

‘Let us offer higher education as our war memorial’: the philanthropic origins of the University of Leicester

A Century of Stories Project Academic Research Commission

**Simon Dixon, Commissioned Researcher and Author
Katie Bridger, Research Assistant
University of Leicester¹**

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Abstract: This paper presents the findings of research carried out during 2017 and 2018 under commission from Leicestershire County Council’s Heritage Lottery Funded project, A Century of Stories. The paper considers the foundation of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland College, predecessor to the University of Leicester, as a case study in philanthropic giving and voluntary action in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. It re-evaluates arguments made in the closing months of the war for the creation of a utilitarian memorial to benefit the young. Consideration is given to the mechanisms of fundraising employed prior to the founding of the College, followed by a statistical analysis of the donors. The role of existing forms of voluntary association in supporting the scheme are assessed, as are the motives of individual donors who made financial or in kind contributions. The paper draws heavily on a database containing biographical details of early donors, which has been made freely available online.²

In October 1921, the first 11 students arrived to study at Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland College, the institution that would later become the University of Leicester. They were accommodated within the grounds and buildings of the former Leicestershire County Lunatic Asylum, which during the war had served as the Base of the 5th Northern General Hospital. The ten women and one male student were admitted to study under the Acting Principalship of Dr Robert Fleming Rattray, Unitarian minister of the Great Meeting, and a small teaching staff comprising Miss

¹ This paper is copyright of the author, and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License [<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>]. Archival research and data collection was carried out by Simon Dixon and Katie Bridger during 2017 and 2018. The paper was written by Simon Dixon, and a slightly shorter version presented at the Century of Stories academic conference in November 2018. With additional thanks to Elizabeth Blood, for contributing research carried out as part of the University of Leicester History Project, Caroline Wessel for providing access to information relating to members of the Gee and Clarke families, and Leicestershire County Council’s Century of Stories Project for commissioning the research.

² <https://leicester.omeka.net/collections/show/10>.

C. E. Measham, Gladys Sarson, and Mlle M.L. Chapuzet.³ The students took classes in English, Latin, French, Geography and Botany at the College, and attended lessons in other science subjects at city's Technical College.⁴ This occasion was the result of four years of debate, organisation, and fundraising to achieve the goal of establishing a higher education institution in Leicester as what Dr Astley Clarke described as a 'living memorial' to the First World War. This paper seeks to reassess the events leading up to the founding of the College, with a specific focus on the philanthropic and voluntary contributions of the men and women who gave their money, time, and energies to make it happen.

The establishment of a University College as Leicester's war memorial, needs to be seen within the context of two distinct historiographies: the history of the commemoration of the First World War, and the history of higher education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Alex King has described how the first stage in the erection of a war memorial was to decide what form that memorial should take.⁵ Should it be a monumental piece of public art, to serve as a focal point for communal and individual acts of remembrance, or should it be something deemed more socially 'useful'? There were passionate debates on both sides, with some believing that the only suitable memorial was a 'morally elevating work of public art' entirely devoted to the memory of the fallen. Others believed that such monuments were of little value, and favoured forms of commemoration that offered some form of practical utility. Such utilitarian proposals included the construction of new cottage hospitals or new wards for larger hospitals, village halls, parks, recreation grounds, or the provision of scholarships for the children of the dead. In Stockport, Cheshire, the monumental and utilitarian were combined in the foundation of Stockport Memorial Art Gallery, which included a Hall of Remembrance containing the Roll of Honour.⁶ In some cases, the form of commemoration chosen had no physical manifestation at all, as in Hull where the memorial was the Hull Great War Trust, a large fund for disabled ex-servicemen and dependents of the dead. In June 1919 *The Times* reported the formation of a committee by Princess Marie Louise that aimed to raise £200,000 to establish a training school for scoutmasters as a 'living memorial' to

³ Jack Simmons, *New University* (Leicester, 1958), pp. 79, 85-6. On the number of students in October 1921 see Simon Dixon, 'Who were our first students?', *University of Leicester Staff Blogs*, archived version at <https://web.archive.org/web/20181104155215/https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/specialcollections/2017/10/13/who-were-our-first-students/> (Accessed 4 November 2018).

⁴ University of Leicester Archives, ULA/D2/1, f. 39r, *Leicester Mercury*, 8 Oct. 1921, Dr Astley Clarke's Scrapbook.

⁵ Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford & New York, 1998), Ch. 3.

⁶ Gaynor Kavanagh, *Museums and the First World War* (London & New York, 1994), pp. 155-156.

the 10,000 former boy scouts who had fallen during the war.⁷ Comparing British forms of commemoration with those favoured in France, Jay Winter has described the greater tendency for utilitarian war memorials in Britain as 'a reflection of Protestant traditions'.⁸

The choice of a University College as a war memorial for Leicester needs to be viewed within the wider context of the civic university movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1880 the Reverend Joseph Wood delivered his Presidential Address to the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society, calling upon the Society to organise the provision of higher levels of scientific and literary education in the town.⁹ In the year that Wood delivered his lecture, there were only five universities in England: Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, London, and the Victoria University (comprising Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds). From this point, until the outbreak of the First World War, the number of Universities increased as Royal Charters were granted to Birmingham, Sheffield and Bristol, while in 1903 the Victoria University disbanded and the constituent colleges became Universities in their own right. During the same period, university colleges were established in Nottingham, Reading, Exeter and Southampton. In Wales, colleges were founded at Aberystwyth, Cardiff and Bangor, the three combining in 1893 to form the University of Wales.¹⁰ These institutions offered a new vision of what a University could be, often defining themselves in contrast to Oxford and Cambridge. They placed an emphasis on practical and professional subjects and prided themselves on their roots within their local communities.¹¹

It was this movement that Dr Astley Clarke had in view when he stood up to deliver his Presidential Address to the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society in October 1912. Clarke was a local medic who had been educated at Caius College, Cambridge, Guys Hospital, and the Rauscher Institut, Stuttgart.¹² He used his Presidential Address to state the case for Leicester to have its own university or university college. The public lectures and education programmes of organisations such as the Lit and Phil, he argued, had become more like entertainment and it was time to aspire for something more:

⁷ *The Times*, 16 Dec. 1922, p. 4.

