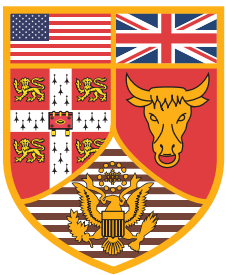


Established for two years to accommodate American servicemen, Bull College is probably the University's least-known institution. But in Michaelmas Term, 1945, it was the place to be.

BULL COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE



Words **William Ham Bevan**
Illustrations **Lee Woodgate**

BULL COLLEGE is one of Cambridge's shortest-lived foundations – and among its most elusive. It occupies a footnote, at best, in chronicles of the University; type the name into an internet search engine, and you are likely to be directed to Sitting Bull College, an educational institute on a Sioux reservation in North Dakota.

Yet at the time, the story of GIs starting up their own college and cutting a swathe through varsity life seemed to capture the let's-do-the-show-right-here spirit of a Broadway musical. News crews from both sides of the Atlantic came knocking, drawn in particular by the spectacle of a Bull boat in the Lent races of 1946, taking on the University and its traditions alike.

Established in October 1945, by American servicemen enrolled on University courses, Bull College was named for the place where many of them were billeted: the Bull Hotel on Trumpington Street. Among the few to recall Bull College's fleeting existence is Patricia Cook, who in the autumn of 1945 was a second-year undergraduate at Newnham College. Invitations to tea at the Bull Hotel were highly prized, as the Americans' regular parcels from home meant they were able to offer treats seldom seen in Britain. Cook remembers being ushered into the dining room to a table groaning with cream cakes, eclairs and doughnuts.

"It was such an experience after six years of austerity," she says. "In a time of extreme rationing, and not being able to get anything at all – to see all this luscious food laid out and available to be eaten, as much as you wanted." Like many others at Cambridge, she did not know the exact status of Bull College. "It was a curiosity," she says. "We didn't know how seriously the Americans were taking it, or how official they were."

In fact, the GIs were at Cambridge under the auspices of a US army programme that had its origins in the previous World War. After the 1918 Armistice, the forces had offered both officers and enlisted men the chance to attend short courses at European universities, to improve their morale and prepare them for reintegration into civilian life. This had been judged such a success that it was decided to repeat it as soon as the European war was won and plans to this effect were laid as early as September 1944.

This time around, a Training Within Civilian Agencies (TWCA) programme was established to place US personnel in educational establishments across the UK. Major George Dewey Blank was duly placed in charge of the programme's Cambridge Area on 4 October 1945. Within a fortnight, 149 officers and men arrived to follow a course of study closely resembling the first term of a Cambridge honours degree. There was room for just 60 of the GIs throughout the Colleges, so the remaining 89, as per orders, were "rationed and quartered at the Bull Hotel, under the supervision of the American Red Cross".

The transformation of the hotel from a military hostel into an academic house came about through the influence of John T Sheppard, the eccentric Provost of King's. In his welcoming address to all the Americans, he said: "As the word 'hotel' sounds so very undignified, I just call you simply 'Bull College'. And you, Major Blank, I refer to as the Big Bull."

However playful Dr Sheppard had meant to be, he was taken at his word. The Cambridge Bull, the GIs' self-produced magazine, picks up the story: "His suggestion was enthusiastically adopted, and he has since been known as the foster-father of Bull College. At the first meeting of the students, Major George D Blank, commanding officer of the Cambridge Area, was unanimously elected Master of the College."

From this time, Bull College seems to have enjoyed at least semi-official status. In the American students' academic records, now held in the University Archives, Bull College is stated as the college affiliation on some individuals' documentation just as Magdalene, Downing or Trinity appears on others'. Furthermore, as The Cambridge Bull makes clear, even those TWCA students at the regular colleges were considered to be a part of Bull, in a sort of dual nationality – particularly with regard to its sporting endeavours.

The servicemen faced a culture very different from that of their units. The student body included all ranks from private to colonel, billeted together with no expectation of deference – and, emphatically, no saluting. Remarkably, a small number of black servicemen were also present at Bull College, at a time when the US armed forces remained wholly segregated along racial lines.

Within weeks, the new foundation had not only a principal, but its own colours, tie and a coat-of-arms created by 'official artist' Al Kohler. His design is a succinct statement of Bull College's origins: the shield's five divisions juxtapose the Stars and Stripes, the Union Flag, the University arms, a bull's head and the American eagle. This became a widely recognised symbol of the college, reproduced on correspondence and dinner invitations, decals and blazer patches. It was also carved into a two-foot oak escutcheon – lately rediscovered in a corner of St Catharine's College library – that was considered the college totem.

