
Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society

(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

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Cambridge and the antiquaries, 1500–1840¹

C.N.L. Brooke

It is our pleasant Cambridge habit to lay a special claim to anyone who has ever lived or studied here, however briefly. In this highly selective review of some of the notable Cambridge antiquaries of the three and half centuries which led up to the foundation of our Society I have tried to avoid a long catalogue of names and, in particular to leave aside the birds of passage.² But that is not so easily done. Thus, one cannot set aside Sir Henry Spelman, who only resided here (so far as I know) during his undergraduate years in Trinity in the 1570s and 80s; but he kept in touch and showed at times a deep interest in Cambridge; and forms a crucial link between the era of the sixteenth-century antiquaries and the great days of the scientific revolution of the late seventeenth century.³

I start, in effect, in the 1530s. The first reformation, Henry VIII's break with Rome, was partly the work of politicians and courtiers, partly of divines; and the central corps of divines, of whom the eldest was an obscure fellow of Jesus called Thomas Cranmer, were the group whom we should call moderate

protestants who gathered round Queen Anne Boleyn and enjoyed her patronage in her brief period of ascendancy between 1533 and 1536.⁴ The most distinguished of these, apart from Cranmer, was Matthew Parker of Corpus, the most numerous were the fellows of Gonville Hall, who had inspired the conservative bishop of Norwich to grumble in 1530 in a famous phrase that 'no clerk . . . hath commen out lately of [Gonville Hall] but savoureth of the frying pan, though he speak never so holily'.⁵ The entrepreneur who introduced these young Cambridge men to Anne was a former student of Gonville Hall called William Butts, who had risen to be a leading royal physician and to sit for Holbein.⁶ It was Butts who sent the young John Caius to Padua to study medicine.⁷ In later life Caius was to return to England and build up a notable medical practice based on the city of London, to make a rapid fortune and spend it re-founding Gonville Hall as Gonville and Caius College, of which he became both founder and master. He was brilliant, devoted, and cantankerous; and his later years were far from happy, partly because he yearned for the good old days, and in ceremonies and the use of vestments he was a conservative in a college increasingly peopled with young protestant fellows. But there is no reason to suppose he was a Catholic in theology: all the indications are that like his more genial successor at Caius, Thomas Legge, he was tolerant of theological differences, and not indeed much

¹ A lecture given as part of the 150th anniversary celebrations of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society on 12 March 1990. I opened by expressing the delight and privilege of joining in the celebration and congratulating the President on navigating the Society into its fourth half century. Since Michael Thompson in his admirable book (Thompson 1990) and lecture covered the history of the Society, it seemed appropriate for me to talk of its prehistory.

² I should emphasize that it is highly selective. Thus several of the founders of the Society of Antiquaries, including William Stukeley himself and the Gales, were Cambridge men; and the links with Cambridge of the Gales were far from transitory (see the list in Evans 1956: 51–2); but Stukeley seems to have had little contact with Cambridge after taking his M.B. from Corpus in 1708 (on him see Piggott 1985; Evans 1956: 51–142 *passim*; *DNB*).

³ On Spelman see *DNB*; Powicke 1930; Cronne 1956.

⁴ See especially Dowling 1984; Ives 1986.

⁵ Quoted Brooke 1985: 51 (see page 52, note 1 for references).

⁶ Dowling 1984, especially 35, 38; Brooke 1985: 49–50, 56–7, and plate 13a.

⁷ For what follows Brooke 1985: chapter 4, and references.

interested in formal or controversial theology.⁸ As a young man he had very probably been happy to mingle with those who savoured of the frying pan, including Matthew Parker. It is certain that Caius and Parker were close friends in the 1560s and 70s when Parker was at Lambeth and Caius in Cambridge; it is probable that this friendship stemmed from the 1520s and 30s when they lived in neighbouring colleges and laid the first foundations of their antiquarian learning – it perhaps went even further back to their childhood in Norwich, where Parker was born in 1504, Caius in 1510.⁹

To Parker and Caius the Cambridge college was a remarkable stimulus to antiquarian zeal: Corpus and Gonville Hall were ancient corporations whose preservation was a sacred trust. Cambridge also rejoiced in such *parvenu* foundations as Jesus and John's, and naturally not everyone honoured the antique. In the 1530s the monasteries were destroyed, and even at that date Parker must have been aware of the potential loss of historical manuscripts which was threatening. In the 1540s the colleges nearly shared their fate; but in a dramatic *volte-face*, Henry VIII appointed as visitors men very different from Cromwell's lackeys who had prepared for the dissolution of the monasteries, men from the heart of the Oxford and Cambridge establishment, Richard Cox, first Dean of Christ Church, John Redman, Warden of the King's Hall (now Trinity) in Cambridge, William May, president of Queens', and Parker, Master of Corpus.¹⁰ It seems that Parker was responsible for the ingenious collection of college accounts which convinced Henry VIII and his greedy courtiers that they were so impoverished they were not worth dissolving;¹¹ and the outcome was the triumphant confirmation of the colleges, and something more. For if Parker combined moderate protestantism with a strong sense of tradition, Cox and Redman were made in a different mould. Cox is reputed to have had the whole manuscript collection of the university library at Oxford destroyed to purge it of ancient superstition.¹² Redman, the elder statesman of the Cambridge visitors and their

eminence grise, somehow inspired Henry to the idea of absorbing into Redman's own King's Hall her smaller neighbours, Michaelhouse and Physwick Hostel – a wholly owned subsidiary of Gonville Hall – and founding Trinity. But for the antiquarian zeal and generosity of John Caius it is very likely that Gonville Hall would have foundered as a result of this radical measure.

