

# On the British Education System and The State Schools in Cambridge ( I )

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## Preface

From October in 1986 to August in 1987, I went to Cambridge in England with approval of the Ministry of Education of Japan as an overseas researcher to seek further enlightenment of my study on Christopher Marlowe and collect the research materials in the University of Cambridge where Marlowe studied and is said to have probably written *Dido, Queen of Carthage* before he left Cambridge. The Chairman of the Faculty of English in the University, Professor D.S. Brewer, was so kind as to give me permission to attend lectures given under the auspices of the Faculty of English during the academical year 1986-87, and to waive the fee. And I was also permitted to make use of the English Faculty Library and the University Library. Moreover, the Society for Visiting Scholars in the University kindly arranged social and cultural events for visitors and helped with accommodation. On that occasion, I was attended by my family (my wife and three children). Leaving Cambridge at the end of July in 1987, I stayed in Paris and New York for about a month, and came back to Japan at 31st August in the same year. But my family stayed in Cambridge till the end of August partly because my children settled in their schools very well, and partly because they hated to go back to their country. After all, saying goodbye to their friends in Cambridge, my family came back to Japan at 31st August in 1987. Looking back upon the past, I myself feel yearning for that lovely country, especially that city of Cambridge with old and beautiful colleges, the River Cam, and so on. Even now, the dear faces of our family's friends and acquaintances who were kind and friendly to us, come across my mind like a revolving lantern. I am sure my family including my wife also had a very good time in Cambridge. Especially my three children did. It is because they went to the local state school and colleges, and made a lot of friends there, I think. So they will never forget their happy school life in Cambridge forever. Therefore, first of all, I will mention how we settled in Cambridge, and how I got permission to the local state schools for my three children, and then I will describe the British education system and the school life of my children in the following chapters.

### I. Settlement in Cambridge and Permission to the Local State Schools

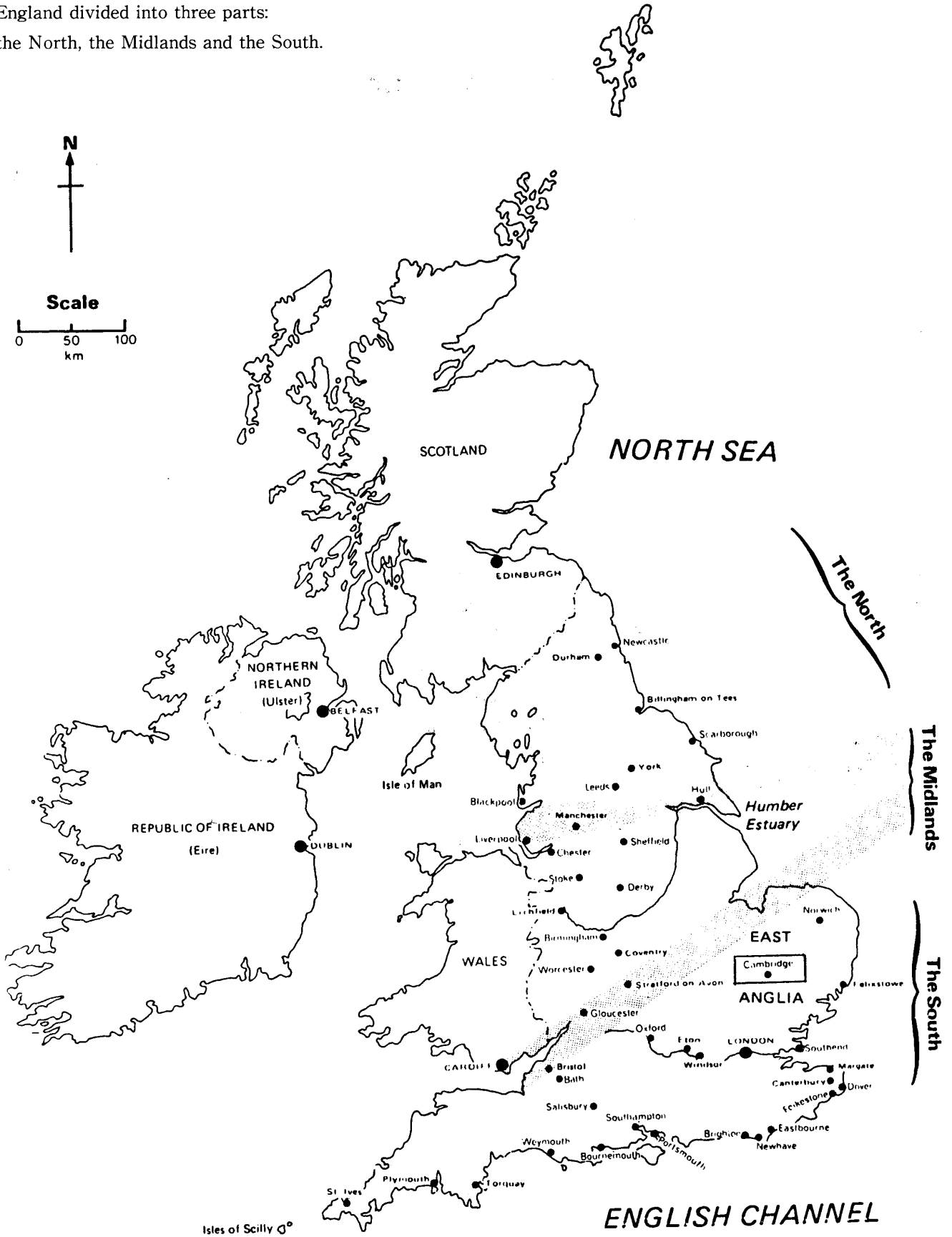
First of all, I will tell you about how we were settled in Cambridge and how my three children were

