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Open Universities: A British Tradition? (Society for Research into Higher Education)

Robert E. Bell, Malcolm Tight

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"Open Universities: A British Tradition" challenges the notion that the open university is a recent invention. It argues that in Britain there is a long and varied tradition of such developments, and that there has been a significant 20th-century reduction in the open-ness of our universities, particularly in the period from the 1950s to the 1970s. Selected examples of open universities from the 19th and 20th centuries are examined and compared. Particular attention is paid to the provision made by the University of London in its 19th-century role as an examining board, and later through its external degree system; to the similar role performed, for very different reasons, by the Royal University of Ireland before World War I; and to the work of St Andrews University in offering an external degree-level qualification for women between 1877 and 1931. Other examples discussed range from Oxford and Cambridge, in their pre-World War II guise, and the 19th-century Scottish universities, to the correspondence colleges and the university extension movement. The authors also give consideration to the present Open University and to other contemporary models of distance education and open learning; and they provide a historical and theoretical framework within these developments can be better understood.

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