

# Baker and Lutyens in Oxford: The Building of Rhodes House and Campion Hall

By GEOFFREY TYACK

## SUMMARY

*Rhodes House and Campion Hall are the only two Oxford buildings designed by Sir Herbert Baker and Sir Edwin Lutyens, two of the most influential and accomplished architects in Britain and the British Empire in the first half of the 20th century. Like most of the inter-war buildings of Oxford University, they have been ignored or dismissed by many commentators for their supposed stylistic timidity, and, while Campion Hall has been to some extent rehabilitated by the recent revival of interest in Lutyens's work, Rhodes House has fallen foul of the fashionable anti-imperialism of the late 20th century. Drawing on the copious surviving documentary material, this paper relates the complex history of each building and draws some comparisons between the two in the light of the early friendship and later antipathy between the architects. In doing so it attempts to foster a better understanding of the place of both in the architectural history of Oxford.*

Oxford's inter-war architecture has attracted little attention from historians, and little praise from those who have ventured to pronounce on the aesthetic qualities of the city's buildings. Commentators from J.M. Richards onwards have berated the dons of the 1920s and 30s and their architects for their nostalgic and sentimental attachment to the past and for their refusal to employ the architectural innovations the *Zeitgeist* demanded:<sup>1</sup> innovations which were not accepted until the 1950s, when a new and more adventurous generation began to assert its influence. Oxford, so the argument goes, could have had Gropius and Le Corbusier (or at least Wells Coates and Maxwell Fry); instead, it played safe with Lutyens and Baker (or, at worst, Hubert Worthington). Though seductively simple, this view of events runs into the danger of subordinating architecture to ideology. For, despite its unwillingness to experiment with new styles or new building materials, inter-war Oxford succeeded in erecting a handful of buildings of real imagination and merit which deserve to be rescued from the condescension of posterity. Perhaps the most impressive of these buildings are Rhodes House, built to the designs of (Sir) Herbert Baker in 1926-9, and (Sir) Edwin Lutyens's Campion Hall (1934-6). Quite apart from their purely architectural qualities, each building throws light on Oxford's relationship with the wider world, and with its own past: questions which continue to pre-occupy the University in the closing years of the 20th century.

## RHODES HOUSE

The genesis of Rhodes House lies in the will of Cecil Rhodes, in which he left the bulk of his fortune to found scholarships at Oxford for young men from the British Empire, from the

<sup>1</sup> J. M. Richards, 'Recent Building in Oxford and Cambridge', *Architectural Review*, cxii (1952), 73-5.

U.S.A. and from Germany. Rhodes's undergraduate career at Oriel College was not very distinguished, and was interrupted by visits to South Africa where he was already involved in making vast sums of money in diamond mining. But he looked back on Oxford with sentimental affection, and he held fast to the belief that an Oxford undergraduate education would promote those qualities of quick thinking, self-reliance and mastery of complex detail essential for rulers and administrators. Above all he believed that, by sending young people from outside Britain to Oxford, the scholarships would help cement the co-operation between the English-speaking peoples, and between them and Germany, on which the future of the Empire, and indeed of world peace and prosperity, would depend.<sup>2</sup> Herbert Baker, who had been privy to many of Rhodes's ideas, later wrote: 'His political faith was to build, through the union of the English-speaking people, the foundation of so great a power as to render wars impossible and promote the best interests of humanity'.<sup>3</sup> This vision inspired Milner and his 'Kindergarten', and, through the 'Round Table' group which they formed on their return from South Africa, it remained a powerful influence in British politics between the World Wars. Milner, a member of the War Cabinet under Lloyd George and subsequently Colonial Secretary in his post-war coalition, was one of the original Rhodes Trustees, and later became the Chairman, and members of the 'Kindergarten', notably Philip Kerr, later Earl of Lothian, played an important part in the subsequent development both of the Trust and of its main architectural manifestation, Rhodes House.

By the end of the First World War the Rhodes Scholars had become a recognised, if somewhat marginal, part of Oxford University. Their teaching, like that of other undergraduates, was organised by the colleges of which they were members, and they lived either in college or in lodgings, as Rhodes himself had. The Trust was based in London, and its only representative in Oxford was the Oxford Secretary, F.J. Wylie, a classics don from Brasenose who operated from a house in South Parks Road. The idea of giving the Trust a more prominent physical presence in Oxford originated partly with Wylie, who wanted a larger and more impressive house in which to entertain official guests, and partly from the formation and growth of a library, starting in 1922;<sup>4</sup> administered by the Bodleian, this has become one of the most important libraries in Britain for the study of the history of the British Empire and its successor states. The building was also intended to serve as a memorial to Sir George Parkin (d. 1922), the first Secretary of the Rhodes Trust, and as a venue for the scholars' annual dinners, provision for which was made in Rhodes's will. Sites in St. Giles (the former Black Hall, now part of Queen Elizabeth House) and to the east of St. Cross church, Holywell, were considered and discarded, and in the summer of 1924 the Trustees and their new Secretary Edward Grigg (later Governor-General of Kenya) entered into negotiations with Wadham College for the purchase of a one and a half acre site (later increased to two acres) at the northern end of the college garden, at the junction of Parks Road and South Parks Road.<sup>5</sup> This land, at the corner of the defensive earthworks put up during the Civil War, had been leased by Wadham from Merton College in 1795 and the freehold was acquired in 1834, by which time it had been incorporated into the Warden's extensive landscape garden.<sup>6</sup> Never one of the better-endowed colleges, Wadham suffered especially badly from the agricultural depression of the late 19th century, and its financial straits made it impossible to look the gift

<sup>2</sup> For the scholarships, see Lord Elton (ed.), *The First Fifty Years of the Rhodes Trust and the Rhodes Scholarships* (1953); R. Symonds, *Oxford and Empire* (1986), 165–70.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 24 May 1942, reprinted in H. Baker, *Architecture and Personalities* (1944), 223–4.

