Intersecting Sets: John Venn, Church and University, 1834-1923

Thesis

How to cite:

For guidance on citations see FAQs.

© 2007 The Author

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher’s website:
http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000ea2b

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online’s data policy on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk
The 1880s marked a turning point in Venn's career; a change in the intersection of different elements of his academic, clerical and family identities. He continued to build a reputation for scholarship, publishing his best known work, Symbolic logic in 1880 and receiving academic recognition through election as a fellow of the Royal Society in 1883 and the award of the degree of Doctor of Sciences in 1884. However, in 1888 he donated his collection of logic books to the University library, having completed his final work on logic, but found new avenues for intellectual enquiry, building upon his knowledge of statistical series in his work on anthropometrics and his researches into College history. Meanwhile, in 1883 Venn made use of the provision of the Clerical Disabilities Act to resign orders, while, domestically, he and Susanna celebrated the birth of their only son, Archie in November of that year. Ill health, both his own and that of his wife and son, meant that Venn spent more time away from Cambridge and sought to reduce his teaching commitments.

Venn's reasons for resigning orders and the timing for his actions will be explored against a changing backdrop of institutional structures for religion in the University and an altered religious tone within the College which contrasted with Venn's experience as an undergraduate. The renunciation of clerical status will also be juxtaposed with further aspects of Venn's professional academic identity as expressed through his participation in academic networks, his search for academic preferment, and the social aspects of Cambridge life. Venn's mature religious position will be compared with that of his family in an examination of the surviving elements of the post-Claphamite network.

Resignation of orders

The circumstances immediately leading to Venn's decision to resign orders are not entirely clear. Indeed, contemporary evidence for his religious position between the time of his
father's death and his resignation of orders is sparse. Henry Venn died on 13th January 1873, having received final communion a few days earlier from his elder son.¹ By 1875, Venn's uncle, John Venn of Hereford, had become concerned about Venn's spiritual welfare when Clayton sent through notice that Venn's name had been seen in public connection with that of Sidgwick and Spencer.² The context is lost but may have been associated with work Venn was doing on the difficulties of objectivity in material logic, in which he referenced both Spencer's and Sidgwick's work.³ What clearly concerned his family was the association with names that stood for unorthodox religious opinion and materialism.

Venn himself does not appear to have discussed his reasons for resigning orders with his family until much later in life. His brother wrote in 1910

> Do you remember how when you decided to give up your Orders you sent me about 3 lines announcing your purpose & then 'This is not for discussion'? Of course I never spoke of it after that.⁴

Harry raised the subject having been given sight for the first time of his brother's autobiographical Annals,

> I am very glad to have read your apologia pro vita sua or shall I say (as Augustine used the word) Confessio? ....Allow me to thank you sincerely for giving me the whole history of your decision.⁵

The Annals were written with encouragement from Susanna Venn during Venn's recovery from pneumonia in 1887. The text was revised in 1902, following another period of serious illness, at a time when Venn was engaged in research for his family history, and he offered the text to his wife to correct in 1917.⁶ The Annals themselves were never published,

---

although they were circulated to be read by close family members. Venn allowed his brother, Henry, to read them in 1910; Susanna offered to show it to their son Archie in 1917 and Albert Venn Dicey was provided with access in 1919.\(^7\)

The Annals covered the period of Venn's upbringing, early years at Caius, curacies, and his academic life in Cambridge prior to his marriage in 1867. He wrote from the position of having abandoned both Evangelical theology and clerical vocation. The Annals were written from the perspective of a man trying to analyse the nature and weaknesses of a religious framework since rejected; and to impose logical order upon a process of change. As has already been indicated, Venn defined the ways in which his former religious orientation had been inadequate, emphasising the intellectual inadequacy of a religious position founded largely on emotion, the failings of the Evangelical examples he encountered outside his family, and the influence of certain authors, such as Mill. Memories were selected accordingly. Venn did not, for example, choose to account for his continued involvement in Evangelical societies in the 1860s, nor his writing for the *Christian Observer*.

With the termination of the narrative in 1867, what is not offered is an explicit explanation of the time which elapsed between Venn's rejection of the theological positions of Evangelicalism in the 1860s, the death of his father in 1873 and his eventual resignation of orders in 1883. Both Susanna Venn and Albert Venn Dicey felt that that Venn's narrative was incomplete. Susanna tried to encourage her husband to extend the narrative and Dicey asked if there were a second instalment.\(^8\) Venn responded in the negative saying that he felt he had said enough to explain his position and as time elapsed he no longer had as much interest in the events.\(^9\)

\(^7\) Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C11/10, H. Venn to J. Venn, 6/6/1910; C25/27 A.V. Dicey to J. Venn, 23/3/1919.

\(^8\) University of Glasgow, Albert Venn Dicey papers, Ms Gen 508(26), J. Venn to A.V. Dicey, 2/4/1919; Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C25/27, A.V. Dicey to J. Venn, 23/3/1919.

\(^9\) University of Glasgow, Albert Venn Dicey papers, Ms Gen 508(27), J. Venn to A.V. Dicey, 15/4/1919.
Venn may have been mirroring the approach taken by his wife. Susanna Venn wrote her own account of her early life in 1885. She ended her narrative in 1867 with an account of her marriage, stating, ‘as a married woman has no history, all her life belonging to her husband as well as to herself, she having no right to give what is not hers to impart, here I end these hasty notes’. For Susanna, married life represented a break with the unhappiness of her childhood. 1867 may have represented a slightly different landmark for her husband. It is notable that Venn ended his Annals discussing the publication of the Logic of chance in 1866, his teaching in the Moral Sciences Tripos and his first candidacy for the Knightbridge Professorship; each signs of his independent identity and emerging reputation in academic circles.

The Annals made the points Venn wished to make:

My creed was not founded on intellectual convictions. It had been accepted as a whole, and was only held together by my emotions, of which emotions one of the chief was reverence for my father.

Within Venn’s narrative, there are two key intertwined elements that build up a picture of Venn’s religious transition: his relationship to his father’s influence and also the change in the basis on which Venn approached religious belief. From this it is possible to infer the direction of Venn’s thought and the impact this may have had upon his ability to subscribe to a clerical position.

Venn had to come to terms with his relationship with his father; who, to Venn, was the very personification of that faith. Henry Venn was the epitome of Evangelical assurance and set the clerical standard against which Venn unfavourably measured himself and others, like Tilson Marsh and Manley. The point constantly reinforced throughout the Annals was the

---

10 CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F30, Notes from the years 1844 to 1867 from my birth to my marriage – S.C. Venn.
11 CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.105.
extent to which Venn felt his Evangelicalism had been adopted wholesale from his father reinforced by emotional attachment and reverence. To reject Evangelicalism was to seem to reject the man; so Venn sought to resolve the paradox of the reverence with which he regarded his father, his rejection of the religious ideas his father represented, and the sense of failure that entailed. Venn's experience was not uncommon. Bradley has pointed to the way in which a fear of being found wanting in a parent's eyes and being found unworthy of one's calling could be intertwined.\(^{12}\) Rejection of parental hopes for a clerical career or the associated faith also represented a rejection of parental expectations.\(^{13}\) The dilemma of a number of Victorian clergy was that they could no longer believe what they had believed since childhood and yet if they abandoned belief they felt untrue to their inmost feelings.\(^{14}\) The close connection between family and religion that was one of the hallmarks of Evangelicalism paradoxically meant that a change of religious direction became more painful to the individuals concerned.\(^{15}\)

Such a departure from the religion of the previous generation was not inevitable, as was evident from the lives of Venn's siblings. Venn described his sister's enduring Evangelicalism [she] took the impress so entirely (that my father unconsciously rather than deliberately put upon her) that to the end of her life the opinions she had early imbibed fitted her like a skin.\(^{16}\)

Henrietta was supportive to her brother when he resigned orders, even though he acknowledged this must have pained her. Henrietta's unwavering faith placed a bar to complete confidence between brother and sister. Venn felt that her bright and sensible mind


\(^{13}\) F. M. Turner 'The Victorian crisis of faith and the faith that was lost' in R.J. Helmstadter & B. Lightman (eds.), *Victorian faith in crisis: essays on continuity and change in nineteenth century religious belief* (Stanford, 1990), p.25.


\(^{15}\) W.R. Ward, 'Faith and fallacy: English and German perspectives in the nineteenth century' in Helmstadter & Lightman (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.45.

\(^{16}\) Society of Genealogists Library, Venn collection, J. Venn to L.M. Forster, 2/6/1903.
was restricted by adherence to doctrines he regarded as narrow. It was Caroline Emilia Stephen who remained her closest confidante, and when Henrietta developed terminal cancer in 1901, it was Carrie who moved to spend nine months near to the woman she described as being like a sister.

Having followed his brother to Caius and then taken orders, Henry Venn of Canterbury initially worked closely with their father, assisting his work for the Church Missionary Society. He then chose parochial life, taking parishes in Devon and Kent. In 1900 he was collated by Archbishop Temple to an honorary canonry of Canterbury, and spent his later years in residence at Canterbury. Henry Venn's career perhaps represents the working in practice of a possibility about which John Venn had privately speculated: the potential result if he had been brought under the influence of a moderate vicar whom he could have respected, and been diverted away from speculation and towards social and practical work.

It is only through surviving parish records that some intimation is given of Henry's churchmanship. Collections were regularly taken for the Church Missionary Society, the Church Pastoral Aid Society and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. Henry's continuing interest in overseas mission was apparent in the appearance of preachers, like Geoffrey Cliff, Bishop of Shantung, who spoke on Mission Work in China, on which occasion the collection was taken for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Henry fathered a large family, marrying twice and having seven children of whom one son, Henry Straith Venn spent a year at Caius, and another, Arthur, became a clergyman. It is a fundamental flaw of Stockton's argument for the transition of the Venns from an Evangelical, clerical dynasty to an academic one, that he concentrates on John and Archie Venn and fails to give due weight to the continuation of the clerical line through Henry Venn of Canterbury.

19 CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.121.
20 Canterbury Cathedral Archive, U3/60/1/44, Walmer Parish Vestry Register 1900-06, 17/4/1904.
There was, however, a notable difference in style between these Venn brothers and previous
generations. It was perhaps natural that given his religious difficulties, John Venn would be
somewhat reticent on religious matters, but both brothers lacked the emotional
expressiveness of their father’s faith. By the end of the century the written style of the Venns
was less overtly religious in tone. Henry Venn wrote of Church matters rather than religion
and faith. When Henry met a man who spoke of being influenced by his brother’s preaching,
he commented

    Probably you often feel as I do that one’s life is slipping away & that one passes
    through the world much as one passes down Fleet Street - meeting many people but
    influencing very few by touch or by word & it is pleasant to get a proof that some one
    of those whom one has passed is feeling grateful to one.22

To their father, this would not have been merely pleasant, but a instance of God’s mercies,
and an encouragement in one’s calling. Secularisation of literary style cannot automatically
be equated with a decline in religiosity, but what it highlights is the difference between two
generations of Venns.

Stockton has described the gradual ascendancy of Venn’s independent identity, and the
rejection of that of his father.23 What has received less emphasis from Stockton is that this
was allied with a redefinition of the basis on which Venn wished those beliefs to be founded,
i.e. upon intellectual convictions. The definitively Evangelical substance of his beliefs was
eroded as the result of the application of an intellectual rather than emotional approach. The
story that Venn told in the Annals is indeed one of a gradual realisation of a shift in the
balance of authority in his life, where a new set of ideas and friends gradually gained
ascendancy over another. For Venn, this entailed a lengthy crisis of authority:

---

22 Ibid, 10/6/1906.
23 W. K. Stockton, ‘The Venn family since the mid-eighteenth century’ (Brandeis University PhD, 1980),
p.450.
how a person who had been impelled by a powerful force (i.e. in my case, my father’s influence) against the natural current of his temperament and studies, may for years remain in a condition of unstable equilibrium, conscientiously holding contradictory doctrines, and sometimes raising suspicions of his honesty. 24

This tension perhaps goes some way to explaining Venn’s maintenance of a publicly Evangelical position over a prolonged period while he was starting to question privately the nature and substance of his beliefs.

Honesty was both a key theme and a key point of tension in the Annals. In writing the Annals Venn showed a continuing concern for Evangelical and family values of religious sincerity and honesty and the importance of self-examination of one’s beliefs. Alongside these inherited influences, his acquired network of friends placed a similar emphasis upon sincerity and honesty of profession and, in Sidgwick’s case, made an argument for stepping aside as a clergyman, if full and sincere subscription to the doctrines of the Church could not be given. Yet Venn maintained a clerical position for over ten years after his father’s death while drawn towards beliefs that could be argued to pull him in the opposing direction.

The lapse of time between the onset of doubt and corresponding action was not unprecedented among Venn’s generation. Fitzjames Stephen also became influenced by Mill and Bentham but the influence of his wider reading was slow to develop and Stephen felt the warring pull of old and new influences.

He could not take things for granted or suppress doubts by ingenious subterfuges.

And yet, he was as thoroughly imbued with the old spirit that he could not go over completely to its antagonists. To destroy the old faith was still for him to destroy the great impulse to a noble life. 25

---

24 University of Glasgow, Albert Venn Dicey papers, Ms Gen 508(26), J. Venn to A.V. Dicey, 2/4/1919.
His brother and biographer commented that 'It took him, in fact, years to develop distinctly new conclusions.'\(^{26}\) Similarly, Leslie Stephen may have wrestled with his conscience in the 1860s, but he did not formally renounce his 'parsonhood' until 1875 after the death of his mother.\(^{27}\) Stephen had to balance the demands of his conscience, the practicalities of supporting himself if he gave up orders, and concern for his family. Writing to Stephen's biographer in 1906, Albert Venn Dicey also pointed out that fifty years ago, resignation of orders was not a step that was undertaken lightly.

The difficulty of any man freeing himself from the bondage of the clerical career seemed all but insuperable, and the men who accomplished it generally, I fancy, found themselves hampered not only by the force of hostile public opinion but by uncertainty in their own minds.\(^{28}\)

Venn may have needed to give more consideration than his cousin to the weight of family tradition. Venn was not just dealing with his relationship with his immediate family, but with the full force of his family's clerical and Evangelical tradition. The Stephen family's involvement with Evangelicalism was primarily as laymen; Leslie Stephen being the exception rather than the rule in seeking to take orders rather than pursuing a legal career. On the other hand a key part of the Venns' identity was based on the continuous tradition of nine generations of university graduate clergy and had further strengthened this tradition by emphasising their association over three generations with Evangelicalism.\(^{29}\) The advent of another generation of the Venn family, with the birth in 1883 of Venn's son, John Archibald, may have been a further milestone that helped to prompt Venn to action in resigning orders in 1883.

It has been argued that marriage sometimes placed constraints upon the experience of a crisis of faith as wives, mindful of social status and responsibilities within the family circle,

\(^{26}\) Ibid, p.124.
established limits to the husband's expression of doubts. Susanna, however, wrote a companion narrative to that of her husband, describing her unhappy upbringing in an Evangelical household at the hands of a governess who

Under the mask of a hypocritical and lying profession of Evangelicalism that woman was false, cruel, violent, abusive in language and deceitful in conduct. Susanna described her own version of religious crisis as being 'in much perplexity of mind' for which her solution was to study.

I tried religious reading but all books in the least unorthodox were forbidden, and orthodoxy had not come before me in a light that I could either rest or work in. Susanna credited Venn and his family with having rescued her from this situation and what is apparent from both her memoir and her letters is her feverish devotion to her husband. The bounds of social respectability may have been important to a don's wife in Victorian Cambridge, but the parallels between Susanna and John Venn's autobiographical accounts - the shared dissatisfaction with an Evangelical childhood and disappointment with selected Evangelical role models - indicate that Susanna would perhaps have been more likely to support her husband's disentanglement from Evangelicalism.

The story of the Annals was of a progression to a less distinct doctrinal position. As Venn himself noted, the theological positions he adopted in the 1860s identified him as a Broad Churchman rather than an Evangelical. As the examples of Maurice and Stanley showed, such views did not necessarily place him absolutely beyond the pale of the Church but they were certainly controversial and potentially suspect to a number of their fellow clergymen. In the early 1870s Venn seemed to find no contradiction between a Broad Church position and a liberal view of subscription. This contrasted with the religious development of Leslie Stephen, who not only rejected religious orthodoxy but also what he saw as the intellectual

30 F. M. Turner 'The Victorian crisis of faith and the faith that was lost' in Helmstadter & Lightman (eds.), op. cit., pp. 32-3.
31 CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F30, Notes from the years 1844 to 1867 from my birth to my marriage - S. C. Venn.
32 Ibid.
dishonesty of the Broad Church.33 Stephen attacked the liberal churchmen who were trying to reach an accommodation with new historical and scientific knowledge, rather than following through their views to a truthful conclusion in agnosticism. Such accommodations within the bounds of the Thirty-Nine Articles, he saw as getting in the way of the formulation of a truthful post-Christian approach.34 Venn may, like Stephen and Sidgwick before him, have been unable to find a permanent refuge in a Broad Church position. Furthermore, once his lengthy internal struggle with his father’s religious legacy had subsided, Venn may have felt that he could no longer offer in good conscience even a modified, less precise form of subscription and fulfil his ministerial duty to use the liturgy in the sense that his congregation understood it.

Looking back at the end of his life, Venn was aware that the context of debate had shifted. In correspondence with Dicey his attention was drawn to the openness with which men like Gore and Sanday adopted positions on the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection, which in the 1860s would have provoked outcry and prosecution.35 Venn himself was prompted to observe:

I suppose, if I had waited till present times, I might have felt that I was just as much entitled to stay where I was as some of the existent church dignitaries.36

However, in the 1880s, Venn felt that he could no longer honestly subscribe to the Articles: unfortunately there is a shut gate with 39 iron spikes on it, which bars the way.37

Venn may have left orders, but unlike Leslie Stephen, he did not become agnostic. To the end of his life, Venn continued to attend church and chapel services and also retained a good deal of affection for the clerical life.

35 Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C25/18, A.V. Dicey to J. Venn 17/5/1914.
36 University of Glasgow, Albert Venn Dicey papers, Ms Gen 508(27), J. Venn to A.V. Dicey, 15/4/1919.
37 Society of Genealogists Library, Venn Collection, J. Venn to L.M. Forster, 15/2/1903.
I do not claim to be 'reverend' — though not, I hope irreverend. 'Dereverend' my Church friends would call me. 38

Collegiate religion

The changing context of the College and University environment was important here. With the removal of religious tests, Venn was under no obligation to resign his fellowship when he resigned orders, and the religious tone of the College was a good deal more tolerant than it had been under Clayton.

In 1871, the University Tests Act had broken the Anglican monopoly upon all fellowships and offices other than in divinity, but re-affirmed the requirement for the continuation of daily chapel services according to the Book of Common Prayer. 39 From this point on, therefore, the colleges were fighting what Peter Searby has termed a rearguard action to impose compulsory chapel upon communities containing non-Anglicans. 40 In Caius, the ‘rearguard action’ was ostensibly the responsibility of the Dean, who in 1890 asked for a clarification of the Fellowship’s position on compulsory chapel. As Dean, Frederic Wallis had relied mainly upon what he termed ‘moral suasion’ and occasional gating of defaulters to enforce chapel attendance. However by 1890 he felt this system to be breaking down, with a number of men courteously declining to attend chapel more often than they themselves saw fit. In response, the Senior Tutor, E. S. Roberts circulated a paper on chapel services among the resident members of the Governing Body for comment. The paper took as its starting point the assumption that a majority of the Governing Body still supported a certain amount of what he termed ‘obligatory or disciplinary attendance’ and that abolition of compulsion would be

38 ibid, 10/3/1903.
39 Statutes of Gonville and Caius College in the University of Cambridge (Cambridge, 1882), Statute 33 Of Divine Worship and Religious Instruction, referring to the provisions of Section 6 of The Universities Tests Act 1871.
'simply disastrous'. It was an assumption from which none of the resident members of the Governing Body demurred. Venn accepted it, albeit reluctantly, commenting,

Accepted: not so much from decided opinion as from total inability to suggest any other course.\textsuperscript{42}

The issue of compulsory chapel within Caius was part of a wider debate. There were those who criticised compulsory chapel for training men to see worship as an obnoxious duty or a schoolboy discipline, while others argued that tutors, acting in loco parentis, should enforce attendance at church services as a healthy discipline for the young, through which they would assimilate common values and develop character.\textsuperscript{43} Chapel attendance remained compulsory in Caius, with declining effect, until 1916. In common with many of the other colleges, the practice was simply not restored after the War. It was a quiet death; its moment unmarked by any particular College Order.

