

AN ENGLISH GEOGRAPHER REMEMBERS
Part One: The War Years 1939-1945

**MEMOIRS OF WORLD WAR II: HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE,
ENGLAND, 1939-1945**

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Queen Mary's High School, Walsall, Staffs, 1933-1941
Girton College, Cambridge, 1941-1944
Cambridge Training College for Women, 1944-1945

The British ultimatum to Germany expired at 11 a.m. on Sunday, September 3, 1939, so on September 4 the U.K. and France were at war. It was called the phony war; preparations began with the organization of rationing with books for food, coupons for clothing, and the fitting of gas masks. The latter were in cardboard boxes and most people carried them daily, but there were no gas attacks. I made a canvas cover for mine and stitched onto it a folded first aid outfit. Then there was the blackout of all lights in the streets and the covering of those indoors with whatever we could find to do this. Windowpanes were decorated with crosses of gummed paper to hold in the shards of glass from an air raid. Batteries, pencils, and paper were in short supply. Ballpoint pens called Birus were invented during the war to cope with the problems in aircraft. We turned in books for pulping and aluminium kitchen pans for aircraft construction. Anderson shelters of steel were available for families. We chose not to have one and slept under the stairs during air raids. My mother and I were invited to go into the shelter next door, but there was only room for four people in damp and dark conditions. On the night of November 14/15, 1940, we saw the red skies thirty miles away as Coventry was bombed and burned. Only once did we as a school go into the shelter, which had been dug in the playground. Because my home and school were not inner city locations, children were not sent to the countryside for safety.

From September 1939 until October 1941, I was in the last two years of my English high school; that is, I was in the VI form preparing for Advanced and Scholarship level exams in preparation to admission to universities. There were not many of these; we thought of Oxford, Cambridge, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, and Bristol. Most girls doing VI form work stayed for a third year preparing for the Universities' own

exams. I did not do this, lacking the money. My A level exams were in geography, history, French, and German. Because I was encouraged to think of Cambridge University, I should have taken Latin when I was 16 (O level), so five of us took a crash course in Latin and all failed. Then I took the exam in Latin offered by Cambridge University. It was called Little-Go and was a medieval vestigial remnant when male students went into Church service. I was allowed to take a dictionary to the exam and passed.

When A level exams were over, there were exams in geography set by Girton College, a part of Cambridge University. I recall choosing the title “Sixpenny Editions” for my three-hour general essay. Allen Lane began publishing Penguin paperback books in 1935, and I bought several at sixpence each. I treasure these to this day. At that time I had put together a book on local geography. I did field work on my bicycle, made maps, wrote a text, bound the pages, and made a potato cut design for the cover. This was for what was called Leisure Hour, and we were required to submit evidence that we had used leisure time wisely. The obvious choices were knitting and cooking. At that time I did not know that local geography was part of the Herbartian revolution in methods of teaching geography. After the College exams and the local geography effort, there came an invitation to go to Girton College for an interview. I was assigned a sitting room and a bedroom. This was how the founder of the College, Emily Davies, had designed living space for her six women students when they moved into the brick structure at Girton village in 1873. (The College was established at Hitchin, a nearby community, in 1869.) A site away from the town of Cambridge was deliberate. There was a laid coal fire and a box of matches, but it never occurred to me to light the fire. Perhaps these two rooms as a design for living have become two bed-sitting rooms with electric fires. The interviewers were amazed that I did not have the other college for women, Newnham, as a second choice. At my Queen Mary’s High School in Walsall, Miss M. W. Eld (1923) taught us biology, Miss M. V. Stafford (1906) was the headmistress, and there had been a student, Kathleen Busill-Jones (1936), so I had heard of the College in several ways.

I was offered a place at Girton beginning in October 1939. I saw my father give a tip to the boy who delivered the telegram. We did not have a phone; very few people did in 1939. When I arrived, I found that I was one of five geographers that year. They were

Lillian Vincett, our Scholar; Myfanwy Bell, our Exhibitioner; Audrey Brooks; Connie Harland; and I. Audrey Brooks and Lillian Vincett were not planning to teach and so were awarded a wartime degree after Part One of the Tripos exams. Lillian Vincett went into agricultural research, and Audrey Brooks became a civil servant and planner before going into nursing, which she had always wanted to do. Because of the Emergency Powers Act of 1940, Ernest Bevin, a member of Winston Churchill's War Cabinet, had absolute control of man/woman power. Teaching was a reserved occupation, so I was allowed to complete the three years of the Tripos exams. Because of the stereotype of Cambridge students coming from wealthy families, the record shows that in this group of five, matriculating in 1941, their fathers were as follows: a tobacconist, a dispensing chemist, a businessman, and two headmasters of primary schools. (One was deceased.)

