

‘A Well-Documented Life: James Arthur Harley (1873–1943)’,

Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford,

18 October 2014 – 8 February 2015

The photograph to the right [1998.266.3] was taken on the Upper Gallery of the Pitt Rivers Museum on the occasion of the first practical examination in Anthropology in 1908. The central figure is Henry Balfour (1863–1939), the Museum’s first curator, pictured with the first three students to study anthropology at Oxford. Both the seated Barbara Freire-Marreco (later Aitken; 1879–1967) and boomerang-holding Francis Knowles (1886–1953) went on to carry out anthropological and archaeological work in association with the Museum, and the details of their lives and careers are well known. In contrast, until recently little was known about the life and career of the fourth figure, James Arthur Harley. Thanks to the ongoing work of Pamela Roberts, however, the story of his remarkable life can now be told. In particular, Roberts’s success in locating Harley’s personal archive in private hands in Shepshed, in Leicestershire, makes it possible to tell Harley’s story here through the personal documents, papers, and photographs that he left in a battered suitcase.

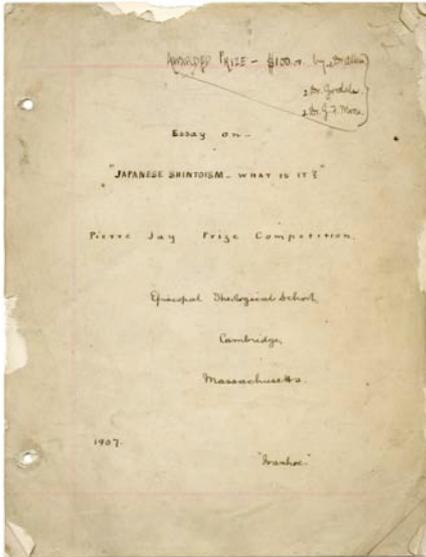
Born in Antigua on 15 May 1873, Harley studied law and classics at Howard University in Washington, DC. Then, after a year at Yale, he studied Semitic Languages at Harvard, where he was awarded a number of prizes. Following a further year’s study at the Episcopal Seminary in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he spent two years at Jesus College, Oxford, studying first theology and then anthropology. Perhaps surprisingly, Harley did not go on to pursue an academic career. Instead, he joined the Anglican Church, serving first as curate at Shepshed, then at Marshside in Kent. Ordained a priest in 1911, he served as curate in Deal in Kent, before apparently abandoning his clerical career around 1916. During the First World War, his application to enlist was turned down, so he trained and served in munitions instead. Returning to Shepshed, Harley entered local politics, initially as a Labour councillor and later as an independent. He was elected to Leicestershire County Council in 1937, serving in this role until his death on 12 May 1943, three days before his 70th birthday.

These bare facts are drawn from the papers in Harley’s archive, which document his life in great detail. What they fail to do, however, is to *explain* his life. They do not explain how a man born in Antigua – and who studied at Howard, Yale, Harvard, and Oxford Universities and entered the Church of England – spent the last twenty years of his life campaigning on local issues in rural Leicestershire. Numerous questions remain. For example, the archive tells us that Harley married Washington-born Josephine Maritcha Lawson in Oxford on 1 July 1910, but not why they apparently separated soon afterwards. The archive also records when and how Harley entered the Church, but does not explain why he left it.

Only a few documents from the Harley archive can be displayed here. What an examination of the whole archive suggests is that Harley was an intelligent man with a highly developed sense of personal status. He also appears to have been extremely loquacious, opinionated, and argumentative. One is left with the impression of a man who could have ‘fitted in’, but chose not to. He was clearly popular in Shepshed, however, winning a comfortable majority in the County Council election of 1937, and is apparently fondly remembered there today. Why Harley led such an unconventional life may never be known. In attempting to understand it, however, we may be prompted to reflect in useful ways on the complex intertwining of education, religion, politics, and race in early twentieth-century Britain.

