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

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In the preceding essays, I mentioned how my family were settled in Cambridge and how my three children were able to get permission to enter the local school and colleges in Cambridge. At the same time, I also mentioned the British compulsory education system especially concerning LEA (Local Education Authority) schools, and also explained some special features of the British school system. In this essay, I will mention Further Education, the Universities, the Polytechnics and Colleges of Higher Education in Britain.

I . Further Education

As we have seen in the preceding essays, education in Britain is compulsory until the age of 16. A number of pupils—by this age they are called ‘students’—stay on at school to take GCE ‘A’ Levels and then go on to full-time study at a university, polytechnic or college of higher education, but the majority leave at 16 so that they can start to earn some money for themselves. What happens to them next in getting equipped to earn a living? *Life in Britain*¹ shows us a lot of examples, so let’s take some possibilities here:

- 1) *John and Susan* are 16, and have just left school. They have no exam qualifications. They are looking for a job, and if they are lucky they will find one with a firm which gives them some training within the company.
- 2) *Peter* is another 16-year-old school leaver, who has some CSE and ‘O’ Level successes, especially in maths and science. He is applying for an apprenticeship with a large engineering company, and wants to qualify as a maintenance engineer. There is a lot of competition for apprenticeships even if an apprentice’s pay is very low for four or five years.
- 3) *Sandra* has 6 ‘O’ Levels. At 16 she was able to go into the sixth form of her school, but she prefers to leave it. Indeed there are not many apprenticeships for girls, but she is a practical girl so she decides to go to a College of Further Education and take an intensive one-year secretarial course. At the end she intends to take Royal Society of Arts exams in typing and short hand.
- 4) *Alison* has passed four CSE exams, and she wanted to train to become a nurse but her qualifications were not good enough. So she took a job as a domestic helper in an old people’s home. She was pleased with the place but after some time she left to attend her local College

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of Further Education. Now she is training to be a social worker. As The City and Guilds of London Institute organizes as many different kinds of *vocational course* to equip students for a career, Alison will take one of its examinations at the end of a year.

- 5) *Nick* is leaving school at 18, and has 4 'O' Levels with good marks and 1 'A' Level; he has just failed his second 'A' Level subject, so he has decided to take a Higher National Diploma (HND) course in Business Studies at a Polytechnic. If he does well enough at the end of the two-year course, he may be able to go on to a shortened degree course. At first he considered taking the new Diploma of Higher Education (Dip.H.E.) course because it has a wide variety of two-year course, but in the end he decided to choose the longer established HND vocational course.

As above-mentioned, even after taking a job the students in Britain have some possibilities to improve themselves and to take their favourite job by taking some authoritative examinations. Here is a chart of main vocational training opportunities.²

Main vocational training opportunities leading to exam qualifications

City and Guilds of London Institute courses taken at a College of Further Education.

{ *Ordinary National Certificate taken at a College of Further Education.*

{ *Ordinary National Diploma (more academic than the Certificate).*

{ *Higher National Certificate taken at a Polytechnic.*

{ *Higher National Diploma*

The course you take depends on the 'O' and 'A' Level results you have.

Most courses can be taken by full-time or part-time study.

So it is possible for English boys and girls to obtain extra qualifications by studying in the evenings and, if the company admits a day-release scheme, one day a week as well. A day-release scheme is one which the company allows the employers to go to a college of Further Education only once a week to obtain some official qualifications, and to the employees who perform this scheme, are some advantages about taxes and grants given through Industrial Training Boards. By extending this idea comes a 'sandwich' course, on which a student studies and works alternately for three or four years before obtaining a degree. 'Sandwich' course is one in which instruction is given intensively for a specified period (the first or the second term). The employees who offer this convenience to their employers, receive, as in a day-release scheme, some advantages about taxes and grants by Industrial Training Law.

