



Emmanuel College

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

Food for Thought

By

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Emmanuel College
The University of Queensland
Enriching lives since 1911

Emmanuel College is Australia's ninth, and with St John's College, The University of Queensland's first residential college to gain affiliation. It was founded by the Presbyterian Church of Queensland in 1911 with the first students taking up residence in Wickham Terrace in 1912. As the Presbyterian Church moved towards partnership with other religious denominations during the 1970s, Emmanuel College also came under the auspices of the Uniting Church. Upon its inauguration, Emmanuel College was an all male residence but this changed in 1975 when women were admitted as collegians. Now, the College numbers around 340 students with half our population being female.

Further change was experienced by the College when it moved in 1955 from its original site in Wickham Terrace to its present location on the main university campus in St Lucia.

Since 1911, Emmanuel has stood for excellence in all round education and has had seven Rhodes Scholars during its history. Its graduates have gone on to make a major contribution to Australia in many areas, including as doctors, scientists, teachers, engineers, lawyers and judges, politicians, ambassadors and diplomats, and church leaders.

THE AUTHOR

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Professor Susan Hamilton is the President of the Academic Board at The University of Queensland. She is also Professor of Biochemistry with particular interests in the structure, function and engineering of proteins.

Her research has been on enzymes involved in bone resorption and enzymes with commercial application in brewing, sugar refining and meat processing. She has longstanding interests in science education and women in science.

Susan chairs the Education Committee of the International Union of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology and has ALTC funding for two projects on assessment. Susan is also a Fellow and member of the Council of Women's College.

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Food for Thought

Thank you for the kind invitation to speak at this splendid Academic Awards Dinner and my sincere congratulations to the students who have received the awards.

It is a great pleasure to be here tonight and share good company and excellent food and wine. The food is better than I remember from my college days but that was a while ago. The company was always good at college and is one of the great benefits of college life.

I'm interested in food (I like to cook, and I like to stick my nose into restaurant kitchens at their chaotic best) and in the history of food. Since I am a biochemist, with a background in research on vitamins, I'm also interested in science of nutrition.

This evening's three course menu which notably included a vegetarian option - more about that later - were all beautifully prepared and served and a tribute to the College's head chef Brian Hain and his team. Just for interest, quantities on his shopping list for tonight included - 40 kilos of lamb, 20 kilos of chicken, 25 kilos of potatoes, 15 kilos of vegetables.

I asked Brian a couple of days ago if there were any special traditions around college dinners at Emmanuel. He mentioned the biannual haggis, which certainly is distinctive.

You probably know that the College began its days in 1912 just two years after The University of Queensland was formed, in a rather grand building which had been a private residence, on Wickham Terrace, with the Principal, two tutors, a lecturer and five students.

The name of the College, "Emmanuel" (God with us) was favoured by the Presbyterian founding fathers because it evoked the original Emmanuel College in Cambridge. This College was established in 1584 in the reign of Elizabeth the First by Sir Walter Mildmay. He was a man of Puritan sympathies, and he decided to establish a College where Protestant preachers would receive a good education and training. Emmanuel was the most puritan of the colleges of the 17th century - when puritan was effectively indistinguishable from Presbyterian. I looked at the UQ Emmanuel College archives but there is unfortunately no record of formal dinners from Wickham Terrace days. I'd be surprised if there wasn't haggis somewhere along the line.

So I had a look for information about formal college dinners and traditions at the original Emmanuel College in Cambridge. The tradition of seating at a high table for the masters and fellows of the College and the wearing of academic dress are longstanding traditions which we continue to follow in colleges here and in Britain.

Another special feature of college formal dinners is the giving of thanks before and often after the meal. This tradition also goes back to the middle ages. Grace is traditionally said in Latin as it was this evening. Probably the commonest and the briefest but none the less beautiful college grace is the one used here at Emmanuel:

Benedictus benedicat (may the blessed one give blessing) per Jesum Christum Dominum nostrum (through Jesus Christ our Lord).

At Emmanuel College Cambridge to this day the grace that was said from the College's inception in the 16th century is still used. It is also rather beautiful. In translation it says:

The eyes of all wait upon thee, O Lord, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand and fillest every living thing with blessing. Bless us O Lord and thy gifts, which of thy bounty we are about to receive.

If on the slender offchance you would like to know more about college graces then I have the book for you - The College Graces of Oxford and Cambridge. Indeed I will soon have three copies of this book as a result of some mistaken efforts at ordering on Amazon.com. You know the procedure - you find the book you want and put it in your virtual shopping trolley, you proceed to the virtual checkout and then you have to give your password, which you have lost or forgotten, so you have a guess (blackcat is always a good guess for me) and it's wrong so you are sent away. You go back to the trolley and put the book in again, try another password etc. Finally get a new password and succeed with the third attempt at the virtual cash register. Success! I am now regrettably in receipt of three emails confirming my purchase of three copies of the book of College Graces of Oxford and Cambridge which is now surprisingly no longer available at Amazon as a result of my buying spree. This is probably not a book with broad universal appeal but it is going to turn up in at least two Christmas stockings this year. Bruce, Chairman of the Council and former Cambridge academic - this one is for you.

