

# The Pre-History of An Oxford College: Hart Hall and its Neighbours in the Middle Ages\*

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## SUMMARY

*In the middle ages the great majority of Oxford undergraduates lived in halls – small unendowed communities presided over by Principals who charged for the accommodation and instruction that they provided. By the 16th century the majority of these halls had ceased to exist. But one that survived was Hart Hall, later to become Hertford College. It owed its good fortune to its acquisition in the early 14th century by Exeter College. This gave it a measure of protection denied to other halls and enabled it to survive the decline in student numbers in the 15th and early 16th centuries. Much can be learned about the hall from the Exeter Rectors' Accounts – for example, its approximate worth to the college, the character of its fabric and the kind of accommodation that it contained. Much more, however, must remain conjectural – notably the identity of the Elias de Hertford who owned the property when the first scholars arrived.*

'The buildings are nondescript, befitting the history of the place, which since the early Middle Ages has been successively a Hall, a College, a Hall again, until finally re-established as a College.'<sup>1</sup> So wrote Evelyn Waugh of the history and architecture of the College where he had idled away the salad days of his youth. About the buildings he was probably unduly disparaging: they are attractive, though not outstanding; and as an ensemble they present a not displeasing aspect.<sup>2</sup> But about the history he was telling no more than the truth. Though claimant to a tradition as old as that of almost any academic community in Oxford, Hertford did not attain collegiate status until 1740 – and then only fleetingly, because it had to be refounded a century later. Until early modern times its site was home to several of the many halls in which undergraduates were accommodated in Oxford in the middle ages.

Thanks to H.E. Salter's definitive work on the tenorial geography of medieval Oxford it is possible to say a little about the location and descent of these properties (see Fig. 1). Facing onto Hammer Hall Lane, or New College Lane as it is called today, was the oldest and possibly the largest of the group – Black Hall. According to the Hundred

\* My first debt is to the Principal and Fellows of Hertford College who some twelve years ago made possible the work on which this paper is based. Its publication now is a modest way of repaying them for their earlier support. Thanks are also due to the late Mr. T.H. Aston and his assistants Dr. Ralph Evans and Dr. Gregor Duncan who generously allowed me access to the material at the disposal of the History of the University project.

<sup>1</sup> E. Waugh, *A Little Learning* (1964), 164–5.

<sup>2</sup> J. Sherwood and N. Pevsner, *Oxfordshire* (1974), 138–41.

Rolls this had been acquired by the University from Walter de Gray, archbishop of York, who had probably devised it by will on his death in 1255.<sup>3</sup> To its S., and facing W. onto Catte St., was Cat Hall. This stood on a site originally composed of three holdings which were brought together by Nicholas de Kingham and acquired by the University between 1279 and 1285.<sup>4</sup> To the E. of Cat Hall, and facing onto Hammer Hall Lane, lay the tenement later to be occupied by Hart Hall. At the beginning of Edward I's reign this was held by one Walter de Grendon, a mercer, but sometime between c. 1277 and c. 1282 it was acquired by Elias de Hertford, Joan his wife and Elias their son.<sup>5</sup> Elias senior is probably to be identified with the clerk of that name who held property in the City of London, and whose social and occupational ties were chiefly with the royal administration.<sup>6</sup> He is first encountered in 1254-5 in the office of escheator – though in which county or counties we are not told.<sup>7</sup> A decade later he is found in a variety of relatively minor positions at court. In 1269, for example, he turns up as marshal of the king's horses and three years later as clerk of the kitchen.<sup>8</sup> By the early- to mid-1270s he was probably at the peak of his career. At roughly this time he was appointed a remembrancer of the exchequer; and by one abbey at least he was considered important enough to be granted an annual retaining fee.<sup>9</sup> But then quite suddenly he disappears from view, and he is not heard of again until the end of the century. In March 1299 he entered into a recognisance with a fellow clerk, William de Hamelton, in respect of a bond for £12, to be levied on his lands in Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire; and two years later, in what is probably the last recorded act of his life, he quitclaimed his rights in the Oxford tenement to his son Elias the younger.<sup>10</sup> That a gap of twenty years should occur between these two groups of references raises the possibility that they relate to not one man but two – the first being the clerk who served in the royal administration in the 1260s and 1270s, and the second his son, who was associated with him in the acquisition of the tenement and who quitclaimed his rights in it to his son in turn, a third Elias, in 1301.<sup>11</sup> The fact that the second of the name is nowhere referred to in the sources as a

<sup>3</sup> H.E. Salter (ed.), *Medieval Archives of the University of Oxford*, i (Oxf. Hist. Soc. lxx, 1917), 300.

<sup>4</sup> W.A. Pantin (ed.), *Salter's Survey of Oxford* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. n.s., xiv, 1960), 92. On this see also T.H. Aston and R. Faith, 'The Endowments of the University and Colleges to circa 1348', in J.I. Catto (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford*, i (1984), 272.

<sup>5</sup> The deed is printed in translation and in summary form in C.W. Boase (ed.), *Registrum Collegii Exoniensis* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. xxvii, 1894), 285. Boase assigned a date of 1283, and he is supported in this by the *V.C.H. (V.C.H. Oxon.* iii, 315). Salter preferred 1277 (*Survey of Oxford*, 148).

<sup>6</sup> In the London eyre of 1276 he was amerced for having built onto his house two solars which overhung more than they should have done (M. Weinbaum (ed.), *London Eyre of 1276* (London Rec. Soc. xii, 1976), Nos. 350, 727). He also had a messuage at Beddington (Surrey) which he granted to the notorious usurer Adam de Stratton sometime in the later part of Henry III's reign (*Cal. Ancient Deeds*, iii, A4050). His connections can be reconstructed in skeletal form from the evidence of deeds. On at least two occasions he witnessed grants in favour of Adam de Stratton (*Cal. Anc. Deeds*, iii, A5916; iv, A7828), and on a third he was a witness alongside him (W.O. Hassall (ed.), *The Cartulary of St. Mary, Clerkenwell* (Camden Soc. 3rd ser. lxxi, 1949), 265-6). The other witnesses on these occasions were chiefly Londoners or men with London connections.

<sup>7</sup> *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, iv, 344.

<sup>8</sup> *Cal. Pat. Rolls 1266-72*, 676; *Close Rolls 1268-72*, 108; *Cal. Liberate Rolls 1267-72*, 211.

<sup>9</sup> He is described as a remembrancer of the Exchequer in *Cal. Anc. Deeds*, iv, A7828. For the annuity of 5 marks which he took from Reading Abbey see R.R. Sharpe (ed.), *Cal. of Letter Books . . . of the City of London*, A (1899), 14.

<sup>10</sup> *Cal. Close Rolls 1296-1302*, 296; Boase op. cit. note 5, 285.

<sup>11</sup> It was either this second or the putative third Elias who was to gain notoriety a few years later on the political scene. In May 1315, at the request of Thomas, earl of Lancaster, the king's cousin, he was assigned to keep land in several counties for a rent of 40 marks a year. However he subsequently refused to pay the rent and, while imprisoned for this, hatched a bizarre plot to kill the king's treasurer by resort to black magic (J.R. Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster, 1307-1322* (1970), 178).