<sup>4</sup> Elton, *op. cit.* 117.

<sup>5</sup> Rhodes Trust Papers at Rhodes House, file 2637/1.

<sup>6</sup> C.S.L. Davies and J. Garnett (eds.), *Wadham College* (1994), 106–10.

horse of the Rhodes Trustees in the mouth; the land was finally sold in 1925 for £20,000.<sup>7</sup>

Herbert Baker's employment as architect was a foregone conclusion. The son of a gentleman farmer from Kent, he went from Tonbridge School – where he captained the cricket team – into the London office of the architect Ernest George. Here he met Edwin Lutyens, seven years his junior, who spent six months as an assistant in George's office in 1887.<sup>8</sup> Both men absorbed the philosophy of the nascent Arts and Crafts movement – the most profound influence on English architecture at the time – but whereas Lutyens soon began to build up a precociously successful practice as a designer of country houses in England, Baker did not find fulfilment until 1892, when he emigrated to South Africa. Not long after his arrival he fell under the charismatic influence of Cecil Rhodes, whom he met at a dinner party, and it was Rhodes who gave him his first important commission: the restoration of the old 'Cape Dutch' house known as Groote Schuur outside Cape Town. Rhodes subsequently paid for Baker to make an architectural 'Grand Tour' of the Mediterranean, and nearly forty years later Baker repaid the debt in a eulogistic biography *Cecil Rhodes by his Architect* (1934). Rhodes introduced Baker to his near-contemporary Alfred Milner, one of the main promoters of the idea of a united South Africa under British rule and subsequently, after the end of the Boer War – which he did much to precipitate – the first High Commissioner of the Union of South Africa. As a young man Milner had attended John Ruskin's Slade Lectures in Oxford, where he had been influenced by the vision of an imperial destiny for the British people, and he transmitted this vision to his 'Kindergarten' of idealistic, often Oxford-educated, young administrators. And when Rhodes died in 1902, Baker followed Milner from the Cape to the Transvaal, the economic power-house of the new Union. Here he built a new house, Stonehouse, on the outskirts of Johannesburg, which he shared with some of the 'Kindergarten', and it was he who obtained the most important commissions for new public buildings, notably the classical Union Building at Pretoria, perhaps the most significant building of his whole career. Baker subsequently co-operated with Lutyens in the layout and design of New Delhi, the new imperial capital of India, designing the 'secretariats' or government buildings and the legislative building (now the Indian Parliament) but falling out with him over the seemingly trivial issue of the slope of the processional way leading to Lutyens's Viceroy's House (Lutyens called the conflict his 'Bakerloo').<sup>9</sup> He moved his practice to London in 1913 and, together with Lutyens and Reginald Blomfield, was one of the architects for the Imperial War Graves Commission, established in 1917; by now he was recognised as one of the leaders of the English architectural profession, and he attracted many of the most important official commissions of the post-war era, including the rebuilding of the Bank of England and the design of South Africa House in Trafalgar Square.

Steeped in the imperialist rhetoric of Edwardian England, Baker shared the values and cultural assumptions of the Rhodes Trustees and could be relied upon to give Oxford a building which would proclaim the lofty ideals of Rhodes for posterity: an aim which was especially sympathetic to a man of Baker's idealistic temperament. Baker had already designed the impressively Grecian memorial to Rhodes on the slopes of Table Mountain, and the Rhodes Trustees were impressed with his recent War Memorial cloister at Winchester College (1922–4), which demonstrated his 'very rare capacity of giving character . . . and quiet beauty to a

<sup>7</sup> Rhodes Trust Papers, contract (16 Oct. 1925).

<sup>8</sup> For Baker's career, see his autobiography *Architecture and Personalities* (1944).

<sup>9</sup> For Baker's relations with Lutyens, see *Architecture and Personalities*, and also C. Hussey, *The Life of Sir Edwin Lutyens* (1950); Mary Lutyens, *Edwin Lutyens* (1980); R.G. Irving, *Indian Summer: Lutyens, Baker and Imperial Delhi* (1981).



Fig. 1. The south range of Rhodes House, central portion.

modern building in unobtrusive harmony with old surroundings'.<sup>10</sup> The style of the new building was intended to be, in Baker's words, 'something very simple and elemental such as Rhodes would like', expressing Rhodes's love of 'the visible efforts of man's handiwork'.<sup>11</sup> The Trustees wanted the new building to harmonise with the early 17th-century Wadham College to the south, hence the decision to use mullioned and transomed windows. But Baker omitted the gables which are such a notable feature of the external elevations of Wadham in favour of hipped roofs with dormer windows. These features give the exterior, especially from the south and west (Fig. 1), something of the air of a substantial manor house of the early to mid 17th century: a type of building admired by Baker, who had been brought up in a somewhat later 17th-century gentleman's house, Owletts, at Cobham in Kent.<sup>12</sup>

The plan, worked out in consultation with Milner, was originally intended to be of the half-H variety used in many English country houses of the 16th and 17th centuries, with a central block containing a south-facing dining hall, and two wings, one of which would be

<sup>10</sup> Rhodes Trust Papers 2637/1, Grigg to Warden of Wadham, 5 Dec. 1924.

<sup>11</sup> Rhodes Trust Papers 2637/1, memo. by Baker, 29 Oct. 1924; H. Baker, *Cecil Rhodes by his Architect* (1934), 22.

