stay away from the dark political and cultural depths of the world, I decided to explore the concept of silly resolutions that never ever end up happening (for more than three occasions).

So, the idea spawned of asking around in House, lessons, sport ... to find out about any quirky unexplained 'resolutions' (habits really) that people are trying to practise, maybe to better themselves or to add a bit of fun and novelty to their busy 7 lesson Monday. A few examples sprung to mind immediately, a few trivial and silly but some with actual benefits.

Without further ado, let the curtains be drawn, and here are the resolutions I've uncovered from around Rugby School

From what I've gathered from the Brooke girls, there is an endless cycle of trying to force new habits to stick. One of the Brooke LXX, Yasmin, has been trying to give ten hugs per day. This is her way of spreading the love and trying to keep positive. Another Brooke LXX and fellow *Quod* writer, Bea, has managed to achieve a 70-day streak of learning Swedish on Duolingo, an impressive feat considering she would not describe herself as a keen linguist. Why is she doing this? She counts it as an engagingly eccentric skill to whip out when asked about party tricks. Another one of my friends, who wished to remain anonymous (you will shortly see why, in the second half of this sentence), admitted to the slightly bizarre resolution of 'eating oranges in the shower'. When met with questioning looks from the rest of us, she persistently claimed that 'Loads of people are doing it on TikTok' – a reason we must believe and accept as gospel. Elsewhere, a member of the D Block proudly announced to the rest of Brooke last term that she had taken up dance lessons: 'an itch I wanted to scratch' was her reason, and she has been known to be caught practising in and around Brooke ever since.



Screenshot proof of Bea's Swedish Duolingo streak

Some resolutions are less wacky than Scandinavian languages or learning hip-hop, such as Avani's weekly trip to town to get her favourite drink of bubble tea with the same group of friends, as the only time she lets herself spend money in the week: she now counts herself as a 'Don't tell Mum' regular. On the subject of food and drink, another friend told me that she is going to stop buying doughnuts for this Lent, as 'Every time I go into town I always end up buying doughnuts'. She exclaimed this, radiating confusion. Then she proceeded to tell me a slightly less niche resolution, to make a diary entry every day in her journal, a resolution that can only be described as *wholesome*.

I always think that a great source of new resolutions and habits to acquire comes from the Clubs & Societies Fair at the beginning of Advent term. I, for one, signed up for about 15 clubs and have since attended maybe 4 maximum: my list is as follows: Bateson, Debating Soc., Psych. Soc. and Hydra (the latter being conveniently held two flights of stairs away from me in the Brooke dining room). The variety of niche societies is a never-ending supply of 'side quests' that will keep you feeling productive and vaguely academic when you have finished your prep but simultaneously exhausted TikTok and Instagram.

For a staff opinion, I briefly 'interviewed' Mrs Van Wyngaard, LXX tutor in Brooke and Maths teacher, on what habits or resolutions she likes to include in her life. After Mrs Van Wyngaard moved over from South Africa late last year, she became a tutor to half the Brooke LXX and she has already shown her tutoring prowess through her kindness and support of us. She had two pearls of wisdom to share with me. Pearl of wisdom one: she tries to greet everyone with a big smile, 'because smiles are contagious'. She, sociably and warmly, tries to greet all her students when encountering them on the campus, something I have only begun to do as I've got older and feel more comfortable socially. Pearl of wisdom two: she likes to notice when a fellow staff member is wearing particularly bright or funky accessories or clothing, like a distinctive coat or a fun necklace, and then she makes sure to make a mental note to compliment that member of staff to savour her appreciation of their individuality.

When discussing the structure of my article, Dr Sutcliffe suggested I include a section about the good habits I do subconsciously, week in week out at school: we think we are bad at keeping resolutions, but, actually, we keep lots of them all the time without even realising it or, being nice to our inner self, congratulating ourselves. When asked by Dr Sutcliffe the weighty question, 'What do you think you do well?', I found myself at a loss for words because that is not a question I am asked often, other than in a slightly alternate form, equally challenging, in my Levee interview earlier this term.

It's true: as individuals, we tend to not properly recognise the things we do well. For some ludicrous reason, enjoying a sense of good-habits-based personal success can easily be mistaken for being distastefully boastful; so, unhelpfully, we don't do it. Is this a result of the very British disposition to be overly polite and self-deprecating, to the point of being awkward? And/or, depressingly, is it that we focus so much on everything we do *wrong* that we miss what we do *right*. So, this article *is* becoming deep and meaningful after all ... I'm sure many of you fellow student readers will relate to the awful feeling of guilt when you hand in an essay that you just *know* is terrible and clunky, and your points are all the same as everyone else's, just reworded differently. That is, more generally, you focus on your apparent weaknesses, but ignore the many achievements, of any size, that you, over time, have tucked under your belt, both inside and outside the academic sphere. Yes, *sphere*.

As this long article draws to a close, and I have come to the conclusion that I have no fun resolutions or habits that act as both a conversation-starter around a supper table, I am making a vow to myself that, by the time of my next *Quod* article, I will have implemented something fun in my week. Flemish on Duolingo? See you in summer term.



LXX Rupert Brooke girls: doing their best to embody 'The Whole Person, the Whole Point'



‘HOW DO YOU LIKE YOUR STEAK?’
FINE DINING AT ON THE ROCKS

MARCUS MABEY

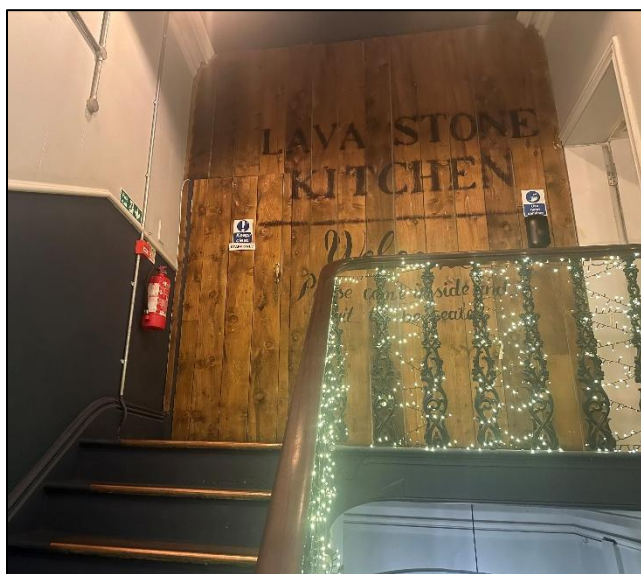
You know the drill: this time we are reviewing *On The Rocks*.

Now, I would say this steakhouse is more of an experience than anything else, and I say this because of their unique gimmick. I don't mean to suggest it is tacky, but rather that it offers something different, which is fun and experimental: you get to cook the meat yourself, on a hot, volcanic 'rock' hence the name of the restaurant.

Located on Albert Street, at the bottom of town next to the post office, *On The Rocks*, a family run establishment, has an understated yet modern exterior, trademark of that contemporary preference for minimalism, with those grey and bluish tones. The entrance actually locates you in a small, Irish pub named *Quigley's*, with *On The Rocks* located directly above it. It's called Quigley's after the owner of the pub and *On The Rocks*, Sean Quigley. The two establishments seem very integrated, with the common course of action seeming to be to have a drink before going upstairs for a steak. To reach the restaurant, guests must ascend a flight of stairs, leading to a wooden panelled landing, which slightly adds to the spectacle and anticipation of the evening, I had heard many good things about *On the Rocks* and had high hopes going in.

I had invited my friend, fellow XX Cottonian, and trusty restaurant guide sophisticate side-kick, Michael Zhang, to join me. We decided to try "The Lava Menu", which sounds interestingly exotic – a Vesuvius-esque explosion of taste? - but it is just a meal with no starters. This conveniently suited our budgetary constraints.

The restaurant appeared to be going for a rustic design, with exposed brick walls and more wooden furniture. A particularly eye-catching piece of artwork on the wall depicted a black and white image of a man holding a glowing-yellow spatula, which I would describe as slightly peculiar but tasteful. What really helped me narrow down the on-going theme were the several brown paper- parchments hung



from the walls, on which the market prices of the menu items were written. And these prices do actually vary. A friend of mine went one week after my visit and paid £18 for the rump steak instead of the £16 I saw. As well as the steaks, they also do chicken, lamb and duck, which are also be subject to their market prices. It was exciting and fun when a table to the right of us ordered a flaming chorizo to share, which created quite a display.

Michael went for the 12oz porterhouse for £25.50, while I opted for the 10oz sirloin for £24.95. To my surprise, the food arrived in just 10-15 minutes. My delight at the fast



service quickly wore off as I remembered that the steak was served raw, and that you had to take the time to cook it. In all fairness, the meal came with fries, salad, peppercorn and barbecue sauce.

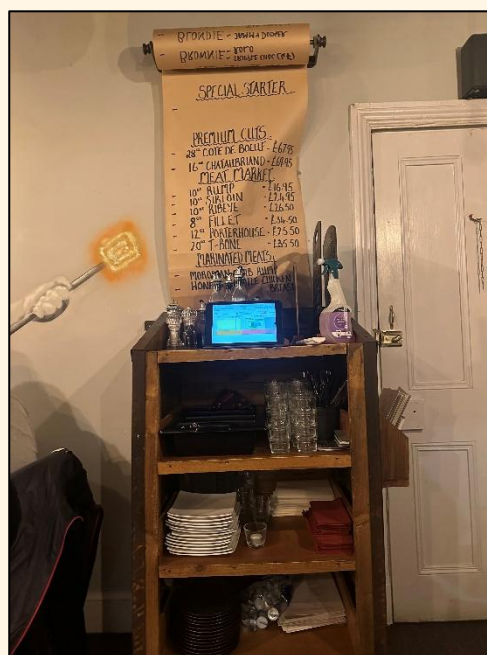
Towards the left corner of the tray of food sat a rectangular, sizzling 'rock', pre-heated and suitable for cooking the steak. Given my lack of culinary skills, it seemed simple enough. However, even though steak can be consumed practically raw, the looming threat of food poisoning as a result of my potential negligence felt very real. And this was a first for me, as, never before had a meal felt so *interactive*, with so much riding on the line. The perfect medium-rare (my ideal degree of doneness) was within reach ... or, if I messed up, so was a very costly blunder. Restaurants usually leave this sort of dilemma to a professional chef, but I suppose this additional drama can be entertaining as well.

Joking aside, I do think food you cook yourself generally tastes better, and *On The Rocks* combines this with a high quality selection of meat, and an exciting way to prepare your meal. My steak, and I think Michael's as well, turned out exactly as we wanted, thanks to our careful attention to the cooking process. We even made use of the small block of butter that they provided on the rock itself to add some extra flavour. I made an attempt to render the fat cap of the steak, but to little avail, though that didn't matter as both steaks were mostly lean.

