

ISSUE 24 | 2026

LANDMARK



THE MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF ROYAL AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY

RAU.AC.UK ALUMNI



Inside this edition

Major milestone for Innovation Village @ RAU | What makes an RAU education distinctive
Unearthing the Cotswold Hoard | Honouring Andy Cato | Alumni updates from around the world

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Welcome to *Landmark*, the annual
magazine for alumni and friends of
the Royal Agricultural University (RAU).
We value the input of our readers, so
please continue to send your stories,
news, and suggestions.
alumni@rau.ac.uk.



< On the cover
An artist's impression of the
Innovation Village @ RAU,
featured on page 10, as we
celebrate a major milestone in
its development.

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us know. You can update your details via
the website or email: alumni@rau.ac.uk



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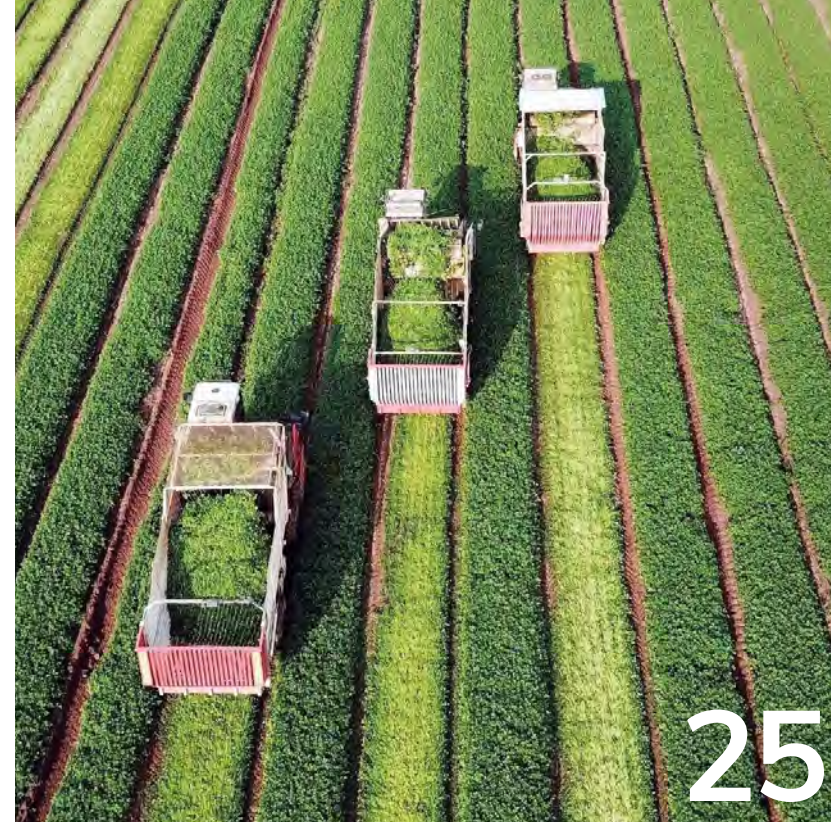
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Welcome from our Vice-Chancellor, Professor Peter McCaffery

Our 180th anniversary last year was a timely reminder of the tremendous contribution our worldwide family of 18,000 + alumni have made as leaders, entrepreneurs and innovators in agriculture and the land-based sector.

We marked the occasion with aplomb including a ‘180 Series’ of six inaugural public professorial lectures, the unveiling of a new sculpture (a ‘Ram’s Head’ named Aries) made from recycled farm machinery, and a Community Heritage Open Day in September 2025 to commemorate the enrolment of our first cohort of 25 students in 1845. A special highlight was the ‘Global Toast Online’ we proffered together with all our international university partners in China, Sharjah, Ukraine and Uzbekistan!

We aspire, of course, to be as socially relevant today as we have been in the past. We were thrilled then, when our outline planning application for our Innovation Village @ RAU Project was finally approved by Cotswold District Council on 13 May. A £140m development on a 12-hectare site on campus, our Innovation Village will bring together industry, food producers, farmers and landowners to develop sustainable solutions for food production and biodiversity recovery. Centred on agriculture, food and land management, our Innovation Village will be a ‘first for the UK’.

We were also delighted to elicit formal government support, in the new ‘Land Use Framework for England’ launched by Defra this March, for our proposed Innovation Academy. Housed within our Innovation Village, the Academy will deliver transformational impact in rural communities through an integrated approach combining education, applied research and enterprise with policy.

Our applied research continues to broaden and deepen. Academic colleagues are engaged with over 130 universities across 40 countries (including one in three universities in the UK) in funded research activity or collaboration leading to publication. Our partnership with Sumy National Agrarian University (on the war front-line in NE Ukraine), focused on war-polluted soils recovery

and remediation, is the only one of 105 twinning arrangements between UK and Ukraine universities to have secured funding (£650k) from Defra.

We continue, as well, to exceed our rival university peers in promoting knowledge exchange. Our research and enterprise underpin our aspiration to acquire Full Degree-Awarding Powers and we are delighted to report the Office for Students has begun its initial consideration of our eligibility – our self-assessment document comprises c. 60,000 words with c. 450 supporting files of evidence – the start of an 18-month period of scrutiny by external reviewers.

Last year also witnessed another landmark – the demolition of our old laboratories (c. 1936)! This, as you can imagine, has opened up an entirely new vista at the heart of our campus, and so we have invited ideas from our students and staff on how we should landscape our re-emergent ‘Green Quad’. In their stead we now have a new state-of-the-art Land Laboratory Teaching Centre in the ground floor of the Frank Garner building which was completed on schedule and within budget – the £5.8m (the maximum amount available) awarded by the Office for Students in their first capital bidding round.

The proportion of our graduates in ‘highly-skilled jobs’ is 8% above the national average and we were shortlisted for the second year running by the National Graduate Recruiters Awards for “the best UK university strategy for student employability”. We achieved a Silver in the small, specialist university category at the What Uni Student Choice awards – the largest exclusively student-voted awards in the UK.

Beyond Cirencester, our provision of trans-national education continues to flourish. A recognised exemplar of good practice by the British Council, Joint Information Committee Systems (JISC) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), we will have over 6,000 student enrolments in China, Sharjah, Ukraine and Uzbekistan by 2028.

In sum, we are a University on which the sun never sets, and continue to punch above our weight today in the same way we have always done.

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

Message from Dame Fiona Reynolds, Chair of Governing Council

What a year! Truly, there’s never a dull moment at the RAU and, as 2026 marches forward, it’s a good time to reflect on progress.

As you’ll read about elsewhere in Landmark, achieving outline planning consent for our Innovation Village is a huge step forward.

Thank you Cotswold District Council!

It also marks the start of an intensive process of partnership building, because the Innovation Village will depend on partnerships – with business, entrepreneurs, local and national governments and other academic institutions, as well as our overseas partners – to succeed. It’s an exciting prospect and we are already talking to many potential allies.

Our campus, too, gets livelier every year. We welcome so many fascinating visitors, from international students and researchers, conference attendees on everything from contaminated Ukraine soils, trees and regenerative farming, to many inspiring speakers. Last year it was a particular joy to hear from Honorary Fellow Andy Cato of Wildfarmed and our Alumnus of the Year social media star Rebecca Wilson, who between them communicate the benefits of sustainable farming to astonishing numbers of people.

This year I’m honoured to be the High Sheriff of Gloucestershire. I have chosen rural as my theme, and I’m loving the chance to get closer to our beautiful county and its people.

Sometimes I feel gloomy about the state of the world and the planet. But at the RAU, whether at Cirencester or around the world, we are growing future leaders with the energy, ideas and creativity to help us find solutions. It’s a privilege to be part of it.

Dame Fiona Reynolds DBE, Chair of Governing Council



Another Landmark year

We're celebrating a year of achievement, innovation and impact at the University

The past year has been one of remarkable progress for the RAU, from major campus developments and pioneering research to expanding global partnerships and strengthening opportunities for students, staff and alumni, the University continues to build on its proud heritage while embracing the future.

This edition celebrates the people, projects and partnerships driving that success, from the Innovation Village and new Green Quad plans to world-leading research and inspiring alumni stories. Together, they reflect an institution that remains committed to shaping the future of agriculture, land management, business and the rural economy, both in the UK and around the world.

“The University continues to build on its proud heritage while embracing the future”

Autumn 2025

- To mark the RAU's 180th anniversary, Professor Mark Horton leads a Heritage Open Day archaeological dig on the Croquet Lawn, uncovering evidence of the historic Port Farm Fair site.
- Musician and regenerative farming pioneer Andy Cato is made an Honorary Fellow of the RAU at our Graduation ceremony.
- Farmer and podcaster Rebecca Wilson is named RAU's 2025 Alumnus of the Year, recognising her impact as one of the leading young voices in UK agriculture.
- New students formally join the University at Matriculation, with a procession through Cirencester led by staff and senior University members, followed by an address from alumnus Ed Horton.
- In Research England's annual Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF), the RAU is commended for its work with business, professional development and community engagement, maintaining a top-two ranking in its peer group since 2021.
- Staff, Governors and international partner universities join Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter



Rebecca Wilson, Alumnus of the Year 2025
Below: Professor Peter McCaffery and Dame Fiona Reynolds cut the 180th anniversary cake



McCaffery and Governing Council Chair Dame Fiona Reynolds for a global online celebration of the RAU's 180th anniversary, culminating in the cutting of a bespoke birthday cake modelled on the University's historic main building.



New students take part in their Matriculation procession in September 2025



The new Land Laboratories opened to students in September

- Students return to a new £5.8m Land Laboratories facility, funded through the maximum available Office for Students' grant and replacing laboratories dating back to the 1930s.
- Professor Duncan Westbury and Ann Conquest of LUC discuss how habitat creation on farmland can boost both pollination and natural pest control.
- Professor Kiran Tota-Maharaj and Andy Blackhall of WRc deliver a public lecture on building more sustainable farming and water management systems in the face of climate change.



Winter 2025

- The annual Christmas Carol Service is held in the RAU Chapel, followed by mince pies and mulled wine in The Tithe.
- The RAU's 180th anniversary is celebrated in a special six-page feature in Country Life magazine.
- Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor David Main is awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM) in the New Year Honours for services to animal welfare, recognising his leadership of the Home Office's Animals in Science Committee.
- RAU Honorary Fellow and entrepreneur Levi Roots shares the story behind his global success in a public talk at the Alliston Centre.
- Dr Simon Daniels and Professor Meriel Moore-Colyer explore the future of sustainable horse nutrition in a public lecture on alternative forages and feeds.



Top: Farm491 Challenge winners Lochhill Agroecological Farm
Above: Prof David Main is awarded a BEM

- The RAU and the Royal Veterinary College agree to expand collaborative research and transnational education opportunities through their global partnerships.
- Lochhill Agroecological Farm wins the 2025 Farm491 Challenge Prize, awarded by the RAU's agritech incubator Farm491 and supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.



