Now the Cambridge University Graduate Society has passed its quarter century. I feel its history should be recorded.

The growth of graduate students in the University was not a slow development. After the First World War it was decided that steps should be taken to introduce a three-year postgraduate course leading to a Ph.D. There had always been a small number of students who had stayed on in their College working in research subjects hoping for a College Fellowship. But after 1918 this decision was made partly as the American students did not wish to go to Germany, where until the outbreak of the war most ultimate University teachers and researchers had been trained. Cambridge seemed a welcome alternative with its famous scholars and scientists.

Many Americans during their war service had been stationed in and about Cambridge. Few home-bred students made use of this new opportunity and so were no problem to themselves or their Colleges. Cambridge was very overcrowded with undergraduates returning to finish their courses or starting their studies which they had been unable to take up because of war service. Also there was not the careful discrimination in the call-up in the First World War, and the loss of brilliance and ability was disastrous.

In the Second World War some lessons had been learnt and though the Colleges emptied there was careful discrimination. Men and women went before a tribunal and they were directed into the war effort for which they were most fitted and a good many had two years at the University before they were called up for National Service, making use of the learning they had acquired during their residence, which might be directed into linguistic, scientific or intelligence work. Two years at the University gave them a war-time degree and many were content with having gained their BA, but others felt that their education was interrupted and wanted higher qualifications. It was then that the PhD became the solution for the able young British graduate, who wanted and needed a wider and deeper knowledge of his chosen subject.

The Cambridge Colleges were hard put to it to deal with the return and influx of this new type of student population. The Colleges were undergraduate institutions, whose numbers had also drastically increased and were in no way prepared to house, feed and deal with these more mature men and women. It not only meant a large increase of students, but teachers, and more accommodation was necessary. Another problem was that some senior research students and
undergraduates were married with and without children. It was a problem never before encountered. All senior members helped as far as they were able. It was still the time of large houses. Students' wives often helped with the housework and so got a home.

Each graduate student had their supervisor; there was a tutor for advanced students; they might dine in some Colleges only once a week except if they were fortunate and were scholars of their College, but otherwise they were dependent on themselves.

Science research students who usually worked in a group under a director of research found their social feet and did not particularly suffer from loneliness. The case with the humanities was very different. They were lone workers in their chosen field and in some cases very rarely saw their director of studies to discuss their work. For them it was frequently a very unhappy time especially if they had not been Cambridge undergraduates and had come from other countries.

I was made aware of the problem by Girton and Newnham British research students in the humanities, who were extremely unhappy in their loneliness, living in digs and dining only once a week in their respective Colleges. All they wanted was to finish their theses and leave Cambridge for ever. This seemed to me a terrible situation and not a desirable way for the taxpayers' money to be spent.

After much thought I talked with Dr Harold Taylor. We discussed the problem and my wish to start a Society where graduates of all Colleges and all disciplines could meet. I was much encouraged by Dr Taylor's kindness. He himself came as a research student to Cambridge from New Zealand and had been very lonely in a very kindly College.

I then called a meeting at Peterhouse of graduate students to find out their reaction. There was an overwhelming wish to have such a Society. The Council of the Senate was then approached and all the Colleges.

The Council of the Senate agreed that such a Society could be founded as long as it had nothing to do with the University and was no expense to them, though they allowed the use of the Smaller Examination Hall for one day a week throughout the year, paying the janitor overtime. Not having any money we charged £2 a person and £2 for married couples annual membership. We used the Smaller Examination Hall, not a cheerful place, for dances, concerts, etc.. We could make coffee, which was a help, but met otherwise in College public rooms; all the Colleges were very generous and friendly. Pembroke had already a Middle Common Room, which was a great asset.
People were prepared to give us good talks, always ending with a lively discussion.

Membership was open to graduate students and their wives, graduates working in Cambridge, and those working in the scientific laboratories round the outskirts. Everyone had to be under 35. This made a good mix, and made life a little more interesting for school teachers, young lawyers, doctors, etc.

