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### Romilly's Cambridge Diary, 1832-42

The Rev. Joseph Romilly (1791–1864) was a bachelor clergyman of the Church of England, a Fellow of Trinity College, and from 1832 to 1861, Registrar of the University of Cambridge. He kept a regular diary from 1829 to his death, and this selection, introduced and edited by J. P. T. Bury, covers the years 1832-42. Romilly was a cultured and travelled man of means; he met many of the ablest scholars and leaders of his day, and was a welcome guest in great houses. This volume, which begins in the year of Romilly's election as Registrar, is a unique record of Cambridge before the Royal Commission of 1852, with many valuable sidelights on nineteenth-century society and on intellectual life – or the more relaxed side of it.

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# Romilly's Cambridge Diary, 1832-42

*Selected Passages from the Diary of the Rev.  
Joseph Romilly, Fellow of Trinity College and  
Registrary of the University of Cambridge*

JOSEPH ROMILLY

EDITED BY JOHN PATRICK TUER BURY



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*For*

M. E. B.

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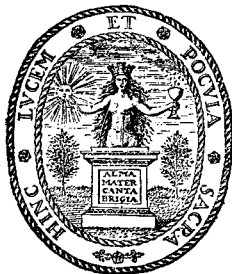
ROMILLY'S  
CAMBRIDGE DIARY  
1832-42

SELECTED PASSAGES FROM  
THE DIARY OF THE REV. JOSEPH ROMILLY  
FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE AND REGISTRARY OF  
THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CHOSEN, INTRODUCED AND ANNOTATED BY

J. P. T. BURY

FELLOW OF CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE



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Bachelor clergymen of the Church of England have been among the most regular and assiduous of diarists, and many readers have delighted in the intimate and artless picture of eighteenth-century rural life painted by Parson Woodforde or in the poetic quality of the impressions of Radnorshire and Herefordshire in the 1870s recorded by Francis Kilvert. These were men whose academic career was merely a stage on the way to a country living and the life of a conscientious, if not over-zealous, parish priest.

In the Diaries of Joseph Romilly (1791–1864) we meet a clergyman of a very different kind, a townsman rather than a countryman, one who spent the whole of his active life in Cambridge as a Fellow of Trinity College and who was for a large part of it an important University official; one, moreover, who, apart from being for a few years the non-resident rector of Porthkerry in Glamorgan, never had a parish and seldom took duty or preached. Yet Joseph Romilly, like Woodforde and Kilvert, was a warm-hearted and sociable person and a devout and conscientious Christian. A cultured and travelled man of means, who by virtue of his position was in touch with or had the opportunity of meeting many of the ablest men of his day,<sup>1</sup> he gave liberally to the poor and to numerous good causes and was a devoted brother, a kind uncle, and a generous master to those in his employ. Urbane and courteous, well read in Continental as well as in English literature, he had a wide circle of friends, loved a game of cards and a cigar, enjoyed ‘good chat, good cheer’ and ‘good champagne’, and was sought after as a guest in great houses such as Audley End and Madingley Hall as well as in Masters’ Lodges and College Halls. It was perhaps these qualities, rather than any supposed especial fitness for the office, which procured him his election as University Registrar at the age of 41; but the choice was a good one, for, apart from being reprimanded on one occasion for too frequent absences from Cambridge, he performed his duties with thoroughness and ability.

Romilly’s sociability, moreover, did not prevent him from being a man of strong principles and decided views, a firm Whig and ‘stout reformer’, in fact one of that group of ‘liberal minded clergymen . . . solid in character and learning, versed in mathematics and in classical

<sup>1</sup> Among those he encounters during the years covered by this volume are Arago and Cavour as well as Coleridge, Macaulay and Wordsworth.