In Parker's mind the zeal for reform and the love of the past were inextricably mingled. Everyone, including Parker himself, seems to have been surprised when Elizabeth hurried him to Lambeth in 1559; yet she had simply chosen the most distinguished survivor of her mother's circle to be archbishop of Canterbury. In the event Elizabeth and Parker were not good friends; and the queen bullied him mercilessly.¹³ But Parker was no weakling; remarkably compounded of gentleness and strength, of charm and ruthlessness, of deep learning and credulity, of scholarly conscience and a breathtaking lack of scruple, he gathered a team of helpers and secretaries about him at Lambeth, led by John Josselin, and employed his leisure time in presiding over a seminar whose aim was to preserve and publish the historical records of early England – to preserve them from destruction, and publish them as evidence above all of the true and natural condition of the English church (as Parker imagined it) before it submitted to the wrongful tyranny of the bishop of Rome.¹⁴ It was very doubtful history but had some admirable consequences. In 1568 he inspired a Privy Council letter which disingenuously observed that the 'Queen's majesty' had 'like care and zeal as diverse of her progenitors have had before times for the conservation of . . . ancient records and monuments' formerly preserved in abbeys; and so the privy council announce her pleasure to all and sundry, 'which is, that the most reverend father in God, and our very good lord, the archbishop of Canterbury, should have special care and oversight in these matters aforesaid'.¹⁵ This greatly helped Parker in gathering his rich collection of manuscripts from many sources, including his own cathedral library at Canterbury – thus ensuring their preservation, to our undying gratitude, and greatly enriching the heritage of Corpus. The full story of his collections cannot now be unravelled; all that is certain is that Corpus received the largest single share, and that many other books have

⁸ On Caius and theology, Brooke 1985: 72–3; on Legge, Brooke 1985: 84–93; Brooke 1988, especially pp.113–14.

⁹ On Parker, see Strype 1711; Parker 1853; and especially Rupp 1977: chapter 6; on his books see especially Wright 1951.

¹⁰ Brooke, Highfield and Swaan 1988: 132–4, 152–3 and references.

¹¹ Parker 1853: 34–6, records his own account of the king's reaction to the accounts.

¹² Ker 1986: 466.

¹³ Rupp 1977: 79–81.

¹⁴ For Parker's historical work, see especially McKisack 1971: chapter 2.

¹⁵ Wright 1951: 212–13 (spelling modernized).

found their way into the Cotton and other collections.¹⁶ He showed touching devotion to his college, but more than a touch of realism towards a society which had lost all its own medieval library, by arranging for an annual inspection by the masters of Caius and Trinity Hall, who might hope to benefit if the fellows of Corpus were found wanting in execution of their charge.¹⁷

In a curiously confused manner Parker and his colleagues grasped quite firmly the principle that medieval chronicles were the stuff of history: firmly, in that it inspired them to the first systematic attempts to put into print the main chronicles of medieval England; confused, in that they saw no very clear distinction between primary and secondary material, and freely inserted into their editions of one chronicle extracts from another or reflections of their own; and Parker not only scribbled freely in his manuscripts with the famous red chalk with which all students of medieval English manuscripts are familiar – though it is far from clear how much is due to Parker, how much to his secretaries and his son – but added portions from other sources to complete the story.¹⁸ The edition of Asser was printed in a sort of Anglo-Saxon script most lovingly devised by Josselin; and it is a work of art. But when one contemplates the interpolations from the annals of St Neot's and Matthew Paris with which it is adorned or disfigured, one can hardly call it a work of scholarship.¹⁹ Yet the idea that history comprises the sources – that the way to grasp the materials for the past is to edit them in a form which enables the student to understand the shape of the history he is studying – has considerable merits, and was taken up by Henry Wharton and others in the heyday of the seventeenth century.

Parker's most significant effort was his *De antiquitate Britannicae ecclesiae*, on the antiquity of the British Church, printed three years before his death, in 1572. His we must call it, and he described in his dedication to William Cecil (Lord Burghley) how he had been 'so spending my wasteful time within mine own walls, till almighty God shall call me out of this tabernacle'; but it was not *his* time only which was spent on it, for most of it seems to have been written by Josselin (who later complained that the archbishop had given him too little credit for his works), and some of it by at least

one other of the circle.²⁰ In 1568 John Caius had printed his similarly titled *De Antiquitate Cantabrigiensis Academiae*, on the antiquity of the University of Cambridge, attributing it with remarkable effrontery to a citizen of London – for it is in fact a tract designed to prove the claim that Cambridge is older than Oxford, a project in which he had help and encouragement from the archbishop.²¹ Caius' other antiquarian study, his history of the University of Cambridge, has much sound learning in it; and at its best it can be set beside his work on the text of Galen which a recent study by Dr Vivian Nutton has shown to reveal considerable scholarly acumen.²² There are occasional moments of fantasy, as in his list of the medieval chancellors of Cambridge. The draft statutes for his own college made by Edmund Gonville about 1350 had a space for the confirmation by the chancellor; and since chancellors were coming and going with alarming rapidity in the age of the Black Death he was given a cipher instead of a name: 'A de B'. This was misread by the scribe of the fifteenth-century cartulary of the college as 'A de G' who was triumphantly expanded by Dr Caius into Anthony of Grantchester²³ – Caius in honour (we may think) of his adopted city of Padua, Grantchester from a source nearer home. Anthony of Grantchester had a long innings; he is in the *VCH*. But he never existed. This is a mild flutter, however, compared with the *De antiquitate*, which is a miracle of perverted learning, based on a magnificent list of irrelevant authorities. The Carmelite historian of Cambridge of the early fifteenth century, Nicholas Canteloupe, had celebrated (or invented) the work of the Spanish prince Cantaber in founding Cambridge in the very remote past – early enough for Paris, Oxford and Cologne to be daughter-universities of Cambridge; and this doctrine had been repeated by the best authorities, probably including John Fisher, thus setting in perspective the Oxford claim to have been founded by King Alfred.²⁴ To this story Caius added a farrago of nonsense. His antiquarian learning, like his medicine, was a curious mixture of sense and nonsense, though

¹⁶ See especially Wright 1951.

