

■ chapter one

FOUNDING AND ESTABLISHING AN IMPERIAL UNIVERSITY: THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

From 1834 to 1838 the renowned British scientist, Sir John Herschel – mathematician, astronomer, botanist, and important figure in the development of photography – spent fruitful years in Cape Town. He studied the southern skies (in the process observing Halley’s Comet), and together with his wife identified and documented local flora. He was also keen to see the development of education in the Cape Colony. This, in his view, required an expansion in the training of teachers in the colony. So in the final year of his Cape Town sojourn he put forward an idea in a letter: ‘A constantly progressive standard [of education] would be kept up by means of the South African College in Capetown, and a similar or better institution which, if not now, ere long, it is to be hoped, will be established in Grahamstown’.¹

This was perhaps the first known mention of the possibility of Grahamstown becoming an educational centre, as opposed to the garrison town which it had long since been. It took seventeen years for Herschel’s idea to come to fruition, with the founding of St Andrew’s College in 1855. Established as a secondary school for white boys, St Andrew’s would in time develop a college department which would prepare students for degrees. In 1873 the University of the Cape of Good Hope (UCGH) was founded in Cape Town – an institution that would function simply as an examining body and award degrees. Teaching was undertaken by its constituent colleges, which, in the eastern Cape, included St Andrew’s, the Grey Institute in Port Elizabeth, Gill College in Somerset East, and the Graaff-Reinet College. The Higher Education Act, passed by the Cape parliament in 1874, enabled these constituent colleges to offer courses leading to a degree under the auspices of the UCGH. St Andrew’s was the only one of the four eastern Cape colleges to make any headway at the tertiary level and even its progress was very limited. A college department was set up at St Andrew’s in 1878, with grants forthcoming from the Cape government. It enjoyed, though,

little success. St Andrew's prioritised secondary schooling, and the college department's infrastructure and equipment were thoroughly inadequate. The only bright spot was the survey class taught by Arthur Matthews. He had come out from England in 1875 to teach mathematics and natural science. Almost thirty years later he would become one of the four founding professors at Rhodes University College, and would over time establish himself as the father of surveying in South Africa.

The idea of establishing a university college in the eastern Cape was pursued from the 1880s. J.H. Brady, the deputy inspector of schools, pointed out in his report for 1884 that the government should try to develop higher education in Grahamstown, which was the natural centre for such development in the eastern Cape. At a meeting of the Eastern Province Literary and Scientific Society in August 1892 H. Lardner-Burke raised the issue, calling for a teaching university 'where the best youth of the English and Dutch races would meet on the common ground of academic life', with such a university becoming the 'rallying point of the culture of this Colony'. His idea was that the five main schools in Grahamstown – St Andrew's, St Aidan's, the Diocesan School for Girls, the Public School, and the Wesleyan School for Girls – should each be assigned a professor or lecturer. These would be shared among the five institutions, making for an intercollegiate system of higher education.

There were two further developments the following year. First, various eastern Cape educational, judicial and clerical figures submitted their views on higher education in the region to *The EP Magazine*, the journal of the Eastern Province Literary and Scientific Society. In the view of some of the contributors Grahamstown would be the ideal location for an institution of higher learning: it was already the chief educational centre in the region, and the Albany Museum provided facilities for the natural sciences. Dr Bisset Berry, a Queenstown figure who would later become speaker in the Cape legislative assembly, also favoured Grahamstown, while being fully aware, too, of the town's limitations:

Its sanitation is defective; its supply of potable water is poor ... the pursuit of the fine arts is not much in vogue; practical demonstration of the many-sidedness and fertility of modern civilization is impossible, and the social atmosphere is somewhat overcharged with that jejune, old-world ecclesiasticism, so often the cause of loss of faith in the young and of the sense of proportion in the middle-aged.

At much the same time, in 1893, a committee was established, comprising prominent eastern Cape men, to devise a higher education scheme for the region. The committee met often, but elicited a weak response from other quarters. Financial support was not forthcoming, and in 1894 the committee finally reported that it was unable to propose a practicable scheme. The higher education movement had temporarily collapsed, only to be revived eight years later.²

In the meantime there seemed to be little prospect of resuscitating the scheme for a university in Grahamstown. Selmar Schonland – botanist and enthusiastic proponent of the scheme – gave up hope. But in 1902 he was visited by Dr William Thomson, the UCGH registrar, who urged him to take up the cause again. Schonland referred Thomson to Josiah Slater, editor of the *Grahamstown Journal*, who had not given up hope. Seemingly emboldened by Thomson, Slater called a public meeting of interested persons in the municipal council chamber in December 1902. At this meeting a committee was appointed, to be chaired by Slater and comprising Dr MacGowan (principal of St Andrew's), Dr Greathead (chair of St Andrew's Council), the rector of St Aidan's, Francis Graham, and Schonland. This committee seemed to be faltering as the St Andrew's representatives appeared reluctant to give up their higher education department, even though it was stagnating. Schonland was adamant that St Andrew's would have to back down if a university college was to be established.

At a further meeting on 5 March 1903 the St Andrew's College Council did indeed back down, agreeing that a university college be founded in Grahamstown. It is particularly interesting that it was also agreed at this meeting that the institution be called the Eastern Province University College – a name that might sit much more comfortably in the minds of many today, but also a name that might have made it difficult for the institution even to get off the ground. Four days later, on 9 March, another committee meeting was held, at which a resolution put forward by Graham was adopted: 'that the name of the proposed new College should be "the Rhodes University College" and that the trustees of the Rhodes estate be approached with a view to obtain from them a substantial grant for the purpose of the new institution'. The name was ratified at a further committee meeting in early April and at a public meeting in late May. The reason for the proposed new name was obvious – to provide leverage in approaching the Rhodes Trust, which administered the estate of Cecil Rhodes (who had died in March 1902), for funding. But was the name appropriate for a university in Grahamstown?

Cecil Rhodes' association with the town was minimal – his interests

lay in the western Cape, Kimberley, Johannesburg and north of the Limpopo. He is known to have made one visit to Grahamstown – a significant one at that – in 1887, arriving at Christmas time to meet with the British High Commissioner, Sir Hercules Robinson, who was attending the South African Exhibition as part of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee celebrations. Rhodes needed to meet with Robinson out of a concern that a boer adventurer from the Transvaal, Piet Grobler, was securing a treaty with Lobengula, the Ndebele king – a treaty that would have threatened Rhodes' expansionist ambitions north of the Limpopo. At the meeting Robinson agreed to send an agent, J.S. Moffat, to meet with Lobengula early in 1888. Moffat's mission succeeded, thwarting boer interests in the interior and enabling Rhodes to proceed with his plan to extend British colonisation north of the Limpopo.

Rhodes had been keen to establish a university, but not in the eastern Cape. In 1891 he had wanted to found a university on his Groote Schuur estate in the foothills of Table Mountain. It was to be modelled on his Oxford college, Oriel, and he even went so far as to have the plans of Oriel sent to him in Cape Town. Funding for the scheme was to come from the profits of the canteens at the De Beers compounds, which accommodated black workers at the Kimberley diamond mine. According to Herbert Baker, the imperial architect, Rhodes used to joke that 'he meant to build the University out of the kaffir's stomach'. He envisaged it as a white institution that would bring English and Dutch students together as a basis for future Anglo-Dutch cooperation. The scheme, though, foundered in the face of opposition from Victoria College in Stellenbosch, a largely Dutch institution which viewed Rhodes' proposed university as likely damaging to its own interests. The plan was revived in 1895, and a decision made to start building, but the Jameson Raid at the end of that year almost destroyed Rhodes' reputation, as well as putting an end to this particular project. Leander Starr Jameson would play an important role in the founding of Rhodes University College, as we shall soon see, and there is irony in that his disastrous raid on Kruger's republic in 1895-1896 probably prevented a Rhodes University being established in Cape Town.³

Once the name of Rhodes had been settled upon for the proposed university college in Grahamstown, the sub-committee responsible for overseeing the project moved fast. A letter was promptly sent to Sir Lewis Mitchell, a Cape Town-based trustee who managed the Rhodes Trust's financial affairs, appealing for 'substantial assistance' towards the establishment of a university college in Grahamstown, with which "Mr Rhodes" name might be coupled'.

Michell was initially lukewarm towards the project, but would be won around. Selmar Schonland, one of the prime movers in Grahamstown, went to Cape Town to meet with Michell after being given an introduction by Jameson. At first Schonland was received as an unwelcome visitor, but then Michell listened attentively to him for an hour-and-a-half and finally intimated that there was a reasonable hope of a sizeable grant. In August 1903 George Parkin, the chief secretary of the Rhodes Trust, came out from England, visited various educational institutions, and recommended that Grahamstown, an ideal educational centre, be given financial support. Jameson weighed in with his backing, proposing that the interest on an endowment fund of £50,000 be granted by the Trust to fund the college's first professors. Milner, the British High Commissioner, also offered his support for the project, which was now rapidly moving to fruition.

Jameson would become increasingly influential and a key player in establishing the college. As leader of the Progressive Party he contested the Grahamstown seat in the Cape election early in 1904, even though, like Rhodes, he had had no previous connection with the town. With Jameson winning the seat and the Progressive Party gaining a majority in the election, the Albany member of the Cape parliament was now also the Cape premier, as well as being a Rhodes Trustee. Jameson's status and influence facilitated the passing of the act incorporating Rhodes University College in May 1904. This provided for the establishment of a council and senate, laying down the functions, powers and composition of both bodies. The measure enabled the college to start operating in July 1904. Rhodes came into being as a white, segregated institution in the sense that all members of the academic and administrative staff and all students were white, while menial work was undertaken by black employees. This racial structure, which was largely in tune with the segregationist practice of the time, went unchallenged at Rhodes for almost thirty years and remained intact for about seventy years.

The financial foundation of the newly emerging institution was, though, still uncertain. A financial sub-committee had been established in June 1903, with fund-raising its main purpose. An appeal was made to the Grahamstown town council for an annual grant of £200, and other funds were sought, but by the time the college was functioning a year or so later only about £16,000 had been raised. There was still the likelihood of funding from the Rhodes Trust, but confirmation of this was only received in October 1904 - £50,000 worth of De Beers preference shares to be set aside as an endowment, with the interest on this sum to be paid to the college half-yearly at a rate of 5%, to fund professorships.⁴

In the meantime a suitable site had to be found for the new institution. Goodwin's Kloof and Waterloo Farm were considered but ruled out. In October 1903 a sub-committee set up to identify a site resolved that the Drostdy grounds would be the most desirable location. The site comprised a few buildings. The centrepiece was the old Drostdy House (on the site of the present main entrance, under the clock tower), a mustard-coloured, double-storeyed building that had been constructed in the 1820s and intended as an office for the landdrost, but in the event never used for that purpose. From 1836 to 1870 the site served as the imperial government's military headquarters in the eastern Cape. During these years new buildings were constructed – military barracks (the surviving part of which currently houses the linguistics department), a prison (the Old Provost), a guardroom (the Drostdy Arch), and, among others, the Drostdy Lodge (now occupied by the maths department). In 1870 the imperial government relinquished possession of the site, on the understanding it could reclaim it should a future need arise. From 1873 the buildings were used by the Grahamstown Public School. But in 1896, following the Jameson Raid, the imperial government reclaimed them in order to station there a newly-arrived British regiment. During the South African War of 1899–1902 the troops left for the front, and after the war the site was again abandoned by the military.

The site duly vacated, it now became a matter of acquiring it. In mid-1904 Schonland, perhaps the most active and energetic of the local role-players, went to see Milner in Johannesburg to request the transfer of the Drostdy site. Although Milner received him in 'rather a chilly fashion', he did agree to consider the matter. Further supplications were made to the War Office. Eventually the college received the go-ahead to occupy the buildings at a rental of one shilling a year, having refused to purchase them at the price set by the War Office. So in November 1904 the old Drostdy House was first occupied by Rhodes University College, its rooms to be used mainly for teaching – not, though, without objection from one local figure. Town councillor Nelson complained that 'the place was crammed full of microbes and bacilli', only to be overruled by the Medical Officer of Health who reported the site to be clean and healthy.⁵

In the meantime the governing bodies of the new university college had been duly constituted. Council held its first meeting on 19 July 1904, chaired by Justice Kotzé, member of the Eastern Districts bench and formerly Chief Justice of the South African Republic – a position from which he had been dismissed following a conflict with President Kruger over a constitutional issue. The newly established Council had seventeen members,

including government, municipal and school representatives, as well as five members elected by donors. It had three sub-committees, one dealing with building matters, another handling finances, and a third known as the Internal Arrangements Committee. Senate, comprising professors and a nominated member of Council, held its first meeting in the Albany Museum on 28 August.

