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Excerpt

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Introduction



1 Old Schools and Senate-House
from Great St Mary's Church tower

INTRODUCTION

In 2009 the University of Cambridge celebrates its 800th anniversary, the origins of the University dating back to the year 1209. What have those 800 years represented in this place? Through a description of the main University, college and city sites, relating their history to their present appearance and function, this guidebook tells the story of a remarkable institution.

Cambridge itself is a city of just under 125,000 inhabitants, with a history that dates back nearly 2,000 years to Roman times when a small garrison stood on what is now Castle Hill, north-west of the Magdalene Bridge crossing of the River Cam. Advantageously placed at the navigable head of a river network leading to the sea, and only 60 miles north of London by road, it grew as a trading post with several churches. Cambridge's position and character, like those of Oxford 80 miles to the south west, were among the factors which drew to it a number of monasteries, as well as groups of scholars and teachers engaged in the pursuit of knowledge, mainly in the fields of theology, church law, civil (i.e. Roman) law, and logic; and by the year 1209 the makings of a University were in place.

2 Across to St John's
from Great St Mary's
Church tower



INTRODUCTION



3 Processing from the Senate-House

Now, 800 years later, Cambridge is the home of a University which consists of 31 colleges, where students reside, eat, and are taught in small groups; of various faculties, departments, and institutes, where particular subjects are researched, lectured on, or taught; and of administrative and ceremonial buildings. The University of Cambridge has a Library, a Press, an international examinations business, a Botanic Garden, a Business School and eight museums, as well as close connections with four theological colleges, numerous churches, and a major hospital. In total there are about 18,000 full-time students in the University, of whom nearly 12,000 are undergraduates. Some 5,000 students are from overseas, nearly two-thirds of these at postgraduate level, with the most represented countries being the U.S.A. and China (c.700 students each), followed by Germany and Canada. The University employs a total academic, research and support staff of 8,500.

With some notable exceptions, such as the Senate-House, Great St Mary's Church, and the Fitzwilliam Museum, the buildings that attract visitors to Cambridge belong to the colleges. Colleges have existed here since the late thirteenth century, and it is this that distinguishes Cambridge (as well as Oxford) from other, less ancient universities in which control is more centralised. The relationship between the colleges and other parts of the University is an unusual one. A college is a centre of teaching and learning which also acts as a social and residential unit within the University. Every student belongs to a college, and most are provided with food and rooms by their college. However, each of the 31 colleges is self-governing and to a significant extent financially independent, relying not upon central University funding but upon special grants, donations, tuition fees from students, and in the case of the older colleges upon bequests, endowments, and investments that have increased in value over many centuries. The colleges are legally individual private institutions, while the non-collegiate parts of the University form a separate entity, and this inter-dependent combination of private and public spheres has proved to be one of the strengths of the Cambridge system. A college takes responsibility for the admission and general welfare of its undergraduate students, offers teaching for them in groups of a manageable size across the whole range of subject areas, and provides a Director of Studies who supervises their academic pursuits. Colleges also provide libraries, to supplement those available elsewhere in the University.

The college teaching enhances that supplied by the University. Students from all of the colleges attend lectures or go to laboratories which are controlled not by the colleges but by the non-collegiate University via subject-specific units of administration called faculties

INTRODUCTION

or departments. Thus, a typical student will matriculate (enrol) in the University of Cambridge as an undergraduate to read (study) a particular subject (such as Natural Sciences, or Mathematics, or Classics, or Law) at the age of 18 or 19, having achieved a sufficiently high standard at school level, and that student's life in Cambridge will then be based in his or her college (e.g. King's, or Emmanuel, or New Hall, or Robinson), but will involve regular attendance at the University sites determined by the subject he or she is reading (e.g. at the Department of Pathology, or Department of Engineering, or Faculty of Classics, or Faculty of Law). A student will complete the degree course by passing the requisite University examinations and then graduating in the subject, becoming a graduate.

Postgraduates are students who already hold a first degree and who are now studying for some more advanced purpose, such as a doctorate. They are admitted to courses by the Board of Graduate Studies and their work is based in the University departments. For them, the colleges – which are multidisciplinary – provide a stimulating social and intellectual environment in support of their work.

There are three terms in the Cambridge academic year: the Michaelmas term, running from October to December; the Lent, from January to March; and the Easter, from April to June. An undergraduate course of study in most cases lasts for three years (though a number run for four) and involves an examination known as a tripos, which usually leads to a degree called the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.). Tripos examinations take place in about 30 subject areas, and the results help determine whether a student will receive a first-class, second-class, or third-class degree. By far the most populous tripos course is Natural Sciences (accommodating just over 2,000 undergraduates in total), with Medicine, Engineering, Mathematics, Law, Modern & Medieval Languages, English and History following in that order. Economics, Veterinary Medicine, Social & Political Sciences, Education Studies and Geography also attract student numbers in excess of 300. Since the abolition of the Cambridge Entrance Examination in 1985, admission is usually now determined by performance in national school exams such as 'A' Levels, and by interview.

