

## Oxford Buildings Criticized

By H. S. GOODHART-RENDEL

I DO not come before you in this paper either as a guide or as an historian. The whereabouts and the history of the buildings I shall mention will be as familiar to you as they are to me. I come as a critic, hoping to offer something acceptable, not so much in critical judgements, as in examples of a critical method. Architecture nowadays is discussed and appraised more widely than it used to be when I was young, but very little of this discussion and appraisal can be called criticism. Most of it starts from no principles and arrives at no conclusions.

I am not going to spend time on a preliminary exposition of principles, but shall leave them to be inferred from criticism which they will underlie. I hope it will be clearly understood that the criticism I am applying, the appraisal I am attempting, is the criticism, the appreciation, of design—of the displayed art of the architect. I may therefore be often led to find fault with buildings that are enjoyably picturesque, and to find merit in others that are superficially repellent. Many buildings whose design is faulty may and should please us by the beauty that they owe to accident or to time. Chance may prove a good composer, artlessness may often secure one merit when aiming at another. The charm of architecture most widely felt is thus fortuitous, and those who delight in it are apt to resist the knowledge that they fear may threaten it. Yet that knowledge would rob them of no pleasure but would rather enlarge it. I think that to admire Merton College and detest Keble College is perhaps a little stupider than to admire Keble and detest Merton, but I do not greatly esteem the judgment of anybody who detests either. In both there are many *admiranda* and the true amateur of the arts should take pleasure wherever it can be found.

To most visitors the tower of Magdalen College (PL. XV, A) is the first thing seen of the University, now that road travel has come back again and our normal introduction to a city is no longer through its railway station. I wonder if it has struck you as it often has me how badly this famous tower always fares at the hands of the pictorial draughtsman. In reality its fretted crown seems nearly faultless, in drawings it almost always appears topheavy. The reason of this I believe to be that if the battlemented parapet were solid

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and not pierced the design certainly would be topheavy, and only in the most artful drawing could the true effect of the piercing be represented. I have never seen it done at all.

The design of Magdalen tower, indeed, has all the false simplicity of the masterpiece. In it many difficult things have been done so well as to appear as though they had been easy. The parapet and pinnacles are of sizes proper to complete the whole tower and are yet so judiciously designed as just not to overpower the rather small bell storey beneath them.

The type of tower to which this one belongs suggests to us a question. Can a bell storey ever look well that is divided vertically into two equal halves? With Magdalen tower before us the answer must be 'yes', given with caution. A bell storey with two bays on each face will be well enough, provided the whole design of the tower be firmly united below and above the stage in which it is divided. If each of the lower storeys of Magdalen tower had two bays, as has the bell storey, if the pinnacles in the middle of each face of the tower were as large and high as those at the corners, the appearance of the tower would be as bad as it now is good. From some cause not easy to explain the eye, when inspecting a regular succession of solids and voids in architecture, will not easily accept a solid as being the middle of the design. Indeed, a symmetrical façade containing an even number of windows is felt to have no middle, and for that reason, usually, to be unsatisfactory. The tower we are now admiring has its middle strongly marked, both by the windows in the lower storeys and by the subordination of the intermediate pinnacles to the large pinnacles at the corners. I think that this subordination has not been carried far enough: seen from some angles the pinnacles large and small make together a confusing silhouette that does not clearly proclaim their arrangement. It may also appear to some that there is a slight excess of plain stonework about the belfry windows and that the arches of these windows seem in consequence to have dropped a little too far down the tower. To say, as has been said, that the tower is a 'monument perfect in proportion and exquisite in detail' is to be more enthusiastic than exact. Mediaeval architects did not aspire to perfection in any one design. What was seen to be the matter in one tower was mended in the next, what went wrong in the next one could be put right in the one after that. The builders of Magdalen tower went astray at the very beginning, making the foundations of what was intended to be a square 3 feet longer from east to west than from north to south. This must have been a nuisance to the builders when they spaced out the ornaments of the bell-storey, but can only be a nuisance to us if it be seized upon by some ingenious person as evidence for his pet theory of 'optical refinements' or what not. The tower is a masterpiece of its empiric mediaeval kind, a little too sweet for

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some tastes, perhaps, but with no nonsense about it. Standing clear, as it was first intended that it should, it might have looked much less well than it does rising above the buildings that cling round its base. Everything in its history seems to have gone right for it, however. Where it needs masking it is masked, it is approached from the bridge at a most becoming angle, and it has acquired the reputation it deserves of being one of the signal beauties of Oxford.

Equally well deserved is the reputation of the buildings at Magdalen designed about fifty years ago by Thomas Garner (PL. XV, B). I suggest as an exercise in architectural discrimination that you compare on the spot these buildings with the newer ones in Long Wall that adjoin them. These newer ones are not bad buildings on the whole, and have enough surface likeness to those of Garner for them to share some of those merits of Garner that are on the surface. In them, however, Gothic seems to be rather imitated than revived, their composition seems wilful rather than inevitable. In particular, whereas in Garner's buildings every gable seems necessitated by a window that breaks up into its base, in the newer buildings most of the gables, being entirely above the window heads, appear added merely for ornament, and look top-heavy into the bargain. Looking at Garner's buildings one might fancy that the Gothic style had never died, and to Garner I do not think it ever had. Whether this was a healthy condition of mind for a nineteenth century architect may be doubted, but it has given to Magdalen College not only an excellent work of art but one whose harmony with its surroundings is perfect. Nothing else of the kind in Oxford has, in my opinion, been nearly as successful as this.

To the taste of to-day Queen's College as it stands is one of the greatest treasures of Oxford architecture, but Mr. Aymer Vallance writing of it forty years ago could see in it nothing but a shameful changeling for the older buildings that stood once upon its site. 'How great the disaster entailed'—he says—'by the effacement of the mediaeval fabric of Queen's College language has no terms of sorrow and indignation adequate to express. The loss can never be mitigated or atoned for while a stone in Oxford shall stand.' When I look at Loggan's print of the mediaeval fabric I do very much hope that forty years hence we shall not have come round again to agreement with Mr. Vallance.

