The Oxford War Memorial: Thomas Rayson and the Chester Connection

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SUMMARY

A recent writer on war memorials states that J.E. Thorpe designed Oxford City war memorial (unveiled 1921). In fact three Oxford architects (Thorpe, Gilbert Gardner and Thomas Rayson) were associated with the project, and the evidence strongly suggests that the design was by Rayson, who seems to have regarded Oxford and Chester as his two major war-memorial works. Claims that the decorative carving on the pedestal was by Alec Miller of Chipping Campden, who worked with Rayson elsewhere, are also considered, but it is suggested that the sculptor was probably Ernest Field of Oxford, and that there may be another war memorial in Oxford for which Alec Miller was responsible. Rayson also, in collaboration with F.H. Crossley of Chester, won the competition for a design for Chester war memorial, stated to be based on the Hereford White Cross. Similarities, however, to the Oxford design (completed before Chester advertised its competition) suggest that it had a strong influence on that for Chester, and that the White Cross may have been the ultimate prototype for Oxford.

I

Derek Boorman, in a recently published account of war memorials to the dead of the First World War,[1] names J.E. Thorpe as the designer of the Oxford City war memorial. This statement requires important modification.

John Egerton Thorpe (b. 1874), partner in the firm of Mills, Thorpe, and Openshaw, of 18 George Street, Oxford, was elected Licentiate of R.I.B.A. in 1912, and last appeared in its official *Kalendar*, still as Licentiate, in 1955–6.[2] He had presumably died before the next issue appeared. After the armistice of 1918, he was a member of a panel of Oxford architects, engaged on a municipal housing scheme, who became involved with the war memorial project at the request of the Oxford War Memorial Committee (constituted 28 May 1919).

The Committee, set up by the City Council and originally styled the War Museum Committee, initially proposed that the City's war memorial should be a hall, to house a museum containing memorabilia of the war. At the committee's request H.T. Hare, the architect of Oxford's civic buildings, produced a design for a classical-style structure surmounted by a dome, supporting a figure of Victory, to go on the piece of land belonging to St. John's College at the junction of Woodstock and Banbury roads. Such a

[1] D. Boorman, *At the Going Down of the Sun* (1988), 144–5.

[2] Brit. Archit. Libr. [BAL in subsequent notes], Nomination papers (Licentiate): J.E. Thorpe, 4 Aug. 1911; R.I.B.A., *Kalendar* (1955–6).

Fig. 1. Proposed memorial building, to be erected in front of St. Giles' church (*Builder*, 6 June 1919).

building would have sat ill in this part of Oxford. A sketch (Fig. 1) was published in the *Builder* of 6 June 1919 but, by the time this appeared, St. John's College had already tactfully indicated that it would not approve the erection of a building which would block the view of St. Giles' Church. The college favoured the Committee's alternative suggestion, 'a large granite cross', and would 'gladly place the ground on the south side of the church at the disposal of the City for the erection of such a memorial, as a free gift'.[3]

Thereafter the direction of the war memorial project passed to a successor committee, the War Memorial Committee, which at public meetings called by the mayor in May 1919, and via letters in the press, received a range of suggestions from members of the public and local pressure groups for various types of memorial, including non-monumental 'social' projects, and the return of the Carfax Conduit from Nuneham Park to the City to become the war memorial. The Committee decided on a monument, and opted by a large majority for a cross, despite the advocacy of a minority who favoured a non-sectarian cenotaph. Any surplus, after a public appeal, was to go to the Radcliffe Infirmary. There was no surplus.[4]

Hare continued as professional advisor and assessor to the Committee, proposing an open competition, with the usual cash prizes, for a design. Later, on 10 April 1920, again

[3] 'Minutes of War Museum Committee' (Oxf. City Council MSS., Chief Executive's Office), 2 May 1919. For Hare: R.I.B.A., *Jnl.* xxviii (1921), 173–6; *Who Was Who, 1916–28*, 464; designed Oxford Town Hall, 1893–7.

[4] *Oxf. Times*, 3, 10, 17, 24 May 1919; 'Minutes', op. cit. note 3, 11 Sept. 1919, 6 Oct. 1919.

Fig. 2. *Left*: Oxford war memorial as executed. *Right*: the octagonal pedestal, with dedication, flanked by the City's and the University's arms. (Ph. J.A. Bruce).

on Hare's advice, this decision was rescinded, and the members of the City's panel of architects (including Thorpe) were asked to produce designs, for consideration by the committee.[5] Nine designs were offered, by five architects; from these the Committee accepted Thorpe's, but for some unstated reason asked two other members of the panel, G.T. Gardner and Thomas Rayson, to collaborate with Thorpe in 'working out' the design and carrying out the work.[6]

A drawing of the intended Oxford memorial cross, as finally approved by the Committee (and ultimately erected on the land offered by St. John's), was published in two local newspapers: *Oxford Journal Illustrated*, on 20 October 1920, and *Oxford Times*, on 29 October 1920. A more satisfactory copy of this drawing appeared in *The Builder* of 14 January 1921. Three names, J.E. Thorpe, G.T. Gardner and Thomas Rayson, in that order, appear beneath it as the 'Associated Architects'.[7] The Committee's own report refers to 'the three architects who are jointly responsible for the memorial'.[8]

Gilbert Thomas Francis Gardner (1880–1955), of 152 Divinity Road, was a former articled pupil of H.J. Tollitt, and student at the City Technical and Art School. By 1920 he had already designed buildings: in Oxford, the Morris Garage in Longwall Street,

[5] 'Minutes', op. cit. note 3, 11 Sept. 1919; *Oxf. Times*, 16 Apr. 1920.

