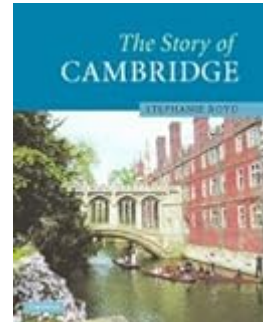


Stephanie Boyd. *The Story of Cambridge.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 96 pp. \$21.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-62897-6.



Clare Hopkins. *Trinity: 450 Years of an Oxford College Community.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. xxii + 500 pp. \$135.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-951896-8.



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Making Sense of Oxford and Cambridge: Some New Historical Approaches

In the conclusion to her thoroughly researched and nicely crafted history of Trinity College, Oxford, Clare Hopkins makes the following observation: “Trinity has always been a community working hard to achieve its aims, and to prosper the lives of its members” (p. 451). This assertion, along with a similar statement made by Stephanie Boyd in her brief examination of the academic, economic, and cultural communities of Cambridge, functions as a telling indicator of the interpretive perspectives embraced by each of these authors. The emphasis in these studies is on documenting and narrating the his-

stories of these ancient university communities and highlighting, for readers, the ways in which these intriguing stories can be situated within broader national narratives. To achieve this goal, each author focuses on the history of their respective institution or city in its entirety. Boyd, in her exploration of Cambridge, begins by guiding readers through the region’s prehistory and concludes with an assessment of the city’s place in the modern economic, cultural, and intellectual life of Britain. Hopkins, in her masterful institutional narrative, traces the history of Trinity College, Oxford from its founding

by Thomas Pope in 1555 to its modernization in the 1980s and 1990s.

Both Hopkins and Boyd are operating in rich historiographical terrain. Outside of London, the cities of Oxford and Cambridge (and their historically important academic institutions) have elicited more scholarly and popular interest than just about any other urban center in the British Isles. The many monographs and essays written about each city and institution cross a variety of disciplinary boundaries. Ranging from hagiographies of college founders and studies of prominent architectural landmarks to, most recently, multivolume histories of the universities and cultural analyses of the undergraduate experience, these iconic places have been subjected to great academic and public scrutiny.[1] Many of these accounts have been produced by insiders, men and women with both an intimate knowledge of Oxford and Cambridge as urban spaces and educational environments *and* privileged access to archival materials and a considerable font of local knowledge. College fellows, university librarians, old members, and, more recently, archivists dominate the frontispieces and bylines of books and articles about the universities. Historians of these broader communities have generally represented a wider cross-section, but they too have frequently been drawn from the ranks of local residents. While not problematic, in and of itself, this tendency has, on occasion, led authors to exaggerate significance, embrace an occasionally celebratory tone, or overstate the degree of harmony within these complicated social environments.

For the most part, Clare Hopkins avoids these tendencies and produces a work that is impressive in its objectivity, carefully researched, balanced, and eminently readable. Stephanie Boyd, on the other hand, despite the attention paid to town/gown conflict and the crippling poverty that gripped some Cambridge residents in the industrial era, tends more toward the celebratory in her short study. The differences in tone can be attributed, in part, to audience. While Hopkins is writing for both an insider audience of Trinity men and women, as well as a much broader scholarly community, Boyd is writing a popular account intended to draw readers in with a detailed, and slightly triumphal, narrative about the progress and success of both the city and the university through the ages. Neither author, however, focuses on one master narrative. Both are clearly aware of recent trends in social and cultural history. While Boyd confines her asides within these fields to sections on the admission of women to the university, the impact of the railway, and social relations between rich and poor, Hop-

kins is much more cognizant of the ways in which categories of analysis connected to race, gender, social class, and, to a certain extent, sexuality impinge upon and ultimately enrich institutional histories. By paying attention to the social distinctions between gentlemen commoners and servitors (poorer students who, until the system was abolished in the nineteenth century, performed a range of menial jobs in return for financial assistance), exploring the racism confronted by Indian students in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and examining the role that servants have played in the history of the college, Hopkins introduces readers to historical methodologies that only serve to enrich the collegiate story she is telling.

Taken individually, each of these works provides illuminating assessments of the roles that Oxford and Cambridge, as institutions of higher learning and urban spaces, have played in British lives. Clare Hopkins's book should be situated within a body of historical writing that might best be described as the new college history. Following the lead of historians like John Twigg, Hopkins has attempted to move the genre beyond the mostly laudatory tradition of institutional history inaugurated in the late nineteenth century by the London publisher F. E. Robinson.[2] As the first major history of Trinity College since H. E. D. Blakiston produced his contribution to this series in 1898, Hopkins's study departs from the methodological perspective of earlier college chroniclers by introducing readers to social historical topics and providing a nuanced assessment of the college's relationship to the broader forces of historical change at work in British society.[3] While Hopkins conforms, in places, to a number of the conventions of the more staid college histories, including relying on a chronology organized around the tenure of particularly notable, ambitious, or controversial college presidents, she also departs from them by creating, as a "main focus ... the people of the College: the presidents, fellows, scholars, and servitors; the undergraduates; and the at times almost invisible servants. Their daily lives and changing needs and aspirations have built buildings, laid out gardens, filled libraries, and created Trinity as it exists today" (p. ix).