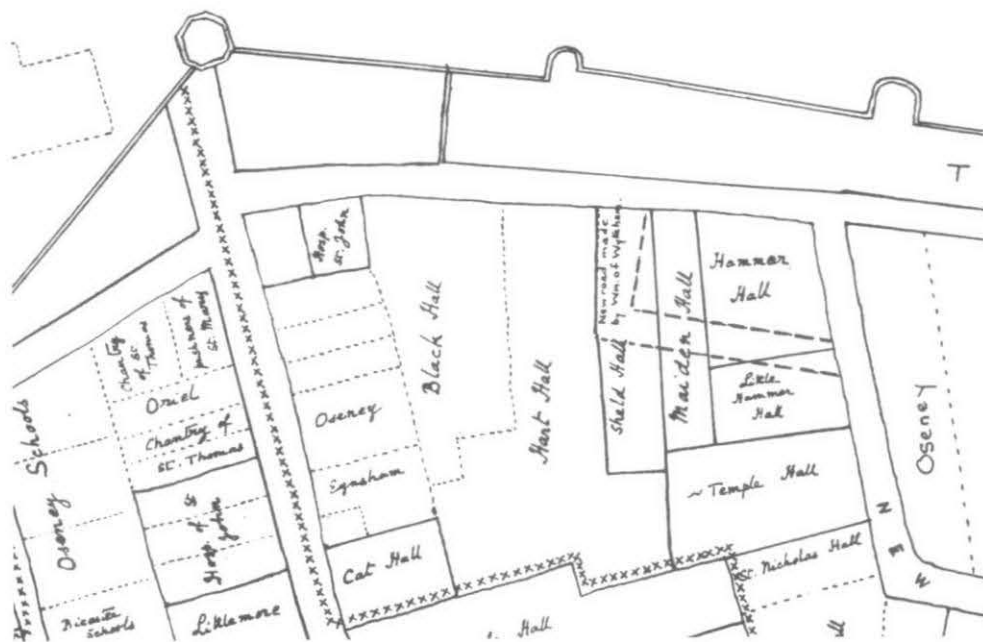


Fig. 1. HART HALL AND ITS NEIGHBOURS IN THE MIDDLE AGES. The broken line indicates the diversion of Hammer Hall Lane for the building of New College cloister. (From H.E. Salter, *Map of Medieval Oxford*.)

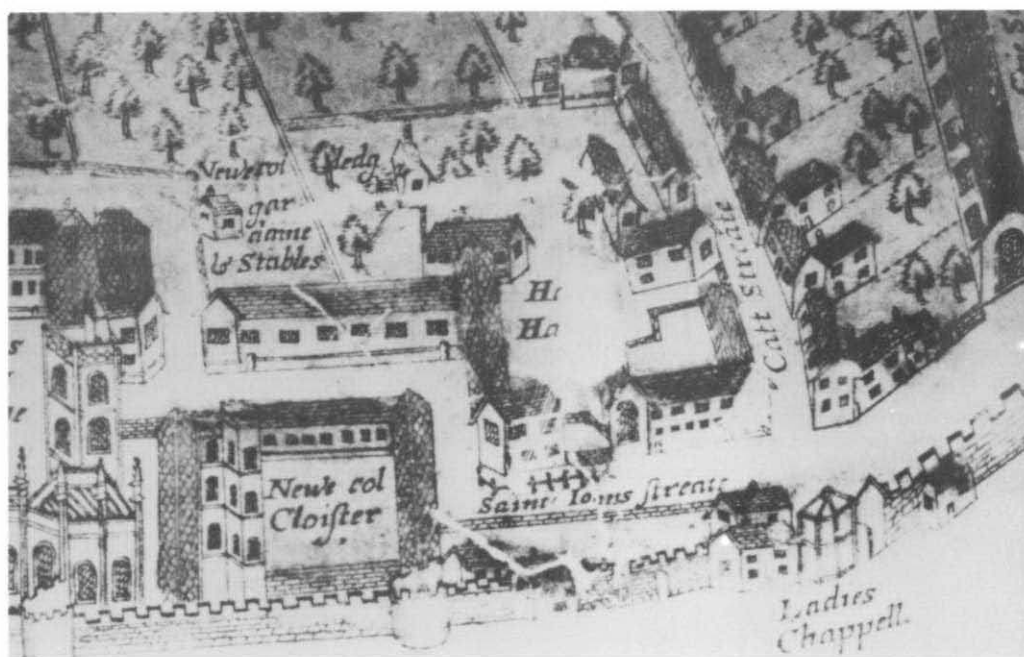


Fig. 2 Hart Hall as shown by Ralph Agas in 1578 (reproduced from *Old Plans of Oxford* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. 38, 1899). Unlike Fig. 1, south is at the top. The mutilated caption read 'Harte Haule'.

clerk might be considered to lend support to this suggestion. On the other hand the evidence is largely negative in character; there is nothing in it which actually *proves* the existence of two men rather than one; and knowing what we do of the lifespan of a number of Elias the clerk's contemporaries, notably of Edward I, it is not inconceivable that he could have been active over a fifty-year period.<sup>12</sup> In the absence of any fresh evidence the issue is unlikely ever to be resolved to satisfaction. But in the end whether it is resolved or not matters relatively little, because in the broader perspective of the hall's history it is an issue of only secondary importance. Of far greater significance is the fact that it was in the Hertfords' time that the first scholars moved in. The evidence for this comes at the end of their period of ownership in the quitclaim of 1301, wherein it is referred to for the first time as 'Hertehalle', or Hart Hall.<sup>13</sup> In 1283, when it had been bought by the de Hertfords, it had had no name at all: it had been defined solely by reference to the tenements adjoining it. Twenty years later, however, it had acquired a name, and one that bespoke its new role as a hall – a community of scholars under the rule of a Principal. Never again, as far as we can tell, was the place to be used as a private dwelling house.

The background to this turn of events is to be found in the determination of the University authorities to assert a measure of control over the ever-growing number of scholars in Oxford.<sup>14</sup> By the second quarter of the 13th century, after the University's return from exile, there were probably as many as 1000–1500 of them – masters as well as students – the great majority of whom were obliged to seek residence in such rooms or lodgings as they could find in the town. Given the rapid growth of this presence it is hardly surprising that ill-feeling developed between the scholars and the host community. There was resentment among the former at what they saw as the landlords' eagerness to exploit the accommodation shortage by pushing up rents; and there was bitterness among the townsfolk at the scholars' unruliness – bitterness aggravated in 1209 by a notorious incident in which a scholar had killed his mistress and then taken to flight. A solution to the first of these problems was found in the policy of controlling rents. At the very beginning of the century – even before the ructions that led to the enforced exile – Taxors had been appointed to assess levels of rent for a period of ten years ahead. Their powers were renewed on a number of later occasions, and in the end they became permanent. The other problem, however – that of unruliness – proved more intractable. It exposed weaknesses in the University's structure which it was not easy to correct – such as the freedom of scholars to come and go largely as they pleased, and the inability of the authorities to track down and correct the disreputable and the unruly. At the very least what was needed was a system of registration that would assist the authorities in identifying who was a scholar and who was not. To this end at some time in the 1220s or 1230s it was enacted that every scholar should place his name on the roll ('matricula') of a particular Master and that that Master should keep a check upon the regularity with which his scholars attended – the required level of regularity being at least one 'ordinary' or morning lecture each day. Soundly conceived though the regulation was, however, it was almost certainly a dead letter in practice; and for that

<sup>12</sup> Edward I lived to the age of 68. For instances of other equally long-lived contemporaries see A. Taylor, 'Master Bertram, *Ingeniator Regis*', in C. Harper-Bill, C. Holdsworth, J. Nelson (eds.), *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. Allen Brown* (1989), 289 and n.

<sup>13</sup> Boase op. cit. note 5, 285.

<sup>14</sup> For this paragraph see A.B. Emden, *An Oxford Hall in Medieval Times* (1927), 7–33, and J.I. Catto, 'Citizens, Scholars and Masters', in Catto op. cit. note 4, i, 174–9.

reason, and at roughly the same time, the authorities decided to experiment with a quite different form of control, one that focused on the newly emerging 'hospitia' or hostels.

