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THREE GREAT TUTORS: LOVELL, ARDERN, MORRELL

Graeme White

On Thursday 25th January 1912, the College celebrated Founders' Day for the first time: Holy Communion at 7.30 a.m., a Commemoration Service in the Chapel at 6.00 p.m., Dinner in Hall at 7.15 p.m. and a Concert to follow in the Students' Common Room. It was an occasion when all three tutors who are the subjects of this essay came together. Albert Lovell, who had moved on from Chester College to become the first Director of Education for the City of Chester in 1903, was one of the distinguished company at the Dinner and proposed a toast to the guest of honour, Edward Rigg son of the first Principal. Theodore Ardern, as the College's music tutor, composed the music for the 'Founders' Hymn' at the Commemoration Service, organised the Concert and played the piano as both soloist and accompanist. Herbert Morrell, one of the College's newest members of staff, sang Schumann's 'The Two Grenadiers' as his contribution to the Concert.¹

The three tutors were linked in more ways than this. Ardern and Lovell joined the staff in the same year, 1886. Lovell and Morrell both served the College as Masters of Method and lecturers in Education, responsible for inducting the students into the theory and practice of schoolteaching. Ardern and Morrell were both appointed in their mid-twenties and devoted the rest of their careers to the College, Ardern dying in post after 37 years, Morrell retiring after 40, and both are commemorated in the College Chapel. But the most significant bond between them is the powerful and enduring influence they had upon their students. None of them sought popularity, none was affable or easy-going. Yet by their integrity and their commitment to making the most of their students' potential, they won the esteem and affection of those privileged to be taught by them. The College H.M.I. in 1886 considered Lovell to have a manner 'somewhat severe and gruff, calculated to repel', but he was 'glad to hear from the Principal that all the men liked him'.² Ardern's *Collegian* obituary in 1923 described him as 'separate, reserved, austere, and yet lovable and kindly'.³ Morrell is remembered by one of his former students, now a retired Headmaster, as 'a benevolent despot whom we all held in awe'.⁴ As dedicated and influential tutors they are not, of course, unique: on the whole the College has been very fortunate in the quality and commitment of its academic staff, certainly since the Edwardian period. But for their professional expertise and their selfless devotion beyond the call of duty, let these three stand as representatives of a tradition.

The appointment of Albert Lovell came as a direct result of an unfavourable H.M.I. Report. The College's record in teacher training during the 1870s and early 1880s was not good: there was a lack of discipline in the practising school, and students' performances in examinations were below the national average.⁵

In June 1885 the Inspectors told the Governors of their dissatisfaction with the 'shallow and superficial' Master of Method, Robert Wilkinson, who could handle the mechanics of teaching but had failed to keep abreast of recent advances in the science of education. The College was threatened with loss of grant unless a remedy was found. The solution favoured by H.M.I. was for the appointment of a new Master of Method who would also be Head of the practising school.⁶ Accordingly, the College's second Principal, John Chritchley, shortly before he left office at the end of 1885, found Wilkinson a new job teaching music, geography and mathematics and selected Lovell for the combined post envisaged by H.M.I.⁷

Lovell was a gifted academic. He was the leading student of his year at Batterssea Training College and while at Chester gained B.A. and M.A. degrees of London University, repeatedly heading the examination lists. But he was also an excellent teacher, who seems to have been equally in control when discussing educational theory with the students as when demonstrating teaching technique in the practising school. The students clearly looked up to him as the commanding presence in the classroom and cultivated man of letters they would all like to be. As the *Collegian* said of him when he left his post in 1903,

'he is as unlike a mere scholar as one can well be. An eloquent and lucid speaker, never at a loss for the fitting word; a bright conversationalist with an inexhaustible fund of amusing anecdote and apposite quotation; a musician of acknowledged skill and taste; and a man of the world'

whose enthusiasm for the extension of public education prompted his application for the Directorship at Chester.⁸

Lovell began work at the College in January 1886, at the same time as the new Principal, Andrew Allen. Allen, a bundle of energy and ideas at the age of 28, presented the Governors with a list of suggested improvements to the College after barely two months in the post: Lovell was one of the few features with which he had no complaint.

