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Higher Education in Bristol and Gloucestershire. 1650-1750

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Some Aspects of Higher Education in Bristol and Gloucestershire c. 1650—1750

By J. R. HOLMAN

IN A RECENT ARTICLE Dr Alicia Percival has drawn our attention to the existence of no fewer than 17 grammar schools situated in 15 Gloucestershire towns, and has suggested that not only were they unable to attract a large body of pupils but that the teaching standards were none too good.¹ One could be excused, after reading Dr Percival's article, in believing that despite the seemingly abundant educational facilities, few people in Gloucestershire could have achieved a standard of education sufficient to proceed to the university. The purpose of this article is to try to identify those of Bristol and Gloucestershire who did go on to university education, to examine their background and the careers they took up, and to see if Dr Percival's opinion is justified.

At the time in question there were only two English universities (Cambridge and Oxford), but one might well include the four inns of court² in London which until the mid 18th century were important centres of legal education. While students wishing to become barristers were trained at the inns of court, those wishing to become attornies and solicitors went to one of the seven inns of chancery³ which were attached to the inns of court. There were in addition the four Scottish universities—Aberdeen (founded 1494), Edinburgh (1583), Glasgow (1451) and St Andrews (1411), and one in Ireland—Trinity College, Dublin (1591), although no boys from Bristol or Gloucestershire have been traced in their registers. The admission registers of both English universities and of the inns of court have all been printed, and it is from these printed editions that it is possible to draw up lists of Bristol and Gloucestershire people who went to them.⁴ The Inner Temple records have not been printed after 1660 and have not been used in this study.⁵

Of the inns of chancery, the admission registers of Clement's Inn are preserved in the Public Record Office, but have not been examined.⁶ The admission registers of Staple Inn (the largest of the inns of chancery) which date from 1716 until the inn was abolished in 1881, have been printed in E. Williams's book on the inn.⁷ Unfortunately the places of origin of the entrants are not given, but since the number of admissions was declining rapidly over the period in question (an average of only five people per year from 1716–49), it is unlikely that any more than a handful of Bristol and Gloucestershire people could have gone there. The registers of the universities have been printed in alphabetical order, giving the name of the student, his father's name and status, place of birth, the

1. A. E. Percival, 'Gloucestershire Grammar Schools from the 16th to the 19th centuries', *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, LXXXIX (1970).

2. Gray's, Lincoln's, the Inner and Middle Temple.

3. Barnard's and Staple Inns were attached to Gray's Inn; Furnival's to Lincoln's; Clements and Clifford's to the Inner Temple; and New Inn to the Middle Temple.

4. J. and J. A. Venn, ed., *Alumni Cantabrigienses Pt. 1 from earliest times to 1751* (4 vols, Cambridge, 1922–7); J. Foster, ed., *Alumni Oxonienses Pt. 1 1500–1714* (4 vols, Oxford, 1887–91) and *Pt. 2 1715–1886* (4 vols, Oxford, 1888), hereafter *Al. Oxon.* I & II; J. Foster, ed., *The Register of Admissions to Gray's Inn, 1521–1889* (privately, 1889); Lincoln's Inn, *The Records of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn, I Admissions 1420–1799* (1896); H. A. C. Sturgess, ed., *Register of Admissions to the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple From the Fifteenth Century to the Year 1944, I 1501–1781* (1949).

5. W. H. Cooke, ed., *Students Admitted to the Inner Temple, 1547–1660* (1878).

6. PRO, Gifts & Deposits Miscellaneous, 30/26/74/1–11.

7. E. Williams, *Staple Inn; Customs House, Wool Court and Inn of Chancery* (1906), Appendix E.

date of his matriculation, his age at that time and the college entered. Unfortunately, apart from the clergy, actual occupations are only rarely given, qualifications used are 'eques' (knight), 'armiger' (esquire), 'gentleman', 'pleb' (plebian), 'pauper', and 'pp' (assumed to be an abbreviation for pauper).⁸ Both Foster and the Venns have added the date of graduation and, until the 1710s, such details of subsequent careers as could be traced. From these works it has been possible to build up a statistical picture of the numbers going on to the universities and inns of court, their background and their careers. For the period in question the numbers entering each institution were as follows:

TABLE 1
Matriculations to the universities and inns of court, 1650-1749

	<i>From Bristol</i>	<i>From Gloucestershire</i>
University of Cambridge	8	25
University of Oxford	179	1,086
Gray's Inn	4	19
Lincoln's Inn	21	91
Middle Temple	40	120
Total	252	1,341

The predominance of Oxford is not really surprising since it was the nearest institution. The figures for Cambridge are perhaps even smaller than might have been expected, but ignore the fact that it was fairly common for persons having graduated from Oxford to take a higher degree later at Cambridge; nearly all of those who gained a second degree at Cambridge were ordained. The figures for numbers matriculating at Oxford and the inns of court in each normal and split decade are set out in Table 2. They show, as might be expected, very few going to Oxford in the 1650s, although the figures for the inns do suggest that the legal life of London continued largely unaffected by the general trouble of the time. Both Oxford figures show a marked increase immediately following the Restoration, although this increase was relatively short-lived, the Gloucestershire figures decline after the mid 1670s and those for Bristol after the mid 1680s. The low point in terms of students matriculating from Gloucestershire came in the decade 1685-94, and for Bristol 1695-1704. Both sets of figures recovered during the first decades of the 18th century, but later fell again, those for Bristol reaching a low in the decade 1715-24 and for Gloucestershire from 1720 until the mid 1730s. Despite a short recovery in the later 1730s, the figures again show a decline at the end of the period.

