

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUME LXXII

for 1982 and 1983

IMRAY LAURIE NORIE AND WILSON

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2. Authors are reminded that the cost of printing is high and that, all other things being equal, a short and succinct paper is more likely to be published than a long one. It would also assist the Editor if contributors who know of possible sources for subventions towards the cost of printing their paper would inform the Editor of this when submitting their manuscript.
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Plate 1 Joseph Lloyd Brereton and his family, a photograph taken in the late 1870s. It is reproduced here by kind permission of Brereton's grandson, Mr John Brereton of Little Massingham.

A FAILURE AT CAMBRIDGE : CAVENDISH COLLEGE, (1877-1892¹)

PETER SEARBY

'What I dreaded was possible *unconscious*, not conscious, wilfulness, or rather unyielding persistence to your own line of action, the result not of mean jealousy, but of a natural, and to a great extent, righteous indignation at less enlightened views, if not less entirely fair purposes, on the part of others.'

Homerton College, Cambridge, Brereton Papers, B8013, 3rd Earl Fortescue to Brereton, 25 November 1870.

In March 1873 a middle-aged Norfolk clergyman, Joseph Lloyd Brereton, wrote to his bishop asking for leave of absence for one year from his parish:

'The first sermon I preached (on the afternoon of the day I was ordained in Norwich Cathedral in 1847) was on the text "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" I can say very solemnly that I can trace through twenty-six years a continuous call to do something for which a special fitness seemed to be given me to remove some of the "estrangement" between the Gospel and the Land, which then oppressed me...And as at the present moment both the universities are looking to me to mature a plan by which Middle Class Education may be more effectually connected with them, it certainly seems to me that, were I set free for a year to devote myself to that object, the course of duty would be plain.'²

The Cambridge enterprise referred to here is the institution that eventually became known as Cavendish College. Its red-brick Gothic buildings are now part of Homerton College, which took over the premises of the defunct Cavendish in 1894. Its failure was the greatest disappointment of Brereton's career, which was marked by many of them. Cavendish was the crown of a grandiose scheme for the education of the middle class to which Brereton devoted his life - he founded schools too - and he combined in his commitment egotism and moral earnestness in the highly distinctive way revealed by the letter quoted. For all its status as a university institution, Cavendish bore the impression of one man's mind; the founding of the college shows Brereton's creative fecundity and its eventual collapse his unpracticality and lack of business prudence.

I

More than most men, Joseph Brereton carried his childhood with him in life; so it is fitting that after the collapse of Cavendish he should have ended his days in the small village where he was born, Little Massingham, on the distant heathlands of north Norfolk. His father was rector - Joseph was to succeed him - and in Joseph's infancy in the 1820s was publishing pamphlets on the poor law and the social function of the clergy. In their mixture of prolixity and zestful combativeness they bear an uncanny resemblance to his son's writing on education. Indeed, his father's ideas and stern, dominant nature and his mother's emotionalism were lasting influences upon Joseph, the more so since, lacking robustness, he was at first taught at home by his parents.³ Though he was for a time at a London day school, he went to Thomas Arnold's Rugby at fifteen as a sheltered, sensitive and perhaps timid boy: 'my first experience of roughness and badness at Rugby was without mitigation and intensely painful'.⁴ Brutality, 'coarseness and tyranny' were commonplace, until Brereton moved into the sixth form and Arnold's own house. At 73 Brereton recalled across a half-century's vicissitudes the gift of Arnold's paternal friendship: 'the tenderness and humbleness of a true Christian...irresistibly pleaded with the boy's conscience and heart for responsive obedience and love'. 'To have been one of his pupils I esteem to have been in some sense the chief privilege not only of my boyhood but of my whole life.' News of Arnold's death, while Brereton was at Oxford preparing to spend a month at Fox How, brought a sense of 'irreparable' loss. The rest of life was a probationary mission, to make flesh the ideal of manhood that Arnold had given him. 'We could only say to ourselves and to each other: "What are we - what can we do - what can we become if we would not be utterly unworthy of our school and school-master?"'

Brereton spun a complex web of sincerity and self-deception, constantly in life taking the strength of his desires as a measure of his talent to achieve them. In some ways he was very like Thomas Arnold, exultant masculinity intertwining with tenderness, while spontaneity of feeling excused lack of self-knowledge. At all events, for sixty years Brereton turned to Arnold's memory to approve his ideas and to make sense of life's reverses. Love for Arnold gave him direction and happiness, called forth powers of

self-conquest and dedication, and helped to release the abundant joyous energy which was one of his most attractive characteristics. Men and women were drawn to him by his combination of genial exuberance and open vulnerability; we glimpse him doing conjuring tricks to entertain his Devon parishioners, spurring his horse to leap over gates, and laughing nervously at inappropriate occasions.⁵

Yet Brereton was very self-centred, often unable to see himself as others did or to judge his actions with detachment. He was aggressive and belligerent, and wasted much of life in a labyrinthine quarrel with brothers and sisters in which he was much to blame; it ended with a seven-year Chancery suit. An overbearing pride and prickliness made him resent the slightest criticism, whether real or imagined, on his honour as a gentleman. In 1899 he pursued some refined difference of principle with his friend Fortescue over middle-class schooling, and offered to resign his prebendal stall in Exeter cathedral because Fortescue's father had helped to obtain it for him forty years earlier.⁶

But Brereton was in fact always guilty of a selfishness over money which only his vast powers of self-delusion could represent as honourable. He never learned to live within his means; thus over the eight years 1854-61 he overspent his income of £1350 by £600 a year, much of it on investment schemes that yielded little.⁷ He often borrowed large sums from friends and relatives, but repaying them dragged on for decades. Fortescue lent him £5000 in 1862; for twenty years Brereton made no repayment, and then in part-settlement gave Fortescue £500 of liability shares on which his friend was soon forced to pay a further £1150. Borrowing another £5000 from his brother, Brereton covered the debt with insurances, but left Fortescue to pay the premiums.⁸

An intelligent and creative man, Brereton was a scholar at University College, Oxford, and gained the Newdigate prize in 1844 (the year after Matthew Arnold won it) with a poem on the battle of the Nile.⁹ But hopes of high honours were disappointed owing to ill-health. He took holy orders and from 1847 to 1850 held curacies in Norwich and London, throwing himself into pastoral duties with his habitual energy. He had mixed feelings about large cities, however, and his poem 'London' (a laboured striving to emulate Samuel Johnson) shows him as oppressed by its heterogeneity and uncontrollable pulse:¹⁰

'Yet whence shall Reason come, or Faith be given,
London, thy mass of living lies to leaven?
City of wonders! midst thy madd'ning din,
Is doubt delusion? - unbelief a sin?
Can thought encompass such incongruous throngs?
Can conscience separate the rights from wrongs?
The gaping rustics wonder as they view, -
Philosopher! go gape and wonder too!