The 'hospitia' came into existence as a by-product of the University's interventions in the local housing market. Two actions in particular helped to foster their growth. The first was one that has already been noticed – the appointment of the Taxors, a group whose work in regulating rents helped to safeguard tenements for academic use; and the second was the promulgation of the rule that premises once let to scholars could not be let to anyone else so long as scholars required their use – the only exception being in favour of laymen wishing to live in houses of which they were themselves the owners.<sup>15</sup> The overriding concern of these measures was to check the vexations of local landlords – which they appear to have done. But their inevitable side-effect, whether intended or not, was to harden the distinction between properties which were held to academic use and those which were not. Alternation between the two uses, which had been common in the past, tended now to die out – those properties which had settled into academic use coming to be handed down, as lodgings are today, from one year's students to the next's. This was a development with far-reaching implications for the future; for not only did it encourage a separation of town and gown, and thus lead to an easing of tensions between the two; it also gave the authorities the opportunity they needed to impose a structure of supervision on the undergraduate population, an opportunity which they were quick to seize. By the mid 13th century if not earlier the rule was laid down that a tenancy should not be taken by the students themselves but by a Master on their behalf. The Master was to be responsible for payment of the rent, offering pledges in the Chancellor's court for his ability to do so. Furthermore, he was to act in the capacity of a guardian to those entering his establishment, supervising their studies and, where necessary, managing their financial affairs.<sup>16</sup> It was a strategy as simple as it was generally effective; and by the third quarter of the century it seems to have attained its objective. The great majority of undergraduate communities were under the rule of an M.A. – a Principal as he was known; and the change in their standing was registered in a change of name, from 'hospitium' to 'hall'. It was as halls that these places were always afterwards to be known.

In their fully-developed form, halls first appear in a series of Oseney Abbey rentals of 1277–1280. A decade later they are found as well in the rentals of another Oxford landowning body, St. John's Hospital;<sup>17</sup> and by the end of the century, as the case of Hart Hall shows, they are evidenced even on the tenements of burgesses. By the end of Edward I's reign, less than half-a-century after their first appearance, there were probably as many as 100 or 120 of them scattered around the town. Their multiplication, then, had been nothing if not rapid. But roughly mid-century it halted and went into reverse. By 1400 there were fewer than a hundred, and by c. 1444, when John Rous compiled his list, the number was down to below 70.<sup>18</sup> The reasons for the shrinkage were several. In the first place there was the general demographic collapse which sharply reduced the number of students in Oxford. In the second there was the difficulty

<sup>15</sup> Emden op. cit. note 14, 17.

<sup>16</sup> For the duties of a Principal see H.E. Salter, 'An Oxford Hall in 1424', in H.W.C. Davis (ed.), *Essays in History Presented to R.L. Poole* (1927, repr. 1969), 421–35.

<sup>17</sup> Catto, 'Citizens, Scholars and Masters', in Catto op. cit. note 4, i, 176–7.

<sup>18</sup> Rous's list is printed in A. Clark (ed.), *Wood's Survey of the Antiquities of the City of Oxford*, i (Oxf. Hist. Soc. xv, 1899), 638–41. It is described as an artists' as opposed to a legists' hall. In other words, it was populated by undergraduates – only graduates were admitted to the law faculties. Rous's list is dated c. 1444–5 by T.H. Aston, 'Oxford's Medieval Alumni', *Past and Present*, lxxiv (1977), 37–8.

that the halls experienced of living without endowment income. And thirdly there was the gradual opening of the colleges' doors to undergraduates, which ate into the market from which the halls recruited. Cumulatively these factors accounted for the loss by the middle of the 15th century of nearly a half of all the halls, and by the early 16th of over three-quarters.<sup>19</sup> That Hart Hall was not to be numbered among the victims is in one sense largely coincidental. Had it remained in burgess hands it surely would have been. It would not have enjoyed the protection given to halls in corporate ownership; and, worse still for the scholars, it would have been exposed to the uncertainties caused by frequent changes of ownership. As it was, the place changed hands twice in the first two decades of the new century. On the first occasion, in 1301, it was bought by John de Ducklington, an Oxford fishmonger, and on the second, in 1312, by Walter de Stapeldon, bishop of Exeter.<sup>20</sup> But after 1312 it was not to change hands again. It remained the property of the community which it was Stapeldon's achievement to endow – Stapeldon Hall, or as it was later to be known, Exeter College.

Exeter was not to be a foundation on the same munificent scale as Merton. Its endowment was neither so lavish nor its buildings so grand as those which the bishop of Rochester had given to his college fifty years earlier. Nevertheless its establishment represented the fulfilment of a long-standing ambition for Bishop Stapeldon. He was a graduate of the University himself; and he wanted to ease the passage of those following in his path by endowing a college in which they could pursue their long years of study. By 1311 it appears that he was ready to act. He set in motion the steps that led to the securing of an endowment; and in the following year he began to look for a site on which to build.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately none that he saw was immediately suitable; so as an interim measure he decided to buy a couple of halls offered for sale by John de Ducklington – Hart Hall and Arthur Hall – and to lodge his men in them until a permanent site could be found. During the eighteen months that they were there the scholars made quite an impression on the halls – so much so that one of them, Hart Hall, even became known as Stapeldon Hall.<sup>22</sup> But by 1315 it was time for them to move on. The bishop had acquired what was to be their permanent home in Turl St., and thither, probably in the late autumn, they migrated.<sup>23</sup> The halls which they abandoned remained in the ownership of the college, but their subsequent fortunes were widely different. Arthur Hall never really recovered. It stood empty, or nearly empty, for a decade or more. It was reoccupied by 1329, when it yielded an income of 12s. to the college. But five years later, in the wake of the Stamford secession, it finally succumbed: a lease was taken on it by one Walter de Plesceye, who appears not to have been a member of the University, and after that it is not heard of again.<sup>24</sup> Its site was eventually to be absorbed into the precincts of New College. Hart Hall, on the other hand, showed itself more resilient. It was quickly reoccupied after the migration and yielded an income during all the years that Arthur

<sup>19</sup> For the decline of the halls see A.B. Emden, 'Oxford Academical Halls in the later Middle Ages', in J.J.G. Alexander and M.T. Gibson (eds.), *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to R.W. Hunt* (1976), 353–65.

<sup>20</sup> Boase op. cit. note 5, 285–6.

<sup>21</sup> For the beginnings of Exeter College see M. Buck, *Politics, Finance and the Church in the Reign of Edward II: Walter Stapeldon, Treasurer of England* (1983), chap. 5, 'The Foundation of Stapeldon Hall'.

<sup>22</sup> *V.C.H. Oxon.* iii, 310.

<sup>23</sup> It was in October 1315 that Stapeldon acquired the messuages that were to form the site of the college. The first statutes were issued six months later in April 1316 (Buck op. cit. note 21, 103).

<sup>24</sup> The decline of Arthur Hall can be traced in the diminishing payments of rent received by the college (Boase op. cit. note 5, 342–3). For the lease taken by Plesceye see *ibid.* 287–8, where he is described as rector of 'Westwardon'. He does not appear in A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500* (3 vols. Oxford, 1957–9).