The Girton Years: 1941-1944

Nineteen-forty had been the bad year when we were cheered on by Winston Churchill's speeches of defiance. There was the British defeat and retreat in May/June at Dunkirk, France. The Battle of Britain in the air began in July. Seventy-five consecutive nights of firebombing of London began in September and, on November 14, Coventry burned. Nineteen-forty-one was a time of challenges. Girton College was a building of very poorly lit corridors, of dining at bare wooden tables in Hall, of one bucket of coal a week for each of the open fireplaces in our individual rooms. There was a permanent source of heat in the Stanley Library, and we geographers envied the classicists who could study there when we were out surveying in cold, windy weather. Because we had labs to go to, we would have lunch at the Girton rooms off Kings Parade. Personal laundry was dried in the huge boiler room that produced hot water and steam heat for the College. I do not remember what happened with washing and drying sheets. There was heated water in bathrooms if we respected the black line marking 5 or 6 inches of water in the tub.

There was one bathroom to one corridor and this produced sundry women in a state of undress, or perhaps in rather nice housecoats, looking for the location of a bathroom. Some rooms had washbasins. For my second year I had a very nice room in the New Wing and the washbasin was hidden behind pleasant looking wooden structures. I had been lucky in a draw for another room; we geographers had been placed in Orchard

Wing because the lighting was better there for our atlas work. I had a depressing view of Ashcan Court, but no one played there and I was glad to move to a single room close to the Library, which was well lit and warm, though it did close at 11 p.m. For any American reader of this missive, we did not have roommates, but sometimes we geographers had a break from studying and met in each others' rooms, rotating the weekly ration of coal, and then we read aloud from what became our favorite book, *The Golden Age* by Kenneth Grahame. This was the time and place for the drying of hair, which in chilly Girton was a miserable experience. It was also the time for repair work on cotton lisle stockings. As prewar clothing wore out, replacements were scarce and were on coupons. (Nylons and pantyhose came after the war years.) For a small donation, Wendy Maskew (Modern Languages 1941) would use a very fine snag hook, attempting to do something about those ladders in heavyweight stockings held up by suspender belts. There were no trousers; we wore woollen skirts and tops. There was some knitting wool, especially the oiled kind, used to make waterproof gloves and mittens. Food was adequate and was rationed with books and points. At 3 p.m. we could collect a small amount of milk for tea if we had put out a small jug. Sunday lunch was usually potato soup. Once we had a meal of some dark flesh, obviously some winged creature. The maids said it was swan. As swan was a Royal bird and was culled, perhaps it was swan. Wine was never around, though it was said that if you joined the Conservative Club they had wine. Fruits such as oranges, lemons, pineapples, grapefruit, and bananas were only memories. If you had time to go to the market there might be soft fruits and medlars in season. Girton had its own asparagus bed, so there was a steady supply of this fine addition to a humdrum diet.

There was little social life. No May Balls. We had a curfew of 11 p.m.; Newnham women had midnight as theirs, yet they were in town and we had a 2-mile bike ride in the blackout, facing American service vehicles on the Huntingdon Road. I attended some musical gatherings and then there were walks in the Girton grounds and in the town. Two of us liked the Botanic Garden. On some college lawns there were large, shallow tanks of water painted green to minimize reflections. Girton had a punt on the River Cam, and we would use it at no cost to us. In College there were no radios or televisions. (Televisions came in the 1950s.) The indoor swimming pool was kept filled but was unheated. If there were newspapers, I never read them nor did I discuss the war. Because of travel

