
On the British Education System
and
The State Schools in Cambridge (Vol. XXIX)
—Access to the Sixth Form in Impington Village College—

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In the preceding essays (Vol. XVI-XXVIII), we have seen the general outline of The Manor Community College, including the school organization, curriculum, extra curricular activities, and so on, according to the school brochure, and the school lessons such as mathematics, science, history, English, French, physical education, and school events such as “Personal & Social Education,” and “Activities Week 1987,” and the miscellaneous things such as “Academic Progress Check,” “The Silver Jubilee of The Manor Community College” and “Manor Community College Yearbook.”

In this essay, we will see first how my three children’s admission to the state schools in Cambridge developed and then general outline of the Sixth Form in England and Wales, and in Impington Village College, and my daughter’s hardships for going to school.

Access to the Education Headquarters and the State Schools in Cambridgeshire

As I said in the preceding essay (Vol. I), on the afternoon of October 7, '86 (the third day after we settled in Cambridge), after I finished all the necessary things to live in Cambridge, I decided to go to the Education Headquarters (Shire Hall at Castle Street) for the purpose of my three children getting admission to the local state schools. Going there, I asked a clerk if I could consult with someone about my children getting admission to the local state schools. After a while, Mr. Gage, one of the staff of the Education Headquarters, came up to me and

asked me the dates of birth of my children, so I handed in the certificates of studentship that I had written out in Japan. Making a note of my children, Mr. Gage told me to call him up in the morning or afternoon two days later, and said that he would be able to make some advice about the matter. Feeling relieved to hear that, I made my way home.

On the morning of October 9 (Thursday), I called up Mr. Gage in the Headquarters from a public telephone because the telephone of my house was not available yet, and he told me that he had made an appointment with the headmaster of a junior school and the head of the pastoral care of a lower secondary school, and that it would be better for me to call Mr. Ellis, headmaster of Milton Road Junior School, as soon as possible. He also advised me to contact with Mr. Dixon at Collegiate Board for my elder daughter. So, calling up Mr. Ellis, I made an appointment with him at 3:25 p.m. that day. Thus my wife, younger daughter and I visited the Junior School and got admission to the school.

On the morning of October 10 (Friday), I got up at seven in the morning because I had to call Mr. Dixon at Collegiate Board for selecting my elder daughter's school and also had to visit the Manor Community College at eleven a.m. to meet Mr. Hunter with whom Mr. Gage at the Headquarters had made an appointment for me. First of all, at ten a.m. I telephoned Mr. Dixon with whom Mr. Gage had advised me to make contact, but unfortunately he was at his office, and a clerk said that he would not come to his office until the next Monday morning. So I was compelled to wait till the next week for deciding my daughter's school. At any rate, my wife, my son and I went to the Manor Community College at 10:50 a.m. When we entered the back gate of the school, a lot of students were running and playing on the school ground. Perhaps it was a break. We went to the main office for reception and said that we would like to meet Mr. Hunter with whom we had had an appointment. After a while, we saw a man approaching us, and he said that his name was Mr. Hunter, and asked us to wait for him in a minute. He asked two girls near by to show us the way to his room, and we headed for his room, conducted by the two girls. After a short time, Mr. Hunter came in and gave us a school brochure, explaining a lot of school rules, and encouraging my son by saying that many students had come to study at the school from all over the world, and that my son would be able to get along well though he would have much difficulty in being settled well. He also told us about the curriculum, school uniform, P. E. kit and where to buy them. And he

told us about Mrs. Brown, my son's form tutor, and school meals, adding that my son could come back to school at 9 a.m. from Monday next week and that he must come in the school uniform and ties. When we left the school building, Mr. Hunter kindly led us to the registration office. We thanked him for his kind advice, and left school from the front gate.

On Monday, October 13, I took my son to the Manor Community College before 9 a.m. and met Mrs. Brown, tutor in charge of his class. After talking with her for some time, I left the college, placing him under her care. As for my wife, she was to take my younger daughter to Milton Road Junior School by 9:20 in the morning, and I tried visiting the school, having some misgiving about them because of language barrier, but I did not find them there, so I went home. After a while, my wife returned and said that she had followed my daughter to the classroom, where my daughter introduced herself to the classmates in English, adding that she had handed in the school form about my daughter that I had written in and paid £3.5 (70P x 5 days) for school meals of the week. Thus my wife and I were much relieved that our two children were allowed to attend each different school and college.