¹⁷ James 1909–12: I, xii–xiv; cf. Brooke 1985: 34, note 63.

¹⁸ Wright 1951: 228–9.

¹⁹ McKisack 1971: 42–3.

²⁰ McKisack 1971: 44–8 (spelling modernized).

²¹ The edition of 1574 and the *Hist.* are reprinted in Caius 1912.

²² Nutton 1987.

²³ Brooke 1985: 10–11.

²⁴ On Canteloupe or Cantelow see Emden 1963: 120; his *Historiola* is in Hearne 1719: 253–80, which includes the remarkable series of forged papal bulls. For texts of the speech attributed to Fisher see Underwood 1989: 43, note 22; Lewis 1855, II, 263–72, especially p. 267.

his medical practice was based on better authorities than Canteloupe and stood the test — from which his kind of history was marvellously exempt — of experience.

The example set by Parker of preserving manuscripts and editing chronicles was carried on in the next generation by Sir Robert Cotton and Sir Henry Savile. But Cotton's learning was of the Inns of Court and the gatherings of Antiquaries in London; and Savile was Warden of Merton. So we must hasten past them. Savile was a notable character and a great benefactor to Merton and Oxford; generous, attractive, bombastic and preposterous all at once, he is in some respects the John Caius of Oxford.²⁵ His learning was universal, and he is best remembered for his interest in astronomy. But his notable collection of chronicles published in 1596 provided tolerable texts of some of the best twelfth century chroniclers and rescued the chronicle of Æthelweard, for the only known manuscript was to be consumed in the Cotton fire of 1731.²⁶ Savile perpetrated some grotesque errors, but at least his editions are better than Parker's. Cotton's contribution to antiquarian learning was very similar to Parker's, for he is remembered above all as a book-collector. He and the circle of antiquaries who gathered round him in intense discussion and debate provided materials and insights which raised scholarship to a higher plane altogether; but not all at once.²⁷ Cotton shared Parker's devotion to ecclesiastical history; but he was equally committed to parliament. He was especially interested in the fourteenth-century spoof — as we know it to be — the *Modus tenendi parliamentum*, the method of holding parliament; and he possessed no less than eight manuscripts of it.²⁸ This book describes in dead-pan fashion parliament — not as it was truly held in the fourteenth century, when the book was written, but as it was to work in the dreams of Pym and Hampden in the 1640s; it was heady stuff. Be this as it may, Cotton was a true antiquary with a passion for anything antique; and we owe him a debt equal to that we owe to Parker. But his interest in parliament proved his undoing, and James I came to frown on Cotton and his circle and even separated him from his library in his later years.

²⁵ Brooke, Highfield and Swaan 1988: 176–7 and references.

²⁶ Leaving only fragments behind: Campbell 1962: ix–xii.

²⁷ See especially Wright 1958; on Cotton, Sharpe 1979; for what follows, see also Brooke 1985: 144 and refs.; Evans 1956: chapter 1.

²⁸ Pronay and Taylor 1980: 118, 202–4.

Meanwhile in the same circle a young man not long down from Cambridge called Henry Spelman, of scholarly tastes and of a much more acute and critical mind than Cotton or Savile, was learning the lessons his elders could furnish and pursuing his own path to an understanding of medieval England.²⁹ Henry Spelman enjoyed the education normal to men of means: he was an undergraduate at Trinity, Cambridge, and he studied and ate dinners in the Inns of Court. He grew up to be a country gentleman who lived on his ample estates in Norfolk; he was also a very conscientious JP and for a time member of parliament, and he spent most of his later years in London. As a young man he fell in with the members of the first Society of Antiquaries, who helped to form his tastes. But his scholarly interests developed on lines of his own, and although he remained in touch with other scholars, especially in Cambridge and London, and was the revered master of many later scholars including his son Sir John Spelman, his virtue as a scholar largely lay in his capacity to follow his own thoughts and interests and enquiries wherever they might lead him. They sometimes led him into deep waters. His unhappy experience in lawsuits over the former sites and properties of two local monasteries led him to a deep investigation into the history of sacrilege and the fate of those who had acquired monastic lands; his *History of Sacrilege* combines a very simple traditional interpretation of divine judgement with considerable antiquarian learning.³⁰ Often his studies led him to good works and the patronage of other good scholars. On a visit to Cambridge he encountered a most remarkable character called Abraham Whelock, university librarian and lecturer in Arabic (recently brought to life by John Oates in volume 1 of the *History of the Cambridge University Library*); and he rapidly found that Whelock was just the man to help him in his Anglo-Saxon studies, and he employed him first as amanuensis then as lecturer in Anglo-Saxon. Whelock was a notable eccentric, lovable and exasperating, fussy and gentle, 'timorous' as he described himself, yet persistent.³¹ Of him Thomas Baker was to write:

So vast a knowledge had this thoughtfull soul for words and languages . . . being able to be the

²⁹ On Spelman, see *DNB*; Powicke 1930; Cronne 1956; Cronne 1961: 43–5; Pocock 1957: chapter 5.

³⁰ Spelman 1698; the new edition of 1846, partly rewritten 'by two priests of the Church of England', is a literary curiosity.

³¹ Oates 1986: 179; cf. the whole of chap. 7.

interpreter generally not only for the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, or of the Wise Men to Herod, but to Mankind, and to serve as the Universal Character; being by the way . . . the likeliest man to make one'³².