With the Fellowship having committed itself to the continuation of compulsory chapel, Roberts sought to balance out the harm they thought could be done to both religion and discipline by the arrangement of its services, introducing music and shorter sermons.\textsuperscript{44} Roberts' reforms were representative of a change in the manner in which religious participation was being approached. Increased attempts were being made to engage the students rather than simply try to discipline them. This fits with Rothblatt's argument that the new dons of the 1860s onwards were dissatisfied with treating students as schoolboys by enforcing petty regulations and sought instead to seek to capture the minds and loyalty of their students.\textsuperscript{45} Concerned as he is with the emergence of secular academic, Rothblatt does not deal satisfactorily with the role that was played by the increased sense of vocation and professionalism among the

\textsuperscript{41} Caius Archive, Ernest Stewart Roberts papers, PPC/ESR, The resident members of Governing Body [paper on chapel services], 8/5/1890.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Caius Archive, Ernest Stewart Roberts papers, PPC/ESR, [paper on chapel services], 8/5/1890.
clergy providing this care, as was evident in the changing role of College Dean. The office had traditionally passed among the clerical fellows by rotation; with Venn serving his turn for two years in the mid 1860s. These deans generally served a short term of office, and among those who served in the 1860s and 1870s, there was little claim for them being good communicators with a broad appeal among the undergraduates. However, as the number of clerical fellows decreased, by 1879, Frederic Wallis was the only clerical fellow willing to serve. Wallis served as Dean for thirteen years, and was succeeded by Knight, who served until 1903. These relatively long terms of office coincided with a greater concentration upon reaching out to students through persuasion and personal influence, and a decline in the disciplinary power of the Dean which passed to the tutors.

While religion based upon compulsion declined, that of the more select number of committed Anglicans who elected to make it their personal choice appears to have prospered. It was a growth that was fostered by the College authorities as a separate strand to the more general, disciplinary participation. In contrast with the general abridgement of services and reduced requirements of attendance, celebration of Holy Communion was made more frequent, so that by the 1890s there was the opportunity of a weekly sacrament. Successive Deans, Wallis and Knight, held Greek testament classes in their rooms after morning service on Sundays, for men of various academic schools and religious views. From this evidence it is possible to see the grounds for Chadwick’s conclusion that

...the two universities, regarded less as institutions than as groups of men, were more religious in 1884 than before 1871.

For those who were committed to religion, acts of college worship were rendered more meaningful through being, increasingly, a matter of personal choice rather than compulsion; and through closer communion with those who elected to make a similar commitment.

The fortunes of the Commemoration of Benefactors service give an indication of the direction in which a more inclusive corporate ritual was simultaneously developing. Historically, the chapel had always been a centre for the performance of the rituals which bound together the members of Caius. The service in Commemoration of Benefactors had developed from the duty of medieval colleges to commemorate the dead. For several years the practice of reading the commemoration at the evening chapel service on College feast days had been discontinued, but the idea was revived by E.S. Roberts in 1894 when a date in November was fixed for an annual commemoration service, with an updated form of service being drawn up by Venn, Roberts and the Dean in 1899. These commemorative services are less important for their religious than their civic and historic significance in reinforcing the sense of corporate identity. On one level, a connection was forged between Caians past and present, in defiance of the radical changes which had taken place in the College over the preceding half century. The common experience of a historically based, but theologically vague ritual could reinforce the sense of belonging in a redefined college community composed of men of diverse beliefs.

By the end of the nineteenth century, religious ritual was operating on two distinct levels. At the start of the period, it had still been assumed that all members of the College would participate in the same ritual, which would affirm both community identity and a shared framework of belief. By the 1920s, the most widely shared public rituals, which helped to establish the community ethos, were still broadly religious in form; but ritual which was also religious in meaning and content had retreated to the relative privacy of a particular religious sub-group, from whom a higher level of personal commitment was demanded.  

51 Caius Archive, GOV/03/01/14, Gesta 1893-1900, 9/10/1894, 19/5/1999; E.S. Roberts, College Annals, 1891-1903, 9/10/1894.
A parallel pattern of change was also apparent in the development of provision for the academic study of theology, and changes in students' and fellows' career expectations. In line with the rest of the University, Caius saw a sharp drop in the number of ordinands among its graduates from the 1860s onwards. A slight increase in numbers was noted in the early 1890s, but the clear trend was of decline of the number of ordinands in relation to matriculants in both proportional and absolute terms. This was a sharper definition of the broader trend in the ancient universities, whereby the number of graduate ordinands between 1830 and 1900 declined proportionally as University numbers grew. While the expectation of a clerical career became less general, particular provision was increasingly made to support those who chose theological study or preparation for orders. Following the establishment of the Theological Tripos in 1873, the existing College theological examinations and prizes were reformed; and scholarships in theology established. College teaching was reformed too, with the appointment of a Divinity lecturer in 1875. In Caius, like the rest of Cambridge, reform had meant that the Church of England derived less benefit than it used to from the College endowment. The establishment of dedicated teaching, scholarships and exhibitions reflected a recognition that the College needed to provide for theological study and clerical training as it had for other emerging specialisms.

It was not only among students that clerical numbers were declining; fewer fellows were taking orders. Whereas in 1841, 65.2% of first class Honours men entered orders, by 1881-3, this had diminished to 18%. A decline, measured by examination results, in the academic quality of ordinands, has been cited as a major element in the loss of clerical position in the academic world. At the same time an independently emerging conception of the functions of a clergyman meant clerical ambition might direct itself more frequently outside the University. Meanwhile, the abolition of fellowships requiring clerical status, together with the reform of

---

53 A. Haig, The Victorian clergy (Croom Helm, 1984), pp.48-52; Brooke, A history of the University, p.143.
54 Caius Archive, GOV/03/01/13, Gesta 1885-1893, 18/6/1892.
55 Caius Archive, GOV/03/01/12, Gesta 1874-1885, 19/10/1875.
celibacy rules and University Tests, made fellowships a more attractive option among men who had no clerical vocation.56

Almost all presentations made to Caius advowsons before 1885 were of fellows; all but two of the College livings at that time being held by former fellows. By 1885, only three clerical fellows could claim the right of presentation, and all three were College officeholders. Finally, in 1911, the claim of fellows to receive presentations to benefices was dropped, although Caians continued to be the main beneficiaries during Venn's lifetime.57 The picture was, of course, more complex than that. Caius, for example, had always had a strong contingent of lay fellows. It also had fellows, like E.S. Roberts and J.B. Lock, who, even in the 1870s, after the abolition of clerical fellowships, chose to take Orders on the title of their fellowship. Neither man exercised their orders for any length of time outside the University; and in other ways, through lifelong commitments to academic research, teaching and administration, they were model modern dons. Their example highlights a fundamental change over the latter half of the century. Once clerical obligations were removed, ordination was a matter of the exercise of personal vocation; religious commitment was no longer an official factor in academic progression. The Fellowship simultaneously accommodated those, like Venn, who made no secret of their religious difficulties. This was exemplified by the election to honorary fellowships, under the auspices of a clerical Master and Senior Tutor, Ferrers and Roberts, not only of orthodox churchmen like Harvey Goodwin, but also of less orthodox men like George Romanes. Venn later took pride in the fact that he had a hand in electing Seeley to a professorial fellowship of Caius in 1882.58

56 A. Haig, The Victorian clergy, pp.48-52; Brooke, A history of the University, pp.89,143.
57 Statutes of Gonville and Caius College (Cambridge, 1882), Statute 34.
58 Society of Genealogists Library, Venn Collection, J. Venn to L.M. Forster, 25/12/1902. The second University Commission appointed in 1877 made further provision for University teaching through the imposition of a tax on the colleges. There was support too for the research and scholarship functions, with a new class of professorial fellowships. E.S. Leedham-Green, A concise history of the University of Cambridge (Cambridge, 1996), pp.160-2 C.N.L. Brooke, A history of Gonville and Caius College (Bury St Edmunds, 1985), p.243.
There were changes too in the religious tone of the College. The Evangelical tone of the
1850s and 1860s had been transitory, but missionary enthusiasm was part of a wider
development of University interest in mission and Empire. Within Caius itself, College pride
in its missionaries was clearly visible. When a new College building was erected in 1869 the
only nineteenth century figure to be commemorated in a set of statues of 'famous Caians'
was Charles Mackenzie. While still a fellow of Caius, Mackenzie had been appointed the
head of the University Mission to Central Africa in 1859 and he died on his way to a meeting
with Livingstone in 1862. It gave a junior fellow of relatively short standing status alongside
College icons like John Caius and William Harvey. On the domestic front, the College
established a College Mission and Settlement at Battersea in 1888. Again, this reflected part
of a broader trend. The University had established a settlement at Camberwell; and six other
Colleges already had a missionary presence in London. In common with similar ventures in
the period, the Battersea Settlement linked mission work with philanthropic and educational
ventures, in an attempt to reinforce the loyalty of existing churchgoers and also reach those
who did not usually attend worship. What is more interesting in this context is the profile the
Mission had within Caius. The Mission was not strictly a part of the College as a corporate
body - it was neither founded by a College Order, nor funded from College endowment.
However, it was the idea of College members and it was given the College's name. It also
had the support, both in terms of time and money, of the majority of the fellowship, past and
present. Three senior fellows, Roberts, Reid and Gallop acted as trustees on a loan to
acquire a site; and the President, Benjamin Drury, donated £500 to the Building Fund. On a
more modest level, John Venn was the patron of a fundraising concert, and like many other
fellows, visited the Mission to give a talk or lecture. Involvement in the Mission seems to have
become almost an official part of College membership, rather than a voluntary act of religious
or social commitment. This point is underlined by the delighted report in the College

60 J. Wolffe, *God and greater Britain: religion and national life in Britain and Ireland* (London, 1994),
p.86-89.

- 164 -
magazine for 1903, that every member of the first year had become a subscriber to the Mission at a time when not every member of the community would necessarily have been Anglican or even Christian.\(^61\)

The College Mission was just one example of the continued willingness of the Fellowship to use its influence in aid of the cause of religion; and of the continued role religious participation played in the formation of the College community. As has been noted, the number of clerical fellows was in decline, but the period from the 1880s to the 1900s marked the highpoint of the seniority of those who remained. With the Rev E.S. Roberts as Senior Tutor and later Master, the Rev J.B. Lock as Bursar, and long-serving Deans in Wallis and Knight, the College had a core of men who were willing to take a lead in supporting religion. They were able to draw upon a broader willingness within the Fellowship to support the role of religion as a civilising influence. The Fellows encouraged support for the College Mission in the same frame of mind as they advocated membership of the Boat Club and the University Rifle Volunteers; all in the name of producing the kind of discipline and character which would suit a gentleman for a life in the service of his college, church, country or empire. This model was epitomised by the Rev. E.S. Roberts, tutor of the College from 1876 until his election as Master in 1902. He was a keen supporter of the Boat Club and he joined the University Rifle Corps, becoming the captain of the College company in 1875, and commanding officer of the corps from 1889 to 1897. The influence of these men rested not only upon their religious work, but upon the role they were seen to play as bridge builders between the religious, athletic and scholastic worlds.\(^62\) Through shared activities undergraduates were brought into contact with fellows whom they might respect for their military and sporting prowess, providing fellows with an opportunity to influence students on the basis of this shared understanding. Roberts and other College officers clearly supported the idea that the moral character and discipline of their students were not formed in chapel alone. This echoes the contemporary educational

---


ideal being put forward in the public schools, where a combination of the values and rituals of
religion, athleticism, imperialism and militarism were the basis of a system of social control
which encouraged the formation of both community and personal character. 63 In the face of
academic professionalisation and disciplinary specialisation, there is a clear reworking of the
early Victorian liberal ideal of training the character as well as mind of the Christian
gentleman. 64

Roberts, generally, was more concerned with the practicalities of College religion, rather than
in the intricacies of ecclesiastical or theological dispute. 65 Nonetheless, where an impression
is gained of churchmanship among the College hierarchy at this time, it is of a high, but not a
party or ritualist, nature. In some cases the indications are oblique, showing themselves in
Roberts' choice to travel to Carlisle to be ordained by Harvey Goodwin, and the academic
dynasties, whereby Goodwin influenced H.B. Swete, who in turn influenced the College's
wartime chaplain, J.M. Creed. Whatever their personal sympathies, the tone projected by
these men does not appear to have been party specific. The emphasis of contemporary
narratives in the College magazine was firmly upon gaining the respect and involvement of
students rather than recruitment to a particular church party.

In this loose synthesis of missionary and social concern, religious, sporting and military
participation, the strength of the religious element varied. There was also a danger that the
religious message was diluted; or that the disciplinary or community-forming elements were
picked up with no specifically religious reference. 66 On the other hand, there were those who
argued that the gradual decline of old structures of religious participation, taken together with

63 B. Simon, 'Introduction' to B. Simon and I. Bradley (eds.), The Victorian public school: studies in the
development of an educational institution (Dublin, 1978), pp.10-14; J.A. Mangan, Athleticism in the
64 M. Garland, Cambridge before Darwin; the ideal of a liberal education 1800-1860 (Cambridge,
65 The Caian, Special Number containing a memoir of the Rev. Ernest Stewart Roberts (1912), p.38.
66 N. Vance, The sinews of the spirit; the ideal of Christian manliness in Victorian literature and
the change of approach in the propagation of religion, had fostered the development of 'true
religion' rather than a mechanical observance. Anglicanism no longer held a monopoly, but
a place had been found for theological research and teaching alongside other disciplines; and
a positive effort, through reform of formal observance and personal example, was being
made to touch the religious consciousness of the undergraduates. It was however a
confidence based on a deeper concern; a greater effort was being made to reach men whom
it was feared were less predisposed to religious thought and participation.

It was a looser, more inclusive framework of collegiate religion which accommodated men like
Venn. Venn's continued attendance of College chapel to the end of his life was unaffected by
the change in undergraduate attendance or the disruption caused by the First World War.
The College's oral tradition places him in the President's stall of the College chapel, head
bowed to his hands in prayer, peering through his fingers at the rather attractive mother of an
undergraduate. Venn showed a continuing willingness to become involved in issues relating
to the chapel, such as a committee for memorials and decorations in 1894; or a stained glass
window committee in 1895. However, these were largely bodies which dealt with aspects of
College history, on which Venn was acknowledged as the authority, rather than bodies, like
the Chapel Committee, which dealt directly with matters of religion and worship. He appears
to have retained a certain sensitivity regarding his status as a resigned cleric and evidently
felt the need to disarm potential criticism,

I shall smooth matters over for those to whom I am (as our late dean, now Theological
Professor [Swete] used to put it) 'an apostate priest', by taking no text. I think that this
will make the difference between a discourse & a sermon. 70

---

69 Caius Archive, GOV/03/01/14, Gesta 1893-1900, 15/6/1894, 16/5/1895.
70 CMS Archive, Venn papers, C42, J. Venn to J.H. Hunter, 4/12/1894.
This sensitivity prevented him speaking out more strongly on the issue of re-introducing lay preaching, and was also expressed in the formal College record when he was invited to give an address rather than a sermon on the occasion of the Commemoration of Benefactors. 71

**Academic recognition and networks**

In one important aspect reform at University level also smoothed the way to Venn's resignation of orders. Under the new Statutes of 1881, it became possible for distinguished graduates of the University who had made an original contribution to the advancement of science or learning to proceed to the degree of Doctor of Science or Letters. These awards were another sign of increasing academic specialisation where there was a desire for career recognition and status. 72 Venn, by this stage, convinced that under the existing Articles he could no longer take clerical duty, was troubled by the details, such as whether he should put on a black tie and lie low or continue to use the title of Reverend. He later described his thinking

> I knew it would be real relief to my sister, brother and uncle (I waited till long after my father's death) to feel that they could just write 'Dr Venn' and have done with it. 73

Venn proceeded to the degree of Doctor of Sciences in 1884, the record of the award being signed by his old friend, Ferrers, as Vice-Chancellor. 74

Venn's scholarly credentials for the degree were clear. Following the *Logic of chance*, he continued to publish regularly. Having begun his career in the 1860s contributing to general publications for intellectuals and men of letters, *Fraser's Magazine*, by the 1870s and 1880s, Venn regularly contributed to more specialised, professional journals. He was a frequent contributor to the early volumes of *Mind*, the specialist psychological and philosophical journal

---

71 Caius Archive, GOV/03/01/15, Gesta 1900-1905, 13/5/1904; Ernest Stewart Roberts papers PPCIESR, J. Venn to E.S. Roberts, 22/5/1890.
73 Society of Genealogists Library, Venn Collection, J. Venn to L.M. Forster, 13/3/1903.
74 *Cambridge University Reporter*, 3/6/1884, p.802.
founded by Alexander Bain in 1876 with his pupil, George Croom Robertson as editor.\textsuperscript{75} Such journals were important in promoting a mutual reinforcement of professional academic networks; Venn's name appeared as a contributor, a reviewer and his work was in turn reviewed alongside Bain, Sidgwick, Croom Robertson and Herbert Spencer. This development in periodical publishing can been seen as another indicator of change in the definition of academic identity and of intellectual fragmentation, denoting a shift from the man of letters writing for a general audience to the academic writing for other specialist professionals.\textsuperscript{76}

Venn was clearly aware of the emerging differences in potential audiences for his published work. In the 1880s he collaborated with Francis Galton on an anthropometrical study of Cambridge students. When seeking a forum in which to publish the results of this work, Venn expressed a preference for publishing in Nature rather than the Anthropological Journal; his reason being that Nature was the more popular in tone and the research would be more likely to reach a general audience.\textsuperscript{77} The establishment of Nature in 1869 has often been cited as a landmark in the self-definition of the scientific profession but in its early years it still aimed to be an accessible public forum for science rather than a specialised scientific journal.\textsuperscript{78} Venn's reasoning had been set out in the Logic of chance a quarter of a century earlier; that although detailed research might be the province of experts, no science should be entirely abandoned to its devotees but should instead be exposed 'to the free criticism of those whose main


\textsuperscript{77} University College London, Papers and Correspondence of Sir Francis Galton, Venn 334, J. Venn to F. Galton, 5/1/1890.

culture has been of a more general character.\textsuperscript{79} Venn was clearly aware of and participated in the growth of journals that support a specialised academic discourse distinct from general circulation, but appears to have retained a sense of duty to bring his findings to a more general audience outside that academic sphere. In a small way, this contradicts the view taken by Collini with regard to Sidgwick's work; where the professionalisation of the intellectual elite has been argued to have separated out the academic sphere from that of more general social influence.\textsuperscript{80}

It was in \textit{Mind} that Venn first tested out the idea that was to become the basis of his next work, \textit{Symbolic logic} (1880), on the diagrammatic representation of logical possibilities through the use of inclusive and exclusive circles.\textsuperscript{81} He drew upon ideas that had first occurred to him when he had read Boole as a curate and had been developed when he lectured on logic.\textsuperscript{82} Again, it is possible to see how Venn's work as a lecturer informed his scholarship; how his logic diagrams may have developed in part as simple visual aids to illustrate to students difficult algebraic formulations.\textsuperscript{83}

Venn's was not the only work in the field; a considerable number of treatises had been written on new approaches to logic and on diagrammatic representation. Venn's diagrams were distinct from those of his predecessors, Euler and Hamilton, in that his diagrams utilised Boole's staged method of determining the complete set of potential outcomes of a set of propositions and then reducing them down to a limited number of actualities.\textsuperscript{84} What gave

\textsuperscript{79} J. Venn, \textit{The logic of chance: an essay on the foundations and province of the theory of probability, with especial reference to its logical bearings and its application to moral and social science, and to statistics}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} edition (London, 1888), p.vii-viii.
\textsuperscript{80} Collini, Public moralists, p.201-2.
\textsuperscript{81} J. Venn, 'On the forms of logical propositions', \textit{Mind}, Volume V (1880).
\textsuperscript{83} M. Gardner, \textit{Logic machines and diagrams}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition (Chicago, 1982), p.29.
\textsuperscript{84} J. Venn, 'On the diagrammatic and mechanical representation of propositions and reasonings' \textit{The London, Edinburgh and Dublin Philosophical Magazine and Journal of Science}, Volume X (5\textsuperscript{th} series) (July 1880), p.8; J. Venn, 'On the forms of logical propositions', \textit{Mind}, Volume V (1880), pp.345-6; Edwards, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.7-8.
Venn's work its impact was his application of Boole's algebra in a classificatory diagram for
problem-solving that was simple yet capable of general application. This was combined with a
careful, critical survey of the history of the use of diagrams and the contributions of his
contemporaries, which was described by one reviewer as a 'remarkable feature'.