And what of the food at Emmanuel College Cambridge? What, if any, traditions are associated with formal meals? Fortunately in view of my ineptitude in ordering there is nothing on offer at Amazon.com on this topic.

However, I located an old Cambridge Emmanuel College magazine article which includes one of the earliest records of an Emmanuel College dinner, in 1763. Heads, doctors, professors and officers of the university were invited to a college formal dinner to mark the opening of the remodelled Emmanuel College Hall.

There were three tables of 25 and we know that they were served two courses.

Each table ate:

Salmon, sole and smelts

3 fowls and oysters

Venison pasty

Marrow pudding and pickles

Chine of mutton

Stewed celery

Dish of puddings

Ham

3 fowls and greens

Pike and eels

So ended the first course.

For those still soldiering on, the second course included:

A haunch of venison

6 partridges

6 artichokes

6 veal olives

4 lobsters

Stewed pippins

26 jellies and syllabubs

Apricot port

7 sweet breads

4 teal

6 oyster loaves

A goose

Special dishes associated with Emmanuel in Cambridge include a very English pudding called Bakewell Tart. Brian - I will send you their recipe. Maybe the centenary of the College in two years' time may be a good time to start a new tradition. Unfortunately I estimate it will involve for a dinner such as this approximately 25 dozen eggs, 20kg of butter and approximately a wheelbarrow full of sugar and almonds.

From a nutritional perspective today's menus are clearly much better balanced than these gargantuan feasts of old. Not for them a vegetarian alternative of nut loaf for a main course.

There's a t-shirt around which you might have seen which could have been popular in colleges in the middle ages if they had worn t-shirts - it says "Vegetables are what food eats".

As I said earlier, I am interested as a biochemist in nutrition and the scientific basis of nutrition. This is an area where the debate has been just as polarised as it is now around climate change. For example, there has been for many years a debate on the importance of dietary cholesterol in contributing to coronary heart disease, with protagonists arguing vociferously for and against. Even today, when the scientific evidence is quite clear that the amount of cholesterol in the diet for most people is not a significant factor in predisposing towards heart disease, products are still promoted as "cholesterol free". Far more important is the level of saturated fat in the diet.

Nutrition as a respectable science had its beginnings at Emmanuel College Cambridge through the work of one of its most revered former fellows, Sir Frederick Gowland Hopkins. He was born in Sussex in 1861 and he attended the City of London School but was forced to withdraw ie, expelled at the age of 14 because of truancy caused by "sheer boredom" to use his own words. He trained in chemistry and medicine, and was one of the first to bring the fields of chemistry and biology together in his thinking - he is sometimes referred to as the father of British biochemistry.

The work for which Hopkins is most widely remembered was his recognition of the necessity, for adequate nutrition, of certain substances, present in only small traces in natural fresh foods - now familiar to us as vitamins. He shared the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in 1929 for showing that the cause of the tropical disease beri beri was a deficiency of a single factor from the diet which was present in the husk of rice. The molecule responsible was later identified as thiamine, one of the B complex vitamins and the first discovered water soluble vitamin.

Hopkins also wrote and spoke eloquently about the divide that existed at the turn of the century between chemistry and biology.

The chemistry side was typified by the German chemist Justus von Leibig. He was certainly interested in understanding the chemistry of living things but knew no biology.

On the biology side there was Louis Pasteur who despite his contributions to molecular thinking favoured the view that a living organism could be understood only by thinking of the organism as a whole. In other words there was nothing to be gained by breaking a cell or tissue down into its components and studying them outside the cell in vitro because they would behave differently.

The work of Hopkins and others on vitamins was absolutely groundbreaking in the history of medicine because it showed for the first time that the cause of a disease could be the absence of a single pure chemical and that addition of that single chemical back to the diet was all that was needed to cure the disease. This went a long way to dispelling the idea that an organism could not be studied by studying its component chemistry and laid the foundations for modern biochemistry and nutrition.

It is a challenging time for nutrition worldwide, with 800 million people chronically undernourished. The University of Queensland is committed to improving participation in degree programs related to food security and agriculture, and I hope that some of you may consider this option at some stage. At the very least I urge you to become critical thinkers, as our graduate attributes say, when it comes to nutrition and shy away from Mark Twain's advice on nutrition and food:

Eat what you like and let the food fight it out inside.

May I again thank you for the privilege of presenting this address, and suggest that we conclude by raising a toast to the head chef Brian Hain and his team for their great contribution to the long tradition of Emmanuel College dinners.



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