The Americans soon began to make an impact on University life, their presence noticeable at lectures, at the Cambridge Union, in collegiate sports, and in the city's tea-rooms. Their easy adoption of British customs was documented by Time magazine: "They got to saying 'rather' and 'actually', and succumbed to the English habit of afternoon tea – though without altering their GI dinner time, so that 5.30 dinner followed 4 o'clock tea with indecent and indigestible haste."

Among those in the first intake was Gerry Frank, billeted at Trinity Hall. Later chief of staff to a US senator and author of a million-selling guidebook to New York City, he applied for Cambridge while with the 89th Infantry Division in Europe. "When the war was over, the army made an announcement that they would choose some folk to go to Oxford, Cambridge, the Sorbonne and others," he says. "I made application to go to Cambridge, and I was the one chosen from my outfit to go. It was the best decision of my life."

FOOTBALL, RUGBY AND THE FIRST 'LADY COX'

More than anything, Bull College's brief fame rested on its sporting exploits. From the start, many GIs appeared as guest players in the football and rugby teams of other colleges, and in second and third eights on the river. But before long, Bull College gained the confidence to challenge the other houses of the University in its own right.

The biggest event of Bull's first term – and by some accounts, the best-attended fixture since the start of the war – was a unique football game played against Pembroke College at Grange Road. The first half was played under rugby union rules; the second under those of American football.

The game was preceded by a procession through the streets of Cambridge, featuring 'Josephine the Bull' on a flatbed truck. Unable to requisition a real bull, the Americans borrowed an artificial cow from the Cambridge Cattle Breeders' Society, adding horns and dressing it in a robe adorned with the Bull coat-of-arms; records disclose that this "formerly draped the salad table

at the American Red Cross". Preceding the truck was Staff Sergeant Casper Seline, wearing a gown and policeman's helmet, and brandishing a plunger.

David Braybrooke remembers the game well. "There was a merry crowd with the band of the Suffolk Regiment in attendance," he says. "The Lady Mayoress kicked the game off. It was all in the spirit that the war was over, and it was time for a bit of fun. Writers nowadays recall animosity between British troops and Americans, but I saw no sign of this – quite the reverse."

All-American flourishes included play-by-play commentary over a loudspeaker, and doughnuts and coffee at half-time. Predictably, the Pembroke Generators beat the Bull College Toreadors 18-0 in the first half, to themselves be trounced 24-0 in the second.

The apex of Bull College's fame came with its entry in the Lent Bumps races of 1946. With none of the men light enough to serve as coxswain, Connie Grayson of the Women's Army Corps was put forward. The University Boat Club

Not all of those who got on to the programme did so via orthodox methods. David Braybrooke is now an 85-year-old professor emeritus at the University of Texas at Austin. In autumn 1945, he was – in his own words – "the lowest-ranked cryptographic technician in the European Theatre" and stationed in Belgium. He says: "I applied and was turned down. I was very unpopular with my signal service battalion headquarters as an unusually noisy wise guy. Extreme measures were called for."

With a friend, Braybrooke stole into the message centre at Brussels, and shoe-horned an extra paragraph into the daily orders from the commanding general – decreeing that the two of them should go to Cambridge. The ruse worked. "And so I went to Cambridge, as in the earlier World War, the Great Gatsby went to Oxford," he says.

At the end of 1945, the Bull Hotel (under requisition from its owner, St Catharine's College) was reclaimed by the British military for Russian language courses. Bull College was forced out to a complex of hutments formerly occupied by the War Ministry, and the new students, in the words of the Cambridge Daily News, had to study

indicated it had no objections to this taboo-breaking first, and news of the 'lady cox' soon spread. As the team trained, they were visited by crews from Reuters, Associated Press, Universal Press, Paramount, Pathé and Time, as well as sundry representatives of Fleet Street.

On the day of the races, the Daily Sketch published a breathy profile: "An Oklahoma farmer's daughter makes rowing history on the Cam at 2.30 this afternoon. She is 23-year-old Connie Grayson, a petite, vivacious brown-eyed brunette, and she is the first girl to cox a crew in the Cambridge Lent bump races."

The first day of racing lived up to the hype. Placed 59th out of 60 crews, Bull College was set the goal of catching St Catharine's Fourth VIII; a boat which, unfortunately, became ensnarled

in a pile-up ahead, and skewed across the river. "The coaches began firing pistol shots and Connie began to scream," Time magazine reported. "Her GIs, who took her shrieks for exhortations, ploughed ahead – and neatly split St Catharine's shell in two."

The races continued without further incident, and the Bull boat held its position for the next three days, finishing second-from-last. The next time any female would take part in the races would be in 1962, when the University Women's Boat Club was grudgingly permitted to enter a crew.