'Mr. Lovell is certainly a very great addition to the staff. I regard him as an excellent man and would be very glad to see him more closely connected with the students as I feel confident that his influence would be good from a moral point of view.'

Allen's reforming zeal, which inevitably involved extra expenditure, met with a cautious response from the Governors and, disillusioned, he returned to Cambridge in 1890 to be succeeded by the more patient and tactful John Best. But Lovell soldiered on for a total of 17½ years and can fairly be credited with laying the foundations of the College's fine reputation for the training of teachers.



VII: A.E. Lovell c.1890

Among the devices either introduced or substantially developed by Lovell were 'observation visits' to schools in the neighbourhood, 'criticism lessons' whereby a student taught a class in the practising school and was later subjected to comment by staff and fellow-students, various other 'criticism exercises' in which students tried out techniques on their fellows, and the group discussion of papers on educational topics prepared by each student in turn. In 1898, H.M.I. Oakeley, whose initial Report on the College in 1886 had been a poor one, wrote that 'this college has greatly improved since I first knew it and is in a very satisfactory position'. That improvement was in large part due to Lovell, who was commended for his efficiency, for the variety and suitability of his 'criticism exercises' and for his imaginative forward planning. Three years later, Oakeley's successor, H.M.I. Scott-Coward

'thought Mr. Lovell a very good normal master [i.e. Master of Method] who does not confine himself to mere perfunctory performance of what is required but by promotion of discussion among the men on subjects such as 'How to teach Geography', 'How to teach Drawing' brings out what is latent in them and is able to direct and guide and encourage.'

The *Collegian* of 1903 echoed some of this, praising his efforts 'to raise the students out of the mechanical groove of a few monotonous formulas and methods into a living and individual freedom of teaching'.¹¹ And slowly but surely the students' examination results improved, with numbers in the first division closely matching those in the second division — in keeping with the national picture — by the end of the century.¹²

Lovell was not a man to be pushed around. In 1894 he had a stand-up argument with H.M.I. Sneyd-Kynnersley in front of a class in the practising school, over their rival interpretations of a grammatical detail on which the boys were being tested. His complaint at H.M.I.'s conduct went all the way to the Education Department.¹³ But ironically, their paths kept crossing. Sneyd-Kynnersley was present in December 1900 at the opening of the new practising school, which with its six separate classrooms did much to ease Lovell's task in finding places for teaching practice: two Church Schools in Chester, Christ Church Boys' and St. John's, had been pressed into service during the 1890s.¹⁴ And after Lovell became Director of Education for Chester, Sneyd-Kynnersley, a city councillor in his retirement, soon had himself elected chairman of the Education Committee! When Lovell eventually retired in 1923, it fell to Sneyd-Kynnersley to make a speech of tribute on behalf of the Committee, recalling their personal association for nearly 40 years.¹⁵ But this may have been one of the last times they met, for Lovell moved on to Surrey to be near his son, a master at Charterhouse, and died ten years later.¹⁶

Our second tutor, Theodore Ardern, began to make his mark at Chester College at the same time as Lovell. Among the many reforms advocated by Principal Allen in 1886 was a new arrangement for the teaching of music. He disliked the system inherited from Chritchley, whereby responsibility was shared



VIII: T. Arden c. 1890

between Wilkinson, the former Master of Method who now taught the harmonium, and a visiting tutor who took pupils for the organ. Allen's discussions with the Governors led to a decision to appoint a single music tutor, 'responsible for all the musical teaching in College and all choir arrangements in Chapel'. Wilkinson was to be retained in this capacity, provided that he could teach the organ and would accept an annual salary of £150, appreciably less than he was currently receiving.¹⁷ This spelt the end of the unfortunate Wilkinson's 15-year career at the College. A student's autograph book of the time described 'Wilkie' as 'best tutor in College',¹⁸ but for the second time in a year he made way for an outstanding one.

