



Hills news

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alumni

Alumni news from Hills Road Sixth Form College.

Spring 2026



Jo Trump, Daniel Zeichner and Hills' new Principal Ali Kirkman.



“I’m so excited to work with our community to continue Hills Road’s outstanding legacy of sixth-form education.”

ALI KIRKMAN

New College Principal at Hills

We are delighted to announce that Ali Kirkman has been appointed the College’s new Principal from August. Ali is currently Vice Principal for Staff and Student Learning at the College and is also a former student.

An opportunity for current Principal, Jo Trump, to introduce Ali to the College’s local MP, Daniel Zeichner, arose during his visit to the College in January. Daniel is a regular visitor to the College and is always keen to stay in touch with what’s happening at Hills Road and in the sixth form education sector.

It was a valuable moment to introduce Daniel to Ali and to reflect on Jo’s leadership as she prepares

to hand over the reins later this year. Both Jo and Ali shared their enthusiasm about continuing the College’s strong partnerships across the city and for providing the best possible sixth-form education for future students in Cambridge and beyond.

Ali said, “It was a pleasure to meet Daniel as I prepare to take on the role of Principal later this year. I’m really proud of the work the College does for young people in Cambridgeshire and I’m looking forward to building on the strong foundations Jo has established, continuing Hills Road’s commitment to high-quality education and strong community partnerships.”

Outgoing Principal, Jo Trump said, “Daniel has been a great supporter of the Sixth Form College sector over the years. I know that he will continue to lend his voice and support to Ali as she takes the College forward into its new chapter. I am sure they will work together with city partners to establish how best to meet the needs and ambitions of Cambridge City for continued growth and to understand how Hills Road can help to meet that ambition. It’s also a huge pleasure to know that Hills Road will be in such good hands under Ali’s leadership and I’m sure it will go from strength to strength.”

Ali features in our 50th anniversary stories.

Read more

Former Head of Art and Design, Ted Coney, shares highlights from his 34 years at Hills Road.



What was Hills Road like in your early years?

I started work at the college in 1971, when it was the Cambridgeshire High School for Boys, knowing it would turn into the mixed sixth form college it is today. It was a relatively progressive school, but the facilities for Art were pretty grim and I only had one room, so I resolved to enlarge the department over time. It was an uphill battle in the early years.

What changed over the years?

When I retired in 2005, the department had grown to over 300 Art, Photography and Art History students, six teaching staff and four technicians. We had eight teaching studios, two resource rooms, and a Sculpture studio and garden. I'm still in contact with some of the staff and try to go back to the former staff party each summer to catch up with art colleagues who are still there.



Any memorable moments?

The department winning the Queen's Anniversary Prize for our community projects. It was a slightly surreal day accompanying art staff and students to Buckingham Palace to meet the Queen. Princess Anne was particularly friendly and invited us to see the Queen's Gallery. Prince Philip was less complimentary: "Not that terrible place," he said, remembering hitting his head on a hanging sculpture some years previously when visiting the department. At least he recognised us.

Which teaching experiences stayed with you?

Hills Road students were always at the top of their game and there wasn't anything they wouldn't do

to be successful. We got permission for one student to burn her sculpture on the field, which she had to record for the examiner. When I suggested she might need a ladder to get a better angle, she exclaimed "A ladder?! I've hired a cherry picker!" Sure enough, as we spoke a cherry picker drove into view.

Ted has continued painting and hosts a pop-up gallery at his home in Ely. He recently celebrated his 80th birthday with a three month exhibition, *Every Object Paints A Picture*, at the Norris Museum in St Ives. In the last three weekends of July 2026, Ted's garden gallery will be open as part of the Cambridge Open Studio's Ely Art Trail.

"Some of the most rewarding times were the art courses at Burwell House and Thornham Magna. Unfettered by bells and time constraints, students could work on their art all day. One time we had a French cabaret complete with Can-Can girls dancing across the room, which had to be sketched at lightning speed."
Ted Coney

Hills Road alumnus Prashant Shah: championing science innovation and community in Cambridge



Prashant Shah studied engineering and completed master's degrees before beginning his career at Accenture's strategy group in London, working across industry groups including music, consumer goods, financial services and big pharma.

He went on to found o2h, an integrated life science and technology company. Prashant is also an author and mentor on entrepreneur development programmes, whilst holding board positions at One Nucleus, Form the Future, Cambridge University Health Partners and the Judge business school biotech Alumni group. He holds NED positions covering Techbio/Biotech, UKSPA, and the Eastern Power House.