[6] *Report of the War Memorial Committee to be presented to the Council on Wed. 3 August 1921* (City Council, Chief Executive's Office). According to the Secretary only four architects offered designs, N.W. Harrison (F.R.I.B.A., 1907) being the fourth: *Oxf. Times*, 8 Oct. 1920. The fifth design may have been late, or may have been that drawn at the Committee's request, by an unnamed artist, to test opinion: *Oxf. Times*, 10 May 1919.

[7] *Builder*, 14 Jan. 1921.

[8] *Report*, op. cit. note 6.

and a furniture workshop for Archers; in Reading, the Central Picture Playhouse.[9] Later elected chairman of the Oxfordshire Society of Architects, Gardner obviously became of some importance in the architectural community, but I have found no evidence that either he or Thorpe designed, or collaborated with anyone else in designing war memorials elsewhere. The case of Rayson, however, is different.

Thomas Rayson (1888–1976) was, by 1920, in practice at 15 Broad Street.[10] Born in Madras, the son of William J. Rayson, a railway engineer who retired to England in 1890, Rayson served articles with Robert Curwen in London, and studied architecture under Professor Beresford Pite at the Brixton School of Building. He came to Oxford in 1910 as assistant to N.W. and G.E.A. Harrison, and during the war had served as resident engineer at Witney Aerodrome. In 1919 he attracted public notice by winning a competition with his design for the Witney Urban Housing Scheme, and thereafter set up in practice on his own account. Subsequently he was to build extensively in Oxfordshire, and his many commissions extended to London, the Home Counties, Norfolk, and the south-west. Rayson was elected F.R.I.B.A. in 1927, and later F.S.A. In addition to being a highly successful architect, he was an excellent amateur musician, a skilled artist in water colour, and a dextrous pen and ink draughtsman.[11]

Rayson had already completed an important war memorial at Witney (dedicated 12 September 1920),[12] 'the first in my experience', he claimed in 1947, 'to be erected after the 1914–1918 war'.[13] Like all his other memorials which I have identified (including Oxford's), it consists of a shaft with a decorative cross at the head, springing from a multi-sided pedestal set on a stepped base. At Witney, the head of the cross is very elaborate, and the sides of the octagonal pedestal are carved. The base is square.

The Woodstock memorial, another of Rayson's works, was designed with a rectangular pedestal, carved only with the dates '1914–1918', a cross, and names of the dead. After the Second World War, Rayson's original pedestal was replaced by an octagonal version, to match the base. The shaft is similar to that at Witney but the cross itself less elaborate. Stanton St. John's (dedicated 27 March 1921) is a simpler version: octagonal base with inscriptions, a similar shaft, and a decorative cross. Cogges memorial consists of an octagonal pedestal from which springs a shaft, carrying a decorated, rectangular-sectioned head, with a niche, in which is placed a plain cross. The head is surmounted by a decorated pinnacle, culminating in a small cross.

Rayson almost certainly designed other, unrecorded memorials, because in his entry in the 1926 edition of *Who's Who in Architecture* he mentions 'others' in addition to Oxford, Chester, and those referred to above. However, he seems to have regarded Oxford and Chester as his two major war-memorial works, because in his R.I.B.A. Fellowship application, submitted in 1927,[14] he mentions only 'Oxford and Chester ... ', subsuming all the others under '&c.'. Of course, to a busy professional architect with a

[9] R.I.B.A., *Who's Who in Architecture* (1926) [the last published]; BAL, Nomination papers (Licentiate): G.T. Gardner, 9 Mar. 1911.

[10] R.I.B.A., *Kalendar* (1920–21).

[11] J. Leathart, 'Thomas Rayson', *Building* (April 1946), 105–10.

[12] *Oxf. Journal*, 15 Sept. 1920, p. 4.

[13] Rayson to Welch, 27 Oct. 1947 (Witney, Town Clerk's Dept). In fact his Woodstock memorial was unveiled earlier, on 23 May 1920 (*Oxf. Times*, 28 May 1920). After 27 years, his recollection may have been faulty, or he may have actually designed Witney first. For Rayson's proposals and designs for post 1939–45 war memorial: Town Clerk's Dept., minutes and corresp. 1947–50, and Rayson's drawing dated 6 March 1949 of proposed addition (unexecuted) to 1920 memorial.

[14] BAL, Fellowship nomination papers: 'Candidate's separate statement', signed 'Thos. Rayson, 2 June 1927'.

growing practice, lesser war memorials, especially in the 'war-memorial era' of the 1920s, would be the small change, so to speak, of his work, but the fact that he won two competitions for war memorial design – Chester, and the Civic Arts Association[15] – is significant. Neither Gardner nor Thorpe seems to have won similar prizes.