In arrangement, the front quadrangle of Queen's College is identical with the south front of Chelsea Hospital, except that at Queen's the ends of the projecting wings are joined together by a screen wall masking a cloister. In both buildings a chapel and a hall outwardly similar stretch to left and right of the entrance in the main block and wings come far enough forward on either side to enclose a squarish piece of ground. In both designs these wings consist of

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domestic rooms having windows of a much smaller size than those of the hall and chapel which lie back between them.

The façade at Queen's College (PL. XVI, A), composed of the ends of the wings and the connecting screen, has an extremely noble aspect and well deserves our admiration. When one obvious fault has been pointed out there will remain nothing to be said of it that will not be in its praise. This fault lies in the identity between the design of the screen and that of the lower storeys of the wings. That there should be niches in the screen where there are windows in the wings is a difference that disappears in perspective and in any case is so small as to be negligible.

Now, the programme before the architect in designing the lower storeys of the wings was to make a massive base for a lofty and obviously weighty superstructure. In designing the screen he had merely to seclude a cloister from the street. Obviously the same architectural features cannot be appropriate to both purposes; the pattern that suited the wings is, as we can see in what has been done, much too massive to be a mere screen. Compare the weight to be supported in one position and that to be supported in the other; the same arch cannot be reasonably used for both. Obviously a desire for simplicity has dictated this mistaken uniformity, but that cannot be a good screen which looks as though it were the ground storey of a central block which is not there.

My fault finding is now done, and I shall ask you to look with reverence due to a great art at the design of the ends of the wings themselves. In Palladian design when a cornice unsupported by columns or pilasters is proportioned to two storeys taken together a discord is apt to arise between the scale of that cornice and that of the window-dressings that occur in the wall beneath. The mind does not at once refer the large cornice mouldings to the whole wall and the small window mouldings to the storeys taken separately. This danger was seldom averted, and perhaps seldom even perceived, by ordinary English architects of the Palladian school, but the architect of Queen's College was aware of it and had an excellent way of dealing with it, exemplified not only here but elsewhere. To combine in long upright panels two storeys of windows was a frequent practice of his, and a practice that completely solves the difficulty of which I have been speaking. By its means the design is resolved as it were into two planes, the foremost of which is the large boned skeleton of the building while in the recessed portions there appear features in the more delicate state appropriate to the several storeys.

This, of course, is no more than the Palladian expedient by means of which small orders of columns or pilasters are threaded through big ones—but here it is done without any columns or pilasters at all, and done with great skill and success. In the basement storey you will observe that the system of

two planes is preserved with the additional refinement of a cove running round the openings and gently connecting the forward plane with the backward. The pediments surmounting the wings, with their grandeur of proportion and their well designed sculpture, are enhanced to the utmost by the simplicity of the framework beneath. Here is a classic example of a contrast wisely planned between richness and simplicity, and no less masterly is the contrast between strength and delicacy presented by the wings and the gateway cupola.

This charming cupola deserves the most careful consideration, if we are to realize all the cleverness and invention that have gone to its design. It is, as you see, in essence an umbrella for Queen Caroline. Now, a statue at the centre of an open circular temple is a notion natural enough and one that has led to many ornaments of parks and gardens. But in a park or a garden you can go inside the temple to look at the statue, so that it is not a matter of any moment that the conventional proportions of a circular peristyle are unfavourable to transparency. Queen Caroline, however, had to be seen from the street and from the quadrangle, so that the dome beneath which she was to stand must be carried by columns so slender that her whole temple might blow over unless it were buttressed in some way. An external ring of columns supporting lintels radiating from the inner columns would form the needed stays and yet not prove obstructive seeing that from all points of view the columns in the middle would be standing in file one behind the other. This is the ingenious system that has been adopted, and clothed with the utmost delicacy and grace. The form of the dome itself, with a brim like a sun helmet, minimizes the outward thrust that the fragile substructure must resist, and satisfies the eye by its intrinsic elegance.

The gateway below this enchanting little temple is as elegant as its burden, and in consequence finds the over-heavy screen-walls rather rough company. Indeed, the little niches on either side of the gate, though excellently in harmony with that gate and its surmounting temple, look pinched and poor from their juxtaposition with the larger niches of the screen. It is remarkable in neo-classical architecture how certainly one sin will find you out in many different ways.

The hall and chapel of Queen's College, which form the far side of this front quadrangle, are dignified with a full-dress Doric order, well designed but without any peculiarities to call for comment. The library also is very well designed in the ordinary way of the late seventeenth century with an interior of some magnificence. To pass these buildings over thus hastily is to disparage them only by implying that the beauty they possess is patent and not so deep as to call for critical contemplation.



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Both Magdalen tower and the front of Queen's are works of architecture, works in which the exigencies of use and structure have been the raw material in the operation of a fine art. Works in which those exigencies have produced the whole result are works not of architecture but of civil engineering. I wonder what name we should give to works at the other end of the scale, to works in which the exigencies of use and structure are placated by concessions rather than taken into consultation—works of which the prime motive has been to make an architectural picture of what only secondarily is made useful and appropriate. I think that in these terms may be described far too many of the buildings of modern Oxford. And the epithet I choose for their style is the vicious picturesque.

All healthy architecture is poetical embroidery upon a prosaic fabric—counterpoint upon a *canto fermo* of necessity, a song upon the way, a dancing approach to a goal. Magdalen tower had to be a bell tower—the front buildings at Queen's had to be a screen and a gateway between two blocks of rooms. There is another kind of architecture that is not healthy but that yet can be delightful—the architecture that fits up for inappropriate use a classical temple, a triumphal arch, a fortified castle. The forms of the temple, the arch, the castle, are simple and to us self-explanatory—to abuse them may be perverse but need result in no visual discord.