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Map of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup>

England divided into three parts:  
the North, the Midlands and the South.



able to get permission to enter the local school and colleges in Cambridge.

We got to Gatwick International Airport in London, 4th October in 1986, which means we arrived one day too late for our original schedule. It was because our airplane for Hong Kong was delayed for some reason or other, arriving there two hours or so late for the time for the changing of the airplane, and we were forced to stay in Hong Kong overnight, and to make use of the same flight the following day as we had intended to make. At any rate, we arrived in London safe and sound, so at once we headed for Victoria Station by British Railway, then went to Liverpool Street Station by taxi, and took a train for Cambridge. As soon as we reached Cambridge, we headed for our rented house, of which I had made a contract with the landlady beforehand, and were relaxed for some time. After a while, we went food - hunting, but to our great surprise, the main shops and stores were closed after five p.m. ! Later I noticed that it was Saturday that day. At any rate, we found an opened store near by, and bought some bread and milk, and some "Fish and Chips" at a

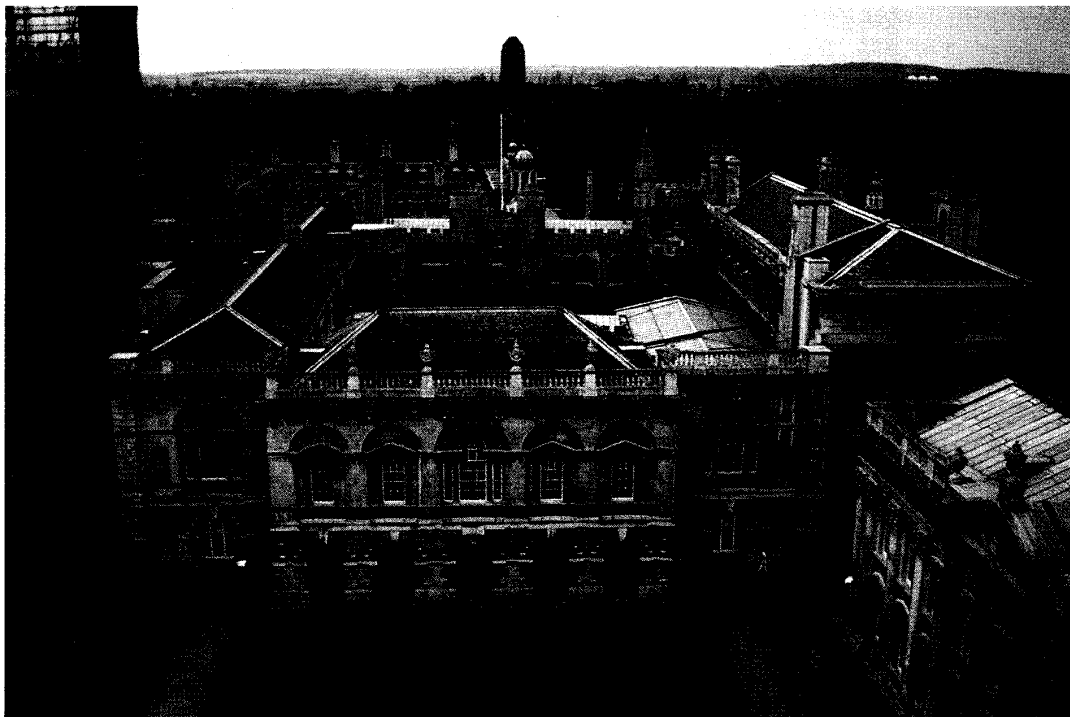


Our terraced house in Cambridge  
(40 Mulberry Close, Cambridge)

takeaway shop, satisfying our appetite with them. The following day it was quite the same !

