

525 Years in the Pursuit of Truth: A New History of The University of Aberdeen

Episode 2

Voiceover [00:00:02] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.

Dr Bradford Bow [00:00:21] Hello, my name is Dr. Bradford Bow, and I'm a co-deputy director of the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies, which is sponsoring this series of podcasts entitled 525 Years in the Pursuit of Truth A New History of the University of Aberdeen. In this episode, my colleague, Professor Bill Naphy, who holds a chair in history at Aberdeen University, will examine student mobility in the global and institutional history of Marshall College from its founding in 1593 through to the Union of 1860.

Professor Bill Naphy [00:01:10] Hello. I'd like to spend a few minutes talking to you about Marshall College. First of all, why it's set up in Aberdeen. But to move quickly beyond that, to talk about its international role and in particular the international and globalised element of its student population, which I think would be incredibly surprising to most people to think about Marshall College as having this particular role and impact. So, what you have here is an image of Marshall College as it existed more or less from its foundation until 1830 when it was substantially altered and replaced. So why did the city government establish a college? I mean, after all, Kings College was just down the road, so obviously just down the road then didn't mean a few minutes on a bus or even on foot. It was a much longer walk and there was a large loch in between. So, the merchants and burgesses wanted a training area beyond the grammar school for their children. And of course, bearing in mind that Aberdeen had had a grammar school for a very long time, it's understandable that this was just simply building on that. And what they're doing, in fact, is plugging in to ideas that have already come out of the Renaissance about civic education and what you find across Europe. You see it in Italy, in southern France, in Switzerland, in the low countries along the Rhine areas where cities, particularly city-states where cities have strong local governments, strong local interests they very much have an emphasis on the education of their own children, whether this is through primary education or through grammar schools and very often through then tertiary education, as we would think of it, colleges and universities. They're also very well off. Scottish student mobility. So, if you're a child in Aberdeen and your son is what we mean in this period goes to university in Scotland, the chances are if they're going to go for anything beyond that first degree, they're going to go somewhere else. So one of the things that's the burgesses want to do is to keep their sons at home for that first degree and then by going abroad, either as part of a career or as part of further education to plug into the key international trading links that Aberdeen has already established and wants to establish. So effectively, what they're doing is they're preparing their children for careers and for making their way in the world. Now, there is a view that has often been expressed that in actual fact, Marshall is established as a Presbyterian alternative to Kings, which is viewed as being too Episcopal and even perhaps to crypto-Catholic. Now, I think this is problematic and it's problematic because of three people, Blackburne, Forbes and Patrick Dunn. I'll discuss in just a moment and you'll see why this explanation, Presbyterian versus Episcopal, becomes extremely difficult when you consider these three men. And that's because they represent the sharing of staff between the two institutions and if there was this serious religious divide between them, it would be unlikely that the staff would be shared and particularly these three men.

Professor Bill Naphy [00:04:47] So the first bishop, Peter Blackburne. In 1598, almost within a few years of Marshall College being established, Peter Blackburne is made director and two years later he moves to Kings as chancellor at the same time as he's appointed

one of the first bishops in Scotland since 1585. It's hard to think that this man, in his role in Marshall College is some advocate for Presbyterianism, when two years later he becomes one of James's first bishops since the Reformation.

Professor Bill Naphy [00:05:26] When we look at Patrick Dunn, we also see him moving around: 1610 he's teaching at Marshall by 1619, he is still at Marshall, but he's also holding a post as Mediciner. So a professor of medicine at Kings. And two years later, he's back at Marshall as principal. In fact, he stayed at Marshall almost for a decade or more, but he also has this post at King's. Again, this suggests that these two institutions are not somehow being set against one another, but there's a different reason to have this college in the city, and I think it's because it's in the city and therefore under the control of the city government for their own children. And you really see this when you look at someone like Bishop William Forbes. So, he's starting in 1592 at King's [which] makes sense if it's seen as being an Episcopal foundation. But by 1601 he is at Marshall, then he's back at King's and in 1620, he's actually the principal of Marshall College. And in 1634, he's made Bishop of Edinburgh by Charles I. And Charles I actually creates the bishopric of Edinburgh for William Forbes. Now it's hard to look particularly at the careers of Blackburn and Forbes, these two prominent bishops who are also heavily involved at Marshall College and argue that Marshall College is in some way a Presbyterian and anti-episcopal foundation. So, I think we really have to think of Marshall College as a civic foundation for the education of the children, of the merchant elite of Aberdeen.