The vicious picturesque on the other hand, abuses forms that are the product of accident, as when James Wyatt set out to house William Beckford in the simulacrum of a 'convent in ruins'. If we turn our back upon the beauties of Queen's College and look at the Examination Schools (PL. XVII, A) we see a similar experiment. This curious structure—this group of school-rooms—deploys upon the High Street a large almost disconnected waiting hall, a *salle des pas perdus* if ever there was one, flanked by wings containing three storeys of offices and store rooms. These wings by the combination of their windows simulate the large oriels belonging to the hall, and the great roof of the hall is extended over them at either end. In the middle of the composition is a very large open porch.

Now the form of a great hall with an oriel at either end and a porch in the middle is a form simple enough to be its own justification to the eye if it be not complicated by contradictions. But why should some of the lights in the oriels be blocked? Why should extremely domestic chimneys be built against their inner sides? Why should I ask any more of these affectedly artless questions when you and I know perfectly well that the oriels in the wings are not oriels at all? If you go round to the quadrangle at the back (PL. XVII, B) you will find a large central entrance that similarly is not an entrance at all, but only what is called an 'architectural feature'; and you also may with luck

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find your way into the building through one of the four inconspicuous doors that really are there if you look for them.

All the business part of the school building lies behind the block that fronts the High Street and when the design of the whole building was first published in the architectural journals it was pointed out quite truly that the great hall with its appendages formed a valuable bulwark against the noise of traffic for the rooms at its back. It was also taken for granted that it was valuable ornamentally, and if the great hall could be regarded merely as a form of decorative plugging against sound I think that only those who paid for it would have much right to complain. An important hall of entrance to examination schools would, of course, be a defensible thing—but this is a very strange hall of entrance—you get into it easily enough, but to get to anywhere from out of it you have to ask the way.

From all these facts it follows that this building can have no other fortune than its face, and if that face were conspicuously agreeable I need not have indicated the incongruity of what lies behind it. The form and proportions, however, of the façade have neither spontaneity nor abstract perfection; they have been decided neither by the nature of the building nor by the exact rule of any proved convention, and in consequence they appear indeterminate and unsatisfying. One of the most learned of our English musicians used to amuse his friends by performing a composition he entitled the 'general public's idea of a Bach fugue'. This delightful work, in sound most pleasing, in texture most polyphonic, made complete nonsense to the musically educated, whose enjoyment of the joke was often embarrassed by the difficulty of responding gravely to others who, not having heard its title, might praise it with enthusiasm. I think that it would be a fair parallel to entitle the façade of the schools the 'general public's idea of a work of architecture'.

The vicious picturesque is still the dominant character in the work of many of our elder architects, who are encouraged in a sentimental approach to their art by the ignorance and thoughtlessness of the public that employs them. To the average Englishman it is much pleasanter and easier to put his heart than his head into his work, and it is more tempting to him to evoke muddled memories of old beauty than to smelt new beauty from fresh ore. To any good architect tradition is indispensable, but the tradition he uses ought to be that of *how* things should be done rather than of *what* has been done already. By this I do not mean that old styles may never be re-employed. That the schools built at Oxford in the nineteenth century should be cast in the style of the late sixteenth century is a thing I regard as being so unimportant that I have not yet mentioned it and propose no discussion of it here. What is of great importance is that the style is there plastered over a building in which all

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traditional honesty and good sense have been ignored—in which haphazard has taken the place of order, in which accident is simulated in a work of art deliberately planned.

Mediaeval architects put the natural forms of buildings under aesthetic control, Renaissance architects regularized those forms as the topiarist regularizes his yews and boxtrees, the architects of high Vitruvianism reduced those forms to an intellectual system and the picturesque architect plays a sort of *planchette* in which forms are materialized from his memory and his fancy under the influence of Inspiration. Many of the works of what is called the Gothic Revival are plainly of this supernatural order which cannot be judged otherwise than emotionally. Others, like Keble College and Pusey House can be savoured by the mind as by the eye—they not only make pictures but also make sense. It is with none of these, however, that should be classed the remarkable quadrangle (PL. XIX, A) added to All Souls College in the eighteenth century, a quadrangle whose style has been misunderstood by many superficial critics, who seeing its pointed arches and crocketed pinnacles have hastily assumed that it is intended to imitate in gross as well as in detail the architecture of the middle ages.

In reality nothing can have been further than this from its architect's thought. When the quadrangle was built it would have been unthinkable that in an important new building the polite sophistications of a rationalized architecture should be rejected. The rules of the architectural game had been codified and universally acknowledged, and standard patterns had been accepted for the pieces the game was played with. Cornice, frieze, architrave, capital, shaft, base, archivolt, impost, pedestal were put up in uniform sets and stocked by all responsible dealers in modules and minutes, with a book of the rules in every box. At first, before the game was mastered, it was fun enough to unpack the box and pile its contents in heaps; a most daring heap can be seen in the courtyard of the old schools where all the five orders are piled up in a tower one on top of the other. Soon, however, the game came everywhere to be studied and played in earnest, and the shapes of the pieces to be taken for granted and regarded without emotion.

So, too, have the wonted forms of chessmen lost all intrinsic interest in the eyes of those familiar with the game, although to a child or a savage they might be strange and exciting. The game is the thing and the form of the chessmen merely the means of differentiating their various functions in its play. You will remember, however, that from time to time some carver or turner of chessmen has rebelled against his wearying routine, and has created fantastic kinds, queens, bishops, knights, castles and pawns, with which he has thought that the game could be played as easily as with pieces of the standard pattern. At



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one time the production was common of sets that were mediaeval, Gothic, in character—and although to most players such sets must be slightly distracting, their peculiarity would make no adequate excuse for playing a bad game.

Batty Langley, a pedantic carpenter fond of making pattern books, has been taken by many historians for a ludicrously incompetent forerunner of the Gothic Revival. I say nothing about his competence in any direction, but forerunner of the Gothic Revival he certainly was not either in intention or in practice. The title of the book by which he is best known is *Gothic Architecture Improved* and its contents are nothing more nor less than a series of Gothic-flavoured patterns for the conventional pieces with which Langley and everyone else of his time assumed that the established game of architecture would always continue to be played. Even in Langley's day traditional Gothic was not extinct and he saw the opportunity of giving it its *coup de grâce*. With all that was valuable in its detail preserved in a code of Gothic orders, no lawlessness of any kind need in future be tolerated; it would now always be possible for an architect to give to his works as much as he might choose of the monkish flavour that was fashionable in many quarters without departing from the sacred rules of the Vitruvian revelation.

