



James Sylvester was born to a London Jewish family in 1814. He went to school in London and in 1837 he took the mathematical tripos exam in Cambridge. He did not graduate until 1841 and even then from Trinity College, Dublin rather than Cambridge because he refused to take the oath of the Church of England. In 1841, aged 27, he became professor of mathematics at the University of Virginia, USA, for six months. He resigned his post in March 1842 because of the lenient attitude of the university towards disruptive students. He returned to England in 1843 and began to study law and met Arthur Cayley who was also a mathematics graduate studying law. Both Cayley and Sylvester discussed mathematics during their walks in the Courts of Lincoln's Inn in London.