Spring 2026

- Councillors grant outline planning permission for the RAU’s proposed Innovation Village, the UK’s first innovation hub dedicated to the land-based sector.
- Dr Andrew Hemmings delivers a public lecture on how research into the horse brain can advance equine welfare and inform human mental health studies.

- Kenyan MSc student Ian Muthumbi wins the Grand Idea competition with Dudufeed, a sustainable enterprise using fly larvae to produce livestock feed and organic fertiliser.



A group visit of students and staff from the RAU's partner university, the IAU in Tashkent, Uzbekistan

- Rural Land Management student Lewis Jackson is named runner-up for Cavalier, his heritage knitwear business producing garments from 100% British wool through low-waste, localised manufacturing.
- Students raise funds for The Long Table Cirencester and RABI during the Students’ Union’s annual RAG Week, featuring a tractor pull, charity rally, sports matches, quiz night, auction and other fundraising events.
- Staff and students from the International Agriculture University (IAU) in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, visit the RAU for their annual study programme. The RAU is a founding partner of the IAU, established in 2022 to help transform agricultural higher education in Uzbekistan.
- Delegates from Ukraine and the UK gather at the RAU to mark the completion of the Defra-funded UK/Ukraine: War-Polluted Soils Recovery and Remediation project, delivered in partnership with Sumy National Agrarian University.

Left: Grand Idea winner Ian Muthumbi and runner-up Lewis Jackson. Below: the tractor pull in RAG Week



Above: the UK/Ukraine soils conference
Right: Shandong Agricultural University (SDAU) Delegation Visit



Dame Fiona Reynolds CBE DBE was installed as the new High Sheriff of Gloucestershire

- Students celebrate the end of the academic year at the annual Students’ Union May Ball.
- Dame Fiona Reynolds, Chair of the University’s Governing Council since 2022, is appointed High Sheriff of Gloucestershire and will serve until spring 2027.
- Delegates from our China partners Shandong Agricultural University (SDAU) and Qingdao Agricultural University (QAU) visit the RAU to strengthen academic and research collaboration as part of our growing international partnerships.

Photo: Lucie Hamilton Photography

Summer 2026

- The RAU partners in the inaugural Great British Farm-Fest at Stoneleigh Park, organised by Jeremy Clarkson and the Clarkson’s Farm team.
- RAU MSc archaeology students uncover late Iron Age artefacts near Cirencester, including silver and bronze coins, iron spearheads, and miniature bronze shields and spearheads dating from around 100 BC to 43 AD.
- Our Student Recruitment team hosts a second successful Teacher and Adviser Conference, welcoming representatives from more than 16 schools and further education colleges.
- Two new recipients of the RAU’s Kaleb Cooper Agriculture Bursary are announced at Cereals 2026, held at Diddly Squat Farm. Robyn Sherriff (23) and Isaac Covington (19) become the fifth and sixth students to be supported through the bursary scheme, now in its third year and exclusive to the RAU.
- At Cereals, an RAU team wins the AICC Ceres Rural Crop

Robyn Sherriff and Isaac Covington



- Challenge after producing the top-performing plot of Skyfall wheat in the Diddly Squat Farm Trials Zone. Graduating students Charlie Turner, Sophie Turner, Archie Pegg and Alivia Ross secure overall victory, finishing ahead of Harper Adams.
- RAU Chair of Governors Dame Fiona Reynolds, former Director-General of the National Trust, delivers the annual Bledisloe Lecture on The Fight for Beauty and Why It Matters More Than Ever.
- Over the year, alumni donations to the Cirencester Fund supported more than 30 students facing financial hardship. We are also grateful to the charitable trusts and donors whose generosity continues to make a difference at the RAU.



Kaleb Cooper

INNOVATION VILLAGE @ RAU

The RAU continues its evolution with a state-of-the-art hub for research and collaboration.

The RAU reached a major milestone in May 2026 when Cotswold District Council granted outline planning permission for the University's Innovation Village, a first of its kind for the UK.

Centred on agriculture, food, and land management, the Innovation Village will act as a hub for research, collaboration, and practical solutions in the sector, combining the RAU's specialist expertise, UK networks and strong international partnerships to drive economic growth, sustainability, and educational excellence, helping to shape the

future of sustainable innovation within the land-based sector.

Of course, the principle and importance of innovation is not a new concept for the RAU. Back in 1845, this was already well understood by the founders of the Royal Agricultural College (RAC), which included celebrated names such as Isambard Kingdom Brunel. It was on these grounds that landowners, politicians, and industry leaders came together to create the first English-speaking agricultural college in the world – to help address some of the biggest challenges facing society at that time.

That spirit of innovation, enterprise and progressive thinking has remained central to the evolution of the RAC and then RAU ever since, building upon its specialist strengths while expanding its global reach.

This is clearly encapsulated in the ambition for our Innovation Village. With a respectful nod to the foresight of those original RAC shareholders, but with a large dose of transformative ambition for the future, the Innovation Village projects a University that will enhance the UK's international standing; drive economic growth through applied research and development; and build national capabilities within a priority sector by developing a highly skilled workforce.

The location – a 29-acre University-owned site, adjacent to the main campus – will be home to 24,000 sqm of multi-use space, which will include laboratories, office space, and event and hospitality facilities. The development will be carbon neutral, rich in nature, and will inspire innovation through its environment. It will demonstrate new innovations in sustainability, energy usage, build quality, materials, and landscaping to be a truly net-zero and exemplary sustainable development, the likes of which do not currently exist anywhere else.

The Innovation Village will become a physical home for multiple

agencies from different sectors to work together in ways that can help find solutions to sustainable land use, food production, climate change and the biodiversity crisis. It will also provide important opportunities for our students to enhance their studies whilst at the RAU, as well as career options upon graduation.

With planning permission now granted, this unlocks the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations with potential funders, investors and partners in the development, who share the RAU's passion and vision for the site. Domestically within the UK, and internationally across the RAU's mix of international partners, there has already been significant interest in the opportunity the Innovation Village provides.

We are now aiming to accelerate progress by taking forward the Innovation Village through four distinct workstreams that will be managed through a Project Board, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, and overseen by Governing Council.

The first workstream focuses upon the detailed design of the development itself, ensuring that we continue to work with the planning authority and key stakeholders to prepare for the different phases of construction.

The second workstream focuses upon securing the fundraising and investment required to support such a development. We are actively engaging with commercial investors, philanthropists, government agencies and charitable trusts that understand and share our vision for the Innovation Village.

Similarly, the third workstream will capitalise upon the RAU's network of

Right and below:
An artist's impression of the development



UK and international collaborators, academic and industry partners, who can play a vital role in building a community on the site.

The final workstream focuses upon ensuring that, politically, the Innovation Village is recognised nationally as a key component of the UK's research capabilities and a stimulus for economic growth, skills development and innovation. The influence of this development aims to be wider than its site boundary, acting as an exemplar project to improve and expedite the sustainability of other local, national, and international developments by being an agent for wider change.

Having celebrated our 180th anniversary, this landmark project will help shape our future legacy looking ahead to the next 180 years. **L**

“ The development will be carbon neutral, rich in nature, and will inspire innovation through its environment ”

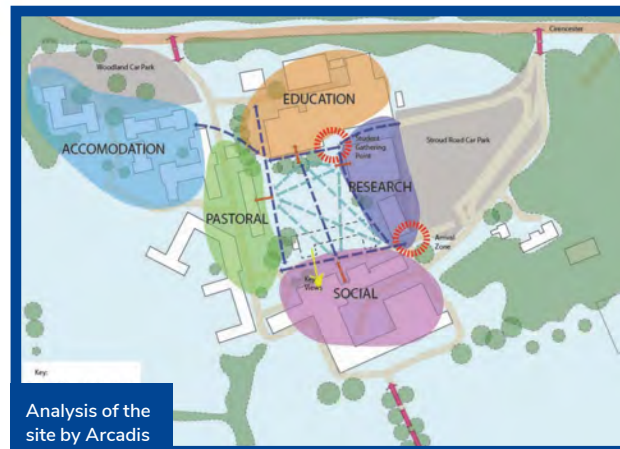


The Innovation Village will be located on a 29-acre site next to the main campus



Creating the heart of campus

Plans for a new Green Quad to reflect the University's heritage and its ambitions for the future.



The centre of the RAU campus is set for a major transformation, with exciting plans emerging for a new Green Quad that will create a vibrant, welcoming space for students, staff, alumni, and visitors.

Following the completion of the new Land Laboratories and the removal of the former buildings, an opportunity has arisen to reimagine the heart of the campus. For the first time in decades, uninterrupted views now stretch across the Quad towards the Tithe Barn, opening up possibilities to create a landscape that better reflects the University's heritage, community and future ambitions.

The project began with a Future Campus Competition, inviting students and staff to share their ideas



Competition finalists Sebastian Kilpatrick, Lily Clarke and Andrea Cable

for the space. Proposals included everything from wildlife-friendly planting and outdoor study areas to public art, social spaces, and features celebrating the University's history. Three finalists were invited to take part in a design workshop facilitated by Arcadis alongside students, staff, alumni, estates colleagues, and other interested parties.

Biodiversity and sustainability are central to the vision, with native species, pollinator-friendly planting, and edible gardens helping to create a greener and more environmentally resilient campus.

The redesigned quad would also improve the experience of visitors arriving on campus, creating a stronger sense of place and a focal point for open days, graduation celebrations, and community events. Flexible spaces would support everything from informal student gatherings to outdoor lectures, performances, and seasonal activities.

The Green Quad is still at the concept stage, with further design development, consultation and fundraising required before construction can begin. However, the

vision is clear: to create a landscape that reflects the University's status as a world-leading institution for agriculture, land management and the environment, while providing a welcoming and inspiring space for generations of students to come. [L](#)

To find out more, please contact Julia Jenkins at development@rau.ac.uk

Sebastian Kilpatrick's design included plaques and QR codes built into dry stone walls



The site as it is today



Musician-turned-farmer Andy Cato (left) and with RAU Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter McCaffery (below)



after becoming concerned about the environmental impact of modern food production. In 2013, he sold his music rights to buy a farm in France and began exploring regenerative farming practices.

He later became a tenant farmer for the National Trust in Oxfordshire and, in 2018, co-founded Wildfarmed with Edd Lees and George Lamb. The company promotes regenerative agriculture by supporting farmers to improve soil health, increase biodiversity, and produce nutritious food while working in harmony with nature.

Today, Wildfarmed works with more than 150 farmers and supplies produce to over 1,000 outlets across the UK, demonstrating that regenerative farming can be both environmentally and commercially successful.

The Honorary Fellowship recognises Andy's innovation, leadership, and commitment to restoring the health of soils and landscapes, while inspiring a new generation to see agriculture as a force for positive environmental change. [L](#)

Award for Wildfarmed founder

Andy Cato is recognised with the RAU's highest honour.

We were delighted to award musician-turned-farmer Andy Cato an Honorary Fellowship, our highest honour, during the University's 180th anniversary year.