Hall stood empty.<sup>25</sup> In the 1350s and 1360s it maintained its recovery, and by the end of the century had established itself as the home of a stable and increasingly self-sufficient community. Why it should have fared so much better than Arthur Hall is hard to say. Probably the deciding factor was location. It was closer to the college than Arthur Hall, which stood some way to the E. in a part of the town later to become depopulated; and for that reason it may have been more attractive to landlord and tenant alike.<sup>26</sup> At any rate it survived; and in a sense survival was all, because it allowed the place a breathing-space in which to recuperate. It was now the college's only teaching and residential annexe, and was for some time to remain so. Later it was to be joined by a number of other halls – no fewer than a dozen in fact – in which the college for financial reasons saw fit to invest.<sup>27</sup> But even so it never entirely lost its early eminence. A relationship was struck up between it and the college which was equally beneficial to both. To the college the hall was a valuable supplement to its resources, while to the hall the college was the very mainspring of its existence. If an explanation is to be offered for the survival of the hall in the long term it is surely to be found in the security afforded by this relationship. It gave the place the stability it would otherwise have lacked; it saved it from the financial hardship which plagued many similar communities; and it prevented it from falling into hands less sympathetic to the scholars' presence. In a nutshell, it provided it with a lifeline during the sometimes difficult times that lay ahead. The irony is that the college, having nurtured the community in its infancy, was later to stand in its way when it aspired to manhood.<sup>28</sup>

From the point of a view of a college like Exeter which had to subsist on a fairly slender endowment, the main attraction of owning a hall was the rental income which it provided. Administratively there was much to be said for drawing an income in rents as opposed to manorial profits. Rents were cheaper and quicker to collect; and, in the case of those to which Exeter was entitled, they were also more easily accessible from base.<sup>29</sup> But they suffered from one grave disadvantage, at least in the 14th century – namely their tendency to fluctuate wildly, sometimes by a margin of 150 per cent or more. Exeter's experience with Hart Hall was not untypical. In 1324–5, the first year for which we have figures, the hall was worth to the college the not inconsiderable sum of £3 – St Edmund Hall by comparison was worth only £2 6s. 8d. to Oseney Abbey in the same year.<sup>30</sup> Some sixty years later, however, it was worth little more than half that – just £1 19s. 5d.; and in the years that followed its value slipped further, to £1 19s. 1d. in 1389 and

<sup>25</sup> Boase op. cit. note 5, 342–3.

<sup>26</sup> *V.C.H. Oxon.* iii, 318. S.G. Hamilton, *Hertford College* (1903), p. 3, was wrong in supposing that Arthur Hall was adjacent to Hart Hall.

<sup>27</sup> There is a list of the college's acquisitions in Boase op. cit. note 5, xiv. For a comment see J.R.L. Highfield, 'The Early Colleges', in Catto op. cit. note 4, i, 228.

<sup>28</sup> For nearly 17 years after 1723 the Rector and Fellows of Exeter blocked Principal Newton's plans to turn the hall into a college. The story is told by Hamilton op. cit. note 26, 40–63.

<sup>29</sup> Merton had been plenteously endowed by its founder with manors and advowsons. But their distribution was, to say the least, inconvenient. Only two of the manors were in Oxfordshire – Cuxham and Ibstone. The others lay much further afield, in Buckinghamshire, Surrey, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Leicestershire and even, in three cases, Durham and Northumberland. The distribution of the Merton properties is plotted on Map 5 of Catto op. cit. note 4. The routes taken by Fellows of the college when travelling to Northumberland are plotted on Maps 6 and 7 of the same volume. For a discussion of the problems the Fellows encountered in administering their estate see T.H. Aston, 'The External Administration and Resources of Merton College to circa 1348' in the same volume.

<sup>30</sup> Boase op. cit. note 5, 341; Emden op. cit. note 14, 109.

£1 14s. 9d. in 1390.<sup>31</sup> Then in 1400 it shot up to even more than the early 14th-century figure – £3 10s. 0d. – only to fall back again in 1415 to £1 6s. 4d.<sup>32</sup> After further oscillations it settled down in the 1440s to 40s., and at 40s. it remained for the rest of the middle ages.<sup>33</sup> What lay behind these fluctuations is hard to say. It is tempting to suppose that it was changes in the hall's well-being; but it is doubtful if this was actually the case, for such changes would only have shown themselves in the long term, whereas those observable here were essentially short-term in nature. More likely it was some quite mundane factor – such as difficulties encountered in squeezing money out of the Principals. Principals, like lessees everywhere, were in business mainly for what they could make out of it, and if there was a chance of getting away with paying less than was due they would readily seize it: by that means they could increase their profit margins. Settling accounts each Michaelmas turned regularly into a battle of wits between the Principals and the college, a battle in which victory went sometimes to the former and sometimes to the latter.<sup>34</sup> It was a wearisome business, and one which by the mid 15th century both sides appear to have been desirous of ending. Rather than fight it out every year, or every few years, they decided to settle for a figure which could be accepted indefinitely. That figure, as we have seen, was 40s. How it was arrived at we do not know. One presumes that it was conceived as bearing some relation to the worth of the hall, or the Principals would never have accepted it. Certainly, by comparison with the rents paid for some halls, it was a by no means insignificant sum. There were a few halls – just a few – like Broadgates which were leased at £4 or more. But there were a good many more – over half in fact – which were let at less than £2.<sup>35</sup> Insofar as rents have anything to tell us about the relative standing of the halls, they suggest that Hart Hall was by no means to be numbered among the least prosperous of these communities in late medieval Oxford.

Unfortunately, very little can be said about the internal economy of the halls, because the accounts kept by their Principals were their own property and were discarded quickly after use. Probably the only accounts to have come down to us are a set preserved on blank spaces in a lecture notebook which in 1424 belonged to John Arundel, a Fellow of Exeter and Principal of a hall with Exeter connections – perhaps St Mildred's Hall, but Black Hall is a possibility. As Salter, who published these jottings, observed, their discovery (in Barnstaple town archives) immediately doubled our knowledge of this shadowy area.<sup>36</sup> For the first time it became possible to say something about not only the cost of living in the halls but also the relationship between the Principal and his charges. The arrangement appears to have been that the Principal was

<sup>31</sup> Exeter College Muniment Room, Rectors' Accounts, 1389–1391. The fragmentary accounts for the winter terms 1329–30, 1333–4, 1336–7 record payments of 23s. or 24s. for those terms, suggesting an annual rent of perhaps £3. For permission to use Exeter Muniment Room I am grateful to Dr J.R. Maddicott.

<sup>32</sup> Exeter Muniment Room, Rectors' Accounts, 1400, 1415.

<sup>33</sup> Exeter Muniment Room, Rectors' Accounts, 1440 and succeeding years. For the level of rent in the 16th century see below, p. 342.

<sup>34</sup> For analogous disputes between lords (or, rather, lords' auditors) and manorial reeves see J.S. Drew, 'Manorial Accounts of St. Swithun's Priory, Winchester', in E.M. Carus-Wilson (ed.), *Essays in Economic History*, ii (1962), 12–30, and N.E. Saul, *Scenes From Provincial Life. Knightly Families in Sussex, 1280–1400* (1986), 125–8. Theoretically, of course, such disputes should never have arisen between Rector and Principal, because the Principal had to answer for an agreed rent – not, as a reeve did, for all the issues. But in practice this was a distinction without a difference. The Principal may have agreed to the terms of the lease; but this did not mean that he would necessarily observe them.

<sup>35</sup> Emden op. cit. note 14, 50.

