

Sidney Sussex College Cambridge, 2016 Visit: Jake Horsfall

Sidney Sussex College in Cambridge was founded in 1596, and has been host to a number of famed academic alumni, including Lord Protector of the Commonwealth, Oliver Cromwell – who now famously has his head buried beneath one of the flagstones of the College Chapel’s Antechapel. This was the College where we stayed during our trip to Cambridge from the 17th - 18th March 2016.

When we first entered Sidney Sussex, it became clear that it was a place steeped in tradition, with its ornamental structures and towering walls giving credence to the fictional view that the College holds – being the ‘alma mater’ of Sherlock Holmes, where he nurtured his talents of deduction, as well as the home of several Nobel laureates – C.T.R. Wilson, John E. Walker and Cecil Frank Powell, among others. With this in mind, it’s easy to consider studying at a prestigious institution like Sidney Sussex or in Cambridge in general to be something of an implausible ambition.



However, as we unpacked and settled into our rooms and really began to take in the atmosphere and spoke to the many students who gave us tours around the College grounds, it became increasingly clear that it wasn’t impossible to go to Cambridge. Those who become Nobel Laureates are people like us – whom, not judged on background or wealth, came to Sidney Sussex and took the opportunities given to them in order to become astoundingly skilled in their field of study, becoming world leaders and pioneers in the process.



This idea was emphasised by one of the students who took us on a tour around the College. Hailing from South-East London (which she described as ‘quite ghetto’) she commented on how she integrated perfectly well into Sidney Sussex’s friendly community, despite her initial preconceptions about the University being “very upper class”. She told us of how instead she found out that many of the students were very alike to her in background and those that were perhaps from a more wealthy background were invariably friendly and welcoming. This is in vast contrast to what many may believe having not studied or visited Cambridge in-depth.

While due to my trip to Oxford a few months ago, I certainly had knowledge of how the Oxbridge universities were populated with people from all walks of life, Cambridge really expanded my views on this. Talks with senior staff and professors at Sidney Sussex revealed that while academics at Cambridge come from all walks of life, they are united under one common banner – a consistent, unending drive to succeed and thrive in their respective fields. As such, it could be said that my experience at Cambridge has certainly widened my perception of one of the world’s top universities.

There are many memorable things I’ve learned as consequence of my visit to Sidney Sussex College - one of which will certainly affect my decision concerning whether to apply for entry to Cambridge. The Tripos system, allowing some students to ‘mix and match’ particular subjects in order to get a wider knowledge of a particular field may well be useful to me as I begin to consider my career options following sixth form and university. Aside from this, I’ve learned many amazing things concerning the culture and history of Cambridge University – from the buried head of the legendary Oliver Cromwell beneath Sidney’s Antechapel and the sheer effort and dedication of those who partake in the age-old Oxford-Cambridge boat race.

While not particularly useful concerning an application, the stories of students hauling an Austin Seven delivery van up onto the Senate House in central Cambridge in order to demonstrate their engineering prowess will certainly stick in my mind for years to come!

Overall, I would consider this trip to Cambridge invaluable to my personal development and my choices concerning post-16 education. Having a view of the world’s top universities unaffected by the opinions of those who have acquired their views through misconceptions about the nature of institutions like Oxford and Cambridge is incredibly important. This is mainly due to the fact that having a clear view on such issues allows me to make informed decisions concerning to which universities I should apply. I’m now able to understand that anyone with the work ethic and academic potential can fit in at Cambridge, regardless of background or wealth - and as such, those factors should never prevent me from applying. In addition, finding out about the Tripos system, the type of courses available at Cambridge and the supervision system of teaching has allowed to me realise that a further in-depth study of the University will be needed in the future in order for me to make a decision that best suits me and my future ambitions – whatever they might come to be.