The pursuit of Anglo-Saxon grew out of one of Spelman's most characteristic interests, in the early history of the English Church. To this end he gathered materials for his *Concilia*, his collection of early English councils and church legislation – and one might say church history in general – which was to be completed (with the piety and energy of a good disciple, though with less than Spelman's critical skill) by William Dugdale.³³ Dugdale's *Monasticon* and *Baronage* are still a part of the equipment of every serious historical library. Spelman's *Concilia* has earned the compliment of being replaced – first by David Wilkins' *Concilia* in the eighteenth century, then by *Councils and Synods* in the twentieth. He was working in the generation before Dom Jean Mabillon, the great French Benedictine scholar who was the central figure of the scientific revolution as it impinged on historical scholarship, and who founded the science of diplomatic; and so Spelman had no knowledge of the ways of medieval forgers.³⁴ Ingulf's imaginary history of Crowland puzzled him: he saw that all was not right with it; but he quite failed to realize it was a spoof, and it led him into some strange errors. Similarly he based his study of early royal seals partly on the products of the Westminster forgers of the twelfth century – but so did everyone else until Dr Chaplais exposed their origin in the 1950s and 60s. With somewhat uncertain steps, Spelman laid the foundations for the study of Anglo-Saxon charters. Apart from the *Concilia* his most notable work lay in the studies of medieval legal vocabulary – the *Glossarium archatologicum*, also partly published by Spelman, partly by Dugdale; and his essay on the origin of feudal tenure 'Of feuds and tenures by knight service'.³⁵ In the words of F.W. Maitland,

were an examiner to ask who introduced the feudal system into England? one very good answer, if properly explained, would be Henry Spelman, and if there followed the question, what was the feudal system? a good answer to that would be, an early

essay in comparative jurisprudence. Spelman reading continental books saw that English law, for all its insularity, was a member of a great European family, a family between all the members of which there are strong family likenesses.³⁶

This was a remarkable historical breakthrough, and prepared the way for Spelman's two most fundamental contributions to English history.³⁷ The first was his perception that the Norman conquest marked a radical break in the history of tenure and of law – that the myth very popular with common lawyers in the seventeenth century that the roots of their discipline lay in the mists of time, that is, far back in pre-conquest England, was profoundly misleading; in its essence it was the product of the royal courts of the twelfth and later centuries. The second was developed in the *Glossarium* in his study of the origin of parliament. He saw that it derived from assemblies summoned by the king in the thirteenth century, and that the doctrine of the *Modus* that it existed fully fledged in the reign of Edward the Confessor was a myth. Both these perceptions were to be given much clearer and sharper focus by Robert Brady.

Henry Spelman died in 1641, fortunate to escape the worst of the Civil War. In 1644 Robert Brady entered Caius as sizar. Later in the same year he was joined by Charles Spelman and in 1645 by Roger Spelman, sons of Sir John and grandsons of Sir Henry. To Roger the Caius library owes its copy of Spelman's *Concilia*; it may well be that Brady owed his antiquarian interests and his deep respect for Henry Spelman in part to this family connection.³⁸ But first he passed through a normal scholastic course and prepared for a medical training; next the young Robert Brady, evidently a royalist from an early age, found himself caught up in politics. His brother Edmund was hanged as a royalist 'traitor' in 1650; Robert had a spell of exile, a brief return to Cambridge, then imprisonment at Yarmouth. In 1660 he had his reward. The aged Master of Caius who had been ejected in the Puritan revolution, briefly returned to office, and in December 1660 he and King Charles II jointly arranged the succession of Robert Brady – once the Master's sizar, now a young physician aged 33. He was Master of Caius till his death in 1700; but he was many other things besides. He was a country gentleman

³² Oates 1986: 175.

³³ Spelman 1639–64; see especially Powicke 1930. For what follows, see Wilkins 1737; Whitclock, Brett and Brooke 1981.

³⁴ Cronne 1956: 81–3. On Mabillon see Knowles 1963: chapter 10; Mabillon 1681. On the Westminster forgers (below) see Bishop and Chaplais 1957: xix–xxiv; Chaplais 1962.

³⁵ Spelman 1626, 1664, 1687; Spelman 1698: 1–46.

³⁶ Maitland 1908: 142.

³⁷ For what follows, see Cronne 1956: 85–7; Pocock 1950–2: 191–2, 194–5; Brooke 1985: 141, 144–5.

³⁸ Brooke 1985: 141–2; for what follows, see *ibid.* chap.8, especially pp.145–7.

cultivating his estate in Norfolk. He was Regius Professor of Physic – following Francis Glisson in 1671. He was a royal physician at times much occupied in the illnesses of Charles II and the vagaries of James II. He was one of the professional witnesses to the birth of the Old Pretender in 1688.³⁹ One or two of these activities might have filled a man's life; yet it is for none of them that we honour Robert Brady in this context, but as one of the most eminent of archivists and medieval historians of the age of the scientific revolution.

In the 1950s Brady was rediscovered by J.G.A. Pocock for his interest in the history of ideas, as a scholar who used his knowledge of early English history to destroy the fantasies of the Whig common lawyers and provide a historical foundation for the Tory view of kingship; as a writer of exceptional verve and a controversialist of redoubtable skill, and a notable scholar.⁴⁰ Hitherto he had been strangely neglected. It is not clear to me why the senior fellows of Calus, engaged in developing their Barnwell estate in the 1880s and 90s, honoured Harvey and Glisson with roads, but not Brady. But I imagine his fame had been tarnished by his association with James II and by Venn's belief, which was hardly fair, that he was largely an absentee master.⁴¹ Among historians, the younger Caian of the same age, Henry Wharton, is better known, for we still use his *Anglia Sacra*, while our Victorian forebears rather foolishly neglected the innumerable historical facts gathered in Brady's books. Foolishly, because Brady was not only a brilliant historical pamphleteer; he was the supreme master of historical fact and of the details of medieval political history among the great scholars of the seventeenth century. His *Complete History of England* from Julius Caesar to Richard II can still be used, anyway from the Norman Conquest to the end of the fourteenth century, as a basic reference book for English political history.⁴² He had learned, above all from the writings of Henry Spelman, of the major narrative and record sources; and the full riches of the public records had doubtless been in some measure revealed to him by the writings of William Prynne, whom Brady was to succeed as Keeper of the Public Records. There could hardly be a greater contrast. Prynne was the absurd, extravagant, heroic Puritan, who spent long years among the records, sorting