This was all very well, but it was not my idea of a Graduate Society as I had envisaged it. I knew from the beginning what I felt the graduate student needed, but I also knew that in so ancient a University one must bide one's time. After eight years I felt I had done so; and all Masters of Colleges and Tutors of Advanced Students were well aware of our activities, that they were peaceful and purposeful. We had a committee of graduate students, who had their special duties. I, as President, attended the meetings, so could clear their minds as to what was possible and what was impossible in this University. Also I could approach the necessary University Authority when need arose, and my views would meet with a sympathetic hearing.

From the beginning of the Society I wished that the graduate students should have a club house, where they could meet and have meals; a library, a music room, and the usual types of entertainments. After eight years I started to move in this direction. The Vice-Chancellor was sympathetic; a house was found, but the University decided on a more pressing use for it.

The next plan was to have a Syndicate sitting on the welfare of graduate students. They took a good time to discuss this matter, though the Chairman was the Head of the House with the largest number of research students and the other members were all Tutors of Advanced Students. Their decision was that all was well in a perfect world and nothing should be done.

It was then suggested to me that I should get the signatures of three M.A.'s and demand a discussion. I did not let grass grow under my feet and within 24 hours I had the signatures of 48 outstanding M.A.'s of this University to ask for a discussion, which was granted. I gave the facts to two friends to open the discussion and got permission for the research students to listen in the gallery of the Senate House. I felt it was a case of do or die.

After my two speakers, one speaker after another got up and said how happy they had been as undergraduates and how lonely and lost as research students and this went on for one and a half hours. The day was won and the Graduate Society became a first priority, being taken over completely by the University. I had thought of a Society shared by the University and the Colleges, but this discussion sealed the fate of the Society, which of course was the correct decision, for the logic is quite simple.
Colleges accept undergraduates of different disciplines. The Degree Committees of the University accept research students, who can only then be accepted by Colleges; therefore research students are the responsibility of the University. This bit of logic had helped me all through the discussion.

We moved into 9, West Road sharing the premises with the Assistant Staff Board, not a good arrangement. We had the ground floor, a large kitchen, dining room, sitting room, a bar (the first for junior members of the University), and a large garden. Upstairs there was my secretaries' room, my office, and a television room. It was a very good start. Everyone was overjoyed and everyone helped manfully, sometimes to my great dismay. The Secretary of the Assistant Staff Board was a sensitive gentleman, and objected to our notice board in the shared hall - our announcements might affect his staff, he disliked our playing the gramophone after lunch whilst his staff counted the money. It was all very irritating and it was important that I should keep the peace, but the rights of graduate students was my first concern and I did not let go.

The money allotted to the Society by the University was not enough to hire a capable cook, for the University was convinced that the scheme would collapse. Ipso facto all research students are introvert and did not need a meeting place and they had their Colleges. So for the first year I did all the main cooking and so taught myself to cook and cater daily for 150 or more and in this way the Society lived well. To teach the cooking staff not to worry was a Leitmotiv that went through all my years in the Graduate Society.

We had a Management Committee of Senior Members. Professor Guthrie was Chairman and we had a Graduate Committee of our members elected at the Annual General Meeting. The Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer of this Committee were also members of the Management Committee, a new innovation.