Best known as one half of electronic music duo Groove Armada, Andy made a remarkable career change

“Andy is a leading advocate for regenerative farming and sustainability”

Supporting our students

Scholarships and bursaries are crucial to the foundation of the RAU.



Mesfin Zenebe,
2024/25 SAFS
African Research
Grant

With living costs increasing, funding issues can be a barrier to going to university. That’s why we are grateful to be able to offer a range of financial support to students at the RAU. Here, alumni and students explain why the funding has been so important to them and the positive impact it has had on their studies.

Harriet Rothwell (Agriculture)

The Douglas Bomford Trust aims to advance knowledge, understanding, practice, and competence in the application of engineering and technology to achieve sustainable agriculture, food and biological systems for the benefit of the environment and society.

For Harriet, the scholarship enabled her to carry out in-depth analysis for her final-year dissertation, *A study in reducing nitrogen fertiliser while maintaining yield and nutritional values of maize forage*. Without the Trust’s support, she says her dissertation would have lacked

the quantitative data needed to support her hypothesis. The funding covered initial set-up costs, including seed, fertilisers, herbicides and other materials, as well as testing expenses.

Harriet was awarded a first for her dissertation. “Without my family’s support and the Trust’s generosity, this would not have been possible,” she says. “I look forward to applying my knowledge and skills in my career in the agricultural industry.”

Sneh Rawat (Agriculture)

Sneh is a current recipient of The Douglas Bomford Trust scholarship and says it has been incredibly valuable in supporting her academic journey. “The scholarship has allowed me to focus more deeply on my studies and research without the added pressure of financial constraints,” she says.

“The award has also boosted my confidence, knowing that my work is recognised and supported. It has opened doors to new opportunities and helped me to stay motivated.”



Robyn Sherriff,
2025/26 Kaleb
Cooper Agriculture
Bursary

Robyn Sherriff (Agriculture and Farm Management)

Robyn, a student from Zambia, is a recipient of the 2025/26 Kaleb Cooper Agriculture Bursary. Kaleb came from a non-agricultural background but is passionate about all things farming and, since 2023, has been giving those who might otherwise be unable to enter the industry a chance to follow their dreams and work in agriculture.

“The bursary has had a huge impact on my university experience,” says Robyn. “It has allowed me to drop two of the four part-time jobs I was working in-between my studies, which has given me more time and energy to put towards assignments and lectures.

“It has made the last semester much more enjoyable and I am extremely grateful for the opportunity I have been given.”



Mesfin Zenebe (Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security)

The SAFS African Research Grant helps MSc Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security students fund flights and living costs for a month to support field research as part of their degree.

Mesfin used his funding to support his research project, *Assessing the adoption and effects of regenerative agricultural practices for the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in Ethiopia*.

Mesfin collected the primary data and examined the prevailing constraints of adoption, and the extent to which adoption of these practices contributed to the improvement of livelihoods for small-scale farmers in the Damot Gale and Sodo Zuria districts in the Wolaita area of Southern Ethiopia.

Ross Wilson (Agricultural Business Management)

The Sir Emrys Jones Memorial Trust scholarships were established in 2004 and have been supporting students with Welsh connections through their education at the RAC/RAU ever since.

Ross used some of the funding to buy a suit ahead of an interview for his placement year. It was an investment that Ross believes helped him make the right impression with his now current employer and boosted his confidence in a vital interview. He says that the scholarship meant he was better positioned to take difficult challenges in his stride, and could direct his efforts towards the future and his professional career path. 



Ross Wilson,
2023/24 to present,
Sir Emrys Jones
Memorial Trust



CIRENCESTER FUND: HELPING STUDENTS STAY THE COURSE

For some students, an unexpected financial setback can place their education at risk. Rising living costs, family circumstances, health challenges or unforeseen expenses can quickly create barriers to academic success.

Often, relatively small amounts of support at the right moment can prevent a student from withdrawing, enable them to continue their studies, and help them fulfil their potential.

Demand for hardship support continues to grow. With your support, we can ensure that students facing financial difficulties receive timely assistance when they need it most, helping them remain at the RAU and thrive throughout their studies.

A GIFT to the Cirencester Fund is an investment in student success, ensuring that financial circumstances do not stand in the way of talent, ambition and achievement.

If you are interested in establishing a scholarship or a bursary at the RAU, or donating to the Cirencester Fund, please get in touch at development@rau.ac.uk

Photo: Clint Randall, pixelp photography.co.uk



Harriet
Rothwell,
2024/25
The Douglas
Bomford Trust



Sneh Rawat,
2025/26
The Douglas
Bomford
Trust



UKRAINE UPDATE

Investing in agricultural recovery

Research teams are working to minimise the threat to global food security posed by Ukraine’s polluted soil.

BY DR DAVID O’CONNOR, PROFESSOR IN SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT

The war in Ukraine has profoundly affected the country’s agricultural landscape, causing widespread environmental damage that threatens soil health and long-term land productivity. An estimated 7.5 million hectares of agricultural land have been affected; an issue of global significance given Ukraine’s role as a major food producer. Military activity has disrupted soils and damaged farmland, making restoration technically complex and economically uncertain. These challenges deter investment, slow recovery, and threaten future agricultural output.

At the same time, Ukrainian agriculture faces growing climate pressures, including rising temperatures, more frequent droughts, and changing rainfall patterns. The combination of climate

stress and conflict-related land degradation further increases risks to food production. As one of the world’s leading exporters of wheat and maize, disruptions to Ukraine’s agricultural capacity have direct implications for global food security. Despite these challenges, recovery presents an opportunity to rebuild more sustainably. Strengthening agricultural resilience through land restoration and climate-adaptive



Maksym Soloha, a member of the project team, standing on the remnants of a tank in a field in Kharkiv Oblast

“Farming families and rural communities are facing profound disruption”

A major component of the project has involved capacity building. Training programmes have been conducted covering soil sampling, XRF operation, soil contamination, degradation, and restoration techniques. A total of 118 participants have been trained, including academics, volunteers, business representatives, and local authority personnel. Participation was drawn from multiple regions, including Sumy, Kharkiv, Kherson, Luhansk, Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Dnipro. The programme supported gender-balanced participation and focused entirely on the agricultural sector, ensuring relevance to land recovery.

The project has been recognised by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (United Nations) as the largest database examining heavy metal contamination in the context of the war in Ukraine.

Project findings

So far, the project has collected and assessed 8,400 soil samples from 44 conflict-affected fields, spanning 30 farms and 19 territorial communities

- across five regions. In total, 4,486 hectares of land have been analysed. The findings show that:
- soil contamination is generally localised, but significant hotspots have been linked to military activity
 - burned military equipment poses a greater contamination risk than explosive craters
 - not all contamination is visually detectable, necessitating systematic sampling
 - portable XRF equipment and high-resolution satellite imagery significantly enhances the ability to identify and prioritise impacted areas.

These findings highlight the importance of combining technological tools with on-the-ground expertise to guide remediation efforts. Moreover, the validated dataset developed through this project advances environmental monitoring and offers potential for scalable assessments in the future.

Pathway forward

Over the next three to five years, our aim is to enable wider soil and crop monitoring, longitudinal environmental and food safety analysis, climate-smart remediation pilots such as phytoremediation and biochar, farmer training and advisory services, digital mapping and decision-support tools, and strengthened Ukrainian scientific and institutional capacity. Our goal is to help restore productive land, improve farmer livelihoods and confidence, strengthen climate resilience and food security, and generate internationally transferable approaches for post-conflict land recovery. **L**



practices can support domestic food security while reinforcing Ukraine’s role in global food systems.

Tackling pollution

In response to these challenges we partnered with Suny National Agrarian University (SNAU) to commence the UK/Ukraine: War-Polluted Soils Recovery and Remediation project, funded by the UK Government, specifically through the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra), under the UK-Ukraine 100-Year Partnership.

Two soil pollution research stations have been established, one at SNAU and another in Kharkiv. These facilities enabled in-country analysis of soil samples using X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysers, reducing reliance on external laboratories and accelerating data availability.

A soil science researcher from SNAU (above and right) taking soil samples at an aerial bomb crater in Sumy Oblast



DIG DIARY 2026

UNEARTHING THE COTSWOLD HOARD

Coins, spears and religious offerings found during a training excavation offer a glimpse of life in Iron Age Britain.

BY DR CASSIE NEWLAND, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN CULTURAL HERITAGE, CO-DEAN OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE AND PRACTICE

Archaeologists are always asked two questions: whether we've found any dead bodies, which we can usually respond to quite easily (e.g. 'yes, this is a cemetery', 'no, this is a bath house') and whether we've found any treasure.

The second question usually elicits an immediate 'no', followed by a

high-brow exposition about how, for archaeologists, 'treasure' is an interesting bit of broken pottery, or an assemblage of bones from unusual fauna, and that we never – well hardly ever – find your actual golden, sparkly treasure. The RAU's Cultural Heritage Institute (CHI) training excavation this summer was rather different.

Every year, lecturers at CHI put on a training dig for our Archaeology and Heritage students. This year's dig, directed by Professor Mark Horton, ran between 22 and 29 May at a secret location near Cirencester. Secret because of the sheer volume of treasure we expected to find on site.

Treasure, in UK law, is precisely defined and includes finds of two or more coins of more than 10% silver or gold. When the site was first discovered in 2020 by metal detectorists, over 150 silver and bronze artefacts were carefully recovered. We would be working with the original finders, so we expected great things from this year's dig.

We recovered more than 150 metal artefacts, including over 100 beautiful Iron Age 'Cotswold Eagle' coins. These were manufactured by the local Dobunni tribe between 50 and 20 BCE and have a rudimentary 'moonface' on the 'heads' side. The reverse, however, is the real star, featuring a stylised horse with three tails streaming behind it as it gallops



During the training dig (left) students discovered Cotswold Eagles (above), an Iron Age coin minted by the Dobunni tribe



Professor Mark Horton working with MSc students, volunteers and enthusiasts



An iron spear discovered during the dig



across the Cotswold hills. It almost makes me wonder if this is where we get the idea of the 'tails' side of a coin from! The eagle – from which the coin gets its name – soars overhead.

Alongside the coins we found iron spears and miniature bronze models of spears, swords and scabbards, daggers, and shields. These are ritual offerings, known as 'votives', many of which had been deliberately broken, to signify that they were offerings and not to be recovered or reused.

Importantly, though less sparkly, we uncovered a central cobbled

pavement worn flat by the procession of many feet around the site. We also found several small pits cut into the local Cotswold limestone and filled with a fine soil. The pits were empty of any artefacts and may have been deliberately made to plant trees or bushes. The context of all our treasure then was likely a natural place, or possibly a grove of trees, where religious offerings were made to the Iron Age gods. The excavation provides a rare and fabulous window into late Iron Age practices on the eve of the Roman invasion. **L**

“ Alongside the coins we found iron spears and miniature bronze models of spears, swords and scabbards, daggers, and shields ”

Research to control equine parasite

Dr Simon Daniels, Associate Professor of Equine Science at the RAU, has played a leading role in the development of the UK's national strategy to combat anthelmintic resistance in horses.



