

ISSUE 22 | 2024

# LANDMARK



THE MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF ROYAL AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY

RAU.AC.UK/ALUMNI



## *Inside this edition*

HM King Charles III, Royal Patron | Celebrating RAU | Global Partnerships | New £5.8m Land Labs underway | Entrepreneurial alumni





# THE RURAL REPORT



With a new government in place, what is next for the countryside?

The next edition of The Rural Report will include the latest research, news and updates to support you and your business.

We ensure our clients are always at the forefront of what's possible. Together, we're shaping a countryside for the future.



Launching in the Autumn, sign up via the QR code to receive your copy.



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LANDMARK | ISSUE 22 | 2024

Welcome to the 22nd issue of *Landmark*, the annual magazine for alumni and friends of the Royal Agricultural University. Dedicated to celebrating the outstanding achievements of our alumni, students and staff, *Landmark* delivers the latest news and developments from the University, highlights the innovative research being undertaken by RAU staff, and showcases the continued success of our graduates throughout the world.




We value the input of our readers, so please continue to send your stories, news and suggestions to [alumni@rau.ac.uk](mailto:alumni@rau.ac.uk).



**< On the cover**  
 Professor Peter McCaffery, Vice-Chancellor, with His Excellency Engineer Ali Saeed Bin Shaheen Al Suwaidi, Chairman of the Sharjah Department of Public Works, and Dr Almina Al Marzouqi, Vice-Chancellor for Student and Branch Affairs, University of Sharjah

### YOUR DETAILS

If you have moved house or job please let us know. You can update your details via the website or email: [alumni@rau.ac.uk](mailto:alumni@rau.ac.uk)

-  [facebook.com/RAUalumni](https://facebook.com/RAUalumni)
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## Welcome from the Vice-Chancellor

A distinctiveness of the Royal Agricultural University is, of course, our royal connection. British sovereigns have served as Patrons of the RAU throughout our 179-year history and I am delighted to report that – further to the review of royal patronages following the King’s accession to the throne – the King’s gracious acceptance of our patronage means this tradition will continue.

We are also acutely conscious of all our historic attributes as we seek to be as societally relevant in the future as we have been in the past.

We came top-of-the-class, for example, in this year’s Knowledge Exchange Framework assessment, where we exceeded our peers in support for graduate start-up businesses, CPD provision, public and community engagement, working with the public and voluntary sector, and local growth and regeneration, where we contribute over £50m to the local and regional economy.

We were also pleased to submit our application for outline planning permission (all 4,000 pages of it!) for our £100m Innovation Village @RAU project – which is projected to contribute a further £50m to the regional economy – to Cotswold District Council in April.

We “put shovels in the ground” on 4 June for our new £5.8m Land Laboratory Teaching Centre, which is due for completion in March 2025.

Globally we have a new partnership with Sharjah to deliver a programme in sustainable agriculture aimed at developing leadership capacity in the Emirate to help it meet the landmark international commitments agreed at COP28 in 2023. This development means that the RAU has co-founded two brand-new universities in the past 18 months – the University of Al Dhaid, Sharjah and the International Agricultural University, Tashkent, Uzbekistan. These are significant milestones in the RAU’s history – no other UK university can lay claim to such an achievement.

In China, our Joint Institute at Qingdao Agricultural University has been recognised as a Shandong Distinguished Professional College, meaning our provision is of the highest quality placing us in the top three per cent of the 1,800+ colleges in Shandong province.

Given we are the leading specialist university for research in England, as well as the only one accredited as a national centre of excellence by the Institute of Enterprise and Entrepreneurs, the RAU is well placed going forward even if the higher education environment – like that of the land-based sector – is more challenging than ever.

**Professor Peter McCaffery BA (Hons), MSc (Econ), PGCE, PhD, CMgr CCMI, FCIPD, FRSA, CF Vice Chancellor**



Image: Marcus Ginns

## Message from the Chair of Governing Council

On the RAU campus today, a seven-acre Zerodig site abounds in delicious fresh vegetables, developing new skills and products that are vital for our future.

For innovation has always been at the heart of the RAU. For many decades it was focused on the imperative of the time, increasing agricultural production. I love the stories of Bobby Bouffleur’s recipes for high milk-yielding cows, as he built the RAU’s reputation for being at the forefront of new ideas.

Now, of course, we need different outcomes from land, and once again the RAU is pioneering new ways of teaching, thinking and researching – this time for sustainability. In pursuit of this goal, our research community is expanding, and our graduates are making a difference in practice, in professions or further education.

Indeed, our whole RAU community is a powerful force for good nationally and globally, with many alumni playing leading roles shaping our future. We congratulate in particular Abi Reader (2005) who was Farmers Weekly Farming Champion of the Year and Kate Drury (1996) who won Women in Innovation, run by Innovate UK and UKRI. There are many more of you out there, so please keep us in touch with what you’re doing.

Given our history, it’s no surprise that innovation is at the heart of our future plans, and alongside our vision for the Innovation Village we are building entrepreneurship into everything we do, bringing together those participating in academic, practical and experimental work focused on the future of the land. We’re proud to be a progressive, outward-facing university with a growing global community and a globally critical mission.

**Dame Fiona Reynolds DBE, Chair of Governing Council**

### Meet the new Alumni Relations & Development team

The Alumni Relations and Development Office aims to develop long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with alumni, supporters and friends, and to help secure philanthropic support for the RAU’s strategic development.

As Head of Development and Alumni Relations, Julia Jenkins has responsibility for the office and managing the RAU’s growing programme of engagement with its alumni, friends and well-wishers.

Former RAU student Malvina Winston has joined the team as Alumni Engagement Officer. Malvina has responsibility for

alumni events, keeping alumni in touch with the latest news and helping to grow the Cirencester Fund. Melissa Spagnoli has joined the team as Development Office Administrator. Melissa has a background in marketing and event planning. She is eager to support university activities and events and the upkeep of our alumni database. The team is supported by a Development Committee chaired by the Vice Chancellor, Peter McCaffery with representatives from across the University and is part of the wider External Relations Directorate, headed up by Will Marsh.



Left to right: Melissa Spagnoli, Julia Jenkins and Malvina Winston





## Palace confirms royal patronage

FOLLOWING the major review of more than 1,000 royal patronages, the RAU was delighted to receive confirmation from Buckingham Palace that His Majesty King Charles III had accepted the Patronage of the RAU. Originally founded as the Royal Agricultural College in 1845, the RAU has had monarchs as Patrons throughout its existence and had been waiting to hear the outcome of the review since the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, its Patron since 1952.

## Research Degree Awarding Powers

The University is applying for Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP), which will allow it to grant research degrees such as doctorates for the first time since the University's formation. Currently, postgraduate degrees are validated by the University of Gloucestershire. The process involves a rigorous and in-depth assessment by the Office for Students.

Professor Mark Horton, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research & Enterprise, said: "Gaining the powers to award research degrees will symbolise a key milestone in the development of the University and enable us to continue to provide students with access to leading academics, demonstrating our ability to develop new areas of knowledge and practice. My hope is that the research that we do at the RAU will help make the world a better place for humans and animals in the uncertain future of climate change and biodiversity loss."

### LAND LABS GETS STARTED

Work has now started on the RAU's new Land Labs project. It will provide the RAU with new laboratory facilities across Frank Garner and the Support Services Building, and an interactive Technology Enhanced Active Learning (TEAL) space on the site of the existing computer room by the Atrium café. This comes after the University won £5.8m of funding from the Office for Students (OfS), the maximum amount of funding available in the OfS's first capital bidding round.

## Honorary Fellow awards

In a special ceremony, presided over by RAU Vice President Lord Bathurst, Wiltshire organic farmer and Chief Executive of the Soil Association, Helen Browning, and Jeremy Moody, Secretary and Adviser to the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers (CAAV) have been awarded Honorary Fellowships of the RAU, the University's highest honour.

An Honorary Fellowship was also presented to Professor Xinmin Liu, former President of Qingdao Agricultural University (QAU), at an official ceremony during a delegation visit. QAU is one of our partner universities in China, and the visit to the RAU coincided with the fourth anniversary of the opening of the RAU's Joint Institute for Advanced Agri-technology at QAU.



## Excellence rewarded

RAU Rural Land Management student Victoria Menzies has been awarded the 2023 Pilkington Farms Partnership Prize, which covers the winning student's final year tuition fees, for being the top performing student in the first two years of her course. Created by RAU alumnus Richard Pilkington in 2021, the annual award is designed to reward academic performance and to celebrate excellence and innovation in real estate and land management.

### LEADING THE WAY

The RAU's Dr David O'Connor and Professor David Main are included in prestigious lists recognising the world's leading scientists at the very top of their profession.

The RAU recently welcomed a high-level delegation from the United States Government who visited as part of a fact-finding trip to study the present state of British agriculture, food and drink.

## Delegation from Sharjah visits the RAU

Following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the RAU and the University of Al Dhaid in the Emirate of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, a high-level delegation from Sharjah visited the RAU. As well as knowledge exchange sessions with academics, the visitors enjoyed a tour of the RAU campus, a formal lunch, traditional English afternoon tea, and a tree-planting ceremony to commemorate the partnership.

In June 2024, Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter McCaffery and other senior RAU staff travelled to the Emirate of Sharjah in the UAE for the official opening of the new University of Al Dhaid.

*See page 10 for all the details*



### New collaboration with Royal Holloway

The RAU has agreed to collaborate with Royal Holloway, University of London, on science and agriculture research projects and to develop knowledge exchange opportunities, as well as sharing teaching and expertise to help develop solutions to enhance the impact of food security research at both institutions.

### Top marks for industry partners

The RAU has scored top marks for its work with industry and the public sector in the 2023 Knowledge Exchange Framework, a survey of 139 English universities and institutes. Half of the University's activities are ranked as very high or high engagement with industry and the public sector and the RAU was particularly commended for its graduate start-ups and professional training.

The RAU has been awarded Silver in the 2023 Teaching Excellence Framework, a national scheme run by the Office for Students which aims to encourage higher education providers to improve and deliver excellence in teaching and learning. The RAU student experience and student outcomes were commended as being of "typically very high quality".



## Charlie Savage wins business awards

RAU Restaurant Manager Charlie Savage has scooped the Rising Star award at the annual Gloucestershire Live Business Awards, and Employee of the Year at Cirencester Business Awards, organised by Cirencester Chamber of Commerce. Charlie, who joined the RAU as a Catering Assistant in 2015, manages a team providing all the University's front-of-house services for students and staff, as well as managing the catering and service for more than 12,000 corporate and commercial visitors a year.

### And finally...

A project to digitise a unique historic collection of more than 10,000 dried and pressed plant specimens dating back more than 200 years, which is housed in the RAU's laboratories, has featured in the prestigious "And finally..." slot on ITV's national News at Ten.

*See page 16 for more details*



# Building better places

The transformation of the University campus has begun with an exciting array of development projects in the pipeline.

The university campus is benefiting from significant investment under the umbrella of our new Estates Strategy and Masterplan. Work is well underway to redevelop the Frank Garner lecture block, Cedar Lodge, and the existing gym, to create new state-of-the-art land laboratories and academic accommodation to the value of £6m.

The new facilities will include microbiology, geospatial and wet labs fitted with the latest equipment and technology, and will also improve the environmental performance of the estate. This investment will support a broad range of our undergraduate and postgraduate courses, as well as our research, with work due for completion in March 2025.

In addition, Cedar Lodge is going through a major transformation to provide our academic faculty with new office and meeting space in the heart of the campus, which can be accessed easily by our students. Work on the new Technology-enhanced Active Learning (TEAL) space is also underway and due for completion by September 2024, in time to provide our arriving students with the best possible on-campus learning environment.

The wider campus estate is also benefiting from enhancements, particularly to our sporting provision. New sporting partnerships have emerged over recent years, most

The facilities will include meeting areas and laboratories



notably with Swindon Town Football Club, which has moved its full elite academy programme to the RAU.