Around ten o'clock in the next morning, I went to a super market near by and called up Mr. Dixon at the Collegiate Board from a public telephone, and at last I could make an appointment with him; he asked me to come to his office at 3 o'clock that afternoon. So after lunch, my wife, eldest daughter and I walked to Burleigh Street around one o'clock p.m., and found out his office about two o'clock. It was too early, and we were unable to meet him, so we strolled through the street. A little before 3 o'clock in the afternoon, we called at Mr. Dixon's office at the second floor, and met him, who recommended the Sixth Form of Impington Village College for my daughter. As soon as we agreed with him, he got into communication with Mr. Hjort, Head of Sixth Form at the college, saying that we could call on Mr. Hjort at 2 o'clock p.m. the next day. Expressing our appreciation, we left his office, and my wife and I felt relieved at my daughter's school being arranged. After making some little purchases, we came back a little before six p.m., and found my son and youngest daughter playing in the Close. When I asked them how they felt their schools, they did not seem to be wholly averse to them, which took the weight off my mind.

On Tuesday, October 14, my son and youngest daughter left for school at 8:20 in the morning. But I was restless from the morning because I had an appointment with Mr. Hjort

at Impington Village College. After lunch, my wife, eldest daughter and I left home for Impington which is in the suburbs of the City of Cambridge, but we could not find out a bus route for the village or catch a taxi, so we were compelled to walk to the college for about forty minutes with the aid of a map. A little after 2 p.m., we could meet Mr. Hjort, and got a sheet of paper written about the Sixth Form, which I will mention in the following chapter. On Mr. Hjort's suggestion, my daughter agreed to take the two subjects, mathematics and biology for 'A' level for two weeks. Then I told him my daughter could play the piano rather well, and he wrote it down on his notebook. And I asked him of the bus service from Cambridge to Impington. According to his explanation, there were not many bus services, and the nearest bus stop from our house was Mansel Way. Expressing our gratitude to him, we got on a bus on our way back home. But my daughter was to have much difficulty in taking this very bus from the next morning, about which I will tell you in the following pages. At any rate, these doings and hardships allowed my three children to go to the school and colleges in Cambridgeshire. After all, it took eleven days before all of my children could attend their state schools!

The Sixth Form

In the preceding essay (Vol.II), we have seen what is the Sixth Form is. It is rather difficult for us Japanese to understand the Sixth Form well, so now we will review the chief distinction of the Sixth Form in England and Wales. After that, we will examine an explanatory note about the Sixth Form in Impington Village College that Mr. Hjort, Head of Sixth Form, gave me when we visited him first.

Most of the school children in the secondary schools in England and Wales find employment at the age of 15 when they finish their compulsory education, but some of them are moved up to the fifth form and they may transfer to college of further education or find a situation by passing O levels of GCE (General Certificate of Education) or some grades of CSE (Certificate of Secondary Education). But some of the fifth formers may stay school for two or three years more, and study three or four subjects, trying to pass A levels of GCE. This system is called the sixth form. In recent years these sixth formers have been increasing in

number. Comprehensive and grammar schools have sixth form departments providing one-, two-, three-year courses, but secondary modern schools do not usually have the sixth form. “In some areas the various schools have combined their sixth forms to make a new and separate Sixth Form College. It offers a wider choice of courses than the individual schools could do—much wider than schools in most other countries.”¹ Studies are highly specialized at the sixth form stage because the courses lead to the GCE “A” Level exam which qualifies students for all kinds of higher education, and at “A” Level only three or four subjects are taken. Here are examples of groups of subjects taken at A Level: English / French / German; Maths / Physics / Chemistry; Geography / History / Economics. As for my daughter, she entered Impington Village College which has the sixth form as well as the secondary school course because maybe there were not any colleges with Sixth Form in the City of Cambridge, I think.

Now we will turn to the explanatory note about the Sixth Form in Impington Village College.

