

Clare College and the Founding of Clare Hall

Richard Eden



CLARE COLLEGE AND THE FOUNDING OF CLARE HALL

RICHARD EDEN

Foreword by the President of Clare Hall
Professor Gillian Beer, Litt.D., FBA



The Founder's Seal given to Clare Hall (now Clare College) by Elizabeth of Clare in 1359. On the left of the seal is the shield of the arms of Edward I, and on the right are the quartered arms of Castille and Leon. These two shields are those of Lady Elizabeth's grandparents. Below is the shield adopted as her own in 1353. The legend is *aula clare pia rege semper virgo maria*. The size is 6cm x 4cm.

CLARE HALL IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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Chapter 11

LAND, BUILDINGS AND
FINANCE

CLARE LAND IN WEST CAMBRIDGE

Although other items would have been considered, only one item was recorded in the minutes for the Clare College governing body meeting on 7 January 1963:

The question of the disposal of a piece of land to the west of the University Library was discussed.

This land, owned by Clare, amounted to three quarters of an acre adjacent to Grange Road, and in the 1950s it was used as a tennis court by members of the college, additional to those at the (new) Clare sports field off Bentley Road. Earlier, this land had been part of a larger sports area including the Clare-King's cricket ground where the University Library now stands. The whole area had been taken over in 1914 during the Great War for a large temporary 'Eastern General Hospital'. Patients were brought to it by road from the railway sidings that had been constructed to the south of Cambridge station. In the housing shortage following the war, the wooden huts of the disused hospital were occupied by squatters until 1926-27, when they were displaced to allow the construction of the University Library¹.

By January 1963, it was evident that Clare might require building land reasonably close to the Memorial Court at some stage in the future. The fellows were therefore unwilling to give up our Grange Road tennis courts without some nearby land in exchange. The issue had been raised a year or so earlier by a request from the university to purchase the Clare land in order to obtain planning permission for building an extension to the University Library. Although, the university had no immediate intention

to build on the Clare land, and it was suggested that we might be able to continue to use it for tennis, its ownership by the university was essential to meet the planning regulations on the ratio between buildings and land areas. At a governing body meeting, the bursar was asked to take a tough line in his negotiations with the university authorities. It is interesting to note that, wearing different hats, both the bursar and the Master were on the relevant university committees.

The resolution of the problem was aided by the fortunate coincidence that the Vice-Chancellor at the time, the Rev. Boys-Smith was the Master of St. John's College, and had previously been bursar of his college. He therefore saw practical advantages to all parties of a triangular exchange². Clare would sell the Grange Road land to the university, the university would sell the Divinity School (located directly opposite to the main gates of St. John's) to St. John's College, and the latter would sell to Clare the freehold of the land in Herschel Road on which Clare Hall now stands. At the time, there were three large houses on this land. There were long leases, nearing their end, for the land occupied by Elmside on the corner of Grange and Herschel Road, and for Huntley at 3 Herschel Road. However, Herschel House at 1 Herschel Road was owned by St. John's, and was divided into flats which were let on short leases, which could be terminated with six months notice³. The total area amounted to about three acres in all.

It was planned that St. John's would lease the Divinity School back to the university for a period of 25 years, during which time a new building would be provided for the Faculty of Divinity, eventually – it was thought – enabling St. John's to redevelop the site of the old building. Alas for these intentions – times changed! The optimism associated with rapid growth in education in the 1960s and general expectations of future national prosperity received a set-back in the 1970s with the oil crisis and

² Holister was at the meeting and has told me that it was Ashby who made the suggestion of the triangular exchange. Boys-Smith, since he was there in his role as Vice-Chancellor, said that he thought the university would be interested in seeking such a solution, but he added that he was uncertain how the Master of St. John's College (himself) might respond. Later, in the latter capacity, he gave his support to the proposal.

³ The bursar of Clare (Cooper) had approached St. John's earlier about the Herschel Road land before the triangular deal was worked out. He had also found a property in Newnham that (subsidised by Clare) could be let at a nominal rent to one of the tenants of a flat in Herschel House.