<sup>12</sup> A. Oswald, *Country Houses of Kent* (1933), 53; J. Newman, *The Buildings of England: West Kent and the Weald* (1969), 237.

devoted to the Secretary's (later Warden's) house and the other mainly to the library. Baker had employed a similar plan at Groote Schuur and in some of his other South African houses,<sup>13</sup> as well as at Port Lympne, Kent, built for Sir Philip Sassoon in 1911–13. But the death of Milner early in 1925 led to modifications which greatly altered the character of the building. As first envisaged, the central (hall) range was to be placed close to South Parks Road, with the two wings stretching south towards the garden of Wadham, and the main entrance in the west wing facing Parks Road. After Milner's death Baker was asked to include a room which could serve as the statesman's memorial. He therefore proposed placing the hall range further south – thus giving the building an H rather than a 'half H' plan – so as to allow the addition of a vaulted 'chapter house' fronting onto South Parks Road. Baker hoped that this would become 'a sort of shrine for memorials of statesmen who have had the great vision of the commonwealth of Nations . . . As London won't do it why should not Oxford! and then London might one day follow' – an allusion to the circular memorial cloister which Baker vainly hoped to build next to the Chapter House at Westminster Abbey.<sup>14</sup> The 'chapter house' was later transformed in Baker's mind into a domed 'Heroön' or hall of fame, circular in plan and surrounded by a corridor which would give access to the rest of the building from a new north entrance in South Parks Road; a canted bay window would meanwhile replace what had originally been intended as the main entrance in the west wing.<sup>15</sup> The final modification took place in the autumn of 1925 after an intervention by a Canadian Trustee, Dr. Rendall. The corridor around the rotunda was now abandoned and the 'hall of fame' became what it is now: a spacious Pantheon-like 'ante-hall' entered through a portico in South Parks Road.<sup>16</sup> Baker later claimed that the rotunda was 'surely not out of place in the seat of classical scholarship' and that its 'high note of impressiveness . . . would arrest the attention of all who entered there'.<sup>17</sup> The completed plans (Fig. 2) were shown to Oxford City Council, and after discreet lobbying by the Trustees they were persuaded to allow the portico to stand flush with the line of the pavement:<sup>18</sup> an arrangement which adds much to the visual pleasure of this part of Oxford.

Baker's decision to add a classical rotunda on to a fundamentally neo-vernacular structure has often been criticised. To Bauhaus-influenced contemporaries his final design must indeed have appeared inconsistent at best, an amalgam of visual clichés at worst. But considered as townscape, the building is highly successful. The portico and rotunda enliven the western end of South Parks Road without overwhelming it or attempting to compete with the nearby University Museum and Keble College. They are visually quite distinct from the rest of the building, and the Ionic columns of the portico and the shallow copper-clad dome of the rotunda provide an unexpected contrast to the mullioned windows and hipped roofs of the main block and wings, which in their turn fit easily into the surrounding landscape of lawns, trees and stone boundary walls (Fig. 3). Perhaps the best way to understand the building is to see it as a late example of the eclectic aesthetic which Baker had imbibed in Ernest George's

<sup>13</sup> D.E. Greig, *Herbert Baker in South Africa* (1970), 54, 118–19. For Groote Schuur, see also R. Gradidge, *Dream Houses: The Edwardian Ideal* (1980), 130–8.

<sup>14</sup> Rhodes Trust Papers 2637/1, 2 June 1925; Baker, *Architecture and Personalities*, 103–6.

<sup>15</sup> Rhodes Trust Papers 2637/1, 28 July 1925; file entitled 'Sir Herbert Baker' (hereafter 'Baker file'), Baker to Wylie 8 & 12 Aug. 1925. Baker had hoped to include a domed 'Heroön' in the Union Buildings at Pretoria, but it had never been built: *Architecture and Personalities*, 60.

<sup>16</sup> Rhodes Trust Papers 2637/2, 19 and 25 Oct. 1925. The word 'Heroön' was dropped at about the same time.

<sup>17</sup> *Architecture and Personalities*, 136.

<sup>18</sup> Rhodes Trust Papers, Baker file, Baker to Wylie 29 Oct. 1925.