As for the flavour of the steak, I imagine cooking it on the sizzling rock helped it develop its very nice sear, something unique to the cooking method. This along with the quality of the meat allowed for a tender and satisfying bite, all greatly enhanced with the butter. All around just a very good steak. The salad was pretty standard, although the fries with the barbecue sauce was certainly a nice change in comparison to the usual ketchup.

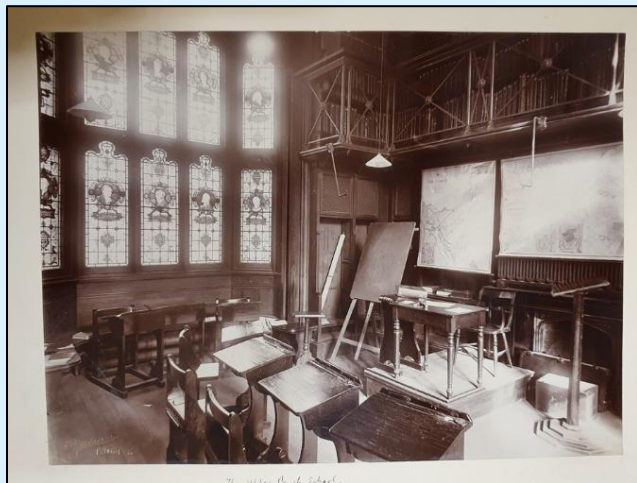
We passed on dessert, having already spent enough money that evening. I have heard, though, that the desserts are very good, ranging from brownies to hand-crafted cheesecakes, which are on a constant rotation, as stated on their website.

Michael and I settled on a solid 8/10 rating. *On the Rocks* was a great experience with excellent food and fine service. Our only minor critique would be the chairs, which could be a bit more comfortable. In this case, price was less of a deciding factor in the final verdict, considering you can have a comparable experience with the rump steak for around £17, which is a reasonable price given what you get. *On the Rocks* is an interesting, a little bit different place to eat: why not try it?



A CLASSICAL ROMANCE: THE CHARM OF UPPER BENCH

ZBIGNIEW KAWCZYNSKI



Upper Bench taken in 1890s

In a tucked away corner of the Old Quad, a winding staircase leads to the Upper Bench - the oldest, and most beautifully atmospheric classroom at Rugby.

Once housing the sole library of the school, the upper part of the room is lined with bookcases and is accessible by another staircase. This area contains a vast range of books, which H.C Bradby describes in his aptly titled "Rugby" volume, as about "antiquarian subjects" donated by Mr. M. H. Bloxam as one of his many legacies to the school. H.M. Bloxham is a famous old Rugebeian and, interestingly, the original source of the Web Ellis myth about the origins of the sport of rugby.

Within the classroom there are numerous desks at which many generations of the Upper School have sat. These can all be seen on the back wall, however, their utility has been somewhat impaired by the historically picturesque inscriptions carved into them, the names of former students.

While gazing upon them, I'm carried away by my imagination, spurred on by the many names carved in. I'm picturing Old Boys surreptitiously carving their names into the desk with a fine disregard for the rules, or what their schoolmaster might think. I ponder over their choice of inscriptions, their names. There's no crass graffiti (though I expect if there had been, it would have been promptly removed and never displayed), yet the absence of any written word that isn't a name brings an idea to the forefront of my mind: the human need to immortalise our own presence. Just like the American flag on the moon, the alternating bottles of whiskey or schnaps left by Canadians and Danes on the disputed Hans Island, many of our kind have always had a desire to state "I woz 'ere".

Moving on to the stunning window. It's a bow-window which looks out upon the street and is made of stained glass containing the names and portraits of successive headmasters from the earliest times until 1894.

As with many other places in Rugby, this room is indissolubly connected with



Upper bench taken in 2020s

memories of Dr. Arnold. It was here, as he says in a letter to an old pupil, "in that undignified kitchen chair, which you so well remember, at that little table, a just proportional to the tables of the Sixth themselves," that, for years, he gave daily lessons.

Looking at the inscribed names here in Upper Bench and thinking about how previous pupils have left a mark on the school, I'm moved to recall my own Classics memories here at Rugby. Over the past five years, Latin has been a constant in my life. Despite some fleeting moments during which I curse myself for choosing such a difficult subject, I am genuinely thankful for my time spent in the Classics department. What with such beautiful rooms and dedicated teachers, one cannot be uninspired. Sometimes, like we all do, I take my situation and schooling for granted. Yet, as I walk to the Classical based Arnold Society on a sombre Monday evening, walking past the Chapel, illuminated by soft lights, I suddenly need a moment to take it all in. A moment to think about what great gifts I have received, of how fortunate I have been, and how simply beautiful the architecture of the school is. I find my mind flitting back to the Old Boys, knowing instinctively that they must have felt like I did, as such a moment traverses time and creed, that feeling of awe about beauty and the excitement of discovery.



*Upper Bench taken between
1960-1980*

Nowadays, the classroom is used for only Classical subjects, with my beloved Classics Department at home in it and the adjacent classrooms. If you took a gander, you could find yourself in the middle of a Classical Civilisation class, a Greek seminar or a Latin lesson with Mr Nicholl. Often, Mr Day will take prospective students and parents around the Classics department, demonstrating his particular reverence for the oldest classroom in the School (he was a pupil here), hoping it will instil in them the same emotional energy.

The photos on the following page show a glimpse into the past of the Upper Bench and their modern counterparts. We can see the implementation of modern technology but the still-standing nature of its original architecture.

Thinking of Upper Bench and Classics as a whole, I find myself labelling what I know will end up being future nostalgia. Even now, I am aware of what I will miss. I'd like to share with you one memory (of many) to finish my piece. During my GCSE exams, I was incredibly worried about Greek. It was by far the subject I had the most difficulty with, and I was tense and worked-up about it. The material for the literature paper was tough: stories of hunting crocodiles; a King named Mycerinus who was convinced he had to stay awake all day and all of the night to evade a prophecy; some quite far out there stuff by Herodotus.

To motivate me - even now I keep this, alongside report comments from my other Latin teachers - I printed out emails from Dr. Chesterton:

"You are the hunters: the exam is the crocodile!"

"You've got this! You are your own Mycerinus ... but with no bad prophecy at the end!"

Big up the Classics Department. They truly deserve the world.



A young Mr Day

Dr Chesterton

My school days start with ritual. Climbing the spiral stairs at the corner of Old Quad, flicking on the lights, illuminating the rows of desks, the wooden walls - desks as once were, carved densely like votive stones of some ancient temple - the big window with its stained-glass figures of Rugby's great and good, Arnold at the centre, looking down, almost saintly. I have to pause on the threshold. Something about the act of stepping in to Upper Bench, passing from the light, from white-painted plaster into dark-stained wood and soft gloom, aware that I am repeating the movements of hundreds of years' worth of students and school masters, demands a moment to acknowledge the ritual.

And yet, stillness is fleeting - that's not the end of the process, for just as in any true Greek

ritual, there's things to be done - to be taught, and learned. Because, of course, Upper Bench isn't static, nor is it lifeless, neither mausoleum nor museum. As the room fills with students and noise, laptops being plugged in and switched on while they retrieve battered copies of Virgil or Homer from the shelves, and conversation, questions, laughter abound, you see Upper Bench at it is meant to be: busy with learning, a classroom proper - now, just as it has been for 200 years.

Mr Day

The memories of a Rugbeian classicist

It is 1983, and I am in School 7. Keith MacLennan conducts the F Block lesson entirely in the target language, Latin. What is the 'etiquette', the *modus operandi*, the *mos maiorum*? Does one laugh at the linguistic witticisms, the verbal dexterity of it all, or does one tacitly reveal one's ignorance. It is now Friday evening in the E Block, winter timetable, double Greek with Uncle Tom Buckney. Tales of Thucydides, the humour of Herodotus, matchsticks might keep my eyes open. LXX and the Arnold Library reveals its latent knowledge of Advanced Level Greek to me. Today, we are working on the round table, reading Plato's Apology. I am sorry for my inadequacy in the erudite company of Ian Barlow. And now I have graduated, to the Upper Bench, the highest seat of scholarship, and the throne room of Dr Arnold himself. I have reached the Augustan peak of the *cursus honorum*. It is dark, but I am guided through the Underworld not by the Sybil but by John King, who lives on Elsee Road. Did I dream this vision of the future greatness of Rome? 37 years have passed since that epic moment.



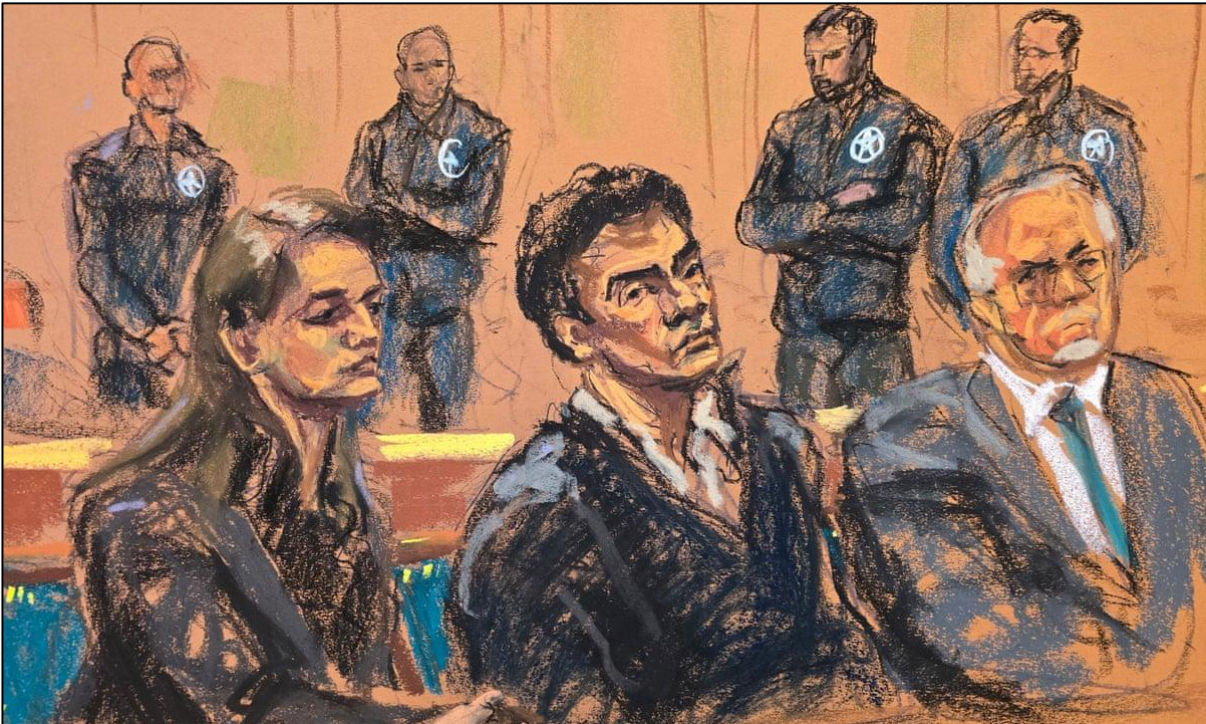
WHEN JUSTICE GETS COMPLICATED: LUIGI MANGIONE AND THE US HEALTHCARE ASSASSINATION

MICHAEL ZHANG

On a cold December evening in 2024, Brian Thompson, CEO of UnitedHealthcare, one of America's largest health insurance companies, was shot and killed outside a Manhattan hotel. The murder quickly captured national attention when investigators discovered shell casings at the scene engraved with the words "delay, deny, depose." As media outlets noted, this was a chilling reference to the insurance industry's notorious reputation for prioritising profits over patient care. Five days later, the arrest of 26-year-old Luigi Mangione revealed a narrative far more complex than a simple act of revenge.

