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LANDMARK



THE MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF ROYAL AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY

RAU.AC.UK/ALUMNI



Inside this edition

180th Anniversary Celebrations | £500k Defra Grant | New Laboratories | Global Partnerships



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Welcome to this special 180th Anniversary issue of *Landmark*, the annual magazine for alumni and friends of the Royal Agricultural University (RAU). 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 our 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.



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

- facebook.com/RAUalumni
- instagram.com/rau.alumni/
- linkedin.com/in/raualumni/

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Opinions expressed are those of individual contributors. The University makes every effort to ensure that information contained here is accurate. Please note that the University’s website is the most up-to-date source of information and we strongly recommend you visit the website before making any commitments. Requests for reproducing material should be made to the Alumni and Development Office.



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Welcome from our Vice-Chancellor, Professor Peter McCaffery

As we celebrate our 180th anniversary, we can reflect that our University, the very first agricultural college in the English-speaking world, is as relevant today as it always has been. Founded in 1845 to help meet a national emergency – how to feed the country at a time of burgeoning urbanisation and industrialisation – we are immensely proud of the contribution our worldwide family of 17,000+ alumni have made as leaders, entrepreneurs and innovators in agriculture and the land-based sector.

Our ‘180 Series’ of six inaugural Professorial Lectures, the unveiling of a new sculpture, a global toast online

with our international partners, and a Heritage Open Day to commemorate the enrolment of our first cohort of 25 students in 1845, will all feature as part of our celebrations.

Equally historic will be the opening of our new Land Laboratory Teaching Centre (on the ground floor of the existing Frank Garner Lecture Block), which has been completed on schedule and within budget (£5.8m). As well as a new ‘wet laboratory’, the Centre will provide an integrated, state-of-the-art facility to train our students in climate-smart, resilient agriculture and land management.

Today we seek to equip a new generation of graduates to help address the global challenges that face us – climate change, food security, sustainable land use, biodiversity loss and heritage management.

Building on our historic purpose – to care for the land and all who depend on it – we are also now driving new frontiers as the leading specialist university in England for research and ‘top-of-the-class’, for the second successive year, among our university peers in our support for graduate start-up businesses, CPD provision, our engagement with business, community and public sectors, and our contribution to local growth and regeneration.

Our £140m Innovation Village aims, with the support of local and central government, to bring together industry, food producers, farmers and landowners to develop sustainable solutions for food production and biodiversity recovery while building resilience in rural communities.

In keeping with our tradition of developing agricultural education and land management across the globe, we are also an exemplar of best practice in Transnational Education (teaching in country), as recognised by UKRI (UK Research and Innovation) and the British Council for our flourishing work in China.

Our aspiration to host a UN University Institute (of Agri-Food Transformation and Innovation) also gained more traction when we received a letter of support from the UK Government for our prospective collaboration with the Government of Sharjah.

Put simply, our influence and impact continue to be felt locally, nationally and globally, and we fully intend to continue to punch above our weight in the future as we have done for 180 years.

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



Image: Marcus Ginn

Message from the Chair of Governing Council

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this year’s *Landmark* magazine, a celebration of the people, projects, and partnerships that define the Royal Agricultural University (RAU) today.

Our founding purpose in 1845 was simple but profound: to care for the land. In 2025, as we celebrate our 180th anniversary, this mission has never been more relevant. In a world facing escalating climate, biodiversity and food security crises, everything depends on how we manage our land. From sustaining communities and ecosystems to feeding the world and ensuring clean water and public health – land is at the heart of it all.

To celebrate our historic anniversary, we are hosting a series of events throughout the year including a special 180th anniversary public lecture series, a Community Open Day, and the unveiling of a new sculpture to mark the occasion. You can read more about the celebrations on our website.

This academic year has been a very busy and productive 12 months in the life of the RAU. It started with the University receiving top marks for the second year running for our knowledge

exchange activities in the annual Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) survey run by Research England. We scored particularly highly in our professional development courses, graduate start-ups, community engagement, and working with the public sector and businesses.

In February, Kaleb Cooper, of Clarkson’s Farm fame, joined our students to help with the traditional charity Tractor Pull as part of the Students’ Union annual charity fundraising RAG (Raising and Giving) Week. As well as helping pull the tractor, he also used the occasion to announce the latest recipients of the RAU Kaleb Cooper Agriculture Bursary. Running since 2023, it offers two bursaries to help support undergraduate students who are not from a farming/agricultural background.

In May, our new £5.8m Land Laboratory Teaching Centre in the ground floor of the Frank Garner Lecture Block was completed on time and to budget. Along with a new ‘wet laboratory’ extension, the Centre will open its doors to students and staff this September, providing state-of-the-art facilities for teaching and research.

As we look to the future, our ambitious Innovation Village plans will move a step closer with outline planning permission due to be considered this summer. Once complete, it will place us as a beacon for UK and international businesses committed to regenerative agriculture, nature recovery and net zero.

We are proud of our strong alumni network and we need your support now more than ever. As Chair of the Governing Council, I invite you to join us in shaping a more sustainable future, not just for the RAU, but for the wider world.

Together, we can ensure the RAU continues as a beacon of excellence and purpose for generations to come.

Thank you for being part of our journey.

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

Celebrating 180 years of the RAU

As the University celebrates a milestone anniversary, we look back on some of the key events that have shaped our history.



1760
Agricultural Revolution
Selective breeding is developed by Robert Bakewell, leading to farm animals increasing in size and quality.

1841
Rail connections
Cheltenham Rail and Great Western Railways build railways connecting the region with the latest steam technology.

1842
Robert Jeffreys Brown
addresses the Fairford and Cirencester Farmers' Club on the 'advantages of a specific education for agricultural pursuits'.



1845
• **Construction in the Victorian Gothic style begins in April 1845**
Earl Bathurst leases a 425-acre site and the Royal Agricultural College (RAC) is completed within a year at a cost of £3,674.

• **Queen Victoria grants Royal Charter**
The College admits its first intake of 25 students on 15 September.

1847
Isambard Kingdom Brunel
one of the first shareholders of the College, purchases five shares numbered 572 to 576.

1849
John Voelcker
is appointed Professor of Chemistry.

1862
• **Botanical garden destroyed**
Rev John Constable, Principal 1860-79, dismisses Professor John Buckman, Professor of Geology, Botany and Zoology, and destroys the botanical garden he has created as it 'might ferment dangerous ideas about Darwinism'.

• **Ezra Cornell**
visits the RAC and is so impressed he donates £100,000 to found Cornell University, one department of which was planned and modelled on the RAC.



1868
Dickens visit
Charles Dickens' son, Edward Bulwar Lytton Dickens, attends the RAC. When he visits the College, Dickens comments on the food, saying that it is 'plentiful and pleasant and served with a good brew of beer'.

1884
Eleanor Anne Ormerod
A well-known entomologist, and Edinburgh University's first ever woman honorary doctor, Eleanor Anne Ormerod is a guest lecturer from 1881 to 1884.



1895
Sir Basil Cave KCMG CB FRGS
An alumnus who married the principal's daughter, Mary McClellan, Basil Shillito Cave was British Consul to Zanzibar. In 1895, he declares the Anglo-Zanzibar War, the shortest war in history at just 38 minutes.

1929
The Great Depression
From September to mid-November, share prices on the New York Stock Exchange collapse causing the Wall Street Crash, the longest and most widespread depression of the 20th century.



1931
Principal Boutflour
Bobby Boutflour, described as 'the most capable, colourful, and forceful character that ever adorned the fields of agriculture', is appointed Principal of the RAC.

1914-1918
The Great War

1938
New labs
Principal Boutflour secures a government grant of £3,150 to build new laboratories at the Cirencester campus.

1939
Second World War
In the first two years of the war, 50,000 skilled farm workers leave home to serve, leaving a huge gap in the workforce.



1939-1945
WWII

1940
Dig for Victory
Victory gardens are encouraged by the Government and wasteland up and down the country is turned towards production.



1979
Deepening equality
The RAC admits its first female students onto the Diploma course in Rural Estate Management.

1982
Royal President
HRH The Prince of Wales, now His Majesty King Charles III, becomes President of the RAC.

1984
Higher Education funding received
The first modern degree programme is launched – BSc (Hons) in Rural Land Management.



2022
• **Patron's death**
The RAU's longest serving Patron, HM Queen Elizabeth II, passes away. She had become Patron of what was then the Royal Agricultural College in 1952, having taken on the role following the death of her father, King George VI.

• **IAU opens**
Uzbekistan's new International Agricultural University (IAU), co-founded by the RAU, officially opens in the nation's capital, Tashkent.

2020
• **International partnerships**
The RAU opens the major Joint Institute for Advanced Agritechnology at Qingdao Agricultural University (QAU) in China to help expand transnational higher education in the land-based sector.

• **Online teaching**
Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the RAU maximises opportunities to deliver teaching through digital platforms.

2000
First plant genome sequenced
A wild member of the mustard family, Arabis thaliana is the first plant to be sequenced. Nearly three quarters of sequenced plant genomes are from crop species including maize, rice, soybean and wheat.

2013
University status
The Privy Council awards the College full University status and the Royal Agricultural University (RAU) is born.

2015
United Nations adopts 17 Sustainable Development Goals

2023
• **Funding secured for new Land Laboratory Teaching Centre**
The University secures £5.8m of funding from the Office for Students.

• **International partnership**
with the University of Al Dhaid in Sharjah, the United Arab Emirates, to create and deliver agricultural programmes.



2018
The Alliston Centre
The state-of-the-art £4.2m Alliston Centre, an incubation hub for agri-tech start-ups, is opened. The Centre is named after the late Professor John Alliston, a lecturer at the RAU and a winner of the Farmers Weekly Lifetime Achievement Award.



2024
• **New Patron**
His Majesty King Charles III is announced as Patron of the RAU.

• **Innovation Village**
Planning permission is submitted for the new Innovation Village, designed to spark entrepreneurial solutions for sustainable land use and a net-zero future.

2025

New Land Laboratory Teaching Centre ready to go

The state-of-the-art facilities will house the latest equipment and ensure that the RAU continues to play a crucial role in tackling global challenges

A new Land Laboratory Teaching Centre has been completed and is ready for students starting in the Autumn term. The new facilities provide integrated, state-of-the-art laboratories to train students in climate-smart, resilient agriculture and land management. The new centre, based on the ground floor of the University’s existing Frank Garner lecture block in Cirencester, has been built within budget and on time, after the University won £5.8m of funding from the Office for Students (OfS), the maximum amount available in the regulator’s inaugural capital funding round.

The new facilities will replace the University’s existing ageing laboratories and will house the latest equipment and technologies across a combined wet lab and IT-enabled learning environment covering a broad range of disciplines and skills. The facilities will support and enhance the delivery of our curriculum, the quality of our students’ learning experience and the development of our research, as well as our ability to recruit students and staff. The funding also demonstrates the OfS’s confidence in the RAU’s direction of travel.

The labs will help to ensure that the Royal Agricultural University




The teaching centre will house the latest equipment and technologies, and was built with a £5.8m grant from the OfS

continues to play a crucial role in tackling global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity and food security, and that the University is able to engage a growing and diverse range of students and practitioners in that mission.

The new facilities will fully embrace agricultural disciplines as science but also as trades and professions to be proud of – demonstrating world-leading techniques and practices. They will help us to ensure students and learners from all backgrounds and abilities, especially those from disadvantaged communities, can be at the forefront of resolving climate change and the goal of a sustainable world.



“After the hard work, it is great to see it come to fruition,” says Susan Coe-Martin, Laboratory Manager. “I am excited to see all the new facilities for staff, students and local businesses, and the opportunities this will bring for the future. We are retaining the original ethos of the University while creating a facility that is cutting edge.” 

Defra land use consultation workshops

From tree planting to house building, it is estimated that an area more than twice the size of Wales is needed to meet all the UK’s land use policy targets. Yet there is no more land. If we want to meet these targets, we need to be innovative with how we use the land we have.