limitations, visitors were infrequent. Sometimes we were reminded of the war when small planes in training flights flew close to the Tower or the night sky lit up with a massive explosion at a nearby American bomber base or perhaps the night sky was full of searchlights but no air raid warnings. Fire watching was an activity for some. To do this at the University Library was popular; they were given food. We were required to take a Red Cross course in first aid and pass the test. I still have my certificate. We had to use each other as patients, and it was then I made friends with Nancy Ball, a historian, and we have been friends ever since. We were also instructed by a local fireman on how to handle fire hoses. Some of the dons invited students to coffee. Miss H. I. McMorran, the librarian, was one of those. Miss H. Wanklyn was our director of studies, and she tried to get to know us, but in the middle of these years she married Mr. J. A. Steers and became the mother of two children. Miss K. M. E. Murray took some of us to see some local churches in her small car. Petrol was rationed; this was a very generous act. She never mentioned her grandfather and his work with the *Oxford English Dictionary* or that she would publish a book about him.

There were men students around in the department; some of them would have been unfit for military service. Perhaps they were on war work, about which we knew nothing. Our war service was minimal; once we were part of a group that met to twist short lengths of wire supplied to us by a local factory. Once I did some paperwork for the social services in Cambridge. During the long summer time away from Cambridge I took over our home as my mother worked in my father's company. Many women did men's work, and this was the time when women began to wear trousers in factories and as bus conductors. I continued to read and do the fieldwork for my thesis. We were never short of library materials. Girton had a fine library as did the Geography Department, and then there was the University Library, though it was quite a distance away. Because so many of the books we used were published before 1939, they were available. It was paper and pencils that were hard to find. I still have the stub of a blue Anadel pencil that I used on the local and white Ordnance Survey maps. These were the only ones we could get. This lack of maps might have been the result of the loss of plates at the Ordnance Survey printer after Southampton was bombed. I pasted cotton bandages on the back of these maps to strengthen them. There was no shortage of cotton bandages. I also spent time

using red and brown pencils where colour would have been printed. There were lectures but no roll call. Sometimes there was news of excellent lectures in other subjects and it was an open door for all. There were labs, and one had to go to them in order to have hands-on experience with surveying instruments such as a plane table, a 100 ft. steel chain, a prismatic compass, and a sextant. We prepared two weekly essays, handwritten, for the two weekly supervisions. One professor met with two students who read their essays aloud, and discussion was part of the visits. Sometimes these supervisions were in the homes of the professors and, hopefully, there would be some heat. Mrs. M. Clegg had heat; always. There was no food or drink because rationing was tight. These essays were returned the next week with Latin grades, and we were given the topics for the following week. There were two clubs. The International Club met for lunch on Sunday, and we had to prepare sandwiches of grated vegetables on dry bread. There were sometimes vegetables in the local market. The Geography Club was a more formal affair. Twenty-four of us cycled to Wicken Fen where Dr. Godwin spoke of changing peat levels. Mrs. M. S. Anderson talked of her work in Barbados but never of her anthology *Splendour of Earth*. Professor Frank Debenham O.B.E. was busy as an administrator and never gave a talk about his role as the young geologist with the last expedition to the South Pole of Captain Falcon Scott in 1912. His book, *Astrographics or First Steps in Navigation by the Stars: A Primer for the Airman*, was published by Heffers in 1941. In the Preface he said that he had taught the use of the quadrant and astrolabe to pre-entry RAF cadets. In the department there were several beautifully made astrolabes which helped to sort out this spherical trigonometry. For a time there were some RAF officers in our class in full uniform. They were a silent group and one wonders what they made of this topic, though he did not teach that lab to us. Mr. Vaughan Lewis did that as well as the field research we did on the flow of the River Cam. Like the surveying, this was done whatever the weather, and Cambridge winters could be very cold. We had been told that the wave tank in the basement was closed; years later, rumour had it that the model of the Normandy beachhead was being made there. Lewis was a geomorphologist, and Mr. J. A. Steers was an authority on the coastline of England and Wales. His 555-page book was published in 1946. There were men in pale brown coats who handled the maps and map storage, yet they were of draftable age. Perhaps there was something to that rumour. Perhaps these lab

men who controlled all the map drawers and the police who controlled the sale of black and white one-inch maps were hiding information from spies. We do know now that spies were dropped at night over the English countryside.