¹ Godwin, *Cambridge and Clare* (Cambridge 1985).

achieved by partially sinking the ground level, and partially raising the ground-floor level of the buildings on the Herschel Road front. It was noted that this would give a slope from north to south of the buildings, which would be an aesthetic advantage. We also had some discussion about the need to include a wine cellar and a launderette and arrangements for disposal of rubbish. Erskine's reply to Ashby's letter of 1 December agreed with the decision to demolish Herschel House and to the suggestions that we made for improvements in sketch number V.

Although we do not have any of Erskine's early sketches of building options, our archives include a rough copy that I made from Erskine's sketch number V, probably during the meeting on 1 December, which shows 10 terrace houses (presumably two-storey) and 4 court houses, and a common room, dining area, kitchen, and seminar room, library, and studies. The general layout has a close resemblance to the eventual layout of the buildings of Clare Hall – the terrace houses and court houses are separated by a walkway (family walk), and the latter are separated from the social and academic areas (by the scholars' walk). However, in this sketch the car-park is still above ground (suggesting that my sketch was made from Erskine's drawings at this meeting), and the terrace houses are to the east, adjacent to the Elmside garden, whilst the scholars' garden is to the west.

It was not until some time later that the planned layout was reversed so that the family houses and family garden were to the west of the site, with the studies and scholars' garden to the east. My recollection is that the change was made because the kitchen and dining room had been located to the south of the common room, with the studies on the north side, but this would have required vehicle access for kitchen deliveries from the rifle range road, on which we had no right of access since it belonged to Jesus College and we could not be certain of its long-term availability for use by Clare Hall. Changes to make kitchen access from Herschel Road, essentially by rotating the plans through 180 degrees, led to the present layout.

PROBLEMS GETTING STARTED

At one of the meetings with Erskine on 1 December 1964, I had sketched out an ideal timetable to construction of the proposed buildings assuming

no delays. Ashby took my notes and formalised them in his letter to Erskine written in the evening of the same day. Noting that the assumption of no delays was unlikely, Ashby's timetable suggested that the buildings could be open for use by October 1967. Erskine's response, dated 16 December, gave a timetable for completion in February 1968. In his accompanying letter he indicated three possible ways in which the construction period might be shortened – the first (and most usual method) being 'wishful thinking'.

The preparation of plans during 1965 was complicated by continuing attempts to prevent the costs from rising above the level that Clare College could prudently finance, with suggestions for economies coming mainly from the quantity surveyors, Messrs Monk & Dunstone. On 24 June 1965, an outline application for the development costing approximately £250,000 was made to the Cambridge City Architect under the Town and Country Planning Acts.

However, on 27 July 1965 the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Labour Government announced a building licensing system for all privately sponsored building projects costing over £100,000. A bill would be introduced in the Autumn to give effect to these new regulations which would be retrospective to the date of the Chancellor's announcement⁸. There were a number of exemptions, including educational buildings financed by the University Grants Committee, but these would not include Clare Hall, which was – in effect – privately financed.

Meanwhile, the provisional council had been considering the request from the President-elect of Clare Hall, Brian Pippard, for some increase in size of the President's house, so as to allow space for a small grand piano in the living room, to allow for up to ten in the dining room, and to provide an additional bedroom. These enlargements were agreed and sent to Erskine on 2 August 1965.

In September 1965, Ashby wrote directly to the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Public Works asking for advice on whether a building licence would be needed and, if so, how an application could be made – the reply was that the Ministry hoped to make an announcement 'very

⁸ The government's objective was to hold back certain privately sponsored projects so that the construction industry would not become overloaded. The Bill would provide permanent administrative machinery ... to ensure that socially important work, such as housing, industrial building and work in development districts would get priority.

soon'. On 1 November, the Minister announced that he would consider applications for works to start which were urgent and in the public interest.

The application was made in the form of a letter dated 10 November from Ashby to the Ministry, giving an outline description of the proposed buildings and estimating their costs to be about £250,000 exclusive of land and fees. The reply was dated 21 January 1966, authorising the work provided it was commenced not earlier than April and not later than six months after that date. It would still be necessary to obtain local planning consents. On 26 May Ashby wrote to the Ministry to say that it might not be possible to complete all the drawings required for tenders so that work could begin before the final date. He was promptly informed that failure to meet the deadline would necessitate making a fresh application.