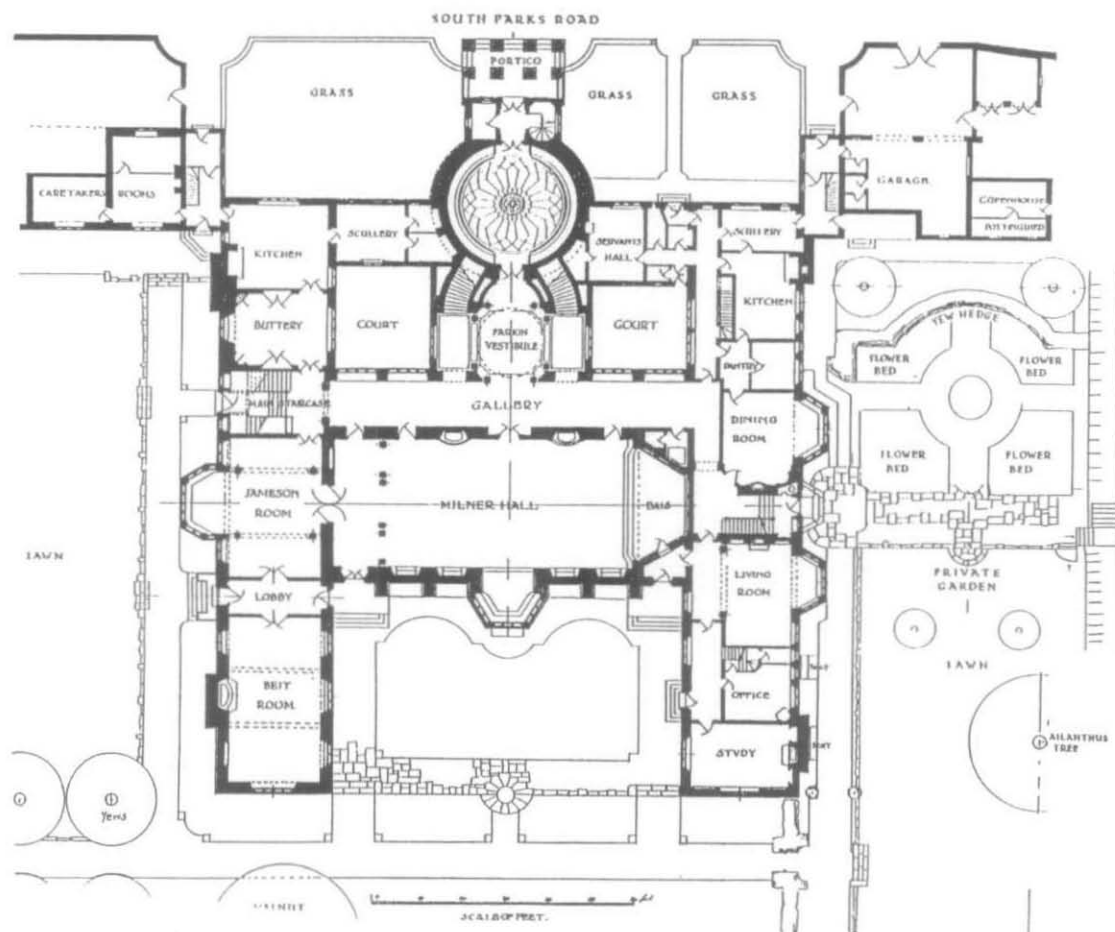


Fig. 2. Ground plan of Rhodes House, from *Cecil Rhodes and Rhodes House* (1929).

office forty years earlier. Such mixing of motifs is perhaps easier to appreciate now than it was in the heyday of architectural modernism in post-war Britain.

Rhodes House took just over two years to build, work starting in the summer of 1926 and continuing until late in 1928; the official opening was delayed until 1929.<sup>19</sup> The builders were Messrs. Martin of Northampton, whose tender was lower than those supplied by the local Oxford builders; the final contract cost was £87,367. Rhodes's love of the 'simple and elemental' may help explain Baker's choice of rubble stone as the main building material. His original inclination was to use flint on the grounds of its superior capacity for weathering.<sup>20</sup> But he had successfully used rubble stone in several of his South African houses, and after consulting the Bursar of Merton – recommended as an expert on building stones in Oxford – he settled late in 1925 for rough 'punch faced' Bladon rubble with Clipsham ashlar dressings.<sup>21</sup> Bladon rubble was first introduced to Oxford by Thomas Graham Jackson, and it has since proved much more durable than the Headington ashlar used with such disastrous long-term effect in most of Oxford's major classical buildings of the previous centuries. But Jackson's relatively smooth 'hammer dressed' stone differs from the rough walling chosen by Baker and later employed by other Oxford architects, notably Hubert Worthington and Giles Gilbert Scott. Punch-faced Bladon rubble later became the *bête noire* of writers who, like the influential planner Thomas Sharp, insisted that Oxford was essentially an ashlar city and that rough walling was both inappropriate for public buildings and, at root, sentimental, conjuring up as it did visions of vernacular farm buildings which were out of keeping with the needs of a modern university.<sup>22</sup> There is no doubt that Rhodes House conjures up something of the rural nostalgia which runs as a *leitmotiv* through much of English culture in the first half of the 20th century. But in Baker's defence it has to be said that his building stone has stood up to the elements much better than the materials employed by his modernist detractors in the 1950s and 60s, and that both it and the roofs of Gloucestershire stone slates complement the almost rural ambience of Parks Road: something for which an Arts and Crafts-trained architect like Baker had an instinctive sympathy.

The decision to move the main entrance from the west wing to the north side of the building led Baker to re-cast his plan on more classical lines than he had at first envisaged. The rooms are disposed in *Beaux Arts* fashion around two main axes: one leading from the portico through the rotunda and a vestibule to the bay window at the centre of the south wall of the hall, and the other from the main staircase in the west wing through a corridor to the Warden's house. Baker had employed a somewhat similar plan in the Governor's House in Pretoria,<sup>23</sup> and by resorting to classical principles at Rhodes House he added greatly to the amenities of the building, creating in the process one of the best-planned 20th-century buildings in Oxford. The provision of public space is notably generous by English standards, the means of access logical and clearly defined. Entering through the portico, the visitor finds himself in a confined space which opens up suddenly into the rotunda, flooded with light from windows at first-floor level (Fig. 4). This is not a very large room, but the marble cladding and the presence of engaged Doric columns at first-floor level impart an appropriate air of sleek nobility. At the far side is a lower vestibule flanked by Tuscan columns carrying segmental arches and lit from above through a lantern in a 'pendentive dome' of the kind often used by Soane. From here,

<sup>19</sup> Rhodes Trust Papers, 2637/3, 6 May 1926; Baker file, 3 May 1928 and *passim*.

<sup>20</sup> Flint was used by Baker at the Winchester War Memorial Cloister, and also at Church House, Westminster.

<sup>21</sup> Rhodes Trust Papers 2637, Baker file, Baker to Wylie 24 June & 29 July 1925; W.J. Arkell, *Oxford Stone* (1947),

117.

<sup>22</sup> T. Sharp, *Oxford Replanned* (1948), 172–5.

<sup>23</sup> Greig, *op. cit.* 123.





Fig. 3. Rhodes House from the north-west showing the rotunda and portico (Oxford City Libraries, Centre for Oxfordshire Studies).



Fig. 4. The interior of the rotunda at Rhodes House (Oxford City Libraries, Centre for Oxfordshire Studies).



staircases lead down to the cloakrooms in the basement, and straight ahead, across the transverse corridor or gallery (Fig. 5) which serves as the main subsidiary axis, is the entrance into the lofty, spacious hall. There are few more impressive sequences of internal spaces in Oxford.