Mangione, a prep school valedictorian and Ivy League graduate from a wealthy Maryland family, was found carrying a handwritten manifesto and 3D-printed weapons. In the manifesto, he described the shooting as a protest against what he called a "parasitic" healthcare system, blending personal grievances with a broader critique of systemic failures. Though raised in privilege, Mangione's life took a radical turn after a 2023 spinal surgery left him entangled in insurance disputes.

His manifesto, equal parts rage and analysis, targeted Thompson as a symbol of corporate healthcare's most criticised practices. UnitedHealthcare, the largest insurer in the U.S., has long faced allegations of obscuring its claim denial rates, with unverified reports suggesting it rejects nearly a third of requests. While the company disputes these figures, the broader picture is undeniable: one in five Americans saw their medical claims denied in 2023, leading to delayed treatments, financial ruin, and even preventable deaths. As CEO, Thompson presided over a system where such outcomes were not anomalies but ingrained features. Mangione's manifesto, both erratic and incisive, laid bare this dissonance, soon igniting a nationwide debate about justice, violence, and the moral failings of a broken institution. The accused, Mangione defies easy categorisation. He was born into a family with investments in assisted living facilities, country clubs, and media, and he excelled in elite schools, graduating at the top of his class before earning advanced degrees in computer engineering at the



University of Pennsylvania. Former colleagues describe him as brilliant but isolated, a man whose disillusionment deepened after his own struggles with the healthcare system.

His manifesto, a mix of personal anguish and policy critique, reveals a mind both analytical and unmoored. Mangione has become a lightning rod for social critique and commentary, hailed by some as a martyr and condemned by others as a terrorist. This divide reflects deeper societal tensions. Despite spending twice as much per capita on healthcare as other wealthy nations, the U.S. leaves



Brian Thompson, victim

26 million uninsured and 100 million burdened with medical debt. Even those with coverage often find themselves entangled in co-pays, deductibles, and prior authorisations that render insurance nearly meaningless. UnitedHealthcare's \$22 billion profit in 2023, alongside executive bonuses, underscores a system where financial metrics overshadow patient well-being. For those unable to challenge opaque pricing or claim denials, the consequences are devastating. The engraved shell casings, with their stark corporate mantra of "delay, deny, depose," were a lethal critique of an industry many see as fundamentally flawed.

Public reaction has fractured along generational lines.

Social media campaigns like #FreeLuigi have turned Mangione into an anti-establishment icon, complete with merchandise and crowdfunding efforts that raised over \$200,000 for his legal defence in just days. Polls reveal a stark generational divide: 39% of adults under 30 sympathise with his motives, compared to only 5% of seniors. Younger Americans, weighed down by debt and stagnant wages, increasingly view institutions as irredeemably corrupt. To them, Mangione's act, however extreme, represents a rejection of a system that ties human worth to economic output. Older generations, however, see his violence as a dangerous erosion of civic norms and an assault on societal order.

Legally, the case pushes boundaries. Mangione faces 11 state charges and four federal indictments, including terrorism and murder counts that could carry the death penalty. His defence team argues that pretrial publicity, such as the highly publicised "perp walk" orchestrated by New York's mayor, has tainted the jury pool. Prosecutors, meanwhile, frame the shooting as premeditated terrorism, unrelated to legitimate dissent. The trial's outcome may hinge on whether the court views Mangione's actions as the isolated extremism of one individual or a symptom of systemic rot. Legal scholars draw parallels to historical cases where political violence collided with frameworks ill-equipped to address underlying societal grievances. Mangione's manifesto blurs the line between personal vendetta and ideological crusade, complicating efforts to define his motives.

The case's significance lies not in its singularity but in its symbolism.

Mangione's journey—from Ivy League classrooms to federal custody—reflects a growing disillusionment among the most privileged youth, who feel complicit in systems they despise. His

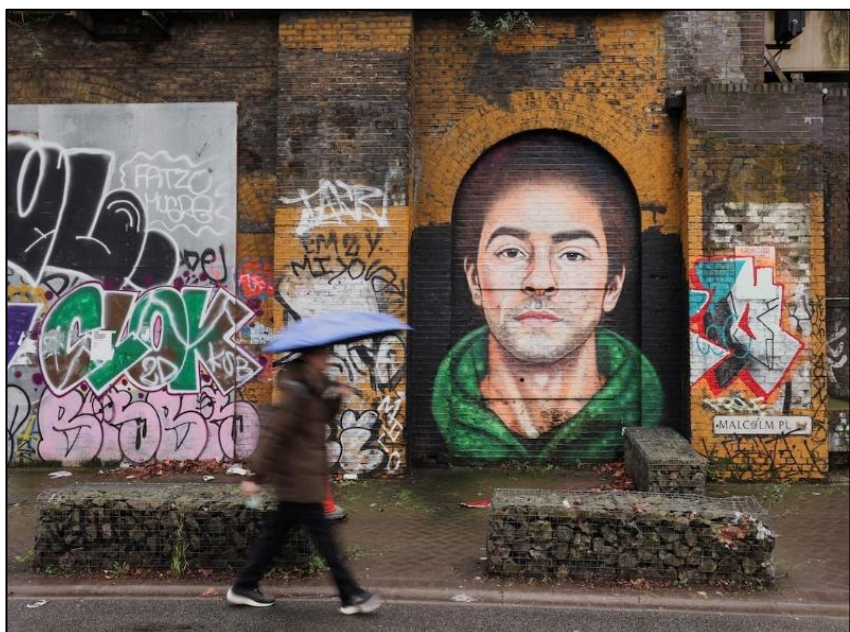
critique of healthcare's profit-driven model echoes broader academic discussions about harm perpetuated through inequitable structures. When millions are denied care due to cost or bureaucracy, suffering becomes normalised, a quiet violence no less banal. Mangione's act violently disrupted this inertia, forcing a public reckoning: is his crime distinct from the systemic neglect he sought to expose?

The question resists easy answers. Dismissing Mangione as unhinged ignores the despair of those crushed by medical debt, while valorising him risks legitimising violence as a form of political speech. Similarly, reducing Thompson to a corporate villain oversimplifies a system where executives, like patients, are bound by its logic. Shareholders demand profit growth, incentivising practices that prioritise financial returns over human lives. Thompson operated within these parameters, a reality that contextualises, but in the view of the accused, does not absolve his role. The tragedy lies in the collision of these undercurrents. It remains that inequity festers, rage simmers, and no meaningful solutions are provided.

In the wake of the shooting, legislators in a dozen states have proposed bills to increase transparency around claim denials and hospital pricing, while advocacy groups demand stricter oversight of insurers. Yet these efforts face familiar obstacles: lobbying, political gridlock, and public fatigue. For younger generations, the case crystallises a broader disillusionment.

A 2024 poll found that 70% of adults under 35 believe the economic system is rigged, a sentiment that mirrors Mangione's condemnation of "profit-driven death." This is compounded by dwindling social mobility, a contrast to the postwar era when Mangione's grandfather, a Sicilian immigrant, built a business empire through personal enterprise. Today, such American Dream trajectories feel like relics of the past, replaced by a pervasive feeling of entrapment in systems that rather than trickling down, instead funnels wealth upward. Culturally, the case transcends policy. Mangione's image has been replicated in memes, murals, and even a viral jumper parodying luxury brands. A vessel for air out social grievances: the review-bombing of the Pennsylvania McDonald's where he was arrested attests to the absurdity of modern protest, where digital mobs hijack trivial platforms to speak their rage. Whether this form of protest is pure simulacrum, or bears the potential for promoting real change, is a matter of opinion.

At its core, the case raises uneasy questions about accountability. Can individuals bear full responsibility for actions shaped by oppressive systems? Or do those systems share blame for creating conditions that breed radicalisation? Mangione's manifesto references critiques of industrial society, casting him as a soldier in a war against dehumanising structures. Yet this mythology does little to ease the pain caused by his alleged crime: a man dead on a pavement, a family left grieving, and a legacy entangled in corporate



power. The trial will not resolve these contradictions. Courts are designed to adjudicate guilt, not institutional morality. Yet Mangione's prosecution will inevitably become a referendum on the failings of the healthcare system. Each courtroom argument will whisper the unspoken question: does a system that denies care to millions bear responsibility for the violence it inspires?



For now, public opinion remains divided. Some argue that Mangione's act forced the issue of healthcare inequity into the mainstream, while others warn that violence undermines the trust necessary for meaningful reform. Between these poles lies an uncomfortable truth: the American healthcare system, as it stands, is unsustainable. It thrives on the exploitation of patients, workers, and the very idea that health should depend on wealth. Until this foundation shifts, the cycle of crisis and reaction will persist.

As the trial approaches, lingering questions remain. Can violence ever spark meaningful change, or does it only deepen divides? Where does accountability truly lie: individuals, or the systems that shape them? And in a nation that spends more on healthcare than any other, why is basic care still a privilege?

Wordplay offers no easy answers, only realisation that both the bullet and the bureaucracy exact a heavy toll. Until healthcare is seen not as a commodity but as a shared responsibility, the cycle will continue. Names may change: another CEO, another protester, but the underlying calculus remains. How many lives must be shattered before the cost of inaction becomes too great to bear?

The Mangione-Thompson saga resists neat, textbook moral conclusions. Compared by some as a modern parable which reflects the tensions between individual agency and systemic failure, outrage and ambiguity. To examine it is to confront not just a broken healthcare system, but a society that too often accepts such brokenness as inevitable. The engraved shell casings - "delay, deny, depose"—are more than evidence; they are a damning indictment of a culture that conflates survival with justice.