In writing a college history from this perspective, Hopkins is able to privilege the themes of transition and institution building while paying careful attention to the experiences of the everyday and uncovering for readers, when appropriate, instructive and illuminating anecdotes from the Trinity College Archives that she clearly knows so well. Hopkins eschews an approach that focuses exclusively on the exploits and adventures, successes and failures of famous former members. Begin-

ning with an exploration of the motives of the college's founder, Thomas Pope, she effectively situates the establishment of the college within the broader religious conflicts of the sixteenth century. According to the author, Pope, upon receiving Letters Patent to start the college in 1555, wanted to create an institution that would aid in the reestablishment of Catholicism and, in the process, serve the monarch, educate poor scholars, and create literate servants for both church and state. The vicissitudes of England's religious journey during the reigns of Mary and her sister Elizabeth thus had a profound influence on the college and a significant impact on undergraduates who were required, under the original statutes, to study theology. The rhythms of religious life dominated the experiences of students who were required to attend chapel on a daily basis, listen to Bible readings and sermons during dinner, and refrain from participating in dice and card games. In marrying these two approaches to institutional history in her first substantive chapter, Hopkins introduces her readers to an interpretive perspective that dictates the structure of the entire book.

This study is thus an exercise in intellectual and methodological balance. Hopkins is able to discuss broader national developments, chronicle brick and mortar improvements, document institutional innovations, *and* analyze (perhaps to a lesser extent) the culture of student life. In her consideration of the early seventeenth century and the presidency of Ralph Kettell (1599-1643), for example, she combines a discussion of the Royalist sympathies of college fellows during the Civil War with an assessment of Kettell's disapproving views of the long hair and excessive drinking that predominated among his undergraduate charges. Similarly, in her analysis of the eighteenth century, she balances an exploration of a widening curriculum that enabled undergraduates to study subjects other than theology with an analysis of how deans imposed greater discipline (through a system of financial penalties for, among other offenses, public intoxication) on an increasingly boisterous undergraduate population.

This merger of the administrative with the social is also apparent in the latter chapters of the book. Hopkins, in discussing the nineteenth century, is not content to merely chronicle reforms, initiated by the Royal Commissions of 1850-52, that broadened the curriculum and opened college fellowships and scholarships. Rather, she also chooses, in these chapters, to explore the rise of athleticism at Trinity, the growing predominance of public schoolboys among the undergraduate population, the impact of the presence of women in lectures at Trinity

(which they were admitted to for the first time in 1885-86), and the popularity of lavish coming-of-age dinners and student bonfires. Her exploration of the twentieth century is dominated by a discussion of the consequences of the First and Second World Wars. She is careful to note, in particular, the effects of the first conflict on the college. Most interesting in her dissection of the Great War is her discussion of the Memorial Library that was built, shortly after peace was declared, to commemorate the loss of some 153 college lives. While her discussion of the post-1945 period is perhaps less developed than earlier sections of the book, Hopkins notes, in instructive ways, two important developments: the growth of the student population and the increased reliance (by students and the college alike) on financial assistance from the state. She remains committed, throughout the study, to chronicling the undergraduate experience and does an admirable job of documenting how students, in the post-war world, sought to both achieve greater autonomy (by challenging college statutes about closing times, for example) and carve out for themselves a unique kind of student identity, reflected partially in the creation of a college Beer Cellar and a Middle Common Room (for postgraduate students) in the 1960s.

Stephanie Boyd approaches her study of Cambridge, as I have already indicated, with an entirely different set of intellectual goals in mind. Concerned primarily with charting the city's rise to prominence, she begins her highly accessible and nicely photographed book with a single question: "Cambridge is a small city on the edge of the Fens, yet is famous throughout the world. Why is this so?" In answering this question, Boyd attributes the city's fame to three factors: Cambridge's geographic location and importance as a market town; the city's emergence, in the late twentieth century, as a leading center of high-tech industry and bio-engineering (sometimes referred to as the "Cambridge Phenomenon"); and, most significantly, its "ancient university, which ranks as one of the top universities in the world" (p. 4). Organized around a set of chronologically focused chapters that are broken down into thematic sections, her book is intended to function more as an introduction for beginners than a definitive urban history.

Boyd, in narrating the story of Cambridge in its entirety, necessarily provides a somewhat selective account of the institution for which the city is most famous. Yet, it is clear that hers is not an intellectual agenda completely separate from the perspective that informs Clare Hopkins's work. She is careful, for example, to note the impact of the Reformation and the Civil War in chroni-

cling the developments of both the city and the university in the early modern period. Like Hopkins, Boyd notes physical changes to the city and the university (illustrated with photographic and artistic depictions), documenting, in one instance, how the Backs (college grounds that abut the River Cam) were substantially altered by the intervention of prominent architects like Christopher Wren. In noting these structural and geographical changes, Boyd shows how the river was transformed from a place of work to a place of leisure as underground drainage systems and proper sewage were introduced over the course of the nineteenth century—a change reflected most clearly in the growing mania for rowing that permeated university life during this transitional era.