Great without grandeur, parts without a whole,
A giant body but no giant soul, -'

Moreover, his illness demanded a healthier location. In 1851 he moved to Paignton, supporting himself by taking private pupils; he closed their Sunday with Arnold's prayer. As so often, underlying impetuosity kept breaking in. At twenty-nine, with precarious health and uncertain prospects, he became engaged to the seventeen year old daughter of a local clergyman. Both families were dismayed, but shortly before his wedding in 1852 influence procured him a living, West Buckland on the slopes of Exmoor.¹¹ He stayed there for fifteen years, till he succeeded his father as rector of Little Massingham in 1867.

In West Buckland, it is clear, Brereton enjoyed the most contented and productive period of his life. Its remote and desolate beauty attracted him¹² and its invigorating winds improved his health. Local society was hierarchical, comprising great landowners, small farmers and agricultural labourers, and was similar to the one he had known in his formative years in Norfolk. In its permanence and intimacy a world apart from London, it gave him an assured and dominant position, enabling him to become the vigilant pastor whom his father had pictured as the exemplary Anglican clergyman in the pamphlets he wrote in Joseph's childhood. The problems of his isolated community - ignorance and agricultural backwardness - aroused his active paternalism; his vitality and breadth are shown by two large parochial yearbooks he compiled, with deftly instructive articles on sinfulness, cricket and the best way to manage poultry. The elementary school was enlarged, a new road constructed, a railway lured near, and an agricultural show begun. Brereton was an agricultural enthusiast, labouring to introduce steam traction engines to local farms; on his own land he bred prize sheep and lost his own and his friend Fortescue's money.¹³

A photograph taken in middle age shows Brereton at the centre of his family, his wife and many of his eleven children,¹⁴ clustered about him in submissive posture. His saturnine handsome face dominates the scene. But like so many Victorian males Brereton lacked the equilibrium needed to sustain the role of patriarch. Much of his enormous psychic energy was poured into a close, volatile and tempestuous friendship with Hugh, third Earl Fortescue, (1818-1905)¹⁵ whom he met in Devon in the 1850s. Its nature - its tears, quarrels and generous reconciliations - may be seen in a letter written by Fortescue in 1884.¹⁶

'Though I thought it better that all *controversial* correspondence between us should cease, lest it should imperil the continuance of our long and intimate friendship, I cannot let a post pass without assuring you how much touched I have been by your letter received this morning. If, as you say in it, my friendship has been by you "cherished for years with real respect and affection", & if "you cannot ever believe my heart will really be hardened against so old a friend", do not think that your eyes alone have been moistened in mourning over that friendship and what has recently befallen it; over it being now sadly (I shall always consider unnecessarily) shaken, but I cannot bring myself to write shattered and gone. To me that friendship I am sure (not less than you say it has been to you) for years has been as the "salt of my soul".'

Brereton had a child's capacity to enslave the affections of those whose patience he endlessly tormented. His family and Fortescue remained unswervingly loyal. Only two of his daughters married, the curt dismissal of one suitor revealing Brereton's willingness to sacrifice his family for middle-class education: 'No, I need her for the work, Mr Thompson'.¹⁷ Yet it suited Brereton's pronounced martyr's streak to see life in adversarial terms. At sixty-three, when Cavendish was enjoying its nearest approach to success and Brereton was receiving more trust than most frail temperaments are given, he wrote in his poem 'Wind and Tide':¹⁸

'Such has life been to me, a countering tide
Of silent opposition, not without
Friendship and favour that with grateful pride
My swelling sails have cherished, bulging out
And pressing onward still with purpose stout,
Straight steering to the haven of my choice.
And now have time and patience brought about
Signs of a change, and here and there a voice
Of some opponent cheering makes my heart rejoice.'

In long conversations he had with Fortescue from the 1850s onwards Brereton elaborated his ideas on 'middle-class' education. They did not so much develop as move in orbits round fixed points; it is typical that Brereton published three works all called *County Education*. In thinking of the needs of the middle class, Brereton had in mind the large group between labourers looking to the elementary school for their children, and the tiny upper class able to afford the handful of public schools available in mid-century. He declared that Thomas Arnold had inspired him 'to cherish the hope (like "a beam in darkness") that I might do something myself towards the solution of this problem'.¹⁹ Also encouraged by Arnold's attitudes was Brereton's constant desire that his educational ventures should exemplify a Broad Churchmanship stressing underlying Protestant unity. At the same time, he inherited several of his essential principles from his father. Charles Brereton hated indiscriminate poor law doles that pauperised the labourer: Joseph also revered the notion of 'self-support', advancing in his educational schemes a variety of expedients to ensure that people paid for what they got. He also believed that the safeguarding of manly independence was best undertaken by ancient agencies, like the counties, under the leadership of their principal inhabitants; he averred that he owed to his father 'the firm persuasion' that the improvement of middle-class education 'with many other civil blessings, might find its best source and stay in the restored life of our local and ancestral institutions, in the parishes and counties of England'.²⁰ He was no more interested in the creation of modern representative bodies than his father had been in the 1820s, and attributed far more vitality to his version of localism than in fact it possessed.

