

A History of Trinity College

The history of Trinity College can be conveniently divided into three epochs—a century or so during which the foundations were laid, a period of colourful expansion extending over the eighteenth century, and a century and a half of strenuous adaptation to a rapidly changing world.

Trinity was founded just before the Tudor monarchy had completed the task of extending its authority over the whole of Ireland. The idea of an Irish university had been in the air for some time, and in 1592 a small group of Dublin citizens obtained a charter from Queen Elizabeth incorporating Trinity College *juxta Dublin*. The Corporation of Dublin granted to the new foundation the lands and dilapidated buildings of the monastery of All Hallows, lying about a quarter of a mile south-east of the city walls. Two years later a few Fellows and students began to work in the new College, which then consisted of one small square. During the next fifty years the community increased. Endowments, including considerable landed estates, were secured, new fellowships were founded, the books which formed the beginning of the great library were acquired, a curriculum was devised and statutes were framed.

The second half-century of the College's history was a time of turmoil, marked in Ireland by an interregnum and two civil wars. In 1641 the Provost fled, and two years later the College had to pawn its plate; some Fellows were expelled by the Commonwealth authorities, others were excluded at the Restoration, and in 1689 all the Fellows and students were expelled when the College was turned into a barrack for the soldiers of James II. But the seventeenth century was also an age of ardent learning; and Trinity men such as Ussher, a kindly polymath, Marsh, the orientalist, Dodwell, the historian, Stearne, who founded the Irish College of Physicians, and Molyneux, the correspondent of Locke, were typical of the adventurous and wide-ranging scholarship of their day.

The eighteenth century was for the most part a peaceful era in Ireland, and Trinity shared its calm, though at the beginning of the period a few Jacobites and at its end a very small group of political radicals seriously perturbed the College authorities. During this century Trinity was the university of the Protestant ascendancy. Parliament, meeting on the other side of College Green, viewed it benevolently and made generous grants for building. The first building of the new age was the Library, begun in 1712; then followed the Printing House and the Dining Hall; and during the second half of the century Parliament Square slowly emerged. The great building drive was completed in the early nineteenth century by Botany Bay, the square which derives its name in part from the herb garden it once contained.

These buildings expressed the ordered vigour of the College's life. Unlike the English universities Trinity took its duties seriously. The Fellows were hard-worked, both as teachers and administrators. The curriculum was kept up-to-date, there were quarterly examinations at which prizes were granted to successful candidates, and the fellowship examination was a Homeric contest. Most of the outstanding Irishmen of the eighteenth century, including Swift, Berkeley, Burke, Goldsmith, Grattan and Tone, were Trinity graduates, and the influence of their university is discernible in their writings and speeches.

Three of the eighteenth century provosts were outstanding. Richard Baldwin (1717-58) was a strong disciplinarian who strove to prevent the boisterous high spirits that characterised contemporary Anglo-Irish society from playing havoc with academic peace. His successor, Francis Andrews (1758-74), was a member of parliament and a widely travelled and popular man of the world, whose taste and social ambitions are reflected in the Provost's House, erected in 1759. He provided in his will for the foundation of a chair of astronomy and an observatory. He was succeeded by John Hely-Hutchinson (1774-94), a barrister and an enlightened if self-interested politician. Eager to widen the curriculum, he was responsible for the foundation of chairs of modern languages, and he pushed forward the eighteenth century building programme. His sometimes not over-scrupulous approach to College problems involved him in wrangles with

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many of the Fellows, and his provostship is the Dublin equivalent of Bentley's stormy and litigious mastership of Trinity, Cambridge.