Various alternative procedures were considered at a meeting of Ashby, Pippard, Cooper and Holister with the architects and quantity surveyors in the Master's Lodge of Clare College on 18 August 1966. It was decided to consider the construction as a continuous two-stage process. Tenders would be invited on 23 September for the sub-structure (stage 1) and schedules of rates would be invited for the super-structure (stage 2). Using this procedure it would be possible to commence work before the end of October, within the period allowed by the licence. The timetable envisaged completing the sub-structure during February 1967, then starting the super-structure and completing it by October 1968.

COMPLETION, 1969

The contract for Clare Hall buildings was awarded to F. B. Thackray & Co., a building firm based in Huntingdon, and work commenced in October 1966. The construction was not helped by the wet Cambridge winters, but by the Spring of 1969 the buildings had been completed, and they were in use by June of that year. The furnishings were chosen by Erskine's daughter, working in collaboration with him.

Ralph Erskine has described the society and its needs on which his design was based in the following terms⁹

⁹ Erskine in an article on Clare Hall in the *Architects' Journal Information Library*, 19 August 1970, pp. 409-414.

... a community of people who are elected to the college to further their self-chosen studies and who are selected according to capacity without regard to age, sex or origin - a group of scholars and their families ... It needed dwellings for families and dwellings for single people, work places for scholars, for house-wives (or house-husbands) and for children. It needed meeting places for mixed groups with many interests, and others for special groups with special interests, places for common or private meals and recreation, places for togetherness and others for privacy ...

Erskine's aim was for buildings that would help achieve the social and scholarly objectives. He continued:

... the buildings are grouped around two main walkways - the family walk and the dwellings, and the scholars' walk with the studies, common room and bar. Beyond these, at each extremity of the site is a family garden and a scholars' garden. Breaking right through and across these groups is a cross-walkway ... (allowing) a varying degree of inter-relationship between scholastic work ... and recreation ... Within the dwellings are many choices of dwellings; there are nine 1-person bed-sitters, one 2-person bedsitter, two 3-person flats with a sleeping balcony, four terrace houses with three bedrooms, three court houses with four bedrooms and one court house with lounge, dining room, study, and four bedrooms. All the dwellings are equipped with full kitchen and cupboard space, and (are) fully furnished ...

The common room, bar and dining room are placed between the public space of the scholars' walk and the quiet seclusion of the scholars' garden, and are planned to give varying degrees of intimacy for relaxed or intensive conversation.

Ten studies, three rooms for the president and for secretaries, and a larger discussion room and a reading room are grouped around an enclosed court to form an enclave for concentration, for individual work or for intensive exchange.

The buildings were occupied during the summer of 1969, beginning in June. They were formally opened on 30 September by Lord Ashby, then acting in his capacity of Vice-Chancellor of the University, a position that he held for the two years 1967-69. The President of Clare Hall, Brian Pippard had by then moved into the President's house with his wife, Charlotte, and their three daughters. Although other colleges have Master's Lodges, it was unusual - though beneficial to the early residents of Clare Hall - to have a head of house who could be available if the need arose to fix the drains or the electricity or the fire alarm during the early days of the new buildings. In spite of these unusual and unintended tasks,



19. *Elmside from the garden.*

number of economy measures were taken to keep the total cost within affordable limits². The changes made included a reduction in the number of studies from 20 to 10, thus allowing all of them to be built on the ground floor.

In January 1967 the governing body was informed of the death of Mr Berry, who had occupied Elmside at 49 Grange Road, and that the house would become available for the use of Clare Hall in the near future. He had been most helpful in allowing part of his garden to be made available to Clare Hall so that the new buildings could extend right up to the eastern edge of the garden of Herschel House. The freehold for Elmside

² The total endowment capital for Clare Hall was fixed except for possible gains through growth in the stock market. Thus, excessive expenditure on the building could have reduced the income from the unspent endowment below the minimum level for operation of the college.

was already owned by Clare College under the earlier triangular transaction, and the bursar (Cooper) had prudently arranged for the college also to purchase from Berry the remainder of the lease under which the house had been built in the 1880s, whilst giving him a life-tenancy at a nominal rent.