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scholarship',<sup>1</sup> who helped to guide Trinity and the University into a new age. His courtesy did not hinder him from being an outspoken critic of abuses, and he was not afraid of advocating causes that were unpopular with many in an academic society which was still predominantly conservative in outlook. His Diaries show him, too, to have been a shrewd and humorous observer of his fellow men and women, with a keen eye to feminine beauty or its absence—witness, for example, the references to Jack Brass 'who is grown a hundred & walks with a flask of brandy in his pocket', to Miss Timberlake '(the younger and uglier)' who sang 'the Ocean Sea like a magnanimous mouse in a Cheese', and to Mrs Trebeck who had 'only one good point, a singularly white skin', but was otherwise 'an ugly cold piece of aristocratical ice'. They also contain plenty of caustic comment on folly and bad taste and on tediousness and obscurantism, whether in the pulpit, in social intercourse, or in the conduct of University or College business. Thus, to give but three or four instances: in March 1832 he 'heard another vile sermon of Dr Battens: he had better stay at Haileybury'; in June 1835 he refers to 'a certain Mr Flanagan (a briefless Barrister of the Norfolk Circuit)' as 'a most extraordinary twaddling fool', who, in reading out a list of subscribers at a public dinner, 'passed eulogies on each . . . beginning with Coke of Norfolk and ending with his own absurd self'; in July 1835 at the conferring of honorary degrees by the new Chancellor, the Marquess Camden, he describes 'the conduct of the young men' as disgraceful in the extreme. They 'proposed a howl for the present ministry, 3 groans for L<sup>d</sup> J. Russell. . . and at the end of the day called for 'God save the King' and interrupted it at 'Confound their knavish tricks' to give a round of applause'; while a few days later he noted, 'It is impossible to imagine anything more insufferably tedious than the speeches of our Master. . .'. Finally, at dinner at Magdalene in November of the same year he did not hesitate to explain at length to the Master of that College his 'opinion of the false position in which the Conservative heads have placed themselves by refusing to nominate Lamb' [the Whig Master of Corpus] for the Vice-Chancellorship, a refusal which was a 'violation of all precedent'.

Joseph Romilly, born on 9 October 1791, and christened at St Anne's, Soho, was the son of Thomas Peter Romilly (1753–1828) and his cousin Jane Anne, daughter of Isaac Romilly, F.R.S. The family, whose best-known member was Joseph's uncle, Sir Samuel

<sup>1</sup> G. M. Trevelyan, *Trinity College. An Historical Sketch* (Cambridge, 1946), p. 88.

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Romilly, the law-reformer (1757–1818), was of Huguenot origin,<sup>1</sup> and Joseph's close friend, the eminent geologist, Adam Sedgwick, once wrote of him: 'He has a great deal of French blood in his veins, which makes him a merry, genial man.' Of Joseph's youth we know little. It seems probable that his early home was in London, although the later part of his father's life was spent in Dulwich; and it is also probable that he was educated privately before his admission in 1808 as a pensioner of the Cambridge college with which he was to be associated for the rest of his days. He matriculated at Michaelmas 1809, was elected a scholar in 1810, took his Bachelor's degree as 4th Wrangler in 1813, and became a Fellow of Trinity in 1815. He held the offices of Junior Dean (1822–3) and Senior Dean (1829–31), and in 1840 he was admitted to the 'Seniority', thus becoming one of the eight Senior Fellows who, together with the Master, in those days ruled the College. The greatest event of his career, however, was his election in 1832 as Registry of the University, an office which he held for nearly thirty years until his resignation at the end of 1861. This imposed upon him a number of regular duties, which are constantly referred to in his Diary, and which included his playing a prominent part in all the chief University ceremonies, some of which he minutely described and evidently enjoyed. He took great interest in the University records of which he had charge, and his most notable service as Registry was their much-needed arrangement, indexing and annotation. Indeed it has been said that 'he rescued the archives from the neglect and indifference of nearly two centuries. . . His work was . . . invaluable and can hardly be too highly praised.'<sup>2</sup> He also edited the volume of alphabetical lists of graduates of the University together with particulars of their degrees, entitled *Graduati Cantabrigienses*, which covers the years 1760–1846, and later continued it to the year 1856. Meanwhile, in 1837 he had resigned the family living of Porthkerry, to which he had been presented in 1830, and had accepted the post of chaplain to his friend and former Trinity colleague Thomas Musgrave, bishop of Hereford and subsequently archbishop of York. He died suddenly of heart failure at Great Yarmouth on 7 August 1864, and was buried beside his sisters in a family tomb in the churchyard of Christ Church, Barnwell, on the east side of Cambridge (a tomb which is now alas! in a sad state of

<sup>1</sup> Useful information concerning the Romilly Family is to be found in the *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of London*, especially vol. viii (1905–8), 'Some Romilly Notes' by Henry Wagner.