The north quadrangle of All Souls, then, is to be judged by the standards that I have used in criticizing the front quadrangle at Queen's, and by those standards will be found to possess remarkable merit. As at Queen's there are here a screened cloister and a gateway that is surmounted by a cupola. The form of the cupola owes something to that of Tom Tower, perhaps, and in its turn has provided a model from which a century later the design of the gateway at King's College, Cambridge, was derived. (This is only presumption but the similarity of the two gateways appears too great to be the result of accident.) Opposite the cloister, and looking its best when seen through its arches, is a composition of two slender towers flanking a projection in the middle of the quadrangle's eastern side. Nothing can be said in rational justification of these towers—of their existence, I mean, for in design they are extremely elegant and well-studied. Useless or exaggerated towers are the Englishman's especial foible: at no period of our history have we been able to resist the temptation to construct them.

Considered purely as an arrangement of architectural forms these twin towers with the connecting ligament that makes them Siamese are extremely successful. Their architect has twice been lured into lawlessness by the peculiar flexibility of his fanciful material; in the upper stages of each tower he has divided one bay into two by means of a pilaster that stands upon nothing, and he has loaded the middle of their connecting ligament with a pinnacle perched over the arch of a window. Had his pilaster been Roman, his

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pinnacle an obelisk, he would probably have done neither of these things, which are certainly breaches of the strict Classical rule. Nevertheless, both the subdivision of the upper parts of the towers, and the pinnacle midway between them, play important parts in the design as a whole: the subdivision, by softening the gradation from the large scale beneath to the delicate minuteness above, and the pinnacle by accentuating, without overemphasizing, the middle of the composition. Throughout the medieval period cathedral builders were constantly having to decide whether the twin towers of their western façades should be separated by a nave gable as emphatic in character as themselves or should be tied together by a screen ending at the top in a horizontal line. It is with such screens that they achieved their greater successes. Indeed, it almost seems as though the alternative to it of a gable recessed between flanking towers were radically unsatisfactory. (If the gable be not recessed but projected between the towers, the case is entirely altered, but this possibility need not concern us here.) Nevertheless, some slight accentuation of the middle of the screen is desirable in order that the screen itself may appear an entity and not a random length of binding material. At Notre-Dame de Paris and in other great designs of the kind this accent is provided by the apex of the nave gable seen *through* the screen, in the little design at All Souls it is provided by the somewhat precarious-looking pinnacle.

Formal, regular, architecture, however different, is all alike in one respect, that of being formal, regular, architecture. Passing, as I propose that we should now do, from the north quadrangle of All Souls to the Taylor and Randolph building in Beaumont Street, which now houses the Ashmolean Museum and the Taylor Institution, we find as great a contrast as can be imagined in the game as played in the two buildings: but it is still the same game. The Taylor and Randolph building (PL. XVI, B) is one of the chief glories of the University, a great work of a great architect, although of a great architect working under hampering difficulties. Its architecture is of the commanding kind that is fixed in its course and impatient of anomaly, and yet circumstances have compelled its principal façade to combine, most disingenuously, two diverse buildings into a uniform architectural whole.

I do not know the successive stages by which the design arrived at its final form, or whether it was in the workshop of the architect's mind or in debate between architect and paymaster. That the whole façade should be duplex, although its two prominent parts do not correspond with the two entities that it masks, suggests that the appearance of a natural composition has survived through alterations and compromises that have deprived it of its spontaneity. The front facing Beaumont Street displays in appearance two equal blocks of building, a considerable distance apart, which are connected by a lower gallery,

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in the middle of which is an entrance-portico. The design implies that having entered through the portico you will be free either to go straight forward to something of importance, perhaps another gallery, perhaps the main staircase, or alternatively to turn either right or left and proceed along a gallery to one or other of the big windowed blocks that must contain the important rooms in the building. In fact, however, the arrangement is not in the least like this. If on entering you turn to the right you find that instead of being able to reach the large block at the St. Giles end of the façade you are forced to go up a staircase and at the top of it turn back. In fact you cannot get into that large block at all because it is another building altogether.

The only sign upon the otherwise healthy countenance of the building that it is suffering from a misplaced staircase is that what are stone panels in the recessed part of the front east of the portico, are panels of rough glass, looking as little like glass as possible in the corresponding part to the west. These panels supply what daylight there is in a gallery made most dreary by its obscurity. Let us now forget this misfortune and enjoy the extraordinary subtlety and grace of the visible architecture.

In any perfect architectural composition of which some elements are high and others low, the designer's first thought must be of how the high and the low are to be knit together. In some medieval and other buildings they may not be knit together at all, but those buildings can hardly claim to be compositions. For example, the front of the University Press in Walton Street appears to be three separate buildings that somebody has gently but not very firmly joined together with material of an entirely irrelevant pattern. Presupposing that such a composition is to be made, the most obvious expedient is that of spreading the uniform design round the whole building up to the top of the lower portions and treating the rest of the higher portions as an extra superstructure that has been added in some places but not in others. This was the general practice of the Palladians, and can be perfectly satisfactory provided that the parts of the design where this superstructure occurs are visibly stronger than those other parts that have less weight to carry. You will find many admired designs in which this requirement is not complied with. We have seen it disregarded at Queen's College, but I do not think that after pondering the matter you will wish to defend them. Yet even when no complaint can be made that we have not been told from the ground upwards which parts of the façade mean to stop early in their height and which to go on, the method of design in which the height of the loftier masses is made to appear merely that of the lower masses plus something left over at the top involves a great sacrifice of possible grandeur.

In the design we are now examining a much more ingenious method has

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been adopted. The loftier masses are fenced round as it were by the continued design proper to the lower part, but break their fence in places and everywhere rise above it. They have at their summits a noble cornice proportional to their whole height. The cornice of the lower part—the top rail of their fence, being no longer the eaves of a roof, can behave as it chooses, jumping forward over columns, stopping on each side of windows and generally tasting the joys of freedom. Where it is on duty, in the portico that is to say, and along the gallery, it bears a cymatium, a gutter, that increases its projection and importance. In the wings, where it is merely ornamental, the cymatium very properly is absent and the cornice without it is light enough to be completely subordinate to the great eaves-cornice above it.

