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(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



~~VOLUME LX~~
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JESUS COLLEGE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

SIR JOHN GRAY

JOHN ALCOCK, the Founder of Jesus College, was born at Beverley but was the son of a Hull merchant, who died in 1434. On 22 November 1479 the son obtained a licence in mortmain to found a Chantry in Holy Trinity Church, Hull. A deed of 24 June 1484 (to which Alcock was not a party) recites that Alcock had made the mayor and burgesses of Hull the patrons of the Chantry and obtained various privileges for it from Pope Sextus IV. In order to settle certain disputes, the parties to the deed had agreed that the income of the chantry should be divided into three parts. The proprietors, farmers and vicars were to divide one-third amongst themselves. Hull Corporation was to receive another third, and the chaplains of the chantry the remainder.

A certificate of 1545 sets out that Alcock founded the chantry to pray for the soul of Edward IV, the founder, and all Christian souls and that the incumbent was bound to keep 'a free school of grammar' and to teach therein all scholars from the town of Hull and all scholars thither resorting without taking any stipend or wages for the same. The incumbent was to have a yearly stipend of £10 and to pay yearly 'to the clerk to teach children to sing forty shillings, and to ten of the best scholars in the school, each of them half a mark' so long as the possessions were able to bear the same.

Very clearly the school and chantry were closely united and the chantry priest and the schoolmaster were one and the same person. The original foundation contemplated a song school as well as a grammar school and the parish clerk was intended to serve the former.¹

There are many striking resemblances between the endowment of this chantry in Hull and that of the grammar school at Jesus College. It is inaccurate to say that 'the Grammar School for Boys formed no part of Alcock's plan for the constitutions of the College.'² As Lady Bray's tripartite indenture of 1506 shows, it formed an integral part of Alcock's foundation of the College and was one of the earliest to receive implementation.

Catherine Bray was the widow of Sir Reginald Bray, who died in 1503. In his lifetime he had been a benefactor on a considerable scale to Jesus College. He is best known as the designer of St George's Chapel, Windsor. After his death Lady Bray, evidently in compliance with her husband's wishes, continued to be a liberal benefactor to the College, as an indenture tripartite, to which she was the first party, shows. The other parties were the Master and Fellows of Jesus College of the second part, and the Master and Fellows of Pembroke Hall of the third part.

¹ V.C.H. *Yorkshire*, I, pp. 449-50.

² Gray, *The Statutes of Jesus College A.D. 1514-1515*, p. 52.

The indenture is dated 11 May in the twenty-second year of the reign of Henry VII (i.e. 1506). It recites the fact that Lady Bray had been put to great charges in procuring the appropriation of the church of Great Shelford, Cambs., and had obtained the licence of the King and of the Ordinary of the diocese to appropriate the same to Jesus College. It further recites that she had contributed other great gifts for the purposes and good intentions thereafter set out.

In consideration of these acts on her part and the promises made to her by Jesus College, it is agreed that there shall be a Master in the said College, who shall be learned and skilled in grammar, in order to instruct teach and inform continuously in the said College all the boys and adolescents and others resorting thereto from other places. They are to be instructed in a certain school built there for that purpose (*in quadam scola ibidem ad hoc constructa*). He is to teach certain boys and adolescents residing in Jesus College and others resorting thereto from elsewhere in the said freely and diligently without any payment or other exaction of money. Jesus College grant to Lady Bray that they will thenceforth pay to the said grammar master an annual stipend of ten marks. They further agree to assign and allot to the grammar master a certain room within the Tower of the said College which adjoins the Grammar School built there (*quandam cameram in eodem collegio in turrim contiguatam dictae scholae grammaticali*).

This grammar master is to be provided with sufficient victuals of food and the services of the barber and the laundress and all other allowances for clothing and albs for divine services as any Fellow of the College at the expense of the College.