them, in his own description, 'into distinct confused heaps' – while, as Aubrey tells us, his man fetched a pot of ale from time to time 'to refocillate his wasted spirits' – and displaying in his books a mind as disorderly as the heaps, but shot through with a depth of learning unequalled by any keeper or deputy keeper of public records till Duffus Hardy.⁴³ Brady was second in learning only to Prynne; but he combined with his deep and first-hand knowledge of the public records – he used amanuenses but did much original work himself – an extremely well-ordered, urbane and subtle mind, so that his books combine to an exceptional degree the dry-as-dust of the scientific historian with the vigour of the born pamphleteer. It is fascinating to compare his account of the Norman Conquest and the royal succession in Brady's books and in Freeman's *Norman Conquest* two hundred years later.⁴⁴ In real understanding of how things worked in eleventh-century England, in grasp of the documentary records, Brady is the master. Freeman, for all his learning and insight, had the disadvantage of being a Victorian liberal, and his account of the democratic workings of the Anglo-Saxon witan is at times pure fantasy. Brady had the advantage of deep study of Spelman's writings. He knew before he began that the Conquest marked a deep crevasse in the legal, political and social history of England, and that Parliament was no offshoot of the witan, but a creation of the thirteenth-century kings. But it was not all based on Spelman.

In 1688–9 the Whigs triumphed and Brady ceased to be a royal physician; ceased also to be keeper, to have access even, to the public records. He trimmed his sails to the glorious revolution sufficiently to preserve his college and some of his colleagues who showed a tendency to be non-jurors, from the storms which blew. He was able to continue writing, though now more often from the safe distance of his Cambridge Lodge than from his London lodgings. But in the previous fifteen or twenty years he had been assiduous in his study of the documents in his care. Long after 1689 the special place in the Exchequer of Receipt where Brady read Domesday Book was still recalled – as Elizabeth Hallam pointed out in her *Domesday Book through nine centuries*, in which she does justice to him for the first time as a very notable pioneer of Domesday

39 Brooke 1985: 126 and note 76.

40 Pocock 1950–2; Pocock 1957: chapter 8.

41 See Venn 1901: 107; but see Brooke 1985: 145–6.

42 Brady 1685, 1700; cf. Brady 1684.

43 See Brooke 1968: 7, and p.28 for references, especially to Aubrey 1898, II, 174.

44 For Freeman's account of the role of the Witan in the royal succession see Brooke 1967: 22–4.

studies.⁴⁵ In Brady's books *Domesday*, the great twelfth-century chroniclers and the rich deposits of the thirteenth and fourteenth-century patent and close rolls first received systematic attention from a scholar of orderly mind. In the process the territory precariously won by Henry Spelman was consolidated and set on firm foundations.

In 1680 the young Henry Wharton entered Caius, and in the fifteen years of life which remained to him he was to compile the *Anglia Sacra* and numerous other works of learning and polemic. It is an astonishing achievement, even allowing that he was an ardent young scholar who worked at breakneck speed. It seems almost certain that he was already laying the foundations of his later work while studying at Caius, and very probable too that like the young Francis Blomefield, the Norfolk antiquary of the next generation, he had privileged access to the College library and made good use of it.⁴⁶ Wharton in fact attempted for the history of the English church what Brady was achieving for the history of the kings and kingdom. We can hardly doubt that the Master influenced and in some sense helped and encouraged the young scholar. Yet there is strikingly little evidence of any close or abiding relationship between them: Wharton, in the surviving parts of his autobiography, never mentions Brady, and in the introduction to *Anglia Sacra*, he seems to refer to him as anonymously as possible.⁴⁷ One cannot help suspecting that they were not good friends. Wharton left Caius without a fellowship and worked for a time for William Cave, the Johnian ecclesiastical historian. He then attached himself to another notable Cambridge scholar, William Sancroft, formerly Master of Emmanuel, now archbishop of Canterbury, and became Sancroft's close disciple and chaplain. Hence the most celebrated incident of his life, when the royal chaplains came to Lambeth early in 1689 to demand that the archbishop publicly recognize the new regime. Sancroft rather unkindly left Wharton to say the prayers in the palace chapel that day – and he prayed for William and Mary, to the archbishop's intense indignation, and subsequently took the oath of allegiance to them.⁴⁸ The young

chaplain was unstable and insecure, longing to have the favour of the new regime while retaining the friendship of the archbishop. Sancroft subsequently forgave him so far as to accept the dedication of *Anglia Sacra*; yet Wharton, deprived of the full confidence of his master and of all the benefits of his patronage, which were confiscated by the new regime, never recovered (it seems) from the anxieties of the revolution; he died aged thirty in 1695. In *Anglia Sacra* (1691) he had conceived an idea which grew naturally out of Matthew Parker's work, that is to say to reveal the early history of the English church by publishing the relevant chronicles and biographies; and it is because Wharton published the sources themselves – including a number which have never yet been re-edited – that he is still so well known to English medievalists. He had also inherited some of Parker's high-handedness and the sources are treated with considerable freedom – not interpolated or rewritten, but abbreviated and knocked into shape to fit his scheme. There are naturally many signs of the haste with which the work was done. He was hardly aware of the shadow which has dogged more recent scholars – whose life has been made a misery, as Sir Roger Mynors once observed to me with a twinkle 'by the unfortunate necessity of getting it more or less right'. But *Anglia Sacra* remains a monument of learning, for he had an extraordinary knowledge of the narrative sources for all the English sees, and a sense of form and method which has given the book a lasting value.