<sup>36</sup> Salter op. cit. note 16, 421.



entrusted by the parent with a sum of money which he doled out to the pupil as his needs required; and when that sum was exhausted he went back to the parent for more. The scholars did not actually need a great deal in order to survive. Most of them were able to get through a 12-week term on 6s. or 7s. or less. John Wode, for example, spent 4s. 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ d., or less than 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. a week, on commons and battels; and even a relatively big spender like W. Clavyle managed on 6s. 10d.<sup>37</sup> Typically 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. a week would have been enough to cover tips and service charges, roughly the same amount to cover clothes and bed-linen and as little as  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. to cover rent. Some of these sums were slightly higher than those of a generation or two earlier – suggesting perhaps that in the interim there had been a modest increase in the standard of living.<sup>38</sup> But one of them remained static – if anything falling a little – and that was the figure for rent, which at  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. a week was almost insignificant. It is only explicable, as several writers have pointed out, on the assumption that rooms were shared.<sup>39</sup> Had they not been, the cost would have worked out at 2d. or 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. a week, which was the going rate in the colleges.<sup>40</sup> For it to be brought down to as little as a quarter of that, students would have to have been packed three or four to a room – exactly how many depending on the capacity of that room. Relative to their size the late medieval halls were undoubtedly quite crowded places. Principal Arundel's, on the assumption that it had some five or six chambers available for use, would have been host to a resident population of at least 15 or 16 – in addition to whom there would have been the not inconsiderable number of scholars, probably half as many again, who came from elsewhere to be taught. That Principals took in each other's students (and other teachers' students as well) is clear from an arrangement that Arundel had with an assistant master whereby, if the number of students exceeded a range of 22–34, then a third master would be employed.<sup>41</sup> Since there is no evidence that a third master *was* employed, presumably numbers did not exceed that range. But even so the implication is that the day-time population of the hall was somewhere between 22 and 34 – a point of some significance to which we will return later.<sup>42</sup>

In the absence of any similar accounts to Principal Arundel's we cannot pry into the internal affairs of other Oxford halls. The most that we can hope to do is establish the identity of the Principals and the order of their succession. From the fourth decade of the 15th century, when the surviving (incomplete) run of Chancellor's registers begins, this is an easy matter to accomplish. Before then it is more difficult. The sources are relatively few: for the most part they consist of leases and entries on rentals and compotus rolls, and it is largely a matter of luck whether for any hall these survive in sufficient number to be of much help. Hart Hall, by comparison with its immediate neighbours, is moderately well served. The names of as many as eight of its 14th-century Principals are known – as against two for Black Hall and none at all for Cat Hall. All but one of these eight, however, held office in the last quarter of the century, in the period after 1378 when William of Wykeham took a lease on the hall pending completion of the

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 422, 426.

<sup>38</sup> This is a point made by J.I. Catto in 'Citizens, Scholars and Masters', in Catto op. cit. note 4, 171.

<sup>39</sup> Salter op. cit. note 16, 431–3; W.A. Pantin, 'The Halls and Schools of Medieval Oxford: an Attempt at Reconstruction', in R.W. Southern (ed.), *Oxford Studies Presented to Daniel Callus* (Oxf. Hist. Soc., n.s., xvi, 1964), 85–6.

<sup>40</sup> Salter op. cit. note 16, 423 and n.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 429–30.

<sup>42</sup> See below, p. 343.

buildings of New College.<sup>43</sup> For that reason they are probably unrepresentative of the early Principals as a whole: they are men who in their different ways were associated with Wykeham, and two of them were also Wardens of New College.<sup>44</sup> When the evidence accumulates, as it does after 1434, and it becomes possible to compile a fuller list of Principals, a very different picture emerges. The Principals then are found to have been for the most part Fellows of Exeter. They were men of west-country origin, as the founder had required his scholars to be – Treganson, Trewinnard and Vivian are some of the characteristically west-country names that we encounter; and it was in benefices mainly in the western and south-western counties that they were to find subsequent preferment. Breaking the general run of Exonians, however, was a significant minority of Principals from other colleges or halls. In the early 15th century there were no fewer than six who were either Fellows of other colleges or whose connections are unknown, and in the 1460s a further two Wykehamists revived the memory of their community's earlier link with the hall.<sup>45</sup> But from the 1470s onwards the Exeter dominance became a near-monopoly, and before the Reformation it was to be broken only once, by the appearance of another Wykehamist, Roger Bromhall. Generally the Principals' terms of office were quite brief; only rarely did they exceed more than about five years. It is possible that this was because the office was a burdensome one of which the holders were keen to divest themselves. But what evidence there is suggests otherwise. The holders were not junior Fellows of the kind onto whom such burdens are usually unloaded; they were senior Fellows of some five or six years' standing – that is to say, they were hardly men who could have been browbeaten into accepting a posting against their will.<sup>46</sup> So far from being a device to relieve Fellows of an office of which they would rather be rid, quick rotation is more likely to have been a means of ensuring that all who wished to take a turn were able to do so.

For the most part the lives of these late medieval Principals were fairly unremarkable and are of interest only from the anecdotal point of view. One who deserves mention is William Glover (1496–1500), who was one of many transgressors, ten other Principals among them, who were ordered by Henry VII in 1499 to 'forbear for the future, lest they undergo the law provided against such that hunt after and kill the King's deer' in the forests of Shotover, Stow and elsewhere.<sup>47</sup> Another similarly deserving of mention is William Ewen (1503–6), who was killed in an affray in August 1506 'between the Southern and Northern Scholars, who being gathered together in the High Street, before

<sup>43</sup> For this episode see *V.C.H. Oxon.* iii, 310, and Hamilton *op. cit.* note 26, 6. Hart Hall was one of five halls which the bishop leased, the others being Black Hall, Shield Hall, Maiden Hall and Hammer Hall. For the architectural consequences of the bishop's action see below, pp. 338–9. The one possible Principal who can be identified for the pre-1378 period is Nicholas Hawe. Payment of the rent of Hart Hall was made through him in 1360 (Emden *op. cit.* note 24, ii, 888); but he is not actually called Principal. His claim to be regarded as a holder of that office is therefore suspect, but on this occasion I give him the benefit of the doubt.

<sup>44</sup> The Principals during this period were: Richard Tonworth, Nicholas Wykeham, Thomas Cranley, John Walter, William Ware, John Wington and John Wytham. Tonworth and Cranley were also, technically, Wardens of New College – in the chapel of which Cranley, later archbishop of Dublin, is commemorated by a brass of exceptional magnificence.

<sup>45</sup> There is a list of Principals in A. Wood, *History and Antiquities of the Colleges and Halls in the University of Oxford*, ed. J. Gutch (1786), 644. The two Wykehamists were John Fermor (1465–8) and Richard Mayo (1468–71).

<sup>46</sup> These observations are based on an analysis of the biographical details of the Principals in Emden *op. cit.* note 24, and A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford A.D. 1501 to 1540* (1974). There were just two exceptions to this general rule of seniority. They were John Rugge who had been at Exeter for only two years before his appointment as Principal in 1501, and John Holwell who had been at Exeter for four years before his appointment in 1505.

<sup>47</sup> Wood *op. cit.* note 45, 658.

St. Mary's church about four of the clock in the afternoon, fought with arms in an hostile manner.<sup>48</sup> But the notoriety earned by these men is hardly the same as distinction; and occupants of their office who attained to the latter quality in later life were relatively few. One who did was Gilbert Kymer (1411-14), twice Chancellor of the University and physician to Humphrey, duke of Gloucester. Another was Richard Mayo (1468-71), later President of Magdalen and later still bishop of Hereford and chaplain to both Richard III and Henry VII. And a third and final one was John Moreman (1522-7), who after leaving Oxford in 1527 held several benefices in Devon and achieved a modest prominence in the crisis-ridden years of the Reformation. Imprisoned in 1547 for preaching in favour of Catholic doctrine and practices, he spent the whole of Edward VI's reign behind bars but gained his reward in that of Mary who appointed him one of her chaplains. Such favour he was to enjoy but briefly, however, as he was to die in May 1554.<sup>49</sup>