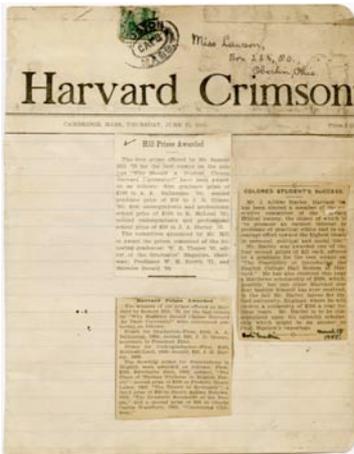
Acknowledgements

The Museum is most grateful to Pamela Roberts for sharing the results of her research into Harley’s life; and to Michael Wortley and Jonathan Wortley for the generous loan of Harley’s archive.



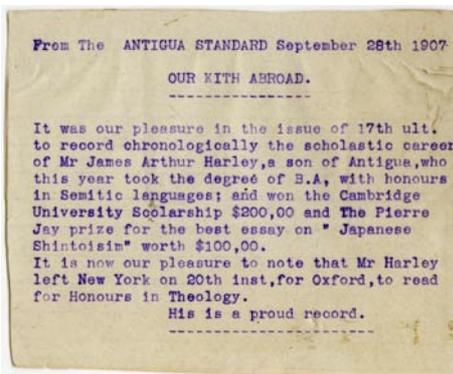
Private collection

Essay, titled 'Japanese Shintoism - What Is It?', written by Harley in 1907 during a year's religious studies at Cambridge Episcopal Seminary, Massachusetts, awarded the Pierre Jay Prize (\$100).



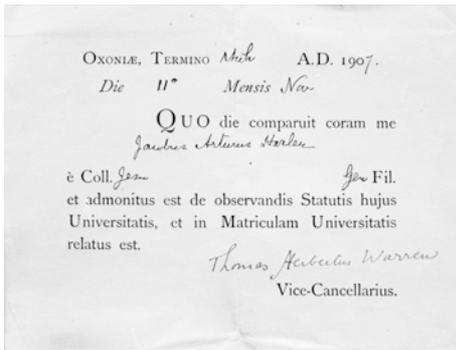
Private collection

Cuttings from several newspapers or magazines, pasted onto a sheet of paper headed 'Harvard Crimson', relating to various essay prizes awarded to Harley, and his planned departure 'for Oxford [U]niversity, England, where he will receive a scholarship of \$300 a year for three years'.



Private collection

Typed announcement from *The Antigua Standard*, dated 28 September 1907, reporting Harley's graduation from Harvard University with a BA with Honours in Semitic Languages, and his recent departure for Oxford, to read for Honours in Theology. 'His is a proud record', the notice concludes.



Private collection

Modern print (made from a glass negative) showing Harley's certificate of matriculation at Jesus College, Oxford, dated 11 November 1907.



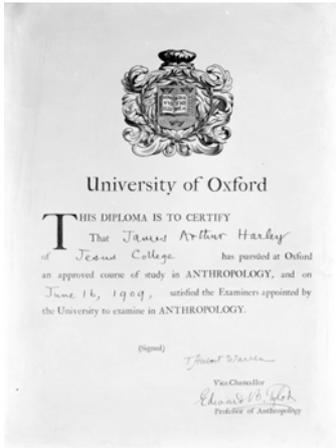
Private collection

'Certificate for Examination in Anthropology' during Harley's studies at the University of Oxford (Hilary Term, 1908). 'I consider that the work which he has done', signed Prof. Edward B. Tylor, 'is, proportionately to the time allotted to the subject, sufficient to qualify him for presenting himself as a Candidate for Examination for the Diploma in Anthropology.'



PRM 1998.266.3

Portrait of the first three students to take the practical examination for the University of Oxford's Diploma in Anthropology, including James Arthur Harley (right), standing with Henry Balfour, curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum (second from left). Photographer unknown. 1908.