⁸ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 2014 ed.), p. 97.

⁹ *Leicester Chronicle*, 9 Oct. 1880, p. 3; Simmons, *New University*, p. 57.

¹⁰ William Whyte, *Redbrick: A Social and Architectural History of Britain's Civic Universities* (Oxford, 2015), p. 128.

¹¹ Whyte, *Redbrick*, p. 132.

¹² 'A Cambridge Alumni Database', <http://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/>, Record ID CLRK889AV (Accessed 4 Nov. 2018).

I look forward to the time when Leicester will not be content without some university college or university in its midst, where the various branches of knowledge will have a fitting home, and the institution be a part of Leicester daily life.¹³

As evidence of the need for such an institution, Clarke pointed to the fact that during the previous year 25 pupils at Wyggeston Boys' School had passed the equivalent of the University of London matriculation.¹⁴ He made direct reference to other major industrial centres and their universities, citing the examples of Manchester, Birmingham, and Sheffield as 'object lessons in the evolution of a university'.¹⁵ Clarke's lecture met with a positive response in sections of the local community and press. Articles appeared in the *Leicester Mail* and *Leicester Daily Post* placing the benefits to local industries and commerce at the heart of arguments in support. The need for a university college to provide a medical school and teacher training was also noted.¹⁶ Clarke pressed the case again at a reception at New Walk Museum on 27 January 1913, and again this was followed with a series of supportive articles in the local press.¹⁷

Here, the discussion rested for the time being. By the time it was revived, the country had endured more than three years of death and suffering from the First World War. As the impact of the war became felt across the country, commemorative ceremonies and objects, such as church services, honour rolls, and street shrines became increasingly popular.¹⁸ On 28 June 1917 Leicester's temporary memorial was unveiled in Municipal Square by the Duke of Rutland, in memory of 2,129 men of Leicester and Leicestershire killed prior to that date. Speaking at the unveiling ceremony, the Duke pointed towards the possibility of a more utilitarian venture after the war, looking forward to 'some much larger scheme of a permanent and valuable character to the borough and county'.¹⁹ On 7 November 1917 a meeting was held at Museum with the aim 'to assist in obtaining for Leicester and Leicestershire a fitting commemoration of those who had fallen in the war'. It was chaired by the Mayor, Jonathan North, and addressed by Alfred Powell of the Civic Arts Association. Powell spoke of artistic memorials, arguing that the country should not 'be covered by little dubs and dabs and bits of memorials here and there' but that they should be 'somehow grouped, so as to be a general and perfectly natural expression of national feeling'. The greatest of all memorials, he

¹³ Astley Clarke, 'The Presidential Address', *Transactions of the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society* (1913), vol. 17, p. 17.

¹⁴ Clarke, 'Presidential Address', p. 17.

¹⁵ Clarke, 'Presidential Address', pp. 19-20.

¹⁶ ULA/D2/1, ff. 1v-2r.

¹⁷ ULA/D2/1, ff. 3r-4r.

¹⁸ King, *Memorials*, Ch. 2.

¹⁹ *Leicester Daily Post*, 29 June 1917, p. 3.

stated, 'was public conduct', continuing that, 'There were so many things that we had misconducted in our lives that we might make better'. He proposed that what he viewed as the 'ragged edges' of big towns might be made into 'memorial districts'. For Leicester, he observed that a large proportion of the buildings were 'dull' and that the streets might be improved by adorning them with 'small sculptured tablets'. Finally, he proposed erecting a group of cottages to be inhabited rent free by war widows.²⁰

With Powell's lecture in mind, along with other local debates on war memorials, a leader article appeared a week later in *The Leicester Daily Post*, almost certainly written by the editor W. G. Gibbs. Headlined 'The Best War Memorial', the article did not deny the need for artistic forms of commemoration. However, it went on to assert that,

no matter how gifted the designer or craftsmen [monuments] will not be adequate.

Something more is required; something of practical utility, yet ministering to the highest which is in us.

That 'something', the article continued, should be a University College, 'the stepping stone to a University itself'. It was proposed that the site for such an institution should be the former Leicestershire and Rutland County Asylum buildings then occupied by the 5th Northern General Hospital. Gibbs knew the site well, having helped to establish the Leicester War Hospitals Committee, of which he was honorary secretary.²¹

Exactly where the idea of a University College as a war memorial originated is uncertain. It may have come first from the Curator of Leicester Museum, E. E. Lowe. Lowe was the first to respond to the 14 November article, referring to himself as 'one who has been striving for many months to get the idea of a University College into form for authoritative adoption as a War Memorial'.²² During the war years, Lowe had established (and taught) London University science courses at the Museum.²³ Therefore, he needed little convincing of the case for founding a university college, believing that university education was only accessible to most young men and women in Leicester if it could be obtained locally. Another to embrace the idea was Astley Clark, who had spent the war serving in the Royal Army Medical Corps (Territorial Force) as Assistant Director of Medical Services to the North Midland Division and later administrator of the 5th

²⁰ *Leicester Daily Post*, 8 Nov. 1917, p. 3.

²¹ University of Leicester Archives, ULA/PCB1, p. 100, Press Cuttings Books, vol. 1.