The more you study this remarkable building the more you discover of its excellence. Muddle-headed people have been known to object to the engaged columns in the wings on the ground that those columns 'support nothing'. They support statues and vases, as we can see, but the objectors mean that they support no lintels from column to column, no continuous entablature. I cannot see that the support of useless lintels gives to columns any usefulness that they cannot claim in themselves, and a lintel applied to a wall is a useless thing if ever there was one. Physical usefulness, however, is not in question, the real use of the columns in this design is to make upward paths for the eye and to vary the surface with their shadows. These things they do most effectually, the contrast between the upward spring of the side blocks and the repose of the middle in this design being one of its most admirable characteristics.

The dissimilarity between this building and the beautiful Pusey House (PL. XVIII, B) that stands not far to the north of it marks the range of modern eclecticism, and the power to enjoy both might almost be made the test of a cultivated mind. I do not think there is in Oxford any better specimen of Gothic design old or new than Pusey House, but I also do not think that its beauties need any analytical exposition. Both the Laudian Gothic of the seventeenth century and such Victorian Gothic as is here displayed are unreal as styles, and inferior intrinsically to the elastic, dynamic Gothicism of Keble and Balliol. Unreality of style, however, can sometimes be surmounted and annulled by the sincerity of the artist, and the architect of Pusey House in all his works subjected his passionate love of the past to a very strong aesthetic self-discipline. In this design everything looks to be of the right size and in the right place, nothing discommodes anything else by trying to show off on its own account—the whole building is a harmonious organism, with the comeliness that comes of unfettered growth from good architectural seed.

Much of the same qualities is to be praised in the quadrangle added in 1933 to Somerville College, further up the road, though here I think you will

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be right if you feel that a building with so very plain an entrance-archway cannot quite naturally have grown such expensive tops to its chimneys. Except for this, the design of this quadrangle seems to me unexceptionable, and of a style generally more appropriate in additions made to older colleges at the present time than the Tudor convention that fitted the mood of the later Victorians. The time has come when stone-mullioned windows and leaded glazing are, in the minds of the young, associated even more closely with road-houses and brewers' hostelrys than with the old universities, and a manner of design like this of Somerville, or to choose an older example, that of the garden court at New College, can increase our comfort without offending any sentimental prejudice that is still valid.

Both Pusey House and the Somerville quadrangle have great charm of surface and colour, and before we turn from them to buildings in which this charm is absent, it will be proper to consider what amount of importance should be accorded to it in our judgements upon architecture. Its great importance to the lazy or incompetent architect is of course unquestionable. In the present state of public taste there is almost nothing you cannot get away with if you say it in bloomy soft-hued bricks. I do not say that bloomy walls and roofs covered with some velvety sob-stuff are not more comfortable to my eyes, and to everyone else's, than the excessively bracing polychrome of Keble or of the University Museum. I do say, however, that almost all varieties of texture and hue have their appropriate aesthetic uses, and that strong preferences for one over another are just as likely to be based upon the fancy of the moment as upon any quality, good or bad, in the varieties themselves. As children, before we had learnt to listen to music, we probably liked any tune played on a flute or a harp better than any tune played on a bassoon or a pianoforte, without any first recognition as to which was the better tune of the two. The sensuous sweetness of the sounds touched us far more strongly than the melody formed by their sequence. As we have grown older we have learnt to welcome all sorts of what are really the strange and alarming noises that contribute to an orchestral *tutti*. Not many spectators of architecture, even among people highly educated in other ways, have got beyond the flute and harp stage of appreciation, although with the pleasure they take in hue and surface they mingle the unaesthetic satisfaction they derive from pictorial and historical attributes.

The buildings of Keble College (PL. XVIII, A) have been compared with many unflattering analogues, but I do not think they have yet been compared with the music of a jazz-band. That comparison, however, has some force, and need not be unflattering if it be held, as I think it should be held, that the jazz-band is a perfectly admissible vehicle for music of a better kind than has



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yet been written for it. The harsh stripes and checks of Keble College are essential in its design, whose challenging vigour any superficial prettiness would actively impede. They may remind us at first of other buildings, in which such stripes and checks express nothing but vulgarity, but we soon can discover that at Keble they express—and express as nothing else could do so aptly—ideas of impressive, if recondite, nobility.

In all the works of the architect of Keble College I observe two elements of excellence, the ethical and the aesthetic. With the ethical element I should have little concern were it not so extremely didactic and intrusive as often to have hampered more than aided the architect's aesthetic activity. It is almost perversely ascetic, determining that the costly sacrifice demanded of man by his maker shall offer to man's eye no sensuous temptation. That sacrifice must be rich, but anything rather than seductive. 'We fancy we observe', wrote a reviewer of an early church by this architect, 'a tendency to prefer stiff and quaint forms . . . to more hackneyed architectural expressions. . . We trust we may not now be registering the first traces of an excessive reaction from traditional rules. In this case we have an interesting and excellent design deprived of much of its beauty by what we can consider little better than the *crochets* of its author'. And that reviewer little knew what was yet to come!

Yes, *crochety* the whole design of Keble is, and the moral sincerity in its design that I have called an element of excellence is not of any excellence that is architectural. What in it is particularly meant to do us good will probably only annoy us—the paraded truthfulness of construction, the contempt of elegance shown in many details, the exclusive use, inside the chapel, of the harsh colours natural to its materials in preference to those kinder tints that could have been given, though less permanently, by paint. These things are there to teach us not to lie, not to be effeminate, not to set up our own fastidiousness against the pigmentation of an all-wise Creator. They are not meant to soothe us, and they do not.