If the plan of Rhodes House is fundamentally classical, the internal decorative treatment, with the exception of the rotunda and vestibule, is not. The hall, dedicated to Milner, has the normal plan and layout of an Oxford collegiate hall, with its high table at one end and screen (of Tuscan columns supporting a wooden 'entablature') at the other, and the timber roof is of a type which Baker had often seen and studied in his youth: arch-braced, with the arches resting on corbels and supporting collar beams from which crown-posts rise to the apex. This kind of roof structure can be found at the 14th-century Nurstead Court (Kent), belonging to Baker's wife's family; there is also an open timber roof in the so-called Yeoman's House at Sole Street, Cobham, which Baker restored and gave – along with his own house, Owletts – to the National Trust, of which Philip Kerr, secretary to the Rhodes Trustees, was an enthusiastic and generous supporter.<sup>24</sup> In accordance with Arts and Crafts precepts, the timbers are pegged together in medieval fashion and their surfaces are left rough to show the marks of the tools. There is a similar roof in the library (Fig. 6), a long, low room taking up most of the first floor of the west wing and reached by a wooden staircase of 17th-century type, with decorated newel posts and carved balusters. The library bookcases, of lighter wood than the roof beams, project at right angles from the walls in traditional collegiate fashion; the desks and chairs were based on 17th-century models and were designed in Baker's office. Nowhere in Oxford is the spirit of the Arts and Crafts movement more pervasively present, and the mood is reinforced by the beautiful Burne Jones tapestry of the 'Romance of the Rose' which Baker presented to Rhodes House, and which now hangs near the foot of the library stairs.

Baker had a penchant for architectural symbolism, and Rhodes House proclaims several quite specific messages. Most of these relate to the British Empire. Classical architecture had strongly imperialist connotations for Baker, as it did for most of his contemporaries; one of Rhodes's pronouncements was that 'through art Pericles taught the lazy Athenians to believe in Empire'.<sup>25</sup> Equally, for the country-bred Baker, the architectural styles of pre-industrial rural England conveyed patriotic and nostalgic associations which perhaps escape today's more cynical generation. The building is also filled with references to South Africa, from the ship called 'Good Hope' on the bronze main doorway to the curious 'Zimbabwe birds' which perch above the dome and on the newel-posts of the main staircase. These birds are based on carvings found in the ruins of Great Zimbabwe in what was then Rhodesia, and for Rhodes they represented 'the link between the older civilization derived from the North or the East, and the savage barbarism of Southern and central Africa before the advent of the European'.<sup>26</sup> Some of the internal woodwork, like the elaborate wooden carving in the fanlight over the door into the hall, harks back to Groote Schuur, and beyond that to Flemish and Dutch carvings which Baker had sketched in his youth.<sup>27</sup>

Baker believed that the impact of architecture was heightened by words as well as symbols; hence the decision to carve one of Rhodes's favourite quotations from Aristotle around the dome in the rotunda, and to place a Latin inscription composed by the Rhodes Trustee Dr.

<sup>24</sup> Baker had published drawings of Nurstead Court and other local houses in *Archaeologia Cantiana*, vols. 16–17 (1886–7).

<sup>25</sup> *Architecture and Personalities*, 178; Baker, *Cecil Rhodes by his Architect*, 10.

<sup>26</sup> [Anon.], *Cecil Rhodes and Rhodes House* (1929), 16; the description of the building was written by Baker himself.

<sup>27</sup> Greig, *op. cit.* 23.



Fig. 5. The ground-floor gallery at Rhodes House (Oxford City Libraries, Centre for Oxfordshire Studies).



Fig. 6. The interior of the library at Rhodes House soon after completion (Oxford City Libraries, Centre for Oxfordshire Studies).

Rendall on the balustrade of the south front. Like many men of his background and generation, Baker was a lover of the classics and of the English Romantic poets. Lutyens believed, however, that Baker's essentially literary approach to architecture stifled his creativity, remarking on one occasion: 'God asked Adam to name the animals after he had created them. Baker names his animals first and then starts creating around a name and words'; and on another: 'I do not think he treats architecture as seriously as I do. He makes her the handmaiden of sentiment'.<sup>28</sup> The charge of sentimentality can never be entirely dismissed when looking at Baker's architecture – it is perhaps what makes him a lesser architect than Lutyens – but at Rhodes House sentiment is for the most part subordinated to the demands of the architectural programme and the need to proclaim an ideal in which Baker believed passionately. It is this which makes the building an impressive and moving one, even in an age which has seen the fall of the British Empire and the all-but-total rejection of the values it proclaimed.

Rhodes House has always been a relatively under-used building. The quasi-ambassadorial east wing, with its eight bathrooms, could be safely entrusted to the Warden (as he was now called) in his capacity as host of the visiting Great and Good. The library soon became an essential resort for scholars and students of colonial history. But for the rest of the building – the rotunda, the hall, designed to seat 200 and larger than the halls of many colleges, the spacious rooms on the ground floor of the west wing – there was no obvious use, except at the time of the annual Rhodes Dinner which Baker assiduously attended in his declining years, remarking on one occasion that the building and its scholars 'always carry me back into the idealism that Rhodes first inspired me with in my youth'.<sup>29</sup> Schemes were mooted between the wars to use the building for training African civil servants or for housing visiting scholars; in one such scheme, Baker and Philip Kerr planned to build a courtyard to the west – part of the garden – in which the scholars could be accommodated. But nothing came of them, and the building has, except for occasional bouts of activity like the visit in 1994 of the current President of the United States, a former Rhodes Scholar, enjoyed a somewhat sleepy existence, removed from the busy centres of Oxford's civic and academic life. That is a large part of its charm, and it is perhaps not too much to hope that something of this unworldly quality will survive through whatever changes lie in store for the building in the future.

#### CAMPION HALL

Campion Hall is a product of the Catholic revival in late 19th and early 20th-century Oxford. Roman Catholics had been legally able to take Oxford degrees ever since Emancipation in 1829, but the Hierarchy barred them from attending Oxford and Cambridge until 1895. An influx of priests and members of the religious orders followed the relaxation of the ban, and in 1896 the Society of Jesus established a hall for six undergraduates known first as Clarke's and from 1900 as Pope's Hall (the name taken from the Master, not the pontiff), in a house of 17th-century origin belonging to St. John's College at 11 St. Giles.<sup>30</sup> The Society later purchased the freehold of the nearby 13–15 St. Giles, on the other side of the Lamb and Flag inn, as an annexe, and in 1918 the establishment became a permanent private hall of the university, with its own governing body and corporate identity; it was then re-named Campion

<sup>28</sup> Mary Lutyens, *op. cit.* 116, 194.