Private collection

Modern print (made from a glass negative) showing Harley's Diploma in Anthropology, dated 16 June 1909, certifying that he 'has pursued at Oxford an approved course of study in ANTHROPOLOGY, and on June 16, 1909, satisfied the Examiners appointed by the University to examine in ANTHROPOLOGY.'



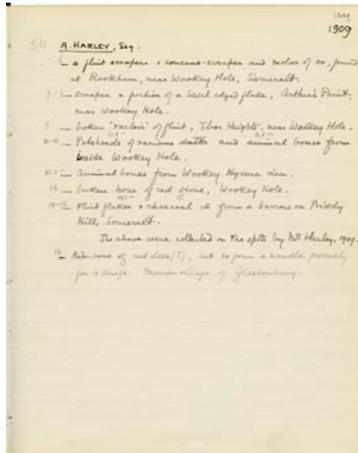
Private collection

Portrait of Harley wearing an academic gown, presumably taken at the time of his graduation. Photographer unknown.

Harley's Donations to the Pitt Rivers Museum

In February 1908, Harley gave the Museum some glass flakes used as razors, from his home island of Antigua, along with the bottle from which they had been struck. The bottle and some of the flakes are on display on the far side of the Lower Gallery in the case devoted to 'Toiletries' (Case L53A, no. 33).

In 1909, Harley gave the Museum a small collection of archaeological material from in and around Wookey Hole Caves in Somerset, which he had 'collected on the spots' earlier in the year. The material may have been obtained during a field expedition connected to his anthropological studies. On display here are a selection of flints, pottery sherds, animal bones, and teeth, together with a reproduction of the relevant page in the Museum's accessions register.



PRM Accession Records (Donations VI), p.124

Page in one of the Pitt Rivers Museum's accessions registers for a collection of objects [1909.54] donated by Harley in 1909.



PRM 1909.54.14 .3, 1909.54.14 .1, 1909.54.3, 1909.54.9, 1909.54.7



PRM 1909.54.10 .1, 1909.54.10 .23, 1909.54.10 .9, 1909.54.10 .4, 1909.54.10 .6



PRM 1909.54.6, 1909.54.16, 1909.54.15 .2

Selection of objects from a collection of flints, pottery sherds, animal bones, and teeth found at Wookey Hole Caves and surroundings, Somerset, donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum by Harley in 1909.

SECTION 2 – CHURCH



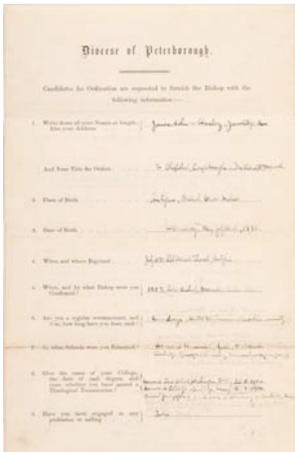
Private collection

Document confirming that Harley had sworn the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, 26 September 1909, at the time of his accepting the position of Stipendiary Curate in the Parish Church of St. Botolph, in Shepshed, Leicestershire.



Private collection

Notebook, headed 'Work at St Botolph's, Shepshed', recording the dates in September 1909 of Harley's first sermon, first baptism, first full evensong, etc.



Private collection

Draft of an application form, furnishing the Bishop of Peterborough with personal information and referees' names, prior to Harley's ordination in June 1911.



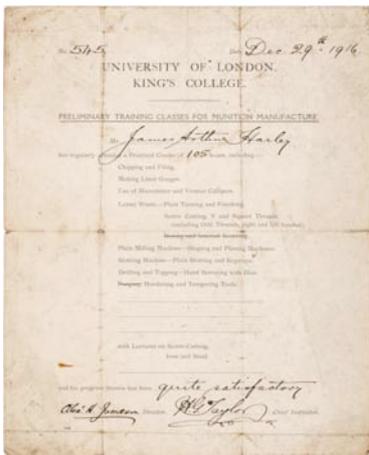
Private collection

Modern print (made from a glass negative) showing Harley standing in the pulpit of an unidentified church. Photographer unknown. Circa 1911.