When attention is switched from the Principals to the scholars who lived in the hall there is still less information to guide us. It is difficult even to be sure how many scholars there were. Principal Arundel's hall, as we have seen, housed a community of about 15 or 16, and it is possible that Hart Hall's resident population was of roughly the same order. Of its medieval alumni, however, only three are known to us by name. The first is Walter Grene, who was there in 1499 and took his MA three years later.<sup>50</sup> The second is Richard Oliver, who was admitted to the degree of BA in February 1452 and four months later was in dispute with two members of White Hall.<sup>51</sup> And the third is John Broughton, son of Nicholas Broughton esquire, who was hauled before the Chancellor's court in 1448 on a charge of indebtedness; on the testimony of his tutor Robert Takell, a Fellow of Exeter, it was said that he owed Thomas Bartelot, the manciple of the hall, the sum of £1 10s. 11½d. for his commons and battels.<sup>52</sup> On the assumption that the cost of living was the same as in Principal Arundel's hall it must be supposed that the young man had run up debts of nearly six terms' standing. When the 15th century turns into the 16th, however, the evidence becomes richer, and it is possible for the first time to attempt a group portrait of the scholars. Some 55 of them are known to us by name for the period from 1500 to 1540.<sup>53</sup> Of these, five were exhibitioners on the foundation of a knight called Bignell who bestowed on Hart Hall the only endowment which it ever received. Bignell was probably Sir John Bignell, sheriff of Somerset in 1472-3, who towards the end of the 15th century founded 10 exhibitions of 5 marks each for the maintenance at Hart Hall of 10 scholars from Glastonbury Abbey, in the church of which he chose to be buried.<sup>54</sup> The west-country complexion of the hall, which we noted earlier and which is suggested by the endowment of these awards, is apparent as well from what we know of its other scholars in this period.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, of the 55, 21 can be identified only by surname from a list of 1534, but most of the remaining 34 are known to have taken up ecclesiastical preferments in Somerset, Devon or Cornwall.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 663-4.

<sup>49</sup> Emden op. cit. note 46, 400.

<sup>50</sup> Emden op. cit. note 24, ii, 820.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 1398.

<sup>52</sup> H.E. Salter (ed.), *Registrum Cancellarii Oxoniensis, 1434-1469*, i (Oxf. Hist. Soc. xciii, 1932), 157-8.

<sup>53</sup> My observations are based on an analysis of the members of the hall in Emden op. cit. note 46. I am grateful to the staff of the History of the University project for providing me with a computer print-out of the names.

<sup>54</sup> Hamilton op. cit. note 26, 10-11; J. Collinson, *History . . . of Somerset*, ii (Bath, 1791), 262.

<sup>55</sup> For the west-country background of the early Principals see above, p. 336.

Although six members of the hall accepted preferments which took them to other parts of the country, two of these were Principals who were Fellows of Exeter, and it is more than likely that they too were of west-country origin. Since matriculation lists were not initiated until the reign of Elizabeth, the limitations of an analysis like this are many and obvious; but it would not be too inaccurate to conclude that the scholars of Hart Hall on the eve of the Reformation came predominantly from the south-western counties.

Of the buildings that they occupied hardly anything now survives – a bleak stretch of walling onto New College Lane, and that is about all: everything else was swept away in the course of the late 16th- and 17th-century reconstruction.<sup>56</sup> The scale of the loss is undeniable; but equally undeniable is the documentary wealth which compensates for it. Hart Hall is a building which by the modest standards of the medieval halls is relatively well documented. In the first place there are the long series of entries relating to the fabric on the Exeter Rectors' accounts, and in the second there is the view on Ralph Agas's map of 1578 which provides a framework into which the entries may be fitted.<sup>57</sup>

To judge from its appearance in Agas's map the hall could hardly have been a very prepossessing place. It was small and squat, and scarcely at all stood out from its surroundings. On the other hand, it was neither more nor less prepossessing than any other hall in late medieval Oxford, for in terms of design there was little to choose between them. They were almost all of two-storey elevation, almost all confined to a single tenement, and almost all laid out according to the same ground-plan – that is to say, in the form of a couple of ranges set at right-angles to each other around an oblong-shaped courtyard; only in terms of size was there much variation. The reason for this general uniformity was that they had all begun life as private dwelling-houses, and their inherited characteristics were those associated with their earlier pattern of use.<sup>58</sup> These characteristics, once acquired, were not easily shed: only total rebuilding could achieve their obliteration, and this was an operation hardly ever embarked upon. For one thing it was expensive, and for another it was not often necessary: the houses were usually solidly built – Hart Hall for example was built of stone<sup>59</sup> – and they were well able to stand the test of time. As a result alterations tended to be piecemeal and few. For the most part they were confined to small-scale repairs and improvements, such as the retiling of a roof or the enlargement of the fenestration. If a fundamental change occurred, which was not often, it was usually brought about by external circumstances. This was the case at Hart Hall in the early 1390s when it was deprived of its eastern neighbours. Wykeham's plans for the establishment of his college – New College as it was to be known – involved the re-routing of Hammer Hall Lane around the outside of the proposed cloister. In other words, the lane had to be diverted to the south before it could then be allowed to resume its eastward course. The block of tenements to the east of Hart Hall was therefore bought up by the bishop and demolished; and Hart Hall itself

<sup>56</sup> The chronology of the reconstruction is not very clear. The process is said by Wood to have begun with the rebuilding of the hall by Principal Rondell in Elizabeth's reign (Wood op. cit. note 45, 648). The year 1566 can probably be taken as a *terminus ante quem* for this work, for it was then that Thomas Neele presented to the Queen, when she was visiting Oxford, some verses which refer to the brightness ('nitore') of Hart Hall (C. Plummer (ed.), *Elizabethan Oxford* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. viii, 1886), 166–7, quoted by Hamilton op. cit. note 26, 15–16).

<sup>57</sup> Agas's map is reproduced in *Old Plans of Oxford* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. xxxviii, 1899). See above, Fig. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Pantin op. cit. note 39, 35.

<sup>59</sup> Stone was purchased for work at the hall in 1354, 1366, 1390, 1397, 1452 and 1482, and a mason ('lathamus') was employed in 1372, 1429 and 1441 (Exeter Muniment Room, Rectors' Accounts for those years).

was left standing, as it does today, on a corner. The sudden transformation was evidently too much for the old structure because repairs immediately had to be taken in hand: the account roll for the summer of 1390 records the expenditure of £3 15s. 8½d. on building operations, of which the largest item – £1 16s. 8d. – was spent, significantly, on the repair of a wall, presumably the newly-exposed eastern wall.<sup>60</sup> When that was done, however, the hall was evidently considered safe for a good while, and subsequent works, though frequently undertaken, were invariably on a small scale. The only exception was provided by the erection of a building in 1521 at the cost of £11 10s. 4d., possibly to be identified with the block at the end of the long range in Agas's view.<sup>61</sup> This was the last alteration made to the fabric before the Reformation, and thus the last before the wholesale remodelling of the place initiated in the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

The lay-out of the hall in the middle ages, as we have seen, was firmly traditional: it took the form of two ranges set in the shape of an 'L', the narrower one facing the street and the longer running southwards from it along the whole length of the tenement. In the former range was almost certainly to be found the hall; it was in this position at any rate that the Tudor hall (the present-day Old Hall) was to be located, and the one presumably stood on the site of the other. In the manner of most medieval halls, including others in Oxford, it probably rose through the building to the roof.<sup>62</sup> Next to it in the Tudor period, and by implication almost certainly in the middle ages as well, was the kitchen, another room which may have risen the full height of the building,<sup>63</sup> and close to that again was the store-room or buttery ('promptuarium'), which is mentioned in a number of the accounts.<sup>64</sup> In the long two-storied range on the E. of the courtyard was probably to be found the majority of the scholars' chambers. Though we cannot be sure, the likelihood is that these were on the ground floor, because on the upper one were a number of other rooms to which reference is made in the accounts. Two of these were of a fairly commonplace nature. One was the so-called 'principal chamber', which may have been the Principal's own chamber prior to the building of the lodging in the 17th century;<sup>65</sup> and the other was the 'alta schola' or high school, in which lectures would have been given.<sup>66</sup> The third, however, was of more exceptional character. This was the library, a room which among the halls may well have been unique to Hart Hall. First mentioned in an account of 1496, it was almost certainly of late origin, for only a community of some maturity could have laid claim to so distinctive a trapping of collegiate identity.<sup>67</sup> It is doubtful if it could have housed an extensive collection; but

<sup>60</sup> Exeter Muniment Room, Rectors' Accounts, summer term 1390. For the date of the New College cloister see J. Harvey, *The Perpendicular Style* (1978), 277.