These partnerships have allowed us to invest in the quality of our pitches for rugby, football and lacrosse. There is also a newly allocated Sports Performance Hub, designed to support elite-level teams, where captains and coaches can meet and use touchscreen technology to plan for matches. There is a food station within the Hub to help meet the specific nutritional requirements of the teams as well as social space for players to relax in between training sessions.

There will also be an RAU Wall of Fame in the Performance Hub celebrating the sporting achievements of our alumni – which include Olympians, Paralympians, British Lions, and Grand National winners. **L**



an exemplar and itself an innovator in terms of sustainable design, materials, energy use and generation. This will act as a unique benefit to attract the right tenants and businesses and drive demand. The outline application has very strong sustainable design and performance commitments, which include Passivhaus, BREEAM Outstanding, WELL Building Standard, Biodiversity Net Gain and Building with Nature.

The RAU has worked with the award-winning architects Architype, as well as Ridge and Savills, to develop the scheme, which is anticipated to generate an additional £50m Gross Value Added (GVA) per year for the regional economy and create in excess of 1,000 new jobs.

Upon achieving planning consent, the focus for the Innovation Village project will be on phase 1 of the development: a Research and Innovation Centre with an estimated development cost of £22m, for which funding will be raised externally. **L**

For more information contact [innovation@rau.ac.uk](mailto:innovation@rau.ac.uk)

# Breaking new ground

The RAU's planned Innovation Village will be a state-of-the-art, sustainable home for pioneering research and industry.

Looking to the future, the Innovation Village at the RAU forms a key part of the University's long-term Estates Strategy. An outline planning application was submitted to Cotswold District Council in June 2024 to create 27,600m<sup>2</sup> of mixed-use development space on the 29-acre 'triangle' site of the campus.

The application proposes a cluster development that will accommodate organisations and expertise from academia, industry and policy-making in order to generate real-world solutions to the global challenges of food production, climate change, and land health. It aims to be of international significance, and will be a first for the UK and a key component of the nation's research and innovation infrastructure.

In order to attract the right partners to the Innovation Village, the development needs to be

The site will be designed to protect and enhance biodiversity and to complement the local landscape





# Sharjah and the RAU forge sustainable partnership

The RAU's collaboration with the new University of Al Dhaid in the UAE will focus on technological developments to address food security and maintain animal health.

His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah in the UAE and President of the University of Al Dhaid, has signed a collaborative agreement with the Royal Agricultural University.

This agreement entails joint efforts in developing a Bachelor's programme in Sustainable Agriculture and engaging in innovative research initiatives related to agriculture at the newly created University of Al Dhaid. The University is a non-profit institution in the Arab region specialising in agriculture, environment, food, and livestock, and includes a wheat, vegetable and dairy farm, as well as a seed bank and laboratories. The collaboration will extend to faculty and student exchange programmes for training and skills development, and sharing of knowledge.

His Highness expressed gratitude towards the RAU for its continuous support, which will greatly contribute to the University of Al Dhaid's education and research progress in the agricultural domain. He praised the esteemed reputation of the RAU globally and acknowledged its extensive experience, making it both an intellectual and practical leader in the field.

The RAU was chosen as a partner because of its ability to bridge theory with practice and



Left to right: Associate Director of Business Development Dr Esther Wilkinson, Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter McCaffery, Chief Operating Officer Graham Pollard, and Pro Vice-Chancellor Professor David Main visited Sharjah

promote innovation, contributing to addressing global challenges in food and environmental security. The University of Al Dhaid's Sustainable Agriculture degree programme has been developed from existing RAU programmes with a focus on the food security needs of the region and an emphasis on identifying and advancing technological solutions to the key challenges of climate change and sustainable crop and livestock development.

Professor Peter McCaffery, Vice-Chancellor of the RAU, said: "A desert setting is a formidable environment in which to produce food and maintain animal health. We are delighted to be working with the Government of Sharjah in a unique collaboration that will enhance food security and animal welfare as the region responds to climate change."

The RAU has a significant and growing number of international university partnerships, building on its global reputation in agriculture, environment and food sustainability. The RAU is a founding partner of the International Agriculture University (IAU) in Tashkent, Uzbekistan and has many long-standing relationships in China, including with Qingdao Agricultural University and Shandong Agricultural University.

As well as offering the opportunity for collaborative teaching and student and staff exchanges, this relationship will also support our interdisciplinary research endeavours at the RAU with the surplus generated from our global partnerships invested into supporting the University's strategic objectives. **L**

# The student learning experience

The University is committed to ensuring a great experience and outcome for all our students.

We aim to ensure that each student coming to RAU receives an engaging experience in how they learn and what they learn, and that they graduate with the skills and knowledge they need to progress into employment or further study.

During the last academic year, the RAU received a glowing endorsement of our approach through the national benchmarking exercise, the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), which is a requirement by the Office for Students for all universities in England. The RAU was pleased to receive a silver ranking overall, with specific commendation highlighting the quality of our student experience and student outcomes.

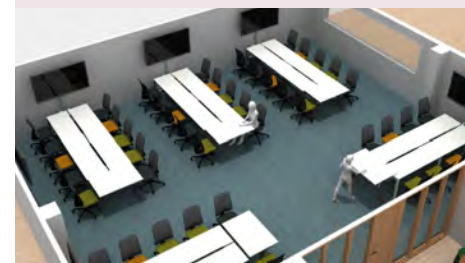
This was reinforced by the 2024 Graduate Outcomes Survey where the RAU outperformed the national average of graduates going on to be employed in highly skilled jobs 18 months after graduating. It is particularly pleasing to see the hard work of our students and staff has led to a trend of year-on-year

improvements in this regard.

An example of how we strive for continuous improvement is through our annual Learning, Teaching and Assessment conference that, this year, was held in June for colleagues and delegates from across the UK and the globe. The event showcased internal and external expertise, with the theme 'Inclusive pedagogies and assessment: Creating a sense of belonging and facilitating student success and retention'.

We have also been taking steps to improve the learning environment in the classroom and through practical sessions. We are investing in a Technology-enhanced Active Learning (TEAL) room that represents a significant milestone for the RAU in providing a more contemporary student-centred and student-led learning space. Through the RAU's Food and Farming Strategy, we are incorporating more field trips, practical demonstrations and applied learning, through trusted partners and through our own farms and food production methods.

A fitting end to this academic year was our first Student Academic Awards event, which celebrated some of our top achievers throughout this past academic year. Awards were presented to students in several categories that included Excellence in Education; Excellent Educational Engagement; and Top Achiever. **L**



The TEAL room will be a student-led space

## OUR STUDENTS' UNION PRESIDENT, ALEXANDRA GODFREY



Our students recognise the importance of expertise when they elect their SU President; the coming year will be my third

term on the Students' Union. A great President can make significant improvements to the academic side of the student experience.

Delivering quality student feedback is a key aspect of my role, to create and add value for our students. I believe all staff have a responsibility to improve the student experience within their respective remits and I work collaboratively with various teams across the University to achieve this.

During my term as President, I will continue my efforts to develop academic feedback pathways to ensure all students feel supported and enjoy their studies. This year, I have completed a BSc (Hons) Agriculture degree and will be likely continuing my studies by undertaking a Masters in Rural Estate Management at the RAU.

As part of the course, I completed research into the relative influence of grassland management practices on soil properties and thoroughly enjoyed the research process. With degrees covering Agriculture, Rural Land Management and three years of Students' Union experience, I will be leaving the RAU with the best of all worlds!

Outside of university, I'm a true country bumpkin, partaking in many country sports, but will be the first to admit I need to work on hitting the clays!



# RAU announces winners of the first *Kaleb Cooper Agriculture Bursary*

*Clarkson's Farm* star hopes annual bursary will encourage more young people from non-farming backgrounds into the industry.

Two RAU students who may have struggled to get into the industry as they are not from an agricultural background have had a helping hand from none other than Kaleb Cooper of *Clarkson's Farm* fame.

In December, Caitlyn Bartlett and Caitlin Oxton were announced as the inaugural winners of the RAU's Kaleb Cooper Agriculture Bursary after a selection process involving both RAU staff and Kaleb himself.

To mark the announcement, the students joined Kaleb at Cirencester Livestock Market to help him buy two calves to join the herd at his farm near Chipping Norton in Oxfordshire.

Speaking after the market Kaleb said: "It's been an amazing day. It's been really exciting to have Caitlyn and Caitlin with me, to introduce them to their first cattle market and actually buy their first cattle. Caitlyn bought a calf for me and they both had a bid - to see the smile on their faces was great."

"I didn't start bidding on cattle until I was 24 because I didn't have the confidence. If I can give them the confidence at 19 or 20 then that's what investing in people and future farming generations is all about. This is just the start for them and I hope they enjoy farming as much as I do!"

Caitlyn, 19, from Brothertoft, near Boston in Lincolnshire, is about to start her second year studying for a BSc in Agriculture. She said: "Coming from a non-farming background, it can be challenging to enter an industry that is often based on what contacts you have."



**Below:** Bursary winners Caitlyn Bartlett (middle) and Caitlin Oxton (right) at Cirencester Livestock Market with Kaleb Cooper (left)



"This bursary will not only help me to gain further vital industry experience and knowledge through the work placement with Kaleb next summer, but will help open up many different opportunities for me in the future within the agricultural sector."

The annual bursary, which is open to RAU undergraduate agriculture students, provides recipients with £3,000 as well as the opportunity to apply for a work placement with

either Kaleb or one of his industry partners.

Caitlin, 20, from Clifton in Bedfordshire, completed her placement with Kaleb earlier this summer. Having previously studied at Shuttleworth

“ This bursary will support students who want to pursue an agricultural career ”

Agricultural College, she is about to embark on her final year of a BSc Hons in Applied Farm Management at the RAU.

Caitlin said: "Support like this is invaluable and will allow me to accelerate my plans whilst gaining relevant knowledge and experience in the sector. Before enrolling at Shuttleworth, I had no direct experience in agriculture but completing that course, and now studying for my degree at the RAU, has made me realise that this is the industry I want to work in."

"Wanting to pursue a career in something that you've never had any involvement with can be quite daunting but opportunities like this bursary give you that extra support to get going. I am really looking forward to what the future might bring and am extremely grateful to have been given such an opportunity."

A self-made agricultural entrepreneur and farm contractor, Kaleb doesn't come from a farming background but has been working in and around farms since he was a boy and is a passionate supporter of UK agriculture and creating opportunities for young people to enter the sector.

Kaleb said: "Farming is who I am. I feel lucky that I knew my path from such an early age and I want to help spread that passion and drive."

"Encouraging the younger generation into agriculture has always been so important to me and this bursary will support students who want to pursue an agricultural career or who might be struggling to get into farming."

"Having come from a non-farming background myself, I believe agriculture can be for anybody. I know there's so much potential for young people to have brilliant careers in agriculture. The industry should be open to all, especially those who have financial difficulties or are new to farming." **L**

**For more information about the RAU's Kaleb Cooper Agriculture Bursary, visit [www.rau.ac.uk/student-life/finance-scholarships-and-bursaries](http://www.rau.ac.uk/student-life/finance-scholarships-and-bursaries)**



# THE FUTURE OF FARM RESEARCH

Farmers are increasingly shaping the future of agricultural science.

BY PROFESSOR TOM MACMILLAN, ELIZABETH CREAK CHAIR

The past half-century has seen astonishing advancements in agricultural science, but also a growing distance between the people doing that research and the farmers at the sharp end. Science has often been ‘done to’ farmers, rather than ‘with’ or ‘by’ them. This has seen more research effort go into new

products that can be sold to farmers – kit, varieties, medicines, chemicals, services – than into better ways of farming. It has sometimes seen time and money being spent on projects that don’t work in practice, and it has left many farmers feeling left out.