Rayson, the youngest member of the trio, but the only one who, when the memorial was designed, was an Associate of the R.I.B.A. (elected 1918), might be assumed to be the 'senior' member of the team; the other two were Licentiates. Furthermore, the fact that the first published drawing of the proposed memorial was drawn by his fellow student and long-standing friend, J.R. Leathart,[16] suggests that Rayson commissioned this drawing, and probably played a major part in the enterprise. Leathart himself, who proposed Rayson for the R.I.B.A. Fellowship in 1927, certainly regarded Rayson as the architect of the Oxford memorial,[17] and Rayson himself, recalling in 1968 the designing of the Oxford memorial, asserted quite uncompromisingly his own leading role: 'There were two other architects, but their pencils didn't touch it'.[18]

I have found no record of any challenge to this assertion, made at a luncheon given by fellow architects to celebrate his half century in professional practice, and reported prominently in the Oxford local press. Gardner and Thorpe were dead, but had they played any significant part we might have expected someone to draw attention to it. It is perhaps significant that in the 1926 edition of *Who's Who in Architecture*, neither Thorpe nor Gardner mentions Oxford war memorial, whereas Rayson, by all accounts a modest and generous man, specifically lists it as his. He would hardly have made such a claim if other practising members of R.I.B.A. had played a major part. Reginald Cave, former Head of the School of Architecture at Oxford, told me that 'local opinion [amongst Oxford architects] does not support the notion of Gilbert Gardner as a designer of war memorials',[19] and in the opinion of Wilfred Foreman, an architectural assistant in the office of Mills, Thorpe and Openshaw during the 1920s, if Thorpe had designed the memorial it was probably 'a sketch on the back of an envelope'.[20]

This could be less than just to Thorpe. On 8 October 1920 Major J.M. Eldridge, secretary of the Committee, announced that Thorpe's design 'was selected', that 'in conjunction with Messrs Rayson and Gardner' Thorpe had 'now prepared a final drawing', and that a 'perspective drawing [was] in course of preparation' and would 'shortly be ready for publication' – a reference, probably, to Leathart's sketch. However, as one purpose of Eldridge's letter was to correct an earlier report, allegedly emanating from the mayor, as chairman, that the 'design has been completed and is in the hands of Mr G.T. Gardner',[21] we may wonder how faithfully the facts and decisions were recorded and reported; or, indeed, whether chairman and secretary were privy to all that had transpired between the three architects.

Whatever it was that Thorpe produced, his proposal seems to have been deemed to

[15] *Who's Who in Architecture* (1926), 242, incorrectly gives 'Civic Arts Society' for 'Civic Arts Association'.

[16] *Builder*, 14 Jan. 1921.

[17] *Building* (Apr. 1946), p. 106.

[18] *Oxf. Times*, 26 July 1968, p. 18 (Mr. Peter Howell of Oxford drew my attention to this). Asked which of his many projects he was proudest of doing, Rayson mentioned eight, and specifically named Oxford war memorial as one of these.

[19] Inf. from Prof. Reginald Cave, of Oxford. Rayson himself had little regard for Gardner as an architect, but much for him as businessman. They collaborated on Headington Girls' School. Rayson used to say that Gardner's only actual designing was to insist on vases on the roof! (Inf. from Christopher Rayson, Thomas Rayson Partnership).

[20] Inf. from Kenneth A. Stevens, of Abingdon.

[21] *Oxf. Times*, 1 and 8 Oct. 1920.

require further professional attention by others, and it is unlikely that his original draft will turn up now. He was a bachelor, and no near relatives survive. Plans and papers were, according to the daughter of his partner Openshaw, probably destroyed when the office was vacated,[22] and nothing seems to have found its way into the Oxford City archives. The remnants of the Rayson papers, however, rescued from a rubbish collection and now in Oxford Library, do include two relevant site plans dated June 1920.

II

The identity of the stone carver who executed the decorative carving on the faces of the octagonal pedestal (Fig. 2) is not revealed in the published report of the War Memorial Committee,[23] or in the incomplete set of extant minutes,[24] but he is named in the *Oxford Times* report of the unveiling as 'Mr Ernest Field, of Stockmore Street'.[25] The claim, however, of Jane Wilgress[26] that it was her father, Alec Miller (1879–1962) of Chipping Campden, who executed the carving, deserves careful consideration. He carried out other work for Rayson, and was certainly responsible for carving the figures on Chester's memorial.[27]

Alec Miller had been a member of C.R. Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft,[28] and had an established reputation as a wood- and stone-carver.[29] In the 'war-memorial era' he was much in demand for war-memorial work, and although his studio was in Chipping Campden, he frequently executed his carving work in Axtell's yard in Oxford,[30] and was well known to architects and designers there. His daughter, on the basis of an entry in her father's record book, ascribes 'Oxford' to him.[31] The actual record book, which she remembers, has not survived, but I have a photocopy of the typed transcript made by her brother Alastair (now deceased). The other Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire entries which I have checked seem correct. It would be straining credulity to postulate that Miller's son invented so specific an entry as 'Oxford – War memorial Cross'. Furthermore, Miller's handwriting, in letters I have seen,[32] is completely legible, and an error owing to a misreading can almost certainly be discounted.