At the third day in Cambridge (6th October), we had to arrange for ourselves a lot of things necessary for our daily life because the landlady lived at Cumbria in Northern England. First my wife, eldest daughter and I went to the Head Quarters of the Police Station in Cambridge to get a green card, i.e. to make alien registration. The officer said that my eldest daughter need not do it, though I thought she had to do it as she was sixteen then. The fee of registration was £ 25 per hand. After that, we went to the City Centre to make an application to the British Telecom for telephone, and collected the pot of the fireplace at the show-room of British Gas plc. as the landlady's letter told me, and at the same time I made an application for supply of gas. In the evening that day, my wife and I called on our next - door neighbours to introduce ourselves. When we visited the next door on the right side, he told me a lot of things, for example, how to treat and control the central heating and washing machine and how to get admission to the local state schools for my children. His name was Brian Michell, and he was living alone, leaving his wife in Northern England, and worked for some kind of insurance company. He also made an appointment to take us to a bank for opening an account and the Eastern Electricity plc. for handing in an application form of supply of electricity.

On the morning of October 7, Mr. Michell called for us, as he had promised us the previous evening. We took a small bus called "Mini Shuttle" to the City Centre. Thanks to Mr. Michell, who had had an appointment, I could register at Eastern Electricity and open a current account, a high cheque interest account and a foreign currency account at Midland Bank. As we finished all the



Old School, Cambridge, seen from Saint Mary Church.  
At the back is Clare College. In the distance the University Library is seen.

important matters to do, I decided in the afternoon to go to the Education Headquarters (Shire Hall at Castle Street) where Mr. Michell had told me to go the previous day, for the purpose of my children getting admission to the local state schools. When I got 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 date of birth of my children, so I handed in the certificates of studentship which I had written out in Japan. Making a note of them, 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. Of course, I informed Mr. Michell of the matter that evening.

The next day all of my family went to the City Centre on a bus, with the matter of my children's education remaining unsettled. The bus fare was 38 pence for adults, 19 pence for children. First I went to Midland Bank to ask a clerk to send a monthly statement about my account. After that we went to the University Centre and dined together at the dining hall, which was self - service one. Then parting with my family, I went to register the Library of Faculty of English, and University Library, and then registered Central Library of the City of Cambridge at Lion Yard.

On the morning October 9 (Thursday), I called up Mr. Gage in the Headquarters from a public telephone, and he told me that he had made an appointment with the headmaster of a junior school and 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 eldest daughter. When I called up Mr. Ellis and said that I should like to see him for the admission of my youngest daughter to his school, he said he could meet me at three thirty that afternoon. So my wife, youngest daughter Ritsuko and I visited Milton Road Junior School at 3 : 25 p.m. to see Mr. Ellis. The headmaster was a gentleman of great stature, and gave me a school pamphlet of his school and explained the school meals and P.E. Kit. Then, showing us a sentence "**The longest journey starts with a single step,**" put in a frame, he asked me to have my daughter understand it well, and said she could come to school at 9 : 20 a.m. the next Monday (October 13), adding that Mrs. J. Russon, teacher of social studies, would be in charge of my daughter, and that my daughter could bring any Japanese teaching materials with her that day. Offering our cordial thanks, we left the school. I made for home, thinking I must call on Mr. Hunter at the Manor Community College for my son one of these days. In the evening, my neighbour Mr. Michell advised me to register our family doctor at the Medical Office, and said it would be better for us to have Dr. Hertig as a family doctor.

On the morning of October 10, I got up at seven, and it seemed that I would be very busy, because I had to call Mr. Dixon at Collegiate Board for selecting my eldest 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 I telephoned Mr. Dixon whom Mr. Gage had advised me to contact, but unfortunately he was not at his office, and a clerk said that he would not come to his office until the next Monday morning. So I thought I was compelled to wait till the next week for deciding my daughter's school. At any rate, my wife, my son and I got to the Manor Community College at 10 : 50. 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. And then we saw a man approaching us, and he said that his name was Mr. Hunter, and asked us



Mulberry Close in autumn seen from the first floor of my house

to wait for him at his room as he would go at once. He asked two schoolgirls near by to show us the way to his room, and we headed for his room, conducted by the two girls. After a while, Mr. Hunter came in and gave us a school pamphlet, explaining a lot of school rules, encouraging my son by saying that many students had come to the school from all over the world as well as from Japan, and that my son would be able to get along well though he would have much difficulty in being settled. He also told us about the curriculum, school uniform, P.E. Kit and where to buy them. When I asked him where I could buy a school tie, he said that I could buy it then, so I got it for £2.5. And he told us about Mrs. Brown, my son's homeroom teacher, and the school meals, adding that my son could come back to school at 9 a.m. from the Monday next and that he must come in the school uniform and tie. In our leaving, he kindly showed us the registration office. We thanked him for his kind advice, and left school from the front gate that time. On our way back home, I called at the Medical Office at Hurst Park Avenue by myself, and registered Dr. Arnold Hertig as our family doctor. When I got home, I found my son playing football on the lawn with the children at Mulberry Close. Since our arrival in Cambridge, he had been enjoying football with them, and he seemed to remember their names. I thought that children could communicate with each other even if they had some language barrier. I almost forgot it, but that day was our eighteenth wedding anniversary. My wife cooked 'curry and rice, which was favorite dish of my children's, and we celebrated the anniversary all together.

