
Oxford

In 1613 John Davenport left Coventry to study at Oxford University. This likely indicated that he had already decided to enter the ministry. At the time college was a place for sons of the upper classes to attain polish, for individuals planning a career in the church, and for talented youths of modest backgrounds seeking opportunities to advance themselves. Those seeking to enter a trade learned from apprenticeships. If John had planned to follow his uncle Christopher as a pewterer or his father as a draper, he would have already been apprenticed to learn the skills of such a trade, as his siblings and cousins had. It is likely that his potential had been recognized by his teachers and the puritan preachers of Coventry, and that they had encouraged his family to send him off to university. Accompanying John was his nephew Christopher, the son of his oldest brother, Barnabas, although Christopher was a few years older than John.

Oxford was south of Coventry and sixty miles west of London in the Thames Valley. One contemporary chronicler who had been born and raised there called it a place with “sweet, wholesome, and well-tempered air.”¹ Like Coventry, Oxford had experienced a sharp decline in population in the latter years of the Middle Ages; the total population had dropped to a low of three thousand in the 1520s. It had, nevertheless, acquired the status of a city when Henry VIII made it the see of the newly created Diocese of Oxford in 1542. Over the remainder of the sixteenth century the population grew dramatically; the city had perhaps ten thousand residents when the Davenports arrived. Over this period the buildings owned by the various religious orders were torn down and the stone was used in the expansion of the colleges. The medieval town wall was partially dismantled to provide further building materials. Gradually, open spaces and gardens disappeared.²