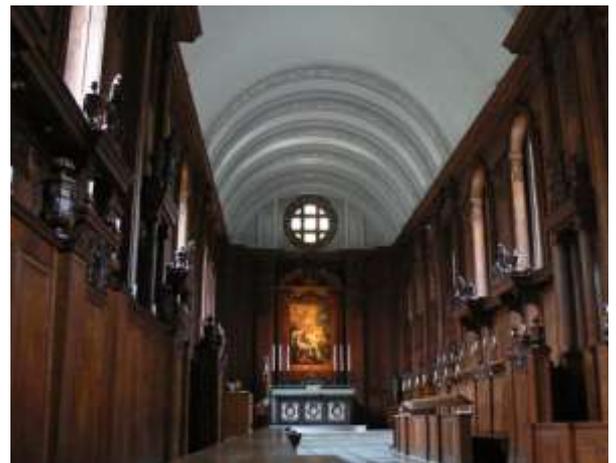
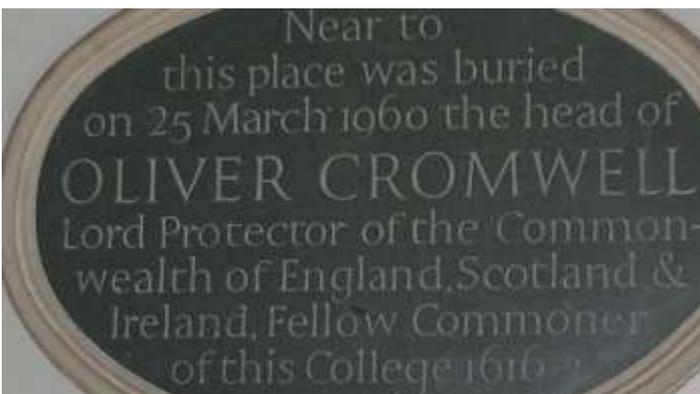


## Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge 2016 Visit: Thomas Curtis

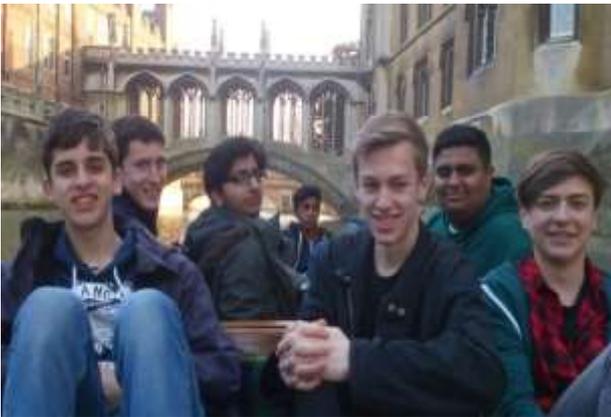
We set off on the 5 hour drive to Cambridge on the cold morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> March at 7:00pm, but despite the weather and time I still turned up to School before the gates were open, filled with excitement. I never really knew what to expect when we first started to drive down to Cambridge. I understood that it was one of the best universities in the country, if not the world, but I also believed the stereotypes that you hear being thrown around, with people making it out that the top universities were only for the top one per cent, with people from state schools not even being given a chance to learn there. When I first arrived at Cambridge, especially the entrance courts of Sidney Sussex, I started to feel that maybe these stereotypes were right. It was decorated with grand archways and golden crests, large sandstone walls surrounding the pristine grass.



However, once we had been given our introductory talk it became very clear that this was not the reality. The only reality that became clear was that you had to be educated and passionate to get into Cambridge University, with the point being constantly stressed was that they wanted students that would do well at their University and they stressed that money or upbringing does not play a role in this, but the factors that Cambridge said they looked for is the students that want to learn, and these tend to be the people that have shown a great interest in their subject, whether by reading around the subject you are interested in, or by relevant experience, such as in a hospital for those that are interested in studying Medicine. This point was then reinforced after the tour round the College, despite getting to see the grandeur and ornate nature of the grounds, which even included the burial place of Oliver Cromwell's head. The moment that this really clicked for me that it was just intelligence that was being looked for was when we met the student that was giving us the tour. I was expecting the stereotypical upper class, privately educated student, instead we got a guide we could relate to; she was from a state school, in a small borough of London, but she was still thriving in the Cambridge environment because she was hard working. She had joined the rowing team alongside her studies, but also applied to be the student rep, and it clearly demonstrated that your background was irrelevant to Cambridge and it was your future that they were interested in.



The first day ended with a “punt” down the river, and whilst I didn’t even know what punting was when I first read it on the itinerary, it was possibly the best moment on the trip. As we travelled down the river we were given a chance to reflect on what we had seen and heard that day with some beautiful scenery as a backdrop. It was also a chance for us to relax and enjoy a small taste of student life, which I personally found extremely enjoyable. The night also gave us a taste of student life, with us getting to see what the halls, which normally you wouldn’t be able to, by staying in them. But the second day also gave us a taste of the places to visit, such as the Whipple Museum of the History of Science and of places we would be studying in if we are lucky enough to get into Cambridge one day, with the talk about the financial crisis being one of my personal highlights as it showed how a Cambridge degree could lead to you going to amazing places in your career, from visiting the world to publishing vital reports.



I feel this trip was more than worthwhile as I gave me a perspective of not just Cambridge, but of university life that would be very hard to come by without a trip like this.