Interesting comment comes from a retired Oxford architect, Kenneth A. Stevens, who entered an Oxford office as a student in 1927, six years after the memorial was unveiled, but who knew the Oxford architectural community well. In response to my enquiries he wrote to me: 'to my knowledge the detail [on the memorial] was carved by John Brooks

[22] Inf. from Mrs. M.R. Bainbridge [née Openshaw], Oxford.

[23] *Report*, op. cit. note 6.

[24] 'Minutes', op. cit. note 3.

[25] *Oxf. Times*, 15 July 1921, p. 12.

[26] Inf. from Jane Wilgress [née Miller], Calif., U.S.A., Feb. 1988; J. Wilgress, *Alec Miller: Guildsman and Sculptor in Chipping Campden* (Campden and Dist. Hist. and Arch. Soc., 1987), 45.

[27] *Chester Chron.* 27 May 1922; Crossley papers (held by Crossley's literary executor and friend, Canon M. Ridgway, Milkwood Cottage, Rhydycroesau, nr. Oswestry), letter, Miller to Crossley, 11 Oct. [1949]; entry in TS copy of Miller's notebook, held by Jane Wilgress.

[28] F. MacCarthy, *The Simple Life: C.R. Ashbee in the Cotswolds* (1981), 9–14; Wilgress, *Alec Miller*, 13–18; Alec Miller, 'C.R. Ashbee and the Guild of Handicraft' (*c.* 1952; TS in V. and A. Museum, London).

[29] Wilgress, *Alec Miller*, 45–61; 'Exhibitions of the Week', *Builder*, 30 Apr. 1920.

[30] Inf. from Jane Wilgress; dedication of Miller, *Stone and Marble Carving* (1948), to Axtell's foreman.

[31] Miller, TS notebk. cited in n. 27.

[32] Crossley papers (see n. 27), *passim*.

and/or Alec Miller . . .'. John Brookes [sic] was, in fact, one of two assistants who worked for Alec Miller in the 1920s.[33]

Nevertheless, the absence of any subsequent challenge to the naming of Field as the carver may presumably be taken as indication that Alec Miller was not really involved – unless he produced designs, or did part of the work – and the likeliest explanation is that he executed the carving on another Oxford monument. There is a memorial cross in the Oxford municipal cemetery, at Botley, where those who died in the military hospital in Oxford are buried, but this was designed in the City Engineer's office, and there is no decorative carving on it.[34] The 'Oxford' of the Miller transcript remains a puzzle.

III

The Oxford memorial deserves closer examination, because it has interesting similarities to that of Chester (Fig. 3). Oxford's pedestal is octagonal and Chester's hexagonal, but the original design, as submitted for the Chester competition, was octagonal,[35] and in this form it must have had an even closer resemblance to the Oxford memorial. The modification was made after Chester cathedral's own architect asked for a reduction in height of the cross,[36] and was probably effected to preserve overall balance. Like the Oxford memorial, Chester's has decorations on the pedestal, but at Chester these are figures of saints,[37] set in niches, whose design echoes that of the niches on the wall of the nave, against which the cross is set. At Oxford, the edges of the pedestal are curved.

The Chester cross, however, was not solely Rayson's work. The competition entry was in the joint names of Thomas Rayson and F.H. Crossley, and *The Builder* of 21 January 1921 announced the winners as 'Messrs Rayson and Crossley, 15 Broad Street, Oxford'. Who was Crossley, why did they collaborate, and what was the nature of Rayson's collaboration with him?

The office at 15 Broad Street, from which the entry emanated, was Rayson's own, but Crossley was not a professional architectural colleague working there. The absence of any mention of Crossley in Rayson's entry in the 1926 *Who's Who in Architecture*, published by R.I.B.A., may be taken to underline this. Frederick Herbert Crossley (1868–1955), Yorkshire by origin, Cheshire by adoption, lived in Hoole, a suburb adjoining Chester, and was, by 1920, very well known in the City. He was not an architect, but a gifted wood carver, engaged in designing and restoring wood screens, and in studying, lecturing, and writing on church woodwork and architecture.[38]

Rayson and Crossley became acquainted probably by 1913, when Crossley was working on a church screen at Littlemore, and certainly by 1917, when Rayson collaborated over drawings for a book on church woodwork which Crossley was

[33] Wilgress, *Alec Miller*, 50; Brookes became Principal of Oxford School of Art (later the College of Technology), and subsequently first Head of Oxford Polytechnic (Wilgress, loc. cit., and inf. from Christopher Rayson).

[34] *Oxf. Chron.* 3 Sept. 1920, p. 20.

[35] Chester City R.O., CCF 42, 'Minutes', 1 Apr. 1921.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Werburgh, representing the City; right, Maurice, for the infantry; left, George, for the cavalry (and England); Alban (proto-martyr of Britain); Michael (leader of the heavenly host); David, for neighbouring Wales. The iconography of Christian martyrdom is explicit.

[38] Obit. in *Jnl. Soc. Antiq.* xxxv (1955), 283–4; *Jnl. of Chester and N. Wales Archit., Archaeol. and Hist. Soc.* (1956), 50–1; *Times*, 28 Jan. 1955, p. 10; *Chester Chron.* 8 Jan. 1955, p. 18; 15 Jan. 1955, p. 20; *Chester Observer*, 8 Jan. 1955, p. 12; 15 Jan. 1955, p. 11.