One of Council's first decisions was to formalise the appointment of the four professors transferred from the St Andrew's college department: Arthur Matthews as professor of mathematics; Stanley Kidd as professor of classics, philosophy and English; George Cory – chemistry and physics; and George Dingemans – modern European languages.

About fifty students enlisted in 1904, only four of whom were women and all were white. Arthur Mullins was the first student to register. The majority enrolled in Matthews' survey class. Before the move to the Drostdy site in November classes were held in St Andrew's buildings – Hillside Cottage and Lynden. When the move to the Drostdy site was virtually completed early in 1905, humanities classes were taught in the old Drostdy House, chemistry and zoology in the old fort, and physics in the former barrack buildings. For the first ten years of Rhodes' existence there was no student accommodation on campus, until the opening of a men's residence, College House, in 1914, and Oriel House for women in 1915. So in these early years students were accommodated either in school hostels or in approved boarding-houses in town.

Rhodes' finances during this first decade were on a sound footing, even though the college operated on a budget that was minute by today's standards. In 1905 the annual income and expenditure balanced out at around £10,200, rising to about £13,000 by 1913. There continued to be a dependence both on the estate of Cecil Rhodes and on businesses and businesspeople formerly associated with him. There was an annual return of about £2,500 from the £50,000 worth of De Beers shares; De Beers also made a one-off donation of £5,000; and in 1907 a bequest of £25,000 came from the estate of Alfred Beit who had been Rhodes' chief financier. Further income came from government grants, student fees and donations – by 1907 over £18,500 had been raised from the Grahamstown public. Council's finance committee exercised strict control over expenditure, to the extent that the most minute cost, amounting even to a mere sixpence, would have to be approved.

An imperial university

Critics have long referred to Rhodes as an old-style colonial university – a view surely confirmed by the very name of the institution. Further weight is given to this notion if we examine the behind-the-scenes negotiations that led to the founding of Rhodes in 1904. It was established not just as an institution of higher learning, but also to bolster the British imperial connection, in line with Milner's anglicisation agenda following the South African War.

During the negotiations with the Rhodes Trust, prior to the establishment of the new university college, much emphasis was placed on this imperial ethos which would, it was believed, surely enhance the prospect of funds being forthcoming. George Parkin, the chief secretary of the Rhodes Trust, was soon persuaded along these lines during his visit to South Africa in August 1903. He expressed his view to Sir Lewis Michell who had been doubtful about the Grahamstown scheme: 'I am satisfied', wrote Parkin, 'that the ideas of Mr Rhodes in regard to South Africa will be carried out better than in any other way by building up an institution of higher learning at Grahamstown, the educational centre of the Eastern Province'. There was a particular concern that there should be a counter to Victoria College in Stellenbosch (the future Stellenbosch University), where anti-British feeling was being cultivated. So, Parkin continued, a university college in Grahamstown 'would create for the Eastern Province and under very strong British influence what is now being very energetically developed in the Western Province'. Michell seemed to have been persuaded, soon proposing that the Rhodes Trust prioritise educational matters in the Cape, as 'the "pure Afri-canders" are straining every nerve to capture the education of the young and their success would be a fatal day for us here and for the Empire'.

Local Grahamstown promoters of the scheme also pushed this line. Schonland expressed the view that 'the proposed College will largely contribute towards the extension of Imperial ideas in South Africa'. And the headmaster of Kingswood College, E.G. Gane, wrote to the Rhodes Trust in similar vein in July 1904: the new Rhodes University College 'will also have a certain political leaning. The Eastern Province is conspicuously more English and loyal to Imperial ideas than the Western yet it is far behind it in educational advantages'. He went on to say that 'the Rhodes College is to imply Higher Education under the best of Imperial influences'. The Rhodes Trustees were duly convinced, coming to the conclusion that such a college in the eastern Cape was 'a necessity, educational and political'.

The close connection between Rhodes University College and the

British Empire would continue for several years. This connection helped to sustain the Rhodes Trust's interest in the new university. In 1907 one trustee, C.W. Boyd, approached the British War Office in support of the College's wish to purchase the Drostdy buildings – his plea 'based on the truly Imperial service rendered by St Andrew's College in the past, and likely to be rendered in a far greater degree by the Rhodes University College'.

The College's continuing close identification with the memory of Cecil Rhodes gave further expression to its imperial character. In 1907 Jameson donated a marble bust of Rhodes, unveiling it in person at a ceremony, at which the professor of law, Macfadyen, spoke of 'the great founder' being such an inspirational figure to the Rhodes community. This bust would stand at the main entrance to the university for many years – and, as Brenda Schmahmann has pointed out, the display of the bust in such a prominent position 'helped to fudge the fact that the institution's founding was not actually the outcome of any wish on the part of Rhodes himself'.

The fudging continued in other ways. In the same year Senate resolved that Empire Day, 24 May, should be observed as Founder's Day for the College. Council, however, overruled this, taking up Jameson's suggestion that 12 September should be the day – a day which had nothing at all to do with the founding of Rhodes University College. It was the day which marked the establishment of white settlement in Rhodesia. On 12 September 1890 the white 'pioneers' had hoisted the British flag at Mount Hampden in Salisbury (the future Harare) in the new colony of Rhodesia. Macfadyen outlined the reasoning behind the choice of 12 September: '[t]his date ... marks the consummation of Rhodes's most notable achievement, and ... has been chosen as the most suitable for honouring his name and commemorating the public services with which his name is associated'.⁶ For several years the annual university calendar would note in its diary for the year the dates of Rhodes' birth and death, along with Christmas and Easter and the dates of Council and Senate meetings, but not much else.

At various Rhodes ceremonies and annual rituals speakers would commonly extol the virtues of Cecil Rhodes. In 1910 Professor Stanley Kidd exhorted that '[h]ere we must and can try to carry out Mr Rhodes' own scheme of life, that of a happy combination of the life of the dreamer and the man of action ...'. The veneration continued in the 1920s. An editorial in a 1923 issue of *The Rhodian* magazine exclaimed, 'Rhodes! How inspiring a name, how perfectly synonymous with Progress'. On Founder's Day in 1927 the British Colonial Secretary, Leo Amery, visited Rhodes – for him 'a happy coincidence' that he came on the day that marked the hoisting of the

Union Jack at Salisbury. It was also, for Amery, a befitting day to celebrate the college's foundation – a day on which all could gather 'fresh inspiration from Rhodes' good example to carry on this College and to celebrate the memory of those of their members who had in the brief years of the College's existence been able to make great services to the Empire ...'. His speech was met with 'rousing cheers'. In 1934 C.J. Sibbett, a Capetonian who came to be known as the 'Rhodes Remembrancer' for his long-standing work in preserving sites in memory of his hero, donated to the college various items of Rhodes memorabilia, including his death mask and several portraits and pictures of him.⁷

'Oxford in the bush'?

When Cecil Rhodes planned to establish a university in Cape Town he wanted to model it on Oxford. Such a model was also in the minds of the Rhodes trustees when they provided funding for the new university college in Grahamstown. It was also in the minds of the local promoters of the project. When their deputation met with the town council in July 1903 to appeal for financial support from the municipality, they expressed the hope that the proposed college 'would have every chance of becoming a veritable Oxford or Cambridge in South Africa'. In the editorial of the first issue of *The Rhodian* magazine in November 1906, the similar hope was expressed, that Rhodes would 'become the Oxford of the Eastern Province'. When Jameson unveiled a marble bust of Alfred Beit at Rhodes he too proclaimed that the college would be the 'Oxford of South Africa'. The comparison would continue to be drawn over the years, highlighted, for instance, by Leo Amery during his visit to the campus in 1927.

In one sense the label, 'Oxford in the bush', has been derogatory, implying that Rhodes has stood as an ivory tower, lacking any kind of regional, national or continental identity as an institution located in Africa. On the other hand, there are those who have taken pride in what they perceive to have been adherence to the ethos and tradition of one of England's two most renowned, elite universities.

Has the label had any validity for Rhodes? It appears that the founding ethos of Rhodes was very much based on that of nineteenth-century Oxford and Cambridge. It has been said that the concerns of these two pre-eminent universities were primarily character-building and training for leadership, and less the pursuit of learning. As Christopher Charle has put it, Oxford's educational ideal was to produce 'the generally educated gentleman, to whom morality was as important as scholarly knowledge'. The ethos was clearly as

chauvinist as it was elitist.

A similar line of thinking was expressed by W.A. Macfadyen, Rhodes' first professor of law and himself an Oxford graduate, in an article in *The Rhodian* in 1908. He remarked on the potent influence of

the corporate patriotism of the great [English] public schools and Oxford and Cambridge colleges. It is not a merely intellectual influence: it affects character and produces practical results of a far-reaching nature. It is an environment in which public spirit is born and a training in subordination and co-operation which supplies public life at once with leaders, and followers both independent and loyal.

The virtues instilled through a Rhodes education were plainly outlined in an editorial in a 1923 issue of *The Rhodian*:

Life at Rhodes is distinctive. It impresses each freshman with a character that bespeaks Self-Reliance, Independence, Courage and Straight Thinking. Thus equipped, the student is sent forth a perfect good citizen and one who in the intellectual struggle for the survival of the Fittest can make good.⁸

It would be a mistake, though, to believe that such virtuosity alone defined the early ethos of Rhodes. As we shall see later, there was also a widespread culture of frivolity that pervaded student life.

In these early years Rhodes also followed Oxford in according pre-eminence to the study of classics. At Oxford 'Greats' – the study of classical history and philosophy – was for long the premier university course. By 1860 nearly everyone at Oxford was reading 'Greats'. As Christopher Stray has noted, classics 'once lay at the heart of English high culture', playing a central role 'as a symbolic resource, drawn on both to provide authoritative exemplars of value, and to establish and maintain social boundaries'. In Victorian England classics provided 'rules of taste and morality, images of the good life'. Many thought a training of the mind came with learning Latin grammar. It was, too, a field of study for the elite – an instrument of social exclusion that separated the middle class from members of the lower classes who went without a classical education. 'Victorian classics', continues Stray, 'was the possession and the symbol of the educated gentleman, its authority tightly linked with both class and gender'. At Oxford and Cambridge all undergraduates were required to pass an elementary Greek exam – a requirement that was abolished only after World War One.

This primacy of classics was also evident at Rhodes. In 1912 Rhodes

had a professor and lecturer teaching Greek, and a professor and lecturer teaching Latin, as against a sole professor teaching English. For years the annual university calendar placed the classicists first in the list of academic staff, not following any alphabetical order; similarly classics was listed first, at the head of all the departmental course offerings.

Of the eleven members of the professorial and lecturing staff at Rhodes in 1905 seven had a training in classics. These included not only the two classicists, Cholmeley and Kidd, but also Dingemans (professor of modern languages) and Lord (professor of philosophy and history). The Oxford-educated professor of law, Macfadyen, would have had a firm grounding in classics, and Cory was self-taught in the subject. Even the professor of geology, Schwarz, had studied classics at London University.

Some of these professors attended a meeting of the Grahamstown Educational Association in 1905, where they made the case for classics. Kidd proposed that Latin be retained as a compulsory subject in the matriculation exam of the UCGH. He was supported by Cholmeley who argued that Latin led students to the greatest empire-builders of the ancient world, as well as counteracting extravagant, careless writing, while for Dingemans Latin was important for the training of character and the mind. The Rhodes Senate was in tune with this thinking, in 1908 unanimously passing a resolution that no student be recognised as a matriculated student for a literary degree unless sufficient knowledge in Latin had been obtained at matriculation standard.

While classics was for many years the pre-eminent discipline at Oxford, so too was there a particular emphasis on undergraduate teaching. Oxford was for long not a centre of research, with tutors concentrating on teaching and pastoral care. This was in contrast to some German universities where there developed in the nineteenth century a growing stress on scientific research among both academics and students. The Oxford approach, brought to Grahamstown by Oxford-trained academics, would characterise educational practice at Rhodes for many decades. The primary purpose of university teaching was to prepare students (predominantly men in these early years) for service in administration, business and the learned professions, with research being a low priority. Professor Lord, after twelve years at Rhodes, bemoaned the lack of research at South African universities (himself an exception to the norm).⁹ This does not mean to say that research was not undertaken at Rhodes in the early decades. Among the first Rhodes professors there were active researchers, as we shall now see.

