

# IN LOCO PARENTIS

*A light-hearted look at  
the role of a Cambridge Tutor*

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——— April 7, 2013 ———

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To all my Tutorial Pupils,  
without whom this book  
would not have been possible

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# *In Loco Parentis*

My dictionary gives two meanings for *loco*, and neither of them is the one I had in mind when giving this book its title. The first is, as expected, as an abbreviation for a railway engine; this does, at least, have some connection with the Latin for ‘place’, though the ending of *locomotive* does rather work against any sense of the stability that a parental substitute is meant to bring. The second dictionary entry is even further from what is required, though no doubt the phrase as a whole has often been mischievously translated as ‘driving the parents mad’. It is only when the whole phrase is sought, under I rather than L, that the real meaning of *in loco parentis* is revealed; and it is in this sense of taking on some of the responsibilities usually associated with parenthood that the role of a Cambridge Tutor was defined.

To be strictly honest, the phrase is not really appropriate any longer. Ever since the age of majority in the UK was

reduced from twenty one to eighteen,<sup>1</sup> nearly all university students have been, technically, at least, if not always in their behaviour, grown-ups and there has been no reason for Oxbridge Tutors to take on quasi-parental roles. However, I have had this erudite-sounding title in mind for a book such as this for well over twenty years and am extremely loath to give it up — despite the fact that it was well past its sell-by date by the time I thought of it!

Nevertheless, even though the strictly parental aspects of a Tutor's job may no longer exist, his or her role as a student's guide, mentor and, if the worst comes to the worst, friend at court, remains as important as ever. Within any one college, and at any one time, up to about ten of its senior academic staff<sup>2</sup> agree to take on the role of a Tutor for, typically, some fifty students of that college, officially known as their *pupils*. These tutorial commitments, which carry largely nominal monetary reward, are undertaken as an addition to the Fellows' normal duties of teaching, examining and research associated with his or her University appointment. Perhaps I should explain that nearly all Cambridge academics have two allegiances, one to their College and another to one of the University's departments; however, the balance between the two varies significantly from person to person.

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<sup>1</sup>In 1970. Footnotes such as this one are added both to provide relevant background and to give the impression of a scholarly piece of work, rather than a simple collection of reminiscences, some accurate, some perhaps less so.

<sup>2</sup>Collectively, and officially, referred to as the Fellows of the College.

One of the more experienced Tutors is declared ‘first amongst equals’ and given the title of Senior Tutor. When I first started, the latter was known simply as The Tutor and the others as ‘Assistant Tutors’. But, in keeping with a move to give many more University Lecturers a title including the word ‘Professor’<sup>3</sup>, all Assistant Tutors were upgraded to Tutors, and The Tutor became The Senior Tutor; grander titles, but no change in duties or pay!

Some of what is entailed in taking on a Tutorship can be judged from the rest of this book. It is also hoped that the reader will gain, at the same time, some insight into the workings of Cambridge University. For many, if not most, of its members, both academic and non-academic, they remain something of a mystery.

With about ten thousand undergraduates and about half that number of postgraduates, spread across some thirty self-governing Colleges, Cambridge University can only function if well-defined procedures and channels of communication are followed. For nearly all of a student’s dealings with the University, that channel is his or her Tutor (or, for technical matters related to a particular academic discipline, a Fellow of the College who directs the studies of students in that subject).

Whilst most college-based matters involving Tutors and their pupils are dealt with by word of mouth (or, increasingly these days, by an informal email), those that involve the University have nearly always to be committed to paper. Com-

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<sup>3</sup>And largely carried through in the Other Place.



posing and replying to such correspondence, aiming to be both persuasive and, at the same time, polite, was one of the most challenging, but enjoyable, aspects of my twenty two years as Tutor or Senior Tutor.

Subject to some limitations imposed by necessary confidentiality, the recollections which follow will give you a number of chances to judge both the successes and failures of my endeavours. In them I have, so far as possible, avoided giving people their real names and have referred to them by the University or College post that they held at the time, as this best describes what might be expected to be their various standpoints and actions.<sup>4</sup> Similarly the names of the individual Colleges are not even hinted at, except where I judge they could not be the least bit offended or embarrassed by being identified.

The identity of my own College, Clare, could hardly have been disguised, and even if I had tried to conceal it, any reader, even one who has had no previous dealings with Cambridge, could have discovered it within a few minutes if they so wished. It is my own College, not with any sense of ownership, but because I have held some sort of position there, undergraduate, research student, Fellow, etc., for nearly sixty years.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Although in many cases one would not do so in ordinary text, I have also capitalised the names of the posts, so that the reader might more immediately anticipate the actions of their holders. I have also capitalised some less specialised words, e.g. Scholarship and Hostel, where in the Cambridge context they have particular or somewhat non-standard meanings.

<sup>5</sup>With a concurrent post as a Cambridge University Teaching Officer for thirty four of them.

When it comes to recollections concerning students or senior academics, in most cases there is nothing to be gained by naming them – and quite often I do not know their true identities – but if several are involved, and have to be differentiated, I have given them fictitious names. However, in order that credit should be given wherever it is unequivocally due, all names given in footnotes are genuine ones; apologies to all those totally blameless University Members, both Junior and Senior, who appear only in the main text, and therefore only as suspicion-arousing pseudonyms.

My period of office as a college Senior Tutor came to an end in the late 1990's, though I did continue to serve as a 'Financial Tutor' for a further ten years. However, I intend these reminiscences to reflect mainly on my time as a Tutor in the sense in which the word is normally understood. Consequently, whilst passages aimed at helping the reader to understand background that is still relevant today are usually written in the present tense, those relating to specific events that occurred during my time as a Tutor are set in the past.

# Chapter 1

## Jack of All Trades

May I may start with the ending? Of my twenty two years as a Cambridge Tutor, all but two were spent as Clare College's Senior Tutor, and so it is largely from my experiences in that post that these reminiscences are drawn. Why begin at the end? Well, when I was first approached by the Master of Clare about taking over this role from another Fellow of the College, who himself was due to take over the post of College Bursar, I thought of it only as a single part-time job. And it was only when I came to relinquish it, and my immediate successors – note the plural – were appointed, that I properly appreciated just how many sides there had been to it.

At the time I was asked, my main occupation was as a Uni-

versity Lecturer in the Department of Physics, having previously been a Research Fellow at Clare and a Physics Demonstrator.<sup>1</sup> I was aware that taking on the Senior Tutorship would restrict the time I would have to undertake research, and, to reflect this, beyond a certain level my University stipend (salary) was reduced by one half of whatever the College paid me.<sup>2</sup> The other duties associated with being a University Lecturer were not reduced at all; lectures, practical classes, examining and administrative duties<sup>3</sup> in the Department were all unaffected.

In fact the ‘Bursar Elect’, who took twelve months of sabbatical leave prior to the intended take-over,<sup>4</sup> did not return to Cambridge and during the year accepted a professorial appointment at another university. The retiring Bursar had held his college post in conjunction with the quaintly-named job in the Engineering Department of ‘Lecturer (part work)’, but the College decided that the person to be appointed to the now-vacant post of Clare Bursar should be full-time and professionally experienced as a finance officer. For the next twenty years there was almost no change of personnel amongst the senior administrators of the College, with only one change of Master and one

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<sup>1</sup>An Assistant Lecturer in a Science department. Since then, the word Assistant has disappeared from all Lecturers’ titles, and the word *Senior* has appeared in front of some of them. Just like Tutors.

<sup>2</sup>In much the same way as there is a deductible personal allowance for income tax. However, there, the 50% rate does not kick in until incomes are about fifteen times those then paid to Lecturers in universities.

<sup>3</sup>I was Secretary of the Departmental Teaching Committee for several years.

<sup>4</sup>Thus, for that year I was technically only an Acting Senior Tutor, but that did not change the duties that go with the post.

change of Bursar – and no change of Senior Tutor.

Nor was there much change in the composition, activities or level of achievement in the College as a whole. Clare remained the college with the male to female undergraduate ratio closest to one-to-one; we were outside the first six in unofficial academic league tables only once; the College's music, and in particular the Choir, continued to have an international reputation; the pitches and courts at the Sports Ground continued to be amongst the best in Cambridge;<sup>5</sup> and the College's sports teams that played on them were, at best, distinctly average most of the time.

Towards the end of this time, perhaps mindful that once, during the 19th Century, Clare had 'drifted' for nearly a hundred years, there was some feeling it was time for a change. It was also the case that Government actions and financial cuts had forced the University to impose tighter controls on all the Cambridge Colleges, over such matters as admissions numbers and college fees; this had significantly increased the burden that fell on the College's Tutorial Office and those in charge of it.

A Committee was set up that had one of the then Tutors as Convener, but deliberately excluded the Master, the Bursar, and the Senior Tutor. In its report, the Committee took the view that the Senior Tutor's post should be a half-time one, but at the same time recommended that duties not strictly associated with organising the teaching of the undergraduates in residence should be undertaken by others. It also proposed that, though

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<sup>5</sup>And has even hosted a cricket Test Match at the under-19 level.

a person could be re-elected to the post, their maximum total tenure should be limited to ten years.

My own point of view, though I did not voice it publicly, was that the recommendations were not internally consistent, or at least they did not chime with the University's view of a Senior Tutor's post. All of my predecessors had also held University Teaching posts, as I did, with no reduction in University teaching and examining duties on taking on the College post. So, even when it included, in addition to being the 'Vice-President for Teaching', the post of Science Admissions Tutor, being administratively responsible for all student grants,<sup>6</sup> and acting as the disciplinary Dean, a Senior Tutorship was considered by the University to be at most half-time.

The report recommended that the posts of Science Admissions Tutor, Financial Tutor,<sup>7</sup> and the Dean of Students should all be filled by different people, and that none of them should be the Senior Tutor. Having just written that, I now wonder whether one reason for the recommendations was that too many strings were perhaps thought to be in the hands of one person. Be that as it may, on several occasions since giving up my twin University and College posts I have had reason to observe, with a mixture of pride and regret, that "When I retired, five posts became vacant, and I filled one of them". That was the post of Financial Tutor, which I held for ten years before coming up

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<sup>6</sup>Maintenance, hardship, travel and book grants.

<sup>7</sup>Sometimes, and officially in the College Statutes, called the Tutorial Bursar, the alternatives jokingly being associated with whether, at the time, the bottom line was to distribute the College's money, or to preserve it.

against the absolute age limitation imposed by Clare's Statutes.

In the remaining chapters of this book, I have tried to give a picture of the various roles played by a Tutor, and in particular by a Senior Tutor within a Cambridge College. Some elements of the picture are purely factual, though necessary for an understanding of the whole, but I hope that the reader will feel in retrospect that even these rather duller sections have added something to their understanding of how Cambridge University and its Colleges work.

The post of Senior Tutor carries with it *ex officio* membership of many of the College's Committees, in particular the Council and the Finance Committee. When I first joined the Fellowship at Clare there was almost no difference between the membership of the the College's Governing Body and that of its Council. Every Fellow was a member of the Governing Body, as has always been the case so far as I know, and at that time all Fellows except the Research Fellows were on the College Council. Although Clare is only an average-sized College, its Council was probably the largest in Cambridge at the time, and it became more and more unwieldy as the size of the Fellowship grew.

Recognising this, the College proposed a change to its Statutes that would stabilise its numbers at a much lower figure. When the proposed change had been cleared by the University, it was submitted to the Privy Council and was 'graciously' approved by Her Majesty in Council, thus enabling it to be acted upon. But, by then, I was on the Council *ex officio*, first as Senior Tutor, then as Tutorial Bursar, and so I found myself on the

College Council continuously for a total of forty three years, which works out at just over three hundred meetings.

The wide-ranging role of the College Council is probably best made clear by quoting two of the relevant Statutes:

The Council shall arrange everything relating to the instruction of the undergraduates.

The Council shall perform all such duties in the administration of College affairs as are not in these statutes expressly assigned to the Governing Body or the Finance Committee; . . . . .<sup>8</sup>

It will therefore come as no surprise to the reader that the Council, having such a wide remit, appears in many different contexts in the remaining chapters of this book. For this reason, I will not attempt to give here a more specific list of all the ways it impinges on College life. In any case, as a result of the second quoted Statute, this would, in principle, be impossible, as the list would be endless.

The Finance Committee was much less demanding so far as I was concerned, although it met with about the same regularity as the Council. Before my membership of the Committee became automatic, I was a member of it for only two three-year stints. Further, unlike for the Council, at which the Senior Tutor is likely to have to present papers on two or three items of

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<sup>8</sup>There are provisions for the Governing Body, the ultimate authority in the College, to require the Council to refer any specified matter to it, but they are very seldom used.



business, the burden of agenda preparation fell on the Bursar's or the Domestic Bursar's Office.

At Finance Committee meetings most items of business were not directly tutorial, though, as one would expect, they nearly all had some potential impact on the education and experiences that the College would be able to offer to its students. Naturally enough, the two Junior Members on the Committee, one an undergraduate and the other a graduate student, had plenty to say about any proposal that might adversely, as they saw it, affect either their finances or their accommodation. Although the discussion of agenda items never came anywhere near to open warfare, to some extent the tutorial role was that of putting to each side the views of the other, but from a more neutral standpoint.

Forty years ago, the undergraduates and graduate students of the College had no official representation on the College's various committees and could only make their views known indirectly via their Tutors or by making a special appointment to see the Bursar. Shortly before I took over as Senior Tutor, the College had established a Liaison Committee which consisted of the elected undergraduate committee of the Union of Clare Students (the UCS exec.), the Clare College Graduate Society Committee, the Senior Tutor, the Bursar, and two other Fellows nominated by the Council.

The Liaison Committee met once each term, hosted in turn by the UCS exec., the Graduate Society Committee, and, in the

Easter Term,<sup>9</sup> by the Senior Members. It had no executive powers, but was an informal discussion group where concern about what was, or was not, happening could be aired, in theory saving time at the more formal meetings of the Council and Finance Committee. In retrospect, I suppose it did – in that members went to subsequent meetings better informed, and sometimes better armed with relevant evidence – but it did not always feel like that at the time.

There is one further Committee of which Senior Tutors have automatic membership, and that is the Senior Tutors' Committee (STC). It is neither a University nor an individual College committee, but is one of the three main channels of communication between the Colleges and the University; the other two are The Colleges' Committee, consisting of the Heads of all the Colleges,<sup>10</sup> and The Bursars' Committee, with an obvious constitution. None of these three committees is even mentioned in the Statutes and Ordinances of the University nor, so far as I am aware, in the Statutes of any of the Colleges. Yet, they are probably the three most important links in the functioning of both. Broadly speaking, the lines of communication can be represented by the diagram

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<sup>9</sup>When, at least in theory, members of the other groups would be too busy, revising for the Tripos, or writing master's or doctoral dissertations, to organise a meeting.

<sup>10</sup>Called the Master in most Colleges, the President in some, and the Principal in two. The Provost, the Warden and the Mistress score one point each.

Colleges		University
Colleges' C.	$\rightleftharpoons$	Council of the Senate
↓		↓
Senior Tutors' C.	$\rightleftharpoons$	General Board
↓		↓
Bursars' C.	$\rightleftharpoons$	Financial Board

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that individuals, particularly those whose principal post is an academic one, can be, and often are, members of more than one of these bodies. Such interlocking membership is generally helpful in ensuring that all parties involved in the consideration of any particular issue are accurately informed about the views of the other committees. One might add that it also encourages those with multiple allegiances not to take too narrow a view.

My personal concern was with the STC, as I was never a member of any of the others, though I did accompany the Master of Clare to quite a number of meetings of the Colleges' Committee. Although, as already noted, the STC is not an official University committee, the Vice-Chancellor, whenever his<sup>11</sup> unavoidable commitments allowed it, took the Chair at its meetings. If he could not make it, the longest-serving Senior Tutor deputised. For the final three years of my time on the STC, I had the privilege of being on stand-by; it wasn't an arduous

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<sup>11</sup>To avoid any charges of sexism, I should record that Dame Rosemary Murray had just finished her period of office as VC when I joined the STC, and that my membership of it ended before Dame Alison Richard began as Vice-Chancellor.

duty, as most times I was not called upon to act, and, when I was, the time-consuming hard work had already been done by the Committee's Secretary.

The STC has a major role to play whenever the University has to respond or react to decisions or proposals made by the Government or its agents, whether they are concerned with, say, University funding, or places for overseas students, or changes in the national examination system. There are, in reality, many more areas from which examples could be chosen, and responses have been called for with ever increasing frequency in the last few years. However, I will restrict myself to three incidents that occurred during my time as a Senior Tutor, one from each of the areas I have specifically mentioned.

The first example is taken from the area of University funding. In the early nineteen-eighties the Department of Education and Science (DES) decided that, in order to cut its costs, the number of university places available nationally to UK students should be reduced by some 6%; this would result in about the same percentage reduction in the funding grant each university would receive.<sup>12</sup> As it happened, some years earlier a local philanthropist had donated a large sum of money for the purpose of increasing the total number of undergraduate places available at Cambridge. This was to be done by founding a new College; and the physical building of that College was nearing completion just as the DES announced its decision. So, far from

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<sup>12</sup>At that time most research funding originated from independent applications to Research Councils, and therefore did not come directly from the DES.

being able to increase the availability of Cambridge places, the Colleges collectively were faced with a reduction.

Clearly, this was a major problem from both the educational and financial points of view. But equally clearly, the existing Colleges could not turn their backs on the potential new addition to their ranks. Concessions had to be made on all sides: the Bursars and the Financial Board had to accept the loss of income and do their best to seek other ways to replace it; Senior and Admissions Tutors had to give up, on average, about six<sup>13</sup> undergraduate places in their annual intake; and the General Board had to try to find ways of reducing or recovering the cost of University teaching (lectures, practical classes, examinations, etc.) without getting rid of Staff. Colleges could try to help in the latter by making up their numbers with overseas students, who were charged higher University fees. College fees were the same for both types of student, as the college facilities available to them were largely independent of their residential status.

Just a few years later, the University was told to restore the number of UK-based students to its original level, but with no increase in the now-reduced block funding grant. Thus the DES – whether by accident or design, and, naturally, I suspect the latter – had effected a reduction in the per capita support it gave to UK students, without ever having to call it that. Because historically many of their buildings have been endowed, and therefore have no need to show a return on investment costs, Cambridge University and its Colleges probably absorbed this

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<sup>13</sup>To allow the new College to have roughly its planned-for UK student numbers.

withdrawal of financial support more easily than most other Universities. But that didn't reduce the amount of time and effort needed to deal with the situation.

My second example is relatively trivial – but not for the students affected by it. The 'it' in question is the number of overseas students a College is committed to admitting, encouraged to admit, may choose to admit, or is limited to admitting. At Clare, in the first category, was a long-standing endowed exchange of new graduates, two each way, with Yale University. In addition, an endowed Scholarship enabled a graduate of Columbia to read for a further degree at Cambridge.

Less firmly committed, but nevertheless a logical consequence of the situation discussed in the previous paragraph but one, was an initial incentive to increase the number of overseas students, and then shortly afterwards a necessity to reduce it. These considerations could more or less be handled directly by individual Colleges, but a decision by the Government, transmitted through the DES, that the number of students who could be admitted to read Medicine in each UK University should be very precisely controlled, called for university-wide collaboration. There would be separate quotas for home<sup>14</sup> and overseas medical students, the latter at a very low level.

Already in place in Cambridge, within each of three groups of Colleges, there was a bidding process for the available medical places. Using the previous track-records and interview reports

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<sup>14</sup>Calculated to match as closely as possible the theoretical number of clinical places available nationally.

of the medical applicants as ‘money’, the next available place in a group’s allocation went to the College that could put forward the strongest candidate amongst the remaining contenders. As there were seven or eight Colleges in each group and about seventy places to allocate within it, fluctuations tended to average out, and by-and-large Colleges felt that they got the number of places they deserved. Before the DES intervention, overseas students were not differentiated from home students in the selection process.

However, after the change of rules, this system could not include overseas applicants. Neither could it be applied to them as a separate operation; with an average of less than one overseas place per college, injustices would be bound to arise. Taking the view to which I think all Colleges actually subscribe, and which is summarised by:

- From the candidate’s point of view, it is more important to get a place somewhere, than to get one at a particular College;
- From the Colleges’ point of view, we want the best possible collective intake of students to Cambridge, whilst, within that, giving as many of them as possible their first choice College,

a small *ad hoc* committee consisting of the Secretary of the STC and a representative from each of the three groups was given the task of considering all the overseas medical applicants that

the Colleges wished to take, and drawing up a batting order long enough (actually, short enough) to match the few available places. These were then allocated without regard to the numbers going to any particular College or group.

The principles set out above guide the admissions process in general and are covered much more fully in the chapter that deals with that topic.<sup>15</sup> The reason for mentioning them here is that implementing them calls for a lot of inter-college cooperation and the STC is the channel through which it is provided.<sup>16</sup>

My final example of the serious and important work carried out by the STC is concerned with examinations that were used to assess the academic ability of those seeking entry to Cambridge. The traditional method of doing this was through the Cambridge Scholarship Examination, which was used not just to decide who should be awarded a scholarship or exhibition, but also to select some of those without such an award who could be offered ‘commoners places’.<sup>17</sup> There were also Ordinary Entrance Examinations, run by the individual Colleges, that did not have entrance awards attached.<sup>18</sup> I have been given to un-

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<sup>15</sup>See chapter 3.

<sup>16</sup>Or, for those who advocate the University’s adopting a more business-like approach, ‘is the process for onwardly progressing the delivery of this mission objective, going forward’.

<sup>17</sup>The offers of places were sometimes conditional on later achieving particular A-level grades, but these were not infrequently set at a nominal level. Under Government regulations, two A-level passes were required as a qualification for state financial support.

<sup>18</sup>I don’t suppose that it is strictly true, but it used to be said that a former Master of Clare, who was also in charge of admissions to the College,



derstand that prior to World War II the latter was the normal mode of entry for most ‘average’ students.

The Scholarship examination was held in Cambridge in early December for entry in the following October, or sometimes in the October after that. Over the years some changes in its format were made – papers were sat in Schools rather than at Cambridge, some less demanding questions were set for those in the second, rather than the third, year of the Sixth Form, provision was made for those taking ‘new’ A-level courses, e.g. Nuffield Physics – but, with the timing of the examination remaining unaltered, it continued to be the general perception in the educational sector that pupils from those schools that could run a third-year Sixth Form had an unfair advantage.

As a result of the abolition in the late nineteen seventies of state-funded places at Direct Grant Schools, and of most state Grammar Schools,<sup>19</sup> the schools able to run a ‘seventh-term’ class, as preparation for the Oxbridge Scholarship Examination, were confined to the independent sector.

The Colleges, as the bodies that decide on who should be admitted to Cambridge, were faced with a difficult decision. The Entrance Scholarships had a long tradition, encouraged ad-

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had the only three copies of the Ordinary Entrance Examination papers in his pocket, and that they never left the examination room except in his pocket!

<sup>19</sup>Those that escaped closure, over 150 spread throughout England, but with concentrations in Kent, Lincolnshire, and Buckinghamshire, continued to attract academically able boys and girls, and they still secure high rankings in academic league tables.

vanced study at schools, and, in the past, had been awarded to many of those now responsible for deciding their future. However, it was accepted that there was an overwhelming case for trying to produce a level playing field when it came to whatever criteria were used to determine Cambridge admissions; and a demanding level for the written papers was certainly one of those. The only solution was to abandon the seventh-term examination and replace it with hurdles that could be tackled during a normal two-year A-level course.

This historic step was taken for the 1987 would-be entrants, and I recall the calendar year 1986 as the only year in my time as Senior and Admissions Tutor when there were no written examinations with a decisive bearing on Cambridge admissions. A subcommittee of the STC was set up to consider the implications of trying to move to a sixth-term examination that would not interfere with a school's A-level programme and would provide sufficient discrimination between the candidates for our purposes, discrimination that A-levels themselves did not provide.<sup>20</sup>

The subcommittee consulted widely and eventually reported to the main STC that it thought that the various desirable objectives were achievable. In brief, most candidates would apply by mid-September of their second year in the Sixth Form to

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<sup>20</sup>One College did rely totally on A-levels, but at the price of normally asking for four subjects at grade A, even though pupils at many state schools were not able, for timetable reasons, to take more than three. As it had a 'corner' in this market, the College was successful academically, but I doubt whether this would have been the case if several other Colleges had followed suit.

their first-choice College, also naming their next two choices; they would be interviewed in early December, and a letter indicating whether or not they would receive a conditional offer would be sent out in January. Any conditional offer they received would require reaching stated standards in three A-levels and so-called STEP papers<sup>21</sup> in one or two specified subjects.

The STEP papers were to be ones that would require knowledge of no more than the topics contained in the corresponding National Cores, which were the compulsory bases for all A-level syllabuses. All such material would therefore have been covered by all candidates, whichever Examination Board or optional extensions they had taken. If questions were to be set on any topic not in the Core, the topic also had to be outside the extended syllabuses of *all* the Examination Boards. The difficulty of the papers was, of course, to be greater than that of A-levels, and the questions were to be framed so as to require deeper thought and more ‘joined-up thinking’ than had by then become the norm.<sup>22</sup>

It was further recommended that STEP should be a public examination run by one of the Examination Boards, so that

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<sup>21</sup>I say ‘so-called’ because, for want of a better working title, they were prosaically called *Sixth Term Examination Papers*. The acronym happened to convey one of the qualities that was being sought in them, and the name stuck.

<sup>22</sup>By this I mean, taking a science question as an example, that the candidate should be given appropriate data, but, with few or no hints, have to construct for themselves a way of arriving at the required answer. This is to be contrasted with an approach based on a printed question or instruction for each and every block of one or two marks.

so far as schools were concerned it was, administratively, just like any other A-level examination entry. The results would be published at the same time as A-levels and made available to Colleges in the same way as for A-levels. The only difference between the two was that, on request, a College would be given sight of a candidate's actual script; this facility was not used often, but could be helpful in those subjects for which essays were required.

All of this took a lot of arranging, and for quite a number of College Fellows became a continuing commitment. In order to ensure that the questions set tested the qualities Colleges sought, they were co-opted to serve on the setting panels; as an example, the Physics panel consisted of two Schoolteachers, whose schools sat different A-level Physics exams, a Lecturer from another UK University, and myself.

The STEP papers ran for about fifteen years, and three of them are still in use today for those wishing to read Mathematics at Cambridge, or at one of a few other Universities. But in all other areas, starting with the Arts subjects, they began to fall out of favour. Some schools reported that they could not find the resources to support students aiming beyond A-level standard, and some Directors of Studies preferred to see essays written under school conditions, or to set their own mini-exam at the time of the interviews. Although the timing of them had permanently changed,<sup>23</sup> in terms of the tests undertaken by the

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<sup>23</sup>The abolition of seventh term candidates, must have made life easier for some boarding schools, as there would no longer be students needing accommodation for only part of a school year.

majority of Cambridge applicants, the wheel had come pretty well full circle – and had taken about seventy years to do so!

The activities of the Senior Tutors' Committee weren't always quite so heavyweight as the previous examples would suggest, and occasionally the STC became involved in a storm in a teacup. One such example, involving a lot of fuss over something that turned out to be relatively minor, was the apparently serious detrimental effect that inter-college rowing was having on lectures and practicals.

The episode began when the Chairman of the Faculty Board of Physics and Chemistry, Professor McIntosh, acting in his official capacity, wrote to The Secretary General of the Faculties,<sup>24</sup> the Masters of Clare and another College, and the Secretaries of the Councils of the Schools,<sup>25</sup> expressing the Board's concern over the matter. The crux of the complaint was an allegation that rowing races organised by the Clare Boat Club and a different competition run by the other Boat Club were scheduled (to quote the letter)

‘to run all day, starting at 0900 on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday of this week.’

and that those taking part would have to miss lectures and, in some cases, assessed practical work. His letter went on to estimate the number whose work would be affected at several hundreds.

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<sup>24</sup>The most senior officer of the General Board

<sup>25</sup>Arts and Humanities, Biological Sciences, Clinical Medicine, Humanities and Social Sciences, Physical Sciences, and Technology.

The Clare races to which reference was being made are known as the Clare Novice Regatta; it was, and still is, a competition that is restricted to VIII's comprised of members who have had at most three month's rowing experience, or have never coxed in a race before, as appropriate. It is open to crews from all undergraduate Colleges, has men's and women's divisions, and the best boats, as nominated by the individual Colleges, have a subdivision of their own. The course is on a part of the river Cam that is straight enough and wide enough to permit side-by-side racing of two boats, and the competition is run on a straight knockout basis. The Clare Boat Club organises, umpires and marshals the whole event.

The Master of the other 'guilty' College, as one would expect, wrote a conciliatory reply, promising that his College would aim to do better in future, but pointing out that the races in question had been around for a very long time – probably much longer than assessed practical work – and expressing the hope that in a balanced University curriculum there should perhaps be room for both.

During the following two weeks letters were flying in all directions. The School of Physical Sciences replied to the original letter, with copies to all the other recipients, expressing its strong disapproval of the situation, and declaring that extra-curricular activities should take place in the afternoon, i.e. after 1.00 pm. The Chairman of the School of Technology wrote to the Secretary of the STC, with copies to everybody mentioned so far, as well as two other named Professors, declaring the situation unacceptable. He also reported a remark on the 'grave

damage that would be done to the University' if a HEFCE<sup>26</sup> teaching quality assessment panel paid a (surprise) visit at the time of the races.

The Secretary of the STC asked me if the matter should go on the agenda for the next meeting; I think that I said it should, even if it turned out to be no more than reporting something that had died a death. Of course, this was all too late to affect that particular year's Regatta as Prof. McIntosh's original letter was sent out only days before it took place.

The Master of Clare sent me a copy of everything he had received and I wrote to the Captain of the Clare Boat Club asking him to supply factual information about what had actually happened at the Regatta. His helpful reply formed the basis of my letter to Prof. McIntosh, who also happened to be a long-standing colleague of mine at the Cavendish Laboratory. The Captain also assured me that, even though he was a scientist, he had not missed any lectures or practicals as the result of rowing. I repeat here the main thrust of the original letter, so that the reader may refer to it when reading my response.

'run all day, starting at 0900 on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday of this week.'

The response, which perhaps was a bit too laid back, read as follows:

Prof B L McIntosh  
Faculty Board of Physics and Chemistry

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<sup>26</sup>Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Dear Barry

### **Rowing Races during Lectures and Classes**

Now that the admissions season and the Christmas break are over, I have been able to consider the information I have gathered on the above topic and respond to your letter to the Master of Clare. I will confine my observations to the Clare Novice Regatta, as I cannot comment on the other events.

On the one hand, your letter overstates the time involved; the Clare Novice regatta was run on two days only, from 12.30 pm (not 9.00 am) on Wednesday and all day Saturday (though half of the crews were eliminated by 10.00 am). On the Wednesday each crew raced only once, and clearly only a small fraction rowed before 1.00 pm. On the other hand, you have underestimated the total number of people involved at some time or other; there were 109 novice crews, about 100 marshals and some number of spectators – an estimated total of 1300 people.

Saturday rowing is necessary because, it appears, a Sunday Regatta is not allowed.<sup>27</sup>

You might also wish to know that, so far as training is concerned, Novice crews are only allowed on the river before 9.00 am or after 3.30 pm, and so the impact of this on morning lectures should be minimal.

In summary, the impact on lectures of the Clare Novice

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<sup>27</sup>By the Cam Conservators, the public body responsible for this part of the river.



Regatta is not as great as that implied in your letter, and in practical terms affects only one Saturday morning. And it does give over one quarter of Cambridge's annual intake something to work towards in their first term!

Yours,

*Ken*

cc  
Secretary General  
The Masters of Clare and Another College  
Secretaries of the Councils of the Schools

I don't remember the issue ever being discussed at the Senior Tutors' Committee, though I think that it was reported.

Before leaving the topic of the Senior Tutors' Committee, I should add that it had a number of more permanent subcommittees, and that most Senior Tutors served on one or two of them at some time or other. Amongst them were subcommittees to deal with the admissions assessment system, student welfare, interviewing overseas candidates, and medical quotas.

I chaired the one that dealt with making the total admissions match the DES targets and, together with one other Senior Tutor and the University's Deputy Registrar, constituted the subcommittee that allocated the resources of the Vacation Grant Fund. The latter was money to support students who had to be resident in Cambridge during the vacations, to prepare for examination resits, to attend transfer courses, or to undertake a compulsory dissertation or project. Clinical medical students

undertaking placements at hospitals away from Cambridge, and Veterinary students seeing practice on farms around the country were also supported by the Fund.

As explained earlier, the post of Senior Tutor in Clare used to incorporate several others, that were later separated out. The task of ‘being in charge of discipline’, later defined as being the Dean Of Students, comes into play in several of the chapters that follow, and for that reason I will not elaborate on that particular aspect here. Similarly, the role of an undergraduate Admissions Tutor, which is treated in some depth elsewhere (chapter 3), will not be further discussed at this stage.

When I started as Senior Tutor, the role of Financial Tutor was largely restricted to the College’s part in the administration of Vacation Grants, making annual tick-box returns to Local Education Authorities (LEAs) about the students they supported financially, making decisions about the eligibility of students to receive College book grants,<sup>28</sup> and, last but not least, chasing up those who were late in settling their college bills.

However, in 1990 all that changed, with the introduction of student loans and the founding of the Student Loan Company, based in Glasgow. This took away the role of the LEAs, replaced most full or partial maintenance grants with repayable loans, and required the administration of hardship grants, some funded by the Government and others by the Colleges (both individually and collectively). The move to a single external

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<sup>28</sup>Initially to encourage wider reading outside their subjects of study, but increasingly to subsidise the purchase of textbooks.

funding body<sup>29</sup> ought to have made things easier. But it didn't, because of all the other mechanisms that had to be set up.<sup>30</sup> By the time I retired from the Senior Tutorship, the financial support of students had become a major administrative load, and it probably did merit a post of its own.

One of the other duties that falls to the Senior Tutor, though I have not previously mentioned it, is that of being the appropriate College Spokesperson, when one is needed. Such a need does not arise often, as most queries from the media are addressed to the University, rather than to a specific College. But if events of general interest relate to specific people, and those people are in some way connected with a particular College, then questions come its way. Thus, during my period in office, I contributed the occasional sound-bite to television or radio, but was once on air for a more protracted interview.<sup>31</sup>

Many academic textbooks, including some of my own, end each chapter with a summary of the main points, results and conclusions in that chapter. For most chapters in this book that would be either impossible or excessively repetitive, but for this

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<sup>29</sup>For students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland, but, ironically given where the SLC was based, not for Scottish students.

<sup>30</sup>And perhaps because whenever I phoned the SLC and a male Glaswegian answered, I had great difficulty in understanding what was being said. The women were no problem!

<sup>31</sup>One of the four Cambridge graduates (all members of a scientific expedition) who were taken as hostages in 1996 by the Free Papua Movement and, 128 days later, were rescued by the Indonesian Army, was a recent Clare graduate. Both BBC Scotland and his district radio station made programmes about his experiences and asked the College to contribute.

introductory chapter, which aims to give the reader some idea of the scope of a tutorial post, it may perhaps be justified. So, for someone holding the dual posts of a University Teaching Officer and a College Senior Tutor some thirty years ago, the roll call of the areas of responsibility was something like: Lectures; Practicals or Classes; Examining; Departmental administration; College Education Officer; Personal Tutor; Admissions Tutor; Financial Tutor; Dean of Students; College spokesperson; College Committees; some University Committees; and perhaps a little research!

Pretty well, Jack of All Trades, but .....

## Chapter 2

# Spreading the Word

Some fifty or sixty years ago the first physical contact that a potential undergraduate had with a Cambridge College was, in most cases, when he<sup>1</sup> came to Cambridge to sit the Scholarship or Entrance Examination. Thirty years ago, it was when s/he<sup>2</sup> attended a College Open Day prior to completing their UCCA (Universities Central Council on Admissions) application form. Nowadays, for some, it is as a twelve- or thirteen-year-old, when a class visit to Cambridge is arranged through a College's outreach programme. Such is the change that has come about as

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<sup>1</sup>As it overwhelmingly was, since there were only three Colleges that admitted women.

<sup>2</sup>As it became, since by then there were no Colleges that didn't admit women.

a result of the Colleges' collective endeavours to allow every school-leaver in the country with the appropriate ability to consider Cambridge as a possible next step.

For most of my time as an Admissions Tutor it was the second of these three scenarios that was the norm. The timing of the various Colleges' Open Days, about seventy in total, was included in the University's prospectus for the following year; they covered the period from March to September. Normally they were for prospective students in all subjects, but most Colleges held one that was restricted to would-be Arts students and one that was specifically for potential Scientists. If a University Department was also planning an Open Day, as Classics and Engineering did regularly, the college programme would be arranged so that the relevant students could also visit the appropriate department on the same day.

If the Open Day fell during a University vacation, the College would be able to offer accommodation for the previous night to those who came from furthest away and requested it when they booked their place. On the day itself, a typical programme would consist of: a reception organised and manned (peopled) by current undergraduate volunteers; a general introductory talk by an Admissions Tutor; a subject-based discussion with a Fellow, who would explain what is expected of a candidate in that subject; a (free) lunch in the Buttery;<sup>3</sup> a second subject-based discussion *or* go to a Departmental Open Day *or* wander round the College grounds and compare notes with other

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<sup>3</sup>Love Lasagne, love Clare – our wonderful Kitchen Manager was Italian!

attendees; reassemble for an open question and answer session with both Admissions Tutors; optionally answer a questionnaire about what you got out of the day, and how it could have been improved; set off for home loaded with pamphlets, information sheets, and (we hoped) enhanced aspirations.

As I'm sure Admissions Tutors in all Colleges did, my fellow Admissions Tutor and I kept records of how many of those who came to an Open Day at Clare subsequently applied to the College, and, for those that did, how successful their applications were, statistically speaking. In most years about 15% of those who attended the Open Days did apply, and it nearly always turned out that they had a better than average success rate. But there was no obvious reason for this; most of the College's Fellows who carried out the interviews had not met any of the candidates before, and, even for those who had, it was typically six months ago and in a group setting. Perhaps enthusiasm for their subject, a quality most definitely sought by interviewers, is reflected in a similar enthusiasm for finding out, before deciding where to apply, as much as possible about where it can be studied most effectively.

College Open Days were not the only way in which Admissions Tutors attempted to 'spread the word'; events away from Cambridge formed an important part of the process. Participation in these was undertaken by small groups or by individuals, not as representatives of particular Colleges, but on behalf of the Colleges collectively, synonymous in most people's minds with Cambridge University. Visits to schools by invitation were not uncommon, and I undertook several of these.

A rather more unusual event was one organised by the Bedfordshire Education Department, in which I took part several times. For this, about a dozen Oxbridge Admissions Tutors would be asked to assemble in Bedford and then, after a ‘pep talk’ by the County’s Chief Education Officer, would be dispersed in pairs to Schools or Sixth Form Colleges throughout the County. There they would be asked to sit in on, or even take, a lesson or two, and answer questions from assembled sixth-formers and Teaching Staff. The occasion on which I was paired with a Philosopher from another Cambridge College was, so far as I can recall, the only time I have ever attended a lecture on *Morals & Ethics*! I did wonder whether the CEO had a hidden agenda.

More orthodox were the Higher Education Conferences organised by many of the Education Departments throughout the Country. At these, each represented University<sup>4</sup> was allocated a desk, typically with one chair behind it, and two or three in front – and, it has to be said, not much room on it. My overall conclusion from such conferences was that the students that were brought to them fell into two distinct groups. There were those with a genuine interest in a subject who asked well-considered questions about the requirements and structure of the appropriate course at any particular University. There were also those who did not want to talk about anything, and saw their only aim as collecting as many university prospectuses as they could.

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<sup>4</sup>On one of these occasions, my Oxford counterpart just happened to be the Chaplain at my son and future daughter-in-law’s College, and I unexpectedly learned something of life in the Other Place.



The latter were often mistakenly encouraged in this by the Conference organisers, who handed out plastic carrier bags; I'm sure that most of the spoils remained permanently unread.

The central Inter-Collegiate Admissions Office tended to ask the same Admissions Tutor to represent Cambridge each year at any particular Conference, and so for many years I undertook the assignments to Hull and Brighton. Fortunately, the Conferences were nearly all held during the summer months, and so getting up at 5 a.m. so as to be there in time to have a 'packed breakfast' in the venue car park, set up some display stands behind the allocated desk, and compose myself ready for a 9.30 start, was all done in daylight and therefore not too much of an ordeal.

Not directly connected with admissions – except, perhaps, in the minds of those with talented daughters – was the decision by Clare, taken in the late sixties and implemented in the early seventies, to become a co-educational College. The change was motivated by the virtually unanswerable case for giving women the same opportunity of a Cambridge education as had been enjoyed by men for nearly seven hundred years. At the time the decision was made there were twenty undergraduate Colleges admitting men and only three admitting women.

Before the change took place, a Steering Committee, led by my predecessor as Clare's Senior Tutor, had wide-ranging consultations, both informally and through the Senior Tutors' Committee, with all the other Colleges and the University Authorities. At these it was agreed that Colleges that did not 'go

mixed' in the first wave, should not do so until a further three years had elapsed. Two other Colleges, Churchill and King's, joined Clare in taking in their first mixed group of Freshers in 1972. That we had made the right decision was overwhelmingly confirmed during the next few years, as all of the remaining previously all-male Colleges opened their doors to women.<sup>5</sup> As remarked elsewhere, there are now more places in Cambridge available to women than there are to men!

But the rush to go mixed that developed in Cambridge once the moratorium was over, hardly compared with the virtual stampede that occurred in Oxford. When the first mixed intakes had had time to settle down and some kind of review of how it had gone was possible, a joint meeting with the Oxford Admissions Tutors was arranged. Clearly, the experiences of the three pioneer Cambridge Colleges, as reported by their Senior and Admissions Tutors, must have created very favourable impressions, as most of the Oxford undergraduate Colleges took the plunge almost overnight, some only two years after the Cambridge change.

Amongst those that decided on a mixed undergraduate population was one previously all-women's Oxford College, and shortly afterwards it did so it asked to be 'twinned' with Clare, thus, at that time, making Clare the only Cambridge College with two undergraduate 'siblings' in the Other Place. One, Oriel, was by accident of birth (both founded in 1326), and the other, St Hugh's, as the result of a decision made some six

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<sup>5</sup>And one previously all-female College, Girton, opened its doors to male undergraduates.

hundred and fifty years later.<sup>6</sup> In case there is any doubt in the mind of the reader, these twinning arrangements are not ancient traditions and do not go back any further than the start of the Twentieth Century.

The decision to open the doors of most, and ultimately all, of the Cambridge Colleges to women was one that aroused interest way beyond those directly concerned with secondary education, and not least amongst former members of the University, and, of course, most of them were men. The Master of Clare wrote to all alumni of the College to explain the decision and the reasons behind it. Those alumni who had able daughters or granddaughters were naturally delighted, and wrote to tell us so. Those who had able sons or grandsons were not so delighted, and also wrote to tell us so. I'm sure that a similar scenario was played out in every other College.

One channel for letting Cambridge Alumni know what is happening in the University is the Cambridge Society, an informal network of former students with branches organised largely on a County basis in the UK or on a more national basis overseas. The local volunteer organisers, as well as arranging events for its members based on what is happening in their area, would sometimes ask the Secretary of the Society if someone from the University could visit them and give a talk on recent developments in Cambridge.

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<sup>6</sup>However, ironically, two years later the Principal of the Oxford Sister College appeared to have forgotten the twinning arrangement with Clare – though its current website has not.

I still consider myself extremely fortunate to have been the one asked to undertake the mission – should I accept it, and who wouldn't – of visiting the Channel Islands to talk to the local branch of the Cambridge Society, as well as the principal schools on the Islands, about admissions in general and the effects of going co-ed in particular. Quite apart from the wonderful hospitality I was shown, I will never forget the experience of flying, seated next to the pilot in an open-cockpit plane, from Jersey to Guernsey, with a perfect blue sky above and a perfect blue sea below.

Another mission on which I was happy to be sent was one to the Cumbria Branch of the Society. Again the main topic was the effect and consequences of going mixed, and this would have been unremarkable if it weren't for one thing. That one thing was that the local Society organisers, my wife, and I were to be entertained to lunch by Willie Whitelaw, MP for Penrith & the Border, one-time Home Secretary, and for ten years Margaret Thatcher's Deputy.<sup>7</sup> This meant that the grounds in which his house stood were crawling with policemen, some of whom seemed to be trying to hide in the bushes, whilst others seemed equally determined to ensure that their presence was noted.

The meeting, held in the local Village Hall, went well, but just as the question and answer session that followed my talk was drawing to a close, a Senior Police Officer entered the Hall through a side door and slipped me a note which he strongly

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<sup>7</sup>And also the inspiration for her famous pronouncement that "Every Prime Minister needs a Willie." He also once accused Harold Wilson of going around the country "stirring up apathy".

implied should be read out to the assembly. Here goes. “Ladies and Gentlemen, the result of the Grand National which has just finished, is: 1st West Tip, 2nd Young Driver, and appropriately, given the circumstances, the 3rd was Classified. I’m sorry to have to report that Mr Snugfit<sup>8</sup> was only fourth.” Well, they *had* given up their Saturday afternoon to show the flag, and they *were* entitled to know!

The World Wide Web became a reality shortly before I retired as an Admissions Tutor, but individual college websites were not developed until a few years later. Consequently, during my stewardship, this particular form of interface with the outside World played no part. Nowadays, a state of the art website is a *sine qua non* for every College, Department, Research Group, and, in many cases, Individual (distinguished or not).