Anthelmintic resistance – where parasites become less responsive to worming treatments – is a growing threat to equine health and welfare. Recognising the need for a coordinated approach, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), an agency of Defra, brought together experts from across the equine sector to develop a long-term strategy for sustainable parasite control.

With a research specialism in equine gut health and nutrition, and a longstanding interest in anthelmintic resistance, Simon was invited to contribute to this national initiative. His expertise spans both academia and industry, and he has published extensively on equine parasite control during his time at the RAU.

In 2023, the stakeholder group formally launched as Controlling ANTiparasitic resistance in Equines Responsibly (CANTER) at the National Equine Forum. The organisation aims to lead a coordinated UK-wide approach to antiparasitic use and help safeguard the effectiveness of treatments for future generations of horses.

National guidelines

One of CANTER's first priorities



Dr Simon Daniels,
Associate Professor of
Equine Science

was the development of national best practice guidelines. Simon was part of the team responsible for writing and editing the guidance, which now provides a framework for veterinary practitioners and prescribers of equine anthelmintics across the UK.

Reflecting on his involvement, Simon said: "It has been a privilege to contribute to the work of CANTER and to help develop these national guidelines. Anthelmintic resistance remains a significant challenge for equine health and welfare, and a coordinated approach is essential if we are to address it effectively.

"The continued focus on this issue at the National Equine Forum demonstrates the industry's commitment to finding solutions. CANTER is a strong example of how research expertise can deliver

real-world impact for horses, owners and veterinary professionals across the UK."

Simon continues to support CANTER's work through its guidelines and research groups, helping to ensure that the latest evidence informs best practice and contributes to the long-term health and welfare of horses nationwide. 

“CANTER is a strong example of how research expertise can deliver real-world impact for horses, owners and veterinary professionals”

Celebrating grand ideas

Awards night recognises student enterprise at the RAU.

The Royal Agricultural University's Grand Idea competition, now in its 19th year, continues to champion student innovation, ambition and values-driven enterprise. Part of the University's Ignite Enterprise Programme, the flagship competition invites students from across disciplines to pitch their business ideas to a panel of expert judges in a *Dragons' Den*-style final.

This year's overall winner was Ian Muthumbi, a master's student in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security, whose pioneering enterprise Dudufeed impressed judges with its potential to transform agricultural waste into value. Ian's business uses the larvae of the black soldier fly to convert organic waste into sustainable, protein-rich animal feed, while also producing frass – an organic fertiliser for crops. The model supports more resilient and affordable livestock systems

while reducing pollution from organic waste.

Awarded the £5,000 top prize, Ian plans to scale up production and supply both feed and fertiliser to farmers. Reflecting on his experience, he praised the support and mentoring provided through the RAU Enterprise team, describing the

competition as a pivotal step in focusing and accelerating his idea.

The £500 runner-up prize was awarded to Lewis Jackson, a Rural Land Management student, for Cavalier, a heritage knitwear business using 100% British wool and low-waste, localised production methods in Cumbria. Lewis hopes the funding will help him to invest in equipment and materials to bring his products to market later this year.

The judging panel, chaired by retail consultant and RAU Honorary Fellow Christine Cross, also included former *Dragons' Den* contestant, food entrepreneur and RAU Honorary Fellow Levi Roots; multi-award-winning PR adviser and brand, marketing, and social media expert Rhea Freeman; RAU alumnus Alex Crawley, founder and co-director of Grazing Management (and previous Grand Idea runner-up);



Lewis Jackson, Ian Muthumbi, Rhea Freeman and Verity Sellers

and finance director Colin Carville. The judges praised the diversity, quality and real-world impact of the ideas presented.

Alongside prize funding, both finalists will continue to receive business coaching through the Ignite Enterprise Programme, reinforcing the Grand Idea's role as a launchpad for future enterprise success at the RAU.

Also receiving awards on the night were third year Rural Land Management student Verity Sellers who was this year's Student Social Enterprise Champion for her involvement in the RAU's Cotswold Hills wine enterprise, and Grand Idea judge Rhea Freeman, who won the award for Outstanding Contribution to RAU Enterprise for her ongoing support of the programme. 

To find out more, contact enterprise@rau.ac.uk



Cotswold Hills wine on display at the event

What makes an RAU education different?

Insights from students and staff show University offers a diversity of perspectives, approaches, and experiences.

BY DR JONATHAN CODE, SENIOR LECTURER IN SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT AND PROGRAMME LEADER MSC AGROECOLOGICAL



Environment and Conservation students take part in an experiential coppicing session led by Ed Bonn (FWAG) and Dr Jonathan Code

Why do we teach? What do we teach? How do we teach? And, perhaps most importantly, who do we teach?

These might be either surprising or seemingly self-evident questions for a university to be asking itself. After all, it might be assumed that the answers to these questions must be well in hand for an educational institution with 181 years of teaching under its belt. These are, however, not questions with once-and-for-all answers, and nor are they going to be answered in the same way by everyone involved with education at the RAU.

Consider just how the world has changed since Robert Jeffreys-Brown gave his address in 1842 on the 'advantages of a specific education for agricultural pursuits' to the Fairford and Cirencester Farmers' Club. Since the doors to the Royal Agricultural College (RAC) opened in 1845, agriculture and land management have seen tremendous changes (some would even say upheavals), developments that would have virtually been inconceivable to the RAC's founding faculty.

Educational emphasis and approaches have also changed significantly over the last century, let alone the last two. This is not just a question of content, the need to keep up with insights and applications in soil science, chemistry, plant and animal husbandry, economics, food systems, and agricultural technology that have emerged from over a century and a half of innovation. It is also a question of changes in perception and understanding, awareness of ecosystem complexity, of policy and population change, and the now unavoidable reality that there are large-scale impacts both on and from local interventions (and vice versa).

It is therefore, not untoward – as a University with a particular legacy and vision, situated in an ever-evolving social, ecological, and agricultural context – to

be asking ourselves the questions about educational purpose posed at the outset of this article.

Inside view

In a participatory research process led by Dr Jonathan Code, which began in the academic year 2024/25, these questions were posed to faculty, students, and learning support staff with a view to understanding and articulating the RAU's approach to teaching and learning 'from the inside'. With a view to shedding light on the question 'what makes teaching at the RAU unique?', colleagues and students were asked to share their own approaches to, and experiences of, teaching and learning at the University.

First findings were, on face-value, contrasting and even contradictory.

Some responses spoke to the need to teach fundamental knowledge, to deliver what industry experts informed us that students needed to know so that they could step into work after graduation fully equipped to get on with the job. Other responses focused on the need for students not to be told or taught content that can now be sourced at the push of a button or swipe of a screen, but that it was more important that they learn to problem-solve, think critically, and thrive in a world rife with complexity and diverging views on almost everything.

The research process into our own RAU teaching philosophy led at first to a picture that could have resulted in the conclusion that we don't have a unified approach to education, that there isn't agreement for the why, what, and wherefore of what we do. In actual fact, what emerged was the realisation that we don't have a uniform approach. We have, rather, a rich tapestry of teaching approaches that overall bring to our students the assurances of professionally informed knowledge and scholarship, the invitation to transform and



Above: Dr Jonathan Code, Senior Lecturer in Sustainable Land Management
Top: Students on the Small-Scale Farming and Local Food Supply module study agroecological principles on Good Small Farms near Stroud, Gloucestershire

not only adapt to change but be agents of change, and to keep learning grounded in experience and reflection.

These findings give us confidence in our standing as a University – an educational ecosystem bringing a diversity of perspectives, approaches, and experiences to our students and to our colleagues. Diversity will at times bring tensions, differences, and perhaps even disagreements to the questions (and answers) of 'why, what, how, and who' we teach at the RAU – but at the same time what has emerged from diving deeply into the question of what makes RAU teaching unique is the confidence that it is so because it stands dynamically on the three pillars below:

- Knowledge and Scholarship
- Experience and Reflection
- Transformation and Application. **1**

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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:

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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 and 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), Listed 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
- Master Planning

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

Learning beyond the classroom

An update on how we are supporting students' employability and career journeys through placements.

You may not be aware, but all RAU undergraduate students must undertake a placement as part of their course. The majority of students are required to do a 12-week (minimum) placement starting around April, but some students also elect to do a placement year.

This is a fantastic opportunity for students to get real-world work experience in their specific field and many have secured their graduate role as a result. For example, 20% of our 2025/26 leavers secured their role through their placement.

Here is what some of our placement providers have said:

- "We've been delighted to support placement year students and have consistently been impressed by their professionalism, enthusiasm, and willingness to learn. Our most recent placement student quickly became a valued member of the team,

demonstrating strong communication skills, adaptability, and a proactive attitude that made a real impact on our day-to-day operations."

- "We were very impressed with the quality and conduct of the student who engaged their placement with our farming business. In all areas their motivation and ability to adapt to the work presented to them was always of a very high standard. We always felt confident in their work. We commend the RAU in producing first-class ambassadors to the agricultural industry."

And here is what students have said about their placement:

- "Undertaking work experience was both invaluable and rewarding, providing me with a deeper perspective on the industry and helping me to clarify the next steps I wish to take in my career."
- "It has given me some much-needed real-world experience. I have gained some insight into parts of the industry and have also grown in confidence having carried out a few placements."
- "My placement has helped me to decide my future career interests and what I would like to go into. It has also given me great contacts for the future and skills that helped to prepare me for the workplace."



Thank you to all the employers who continue to support our students; we really do appreciate it and we do need more placements. **L**

If you wish to support RAU placements, including advertising any vacancies you may have, please email placements@rau.ac.uk



International collaboration

Sustaining excellence in China partnerships: a year of progress.

BY DR YONGMEI CAROL ZHANG, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS, ASSOCIATE DEAN OF CHINA PROGRAMMES

I joined the RAC in 2009 and, over the years, have had the privilege of witnessing the remarkable development of our China programmes, from their early foundations as largely teaching-contract-based provision for around 100 students, to today’s thriving portfolio of innovative transnational education (TNE) partnerships, now engaging around 2,300 students. This evolution reflects the sustained commitment of colleagues and partners both in RAU and China. It is within this context that I reflect on the progress made over the past year.

Our China programmes have continued to evolve, underpinned by a clear focus on sustaining academic excellence, promoting student mobility, recognising staff achievements, advancing research collaboration, and enhancing the overall student experience.

One of the highlights this year has been the successful delivery of our Summer School and Visiting Programmes. We were delighted to welcome students from partner institutions (QAU, SDAU, HAU, IMAU) across different regions of China, who joined us for a range of academic and cultural experiences.

It has been particularly rewarding to see how these experiences contributed not only to students’ academic development, but also to their confidence, independence, and global outlook. The consistently positive feedback we receive from students reinforces the importance of maintaining and expanding these opportunities as we continue to deliver our vision: “to be the UK’s global university for sustainable farming and land management, enabling communities locally, nationally and across the world to thrive in harmony with nature.”