Here we will see the whole statement:

General

The Sixth form at Impington is well established, having been introduced in 1965, and at present there are 90 students, a proportion of whom have always come from other schools. It is an integral part of the Village College and the 11-19 school.

Accommodation

The College is situated in pleasant surroundings three miles North of the City Centre. Recent additions to the original building include modern teaching accommodation, gymnasium and heated swimming pool. Members of the Sixth Form have their own common room close to the Senior Library.

Transport

The College is easily reached by bus from Drummer Street Bus Station or from the Northern by-pass.

Organization of the Sixth Form

Impington Village College has a tradition of caring for the individual and this is extended into the Sixth Form. For administration and general guidance, each student belongs to a small tutor group which meet daily.

The responsibility for and coordination of the assessment of academic progress lies with the Head of Sixth Form, who regularly interviews all students. Contact

with parents is maintained through consultation evenings and reports. In addition staff always encourage and welcome discussion of progress and plans with students and parents.

The Head of Careers provides both groups and individuals with information and advice on careers and the students are encouraged to use the Careers / Higher Education library.

Students are prepared for admission to Universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, Polytechnics, Colleges of Higher Education, Colleges of Art and Technology and for a wide range of employment.

Sixth Form Activities

We encourage students to contribute to the life of the College in a variety of ways and our Sixth Formers undertake a range of voluntary community service activities.

The Sixth Form Social Committee manages the Sixth Form Fund and arranges dances and charity events.

Sixth Form societies include Literature, Debating, Science, French, Computing, Mathematics. Dramatic and Musical productions are staged annually and opportunities to develop other interests are provided by evening classes. The Young Enterprise scheme has recently been introduced into the General Studies programme.

The Head boy and Head girl, elected by the Sixth Form students, are members of the College Council which represents all the many users of the College.

As the students are expected to develop an increasing amount of responsibility both for their studies and their life in the College, they are not required to wear a uniform.

Sports

Sports offered include Hockey, Netball, Basketball, Football, Rugby, Volley Ball, Badminton, Tennis, Table Tennis, Swimming and Jazz-ballet. Participation is encouraged but not compulsory.

Courses available

Students at Impington follow 'A' Level courses, but may, in addition, study some subjects to 'O' Level.

The courses available to 'A' Level and the supporting programme of 'O' and 'AO' Level courses are shown below.

Teaching is arranged in all subjects for those who wish to enter for 'S' Level papers.

Students should normally choose three 'A' Level subjects, but for some students concentration on two subjects may be acceptable.

The combination of 'A' Level subjects offered may be affected by the demands of the timetable and so students are advised to consult the Sixth Form Brochure and / or the Head of Sixth Form before they make their final decision.

Advanced Level courses of two years' duration

| | | |
|----------------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Chemistry (Nuffield) | Geography | Art |
| Physics (Nuffield) | History | Design and Technology |
| Biology | German | Environmental Studies |
| Mathematics | English | |
| Further Mathematics | French | |
| | Economics | |

'O' and 'AO' courses offered as part of an 'A' Level course

Mathematics, Additional Mathematics, Human Biology, Environmental Studies, Geology, English Language, Spanish, Study of Art, Economics, and Computer Studies.

Some of these will be taught within the General Studies programme, which is arranged each year in the light of student interest and staff availability.

General Studies

This is a programme followed by all students in which lectures of general and topical interest alternate with revolving small-group courses in Current affairs, Philosophy, Careers and Study Skills. All students opt for a further General Studies course of one year's duration, chosen from a wide range of subjects and activities.

An Annual Conference is held, the preparation for which is made in discussion groups based on the tutor group.

Further information

The Warden and Staff are most willing to help and advise any parent or student.

Please telephone for an appointment with the Head of Sixth Form, Mr. Dale Hjort (Histon 2835), if you wish to visit the College or to seek advice.

As is shown in the Sixth Form brochure at Impington, my daughter consulted the Head of Sixth Form before she made her final decision and chose two subjects of Mathematics and Biology, according to the regulation "Students should normally choose three 'A' Level subjects, but for some students concentration on two subjects may be acceptable," and got a permission. But by this very choice, she was destined to have a hard time studying these two subjects. About her hardships and difficulties, I will tell you on another occasion.