So far as Trinity was concerned, the nineteenth century began only when Bartholomew Lloyd became Provost in 1831. A determined if conciliatory reformer, his provostship was marked by a number of important changes, of which the most significant was the introduction of the modern system of honor studies in 1833. Until then there had been only one course for the degree of B.A., the ordinary or general course in arts embracing classics, mathematics, a little science and some philosophy. It became possible for an undergraduate to specialise when in 1834 examinations for degrees with honors, or moderatorships, were established in mathematics, in ethics and logics, and in classics. In 1851 a moderatorship in experimental science was added; this at first included physics, chemistry and mineralogy, and was later expanded to comprise geology, zoology and botany. In 1871 it was divided into two, moderatorships being given in natural science and in experimental science. This arrangement was maintained till 1955, when the two groups were again combined in a moderatorship in natural sciences. In 1856 a moderatorship was founded in history and English literature, which continued till 1873, when separate moderatorships were instituted in history and political science and in modern literature. In 1961 a moderatorship in English literature and language was introduced. The introduction of these moderatorship examinations was accompanied by the development of honor courses and of a system of 'honor privileges' which eventually enabled honor students to substitute honor for ordinary lectures, and honor for all ordinary examinations except the Final Freshman examination, or 'Little-go'. The abolition in 1959 of 'Little-go' for honor students completed the separation of the honor from the ordinary curriculum; since then the ordinary course in arts has undergone several revisions and was finally discontinued in 1978. Two-subject moderatorship courses, instituted in that year, now offer alternatives to the single honor more specialised courses.

The nineteenth century was also marked by important developments in the professional schools. Divinity had been taught from the foundation of the College, and in the nineteenth century its teaching was systematised. The Law School was reorganised after the middle of the century. Medical teaching had been given in the College since 1711, but it was only after the establishment of the school on a sound basis by legislation in 1800 and under the inspiration of Macartney, the brilliant and quarrelsome anatomist, that it was in a position to play its full part, with such teachers as Graves and Stokes, in the great age of Dublin medicine. The Engineering School was established in 1842 and was one of the first of its kind in the British Isles. The School of Commerce was established in 1925, and the School of Social Studies in 1934. In 1962 the School of Commerce and the School of Social Studies amalgamated to form the School of Business and Social Studies. The School of Pharmacy was established in 1977. In 1969 the several schools and departments were grouped into Faculties as follows: Arts (Humanities and Letters); Business, Economic and Social Studies;¹ Engineering and Systems Sciences;² Health Sciences³ (since October 1977 all undergraduate teaching in dental science in the Dublin area has been located in Trinity College); Science.⁴ In 1977 the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine was transferred to University College, Dublin. In 2005 the Faculties of Arts (Humanities), Arts (Letters) and Business, Economic and Social Studies were restructured to form two faculties, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences. In 2008 the number of faculties was reduced to three – Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science and Faculty of Health Sciences.

¹Formerly the Faculty of Economic and Social Studies — its title was altered in 1987.

²Formerly the Faculty of Mathematical and Engineering Sciences — its title was altered in 1981 as a result of the Departments of Pure and Applied Mathematics having transferred to the Faculty of Science.

³Formerly the Faculty of Medical and Dental Sciences — its title was altered in 1985.

⁴Formerly the Faculty of Natural Sciences — its title was altered to recognise the inclusion of a School of Pharmacy from October 1977. In 2005 the School of Pharmacy transferred to the Faculty of Health Sciences.

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This expansion of the College's activities had an outward sign in the buildings erected after 1800. Just after the middle of the century, the New Square was completed by the erection of the Museum Building; and new buildings at the east end of the College Park expressed the increasing importance of the natural sciences and of medicine in the life of the College.

Between 1830 and 1900 twenty new chairs were founded, and Trinity scholarship displayed to the full the versatility, the industry and the self-confidence of the Victorian age. The Trinity tradition, which, even in an age of increasing specialisation favoured a wide range of interests, had a stimulating effect on members of the College. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the School of Classics could boast not only classical scholars like Palmer and Purser, but also men such as Tyrrell and Mahaffy, whose interests ranged from ancient Egypt to Georgian Ireland, and Bury, whose Byzantine studies straddled the classical and modern eras. In mathematics and science there were Rowan Hamilton, Humphrey Lloyd, Salmon, Fitzgerald and Joly. In English there was Dowden, a sensitive critic and an irascible politician, and in economics Ingram, the most outstanding of the Irish positivists.