The date of 1209 provides a marker for the origin of the University of Cambridge, for in that year groups of scholars (reputedly migrants from the University of Oxford, which existed slightly earlier) had begun to congregate here for the purpose of study. Teaching in those early days revolved around theological subjects, and a close relationship between the church and University existed for several hundred years. At least four of Cambridge's surviving medieval churches served at various times as college chapels.

INTRODUCTION

4 Lady Elizabeth de Clare, foundress of Clare College, and Lady Margaret Beaufort, foundress of Christ's and St John's Colleges
(from Ackermann's *A History of the University of Cambridge*, 1815: images courtesy of Cambridge University Library)



The college system, modelled on those at Paris and Oxford, began in 1284 with the foundation of Peterhouse, and by 1400 seven of the present-day colleges existed in some form (including Trinity, which did not adopt its modern identity until 1546). The number had risen to 17 by 1800; and in the nineteenth century the University itself underwent a rapid expansion, partly in response to the rise of science in a fast-changing world. In the twentieth century 14 additional colleges were formally affiliated to the University – some of them Victorian institutions newly recognised, others new foundations. The 14 included a college for mature women (Lucy Cavendish), and five ‘graduate colleges’ intended mainly for postgraduates and mature students (Clare Hall, Darwin, Hughes Hall, St Edmund’s and Wolfson). This brings the total to 31, ranging in size from Homerton, with around 1,100 students, to Lucy Cavendish and Clare Hall, with fewer than 200 each.

Each college has its own atmosphere and traditions. Some are more relaxed, others more formal. A number preserve traditions such as a nightly dinner at which gowns are worn and a Latin grace recited; a system of Scholarships and Exhibitions to enhance the status of undergraduates who perform well; and an emphasis on accommodating the majority of students within the main college buildings to help them feel members of a tight-knit community.

Only 27 of the colleges have the word ‘College’ in their familiar title. Three retain the word ‘Hall’ instead, and then there is Peterhouse. The heads of the colleges also go by different titles, ranging from Master (the most common), to President (six colleges), Principal (two), Mistress (one), Provost (one), and Warden (one).

The picturesque quality of the central colleges is enhanced by their position on the river, which runs from south to north past Darwin, Queens’, King’s, Clare, Trinity Hall, Trinity, St John’s, and Magdalene. These colleges back on to the riverbank, giving rise to the name the