A nameless man taught us how to make maps of seaweed beds off the coast of Scotland from air photographs. These were to show areas of food resources when Hitler had starved us out. We turned in our maps, but the lecturer disappeared and we heard no more about them or the seaweed diet. Hitler did not starve us out; we had the splendid support of American Lend Lease with tinned Spam, dried egg, dried milk, and sausage meat. Monty Python has a skit based on Spam with its many ways of being cooked and served, and it is still available to American cooks very cheaply. One lecturer, Mr. Stanners, had to talk about economic geography for three hours. We had to cycle back to college in the blackout facing oncoming American vehicles from the nearby bomber bases. We had to hope that the kitchen staff had remembered to set our dinner aside and keep it warm. They did. Mr. Thatcher took over the economic geography and one day said, "I think we are a quorum." Mr. G. Manley seemed happier talking about weather and climate, but he was assigned to teach exploration. Our region of expertise was Africa south of the Sahara. Miss Jean Mitchell taught the historical geography of the Domesday Book. We did not know then that Mr. H. C. Darby was editing the fine series of regional textbooks for the army. I used my own county's Domesday statistics and turned in my essay. Miss H. Wanklyn (Mrs. J. A. Steers) was the best lecturer. She had published her work on the eastern Marchlands of Europe in 1941 and was well informed and prepared. I still have my notebooks of her lectures. Mr. Steers, lecturing on physical geography, did not have her talents. During the war years, the London School of Economics and Bedford College were evacuated to Cambridge and used our building. When we came into the room the blackboard was covered with complex maps drawn in coloured chalk as she talked. Students had to copy them at top speed, and they were erased as we walked in. We muttered that we were glad we were not Bedford students. We had to use an atlas every time; it was so big it was burdensome on a bicycle and it certainly helped to identify us. It was *The University Atlas* by Goodall and Darby, published in London, by Philip, second edition 1940. It was 15 inches long and 11 inches wide. In the Tripos exams we were allowed to use it, but it had to be turned in and examined before the exam by the

invigilator (the exam proctor) and then given back for use in our answers. We never knew who our examiners were. Looking back at the list of lecturers, they never mentioned their research and publications, yet most of them published books in the 1940s and 1950s.

In the second year, fieldwork outside Cambridge was expected but not in wartime, so the five of us made our own plans. Lillian Vincett was in charge and found a guesthouse near Lockerbie in the Southern Uplands of Scotland close to a drumlin field; I worked on historical geography. If any written material remains, I do not know of it. I do remember the constant rainfall and the way we put on sodden shoes and wet socks for the morning's trudge and faced the hostility of some of the other guests. We were foreigners.

The third year was the time of lengthy and serious research for the thesis, called the regional essay. This was my third venture with field investigations on my own with no supervision. I knew a family who lived in Cheslyn Hay; there were some other Hays and those were the settlements I researched travelling on my bicycle and sometimes stopping for tea at their house. These villages were in Domesday Book of 1085 A.D. and were clearings in a Royal hunting area called Cannock Chase. I had the manuscript typed professionally—none of us could type or owned a typewriter—placed between covers, and then I turned it in. It came back in pristine condition. However, this kind of place-name research has lingered on for decades and, in 2005, I published a review of the second edition of the *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*. Google engineers found it, quoted from it, and now it is in cyberspace (<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.chi?path=133861095336086>).

As a postscript, mention should be made of money and who paid for this. I had been awarded a county scholarship. Then there was an award from an organization for which I had an interview. They gave me money because my father had fought in France in World War I, was gassed, and had shell shock. (He had volunteered at 17.) He managed the money and I had enough. There were few items to be bought and no foreign travel. We worked very hard at the academic demands and survived. We never did paid work outside our studies. Rationing continued after the war ended in 1945.

Food rationing per week for an adult. We had to be registered with a grocer and a butcher.

Bacon and ham 4 oz. / meat to the value of 1s. 2d (6p today)

Butter 2 oz. / cheese 2 oz.

Cooking fat 4 oz. or less / milk 3 pints (1800 ml.) or less

Sugar 8 oz. / tea 2 oz.

Eggs 1 shell each week, if available / preserves 1 lb. every 2 months

Sweets 12 oz. every 4 weeks

Monthly points:

16 bought 1 can fish / meat or 2 lbs. dried fruit or 9 lbs. dried peas

Cod liver oil, orange juice and more milk for mothers and the elderly.

