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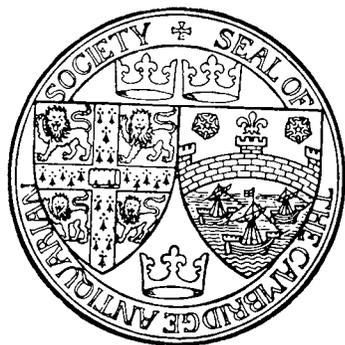
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ALMA MATER CANTABRIGIA: A DEVICE IN PRINT AND PLASTER

SUZANNE M. EWARD

The writing of this article has been prompted by the reprinting in 1986 of the Rev. H.P. Stokes's booklet *The Emblem, the Arms, & the Motto of the University of Cambridge*, which first appeared in 1928 for private circulation only.¹ In his booklet Stokes describes the different variations of a basic emblem and its accompanying motto which were used by the University printers as their device from c. 1600 to our own century.² It seems however that Stokes was unaware (because surely he would have mentioned it if he had known) of a rather unusual connection between the printer's device and an old house in the Cathedral Close at Gloucester. It is to be hoped that some reader of this article may be able to produce a reasonable explanation as to why this connection came about.

THE DEVICE

On 2 November 1588, John Legate, who was 'reported to be skilful in the art of printing books',³ was appointed Printer to the University of Cambridge in succession to Thomas Thomas. About 1609 he left Cambridge in order to live in London, and died in 1620. During his time as University Printer, Legate adopted his own personal device, to be displayed on the titlepages of books he printed. This was a common-enough convention. For example, William Caxton had used a trade-mark flanked by the letters *W* and *C*; the Estienne family, a philosopher standing under the Tree of Knowledge; Geofroy Tory,



Figure 1. Earliest known example of *Alma Mater*, in William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1600.

a broken vessel on a clasped book; Aldus Manutius, a dolphin and anchor; and Christopher Plantin, a compass on a book. Some, but not all, of these printers incorporated a motto with their pictorial device. Exactly when John Legate first used his own chosen device is not known, but as the earliest example so far found is in the popular theological writer William Perkins's *A*

1 Edited by Dr J.D. Pickles, Librarian of the CAS, who has a number of copies left.

2 Stokes illustrates the different variations, but does not give dates to all the examples he has discovered, which makes his booklet less useful than it might be. He is also perhaps too ready to

differentiate between the emblem itself, and the motto which accompanies it, when it seems more likely that the two were intended to be mutually complementary in order to make up the complete device.

3 *Dictionary of National Biography*.

Golden Chaine (Fig. 1), printed in 1600, that may well be the first instance of its use. Perkins was a fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, from 1584 to 1594. He must have been personally known to Legate, who printed a large number of his books, and indeed contributed a preface to his edition of Perkins's *Collected Works* of 1616–1618.

Legate used several variations of his chosen device, as did successive University printers after him, but the basic form is as follows. Within an ornamental oval frame is a square pedestal on which are printed the words 'Alma Mater Cantabrigia' (Cambridge our nursing mother). Arising from the pedestal is a three-quarter length nude female figure, with long flowing hair, and milk coming from her breasts. On her head is a wreath surmounted by a mural crown (the traditional symbol for personifying cities). She holds a sun in one hand, and in the other a cup or chalice into which drops are falling from a cloud. The figure is flanked on either side by a small tree, representing perhaps the tree of life and the tree of knowledge.⁴ On the oval frame are printed the words 'Hinc Lucem et Pocula Sacra' (Hence light and sacred draughts). The origin of these words has so far not been discovered. For a long time they were thought to be a quotation from some unidentified classical or renaissance Latin poet, a belief which led to a question being asked about their origin in the first number of *Notes and Queries* in 1849,⁵ and again in a later number in 1876.⁶ Stokes gives examples of the subsequent use of this 'motto' by such writers as Robert Leighton, Archbishop of Glasgow (1611–1684), but its origin has never been discovered, and it seems more than likely that it was composed specifically as part of the printer's device.⁷