He loathed State intervention and fought a vain rearguard action against it, seeing it as a threat to both the 'county' and 'self-support'. Brereton had no interest in the city, no knowledge of its problems necessitating State intervention, nor of the possibilities held out by popular movements away from the

subdued and deferential countryside. Like his father, who had hated the erosion of the clergyman's role at the centre of the village polity, he was essentially a rural paternalist; many of his ideas were merely attempts at generalising from his own vague desires to do good - to offer education to those without it. His instinctive vision of society was hierarchical, with schools which were carefully graded for different layers and did not disturb the status quo very greatly. Yet he took from Thomas Arnold a considerable respect for one instrument by which since the last century the status quo has been very much altered: he valued competitive examinations as a test of merit and a stimulus to effort, and was one of the founders of the Oxford Local Examinations in the 1850s. Characteristically, Brereton never resolved this antinomy between the ideas of his father and his headmaster; he seems indeed not to have been conscious of it, and to have thrown far more energy into setting up his schools than into deciding what was their profound purpose: as so often with Brereton, activity was self-validating. His intellectual muddle is revealed by lines in his poem 'London':

'Let education teach with rising aim
That manual labour is not menial shame;
That trained by art the dexterous workman brings
Beauty to grace the use of common things.
Let honour's meed to handicraft be given -
A quickening taste the coarser lump will leaven -
The artisan will cease to be despised,
And mere gentility will less be prized.'

But it continues:

'And yet, ye workmen, do not think with scorn
On those around you who are gently born ...
Evil for England will be found the day
That sweeps respect for ancestry away.'²¹

Given Brereton's background and tastes, it was natural that it was the needs of farmers that specially concerned him, and it was to serve them that he founded two boys' schools in Devon and Norfolk. The first survives, though in the last century its hold on life was feeble; Norfolk died in 1891. It was Brereton's singular misfortune to address himself to the class least interested in education and in the agricultural depression of the 1880s and 90s least able anyway to pay for it. Still, with hopes as yet undimmed, Brereton turned about 1880 to girls' education, contemplating a pattern of schools for girls of different ages. He had difficulty in raising funds because his fecklessness was now well known, but his dreams were grandiose, one doodle concerning a plan to raise £1,000,000 in 5,000 shares.²² In 1884 the Graduated County Schools Association was formed, and within two years nine schools, scattered from Darlington to Taunton, were in its net. Very needlessly, its accounts were centralised in London and Brereton was in virtually unfettered control. His faults of personality were much aggravated by a rail crash he was involved in in 1882; spending a great deal of time and money travelling the land on association business, Brereton made no proper settlement for the cash he received on its affairs; by February 1886 he owed it £1700. His personal finances were in desperate condition, and Brereton undoubtedly borrowed association money for private purposes; he was living dangerously from hand to mouth and risking a conviction for fraud.²³ Meanwhile, pupil numbers did not expand. By the end of 1886 the association had very little ready cash but debts totalling over £16,000.²⁴ In July 1887 Fosters' Cambridge bank forced the GCSA into liquidation, ignoring Brereton's claim that only another £10,000 would suffice to put the schools on their feet. He wrote:

'The "GCSA" was *not* a speculative undertaking, but the outcome of the work of a life; the result of much thought and experience. As founder and active chairman of three other successful Educational Associations all on similar principles I was able to give to the Graduated advantages which ensured its success. Its ruin has been the result of neglect of my instructions, opposition to my deliberate advice, and scandalous combinations to tie my hands and blind my eyes.'²⁵

But to Brereton's son Fortescue wrote that his father was guilty of 'unwise haste in embarking on fresh ventures before the capital, which he was always too sanguinely counting upon, had actually come in - in short want of calm judgment and prudence'.²⁶ In the same month Cavendish College was afflicted by a similar crisis.

II

'Ye seats of learning, haunts of knowledge,
 That dignify the name of College,
 Sifting true culture from pretence
 By academic residence;
 Within your circle deign to grant
 Place for a modest debutante!
 Though some among you will insist
 That Downing has made up your list,
 For ever to remain the last
 Unrival'd outcome of the past;
 Others perhaps may think that ground
 Within your precincts has been found,
 If not than Downing College nigher
 At all events a little higher;
 Indeed upon the highest spot
 Where Cam's effluvium reaches not.
 There where the road that seeks the hills
 With its best view the prospect fills,
 There, offering with ingenuous truth
 A healthy home for studious youth,
 Stands the new claimant for a place
 Within your circle, - by your grace.'²⁷

Thus did Brereton's facile and uncritical pen record the climax of his educational career, the opening of Cavendish College in 1877. In the 1850s Brereton envisaged County Colleges as complements to his county schools, for boys of fifteen and over; they would be controlled by leading inhabitants of the county and would award 'county degrees', of a lower standard than most English bachelor's degrees. He described his ideal county college as filling 'the gap that now exists between the training college at Exeter and Balliol College at Oxford'.²⁸ By the 1870s Brereton had in mind new colleges in the ancient universities, but retained the notion of their awarding sub-degree qualifications. His approach to Oxford came to nothing. Some Oxford dons disliked his Broad Church notions. Some were puzzled by his desire to place a sort of school for older boys in a university town where undergraduates might be a bad influence on them.²⁹ The Cambridge plan produced Cavendish College.

In the third quarter of the century Cambridge was changing rapidly. Academic standards rose, as intellectual merit counted more in the appointment of fellows. A new idea of the teacher penetrated the University. Scholarships were thrown open to talent and no longer confined to select schools. Religious tests were abolished. Residence was cheapened by the admission of non-collegiate students. Dons took their scholarship to a wide audience in the extension movement. Thus Brereton proposed his scheme to a university rapidly developing, and sympathetic to innovation.³⁰

Brereton envisaged a college run on the proprietary principle. Capital was to be attracted by the prospect of dividends, though these would be limited to 5 per cent to ensure the public and non-speculative nature of the venture; Brereton believed that this example of the 'self-supporting' principle would be good for the University as a whole. Students might enter at fifteen, after success in the Junior Local Examinations; residence in the college for one year, and success in the Senior Locals, would be rewarded by a certificate which Brereton hoped might be entitled the 'County Degree' - an idea that the University did not countenance. Students staying longer might take the B.A. at eighteen or nineteen, two years younger than normal. By keeping costs low Brereton thus hoped to open university education and the professions to men from the lower middle class previously deterred from entering them by the length and cost of training. In addition, he contributed to the current debate about the possibilities of training secondary-school teachers. Ardently wishing the universities rather than the State to undertake this training, Brereton hoped that it would be a special function of the county college; he thought of combining educational theory with teaching practice in local schools.³¹

In the spring of 1873 an association was formed to carry the plans into effect. A temporary college for a handful of students was opened in Norwich House, Panton Street.³² In 1877 the College moved to its



Norwich House, Pantton Street, 1984 – the first home of Breerton's County College. (Photographed by Mr Don Manning).