Here we will consider Further Education more minutely. Section 24 of the Further Education Law enacted in 1944 that each local education authority must establish enough educational facilities for Further Education. Further Education includes education of very wide range from education intended for the Fifth Form students, who have just finished the compulsory education, to education of university standard intended for those who finished the Sixth Form. The lectures, roughly speaking, are classified into 3 fields; vocational education, subjects for general education, and social intercourse and recreation. All the educational institutions are sustained and backed by local education authorities, except for a small number of colleges receiving grants directly from Ministry of Education and Science. A large number of students studying at Colleges of Further education,

used to attend once a week, but recently if they have a job, they are given holidays for a specified period for the purpose of taking the shortened full-time course. Typical educational institutes for Further Education are, in my opinion, technical colleges. Taking an example of West Ford Technical College, Shirley Toulson mentions the college rather concretely.³ According to him, about 7,000 students attend the college, and about 500 of these are on full-time courses. The full-time students are given grants to live on, and their fees are paid by the local education authority. Indeed local education authorities can collect fees, but the students under the age of 19 are admitted free of fees in most cases. Local education authorities are also bound to give grants to properly qualified students who take the course to obtain the degrees and official qualifications of universities and technical colleges. Moreover to the students who take the other courses they can give some assistance by their latitude. The rest of the students other than 500 full-time students are in employment, and just come into college for one day a week, but they are not all studying for the same examination. Some of them failed to pass the necessary subjects in the General Certificate of Education while they were at school, so they are studying for these now. Others are studying for the Higher National Diploma, which is more advanced than the ordinary. As for Ordinary National Diploma, this system for vocational training opportunities was started by advocacy of a certain Secretary of State for Education and Science in the early 1920s. Both the Certificate and Diploma are given to the applicants by a joined committee of Ministry of Education and Science and the technical association concerned. Each college makes its handbook and marks examination papers. The joined committee admits the handbook and appoints the examiners. The Certificate is given to the part-time students, while the Diploma to the full-time ones. The standard of this system is equivalent to that of requirements for graduation of a university.

As we have seen, "Technical College" is not really a college in the true sense of the word, just as there are many institutions of university grade in Japan. Unlike universities, technical colleges have kept their peculiar tradition; they are concerned with technical and vocational education, and accept anyone who finished the compulsory education and prepare courses appropriate to the student's ability. Moreover, they keep in close contact with commercial and industrial circles, and provide any new courses if necessary. In addition, they have full-time and part-time students, and are educational facilities rather than research institutes. The quality of education is chiefly concerned with the studies for the examinations like National Certificate, City and Guilds, General Certificate of Education (GCE), and Royal Society of Arts.

Another interesting development in the field of adult education is the Open University. Adult education was made a part of Further Education by the Educational Law in 1944, and the law obliged local education authorities to consult adults' convenience to their systematic and cultural activities and recreational ones. And this conception of the Open University was conceived in 1963 by Prime Minister Wilson. All the outcome of this university is backed by the national finance, and its courses are broadcast on radio and television, supplemented by correspondence with tutors as well as by weekend and summer seminars. A lot of programmes are developed by the 280 local audio-visual centres, and the students can obtain the same degrees as ordinary universities if they take the necessary units. This university does not receive the students under 21, but admits those who lost requirements for admission to a university in the past. Therefore, the aim of Further Education in Britain is not only "to provide an extension to school, but to try and provide as wide a range of

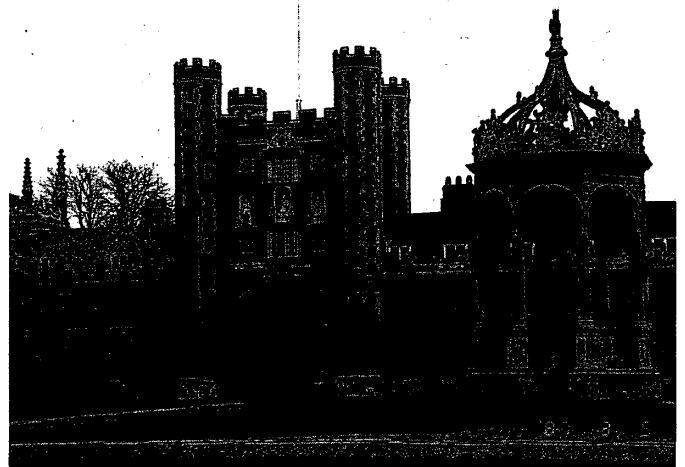
facilities as possible for specialist study, so that each can find the pattern of study best suited to his particular circumstances.”⁴

II. The Universities

About 2,500 years ago Plato had the idea of university education and created in Athens the first University of the West, which was called the Academy and lasted for a thousand years. It set the course of educational development in Europe and even modern education bears the traces of his influence. Indeed Plato passionately believed that “societies, and therefore the individuals in them, could only prosper if human affairs were guided by systematic knowledge. It was essential that the ablest people of a community, those likely to fill leading roles in running it, should receive rigorous intellectual and moral training.”⁵ Today a very large number of universities all over the world are still pursuing ideas similar to those of Plato. However, they face new problems because so much has changed since his time; advances in every branch of learning have been so large that no one can master it all, so that students concentrate on a particular subject which interests them or which they want to use in their future career. Indeed unless they specialize very narrowly, even what they learn will remain incomplete. But if universities merely prepared people for their future careers or