Giorgio Agamben, a contemporary Italian philosopher, explores the critical distinction between the ancient Greek terms *zoe* and *bios* in his seminal work *Homo Sacer*. Here, *zoe* refers to the bare biological existence shared by all living beings, while *bios* signifies a politically and socially shaped life—



one oriented toward flourishing within a community. Agamben contends that modern society must reconceptualise its understanding of "life" by shifting from *zoe*—mere survival—to *bios*, a form of existence where individuals thrive with dignity and protected rights. In the context of healthcare, his framework reveals blistering urgency: until the right to healthcare is universally ensured, there will be many more individuals like Thompson and Mangione. Without this foundational guarantee, there will be no grand emancipation.

WHERE WERE THE LADS WHEN LITTLER CONQUERED THE WORLD?

LUCA LOWRIE

Luke Littler has always had a natural talent for darts, but, in early 2024, he made history by becoming the youngest-ever PDC World Darts Champion. He was just 17 years old. His rapid rise has shaken up the professional circuit and ignited a new wave of interest among younger audiences, redefining what was once seen as a pub pastime into a globally recognised sport.



Littler's love for darts began almost as soon as he could walk. At just 18 months old, he was already throwing darts at a magnetic dartboard, a sign of what was to come. By the age of 14, he had won the WDF Irish Open (2021), a senior title that showed he was ready to compete at the highest level. His fearless playing style propelled him forward, culminating in his historic PDC World Darts Championship victory on January 3, 2024. Littler didn't just win—he dominated. Over the course of a single year, he claimed multiple major titles, including the PDC World Darts Championship, the Premier League of Darts, the World Series of Darts, the Belgian Darts Open, the Austrian Darts Open, and the Bahrain Darts Masters. His electrifying performances didn't just rewrite the record books, they brought in millions of new fans, with the PDC World Championship final attracting over 3.7 million viewers, making it the most-watched non-football sporting event in the UK.

Darts has come a long way from its humble beginnings. The sport is believed to have originated from medieval soldiers who would throw spearheads or arrows at the bottom of wine casks to test their accuracy. Over time, this evolved into a more structured game, with wooden dartboards made from cross-sections of trees. In the 20th century, darts became more organised with the introduction of Brian Gamlin's numbering system (1924), which brought in the double and treble scoring sections. The British Darts Organisation was founded in 1973, followed by the Professional Darts Corporation in 1992, marking a turning-point for the professionalisation of the sport. Originally played in pubs, darts was seen as a casual social game, but thanks to television coverage, sponsorship deals, and larger prize pools, it has transformed into a multi-million-dollar sport, now worth over £671.11 million worldwide.

Historically, darts was associated with middle-aged men in pubs, but Luke Littler has shattered that stereotype, proving that it is a game for all ages. His rise has sparked a youth movement in the sport, with more teenagers picking up darts than ever before, he has also had a major impact on women in darts with it become a more gender-neutral sport. At just 17 years old, he has already amassed over £1.5 million in prize money. Despite his success, Littler remains grounded, spending much of his

winnings on his family and a trip to Benidorm. On his 18th birthday, January 21, he treated himself to a Mercedes A-Class, a well-earned reward for conquering the world of darts. He is from a small village in Cheshire whose inhabitants have got behind his meteoric journey. His dad started him playing darts when he was a baby and, by the time he was 6, he had, astonishingly, already achieved his first 180.

On a personal level, darts has always been a sport that has grabbed my attention, and I rarely miss the Premier League when it's on. There's something about the roar of the crowd when 180 lands, and the sheer precision that makes it impossible to look away. As much as I enjoy watching, I also love playing, even though I am *nowhere near* Luke's level. My dartboard is set up in my garage, and, whilst I've hit my fair share of trebles, I've also left a few too many marks on the wall. When Luke Littler stepped onto the stage for the final, I was watching from an airport, fresh from a holiday and glued to my phone. Seeing him lift the trophy aged just 17 was a sensational history-making performance and heightened my interest in darts further.

Luke Littler's influence has even reached Rugby School, where students have fully embraced the darts fever. Inspired by his triumph, Rugby hosted its very own Ally Pally Darts Night in the TSR to raise money for Movember and men's mental health awareness.

Run by Mr. Wood, the event was a massive success, with a strong turn-out, particularly from the School Field XX Lads. The night featured an impressive display of darts skill as well as a hilarious array of costumes, including Ali G and his East-Side Opp, while others attempted less successful costumes, including a disappointing lobster outfit. In a fierce showdown, Arthur Laver from Kilbracken emerged victorious, proving his impressive talent. Luke Tuckey only played darts as a bit of fun on a Saturday night in School Field but, from this, he quickly developed into one of the best darts players in the



Winners of School Movember darts competition

School. The girls' competition showed just how keen they are with a final duel between the victorious Charlotte Hon and Rosie Utley.

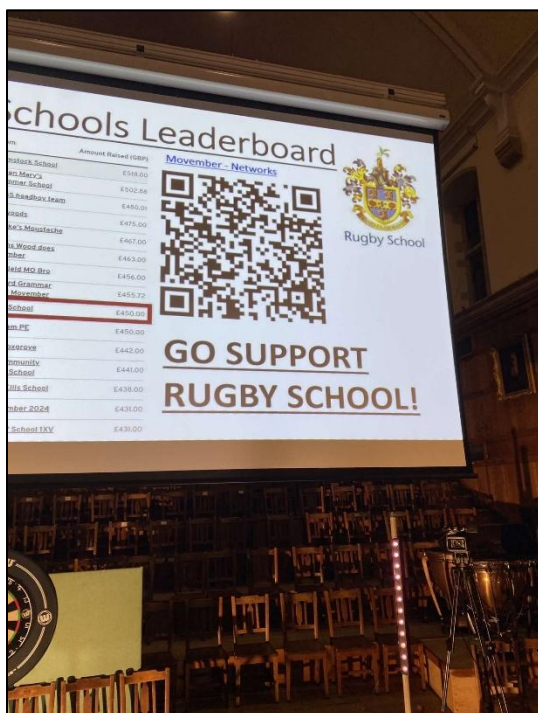
This event was created by Mr Wood, Geography teacher, who has been keen to break the stigma around men's mental health. Mr Wood decided to bring this Movember darts night to Rugby, as it is a movement close to his heart due to past mental health



issues at university. He is keen to make sure that everyone knows that the ‘macho’ male stereotype, which includes not being able to open to anyone about difficult feelings, is dangerous: he strongly believes that we all need to break this stigma. Mr Wood has been involved in Movember for a while. When he was 21, he tried to grow a moustache ... but it went miserably

wrong. He emphasizes that it is key to remember that, whilst growing a moustache may look silly, or be a weak attempt, it is about raising awareness about something important. Most of the boys here will be glad to hear that it’s not about if you can grow a proper tache but spreading awareness and sparking conversations around a still essentially taboo area.

Some of the lads from Rugby School were fully caught up in the excitement of Littler’s victory. Will Hosking, a keen supporter of Luke Littler, due to their similar physique and questionable facial hair, was enjoying himself at the Flying Circus in Newark while throwing some arrows in celebration. The famously laid-back Jamie Cowan took a more relaxed approach, watching Littler’s historic triumph from the comfort of his bed after a stirring performance at the local all-you-can-eat Chinese, the Szen in Berkhamstead.



At just 18 years old, Luke Littler has already changed the face of darts, bringing new energy, fans, and excitement to the sport. As he continues to dominate the circuit, one thing is clear: this is just the beginning. With Littler at the forefront, darts is no longer just a pastime for pub-goers, it is a global phenomenon. The question now isn’t whether he will win more titles, but how many records he will break along the way.



ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY! RUGBY SCHOOL'S OWN DARTS CHAMPION

Julie Mobbs

I first started playing darts in 1998, when a lady called Vi, who I sat next to at work, asked if I played darts. I said I had in the past, but was not very good. She said she was looking for more players for the ladies' darts team, the LMRCA Locos. I said I would give it a go.

I found my really old brass darts and went to the next game, where I was warmly welcomed by the other players and really enjoyed playing again. And the rest, they say, is history!

I became the secretary and treasurer of the LMRA Locos darts team, and I'm now the captain as well.

When I first started, there were 16 teams in the ladies' league and we travelled to nearly all the pubs and clubs in rugby and further afield: Catthorpe, Braunston and Harborough Magna. The scale has diminished and now there are only 9 teams.

I have been playing darts for 27 years, and the team name has changed to the Railway Locos, as we play from the Railway Club in Hillmorton Road. We have a really lovely group of ladies and are all friends and family now; my sister-in-law and niece play as well.

We play regularly on a Tuesday night: matches start at 8.00pm; the format is 5 singles – 301 and 2 pairs games – 401, so a total of 7 games; we play at home one week and away the next. It's nicely social, as there is always a lovely supper afterwards and we have a raffle which helps pay for the food, which is usually a bottle of wine.

We also play in the summer league, and there are competitions during the year, Singles, Pairs and Triples.

We won the League Cup back in 2014.

And Sue and I won the Pairs in 2015.

I got my first ever 180 in a match in 2022, against the Half Moon. To say I was ecstatic is an understatement. And it was a seven dart leg: 81, 180, and double top finish.



Julie's first ever 180 in a match in 2022

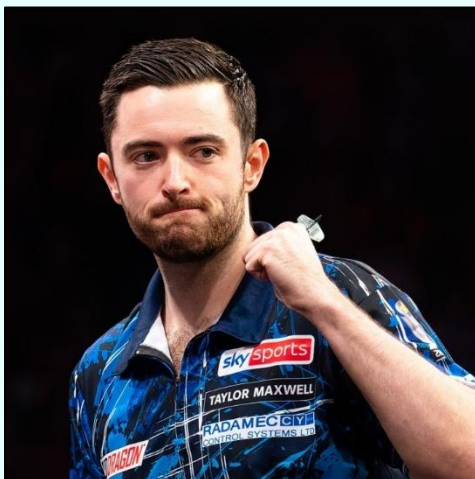


The League Cup from 2014



Sue and Julie winning the pairs competition in 2015

I Love watching the darts on TV and have been to the Birmingham Arena twice to watch the darts. My favourites of the older players are Phil - 'The Power' - Taylor; Steve Beaton and Gary Anderson. Today I like Luke Humphries and Nathan Aspinall.



Luke Humphries, who is nicknamed 'Cool hand Luke' won the World Cup of darts for 2024, becoming the champion.



Phil 'The Power' Taylor has 214 professional titles including 85 major titles, and a record 16 World Champions. He has now retired but leaves a great legacy in the world of darts.