Plate 2

permanent buildings, on ten acres in the Hills Road bought from Trinity College.³³ The location was remote, more than one mile from Petty Cury and on the rural side of the railway track. The red brick vaguely Gothic buildings of Cavendish were the first development in the area; their architects were Giles and Gough, who had previously designed the Norfolk County School for Brereton. A splendidly detailed picture of the college had been published in Brereton's *County Education* (1874), but it is typical of the perpetual contrast between his dreams and the reality that the structure proved to be much less grand than the prediction. Cavendish lacked many amenities, including the traditional focus of the Cambridge college, the hall, and this startling omission was only made good towards the end of its life.

The name Brereton suggested, Arnold College, was not taken up, the College being named after the largest shareholder, William Cavendish, seventh Duke of Devonshire and Chancellor of the University, and also of course the benefactor of the University's physics laboratory. For Brereton's venture he subscribed £1,000 of the £12,000 taken in shares up to the end of 1877.³⁴

As chairman of the directors Brereton had considerable power, but he lacked the virtually unfettered discretion he enjoyed in his girls' schools association, since the directors included notables from the University and the locality, the Speaker of the Commons, and F.W. Farrar, Dean of Canterbury. Samuel Morley, the Congregationalist politician and philanthropist, was carefully added to demonstrate the College's religious inclusiveness. It had an Anglican chaplain and worship, but its tone was Broad Church and stressed Protestant unity, while Nonconformists could claim exemption from attendance at chapel. The college was planned on the proprietary principle, a dividend of 5 per cent being expected. Costs were very carefully worked out, apparently by Brereton himself; students were charged £84 a year, from which it was thought that £40 would suffice for board in the college year of 35 (later 32) weeks, £30 would pay for tuition and university fees, and £14 be left for interest on capital, and a reserve fund. These figures however were calculated on a total of 300 students, a number never realised. Brereton estimated that a college for 300 would require £54,000 in capital. But in fact only £24,000 was subscribed in shares, and rooms were built for only about 100 students.³⁵ This was a severe financial handicap, making the original costings wildly over-optimistic.

From early in 1877 students were living and working together in Cavendish. There was a full-time warden, T.J. Lawrence, a lawyer from Downing College, aged 27. He received a stipend of £500 a year and a house allowance pending completion of his official residence. But like many other dons Lawrence soon discovered a distaste for administrative tasks, and he resigned in March 1877.³⁶ He was succeeded by John Cox, who had been ninth wrangler in 1874 and elected a fellow of Trinity in 1876. Cox was warden of Cavendish for ten years. While his later career as professor of physics at McGill University, Montreal, was successful, his record at Cavendish was patchy. His teaching was good, but he was thought to be too easy-going and lenient with students who misbehaved, while in days of rapid postal deliveries and no telephones his failure promptly to answer letters brought criticism.³⁷ Cox perhaps bears some marginal responsibility for Cavendish's eventual collapse, and he resigned in the crisis of August 1887. His successor was J.H. Flather, a classics graduate of Emmanuel who had worked under Cox as tutor and bursar. It was his melancholy task in the next four years to preside over the College's agonised decline.³⁸ Besides the wardens there were several tutors, sharing the heavy burden of teaching intensively Cavendish's young students in a long academic year. Part-time teachers were also employed, the young J.J. Thomson (later Master of Trinity) being one of them for a time; he lectured at Cavendish on three mornings a week soon after he graduated in 1880.³⁹

Cavendish was not in fact a university college in the proper sense: the University regarded it at first as a lodging-house for non-collegiate students. Then in 1882 and 1883 Cavendish and Selwyn became the first public hostels - a new sort of institution, recognised by the University as possessing a corporate identity though still lacking the power and status of a college.⁴⁰ Cavendish students became undergraduates. But nothing came of Brereton's idea that some students might enter at fifteen and read for the Senior Locals; schoolmasters disliked the notion of losing their promising older pupils, and the University did not wish schoolboys and young men to mix. Even so, Cavendish students, often admitted at sixteen, were younger than those at other colleges. Most took Ordinary degrees, their youth deterring them from Honours.⁴¹

As to the social background of the Cavendish students and the occupations they took up, it is hard to reach firm conclusions because of the cryptic and partial quality of the evidence. The least indefinite sources relate to the previous education of Cavendish students, and a comparison is offered in Table I between the educational backgrounds of Cavendish and other Cambridge undergraduates. For

Cavendish details of schooling have been obtained by collating the 358 names in a manuscript list of Cavendish students with entries in Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*. Cavendish is compared with five colleges which have published lists of members, and details of men matriculating between 1876 and 1890 have been drawn from these lists. In the table students are placed in four groups according to the hierarchy of status recently devised for Victorian schools by John Honey. The second column contains the percentage from the 22 most highly esteemed schools - the ancient Great Schools and the Victorian creations like Clifton and Marlborough often ranked with them. The next two columns comprise the percentages from successively less esteemed groups of public schools, and column five includes students from schools not ranked as 'public' at all, or educated privately or abroad.

