

Notes on Nos. 56, 58, 60, 62 and 64 Banbury Road

By E. O. DODGSON

IN 'A Handbook for Visitors to Oxford', published by James Parker in 1875, the author draws a gloomy picture of the architectural changes in the city during the previous fifteen or twenty years, declaring that it was hardly to be recognized by those who returned after an interval. 'It is impossible also', he continues, 'to look back on the work of those years with satisfaction. Oxford has been made the field for experiments, and, as the fashion of the day has been to look for novelty rather than harmony, the new buildings are not only incongruous with each other, but appear quite out of place amidst the buildings which were previously here and disturb the repose which has been so frequently referred to as the characteristic of Oxford.'

The eight houses on the west frontage of the Norham Manor estate, five of which are soon to be demolished, are good examples of the new architecture which was here deplored, though Parker was referring especially to the centre of the town and, as the estate was then on its outskirts, the houses did not threaten any pre-existing architectural harmony. Indeed, as some of us can now recognize, they created a new harmony of their own.

The plan for the development of the estate was drawn up about 1860 by William Wilkinson,¹ architect to St. John's College, and to him were submitted for approval the designs for individual houses. Banbury Road was not then so-called, but was still regarded as an extension of the more important old thoroughfare, St. Giles, and the new houses along it were described for some years as being in St. Giles East, while Woodstock Road was known as St. Giles West. Originally the houses were named, but not numbered. They are described here in the order in which they were built and not in the sequence of their present numbers.

'KETILBY', NO. 62 (PL. V)

The pioneer who built this first house on the west frontage of the estate in 1864-65 was the Rev. Richard St. John Tyrwhitt, Vicar of St. Mary Magdalen from 1858 to 1872, who interested himself not only in the spiritual

¹ 1819-1901. He was a native of Witney, where a William Wilkinson of High Street is described as an auctioneer, architect, surveyor and builder, in Lascelles & Co.'s *Directory and Gazetteer of Oxfordshire* for 1853.

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but in the artistic life of the city. An amateur artist himself, he had worked with William Morris in the previous decade on the new debating hall of the Union Society, where he took part in the painting of the ceiling.² He also made some slight contribution to the creation of the new Museum by decorating the walls of the geology lecture room in fresco with representations of the Mer de Glace which are still to be seen, though sadly dimmed by time.³ Both he and the architect of his new house, E. G. Bruton, were much concerned with the development of 'art education' in Oxford.⁴

As surveyor to the Dean and Chapter of Christ Church and later as Diocesan Surveyor, Bruton had a long career as a restorer of churches and a designer of parish schools and 'parsonage houses' and was also responsible for many secular buildings in and around Oxford. At this time he had just finished the re-fitting of the interior of St. Martin's Church at Carfax and had been the architect of a new building at the Radcliffe Infirmary. He was an active member of the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society and in 1859 had read to its members a paper on 'The value of mediaeval precedent in planning modern secular domestic buildings'.⁵ In the same year, speaking at the close of a paper read by James Parker on 'The study of English domestic architecture', he deplored 'the unwillingness shown to go to any expense by persons who were building houses, the small proportion of houses built by architects to those erected by builders and the difficulties which an architect who wishes to employ the old English type had to undergo from the caprice of employers'.⁶ Tyrwhitt can, therefore, have been in no doubt as to Bruton's feelings when they collaborated in producing the pleasant, dignified house in red brick with stone dressings which the owner called after an estate in Lincolnshire formerly in the possession of the Tyrwhitt family.⁷ The most elaborate feature of the house is the doorway, above which is carved a representation of the Book of Proverbs, xxx.29: 'There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going: a lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any; a greyhound; an he goat also; and a king, against whom there is no rising up.'

A persistent tradition attributes this striking design to J. Hungerford Pollen, the designer of the doorway at the Museum; and the actual carving of it to O'Shea, whose name is also well-known in connexion with the Museum. So far there seems to be no positive proof of either attribution, though as both

² *The Oxford University and City Guide: A New Edition*. (Slatter & Rose, no date), 257.

³ *The Oxford Museum*. H. W. Acland and J. Ruskin 1893.

⁴ In 1868 Tyrwhitt published *Suggestions on the Study of Art in Oxford*. Bruton (1825 or 1826-1899) was an F.S.A. and F.R.I.B.A.