Ardern arrived to take sole charge of music after three years' teaching at St Augustine's School, Kilburn. His own education had been at Lymm Grammar School, after which he had gone to St Mark's College, Chelsea, for teacher-training. His work at Chester was distinguished by the patient attention he gave to improving each student's individual performance: as one H.M.I. put it in 1897, he took 'a great deal of pains with the men'.¹⁹ The results can be read in successive H.M.I. Reports. In 1898, Sir John Stainer gave a better account of Chester than of any other residential college in the country:

'Most of the students I examined gained full marks. The fluency of a large proportion was as remarkable as it was pleasant. The songs were capital; they included many by the classical composers and some well-selected modern songs. The choral music presented at this College almost always includes some striking novelty.'

In 1907, Stainer's successor, Arthur Somervell, wrote that

'the enthusiasm of the teacher is reflected in the students and both individually and collectively the men attain a high standard. It is no small thing that in a College of 110 students, there should be an orchestra of 33, many members of which have learnt their instruments since they came to College.'

And in 1911 we are told:

'A feature of the College Music is the Orchestra — string, woodwind and brass. It is impossible to over-estimate the benefit derived from such an institution. It enables the students — players and non-players — to get a wider outlook on Music, and to cultivate musical feeling and taste. The orchestra has been well trained and played remarkably well. . . There seems to be a splendid spirit of musical enthusiasm throughout the College.'²⁰

Among the manifestations of that musical zeal were the frequent concerts performed in College during Ardern's time, whether for student audiences, for visiting dignitaries or for the local public. In June 1904, for example, the students gave a concert particularly for local teachers which included solo- and part-songs, choruses, a piano duet and full orchestral pieces, one of the latter being 'A College March' specially composed by Ardern for the occasion. He also helped to

found the College Debating Society and in that same year, 1904, gave the members a lecture-recital on Russian music with selections from Rubinstein, Rachmaninoff, Tchaikowsky and others.²¹

The staff register recording duties and salaries of those employed by the College in the period just before the First World War included 'to assist in the general oversight of College life' as a standard requirement of all.²² For Ardern, this was no mere formality. Although non-resident — married, and raising six children in his home at 49 Bouverie Street — he was actively involved with the welfare of students. He was elected secretary of the College Club in 1893, also becoming manager of its journal the *Collegian*, and tirelessly did the rounds of social evenings and reunions in places such as Liverpool, Manchester and Bolton. When he died, the *Collegian* devoted no less than eight of its 32 pages to him and claimed — with little exaggeration, one suspects — that 'he could give the name, and describe the personality of the three thousand students with whom he was concerned during his thirty-seven years' membership of the Chester College Staff'.²³

But in his closing years Ardern was a shadow of his former self.²⁴ The War claimed his eldest son and 77 of the former students to whom he had devoted so much. In 1919 he suffered a severe breakdown. Staff and students, past and present, subscribed to a Holiday Fund which enabled him to recuperate in Scotland, France and the Channel Islands and also paid for specialist treatment. He resumed work, with difficulty, and appeared to be making a good recovery when he was soaked by heavy rain on a visit to supervise teaching practice at Backford School and died of pneumonia and pleurisy a few days later on 10 May (Ascension Day) 1923. He was buried the following day in Backford churchyard, his own choice in preference to the riverside cemetery in Chester which was liable to flood. His grave still shows the inscription, 'Chester College, 1886-1923'. A further subscription fund in his memory enabled the Ardern Memorial Window to be installed in the College Chapel towards the end of 1924.²⁵

When Ardern died, Herbert Morrell was just completing his first year as Master of Method, having been promoted to the post in May 1922. He had originally joined the College staff in August 1911 as assistant Master of Method and tutor in Maths and Science: one of the line of very able scholars and teachers in the field of Science throughout the College's 150-year history. After experience as a pupil-teacher in York, he had trained at Battersea from 1904 to 1907, acquiring a London B.Sc. in the process. He had gone on to be a tutor at King Alfred's College, Winchester, for four years before coming to Chester.²⁶

As Science tutor he was an undoubted success. An H.M.I. Report on the College in 1922 said that:

'Science instruction is in the hands of a teacher of considerable experience who gives adequate consideration to the individual capacities of students and who is more than usually interested in Science teaching method. Advanced courses in Chemistry and Physics are provided and in both sound work has been done.'