²² *Leicester Daily Post*, 17 Nov. 1917, p. 3.

²³ 'E E Lowe BSc 1922-23', *Leicester Lit & Phil Society*, <http://www.leicesterlitandphil.org.uk/1922-e-e-low-e-b-sc-1922-23/> (Accessed 4 Nov. 2018).

Northern General Hospital.²⁴It seems to have been Clarke who broadened the purpose of the proposal to commemorate not only those who had died, but those who had served and survived as well:

The memorial should not only be to those who have made the supreme sacrifice, but its inscription should embrace a larger idea, namely:

“To the Honour of those who took their part in the Great War,

“To the Glory of those gallant fighters who came through, and

“To the Memory of those devoted heroes who gave their lives in the Cause of Freedom.”²⁵

Three of the first five *Daily Post* correspondents to write in favour of the plan were women, including two prominent local school mistresses. The first was Florence Rich, Principal of Granville School, Leicester, and one of the first women admitted to study science at Somerville Hall, Oxford.²⁶ Rich regarded the extension of university education as one of the ‘most urgent needs of the time’, and echoed Lowe’s comments about the lack of educational opportunities for those who could not afford the expense of studying away from home.²⁷ Sarah Heron, Headmistress of Wyggeston Grammar School for Girls, emphasised that this need was especially acute with respect to girls’ education, since ‘many girls are tied to their native town in order that they may give help and companionship to their parents’.²⁸ Both Wyggeston Girls and Granville School were preparing their pupils to study at a higher level, with a number having been admitted to Universities in other towns and cities.²⁹ Further support came from Isabel Ellis (née Evans), who had been an early student at Mason College (a predecessor to the University of Birmingham). Ellis viewed Mason as having expanded the cultural horizons of Birmingham, and believed that its Students’ Union had fostered a spirit of association and ‘high ideal of citizenship’ among its students.³⁰

Statements of support for the university college proposals combined elements of civic pride, commercial need, and philosophical arguments in favour of higher education as a social good. Most

²⁴ Obituary, ‘Astley V. Clarke, M.D.’, *British Medical Journal*, 3 March 1945 (1: 4391), pp. 312-313.

²⁵ *Leicester Daily Post*, 27 Nov. 1917, p. 1.

²⁶ Simon Dixon, ‘Florence Rich and Granville School for Girls’, Archived version at <https://web.archive.org/web/20181104161525/https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/specialcollections/2018/05/22/florence-rich-and-granville-school-for-girls/> <https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/specialcollections/2018/05/22/florence-rich-and-granville-school-for-girls/> (Accessed on 4 Nov. 2018).

²⁷ *Leicester Daily Post*, 20 Nov. 1917, p. 3.

²⁸ *Leicester Daily Post*, 22 Nov. 1917, p. 3.

²⁹ *Leicester Daily Post*, 22 Nov. 1917, p. 3; Dixon, ‘Florence Rich’.

³⁰ *Leicester Daily Post*, 22 Nov. 1917, p. 3.

of these were summarised in the appendix to a letter issued by Walter Lovell (then Mayor of Leicester) dated 25 March 1919 calling a meeting to be held on 2 April. This gave seven reasons why Leicester was in need of a university college, covering growing demand for higher education, the need to retain the talents of local people, the requirement to raise the standard of teacher training, and the benefits a college would bring to existing educational institutions. The advantages to trade and industry were stated, both in terms of the need for a skilled workforce and the potential for research into the 'scientific and technological problems which continually confront them'. Finally, it was stated that the establishment of a university college should be regarded as a matter of civic pride:

No town of the importance of Leicester is without such an institution. The presence and activities of a University College should contribute immensely to the welfare of the Town and County.³¹

These arguments could have been made at any point during the 40 years since the Revd Wood delivered his presidential address to the Literary and Philosophical Society in 1880. The war memorial idea provided an added emotional dimension, rallying members of the local elite into devoting their time, energy, and money to turn the vision into reality.

The broad narrative of events that took place between November 1917 and October 1921, when the first students were admitted to Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland College, have been charted elsewhere and a brief outline is all that is required here.³² During the closing months of 1917 and into 1918 debate continued in the local press. While there was dissent from some quarters, the scheme found support across the local industrial and professional middle class, as well as from representatives of the Workers Educational Association.³³ A group of supporters met in March 1918, including Jonathan North, Astley Clarke, W. G. Gibbs, Sarah Heron, Florence Rich, W. A. Brockington (Director of Education for Leicestershire) and a number of other local councillors and prominent figures. It was agreed that the best war memorial for Leicester would be to co-operate with University College, Nottingham, to form an East Midlands University.³⁴ The first donation of £100 was made by Astley Clarke on Armistice Day, with £500 following the next day from Dr. F. W. Bennett. The appeal continued to be widely publicised, with the next significant development

³¹ ULA/D2/1, f. 11v.

³² Simmons, *New University*, Ch. 3; 'University of Leicester History Project', *University of Leicester: Archives and Special Collections*, <https://www2.le.ac.uk/library/find/specialcollections/university-history-project> (Accessed 4 Nov. 2018).

³³ ULA/D2/1, f. 7.