A recent report, published during the Government’s consultation on a Land Use Framework for England by the RAU – in partnership with the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE); The Land Use for Net Zero, People & Nature (LUNZ) Hub; and AFN Network+ – sets out how the UK can support innovation to address these pressures on land.

Professor Tom MacMillan, who led the research, said: “Using land wisely is in everyone’s interest and more crucial than ever. Meeting all the needs that depend on land, from food and nature to houses and green energy, will take creative solutions.

“UK businesses, researchers and policymakers are pioneering many of these – such as developers building affordable, climate-friendly houses with timber and start-ups making apps that help farmers or planners decide what’s best to do where.

“By backing these innovators, investing in the infrastructure to connect entrepreneurs and research, Government can not only help on the ground but also make sure the UK reaps the economic rewards of meeting similar needs globally.”

Later this year, the RAU will launch support for the land use sector using online and existing onsite facilities. The RAU also led the research to explore what the sector needs from our proposed Innovation Village @ the RAU project on campus.



ALUM OF THE YEAR – REBECCA WILSON

Each year we celebrate the achievements of our alumni community and recognise their career success, outstanding achievements and contributions.

This year, we are delighted to present the award to Rebecca Wilson, MSc Rural Estate Management (2017).

Rebecca has appeared in the ‘most powerful 30 under 30’ list in The Sunday Times and in May 2024 she was named Agricultural Influencer of the Year at the National Women in Agriculture Awards.

A fifth-generation farmer, Rebecca runs a popular Instagram

page about her life on the family farm in North Yorkshire. She also co-hosts the Wilson & Ashley podcast, which records from a trailer converted into a mobile podcast studio.

Rebecca believes social media gives all farmers the power to tell their farming stories. She is passionate about encouraging people to consider agriculture as a career and also aims to help people learn about food production.

She is a very worthy recipient of the RAU’s Alum of the Year 2025. Thank you to everyone who nominated.



Rebecca Wilson is passionate about promoting careers in agriculture



Photograph taken by MSc Rural Estate Management student James Allen

Heavy horses return

Heavy horses returned to the fields at the RAU earlier this year, in sessions to show students the sustainability benefits of using horses rather than agricultural machinery.

In a scene reminiscent of those which would have taken place on the fields surrounding the campus throughout the institution's 180-year history, Ardenne heavy horses Sol and Kipp helped teach RAU agriculture, agroecology and equine students how horses can be used in various agricultural and countryside management tasks, including logging.

Organised jointly by the RAU and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) South West, which runs the GREAT Zerodig site on land next to the Cirencester campus, the horses were working on land at the Zerodig site with their owner, Kate Mobbs-Morgan.

Dr Andrew Hemmings, RAU Associate Professor in Equine Research Leadership, said: "We were able to show our students first-hand how horses can be used in small and larger scale farming operations and how working in this way can have enormous sustainability benefits.

"There is increasing industry demand for low-impact logging strategies and the advantages of horse logging compared to the use of machines in sensitive woodland areas are huge. There is also the potential for horses to 'regenerate as they work' with selective grazing that promotes the growth of valuable plant species.

"We firmly believe that horses have a key role to play in modern farming systems. By embracing horse power on farms, not only do

Images: RAU; Paul Nicholls (2025); Photo archive from Joan Goodworth (1900-1920)



“ We were able to show our students first-hand how working in this way can have enormous sustainability benefits ”

we reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, but we also create enduring bonds between horses and humans while preserving these wonderful breeds for future generations.

With mental health issues becoming more common in isolated farming communities, the physical and psychological health benefits of horse contact are manifold.

Traditionally, heavy horses would have been used for many jobs on the farm, including timber extraction, mowing, harrowing and bracken bashing. Using conventional agricultural machinery to do these tasks in often fragile habitats, with soils that have developed solely from natural processes, can damage the important underground networks of fungi and root systems that benefit associated ground flora.

As well as learning about the importance of using horses in sustainable agriculture and land management, the students also had the opportunity to get hands on with the horses, fitting the harnesses and even driving the horses during the various tasks.

Congratulations to MSc Rural Estate Management student, James Allen, whose photographs, taken with his 100-year-old Kodak 'box' Brownie camera, featured in *Cotswold Life* magazine.



THE McCORMICK REAPER (1906)



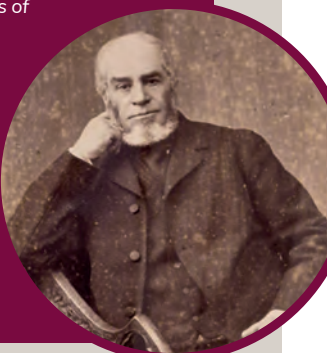
The McCormick reaper was a famous agricultural implement that greatly improved farm productivity in the 19th century. James Miles-Hobbs (Advanced

Farm Management, 1983) kindly sent an extract about his great-great-grandfather, Charles Hobbs, who farmed near Cirencester and visited the College in 1851.

In August, Charles renewed his acquaintance with Baron Liebig who came to visit the Agricultural College at the request of his countryman, Dr Voelcker, the Professor of Chemistry. Charles took full advantage of the facilities for advice afforded by experts. Artificial manures were as yet in their infancy. Bones were collected, crushed and applied with ashes. But the use of the new superphosphates was spreading, and Thomas Arkell was its prophet.

The College invited Mr McCormick from Chicago to bring down his reaping machine for the Great Exhibition, which was viewed by thousands of spectators. Horses of great size and power that belong to the College drew it along and did the work with ease. The reaper cut 27 poles of barley in 15 minutes at the rate of 16 acres per day of 10 hours, oats with the same rapidity and finally wheat, which it cut more cleanly. Charles thought it would have to be much improved before he would buy one, as there was great labour in removing the corn from the frame on which it was cast out.

Charles Hobbs, right, and the McCormick reaper, above (Wisconsin Historical Society)



Reaching out

James Watson, our new Student Recruitment Officer (Outreach), trained in primary education, taught in secondary education, and is now aiming to make a change in higher education. Here, he updates us on his plans for the future.

“This year, I have focused on putting students first and making higher education more accessible and inclusive. Working with the team, we have significantly stepped up our engagement, tripling the number of school visits compared to last year.

“Our new subject-based masterclass sessions, which really make us stand out, have given students a genuine taste of university life and shown how land-based subjects connect to real-world careers. Our database is regularly being updated and now includes contacts from close to 400 schools and 100 clubs, helping us stay connected and communicate more personally and effectively.

“One of the highlights this year was our Teachers and Advisers Conference, which brought staff from a wide range of schools to campus and gave them meaningful insight into what we teach, how we teach it, and how we support students in building strong, future-focused career paths.

“We’ve also continued to strengthen our local partnership with our neighbour, Cirencester College. I’m particularly proud of working closely with some wonderfully enthusiastic staff members to support students who may be uncertain about their next steps and helping them explore subjects that genuinely spark interest in their future goals.

“Looking ahead, I’m excited to keep building on this momentum, with more events, more school and club engagement, another Teachers and Advisers Conference, and even more opportunities to show that higher education, especially in the land-based sector, really can be for anyone.”

If you would like to know more, you can email James at outreach@rau.ac.uk



James Watson is the RAU's new Student Recruitment Officer

Defra grant boosts soil research


Government funding has been awarded to Dr David O'Connor and his team to conduct research on soil pollution in Ukraine.



The practice of smelting ore to extract metal, which dates back approximately 10,000 years, has initiated a toxic legacy that persists today. From crafting copper arrowheads to engineering nickel-alloy rocket engines, metallurgy has empowered humanity to develop increasingly advanced tools.

However, soil pollution resulting from mining, along with industrial activities, agriculture and military operations, poses significant risks not only to human health but also to food security and the long-term sustainability of farmland.

Alarmingly, our global understanding of the distribution and concentration of these toxic metals within agricultural soils remains insufficient. Dr David O'Connor is a member of an international research effort that produced the first global map of toxic metals in soils. Published in the journal *Science*, it




Dr David O'Connor (left) is an Associate Professor in Sustainable Land Management at the Royal Agricultural University. Dr O'Connor's research involves pollution issues relating to brownfield development as well as agricultural land degradation. His guiding principle is that land requires careful stewardship in order to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Dr O'Connor's research in this subject has led to 49 SCI articles in journals including *Nature*, *Science*, *Nature Sustainability* and *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment*.

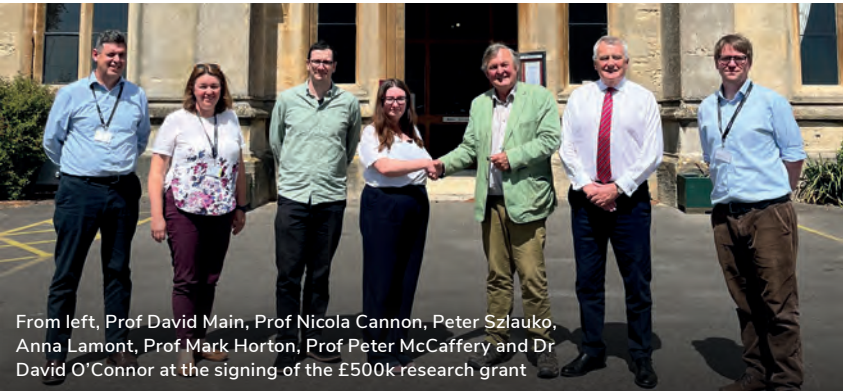
indicates extensive contaminated regions, unveiling a transcontinental corridor of metal-impacted soils stretching from southern Europe to China, along with identified hotspots across Africa and the Americas. The study estimates that between 900 million and 1.4 billion people may be exposed to elevated levels of at least one toxic metal, with 14% to 17% of global farmland at risk.

In many developing nations, there is often a gap in awareness of soil pollution. Yet, under Dr O'Connor's guidance, significant strides are being made. Collaborating with

the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization's International Network on Soil Pollution, he leads a working group dedicated to developing educational resources for farmers. A trial in February with farmers in Trinidad and Tobago received overwhelmingly positive feedback.

The situation regarding soil pollution is particularly urgent in Ukraine, where soil health is crucial for agriculture. Since Russia's invasion, Ukrainian farmlands have suffered from bombardments and various war-related pollutants, resulting in risks to crop safety and the overall food system – though the full extent of the damage is unknown.

To tackle this pressing challenge, a £500,000 Defra grant has been awarded to the RAU. The project will strengthen the RAU's partnership with Sumy National Agrarian University in training Ukrainian experts, establishing soil laboratories and analysing over 8,000 soil samples across five regions (see front cover for the signing of the memorandum). 



From left, Prof David Main, Prof Nicola Cannon, Peter Szlauko, Anna Lamont, Prof Mark Horton, Prof Peter McCaffery and Dr David O'Connor at the signing of the £500k research grant

Global partnerships keep growing

Professor Xianmin Chang, Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor, has been working to build the RAU's international programmes and says these partnerships are stronger than ever.

Since joining the RAU, I have been focused on developing and expanding our international portfolio, particularly by building strong academic partnerships in China.

Collaboration with Universities across the world contributes directly to the RAU Strategy 2023-28, specifically the objective to maximise our reach internationally and to grow partnerships with like-minded organisations. International collaboration has been at the heart of the RAU's activities since our inception; currently we have significant partnerships with China, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. Our partnerships are multi-faceted, growing opportunities across teaching, research, staff and student exchange and other forms of mobility and knowledge exchange.

Our transnational education (TNE) collaborations with universities in China deliver high quality education programmes, applying advanced and innovative pedagogical ideas and teaching concepts which align with global education trends, combined with a focus on creativity, practice and academic research from both the UK and China.

We have been running two teaching programmes with Shandong Agricultural University (SDAU) for over a decade, comprising undergraduate programmes in Food Quality and Safety, which began in 2007, and in Real Estate and Business, which launched in 2013. After more than a decade of teaching collaboration, both SDAU and RAU aim to build these programmes further to double degrees, to improve enrolment and teaching quality assurance management. In

2020 the application to enhance the Real Estate programme to a double degree was submitted; due to the commitment and dedication of the RAU China Team and the excellent reputation of RAU, the application was approved by the Ministry of Education (MoE) of China in April 2021. From 2021 through to 2024 there were 93, 142, 141 and 136 students enrolled on the Real Estate double degree programme respectively. In addition to students on the SDAU teaching programmes, there were a further 531 registered students in 2024, and 1,040 registered students in September 2024.