However the Report was more critical of the College's professional teacher training, which seems to have become more stereotyped than in Lovell's day. Year lectures on the 'Principles of Teaching' were condemned as outmoded, and a less formal, more discursive approach was recommended.²⁷ Fortunately the retirement in the same year of the Vice-Principal, David Boyle, who also served as Master of Method, gave the College the opportunity to act on the Report. Morrell succeeded as Master of Method, but not immediately as Vice-Principal, a post which was left vacant for over two years; only in October 1924, after a government circular had allowed extra salary to be paid for posts of special responsibility, was he offered the Vice-Principalship as well.²⁸ Nor did Morrell combine his duties as Master of Method with the Headship of the practising school, as Lovell had done. In 1907 the College had separated the posts, in line with current H.M.I. thinking,²⁹ although it had also been in response to the Inspectorate's pressure that the two had originally been combined back in 1886!

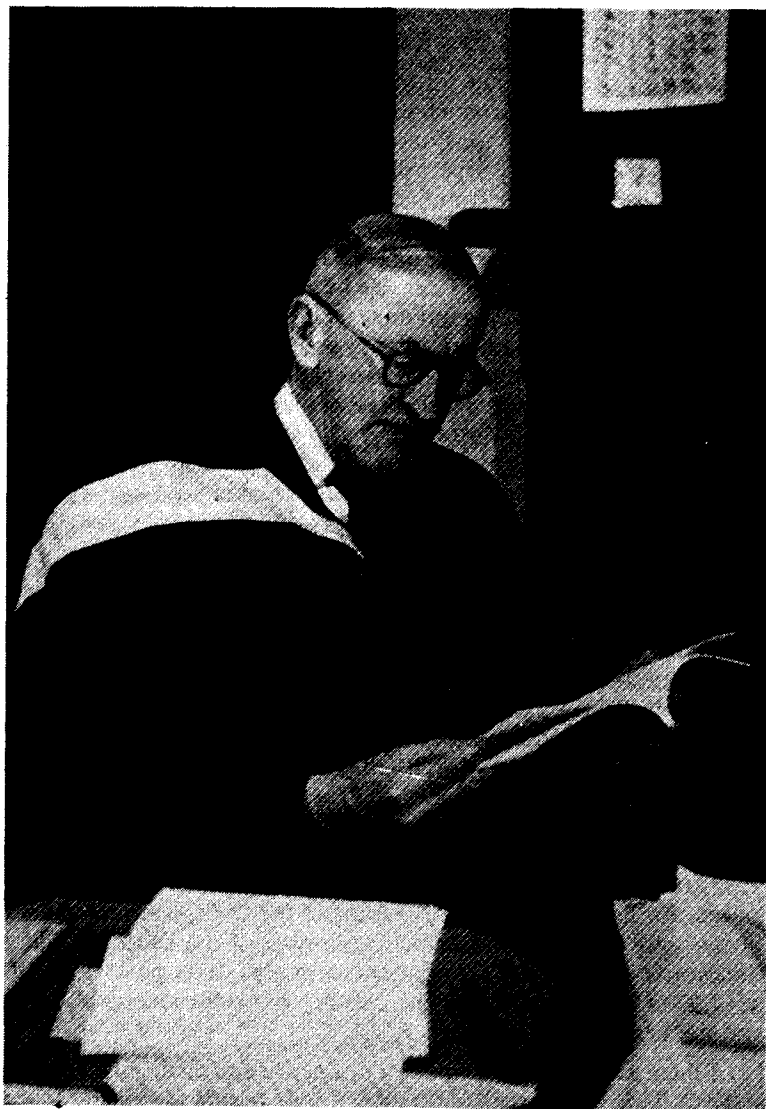
Morrell wasted no time in introducing reforms. In his first year as Master of Method, lectures were opened up to allow more exchange of ideas between tutor and students; students were encouraged to produce written answers to questions posed in class, with the answers provoking discussion when eventually read out; more emphasis was once again placed on 'criticism lessons', which became regular features of the weekly timetable. He also extended the range of schools to which students were sent on teaching practice, embracing Ellesmere Port, New Ferry and Port Sunlight as well as those in Chester and District, Birkenhead and Liverpool which had been used in the past.³⁰ These were now to be the real 'practising schools'; the one on College premises came more properly to be called a 'Practising and Demonstration School', with Morrell, like Lovell before him, vigorously providing the demonstrations before groups of admiring students.