But this is starting to change. The challenges facing farming

right now, from climate change to market disruption, call for a new approach. Rather than just being beneficiaries or buyers of agricultural technologies, farmers are becoming recognised as experimentalists and innovators. Through initiatives such as the Innovative Farmers network and the British On-Farm Innovation Network (BOFIN), farmers and growers can link up with researchers to carry out hands-on, practical farm trials backed up by scientific rigour. The Farmer-Led Innovation Network, founded by the RAU, brings

together a growing community of such initiatives. Our joint Centre for Effective Innovation in Agriculture quietly but persistently supported Defra and Innovate UK to adopt such approaches at scale.

Involving farmers at every stage of the research process is becoming commonplace. Funders want to know how projects will engage farmers and other stakeholders in the design and trial stages, not just in how the results will be disseminated.

Farmers are also helping to set the research agenda. This year, on behalf of the Agricultural Universities’ Council (AUC), we asked farmers what challenges they are facing and where they want researchers to focus their efforts. We teamed up with a wide range of farming groups, from the NFU to the Landworkers’ Alliance, to make sure we heard from farmers with diverse systems and priorities.

Farmers are also playing a critical role in shaping cutting-edge technologies that threaten to disrupt traditional agriculture. A team led by the RAU has just published research exploring what a future with cultured meat might mean for farming. We held focus groups with farmers up and down the country and from all different agricultural sectors, and then we partnered with nine case farmers. We asked them how they might adapt their business if it were given the green light and assessed the economic and environmental impact of some of the ideas this brought up.

The farmers who spoke to us had concerns about cultured meat that went far beyond simply seeing it as the competition. They worried about public health, the consolidation of our food system, and the knock-on effects for rural life. They also raised unintended consequences, for example for environmental footprint of dairy or for nutrient management. However, some of the farmers could also see opportunities, such as supplying ingredients, or adapting

their business to produce cultured meat on-farm. Another potential synergy would be to use agricultural by-products, such as oilseed rape meal or even hoof and horn meal, as raw materials for cultured meat, which our early findings suggest could be cheaper and have a lighter environmental footprint than the inputs currently being used.

Clashes over issues such as cultured meat or net zero can make scientists and farmers seem worlds apart. Yet in practice, there is not only ample shared ground, but common cause to be found among people promoting competing visions of the future of farming and food. Brokering conversations between researchers and farmers, on the farmers’ terms, has never been more crucial. **L**

*For a copy of the report please scan the QR code below, or go to [www.rau.ac.uk/research/research-at-rau/cultured-meat-report](http://www.rau.ac.uk/research/research-at-rau/cultured-meat-report)*

“Farmers are playing a critical role in shaping technologies that threaten to disrupt traditional agriculture”

RAU students visiting Planton Farm, a regenerative farm in Shropshire set up by Clare Hill





# Historic herbarium to be digitised

Dried plant specimens with links to Charles Darwin could help today's ecologists tackle environmental issues.

A collection of more than 10,000 dried and pressed plant specimens that dates back more than 200 years is being digitised to create an historical record of plant biodiversity in the UK that will help to teach the ecology students of today and hopefully aid nature's recovery.

The unique herbarium, housed in the RAU laboratories, is currently in its original delicate paper format but is being digitally photographed, recorded, and catalogued by RAU staff, students, and volunteers with the help of funding from Gloucestershire Naturalists' Society and the RAU's own Cirencester Fund.

The dried plants, which are almost all UK species with many collected in and around the Gloucestershire area, are mounted on around 4,000 sheets and predominantly date from the 1820s to the 1920s, with some later specimens added between 1950 and 1970. There is also an as-yet-unrecorded collection of moss, algae, and lichen.

RAU Associate Professor in Ecology and Agro-ecosystems, Dr Kelly Hemmings, who is leading the project, said: "Natural science

organisations are recognising the immense value of historic herbarium collections for tackling current environmental issues. Our specimens give the location and date at which they were collected, helping us to piece together patterns of biodiversity change over the past two centuries.

"The research possibilities are endless – branching out into climate change, habitat management, genetics, and so much more. But until it is digitised and the metadata collated, we have no way, other than manually sifting through the handwritten sheets, of knowing exactly what the collection holds, so this rich seam of data is effectively 'hidden' natural heritage."

Many of the specimens were collected by the English geologist Samuel Pickworth Woodward, who was Professor of Natural History and Geology at the Royal Agricultural College (RAC) between 1845, when the RAC was first established, and 1848. He went on to become Professor of Natural History at the British Museum.

Other specimens were collected by Woodward's successor, James



Buckman, who was Professor of Geology, Botany and Zoology at the RAC from 1848 to 1862, and who also helped to establish the Corinium Museum in Cirencester and was its first curator.

Buckman created a botanical garden at the College where he conducted a number of botanical experiments, some of which are reported to have been mentioned in Darwin's *On The Origin of Species*. However, Reverend John Constable, the Anglican Principal of the RAC, found Buckman's theories distasteful and, when Buckman resigned his position in 1862, Constable ordered the botanical gardens to be destroyed.

In around 1850, Buckman developed a new strain of parsnip, which he named The Student Parsnip as it was originally developed as

an experiment to prove to his students that existing strains could be improved by crossing them with a wild parsnip. The results were so good that you can still buy the seed today.

The James Buckman Presentation Cup, an antique silver cup which was given to Buckman by his students and friends when he left the RAC, was sent back to the RAU from Canada, by Buckman's great-great-granddaughters, in 2015.

Since then, the Buckman Cup has been presented annually to a member of staff in recognition of excellence in education. At the 2024 Staff Awards, held earlier this summer, the cup was presented to Senior Business Lecturer Carol Zhang.

Dr Hemmings added: "The majority of specimens seem to have been collected and catalogued in the 19th century, which means they are now very delicate and can only bear a minimum of handling, but photographs and web pages can be revisited again and again, meaning that this unique collection will be accessible to many more people than it is in its current paper form."

The digitisation process is being managed by RAU graduate Sally-Anne Swannell who is undertaking a MSc degree having graduated from the RAU's Wildlife Conservation FdSc last year. She is also a qualified natural history illustrator. The project is expected to take around two years.

Sally-Anne said: "The collection is very old and the specimens are extremely delicate so it's a gradual



Unlocking the biodiversity of the past should help to inform ecological management and nature recovery in the future

and intricate process but it's a fantastic opportunity and a real privilege to be able to work with and research a collection like this one.

"We know that lots of different collectors contributed to the

herbarium and the majority of the early specimens were collected by Woodward and Buckman when they were working right here – at what was then the RAC – in the 1800s, which is a really exciting link to the present-day RAU."

Cassie Newland, Associate Professor of Cultural Heritage at the RAU, added: "Archives are only useful if we can get the information out of dusty drawers and into current research, teaching, and wider conversations. This project aims to involve interested groups and individuals in the process of digitisation and analysis, as well as unlocking the valuable information held within the archive to international study."

RAU Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Enterprise Professor Mark Horton commented: "In the 1840s and 1850s, the RAC was at the cutting edge of Victorian science. Figures such as Buckman were key contributors to Darwin's theory of evolution and victims of the intense debate that followed the publication of *On The Origin of Species* in 1859.

"This fascinating herbarium is an amazing survivor from those controversial times and it will be fantastic to have it all catalogued and in a format that we, and others, can use for research and future teaching to help us protect our precious and delicate world."

The RAU herbarium story featured on *ITV News at Ten's* "...and finally!" slot in February 2024 and in the June 2024 edition of *Cotswold Life* magazine. 📺

**For more about the Gloucestershire Naturalists' Society, visit: [glosnats.org](https://glosnats.org)**





Scan the QR code to donate online

# Fundraising priorities and development plans

From renovating the Clock Tower to upgrading the sports facilities, the RAU has bold plans to ensure our campus is fit for the future – but we also need your help to continue this work.

For information on how to make a gift to the alumni fund, please visit [www.rau.ac.uk/student-life/alumni/make-a-donation](http://www.rau.ac.uk/student-life/alumni/make-a-donation)



The RAU aims to maintain our historic buildings and beautiful grounds, creating new spaces that meet our community's evolving needs. Finding answers to complex global challenges depends on our ability to bring people together across subjects, disciplines, and backgrounds.

As you may know, the University was founded as the Royal Agricultural College at a meeting of the Fairford and Cirencester Farmers' Club. Robert Jeffreys-Brown was a passionate advocate of the importance of education; concerned by the lack of government funds, he called on those present to help raise the money. Through his dedication and donations from kind benefactors, the College was created and the first 25 students were admitted in September 1845.

The University continues to be unique in its ability to provide personalised support to each student, with engaged learning and participation opportunities that prepare them to be leaders. However, to build on this success we need your help.

**Cirencester Alumni Fund** Our university is more than a place of learning, it's where talents are uncovered and lifelong friendships are made. Your donations help students to pursue placements and take part in clubs and societies that build their skills and confidence.

**Scholarships and bursaries** Scholarships mean we can continue to attract the most talented students to the University. We also need to build our bursary funds to support students experiencing hardship. Donations from our alumni ensure many more disadvantaged students can be offered a financial lifeline.

**Research** Your donations help to support research that is changing people's lives. The RAU has always been at the forefront of 'applied research' in agriculture. Research projects reflect societal concerns and include how to grow healthier food, conserve the land and enable long-term sustainability in a period of challenge and change.

## What are our future development plans?

We've been working on a plan to develop our campus over the next five years. The plan involves many interrelated parts, including constructing a new Innovation Village, upgrading buildings, and improving infrastructure. Here are details of three of our proposals:

### Upgrading the Clock Tower

Made from locally quarried limestone and 80ft high, with a turreted newel extending a further 20ft, the tower was originally intended as an observatory for meteorological and other scientific purposes. Considerable decay in the wooden structures has made the rooms beneath unusable and the tower is in need of refurbishment. This project provides a challenging but exciting opportunity to open up the space within. We are also exploring innovative ways to improve the heating system, while also protecting this important heritage asset.

### Investing in sports facilities

The University has a strong history in sporting achievements and continues to excel. We are seeking funds to develop facilities to support competitive student sport, health and wellbeing of all those on campus, and the needs of the local community. We plan to invest in natural playing surfaces and all-weather and indoor facilities, and replace the existing sand-based all-weather pitch with a surface more suitable for the modern age. We will also improve



changing facilities and gym provision. An indoor 4G playing surface will provide a year-round sports surface to support university and local community sport without intrusive light or noise impacting our neighbours.

### Outdoor social space

Our successful bid for new land labs will enable the University to develop the centre on the ground floor of the Frank Garner lecture block and demolish the existing ageing labs. This will create a large, open space in the middle of the campus and provide us with an exciting opportunity to create a plaza and social area for students, staff and visitors. This outdoor space could include an amphitheatre and will serve the Tithe Barn and Boutflour Hall indoor social spaces and link with the stunning backdrop of the main building as the heart of the student village. We would like to develop this space as a central point for students on campus, linking their learning, social, and residential spaces.

To find out more about campus developments and ways that you can help, please email Julia Jenkins, Head of Development & Alumni Relations, at [development@rau.ac.uk](mailto:development@rau.ac.uk) or call 01285 889858.



# RAU praised for excellence in teaching, research, and knowledge exchange

Stellar results demonstrate that the University is ‘punching above its weight’ and are a tribute to the commitment of staff and students.



The RAU's performance in all areas over the past few years has been recognised in prestigious university rankings.

In September 2023, both the student experience and student outcomes at the RAU were commended as being of “typically very high quality” and the University was awarded Silver in the latest Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) rating, a national scheme run by the Office for Students (OfS). The RAU was previously awarded a Silver rating, valid for three years, in the OfS’s inaugural TEF in 2017. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that the 2020 TEF did not take place, so the September 2023 assessment was the first since 2019.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter McCaffery said: “To have retained our Silver rating in the latest TEF is testament to the very high quality and outstanding features of the student experience we provide and the student outcomes we generate.”