RAU and SDAU are now working on a further double degree programme aiming to launch in 2026, which brings together an honours degree in Equine Science Management, aligning with SDAU's degree in Animal Science. An application was submitted in June 2024; this will then meet the Chinese Government's requirements to qualify as a RAU-SDAU Joint Institute (JI) (i.e. running three programmes).



Professor Xianmin Chang, pictured working in a lab (above right), was invited with RAU colleagues to the Education and Skills Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in May 2025 (right) **Below:** Graduation celebrations at SDAU



The RAU Joint Institute for Advanced Agritechology at Qingdao Agricultural University (RAU-QAU JI) was approved by the Chinese MoE in April 2020, after two years of preparation.

The Joint Institute brings together the strengths of both universities to produce high-quality graduates with skills and abilities to meet the requirements of a modern economic agricultural world. The Joint Institute is made up of four honours degree programmes: Agriculture; Environment, Food and Society; Food Production and Supply Management; and International Business Management (Food and Agribusiness) which cover pre-, mid-, and post-food production, and the whole food supply chain.

There were 1,068 students registered at the RAU-QAU JI in September 2024. In the first cohort of 247 graduates in June 2024, 60% progressed onto Masters (MSc) studies, with 89 students receiving offers from QS top 200 universities. Building on this, I am now leading the development of four Masters programmes with QAU, which will enrol a further 300-400 students per year.

These programmes significantly improve employability of graduates who study on them, including being proficient in both Chinese and English. We encourage prospective students to continue their postgraduate studies at RAU, which not only provide new opportunities and experiences for students but also jointly



To learn more about teaching abroad, read **A Day in the Life with James Cipriani** on page 30

enhances our international reputation. RAU and QAU continue to develop research opportunities including academic research collaborations. Recently, following strong competition and a rigorous panel review, our China TNE BSc programmes at both QAU and SDAU have been recognised by the Chinese Government as outstanding; this now enables our joint collaborations to grow in strength and numbers by 30% from 2025/26.

We have also secured a further opportunity for the Postgraduate Certificate in Research Methodology at Shenyang University to prepare students to progress to a PhD programme in Environmental Risk Management and Sustainable Development. This programme will significantly enhance RAU's global visibility. 1

For further information about International Partnerships, email international@rau.ac.uk

Kaleb Cooper lends a helping hand

Two RAU agriculture students, who may have struggled to get into the sector because they don't have an agricultural background, have had a helping hand from the Cotswolds' most famous farmer, as seen on Clarkson's Farm.

Rose Geggie, 20, and 19-year-old Rupert Jones were chosen as recipients of the 2024/2025 RAU Kaleb Cooper Agriculture Bursary and they met the man himself earlier this year when he joined Rose, Rupert and other RAU students for the RAUSU's annual RAG Week Tractor Pull.

Kaleb said: "This is the second year of my agricultural bursary with the RAU and I'm so proud that once again we've been able to award it to two very deserving young people."

"I am so passionate about supporting the new generation to get into the best industry in the world. Especially as I know, from my own experience, that it's not an obvious or easy route for someone who doesn't come from a farming family."

The scheme, which launched in 2023, currently offers two bursaries annually – one funded by Kaleb himself and one funded by the Elizabeth Creak Charitable Trust, which has an existing relationship with the RAU.

The bursaries are open to all RAU undergraduate agriculture students, although preference may be given to students – like Kaleb – who are not from a farming/agricultural background or those who can demonstrate hardship or financial need. Rose and Rupert both get £3,000 as well as the opportunity to apply for a work placement with either Kaleb or one of his industry partners.

BSc Agriculture student Rose, who comes from Lymm in Cheshire, joined the RAU



“Whatever happens, if I'm a farmer, I'll be the happiest person in the world”

last September. She said: “When I applied for the bursary, I didn't dare dream that I would be chosen. I come from a non-farming background but my mum has always insisted that I follow my agricultural

dream, go to university and take all the opportunities that come.

“This is an enormous opportunity. I don't yet know in which direction my career is headed but, whatever happens, if I'm a farmer, I'll be the happiest person in the world.”

Rupert who hails from Bournemouth is also in his first year studying for a BSc (Hons) in Agriculture. He said: “Receiving the RAU Kaleb Cooper Agriculture Bursary has given the start of my studies a real boost, providing inspiration for the future and my career within the agricultural industry.

“Coming from a non-agricultural background, I haven't had the opportunity to gain a good understanding of the working practices of a farm.

“The RAU has already given me a great insight into this through my studies but this support from Kaleb will provide further opportunities for me to increase my networks


within the industry and will help me work towards my goal of having a career in the agricultural sector.”

Kaleb, a self-made agricultural entrepreneur and farm contractor, has been working in and around farms since he was a schoolboy and is a passionate supporter of UK agriculture and opportunities for young people to enter the sector.

He added: “Agriculture can offer such a varied and rewarding career. If you're hard-working, curious and want to learn skills for life, I can't encourage you enough to look into agricultural studies and take that first step.”

RAU Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter McCaffery said: “We are delighted that Kaleb has renewed his support this year for RAU students through this bursary.

“He is a passionate advocate of farming, as we have seen in *Clarkson's Farm*, and he has significantly raised public awareness of farming and agriculture at a very challenging time for the sector.

“Our bursary winners are new entrants to farming and it's fantastic that this support will help them to realise their career dreams and aspirations and follow in Kaleb's path. We are very grateful and excited to be working with him.” 

Above: Kaleb, Rose and Rupert join other RAU students for the RAUSU's annual RAG Week Tractor Pull
Left: Kaleb Cooper (centre) with Rose Geggie and Rupert Jones, recipients of the 2024/2025 RAU Kaleb Cooper Agriculture Bursary

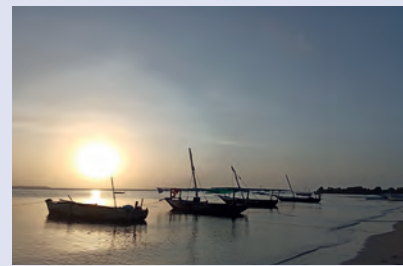
Project Update: Giving Us Voice

Dr Annalisa Christie shares the latest work from Giving Us Voice: curating community perspectives on the impact of climate change on marine resource exploitation.

From January to March 2025, a team of researchers from the RAU and the University of Dar es Salaam visited Unguja and Pemba Islands off the coast of Tanzania as part of the British Academy funded project, Giving Us Voice. The project aims to understand how coastal communities in these islands are affected by and are adapting to the effects of climate change, and to inform fisheries' policy on the islands. Fishing and other maritime practices are a core

element of the region's tangible and intangible heritage, with a long history evidenced across the archaeological and historical record.

While in Tanzania, we led workshops with women to co-create graphic novels that convey their experiences and the ways climate change is affecting their livelihoods and lives. While some highlighted the hardships and impacts on social cohesion arising from climate change, they also showcased the



value the women placed on the importance of villagers coming together to promote conservation and environmental regeneration.

We also hosted workshops with men and women using material culture as a focal point for storytelling. The communities co-produced objects including a model boat, two basket traps and a miniature basket that embody their activities and symbolise their hopes and fears for the future.

Interviews were conducted with over 250 participants, providing insight into why the sea is important to them and to understand the nature of their activities, the challenges they face and the changes they have seen. These narratives will be examined comparatively to identify areas where we can better support the resilience of these communities and their heritage.

Some participants spoke on camera and their stories have been included in a documentary, *Bahari ni Maisha Yetu* (The Sea Is Our Life), which premiered at the Zanzibar International Film Festival in July 2025. [L](#)

Celebrating 180 years

RAU hosts free lectures and unveils sculpture to mark milestone year



As part of our 180th celebrations, RAU professors hosted a series of free lectures exploring challenges and opportunities in environment, farming, food and water security, and land management.



Andy Cato with Professor Nicola Cannon

'Cereals' Rethinking Arable Growing Systems was a joint event with Nicola Cannon, RAU Professor of Agriculture, and Andy Cato. In 2018, Andy co-founded Wildfarmed, a regenerative food and farming company that aims to bring quality food from nature-rich landscapes to the high street.

Andy explained: "Regenerative farming – a solution to many problems – is being adopted slowly because it's a system, not a single practice. After centuries of reductionist science, our ability to think systemically is compromised. A proper analysis of such systems requires input from diverse experts – agronomists, economists, hydrologists, soil scientists, entomologists, nutritionists, and botanists."

The RAU's Mark Horton welcomed eminent historian William Dalrymple for an evening exploring the **Origins of Empire and Globalisation**. Their journey spanned Madagascar, Zanzibar, Sri Lanka, the Vikings, Panama, the Caribbean, and Virginia, revealing how archaeology uncovers the roots of the modern world.

Professor Horton noted: "While globalisation is a modern buzzword, ancient societies connected across vast distances – via the Silk Roads or Indian Ocean monsoons. Much of our food originates from these exchanges – apples, citrus, sugar and, post-1492, potatoes, tomatoes and corn through the Columbian exchange."

In **Dancing with Daffodils**, Professor Xiamin Chang and Kevin Stephens from Agroceutical Products shared how daffodils grown in Powys (pictured) produce galantamine, used to slow vascular dementia. Professor Chang said: "This long, complex journey has given us insights to guide the next generation of agricultural entrepreneurs."

Visit the website for the latest events and booking details.



Steel and Spirit: Ram's Head Sculpture

A ram's head sculpture made from recycled steel rods has been unveiled as part of the RAU's anniversary celebrations. Harlan Beales, 17, an art student at Hereford College of Arts, designed and fabricated the piece – named *Aries* – with support from former RAU student and sculptor

Will Carr.

Harlan said: "Will and I worked on the design together – he created 3D projections, and I made paper models. This is my first large-scale sculpture, and I'm excited it will stay at RAU."

Will now runs a 200-hectare farm in Weobley and an international sculpture business. In 2015, he created a *Barley Ears* sculpture for the RAU's 170th anniversary. "It was great to be asked again," Will said. "Working with Harlan was fantastic. The joined steel bars in *Aries* symbolize the shared knowledge and collaboration at the heart of RAU." [L](#)



Harlan Beales and Will Carr with *Aries*

Great food can be kind to the planet

Ryan Hanson, Director of Campus Experience, explains how our students are benefiting from the University’s commitment to sourcing sustainable and local ingredients to produce award-winning catering.

We are very proud that our students can enjoy amazing food at the RAU as part of the University’s responsibility to provide healthy and sustainable food to our staff, students and visitors. Our aim is to minimise the impact of our catering provision on the environment, and to promote sustainable practices and consumption, while serving fantastic food for all.

Our philosophy for sourcing is derived from our purchasing mantra, LEAF – Local, Environmentally conscious, Alumnus, Fair. We look to use produce and work with suppliers that fit into at least one of these four pillars, helping to shape our habits going forward.

This includes our partnership with social enterprise project Zerodig, where a wide range of crops are grown using a low soil disturbance system to try to improve soil health. Sitting alongside our rugby pitch, this seven-acre site not only helps teach students on the RAU’s MSc in Agroecology course but also works directly with our kitchen.

Our students are actively involved in all aspects of Zerodig, including planning planting schedules to match the University’s catering



Alison Inch from the NUS Charity with the RAU Catering and Hospitality Team



Zerodig Project Manager Rachel Wheatley and Dr Jonathan Code, Senior Lecturer in Sustainable Land Management

requirements. This innovative project is delivering food from field to fork in just 500 metres!

Besides sourcing local food, a key area of focus in the past few years has been minimising our food waste. Globally, over a billion metric tonnes of serviceable food went to waste in 2022 (UNEP, 2022). This eye-watering figure generates around 10% of global

greenhouse emissions, the equivalent of emissions from aviation and shipping combined. These startling statistics clearly demonstrate that – in spite of our best efforts to improve procurement and buying well from the right places at the right time – waste management is where the most sustainability gains can be made.

