Trinity’s Lewis Croney in Channel 4 documentary
Lewis Croney, a first year at Trinity studying Maths, doesn’t wear his class on his sleeve. ‘Professor Green’ – the musician and documentary maker, Stephen Manderson – has ‘Lucky’ tattooed across his neck, intersecting with a scar from a stabbing in Hackney, where he grew up.
Their stories are very different – Lewis grew up in Hampshire, Stephen in Clapton - but they have some things in common. Class is the reason their paths crossed: Lewis is one of six young, working class white men whose journeys Professor Green charts in a two-part series for Channel 4 starting on 9 January.
Even if you know the outcome, the scenes of Professor Green driving to Eastleigh and waiting with Lewis and his family for the exam results to appear are tense – and compulsive watching. As he says:

*Driving to Lewis’ house to find out if he’d got into Trinity, Cambridge, was one of the most terrifying things in the world, I was so nervous to film that part of the programme.*
For Lewis and his family, getting in to Cambridge was ‘a dream come true.’

Several factors helped Lewis. Moving from an underperforming secondary school to Barton Peveril College may have changed his fortunes – a careers advisor suggested he consider applying to Oxford or Cambridge, and he met like-minded students.

But of course Lewis’ achievements aren’t down to luck.
He worked very hard, had a clear goal in mind, and received support from his family and mentors at Barton Peveril and his secondary school, where then Librarian, Loretta Gray, (pictured left) encouraged the student she affectionately called ‘LuLu.’

Lewis’ ordinary family life – his Mum admits it wasn’t always easy bringing up two children as a single parent – wasn’t an issue for the triple A* student. But Lewis knows that many of his peers at Cambridge didn’t grow up as he did, despite his smart clothes and quiet, confident manner.
Lewis is also aware that some academically able students from his background think ‘Cambridge? It’s not for me.’ That’s a key reason he took part in the Channel 4 documentary.

*I thought it could inspire others like me to at least apply. Getting the information out there about the opportunities available is necessary to ensure the top universities get the applicants with the most potential, from a wide range of backgrounds.*
His Mum, Joanna Croney, felt the same.

I knew that if the documentary reached and inspired just one extra person from a similar background who wasn’t confident in their abilities, then it would have been worthwhile.
A telling scene during filming comes when Trinity’s TSCU Access Officer, Seb Millar, says that 35% of Cambridge students are privately educated. ‘And the rest are from state schools.’ Lewis, his Mum and Professor Green are surprised.
Joanna knew early on that her son was unusual. Aged two, he began reading the road signs on car journeys.

*At that age, Lewis would bring me A4 pieces of paper, wanting more sums, over and over again.*

Along with Lewis’ grandmother and aunt, she nurtured and supported him through the hard work and periods of self-doubt that inevitably arose. Just because people tell you that you are clever and can achieve top grades doesn’t mean you believe it, says Joanna.
Through Barton Peveril’s university links, Lewis took part in Cambridge University outreach activities, including an Open Day, the Sutton Trust Cambridge Summer School, and the Cambridge Shadowing Scheme. He also overcame initial doubts to apply to Trinity. With his first term under his belt, Lewis feels at home at the College.

It has been a real pleasure to be intellectually stimulated much more than ever before and this is something I am very much looking forward to returning to in the coming term.
Principal of Barton Peveril College, Jonathan Prest, paid tribute to Lewis’ achievement.  

*His is a real example of what bright, hard-working, single-minded people from any background can achieve.*

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*Photos courtesy of Channel 4, Lewis Croney and Cambridge University.*