



Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge
2016 Visit
Hamaas Hassan



From Thursday 17th March to Friday 18th March, I had the opportunity to visit Sidney Sussex College in Cambridge, as part of an experience to understand varsity life. The trip entailed various programmes, held over the course of the two days, which aimed to give us an insight into the unique lifestyle of Cambridge University and its local area.

Thursday 17th:

Our day officially began at 7 am where we made the departure from West Hill School and set off for our visit. After a nauseating 4-hour journey, and several noisy complaints on my behalf, we soon arrived at Cambridge. As a group of students residing on the outskirts of Manchester, Cambridge in comparison was a wonderland, with archaic yet awe-inspiring structures and sublime scenery of freshly cut, uniform green grass and a scenic river.



Thereafter, we reached Sidney Sussex and having been welcomed by staff, our focus was to settle into the accommodation. We each received keys for our residential rooms, unpacked and regrouped at the Porters' Lodge. A 'Welcome and Introduction' presentation followed next with the Director of Admissions, Dr Kirsten Dickers. She introduced the talk by highlighting general information regarding Cambridge University, such as covering the fees, social/academic lifestyle and the courses available. Towards the end, we were able to ask questions and gain further insight about the collegiate system and the varied extra-curricular activities offered at Cambridge - all of which was immensely beneficial.

The rest of the day was based around a provisional programme, which followed:

- 15:15 - Tour of Sidney Sussex College and Q&A with undergraduate students
- 16:00 - Punting down the 'Backs' on the River Cam
- 18:00 - Dinner in College (Hall Court)
- 19:00 - Evening social activities (Quiz, etc.) (Knox-Shaw Room)

Throughout the course of the day, we were allotted moments of 'free-time' where we had the chance to explore the city for ourselves, and learn about Cambridge's weird and wonderful history. A particular highlight of mine was the anecdote about students climbing on the college buildings at night and committing several ingenious pranks. For example, Cambridge engineering students were able to get an Austin Seven on the roof of the Senate House, while others had managed to place Santa hats on various buildings, including all the four spires of King's College Chapel.

Punting, in particular, was an extraordinary experience. This involves going in a flat boat down the River Cam while someone at the back uses a pole to move the punt. This activity has existed since Edwardian times and has been largely popularised by Cambridge. It was a great opportunity for surveying various parts of the city while similarly learning about the different colleges.



Another fascinating thing that we came across was the Corpus Clock. It is a stunning piece of public art that celebrates the ‘grasshopper escapement’ mechanism invented by English clockmaker, John Harrison. The time itself is told by a series of illuminated slits cut into the surface and it works unexpectedly, to represent relative time and imminent death. Below the mechanism are these inscribed words: ‘mu(n)dus transit et concupiscentia eius’ - ‘the world passeth away, and the lust thereof’, emphasising the futility of this materialistic world.

Friday 18th:

After waking at the early hours of 6 am, our focus was to vacate our rooms, return the keys to the Porters’ Lodge and leave our belongings in the minibus. Subsequently, we gathered at the Knox-Shaw room to attend an academic taster session on ‘The causes and consequences of the Global Financial Crisis’. Despite its mundane title, the session was rather intriguing. The talk, led by Jenifer Varzlay, covered the basis of the economic struggles in 21st century America and elucidated the monetary system behind house loans. Hereafter, we went to an ‘introductory Law lecture’ at the Faculty of Law. The presentation covered the basics: the required GCSE grades, possible job careers and Law as a subject at Cambridge University. Next on the programme was the visit to the Whipple Museum of the History of Science. This held a collection of unusual scientific instruments, used in navigation, astronomy and surveying. Here we had the opportunity to learn trivial facts relating to the history of European and American science from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. This concluded our trip to Cambridge University and we soon made our departure at 4pm, making another nauseating journey back to West Hill School.

During my visit to Cambridge, I experienced many memorable moments and worthwhile opportunities. I was also enlightened with a better perspective on varsity life and this, therefore, has encouraged me to proceed into further education. My impressions of Cambridge University have greatly changed as a result of the visit and I am openly aware of the courses the University offers – and preferably look to apply in the foreseeable future. Furthermore, I learnt that Cambridge is based on the intellectual potential of applicants, regardless of a financial background – as is peddled as a stereotypical myth. Ultimately, I am able to understand the value of going to this University. On another note, I learnt that Cambridge takes pride over its prestigious grass, as it is exclusive to the Fellows of the colleges to walk on, and even as much as standing on the grass is well beyond bounds.