King's College, Cambridge



Trinity College, Cambridge

produced academic experts in specializations, they would not deserve the name of “university,” because this word is cognate with the adjective “universal,” meaning “all embracing,” or “without exception,” and with the noun “universe,” which means the totality of our surroundings, everything that exists. In this sense, John Henry Newman wisely says that a university “is a place of teaching universal knowledge.”⁶

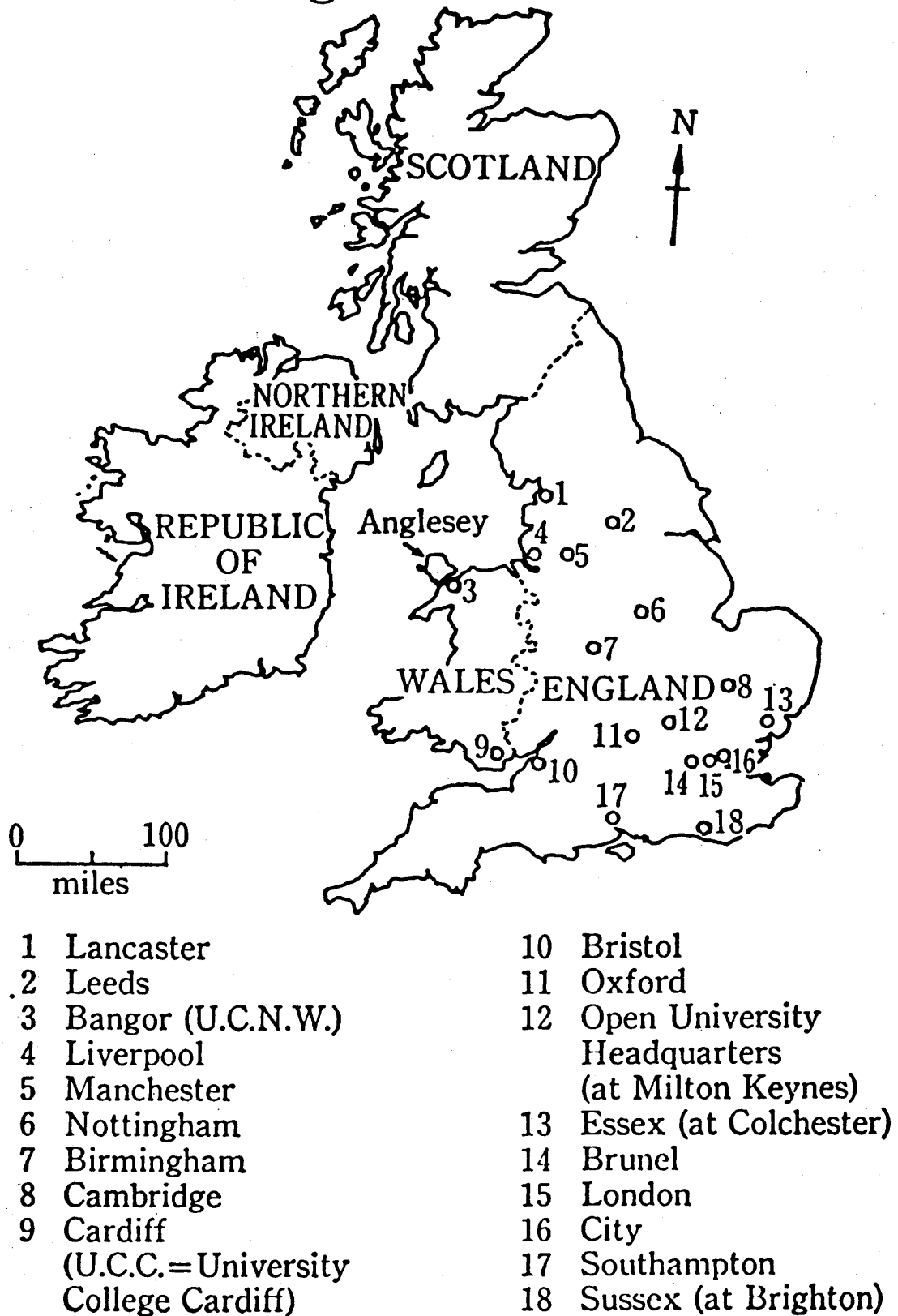
Apart from the idea of a university, in Britain, about 5% of all 18-year-olds enter university each year. In Japan, the figure is much higher. Therefore, going to university is definitely a minority activity in Britain, and students go to university of their own free choice, and for three years, mainly at the tax-payer’s expense, they can study the subject of his choice, and at the same time enjoy a rich and varied social life.