As Edwards, in his history of Venn diagrams, has pointed out, Venn's contribution — and the
justification for his name being given to the diagram — was the combination of the application
of Boolean algebra to produce a diagram that could be generalised to any number of sets
together with Venn's success in drawing it to the attention of a wider public.

Venn's work on logical diagrams attracted positive reactions from his peers, men like
Alexander Bain, and also from Venn's rival and fellow logician, William Stanley Jevons,
whose own work, on the application of Boole's algebra was concentrated on the production of
logic machines. Academic challenge came from the direction of Charles Dodgson, whose
own rectangular symbolic diagrams appeared in the *Game of logic* in 1887 and his 1896
*Symbolic logic*. Again, the long term impact of Venn's work was assured by its inclusion on
the list of recommended works for the Moral Sciences Tripos, resulting in a second edition in
1893 and remaining a standard work in formal logic until the twentieth century work of the
later Cambridge philosophers, Whitehead and Russell.

One further work of logic followed, with the publication of *Empirical or inductive logic* in 1889.
Venn's stated aim was to attempt a systematic treatise on inductive logic that he described to
Galton as 'something between Mill and Jevons in respect of scope and general treatment'.
He removed the sections on inductive logic from the third edition of the *Logic of chance* and

85 Review by C.J. Monro of *Symbolic Logic*, in *Mind*, Volume VI (1881) p.574; M.E. Baron, 'A note on
the historical development of logic diagrams: Leibniz, Euler and Venn', *Mathematical gazette*, Volume
87 Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C45/4, W.S. Jevons to J. Venn, 18/8/1880.
89 C.D. Broad, 'The local historical background of contemporary Cambridge philosophy' in C.A. Mace,
90 UCL, Sir Francis Galton papers, Venn 334, J. Venn to F. Galton, 5/5/1888.
transferred them to this new work, which looked particularly at inductive logic in relation to scientific method, examining the physical and psychological pre-conditions of induction, exploring the language, standards and units of scientific classification and examination.\textsuperscript{91} The reference to inductive logic was Venn's acknowledgement of his continuing debt to the logical and scientific thought of J.S. Mill, but the reference to empirical logic signalled his own conclusion, departing from Mill, that objective certainty could not be achieved from human reason.\textsuperscript{92} Although considered less original than previous works, this book has again been considered to be influential on subsequent cohorts of students in Cambridge.\textsuperscript{93}

By the time of its publication, Venn was weary of logic. It was something of which he had made a joke to friend in\textsuperscript{1883},

\begin{quote}
Logic, as you know, is a hobby of mine, but I frankly admit that no healthy mind unless carefully and artificially warped can take any interest in such a subject. Of downright palpable nonsense I don't think that it has contributed nearly as much as other subjects, e.g. Law & Theology; but it has done what it could to redress the balance in the way of masses of unspeakable dreariness in times past.\textsuperscript{94}
\end{quote}

By 1888, having finished writing \textit{Empirical or inductive logic}, he donated his considerable collection of logic books to the University Library and talked of finding a change of academic direction.\textsuperscript{95}

However disillusioned Venn may have become with his discipline, it continued to be the field in which he sought preferment. The University reforms of the second Commission had opened up a new potential avenue of advancement for Venn as the new statutes made provision for the creation of a chair in mental philosophy and logic as soon as funds

\textsuperscript{91} J. Venn, \textit{The logic of chance}, p.xviii.
\textsuperscript{92} J. Venn, \textit{The principles of empirical or inductive logic} (London, 1889), p.vi.
\textsuperscript{93} Broad, \textit{op. cit.}, p.20.
\textsuperscript{94} CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81, C42, J. Venn to J.H. Hunter, 4/2/1883.
\textsuperscript{95} UCL, Sir Francis Galton papers, Venn 334, J. Venn to F. Galton, 5/5/1888.

- 172 -
allowed. The prospect was greeted by Venn in 1883 with a mixture of dry humour and weariness:

...a professorship of Logic will be founded, for which if alive & not too decrepit I shall presumably stand. This represents the sole piece of preferment which I can conceive that the present dispensation of things on earth has in store for me:- & I shall probably not get it when it does come.

The prospect of gaining a chair in logic, combined with a realistic view of the primacy of Sidgwick's claims were probably combined in Venn's decision not to stand for election to the Knightbridge chair when it became vacant on Birks' death in 1883. In the event, Venn served as an elector together with Todhunter, Leslie Stephen, Hort and Seeley, and elected Sidgwick. Sidgwick's election was a further milestone in the emergence of a distinct and increasingly secular academic culture, as it finally severed the traditional link between the Chair and membership of the Church of England.

Following a severe illness in the winter of 1886, and long-term concerns over the health of both his son and his wife, Venn announced his intention of resigning his lectureship in 1887. In the event he proposed a reduction in Moral Sciences teaching. The justification of the measure had a professional as well as a personal basis. The creation of separate triposes for History and Theology had reduced the number of students reading for the Moral Sciences Tripos; and these students were now distributed between a larger number of inter-collegiate and University lecturers, which reduced the scale of the requirement for teaching within Caius. The College agreed the compromise measure and re-appointed Venn as Moral Sciences lecturer with a requirement to teach in one term only. Venn's proposal was notable for a number of reasons: the indications it provided of the growth of teaching provision across the University since his initial appointment and also, the precarious state of the Moral

---

96 Cambridge University Reporter, 1/12/1896 p.261.
97 CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81, C42, J. Venn to J.H. Hunter, 4/2/1883.
98 Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Add.mss.c.95175, J. Venn to H. Sidgwick, 13 Jul 1900.
99 Cambridge University Reporter, 2/10/1883, p.2.
Sciences in which no more than 2-3 students were expected each year in Caius. In addition, Venn had taken the time to canvass the support of colleagues on the University Board of Studies for his proposal, highlighting a sense of discipline-based, professional collegiality that was distinct from collegiate structures. 100

A peripatetic existence ensued with Venn sustaining two households, one in Cambridge and one on the south coast for his wife and son. Despite this and his disenchantment with logic, Venn does not seem to have given up on gaining academic promotion. In 1889, he sought Dicey’s advice on his prospects of election to the vacant Wykeham Professorship of Logic at Oxford. 101 Although not convinced that Venn stood a strong chance, Dicey strongly favoured Venn’s candidature and approached the electors informally on his behalf. The list of names appended to Venn’s unsuccessful application perhaps indicates why attainment of a chair remained of importance to Venn, as well as highlighting the continuing importance of his family connexion and its integration into the academic elite. Bain, Sidgwick, Croom Robertson, Dicey and Marshall all now held the title of professor; Leslie Stephen and Francis Galton being the only names on the list from outside the University network. 102

One further application was to follow. In 1896, Sidgwick offered £200 from his own stipend in order to establish the Chair in Mental Philosophy and Logic that had been provided for in 1881. Venn put his name forward. A former pupil and lecturer in Moral Science at Trinity, James Ward, also submitted his name. Ward had initially said that he would not stand against Venn on the understanding that the chair was likely to become vacant again in five or six years. He changed his mind and wrote apologetically to Venn to explain that if the electors were looking for a logician, they would surely choose Venn, but he had heard that they might

---

100 Caius Archive, GOV/03/01/13 Gesta 1885-1893, interleaved letter from J. Venn 16/2/1887; C62 J.S. Reid to J. Venn, 3 Nov [1887].
101 CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C41, A.V. Dicey to J. Venn, 10/1/1889.
102 Ibid, J. Venn to the electors [draft].

- 174 -
prefer a specialist in psychology and metaphysics, which was Ward’s specialism.\textsuperscript{103} The electors, who included J.B. Mayor and Sidgwick, chose Ward in January 1897.\textsuperscript{104} Venn’s disappointment was evident in his resignation in March of the office of catechist and talk of his ceasing to reside in Cambridge. The disappointment may initially have been all the more bitter given he had assumed from Ward’s letter that it had been Sidgwick who had encouraged his candidature – an assumption Ward, in another apologetic letter, hastened to correct.\textsuperscript{105}

The appointment can be seen as a signal of a generational change allied to the development of specialised single subject degrees, such as in history and law.\textsuperscript{106} The reformed Moral Sciences Tripos attracted a small number of high calibre men, like William Cunningham, W.E. Johnson, F.W. Maitland, James Ward, Stout and J.N. Keynes, who became the first generation to have graduated from the Moral Sciences Tripos and to continue as its teachers. It is in this development of ‘home-grown’ talent in the Moral Sciences Tripos that is possible to see the grounds for Venn’s verdict that as the number of Moral Sciences teaching staff increased, they were ‘a very homogeneous body, in constant and friendly intercourse with each other’.\textsuperscript{107} Maitland specialised in constitutional law as part of the newly independent Law Tripos. Cunningham who was listed first in the Moral Sciences Tripos with Maitland in 1872 initially sought to teach philosophy and theology, but failed to get a permanent appointment and having attended Marshall’s lectures in Economics became a lecturer and examiner in economic history in the new History Tripos before becoming the Professor of Economics and Statistics at King’s College London.\textsuperscript{108} The relationship between the logical and economic elements of the Tripos were closer; J.N. Keynes, for example, was a University lecturer

\textsuperscript{103} Caius Archive, John Venn papers C80/1, J. Ward to J. Venn, 4/1/1897.
\textsuperscript{104} Cambridge Chronicle, 22/1/1897, p.4.
\textsuperscript{105} Caius Archive, GOV/03/01/14, Gesta 1893-1900, 16/3/1897; John Venn papers C80/3-4, James Ward to J. Venn, 6/3/1897 & 13/3/1897; The Caian, Volume VII (1897-8), p.8.
\textsuperscript{106} Leedham-Green, op. cit., p.162.
\textsuperscript{107} CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, pp.125-6.
between 1884 and 1911, publishing on both logic and economics. Here too there was growing pressure, led by Marshall in opposition to Sidgwick, for the creation of a separate Economics Tripos. Meanwhile, Ward and Stout both specialised in psychology. Ward contributed a celebrated entry on psychology to the Encyclopaedia Britannica in 1886 and Stout became the editor of Mind between 1892 and 1922. The transition to an entirely specialised discipline-based structure was not yet complete. It continued to be difficult for men to find remunerative posts in the new subjects, thus W.E. Johnson, for whom Venn had a particular respect, lectured for a number of years on the mathematical theory of economics and psychology but also published on the philosophy of the mind. These men had respect for Venn and Sidgwick's generation but there was also a growing centrifugal tension within the loose consortium of subjects that was the Moral Sciences Tripos which was only partly checked by the clustering of careers around the limited number of University posts that were available in newer academic disciplines.

In 1899, having decided that they could never feel at home anywhere else, the Venns determined to make their final home in Cambridge once Archie was old enough to go up to Trinity, and by 1901 found a permanent home at Vicarsbrook on Chaucer Road, Cambridge. One more move was briefly considered when Ferrers, the Master of Caius, died and the selection of a new master took place in 1903. It has hitherto been assumed that the Senior Tutor and motive force behind college teaching in Caius, E.S. Roberts, was the automatic choice. From letters Venn wrote to his brother, it is clear that his own seniority among the fellowship and his track record of College service made him a serious candidate for the role. Venn weighed up his chances being careful not to show too much desire for the mastership,

112 Ibid, pp.23-4; UCL, Sir Francis Galton papers, Venn 334, J. Venn to F. Galton, 8/5/1888.
113 CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C42, J. Venn to J. Hunter, 21/1/1898, 30/4/1899.
114 Brooke, A history of Gonville and Caius College, p.235.
Five or six years ago the odds are that I should have been elected; as things now are
my wish for the post has fallen far more than my chance. There is much against it - a
detestable house, no garden, a lot of hateful ceremony, &c, &c. 115

College gossip from another fellow of Caius, Clifford Allbutt, was that only one of the twenty
eight members of the governing body decidedly favoured Roberts, but that a number were
looking to the College office that Roberts would relinquish in the event of election. 116 Venn
was willing to give up his acquired habit of 'gentle leisure' if there was a decided majority in
his favour, but otherwise asked William Ridgeway to withdraw his name. 117 Roberts was
elected in February 1903 and Venn, by way of consolation, became President of the College.
Venn was sufficiently engaged in the process by this point to express privately his annoyance
at the way in which the election was handled. 118

Venn may not have received the academic preferment he sought but by the late 1880s he
seems to have at least found something of the academic change of direction, through
anthropometrical and biographical research. 119 In his application for the Wykeham chair,
Venn added to the list of his accomplishments in logic, an academic interest in 'the subject of
Psychophysics, having both some knowledge of, & considerable interest in, the requisite
mechanical appliances' and his work on Empirical or inductive logic contained a discussion of
the physical and psychological pre-conditions of induction, standards and units in physical
and psychological measurement. 120 In 1877, Venn, together with James Ward, had proposed
the creation of a University laboratory of psychophysics, i.e. experiments to measure
perceptions and states of consciousness. Ward was interested in the philosophical strand of
psychology and was keen to start a psychological laboratory. The proposal failed in the face
of opposition to what was seen as an approach which took a materialist view of the soul. A

---
115 Society of Genealogists Library, Venn Collection, J. Venn to H. Venn, 2/2/1903.
116 Ibid, 12/2/1903.
117 Ibid, 12/2/1903.
118 Ibid, 17/2/1903.
119 Venn's biographical research will be explored in the next chapter, see p.214.
120 CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C41, J. Venn to the electors [draft].
further attempt by Ward failed in 1879; and he finally received a grant for psychological
equipment in 1891, two years before the physiologist, Michael Foster, was able to create a
lectureship in experimental psychology and physiology. 121 By this point, Venn had already
collaborated with Francis Galton on an anthropometrical study of Cambridge students.

Venn and Galton had known each other since the mid 1870s, drawn together by a shared
interest in the field of statistical probability. Galton was an admirer of Venn's work and was
one of the signatories on Venn's candidature form for admission to the Fellowship of the
Royal Society in 1883. 122 Both were contributors to Mind, shared common texts, such as
Quetelet's work on statistics, and had a number of common acquaintances, including Horace
and Frank Darwin in Cambridge and George Croom Robertson and Leslie Stephen in
London. 123 For Galton, Venn was not only a fellow researcher but also a research subject; an
example of the intellectual elite whose characteristics Galton was anxious to tabulate and
analyse. Venn supplied a return when Galton asked every fellow of the Royal Society to
complete a questionnaire on noteworthy achievements of near relatives and the inheritance
of disease or disability. The Venn and Stephen families were accordingly entered into
Galton's subsequent work on Noteworthy families. 124

Stimulated by evolutionary thought, Galton was interested in inherited physical and mental
characteristics, particularly hereditary ability. His interest in statistical method was combined
with a belief that the mind was constituted of separate faculties physically located in particular
regions of the brain, which could therefore be investigated by measurement and

121 Boring, op. cit., pp.460, 489.
122 UCL, Sir Francis Galton papers, 190A, J. Venn to F. Galton, 3 Feb 1875; J. Venn, The logic of
chance, p.xvii; The Royal Society, EC/1883/15, Certificates of election and candidature
[www.royal.ac.uk, accessed 22/1/2006]
124 UCL, Sir Francis Galton papers, 133/6, Letters to E H Schuster in connexion w corrections in the
Research Fellow in National Eugenics, 1905.
This in turn led to an interest in obtaining exact measurements of the mind and body as a statistical basis on which to theorise and an anthropometrical laboratory was established in London under the auspices of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in London in 1884. Galton provided equipment for the creation of a similar Anthropometrical Laboratory in Cambridge. Measurements of student subjects, including sense testing, size measurements, strength and reflexes, were recorded on cards by a paid superintendent. By September 1887, over 1000 cards had been indexed. These were mapped against data on predicted academic performance categorising the men as high honours, low honours and poll men, which was solicited by Venn from college tutors with a view to determining a correlation between physical and mental capacity. Venn undertook the statistical analysis of the data which showed that there was no significant correlation between physical stature or fitness and intellect or examination performance. The analysis of the first batch of results was presented to the Anthropological Institute, of which Galton was President, in 1888 and also published in *Nature*.

There was a clear line of progression from Venn's interest in the observation of series in his work on probability to the statistical analysis of a series of measurements of a series of human characteristics, and there are also clear parallels with his habitual academic method of careful and methodical classification. The statistical work also fed into Venn's preparation of a new series of lectures for the Moral Sciences Tripos in 1891 on the theory of statistics.

In the next chapter, it will also be seen how this methodology also informed Venn's approach...

---

127 UCL, Sir Francis Galton papers, Venn 334, J. Venn to F. Galton, 23/9/1887, 7/11/1887.
128 Ibid, 16/2/1888.
130 UCL, Sir Francis Galton papers, Venn 334, J. Venn to F. Galton, 23/2/1890, 21/8/1891.
to biographical and historical research. Gibbins has drawn attention to this consistent application of methodical classificatory techniques across the different spheres of Venn's academic activity, linking it back to the methodical habits of the Claphamites.\(^{131}\) There are two other elements that could equally be drawn out: firstly, the possible linkage of a rigorous methodology drawing upon detailed analysis of source data with an emerging sense of academic identity in research and scholarly activity, and secondly, the influence upon Venn's work of inductive logic, where conclusions were drawn from observation of categorised series.

The collaboration with Galton highlights another aspect of emerging professional identity. Galton operated within a scientific tradition that did not confine itself to the institutional structure of a University. The Cambridge anthropometric laboratory was located in the University, but was not of the University. Nor did Galton's work, ranging as it did from geography and meteorology to genetics, experimental psychology and statistics, recognise disciplinary boundaries. Such a generalist and 'amateur' approach was eventually to be marginalised by a University-based 'professional' scientific community in which the boundaries of disciplinary specialism were being drawn.\(^{132}\) Galton's collaboration with Venn, and with Horace Darwin, which gave him a foothold within a University, was important to the research methodology, and also supports Burrow's argument that the boundaries of professional status were still porous.\(^{133}\) The ties of shared texts, interests and societies were for men like Venn more important than boundaries defined by occupational professionalism.

The link with Galton also highlights another element of Venn's intellectual landscape, a connection to the men Turner has termed scientific naturalists – those like Clifford, Spencer,


\(^{132}\) G. Jones, 'Spencer and his circle' in G. Jones and R.A. Peel (eds.), Herbert Spencer: the intellectual legacy (Galton Institute, 2004), pp.11-12.