The key to our interpretation of this parti-

cular design lies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' fascination with 'emblems', in the sense of an allegory or moral lesson being depicted by mutually interdependent words and pictures. This is evidenced by the fashionable emblem-books which reached the height of their vogue in about 1580. The device is intended as an emblematic representation of Cambridge depicting the University as the source of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment and sustenance. But the fact that Cambridge was thus symbolically represented as a nursing mother for the first time in 1600 may be not entirely unconnected with the fact that that was the year in which Legate's eldest son John (who was to succeed him as a printer) was born.⁸ The conceit of Cambridge as a fertile woman must soon have become well known, as is evidenced by Michael Drayton's long poem *Poly-Olbion*, which was first published in its complete form in 1622. In this, Drayton addresses his 'most beloved Towne' of Cambridge thus:

The woman's perfect shape, still be thy
emblem right,
Whose one hand holds a Cup, the other
bears a Light.

On the map of Cambridge which accompanies this section of the poem, the personification of Cambridge is portrayed pictorially, not on her pedestal, but striding along beside the river Granta, bearing her cup and sun, wearing her wreath and mural crown, and with flowing breasts (Fig. 2).

THE HOUSE

Further evidence that the device became well-known after its inception is shown by the

- 4 I am grateful to Dr Frank Stubbings of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, for this idea and for other suggestions about the device.
- 5 On 1 December 1849 J.J. Smith asked, 'From what author, "chapter and verse", comes the Motto of the University of Cambridge, *Hinc Lucem et Pocula Sacra*? It is used as a quotation in Leighton on St Peter's Epistle; but in the last edition the learned editor does not give a reference' (Stokes, p. 46).
- 6 On 14 October 1876 Professor J.E.B. Mayor asked, 'May I repeat the question often put, never answered – From what mediaeval poem does the

Motto *Hinc lucem et pocula sacra* come?' (Stokes, p. 48).

- 7 Dr Frank Stubbings writes, 'it is fair enough to ask whether it is a quotation, and if so from where. But it could just as well be composed *ad hoc* as a concise statement of the theme; and since diligent search has never found a source, I myself take that view.'
- 8 John Legate, the University Printer, married Alice Sheirs on 4 February 1589. Between 1590 and 1609 the couple had nine daughters and three sons (*D.N.B.*).



Figure 2. *Alma Mater* on the banks of the Granta, map in Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, 1622.

fact that it is depicted on an early-seventeenth-century plaster ceiling in a house in the Cathedral Close at Gloucester. The house is ancient and has an interesting history. It served originally as the monastic kitchen of the former Benedictine Abbey of St Peter, being situated on the north side of the monks' refectory, into which a door led from the north-west corner of the cloisters. Following the dissolution of the Abbey in 1540 King Henry VIII created a new diocese of Gloucester from what had been the large diocese of Worcester. The former Abbey Church became the Cathedral Church of the new diocese, and a Bishop, Dean, and Chapter were established there in 1541. Inevitably, the use of the former monastic kitchen changed. In the Henrician Statutes which were drawn up in 1544 special obligations and duties were laid on the Dean and Chapter, their ministers and other officers. Although the Dean and prebendaries were allowed to 'live apart with their several fami-

lies' and to dine at their own houses, the Statutes specifically enjoined that the minor canons, schoolmasters, master of the choristers, lay-clerks, choristers, and the 'inferior officers' (such as the janitors and sextons) were to feed together in the 'Common-Hall'. Therefore what had been the Monks' Refectory now became the Common Hall of the new community.

Among the statutory office-holders of the new foundation were a cook, an under-cook, and a butler. Meals for serving in the Common Hall were prepared by these people (or more likely by their deputies) in what had been the monastic kitchen, but which now became known as the 'Common Kitchen'. This arrangement does not seem to have lasted long, for the bachelor state of the minor canons and lay-clerks changed, and as the years went by it became the norm for them to be married men who preferred to dine at home with their families. The result of this was that through lack of use the Common Hall fell into disrepair, as is apparent by a question asked about its condition by Bishop Thomas Ravis at his Visitation of the Cathedral in 1605. By the year 1612 at the latest the Common Hall had either fallen or been pulled down; and so, because the Cathedral officers no longer dined there, meals were no longer prepared in the Common Kitchen which now became redundant. The Dean and Chapter therefore decided to let it.