Professor Bill Naphy [00:07:24] Now, when we look at international prestige, I think this is where you do see, again, this idea that Marshall is really much more of a town institution, whereas King's is the more prestigious. Now, what do we mean by higher degrees? Well, in this period, that doesn't mean that you're actually studying. What it tends to mean is something between an earned degree and an honorary degree. So if you do your first degree and you go out into the world and you become a lawyer or a doctor or a theologian and you become famous and you publish in the sphere then people can nominate you to a university to be awarded a higher degree based on, in effect, your career. So that's what I mean by higher degrees. Now, if you look at Kings, the higher degrees that are being awarded to people who are coming from outside the U.K. and what you see is it's really [that] there's just a smattering until 1750 and then you see a fair number. And many of these are actually from the Americas. And then in the early 19th century to the amalgamation of the two colleges into the University of Aberdeen, you also see a fair number, not substantial, but good numbers. Now, if you look at Marshall, you see a very different picture. Marshall doesn't actually award anyone a higher degree who comes from outside the U.K. until the 1730s. Even in the 1750s, they're barely matching what King's is doing at the same time, and it's not till the 19th century that they pull ahead of Kings, but only very, very slightly. And I think what this suggests, again, is that Marshall continues to have this feel of being a town college for the children of the town's elite, whereas King's has this much more prestigious feel and image and reputation, and therefore, if you're going to nominate someone who's had a wonderful career in theology, medicine or law and you want to nominate them for a higher degree at an Aberdeen institution, your inclination is to nominate them to King's rather than Marshall. You see a similar sort of thing when it comes to students coming to Aberdeen for their Masters, in other words, for their first degree, if you will, the more workaday degree as opposed to doing some sort of higher study. Now, in King's what you see is actually almost no foreign students come to King's to study. From 1600, which is more or less when our records of matriculants and graduates began until the amalgamation in 1860, [one sees] literally a handful. One or two at a time. When you look at Marshall College, you see a very similar picture up until 1750, but then it becomes very, very different. From 1750 until 1799,

Marshall College attracts 42 foreign-born students, and most of those are coming from the Caribbean. From 1800 to the amalgamation of the two colleges, 189 students, some still coming from the Caribbean but increasingly from India and the general subcontinent region. You'll notice that no one comes in 1700 to 1749 to either. I think this is a comment on how turbulent Scotland was in the period of Union, the 1715 and '45 risings. It's not a place where any one is sending people from abroad.

Professor Bill Naphy [00:11:13] Now, I want to look at mobility of the students as well, if you think that King's is by far the more prestigious one, then it's likely to have people going to it from the rural elite, the gentry, who don't really have a reason to go abroad. And let's remember, in this period, if you're going abroad, it's almost certainly because that's where you can make a real advance in a career, because you go abroad, because you need to. And if you're coming from abroad, it's almost certainly because you have ties with the place, your culture, which your father is from there, almost certainly. And you see a very similar sort of pattern. So, King's throughout the period from 1600 onwards about 78 honorary degrees are given to people that are either from abroad or spend some of their career abroad. And 126 during their M.A. degree either come from abroad (and as we saw, that was actually very few) or they go somewhere to make their living out in the world. This is what you would expect from King's, not a lot. If you look at Marshall, at the town institution, educating the town's children of the elite to go out into the world and make a living, you see something entirely different. The honorary degrees, almost the same as King's, very, very similar. But if you look at the M.A. degree, an enormous number of graduates of Marshall College or matriculants at Marshall College are leaving Aberdeen and leaving Scotland. And if you're going to be from abroad and come for your first degree, you're more likely to study at Marshall College. And I throw in Aberdeen from the period, from the amalgamation to just after the First World War to give you an idea [by comparison]. So, what really stands out is Marshall College. So obviously it's a much longer period of time, but one tends to think of maybe the late 19th century is a period of greater mobility. And yet if you look at Marshall College, you see that there's considerable mobility there in the two and a half centuries before the amalgamation.