Intellectual life in the early years

Over the past fifty years or so the work of university academics has become ever more specialised, with disciplines fragmenting into sub-branches and scholars developing expertise in ever narrower fields of research. The picture was very different at the time when Rhodes was founded. A particularly striking characteristic of many of the first Rhodes professors was their remarkable versatility and breadth of expertise. Each of these is worthy of a mention and profile.

At the outset over half of Rhodes' first students enrolled in the survey class of Professor Arthur Matthews, appointed in 1904 as professor of mathematics at a salary of £450 a year with an added special merit grant of £100. Educated at Cambridge, he came to Grahamstown in 1875 to take up the post of vice-principal at St Andrew's where he would also teach in the school's college department. He proved to be a successful teacher of aspirant surveyors, enabling his students to pass their professional exams – so much so that the Institute of Government Land Surveyors had to stiffen its syllabus in order to restrict entry into the profession. At the time of Matthews' death in 1911 at least half of South Africa's practising surveyors had been trained by him. While he also taught pure mathematics he was mainly a purveyor of useful knowledge. According to his Rhodes colleague, Selmar Schonland, Matthews did not really believe that a university education was needed in South Africa and Matthews himself had over time become 'a bit fossilised'. He cannot be counted among those who were versatile scholars or active researchers, but must still be considered as having played a worthy role in the early years of Rhodes.

A mainstay of the professoriate for the first forty years of Rhodes' existence was George Dingemans. Known as 'Dingie', he was, in the words of Guy Butler 'a big, childlike man'. Of mixed Dutch and Scottish parentage, he came to South Africa in 1902, taking up a teaching post at the South African College in Cape Town, before moving to Grahamstown in 1904 at the age of twenty-five. There he was first appointed as professor of modern languages at St Andrew's, taking up the same post at Rhodes in July of that year, so becoming one of the four founding professors.

Dingemans was a gifted linguist. At school he displayed a talent for modern languages, acquiring a grasp of French, German and Spanish. While Dutch was his first language, at Edinburgh he studied classics through the medium of English. He also studied Hebrew, developing a lifelong interest in Jewish culture and thought. For his first few years at Rhodes he bore the major responsibility for modern languages, teaching Dutch, French and

German without any assistance, until a lecturer in French was appointed in 1912. Then Dingemans became professor of Dutch, a post he would hold for thirty years or so – during which time he delighted in the development of Afrikaans as a language. He also displayed pro-boer sympathies, delivering a speech at Graaff-Reinet in the early 1920s at the unveiling of a monument to Gideon Scheepers, a boer commando leader executed by the British during the South African War – a speech that prompted an anglophone colleague at Rhodes to lament that Dingemans had made ‘an ass of himself’.

There was also a religious affinity with Afrikaners – the same colleague describing Dingemans as ‘a real old Calvinist who believes literally in Predestination’. He often conducted services in the local Dutch Reformed Church. At Rhodes he chaired the Students’ Christian Association, and so fervent was his faith that he consistently opposed any relaxation of the ban on Sunday sport on campus. At the same time Dingemans stood out as one of the more liberal professors at Rhodes in these early years. It was he who in 1933 proposed, unsuccessfully, that an Indian student be admitted to Rhodes. And for twenty-five years he served as one of two University of South Africa (UNISA) representatives on the University of Fort Hare Council, becoming its chairperson in 1931.

A fellow professor described Dingemans as ‘a very learned and clever man, widely-read and most charming to talk to’. It appears, too, that he was an outstanding teacher. According to one former student, F.G. Reynolds (who would later become judge-president of the Eastern Cape), study under Dingemans ‘was a liberal education in all knowledge, philosophy, everything. He lectured not only with knowledge, but personality and magic’, and awakened in students a sense of beauty in literature and art. His public lectures drew huge audiences, even though the lectures were twice as long as the norm. In the words of Reynolds, Dingemans would ‘always stand out as the greatest of the great as a Professor’.¹⁰

Another central figure in the early history of Rhodes was George Cory, appointed in 1904 as professor of chemistry and physics, but a figure who would in time make a name for himself as an historian. In recent decades his historical work has become hugely discredited for its eurocentrism and crude racial assumptions, but when one looks back over his whole life one cannot but admire the way in which he built for himself a career from a most unpromising start.

He was born in 1862 in London into what he later described as ‘a properly half-starved and distressed family’. His was a childhood of hardship and misery – his father ‘a bad, unsteady man’ who saw little of his three sons.

Cory's mother had 'a very sad and painful life' – poorly educated, assaulted and soon abandoned by her husband. As the marriage broke up the young George was shunted from home to home, from one unsatisfactory school to another. At times his life was that of a 'street kid'; there was even a spell in a workhouse. At the age of thirteen he was already taking on menial jobs to earn money, often for long hours, sometimes up to twelve hours a day.

Cory was carried along by a spirit of resilience, self-reliance and curiosity. In one of his jobs he came across six volumes of *Lardner's Encyclopaedia of Science and Art* and was utterly fascinated. At the age of fifteen he obtained a job as a pageboy at Lancing College, a prestigious school in Sussex. There one of his tasks was to sweep the chemistry laboratory. He knew absolutely nothing about the subject, but loved to linger in the place. When a master gave him two basic chemistry books Cory memorised their content. A year later he became a servitor at another Sussex school, Hurstpierpoint, where he would be given some education in return for undertaking domestic chores. So a proper school education only began for him at the age of sixteen, but even at Hurstpierpoint the teaching was poor and most of his time was given over to the chores. Two years later Cory was working at the Siemens electrical engineering company in London, and attending evening classes in chemistry, electricity and metallurgy. Then it was back to Hurstpierpoint as a probationary teacher – Latin, German and English among the subjects he taught, and, by his own admission, taught with minimal competence. A combination of his own determination and outside benefaction earned him a place at Cambridge University where he obtained a third-class degree in chemistry, comparative anatomy and physics.

In 1891 Cory sailed to South Africa to take up appointments as an assistant professor of chemistry at the UCGH and as vice-principal of the Public School in Grahamstown (on the site of the future Rhodes University). Three years later he took up a lectureship in chemistry and physics at St Andrew's College, where he designed and oversaw the building of a science laboratory.

While Matthews taught the survey class and mathematics at the founding of Rhodes in 1904, Cory initially taught all the other sciences, until the appointment of professors of physics and geology the following year. During the late nineteenth century chemistry had developed rapidly, and Cory had familiarised himself with these advances. He was a popular lecturer who enlivened his classes with 'clever and brilliant experiments', and disseminated knowledge by delivering public lectures to a wider audience.

Today it would be unthinkable for a professor of chemistry to be a

prolific historian at the same time. Cory is now mainly remembered for his historical writing, and not for any original research in chemistry. His interest in history was aroused during the 1890s when he came across bound volumes of original letters from the 1820s and 1830s in the magistrate's office in High Street. These he précised and copied. He was, too, a prodigious oral historian, walking hundreds of kilometres throughout the eastern Cape, mostly in the hot summer vacation, interviewing informants, white and black. It is said that he had mounted a horse five times, and five times been thrown off – hence the footslogging. On his travels he was often mistaken for a tramp. A Rhodes colleague, Kidd, once found Cory lying on a bench in a country hotel bar after a long hike during which he had been held up by a troop of baboons. He was unshaven and dressed in old clothes; beside him lay a faded umbrella, a water-bottle, a camera, field-glasses, and a knobkerrie.

During his lifetime Cory published five volumes of his book, *The Rise of South Africa*, an uncompleted sixth appearing after his death. While his research effort can be admired, no historian today would take his published work seriously. His writings are replete with racial stereotypes and myths, representing the typical white, colonial, racist outlook of his time. For him South Africa was essentially white South Africa, so his focus was on white achievement, with black people coming across as little more than obstacles to progress. White oppression and exploitation of blacks was glossed over, and white liberals, small in number as they were, came in for sharp criticism from Cory.

While active as a scientist and historian Cory also gave of his time and energy to Grahamstown. In the mid-1890s he famously regilded the four dials of the cathedral clock. Hoisted up the spire day after day, he spent a week on each dial, completing the task for nothing, turning down the municipality's offer of fifty pounds for the undertaking. He also served on the city council for two years, organised the 1912 Grahamstown centenary, and played a major role in the 1820 settler centenary commemoration (held in 1921, delayed in the aftermath of World War One). There were, too, many historical lectures, illustrated with lantern slides delivered to public audiences across the eastern Cape. In 1933 he presented his collection of Africana to Rhodes, making for the establishment of the university's Cory Library for Historical Research (where this book was researched and written).

Cory was one of Rhodes' most colourful characters in those early years. A social entertainer, he was renowned for his rendering of songs such as 'The Tin Gee-Gee' and 'When father laid the carpet on the stairs'. Possessing a fine collection of records he would invite students to his house for

a Gilbert and Sullivan evening. There was, too, his sense of humour – described in his obituary as being ‘brimful of good spirits and energy’. On one April Fool’s Day he was greeted by students stamping loudly on the floor, prompting him to mix some stink gas and leave the room, locking the door.

While Cory’s versatility, energy and public service can be much admired, his colleagues were not always so complimentary. Professor Smail, the classicist, described him as ‘a simple soul, deliciously vain in a childlike and innocuous fashion’. Selmar Schonland saw him as ‘an old-fashioned chemist, but a hard and conscientious worker’. Although there is now little regard for Cory’s historical writing, it was this that earned him two of the highest accolades in 1922 – a knighthood and a Cambridge honorary doctorate. No other member of the Rhodes academic staff has ever been so honoured.¹¹

Stanley Kidd was another of the versatile early Rhodes professors who came to Grahamstown from England, bringing with him a strong background in classics. His Cambridge degree had a significant classics component (he was at Cambridge with Smuts), and he went on to lecture in classics at what would later become the University of Sheffield. In 1889 he came to St Andrew’s to lecture in literature and philosophy. At the founding of Rhodes in 1904 he shared with Dingemans the responsibility for all teaching in the humanities. While Dingemans taught Dutch, German and French, Kidd, at least for a few months, taught all the other arts subjects – Greek, Latin, English, history and philosophy. His wife, Edith, later recalled how he ‘had so many subjects to take that he was toiling up and down those hills several times a day on his push-bike’. With new appointments in the humanities in 1905, Kidd’s responsibilities were reduced significantly, and in time he came to operate essentially as professor of English, a post he held until his retirement in 1932. One of his particular concerns was the poor standard of spoken English in South Africa, which he likened to ‘a semi-foreign language’. Although primarily a classicist he oversaw the growth of the English department, aided by only one assistant, thereby gradually ending its subordination to classics and laying a foundation for Rhodes to become later a centre for English studies in South Africa.¹²

Rhodes was fortunate to have such versatile academics in its ranks during these early years. Supreme among these polymaths was Arthur Lord, appointed professor of history and philosophy from July 1905. He had studied at Balliol College, Oxford, and briefly lectured in politics at the University of Aberdeen, before taking up a chair at Rhodes at the age of twenty-five. Lord was one of a number of young university graduates who left Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to take up university posts in

the empire, carrying with them ideas that would have a significant influence on the new societies into which they moved.

During his thirty-five or so years at Rhodes Lord taught in a wide range of disciplines at various times. He bore the main responsibility for courses in philosophy, in particular courses in logic, ethics and psychology. He had a special interest in politics, teaching two courses in the subject until 1931. He lectured in history from 1905 to 1910, and from 1917 until the mid-1920s, in the latter phase clashing with the appointed historian, I.J. Rousseau, of whom Lord had a very low opinion. Like so many of his contemporary scholars Lord was steeped in the classics, and so taught Greek for a while, as well as a course in classical culture for a few years. During World War One he was called on to lecture in economics and economic history.

Lord was renowned as a brilliant, witty lecturer. Guy Butler remembered Lord's course on ancient philosophy as the most interesting one that he took as a first-year student in 1936: Lord was 'a superb lecturer' who spoke without notes, and 'each sentence rolled from his lips at just the right pace for the assiduous girls in the front row to get it down in all its Ciceronian elegance'. Given his immersion in classics he was deeply conscious that so much could be lost in an English translation, prompting him to tell his students, 'you must either learn Greek or remain in semi-darkness'.