Last year, we became the first UK university to work with Leanpath, a system that allows us to measure and track our food waste intelligently to increase operational efficiencies.

This June, those sustainability efforts were recognised nationally when we won the Sustainability Award category at the U Dine Network Awards – an accolade sponsored by the NUS Charity to honour those “pushing boundaries and shaping a greener future” in university catering. Feedback from our submission suggested we had moved the dial so much in this area that the way they consider these entries has changed forever!

This award shines a spotlight on our work to reshape the food landscape one delicious, responsible plate at a time. The message is clear: RAU is proving great food can be kind to the planet.

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Growing together for generations. With 170 years of expertise, we help you navigate what’s next.

Explore the **Rural Knowledge Portal** — your hub for insights and opinions.

LEARNING ON THE FARM

The RAU has joined forces with a local alumnus' award-winning regenerative farming business to make its teaching farm fully regenerative.

Coates Manor Farm, a 457-acre arable farm next to the RAU campus, teaches our students about agriculture and related disciplines and is now being farmed in an exciting new collaboration between the University and award-winning regenerative farming business SS Horton & Sons, run by RAU alumnus Ed Horton.

This change in farming system – which includes a more diverse crop rotation, a range of cover crops, grazing cover crops with livestock and direct drilling – has enabled

students to gain experience in a wider range of farm management techniques, including growing peas, beans and spelt wheat, as well as the management of over-winter cover crops.

RAU Agriculture Professor Nicola Cannon, who oversees the teaching at Manor Farm, said: “The RAU is at the forefront of both education and research to find solutions to the challenges facing the agricultural industry and Manor Farm provides a vital canvas for our teaching as well as our research projects and links

with the agricultural industry. In addition to using the farm as a base for practical field classes, real-life scenarios, case study-based learning, and environmental planning, it also allows us to teach students traditional agricultural skills, such as crop and livestock monitoring and evaluation, understanding a range of husbandry practices and weed, pest and disease identification.”

Regenerative farming focuses on enhancing soil health. A combination of practices – including maintaining soil cover, integrating crop and livestock enterprises, maintaining living roots in the soil, practising diverse crop rotations and minimal soil disturbance – helps to build organic matter which, in turn, stabilises the soil and helps to reduce erosion as well as creating diverse soil microbiomes and decreasing the risk of environmental stress.

Ed Horton, partner at SS Horton & Sons, explained: “We are aiming for the RAU’s farming operation to be a guide to regenerative agriculture at scale. Utilising our access to local markets for produce allows us to grow a more diverse range of cropping, such as spelt wheat for Northern Pasta Co. and durum wheat for our local mill, Matthews Cotswold Flour.

“Having a close working relationship with the customer means



A farm visit to the Sandy Hill Mob in Sherborne, Dorset, hosted by RAU alumnus Matt Elliott (GDA, 2017)

that the end user has full traceability and transparency in how their food is produced, and what the long-term benefits are to biodiversity, soil health and water quality.

“We also aim to show students and the wider farming community that, over time, a reduction in external synthetic inputs will still produce commercially viable yields in a tough market, with far less risk exposure to the vagaries of the global commodity markets.”

Regenerative farming is a key step towards developing resilient farming systems that can cope with extreme weather conditions and a changing climate.

Professor Cannon explained: “The UK is experiencing more extreme weather – named storms, prolonged wet periods and flooding, and, at times, very hot and dry periods limiting growth – and these extremes are occurring more frequently.

“Farming systems, not just here in the UK but across the globe, need to respond to this changing environment to ensure that we can carry on producing food while also acting as part of the solution for climate change.”

This method of farming offers resilience to changing market conditions as it is not reliant on

a single crop. It also encourages diversity on farms through a wider range of crop rotations, which not only improves the ability to cope with environmental stressors but also creates a wider range of habitats, enhancing biodiversity.

Professor Cannon added: “As well as helping farmers to deal with climate change, regenerative farming is a climate change solution as it is one of the most reliably tried-and-tested ways of sequestering carbon. It also reduces emissions by using less fossil fuel for cultivations and being less reliant on crop protection products, so it should also lower greenhouse gas emissions.”

Edward Bonn, Farm Environment Adviser at Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) South West, which is working with Zerodig,



A Farm491 member assessing incorporation and application rates in a biochar field trial

“The UK is experiencing more extreme weather and these extremes are occurring more frequently. Farming systems, not just here but across the globe, need to respond to this changing environment”

said: “We grow a wide range of crops using a low soil disturbance system to try to improve soil health.

“The RAU wants to ensure that as much of the food as possible that it serves to staff and students, as well as at weddings, conferences and other events, is RAU grown. Not only does this cut food miles, it also raises the visibility of seasonal vegetables that can be harvested to meet market demands.”

Professor Cannon concluded: “Both these partnerships help us to provide real-time examples of regenerative farming practices and sustainable food production systems.

“Our focus on supplying locally produced food also helps consumers connect with what they eat, supports local businesses and maintains the UK as a valued food producer. It’s a win-win and absolutely what we should be doing as an agricultural university.” **L**



Above: Drilling crop trials on The Steadings
Left: Students visiting the FWAG GREAT market garden adjacent to the rugby pitch

Planting the seeds of the future

From funding scholarships and bursaries to upgrading essential infrastructure, your support for the RAU matters more than ever.

Since 1845, the Royal Agricultural University (RAU) has been at the forefront of rural education. Today, in the face of climate change, food insecurity, biodiversity loss and rural inequality, our mission has never been more urgent. Our students and research are essential to addressing these global challenges.

To continue driving meaningful change, we must invest in education, skills, research and our historic campus. That's where your support comes in.

Your donations make a difference

Every contribution to RAU helps us:

- Fund vital academic research, specialist equipment and scholarships for students who might otherwise miss out on a university education.
- Invest in our 'Campus for the Future' – sustainable spaces for learning and innovation.
- Preserve our heritage, including projects such as the Clock Tower refurbishment and the creation of a new Village Green.

A university with purpose

Founded through generous donations, RAU opened its doors to 25 students

in 1845. Innovation and ambition have defined us ever since, and today we prepare students to meet the future with resilience and creativity.

Real impact

Sophie, a Rural Land Management graduate, now leads sustainability programmes across the South West – her studies made possible by a scholarship. Jamal, a postgraduate researcher, is tackling urban food insecurity through vertical farming. Stories like theirs are possible thanks to the generosity of our alumni and supporters.

Join our community of supporters

Giving to RAU is more than a donation – it's a shared commitment to stewardship, community and the future of the land. Whether you give monthly, annually or through your legacy, your support makes a lasting impact.

Ways to give:

- Make a one-off or recurring donation online.
- Support a specific project – e.g. Clock Tower, sports facilities, hardship funds.
- Leave a legacy gift in your will to help future generations.

Together, we can ensure RAU remains a place of innovation and learning, and has a positive impact for generations to come

To explore giving options, please contact Julia Jenkins, Head of Development & Alumni Relations, at **01285 889858** or email **development@rau.ac.uk**.



Scan the QR code to donate online



Fundraising priorities

1. Academic excellence and access

We strive to attract leading academics and stay at the cutting edge of teaching and research. Support helps fund academic posts, research partnerships, and access to advanced technologies.

Scholarships attract top students from around the world, while bursaries assist those facing financial hardship. You can contribute a one-off gift or support long-term scholarships and endowments.

2. Preserving our historic campus

Our Cotswold campus features historic buildings, including the Grade II-listed Clock Tower and a 17th-century farmhouse. Preserving these structures requires careful investment.

• Clock Tower refurbishment

An 80-foot limestone landmark, the Clock Tower now needs urgent repair. Planned work includes roof and structural fixes, heating upgrades for energy efficiency and transforming unused rooms into functional teaching and event spaces.

• Village Green

Replacing the old land labs, this new space will become a vibrant outdoor teaching and social hub – central to student life and framed by our historic buildings.

3. Building a campus for the future

We aim to transform RAU into an international centre for agricultural research, innovation and education – where staff and students thrive.

• Innovation Village @ RAU

This upcoming world-class centre will unite cutting-edge research with industry to address pressing issues such as climate change, food systems and biodiversity. It will also be a model of sustainable design and ecological harmony.

• Investing in sport

Sport supports student wellbeing and achievement. Planned upgrades include improved pitches, enhanced indoor spaces, and modernised gym facilities. ①

See the panel on the left for more information about making a donation.

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

GRAND IDEAS BECOME A REALITY

The RAU competition has inspired young entrepreneurs to bring their business dreams to life.

Entrepreneurship, for many, begins with a business plan or a gap in the market, but for Diploma in Agriculture student Chloe Marsh, it started with something more personal – a desire to live a life that feels truly authentic.

Herbert & Mo is a heritage design agency dedicated to celebrating craftsmanship, history and timeless design and creating exquisite, hand-drawn designs for heritage brands.

One of Herbert & Mo's first creations is a customised silk ribbon 'twilly', crafted for graduates in celebration of the RAU's 180th

year. Chloe had been considering the concept for some time, but it was her decision to enter the 2025 RAU Grand Idea competition that brought it to life.

Starting a business while juggling her studies, working full-time as a graphic designer and relief milking at weekends was no small feat. But now Chloe has finished her studies – she graduates this autumn – she has made the leap to self-employment, carving out dedicated time each week for Herbert & Mo.

Like many entrepreneurs, Chloe learned some of her most important

lessons the hard way.

“At first, I tried to do it all myself but I quickly realised the importance of asking for help. The support and generosity I've received have been overwhelming and I hope, one day, to pay that forward.”

Support from the RAU has been instrumental in Chloe's journey. While she was not selected as one of this year's Grand Idea finalists, she did receive £250 in start-up funding, mentoring from a business coach and invaluable resources from the Enterprise Team.

Her advice to other students thinking about launching their own ventures? “Just start! Don't let setbacks stop you – let them fuel you. And most of all, be authentically you. That's your selling point.”

If you would like to know more about how you can help our Enterprise Programme, please contact Katy on 01285 652531 or email enterprise@rau.ac.uk



Above: Chloe Marsh
Right: Mock-ups for the silk twilly she has designed (above)



PIONEERING PADEL PROJECT WINS THIS YEAR'S GRAND IDEA AWARD

An innovative business idea to build mezzanine padel courts in existing stadiums – improving public accessibility to the fastest growing sport in the world – won this year's RAU Grand Idea competition.

Second year Rural Land Management student Daniel Blacker scooped the top prize in the Dragons' Den-style competition, winning £5,000 to invest in his business.

He explained: “Despite being the fastest growing sport in the world, padel is still not that accessible to many people in the UK because of the amount of space you need for the courts. Many courts have been built on industrial estates, or similar locations, and often these are not accessible for everyone.”

Alongside the Grand Idea prize money, Daniel will continue to receive guidance and business coaching while developing his business through the RAU's Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Programme.

Daniel is now working with his father's steel fabrications company to develop his plan to build mezzanine level turnkey padel courts in existing sports stadiums and arenas. He explained: “Arenas and stadiums have space but a lot of it is above ground – they

are high enough but not wide enough.

A mezzanine floor provides loads of space.

“Padel is a doubles sport but I am also keen to build narrower singles courts. These will not only make padel more accessible for people who want to play as a pair, but also for disabled people who may not have the ability to get around a larger court.”

He admits that he could never have got as far as he has with his business plan without the help and guidance of staff from the RAU's Ignite Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Programme, which provides a supportive environment for students to develop and launch their ideas.

He explained: “Studying Rural Land Management has definitely helped fuel my passion for sports business but the Enterprise programme and the staff are amazing. The amount of help I have had is quite astonishing – I wouldn't be where I am today without them.”

Part of the RAU's Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Programme, and now in its 18th year, the Grand Idea competition invites students to pitch their business ideas to a panel of experts.