There is little doubt that the single issue that brings Cambridge and its Colleges into contact, and sometimes into apparent conflict, with the educational system at large is that of admissions statistics. Every few weeks the national press report a complaint by some representative of the state sector about the fact that about 40% of Oxbridge admissions are from the private sector even though only 7% of students are educated there. With about the same frequency, there are complaints by representatives of the independent sector alleging that Oxbridge Admissions Tutors are showing positive and unfair discrimination in favour of state-school pupils by making them offers that are below the level stated in the University’s prospectus, whilst

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<sup>8</sup>The pre-race favourite.

rejecting some candidates from the private sector whose results are predicted to exceed this level.<sup>9</sup>

Almost needless to say, from my point of view, and I think that of every other Oxbridge Admissions Tutor, both past and present, both observations are wrong and neither stands up to any kind of rigorous objective scrutiny.

For the first, it may well be true that only 7% of the nation's students are educated in the private sector, but the percentage increases significantly to 18% when only those who stay on to take A-levels, or their equivalent, are considered – and doing this is ‘your starter for one (or nought)’ when considering any sensible population of potential candidates. As it would be no kindness to any student to admit them to a course with which they would struggle, the only realistic field of competitors for places consists of those who, if they are taking A-level, have the ability to obtain at least a B grade in all relevant subjects.

That is what I might have written some twenty years ago, but, with more than 25% of *all* candidates now being awarded an A or A\* grade,<sup>10</sup> this minimum level is no longer realistic. To understand the reasons for this, it should first be noted that annually there are over six hundred thousand university applicants<sup>11</sup> and only just over six thousand Oxbridge places

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<sup>9</sup>For Cambridge, currently A\*AA in A-level, or 40-42 plus 776 or 777 at Higher Level in the IB.

<sup>10</sup>For an additional discussion of grade inflation in A-level results, see page 281.

<sup>11</sup>UCAS statistical report on applications for 2012.

available, i.e. only about 1% of all potential applicants *could* be offered a place at Oxford or Cambridge.

If the 8% of A-level subject entries graded A\* were randomly distributed amongst the candidates, and all of them were made the current Cambridge standard offer of A\*AA, there would be eight times as many qualified applicants as either University is permitted to accept, or is able to accommodate. But, of course the distribution is not random and contains very strong correlations, and, in addition, not all of the best A-level students wish to apply to Oxbridge. But even if there were close to a total correlation, i.e. whenever a student obtains one A\* they will nearly always obtain three, there would still be approximately twice as many qualifiers as Cambridge could accept.<sup>12</sup> Hence the additional filter of a searching interview plus some auxiliary submission or test requirement is necessary. Further, given this statistical data, the sentence in the previous paragraph but one now has to be replaced by ‘the only realistic field of competitors for places consists of those who are taking A-level and have the ability to obtain at least an A grade in all relevant subjects’.

Having established that nowadays, because of grade inflation, the minimum requirement for attainment has to be AAA, and that, because of the relevant limits on permitted and practical place numbers, at least one of the subjects needs to be at the A\* level, we now turn to the question of school type and the

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<sup>12</sup>Amongst those accepted by Cambridge in 2011, 31% had obtained A\*A\*A\*, 22% had A\*A\*A, and 22% had the standard-offer level of A\*AA. Nearly all other acceptances had taken other examinations: the IB, the EB, Scottish Advanced Highers, various national Baccalaureates, etc.

alleged biases, in both directions.

The analysis is not totally straightforward because of the existence of a small but important selective maintained sector, as mentioned in the footnote on page 15. In this sector some 12% of A-level grades are A\*s, but I do not know what fraction of the total A-level candidature fall into this category. It is probably small, but certainly not negligible, given that the sector consists of about 150 schools out of a total nationally of about six thousand. The difference between the A\* percentages of the selective and non-selective segments of the maintained sector is ignored in the following simple calculation, but it may be noted that the maintained sector admissions should be a little higher than is actually calculated.

With an A\* requirement included, and assuming that an applicant who obtains an A\* will almost always obtain at least AA to go with it, the estimation is as follows. For the maintained sector, the percentage of A\* results is 5.8, and as 82% of A-level candidates are in this sector, the percentage of offers should be proportional to  $0.058 \times 0.82 = 0.0476$ . The corresponding result for the independent sector, for which the percentage of A\*s is 18.1 is  $0.181 \times 0.18 = 0.0326$ . Thus on a purely random basis within the realistic field of potential applicants the ratio of maintained to independent offers should be  $0.0476 : 0.0326$ , i.e. 59% to 41%.

By pure chance, this is exactly the ratio for the Cambridge 2011 admission cohort. Of course, the calculation is too naive for any great significance to be attached to this chance agreement,



as it takes no account of impressions made at interview, the individual university choices made by the highest-performing sixth formers, the non-random distribution of A\* grades amongst candidates, and, as already noted, the effect of the selective maintained sector. However, it does show that the actual admissions are not too far from what a reasonably objective estimation would indicate as fair, given the identification of the realistic field of candidates and their achievements.

A ratio of 65% to 35% would perhaps be the result of a more sophisticated calculation, if the appropriate data were available to me. But, be that as it may, there is no case for expecting over 90% of admissions to come from the maintained sector, as is implied by those who repeatedly present the ‘only 7% of students . . . . .’ argument. Equally there is no evidence to suggest that the independent sector is being unfavourably treated; if anything they may get slightly favourable treatment. But if this is the case, then it is much more likely to be the result of the attitude of some careers advisers in parts of the comprehensive system than of anything Subject Interviewers and Admissions Tutors may do. Both of the latter want as students the applicants with the greatest possible potential, irrespective of where they may come from.

A few months ago I read of a survey that claimed to show that between thirty and forty percent of higher education advisers in the comprehensive sector would never advise even their very strongest students to apply for Oxbridge; if this is so, then they are doing a terrible disservice to those whose future careers they are guiding. If a potential applicant is persuaded not to

apply, he or she cannot be made an offer, however compelling the case for receiving one would have been – it's as simple as that!

## Chapter 3

# Leading the Way

The somewhat arrogant title of this chapter applies rather more to the distant past than to any current claim, though it has to be said that it was Clare's then Senior Tutor who first proposed to the Cambridge undergraduate Colleges in general the notion of becoming a mixed College, and Clare was in the group of three Colleges that were the first to take that step. Earlier, when, in the 1960's, there was a need for new Colleges that would accept graduate students,<sup>1</sup> Clare was the only College to establish one unaided, using part of its own endowment and financial support

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<sup>1</sup>These Colleges were Cambridge's response to the Bridges Report, which considered the assimilation of researchers, both pre- and post-doctoral, into the College structure.

from its alumni.<sup>2</sup>

It was in 1326 that Clare, then known as University Hall, really led the way, by being the first College to have both Fellows *and* academic Students (as opposed to trainee clerics or clerks) in the *same* establishment; prior to that time Colleges had had only Fellows as members, and students found their own accommodation or lived in Hostels. Nowadays, of course, all Oxbridge Colleges, with one exception,<sup>3</sup> have both Students and Fellows.

That Clare's initial foundation was rather more focussed on the production of graduates, than on pure research and scholarship, can best be judged by the Preamble to the Statutes given to the College by our Foundress, Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare, in 1359, some thirty years after she had taken it under her wing; it changed its name to Clare Hall in about 1339. Though it is a little lengthy, and of course was originally written in Latin, it is reproduced below, in English, so that the reader may appreciate what she had in mind.

**Preamble to the Statutes of the Foundress, 1359**

Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare, to all children of Holy Mother Church who read these words: greeting and remembrance of our deed! Experience, the universal guide, plainly shows that learning is no mean advantage in every rank of life, ecclesiastical or civil. Though many people seek it in many ways, it is best acquired in a

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<sup>2</sup>Two other new graduate Colleges were founded at the same time, one by the University, the other jointly by a group of three Colleges.

<sup>3</sup>All Souls College, Oxford

recognised university community; and when its pupils have acquired it and tasted its sweets, it sends them out well qualified to rise according to their merits to different ranks in church and state. But so many men have been swept away by the ravages of the plague<sup>4</sup> that learning has lately suffered a sad decline in numbers. We, therefore, desiring to assist true religion and to further the public good by promoting learning so far as God has put it in our power to do so, have turned our attention to the University of Cambridge in the diocese of Ely, where there is a body of students. Our purpose is that through their study and teaching at the university they should discover and acquire the precious pearl of learning, so that it does not stay hidden under a bushel but is displayed abroad to enlighten those who walk in the dark paths of ignorance. And to enable the scholars residing in our said college to live in harmony under the protection of a firm discipline and so enjoy greater freedom to study, we have with the advice of experts made certain statutes and ordinances, set out below to stand in perpetuity.

For nearly seven hundred years, the College has been aiming to admit to its ranks those with the potential to make the significant contribution to civilization that our Foundress had in mind. There is no doubt that, amongst those admitted over the years, there are many who didn't, not least because, for nearly all of that time, many of the available places could only be filled by the sons of wealthy families. Some places, and relevant fi-

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<sup>4</sup>The Black Death, 1348-50.

nance, could be gained through competitive Open Scholarships and Exhibitions, but these were relatively few in number and potential students who did not attend one of the major public schools were unlikely to receive appropriate preparation for the examination involved.

However, that situation changed radically soon after the Second World War with the introduction of potential state support for all would-be undergraduates. Since then, it has been realistic to attempt to fill *all* available places from the students with the strongest claims to become ‘well qualified to rise according to their merits’. As is indicated in other chapters,<sup>5</sup> over that time there has been a variety of changes in the actual manner of trying to make appropriate assessments of those claims, but in the end the objective has always been the same.

When I started as Senior Tutor at Clare, the Joint Colleges’ Examination (JCE) was still in place, but had reached the stage of having all Colleges holding their examinations at the same time in late November, and with the same papers sat by all candidates in any particular subject, regardless of their first-preference College.<sup>6</sup>

With every secondary school in the country in a position to put forward any student they thought had the necessary potential, and all of the places open to both men and women, the

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<sup>5</sup>Principally in chapter 1.

<sup>6</sup>Prior to that, each of three groups of Colleges had set their own paper in any particular subject. Even earlier, whilst most Colleges held their examinations in early December, a few did not do so until January or February.

number of applicants became almost too large to handle. For each of the one hundred and twenty or so freshman places available at Clare each year, there were about six strongly-supported applicants. Further, in order to yield a balanced assessment, it was felt that a potential student should be interviewed by at least three people, and they should include a Tutor and two Fellows who might become their supervisors if they were admitted. These considerations, together with the examination schedule, largely determined the associated pattern of interviews.

The competition for places was sufficiently fierce that anyone to whom a place might be offered would have to perform at least 'quite well' in the written papers. On this basis, the pattern that was adopted was to pick out from the submitted applications<sup>7</sup> the very strongest candidates and interview them in late September. Then, after the written papers had been marked in early December, to call for interview in mid-December those who had reached the 'quite well' level but had not yet been interviewed. In practice, the number of candidates actually interviewed was approximately half of the number who applied; roughly a thousand face-to-face interviews were carried out each year, with each Tutor having a schedule of about sixty.

With the later abolition of the December examination and an entry closing date in mid-October, the December interviewing load increased considerably on everybody involved. Nearly every candidate was predicted to get, or in a few cases already had got, top A-level grades; consequently, in order to give them

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<sup>7</sup>At that time candidates had to submit a special Cambridge application form by early September.

all a fair chance to stake their claim, virtually every one had to be interviewed. This produced a very large load, especially for Tutors. I might add here that, in recent years, some ‘deselection’ from interview has been made possible by the introduction by public examination bodies of aptitude tests for would-be lawyers, doctors and vets, and a more general ‘thinking skills’ test. These are taken, and their results are published, before the interview lists have to be drawn up.

Although the realistic field of potential admissions has grown enormously in the last seventy years, there are still some restrictions on who can be a candidate for admission. The restrictions are, in effect, imposed by the University’s Ordinances and are largely concerned with the previous general education of potential undergraduates. They are expressed in terms of the qualifications obtained at school and require sufficient achievement in a number of subjects, which normally includes English and Maths or a Science. There is no longer a specific list of exclusions. At one time there was, and included (in no particular order of undesirability) burglars, anyone expelled from Oxford, and harassers of women; we still try to maintain those standards.

Once the interviews were over, the other Clare Admissions Tutor and I required each Director of Studies to consult with his or her colleagues, and with the Tutor who had interviewed all of the candidates in their subject, and then draw up a ‘batting order’ for those to whom they would like to make offers of conditional or unconditional places<sup>8</sup> They were also to indicate

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<sup>8</sup>These could only be made to those who had already taken their A-levels



any candidate to whom they did not wish to make an offer, but felt that he or she would stand a reasonable chance of receiving one from another College via the Inter-college Pool.

The Pool operates on either side of Christmas and is a very important mechanism for ensuring that a candidate's chances of securing a Cambridge place to read a particular subject are, so far as possible, not affected – either one way or the other – by their choice of first-preference College. When asked about the Pool and college preference by prospective applicants at Open Days or Higher Education Conferences (see the previous chapter), my normal advice was 'Put down what you would like, and accept anything that is offered to you – the important thing is to get a place somewhere; the course and degree are the same whichever College you go to.'

With the battling orders drawn up there would be a final selection meeting, or a series of meetings, with the Admissions Tutors. Although the College aimed to have roughly equal numbers on the Arts and Science sides, there were no fixed quotas for individual subjects; again the aim was to take the best available, irrespective of subject. Consequently, for example, History would be competing with English and Economics, and Engineering with Mathematics and Medical Sciences.

Who attended that final meeting was changed when the Colleges' Joint Examination (taken before the meeting) was replaced by STEP examinations (taken after it) in 1986. Prior to the changeover, it was the Tutors who, armed with the JCE

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or an equivalent examination.

results and their batting orders, put the cases for applicants in those subjects for which they had interviewed. After the change, with no concrete examination results yet available, it was more appropriate for the academic interviewers in each particular subject, to justify their order of preference to the Admissions Tutors. In either scenario, it was the Admissions Tutors' role to play the devil's advocate and query, particularly near the cut-off point in each list, exactly why the preference order was as it was.

Before 1986, all six or seven Tutors were present at the final meeting<sup>9</sup> and made the final decisions, although it often took all day to do so. After that time, following separate meetings with the interviewers from each of the two dozen or so subjects, the very final meeting was a discussion between myself and the Arts Admissions Tutor; each was there to keep the other one 'honest'. Not that it ever came to that; we seldom disagreed about who should get the last few places, but when we did, we called in the two or three relevant Tutors and let them decide.

A somewhat easier task, carried out by the Admissions Tutors, but heeding the recommendations of the interviewers in each subject, was deciding whose files should go into the Inter-college Pool mentioned earlier. During the twenty years in question, Clare received significantly more first-preference applications than would be expected for a medium-sized College,<sup>10</sup> and

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<sup>9</sup>Including myself, despite also being an Admissions Tutor, as I had a full tutorial side and had carried out all the tutorial interviews for the subjects studied by my tutorial pupils.

<sup>10</sup>It still does.

so the number of candidates who merited consideration in the Pool was about the same as the number to whom we were able to offer places.

All application files that were going to be placed in the Pool had to be internally organised according to a common scheme, supplied with a full set of interview reports, and summarised on a standard cover sheet. With more than a hundred files to deal with in this way, neither Admissions Tutors nor Directors of Studies had much time for Christmas shopping.

So that the reader can be assured that the Pool largely achieved its aim, as described earlier, I should record that each year about half of Clare's Pool Candidates were made offers by other Colleges. As might be expected, with all subjects considered, about one third of the Colleges were net donors to the Pool, about one third were net receivers, and the remaining third were broadly neutral, accepting roughly the same number of applicants from the Pool as they passed on to other Colleges through it.

There was one further quite important aspect to the admissions procedure that I haven't yet mentioned, and that was the music of the College, both formal and informal. Quite apart from admissions for those wishing to read the Music Tripos, there was the question of Organ, Choral and, in the later years, Instrumental Awards. All of these offered their recipients some professional coaching to enhance their performance, but some also provided opportunities to be involved in events on a national, or even international, scale.

Many of Cambridge's Colleges hold regular services in their Chapels,<sup>11</sup> and nearly all Chapels have an organ to accompany the services. Consequently, nearly all Colleges offer Organ Scholarships and normally aim to make an appointment every other year, so that when the Senior Organ Scholar is in his or her third and final year, there is a freshman Junior Organ Scholar learning the ropes and preparing to take over as the Senior Scholar for two years.

Because of the commitment to services, appointing the best Organ Scholar available at the appropriate time is a virtual necessity, and, in practice, the Directors of Music in the various Colleges consider the whole field of potential Organ Scholars. Almost immediately after the trials, held in late September, there would be an Awards meeting at which all the Directors would be present.

Those who wanted to take any of the candidates who had put their College as first choice laid claim to them; candidates not taken immediately became available to their next preference College, and so on, until their preference list was exhausted; after that it was a free-for-all. However, an Organ Scholar is still an undergraduate and, however skilled they might be at the console, if they are likely to struggle with their chosen course (nearly always the Music Tripos) then an Admissions Tutor should say 'No'; an effective Organ Scholar needs to be better than average academically, as he or she will be required to devote a significant amount of time to Chapel duties.

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<sup>11</sup>In most cases two or three a week during Full Term, but almost daily for those Colleges with a Cathedral tradition and Choir Schools.

This was certainly so in Clare, where, it seemed to me, that in some ways the Organ Scholar was a rallying point for the Chapel Choir, generally agreed to be one of the best, if not *the* best, SATB<sup>12</sup> choir in Cambridge. Although I have no musical skill whatsoever – and was relegated to handing out and collecting in the hymn- or song-books as my contribution to music lessons when I was at school – I attended many of the Organ Trials, not only to keep an eye on how things were going, but also to enjoy the music. Despite not being able to read a note, I heard the Bach *Tocatta and Fugue in D minor*, the compulsory element for every candidate, so often, that I could sometimes tell when a mistake was made.

I did not attend the Choral trials, which were held immediately following those for Organ Scholarships, and therefore before any firm academic results were available. Here, the numbers involved were much greater, and there was no absolute need to find somebody with the appropriate talents. Of course, the Director of Music didn't see it quite like that with respect to the make-up of the Choir, though he readily accepted that any awards that Clare made had to be to students who merited an academic place.

My contribution to the trials was to 'mark his card', either before or during the trials, and, in particular, to indicate those candidates who appeared to me on academic grounds to be non-starters for a place. He would then make his selection from those amongst the remaining candidates who displayed the necessary

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<sup>12</sup>Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass

vocal talents; after that it was a matter of hoping that they made favourable impressions on the relevant Directors of Studies, and subsequently on the CJE or STEP examiners.

The Instrumental Awards looked after themselves as only students who were just about to start their first year were involved; all academic questions had been favourably settled by that stage. As a College, Clare had rather more than its fair share of Instrumental Award Holders. Theoretically, this, and the Choral awards, could have been a worry for the College's Bursar, as each one involved an (admittedly modest) monetary award, and the professional teaching had to be paid for as well. Even outside the various musical award schemes and the Music Tripos, there was plenty of musical talent; I recall remarking one year that, based on Grade 8 or better, the Natural Scientists in the College could, by themselves, put together a very respectable orchestra.

Not all of a year's intake came straight from school; as indicated briefly in the opening chapter, there was a direct exchange scheme of new graduates between Clare College and Yale University. The arrangement was supported financially by an American charitable foundation set up in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century by members of the Mellon banking family. One of them, Paul Mellon,<sup>13</sup> became an Affiliated student at Clare after graduat-

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<sup>13</sup>This is not a pseudonym. Paul Mellon endowed two Colleges in Yale, as well as the Masterships and Deanships of all twelve of its Colleges, was a leading force in establishing the National Gallery in Washington D.C., and was the owner of *Mill Reef*, one of the greatest racehorses of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. When *Mill Reef* was retired from racing, Paul Mellon gave him

ing from Yale in the late 1920s. Both Clare and Yale, to say nothing of the Art World in general, have had every reason to be grateful for his unfailing generosity, right up until his death in 1999.

The two Affiliated students coming to Clare were selected by a panel in New Haven, and there was nothing to be done at our end except receive them. But, for about half the time covered by these reflections, the two Clare graduates going to Yale were nominated by the Tutors after they had interviewed all of those applying. Later, a rather more carefully selected interview panel, including the Master and any of the Fellowship who had actually studied at Yale, was introduced. This change must have produced more pertinent questioning of the candidates and I can't think why the earlier system survived for well over thirty years.

I have mentioned elsewhere that each year a postgraduate from Columbia College, New York comes to Clare to read for a further degree. I'm not sure when this one-way exchange started but it was before my time as an undergraduate, as one of the so-called Kellett Fellows then in residence, Dr Gordon Rodgers, stayed on in England and later became a Clare Fellow. He served as a Tutor for many years and, unusually for Clare, also as the Director of Studies for some of his own tutorial pupils. It seems to have done them no harm, as he can now number amongst his former charges several who have made their names in the world of Literature and the Arts.

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to the National Stud at Newmarket.

The connection between this and undergraduate admissions came about some five years into my time as Senior Tutor, when Dr Rodgers and one of the faculty Deans at Columbia enquired about the possibility of arranging a JYA (Junior Year Abroad) Program(me) for Columbia students at Cambridge. The Clare Council was prepared to let me try it out, and, when I made enquiries of all the other Colleges, about one third of them were happy to join in. It seemed, in some ways, to be a fortuitous partial response to the Government-imposed reduction in the numbers of home students Cambridge was allowed to admit.<sup>14</sup> As overseas students would pay higher University (but not College) fees than the home students they were replacing, the University should have welcomed the move. It didn't seem to, but did not stand in the way.

After a small-scale test run with only Clare involved, the scheme was set up, with Columbia nominating each year about a dozen of its strongest Junior (third) Year students, selected after internally-organised interviews. The complete list of nominees, together with academic transcripts and references, would be sent to me, and I would provisionally allocate the students amongst the participating Colleges, bearing in mind the various combinations of subjects in which they were prepared to offer JYA places.

These arrangements and the supporting transcripts then had to be submitted to The Old Schools, as the set of buildings that house the University's administrative offices is known, for

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<sup>14</sup>See page 11.



approval so far as matriculation<sup>15</sup> is concerned. I have to say that receiving a response to such submissions often took rather longer than I thought it should, and sometimes a reminder was needed as well; perhaps this reflected the earlier lukewarm reception the scheme had received from the University.

However, the arrangement flourished and a couple of years later there were fifteen JYA Columbia students in Cambridge spread across a dozen Colleges. When the Government made one of its cynical U-turns and restored the number of home students (but not the associated teaching grant), some Colleges withdrew, as now they were up to full capacity again, but others, including Clare, continued and the reduced scheme is still running, more than twenty five years later.

As a bonus, a few of the JYA students returned to Cambridge two years later, having won the Kellett Fellowship competition at Columbia. Another has returned to Clare as a major benefactor. When his reference for the JYA programme arrived, it declared ‘that he would be an asset to the Clare football team, and should have no difficulty in meeting his college bill’. When he returned he *owned* two football teams – one on each side of the Atlantic – and was generously able to help Clare meet its college bills!

The final distinct aspect of the admissions process is dealing with applications for admission that do not come in the

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<sup>15</sup>The formal name for joining the University. Gaining approval for matriculation includes showing evidence of a sufficiently broad previous education.

standard way. Appearing unannounced and in person usually results in a polite but relatively brief discussion with an Admissions Tutor or a member of the Admissions Office Staff, and being given copies of the University and College Prospectuses. Occasionally this is not so, and the table tennis-playing Chinese student mentioned in a later chapter, did appear in the Admissions Office unannounced; he finished up sitting two three-hour written examination papers.<sup>16</sup>

Non-standard applications usually come in the form of a letter, and the reply usually consists of a copy of the University's Admissions Prospectus together with a covering personal note – or, in more recent times, an email and the web addresses of the College and the University. I have kept only two of the dozens of 'application letters' I received over a period of twenty years.

One of them is a hand-written request from Iran that was, at the same time, both endearing and hopeless. It was also impossible to answer, as it was not laid out in conventional lines of text, but covered with arrows pointing from one block of text to another. It asked for a full list of all possible degrees and for the names (written perfectly) of every subdivision of every subdivision of every . . . subject available. It also requested the *full* CVs of every Clare Fellow and wanted to know what could be studied by correspondence, by television, and by moon (sic). One complete sentence that did appear read 'Please send for me a<sup>good</sup> dictionary.'. As if that were not enough, the letter included

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<sup>16</sup>It was also the case that a future Nobel Prize winner became a Clare student in the early 1950s when he wandered into Old Court and asked to see the then Senior Tutor.

the further sentence ‘Please send for me catalogues, bulletin(e)s, cassettes, magazines, newspapers, maps, and . . . etc of scientific and cultural and educational and . . . of the College of Clare.’; the ellipses here are as they appeared in the original.

The letter evoked a certain amount of sympathy in the Admissions Office, and well-deserved praise for its almost perfect spelling, but I could do no more than send the usual prospectuses, which despite their many pages could not contain all the information requested, and certainly could not be used as a dictionary.

The other letter I have kept came from Nigeria, but was received long before the emails I get nowadays from there wanting to transfer the odd ten million dollars into my bank account. I have reproduced it in Appendix A just as it came, except for the suppression of the writer’s name. The interested reader may wish to note that the letter itself does not name Clare, and so I imagine that we were not the only College to receive it. It is also helpful to know that, in reality, the Chancellor at that time was Prince Philip, and that Mr Skelsey was an Administrator in the Office of the Registrar – I don’t suppose he ever pretended to be anybody else.

Although the College’s admissions procedure nearly always produced satisfactory results, it was not totally foolproof, and one of the real lowlights of my time as Senior and Admissions Tutor was the mistake that was made when we accepted to read Medical Sciences one particular Affiliated Student, i.e. a student

with a previous degree from another University.<sup>17</sup>

Robert Andrewes' application included photocopies of certificates showing that he had AAA at A-level and a first-class degree from London University, and that he had attended a degree-level course at the Vatican. His references from London were very encouraging and he *did* impress the medical interviewers. Robert was accepted and began the medical course, but after a few weeks his Supervisors started to report that he was struggling academically. His Director of Studies did what he could for the student, including some individual tuition.

Then came the bombshell. And it came, not from any of Clare's Fellows, but from the Master's Secretary! She had received from a small printing firm in a nearby town a 'thank you for your recent order' follow-up letter. As she had not ordered any printing from anybody, and did not even recognise the name of the printers, she made some enquiries. It turned out that the person who had placed and collected the order in person had given his name, but left no address. The only address that the printer had was that in the letterheads of the two sets of printed stationery that it had been asked to produce. One of these read '*The Master's Lodge, Clare College, Cambridge*'; so that was where they had sent their thank-you letter. The other set was headed with the name of Robert's Tutor.

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<sup>17</sup>Another lowlight was the humiliating defeat by the undergraduates in a University Challenge Competition (in aid of the Student Rag Week) of my team of Fellows – including two members of the Finance Committee – largely because we didn't know the prices in the Buttery of a turkey escalope or a helping of chips!

Once it was realised that Robert was capable of forgery and false pretences, everything had to be checked. I got in touch with London University and, yes, there had been a student called Robert Andrewes on their books, but he had withdrawn early in his course. The A-level Examinations Board, when asked, reported his grades had been two Ds and an E, rather than A,A,A. We never got to the bottom of the certificate from the Vatican, but suspect that it was not even a standard certificate and that the signature of the Secretary to The Pope had been forged. The A-level certificate appeared to have been genuine apart from the alteration of D,D,E to A,A,A. When questioned, Robert more or less admitted that the degree certificate he submitted was a copy of a copy of someone else's certificate, but with the name altered between making the two copies, an alteration that was covered up by making the final copy. He had to go.

Some time later The Master received a phone call from a commercial finance company based in the City of London asking for verbal confirmation of something appearing in 'his reference' for Robert Andrewes. What was known, and what was suspected was conveyed to the company, and at that point the Police were called in . . . . .

The other most memorable episode connected with admissions happened to involve somebody with a second name very similar to Andrewes, namely Prince Andrew.<sup>18</sup> I'm not sure exactly where the story begins, but it may have been when HRH Prince Philip became Chancellor of the University. Clare's Statutes decree that the Chancellor of the University shall also

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<sup>18</sup>For this particular saga, the names used are genuine.

be The Visitor of the College; his principal duty was set out in the following Statute<sup>19</sup>

The Visitor shall visit the College and inquire into its condition whenever either the Master or a majority of the Fellows shall apply for a visitation, and also without any such application if it shall seem to him necessary. At such visitation he shall duly correct and, if he see fit, punish any irregularity in the Master or the Fellows.

Well, we didn't apply for a visitation, but the College did invite HRH to tea shortly after he was inaugurated as Chancellor. He came and, amongst other things, enquired as to how things had changed within Clare since it went mixed, how large the Fellowship now was, how were our academic results, etc. – all the sort of things a Visitor ought to ask if he were on an official visit.

I didn't think much more of it, but about a year later an article appeared in the *Daily Mail* indicating that The Palace was considering sending the Queen's second son to Cambridge, and in particular to Clare. The article also included an interview with the then Master of Trinity College, R.A. (Rab) Butler,<sup>20</sup> in which he was invited to give his views on Clare and its suitability for Prince Andrew. The BBC also went to town, and spent half an hour interviewing the undergraduate President of the JCR on what it would be like to have the Prince as a fellow student.

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<sup>19</sup>A more recent revision of the Statutes has the same meaning, but uses rather clearer wording.

<sup>20</sup>Sometimes described as the best Prime Minister we never had.

The mystifying part of the whole affair was, to me, that I didn't know anything about it – and I was the Admissions Tutor of the College! In fact, nobody amongst Clare's office holders knew anything about it, unless the Master did, but had been asked not to say anything. That was possible, but seemed unlikely as, if nothing else, it was normal in Cambridge for any student whose presence entailed a body of security personnel, to have the Senior Tutor as their personal Tutor, whatever subject they were reading.

However, the *Evening Standard* was on the case and phoned me. What was subsequently written was a bit of a distortion of what I told them, though the general drift was accurate. The article that appeared in May 1978 under the heading "Andrew faces year of swotting for Cambridge" read as follows:<sup>21</sup>

I have alarming news for Prince Andrew over his ambitions to join Cambridge's most intellectual college, Clare, next year. He must work very much harder than his elder brother Prince Charles if he is to hope to win a place there. No strings will be pulled.

Charles, 29, had a mere . . . . . to read archaeology in 1967. Andrew, 18, swotting at Gordonstoun to pass his A-levels in summer 1979, is no brainbox and indeed is nicknamed Randy Andy because of his interest in extra-curricula activities.

"Most colleges like to have people with two As and a B grade", points out Tom Hayhoe, president of the Cambridge Students' Union. "Clare is able to be even more

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<sup>21</sup>The punctuation and capitalization are as they were printed.

demanding as it has a high academic reputation.” Andrew, studying for “A” levels in English, history and economics with political science, already has six “O” levels. Dr. Ken Riley, senior tutor at Clare (founded in 1326 and suitably co-educational), has no official notification of the royal arrival. “About 50 per cent of our undergraduates have two A grades and a B at A level,” he tells me. . . . .

I don’t know whether The Queen reads either of the *Daily Mail* or *Evening Standard*, but a few weeks later a press release from The Palace declared that “My Husband and I are pleased to announce that Prince Andrew will . . . . . the Britannia Royal Naval College at Dartmouth.” Well, that was the end of that, and, of course, Clare had never been involved.



## Chapter 4

# Tutors who Lunch

It will be apparent from many of my recollections that Clare's Tutors, as well as undertaking their roles as guides and mentors for their own particular pupils, collectively form a body that has a significant influence on the way the affairs of the College are conducted. There are enough of them that any one's, perhaps off-beat, view does not unduly colour that of the whole group, whilst there are not so many that getting them together to consider proposals or observations from other College Fellows, is a major undertaking. In short, 'The Tutors' form a convenient sounding board for the College and, in practice, that is how they are used.

So as to make this informal, i.e. non-statutory, arrangement

work as well as possible, there is an understanding that, unless other unavoidable commitments dictate otherwise, all Tutors will be available for a working lunch<sup>1</sup> every Wednesday during Full Term. It is for this reason that, in the correspondence that is quoted in some other chapters, especially that associated with longer-running issues, letters to students giving a tutorial view, request or instruction are usually dated on a Thursday. Both in intention and in practice, the meetings seldom last much more than an hour; some Tutors are lecturing or running classes until one o'clock and, although there are not many afternoon lectures, some practical classes begin at 2.00 or 2.15, as do the meetings of most University committees.

The agenda for any particular meeting is usually drawn up by the Senior Tutor on the morning of the meeting, and, at least in my time in that role, quite often consisted of only one item, A.O.B. This is not to imply that there was almost nothing to discuss, only that the individual cases that the Tutors wished to raise, concerning an individual pupil, or a perhaps group of pupils all of whom were following the same academic course, were most easily presented verbally and in a discussion format.

Many cases were resolved by a simple pooling of accumulated knowledge, some required the formulation of a Tutorial Policy, whilst a few raised far-reaching considerations that might affect the whole College. The last of these would usually result in a paper, written by myself and the Tutor who initially raised the issue, being presented to the appropriate College body, usually

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<sup>1</sup>i.e. a soup-and-sandwich lunch, not a three course meal.

the Council, but sometimes the Governing Body or the Finance Committee.

When matters are referred to the Tutors, perhaps by the Master or Bursar, they are normally accompanied by papers setting out the issues to be discussed, sometimes generated within the College but more often originating in a University Office. In these cases copies are circulated to Tutors before the meeting and discussed at the Tutorial Lunch in a rather more formal way. As all such issues are further considered by one of the three main College bodies, the tutorial viewpoint is reported to that body, or, if there is no consensus, the variety of individual tutorial views is made known at its next meeting.

So far as this account of the work of Clare's Tutors is concerned, major issues such as the award of academic prizes on the positive side, and the control of unauthorised garden parties on the negative, are dealt with elsewhere, and I will restrict myself in this chapter to less weighty matters. Even here, there were both pluses and minuses – not so much in terms of good or bad, but more in terms of amusing and serious. The 'amusing' incidents were ones in which some tutorial action was called for, but for the majority of the Tutors little more than an inward smile was required. Just as they came to the Tutors over a period of some twenty years, my almost arbitrary selection from the various incidents will mix the serious with the amusing in no particular order, though, not surprisingly there tended to be rather more of the former.

Perhaps an appropriate place to start is with two incidents

that occurred before the Tutors had even met for the first time in the relevant years, one of them before the student in question had even come into residence; in fact, it was his failure to do so that led to the problem. He was a student who had been accepted for an Engineering degree, a course in which the first Freshman week is very important because of the general and safety instructions given, and the practical and drawing class allocations made. When his failure to arrive, without any notification to the College, was reported to me by the Porters, an urgent phone call to his home had to be made.

The response was along the lines ‘Well, yes, he will be a few days late in arriving, probably a week or so, because for religious reasons he is in Ireland to observe the Feast of Tabernacles.’. Feast of Tabernacles? Ireland? Time to call the Chaplain and inform the student’s intended Tutor. Having established that the Feast is an important event in the Jewish Calendar, the Tutors could appreciate what had happened, but felt that the College should have been given due notice. In addition, I felt that being sent to Ireland to experience the discomfort of living for a week under minimal shelter was a bit excessive, particularly as Ireland in October could hardly compare with anything the Israelites might have experienced at any time during their forty years of wandering in the desert.

The second incident was in many ways just the opposite. On this occasion, a Freshman medical student from the Home Counties disappeared almost as soon as he had arrived. I don’t know why, but he abandoned his college room. However, some two days later, he did appear for a Director of Studies’ meeting

and revealed to his Tutor that he had booked himself into what was at that time the most expensive hotel in Cambridge. I don't suppose that his father was too pleased to receive the not insubstantial bill for the two-day stay, but at least he persuaded the student to return to College; the rest of his time at Clare passed without incident.

To complete a trio of 'runaways', I also recall the case – and I use that word deliberately as the Police were involved – of the second-year student who was reported by one of her friends as missing from her room in the Colony. This happened at a weekend and only her Tutor and I were involved in trying to determine what had happened. Naturally, the first place to contact was her home, but when it was revealed that she was not there either, all we had succeeded in doing was to add three more people to the list of those very worried by the situation.

The Tutor, the Master, and I decided that we had to call in the Police, and I have to say that they performed exceptionally well. With the cooperation of the relevant card company, they established that the missing student had used her credit card in Jersey and, further, that she had purchased a ticket for a passage to Sark. Supplied with this information, her parents were able to suggest where she might be and, to their great relief, and not only theirs, they proved to be right.

It turned out that the student had learned that a close friend living in Sark had become depressed, and on the spur of the moment had decided to go there to try to cheer her up; this

she had done without telling anybody, not least her Tutor.<sup>2</sup> As the student later acknowledged, all she had actually done was to make a lot of people very worried and given her parents an extremely anxious time.

Incidents that never needed a vote by the Tutors when they came to discuss them, were those in which students showed any form of contempt or disregard for members of the College Staff. As I used to point out in my speech to each new intake of Freshers, the College Staff are not only dedicated but sometimes doing a very difficult job. All members of the College are expected to cooperate with them and no level of disrespect will be tolerated.

The two groups of College Staff members most likely to experience non-cooperation from Junior Members were the Porters and, perhaps surprisingly, the Catering Staff. Problems with day-to-day catering were rare, and to the best of my knowledge, there was never a problem with the self-service cafeteria operating in the Buttery nor with the self-service Salad Bar that ran in the Main Hall at lunchtime. Ironically, the worst behaviour was nearly always associated with Formal Hall, which nowadays offers the opportunity to entertain guests to a special meal in a historic and dignified setting.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Technically, she was required to obtain an 'exeat' from her Tutor, giving her permission to go out of residence in Term time. At that time 'keeping Term', i.e. being in residence for a certain minimum number of days in each Term in order to qualify for a degree, was more rigorously enforced by the University than it is now. The Residence Return was the *only* University-issued document that had to be signed by *both* the Senior Tutor *and* the Bursar.

<sup>3</sup>Until about forty years ago, attendance at Hall, wearing gowns, and

Perhaps the most serious incidence of unacceptable behaviour during my time as a Tutor occurred at a Formal Hall at which I was present, in the sense that the normal evening meal for resident Fellows and those on duty was taking place in the Hall at the same time. The unofficial<sup>4</sup> drinking society known as the Clare Crabs had, because of its previous antisocial behaviour, been largely responsible for the Council laying down guidelines for Club and Society dinners held in College. This particular incident both did and did not involve the Crabs; but it did involve six male Clare undergraduates, known to be members of the Crabs, and some of their guests.

In brief, ‘drunken and unruly behaviour, culminating in the throwing of food’ is as neutral a description of what happened as I can come up with. But as the main thrust of this chapter is the Tutors’ collective action in the whole sorry episode, I will not go further into those details, save to say that several others attending dinner that evening provided unsolicited written condemnation of what happened. The only report that I specifically requested was one from the Catering Manager, and that included the following sentences:

... you will have noticed Alan Pattison [the Fellow’s Butler] and myself talking to them and trying to quieten them down. We had already confiscated four bottles of wine as we felt that there was too much alcohol for that number of people, but left some unopened bottles on the table.

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for six days a week, was the norm for all undergraduates, and was part of a requirement for ‘keeping Term’.

<sup>4</sup>i.e. Officially disapproved of. See page 128.

All of the Junior members mentioned [in a list provided] are members of the Crab Society, but on Thursday came as individuals. I strongly feel that it is quite degrading for me and my staff to clean up all the mess that was made, not to mention . . .

Now, as the reader may already have gathered, Tutors try to see all the good they can in the students assigned to them as pupils. But in this situation, and in all others involving established abuse of College Staff, there could only be one outcome. It is exemplified by the letter I wrote to the six a few days later. It is somewhat lengthy, but to omit any of it could lead the reader to misinterpret the Tutors' response to this kind of situation. It read as follows:

Dear Xxxxx

I recently received a letter from the Catering Staff of the College which complained about repeated episodes of rowdy, disruptive, and generally unacceptable behaviour in the College Hall by a number of undergraduates, including yourself.

As you will probably recall, I was on tutorial duty on Thursday, 27 February, and saw for myself some of the consequences of the sickening behaviour of a group, who, although booked into Formal hall as individuals accompanied by guests (most, if not all of whom appeared to be from Another Named College), came in practice, to hold what was effectively a Crabs dinner.

The College of course has no objection to groups of friends dining in Hall, and indeed encourages it, but only on the understanding that it is recognised that it is a



formal meal, and their behaviour is correspondingly disciplined. However, it was apparent, even before things got out of hand, that the amount of alcohol brought to Thursday's meal was far in excess of what would be allowed at a properly booked club dinner – and could even be viewed as a deliberate attempt to circumvent the rules approved by the College Council for officially-booked occasions. What happened when the dessert course was served was altogether as deplorable as it must have been disgusting to others dining in Hall, some of whom were visitors to the College. Some College members who were present have written letters to me expressing their revulsion.

The Tutors have discussed the reported events and the letters received, and, in some cases, spoken to those involved who are their tutorial pupils. I have enquired further of the Catering Manager. The sum total of the evidence indicates that your presence at any event in Hall (except the normal lunch-time salad bar) where alcohol has been available has, on a significant number of occasions, led to behaviour which cannot be condoned.

I am therefore informing you that, as from today, you are banned from attending any meals in College, other than those in the Buttery or the salad bar in Hall; the ban covers normal Hall, Club and Society Dinners and any meals organised by the College. The ban will last until the end of the Easter Term, i.e. 18 June. If you are in your final year, you will, if you are graduating in person, thereby be permitted to attend the Graduation Dinner.

I should point out that, if you feel you have been unfairly

treated by this decision, you may, after consulting your Tutor if you wish, appeal to the Court of Discipline by giving written notice to the Master. My advice to you is that you should certainly consult your Tutor before considering any further action.

Needless to say, it is with great regret that I find it necessary to write to you in this way.

Yours sincerely,

*K.F. Riley*

cc The Master, [The relevant Tutor], the Catering Manager, The Steward.

At this point the incident rather fizzled out; the students apologised to the Staff, did not contest the ban, kept out of trouble, and the three of them who were in their final year graduated in June.

A somewhat similar situation came before the Tutors after a ‘bonding’ meal held by two newly-formed rowing crews got out of hand. It took place in the room of one of the members of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Novices Eight – and left it in such a state that when the Housekeeper was called the following morning, she felt it necessary to organise additional cleaners to tackle the mess. Some of the novice rowers had left early after one of them had felt unwell, but there were eight who remained, and who ultimately accepted responsibility for meeting the clean-up and damage bill of more than £100.

In addition the Clare Boat Club Captain read the riot act; or, more accurately, he issued a notice to all ‘Boaties’ declaring that, in future, no crew dinners may be held without his express permission, pointing out the possibility of a College ban on future Boat Club Dinners, and listing all the powers he had to punish any who brought the Club’s name into disrepute. The part dealing with future CBC dinners included one rather ambiguous sentence that probably didn’t say quite what he meant, but did make the Tutors smile. I quote:

“Quite aside from what the College thinks about it, we will have guests present – coaches, sponsors, former members and supporters – and I do not expect them to be embarrassed by our behaviour.”

Just as there was a trio of ‘runaway episodes’ that I can readily recall, the incidents of unacceptable behaviour involving sports teams also came as a threesome. The third of these to finish up with the Tutors could, at least, proffer the excuse that it was celebrating something positive. For the first time in forty years, Clare’s football team had won a piece of inter-college silverware – admittedly only the Plate competition, but they did win.

The final took place on a Sunday, and, by chance, it was one of the days when an evening of jazz had been organised in the Cellars.<sup>5</sup> Adjacent to the Cellars is the College Bar, and the Clare Jazz Club had requested an extension to the normal

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<sup>5</sup>The ‘trading name’ of the Junior Common Room, and, architecturally speaking, the Crypt of the College Chapel.

Sunday opening hours of the Bar; as previous such jazz events had been well organised, well attended and well behaved, the Tutors supported the application and the Council duly agreed.

However, the football team let their celebrations get out of hand, drank too much, and invaded the Cellars, seriously disturbing the jazz gig. The Porters were called and most of the trouble makers left the Cellars, but headed for Clare Bridge and there made matters worse by throwing bottles, a chair, and a bicycle into the river.

The first I knew about this was the following morning when I received a curt letter from the Master urging the Tutors to take 'prompt and effective action against members of the Football Club for the rowdy . . . . . kept us awake until 2.00 a.m. . . . . served drinks until 11.30 p.m. Since the Tutors supported the extended hours, I am sure . . . '.

I wrote to the Secretary of the Football Club, pointing out that what had happened had achieved what few other College events ever managed, namely to draw adverse criticism from all sides, the Master, the College Staff *and* the Students. I listed the various grievances and indicated all of the apologies and explanations that were needed; to their credit, it turned out that members of the XI had already done some of those things.

In his reply the Secretary said that the Clare team took collective responsibility for the unacceptable events, but pointed out that, uninvited and unexpectedly, members of the team they had played in the final had just turned up in the Bar. As none of the Clare side had ever met any of the opposition before that

afternoon, they were unable to persuade their uninvited ‘guests’ to moderate their behaviour; further, it was the visitors who had thrown things off the bridge. As do all such letters of contrition from students, it finished with an assurance that this was a one-off incident and will not happen again. In this case I was, for once, inclined to believe it, as I felt it likely that by the time the Football XI next won another final, I would be long-retired.<sup>6</sup>

As indicated earlier, amongst the items that the Tutors had cause to discuss at their lunchtime meetings, the serious tended to outnumber the amusing, and even the latter nearly always had a serious origin. This was certainly so in the case of the student who literally brought a piece of Old Court crashing to the ground. The piece in question was part of one of the stone pillars<sup>7</sup> supporting the balustrade that runs around the inner perimeter of the Court’s roof; there is a similar balustrade running around the outer perimeter. Fortunately, nobody was hurt – though significant expense was occurred in restoring that part of the Grade I listed building to its former state.