To the historian of today the next generation is best remembered for the work of Thomas Madox, who laid the foundation of English diplomatic, Humphrey Wanley, the great palaeographer and one of the founders of the Society of Antiquaries, or Thomas Hearne, the eccentric non-juror.⁴⁹ Many of us have had the experience of discovering a precious pearl of a medieval record only to find that Hearne had printed it in an irrelevant appendix to one of his many volumes of texts. But none of these were Cambridge men; nor can Cambridge in the age of Richard Bentley – the greatest classical scholar in Europe – claim any antiquary quite of the stature of Brady and Wharton. Yet it

⁴⁵ Hallam 1986: 124–7, 191, especially p. 126.

⁴⁶ Brooke 1985: 147–50; Douglas 1951: chapter 7; D'Oyly 1821, II, 105–54. For his works see especially Wharton 1691. On Blomefield see below, note 62; and for the fruit of his early work, Blomefield 1750.

⁴⁷ D'Oyly 1821, II, 105–24 prints what survives of the autobiography; for an oblique reference to Brady see Wharton 1691, I: ix; cf. Brooke 1985: 149 and note 32.

⁴⁸ Brooke 1985: 149 and note 30, citing D'Oyly, II, 135–7.

⁴⁹ On these see especially Douglas 1951. With great reluctance I have omitted William Stukeley, co-founder with Wanley and others of the Society of Antiquaries, and the most eccentric, learned, ambivalent figure of all – whose intellectual curiosity yet paved the way for a wide variety of antiquarian and archaeological studies. He was at Corpus from 1704 to 1708 (Piggott 1985: 29–31), but there is little evidence of him in Cambridge thereafter, though he lived at Stamford not far away. See above, note 2.

enjoyed in Thomas Baker of St John's a man who had many of Hearne's qualities and yet was altogether a more attractive character.

Brady and Wharton, in their different ways, had conformed in 1689 and taken the oaths to William and Mary. Brady's acceptance of the revolution seems to have carried the College. He was able to assure the authorities that all but two of the fellows had taken the oaths, and of the two one was out of his wits and the other out of Cambridge.⁵⁰ But in St John's things were different. At the Restoration the eminent Anglican divine Peter Gunning had been presented as Master by the king, and he fostered a tradition of high Anglicanism mingled with devotion to the monarchy which would have been labelled Laudian a generation before. He also attended with devoted care to the chapel music: to his regime above all St John's owes its endowed choir and continuous tradition of organ music, which survived the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries when most services in most college chapels were said.⁵¹ Under Gunning and his successors, Francis Turner and Humphrey Gower, who was the very type of the poacher turned gamekeeper (from Gunning's point of view) – in other words, a man of Puritan pedigree turned high Anglican – St John's was the nursery of devout high churchmen; and no less than three of the seven bishops who resisted James II's efforts at toleration were Johnians. In 1693 the Master was ordered 'to eject twenty of the fellows who had refused the oath of allegiance to William III and Mary'. The master had taken the oath and, like Brady, was determined to protect his colleagues. So he did nothing, and was haled into court. Gower argued that a fellowship was a freehold 'and Magna Carta and many other statutes forbade a man to be put out of his freehold save by due process of law.'⁵² The argument suggests that he had antiquarian advisers among his non-juring colleagues, as well as a doughty ally in the obscurity of the common law – for the case failed owing to a technical flaw and the fellows remained in possession of their freeholds until 1717, when a more stringent demand for an oath to the Hanoverian succession led to the resignation of the surviving non-jurors. Among these was Thomas Baker. A non-juror in 1689 and in 1717, Baker was at last compelled to resign his fellowship and ever after 'inscribed his books

socius ejectus; but,' as Edward Miller observes in his history of St John's, 'his severance from the college was far from complete. He continued to reside in third court until the afternoon in 1740 when he was found lying in his rooms, his tobacco pipe broken by his side.'⁵³ In a few days he was dead; but his books lived on, for he left them to the college. He also had a portrait of John Cosin, the fiery and energetic Laudian divine, who had been a fellow of Caius in the 1620s, master of Peterhouse in the 1630s, and after heroic exile, bishop of Durham at the Restoration – and we may well suppose that Cosin and Gunning were the gods of Baker's early life who inspired him to his lifelong devotion to the cause of church and king, that is, of the Stuart king. Baker left the portrait of Cosin to Mr Burrough, the Tory tutor, later Master of Caius – himself an antiquary and patron of Blomefield – and today it hangs in the Caius hall.⁵⁴ Materials for a biography of Baker were collected after his death by Zachary Gray and edited and published in 1784 by Masters. Baker set out on a normal clerical career: fellow of St John's in 1679, deacon 1685, priest, 1689, rector of Long Newton. But presently James II made a Declaration for Liberty of Conscience; and many and deep as were the virtues of the Anglican divines of the seventeenth century, toleration was rarely among them. He resigned his rectory and retired on to his fellowship, and spent all the remainder of his days in his college. Later in life he became 'almost a recluse, and seldom went farther than the college walks'.⁵⁵ He thus had ample leisure for his life work, which was to collect the materials for the history of St John's and of Cambridge. Baker is familiar to scholars from the many volumes of his manuscript notes and transcripts which were divided between the Harleian collection (and so are now in the British Library) and the Cambridge University Library; and here one may find ample traces of the unfinished project for collections on the antiquities of Cambridge – *Collectanea de antiquitatibus Cantabrigiensebus*. Everyone since who has worked seriously on Cambridge has used them, and they formed the basis for innumerable entries in Cooper's *Annals*, which comprise in a measure Baker's project realized in print. Baker's History of St John's was eventually prepared for press by one of the notable Cambridge eccentrics and antiquaries of the later nineteenth century, J.E.B. Mayor, University Librarian and Professor of Latin,

⁵⁰ Brooke 1985: 151.