This year's judging panel consisted of retail consultant and RAU Honorary Fellow Christine Cross; Former Dragons' Den contestant, food entrepreneur, and RAU Honorary Fellow Levi Roots; Colin Carville, Finance Director at



Grand Idea 2025 winner Daniel Blacker (right) with runner-up Zachary Costello

the RAU; and award-winning brand strategist Belinda Furneaux-Harris, founder and CEO of Branded & Unstoppable.

Daniel added: “To have people of the judges' stature in the business world say you have done something impressive is a massive validation. Winning the Grand Idea competition has genuinely been one of the best moments of my life and I am incredibly grateful to the judges – and to the Enterprise Programme – for this incredible opportunity.”

HE'S IN FASHION

Fellow Rural Land Management student Zachary Costello, from Warwickshire, was a runner-up in the competition and won £2,500 to invest in his business, Chauvet Couture, a fashion brand curating high-end, pre-loved garments, styles, looks and outfit guides.

Zachary, who is also in his second year, said: “The Grand Idea was a brilliant experience. The feedback, mentoring and encouragement I received from the RAU and the University's Enterprise team made all the difference.

“It's been an inspiring journey and I gained so much from this experience.”

“I wouldn't be where I am today without the help of the amazing staff”

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Acorus is a national company with a strong local presence, specialising in rural development. We are proud to be part of the NFU group, the trusted voice of British farming.

As a member of the NFU group, we benefit from the depth of knowledge, reputation, and resources of one of the most respected organisations in the agricultural and rural sector. This partnership enhances our ability to support clients with expert advice, up-to-date industry insight, and a commitment to high standards.

We handle a wide range of planning and development matters, managing projects from initial concept through to completion and even sale, if desired. We offer a comprehensive, turnkey solution, we act as a 'one-stop shop' for our clients, delivering services that include:

Planning Consultancy

Acorus cover a broad spectrum of planning work and provide general advice regarding increasing the value of property assets, advising on the need for planning permission and scope for any permitted development rights, applying for permission and resolving rural development issues.

Architectural Services

Acorus has the benefit of an experienced in-house design/drawing team. We work closely with each other to negotiate the complexities of rural planning. For example, we understand the difference between different types of farming enterprises and have the technical experience to design farm buildings that work on their own or part of a group of buildings.

We offer a full project management service. In particular, our contract administration and health and safety services are specifically designed to assist clients through complex building projects. We know our way around associated various legislation such as Construction Design Management Regulations (CDM), Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), Listing Buildings and Building Regulations.

Property Sales

Our property sales department specialise in rural properties and deal with both properties subject to planning conditions, such as agricultural occupancy conditions, and those without.

Due to our broad knowledge of the rural sector, our experience and resources, we are well placed to deal with any planning and design queries that may arise during the process for both sellers and buyers.

Some of the projects that we have recently assisted with include the following:

- Livestock buildings
- Leisure facilities
- Farm shops
- Changes of use
- Barn conversions
- Agricultural dwellings

The above is just a handful of matters that we can help with.

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Tackling the land crunch

The RAU is calling for innovative thinking to ensure the UK is making the best use of its limited resources.


In the UK, we rely on our roughly 94,000 square miles to house, feed and produce energy for us, much as we always have done. But increasingly we are asking more of the land – we now need it to protect us from the impacts of climate change, to restore biodiversity and to reduce our reliance on imported food. This mounting pressure has been labelled the 'land crunch'.

Whether it's tree planting, house building or peatland protection, it is now estimated that an area more than twice the size of Wales is needed to meet all the UK's land use policy targets. Yet, there is no extra land. If we want to meet these targets, we need to be innovative with how we use the land we have.

Conscious of this growing pressure, this year the Government held a consultation on land use in England, with a strategy due over the summer. At the RAU, our message has been

clear: we need to support the growing land use sector to find innovative solutions to the land crunch. Our report, Land Use Innovation, which was published in April, laid out the need for innovation in the sector and profiled several pioneering organisations who are already rethinking land use. Some of these are included in the panel on the right.

One way to foster this kind of innovation is with infrastructure such as the RAU's planned Innovation Village. This kind of 'start-up and scale-up' support can be instrumental in getting good ideas off the ground, and was widely supported by the land-use folk we spoke with while writing the report.

This kind of hub can bring together the whole sector – farmers, local authorities, energy producers and environmentalists – and help find ways to meet the mounting demands and pressures on land. 



Follow the link to read the report:



GROUNDBREAKING IDEAS

LAND APP

Land App is an online platform that can help farmers map out and assess the natural capital of their land. They can then explore different land-use strategies. For example, where would planting trees provide the best balance of biodiversity and profitability? Or what's the best way to manage land that's susceptible to flooding? In addition to managing their own holding, land managers can link up with their neighbours to make changes that enrich the whole landscape.

FOOD, FARMING AND COUNTRYSIDE COMMISSION

In Cambridgeshire, the FFCC brought together a range of stakeholders to explore their ambitions for land and its use. With the help of local spatial data design company Vizzuality, it also developed a prototype spatial data visualisation tool. The FFCC believes the tool could be used to layer data about key land uses in an area, bringing issues that are normally not seen together on a single map to illustrate both where the conflicts lie and where potential synergies can be found.

SCOTTISH LAND COMMISSION

The Scottish Land Commission works directly with landowners, managers and communities to support good practice on the ground. Its work has involved convening a taskforce to tackle vacant and derelict land, publishing codes of practice for tenant farming and informing the Land Reform Bill. Currently going through the Scottish Parliament, the bill would introduce significant regulation of large land holdings in the public interest.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Former RAU student James Cipriani is a Senior Lecturer in Business, based at the Qingdao Agricultural University (QAU) in China.

James Franco Cipriani's career journey began at the RAU in 2011, where he completed a BSc (Hons) and MSc in Business Management. Since becoming a lecturer in 2020 at South Gloucestershire and Stroud College, he has also embarked on a Doctorate in Education at the University of Gloucestershire.

At the Joint Institute in China, James's teaching focuses on Organisation Studies, Strategic Management, Marketing and Entrepreneurship. Now in his second year of transnational education, he was inspired by the chance to apply his enthusiasm for education within a vibrant, diverse environment and says he feels incredibly excited by the opportunity to represent the RAU internationally.

What does a typical day look like?
My schedule varies depending on

the semester. In the first semester, days are often full. I typically start at 7am, as classes begin at 8am. While 8am is officially a student preparation session, I like to be available for questions or to set activities. On teaching-intensive days, I will be in class until 11.35am. Lunchtime is my chance to catch up on emails before grabbing a bite to eat, either on campus or nearby. Some evenings involve teaching and student preparation sessions that run as late as 8.30pm.

How do you balance teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities?

Fortunately, my research often directly informs my teaching, so classroom interactions provide rich opportunities for reflection and data gathering. For dedicated research tasks such as writing papers, I need disciplined time management, slotting these activities wherever possible around my core teaching and admin duties.

What tools or technologies do you rely on throughout your day?

Technology is indispensable! My laptop is central for creating teaching materials, everything from presentations and case studies to interactive activities. I use platforms such as Padlet and Vevox to engage students and diversify the learning experience.

What are some of the biggest differences you've noticed between teaching here and in the UK?

Teaching at QAU has been wonderful.

Interestingly, what often strikes me most are the similarities, not the differences. I find students have similar concerns and worries about assessments and exams, ambitions for the future, and shared interests such as football (there are many passionate Premier League fans here).

How do you connect with students from different cultural backgrounds?

I strive to create a positive impression through patience, dedication and inspiring learning experiences. Walking across the QAU campus, I am often pleasantly surprised by how many students stop to say 'hello', wave or call out my name. I have been touched to hear students refer to me as the 'kind teacher'. Making time for each individual is a priority.

Have you experienced any culture shocks or challenges adapting to local life?

Perhaps the biggest 'shock' has been how quickly Qingdao and QAU have become a second home. My heart is now genuinely torn between China and the UK.

How do you prepare your lectures and course materials for a diverse classroom?

I act like a sponge, absorbing local trends, interests and norms, and incorporate these observations into my teaching materials, ensuring examples strike a balance between

Opposite page: James with his students at QAU (top) and with his partner, Jinghan (bottom) **Above:** James says China's rich culture and traditions have enabled him to enjoy some incredible experiences



relatable Chinese contexts and broader international perspectives.

What's one of the most rewarding moments you've had as an international lecturer?

There have been many, but one stands out. When returning for the second semester in my first year, I walked into a classroom to spontaneous applause. One student called out, 'We've missed you!'. That moment was incredibly special.

What are some unexpected challenges you've faced teaching internationally?

Navigating the language barrier and differing educational backgrounds requires constant attention. I focus on ensuring my communication is crystal clear and accessible, and I'm always prepared to revisit topics if students need more support.

What advice would you give to someone considering an international academic career?

Take the opportunity! It's an incredible, eye-opening experience. It has fostered deep humility and gratitude within me, and I genuinely look forward to starting each new day.

“ I act like a sponge, absorbing local trends, interests and norms, and incorporate these observations into my teaching materials ”

How has working abroad changed your perspective?

It has made me profoundly humble about life and our world, and reshaped my perspective in countless ways. Most significantly, I met my partner, Jinghan, who is training to be a dentist and is an incredible force in my life.

What do you enjoy outside of work?

I love staying active, running, cycling and hitting the gym. My favourite pastime is heading to Shilaoren Beach with a coffee and catching up on research while enjoying the sea view.

Any favourite local foods, phrases or traditions you've picked up?

I've become a huge fan of HaiDiLao Hotpot. I also participate in traditional activities – it's a wonderful way to immerse myself in Chinese culture. **L**



Farm animal health and welfare

Dr Lisa Morgans, Senior Lecturer in Animal Health & Welfare, explains how the RAU brings livestock teaching to life and leads research that could help to shape the future of food production.

As part of the agriculture undergraduate degree programmes, as well as at MSc level, the RAU has at least seven modules covering livestock in some way – from the role of farm animals in our food system and the science behind ensuring high levels of health and welfare to the contribution they make to a thriving rural economy, people's livelihoods and wellbeing, as well as the impact they have on the land and the climate at global scale.

- Applied Animal Science
- Livestock Husbandry
- Farm Animal Health & Welfare
- Livestock Systems
- Livestock Production Technology & Innovation
- Integrated Farm Management
- Climate Change and Natural Resources

On farm learning

To bring my teaching to life and cater for the practical learning our students prefer, I coordinate a number of field trips and practicals for each module

I lead. I have built up an excellent network of local farms, all within 90 minutes of the campus, who relish hosting our students and showing them the realities of rearing farm animals.

We visit farms with outwintered, extensively grazed beef herds that are practising and researching adaptive multi-paddock grazing to improve soil health and economic sustainability. We visit an RAU alum who breeds pedigree Aberdeen Angus and optimises technology to support animal health, such as ear-tag monitoring and fertility improvement through embryo transfer.

We have dairy farm hosts who demonstrate the intricacies of

“My research is about promoting an ethical and ‘just’ transition in animal agriculture, which benefits animals, people and planet”



Learning about animal health and welfare involves visits to local cattle and dairy farms (above and right) and to an abattoir (top)

running high-yielding dairy herds in indoor systems, with arable and anaerobic digestion systems built into the mix to promote circularity, compared to farms with similar breeds, yields and production parameters where farmers choose to graze their cows and produce milk with minimal inputs and off grass.

We regularly discuss the practicalities of rearing broilers (chickens for meat) and the welfare implications from intensive systems, contrasting this to organic and



mixed farming systems where birds are reared outside. We also have some fantastic shepherds and sheep flocks surrounding us in Cirencester, as well as on our own farm as part of a regenerative arable rotation. I organise practicals with these flocks so students can practise handling skills and good stockpersonship, which are often highly rated.

One of the most prized field trips for our students is to Foyle abattoir, where the students are given a tour of the factory floor to see all elements

of the food chain and gain a deeper appreciation of where and how our food is produced. This nearly always sparks lively debate, which is so important.