Table I: Matriculants in Cambridge Colleges, 1876-1890: their Previous Schooling

	1 Total of Matriculants	2 % from 22 leading public schools	3 % from 42 lesser public schools	4 % from 100 fringe public schools	5 % from other schools educated privately or abroad	6 % schooling not known
Cavendish	358	12 (42)	12.5 (45)	7 (25)	11 (40)	57.5 (206)
Caius	881	30 (266)	19 (169)	18.5 (162)	30.5 (267)	2 (17)
Christ's	713	21 (152)	16 (112)	21 (152)	38 (270)	4 (27)
King's	416	54 (223)	15 (64)	8 (34)	21 (88)	2 (7)
Peterhouse	400	16 (65)	19 (77)	21 (84)	40 (159)	4 (15)
Trinity	2740	68 (1871)	8 (214)	8.5 (229)	14 (386)	1.5 (40)

Notes

- (1) The numbers in brackets are of the matriculants in question
- (2) For the categories of school referred to in columns 2, 3, and 4 see John Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe* (1977) 264-270
- (3) Details of matriculants have been taken from the following sources:
 MS list of Cavendish College students in the library of Fitzwilliam College
 John Venn, *Biographical History of Gonville and Caius College 1349-1897*, Cambridge 1898
 John Peile, *Biographical Register of Christ's College 1505-1905*, Cambridge 1913
 J.J. Withers, *A Register of Admissions to King's College Cambridge 1797-1925*, London 1929
 T.A. Walker, *Admissions to Peterhouse 1615-1911*, Cambridge 1912
 W.W. Rouse Ball and J.A. Venn, editors, *Admissions to Trinity College, Cambridge, 1851-1900*, London 1913
 J.A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, Part II, 1752-1900, 6 vols, Cambridge, 1940-1954

The comparison makes clear the enormous variation in students' educational backgrounds between one Cambridge college and another. At one extreme 68 per cent of Trinity men came from the 22 leading schools, while the corresponding figure for Peterhouse was only 16 per cent. Comparison between Cavendish and the other colleges is difficult, partly because of the high proportion of its students, 57 per cent, whose educational background is not known. Nevertheless, it is likely that we have the names of almost all Cavendish men educated at the leading schools, whose printed registers make their pupils traceable. The figures suggest, therefore, that Cavendish students tended to come from less exalted schools than those at other colleges. But the gap between Cavendish and Peterhouse or Christ's was not dramatic; while Cavendish was at one end of a very wide spectrum, other colleges were placed close to it. Thus the comparison implies that the College did not represent a radically new departure in the social composition of Cambridge undergraduates.

This conclusion is confirmed by evidence of the socio-economic status of its entrants. Analysis of the occupations of Cavendish students' fathers indicates that early entrants were mostly from professional backgrounds. In 1881 the origins of the first 142 students were listed; 62 were from medical families, 18 from 'mercantile', and 9 from legal. There were 23 sons of clergymen, 10 of 'gentlemen', 7 of schoolmasters, and 5 of farmers, while 8 came in ones and twos from backgrounds described as 'literary', 'engineer', or 'civil servants'.⁴² Especially notable in these figures is the very high proportion of doctors'

sons, perhaps explained by their desire to begin as soon as possible the long training needed if they were to follow their fathers' profession. At the same time, the landowning class was much less heavily represented than it seems to have been in the University as a whole.⁴³ Nevertheless, these 142 were from groups traditionally present at the University, and were in class terms not unlike the entry for Sidney Sussex, a small unaristocratic college, for the same period.⁴⁴

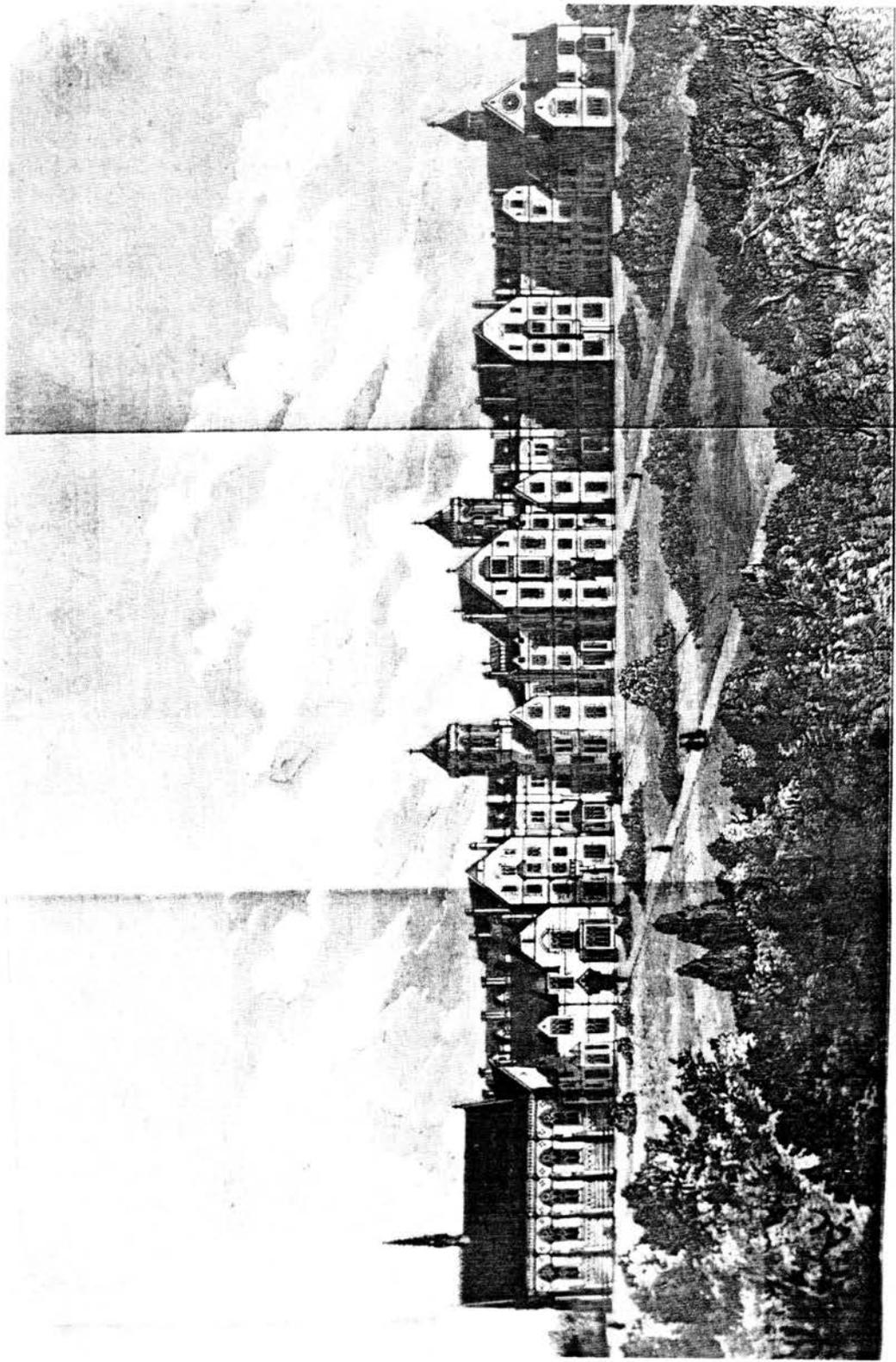
It is noteworthy that there were very few sons of farmers, a group that Brereton specially wished to recruit: 'To a farmer's family, (he wrote) access to higher education must be the greatest boon, not only because the art of agriculture itself urgently demands higher qualifications in those who follow it, but also, because all other honourable callings in life are more and more expecting a higher standard of education in all who can reasonably hope to prosper'.⁴⁵ Among these early entrants another group largely unresponsive to Brereton's publicity were business families, which tended to send a few sons to Oxford and Cambridge in Victorian times. By 1886, however, it seems that the College had gained more recruits from them. Among the 281 entrants then on the books there were 64 sons of businessmen, though this modest success did not by any means satisfy the college's hopes.⁴⁶ Nor does it alter the strong overall impression that in social composition Cavendish's entry did not break radically new ground.