Private collection

Cover of *All Deal Parish Magazine* (March 1913), showing Harley's description of himself as 'Anthropologist, with Diploma of Oxford University'.



Private collection

Certificate confirming that Harley had attended a Practical Course of 'Preliminary Training Classes for Munition Manufacture' (105 hours) at King's College, University of London, 29 December 1916.



Private collection

Modern print (made from a glass negative) of Harley dressed as a curate. Photographer unknown. *Circa* 1911.



Private collection

Modern print (made from a glass negative) of Harley dressed as an ordained priest. Photographer unknown. *Circa* 1911.



Private collection

Modern print (made from a glass negative) of Harley dressed as a 'gentleman', wearing a suit and top hat. Photographer unknown. *Circa* 1911.

SECTION 3 – LOCAL POLITICS



Private collection

Shepshed Bulletin, 25 (18 July 1927 [sic, should read '1928']), a printed newsletter produced and published from his home by Harley.



Private collection

Charwood Bulletin, 36 (14 November 1928), a printed newsletter produced and published by Harley.

Leicestershire County Council Election. Saturday, March 6th, 1937

Do You Pay Rates Directly or Indirectly? If So—

VOTE FOR HARLEY

Loughborough Corporation is up in arms against a 5d. C.C. increase — Shepshed has a 6d. C.C. increase

Your pockets did hurt, your County Councillor was dumb — Councillor Harley's Rate Resolution was sent to Leicester!

LOOK AT THESE RATES

1933-4 Our Full Rates	11/-	C.C. Rates took	8/6
1934-5 do.	11/2	do.	8/10
1935-6 do.	12/0	do.	9/2
1936-7 do.	13/4	do.	9/7
1937-8 do.	not yet fixed	do.	will be 10/1

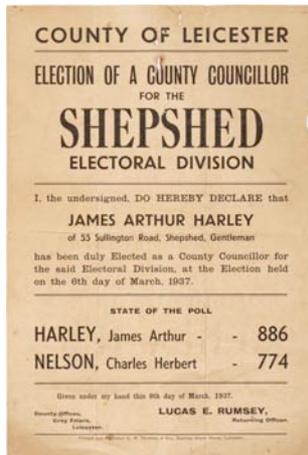
BE FAIR. VOTE FOR HARLEY

The man who lets the Ratepayers know and gets mobbed for doing so.

MORE FACTS at Public Meetings, Friday, Mar. 5th, 7.30 p.m. in Council Chamber. COME, PLEASE!

Private collection

Campaign poster for the Leicestershire County Council election held on 6 March 1937: 'VOTE FOR HARLEY [...] The man who lets Ratepayers know and gets mobbed for doing so'.

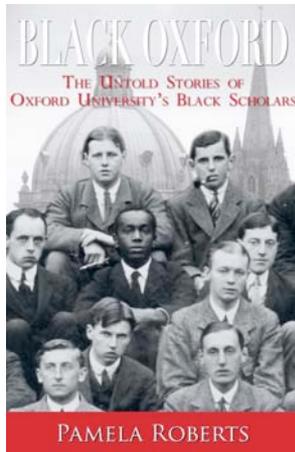


Private collection

Poster of voting results on the occasion of Harley's election to Leicestershire County Council, 6 March 1937.

Black Oxford

Pamela Roberts's book telling 'the untold story of Oxford University's black scholars', with a chapter on James Arthur Harley, is available from the Museum shop for £7.99.



Copy of the recently published book by Pamela Roberts, *Black Oxford: The Untold Stories of Oxford University's Black Scholars* (Oxford: Signal Books, 2013).