The next day was Saturday, October 11. It was a whole week since we had settled in Cambridge. That morning I received a letter from British Telecom early in the morning. Though I had been quite surprised at the early delivery of mails, a mailman came after seven o'clock in the morning that

day, too ! In the afternoon, my wife and I went shopping to the City Centre with my son and youngest daughter to buy their P.E. Kit and school uniform, though my youngest daughter need not wear school uniform. We got my son's uniform at Marks & Spencer's, and their P.E. Kit at the Grey's. It cost us about 100 pounds. Coming home, my son went to play football with the children in the Close. As it was Saturday, the children in the Close had no school and were rather relaxed.

On Sunday, October 12, I slept off my fatigue of the past weekend and got up at eight in the morning. My wife also overslept herself and showed some sign of fatigue when she got up. My three children had a long sleep. Almost all the shops near by were closed as usual, and we spent the morning as we liked. Around three in the afternoon, my son and youngest daughter were invited to Dr. Nagai's home in the Close, and were entertained with cakes, for that day was the birthday of Dr. Nagai's son, Ken. According to my daughter, Dr. Nagai had a second - hand piano, and my daughter let it played. When my youngest daughter told Dr. and Mrs. Nagai that her elder sister could play it, they told her to bring my eldest daughter there, so my wife and eldest daughter, Chiharu, went there, and thus she could play the piano for the first time in 12 days after she left Japan, and seemed to be rather satisfied. In the evening, I was writing a report of residing in England to the Japanese Embassy in London, and some letters for Japan, when Mr. Michell visited us and asked us how we were getting on. So I told him about visiting my children's schools and the registration of our family doctor, and the bicycle with the rusty saddle. And he said he would try checking it, and lowered the saddle a little with some tools, and oiled the bicycle here and there. He was kindness itself. In acknowledgment of his services, we treated him to a cup of Japanese tea, and taught him some Japanese "Ohayo" for "Good morning" and "Kon - nichiwa" for "Good afternoon." My son and youngest daughter seemed not to fall asleep, partly because they were worried about attending school the next day, and partly because they were rather in excitement. As for me, I was thinking of making an appointment once again with Mr. Dixon at Collegiate Board the following day.

On Monday, October 13, I took my son to the Manor Community College before 9 a.m., and met Mrs. Brown, teacher 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 youngest daughter to Milton Road Junior School by 9 : 20 in the morning, but I tried visiting the school, having some misgiving about them, but I did not find them there, and I went home feeling somewhat relieved. 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 and paid £3.5 (70 P × 5 days) for school meals of the week.

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 to meet him, so we strolled through the street, and I changed my Traveller's Cheque £100 into cash at Midland Bank at Burleigh 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 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 o'clock in the evening, and found my son and youngest daughter playing with 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. After dinner, there was an occurrence; the stool at the toilet got clogged. My wife boiled out the overflowing water and picked the tool with the wire made by stretching a hanger, and at last the water returned to the normal condition. But then did the wire to adjust the water flowing out into the tool snap. Therefore, when we used the tool, we had to open the upper lid of the tool and pull the broken wire. One misfortune followed close on the heels of another! Indeed we were leading troublesome daily life!

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. I went shopping to a super market and a hardware store, and bought a pair of cutting pliers (£6.7) and a pair of radio pliers (£4.2) at the store in order to repair the wire of the toilet mentioned above. Around 11 in the morning, I got one of the parcels I had sent to England from Japan but which I had not received. It contained some kinds of dictionaries, and a note with the proviso that they had reinforced with vinyl bag as the parcel box had broken. Seeing this message, I was deeply impressed with such a kind handling by Royal Mail in England! 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 o'clock in the afternoon, 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 getting on this very bus from the next morning, about which I will tell you in one of the following chapters. At any rate, these doings and hardships allowed my three children to go to the school and colleges in Cambridge. After all, it took eleven days before all my children could attend their state schools! At any rate, my wife and I were greatly relieved.

(Continued)

**(Note)**

1. The map is borrowed from the inside cover of *Life in Britain* by H.F. Brookes and C.E. Fraenkel (Kinseido, Ltd., Tokyo, 1985).