INTRODUCTION

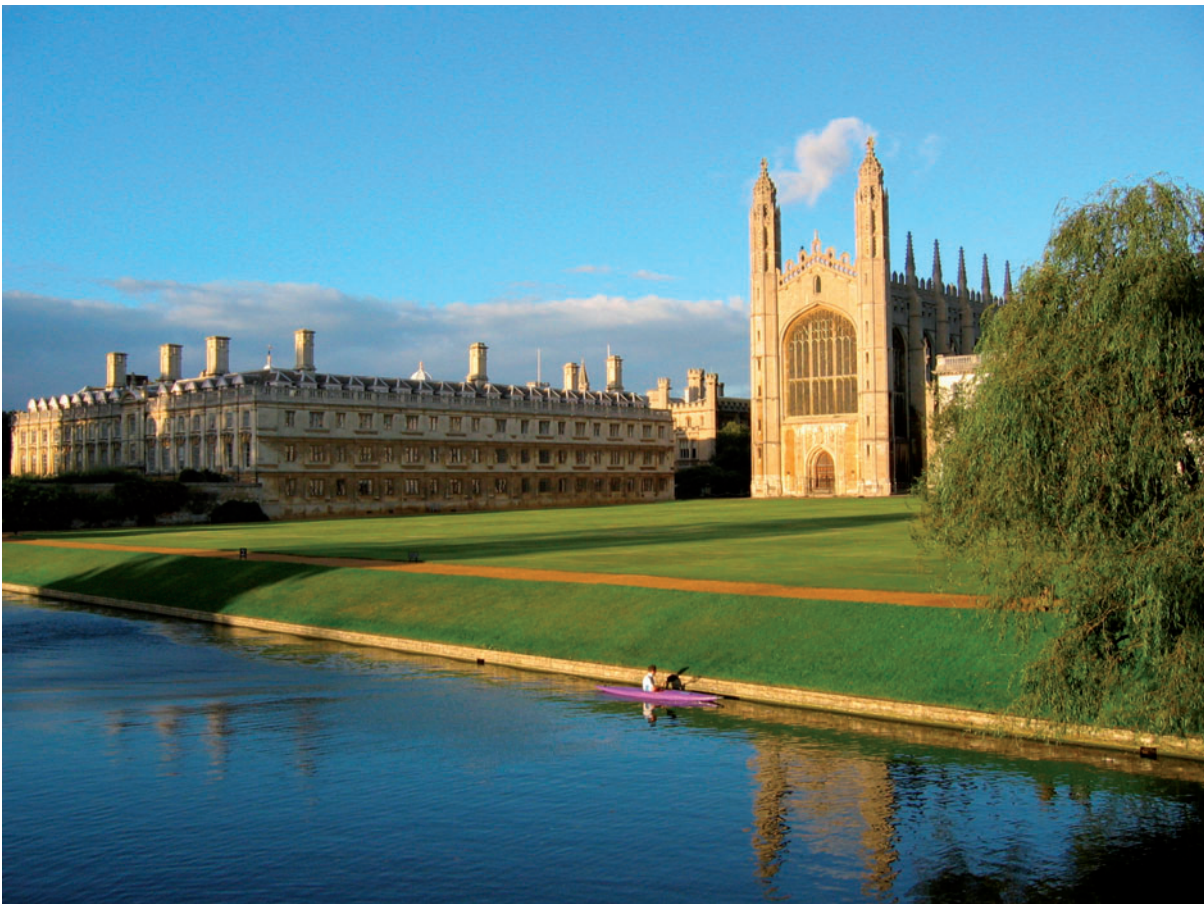
Backs, which describes this thousand-metre stretch. Here the river is known as the Cam, but at various times in history it has been called the Granta, a word which now designates a small tributary of the Cam and which is familiar from the name of Grantchester village, a two-and-a-half-mile walk away along delightful meadow paths to the south.

Two of the earliest Cambridge colleges (Michaelhouse, 1324; and King's Hall, 1337) no longer exist, having been amalgamated to form Trinity in 1546. Indeed, the mid-sixteenth century was a time when all of the colleges were threatened by an Act of Parliament of 1544 enabling King Henry VIII to dissolve them as he had dissolved the monasteries; but Henry was persuaded to take a progressive view of the collegiate function, turning it to his own ends, and with his foundation of Trinity the colleges became training-grounds for a wider range of professional and courtly roles, bringing the University into its early-modern phase and paving the way for its present-day situation, as a place where both arts and science subjects are studied, taught, and researched to the highest level by students and academics from all over the world.

Though now only one among more than 80 English universities, Cambridge retains a strong reputation for academic excellence and continues to be placed at or near the top of the government's ratings for quality of teaching and research, receiving one of the highest annual grants from the public purse. One of the oldest traditions of scientific research thrives here, in the laboratories of the New Museums Site, Downing Site and Tennis Court Road, where scientists have worked since the nineteenth century, as well as in modern premises such as those on the West Cambridge and Addenbrooke's Hospital Sites. In recent years, Cambridge has led the way with important cutting-edge work in fields including software engineering, genetics, nanotechnology, stem cell research and cancer research.

The thoroughly co-educational character of the modern University of Cambridge is a relatively recent development. Even though six of the early Cambridge colleges (Clare, Pembroke, Queens', Christ's, St John's, and Sidney Sussex) were founded by women, they remained male institutions for hundreds of years, the colleges only beginning to allow their fellows to marry as late as 1860; and the first women's colleges (Girton and Newnham), although established here in the 1870s, were not fully recognised as part of the University until some 75 years later. In 1881 women were first allowed to sit Cambridge exams, and in 1916, under force of circumstance during the First World War, women were permitted to take medical exams; but they had to wait until 1948 for full admission into degrees and for membership of the University Senate and Regent House (when, to mark the occasion, Queen Elizabeth -

INTRODUCTION



5 King's College Backs
(photo by Marc Anderson)

later the Queen Mother – was presented with an honorary degree in the Senate-House). In 1960 there were still only three female colleges in the University, the first mixing of the sexes within an undergraduate college occurring in 1972 when Churchill, Clare and King's admitted women. Change then followed rapidly, and today there remain only three colleges with a single-sex undergraduate composition (Newnham, Murray Edwards and Lucy Cavendish), all of them for women. The male:female ratio is currently 52%:48% (as 50%:50% for undergraduates and 55%:45% for postgraduates).