As for the number of the universities in Britain, “In 1960 there were only 23 British universities. There are now 46, of which 35 are in England, 8 in Scotland, 2 in Northern Ireland and 1 in Wales”⁷ as of February 1, 1991. They are roughly divided into three groups:

- 1) The old established universities, such as Oxford and Cambridge. Oxford and Cambridge together are often called Oxbridge. In the early thirteenth century scholars were studying in these ancient universities. Until the nineteenth century they were the only universities in England, and they offered no places to girls.
Four universities were founded in Scotland before Scotland and England were united: St. Andrews (1411), Glasgow (1450), Aberdeen (1494) and Edingburgh (1583).
- 2) The redbrick universities, such as London and Manchester. All the universities in this group were founded in the major towns in Britain between 1850 and 1930. The name “redbrick” obviously derives from the building material which was predominantly used, and red brick is especially common in the industrial Midlands of England.
- 3) The new universities established after World War II, such as Essex, Lancaster, the New University of Ulster. In 1960s, Britain was ready to build new universities to meet the increased demand for higher education, with the immediate problems of post-war reconstruction behind it. As some of these new universities were built in a modern style, they received collective name of plate-glass universities. On the next page I will show you “A Location Map of Selected Universities in England and Wales” borrowed from *University Observed* by M.C. Mobbs.⁸

Before mentioning a particular university, I will tell you about the admission procedures which must be taken by the applicants. M.C. Mobbs explains them rather minutely: “Students wishing to enter a university in the October of a particular year must send an application form in the autumn term of the previous year to a body called the *Universities’ Central Council for Admissions* (UCCA). On this form, applicants state which universities they are interested in entering (maximum six in order of preference), and which subject or subject combination they wish to study. They give details of their academic qualifications obtained so far (which for most people means details of passes obtained in the Ordinary Level examination of the G.C.E.), and state which further qualifications they are currently working for (Advanced Level examinations of the G.C.E.). U.C.C.A. circulates copies of this form to the universities nominated by the candidate, and these either make a conditional offer

Location of Selected Universities in England and Wales



of a place or reject the candidate. A conditional offer is normally dependent on the candidate's obtaining at least 2 A Level passes at stipulated grades in subjects relevant to the course applied for. It is very rare for a university to make an unconditional offer of a place. In August, when the A Level results are announced, candidates are anxious to know whether the grades they obtain match the conditions set down by their preferred universities.⁹



Mathematical Bridge, Queen's College, Cambridge, and the River Cam

As we have seen, there are three groups of the universities in Britain. But I will mention the old established universities, especially the University of Cambridge, where I obtained 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 also to make use of the English Faculty Library and the University Library, and the University of Oxford I visited once or twice on day-return tours to Oxford by the Society for Visiting Scholars of the University of Cambridge in my next essay.

(Continued)

NOTES

- 1 . See *Life in Britain*, ed. by H.F. Brookes and C.E. Fraenkel (Kinseido, Ltd., Tokyo, 1985), pp. 15-16.
- 2 . *Ibid.*, p.16.
- 3 . Shirley Toulson, *Education in Britain* (Kinseido, Ltd., Tokyo, 1985), p.75.
- 4 . *Ibid.*, p.80.
- 5 . H.P. Rickman, *British Universities* (Nan'un-Do, Ltd., Tokyo, 1987), p.8.
- 6 . Michael C. Mobbs, *Universities Observed; Portraits of Four British Universities from a Historical Perspective* (Seibido, Ltd., Tokyo, 1982), p.6.
- 7 . Richard Musman & Adrian-Vallance, *Britain Today* (Eichosha, Ltd., Tokyo, 1991), p.67.
- 8 . Mobbs, *op. cit.*, p.iv.
- 9 . *Ibid.*, pp.98-99.

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