TABLE 2
Matriculations per decade

	<i>From Bristol</i>		<i>From Gloucestershire</i>			<i>From Bristol</i>		<i>From Gloucestershire</i>	
	<i>Oxford</i>	<i>Inns</i>	<i>Oxford</i>	<i>Inns</i>		<i>Oxford</i>	<i>Inns</i>	<i>Oxford</i>	<i>Inns</i>
1650-9	1	4	7	34	1700-09	17	6	112	20
1655-64	7	8	76	35	1705-14	23	9	115	21
1660-9	24	8	169	32	1710-19	19	4	117	18
1665-74	26	12	193	29	1715-24	16	—	102	14
1670-9	29	12	171	26	1720-9	21	7	92	12
1675-84	29	6	138	31	1725-34	18	10	92	12
1680-9	16	6	111	36	1730-9	19	6	111	12
1686-94	16	6	85	29	1735-44	17	5	110	13
1690-9	18	4	93	22	1740-9	15	8	103	14
1695-1704	14	2	96	20					

8. An investigation into the meaning of the terms is found in L. Stone, ed., *The University in Society, I, Oxford and Cambridge from the 14th to the early 19th century* (1975), 13-14. This article was originally written before the publication of Stone's work and has been revised in the light of his findings.

The figures for entry to the inns of court show a somewhat similar trend for most of the period, the Gloucestershire figures falling from a peak in the decade 1655–64 to a low in the 1670s and then rising again to a second peak in the 1680s, thereafter falling continually, so that by the 1730s the number of new entrants stood at one-third of that of the opening decade. The Bristol figures, however, reached a peak in the late 1660s and early 1670s, thereafter falling gradually to merely two in the decade 1695–1704 and to none in the decade 1715–24, before recovering fairly dramatically in the decade 1725–34. Both sets of figures, unlike those for matriculation to Oxford, show upward signs in the 1740s. Professor Stone found a general decline in admissions from 1670 to 1810; in our period the 1690s, 1720s, 1730s and 1740s showing the lowest numbers.⁹

Figures, however, are of little real value to historians, unless we investigate what lies behind them. For this analysis, it has been thought convenient to deal separately with the Bristol and Gloucestershire students.

I. *Bristol*

For the period as a whole Bristol sent 179 scholars to Oxford, the greatest numbers in the 1660s and 1670s. This would seem to compare favourably with the number sent from Norwich, its closest rival in terms of population and commercial prosperity, to its nearest university at Cambridge.¹⁰ In the 1660s and 1670s the greatest number of students were the sons of 'plebs' (54 per cent and 40 per cent respectively), thereafter the sons of gentlemen predominate, reaching a peak of 69 per cent in the 1730s. A mere eight boys went to Cambridge and four to Gray's Inn, all sons of 'gentlemen'. The other two inns of court attracted slightly more Bristolians; 19 went to Lincoln's Inn and 38 to the Middle Temple. Amongst the fathers can be found five knights, 17 esquires, 17 gentlemen, 14 merchants, a clergyman, a doctor and a woollen draper. It is a general problem facing historians trying to identify social and occupational groups that many people in the early modern period described themselves simply as 'gent', 'esq' or just 'Mr'. In the countryside these qualifications would refer to members of the landed classes, who formed the highest social group in Gregory King's analysis. Yet this analysis has little relevance to the social structure of cities; in Bristol the merchants and traders, members of the middle class in King's analysis, constituted the top social class. This social division had important implications for the educational achievements of the city. Professor Peter T. Marcy has pointed out that outsiders had a pretty poor impression of Bristolians, finding them dull, poorly educated and lacking in cultural interest.¹¹ Professor Marcy tries to explain this by describing Bristol as in essence a two- rather than a three-class society—there was a middle class and a lower class, but the city could not boast of a noble or an aristocratic class, and it was just this class that promoted education and cultural activities. Whilst he considers the social structure of London to have been very similar, London acted as a great social and cultural centre for a very large area, but in this area of the west country Bath rather than Bristol acted as the cultural mecca. The Bristol gentleman was not the gentleman that King had in mind, and this becomes only too clear if we trace the actual occupations of those who described themselves as 'gentlemen'. From various sources, and especially court records and poll books, it has been possible to identify a number of Bristol fathers described as 'gent' or 'esq' in the Oxford matriculation registers. These qualifications cover no fewer than thirteen different occupations—(in alphabetical order) apothecary; attorney; bodicemaker; cooper; distiller; grocer; linendraper; mercer; merchant; pewterer; schoolmaster; wine-cooper; and writing-master. The few esquires traced were all merchants. There were also two knights, one a brewer and the other a soapmaker by occupation; both were knighted in recognition of their civic service, being mayors of the city.¹² Recruitment to the ranks of these top traders was by apprenticeship (often to one's own father or a near relative), rather than by education.