A similar conclusion is reached by comparing graduates from Cavendish and other colleges with respect to the occupations they took up. The 358 names in the list of Cavendish members have been checked against their entries in Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*. He records a profession for 251, just over 70 per cent; the careers of 30 per cent are unknown, as against 16 per cent for the sample drawn on by Jenkins and Jones in 1950 for their study of the socio-economic background of Cambridge students; perhaps this doubling reflects the greater proportion of humble occupations amongst Cavendish graduates, as distinct from the generality of Cambridge alumni. Of that 251, 36 per cent became Anglican clergymen (and one per cent clergymen in other Protestant denominations), 28 per cent doctors, 13 per cent schoolmasters, 14 per cent solicitors or barristers, and 2 per cent army officers. Six per cent took up a miscellany of other jobs - some of them very varied, as in the case of Albert Foweraker, who became successively a demonstrator in chemistry at Exeter Technical College, an engineer, a journalist, and a landscape painter. These figures are very similar to those for the Jenkins and Jones general sample - apart from Cavendish's producing four times the usual percentage of doctors, and apparently no landowners.

Very few are known to have become businessmen or farmers, one of the two farmers being William Page (an emigrant to the North-West Territories of Canada who was frozen to death in bed). This tiny number is consistent with the findings of Jenkins and Jones, but it points to the difficulty (perhaps often not appreciated) of using Venn to trace men in some occupations. Venn was able to find members of the clerical, legal and medical professions among Cambridge alumni; accurate registers exist of these callings, and eventually men in them were often given an obituary in *The Times*. But the names of minor businessmen or farmers are much less easily traced; they may well be among the 30 per cent of the Cavendish entry for which no occupations could be discovered. Nevertheless, despite all necessary reservations it is possible to conclude that Cavendish does not seem to signify a spectacular new departure in Cambridge.

If Cavendish did not break new ground its failure is more difficult to explain. Did the College not possess enough amenities to attract students? Certainly, life could be pleasant at Cavendish. Its surrounding were leafy, and playing fields and a cycle track were laid out in the grounds. The college boat was successful on the river. One ex-student, the journalist Will Saunders, recounted in 1885 his enjoyment of 'almost all the sports of flood and field', and his active membership of the Cambridge Union.⁴⁷ But unfortunately the College was not attractive to enough students or shareholders, and the story is one of eventual decline and collapse. The puzzle is hard to solve, since although contemporaries anguished greatly over the cash crisis which was failure's most obvious symptom, they said little about its underlying causes.

But Cavendish just did not attract a new clientele to higher education. Its unique eagerness to admit students at sixteen was discounted by its modest degree results. Its liberty of conscience to Nonconformists gave no more than other Cambridge colleges after the University Tests Act of 1871; it did not arouse Dissenters' enthusiasm, when London and the civic colleges provided total religious freedom without hint of condescension. Brereton's Broad Churchmanship seemed bold in the Devon of 1850, but nothing to enthuse over in Cambridge thirty years later. On the other hand unlike Selwyn (a more successful new foundation) Cavendish did not offer a sufficiently affirmative Anglicanism to



J. L. BRERETON ARCHT. 1874

THE COUNTY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

The original design for Cavendish College, from J. L. Brereton, *County Education* (1874).

Plate 3

attract a group increasingly in need of special provision in a university with a novel and self-confident secular ethos. Many members of the middle classes which Brereton regarded as his constituency are likely to have found the rapidly growing newer universities more suitable. They offered an easier entry for many, since they did not demand the qualification in Greek that was required by Oxbridge and was so great a bugbear for boys from second-rank schools. They were cheaper and more accessible for inhabitants of the large cities where they were located.

Still, a Cavendish education was cheap. College fees were £84 a year, and Will Saunders, the journalist mentioned earlier, claimed it was possible to manage on £110 for all purposes. This compared with £150 for a frugal undergraduate at an older college, who stayed up for the longer year as at Cavendish. But a non-collegiate student might live in comparative comfort for £80, and the meagre subsistence that £50 a year gave him would not perhaps be much less agreeable than Cavendish.⁴⁸ No other college was so comfortless. Its rooms were so small that a special narrow bed had to be manufactured. (It was patented.) No proper hall, chapel, library, kitchen, cellars and larder were built in Brereton's time. Makeshift and inadequate premises served these purposes; meals appear to have been poor. The warden's report in 1886 said: 'At present the College suffers from the want of all those principal features... which arouse the sense of dignity and pride in the members of other foundations, and in an inexplicable but very real way, by symbolising the common life, call forth and foster *esprit de corps*'.⁴⁹ Perhaps as important was the college's remoteness from the city-centre, and the introverted university society nestling around it. The only other college as distant was Girton, serving its special need.