<sup>29</sup> Rhodes Trust Papers, Baker file, 25 Nov. 1935.

<sup>30</sup> *Oxford Magazine*, 28 May 1936, 628–9. The house is now called Middleton Hall, and has been incorporated into the college.

Hall after the 16th-century Jesuit martyr Edmund Campion, who had been one of the first undergraduates at St. John's College.<sup>31</sup>

Only sixteen undergraduates could be accommodated in the enlarged premises, and negotiations for a new or expanded site began soon after the end of the First World War, dragging on sporadically and inconclusively throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. Sites examined included two of those considered and rejected for Rhodes House: Black Hall, further north in St. Giles, and a site at Holywell Mill owned by Merton College, for which Giles Gilbert Scott, himself a Roman Catholic architect, produced designs. But, with the lease on 11 St. Giles due to expire in 1936, and with St. John's refusing to renew it, the Master, Fr. Ernest Vignaux, finally opted in 1932 to build a new Hall on the site of the annexe at 13–15 St. Giles, having already approached the architect E. Bower Norris, designer of several churches in the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Birmingham, to supply designs in 'a conventional Gothic style' (Fig. 7).<sup>32</sup>

Fr. Vignaux retired as Master of Campion Hall in 1933. He was described by his successor Martin D'Arcy (1888–1976) as 'not only inexperienced, but shy and anxious'. This was certainly not something which could be said of Fr. D'Arcy. A leading figure in inter-war Catholicism, he has been described as 'the foremost English apologist for Roman Catholicism', responsible for receiving Evelyn Waugh and many other converts into the church.<sup>33</sup> Encouraged by the Bursar of St. John's to abandon plans for building on the existing site, D'Arcy showed Norris's designs to some of his numerous acquaintances, including the manager of Claridge's, who had sent his son to Stonyhurst, where D'Arcy had once taught. He also showed them to Frances, Lady Horner, the *châtelaine* of Mells Manor (Somerset), who, though 'a tremendously grand lady and one of the stalwart Protestants of her time',<sup>34</sup> numbered among her friends Evelyn Waugh and other members of the Catholic *beau monde*. She was also one of Edwin Lutyens's most faithful and long-standing patrons, and it was she who suggested that D'Arcy should seek his advice.<sup>35</sup> As D'Arcy rather ingenuously put it:

[Lutyens] had a very low opinion of the plans, and as evidence for his judgment, he brought out an immense album full of photographs of the leading houses and colleges in England . . . I asked Lutyens whether he would come and have a talk with [Norris] and help him to improve his designs. Lutyens agree to do this, but when I mentioned the matter to [Norris] he would not hear of it. I was wrong to propose the meeting, and I had thought that [Norris] would be delighted to pick the brains of perhaps the most distinguished English architect of the time, but I had overlooked the sensitivity and prickliness of men like [Norris].<sup>36</sup>

D'Arcy then asked Lutyens whether he could recommend a good young architect in Norris's place:

To my surprise he answered that if it came to that, namely wanting a new architect, why did I not ask him? "But you are far too expensive", I said, and his reply to that was that he had no building of his own in Oxford, that he would like to do one, and that he would charge me the minimum. This was very generous of him, and

<sup>31</sup> Campion Hall Papers, envelope entitled 'History of Campion Hall'; C. Hibbert (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Oxford* (1988), 67, 363.

<sup>32</sup> Campion Hall Papers, file entitled 'Negotiations for Site'; typescript notes at Campion Hall by Fr. Martin D'Arcy on the new Campion Hall (hereafter 'D'Arcy typescript'), p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> *D.N.B.* 1971–80, 206–8.

<sup>34</sup> W.S. Abell (ed.), *Laughter and the Love of Friends: Reminiscences of . . . Martin Cyril D'Arcy*, SJ (Westminster, Maryland 1991), 50. I owe this reference to Timothy O'Sullivan.

<sup>35</sup> For Lady Horner, see J. Brown, *Lutyens and the Edwardians* (1996), 107–10, 220–2.

<sup>36</sup> Campion Hall Papers, D'Arcy typescript, p. 2. The last two sentences are contradicted by a memorandum from D'Arcy's deputy Fr. Walker at Campion Hall, in which it is stated that Lutyens met Norris informally.



Fig. 7. E. Bower Norris's design for Campion Hall, 1930 (Campion Hall archives).

I am sure he meant what he said, but I was glad that I had Lady Horner to check extravagance. She had early on given him the chance as a young man, and so could control Lutyens and watch that he did not land me into debt or too expensive ventures.<sup>37</sup>

D'Arcy and Lutyens now began to look for a new site and settled on one on the south side of Brewer Street, just outside the old city wall, part of which survives opposite as the southern boundary of Pembroke College. This site consisted of a 16th or 17th-century house called Micklem Hall, belonging to Hall's Brewery, and a garage belonging to St. Aldate's parish; the hall, as D'Arcy subsequently recorded with obvious pleasure, had been home to several well-connected Christ Church undergraduates, including the Earl of Halifax and possibly even Edward VII.

Lutyens was confirmed as architect in April 1934, whereupon Norris demanded payment of 7½% of the estimated cost of his proposed building in St. Giles, on the grounds that he had already made working drawings: something which the Campion Hall fathers were able to disprove. He also attacked Lutyens for professional misconduct by filching the commission from him, but at an official hearing held by the Royal Institute of British Architects in November 1934 the claim was not upheld, and Norris had to content himself with a fee of 1½% for his preliminary designs. It was at about the time of the hearing, according to D'Arcy, that Lutyens made his famous quip about Norris's design: 'Queen Anne in front, Mary Ann behind',<sup>38</sup> though like several of D'Arcy's *obiter dicta* this needs to be taken with a pinch of salt, since Norris's design was not 'Queen Anne' but Gothic.