## Knowledge exchange

In the same week, we also scored top marks for our work with industry and the public sector in the 2023 Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF), a survey of 139 English universities and institutes. Part of the STEM cluster of 12 small specialist universities in medicine, technology, science, and engineering, and which also included world-leading medical research institutes and specialist technology



universities, the RAU gained the highest aggregate score alongside the Royal Veterinary College.

Professor Mark Horton, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Enterprise, said: “With the current climate and ecological emergencies, how we manage the land and produce food for the world is one of the most pressing societal issues of our time. The RAU is at the forefront of this research and to come top of our cluster in these rankings is a real accolade to our staff and students.”

## World-leading research

In a parallel exercise, the 2021 Research Assessment Framework (REF), which reported in May 2022 and evaluated the quality and impact of research at UK universities across all disciplines, rated more than half of the RAU’s research as world-leading or internationally excellent. The University’s research is at its highest ever level, making it one of the most improved universities in the country.

Professor McCaffery concluded: “When you consider these three national assessments in research (REF), knowledge exchange (KEF), and teaching (TEF) together, they demonstrate that the RAU is punching

“How we manage the land and produce food for the world is one of the most pressing societal issues of our time”

considerably above its weight. These results are a tribute to the professionalism of our staff and students, as well as our commitment to making a practical difference locally, nationally, and globally.”

## Sustainability credentials

The RAU’s work on food security, and protecting and restoring the land, also ranked highly in global rankings linked to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This year (2023) was the first time we had entered the Times Higher Education (THE) University Impact Rankings, a global survey of more than 2,152 universities from 125 countries which identify universities that excel across multiple SDGs. The RAU ranked in the top 200 globally\* for Zero Hunger (Goal 2) – coming in at joint 15th for UK universities and joint 12th for an English university. While, for Life on Land (Goal 15), the RAU was in the top 300\* globally and joint 38th for a UK university. Universities are able to enter in three areas, and for Sustainable Cities and Communities (Goal 11) – the RAU ranked in the top 800\* globally and joint 49th for a UK university. 1

\* for those institutions which submitted evidence for this SDG

Left: The RAU has been praised for our student experience  
Top: The University’s work on food security scored highly in global rankings



# Pass on something wonderful

Leaving a legacy to the RAU can help to ensure that the University continues its vital work.

The College would not have existed without the kindness of local landowners and friends who raised the funds to establish it, and throughout its history gifts left in Wills have had a transformative impact. After taking care of family and friends, please do consider a gift in your Will to the Royal Agricultural University.

The RAU and the former Royal Agricultural College hold a special place in the hearts of many. By choosing to remember us in your Will, you weave your name into the fabric of the University and become part of the RAU's story for generations to come.

There are many ways in which your gift can make a real and lasting difference.

### Supporting the next generation

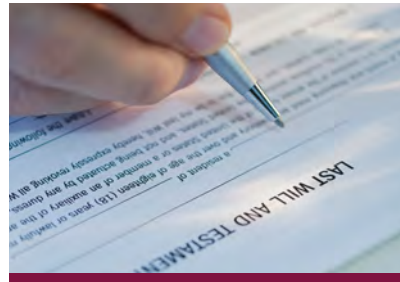
Your legacy could ensure that the brightest and best students can benefit from first-class teaching, whatever their circumstances, by providing scholarships, grants and awards for academic excellence.

### Changing lives through research

Our researchers are focused on finding solutions to the global challenges of today – and tomorrow. Your gift could help to find the answers.

### Protecting our heritage and planning for the future

Our buildings and grounds are among the most beautiful in the UK and a central part of the student experience. Your gift could help to safeguard and develop these stunning natural environments for future generations. **L**



## HOW TO LEAVE A GIFT IN YOUR WILL

We've produced some suggested wording for your Will. We ask that you include our **Exempt Charity reference** and address, as this ensures that any sum left to the University is free of inheritance tax.

**Exempt charity reference:** (2019/586)

**Address:** Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester, Gloucestershire GL7 6JS

- Whenever you write or update your Will, we strongly recommend that you seek professional advice from a legal advisor.
- A **residuary gift** maintains its real value in relative terms, regardless of inflation:  
**"I give to the Royal Agricultural University a gift of all [or a percentage or share of your estate] after allowing for expenses, pecuniary and specific bequests."**
- A **pecuniary gift** is a gift of a fixed sum of money. Please be aware that because of inflation, the value of the gift may reduce over time, which may require the Will to be updated at a later date:  
**"I give to the Royal Agricultural University the sum of [in figures and in words] free from all taxes and duties, to be applied to the general purposes [or your preferred area] of the University and I declare that the receipt of the Treasurer or other authorised officer for the time being of the University shall be good and sufficient discharge to my Executors."**

*Leaving a legacy to the RAU will help to guarantee our future.*



# CPD ENABLES BUSINESSES AND INDIVIDUALS TO GO FURTHER

The RAU has offered world-class training programmes to professionals in the agricultural and land-based sector for over 30 years

The learning experience does not end after graduation. It's an ongoing process through one's subsequent career and continued professional development (CPD) is a key way to further develop knowledge, skills and expertise.

At the Royal Agricultural University, we are proud to be able to deliver two popular courses, which enhance the knowledge and understanding of business professionals in sustainable farming and land management.

The Insight to Agriculture (Farming for Non-Farmers) course is aimed at business professionals working in agriculture and the wider land-based sector but with little or no previous background experience or knowledge. Delegates, through this

course, develop their understanding of the complexities and nuances of the sector, while also enhancing their working relationships and expertise.

The Wayleaves Officer Training Programmes, offered at introductory, intermediate and advanced level, incrementally develop the skills and understanding that delegates will require to deliver best practice when working with clients and other stakeholders on wayleave cases.

Both courses are led by highly experienced and knowledgeable farming practitioners, supported by a variety of experts from SMEs in the agriculture and land-based sector, as well as academics at the University.

We aim to best support delegates' understanding and engagement with

the high-quality course material, as well as establish a strong foundation and professional curiosity for further development through flexible modes of course delivery – face-to-face (residential), online (live delivery) or a blended learning approach. Lecture-delivered theory is combined with engaging discussion of real-life examples and site visits (either physical or remote, depending on the mode of course delivery).

Both courses are open to any delegate or to organisations that can tailor them to their specific needs. We offer a range of dates year-round.

Whether you are an individual wishing to upskill or you represent a prospective organisation, we welcome all enquiries.

Please email [professional.development@rau.ac.uk](mailto:professional.development@rau.ac.uk) or scan the QR code for more information



# The toast of the trade

From a much-maligned 1970s also-ran to some of the most prestigious brands on the market, Martin Fowke (BSc Agriculture, 1984), Winemaking Director at Three Choirs Vineyards, charts the rise of English wine.

My introduction to English wine came about in the early 1980s. I had trained in agriculture at Cirencester, now known as the RAU, where I met my future wife, Elaine. Her father had planted vines in 1973, just half an acre, and after the hot summer of 1976, the first crop came in and everyone got very excited. More vines were planted and the wine needed to be sold.

We opened a farm shop and welcomed visitors, mostly by coach as part of a Probus, Rotary or WI club. The wines were generally well received but the market away from the farm was difficult. British produce was not in demand – we ate French Golden Delicious and drank French wine. The only supporter of our homegrown product was the supermarket sector, but it placed our wine on the bottom shelf with ‘British wine’, a cheap manufactured product made in the UK with foreign grapes.

In the 1990s, the great British public had a change of attitude, largely due to the emergence of farmers’ markets, a kick against the powerful supermarkets. Celebrity chefs championed

homegrown produce and the industry had an opportunity to grow into other markets such as independent restaurants and wine shops.

Our wines were winning awards internationally and we started to export

around the world. The opportunities were finally opening up for our industry.

We made our first vintage sparkling wine at Three Choirs in 1988, but it was Nyetimber in the 1990s that really opened people’s eyes to the opportunity for English sparkling wine, winning numerous international awards, beating well-known Champagne houses and opening the door for others to enter the market.

The realisation that the chalky bedrock of the Champagne region stretched north into south-east England was a game-changer.

For those of us further west, there were other opportunities. New varieties were being developed and planted, attractive because of their increased disease resistance and suitability to our cooler climate. We became more selective about rootstocks and clones in order to maximise the quality of our fruit. Now Phoenix, Orion, Regent and Rondo are well known varieties in our industry.

Climate change is also now a huge topic of conversation. There is no doubt that a warmer climate has allowed us to produce wines that we couldn’t make 30 years ago. Red wines, especially Pinot Noir, are now winning awards in the same way that sparkling did 10 years ago. Chardonnay, originally thought of as a component for sparkling wine, is now being made as still wine. We are likely to see more producers who set up primarily for sparkling production throw a little still wine into the mix.

There is no doubt that our industry is now taken very seriously. Over 950 vineyards produced in excess of 20 million bottles in 2023.



Much of this is for sparkling wine and so will not hit the market for several years, but the plantings continue. Over 1.5 million vines were planted last year and a similar amount has gone in this year. Production is expected to increase to over 40 million bottles by 2030, and 76% of new plantings are being aimed at sparkling wine production.

The quality of English wines has never been higher, which makes marketing so much easier. But there are challenges in managing the rapid growth and preserving the market for the longer term. Our trade body, Wine GB, is putting a lot of work into establishing exports, especially in Asia and the US. There are early signs of success. At home, high duty undoubtedly restricts sales, but the duty restructuring from last year might help.

Vineyards and wineries are investing more in direct sales to consumers. Wine tourism is booming, up over 10% in the past 12 months. With that comes the opportunity to sell wine at retail prices, but also to add hospitality into the business, something that we have done at Three Choirs for many years. We have a retail shop, restaurant and hotel rooms on site to allow visitors to immerse themselves in a wine experience. Then the bottle of wine becomes far more: it has a story attached; a memory; and the vineyard has a fan for life.



All this comes at a price. The joke is that to make a small fortune from a vineyard and winery you need to start with a large one. There is no doubt that these are long-term projects with high upfront investment, but the rewards are there for those that do it well.

From humble beginnings in the 1970s the industry has come a long way. In many ways it is unrecognisable, but it is important to remember that without the slightly eccentric pioneers from those early days the foundations would not have been laid for the industry to flourish. Back then most vineyards were a family affair, but now it is a fast-growing industry with opportunities for employment in growing, winemaking and marketing.

English (and Welsh) wine has an exciting time ahead. Let’s raise a glass to the future. **L**

**Top:** From humble beginnings on family-run vineyards, English wine production is expected to reach over 40 million bottles by 2030. **Above:** Wine tourism is booming

The changing climate has enabled producers such as Three Choirs Vineyards to expand their range of wines







# Abi Reader

Despite coming from a farming family, Abi hadn't even considered a career in the sector – until a friend suggested applying to the RAU.

Life for Welsh farmer Abi Reader could have been very different had a friend not suggested she call the RAU, then the Royal Agricultural College (RAC), during her gap year.

Third-generation farmer Abi (MBA Farm Management Advanced, 2004, and BSc Agriculture, 2003), who is now Deputy President of NFU Cymru, went to a secondary school in inner-city Cardiff and admits that when she left education she had no idea what she wanted to do.

“Farming just wasn't on my radar. I had always worked on the farm but never really considered it as a possible career,” she said.

“My parents didn't want to push me to take on the farm and I went to an urban school in the centre of Cardiff so farming wasn't one of the options that the careers advisers would have suggested.



“Farming just wasn't something that was seen as a viable career – we were meant to be solicitors, dentists, doctors – definitely not farmers!

“Applying to the RAC was the only application I did but it turned out to be the best thing I ever did. I had an interview and was offered a place to study for a BSc in Agriculture.

“The moment I arrived on campus – pretty much the minute I got out of the car – I found out who I was. I got into the halls, saw and felt the buzz around me, and knew that was where I wanted to be. I was accepted and knew I had arrived.”