The amusing aspect of this incident only surfaced after it was established how the balustrade had come to be damaged. The student in question, who lived in one of the attic rooms in Old Court, had for some reason purchased a hammock. As most rooms in this range of the Court take up the full width of the range, it was possible, by opening windows on opposite sides of the room, to use the two balustrades as anchor points for the hammock.

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<sup>6</sup>I was right!

<sup>7</sup>Technically, a baluster.

Now, as anybody who has ever tried, by pulling horizontally on its loose end, to straighten an anchored rope that has even a modest load attached at its mid-point will know, the force needed is many times the weight of the load. Conversely, to support a student in a hammock, even one of modest weight, requires very high tensions in the anchor ropes; then, as absolutely everybody knows,<sup>8</sup> ‘action and reaction are equal and opposite’ – and the balustrade and its supporting pillars just couldn’t take it. And the really ironic part? The student in question was reading Engineering!

Another episode involving the Old Court balustrade that I think the whole College, and not just the Tutors, found amusing, was one perpetrated by an undergraduate prankster, Dave Nicolls, who in academic terms was a bit of a butterfly, flitting from one Tripos to another, but always within what is allowed by the rules for the B.A. degree. But it was a spider rather than a butterfly that was the centre of this particular happening. Those living in Old Court woke up one morning to find a giant spider’s web covering a large part of the open space enclosed by the Court, an area of perhaps four hundred square yards. And from the middle of the web hung a giant spider, nearly six feet across.

Subsequent enquiries seemed to indicate that the web was constructed by Dave and several helpers at the College sports ground and then transported well over a mile to Old Court. Presumably, it and the spider were then secreted in an attic room

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<sup>8</sup>Newton’s 1<sup>st</sup> Law.

until nightfall, but I never asked. Whatever the manoeuvres employed to smuggle the net and spider into the Court, once it was up, it certainly attracted attention.

The *Cambridge Evening News* sent a photographer along to record the situation and that evening's edition contained a rather grainy picture of the spider accompanied by a measured comment from the Senior Tutor to the effect that he didn't think that anybody was likely to be punished for 'being on the College roof without good reason'. What I *did* think was that the cobweb actually looked more natural when, later, a couple of its support strings broke.<sup>9</sup> When this happened, the web finished up draped across one corner of the Court, still attached to the balustrade at points on either side of the corner but with much of it laying on the grass and cobbles; the forlorn spider seemed to be a prisoner, trapped within its own web.

I have reason to believe that, even after he had graduated, Dave Nicolls' appetite for practical jokes remained undiminished. He entered the 1985-86 British Ladies Correspondence Chess Championship, using a (female) pseudonym. Because opponents in correspondence matches never come face-to-face, his deviousness was not detected and eventually (s)he won the event. However, he was later found out and admitted that his deception was a prank that got out of hand; as a result he was banned from the British Correspondence Chess Association.

By chance, as I write these reflections, the London 2012 Olympic Games are in progress, and I do recall making a grant

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<sup>9</sup>Under the weight of the spider. See the previous paragraph but two.

to one of Clare's undergraduates to help him with the costs of fencing for Great Britain at the Los Angeles Olympics of 1984. However, that is not the point; what is relevant is the Royal Mail's announced intention to re-paint a post box in the home postal district of any member of Team GB who wins a gold medal, and to paint it gold rather than red. This is a far cry from the view it took some two years after the LA Games about the pillar box that was sited on the pavement close to Clare's front gate, and had stood there for at least one hundred years.

A phantom artist took to painting it, under cover of darkness, in a variety of ways none of which, it would seem, gained the approval of the Post Office, as each time it happened the artist's work was, within days, painted over in a much less interesting shade of red. Three of the many samples offered by the artist, or perhaps artists, consisted of a fetching arrangement of pink, white and maroon vertical stripes, a procession of yellow ducks following each other round the cylindrical pillar box, and a make-over into a giant toadstool with grass and flowers around its base. One might have thought that at least one of these would have appealed to the Post Office officials. But no, it had to be pillar box red or nothing. And in the end it was nothing, as they rather petulantly took the box away altogether!

You may wonder what this episode had to do with the Clare Tutors' lunches. The answer is very little, because although it was strongly suspected that at least one of our undergraduates had hidden artistic talents, the Colleges were never asked by the Post Office for any help in the matter; had they been, Clare's Tutors would no doubt have sprung, albeit reluctantly, into ac-



tion. As it was, for a period of several months the pillar-box mystery gave us something to talk about whenever the more serious business of the meeting was completed uncharacteristically quickly.

Before returning to that more serious business, I think I should record another tutorial storm in a teacup. It was reported to the Tutors, via one of the cleaners and the housekeeper in charge of servicing the College's graduate housing, that the three graduates sharing one of the houses had acquired a snake. They were seeking permission to keep the snake in the house, as well as mice to feed it.

Naturally, this request did not get much of a welcome, and the Tutors asked me to write to the graduates pointing out that the disadvantages of such an arrangement heavily outweighed any perceived attractions, and that their request would have to be refused. It was with a certain amount of egg-on-one's-face feeling that I read their reply, which pointed out that the snake in question was a harmless, toothless, non-venomous grass snake (*Natrix natrix*), and that far from feeding on live mice, it could just about manage small frozen fish. I was also invited to call round to inspect the snake and its accommodation, an escape-proof cage designed with the help of a local veterinary surgeon.

Now for that more serious business. Clare, like every other College and University, takes a positive view of entrepreneurship, but sometimes has to appear not to; two incidents come to mind. In the first, a student who was in residence during

the Long Vacation term,<sup>10</sup> notionally to work on his third-year project, was found to be going to London, rather than the laboratory, on most days.

Something was wrong, and when the Long Vacation Duty Tutor and I investigated we were told that each time he was taking with him a supply of candles. Further, though his room was one of the very few in College with the luxury of its own bath, it was obvious that it had been used only to hold wax, not water. We never really got to the bottom of it, but it seems he bought plain candles cheaply in Cambridge, attempted to decorate them with wax from other melted candles, and took them to London hoping to sell them there. It was not established whether he ever actually sold any, but, even if he did, the profit would be most unlikely to cover the cost of his daily train fares. Clearly he was having problems, and his parents had to be called. When the situation was explained to them they took him home and arranged for medical help.

The second incident was triggered by an enterprising undergraduate who spotted what could have been a realistic opportunity to generate income. He wrote to several large firms that normally recruited graduates from the University, extolling the virtues of having their recruiting posters displayed at many sites around each college, and offering to arrange this for one-tenth of the price of placing a one-off advertisement in a University newspaper. He gave his 'company' a suitable name, described himself as a director, and – and this is where the problem lay –

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<sup>10</sup>Early July to mid-August.

gave Clare College as the address of the company.

After the situation was brought to my attention by the University's Careers Service, consultation with the Master, a lawyer, confirmed the tutorial view that this had to be stopped. The student had to be told that he could not use the College as a business address, because, if nothing else, it might appear that the College endorsed his activities, and so could be saddled with legal problems. There was also the question of the effect on his academic work. Best advice, cease trading; failing that, get an accommodation address.

Most of the rest of the specific problems that exercised the Tutors as they inspected the contents of their sandwiches fell into the serious category, but were all similar in that they were concerned with irresponsible behaviour; they could really be summarised by the two phrases 'climbing where they shouldn't be' and 'causing a fire risk'. Several students had to be reprimanded, or in one case sent out of residence<sup>11</sup> for a period, following climbing on temporary scaffolding or the College buildings themselves.

In one of the climbing incidents, two female students were so frightened by the appearance of faces at their first-floor window that they called the Police. They came promptly and 'were excellent' despite being insulted by one of the two rather drunk male undergraduates involved.

The decision that the Tutors took to send a (different) student out of residence is explained by the following extract from

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<sup>11</sup>Generally referred to as 'rustication'.

my formal letter to him.

The Tutors take a very serious view of what happened, and in particular of your blatant disregard of the consideration shown, and the advice given, to you by the Head Porter. To deliberately climb on the College buildings is bad enough, but to do so a second time when the Head Porter has given you a clear warning after the first incident is entirely unacceptable.

I think that it is well known that alcohol and fire extinguishers don't mix. Too much of the former tends to lead to the unnecessary employment of the latter, especially when students are involved. Further, putting right the damage caused does not come cheaply; given the stringent legal requirements that govern buildings such as Hostels, the resulting repair bills can seem to be out of all proportion. More than twenty years ago, a few pints of beer could, and did, cost two of Clare's students nearly a hundred pounds each.

Less expensive, but decidedly irritating for a number of people, was the triggering of the smoke alarm in one of the college houses. I cannot think why they should even have one, but a group of students holding a party activated a smoker, more normally used in a beehive than in a house, thus setting off the alarm. The students claimed to have tried, unsuccessfully, to switch off the siren and ventilate the room, just as soon as they realised what had happened. This was little comfort to an off-duty Porter who had to be called out to reset the alarm.

Finally, in this chapter concerned with the things discussed

by Tutors who lunch, I come to the only case I can ever remember of their taking up the cudgels on their own behalf, rather than that of their pupils or of the College. Even then, it was not to gain some advantage, but simply to avoid a wrong and to establish a principle.

As I have indicated in an earlier chapter, the stipend attached to a Tutorship in no way reflects the responsibilities attached, nor the time and work involved; in this context, I exclude the Senior Tutor since his or her stipend is determined by a different formula. What caused the Tutors to be up in arms was a notice from the Master and Bursar announcing that the stipends of the (two) Tutors on sabbatical leave<sup>12</sup> would have to be funded from the stipends of those not on leave; the latter would therefore be cut by some 15%. The next day found me writing to the Master to say ‘... To put it mildly, the notices the Tutors received about their stipends for this year did not go down well. . . . . and I have been deputed to seek a meeting with you and . . . . . strength of feeling about the matter and its manner of implementation have aroused. . . .’

Some days later, following a meeting of the Finance Committee<sup>13</sup> a revised notice was circulated to the Tutors proposing a small increase on the then current levels for those not on leave, but not restoring the 15% cut for those who were. But the damage had been done; it was not the total money available

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<sup>12</sup>Permission for which is normally only granted if the Tutor is also entitled to and taking sabbatical leave from the University.

<sup>13</sup>I and the other Tutor on the Finance Committee absented ourselves for this item.

that mattered,<sup>14</sup> but the principle that retrospective decisions should not be made without prior consultation with anybody who might be affected, one way or the other. Again, I was deputed to write to the Finance Committee and . . . . .

Well, it shouldn't have happened, but it did. Perhaps I should be grateful that it only happened once.

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<sup>14</sup>By now only some £150 less than the projected total cost when the Tutors for the year were appointed some six months earlier.

## Chapter 5

# Little Room for Manoeuvre

It might seem somewhat curious, but one of the duties of its Master, as laid down in the Statutes of Clare College,<sup>1</sup> is to assume responsibility for the assignment of rooms to the various members of the College. His first duty is, to quote the Statutes, ‘to exercise a general supervision over all the affairs of the College’. This is only to be expected, but it is a little surprising to find that the Statutes go on to assign so specific a task as room-allocation to the most senior figure in the College. How-

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<sup>1</sup>Which, it will be recalled, have to be approved by the Privy Council.

ever, there may well be some good practical reasons behind the decision to explicitly include this particular provision.

Nowadays, not many of the Fellows actually live in the College, as they used to do before the Statutes were changed to allow the College's Senior Members, all male at that time, to get married and live in their own private houses whilst retaining their Fellowships. But, I can well imagine that, before that change took place, there would have been many conflicting views on which Fellows should occupy which sets of rooms. But laying down a specific procedure involving the Master for settling matters, and putting it in the Statutes, effectively tied the hands of those who, on their admission to a Fellowship, had pledged 'to be obedient to the Master in the exercise of his statutable powers'; a cunning piece of legislation.

Whilst the formal allocation of rooms for Fellows still goes through the Master's office, that for students is delegated to one of the Fellows and is administered under his or her direction by the Staff of the Tutorial Office. The outcome of the former is largely a matter of carrying on as last year unless there has been a significant change in a Fellow's college duties. With the number of teaching Fellows nearly doubling over the last forty years, and the number of suitable rooms hardly increasing at all, some changes have been inevitable and the sharing of rooms has become quite common, especially amongst retired Fellows — they seldom actually retire, they are simply almost free to concentrate on their own pet research or writing projects, and don't get paid for what they still do on the College's behalf.



However, dealing with the allocation of undergraduate accommodation is a totally different kettle of fish. The Fellow who does so is known as the Rooms Tutor, and, in the sense that he or she wants to see as many as possible of their five hundred or so ‘pupils’ happily settled and behaving in a responsible way, they have a similar role to a normal Tutor. Like ordinary Tutors, the Rooms Tutor has advertised office hours during which individual or groups of Junior Members can raise problems with, or suggestions about, their present or future accommodation.

Being the Rooms Tutor is not a job that I have ever known any Fellow of Clare to genuinely volunteer for; all holders of the post have to be ‘fingered’ by the Master. However, having said that, most Fellows so selected, having seen over a few years that taking on the related duties is an important contribution to the functioning of the College, agree to act in that capacity for two or three years. The periods of office used to be much longer than this, but more recent holders of the post have tended to be relatively young academics who are under pressure to establish their research credentials in order to secure future funding and, hopefully, promotion.

In order to reduce the potential for complaints from students throughout any particular academic year, as much as possible is done to allow students to express any preferences they may have before the Rooms Tutor makes the actual allocation, formally on behalf of the Master. For first-year students (Freshers), who for obvious reasons are never offered shared accommodation, the choice is normally only about the the size and amenities available in single rooms in the Memorial Court set of

buildings. Naturally the termly rents reflect what the different rooms have to offer, though the variation and hence the range of rents is relatively small. When the College first admitted women in 1972, one of the preferences that they could express was for an all-female staircase, but there were so few takers that this rapidly became an all-female landing within a staircase, and not long afterwards the question was dropped altogether.

For the second-, third- and in some cases fourth-year undergraduates, the possibilities are greatly expanded; all of the hostels and houses at the Colony, a few houses in other nearby parts of Cambridge, and the rooms in Old Court come into play. However, the annually recurring preference of a sufficient number of third-years for living and sleeping beneath ancient beams means that the chances of a second- or fourth-year student<sup>2</sup> gaining a room in Old Court are practically nil.

Towards the end of their first year, each student is allocated a random ballot number which determines where in the order of choosing second-year rooms they stand. When the second-year students come to select their third-year rooms, their first-year ballot order is inverted; consequently, many students hope to get quite a poor (high) ballot number so that, in their third year, they have a good chance of securing an Old Court room.

Old Court dates from the seventeenth century and its internal architecture makes it difficult to alter. The inhabitants

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<sup>2</sup>For these purposes, undergraduates who are required to spend their third year away from Cambridge, mostly Modern Languages and Oriental Studies students, are counted as third-years.

of some of its staircases still have to cross the Court to use the washing and toilet facilities that have been installed on others; but this doesn't seem to deter students from wanting to take rooms on these staircases.<sup>3</sup>

The first type of accommodation to be allocated is that available to groups of students who have expressed a positive wish to share accommodation. Typical group sizes are: six for sets of rooms on one or two floors of a house with a shared sitting room and kitchen; three for self-contained flats within a house or hostel; and two for 'double sets' in Old Court or the Memorial Court Block, such sets have larger than average sitting rooms and one large or two normal-sized bedrooms.

Where there are competing groups for the same set of rooms, priority is determined according to the aggregated ballot numbers of each group. In most years there are one or two groups of undergraduates who miss out on the particular type of accommodation that they have applied for, and they have to go into the normal singles ballot. Occasionally, the reverse is true and some particular multiple-occupancy set of rooms goes unclaimed, and theoretically should be assigned to the last few people in the singles ballot. However, since requiring people who have no wish to live together to do so is almost bound to lead to problems, Rooms Tutors do their utmost to avoid

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<sup>3</sup>By way of contrast, I still recall from my own student days the reported indignation of the Mayor of Blackpool, who was staying in another College, at having to cross a Court in his dressing gown to get washed and shaved – though it has to be admitted that it was a much larger Court than the one at Clare.

this. In line with the Economics principle that everything has its price, a sufficient reduction in rent invariably brings to light previously undiscovered urges for communal living.

When the multiple occupancies have been settled the process of choosing their next-year's rooms by those in the singles ballot begins; this is a somewhat lengthy but straightforward procedure. In ballot order, each student is allocated a particular fifteen minute slot during which they may visit the Tutorial Office and choose any room that is not already taken. Clearly, if they come late to the Office they will have reduced the options available to them.

I have specifically mentioned the various types of shared accommodation the College can offer, as, when difficulties that exercise the Rooms Tutor do arise during the academic year, they nearly always involve students who are sharing. Sometimes, too much team spirit develops and mutual encouragement amongst the members of a sharing group leads to matters getting out of hand; this could be said to be the case in the incident, involving rooms in a house on the Colony Site, described elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

A further general type of difficulty, needing the attention not just of the Rooms Tutor but also of other departments such as Maintenance and Housekeeping, arises when students living in a self-contained unit such as a flat, decide to make alterations to it, usually by 'redecorating' it. The account given a little later describes just such a case.

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<sup>4</sup>See page 164.

But by far the most difficult situation to deal with from a tutorial point of view is that in which two people, usually a man and a women, opt to share a set of rooms and then during the course of the following year fall out with each other. Fortunately such cases were relatively rare during my time as a Tutor, but when they did happen they took up a considerable amount of time for those whose job it was to try to find a satisfactory solution. The latter would typically include two Tutors, the Senior Tutor, the Rooms Tutor, the Chaplain or Dean, and the College Nurse. Others who might be involved were the students' parents, local G.P.s and members of the University Counselling Service.

If there happened to be an empty student room or an un-booked guest room available, suitable physical rearrangements could be made, but straightening out minds and attitudes was generally much more difficult and on one or two occasions a student had to degrade<sup>5</sup> for the rest of the academic year.

The rent paid by a student for any particular room covers the three continuous periods during an academic year that are described by the University as Michaelmas Term, Lent Term and Easter Term. The precise specification of these Terms can vary from year to year, but they are required by a University Statute to include in total at least 227 days of an academic

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<sup>5</sup>This is the formal term for being given permission by the University to go out of residence, and to have some specified period of preparation ignored so far as eligibility to sit any particular examination is concerned. Permission for a student to degrade has to be requested by their Tutor, and is usually sought on medical grounds.

year. Within each Term, a particular period, covering at least three-quarters of it, is defined to be Full Term and this is the period during which virtually all formal teaching, i.e. lectures, teaching seminars and practical classes, takes place.

In length, Full Term also represents the minimum period that students must reside in Cambridge for the term to count towards the residence requirement of the B.A. degree. Most spend at least a week longer, and some aim to come as early and to stay as late as possible, sometimes to use college and university facilities whilst writing a dissertation, sometimes to get ‘value for money’ from their rent, and sometimes because, rather sadly, they ‘don’t get on at home’.

The College does not distinguish between the various reasons for opting to stay throughout the full period covered by Term.<sup>6</sup> However, those wishing to occupy their rooms in the Vacation periods between Terms *do* have to produce a convincing reason for doing so. Being an overseas student from outside Europe is one good reason, especially for the Christmas and Easter Vacations. Requiring regular medical treatment at a Cambridge hospital is another, as is assisting at official College events such as Open Days for potential Cambridge applicants.

My reason for somewhat labouring this point is an incident that showed how easy it is for a small misjudgement to have unintended consequences. As the reader will no doubt judge from reading the correspondence reproduced below, my view was that, at worst, the student involved had failed to recognise

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<sup>6</sup>Don’t forget, Full Term is shorter than Term!

how his laid-back attempt at informality and humour could be misread by others — and that too much had been made of it. Not quite a storm in a teacup, but certainly a noticeable breeze.

Harvey Tinbergen was the elected Rooms Representative of the Clare Students Union, and it was his job to liaise with the Rooms Tutor and the Bursar on matters that affected rooms in general, such as the rooms ballot, the level of the annual inflationary increase in rents, and on matters that affect particular groups of rooms, say, the noise from a nearby building site. On the whole he did these things well, and I was inclined to feel that the notice he placed in the Student Newsletter, whimsically called *CLAREification*, towards the end of the Lent Term 19xx was fully intended to be helpful. Just as it appeared (including one small typo) it read as follows.

**Rooms**

You probably all received a note about having to go down at a given time at the end of term. The case is that you can stay up until the end of term without permission and if you ant to stay up longer just contact your tutor who will without further hassle fill out a form allowing you to stay up for the break, if you give a reason. I can't guarantee your room will be available, but most will. Note you will be charged for using your room outside term

*Harvey Tinbergen*

The first I knew about this matter was some three days later when I received a highlighted copy of the Newsletter with a brief note from the then Master attached; I read the note as being deliberately phrased in a distanced way, intending to pass on the Staff members' complaint, but not necessarily endorsing it. With the substitution of fictitious names for the Housekeeper and Conference Organiser, it read.

The Senior Tutor  
Clare College

My attention has been drawn to this notice by Harvey about rooms in vacation. I am told that this is exactly what Alison Bradshaw and Wendy Akhurst moan about. It might be helpful to have a very clear written statement of the rules and, as agreed with Alison and Wendy by the Tutors, published to all students so that there are no misunderstandings.

*Henry*

cc College Bursar

My reply to the Master, and subsequent letter to Harvey are reproduced below; composing them was not without its problems. 'Telling it like it was' to the Master was relatively straightforward, but writing a letter to Harvey which hopefully would keep everybody happy without misrepresenting my own view of his intentions was difficult. Re-reading it now, I think that it was phrased more severely than the facts justified. He probably gave me a  $\beta_-$  for it!



The Master  
Clare College

Dear Henry

**Harvey Tinbergen Notice**

It is unclear to me who has drawn your attention to the item in the Newsletter. I had not seen it when your letter arrived, and neither had the College Bursar.

In purely factual terms there is not much wrong with it, though all would agree that the implications of the way it is written are totally wrong and unacceptable. The rules governing the occupation of rooms out of Term are set out in the hand-out that all students receive — and they have been agreed with, and in some cases written by, the Housekeeper and Conference Organiser.

In the past the College Council has generally looked favourably on the notion that students, especially final-year students, should be allowed to remain in residence to work on projects and dissertations, and use the College and faculty libraries.

I will write to Harvey to point out the consequences of this ill-considered notice, and, as I understand it, some previous notices in which his choice of phrasing has been less than judicious.

Yours

*Ken*

The letter to Harvey, written on the same day as that to the Master, is reproduced below. The reference in the final paragraph to the next UCS Rooms Representative should not be

taken as implying that some Fellows play a part in making such appointments; a new Representative, elected by the undergraduates, would take over at the start of the Easter Term, but the relevant election had not been held by the time of this incident.

Harvey Tinbergen  
Clare College

Dear Harvey

I am writing to complain of the tone and ill-founded implications of your notice in last Friday's Newsletter about the possibility of students occupying their room over some or all of the Easter Vacation period.

The College Tutors do consider requests to be allowed to stay/come back in residence during this period, and will approve all applications based on reasonable academic, personal, or health grounds. However, it would be totally impractical for all students to stay, as some rooms are needed to accommodate ex-members of the College, and all have to be cleaned at some point.

It is quite unacceptable for you to imply that any frivolous reason will do. Perhaps you did not intend to give that impression; in that case, your wording was ill-considered.

I understand that there have been one or two previous instances in which you have added your own interpretation to agreed operating procedures. Those actions were also unhelpful.

I do not know who your successor as Rooms Rep will be, but I trust that you will make it clear to him or her that they have an implied duty to make the rooms system

work as smoothly as possible.

Yours sincerely

*Ken Riley*

cc The Master, The Rooms Tutor,  
Housekeeper, Conference Organiser,  
College Bursar

Far more serious, but far easier to know which side was in the right, was a series of events that took place several years earlier, and which, statutorily at least, was a problem for an earlier Master of the College. It involved three undergraduates, George Avery, Richard Anderson and Sean Akhurst.<sup>7</sup>

Following the normal room allocation procedure, they had opted to apply, as a group, for a flat that forms part of one of the Colony Hostels. That particular hostel, when originally built in the nineteen sixties, was theoretically divided into two, Wilflete, to retain the name of the building it replaced, and Castle End, to reflect its proximity to the 'hill' on which Cambridge Castle once stood. More recently, the name of Wilflete has disappeared, but at the time the flat was known as the Wilflete Flat.

Although it might look as if the group occupying it was formed by a third party selecting successive entries in an alphabetic list of undergraduates, this was not in fact the case. What seems to have drawn them together was a common tendency

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<sup>7</sup>Not related to the Conference Organiser, as I'm sure she would want to be the first to point out.

towards anarchy and, as will be seen later, a lack of any desire to get up at a reasonable time of day.

The new academic year was less than two weeks old when I received a letter from the College's Domestic Bursar about the state of the flat occupied by Anderson, Akhurst and Avery. As it was reported, despite being reminded directly by the Housekeeper, they had failed to collect the free poster hangers available to help with room decorations, and, in direct contradiction of the circulated room instructions, had used Blutak, drawing pins and Sellotape to attach posters and other sheets of paper to the plaster on some of the walls. They had also 'decorated' one of the ceilings in a similar manner. Further, many of the sheets of paper had obscenities written on them. The instructions had been agreed with a previous year's UCS committee, with the express purpose of keeping down redecoration costs, and hence room rents. The Domestic Bursar certainly had a point.

I wrote to the three, pointing out their blatant disregard of the previously-circulated room instructions, their failure to use the poster-hangers and, in many ways the worst of all, their lack of concern for the feelings of the bedmaker (bedder) who looks after and cleans the flat. Whilst making clear that I doubted that there could ever be an acceptable explanation of their behaviour, I invited them to send me any written submissions they wished to be placed before the Tutors. At their weekly meeting they would consider whether to forward the matter to the Court of Discipline, who in turn would report to the College Council.

Whilst thanking me for my letter, their joint reply ex-

pressed their belief that this was a matter that should not involve the Senior Tutor, let alone the Council; they thought that the bedmaker should have taken the initiative and asked them nicely to remove the offending material! The reply went on to complain about the ‘peeling plaster’ on the ceiling, the ‘many large cracks in the stained walls’, the alleged inadequacies of the poster hangers, and the general ‘poor quality and taste’ of the decoration. The letter concluded with a statement which accused me of being unreasonable and over-confrontational, and the Domestic Bursar, with his ‘random spot-checks and unreasonable threats’, of having caused them far more distress than they had inflicted on the bedmaker.

As promised, I took their reply to the other Tutors and, after further consultations with the Domestic Bursar and the Rooms Tutor revealed that the three had gone some way towards putting matters right, wrote them a further letter. In it, I pointed out that the Domestic Bursar would not have visited the flat at all if *their* behaviour had not brought the bedder near to tears; it was his duty to investigate anything that upset any member of the College Staff. I also accepted that some things are simply a matter of taste — and that I too would not like an entrance hallway that was painted orange — and, subject to one non-negotiable condition, and a written assurance that they have both apologised to the bedmaker and rearranged their decorations in accordance with the agreed code, I was prepared to consider the matter closed. The condition was that ‘no matter carrying offensive or obscene messages may be placed where the bedmaker, carrying out her normal duties, may come across it’.

Naturally I hoped to receive an assurance from them that would close the affair, but when I came into College on the following Monday, there was no sign of it. Rather, the Housekeeper, as her immediate ‘line-manager’,<sup>8</sup> came to see me to tell me that the bedder had received no apology. Further, it seemed that at some time during the weekend, a meeting or dinner had been held in the flat which was, to use her description, in an appalling state. As I had given the three until the following day to send me the assurance I sought, I asked Mrs Bradshaw to instruct the bedder to do no more than empty dustbins at the flat, until such time that the occupants had put the flat to rights, so that she could carry out her normal duties.

By Wednesday of that week, nothing at all had been received from any of the three, and at the Tutors’ weekly meeting held that day, the Rooms Tutor showed the others a new obscene notice. He had found it on display when he had accompanied the Housekeeper on her inspection of the flat on Monday morning.

It was agreed that I should summon Messrs Akhurst, Anderson and Avery to a face-to-face meeting with me and their personal Tutors, as a group or separately, as they wished. At the meeting they could explain their inaction with respect to the requested assurance, what action they had taken in respect of the College Staff, and any other points they wished to make. The time chosen for the meeting was aimed at avoiding all lectures and practical classes, and any necessary postponement of

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<sup>8</sup>A term that did not find its way into the College vocabulary until some fifteen years later.

a supervision would be explained to the inconvenienced Supervisor.

Because, by now, the affair was threatening to become really serious, I felt that what nowadays is widely described as a yellow card had to be shown. Consequently, the final paragraph of my letter read as follows.

It hardly needs to be stated that this is very much your last chance to prevent the matter going further – if this letter too is ignored, I will have little option but to bring your non-cooperation to the attention of the Master and College Council. However, since it is a required part of the College's procedure to give written warnings, I am doing so and you may take this letter as notice of the likely consequences of continued failure to respond to the situation.

This letter did bring an immediate response – written and delivered on the same day – and implying that Sean and Richard would attend as requested, but that George Avery had a commitment to sing Evensong with the Choir of another College at that time. At any other time I would have considered this laudable, but in the circumstances it made me wonder whether he appreciated the gravity of the situation. However, I did not pursue it, and, at the appointed time, Sean and Richard came together to my office in Old Court, as did their respective Tutors. As Tutors always do, the latter tried to elicit anything that might reflect favourably on their pupils' behaviour in this affair.

However, what emerged from the meeting, in which I asked most of the questions and the two students provided most of the answers, was that George had at least apologised to the bedder – but only on the previous day, some three weeks after my initial letter to the three of them; before that, he had not even tried to meet her. For Sean and Richard it was even worse. By their own admission, they had *never* tried to find her to apologise, even though she came into the flat every weekday morning; they offered as a reason the insulting excuse that they never get up until nearly eleven o'clock, at the earliest.

So that the reader may understand a later reference to the topic, I should record here that the students claimed that they were all vegans. There was nothing to support this statement, for example, neither of the two present could produce a membership card for the University's Vegan Society. But the Tutors accepted the claim at face value, and informed them that a vegan option was available in the Buttery, something that seemed to take them by surprise.

By the end of the meeting, they had undertaken to do three things: to individually apologise to the bedder; to rearrange the flats decoration to comply with the official instructions; to clean the flat so that the bedder can resume her normal duties. In addition, the Tutors present had agreed that the three could approach the Domestic Bursar and the Housekeeper to see if a mutually satisfactory way could be found to meet their vegan habits, without leaving the kitchen in an unacceptable state for the bedder.



As the reader will have anticipated by now, and I feared at the time, little happened over the following week. I had not received the promised notification that all their undertakings had been honoured, and so had to make my own enquiries. They revealed that the three had sent the bedder a written apology, but they had not made it possible for her to resume her normal cleaning duties. In particular, she was unable to sweep or dust their bedrooms because whenever she called at perfectly reasonable times,<sup>9</sup> they were still in bed.

Some cleaning of the oven had taken place, but nothing had been done about the state of the kitchen; and neither the Domestic Bursar nor the Housekeeper had been approached. You may well wonder why it had taken so long, and in retrospect so do I, but the time had come for a final ultimatum; the other Tutors and I would place the whole matter before the College Council in two week's time unless every aspect had been dealt with to our satisfaction within the next four days. The four remaining issues were that the flat decoration should obey the approved rules, that the bedmaker should be enabled to complete her work at the scheduled times, that the cleanliness and tidiness of the kitchen be kept at the expected standard or that they do the cleaning themselves subject to periodic inspection, and, finally, that an assurance be given that these standards will be maintained in the future.

The next four days saw another round of letter writing,

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<sup>9</sup>The UCS Committee took the view that all students, even those reading Arts subjects, should have vacated their bedrooms by 9.00 a.m. on days when their rooms were to be cleaned.

with the students denying some of the complaints made by the Housekeeper and her Staff, and my setting out the scheduled timetable for cleaning the flat – every Tuesday, beginning no later than 9.00 a.m. So as to ensure that the three messages would not be delayed over the weekend, I had to resort to photocopying a hand-written letter. But the hoped-for outcome was not to be; the flippant tone of one reply I received can be summed up by a couple of extracts taken from it: “. . . we will make further arrangements with the Domestic Bursar as time and studies permit.” and “. . . we consider this endless letter-writing to be unproductive, and is an unnecessary intrusion into our studies. We therefore think it unlikely that we will reply in detail to any more unconstructive letters.”

Well, I agreed with them that the letter-writing *had* been unproductive, but didn't see how it could have interfered with their studies nearly as much as lying in bed until nearly noon each day must have done.

By now the die was cast, at least in my mind; the matter *would* have to be referred to the Master and then, perhaps to the Council.<sup>10</sup> On the Tuesday six days before the Council was due to meet, a further escalation took place. The Housekeeper phoned me shortly after 10.00 a.m. to say that the occupants of the flat were still in bed. The bedder had been instructed to clean the toilet and bathroom, but she clearly could not clean the bedrooms and the kitchen sink was full of dirty dishes. The following morning, further information provided by the bedder

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<sup>10</sup>At the time of this saga, there was no provision in the College's Statutes for a Court of Discipline.

confirmed that, as requested, electric cables on the floor of the lounge had been removed. However, it also confirmed that it was not until 10.45 a.m. that the first of the three, Sean, had got up.

All of this was reported to the other Tutors at their weekly meeting later that day, and on Thursday morning I wrote a formal letter to the Master. This was the only time during my twenty years as Senior Tutor that I had had to write in this way about anything other than strictly academic matters.

As such formal letters have to be very carefully drafted, it would not seem right to try to paraphrase it. So, apart from the usual false names and hidden dates, it is reproduced here as it was written.

The Master  
Clare College

Dear Michael

#### **Occupancy of the Wilfete Flat**

At their meeting yesterday the Tutors considered the series of events and the correspondence relating to the occupancy this term of the Wilfete Flat by George Avery, Richard Anderson and Sean Akhurst. I am sorry to have to tell you that their conclusion was that the totality of the conduct of the occupants, in their attitude to the College Staff, and in their written and practical responses to reasonable requests by the College Officers,

has been such that the Tutors recommend that the three no longer be allowed to occupy College accommodation and are required to find their own accommodation for the Lent and Easter Terms 19xx.

I am enclosing copies of the relevant correspondence, and of notes I made on meetings and conversations. I have told the Domestic Bursar about the Tutors' decision, and he and the Housekeeper may well wish to add further information and comment relevant to the case.

The Statutes (31) are not entirely clear whether this matter should go to you in the first place, or whether (Statute 31(2)) the Council needs to be given the chance to lay down any principles first.

I am sorry to have to involve the Master (and Council) in this matter, but these three students have failed to respond in an acceptable manner over a period which is now more than six weeks long. Naturally the Rooms Tutor and I are prepared to give any further information you may require, and, if needed, be present at any future meeting you may arrange.

Yours sincerely,

*Ken*

Encs

I don't know what the Master did on receiving my letter, or whether he had discussions with any of the College Staff, but from what happened three days later, I assume that he asked the three students to call on him, so that he could hear for himself any points or comments they may wish to make. Whatever it

was that happened during those three days, the outcome was that at the end of the Council meeting (at which nothing was said about the problem) the Master gave me an envelope that had been opened and contained a sheet of paper on which was written

**WILFLETE FLAT**

Telephone Number 0223 350791

The Master  
Clare College  
Cambridge

25th November 19xx

Dear Professor Roberts, CBE FBA

We would like to see you at 6pm on Tuesday, 27 November, in Wilflete flat. Should you have any other engagement at this time, kindly rearrange it.

We think it would be best if the invitation you have sent us for the following day is cancelled.

Yours sincerely,

*S J Akhurst*

Sean Akhurst

*Richard Anderson*

Richard Anderson

That was it – off with both their heads! Actually, it was more a matter of using the Master's statutory duty to assign College rooms to send them into exile, i.e. out of Clare housing, until at least next October. I imagine that they were not too unhappy

with this outcome, provided they could find an approved non-college property and afford the deposit and rent for it.<sup>11</sup> Rooms and lodgings for undergraduates have to be approved, either by the University or by the College on its behalf, because nine terms of residence in such accommodation is one of the requirements for qualifying for the B.A. degree – it's not just a matter of exams. I can't remember whether or not George Avery went with them.

Finally, in a far less serious vein was the correspondence that took place between myself and Marcus Stewart, an undergraduate member of the cast of the May Week Play. This was an outdoor production, staged in the Fellows' garden by Clare Actors at the end of the week in which the May Ball was held. Because both events used the part of the garden known as the Sunken Garden,<sup>12</sup> the Play could not start public performances until a couple of days after the Ball was over. Consequently, its cast members needed to stay in Cambridge beyond the end of Term, that is, beyond the end of the period covered by their termly rent.

Following the normal procedure, the play's producer, Anne Lucas, supplied me as Senior Tutor with a list of the relevant names and their college addresses. This did not throw up any

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<sup>11</sup>At the time, open-market rents in Cambridge, even those for accommodation approved by the University's Housing Syndicate, were nearly twice a typical college rent.

<sup>12</sup>This is a hedged lawn, surrounding a lily pond, and in the form of a rectangular amphitheatre, but with only two tiers. It is below the general level of the Fellows' Garden and in periods of exceptionally heavy rain, it literally lives up to its name.

potential problems and I gave permission for all of them to stay for three extra nights, with the usual daily rent charges, one sixtieth of the termly charge per day, applying. These charges would be added to the college bills that were sent out to all students by the Bursary<sup>13</sup> in the month following the end of each term. As I recall, all went well, the Play was well attended by the public, and the umbrellas that they were always advised to bring to such outdoor productions proved unnecessary.

No doubt, if either of us had ever anticipated that our letters may be reproduced later, both Marcus and I would have been more careful in our phrasing, more measured in our claims, and more succinct in our attempts to be humorous. However, though it is rather long, I have copied his original letter almost verbatim; just the usual changes of name, other than my own. I would have liked to add that I have corrected his spelling mistakes, but there weren't any. It was sent to the Bursary and read:

Dear Sir/madam

Please find enclosed a cheque for £71.22. This is a cheque for my amended college bill, and excludes the £11.00 for the "missing undersheet" and the £11.34 for "residence outside term".

With respect to the former; the sheet was indeed missing though not, as no doubt you had suspected, through

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<sup>13</sup>The traditional name for what is now more commonly called the College Office.

student absent-mindedness brought about because of important university exams and a May Week play to produce, but rather as the result of cold, brutal and calculated acts of theft and deceit carried out by me. Now that you have found me out I am forced to confess that I am driven by an evil kleptomania for Clare College undersheets, an obsession I can no longer ignore, as I am now a central figure in a sophisticated Latin American “undersheet ring”.

Before your agents uncovered this international plot – which at one time spanned all five continents (including Leeds Market) – I was in the habit of flying to Rio at the end of every term and, unbeknown to the Housekeeper, taking often hundreds of undersheets, drying-up clothes and buttery table-wipes. Once there, a group of local tailors would turn what you may admittedly view as a plain old undersheet, into a highly elegant albeit somewhat unusual tuxedo.

In this present state of shock (similar to the one you are no doubt experiencing at this moment) I am returning the latest bedsheet with this letter, though I’m afraid the other 342 sheets, 12 cloths and 56 wipes are probably wandering around somewhere on the back of eminent world politicians and their friends. While I may be able to provide a rough list of names and addresses, I trust this one bedsheet is adequate for the time being.

I am deeply sorry for the trouble I have caused, and for the bedsheet-less conference guests who have suffered miserably these past two weeks, though I would like to point out that a rather exciting knitting trouser pattern for a Clare College duvet is available on request (how-



ever, it's in Brazilian).

The £11.34 for “residence outside term” seemed as though it was someone else's mistake – I had permission from Dr Rawby, Dr Riley, Commander Turner and the House-keeper long before the final application date, and confirmed Anne Lucas's application on my behalf twice afterwards!

Have a nice summer and I hope to receive a reply and/or knitting pattern in the near future.

Yours faithfully

*Marcus Stewart*

The letter was passed on to me by the Bursary. As this was hardly a grave matter, I sent him a hand-written reply, as follows.

Dear Marcus

Thank you for your informative letter about the international trade in undersheets – I'm sure that we can now all rest more easily in our beds.

However, on the question of out of term residence, more serious issues are at stake. Yes, you did have permission from all the people you mentioned long before the final application date – but, No, none of them said that your stay would be rent free.<sup>14</sup> This is quite clear on the official booking form (copy enclosed); what you were doing

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<sup>14</sup>As it would have been for those taking part in official College activities, such as helping at an Open Day, rehearsing for a Choir Tour or special service, or sitting compulsory University exams.

would be described as an ‘artistic activity’. I hope that this mystery is now solved as well – and that the sum of £11.34 will be winging its way into the Clare College Coffers; no doubt it will be ear-marked for additional undersheets.

Yours sincerely

*Ken Riley*

If only all room problems could be solved so easily!

## Chapter 6

# Brought to Book

During the period covered by these musings, permission to use public rooms within the College for major events such as concerts, art exhibitions and the May Ball, had to be sought from the College Council. All other, smaller-scale, bookings were dealt with by the Senior Tutor, who also had to try to ensure that no clashes were likely to occur; this applied just as much to the Porters' availability to deal with any problems as it did to the use of the facilities.

To give just two examples of regular bookings, during the Michaelmas and Lent Terms the Crypt of the College Chapel, known throughout Cambridge as The Clare Cellars and much

in demand,<sup>1</sup> was booked at least one day each weekend as the venue for a student-organised gig or disco, and, at the other end of the noise spectrum, the Chess Club met in the Buttery<sup>2</sup> on alternate Thursdays evenings.

Less regular requests might be for a room in which to hold acting auditions, or for permission to hold a staircase party with up to sixty people attending, or a more restricted room party for no more than two dozen. Whilst trying to respond favourably to all properly presented proposals was the major aim, making sure that none of the three Porters Lodges was going to have to look after more than three simultaneous events was always part of the equation. To try to ensure that applicants had thought through what they were proposing and planned accordingly, each booking had to be made at least a certain number of days before the proposed date — the bigger the event, the larger the lead time, and the more detailed the proposal had to be.

‘The Cellars’, or, to give it its everyday name, the JCR (Junior Common Room), was the major source of potential problems so far as conflicting events were concerned. Ironically, the

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<sup>1</sup>As the College Officer in charge of bookings, I once estimated that if it had been possible to agree to all the requests made by non-members of the College to rent the Cellars, it would have produced about a quarter of my salary. In fact, no term-time outside events were ever allowed, as the room was the students’ principal social centre.

<sup>2</sup>Originally the name for a room in which liquor was stored in butts, and where the butler butttled, it came to mean a more general food and drink store within a college. Nowadays it is the name by which the College’s self-service cafeteria is known.

very reason for its existence, as the ‘basement’ of the Chapel, brought any noisy event held in it into potential conflict with a service or concert being held immediately above it.

Happily, the general desire of students to begin everything very late in the day, but then to prolong it as far as possible into the night, meant that there was seldom a problem with services. Occasionally the starting times for events in the Cellars had to be put back to allow a concert to finish; naturally, when this happened the event organisers claimed that they *really* had wanted to start much earlier, and that clearly they should be allowed to continue well past the normal finishing time in compensation, say an extra two hours. Well, No. But perhaps an extra forty-five minutes, . . . provided the Head Porter can see no problems with it.

One particular attempt to book the JCR by the College Boat Club (CBC) led, not to a clash with another event, but to a stand-off, with the Boat Club on one side and myself, perhaps as a Walter Mitty-like Champion of the non-Boaties, but certainly as a responsible Senior Tutor, on the other.

The Boat Club holds a dinner in the Great Hall<sup>3</sup> after the last night (day) of each year’s May Bumps and follows it with a party at which its members traditionally make their own cocktails. In some previous years the College Gatehouse, a building that, though designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, looks like an

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<sup>3</sup>When I was an undergraduate it was simply ‘the Hall’, but for PR purposes to do with hosting conferences and wedding receptions it has been elevated to ‘the Great Hall’

air-raid shelter, had been the venue for the party. For the last two or three years it had been held in the JCR, but not without a significant number of complaints from both non-CBC members who were in the room at the same time and the College's cleaning Staff who had had to deal with the aftermath. In addition, the conditions under which alcohol could legally be served in Cambridge Colleges<sup>4</sup> had been made more stringent by the licensing authorities, allowing only those with direct delegated authority to serve alcohol in college bars.

Several weeks before this particular year's bumping races CBC had asked to again hold the party in the JCR but that, to combat the change in licensing laws, the official bar should be closed and the party deemed to be private, with all non-members of the Club required to vacate the Crypt. I felt that it would be quite wrong to deprive the majority of undergraduates of their common room in this way. I said 'No', urged CBC's Social Secretary to book the Gatehouse as they had done in the past, and assumed that that was the end of the matter.

However, on the Monday morning of the week in which the Bumps started on Wednesday, I received an email from the Secretary raising the matter again and saying that he had a letter that he wished to show me. It had been signed by various CBC office holders, the undergraduate Bar President and the UCS President, and it supported the previous request. I replied that, as it happened, the College Council was meeting that afternoon

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<sup>4</sup>Under the so-called Vice-Chancellor's Licence, which when originally granted in the XVI<sup>th</sup> century allowed the Vice-Chancellor to control the sale of liquor, not just in Colleges, but also in the Town.

and, as designated Junior Members are on the Council, the letter, together with a reasoned case, should be presented there.

This the Social Secretary did, and put to the Council a well-presented argument outlining the licensing difficulties and saying that, of all the possible venues in the College, only the JCR would be large enough to accommodate all the ninety plus CBC members who wished to attend. After some discussion, and perhaps influenced by the experiences of recent years (mentioned above), the Council decided that on balance the Senior Tutor's view was the right one and should stand.

Though it had perhaps caused a little disharmony, I had no quarrel with what had happened; one section of the College community had had a particular viewpoint and had presented it for due consideration and discussion — that's the way academia in general, and a College in particular, works. It was what happened next that made me wonder where the apparently rational thinking implied by the CBC's presentation had gone.