By 1934 Lutyens had reached the peak of his profession. Like Baker, he had discovered the expressive power of monumental classical architecture before the First World War, and he went on to design some of the most original and impressive of all 20th-century classical buildings: the Viceroy's House at New Delhi, the Memorial Arch to the Missing of the First World War at Thiepval on the Somme, and above all the magnificent Roman Catholic cathedral in Liverpool, begun in 1933 but never, alas, completed.<sup>39</sup> But, like Baker, he never lost sight of his Arts and Crafts upbringing, and it was this aspect of his genius which came to the fore at Campion Hall.<sup>40</sup>

Lutyens's plans met with a mixed reception by D'Arcy's superiors in the Society of Jesus. The Father Provincial praised 'the pretty Lutyensian picture full of good traditional English features - he's even worked his love of Greek entases into it', but regretted that the design was not 'so nicely medieval as ours was! but what can you expect from a pagan, heretic enough to build that Liverpool monstrosity he's contemplating'.<sup>41</sup> D'Arcy succeeded nevertheless in converting the sceptics, and an appeal was launched for funds early in 1934. D'Arcy's superiors insisted that an extra staircase should be inserted behind the refectory in the east range, so Lutyens produced a new set of plans in September 1934, and it was on the basis of these plans that the foundation stone was laid on 25 November of that year.<sup>42</sup> Evelyn Waugh celebrated the occasion by writing his biography of Edmund Campion, dedicated to D'Arcy, the profits of which were made over to Campion Hall.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> A model of the cathedral, made in 1934 and preserved in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, is illustrated in Hussey, *Life of Lutyens*, 535.

<sup>40</sup> He apparently believed that his celebrated frivolity had 'rather shocked the professors': A.S.G. Butler, *The Architecture of Sir Edwin Lutyens*, ii (1950), 49.

<sup>41</sup> Campion Hall Papers, Lutyens letters 24 April 1934.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 23 June 1934; plans at Campion Hall. The builders were the local firm of Benfield and Loxley.

<sup>43</sup> C. Sykes, *Evelyn Waugh* (1975), 145.



Lutyens took a close interest in the progress of the building, visiting the site several times and maintaining a detailed correspondence with the Bursar and Senior Tutor, Fr. Leslie Walker, who exercised a meticulous and at times almost obsessive control over the work. Several changes were made as work progressed, and most of the internal details were not decided until well after the main structural work was under way. Relations between the two men were strained from time to time; in May 1935, for instance, Lutyens remarked that he would 'bring an olive branch as usual [on his next visit to Oxford] but you must provide the olives'. But they remained on friendly terms, and Walker told him three months later: 'I do appreciate the immense trouble you are taking and the beautiful building you are putting up. Everybody praises it, even the coal man, who is quite enthusiastic about your coal-shutes and the cellars'.<sup>44</sup>

The site of Campion Hall was a much more difficult one than that of Rhodes House. Not only was it smaller; it was also hemmed in by other buildings – H.W. Moore's Christ Church Cathedral School to the east, a row of houses to the west – and the main frontage faced north across a narrow street to a higher building (Pembroke College chapel) and to the remnant of the old city wall. Part of the site, moreover, Micklem Hall, was an historic building, and pressure was successfully applied by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the recently-founded Oxford Preservation Trust during the course of 1935 to make sure that, contrary to Lutyens's original plans, the stuccoed facade remained largely unaltered (there was never any question of destroying the panelled interiors, which have always served as common rooms).<sup>45</sup> This was something which Baker, not to mention architects of earlier generations, had not had to face.

On this unpromising parcel of ground Lutyens was faced with the task of providing accommodation for 25 people, both residents and guests, lecture rooms, a chapel, library and dining room, together with service quarters, in a style 'worthy of the tradition of a great university', for a cost of £36,478: less than half that of Rhodes House, and also, despite Lutyens's reputation as an expensive architect, less than Norris's estimate for a smaller building.<sup>46</sup> The nature of the site virtually dictated that the building should be L-shaped, with the bulk of the accommodation – library, refectory, kitchens and most of the bedrooms – placed in a three-storied building occupying the eastern portion of the narrow site between Pembroke Street to the north and Rose Place to the south (Fig. 8). Contrary to universal collegiate practice, the kitchen and service rooms were placed in a basement in the east range, thus allowing most of the ground floor to be devoted to the library and refectory or dining hall, both of them facing west over the garden; the placing of the kitchen in the basement necessitated the employment of an electronically powered ejector system similar to one used at Selfridges in Oxford Street, London.<sup>47</sup> The north range, flanking Brewer Street, is shorter, and comprises the existing Micklem Hall, embellished with a gable by Lutyens, and an eastward extension containing the main entrance and a lecture room, with the chapel on the first floor above: an unusual, though not quite unique, placing of an Oxford collegiate chapel.<sup>48</sup> The main staircase is at the junction of the two ranges. In contriving his plan Lutyens encountered several problems which Baker did not face at Rhodes House. The presence of the low-ceilinged Micklem Hall meant that there were inevitable discrepancies in the floor levels of the old and newer parts

<sup>44</sup> Campion Hall Papers, file of Lutyens correspondence, 23 May & 15 July 1935.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* site file; Lutyens's first design, which illustrated an appeal leaflet put out early in 1934, shows the north front of Micklem Hall refaced in stone.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* appeal leaflet and memo. from Fr. Walker in site file; Lutyens letters, 8 May 1934, 10 Jan. 1935.