9. Stone, 91.

10. Both cities are about 60 miles from the two universities.

11. P. T. Marcy, *Eighteenth Century Views of Bristol and Bristolians* (Bristol, 1966), 15.

12. Sir John Hawkins, brewer, mayor 1701–2, and Sir William Lewis, soapmaker, mayor 1702–3.

There were only four boys' schools of note, the Grammar School (founded 1532), the Cathedral School (medieval in origin, refounded in 1538), the Redcliffe Grammar School (1571) and Queen Elizabeth's Hospital (1586), which at the end of the 17th century probably contained about 100 boys.¹³ There is a reference in one of the volumes of the proceedings of the common council which shows quite clearly that most of Bristol's elite considered a grammar school education sufficient for their sons. In July 1717 when the Rev. William Goldwin resigned the headmastership of Bristol Grammar School he wrote to the council giving an account of the careers of his pupils since he took office in 1710. Only 12 went to Oxford, 7 into the legal profession, 'to physick' 1; to the army 1, to shop trades 56; to merchants and the sea 53; to business known 11; to 'country affairs 2'. A further six 'went from the upper school to other schools', and six died, making a total of 155 pupils. Goldwin stated that there had been 81 pupils in 1716; by 1717 and 1722 the number had fallen to 56 and 20 respectively, increasing again to 70 by 1724.¹⁴ The schools were not, it seems, aiming to educate boys for university admission. There is, furthermore, inferred evidence to suggest that those who did seek a university education for their sons might have sent them to schools outside Bristol. Thomas Foy, the son of Edward Foy, a surgeon of Castle Lees, appears in the Marriage Act assessments for 1696, 1698 and 1699¹⁵ but thereafter disappears, until he is recorded matriculating at Oriel in 1710, although his family remained in Bristol. What happened to him in the meantime is not known, but it is quite likely that he was at boarding school. Two other examples illustrate the low priority given to academic education by the Bristol elite; Samuel Greenaway, a merchant tailor from the well-to-do parish of St Werburgh, took his eldest son Joseph apprentice to himself, his second son John being apprenticed to a mariner. It was his fifth son, Benjamin, whom he sent to Oxford in 1714.¹⁶ John Yeamans, a merchant of St James Barton, took his son Weare Yeamans apprentice to himself in November 1698,¹⁷ and only eighteen months later was it decided that it would be better for him to go to Oxford; he matriculated at Balliol on 2 March 1699/1700.¹⁸

However, it would be unfair perhaps to suggest that the small number of boys who went to the universities was entirely due to poor educational standards and the lack of interest by the merchants. A major problem was that of financing a career at university. The Grammar School was fortunate in having four bequests for such a purpose. By his will dated November 1566 Sir Thomas White (1492-1567), a merchant tailor, lord mayor of London (1553-4) and founder of St John's College, Oxford (1555), established scholarships at this college for pupils of the grammar schools of Bristol, Coventry and Reading.¹⁹ Until as late as 1854 the holding of one of these scholarships enabled one automatically to become a fellow of the college after three years.²⁰ Later in the 17th century exhibitions were granted by alderman John Whitson in 1627, to provide £20 yearly for the sons of two poor men to attend Oxford or Cambridge; in 1634 by George White £5 annually to attend Oxford and in 1636 by Anne Snagge £12 annually to attend Oxford or Cambridge.²¹ The usual method of obtaining such a scholarship was by petition to the city council. On 13 August 1678 Jenkin Morgan, a tailor, petitioned the council 'that hee haveing lately settled his sonne John Morgan in Exeter Colledge in the University of Oxon and not being able to Support him there without the favourable assistance of the house prayed to be conferred upon his son the Five pounds annyty given by Mr. George White merchant. . . .'²² Occasionally there was competition for an

13. Only Q.E.H. was a boarding school and housed 30 pupils in 1696, *vide* E. Ralph and M. E. Williams, ed., *The Inhabitants of Bristol in 1696*, Bristol Record Society, xxv (1968), 47. The grammar school probably had about 50 scholars and the Cathedral School 20.

14. Bristol Record Office (hereafter B.R.O.), 04264(9), 464-5, quoted in J. Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Bristol, 1893), 119.

15. Ralph and Williams, *Inhabitants*, 20, for 1696 assessment; 1698 and 1699, original documents in B.R.O.

16. *Al. Oxon.* I, 600.

17. B.R.O. 04353(2), f. 289v.

18. *Al. Oxon.* I, 1701.

19. He was born at Reading, but *D.N.B.* gives no clue as to any connections with Bristol or Coventry.

20. C. P. Hill, *The History of Bristol Grammar School* (1951), 46.

21. *Ibid.*, 50.