⁵ *The Builder*, 1859, 813.

⁶ *The Builder*, 1859, 156.

⁷ R. P. Tyrwhitt. *Notices and Remains of the Family of Tyrwhitt*. First printed 1858.

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Pollen and Tyrwhitt had worked in the Union Society building and at the Museum, they must certainly have known each other. As regards O'Shea, he was in Oxford the year before the building of 'Ketilby', when he was responsible for the carvings of agricultural products within the new corn exchange built behind the Town Hall.⁸

Four years later another house, now No. 64, also designed by Bruton, was put up to the north of 'Ketilby' and Tyrwhitt took the opportunity of acquiring a further strip of land between the two in order to make room for a coach house, which is still there, at the east end of his garden, with access to the main road.

'SHRUBLANDS', NO. 60 (PL. VI A).

This house was built in 1865-66 and leased to Mr. Thomas George Cousins, chemist, of 17 Magdalen Street. It was designed by Wilkinson himself and is one of the Oxford houses built by him which he chose to describe in his book *English Country Houses* as follows: 'The entrance is on the west side facing the public road. There is access from the drawing-room on the east side to verandah, conservatory and lawn.'

'The walling is carried out with local white bricks, and the freestone dressings are of Box ground stone. The roofs are covered with Broseley brindled tiling.'⁹ The cost of the house is given as £1,735. There were three reception rooms, five bedrooms and a dressing room, a w.c. and closet, a kitchen, scullery, larder and china closet, and in the basement a wine, a beer and a coal cellar.

Wilkinson and Cousins, no less than Bruton and Tyrwhitt, must have been well known to each other. The splendid new Randolph Hotel, designed by Wilkinson, was opened with a great fanfare of trumpets in February 1866. The architect's own house and office were close to the site on the Beaumont Street side, while Cousin's shop adjoined it on the Magdalen Street frontage. In fact, *Jackson's Oxford Journal* for 1865 tells us that the shop was incorporated into the south-east corner of the new building and that it was fitted up inside 'in the most complete manner and quite in London style'.

That Cousins should live in a house of Wilkinson's designing was almost a foregone conclusion and he enjoyed its amenities for many years.

Of the three other houses in Oxford designed by Wilkinson and described and illustrated in his book, the earliest, Edwin Butler's house on Walton Manor, now 113 Woodstock Road, is due to be demolished shortly. 'The Firs', built for G. Ward on the west side of the Banbury Road, has already

⁸ *The Builder*, 1863, 283.

⁹ Illustrated by Plates 17 and 18, 1875 edition.

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been demolished to make way for one of the new buildings of St. Anne's College. T. F. Dallin's house, no. 13 Norham Gardens, has been so much altered as to be scarcely recognizable.

'NORHAM HOUSE', NO. 58 (PL. VIB)

This house also was built in 1865-66, for Mr. William Walsh, another chemist, who in addition had an oil and colour warehouse in Queen Street. He was a freeman of the city. The architect was John Gibbs, an Oxford man,¹⁰ who had attracted attention in 1859-60 when he designed the new Banbury Cross. *Jackson's Oxford Journal* describes him in 1861 as 'an architect of considerable eminence, the designer of the celebrated Banbury Cross and a gentleman not unknown in literary circles.' He had previously lived for some years in the north, first at Wigan and then at Manchester, and while there had become a member of the Liverpool Architectural Society¹¹ and had published three books of designs for Gothic monuments and furnishings.¹²

In 1863 Gibbs won the competition for the memorial to the Prince Consort at Abingdon.¹³ In this and the following year he was also successful in two other competitions for memorials, one to Sir George Cornewall Lewis at New Radnor¹⁴ and the other to Sir Tatton Sykes at Sledmere in Yorkshire.¹⁵ More important from the Oxford point of view, he had begun in 1863 the rebuilding of St. Alban Hall, since absorbed into a new quadrangle of Merton College, and had taken part in Bruton's refitting of the interior of St. Martin's Church, for which he designed the reredos.¹⁶ He had a reputation for economy, fostered no doubt with an eye to employers who, as Bruton had complained, 'showed unwillingness to go to any expense'. The cost of his work at St. Alban Hall, which was borne by the Principal, was said to be 'unusually small'; and much the same remark is made with regard to 'Laleham House', now the core of the Wycliffe Hall buildings at 54 Banbury Road,¹⁷ which Gibbs built in 1886 for Thomas Arnold, son of Dr. Arnold of Rugby, who was then

¹⁰ In a *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Oxfordshire* for 1852 a John Gibbs in Little Clarendon Street is described as a 'stone and marble mason (and statuary) also gravestone cutter.' John Gibbs, the architect, was in the North at this time, but this might have been a family business. The later address is London Place, St. Clements.

