



THE ORATION

DELIVERED BY

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**MASTER, VISITOR, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, MEMBERS OF
THE COLLEGE**

Here we are again, on this cold February evening, gathered to commemorate Magdalene's most famous old boy. There's no great mystery why. His library is the College's greatest treasure. His diary is one of the world's truly indispensable books, the most endearing piece of autobiography in the language, a window into the head and the heart, to look no lower, of one of the most vividly alive men of the seventeenth century, maybe of any century.

So it's obvious enough why Magdalene remembers Pepys. It's maybe not so obvious why Pepys should have remembered Magdalene. He was an undergraduate here in a difficult time: Cambridge in the 1650s was an austere place. The very first mention of the College, in the diary records a visit Pepys made here two days after his 27th birthday, in February 1660, when he recalled that in his time the Fellows were puritanical and precise: maybe that had something to do with the fact that the longest entry about him in the College

books records how he was hauled up before the whole fellowship in October 1653 and admonished for being “*scandalously overseen in drink*” the night before.

He tells us nothing at all about his education here. His memories of life in College included ordeals, like compulsory chapel at six o'clock every morning, but were mostly of play, not work, country walks to Chesterton, visits to pubs, adventures with respectable girls *and* the women of the town, and the excellent beer in the buttery.

The absence of references to his education may have had something to do with the man who supervised it, his tutor, Sir Samuel Morland. Morland was the first recorded Cambridge spy, an extremely ambitious engineer and inventor, who couldn't settle to an academic life. He left the College shortly after Pepys himself in 1654, and went into the Cromwellian diplomatic service. But after Cromwell's death Morland became a double agent, spying on the republican regime for the future Charles II. That earned him a baronetcy and a handsome pension at the Restoration. But it also earned him everyone's contempt, and Pepys tells us that Sir Samuel was “*looked upon by all men as a knave*”: he was also hopeless with money, and sold and gambled his pension away, some of it on his multiple marriages, five of these in all, two of them to voluptuous teenage girls. The last of these went disastrously wrong, because this time Morland married for money, not for love. As it turned out, the woman he thought was a rich heiress was in fact a penniless confidence trickster, who had married *him* for *his* money: she eventually left him to become another man's mistress.

Morland was colourful by the standard of Cambridge tutors, and Pepys never lost an opportunity of gossiping about him with other Magdalene men. But as

Morland's fortunes plunged, he became a problem for Pepys, constantly cadging money, constantly lobbying him to use his influence at Court to promote some scheme or other. And there were plenty of schemes. As well as a spy, Morland was an inventor. Some of his inventions were connected with military espionage, like the *Ottacousticon*, a device like a vast ear-trumpet which was meant to enable you to transmit and to listen to messages at a distance of several miles. He was also an expert on hydraulics, and designed fountains for Louis XIV's Versailles. Using the same techniques, he invented a medical device called the *mechanical chyster*, with which you could give yourself an enema without having to get out of bed. It operated round a simple stirrup pump, but there were technical problems; a valve which was prone to blow when it should have sucked. It wasn't a commercial success - the bottom fell out of the market.

Morland was undoubtedly the least satisfactory of the many College personalities who surface in the diary. But you don't in any case get the impression reading the diary that Pepys was an unqualified admirer of his Cambridge contemporaries. He *was* fond of one of them, John Peachell, who had been an undergraduate with Pepys, stayed on as a Fellow, and eventually became Master. It was Peachell who launched the fund-raising campaign for what we now call the Pepys building. But he was a notorious drinker all his life long, and was rebuked while he was Master by the Archbishop of Canterbury for setting a bad example to the young. He's said to have died in 1690 after four whole days of uncharacteristic and as it turned out fatal abstinence from drink. Unsurprisingly, he sported a magnificent bottle nose, very much in evidence when Pepys ran into him in London on May 3rd 1667: "*I to*

Westminster Hall, and there took a turn with my old acquaintance Mr Pechell, whose red nose makes me ashamed to be seen with him, though otherwise a good-natured man”.