22. B.R.O. 04264(7), f. 118.

exhibition, for example both Mary Baskerville and Andrew Ball petitioned the council on behalf of their sons in May 1681.²³ In September 1699 the council appointed a committee to look into the exhibitions and at the council meeting on 23 August 1700 learned that 'the . . . exhibitions have been sometimes bestow'd upon such who are not design'd by their parents or Friends to be schollars; and at other times on such whose Friends are not able to allow them soe much, which together with the exhibition will be sufficient to maintain them comfortably in the university; we alsoe find that those Exhibitioners have been dispers'd in the university into severall colledges and halls at the will and pleasure of their Friends; soe that the Mayor and aldermen have noe account of their behaviour or improvements and by reason thereof cannot have that inspeccion and oversight over which patrons ought to have. . . .'²⁴ Of the 'severall colledges and halls' referred to Magdalen was the most popular, followed by Balliol and St John's. During their deliberations the committee spoke with Dr Roger Mander, the master of Balliol, who told them that at his college all exhibition monies were given to the bursar who made each exhibitioner a weekly allowance, payment being stopped if the student were absent. He suggested that the council should order 'that all the exhibitioners from this city shall be admitted in that Colledge and their exhibicons constantly paid unto the Bursar. . . .' He also gave a guarantee that if this arrangement were agreed all Bristol exhibitioners would ' . . . be in the colledge upon the same Foot and foundation and enjoy all the benefits and priviledges and be putt upon equall terms and have equall prospects of preferment in the colledge with those exhibitioners who are chosen by the Master and Fellows'. In return the council agreed to donate £100 towards the cost of the new lodging accommodation then being built at the college. On 24 August 1700 the deal was agreed by the council and the agreement signed on 1 October 1700.²⁵ After 1702 fewer references are found in the council proceedings of petitions for the exhibitions, and in September 1738 the council ruled that the Snagge bequest had not been applied for its proper use owing to the lack of demand for it, and ordered that henceforth the money would be used to assist 'decayed tradesmen or husbandmen'.²⁶

The usual age at matriculation in the 1660s to the 1690s was 16; in the 1700s an equal number were aged 15 and 17, with very few of other ages. From the 1710s onwards 17 was the usual age of entry. Over the whole period 31.6 per cent of the students were aged 17, 28.8 per cent aged 16 and 16.4 per cent for both age 15 and 18. 3.4 per cent did not enter until the age of 19, and 2.8 per cent were only 14 years old. Only one student was aged 20 at the time of entry.²⁷

Unfortunately worthwhile statistical information concerning the careers of the Oxford graduates is not available, since the details are only rarely given by Foster. Most seem to have become clergymen, although the legal profession was fairly well represented in the 1660s, 1670s and 1700s. We must, therefore, rely more heavily on case studies. Richard Cobbe, son of John Cobbe, the master of Queen Elizabeth's Hospital, graduated in 1709 and became chaplain to the English factory in the East Indies, where he built a church at his own expense.²⁸ In a similar way Dr Joseph Wilcocks, son of John Wilcocks, a physician, having graduated in 1695 became chaplain to the ambassador in Portugal and to the English factory at Lisbon.²⁹ Later he became chaplain in ordinary to George I and preceptor to the daughters of the prince of Wales. No doubt partly as a result of royal favours, he became dean of Westminster, bishop of Gloucester (1721-31) and finished his days as bishop of Rochester (1731-56), being buried in Westminster Abbey.³⁰ George Atwood, born in St Thomas parish in March 1684/5, matriculated at Balliol as Whitson exhibitioner in July 1700 at the age of

23. *Ibid.*, f. 149.

24. B.R.O. 04264(8), ff. 203-205v.

25. *Ibid.*, f. 214v.

26. B.R.O. 04264 (11), 5, cited by Hill, *History*, 48.

27. Stone found the median age at matriculation to be 17.8 in 1661, 17.4 in 1686, 17.7 in 1711 and 18.2 in 1735-6 (Stone, 97, 578).

28. *Al. Oxon.* I, 295.

29. *Ibid.*, 1630.

30. *D.N.B.*, LXI, 218. He was educated at Merchant Tailors School.

15, eventually becoming a doctor of divinity.³¹ Later he became chaplain to the bishop of Bath and Wells, and was archdeacon of Taunton from 1726 until his death in 1752. Only one Bristol graduate seems to have entered politics. Richard Combe, the son of Henry Combe, the defeated Whig candidate in the Bristol by-election of 1739, graduated from Queen's College in 1745 and became M.P. for Milbourne Port, Somerset in 1772 and for Aldeburgh, Suffolk in 1774.³² He died in Bristol in 1780. In local politics, Abraham Elton, of the wealthy merchant family, who matriculated at Christ Church in 1728, was mayor in 1753-4, thus becoming the sixth member of his family to hold that office.³³ Four people became eminent in school and university work. Thomas Collins graduated in 1664, becoming vice-president of Trinity College in 1668 and 1671 and master of Trinity School from 1673 to 1723.³⁴ Dr Henry Hellier, a graduate of 1680, was vice-president of Corpus Christi College at the time of his death in December 1697.³⁵ Robert Eyne, who matriculated in 1735, became a fellow of Magdalen,³⁶ and at the end of the period Dr Richard Roberts, son of William Roberts, a merchant, who graduated in February 1749/50 was high master of St Paul's School from 1769 to 1814.³⁷ In medicine Bristol can boast two distinguished sons, Dr Robert Welstead, who graduated in 1691, became a licentiate of the College of Physicians and practised in both Bristol and London.³⁸ He was elected F.R.S. in 1718 and died in Tavistock Square, London in February 1734/5. Dr Rice Charleton, whose father was an apothecary, graduated in 1744, was elected a F.R.S. in 1747 and became physician to Bath General Hospital ten years later.³⁹ However, it was not only the sons of the gentry and the merchants who achieved success. Thomas Fry, the son of Thomas Fry 'pleb' of Pipe Lane, matriculated at St John's College in June 1732 at the early age of 14, holding both the George White and Whitson exhibitions. Graduating in 1736, he went on to proceed to M.A., B.D., and D.D. degrees and was president of the college from 1757 until his death in 1772.⁴⁰ Finally there is the interesting case of John Massy, son of John, also described as a 'pleb', who following his graduation in 1676 became fellow of Merton and dean of Christ Church (1686). In 1688 he fled beyond the seas after the landing of William III and became confessor to the Convent of Blue Nuns in Paris, where he died in 1716.⁴¹