Having founded a number of micro-community groups including the AIM squad and Techbio Caucus, Prashant has organised biotech bootcamps, innovation conferences, and women-in-science open days (see also Cambridge Wide Open Week below).



Last year's Cambridge Wide Open Week.

"Being a student at Hills Road was a precious time in my life. Looking back, I grew in so many ways given the diverse range of activities on offer, including the Young Enterprise competition, which I led and in which we won the regional competition. The kind of experiences which perhaps contributed to me being an entrepreneur later in life. It was the perfect bridge to university, and it's great to see how this college continues to develop well-rounded students."

Prashant Shah, Class of 1990

Cambridge Wide Open Week, 11-19 June

CWOW, a week of life science driven by o2h, returns in June 2026 and brings the spirit and energy of Cambridge to Oxford and London.

It brings together investors, entrepreneurs, academics, policymakers, operators, biotech/techbio enthusiasts and local residents to explore the region's thriving life sciences ecosystem

and meet the people behind breakthrough innovations.

The community-driven initiative showcases the momentum of the cluster through curated investor sessions, exclusive lab and campus access, interactive discussions, community engagement and a summer garden party at Hauxton House,

o2h's incubator at the Mill SciTech Park.

Last year's event drew more than 4,000 participants across 25+ venues and 200+ sessions during a week-long celebration of Cambridge science and innovation.

Click to find out more or to register

Here you can read the stories of alumni from across the decades.



Tim (far left) in Zimbabwe, 1996.

“I nearly did not get ‘the County’, as the Cambridgeshire High School for Boys was colloquially known, but my form teacher, Norman Bonnet, advised my parents that it was the most suitable school for me. What sound advice that proved to be!

I entered the County in 1965. It proved to be an incredibly worthwhile experience. I made life-long friends, such as John ‘Jimmy’ Russell and Paul Green. Not only was the teaching first class, but the sports on offer – including rugby under the tutelage of ‘Taffy Thomas’ – was really fantastic.

Thanks to the County’s Masters, I obtained eight O-levels and studied Geography, Botany and Zoology at 6th Form, becoming a Senior Prefect.

I won full ‘Blues’ playing rugby for Cambridge

University in 1975 and 1976 at Twickenham, students from the school travelling to watch both games.

I qualified as a barrister in 1979 and was given a seat in what is now Keating Chambers. I took ‘Silk,’ being appointed Queen’s Counsel (now KC) in 1996. I have worked around the world and got to view Hills Road from an interesting new perspective as a Governor in 2000-2003.”



Phil Boulding
Class of 1972

“In 1985 an alum returned to Hills Road to talk about their gap year teaching overseas. That evening, I told my parents I was going to Africa to teach instead of going straight to university.

After my A levels, I headed to a rural school in Zimbabwe with Project Trust. I planned to return to study maths before making a fortune in the city. Some antelope ended that plan.

An encounter with a herd of impala made me realise I wanted to be an ecologist. Instead of maths, I studied biology at York. A PhD at Imperial College followed, as did jobs at the Zoological Society of London, Cambridge, Imperial College, and now Oxford as Professor of Zoology and head of department.

My research explores how predators influence ecology and evolution and can repair damaged ecosystems. I research ecosystems in the US, Trinidad, and Queensland, and much of my work uses maths skills honed at Hills Road. My second book *Predators: How Nature’s Killers Have Shaped Life on Earth* is set to publish next year and follows *A Little History of Everything from the Big Bang to You* published in 2025.”



Tim Coulson
Class of 1986

“While some details from Hills Road have faded, the feelings haven’t. I initially found it a little daunting; most students already seemed to know one another. But I soon made new friends and absorbed the collective drive to work hard. I remember the camaraderie in the common room listening to INXS, and the sweltering portacabin classrooms.



Vikki Bradney-Spencer,
Class of 1989

After A levels I studied Geography at the University of Nottingham, where I became Student Rag Director and later General Secretary of the Students’ Union. Running a limited company, managing staff and navigating stakeholders proved an invaluable lesson in leadership.

My career began on the Barclays Graduate Scheme, followed by roles at PwC and IBM. I moved from consulting into Marketing & Communications, eventually leading Corporate Communications across Europe. Today, I head Corporate Social Responsibility for IBM UK & Ireland, with a strong focus on education and skills, including championing the free learning platform SkillsBuild.

I live in East London, coach girls’ football, and serve as a long-standing school governor. Hills Road gave me the confidence to aim high – and the work ethic to thrive.”



Radha Balani
Class of 1999

“My time at HRSFC revolved around playing, studying, and watching sport – and getting involved in as many teams as possible. I was lucky to be there during Ann Hemming’s tenure, an exceptional teacher and coach whose energy and commitment created opportunities for everyone.