Not surprisingly, students migrated to other colleges; 71 out of the first 281 did so. Numbers in residence crept up slowly, from 16 in 1877 to 96 in October 1883 - the high point in the College's history, after its designation as a public hostel. Migrations ceased for a period, and for the first time there was a shortage of accommodation. For some years third-year students had been allowed two rooms each; this privilege was now rescinded, and migration resumed. By 1887 the number in residence fell to 54.⁵⁰ The College was in a vicious circle of poverty. Its original costings assumed 300 students in residence, but it did not attract enough capital to build more than one hundred bedrooms, or enough students even to fill those. Indebtedness grew steadily. Between 1877 and 1883 there were deficits every year, amounting for example in 1881 to £1200, or over £15 per student.⁵¹ By July 1887 there was a mortgage of £20,000 on the College buildings; £4,000 were owed to Fosters' bank in Cambridge, and another £3,000 to tradesmen and college tutors. Apart from buildings, the only asset was £1,000 in arrears of fees, not all of them collectable.⁵²

It was obvious that bankruptcy for Cavendish was held off by the forbearance of creditors. Brereton offered to carry on the College as a personal venture at four-fifths of the students' fees, the balance to be applied to discharging debts. Since all his properties and insurances were mortgaged, his bank overdraft stood at £1,300, and he had himself contributed to Cavendish's debt by failing to pay the fees for his sons' education there, his offer was declined by the other directors. It was believed that fresh capital, if used to build the amenities Cavendish lacked, might give it a new start, but to raise it the pretence at the 'commercial' principle had to be dropped.⁵³ A meeting of directors and dons in Trinity Lodge (to which Brereton was not invited) devised a new association to assume the liabilities and functions of Cavendish but dropping the idea of paying dividends; the Duke of Devonshire and Fosters' bank each offered the new body £5,000 - rarely has a bank been so forgiving and beneficent.⁵⁴ Brereton, deeply wounded by the flouting of his person and principles, complained of the 'clandestine' nature of the negotiations, and the abandonment of the commercial basis and the shareholders. If the proprietary principle was discouraged, he predicted that middle-class education would become dependent on State support.⁵⁵ But Cavendish's history showed that the proprietary principle could not raise enough capital, while the shareholders who received his sympathy had never received dividends, and their shares were of little value. Fortescue gently reproved his old friend. In his succinct reply Brereton referred to the Fortescue family motto: 'You are fortifying your shield. It needs to be strong, for it has to cover not only your own safety but your desertion of the friend you have left to the mercy of traitors and plunderers. For myself I prefer to hold by the motto of my own family - *Opitulante Deo*'.⁵⁶ Brereton returned to the parish he had so often abandoned, spending his declining years encumbered by recrimination, regret and monstrous debts which his family had not paid off at the outbreak of the Second World War.

Meanwhile in the next four years a hall and kitchens were built at Cavendish, by a new association in which Brereton took no part. But Cavendish still failed to attract enough students to make ends meet; the annual deficit ranged from £1,200 to £1,800. It closed in the summer of 1892,⁵⁷ and was sold to



Part of the 'Cavendish' buildings of Homerton College, 1984. The hall is on the left. On the right-hand gable are the arms of the Cavendish and Brereton families, to the left and right respectively. (Photographed by Mr Don Manning).

Homerton College in 1894. Although his supporters must share responsibility for the mistakes of Cavendish, Brereton must be given the greatest blame as originator and leading spirit. It suffered from its remote position, grandiose unpracticality, and vagueness of purpose. Selwyn succeeded because it was more centrally placed, and planned with prudence to be a small but balanced community which could grow naturally; though modest, it did at least have a proper kitchen, and it served a specific and tangible social group. By contrast, Cavendish did not appeal forcefully to anybody. It reflected a vigorous and colourful mind which had unsure contact with the world it hoped to gratify.