The question of the number of children excluded from the benefits of higher education because of the religious views of their parents was of much greater moment in Bristol than in Gloucestershire. The Evans MSS, in the Dr Williams's Library in London, estimates that there were some 500 Independents, 2,100 Presbyterians and 1,700 Baptists in the city in 1717. There was also stated to be a 'great Body of Quakers, who are generally well affected to the present Government, & large Traders & very rich. Their numbers may be supposed about 2,000 & upwards & their wealth not less than 500,000*li*. And the strength of all the dissenters in Bristol may justly be reckoned much more than that of all the low church party there'.⁴² Even if they had not been legally excluded, one must ask if there is any reason to suppose that significant numbers would have wished their sons to go to university? Professor Kearney is of the opinion that 'a high proportion of the Presbyterians and the Independents, though not the Baptists, had accepted the necessity of a university qualification; from 1662 this source of potential students dried up'.⁴³ However, this was less true of the Quakers.

31. *Al. Oxon.* I, 43, cited by Hill, *History*, 49.

32. *Al. Oxon.* II, 283.

33. *Ibid.*, 424.

34. *Al. Oxon.* I, 310.

35. *Ibid.*, 691.

36. *Al. Oxon.* II, 442.

37. *Ibid.*, 1208.

38. *Al. Oxon.* I, 1597.

39. *Al. Oxon.* II, 240.

40. *Ibid.*, 499, cited by Hill, *History*, 49.

41. *Al. Oxon.* I, 984.

42. Dr Williams's Library, MS. 34/4. If these figures are correct, they suggest that the number of non-conformists approached 25 per cent of the city's population.

43. H. Kearney, *Scholars and Gentlemen: Universities and Society in Pre-Industrial Britain 1500-1700* (1970), 142.

Despite the impression of relative wealth and social status one gets for the 1710s from the Evans MSS, Mr Mortimer has shown that in the 1660s and 1670s only a few members of the Society of Friends were in fact wealthy merchants; most were ordinary clothworkers, weavers and similar artisans.⁴⁴ Furthermore education did not rank highly in the Friend's philosophy for as Mr Mortimer points out, the Friends inherited the Ranter ideology of education which ultimately had its base in the belief that God would inspire his people to do his work notwithstanding any lack of preparation on their part.⁴⁵ In part this may be due to the fact, as Mr Gummers pointed out, that 'as any of their membership might at any time become ministers, it followed that education, except in its elementary form, was quite unnecessary for the Quakers'.⁴⁶

Following the change in the established church in Scotland from episcopalian to presbyterian in 1689, dissenters were acceptable at the Scottish universities, although no Bristolian can be found admitted during the period in question.

II. Gloucestershire

It would be tempting, in the light of Dr Percival's article, to think that most students would come from the places where the grammar schools were situated and where independent schoolmasters would be more likely to set up their establishments because of the larger potential clientele. Table 3 analyses the numbers entering Oxford stated as born in the fifteen places in which Dr Percival has traced grammar schools.⁴⁷

This total figure of 300 therefore accounts for no more than 27.6 per cent of the total number matriculating from Gloucestershire, so clearly the grammar schools, as Dr Percival has suggested, were not fulfilling the function of preparing boys for the university with any great success. Even at Gloucester and Wotton under Edge, where there were two schools, the figures are not impressive

TABLE 3
Numbers of students entering Oxford from
Gloucestershire grammar schools

Chipping Campden	10
Cheltenham	16
Cirencester	27
Gloucester (2 schools)	112
Henbury	4
Newland	3
Northleach	23
Chipping Sodbury	7
Stow on the Wold	8
Tetbury	10
Tewkesbury	15
Thornbury	7
Wickwar	5
Winchcombe (2 schools)	4
Wotton under Edge	49
Total	300

44. R. Mortimer, ed., *Minute Book of the Men's Meeting of the Society of Friends in Bristol 1667-1686*, Bristol Record Society, xxvi (1970), xxvi-xxvii.

45. R. Mortimer, 'Quakerism in Seventeenth Century Bristol'. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Bristol, 1946, 274-5.

46. A. N. Gummers, 'Early Quakers and parental education', *Present Day Papers*, 5 (Sept. 1902), 279, quoted by Mortimer, *ibid.*

47. The place given in the admission registers is the place of birth and one can only assume that they were educated locally and lived in the same district at the time of matriculation. This is recognized to be a dangerous assumption since the population at the time was far from static, but there is no way of telling whether the place of birth and of residence before matriculation were the same.