Lady Bray was during her natural life to nominate and assign some suitable person, able and sufficiently grounded in grammar, to be such grammar master, whenever a vacancy arose. After her death such person was to be nominated and assigned in accordance with the tenor of the statutes of Jesus College.

No person was to be appointed to the post, who had any benefice exceeding the annual value of ten pounds in value unless Pembroke Hall consented thereto.

Power was given to Pembroke Hall to distrain on the revenues of Jesus College if the grammar master's stipend should be in arrear for more than three months, except in time of pestilence.

From this deed we learn that in 1506 there already was in existence a grammar school and a grammar school master, who lived in a chamber over the Gate Tower and the school was in a building to the west thereof. This building comprised a ground and an upper floor. The upper floor was possibly used as a dormitory for the boys and the lower floor for teaching and other purposes.¹

The accounts of Agnes Banastre, Treasures of the Nunnery of Saint Radegund, for the years 1449-50 and 1450-51 show that buildings of some description existed on the site of the Grammar School. In 1449-50 certain *magnas portas exteriores* together with a building (*domus*) adjoining them had to be thatched with sedge. In the following year's accounts a payment was made for the reeds for the repair

¹ An additional floor was added to the range in 1718-20, which in 1952 was transformed into a War Memorial Library.

of the chamber *desuper portas exteriores huius monasterii*. This latter was clearly the chamber in the occupation of the grammar school master at the time of Lady Bray's benefaction. The purpose of the buildings to the west thereof can only be conjectured. Possibly they were used as an Almonry.

We can with a certain measure of certainty locate the room in the Gateway Tower, which was allotted under Lady Bray's deed to the schoolmaster. There are at present two sets of rooms, one above the other, in Gate Tower. In the bedroom of each of these there is a cupboard of the thickness of the wall, separating them from the Master's Lodge, and in one of them is a low blocked door communicating with the Lodge. Between the Gate and the door of the Master's garden there was discovered in 1912 a cesspool, vaulted and walled in the same red brick as the lower part of the Gate Tower and connected by a shaft with the Tower rooms.¹

Alcock's plans of including boys and 'dons' within the same walls resembled that of Walter de Merton, who made provision in his College at Oxford for a *grammaticus* and *pueri*, who were placed by him in Nunhall, a building detached from the College. Probably Alcock's decision to come to a similar conclusion at Cambridge was due partly to the innate conservatism of the man and partly to the force of the circumstances in which he was placed. He set apart for the school the quarter in which monastic schools were always placed, next to the entrance gate. Accordingly the building which Alcock selected for his school was that described by Agnes Banastre in her accounts of 1449-51 as adjoining the gate tower and had possibly been used in those days as the almonry of the Nuns of St Radegund.

The royal licence was for the foundation in the Nunnery of a certain College comprising one Master, six Fellows and a certain number of scholars to be instructed in grammar (*certo numero scholarium in grammatica erudiendorum*).

In all probability we can ascertain with a large measure of certainty not only the date of the establishment of the school, but also that of its first Master. Henry Forthe graduated B.A. in 1501-2 and M.A. in 1504-6. In 1504-5 he was allowed exemption from attending University masses and exequies whilst he was occupied *in schola grammaticali* provided that he pronounced those exequies at home.² In 1506-7 he was allowed exemption from attending three masses, exequies and congregations, and when it happens that he was absent through ignorance.³ In 1511-12 the University passed a Grace that seven years' study should suffice for entering sentences. He was presented by Jesus College to the Vicarage of All Saints, Cambridge, on 10 June 1511 and held the post until his death in about 1524. From 1517 he was Vicar of St Stephen's, Coleman Street, London.

A near successor to Forthe was Thomas Grove, who graduated in 1514-15 and proceeded to his M.A. degree in 1518, having become a Fellow of St John's in 1518. On 28 March 1517 he was ordained deacon at Ely, his title being that he was in charge of a grammar school (*prefuit scholae grammatici*). In that year it was granted

¹ Grey, *The Master's Lodge, Jesus College, Cambridge*, pp. 18-20. As to the transition from red to yellow brick see Pevsner, *The Buildings of England—Cambridgeshire*, pp. 73-4.