³⁴ ULA/D2/1, f 4v.

coming in February 1919 with the bequest of £5,000 'to be used or held for the purpose of establishing or endowing a university' from Dr J. E. M. Finch of Stoneygate, former Medical Superintendent of the City of Leicester Mental Hospital.³⁵

The Finch bequest was followed just over a month later with the most significant turning point towards the foundation of the College. In preparation for addressing the meeting called by Mayor Lovell on 2 April 1919, Astley Clarke visited the nonagenarian Thomas Fielding Johnson at his Brookfield home on London Road, Stoneygate. The purpose of the visit was to gather facts about the old asylum buildings and site in an attempt to make the case for buying it for educational use. To Clarke's amazement, Fielding Johnson informed him, 'you can't buy it for I (Mr Johnson) bought it yesterday'.³⁶ His purpose was to gift the land and buildings to the Borough of Leicester as a site for the two Wyggeston Schools and the proposed university college.³⁷ Further significant donations or pledges followed, including £20,000 from Harry Simpson Gee of Stead and Simpson, £20,000 in memory of William Tyler of the Wolsey Company, £10,000 from Freeman Hardy & Wills, and £5,000 each from Jonathan North, Sir Samuel Faire, and J. E. Faire. Developments were steered by the college committee, chaired by Sir Jonathan North, with Astley Clarke as Vice-Chair, Simpson as Honorary Treasurer, and F. P. Armitage as Honorary Secretary. Among the other members were representatives from each of the local authorities, Leicester Trades Council, Art and Technical Schools, Leicester Teachers' Association, and the Adult School Union.³⁸

By the close of the College's first session in 1922, over £120,000 had been raised or pledged in financial donations. This is a comparable sum to the fund raised by Sir Jonathan North to erect homes for disabled ex-servicemen in Oadby, opened by the Prince of Wales in 1927.³⁹ In addition, the first annual report lists a host of gifts in kind, at the top of which was that of the college site and buildings from Thomas Fielding Johnson.⁴⁰ Fundraising on this scale required energy, organisation, and contacts. Initially, appeals for contributions were made through the local press and at public meetings. Addressing the Town Council in February 1919, Jonathan North declared that it should be possible to raise the sum of £150-200,000, and indicated that he would cease pressing for new donations to the Disabled Warriors' Fund in order to appeal to those with money to concentrate on

³⁵ University of Leicester Archives, ULA/HIS/FOU/2, Memorial Portraits Book.

³⁶ ULA/D2/1, f. 11r.

³⁷ ULA/D2/1, f. 14r.

³⁸ 'Our Beginnings', *University of Leicester: Archives and Special Collections*,

<https://www2.le.ac.uk/library/find/specialcollections/university-history-project/our-beginnings>.

³⁹ 'North Memorial Homes', <https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/14756> [Accessed 3/10/2018].

⁴⁰ University of Leicester Archives, ULA, P/AR1, *Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland College Report and Accounts* (1922).

the University College scheme.⁴¹ When he addressed the Rotary Club in March 1919 to seek their support, Astley Clarke pressed home the need for donations, quoting the American physician and poet Oliver Wendell Holmes Senior:

God bless you, gentlemen. Learn to give money to colleges while you live. Don't be silly and think you'll try to bother colleges when you die.⁴²

On 4 April the 'Here and There' column in the *Daily Post* proposed 'Motives for subscribing'. As well as those who felt moved to honour the fallen, or give thanks for the safe return of loved ones, the article proposed that donations should also come from the 'fairly numerous class' who had no sons to send away or whose sons were exempt from serving. A further category, were those who had profited from the war, the article commenting that:

Leicester has done well out of munition-making: it has also done well out of the high prices which have prevailed during the last few years. A good many tradesmen have made fortunes out of the country's necessities.⁴³

In July 1919 Sir Jonathan North addressed a meeting of representatives from the city and county University College committees, noting that gifts and pledges had been received in excess of £63,000 from the city and expressing the hope that more support would be forthcoming from the county.⁴⁴ This sum had been raised without a public appeal having been issued, and at the same meeting it was agreed to prepare an appeal letter to be signed on behalf of the city and two counties.⁴⁵ Before the appeal was extended to the general public, a letter was circulated among a smaller group of wealthy inhabitants and business owners of Leicester and Leicestershire. A list of 42 names was drawn up, and members of the 2 committees were appointed to pay personal visits to each person in an effort to solicit further donations.⁴⁶ This initial campaign met with some success, including the pledge of £20,000 from the Tyler family, £5,000 from Joseph Wallis Goddard, and £1,000 from William Skevington.⁴⁷ However, not all of those approached were quite so receptive. Robert Rowley of Great Glen sent Astley Clarke and Sir Samuel Faire away with a promise of something in his will, 'if we did not ask him again'.⁴⁸ Arthur, John and Reginald Corah replied stating

⁴¹ ULA, D2/1, f. 9r.

⁴² ULA, D2/1, f. 9v.

⁴³ ULA/D2/1, f. 12v.

⁴⁴ University of Leicester Archives, ULA/M1, p. 10, Leicester University College Minute Book, 1920-21, 16 July 1919.

⁴⁵ ULA/M1, p. 13, 16 July 1919.

⁴⁶ ULA/M1, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁷ These amounts are recorded in Astley Clarke's notebook, inserted into the front of ULA/D2/1.

⁴⁸ ULA/D2/1, notebook.

that the £20,000 given to their employees as a war memorial meant that they were not in a position to be included in the first list of donors.⁴⁹

By May 1920 a public appeal for funds was ready for distribution.⁵⁰ The appeal letter, signed by Jonathan North and Thomas Cope, repeated the familiar educational and economic arguments, ending with a reminder of the commemorative nature of the scheme:

A University College is a centre from which flows knowledge, which is power, whence comes peace. Such a palace of peace is the worthiest memorial of those who gave their lives in combating ignorance.⁵¹

Copies of the appeal were distributed to locations across the city where they would be seen by those most likely to contribute. The circulation list included the Central Municipal Library, Museum, Leicester Permanent Library, the Constitutional Club, Liberal Club, the major banks, Chamber of Commerce, Turkey Café, Oriental Café, and Café Royal.⁵² Copies were addressed directly to wealthy individuals, which were followed up in writing or a telephone call requesting an appointment.⁵³ By the end of the year, there can have been few regular middle-class visitors to Leicester who had not been exposed to the call for funds.