<sup>2</sup> This tribute was paid by the present Keeper of the University Archives, Miss Heather E. Peek, and her sometime associate, Miss Catherine P. Hall, in their book *The Archives of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 22.

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disrepair). An undated photograph of him is preserved in one of the albums in Trinity College Library and a water-colour portrait of him painted by Miss Hervé in 1836 hangs in the Long Room of the University Registry. This water-colour is reproduced as the frontispiece to this volume.

Cambridge in 1832, when Romilly became Registrary, was a country town of some 21,000 inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> Although the Inclosure Acts of 1801 and 1807 had 'rendered possible the rapid extension of the built-up area over the old open fields', the country was still close at hand on every side. The main direction of expansion at this time was to the east along the Newmarket Road and in Barnwell, but on the south there were few houses beyond St Andrew's Street, to the north Chesterton was still a village 'principally inhabited by farmers', and to the west the open country began almost at once beyond the Backs and the top of Castle Hill. The town enjoyed an extensive trade in coals and corn; quantities of oil, 'pressed by the numerous mills in the Isle of Ely from flax, hemp and coleseed', were brought up the Cam; and butter in abundance from Norfolk and the Ely region was forwarded by Cambridge wagons to London where it was sold under the name of Cambridge butter. But apart from this, according to a contemporary Guide Book, very little business was carried on except what was 'immediately or remotely connected with the University'. As for 'the general appearance of the town', it was 'certainly below what might be expected': the streets were 'narrow and winding, and the houses (with the exception of those in the market-place, and the streets contiguous)' 'in many instances old, ill-built, and crowded closely together. A general spirit of improvement' had, however, 'lately displayed itself, and the number of houses of a better and more genteel description (on the outskirts of the town)' was rapidly increasing. It was to one such house in the newly developing Hills Road that Joseph Romilly brought his two unmarried sisters in 1837. To the growth of the town during the ten years, 1832-42, covered by this volume, and to some of the notable new buildings which are still an integral part of the Cambridge scene, such as the Fitzwilliam Museum, the Pitt Press, and Christ Church, Barnwell, his Diary makes several interesting allusions.

The University, on which the town so much depended, had increased considerably in size since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, so that by 1830 there were nearly six thousand members on its books and the resident population during term time numbered about two thousand. But it was still an unreformed University, whose continued

<sup>1</sup> By the census of 1841 it had increased to 24,453. This figure included the undergraduates.

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claims to exercise a medieval jurisdiction in the town caused friction with the civic authorities, and whose inefficiency and narrowness of outlook were coming under criticism both from within and without its walls. Fellows of Colleges were debarred from matrimony and required to take holy orders, religious tests were imposed which prevented Jews and Dissenters from taking degrees, and the Heads of Colleges formed an exclusive oligarchy. Although a Classical Tripos had been instituted in 1822, mathematics was still the main road to honours; but honours men had to depend largely upon private coaches to help them through their studies, and more than half the undergraduates did not read for honours at all but took the ordinary degree course, the standard of which was extremely low. After the reform of Parliament, however, it was not to be expected that the ancient universities would be left undisturbed. In 1837 motions were introduced into both Houses of Parliament for the appointment of a Commission of Enquiry into the state of these universities and their colleges. Although the motions were withdrawn and it was not until 1850 that a Royal Commission was nominated, public opinion was moving slowly in the direction of reforms. Oxford and Cambridge were clearly under notice to begin putting their houses in order, and in 1848, it has been said, 'the stagnant waters really began to stir'. Of these rumblings of reform there are also many echoes in this volume, and it is not surprising to find that Joseph Romilly, staunch Whig and supporter of reform in national politics that he was, was also generally a friend to liberal causes in his own college and University.

Romilly's Diaries were given to Cambridge University Library in 1934 (except for three volumes, probably overlooked or mislaid, which followed in 1938) by his great-niece Miss Rachel M. Allen, a descendant of his eldest sister Caroline Jane (1781-1831) and her husband Lancelot Baugh Allen, at one time Warden and Master of Dulwich College. They were utilized by D. A. Winstanley when he wrote his books on *Unreformed Cambridge* and *Early Victorian Cambridge* and they were also drawn upon by J. W. Clark and T. M. Hughes, the biographers of Romilly's friend Adam Sedgwick, but no part of them has ever before been published *in extenso*. They fill forty-one notebooks in a small but legible hand and extend from 1818 to 1864. Apart, however, from three volumes devoted to holiday tours with his unmarried elder brother Cuthbert, the entries in the earlier books are both intermittent and scrappy. It was not until 7 February 1829 that Romilly began to write a regular daily chronicle; but from



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then until the eve of his sudden death hardly a day is missed and the entries, at first very brief and factual, generally become ampler and more full of human interest as time goes on.