<sup>61</sup> Exeter Muniment Room, Rectors' Accounts, 1521.

<sup>62</sup> This is clear, for example, from the 18th-century drawing of Tackley's Inn, reproduced as Plate III of Catto op. cit. note 4. For other instances see Pantin op. cit. note 39, 65, 74.

<sup>63</sup> The kitchen is referred to in the accounts for 1366, 1400, 1404 and 1479 (Exeter Muniment Room, Rectors' Accounts, accounts for those years).

<sup>64</sup> The 'promptuarium' is first mentioned in the account for those 1366 (Exeter Muniment Room, Rectors' Accounts, 1366).

<sup>65</sup> The 'principal chamber' is mentioned in the accounts for December 1360 to March 1361 and for 1401 (Exeter Muniment Room, Rectors' Accounts, accounts for those years). A room of this name is also mentioned as having existed at White Hall (Pantin op. cit. note 39, 60).

<sup>66</sup> The high school is mentioned in the account for 1392 (Exeter Muniment Room, Rectors' Accounts, account for that year). The 'magna schola' was the equivalent room in St. John's Entry, a hall round the corner in Catted Street (Pantin op. cit. note 39, 53).

<sup>67</sup> Exeter Muniment Room, Rectors' Accounts, Hilary Term 1496. Pantin op. cit. note 39, 45, 90, thinks that the regular fenestration in Loggan's view suggests that St. Mary's Hall (or Bedel Hall, its neighbour) possessed a library, but the evidence is hardly convincing.

even so the fact that it was in existence at all is a measure of how far the hall had developed since its early days as a student lodging-house.

When we turn from the lay-out of the rooms to the matter of their contents we find far less in the accounts to guide us – beyond the occasional reference to the purchase of such items as tables and benches, hardly anything in fact. The reason for this is not difficult to find. In the middle ages the scholars were expected to provide the bulk of the furnishings themselves.<sup>68</sup> The larger items of course – such as bedsteads – the landlord or Principal would supply; but everything else, from lecterns and chairs to dinner-plates and bed-linen, the scholars would have to find for themselves. The result was certainly a saving for the college; but its by-product regrettably is a loss for the historian, who is thereby deprived of sources to which he would otherwise have had access. What he is left with in the accounts is little more than a monotonous record of locks being repaired and keys being replaced. Scarcely a term passed when a lock or a key somewhere was not in need of attention. Sometimes it was one on the main outside door. But more often it was one inside. In 1490, for example, a key costing 2*d.* was needed for one room, and a lock and key together costing 6*d.* for another; and in the following year a lock alone costing 6*d.* was installed on the door of a room occupied by a scholar whose name is unfortunately indecipherable.<sup>69</sup> The frequency of these entries suggests that security in the hall posed something of a problem. Not unnaturally the scholars wanted to know that they could keep their valuables, notably their books, in relative safety, and in rooms that were shared this was not always easy to achieve. As a result, the practice developed of providing screened-off 'studies' within the rooms in which articles of value could be deposited; and it may have been the doors to these rather than those to the chambers as such that had the locks which were in such frequent need of repair.<sup>70</sup> For those who still felt concerned about security, however, after 1507 there was always the possibility of using the 'jewel house'.<sup>71</sup> Why a room sounding more appropriate to a palace should have existed in an academic hall is something of a mystery. It is unlikely to have been because of the abundance of jewellery needing to be stored: the Principals of the hall were no monarchs, nor their charges any courtiers. More likely the room was a sort of treasury – a place where the Principal could keep the money that he collected from the students, for he himself only paid his rent to Exeter three times a year and then in unequal portions.

It is easy to write about Hart Hall to the exclusion of its neighbours if only because, by the meagre standards of the medieval halls, it is well documented. But the reality was that it was already coming to overshadow its neighbours. By the 1530s, for example, it had all but absorbed Black Hall (though the latter still remained separate structurally). Considering how successful Black Hall had once been this represented a major reversal of fortunes. Black Hall had for long been known as Great Black Hall to distinguish it from a more insignificant namesake near the University Church; and it was probably the largest of the five halls which Wykeham had leased for the use of his scholars during the building of New College.<sup>72</sup> But by Edward IV's reign it had fallen on hard times.

<sup>68</sup> Pantin *op. cit.* note 39, 88–9.

<sup>69</sup> Exeter Muniment Room, Rectors' Accounts, accounts for 1490, 1491.

<sup>70</sup> Pantin *op. cit.* note 39, 86.

<sup>71</sup> *V.C.H. Oxon.* iii, 310.

<sup>72</sup> The evidence for this is to be found in the rents that Wykeham paid for the halls when he took leases on them in 1378. For Hart Hall he paid £2, for Shield Hall £1 13*s.* 4*d.*, for Hammer Hall £1 14*s.* 0*d.*, for Maiden Hall 13*s.* 4*d.*, but for Black Hall no less than £5. Insofar as rent is an index of size it must be supposed that Black Hall was a good deal larger than its neighbours (Emden *op. cit.* note 14, 119).



Whereas it had once been worth as much as £5, it was leased from the University between 1464 and 1496 for only 16s.<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately it is impossible to trace the history of its decline in any further detail, for nothing more than the bare succession of its Principals in the 15th century is known. Although it was owned by the University, it was clearly falling into greater dependence on Exeter College, as is evidenced by the frequent appointment of Fellows of that college to the office of Principal. By the beginning of the 16th century it was also moving into closer association with its neighbour. On 6 September 1505 John Holwell, a Fellow of Exeter, tendered caution for Black Hall, described as annexed to Hart Hall.<sup>74</sup> In 1509 the University finally leased Black Hall to Exeter for 99 years at a rent of 10s., less still than it had been between 1464 and 1496.<sup>75</sup> Not infrequently thereafter, and permanently after 1527, the two halls, contrary to accepted practice, were held by the same Principal.

The second neighbouring community, at Cat Hall, had disappeared much earlier. Like Black Hall it was owned by the University, which leased it in 1350 to one John Crouk and Margaret his wife for their lives at a rent of 25s. It was back in the hands of the University again in 1372 when a lease was taken by Roger Clifton, the University beadle, for an annual rent of 20s. The University recovered possession a second time in 1389, when Clifton died, and in 1406 a lease was taken by Master William de Farington, a pluralist who had been at Queen's in 1384-5. But by 9 September 1451 when William Ketell, a Fellow of Lincoln, submitted caution for the hall it was described as a garden.<sup>76</sup> In the following year it was leased to All Souls for a rent of 4s., which reflected the depths to which it had sunk. Nevertheless, between 1458 and 1469 All Souls College maintained the pretence that it was still in existence by regularly appointing one of its Fellows as Principal – a curious practice by no means uncommon in the history of Oxford halls.<sup>77</sup> When it was of use to the college no longer, the site of the former hall was finally returned to the University which then demised it to Exeter in 1509. Four years later it was let by the college to the Principal of Hart Hall; and by 1525, when Exeter obtained from the University new 99-year leases of Black Hall and 'a garden once called Cat Hall' at rents respectively of 10s. and 1s. 8d., both properties had become little more than annexes of Hart Hall.<sup>78</sup>

What had proved fatal to their chances of survival was their lack of institutional backing. Unlike Hart Hall, which was owned by a college, or St. Edmund Hall, which was owned by an abbey, they did not have the good fortune to be owned by a body which could nurture them through bad times as well as good. The vague entity known as the University to which they belonged was too weak to be of much help. It could not assure them of a supply of students; nor could it provide them with the funds necessary to keep their buildings in good repair. The most that it could do was save them from exposure to the uncertainties of the land market. Halls in its ownership were therefore at a considerable disadvantage compared to those owned by colleges or similar corporations. How much Hart Hall gained from its connection with Exeter has already been shown.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>73</sup> H.E. Salter (ed.), *Mediaeval Archives of the University of Oxford*, ii (Oxf. Hist. Soc. lxxiii, 1921), 276.

