

The Master that never was

On 7th July 1697 John Eachard died. He left the Mastership vacant and a College in an unsettled state.ⁱ Despite Eachard's efforts at reconstruction (he was responsible for the completion of the rebuilding of the College, with the exception of the Chapel), he was not seen as a good influence on the College, with contemporary accounts describing the College as 'debauched'.ⁱⁱ

Peter Fisher was elected to succeed Eachard on the 12th July 1697. Fisher came from Suffolk and was admitted to St. Catharine's in March 1661. He gained his BA in 1664/5 and his MA in 1668. He went on to be Vicar of Shephall in Hertfordshire (1679-1991) and Rector of Bennington also in Hertfordshire. He was latterly incorporated at Oxford (1671).

Fisher was elected to a Fellowship from 1672-1677. Here can be seen two extracts from the Fellows' Account books, one from the year Fisher was elected and a second for 1674. Other familiar names such as Eachard and Calamyⁱⁱⁱ can be seen.

The 2^d Quarter ending March 18th 1672

Item	Debit	Credit	Balance
Collogium			3 8
Mr. Collogij			
Mr. Slader		3 0	3 0
Mr. Fullwood			
Mr. Brunning		3 0	3 0
Mr. Eachard	3 6		3 0
Mr. Calamy	4 4	5 0	8 6
Mr. Fisher		3 0	9 4
Mr. Shaw	2 11	5 0	3 0
			7 11

Extract from a Fellows' Account Book, 1662-1674
Reference: L/74

The 4th Quarter ending September 18th 1674

Item	Debit	Credit	Balance
Collogium	3 6		3 6
Mr. Collogij	3 0		3 0
Mr. Slader		3 0	3 0
Mr. John Rous			
Mr. Brunning		3 0	3 0
Mr. Eachard	2 9	4 8	7 5
Mr. Calamy	5 7	4 8	10 3
Mr. Fisher		4 8	4 8
Mr. Shaw	3 6	4 8	8 2

Extract from a Fellows' Account Book, 1674-1793
Reference: L/75


Bennington was the home of the Caesar family, who had sent four members to be Fellow Commoners at St. Catharine's between 1667 and 1701 (Charles, Charles, Henry and Thomas). Perhaps the College was trying to curry favour with the family by appointing the local Rector, we will never know.

Having been an undergraduate and Fellow he would have been familiar with the workings of the College, but perhaps also its politics, and that may have given rise to his resignation of the Mastership. It is unclear why he would have allowed his name to go forward though, if he did not wish to take on the position. Perhaps something happened in the month after his election?

M 5 FISHER
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Whereas the Mastership of St. Catharine Hall or College in the University of Cambridge was lately vacant by the death of John Eachard D^r of Divinity and the Fellows of the aforesaid Hall or College of St. Catharine did on or about the twelfth day of July last Elect Peter Fisher D^r of Divinity and Rector of Bennington in the County of Hertford Master of the aforesaid Hall or College of St. Catharine Now this present writing witnesseth that the said Peter Fisher doth refuse to accept the said Mastership of St. Catharine Hall or College and doth hereby resign the same with all his right interest and title thereunto to the Fellows of the said Hall or College and doth give full leave licence and authority to the said Fellows to declare the said Mastership void and to proceed to a new Election of a Master for the said Hall or College as if the said Peter Fisher had never been Elected.

Signed and sealed in Aug: 11th 1697
in presence of
DARCH
Dan: Hollows

Peter Fisher 

Fisher's letter of resignation.
Note that no reason for the resignation is given; Fisher simply asks that the College proceed "as if the said Peter Fisher had never been elected."
Reference:
M/5/Fisher/1

Fisher does not seem to have harboured long-term ill will to the College. His son Charles was admitted to the College in July 1711, formally matriculating in 1712.

Fisher continued as Rector of Bennington until his death in 1718. His will was made on the 8th July 1718 and is now available in the records of the National Archives.^{iv} It proves instructive about his family life; no wife is mentioned probably indicating that she predeceased him, he also gives legacies to his son Charles, 2 daughters and a grandson, William. He also had several servants who were left money too. Money was also left to the poor of his Parish. A record of probate is also present, though this is recorded in Latin.

The Archivist is always pleased to answer questions about the College and its members. Enquiries should be directed to archivist@caths.cam.ac.uk, or call 01223 338343. The Archivist only works for the College on Thursdays and Fridays so there is sometimes a delay in being able to answer queries.

ⁱ W. H. S. Jones, 'A History of St. Catharine's College Cambridge', 1936, p. 110.

ⁱⁱ W. H. S. Jones, 'A History of St. Catharine's College Cambridge', 1936, p. 307.

ⁱⁱⁱ For more information about Calamy see Jim Spivey, 'Calamy, Benjamin (*bap.* 1646, *d.* 1685/6)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2006 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4354, accessed 25 April 2014].

^{iv} Fisher's will can be accessed via the National Archives website, or directly at <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/SearchUI/image/Index/D680370>.