During our first year we moved into 9, West Road became too small and we had to consider larger premises; inviting members of the Cambridge University Council to lunch with us, this became clear to them as well. I knew what I felt would be suitable but did not know whether it would fall into my lap. So I waited till I was invited to look over 32, Trumpington Street, the old Fitzwilliam House, which had moved and became Fitzwilliam College. This was exactly what I felt was right and proper for the Society. It was central, near the laboratories, the University Library, etc., and it was an early eighteenth century building with good, large, elegant rooms. My Senior Treasurer, Mr John Bowen of the Financial Board, and I made a thorough survey. It was in a terrible condition but the structure was good, and we accepted the offer. The University, knowing Fitzwilliam House would move, had spent nothing
whatevers on the premises and it needed doing up inside and outside. The electricity was in a dangerous condition. It had no central or gas heating, and had only one lavatory -- no good for some 900 members. So there was another big job to be done. I persuaded the University to let me have the accommodation above Peck's the chemist, which had two other bathrooms and plenty of lavatories. Having to pay out of our grant for re-wiring this large building we were pretty short of money, so we decided to decorate ourselves, the University paying for the paint and we producing the labour. Enthusiasm ran high and everyone was willing to help, so every evening there was a foreman and graduate students who took it in turns to paint the interior of 32, Trumpington Street. They made a very good job of it.

Cookers and a deep freeze had been left in a terrible condition, some had to be scraped, others cleaned by professionals, which meant more drain on our grant. As far as I could I bought antique furniture and Oriental rugs having to keep to the cost of second-grade Fitzwilliam carpet by the yardage, but I managed it. It seemed important that the surroundings should be as gracious as possible. One of the members persuaded artists to lend us their pictures so that we had a good turn round and no-one could unseemly look at the walls. We had a bar under the auspices of the University mainly run by members and the staff; in exchange for these services there were free meals. Membership was free for all graduates and their wives. There were associate members who paid £2.00 a year, who were graduates under 35 employed in Cambridge in teaching, research etc... They were very valuable, as they were helpful and were a more permanent population than research students. The education diploma students were particularly valuable and helpful. Many came from other universities and wanted to live the Cambridge life fully and so were interested and cooperative. The Graduate Society was very international, and the students came from all the five continents. We helped them to integrate quickly and to make friends. The number of research students in the University was then much smaller than now and Colleges were geared for undergraduates, and research students in many Colleges felt out on a limb.

Once the Society was established meals were served. Being international we respected the rules imposed by different religions. This was unobtrusive but sometimes difficult when everyone was attracted by the vegetarian dish meant for the Brahmins. The midday meal was the main effort, but we also had suppers. These were turned to dinners for special occasions. We had dances, talks, wine tasting, chess, bridge and other entertainments. We ran an orchestra and a choir. Our newspapers and periodicals were international. We had a television room, a ping pong room and a grand piano. The Moslems
prayed on Friday in the parlour, but politics and proselitising were kept out of the premises; wars were not allowed to interfere with relationships. We were an international society, whose central interest was the life and work of the University of Cambridge.

An anonymous benefactor, when he found out about the Graduate Society, donated money to the University for research students in the Graduate Society. The deciding committee consisted of two Senior Members (the Chairman and the President) and three research students (members of the Committee). This made it possible to buy a Bluthner grand piano, a gramophone, books, records, and a high fi put together by Nigel Balchin. Later we had another grand piano. It was extremely valuable, and these amenities meant a great deal to the Society, especially to those for whom escape was very necessary, for the pressures can be very great in these three, often very lonely, years.

Difficulties did frequently recur, some were general - then a discussion took place. The difficulties were put by the President to the Vice-Chancellor or the Master of the College concerned. Notice was taken and the desired action was put in force by the University. There never was any fuss or disturbance - it was quite unnecessary. Personal problems were solved, the research students talking to me in my own room at the top of 32, Trumpington Street, and then, when I did not personally solve the problem, which might be finance, supervisors, emotional, medical, I could then consult the Tutor or Senior Member or anyone else who might be helpful, and so solve the problem and smooth the way. This I considered the most valuable work of the President of the Graduate Society. It was very private and was not common knowledge; I knew I was trusted by the graduate students and they felt I was their mascot and a go-between when needed.