On Wednesday morning the Social Secretary, Luke Green, emailed me seeking to book the television room in the so-called Colony for a limited-numbers cocktail party, to start soon after the CBC Dinner in the Great Hall had finished. The Colony is the College's secondary residential site, some half a mile from the main one, and consists of several purpose-built student hostels, as well as a number of houses on the streets that border the site. It also contains a number of bookable rooms of various sizes and occupation capacities, the latter being set by the fire authorities. That for the TV room is sixty.

The possibility of so many students, in various stages of inebriation, trying to negotiate the streets and traffic of Cambridge late at night, was one I didn't want to contemplate. As might be expected, my emailed reply was written to express my dismay at receiving Luke's request. This is a copy of it.

Dear Luke

I can hardly believe that you have sent me this.

How can the numbers attending this 'drinking event' suddenly be reduced from 90 to less than 60 and it still be an event that 'all the Boat Club' wishes to take part in. At 60 you could have booked the Gatehouse long ago, before others did.

But even more worrying is the thought that 60 people who have been 'celebrating' since early evening should then make their way to the Colony for yet more drink – with some of them having to make the return journey after that.

My reason for not being able to agree to your request is principally that of the College not doing anything that will potentially lead to less-than-sober Clare members being on the streets of Cambridge. I now also have some doubts as to whether the initial application was all that it appeared to be.

I am copying this to others who have been involved and/or are on the College Council. If they feel that my view is wrong, I will get back to you.

*Ken Riley*



I had no need to get back to Luke.

One of the other public rooms at the Colony, built at the same time as one of the hostels, and named after Samuel Blythe who was Master of the College for 35 years, proved to be something of a white elephant in its early years. Though it offers a larger unobstructed floor space than any other of the College's public rooms, very few groups or societies wanted to use it. This, despite the fact that it was right on the doorstep of the nearly one hundred and fifty students who lived on the Colony site. Those of us who had been involved in its planning had seriously underestimated the deterrent effect of its distance from the central site.

We discovered the effect for ourselves when, endeavouring to bring the room into regular use, the Master convened one of the College's termly Governing Body meetings in the Blythe Room. For some Fellows, particularly for those who seldom left their rooms or departments, this was very much a journey into an unknown part of the City. The experiment didn't last long – one meeting in fact – and we reverted to meeting in an admittedly much more crowded room in Old Court.

As time went on, the Blythe Room did become more fully used, for table tennis, for play rehearsals and performances, and as a meeting place for 'well-behaved' University societies. It was not normally available to organisations based in other colleges, but I do recall the problems caused when on one occasion it was.

Two students from my own college, Nadine and Tom, were part of the cast of a play to be put on by the Drama Society of

another College. They sought permission for the Room to be used for the production, saying that they would make sure that the rules governing the use of public rooms were followed. Given the general underuse of the Blythe Room at that time, and the fact that two of our own students were being given a chance to increase their acting experience, I agreed that the room could be used for the production. And almost immediately wished that I hadn't!

When I arrived in College one Monday morning, in my post tray were several letters of complaint from some of the students who lived on the corridor that ran along one side of the Blythe Room. Other complaints had been channelled through the Colony Porter, who added to them by noting that the rules about the consumption of food and drink in a public room had been violated. One of the written complaints included the following passage.

I was woken up at 8 am on the Sunday morning because the actors couldn't get in, they then blocked the hallway with a coffin and left open the fire door at the end of the corridor. During their rehearsals we were unable to use the toilet and my neighbour was asked to turn off his music. We also had to lock our kitchen to prevent the actors helping themselves to our food.

To her credit, in amongst the complaints was a letter from Nardine, apologising for all that had happened and, as such letters always do, expressing the pious hope that future requests to use the Blythe room would not be jeopardised because of it. So far

as I know, that particular acting group has never asked again — it certainly didn't during my remaining time as Senior Tutor.

As became all too apparent to me that morning, the fault was almost entirely mine. Whenever an outside student group seeks to use facilities within a College, almost the first question that the Senior Tutor should ask is 'Why can't (or won't) their own College provide them?'; on this occasion I had failed to do that. If I had contacted their Senior Tutor before, rather than after, the event, I would have been warned that this particular acting group had a reputation for behaving irresponsibly. As it was, my failure to ask at the time of the booking led to an unwelcome situation for several of our students and an article in the student newspaper *Varsity* that the College could well have done without.

Theatrical productions put on by students at Cambridge, especially at the College level, often seem to bring problems in their wake. Not usually serious problems, but enough to keep college Porters and Senior Tutors on their toes. One case that comes to mind did not involve any actual booking of a room; in fact, where the incident took place there were no rooms to book, as the building that was to stand there was still under construction.

Late one February afternoon a Clare student reported to the Porters in Memorial Court that three people were removing oil drums from the site where Clare's new Library was being built. It was Saturday and so there were no workmen around to stop them. The (fearless) Porter went to the site and found two

girls from another College trying to remove one of the drums, claiming to have been told by a Clare student that they could. The same student had already helped them to remove one drum off site – of how they did it, and where they took it, I unfortunately have no record. The missing drum was returned, and the non-Clare miscreants gave their names, and that of their Tutor, to the Porter.

It subsequently appeared from my enquiries, made of the Clare student and the named Tutor in the other College, that the three students were involved in a play supported by the University's French Society, and it required two people to sit in buckets.<sup>5</sup> Plastic buckets were not up to the task, and they wanted to try the drums on stage before the week of actual performances arrived. They claimed that they intended to borrow and then return the drums, with a view to asking the site foreman on Monday if they could have them for the play.

When asked on Monday, he said that they could, though first the tops would have to be cut off and the insides cleaned with petrol. However, by then the offer was irrelevant, as the actors, having not been able to borrow the drums, had tried out and settled for cardboard boxes. No harm had been done, and the story didn't quite hang together, but after I had related it to the other Clare Tutors we declared the case closed.

Just as the public rooms can be booked by clubs and societies, groups of students, or even individuals, so can the lawns

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<sup>5</sup>Given the French Society's support, the play may have been *Waiting for Godot*, which was originally written in French.

that form parts of the various College Gardens. The Gardens themselves are considered to be amongst the best in Cambridge — and not just by the members of Clare. In the days before it became British Rail in 1965, British Railways used a prominent image of the Fellows' Garden on its poster<sup>6</sup> advertising Cambridge as a place to visit.

For further confirmation that the Gardens are something a bit special, we need look no further than the fact that they are eagerly accepted as part of the National Garden Scheme. One Sunday each year, nearly always in late June or early July, the Gardens that flank the river are opened to the Public and cream teas are served, with all profits going to a named charity, usually The Red Cross.

The individual highlight for most visitors is the herbaceous border in the Fellows' Garden, though for the real enthusiast the way that the flower borders in particular, and the whole garden in general, are laid out is the real heart of the experience. The post-World War II remodelling of the Gardens was directed by a Fellow of the College who was also a Professor of Histology. He had a special research interest in the mechanism of colour vision, and in particular of how the perceived distance of an object is related to both its own colour and that of other objects in the field of view. He used the results of his researches to draw up planting schemes that give the impression that some vistas are longer than they really are, and that others are shorter.

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<sup>6</sup>I had one of them on the wall of my undergraduate room, given to me by my cousin who worked for BR.

As might be expected, bookings for the Gardens were largely confined to the Easter Term and Summer Vacation period, though, it has to be said, the weather did not always come up to expectations. Nevertheless, in the Easter Term, students could if they wished take their lunches onto the lawn of the Scholars' Garden, and other bookings for it between noon and two o'clock had to be avoided. But, again, even this licence had to be withdrawn if there were examinations being held in the rooms which overlooked the Garden. As explained in another chapter,<sup>7</sup> taking an examination in a candidate's own College is the normal procedure when the candidate suffers from any kind of handicap or has been granted extra time.

However, from the Tutorial point of view things that happen in the Fellows' and Scholars' Gardens are secondary. Although the principal events that take place in the Fellows' Garden, the May Ball<sup>8</sup>, the May Week Play and the National Garden Scheme Open Day, are large, they are all events for which permission comes straight from the College Council. Those bookings that do go through the Senior Tutor are largely confined to small receptions hosted by one or more of the Fellows, or official team or college photographs; problems arising from such events are rare.

Having said that, I do recall the occasion on which one of the College's Law Fellows (foolishly) agreed to host the summer garden party of the University's Law Society in the Fellows' Garden, as he was fully entitled to do. However, the event

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<sup>7</sup>See chapter 11.

<sup>8</sup>See chapter 14

had hardly started before he regretted having done so; many times more students turned up than he had been led to believe would and were soon damaging the surrounding shrubbery and harassing passing punters from the Bridge and river bank. For the rest of my time as Senior Tutor, and perhaps ever since, the University Law Society members were *personae non-gratae* and if any of our Law Fellows was approached by them about a booking, both the Head Gardener and I would remind that Fellow of what had happened on that earlier occasion.

What do matter much more so far as the Senior Tutor is concerned are requests to book the College lawns other than those on which the May Ball takes place. The two groups are separated by a busy road and a strip of land, owned by another College, and across which there are a number of rustic footpaths.<sup>9</sup> This road and grass barrier are a sufficient deterrent that the College Courts and lawns that lie beyond them are largely off the tourist trail. This makes them very suitable for hosting outdoor student gatherings, particularly in the weeks on either side of the end of Easter Full term, after examinations are over. The main Court in the group is known as Memorial Court<sup>10</sup> and the lawns in front of it, referred to as the Memorial Court Lawns, are large enough to accommodate garden parties with up to about one hundred and fifty guests.

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<sup>9</sup>Although it would be appreciated by many who use them, especially when wet weather turns them into mud tracks, the Cambridge City Council refuses to give permission for them to be given an 'all-weather' surface.

<sup>10</sup>Built in the late 1920's, it is dedicated to those ex-members of the College who lost their lives in the First World War.

Most bookings are for gatherings much smaller than that; for example, one might be for all undergraduates in the College who are reading, say, History, perhaps about thirty people. Another might be a social get-together for all those who have lived throughout the year on a particular staircase, or belong to the Netball Club. The Lawns host two May Week events that have become established in the last fifteen years, a garden party organised by the UCS Committee and an outdoor concert given by the College's Music Society. Sometimes, the Porters from the Memorial Court Porters Lodge, which overlooks the Lawns, have to put in a brief appearance at the garden party and quieten things down a bit, but generally both events are well-organised enjoyable occasions.

If there is trouble, it is almost certain to be at an event that is authorised to have a near-capacity number of participants, and an even larger number turn up. Into this category come garden parties for University Societies of which at least one of whose *elected* (not self-appointed) officers is a member of Clare; that person must make the booking and undertake to meet certain conditions concerned with ticketing and the provision of stewards.<sup>11</sup>

In my time there were a number of occasions on which some serious action had to be taken by the Porters or by the Duty Tutor — whichever of the Tutors or Senior Tutor was on call, rather like doctors used to be — but two particular occasions stick in my mind. The first of these involved, of all people,

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<sup>11</sup>But the officials of the University Law Society need not even bother to ask!



the University's Mathematical Society, the Archimedean. They had booked the Lawns following the approved procedure, and because the Society had not caused any problems in previous years, I was not expecting to be called in my capacity as Duty Tutor on that day.

However, I *was* called from my office in Old Court by the Memorial Court Porter who said that a student whom he did not recognise had rushed into his Lodge to say that he "thought he had found a dead body in a toilet". Senior Tutors don't normally run – for anything – but on this occasion I did, and arrived at the toilet only shortly after the Porter and his informant. Although there was a body on the floor, I was enormously relieved to see it starting to stir, and not long afterwards able to sit, propped up against the wall, without falling over. I did not recognise the student who was clearly totally overcome by drink and we could not get him to tell us his name or College. An ambulance was called and, accompanied by one of the garden party organisers, the 'body' was taken to Addenbrookes Hospital. I don't know exactly what happened there, but the duty doctors and nurses clearly had more success than we did in establishing his identity, as the next morning I had a phone call from another Senior Tutor both apologising for what happened and thanking the College, and in particular the Porter, for what we had done.

Later that day, on quizzing the Archimedean officer who had made the original booking, I learned that the organisers had allowed for an average of half a bottle of wine per person attending the garden party. He had to admit both that this was an unreasonably high average and that, despite being mathe-

maticians, they seemed to have forgotten that the destinations of individual glasses of alcohol is hardly a random process. For my part, I added an additional rule to the booking form and submitted it to the next Council meeting for approval.

Curiously, the second major incident of this kind is memorable largely because I was temporarily incapacitated<sup>12</sup> at the time and therefore *wasn't* around College when it happened. Nevertheless, it had a major effect on the College's policy on hosting large garden parties.

A long-established but unofficial society within the College is a group of men known as the Clare Crabs. I believe that theoretically it is an off-shoot of the Clare Boat Club as its original members all rowed, but it is in fact a drinking club of the 'Hooray, Henry' variety.<sup>13</sup>

I returned to duty about a week after the incident had taken place and from the various reports that were produced, together with what was said at the subsequent College Council meeting, pieced together roughly what had happened. Without following the approved booking procedure, the Crabs had let it be known that it intended to hold a garden party on the Memorial Court Lawns on the Sunday of May Ball Week. By doing so they had inadvertently contravened, or deliberately side-stepped, all of the required conditions in respect of numbers attending, the

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<sup>12</sup>In view of the previously described incident, I should add that my incapacity had nothing whatsoever to do with alcohol.

<sup>13</sup>About twenty years after the first admission of women to the College, a corresponding women's group, the Lobsters, started to indulge in similar (largely unacceptable) behaviour.

ticket-only admissions procedure, and proper stewarding of the event.

As a result of these omissions, there were many more people there than was safe — the Duty Tutor, when called, estimated the number as about one thousand<sup>14</sup> — and clearly included hundreds of people who had nothing at all to do with the College, let alone with the Boat Club, the Crabs, or the Lobsters. The damage and general mess that resulted was never fully catalogued, but included broken glass in a staircase door and a room window, broken shrubbery, and rubbish strewn all over the Lawns. It has to be said, in their defence, that the members of the Crabs did all they could to assist the Porters in keeping control of the situation; they also made a good job of clearing up afterwards.

However, not just on this occasion, but also in the previous few years, it had become clear that a culture was growing amongst Cambridge undergraduates in which it was considered ‘cool’ to invade any outdoor gathering where food or drink was being provided, and to do so in large enough numbers that the invasion could not be controlled. The day had thus come to be known as Suicide Sunday, and when the matter was later considered by the College Council, it decided to adopt the Tutors’ proposal that no bookings for the Memorial Court Lawns should be allowed on that particular Sunday, a decision that also meant that there would be no potential conflict with the preparations for the May Ball and the May Week Play.

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<sup>14</sup>Probably an overestimate, but at even half this figure it would still be three times the nominal capacity.

It was further decided that, so far as groups and societies are concerned, only those that are either recognised by the College or appear on the University's Junior Proctor's approved List of Societies, may ever book the Lawns. Perhaps I should add that the term Suicide Sunday is still in use, and has even spread to the pages of the *Cambridge News*, though it tends to concentrate on the City's fun races in cardboard boats that take place along the backs on that day.

Happily, the bookings for that have nothing to do with the Senior Tutor, who can, if he or she wishes, join the gallery of spectators watching them from Clare Bridge.

## Chapter 7

# To Build or Not to Build

During the last hundred years the size of Clare, as measured both by student numbers and buildings constructed, has grown enormously. Until the nineteen twenties, some six hundred years after its original foundation, the College still had only one Court, about twenty Fellows and not more than about one hundred all-male undergraduates. In the ninety years since then it has grown to five courts, about a hundred Fellows and some four hundred and fifty undergraduates, nearly half of whom are women. During that same period it has also developed the so-called Clare Colony Site, which hosts several Hostels and converted Houses,

and added a body of about one hundred and fifty research students.

Whilst being both academically desirable and in line with the wishes of our Foundress, Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare,<sup>1</sup> all of these developments have come at a price. And that price is not measured purely in monetary terms, but also in the disruption that all major changes, however beneficial they may be in the long run, inevitably cause.

Some major changes call for relatively little money and only minor changes to the physical structure of an establishment, but require a lot of detailed planning, negotiation with other parties, and fine tuning after the changes have been made. In Clare, this was very much the case when in the late nineteen sixties it decided, as did two other previously all-male Colleges, to become co-educational. It is worth noting that, with these three Colleges leading the way, within a few years all the remaining men-only Colleges in Cambridge had opened their doors to women. Of the previously all-female Colleges, only one changed its statutes to permit the admission of men. Consequently, though it is often still not recognised, especially by the media, there are in fact more Cambridge undergraduate places open to women than there are to men.

So far as the disruption caused by ‘going mixed’ is concerned, it was sometimes jokingly said that, as our main res-

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<sup>1</sup>Part of the Preamble to the Statutes (see page 42) she gave to the College in 1359 forms the most quotable part of its current ‘Mission Statement’... they should discover and acquire the precious pearl of learning, so that it does not stay hidden under a bushel but ...

idential buildings, on the Memorial Court site, had been designed with separate unisex toilets, all the Domestic Bursar had to do was install a few long mirrors in the students' rooms. This wasn't quite the whole truth, because, in order to partially meet the expected increase in the number of applicants to the College, it was decided to convert many of the attic spaces in the same set of buildings into student rooms. This did take money and did cause some disturbance, though much of the conversion was carried out during the vacations so as to minimise the latter.

The original building of Memorial Court, to a design by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, would of course have meant a lot of work for the then Master and Bursar and any other of the Fellows involved in the process of gathering subscriptions to the building fund. The formal name of the new building was The War Memorial Building<sup>2</sup> and it was officially opened, though not fully completed in 1924, the architect having turned his attention to the commission he had received to design a new University Library on an adjacent site. However, from a Tutorial point of view, neither the funding nor the construction of the building, large as the Memorial Building was,<sup>3</sup> would have raised any problems. And the reason it would cause no tutorial concern was that it was being put up on a new site, well away from where students were already living.

New buildings only give trouble for Tutors when their pupils are disturbed by the associated noise and access problems. And

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<sup>2</sup>Dedicated to Clare alumni killed during the first World War.

<sup>3</sup>It had twelve staircases each servicing either 8 or 12 two-roomed sets, as well as gyp rooms (small kitchens), baths and toilet facilities.

it doesn't matter whether it is their study or their sleep, or even time when they are doing neither, that is interrupted; they will, perhaps not surprisingly, register a complaint either directly with the Bursar or, more often, through their Tutor. And I have to say that usually they have a good case; I would doubtless feel the same if there were an active building site just outside my window for several weeks.

Having been either a student or a Fellow at Clare for nearly sixty years, I have seen quite a number of these positive step-changes, but by good fortune have never had to suffer any of their downsides – except for the complaints received in my role as Tutor or Senior Tutor.

When I came up to Clare as an undergraduate in the mid-fifties, Thirkill Court, which is a southern 'side-court' to Memorial Court, and dedicated to alumni who lost their lives in the Second World War, had just been completed and the builders had left. By the time the next major building project came along, a new College Library sited near the centre of the Memorial Building, and effectively dividing it into two,<sup>4</sup> my appointment as Senior Tutor had meant a move to an office in Old Court. The recent addition of Lerner Court, which matches Thirkill Court but on the northern side, took place after I had ceased being a Tutor, and, as I still had a pied-à-terre in Old Court, I escaped both the disturbance and the complaints associated with its construction.

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<sup>4</sup>The new Court so formed is called Ashby Court. Both Sir Henry Thirkill and Lord (Eric) Ashby were previous Masters of Clare.



Making decisions that are clearly going to be unwelcome to a significant part of a community is one of the most difficult tasks facing those who have the ultimate responsibility for the future of that community. Whether it is closing down some uneconomic section of a company, with the consequent loss or relocation of jobs, or starting up a desirable new facility at a university, with the consequent loss of an environment conducive to study and research, there is never a totally right solution. For a Cambridge College, or indeed the University as a whole, the decision almost inevitably goes the way of giving preference to long-term gain over the avoidance of short-term inconvenience. The University has just celebrated its eight-hundredth anniversary, and Clare is approaching its seven-hundredth; the planning for such institutions has to be on a timescale measured in decades, not in weeks or months, and hence the long term goal nearly always wins out.

But having said all that, I have to admit that, having taken a decision in favour of establishing a long-term benefit for future members of Clare, the College did not always arrange the details of implementing that decision in a way that reduced to a minimum the impact on those adversely affected in the short term. For them, the short term was the key to their personal long-term prospects and, although they nearly all recognised the benefits to come for future generations of Clare students, they were understandably concerned about the extent to which their own prospects might be damaged.

The difficulties were always most acute if noisy construction work was allowed to take place in the Easter Term, when stu-

dents were just weeks away from their end-of-year, and in some cases final, exams. From the students' point of view they might get lower class degrees as a result of not being able to revise effectively; from the College authorities' point of view calling a temporary halt to the building procedure would greatly increase both the overall cost of the new building and the risk that the building would not be completed in time for its scheduled occupation. With the Government funding authority requiring tightly-controlled student numbers and offers of places having to be made nearly a year in advance, this was a very serious consideration.

During my twenty years as Senior Tutor, there were two building projects that gave rise to a significant number of complaints from the students with rooms close to the building site. The first of these has already been mentioned, and was the new undergraduate Library, a stand-alone building to be sited more or less in the centre of Memorial Court.

Whilst the College's Governing Body had voted decisively to replace the inadequate library in Old Court with a larger more efficient one on the Memorial Court site, there was less agreement about where on the site it should be positioned. In the end, the unsurprising view of the Architect, a Clare Alumnus and shortly to become the President of the Royal Academy of Arts, no less, that it should be in the middle of the Court, and not to one side of it, won the day. The obvious difficulty arising from that decision was that *everybody* living in the Court would have to put up with the noise and disruption; in the event, though complaints about it were made, it was found possible to

somewhat reduce its level during the examination term.

The second project to give cause for concern was a Hostel built on the Colony site at the end of the 1980's and subsequently named Castle House. Other hostels had been on the site for many years, with some as long established as Memorial Court, but the chance to add a further one and also provide a large meeting room (the Blythe Room<sup>5</sup>) came when the medium-term lease of a garage repair shop on the site ran out, and the area it occupied became available for redevelopment.

The garage site was effectively in the middle of a 'court' formed on two sides by the backs of Clare-owned houses that faced onto a public road, Castle Street, and on a third by the steepish grassy slopes of just about the only hillock in Cambridge, known as Castle Mound. The potential problems were much the same as those faced when the new Library was built in Memorial Court, except that there were no students living or studying on the grassy slopes. Since I have rather better records of the tutorial problems raised by the Hostel than of those associated with the Library, I will use the former to illustrate the kind of thing that can happen.

I think that I should say explicitly that the students occupying rooms in the houses on Castle Street knew, when they chose them, that the building of the new Hostel would be taking place; but, of course, those with unfavourable ballot numbers<sup>6</sup> would have very little choice in the matter.

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<sup>5</sup>See page 119.

<sup>6</sup>See page 88.

I was first directly involved in the Castle Street saga when I received a copy of a letter that five of the residents of one of the Castle Street houses had sent to the Rooms Tutor, Dr Partridge, about two weeks after the start of the Easter Term. In it, they said that they were ‘dismayed’ at the level of their heating bills for the previous term, but more importantly that the noise from the building work woke them up too early and also prevented them from working in their rooms once they were awake. The noise problem was not new and they had endured the situation for most of the Lent term, but as this was examination term, it was even more important that something be done about it.

They really had no grounds for challenging the heating bills — the rooms were insulated to modern standards, and the College only passed on the averaged cost of what they actually used in their rooms, the bill for heating public rooms, staircases and corridors being met by the College from other resources. Their building noise concerns had much more substance, not least that the machinery noise and loud hammering started each morning at 7 a.m.

The presentation of their two main points was rather spoilt by the final paragraph of the letter, which accused the College Officers of cursory answers to previous letters, deliberately keeping them uninformed, and, more mysteriously, ‘keeping them at arm’s length when dealing with access problems’. It finished with a threat by those who had not yet paid their College bills to refrain from doing so until satisfactory arrangements could be reached.

Ignoring the errors of fact and the threat in this final paragraph, Dr Partridge arranged a meeting with seven representatives of the thirty or so students, mostly second-years, who lived in houses on Castle Street. After hearing their reports on the impact of the building operations, in terms of noise, disturbance and loss of privacy, he wrote a letter to the Master of the College. In it, he recorded that the students said they appreciated the working common room that had been made available in the Castle End Hostel on the far side of the site; this was useful for a minority but didn't compensate for being deprived of any quiet enjoyment of their own rooms for 8 to 9 hours a day, six days a week (occasionally seven).

He also reported that there was a feeling that the building workers were knowingly disregarding the general agreements about noise that were included in the original contract for the project. Loud radios were being played, particularly on Saturdays when the foreman was absent; and singing and calling out to any students who appeared, particularly women, had caused considerable annoyance. It was accepted that recently there had been some improvement in the early mornings, in that the start of very noisy operations now occurred after 8 a.m., rather than before 7 a.m.

The overall position of the students was clear, and hardly unexpectedly, they asked that all work on the building site be stopped as soon as possible, and only be resumed when every undergraduate living in the Castle Street houses had finished their examinations; this would have meant a stoppage of some four to five weeks. Having reviewed what the students said and

discovered that the contractors intended to bring in a compressor to do outdoor percussion drilling for ten days, the Rooms Tutor gave the request his support, adding that in his view the new Hostel would still be finished early enough for it to be ready for occupation in October.

As can be imagined, this precipitated a flurry of consultations, both amongst the College Officers and with representatives of the builders, and some immediate steps were taken to try to alleviate the position, such as the installation of sound insulation boards. However it was also decided, probably wrongly in hindsight, that a complete stoppage for about a month could not be accepted, both for the threat it posed to having the Hostel ready for the new academic year, and the additional cost that would be entailed, somewhere between £70,000 and £110,000. Even today, this would be a lot of money for a College to find, but twenty-five years ago it was an unthinkable sum to pay for doing nothing. Even the committee of the student body, the UCS exec., agreed that this was so.

During the next few days, the Master, their Tutors and I received copies of further letters written by three Castle Street residents to the Rooms Tutor, acknowledging the steps that had been taken, but stating that their effects had been negligible. One was couched in considerably less measured terms than the other two, but, in effect, all three asked for building operations to be suspended. A further round of 'high-level' discussions followed, and as a result I was asked to write a circular to the relevant Castle Street residents, summarising the current state of play.

By now, the reader will probably have made up their own mind about how this episode should have been resolved, but to follow what actually happened, I reproduce below the circular that was sent out.

#### **Noise on the New Hostel Site**

As you will probably know, following your representations to the Rooms Tutor, there has been considerable discussion between the College and representatives of the builders about ways in which interruption of students' studies can be minimised.

During the last few days a number of significant changes in the way the builders operate their equipment have been agreed, and assessments made on Wednesday by a number of observers indicated that they have had a noticeable beneficial effect. The changes include:

- Early completion of glazing on the West side and the installation of insulation board.
- Changing the two-stroke cement mixer engine for an electric one.
- Agreement to use the noisiest equipment only during the very restricted period of noon-2pm.

However the College would wish to go even further in enabling students to enjoy a quiet atmosphere in which to pursue their studies prior to the examinations. A complete stoppage of all work until 11th June was investigated in detail, but the additional cost that this would entail (a minimum of £70,000, and perhaps as much as

£110,000) was considered by the College Officers, and by a number of students who commented, to be too high a penalty to incur. A complete stoppage would also put in jeopardy the availability of the hostel for next Michaelmas Term.

It has therefore been decided with the builders' cooperation, that work will continue but with two further changes in working practice.

- Additional insulation material will be installed
- There will be no Saturday or Sunday working until after the examinations (except possibly for virtually silent operations such as plastering or painting).

In addition the Bursar has agreed that no rent will be charged for the Easter Term to students whose rooms in 14-20 Castle Street overlook the site.

I hope that with all these measures and the Castle End reading room in operation the main objectives will be achieved, i.e. that students can prepare for their examinations in a relatively undisturbed environment, and the builders can complete the building by the expected completion date. Although there is clearly not enough spare room in College to accommodate more than one or two students, if next week you still find it impossible to work in your Castle Street room, please see your Tutor who will see what further can be done.

K.F.Riley

On the Monday following the distribution of this circular, I



and the other College Officers involved, The Bursar, The Buildings Bursar, the Domestic Bursar and the Rooms Tutor, received a statement from the Master; in it he explained what had happened on the previous Friday evening. Four students Jenny Crawley, Catherine Field, Oliver McIntosh, and Keith Richards (No, not that Keith Richards) had been to see him, allegedly as representatives of all of the Castle Street residents. Obviously, they were extremely disappointed that the work was not going to stop, although they understood the College's dilemma, in terms of both timing and money.

At the meeting with the Master, the four students, having accepted that the building works would not be halted altogether, had suggested further concessions. These included the builders not starting work until 9.00 a.m. – not really a starter, given that some of the students were supposed to be in lectures, or even examination rooms, by that time! Another suggestion was to include circular saws and mechanical hammers amongst the tools restricted to use only during the noon-2 p.m. period; this would have slowed down the whole operation too much, but it was agreed to site the saws within a builders hut.

On the question of cash compensation – this always seems to be an acceptable analgesic, whatever the nature of the loss a student has suffered – Catherine's proposal of '*at least* a year's room rent' fell on rather deaf ears, but a more defensible suggestion of extending the concession of zero Easter Term rent to all residents of the Castle Street Houses, i.e. including the ones whose rooms faced onto Castle Street, had more support from the College Officers, including the Tutors. Later that day the

Master wrote to all students who might be affected; an extract from the letter read:

... prepared to remit this term's rent to any resident of Castle Street who feels that he or she can in good conscience claim this remission in the light of disturbance he or she personally has experienced.

For the the rest,<sup>7</sup> may I most earnestly repeat to all of you what I said to Jenny, Catherine, Oliver and Keith on Friday, namely that I hope you will now in your own interests do all you can to dismiss the matter from your minds. It is a great mistake to allow yourselves to become over-sensitised on this issue, understandable though that reaction is. To take an example. Complaints were received by Dr Riley about noise on Saturday and Sunday. On enquiry, it has turned out that none of the builder's men was on the site on these days (as evidenced by the time-sheets used to determine their pay) and that noise came from a neighbour of yours engaged in D.I.Y.

I repeat also the College's regret at ...

On the same day as the Master wrote to the residents, I received a lengthy letter from an undergraduate named Edward Jones, who lived in one of the Castle Street Houses. It was dated some three days earlier, and delivered at some time over the weekend. It raised a totally new dimension to the consequences of the decision to build the new Hostel.

Although it stated in its final paragraph that he did not intend to introduce a hostile tone into any future negotiations,

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<sup>7</sup>Of the points made by the four students.

its opening sentence was “I am writing to you on legal advice concerning . . .”. It went on to say he was aiming for a middle-to-high 2.1 grade in his final examination in Social Anthropology, with a view to taking a non-academic break of a few years and then applying for funding for an M.A. or PhD. This was hardly a realistic plan as, even in those days, funding for Arts and Social Science post-graduate degrees was difficult to come by, and without a first-class Bachelor’s degree a student’s chance of procuring a Social Sciences Research Council grant were very low.

However, that is not the main point. After several paragraphs describing how much he had been disturbed by the building noise, stating that ‘his overall state of mind’ was being affected, and listing those with whom he had taken up the matter, he went on to state:

I therefore trust that the College will take full responsibility, financial and otherwise, for any loss of funding and/or livelihood which may occur as a result.

I would be grateful if you would acknowledge receipt of this letter in writing within the next three working days. Please indicate in that reply if there is anything I have written in this letter of which you dispute the factual accuracy (or of which you do not fully understand the meaning), so that I have the opportunity to consult you further within a reasonable period.

Well, he got his reply the very next day, but hardly the one he was hoping for. It read:

Dear Edward,

On behalf of the College, I acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 18th May and received on 21st May. However, the College does not accept responsibility, financial or otherwise, of the kind indicated in the fifth paragraph of your letter, nor of any other kind.

Yours sincerely,

*Ken Riley*

cc. The Master, Dr Robinson, The Bursar, UCS President, Dr Partridge.

A second student also asked the College to take some responsibility in the matter of his examination results, should they fall below what he was hoping for. But this time, the letter was written without implicit threats, and in terms of something that could be contemplated.

The student in question, John Barnard, a second-year undergraduate was aiming to obtain qualifications in both Computer Science and Psychology. The University's Ordinances do not allow any student to be a candidate for Honours in two different Tripos examinations at the same time, but do not preclude taking a Preliminary Examination, or being a 'Candidate not for Honours', in one Tripos subject whilst being a Candidate for Honours in another. John was preparing for both the second-year Computer Science Tripos examination and the Preliminary Examination in Psychology. He hoped to take the final

examination papers in both subjects in the following year, one for Honours (and the B.A. Degree) and the other as a Candidate not for Honours. This was an ambitious undertaking.

In order to demonstrate his ability to cope with such a load, he had been set the target of reaching the 2.1 standard in both of his second-year courses. He claimed that his Supervisors predicted that he would manage this, but understandably, with such a 'double load' he was worried that his disturbed studies might cause him to fall short. In particular, he asked that if he did fall short, the College would explain to the Psychology Department what had happened. The essence of my reply was the sentence:

The College cannot accept responsibility for the classes you obtain in Tripos and Preliminary examinations, but, should your results fall below the College's expectation, I will be glad to explain the circumstances to relevant people.

I didn't have to explain anything.

As I said at the start of this chapter, all innovations, whether they be new internal organisations, new scientific or literary theories, or new buildings in which to teach or research them, cause some disruption to academic communities. The easy thing for a quiet life would be to not introduce them at all, but to carry on with whatever was working at the time. But, for all the complacent and unworldly reputation that much of the World associates with academia, and in particular with Oxbridge, this

is *not* the way it is. We are always trying to improve on what has gone before: to find new theories or ideas that make for a more complete understanding of the way the Universe and any creatures that inhabit it work; to find students that have the potential to go further than we have gone ourselves; and, when it comes to an environment in which to do all this,

To build, or not to build: it's not really a question.  
It's clear 'tis nobler to take the long-term view  
And suffer the moans and anger of the short-term few.

## Chapter 8

# Getting on with the Neighbours

Just as real parents sometimes become the temporary guardians of other peoples' children, so the Tutors of one College sometimes become involved with students of another College. Such intercollegiate child-minding activities<sup>1</sup> are usually confined to Senior Tutors, as other Tutors normally only become involved if one of their own tutorial pupils has misbehaved in another College or they happen to be the Duty Tutor at the time some incident takes places within their own college grounds.

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<sup>1</sup>But with no hourly pay or access to the fridge (or cellar).

By contrast, the people who are nearly always involved are the Porters of the various Colleges. I have every reason to believe that their group communications are better than those of the Senior Tutors, and that the League of Porters is probably better informed than the Senior Tutors Committee. There was a time, not so long ago, when the method of delivering correspondence between undergraduates in different Colleges was for a Porter from each College, at a common time each day, to visit a central point in the Cambridge Union building,<sup>2</sup> delivering the out-going mail from their own College, and returning with the incoming post; it is almost inconceivable that they did not take the opportunity to get themselves up-to-date on the University's gossip. I never knew – and don't want to know, even now – how many times incidents in which students crossed the intercollege line were dealt with by the Porters, and never reached my in-tray.

The guidelines at the Senior Tutor level for dealing with non-criminal matters were to keep the incident as low-key as possible, to try to placate and be friendly with everybody involved, to ensure that personal apologies were made to aggrieved parties, that all damage was paid for by those who caused it, and that steps were taken to ensure that no similar incident can occur in the future. Sad but obvious to say, seldom were all these goals achieved, particularly the final one – but not for the want of trying.

There were quite a number of such incidents during my

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<sup>2</sup>Where the well-known debates, usually involving one or two national or international figures, are held.



twenty years, and I have to admit that, due to one particular generation of undergraduates,<sup>3</sup> I was more often than not the one apologising on behalf of the College. Sometimes it was possible to have the apologies come only and directly from the students whose behaviour had caused the problem in the first place.

This was the case with the two aspiring thespians who were advertising both the auditions and the intended performances of a play they hoped to put on. The problem was their method of advertising, which was to stick up a poster wherever they thought somebody *might* read it; and ‘stick up’ might more aptly have been described as ‘stick on’, as the glue they used was especially tenacious. The Bursar and I were soon fielding a steady stream of complaints. Under a Cambridge City by-law fly posting was illegal, and even for authorised locations<sup>4</sup> specific permission was often needed. They had to be told to immediately remove the posters from all except those authorised sites for which they had specific permission,<sup>5</sup> and apologise in person to the Bursar of a particular College, one Court of which had been festooned with posters.

However, there are also two episodes that come to mind, involving nearby Colleges and their pupils, that illustrate how, at the Senior Tutor level, things did or didn’t work out in practice. The first of these is brief, and was initiated by somebody who

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<sup>3</sup>See chapter 9.

<sup>4</sup>There are quite a number of such sites, mostly on the railings of the University and College buildings, including those of the University Church.

<sup>5</sup>Of which I suspect there were very few, if any.

was a Lay Dean, rather than a Senior Tutor. What was written was couched in rather more terse and distant terms than would usually be the case. The Porters at his College had discovered a number of students on the roof of its Chapel and following questioning had recorded the names of four of them; I presume that the Porters knew the names of the others. Three of the four, all women, had given their College as Clare, and he asked whether I could confirm that there were students with those names at Clare: he concluded “If we can identify who the miscreants were, we can take it from there.”

Two of the three names he gave me, Miss Constance Harper and Miss F Harrison, were immediately recognisable, but ironically the third, Miss T Turnbull was not. It was not that we didn't have a Miss T Turnbull – in fact, we had two, Thea Turnbull and Theresa Turnbull, known as Tessa. The result was that I had to write a letter to both of them asking for ‘the real Miss T Turnbull to step forward and be recognised’. One did; the other wrote me a letter in which she said she could assure me that she was *not* the Miss T Turnbull who was found on the roof of a certain College's Chapel recently.

When she came to see me, Tessa immediately confirmed that she was one of the people intercepted by the Porters at the offended College. However, she also explained that all the people who had been on the roof were there as a result of taking part in a Blind Date event which was part of the Cambridge Students' Rag programme, aimed at raising funds for charity.<sup>6</sup> Several of

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<sup>6</sup>Fifty years ago the charity in question was always the British Legion

the Blind Date couples had decided to make their way onto the famous Chapel Roof when they discovered that they could do so simply by climbing ladders; they were never going to get the chance to do so in the normal course of events!

That the ladders were there and available was down to the workmen who were in the process of making repairs to the roof. Scaffolding had been erected and access ladders installed, but they had failed to remove the one reaching to the ground when they had finished work for the day. They had also failed to lock the entrance to the boarded-off area at the base of the ladder. This information, and that about the names, was relayed to the Lay Dean; I don't know, but I expect that he then turned his attention to identifying the 'miscreants' amongst the builder's men.

More typical of being an *in loco parentis* deputy was an incident that involved students from another nearby College, one that has one of its Courts separated from its main buildings by the River Cam and a busy road. Let us call it Harvey College; its Senior Tutor at the time was Dr William Jamison. What I want to convey to the reader, namely the measured mixture of propriety and pressure in intercollegiate tutorial correspondence, can really only be shown by quoting that correspondence in full. So, starting with my letter to Dr Jamison:

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and the Rag efforts were closely associated with Poppy Day in November. For about the last thirty years, activities have been spread over a week, involved many more types of events, benefited a broader spread of charities, and taken place in February or March.

Dr W Jamison  
Harvey College  
Cambridge

1st March 19xx

Dear William

**Events of Friday 24 February 19xx**

As you will know Harvey students, particularly those living in Downs Court, have been passing through Clare on their way to the Harvey main building for many years, and, with a few exceptions, there have been no problems.

However, last Friday evening a group of students, some wearing Harvey scarves, passed through Clare at about midnight and damaged one of the 'chicane' barriers that had been erected at either end of Old Court to discourage cyclists from riding through the Court (reportedly as dares or for bets). The barrier was chained to a wrought iron gate, and damaged to such an extent that the chain and padlock were still attached to the gate whilst the broken barrier was carried towards the river. Clare's Porters just prevented two of the students from throwing the barrier into the river from Clare bridge.

Our Porters reported that several of the students, of whom there were perhaps ten in all, were the worse for drink. Two in particular were remembered by the Porters, who independently picked them out from the Freshers' photograph in the Harvey Porters Lodge. They were identified as Mr A. and Mr P., the former being distinctive in a black turban, and the latter from his height and hair. Mr P. was wearing a Harvey scarf, and was one of two students attempting to deposit the barrier in

the river.

The barrier was a substantial one, some five feet long and three feet high, and could not have been accidentally damaged. Our Domestic Bursar estimates the cost of repair at £60.

I hope that, if your investigations confirm the events as reported to me, you will feel it appropriate to impose some penalty and to warn other students of the possible consequences of drunken and unacceptable behaviour. There is already some pressure in Clare to restrict access after dark to those members of Clare issued with keys, and any further incident could only add to that pressure. Sorry to have to bother you with this.

Yours,

*Ken*

Two days after I had written, I received an appropriate letter from Mr P. in which he regretted his inexcusable behaviour, apologised for wasting so many people's time, and expressed the hope that Clare would not restrict the passage of others as a result of his foolish actions. This was followed a few days later by a letter from Dr Jamison. It read:

Dr K.F.Riley  
Clare College

6 March 19xx

Dear Ken

Thank you for your letter. I am sorry that you have been troubled by our students. It cannot be easy for Clare to

put up with the constant coming and going through the main court, and I can quite believe that Harvey students contribute more than a little to the noise on occasion.

I have spoken to both A. and P. about the incident on 24 February. Both admitted having been present. A. says he was an innocent bystander. It was probably just his bad luck that the combination of a black turban and a Harvey scarf made him easy to identify. P. admits having picked up the barrier, though he says the chain was already broken. On the other hand he conceded that his recollection of what happened was far from clear since he was fairly drunk.

I have warned both of them and shall extend that warning to the other inhabitants of Downs Court. I did not feel that it was appropriate to fine them on this occasion. As it is, however, quite possible that the damage was caused by our students I would be grateful if you might send me the bill for the repair.

Many apologies again.

Yours,

*William*

This might have been the end of the story, but whilst this correspondence was in progress the Clare College Council made a decision, based on general security considerations and not on this particular incident, that, as from the start of the next Term, the gates leading to the bridge would be locked at midnight, rather than at 2 a.m., as had previously been the case.<sup>7</sup> Consequently,

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<sup>7</sup>When I was an undergraduate the gates were locked at 10 p.m. and the

when I wrote to William to acknowledge his letter, I included a paragraph to let him know what was going to happen, but also to reassure him that any inconvenience that this might cause for his stay-out-late pupils was not the direct result of the recent episode.

However, the early part of the letter read as follows:

Dear William

Many thanks for your letter. I had a letter of apology from Leonard P. on 3rd March.

As you may know, there was a further incident involving Harvey students about a week ago; one was injured whilst climbing over the gates at the Queens' Road end of the garden Avenue, and the other fell into the ditch whilst trying to climb round the same gates. As this was about 3 a.m., I don't know why they were trying to either enter or leave Clare; I understand that they were the worse for drink.

But that's another story.....

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fine a student paid to have them opened was a modest source of revenue for the Porters.

## Chapter 9

# A Law Unto Himself

There are only a few of my ex-pupils whose activities whilst at Cambridge would take more than a few lines of print to record, although there are quite a number whose subsequent career achievements would. However, there was one student, let us call him Mark Johnson, whose exploits during his six plus years at Clare will hardly be forgotten by any of the then current Tutors or College Staff, particularly the Porters and those who looked after the Halls where communal meals were eaten. I have included some account of them here so that the reader may get an idea of the extra work entailed by disruptive activities, such as those indulged in by Mark. Not everything is described at length, but some of the correspondence passing between the various parties is included in full to show that due process, as



laid down in the College's Statutes, has to be observed in such matters.

From the fact that he was in residence for more than six years,<sup>1</sup> it can be judged, correctly, that Mark was academically talented and, following a successful undergraduate degree course, he was accepted for postgraduate research leading to a Ph.D. degree. Whilst an undergraduate he also found time to be a member of the Clare May Ball Committee and to act as Punts Secretary, administering the servicing and booking of the undergraduates' collectively-owned punts. However, from the fact that so many of the College Staff become aware of who he was and what he did, it can also be judged that, as the result of some of his non-academic activities, there was also a significant downside.

Mark's failings stemmed principally from his failure to control the amount of alcohol he drank and his love of climbing, a dangerous combination. Whilst the climbing and organising he did in connection with the College Climbing Club<sup>2</sup> away from Cambridge, in the Peak District, the Lake District, the Alps, or even other continents, could only to be commended, the climbing undertaken by Mark and a few other individuals on College and University buildings could not. The latter often occurred after they had been at a function where alcohol had been served, bringing with it risks that any sober person would have recognised. Whether or not climbing was involved, there was always

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<sup>1</sup>And being neither a Medical nor Veterinary student, for whom either five and one-third or six years was the normal course length.

<sup>2</sup>Known as the Clare RATS; see page 186 for a more detailed description.

the danger with Mark when he had had too much to drink that he would turn to irresponsible acts or even vandalism.

Although most episodes will only be mentioned in passing, there were two particularly memorable incidents, and I will give more complete accounts of them. One records an episode that some will think was a cautionary tale in which the 'villain' got his just desserts, the other had more of the flavour of an Agatha Christie detective story.

Although I believe that Mark had previously attracted the attention of our College Porters – who, with their genuinely student-friendly approach, had dealt with his minor misdemeanours without reporting them to the College authorities – the first time his exploits came to my attention was when the Senior Tutor of another College contacted me to say that he, Mark, not the Senior Tutor, had been caught on the roof of that College by one of their Porters.