As a philosopher Lord had been trained in the idealist tradition that dominated British philosophy from the 1870s to the 1920s. In the view of one fellow philosopher, Lord 'thought through and mastered the Hegelian position'. His work was informed by the writings of philosophers such as Plato, Spinoza and Kant. He could expound with authority on a range of philosophical themes – freedom, logic, aesthetics, religion, to name a few – and he had a particularly strong interest in politics, the subject of the only book he wrote, *The Principles of Politics*, published by the Clarendon Press in Oxford in 1921. One of his essays, entitled 'The passions and their importance in morals' (1911), won the Green Moral Philosophy Prize at Oxford. Recently two philosophers, William Sweet and Errol Harris (the latter having once been one of Lord's students), undertook research into Lord's life and work, gathering together his writings, all of which appeared in a three-volume publication in 2006. Harris, who himself would go on to author some twenty-five books in philosophy, sees Lord as 'one of the most brilliant and least recognized philosophers who taught in South Africa'.

Besides his wide range of teaching subjects, Lord had an array of other interests – literature, music, art and architecture among them – being able to compose Latin verse and prose with ease and style, or playing the bassoon

in the Rhodes orchestra. At one point he contemplated practising law and studied for the bar. There was, too, his involvement in the Social Welfare League, an association of Grahamstown residents established in 1915 to work towards social and economic improvement in the area. For recreation Lord was a keen golfer – even incorporating golf into a philosophy lecture to throw light on a discussion of free will. This enthusiasm meant he would spend his long summer holidays at the family's Port Alfred cottage near the golf course. His colleague, W.M. Macmillan, reckoned that this preoccupation cut Lord off from the world – he never returned to Britain during his time in South Africa.

His great weakness was alcohol. At a university Council meeting in 1918 the chairperson made a statement on Lord's conduct (presumably in reference to his drinking), agreeing to give him another chance. One later student remarked that 'Lord drunk was far better than his successor sober'. On one occasion he arrived drunk at a music rehearsal, whereupon the conductor, Professor Bodmer, interrupted proceedings with the words, 'the wind bloweth where it listeth, and only the Lord knoweth the way thereof.' (The surname was obviously conducive to punning. While a student at Oxford Lord once called out from the Balliol quadrangle to his friend Herbert Samuel, 'Samuel, Samuel, where art thou?', prompting Samuel to reply from his window, 'speak, Lord, for thy servant hearest'). Lord could be cantankerous, and once got into a brawl with I.J. Rousseau in the common room.

Deteriorating health forced Lord to retire early, at the age of sixty, at the end of 1940. A year later, on 30 December 1941, he died of cancer in hospital. Errol Harris, one of the last persons to see him alive, recalled that Lord's final request to him was to 'get me a pack of cigarettes'.¹³

Another new recruit in 1905 was R.J. Cholmeley, appointed as professor of Latin and classical literature, relieving Kidd of that responsibility. Like Lord, Cholmeley was Oxford-educated and a composer of Latin verse. And like Dingemans, he was multilingual, having a good understanding of French, German, Italian, Russian and Dutch, as well as English, Latin and Greek. His non-academic interests, though, were very different from those of his two colleagues. Cholmeley was a military man – according to Selmar Schonland his heart was in soldiering – an involvement that would cost him his post at Rhodes, and ultimately his life. He had served with the British forces during the South African War, and while at Rhodes he became adjutant of the 1st City Regiment. It was deemed that this latter preoccupation led him to neglect his teaching, so much so that Council terminated his appointment at Rhodes at the end of his three-year probationary period in

1908 – a decision opposed by Senate, whose members stood by their colleague. There may have been another factor behind the termination of his appointment. One former student later recalled that Cholmeley ‘not only could compose odes to Bacchus, but also poured libations to him’. It was reported that on one occasion, upon returning from the Drill Hall he had taken off his boots and socks to cross a dry street, believing it to be a river. Later Cholmeley fought in World War One and was twice wounded. In 1919, fighting for the White Russians in the civil war against the Reds, he drowned after being washed overboard from a gun-boat. While his Rhodes career had been short-lived, he did make an important contribution to the college by helping to establish a fledgling library, serving as chief librarian and personally cataloguing the holdings.¹⁴

In the sciences Rhodes was served well by its early professors. An outstanding teacher among these was Alexander Ogg, appointed professor of physics in 1905. A graduate of the University of Aberdeen, where he would also lecture for a while, Ogg obtained a doctorate from the University of Göttingen in Germany, and gained recognition for translating into English Max Planck’s ‘Treatise on Thermodynamics’. During his stay of ten or so years he did much to establish a high reputation for Rhodes. He created an effective teaching environment by establishing an excellent laboratory in the old stone barrack building. Such was his reputation Ogg attracted the ablest students into his honours class. Year after year his students would come top, or close to top, in the UCGH’s physics honours exams. Among these students were E.H. Wilson, top in 1908, followed by R.W. Varder in second place; G.A. Sutherland, first in 1909; in 1911 it was H.W. Phear, who went on to Cambridge, where he achieved the remarkable feat of taking a first-class Mathematical Tripos after being in residence for only six months; S.W. Watson came first in 1912; and Basil Schonland in 1914 – he had registered at Rhodes in 1911 at the age of fifteen. Ogg’s students became future leaders in science, engineering and teaching – Varder and Watson returning to join the physics staff at Rhodes, while Schonland would go on to do a Ph.D. under Rutherford at the renowned Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge, later becoming an internationally renowned scientist, and Rhodes’ first chancellor in 1951.

Ogg left Rhodes in 1915, moving first to England where he undertook war research for the British navy, before returning to South Africa to take up the chair of physics at Wits University in 1917, and moving into the same chair at UCT in 1921. Over time he established a reputation as South Africa’s foremost geomagnetician – while at Rhodes he had bought a

Kew magnetometer and dip circle (which are still in the department). After retiring in 1935 Ogg became the first director of the new Union Magnetic Observatory at Hermanus.¹⁵

Rhodes' foremost researcher in the first twenty-five years of its history was James Duerden, appointed professor of zoology in 1905. He would develop a formidable capacity for hard work, already evident in his boyhood when he would study at night at the Burnley Mechanics Institute in Lancashire, working in a cotton mill during the day. Duerden arrived at Rhodes at the age of forty, bringing with him an impressive academic record and a wealth of research experience. In the 1880s he had studied in London at what would become the Imperial College of Science and Technology, later obtaining a doctorate at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. At various times he held posts at the Royal College of Science for Ireland in Dublin, the Museum at the Institute of Jamaica, the University of Michigan, the University of North Carolina, and the American Museum of Natural History in New York. He had already published fifty papers before coming to Rhodes.

Duerden's work-load and productivity during his twenty-seven years at Rhodes would nowadays be considered hardly believable. He ran the zoology department almost single-handedly for about twenty years, teaching courses at every level from first year to honours, and supervising seventeen masters theses during his tenure. He was also for a time in charge of the zoological section of the Albany Museum.

On top of all this he engaged in unceasing research activity. Before his Rhodes days he had specialised in fisheries and corals research. At Rhodes he worked in three main fields. First, there was his interest in tortoises – such was his collection that they were known to roam the campus and even invade the chemistry laboratory. His other two research areas had a strong practical dimension. He was friendly with white farmers in the Albany district and was keen to pursue research that benefited them. So he developed expertise in the study of ostriches – their morphology, breeding, behaviour, and, most important, their feathers, as it was these that enabled the ostrich industry to thrive. Keeping ostriches in an enclosure on the site of what is now Botha House, Duerden published over fifty articles on ostrich biology. The First World War, however, brought the collapse of the ostrich industry, as the international demand for feathers as a fashion item fell away. Duerden then shifted his focus to wool research, a field in which he became a pioneer and a leading authority. An expert in understanding the growth of wool fibre, he devised a scale for measuring the quality of merino wool. In time the government Department of Agriculture appointed him as Director of Wool

Research.

There was a further interest in anthropology and racial matters. Elected president of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science in 1921, he gave a presidential address entitled 'Social anthropology in South Africa: problems of race'. His views were in tune with the liberal segregationists of his time, believing, as he did, in white superiority and white leadership, but also calling for interracial co-operation and stressing the importance of education as a means towards black upliftment. Moreover Duerden held that white superiority was not innate, taking the view that human development was shaped by a complex interdependence between hereditary and environmental factors (his parents had, with great foresight, made Darwin his second name). Duerden retired from Rhodes in 1932, moving back to England, where he died in 1937 following a fall in a bus on the way to a scientific meeting. He had developed for himself an international reputation as a scientist, publishing over a hundred articles, mostly sole-authored, during his time at Rhodes – and in so doing must have enhanced, too, the reputation of the institution itself.¹⁶

Another of the four new science professors appointed in 1905 was Selmar Schonland, the botanist. With degrees from the universities of Kiel and Berlin in Germany, he had gone on to become assistant curator of the herbarium at Oxford. In 1889 he came to Grahamstown to take up a post at the Albany Museum, before becoming one of the prime movers behind the establishment of Rhodes.

In 1905 Schonland was appointed professor of botany, while retaining his position as director of the museum – the latter he relinquished in 1910. His classes began in a small room in the old Drostdy House, with no apparatus except a microscope, and with only two students, one of whom was Lilian Britten who herself would soon become a productive member of the botany staff. As a lecturer Schonland inspired his students, many of whom would go on to take up posts as researchers, teachers or government officials. Upon his retirement in 1927 he left behind a strong, highly regarded department.

Schonland's legacy as a botanist is mainly evident in the Albany Museum, especially in the herbarium which he built into a major repository. In 1889 it comprised less than 1000 sheets of specimens; by the time of his retirement there were 100,000 sheets of South African flowering plants, all fully classified. The practical application of scientific knowledge to address local and regional problems was a particular concern for Schonland – to this end influencing the government to launch a campaign against noxious

weeds, at other times studying rust in wheat, investigating diseases in pine-apples and vines, proposing the reclamation of ruined pasture land near Keiskammahoek. To publicise his ideas beyond the classroom he gave lectures to farmers and teachers. In 1917 he played a leading role in planning the Botanical Survey of South Africa.

Schonland's contribution was a most significant one – first, in playing a key role in the founding of Rhodes; second, in establishing botany as a teaching subject and field of research; and third, in heightening awareness of local environmental issues. His manner could be forthright and blunt, sometimes unpalatable to those who opposed him. In 1914 he was forced to resign from the city council on the grounds that he was considered to be an enemy alien. It was at this time he also dropped the umlaut over the first vowel in the family surname as a gesture to affirm his loyalty to Britain. His son Basil would later engage in important scientific activity to assist the British war effort against Nazi Germany. He would also become Rhodes' first chancellor.¹⁷

A third UK-trained scientist to arrive at Rhodes in 1905 was E.H.L. Schwarz, who took up the chair of geology. He had come to southern Africa in 1896 to work as a field geologist for the Cape Geological Commission, spending nine years trekking around the colony in an ox-wagon, making a significant contribution to the Geological Survey of the Cape. For the first five years of his stay at Rhodes, Schwarz, like Duerden and Schonland, also worked part-time at the Albany Museum where he established a well-arranged collection of clearly identified geological specimens.

Like some of his Rhodes colleagues, Schwarz, too, was a polymath. His original schooling was in the classics and he would be known for his ability to quote from the Greek tragic poets. With Duerden he shared an interest in anthropology, writing articles on African culture and custom. There was, too, an interest in astronomy – for some time the Rhodes telescope was located in his garden, where students would come for evening viewing sessions. He even published a novel.

As a geologist Schwarz was both a writer and a man of action. He produced textbooks on geology (1910) and South African geography (1921). His particular concern for the problem of drought led to the publication in 1918 of a book on the desiccation of Africa, with a focus on its causes and possible remedies. This concern led him to devise a scheme to reclaim the Kalahari and make it habitable by diverting the course of the Zambezi River. His bold plan, presented in a book published in 1918, received mixed reactions. While it captured the imagination of some and won the support of

influential people, it was also widely rejected by members of the scientific community.

Schwarz's propensity for action and adventure led to his death, in 1928, while on an expedition in West Africa. Two very different explanations for his demise were given at the time – one that he died of a heart attack while investigating climatic conditions in the region, the other that he died from poisoning while prospecting for minerals on behalf of a French mining syndicate.¹⁸

Of the seven new professors appointed in 1905 the last to take up his post, the chair of law, was W.A. Macfadyen, yet another polymath. He had spent a dozen or more years in southern Africa before coming to Rhodes – serving for four years as vice-principal of the Graaff-Reinet College, for six years as a lecturer in English and Logic at the Staats Gymnasium in Pretoria, being a member of a commission that translated the laws of the South African Republic, and practising for three years as an advocate at the Supreme Court. While his first degree was at Oxford, his law degrees were obtained through the UCGH – an LL.B. in 1892 and an LL.D. in 1899.