Former University Librarian Brian Burch has undertaken a detailed statistical study of 1,673 men and women associated with the University College up to 1957.⁵⁴ The focus of the present paper is the group of early donors to the College named in the first annual report issued in 1922.⁵⁵ In order to understand who the first donors were, their occupations, where they lived, and how they were connected to one another, a database was created drawing on records including census returns, trade directories, and records of organisations such as the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society, Leicestershire Archaeological Society, and Belmont House Society.⁵⁶ This first set of accounts records 138 financial donations or subscriptions received, totalling £63,240. In addition, £42,020 had been promised, although the names of the donors were not recorded. A further 32 individuals,

⁴⁹ ULA/M1, p. 18, Finance Committee meeting, 24 October 1919. ULA/AD/D1/C1, Alfred Corah to F. B. Armitage, 23 October 1919.

⁵⁰ ULA/M1, p. 41, Finance Sub-Committee meeting, 5 May 1920.

⁵¹ ULA/AD/A2/1/28, Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland University College. An Appeal (March 1920).

⁵² See letters contained within ULA/AD/A2/15.

⁵³ Records of this process are among papers in ULA/AD/D1, Donations and Gifts. For example, ULA/D1/B1, correspondence with W. A. Bates & Co.

⁵⁴ ULA/D12/1, Brian Burch, 'The Making of a University in Leicester; A second opinion on the "sickly child"' (Unpublished typescript, [1998]), pp. 26-50.

⁵⁵ ULA/P/AR/1, Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland College, *Report and Accounts Presented to the Second General Meeting of the Court of Governors* (1922).

⁵⁶ Katie Bridger and Simon Dixon, 'University of Leicester Founding Donors', *University of Leicester Special Collections Exhibitions* (<https://leicester.omeka.net/collections/show/10>).

families, and organisations are listed as giving gifts in kind, ranging from Fielding Johnson's gift of the site to small donations of books, equipment, furniture, and other items. Some donations were given in the name of more than one individual, typically a family group or married couple, and some donors were associated with more than one donation. Therefore, the total number of individuals, businesses, and other organisations named among the first donors is 169.

Of the first 170 cash and in kind donations, 75% came from private individuals (110), families (5) or married couples (12). The remainder (43) were received from corporate donors, the largest of which was £10,000 from Jonathan North's company, Freeman, Hardy & Willis. Other corporate donors included Woodford and Wormleighton, hosiery manufacturers, and banks including the London Joint City & Midland, Lloyd's, Barclay's, and the London County Westminster & Parrs. A series of small donations were received from the Co-operative movement under the auspices of the Midland Productive Societies Education Committee. Two donations, amounting to £112 14s 2d, were received from the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society, while the Leicester Rotary Club contributed 'fabric of [the] Rotary Workshop, tools and equipment, and the oak panelling, dais and platform table of College Hall'.⁵⁷

Among the named individuals listed, 54 (or 39%) were women and 84 (61%) were men. Therefore, one conclusion that can be drawn from the research is that while prominent men have tended to dominate previous accounts of the origins of the University of Leicester, a significant proportion of the early supporters were women. Where an occupation can be identified from cross referencing names against trade directories and the 1911 census, just under half of the male donors (41) were engaged in trade or industry. A dozen of these were from Leicester's boot and shoe industry and eight from the hosiery trade. A significant proportion (29 or 34%) were members of the professions, including 16 medics, 6 lawyers, and 5 educationalists. Very few of the female donors are recorded in the census or directories as having an occupation. Of those who were, six were teachers and one, the prominent suffragist and tax resister, Dr Elizabeth Wilks of Hackney, was a medic.⁵⁸ The founding group, therefore, comprised roughly equal numbers of members of professions who would themselves have received a University education, and industrialists, bankers and tradesmen who had been convinced by the arguments in favour of founding a Higher Education Institution in Leicester.

⁵⁷ Correspondence relating to the Rotary Club gift can be found in Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, 8D62/Box 34/5, Correspondence regarding Rotary Club gifts of carved chair, ceremonial and dais for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland College.

⁵⁸ Hilary Frances, 'Wilks [nee Bennett], Elizabeth', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (<https://doi-org.ezproxy4.lib.le.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/56258>).

Using addresses recorded in the census and trade directories, it has been possible to plot the group of founding donors on a map.⁵⁹ This confirms that the vast majority were drawn from the City of Leicester and its immediate neighbourhood. A strong concentration of pins is clustered around the suburbs to the south of the city centre along the London Road and out into Clarendon Park, Stoneygate and Oadby.⁶⁰ The group comprised a significant section of Leicester's middle-class elite, who were closely connected through business ties, shared interests, and, in some cases, kinship links. Nearly half of the individual donors (63) have been identified among the membership lists of the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society, including several who had held, or would later hold, the Presidency of the society.⁶¹ A smaller, but still substantial, group of 33 appear among the members of the Leicester Archaeological Society. There were further links among the College founders through their involvement in wartime relief work, and the treatment of wounded soldiers in Leicester's war hospitals. Among the founders, Astley Clarke, C. J. Bond, R. W. Henry, and L. K. Harrison had all played leading roles in running the 5th Northern General Hospital during the war, while W. J. Freer, W. G. Gibbs, and Jonathan North were involved in running the Leicester & Leicestershire War Hospitals' Committee.⁶²