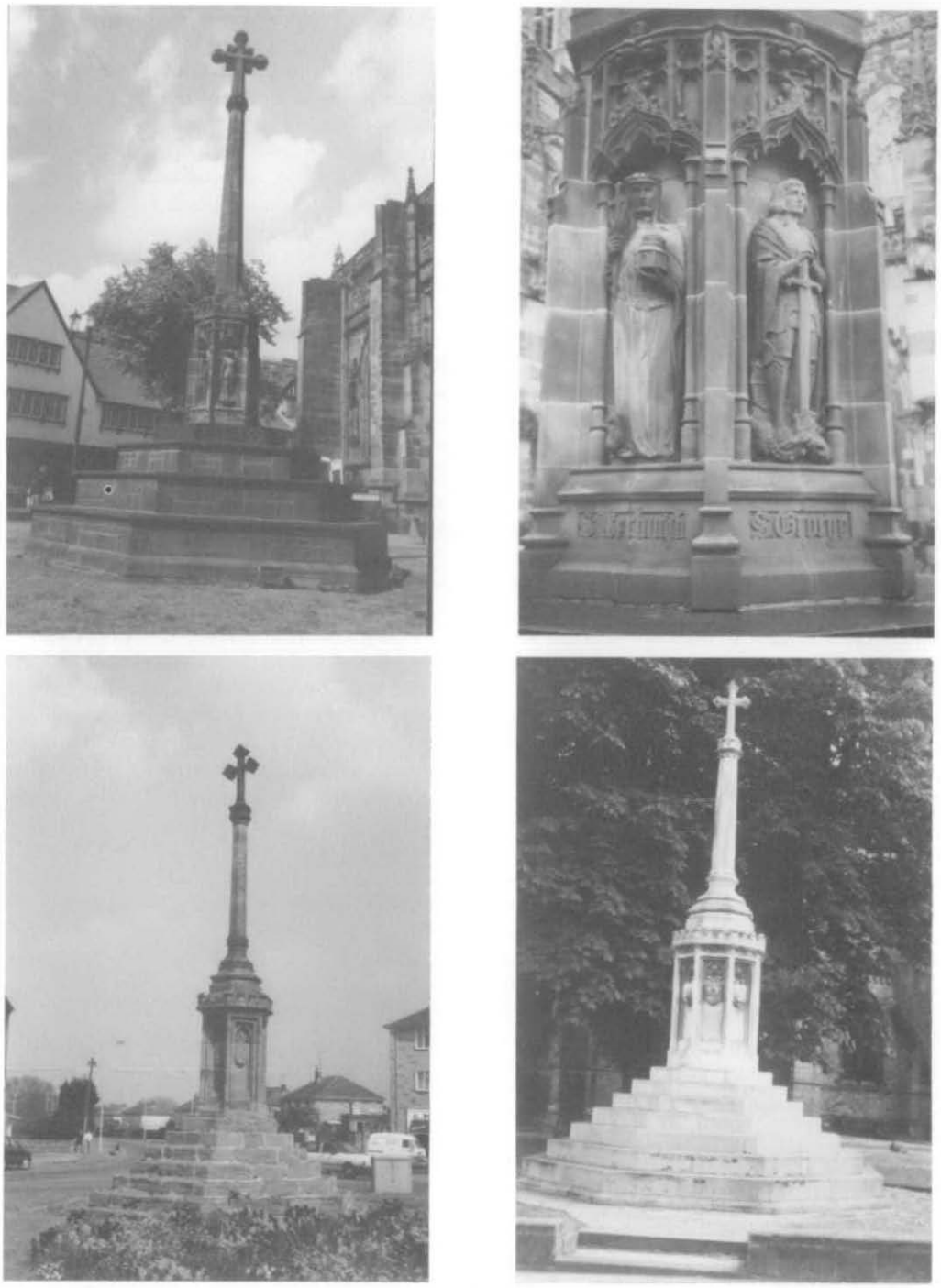

Fig. 3. *Top*: Chester war memorial, from the E. (left), and the pedestal from the W. (right), showing SS. Werburgh and George. *Bottom*: Hereford White Cross (left); Worcester war memorial (right). (Ph. J.A. Bruce).

producing jointly with F.E. Howard, an Oxford designer.[39] Both Crossley and Rayson knew Herbert Batsford, the publisher,[40] and he may have brought them together, as may Will R. Rose, Chester photographer, who had premises, also, in Oxford, and was an old acquaintance of Rayson's.[41] Crossley, a photographer of near-professional standard, would be likely to know Rose. There is no evidence, however, that Rayson and Crossley collaborated in any other architectural work, and there are no other stone monument memorials with which Crossley's name is associated, though there is, curiously, another, unrelated, F.H. [Frederick Hamer] Crossley, a professional architect who did design war memorials.

Why, then, did Rayson and Crossley collaborate over Chester? I have found no documentary evidence to answer the question, and can resort only to tentative speculation.