CONNIE GRAYSON



RUGBY — ATOMIC FOOTBALL
ONE — HALF GAME EACH

BULL COLLEGE
(TOREADORS) Founded 1945

v.

PEMBROKE COLLEGE
(GENERATORS) Founded 1347

Varsity Grounds, Grange Rd.
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6th, 1945
KICK-OFF 3.15 p.m.

ADMISSION FREE
EVERYONE INVITED

Coffees and Doughnuts by American Red Cross
Music by Royal Suffolk Regimental Band and American Air Force Band

under "barrack-room conditions". The change did not seem to blunt the enthusiasm of Bull College's second intake, who came up in the bitterly cold January of 1946.

Notably, this group included two women: Connie Grayson, who gained fame as the college sweetheart and boat-club cox, and army nurse Margery Short. And again, some candidates made it to Cambridge via unconventional means, though few took as convoluted a route as Richard Barancik, a 19-year-old private first class and would-be architect from Chicago. Under the TWCA scheme, he had been seconded to a London architect who secured him the chance to study at Cambridge's small School of Architecture. But despite his holding a letter of introduction from the Dean of Architecture to General Mark Clark, then Allied commander in Austria, Barancik's captain refused to release him.

He says: "I thought, to hell with you, buster. So I went AWOL to Vienna, and hid out at the Military Police barracks. The next day I went to the Intelligence and Education officer, who was from Chicago. And he asked, 'Is your father a doctor?' I said, yes he is. And he said,

'He saved my father's life.' I gave him the letters I had for General Clark. And he said, 'Mark is usually hung over in the morning. I'll cut orders for you – pray to God he signs it.' And he did."

Barancik's first impressions of Cambridge, even in a bitter winter and under austere conditions, were magical. "When I first arrived, I was overwhelmed. It was very heady – I had my gown, and my bicycle. We studied like hell, and enjoyed tea and crumpets in the afternoon. I thought it was the most beautiful place."

After army discipline, it might be imagined that those at Bull would be reluctant to submit to the authority of the Proctors, with their curfews and rules about forbidden pubs. Yet the Americans seemed keen to pay lip service, at least, to the same regulations that governed normal undergraduates. Indeed, Time magazine suggests that members began to stitch the college badge on their uniform sleeves as a favour to the Proctors – letting them distinguish those at Bull College from other uniformed US personnel who were on leave in the city, without risking the embarrassment of having to confront them.

Indeed, it was the academic customs of Cambridge that proved

a greater surprise: in particular, that lectures were optional, and students left to manage their own workload. In her self-published memoirs, *My Hopscotch Life*, Margery Short marvelled that “the idea prevailed that all students, as in the old days, went to college to learn, and that all instructors were there to teach, and that both would fully avail themselves of all opportunities to do just that.”

Academic standards could be a shock, too. Gerry Frank says: “I found that the Brits were far ahead of us. I’d had a year and two-thirds at Stanford and a year at Loyola, but I was not nearly as up-to-speed as my contemporaries in Britain. The professors were so outstanding – people like Bertrand Russell.”

Earl Russell – lately restored to his fellowship of Trinity College in 1944, having been dismissed for his pacifist activities in 1916 – is a figure mentioned by almost all veterans of the TWCA scheme. Like Dr Sheppard, who hosted weekly soirées for the visitors, he took a lively personal interest in Bull College. Richard Barancik says: “He adored the American students, and would have us to tea on Friday afternoons. He was absolutely brilliant.”

But if Russell was universally liked and respected, not every student received his opinions in hushed awe. Bill Gandall, one of only a handful to stay at Bull College for both terms, gleefully recounted in his memoirs: “I had a fierce debate with him, in which he lost his temper and shouted ‘Balderdash!’ The students were amused.”

Even among the mavericks of Bull, Staff Sergeant William P Gandall stands out. Older than many of his compatriots, he had witnessed atrocities in Nicaragua as a US Marine in 1926, and had fought for the republic in the Spanish Civil War. At Cambridge, he threw himself into the Union Society with gusto, becoming a figurehead for the GIs. Gandall died in 1991, but the drafts of his unpublished memoirs, now in the hands of his daughter Kate, include an affectionate sketch of his exploits.

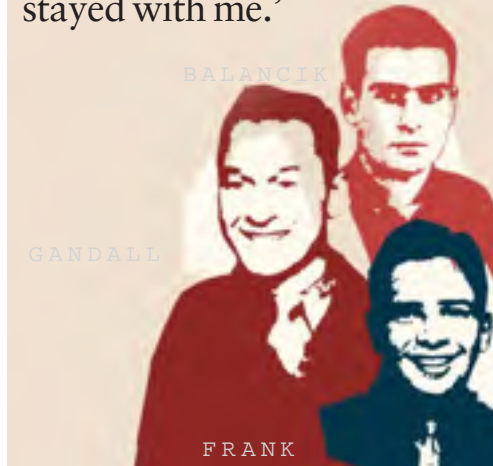
He wrote: “One memorable debate was against Lord Winterton, an Irish peer and Father of the [British] House of Commons. The English audience was amused at my manhandling of the King’s English. I am afraid I used quite a few Americanisms, and not unlikely, a few words picked up on the streets.”