Another H.M.I. Report, this time in 1936 when Morrell was at the height of his powers, gives us a glimpse of his achievement. On the 'Principles and Practice of Teaching':

'lectures are rightly simple in manner of presentation and at the same time interesting and stimulating. There is free and frequent discussion between lecturer and students and the latter express their opinions with refreshing frankness.'

Although H.M.I. would have liked to see greater emphasis in course content on educational psychology and on the challenges posed by differences between individual children, there was approval of the variety of written work set to students and of the fact that observations of classroom practice included visits to local Infants Schools. On teaching practice,

'it is only necessary to say that it is distinguished by the care with which it is arranged, the effectiveness with which it is supervised and the soundness of judgment shown in assessing the teaching marks on the results of it.'³¹



IX: H. Morrell c.1950

From a student viewpoint, his lectures on Education, particularly on Maths Method, were not to be missed: partly because he was bound to notice absenteeism and partly because they were so obviously useful. His demonstrations of the use of the blackboard in mathematics teaching were legendary.

As Vice-Principal, responsible for the orderly conduct of an all-male college, Morrell found another role in which to shine. The 1936 Report considered him 'a most able and experienced Vice-Principal . . . whose enlightened and beneficial influence is apparent in every aspect of the College life and work'. He crossed Parkgate Road each morning from his now-demolished house, 'Silverdale', to take the roll-call and make the announcements in the area which currently serves as a foyer adjacent to the Porters' Lodge. He gave permission for absence and issued the passes for late evenings out. He lectured the students on deportment and checked that everyone going out on teaching practice each day wore a suit, white shirt and tie. He could be ruthless in securing the removal from College of those who did not come up to scratch in academic or behavioural terms, but he could also be very kind and considerate to individuals in difficulties. Although the students were fearful of Morrell, they also appreciated what a tremendous asset he was to the College, a man who seemed to have at his fingertips both administrative routine and current educational thinking.

Morrell succeeded Ardern as secretary of the College Club and manager of the *Collegian*, continuing to serve until his retirement, and accordingly he maintained contact with the thousands of schoolmasters whose teaching techniques owed more to him than to anyone else. As the chief link between the College and its former students, he played a key role whenever support was needed from outside: as in 1932-33 when 40,000 people signed the petition against the threatened closure of the College, and in 1936 when an appeal was launched for money to build a gymnasium and new block of study-bedrooms.³² He resisted pressure to apply for the Principalship when it fell vacant in 1935. However the Second World War thrust the job upon him when Principal Astbury left on military service, and from 1942 to 1945 he had charge of the Chester students who continued their training at St. Paul's Cheltenham. Even six further years of post-war reconstruction, until he retired in 1951, did not exhaust his commitment to the College, for he stayed on as a Governor of the College School and a part-time bursar until 1959. He was an active member of the Diocesan Education Association from 1952 to 1976, two years before his death on 14 June 1978 at the age of 92. A wooden plaque in his memory was subsequently placed at the west end of the College Chapel.