<sup>74</sup> Emden op. cit. note 24, ii, 955.

<sup>75</sup> Boase op. cit. note 5, xxiv, xxv.

<sup>76</sup> For these leases see H.E. Salter (ed.), *Mediaeval Archives of the University of Oxford*, i (Oxf. Hist. Soc. lxx, 1920), 289, and Pantin (ed.), *Salter's Survey of Oxford*, 92. For beadles as landlords see Catto, 'Citizens, Scholars and Masters', in Catto op. cit. note 4, i, 164.

<sup>77</sup> Salter op. cit. note 76, i, 289.

<sup>78</sup> Boase op. cit. note 5, xxiv, xxv.

<sup>79</sup> See above, pp. 332-3.

In some years it was the beneficiary of expenditure far in excess of what was remitted to the college in rent. In 1363, for example, £4 was spent on its fabric, in 1390 £3, and in 1521 over £11 – when on each occasion the rent paid was a mere £2 or less.<sup>80</sup> This was expenditure on a scale that the University simply could not match in respect of its own halls. Yet it was not as if Exeter was a particularly rich college. Quite the reverse in fact: it was a relatively poor one. Paradoxically, however, it may have been precisely because it was poor that it needed to nurture its halls as it did. A rich college like Merton could manage perfectly well without any. But a less affluent one could not. It needed all the resources it could get; and building up a stock of halls was one way of providing them. It generated a rental income; it made available additional teaching facilities;<sup>81</sup> and it created openings for Fellows keen to serve a while as Principals. In these ways it went some way to compensate for the poverty of the original endowment. For a hall like Hart Hall this was a blessing twice over. It gave the college a reason for ensuring its survival; and it went some way to providing it with the means whereby to do so.

The most testing period through which the halls passed was probably the early 16th century. This was a time when a large number of these places fell by the wayside. In 1505 there were apparently some 52 still in existence. By 1513 that number had already dwindled to 18; and in the years that followed it fell further still.<sup>82</sup> That Hart Hall itself was passing through hard times is suggested by the difficulty that the Principal experienced in meeting the rent. In 1538 this stood at £2 6s. 0d. for Hart Hall and Black Hall together, but in the following year it fell to £2 2s. 8d. and in 1540 to £1 16s. 0d.<sup>83</sup> For it to have fallen so sharply suggests that the hall's population must also have fallen sharply. That this was indeed so is confirmed by the request of Principal Bromhall on 22 February 1544 that two University Taxors be appointed to reassess the rents of the two halls over which he presided. They reported that the rent of Black Hall should be fixed at 13s. 4d. and that of Hart Hall at 20s. – an assessment which was to last for five years, with the proviso that if the number of students or inhabitants in the two halls should rise to 30 then the Principal should pay £1 6s. 8d. for Hart Hall and should stand the cost of repairs. Evidently the number did rise to 30, because it was £1 6s. 8d. which the Principal paid for Hart Hall for the next few years. Then in 1551, at the request of Principal Rondell, a second assessment fixed the rents of Hart Hall, Black Hall and Cat Hall together at £1 13s. 4d.<sup>84</sup> Since it is unlikely that there were any scholars at Cat Hall by this date, its inclusion in the group was of doubtful worth to the Principal; it was from the other two halls that he was going to draw the bulk of his income.

By the time that these adjustments were being made, however, the worst of the crisis was over. The decline in the number of halls was coming to an end, and the size of their populations was beginning to pick up. A census of the University taken in 1551 suggests that the larger halls were actually surpassing the smaller colleges in size. New Inn Hall, for example, had 49 members attached to it, Magdalen Hall 35, St. Alban 38,

<sup>80</sup> For the expenditure in 1390 and 1521, see above, p. 339. For the expenditure in 1363 see Exeter Muniment Room, Rectors' Accounts, account for Hilary Term 1363. The level of expenditure in these years was by no means exceptional. In 1436 40s. was spent, in 1447 £1 17s. 10d. and in 1450 £1 18s. 9d. (Exeter Muniment Room, Rectors' Accounts, accounts for those years).

<sup>81</sup> As late as 1539 the scholars of Exeter College were required to attend lectures at Hart Hall, as the founder's statutes had originally enjoined (Boase *op. cit.* note 5, lxxiv).

<sup>82</sup> J. McConica, 'The Rise of the Undergraduate College', in J. McConica (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford*, iii. *The Collegiate University* (1986), 52.

<sup>83</sup> Exeter Muniment Room, Rectors' Accounts, accounts for 1538 to 1540.

<sup>84</sup> University Register, 22 February 1544, of which an 18th-century transcript is preserved in Exeter Muniment Room.

Broadgates 41 and Hart 45 – whereas no fewer than seven of the colleges had only between 25 and 35 members.<sup>85</sup> If the halls had once found it a struggle to survive, they were certainly doing so no longer. They had become miniature colleges in all but name. In that case it is puzzling that there should have been so much argument about the level of rent due – argument which in the case of Hart Hall seemed to arise from a perception of the community's, or rather the Principal's, inability to pay. The explanation is probably to be found in two main factors. In the first place, the 1551 figures include not only scholars but servants as well – officials such as the cook, the butler and the manciple, for example; and in the second, they almost certainly include scholars who were taught in the hall but did not necessarily reside there. As we have seen, in Principal Arundel's hall in the early 15th century many more students were taught than actually resided; and the same must have been true of Hart Hall a century later.<sup>86</sup> If it was not, it would be difficult to account for the presence of as many as 45 scholars in the place when (even allowing for its take-over of Black Hall which would have doubled the number of rooms at its disposal) there could hardly have been accommodation for more than about 30–35.

Principal Rondell's difficulty, then, was not so much that his hall had fallen on hard times as that the number of students from whom he collected rents fell short of the number to whom he gave instruction. The students who attended had to pay for their instruction, of course. But for the Principal the margin of profit would have been small – smaller, at least, than it was in respect of those who resided. In the long run the answer to the problem was to be found in the continued expansion of the hall. In the second half of the 16th century it grew in size by over 50 per cent. In 1568, in addition to the Principal, there were in the hall a Doctor of Laws, five MAs, five BAs, 53 students and eight servants, totalling in all 73; and four years later there were the Doctor of Laws still (one Dr. Langford), five MAs, a Bachelor of Laws, 11 BAs, seven other scholars, 49 matriculands and eight servants, totalling no fewer than 83.<sup>87</sup> The 'invasion of the commoners', which encouraged the foundation of so many new colleges in both Oxford and Cambridge, therefore had the additional effect of confirming and strengthening the position of those pre-collegiate establishments, the halls – or at least of such few of them as remained.<sup>88</sup> Small wonder that it was at this time that Principal Rondell contemplated the rebuilding of his hall. He needed to as it grew bigger; and, what is more, he could well afford to.

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<sup>85</sup> McConica loc. cit. note 82.

<sup>86</sup> For Principal Arundel's hall see above, p. 335.

<sup>87</sup> A. Clark (ed.), *Register of the University of Oxford*, ii, ii (Oxf. Hist. Soc., xi, 1887), 29–30, 35.

<sup>88</sup> For the 'invasion of commoners' see most recently McConica op. cit. note 82, chaps. 1 and 10.