² Grace Book F. 38.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 53-4.

to him that the nine terms in which he heard the *ordinarium* for the greater part except for three terms in which he was in charge of the grammar school in Jesus College should be allowed to him for responsions, if he could attain to them or with two at least of them after completing his inception.¹ In 1519 he became Rector of Hadstock, Essex, where he died in 1522.²

College records concerning the school are scanty. Structurally it was beyond the limits of the College itself, and its government was not in the immediate control of the College as a corporate body.

Alcock died in 1500. He appears to have left no will or any other written instructions as to the administration of his school and college. Later writers refer to his *statuta*, which may have been purely verbal. If written, the documents appear to be no longer extant. But the draft College Statutes, which were drawn up for confirmation by James Stanley, Bishop of Ely, in 1514 or 1515, very probably reflect what were his wishes and intentions in regard to the school.

Chapter IV of the Stanley draft statutes sets out that there shall be four boys, who at the time of their admission shall be less than fourteen years of age and sufficiently trained in singing. They are to be elected by the Master of the College and the greater part of the Fellows. The College shall provide for them at a rate prescribed, and they shall attend the grammar school. If perchance such a boy as is to be elected has been sufficiently trained in grammar, he shall read such arts or other study as the Master of the College shall decide. These four boys shall serve the choir as choristers.

Chapter VIII sets out that 'in all future times there shall be a good man learned in Grammar and Rhetoric, nominated (since the death of Lady Bray) by the Master of the College. He shall be bound to teach and instruct all boys, as well those of the College as those drawn to the Grammar School from elsewhere in such fashion as the Master of the College shall appoint with the consent of his Fellows that are skilled in Grammar.' As prescribed in Lady Bray's tripartite indenture he is to receive ten marks yearly, payable at the four quarters of the year. The schoolmaster is to teach at the times and hours to be appointed by the Master of the College. If he does not do so, he is to be removed by the Master of the College and another shall be appointed in his place within three months.

Lady Bray's endowment made no provision for an usher. Chapter IX supplies this omission. He is to be appointed by the Master of the College, and is to be one who, in accordance with ordinances of the school and of the Master of the College with the advice of the school master, knows how to teach the smaller and lower boys, and so teaches at suitable times to be settled by the Master of the College all boys gathering to the school *gratis* and without demand of money. His yearly salary is to be forty shillings or less, according as the Master shall agree with him. He is to be removed whenever it is deemed fit by the Master of the College.

Both the schoolmaster and the usher are to observe and take part in divine services and to be bound by the College Statutes as the Fellows and other Scholars

¹ Grace Book F. p. 157.

² Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*.

of the College are bound. They are to be bound strictly so to do by oath personally made (chapter ix).

Chapter xvi ordained that all the Fellows of the College and the Schoolmaster, either by themselves or by some other, should each week be a *hebdomadarius* in turn. Their duty as such was to carry out divine service in the College under penalty of one penny for each of such services.

It also provided for the celebration on all and Singular Sundays and Festival Days of special celebrations of first vespers, Matins, and Mass, and two Vespers. Immediately after the third stroke of the bell the four College boys, clad in surplices, were to enter the Church in readiness to say distinctly and devoutly and accurately to rehearse the service of the Blessed Mary, as acolytes do, at times meet and proper for celebration.

Chapter xviii deals at considerable length with exequies for the dead, which are to be attended by the schoolmaster and usher under penalty of one halfpenny to be inflicted for such defect.

It also enacts that the boys every night about the seventh hour shall sing the antiphon of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary and shall before their retirement say the accustomed suffrages for the souls of John Alcock and the well being of all benefactors of the College, as well living as dead.