Abi excelled in her undergraduate studies and was the top student in her year for two of the three years of her degree. After graduation, where she was awarded the prize for the Most Prospective Farm Manager, she stayed on at the RAC to complete an MBA in farm business management.

She admitted: “I wanted to stay on, mostly because I really wanted to learn more but also because I had really enjoyed college life – perhaps a bit too much.”

Abi attributes much of her success in the industry to the late Professor John Alliston who was emeritus professor of Agriculture at the RAU until his death in June 2017.

She said: “John helped me enormously throughout my entire time at the RAC. He encouraged me to apply for a scholarship, which enabled me to stay on and study for my Masters.

“Importantly, he told me that you need to ‘network, network, network’. He also told me that if you keep your mind open to new ideas, you will find them. His advice was that if you show you're keen, then people will go out of their way to help you.”

When she finally left the RAC in 2005, Abi headed home to the Vale of Glamorgan and started working with her father on the family's 900-acre Goldsland Farm, where she now manages a herd of 200 Holstein Friesian and Dairy Shorthorns alongside 150 acres of arable land and around 100 sheep.

Abi is now responsible for running the whole farm and, inspired by what she learnt at the RAC about change and improvement, has recently introduced new agroforestry and horticulture trials.

She said: “The agroforestry trial is really interesting. It's not only an opportunity for carbon sequestration and diversity but also a business opportunity. The horticulture trial is looking at

how to create more jobs by using less space.”

A regular in the press and on TV and radio to promote and defend the dairy sector, Abi won Wales Woman Farmer of the Year in 2016, was awarded the MBE for services to farming in the late Queen's Birthday Honours in June 2019, and earlier this year was named as both Farming Woman of the Year and Agricultural Influencer at the Women in Agriculture awards.

Abi co-founded Cows on Tour, visiting UK primary schools with other young farmers to teach inner-city children how meat, crops, eggs, and fruit are produced and arrive on their dinner tables. She also mentors young people keen to get into farming, or to further develop their farming skills, and, since 2005, has hosted placement students on her farm for up to 10 months each year.

One of a large group of farms that supplies milk to Sainsbury's, Goldsland has just been recognised as the farm with the lowest carbon footprint in the organisation.

Abi concluded: “I could not have done any of it, or have been able to achieve any of the things I have, without everything that I learnt and the foundations I had from my studies at the RAC.

“Without a doubt, I use the knowledge from there every single day. I always remember what I learnt at the RAC – it is the bedrock of how I progress.

“If anyone is thinking about applying to study at the RAU, I would 100% recommend it. The RAU produces the very best people and will help you to open doors that you didn't even know were there.”

## TWENTY YEARS OF THE SIR EMRYS JONES MEMORIAL TRUST AWARD



William Emrys Jones was a leading figure in

the rejuvenation of agricultural production after World War II and had a great influence on British farming. He worked as Chief Advisor to the Minister of Agriculture from 1967 to 1973 and

was Director of the Government's Agricultural and Development Advisory Service.

Sir Emrys Jones was Principal of the RAC from 1974 to 1979.

He forged strong links with industry and oversaw significant developments in educational standards and facilities at the College. The Sir Emrys Jones Memorial Trust scholarships were

established in 2004 and have been supporting students with Welsh connections through their education at the RAC/RAU to the present day.

Students with a Welsh connection can apply for up to £4,500 in funding for undergraduates and up to £3,000 in funding for postgraduate courses at the RAU. Visit [www.rau.ac.uk](http://www.rau.ac.uk) for further information and eligibility criteria.



# Supporting future leaders

Debate highlights that education is the key to tackling the world’s environmental problems.

We recently hosted an evening discussion, *Food, Farming and Water – How to support future leaders*, looking at how education can play a role in addressing the urgent global challenges that affect us all.

The panel included Kate Drury, RAU alumna, BSc Land Management (1996) and postgraduate student, whose award-winning innovation business, Sustainable Rope, is developing a natural fibre alternative to synthetic ropes to reduce microplastics polluting our waterways. Kate was joined by RAU Honorary Fellow Helen Browning OBE, Chief Executive of the Soil Association.

Professor Dr Kiran Tota-Maharaj, who leads the RAU’s new MBA Water Management course, and is actively involved in the innovation of water management, and Dr Jonathan Code, Senior Lecturer in Sustainable Land Management at the RAU, also gave their insights.

The evening was also an opportunity to showcase the RAU’s two new MBA courses – MBA Food and Agriculture and MBA Water Management – and lively discussion took place as to how we can nurture and develop the next generation of leaders in these crucial industries.

At the end of the evening, we celebrated Kate Drury’s success at having been chosen as one of just 50 winners, selected from more than 900 nominees, in the annual Women in Innovation Awards, run by Innovate UK and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Kate (right) was joined by Alex Taylor from Innovate UK to unveil a special plaque honouring her achievement in the foyer of the RAU’s Emrys Jones building



## MBA ALUMNI COLLABORATIONS WITH THE RAU

We are developing a range of MBA programmes and are seeking engagement from our alumni to support our future leaders.

We know that providing our students with industry-reflective learning experiences is crucial to their success. By engaging with business leaders and tapping into key industries to stay up to date with the latest trends and developments, we can offer our students practical and relevant knowledge that they can apply in the business world. This is designed to guide what we teach, how we deliver learning, and how we support our students and graduates to achieve their career goals.

Can you contribute as a guest speaker in MBA modules and workshops, sharing your industry experiences and insights, current trends, and the issues challenging businesses?

Another great way in which alumni support our MBAs, while also benefiting from input from MBA (or MSc) students, is to offer mentoring, consultancy projects, sponsorship, and placement opportunities.

We are also seeking alumni who may be able to facilitate collaborations on our existing and future MBA programmes. If you are interested, please call Julia on 01285 889858.

# University launches two new foundation degrees

Foundation degrees are designed for those who wish to develop their skills in the workplace while simultaneously growing their academic abilities.

## FDSC RESIDENTIAL ESTATE AGENCY

A new course offering would-be estate agents the chance to obtain a foundation degree in residential estate agency is being launched at the RAU’s Swindon campus in September 2025.

This unique course will be taught two days a week, enabling students to work while studying for the qualification. Areas covered will include valuations, marketing, law, and professional sales practice, as well as more ‘hands-on’ modules such as surveying, inspecting, and measurement.

The two-year course will also include a 10-week summer work placement, between the first and second year, where students will gain further ‘on-the-job’ training and experience, as well as developing their confidence and employability skills, and gaining valuable industry contacts.

Course leader William Leschallas, Senior Lecturer within the Land and Property team at the RAU, said: “Residential estate agency has become an increasingly complex area of business with modern and traditional approaches adding to the competitive nature of the work. The role of an estate agent requires a diverse set of skills and attributes and this course sets out to provide the foundations specifically required for a career in residential estate agency.”

For more details about both courses, visit: [www.rau.ac.uk/courses/foundation-degrees](http://www.rau.ac.uk/courses/foundation-degrees)



## FDSC BUSINESS AND ENTERPRISE

The estate agency course will be joined at RAU Swindon by a new FdSc in Business and Enterprise, which will explore core business disciplines and help students to develop practical and academic expertise in creativity and leadership.

As well as learning about sustainable business management by examining finance, marketing, and business strategy, students will benefit from access to a host of CV-enhancing activities including access to the RAU’s Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Programme, business plan competitions, careers fairs, and mentoring activities.

Course leader Senior Lecturer Carol Zhang said: “This course will equip students with business management skills that will help those who are thinking about a managerial career, or enable them to set up, manage, and grow their own business.”



# *We Feed The World* comes to the Royal Agricultural University

A fascinating exhibition featuring award-winning photographers who have documented farming communities across the globe goes on display at the RAU.

**W**e Feed the World is a global photography initiative capturing the triumphs and tribulations of smallholders and food growers across six continents. A remarkable collaboration between the arts and environment sectors, it was commissioned by The Gaia Foundation between 2015 and 2018 and has produced exhibitions and a book of the same name. Now the exhibition is being hosted at the Royal Agricultural University on permanent loan.

Award-winning photographers from around the world, including Rankin, Sophie Gerrard, Martin Parr, Omar Victor Diop and Graciela Iturbide, gave their time to document the lives of nearly 50 farming communities, focusing their lenses on a rich range of themes from seed to soil, across rural and urban landscapes as well as fishing communities.


Dr Jonathan Code, Senior Lecturer in Sustainable Land Management at the University, welcomed the exhibition's arrival: "Resilient food cultures of the future will need to be rooted in sound agro-ecological practices. These must include the stewardship of soils, waters and places in ways that support the lives of all of Earth's inhabitants. In the astonishing diversity of small-scale farmers featured in the We Feed The World exhibition, we meet individuals and communities dedicated to these aims while providing food for a significant percentage of the world's population.

"We are delighted that the Royal Agricultural University, itself a global institution with a global student body, can celebrate these stories of resilience, nutrition, ingenuity and diversity across our walls, creating a springboard for rich conversations in the years to come."



Rowan Phillimore, project coordinator and Co-Director of The Gaia Foundation, said: "From ice-covered Northern Sweden to the depths of the Amazon jungle, these iconic images tell the diverse and inspiring stories of the men, women, families and communities producing food in ways that support biodiversity, sequester carbon, and share the land's bounty whilst leaving a positive legacy for future generations. As the regenerative, nature-friendly farming transition gains momentum across the UK and beyond, the time is ripe to inspire the next generation of farmers and landowners with stories from the global farming community and the rich traditions of diverse communities across diverse landscapes."

The arrival of We Feed The World at the RAU is particularly timely as a UK-focused series of commissions is also currently exhibiting nationally as part of We Feed The UK, the latest iteration of the project.

We Feed The UK is a celebration of British farmers and food growers who are putting nature and community at the heart of what they do. From Northumberland and Aberdeenshire to London and Walsall, there are 10 exhibitions featuring photography and poets on show nationally until June 2025. A selection of portraits from We Feed The UK will also be featured within the RAU exhibition. 

**To find out more about We Feed The World and We Feed The UK from The Gaia Foundation, visit: [wefeedtheworld.org/](https://wefeedtheworld.org/) [wefeedtheuk.org](https://wefeedtheuk.org)**



**Clockwise from top left:** The exhibition features small-scale farmers and fishers from Bolivia (Nick Ballon); Indonesia (Martin Westlake); Spain (Spencer Murphy); India (Jason Taylor) and Benin (Fabrice Monteiro)





## Collaborating with our colleagues in Ukraine

Olena Melnyk (centre) with Professor Mark Horton (front left) and Professor David O'Connor assessing contaminated farmland

Olena Melnyk, Associate Professor at Sumy National Agrarian University (SNAU) and Honorary Professor at the RAU, explains how the war has affected the institution and how twinning with the RAU has helped to manage the situation.

Even before the Russian aggression, SNAU was cooperating with the RAU, and that cooperation has just deepened. When the war started, I had to rescue my children, but still support my university. Now located in Switzerland, I try to build collaborations with as many universities as possible through the Ukraine Twinning Initiative. In our twinning cooperation with the RAU, I bring in Swiss partners from Bern and Zurich to build the capacity of our relationship.

SNAU is located in north-east Ukraine, just 30km from the Russian border. I'm proud to say that our people there have a lot of courage and resilience. SNAU is not a large university, with 7,000 students, and our

main discipline is agriculture. We have six colleges, two of which have been damaged in the war. One was used as headquarters for Russian soldiers before the territories of our region were liberated. In spite of the damage, we have started to work in them again.

SNAU and the RAU are very similar in nature, we are relatively small but ambitious and success-oriented, with common goals and values across both research and education. Intercultural differences between our countries could be a challenge, however, when I come to the RAU (as I have done regularly) I feel the same spirit and support. We are small, but we are proud of our respective universities.

It's very important to me to share our experiences beyond the

practicalities of the collaboration. I'm full of emotion when I remember the start of the war and what we were subjected to, but when we talk about the events and share our knowledge, it makes us all stronger.