Huxley, Leslie Stephen and Galton who looked to secular, rational and scientific ideas as a sufficient explanation for and guide to life, as an alternative to the religious constructs they had rejected.\textsuperscript{134} This was not merely advocacy of the scientific method but the expansion of scientific ideas as an alternative cultural ideal replacing the role of religion.\textsuperscript{135} In contrast, men like Sidgwick and Ward, although similarly disillusioned with the religion of their youth and committed to the scientific method, refused to accept that all human experience and aspiration could be explained in scientific and rational terms.\textsuperscript{136} Sidgwick distinguished between the scientific data and method with which he had no argument and the theories and interpretations which were built upon the data. He judged the new scientific dogmatism to be as intellectually restrictive as religious dogma and sought what he described as a reconciliation of spiritual needs with intellectual principles.\textsuperscript{137} Venn appears to have more in common with Sidgwick here. He may have been at one with Galton with regard to the academic application of scientific method, but he declared himself unwilling to believe that the course of the world was a 'random or mechanical business, but that it is ruled by some Being whom we may, in some conventional way, call 'infinite'.\textsuperscript{138}

It may have been a search for an empirical basis for this recognition of spiritual need, together with his interest in psychology, that drew Venn to psychical research. Psychical phenomena had been a topic of conversation among members of the Grote Club in the 1860s, when following a meeting of the members at Venn's house, Sidgwick talked of his spiritualist experiences and Maurice recalled having witnessed a friend being mesmerised. Sidgwick started to pursue his interest in psychical phenomena more systematically in the 1870s. The Society for Psychical Research was established in 1882 and Sidgwick became its President. Although the Society had links to the spiritualist movement, its identity was also

\textsuperscript{134} F.M. Turner, \textit{Between science and religion}.
\textsuperscript{135} Jones & Peel (eds.), \textit{op. cit.}, pp.ix-x; Turner, \textit{Between science and religion}, pp.9-22.
\textsuperscript{136} Broad, \textit{op. cit.}, p.37.
\textsuperscript{137} Turner, \textit{Between science and religion}, pp1-4, 62-63.
\textsuperscript{138} University of Glasgow, Albert Venn Dicey papers, Ms Gen 508(25) J. Venn to A.V. Dicey, 20/1/1919.
shaped by reference to the free discussion and inquiry of debating clubs, like the Grote Club and the Apostles, from which it drew a number of its members.\textsuperscript{139} It was Sidgwick and his friends who led and established the public tone of the Society. Their reputation for scientific method and rigorous academic enquiry gave the Society social and intellectual credibility.\textsuperscript{140} Unable to compromise his commitment to honesty in intellectual inquiry, Sidgwick never entirely disposed of his doubts over human survival after death, although by 1894 he accepted the validity of telepathy and this bolstered his optimism for further discoveries.\textsuperscript{141}

In 1887, the Council and Honorary members of the Society included Gladstone, Balfour, Tennyson, Ruskin, Charles Dodgson, two bishops and nine fellows of the Royal Society, one of whom was Venn.\textsuperscript{142} In 1903, Venn was still a member, albeit 'a rather sceptical member'.\textsuperscript{143} Venn was at least willing to entertain at least the possibility of an afterlife. In a letter to Laura Forster in 1903, discussing the habit of Evangelical forebears of referring to meeting again in heaven, he wrote

\begin{quote}
It seems to me a very rational view. The only condition on which a future life can be considered probable, to my thinking, is that it should be a continuation of this.\textsuperscript{144}
\end{quote}

If Venn's engagement with the Society for Psychical Research was tinged with a level of scepticism, Susanna Venn appears to have been more personally committed. In 1895, she submitted a case to the Journal of the Society for Psychical Research describing a case of apparent clairvoyance involving her son, Archie, to which she added a report of an instance of dream transference between her and her son. Her account of the first event was endorsed by John Venn with a terse 'This was so.'\textsuperscript{145}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{139}{Turner, Between science and religion, pp.53-54 ; J. Oppenheim, The other world: spiritualism and psychical research in England 1850-1914 (Cambridge, 1985), pp.49, 127, 136.}
\footnotetext{140}{Oppenheim, op. cit., pp.119-120.}
\footnotetext{141}{Turner, Between science and religion, p.59; A. Gauld, The founders of psychical research (London, 1968), p.275.}
\footnotetext{142}{Gauld, op. cit., pp.137-140.}
\footnotetext{143}{Society of Genealogists Library, Venn Collection, J. Venn to L.M. Forster, 15/2/1903.}
\footnotetext{144}{Ibid, 15/2/1903.}
\footnotetext{145}{[S.C. Venn], 'MCI.92 Visual', Journal of the Society for Psychical Research (June 1895), pp.103-4.}
\end{footnotes}
The appeal of psychical research has been characterised in a number of ways. For some, the need was emotional – the need for a sense of purpose to life.\textsuperscript{146} To men like Sidgwick, and perhaps for Venn too, this was an intellectual quest that was religious in foundation. These were men who intellectually were unable to accept orthodox religious dogma in which they had been raised, but who were not satisfied by pure scientific materialism. They were still disposed to be religious and were profoundly interested in religious questions, and hoped to find the evidence that might justify them in taking an optimistic view in the face of the various ethical, scientific and doctrinal issues that had contributed to their doubts. This went to the heart of the ethical questions Sidgwick was exploring academically. He was unable to accept the incentives to moral behaviour provided by traditional formulations such as heaven and hell. He had also rejected Utilitarian ethics perceiving there to be no inherent concord between a man's duty to society and his personal happiness. Attempts to base ethics on a scientific and evolutionary basis were also refuted as providing no rational ground for ethical behaviour. Sidgwick looked instead for evidence of survival after death, of human immortality, on which to base a system of ethics and committed over a quarter of a century to the search. For the remainder of his life Sidgwick was a 'reluctant doubter', torn between his hope that there could be some reasonable basis to religion and theology tempered by his rigorous commitment to the principles of honest intellectual enquiry.\textsuperscript{147} Sidgwick experienced a further crisis in 1887 when he became doubtful of the possibility of finding empirical evidence of life after death. He finally found his way through this by making a non-empirical affirmation of the rational nature of the relationship between man and the universe, in accordance with which it was rational for man to live his life. On this basis he centred his future academic efforts upon the pursuit of academic philosophy rather than empiricism.\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{146} Turner, \textit{Between science and religion}, p.106; Gauld, \textit{op. cit.}, p.104.
\textsuperscript{147} Oppenheim, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.111-118; Turner, \textit{Between science and religion}, pp.43-44.
\textsuperscript{148} Turner, \textit{Between science and religion}, pp.56-63.
Venn seems to have shared some of Sidgwick's concern about the alignment of public and private morality,

I can't but wonder what will be the outcome of two or three generations such as we see all around us now...an average British public absolved from all religious feeling & without even any second hand tradition behind them does not seem a promising agent for high achievements.\textsuperscript{149}

This parallels the view previously reached by Fitzjames Stephen. By 1874, Stephen no longer found himself able to take part in church services and had lost faith in the logic of Christian belief but in the absence of an alternative he continued to hold to the social purpose of organised religion as a defence against moral decline.\textsuperscript{150} The importance of organised religion to social cohesion also appears to have been a key factor for Venn in his view both on compulsory chapel and on religion in society generally.

**Family networks**

Social and academic networks in Cambridge were reinforced by family ties; the clerical, Evangelical family life of Venn's upbringing contrasting with his own mature family life shaped by academic activity and community, with the surviving elements of family-based network bridging the worlds of Clapham and Cambridge.

As well as sharing her husband's interest in psychical research, Susanna Venn was credited with sharing her husband's academic interest in philosophy and logic, claiming to have taken unofficially many of the early Moral Science Tripos papers. She also became a published author, although in deference to the objections of her Evangelical father, all but the last of her novels were published anonymously.\textsuperscript{151} Susanna is said to have attributed her inspiration to

\textsuperscript{149} Society of Genealogists Library, Venn Collection, J. Venn to L.M. Forster, 7 Jan 1907
\textsuperscript{151} Obituary of Susanne Carnegie Venn, The Times, 27/3/1931.
being possessed by the soul of Susan Ferrier at whose bidding she wrote.\textsuperscript{152} However, according to her own autobiographical narrative, Susanna drew considerable inspiration from her own experience. For example, in Some married fellows, she was later to provide a contemporary view of life in Cambridge with the advent of married fellows and the first female students, having her characters comment upon changing ideals of undergraduate education and the academic search for philosophical answers for questions to supplement religious dogma that was no longer sufficient.\textsuperscript{153}

Having rejected the Evangelicalism of her upbringing, Susanna Venn’s later religious experience was shaped by the twin aspects of increasing undogmatic, mystical belief, and of physical and mental ill-health. Although she may have rejected the religious viewpoint of her youth, religious concerns remained of primary importance. Susanna Venn’s commonplace book was largely religious in mystical and religious in content, recording, among other things, a final message from Leslie Stephen’s sister, Caroline Stephen, who had rejected Evangelicalism in favour of Quakerism:

\begin{quote}
The broad and beautiful spaces of the unseen shine out against the dark background – please tell SCV.\textsuperscript{154}
\end{quote}

In a letter to her husband of 1895, Susanna wrote of the conflict between:

\begin{quote}
...an occasionally absolutely triumphant strain of inner faith, of mystic realisation, illumination, knowledge of no creed, no church, no sect, even of no people and no language; but yet always in conflict, gaining, losing strong, being hidden and worsted; being gloriously victorious then again buried as in the depths of a despair which admits neither of the thought of God nor man as any alleviation.\textsuperscript{155}
\end{quote}

Susanna Venn’s descriptions of her religious position are far more emotionally charged than those of her husband. That is not to say that her religious development did not encompass a

\textsuperscript{152} Girton College Cambridge, Aelfrida Tillyard Papers, GCPP Tillyard 2/23/4 Memory Pictures Section 4. This was probably Susan Edmonstone Ferrier, novelist (1752-1854).
\textsuperscript{153} S.C. Venn, Some married fellows (London, 1893), Volume I, pp.41, 117.
\textsuperscript{155} Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C06/1a, S.C. Venn to J. Venn, 26/4/1895.
level of intellectual enquiry. Drawing upon her acquaintance with a Cambridge scholar of Sanskrit, she had acquired and studied a number of translations of works of Eastern religious philosophy. Nevertheless, Susanna Venn was conscious of the contrast between her own strongly emotional connection with religion and her husband's more measured and intellectual demeanour. She wrote of her fear of being found wanting by her husband when measured against the academic's ultimate standard, truth:

I am afraid of your calm wisdom and utter absolute rectitude. I dread your saying perhaps 'She doesn't even speak the truth'.

She was also concerned about her church-going husband's view of her mysticism and lack of orthodoxy, defending herself thus:

Only I wasn't born so, any more than you were, & I can no more go back than you can.

Susanna perceived that the steps in a journey away from religious certainty could not be retraced nor could the old certainties, however comforting, be regained and through Eastern philosophy and psychical research she looked for the comfort of a new certainty. What is perhaps apparent in Susanna Venn's comments about her fear of her husband's judgement, is the personal isolation that a journey away from religious orthodoxy could cause, even in a social group or family where other members were undergoing a similar experience in parallel, and where, in the absence of ecclesiastical structures and religious dogma, judgement of the standards of religious truth became personal and subjective.

The other key theme of the commonplace book and of Susanna Venn's later religious viewpoint was that of sickness and suffering. From the earliest days of their marriage, his wife's illness periodically drew Venn away from Cambridge or resulted in separation for the

---

156 Girton College Cambridge, Aelfrida Tillyard Papers, GCPP Tillyard 2/23/4 Memory Pictures Section 4.
157 Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C06/1a, S.C. Venn to J. Venn, 26/4/1895.
158 Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C07/25, S.C. Venn to J.A. Venn, 28/5/1916.
couple. In the mid 1890s, Susanna Venn was in particularly poor health following the final illness of her father, and in 1906 was unable to attend her son’s wedding because of faintness and sickness. She was intermittently bedridden and had difficulty with mobility, and was frequently reported to be under the care of a nurse. Aelfrida Tillyard later reported that one of the causes of Susanna’s suffering had been recurrent problems during pregnancies;

She had borne him as many children as Queen Anne, and of these, only one had survived.

At least part of Susanna’s difficulties appeared to be psychological in nature, something that she herself regarded as a hereditary form of melancholia. During one episode in June 1900, when John Venn was seriously ill with pneumonia, nurses were required to restrain Susanna from throwing herself from the window of a London hotel.

There is evidence that Venn had some understanding of his wife’s personal and individual need for religion. In his Hulsean lectures, Venn had reviewed the case for the impact of suffering upon one’s perception of religious truth. Writing of Maitland’s biography of Leslie Stephen in 1907, he commented that

I have heard the Life by Maitland quoted as a sort of triumphant vindication of agnostic principles. I can’t accept this...A man who enjoys the legs & lungs that can carry him, till almost old age, to the tops of the highest Alps; & also the money & the

---

160 Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers Add.mss.c.100206, H. Sidgwick to F. Myers, Feb 1870; Society of Genealogists Library, Venn collection, J. Venn to L.M. Forster, 3/3/1903.
162 Girton College Cambridge, Aelfrida Tillyard Papers, GCPP Tillyard 2/23/4 Memory Pictures Section 4.
163 Society of Genealogists Library, Venn collection, Henrietta Venn to H. Venn (of Canterbury), 12/6/1900.
164 J. Venn, On some characteristics of belief scientific and religious being the Hulsean lectures for 1869 (London and Cambridge, 1870), p.93.
leisure to do it almost every year, is not a fair sample of the stock for whom religions have to be fitted.\textsuperscript{165}

It is hard not to conclude that Venn's understanding of the continuing function of religion and his observation on Stephen was shaped in part by personal awareness of his wife's suffering as well as academic observation.

Susanna Venn's episode of mental illness in 1900 is of interest as an illustration of the continuing connection between the Venns, the Stephens and the Diceys. John Venn's family were concerned that Susanna had made a statement that her husband was mentally unstable. Henrietta Venn alerted her brother Harry to their sister-in-law's health crisis. In a series of letters that went around in a circle from Harry's wife to Caroline Stephen then to Albert Dicey and finally back to Harry Venn, a family consensus was sought and reached. It was decided to solicit a letter from the family doctor affirming John Venn's sanity in the face of Susanna Venn's 'delusions'.\textsuperscript{166} This was intended as insurance against the contingency that Venn might die and Susanna might contest arrangements made in his will for the guardianship of their son and also a fulfilment of the duty of a man's friends and family to protect his reputation.\textsuperscript{167} The surviving cousins had gone their separate ways in terms of religion but the ties of kinship remained a strong bond.

In addition to historical family links, Cambridge and academic connections provided a new basis for interaction between some of the Clapham descendants. Venn shared a particularly close and open correspondence with Laura Mary Forster, a descendant of Henry and Marianne Thornton, and also a friend of the Cambridge Darwins. Caroline Stephen settled in Cambridge in 1885 and was also in regular contact with the Venns. In 1910, Venn made the rare effort to venture out socially in order to meet Dicey when he stayed with the Darwins,

\textsuperscript{165} Society of Genealogists Library, Venn collection, J. Venn to L.M. Forster, 7/1/1907.
\textsuperscript{166} Society of Genealogists Library, Venn collection, A.V. Dicey to H. Venn, 13/6/1900.
\textsuperscript{167} Society of Genealogists Library, Venn collection, C.E. Stephen to L. Venn, 7/6/1900; A.V. Dicey to cousin [probably C.E. Stephen], 6/6/1900; A.V. Dicey to H. Venn, 13/6/1900.
and in 1915 attended a dinner hosted by Caroline Stephen’s niece and future principal of Newnham, Katherine Stephen. The connection seems to have been less close with the Stephen men. Leslie Stephen and John Venn had ‘drifted apart’ in academic and religious terms over the course of the late nineteenth century but in a letter of condolence to Venn following the death of Henrietta Venn in 1902, Stephen spoke of the connection they retained through the close friendship of their sisters, and of the ‘genuine affection’ he felt for a man with whom he shared a cherished family history.

Albert Venn Dicey was the surviving male relation with whom Venn retained the closest contact. Dicey drew away from the moderate Evangelicalism of his parents into an undogmatic and vague Christianity. He did not experience the issues of conscience of his cousins but like them, his conventional religion was challenged by rationalism and he saw reason as the ultimate criterion of religious belief. Dicey retained the spirit if not the dogma of his childhood religion and never lost interest in religion as part of human experience and in the historical evidence for Christianity. The Evangelical fervour of previous generations manifested itself in his commitment to useful work, political activity becoming his secular vocation. Again, shared family history and joint worship of the Clapham myth formed a substantial part of Venn and Dicey’s bond, but this was reinforced by common, current interests in theological questions, free trade and Liberal Unionism. Dicey would travel to Cambridge for dinners of the Ad Eundem club, an informal group of Oxford and Cambridge educated men interested in ‘advanced opinion’ started by Henry and William Sidgwick in 1865. Dicey was one of the original members and although it is not clear whether Venn was a

---

168 Caius Archive, John Venn papers C06/03, S.C. Venn to J. Venn, 1/5/1901; C07/05, S.C. Venn to J.A. Venn, 16/10/1915.
169 Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C12/04, L. Stephen to J. Venn, 2/9/1902.
later member, he was certainly aware of the group and had contact with many of its members on an individual basis.  

It is in Venn's correspondence with Dicey that one gets a picture of Venn's political views. In common with Seeley, Ferrers, Sidgwick, Dicey, James Ward and J.F. Stephen and many educated liberals, Venn was a Liberal Unionist. He opposed Home Rule and, despite his support for the education of women, was also an opponent of female suffrage; on one occasion referring to the strength that would be required 'to stamp the life out of such growths as these.' Stephen and Dicey were particularly prominent in setting out publicly the constitutional threat posed by Home Rule, and Seeley, Ferrers and Sidgwick took a public stand at a Unionist meeting in Cambridge in 1886. Venn may have shared their views but he did not take a public position on the subject, preferring to confine his arguments to after dinner discussion in the Combination Room and correspondence with Dicey. Dicey pressed Venn to co-author an article against Free Trade. Venn declined, lacking Dicey's appetite for controversy. The focus of this study is upon Venn's religious and academic identities rather than upon his political affiliation but what Venn's connections in this regard serve to illustrate is the continuing vitality of elements of the post-Claphamite connexion based upon current shared academic and political interests as well as historical and religious tradition. It is also an additional sidelight upon academic identity, where shared intellectual interests and connections were reinforced by social and political interaction.

171 Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Add.mss. b. 71452(14), H. Jackson to E. Sidgwick, 10/3/1904; University of Glasgow, Albert Venn Dicey papers, Ms Gen 508(18), J. Venn to A.V. Dicey, 18/10/1886.
173 University of Glasgow, Albert Venn Dicey papers, Ms Gen 508(21), J. Venn to A.V. Dicey, 10/3/1912.
175 University of Glasgow, Albert Venn Dicey papers, Ms Gen 508(22), J. Venn to A.V. Dicey, 3/5/1914.
176 University of Glasgow, Albert Venn Dicey papers, Ms Gen 508(24), J. Venn to A.V. Dicey, 28/2/1917.
177 Caius Archive, John Venn papers C07/21, S.C. Venn to J.A. Venn, 28/3/1916.

- 190 -
Conclusions

From a position of personal and professional independence, Venn finally found himself able to set aside his clerical identity in the 1880s, but always retained a form of Christian belief. He also recognised the social importance of organised religion; continuing to attend chapel and church services and helping to define a historically based civic ritual. As a member of the Society for Psychical Research, he continued to look for empirical evidence on which to base a new religious certainty. He also retained a good deal of affection for the clerical way of life, although he found that theologically he could no longer honestly subscribe to the Articles, Creeds or liturgy.

Venn's religious and vocational transition took place against a shifting institutional context. This transition was exemplified by changes in religious structures and tone within Caius.

The best tribute that we can offer to our second founder is to maintain as a College the happy alliance of religion, learning and science, which if I mistake not, is the chief glory of his life.178

So preached Henry Swete in 1910-11, four hundred years after the birth of John Caius. During the period 1853-1923 that ‘happy alliance’, as John Caius might have recognised it, with compulsory chapel, University tests, and celibate, clerical fellows with pension funds in the form of advowsons, had largely disappeared. In its place was a less specific commitment, to the College as a ‘place of education, religion, learning and research’.179 The College still admitted responsibility for religious and moral discipline, and supported a more personalised approach to committed religion, and a specialised, professional approach to theological learning. The example of corporate religion at Caius supports the observations of Garland and Rothblatt, that while a uniform religious view supported by tests and compulsory chapel declined, the College continued its commitment to the moral if not the specifically Anglican

179 Statutes of Gonville and Caius College in the University of Cambridge (Cambridge, 1882).
guidance of the individual, at least until the end of the mastership of Roberts. The changes in the pillars of religion were part of a broader change in the relationship between the Church and the University, the Church and the individual, and a re-definition of what it meant to be a clergyman or a don.

Caius usefully provides a well-documented picture of two very different stages in the development of the tone of Victorian religion, and two very different models of how it was believed a Christian community could be created. Under Clayton, the Evangelical party had a clear idea of its own theology and its own party identity. It was confident in its own exclusivity; and clear about the division between the religious and the secular. By the turn of the century, the emphasis was upon Christian-based morality rather than dogmatic Christianity. Less able to rely upon compulsion and uniformity, Roberts and his contemporaries worked harder to form a connection with their students; to include them in the rituals of the College, whether religious or sporting, as a means of facilitating the assimilation, through participation, of the values of that community. This inclusivity meant that the division between the religious and the secular were blurred; religion was but one element in a wider process of training and educating a gentleman. Importantly for Venn, as long as men did their academic duty of teaching and researching and their college duty in attending chapel, matters of conscience were not brought to the fore.

At a domestic level, family ties that had been reinforced in the previous generations by shared religious ties were on one side loosened by the divergence in religious paths among Claphamite descendants, but endured on the basis of shared reverence for the religion of family saints, and, in selected cases, retained a currency based upon continuing social interaction in Cambridge and shared political and academic interests. One further enduring

---

181 Rothblatt, op. cit., p.244.
182 Brooke, A history of Gonville and Caius College, pp.231-2.
aspect of Venn’s religious identity, his engagement with the historical religious identity of his family, will be explored in the next chapter.

