



**Cambourne & District u3a**  
**Bulletin March 2026**  
**Issue No. 83**



**Happy Mother's Day**

## **A bit of Cambridge history**

**Way back in the olden days when women began to get some recognition of their ability and worthiness circa 1970's, Cambridge University, finally and universally, started to give equal standing to women undergraduates. The last three men only colleges, began the process of equal rights. It was all very positive, and in 1988 the first women undergraduates were welcomed at Magdalene college with the flag flying at half mast and male students wearing black armbands. 1988! What were they afraid of?**

**The term Town and Gown was something I only came aware of when arriving here at Cambourne. However, there is a book called the Spinning House by historian Caroline Biggs, which looks into the way Cambridge University in the 19<sup>th</sup> C had the power to lock up random women in their own private prison. This was to protect the well to do young gentlemen from temptation and ruination. The university had their own MP's, laws and power which they would exercise over the town. For instance, they controlled the licensing of alcohol and when theatres could open. They didn't want these young men to go to see loud and bawdy performances and women that might appeal, so in term time they were closed. Interesting, as when I think of Cambridge it is often because of the liberal and artistic footlights crowd, like Emma Thompson and Stephen Fry. But as the author says, Cambridge very much followed the monastic tradition. Fellows were not allowed to marry till late in the 19<sup>th</sup>C and guess who benefitted from their financial legacy when they died?**

**In term time the proctors at the colleges would roam the streets at night and 'arrest' any women out walking. The next morning the totally neutral Vice Chancellor would sentence them to 2 weeks in the Spinning house. Girls couldn't speak in their defence at this 'trial' only to say their name. If they tried to protest they got longer sentences. One very meek young woman was so accepting of her fate that she was released the same night. On her way home she was arrested again by the Bulldogs as they were called. Logic anyone?**

**Of course these were Victorian times when women came under a lot of restrictions. For instance if you were on a bicycle you had to wear a hat and gloves. Goodness knows what bare hands would have done to men. However, the gender and class reality that governed the Spinning House objectives, were that the women arrested were mostly**

poor and often came to Cambridge in search of work from the surrounding villages. It was only when some of the women's cases came to national attention did the practice finally stop. When Elizabeth Howe died after being released very ill after her 2 weeks detention, there were riots between Town and Gown. One man tasked with the job of assessing prisons said it was the worst he had ever seen.

When you walk round the science park at Maddingley all the road signs are dedicated to STEM pioneers. Among them you will find Ada Lovelace and Philippa Fawcett. Philippa went to Newnham college one of two opened for women in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, although they couldn't attain degrees. That didn't change till 1948. She was the daughter of a Cambridge professor and a suffragette and she became the first woman to attain the top score in the Cambridge mathematical Tripos exam. However, as a woman she could not be the top Wrangler as it was called.

All great institutions can have a murky past. Cambridge with its world wide reputation as a top university is no different. I'll finish with a poem written anonymously in 1890 praising Fawcett's Tripos achievement and mentioning two other great male mathematicians Cayley and Salmon.

tCurve and angle let her con and  
Parallelopipedon and  
Parallelogram  
    Few can equal, none can beat her  
    At eliminating theta  
By the river Cam.

May she increase in knowledge daily  
Till the great Professor Cayley  
Owns himself surpassed  
    Till the great Professor Salmon  
    Votes his own achievements gammon  
And admires aghast.

**Kath**

## EDITORIAL

We are indebted to Dave Nuttycombe for pointing out that the issue numbers have gone awry. Numbers into the 740s ( last few editions) would mean that Cambridge u3a had been around considerably longer than any other u3a. 740 editions would mean that the newsletter started over sixty years ago. Having caused the problem, I thought that the least I could do would be to find out where it all went wrong.

Issue number 73 in April 2025 was fine. The rot began in May which became issue number 734. I had added a 4 without deleting the 3! No guarantees that the issue number on the front of this issue is correct, but it's close. Calls for my resignation echoing around West Cambridgeshire will go unheeded!

Thanks to Lucy Purvey for her continued support and for the lovely poem in this edition.

Peter

## Mother's Day

When I have walked through many ways  
Great, lowly, false or true  
When on high clouds I drift away  
Or through the streets I sadly stray  
I'll always think of you

No matter what the world may do  
It can't turn me away  
From you who gave to me my life  
Who helped me conquer storm and strife  
And led me day by day

Without your love, without your help  
I don't know where I'd be  
And after all is said and done  
I must say thank you to my mum  
Who's done so much for me

Lucy Purvey

*(I wrote this poem for my mother when I was 17.)*

## MOTHER'S DAY

( Reproduced from the Hardwick Happenings with thanks to Chris Richards, guest editor for March 2026 )

Mother's day this year falls on March 15th, the fourth Sunday in Lent. Here are some interesting facts about Mother's day.

In ancient times the Greeks and Romans honoured mother figures with festivities dedicated to the goddesses like Cybele and Rhea. In the sixteenth century the tradition on Mothering Sunday was for people to return to their 'mother church', the main church or cathedral in their area. The pilgrimage provided an opportunity for people to reconnect with their faith and their community. It became a day for families to reunite and evolved into a celebration of mothers.

Later many domestic servants who often lived away from home were granted the day off to visit families. This rare time together led to the tradition of children presenting flowers or small gifts to their mothers as tokens of love and appreciation leading to a blending of the religious and personal celebration of motherhood, shaping the modern version of Mother's day that we know today.

Mother's day is celebrated around the World but when and how it is observed depends on cultural traditions, historical influences and even religious significance.

Happy Mother's day to al mothers and grandmothers. Have a lovely day on March 15th,

At our February meeting we welcomed a new Art Apper: Jules Hannaford, and hope that we have whet her appetite, so she will become a regular attendee.

We discussed "Cubism": did we like it (viz Marmite, 'love it or hate it'), did we understand it... and finally, did we appreciate it?

The concepts of Cubism were seeded by Paul Cezanne at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> / early 20<sup>th</sup> century: his later works included aspects of 'binocular vision' and how the human brain and eye actually see things, resulting in multiple perspectives instead of a single fixed viewpoint. We see this in his still life paintings and in his landscapes. In addition, he considered reducing and simplifying forms into basic geometric shapes - in his much-quoted letter of 15<sup>th</sup> April 1904 to the painter and art theorist Émile Bernard, who had met Cézanne in his last years, he wrote: "Treat nature according to cylinder, sphere, and cone and put the whole in perspective, like this that each side of an object, of a surface, leads to a central **point...**". Cezanne is now recognised as the Father of Cubism, and indeed the Father of Modern Art.



## **Passports, Assassins, Traitors and Spies**

*A dramatic talk by Martin Lloyd*

**20<sup>th</sup> March 2026**

**At 11.00**

**The Hub Community Centre  
Cambourne**



Thrill to a dramatic account of how the actions of a group of assassins brought about a change in the passport regulations; how the unmasking of a spy caused a modification in passport design and how, for one man, the passport itself turned into a killer. Martin Lloyd is an experienced and popular speaker. He travels throughout the country giving talks to all kinds of groups and associations and is very much in demand.



The meeting starts at 10.30 with coffee/tea being served. It is due to finish at 12.00 following the Q&A session.

We very much look forward to seeing you.

