SNAU was not captured, although bloody battles took place just 300 metres away. The entrances to our city were blocked, including for food and other essential commodities, and the challenge of shortages arose immediately. As an agricultural university, we decided we had to do something to help our community –



Olena with students analysing soil samples

so teachers, students and staff baked bread, gutted chickens and made stew for citizens, including for our soldiers.

Pigs were taken through the fields past enemy checkpoints so that we would have something to cook with, and eggs, meat, bread, flour and pasta were provided by our agricultural partners. Residents of neighbouring regions and districts would come to our campuses for a hot meal. This was especially important for the vulnerable and, of course, the students who couldn't leave Sumy because their hometowns were occupied or they were from overseas.

Many of our international students did not understand the situation but were terrified by the scale of the attack. At that time, we had 72 undergraduate and postgraduate students from China and other countries, many of whom stayed in dormitories in our basement. When we delivered food to them, I saw such gratitude in their eyes – I still remember that feeling. The blast waves

blew out the windows in our Centre for International Students, and our research fields and greenhouses were also hit. SNAU needed to be guarded; staff spent their nights protecting the university from Russian troops.

We have been helped by our partners both inside and outside Ukraine. With their support, we are trying to restore our premises, equipment and teaching materials. At the outset of our collaboration, RAU sourced money to buy a solid fuel boiler for our greenhouses. The war caused frequent blackouts and problems with energy supplies, which impacted on our unique plants and seeds. SNAU staff managed to find support from many different countries and two now work at RAU, supporting our collaboration and helping to develop a dual degree MSc programme.

When we are separate, we are still strong, but not so strong as when we are together, and together we have done so many good things. I hope that our experience can inspire someone to start a new Twinning initiative. [L](#)

*The RAU and SNAU are grateful for the support of Cormack Consultancy Group, which coordinates the Ukraine Twinning Initiative, the British Academy for its Researchers at Risk Fellowships, and XTX Markets' Academic Sanctuaries Fund. Olena has launched an exhibition in Switzerland. In December 2023, she visited the US with Professor Nicola Cannon (RAU) to deliver a presentation at the annual meeting of the American Geophysical Union (AGU). The research project, looking at ways to measure soil contamination in bomb craters, was one of just a handful of papers chosen to feature at an AGU23 press conference.*

## SAFS AFRICAN RESEARCH GRANT

Two RAU students have been awarded the SAFS African Research Grant, which helps MSc Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security students from an African country to undertake field research. Congratulations to Abdulmumin Opeyemi Muhammed and Ogunremi Olugbenga Ayobami.

Abdulmumin will be exploring, through first-hand accounts, the effects of climate change on food security in rural farming households in Oyo State, Nigeria. While Ogunremi will be investigating the effect of border closure and reopening on food security in South West Nigeria.



From top: Abdulmumin Opeyemi Muhammed and Ogunremi Olugbenga Ayobami



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# Spotlight on Farm491

RAU alumnus Stuart Homewood was one of the first resident members of Farm491, which has helped over 200 business start-ups attract £33m investment since its inception in 2016, including a number of student and alumni enterprises.

As one of the UK's leading AgriTech incubators, Farm491 is focused on the future of farming and food systems. It works with entrepreneurs at all stages of business growth, leveraging its network of academic, industry, and farming contacts and in-house experts to help business owners achieve their aspirations.

Stuart graduated from the RAU in 2010 having completed the Agriculture and Land Management course. He joined Low Carbon in the same year and launched his career in renewable energy. Over the next four and a half years, he developed 185MW (900 acres) of solar PV, comprising over 20 schemes from Cornwall to Lincolnshire, including the UK's first three 5MW solar farms.

In 2015 Stuart joined Raw Energy and shortly afterwards became one of the first resident members of the newly launched Farm491. Stuart spends his time advising and working on various M&A transactions, successfully representing developers and asset owners with buyers from the UK and overseas.

In 2018 Stuart co-founded Raw Infrastructure (trading as Raw Charging) and, following significant growth in the EV charging sector, sold the company to Gulf in 2021. In the same year, Stuart closed the financing on Raw Energy's own biomethane plant with the Parisian fund Swen Capital Partners and built it with HoSt Energy Systems.



Stuart Homewood has worked across all forms of renewable technology and been through many project financing rounds

Alongside his work at Raw Energy, Stuart is also a director of the property company Albion Quarters, which owns and manages student houses in Cirencester and Gloucester. Most recently Stuart has launched a new platform, Albion Lepus, as an acquisition vehicle for other renewable energy companies. The platform completed its first purchase, Roxon Electrical, in February 2024. Both Albion Quarters and Raw Energy are based at the Farm491 site, Trent Lodge on the RAU campus. <sup>1</sup>



### WHAT FARM491 OFFERS

- One-to-one support to help develop key focus areas such as strategic advice, hiring and investor readiness
- Access to our strong network – mentors, investors and farmers
- Invitations to exclusive events, such as investor days and farmer focus groups
- Potential to collaborate with RAU students and academics
- Hot-desking, practical workshops and offices
- Promotion and exposure within the industry

#### How to get involved

There are a number of ways in which RAU alumni can get involved with Farm491: becoming members; joining our service provider, business advisor and investor networks; or attending our dedicated events as either guests or speakers.

Farm491 has options for resident membership, with office space available in two dedicated campus buildings, co-working memberships, or virtual memberships. Current RAU students benefit from free membership during the course of their study and for a further six months after graduation.

For more information, please visit [www.farm491.com](http://www.farm491.com) or contact the team at [farm491@rau.ac.uk](mailto:farm491@rau.ac.uk)



# On Rush Farm

Regenerative farmer Alice Parsons on managing this flagship biodynamic farm in the heart of Worcestershire.



At Rush Farm, Alice helps to look after a flock of Lleyn sheep, a herd of Hereford cattle, and also hosts foraging courses

From the 700-year-old farmhouse which is mentioned in the Domesday Book to its ridge and furrow fields, Rush Farm has a long history of land stewardship.

The 190-acre farm, in Stock Wood near Redditch, has a breeding flock of 80 Lleyn sheep and a herd of 30 pure-bred traditional Hereford cattle. The animals are kept to the highest animal welfare standards and treated with homeopathy as a preventative measure.

To ensure this exceptional land stays free from pesticides and artificial fertilizers for future generations, the Parsons family came up with a unique solution, transferring what was a privately owned farm into the hands of the community. Anyone can now own a share of a beautiful piece of Worcestershire farmland.

“We are a beacon farming project pioneering a model that is sustainable, practical, and will transform land

ownership and family life in the rural community for many years to come,” said Alice, who graduated from the RAU in 2020 with an MSc in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security.

While not from a farming background, Alice now helps to manage the farm with her husband Brendan and his uncle. “I had envisaged a career in policy, but now I’m a farmer,” she said.

### Sustainable food

Alice believes her ability to understand government decisions has helped to shape her approach. “My passion lies in creating a sustainable food system, providing consumers with real food, while ensuring that environmental quality isn’t forfeited in the process. The culminating paper of my thesis explored the social factors that influence consumers’ dietary choices, specifically in relation to the uptake of a planetary health diet,” she said.

“I was fortunate to be taught by very enthusiastic staff at the RAU, including Professor Nicola Cannon and Senior Lecturer Phil Hudson, and it has been fun being able to put that into practice.”

The Biodynamic Land Trust (BDLT) is a custodian trustee of Rush Farm. In 2012, it helped to co-found the Stockwood Community Benefit Society (SCBS) to ensure the farm’s long-term survival. In 2014, the SCBS purchased 150 acres of Rush Farm land and the Stockwood Business Park, guaranteeing its future as a biodynamic farm and social hub. The land and property were placed into a community trust, which now has over 500 members.

“ This model is sustainable, practical and will transform land ownership and family life in the rural community for years to come ”

The BDLT stewardship holds Rush Farm within the SCBS rules and should the Parsons family stop farming or decide to farm in a way not compatible with the rules, the BDLT will ensure that the farm remains biodynamic.

SCBS installed a £400,000 solar and ground source heat pump system to heat the business park. The pump provides warm air in winter and cold air in summer, which is better for the tenants as well as the environment. According to the Farm Carbon Toolkit, the farm also sequesters an estimated 4,200 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> each year.

Though comparatively small, Rush Farm is a hive of activity.

“We run a herd of traditional Herefords, commercial Lleyns, a small fibre flock of Shetlands, and a noisy flock of guinea fowl,” said Alice. “Alongside this, we have a bustling and diverse business park, a small vegetable garden and an early-years nature playschool. We also host foraging courses, horse shows, and supper clubs. We are trying to maximise the amount of produce available ‘from the farm gate.’”

### Responsible stewardship

Back in the 1960s, Rush Farm was a renowned racehorse and cattle stud, and the inspiration for the long-running Radio 4 show, *The Archers* – the first episodes were recorded in the farmhouse kitchen. Now, however, the focus is on responsible stewardship of the land. “Our organic and biodynamic practices focus on nurturing soil which can support not just our livestock, but also the wildlife which flourishes alongside us,” said Alice. “These farming practices are at the heart of everything we do.”

## THE PRINCIPLES OF BIODYNAMIC FARMING

While perhaps more familiar in the world of viticulture, biodynamic farming is intrinsically connected to livestock farming, and cattle in particular. Alice uses a range of different preparations to enrich the soil and the plants’ capacity to capture more sunlight and produce healthier leaves.

Biodynamic preparations are combinations of fermented herbs, minerals, and manure designed to bring energy and vitality to a farm during its seasonal growth cycles. There are nine preparations practised in biodynamic farming. Each is like a tonic or homeopathic remedy for the farm; in the same way we might take tonics for

our health, the health of a farm is enhanced with the use of a variety of these all-natural solutions.

To make Biodynamic Preparation 500, fresh cow manure is packed into cow horns before being buried underground for six months. After the horns are uncovered, the manure, now more like rich compost, is stored in dark, dry conditions until needed. The burying of the manure allows it to ferment within the horns and become a concentrated loam-like material that smells sweet and is incredibly rich in nutrients.





# TOMORROW PEOPLE

Meet the RAU alumni whose innovative approaches have enabled them to build varied and successful careers.



## James Nightingall

Homefinder.ai | SuitesandVillas.com  
BSc (Hons) Property Agency and Management (2012)

James completed a BSc in Real Estate at the Royal Agricultural University and served as the RAU's Entrepreneurs' President from 2010 to 2011. He founded his first company while studying at Cambridge University's Judge Business School in 2012 and was nominated for the Spear's Young Turk Entrepreneur of the Year Award in 2014. His property agency was featured as one of the 150 Great British Brands by Country & Town House magazine.

James launched Homefinder.ai in 2021 with a vision to transform the

real-estate market through innovation and technology. An online serviced marketplace for new builds, he attributes the platform's success to its advanced AI-driven solutions, which streamline the property search process and focus on selling London's best off-market homes.

Recognised for its potential and impact, Homefinder.ai was awarded a £20,000 equity-free grant by the Geovation Accelerator Programme in 2021 and reached the finals of the prestigious CVC competition. Clients have included top-tier executives, entrepreneurs, property developers, film stars, and billionaires.

SuitesandVillas.com was born out of a unique opportunity after a lockdown, when James was helping a Chelsea FC player find a house. This venture quickly evolved into a luxury travel service, connecting high-end clients with exclusive properties and services without membership fees. With a portfolio of 800+ property listings and strategic partnerships, including arrangements with private jet companies, the company achieved a booking value of £400,000 in its first year. Many of the villas and chalets are off-market and cannot be booked online. James is now focused on getting more owners to join the platform.

**Homefinder.ai / Suites & Villas**  
[www.jamesnightingall.com](http://www.jamesnightingall.com)

## Tom Hall-Wilson

Nomad Ideas  
BSc (Hons) Property Agency and Management (2011)

### What is your product?

My wife Laura and I own a company called Nomad Ideas. We specialise in the design, manufacture and sale of shoes, homewares and accessories which are made from repurposed antique rugs and carpets from Turkey. The material, kilim, is known for its bright colours and unusual patterns.