Macfadyen's stay at Rhodes lasted little more than six years, during which time he taught future judges – Oswald Sampson, who graduated in 1907, C. Newton-Thompson (1910), and F.G. Reynolds (1910) – as well as Harold Sampson (1910), Oswald's brother, who would himself later take up a chair of law at Rhodes. Apart from establishing the law department his other main contribution was to initiate the establishment of Rhodes' first sports ground between African Street and Prince Alfred Street, proposing the idea in 1907 to a skeptical Schonland, who tended to be irked by what he generally considered to be Macfadyen's grandiose schemes. Most of these, in Schonland's view, wasted much time in discussion in Senate, but this particular one did come to fruition with the opening of the sports ground in 1913. Macfadyen was another of those versatile academics, going on, after leaving Rhodes, to teach mathematics at Grey University College in Bloemfontein, and later, philosophy, psychology and economics at the Transvaal University College (the future University of Pretoria).¹⁹

In the early years Rhodes' infrastructure was little more than rudimentary, its equipment minimal, the library minuscule, initially comprising, according to one recollection, 'a shelf of books housed in a tin shed'. The key resource enabling the institution to function more or less at the tertiary level was the professoriate – its members' breadth of knowledge, their intellectual versatility, and accumulated experience. Their teaching loads were heavy, requiring, in some cases, participation in a number of different disciplines

– Lord being the prime example, Kidd and Dingemans also having multidisciplinary obligations. Some were clearly inspirational teachers – Ogg able to turn out some brilliant students, while Lord and Schwarz were reputedly able to dazzle in the classroom. Others were effective vocational teachers – Matthews renowned across the country for his training of surveyors. Duerden, Schwarz, Schonland and Cory led the way in developing a research culture, and much of this research was geared towards practical application – especially so in the case of Duerden, Schwarz and Schonland who were all concerned to utilise natural resources more fully. Moreover, in their work for the Albany Museum these three did much to disseminate knowledge to the wider community, as did Cory with his numerous public lectures.

Just as the infrastructure and equipment were rudimentary, so was the executive and administrative capacity of Rhodes little developed. Council was responsible for the general management and oversight of fundamental matters – this meant responsibility for acquiring property, developing infrastructure, exercising control over staff, raising funds and overseeing the finances. This latter responsibility often involved authorising the most minute items of expenditure, perhaps amounting to just a couple of shillings.

Senate comprised all professors and one Council nominee – but Senate did not initially have a representative on Council, an anomaly which created the potential for an uneasy relationship between the two bodies. The chairperson of Senate was elected annually, but normally served for a two-year term. This person was in effect the chief executive figure on campus on a daily basis, until the appointment of Rhodes' first master in 1925. With the chair rotating regularly from one professor to another there was little stable continuity at the head of the institution.

Senate meetings were held monthly, on a Wednesday evening. Cory later recalled these 'dreadful' meetings, which often lasted till long after midnight (in contrast to recent times when members would become restless if meetings went beyond 5.00 pm on a Friday afternoon). According to Cory, some professors would talk incessantly, while saying very little. His memories of this body were painful: 'I have never attended any meetings in my life which I so hated as I did these Senate meetings'.²⁰

Rhodes' first registrar was Rev. A.W. Brereton – and the first Rhodes figure to be at the centre of a scandal. Like most of Rhodes' early staff he was an immigrant from the UK, having come to the Cape in 1885 to work as a missionary at St Matthew's station at Keiskammahoek. Later he became a master at St Andrew's, where he created a poor impression – Cory thought little of him as a teacher and believed he had no chance of becoming regis-

trar. Brereton, however, had been a member of a delegation that went to President Kruger to plead the cause of those involved in the Jameson Raid who were at the time imprisoned in the Transvaal. This evidently earned him the favour of Jameson, who was an influential figure at Rhodes given his role in securing funding from the Rhodes Trust – hence Brereton's appointment as registrar.

Cory would later concede that Brereton proved to be an excellent secretary of Senate, producing full, accurate minutes. In 1912, however, Brereton was forced to resign following complaints of harassment made against him by two women students. The two made separate, similar statements – that on different occasions in February 1912 each had been invited to Brereton's office where he had made unwelcome advances. The first student stated that she had been embraced and kissed by him. She had, though, felt sympathy for him because of the death of his daughter, Hope, with whom she had been friendly, in the Blaauwkrantz train disaster of the previous year. This student had intended to keep quiet about the episode until she learnt that a friend and fellow student had endured a similar experience. The latter also made a statement.

These incidents were brought to the attention of Cory, tutor to one of the two, and Schonland, chairperson of Senate. At a Senate meeting in March Brereton pleaded for forgiveness, and Schonland was inclined to let the matter drop. But it soon emerged that the incidents were not isolated, and that knowledge of them had spread. Whereas it had been deemed acceptable to brush a case of harassment under the carpet, it was now a matter of protecting Rhodes' reputation. Cory extracted a confession from Brereton who tendered his resignation, while also claiming that his motives and conduct had been misconstrued by the two students – he had been softened by their sympathy over the loss of his daughter and had treated them as if they themselves were daughters rather than students. The claim was dismissed and Brereton removed from office, but not before his daughter had physically attacked Schonland, her father's alleged persecutor, calling him a 'dirty little German Jew'.²¹

After this episode it appears that Rhodes decided to dispense with the administrative services of clerics and to opt instead for military men as registrars. Brereton was replaced by Colonel Greener, who had been a paymaster to British troops during the South African War and had had long experience as a colonial civil servant in southern Africa. As registrar he was reputed to have established an effective system of financial control at Rhodes. In the mid-1920s Greener would be succeeded by Major Walker whose term as registrar

would last for over two decades. Later Brigadier Martin would assume the post. There were other associations and connections linking Rhodes with the military during these early decades. There were the military buildings in which the university first operated. Staff and students would serve with the allied forces during both world wars. In 1924 a university company was formed as part of the First City Regiment, its members drilling every Friday evening and engaging in the occasional field exercise in the surrounding hills.

Early student life

It would be difficult today to imagine a tertiary educational institution having so few students as did Rhodes for a number of years. In 1904 student enrolments stood at about fifty, more than doubling to over a hundred by 1908, rising to about 140 in 1913, by which time about two-thirds of students came from the eastern Cape and one-third from other parts of South Africa.

Initially most students took Matthews' survey course, but following the appointment of the new professors in 1905 a set of new course offerings became available, mainly in the sciences and languages. For the intermediate exam in arts, held at the end of a student's first year, there were four compulsory subjects – English, Latin, mathematics, and one science subject (the latter two were deemed to fall in the arts category), as well as one to three optional subjects.

Academic standards were considered to be low at this time. The intermediate exam (from which the term 'ink' is thought to have been derived – a term long used to denote a first-year student) was little more than a glorified matric. In 1907 Council bemoaned both the poor lecture attendance by students and an apparent lack of proper preparation on the part of some professors. Four years later Schonland was complaining about the immaturity of students upon their arrival at Rhodes – their school learning, in his view, had amounted to little more than cramming, and the courses taught at Rhodes during students' first two years were far too elementary. Towards the end of his first year as professor of Latin in 1913 W.A. Smail was particularly blunt and cynical in his private assessment of his students, considering them to be 'docile and stupid', not finding 'any prodigious geniuses amongst them', viewing one honours student who had won a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford as 'not very brainy', and going on to complain that athletes rather than scholars were sent to Oxford from South Africa.

There were also, though, some positive indicators. As early as 1908 Macfadyen reckoned that Rhodes was broadening out from the old view that

university was a place where students were simply prepared for the military, the law or the church. By this time, too, notwithstanding the seemingly low academic standards, the average pass rate of Rhodes students was the highest among the constituent colleges of the UCGH. Moreover exam conditions were extremely tough. Today students complain if they have to write two exams in one day. In those days students for the BA degree had to write sixteen three-hour papers on eight consecutive weekdays, Monday-to-Friday and Monday-to-Wednesday with only a weekend break. By 1917 Lord was able to report that he had seen a remarkable improvement in the standard of the student work over the previous twelve years.²²

At Rhodes in these early years student culture – a phenomenon not easily characterised in general terms – was a mixed bag. At one level there was a culture of gentility and frivolity, constrained by enduring Victorian codes of behaviour and by accompanying rules and regulations. At another level there was serious cultural activity, engaged upon in a small set of student societies.

The Debating Society was the first to be formed, in 1905. It would be kept alive and sustained with the energetic support of Cory who soon became its president. The following year the Students' Christian Association was established. It would meet weekly for study and discussion, and would enjoy unstinting professorial backing from Dingemans for over three decades. *The Rhodian* magazine first appeared at the end of 1906, edited and produced by students, carrying general college news, reports on student societies and sports clubs, as well as literary contributions. Other societies would emerge over time. An active Dramatic Society would produce one or two plays a term. In 1913 the Musical Society was established under the management of Professor Bodmer, who would later form a Rhodes orchestra. Cory continued to be an enthusiastic promoter of extracurricular activity, chairing the Scientific Society, set up in 1915, and founding the History Society in 1919.²³

John Darwin has suggested that undergraduate life at Oxford in the Victorian era often seemed to centre around organised sport and less organised frivolity. The same might be said of Rhodes in its early years, as sport rapidly assumed importance, gaining extensive coverage in *The Rhodian*. The Athletic Union was formed in 1905 to oversee all sporting activities, but these were held back by a lack of facilities and the sparse number of students. It was resolved in 1908, following Macfadyen's initiative, that Rhodes develop a playing field, but this only came into existence in 1913. This delay meant that some students who boarded at schools played for the school rather

than for Rhodes – a matter that gave rise to some resentment and friction.

From the start the tennis club was at least functional, but had to make use of a most rudimentary, student-made court on the site of the present-day Drostdy lawns. Cricket of a sort was first played with one stump and a tennis ball, before nets were put up behind the Drostdy Arch. By 1907 Rhodes had a men's cricket team in the Eastern Province league, and the following year a women's team was playing.

Rugby would be Rhodes' main sport for many years. Having had an insufficient number of players to make up a team in 1906, three years later Rhodes won the Eastern Province Cup, having won its way through the local Grahamstown league, then through the regional country league, before triumphing in Port Elizabeth. A.S. Knight, one of Rhodes' star players and the driving-force behind the founding of the team, went on to tour England with the South African team in 1912, along with another Rhodian, S.N. Cronjé. Also a star of the 1909 team was Harold Sampson, who would go on to play rugby for Oxford (and later became an advocate, a Rhodes law professor, and an ardent apologist for apartheid).

There were other Rhodians who became prominent sporting figures at this time. E.B. Lundie played one cricket test for South Africa against England in Port Elizabeth in 1914 – his international career cut short by the war. Bevil Rudd, an outstanding athlete during his time at Rhodes in 1911 and 1912, went on to win a gold medal in the 400 metres at the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp, as well as winning a bronze medal in the 800 metres, a race in which he beat a future Rhodes professor, Edgar Mountain, into fourth place. C.N. Thompson played rugby and tennis for Cambridge after leaving Rhodes.²⁴

Beyond the class room and the sports fields student social and recreational life was limited in scope and constrained by rules. Among such rules drawn up at one of the first Senate meetings, in November 1904, was one that required men students to enter the college building through the door on the right, women through the door on the left. Over the years rules were tightened and more precisely defined, placing limits on students' nights out, laying down strict chaperonage requirements for women students, and imposing rigid dress codes. Such was the level of primness and propriety that one male student was hauled before Senate for the offence of escorting a woman student along Somerset Street, even going to the disreputable length of carrying her books for her. In the years ahead these strict rules and codes would give rise to growing student discontent and eventual defiance.