On 27 April 1612, the first lease of the Common Kitchen ('*Communis Culina*', or the 'old kitchin', as it was variously referred to in the Chapter records), was granted to 'Symeon Wrenche the sonne of Elias Wrenche one of the Prebends of the Cathedral Church' for an annual rent of two shillings. Now this was curious, for Simeon Wrench was then only four years old, and was obviously too young to be able to undertake the responsibilities of a leaseholder or even to pay the rent by himself. However, Elias Wrench his father (a staunch supporter of William Laud) was Prebendary of the Second Stall, and the house allotted to successive prebendaries of the second stall was that adjoining the Common Kitchen on its east side.⁹ In the event of Elias's death the family would have had to vacate the preben-

9 Now known as Little Cloister House.



Plate 1. Jacobean carved overmantel in Elias Wrench's house, 3 Millers Green, in Gloucester Cathedral Close.

dal house, and so might have been in real want. The acquisition of the Common Kitchen in his son's name therefore provided some measure of security. The additional accommodation next door must also have been very welcome, for the young growing family of Elias Wrench and Mary his wife was to consist finally of seven sons and two daughters.

Having acquired the lease in his son's name, it must have been Elias Wrench who converted the building from a kitchen into a dwelling-house.¹⁰ He did this by having floors and ceilings put in, with the result that the finished house contained cellars, ground floor, first floor, and attics. On the outside it is half-timbered with two gables on each of the north and south elevations.¹¹ One room on the first floor must today look very similar to what it did when Elias's renovations were first completed. It contains oak panelling of the period; a magnificent Jacobean carved

overmantel (Plate 1), remarkably similar to the one carved by John Abel at Hellens, the manor house at Much Marcle in Herefordshire; and a plaster ceiling (Plate 2), decorated as were so many in fashionable houses of the period. On this ceiling are embossed flowers, thistles, a swan, a crane, a cartouche, and – John Legate's printer's device. There, in a plaster composed of lime, hair, and sand, is depicted, not a square pedestal, but a round one. Rising above it is a half-length nude female figure bearing her cup and sun, with drops descending from the clouds above into the cup, and with a tree on either side of the figure. The pedestal bears the words 'Alma Mater Cantabrigia', but the words of the motto, 'Hinc Lucem et Pocula Sacra', are not depicted. The image (Plate 3) measures eighteen inches from the top of the crown to the bottom of the pedestal, and eleven inches from the end of one outstretched hand to the end of the other.¹² Also

10 He also turned the site of the Common Hall on the south side of his prebendal house and the Common Kitchen into a garden.

11 Recent extensive repairs to the house have revealed that part of the exterior walls and some of the interior walls are stone behind their panelled or plaster façades.

12 The question might well be asked whether it was unusual for a device in plaster to be copied from a printed source. Dr Frank Stubbings points out that Henry Peacham the younger's *Minerva Britanna*, 1612, an emblem-book, was used as a source for twenty-one emblems which were reproduced in plaster at Blickling Hall.



Plate 2. Early seventeenth-century plaster ceiling in Elias Wrench's house.