Chester was well outside the area in which Rayson was working in the post-war years, and the Chester memorial is the only one of those he recorded in 1926[42] which is not in Oxfordshire. It would not necessarily be a surprise to find Rayson entering for a nationally advertised war-memorial competition, but Chester, after facing several set-backs and having decided to advertise, seems to have been determined to restrict the field, if possible, to local designers, by announcing their competition only in the local newspapers.[43] Furthermore, the Chester committee gave their subsequent contract for erection of the memorial deliberately to a local firm which had connections with the cathedral, although its tender was not the lowest.

The press notice of the competition appeared only once, and it is a reasonable assumption that a non-local architect would be unlikely to learn of it except via a local contact. This was probably the initial basis of the Rayson-Crossley collaboration. Furthermore Crossley, the local man, knew the Chester 'scene', must have been aware of the many problems which the War-Memorial Committee had already encountered in its abortive quest for an appropriate design, and presumably had some idea of what might be acceptable locally. The background to the Chester competition is thus relevant.

A 'secular' cenotaph, designed for the Town Hall Square, was not executed because the two possible sites were opposed by the King's School and the City Council. A proposal to reerect elsewhere a renovated version of the old city cross was rejected by the City Council, and the suggested use of an unexecuted design, produced for a family memorial, found limited favour.[44] After all these failures, the Committee asked Giles Gilbert Scott to produce designs for a memorial cross to go on the cathedral green. His first design was rejected by the cathedral authorities, who disliked the style, and his second by the Committee,[45] who claimed that it did not comply with their new brief for either an Eleanor cross or a 'step' cross.[46]

The winning Rayson-Crossley design (Fig. 3) was, of course, not only a 'step' cross, but was decorated with carved representations of saints, figures which would be highly

[39] F.E. Howard and F.H. Crossley, *English Church Woodwork* (1917).

[40] Rayson and Crossley provided Batsford with inf. for his *English Mural Monuments and Tombstones* (1916), *q.v.*

[41] Inf. from Christopher Rayson and Canon M. Ridgway. The Will R. Rose firm still exists in Chester.

[42] *Who's Who in Architecture* (1926).

[43] Chester City R.O., CCF 42, 'Minutes', 19 Oct. 1920; *Chester Observer*, 23 Oct. 1920, p. 5; *Liverpool Post*, 23 October 1920, p. 1.

[44] Chester City R.O., CCF 42, 'Minutes'; ibid. *Minutes and Proc. of Council: Improvements Committee*, 9 Feb. 1920; Office of Clerk to Govs. of the King's School, Chester, 'Mins. of governors' meetings', 5 Dec. 1919.

[45] Chester City R.O., CCF 42, 'Minutes', 17 June 1920; BAL, GG 86/1, Bennett to Scott, 22 Oct. 1920. Scott's first design is in BAL, Drawings Collection, Sc 29 (178).

[46] BAL, GG 86/1, Brown to Scott, 23 June 1920 and 12 Feb. 1921.

acceptable to the recently-appointed 'high church' Dean Bennett, who was successfully urging individuals to donate stained glass windows, with representations of saints, as cloister lights in memory of loved ones, and was embarking on a determined campaign to renovate and beautify the cathedral and its surrounds. The winning design would seem to have been well suited to appeal to both Committee and cathedral authorities.

Not being a professional architect Crossley would, of course, have been at a disadvantage in producing designs and working drawings for a monument in stone, had he decided to enter the competition solely on his own account, but as he was on hand in Chester he would be able to supervise work and liaise with the builder and the War-Memorial Committee, and all this he eventually did.[47] He also met Alec Miller, with whom he was almost certainly not previously acquainted, when Miller came to Chester, in connection with his carving work. As fellow craftsmen they shared common interests, and although they did not keep in touch immediately thereafter, Alec Miller renewed his acquaintance with Crossley 25 years later, following the Second World War, when they corresponded and exchanged copies of their books.[48]

The family resemblance between the Oxford and Chester memorials underlines the role of Thomas Rayson in both designs. Apart from the general similarity in appearance, it may be noted that both were claimed to be in a 15th-century style,[49] and in fact the Chester war-memorial design is much more clearly related to Oxford's than to anything to be seen locally. It is, incidentally, interesting that the respective costs of the two crosses were very similar: total expenses at Oxford were £1,500, and at Chester £1,540.[50] The contract price for erection at Oxford, by Wooldridge and Simpson, was £1,200; at Chester, by Haswells, £1,273.[51] The overall height of the Oxford cross is 37 ft. 6 in.; Chester's (with the originally proposed octagonal pedestal) was to have been 35 ft., but this was reduced to 32 ft.[52] Comparisons of size and costs, though interesting, prove little, but in view of the similarities in design it is relevant to establish firmly which was conceived first.

IV

We cannot fix the exact date on which the Oxford War-Memorial Committee approved the design which was ultimately executed, as no minutes are extant for meetings held after 8 December 1919. However, the *Oxford Times* of 16 April 1920 reported that, on the advice of H.T. Hare, the assessor, it had been decided not to advertise a competition; instead, 'the committee of Oxford architects engaged upon the housing scheme have agreed to submit a design at an early date'.[53]

[47] Chester City R.O., CCF 42, 'Minutes'. Crossley told Ridgway that he had had a considerable row with Haswell, the builder, when he discovered that Haswell was using rubble instead of stone in the core of the base (inf. from Ridgway). Crossley also met Miller, the carver, when Miller came to Chester: Crossley papers (see n. 27), Miller to Crossley, 11 Oct. [1949].