Ways of cooking with rationed American dried egg/milk/Spam were circulated. Vegetables were available and many grew their own.

‘Dig for Victory’ was on posters.

Source: Patten, Marguerite, *We'll Eat Again*, Hamlyn and Imperial War Museum, 1990.

Comments on unrationed offal: My mother spent a lot of time searching the shops for liver, ox tails, pigs' heads and feet, sheep's brains, ox hearts, lambs' tails and kidneys, tripe (cows' stomachs), sheep's testicles, and chitterlings (pigs' intestines).

From My Commonplace Book

1. We had a 21st birthday party for Audrey Brooks. There was a treasure hunt in those long corridors with the dim blue lights. Then we returned to someone's room and made up limericks. No mention was made of Anthony Trollope's characters playing this game in his 19th century Barchester.

We thought we heard the Basham Bull
Give voice to a mighty roar.
We looked again and saw
That Lewis held the Qualifying floor.
The Bull had piped "What rot, that's wrong.
It's two plus two, not four".

--Mr. Lewis to first-year students

A geographer young, Connie Mary,
After surveying was feeling quite weary.
She partook of a pail of intoxicating ale,
And then she felt light as a fairy.

--First-year surveying

2. Lillian Vincett knew this grace before a wartime meal.

Bless this tiny piece of ham.

Bless this lonely dab of jam.
Bless lightly buttered toast.
Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

3. Advert in the London *Times*: Officer going overseas urgently requires thermos, small electric iron, and single stone engagement ring.

Cambridge Training College for Women (C.T.C.): 1944-1945

In the last year of the war three of the 1941 geographers moved to the Cambridge Training College for Women, which had been founded in 1885 by Elizabeth P. Hughes with 13 women students. It is now known as Hughes Hall. A most able principal, Miss H. Dent, administered it. Two lecturers were in residence; for example, Dr. W. Gladwell was in charge of geography. Miss H. Dent knew our footsteps as well as our names and ambitions. There were 40 of us, each with a room to herself. She made us feel like young professionals; there was no curfew and we had the key to the front door. As a lecturer, she was outstanding. Her organization and delivery were first class, and she said “Save your notes.” I did so and used them here in the U.S.A. in my work on the Herbartians in my retirement publications. She brought in university lecturers; one was Mr. R. H. Thouless and we used one of his books on psychology. We had to do school practice, and I went to a local trade school for several weeks, teaching cooks and dressmakers, carpenters, and bricklayers. I found that getting their attention in the first five minutes was the secret. So, evenings were full of preparation of visual aids such as a map of New York harbour. We had to practice inductive questioning, a Herbartian trait, as I was to learn later, and that meant evenings recovering from the fatigue of it. To change the experience, I was sent to Herts and Essex High School for Girls. We walked down to the British Restaurant where there was mass feeding for a low cost; it was an attempt by the government to add to our rations. It worked well if you were hungry and did not mind army style of delivery. At college the food was again adequate though rationed, and the cook knew how to use offal in the best-ever steak and kidney pudding with a beef suet pastry top.

There were highlights the like of which we never had at Girton. One day we woke up to find a huge flag bearing the skull and crossbones of a pirate crew flying from the flagpole. Miss Dent was not amused, though she made no mention of it until much later and then in private to me. (I was the elected Senior Student.) Then there was a more happy event. We put on a play, *Trelawney of the Wells*. As stage manager I had to rent a sofa, find a man's nightshirt, and a pigeon pie. One of the former geographers was now in agricultural research and knew a farming family. The farmer shot the birds, his wife made the pie, we used it in the play, and then one of the cast members ate the whole pie, as we cleared up around him.

Small World

Henriette Dent lived in perilous times. According to the *Girton College Register* 1869-1946, she was born in 1883 to a German family living in Paris, France, with a father who was a bullion broker. The name changed from Deutsch by deed poll, making it legal. She matriculated to Girton College, Cambridge University, in 1903, achieving a first class degree in history, and then went to London University as a graduate student in education. She became a distinguished lecturer and administrator and specialized in the history of education. She survived World War I and was principal of Cambridge Training College from 1933, surviving World War II and retiring from C.T.C. in the last year of the War. It was in that year I heard her suggest that we save our notes. As she was so well organized as a lecturer, I did that and, in the year 2000, I reread them. I was researching the Herbartian revolution in teaching methods. The American center was Normal, Illinois, the home of Illinois State Normal University (ISNU), renamed Illinois State University in 1963. It was founded in 1857.