In some cases, the founding families were connected through marriage. Astley Clarke married Ethel Mary Gee, the daughter of H. Simpson Gee, in 1899. Simpson Gee was the first treasurer of the College, and left £20,000 to it in his will.⁶³ The two families were joined again by marriage when Clarke's sister, Hilda Mary, married Simpson Gee's eldest son, Ernest, in 1900. The second donor, Dr. F. W. Bennett, was the brother of Henry Swain Bennett whose gift of £1,000 was the first of a series of donations from him. H. S. Bennett was a member of the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society, Leicestershire Archaeological Society, and the board of Freeman, Hardy & Willis, where he sat alongside Simpson Gee and Jonathan North.⁶⁴ F. W. Bennett's donation of £500 was given in memory of his nephew, Garth Taylor, son of his sister Mary Ellen and Thomas Smithies Taylor, a Leicester engineer and founder of Taylor, Taylor and Hobson. The Taylors were also among

⁵⁹ 'University of Leicester Founding Donors', <https://goo.gl/ffGxLh> (Accessed 4 Nov. 2018).

⁶⁰ This follows the pattern described for a longer period by Burch, 'Sickly child', p. 50.

⁶¹ These included C. J. Bond, Josiah Mentor Gimson, F. W. Bennett, Frederick Barnes Lott, Agnes Archer Evans, Bernard Ellis, Harry Hardy Peach, Robert Wallace Henry, and Astley Clarke himself. See <http://www.leicesterlitandphil.org.uk/presidents/> (Accessed 4 Nov. 2018).

⁶² On the 5th Northern General see ULA/HIS/PH/2, available online (<http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/digital/collection/p16445coll9/id/433>). Membership of the War Hospitals' Committee is recorded in the annual reports at ROLLR, 14D35/23, Leicester War Hospitals Committee (previously Leicester War Hospitals Games Committee), Printed Reports, 1915-19.

⁶³ Burch, 'Sickly child', p. 52. 'Mr Harry Simpson Gee', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/544>.

⁶⁴ Burch, 'Sickly child', p. 54. 'Mr Henry Swain Bennett', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/510>, 'Dr Frederick William Bennett', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/508>.

the founding donors, giving £100 in memory of their son, as was another member of the Bennett family, Dr Elizabeth Wilks. The depth of kinship links among the founders can also be seen in the family connections of Thomas Fielding Johnson and his second wife Agnes Paget.⁶⁵ Her sister-in-law, Jane Helen Paget (née Clephan) gave £50, as did her sister Annie Clephan. Annie was a prominent educationalist and philanthropist whose house on Regent Road was for many years the gathering place of the Leicester Ladies Reading Society.⁶⁶ Membership of this group included several other College supporters, among them Ethel Clarke, Isabel Ellis (née Evans), Edith Harvey, and Edith Ready.⁶⁷

While it is relatively straightforward identifying when, how, and how much various individuals pledged in support of the appeals for donations, the motivations for giving are much harder to trace.⁶⁸ A small number of donors did accompany their contributions with an explanation of their motives. Writing to Jonathan North in April 1919 Jeannie Beattie Tyler,⁶⁹ who gave £500 and 'three beautiful books from the Gregynog Press', said she was motivated by a long-held belief that,

Such an Institution planted down in our midst should be of incalculable benefit to the town, not only as you pointed out, in increasing the general standard of efficiency, but also in bringing a new spirit into our affairs.⁷⁰

Similarly, Sarah Elizabeth Roberts,⁷¹ former Headmistress of Granville School for Girls, gave £500 stating that,

There is no need for me to enlarge on the interest I have always taken in educational efficiency & progress. It is my earnest wish that Leicester should be able to offer the best and most complete education to all who desire it.⁷²

For some donors, their contributions provided an opportunity to commemorate a deceased family member. The Tyler family's donation of £20,000 was in memory of William Tyler with the

⁶⁵ Burch, 'Sickly child', p. 55.

⁶⁶ Gertrude Ellis, *A History of the Leicester Ladies Reading Society* (Leicester, [1932]); Shirley Aucott, *Women of Courage, Vision and Talent: Lives in Leicester 1780 to 1925* (n.p., 2008), pp. 52-56.

⁶⁷ 'Mrs Ethel Poppy Clarke', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/521>, Mrs Isabel Clara Ellis, <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/537>, 'Miss Edith Harvey', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/556>, and 'Miss Edith M. Ready', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/584>.

⁶⁸ These are at ULA/AD/D1, Donations and Gifts.

⁶⁹ 'Mrs Jeannie Beattie "Edgar" Tyler', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/602>.

⁷⁰ ULA/AD/D1/T2, J. B. Tyler to Jonathan North, 7 Apr. 1919.

⁷¹ 'Miss Sarah Elizabeth Roberts', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/587>; Dixon, 'Florence Rich'.

⁷² ULA/AD/D1/R1, S. E. Roberts to Sir Jonathan North, 21 June 1919.

expressed intention of endowing a Faculty of Commerce. Discussing the matter in a letter to Jonathan North in November 1919 Alec Tyler expressed the feeling that,

No sons had a better home influence than we & few a finer opportunity to continue a business so well established. We shall ever revere and honour his memory, & regard this occasion as a great privilege for us to be able to associate with his name. It is with much gratitude that we thus also assist our worthy city.⁷³