In dissecting Venn’s academic identity, it is necessary to think in terms of multiple elements of academic identity and professionalisation. What Venn’s career illustrates is how teaching and research identities could work symbiotically. In the prefaces of each of his works on logic, Venn indicated that he was drawing upon ideas that had been developed in the lecture room.\textsuperscript{183} One can see how the critical surveys of existing literature, that form a notable part of Venn’s published works, may have been built up with a pedagogic purpose; and how his logic diagrams may have developed in part as simple devices to illustrate to students difficult to grasp verbal or algebraic formulations.\textsuperscript{184} That is not to say that Venn was merely a writer of textbooks and a teacher – which may be just as well, as one student was to describe some of his lectures as ‘useless’.\textsuperscript{185} He made an original contribution to the scholarship of his field – reviewing and being reviewed in the learned journals of his time. Venn’s first book, the Logic of chance, has been described as the most influential British treatment of the frequentist theory of probability.\textsuperscript{186} Symbolic logic, his work on the diagrammatic representation of logical possibilities, gave him a lasting reputation for the Venn diagrams that bear his name.

As has been suggested with regard to the emergence of history as a discipline, the idea of professionalisation can cover a range of meaning, blurring important continuities and distinctions.\textsuperscript{187} As someone educated in the pre-Reform era of the University, Venn supported and benefited from reforms which opened up new opportunities for University careers.\textsuperscript{188} He chose to remain in Cambridge active in research, teaching, examining, publishing and

\textsuperscript{183} J. Venn, Logic of chance, p.xiv.
\textsuperscript{184} Gardner, op. cit., p.29.
\textsuperscript{185} Diary of J.N. Keynes, 13 June 1874 quoted in Skidelsky, op. cit., p.11.
\textsuperscript{187} Burrow, op. cit., p.129.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid, p.137.
seeking preferment via academic routes. Venn became engaged in teaching and scholarship not merely as an interlude before a career, but as an independent and permanent career in itself with a professional status befitting a gentleman.\textsuperscript{189} However, in contrast with the generation of academics that followed him, Venn never fully specialised in a disciplinary sense. His work ranged across theological, philosophical, logical, statistical and historical enquiry, and his interest in communication with general as well as specialist audiences can be seen as part of this.\textsuperscript{190} His approach also perhaps showed the stamp of mid-nineteenth century optimism for the comparative scientific method applicable across disciplines. Venn the academic was not only a teacher and a scholar, but also a University reformer, a gentleman and a College man.

\textsuperscript{189} Engel, op. cit. pp.3-8; Brooke, \textit{A history of the University}, p.89; Burrow, op. cit., p.137; Soffer, 'The development of disciplines', p.936.

\textsuperscript{190} Jann: p.122-6
7. 'a tie of gratitude to the past' – Biographer

In the 1880s, the same period in which he resigned orders and achieved national recognition of his academic achievements, Venn showed an increasing interest in the history of his family, College and University.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been referred to as the 'golden age of biographical writing' as a reflection of the apparent Victorian fascination with the genre, and the quantity of works that were produced.¹ This view has been challenged by Kendall, who argued that the strength of the values of decorum and respectability strangled the development of published biographies, leaving them as 'varnished exemplums', and directing Victorian biographical energies towards 'industrious busy-work, of varying worth, to the classifying of information, to the large scale accumulation of materials'.² Whatever the value of the writing produced, it is still necessary to explain its genesis. On a broad level, Levine has viewed biographical and autobiographical writing as an intellectual mechanism though which time could be measured and evaluated; a by-product of a society that had developed a belief in progress, and which therefore fostered a teleological view of the past.³ While on a more individual level, for Pascal, such writing could be the means through which a life was shaped, filtered and understood; and the experience of the individual placed into the context of the broader historical process.⁴ The very act of writing has been argued to evidence the assumption that a life could have a meaning which was worth communicating, and more generally, a preoccupation with posterity, which expressed itself in the urge to preserve and pass on a heritage.⁵ Linked to this is the identification of certain values that 'Lives' typically expressed, whether the provision, through of heroes and inspiration to the reader; or the

⁵ Cockshutt, op. cit., p.21; Levine, op. cit., pp.3-4.
communication of a sense of national duty and pride in past achievements. The action of writing could in turn reinforce a sense of identity on a number of levels, from the nation to the family. MacFarlane has illustrated the emergence of a 'powerful myth' of community in a nineteenth century society, which as a result of industrialisation, had a sense of society changing and of old ties being lost.

In his thesis on the development of the Venn family, William Stockton argued that the key to understanding the Venns' identity was the emphasis they laid upon the importance of continuity. Thus Stockton's explanation of John Venn's historical labours is placed in the context of this family tradition. By resigning orders and moving away from Evangelicalism, Venn broke two strands of continuity, and tried to reinforce the remaining strands of academic connection and historical sense through storytelling which sustained the family idea. Venn has been seen to have perpetuated a family tradition of biography, and in his writing may be seen some of the characteristics which have been identified as characteristic of 'domestic biography'. Christopher Tolley has used the term 'domestic biography' to describe 'the writing of lives and memoirs by authors whose connection with the subject is first and foremost a family one.' Domestic biography sustained a corporate ethos over several generations, despite departures from the original Evangelical outlook; the literary forms surviving the particular beliefs which had originally generated them. Underlying their production was an understanding of certain values and conventions, such as a sense of family duty in producing such materials for the instruction of future generations, the importance of a corporate sense of family, pride in the family's achievements, the importance of a close relationship to one's subject, and the importance of the documentary method to the creation of a living portrait.

---

8 W.K. Stockton, 'The Venn family since the mid-eighteenth century' (Brandeis University PhD, 1980), p.553.
10 Ibid, p.2.
However, Tolley acknowledges that Venn wrote as a 'professional antiquarian' as well as a 'domestic historian'. In so doing he hints at the broader influences that were pertinent to Venn's historical researches. As will be shown, Venn was not solely the product of his Evangelical upbringing. His intellectual horizons were greatly broadened by the contacts he made on coming to Cambridge; and their intellectual influence was no less important in shaping his views. Nevertheless there are parallels to be drawn between the values and approaches Tolley has associated with domestic biography and those that Venn illustrated in his work on family, and perhaps less obviously, college history.

The aim here will be to deconstruct Venn's authorial identities by locating him within the real communities and networks which both facilitated the production of his works and formed the audience for them; to place him in the context of the intellectual influences, or virtual communities, which shaped his historical view, and also, to examine the values his works communicated and the virtual communities they reinforced. Four communities - antiquarian networks, family, academic communities and collegiate identity - will be examined in this way. In the course of producing his historical works, Venn drew heavily upon the broader, contemporary trend for antiquarian activity, operating as part of a network of gentleman amateurs, brought together by shared historical enthusiasm. Venn was the product of a family, inheriting a tradition of genealogical interests, where historical and familial identity were closely entwined with religious identity. His contributions to this tradition provide an opportunity to examine the development of religious literary forms and their role in the formation of familial identity. However, Venn’s mature outlook was formed in the philosophical and scientific debates of the 1860s. The influence of his reading of Mill, Comte and Buckle, and his association with men like Galton, needs to be examined in relation to his historical work as well as that in logic and statistics. As well as further illuminating Venn’s

understanding of the historical process and his motivations in undertaking historical research, this combination of the roles of modern don and gentleman antiquarian opens up additional broader questions on the development of professional identity and community in academia. Finally, Venn was writing for identifiable audiences: primarily, people with whom he at some point shared a tie of blood, religious or historical interest, or collegiate/university membership. The aim is not only to locate Venn within a matrix of influences and communities through which his own narratives and self-identity were formed, but also to examine the symbiotic process though which Venn's works became not only an expression of community or identity, but also a reinforcement of it, whether through the development of the networks he used to produce his works, or by giving a historical dimension to what it meant to be a Venn, a Caian, and a professional academic.

Antiquarian networks

Venn's publications in the area of College and University history took a variety of forms. He edited texts, starting with an edition of the first Caius matriculation book published in 1887. It was also in 1887 that Venn persuaded George Forrest Browne to approach the Cambridge Antiquarian Society with the idea of publishing transcripts of Cambridge parish registers. The scheme was adopted and Venn edited the St. Michael's register for publication by the Society in 1891. The association with the Antiquarian Society continued into the twentieth century, when Venn also edited one of the University grace books; and the annals of Dr Caius. Venn's narrative works included the Caius contribution to the Robinson series of college histories in 1901 and he also became a major contributor of articles to the newly created

12 J. Venn & S.C. Venn (eds.), Admissions to Gonville and Caius College in the University of Cambridge March 1559-60 to Jan 1878-9 (London and Cambridge, 1887).
14 J. Venn (ed.), Grace Book A: containing the records of the University of Cambridge for the years 1542-1589 (Cambridge, 1910); (ed.), The annals of Gonville and Caius College by John Caius [Cambridge Antiquarian Society Octavo Series XL] (Cambridge, 1904).
College magazine, *The Caian*.\textsuperscript{15} However, Venn was chiefly known for his biographical dictionaries - the *Biographical history* of Caius, and *Alumni Cantabrigienses*. Indeed, his other publications can be seen as by-products of these larger works. For example, in the preface to the Caius' admissions list, Venn intimated that he regarded it as the first stage in the development of what he termed a 'much ampler scheme' for a 'sort of College Biographical dictionary', which would serve as a reference work regarding the subsequent careers of all former students.\textsuperscript{16}

From the 1880s to 1897, Venn fitted in his research for the *Biographical history* around teaching and family commitments. Non-lecturing days in Cambridge were spent either in the College Treasury and Library, or in the University Library and Registry. Vacations were spent in visits to the Public Record Office, the British Museum and Lambeth Palace; as well as pilgrimages around diocesan registries, which he described with dry humour in letters to an antiquarian friend, Henry Hunter,

Lincoln is, as episcopal registries go, quite at the top. The secretary gives me the key & I sit up amongst the records in Bp Alnwick's tower with the doves cooing about me & the records mouldering on the floor.\textsuperscript{17}

The resulting two volumes of the *Biographical history*, complete with introduction and index amounted to over one thousand pages, containing a record of every student known to be admitted to Gonville Hall or Caius College between 1348 and the time of publication, together with a record of their degree(s), and a summary of the major events in their subsequent careers.\textsuperscript{18} The publication represented over a decade of research; a mastery of gained College and University sources before casting the net wider to navigate through a sea of biographical reference works, diocesan and public records and manuscript collections. The

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item J. Venn, *Caius college [University of Cambridge College Histories]* (London, 1901); *The Caian*, 1891-.
\item J. Venn & S.C. Venn (eds.), *Admissions to Gonville and Caius College in the University of Cambridge March 1559-60 to Jan 1878-9* (London and Cambridge, 1887), p. xxiv.
\item CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C42, J. Venn to HJ. Hunter, 15/6/1893.
\item J. Venn, *Biographical history of Gonville and Caius College 1349-1897*, Volume I 1349-1713 (Cambridge, 1897); Volume II 1713-1897 (Cambridge, 1898).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
mass of data so accumulated was then regimented into the neat, structured formula characteristic of Venn's work.

Venn's next major undertaking, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, was nominally the project of Venn's son, Archie. When, in 1907, the Council of the Senate agreed to a request from the Registry, John Willis Clark, to ask the University Press to undertake the publication of a volume of *Matriculations and degrees*, Archie Venn was named as the candidate to undertake the work; and later, it was he who reported to irregular meetings of a Press sub-syndicate on the progress being made. However, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Archie Venn got the job on the basis of his father's reputation. In 1906, Archie Venn was planning to get married, and his father and prospective father-in-law, William Ridgeway, were casting around to find suitable employment for him. Posts as an assistant to John Willis Clark and in the engineering department were both mooted. It is not impossible that the proposal from Clark to the Council of the Senate in 1907 resulted from contact with John Venn — someone whom Clark may have been disposed to regard favourably as Venn had recently furnished him with a list of Caius alumni as potential contacts for his Library appeal. There is also a suggestion that an anonymously donated honorarium, from which Archie's work on *Matriculations and degrees* was paid, may in fact have been a gift from John Venn himself.¹⁹ Although the agreement with Press was made with Archie, John Venn was active throughout the project. While his son was mastering the records of admission and graduation, John Venn was at work on University records of governance. Venn admitted in 1913 to having spent the bulk of his time over the past five years on the production of *Matriculation and degrees*, a contribution which was recognised in a vote of thanks from the Council of the Senate.²⁰ Notably, the *Alumni* took on the main characteristics of his *Biographical history* format. Venn also took the main burden of the work during Archie's war service and also after the 1⁰ World

---

¹⁹ University of Cambridge Archive, University Press Archive, PR.A.V.66/1, Venn, Matriculations & Degrees, 3/5/1907; PR.A.V.65 J. Venn to Waller, 20/10/1913.
²⁰ Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C43, M.R. James to J. Venn, 20/10/1913.
War, when Archie took work in London.\textsuperscript{21} The \textit{Alumni} was an immense undertaking. Part I alone contained nearly 80,000 names. Venn wrote that, at the start, no one had quite realised the magnitude of the task; he estimated that he alone had worked for over 12,000 hours on its production.\textsuperscript{22}

Venn's endeavours fit into a larger picture of increasing antiquarian activity in the nineteenth century. This has been linked variously to the need to deal with the impact of industrial change and urbanisation; and the increase in the number of gentlemen who had the leisure and money to pursue their interests; alongside an interest in the suggestion by evolutionists that family pedigrees might have a broader significance.\textsuperscript{23} Personal interest was fostered through local antiquarian societies and publications.\textsuperscript{24} In Cambridge, there also was a willingness among senior figures to support the publication of historical records. The University published lists of graduates, the \textit{Historical register}, and the Index to Tripos lists; and in addition to supporting the production of \textit{Alumni Cantabrigienses}, the University Press took over from the Antiquarian Society the responsibility for the publication of the final two volumes of the grace books. In 1893, J.E.B. Mayor, editor of the admissions list of St. John's, issued a challenge to other colleges to follow suit.\textsuperscript{25} Nor was the idea of the publication of a list of Cambridge alumni a new one. There was a suggestion that Joseph Foster, editor of \textit{Alumni Oxonienses}, might have performed some preliminary work towards a companion volume for Cambridge and in 1900, C.M. Neale issued the first volume of a list of the careers of honours men.\textsuperscript{26}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
    \item Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C05/02, J. Venn to H.T. Francis, 10/9/1918.
    \item University of Cambridge Archive, University Press Archive, PR A V 65 (5), J. Venn to Waller, 3/1/1921.
    \item J. Morrell & A. Thackray, \textit{op. cit.}, p.19.
    \item T.E. Walker, \textit{Admissions to Peterhouse or St. Peter's College in the University of Cambridge} (Cambridge, 1912), p.vii.
    \item C.M. Neale, \textit{An honours register of the University of Cambridge from the year 1246}, Part I (London, 1900).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Venn's research benefited from the achievements of the Records Movement of the early part of the 19th century, which had resulted in the publication of, and provision of access to, key series of records. His task was also made easier by what might be called meta-research. Venn made use of the work already done by others, from the collections of manuscript material brought together by generations of antiquarians, like Cole, Baker and Foster, to the indexes and editions being published by historically minded clubs and groups, like the Society of Antiquaries, and the emerging genre of professional directories, like Crockford's. Meta-research not only rested upon a network of documents but also a network of people. Sympathetic Cambridge colleagues, other antiquarians and fellow Caians were all enlisted to help. Production of *Alumni Cantabrigienses* relied upon a far-flung network of contributors, card-sorters, secretaries and proofreaders, from Mr J. Gardner Bartlett of Boston Massachusetts, who supplied the biographies of more than one hundred Cambridge students who emigrated to New England before 1650; to 'the Reverend boy Frank' a needy, newly married curate, who wrote in 1915 to say that 'he should be to make a trifle if any work could be found for him' and who was promptly sent off to the British Museum Reading Room with a box of cards to check.

Venn relied upon informal networks based around a common area of study; where men who knew each other personally or through correspondence, consulted each other, exchanged information and collaborated on common projects. For example, Venn was in regular contact with Frank Johnson of Great Yarmouth, who from his vantage point at the Norwich registry was able to provide information on wills. When the research was completed, Johnson was called into service again as a proofreader; as was Walter Rye, another antiquarian, whose own research made him an useful authority on readings of Norfolk names and placenames.

---

28 Caius Archive, J. Venn papers, C02, J. Venn to J.A. Venn, 21/10/1915, 29/1/1916.  
30 Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C88/1, W. Rye to J. Venn, 8/6/1896.
around a circuit of antiquarian friends for corrections and additions, before being sent to the
Press, as Venn reported:

I have now received back all 4 D vols from the home correspondents & two of them
from the Eastern circuit. Nothing has yet come from the Western circuit, i.e. the one
which ends with Beavan. I wonder if he has got them all four in his study, & is
chuckling over the omission on the part of his predecessors to spot blunders. 31

While some of these contacts were the product of long term acquaintance, others were
casual. Men contacting Caius in search of information for their own pedigrees, registers and
family histories would receive a helpful response from Venn, who in return would request
copies of their information about Caians; or if the correspondent was suitably geographically
placed, would ask for their assistance with a source local to them. 32 When the combined
forces of archives, reference shelves and antiquarian networks had been exhausted, Venn
had one more constituency to call upon for aid - Caians themselves. He asked them to work
through local records and biographical dictionaries to fill gaps in College information. 33 He
likened such service to that of the benefactors who had endowed the buildings and
fellowships of the College.

This networked approach to compilation was both the strength and the weakness of Venn's
biographical dictionaries. Meta-research enabled Venn to cover more ground than others who
attempted the same task. However, there was an issue of quality control. Venn was the first
to admit that his work was not perfect, and in the preface to Early collegiate life, he related
the College biographer's nightmare, where 9,000 of the men whose lives he had written,
appeared to him in a dream, and pursued him for having made mistakes in their biography. 34

One surviving letter was annotated by Venn, 'Killed inadvertently by me', although the corpse
in question was understanding,

31 Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C02/31, J. Venn to J.A. Venn, 14/6/1921.
32 For example, Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C61/1, H.A. Phillips to J. Venn, 29/9/1904.
33 J. Venn, 'A chapter in College history', 'An Elizabethan episode in English History', The Caian,
Volume I (1891), pp.36-7.
It seems to me if there is any apology it is due from me for having, though unwittingly, falsified any official history.\(^{35}\)

Of his contributors, Frank Johnson felt obliged to apologise to Venn for errors he had failed to spot in the *Biographical history*; and inaccuracies were also spotted in the work of the Norfolk antiquarian, Walter Rye.\(^{36}\) The *Biographical history*, and *Alumni Cantabrigienses* rested not only upon Venn’s attention to detail, his hard work, his omissions and mistakes; but also upon the strengths and weaknesses of the web of people, indexes, transcripts and pedigrees upon which he drew.

The importance of networks to the academic activities of nineteenth century gentlemen has been extensively described; a socially homogeneous, highly motivated and largely self taught intelligentsia, brought together by shared enthusiasms and activities through learned societies and publications, and through their collective work and more informal social ties, forming ‘invisible colleges’ or networks.\(^ {37}\) Venn can be seen as the very epitome of the type—a Cambridge graduate of Anglican background, for whom historical pursuits were an enthusiasm rather than a profession; the income from his fellowship, teaching and examining giving him the means to pursue his researches.\(^ {38}\) Venn came into contact with like-minded men through his involvement in societies. He joined the Cambridge Antiquarian Society in 1886 and his status within the general antiquarian community was cemented in 1892 when he was elected as a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.\(^ {39}\) Such societies provided a basis for the cultivation of more informal networks based around a common area of study; where men who knew each other personally or through correspondence, consulted each other, exchanged information and collaborated on common projects.\(^ {40}\) Thus, Venn could call upon the Registrary and architectural historian, John Willis Clark, with whom he served as co-editor.

\(^{35}\) Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C87/9, W.H.S. Neill to J. Venn, 9/5/1911.

\(^{36}\) Caius Archive, John Venn papers, F. Johnson to J. Venn, 11/8/1893.


\(^{40}\) Levine, *op. cit.*, pp.19-20, 36-7.
of the Antiquarian Society, to clarify points of architectural history. On the committee which commissioned Venn to edit one of the grace books, was a former pupil, Frederic Maitland, who was called upon to help Venn with points of mediaeval law.

It was an ‘invisible college' which rested upon a willingness to work co-operatively, where members formed reciprocal ties, citing and acknowledging each others work. Thus Venn's study was invaded on a regular basis by the Master of Jesus and Augustus Austen-Leigh of King's, who used Venn's card index of names to compile their own college lists. In turn, Venn was given access to Foster's manuscript lists for the Inns of Courts and the First Fruits and Tenths; and to the unpublished research of F.L. Clarke on Kings, Searle on Queen's and Stamp on Trinity Hall. This antiquarian network was of course reinforcing existing links which resulted from a shared academic background, teaching in the same university, serving on the same committees and boards, and dining at the same college table. These were Cambridge men talking and writing about their own colleges and University.