[48] Crossley papers, Miller to Crossley, 11 Oct. [1949]. Tone of letter suggests that their first meeting had been in connection with Chester War Memorial.

[49] *Report*, op. cit. note 6; but *Oxf. Times*, 15 July 1921, p. 12, states 14th-century; Chester City R.O., CCF 42, 'Minutes', 1 Apr. 1921.

[50] *Report*, op. cit. note 6; Chester City R.O., CCF 42, 'Minutes', 18 Apr. 1922.

[51] *Report*, op. cit. note 6; Chester City R.O., CCF 42, 'Minutes', 13 May 1921 (Rayson was present in person, with Crossley, for this meeting, to deal with tenders); *Chester Chron.* 21 May 1921.

[52] *Report*, op. cit. note 6; Chester City R.O., CCF 42, 'Minutes', 1 Apr. 1921.

[53] *Report*, op. cit. note 6. Minutes of meeting 8 Dec. 1919 (last extant minutes) are endorsed as confirmed by Mayor Waller on 10 Apr. 1920, presumably at a meeting; *Oxf. Times* must be referring to this 10 Apr. meeting.

Thereafter detailed arrangements seem to have been in the hands of an 'inner', executive committee under the mayor, who had made the request to the Panel, and no further news emerged to the public for some months. By early autumn 'Oxford residents', according to the *Oxford Times* of 1 October 1920, 'have, of late, been asking what has become of the proposed war memorial to be erected in St. Giles, as the matter seems, to the general public, to be at a standstill'. The mayor, however, had disclosed to the newspaper that 'the design [had] been completed', and the secretary confirmed this in a letter published on 8 October 1920. The substantive decision, therefore, had been taken well before the first publication, in the *Oxford Journal Illustrated* of 20 October 1920, of the drawing of the memorial cross as approved. St. John's College donated the St. Giles site, and formally approved the accepted design of the memorial to be erected there, on 10 March 1921.[54]

Chester War-Memorial Committee did not decide to seek a design by competition until its meeting of 19 October 1920, when it considered and rejected Giles Gilbert Scott's revised design.[55] A small advertisement appeared, inconspicuously, in the local Chester and Liverpool newspapers a few days later, offering a prize of £25 with £10 to the runner-up for designs of a memorial cross, to go on the cathedral green. The closing date for entries (to be submitted anonymously) was 15 December 1920, by which date 22 had been received by the town clerk.[56] The Committee had inspected them, and they were on view in the Town Hall (with opportunity, it may be suspected, for discreet speculation about their authors). David Theodore Fyfe, recently appointed cathedral architect in place of Giles Gilbert Scott,[57] produced a short-list of those entries which he was prepared to recommend as acceptable. The decision was taken on 14 January 1921, which was, by a coincidence, the date on which the design of the Oxford memorial appeared in *The Builder*. The Chester result was announced in *The Builder* a week later. The change to a hexagonal pedestal was made following consultations with Fyfe, who had the last word.[58]

It is conceivable, of course, that Crossley had perceived the Oxford design as a model which, with appropriate carving on its pedestal, would be acceptable to the cathedral authorities – and especially to the new Dean of Chester. Thus, he may have sketched the detail to go above and around the niches, and suggested which saints should figure on the pedestal. Crossley reported to the Committee that a first-class sculptor would be employed, but the commissioning of Alec Miller was most probably Rayson's decision, and Miller almost certainly followed his standard practice of designing his own figures.

What is not conceivable is that Crossley himself conjured up a design for Chester, which happened to bear an interesting resemblance to the Oxford design, and that Rayson then did the work on it. Rayson's influence was paramount from the beginning, but as he was busy in Oxford it was the local man, Crossley, who, probably having made the initial suggestion to Rayson, kept an eye on the work, and attended at Committee meetings when required. Both he and Rayson were present at the dedication on 24 May 1922, but the scribe who composed the entry for the day in the Chapter's Commonplace Book, ignoring Rayson, recorded that the well-known Crossley 'received the heartiest congratulations from his fellow citizens on the great success of his effort'.[59]

[54] Inf. from Keeper of the Archives, St. John's College.

[55] Chester City R.O., CCF 42, 'Minutes', 19 October 1920.

[56] Chester City R.O., CCF 42, 'Minutes', 20 Dec. 1920, state 22 entries, but *Builder*, 21 Jan. 1921, reported 23.

[57] Cheshire County R.O., 'Chapter Minutes, 1894–1921', 27 Sept. 1920; BAL, GG 86/1, Bennett to Scott, 28 Sept. 1920.

[58] Chester City R.O., CCF 42, 'Minutes', 1 Apr. 1921.

[59] *Chester Chron.* 27 May 1922; Cheshire County R.O., EDD/3913/6/1/4.