Ultimately, Boyd's emphasis on the contributions of Cambridge to the growth and development of the nation precludes any detailed analysis of the social and cultural complexities of the community she is exploring. This does not mean, however, that she systematically ignores the poverty apparent in Cambridge workhouses in the nineteenth century, the comparative sumptuousness of college life, or the demographic transformation that began when college fellows were first allowed to marry in 1882. It does imply, however, that her study tends more toward the congratulatory. This general tone is reflected in the final sections of the book, where Boyd highlights the contributions of individual members of the university to the arts (in the form of actors John Cleese, Stephen Fry, Hugh Laurie, and Emma Thompson) and science (in the form of Francis Crick and James Watson who, in 1953, worked out the structure of DNA in a Cambridge laboratory).

Comparing these works presents both the reader and the reviewer with certain difficulties. Each represents a particular genre of historical writing (one popular and the other more scholarly) and introduces its audience to some fascinating stories about these important cities and institutions. While linked in their desires to reach a wider readership by producing richly textured and accessible narrative histories, many of the similarities pointed to in this review will not always be readily apparent to the casual reader and may, in fact, be the creation of a reviewer keen to link these books in a cohesive manner. In the end, the work of Stephanie Boyd should not be consulted for its archival research or analytical incisiveness, but rather for its conciseness and comprehensiveness. While the interested general reader will find it a compelling enough story, the expert will undoubtedly leave unsatisfied. It will be of greatest utility to historians interested in locating useful and, in some instances, provocative images for

classroom settings and understanding, in a preliminary fashion, of how the people and institutions of Cambridge responded to big and small events alike in British history.

Hopkins's work, on the other hand, functions much more firmly within the realm of academic history. It is meticulously researched (utilizing, in an expert fashion, material housed in the Trinity College Archives and at the Bodleian Library), nicely organized, readable, and more thought-provoking than most of the standard college histories. Similarly, the author's grasp of the major developments in British history over the past 450 years, and her ability to relate them to the subject at hand, is impressive. Hopkins is not afraid, as Michael Beloff (President of Trinity College) notes in his foreword, to expose "warts and all" (p. vi) and she rightly exposes bigotry, exclusivity, and snobbery, where she sees it, in the historical record.

Still, despite these considerable achievements, readers may be left wondering why, for example, Hopkins chose to adhere to a chronological framework that relies heavily on the shifts in administrative power in organizing the chapters of her book. Might it have been possible, instead, to structure the study around a consideration of selected themes or topics of particular relevance to both past and present fellows and undergraduates of Trinity College? Furthermore, there are places where the author utilizes concepts that beg for some additional explanation. In her final chapter, for instance, she urges readers to think about the college as an interdependent community of administrators, fellows, students, and staff; an instructive reminder that hints at an interpretive perspective never entirely explicated in her text. How, for example, were notions of community cemented? In what ways were the ethical, moral, and cultural standards of such a community formulated and reproduced? These are the sorts of questions to which I would have liked to have seen the author provide more detailed and fully developed answers. In the end, however, criticisms of this sort function more in the realm of the intellectual wish list than as a precise delineation of significant scholarly deficiencies. Hopkins's book, in particular, reminds us that the study of Oxford and Cambridge as both cities and academic institutions can, when undertaken from a critical perspective and through reconfigured historical lenses, yield occasionally surprising and always illuminating results.

Notes

[1]. On college founders, see Thomas Warton, *The Life of Sir Thomas Pope, Founder of Trinity College, Ox-*

ford (London: Printed for T. Davies, T. Becket, T. Walters, and J. Fletcher, 1772). On architecture, see Ralph Durand, *Oxford: Its Buildings and Gardens*, illus. William Wildman (London: Grant Richards, 1909); and Robert Willis, *The Architectural History of the University of Cambridge and Eton, Edited with Large Additions and Brought Up to the Present by John Willis Clark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1886). For the multivolume studies, see T. H. Aston, ed., *The History of the University of Oxford*, vols. 1-8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984-2000); and Christopher N. L. Brooke, ed., *A History of the University of Cambridge*, vols. 1-4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988-1997). For studies that analyze the cul-

ture of these institutions, see Paul R. Deslandes *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); and W. C. Lubenow, *The Cambridge Apostles, 1820-1914: Liberalism, Imagination, and Friendship in British Intellectual and Professional Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[2]. John Twigg, *A History of Queen's College, Cambridge, 1448-1986* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell, 1987).

[3]. H. E. D. Blakiston, *Trinity College* (London: F. E. Robinson, 1898).

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