What happened next secured Gandall’s reputation as a University character. “I wished to show that even crude Americans were capable of courtesy, so I took hold of Lord Winterton’s elbow and walked him through the Ayes door – and hence lost the debate by one vote. My own. A university magazine commented upon the event and wrote a humorous article about me. I was quite a figure as I rode my bicycle through town and country with my cape over my uniform.”

The end of Bull College came at the beginning of March 1946, with the announcement that the army educational programmes were to be cancelled. Few GIs were keen to leave, and yet fewer wished to see Bull College disappear on their departure. Fanciful plans emerged to place it on a permanent footing, and the press soon picked up on the story. Under the headline “Keep us at Bull, say Yanks”, the *Daily Sketch* reported on the American “truants in reverse, the boys who would sooner stay at school than go home ... the latest problem facing US army authorities.” Characteristically, it was Bill Gandall who was quoted for the rank and file. “Frankly, we don’t want to go,” he said. “We like the atmosphere of real study and tradition.”

Major Blank outlined plans for a greater Bull College. As well as a base in Cambridge, it would include “a college in the USA for British students, and would enable American and British students to make the best of both worlds”. He told the newspapers that he would seek backing from charitable funds such as the Carnegie Trust; but in the

‘When we came back, they just weren’t there. But the memory of American hospitality, at a time when it could never have been more appreciated, has stayed with me.’



apparent absence of further records, it is difficult to gauge how far these plans progressed, or whether there was ever any realistic chance of their success.

About 50 Bull students applied to stay on at Cambridge in an individual capacity, but government policy militated against their success. From the autumn of 1946, the colleges were to be obliged to reserve nine out of every 10 places for returning British servicemen. And of those who did secure entry to full degree courses, several found further hurdles in their way.

Having been offered a place to stay on at Downing, David Braybrooke at last fell foul of army bureaucracy. He requested dispensation for the few months he had still to serve in the military, so that he could continue with the next term, but was refused. Richard Barancik also won a place, but was unable to take it up. “My father in Chicago had a good friend who was a general,” he says. “He assured him that there was going to be a war with Russia, and told him to get me home.”

Gerry Frank was one of the few from the TWCA programme to make it back as a full-time student – in preference to returning to his

alma mater. He says: “I didn’t want to go back to Stanford – there were too many spoilt rich kids. I became the only American at Trinity Hall.”

On Thursday 14 March, Major Blank hosted a farewell dinner at which Dr Sheppard, the other heads of houses, and Lady Bragg, Mayor of Cambridge, were treated to a feast of southern fried chicken. So ended the formal term; but there was one last deferment of the inevitable. Margery Short wrote: “The CO called us together and announced that he could extend our orders by one week if we’d like to witness the yearly boat race between Cambridge and Oxford. Our Bull College boat team and Connie the coxswain were especially thrilled ... We cheered for ‘our’ team like true Cantabrigians and wept with them when they lost the match to arch-rival Oxford.”

Patricia Cook, returning to Newnham after the Easter vacation, found the University a less colourful place. “When we came back, they just weren’t there,” she says. “But the memory of the American hospitality, made at a time when it could never have been more appreciated, has stayed with me.”

As for the Bull Hotel itself, the requisition order lapsed in September 1946. Rather than renew the hotel’s lease on the buildings, St Catharine’s took possession of them to house the influx of undergraduates demobbed from UK forces. Recognising St Catharine’s as Bull College’s geographical heir, John Sheppard offered to its archives two mementos that the departing GIs had left in his care: the carved oak shield and a framed resolution signed by every member of the class of 1945. Its text concludes with the wish that “the appropriate agency of the United Nations Organisation be urged, through this resolution, to bring about in the future a great increase in the number of students to be exchanged among the several United Nations.”

These two items, along with a few copies of *The Cambridge Bull* and a clutch of decals and patches, seem to be all the physical artefacts of the College that remain in the University; but a comment upon their acquisition by St Catharine’s, in its *College Society Magazine* of 1955, is worth quoting in full: “Let us not forget these exiled students from a far and friendly land who came to fight a common enemy – and having fought, laid aside their weapons and founded for a brief season an academic home away from home.”

William Ham Bevan is working on a book on the GI colleges in Europe, and would be delighted to hear from anyone with recollections of Bull College: mail@williamhambevan.com