Cambridge has one of the most comprehensive systems of academical dress in the world, with distinctive gowns and hoods worn on formal occasions enabling precise identification of a graduate's degree and in many cases of a student's college. Another tradition is that of May Balls, elaborate night-long entertainments organised by many of the colleges to take place – nowadays always in June – after the summer examinations. Visitors interested in traditional regalia should not miss Ryder & Amies, the University outfitters on King's Parade by Great St

INTRODUCTION



6 Academics in formal dress
(from Ackermann's *A History of the University of Cambridge*, 1815; photo courtesy of Cambridge University Library)

Mary's, where the college shields are displayed and where students can buy ties, scarves and blazers in their college colours. Here also in the window the University sports clubs advertise events and display results. The colleges are well provided with sports grounds in outer-lying parts of the city, and University facilities include Fenner's on Gresham Road (cricket, tennis and gym), the athletics track on Wilberforce Road, and the rugby and soccer grounds on Grange Road. Cambridge University was the first institution to draw up rules governing the game which was the forerunner of modern football: these appeared in 1848.

Important complementary functions of the University are governed by its Press Syndicate, which is responsible for the University's printing and publishing house, Cambridge University Press, an international organisation employing 1,850 people; and its Local Examinations Syndicate (Cambridge Assessment), which produces exams that are sat each year by pupils across the world. The University has a Chancellor: Prince Philip was installed in that role on 10 June 1977 – his fifty-sixth birthday – and retired on 30 June 2011 shortly after his ninetieth. In 2007, marking his thirtieth year in post, a new Professorship was established: the Prince Philip Chair of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, supplementing the Prince Philip Chair of Technology established at his twenty-fifth. His predecessors as Chancellor included Lord Burghley, chief minister to Queen Elizabeth I, and Albert, Prince Consort to Queen

INTRODUCTION



7 Passageway from
Clare Old Court
to Clare Bridge

Victoria – whose statue by John Henry Foley is in Wolfson College. The full-time Vice-Chancellor is the administrative head of the University.

The city is also now home to a second university, Anglia Ruskin University, situated on East Road beyond Parker’s Piece. Previously Anglia Polytechnic University (from 1992), and before that the Cambridgeshire College of Arts & Technology (from 1960), Anglia Ruskin has its origins partly in the Institute for Technical Education first built in East Road in 1889. It takes its present name, adopted in 1995, from the art critic John Ruskin who opened a school of art in Sidney Street in 1858. 28,000 students are spread mainly between this campus and another at Chelmsford in Essex.

The centre of Cambridge has changed markedly since the first edition of this guidebook was published in 1994. Vehicle access has been restricted due to congestion, and there is sometimes more of a commercial air about the colleges, which make increasing use of their buildings and location to attract summer schools, conferences and other business activities. Many colleges have full-time development directors co-ordinating fundraising campaigns. The student-loan system has taken hold, causing students to carry a burden of debt which colleges and the University attempt to ameliorate through generous bursaries. The University itself is engaged in major fundraising activity, reaching out to its 170,000 alumni around the world with an ‘800th Anniversary Campaign’ designed to raise £1bn by 2012, and in 2007 appointed its first Chief Investment Officer to manage its endowment fund. In the last ten years the University has created 250 new professorships and invested £600m in new and refurbished buildings. The city of Cambridge has seen large-scale residential and retail development within a short train commute of London, the Grand Arcade on St Andrew’s Street (2008) providing one example.

Library building has been a noticeable feature of the last couple of decades. Cambridge is truly rich in libraries, with 113 at the last count. At a time when so much appears to be going electronic, it is telling that the University should remain dedicated to providing suitable physical spaces for access to the world’s information and for proper storage of its precious books and manuscripts. In the centre of the city, newer highlights are the Jerwood Library of Trinity Hall (1998), Jesus College Quincentenary Library (1996), St John’s College Library (1994), and the internal refurbishment of the Cockerell Building to house the collections of Gonville and Caius (1997). Further afield, the University Library has been significantly extended, the Sidgwick Site features splendid new faculty libraries including Sir Norman Foster’s spectacular addition to the Faculty of Law (1996), the Chemistry Department on

INTRODUCTION

Lensfield Road has a new library, and colleges which have provided new building or expansion or refurbishment of library spaces include Corpus Christi, Girton, Lucy Cavendish, Murray Edwards, Newnham, Pembroke, Peterhouse and Wolfson.

The so-called ‘Cambridge Phenomenon’, which in the 1980s saw the proliferation of software, pharmaceutical and other high-tech companies capitalizing on research activities within the University, has matured in the form of fully integrated academic-business relationships in evidence on the West Cambridge Site with the William Gates Building and BP Institute standing close to the famous Cavendish Laboratory of Physics.

8 Central Cambridge
from the south
(photo courtesy of
University of Cambridge
Air Photograph Library)