when one considers that they cover a hundred-year period. The reason might in some cases have been poor educational standards, which dissuaded parents from sending their children to local schools. This may well have been the case at Winchcombe, since the tiny number going to Oxford cannot be explained simply in population terms. The town, which was notoriously poor in the 17th century, had a population of about 2,000 and yet its two schools produced only four graduates over the whole period. However, it must be stressed that the figures are composed only of persons described as born in those fifteen places. These schools must have attracted some scholars from surrounding villages and hamlets, although it is unlikely that boys travelled great distances to these day schools. Dr Percival writes that 'it is remarkable that no Grammar School was endowed at Stroud, Dursley, Minchinhampton, Berkeley or Painswick, some of which were larger than all Gloucestershire towns except Cirencester or Tewkesbury' Indeed if one looks at the figures of students originating from these towns her statement is confirmed for between them these five developing industrial centres sent more students (56) than the eight grammar school places of Chipping Campden, Chipping Sodbury, Henbury, Newland, Stow on the Wold, Thornbury, Wickwar and Winchcombe put together (51). In view of the absence of grammar schools in these towns it would seem probable that those fathers who cared about their children's education must have either sent their sons to public schools or engaged private tutors. It is likely that a not insignificant number of boys went to the King's School at Gloucester which, says its historian, was at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries at 'the peak of its fortunes . . . (earning) an important place in national life. To it were sent the sons not only of leading Gloucestershire families, but of men of distinction from all over England'.⁴⁸ It is clear, however, that the majority of its boys were sons of local people, for when Maurice Wheeler took over as master in 1684, all but four of the 57 pupils were from Bristol and Gloucestershire.⁴⁹ Looking farther afield, nine and 29 boys from Bristol and Gloucestershire respectively were admitted to Eton between 1650 and 1750. Of these all but nine later went on to university. Four Gloucestershire boys are found in the registers of Rugby School between 1675 and 1750, and a further five in the admission registers to Westminster School for the same period.⁵⁰ An examination of the registers of other public schools would undoubtedly trace more examples.

In another article Dr Percival has produced a list of the parishes in the diocese of Gloucester giving population estimates for various dates between 1563 and 1779.⁵¹ An analysis of her figures into towns (population 1,000 and over), large villages (500-999) and small villages (below 500) reveals that Gloucestershire was primarily a county of small villages in 1712. (The 1712 population figures have been used as these are the nearest estimates to a mid-point in the hundred years under examination.) Table 4, below shows the number of units of each size and the percentage of each unit

TABLE 4
Size of population unit in Gloucestershire in 1712

	No.	%
Towns	23	9.2
Large villages	32	12.7
Small villages	179	71.3
Not given	17	6.8
	—	—
TOTAL	251	100.0
	—	—

48. D. Robertson, *The King's School Gloucester* (1974), 61.

49. *Ibid.*, 70.

50. Sir Wasey Sterry, *The Eton College Registers 1441-1698* (Eton, 1943) and R. A. Austen-Leigh, *The Eton College Registers 1698-1752* (Eton, 1927). G. A. Solly, ed., *Rugby School Register Vol. 1 From April 1675 to October 1857* (Rugby, 1933) and J. Welch, ed., *The List of the Queen's Scholars of St Peter's College, Westminster admitted to that foundation since 1663 . . .* (1852).

51. A. Percival, 'Gloucestershire Village Populations', *Local Population Studies*, 8 (Spring 1972), 39-47. Parishes in the diocese of Bristol and the city of Gloucester are not included.

of the total. In the case of 17 parishes population figures were not given, but it is likely that most of these would have been included in the small village group. Of those qualifying as 'towns' at this time, eight had a population exceeding 2,500—Berkeley, Bisley, Cirencester, Dursley, Stroud, Tewkesbury, Winchcombe and Wotton under Edge, of which Cirencester was the largest with a population of 4,000. If one links the size of place with the occupation or status of the student's father, one gets a clearer idea of the type of person sending his son to university, and the type of schooling he might have received.

TABLE 5
Occupation of father according to place of origin⁵²

	<i>Town</i>		<i>Large village</i>		<i>Small village</i>		<i>All places</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Knight	2	0.5	—	—	8	1.6	10	1.0
Esquire	29	7.7	5	5.4	93	18.2	127	13.0
Gentleman	125	33.3	30	32.6	170	33.2	325	33.2
Clergyman	53	14.1	16	17.4	114	22.3	183	18.7
Doctor	2	0.5	1	1.1	6	1.2	9	0.9
Plebian	116	30.9	30	32.6	78	15.2	224	22.9
Pauper	47	12.5	10	10.9	43	8.4	100	10.2
Others	1	0.3	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	375	100.0	92	100.0	512	100.0	978	100.0

The difference of 108 between the total number given in this table and that given in Table 1 is made up of those described simply as being of Gloucestershire and of those from villages for which no population estimate is available. As can be seen from the figures the sons of the gentry accounted for roughly the same percentage for all three sizes of unit. In the villages the gentleman was usually a landowner, whereas in the towns he was often a prosperous merchant. No detailed work on the occupational composition of the different status groups has yet been done for Gloucestershire.

The definition used here is that generally accepted by historians, although a detailed investigation would show that others, such as lawyers and sons of the gentry or minor aristocracy also described themselves as gentlemen.⁵³ Above the gentry were the knights and esquires—substantial landowners and in the towns wealthy merchants. The largest number of them appear in the small villages group. Clearly these were the people who would be able to afford either a private tutor for their children or to send them away to one of the great 'public' schools. Of greater significance to the small villages were the clergy, who were themselves usually university graduates, and it is possible that where they could not afford to send their sons to a public school they educated them themselves. The plebian group is as one might expect larger in the large villages and towns, and probably comprised the small merchants and tradesmen. The Cambridge registers do not use this term, and where any description is used, actual occupations are given. The only one found for Gloucestershire is a shoemaker of Tewkesbury, so supposedly the Oxford plebian group would include people of quite lowly status. The term 'pauper' was presumably reserved for those who could not afford the university fees which were paid by some charity, sometimes the town or city council. If, as seems reasonable, the three top groups did not send their sons to the local grammar school, then the main source of pupils for these schools must have been the sons of the artisan class, which meant that the schools were unlikely to supply any more than about one-third of the total university intake, a slightly larger proportion coming from the towns and large villages than from the small villages.