The independently wealthy Francis William Islip gave £500 in memory of his mother, Betsy Islip (1820-1897), who had founded the Leicester Collegiate School in 1867.⁷⁴ Rachel Ellis of Knighton Hayes donated the same amount, wishing to commemorate her late nephew George Aiden Hutchinson, a graduate of Balliol College, who had died at the age of 27 in 1912.⁷⁵ Others wished their contributions to be recorded as remembering those they had lost during the war, in keeping with the proposal that the College should be founded as a war memorial. Among these were Bernard and Isabel Ellis, whose £1,000 donation was given 'In memory of their son, Oliver, of the R.A.F., killed in action'.⁷⁶ Henry Copeland Brice had joined the Leicestershire Regiment in 1914, and was 'Fatally wounded by premature explosion of a rifle grenade while helping a brother officer' in June 1915. His parents, of Middlemeade, Oadby, donated £2,000 in his memory and also established Brice Memorial Hall on Queen's Road, Leicester, in his honour.⁷⁷ Other casualties of the war commemorated included two members of the Lennard family, Garth Taylor, Robert Evans, Edward Dare Evans, and Arthur Edward Davis.⁷⁸ In a few cases, those with loved ones had served and survived made donations to give thanks for their safe return.⁷⁹

As well as individual donations, income was generated through other fundraising activities. These highlight both the importance of voluntary action and the role of women in founding the college. With the exception of W. G. Gibbs, who was appointed to the salaried position of General Secretary in 1920, the majority of those whose labours led to the establishment of the Leicester,

⁷³ ULA/AD/B1/19/1/1, Alec Tyler to Sir Jonathan North, 7 November 1919.

⁷⁴ 'Mr Francis William Islip', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/564>; ULA/HIS/FOU/2, Memorial Portraits, <http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/digital/collection/p16445coll13/id/688>.

⁷⁵ 'Mrs Rachel "G. H." Ellis', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/535>.

⁷⁶ On Oliver Bernard Ellis, see <http://blogs.boothamschool.com/archives/?p=329>. Details of Ellis are at ULA/G13/1.

⁷⁷ 'H. C. Brice', <https://www.oadbyremembers.org.uk/roll-of-honour/h-c-brice/>.

⁷⁸ 'Mrs Annie Eliza Lennard', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/567>; 'Captain Thomas Smithies Taylor', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/599>; 'Mr William Arthur Evans', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/540>; 'Mr John Henry Davis', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/529>.

⁷⁹ For example 'Mrs Elizabeth Wilson Henderson', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/558>; 'Mr Duncan Henderson', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/557>.

Leicestershire and Rutland College gave their time voluntarily.⁸⁰ This was the case with the Belmont House Society, formed in 1886 for former pupils of Belmont House School. In the words of the Headmistress, Miss Beale, the aim of the Society was for members to, 'further in your town and country all that would improve yourselves and your neighbours'.⁸¹ After the school was closed in 1893, membership was opened up to other women and went on to comprise members of many prominent local families.⁸² All members were expected to contribute to the work of the Society, which included philanthropic work, arts and crafts and amateur dramatics.⁸³ In September 1921 a letter was received from Gertrude Vincent, appealing for help towards the funds of the University College. It was agreed that the proceeds of their next play should be put to this cause. A production of *Prunella*, by Laurence Housman and Harley Granville Baker, was staged the following February at the Knighton Church Rooms. The performance was considered a success, with £87 1s handed over by Ethel Clarke to the University College funds. When the Society met in March, it was recorded that if the amount could be increased to £100 members would be invited to nominate one of their number to serve on the College committee. It was proposed to raise the balance through members all bringing an item worth 1s to the next Arts and Crafts Exhibition, and each buying a 1s item from the event. Unfortunately, this didn't quite achieve the desired aims, with £6 2s 10d raised and gifted to the College.⁸⁴

The contribution made by members of the Belmont House Society, and of other organisations such as the Literary and Philosophical Society, Rotary Club, and West End Association, highlights the importance of existing voluntary organisations in galvanising support for the college.⁸⁵ The West End Association had been formed midway through the war to support the work of the local war hospitals, particularly through, 'the systematic up-keep of Billiard Tables, Pianos, Card Tables, Libraries, indoor and outdoor Games, and numerous other demands and necessities' such as

⁸⁰ See Elizabeth Blood, 'Walter George Gibbs', <https://www2.le.ac.uk/library/find/specialcollections/university-history-project/our-founders>.

⁸¹ Quoted in S. E. Francis, "'Worthy Citizens'" Middle Class Women in the Public Sphere in Leicester c. 1850-1900' (MPhil thesis, University of Leicester, 2013), p. 158.

⁸² For example, the names Gee, Ellis, Gimson, and Wykes all appear regularly in the records of the Society held at ROLLR, 18D57, Records of the Belmont House Society.

⁸³ Isabel C. Ellis, *Records of Nineteenth Century Leicester* (n.p., 1935), p. 268.

⁸⁴ Simon Dixon, 'The Belmont House Society and the Founding of the University of Leicester', archived version at <https://web.archive.org/web/20181104170301/https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/specialcollections/2017/09/13/the-belmont-house-society-and-the-founding-of-the-university-of-leicester/> (Accessed 4 Nov. 2018).

⁸⁵ In addition to the contributions of the Literary and Philosophical Society and Rotary Club referred to above, £120 was given by the Leicester West End Association for a 'Memorial Prize', <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/626>.

the organisation of concerts and other entertainments.⁸⁶ After the war had ended, the Association issued an appeal for subscriptions to found two West End Association War Memorial Prizes to be awarded to the 'best student in his or her year of graduation' in History and Modern Languages. These were intended as a memorial of the work carried out by the Association during the war, the choice of subjects explained in the published appeal as follows:

Many ideas for PERPETUATING the Association's work have been suggested, but having regard to **History** made by the war, and the importance of the coming generation acquiring an efficient knowledge of **Modern Languages** to enable this Country to retain its position in the world, it is believed the selection made will be acceptable as a **PERMANENT MEMORIAL**.⁸⁷