Shared activities and interests built upon a sense of membership – the importance of membership becoming most clearly apparent when an ‘outsider’ attempted to work in the same field. In the early 1890s a London based antiquary, William J. Harvey produced a proposal for an Alumni Cantabrigienses covering the period 1443 to 1893 to be issued in an individual volume for each College. The University took care to establish Harvey's credentials through his membership of what they termed learned bodies, such as the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and the Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, but was not content to proceed until it had received a number of assurances that Harvey's request did not undermine Venn's work. Venn gave his full backing to the proposal, and it was largely due to this that Harvey was granted the so-called exclusive access to University records - although the Council understood that its permission did not exclude other work by members of the

---

41 Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C07/21, S.C. Venn to J.A. Venn, 28/3/1916.
University.\textsuperscript{42} Such was not the understanding of Harvey, who wrote to the Registrary to threaten legal proceedings if Venn was allowed continued access to University records.\textsuperscript{43} The University closed ranks in the face of Harvey's demands. Caius refused Harvey entry to its records, and St. John's was also to withdraw its backing.\textsuperscript{44} Harvey, who was not a Cambridge man, exhibited anxiety about his status as an outsider. In a prospectus of 1893, he wrote

\begin{quote}
I did not quite foresee the many obstacles to be surmounted at the outset by an 'outsider', however competent and influentially supported.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

The Harvey project came to nothing, but demonstrated the importance of insider status. By contrast, Venn was a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, a member of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, and had a family name which would gain him access not only to academic but also to ecclesiastical records.

\textit{‘Domestic biography’}

It is possible to contextualise Venn's historical biographical researches not only in terms of the contemporary taste for antiquarian research and Cambridge interest in College and University history, but also a family tradition that Venn chose to uphold. The use of particular documentary forms within the Venn family to convey a religious message, and the pride that the Venn family took in their Evangelical and clerical heritage has already been noted. The focus here will be upon Venn's contribution to that tradition and how that contribution relates to the conclusions drawn by Tolley and Stockton about continuity of strands of Evangelical tradition.

Venn inherited a family archive of diaries, autobiographies, letters and papers, which stretched back to the eighteenth century. The archive consisted of family correspondence

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43} St. John's College Cambridge, D109/116, J. Venn to R.F. Scott, 30/12/1891.
\item \textsuperscript{44} St John's College Cambridge, SB2 27, Bursar's letter book, 2343.
\item \textsuperscript{45} St. John's College Cambridge, D101/124.3 W.J. Harvey's proposals for Alumni Cantabrigienses, [prospectus].
\end{itemize}
and a number of personal and spiritual narratives directed towards other members of the family. To this, Venn added some of his own letters, both family and academic related, together with his and Susanna's autobiographies, with the intention of passing them on to their son.\footnote{CIVIS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C42, J. Venn to H.J. Hunter, 14/8/1901.} The contents of the family archive were not only preserved, but were also considered to be of use to members of the family. At the turn of the century, documents such as John Venn's autobiography and an account of a foreign tour written by an aunt, were circulated among interested family members.\footnote{Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C25, A.V. Dicey to J. Venn, 16/12/1904.} This fits the pattern described by Tolley, highlighting the importance of domestic archives and their role in fostering a sense of corporate identity and pride in the Clapham families.\footnote{Tolley, op. cit., pp. 115-125.} Susanna Venn, however, departed from this pattern, emphasising the private nature of her narrative, addressing her autobiography 'To her two' meaning her son and husband.\footnote{CIVIS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F30, Notes from the years 1844 to 1867 from my birth to my marriage – S.C. Venn.}

Venn was also heir to a tradition of genealogical activity. Venn's grandfather, John Venn of Clapham, had been a keen antiquary who had gathered together family reminiscences in a volume called, 'Parentalia' and had researched a biography of his father, Henry Venn of Huddersfield. This research was completed and published by John Venn of Clapham's son, Henry, who had himself researched the family's clerical succession.\footnote{W. Knight, The missionary secretariat of Henry Venn, BD (London, 1880), with an introductory biographical chapter and a notice of West African commerce by J. Venn and H. Venn, p.30.} Venn's father and grandfather had both sought to keep diaries and private spiritual narratives as a means of self-examination; and to publish "lives" which would act as Christian exemplars to others.\footnote{CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F16 Diary, 1838-1846, 27/5/1838; Tolley, op. cit., pp.56-80.}

Following the death of his wife, Henry Venn had also produced a spiritual autobiography to be passed on to his children. To this tradition, Venn contributed part of the biographical memoir of his father, Dictionary of National Biography articles on four members of his family, a
Venn clearly identified with his family's (auto)biographical tradition. When he wrote the *Annals of a clerical family*, he made direct reference to this family practice; and acknowledged the work of his ancestors before him. He prefaced his own autobiography with a reference back to his father's and grandfather's habits of self-documentation and evinced a sense of trusteeship 'wishing to leave some record which shall give information to those who come after me'. It was a pattern Venn shared with others in his generation of Clapham descendants, who retained their family's forms of biographical expression, but not the beliefs which had been their original justification. Leslie Stephen noted the effect of religious training in his brother's tendency to self-analysis. Fitzjames Stephen was inspired by reading his father's recollections to write his own 'spiritual autobiography' as an account of his inner development. Venn also added a new public dimension to the pursuit of historical interests - as a familial activity. As well as working with his brother to produce the chapter for the memoir of his father, he produced his first volumes relating to the history of Caius with his wife, Susanna; and his greatest project, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, was undertaken with, and in the name of, his son, Archie.

Although Venn may have been upholding aspects of familial tradition, there were departures. Tolley has indicated that the existence of a personal connection between biographer and subject was assumed as the norm; intimacy being seen as a pre-requisite for producing a living portrait of the subject. This norm was evident when Venn's father died and it was assumed that like his father and grandfather before him, John Venn would interest himself in

---

52 *J. Venn, Annals of a clerical family: being some account of the family and descendants of William Venn, Vicar of Otterton Devon 1600-1621* (London, 1904), p.vii.
54 Tolley, op. cit., pp.5-7.
55 Ibid, pp.67-9, 76.
56 Tolley, op. cit., p.122.
family biography and contribute to the genre of 'lives of saints'. Within weeks of Henry Venn's death in 1873, John Venn's uncle was writing to Charles Clayton that he and his nephew would be writing a biography.57 So strong was this assumption of familial prerogative in biography that when the memoir appeared in 1880, with only a chapter by Venn, and the remainder by a Church Missionary Society colleague of his father's, it was felt necessary to explain this fact in the preface. This was achieved by drawing a distinction between intimacy with the subject in private or domestic life, and the public arena. The narrative about Henry Venn's domestic life and character was produced by his sons; and his CMS work was described by William Knight, who was felt to be qualified for the task by having worked with Henry Venn for thirteen years.58

Venn returned to family tradition in using the literary form of spiritual autobiography to testify about his own passage from one life to another and to assert the sincerity of that change.59 What distinguished John Venn's position from those that had gone before was his loss of the distinctively Evangelical perspective which had informed the writings of the three previous generations of Venns. Stockton termed this the 'loss of the double perspective', meaning that Venn was writing from a purely earthly perspective while his ancestors had sought to place earthly experience into the context of the divine. Unlike that of his father and grandfather, therefore, Venn's autobiography was a largely secular narrative, dealing more with the self and the intellect than the soul.60 Venn was conscious of the structure and requirements of the literary genres of self-examination and conversion narratives. This arose not only from a familiarity with the contents of his own family's private archive, but also contemporary published works such as Newman's Apologia. Whereas Newman was writing the story of a change of religious conviction - of the loss of one outlook and the acquisition of another - with

57 CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C37, J. Venn [of Hereford] to C. Clayton, 29/1/1873.
58 Knight, The missionary secretariat of Henry Venn, p.v-vi.
59 F.M. Turner 'The Victorian crisis of faith and the faith that was lost' in Helmstadter, R.J. & Lightman, B. (eds.), Victorian faith in crisis: essays on continuity and change in nineteenth century religious belief (Stanford, 1990), pp.15-16.
Venn the process was one way. His was the reverse of a conversion narrative; it was the
deconstruction of one set of beliefs without being able to replace them rather than the
acquisition of a religious position.

By the turn of the century, Venn was preparing his family papers for press. Working from the
family archive and the preparatory work already done in manuscript form by his grandfather,
Venn looked to produce a small private edition, anticipating that his known blood-connections
were numerous enough to provide a sufficient audience. The resulting volume, entitled
*Annals of a clerical family*, was published in 1904. The book was dedicated:

> In pious memory of devout and worthy ancestors these pages have been gratefully
> compiled. "A good life hath but a few days, but a good name endureth for ever" H.V.

John and Henry Venn felt it to be their inherited duty to perpetuate the reputation of their
family name. Thus they paid for the creation of a monument in a parish with which the family
had been associated, and looked to circulate copies of the family history:

> I agree with you about giving away plenty of the Venn annals. I always looked upon it
> in the same way as the monument at Otterton - a duty we owed to those who have
gone before us & whose name we share.

The book was presented as a continuation of the genealogical interests of his grandfather
and father. It was addressed to those

> ...connected by ties of consanguinity with the various persons mentioned, or of the
> few who, for biographical or other purposes, have occasion to consult family
> pedigrees...

It was also distributed to those who claimed some sort of connection with the Venns and their
interests. While in the United States in 1906, Henry Venn asked his brother to send him a

---

61 CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C42, J. Venn to H.J. Hunter, 19/8/1900.
62 J. Venn, *Annals of a clerical family: being some account of the family and descendants of William
Venn, Vicar of Otterton Devon 1600-1621* (London, 1904).
63 Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C11/04, H. Venn to J. Venn, 9/11/1906.
number of copies. He had visited a seminary once aided by a Church Missionary Society
grant, where the Venn name was well known for its CMS connection, and wished to do his
duty by his ancestors. Venn may have departed from the clerical and Evangelical traditions of
his forebears, but he retained a sense of duty to record their past, and to pass something on
to future generations.

John Venn’s works were also consistent in projecting certain of his family’s values across
generations. A recurring theme, for example, was the distinction achieved through service
and unassuming work rather than by virtue of wealth and high office;

the Venns have never possessed much wealth or held any of the higher offices in the
Church...They have been clergymen from father to son, distinguished chiefly by their
steady application to the duties of their office, and content with the influence that God
gives, as the reward of honest and unselfish service.66

In publishing the Annals of a clerical family, Venn was also picking up on a clerical tradition
that had been a continuing theme across generations. In 1834, Henry Venn of CMS wrote
that his grandfather’s ancestors ‘were clergymen of the Church of England, in an
uninterrupted line, from the period of the Reformation’.67 This fact was reiterated in the 1880
biography of Henry Venn of CMS where an appendix was attached placing Henry Venn’s life
into the context of a family which had been ‘clergymen from father to son’.68 As the title
suggests, eight out of the ten chapters of the Annals were constructed around the clerical
succession; with portions of the later narrative also being devoted to the Venns’ academic
experience. Part of this can be attributed to the shape of the historical record — of surviving
Venn children, it was easier to trace the careers of those who had made their mark on
University or Church records. Elsewhere, as in the case of Henry Venn of Yelling, the
decision was editorial. The careers of two other surviving brothers were glossed over,

66 Knight, The missionary secretariat of Henry Venn, BD, p.549.
67 H. Venn (ed.), The life and a selection from the letters of the late Rev. Henry Venn, M.A. (London,
68 Knight, The missionary secretariat of Henry Venn, BD, p.549.
allowing the clerical succession to be followed through to John Venn's grandfather.\textsuperscript{69}

Continuity in theological position was also alluded to with regard to the three generations of the Evangelical succession:

His religious convictions, which were already very decided, were in substance those which he retained through life, and which he held in common with his father and grandfather.\textsuperscript{70}

By drawing the narrative of the \textit{Annals of a clerical family} to a close in the preceding, and deceased, generation, Venn avoided the question of the continuation of the clerical and Evangelical succession in his own lifetime.\textsuperscript{71}

Venn's problem was that he had to mediate between his family's, and his own, pride in its own continuous achievement, and the change in his own position. His sensitivity about his status as an 'apostate priest' and his own silence on the matter within his own family have already been noted, and are perhaps also evident in another departure from the accepted norm of his family's documentary tradition, Venn's narratives lacked the appeal to the spiritual which had characterised his father and grandfather's writings.

It would be foreign to the purpose of these Family Notes to enter into the details of such a spiritual change.\textsuperscript{72}

Venn was conscious of moving on from the concentration upon his family's religion. He took a more measured, less emotive style on the subject of religion, and emphasised family connections and locality rather than the working of the spirit. The life of the individual saint, as characterised by the biography of Henry Venn, had given way to a focus upon the history of the Venns as a corporate body, placed in the context of their various communities. Venn distanced himself from dealing with the Evangelical viewpoint. In writing of the conversion

\textsuperscript{69} J. Venn, \textit{Annals of a clerical family}, p.62.

\textsuperscript{70} Knight, \textit{The missionary secretariat of Henry Venn, BD}, p.13.

\textsuperscript{71} Although following his own editorial pattern, it would have been possible to continue the line through his brother, the Reverend Henry Venn, and his nephew, the Reverend A.D. Venn.

\textsuperscript{72} J. Venn, \textit{Annals of a clerical family}, p.75.
experience of Henry Venn of Yelling, he pointed to the availability of the material elsewhere, implying his own distance from the doctrines involved.

The change is very fully described by my grandfather; and well and wisely so; for he was profoundly convinced of the all-importance of the principles thus acquired.\textsuperscript{73}

Venn was keen to emphasise the importance of religious activity and example rather than to dwell upon particular Evangelical doctrine. Thus, in describing the ties binding the Clapham sect, he wrote

No doubt they accepted in the main the body of doctrines known as Evangelical...But the real bond of union amongst them, that which continually brought them into mutual co-operation, was rather to be sought in their deeds of active charity than in their speculative opinions.\textsuperscript{74}

However, through his historical works, Venn was still perceived to be fulfilling a moral, if no longer a specifically spiritual, role within his family network, as Laura Forster wrote to Venn in 1907

I have also long thought that for the rising generation some kindling of a worship of ancestry was the best way of opening their minds to the unseen. I do not ever worship in its conventional form, but the giving of full worth to past lives, & the realisation of their survival in us – which means also a continuity in the life of the spirit. Of this past of religion you are a high priest\textsuperscript{75}

Similarly, by contributing articles on members of his family to the \textit{Dictionary of National Biography}, he was fulfilling the biographical ideal of another member of his family. Drawing upon his own Evangelical inheritance for producing lives of saints, Leslie Stephen had justified biography in terms of the ennobling effect it might have upon the reader; a means of diffusing the effect a man had upon his contemporaries.\textsuperscript{76} Bearing this in mind, Stephen told

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Ibid}, p.74.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Ibid}, p.145.
\textsuperscript{75} Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C29/1, L.M. Forster to J. Venn, 14/2/1907.
\textsuperscript{76} Tolley, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.120-5.
his co-editor, Sidney Lee, that the entries under the name of Venn could have been a little longer.\textsuperscript{77}

The religious community of Clapham had been lost, the continuity of clerical and Evangelical traditions had been broken but for John Venn's generation the respect for the past remained. However, by the end of their lives, Henry and John Venn's confidence in the continuing appreciation for works of family biography was eroded. John Venn privately expressed concerns that the history of the Clapham Sect may have been 'overdone'.\textsuperscript{78} Venn's brother, Henry, wrote down his own reminiscences, which he circulated among his immediate family members, but he expected a mixed reception,

\begin{quote}
I am wondering if the next generation & the one below it will much care for our memories.... I had thought of printing it for private distribution but I am doubtful if it is worth the expense. Louie does not think the grandchildren will appreciate it\textsuperscript{79}
\end{quote}

There was also a recognition that the wider religious landscape had also changed. Venn recognised that the popularity of his great-grandfather's \textit{Complete duty of man} would be incomprehensible to the modern reader; and that the religion of his uncle was that of a 'decided and consistent evangelical of the old type' with the 'old Protestant horror of Popery'.\textsuperscript{80}

\section*{Science and logic}

Venn's work as a historical biographer drawing upon antiquarian networks and family tradition is still not the whole picture. If Venn's \textit{Alumni Cantabrigienses} is compared with Foster's \textit{Alumni Oxonienses}, Venn's work is considerably more structured – to the extent that it is possible for present day archivists to use the existing structure of Venn's work as a basis for digitisation of \textit{Alumni Cantabrigienses}. Venn clearly signposted the potential for this carefully

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{78} Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C68, G.W.E. Russell to J. Venn, 25/7/1904.
\bibitem{79} Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C11/10, H. Venn to J. Venn, 6/6/1910.
\bibitem{80} J. Venn, \textit{Annals of a clerical family}, pp.200-1.
\end{thebibliography}
classified and tabulated data to be used as a basis for historical and social analysis. This points to the links between Venn's historical interests and his other work in statistics, philosophy and logic.

In the *Logic of chance* and in his anthropometrical work, Venn had directed himself to observing and building up statistical series from which to infer general conclusions. This approach can in turn be seen to have informed his work on the *Biographical history* and *Alumni Cantabrigienses*. In embarking upon work for the *Biographical history*, Venn recognised that the scope for a conventional history of Caius had largely been covered in existing works, and so he applied himself to a different purpose,

...the Biographical History, in the shape of a complete and descriptive Admission List, is a comparatively new field; and such an attempt to give a continuous presentment of the life, and social and intellectual outcome of our ancient house, seemed worth following out...such a work as is here proposed cannot but offer much interest to every student of the successive phases of the religious, intellectual, and social development of our country.\(^{81}\)

Venn laid out the uses to which he envisaged the *Biographical history* would be put, aside from the pursuit of genealogy; namely the use of statistical analysis to examine 'the comparative social status of the students, the districts from which they came, and the careers they subsequently pursued'.\(^{82}\)

Venn also expressed the view that, based upon statistical study, his work had a wider import. The College could be viewed as a historical microcosm of the nation as a whole, which demonstrated in miniature not only the role of the College and the development of education, but also the impact of locality and events.\(^{83}\) He commended his work to historians, who might

81 The Caian, Volume V (1895-6), p.150.
82 J. Venn, Biographical history, Volume I, p.xi.
benefit from the new sources of information that had been uncovered, but also from the particular historical perspective which could be provided from the data which had been amassed:

...the number of cases with which we are concerned, though dealing only with a single college, are still sufficiently large to claim the steadiness and generality which may be called statistical, and therefore to furnish a tolerably fair sample of what was going on throughout the country.\textsuperscript{84}

Using this method, for example, he examined the religious complexion of the College during the Reformation and Civil War, not only from the contemporary reputation of the College, but by prosopographical study of the known lives of all of the Fellowship.\textsuperscript{85}

As well as pride in the achievements of one's own institution, there was a consciousness of the contribution made in the broader arena of national history, thus Venn wrote,

> Besides the link of personal and local attachment, therefore, such a work as is here proposed cannot but offer much interest to every student of the successive phases of the religious, intellectual, and social development of our country.\textsuperscript{86}

This sense of contributing to a broader understanding of English history can be related to a broader theme identified by both Collini and Levine of an intellectual elite with a sense of trusteeship of national heritage, concerned to nurture and present narratives on the continuous development of English people. It was also important in a University that was trying to emphasise its utility to national life.\textsuperscript{87} The past was being viewed through the eyes of generations who had faced the scrutiny of critics and the University Commissioners, and were attuned to examining the University in terms of its contribution to national life and national progress.

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{ibid}, p.xxii.
\textsuperscript{85} J. Venn, \textit{Caius College}, p.72.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{The Caiian, Volume V} (1895-6), p.150.
\textsuperscript{87} S. Collini, \textit{Public moralists}, pp.315-17; Levine, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.20, 62.