On the Feast Day of St Luke (18 October) there were to be exequies for the soul of William Chubbes, first Master of the College. This was to be followed by a distribution at which the schoolmaster was to receive eight pence, the usher four pence and the boys each two pence, but, if any of these were not at Mass or at the Mass but not at the exequies they should forfeit half that sum.

On the morrow of Michaelmas Day there was to be a similar distribution at the Mass of Master Richard Preston.

On Tuesday in Rogation Days there was to be yet another similar distribution in commemoration of Thomas and Cristina Roberts of Over, Cambs.

Moreover the usher and all the scholars were before breakfast to recite certain psalms and litanies.

Finally 'in departing from school they shall say *De profundis* for the soul of Reginald Bray, Knight, and Catherine his wife, whom may God absolve and may the souls of Reginald Bray and Catherine his wife, and all the benefactors of this School (*hujus scholae*) by the mercy of God rest in peace'.

It was also ordained that after the death of the then Master John Eccleston on the day of the Exaltation of the Cross, similar distributions were to be made for the exequies of himself and certain benefactors to the College, who included Sir Reginald Bray and his wife Catherine.¹

Chapter xx fixed the maximum allowance for the boys' commons at eight pence a week. On Christmas Day, Easter Day, and Pentecost and Jesus Day the Senescal was to provide six shillings and eight pence for the bettering of the commons of the Master, Fellows, Scholars and boys together with a boar at Christmas at the discretion of the Master of the College.

¹ Eccleston died early in 1516.

Chapter xxv enacted that the Schoolmaster should have commons at weekly rate of fourteen pence and also free chamber, barber, laundress and wine and wax for divine service. In the case of the boys and the usher the weekly rate for commons was to be eight pence.

The last paragraph of this chapter shows that the College was being hard put to it to make both ends meet. It ordains that 'whatever happens to our aforesaid College, in any case provision shall be made for the Master of the College, the Master of the Grammar School, two Fellows, two youths, four boys and the Usher'.

The concluding page of the draft Statutes ordains that on all week days before breakfast the boys should in the dormitory or in church, as the Master of the College should direct, under supervision of the Usher recite certain suffrages and hymns.

The oldest copy of the Stanley Statutes is written on paper in a sixteenth-century hand. Stanley's successor Nicholas West drew up a new code. In his preamble he ignored Stanley's Statutes, from which his own differ radically in arrangement and wording. The earliest copy thereof is bound with the manuscript of the Stanley Statutes which are bound up in the Jesus College muniments with a rental of 1555-6. The West Statutes must have been delivered at some date before 19 July 1517 the date of the first election to a fellowship under West's Statutes.¹

Though chapter I of the West Statutes speaks of the possibility of an increase in the rents and possessions of the College it is clearly superoptimistic.

Chapter ix of the West Statutes ordains that there 'shall be in our College eight scholars, who we desire shall study continuously grammar, rhetoric, logic, mathematics or philosophy; and because we desire them to give more work to grammar, rhetoric, logic, mathematics or philosophy we decree and ordain that they shall be before admission competently instructed in singing so that they can sing psalms at Divine service with the Fellows, serve God and the offices in the choir, which are usually performed by scholars, may be fulfilled or due from them. It is lawful therefore for the Master and greater part of the Fellows to elect two or three of the said boys as scholars of mature age, so that the worship of God and the College may be better maintained. . . .'²

John Eccleston had become Master of Jesus College in 1505 and died at the end of 1515 or beginning of the following year. Evidently it was he who had procured the insertion of the provision for reduction of the numbers in the College which appears in chapter xxv of the Stanley draft statutes. He ordered that the Master of the College was to have £6. 13s. 4d. (ten marks) as prescribed by the Statutes: whereas that of the teacher of grammar was raised to ten pounds. The Usher was given 34s. 8d. for his commons and forty shillings for his stipend. The Master of the College was to have fourteen pence a week for his commons, but no allowance was made to the teacher of grammar, in respect of commons, and the boys and youths were to have eightpence per week. Their number was reduced from eight to six, and they were all described as *discipuli*, in a return to the Commissioners of Henry VIII.