### What inspired you to create your product?

I have always had a bit of a creative side. My wife Laura and I first came across kilim rugs on a trip to Istanbul and we just fell in love with it. The material, coupled with the fact that we can give an old product – in this case a rug – a new lease of life, is what we love about Nomad Ideas.

### How did the skills you acquired at university help you?

I studied property at Cirencester, so nothing to do with fashion. What I did find extremely useful, though, was the ability to manage and prioritise different tasks; something I learnt to do initially at Cirencester, and then in the military. Most core skills, such as organisation, planning, work ethic etc, are transferable as long as you have the interest and desire to do so.

**Opposite page:** James Nightingall helps clients find high-end homes and holiday stays. **Above:** Tom and Laura Hall-Wilson run Nomad Ideas, which designs and sells kilim shoes, homewares and accessories



### What are your plans for the future?

See how it all goes really. We both work full time currently, but would love for one of us to 'do Nomad' full time in the future if possible. We have plenty of ideas of how we would like to grow the business, but we need to find the time (and of course funds) to do this. I think finding (or making) the time to go to more shows will be our next step in achieving this.

### What advice would you give to budding entrepreneurs?

If you have an idea and a plan, you have properly looked at the numbers and they work, then the only person who will push it forward is you. It can be incredibly hard work, but also incredibly rewarding. Don't be afraid to ask for help along the way, as the path to starting a new business venture is well trodden. People are usually more than happy to share their experience, chat through ideas and offer advice.

[www.nomadideas.com](http://www.nomadideas.com)



“ My wife Laura and I first came across kilim rugs on a trip to Istanbul and we just fell in love with it ”





Jennifer King at work in her studio

“ Nature is my passion, and it weaves through my entire business ”

with the interactive possibilities of modern technology. As a successful greetings card publisher, I noticed that while digital platforms like TikTok, WhatsApp and Snapchat offered instant gratification, they lacked the personal touch and lasting sentiment of a physical card or gift. addSQUIRREL uses innovative QR stickers to bring a modern twist to the traditional card and gift industry. These smart QR stickers allow users to upload a video, photo, or voice note, transforming a simple card or gift into a personal, interactive experience. Simply scan the QR code with your smartphone, upload your chosen media, and stick the QR sticker onto your card or gift.

**You won The Grand Idea in 2016 – how did that inspire you?**

It was a pivotal moment, setting the stage for a journey filled with creativity, resilience, and innovation. My story began with a passion for art and has now expanded into the digital realm. Today, I continue to blend creativity with technology to make the world a more connected and beautiful place.

[www.jenwinnettart.co.uk](http://www.jenwinnettart.co.uk)  
[www.addsquirrel.com](http://www.addsquirrel.com)

**Jennifer King**

Jen Winnett Art | addSQUIRREL  
 BSc International Equine and Agriculture (2017)

**What was the inspiration for your business?**

My journey as an artist started not in a studio, but as a therapeutic outlet during my recovery from a long battle with anorexia. In 2018, I picked up watercolours and began painting as a way to support my mental wellbeing. The joy and peace I found in painting was transformative, and I started sharing my work online. To my delight, my paintings resonated with others. Encouraged by the positive response, I made the bold decision to leave my job in 2019 and turn my passion into a full-time business. Nature weaves through my entire business – from the inspiration behind my paintings to the eco-conscious production methods I

employ. I wanted to show consumers that making small, sustainable swaps can lead to a more eco-friendly lifestyle without sacrificing beauty or affordability.

**How has your business grown?**

Over the past five years, Jen Winnett Art has grown significantly. Today, it turns over six figures annually and my products are stocked in over 300 shops across the UK and the USA, including retailers such as the National Trust and the RSPB. However, beyond the commercial success, the greatest achievement has been finding happiness and health through my art. While Jen Winnett Art was flourishing, I was inspired to innovate and find new ways to bring joy and personal connection to people's lives. This led to my latest venture, addSQUIRREL. The idea came from a desire to blend the timeless appeal of traditional cards and gifts

**Jemima Gray**

Cotswold Fox  
 MSc Business Management (2021)

**What is your product?**

Launched in 2021 from my parents' kitchen table, Cotswold Fox has grown from a lockdown hobby into one of the most exciting country clothing brands. Featuring a new generation of eye-catching country casual wear we aim to bridge the gap between affordability and great quality to fill wardrobes with timeless countryside staples.

**What inspired you to create your product?**

I've always loved the country casual look, whether I was riding my horse or just hanging out on campus. I saw a gap in the market for more 'fun' products that are still fantastic quality and also affordable for students. It's not hard to feel inspired whilst seeing what my university friends liked to wear and Cirencester was the perfect place to do some market research.

**How did the skills you acquired at university help you?**

At the time of launching Cotswold Fox, I was studying MSc Business

“ I've always loved the country casual look, whether I was riding my horse or just hanging out on campus ”



Jemima Gray wanted to create fun country clothing

Management. From finance and marketing to business development and strategy, the course couldn't have been a better base on which to start a business. I was also part of the Enterprise Society and lucky enough to go to some really relevant talks, which hugely inspired me.

**What are your plans for the future?**

To grow the business as big as we can! Of course it's not that simple but we've got so many plans in the pipeline, whether that's attending more events, bringing out new product lines or developing our wholesale strategy. Make sure to watch this space for some exciting developments.

**What advice would you give to budding entrepreneurs?**

Just give it a go. Obviously planning and market research is an essential part of launching a successful business. However, I think the most important aspect is testing whether there's an appetite for your product or service, and the only way to find out is to get started. Try to keep it low cost and low risk for as long as possible to have the best chance of getting your business off the ground.  
[www.cotswoldfoxclothing.com](http://www.cotswoldfoxclothing.com)





**Lord William Seymour, Earl of Yarmouth**

St Maur Elderflower Liqueur Property Agency and Marketing (2003) / MSc Rural Estate Management (2015)

**What is your product?**

My wife Kelsey and I brought St Maur to market in 2020, based on a drink we had originally created for a unique champagne cocktail on our wedding day. We make St Maur with wild elderflowers picked on our family farm and in the ancient woodlands I own in Warwickshire. We call St Maur 'a little drop of England's heart', and with the international acclaim we are now getting we are looking at how we take that out into the world.

**What inspired you to create your product?**

Well, there is the love story behind the product, which is inspiring for us

**Above:** St Maur was named the World's Best Floral Liqueur at the World Drinks Awards 2024

both. It is something that has grown quite literally from our wedding day, and that's serendipity. Then for me, there was a desire to reboot my family's heritage with actually a rather badly needed business success story, which would in turn inspire the next generation. We have two young sons, and I am keen for them to grow up in a household with a proper work ethic.

**How did the skills you acquired at the University help you?**

The things I really picked out were how to think more innovatively about ways of looking after a landed business, whatever its size; to look at things through fresh eyes and see potential in diversification; and to challenge. It taught me the benefit of creativity, hard work, and tenacity, and about the relationships which deliver results. I have also begun to learn what it means to be a good custodian of what we have – and the Earth needs as many good custodians as it can get right now.

**What are your plans for the future?**

We drive our business around milestones and we are ambitious. Achieving the status of one of the best products of our type in the world was one such milestone. The best accolade for us will always be the reaction people have when they taste St Maur, when they get the 'Wow! That's good' factor. The plan is to build on that, to get our product out into the world.

**What advice would you give to budding entrepreneurs?**

Tenacity pays the bills, and surround yourself with the right people. My career path is definitely proof of that. [www.drinkstmaur.com](http://www.drinkstmaur.com)

**ALUMNI CONNECTIONS**

The Royal Agricultural University has a global community of over 17,000 alumni. When you graduate, the RAU is here to help.

You can still access support, including appointments to speak to our Careers Advisor either online or on campus. You can have your CV checked, access the alumni Jobs Board and attend our Career Fairs in the Autumn term. We also offer discounts to our alumni for postgraduate courses and for venue hire.

If you are interested in starting a business you can speak to our Enterprise staff about your business idea and receive six months' free membership of Farm491. University alumni also receive a monthly e-newsletter, invitations to events around the country and on campus, and a copy of *Landmark* magazine.

Many of our alumni help current students by offering mentoring support, placements and job opportunities, as well as providing case studies, and hosting trips or visits which are relevant to RAU courses. Alumni also give donations to the Cirencester Alumni Fund to help enhance the student experience and other priority areas.

**Are you connected?** LinkedIn is a free, professional social networking site. You can use it to:

- connect with professionals
- get seen by employers looking to hire
- learn more about work you are interested in
- find and apply for jobs
- get advice and support from experienced professionals

*As a former student, you can join the Official RAU (RAC) Alumni Group on LinkedIn to keep up to date with all the news. It is also one of the easiest ways to connect with fellow alumni.* [www.linkedin.com/in/raualumni](http://www.linkedin.com/in/raualumni)



# CONSIDERING POSTGRADUATE STUDY?

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- Certificate in Regenerative Farming

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- MBA Food and Agriculture
- MBA Water Management
- Diploma in Business Administration (Food and Agriculture)
- Certificate in Business Administration

**CULTURAL HERITAGE**

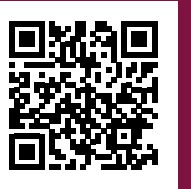
- MSc Archaeology
- MSc Conservation and Management of Historic Buildings
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\*Please see website for terms and conditions



[www.rau.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/postgraduate-courses](http://www.rau.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/postgraduate-courses)

For further information on the courses and for a full list of scholarships and awards please visit



# FOOTBALL FOCUS

The University's partnerships with two local teams are a win for grass-roots football, elite development squads and student players alike.



**F**arming and football don't usually go hand in hand but the RAU has brought the two together in a union which is benefitting both groups.

The University has teamed up with two local football teams to give them both a much needed "home ground" and a regular, year-round, place to train. With training and matches scheduled to fit around the RAU's own sports activities and matches, the agreement means that the University has been able to invest in improvements to pitches and sports facilities.

The campus is already home to the local Stratton Youth football club which started to use the RAU facilities for some of its training and matches during the 2022/23 football season, and, for the 2023/24 season, we welcomed players from Swindon Town Academy's Under 18s and Under 16s teams to train and play their home matches on the RAU pitches.

Swindon Town Academy Manager Alex Pike said: "The Academy has used various

different grounds over the past couple of years and, until now, we haven't had a permanent base so it's been fantastic for us to finally have a home!

"To be able to have everything we need for training and matches here, instead of carrying it all round with us, has made a real difference. As well as the great pitches and facilities, the RAU has a real family feel to it and it's very special for us all to be part of that."

During the football season, Swindon Town Academy trains twice a week with matches taking place most Saturdays. And when the Academy has finished for the day, players from nine different Stratton Youth teams use the pitches for their evening training sessions and Sunday morning matches.

Stratton Youth Chairman Jon Cummins said: "We have more than 19 league teams so the opportunity to use the outstanding facilities at the RAU has enabled more than 60 children to have access to regulated matches and high-quality training who we would have been unable to support due to a lack of pitch space."

RAU Chief Operating Officer Graham Pollard said: "Sport can play a significant role in bringing communities together and we're proud that the RAU is able to help enable this through our facilities.

"This partnership not only provides children from the local area with greater opportunity to become involved with grassroots football but it also gives us, at the RAU, access and insight to elite-level sport that is helping with the development of our own university teams." 

# GOOD SPORTS

RAU students are celebrating another year of sporting success, says Luke Overthrow, Sports Development Manager.

**S**tudent sport at the RAU comes in many different forms which we are eager to celebrate.

British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) is the national governing body for higher education sport in the UK. During the 2023/24 season, the RAU had nine teams competing in the Western region leagues.