52. These figures compare with those found by Professor Stone in 1686 and 1711—peers, knights and baronets 5 per cent, esquires 10 per cent, gentlemen 32 per cent, clergy 21 per cent and plebians 32 per cent; in 1711 the percentages were 5, 14, 33, 21 and 27 respectively. Stone, 93.

53. Some discussion of this problem is found in J. S. Moore, ed., *The Goods and Chattels of Our Forefathers* (1976).

A study of the careers of the Oxford graduates is of particular interest. After the 1710s career details are not usually given and since there were only seven entries for the 1650s, we will confine our attention to the fifty years from 1660 to 1709.⁵⁴ The results are given in Table 6 below:

TABLE 6
Careers of Gloucestershire students at Oxford, 1660-1709

	1660s		1670s		1680s		1690s		1700s		All	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Clergy	57	62.0	57	62.6	30	53.6	33	60.0	44	80.0	221	63.3
Law	27	29.3	27	29.7	21	37.5	15	27.3	9	16.4	99	28.4
Academics	6	6.5	—	—	3	5.4	2	3.6	1	1.8	12	3.4
Medicine	2	2.2	3	3.3	1	1.8	3	5.5	—	—	9	2.6
Schoolmaster	—	—	2	2.2	—	—	1	1.8	—	—	3	0.9
Politics	—	—	1	1.1	1	1.8	1	1.8	1	1.8	4	1.1
Military	—	—	1	1.1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	0.3
TOTAL	92	100.0	91	100.0	56	100.0	55	100.0	55	100.0	349	100.0

Overall 63.3 per cent of graduates whose careers can be traced took holy orders, followed by 28.4 per cent in law; 3.4 per cent stayed in the university life as academics, 2.6 per cent became medical men and a mere 0.9 per cent schoolmasters. The numbers entering the various professions fluctuated fairly substantially from one decade to another, for example the percentage entering the clergy varied from 53.6 per cent in the 1680s to 80.0 per cent in the 1700s. Law was obviously more popular as a career for those who matriculated in the 1680s (37.5 per cent) than in any other decade, and particularly the 1710s when only 15.8 per cent of those who matriculated entered the profession. Only in the 1690s did the percentage for medicine rise above 5 per cent, but even then this only involved three people.

Before leaving Oxford it is interesting to see which of the colleges were the most popular with Gloucestershire people and at what age students entered the university. Of the 24 colleges and halls mentioned, Pembroke proved the most popular, taking 12.3 per cent of those who went to Oxford, followed by Magdalen Hall (10.1 per cent), Oriel (9.2 per cent), Balliol (9.1 per cent), St Edmund Hall (6.9 per cent), Christ Church (6.6 per cent) and Trinity (5.9 per cent). All the others took less than 5 per cent each of the students. The popularity of colleges, like careers, varied from decade to decade. Magdalen and St Edmund Hall were the most popular in the 1660s and 1670s; Pembroke and Trinity in the 1680s and Christ Church and Queen's in the 1690s. Pembroke came to the fore in the 1700s followed equally by Balliol, Magdalen and Trinity, and shared joint popularity with Oriel in the 1710s, Balliol coming second. Pembroke led in the 1720s, 1730s and 1740s, rivalled in second place by Balliol in the 1720s and 1730s and by Oriel in the 1740s. It is difficult to evaluate the popularity of both colleges and careers since one is not clear whether the student himself chose or whether it was decided for him by his father. There is clear evidence to show that a fairly large number of sons followed the occupation of their father, in particular the sons of clergy and that more often than not where a father and son were noticed in the registers, the son went to the same college as the father, and this was sometimes repeated over several generations. The endowment by George Townsend in 1682 of scholarships at Pembroke, available to boys from four Gloucestershire grammar schools, was undoubtedly a reason for the popularity of that college. Amongst other factors influencing the choice of college would be the question of one's religious and political views. Indeed it is quite likely that amongst those financially able to send their sons to university the decision was as much dependent on the political and religious climate at the university as on the economic and

54. For the years 1660-1709 career details are available for at least 50 per cent of entries, thereafter the percentage falls significantly, and only 16 per cent of entries are so detailed by the 1730s.

social conditions prevalent at home. Whereas in the later 17th century most of the colleges were Whig dominated a few had Tory masters such as Corpus Christi, St John's and Christ Church in the 1690s, which might explain the increased popularity Christ Church enjoyed amongst the sons of Gloucestershire gentlemen in the 1680s and 1690s. By the 1710s most Oxford colleges were fairly strongly Tory, indeed Sir Charles Mallett goes so far as to suggest Oxford as 'the Jacobite capital of the south'.⁵⁵ By 1715 there were only three colleges—Wadham, Jesus and Merton—whose heads were not 'violent Tories and Jacobites'.⁵⁶ Wadham's popularity slipped in the 1720s which may have some connection with its Whiggish tendencies. The question of the religious and political views of the fathers raises the point that many people were automatically excluded from university by their religious beliefs. Evidence suggests that the nonconformists were an appreciably numerical group. The Evans MSS already cited, gives details of some 28 Presbyterian, 4 Independent and 18 Baptist meetings in the county in 1717⁵⁷. The numbers of 'hearers' at each meeting are given for most meetings amounting to nearly 10,000 in total. No figures are given for the number of Quaker meetings.