There was some suspicion that he and his fellow climber had been drinking, but they cannot have been too drunk as they had climbed up onto the roof, against all the rules, but without mishap. It was also alleged that Mark had assaulted the Porter when he was challenged; it was accepted by both sides that the confrontation became heated, but, perhaps not surprisingly, there was a difference of opinion as to who was the first to become aggressive.

Some three months later a similar incident took place in yet another College. It was reported to me by their Senior Tutor that three students, not from that College, had been drinking

in its bar, had become rowdy, broken a glass, and ignored the barman's requests to behave themselves. When the bar closed one of them left directly but the other two went into the adjoining men's toilet. When they emerged one of them was carrying something hidden under a loose coat; this later turned out to be a hand dryer from the toilet wall. It appears that, once outside the bar, the two had also been shouting obscene remarks about that College, directing them at the windows of a room in which its football club was holding a dinner.

The College's Porters had been called and, despite several attempts to run away by both students, they had been able to detain one of the miscreants. He eventually volunteered his name, Harry Trentham, and his college, Clare. Other students who had been in the bar were collectively able to provide their Senior Tutor with detailed descriptions of the other two troublemakers. From the details given and my own knowledge of who tended to associate with whom, it was not hard to identify the other two: Mark Johnson as the one who had escaped by scaling a wall; and Lewis James who had taken only a minor part in the whole episode.

When summoned, the three did not deny what they had done, but claimed that the dryer had already been taken off the wall, and that they were not responsible for that. Needless to say, they were required to go to the other College<sup>3</sup> and apolo-

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<sup>3</sup>Somewhat ironically, I was asked some years later to serve as an external Assessor to the Student Discipline Committee at that same College. This I was happy to do for several years, but was never called upon to act; perhaps their undergraduates are better behaved than Clare's.

gise individually to their Porters, Senior Tutor and football club captain, and to pay for the damage and additional work they had caused; they were also fined and given warnings as to their future conduct, in Mark's case for the second time.

Like most College sports clubs and societies, the RATS held an annual dinner. And like most club dinners attended by young adults, RATS's dinners, though monitored by the College's Catering Staff, tended to become rather noisy, with rather too much alcohol being consumed. However, they very seldom got out of hand, and neither did the particular one I have reason to recall. But two of the people attending it did; as in the previous incident, Mark Johnson and Lewis James. Both became seriously the worse for drink and damaged the top of one of the dining tables by banging vigorously on it with the ends of their knives; Mark went even further, and for no reason that he could give afterwards, vandalised a university-network phone located outside the room where the dinner was held.

After an investigation carried out with the help of the Catering Staff and discussion at a meeting of the Tutors, the matter was referred to the College Council, who, after hearing representations from the two students, decided that they should both be banned from attending any function catered by the College for the rest of the academic year. This was hardly a harsh punishment, but I was informed indirectly that Mark and Lewis were upset about it, as it precluded them from several events they may have wished to attend at the end of the Easter Term, including the Clare May Ball.

College events may have been off the menu, but that did not stop Mark indulging, elsewhere in Cambridge, his passion for climbing and drinking. I can't offer any explanation as to why he was there (and afterwards, neither could he) but he was present at the Veterinary School's end-of-year outdoor evening party, and from all reports, much the worse for drink.

The complaint that I received the next day from the School stated, amongst other things, that relatively early in the evening, he had had to be stopped from climbing on the building containing the contagious diseases unit. Not deterred, and, perhaps surprisingly, not recognised as a gatecrasher at that point, he later attempted a second climb, this time on the wall of the Veterinary School itself. The letter of complaint also claimed that between the two climbing incidents, he had helped himself to a bottle of wine from the drinks table; there is no evidence I know of, other than the letter itself, to support this allegation. What can't be doubted was that shortly after midnight he fell off the wall sustaining serious injuries, and had to be taken to the Accident and Emergency department of Addenbrookes Hospital. There he was diagnosed as having sustained a compound fracture of one of his legs; he was also described by the duty nurse as being 'very drunk'.

This particular episode did not end there. The University's Safety Officer was informed of what had happened and, although I never received a copy of it and presumed that it was really for digestion and action by the Vet School, he went so far as to write an official report about the incident. At the time, I thought that this showed that he considered the episode to be amongst the

most serious he had to deal with, but, on reflection, I now think that Health and Safety regulations required the recording of the accident, and this set in train an inevitable series of actions leading to the report.

Be that as it may, Mark's determination to 'do his own thing' had certainly caused a great deal of trouble for many people. I have to admit that, when he was laid up in Addenbrookes with his plastered leg held in the air by a system of ropes and pulleys, I did jokingly say that, as both his personal and Senior Tutor, I should visit him and give one of the ropes a sharp tug — just like they do in many comedy and gangster films!

With Mark first confined to hospital and later restricted to crutches, there were no further problems that academic year and it wasn't until the following November that he again came to my notice. Six students including Mark, Lewis James and Harry Trentham, had opted to share the rooms on the top two floors of one of the College's houses. Allocating out-of-college accommodation in this way for those in their second or later years is a normal practice. The option, one normally taken up by groups of friends, is generally encouraged by the Rooms Tutor,<sup>4</sup> as it largely avoids individual students complaining about the behaviour of those who have become their neighbours by chance.

Unfortunately, such close groupings of like-minded people

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<sup>4</sup>Not a Tutor in the normal sense of having a particular group of students as pupils, but one who undertakes the generally thankless task of organising student accommodation, and then stands by, ready to receive complaints about it. See chapter 5.

also mean that any initially trivial undesirable behaviour tends to grow into something that can easily get out of hand. This is just what seems to have happened on one occasion during that Michaelmas (Autumn) Term. As Senior Tutor I received a letter signed by the students living in the lower two floors of the same house and by some who lived in an adjoining house. It complained about the behaviour of the six, which had included throwing water around, an unacceptable level of noise, and the letting off of fireworks indoors.

The site Porter, who had been called at one-thirty in the morning by the other residents, also reported that the group had been uncooperative when he had tackled them about the disturbance they were causing. Even worse, further investigation revealed that they had been lighting inflammable liquid from a pressurised can. Again, the riot act had to be read — and this time it appeared to have its intended effect. No doubt conscious that they were only months from graduation and that the College Council was unlikely to be as lenient as in the past, should any of the three named students appear before it, the six gave no further cause for complaint and concentrated on their studies. All graduated successfully, Mark Johnson with first class Honours.

The final episode that I feel I must record in this rather sorry saga took place just over two years later. Mark, having distinguished himself academically as an undergraduate, was, as noted earlier, accepted as a research student and started working towards the Ph.D. degree. There was never any suggestion of an adverse report from his Ph.D. supervisor, which speaks

well of the progress he was making. He also continued to contribute positively to College life, through the RATS, on the May Ball Committee, and as the elected Secretary of the MCR, the abbreviation used to denote the Middle Common Room, whose membership consists of those studying for research and other postgraduate degrees.

I first became aware that something untoward had happened when, on arriving in College one morning after giving a 9 a.m. lecture, I was told that the Master of the College would like to see me. What he wanted to talk about, and the investigations he wished me to make, will become apparent from the correspondence between myself and various members of the College that is reproduced below. In it, one (hopefully elucidating) footnote has been added, year dates and some other identifying markers have been suppressed or altered, and, as hitherto, students' names are fictitious. As stated earlier in this chapter, I am giving this correspondence in some detail so that the reader may see that, in the last forty years, *in loco parentis*, and even 'a good talking to in the Headmaster's study', have been largely replaced by something much more akin to legal proceedings, with the possibility of a court appearance to follow.

The College members involved and their respective posts were: Gina Palmerston, President of the May Ball Committee (MBC); Harvey Richardson, a member of that Committee; Victor Radley, President of the MCR; Mark Johnson, Treasurer of the MBC; Mr Marsh and Dr Ashurst, College Fellows appointed to oversee preparations for the Ball but not 'proper' members of the MBC.



As is stated in my first letter to Gina, there were clear indications that the customary 'bonding' dinner of the MBC, held shortly after its membership had been settled, was the root cause of the Master's main concerns. They were firstly that in the early hours of the morning somebody had been on the roof above the Master's Lodge, and secondly that vomit had been discovered on one of the windows of the Lodge. Consequently, prior to my writing the first of the letters, Gina, Harvey and Mark, as members of the MBC were asked to come to a meeting with the Tutors to explain what had happened.

Following that meeting, it was agreed that I should write to Gina to set out the position; my letter of the 3rd of February read as follows.

Gina Palmerston  
President, May Ball Committee  
Clare College

Dear Gina

**The Events of the Evening 21/22 January**

As you will know from our recent meeting, when you came with Harvey Richardson and Mark Johnson, I and the other Tutors are disturbed about the unauthorised presence of some students on the roof of Old Court, the damage in D11, and the removal of some items of tableware from the Dining Hall. The Master has also asked the College Officers to investigate what happened that evening.

The damage to the windows in D11 is acknowledged by Harvey, and I believe you all agreed that some members of the May Ball Committee went onto the roof above D and E staircases; however you all denied being on any other part of the roof, and in particular on the West Range. One member of your Committee does acknowledge being on the West Range roof, as a result of what appear to be legitimate concerns, and that student's account is confirmed by members of the College Staff.

What remains unexplained is how somebody, clearly on the West Range parapet, was sick over the windows and garden steps of the Master's Lodge, and how the Master and his family were disturbed in the middle of the night. I have convincing evidence that the person who was sick (and on the roof) was at the May Ball Committee Dinner,<sup>5</sup> and no doubt, with some additional effort, could narrow further the range of those who might be responsible. It will be clear to you and your Committee that if I have to do that, the College Council or Court of Discipline is unlikely to take a lenient view, as much more than the actual damage and nuisance will be at stake.

Even now, the Tutors are concerned that a Committee that contains one or more individuals who could behave in the way implied by the events or aftermath of whatever happened on 21 January, should be in charge of a May Ball, that not only carries Clare's name, but is held on its premises. I understand that members of last year's

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<sup>5</sup>Although the task was hardly a pleasant one, two members of the Catering Staff were able, by examining the vomit at close quarters, to confirm that its previous owner had enjoyed the meal served at the MBC Dinner.

Committee were also present at your Dinner, but, at this stage, I have taken no steps to determine whether they alone are to be held responsible; consequently this is addressed, through you, to all Junior Members who were at the Dinner.

I am therefore asking you, by calling a meeting of those attending your Dinner if necessary, to urge all those who were on the West Range roof at any time during the evening/night to come to me to say so, and subsequently to apologise in person to the Master.

When this has been done, consideration will be given by the Tutors to whether they should recommend to the Council that permission for the Ball be rescinded, and to whether particular individuals be required to stand down from the organising Committee, even if the 19xx Ball is allowed to go ahead.

I am expecting to report progress in this matter to next Wednesday's meeting of the Tutors.

Yours sincerely,

*Ken Riley*

cc: The Tutors, The Master, Mr Marsh, Dr Ashurst

The following Tuesday Mark Johnson came to my office and confessed that he had been on the roof of the West Range of Old Court and that he was the person who had been sick over the parapet. He also stated that he was alone on the West Range roof. This information was relayed to the other Tutors the next

day and as a result of the ensuing discussion I wrote to Mark as follows.

Mark Johnson  
Clare College

Dear Mark

Thank you for coming to see me on Tuesday to explain your involvement in the events of 21/22 January.

As I said I would, I have reported what we said at the meeting to the College's Tutors. They have discussed the implications and the range of possible penalties that might be appropriate. One thing that is quite clear is that, given the record of your first 18 months here, this new incidence of antisocial behaviour, and your initial denial to me of having been involved with the specific issue I put to you, they are not prepared to see you hold a position calling for trust, sensitivity or judgement within the College structure.

For this reason they have instructed me to ask you to do the following.

- (i) To resign, with immediate effect, your position as Secretary of the MCR, and not to seek election to any MCR Committee post in the future. They do not feel that such sensitive, and sometimes confidential, matters as are discussed at College Bodies (The Governing Body, Council, and Finance Committee) could now be entrusted to you.
- (ii) To resign, with immediate effect, from your position on the May Ball Committee, and not to seek

membership in future years.

It will be apparent from the above that the only basis on which a significant part of the College Council is prepared to consider your remaining in residence, is for you to devote yourself to your research studies and refrain from any action that has the potential to lead you into even a single instance of irresponsible or anti-social behaviour.

I am writing to Victor Radley and Gina Palmerston to let them know the tutorial view on your membership of the MCR Committee and the May Ball Committee, respectively.

Please let me have a written reply to acknowledge receipt of this letter and to indicate your intentions. I would appreciate, but do not insist on, copies of any letters you may write to Victor or Gina.

Yours sincerely,

*Ken Riley*

As indicated I would in my letter to Mark, I also wrote to Victor and Gina. Below is a copy of the letter to Victor in respect of the MCR; that to Gina about the MBC was essentially the same.

Victor Radley  
MCR President  
Clare College

Dear Victor

I am writing to inform you, as President of the MCR, of the actions of the College's Tutors insofar as they concern the MCR Committee.

Having considered a number of relevant factors, both current and past, the Tutors, through me, have asked Mark Johnson to resign from the MCR Committee and not to seek re-election. The reasons for this decision have been set out more completely in a letter I have written to Mark.

I regret the disturbance and inconvenience that will be caused by any such mid-term resignation, but hope that you will accept that it is likely to be less disruptive in the long run than any reasonable alternative course of action.

Yours sincerely,

*Ken Riley*

There was no particular reason for Victor to reply, and he didn't. Gina had more reason to, and her (admirable) reply was as follows.

Dr K Riley  
Senior Tutor

February 14th 19xx

Dear Dr Riley

Many thanks for your letter of February 10th informing me of the decisions of the Tutors. This places me in the unfortunate position of having to request the Tutors to reconsider their decision.

Should Mark Johnson be forced to resign, the Committee would face the loss of a very experienced Treasurer at a crucial time in the proceedings; tickets are now starting to come in, and contracts are being signed. His expertise is essential, and I do feel that asking him to resign will hinder the confidence of the Committee and the subsequent success of the Ball.

I fully appreciate the Tutors' concern for the reputation of the College, insofar as the Ball reflects on the College in various ways, and I also understand their sentiments and dismay at recent events. However, I would ask them to consider that Mark has been on the MB Committee for four consecutive years, and his capabilities have been proved by the success of the Balls in which he was involved. The loss of such a committee member would certainly weaken the team.

Although I realise that their decision may remain unchanged, I would still like to ask the Tutors, in my capacity as President of the Ball, to reconsider their judgement with regard to the 19xx Committee.

Yours sincerely

*Gina Palmerston*

On the same day as Gina's letter arrived, so did one from Mark. It read as follows.

Dear Dr Riley

I am writing in reply to your letter of 10 February after giving the matters mentioned careful consideration.

After my previous problems several years ago, I have taken great care to ensure that my behaviour was more than acceptable, and until this one incident I felt that I had succeeded. I deeply regret what occurred the night of 21/22 January and sincerely wish I had not been so foolish. I will make sure that no other incidents occur for the rest of my time at Clare.

During my time here I have held many positions of responsibility: president of the Rats, construction for the May Ball, trips officer for the Rats, leader of the Cambridge Himalayan Expedition 19xx, vice-president for the May Ball, undergraduate punt secretary, and presently treasurer for the May Ball, and MCR secretary. Though my personal behaviour has at times been reprehensible, I think that I have always discharged my duties in a responsible manner; and kept them separate from my private affairs.

I have spoken to Dr Radley and Ms Palmerston, both of them think that I am (an) effective member of their committees, and would like me to continue in my positions. I do not think that this incident effects (sic) my ability to continue to operate effectively and responsibly in my roles on these committees, and whilst I appreciate



your concern I would be grateful if you would reconsider your decision to ask me to resign.

Yours sincerely

*Mark Johnson*

The letters from Mark and Gina were discussed at the next Tutors' meeting, with a range of opinions expressed about the severity of punishment that is appropriate. The outcome is summarised in my letter to Mark of 21 February; it read as follows.

#### **Urgent & Personal**

Mark Johnson  
Clare College

Dear Mark

Thank you for your letter in response to mine of 10 February 19xx.

I have considered your request, and what you say in support of it; I have also received a letter from Gina Palmerston asking that you be allowed to continue on the May Ball Committee.

The Tutors have exchanged views on both letters, but have decided that the terms of my original letter should stand, i.e. that you should be required to resign permanently from both the MCR Committee and the May Ball Committee, with immediate effect. Perhaps I should add that this is the minimum that most of the Tutors would

find acceptable; there was some feeling that, in view of your previous record, you should be required to leave the College altogether. I would therefore ask you to let me have, by noon on Wednesday 23 February, your written undertaking to resign from both committees.

If I have not received the undertaking by this extended deadline, I will assume that you wish the matter to be taken further, i.e. placed before the Court of Discipline. If you opt for this, you can expect that the case presented by the Tutors will seek the more severe penalty of your being required to leave. The grounds for this would be as follows.

- (1) That you have broken the undertaking given to me (as Senior Tutor), verbally in March 19xx, and in writing on 17 December 19xx and in your undated response to my letter of 6 January 19xx.
- (2) That you knowingly and falsely denied to me that you were the person involved in a particular incident on the night of 21/22 January 19xx.

Needless to say, I regret having to write a letter such as this, but look forward to receiving an early reply.

Yours sincerely,

*Ken Riley*

The next day, I received a letter from Mark agreeing to do what had been asked. It read

K.F.Riley  
Clare College

Dear Dr Riley

Thank you for your letter of 21 February 19xx.

I agree to resign permanently from the MCR Committee and the May Ball Committee. I am sorry for the trouble I have caused, and I shall ensure that my remaining time at the College is as uneventfull (sic) as possible.

Yours sincerely

*Mark Johnson*

As I draw this protracted saga to an end, may I take the chance to remind the reader that a major reason for quoting the relevant correspondence at such (possibly tedious) length is to show that for those Junior Members who violate College or University Statutes or Regulations, summary justice, administered by a College Dean or Master, or by a University Proctor, is no longer the order of the day. Due process has to be observed, and any punishment has to be 'proportionate', to use a term very much in vogue at the time that I write. One additional factor, not present in a criminal or civil court, is that, despite the exchange of arguments and counterarguments, one of the sides is trying, so far as is consistent with the established facts, to arrive at an outcome that is in the longterm interests of the other.

For all the problems that Mark Johnson brought for those whose job it was to act *in loco parentis*, in spirit if not in law, he was still a very fine student in academic terms, a very positive contributor to many aspects of College life, and, for better or worse, a role model for many of his contemporaries. Even for those of us charged with trying to keep his undergraduate and postgraduate career path on the reasonably straight and narrow – and by and large not having too much success – there were still enough attractive elements to his character for us to want him to succeed.

And in the end, succeed he did. So as not to reveal too much of his true identity, suffice it to say that he is now a very successful researcher, working in a distinguished department at a world-class university. There he combines two of his passions, mountaineering and his academic subject, investigating amongst other things, the nature of avalanches. As to any possible further studies of alcohol and its derivatives he might have undertaken, I have no information.

## Chapter 10

# All Work and No Play Makes Jack . . .

It will come as no surprise to the reader to learn that non-academic activities play a significant part in a Cambridge education. Too significant a part some might think, particularly when they read in a later chapter of how, in the past, examinations were not infrequently fitted round sporting events, rather than the other way round. However, over the years the work-leisure balance for a typical undergraduate has moved somewhat in the direction of a heavier academic load; this is only to be expected as fully accredited qualifications are nowadays a necessity for the vast majority of Cambridge graduands.

To give one simple example that reflects this change: when I was an undergraduate, all the lectures and practical classes for the Engineering Tripos were arranged so as to leave the afternoons free for those outdoor activities that needed daylight, such as rugby, rowing, tennis and cricket. By the time I became a Tutor this had changed. Although, as noted elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> the Engineering and Physical Science Departments still supported the idea of afternoon sport, in practice some afternoon teaching was scheduled.

However, by a judicious choice of which of several duplicated practical sessions to attend, for most students it is still possible to engineer a regular free afternoon on any particular day of the week.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly important for those students who play in teams that are members of a league. Having inter-college sport organised on a league basis – complete with promotion and relegation – is something that has been introduced since my undergraduate days, when all matches were ‘one-off’ fixtures as agreed at a meeting of Club Secretaries at the start of each season. With the league structure, all matches in any particular division are scheduled for the same day of the week, and members of the teams involved can plan accordingly.

It might also be added that, whilst inter-college sport has become better organised, the playing standard may have slipped a little, but not very significantly, so far as I can judge. Unfor-

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<sup>1</sup>See page 20.

<sup>2</sup>However, this is not always easy for those required to attend practical classes in several subjects, Natural Scientists and Medics for example, and is sometimes impossible.

tunately, the same cannot be said for most University sports, particularly for those that are run on a professional basis elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> In the mid-fifties the University's rugby side used to take on the leading clubs in the country, and in most cases beat them; if the undergraduates' skill alone was not enough to prevail,<sup>4</sup> then running their opponents into the ground nearly always was. All of that has now changed; with the ending of National Service and the advent of professional rugby, genuinely undergraduate sides have become younger and weaker, whilst their club opponents have become stronger and fitter.

This total sea change has been implicitly recognised in several ways: matches against clubs are no longer against their first team, but against their second XV or youth development squad; there is an essentially undergraduate under-21 squad that meets its Oxford counterpart on the morning of the Varsity Match; the University Blues side relies heavily on postgraduate students from other, mainly Commonwealth, Universities around the world and on 'mature' students returning to study for a certificate or diploma to enhance their professional qualifications.

What has happened in rugby is symptomatic of what has happened across nearly the whole sporting spectrum at University level. There is little to be gained by cataloging the changes

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<sup>3</sup>Of which the most obvious example is rugby, whilst rowing, still largely amateur, may well be the obvious exception.

<sup>4</sup>I recall that in my second year, the Varsity XV included thirteen players who already held international caps. Other internationals who could not make it into the first team, 'sat on the bench' – except that there was no bench.

on a sport-by-sport basis, but one further example is provided by cricket. Annual matches against Oxford University continue to take place,<sup>5</sup> but when it comes to facing County sides, the University has to combine with other local universities, notably Anglia Ruskin University, to field a side of adequate strength. Even then, Counties usually take the opportunity to give several members of their second XIs some match practice.

Despite what has happened at university level, sports continue to be played and enjoyed as intra-college and inter-college competitions and, as they have always done, form part of the ‘Cambridge experience’. Of course, not everybody takes pleasure from getting sweaty, muddy, wet or exhausted, and the notion of ‘sports’ has to be extended to take in a host of other non-academic activities. For many students at my own College one of those other activities is music, and I think that it can be fairly claimed that, discounting the fine Cathedral Tradition of two of the Cambridge Colleges, involving Choir Schools and musicians who are not members of the University, Clare either sets or matches the university standard in the provision of music of all types.

Much could be said about the music at Clare, but the purpose of the current chapter is to give the reader an overview of the extra-curricular activities that Cambridge has on offer, to complement its demanding academic requirements. Perhaps as the result of diminished participation in traditional outdoor team sports at schools, the range of non-academic pursuits seems

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<sup>5</sup>Now in the 20-20 and 50-over one-day formats, as well as in the more traditional 3-day game.



to have increased; who, fifty years ago, would have imagined that there would be Ultimate Frisbee, Korfball and Darts leagues flourishing as part of the Cambridge curriculum?

This drift from mainly outdoor team games to a much wider range of interests, some of them pursued as individuals, has been reflected in the way such activities have been supported, both financially and in terms of facilities. In my own College the change was also recognised by what would nowadays be described as a ‘rebranding’ exercise. The following slightly abridged extracts from an article I contributed to a book published to mark the turn of the century, and entitled *Clare Through the Twentieth Century; Portrait of a Cambridge College*, reflect the changing preferences (both sporting and political)

... the cost of some subscriptions, particularly to the Boat Club, were high, and, with typically Clare egalitarian spirit, it was decided in 1886 that a single uniform subscription should allow a man to take part in any form of sport at which the College was represented. Thus the Amalgamated Clubs came into existence and took over the running of all .....

... Clare College Amalgamated Clubs remained under that name until the early 1970s when a change was made to reflect the fact that other non-sporting interest groups, such as the Music Society, the Christian Union, the Chess Club and the Darts Team, had come under its wing. At that point, the CCAC became the Clare College Stu-

dents' Association.<sup>6</sup> Later still, when students started to acquire 'rights', as a result of both the general climate of opinion and parliamentary legislation, the name became its current one, the Union of Clare Students, a change that not everybody thought was for the better.

If I were looking for sporting College members whose exploits it was a pleasure to record, I might have gone outside my time as a Tutor, far outside it in fact, and noted the (real) names of cricketers A.P. Lucas, who often partnered W.G. Grace at the start of an England innings,<sup>7</sup> and K.S. Duleepsinhji who was rated by Mr P.F. (Plum) Warner as 'a better player at his age' than his illustrious cricketing uncle Ranjitsinhji, the Jam of Nawanagar.

For team performances it would hard to better that of the Clare Lacrosse side at the start of the twentieth century, every member of which played for one of the two University sides; or of the College squash team of the mid-fifties which included half of the University first VI. Despite the undoubted ability of the Clare undergraduate squash players, it is said that none of them ever beat the College's then Senior Tutor – and it wasn't down to deference, but had more to do with the fact that he had been

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<sup>6</sup>With a constitution drafted by a committee consisting of the present [when the article was written] Master (then Mr B.A., but later Prof. Sir Bob, Hepple), Matthew Parris (then President of the JCR and later an MP, columnist of *The Times*, and Grumpy Old Man) and myself (then Senior Treasurer of the CCAC).

<sup>7</sup>And was said to be an attractive batsman even when he was scoring slowly, or not at all!

the runner-up in the Australian Open and played exhibition matches with the World Champion.

That purple patch in squash occurred whilst I was an undergraduate, but to be more in keeping with this book's title, and also to illustrate the broad range of activities 'sport' had grown to encompass, I should recall the achievements of a few of the students from my time as a Tutor.

One of them, who made his mark in the national press, as much for his early disappointments as his later successes, was a rugby-playing graduate from Oxford who joined Clare to become a research student. He had been on the losing side at Twickenham for three successive years, and then, having changed allegiance, he followed this up with two more losses. However, virtue triumphed in the end, and he left Clare with a PhD, a winning Blue, a Clare clinical medical student as his wife, and a Research Fellowship at another Cambridge College.

Amongst my own tutorial pupils, I recall in particular two mathematicians, one of whom was a judo black belt who mentored other Clare men and then led them, as Captain of the University team, to the fourth consecutive victory over their Oxford counterparts. The other was the College's first 'serious' female cricketer<sup>8</sup> who in 1991 gained the last of her three Blues, captained the University side, led Clare to victory in a

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<sup>8</sup>I must admit to a particular interest in female cricketers as, whilst playing for a local club, I was once dismissed, caught & bowled, by Charlotte Edwards, at the time a young teenager playing in a men's team, now the Captain of the World Champion England Women's XI.

six-a-side Cuppers competition, and was made a member of the Young England squad.

Although I was his Director of Studies, rather than his Tutor, another with a notable sporting record was a Chinese student who came to Clare via a one-year A-level course at Warrington College for Higher Education and two scholarship-level test papers that I personally set and marked. He carried the College's table tennis team from a very lowly starting point into the top division of the inter-college league, playing every match and remaining unbeaten throughout his three years in residence. I don't know where he is now, but on leaving Clare he moved to the United States to study for a PhD; played hard, worked hard.

As noted above Clare's heyday in the squash court was during the 1950s, but one particular squash-playing student of the late eighties readily comes to mind. Although her name was thoroughly Scottish, she had already represented Belgium before she came into residence. Now, you may not rate Belgium as a top squash nation, but Maggie was so good that she was barred from women's inter-college matches and had to play for the men's team; at University level she led the women's side and played regularly for the men's Second VI.

In addition to the achievements of individual students in their various sporting activities, I should also record those of particular clubs or societies, especially those nurturing non-traditional sports. The most notable of these during my time as a Tutor was that of the Clare Rats. They feature elsewhere

in this book – not always to their credit – and their name derives from the more respectable sounding Rock-climbing And Trekking Society. This was the version its members used when they were applying for financial support from the College or the College’s Student Union.

What was remarkable about the RATS, formed in 1985 as the re-foundation of an earlier climbing club, was the number of members it attracted. At one time it had a membership comparable to that of the Boat Club.<sup>9</sup> The RATS trained all over the UK and climbed in continental Europe, the Himalayas, Africa and South America. It sent dozens of Clare Junior Members to the top of Mont Blanc, including twenty two in 1991 alone. The fame, or perhaps infamy, of the Clare Rats appeared to reach at least some schools, and sometimes at admissions interviews it was given as one of a candidate’s reasons for applying to Clare.

Moving on to some other less traditional sports, the College enjoyed a certain amount of reflected glory from the successes of its members of the University’s Ballroom Dancing team and of Fred (not his real name, but the one he used) a graduate student from New Zealand; the latter swam the longer races<sup>10</sup> in the 1994 Varsity swimming match, but, more significantly, was the Triathlon World Champion in his age group a few years later. These are just two examples of leisure activities that would not have been around to seek a share of the financial support the

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<sup>9</sup>There is some resonance here with lacrosse in the 1900s. At that time, the Captain of Boats was moved to openly protest about the effect the popularity of the Lacrosse Club had on recruitment to the river.

<sup>10</sup>The 200m, the 400m and the 1500m freestyle – and all in one session!

Clare College Amalgamated Clubs had to offer. There are several others, some of which are mentioned in the extract quoted earlier, but it would be tedious to list them all, and these two will have to suffice.

From the outdoor green fields to the indoor green baize. Chess and Bridge are not exactly new ‘sports’<sup>11</sup>, but it is only very recently that they been even considered for such things as the Olympics and the award of Blues. Nevertheless, they are now recognised as legitimate claimants for support from the UCS budget, and it is good to report that in my time as a Tutor some of Clare’s students attained commendable standards in these two Mind Games. Amongst the events won were the UK Universities’ Individual Chess Championship, and as Bridge pairs or team members, the Home Counties U-25 Teams competition, the European U-25 Team Championship,<sup>12</sup> and the National Junior (U-25) Pairs Event.

Another mind game that became part of the cycle of events at Clare during the period that covered most of the nineties and noughties was the (paper) challenges that I set annually for completion in the last couple of weeks of the Michaelmas Term and over the Christmas Vacation. They were taken up by a relatively small number of contestants, but included a full range of College members – Staff, Students and Fellows – sometimes working as teams.<sup>13</sup> The Staff and non-retired Fellows could not

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<sup>11</sup>And Chess has about a millennium’s start over all the other sports mentioned.

<sup>12</sup>As a member of the victorious England team.

<sup>13</sup>And even some people who had nothing to do with Clare. Towards the

really work on them until the Admissions Interview period was over, and I like to think that the Students were concentrating so hard on their studies that they too could not give the challenges their attention until the Vacation. I also like to think that they *then* took the time to tackle them,<sup>14</sup> if only because all work and no play makes Jack . . . . .

Most of the challenges were in the form of crosswords, or at least depended on the types of clue found in cryptic crosswords. Further, many of them required specific knowledge about Cambridge or about Clare and its members, knowledge that would not be available to most readers. However, I have reproduced on the next few pages four of the competitions that do not suffer from this restriction, and which you are invited to tackle if you so wish. Apart from the first one, they are likely to take several hours, or days, to complete. The solutions are given in Appendix B.

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end of the period, the competitions were also posted on the Clare website, and they had come across them there.

<sup>14</sup>Next competition: Construct as long a sensible sentence as you can, all the words of which begin with the same letter, but all adjacent words are different; i.e. no "had had 'had had', had had 'had had had' . . .". No prizes.

## Tutorial Torture The Christmas Puzzles

### Twenty Questions – The Senior Tutor’s TV Challenge

It is a well-known, but often ignored, law of the land that students who have a personal TV in their room must purchase a separate licence for it; some do not. In order to assist the Authorities in their hunt for these hardened criminals, the Senior Tutor offers as bait the following cryptic quiz. If you do too well in it you may get a prize, or you may just get a visit from a man with a van – a TV detector van.

Identify these cryptically-named (terrestrial) TV programmes.

- |                                    |                        |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. First wedding anniversary       | 11. Flat cap           |
| 2. Devils capture religious leader | 12. <i>Times</i> agent |
| 3. Lead out / out of the wood      | 13. Unholy See         |
| 4. Where? At random!               | 14. Things?            |
| 5. Eggs on toast                   | 15. Page three         |
| 6. Study of E. Indian lizards      | 16. Freewheel          |
| 7. Fighting redundancy notice      | 17. How?               |
| 8. Not unknown here in Ireland     | 18. Crouch down        |
| 9. An MA or a PhD first? Confused? | 19. Trade unions       |
| 10. Wallis and O.J.                | 20. Final reckoning    |



## The Tutorial Bursar's Christmas Give-away, 2003

Continuing to support the Government's aim of improving number work, spelling and IT proficiency in UK educational establishments, the Tutorial Bursar offers a modest prize for what he judges to be the best performance on the following Key Stage 5 test paper (whilst reserving the right not to award the prize if, again in his opinion, no entry is of a sufficient standard).

Entries may be made on . . . . .

### Numeracy

**1** What are the significances of the following numbers or sequences of digits?

- (a) 31536000
- (b) 53,644,737,765,488,792,839,237,440,000
- (c) 0588235294117647

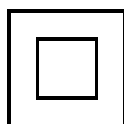
**2** Use the digits 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, in that order and exactly once each, and any of the usual arithmetic signs to form the following  $(-1 \times 2) + 3 + 4 + 5$  objects.

- (a) A century.
- (b) A gross.

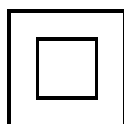
- (c) 32k (as in bytes).
- (d) Secret of the Universe.
- (e)  $\pi$  to 3 s.f.
- (f)  $\alpha^{-1}$  where  $\alpha$  is the fine structure constant of atomic physics.<sup>15</sup>
- (g) 10 billion.
- (h) Golden mean: the limit of the series  $\frac{2}{1}, \frac{3}{2}, \frac{5}{3}, \frac{8}{5}, \frac{13}{8}, \frac{21}{13}, \dots$
- (i)  $\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \left(\frac{5}{9}\right)^n$ .
- (j)  $e^{-1}$  (3 s.f.).

### Information Technology

**3** Below are shown the plan and front elevation of a solid figure that has no curved surfaces. As usual, hidden edges are represented by thinner/dotted lines. Draw the side elevation.



Plan



Front Elevation

---

<sup>15</sup>For non-scientists, construct 137.

**4** A plane network consists of straight lines, exactly three of which meet at every vertex; and there are no loose ends. Show by producing a counter example, that it is *not* always possible, using only three colours, to colour the lines in such a way that no two lines of the same colour meet at a vertex.

**5** Show how to obtain, at the same time, 1, 6 and 7 pints of beer in ungraduated containers A, B and C (not necessarily respectively), given an unlimited supply of beer in large casks. The capacities of A, B and C are respectively 6 pints, 10 pints and 15 pints. The Wine Steward can manage this in twelve moves. You should aim to at least match him.

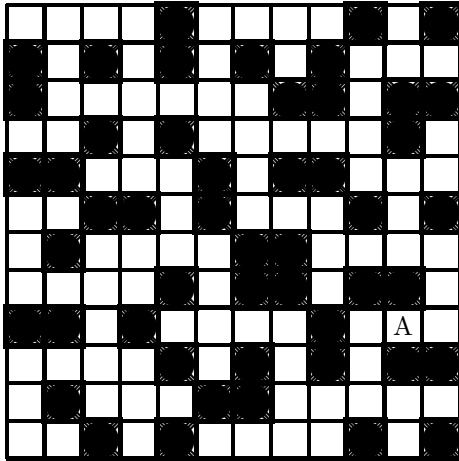
### Literacy

**6** Fit all 26 letters of the alphabet (plus whatever repeats are needed) into a rectangular block of cells (with at least two rows and at least two columns) following the normal rules for crosswords (all interlocked), with blanks or frame edges as terminators. All words so made must appear in the Tutorial Bursar's dictionary. The best solution is the one with the smallest number of cells overall, including the blanks.

**7** Write not more than a paragraph on your name and email address. Marks will be deducted for spelling errors and incorrect punctuation.

### The CLARE Economy Crossword

As will be well known, the College has, in these difficult times, to make every reasonable economy. With this in mind, the Senior Tutor offers the following minimalist crossword for members of the College to try.



The above grid should be completed by entering the answers to the cryptic clues given below, bearing in mind that certain economies have been made, both in arriving at the answers and in their presentation.

With the Bursar's approval, the Senior Tutor has made his first major economy by using the five letters C L A R E time

and time again. In fact they each appear in every answer, but, again in the interests of economy, one appearance of each has been subsequently removed. So that they can be more aesthetically packed, the remaining letters of each answer have been rearranged to spell a proper (Chambers English Dictionary) word before being entered in the grid.

As a second major economy, all grid clue numbers have been dispensed with, as has any indication of the lengths of the correct answers. The numbering given in the clues bears no relation to positions in the grid. However, taking the usual sympathetic Tutorial view, the Senior Tutor has provided one letter of the answer – just to get you started – and will also provide a bottle of Clare CLARE\* to the College member submitting the first correct entry to . . . . .

Unfortunately, there was an unforgivable error in one of the clues, and when I discovered it I felt obliged to issue an apology. So that any reader who wishes to try the Economy Crossword for themselves (no knowledge of Clare or Cambridge needed) does not waste their time trying to solve that particular clue, the apology is printed here, before the clues:

It is with the greatest regret that the Senior Tutor has to  
announce that

## The Clare Economy Crossword

was born severely handicapped, with a near-fatal malformation.

Clue number 2, the solution to which is 'theatrical', was  
intended to produce the word 'tithe' for insertion in the grid.

But it does not!

The Senior Tutor sincerely apologises for all the time wasted by  
mystified puzzlers, but is sure that, with this solution provided,  
there will now be a flood of completed grids.

He also offers his resignation as Purveyor of Crosswords to  
The Master, Fellows, and Scholars of Clare College.

1. Forward note about the drink, and make another.
2. The one caught in a Test with dramatic effect. (see above)
3. Sticky part of course – no loose woman allowed!
4. Girl upset free underwater spectacle.

5. Moving upstairs, with a change of story when in New York.
6. Radical new choral note.
7. Recovered from unripe apples scattered in the grass.
8. A doctor takes on a French girl and has a shot at billiards.
9. Note, the unfinished line on board can be drawn up.
10. Put the Spanish initially well-known encyclopedia in a box and be happy.
11. Cut and spike the deserter – to the end!
12. Attend to their call to be completely covered.
13. Clear paste for legal helpers.
14. The Derby on TV?
15. Spread the story of the retarded salesman with the company no longer.
16. Friar begs for woollen material.
17. Shrewd supporter. In the gods?
18. Knights give cheers about half-truth.
19. Real national leader confused about the actors in the House.
20. An early reader? To some degree.

21. Elegant old king one begins to satisfy.
22. Have connection changed; alter in the middle.
23. An indefinite type.
24. Infallible guides for boats that have lost their leader.
25. Sweet offering for High Table when the elite have gone away.
26. Sizes up the East European next to the confused layman.
27. See Tom presented to the Queen as a discoverer.
28.  $\mu$ ,  $\nu$ , and  $\pi$ . Not so elementary, my dear Watson.
29. Holy Grail? Sounds like it.
30. Muddled précis about the backward French for finding twenty six.
31. 0-0, . . . , 0-0. Not allowed on board.
32. It's about a confused tea-girl. She serves in a low-down joint.
33. The City? Dens of sweet temptation.
34. About time, Julian!
35. Reel and, initially confused, scramble into bed.
36. Close to capital institution; inside Dept. of Physics.



37. Worker who makes it so.
38. Turn on church warden's organ (descriptively).
39. Declare student unstable but reinstated.
40. Touchy about revealing leader, but could be drawn out.
41. Constellation visible from part of Cornwall.
42. Initially, choose everybody one clear soup – vegetable, of course.

## Tutorial Bursar's Geography Test, Christmas 2006

Identify as many as you can of these 100 cryptically-named towns, cities and districts (not villages or hamlets) in the British Isles and provide a clue of the same type (including as much misleading punctuation as you wish) for a named town, city or district not included in your list. In the event of a tie in the number of correct answers, the best (cleverest) original clue, as judged by the Tutorial Bursar, will be used to determine the winner of the modest prize offered. The intended answers and the winners name will be published on the Clare website towards the end of January 2007.

[The original Test proved to be a little too difficult, with a top score of 68%. That was obtained by an Admissions Tutor, who, perhaps because of his connections with so many schools throughout the country, appeared to be familiar with more places than all other contestants (Students, Staff and Fellows). To make it somewhat 'easier', the letter 'e' has now been pre-entered wherever it appears in a solution; if no 'e' appears in an answer space, there isn't one in the required place name. A few of the clues have been slightly amended so as to make them more tightly defined.]

- 1 About an overturned vessel (5)  
\_ \_ e \_ e
- 2 All of Aberdeenshire initially (5)  
\_ \_ \_ \_ \_
- 3 Animal mentioned in the note is included in total (9)  
\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ e \_ e \_

- 4 A pen to draw the arrangement (10)  
 -----e
- 5 Article dropped by hunger-striker (6)  
 E \_ e \_ e \_
- 6 Association president (9)  
 -----
- 7 Australian Food includes final article by father (10,3)  
 - e -----
- 8 Back a long way (6)  
 -----
- 9 Be from Tallinn – not a Scotsman (7)  
 - e e -----
- 10 Bungle an arrest and run inside (9)  
 -----e -
- 11 Calling Eire on the phone (7,6)  
 -----
- 12 Cardinal on outstanding horse (6-5-4)  
 - e -----e -----e
- 13 Carry on decorating! That's what we are told.(8)  
 -----
- 14 Clear working (8)  
 -----
- 15 Cut in Calendar Girls? No, just the opposite (6)  
 -----
- 16 Decline, with a farewell (4,4)  
 E --- ---- e
- 17 Do not dust cell if it would damage it (6,9)  
 -----e --
- 18 Do very well to finish early (5)  
 ---- e -
- 19 Drug supply (5)  
 E \_ e --

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- 20 East's friend and foe thrown out, but not North (10)  
 -----
- 21 End of the line for a Peruvian import (10)  
 -----
- 22 Four times fifty, i.e. an anagram (8)  
 -----e-----
- 23 Frequently the most depressed (9)  
 -----e-----
- 24 Girl caught garland; rather the reverse. Not hard. (9)  
 \_e \_ \_ e \_ \_ e \_
- 25 He has your old reference mixed-up (5)  
 -----e-----
- 26 Hence, Latin student figures in the solution (8)  
 -----e \_
- 27 Hiding some little wish amongst big ones is the answer (8)  
 \_e-----
- 28 Home of number eight and three-quarters (10)  
 -----e-----
- 29 Home of refined bottlers? (6,4)  
 -----e \_ -----
- 30 Its important partners initially have a method (8)  
 \_e-----
- 31 In a ship, with a sci-fi author aboard (9)  
 -----e \_ \_ e \_ \_
- 32 In the morning (5)  
 -----e-----
- 33 'Its only right that money owed be paid' – that says it all! (5)  
 -----
- 34 Jill, tart woman, was from the Vale of Glamorgan (8,5)  
 -----
- 35 Keep weight above the supports (8-2-4)  
 -----e \_ \_ e \_

- 36 Landlord (7)  
 -----
- 37 Left the Flock (5)  
 \_ e \_ e \_
- 38 Local dispute (6)  
 -----
- 39 Looks pale on a green background (7)  
 ----- e
- 40 Lower by two points (5)  
 \_ \_ \_ e \_
- 41 Meadow for bulls and zebras (8)  
 ----- e \_
- 42 Mixed teams, say (7)  
 \_ \_ e \_ \_ e \_
- 43 Mr Sanders house (8)  
 \_ e \_ \_ \_ e \_
- 44 Neat car (6)  
 -----
- 45 Newlywed rang to arrange area of business (6,6,4)  
 \_ e \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ e \_ \_ \_ \_
- 46 Noted card's value (14)  
 ----- e -----
- 47 Novice crew with no initial training (5)  
 \_ e \_ \_ \_
- 48 Octopussy's director has upset others (10)  
 \_ \_ e \_ \_ \_ \_ e \_
- 49 On, not off (10)  
 -----
- 50 Ought to be housed in some part of London (8)  
 -----
- 51 Piece of music not ultimately played back (5)  
 -----

52 Place of temptation and hell and no end of vice (13)

-----e-----

53 Plot includes a fabulous ship (7)

-----e-

54 Postal levy with no change, oddly (5)

----e-

55 Publication at the centre of a surprise declaration (5)

-----

56 Put light on? Sounded like it.(9)

---e-----

57 Questionable computer part agreed retrospectively (6)

-----e-

58 Quick driver (9)

---e e-----

59 Recognise the boy from the back (6)

-e-----

60 Reinforcements arrived just around the start of Bannockburn (9)

---e-----e

61 Republicans accept defeat (7)

-----

62 Research Fellow (10)

-----

63 River scene makes stunning photo when air-brushed (8,4,6)

-----e-

64 Rowan Williams (8)

-----e--

65 Scottish flower catches the eye (6)

-----

66 . . . seeing a red light (10)

-----

67 Sets out without evident leader (8)

-----

- 68 Ships sirens have this effect? (7)  
 --e----
- 69 Shows character if, and only if, its there (7)  
 -----
- 70 Show the head bringing up the rear, say (10)  
 -----
- 71 Sir Frank loses his wicket (6)  
 ----e--
- 72 Snooker (7,3)  
 -----e--
- 73 Spider that lost sense of direction (6)  
 -----e-
- 74 Spooner by mantle light (7)  
 -----
- 75 Spot a knot, either simply at first, or in a branch later (13)  
 -----e-----
- 76 Stand for musical segregation (10)  
 -----e-----
- 77 St Cross (6)  
 -----
- 78 Stew cooked by man without name (11)  
 -e-----e-
- 79 Stop the loud noise (5)  
 -----
- 80 Stop tree growth (4)  
 -----
- 81 Support in the branches (9)  
 -----e e
- 82 Teacher continued eating? Sounded like it.(8)  
 -----
- 83 The start of stereo on the French channel (10)  
 -----e--e-

- 84 The Kop? (7)  
 - e - - - - -
- 85 The old old scoundrel more than half-forgotten (6)  
 - e - - - - -
- 86 Therefore, unlimited decline begins (8)  
 - e - e - - - - -
- 87 Tidy hospital (5)  
 - e - - - - -
- 88 To be found, oddly, in the middle of consulting rooms (5)  
 - - - - -
- 89 To new union member, whose carrying a note (9)  
 - - - - - e
- 90 To the far post at the Kop end, perhaps (8,5)  
 - e - - - - - - - - - - -
- 91 Touring in Perth, starting with the Swan River (7)  
 - e - - - - -
- 92 Town will lose! (6-2-7)  
 - e - - - - - e - - - - - - - - - - -
- 93 Understanding one should miss out the middle of Hazleton (10)  
 - e - - - - - - - - - - -
- 94 Underworlds back entrance (8)  
 - - - - - - - - - - -
- 95 Unlimited electrical appliance (7)  
 - - - - - e
- 96 Untouched meal? That's what's reported.(8)  
 - - - e - - - - -
- 97 We hear that the dogs depressed. A dachshund? (8)  
 - - - - - - - - - - -
- 98 Where they pass out cornets (9)  
 - - - - - - - - - - -
- 99 You cross on the raised walkway, were told (8)  
 - - - - - e
- 100 Young Brook finishes at Abingdon (8)  
 - - e e - - - - -



No. of correct answers claimed .....