With sport at the centre of everything I did, Loughborough University was the natural next step. I studied Sports Science and English, then spent a year as the elected Athletic Union President. An injury – ironically sustained in an old girls’ match against the HRSFC team – ended my playing days.

But this opened a door to a career focused on sport driving both societal impact and business value. Since then, I’ve worked with the Football Foundation, Women in Sport, and London Sport. I’m now an Expert Partner at Think Beyond, and moved to New York in January 2023 to reopen and grow our North America office.

My job today didn’t exist when I sat in Ms Hemming’s Sports Studies class, but the passion for this industry certainly did. I’m grateful for how HRSFC nurtured that interest and set me on this path.”

Tap or click to find out how you can support the College!

“Hills Road was a profoundly formative experience for me, shaping most of my work since. I joined in 2001, just days before the September 11th attacks. My second year was spent organising protests against the Iraq war – getting to know much of the student body and many Cambridge University students.



Heather Allansdottir,
Class of 2003

It was a perfect place of alchemy between ideas and experience, leading me to study Political Science. I still draw upon this formative time in my work on space law and space sustainability, through my consultancy *Astrodottir* and my project *Decolonise the Cosmos*.

Last year, I was honoured to help with mock interviews for upper sixth students and was struck by how well-read, engaged and dynamic they were. I would have been very intimidated by their intelligence at their age!

I also still cherish my English lessons with the amazing Dr Hinchcliff, who introduced me to contemporary writers and encouraged me to apply to Oxford. Without that early support, I doubt I would have written my first novel. That, and my closest friendships of 20 years, are remarkable gifts for which I will always be grateful.”

“As an economist, I often look back on things to see what impact they had. I’m currently looking at the government’s planning reforms for early signs of impact on housing supply. I’ve investigated international trade agreements, covid-19 (who hasn’t?) and local authority cybersecurity.

These experiences trace back to Hills, where I first encountered economics and a lot of great people. The energy of the economics, maths and history teachers went a long way towards building my love for anything involving numbers.

I went on to study economics and took a master’s degree in its application to development policy analysis. I started my career in economic consulting in London – certainly a start at the deep end, but one I’d recommend to any budding economist. It’s a great place to be creative with the economist’s toolkit.

Now in the Civil Service and back in Cambridge, I regularly visit local schools to talk about routes into economics. My apprentice economist and I try to dispel the myths that economics is out of reach and must

lead to a career in finance. A wonderful thing about economics is that it can be applied to anything.”



Theo French,
Class of 2014

Would you like to feature in a future edition? Get in touch

Playwrighting, punting, and perseverance: how Tom found momentum against the current.

“In 2021, I moved to London to try to make a career as a playwright. I was fresh out of uni and, despite some small successes early on, I soon found myself crashing out of London unable to afford rent in a barren post-covid climate. I was unemployed and living with my parents – after two years I felt like I was making no advances.

But in April 2023 that all changed. Whilst training for a job as a tour guide on the river Cam, I received two notifications to say that I’d won the Royal Shakespeare Company 37 Plays Award and The Peter Shaffer Award. The first, a commission by the RSC to celebrate 400 years since Shakespeare’s first folio. The second, a year-long residency at Trinity College, Cambridge, funded by the Peter Shaffer Foundation. Suddenly, a career that felt dead in the water had a whisper of momentum.

Since then, my career has ebbed and flowed. I’ve been published with Methuen Drama and had two national tours, including my latest play *American Candy*, a comedy crime thriller set in an American Candy Store, which toured London, Oxford, Manchester, and Newcastle supported by Arts Council England. I’m not completely out of the water yet. I still have a part-time

“My wonderful English teachers Mr Binfield and Mrs Butcher introduced me to Beckett, whose Absurdist influence still echoes through my writing to this day. Likewise, Mr Fredman’s anarchic approach to Theatre Studies, to my delight, stretched my understanding of what theatre could be and, at times, what an audience can tolerate. For better or for worse, I’ve been testing my audiences’ tolerance ever since.”

Tom Murray, Class of 2018

Tour poster of Tom’s latest play.



job punting on the Cam, which seems an apt metaphor for the relentlessness of a career that won’t come easily... That feels like pushing ahead against a heavy current.

Although it’s fashionable for artists to say they were overlooked and misunderstood during their school years, I’d be lying if I claimed that was true for me. Hills Road was such a fantastically formative time in my development.

