Preface

My own interest in the life and times of John Neville Keynes was aroused almost twenty years ago when my researches in the history of economic thought attracted an invitation to write an introduction to an Italian translation of his classic text – *The Scope and Method of Political Economy* – first published in 1891. Setting the argument of that monograph in the personal, intellectual and historical context of the methodological debate to which it was designed to contribute led me to the long series of J.N. Keynes diaries preserved in the Cambridge University Library, as well as to much relevant (published and unpublished) correspondence that flowed between him and contemporary scholars. Unexpectedly, these sources uncovered a broader and more fascinating area of personal, social and academic history than was pertinent to my original brief. It was unexpected, because, although the name of J.N. Keynes, as founder of a famous Cambridge family, flits in and out of numerous biographies of his brilliant son, Maynard, and figures repeatedly (hence invisibly) in lists of examiners, lecturers or administrators, or in signatures attached to official university documents over more than four decades, neither his personality nor his function has attracted more than a glancing notice in print. This book represents an attempt to justify my conviction that his was a remarkable, if self-effacing, personality and that the story of his life and achievements opens up an unusually fruitful perspective from which to view social and academic developments in Cambridge during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The result is not a biography in the sense of a creative reconstruction of the life of an historically famous character. It is focused on the life and times of John Neville Keynes, a Victorian graduate in Cambridge moral sciences when that honours course comprised four broad subjects – philosophy (moral and political), logic and political economy. He studied, matured, fell in love, raised a family and served the University of Cambridge first as a teacher of logic and political economy and then as an increasingly responsible administrator during the period when it was transformed from a loose federation of 15 religious communities into an integrated institution dedicated to scientific learning, education and research. His career as logician, economist and administrator lasted from 1876 (when he became Pembroke College's first nonconformist fellow) until 1925 when he retired as registry (the universi-

ty's top permanent administrator). The starting-point and the core source for this life story is a virtually continuous Diary – candidly recording his pleasures, griefs, problems, ambitions and achievements over the half-century ending in 1917, and providing an intimate commentary on the university developments in which he was personally closely involved. What gave the Diary a particularly illuminating perspective from which to view the academic revolution – which began in Cambridge early in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and continued through the first quarter of the twentieth century – was the moral integrity of the diarist as well as his central role in the actual sequence of change. The other main primary source, of course, has been the formidable series of annual *Cambridge University Reporter* volumes – with their detailed record of changes in, and debates on, the human, institutional and financial context within which the academic revolution gradually, and sometimes stormily, developed.

When 14-year-old Neville, the son of provincial middle-class parents, whose antecedents were commercial, rather than professional, entered a private non-conformist boarding school at Amersham in 1866, his prospects of becoming a Cambridge don were remote; but by the 1860s and 1870s, religious and class barriers to higher education in the two ancient English universities were collapsing under the combined weight of progressive academic opinion and parliamentary pressure. After 1856 – when the Cambridge University Act abolished the condition that the award of a degree (other than in divinity) required the candidate formally to declare his acceptance of the liturgy of the Anglican Church – nonconformists could at last qualify for a Cambridge degree. In 1871 the University Test Act abolished religious tests for senior, as well as junior, members of the colleges and university. So, when Neville Keynes was admitted to Pembroke College in 1872 – without the public school or family connections that had traditionally lubricated entry to Cambridge University – he was aware that he could, in principle, work his way to a life fellowship through a succession of competitive examinations. His first hurdle was the London University matriculation examination where he won a scholarship to University Hall, the Gordon Square hostel of University College, The second was a Cambridge college entrance examination. Three years residence at a London college that openly disavowed all denominational distinctions and tests and insisted on the sanctity of private judgement in matters of religion, offered young Neville a mind-broadening finishing school. It gave him access to a wider range of honours courses than were available at Cambridge (or Oxford), whilst providing the time and additional coaching to improve his performance in the two subjects sure to win high marks in Cambridge college entrance examinations – mathematics and classics.

In the event, Neville's academic ambitions wilted as soon as he occupied his rooms at Pembroke's small, exclusively male, Anglican community of

bachelors, and realized that the only certain way to a life fellowship involved three years cramming mathematical bookwork under the tuition of hired coaches skilled in grooming their pupils for a first class result in the mathematical tripos. His Diary suggests that he would have abandoned Cambridge at the end of his first term, had he not instantly been scooped up into a lively nonconformist social network centring on a congregationalist grocer's family home located a few hundred yards along the road from Pembroke. It was there that he met two individuals who determined the direction of his future career. The first was James Ward, then a mature Trinity student of moral sciences, who encouraged him to switch (at the end of his first year) from mathematics to a less prestigious but intellectually more stimulating course of study – where a modern breed of dons (who included Henry Sidgwick, Alfred Marshall and John Venn) were obviating the need for coaches by personally teaching the undergraduates who audited their lectures. In the same nonconformist family home – after justifying his subject switch by topping the final list in the moral sciences tripos and being elected a fellow of Pembroke – Neville met and fell in love with Florence Brown, a young Newnhamite, marriage to whom involved resigning his Pembroke fellowship.