Alternative clue:.....

Solution:.....

Name and email address. ....

Return to the Tutorial Bursar's tray in the Tutorial Office by 4 pm on Monday 22 January 2007 to be eligible for the competition, for which a modest prize is offered.

## Chapter 11

# The Tripos Stakes

The aspect of a Cambridge education that probably generates more correspondence between a College's Tutorial Office on the one hand, and the central University offices on the other, is that of university examinations. Responsibility for the setting, supervising and marking of examinations rests with the University and its many Departments, whilst that of ensuring that students are correctly entered for the examinations for which they are both adequately prepared and qualified to sit falls to the individual colleges.

With some ten thousand candidates to be examined and about thirteen hundred different papers to be set each year, there is plenty of potential for something to go wrong. Fortu-

nately, it didn't happen often — and the person that we all had to thank for that was, during virtually the whole of my time as Senior Tutor, the Secretary to the Board of Examinations.

Being Secretary to the Board was not the only, nor even the main, job that fell within the remit of the University's Deputy Registrar.<sup>1</sup> His principal duties were to 'oil the wheels' of the University and serve as the Secretary to many of the University's most important Committees. He was also the person to be consulted whenever clarification of the correct procedure to be followed or a summary of the *practical* implications of a university statute or ordinance was needed; typically a phone call would produce the required information either immediately or, in more complicated cases, within a few minutes. However, my concern here is Cambridge University examinations, or, as they are almost always called, Tripos examinations. Because of his major role in the organisation of them, and hence his frequent appearances in this chapter, I will usually refer to him simply as 'the Secretary', rather than give him his full title on each occasion.

The three- or four-year course associated with each subject of study is called the corresponding Tripos and each is divided into two, three or four parts, each part lasting one or two years. Although most students confine their studies to all the parts of some particular Tripos in order to qualify for a Bachelor's or Master's degree, the University's regulations allow a wide variety of mixed Tripos courses to qualify for the B.A. degree.

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<sup>1</sup>Known in most other universities as *The Deputy Registrar*.

The origin of the word *Tripes* is not totally clear, but nearly all explanations of it involve a three-legged stool, and I can do no better than quote from the University's web site

The term Tripes goes back to the seventeenth century when verses would be read out by someone sat on a three-legged stool (or Tripes) at graduation ceremonies. These became known as the Tripes verses. Eventually Tripes was used to refer to courses offered by the University, when the lists of graduating students for each subject were written on the back of the Tripes verses.

However, to return to the Secretary, part of the requirement of the post was to produce for the Board a report giving a mass of statistics, the procedures that had been followed to get round difficulties, and accounts of untoward, and sometimes unexplained, happenings. Although I doubt whether it was part of the requirement, each report included an annual update on how increasingly difficult it was to fit an ever-expanding examination system into a fixed examination period.

As the years went by, the reports, whilst still packed with 'solid facts', became more and more whimsical and, to quote the Secretary himself, 'reflected the amused and resigned exasperation of the Secretary at the inability of himself and his colleagues to achieve more orderly procedures'. After twenty three years of reports, the Members of the Board suggested that they might entertain a wider readership. As a result the reports covering the period 1973-1993 were bound together and issued under the title *A Ride on the Dodgems*, reflecting the Secretary's view

that the Tripos examinations provided travel, for a strictly limited period, at uncomfortably high speed, and in a restricted space, with many a near miss or collision, both accidental and contrived.

It is easier to understand the bigger picture presented by the Cambridge examination system if it is viewed from the standpoint of someone in the centre, rather than from one of its outposts — and no one was more at the centre than the Secretary to the Board of Examinations. I have therefore taken the liberty of drawing heavily on his consolidated reports to present the somewhat lighter side of this aspect of a Cambridge education. Most of them do not name the specific students or Colleges involved in any particular episode, though I and, no doubt, all other Senior Tutors of the time, would recognize the occasions on which we should hold up our hands.

Examination entries have to be submitted to the Old Schools relatively early in the year, thus giving time for minor errors or ambiguities to be sorted out. The sort of mistakes that Colleges make at this stage include trying to enter a candidate for an examination for which they not 'of standing', or for an illegal combination of papers. For ambiguities, the blame is generally more equally shared between a College and the University.

As a specific example, at one time the regulations for Part III of the Mathematical Tripos *did* specify a maximum number of topics that could be offered for examination, but, through an oversight I presume, *didn't* specify a minimum number. One candidate, either innocently or mischievously, proposed offering

a single area of mathematics for examination, since that would meet the regulations. However, he had to be advised that to show his mathematical competence he should offer at least four out of the fifty or so available, with each area examined in a separate paper.<sup>2</sup>

However, with a few exceptions, most students are entered for the examinations they thought they were preparing for. Nevertheless, two modern languages students entered for a Swedish literature paper must have had severe doubts when they were presented with a paper containing only questions on works by Danish authors, none of whom they had ever heard of.

It has to be admitted that the regulations governing the Modern Languages Tripos are as complicated as they come. For a period, it happened that both the Chairman and the Secretary of the Modern Languages Faculty Board were Fellows of Clare and, as they had been primarily responsible for the latest attempt to simplify them, we used to half-seriously say that we three<sup>3</sup> were the only people in Cambridge who properly understood them.

The complexity of the regulations didn't really account for the Scandinavian mix-up mentioned above, but may have led to a Provençal literature paper that, amongst the three questions

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<sup>2</sup>At least he would have known which questions to attempt. Thirty years earlier the examination consisted of four sessions each with a single multiple-paged question paper; it really was a matter of "Can you locate five or six questions that you understand? If so, they're yours, get on and answer them".

<sup>3</sup>And, of course, the Secretary to the Board of Examinations!

on set texts, included one, and, depending on interpretation, possibly two, questions on texts that had in fact not been set — well, they may have been set in the minds and minutes of the relevant committee, but they hadn't been announced as such in any public document.

I don't know whether or not the regulations governing one particular paper in the Modern Languages Tripos<sup>4</sup> had just been altered, but one MML Examiner for the 1981 examination wanted to show the candidates a sample rubric for the paper they were due to sit, so that they would be prepared for its particular format. Unfortunately, he circulated photocopies, not just of a rubric, but of a whole paper. Even more unfortunately, the paper was the one that had just been finalised for the 1981 examination. Back to the drawing board!

Although being entered for the wrong examination or for the wrong selection of papers in the right examination is relatively rare, seeking to sit the examination under conditions that are not the standard ones (on the appointed day, in the designated room, at the allocated desk<sup>5</sup>, and starting at the announced time) is far from uncommon.

It is only to be expected that requests to vary the standard conditions are largely based on medical or religious grounds.

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<sup>4</sup>More strictly, the Modern and Medieval Languages Tripos, usually abbreviated to MML.

<sup>5</sup>The records show that, each year, some forty thousand desk-tickets were written out by casual labour or the Old Schools staff, and checked by three or four 'casually employed ladies' during a period of several weeks before the examinations were sat.

To give an obvious example, even though every effort is made to keep Saturday examinations to a minimum, each year about twenty five Orthodox Jews scheduled to sit examinations on a Saturday are unable to do so, and they have to be incarcerated and invigilated in the house of a Jewish family until their rescheduled session on Sunday is over. For well over twenty years, this arrangement was meticulously organised each year by one particular Jewish member of the University's staff, and for two of those years his own wife, a student at my own college, was amongst his charges.

In *A Ride on the Dodgems* the Secretary reports that on one isolated occasion his Sunday breakfast was interrupted by a phone call saying that one of the examination papers needed for the Sunday session was missing. This resulted in one member of the Old Schools staff, leaping from his bath, getting hurriedly dressed (though this is not specifically reported), dashing to the Examinations Office, locating a copy of the missing paper, and delivering it in time for the candidate to sit the examination within the scheduled session.

In some years the Jewish Festival of Weeks (Shavuoth)<sup>6</sup> causes additional difficulties, especially when it falls in mid-week. Some Jewish sects are required to keep only one of the two days and so arrangements similar to those for Saturday

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<sup>6</sup>A two-day festival, also known as Pentecost, it is celebrated precisely fifty days after the second day of Passover and can therefore start on almost any day of the week. The Christian equivalent is Whit Sunday and so causes no clashes with a general examination timetable that is specifically designed to avoid Sundays!



examinations are feasible. However, mid-week examinations are far more numerous than those held on Saturdays and the overall effect of the Festival is significant in terms of the number of ad-hoc arrangements that have to be made.

Other requests for concessions based on religious grounds are more one-off, but from amongst them can be noted the case of three Christian Sabbatarians who happened to belong to a sect that had opted for Saturday as its sabbath. No problem, you might think; handle it as if they were Orthodox Jews. But, no, this particular sect also had an annual Sabbath on the first Sunday in June. So, their Saturday examinations had to be held on the following Monday. With no well-oiled machinery in place to deal with the situation, it fell to their individual Tutors to make sure that each of the students had no contact with the outside world for two whole days. Being a Tutor occasionally has some unexpected downsides!

In the early 1990's a new problem appeared. It arose from the need for members of some Muslim sects to attend the Mosque for prayer on Fridays *at noon* — and so, with the normal starting time for afternoon sessions of Tripos examinations being 1.30 p.m., some new arrangement was needed. When this difficulty was raised for the first time, the student's Tutor said initially that his pupil could not be available to sit his examination until half past three or even four o'clock.

However, as it happened, this claim was almost immediately undermined by a similar one on behalf of a student from a different College; he could be back from the Mosque and ready

to start by 2.30 p.m., and the College would provide an ‘armed guard’ to make sure that he could not make contact with anybody else. So, an armed guard to and from the Mosque, followed by a 2.30 start in college, was to be the order of the day. A third request was later dealt with using this, by now, long-established procedure. By the following year it was all totally routine and caused the Secretary to remark that it was ‘No problem, as they probably say in Arabic’.

As noted earlier, the other main reasons for seeking exemption from taking Tripos examinations in the normal way are the difficulties experienced by students with medical problems, both temporary and long-standing. Of course, one can only sympathise with students who have to contend with any such difficulties, and to a large extent the University’s regulations, having being devised by committees that include many past and present Tutors, are relatively humane.

However, there are, quiet rightly, procedures that must be followed and they include starting the process early enough that the circumstances, including the medical evidence provided by a student’s doctor or a College Nurse, can be properly considered. Any application has to be submitted through a candidate’s Tutor and, with most applications being straightforward, nearly all can be dealt with by the Secretary without having to be considered by the full Board.

Some medical conditions are long-term, and, with suitable notice given, cases involving total or partial blindness,<sup>7</sup> bad

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<sup>7</sup>Or even temporary blindness, as suffered by one student who had for-

backs, deformed hips, and even the very unfortunate undergraduate who suffered from haemorrhoids and had to take all his examinations standing up at a lectern, were dealt with in a seemly and controlled manner.

Others, such as those caused by accidents, can arise just before or even during the examination period and snap decisions have to be made. Damaged shoulders, wrists, fingers and thumbs are the market leaders in this sector and last minute arrangements to deal with them, such as taking the examination in college and extra time allowances, have to be implemented. One such candidate almost seemed to be positively trying to test how far the safety net stretched; despite having broken the thumb of his left hand shortly before his Tripos examination period began, he was set to bear the pain and take his papers normally — but then managed to break his right wrist as well!

As with any set of rules that involve judgements rather than box-ticking, there will always be cases where one party tries to push the boundaries, whilst another has a duty to try to maintain them. Applications to get examination conditions altered are no different, and, with Tutors having a ‘duty’ to do the best they can for their pupils, albeit reluctantly on occasions,<sup>8</sup> some almost farcical situations are bound to arise.

As a relatively mild example, it can be recorded that one

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gotten to take out his contact lenses overnight and could not see the following morning.

<sup>8</sup>Though the opposite could be said of the Tutor who submitted a warning that his pupil suffered from colour-blindness. The pupil was due to take an examination in Mathematics!

Tutor wrote to the Secretary to say that his pupil was not particularly well and might get up and walk about the examination room but ‘would not do anything unusual’. Would that be all right? The Secretary replied that he did not consider walking around the examination room to be *usual*, and that if anything like that happened the candidate would be banished to his College. In a rather similar vein, permission for students with joint and muscular problems to be allowed to undertake regular exercise routines in the examination room were refused, though there were no objections to their bringing in special chairs, so long as they remained *seated*.

At first sight, a somewhat more bizarre tutorial application was for a candidate to be allowed to take measured quantities of Mars Bars whilst sitting her written papers. However, this and similar requests on behalf of other diabetic students were supported by medically qualified practitioners and became routinely granted. What didn’t become routinely granted were tutorial requests such as that made for a whole new alternative paper on a different day, as the student would like to attend a conference on the appointed one.

On other fronts, ones that were neither medically or religiously based, the firmness or otherwise of the rules was tested most frequently by requests for the rescheduling of examination papers so that one or more of the examinees could take part in sporting events. As the Tripos examinations take place in the summer term<sup>9</sup> it is not surprising that most cases concerned cricket, rowing or athletics.

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<sup>9</sup>Officially known as the Easter Term in Cambridge, and as Trinity Term

Most of the problematic applications involved Oxford in some way or other, and, although getting individual students to the Other Place in time for a croquet match or for the annual Women's Cricket Match was managed without too much difficulty, when it came to an athletics match involving a men's first team, a men's second team and a women's team, the operation moved to a whole new level.

Naturally, the first question to be asked was why a date during the period in which it was likely that several members of the squads would be required for examinations, had been chosen in the first place. Well, it had been arranged by the Achilles Club<sup>10</sup> ... training for a year ... match on a knife edge ... not practicable to postpone it ... umpires of distinguished athletic pedigree were involved. Besides, there was the post-match dinner. The dinner? Well yes, and nobody could possibly sacrifice that, least of all the distinguished umpires. When the dust had settled, there were six would-be first team competitors, all due to take examinations on the Saturday in question, who would do anything to be able to compete, and *really* did want to sit their papers on the previous day.

In a surprisingly short time the President of the Athletics Club, no doubt abetted by its Senior Treasurer who happened

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in Oxford

<sup>10</sup>A club for past and present members of the Athletics Clubs of Oxford and Cambridge. Its members include many Olympic Gold Medal winners and former World Record holders, such as Harold Abrahams, Roger Bannister, Chris Brasher, Christopher Chataway, Herb Elliott, David Hemery and Stephanie Cook.

to also be the University Treasurer (to put the cart before the horse), was able to assure the Secretary to the Board of Examinations that their Tutors were willing to invigilate the candidates and put them up overnight in houses well away from central Cambridge. What was more, several senior members of the University, including The Master of one College, were willing to ride shotgun on the coach to Oxford and then keep an eye on all Cambridge competitors until the Saturday examinations in Cambridge were under way.

And so it came to pass. The six were escorted from their Friday examinations to ‘their Tutors’ houses in the country’, kept *incommunicado* overnight, delivered to the coach at 9 a.m. the next morning, and passed into the care of their security guards for the journey to the Other Place. Although the women’s match was won by a narrow margin, the men’s first team were defeated!

Compared to the upheaval caused by the athletics match, it was a stroll in the park to arrange for a women’s rowing eight, four of whom were due to sit the same Saturday Pharmacology paper, to take part in an Olympic trial at Nottingham. Equally, rearranging the examination timetable for a student representing his country in the World canoeing championships, held in Belgium, did not make waves. However, the tangled knot that the University, and one of its Departments in particular, got itself into over a cricket match did raise quite a storm, and resulted in irate articles in *The Times* and no less than three critical major articles in the normally placid local paper *The*

*Cambridge Evening News*.<sup>11</sup>

The problem arose when the combined Oxford and Cambridge cricket team, having reached the quarter finals of the Benson and Hedges Cup, were due to play Somerset on the same day as one of the papers in the Tripos taught and examined by that Department was scheduled. One of the combined team's leading players was a student in that Department and required to take the paper, not only to count towards his expected Affiliated degree, but also towards a professional qualification for his intended career.

On the one hand, the Department wanted there to be no doubt about the seriousness and validity of its examinations for professional purposes, and was requiring two other rather poorly candidates to take the same examination for this reason. On the other, the candidate's Tutor, the Department itself, and a one-time Vice Chancellor were all hoping that some timetable rearrangement was possible. With no satisfactory security arrangements either available or suggested, with the Department pulling in both directions at the same time, and conscious that no concessions were being made to other students taking the same course, the Secretary, understandably, decided to stick to approved procedures and allow no timetable variation. The general tenor of the subsequent media uproar was that the University had its priorities upside down — I rather doubt whether that would be the verdict today, nearly twenty five years on.

Tending to get rather less sympathetic treatment than sports-

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<sup>11</sup>Now published as the morning paper, *Cambridge News*.

based requests were applications relating to attendance at weddings and funerals. Personally, I have some doubts that this should be so, particularly in relation to funerals. But it has to be said that the security aspects of allowing candidates who have taken papers early, or are due to take papers late, to be 'at large' and unsupervised are significant. There is also the tenable view that attending the funeral of a parent or grandparent is hardly an ideal preparation for sitting examinations that could affect an undergraduate's whole future.

Nobody, so far as I know, was ever refused permission to attend such events, but in the majority of cases no special arrangements were made. Where adequate supervision could be provided there was little difficulty in allowing a candidate to sit the paper either early or late; providing such supervision usually involved the candidate's Tutor or some other College Officer fulfilling some of the duties originally implied by being *in loco parentis*.

One such case was that in which a strong student, likely to obtain a first provided she took all her scheduled papers, was determined to attend the funeral of her grandfather. The day of the funeral clashed with that of one of her examinations, but this problem was overcome when her College Chaplain volunteered to accompany her from Cambridge to Derbyshire and back again. In practical terms, being a College Chaplain or Dean brings with it many of the duties of a Tutor and, not infrequently, College Deans hold official posts as Tutors at the same time.

As I have said, perhaps too often, Tutors have an *a priori*



position that, consistent with the truth, they must always make the best case they can on behalf of their pupil; rather like a duty solicitor who is appointed to act for a would-be burglar, even one who has been arrested and charged whilst still stuck in a window frame. This applies whether the ‘court’ is a University Committee or its delegated Officers, the Council of the student’s College, the Police Station, or, on rare occasions, a real criminal court. As can be imagined, there are sometimes cases or applications to be put that are so far from being realistic that the sensible thing would be to not put them at all.

Nevertheless, one Tutor felt obliged to forward a request from one of his pupils for permission to write their examination answers on their own special paper, on the grounds that the script paper provided by the University was ‘too rough’. Not surprisingly, this proposal was turned down flat by the Secretary, officially on security grounds but also because, in his view, the paper provided by the University, far from being rough, was of a quite superior quality.

Also rejected was an application for an *amanuensis* made on behalf of a candidate for the Certificate of Competent Knowledge (CCK) in a Modern Language. This is a course and examination taken by students who are *not* reading MML<sup>12</sup>, but wish to acquire a good working knowledge of a particular modern language, without any need to study the corresponding literature; it involves a significant workload, as it requires both written work for supervisions and language classes. Most, but

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<sup>12</sup>Or, if they are, the CCK language is not one they are studying in the MML Tripos.

not all, of the students studying for a CCK are students in Arts subjects, such as English, History and Philosophy.

This particular application for the services of an amanuensis, who themselves would have to be (very) competent in the particular language, was made on the grounds that the student had a damaged wrist and could not write. Could she therefore dictate her answers and have them written down by somebody else? The Secretary, quite rightly, took the (perhaps old-fashioned) view that grammar and spelling formed the very essence of a language examination and that, short of making the candidate spell out every letter, space and accent, a process whose length might be measured in days rather than hours, dictating to an amanuensis, who would not know how and when to misspell words, would doubtless result in a script far superior to that which the candidate might have produced.

Over the years that I held the post of Senior Tutor, and was therefore most directly involved in overseeing Tripos examinations from a college point of view, it became quite apparent that getting each student entered for the right examination papers, and obtaining permission for any necessary concessions, was, in some cases, less than half the battle. Getting the right students to the right place at the right time, could also be a major tutorial problem.

It will come as no surprise to the reader to learn that students are not too reliable when it comes to timekeeping, even when they have what should be cogent reasons for trying to avoid being late. It seems to be almost a matter of honour,

particularly amongst Arts students, to stay up late, but then, having got into bed, to remain there for as long as possible.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, the habits acquired during an academic year are not easily lost, and the lack of a well-practised morning routine, unfamiliarity with how to set an alarm clock, failure to find out beforehand where an examination is to take place, and the occasional genuine mistake about the starting time, all add up to a number of empty seats in the examination room shortly after 9.00 a.m.

It is at this point that Tutors again come into the picture. Either directly, or through their Colleges' Porters Lodges, they are informed about the missing students, and each such notification sets off a man- or woman-hunt in the relevant College or in one of its houses or hostels.

Some such searches are successful and the errant student then has to be accompanied to the place of examination, and the Tutor, from a sense of duty, tries to persuade the examination invigilator that the said student could not *even possibly* have had contact with any other examinee and should be allowed to continue for an extra forty-five minutes beyond the normal finishing time. As can be imagined, Invigilators do not welcome having such extra bodies sitting around in a room where they and their assistants are trying to collect completed scripts, prepare the desks for an afternoon examination, and, if possible, squeeze in a little time for lunch — all to be done within a ninety-minute slot.

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<sup>13</sup>It is often said, both proudly and cynically, that only Scientists have nine o'clock lectures.

But, returning to the ‘student-hunt’, as often as not, after a frantic but fruitless search, it can be called off, as the examination room officials have phoned back to say that the student has put in an appearance or that he or she had been there all the time, but had been sitting in the wrong seat.

It may be wondered how a student could be in the wrong seat, given that each desk displays a desk-ticket stating the name and college of the intended candidate, and that that same intended candidate should, in theory, have challenged the right of any usurper to occupy the seat, before the examination had even begun. However, for any given examination session<sup>14</sup> there are almost always a few examinees who are not present at the scheduled time, a few examinees with the same surname, and a few examinees who are unaware they have assigned desks and think that they can sit anywhere. Given this mix, the chance that there will be somebody sitting unchallenged in the wrong seat at 9.05 a.m., and consequently that there is an empty one elsewhere in the room, is not altogether negligible. The net result of this is likely to be that the Tutor of a missing candidate remains unaware of the fact, whilst that of one who is present, but wrongly-located, is sent on a wild-goose chase; a lose-lose situation.

Not all missing candidates can be, or in some cases want to be, found in time. Certainly, the student who relocated to his home in Jersey, for reasons which remain unclear but had something to do with his student grant, did not give his Tutor any

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<sup>14</sup>Which might include students from different Triposes if the examination room is a large one.

chance to rescue the situation. Similarly stymied was another Tutor, whose pupil wrote him a note the day before the exam to say that he was going on an anti-war demonstration, hoping not to be arrested — but was!

Another curious going-on, reported to the Board of Examinations in connection with certain examinations in the Architecture Tripos, was that the candidates would arrive somewhat late and furthermore, instead of going into the examination room, would sit around outside reading text books, only going into the room when they appeared to have completed their revision. I was not aware of this until long after it happened, but it reinforced my view that the written examinations in Architecture were not taken too seriously and that, in fact, it was almost impossible to get an overall class that was different from that awarded to a student's design portfolio. One of my own Architecture students was awarded an overall first class despite having received zero marks for his answers on a *Materials and Structures* paper. I can only hope that the buildings he has designed professionally are still standing.

Whilst missing candidates are not all that rare, extra ones are decidedly uncommon. There had been a case in which two students following a two-year part of their Tripos, and expecting to sit a College progress exam at the end of the first year, had been wrongly advised that this was the same as one of the university-administered examinations. They turned up for the latter, but were soon made aware of their error.

Much more interesting, at least to me because I was person-

ally involved, was the case of a deliberate impostor. A student turned up for one of the examinations in the History of Art Tripos and complained to the Invigilator that there was no place set for him. He claimed that he was from Clare and that his name was J. R. McNeice. He was given a desk and examination paper and proceeded to write busily. In the meanwhile, examination lists and records kept in the Old Schools were checked, but no trace of the name could be found.

As it happened, the Chairman of Examiners for this paper was both a Fellow and the Director of Studies for History of Art at Clare; he was also the University Lecturer who had taught the course being examined. When consulted by phone, he had to admit that he did not recognise the student's name. At this point I, as the Senior Tutor of the College in question, was contacted and asked, whether I could help. For reasons soon to become apparent the name was neither in my head<sup>15</sup> nor on the College's list of students, but I agreed to go to the examination room to see whether a visual check would clarify matters. It didn't.

The would-be candidate was confronted once again and asked who was his Director of Studies (DoS). Clearly, he was either raising the stakes in an elaborate prank, or desperately unlucky in his selection of bogus college, in that he failed to notice the connection between his choice and the college affiliation of the Chairman of Examiners. I don't know which it was,

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<sup>15</sup>Since I was both Senior Tutor and one of the College's two Admissions Tutors, I was very familiar with the names of virtually all of our undergraduate students.

but at this point he gave up and confessed his real name<sup>16</sup> and college affiliation; it turned out that he was a student who had just finished the second year of the English Tripos, had a genuine wish to transfer to the History of Art Tripos, and wanted to take one of its examinations for the experience. This did not save him from a dressing down from the Senior Proctor,<sup>17</sup> but added both amusing and admirable elements to the incident.

Having got the right candidates to the right examination room is far from the end of the story, and many things can go wrong before their written offerings can be presented for marking. First there are the exam papers themselves; with so many to be produced each year there are bound to be some mistakes. A sample, all taken from a single year, a year that had been described as better than average in this respect, included a passage in a Persian paper that had been printed upside down (I hope that the examinees, at least, could recognise what had happened), a Hebrew passage from Isaiah printed twice in a Theology paper with different chapter and verse references in the two cases, and a Dutch literature paper containing questions on topics that had never been announced.

As equally shocked as those sitting the Dutch paper must have been the English student who, when asked to 'comment on the following passages', was rather taken aback to find that

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<sup>16</sup>So far as possible throughout these memoirs, I have avoided giving actual names, but, as his stated name turned out to be false, I have included it.

<sup>17</sup>The University's most senior disciplinary officer in matters involving Junior Members (undergraduate and postgraduate students).

there appeared to be five such passages. In fact, only the first two were called for; the extra ones were the result of the sheet consisting of pages 5 and 6 having been stapled back to front in his copy of the question paper; the three additional ones belonged to a later question that started on page 5.

In addition to the problems that result from carelessness in the physical production of the examination papers, there are those that are due to the questions themselves. It is to be expected that a few minor typographical errors will go undetected, despite the number of times they have been read at setting meetings and in proof, but mathematical problems that are insoluble or include equations containing errors of sign are virtually impossible to deal with under examination conditions. In one such incident, a candidate claimed to have spent a long time fruitlessly trying to solve just such a problem; the Chairman of Examiners agreed that there was a difficulty and said that due account had been taken of it. Fifteen-love! However, the Chairman added that this particular candidate had made a great many allegations about errors in the papers and this was the only one that was valid. Fifteen all!

Equally disturbing must have been a reference made in a Part II Classics paper to a particular photograph; there were no photographs at all in the paper, and later investigation showed that there never had been, not at any stage of its preparation. When I read this in one of the Secretary's reports I was rather taken aback, as in my own subject each question is read and worked through by at least three of the Examiners.



Another piece of absent material was the data sheet that was supposed to accompany the *Materials and Structures* paper in the Architecture Tripos. The Examiner, who should have been present and might have provided at least one of the data sheets, was also absent and it took a quarter of an hour to locate him and resolve the problem; somewhat cynically, I am inclined to think that it would not have mattered much if the Examiner and his data sheets could not have been found, as a candidate's ultimate class seems to have, at most, minimal dependence on their performance in this paper.<sup>18</sup>

A further serious error by the Examiners, one that resulted in questions being raised, by both candidates and their Tutors, was a mistake that appeared in a Pathology Practical exam for medical students. A particular culture was described in the written material as having been incubated 'aerobically' whereas it was in fact grown anaerobically. The Senior Examiner, whilst regretting the error, was able to assure all concerned that the candidates had performed particularly well in the Pathology Practical and that, as usual,<sup>19</sup> nobody had been adversely affected by the Examiners' failure to proofread properly. Perhaps I should add at this point that not all mistakes by the paper-setters work to the candidates' disadvantage; one year, in the Computer Science Tripos, exactly the same question was set in two of its five papers.

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<sup>18</sup>See p.227

<sup>19</sup>According to all the Senior Examiners ever asked, no candidate has ever suffered as a result of an error made by an Examiner. Due allowance has always been made!

In one particular year (1980) the difficulties associated with producing satisfactory examination papers moved up several notches. Industrial action<sup>20</sup> at the University Press, called for by one of the print unions in support of a pay claim, caused problems from the word go. As most of the examination papers that required specialised techniques to produce, such as glossy photographs and half-tone plates, had always been the province of the Press, a crisis was looming.

The Board of Examinations and its Officers must have been seriously exercised in making alternative and back-up arrangements, but, as these reflections are from the point of view of a College Tutor, we will not dwell further on that aspect. It should be added that a number of Departments, landed with producing some of their more complicated papers themselves, emerged with considerable credit, and probably accelerated a more permanent switch from centrally-produced to departmentally-produced question papers.

One Tripos examination that emerged that year with less than average credit was that taken by second-year History students, not for anything to do with photographs or diagrams, but for the apparent casualness with which its examination papers had been put together. After the paper had been sat, a number of Tutors, no doubt urged on by their Directors of Studies in History, complained that the *General Historical Problems* paper had offered a choice of only fourteen questions, rather than the usual nineteen and, what was more, the topics covered were

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<sup>20</sup>i.e. inaction.

unbalanced. The Chairman of Examiners at first denied that the number of questions had been reduced, but, after a recount (or two) using the proof copy signed off by that same Chairman and passed to the Press for final production, he accepted that there had indeed been a reduction.

Now, a reduction from nineteen to fourteen, however it had happened, is not really all that bad, but suggestions of imbalance could hardly be ignored. However, even worse was to come, as another paper in the same examination, *European History since 1715* was accused, not only of being badly balanced, but also of exhibiting some dilettantism. This did not go down well, and the Chairman said that he and his colleagues were angered by the criticism, which they regarded as ‘effronterous’ – a word that does not even exist in my dictionary. I’m no historian, but feel that there were certainly some grounds for the criticism, not least because one of the questions whimsically asked ‘Was Romanticism masculine, feminine or neuter?’.

Unsatisfactory question papers are not the only things that can produce problems during an exam. The candidates themselves, and even events outside the examination room, are quite capable of causing untoward things to happen. In one incident, a student collapsed during a paper that formed part of the Medical Sciences Tripos and it was eventually established that it was four days since he had last eaten anything; clearly there was something lacking in his understanding of the basics of his subject.

In the same year, during an examination for the Master of

Laws degree, one candidate felt obliged to call an invigilator and whisper to him that he had seen the candidate sitting in front of him take a piece of paper from his pocket, consult it, and then put it back into his pocket, and that this had happened several times. The invigilator summoned one of the Proctors and when the alleged cheat left the examination hall he was confronted and challenged about the illicit paper in his pocket. Well, yes, he did have some notes and he had consulted them – they were ones that he had made to remind himself how long to spend on each question! No case to answer, Your Honour.

Also disturbed by the actions of another candidate seated close by was a final-year Modern Languages student. After about thirty minutes he complained to an Invigilator that ‘his neighbour’s pen was too noisy’ and asked whether he could be moved to another desk. This request was granted; he then asked further that the inconvenience that this had caused him be recorded and that the Examiners be informed accordingly.

As noted a little earlier, events that take place away from the examination room, and have nothing to do with the examinations themselves, can affect the running of them. Even outside events that didn’t actually happen can cause problems. As a minor example, I was told of the occasion on which it had been arranged for a party of Australian Aborigines to visit the Department of Physical Anthropology to discuss the possible repatriation of the bones of their ancestors, some of which were in the Department’s museum. Although this had not been publicly announced, the *Cambridge Evening News* rang up early in the morning to ask about the visit, and, as a practical exami-

nation which might include answering questions about some of the museum's specimens was scheduled for that day, this led to quite unjustified fears that some kind of demonstration, aimed at disrupting the examination, might be planned. Of course, nothing happened.

Much more serious was the disruption to the 1989 examinations caused by a telephone message warning of a bomb that was due to explode at noon on the University's Downing Site, a site that includes the Department of Physiology. It was sent to the Cambridge Police at about 10 a.m. and assumed by them to be sent by animal rights activists; the police concluded that the Physiology building and the adjacent Geography Department, which that morning had three of its rooms full of examination candidates,<sup>21</sup> should be evacuated from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m.

However, before this evacuation could be organised, the Police called back to say that re-examination of the recorded telephone message had shown that it referred, not to the Downing Site, but to the New Museum Site, which is situated in Downing Street.<sup>22</sup> On this site there were even more Tripos examinations

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<sup>21</sup>Who had started their three-hour examinations at 9.00 a.m.

<sup>22</sup>This Downing Street is nominally associated with Downing College, itself named after the third Baronet, Sir George Downing Bt, who left a legacy to found a Cambridge College if ever the legitimate Downing line should die out; this it did, but it took 36 years of legal wrangling before the widow of the fourth Baronet and her family were forced by the courts to give up any claim to the legacy money. The Downing Street in London (and those in Manhattan and Brooklyn in New York) is named after the first Baronet, also Sir George Downing, who played a large part in securing New York (formerly New Amsterdam) from the Dutch.

in progress, with over three hundred students sitting written papers or undergoing related oral examinations; evacuation of the whole site, research departments as well as examination halls, was ordered by the police. The University officials directly involved<sup>23</sup> all doubted whether the bomb warning was genuine, but, understandably, they acted in accordance with the Police instructions. Noon came and went, and, as with the rumour-based Aborigine ‘disruption’, nothing happened. This was, at the same time, both a great relief and a trigger for considerable annoyance at the needless havoc caused by the false message.

I forget who first informed me, as Senior Tutor, of what had happened that day – it may have been the College Porters, who have a well-merited reputation for knowing what is going on in the Colleges and Departments of the University before anybody else does – but I do remember later receiving very full accounts from those of my fellow Fellows who had been involved as Examiners. As can be imagined, sorting out how to deal with the marking of partially-completed answer papers, and aborted practical and oral examinations, had to be very much an *ad hoc* procedure and, no doubt, resulted in a number of injustices.

Rather less disruptive than the false bomb warning, but nevertheless causing a number of last-minute changes of venue, were the rehearsals associated with a series of concerts booked for the Cambridge Corn Exchange, a public building situated not far from one of the University’s Examination Halls. The

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<sup>23</sup>The University Safety Officer, the Senior Proctor, the Heads or Deputy Heads of several Departments, and, of course, the Secretary to the Board of Examinations.

concerts were to be held in the evenings and would cause no problems, but there would be rehearsals and sound testing in the afternoons.

In increasing order of potentially disturbing decibels, the performers were *Living Country Legends*, the *Red Army Ensemble*, and *Arrested Development*. As might be expected, relevant research confirmed that *Arrested Development* would probably offer the greatest threat. Arrangements were therefore made to move the examinations scheduled for the relevant afternoon to a new venue; those on other days went ahead as planned. This seemed to work out satisfactorily.

In a similar vein, with the examination period due to begin in a week's time, the Vice-Chancellor received notification that arrangements had been made for the fifth stage of the Milk Race<sup>24</sup> to start from near the Senate House at 11 a.m. on a day when examinations would be taking place there. The race would have 120 cyclists and be escorted by 150 vehicles carrying officials, stewards, repair teams, TV crews, etc., to say nothing of loud music aimed at attracting a large crowd and providing a musical introduction to Sky Television's coverage of the race; there were plenty of reasons to be concerned. In the event, a negotiated change of some fifty metres in the siting of the start line, coupled with a certain amount of vocal restraint by the marshals equipped with megaphones, solved the problem so far as the Senate House examinations were concerned. It did, however, make the situation a whole lot worse for a small

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<sup>24</sup>A multi-stage cycle race around Great Britain, sponsored for 35 years by the now-defunct Milk Marketing Board.

number of examinees who were taking their papers in a College close to the new starting point; they had to be allowed extra time as some compensation.

Though it might well give the impression that echoes of its feudal past still ring round the University today – despite all of its contributions to cutting-edge Science, the Social Sciences and the Arts over the last hundred years – the rather amusing incident of the ‘noisy moss’ is worth recalling. Well, actually, it was very quiet moss, but it *was* the root cause (no pun intended) of troublesome noise. The Secretary reported on it to the Board, and I can do no better than quote from his report, almost verbatim.

The Vice-Chancellor was worried that the cobbles in one of the Courts in The Old Schools were overgrown with moss and looked untidy, especially as The Chancellor<sup>25</sup> would be walking through that Court during the forthcoming Honorary Degree Ceremony. The V-C therefore asked the University’s Department of Estate Management to deal with the matter. Estate Management offered to use powerful weedkillers, but the inhabitants of the neighbouring rooms muttered something about health and safety and that idea was dropped. The Vice-Chancellor indicated that in his College such work was done by a young gardener on his knees; this crystallised matters, and Estate Management sent three people to scrape away the moss – though they were not on their knees. If they had been there might have been no prob-

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<sup>25</sup>aka HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh



lem, but they had hardly started when an Invigilator from the so-called East Room appeared and complained that the ringing of their trowels and hoes on the cobbles was disturbing his examination candidates in that room. Trapped between the Devil and the deep blue sea, the three moss-gardeners were forced to go away and come back later to complete their work during unsocial hours.

Now we come to the matter of dissertations, long essays, project reports, etc., etc. Most of these commence life well before the Easter Term, the time when most examination procedures get under way, and they might well have been mentioned earlier. But it is their later stages, particularly those connected with dissertations, that are responsible for most of the trouble with which Tutors, Directors of Studies and the relevant Departments are landed.

Reports on experimental projects, almost exclusively confined to work in laboratories, either in Cambridge during the academic year or with industrial firms during the Long (Summer) Vacation, are usually produced and submitted in accordance with the University's Ordinances and Regulations. This is largely because it is in the nature of most scientific research that meetings with the scientist or engineer in charge occur on a daily basis, and so both the work and the production of a report are closely monitored.

Projects of a theoretical or computing nature are also carried out under the regular guidance of an appropriate academic

staff member and nearly all are submitted on time<sup>26</sup> and in the required format. Long essays, this time largely confined to the Arts and Social Sciences, are similarly overseen by the DoS, either directly or through the supervision system; they too give relatively little trouble.

It is with *dissertations* that the problems really arise but, in order to appreciate how they come about, the reader needs to have at least some familiarity with the general procedures involved. In most Arts and some Social Science Triposes provision is made for a candidate to submit a dissertation instead of sitting one of the written papers; nearly all final-year examinations (Part II of the relevant Tripos) either offer or require such a substitution. Part II of the English Tripos does both; there, candidates *must* take certain compulsory papers and submit one dissertation, but they *may* also offer a second dissertation that replaces one of the other papers. The examination scheme for Part I English, taken by second-year students, includes an optional dissertation.

The procedure for submitting dissertation work for examination credit is much the same for all subjects: early in the year, or even during the previous year, a title and topic description are submitted through a student's DoS or Tutor to the relevant Department; approval, or the changes required to obtain it, are sent in reply; a closing date for submission is set by the relevant regulation for each particular examination; the student prepares

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<sup>26</sup>In the Computer Science and Engineering Triposes late submissions are tolerated to some degree, but the maximum mark obtainable is reduced by a fixed amount for each day of lateness and soon becomes zero.

a realistic (or unrealistic) schedule for meeting his or her target submission date; the student meets (or doesn't meet) the submission date; Tutors and Directors of Studies feel greatly relieved (or have to start thinking of plausible excuses and/or simply plead for extra time on behalf of their charges); the dissertation finally arrives (or the student gives up the struggle and sits a written paper for which they are usually ill-prepared).

Although there have been changes since, in the period during which I was a Tutor, some dissertation submission dates were really quite early in the academic year. For example, in 1987 that for Part II of the Geography Tripos was set for the middle of the Lent Term (the day before St Valentine's Day).<sup>27</sup> In one of his reports to the Board of Examinations, their Secretary recorded that a particular final-year Geography student had an uncomfortably close call with the set timetable. She was preparing a dissertation on Irish pilgrimage, in particular as it might affect the future development of Knock Airport.<sup>28</sup>

An Irish M.P. had agreed to lend her some of his personal papers, ones that were highly relevant to her investigation. However, the papers had become stuck in the postal system as a result of a January strike by Customs workers in the Irish Republic. Clearly the candidate could hardly be faulted, and with the

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<sup>27</sup>The submission and approval of proposed titles took place correspondingly early — early enough that candidates could, if they so wished, spend part of the previous Long Vacation undertaking fieldwork or surveys to provide material for their intended dissertations.

<sup>28</sup>In addition to pilgrimages visiting the shrine of Our Lady of Knock, Queen of Ireland, there are many others that start from Knock and go to shrines such as those at Lourdes and Fatima in mainland Europe.

deadline less than a month away, an extension to mid-March was readily agreed by the Examiners; fortunately this proved sufficient as the papers were released shortly afterwards. I think that this incident shows that there is something to be said for an early timetable for dissertations, because if this incident had happened in May, by which time there is no slack in the system, it would have been very difficult to have the candidate's inevitably almost-minimal submission assessed fairly.

For Geography, and for most other subjects, late submissions, with or without an approved extension time, are relatively uncommon, at most a few percent of the total number of candidates. But that's not so for Part II of the English Tripos, the undisputed king of the late submission. There are usually about two hundred students taking this examination, and it should be remembered in mitigation that they *all* have to submit *at least one* dissertation, but in the mid-seventies the number of late submissions was averaging fifty per year. By the end of that decade and for most of the next, closer control by the English Department and College Directors of Studies had brought this down to the more reasonable annual figure of about ten, still several times higher than most other departments, but understandable, bearing in mind both the compulsory and permissive elements of the regulations governing that particular examination.

However, towards the end of the eighties things began to get out of hand again and one year the Faculty Board of English decided that the problem should be tackled head-on and that drastic steps should be taken. It decreed that, even though the

submission deadline had been set as early as 5.00 p.m. on the third day of the Easter Full Term, a full month before the Part II written papers began, no post-deadline dissertation should be accepted, even if it was only a few minutes late (unless there was an overwhelming case for a small extension).

Given the subject's previous record with regard to late submissions, it was hardly surprising that this was queried. Bearing in mind that one dissertation was compulsory, did the Faculty Board really want a significant fraction of its potential graduates to fail? Could the deadline be moved, at least as far as the Monday after the first weekend of Term, rather than be on the Friday before it? Could those students struggling to submit (start?) a second (optional) dissertation have the option to take an additional written paper instead, as they could in Part I?

Well, 'No'. The Faculty Board Chairman explained that his Board was 'hawkish' and wanted its undergraduates to be well-organised and multi-skilled, so that they would be more employable when they did graduate! This response must have put the Secretary into something of a quandary; normally he was challenging Tutors, good-naturedly of course, asking them why their pupils had not complied with perfectly clear regulations, but here he was challenging the Chairman of a Faculty Board, asking him why the regulations were so draconian. Hardly believable, but he was behaving just as if he were a Tutor. Whatever next?

In the end, faced with the prospect of nearly thirty of its final-year students failing to graduate, the Faculty Board ac-

cepted that perhaps a few days grace would be acceptable after all. This episode should have acted as at least some sort of check on the re-emerging problem, but it seems not to have done so and two years later the following rather amusing scenario unfolded.

The official submission date for dissertations in Part II Economics was a little earlier than that for Part II English, and when the first of these dates arrived the Secretary had granted four extensions to candidates in Economics, whilst the English score stood at the paltry total of one, yes, only one!

Judging by subsequent events, news of this must have leaked out and been seen as a challenge to their status as late-submission's perennial Champions by all those involved in the teaching of English. As the Secretary told me over the phone,<sup>29</sup> 'he didn't know what their Manager had said to them at half-time, but the usual Tutors suddenly began shooting from all angles, and he had no chance of saving most of the attempts'. This went on until the Secretary, acting as both goalkeeper and referee, thought that enough extra time had been played — but no sooner had he blown what he thought was the final final whistle, than more unstoppable shots came raining in and a period of extra extra time had to be played. The final final final score read: English 20, The Rest of the World 7; the old order had been restored.