LOOKING BEYOND THE RUGBY PITCH: OBSCURE SPORTS CORNERS TUESDAY TO SATURDAY

ELLIE MOYNIHAN

In the Rugby School community, there is a strong emphasis on traditional sports, with rugby, naturally, gaining most notable traction. Most people play it safe, choosing hockey, tennis or rugby, perhaps occasionally venturing out to football when feeling particularly spontaneous. There are a select few, though, who choose to take a more *avant-garde* approach to their sporting careers, venturing into realms of athleticism most would not dare to tread. Make no mistake, selecting ‘recreational swimming’ on the sports-option form year after year takes a certain degree of courageous boundary-pushing perseverance that invites intrigue from the rest of us whilst we scurry around tirelessly on the netball pitch, wondering if the grass could possibly be greener should we choose to spend our afternoons diving through underwater hoops, or perhaps obliterating ceramic disks out of the sky.



Bea Orme Smith and Eloise Walker jumping and stretching at Zumba

As such, I thought it fitting to delve into the truth behind many of the seemingly obscure sports options, to shine a spotlight on the thought-processes behind some of these *against-the-grain* decisions, and to answer the questions that *really* matter. Should zumba really be considered a sport? Does anyone *actually* choose recreational swimming? Can shooting clay pigeons really qualify as exercise? In fact, can shooting clay really be associated with pigeons at all? It doesn't take an artist to point out the fact that there is a rather tenuous connection between a feathered bird and a small plate of ceramic.

Fear not, over the course of this article I will endeavour to debunk each and every one of these myths with no stone left unturned. In this aim, I have engaged with experts, at the top of their respective fields, to gain a raw, first-hand perspective on the truth behind these sports.

Zumba

Having stuck out zumba for a whole term in D-Block with a few brave soldiers by my side, I thought it would only be right to give it an honourable mention. Contrary to popular opinion, zumba does actually require some serious stamina, not to mention rhythm. Bopping on the spot for upwards of an hour is certainly not for the faint of heart! In an effort to validate this claim, I turned to the best-of-the-best, none other than Eloise Walker, a dyslexic member of the XX who managed to defy any awkward

anticipatory feelings through zumba. Her story stands to inspire others, proving to the community that no matter what challenges you may face, zumba is always there with open arms, ready to embrace all who are willing to give it a crack.

Close-up with Eloise Walker

"What has been the biggest challenge you've had to overcome as a dyslexic person doing zumba?"

"I would say getting the steps right. There's a lot of getting used to new vocabulary within the zumba sphere. It was a challenge, but I took it day by day."

"In the future, how do you envision your zumba journey progressing?"

"Honestly, I carry on doing zumba late at night in my room! It's become a part of my bed-time routine, and I hope one day I can get out there and use it as my party trick just to show the world that zumba is real."

"What do you say to people who claim zumba isn't a real sport?"

"I'd like to see them try it. Honestly, it's hard; you break a sweat in zumba, I'll tell you that for free! You've got to be on your feet constantly, there are new steps every second of the day."

Recreational Swimming

Swimming; the dark horse of all sports. When considering this particular sports option, I was honestly at a loss for information, having never met anyone who'd openly declared they fancy a dip on a tri-weekly basis. However, I was pleasantly surprised (and mildly puzzled) to learn, upon further investigation, that some close friends actually fit into this category! Feeling compelled, I decided to interview these brave trailblazers, and I would be lying if I didn't admit I came away feeling rather inspired ... Despite some forceful encouragement, these swimmers have chosen to remain anonymous.

Close-up with an Anonymous Source(s) ...

"What first inspired you to choose recreational swimming?"

"Because I heard it was only half an hour, and you didn't have to do any swimming. You can just jump in and out of the pool and play tag with your mates!"

"What would you say to any young swimmers out there who are aspiring to get in the pool but haven't quite mustered the confidence?"

"Just dive head-first into the pool! It's a very good sport option. You can keep your fitness up quite easily and it's a fun alternative to other options."

"How do you see recreational swimming evolving in your life as you progress beyond school?"



Recreational swimming (just imagine its water)

"I would like to do more cold water swimming and make the conditions slightly harder for myself, having progressed over the term at school. I might also be very ambitious and get into some charity work which might entail swimming across the Channel or even completing a triathlon."

"If your talent (in recreational swimming) were to become an Olympic sport, what would it be?"

"Either a Cannonball or a Woggle in-between my legs."

"Finally, what is a must-have essential you need in order succeed in this activity?"

"Some swimming trunks (or costume) would be a good start! And perhaps a woggle."

Clay-Pigeon Shooting



There is always a slight grey zone in terms of whether standing in a field, decked out in full tweed, pretending to shoot birds that don't really exist should be considered a sport. It also raises the question, let's face it, whether some people just have too much free time. For those unaware, in clay-pigeon shooting, participants take turns obliterating small ceramic disks which have been flung into the air at great speed, presumably to stimulate the thrill of hunting without the minor inconvenience of all those feathers. Don't misinterpret my laconic tone: should we be invaded by an army of militant disk-shaped soldiers, we can all sleep easy in the knowledge that we are in safe hands.

Charlie Hill Clay Pigeon shooting

Every year, millions of ceramic birds are launched into the sky, only to be mercilessly gunned down before they even have a change to dream of freedom. Some would argue it sounds more like a dystopian nightmare than a sport. In an effort not to jump to rash conclusions, I embarked upon a quest to learn more about this curious activity, speaking to none other than Charlie Hill, acclaimed School Field XX pigeon-shooter.

Close-up with Charlie Hill

"What would you say to those who claim that clay-pigeon shooting doesn't qualify as a real sport?"

"It's actually considerably difficult. Honestly, it depends how seriously you take it and I take it very seriously."

"To any young, aspiring clay-pigeon shooters out there, what would you say is your biggest piece of advice?"

"Find out which eye-dominant you are. This should be the very first thing you do. Then, always lock-in and be safe with the gun."

"Have you ever felt a pang of sympathy for the clay?"

"It's clay. It's not a bird, so no. The clay's raison d'être, existentially, is to be shot."

Brutal.

"Do you think that clay pigeon shooting has become more popular recently?"



"Personally, I wouldn't say it's very popular at School, as there are about five of us who do it. More people should join: it's very laid back and you get a cheeky hot chocolate afterwards."

"What are the essentials that you need in order to break into the clay-pigeon shooting industry?"

"A gun."

Insightful.

Luke Tuckey Clay Pigeon shooting

Close-up with Luke Tuckey

With more and more questions springing to mind, like the clay-pigeon itself catapulting enthusiastically towards the sky, I decided to explore this particular sport even further. This involved catching a moment with the Captain of the Clay Pigeon Shooting Squad himself, Mr Luke Tuckey.

"What do you hope to achieve as Captain?"

"First place in every competition."

It's safe to say clay-pigeon shooting isn't exactly a *team* sport.

"What would your response be to anyone who claims that clay-pigeon shooting cannot qualify as a real sport?"

"Many elements go into being successful in clay pigeon shooting: hand-eye coordination; strength; endurance. All the key elements of a true sport are involved, so, I hope that quashes any such nefarious rumours."



Our recent Inter House Clay Pigeon Shooting competition

Off-Games

Yes, you read that correctly. To address the elephant in the room, yes, I'm very much aware that 'off-games' has not (yet) gained official sport status, in fact it is generally regarded as quite the opposite. However, allow me to float an idea: to master the art, to refine the skill, to achieve the near-impossible task of earning a spot on the 'off-games' list week after week without so much as a hint of suspicion isn't just luck, it's a dedicated craft.

Close-up with Cecily Harley

"What would you say to any young, aspiring off-gamesers who haven't quite mastered the art of getting on the list yet?"

"The key is to have a consistent injury, that is, until you can get yourself established as a regular in the off-games team. It can also help to plant your injury the day before, or the morning of; for example, if you wanted to get off for a headache, you need to start in the morning, and then come back again after lunch."

"What do you enjoy most about being in off-games?"

"I enjoy seeing who comes and goes in the off-games community. There are the regulars and the others who are less committed and more temporary. It's interesting to survey the shifting landscape."

"Have you ever faced any challenges or close calls in securing your place on the off-games list?"

"Not for me personally, as I've got a pretty solid excuse since I had hip surgery. But I know people who've tried to continue their off-games journey and it was summarily curtailed. Luckily, I'm still going strong."

After conversing with a variety of sources, from all walks of life and sporting backgrounds, I must say my main take-away is that the most important thing is to do what you most enjoy! If that means frolicking in googles and picking up bricks from the bottom of the pool, then so be it. Chances are the rest of us are feeling rather envious whilst we brave the cold for hockey on a Tuesday afternoon. Sport is so much more than the competitive atmosphere it has become too often associated with, and we mustn't forget to just have fun.



Cecily Harley on her laptop at Off Games

‘WHAT’S IN A CREST?’ RUGBY HOUSE DIFFERENCES EXPLORED

BEA MCNAIR

Are Houses at Rugby School different from each other, or are they all really much the same? New students touring round the School have the difficult decision of not only choosing their House, but determining how their own personality matches up to the feel of each House.

Where, though, did it all start, this variation in the culture of each House?

I’ve prepared a (very difficult) quiz to see how well you know the history of YOUR house

4) *Why does School House have the skull and cross bones crest?*

- a. The house is haunted.
- b. It was established by a pirate.
- c. The original Rugby jerseys had a skull and crossbones on it.

5) *Why is Whitelaw a star?*

- a. Star represents all Rugby School values (see your reports).
- b. When you look out the window of Mr Ellis’s office, you can see the North Star.
- c. It is a mystic pentagon, linked with JH Wilson

6) *What about the Michell crest?*

- a. The Fleur de Lys is part of the Michell coat of arms.
- b. They have splendidly glamorous European flowers in their House garden.
- c. Everyone there has to do French GCSE.

1) *Why does Rupert Brooke have a crown?*

- a. Everyone in Rupert Brooke is a queen.
- b. Rupert Brooke is the best House of all, the crown jewel in the Rugby School pack.
- c. It is thought to be linked to the crest of Rupert Brooke himself.

2) *What about the scales of Sheriff?*

- a. Everyone who goes to Sheriff must be good at physics.
- b. Everyone in Sheriff must become a lawyer.
- c. It relates to the School’s founder, Lawrence Sheriff, who was a grocer by trade.

3) *The crescent of School Field?*

- a. The windows are all tinted red so, whenever they see a moon out the window, it’s a red moon.
- b. It’s adjacent to Horton Crescent and formerly situated in the Crescent.
- c. There used to be a plant that grew red bananas outside the House.

8) *Bradley's double-headed eagle?*

- a. The emblem was admired by a former Housemaster, who had a friend who was an acquaintance of Franz Joseph, emperor of Austria-Hungary. He asked to use the emblem for his house which was granted.
- b. Bradley have two pet eagles.
- c. An old Housemaster was nicknamed 'Eagle-eyes'.

9) *Why does Kilbracken have an anchor?*

- a. Rumour has it Kilbracken has fishy Friday three times a week.
- b. The anchor crest was supposedly linked to Lord Kilbracken.
- c. Join, and you'll sink without trace.