Research with the livestock sector

Alongside my teaching I also conduct applied research with the livestock farming community. As a trained veterinarian, I am drawn to the more applied end of research. Will this research matter or make any difference? If we want to improve the lives of animals in agriculture and reduce the negative impacts, which we should all strive to do, this means helping people.

During my PhD I had a eureka moment, where I took a deep dive into the social sciences doing research with people rather than on people. I worked

with 30 dairy farmers over four years as they committed to reducing antibiotic use and implementing tailored action plans. My research is about promoting an ethical and ‘just’ transition in animal agriculture, which benefits animals, people and planet. This can be seen in research I conducted with colleagues looking at the impact cultured meat might have on the farming sector, here in the UK.

I am currently leading or co-leading a number of active projects: improving the sustainability of

the broiler sector across Europe (BroilerNet); co-designing the most cost-effective ruminant breeding strategies with industry; and evaluating regenerative farming practices with farmers against their potential to reach net zero (the latter two are scoping studies as part of the Agri-Food for Net Zero Network). I also facilitate a number of farmer-led projects on composting slurry to reduce environmental harm, with a new £500,000 project just confirmed to investigate the impact of applying Bokashi compost on fields and trialling wastewater filtration systems using biochar.

Finally, we have launched a Rothschild Foundation-funded project to train UK researchers in working more effectively and collaboratively with farmers (see page 34). I am a firm believer in the power of farmer-led innovation and a true trans-disciplinarian, who applies my veterinary knowledge, social science training and facilitation skills to understand and solve some of the challenges facing our food system. 1

FIND OUT MORE

- What cultured meat could mean for UK farming: www.rau.ac.uk/research/research-at-rau/cultured-meat-report
- BroilerNet: broilernet.eu
- Composting slurry project: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ol-THelMdSs
- Agri-Food for Net Zero Network: www.agrifood4netzero.net/funding/funded-projects/funded-scoping-study-projects/breeding-better-beef-and-sheep-co-designed-breeding-strategies-to-achieve-net-zero-2

Bridging Fields

Lisa Morgans explains how to gain the skills for effective, farmer-led research.

On a call the other day, I heard the well-worn idea that the UK is great at doing research, but slow to adopt the findings. Historically, the blame for this tended to fall at the feet of the people on the ground – farmers and land managers, who we’re told just won’t change their ways! Thankfully, this view is starting to change. The research community is becoming far more aware of how to make its work more practical and, over the past decade or so, the question has started to flip from ‘how do we convince farmers to adopt academic findings?’ to ‘how do we address what farmers actually need?’

Central to this shift has been the rise of farmer-led research. Since 2012, Innovative Farmers has run over 150 ‘field labs’, practical on-farm trials that put farmers in the driving seat of research. Rather than being on the receiving end of the findings, or simply hosting trials, farmers work with the researchers from the start – deciding what challenge to tackle, helping to design the research, collecting the data and benefiting from findings in real time. There are now so many organisations running their own farmer-led trials that the Farmer Led Innovation Network (FLIN), chaired by the RAU, was set up to share best practice.

Thanks in part to such initiatives, this May Defra launched ADOPT




(Accelerating Development of Practices and Technologies). The fund of at least £20.6m is specifically for supporting on-farm trials of new technologies and, crucially, of new practices. This is important, as farmers are less likely to come up with new tech or a new product to sell back to farmers and more likely to find solutions that are about changing practices and doing things differently on the farm.

ADOPT, and the endorsement it implies for farmer-led approaches, is a monumental shift in the right direction. However, if there is going to be more farmer-led research, we will need more researchers with the practical and personal skills to work with farmers – skills that can take years to acquire ‘in the field’. This is where Bridging Fields, the RAU’s new training programme, comes in.

Funded by the Rothschild Foundation, it will offer workshops, webinars and residential courses

to researchers who want to work more effectively with farmers. The programme will cover practical skills, such as building relationships with farmers and co-development of research projects, as well as essentials such as remembering to close the gate.

There has been a lot of interest so far, with hundreds of researchers, farmers, and others attending the first webinar in May. With the right funding and the right researcher support, hopefully farmer-led trials can be better equipped than ever to develop solutions that are adopted, rather than left sitting on the shelf. 

Bridging Fields is led by Dr Lisa Morgans and Dr Emmanuel Junior Zuza, with the original concept spearheaded by Prof Tom MacMillan.

[Sign up here to find out more:](#)



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Property and Business Consultants

Our team of experienced rural professionals provide expert advice in land and farm business management, helping clients navigate the complexities of change with confidence in the evolving agricultural landscape.

In an era marked by rapid changes and significant challenges within the farming sector, we understand the importance of personal independent advice and a trusted relationship.



BROWN & CO

FARM491 CHALLENGE PRIZE 2025

Two of the beneficiaries of the 2024 competition share the impact the win has had on their businesses.



Left: An Agile 'Tam' built by prisoners at HMP Leyhill as a home for young single mothers and their babies

Below left: Hydrology work has taken place at RegenFutureCo's Yorkshire Biohub site to make it a living model of regenerative land use



Yorkshire Biohub site, making it a living model of regenerative land use. A key focus has been hydrology – integrating swales and water features to retain moisture, boost biodiversity and create conditions for life to thrive.

Another major development has been the installation of adaptive fencing systems, enabling a more nuanced grazing strategy. Sheep are no longer the dominant force but part

of a broader ecosystem that blends traditional knowledge with modern ecological science.

The judges praised the project's ambition and impact. Esmée Fairbairn Foundation's Will Steadman commended the integration of regenerative agriculture with hydrological design.

RegenFutureCo is now forging new partnerships with farmers, foresters and landowners to scale its model – proving that regenerative landscapes can be productive, profitable and resilient for generations to come.

Agile Property and Homes Building a new future for rural housing

A year on from winning the £25,000 runner-up prize, Agile Property and Homes has made bold strides in redefining what affordable, sustainable housing can look like, especially in rural communities.

Led by CEO Craig White, Agile is tackling two of the UK's most urgent challenges: the housing crisis and

the climate emergency. Its innovative model combines low-carbon, bio-based construction with a unique economic engine that reduces the three biggest costs in housebuilding: land, labour and materials.

Agile's land unlocking mechanism identifies underused land with high social value, dramatically lowering acquisition costs. On the labour front, its Prisoners' Building Homes programme – developed with the Ministry of Justice – trains inmates in construction skills, offering a path to employment and reducing reoffending. Thirteen graduates have already found work and stayed out of prison.

To address volatile material costs, Agile has launched Carbon and Social Value Trading (CSVt) through a new platform called Captivate. This fintech innovation monetises the carbon stored in homes and the social value created through their projects, unlocking new funding streams.

With its pioneering approach, Agile is proving that homes can be good for people, the planet – and still be affordable.

Farm491 Challenge Prize 2025

The 2025 Farm491 Challenge Prize promises to build on the momentum of last year's trailblazing winners, supporting the next wave of innovation in sustainable land management.

"Land is under unprecedented pressure in the UK and globally," says Verity Payne, Challenge Prize Organiser and Operations and Events Manager at Farm491. "We hope this year's prize will inspire companies developing innovative products and services that support multifunctional, regenerative land use." 

To learn more about the Challenge Prize, and how to get involved, visit farm491.com/farm491-challenge

DRIVING CHANGE

Farm491 is located on the RAU campus at the Alliston Centre and Trent Lodge. It provides coworking, meeting room, event and office space, tailored business support and a vibrant ecosystem of networking and knowledge exchange, empowering start-ups and established businesses to drive meaningful change in agriculture and land use. farm491.com



This summer, we launched our second Farm491 Challenge Prize, supported by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

The prize offers a unique opportunity for forward-thinking companies to secure funding, accelerate product development and scale their environmental impact. Last year's challenge attracted more than 15 high-quality entries.

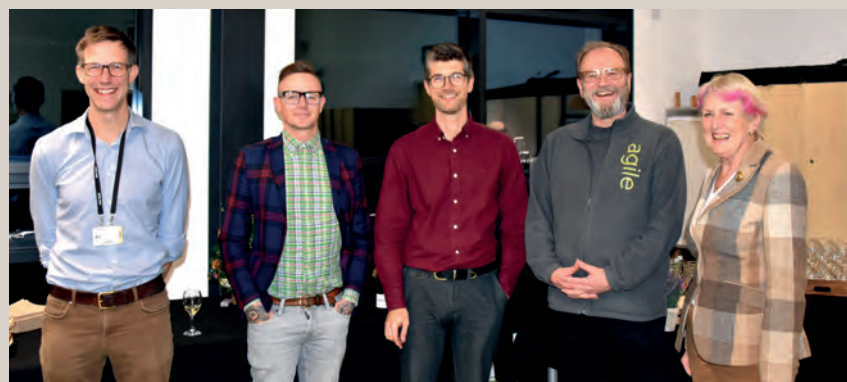
After a rigorous judging process, RegenFarmCo claimed the £50,000 top prize, with Agile Property and Homes awarded £25,000 as runner-up.

RegenFutureCo Designing regenerative landscapes for the future

Since winning the top prize in last year's Farm491 Challenge, RegenFarmCo – now rebranded as RegenFutureCo – has accelerated its mission to transform how we manage land, food and water. Managing Director Dr Vincent Walsh explains that the new name reflects a bold vision for landscape-scale regeneration, rooted in ecological design and future-focused thinking.

Dr Walsh's team has used the money to expand its work at the

From left, Professor Tom MacMillan, Challenge Prize judge; Dr Vincent Walsh, Managing Director of RegenFutureCo; Will Steadman of Esmée Fairbairn Foundation; Craig White of Agile Property and Homes; and Baroness Young of Old Scone





STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD WITH A POSTGRADUATE COURSE

POSTGRADUATE COURSES 2025/2026

AGRICULTURE

- Graduate Diploma in Agriculture
- MSc Agricultural Technology and Innovation
- MSc Agroecology
- MSc Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security

BUSINESS

- MSc Business Management
- MBA Food and Agriculture
- MBA Water Management

CULTURAL HERITAGE

- MSc Heritage and Archaeology
- MSc Conservation and Management of Historic Buildings
- MSc Cultural Heritage Management
- PgCert in Cultural Heritage Research
- PgCert Retrofitting, Regeneration and Sustainability in Historic Buildings

LAND AND PROPERTY

- MSc Real Estate
- MSc Rural Estate Management

RESEARCH

- PhD Programme
- MSc by Research Programme

FLEXIBLE STUDY

Don't have time for full-time study? Why not consider part-time study or a PGDip or PGCert? PgCert credits can be used towards a PgDip or a Masters qualification down the line. Completing studies using this route is likened to building blocks – the first step being a PGCert.

20%
reduction in
tuition fees for all
RAU/RAC alumni*

PLUS
You could be
eligible for one of
our scholarships,
bursaries or awards



*Please see website for terms and conditions

Growing businesses

The Growth Hub Cirencester, part of the wider Growth Hub Gloucestershire network, is a business hub focused on the launch, growth and scaling of businesses in the Cotswolds.

Based at the Alliston Centre on the RAU campus, the Growth Hub Cirencester has supported over 600 businesses, including those of RAU students and alumni.

As well as providing fully-funded business support, including green consultancy and knowledge exchange events and workshops to pre-start-ups, start-ups, sole traders and small- to medium-sized businesses, the Growth Hub Cirencester also offers coworking, hot desking, meeting rooms, offices and event space hire.



BUSINESS SUPPORT

- Whether the Growth Hub Cirencester can support you in your business journey, elevate your business gatherings or offer you a brand-new coworking environment, get in touch by calling **01285 889850**, emailing cirencester@thegrowthhub.biz or visiting thegrowthhub.biz/cirencester
- RAU alumni receive a **25% discount** on all coworking memberships and meeting rooms, and all other paid services, for 12 months after graduation.

CASE STUDY

Will Matthews, Harvestory

Autumn 2024 saw the installation of a vertical farm at the Alliston Centre, which remains a perennial talking point for visitors and members alike as they pass through reception.

The farm is the creation of Harvestory, founded by Will Matthews, which has in the past year embarked on a journey to transform office spaces into sustainable, thriving ecosystems.