In later years former students would recall these early days. According

to one reminiscence, student life at this time was 'sweet, simple and above board'. A social highlight of the year was the annual Founder's Day picnic which took students and staff to one of the local haunts where a jolly time was had, singing and playing games. There was much walking, with Mountain Drive a popular destination; and it was not uncommon for a group of students to walk the fifty-eight kilometres to Port Alfred through the night, catching the train back.²⁵

This enthusiasm may well have saved the lives of ten students in April 1911. The ten were planning to take the Port Alfred–Grahamstown train, but chose to walk instead (three other students missed the train). This was the train that crashed off the Blaauwkrantz Bridge into a deep gorge, killing twenty-nine passengers and injuring twenty-three, two of whom were Rhodes students. It was a disaster that saw students rally, a number rushing to the scene to assist the rescue effort.

Another feature of student culture at this time was a general disengagement from South African politics. In 1911 a students' representative council (SRC) was established for the first time, but for years it would steer clear of South African political matters. The particular issue that apparently prompted the formation of the SRC was the practice of some Rhodes students playing rugby for St Andrew's rather than for Rhodes. The main SRC functions, as set down in the initial constitution, were to act as an intermediary between students and the university authorities, and to oversee social events, the organisation of the annual Founder's Day picnic being one of its most important activities. In 1914 close consideration was given to changing the university's colours from the existing green, red and white to purple and white – a matter discussed at an enthusiastic general student body meeting, with the decision to make the change being carried through in the same year.²⁶

Student apathy, though, rapidly gave way to fervour when it came to serving the British Empire in World War One. Involvement was immediate. Just three weeks after Britain's entry into the war on 4 August 1914, three-quarters of Rhodes' men students participated in a two-week Defence Force camp in East London. Several students volunteered for active service, and the editors of *The Rhodian* wished them well 'in their dangerous defence of *their* [my emphasis] country'. There was also strong encouragement from the university authorities. In his annual report to Senate in 1916 Duerden stated the college's intention 'to turn out the best type of South African manhood'. In his end-of-year address in 1917 Kidd declared it 'a matter of pride' that so many students had gone to war.

There were a few anti-war voices at Rhodes, among them W.M. Macmillan, the history lecturer, who believed himself to be 'a good enough European to be appalled at the war spirit and madness'. He considered joining up, but was not going 'to enlist with and for the sake of a flourish of trumpets' – and nobody handed him a white feather, even in what he called 'bellicose little Grahamstown'.

Out of about 260 past and current Rhodes students and staff who served in this war, forty-four were killed. Those enlisting would have constituted a very high proportion of male Rhodians in these early years when the total student population never rose above 150 in any one year – and fell significantly during the war owing to the exodus of volunteers. Those who stayed behind also tried to make their contribution, in gendered ways – women students in Oriel House knitting socks for servicemen, men students holding a fund-raising concert to buy tobacco to send to Rhodians at the front.²⁷

During the first fifteen or so years of Rhodes' existence the ethos of the institution and some of its general characteristics were shaped in ways that would remain evident for several years. There was this sturdy imperial loyalty among staff and students alike, as manifested in the ongoing homage paid to Cecil Rhodes and in the contribution to the British war effort. Alongside this imperial loyalty there was, in contrast, a seeming indifference to South Africa's highly racialised socio-political order – a matter that barely featured in the university discourse of the day. A handful of staff members – Duerden and Macmillan among them – engaged with such issues, but the student body, wholly white, generally seemed to acquiesce contentedly in the status quo. There was no need to question a system that suited their interests. It would only be in the 1930s that one could begin to find some evidence of a more liberal political awakening, and even then it was to be found among just a small minority of students and staff.

Institutional and infrastructural developments till c.1930

The act that passed through the Cape parliament in 1904 incorporating Rhodes was a fairly simple, straightforward measure, laying down the powers, functions and composition of Council and Senate, and providing for the appointment of academic staff and senior administrators. After union in 1910 the new South African central government set about formulating policies and structures for the tertiary education sector. To this end it established the Lawrence Commission in 1913 to consider and recommend reform of the sector. In its 1914 report the commission proposed the establishment of

two federal universities, one in the north and one in the south. This proposal was not taken further, and university reform was delayed, partly by the outbreak of war, partly because of regional conflicts of interest – mainly between Cape Town and Johannesburg – and partly owing to a growing Afrikaner insistence on language rights.

In time reform was enacted with the passage of three bills through parliament in 1916. One provided for the transformation of the South African College into the new, independent University of Cape Town. On similar lines, the second transformed Victoria College into the University of Stellenbosch as an independent Dutch/Afrikaans-medium institution. The third, which directly affected Rhodes, established a new federal university based in Pretoria, the University of South Africa (UNISA), to replace the UCGH. The defects of the latter institution had become apparent. There was no senate that could bring together representatives of the constituent colleges; and teaching at the colleges was constricted by the syllabi and exams imposed on them by the UCGH. UNISA would comprise six constituent colleges: the School of Mines in Johannesburg (out of which Wits would soon emerge); the Transvaal University College in Pretoria (the future University of Pretoria); Natal University College in Pietermaritzburg (a future campus of the University of Natal/KwaZulu-Natal); Grey University College in Bloemfontein (the future University of the Free State); the Huguenot College in Wellington (which eventually became defunct); and Rhodes University College. UNISA opened in 1918, operating as an examining body, but also taking in its own external students, unlike its predecessor, the UCGH. Affiliation to UNISA brought with it, for Rhodes and the other colleges, a new degree structure. The old first-year intermediate exam fell away. There would now be a three-year bachelor's degree, comprising between nine and eleven courses, with provision also made for a fourth-year honours degree.²⁸

In the meantime Rhodes had had to work towards developing an infrastructure appropriate for a university, either replacing or expanding around the historic but unsuitable set of buildings that it had occupied from the outset. It first had to obtain ownership of the Drostdy site and buildings which were being rented from the military at a rate of one shilling a year. This purchase was made possible by an act which passed through the Cape parliament, once again with the help of Jameson. The property was bought at a cost of £9,400 and transferred to Rhodes in 1909.

Council soon contemplated a grand scheme of infrastructural development, organising a competition for the design of a new central building. The firm of Baker and Kendall won the competition. Herbert Baker had come

out to the Cape from England in the 1890s and developed a close friendship with Cecil Rhodes, working as his architect. Along with Jameson, Baker provided another link between the university and Rhodes, the historical figure.

The Baker/Kendall design, presented in 1911, was extremely ambitious. The plan was for a building made up of four wings surrounding a central quadrangle. The front, east-facing wing would have a tower, while the north wing would make provision for a great hall. It was envisaged that the buildings would be constructed out of hard sandstone, with Bathurst limestone used for columns and balconies. The architectural style would be grand and imposing, typical of Baker, the imperial architect much influenced by Roman architecture with its columns and arcades.

The plan for this Rhodes building was in keeping with this style, but the design never came to fruition. It was far too costly – an amount of £109,000 required. An approach was made to the Rhodes Trust for funding, but this was not forthcoming. The plan would also have required the demolition of the old Drostdy House, which the National Monuments Commission was keen to preserve. So the plan was abandoned, and the present-day wing with the tower would not be built until twenty-five years later.

Baker departed South Africa in 1912, returning to England, and it was left to Kendall to design most of the new buildings to be erected on the Rhodes campus. These first buildings were two student residences – College House for men, opened in 1914, and in 1915 Oriel House for women, named after Oriel College which Rhodes had attended as a student at Oxford. The first academic building to be constructed was a science block, also designed by Kendall. This was, in effect, part of the south wing of the original grand design (today on the south side of the second quadrangle, facing the Botanical Gardens). Construction having started in 1914, the ground floor was ready for occupation by the zoology department early in 1916, while the chemistry department moved into the upper floor a year later. The building comprised offices, two laboratories, and a 120-seat lecture theatre.²⁹

The building of a new arts block was the next development. For some years the arts department had been housed in two parallel barracks, known as 'The Blessed Isles', on the site of the present-day Botha House. For Dingemans this had been a scene of 'charming rusticity' where cows could often be seen grazing close by. Others, though were less enchanted with the place. The story went that Duerden's ostriches used to be encamped at 'The Blessed Isles', but when the buildings were deemed unfit for ostrich habitation they were considered to be adequate for the arts professors and were

duly handed over to them. Opened in 1922 the new arts block adjoined the science block, extending eastwards, making up the south wing of what is now the first quadrangle. This three-floor building, costing £32,000, was also designed by Kendall's firm, which had become Kendall and Morris. On the outside were two small balconies and two columns, and parts of the exterior were laced with Grahamstown greystone. On the inside many new spaces were created – a council chamber, a senior common room, lecture and seminar rooms, and offices. Six years later a new science wing for physics and chemistry was completed. Making up the 'old wing' of the present-day physics building, it was opened in 1929 by the renowned physicist, Sir Ernest Rutherford. Within its walls were physics and chemistry laboratories, offices and two lecture theatres.

There was an expansion of student residential accommodation in the 1920s. Botha House for men, and Jameson House for women were opened in 1923, following the completion of Founders Hall in 1921 – providing the first dining facilities for students on campus and serving as Rhodes' only general meeting-place until a wood-and-iron hall in University Road (on the site of present-day John Kotze House) was built a few years later. Oriel Hall, for women students, was built soon after Founders, in 1923. A third residence for men, Milner House, was completed in 1927.

Around this time, in the mid-1920s, new 'luxuries' were introduced to Rhodes. An electricity generating plant was installed on campus, providing light for all residences, class-rooms and laboratories, prompting *The Rhodian* to report that 'the comfort of being able to walk along erstwhile gloomy passages and not having to stumble into darkened rooms is much appreciated by all'. At much the same time there was the first proper provision of water and sanitation at Rhodes. Water was supplied to the new residences, with hot and cold baths and showers available on every floor. Septic tanks were installed to provide sanitation, replacing the old bucket system.³⁰ Later generations of students would come to take these basic facilities for granted and would complain bitterly if their provision was ever interrupted – failing, perhaps, to recognise that for decades the majority of the South African population would not enjoy access to such facilities.

Academic life till c.1930

Rhodes continued to be a small institution, the number of students only rising above 400 in the mid-1920s. They had access to a minuscule library, although this did grow from the single shelf there had been in 1904 to holdings of over 4,200 volumes in 1906, rising to about 12,500 in 1930.

There was a parallel growth in the academic staff: by 1910 comprising eleven professors, four lecturers, and an instructor in drawing, rising twenty years later to a total complement of forty-one – seventeen professors and twenty-three lecturers or senior lecturers, and still an instructor in drawing.

For the first two to three decades the professors appointed in 1904 and 1905 were the mainstays of the academic staff. Some of them had been appointed at a young age and would serve Rhodes loyally for many years. An exception was Matthews, an older appointee who retired at the end of 1910. Ogg resigned from Rhodes at the end of 1915, and Cory followed suit in 1925 to devote his attention to historical research. The stalwarts stayed on at Rhodes till retirement or death – Dingemans, Kidd and Lord in the humanities, Duerden, Schwarz and Schonland in the sciences.

While these figures may have been the academic pillars for many years, Rhodes continued to draw into the ranks of its teaching staff a number of able scholars. In the sciences an important personality was the botanist, Lilian Britten. She had been one of Rhodes' first students, graduating with an honours degree in 1907. Schonland, a stern judge of intellectual ability, rated her so highly that he appointed her as a part-time demonstrator in 1907. Following spells of school-teaching, and further study at Cambridge and Oxford, Britten was appointed as a lecturer in botany at Rhodes in 1918 – she would remain in the department for twenty-four years.

Like Schonland, she had a special interest in the local environment – this she passed on to her students. It was said that she knew more about eastern Cape flora than anybody else. An intrepid researcher, she was known to fall into pools while looking for pond organisms and water-weeds. Her research into *Streptocarpus* came to be highly regarded. She was also an ardent conservationist, with a particular concern about the alien invasion of pine and hakea on Mountain Drive. This concern would be taken up by the Grahamstown Natural History Society, Britten being one of the prime movers behind its founding in 1918.

Britten was renowned as a public-spirited, selfless, high-principled person – campaigning, for instance, as an early suffragette who did much to secure the vote for white women in South Africa. For thirty years she was the mainstay of the Old Rhodian Union from the time of its founding, serving as its secretary, keeping a meticulous card record of all past students, and being known to pay Union bills out of her own pocket.

The task of maintaining the high standard of physics teaching, following the resignation of Ogg, fell to R.W. Varder. Like Britten, he had been one of Rhodes' first students and was appointed as a lecturer in physics and

applied mathematics in 1909, before succeeding Ogg as professor of physics in 1917, a position he would hold for thirty-four years until his retirement in 1951.