Evidently the rise in stipend to the Schoolmaster was intended to compensate him

¹ Footnote by Dr. F. Brittain in V.C.H. *Cambs.* III, p. 422.

² Lamb, *Documents*, III, pp. 104-5

for the loss of College rooms and commons. The Usher continued to reside in the College proper, but it was evidently one of those which was vacant *per defectum reparacionis* in 1551.

The Master of the College had evidently taken over the Schoolmaster's premises in the Gate Tower, where in 1557 lay a diaper cloth on a cupboard, which Edmund Perpoynte, then Master, bequeathed to the College Chapel.¹

Probably the very first headmaster was Henry Forthe, who in 1504-5 was granted absence from masses and exequies when he is occupied *in scola grammaticali* provided he said exequies at home. In 1511-12 after seven years' study, these were held to suffice for him to enter sentences for an M.A. Degree.² On 11 June he was presented by Jesus College to the living of All Saints', Cambridge. On 28 September 1517 he was also presented to St Stephen's, Coleman Street, London. In his will dated 12 June 1516, Peter Clarebolt of Cambridge said 'I will there be at rental in All Hallows' Church, Cambridge by Master Forthe or by any other priest such as Master Forthe shall assign.'³ On 18 November 1524 a successor was appointed to All Saints', Cambridge, after his death.

Thomas Grove was very probably his immediate successor at the School. In 1517-18 he was allowed a grace in respect of three terms in which *prefuit scola grammaticali in collegio Jesu*.⁴ He took his B.A. in 1504-5 and M.A. 1518. He became a Fellow of St John's and died as Rector of Hadstock, Essex, in 1522.

Ralph Radcliffe is certainly the most attractive of all the known headmasters of the Grammar School. He was born in Lancashire in about 1518 and originally went to Oxford, where he was one of the earliest undergraduates at Brasenose. But he migrated to Jesus College and took his B.A. Degree in 1536 and his M.A. in 1539. The date of his appointment to the headmastership is not certain, but in an undated letter addressed by him to Henry VIII he subscribes himself as 'Your Grace's humble servant Ralph Radclif, professor of arts and schoolmaster of Jesus College, Cambridge'.⁵ He subsequently removed to Hitchin, where he acquired a house which had been in the occupation of the White Friars. He converted the building into a school where he exhibited miracle plays performed by his pupils. John Bale, who like Radcliffe had been educated at Jesus College and was likewise a playwright, gave an account of Radcliffe's work in his *Scriptores Anglicanae*, describing his school as his *Theatrum longe pulcherrimum*.

Radcliffe died in 1559 at the early age of forty. One would fain believe that the first experiments in his *theatrum* were made whilst he was teaching at Jesus College. It is possible, but there is no evidence to support any such inference.⁶

On 15 October 1541 Christopher Carlell was admitted to the headmastership of the Grammar School. He was a member of Corpus, when he had graduated B.A. in 1538-9 and M.A. in 1541. He was an eminent Hebrew scholar. A copy of his

¹ Baker, MS. B. C.U. Library Mm 223 f. 237.

³ Baker, MS. B. C.U. Library Mm 224 f. 124.

⁵ *Historical Manuscripts Commission—Second Report*, p. 853.

⁶ The first mention of play acting in the Bursar's Books is in 1562.

² Grace Book Γ 38, 53, 54, 96, 97.

⁴ Grace Book Γ, p. 157.

Psalms of David in English with annotations is to be seen in the Cambridge University Library. He had been elected a Fellow of Clare in 1539 and took his STB Degree from that College in 1552. Nothing is known concerning his headmastership of the Grammar School, and one may even crave leave to doubt whether an eminent Hebraist was a suitable person to instruct small boys in grammar or rhetoric.