As it turned out, Neville Keynes's six years as a Pembroke fellow were dominated by central government pressure for university reform. The 1874 Report of the Royal Commission on Oxford and Cambridge had revealed that progress in standards of teaching and research at both universities was paralysed by the concentration of most of their disposable wealth in colleges whose exclusive and privileged governing bodies accepted no responsibility for promoting educational reform at university level. Accordingly, under the 1877 Universities of Oxford and Cambridge Act, statutory commissions were appointed at each to rewrite university and college statutes, with a view to introducing administrative and financial structures designed to divert from colleges to central bodies the funds needed to improve overall standards of teaching and scholarship and to finance the libraries, museums, scientific equipment and other facilities essential to a modern university. The effect of the statutes finally approved in 1882 was to cap college dividends, end the system of life fellowships (unless attached to the most senior college offices), create new openings for paid employment as university lecturers, readers or professors, and lay the foundations for an effective university bureaucracy. By the time the new statutes came into force in October 1882, Neville's marriage to Florence Brown, for whom he had built a substantial family home in central Cambridge, had determined his career options. Already a regular lecturer in both logic and political economy for the Moral Sciences Board and for Newnham College, he had taken an administrative post at the Local Examinations and Lectures Syndicate, which he was to serve at increasing levels of responsibility for almost 30 years. In 1884 he was among

the first batch of Cambridge University lecturers ever appointed. He thus became one of the earliest examples in Cambridge of a new breed of professional academics – a university employee whose link with his college had dwindled to dining-rights and common-room privileges and whose teaching and/or organizational skills were at the disposal of faculty boards and other central bodies responsible for raising overall standards in education, learning and research.

For the rest of his 97-year life span Neville Keynes resided in the house where, within three years of their wedding, Florence bore their three children – Maynard, Margaret and Geoffrey – each of whom was destined to achieve national distinction. The problems and pleasures of giving birth to, rearing and educating these distinctive offspring, as well as of running a hospitable household in Victorian Cambridge, are fully spelt out in Neville's Diary. Less detailed, but none the less revealing, are the entries relating to his career as lecturer and examiner in logic and political economy and to the pair of classic textbooks inspired by the research that informed his teaching activities. Especially significant is the light shed by his perspective – as secretary (and would-be mediator) to the moral sciences faculty – on the often bitter conflicts between warring dons that led to the foundation of the modern Cambridge economics and politics tripos and to the exclusion of political economy from the moral sciences tripos, although not from the history tripos.

It was in his forties that Neville Keynes began to evolve into an administrator rather than a teacher (or writer) in moral science. In March 1892 the Syndicate for Local Lectures and Examinations (which he had served as one of two assistant secretaries for over a decade) formally appointed him its chief secretary for examinations. The crucial watershed in his career came early in the next academic year, when he reached 'cabinet rank' by being elected to the Council of the Senate, the university's supreme governing body. Four months later, having established his credentials for sound common sense and orderly thinking, he was invited by the Council – consisting of four heads of houses, four professors or readers and four other resident members of the Senate – to act as its secretary. This unpaid, but challenging, office was to place him at the centre of policy making in the university for the rest of his working life. It called for administrative talents of a kind that few academics cared to cultivate but which Keynes himself was genuinely concerned to develop: for example, a methodical approach to policy problems; a capacity to identify and assess the agenda, or the strategy, essential to effective executive action; an ability to draft unambiguous, concise and accurate minutes (or university notices) and to formulate lucid recommendations for validation by the Senate in congregation; and a genuine commitment to promote policies preferred by the Council majority even when he had himself voted in the minority.