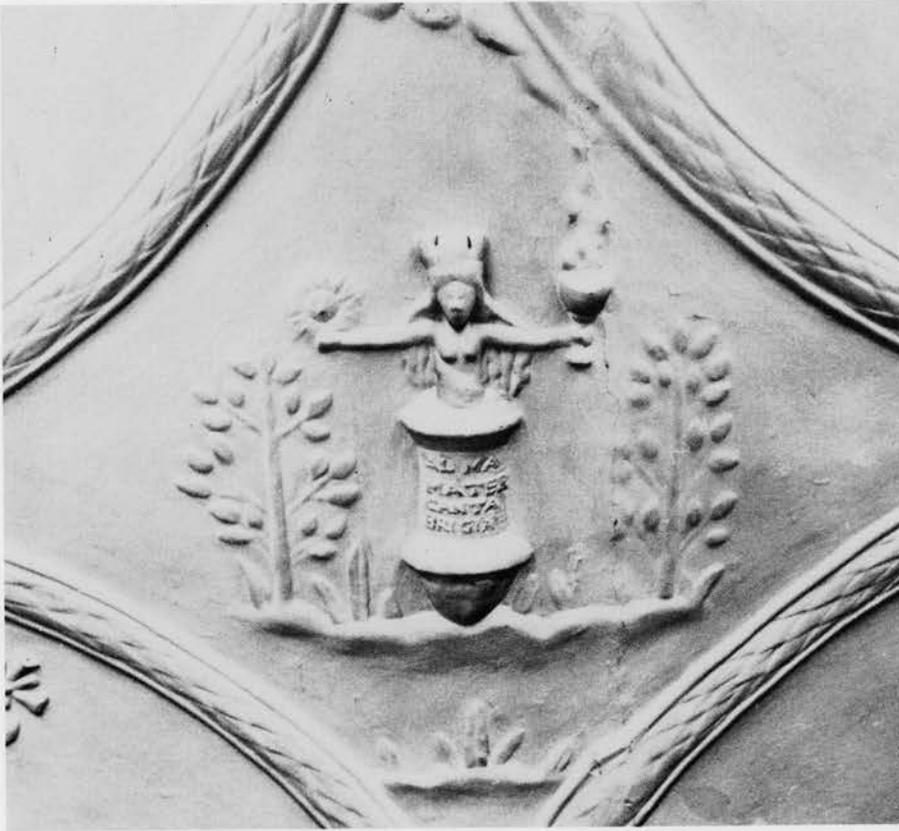


Plate 3. *Alma Mater Cantabrigia* on the ceiling of 3 Millers Green, Gloucester.

on the ceiling are the heads and shoulders of three small figures. From their clothing it seems that these are meant to represent a cleric (wearing a skull-cap and clerical bands), a boy or young man (wearing an ordinary doublet), and a chorister (for the third figure has a ruff around its neck). Perhaps it is not too fanciful to suppose that these are depictions of Elias Wrench himself, and two of his sons, Simeon who had the first lease of the house, and Barkeley, who was a Cathedral chorister from 1621 to 1629 (which may perhaps date the ceiling more specifically).

As with the source of the University Press's motto, the presence of the device on this ceiling provokes another question which is continually asked and never yet answered. Why should this depiction of Cambridge appear on a ceiling in Gloucester? Elias Wrench had been a sizar of Trinity College, Cambridge, from 1578 to 1582, but his subse-

quent career shows no connection with, or interest in, Cambridge.¹³ Whether, having graduated, he ever became acquainted with John Legate is not known. He may of course have been familiar with the device from seeing it on the titlepages of books. But why he should be so loyal to Cambridge that he incorporated such a blatantly Cantabrigian device into his ceiling is a mystery.

None of his sons were undergraduates at Cambridge, although four of them, Elias, Simeon, Henry, and John, became undergraduates at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. However, there may have been some kind of family connection with Corpus, for when a Richard Wrenche matriculated there in 1576, he was described as 'famulus Praesidis' (of the President's household). The President at that time was William Cole, but in the years 1614 to 1629, when two of the Wrench sons were at Corpus, the President was Thomas Anyan, who happened at the same time to be

13 Elias Wrench was Master of the College School, Gloucester, from 1588 (the year of John Legate's appointment as University Printer) to 1599 when

he resigned on being appointed a prebendary of the Cathedral. Here he continued for thirty-four years until his death in 1633.

a Prebendary of Gloucester Cathedral.¹⁴

Enquiries in the Cambridge University archives have revealed nothing which might explain why the device should have been placed on the ceiling. Whether anything will ever come to light now seems doubtful. But it

is to be hoped that the link thus forged so long ago between Cambridge University and the old house in the Cathedral Close at Gloucester will not in future years become forgotten.¹⁵

14 Thomas Anyan was Prebendary of the Fourth Stall from 1612 to 1633. During these years he was, thanks to the abused system of pluralism of the time, remarkably conspicuous by his absence from Gloucester.

15 From 1731 the name of the 'Common Kitchen' was no longer used in any lease of the house, and so for well over two hundred years its origins were forgotten. Today it is known by the more prosaic address of 'no. 3, Millers Green'.

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