Varder did indeed maintain a high standard of teaching, with a number of his students winning overseas scholarships. A heavy teaching load limited his time for research, but he kept up with the rapid advances being made in physics and did engage in some research, making the first reliable measurements of the range of Beta rays, and pioneering techniques of magnetic separation. Such was his reputation, Varder became president of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science for the years 1932-33. He was assisted in the department by Sherwood Watson who lectured in physics for thirty-six years. His research activity was also limited, but he was known to have contributed to the study of radioactivity while working under Rutherford at the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge in the early 1930s.³¹

Following the retirement of Matthews in 1910 the chair of mathematics was taken up by 'Taffy' Williams, who had assisted Matthews as a lecturer in the department since 1905. Williams had had a brilliant university career, undertaking research in Berlin, and might have gone far in the scientific world. But poor health brought him to the Cape where he would first support, and then continue, Matthews' primary activity – the training of land surveyors. Williams was a much-liked, quietly-spoken man of nervous disposition – so quiet and nervous that he was known to teach by writing on the blackboard almost throughout a whole 'lecture' without uttering a word, stopping only towards the end to invite questions. There may not have been a dynamic classroom presence, but there was a sharp mind that, among other interests, speculated over the form and nature of the universe.

Another science professor to render lengthy service to Rhodes was William Barker, who would hold the chair of chemistry for thirty-six years from 1925 to 1961, appointed at the young age of twenty-four, having obtained his doctorate at the University of Liverpool by the age of twenty-one. Initially assisted by two lecturers – one being J.L.B. Smith who would later gain international renown as an ichthyologist – Barker built up the chemistry department, in the process creating a strong team of committed scientists and developing a research culture. A growing number of postgraduate students passed through the department, and many of these went on to become prominent scientists elsewhere.

Barker himself kept up-to-date with the latest trends in the discipline, while also pursuing his own research interests, the chief of which was in the field of photochemistry. Like other scientists at Rhodes he promoted

research that would bring practical benefits to the local economy. One such research area was soil chemistry, but more important was the development of research into leather tanning – this would lead to the establishment of a specialised leather research institute at Rhodes in the late 1930s. For his work Barker developed a strong reputation nationally and internationally, serving as president of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science for a time, and taking up fellowships in the US after his retirement.³²

In the humanities classics continued to be a prominent discipline, if not as pre-eminent as it had been at the outset. Unlike most other disciplines at Rhodes in these early years, there was a regular turn-over of staff in classics. Cholmeley departed from the chair of Latin in 1908, seemingly over his failure one night to recognise that High Street was not a river. His two successors each enjoyed a brief incumbency – Professor Exham (1909-10) and Professor van Braam (1911-13). Cullen Bowles was appointed as a lecturer in Greek in 1909, before assuming the chair in 1911, thereby allowing Kidd to devote his attention to English. William Smail assumed the chair of Latin in 1913 and remained in the position until 1931, bringing some stability to the department, along with a rather jaundiced view of Rhodes – in 1922 confiding to his wife that he was keen to find a post in the UK, but might hang on at Rhodes as ‘it isn’t such a bad place really’.

The multilingual Dingemans bore the main responsibility for modern languages for almost seven years until new lecturers were appointed in 1911: H.S. Bodmer to teach French and German, P.B. Weehuizen as a lecturer in German and Dutch. Both men, who would in time be promoted to chairs, were, like many of their colleagues, polymaths who contributed much to the cultural life of Rhodes over two decades. And both died, suddenly, within two weeks of each other in the spring of 1930.

Bodmer was reckoned to have developed the strongest department of French in South Africa, while at the same time playing a major role in promoting music and theatre at Rhodes. Himself an accomplished pianist, he first created and managed a music society in Grahamstown before going on to establish a university orchestra. In a similar way he transformed the students’ dramatic society from what had begun as a play-reading group into a body that put on full theatre productions. Bodmer was renowned for his wit, and for his compassion, being known to have housed homeless people and to have cared for the sick in his home.

Born and educated in the Netherlands, Weehuizen moved to the Transvaal in the late 1890s. There he joined the boer ranks in the South African War, was captured and sent to a prisoner-of-war camp in Ceylon (Sri

Lanka). Joining the Rhodes staff in 1911 as a lecturer in German and Dutch, he would in time take on the main responsibility for German. Weehuizen was another of those versatile scholars who made up the Rhodes staff in these early decades – in Dingemans' view, 'an excellent pianist and draughtsman, a mathematician of considerable attainments', and one who delighted in literature and art.³³

For the first five or so years from 1905 the responsibility for teaching history fell to Lord. In 1911 a lectureship in history and economics was created, and the post was assigned to W.M. Macmillan, one of only three historians with an academic training to be working in the country in the early twentieth century. Although Macmillan would remain at Rhodes for only six years he made an important contribution to the university and to the town. History developed rapidly as a subject under his tutelage, with his honours class being particularly successful – his class of 1913 especially so, comprising four fine students: Margaret Hodgson (later Ballinger) who would herself become an academic historian before moving into politics and taking up a seat in parliament as a liberal-minded MP; Ronald Currey – a future Rhodes Scholar, classicist, and school principal (and author of the first history of Rhodes University); Albert Geyer, who would become editor of *Die Burger* and an important figure in Afrikaner nationalist politics; and Harold Howse, who had a potentially brilliant career cut short when he was killed in World War One.

Macmillan would become a leading South African historian of his time, but while at Rhodes his research was much more sociological than historical, centring on health, sanitation and poverty in Grahamstown. He had practical objectives, wanting to 'persuade the dirty little City that they might save money by being cleaner!'. In 1915 he produced two pamphlets on Grahamstown: one on sanitary reform, the other on economic conditions in the city. Much of his focus was on white poverty, reaching the conclusion that 10% of Grahamstown's white population lived in abject poverty. But he was also shocked by conditions in the African township, where the death-rate exceeded the birth-rate – 'Can there be anything more abominable than that?', he asked, 'And who cares? Nobody.' – and where there was a water supply of about 15,000 litres a week for a population of five to six thousand.

Blessed with a spirit of restless curiosity, immense powers of observation, and a deep concern for social welfare, Macmillan, like Cory, travelled extensively. While Cory was more of a foot-slogger roaming the eastern Cape, Macmillan ventured further afield, make use of rail and road travel. Both men were pioneering field-workers. Rhodes was keen to promote

Macmillan to a professorship, but was unable to do so as the minister of education turned down the application owing to a lack of funds. So he was lured away to the chair of history at Wits in 1917. Even if Rhodes had been able to offer him a chair it is doubtful whether he would have stayed on as he was not greatly enamoured of Grahamstown, which he described as 'lotus-eating and sleepy, quite good for more arrears of reading'.³⁴

Macmillan's departure was a huge loss to Rhodes, and his eventual successor certainly not a gain. In 1920 I.J. (Pip) Rousseau was appointed professor of history – an appointment that Rhodes would surely regret, and one that underlined the importance of carefully checking the qualifications and credentials of applicants – which clearly had not happened in this case. Late in 1921 questions were being asked about his competence. Rousseau's chief adversary was Lord, who thought him unfit for his professorial post and wanted him out. There was even a brawl between the two in the common room, Rousseau having torn down a notice that Lord had posted on the Senate notice-board questioning the extent of Rousseau's teaching-load. Dingemans backed Rousseau, as did Schonland who wrote a letter of complaint to Lord (opening it with the greeting 'Dear Lord'). Smail was dismayed by the whole matter, believing Senate had 'behaved like a lot of rats and jelly-fish'. Eventually Council resolved that Rousseau be granted a year's leave for further study at Oxford – in other words, to brush up on his history. In June 1923 a senior Oxford professor reported on Rousseau's year at the university. It was not favourable: prior to his Rhodes appointment Rousseau had taken a shortened post-war course in history at Oxford and merely obtained a pass, indicating a student of second-rate ability. In the professor's view he was not qualified to hold a chair

While Rousseau would remain at Rhodes for many more years, his career would move in a downward trajectory. In 1925 he was demoted to the level of senior lecturer. Thereafter he made various attempts to regain status. In 1926 his fiancée, Ms Ericsson, allegedly offered to endow a chair in South African history to the amount of £4,000, obviously with a view to it being filled by her future husband. Although the offer was considered, Rhodes was not to be bought and it was turned down. The story went that the couple had met and become engaged on board a ship *en voyage* to South Africa, the fiancée apparently being led to believe that she was going to marry a professor, only to discover on arrival that he was an ex-professor. In 1931, as Rhodes faced a financial crisis brought on by the depression, Rousseau was again demoted, from senior lecturer to lecturer. Three years later he asked to be appointed senior lecturer in a new special department of 'Afri-

kaner Kultuur'. The following year he applied for the vacant chair of history and was allowed, most unusually, to state his case for the post in Senate, but was again overlooked, failing to gain a single vote.

Following a tour of Europe in 1936-37 Rousseau flirted with Nazism. According to Guy Butler, a student at Rhodes at the time, this 'scandalised the student intelligentsia'. Butler also recalled a particular lecture given by Rousseau to a history class – a lecture that was supposed to be on the British occupation of the Cape, but one that turned out to be an account of all the sights and personalities he had encountered on his travels. The highlight was a signed photograph of Jessie Matthews, given to Rousseau by the actor herself, and duly passed around the class for all to view.

Although Rousseau was also seen attending a meeting of a far-right Afrikaner movement in the late 1930s (no doubt the Ossewabrandwag or New Order), his flirtation with Nazism was short-lived. In World War Two he rendered service with the Intelligence Department of the permanent force. He eventually resigned from Rhodes in 1946 after more than twenty-five troubled years on the staff, but continued to be bothersome – in 1948 a special committee of Council being set up to investigate Rousseau's complaints against Rhodes. The last word on Rousseau goes to Guy Butler: '[o]ne could laugh at Pip, and we did, but he was a man of ideas. The ideas might sound crazy, but there was a sane gleam in some of them. This was better than having no ideas at all'. In the annals of Rhodes Rousseau stands out as one of the university's more eccentric figures, remembered, too for his practice of nudism and his habit of rolling naked on the dewy grass in his garden.³⁵

While Rousseau had soon proved to be ill-equipped to hold a chair, Rhodes did manage to attract an able scholar to fill the post, Professor John Ewing, appointed in 1927. A specialist in British colonial history, he contributed chapters to the *Cambridge History of the British Empire*. He was considered to be a fine lecturer who kept in touch with the latest trends in the discipline. A military man, who had served in World War One and would become the commanding officer of the university company while at Rhodes, he also had liberal inclinations, being a member of Grahamstown's Joint Council of Europeans and Natives. He died in 1934 at the age of fifty-one.

In 1914 a department of education was established, initially with the purpose of offering courses to train postgraduates for the teaching profession. A.H. Fitt headed the department for its first three years, before being succeeded by F.M. Earle who resigned in 1924. When John Adamson was appointed as Rhodes' first master in 1925 he was also required to take on the

chair of education at the same time. Another lecturer in the department was Marjorie Martinius, a Rhodes classics graduate appointed in 1920 – only the fourth woman to take up an academic post at Rhodes. She was forced to resign her permanent lectureship in 1928 on account of her marriage to Grant McKerron, the professor of law. She would, though, remain deeply engaged in the field of education, teaching and writing, and much later becoming a key organiser and fund-raiser for the Grahamstown Area District Relief Association (GADRA). In 1969 Rhodes awarded her an honorary doctorate.

Henry Lewis, a Cambridge graduate, succeeded Macfadyen as professor of law in 1911. The decline in student numbers during World War One led to the abolition of the chair and the departure of Lewis who went on to practise as an advocate before his later elevation to the bench where he presided as a rather brusque, intimidating judge. For five years from 1918 the teaching of law was handled by part-time lecturers, one of whom was Grant McKerron, a UCGH graduate who became a full-time lecturer in 1923 and went on to hold the restored chair of law from 1928 to 1944. Studious, well-read, courteous and dedicated, McKerron was the sole full-time member of the department until 1941 and carried a heavy teaching load, often amounting to twenty-five lectures a week.³⁶

In the early 1920s there was an expansion in courses offered at Rhodes, requiring in turn the creation of new academic posts. In 1922 courses in commerce were introduced for the first time, with the appointment of J.W.M. Williamson as lecturer in accounting, business management and auditing. He would be replaced in 1926 by David Liddell, an Edinburgh graduate, appointed initially as senior lecturer in charge of commerce, later taking up the chair of commerce in 1940.