¹¹ *Liverpool Architectural Society Transactions*. List of Members for 1851. In 1858 he was elected a member of the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society and read a paper on *Street Architecture* on 28 April 1858.

¹² *Gothic Monuments*, Wigan 1852, *Designs for Gothic Ornaments*, Wigan, 1853, and *English Gothic Architecture, or suggestions relative to the designing of Domestic Buildings*, Manchester, 1855.

¹³ *The Builder*, 1863, 122, 601, 637, 896 and 1865, 475.

¹⁴ *The Builder*, 1863, 495, and 1864, 334.

¹⁵ *The Builder*, 1864, 259, 850 and 1865, 245, 818, 916.

¹⁶ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 15 October 1864 (in the annual review of building in Oxford).

¹⁷ Not, therefore, at present threatened with demolition.

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settling down in Oxford with the idea of taking pupils in what *Jackson's Oxford Journal* calls 'one of the largest private buildings' in the city.

'Norham House' and 'Laleham House', like 'Glebe House', South Leigh, which Gibbs built in 1871¹⁸ are in a style which he describes as 'a development of the ancient Romanesque'. They are in red brick faced with stone. Since 'Norham House' was for private occupation, it is more modest in size than 'Laleham'. It remained in the possession of the Walsh family for more than forty years.

'WYKEHAM HOUSE', NO. 56 (PL. VIB)

When he built this house for Mr. Henry Hatch in 1865-66, Gibbs made use of the fashionable Gothic style and no doubt himself inspired the writer of the architectural article in *Jackson's Oxford Journal* to declare that 'when fully carried out' it was 'the style best adapted for buildings of a similar description' and 'can be treated as economically as its rival, the classic'.¹⁹ Two of the features of the house mentioned in this account are still to be seen, the 'richly carved chimney-pieces with marble columns' and the statue of 'that illustrious man', William of Wykeham, on the outside, the setting up of which was said to have been suggested by the name given to the house. 'The figure', we are told, 'is upwards of 6 ft. in height and stands beneath a simple but effective canopy.'²⁰ It was carved by W. Forsyth,²¹ of Worcester, who had worked with Gibbs on both the Cornwall Lewis and Tatton Sykes memorials. The builder, as of No. 58, was Young of St. Aldate's.

In 1868 Gibbs published a volume of architectural drawings with a short introduction, called *Domestic Architecture and Ornament in Detail: Designs for the use of Architects, Builders, Sculptors, Carvers, Masons*. Among these is one for a window and one for a very elaborate doorway for Wykeham House.²² The window was said to show from within the rooms the same as outside 'with admired effect'. The original main doorway has since been obliterated by a large covered-in porch extending to the bottom of the steps. Gibbs describes the house as having 'white brick walls, Box stone dressings, red brick arches'.

A word must be said about Mr. Henry Hatch, who chose for his house Gibb's Gothic style, with all 'its richness of detail', rather than the more sober 'ancient Romanesque', which appears in red brick on either side of

¹⁸ *The Builder*, 1871, 43. It was built for the Vicar of the parish who also intended to take pupils.

¹⁹ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 13 October 1866 (review of building in Oxford).

²⁰ There is also a 'simple but effective canopy' on the front of 'Laleham'. No statue now graces it.

²¹ Not to be confused with the better known James Forsyth.

²² Designs 23 and 67 respectively.

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it at Nos. 54 and 58. He was the owner of a drapery and clothing store in Magdalen Street and at different periods had as well a funeral outfitting business at 59 St. Giles and a boot and shoe shop in High Street. These, however, were not the only services for which Oxford citizens had to thank him. When he opened the Victoria Theatre in Victoria Place, behind his Magdalen Street shop, they had for some time been forced to content themselves with theatrical performances in the Town Hall, the Corn Exchange, or the Assembly Room in the Star (later Clarendon) Hotel. Not undeservedly, Mr. Hatch was elected a councillor for the Central Ward in 1869.