The total raised was £120, and the prizes are still awarded to students in these subjects today.⁸⁸

Voluntary action on a grand scale was demonstrated by the organisation of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland College Bazaar & Fete, held over 6 days from 15-20 May 1922 at the Junior Training Halls, Aylestone Road, Leicester.⁸⁹ A meeting was called by Jonathan North and Astley Clarke at the Town Hall on 30 June 1921, comprising middle class women including members of the National Council of Women, wives of local employers, and other prominent women.⁹⁰ North and Clarke invited those present to raise in excess of £10,000 towards the cost of building alterations and equipment in order to accommodate 200 students. It was moved by Annie Clephan and Sarah Heron that a Bazaar Committee was formed chaired by Ethel Clarke, with Lady North as President, and Gertrude Vincent as Honorary Secretary.⁹¹ The event itself consisted of a large number of stalls, all named after universities in the UK, Europe, and North America, each hosted by a local organisation or individual. Among the organisations represented were the City School of Arts and Crafts, Leicester Branch of the National Council of Women, Leicester Teachers' Association, Leicester Hebrew Congregation, and Leicestershire County Cricket Club.⁹² There were also games, cake, glacier mint and doll competitions, and a variety of musical and dramatic performances. A ball was held on the evening of 19 May and the proceedings were brought to a close on 20 May with a dance. The

⁸⁶ *1st Annual Report of the Leicester West End Association for the Entertainment of Wounded Soldiers* (October 1917), pp. 8, 20.

⁸⁷ ROLLR, 14D35/9, Leicester West End Association Minutes, f. 32.

⁸⁸ <https://leicester.omeka.net/items/show/626>; information provided by the School of History, Politics and International Relations.

⁸⁹ For an account of the Bazaar and Fete see Siobhan Begley, 'Voluntary Associations and the Civic Ideal in Leicester 1870-1939' (University of Leicester PhD thesis, 2009), pp. 210-213, <http://hdl.handle.net/2381/9924>.

⁹⁰ Begley, 'Voluntary Associations', pp. 211-212.

⁹¹ ULA/AD/B3/1/12, Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland College. Ladies Meeting re Bazaar, 30 June 1921.

⁹² ULA/D2/1, ff. 45d-45m.

final total raised recorded in the *Report and Accounts* for 1922 was £15,206 17s 3d.⁹³ The success of the event was applauded in the local press, typified by an article in *The Daily Mercury* headed 'WELL DONE, LADIES!':

Bazaars are generally women's affairs, so far as the salesmanship (and the purchasing) are concerned. This particular bazaar was more of a women's effort than that. It was organised from the beginning, and carried through in its entirety with very little masculine assistance.⁹⁴

Mary Maitland, a regular columnist for the *Mercury*, commended the effort of everyone involved, commenting on the substantial amount of effort expended by everyone involved, and observing that:

One can only surmise that if all the ladies who took part in it determined to link together for a business enterprise, the whole commercial world would have reason to shake in their shoes.⁹⁵

In spite of this, however, Maitland felt that there was still a need for a suitable memorial to the war dead, presumably having in mind the kind of monumental memorial that W. G. Gibbs had expressed scepticism about five years earlier. Concluding her column reflecting on the week's events, she added,

couldn't those same magnificent women band themselves together and undertake the getting of funds for that memorial to our men we have so long and so sadly been looking for. . . . Nothing in this world could be more finely appropriate than that mothers and wives, sweethearts and sisters of those who are gone should provide a memorial in their honour.

While the initial campaign for funds had succeeded in bringing Leicester to the point where young people from local families could receive a University level education at a local institution, the financial situation would remain precarious for a number of years. Direct support from the City Council came in 1922-23, with a grant of £1,140, the equivalent of a farthing rate.⁹⁶ Annual contributions from Leicestershire county council of £500 followed a few years later.⁹⁷ It was not until 1945 that the College was recommended by the University Grants Committee to receive funding from central government.⁹⁸ It was, therefore, private philanthropy and voluntary action in the

⁹³ ULA/P/AR1, *Leicester Leicestershire and Rutland Report and Accounts* (11 Dec. 1922).

⁹⁴ ULA/D2/1, f. 47, *The Daily Mercury*, 22 May 1922.

⁹⁵ ULA/D2/1, f. 47, *The Daily Mercury*, 22 May 1922.

⁹⁶ Simmons, *New Univeristy*, p. 87.

⁹⁷ Simmons, *New Univeristy*, p. 103.

⁹⁸ Simmons, *New Univeristy*, p. 133.

immediate aftermath of the First World War that established what would later become the University of Leicester. The founders were drawn largely from Leicester's middle-class civic elite, with representation from the local authorities, and established societies and associations foremost amongst which was the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society. As well as giving money and gifts in kind, they also gave their time to attend meetings, raise funds, and, in the case of Astley Clarke, even design and make bookcases for the College library.⁹⁹ This paper has highlighted that the role of women in this process has been overlooked by previous historians. Influential educationalists such as Sarah Heron, Florence Rich, Isobel Ellis, and Agnes Archer Evans, were among the first and strongest supporters. Leicester, famously the 'second most prosperous city in Europe' in 1936,¹⁰⁰ would, no doubt have established a University sooner or later during the first decades of the 20th century. It was, however, the charitable impulse created by the need to commemorate the sacrifices of war that led to it happening in 1921, making Leicester unique amongst British towns and cities in its response to the sacrifices of war.

⁹⁹ David Baker, *Leicester University Library: A History* (Leicester, 1984), pp. 9-10.

¹⁰⁰ David Nash and David Reeder (eds) et al, *Leicester in the Twentieth Century* (Stroud, 1993), p. 54. This statistic related to the average level of household income.