The aesthetic element in the design of the college is of commanding importance: indeed, that design is one of the outstanding triumphs of English architecture. English in the derivation of its details, English perhaps in its uncomfortable morality, English in its conquest over difficulties. The programme its designer had to fulfil was that of a college combining the arrangement traditional at Oxford with certain provisions we now should call 'labour-saving' and above all with a chapel that must visibly predominate over all. There could not here be the customary multiplication of staircases: economy both in construction and in working required that the rooms be reached by passages running along each floor. A rich benefactor would make the chapel splendid, but elsewhere money must be frugally spent.

## H. S. GOODHART-RENDEL

From the general plan down to the last detail the building is signally utilitarian. In the rooms next to the towering chapel the fires would certainly have smoked if their flues had not been transferred to the north wall of the chapel itself and carried right up to a prominent chimney on the transeptal gable. Where one dormer window must be divided unevenly between two rooms the partition wall ends in a specially large mullion, no matter where that mullion comes in the window—and so on, and so on. Everything required by convenience is done *sans façon* in a self-expressive way.

Out of most of these necessities graces have grown, usefulness has flowered into comeliness. The nobility of the whole design, however, its unity and its ordered variety in line and mass, have grown from nothing but the will of its architect. The polychromatic brickwork, harmonious in the chapel, where it is plentifully mixed with yellow stone, remarkably inharmonious elsewhere owing to the perpetual youth of the white bricks amid their ageing neighbours, is essential in the liaison it produces between windows, buttresses and gables of necessarily diverse forms. Without these bands and patterns separate elements in the design would float loosely about upon a pathless background; with them the eye is drilled in the movements it must make to encompass the design as a whole. We may wish that the drill were less severe, but that is to wish that the Tractarian movement, of which this building is a fitting memorial, had been other than it was. It will also be to wish for the elimination of that Puritan trait in the English character which casts suspicion upon all virtue that is easy.

Certainly I do wish for the elimination of that trait when I remember another suspicion that it engenders, the suspicion of anything that savours of religious gaiety. In the early '60s of the last century the lovely south porch of St. Mary's church (PL. XIX, B) was condemned to destruction. Gaiety obviously was its crime, although incongruity was the official charge against it. It was reprieved and restored by a wise dean who should be constantly remembered in our prayers. Not very much English architecture of the reign of Charles I can stand up to impartial criticism as well as can this skilful design: it is perhaps sculptor's work rather than architect's, and this, in such a piece of pure decoration, is as it should be. Its sculptor, I think, was better at capitals, volutes and modillions than he was at the human figure, but his greatest superiority appears in the proportions, the balance, and what it is allowable to call the *movement* of the whole design. Its general arrangement is familiar enough to students of the *barocco*—an arch surmounted by a pedimented niche, to admit which a larger pediment supported on spiral columns has been broken and scrolled. Usually the horizontal cornice of the larger pediment is continued unbroken across the arch so as to tie the two sides

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of the design together and to give the niche something to stand on. Here the niche has no apparent support and the sculptor has therefore made it seem to float—no, more than to float—to rise ; for to me this niche seems in itself an Assumption—its vertical lines seem propelled upwards by the coiled springs of the great volutes—the pendant below it seems to drop across the arch rather than to be upheld by it. With this fantastic overstatement I shall end my description, stopping short of a sentence in which I suggested that the columns were wriggling in excitement at the prodigy, and of which I think you had better hear no more than that. The values of sculpture are difficult to convey in words and the temptation to hyperbole and fanciful metaphor is often hard to resist. St. Mary's porch, however, can speak for itself, and, in choosing to illustrate it at the end of my paper, I think I have ensured that I can end leaving a very beautiful picture uppermost in your memories.

PLATE XV



A



B

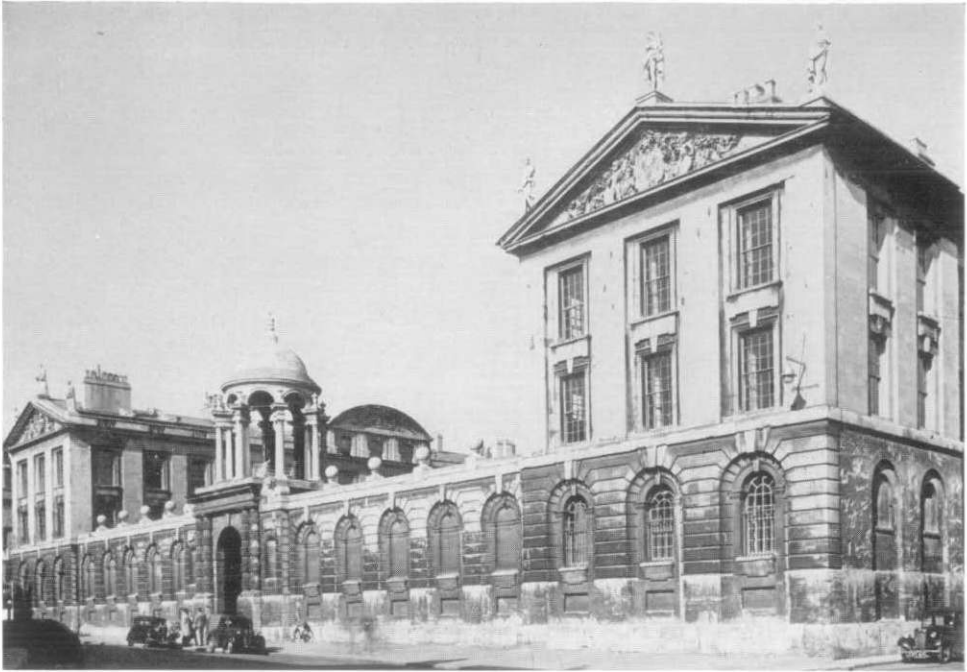
A. THE HIGH STREET FRONT OF MAGDALEN COLLEGE LOOKING E. (p. 200)