Unlike the owners of the other four houses, he did not intend to live in his. It was just another speculation, like the 'job lot of 400 straw hats' at reduced prices which on one occasion he advertised on the front page of *Jackson's Oxford Journal*. For a time the house was let to a Mrs. Harrington; then a year or two later Hatch netted a much bigger fish. Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany, the Queen's youngest son, matriculated in November 1872 and during his years at Christ Church 'pretty Wykeham House', as the *Gossiping Guide* calls it, was his home.

Hatch only kept the house for fourteen years. In 1880 the lease was assigned to George Palmer, M.P. for Reading, and from the time of their marriage in 1881, his daughter Emily and her husband, E. B. Poulton, afterwards Hope Professor of Zoology, lived there for the rest of their lives.

Professor Poulton, himself the son of a well-known Reading architect, had inherited an interest in building processes and no doubt enjoyed making the additions which enlarged the house. An extension was built on the south side in 1884, with a conservatory in front, and a further alteration was made on the north-west of the house in 1894. These were both in the same style as the original. The large closed-in porch obliterating the door designed by Gibbs has already been mentioned.

Though the latest occupants of the house are quite ignorant of John Gibbs' theories as to the advantages of the Gothic style in domestic architecture, they have apparently learnt by experience to appreciate its comforts and are dismayed by the prospect of the demolition of the house. So far at any rate Gibbs has been justified.

'MINSTER HOUSE', NO. 64

This house, also designed by Bruton, was begun in 1868 for J. W. Weaving, a corn merchant and, like Walsh, a freeman of Oxford. It is perhaps the duller of the series and compares unfavourably with its neighbour, 'Ketilby'. It is in 'white brick'. The minimum sum mentioned in the agreement with

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St. John's College was £1,400. *Jackson's Oxford Journal* informs us²³ that it originally contained three sitting rooms, the usual offices, and no less than eleven bedrooms, and that it had a stable and coach house, which are still to be seen. Symm of St. Giles was the builder.

When the widowed Mrs. Weaving assigned the lease in 1890 to Professor J. Burdon Sanderson, Waynflete Professor of Physiology, he apparently did not think it big enough, for he submitted the plans of a London architect, Gerald C. Horsley, which added extra servants' quarters to the north and enhanced the rather plain exterior by an elaborate window. This has now disappeared, owing perhaps to later additions on the east side. A long window on the north front has been blocked up, but this was probably part of the original plan.

Besides Nos. 62 and 64, Bruton also designed two houses on the west side of the Banbury Road below Bevington Road. 'Springfield', built for the Durell family in 1866, has already been demolished to make room for the new buildings of St. Anne's College. Between the former Girls' High School and the Acland Nursing Home is the house which Bruton built in 1867 for the Rev. S. J. Hulme, who, like Thomas Arnold, received into his home 'a high class of private students'. It will soon be the only one left of Bruton's four houses.

The three remaining houses of the eight built on this frontage of the Norham Manor Estate are not at present threatened with demolition, though two of them, 'Laleham' and No. 66, the towered and turreted 'St. Catherine's',²⁴ now Wolsey Hall, have lost their character to a large extent owing to later additions and alterations. The last house to the south, which is now also part of Wycliffe Hall, was designed by Frederick Codd²⁵ and is the least altered of the three.

The lease books of St. John's College and other papers connected with the Norham Manor Estate, which I have had kind permission to use, have provided the groundwork for these notes, together with the invaluable *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, in which the annual review of new building in Oxford, published every October, furnishes not only facts but on occasion a wealth of colourful description.

²³ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 16 October 1869.

²⁴ Almost certainly by F. Codd.

²⁵ Architect and Speculative builder, who worked in Oxford from the late 1850's until 1885. He was City surveyor from 1880 to 1885.

PLATE V



'KETILBY', 62 BANBURY ROAD

Photo: P. S. Spokes

PLATE VI



A

'SHRUBLANDS', 60 BANBURY ROAD

Photo: P. S. Spokes



B

'NORHAM HOUSE', 58 BANBURY ROAD AND 'WYKEHAM HOUSE', 56
BANBURY ROAD

Photo: P. S. Spokes