9) *Why does Cotton have an oak leaf in their crest?*

- a. It's the crest of former Housemaster, Smythies
- b. The only trees in their garden are oak trees
- c. They take great pride in having oak leaves in their salad bar instead of lettuce.

7) *The lion of Town?*

- a) It's part of the crest of many local families, notably the Humes of Bolton Grange and the Duke of Buccleud.
- b) A ghost of a lion romans the house.
- c) It's patriotically derived from England's national animal



Sorry, everyone in Griffin, Dean, and Southfield, I've run out of creative energy at this point.

Now that we've gone through the history of (most of) the House crests, you may be wondering what actually goes on in the different Houses today? I've interviewed three people (myself being the fourth source of information) to give you a brief insight into the different traditions of boys and girls Houses.

Tudor

My first interviewing victim was a friend in Tudor, Daisy Donne (LXX). Many different people who go to visit their friends in Tudor may be amazed by the DB and LXX bunkbeds, and how the ladders are simply not attached to the beds. Most seem to be shocked by the fact that you physically cannot "roll out of bed" in the morning in Tudor. Although the House is next in line for a renovation, both staff and students are all attached to how homely and cosily traditional it feels.

Talking about feeling close to home, one of the traditions that shapes Tudor is how they celebrate Thanksgiving. Daisy told me, *"As we have American girls in the house every year, we have a roast. Everyone in each year adds to a list of things they are grateful for, and the 'lucky' one from each year has to stand up and read it out in front of the whole House"*.



Daisy Donne – Tudor

Intrepid reporter as I am, and on the look-out for an exclusive scoop, I asked my next killer question. What is Tudor's favourite snack? I was shocked to hear that Carol's cookies are put on the bill. Extremely jealous is how I felt hearing this, and imagining that the rest of Rupert Brooke feel the same, as we all have to scavenge for lost change to pay for our break time cookies. We call it a luxury to have a left over 40p for the tuck shop. Recovering from this shocking revelation, I asked Daisy, 'What the most liked meal in Tudor?'. *"Chicken curry."* I get the impression Rupert Brooke girls agree that they're happy when it's Thursday lunchtime curry, though the School Katsu curry remains a hotly debated topic.

Kilbracken

The next person to appear in front of my microphone was Eddie Inglis (LXX) of Kilbracken. His answers were more terse than Daisy. *"Pizza."* I had asked him what the most liked meal is. Perhaps they all are thinking less of the food and more of the dramatically emotional countdown to when they can leave New House and return to their beloved ancestral home on the verge of the hill. They like the 'tradition' of summer term football on Hillbrow.

Almost every term each House has their outings, and, though they all seem to be completely different, you always seem to find yourself ending up on that first Sunday of the Advent Term at Drayton Manor with Thomas and his tank engines. Kilbracken, switch it up and go rogue. They go an outing I've never actually heard of before: paint-balling. Rupert Brooke like to Go Ape. (That's an outing, by the way.)

Rupert Brooke

A hot topic discussed in Rupert Brooke is, 'In every House, do you have to go to breakfast?'. In Brooke, we all have to be down in time for C.O. and, if one person is still deep in their sleep, no-one is allowed to leave breakfast until everyone is there, and the same applies to Sunday 3:30 CO. You sit there and wait, and wait ...

Kilbracken and Tudor don't have these rules, however, Tudor has a very specific 'breakfast attire' code, which is that the LXX and XX are allowed to wear pyjamas for breakfast: this, to Brooke girls, feels glamorously luxurious and stylishly decadent. But it's not quite as simple as that. LXX Tudor girls have to wear a school skirt and only wear their pyjama *tops*, almost like a half and half rule. The XX sport full pyjamas.

Although in Rupert Brooke we do not have Thanksgiving celebrations like Tudor, we do have a favourite lunch-time grace recited by Miss Cave: "*We love our bread, we love our butter, but most of all we love each other*"! This efficiently combines fun and spirituality.

With House entertainments, there are many approaches. Whilst Tudor perform their House Singing rendition again to parents, in Brooke we skip House entertainment and instead have a House play. It feels unique to our House, and it's always fun seeing versions of well-known plays/movies (this year *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*) with comic twists.

School House



Snack made by chef Aidan



Miss Hollings, Rupert Brooke Housemistress

Interviewing School House's representative, Aidan Yu (LXX), I made sure to be specific in asking for "no one word answers" (remember Eddie at Kilbracken). At School House, the boys have a (some may say unhealthy) obsession with making steaks in their rather modern kitchenette. A comic miscommunication occurred when I asked Aidan what his favourite snack was in School House and he replied by saying what his favourite home-made snack is rather than what the chefs make (ok: you had to be there). Here is a photo of one of the many snacks made by Chef Aidan.

The unique traditions and crests of each House make for a distinctive existence within the broader Rugby School umbrella identity: from Tudor's warm atmosphere of Thanksgiving celebrations to Rupert Brooke's yearly House play, these traditions help create a strong sense of community. House loyalty aside, what's your favourite crest?



BOWIE TO DAFT PUNK: THE GREATEST ALBUMS

NICK GERBER

In this article, I'll share some of the albums that have not only been some of my personal favourites but have also defined entire genres and pushed boundaries in ways that still resonate today. Make sure to give them a try.

David Bowie: The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars

Rock

One of the all-time great concept albums, *Ziggy Stardust* tells of an androgynous alien rock star sent to Earth as a messenger of hope amid impending doom. Blending glam rock with themes of identity, alienation and societal change, Bowie depicts Ziggy's rise to fame and dramatic downfall after falling victim to the excesses of celebrity culture. From a musical perspective, this is one of those albums without a single let-down. From start to finish it is well thought out, original and creative, offering something for every emotion.

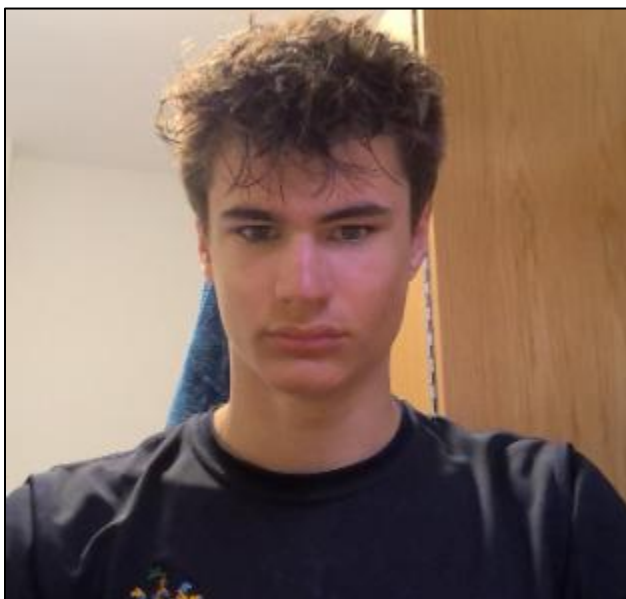


David Bowie: The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars album cover

I came across this album after hearing what is one of its biggest hits, 'Ziggy Stardust' a couple of times and wanting to add it to a playlist. Coming to the album solely for the one song, I nevertheless let the next song 'Star play' which I realised was actually really good. Over the next month I proceeded to slowly listen through the whole album as I began to really love it, eventually stumbling across the well-known 'Starman', which I had not realised was a part of this record. Now, the album has become one of my most listened to of all time.

Highlights: Starman, Ziggy Stardust, Moonage Daydream, Lady Stardust

MF DOOM and Madlib - Madvillany – Madvillan MF DOOM and Madlib



Hip Hop

One of the most celebrated hip-hop albums of all time, *Madvillainy*, a collaboration, is a masterpiece of abstract lyricism and intricate production. The album presents DOOM as a masked supervillain, weaving cryptic rhymes filled with wordplay, humour, and obscure references over Madlib's dense, jazz-infused beats. The result is a record that feels otherworldly—both playful and menacing, chaotic yet meticulously crafted.

Musically, *Madvillainy* is unpredictable and endlessly engaging, with short, fragmented tracks that defy traditional song structures.



*Rare image of the home studio used by Daft Punk to record *Discovery*.*

There's no filler, just a continuous stream of inventive, left-field hip-hop that rewards repeated listens. It's one of the most original and influential rap records ever made.

I only discovered this fantastic record thanks to a friend's recommendation. I initially wrote the album off as boring and repetitive and was only convinced to come back by the widespread critical acclaim it receives. After listening through it a few more times, I started to see just why it is celebrated. In the right circumstances, there is nothing better to listen to than *Madvillany*.

Highlights: Accordion, All Caps, Figaro

Discovery – Daft Punk

Disco

Perhaps the most defining electronic album of all time, *Discovery* is a vibrant, genre-blending journey that re-imagines dance music with a sense of nostalgia and futurism. Daft Punk crafts a world where house, disco, rock, and synth-pop collide: the feels is timeless and otherworldly. With its robotic vocals, infectious grooves, and cinematic soundscapes, *Discovery* plays like a love letter to the music that shaped it, while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of electronic production.

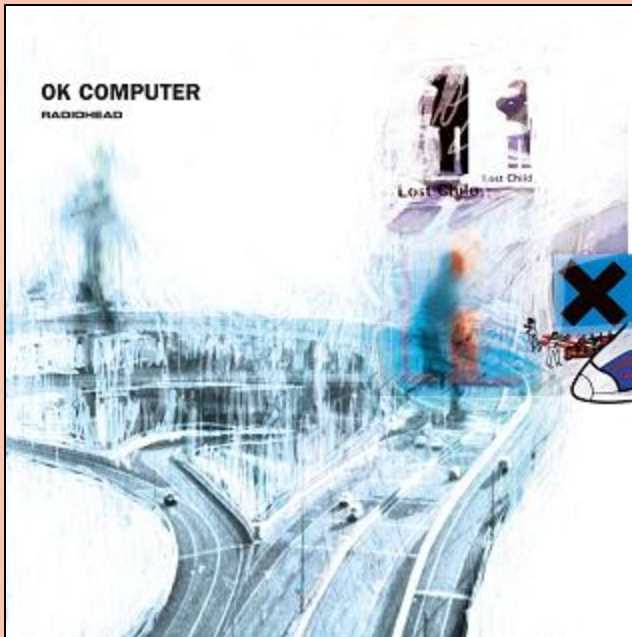
The sound achieved by this album would be considered impressive if produced today, let alone in a Paris basement in 2001. From euphoric anthems to dreamy interludes, every track is meticulously crafted, filled with warmth, emotion, and an unmistakable sense of fun. It's an album that captures the magic of discovery itself, as each listen revealing new layers of detail and innovation.