The leader of the American Herbartians was Dr. Charles DeGarmo of IS(N)U. There were four others, three men and one woman, who were to become known nationally and internationally, hence, Miss Dent's reference in her lectures of 1945 at C.T.C. One of the men, Charles A. McMurry, a professor at IS(N)U presented a paper entitled "Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Pedagogy." The venue for the presentation was the International Congress of Education at the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago, Illinois, July 25-28, 1893. The paper was published in the *Proceedings* of the National Educational Association, 1893, pp. 438-440. At the same Congress of Education,

Elizabeth P. Hughes, the founder and first principal of C.T.C., presented a paper entitled “The Professional Training of Teachers for Secondary Schools.” It was published in the *Proceedings* of the N.E.A. in 1893, pp. 217-221. The Atlantic journey by coal-fired ship must have been daunting to anyone’s stamina at that time. By invitation she published a paper in 1899, in the early version of the *Journal of Geography*, an American publication. It was then called the *Journal of School Geography*, 1899, Vol. III, pp. 375-382. The paper was entitled “An Experiment in the Teaching of Geography.” R. E. Dodge of Teachers’ College, Columbia University, founded the *Journal of School Geography* in 1895. He was editor and owner and had been encouraged to found a journal for teachers by William Morris Davis of Harvard University. (Davis became the Associate Editor of this journal.) Davis made three trips to Europe and studied the origins of certain English rivers, publishing his findings in an English publication, the *Geographical Journal*, in 1895, Vol. 5, pp. 128-132. Small world indeed.

As time passed, we had to think of the written exams at the end of the year and also the need to find jobs. As teachers in training, we were in a reserved occupation. Once we were qualified, we had to find work at once or be drafted. Ernest Bevin as Minister of Labour and National Service in Churchill’s coalition government had total control of labour. I was offered a post in a girls’ school in Batley, Yorkshire. I was to teach geography to A level. I had excellent students. One of them, Barbara Fenton, won an award, called an Exhibition, to my Cambridge college and later, like me, crossed the Atlantic and married a geographer. He, Dean Fred Lukermann, and she were in the same department. Because of the nepotism rule, she had to leave. She set up her own company as a town planner and did well. In Batley her father was a grocer and his customers would have worked in the shoddy trade. This was fabric for army uniforms made from rags collected worldwide. The town was easier to get to from York, which was on the main line, London to Edinburgh. My train journey to Cambridge was slow and complicated if I chose not to go into London and then to Cambridge. This slow journey needed two changes and went through Bletchley, where the station platform was so much bigger. We were not to know that this was where thousands cracking the German Enigma code alighted for Bletchley Park. In the weeks after the end of this fourth year, and with a job for September, I went haymaking on a farm in northern England. Because all men had not

returned from the war, haymaking was done by any able-bodied person. We had to walk along rows of cut grass, turning it as we went. It was hard work and midges were very bad. The owner of the farm wrote historical novels and, as he did this in front of an open window, we had to hunt for them on windy days. One day there was a foxhunt. We were placed in a line and had to advance between bushes and trees, shouting. This was to scare the fox that would run into the line of fire formed by the landowner. Only he had a gun. This pushing through trees and bushes ruined my beige raincoat. The fox got away. The landowner was a cousin of a famous historian, Arnold J. Toynbee. He came to visit at the time when the Conservative government led by Winston Churchill was voted out of office in 1945. Toynbee took this very calmly, saying that the new Labour government could not do much damage. Ernest Bevin was made Foreign Secretary. Rationing continued and there were German prisoners of war in the Vale of York. Schools had a week off and had to decide who was going to pick potatoes; the Germans handled the horse-drawn carts onto which we loaded the harvest. We slept on concrete floors in a farm building, and I was glad I had had camping experience and knew how to make the most warmth and comfort from three gray army blankets. The winter of 1945 was one of the coldest ever and there was a shortage of coal. I wrote to Miss Dent; she had the contacts. I left the moors and mill town of the West Riding and went south to the metropolis of London for the next decade. My “sheepskins” had come to me in the post, rolled up in tubes. I did not walk in any degree-awarding procession. Women were not full members of Cambridge University until 1948.