The Council, chaired by the current vice-chancellor, generally met at least twice weekly each term and its members represented it on the many boards, syndicates or committees that managed university departments or faculties, or planned new projects and sought solutions to urgent policy problems. Its secretary's responsibilities included drawing up its meetings agenda (in agreement with the vice-chancellor), compiling, or drafting, associated papers for advance circulation to Council members, writing its minutes and drafting its reports or recommendations to be published in the *University Reporter* for discussion and ratification by the Senate in congregation. Because each vice-chancellor's term in office normally lasted no more than two years, successive vice-chancellors had to be initiated, and guided by, the secretary through the current policy problems confronting the Council over which they were to preside. The dedicated impartiality which ensured that, whenever his own term came up for renewal, he would be renominated for election to Council by both the 'liberal' and 'conservative' wings of the academic community, also put him under continual pressure to act as chairman – first of the Moral Sciences Board and later of the new Economics and Politics Board. As early as 1896, when he briefly contemplated applying for the relatively high-profile registrarship of the recently reformed London University, an anxious flurry of letters from present and past vice-chancellors persuaded him that he was an indispensable element in Cambridge's central bureaucracy. On becoming registrar in 1910 he was obliged to resign both his university lectureship and his Local Exams secretaryship. By remaining secretary to the Council, however, he continued to play a pivotal role in the slow, controversial and intellectually challenging process of academic reform that characterized the first 14 years of the twentieth century. More than a decade before the end of his 32 years of unbroken service on the university's governing body he had become its most experienced and well-informed member. Given the vision, idealism and intelligence of the leading academics then actively seeking to bring the University of Cambridge into the twentieth century, the extent of the reforms achieved by 1914 was extraordinarily limited. The prime obstacle was the need to submit each change to the approval of a Senate that included among its members an army of non-resident MAs who could readily be summoned to vote against any proposal conflicting with traditional prejudices – such as the admission of women to degrees, the abolition of compulsory Greek in the Previous examination or the admission of a Roman Catholic hostel to college status.

With the outbreak of war, the problem of modernizing Cambridge University's antiquated constitution lost its urgency and Neville Keynes was abruptly freed from the chore of drafting and redrafting Council reports that were fated to be rejected by the Senate's irresponsible non-residents. By October 1915, when the university's resident membership had shrunk by two-thirds,

its most urgent policy problems revolved around protecting the interests of senior and junior personnel engaged in the war effort. It then became necessary to pass through the Senate and coordinate with the colleges a multiplicity of changes in statutes and regulations covering the special circumstances of those whose studies and jobs had been suspended for an uncertain duration. In all the practical and financial problems raised by such unanticipated external events, the registry was the ultimate oracle. He became the beacon in that tempest as he had been in earlier more localized storms, provoked by conflicts within and between faculties and special interest groups. The end of the war called for another rapid redeployment of human, physical and financial resources at both central and college levels. In these circumstances, Neville Keynes was still the beacon to which the elderly academics who had steered the university through the past four and a half years looked to first, when focusing on peacetime goals. For recently demobilized men grappling with problems of teaching, examining and researching within the framework of a desperately impoverished university he was the familiar amiably accessible adviser at the Registry. Meanwhile, issues of radical reform which had preoccupied his working hours in the prewar decade were transformed by financial crisis in the aftermath of war. The need for substantial government aid was such that another Royal Commission on Oxford and Cambridge was inevitable. Appointed in 1920 it reported in 1924, and Cambridge's second revolution by Royal Commission began to be put into effect. When Neville Keynes retired at the end of 1925, it was in the knowledge that most – if not all – of the reforms at which he had aimed throughout his administrative career were being systematically embodied in the statutes and ordinances of the university and its colleges.

Researching and writing this book has taken an inordinate amount of time – in spite of the fact that I have by no means followed up all the sometimes voluminous Diary entries and that I have been able to draw – more often than my footnote references might suggest – on the dependable scholarship of historians published, for example, in such books as C.N.L. Brooke's *History of the University of Cambridge, 1870–1990* (1993) or in Rita McWilliams-Tullberg's *Women in Cambridge* (1975) – as well as on the exhaustively researched biographies of Maynard Keynes by R.F. Harrod, R. Skidelsky, and D.E. Moggridge or of Alfred Marshall by P. Groenewegen plus J.K. Whitaker's splendidly informative three volumes of Alfred Marshall's *Correspondence*. It would be superfluous to name all the friends and colleagues (including university librarians and staff) who have directly encouraged, advised and assisted me in this enterprise over the past years; they know I am grateful. I feel impelled, however, to mention those who have patiently read their way through drafts of the manuscript (in part or in whole, sometimes more than once) and whose comments, frank criticisms or corrections have substantially

reduced the number of errors of fact, exposition, judgement or interpretation in the final version. Among them are the first and penultimate grandchildren of my subject – Polly Hill and Milo Keynes; Donald Winch; Don Moggridge; Mark Perlman; Geoffrey Harcourt; Daniel Merrill; and Jayne Ringrose. My debt to Milo Keynes has been further compounded by his kindness in finding me suitable photographs and (on behalf of the family) for allowing me to quote extensively from the diaries and letters of which they own the copyright. On the matter of copyright, I am grateful also to the Syndics of the Cambridge University Library for granting me access to and permission to quote from the material of which they are the custodians, and for the kind permission of the Chancellor, Masters and Scholars of the University of Cambridge for allowing me to use important extracts from the *Cambridge University Reporter*.

Finally it must be said that putting the manuscript in the hands of a specialist publisher, staffed by a remarkably helpful team of vigilant professional editors, has helped this grateful author to exclude a great many errors, omissions and obscurities from the printed text.

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