Weirdly, I started listening to this album as something to keep me from getting bored when completing preps: I find the predictable, repetitive nature of the music is very helpful for focus, unusual as that might sound. For all its looping and repetitiveness, I found the sound quite fun and it quickly became one of my all-time favourite albums. Very impressive given its 2001 release date.

Highlights: One More Time, Veridis Quo, High life



Daft Punk



Radiohead - Ok Computer

A landmark in modern music, *OK Computer* has every right to be included in the greatest album of all time debate. This masterpiece set a new standard for rock musicians that has yet to be challenged, as it is beautiful, mysterious, scary, and thought-provoking. Tracks shift between soaring, cinematic swells and hushed, intimate moments, creating an atmosphere that is hard to put to words. The production is lush yet unsettling, wrapping the listener in layers of sound that feel like a transmission from a beautifully broken world.

This is another album that I had a challenging time coming to really love. While I have always enjoyed the less innovative parts of the album like 'Karma Police' or 'No Surprises', it took me a couple of listens to start really enjoying the album as a whole. Almost like a dish with a slightly acquired taste, *Ok Computer* quickly grew on me until it became one of my favourites of all time.

Highlights: Karma Police, Exit Music, Subterranean Homesick Alien (and much more – this album is amazing)



The mansion of St Catherine's Court in Bath where 'Ok Computer' was recorded



The original Radiohead



Lead Singer - Thom Yorke

SHE'S GOT GAME! A NEW ERA OF GIRLS' FOOTBALL!

TABBY MOORE

This term, there has been a notable increase in girls' football participation, with numbers nearly doubling in size.

Personally, I've decided to return to the sport after a brief period of not playing, drawing inspiration from my previous experience in Bahrain. Football was one of the primary sports for girls at my middle school, St Christopher's, where we actively participated in competitions, including the yearly British Schools Middle East event. This competition allowed teams to travel across the Middle East to compete.



When I moved to Rugby, I found it intriguing to enter a school with a vastly different sports culture, where girls' main sports are hockey and netball. However, as someone who grew up in a football-loving family, the sport has always been a central part of my life.

From a young age, I joined my dad at matches, experiencing the energy and joy that football brings to both players and fans. His passion for the sport has carried its way down to his children and we are all very grateful for the immense amount of Birmingham City merch we have received over the years: thank you, dad!

Girls football around the world has recently risen in status and it is refreshing to see women entering into this male-dominated field. The interest in girls' football has changed over the years, and something that has obviously contributed to this was the Lionesses winning the Euros in 2022 against Germany at Wembley stadium, against Germany, in front of a record crowd of 87,192 fans. It has had a huge impact on the expansion of the game for women, which is reflected now in the enthusiasm felt by girls such as myself here in our Rugby community.

This term, due to the recent increase in numbers, the School has been able to create two girls teams with 45 students attending each training session.



Speaking to one of my coaches, the Head of Soccer, Mr. Adams, it is clear there has been a really significant improvement in the quality and passion of the play coming from the girls' teams: we trek up to Spring Hill and back each session and love every moment! Mr. Adams states that the biggest challenge he has found



introducing girls' football to the school is convincing girls to change from netball to football. As it is new to most of the girls at School, it can appear daunting. *"Some schools have started doing football before our School and are further along the developmental line, however, it has been impressive to see so many girls try something new and pick it up very quickly."*

"Regardless of the results, girls play with a smile on their faces'."

Speaking of smiles, there have been some surprisingly funny moments this term. Tatiana Gable has found it challenging to stay on two feet this season and often finds herself on the floor. *"One of my boots only has two studs!"* she exclaims, imploringly. The rest of the team remain unconvinced. Nonetheless, Tati picks herself up and plays an integral role in the success of the team by carrying the ball up the pitch and helping to assist some of the brilliant goals scored this term.

It has been a cold start to the season with temperatures reaching an average zero degrees celsius. High winds, too. The girls have, though, coped with this very well, encouraged by the positive words of Rosie Utley, the girls' football captain: *"We can do this, guys!"* Although the girls did not play a match during the first few weeks of term (due to Stowe cancelling), we like to believe it was because other schools were too scared of the competition because of word getting about how slick we looked in training. The squad agree that one of the most memorable moments the team have shared together was when one school, which will remain nameless (it begins with 'R'), secured a win and walked off without shaking hands or offering three cheers. As a result, our team gave the loudest three cheers, illustrating the noble and fighting spirit of Rugby School's girls' football team.

How has this term gone? Star player, Tatiana Gable, has this to say, *"So far, this season's girls' football journey has been a surprising success! After last year's memorable losses (to put it lightly), we came in doubting ourselves. But, guess what? We're no longer the School's laughing-stock! We've played three matches so far, and, just last week, secured our first win, a solid 4-1 victory against Oakham, with D-blocker Florrie almost bagging a hat-trick! That said, it hasn't been all smooth sailing. Our first two losses hit us hard, and we then missed Ms. Burrows' helpful steering hand. But we remained defiant, turning our setbacks into motivation. And the best news? Ms. Burrows made it back to training this week!"*

I play the role of the striker. Being a striker on the girls' football team is a bit like being a secret weapon! You are always looking for a chance to score, using speed, and a little bit of

creativity to get past the defenders. It's all about teamwork, whether it's a perfectly timed pass or a shot at goal. And when the ball hits the back of the net: pure excitement!

It's been an exhilarating term in so many ways, footballing-wise and in terms of friendships. We are extremely proud of the progress and development of girls football at Rugby, from its start in the early 2000s to now. It feels an achievement.



NETBALL'S BRIGHT NEW FUTURE

AIMEE DUNNION

Netball is defined as a 'seven-a-side game in which goals are scored by throwing a ball so that it falls through a netted hoop'.

It is a fair assumption that netball is overlooked, probably due to the fact that it is predominantly played by women. It doesn't have the obvious physicality of rugby, or interesting props to use like hockey. There are a multitude of confusing rules in netball: repossession, obstruction, offside ... the list goes on. You may be wondering, 'What is the point of learning these rules if I am never going to play?'. Well, first of all, never say never, as maybe you'll decide to pick it up at some future point. Also, even if you have no plans to play netball, you can still enjoy watching what, to me, is a fascinating game.

Matches turn around within seconds and possession is never in one team's hand for long, resulting in unmatched camaraderie and team spirit.

At Rugby School, all students are lucky to be encouraged to play sports, however, in the wider world, the stereotypes surrounding netball are just one example of the way in which women's sport is underappreciated. It is an exciting time to be a part of women's sport, but even more so netball. Think of this article as your own personal guide to the 2025 netball season!



Me playing netball in an U16 Regional Match



One of our first ever netball matches as U11's

I have been playing netball since I was 10. I distinctly remember my second training session being on my birthday. At the time, I couldn't think of anything better, believing that going to netball on my birthday demonstrated my upmost dedication. In retrospect, missing my second ever training session for my birthday probably wouldn't have been detrimental to netball career, yet it shows how importantly I thought of the sport before I really started playing.

I have played netball at least once a week since then. Many of those early matches resulted in a scoreline that closely resembling 50 to our opponent, 5 to us. However, my team, the 'Henley leopards' and I still turned up to training each week and were still raring to go at 9am on the next Sunday morning. The matches have got better since then,



Miss Masser for Thunder, where she has just recently made her debut

for example, getting to regionals as an U16 and becoming the West Midlands U19 runners-up. The results of the matches have changed over the years (thankfully in the positive direction), but one constant in my netball journey has always been the people, as I play on a team with the same people now that I was playing with as an U11.

I started playing netball because I liked the sport, but I continued playing netball because of the people I was playing it with.

Little did I know that this journey would come so full circle, not realising that my U11 club coach would later be coaching at Rugby School and would become a 2024 netball Super League player, Indya Masser.

I was eager to sit down with Ms. Masser and hear about her vast netball experience. She first began playing netball because it was always something she 'gravitated towards'. She strongly believes in needing to 'have a love for the sport' and, when faced with the decision of netball or football, which she also played at a high level,

the answer was always netball. On playing in the Super League, she describes how she 'always knew this opportunity was going to come', as it was something she has worked towards her entire life. In her debut season, she never anticipated travelling down to London 'three to four times a week after a full day of work' in order to be a professional netball player, emphasising how it 'definitely took a toll on my body'.

'What was playing in the Super League like?' 'Surreal,' came the reply. One moment that sticks out was at the season opener when it felt difficult to grasp how a packed Nottingham Motorpoint arena were all going to watch her play. A favourite match from last season was the Saracens Mavericks arena match: 'It was such a momentous occasion, the first netball match to be played at Wembley arena'. She won player of the match.

Another person of particular interest as regards netball at Rugby School is our Director of Sport, Mrs Skene. First having played netball in primary school, I wrongly assumed that it had always been her sport of choice. I realised my mistake when Mrs Skene went on to explain how 'at that age, I played loads', going on to list a multitude of sports which included hockey, judo, athletics and basketball, for which she was selected to trial for England. Having to travel all over the Midlands for the countless sports she took part in was 'an absolute logistical



Mrs Skene at the Super Cup for Birmingham Blaze



nightmare', which resulted in her having to whittle down her exceptional talent into one main sport: netball. This allowed her to specialise in one key area and not have to travel extreme lengths of the county on a daily basis.

Mrs Skene's netball career reached great heights, playing in the Super League, or what it was originally called in 2002, the 'Super Cup'. She was part of the inaugural season 'where all the franchises we know today were first created' and began her career playing for Birmingham Blaze and then Loughborough Lightning to be a training partner. This allowed her to focus more on becoming a teacher. Her experience playing at this level gave Mrs Skene an 'understanding of what it was like to coach sport at an elite level, and a better insight into what it takes to run an elite team'. She implements her netball experience in her approach to coaching: 'being able to anticipate the

play' allows for the brilliant coaching we all know and love

Netball is of topical discussion at the moment, with the coming season set to be very interesting. Prior to this 2025 Super League season, netball has never been considered a professional sport. This means that 150 athletes received no money for playing the sport, even when they were training up to 6 days a week: they had to not only do a full-time job but also secure a job that would allow them to commit to their demanding netball routine.

I am an avid fan of the Super League, being a Loughborough Lightning season ticket holder. It's a nice feeling to see people who work so hard get the recognition they deserve. Ms. Masser, for example, has personally found success in the new structure of the Super League. She understood that sacrifices had to be made, yet persevered, and is now a permanent member of Manchester Thunder's 2025 netball super league team.

Sounds perfect, right?

Well, professionalisation has been controversial amongst fans. As part of the professionalisation process, four franchises were collapsed due to lack of financial backing with the consequence that two of the teams cut were the most successful netball teams in UK history, Surrey Storm and Team Bath. These fans now have no club to support and many aspiring netballers have been left with no local franchise at NPL level. Granted, two new teams have been added into the league, Nottingham Forest and Birmingham Panthers, but they are both located in the Midlands; Scotland has reduced pathways, and the South East no pathway.