My Daughter's Anxiety and Hardships

As for my eldest daughter, she seems to have been much worried about when she would be

able to attend a state school in Cambridge. I knew her anxiety and irritation by her diary, for I had told my three children to keep a diary every day after our arrival at Cambridge. Here I will show you two days' diary of hers translated into English:

9th October, Thursday

It is only my father that is very busy in doing a lot of things every day. Today Father, Mother and my sister Ritsuko went to a junior school to take an interview with the headmaster. I hear my sister will be able to attend school from Monday next week. They will have a swimming lesson once a week, I hear. Little did I dream that we could swim because it is very cold in this country. I envy my sister because her school was decided. I have no idea whether I will be admitted to a school. Tomorrow my brother is to have an interview with the headmaster of an upper secondary school. I want to attend school as soon as possible.

13th October, Monday

Today Father had a telephone call to the school office where I wanted to be admitted and made an appointment with the head of Sixth Form at 3 p.m. tomorrow. Until now I have had my heart in my mouth, worrying about whether I will be admitted or not. Now I have felt relieved to hear that my school to attend is decided, though it seems to be rather far from Cambridge.

As is shown in her diary, the next day, my wife, eldest daughter and I met Mr. Hjort and she was finally admitted into the college, and it was also decided that she was able to attend school the next day. But as stated above, she was to have much difficulty in taking a bus for Impington. You will see her strenuous efforts for taking a bus from her diary:

15th October, Wednesday

It was the first day when I went to school. I went to the bus stop of Mansel Way by myself, but I got lost on the way. I managed to get there at 8:44, but the bus did not come. Thinking that I missed the bus, I went back home at once. This time my father and I went to the bus stop, but we could not find the exact place. Giving up finding it, we came back. So Mother, going to Mrs. Maruyama who is one of the Japanese neighbours in the Close, asked her of the way to the bus stop, and Mrs. Maruyama was kind enough to pick me up to the college. When we reached the College, lunch time had already begun. Then Mr. Hjort, Head of Sixth Form, introduced me to some students of the same age. After school, Mr. Hjort came for me and had me get on a bus by telling the driver my bus stop. He is a very kind Head.

16th October, Thursday

Today Mother accompanied me to the bus stop. We waited for the bus, which did not come ten minutes past the expected time of arrival. We made a telephone call to my house, called a taxi, and I went to college alone by taxi. On arriving at college, I went to the reception room and asked a tall male clerk of the room where biology was being taught. And the clerk showed me to the room, but the lesson, in which we examined a cell through a microscope, was soon over. I had lunch at dining room with two friends of mine, but they ate their own packed lunch. And I knew they took the trouble to follow me there, and felt sorry for them.

Also today, Mr. Hjort followed me to the bus stop, but this time I got on a bus, telling the driver the bus stop to get off.

According to her diary, the next day my daughter waited for the bus with my wife for about twenty minutes, because Mr. Hjort told her to wait till another bus came even if the expected bus did not come. That day it was very foggy and chilly, and they kept standing at the bus stop while waiting. When they were about to leave there, then the bus came at 9:05. So she was late for school again because school begins at 9 o'clock.

As we have seen, she struggled hard against difficulties to take a bus throughout the week. After that, such delay of bus seems to have continued for some time. I wrote to Mr. Hjort, telling him about her difficulties in taking a bus, and he appealed such situation to the bus company, but it showed no sign of improvement. However, I got a secondhand car soon and picked her up to her college, so such hardships of hers were more or less got rid of!

So far we have seen the access to the Education Headquarters and the State Schools, the distinction of the Sixth Form in England and Wales and in Impington Village College, and my daughter's hardships in the process of going to school. About her hardships and difficulties in studying the two subjects of 'A' Level, and other things, I will tell you on another occasion. Lastly showing you two photos of Impington Village College in the following page, I will bring this essay to a close.

NOTE

1. See *Life in Britain* by H.F. Brookes and C.E. Fraenkel (Kinseido, Ltd., Tokyo, 1985), p.12.



Impington Village College seen from the Front Entrance



My Family at the Entrance Hall of Impington Village College