The reader may well wonder about the grounds on which a

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<sup>29</sup>I don't recall, for certain, what the call was about, but have to admit that it may have been in connection with a late submission by a student at my own College.

successful application for an extension to a submission deadline could be made. Most are made on the straightforward basis of the student's studies having been interrupted by accident or illness, a major family crisis, or the failure of a third party to provide promised facilities or material at the agreed time.

On rather shakier grounds was an application made on behalf of a Part II Economics candidate writing an optional dissertation. It was based on the fact that, although she was reading Economics, she was not very good with numbers! Because the relevant literature circulated by the Department of Economics contained some ambiguities, an extension was in fact granted; but to no avail, as the numbers were still too much for her and she had to revert to an examination consisting entirely of written papers.

Somebody else who was not very good with numbers was the History candidate who, despite the published Faculty limit of 16,000 words for all dissertations, produced one of 32,000 words. He requested and was given a few days to try to cut it down to size, but again to no avail, and the dissertation was withdrawn. However, some of the other cases recorded by the Secretary in his reports to the Board can only be described as distinctly unusual, and their curiosity value alone makes them worth recording here.

Broadly speaking, they fall into two camps; those based on the student's situation, and those based on the whereabouts or physical state of the dissertation. Into the first of these must go the case of the student who was late with *two* dissertations

– Part II English of course – and was described by his Tutor as ‘a strange man who could not be expected to understand things like closing dates and University regulations’, citing as evidence that the student in question had tried to become a monk, but (unfortunately for his College) had been rejected by the Abbot. So, could he be given more time? Is there any limit to a Tutor’s sense of duty to his or her pupils?

It may appear that I have some particular axe to grind with regard to the subject of English. Far from it, the final-year English students in my own College regularly produce some of its best Tripos results, as measured by the percentage of them that graduate with first class honours or receive University prizes.<sup>30</sup> Several of them are now established authors or journalists, recognised by the public at large. Nevertheless, when it comes to generating dissertation difficulties, the subject wins hands down, though it’s not always entirely the student’s fault.

As noted earlier, the title of a proposed English dissertation is submitted through the student’s Director of Studies, and the dissertation itself, when completed, has to be certified as the student’s work by their Tutor, who may or may not glance through it. These are the two stools between which a dissertation can fall, as is illustrated by the case in which a Part II student submitted two dissertations, neither of which corresponded to the titles approved for them; rather, they appeared to be about

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<sup>30</sup>Though perhaps I should add that very shortly after I first became a Fellow of Clare, I attended a College Meeting at which a Senior Fellow, who had a world-wide reputation in his own subject, went so far as to query whether English is a subject at all.



mathematics — a discrepancy that did not escape the notice of the English examiners for long. In the same year, the offering from another candidate was more musical than literary.

The first of the two ‘mathematical’ English dissertations was accompanied by a letter from the student’s Director of Studies pleading *incuria*. This was not, as might be thought, a notification that the dissertation had some curiosity value, but an admission that the DoS had been guilty to some degree of negligence.

A plea of *incuria* is effectively a request to the University to allow an anomalous situation to be treated as if it were legal within the Universities rules. Such pleas are usually made by Tutors when, for some reason, a violation of the University Ordinances or Regulations involving one of their pupils has taken place, and they have not noticed it in time to correct the situation. In the context of the Tripos, this most often comes about when a student is inadvertently allowed to prepare for a combination of examination papers that is either not permitted in general, or not permitted for a student with their particular past examination record.

If it is not realistic to require the student to switch to an allowed combination of papers in the time still available, then a plea of *incuria* is made by the student’s Tutor, in practice asking that an exception to the Regulations be made in this particular case. As the application involves a violation of the University’s rules, if the plea is accepted a notice is published in the *Cambridge University Reporter* so that the Senior Members of the University have been properly informed. A typical notice

might read as follows<sup>31</sup>

On the recommendation of the Faculty Board of Modern and Medieval Languages the General Board have agreed to permit Miss U. N. Aware, of Careless College, to offer the following combination of papers in Part II of the Modern and Medieval Languages Tripos in 2020: Papers Fr. C1 and C2, Fr. 6, 8, 9, and 10, notwithstanding the provision of Regulation 24(a) for the Tripos. Miss Aware was wrongly advised that she could offer an extra paper instead of the compulsory dissertation. The General Board have received a plea of *incuria* from the candidate's Tutor.

Clearly, in the case of the mathematical English student, either the Director of Studies or the Tutor, or both, had been less than vigilant at some stage. I don't know how this case, and that involving the musical dissertation, were finally resolved by the Examiners, but as neither student was from my own College, and I would rather not discover any skeletons in our own cupboards, I made no effort to find out.

Two of the more unusual reasons for delayed submissions, as reported to the Examinations Board, came in the same year. In the first of these the student had left her completed dissertation and all related notes in a taxi in Greece; she had advertised for their return in a local paper, but with no success. Another candidate, in 1984, had his dissertation stored on a word processor in a building in London's St James's Square, and, as luck

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<sup>31</sup>Fr. indicates that the relevant language is 'French'.

would have it, before he could print and take away a paper version, the police closed off the Square for the duration of the siege at the Libyan Embassy. Until that was over, he could not retrieve and submit his work.

Nearly ten years later, when personal computers had largely replaced stand-alone word-processing machines, dissertations were often stored on removable discs. One dissertation so stored, this time for Part I English and therefore optional, gave rise to a somewhat implausible claim for an extended submission time. The claim was that the candidate had tapped the disc rather sharply on his teeth and that this had damaged it to such an extent that when he next inserted it into the disc drive it had fallen to pieces. What bad luck. But not a disaster because, of course, he would have a back-up copy. Well, yes he had, but unfortunately it was on the same disc as the original. I imagine he had to fall back on taking the written paper he had hoped to avoid when he opted for a dissertation.

Finally, after nearly nine months of training, some withdrawals, rather more allowances than additional handicaps, and quite a number of the runners already some way down the course, the Tripos Stakes could get underway – not so much a race, more like the cross-country phase of a three-day event. As I have already indicated, some of the obstacles to be negotiated had been found to be badly constructed, even before the trials had begun; others had shortcomings that only became apparent after the competitors had completed the course. And it wasn't just the fences that came in for criticism, quite a number of the runners queried the penalty marks they were given for knocking

them down, and, as we have seen, others lodged official protests about the behaviour of their rivals.

As so we move on to .....

## Chapter 12

# The Stewards' Enquiry

Once a written paper or practical examination is over, and almost before the Examiners can get down to the task of assessing what has been presented, it is quite common for the Secretary to receive a stream of comments, complaints, or requests, from both candidates and their Tutors. Sometimes they flow, as they should, from the student to his or her Tutor, from the Tutor to the Secretary, and finally from the Secretary to the Chairman of Examiners – with the appropriate scrutiny at each stage, of course. But sometimes the student decides to cut out one or both of the two middle-men and contact the Chairman directly,

generally much to the annoyance of everybody else involved – or not involved, as the case may be.

Some comments made in this way are directly concerned with the papers themselves, such as the round robin sent by forty four candidates for Part II of the Mathematical Tripos in 1992 to the effect that the paper contained several misprints, did not properly reflect the lectured course, and asked questions that were 'much too difficult'.

Others were more concerned with the answers that a candidate had submitted. Not, as might be expected, to offer an excuse for why they might be judged substandard; rather, because they were of superior quality, perhaps better than the Examiners might manage. In 1980 a final year candidate, supported by his DoS, pressed hard for the return of his examination scripts on the grounds that they might contain publishable material; the rules forbid the return of scripts to candidates and the request was denied.

Eight years later a candidate for Part II of the English Tripos wrote, through her Tutor, to ask that her script for the *20th Century Poetry* paper be kept in a safe place after it had been marked. In it she had advanced certain theories that she wished to publish and wanted to protect against the possibility that an Examiner might, perhaps subconsciously, plagiarise her work. The Secretary did procure the relevant script, but when he came to file it away he remembered that he still held three Part II English scripts from several years earlier. They had been retained at the request of a Tutor and contained a num-

ber of poems as well as a declaration by their author that she held copyright for them. Enquiries as to whether they should be retained any longer had received no reply by the time the Secretary reported to the Board. So far as I know, one of his successors is still waiting.

An equally unusual, but milder, complaint was received from a candidate for the Mathematical Tripos. His examinations were being held in the Arts School, where the pew-like seating has only relatively narrow shelves on which to rest writing materials. The candidates were therefore seated in alternate rows and provided with drawing boards on which to work. His claim was that his concentration was adversely affected by the words ‘so boring’ that somebody had written on his board. Could the words be removed before his next exam? Enclosed with his letter was a sheet of sandpaper for the purpose.

Rather more routine communications with the Secretary at this stage of the examination process are from Tutors seeking to explain the particular circumstances that have, or may have, affected the performances of one or more of their pupils. In one unusual example, in that it affected a very large number of students from a single College, its Senior Tutor reported to the Secretary that during the previous night a violent thunderstorm had triggered their newly-installed fire detection system and sounded alarms throughout the College. The night porter, when he realised what had happened, had switched the system off, but had put it back on again when he thought the storm had passed. Unfortunately, the storm returned and the whole episode was repeated — and then re-repeated. Three times in

one night, to say nothing of a burglar alarm in a nearby house that had rung, very loudly, for four hours the night before. A lot of students had lost a lot of sleep. The Senior Tutor didn't know what the Secretary could do about it, but had thought that he ought to be informed.

A Tutor in a different College, doing the best he could for an errant pupil, reported that the student in question, a candidate for Part I of the Historical Tripos, had misunderstood a question and written on the crisis of 1297,<sup>1</sup> rather than on one of a century later. The Tutor suggested that it might be important for the Examiners to know this. Too true.

Whilst the Secretary is receiving the kind of correspondence just described, the Examiners are receiving the candidates' scripts. Well, most of them are. Completed scripts, once available, are usually delivered to internal examiners at their Departments or Colleges in Cambridge without too much difficulty; some examiners even turn up at the examination room to collect their allocation.

But for External Examiners, this is not always the case. There are some who, despite having agreed to act as an Examiner, seem almost reluctant to have the scripts catch up with them. A rather extreme example was an External Examiner in Veterinary Anatomy who had asked for some two dozen scripts to be sent to her in Bristol on the Saturday of a Bank Holiday

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<sup>1</sup>Concerned with the ruling of Scotland, involving Edward I, William Wallace and Robert Bruce.



weekend.<sup>2</sup> She later gave a new address in Wales and arrangements were made to get the scripts to her there. Her next move and delivery request centred on Fife in Scotland. The quoted cost for a courier to collect the bundle of scripts and then deliver it to Fife on a Bank Holiday Weekend was £150, plus VAT of course. The Secretary said ‘No’, she would have to receive the scripts by ordinary post and, if necessary, read the last few of them on the train as she was coming to Cambridge for the Oral Examination. This appears to have concentrated the minds of the powers that be in the Anatomy Department and they found a courier willing to do the job for just £12.

When the envelopes containing completed scripts do arrive with the Examiners, there are three sorts of scripts that are difficult to deal with: those with pages that are, or appear to be, missing; those that are illegible; and those that are missing altogether.

Actually, on one occasion a fourth type turned up, two scripts submitted by a candidate for the LL.M. degree,<sup>3</sup> each of which did little more than ask a sequence of rhetorical questions. Now this may have been good practice for her later career as an advocate in court, but was not what was required when asked for *her own* opinions in a written examination paper. This was a

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<sup>2</sup>So as not to disrupt the normal patterns of lectures, practical classes, supervisions and committee meetings, Bank Holiday Mondays that occur during Full Term are treated as normal Mondays in the Cambridge University calendar.

<sup>3</sup>Although this is a postgraduate degree, in Cambridge it is examined in the same way as a Tripos qualification.

pity, as she demonstrated high ability in other papers, and even the rhetorical questions showed evidence of wide reading. When it ultimately came to drawing up the class list, the relatively low marks awarded to these two papers were to reduce her aggregate mark to lower than that needed for a First Class.

Turning to the more normal difficulties with problem scripts, it can be said that those that appear to be incomplete, usually are. But all the obvious solutions have to be tried before drawing the statistically likely conclusion. Students *do* accidentally take their answers out of the examination room, returning them almost immediately, or later through their Tutor, or even by leaving them, without any explanation, on a table by the entrance to the examination room a day later!

Copious waste paper baskets, nominally for deliberately discarded work or jottings, are placed at the exit of each examination room and Invigilators are on guard there to make sure that no script paper is taken out of the room at the end of an examination. The first places to look when whole questions or individual pages seem to be missing are the contents of these baskets; accordingly they are carefully bagged up at the end of each session and stored for a few weeks.

Missing questions are usually detected by Invigilators when they collect up the scripts. They check what has been left on a desk against a cover sheet showing, amongst other things, which questions the candidate claims to have attempted; this is most easily done if individual questions are tied up separately. That pages are missing normally only comes to light when the

Examiners begin their task.

Essays and calculations that terminate, unfinished, in the middle of a page can usually be put down to time having run out; the real nightmare is the essay that finishes mid-sentence in the bottom right-hand corner of the page! Did time really run out just then? Over the years, the Secretary reported quite a number of cases in which the student subsequently confirmed that that was exactly what had happened.

When a complete script appears to be missing, getting to the bottom of the matter is generally somewhat easier than when a part script goes AWOL. Very occasionally a candidate does absent-mindedly walk out of the examination room carrying his or her script and is not noticed by an Invigilator. But if the script actually exists it is usually to be found with one of the Examiners, though perhaps not with the one designated to be the first, or only, person to mark it. A few telephone calls (or, these days, emails) are normally sufficient to sort out such situations.

More common explanations are that the candidate did not sit the examination paper in question, had been withdrawn from the examination, had changed to a different optional paper, or had been ill on the day. It needs only one weak link in the information chain to result in a particular Examiner not receiving a script that he or she is expecting. To take one particular example from the 1981 MML examination, the Chairman of Examiners telephoned the Secretary shortly before the final meeting of the Examiners to say that a second-year candidate

in Polish and Serbo-Croat seemed to have no script for one of his Polish papers. There were, apparently, a number of reasons for supposing that either the candidate had not sat the paper, or that he had but it had not been marked:

- The usual Director of Studies in his College was ill.
- The supervisor in Polish had no idea that the candidate was offering the paper concerned.
- The intended Examiner of the paper had died and his replacement was a lady in a fairly late stage of pregnancy.
- The candidate was admitted (by his Tutor, I suppose) to be fairly casual about his obligations.

However, all of these turned out to be red herrings, and when the College concerned was consulted it was able to confirm that the candidate had indeed sat the paper, though it was one in Early Russian, not Polish. When the right Examiner was consulted, he produced and marked the paper. Mystery solved, but somewhere along the line what had started as Early Russian had become Polish, or was it vice-versa?

That brings us to scripts that are present but can't be marked, namely the illegible ones. The University's general policy with regard to possibly illegible scripts is, in the absence of a proven physical disability, to wait and see if the Examiners can in fact read what is written. With adequate medical evidence of a disability, arrangements can be made beforehand for the

transcribing of scripts, or for dictation to an amanuensis in the student's College,<sup>4</sup> or even for the candidate to read out each of their answers to the relevant Examiner.

Without medical evidence, no prior guarantee can be given that a typed version of unreadable scrawl will be permitted; the student has to be given every incentive to write legibly and not be allowed to gain an unfair advantage through furious scribbling. If transcription is allowed then the candidate's College has the task of arranging it, which usually means one of its secretarial staff – whilst trying not to give the impression that they would much rather be doing their normal job – types intermittently over a period of several hours, whilst the student struggles to read out what they themselves have written. The completed transcript is then forwarded to the Examiner for marking; the original scrawl is also sent, so that some sort of check can be made that nothing has been gained in translation.

In a typical year up to about twenty scripts are declared by the Examiners to be illegible and have to be treated in this way, though, of course, the number of candidates responsible for them is significantly less than twenty. Despite the extra administrative problems such cases entail, the Examiners appear to bear no ill-will, and one History candidate who produced five such scripts in 1976 was awarded a starred first, implying work of special distinction.

In a similar case, a 1983 candidate for Part II of the His-

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<sup>4</sup>Nowadays, the usual arrangement is for the student to use a word-processing program on a computer.

tory and Philosophy of Science Tripos also produced scripts initially declared to be illegible. By then a working rule had been introduced that normally<sup>5</sup> only three out of the five could be transcribed with the 'assistance' of the candidate — after all, candidates were always instructed in a paper's rubric to write legibly and warned that those not doing so may be penalised. A noble Examiner struggled, using the transcribed papers as a guide, to unravel the mysteries of the other two papers. This candidate was also awarded a first. So that you may see for yourself what first-class work looks like, a sample from a first-class script of 1981 is reproduced in Appendix C. It appears to be an erudite answer to question 5 (or is that 8?), but no doubt you will draw your own conclusions.

Just to show that getting your work transcribed is not the easy way to success, I should also mention the case of the candidate for Part I English whose six scripts contained five which were virtually unreadable. Following his working rule that normally no more than sixty percent of a candidate's scripts could be transcribed, the Secretary arranged for four of them to be made accessible to the Examiners, but then called a halt. However, at the last minute, they said that they simply could not read the remaining script, and it might be extremely important that they should be able to do so. Reluctantly, permission for the final transcription was given. Credited with the full six-

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<sup>5</sup>It is something of a standing joke amongst the University's Senior Members that the word 'normally' is normally inserted into every rule or regulation, so as to allow the exceptions that are normally needed from time to time.

papers worth, the candidate just scraped a third.

Whilst most complaints about the conduct of examinations originate with the candidates and their Tutors, the Examiners themselves are not entirely blameless. To start with a rather lightweight example, the 1986 Examiners in Part I of the MML Tripos had a triple-pronged complaint: they couldn't work out where to enter their assessments in the oral mark book;<sup>6</sup> the building where they had held the orals was cold; and, worst of all, they had been unable to obtain any coffee. The Secretary repulsed this attack comfortably enough by noting that heating and coffee fell outside his job description, and that the form of the mark book was that agreed with last year's Examiners.

Another Examiner, this time the Chairman of those charged with the task of examining Part I of the Archaeological and Anthropological Tripos, was outraged by a time delay that occurred in the posting of the corresponding class list. One of the candidates for this examination was a certain Royal Personage. As with all such A-listers, there were always a number of newshounds in fairly close attendance, each hoping to register yet another exclusive scoop.

The candidate in question managed to avoid them, and attend and complete his papers without too much fuss. The class list was drawn up. It had been agreed that the candidate's Director of Studies should be given early warning of his

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<sup>6</sup>Though this is not as bad as the Examiner, in a different examination and year, who thought he did know, but entered the candidates' desk numbers instead of their marks.

student's result, so that The Palace could be made aware of it before it was made public. This was done and the class list was then forwarded to the Old Schools. However, because unrelated problems at the Examinations Office intervened, the list was not given its routine pre-release check until the following morning, thus delaying its publication. The Chairman seemed to think that the delay in posting the list was scandalous, and somehow saw it as an indefensible 'advantage' to 'one candidate'. I can't work out why.

Finally, I recall a complaint from an Examiner that had nothing to do with the scripts or marks as such, but was occasioned by his being an External Examiner in Veterinary Anatomy. He was being put up overnight at one of the Cambridge Colleges, but did not inform the College that he would be coming by car, rather than by train and taxi. Consequently when he parked his car in the private college car park, still without informing anybody, it attracted several warning stickers.

Even worse, scratches had appeared on the car, scratches that the Examiner 'knew' were not there when he had initially parked; he claimed some £25 (this *was* over thirty years ago) in repairs, either from the University or from the College, saying that from his point of view there was no difference between them. But there was: the College said that so far as they were concerned he was guilty of unauthorised parking and they could accept no responsibility; the University maintained that the expenditure had been incurred not by an Examiner acting in the line of duty, but by an errant car driver, and it could accept no responsibility. Unfortunately for him, the External Examiner



had no Tutor to plead his case.

After the papers have been marked, the marks have been collated by their Chairman, and the Examiners have had their final meeting at which 'they looked at the big picture', signed class lists showing in which class each of the candidates has been placed are posted on the boards. The 'boards' are glass-fronted display cabinets that are, for a period of about four weeks, positioned against the southern outside wall of the Senate House. For most students, it is by consulting the appropriate list that they first find out how well or badly they have done. Once posted, a class list normally remains on display for several days, but it does not take that long for the queries and complaints to begin to flow.

Some of the queries, particularly in Science subjects, are easily answered, as was that from a second-year Natural Scientist about his Mathematics papers. His own view about his efforts was much rosier than that of his Examiners. 'Have all my questions been marked?' to which the answer was 'Indeed they have, and only one of the twelve was substantially correct'. Equally easy to give was the answer to a litigious candidate for the Master of Laws degree who had failed in two out of four papers, and believed she had a right to have her failed scripts re-marked by an independent external Examiner. 'Certainly not'. In fact, the scripts, being at the failure level, had already been re-marked and inspected by the official External Examiner, who confirmed the original assessment.

The 1992 examination for Part II of the Theological and

Religious Studies Tripos had errors on both sides. A late change of option choices by one student meant that there was now a candidate for a section of the paper for which no questions had been set. After a certain amount of panic, and profuse apologies by the Chairman of Examiners, some (I imagine very open-ended) hand-written questions were produced and the candidate had no further complaints. But his DoS apparently had, and wrote directly to the Chairman. This was wrong on two counts, maybe three; all complaints should be channelled through the Secretary, they should be submitted by Tutors, not by Directors of Studies, and at that stage they can do little good.

As if that weren't enough, another candidate queried the marks awarded on no less than four of his papers, and a third asked why his dissertation and one of his papers had been given such low grades. The latter let it be known through his Tutor that his dissertation had been warmly praised by his distinguished Supervisor, and that in the previous year he had received a much higher mark in the paper that corresponded to the one which had been so poorly rated this year. How could these discrepancies be explained? The Chairman, via the Secretary, told the doubting candidate and his Tutor that both pieces of work had been gone over yet again and that the marks given were correct, and stood.

Although it is made very clear in the rubric of every paper, the fact that in the Mathematical Tripos<sup>7</sup> more credit is given for complete correct answers than for an equivalent number of

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<sup>7</sup>And also in some other mathematically-based subjects, such as Mathematics and Physics in the Natural Sciences Tripos.

fragments, is not appreciated by a significant fraction of the students taking the course. To implement this consideration, each answer, as well as receiving a mark, is given an  $\alpha$  if it is, or is close to being, completely correct, or a  $\beta$  if about half of it is beyond reproach; otherwise it is ungraded, but still contributes its mark toward the candidate's total. To achieve any particular class, certain minimum numbers of  $\alpha$ -questions, together with a sufficient total, are needed; at the boundary between the first and second class, the  $\alpha$ -count assumes great significance.<sup>8</sup>

One candidate in Part II of that Tripos queried being placed in the second, rather than the first, class and wondered why his computer project had not been well received. The Examiners had to tell him that his notion of what constituted a half- or nearly-complete answer was not the same as theirs. Further his computing project had not been marked down for being carried out on his own machine, as he had rather tendentiously suggested, but because of his own inadequate mathematics.

In the same year, a candidate with a third in Part II of the English Tripos had complained about his result. Well, as the Secretary to the Board of Examinations commented, anyone would, because it is pretty rare to get a third in Part II English. On this occasion there were six candidates who had managed to do so, three of them from one College. Ironically, their Tutor was one of the Examiners. He was not the Tutor of the original complainant but, by chance, he was the Examiner the Secretary

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<sup>8</sup>A significant  $\beta$ -count comes into its own in guarding against not being classed at all, and together with one or two  $\alpha$ -answers can lift a candidate out of the third class.

was able to contact first. No doubt rather sadly, he was able to confirm that, although they had all been discussed at great length, the performances of all six were much of a muchness, and that muchness was below the second class borderline.

Three years later a candidate actually failed part II English and consequently also failed to graduate, causing his father, a Professor at another University, to question and complain to anybody he could get hold of. Little sympathy was forthcoming, not even from the student's College — I can only conclude that he must have driven his Tutor and Director of Studies mad during his three years of residence.

These days, third-classes and failures in final-year Arts subjects and Biological Sciences are almost unheard of, and lower seconds are very much in a minority. Even twenty five years ago, thirds in Arts subjects were quite uncommon, so uncommon that a certain amount of unwanted distinction went with them.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it is with no pride at all that I have to record that one year, early in my time as Senior Tutor, only two students sitting Part I of the History Tripos were placed in the third class, and they were both from Clare. To make matters worse, one was the elected President of Clare's undergraduate student union.

Finally, so far as complaints raised by students are concerned, I should mention the incident that took place in 1993. Perhaps with their collective tongues in their cheeks, a num-

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<sup>9</sup>If only for the amount of white space that surrounded the student's name on the class list.

ber of candidates for the LL.M. law degree complained that the appearance of their names in a class list infringed their privacy. Unfortunately, no reply could be sent to them, as they had maintained their right to privacy by not including their names in the letter of complaint.

What about the class lists themselves? Not surprisingly, with so many people involved in producing any one year's crop, they contain quite a number of errors. The vast majority of these are noticed and corrected by the staff of the Examinations Office before the lists are actually posted on the Senate House boards. Very occasionally a notice, formally from the Vice-Chancellor, has to be issued, authorising a retrospective change to a published list.<sup>10</sup>

Some of the errors should have been picked up before the lists reached the Old Schools. For example, one submitted list for Part II Mathematics had one particular candidate in three different categories; having failed, having been absent from the examination, and having been placed in the first class. Happily the last of these was the correct one.

In one particularly careless year the following episodes were associated with lists that required amendment: the results for the Qualifying Examination in Education listed as successful two students who had not taken the examination. One of them was not even a candidate for it; in the similarly non-compulsory

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<sup>10</sup>Such changes can also result from decisions made by the Applications Committee, a committee that considers appeals, on behalf of their pupils, made by Tutors after the relevant class list has been published.

Preliminary Examination to Part II Economics, there were two candidates with the same surname and they had been muddled up; one MML candidate who was placed in the first class also appeared in the 'Deserved Honours' category<sup>11</sup>; a candidate who had gained a lower second was completely missing from the same list; in Part II of the Archaeological and Anthropological Tripos a candidate who had missed some of the examination was mistakenly given an upper second, rather than being declared to have Deserved Honours; and, finally, a Part II History student, who had not even been a candidate for Honours, was also placed in the upper second class.

As always, Tutors did what they could for those whose results fell below expectations, though, of course, the expectations of the students and those of their Supervisors and Directors of Studies did not necessarily match. Most enquiries sent by Tutors to the Secretary were along the lines of 'have all the marks gained been added into the total?', or 'could there have been a mix-up with some other candidate with a similar name?'; queries submitted more in hope than expectation. However one Tutor, ever the honest broker, phoned to say that one of his pupils appeared from the marks circulated to Colleges to have gained a seriously high mark in a paper he had not actually taken. It seems that there had been some internal misunderstanding within the Examiners, but they could (just about) live with the

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<sup>11</sup>A candidate who for good reason (such as illness or accident) has been forced to miss some, but not all, of the requisite papers and has shown work of Honours standard in the papers actually taken, can be declared by the Examiners to have Deserved Honours.

overall class originally awarded to the candidate.

One Tutor certainly pulled out all the stops on behalf of his pupil, who did genuinely appear to have had a question lost by one of the Examiners. The candidate was therefore credited with an average mark for that question, but because of his almost uniformly miserable performance in the rest of the questions and papers, he failed. The examination in question was only a Preliminary Examination and so would not count towards the student's hoped-for degree, but his Tutor, ever optimistic, rang the Secretary to suggest that if his pupil had been given virtually full marks on the missing question he might just have scraped a pass. Talk about clutching at straws! The Secretary replied that that would strain the credulity of the Examiners too far, and the Tutor conceded gracefully.

Although I can look back on most of the Tripos examinations that took place during my twenty years as a Senior Tutor with equanimity, or even mild amusement, one episode made me very cross at the time, and still does. I was not the only one to be upset, as will be apparent from the account given below, which I have taken (almost) verbatim from the report made to the Board of Examinations by their Secretary in July 1986. As will be seen, some element of blame for what happened could perhaps be laid at the doors of Examiners in two other subjects, but the principal responsibility lies with those appointed to examine the Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic Tripos (ASNC), in those days a two-year course with only one compulsory Tripos examination, taken at the end of the second year. The Secretary wrote:

One afternoon the Secretary was rung up by the Chair-

man of Examiners for the Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic Tripos who was obviously very cross. He said that two of his candidates were taking (borrowing) papers from Part I of the English Tripos and four (were taking papers) from Part II of the Historical Tripos. He needed marks from the Examiners for those two examinations; of the eight sets of marks (expected) from History he had only seven, and of the four sets of marks from English he had none. This meant that his Examiners would be unable to meet on the following morning as arranged, and if they did not meet then they would not be able to meet until October(!). There would thus be a most tiresome delay and everybody would suffer from it, but it would not be the fault of the Examiners for the ASNC Tripos.

He asked the Secretary to prepare a note, (both) acknowledging that he had received this grave report and noted the consequences, and exonerating the Chairman from the consequences of his apparently contemplated action. He would then call round in ten minutes to collect it. The Secretary said that actually he had one or two other things to do and wasn't able to comply. The Chairman said that he would ring the Vice-Chancellor and the Secretary said why didn't he. He did ring the Vice-Chancellor and apparently retailed the same story and asked for his advice. The Vice-Chancellor did not give any advice but merely expressed the hope that the Examiners would be able to hold their meeting in the reasonably near future and produce a class list. The class list arrived the following morning and it was remarkably bottom heavy. Out of seventeen candidates, six had up-



per seconds, one a lower second, and six had been given thirds; there were two allowances towards the Ordinary B.A. Degree and two complete failures. The Secretary received a great many representations about this, including four letters of complaint from Senior Tutors and was rung up by the THES<sup>12</sup>.....

I think that this was the only time that I ever complained (on behalf of the College) directly to a University official about examination results, or about anything else, and unfortunately for the Secretary it had to be through him, as this was the procedure laid down in Regulations. I have no reason to suppose that the candidates as a whole were any better or worse than normal – certainly those from Clare College were well up to the usual standard – and, with seventeen candidates, one might have expected something like three firsts, eight or nine upper seconds, four or five lower seconds, and perhaps one third.

I raised the matter with one of the Fellows in Clare who was a UTO<sup>13</sup> in the ASNC Department, though not one of the Examiners, but he could offer no explanation. Indeed, as the Director of Studies of our students reading that subject, he was every bit as annoyed as I and the students' personal Tutor were. Perhaps it should be added that a small number of those taking the English Tripos were also badly affected, as they had borrowed one or more papers from the ASNC Tripos and had received extremely low marks for them.

<sup>12</sup>*The Times Higher Education Supplement*, now known as *The Higher*

<sup>13</sup>University Teaching Officer, a general term that includes Professors, Readers and Lecturers.

The ASNC and English students were not the only ones who suffered 'cruel and unusual' treatment in 1986; a significant number of first-year medical students also fared badly at the hands of the Examiners. In addition to being a course leading to the B.A. Degree in its own right, the Medical Sciences Tripos is recognised by the national medical authorities as an approved way of gaining exemption from the Second M.B. examination, itself a necessary step on the way to becoming medically qualified. This applies on a subject by subject basis over two years, and in each of six or so subjects the standard of a lower second is needed to gain the corresponding exemption. In a normal year the fraction that fail to reach that level in any one subject is well below ten percent, and, not surprisingly, most of these failures are down to the same few candidates.

In this particular year about one third of the students sitting the Anatomy examination were declared by the Examiners to have failed to gain the exemption. In other words, taking Anatomy alone, more than thirty percent of those who had won places on one of the most competitive courses in Cambridge had been judged to be third class or worse.

Naturally there were many complaints to the Secretary (the only official channel for grumbling) and his investigations seemed to pin the blame on one serially maverick Examiner, who it was hoped would not be appointed to examine again. Though there is less opportunity to do so now, at that time for the purposes of obtaining Second M.B. exemption, but without affecting any Tripos classification, it was possible to take re-sits in individual subjects, a number of times if necessary.

So, although the injustice upset some students' plans for Long Vacation<sup>14</sup> activities, the setback was not fatal for any of the would-be doctors.

On a much lighter note, a rogue class list of a different kind caused a certain amount of extra work and, perhaps, unnecessary extra expense. In his incident-packed report for 1986 the Secretary recorded that one board carrying three class lists disappeared overnight. Suspecting some kind of prank but unable to do anything about it, the Examinations Office posted duplicate class lists on another board and even went to the expense of buying some padlocks to fasten all boards together in pairs.

This attempt to make them more difficult to steal was an abject failure, and shortly afterwards the board carrying the duplicate class lists had also disappeared, only to be replaced by the original board with its three lists. Two of these were originals but one, for Part IA of the Mathematical Tripos, was definitely not. It showed that, amazingly, all of the students placed in the first class were members of the same College<sup>15</sup> and, equally amazingly, that all of those who obtained thirds or an allowance towards an Ordinary Degree were concentrated in just two Colleges. So far as I know, the Senior Tutor of T..... is still keeping an eye open for the missing board.

The spotlight now swings away from the publicly-posted class lists for each part of every Tripos and focuses instead on the rather more privately-compiled lists of results for each College.

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<sup>14</sup>The mid-June to early October break between academic years.

<sup>15</sup>A mark of special distinction was awarded one of these, Newton I.

## Chapter 13

# Back at the Stables

When all the class lists had been posted, occasionally amended with the Vice-Chancellor's authorisation, and the results of any appeals had been received, it was the duty of the Senior Tutor to draw up consolidated lists showing how our own students had fared. These lists would ultimately be presented to the College Council, so that it could formally declare who were the good, the bad, and the ugly. The good would get prizes and, in most cases, the formal title of Scholar, the bad would get much of the Council's time and, in a few cases, notice to leave, and the ugly would get a warning that they were expected to apply themselves better next year and halt the downward slide.

But before the lists got as far as the Council, the Tutors,

meeting as a body, would spend at least a day going through the examination results, deciding what to recommend to the Council, and interviewing some of those who had been placed in the third class, all of those who had been ‘made an allowance towards the Ordinary B.A.’, and all of those who had failed to make it onto the class list at all. These latter two categories need some further explanation for those who are not familiar with the Cambridge examination system – and even for some who think they are.<sup>1</sup>

The Cambridge B.A. Honours degree is gained by passing, at the level of a third class or better, a series of either two or three examinations, normally culminating in Part II of some Tripos.<sup>2</sup> To ensure that this can only be done through an educationally approved course, the regulations governing each part of each Tripos require that a would-be candidate has attained the Honours standard in an acceptable previous course, and that this was not accomplished too long ago. Clearly, the examinations for first-year students cannot include a requirement to have taken a previous Tripos examination, but they do exclude students who have been in residence too long.

If the work submitted by a candidate is judged by the examiners to fall short of the third class standard, and there are no medical grounds for having the situation referred to a special University committee (the Applications Committee), the exam-

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, page 267 for some of the errors made by examiners when compiling class lists.

<sup>2</sup>It is possible to qualify for the degree by taking certain combinations of three Tripos examinations, none of which is a Part II.

iners need to decide whether it, nevertheless, meets the standard required for an Ordinary, i.e. non-Honours, degree. If it does, then the candidate is granted an allowance towards the Ordinary degree, and this is published at the foot of the class list. If it doesn't, the student fails and his or her name does not appear on the class list at all.

Except in very special, and somewhat anomalous circumstances, a student cannot recover from either of these situations and get back on track for an Honours degree. If allowed to by their College, a student with an allowance towards the Ordinary degree may continue with their course, taking the same papers as an Honours candidate, but being judged only on whether or not they reach the Ordinary degree standard. Outright failure nearly always leads to a student being asked to leave Cambridge; they may appeal to the College Council, but its decision is final.

We now return to the review carried out by the Tutors. Much the most pleasant part of the meeting was deciding which of the students should receive the College's named prizes. These are nearly all tied to particular Tripos subjects, or groups of subjects, by the deeds establishing the funds which support them. Most were initially endowed by Clare's Benefactors before the middle of the last century, but they have been added to at regular intervals since then, and now most subjects have at least one prize associated with them.

With the agreement of the Benefactors, or of their descendants where they can be traced, some re-interpretation of the original terms of the benefaction has proved desirable in some

cases. For example, a Clare prize known as an Owst Prize was originally to be awarded to any student who was placed in the first six (in the University) in the Mathematical or Classics Triposes. The ratio of student numbers taking the two Triposes stands nowadays at about five to two and, to recognise this, the current qualification for a mathematics student to receive an Owst Prize is being placed in the top third, rather than the first six, of the Wranglers.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the prizes are straightforwardly allocated to the Clare student with the highest marks in the relevant examination, but others, such as ‘for the best performance by a medical student’ call for some judgement as the full medical course, including the post-graduate clinical work, is six years in all, with different examinations in each year. Also calling for some subjective assessment are those prizes that are not Tripos-based, but are to be awarded to the students who are judged to have contributed the most to college life in areas such as music, drama, and the visual arts. In consultation with the College Dean, the Clare Tutors also make recommendations to the Council about the so-called Greene Cups.

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<sup>3</sup>Part II of the Mathematical Tripos is unique in having special names for those placed in the various classes: first class, *Wranglers*; second class, *Senior Optimes*; third class, *Junior Optimes*. Until just over a hundred years ago, all candidates were placed in order: Senior Wrangler, 2nd Wrangler, 3rd Wrangler, . . . all the way down to the last person in the Junior Optime class, who was awarded the Wooden Spoon. The Mathematical Tripos is also unique in having the class lists for Parts II and III read out at the Senate House by the Senior Examiner; copies of the two lists are then thrown to the public.

A fund left in the will of Dr Greene,<sup>4</sup> an early eighteenth-century Clare Fellow, provided for silver plates or tankards to be awarded annually to two graduands, one for ‘General Learning’ and the other, to quote the Latin prescription, ‘*pietatis causa*’. Dr Greene was for a time the Dean of Clare and in defining how piety was to be measured, he stipulated that regularity of attendance at Chapel was to be given particular consideration; nowadays, being a Warden in the Chapel does carry some weight, but doing ‘good works’ in the outside world is at least as important.

The cup for general learning was sometimes difficult to award, and I can remember occasions on which no ‘incepting Bachelor’ was considered sufficiently generally-learned to qualify. Taking two distinctly different Triposes and doing well in both was usually the hallmark of a serious contender, but sometimes the breadth of a student’s learning became apparent from his or her contributions to serious, but non-Tripos driven, activities.

Just as important as the examination performances of the individual students, from the Council’s point of view, was some measure of how well the College as a whole had fared. At the time that I took over as Senior Tutor, tables produced each year by the Board of Examinations showed for each separate Tripos examination the percentages of all candidates placed in each class or failing to reach the Honours standard. It also showed the same data variously aggregated according to Tripos,

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<sup>4</sup>Amongst many other oddities in his will, he ordained that all the bones of his skeleton should be left to the College.



or to College, or to the Arts/Science divide. As one would expect, the University, as such, deliberately did not try to turn each year's results into a 'league table'. However, as one would equally expect, most, if not all, Colleges did, if only for their own consumption.

The data was very stable from year to year, with almost exactly 50% of all candidates, in both the Arts and the Sciences, securing firsts or upper seconds.<sup>5</sup> There was some variation between subjects within each category. For example, outright failures were rare in Arts subjects, whereas in Mathematics, Engineering, the Physical Natural Sciences and Computer Science, if a student, despite writing a lot, got virtually nothing right, then he or she was failed. By contrast, first class performances were much more common in these same Triposes than in most Arts subjects. Although I don't think that it is any longer the case, at that time Classics stood out as an Arts subject whose students, as judged by their class lists, were *all* above average.<sup>6</sup>

With these tables available, a very easy measure to compute was the percentage of all the students sitting Tripos (not Preliminary) examinations who were above the upper second/lower second (2.1/2.2) divide. This provided a very fair index of per-

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<sup>5</sup>For the few class lists with, at that time, an undivided second class (Mathematics and first-year Natural Sciences) it was assumed that half of the seconds were upper seconds.

<sup>6</sup>A state of affairs that would doubtless have been approved of by all those Ministers and Advisors at the Department of Education who have said that this is how it should be in *all* subjects in *all* schools – with nobody below average! I think that they do not know the meaning of the word 'average'.

formance, as the corresponding University-wide indices for Arts and Sciences were equal. By contrast, an index based on, say, the percentage of firsts, would automatically favour those Colleges with a preponderance of students reading the science-based subjects specifically mentioned in the previous paragraph.

For this reason, the simple firsts plus upper seconds index was the one adopted internally at Clare for drawing up a retrospective league table each year. I also kept a cumulative table that was added to annually, with each College being given a score equal to its position in the league table that year; clearly, the long-term objective was to have as low a cumulative score as possible.<sup>7</sup>

However, from about the end of the nineteen eighties, the foundations on which Clare's internal index was based started to shift. The percentages of candidates awarded firsts and upper seconds began to move upwards, but at very different rates in the different subjects. I have no doubt that the shift reflected a university-level response to the grade inflation that had undoubtedly taken place at school and sixth-form level.

Many more students, in both absolute and percentage terms, now move on from school to university with top A-level grades, together with expectations, both their own and those of the educational establishment, that this should lead to improved degree

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<sup>7</sup>Although the cumulative table was never published, or even formally reported to the College Council, I was personally very pleased with the fact that over my period as Senior Tutor, Clare's total was significantly less than that of any other College.

classes. Like many, and perhaps all, other Universities, Cambridge has felt obliged to respond. Given that its undergraduate population has an average UCAS points score higher than that of virtually, (and probably actually) all other UK undergraduate populations, its degree classes when placed in a national context should reflect this.

My reasons for thinking that grade inflation has taken place at A-level come from my cumulative experience as schoolboy, undergraduate, undergraduate supervisor, A-level examiner, chairman of the Physics examiners for both the Cambridge Scholarship and STEP<sup>8</sup> examinations, university lecturer and examiner, and as the author of academic textbooks at the undergraduate and advanced sixth-form level. Whilst clearly my views on A-level grades are subjective and can be challenged, they are supported by the fact that thirty years ago, although they constituted only about one tenth of an annual intake, it was not uncommon for the winners of Cambridge Open Scholarships to have no more than A,A,B at A-level. Today, Cambridge alone has to turn away, every year, some seven or eight thousand applicants who are predicted by their schools to obtain results of A,A,A or better.

Whether or not it came about in the way I suggest, it is a matter of established fact that the change in class distribution has taken place. This is particularly evident in final year examinations. In many subjects the middle of the class list

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<sup>8</sup>Sixth Term Examination Papers, a public examination with questions based on A-level core syllabuses, but demanding thought and reasoning beyond that expected for A-level. See page 14.

is now located above the half-way point in the upper seconds. In almost all final-year class lists for Arts subjects, the Social Sciences, and the Biological Sciences, the firsts outnumber the lower seconds, and third class results are a rarity.

It is not surprising that these final-year results, taken as a whole, are better than those of the first two years, as by then students are able to concentrate on areas that particularly interest them, and personally-motivated dissertations and experimental projects contribute significantly to the overall result. However, the change has been so significant that a 2.1 is now the 'O.K. degree' and a 2.2 in these subjects is something of a failure. Even by the mid-nineties, in a typical graduating class at Clare about ninety percent of the Arts and Social Science students would be leaving with first or upper-second class degrees. The shift has not been quite so marked in the Physical Sciences, but, even there, about two-thirds of final year candidates are placed in one of the top two classes.

As noted earlier, the University deliberately refrains from converting the published class lists into a college league table. But, as is almost inevitable, the media does not. For quite a number of years up until 1990, the class lists, augmented by the names of the schools the candidates had previously attended, were reproduced<sup>9</sup> in some of the broadsheets, the newspaper format that used to be almost synonymous with a 'serious' paper.

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<sup>9</sup>Though the third class was often omitted. Can't think why. Well, actually, I can.

The first publicly available *table* for Cambridge examination results to appear was that compiled in 1981 by Peter Tompkins, a third-year undergraduate at the time; it appeared initially in *The Times*, but some years later transferred to *The Independent*. Until 1997 it was based solely on the posted class lists for those Tripos examinations that were normally taken by final year students,<sup>10</sup> but in that year was extended to include all classed Tripos examinations. The Tompkins scoring system puts particular emphasis on obtaining a first, giving it a score of 5; a 2.1 scores 3, a 2.2 scores 2, and a third merits only 1 point. With a weighting to allow for the fact that some Triposes give a larger percentage of firsts than others, and some Colleges have a larger percentage of students taking those Triposes, the average score of each College's students is obtained and the Tompkins Table compiled.

For about the last twenty years, another set of tables based on the same Tripos classifications, and known as the Baxter Tables, have been compiled for internal use by the Colleges. The scoring system is the same as that used in the Tompkins table, but the subsequent analysis is, at least nominally, more sophisticated. The variations in average scores and distributions amongst the various class lists are handled by shifting and scaling the raw results so as to make them all have the same average and the same distributional shape.<sup>11</sup> The Baxter Tables

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<sup>10</sup>Even this was not totally clear-cut. It was possible for a third-year student to be legitimately sitting what was normally a first- or second-year Tripos exam. See the footnote on page 275.

<sup>11</sup>For the more technically-minded reader: the distributions are all re-

analyse the available data in many different ways including, by subject, by year, by college, by intake cohort, and by improvement throughout a three-year course.<sup>12</sup> In fact, it includes so many individual tables that there are always one or two that any Senior Tutor can point to with pride, and equally one or two that the hawks on his or her College Council can express grave concerns about.

Before leaving the topic of intercollegiate academic league tables, I should point out that both the Tompkins and Baxter tables are based on published class lists, and such lists do not include the names of those students who have failed, or, for whatever reason, did not complete the examination. The Tutors at Clare – and probably at every other College – used to say jokingly to each other (but not, of course, to the students) that it was much better to fail completely than to pull down the College’s Tompkins or Baxter ranking by being classed as a two-two or a third.

