

Poetry and Place

IN CAMBRIDGE

Exhibition Guide

Christ's College Old Library
18th November 2021 – 17th February 2022

TOWN
AND
GOWN

HENRY DUKE OF SOMERSET

KING HENRY THE VII.

This case contains some of the earliest poetry about Cambridge in our collection. It also brings together four poems that highlight the relationship between the University and the town of Cambridge. In the Reeve's Tale, two students venture to Trumpington, after their college is overcharged by a cheating miller. Milton's poems on the University Carrier reflect the Christ's student's interconnections with town matters, while Mary Davys used her position as owner of a coffee house to satirise the modern poets, and the student 'Lowngers'. Wordsworth describes his journey into Cambridge as a student, ending at the Hoop Inn, a town establishment famous for political celebrations.




A 1798 map showing the location of the Hoop Inn, described by Wordsworth in *The Prelude*



John Wisken and James Payn both wrote poems celebrating the Backs, an area to the east of Queen's Road where several colleges back on to the River Cam. Wisken was a servant or 'scullion' at Christ's College from 1814 until his retirement in 1869. His poem on the boats racing at the back of King's College has survived in our College Archives since his death in 1873. James Payn's poem on the Backs was published in his collected *Poems* of 1853 and describes the area in late spring, 'through the hidden outlet / Of some happy stream'.



'The Northwest Prospect of the University and Town of Cambridge', after S&N
Buck, 1743



THE MODERN STUDENT

This area showcases the innovations in poetry made by several twentieth-century students of the University. Xu Zhimho studied at Cambridge in 1921; his famous poem 'Taking Leave from Cambridge Again' combined the influences of European Romanticism with Chinese poetry. Sylvia Plath studied at Newnham College in the late 1950s as a Fulbright Scholar, and employed an autobiographical style of poetry to describe the areas of Newnham and Grantchester.

Veronica Forrest-Thomson studied for her PhD at Girton College during the 1960s and 70s, and developed an innovative poetic style influenced by language and philosophy.



Granite stone memorial at King's College, recording the first and last lines of Xu Zhimho's poem 'Taking Leave from Cambridge Again'

MEMORIES OF CAMBRIDGE

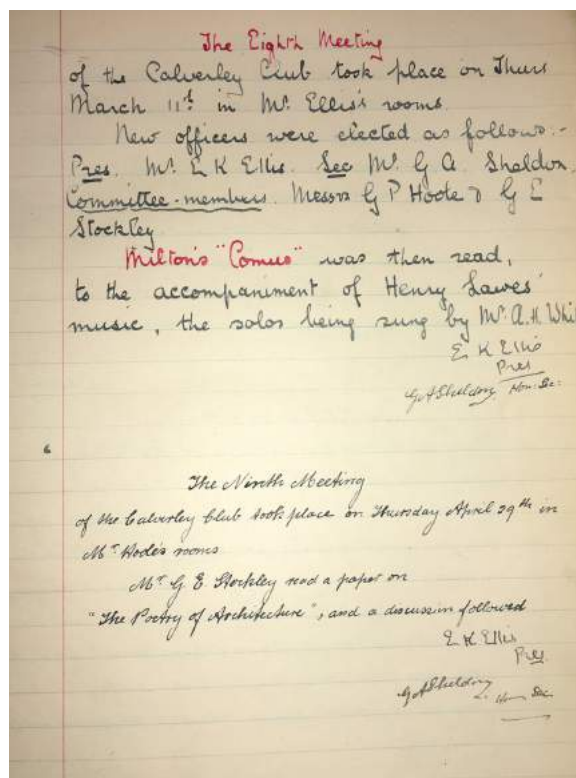
Charles Stuart Calverley and Rupert Brooke both wrote poems looking back on their time in Cambridge and the surrounding area. Calverley's *Hic Vir, Hic Est* (1862) describes the Christ's alumni's walk through the centre of town, from King's College to Market Hill, as he remembers his undergraduate days in the city. His Greek and Latin composition book is also in this case. Rupert Brooke's poem *The Old Vicarage, Grantchester* (1912) also memorialises Cambridge, particularly the area of Grantchester in which Brooke lived before the beginning of World War One. Both poems romanticise the city, but reflect the perspectives of two very different poets.



Rupert Brooke, in the portrait frontispiece to *1914 and Other Poems* (1915)

POETRY AT CHRIST'S COLLEGE

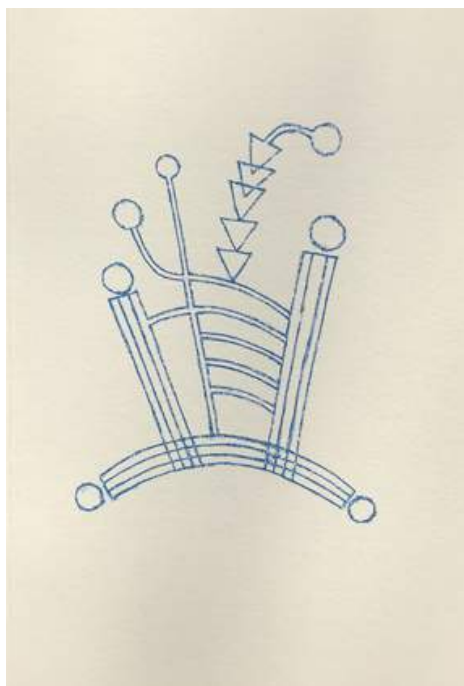
In the Foreword to *Voices in Isolation* (featured in this case), the academic, poet and literary scholar Professor Sir Michael Edwards writes that poetry is 'something that the dead did when alive, and that the living do now'. This case samples the history of poetry at Christ's College, from the Jabberwocks, a debating and literary society of the 1880s, to the Calverley Club, named after Charles Stuart Calverley in 1919. Two hundred years after this club's minute-book was written, the Christ's College Poetry Society published *Voices in Isolation*, a chronicle of the very current consequences of Covid-19.



English Literature Society Minutes 1919-1924
Christ's College Archives

POETRY NOW

This case reflects the rich culture of verse in Cambridge. It includes a recent selection of publications by independent poetry presses associated with the city, such as Barque Press and Critical Documents, as well as poetry by writers linked with Cambridge, including Mike Wallace-Hadrill, Imogen Cassels, and Maria Sledmere. The variety of these works demonstrates the breadth of the city's poetic culture and influences. Some, including J.H. Prynne and Raymond Crump, published poems in the 1960s magazine *The English Intelligencer*, and have come to be associated with the so-called 'Cambridge School' of poetry. These works are printed in limited quantities, and are often experimental in form or style.



Chords, by Raymond Crump

Christ's College Old Library

The story of Christ's College began in the 1430s when William Byngham (1390–1451) established 'God's House'. Moved to its present site in 1448 to make room for King's College, it was re-founded as Christ's College in 1505 by Lady Margaret Beaufort (1443–1509), the mother of the Tudor dynasty. Lady Margaret arranged for 38 books to be given to the Library. Others have followed her example over five centuries and now the Old Library is home to some 50,000 rare printed books and manuscripts.

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