Will graduated from the RAU last summer with a Master's degree in Agriculture. His thesis, 'Vertical Farming as an Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Initiative', led to the creation of Harvestory.


The concept was first developed during the business module of his course and, after completing his studies, he tasked himself with turning his concept into a reality.

The Growth Hub Cirencester is delighted to host what is Harvestory's very first vertical farm. Since installation, the design of the vertical farm has evolved to better suit the coworking environment and



Will Matthews of Harvestory

that of what is grown, and the Growth Hub Cirencester is proud to be able to act as a testbed for this high potential start-up.

Over the course of the year, it has also been pleased to support Will through its fully-funded business support and welcome him into its vibrant coworking community. 

“ The Growth Hub is proud to be able to act as a testbed for this high potential start-up ”

RAU Sporting Hall of Fame



CELEBRATING OUR SPORTING STARS

New Hall of Fame recognises RAU alumni for their achievements in a wide range of sports.

The University has an exciting new addition to the walls of its main building – the RAU Sporting Hall of Fame.

The three-metre-wide montage honours some of our famous sporting alumni for their amazing achievements in their chosen field.

Designed in the University’s traditional burgundy and gold, the Hall of Fame is already proving to be a talking point for staff, students and visitors alike.

From England and British Lions rugby player John Pullin, who graduated in 1960, to professional golfer Darcey Harry, who graduated last year, the montage covers a wide range of sports and some amazing careers.

Sitting alongside the Hall of Fame is a Sporting Roll of Honour, which includes a longer list of sporting alumni stars, with plenty of room to add new names in the coming years.

Professor Peter McCaffery, RAU Vice-Chancellor, said: “For a small and specialist institution, we have an impressive sporting heritage. Over the years, our alumni have performed at numerous elite sporting occasions, including the Olympics.

“We are incredibly proud of their achievements. Our new Sporting Hall of Fame allows us not only to honour those individuals, but also to inspire current and future RAU students.”

Pass on something wonderful

Leaving a legacy to the RAU ensures that the University can continue its vital work.

The Royal Agricultural University (RAU) has always been more than just a place of study – it is where values take root, innovation is cultivated and generations are nurtured. As an RAC/RAU alumnus, your story is part of that proud legacy. Whether you studied Agriculture, Equine Science, Rural Land Management or Agri-Business, your time in Cirencester helped shape your future. Now, you have the opportunity to shape the future of others.

Why leave a legacy to the RAU?

A legacy gift is a powerful way to extend the impact of your life and career. By remembering the RAU in your will, you help preserve and enhance the University’s mission: to equip students with the skills, knowledge and leadership needed to tackle some of the world’s greatest land-based challenges – from food security and sustainability to rural entrepreneurship and environmental stewardship.

We understand how important it is to provide for your loved ones. After doing so, please consider

Your bequest could help to transform the old pavilion into a new sporting centre for future generations Inset: The tennis team in front of the pavilion in 1883



By remembering the RAU in your will, you help preserve and enhance the University’s mission

leaving a share of what remains to the University. Every gift – large or small – helps us transform lives. Even a small percentage of your estate can make a significant difference.

Your legacy, their future

Every legacy gift, regardless of size, creates opportunities:

- Scholarships and bursaries – supporting students who might

not otherwise be able to afford a place at RAU.

- Research and innovation – funding critical work in areas such as climate-smart agriculture, agri-tech and biodiversity.
- Campus and community enhancements – improving facilities and services that enrich student life and promote academic excellence.

A lasting impact

Including the RAU in your will is straightforward and can be tailored to reflect your personal wishes.

Whether you choose a fixed amount, a percentage of your estate or a specific asset, it's a meaningful way to express your belief in education, the countryside and the future of rural enterprise.

Pledging a legacy costs nothing today, but it will be of tremendous value to the University for years to come. We are deeply grateful to those alumni who have already pledged or are considering pledging a gift to the RAU in their wills. This is a unique way to pass on something truly wonderful to future generations. **L**

“It’s a meaningful way to express your belief in education, the countryside and the future of rural enterprise”

WE’RE HERE TO HELP

- Leaving a gift in your will to the RAU is a personal and meaningful decision. We’re here to provide support and guidance. Any conversation you have with us will be confidential and non-binding.
- By leaving a legacy to the Royal Agricultural University, you become part of a story that spans generations. Your generosity will create lasting opportunities for students, researchers and the rural communities they go on to serve.
- To discuss your gift or request further information, please email development@rau.ac.uk or call the Development Office on **01285 889858**.



HOW TO LEAVE A GIFT IN YOUR WILL

We’ve prepared suggested wording to help you include the RAU in your will. It is important to include our **Exempt Charity reference** and address, as this ensures that any legacy left to the University is free from inheritance tax.

The Royal Agricultural University is a UK Exempt Charity, meaning it has charitable status and, as a higher education institution, is regulated by the Office for Students. It does not have a Charity Number.

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 advice from a qualified legal advisor.

Types of legacy gifts
• **A share of your estate (residuary legacy)**
You can leave a percentage of your estate (or the remainder after other specific gifts) to the University. This is often a simple and effective way to divide your estate among multiple beneficiaries. Because the value is relative, it retains its impact over time and is often the most beneficial to the University.
Suggested wording:
“I give to the Royal Agricultural University a gift of all (or a percentage/share) of my estate after expenses, pecuniary, and specific bequests have been made.”

• **A fixed sum of money (pecuniary legacy):**
You may choose to leave a specific amount. To protect the value from inflation, consider linking the amount to the Retail Price Index.
Suggested wording:
“I give to the Royal Agricultural University the sum of £[amount in figures and words], free from all taxes and duties, to be applied to the general purposes (or a specified area) of the University. I declare that the receipt of the Treasurer or other authorised officer of the University shall be a full and sufficient discharge to my Executors.”

Can I reduce inheritance tax?
Yes. Gifts to the University, or any charity, are exempt from inheritance tax. Normally, inheritance tax is charged at 40% on estates valued over £325,000 (the “nil rate band”). Depending on your circumstances, this band may be higher, possibly up to £1 million.

Additionally, if you leave 10% or more of your net estate to a charity (or multiple charities), you could qualify for a reduced inheritance tax rate of 36%. In some cases, this means giving more to charity could result in a lower tax bill – allowing you to leave more to your other beneficiaries overall.

We recommend speaking with a legal advisor to understand the tax implications of leaving a charitable gift in your will.

Big Cat Project marks 10-year anniversary

Associate Professor Andrew Hemmings reports on a decade-long search for evidence.

Human peripheral vision is sensitive to movement, especially in low light. A retiree from the Painswick area noticed a dark shadow moving behind her in a Gloucestershire coppice as dusk fell.

From the demeanour of her Lakeland Terrier, Whisper, it was obvious that the dog had also sensed danger. When she looked back, the dark shadow slowly materialised into something resembling a large black Labrador, which gradually moved closer each time she turned around.

Hurrying to reach the exit stile with Whisper in hand, the lady took a last glance back and saw that the creature had moved closer still, making its feline characteristics more obvious.

It is likely that the panther-type cat was displaying a territorial protection strategy, rather than one of human stalking. Nevertheless, it was reports such as this that drew me to the study of big cats just over 10 years ago.

Hunt for evidence

No matter how convincing eyewitness accounts might be, there is a need for scientific evidence.

While the cats are highly secretive, they will, like any large predator, leave behind the remnants of their last meal, in the form of deer carcasses and, to a lesser extent, farm livestock such as sheep.



Left: Associate Professor Andrew Hemmings and student Rebecca Smith in the RAU labs
Above: The pelvis of a sika deer displaying a typical carnassial imprint: three indentations, or tooth pits, arranged in a triangular fashion

Bone samples from potential kill sites are collected by a network of citizen scientists and shipped to the RAU laboratory for detailed investigation. Here they are subjected to a procedure called ‘tooth pit analysis’ whereby the indelible indentations left on the bone by the predator’s teeth are measured to ascertain length, breadth and the distance between the tooth pits.

High-precision work

The two candidate species (black leopard and mountain lion) leave behind two main types of tooth marks. The first are created by the pointed canine teeth located at the front of the jaw, while the second are created by the carnassial teeth (molars and premolars) at the back.

It is the carnassial imprints that are most valuable to us, as the spacing between carnassial imprints of the large cat are considerably bigger than

that expected from other similar-sized predators that could take down deer, such as the domestic dog.

For enhanced precision, we have a range of bone samples, or ‘control specimens’, that have been fed upon by the candidate cats at locations such as Exmoor Zoo.

To date we have 11 carnassial samples recruited from Gloucestershire and Dorset that fit the spacing measurements of either the black leopard or mountain lion.

We also have DNA evidence to support the tooth pit study findings. For example, a hair sample found near a sheep carcass in the Stroud area demonstrated a 100% sequence alignment with the leopard (*Panthera pardus*). **L**

Would you like to learn more?
This year’s RAU Big Cat Project update event is open to RAU alumni. Look out for an invitation.

Stranger things

From mysterious footsteps echoing down corridors to shadowy figures floating through rooms, Melissa Spagnoli, RAU Development Coordinator, investigates campus ghost stories.

Stories about ghosts and hauntings at the Royal Agricultural College campus, now the RAU, have been emerging since the fire of 1913 – some are clearly fictional while others are more mysterious...

The supernatural stories include all the usual culprits – objects flying through the air, unexplained noises and strange apparitions or shadowy

figures. It was these stories that compelled me to dig a little deeper and request a dusk ghost tour with an RAU security guard.

We start in the **Landmark Room**, where the 1913 fire broke out – rumoured to have been caused by coal spilling from the fireplace or, more likely, a student carelessly discarding a cigarette. From this catastrophe, the story of the ‘bedder

“ She heard loud footsteps approaching – but when she turned to see who it was, there was no one there ”

lady’ was spun. She apparently discovered the fire and attempted a rescue, but was consumed by flames and is now said to haunt the area.

We walk along the creaky corridors and head to the **Kenneth Russell Room**, the College’s former Library, with its heavy drapes and old-world wallpaper. Sophie Dunton, the RAU’s Retail Manager, told me that about 10 years ago, when working in the small kitchen adjacent to the Kenneth Russell Room, she heard loud footsteps approaching – but when she turned to see who it was, there was no one there.

The **Bathurst Wing**, with its exposed beams, dark wooden staircase and well-worn floors is the oldest part of the campus – the original farmhouse dates from the early 1800s. It was here that Tina Simmonds, RAU Commercial Administrator, would often hear people climbing the stairs – but, like Sophie, when she looked to see who it was, there was no one to be seen.

Tina also recalls an incident a few years ago in the University’s **conference guest accommodation**.

“A guest witnessed items being moved around her room and, the following night, awoke to sounds of a crying baby. In the moonlit room she saw the figure of a woman, who appeared to be frantically searching for her child, but there were no babies on campus that night.”

Former employee Mandy Watkins had her own chilling encounter when she stayed in one of the guest rooms. At nightfall, she witnessed a dark figure exit the wardrobe, walk towards her and then disappear through the window. Both Mandy and Tina have also experienced strange electrical occurrences, such as a kettle and a TV apparently switching on by themselves.

Continuing through the labyrinth of rooms, we head to the **catering area**. The staff, most of whom have left for the day, tell me that the back kitchen is a hive of ghostly activities.

Late one night, when Tina and a colleague were working in the wash-up area, they witnessed a glass tumbler lift from a tray before setting back down. Mandy had a similar experience while working late after an event. She and a colleague saw six glasses appear to push themselves off a top shelf and fall three feet to the floor before rolling towards a door, which then slammed shut. Both Tina and Mandy assured me that no alcohol had been consumed!

Maria, who now works in the **Atrium Café**, has heard her name being gently called by a female voice in the kitchen corridor leading to the back door, and toilets being flushed in empty ladies’ cubicles.