⁵¹ Miller 1961: 43. Gunning's will, describing how he and others endowed the 'quire' of St John's is in Public Record Office, Prerogative Court of Canterbury, 89 Hare (dated 25 August 1679, proved 26 July 1684).

⁵² Miller 1961: 44–5.

⁵³ Miller 1961: 45; on Baker see Masters 1784; *DNB*.

⁵⁴ Masters 1784: 135; cf. Vern 1901: 293.

⁵⁵ Masters 1784: 108.

who attached to Baker's work, which is relatively orderly and concise, an infinite collection of discursive notes, at once maddening and enchanting, as I believe Mayor was himself.⁵⁶ Thus Baker is in a sense the most parochial of my specimens; yet not so parochial as the titles of his projects suggest, for among his collections are materials of much wider interest; and in the care and precision of his work, like Hearne, he showed an innate tendency towards accuracy which seems hardly fair to those of us who have to struggle endlessly in the attempt 'to get it more or less right'.

I might very naturally pass on from Thomas Baker to the great Tory antiquary of the next generation, William Cole of Clare and King's, who from his rectories at Bletchley and Milton continued Baker's history of St John's, and compiled a like collection of antiquarian notes and transcripts – and whose witty and mordant comments on all and sundry Cambridge worthies of his age have left them blackened for ever.⁵⁷ I could go on to Charles Cooper, whose *Annals* and *Memorials* take us to the age in which our Society was founded.⁵⁸ But it will not have escaped attention that the antiquaries we have so far contemplated were in essence historians; that prehistory and archaeology in the modern sense have rarely impinged on our view. That is largely because they played a secondary role in the work of the Cambridge antiquaries, though not so negligible as might appear; and to redress the balance I conclude with two characters whose interests spanned the horizons of human knowledge, in contrast to Baker, whose microscope was turned on his own city and college.

John Frere came to Caius while James Burrough was Master and rose to be a fellow in 1766 under his successor John Smith, a remarkable nonentity who none the less planted a telescope on the roof of Caius chapel (for he aspired to be professor of astronomy) and the foundation stone of the west front of the Senate House at an even greater height – and was a keen Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.⁵⁹ The college was not a flourishing academic community in his time, but it fostered a very small number of men of high intellectual stature, of whom Frere was one; and he has recently been rediscovered by David Phillipson in an article in the *Catana*, in which he reminded

us that 'the College gives but slight honour to a man who recognized and published scientific evidence for the antiquity of man more than half a century before Darwin, Prestwich, Evans and Lyell' and 'who, perhaps more than any other, laid the intellectual foundations for the scientific study of human prehistory'.⁶⁰ Like so many Calans he was a Norfolk man; and like Spelman and Brady he came of landed family and could afford the life of gentleman antiquary: he was high sheriff of Norfolk and for a time MP for Norwich as well as being FSA and FRS. In 1797 he discovered flint handaxes at Hoxne in Suffolk and in a letter read before the Society of Antiquaries he inferred the great antiquity of the axes (which he recognized to belong to a people who had no use of metals and were in a fact Lower Palaeolithic) from the depth of stratified soil in which they lay and the company they kept – including extinct animals. He laid the foundations of stratified archaeology and observed that 'the situation in which these weapons were found may tempt us to refer them to a very remote period indeed, even beyond that of the present world'; and Phillipson goes on to show the link between this almost forgotten letter of 1797 and the geological and biological enquiries which finally upset current views of the age of the world sixty or so years later.⁶¹ Frere takes us into a larger world, in two different ways: first, he opens the door which leads from antiquarian study to the roots of modern science, to the foundations of geology, palaeontology and Darwinian evolution. Second, he was a Cambridge man all right; but even more an East Anglian. His predecessors among the Norfolk antiquaries included Spelman and Brady, and more recently Peter Le Neve, one of the founders of the Society of Antiquaries, who had no connection with Cambridge – but also the Calans Francis Blomefield, whose history of Norfolk is still much in use, and Sir John Fenn, whose edition of the Paston Letters not only put that celebrated collection on the map, but in such good form and order that Gairdner's edition reproduced it very little altered – the late Norman Davis, who first seriously revised Fenn's texts in print, none the less regarded Fenn's work as 'very creditable'.⁶²

⁵⁶ Baker 1869.

⁵⁷ On him see *DNB* and e.g. Cole 1765–7.

⁵⁸ *DNB*; Cooper 1842–1908; Cooper 1860–6.

⁵⁹ On Frere see Phillipson 1989 and references; Brooke 1985: 178–9; on Smith, Brooke 1985: 174–9.

⁶⁰ Phillipson 1989: 51. His significance has been better understood by recent archaeologists.

⁶¹ Phillipson 1989: 52.

⁶² Brooke 1985: 177–8 note – cf. pages 177–9. On Peter Le Neve, see *DNB*; Evans 1956: 37–9, 51, etc.; on Blomefield see Brooke 1985: 177 and note 75; Blomefield 1739–75, 1750.