The Usher appears to have been lodged in the Cloister Court of the College. His quarters appear to have been unattractive. In 1557 they were vacant and in need of repair. In 1540–1 they were occupied by one Dixson, who in the year 1542–3 is described as ‘Dixson, Usher’ and matriculated in that year as ‘John Dixson, sizar’ and was perhaps the ‘Mr Dixon’ referred to in the Bursar’s books of 1546–7. It should be noted that he was apparently Usher at the time when Christopher Carlell (see above) was headmaster.

‘Sir’ Watson and ‘Sir’ Highson are described as having been Ushers in 1564. The former would appear to have been Richard Watson who vacated the post on taking his B.A. Degree in 1563–4, when the latter would have succeeded him.¹

The names of only two of the choristers survive. These were Edmund and John Richards who were lodged in rooms in the College proper in 1538–9, according to the Bursar’s Books. The reason for their being so lodged may have been because, in the words of chapter IV of the draft Stanley Statutes, they had been found ‘to be sufficiently trained in Grammar and apt to read Arts or other study according to the decision of the Master of the College’. Their after careers are not known.

In the instructions given to the Edwardian Visitors to Cambridge University in 1549, they were bidden to divert moneys expended in any college on choristers, chantries, or other daily ecclesiastical services or grammar schools, for the support of scholars in literature and philosophy. This sounded very much like the death knell of Jesus College Grammar School, but for some reason the Visitors did not apply the axe. Like the choristers’ school which Henry VI had established in 1443 at King’s College, that at Jesus College was spared.

All the same the arrival of the Visitors must have been a sore time of affliction for John Reston, Master of Jesus College. On 28 July 1542 he had entered into an agreement with Jesus and St John’s Colleges for the establishment of a yearly obit on 3 August for the souls of his parents Robert and Agnes, as well as for his own soul when he died. Amongst those present at the ceremony, the grammar master was to receive six pence and the usher four pence, and every chorister two pence.²

In addition—as Sherman, the earliest historian of Jesus College tells us—he had consecrated for himself an oratory, which was in fact none other than the former oratory of the Prioress of St Radegund. This was evidently the place whither on Sunday, 26 May 1549, the Visitors ‘went from the church into a chamber where certain images were and caused them to be broken’.

When Reston made his will he was a generous benefactor to the College, but he must have died in 1551 a broken-hearted man.

¹ Baker, MS. B. C.U. Library Mm 2. 23 f. 71.

² Thomas Baker, *History of the College of St. John the evangelist Cambridge*, ed. J. E. B. Mayor, p. 362.

The accession of Mary in 1553 gave the Grammar School another respite, but it was not for long. On her death in 1558 the end was clearly very near at hand.

Once again the Visitors were slow to move in regard to Jesus and King's Colleges and also to the choristers' school which Mary had established at Trinity College. In the Statutes drafted in 1569 it was ordained that 'no person shall learn grammar in any college except in Jesus College only and in the Colleges of Trinity and King's to the choristers'. But in the revised Code of 1570 the exception in favour of Jesus College was omitted. The College had in fact anticipated this conclusion by ceasing to pay the stipends of the Master and Usher after Christmas 1567.

Though the Ely diocesan records show that a number of schoolmasters were licensed to teach in Cambridge in the reign of Elizabeth, their schools appear to have been private ventures and purely ephemeral, though a more permanent school in the town was clearly needed.

This want appears to have been realized in 1576, when the Cambridge Corporation appointed nine of their number as a Committee 'to devise and put in writing some good device for the erecting of a grammar school within the said town and how the charges of the same may be borne and raised'. Later in the same year a further committee of eleven was appointed to 'rate and assess what sums every person shall pay towards the charges thereof'. Rate paying is never a popular proposal and so nothing further was heard of it.

Despite legacies of one hundred marks each from William Bridon in 1590 and Thomas Cropley in 1607 no further attempt was made to establish a local grammar school, until in 1615 Stephen Perse in his will provided the means which led to the establishment of the school which now bears his name.