Above: Students visit the Zerodig project
Below: Qingdao Agricultural University (QAU) Delegation Visit October 2025



Striving for excellence

Alongside our focus on students, this year we have placed significant emphasis on strengthening academic staffing and collaboration across our China programmes, helping to ensure both continuity and academic excellence. I am consistently impressed by the professionalism, dedication, and innovation demonstrated by colleagues teaching on China programmes.

Over the past year, it has been especially pleasing to see a number of colleagues recognised through RAU staff awards including Dr Ishwar Pun for Outstanding Student Support, Dr Kevin Cutsforth for

Above: Dr Yongmei Carol Zhang, Associate Professor in People and Organisations, Associate Dean of China Programmes
Above right: China partnership farm visit



Outstanding Programme Leader, and Dr Jamie Cipriani who achieved an Outstanding Lecturer award.

In parallel with teaching and delivery, we have also continued to develop research engagement across our academic community. A key focus has been on encouraging deeper collaboration based on shared research interests and disciplinary expertise. By facilitating the formation of research groups and strengthening links between colleagues internally and externally, we are beginning to build more connected research networks. These initiatives are creating new opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration, international engagement, and long-term academic impact, further enriching the contribution of our China programmes to the wider RAU research agenda.

As I reflect on the progress made over the past year, I am proud of what has been achieved collectively across our China programmes. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all those who have contributed to the continued success and development of these programmes. Together, we will continue to sustain excellence and build on the progress achieved.

Looking ahead, I am confident that through sustained collaboration, innovation, and academic excellence, we will further enhance opportunities for students and staff, while ensuring that our TNE programmes remain at the forefront of high-quality international education. **L**



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Farm491: cultivating connections

One member explains how a business breakfast conversation led to an opportunity to collaborate on the development of an innovative product.

Farm491, our business development space focused on land use innovation and the future of farming and food systems, continues to support entrepreneurs and innovators around the globe.

CASE STUDY: Rui Filipe Manaia, MSc Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security

What value has attending our business breakfasts brought to you? I came to the RAU after deciding to change career paths. The business breakfasts have proved to be one of the most valuable experiences offered by the RAU, providing entrepreneurial students like me the opportunity to engage with Farm491 members and the wider community.



Tell us about the connections you have made.

It was at a business breakfast that I first met the Cirencester-based product designer and entrepreneur Nigel Chute. Nigel shared the background of the LYDEL trays – a project he had developed years earlier in collaboration with a late farmer friend named Joe. The aim was to create a practical and cost-effective solution for safely disposing of agricultural chemicals from crop sprayers, in compliance with environmental regulations.

This project immediately appealed to me. I have always valued simple, practical solutions to everyday problems, and I believe that increasing reliance on complex technologies can sometimes obscure more efficient, low-tech alternatives.

Another key aspect that attracted me was that the drip tray was already a market-tested product, with approximately 1,600 units sold. Despite this, there remains significant potential for further business development.

Tell us about your role within the LYDEL project.

I have been helping with market research, business development and I am currently building a business plan, drawing on the knowledge



I have obtained through my studies.

Going forward, Nigel and I have discussed me taking on some sort of leadership position, presenting the product to possible customers and managing some of the day-to-day logistics.

This opportunity represents an ideal learning environment: I can gain insight from an experienced entrepreneur while contributing to a project with real commercial potential. 

Learn more about Farm491, including events, at farm491.com. Membership is free for RAU students and those who have graduated in the past 12 months.

Rui Filipe Manaia connected with a fellow entrepreneur at a Farm491 business breakfast

LESSONS FOR LIFE

RAU alumni share the stories behind their success and offer valuable advice for students at the start of their career journeys.



Philip Wynn OBE

Advanced Farm Management, 1974

With a career spanning over 50 years, Philip has managed and advised businesses in nearly every sector of agriculture. He has been a Director of Dyson Farming since it was formed in 2013 and has several other directorships across the food and farming sector. He is a financial and strategic adviser to a number of large-scale vegetable, potato and arable businesses. Philip has had a long connection with LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming), having been Manager of the Nevile Estate in Lincolnshire, one of LEAF's first Demonstration Farms. He has been Chair of LEAF since 2017.

What would you say to students considering a career outside their expected field?

It was probably a lot more difficult when I started, 50-odd years ago. I think it is easier now because the opportunities are much broader. I developed a passion for farming the

first time I started working for Joe Henson, before I even came here. I thought, I really like this. I can feel part of it. So, I don't think it matters what background you have, if you have the passion and commitment to make a success of it. When I talk to children about opportunities, they often say, "We don't come from farming. We don't own land." My response is: you don't have to own land. I've never owned an acre. I've used my experience and knowledge to help landowners, businesses, families and now corporates to be successful. Farming and food production requires passion. Every day, every week, every year is different. Isn't that great?

Your mentor, RAC alumnus Joe Henson, was clearly important in your journey. What do you think a good mentor brings?

I set up the mentoring for the Henry Plumb Foundation, which matched mentors with young people receiving small grants. Mentoring isn't about giving advice. It's about being a sounding board, helping people see what they're capable of and supporting them. It's about expanding horizons and giving the comfort and support to make the journey, not telling someone to do X, Y or Z. I enjoy doing it, and I enjoy making the connections like Joe did for me. It's about encouraging

people to be brave and step outside their comfort zone. There are people who've come here after leaving the army who wanted to get into farming but didn't know how. I supported them for a couple of years, they studied here, and they're now very successful. It's rewarding.

How do you navigate change in family businesses?

There's always been a route: your family has a farm, you learn how to run it, you go run it. That's changing. There isn't as much money as there used to be, so people need to diversify. I do quite a lot of brokering between generations. Farming is such a solitary profession; bringing people together matters.

What skills and mindsets do future leaders need?

We talk a lot about data, but few use it to the extent they could. With challenging margins and markets, using data to improve profitability and efficiency is vital. Future leaders need a mindset that is open to change and uses data, not just collects it.

Technology is important, but because of the cost of entry, people will have to share more. We need more near-market research. We need innovation that moves the dial quickly, not in 10 years' time. That requires collaboration and private investment.

Where do universities fit in?

Universities need to open students' eyes to the fact that we're living

Opposite and above: Philip Wynn OBE

in a different world, and there's no going back. Family businesses that adapt, use data, communicate well and are resilient will grow. But it requires a different mindset.

Who has inspired you and made a difference in the industry

John Alliston had just started when I was a student. Vic Hughes was here too, and I kept in touch with both. John inspired a lot of people. He's had an enormous impact on the industry and he was a great listener.

Emrys Jones was the principal when I was here. He was supportive of me. I've been lucky and people have helped me along the line and said "You can do it, Philip, why don't you do this?" I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing today without them. That's why I mentor people now.

You often quote, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal". What does courage look like in practice and what advice would you give to students beginning their own journeys?

Courage is the courage to continue. When I look back, plenty has gone wrong – but that's part of the experience. There is always another day. That's something I try to impart to others: don't worry. We will get over this. There's always another way.

Because of isolation on farms, people can become insular and buried by it. They have to remember there's another day and another way. Not everything works. You need the determination to work around it and find another solution.



“Farming is such a solitary profession; bringing people together matters”

Experience tells you there's a way. The courage to continue is the important thing. And you mustn't make the same mistake twice.

A lot of the difficulties aren't practical, they're about people. Whether it's a business issue, a crop issue, or a family issue, you have to carry everybody. Being a good communicator is essential. People tend to bury problems, but you have to talk about them. Not to everybody, but to those who can help. Problems don't tend to get better on their own. →



Miranda Tate

International Business Management, 2019

Miranda graduated in 2019 with a First-class degree in International Business Management. She now works as an Operations & Accounts Executive and is widely recognised as a member of the team behind Diddly Squat Farm Shop, working alongside Lisa Hogan, as featured on Clarkson's Farm.

How did you first become involved with Diddly Squat Farm?

The job was actually advertised on The Grapevine Works. The show had just dropped and I had no idea what I was letting myself in for. I applied, went and had an interview with Lisa and Jeremy, and in a matter of weeks I had moved my life down to Oxfordshire!

What does a typical day at work look like?

It varies from week to week but these days my job is largely

office based. I love being able to turn my hand to everything and anything. Sometimes I am unloading pallets and sometimes I am on site visits to new suppliers!

What do visitors often misunderstand about running a busy farm shop?

I think people are surprised at how small the original farm shop is, quite often customers will stand in the shop and say "gosh, we didn't realise it was THIS small!". I think people also think we just have the farm shop itself, but we also have the shop at The Farmer's Dog, our online store and our wholesale arm.

What achievement are you most proud of so far?

Being able to adapt with my role as the business has grown. A lot has changed, we are a very

dynamic business and I am proud that I have been able to continue to grow and develop my professional skills alongside that growth – it is never dull!

What advice would you give to current students interested in a similar career?

Don't be afraid to just roll up your sleeves and get stuck in, no one starts at the top – I have done my fair share of shifts in the shop. Just stick with it, and don't underestimate the compound effect of time in a job and the doors that can open.

If you could give your younger self one piece of advice, what would it be?

Never be afraid to take a risk!
And pay more attention in your finance modules... →



Miranda is a member of the team behind the Diddly Squat Farm shop, working with Lisa Hogan (below)



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Serena Cross, The Field magazine columnist

Serena Cross

Rural Land Management, 2008

Serena Cross is the country sports columnist for *The Field* magazine and a senior national representative for the UK in Italy. She is a member of the Worshipful Company of Gunmakers, works with the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC), and is a brand ambassador for James Purdey & Sons. She also sits on numerous committees where she helps to bring field sports to the forefront of people's agendas.

Was there a defining moment when you realised storytelling and writing would become central to your career?

Being asked to launch *The Field* magazine's Sporting Diana series, for women who excel in the field, and to feature on the front cover was very humbling. It launched me onto

a platform that snowballed, where I could grow and develop my writing to empower women and future generations to get into field sports. We have been writing our joint column for six years as well as contributing numerous features and we've loved every second.

What originally drew you to the sporting world and field culture?

Pony Club tetrathlon was my introduction to shooting. Air-pistol shooting was one of the four disciplines – along with running, swimming, and riding – and I progressed, at the age of 12, to the pair of side-by-side 20 bore Arrietas that I still use today.

We were extremely lucky as children to grow up surrounded by the beautiful, wild Cornish countryside. I loved the hands-on approach we were afforded and learning the rhythms of the seasons that are so very important.

I remember collecting pheasant eggs in the pens, laden down with a basket brimming with eggs ready for incubation. Mucking out before school amongst the menagerie of animals only deepened my love for the land. I competed to Advanced Level eventing, gaining a scholarship to Cirencester, even though I did Rural Land Management. Then, once I got let loose with my horse in tow, I could really indulge in my love of country pursuits. What an unbelievably blissful time of my life that was.

Which story or feature are you most proud of?