Each of these men was able to make a distinctive and distinguished contribution to the College, appropriate to his time. Lovell, accomplished and articulate, brought much-needed professionalism to the teacher-training programme. Ardern, intense and painstaking, equipped his students to play and to appreciate music in a period before 'push-button' home entertainment. Morrell, uncompromising in the standards he expected of himself and of others, set an example

of discipline, tenacity and sheer good practice to generations of schoolmasters, the last of whom are only now retiring. But every age has its heroes and there are among the present staff, and among those of the recent past, some men and women who may in time be judged to have made at least as great an impact. For them, the closing words of Theodore Ardern's obituary, written for the *Collegian* in 1923 by his former Principal, John Best, are not a bad epitaph to which to aspire:

'His work has been great and will be lasting, but he was much more and greater than his work.'

Footnotes

1. *Collegian*, March 1912, pp.2-4.
2. CR86/1/3: 12th June 1886.
3. *Collegian*, June 1923, p.12.
4. W.M. Smith, Esq., (student, 1950-52), retired Head of Gorsthills Junior School, Great Sutton, to whom the author is grateful for information on Morrell.
5. CR86/1/3: 12th June 1884, 27th March 1885; for exam performances, CR86/5/1.
6. *ibid.*: 17th June 1885. Wilkinson's lesson notes survive as *Syllabus of selected lectures on Psychology and Method used in the Practising School, Chester College, 1885* (CR86/12/32), from which it is clear that he was not an original thinker; he acknowledged that a great deal was drawn *verbatim* from the notes of his predecessor, Hardy, method master 1852-71. The notes are full of instructions such as 'Let your introductory remarks be short, clear, useful and interesting' and 'In answering questions, boys who can answer must put out their right hands from the elbow' but are very weak on educational theory.
7. Chritchley's report to the Governors, CR86/12/32; Allen's report to the Governors, CR86/12/33.
8. *Collegian*, Sept. 1903, pp.33-35.
9. CR86/12/33.
10. *Education Dept. Training Colleges Reports for the year 1886* (1887), p.22; *Education Dept. Training Colleges Reports for the year 1892* (1893), p.40; CR86/1/5: 14th March 1901.
11. *Collegian*, Sept. 1903, p.34.
12. CR86/5/1: in 1897 Chester recruited the student placed first in the national entrance examinations, Francis Heath from Church Coppenhall Board School.
13. CR86/12/42; cf. *Collegian*, 1986, pp.50-51.
14. *Collegian*, Nov.-Dec. 1900, p.92 and 1983, pp.38-41.
15. *Minutes of Proceedings of the Chester Education Committee*, 12th June 1923; Sneyd-Kynnersley, who had first become chairman of the Education Committee in 1908, was deputy-chairman by 1923.
16. *Collegian*, Lent 1933, p.24.
17. CR86/1/3: 12th April 1886.
18. CR86/13/5: a poem on 'The Tutors of Chester College' by 'The Muse of Bottom John', Joseph Maiden of Bury.
19. CR86/1/5: 5th April 1897; CR86/6/1.
20. *Education Dept. Training Colleges Reports for the year 1898* (1899), pp.70-71; CR86/12/55; CR86/12/59.
21. *Collegian*, March 1904, p.10; June 1904, pp.29-30.
22. CR86/6/1.
23. *Collegian*, June 1923, p.2.
24. The author is most grateful to Mrs P. Gardner of Chester, a granddaughter of Ardern, for some of the information in this paragraph.
25. *Collegian*, June 1923, pp.12-14; Dec. 1923, pp.44-45; CR86/1/8: 15th Oct. 1924.

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26. CR86/6/1.
27. CR86/12/70.
28. CR86/1/8: 19th March 1924; CR86/6/1.
29. CR86/1/8: 11th March 1907.
30. CR86/12/70.
31. CR86/12/85.
32. *Collegian*, Lent 1933, p.22; CR86/12/85.
33. *Collegian*, Summer 1951, p.31 and 1980, pp.14-15; CR86/1/10: 8th June 1951, 12th June 1959; personal communication from Rev. Canon J.G. White, former Diocesan Director of Education.