This volume contains a selection covering the years 1832-42. The year 1832 has been chosen as the starting-point because it was the year of Romilly's election to the office of Registry which he filled so long and so honourably. After the excitement of the election we soon find him busied at the tasks which were to occupy him until his retirement, working at his books with his one clerk, Rowe<sup>1</sup>—in other words recording the administrative business of the University (and much of more general interest) in 'Grace Books' and other registers—keeping registers of degrees and receiving the appropriate fees from the new-made Bachelors and Masters of Arts, attesting the admission of newly elected professors, attending the Vice-Chancellor's court of discipline and the annual proclamation of Sturbridge Fair, and taking part in royal and other ceremonial occasions. These and other duties of his office together with the alternation of term and vacation, Sunday churchgoing, week-day entertainment and evening reading supply the basic rhythm of the Diaries. But to have attempted to cover the whole of Romilly's career as Registry in a single volume would have meant producing a book which would have been either too cursory in treatment or too formidable in bulk. The flavour of a Diary such as this can only be properly tasted if the reader is gradually able to enter into the quiet daily round of the Diarist, to share his interests, and to learn to know his circle of friends. There must be a sufficient continuity of entries. I have therefore decided to close this volume in 1842 and to leave the publication of extracts from the remainder of the Diary for a later occasion, should it arise.

The choice of March 1842 as a terminal date is an arbitrary one. I had originally hoped to carry this book as far as the end of 1847; but this, too, would have made it too bulky. My main justification for ending in 1842 is that this year marked the tenth anniversary of Romilly's election to the office of University Registry. My choice also has the advantage of enabling the book to be divided into two parts nearly equal in time. Down to 1837 Romilly lived the life of a bachelor Fellow resident in College: but this was changed in 1837, as a result of the death of his brother Cuthbert, for he then decided to take a house in Cambridge and to bring his two sisters Margaret and Lucy to live with him there.

From the arrival of these maiden ladies in Cambridge on 5 July

<sup>1</sup> Rowe resigned in 1840 and was succeeded by a man called Welsford.

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1837, Romilly chronicled their doings almost as fully as his own. The Diary is correspondingly enriched and its value as a social document enhanced. The reader comes to know 'M and L', 'the women', as well as he knows their brother Joseph. On account of the family's frequent ailments he meets the medical men of Cambridge, while through their good works he is taken to the poorer quarters of the town and visits charity schools and Church bazaars, and a succession of pauper 'protégées'. Lucy, thirteen years Margaret's junior, with her impulsiveness and her admiration for the handsome Evangelical incumbent of Holy Trinity, the Rev. William Carus, emerges as the more colourful of the two sisters, but the near-sighted Margaret was also a woman of character. The household, moreover, is periodically enlarged and enlivened by the presence of the Romillys' nephews George Romilly and George and Edward Allen, who come to stay while they are schoolboys and then in turn reappear as undergraduates.

In addition to limiting this volume to the years 1832-42 I have confined the extracts to Romilly's life in Cambridge, both for pressing reasons of space and because there is perhaps a particular interest in concentrating upon the Cambridge life of a prominent official of the unreformed University. Yet I have done so with some regret, for Romilly indulged in long summer holiday tours and in frequent briefer visits to London and elsewhere, and on such occasions, especially his Long Vacation journeyings, often recorded his doings much more fully and no less vividly than when he was at home. I have, however, in passages of connecting narrative, given very brief indications of his movements and some of his activities when he was away from Cambridge.

The text has been printed as Romilly wrote it except for the dates of the entries (for which a uniform pattern has been adopted), for his use of the old-fashioned 'fs' for double 's', for his abbreviation 'wch' (printed as 'wch') and for certain adjustments in punctuation. Where his abbreviations are obscure I have added the missing parts of words in square brackets. In annotating the text I have tried to be helpful to those who may be interested in the procedure and customs of a bygone age and, in the hope of rendering service to social and local historians, I have attempted to identify as many as possible of the people mentioned in the Diary. These identifications have been placed in a biographical index at the end of the volume in order not to overload the pages with footnotes and in order to reduce the cost of an unhappily expensive volume.