It would be a mistake to picture these men and their colleagues as working in an undisturbed academic calm. Momentous changes were taking place in Ireland, and these were reflected in the controversies that raged round the government's Irish university policy. Between 1873 and 1908 schemes were proposed by the government of the day which would have made the College a member of a federated university, in which several other Irish academic bodies would have been included. These schemes were strenuously and effectively resisted by Trinity as threats to its independence. On the other hand the College progressively abandoned the exclusive religious character that, in common with Oxford and Cambridge, it had hitherto borne. As early as 1793 Roman Catholics had been permitted to enter and to take degrees in Trinity. In 1854 non-foundation scholarships, open to candidates of all denominations, were instituted. In 1873 all religious tests, except those connected with the Divinity School, were abolished.

In the government of the College the last centuries have witnessed far-reaching changes. The creation in 1874 of the University Council, a representative body, gave control over the shaping of courses and appointments to the teaching departments. From 1900, as can be seen from the evidence given before the royal commission of 1906, the composition of the Board was being strongly criticised by important sections of College opinion, and in 1911 the constitution was modified by the addition of two representatives of the Junior Fellows and two representatives of the non-fellow Professors to the Board. The representation of the Junior Fellows was increased to four members in 1958. At the same time the Statutes were altered to require that half of the professors should be Fellows. Under private legislation, The Trinity College Dublin (Charters and Letters Patent Amendment) Act, 2000 amended the constitution of the Board. With effect from September 2001, the Board comprises: The Provost, Vice-Provost, Senior Lecturer, Registrar and Bursar (*ex-officio*); six Fellows; five members of the academic staff who are not Fellows, at least three of whom must be of a rank not higher than senior lecturer; two members of the academic staff of the rank of professor; three members of the non-academic staff; four students of the College, at least one of whom shall be a postgraduate student; two external members.

Strange to say, one innovation of far-reaching significance aroused relatively little controversy. In 1904 women were admitted to the University and by 1914 they already amounted to 16 per cent of the students on the College books. In 1908 a women's hall of residence, Trinity Hall, was founded. In 1968 women were elected to Fellowship. From 1972 men and women students have resided in the College and at Trinity Hall.

The Great War of 1914-18 marks in more than one way the end of an epoch for Trinity College. When conditions again became settled Ireland had undergone a constitutional revolution and the College found itself in a divided Ireland outside the United Kingdom. Moreover, at a time when the newer universities in the British Isles were growing in strength and prestige, Trinity College found itself lacking in the resources required to maintain its position in the new age. In 1920 a royal commission recommended that the College needed both a large capital grant and an annual subsidy. But the change of regime occurred before its recommendations could be implemented, and it was not until 1947 that the College secured an annual grant from the State.

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The grant now represents approximately 36 per cent of total recurrent income (excluding research grants and contracts).

In recent years student numbers have risen well above what had come to be considered the norm. In 2010-11 they stood at 16,747 as compared with 1,500 in 1939. The increase in numbers has brought greater diversity, with students coming from as many as 121 countries and spread over all six continents. In 2010-11 the full-time undergraduate degree intake was 85.7 per cent Irish: the proportion of non-Irish students to be admitted in the future will not, it is hoped, fall below 10 per cent of the total annual admissions. There is no restriction on the number of postgraduate or one-year students subject to availability of places in certain areas. This change in the composition of the student body has been accompanied by a similar change in the composition of the academic staff. Until the nineteen-thirties, the great majority of the holders of academic posts in Trinity College were doubly indigenous, being Irishmen and Dublin University graduates. But since 1945 many of those appointed to the staff have come from other universities. Probably this is one of the factors which accounts for the accelerated pace of change, which has been a striking characteristic of the period since the end of the war—change reflected in an increase of the representative element on the Board, in a radical recasting of the arts curriculum, in the erection of new buildings and the adaptation of old buildings to new needs, in the improvement of College rooms and the provision of new amenities for undergraduates, in the extension to women of those privileges previously reserved to men, and in the institution of joint student-staff advisory committees covering most aspects of College life.