- 216 -
Venn's methods also allowed for identification of historical change. Unlike Buckle who sought to derive historical laws from the steady persistence of statistical details, Venn was interested in the variations. He argued that if an alteration in the statistics was connected with some concurrent circumstances, then it might be possible to believe that a certain circumstance was linked to the production of the recorded phenomena. This reasoning was evident in Archie Venn's work on a graph of Oxford and Cambridge matriculations which attempted to show the link between admissions to the University and the impact of external events such as wars and religious disturbance.\(^8^8\)

In order to build up data on series of subjects, Venn drew upon the techniques learned from the statistical and anthropometrical work he had undertaken with Galton in the 1880s, recording data for each subject on individual cards, tabulating their lives into a series of events — place of birth, age on entry, social group of father and previous education. For the Biographical history, Venn drew his data from the Caius matriculation book, and thus had a series of subjects, i.e. Caians, who shared the common characteristic of having entered the same College. He then broke down their lives into a series of events — place of birth, age on entry, social group of father and previous education. Certain of these characteristics were shared, others were dissimilar, but the process of classification and tabulation allowed patterns to be observed in the make-up of the collegiate body. In the same way that his statistical analysis of anthropometrical data was intended to facilitate scientific hypothesis, this structure was intended to facilitate further historical analysis or scientific analysis, such as that undertaken by Galton, who used biographical dictionaries as part of his work to establish a link between heredity and social eminence.\(^8^9\)

\(^8^8\) J.A. Venn, Oxford and Cambridge matriculations 1544-1906 with a graphic chart illustrating the varying fortunes of the two Universities (Cambridge, 1908, reprinted from The Oxford and Cambridge Review).

Galton's influence was evident also in Venn's work on family history. Venn called upon Galton to act as a proofreader for his family history, and discussed with him the achievements of various members of his family.\(^{90}\) While Venn was researching his own family, Galton was surveying 66 families, including the Venns, whom he labelled as noteworthy. He sought to demonstrate from scientific observation of families where eminence was a recurring feature, that noteworthiness was the outcome of inheritance and environment; and that from statistical methods it was possible to derive statistical laws of heredity.\(^{91}\) One aspect of providing data for such work, Galton proposed, was for the authors of family pedigrees and biographies to record, where possible, details of physical and mental characteristics, with a view to providing accurate raw data for such analysis of hereditary laws to take place. The specific influence of this thinking upon Venn's writing was evident in the Annals of a clerical family, where he took pains to include details of the height, illnesses and physical characteristics of his great-grandfather, grandfather and uncle.\(^{92}\)

It would be false to present the intellectual influences upon Venn's work as purely logical and scientific. Scientific method was not enforced at the expense of the pen portrait of the individual. Venn was writing for a mixture of a domestic audience of Caianers or Cambridge men, as well as antiquarians who might have recourse to his work in the process of their individual research, and the social scientists and historians who might wish to base their analysis on his data. He was trying to satisfy a number of constituencies in different ways. Thus colourful tales of College characters were provided alongside abstracted biographical data. Underlying this variety, however, was the contribution of Venn's scientific approach; his historical research benefited from the cross-fertilisation which arose from his parallel use of classificatory methods developed in a different discipline. Thus Venn's example supports

---

\(^{90}\) Caius Archive, John Venn papers, F. Galton to J. Venn, 29/8/1905.

\(^{91}\) F. Galton & E. Schuster, Noteworthy families (Modern Science): an index to kinship in near degrees between persons whose achievements are honourable, and have been publicly recorded [Publications of the Eugenics Record Office, Volume 1] (London, 1906), pp.vii-xx; F. Galton, Hereditary genius, p.2.

\(^{92}\) J. Venn, Annals of a clerical family, pp.104, 175.
Burrow's identification of generally scientific approach to method being used in parallel across different disciplines. 93

There are comparisons to be drawn here with the methods and approach employed by Leslie Stephen in his compilation of the Dictionary of National Biography from 1882 onwards; an enterprise to which Venn contributed articles on members of his family, members of Caius and his intellectual forebear, Boole. Stephen too had embarked upon a major endeavour in compilation, being responsible for bringing together 29,120 lives in 63 volumes. 94 Both men were concerned to honour the achievements of those who had preceded them, and both understood the purpose that biography could serve in making a moral impression through the presentation of the life of a man (or woman) of 'strong and noble character'. 95 However, the differences between the intellectual approaches of the two men were symbolised in the differences between their works. Whereas Stephen took a more literary approach being concerned to assemble those facts that contributed to a 'speaking likeness', Venn's approach was defined by core factual events and the classificatory structure. 96 There was a difference too in the men they found interesting. Stephen looked to the lives of great men, and to those of the second rate whose lives were made accessible through the Dictionary, while asking,

Admitting as we all admit, the importance of keeping alive the leading names in history, what is the use of this long procession of the hopelessly insignificant?... Better oblivion than a permanent admission that you were thoroughly and hopelessly commonplace. 97

Venn the statistician, on the other hand, was interested in each and every graduate – in compiling as complete as a possible series from which to observe patterns. For him, the occurrence of eminent men was a statistically insignificant sample and could not be seen in themselves as

evidence of the success of the College or University system. His interest therefore also lay in the larger mass evident in professional directories, the 'respectable class', as well as the 'man of uncertain habits and probably of picturesque career'.

Stephen remained interested in the individual rather than in movements or groups, arguably staying close to the family's tradition of 'lives of saints'.

Venn did pick out what he termed the 'celebrities of the college', referencing his cousin's work by picking out the members of Caius who were of 'DNB-standard', but Venn was more clearly influenced by scientific and logical methodologies and 'the aggregate made up by the host of the unrecorded', and thus the need to document and classify the community as a whole.

Venn's use of a scientific approach to inform antiquarian activity again points to the ways in which the boundaries of the professional and the amateur could be blurred. Contemporaneous with the high tide of antiquarian activity in the University, history was emerging as an independent academic discipline. As Levine has pointed out, the growth of self-conscious professionalism in the academic sector at the end of the nineteenth century was redefining the intellectual boundaries between the academic and the dilettante, the professional and the amateur in the field of history.

Following the creation of the History Tripos in 1873, the first generation of men was emerging who had been trained in historical study; men like Maitland and Cunningham, who had been taught by Venn for the Moral Sciences Tripos. The terms historian and antiquarian were developing separate and distinct meanings – while the historian was the trained professional, the antiquarian's status was devalued as amateur. Historians like Seeley regarded the study of history as too important to be left to men of letters, instead requiring the attention of a University based elite professionally interested in its pursuit.

98 J. Venn, 'College Biographical History', The Caian, Volume VI (1895-6), pp.36-7.
101 Levine, op. cit., p.6.
Venn never held an appointment in history. He did not refer to himself as a historian, preferring instead the term biographer or annalist. When he used the term, it was always in the context of being a College historian. His work on the Biographical history and the Alumni Cantabrigienses placed him among the front rank of antiquarians – or as Tolley as termed it, a professional antiquarian. In one important sense, Tolley’s description of Venn is incorrect. Historical research and writing was not a means of earning a living for Venn. What might be termed gentlemanly or amateur values came into play here. Venn was part of a group that set itself apart from professional pedigree hunters, as his rival William Harvey was suspected to be, and from the almost invisible class of paid record-keepers, like the assistant registraries, library and bursary staff, whose transcriptions and indexes underpinned a number of Venn’s publications, and yet whose names were buried in the acknowledgements. A letter from a member of the University in 1909 made it clear how Venn was regarded within the University hierarchy

...an archaeologist or a man of letters who prefers to work as he pleases & when he pleases; & being independent of pecuniary difficulties, does not care to make 'arrangements' with other people, who wd demand as exact return of what he is about, & when he will finish.¹⁰⁴

This work was also for Venn a matter of ‘public service’ for one already supported by income from a fellowship, teaching and examining.¹⁰⁵ It was an expression of the strong personal and corporate sense of duty he felt as a College man. In this sense Venn’s sense of duty speaks to the values by which Rothblatt has argued an emerging academic profession sought to define itself in terms of culture, gentility and an ideal of service.¹⁰⁶

---

¹⁰⁵ University of Cambridge, University Press Archive, CUP PR A V 65, John Venn to Waller, 20/10/1913.
Separation of motivation and method is possible. In the introduction to his history of the University, Mullinger, himself a lecturer in history, sought to distinguish his own work from that of the antiquarian tradition. Commenting on the work of Cooper he wrote,

...his aim was entirely restricted on one object, - the accurate investigation and chronological arrangement of facts; he never sought to establish any general results by the aid of legitimate induction...\(^\text{107}\)

The majority of Venn's works can easily be bracketed under the heading of accurate investigation and chronological arrangement of facts. However, in the *Biographical history* and *Alumni Cantabrigienses* Venn was aware of presenting his work as a dataset to facilitate the opening of new avenues of research by social scientists and historians. He took the methods and techniques associated with his expertise as a professional academic in the field of logic and statistics, and applied them in his historical biographical researches. In the same way that his statistical analysis of anthropometrical data was intended to facilitate scientific hypothesis, biographical data was intended to facilitate further historical analysis. Venn's logical approach to the presentation of his historical researches, and his understanding of how this data could be utilised, bears comparison to J.B. Bury's inaugural lecture as Regius Professor of History in 1903. Bury declared history to be a science in its own right, in the sense of being based upon a scientific method of accumulating facts in an orderly and comprehensible fashion, from which generalisations could be made.\(^\text{108}\) In terms of rigour and methodology, if not in terms of professional identity, Venn perhaps had more in common with the research-based professionalism of historians of the 1890s than with his own contemporary, Seeley, for whom the study of history was driven more by the pedagogical imperative of preparing men for leadership.\(^\text{109}\) It is therefore perhaps worthwhile to appropriate for Venn the description used by Annan to describe Leslie Stephen - 'the

---


integrated intellectual’ — one who brought professional standards to literary, or in this case, antiquarian, studies.\footnote{Annan, Leslie Stephen: the godless Victorian, pp.339-43.}

Collegiate genealogy

The patterns identified as typical of domestic biography and the purpose they served in reinforcing a sense of familial identity are not just evident in Venn’s works on his family, but also in his writings on Caius and the University. Such an overlap is not surprising as Venn was often researching in both areas simultaneously and both were manifestations of Venn’s strong sense of duty. In tracing through successive generations of Caians in the Biographical history, Venn was engaged in a variant of domestic biography; what might be termed collegiate genealogy. Both areas involved parallel activities and shared characteristics. Venn made repeated reference to the record-keeping and annalist tradition of the College traceable to the sixteenth century. He was writing largely for a domestic audience who may not have shared ties of blood, but who had experience of a common past. Venn also assumed that a close connection between the author and his subject was preferable. Venn’s comment on the appointment of William Moore as College annalist in 1603 can be seen as providing the blueprint for what he thought a College historian should be.

No more competent person could have been appointed. He was eminent as University Librarian, was a careful and accurate historian, and devoted to the interests of the College of which he had been a resident member for more than 40 years...\footnote{J. Venn (ed.), The annals of Gonville and Caius College by John Caius [Cambridge Antiquarian Society Octavo Series XL] (Cambridge, 1904), p.ix}

The history of Caius was only in part the history of an institution; it was also, like the Annals of a clerical family, the history of a succession of people. Venn was personally involved — his history became part of the history of Caius and vice versa, as was illustrated when his own
memories were woven into the fabric of the College history in *Early collegiate life* and the *Biographical history*.\(^{112}\)

The relationship between the two main areas of Venn's historical writing cannot however be defined simply as the application of the values of domestic biography to that of collegiate genealogical activity. A process of cross-fertilisation seems more likely. Venn's use of vocabulary alone is suggestive of a two-way connection. Both his family history and his autobiography took the title of annals, a term with which Venn would have been familiar from the Caius environment, where the College annals were one of the record-keeping requirements established in the sixteenth century. In a letter of 1900, Venn spoke on a personal level of adding a name to his 'private Commemoration Service'.\(^{113}\) This calls upon another College ritual, the Commemoration of Benefactors, a service that Venn had helped to revise.

In a commemoration address, Venn referred to the duty of commemoration and stewardship that Caians owed to their benefactors,

> Each succeeding age has rightly regarded itself as a trustee; bound to guard carefully what it had received from those before, and to hand it on undiminished to those who came after.\(^{114}\)

The reference to the Commemoration of Benefactors echoes closely Venn's comments on the duty owed to his ancestors, and indicates that the sense of duty and trusteeship which informed Venn's attitude to family history also appears to have underpinned his work for the College. Just as the creation of physical and literary monuments to the Venns was part of the duty of bearers of that name, to pay due regard to past members and benefactors of the College was a duty for all Caians. This sense of college piety was also evident in other works

\(^{112}\) For example, the insertion of personal recollections in the footnotes of the history of College buildings in *Biographical history of Gonville and Caius College*, Volume III (Cambridge, 1901), p.179, and the chapter on 'College life and ways sixty years ago' in *Early collegiate life*, p.253.

\(^{113}\) CMS Archive, CMS/AC81 C42, J. Venn to H.J. Hunter, 21/3/1900.

\(^{114}\) J. Venn, 'Toast to the memory of the benefactors', *The Caiian*, Volume VIII (1898) p.105.
of the period, such as J.B. Mayor, who urged Johnians to 'earn their inheritance' and Philpott on St. Catharine's to whom

...it seemed due to the memory of the founders and benefactors of the College that their benefactions should be recorded in some more permanent and generally accessible from than the manuscripts preserved in the College Treasury.

This attitude was evident in Venn's criticism of the University Commission of the 1850s. He did not resent the substance of the reforms of the Commissioners, but rather that they suppressed the connection between the ancient endowments and their donors. In so doing they were betraying the memory of the donors and the duty of the present community to commemorate those benefactors and account for their actions with regard to their trust. In documenting College history, therefore, Venn was fulfilling what he perceived to be his duty as a member of that community.

Venn was contributing to a corporate ethos which had a sense of itself being at the centre of a continuum of past, present and future. Implied in this was a sense of continuity. Venn was at pains to point out the continuity in certain elements of College life; and also to play upon the feeling of being part of unbroken succession of Caians.

Nothing can remove that sense of continuity with the past...The links of attachment are double; prospective as well as retrospective. If there is a tie of gratitude to the past, there is also that of obligation to the future.

However, he also had to recognise the considerable break in continuity which the University reforms of the 1860s and the 1880s represented. On one hand, the College of the past was linked directly to the College of the present by a continuous succession of residents. However, Venn also had to acknowledge the difference in time, habits and thought which

117 J. Venn, Caius College, p.237.
118 J. Venn, 'Address delivered in the College chapel, after the Commemoration Service, Dec 21 1894', The Caian, Volume IV (1893-4), pp.31-2.
were a barrier to understanding. During the time of Venn's tenure as a fellow, the traditional collegiate model of shared residence, dining, prayer and study had been substantially affected by the reform of endowments, the freedom of fellows to marry, the admission of non-Anglicans and specialisation of new Tripos. As in his domestic biographies, Venn had to come to terms with notions of continuity and change. Through his historical work he tried to bridge that gap, trying to construct and hand on to successive generations of Caians 'that sense of historic unity and continuity which is so impressive an element in the life of an ancient college like ours'.

This historical consciousness formed one strand of the assertion of a re-modelled Caian identity, which found expression in the range of collegiate sporting, literary and social clubs that were springing up, the adoption of College colours and the writing of a College song in 1894. As well as the immediate community contained within the walls of the College, there was also an increasing sense of the 'greater Caius', defined by all those who had shared the experience of being at the College. In 1882, the Governing Body established an annual dinner for the purpose of entertaining past members of the College. In 1907, Caians formed their own alumni society, which supplemented the College magazine, The Caian, established in 1891. Similar developments in other colleges have been seen as key to raising 'communal consciousness' in Cambridge. The magazine was established by a number of students with the support of the Senior Tutor, E.S. Roberts, with the aim of reporting current College news, 'keep alive the memories of the past and point to its traces' and link resident and non-resident Caians. The Caian served as a channel of communication between Caians past and present, resident and non-resident by reporting upon College events, detailing the activities of College societies, and offering news of recent events in the lives of old members of the College.

---

120 'J. Venn, 'A chapter in College history', The Caian, Volume I (1891), pp.36-8.
121 Caius Archive, GOV/03/01/02, Gesta 1874-1885, 28/3/1882.
Thus, participation in College life could be experienced at second-hand, and the memory of one’s own period of residence reinforced over a longer period of time, by continued news of both the College and one’s peers. It was possible to participate within this greater Caian community on a number of levels – by reading or contributing to The Caian, by making a donation to an appeal, or by joining the Caius Club. The pattern echoes that uncovered by Morrell and Thackray, where a sense of community was fostered by membership of societies, publications, patronage and participation in shared activities.\textsuperscript{124} The Caian hero of the past could also be looked to provide young Caians with moral inspiration through the strength of example. \textit{The Caian} made no apology for printing a long obituary list,

For if the generation that now is would seek models to live after and would maintain the reputation of their College... then these stories of lives well-spent will afford them food for thought and rich material for imitation.\textsuperscript{125}

And the preacher of the commemoration sermon in 1897-8 spoke of the

...inspiring force which that great ‘Cloud of Witnesses’, the past worthies of our College, bring to bear on the practical life of its members.\textsuperscript{126}

Venn participated by becoming the College’s biographer and historian. The College spirit expressed on the sports field or through singing Carmen Caianum was reinforced by a sense of Caian pride and distinctiveness based upon past glories.\textsuperscript{127}

College history became a shared activity for the men of ‘greater Caius’ just as it had for the Venn family. Some, like J.S. Reid, were brought into service as proof-readers; others formed the audience of Venn’s speeches and lectures on College history at feasts and society meetings; some subscribed to the volumes Venn produced, and others responded to his

\textsuperscript{124} Morrell & Thackray, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.128-36.
\textsuperscript{125} Editorial, \textit{The Caian}, Volume IV (1893-4), p.79.
\textsuperscript{126} J. de Soyres, ‘Sermon for the Commemoration of Benefactors’, \textit{The Caian} Volume VII 1 (1898), F.127.
\textsuperscript{127} J. Venn & S.C. Venn (eds.), \textit{Admissions to Gonville and Caius College}, p.ix.
requests for information about themselves, or about Caians from their locality. 128 The College magazine was again an important element. In 1891, Venn produced two articles for the first issue of *The Caian*. 129 Over the next two decades, Venn became a major contributor to the magazine, offering articles on particular periods and characters in the College's history, reporting on the progress of his researches and advertising the results to his primary audience, Caians. *The Caian* gave Venn an outlet for raising awareness of details of College history he uncovered in the course of his research, such as the letters to Dr Caius he discovered at Lambeth Palace; or to give a wider audience through publication to historical lectures he gave in College. The publication of the *Biographical history* provided living Caians with their Caio-Gonvillian genealogy, linking them across the generations in defiance of the changes which differentiated their experience of College life. The *Biographical history* also resembled a professional directory, defining the boundaries of the Caian community. The existence of a published register was a public statement of the membership of the community; a concrete representation of a invisible link between all men who had passed through the gates of Gonville and Caius.

Conclusions

To view Venn solely as an antiquarian or a 'domestic biographer' or a Caian or a logician is not the whole picture. He was all of these; writing biographies was an expression of the sum of his life’s experiences and influences, from Evangelicalism, through Mill to Galton and antiquarian networks. 130 The communities and ideas with which he engaged overlapped to a certain extent, and were mutually reinforcing, as is evidenced by the replication of forms and values in his writing. Venn’s work also points to the cross-fertilisation that could take place between an academic identity on the one hand, and an antiquarian identity on another - a blurring of distinctions that were being drawn between professional and amateur.