One can hardly make many general conclusions about the mere 25 who went from Gloucestershire to Cambridge throughout the period. Only in six cases are the occupations of the fathers given—two were vicars, two were knights and one each a shoemaker and a grocer. By far the greatest number of them became clergymen. Occasionally the student's school is given, in only one case a local school, at Stroud in the 1730s. Otherwise they were the public schools—Shrewsbury (mentioned in the 1660s); Westminster (1660s, 1690s, 1700s and 1730s); St Pauls (1670s); Eton (1680s, 1690s and 1720s); Hereford (1720s) and Manchester (1740s). In addition to the 25 students, a further 27 went to Cambridge after Oxford.

Of those who went to the three inns of court, 132 (57.4 per cent) were the sons of knights or esquires and 87 (37.8 per cent) of gentry. There is only one instance of the son of a clergyman gaining admission to an inn. In the case of Lincoln's Inn one finds five sons of legal and government officials, one a sergeant-at-law, one a master of the bench and three sons of Sir Matthew Hale of Alderley, the chief baron of the exchequer. In several cases in the 1660s students are recorded as gaining admission 'at the request of Robert Aston, Reader' of the inn. Amongst the names can be found those of many of the more important families in the county, such as that of Poyntz of Iron Acton, Berkeley of Stoke Gifford, Southwell of King's Weston.

CONCLUSION

To attempt a general conclusion about the adequacy of preparation for higher education, based almost entirely on a survey of a single class of source material would clearly be foolhardy. Yet this analysis does provide some statistical framework against which other, mostly impressionistic, material can be judged. Dr Percival in her article painted a rather pessimistic picture of the academic achievements of the grammar schools and by implication of the educational environment of Gloucestershire. One must ask if this is confirmed in the light of this analysis. There are perhaps two ways of trying to evaluate this problem; firstly by seeing what proportion of university entrants were provided by the grammar schools, and secondly by comparing the number of entrants from Gloucestershire with that of other counties. As has been shown, the grammar schools seem to have contributed a quarter and a third of all university entrants, and so it must be assumed that the bulk of university entrants were educated at either the great public schools or privately by tutors. The question of the performance of Bristol and Gloucestershire in relation to other parts of the country is perhaps easier to evaluate. Despite the fact that between them Bristol and Gloucestershire sent on average only 13 students annually to higher education, the evidence of the total numbers of students

55. Sir C. E. Mallett, *History of the University of Oxford*, III (Oxford, 1927), 39.

56. *Ibid.*, 43.

57. Dr Williams's Library, MS 34/4.

at the two universities suggests that they were probably doing as well as anywhere else. Professor Stone suggests that Gloucestershire was doing quite well in terms of the numbers of boys admitted to Oxford, supplying some 34 per cent more than the average for English and Welsh counties in both 1701 and 1750.⁵⁸ Furthermore, one might ask whether a larger number of graduates should be expected, and whether their lack made any appreciable difference to the life of the community. Whilst Gloucestershire's record is not good this might in some part be explained by the fact, as Professor Kearney has pointed out, that both the major elements in rural society—'the clergy and the gentry for whom university education was intended declined in both numbers and importance during this period. The Church had undoubtedly suffered materially as a consequence of the Civil War, and the losses were not made up in succeeding years. By 1700 many clergymen were unable to make ends meet. . . .'⁵⁹ In Bristol the lack of a graduate class of any size obviously made no difference to the economic development of the city, but from a social point of view the lack of interest in education made Bristol something of a cultural backwater. What evidence we have of middle class entertainments in Bristol suggests that it was only little more sophisticated than that enjoyed by the masses.⁶⁰ At the very end of the period there is evidence that the Bristol elite were beginning to take an interest in improving the quality of their life, but it seems likely that their inherent attitude resulted in this manifesting itself in a material rather than an intellectual way. A noble home, rich furnishings and fine clothes, rather than an educated mind, were considered the hallmark of a gentleman and the most successful way to this was by trade rather than through the church, medicine or the law. Only in the 19th century, when the wealth of the great merchant dynasties was secured did they consider a career for one of their sons in the liberal arts. Thus the situation in Bristol and Gloucestershire must be seen in a national context at a time when, as Professor Kearney writes, 'the universities turned their face against the new commercial civilization'.⁶¹ Or was it, perhaps, the other way about?⁶²

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58. Stone, 104. This put it 15th in the county 'league' in 1701 and 12th in 1751.

59. Kearney, *Scholars*, 143.

60. From the advertisements in Bristol newspapers.

61. Kearney, *Scholars*, 171

62. I am grateful to Professor W. Ashworth, Mr J. S. Moore, Dr B. W. E. Alford and Dr C. G. A. Clay, of the University of Bristol, for their many helpful comments on the first draft of this article, and especially to the Editor for his considerable assistance in seeing it through to publication.