Upon graduating Hills Road in 2018, I was given the Old Cantabrigian Society Award for my contribution to theatre along with a very generous £50 cheque which I almost certainly didn’t spend on play tickets like I should have. This epitomises what Hills Road has always been for me – a brilliant source of support and encouragement. I will always be indebted to it. And if at any point they should decide to give me £50 again, I promise not to go straight to the pub.”

Eppendorf donates industry-standard equipment to Biology

Eppendorf, a leading international life science company, has generously donated equipment and consumables to the biology department. Students at the College, have been able to carry out DNA barcoding using newly donated industry-standard equipment thanks to the generosity of the leading life sciences firm.

Insights into what it's like working in a real-life lab were made possible thanks to the exceptionally generous donation of equipment and consumables from Eppendorf, whose UK headquarters are located in Stevenage, just under 30 miles from the College. As Eppendorf are a leading supplier to the life sciences industry, students are able to experience use of high-quality equipment found in real-life labs worldwide.

The donated equipment includes multi-channel micropipettes and a temperature-controlled microcentrifuge. Students will also be using a new PCR machine to create billions of copies of DNA within just a couple of hours as they amplify their DNA barcodes.

Head of Biology, Lizzy Bazley said, "This donation benefits our A level students as well as students who are taking Biology as an enrichment subject. This simply would not have been possible within existing resources."



A student using the Eppendorf equipment.

The equipment and consumables that have been donated will also be used by Biology A level students during their Year 13 studies of gel electrophoresis, DNA sequencing and profiling.

Biology at Hills Road is a highly popular A level and enrichment subject. In the 2025-26 academic year alone, over 800 students at

Hills Road will be able to benefit from the equipment in some way, followed by potentially thousands more in the years to come.



"We are so grateful to Eppendorf for enabling our students to have the chance to use industry-standard equipment."

LIZZY BAZLEY,
HEAD OF BIOLOGY



Karen Stephens, Biology teacher demonstrates the equipment to students.



Students interviewing Tim Winn, Head of Art & Design.

Students create film for nationwide campaign

A level Film Studies students are leading the way in sustainability through their work on a national film project for the Flight Free Schools campaign, which encourages schools to reduce air travel and explore more sustainable alternatives.

Four students – Oliver Bowman, Lena Popczyk, Kamila Matviienko, and Lara Williams – are producing a short film that highlights how schools can take meaningful steps toward lowering their carbon footprint.

"By reducing carbon emissions from flights, schools can make a positive difference and demonstrate that sustainability is something we all need to take seriously."

LENA POPCZYK, YEAR 12

Since 2023, Hills Road committed to ending all trips involving flights.

Working alongside the English, Media and Film department and Chris Graham, the College's Head of Sustainability, the students have taken charge of every stage of the process – from planning and filming to conducting interviews across the College. The project's creative direction, storytelling, and technical production have all been student-led.

During the production, the team collaborated with Anna Hughes, Director of Flight Free UK and organiser of the Flight Free Schools campaign, who visited the College on 6 February. The campaign aims to inspire schools across the country to pledge to avoid air travel and spark deeper conversations about sustainable travel choices.

The finished film – due for release later this year – will spotlight both the environmental impact of aviation and the practical ways schools can create lasting change through responsible travel decisions.

Collaborating with OCR on a National Sustainability Qualification

Chris Graham, Head of Sustainability, has worked with exam board OCR to develop the new Level 3 Certificate in Sustainability, a qualification equivalent to half an A level. Introduced nationally this academic year, the vocational course is fully funded in the same way as A Levels.

Chris authored teaching materials for the examined component, including presentations, teacher guidance and a scheme of work to support schools delivering the course nationwide. These resources are hosted on OCR's Teach Cambridge platform for approved centres. Alongside helping shape the qualification, Chris continues to support teachers through a national network, sharing guidance and best practice as the first cohort of students completes the course this year.

"The more young people who understand how environmental, social and political systems interact, the better equipped we are to respond to the challenges ahead."

CHRIS GRAHAM,
HEAD OF SUSTAINABILITY



Chris Graham.

Careers week inspires Year 12s

Year 12 students had a fantastic opportunity to explore their futures during this year's Careers week in January. The Careers team organised an impressive 38 online talks, all designed to help students discover potential university courses, career paths, and post-18 options.

Sessions covered a wide range of topics – from apprenticeships and the UCAS process to choosing the right

degree and preparing for university life. Students also enjoyed insights into specialist areas such as graphic design, sports rehabilitation and physiotherapy, ocean and earth sciences and careers in the Armed Forces.

Drawing a total of 4,166 attendances across all sessions, it was a brilliant demonstration of student enthusiasm and engagement. The week offered valuable guidance and inspiration,

helping them take their next steps with confidence.