Lord, as we have seen, was for long Rhodes' main bearer of multidisciplinary responsibilities, for some years carrying the title of professor of philosophy, history and economics, with philosophy deemed to include politics and psychology. Gradually over the years he was given relief, with the appointment of specialists. Macmillan took over history in 1911. R.L. 'Jimmy' Hall was appointed as the first full-time lecturer in economics in 1920 – one of very few academic staff members at the time to have been born in the eastern Cape.

From small beginnings economics would develop over the decades into one of the largest departments at Rhodes. It would be the same story with psychology. In 1926 Rhodes was the first South African university to establish an independent department of psychology, with the appointment of Morris Ramsay as senior lecturer. The discipline, as taught at Rhodes, com-

prised two branches – one for arts students, and another for science students. The former focussed on such themes as the nervous system, mental processes, emotion, and intelligence, while the latter was more centred on psychopathology, psychoanalysis, vocational and industrial psychology.³⁷

Music as a field of study and practice was introduced at Rhodes in 1923, with W.B. Collingwood, an Oxford graduate, appointed as the first lecturer. Two decades later, as we shall see, this department would go through troubled times. In 1925 Rhodes established a department of fine art, taking over the Grahamstown School of Art. This had been founded in the early 1880s, and had been variously housed, at different times, in Gowie's buildings in High Street and in the upper floor of the city hall. Management of the school was taken over by the Grahamstown Fine Art Association, founded in 1903 to promote fine art and hold exhibitions. F.W. Armstrong, an associate of the Royal College of Art, came to Grahamstown to head the school the following year. In 1905 he also took on the part-time position of instructor in drawing at Rhodes, mainly teaching mechanical drawing and graphics to science students and the survey class.

Armstrong was appointed as Rhodes' first professor of fine art when the school was taken over in 1925, resigning at the end of 1928 to take up the headship of the Witwatersrand Technical Institute's art department – but not before taking occupation of the newly constructed art school building on the Drostdy lawns at the beginning of 1928 (probably the only building on campus which has housed the same department throughout its history up till the present day). Armstrong was another of those versatile figures who served Rhodes and Grahamstown during the first two to three decades of the twentieth century. Soon after arriving in the town he conducted experiments with local clay and found it to be free from impurities, able to withstand high temperatures, and therefore ideal for pottery. Himself an accomplished ceramicist, he displayed work at the empire exhibition at Wembley in 1925. A large lancet window in Grahamstown's Christ Church was his creation. In his retirement at Port Alfred he built a small aquarium for the study of marine life, later known as the Armstrong Field Station for Biological Research. And he is reputed to have been one of Grahamstown's first owners of a car, acquired in 1913.³⁸

Having evolved first as a garrison town and then as an educational and judicial centre, Grahamstown also belonged to a region whose economy centred on white farming in the early decades of the twentieth century. From the outset decision-makers at Rhodes were keen that the institution should service the white farming sector. It was thought that this could best

be achieved by establishing a department of agriculture and veterinary science. Over several years hopes for such a development were expressed and motivations presented, but always in vain.

As early as 1905 a special sub-committee of Council proposed the creation of a department of agriculture at Rhodes, but the Cape government was not responsive, and two years later Rhodes could do little more than offer a vacation course in farming. Selmar Schonland was the driving-force behind such a scheme and his hopes were raised when Rhodes received a bequest of £25,000 from the estate of the late Alfred Beit in 1907. Schonland believed this amount could have been used to establish such a department, but Council merged the bequest into general funds, much to the annoyance of Schonland and Jameson. The scheme was revived in the early 1920s, but the government decided to restrict agricultural education to the two existing centres, Pretoria and Stellenbosch. So at this time Rhodes' efforts were constrained and it could do no more than introduce a diploma course in conjunction with the Grootfontein School of Agriculture – and even this did not survive for long. There were further attempts in the late 1940s and early 1950s to set up a department of agriculture, but no support was forthcoming from the National Party government.³⁹

Rhodes had started out in 1904 with a mere four professors, each burdened with multidisciplinary responsibilities and a heavy teaching load, and working within a wholly inadequate infrastructure, with minimal equipment and a minuscule library. Twenty-five or so years later the body of academic staff had grown and come to comprise scholars with greater specialist expertise, working alongside the survivors from the earlier generation of polymaths. Course offerings had expanded, and what had started out as conglomerate departments had fragmented into narrower entities in forms that still exist today.

Student culture in the not so 'roaring' twenties

Student numbers more than doubled in the 1920s, from about 200 in 1920, to almost 430 in 1930. Through much of the decade about two-thirds or more of students came from the eastern Cape, about 10% from 'Rhodesia' (presumably meaning Southern or Northern Rhodesia), and the remainder from others parts of South Africa. In 1930 the English and mathematics departments had the most students – 134 and 104 respectively – followed by classics, which was still strong but losing its earlier pre-eminence. Student numbers in economics and commerce were still relatively low – at sixty-two and thirty-one – an indication that Rhodes still had the character of a liberal

arts college.

World War One had taken its toll on Rhodes, owing both to the casualty rate and to the departure of male staff and students to join the allied war effort. Just as the war was ending another trauma affected Rhodes – the Spanish flu pandemic which hit the campus late in 1918. In October and November the two residences, College and Oriel, were converted into makeshift hospitals, with staff and students taking on caring roles. All normal activities were suspended, lectures were discontinued, and exams were postponed to the following February. Four members of the Rhodes community died during the outbreak: Ms Greenhead, the College House matron, and three students – Natalie Rider, Adriaan van Gorkum, and A.K. Dugmore, the SRC chairperson and senior student.

Through the 1920s student life continued for the most part to be decorous and repressed, constrained by rules and codes of behaviour. The College House rules in 1921 laid down that first-year students had to be in residence by 8.00 pm, and second-years by 8.30 pm. After a boxing club was formed in 1924 the number of spectators attending was restricted by a Senate resolution prohibiting women students from watching boxing contests (because they were considered too violent, or because of exposure to too much male flesh? Not clear.).

According to one later reminiscence there were virtually no instances of disciplinary action in the 1920s, but official records do reveal the occasional case. In 1925 Senate considered what it deemed a serious breach of discipline when a woman student was found to have paid visits to a male student's room. Although Senate was satisfied that 'no more than very grave indiscretion is involved' the two students were confined to the campus for the rest of the term, and the male student's forthcoming appointment as a leave replacement in the maths department was cancelled. In 1927 two women students were gated for travelling in a car with two Grahamstown men on the last night of term when returning to their homes for the vacation. Senate was also soon expressing its concern about the large number of unauthorised dances occurring, and recommended that no dances be held without Senate's approval. The *in loco parentis* principle held firm, and would continue to do so for a number of decades.⁴⁰

The social life and general culture of students continued to be at once proper and genteel, but also frivolous and rowdy. There were strictly controlled dances and dancing classes, with ever-present chaperones keeping a watchful eye. For some years an annual 'social' took place in the junior common room on a Saturday night early in March. Several years later a former

student reflected on this event, suggesting it would have seemed 'excruciatingly dull' to a modern generation: '[a]ll of us, staff and students alike, were there, sitting in stiff rows ranged along the walls'. There were welcoming speeches, 'and one or two Professors sang comic songs or played musical instruments. We all enjoyed it vastly, incredible though it may seem'.

The annual Founder's Day, on or close to 12 September, was an important social occasion. In 1926 it began with a church service, followed by a 'stirring address on Cecil Rhodes' delivered by Rev. Marsh. Events included a treasure-hunt, a bridge drive, and the usual fancy dress, all of which, according to *The Rhodian*, 'made for a most successful day'. Taking a train out of town and stopping off for a picnic was another regular recreational activity.

In 1925 the Prince of Wales (the future Edward VIII) visited Rhodes. Students dressed up as Zulu warriors and ambushed the prince as he passed through the Drostdy Arch, before pushing him in a cab to the war memorial in front of Botha House (the same war memorial that was later moved and now stands in front of the Great Hall). The prince conferred 'the privilege of dress' to be worn on Founder's Day – for men, a purple stripe along the seam of their trousers, and, for women, a purple band around the neck. He then attended a ball in Oriel Hall (now Courtenay-Latimer Hall), dancing with the senior student.

Pranking and general frivolity seem to have been conspicuous features of student culture in the 1920s. During the 1921 end-of-year ceremony, for instance, students placed boxes of confetti on a beam over the platform and emptied them out on Professor Lord during his address. In the reminiscences and recollections of some former students all this is represented as students just having fun. But in the 1920s there were a few critical voices that could be heard. In a 1927 issue of *The Rhodian* one student (with the initials 'J. De M.') complained that there was 'a very large element' at Rhodes who believed that students' main purpose in life was 'to be funny, to make humorous remarks, and generally to indulge in hooliganism and rowdiness'. Debating Society meetings were farcical, with most contributions amounting to little more than 'perverted attempts at humour' – which was what the audience apparently wanted. Furthermore there was a near total lack of interest in South African affairs – one student in fifty, so the article alleged, followed political matters.

In a similar vein a temporary lecturer in history, Harry Ross, reflected on his two years at Rhodes in 1929 and 1930. He had found students largely indifferent to intellectual matters and political issues, with student societ-

ies being moribund. ‘You [students]’, he concluded, ‘are happy-go-lucky because the sun shines and when it doesn’t you are depressed, you shiver and you retire to play bridge You buy no books, you read no books and certain it is that you will write no books’.⁴¹

There was, too, a nastier, brutish side to this culture – in the form of initiation practices. First-year students were for long known as ‘inks’ and ‘inkettes’ (terms that have fallen out of use in the past two decades) – the words derived in part from the term ‘intermediate’ which originally denoted a first-year student, and in part from the use of fountain-pens and ink (before the days of ball-point pens), giving rise to a newly-coined term, ‘inky-mediate’.

Initiation took various forms in the first two to three decades of Rhodes’ history. It might involve a ducking ceremony at a local dam. An essential component was the ‘inky concert’, held in the men’s and women’s residences, where first-year students were required to perform before an audience of senior students likely to subject them to derision and humiliation. The whole practice was overseen by a group of senior students known as the ‘assassination committee’, whose task was to ensure that new students were integrated into university life and conditioned to treat senior students with respect. One former student later recalled that initiation in the 1920s was ‘intense but over quickly’, after the first week not ‘having to submit to anything but a nocturnal visit from thugs’. Its proponents defended initiation as ‘a forceful, happy custom’ that worked towards ‘greater unity among the students’. But in 1927 it came to the attention of the university authorities following a complaint that a number of students had entered the bedroom of a first-year who was forced to strip and then had his face and chest blackened. The master, Adamson, intervened, deploring such practices as degrading to both the victim and perpetrators, and ruling that no students be permitted to enter another student’s room to carry out initiation. In the 1930s, as we shall see, there were further attempts to curb the practice, but an ‘assassination committee’ was still operating in the 1940s.⁴²

With opportunities for recreation somewhat limited students devoted much time and energy to sport. For men, rugby reigned supreme. The sport gained impetus and success in the 1920s, with the Rhodes first team winning the Eastern Province rugby trophy in 1926, going through the season unbeaten. Such was the popularity of the sport that in that year Rhodes fielded five teams – remarkably, given that there were less than 200 men students at the time. In the early 1920s Rhodes’ star player was Jack Slater, a try-scoring wing who would go on to play for South Africa.

For about twenty years hockey was predominantly a women’s sport,

with a team being established at Rhodes in 1908. In the 1920s men sometimes played alongside women in mixed matches. A men's hockey team was set up in 1927, on the initiative of a senior student, George Randell. While this might have ended 'de-gendered' hockey, it did bring some success to Rhodes, with the team winning the Eastern Province Cup in 1928 and 1929.

The progress of other sports depended much on the provision of facilities. In 1922 men students excavated most of a site for the construction of tennis courts, while women students, acting out their gendered role, 'made tea and sandwiches for the sweating workers and bandaged their blistered hands', according to one later reminiscence. Four years later students were again at work, excavating the site for the swimming pool (which still exists today), with contractors completing the work in time for the pool to open at the beginning of 1930.⁴³

During the first twenty-five years of its existence Rhodes had progressed sedately, its staff complement and student body growing steadily, and its infrastructure developing in such a way as to give the campus more the look of a university. The intellectual and cultural life of the institution had been uneven, with evidence of both academic energy and versatility on the part of some, along with widespread student apathy. While this first quarter of a century had been relatively serene and trouble-free, it would not be so in the two decades that followed.