Pepys’ own rickety College past almost caught up with him on a visit to Cambridge later that same year. He came here in October 1667, to visit his relatives in Huntingdon, but also to show his wife off in the University, “*in her velvet vest, which is mighty fine and becomes her exceedingly*”. On the way they broke their journey at Bishop’s Stortford, and stayed at the Reindeer Inn. Pepys was alarmed to discover that the landlady there was a Mrs Betty Aynsworth, once upon a time a notorious Cambridge prostitute, who had been whipped out of town by the Proctors not long before, and was now set up in her old line of business, with the pub as a front “*and is here what she was at Cambridge, and all the goodfellows of the country come hither*”. With his wife and servants in tow, Pepys had to pretend he’d never met Betty Aynsworth before, but he confided to the diary that they were in fact old and indeed close acquaintances, “*whom I knew better than they think...and [she] did teach me Full Forty Times Over, a very lewd song*”.

Pepys doesn’t record what else Mrs Aynsworth taught him at Cambridge.

During that October visit, he noted approvingly that the posts in the street outside the College had been newly painted, because the master was vice-chancellor that year. From his accounts of such visits we get a glimpse of the reasons for his affection for this place, and indeed, of the reasons why Colleges remain important to so many people.

Magdalene mattered to Pepys because it was a landmark in his life, because he had been young here. He liked to think he had been a bit of a dog and

daredevil as a student, and he liked to feel that however much the world changed, the old College was a fixed point, which would still be much as it always had been. As he rose in the world, he liked to come back to measure his success against his teachers and contemporaries. He was pleased to return as a success, especially with family and friends in tow, he liked to reminisce with the porters and the buttery staff, to pay lord bountiful with tips and patronage.

All that's on display in the last diary entry describing a visit here in May 1668. Pepys just then was on a roll. His career was prospering, he had money in his pockets, fine clothes to wear, and for a change he was getting on well with his wife. Life was good. On May 25th he and his party took a coach to the Rose Tavern in the Market place "*And here lighting, I took my boy and two brothers and walked to Magdalen College; and there into the Buttery as a stranger and there drank my bellyful of their beer, which pleased me the best I ever drank; and hear by the butler's man who was son to Goody Mulliner, over against the College that we used to buy stewed prunes of, concerning the College and persons in it: and find very few, only Mr Hollins and Peachell I think, that were of my time. But I was mightily pleased to come in this condition and ask: and thence, giving the fellow something, away. Walked to Chesterton to see our old walk...and so to the ferry...the river being mighty high ... and so by Jesus College to the town, and so to our quarters and supper, and then to bed, being very weary and sleepy, and mightily pleased with this night's walk*".

And so, at the end of his life, Pepys' thoughts turned back here. He'd kept in touch with Magdalene, he'd done all the things a good old member is supposed to do, not least involving himself energetically in fundraising for what he called the new building, and we the Pepys, and he loaned large sums of his own

money to solve the College's cash-flow problems when the work was at its height.

Mens cuiusque is est quisque was Pepys motto – you can see it blazoned on the front of the Pepys. *The Mind is the Man*. Pepys was a man of action, but he was also a man of the mind, and his library was the mirror of his mind. He put all of himself into that library, and it was to the College, where the formation of his mind had begun, that he entrusted his library in perpetuity. Shelved among the books were the six shorthand volumes of the diary, into which, though no-one realised it then, or for a century to come, he really had poured his mind. Pepys gave his books and with them his secret self to his College, in search of some kind of immortality. And thanks to Magdalene's custodianship of his gift, he has that immortality now. Commemorating him tonight, we celebrate the trust he placed in us, and the gifts he gave us, but we also celebrate the College itself, the rooted permanence which he recognised, and which is still to be found here in Magdalene, in what was for him as it is for us, this dear perpetual place. And so, Master, Visitor, Ladies and Gentlemen, I ask you to stand, and join me in our customary toast:

TO THE IMMORTAL MEMORY OF SAMUEL PEPYS.