B. ST. SWITHUN'S BUILDING, MAGDALEN COLLEGE, LOOKING W. (p. 202)

A. Copyright, 'Country Life', Ltd., London

B. Copyright, National Buildings Record

By courtesy



A

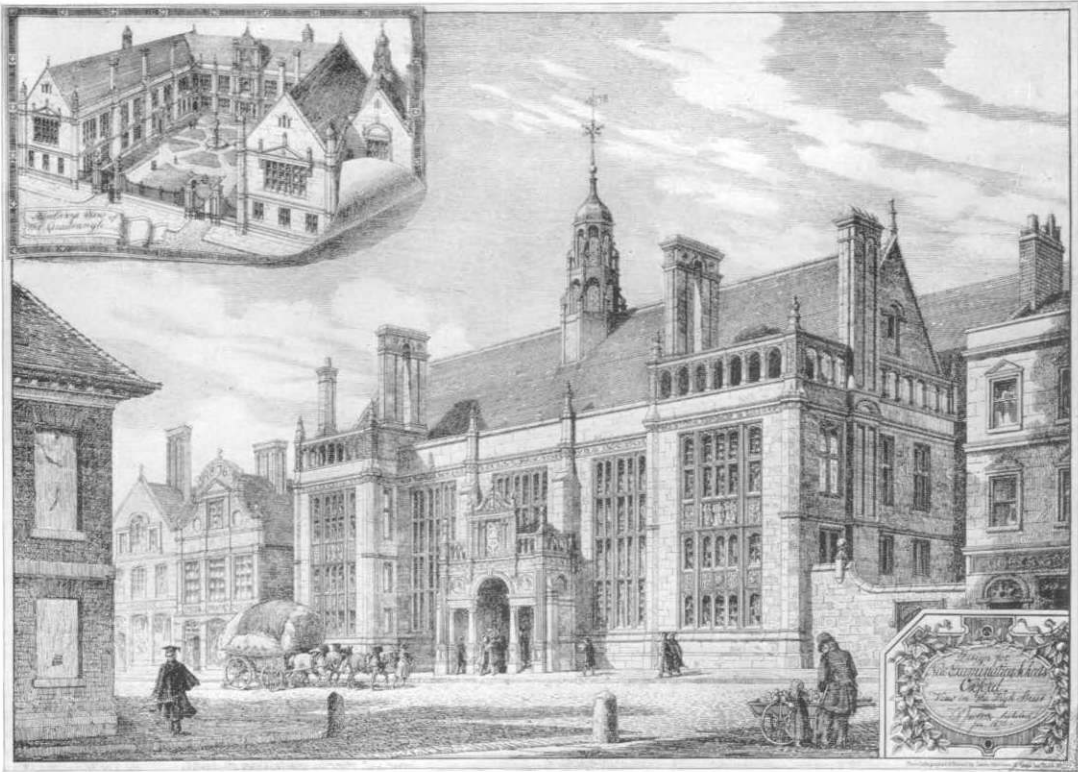


B

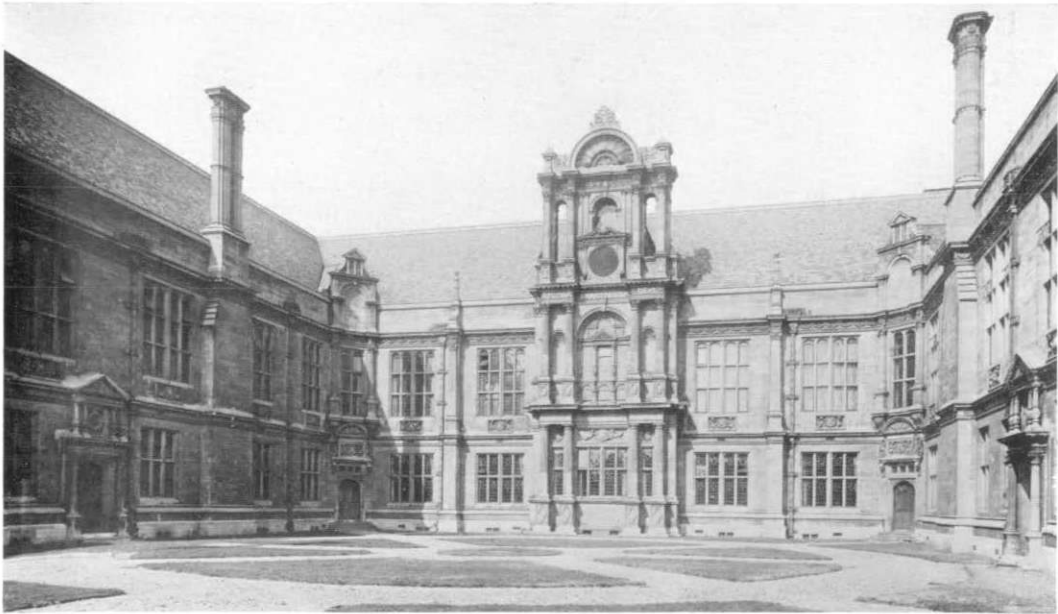
- A. THE HIGH STREET FRONT OF THE QUEENS COLLEGE, LOOKING NW. (p. 203)  
 B. THE TAYLOR AND RANDOLPH BUILDING IN BEAUMONT STREET, LOOKING NW.  
 (p. 209)

A. Copyright, National Buildings Record  
 B. Copyright, Ashmolean Museum  
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A