A couple of features stand out. Banking the Prize, a piece about racing over banks, took me two years to research and involved tracking down original material dating back to 1919. Collating original accounts, scrapbook cuttings and newspaper articles took a long time, but it was worth it.

The story is about HRH Edward VIII, then Prince of Wales, and his horse Miss Muffitt, a six-year-old bay mare who he rode to make good on a wager to race over banks in the South West. He travelled 400 miles to sprinkle his fairy dust over this race and was the clear favourite. Little did he know who he would be up against: Hext, the descendant of a dear family friend, whose daughter, Suzannah, is also an alumnus.

At a time when horses were just as famous amongst racegoers as the jockeys, these events regularly drew crowds of over 3,000; soldiers were stationed at fences to steady the jostling throng, such was the clamour

for a view of the Prince. HRH was in the lead up until half a mile from home, when he was challenged by Hext. The local pair took the lead and gave no royal quarter when they secured a win by 20 lengths. The most famous sportsman of his era had been pipped to the post by the local man of the hour. Being able to bring this story to life was joyful.

The second was Dredging up the Past – The last of the Oystermen. David Gunn works his 100-year-old 16ft punt along the River Fal. His family have been working these waters for over 500 years, making a living in the summer months by gathering oak bark from the creek and shipping it upriver to Croggan's tannery at Grampound where the leather for the Household Cavalry was tanned.

In the autumn the oysters are dredged by hand. Fishing like this rakes up the shale and keeps the

oyster beds healthy. However, this businesslike and entirely traditional setup is no mere nod to nostalgia but a working, living craft that plies these waters in the harshest of weathers to bring the most succulent, sustainable shellfish to the smartest tables in town.

How do you balance authenticity and accessibility when writing for both seasoned sporting readers and newcomers?

We write from our own life experiences, drawing on our collective 90 years spent in the field. We shoot and fish all over the world, so there is always a story to be told. Our writings are often humorous, which keeps it accessible for everyone. We never patronise the seasoned campaigners and we never want to lecture newcomers. Hopefully they can relate to our pieces and take away something from each of them.

“ We were extremely lucky as children to grow up surrounded by the beautiful, wild Cornish countryside ”

What does your role as senior national representative in Italy for the UK involve?

As a cultural ambassador, I represent the customs, etiquette and culture of the UK at multinational events, military ceremonies, charity functions and official dinners. I also look after the spousal support network for families on our patch, helping them with schooling, housing, and adapting to life in Italy. The NRDC-ITA Spouses' International Club brings together the wives to raise money for military causes.

You mention regularly hearing from RAU students with sporting questions – what qualities do you think young people entering these industries need most today?

I absolutely love hearing about their up-and-coming adventures and how I might guide them in some small way. Be that advice on what boots to wear stalking in The Highlands (Brandecosse) or which fly to tie on for a day's fishing on the Spey, or even how to tip a keeper when boar shooting abroad (it's not a thing). It's wonderful to hear that the next generation are as mad keen as we were 20-plus years ago. →



Serena with her brother



Mary Oakes with smallholder farmer Jean D'Arc in Rwanda

Mary Oakes

MBA Equine Business Management, 2002

When Mary Oakes (née Smith) came to the RAU to study Equine Business Management, she did not imagine a future in global charity leadership. With a background in Equine Science from Aberystwyth and practical experience in Australia and the UK, the MBA felt like a natural step to deepen her expertise. "I had absolutely no idea it would lead to a career in the charity sector," she reflects.

Today, as CEO of Opportunity International UK, Mary leads an organisation working to enable people to lift themselves out of poverty through access to finance, training and support, particularly smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa. The RAU's focus on innovation and global thinking continues to shape her work. "Everything that we do is global," she says. "We're constantly looking across borders and asking how we tackle shared challenges like food security and climate change. Innovation is equally central,

“I had absolutely no idea it would lead to a career in the charity sector”

from new fundraising approaches to tailored financial solutions for communities.”

A sense of adventure

Mary's career has been shaped by a willingness to embrace opportunity. After leaving the equine sector, a temporary role in alumni relations at Oxford introduced her to fundraising and set her on a new path.

A defining moment came on her 30th birthday, when she travelled to Rwanda to help build homes for children who had lost their parents. "You don't come away from something like that unchanged," she says. "That's when I found my purpose."

That experience led her into the charity sector, starting with Tearfund and developing into a long career in international development. Travel remains a key part of her role, connecting her directly to communities and reinforcing her commitment to impact.

A sense of purpose

Mary credits her RAU education with giving her the business foundations needed to lead effectively. Moving into business study introduced a structured, strategic way of thinking.

Mary with a group of farmers at the Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Uganda



"It gave me the confidence to make decisions, manage resources and think about growth and impact," she explains.

Paying it forward

Supporting others is central to Mary's approach. She is passionate about mentoring young professionals, inspired by those who gave her early opportunities. At Opportunity International UK, she creates an environment where people are trusted with responsibility and supported to grow. "It's about creating a space where people can thrive," she says.

Advice for purposeful careers

Mary encourages RAU students and alumni to start by understanding

their values. "That clarity helps guide your decisions," she says. Remaining curious, seeking meaningful experiences and building strong relationships are equally important. "Your network matters, especially when it's built around shared values." →

If you'd like to know more about Opportunity International's work with smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa, please visit www.opportunity.org.uk

BRIDGING FIELDS



enhancing researchers' skills at collaborating and communicating effectively with farmers. Visit rau.ac.uk/research/knowledge-exchange/bridging-fields for details.



Roger Bracewell with his sons, William Bracewell (Rural Land Management, 2010) and James Bracewell (Rural Land Management, 2012) and daughter, Communications Director Georgina Sims-Stirling

them. The land provides you with the resource necessary, and the consent releases those opportunities, where demand exists.

Your career has spanned farming, land agency and building GA Pet Food into an international business. Did you ever imagine the family enterprise would evolve in this way?

The family business has always been one of seeking opportunities. I recall my Estate Management lecturer saying, “You must maximise your opportunities, and minimise your constraints”. So, it has always been on the basis of building and developing opportunities that are available. Then continuing to ‘push’ where those opportunities present themselves, and where there is less resistance.

Was there a pivotal moment when you realised the business had the potential to become something much bigger than a traditional farming operation?

From the first moment we took the wheat grown on the farm and poured it into a soya bean extruder, driven off the PTO shaft of a tractor, and out came this meal, with someone willing to pay us more for the meal, than the wheat. This is where we saw the potential of the opportunity. Slowly, step-by-step, with many challenges, failures and some good fortune,

Roger Bracewell

Rural Estate Management, 1983

Roger spent three years at the RAC, before working as a young land agent in Bolton.

In 1984, Roger returned to the family land agency business and qualified as a Chartered Surveyor in 1985. He joined his father and brother Giles (also an alum) as a partner in the family farming and land agency business in 1986.

The business started to manufacture dry extruded pet food in 1992, shortly before the death of Roger’s father, Tom, in 1993. As Chairman, Roger is responsible for the administrative side of GA Pet Food, as well as continuing to look after the farming business.

Why do you think the institution has remained important to successive generations of your family?

Because each generation learnt so much about life, work, and the countryside in which we live, that has served us so well throughout our future business.

The rural economy has changed enormously since you graduated. What developments have surprised you most, and what opportunities do you see for the future generation?

Changes to the planning policy in recent years are opening up opportunities that are now authorised under the Permitted Development Rights, enabling landowners and farmers to diversify into other enterprises previously unavailable to

“ Find your opportunities and continue to work hard on them until the wind changes, then adjust your sails ”

the business has grown, but with considerable hard work by all those involved throughout the last 35 years.

What values have been passed down through the generations of the Bracewell Family, and how have they shaped both your business and leadership approach?

The family motto “labor ut ludas”, means “work so that you may play”. We all start early and work late into the night. The other major factor is the farmer’s mentality of seeing no barriers, with a willingness to constantly change by keeping up-to-date with the latest developments, while realising there is nothing, given today’s availability of information, that you cannot do.

The RAU has been part of your family’s story for decades. If you were writing a message to future generations of Bracewells, and future RAU students, what would you say?

I would say, find your opportunities and continue to work hard on them until the wind changes, then adjust your sails to account for the new circumstances and push on finding solutions to all your challenges. →

RICHARD ALEXANDER BEGG SHORT FARMING COURSE, 1962/63



A student on the Short Farming Course, 1962/63, Richard describes his time living at the College as “one of the best years of my life”.

Arriving from Australia, he already felt a sense of familiarity. Several close friends in Adelaide had attended the College before him. Life at the College in the early 1960s, Richard recalls, was relaxed, sociable and full of camaraderie, with strong bonds formed between students that would endure long after graduation.

Beyond the enjoyment of college life, the RAC had a profound and lasting impact on Richard’s future. The year broadened his horizons, took him beyond his comfort zone and helped shape his confidence. The practical knowledge he gained went on to underpin a long and fulfilling career, farming sheep and cattle across South Australia and Victoria.

What makes Richard’s story especially distinctive, however, is his artistic journey.

As a young child of six or seven, Richard showed a natural talent for art, carefully filling a small book with

drawings – one he still has today. Yet he set art aside at an early age, only to return to it 81 years later, at the age of 88. Rediscovering drawing has brought him immense pleasure, and he now paints with enthusiasm, determined to make up for lost time.

With little formal training, Richard believes his own artistic ability is something he inherited. Often told that he should have been an architect, Richard has developed a distinctive style, marked by patience and a love for fine detail. This approach is clearly seen in the two works he donated to the University.

In 2025, to help mark our 180th anniversary, Richard completed a detailed drawing of the College as it appeared around 1850. After finishing this piece, he felt inspired to paint the town of Cirencester itself. “As far as I was concerned, they always went together in my mind,” he explains.

He is deeply touched that the University has chosen to display his works in the Vice-Chancellor’s office, making them part of the University’s environment and heritage.

CLASS NOTES

We love to hear how former alumni are getting on. For more about how you can stay in touch, see page 50



Above: Nigel Wallace with his daughter Linda and his granddaughter Marina, who is currently studying at the RAU
Above right: Cosmo Stewart and his family

Nigel Wallace

Agriculture, 1964

Nigel returned to the campus with his daughter, Linda, on his first visit in 60 years. Nigel's granddaughter, Marina, is currently studying at the RAU.

Unusually for students at the time, Nigel was married and Linda's older sister was born while he was completing his course.

Recalling a few favourite memories, he says: "Much of the Easter term was occupied by mere survival during the 'big snow' of 1963. For about six weeks, my wife and her sister drove to Gloucester with snow chains on the car. We did have some social life, attending dances in the Boutflour Hall and a Ball at Bledisloe Lodge. We also held a couple of parties at the Steadings, with a lively mixture of Bristol Spelaeos and RAC Agriculturalists."



Charles 'Cosmo' Stewart

Agriculture, 1965

Cosmo and his wife recently visited the Cirencester campus, a treat from their family for the couple's 61st wedding anniversary. During the visit they were given a book about the College, from its beginnings in 1845, and a book of rural poems. Reading these reinforced the importance of the college to Cosmo and prompted him to record his thoughts in verse.