After the Tutors had drawn up their list of recommendations, it was presented to the College Council, which at Clare has a specific statutory duty to ensure that<sup>13</sup>

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duced to the standard Gaussian distribution  $N(0,1)$ , with zero mean and unit variance, by changing to the standard variable  $z = (x - \mu)/\sigma$ .

<sup>12</sup>I have always had serious doubts about ‘value added’ assessments, because any institution, be it a school, a college, or a university, that has succeeded in attracting the best qualified entrants hardly has room for improvement in any league table. It would appear that those mentioned in footnote 6 don’t see it that way.

<sup>13</sup>The use of ‘shew’ rather than ‘show’, whilst nowadays old-fashioned, reflects the six hundred and fifty year history of the Statutes.

‘No person *in statu pupillari* shall be permitted to remain in residence unless they shew themselves by their ability, application to study, and general good behaviour, able and willing to profit by their residence.’

As noted in the first chapter,<sup>14</sup> it also has one to be responsible for everything that isn’t specifically assigned to some other College body. Perhaps to show (or should that be ‘shew’?) that they were doing their duty, members of the Council usually queried one or two of the Tutors’ recommendations in respect of the named subject prizes, but then agreed to them. The award of Scholarships and Exhibitions for the coming year, or the award of an Honorary Scholarship to a graduand who had ‘unexpectedly’ distinguished themselves in their finals, usually took a bit longer. This was because the Senior Tutor had to explain, yet again, exactly what the rules that govern these awards said, and remind Council that *it* drew up those rules.

The Greene cup nomination *pietatis causa* usually went by without dissent, as the Council members knew that they could hardly challenge the Dean and Tutors when it came to piety. On the other hand, they did think that they knew something about learning, and so when it came to the General Learning nomination there were generally a few questions along the line ‘but did you consider ...?’, to which the answer is ‘Of course, but ... and ...’. Again, though it took a little longer, the Tutors recommendation was eventually accepted, whether it was a specific nomination or for no nomination.

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<sup>14</sup>See page 6.

But all this was only a warm-up for the the most difficult part of the meeting. What to do about the students who in some way had failed their examinations, but for whom total or partial redemption was still a theoretical possibility? Roughly speaking they fell into one of three categories: those whose examination had been a Preliminary, rather than a Tripos, Examination; those who had been made an Allowance towards an Ordinary Degree; and a special category of certain Medical and Veterinary students.

To deal with the last one first, this category consisted of those undergraduates who, although they had been classed in the Medical and Veterinary Sciences Tripos and were on track for the B.A. Degree, had fallen below the required level in at least one of the exemption subjects.<sup>15</sup> Here there was little to discuss; at that time it was possible to take resits both in a few week's time and/or near the end of the Long Vacation. Provided the relevant Director of Studies had no rooted objections, the students would be allowed to continue, provided they had obtained the exemptions before the start of the next Academic Year; sometimes they were required to come into residence during the Long Vacation, either for supervisions or for monitoring.

The next easiest group to deal with were any students who had failed a Preliminary Examination. Although set and marked by the University, these examinations are not a necessary part of any Tripos; they are run more or less as a progress examination service for the Colleges. They are essentially con-

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<sup>15</sup>See page 272 for a fuller explanation.



fined to Arts subjects, and only then to those subjects in which some part of its Tripos is a two-year course, e.g. Part I of the History Tripos. In some Faculties there are not enough potential examiners available to set and mark both Tripos and Preliminary examinations, and the latter are not available. For many years, Clare has run its own internal first-year assessment for students reading for Part I English.

Some Preliminary Examination results lists are divided into classes and others are simply a list of those who have passed. Either way, it is those who are not on the list that need their College's attention. Some are not there on a pure technicality, such as those whose College's policy is not to enter its students for a full set of papers.<sup>16</sup> In other cases much hangs on the views of the Director of Studies involved and on the reports about the students' diligence and progress that have been written termly throughout the year by those that have supervised them. For each student there might be anything between six and a dozen reports; they are consolidated and made available to Council members. In practice, endeavour is virtually everything, and only those who have wilfully ignored their studies and not responded to repeated promptings are likely to be required to leave.

The final category, those who have been made an allowance towards the Ordinary B.A., are treated in much the same way as

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<sup>16</sup>For example, in the past a College might have decided to ignore the foreign language paper that candidates used to have to offer and pass if they wished to be deemed successful in the Preliminary Examination for Part I History.

Preliminary Examination failures. In both cases, there is always the argument that, on the one hand, if they were required to leave, then an additional Fresher could be admitted next year. But on the other, if they are failing despite having tried hard, it was an error of judgement by the College to have admitted them in the first place and we should do all we can to get them some qualification.<sup>17</sup> During my time as Senior Tutor, and I don't think that it is any different now, the Council as a whole was more of a pussy-cat than a tiger and, to mix one's metaphors, the doves nearly always won out over the hawks. Provided the relevant Director of Studies and Tutor were prepared to organise it, the Council would require work of a minimum specified standard, usually a lower second, to be undertaken by the student over the summer as a condition for being allowed to return for the following year.

With the difficult decisions made, or at least postponed until the end of the Long Vacation,<sup>18</sup> the Council, and the rest of the Fellowship can turn to the more uniformly enjoyable job of giving the new graduates an appropriate send-off.

The principal participants on Graduation Day itself are the

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<sup>17</sup>This might, in some circumstances, mean trying to secure a transfer to a different University, one that offers a course more suited to the student's interests and talents.

<sup>18</sup>To the mild amusement of some, including myself, a few years ago, the official University Diary, changed the page headings for July, August and September from *Long Vacation* to *Research Period*. Whether it was to give the impression that more research should be undertaken, or, contrariwise, that less should be done, with October to June ruled out, I have never figured out.

Master of the College and its Praelector. The latter is one of the Fellows who has ‘volunteered’ to undertake the task of formally presenting members of the College who are qualified to receive a Bachelor’s, a Master’s or a Doctoral degree. The candidate is presented to the Vice-Chancellor or his deputy, and, after the Praelector has vouched in Latin for the worthiness of the student, the VC formally bestows the degree using a prescribed formula, also in Latin.

However, preparations for Graduation Day, known in Cambridge as General Admission, have to start well before the day itself arrives. A lot of this work falls on the College Staff under the general supervision of the Senior Tutor. Lists of those who intend to graduate in person have to be submitted to the Old Schools, noting anybody who for religious (or non-religious) reasons does not wish to be admitted to the degree in the name of the Holy Trinity. It has to be established how many of each student’s family would like to attend the degree ceremony – it is almost always far more than could possibly be allocated tickets – and whether they would just be coming to Cambridge for the day, or hoping or needing to stay overnight.

As General Admission takes place after virtually all non-graduating undergraduates have left for the summer, the College was in my time able to offer relatively cheap rooms to many of the families, but there were never quite enough to go round and some hard decisions had to be made. For calculational purposes, each family was notionally limited to six<sup>19</sup> and a maximum of

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<sup>19</sup>Two parents (though some claimed to have more), one brother, one

two rooms. After that, the distance and difficulty of travel determined where the line had to be drawn – the further away your family lived, the more likely you were to get College accommodation.<sup>20</sup> Even with these guidelines to work from, the annual arranging of family accommodation was a major operation for the Housekeeper and her staff, dealing as they did, without too much complaint, with last minute changes in numbers and arrival times. Last minute changes in numbers? Well, yes, her other grandfather has just had his operation postponed . . . . . wants to be there . . . . . first in the family to go to university . . . . . may not see another . . . .

The organisational problems the Housekeeper faced over rooms were mirrored by those presented to the Head of the Tutorial Office (the Tutors' Clerk as she used to be known) over family access to the Senate House, where the degrees are actually conferred. At one time the two sets of graduands from Peterhouse and Clare were processed one immediately after the other, with no break to allow one lot of 'parents' to leave and be replaced by another. Consequently, each graduate could be issued with only two tickets for places in the Senate House, much to the disappointment of most of his or her family. Very recently, I'm pleased to say, a wholesale change has been made and Clare's graduates are now presented in two cohorts with a chance to change the observing families in between; clearly

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sister, and two grandparents.

<sup>20</sup>Though one American student's family of about ten who had flown over 3000 miles to attend were assumed to be able to afford hotel accommodation!

many more members of any particular student's family can be present when the VC intones the magic formula.

The reason that Clare use to be paired with Peterhouse was that the Colleges are presented to the VC in their order of foundation. Peterhouse is the oldest existing College in Cambridge, and Clare is the second oldest though it has twice changed its name.<sup>21</sup> On this basis, Clare ought to be the second College to have its graduands presented at General Admission, but this isn't so. At some point, somebody – and I suspect Henry VIII, but have no concrete evidence for doing so – ordained that the so-called Royal Colleges, King's, Trinity and St John's, in that order, should be placed at the head of the queue. Since Trinity and St John's are the two largest undergraduate Colleges in Cambridge, the Clare graduands do not get to the Senate House until some three to four hours after proceedings first get under way.

With total undergraduate numbers at Cambridge having increased over the last fifty years, and a much larger fraction of them wishing to take their degree in person, what started as a two-day ceremony commencing each day in mid-morning, and with a significant lunch break, has become a three-day event working office hours with barely time for lunch.

Even in its earlier format, conferring thousands of degrees over two days, each one involving caressing the palm-to-palm

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<sup>21</sup>Originally founded as University Hall in 1326, it became known as Clare Hall about 1339, and finally changed its name to Clare College in 1856. This final change is said to have taken place because the Fellows at the time thought a Hall sounded inferior to a College. See also page 42.

proffered hands of the graduand and pronouncing the appropriate Latin phrase, would have been too much for one person. This problem has been overcome by the simple expedient of the Vice-Chancellor nominating a series of deputies, who just happen to be the Heads of Houses, and then asking them to deputise at the session or sessions at which members of their own College are being presented. I think that it is fair to say that the graduands themselves are pleased to receive their degree from the person who first welcomed them to Cambridge, rather than from somebody they have never met before.

Part of the send-off that nearly every student graduating at Cambridge receives is a graduation meal, provided by his or her College. When I graduated from Clare, and we were part of the first afternoon session at the Senate House, that meal was lunch just before the ceremony. The actual food was nothing special, something with salad, but the wine was more plentiful and more potent than most of us had ever been able to afford; the four-across column into which our Praelector formed us in Old Court lost all sense of organisation well before it got to the East Door of the Senate House, even though the total journey was less than two hundred yards.

Perhaps it was because this happened, and that I don't know, but shortly afterwards the meal was changed to a dinner on the previous evening. This shift also made it possible for the morning reception for parents, the instruction from the Praelector about what would happen in the Senate House, the forming up of an orderly and sober cohort of graduands, and the procession to the Senate House, to follow each other without any

significant break or consequent risk of somebody wandering off.

At the Graduation Dinner, the Master would tell the assembled final-year students how well they had done collectively in their examinations, how many new academic records they had established, how much they had contributed to the sporting, artistic and cultural life of the College and, he hoped, each other, how he and the Fellows hoped that they would remain in touch with the College – and, last but not least, how good it would be if they could remember it in their wills! Well, we do have to take the long-term view.<sup>22</sup>

He would also wish them well for the future and told them that he would be ‘in the chair’ when they received their degrees, expressing the hope that they would not make him lean too far forward to reach them when they knelt before him. In most years, one of the graduands, usually an ex-President of the UCS, would make a reply saying most of the things one would expect, but invariably including some oblique references to people or events that left the Fellows present totally mystified, even the Tutors, who are supposed to have their collective finger on the pulse.

The following morning was the time when I was grateful to Henry VIII, or whoever, for pushing the Royal Colleges to the front of the queue. Especially in the latter years, when an early, rather than mid-morning, start to the three-day marathon was

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<sup>22</sup>Alumni are invited back to Clare for a Reunion Dinner roughly once every ten years – but rather more frequently as they approach ‘the last-will-and-testament’ stage!

introduced, it was a relief not to have to get the Clare contingent ready and delivered for shortly after 9.00 a.m. The actual start tended to be somewhat awkwardly placed with respect to a normal time for lunch, but this was a relatively small price to pay.

Our delayed entry allowed adequate time during the morning for both formal and informal photographs of the graduating group, usually taken in the Fellows' Garden, and a reception in the Scholars' Garden (in the Old Court marquee if wet) for the graduands and their parents. This was the chance for Tutors and Directors of Studies to meet the real parents, and convey to them positive, or sometimes diplomatic, *in loco parentis* comments about the abilities and achievements of their offspring.

With the reception over, it became the Praelector's turn to address the troops, before he took them off to the Front Line. He started proceedings by forming the 'incepting Bachelors' into an orderly array, in alphabetical order and four-deep. At that time, the clinical medical course was two years and one term in length and therefore finished in December each year; as a result there were no M.B. or B.Chir. degrees to be collected. Two postgraduate qualifications that *did* finish in June were the Vet.M.B. and the LL.M. degrees. I never understood why it should be so, but those about to receive the LL.M. degree were placed ahead of the B.A. phalanx, but the vets were relegated to the rear of it.

Having formed up his charges, the Praelector would then order a dress inspection. Experienced Tutors helped with this



and had to keep a sharp lookout for such things as over-fancy shirts or blouses, academic hoods being worn inside out, and coloured socks. Coloured socks? Yes, no coloured socks; the Praelector could be fined<sup>23</sup> by the University Proctor for presenting an improperly-dressed supplicant. The Tutors' Clerk was always on hand with a good supply of black socks to make sure that this didn't happen.

Next came a lesson in how to tell your right hand from your left hand. This was important. When a Praelector was presenting graduands to the (stand-in) VC he did so in batches of four, standing to their left and holding out his right hand with its fingers splayed. The four were required to each hold a finger with their *right* hand, whilst the Praelector vouched for their learning (no problem) and their morals (rather less certain). The first of the four then stepped forward to kneel before the VC and receive the full B.A. Latin formula. In order to save both time and their Master's voice, the other three had to be content with a shortened form, which could be translated, so I'm told, as '*even you* I also admit to this same degree'.

Then, with an undergraduate standing in, or rather sitting in, for the Master, who in turn would later be sitting in for the Vice-Chancellor, the Praelector organised a demonstration of how to kneel, how to not get your gown caught on the heel of your shoe, how to get up with dignity, and how to give a seemly bow to a stand-in VC – not extravagantly from the waist, but with a respectful lowering of the head. After this, it was again

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<sup>23</sup>Traditionally, any fine was measured in bottles of port.

emphasised how important it was to know your left from your right, as the exit door for new graduates is the one on the right, leading out to the top of the Doctor's Steps in Senate House Passage. Don't try to exit through the door on the left – that is for parents.

Finally, as one last check, he would ask all to raise their right hands. This done, it was time to advise the families who had been watching the proceedings that they should make their way to the Senate House; they had to be there with their tickets some time before the session involving Clare was due to start.

At the appointed time the Praelector would lead his flock into the Senate House via the East Door, whilst the Tutors, wearing the gowns of the highest degree to which they were entitled, positioned themselves at the foot of the Doctor's Steps. The Senior Tutor stood closest to the Steps so that he could shake the hand of every new graduate, as he or she came down them. The other Tutors made a particular point of congratulating all of their own pupils, and as many of the others as they could. A final round of applause greeted the Master, as he followed the last of the veterinary graduands down the steps and so bring to an end Clare's part in that year's General Admission.

## Chapter 14

# Having a Ball

Of all the events for which rooms and gardens in Clare have to be reserved, the most comprehensive, taking over the whole of Old Court and three of the College's Gardens, is the May Ball. Ironically, of all the things that happen in the College, it is the one event that, in almost every respect, might seem to be out of keeping with the primary purposes of a Cambridge College — often quoted as 'learning, religion, and research' but stated in the University's mission statement to be 'education, learning, and research'. What can be said in its defence is that it gives a group of about a dozen Junior Members, the May Ball Committee, a chance to exploit any managerial skills they may have, or in many cases to acquire them in a hurry. The College appoints two or three of the Fellows to keep a general

eye on things<sup>1</sup> but they only get seriously involved if something dangerous or unacceptable is being proposed.

Nowadays, with typically some nine hundred people attending the Ball and a double ticket costing somewhere in the region of one hundred and fifty pounds,<sup>2</sup> the budget for a May Ball approaches a six-figure sum. The management of the purely financial side, the organisational ability required, and the hundreds of hours of direct labour that are needed to make the Ball the success it invariably seems to be, all add up to an enormous challenge. Of course, the Committee do not undertake all of this themselves and up to about one hundred Junior Members are involved in one way or another.

Typically an undergraduate who gets involved with the organisation of the May Ball does so for only one or two years. But the College Staff are fully involved every year and some may see some twenty or thirty Balls come and go. During the period covered by my time as the Senior Tutor, the Kitchen Manager and his Staff faced the annual task of catering for the more than one hundred guests who had purchased dining tickets, as well as providing some of the more general food available throughout the night. In the last few years the preference, perhaps of the Staff as well as of the students, has been for having a number of food and drink stations scattered throughout the site, each

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<sup>1</sup>The Cambridge City authorities inspect the site from the Health and Safety point of view a few hours before the Ball and monitor the noise aspect during it. They also require the official licence holder for the event to be one of the College's Senior Members.

<sup>2</sup>Though, in keeping with tradition, prices are often set in guineas.

serving its own limited range of 'portable' or 'potable' delicacies. Some idea of what is on offer can be gauged from the comparison given later.

Amongst the other departments that are particularly hard worked in the run-up to a Ball are the Maintenance Department and the Porters. Anywhere up to about a dozen outside contractors provide, amongst other things, both large and small marquees, tables and chairs, flooring, PA systems, extensive outdoor lighting, food and drink, flowers, fireworks, and the necessary, but distinctly less glamorous, rubbish-collection facilities and portable toilets; all of these have to be carefully marshalled by the Porters and their activities overseen and guided by the Maintenance Staff. Traditionally at Clare the Ball is held on the Monday of May Week; the first contractors start to arrive on the previous Friday and that is the start of a truly hectic weekend for these two departments and dozens of student helpers and organisers.

Since roughly 1985 it has been the standard practice to choose a theme for the Ball and to decorate the various sites within the College accordingly, rather than simply make them all look attractive with similar mixes of flowers, foliage, and fairy lights. During the weekend in question, the buildings and riverside gardens undergo a transformation aimed at producing an atmosphere appropriate to the theme chosen for that particular Ball.

Given that the College has a riverside setting, the theme almost invariably has a romantic element to it. And here, the

Bridge, which has a character unique amongst those spanning the Cam, really comes into its own. It is the oldest bridge on the river<sup>3</sup> and when illuminated from the side, whether or not decorated with natural flowers and foliage, it has a charm that is hard to resist.

As already noted, the Bridge is not the only thing to receive a makeover at this time of year. All of the rooms in Old Court that are used at the Ball are decorated to a greater or lesser extent. Even rooms not being used sometimes contribute to the general effect, and on several occasions I was asked whether banners could be hung from the windows of the room that was my office.

Perhaps not with the best of timing, such requests were accompanied by another request — more of an instruction, actually — telling me that I was expected to be out of my room by 7 pm on the day of the Ball. The nightwatch would be around then to make sure that all's well! For this particular event, I was quite happy to do as requested, and once my allotted banner was in position and helping to transform Old Court into the Court of King Arthur, or into Wonderland, I would set off for home and hope not to be phoned by the Porters in the middle of the night.

By noon on the day after a Ball there is usually little sign of the temporary decorations that have so enhanced its charm.

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<sup>3</sup>Dating from 1640, the present bridge was constructed to facilitate the transport of building materials across the river when Old Court was re-built. This took a period of some seventy years as it included a long interruption due to the English Civil War.

However, this is not always so, and I remember one attempt at embellishment that did nothing to increase the charm, and certainly had totally the opposite effect on the then Bursar of the College. Some members of that year's Committee had thought that painting the ceiling of the JCR (Crypt) dark red would add atmosphere, and without even consulting the Clerk of Works, the Head of the Maintenance Department, they just went ahead and did it. Even worse was their choice of materials, which resulted in the naturally exposed brickwork of a Grade I listed-building being coated with gloss paint! The Bursar was not pleased, and neither were English Heritage, who made it very clear that it was not acceptable; the cost of the painstaking job of removing the paint, whilst causing minimal damage to the brickwork, was considerable.

The other department within the College that is very fully involved with the Ball, and in particular with its aftermath, is the Gardening Department. As mentioned elsewhere<sup>4</sup> the Clare College Gardens are amongst the most admired in Cambridge, and ever since they were re-designed and laid out in their present form in the late nineteen forties, successive Head Gardeners have aimed to keep them that way. However, they have not all taken quite the same approach to doing so. One was perhaps aiming at gardens that were the *most admirable* in Cambridge, and it was sometimes said in jest that he did not want any benches or seats in the garden, in case they encouraged people to come in and sit down, walking all over the grass in the process. The current holder intends them to be the *most admired* in Cambridge and

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<sup>4</sup>See page 123.

encourages as many people as possible to visit, being very willing to give well-received conducted tours to interested groups.

Whichever individual approach each may take to general visitors, Head Gardeners are all in the same boat when it comes to May Balls and May Week Plays. They pray for rain, of the right kind of course, throughout April and May, but in the first half of June, when these events actually take place, they are equally fervent in wanting cloudless skies and no precipitation. In this way they hope to limit the damage to the lawns and flower borders that inevitably comes with the installation and subsequent dismantling of so many temporary structures. And the presence of nearly a thousand people wandering around in the dark does not help. The possible hazards are too numerous to list in full and two examples will have to suffice.

Until relatively recently, marquees had to be supported by guy ropes tied to large iron stakes which were driven into a lawn, flower bed, or, even more destructively, the cobbling of Old Court; their replacement by ones that include a more rigid framework has greatly eased this problem. But whilst the stakes were still being used there was considerable potential damage to be repaired once they had been removed. Another worry was that of the damage caused to lawns as the result of hot objects being placed upon them. It didn't happen every year, but often enough to be a major concern; although operators of kettles and grills were given specific warnings before the Ball started, one thoughtless action during a three-hour shift was all it took.

The reader will not be surprised to learn that it was with



fingers crossed that I walked through the Gardens from the College car park to my office each May Week Tuesday. On the odd occasion, the Head Gardener was even waiting on the Bridge to make sure that I was shown the damage, both at first hand and immediately. However, the annoyance and complaints were usually short-lived, the experienced gardening and maintenance teams got on with their well-practiced repairs, and only rarely was there any need to report adversely to the College Council.

I have to admit that, especially after I had ceased to have any direct connection with it, I did sometimes wonder on arriving in College on the day after a Ball whether it was really worth all the effort. This was not really about the cost — though I know from my later job as Financial Tutor that some students who pleaded continuing poverty throughout the year, still found the money to buy a ticket at the end of it — but, rather about the amount of time and effort so many people had put in for something that was over in just nine hours. But, on further reflection, the fact that the students were doing it for the experience, rather than to make money, invariably won the day and made me view the enterprise in a favourable light. In fact, if the Ball does make a profit, once a small float to get next year's event under way has been set aside, the rest is usually given to charity.

Though they do not have any direct bearing on the duties of a Tutor, the history and changing nature of Cambridge May Balls in general, and of those held in Clare in particular, offer some interesting facets. The Archivist at Clare has recently done some research on these topics and some of what follows is based

on his findings; in particular, all the information relating to May Balls held before I started at Cambridge as an undergraduate in the mid-fifties.

May Balls seem to have first taken place at some time in the 1860's though the earliest existing photograph taken at one held in Clare is from some thirty years later. The ornate heading on its mount shows that the Ball took place in May 1898, confirming that originally the Balls were held in May, rather than in June as has been the case for about one hundred years. The photograph shows about fifty formally dressed men, presumably undergraduates, and, rather surprisingly, a somewhat larger number of women – definitely not undergraduates, unless some of them were from the relatively recently established institutions known as Girton and Newnham. Closer examination reveals that about one third of the women present were both middle-aged and 'severe of countenance'. This rather unexpected discovery is almost certainly explained by the likelihood that, at that time, young women at a Ball held in an all-male College had to be chaperoned.

It was at about the time of that photograph that May Balls started to offer more than just food and dancing, adding punting for riverside colleges and other more general entertainments. Nevertheless, for well over half a century, the main emphasis *was* on food and dancing. Indeed, the programme for the 1949 Clare College Ball was to all intents and purposes a dance card, listing the dance tunes to be played by Tommy Kinsman and His Orchestra and providing spaces for noting down one's intended partner for each. There were to be 34 tunes, nearly all of them

Fox Trots, the only minor concessions being that numbers 12, 21 and 32 (to the tune *So Tired*<sup>5</sup>) were to be Slow Fox Trots. The dancing was scheduled to end with *Auld Lang Syne* and *God Save the King* shortly before 6 a.m., when the Ball photograph would be taken.

The notes in the 1949 programme make only a passing reference to food; refreshments will be served at the Buffet from 11 p.m. to 2 a.m. and rolls and coffee will be available at 6 a.m. This is perhaps not too surprising, given that the effects of World War II were still being felt and food rationing was still in place. What is more surprising, given that it took place at the height of the Great Depression, is the food that was on offer at the May Week Ball Dinner held on 15 June 1931. The menu read as follows.

#### M E N U

##### Consommé

Truite Saumonée en Mayonnaise  
Salade de Homard  
Filets de Soles à la Favorite

Pigeonneaux Farcis en Médallion  
Petit Vol-au-vents à la Maison

Galantine de Dindon aux Truffes  
Poulets à la Printanière

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<sup>5</sup>Not to be confused with The Beatles' song *I'm So Tired*.

Jambon de Yorke  
Quartier d'Agneau  
Sauce Menthe  
Canetons d'Aylesbury  
Bœuf Salé en Gelée  
Langue à l'Écarlate  
Bœuf froid roti  
Salades à la Française

Crème aux Fraises  
Biscuits de Savoie en Caramel  
Meringues à la Chantilly  
Gelée au Bénédicte  
Crème à la Reine de Fées  
Salade aux Fruits en Liqueur Glacé

Champagne *Veuve Clicquot 1923*

Soup will be served after the Ball in the Buffet

Whether in English or in French, the food on offer in the 1931 event differs markedly from what is preferred by the undergraduates of today. The same may be said of the balance between food and alcohol! Clare's May Ball Committee chose a French theme for its 2007 May Ball, *Chateau Fantasie*, and, although it might have been considered appropriate, I doubt that the corresponding menu would have been written in French. It would have looked something like this.

## M E N U

Pinot Noir, Chardonnay & Kir Royale at the *Bar à Vin*  
Cocktails in *The Fellows' Garden*

Pizza & Chips on *The Avenue*  
Deli in the *Scholars' Garden*

Hog Roast, Rolls & Apple Sauce in *Old Court*  
Fajitas in *The Master's Garden*

Candy Floss in *Old Court*  
Crêpes on *The Avenue*  
Donuts in *The Fellows' Garden*  
Chocolate Fountain in *The Fellows' Garden*  
Ice Cream on *The Avenue*

Tea, Coffee & Hot Chocolate on *The Avenue*  
Vodka Luge in *The Fellows' Garden*  
Guinness, Baileys & Red Bull in the *Bar*  
Pimms and G & T's in *The Fellows' Garden*  
Wine, Port, Whisky & Whiskey in the *Scholars' Garden*  
Beer, Energy Drinks, Smoothies & Water in *The Fellows' Garden*

But, in addition to a menu of food and drink, the 2007 Ball offered a wide range of activities and entertainment. There are five main sites within the College where the entertainments were based, and each had a programme that ran for approximately eight hours, with each item on the programme lasting between one and two hours. Because there were so many performers in total, I cannot devote more than a few words to each. But so that the reader can appreciate the organisation and planning

needed to put on all of these programmes at the same time (as well as some other activities mentioned later), I have included nearly all of them, often ungrammatically. Set out as a (much compacted) menu in running order, the list of delights on offer, might have read as follows.

#### E N T E R T A I N M E N T S

##### *In Old Court*

College Music Society, mini-concert; Traditional Jazz; Jazz-Funk;  
Stand-up Comedy; Catchy Melodies; Indie Music; DJ Disco.

##### *In the Great Hall*

Salsa; Ceilidh; Ballroom à la Versailles;  
Molière's Play *Le Misanthrope*;  
Film *Marie Antoinette*.

##### *In the Cellars*

Soul; Jazz; Mediterranean Vibes; House Music; Hip Hop;  
Drum & Bass.

##### *In the Master's Garden*

Operatic Excerpts; Two *a cappella* Groups; Acoustic Whimsy;  
Saxophone Serenade; Chill-out Music; Piano Pieces.

##### *In the Fellows' Garden*

Hip Hop; Guitar-pop; Drum & Bass; Indie; Pure Cheese.

## A C T I V I T I E S

Swing Boats in the *Fellows' Garden*Casino in the *Small Hall*Punting on the *River*Massage, Makeover and Fortune Teller in the *Buttery*Shisha Pipes in the *Sunken Garden*

Not included in the above menus is the fireworks display that could once be watched from almost anywhere outdoors, and during my time as a Tutor this was when the Bridge was subjected to its greatest annual load.<sup>6</sup>

Although it used to be put on much later, for roughly the last twenty years it has taken place at about half past ten. The change of time has, quite rightly, been made so that those residents of Cambridge who live close to or downwind of the College are not disturbed at an unreasonable hour.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, in one unfortunate incident an employee of the firm hired to put on the display was less than careful, and a rocket went astray, travelling almost horizontally close to the ground. Since then spectators have had to be kept well back from the launch site; at least theoretically, this has meant that the Bridge can no longer be used as a viewing platform, but this is difficult to enforce in practice.

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<sup>6</sup>About forty years ago one of the College's Engineering Fellows undertook a structural survey of the Bridge, and concluded that one might drive a light car across it — but only if the car belonged to somebody else!

<sup>7</sup>As mentioned in the footnote on page 298, Cambridge City Council, who issue the relevant licence, ultimately determine when firework displays may take place, and now require that they should be finished by 11 p.m.

The final event of the night, marking the official end of the Ball, is the so-called Survivors' Photo. This calls for all those still standing at a quarter to six to assemble in Old Court and rustle up one last big smile. Well, actually, a few big smiles, as the photographer wants to be sure about it — that those in the picture will want to buy it, that is. For some this is not quite the end and, in keeping with alleged tradition, a few hardy souls punt, or pay to be punted, up the river to Grantchester for breakfast at one of its public houses or at the Orchard Tea Garden. But even for them, that really is the end.

And so to bed . . . . . or should that be retirement? That's what it's called when academics in Cambridge are no longer paid for doing the things they continue to do.



# Appendix A

## Letter from Nigeria

PLEASE REPLY TO  
POSTAL ADDRESS

Bxx OXXXXXX  
P.O.Box 2711  
Festival Road  
Garki Main Post Office  
ABUJA Nigeria W.A.

OFFICE ADDRESS

Bxx OXXXXXX  
FM Trade  
Finance and Supplies Dept  
Budget Div. Rm 337  
ABUJA

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20 April 1990

My dear Sir

REQUEST FOR OFFER OF ADMISSION  
INTO YOUR COLLEGE

The Chancellor of Cambridge University, His Royal Highness Prince Charles, speaking through the Vice Chancellor Geoffrey Skelsey in his letter to me advised me to address a letter to you in respect of admission into your College.

I have almost concluded necessary arrangements on payment of school fees. You may therefore enunciate further any unexplored strategy that will facilitate the realization of my desire to study at your College.

I am a civil servant. My ambition to study at Cambridge has actually cost me a lot of denial of pleasure in life in order to achieve this singular objective. I only hope my life dreams will touch your heart compassionately with a view to making my dream come true.

The only light we in Africa is having TODAY is due to British magnanimity and mercy for human beings. I hope I will be opportuned Sir to have a piece of the action of your benevolence to mankind.

I look forward to hearing from you about methods/procedure of admission. Please Sir do not disappoint me. You will learn a lot from my wealth of experience in Government and other aspect of African life if and when my humble application attracts your favourable consideration for admission, please.

Please reply by Airmail to avoid delay or loss in transit.

A copy of this letter is addressed to His Royal Highness,  
Prince Charles, and the Vice Chancellor SKELSEY for their  
information only.

Sincerely yours

*indecipherable signature*

Bxx OXXXXXX

## Appendix B

# Am I All Right, Jack?

### Twenty Questions – The Senior Tutor’s TV Challenge

- |                         |                        |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Match of the Day 2   | 11. Top Gear           |
| 2. Friends              | 12. The X Factor       |
| 3. Deal or no Deal      | 13. Crimewatch         |
| 4. Weather              | 14. Newsnight          |
| 5. Cheers               | 15. A Place in The Sun |
| 6. Dragons’ Den         | 16. Coast              |
| 7. Scrap Heap Challenge | 17. Doctor Who         |
| 8. Countdown            | 18. Blue Peter         |
| 9. Panorama             | 19. Wife Swap          |
| 10. The Simpsons        | 20. The Bill           |

### The Tutorial Bursar's Christmas Give-away, 2003

The Tutorial Bursar was pleased to see an increased number of entries this year; naturally, Downing Street is claiming this as clear evidence that its policies are working. He was also pleased to note that the standard of entries has improved; naturally, Downing Street is claiming . . . . .

The winner, largely, but not exclusively, due to his success with the crossword, was Oliver Grendale, but honourable mentions go to Barry March-James and Frederico Rossi. The most imaginative entry came from Pippa Judge [and her father (Clare 1958)], but the price of their ingenuity was a rather non-minimal crossword; but it *did* come with a complete set of crossword clues, both cunning and cryptic.

A possible set of answers is as follows:

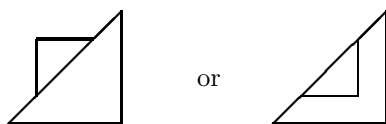
**1** Most entrants solved these, but, no, (b) is neither the National Debt nor the VC's stipend. Surprisingly, the winner did not spot (c).

- (a) The number of seconds in a non-leap year.
- (b) The total number of possible bridge or whist deals.  
 $52!/(13!)^4$
- (c) The recurring digits of  $1/17$ .

**2** There were almost as many correct solutions to each part as there were entrants; those below are the Tutorial Bursar's.

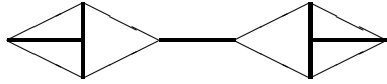
- (a)  $((1 \times 2) + 3) \times 4 \times 5 = 100$ .
- (b)  $1 + 2 - 3 + 4! + 5! = 144$ .
- (c)  $1 \times 2^{3!+4+5}$  or  $1 \times ((2 \times 3) + \sqrt{4})^5 = 32768$ .
- (d)  $(1 + 2 + 3) \times (\sqrt{4} + 5) = 42$ .
- (e)  $(-1 + 23)/(\sqrt{4} + 5) = 3.14$  (3 s.f.).
- (f)  $1 + (2^3 \times \sqrt{4}) + 5! = 137$ .
- (g)  $^{12}\sqrt{(3! + 4)^{5!}} = 10,000,000,000$ .
- (h)  $(1/2)(-3 + 4 + \sqrt{5}) = \frac{1+\sqrt{5}}{2}$ .
- (i)  $-1.2 + 3.45 = 2.25 = 9/4$ .
- (j)  $(-1 + 2 + 3!)/(4! - 5) = 7/19 = 0.368$ . (3 s.f.).<sup>1</sup>

**3** With hidden edges shown by thinner lines:



<sup>1</sup>For the more serious mathematician: One student, Russ Williams, though not strictly limiting himself to arithmetic signs, gave an *exact* expression for  $e^{-1}$ , namely  $\cos \sqrt{-1} + \sqrt{(2-3)} \sin \sqrt{(4-5)}$ , provided the square roots of  $-1$  are interpreted appropriately.

**4** A number of entrants did not attach enough (any?) significance to the words ‘plane network’ and drew crossing lines without treating the crossing as a vertex. One even had six lines meeting at a point and used four colours!



Starting from the left-hand vertex with a three-colour scheme, the diagram above runs into trouble at the first vertex involving the central horizontal line.

**5** Most entrants managed this in 15 moves, but since the Wine Steward (being well-versed in providing appropriate liquid refreshment) took only 12 moves (see below), most competitors lost a few marks for ‘lack of elegance’.

A(6)	B(10)	C(15)
6	0	0
0	0	6
0	10	6
0	1	15
6	1	9
0	1	9
6	1	3
0	1	3
3	1	0
3	0	1
3	10	1
<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>

7 Below are the crosswords submitted by Oliver Grendale and Barry March-James, the one to be commended for coming closest to the goal set and the other for its elegant simplicity.

Z	E	N	I	T	H	S
E	X	O	D	E		Q
P		V		G		U
H		A	M		F	A
Y				J		W
R		B	L	O	C	K

$$6 \times 7 = 42$$

B	R	O	N	Z	E	D		J	U	M	P	I	N	G
		V				A	X	E						
Q	U	A	L	I	F	Y		T	H	W	A	C	K	S

$$3 \times 15 = 45$$

However, the Senior Tutor, rather smugly, cannot resist giving his own  $5 \times 8 = 40$  solution, which is even more compact.

B	L	O	W		Z	E	D
Y		F	A	R		V	
	J		T	A	X	E	S
Q	U	I	C	K		N	O
	G		H	E	M		P



## The CLARE Economy Crossword

Congratulations to MARTINA CORAL who completed the grid despite the fact that one of the clues was wrong! Nevertheless she is awarded the bottle of CLARE\*. Professor Titley, by sticking to the rules, managed to *prove* that no solution was possible, and is therefore awarded a consolation prize, and, of course, free entry to the next competition.



The answers to the initial clues, and the final contracted solutions obtained from them are given below. Other final words are possible, and these have been given in lower case,

but can be eliminated when the constraints of the self-consistency of the grid are imposed.

The notation used to explain the solutions is:

UPPER CASE letters retained; lower case letters ignored;  
 $\Rightarrow$  = reduces to; (ABCD)\* = anagram of ABCD;  $\overset{R}{}$  = in reverse order;  $\supset$  = contains;  $+$  = sounds like; [...] = notes of clarification.

1. PER(COLA)T-E = PERCOLATE  $\Rightarrow$  POET, tope [see 15]
2. THE-A-TRI(C)AL = THEATRICAL  $\Rightarrow$  TITHE (but see note in the original)
3. TREACLE tart = TREACLE  $\Rightarrow$  TE
4. CORAL(FREE)\* = CORAL REEF  $\Rightarrow$  FORE, orfe
5. ESCALATOR  $\Rightarrow$  OAST, oats, stoa
6. (CHORAL)\*-TE = CHLORATE  $\Rightarrow$  HOT
7. RE(MALIC)\*ED = RECLAIMED  $\Rightarrow$  IDEM, dime, demi
8. CAR(A-MB)OLE=CARAMBOLE  $\Rightarrow$  AMBO, boma
9. RE-TRACK-TABLE = RETRACTABLE  $\Rightarrow$  BATTER
10. C(EL-EB [Encyclopedia Britannica])RATE = CELEBRATE  $\Rightarrow$  BEET
11. LACE-RAT-E = LACERATE  $\Rightarrow$  EAT, ate, tea, eta
12. (THEIR CALL)\* = CLEITHRAL  $\Rightarrow$  HILT
13. (CLEAR PASTE)\* = PARACLETES  $\Rightarrow$  PATES, paste, tapes, spate
14. FLAT-RACE  $\Rightarrow$  AFT, fat

15. (REP)<sup>R</sup>-CO-LATE = PERCOLATE ⇒ TOPE, poet [see 1]
16. CARMELITE ⇒ EMIT, mite
17. ARCH-ANGEL = ARCHANGEL ⇒ HANG
18. CHE(VALIdity)ERS = CHEVALIERS ⇒ HIVES
19. (REAL-N)<sup>\*</sup> ⊃(CAST) = LAN(CAST)ER = LANCASTER  
⇒ ANTS, tans
20. PRAE-LECTOR = PRAELECTOR ⇒ TOPER, repot
21. GR-ACE-FULfil = GRACEFUL ⇒ FUG
22. COR(ALTER)<sup>\*</sup>E = CORRELATE ⇒ ROTE, tore
23. ARTICLE ⇒ IT, ti
24. cORACLES = ORACLES ⇒ SO
25. creme CAMEL = CAMEL ⇒ AM, ma
26. (LAIC)<sup>\*</sup>-(SERB)<sup>R</sup> = CALI-BRES = CALIBRES ⇒ BIS, sib
27. LO-CAT-ER = LOCATER ⇒ TO
28. elementary PARTICLES = PARTICLES ⇒ PITS, tips, spit
29. COLANDER [= holey<sup>+</sup> grail = perforated cup] ⇒ DON, nod
30. (PRECIS)<sup>\*</sup> ⊃(LA)<sup>R</sup> = C(AL)IPERS = CALIPERS [for  
measuring calibres] ⇒ SIP, psi
31. RECASTLE [chess] ⇒ SET, est
32. C-A-(TEA GIRL)<sup>\*</sup> = CARTILAGE ⇒ GAIT
33. EC-LAIRS = ECLAIRS ⇒ IS
34. CALENDAR ⇒ DAN, and
35. (REEL AND C)<sup>\*</sup> = ENCRADLE ⇒ END, den
36. (NEAR) ⊃UCL [University College, London] = NUCLEAR ⇒  
NU

37. CLEANER  $\Rightarrow$  EN  
 38. WIND PIPE [=organ, anatomical](descriptively) =  
 TRACHEA(descriptively) = TRACHEAL  $\Rightarrow$  HAT  
 39. (DECLARE-L)\* = RECALLED  $\Rightarrow$  LED, del  
 40. T(R)ACTILE = TRACTILE  $\Rightarrow$  TIT  
 41. LACERTA [=lizard]  $\Rightarrow$  AT, ta  
 42. C-E-(I-CLEAR)\* = CE(LER)IAC = CELERIAC  $\Rightarrow$  ICE

Starting from the only six-letter word available, one possible order for filling the grid is as follows:

BATTER; AMBO; ROTE; TOPER; FORE;  
 Need ?xET and ?xxx, hence ? = P, hence POET and PITS;  
 No xAxP, and so xxTxx is TITHE (not 'pates');  
 No xxV, so HIVES must be where it is shown;  
 No Mxx, and so xxEx is BEET (not 'idem'); BIS; SO; TO.  
 Remaining five-letter word: No xxS (and so not 'paste'),  
 'tapes' requires 'sip' but there is no SAx (and so not 'tapes'),  
 'spate' requires Px which is not there, hence PATES; EN;  
 TOPE; IDEM; (AM);  
 Need ?Ax and ?xT, hence ? = H, hence HAT and HOT.  
 For xxx in the 1st column: No Fx, hence not 'fug', hence xxIx  
 is not 'gait' and must be EMIT;  
 Need x?xT and xx?x, and the only possibility is ? = I, hence  
 HILT and GAIT; HANG; (AT); OAST;  
 ?xN must have ? = D, hence xxD = LED.  
 Remaining four-letter word: 'tans' requires ?xN and, as above,  
 ? = D, but no EDx, so the word is ANTS (not 'tans'); SET;  
 SIP; TIT.

The only place where FUG will fit is as shown; NU; similarly ICE;

No ExS, and so IS will only fit as shown.

Consider 'eat', 'fat' and 'aft' for xxT: No EEx, no EFx, hence it must be AFT; EAT; END; DAN; DON; IT; TE.

All done!

### **Tutorial Bursar's Geography Test, Christmas 2006**

1. Crewe, Alloa, Uttoxeter, Pontardawe, Exeter, Guildford, Leamington Spa, Forfar, Beeston, Stranraer,
11. Hayling Island, Weston-super-Mare, Paignton, Brighton, Hawick, Ebbw Vale, Sutton Coldfield, Dover, Ewell, Wandsworth
21. Paddington, Llanelli, Lowestoft, Leicester, Hythe, Hinckley, Lewisham, Twickenham, Camden Town, Keynsham,
31. Inverness, Thame, Oadby, Llantwit Major, Stockton-on-Tees, Barking, Lewes, Barrow, Swanage, Cowes,
41. Finchley, Maesteg, Bearsden, Oxford, Welwyn Garden City, Sawbridgeworth, Leigh, Glenrothes, Workington, Loughton,
51. Luton, Littlehampton, Bargoed, Otley, Omagh, Prestwich, Romsey/Ramsey, Fleetwood, Kendal, Morecambe,
61. Glossop, Huntingdon, Kingston upon Thames, Holyhead, Torbay, Carshalton, Gosforth, Wrexham, Cardiff, Portsmouth,
71. Orrell, Potters Bar, Pinner, Glasgow, Knaresborough, Canterbury, Strood, Westminster, Banff, Cork,
81. Braintree, Surbiton, Manchester, Redhill, Yeovil, Hereford, Neath, Sligo, Tonbridge, Gerrards Cross,
91. Penrith, Newton-le-Willows, Kensington, Sidmouth, Airdrie, Nuneaton, Hounslow, Sandhurst, Uxbridge, Greenock.

## Appendix C

# First Class Scrawl

On the next page is a sample from a script that was awarded a first class in the Law Tripos in 1981 (see page 260).

Found on the internet as an  
 exception to the standard and  
 procedural rule in Fed. R. Crim.  
 as stated in comments with an  
 important source of information  
 for the courts.

The court has held that the  
 defendant's right to a fair trial  
 is not violated by the admission  
 of evidence obtained from a  
 search of the defendant's  
 private papers in a home  
 where the defendant is  
 present at the time of the  
 search.

The court has also held that  
 the defendant's right to a  
 fair trial is not violated by  
 the admission of evidence  
 obtained from a search of  
 the defendant's private  
 papers in a home where  
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 obtained from a search of  
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 papers in a home where  
 the defendant is present  
 at the time of the search  
 if the search is conducted  
 in a reasonable manner.

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 fair trial is not violated by  
 the admission of evidence  
 obtained from a search of  
 the defendant's private  
 papers in a home where  
 the defendant is present  
 at the time of the search  
 if the search is conducted  
 in a reasonable manner  
 and the evidence is  
 relevant to the case.