128 J. Venn, 'A chapter in College history', pp.36-7.
130 Cockshutt, op. cit., p.177.
A historical sense underpinned all of Venn's work. This was not only evident in Venn's biographical and historical work, but also in the historical surveys that were incorporated into his logical works. Venn was conscious of the historical traditions in which he stood, as an academic and as a Venn. Fundamental to understanding Venn's work was the concept of membership and community. He was born into a strong family and Evangelical network, and was part of a noteworthy, intellectual elite. With respect to his family, his College and his University, Venn's historical narratives were based upon a basic discontinuity. Venn had broken with the Evangelical and clerical traditions by which he had defined his family; and the College and University of which he was a part had reformed many of its endowments, modes of study and life during Venn's own lifetime. Yet through his narratives, a sense of historical continuity was cultivated. Through his historical research and writings, Venn further nurtured that sense of identity and community - whether through the development of the antiquarian networks he used to produce his works or as an expression of the family and academic communities of which he was a part. He contributed a historical dimension to what it meant to be a Venn, a Caian or a Cambridge man.
8. Conclusion

Venn remained relatively healthy to the end of his life. Alongside his biographical and historical researches, he carefully conserved his energy in order to visit old friends, to attend services in local churches and in the College chapel, to appear at College meetings and occasionally to dine in Caius or with Cambridge friends.¹ He was also sufficiently active in old age to support the war effort during the First World War by entertaining officers housed in the College, taking wounded officers out for drives and cutting out bags for hot water bottles for the Red Cross stores.² Venn was however aware of a culture changing around him. He contrasted his own tastes in literature shaped by the Victorian age and dominated by Walter Scott with a lack of comprehension of the ethics of modern novels.³ Venn was also conscious of a narrowing of his horizons, spending fewer nights away from Cambridge and being less in touch with College gossip.⁴ He observed the passing of time among his friends and family: he read sermons and newspapers to an old Caian contemporary, Whiting, who could no longer see or hear well; and recorded the deaths of fellow liberals and University reformers like Richard Jebb and Henry Jackson.⁵ When Sidgwick died in 1903, Leslie Stephen wrote to Venn to ask for his assistance with an obituary for Mind having previously remarked that 'The old world to which we belonged is vanishing very rapidly'.⁶

Venn died in Cambridge in 1923. He was survived by his wife, his brother and Dicey but when Susanna Venn died in 1931, she was described as 'known only to a sadly depleted circle of old friends'.⁷ Venn's obituaries for The Caian and for the Royal Society were written not by a member of the Venn family but by Venn's Caian contemporary and fellow of Caius,

¹ Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C07, S.C. Venn to J.A. Venn, 2/12/1915, 6/12/1915, 2/5/1917, 7/1/1918.
³ Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C05/6a, J. Venn to H.T. Francis, 23/9/1915.
⁴ Ibid, 10/9/1918, 15/8/1915.
⁵ Ibid, 23/9/1915; Society of Genealogists Library, Venn Collection, J. Venn to L.M. Forster, 25/12/1905; University of Glasgow Albert Venn Dicey papers, Ms Gen 508(31) J. Venn to A.V. Dicey, 28/9/1921.
⁶ Ibid, John Venn papers C12, L. Stephen to J. Venn, 30/10/1903, 2/9/1902.
⁷ Obituary of S.C. Venn, The Times, 27 March 1931.
H. T. Francis; while Archie Venn went on to complete the publication of *Alumni Cantabrigienses* and became President of Queen's College Cambridge. The transition from an Evangelical dynasty to an academic elite was complete.

The aim of this thesis was to account for Venn's religious and academic identity within the context of the inherited and acquired communities of which he was a part. In so doing, the constituent elements of Venn's religious development have been traced and balanced against the parallel emergence of a multi-stranded academic identity. This in turn has been related to broader developments in Evangelicalism, College and University reform and professionalisation.

Venn's starting point in terms of his inherited religious identity was a bond not to Evangelicalism per se, but rather, attachment to and respect for the authority of those in his family, particularly his father, who exemplified Evangelical ideas and values in practice. In common with other Clapham families, the example of the living Evangelical saints was reinforced by a strong sense of family tradition. For the Venns, this family tradition was clerical as well as Evangelical in nature. Additionally, as a student, Venn became aware that to bear the Venn name was to be publicly associated with a particular party identity. Family connexion and public reputation brought with it a defined range of connection and association, such that Evangelicalism was the only religious position that appeared to be open to a young man with a respect for his family and a desire to be religious.

This strong combination of family tradition and expectation, the forceful example of his father and the lack of alternative influences can be seen to have given Venn a strong impetus in his early religious direction: to the point of being ordained and undertaking clerical duty. However, what is striking about Venn's religious identity as a young man was that it was formed by his acceptance of religious authority and expectation, rather than by a sense of
personal conversion or vocation. Venn's Evangelicalism was underpinned by attachment to the tradition and examples established in previous generations. It seems to have been undermined rather than reinforced by contemporary experience. He was repelled rather than inspired by the Evangelicalism of the students and clergymen he encountered as an undergraduate and curate.

As a curate, Venn started to explore a new range of reading and to establish a circle of acquaintance of his own choosing. He began to form his opinions by testing them out in thought and discussion rather than by adopting ideas from respect or a feeling of being constrained by awe. This gradually entailed a shift in the basis on which Venn based his theological engagement with Evangelicalism. He sought to base his religious ideas on reason rather than emotion. Such a change was not instantaneous, but rather a rebalancing of religious identity as the impact of new ideas rippled outwards across positions adopted on the basis of paternal authority. Nor was the transition straightforward and linear: changes in private thinking and discussion were not immediately reflected in public positions. It is what Venn termed the 'oscillations in belief' between inherited beliefs and acquired identity that makes Venn a particularly interesting study. His experience gives a sense of the prolonged and contradictory pressures that departure from a position related to family expectation, public reputation, professional status and social respectability could entail. It is here that dealing with religious in terms of multiple elements, helps to facilitate an understanding of Venn's development. Venn's development was not neat and linear but the result of overlapping and sometimes contradictory positions and influences.

Venn did not experience a short period of intense intellectual or emotional turmoil followed by emergence of a new certainty. This was less a crisis of faith or a crisis of vocation than a prolonged conflict of authority between Evangelicalism as represented by his father and the demands of a questioning academic approach. Nor did Venn follow Leslie Stephen into
agnosticism and antagonism to the Established Church. Having first defined himself as a 
Broad Churchman, Venn eventually found that he could no longer honestly subscribe as a 
clergyman to the 39 Articles and the Creed. Moving as he did to a doctrinally less distinct 
position, Venn appears to have eventually reached the point recognised by his father, 
Sidgwick and Leslie Stephen before him, that a clergyman had a certain obligation to 
subscribe to a certain doctrinal standard. However, to the end of his life, Venn retained a form 
of faith sufficient to allow his regular participation in Anglican services as a member of a 
congregation. He saw the social importance of religious participation, and lent his name to the 
endeavour to find proof of an afterlife. He also retained considerable affection for clerical life 
and for the family tradition with which it was associated.

The change that Venn underwent in relation to his religious identity was paralleled by the 
acquisition of an academic identity – or rather, identities, as once again, there were a number 
of strands apparent. Venn’s academic career was facilitated by institutional reform of the 
University to provide opportunities for academic work and preferment detached from religious 
expectations. Within this context, Venn became a committed University lecturer, who in turn 
played his part in University reform, in shaping the direction of a new discipline, and who 
participated in a closer academic relationship with his students. Inextricably linked with his 
teaching role, was Venn’s contribution to research and scholarship. Ideas developed in the 
lecture-room became enduring contributions to academic thought. This academic identity was 
formed and reinforced amid a network of like-minded men who taught alongside each other, 
served on the same committees, reviewed each others’ works, and who shared a common 
academic commitment to a questioning approach to knowledge.

Through this biographical study of Venn, a notable descendant of an Evangelical dynasty and 
an early example of academic professionalisation has been documented substantively for the 
first time. Venn’s experience has in turn been shown to be an entry point to exploring the
nature of selected religious and academic networks, as well as changes in a number of communities and institutions. Nowhere is this clearer than in the exploration of the development of collegiate identity. From the perspective of Venn's membership of Caius, it has been possible to observe changes in the way that religious identity was characterised, the way that the academic function of a college was defined, and the way that the historical identity of Caius was expressed.

It has not been the intention to argue that Venn was an influential religious figure. Nor can it be argued that the son of an elite Evangelical family, a fellow of the Royal Society and President of a Cambridge college was necessarily representative of a generation. However, the stock of biographical examples that can be drawn upon in writing about the post-Clapham development of Evangelicalism has been extended, enabling new comparisons to be drawn with contemporaries like Leslie Stephen. Venn's experience also usefully encapsulates and enlarges understanding of related historiographical strands, such as understanding of the nature of crises of faith and vocation.

Venn's significance is not, however, confined to the sphere of the history of religion. The academic reputation of his body of work both as a logician and a biographer has retained a general currency that arguably surpasses that of contemporaries like Sidgwick. As an academic figure, Venn was influential within Cambridge. Pupils like John Maynard Keynes cited the direct influence of his work; generations of schoolchildren make reference to Venn diagrams; and academic historians still have frequent recourse to *Alumni Cantabrigienses*. This study has set out the key influences and networks that shaped this work and sought to assess Venn's work within its intellectual context.

Venn's career also has a broader interest in offering a more rounded portrait of nineteenth century professionalisation in academia than that of someone like Leslie Stephen. What has
been illustrated through Venn's example is a complex definition of academic identity constituted of institutional participation, membership of networks, adoption of identified functions and values, as well as engagement with particular ideas. To add further nuance to this picture, Venn himself recognised that he was part of a transitional generation in academia. His work cut across disciplinary boundaries. He collaborated with intellectuals operating outside the academic boundaries of the University. He taught in a subject area which was neither fully secularised nor fully developed. In short, Venn was both clergymen and don.

Venn was the acknowledged biographical historian of not only of his family, but also of his College and University. This painstaking work has also stood the test of time, with *Alumni Cantabrigienses* remaining the key first point of general reference for biographical information on members of the University. To understand the genesis, strengths and weaknesses of Venn's biographical works, located in a matrix of antiquarian, family and scientific influences, is thus to achieve a clearer, critical understanding of key sources for the writing of College and University history.

In each strand of this work, Venn demonstrated a strong sense of the religious and academic traditions to which he belonged. The spiritual bonds with those who had gone before might have been broken, but Venn demonstrated a continuing respect and affection for his saintly forebears, building literary monuments through his published family histories. Venn acknowledged the debt he owed his academic forebears in the historical surveys he incorporated into his logical works; and, through structured biographies, he explored the genealogy of the academic communities to which he belonged. Venn's work as a College and family biographer has highlighted the importance of continuity as a concept in itself. Through his historical works, Venn tried to bridge the gaps represented by religious change and by University reform, and tried to construct historical continuities. In so doing, Venn has been
shown to have contributed in turn to the formation and presentation of Caian and Venn identity.

What is notable about Venn is the extent of his connections and contacts. These cut across a number of groups, from Evangelical to academic elites, from Anglican clergy to honest doubters and scientific naturalists. This thesis takes for its title the idea of intersecting sets not just as a reference to Venn's own branch of logic, but also an apt way of encapsulating the groups between which Venn moved. For example, Venn's professional identity as an academic rested on a number of parallel networks – institutional, intellectual and social. The men alongside whom he taught, examined and refined the University curriculum were in turn linked with the men with whom he exchanged articles, letters and reviews. Institutional and academic links were reinforced through social contact, either in societies like the Grote Club or the Society for Psychical Research, or across the dinner table as the Venns joined a network of prominent University families. The idea of intersecting sets - or an examination of the institutions, networks and ideas with which Venn engaged – has offered a viable framework through which to tease out some of the complexities of Venn's religious and academic identity.

It has proved important to look at Venn's career in the round - not simply as a fellow or a clergyman, a logician or an antiquarian, a teacher or a scholar - but seeing each of these as contributing parts of Venn's identity. In this way it has been possible, for instance, to demonstrate a clear overlap or intersection between the methodologies and ideas that Venn employed as a College annalist, family historian and a logician. It is my contention that it is in these intersecting, sometimes seemingly contradictory, circles of association and ideas that we find a meaningful way of examining Venn's religious and academic identities - effectively by creating the Venn diagram of an intellectual elite.
9. Bibliography

1. Venn's works

The following list includes each of the works by Venn to which direct reference is made in this thesis, as well as those works that have been utilised in the course of research. It does not purport to provide a full bibliography of Venn's religious works; most of which were unsigned articles for the Christian Observer, which can be identified only through references in letters between Venn and his father. Professor A.W.F. Edwards of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge has compiled the most complete list of Venn's known logical works. The list of Venn's historical works is thought to be close to complete.

i. Religious works

[anon.] 'Alleged Evangelical ritualistic irregularities', Christian Observer (March 1869).

On some characteristics of belief scientific and religious being the Hulsean lectures for 1869 (London and Cambridge, 1870).

[anon.] 'Bishop Butler reviewed in the light of modern thought', Christian Observer (September 1871).

ii. Logical, philosophical and statistical works

'Science of History', Fraser's Magazine (May 1862).

The logic of chance: an essay on the foundations and province of the theory of probability, with especial reference to its logical bearings and its application to moral and social science, and to statistics, 3rd edition (London, 1888).

'Boole's logical system', Mind: a quarterly review of psychology and philosophy, Volume I (1876).

'The difficulties of material logic', Mind: a quarterly review of psychology and philosophy, Volume IV (1879).


'On the forms of logical propositions', Mind: a quarterly review of psychology and philosophy, Volume V (1880).

'On the diagrammatic and mechanical representation of propositions and reasonings' The London, Edinburgh and Dublin philosophical magazine and journal of science, Volume X (5th series) (July 1880).

'On the various notations adopted for expressing the common propositions of logic', Proceedings of the Cambridge philosophical society, Volume IV (December 1880).


'Our control of space and time', Mind: a quarterly review of psychology and philosophy, Volume VI (1881).


Review of Studies in logic by members of Johns Hopkins University, Mind: a quarterly review of psychology and philosophy, Volume VIII (1883).

Review of Fallacies by A. Sidgwick, Mind: a quarterly review of psychology and philosophy, Volume IX (1884).

Review of Studies and exercises in formal logic by J.N. Keynes, Mind: a quarterly review of psychology and philosophy, Volume IX (1884).

'The law of error' [Letter to the Editor], *Nature: a weekly illustrated journal of science*, Volume XXXV (1 September 1887).


*The principles of empirical or inductive logic* (London, 1889).


iii. Historical and biographical works

Knight, W., *The missionary secretariat of Henry Venn, BD* (London, 1880), with an introductory biographical chapter and a notice of West African commerce by J. Venn and H. Venn.


- & Venn, S.C. (eds.), *Admissions to Gonville and Caius College in the University of Cambridge March 1559-60 to Jan 1878-9* (London and Cambridge, 1887).

- & Venn, S.C., *The Perse School: notes from 1619 to 1864 from the admission registers of Gonville and Caius College and other sources* (Printed for private circulation, 1890).


'Monks in College', 'Dr Gostlin', *The Caian*, Volume III (1893).

- 239 -
'College Registers', 'Some personal reminiscences of J.R. Seeley', 'Address delivered in the College chapel, after the Commemoration service', *The Caian*, Volume IV (1893-4).


'Toast to the memory of the benefactors', 'Notes on the portraits of Dr Caius', *The Caian*, Volume VIII (1897-8).


*Biographical history of Gonville and Caius College*, Volume III (Cambridge, 1901).

*Caius college* [University of Cambridge College Histories] (London, 1901).

(ed.), *The annals of Gonville and Caius College by John Caius* [Cambridge Antiquarian Society Octavo Series XL] (Cambridge, 1904).

*Annals of a clerical family; being some account of the family and descendants of William Venn, Vicar of Otterton Devon 1600-1621* (London, 1904).

'College life and ways fifty years ago' *The Caian*, Volume XIV (1904-5).
John Caius, Master of Gonville and Caius College in the University of Cambridge 1559-1573: a biographical sketch (Cambridge, 1910).

(ed.), Grace Book A: containing the records of the University of Cambridge for the years 1542-1589 (Cambridge, 1910).

Roberts, E.S. (ed.), The works of John Caius, MD: second founder of Gonville and Caius College and Master of the College, 1559-1573 (Cambridge, 1912), with a memoir of his life by John Venn.


*Early collegiate life* (Cambridge, 1913).

- & Venn, J.A., The book of matriculations and degrees: a catalogue of those who have been matriculated or been admitted to any degree in the University of Cambridge from 1544 to 1659 (Cambridge, 1913).

- & Venn, J.A., *Alumni Cantabrigienses: a biographical list of all known students, graduates and holders of office at the University of Cambridge, from the earliest times to 1900*, Part I, Volumes I & II (Cambridge, 1922).

- & Venn, J.A., *Alumni Cantabrigienses: a biographical list of all known students, graduates and holders of office at the University of Cambridge, from the earliest times to 1900*, Part I, Volume III (Cambridge, 1924).

- & Venn, J.A., *Alumni Cantabrigienses: a biographical list of all known students, graduates and holders of office at the University of Cambridge, from the earliest times to 1900*, Part I, Volume IV (Cambridge, 1927).

2. Archive material

Canterbury Cathedral Archive, parish records of Walmer.

University of Cambridge, University Press archive.

Girton College, Cambridge:
Emily Davies papers;
Aelfrida Tillyard papers.

Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge:
John Venn papers;
College Archive;
Charles Clayon papers;
Francis Guillemard papers;
Ernest Stewart Roberts papers.

St. John's College, Cambridge, college archive.

Trinity College, Cambridge:
Mayor family papers;
Henry Sidgwick papers.

Islington Public Library, YA160 ISL, Newspaper clippings, 1837.

The Royal Society, EC/1883/15, Certificates of election and candidature.

Society of Genealogists Library Special Collections, Venn collection.

University of Birmingham, Church Missionary Society Archive, Venn family papers,
CMS/ACC81.

University College London, Papers and Correspondence of Sir Francis Galton.

University of Glasgow, Library Special Collections, Albert Venn Dicey papers.

3. Periodicals

The Caian, 1891–.

Cambridge Chronicle, 30/6/1886, 27/10/1886, 22/1/1897.

Cambridge University Reporter.

Christian Observer.

The Guardian, 20/10/1895.

Journal of the Society for Psychical Research, June 1895.
4. Works first published pre-1923

Excerpta e Statutis Collegii de Gonville et Caius in Academia Cantabrigiensi et e Statutis Academiae (Cambridge, 1843).

Statutes of Gonville and Caius College (1860).

Statutes of Gonville and Caius College in the University of Cambridge (Cambridge, 1882).


Deane, A.C., 'The religion of the undergraduate', Nineteenth Century (Oct 1895).

Francis, H.T., 'In memoriam: John Venn' The Caiian, Volume XXXI (Cambridge, 1922-3).


Galton, F., 'Head growth in students at the University of Cambridge', Journal of the Anthropological Institute, Volume XVIII (1888).

'Head growth in students at the University of Cambridge', Nature: a weekly illustrated journal of science, Volume xxxviii (3 May 1888).

& E. Schuster, Noteworthy families (Modern Science): an index to kinship in near degrees between persons whose achievements are honourable, and
have been publicly recorded [Publications of the Eugenics Record Office, Volume 1] (London, 1906).

Memories of my life (London, 1908).


Grote, J., To members of Senate: Remarks on proposals made by the syndicate appointed last term in reference to the Moral Sciences Tripos (Cambridge, 1860) (Trinity College Library, LL.696.c.127(18)).

Knight, W., Memoir of Henry Venn BD Prebendary of St. Paul's and Honorary Secretary of the Church Missionary Society (London, 1882).


Mayor, J.B., Remarks on the proposal to grant the degree of BA to persons who have obtained honours in the Moral Sciences Tripos [Cambridge, 1860] (Trinity College Library, LL.696.c.117(28)).

Mayor, J.E.B., Admissions to the College of St. John the Evangelist in the University of Cambridge, Part I Jan 1629/30-July 1665 (Cambridge, 1882).


Neale, C.M., An honours register of the University of Cambridge from the year 1246, Part I (London, 1900).

Philpott, H., Documents relating to St. Catharine's College in the University of Cambridge (Cambridge, 1861).


  *Studies of a biographer* (London, 1899).

  *Some early impressions* (1924).

  *Selected writings in British intellectual history*, edited by N. Annan [Classics of British historical literature] (University of Chicago, 1979).


Venn, H., *The complete duty of man; or, a system of doctrinal and practical Christianity with prayers for families and individuals* [Select Christian authors with introductory essays No 53] with an introductory essay by Rev. John Brown (Glasgow, 1829).

Venn, H, *Academical studies subservient to the edification of the church; a sermon preached in the chapel of Queen’s College, Cambridge on Sunday the second of March 1828* (Cambridge, 1828).


Venn, H. & Venn, J., *The hope and joy of re-union in the heavenly state...sermons on the death of Eling Elliott* (London, 1843).

Venn, J.A., *Oxford and Cambridge matriculations 1544-1906 with a graphic chart illustrating the varying fortunes of the two Universities* (Cambridge, 1908, reprinted from *The Oxford and Cambridge review*).


'MCI.92 Visual', *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* (June 1895).


Walker, T.E., *Admissions to Peterhouse or St. Peter's College in the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1912).

5. **Works published post-1923**


*A history of Gonville and Caius College* (Bury St. Edmunds, 1985).


Ellis, I., Seven against Christ: a study of Essays and Reviews (Leiden, 1980).


Gardner, M., Logic machines and diagrams, 2nd edition (Chicago, 1982).


Haig, A., The Victorian clergy (Croom Helm, 1984).

'The Church, the universities and learning in later Victorian England', The Historical Journal, Volume 29 (1986).


& Peel, R.A. (eds.), *Herbert Spencer: the intellectual legacy* (Galton Institute, 2004).


Knight, F., *The nineteenth century Church and English society* (Cambridge, 1995).


- 252 -

*God and greater Britain: religion and national life in Britain and Ireland* (London, 1994).


6. **Unpublished Theses**


Stockton, W.K., ‘The Venn family since the mid-eighteenth century’ (Brandeis University PhD thesis, 1980).