In conclusion, it gives me great pleasure to express my gratitude

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to the many people who have come to my aid in the preparation of this book. I am indebted first and foremost to my wife who has assisted me in ways too numerous to specify. I also owe a special debt to my friend and colleague Dr J. P. C. Roach, who has read the proofs and helped in the elucidation of many obscure references, and to Dr R. Robson, who has so promptly answered queries relating to Trinity College and has also most kindly read the proofs. I have to acknowledge the assistance of various transcribers, especially Mr Brian Hayes; of Miss Heather Peek who initiated me into the mysteries of the University Archives and took infinite trouble in seeking out records which might be of use; of Mr Gautry and the staff of the Anderson Room in the University Library, who so readily supplied my needs; and of Mrs D. M. Watson, who heroically and efficiently wrestled with a difficult typing enterprise. The following, too, have kindly answered inquiries or assisted in various ways: Mr William Addison, the historian of Audley End; Mr Noel Blakiston, of the Public Record Office; M. Borgeaud, Directeur de la Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire of Geneva; Lord Braybrooke; Dorothy Lady Braybrooke; Dr G. H. S. Bushnell; Professor Bruce Dickins; the Rev. P. D. Hewat; Mr J. Hiden; Mr Sidney Hutchison, Librarian of the Royal Academy; Dr G. Kitson Clark; Mrs Marsh; Mr A. N. L. Munby, Librarian of King's College; Miss Susan Nicolson, Assistant Curator of Saffron Walden Museum Society; Miss Porter, Curator of the Cambridge Folk Museum; the late Sir Sydney Roberts; Col. Russell Jones; Mr L. Unwin and the numerous readers of *The Cambridge News* who telephoned or wrote to me about Two Pot House; Dr Richard Vaughan; Professor E. R. Vincent; Mr Peter Ward; Mr D. Pepys Whiteley, Keeper of the Archives of Magdalene College, who kindly allowed me to reproduce a fine lithograph of the Star Coach in his possession; and Mr A. G. Woodhead. I am also very grateful to the Master and Fellows of Trinity for permitting me to reproduce Harraden's water-colour of the Great Court and to the Registry of the University for allowing me to reproduce Miss Hervé's portrait of Romilly as the frontispiece to this volume.

J. P. T. B.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS OF BOOK TITLES USED IN THE FOOTNOTES

Ainslie, <i>Oaths</i>	Gilbert Ainslie, <i>An historical account of the oaths and subscriptions required in the University of Cambridge</i> . . . (Cambridge, 1833).
<i>Al. Cant.</i>	J. A. Venn, <i>Alumni Cantabrigienses, Part II from 1752 to 1900</i> (Cambridge 1940-54).
Clark & Hughes	J. W. Clark and T. M. Hughes, <i>The life and letters of A. Sedgwick</i> , 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1890).
Cooper	C. H. Cooper, <i>Annals of Cambridge</i> , 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1842-52).
<i>D.N.B.</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i> .
Gunning, <i>Ceremonies</i>	H. Gunning, ed., <i>The Ceremonies observed in the Senate-House of the University of Cambridge</i> . . . by Adam Wall, M.A. (Cambridge, 1828).
Pigot's <i>Directory</i>	<i>Pigot and Co's Royal National and Commercial Directory of the Counties of Bedford, Cambridge</i> . . . (London and Manchester, September 1839).
Smyth, <i>Simeon</i>	Charles Smyth, <i>Simeon and Church Order</i> . . . (Cambridge, 1940).
Todhunter	I. Todhunter, <i>William Whewell, D.D., Master of Trinity College, Cambridge. An account of his Writings</i> . . . 2 vols. (London, 1876).
Trevelyan	G. M. Trevelyan, <i>Trinity College. An Historical Sketch</i> (Cambridge, 1946).
<i>U.P.</i>	<i>University Papers</i> (in the University Archives).
Willis & Clark	<i>The Architectural History of the University of Cambridge and of the Colleges of Cambridge and Eton</i> by the late Robert Willis, edited and brought up to the present time by J. W. Clark, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1886).
Winstanley	D. A. Winstanley, <i>Early Victorian Cambridge</i> (Cambridge, 1946).