An excerpt:

*It was a childhood dream of mine,
Only realised after some good time
For a farmer I would like to be,
So to learn I attended The RAC.*

*At school my effort was very poor,
Little valuing what I was working for.
Education was of no interest at all
Though in favourite subjects I had a ball!*

Diana M Davidson

Agriculture and Estate Management, 1984



When Diana arrived at the RAC in the early 1980s, women were still a rarity on campus, outnumbered by men 12 to

one. Without a farming background, she completed a mandatory year of practical farming before beginning her Agriculture course.

The RAC's broad scientific approach and inspirational lecturers helped shape Diana's systems-thinking mindset, leading her first into biotechnology and animal genetics, then information technology and, ultimately, sustainable energy and digital transformation.

Today, as founder and MD of Vertemis, Diana works at the intersection of agriculture, AI and clean technology, helping develop digital systems that connect farming, food production and renewable energy to improve efficiency, resilience and sustainability.

Reflecting on her time at the RAC, Diana says the friendships she made have proved just as valuable as the education she received. Her advice to today's students is simple: work hard, stay curious and be prepared for opportunities you never expected.

Will Carr

Agriculture, 2015

Will is the designer who made the Barley Ears sculpture and, more recently, Aries, the ram's head for our



CLASS OF 1987

STEPHEN CHESHIRE,
JAMES BUTCHER, GILES
BILTON, DAN WILD,
CHRISTIAN CARVER

A group of alumni from the late 1980s came back to the campus for a special tour, which gave them the opportunity to revisit familiar haunts and see how the University has evolved.

The group thoroughly enjoyed the morning, praising both the warm welcome and the chance to witness the many developments across campus.

One alumnus described the tour as "thoroughly enjoyable", noting how much has changed since the 1980s and that the University's strong focus on academic



From left, Stephen Cheshire, James Butcher, Giles Bilton, Dan Wild and Christian Carver

excellence is clear. Another guest said it was "lovely to look around and see both the changes and the familiar places" while another said it was "excellent to see that the future of the RAU looks bright".

180th anniversary, both of which can be seen on campus.

In February, Will travelled to Kagando, in rural west Uganda, to manage the building of a goat shed for the farm which supports the town's hospital. In addition to giving his time, his business, Will Carr Sculpture, donated the shed and is now raising funds to fill it with goats.

Annabel (Annie) Landless

Agriculture, 2020

Annie came from a farming background but worked in communications in London and Berlin until, aged 30, she pivoted to study agriculture at the RAU.

Now, Annie works at Ampney Brook Farm, a 600-acre organic and regenerative farm in the Cotswolds, focused on nurturing biodiversity and healthy soil, and caring for animals to the highest welfare standards. Annie oversees the farm and market



Above: Annie Landless
Below left: Will Carr

garden, splitting her time between the fields and the farm office. She is passionate about grass-fed cattle, mob grazing, soil health, biodiversity, population grains, and good food. Annie manages the team as well as relationships with mills, butchers, brewers, and restaurants.

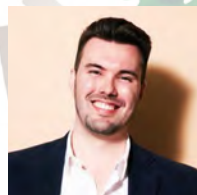
Annie has featured in several publications including *Wicked Leeks* (from veg box provider Riverford) and *Country Life*.

Did you know
alumni who refer
international students
through the International
Referral Programme
may also be eligible
for a £500 referral
reward?

Introducing the RAU's International Alumni Ambassadors

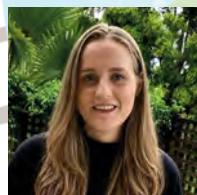
Meet the first three alumni to join our International Alumni Ambassador Programme.

Our International Alumni Ambassador Programme has been created to reconnect and strengthen relationships with our global alumni community, which spans more than 125 countries.



DANIEL SUTHERLAND, BSC (HONS) INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT (FOOD AND AGRI-BUSINESS), 2017
International Alumni Ambassador for Canada

A seventh-generation arable farmer from Quebec, Daniel's career has spanned finance and global commodity trading. After graduating from the RAU, he worked in banking in London before returning to Canada, where he is now Vice-President and Partner at McGill St-Laurent, leading agricultural and carbon trading divisions. Daniel remains actively involved in his family farming business. He is committed to strengthening connections among Canadian alumni and reinforcing the longstanding relationship between Canada and the RAU.



ACCACIA FOGGIN, BSC (HONS) INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT, 2021
International Alumni Ambassador for South Africa

Originally from a remote farm in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa, Accacia moved to the UK during her sixth-form years and later chose the RAU for its close-knit, rural environment. After working as a copywriter in the US, she completed

a Master's in Anthropology at the University of St Andrews before returning to South Africa, where she now writes for *The Midlands Magazine* (a country lifestyle magazine). Accacia is passionate about building a stronger alumni network in South Africa, where she has already seen the enduring legacy of RAU/RAC connections. She hopes to foster regular alumni gatherings that encourage networking, collaboration, and shared learning.



ERIC LE VIEUX, AGRI-BUSINESS MANAGEMENT, 1987
International Alumni Ambassador for Mauritius, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Seychelles and Réunion

With nearly four decades of international experience, Eric brings a global perspective to the Programme. A graduate of the RAC with distinction, he has built and led ventures across agriculture, commodity trading, food manufacturing and industrial equipment. As Managing Director of Truco International in Mauritius, he leads global partnerships and delivers engineered solutions to mining and industrial sectors. Earlier in his career, he founded and scaled multiple ventures, including greenhouse farming operations supported by climate-finance funding and nationwide food manufacturing businesses. 

As the programme evolves, we look forward to welcoming ambassadors from even more countries and expanding this network of advocates. To find out more, please contact the Development & Alumni Relations Office at alumni@rau.ac.uk

A proud tradition of sporting heritage

The University has long valued the many benefits of a strong programme of sports.

Sport has long been woven into the fabric of student life at the RAU – shaping character, forging lifelong friendships, and instilling the resilience, teamwork and determination that helps to define its graduates.

Generations of students have pulled on University colours with pride, representing not only their teams but the wider values of the institution – commitment, integrity and a deep respect for community. Many have also gone on to represent professional clubs and even their country.

Rugby, football, hockey and equestrian sport have each played a central role in University life, with fixtures and rivalries forming an important part of the student experience. Equestrian sport remains a cornerstone of the RAU's identity, reflecting its strong links to the rural and land-based sectors. Students have achieved success in a range of disciplines, from eventing to show jumping, and gone on to have distinguished careers in the equine industry.

The annual Varsity competition with Harper Adams University has become a highlight of the sporting calendar, bringing together students and supporters in a celebration of teamwork and healthy competition. This year, Harper hosted the RAU teams in a fierce but friendly battle. Our all-conquering men's hockey team, which had already claimed the BUCS Tier 3 Division A championship, were victorious, while there were honourable defeats for our other teams.



Yet the true strength of sport at RAU lies not only in elite performance but in participation. For many alumni, memories of training in all weather, hard-fought matches and post-game

celebrations remain some of the most cherished aspects of their time here.

Sport at the RAU is about far more than competition; it is about belonging, personal growth, and the shared experiences that connect generations. 

Sport has long played a central part in student life at the University. Middle: students in the 1880s posing with sport trophies

Would you like to coach or sponsor one of our teams, or get involved in alumni vs student sporting events and leadership programmes to inspire the next generation? To find out more, contact Simon Carden, Sports Development Manager, at simon.carden@rau.ac.uk

Building belonging and community

Meet RAU Students' Union Director Caroline Dangerfield.

The Royal Agricultural University Students' Union (RAUSU) has long played an important role in student life, from supporting clubs and societies to helping create the memorable experiences that many alumni still look back on with fondness. Today, however, the role of a Students' Union extends far beyond organising events. Since joining RAUSU in 2025, Caroline Dangerfield, Director of RAUSU, has been ensuring the organisation remains relevant, inclusive and responsive to the needs of today's students.

"Students' Unions are still about community, friendship and making the most of university life," Caroline explains. "But they are also focused on representation, wellbeing and fostering a positive student culture."

A varied role at the heart of student life

Caroline oversees the day-to-day management of the organisation, working with the elected President and the Union's Board of Trustees.

"The Students' Union is, by its very nature, all about students," she says. "Our role is to support and enable student leadership while providing professional expertise and continuity."

That responsibility ranges from governance, finance and charity compliance to ensuring the Union delivers meaningful opportunities and represents all students, including postgraduates.

No two weeks are quite the same. "One day I might be writing policies and reviewing risk assessments, and the next I'm setting up for an event, managing budgets or creating posts for Instagram and the website," Caroline laughs. "There's never really been a typical week."

A passion for student representation

Caroline's own journey into student representation began during her postgraduate studies at the University of Salford, where she became involved in a sports club before standing in Students' Union elections.

"I had the best two years of my

life as a sabbatical officer," she recalls. "That experience gave me a real passion for student representation and student experience."

Since then, she has built a career in higher education and Students' Unions, attracted by the opportunity to make a tangible difference.

"You're working with different students every year, championing their interests as well as helping them make the most of their opportunities. It's challenging, but lots of fun too."

Supporting students in a changing landscape

Like universities across the UK, Students' Unions are operating in a period of significant change.

"The higher education sector is facing real pressures," Caroline says. "Resources are tight, and we have to be very clear about how we use them to make the greatest impact."

At the same time, the profile of students is evolving. "The traditional image of a student who studies full-time and has plenty of free time simply



Caroline with students at the May Ball (left) and at a charity coffee morning (right). The May Ball (above and above right) is an annual highlight, as is Rag Week (below). SU President 2025/26, Robin Brown (far right)

doesn't reflect reality for many people today," she explains. "Many students are balancing their studies with part-time work, financial pressures and other responsibilities."

This can make it harder for students to participate in extracurricular activities that are often such an important part of university life.

More than social events

For generations of RAU students, memories of events, societies and sporting activities have been central to their university experience. Caroline believes these remain as important as ever. "Clubs, societies and events help students find their community and develop a sense of belonging," she says. "They bring people together, help students make friends and create the experiences that often become lifelong memories."

RAUSU is re-developing its support for a range of societies, reflecting the diverse interests of today's students, while working closely with the University, who now oversee sports clubs, ensuring activities are positive

and inclusive of everyone. Alongside social opportunities, these activities also provide valuable personal development.

"Students who take on roles in clubs and societies gain skills in leadership, organisation, budgeting and teamwork. These experiences help prepare them for future careers and are a significant part of what makes student involvement so valuable."

The Union also continues to champion student-led fundraising, helping students contribute positively to the wider community while developing important life skills.

Giving students a voice

A core part of RAUSU's work is driving change that improves students' experiences. "We have a very positive and constructive relationship with the University and are proud of the ways students and the Union contribute to decision-making," Caroline explains.