The men's hockey team had an amazing season, going undefeated and winning the Western 4A league and the Conference Trophy. The RAU performed brilliantly in every match, scoring 53 goals and conceding just 17.

The men's rugby first team also had a


great season, coming out winners of the last game of the season, winning Western 5A. The team also competed in the Conference Shield final, losing by just one against UWTSD in a great game. Alongside their BUCS wins, the team had their

final match of the season in the Varsity fixture against Harper Adams University. Going in as underdogs, the RAU came out on top away from home.

The women's hockey first team showed great resilience this season. Despite not having great success in the league, they found themselves competing in the Conference Trophy final. The match against Cardiff didn't go their way, but they ended the year on a high with a silver medal.

This year, first-year Sports Scholar Elizabeth Fraser competed in the BUCS National Fencing Championships, finishing the event in ninth place. It was great to see Elizabeth represent the RAU on the national stage.

The RAU shooting club has represented the University on the national stage, competing against universities four times our size. The RAU has won five team titles this season, which includes four men's and one women's title. The RAU had an amazing performance at the Loughborough Challenge, taking home gold and silver in the men's event.

Alongside the team titles, many individuals took home their own awards. Congratulations to Harry Lee, Jochem Van Hogendorp, Harry Birch and Dan Casey-Ford, who all won top shooter at different points this season. Well done all! 



The Students' Union offers students access to a wide variety of clubs and societies including Agric's Society, Caledonian Society, Christian Union, Conservation Club, Craft's Society, Croquet Club, Equestrian Club, Men's Football, Golf Club, Men's Hockey, Women's Hockey, Women's Lacrosse, Land & Estate, Mountaineering Club, Netball, Polo Club, Men's Rugby, Women's Rugby, Shooting Club and Tennis Club.

Above: Players from Stratton Youth's 19 league teams are able to use the RAU facilities





# EVENTS

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# FIRE! FIRE!

A trawl through the archives reveals how close the College came to disaster in November 1913.

BY PETER BROOKS, UNIVERSITY ARCHIVIST

**O**n 10 November 1913 at approximately 7pm, whilst most students were at dinner, a fire broke out at the RAC that seriously damaged the West Wing. The Agriculture and Physics lecture rooms were completely destroyed, including almost all the engineering and physical apparatus, drawing boards and material, building construction diagrams and Agriculture and Forestry lecture diagrams.

Additionally, the students' common room and billiard room were rendered unusable as much by water as by fire. The fire threatened to spread to the Chemistry laboratory (which was then housed in the Tithe Barn) and even the Chapel. Fortunately, the fire was brought under control in time. Some 35 years later, a long-serving member of the College's academic staff, Major Alexander Charles Duncan, vividly described the origin of the fire:

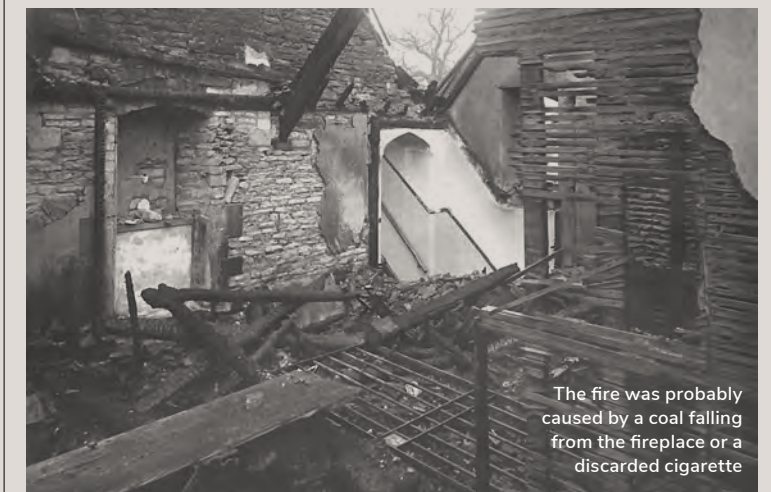
*[The fire] arose in a private room at the top of a small staircase at the north end of the west*

*dormitory corridor, and was first discovered by a cleaner ... [She] found the door to the room locked, and smoke issuing from underneath it. As the occupant was missing it was feared that his charred remains would be found inside, so the door was burst open, when flames and smoke prevented any attempt at rescue ... the occupant was not inside but had made up a large fire before going into town.*

The origin of the fire could not be determined with any certainty, but was most likely caused by a live coal falling from the fireplace, or a carelessly discarded cigarette in what was then Room 23. We know that in addition to the local Cirencester Fire Brigade the seriousness of the conflagration necessitated the call-out of four other brigades from Tetbury, Gloucester, Stroud and Malmesbury.

### College Farm employees to the rescue

What the 'official' history of the College written by Roger Sayce does not tell us is that employees of the College Farm also played a significant role in extinguishing the fire. In a letter dated 14 November to the Principal of the College, Professor James Ainsworth-Davis, the Farm Manager Russell Swanwick makes a convincing case for some form of recompense for his men and their work in putting out the fire:



The fire was probably caused by a coal falling from the fireplace or a discarded cigarette

*If [my men] had not carted up water as hard as they could for some hours there is no doubt the Cirencester fire engine would have been stuck for want of water, indefatigably in directing them and by getting out four of my cart horses managed to get one of the other engines out of a mire in which they were stuck hopelessly.*

*My carter who is an experienced fireman played the hose on the fire up in the roof most of the evening and the other men dug the* →



holes necessary to get down to the [water] tanks. They were all wet to the skin for hours and many of them ruined a suit of clothes as they came out instantly without preparing for the rain or water ... One of my men is seriously ill through his wetting and is now in the Cottage Hospital.

Swanwick encloses with his letter a list of the 11 men and the work they did to help extinguish the fire, and he suggests they each be recompensed by 5 shillings, or 10 shillings for his Bailiff and Carter, adding that 'this is the least' they should receive and that 'they deserve more'.

He follows up on 16 November with another letter to Ainsworth-Davis, adding:

*My Bailiff Mr Goodworth did splendid work in directing the men ... He was the first to notice the fire and instantly sent up his son Allan and the head carter with our extinguishers and then came and told me. He directed my men and arranged the horses and pulled the Stroud Engine out of the mire where it was hopelessly stuck. He promptly sent up coal to the Malmesbury Engine at the sewage tank as they were stuck for want of coal.*

Subsequently the salvage claim document shows the services of the College Farm staff as valued at £13 in total, or around £100 each in today's money. It is gratifying to know that their significant contribution was recognised by the Principal.

### Protecting the Chemical laboratory

Lack of water was not the only challenge facing those fighting the fire. Staff of the Chemical Department risked their lives to remove ether and other inflammable materials stored against the very hot walls of the laboratory. Other brave souls had to locate and cut the gas pipes laid under the floors to prevent flames from spreading along the molten pipes, somehow managing to do so without cutting off the supply of gas then used for lighting as this would have seriously hampered efforts at fighting the fire.

Nevertheless, the scene the next morning revealed how narrow an escape the whole building had had. Miraculously, there was only one casualty besides one of Swanwick's men, and that was the Captain of the Stroud Fire Brigade who slipped and broke his collarbone.

### The insurance claim

Ironically, the fire occurred just at the time when student numbers were on the rise and the College was appealing for additional funds in order to extend its facilities. Consequently, it was vital that the costs of restoration of the buildings and contents damaged by the fire were met by insurance. Remarkably, the details of the insurance claim are still kept in the RAC/RAU Archive and they make for some fascinating, and sometimes amusing, reading.



The Chemical laboratory was housed in the Tithe Barn

Amongst the list of laboratory apparatus destroyed the following are listed:

- Thomson's Jet pump
- Cartesian Diver
- Magdeburg Hemispheres
- Richardson indicator
- Ampere's Parallelogram with mercury cup
- Ampere's Apparatus with Barlow's Wheel
- Henley's Universal Discharger
- Winhurst Machine 24" Plates
- Etc. etc.

In total the claim for 'Apparatus and Specimens Destroyed' was £425 (approx. £41,000 today).

The losses recorded by those students affected by the fire also make for fascinating reading. In total, three student rooms were completely burnt out and 19 other students had possessions that were burned, damaged or lost in the fire. One student, Calderon, claimed for possessions to the value of £141, more than £14,000 in today's money. His claim included:

- 1 gold watch
- 2 felt hats
- 1 gramophone and 20 records

- 6 pairs white flannel trousers
- 2 dozen handkerchiefs
- 1 Norfolk coat
- 4 pairs stockings
- 1 stamp album
- 60 books and 15 notebooks
- 2 trunks

Much of the furniture and student belongings were deposited outside on the main drive, and one opportunistic thief apparently tried to walk off with a 'souvenir' or two of the fire, but he was spotted by a student who had been busy with an axe, and the only souvenir that the would-be thief carried away was a lump on his head delivered by the handle of said axe!

Glossop lists 18 books that he has lost due to fire and water damage. The titles include:

- *Fly fishing*
- *Faust*
- *The Hunting of the Snark*, and *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll
- *Kingsley's Poems*
- *Great Englishmen of the 16th Century*
- *David Copperfield*
- *Short History of English Agriculture*

### Fighting a fire is thirsty work

According to a note to the Principal dated 25 November 1913 from W. H. Hayday, the College Butler, between 80 to 90 persons were provided with refreshments during and after the fire. He then provides, for insurance purposes, a list of articles consumed by the fire brigade and working parties. They must have worked up quite a thirst! They drank:

- 32 gallons of ale
- 5 and ½ bottles of whiskey
- 1 bottle of brandy
- 2 bottles of champagne
- 6 dozen minerals

### The aftermath

Rebuilding after the fire was completed by September 1914. The July 1914 issue of the *Agricultural Students' Gazette* contains a brief item titled 'Rebuilding After Fire':



The aftermath of the blaze



Staff of the Chemical Department raced to remove flammable materials from the walls of the laboratory

*The restored part of the College will be ready for use next term. Great improvements have been effected in the Agriculture and Physics class-rooms, and by abolishing the private rooms on the second floor it has been found possible to secure a really good laboratory for the departments of Veterinary Science and Zoology. The new arrangements include a fireproof staircase, accessible from the first and second floor corridors of the West Wing.*

Sadly, many of those labouring so hard to extinguish the fire that evening would soon be caught up in a far more consequential conflagration – the Great War. Among those killed was Lieutenant Russell Kenneth Swanwick, a former student and the third son of the Farm Manager Russell Swanwick. Aged just 30, he was killed at the Battle of the Aisne in 1914, 'cheering his men on regardless of his own wounds'. Many other College staff and students served in the Allied forces in the Great War, and not a few paid the ultimate price – but that is a tale for another time. **L**



If you would like your wedding to be included in a future edition of Landmark, please email [landmark@rau.ac.uk](mailto:landmark@rau.ac.uk)

# Congratulations!

A highlight of *Landmark* is celebrating the weddings in our alumni community. We are delighted to feature the latest couples who have got married and wish them all the best for the future.



1) **Joseph James Light** (2018) and **Rhianna Ann Prentice** married on 8 July 2023 at St Peter and St Paul's Church, Lavenham.



2) **Alice Hind** (2012) and **Thomas MacGinnis** married on 6 July 2024 at St Asaph Cathedral, North Wales. Alice studied Rural Land Management.



3) **Anna Bowen** (2014/2016) married **Freddie Lawder** on 9 September 2023 at St Anne's Church, Cwmffrwd. Anna studied Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security.

5) **Jack Frater** (2013) married **Charlotte** on 24 June 2023 in Bamburgh, Northumberland.

6) **Mary Eyles** (2016) and **Ian McKenzie** married on 24 June 2023 on Mary's family farm in Cornwall. Mary studied Rural Land Management.



2) **Laura Smith** (2017) married fellow alumnus **Matthew Blatern** (2018). Laura studied International Equine and Agricultural Business Management and Matthew studied Rural Land Management.



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