When it was first mooted that foreign students should pay higher fees than home students, feelings ran high. Our non-British students, especially those from East of Suez, were insensed. They came as scholars from poor countries, who had great need of their ultimate know-how, and who were mainly members of the Commonwealth. A heated argument took place and I went to the meeting called by the Council of the Senate to discuss the matter. I thought all Tutors of Advanced Students would attend and so did not write out reactions of research students. To my surprise there were only two Tutors and myself, a very poor showing, and I had not prepared a written speech feeling that it would be unnecessary. All we won was a year's grace, without being told that fees would not be raised for only a year, so that it came as a great disappointment that the following year the University voted for the rise of fees with remission in hard cases.
The Society carried on reasonably smoothly though there were the trouble-makers in the 1960's who sought the peacefulness of the Society. I felt sure that disruption would follow when we had to move into the University Centre. We were not allowed to occupy the top floor which we were promised, as the disrupter informed the Committee that they wanted to be one with the Regent House, though they never felt any duty towards Senior Members when parties were arranged for the advanced students to meet the Regent House and left that job for the Secretariat, which was pointless.

I managed to get 12, Mill Lane as sole possession for the Graduate Society; but that meant offices, music rooms, library and television rooms, not the general mix which was the value of the Society. The President could never have contact with the members because they were part of a Society of Senior Members, Visiting Scholars and themselves. It was a disaster.

When I decided to retire in 1969 I begged the Vice-Chancellor to replace me with someone knowledgeable and permanent of the University, but neither my experience nor the voices of my own very competent Graduate Committee was listened to, but it was the voice of those who had not even joined the Society so knew nothing about it. So now it is run by graduate students with none of the permanent background of a Senior Member who knows the University as no student can know it and who has the great and important advantage of permanency and can give the help only long experience of the ways of the University can give.

December 1980

The above was written a good time ago. Matters had been made impossible for the President of the Graduate Society when the Society moved into the Centre due to the Kitchen Manager, whom the President had employed and found wanting and believed dishonest. Unfortunately the Kitchen Manager completely ruled the Warden who had no sympathy with the graduate student or the President. It was a complete vendetta, the President of the Cambridge University Graduate Society being considered the culprit. It was a case of double dealing. My defence for the rights of graduate students was not acceptable.

My only possibility was to retire with the hope that someone more acceptable to the Warden, the Kitchen Manager and the Regent House would replace me, but even this was not to be. The Warden did his utmost to destroy the oneness of the Graduate Society, taking the attitude that only he had a right to the allocation in the Centre and however much discussion preceded arrangements he would ignore what he had agreed to earlier. The President was to have the same rights of free meals and entertaining the guests of the Graduate Society, but he did not accept this and in fact firmly overcharged for meals given to speakers. The
whole situation became unbearable. This made the President retire and take the Society for Visiting Scholars, which had at last been accepted by the Council of the Senate, to Botolph Lane. The Vice-Chancellor did not feel that the President should be replaced (who had done the work voluntarily), as it would cost money. The Society then went through bad times; it now became a leftish cell. It is recovering, but today it is purely a welfare society lending out goods thanks to the annual income of the anonymous benefactor.

Where should it go from there? Are all the discussions on the Graduate Society by the Council of the Senate to be ignored, and let the Centre be a place where people eat, read the paper, watch television, but each member is a stranger to the other and the idea of being a meeting place for graduate students with one another and with Senior Members, if either side wish, does not exist.

The benefactors who made the Centre possible never meant it to become a financial revenue for the University, but something human and intimate, which it certainly is not at present.

Inquiries at other Universities inform me that Staff houses and dining rights are not counted as an income to the University Chest, but are an essential amenity as they are for students, where they share the premises. As an example, at Sheffield University the senior staff’s contribution is £5 a member annually to cover newspapers, which is reasonable.

It is obvious to me that the Graduate Society will never survive by its own right without a Senior interested Member as its President. It might be someone just retired who would discuss present and future arrangements, if possible with a Senior Members’ Committee.

The Cambridge University Graduate Society is a University Institution set up by the Council of the Senate and should be treated in this manner, not as a self-appointed Society by graduates as the Cambridge University Union of undergraduates.

[Signature]

January 1981