But her most memorable experience happened in December 2024, when she was working with a former colleague, Daisy. She left

BOBBY BOUTFLOUR HIDES LEGENDARY SAILOR, ANN DAVISON, AT THE RAC

An excerpt from *Bobby Boutflour, The Life and Reminiscences of Professor Robert Boutflour CBE MSc* by Mary Boutflour:

In 1952-1953 Ann Davison became the first woman to sail alone to America in her 23-ft yacht *Felicity Ann*. She was the elder daughter of Boutflour’s much loved sister Josephine, the late Mrs William Longstaffe. Ann had lost both parents, then her husband Frank and all she possessed in the tragic wreck of their ketch *Reliance* off the south coast in 1949 and had miraculously reached shore herself.

After a cat-and-mouse chase, to shake off newspaper reporters, in a car driven by Ann’s stepmother, she was successfully hidden by her uncle and aunt in the college house. Until things blew over, only the doctor who treated Ann for the appalling bruising and shock she

had suffered knew of this secret, and until Ann got on her feet again, she made her home with her uncle and aunt at the college.

Here, she wrote ‘Last Voyage’ the story of her dreadful experience, a remarkable book that proved to be a best-seller. After this success, perhaps inheriting a love of the sea from her grandfather, the Captain, and well-endowed with much of her uncle’s courageous determination to prove the truth of her convictions, she was off on what seemed to everyone a hare-brained adventure and sailed alone to America, after which she wrote ‘My Ship is so Small’ and dedicated this book to Robert and Mary Boutflour.



“ At nightfall, she witnessed a dark figure exit the wardrobe and then disappear through the window ”

Daisy putting away plates in the catering area but while walking back towards the wash-up room she saw the door at the bottom of the stairs close of its own accord. Seconds later, Daisy rushed out to say that she had seen a rubbish bin lift from the floor and then drop so forcibly that it fell over, spilling its contents.

In the corridor by the **Bathurst Seminar Rooms**, Mandy experienced “a cold surrounding her” and then “felt someone push by”. In the dimly-lit **Bathurst Lounge and dining area**, another staff member was cleaning

up late at night in the dark-panelled dining room when suddenly the old metal door handle started turning and rattling – but there was no one on the other side.

It’s not just in the **Main Building** that ghostly sightings have been reported. One evening, when Tina and a colleague returned to their cars having tidied up and turned off the lights at **Trent Lodge**, they saw the top-floor lights switch on again. Confused, they returned to turn off the lights again, only to see them switch back on when they got back to their cars. Shaken by the experience, they quickly left.

While I didn’t experience anything unusual on my ghost tour, I was relieved to step out into the crisp night air. Yet, as I headed to my car, I couldn’t help but look back towards the Clock Tower windows, hoping to see a shadowy figure pass by... **1**

If you would like your wedding to be included in a future edition of *Landmark*, please email landmark@rau.ac.uk

Congratulations!

A highlight of *Landmark* is celebrating our alumni weddings. We wish all the couples the best for the future.



1) **Will Millar** (BSc International Agribusiness and Trade, 2013) and **Fran Steer** (Masters in Rural Estate Management (P Course), 2014) married on 7 September 2024 in Shrewsbury, Shropshire.



3) **Ella Hitchman** (BSc International Equine & Agricultural Business Management, 2019) and **Harry Stevens** (BSc Agriculture, 2019) married on 7 June 2025 in Overbury, Gloucestershire.



5) **Isabel Branch** (BSc Business Management, 2004) and fellow alumnus **Jeremy Johnson** (BSc Agriculture, 2008) married on 25 May 2025 at St Nicholas Church, Cherington, Gloucestershire.



6) **Katie Evans** (International Equine and Agricultural Business Management, 2017) and **Jack Moncur** (BSc Agriculture & Farm Business Management, 2017) married on 7 June 2025 at All Saints Church in Writtle, Essex.



2) **Rupert Arvidsson** (BSc Countryside Management, 2013) and **Alice Hirst** (Masters in Rural Estate Management, 2016) married on 22 June 2024 in Burton, Mere, Wiltshire.



7) **Rosie Freeth** (BSc Business Management, 2012) and **Ben Lewis** (known as Mungo) (BSc Business Management, 2013) married on 31 May 2025 at Bibury, Gloucestershire.



8) **James Hunter** (BSc Rural Land Management, 2020) and **Emily Wright** married on 12 April 2025 in Beverley, Yorkshire.



9) **Charles Hooper** (Agriculture & Farm Management, 2015) and **Sally Panton** (BSc Property Agency and Management, 2014) married on 14 September 2024, with several alumni as bridesmaids and ushers.



10) **Rebecca Walters** (BSc Equine Science/ Business, 2012) and **Paddy Moore** married on 24 January 2025 at Manly Beach in Sydney, Australia.



11) **Poppy Arvidsson** (BSc Agriculture Business – Agribusiness) and **Mitchell Atkins** married on 26 May 2025 at Isle of Capri, Gold Coast, Australia.



4) **Mike Wilkins** (BSc Agriculture, 2015 – and then SU President) and **Matt Greenwood** married on 3 May 2025 in Yatesbury, Wiltshire.

Farming and land management training

Whether you are an individual eager to upskill or represent a prospective individual organisation, find out more about the RAU’s professional development courses.

We are proud to continue to deliver two perennially popular training courses at the RAU for those keen to enhance their knowledge and understanding of farming and land management.


Insight to Agriculture (Farming for Non-Farmers) is a course for business professionals working in the land-based sector or interacting with those in it, but with little previous experience. Delegates gain a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the complexities and nuances of the sector, enabling them to more effectively deliver their professional roles.

Wayleave Officer Training is a programme aimed at individuals, particularly those within utility

and land management companies, seeking to develop their understanding and competency in dealing with wayleave issues and work effectively with clients and other stakeholders. Both our courses are led by highly experienced and knowledgeable land-based practitioners, supported by a range of individuals from leading organisations within the sector, as well as academics at the University.

We offer our courses face-to-face (residentially) and also live online (which includes virtual farm visits), with open course dates as well as closed dates for organisations available throughout the year, with the ability to tailor content to your employees’ specific needs.

We adopt a blended learning approach, combining lecture-delivered theory with discussion of real-life examples and farm visits (physically or remotely) to promote understanding of and engagement with course content amongst delegates.

We are in the process of developing several brand-new courses. Keep an eye on our website for their launch over the coming months. 

Get in touch at professional.development@rau.ac.uk or scan the QR code, right, for more information.



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The Class of 1994 returns

This spring, the RAU was filled with laughter, stories and nostalgia as the Class of 1994 returned to mark its 30th year reunion.

The reunion weekend attracted attendees from across the country and as far as New Zealand. A gentle sense of excitement set the tone as familiar faces gathered for a campus tour offering alumni a chance to see how the University has evolved, while still holding onto its character.

The highlight of the reunion was the black-tie dinner and celebration in the Tithe Barn. The room came alive with warmth, laughter and a palpable sense of camaraderie.

An archive display showcased photos, memorabilia and publications from their student days. Nostalgia filled the air as alumni pointed to familiar faces and rekindled vivid memories about long-forgotten events such as the May Ball.

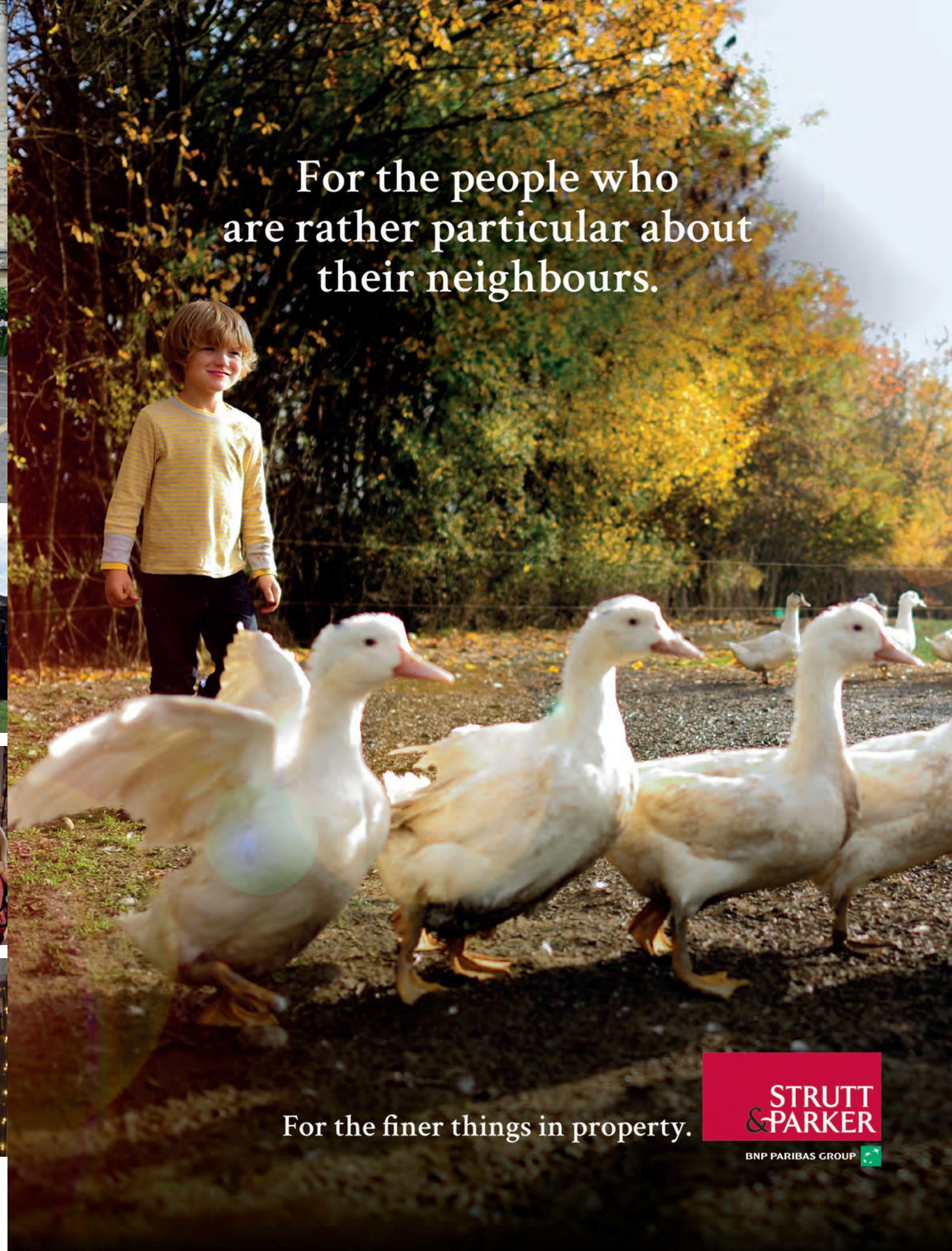
A three-course meal followed the reception. The atmosphere was lovely with warm chatter, toasts and, of course, some drinking games to recreate student life.

After dinner, the alumni proceeded to their Bout' Do, which the Alumni Office had emulated to match Friday nights of old. The music and merriment continued late into the evening. The dance floor was full and the conversation flowed – proof that while years may have passed, the bonds formed at the RAC remain strong.

The reunion wrapped up on Sunday morning with a full English breakfast and heartfelt goodbyes. As they departed, many alumni reflected on how meaningful it was to reconnect, not only with each other but also with the place that helped shape so much of their personal and professional lives.

The weekend was not only a celebration of the past but a rekindling of community – proof that the RAU spirit lives on, stronger than ever. A date has already been booked for another reunion next year!

Interested in reconnecting?
We have lots of plans for alumni get-togethers – watch this space! You can also contact Malvina Winston in the Alumni Office, alumni@rau.ac.uk.



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CONGRATULATIONS TO THE CLASS OF 2025

By keeping your details up to date, you'll continue to receive exclusive discounts and event invites, university news, and opportunities to engage with fellow alumni around the world.



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Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester, Gloucestershire GL7 6JS

T: +44 (0)1285 652531 | www.rau.ac.uk

Alumni & Development Office: alumni@rau.ac.uk | T: +44 (0)1285 889858