Bennett's son Frank acknowledged Rayson's role in his book on Chester cathedral,[60] but Dean Addleshaw, in accounts of the architecture and sculpture of the cathedral, failed to mention him and credited Crossley with the memorial.[61] The author of the standard guide book to the City follows Addleshaw, but locates the memorial incorrectly,[62] and even the published catalogue to the R.I.B.A. drawings collection, in an aside on Giles Gilbert Scott's rejected design, attributes the executed design solely to Crossley.[63] The role of the also non-local but similarly important Alec Miller has, likewise, been totally ignored. Popular guide books ignore the war memorial completely, but a collection of reproductions of postcards, 'selected to follow a tour of the city', includes one of the memorial, which the editors attribute to Crossley alone. They then confuse it with the Cheshire Yeomanry memorial (by D.T. Fyfe), which is inside the cathedral, giving statements about cost and unveiling which relate to the Yeomanry memorial.[64]

V

The model for the Chester memorial, according to a report submitted to the Committee, was the Hereford White Cross (Fig. 3), and, Crossley told the Committee, the alteration to a hexagonal pedestal brought it closer to its prototype.[65] An inspection of the White Cross clearly reveals this to be the ultimate source, but was it therefore the original inspiration for Oxford's memorial also, and if so who proposed it?

All nine offerings of the five architects must have been versions of a cross, because the Committee had decided that this was to be the form of the memorial. It is difficult to speculate on what Gardner and Thorpe might each have produced because we have no paradigms. All Rayson's memorials, however, are of the 'cross-on-steps' variety, with the shaft usually rising from a significant multi-sided pedestal, capped with a multi-foliate or otherwise decorative cross, and his own initial design was almost certainly some variant of this pattern.

Rayson had a considerable interest in medieval work, and if we accept that his role in the production of the Oxford design was dominant, it could be argued that he adapted Thorpe's draft (whatever it may have been) with the White Cross in mind as prototype, having, perhaps, even derived his own design from this model. Another possibility is that Thorpe's original draft was a somewhat literal version of the White Cross, with its heavy 19th-century shaft as 'restored' by Sir George Gilbert Scott, and that Rayson saw the possibilities for imaginative adaptation, with octagonal pedestal and more elegant

[60] F.L.M. Bennett, *Chester Cathedral* (1925), 118.

[61] G.W.O. Addleshaw, *The Pictorial History of Chester Cathedral* (1970), 1; Addleshaw, 'Architects, Designers, Sculptors, Craftsmen', *Jnl. of Soc. of Archit. Historians of Great Britain*, no. 14 (1971).

[62] B. Harris, *Bartholomew City Guides: Chester* (1979), 76.

[63] G. Fisher, G. Stamp and others, 'The Scott Family', in *Cat. of the Drawings Collection* (R.I.B.A. 1981), 169.

[64] K. Goulburn and G. Jackson, *Chester: A portrait in Old Postcards* (1987), Intro. and p. 16. For Yeomanry's memorial, R. Verdin, *The Cheshire (Earl of Chester's) Yeomanry 1898–1967* (1971), 186. Cf. the passing ref. to Oxford memorial (unattributed) in C. Hibbert, *Encyclopaedia of Oxford* (1988), 394, though other works of Rayson are dealt with adequately (e.g. 28 Cornmarket, 103).

[65] Chester City R.O., CCF 42, 'Minutes', 1 Apr. 1921 ('the ancient Hereford Whitefriars [*sic*] Cross'); for White Cross (*c.* 1361–69, shaft 'restored' 19th century): F.T. Havergal, *Fasti Herefordenses* (1869), 203; G.S. Tyack, *The Cross in Ritual, Architecture and Art* (1900), 130; A. Vallance, *Old Crosses and Lychgates* (1920), 44; A. Watkins, *Standing Crosses of Herefordshire* (1950), 33.

Fig. 4. Thomas Rayson's New Year card, 1926, showing Oxford war memorial. (Crossley papers, in possession of Canon M. Ridgway).

shaft. There may be suggestive parallels in the design of Worcester's memorial (Fig. 3). There the model accepted was a photograph of the White Cross, followed almost literally except for the eventual decision, at the behest of the cathedral architect, to adopt an octagonal pedestal.[66] Not surprisingly the resulting monument lacks the distinctive character of Oxford's memorial cross.

Rayson seems to have been sufficiently proud of the Oxford memorial to have sketched it as the centrepiece of his 1926 version of the New Year card which he designed each year and sent to his many friends – including Alec Miller and F.H. Crossley. He places it in a composite Oxford scene, and significantly, in front of a building of his own designing: 38 Cornmarket Street, the former Plough Inn, which he had reconstructed in 1925 (Fig. 4).[67] Does this signal his dominant role, also, in the designing of the cross? And was the name adopted for his entry in the Chester competition ('Wayneflete')[68] a whimsical, coded reference to Oxford?

[66] Worcs. R.O., 259. 9:26 BA 3239.

[67] Building identified by Dr. M. Graham, Oxf. Central Library, and by Christopher Rayson, who adds that his father converted it into a craft shop, and ten years later into a shop for Austin Reed; Hibbert, *Encyclopaedia of Oxford* (1988), 103; J.S. Curl, *Erosion of Oxford* (1977), 73–4.

[68] Chester City R.O., 'Minutes', 14 Jan.. 1921.

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