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E. Joan Wilson

Queen Mary's High School, Walsall, Staffs, 1933-1941

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Glossary

College

A Cambridge college is a named building in which undergraduates, some graduates, and some lecturers, called dons, live in separate rooms and are cared for during the academic year of three terms, eight weeks each. There is no campus. These colleges were built in the town of Cambridge. Girton College was deliberately built more than 2 miles out of the town at the village of Girton. Some are very old – Cambridge University will be 800 years old in 2009 – and others are very new. Each is recognizable by its shield of heraldic design and by the scarf of coloured strips of cloth in college colours. Students leave the colleges on foot or bicycle to go to classes in lecture halls in separate buildings in different parts of the town. Each college is self-governing and private, and may be very wealthy from investments, endowments, and gifts. Until 1983 it could set its own admission exams following successful A-level exams. A library and chapel may be part of the structure. The public university receives money from the national Treasury. It was University Ordinances in 1923 that established 300 as the maximum number of women students in Girton and Newnham colleges, where women were taking university exams.

There was another college for women, called Homerton, which was peripheral, training teachers for children in the elementary public schools.

High school, VI forms, and A-level exams in the 1940s

Between the ages of 16 and 18, girls in high schools were in the last two years of school, called the VI form. Admittance to the VI form was achieved by success in O levels (“ordinary”) at 16. These O level exams, like the A-level (“advanced”) exams, were devised, administered, and graded by universities which were grouped regionally. The exams were in essay form and students used pens and ink. There were no multiple choice questions or short answer questions. There were no quizzes during the term but there were essay-style exams, graded by the schools’ teachers. In the years under comment it was usual to study four subjects in the VI form. Such work needed well-trained teachers who were dedicated to the mission of the VI form, which was advanced education for women; some students aimed at university entrances and careers. It called for much study and homework. Part-time work for pay was not possible or expected. Students became capable of independent work, correctly written English, and a fast speed of writing. Teachers would have spent hours correcting essays. Field work was required for geography, usually with no financial aid for anyone. One external examiner would come to examine the field notebooks.

Tripes at Cambridge University for an Honours Degree

This medieval term relates to the division of a three-year plan of work and exams. The first year was the qualifying exam time. At the end of the second year came Part I. Part II was the third year, and the exams marked the end of the undergraduate time. A First in either part was very good; a First in both parts was outstanding. Wartime was

different: would-be teachers were allowed to finish the three years, while others had to leave after part one with a wartime degree. Results were posted in a public place. An anxious, silent group read the results that labeled them for life. All the 1941 geographers achieved Seconds.

May Ball

Each college has one of these in June at the end of the academic year when exams are over. No cost is spared for these black-tie, all-night extravaganzas. These did not happen in wartime.

Punt

A flat-bottomed boat driven by a long pole dropped into the shallow, muddy, sluggish River Cam by a person standing on the flat end of the craft, which is then pushed along. I believe at Oxford University the one with the pole stands at the other end, which is not flat. There is room for two passengers. If anyone falls in, it is possible to walk out of the River Cam.

Appendix

Social life during the war

Social life for civilians was limited by controls such as the rationing of food beginning June 3, 1940. No more than five pounds could be spent on a meal in a hotel. Petrol was rationed; it was being pumped under the English Channel in a pipeline named Pluto to the fighting forces in Europe. A blackout of all lights restricted much safe

movement. There was a lack of time; volunteers went to their war jobs after their day's work. They became part of the Air Raid Precautions (ARP), which applied to everyone in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Republic of Ireland was neutral. Families and friends would sit around the radio, called the wireless, and listen to the British Broadcasting Corp. (BBC), especially at 9 p.m., which was news time. Before the news was read there would be a selection of parts of the national anthem of the occupied countries in Europe. Some of their governments were in exile in England. In those days the news was read in what was called "the BBC voice." Regional accents were used after the war. There was a Home Service and ITMA was great entertainment. It was always good for a chuckle the next day when everyone had heard it. There were songs for the forces on the Light Programme, and the Third Programme featured serious material, some of which would be published in the BBC's weekly, *The Listener*. By repute, it had the hardest crossword puzzle. As paper became scarce it languished as did other magazines. Some, like *The Listener* and the *Geographical Magazine* survived. In 1991 the BBC produced a programme called "Dad's Army". These were the veterans of WWI and were doing their bit on the home front. It is still in circulation as a DVD and still as funny and accurate in its detail of the Home Guard and their rivals, the firewatchers of the ARP.