When I set out to write the history of Caius, I expected to find a continuous tradition of medical teaching in the college from the days of Dr Caius to the present, and a few antiquaries scattered about here and there; but I found to my surprise that the antiquarian tradition in the college was more continuous than the medical, to the extent that it may be suspected that this lecture is on the Caius not the Cambridge antiquaries. To this I can only say that in the present state of knowledge the tradition is more continuous in Caius than in any other college – but further enquiry will surely correct this impression, for almost every college at one time or another has inspired the kind of antiquarian zeal so marvellously exemplified by Thomas Baker. I also freely confess that the tradition in Caius has at certain periods been very thin; and indeed that is true of the national story as well. Even Dugdale found a very scanty market for most of his books in the heyday of the scholar antiquary in the mid and late seventeenth century; his *Baronage* sold well to the country gentlemen who hoped to find their forebears in it, but the *Monasticon* hung fire.⁶³ By the same token the characters I have deployed are specimens, not of a great multitude, but of a small and seemly gathering whom we may reasonably honour as our predecessors today. In the nineteenth century, though it was to be long before the scholarly standards of Brady were emulated among British medievalists, there came rapidly to be a much wider appreciation of the richness of the historical heritage. The natural leader in antiquarian studies, the Society of Antiquaries, languished under the presidency of Lord Aberdeen; but its failings in the 1830s and 40s proved a stimulus to other societies which grew like asparagus in May, especially in the late 1830s and 1840s.⁶⁴ Among these our own was not the least distinguished. With great restraint I refrain from ending with an encomium on J.J. Smith, the first Treasurer, an antiquary deeply interested in both manuscripts and artefacts, and a worthy successor to Fenn and Frere in the Caius fellowship,⁶⁵ and present as epilogue

rather the state of things in the generation immediately before, symbolized by E.D. Clarke, professor of mineralogy. Clarke was the son of a peripatetic divine, and after collecting a fellowship at Jesus and holy orders, he himself set off on his travels in the 1790s as tutor to this great person and that – through Britain and most of Europe, to Russia in 1800 and Asia Minor, Palestine and Greece in 1800–1.⁶⁶ By this date he was a collector on his own account, voracious in appetite and catholic in taste. Greek statues, minerals, coins, manuscripts and marbles – all were grist to his mill, and the Bodleian and several institutions in Cambridge benefited from his adventures. There was a genuine side to his pursuit of universal knowledge: he greatly stimulated the intellectual life of Cambridge. He was also a clerical don in the tradition of the age, rector of Harlton and Yeldham, and a devoted member of Jesus in whose chapel he lies. But there was another side maliciously exaggerated by Henry Gunning in his *Reminiscences*, which may serve to remind us of the variable standard of scholarship which it was to be the vocation of the societies of the nineteenth century to harness and garner and advance:

It was the characteristic of Clarke, that whatever subject he took up he was enthusiastic in its support and advocated it with heart and soul; but this enthusiasm, unhappily, only lasted until his attention was directed to some new object, in favour of which he was equally ardent. . . .

When the parish of Whittlesford was enclosed, a dry well was discovered, bricked both at the sides and bottom, and containing several bushels of bones, chiefly (as was generally considered) of mice: it seemed to have been the grand mausoleum of all the mice in the county of Cambridge. Clarke went over to see this place, and carried away a prodigious quantity of the bones. Mrs Clarke, under his direction, united these bones, and formed some beautiful specimens of a nondescript animal. In a few days Clarke published a small pamphlet, describing this species of mouse, which he termed the 'Jerboa' mouse. The construction was very peculiar; the hind-legs were in every instance disproportionately large compared with the bodies, and the fore-legs were peculiarly small; so that the animal resembled a kangaroo in miniature. Conversing with Mr Okes on this subject, I asked him his opinion; he said the whole thing was very easily explained. The *hind-legs* were invariably those of a rat, united either to the body of a smaller rat than that of which they originally formed a part, or to the body of a mouse; but that the *fore-legs* in every instance were those of a mouse!⁶⁷

63 Cronne 1956: 79–80. On Dugdale see also Douglas 1951: chapter 2; Denholm-Young & Craster 1934.

64 Evans 1956: chapter 13, especially pp.226–8, 235, 239–42, 251 – 'a period when the Society [of Antiquaries] was not very distinguished in its work or very creditable in its state'; Levine 1986; Thompson 1990, especially chapters 1–2.

65 On J.J. Smith see Brooke 1985: 205 and n.62 (and references), 213–14; Thompson 1990: 15–16, 49, 51–2, 64, 71. He catalogued the MSS of Caius and the Society's collection of coins; and he was interested in field archaeology and the preservation of finds.

66 For the details of his career, see *DNB*.

67 Gunning 1854, II, 212–15.

We may think ourselves not far from the age of the scientific archaeologist, and I shall soon be straying beyond my brief. It was indeed the case that this society in its first generations was to be dominated by scientists a great deal more eminent than Clarke, and first of all by Robert Willis, mechanical engineer, Jacksonian professor – still well remembered in the engineering school and a cult figure among architectural historians.⁶⁸ He became president in 1845 and is just out of my reach; so let me close with a definition of the antiquaries' role from a man of more ordinary clay. We do not know who he was, but he was stirred to speak by the heated arguments raging in the Society of Antiquaries of London as to its place and function, and his utterance is dated 1829, just a decade before Halliwell and Smith and their colleagues set our society on the rails:

It is not the business of an Antiquary merely to decipher, transcribe, and to pile document upon document, extract upon extract. . . . The judicious Antiquary has higher views than these; it is his to weigh in equal scales the force of conflicting evidence, to reconcile discrepancies, and to draw strong conclusions out of minute facts which have escaped the general eye. A spear head, a coin, an imperfect inscription, a fragment of painting, the remnant of a building, a rude stone, are all legitimate objects of his speculation. The exuberance of fancy may sometimes in these points be difficult of restraint; but without the exertion of a conjectural spirit, guided by sober caution, the Antiquary would indeed be little better than a heaper up of old bills, inventories, ballads, a dealer in verdigris and iron rust, or a collector of . . . bricks, stones, tiles and pipkins. . . .⁶⁹

In such a spirit, I take it, this Society was founded.

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