Colleges are by definition corporate enterprises, the result of collective vision and inspiration, with all that that implies by way of creative ambiguity of aim and purpose. In contrast, Cavendish was an intensely personal statement - individual, narrow, and without the capacity for growth. Beneath the sombre Gothic mask of Cavendish College, the face of Joseph Lloyd Brereton peers through.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was read to the Society for the Study of the History of the University of Cambridge in November 1980. I am most grateful for the comments and suggestions of friends, particularly Anne Digby and Felicity Hunt.
2. Homerton College, Cambridge: Brereton Papers B8006, Brereton to the Bishop of Norwich, 22 March 1873. Leave was granted.
3. Brereton Papers, B7106, P.H.L. Brereton, Biography of J.L. Brereton, 1822-1858 (typescript).
4. J.L. Brereton, 'Dr. Arnold of Rugby', *Lynn Advertiser*, 9 November 1895, from which the quotations that follow are taken.
5. Brereton Papers, B8013, Fortescue to Brereton, 23 March 1868.
6. *ibid.*, Fortescue to Brereton, 25 September 1899.
7. Brereton Papers, Fortescue letters, Brereton to Ebrington, 6 December 1861.
8. *ibid.*, B8013, Fortescue to Brereton, 30 March 1885, 8 February 1886, 20 September 1887.
9. J.L. Brereton, *Musings in Faith* (Cambridge, 1885), 81-90.
10. *ibid.*, 65.
11. Brereton Papers, B7106, P.H.L. Brereton's memoir of JLB, p. 10.
12. *West Buckland Year Book, and Kalendar* (South Molton, 1857), 31.
13. *West Buckland Year Book, and Kalendar* (London, 1860), 92-5. Brereton Papers, B8012, Fortescue to Brereton, 4 October 1864; B8013, Fortescue to Brereton, 12 March 1874.
14. Five others died in infancy. The photograph is in the possession of J.L. Brereton's grandson, Mr John Brereton of Little Massingham. (Plate 1).
15. Until he succeeded his father in 1861 he was Viscount Ebrington. Fortescue was M.P. for Plymouth, 1841-52 and Marylebone, 1854-9. He was Secretary to the Poor Law Board 1847-51 and held a number of official posts till his health was impaired in 1856. He wrote pamphlets on health, official salaries, and public schools.
16. Brereton Papers, B8013, Fortescue to Brereton, 22 May 1884.
17. From a letter written by Mr H.L. Brereton to the author, 13 July 1977.
18. *Musings in Faith*, 134.
19. J.L. Brereton, 'Dr. Arnold of Rugby', *Lynn Advertiser*, 9 November 1895. A more detailed account of Brereton's educational ideas and the schools he founded is P. Searby, 'Joseph Lloyd Brereton and the Education of the Victorian Middle Class', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, xi, i, January 1979.
20. J.L. Brereton, "County Education." *A letter addressed to the Right Hon. the Earl of Devon* (London, 1861), 1-2.
21. *Musings in Faith*, 76-77.
22. Brereton Papers, B5005/2, Prospectus of the Parents' Union.
23. *ibid.*, B5031, Brereton's account with GCSA; B5046, C. Martin to Frank Brereton, April 1885 (2 letters).
24. Brereton Papers B5034, GCSA balance sheet, 31 December 1886.
25. *ibid.*, B5041, MS notes of Brereton's speech; B5043/1, Memorandum by Brereton, 15 August 1887.
26. *ibid.*, B8013, Fortescue to Frank Brereton, 27 August 1887.
27. 'A Plea for Cavendish College', *Musings in Faith*, 107-110. The poem was written in 1881.
28. *Schools Inquiry Commission. Minutes of Evidence*, Part II: P.P. 1867-8, XXVIII, Part IV, [3966-IV], p. 133.
29. Brereton Papers, B2002, J. Lee Warner to Brereton, 9 January 1873; B2004 and 2005, H.G. Liddell to Brereton, 1 and 17 February 1873.
30. J.P.C. Roach, ed., *Victoria History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely*, iii (London, 1959), 253-65. S. Rothblatt, *The Revolution of the Dons* (London, 1968), 181-247.
31. J.L. Brereton, *County Education* (1874), 40-65. Brereton Papers, B4115, Printed Prospectus for County College, 1875. *Cambridge Independent Press*, 19 April 1873. Some Cavendish students attended the lectures on education given in Cambridge from 1879 onwards, but Brereton's teaching-practice hopes were disappointed because only the Norfolk County School was willing to co-operate: Brereton Papers, B8013, Fortescue to Brereton, 25 May 1882.
32. Between 1877 and 1880 Norwich House was leased from Brereton by Henry Sidgwick on behalf of the Association for Promoting the Higher Education of Women in Cambridge, the founders of Newnham College; Norwich House was their temporary hostel. In the 1880s it was the home of a university hostel for women founded by Brereton to crown the GCSA. Norwich House (which still stands) thus has the unique distinction of having housed three colleges. (Plate 2).
33. Another thirteen acres were later leased from Trinity.

34. Brereton Papers, B4125, Report of the Directors, 1877.
35. J.L. Brereton, 'Cavendish College. An Experiment in University Extension', *Contemporary Review*, xxxiii (September, 1878), 361-75. Brereton Papers, B4150, Report of the Directors for 1887.
36. Brereton Papers, B4605/77/1. T.J. Lawrence to Trustees of Cavendish College, 7 March 1877. Lawrence later became lecturer in international law at the Royal Naval College, and reader at Bristol University.
37. *ibid.*, B8013, Fortescue to Brereton, 11 April 1881, 3 July 1882, 12 May 1887.
38. Flather later became secretary to the Local Examinations Syndicate.
39. J.J. Thomson, *Recollections and reflections* (London, 1936), 78-9.
40. *Cambridge University Reporter* (1882-3), 85-9, 157.
41. Brereton Papers, B4701/18, S.S. Lewis to Brereton, 17 June 1873; B4710, R.B. Somerset to Brereton, 19 January 1877; B4147, Warden's Report, 29 January 1886.
42. *ibid.*, B4135, Report and Balance Sheet, June 1881.
43. H. Jenkins and D. Caradog Jones, 'Social Class of Cambridge University Alumni of the 18th and 19th Centuries', *British Journal of Sociology*, i (1950), 99.
44. S. Rothblatt, *The Revolution of the Dons*, 280.
45. J.L. Brereton, 'The Advantages offered by Cavendish College, Cambridge, as bearing on the Education of Agriculturists', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, 2nd series, xiii (1877), 178.
46. Brereton Papers, B4147, Warden's Report, 29 January 1886.
47. Will. M. Saunders, 'Cavendish College, Cambridge'. *Cassell's Family Magazine* (1885), 300-302.
48. *Students' Guide to the University of Cambridge* (4th edition, 1882), 95-102, 121-3.
49. Brereton Papers, B4147, Warden's Report, 29 January 1886.
50. *ibid.*, B4150, Report of Directors, 1887.
51. *ibid.*, B4520, Costs of Cavendish College 1877-1884.
52. *ibid.*, B4726/1, F.A. Currey to Brereton, 3 August 1887.
53. *ibid.*, B8013, Fortescue to Brereton, 18 May, 26 July, 30 July and 27 August 1887; B5044/15, Richard Booth to Brereton, 25 July.
54. *ibid.*, B4726/4/1, John Cox to Brereton, 6 August 1887. *The Times*, 9 August 1887.
55. Brereton Papers, B4726, Brereton to Devonshire, 5 and 10 August 1887. *The Times*, 11 and 16 August.
56. Brereton Papers, B8013, Brereton to Fortescue, c. 1 August 1887.
57. *ibid.*, B4207, prospectus, March 1891. *The Times*, 16 November 1891.