Alterations were made in Elmside so as to accommodate 8 graduate students and provide a flat which would later provide accommodation for a housekeeper. The house came into use in October and two fellows and four graduate students took up residence. The labour of installing furniture in the right places and generally making Elmside habitable was carried out by volunteer fellows organised by Audrey Glauert who had temporarily taken on the responsibilities of honorary housekeeper – one of the first of her many contributions to Clare Hall. All members of the college and their spouses were invited to a meeting in Elmside on 9 November 1967 at which all fellows in order of seniority signed the Book of Fellows and confirmed their undertakings to conform to the statutes and ordinances of Clare Hall and generally to assist towards the success of the society. This ceremony was followed by a modest party at which sherry was served. The next official use of Elmside was for a meeting of the governing body on 11 January 1968, appropriately the fourth anniversary of the approval of the concept of Clare Hall by the governing body of Clare College.

In addition to the common rooms, which were used for meetings of the governing body and the council, one of the assets in Elmside was a large room, known as the Magic Room, that had been built to the south of the main house. It was unheated, uninsulated and very cold in winter. In the autumn of 1968, at the suggestion of Will Taylor, it was decided to renovate and improve the Magic Room so that it would be available for meetings or other functions, which it was suggested could include its rental for a long established painting class led by the notable Miss Vellacott, who was looking for a suitable venue. Its later uses included yoga classes, but eventually, following a donation from Obert Tanner, it was renovated again as the Ashby library.

The construction of the new buildings has been described in chapter 11. They were in use by the summer of 1969, and were formally opened by the Vice-Chancellor, Lord Ashby on 30 September.

dinners in the Master's Lodge. There was a preliminary change during the summer months, when dinners were held in the fellow's Parlour on E staircase of the Old Court, and from mid-September 1967 the Clare Hall dinners were held on Tuesdays in the new University Centre in Granta Place. They were well attended, both by fellows and their spouses, and beginning in February 1968, at each dinner two fellows of Clare College with their wives attended as guests of Clare Hall.

ADMINISTRATION

From the beginning it was expected that the President would preside, but the more detailed administration would be done by the bursar. Other fellows would be expected to assist and in due course there would be full-time appointments for staff. The Trustees had appointed Pippard as President until 1973, but the governing body had not itself considered the question of the length of tenure of the President, though it had been discussed earlier by the provisional council who had recommended a period of seven years. This was considered in May 1966 by a sub-committee, whose recommendation was accepted by the governing body, namely, that the wording of the relevant ordinance be amended to make it clear that at the end of a seven year period of tenure the President would not be eligible for re-election for a further period of office. It was also agreed that at the end of his or her tenure the governing body may invite the retiring President to become an official fellow, notwithstanding the regulation that limits the total number of official fellows.

The secretary/bursar was to be the key administrator. Cameron took over from Kingsford as secretary of the governing body at the meeting on 10 October 1966. Subsequently, he generally assisted the President in administrative matters, but only gradually took over full responsibility for bursarial duties. They were assisted or advised on all matters concerning the buildings by Holister. Financial matters continued to be managed mainly by the bursar of Clare College and his chief clerk until in 1969 the new buildings had been completed and paid for. However, Pippard and Cameron had the main responsibility with the governing body for ensuring that Clare Hall itself would be operating within its budget.

In January 1967 the governing body decided that a college council should be formed, as required by the regulations. This would consist of

the President, the tutor, the bursar, the praelector, three elected fellows, and (later) two elected graduate students. Following a postal ballot, Taylor, Evans and Glauert were elected. The duties delegated to the council would include the impending negotiations on the second part of the building contract, action on graduate students, and financial provision for officers and staff. Graduate students, when admitted, would be able to join the fellows for lunch, but dinner would be difficult since we were then still limited by space in the Master's dining room.

BUILDINGS

On delegated authority from the governing body, the decision on which tender to accept for the Clare Hall buildings was made on 8 October 1966 by Pippard, Eden, Cameron, and Cooper (bursar of Clare College), in discussion with the local associate architect and the quantity surveyors. The first phase of construction work – for the foundations and basement – began on 17 October 1966. Before the second phase in the Spring of 1967 a



18. Foundations for the Clare Hall buildings, 1967.