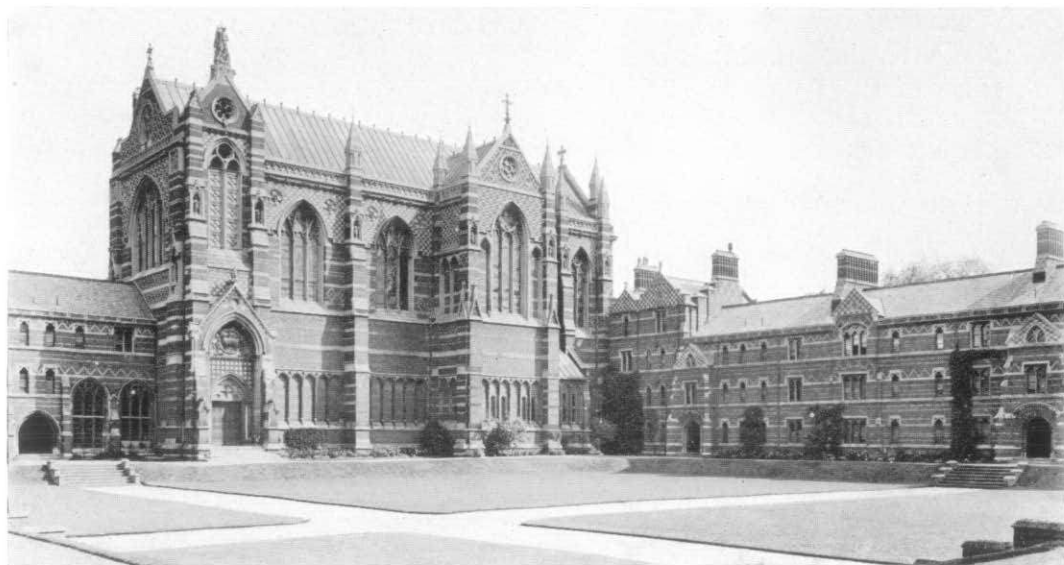


B

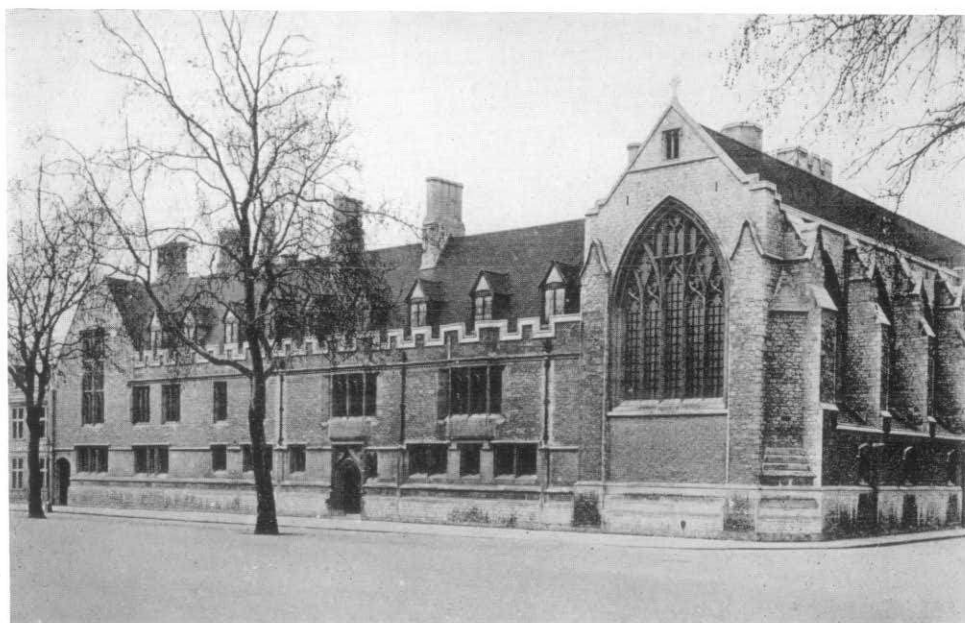
- A. THE EXAMINATION SCHOOLS, HIGH STREET, FROM A DRAWING BY T. G. JACKSON, THE ARCHITECT (p. 205)  
 B. THE EXAMINATION SCHOOLS QUADRANGLE, LOOKING N. (p. 205)

A. After Recollections of T. G. Jackson, pl. 15 (Copyright Basil H. Jackson)  
 B. Copyright, National Buildings Record

PLATE XVIII



A



B

A. KEBLE COLLEGE, FRONT QUADRANGLE, LOOKING NE. (p. 212)

B. PUSEY HOUSE, ST. GILES'S FRONT, LOOKING SW. (p. 211)

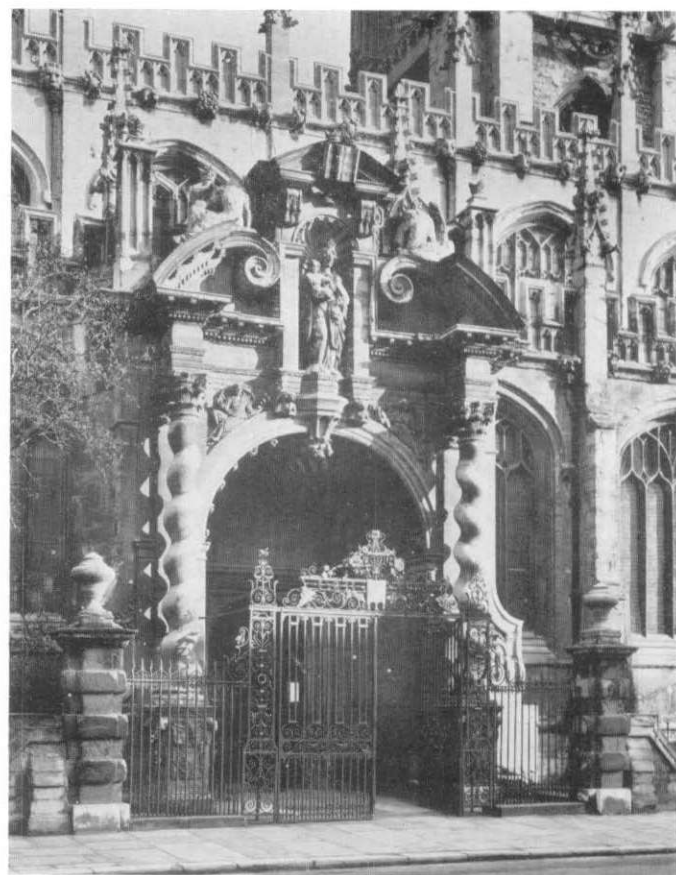
A. Copyright, 'Country Life' Ltd., London  
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By courtesy



A

A. ALL SOULS COLLEGE, NORTH QUADRANGLE, LOOKING E. (p. 207)



B

B. ST. MARY-THE-VIRGIN CHURCH, SOUTH PORCH (p. 214)

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GOODHART-RENDEL, OXFORD BUILDINGS