Mrs Skene coaching on a Rugby School Sports Tour

Maybe this is just sport at an elite level where tough decisions and cuts have to

be made. Yet, at the same time, you cannot help but feel empathy for players who have worked their whole lives to gain these opportunities, and the young, aspiring netballers left with less infrastructure to support them. I asked Mrs Skene's opinion: 'Netball 2.0 is a long time coming', but she feels '50/50' on the decisions made. Her main hope for the coming season is that the league 'gets the tv viewers it needs and manages to keep the commercial aspect'.



Photograph I took at the Nations Cup in 2024

For a sport that is still developing, netball really does have it all. Having played netball for so many years, I obviously enjoy playing it. However, some of my all-time favourite memories are off the court. Going to watch England vs New Zealand at the 2022 Commonwealth, amongst a sold NEC Arena was an unforgettable atmosphere: this helped England take the win 54-44 after being down for at least half the match. As well as this, going to watch England vs Australia in the 2024 Nations Cup was a fantastic day which resulted in a narrow loss for England, but turned out to be one of my favourite days as my sister and I managed to meet Jo Weston, one of our netball idols and even ended up on her Instagram. Over my time playing netball, I have had the opportunity to be coached by many different people, from professional players at camps to my club coaches I see multiple times a week. Yet, it is the coaching of netball at Rugby School, provided by Mrs Canning, Mrs Skene and Miss Masser that stands out the most. Our sessions are full of hard work, yet I always leave feeling fulfilled and encouraged.



KILBRACKEN: BEHIND-THE-SCENES

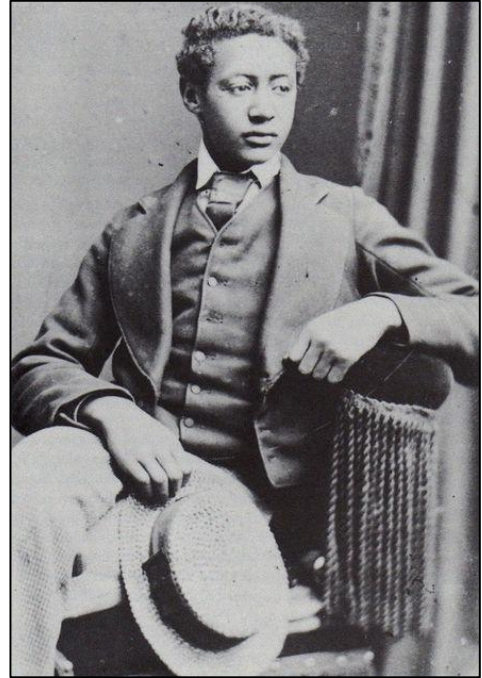
SACHIN SAGGER

How well do you know Kilbracken? Well, let me bring you up-to-speed.

Kilbracken was established in 1841 at 33 Bilton Road and was originally known as Penrose after Reverend John Penrose who was the first House Master. In 1848, when G. G. Bradley was House Master, the House moved to 1 Hillmorton Road which was bought by Rugby School in 1907.

The House was permanently named Kilbracken in 1932 after James Arthur Godley, 1st Baron Kilbracken and it moved to its present site, on Barby Road, in 1941 which had been the site of Hillbrow Prep School.

Did you know that Kilbracken had once been the home of a Prince? One old schoolboy of Kilbracken was Prince Alemayehu of Ethiopia who attended Rugby School from 1874-1879 after the request from Queen Victoria that he should study in England. The heir to the Ethiopian Empire, after finishing at Rugby, he attended officer training school in Sandhurst, where he contracted pleurisy and died at the age of 18. His passing greatly upset the Queen who decided he should be buried in the catacombs of St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle, where he remains to this day.



Prince Alemayehu of Ethiopia

I joined Kilbracken at the start of this academic year (LXX) and so far, have really enjoyed my time at Rugby. Being very different from the day school in London I left behind, I saw Rugby as a great opportunity to improve both academically and in extracurricular activities. After my initial visit to the school and Kilbracken, I felt an instant connection to the House and so made my mind up fairly soon



Just one aspect of the Kilbracken refurbishment

with my decision to board here. My Rugby journey began in New House with Kilbracken, for the past year and a half, being under construction to improve its facilities, rooms and communal areas. Now, after 588 days later the house has completed its move back over the road to a much improved and upgraded Kilbracken.

One of the main reasons why I have loved my time in Kilbracken is the wonderful people who work behind the scenes, so I decided to find more out about them!



Sharon, Head Chef of Kilbracken

Sharon

Head Chef of the kitchen team, Sharon is an important figure in Kilbracken and has worked at Rugby for 22 and a half years, specifically in Kilbracken for 19. The favourite aspect of her job is the people, from the kitchen team to the House staff and the students. Sharon's favourite memories from her job have always been when people "come up to me and say thank you or that they enjoyed something". Delving a bit into her childhood, I discovered that, at 17, Sharon decided she wanted to be a chef which is why she went to catering college. An interesting fact about Sharon is that when she was younger, she enjoyed a brief moment of Saturday Morning fame when she appeared in the popular children's TV series *Tiswas*, famous in its day for its improvised mood of chaos and anarchy, which aired from 1974 to 1982 on ITV for 8 seasons. Since joining, I have had the pleasure of trying

Sharon's food at both lunch and supper with many of her dishes being house favourites. For me personally, I would have to say that her best meals have been the Katsu Curries on a Thursday and the delicious toad-in-the-hole she makes.

Unfortunately, this is Sharon's last term working at Rugby school so I would like to thank her on behalf of Kilbracken for the exceptional job she has done.

Tina

Our resident matron, Tina, started working at Rugby in the 1990s for 12 years and then returned in 2017 as non-resident matron for Cotton, before moving to Kilbracken in 2018. Asking her about her job, she explained that her favourite aspect is all the fun that we, the Kilbracken boys, have enjoyed together, including our late evening gatherings in her office. Her best memories of working in Kilbracken are of summer term back garden Sundays when the "music is on, and the slip-and-slide is out."

What dramatic information can I exclusively reveal about Tina? Growing up, her favourite childhood movie was Disney's *The Jungle Book*. Aged 17, she went to college to do a secretarial



Tina, Kilbracken's beloved matron, with dog; Giggsy

business course but still hadn't quite decided what she wanted to do (so, luckily for us, fate and career choices moved her to Kilbracken). Tina is also a big Man United fan and is always keeping up to date with their latest games and scorelines (which recently have seen better days).

I knew that Tina had kindly helped with the appeal to look after Ukrainians looking for shelter when the war broke out three years ago, so I asked her for an update. "Liza and Nastya are still living with my son at our family home. They have returned home to Ukraine a few times to visit their families, but life is still difficult over there with power-cuts and water shortages added to the danger of the war. They are now very much members of our family, too. They still work in a hotel, but with their excellent English they help other Ukrainian refugees with translation and are studying accountancy. They are planning on moving out this summer to their own apartment but will stay close by. I can't imagine my life without my two adopted daughters."



Sachin

The Year So Far

Thinking back on the past few months, it seems a good time to reflect on some moments and memories that have stood out since September. My first one has to be whole School House singing rehearsals which were not only entertaining, but they also brought everyone together, making the preparation just as memorable as the performance itself. Another memory, that for many may be considered a nightmare, was House cross-country which despite the challenge, was great, competing in an event for the House with friends. Even the quieter evenings spent playing pool and darts in House (which are not everyone's stronger skills) became a great way to unwind after a productive prep time.



The new and improved Kilbracken



‘THE ECHO OF TWO SOULS’

THE WINNER OF THE D BLOCK POETRY PRIZE

EESAH ARIF

Our Horizon is muted, like the earth before words are written,
Two Birds, we are, strangers in flight one from the land of lost dreams,
One from a place that yearns for home,
Our feathers lay heavy with silence,
As the world around us burns softly like the sun's forgotten flame.

I gaze upon you, a pearl nested in night dark hair,
Your light guides me, like a lamp to the lost traveller.
A camel of the dunes, your neck holds the weight of burdens with elegance,
And I plunge into the ocean of thoughts that surround you
Endlessly drifting, with no shore in sight and no depths to touch.

Tell me, tell me, tell me what you think of when the horizon is silent.
Do you think of Yousef, or the date trees and honey back home?
Or the scent of jasmine, woven into those nights we left behind.
Has it faded like the taste of home,
Now a distant sweetness which slips through our fingers?

In this stillness between us, our breaths mingle,
The tender weight of your head rests on my shoulder,
Your laughter, a soft melody which fills the silence
Two birds entwined, as we share warmth and soft whispers.
Our hearts beat as one, bound by the quiet promise of return.

In the quiet, our heartbeat in sync beneath the stars,
Maktub*, sealed in the sky that watches over us.
Two birds, we are, bound by love and the pull of distant lands,
As the moonlight weaves stories of our dreams into the night,
Each sigh a promise, each glance a reminder of the journey ahead.
And in this Embrace, we bear the weight of our return-
To the soil that beckons, to the love that first held us close,
Where one day, our weary wings will find rest.

*Maktub**: Arabic: مكتوب translates to 'it is written' in English and is similar to the concept of destiny or fate.

QUOD 10 QUESTIONS

MRS AMY ZHANG



Mrs Zhang being presented with an award for 'Best Goalkeeper'

1. Where were you at school, and what is your happiest memory of school?

I was at Xi'an XingCheng School in the 1980s. My happiest memory of school was when I broke the provincial record for the women's under 18 400m sprint.

2. When you were younger, what job did you see yourself doing?

When I was younger, I dreamed of becoming an airline stewardess; older, I wanted to travel around the world.

3. Which is your favourite restaurant?

Haidilao Hotpot

4. What is your favourite film?

Wu Ze Tian - The First Queen of Tang Dynasty

5. How did you come to work at Rugby School?

I started in 2012 as a private Mandarin tutor.

6. What is your favourite book and how did you come to read it?

'The Soong Sisters', because they are the most influential ladies in modern Chinese history.



Terracotta Army line up ready for kick off

7. Do you have a pet? If not, what type of animal would you like as a pet?

We had some chickens before as pets, but, nowadays, I would love to have a goldfish, since they are a lot easier to take care of.

8. What is your favourite thing about Britain?

I like the British summer, as it's neither too hot nor too cold, and feels full of colourful trees and flowers.

9. What do you miss about China?

I miss Chinese food, especially from my hometown Xi'an, which is famous for its noodles as well as the Terracotta Army.

10. You're a goalkeeper, I hear?

I used to play football as a goalkeeper on weekends 20 years ago at Durham University. In fact, I was the only female player in the team.



Mrs Zhang, front row, third from right: 'V' for victory



Hope you enjoyed that!

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