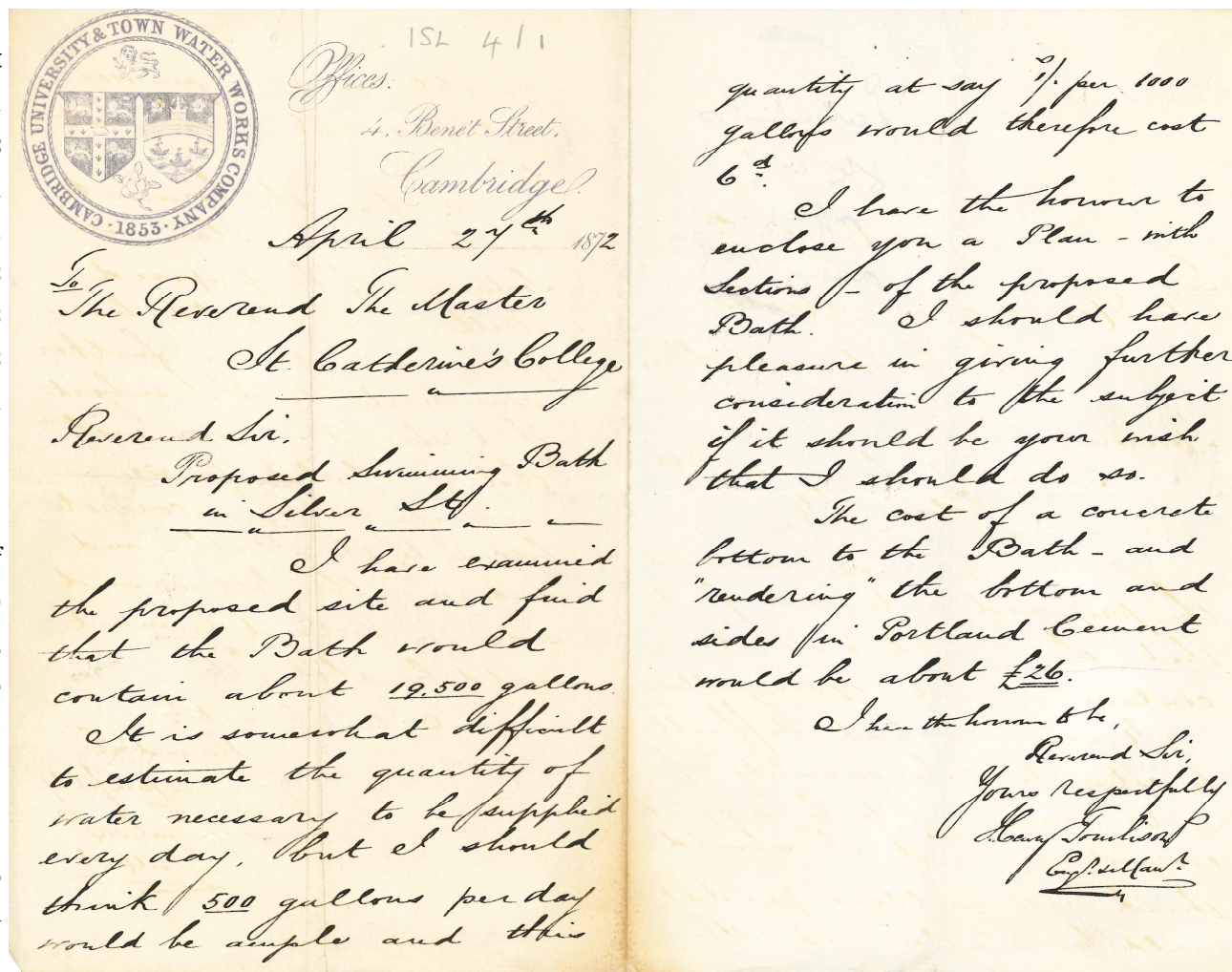


The College Swimming Pool

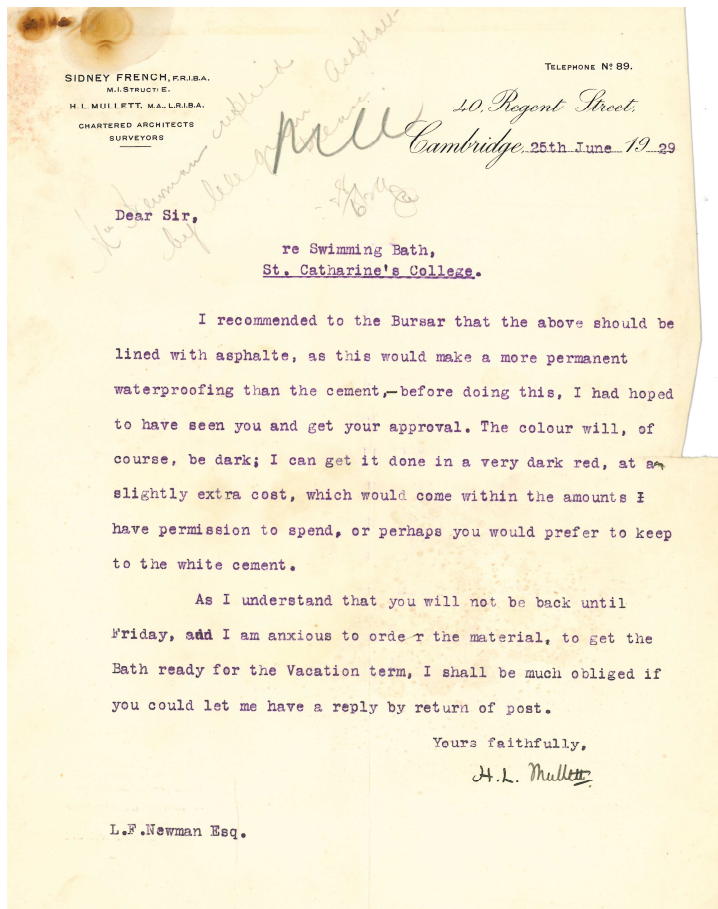
The purchase by the College of 70 Trumpington Street in 1871, where today you will find Ede and Ravenscroft, enabled the College to begin one of its more unusual building projects: the construction of a swimming pool. It was one of the first in Cambridge. Described as a "small tank" or "plunge pool", it was constructed on the site of what is now the John's Building, more specifically I and J staircases. It was about 40 feet long by 15 feet broad and allowed students to swim a few strokes at a time!

Little information, and no pictures, have survived of the pool, but it is believed to have been built to designs prepared by the Engineer, Henry Tomlinson. In this 1872 letter from Tomlinson to the College, he talks about the amount of water that will be needed to fill the pool: 19,500 gallons.

By 1872 William Sell, a long standing College servant, born in around 1836, had become bath keeper and payment of his wages can be seen in the College accounts of the time. No records survive to document the use of the pool but in the late 1920s the College had an active swimming club, although they were making use of the Leys School swimming pool as the College pool was rather small. Swimming in the river was common, but rather cold and was generally seen as something to be done in the Long Vacation when it was a little warmer. Swimming in the river was often frequently done naked or with very small coverings!



Reference: ISL/4/SHC/3



Reference: ISL/4/WHO/5

By the late 1920s repairs were required to the pool, as this letter to the Bursar describes. The proffered solution of lining the pool with asphalt may well have been taken up as some descriptions note the pool's dark appearance, as if in a steel tank. However, by 1935 the pool was gone. The need for further undergraduate accommodation necessitated the construction of more rooms and the site of the pool was an obvious candidate. Construction of the new building and the dismantling of the pool can be seen in the photograph below.



Reference: PHOT/3/23/5

The College is always happy to receive memories from members of the College and those sent in by F. Thompson who came up in 1932 provide some of our only detailed information about the swimming pool. He writes

“open to the sky, but surrounded about completely by buildings, so there was no need to wear any kind of costume. In any case there were no women in the College apart from the bedmakers in the morning.”

The Archivist is always pleased to answer questions about the College. 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.