Professor Bill Naphy [00:13:32] You also see a real difference in the professions. And the professions, again, suggest that Marshall College is training people in professions where they are going to go somewhere because they want to make a living. So, King's, you see clergy. By far, the profession, if you're going to be from King's and have an international experience in your life, whether you're from abroad or you go abroad for the rest of your career, mostly what King's is sending out are clergy. Marshall College, it's an entirely different picture, first of all, the numbers are much greater, but you see that the real big number is people trained in medicine. So if you come to Aberdeen and you want a career that's going to pay or if you're from Aberdeen and you want a career that's going to pay out in the world, then it's more likely to be medicine. And clergy is obviously second. That's not surprising. But you really see these professions that are next military, mercantile, civil service. These are careers that an Aberdeen merchant and Aberdeen elite citizen burgess would want their kid, their son to go into. And this is what you see, this many students leaving Aberdeen to go abroad in these particular professions. And again, it suggests that Marshall College, it's not only, if you're trading in more workaday careers where you can make a good living, but it's also much more plugged in to the expanding world of the British Empire. So where are these students going? Where are the links, whether it's King's, whether it's Marshall or whether it's amalgamated Aberdeen actually have. And this, I think is really important because again. I think it's somewhat unexpected. So, the vast majority of the students who have some sort of an international link, whether they're from abroad or this is where they spend part or all of their career, is with, as you

can see, India. And in fact, while you might expect China to be high on the list, in actual fact, Sri Lanka is an even more important destination than China. North America, not surprising, but the fact that Canada predominates again is an interesting insight into where Scots are going. This, I think, will surprise most people: the Caribbean is a major destination and a major international link for Aberdeen, whether it's for students coming from the Caribbean or going to the Caribbean and in particular Jamaica. And what this suggests is that while we might look at places like Glasgow and Bristol and Liverpool and think about their involvement in slavery in the Caribbean, we have to be aware that it is definitely the case that Aberdeen is very plugged into that world as well. Scores and scores of Aberdeen elite's children are making their careers in the Caribbean and in particularly in the sugar plantations of Jamaica. A fair number are heading off mostly in the later period in the 19th century to the Antipodes, so in particular Australia. Interestingly enough, Africa and Europe are exactly the same number of linkages. However, what you see is that in Africa, South Africa, by and large, predominates whether this is the Cape Colony or one other part of what eventually becomes South Africa. In Europe, it's much more evenly spread out. And as you see, the Netherlands and France are equal destination points, which again is interesting. The links with the Netherlands because of Presbyterianism and its reformed sister, the Dutch Reformed Church. But France, I think, for very historic reasons and the links between Scotland and France being very strong. And finally South America. Now, this is somewhat misleading because as you can see, many of these links are actually with Guyana or what it was then really known as Demerara. This, again, is sugar plantations and slavery. So, what you see when you look at Marshall College, through the prism of international students and international careers after graduation, is that Marshall College, which is effectively a city foundation, a city college, is really, really plugged into the imperial world of Britain in a way that King's isn't. King's, it would appear, is much more educating people for roles and lives within the U.K. Marshall College is putting much more of an emphasis on students reaching out into the world beyond Aberdeen.

Professor Bill Naphy [00:18:45] Thank you very much.

Voiceover [00:19:01] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.