Careers Advisor, Anita Irving said, "We were incredibly grateful to the many speakers who gave their time to speak during Careers Week. Students were fortunate to have such a wide choice of talks to attend, and we hope the experiences have broadened their horizons about the many opportunities available to them in the future."

Hills students celebrate Oxbridge success

Hills Road is thrilled to share that 70 of its students have received offers to study at the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge. Their chosen subjects span an impressive range – from Music, German, Classics and History of Art to Earth Sciences, Land Economy, Natural Sciences, Physics, Chemistry and Engineering.

This year's number is similar to previous years, with 35 offers from the University of Oxford and 35 from the University of Cambridge. The College is immensely proud of all the students' dedication and hard work.

This success also highlights the exceptional support provided by Hills Road's Careers team, who guide students through every stage of the process – from interview preparation and mock interviews to crafting standout personal statements.

Head of Careers, Bekki Clark said, "We were thrilled to see so many students receive Oxford and Cambridge offers this year and we wish them all the very best in their future studies. For those who weren't successful, we know that they will go on to do great things wherever they go."



The annual Employer Fair, organised by the Hills Road Careers department, took place on 3 March, welcoming a broad range of employers to the College. Students met representatives from local organisations, including Addenbrooke's NHS Trust, Cambridge City Council and Cambridge Consultants, as well as national and international companies such as Deloitte, ARM and AECOM. The event provided a practical opportunity to explore apprenticeships, work experience, part-time roles and year-in-industry pathways.

Find out what our super-talented Performing Arts students have been getting up to this term.



A showcase of dance

On 12 March, dancers took part in an exciting Showcase of their work. The programme included a rich variety of student choreography, ranging from beautiful lyrical solos, impressive jazz groups, to poignant and thoughtful contemporary work.

Y12 students had worked on a previous exam question, choosing from a Mondrian painting based on Broadway, an idiom or proverb, or the use of technology, which inspired a real range of dances, all performed with energy and intensity.

The Enrichment students chose a song that they liked and created some beautifully emotional work, and Y13 dancers performed some of their upcoming exam work. Their pieces were based on the Italian Renaissance, Textiles, and Assemblage Art, and they did not disappoint! Their work was full of choreographic integrity, innovative movement content, and insightful intentions brought to life through dynamic and charismatic performances.



“The recent Dance Showcase was a truly brilliant evening that once again demonstrated the remarkable talent and creativity of our students. The variety of performances, along with the polished stage production, ensured that every piece felt fresh and dynamic!”

ALI KIRKMAN, VICE PRINCIPAL



Booking is now open for *Machinal!*

Monday 20 April, 4.30
Tuesday 21 April, 7.30

Starring the fiercely talented Y13 company, don't miss Sophie Treadwell's ground-breaking expressionist masterpiece brought roaring into life at the Robinson Theatre!
Age 12+

[Book here](#)

12 SPORTS ROUND-UP



Men's Rugby team following their win over Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College.

This term's sport highlights



Women's volleyball team.

The Men's Rugby team made it through to the AoC Cup quarter finals, defeating Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form. Unfortunately, they lost to Hartpury College in the semi-finals 38-12.

The Hills Women's Basketball team kicked off their season with an exciting first win, edging out Long Road in a tense local derby. After a hard-fought match, the team secured a well-deserved 26-23 victory – a fantastic team effort all around!

The Men's Basketball have made



Netball team.

it through to the semi finals where they play Myerscough College in the Dynamik KO Cup.

The Netball first team also shone this term, dominating Sigma Sixth from Essex in a high-scoring clash to claim an impressive 56-20 win.

In Hockey, the Men's team continued their strong cup run with a win over Truro in the AoC Cup quarter-finals. They went on to face Peter Symonds in the semi-finals, but lost 0-5.

AoC Sport National Championships

Our Hills Road sports students have been hard at work this term, training and preparing to proudly represent the East region at the upcoming AoC Sport National Championships next term. Each April, Hills students travel to Nottingham to take part in this national event, where colleges from across the UK compete for

regional honours. Qualification for the Championships takes place through regional tournaments held during the autumn term, with only the top college teams and individual athletes going on to represent their regions.

This year, we're thrilled that 66 Hills Road students have earned

their place at Nottingham. They will be competing across eight sports: Badminton, Cricket, Cross Country, Mixed Hockey, Table Tennis, Tennis, Men's Volleyball, and Women's Volleyball. We wish all our athletes the very best of luck as they prepare to showcase their skill, teamwork, and dedication on the national stage!