A university rule required students to keep so many nights in college. The curfew times varied from college to college but we knew those who climbed in late with the aid of friends with rooms on the ground floor. Such latecomers would have faced a dangerous and dark ride of more than 2 miles to get back to the college. There were few batteries for bicycle lamps. I once did this trip on foot because the saddle of my bike was stolen in

town. The road was a busy one because of the truck traffic from American bombers bases near Cambridge.

Eating swan

There are three of us who say we ate swan (Wilson, Helliwell, and Loch). Nancy Ball (History 41) says the dark flesh and smaller bones were those of rooks. She recalls that their carcasses were served on Sunday evenings, with salads. She and others ate it; there was no choice. Swans are owned by someone. Those on the River Thames are owned by the Crown. Would there have been enough swan to have it every Sunday evening? Rooks are smaller than American crows and bigger than American grackles. They feed in great numbers in grain fields. Hence their certain death in wartime.

The model of the Normandy beaches

In March 1944 this model was moved over the road from London to St. John's College, Cambridge. The planners had been at work on the Clyde. This information comes from a letter by John Braddock in *CAM* Michaelmas Term 1994, p. 33. He does not say where it was made or by whom. Nor do we know where it stood between March and June 6, 1944. Perhaps here is the kernel of the rumour we geographers picked up that it was made in the basement of the Department of Geography where the wave tank was closed to us.

Communists

The three most notorious Communists in Cambridge were at work in the 1930s. In the 1940s there was known to be a cell in Girton and Newnham colleges. An informed source said they were "10 a penny." We geographers knew one of them and found her to

be naïve. We went about our work surveying, scrutinizing map projections and foreign sheet maps, and researching and writing our two essays a week.

Academic dress

Because we were not full members of the university until 1948, we did not wear the simple, hip-length gown of the undergraduate. University Library *Admissions* made this clear in 1943:

Graduate members of the university are admitted at any time when the library is open. Undergraduates in academic dress, and students of Girton and Newnham colleges, are similarly admitted, except on the first and last days of each quarter, when only persons entitled to borrow books are admitted.

Women and the education of women

Girton and Newnham were the two colleges of women in the 1940s. Ageing administrators and lecturers were the spinsters and widows of WWI. The book by Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men after the First World War*, is about them. The review in *The Economist* of September 1, 2007 makes one pause. Such a group was formed by WWII – my generation – and there is a pattern.

Women taught girls in girls' high schools – sometimes called grammar schools in England – and these girls in the VI form were to go to women's colleges to prepare to earn a degree and then teach VI forms of girls to go to colleges for women. Of the 80 matriculants to Girton College in 1941, 27 went to teach after earning their degrees. There is an interesting spinoff for this generation of spinsters. If they earned a two-year, non-teaching wartime degree, then they were drafted into war work or the fighting services where they might be taught to drive a vehicle. If the single women of WWI drove cars,

then they were from wealthy families. Cars were few and traffic was very light in those years.

Voting for two Members of Parliament

Nineteen-forty-five was a time of events beyond the difficult examinations of Part II of the Geography Tripos for an Honors degree. VE Day on May 8 was one of the noisy street celebrations of victory and the quiet intensity of a special service in King's College chapel. Here, only the west window had its stained glass of 1879 "...left in position to take its chances with the Luftwaffe." *CAM*, vol. 50, Lent Term, 2007, p. 14. We three geographers of '41 had a new director of studies, Mrs. W.B. Wright, and her sitting room was always warm for her supervisions. In the post came the invitation to vote for a Member of Parliament (M.P.) to represent the University at Westminster. Cambridge as one of the two ancient universities had this right. It was a medieval relic of the Third Estate of the Realm; the First Estate was the Crown and the Second Estate was the Church. So, we women had this vote as well as the one for the politician based on the national franchise. After the general election of 1945 the Atlee Labour government got rid of the relic. It is ironic that the women of Cambridge did not vote on university matters until they were granted full membership in 1948.

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