Our Students' Union President sits on a range of committees as well as serving on the University's Governing Council. Programme Representatives

provide feedback on academic issues, and surveys help gather student views throughout the year.

One recent initiative has been the introduction of a Student Forum, run jointly by the University and RAUSU, giving students an open platform to raise concerns and suggest improvements. "Student feedback and insight is incredibly valuable and central to what we do," says Caroline. "Whether it's teaching, accommodation, catering or wider student life, the Union's role is to empower students to use their voice and shape decisions that affect them."

The Union has also introduced a Student Life Survey to better understand the factors affecting students' experiences, including finances, transport, and wellbeing.

Looking ahead

Although Caroline has been at RAUSU for less than a year, she has a clear vision for the future. "I'd like to create a Students' Union that is thriving, inclusive, and impactful," she says. "A Union that champions every student, regardless of their background, and helps them make the most of their opportunities at RAU."

For alumni who remember May Balls, societies, sports fixtures and lifelong friendships, that vision may sound reassuringly familiar. While the needs of students continue to evolve, the fundamental purpose of the Students' Union remains the same: representing students' interests, helping them feel part of a community, develop as individuals, and create memories that last long after graduation.

And as Caroline puts it: "Ultimately, we're here to make a difference to students' lives." **L**

Together again

From milestone anniversaries to cherished traditions, alumni reunions serve as powerful reminders of the shared histories that bind generations of graduates together and the enduring spirit of connection that defines our alumni network.



**BLEDISLOE LODGE
60-YEAR REUNION**

Alumni who once called Bledisloe Lodge home reunited on campus, joined by their spouses, for a truly special occasion.

The gathering began with a drinks reception, offering a chance to reconnect and reminisce about student life in 1966, followed by lunch. The event concluded with a guided campus tour, allowing attendees to revisit familiar spaces and see how the university has evolved.

Frazer Spence reflects: “It was 60 years since we were last all together. The reunion was such a great success.

“We organised a WhatsApp Group to restart the conversations and exchange stories and photos, but actually being together was the most important thing!”



**RURAL ESTATE
MANAGEMENT, 1972–75
50-YEAR REUNION**

Organised by alumni Ralph Tomley and Robin Thomas, and supported by the RAU Alumni Office, the reunion last October brought together about 50 former students for a packed and memorable weekend in Cirencester. For many, it was the first time they had returned in decades.

Reflecting on the occasion, Robin Thomas said: “Ralph and I were delighted to get members of the course back to Cirencester. I spoke to more members of the course that weekend than in my entire three years at the RAC in the 1970s.”

Ralph Tomley added: “We enjoyed a great meal, speeches and above all renewed friendships. A superb 24 hours enjoyed by all.”



KENYA BALL RETURNS

Reunions are not confined to Cirencester. Across the globe, RAU and RAC alumni continue to celebrate their shared heritage, as demonstrated by the return of the Kenya Ball.

After a few years’ hiatus, the Ball made a welcome return, thanks to the dedication of alumna Nathalie Harrison (1997).

Nathalie brought together over 100 alumni at Nairobi’s Muthaiga Country Club for an evening of food, music, and celebration.

“We were so grateful to have RAC/RAU alumni from across the globe making their way to the Muthaiga Club to join us in celebrating our time at Cirencester once again,” she says. “We hope to make the Kenya Ball a biennial event – come and join us for the next one!”



RAC 66 CLUB

Since graduating in 1966, the RAC 66 Club has been reuniting every year, a tradition faithfully organised in recent years by Gordon Kingston.

Its cherished annual luncheon continued last year and with this year’s reunion on Sunday 18 October, will hopefully carry on for many years to come.

As Gordon reflects: “The ‘Royal’ was the foundation for the 66 Club members’ hugely varied and successful careers.

“We would like to thank the RAU for warmly welcoming us with fabulous hospitality over many years. Long may our close association continue.” 

If you’d like to arrange a reunion meeting on campus, contact the alumni team on alumni@rau.ac.uk

Supporting future generations

Leaving a gift in your Will, however modest, enables the RAU to make sure we can continue to help the students of the future fulfil their potential.

For many of us, our time at the RAC/RAU was about much more than lectures, assignments and exams. It was where lifelong friendships were formed, careers began, passions were discovered and, for some, where future spouses were first met.

Whether you arrived in Cirencester in the 1960s, the 1980s, or just a few years ago, chances are the RAU played a part in shaping the person you are today. That is why an increasing number of alumni are choosing to remember the University in their Will.

Now, before you turn the page thinking, “This sounds rather serious,” bear with us.

A gift in your Will is not about grand gestures or vast fortunes. In fact, many legacy gifts are surprisingly modest. Yet when combined with gifts from other alumni, they can have a remarkable impact, helping future generations of students benefit from the same opportunities that previous generations enjoyed.

Universities have always depended on the support of those who believe in their mission and the RAU is no exception.

Today, gifts in Wills can help fund scholarships, hardship support, student wellbeing initiatives, research projects, campus improvements and opportunities that might otherwise be beyond reach.



choose to leave a legacy gift do so only after ensuring those closest to them are provided for. A percentage of an estate, a fixed sum or even a small residual gift can still make a meaningful difference.

And there is something rather fitting about it. Agriculture, land management and stewardship are professions built on thinking beyond our own lifetimes.

“The RAU gave me a career, lifelong friends, and memories that have stayed with me for decades. Leaving a gift in my Will felt like a way of saying thank you”

They can also provide something less tangible but equally important: confidence. Confidence that future students, regardless of their background, will have the chance to study, grow and thrive at the RAU. One former student recently summed it up perfectly: “The RAU gave me a career, lifelong friends and memories that have stayed with me for decades. Leaving a gift in my Will felt like a way of saying thank you.”

Of course, family and loved ones will always come first. Most alumni who

Whether planting a woodland, improving a landscape or investing in the next generation, the work we do is often about leaving things better than we found them. A gift in your Will follows that same principle. It is not about looking backwards. It is about helping to shape the future.

As the RAU looks ahead to its next 180 years, legacy gifts will play an increasingly important role in ensuring talented students can flourish, pioneering research can continue and our historic campus remains a place of inspiration and opportunity.

After all, while buildings, fashions and farming methods may change, the values that have defined the RAU since 1845 endure: community, opportunity and a belief in the power of education to transform lives. And that is a legacy worth leaving. 

If you would like to discuss a gift in your will please contact Julia Jenkins, Head of Development & Alumni Relations, on development@rau.ac.uk

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

Congratulations!

We love to celebrate our alumni weddings and wish all the couples the best for the future.



1

1) **Alexandra (Lexi) Buckingham Jarvill** (BSc Environment, Food and Society, 2023) and **Joshua Charlie McGrath** married on 27 September 2025 in Lexi's local village church in Northamptonshire.

2) **Anna Alcock** (BSc International Equine and Agricultural Business Management, 2016) and **Ben Marshall** (MSc Rural Land Management, 1998) married on 7 June 2025.

3) **Fiona Bridge** (BSc International Equine and Agricultural Business Management, 2004) and **Craig Cooper** (BSc Rural Land Management, 2004) married on 5 May 2007 at Tabley House in Cheshire.

4) **Mari Lewis** (BSc Real Estate, 2020) and **Henry Jackson** (Real Estate and Land Management, 2019) married in summer 2025.

5) **Alice Doyne** (Agricultural Business, 2024) and **Harry Chichester** (BSc Rural Land Management, 2015) married on 21 September 2024 at All Saints Church in Danehill, Sussex.

6) **Anna Thomas** (BSc Agriculture, 2015) and **Richard Guest** (BSc Agriculture, 2016) married on 9 August 2025 at St Giles church in Leigh-on-Mendip, Somerset.

7) **Charlotte Mason** (BSc Real Estate, 2020) and **Angus Bennie** married on 21 June 2025 at Charlotte's family home in Northamptonshire.

8) **Lucy Brice** (BSc Rural Land Management, 2015) and **Doug Williams** (BSc Rural Land Management, 2015) married in 2021 at Lucy's family home in Witham, Essex.



4



5



6



7



8

The estates that will be thriving in 50 years' time are acting today.

Will you be among them?

Rural estates, farms, and other land-owning entities face increasing pressure to adapt and need bold, long-term strategies to thrive.

Leveraging the potential of land and property assets can often be the key to long-term resilience. Unlocking this potential – creatively, commercially, and sensitively, requires more than a standard development template.

Rural Solutions brings a different view to estate and rural enterprise development strategy.

We combine consultancy, specialist planning, architecture, and landscape design within one integrated team. For more than twenty years, we have helped estates, farms and landowners identify opportunities, navigate complexity, and deliver development and diversification projects that generate lasting value, strengthening long-term resilience.

We work alongside you from idea to execution, creating new chapters and legacies to be proud of.

Resilient rural enterprises, built to last.

A different view

 Rural Solutions

Consulting • Planning • Architecture • Landscape Architecture



ruralsolutions.co.uk



Did you know?
Alumni who refer
international
students through the
International Referral
Programme may also
be eligible for a **£500**
referral reward

A lifetime of connections

Graduation is the beginning of a lifelong connection to a global community of alumni, students, academics and industry leaders. Whether you want to reconnect with friends, share your expertise, support future students or help shape the future of land-based industries, there are countless ways to stay involved with the RAU.

Can you help to inspire the next generation?

Your experience can have a lasting impact on current students. You can become a mentor, return as a guest speaker, support careers events or Open Days, or share internship, placement and job opportunities.

Would you like to shape teaching and make sure it is aligned with industry needs?

Alumni professionals contribute specialist workshops, curriculum development and employer forums, sharing insights on emerging technologies, changing skills requirements and future trends across the rural economy.

Many alumni continue to work alongside the University long after graduation.

Opportunities include collaborating on research or innovation projects and exploring corporate partnership or CPD initiatives. Have you thought about organising your conference, workshops and business events on campus?

Will you share your story?

Feature in an alumni case study, share a career update, or take part in surveys and focus groups that help shape future alumni programmes and communications.

Create opportunities

Your support of scholarships and hardship funds can help talented students access an RAU education regardless of background. You may also choose to leave a gift in your Will, helping future generations of students benefit from the same opportunities and experiences that shaped your own journey. Whether you give your time, expertise or support, every contribution strengthens our community and helps future generations thrive. 

Please scan the QR code to let us know how you would like to get involved, or contact the Development & Alumni Relations Office at alumni@rau.ac.uk

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Your insight, professional expertise and real-world knowledge are invaluable – they don't just guide the next generation, they inspire them. This programme isn't only about career development; it's about opening doors, sparking potential and helping people see what they're truly capable of.

The strongest universities are built on collaboration between education and industry. Alumni play a vital role in helping us prepare graduates for the challenges and opportunities ahead.

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Suzie Burley,
Careers and
Enterprise Team



BROWN & CO

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



Artist's impression of the proposed Innovation Village @ RAU, a dynamic new hub designed to foster collaboration, enterprise and cutting-edge research. Envisioned as a catalyst for innovation, it will connect students, academics, industry and the wider community.