

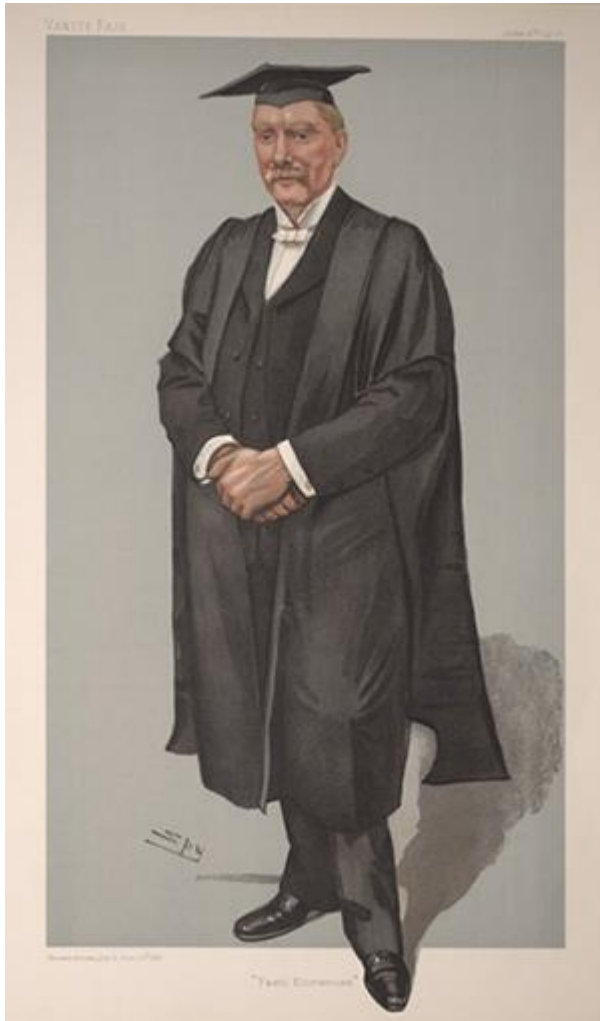
From the Magdalene College Website:

The Robert Cripps Gallery

Current Exhibition

**Arthur Christopher Benson, Diarist
A Centenary Exhibition**

12 March - 21 March 2025



Arthur Christopher Benson, son of Archbishop Edward White Benson and his remarkable wife Mary (Minnie) Sidgwick, was Fellow of Magdalene from 1904, President from 1912, and the College's greatest and most generous Master from 1915 till his death in June 1925. From 1897 onwards, he kept a diary which at the time of his death had swelled to 180 volumes and almost 5 million words: for comparison, the complete diary of Samuel Pepys is just over one million words, the Authorised Version of the Bible a mere 783,137.

Benson's published works are now mostly forgotten: if he is remembered at all, it is as the lyricist of "Land of Hope and Glory". A brilliant conversationalist, he himself admitted that "In my books I am solemn, sweet, refined; in real life I am rather vehement, sharp, contemptuous, a busy mocker." In his diary Benson gave free rein to his sharp observation and conversational talent, with all the "flippancy & brutality" lacking in his published works. It vividly evokes the life of the Edwardian social, literary and academic elites, to all of which Benson had privileged entrée, and an England still criss-crossed with railway branch lines

and dusty unmetalled roads, where “my brother the bicycle” was the favoured means of travel. It gives a fascinating picture of Cambridge before and during World War 1, when it was effectively taken over by the military, and when Benson on a walking holiday was mistaken for a German spy. It has a fascinating and harrowing treatment of Benson’s bi-polar disorder and five-year breakdown. And it provides an unrivalled window into early 20th century Cambridge, and the life of Magdalene in a crucial period of transition, from a tiny and obscure late Victorian backwater to a thriving institution attracting staff and students of the calibre of the scientist David Keilin, the literary critic I A Richards, and the linguist and philosopher C K Ogden.

The exhibition, which will be inaugurated with a lecture by Professor Eamon Duffy, co-editor of a [new annotated edition of Benson’s diary](#), illuminates Benson’s remarkable family background, the Edwardian literary scene in which he was a significant figure, and the academic world before, during and in the aftermath of the First World War.

Image: From 1885 to 1903 Benson taught at Eton. This cartoon by 'Spy' (the artist Leslie Ward (1851-1922)), entitled 'Fasti Etonenses', appeared in Vanity Fair in June 1903.

Opening Times

12 March – 21 March 2025

Open: 14:00 - 16:00, Monday - Saturday

Closed: Sunday

Information for Visitors

- to access the exhibition please call in to the Porters’ Lodge on Magdalene Street
- entrance will be to the Gallery only
- visitors are requested not to enter other parts of the New Library