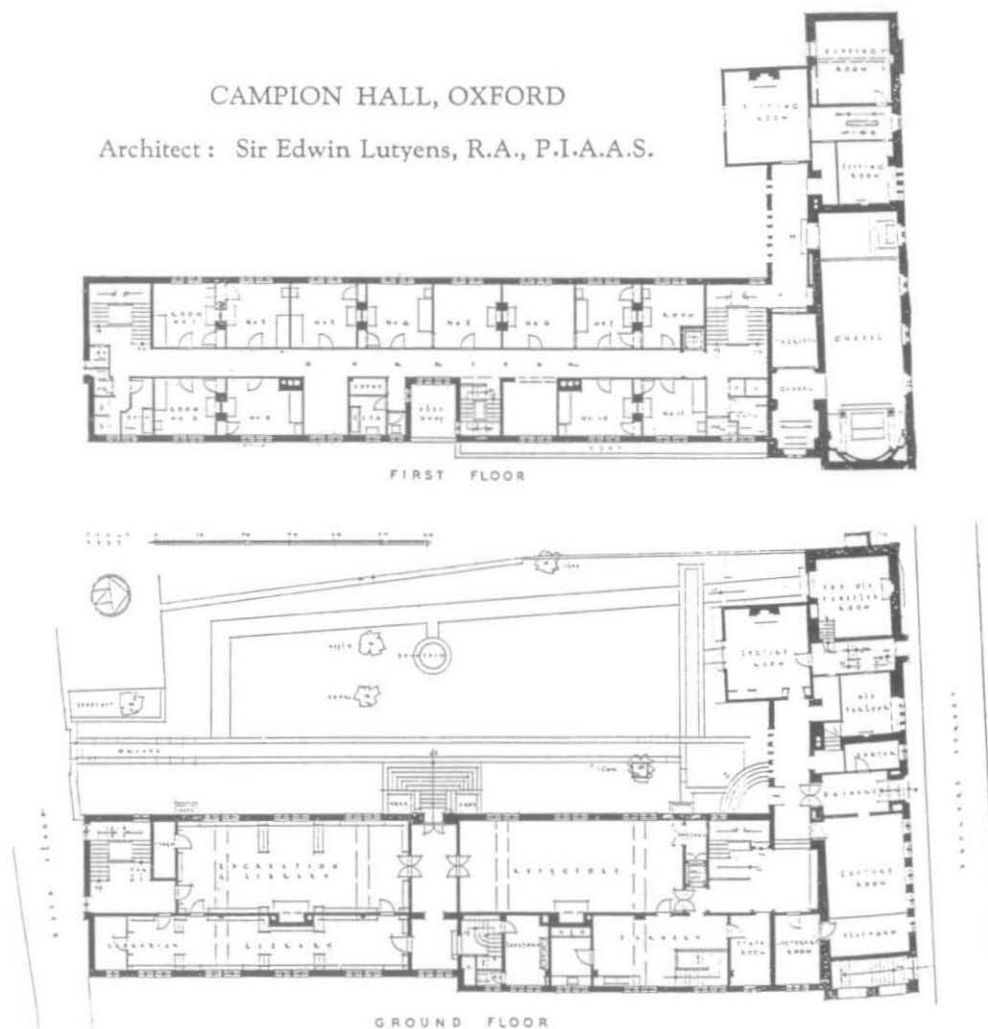
<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* Lutyens letters, 8 May 1934.

<sup>48</sup> The 17th-century chapel of St. Mary Hall – now part of Oriel College – was also placed on the first floor.



## CAMPION HALL, OXFORD

Architect: Sir Edwin Lutyens, R.A., P.I.A.A.S.

Fig. 8. Ground plan and first floor plan of Campion Hall (*The Architect and Building News*, 26 June 1936).

of the building; and because the accommodation had to be disposed around the north and east boundaries of the site, it was impossible to indulge in the spacious classical planning which Baker had employed at Rhodes House. The overall effect is therefore additive and intimate rather than monumental: more a modern recreation of a medieval academic hall than an embodiment of a grandiose idea.

Like Baker, Lutyens chose Bladon rubble as his building material, and his reasons were similar: just as Rhodes House has to blend in with the rubble-stone walls of Wadham College garden, Campion Hall faces the section of the city wall which was incorporated into Pembroke College. As at Rhodes House, classical ideas are incorporated into a fundamentally neo-vernacular architectural idiom rooted in the Arts and Crafts-inspired houses with which Lutyens had first made his reputation. But there is little of the seductive prettiness of those engaging buildings, or indeed of Rhodes House, and the stone is of the 'hammer-dressed' variety employed so often by T.G. Jackson, rather than the supposedly 'sentimental' punch-faced type employed by Baker and Worthington. Indeed, far from being 'sentimental', the north or entrance front of Campion Hall announces itself almost brutally with its heavy and austere mass of stonework broken up only by square-headed and plate-traceried windows – the latter lighting the chapel – and by the deeply inset rounded entrance doorway surmounted by a coat of arms. Echoing the garden entrance to Deanery Garden, Sonning (Berkshire), one of Lutyens's most important early houses, this is the most impressive single feature of the exterior. The north range (Fig. 9) can only be seen from very close up, and on approaching it from the east the eye is struck first by the three-sided and windowless east end of the chapel, with its conical roof, and a pair of round arches on the ground floor. Here Lutyens allowed the function of the building to dictate its form, and in so doing created one of the most striking pieces of 20th-century street architecture in Oxford.

From the east end of the chapel the main residential range stretches south alongside the Cathedral School playground, plainer and more conventional in character than the north range – Fr. Walker called it 'a barracks pure and simple'.<sup>49</sup> Visual relief is provided by the mullioned and transomed windows, and by the plain triangular gables at each end, echoing Lutyens's earlier Benson Wing at Magdalene College, Cambridge and, closer to home, the former Wolsey Almshouses in St. Aldate's, Oxford (now the Master's Lodging of Pembroke College). The main front faces west on to the garden, and here the most striking feature is the central doorway (Fig. 10), placed between the refectory and the library and framed by pilasters of the so-called Delhi Order, created by Lutyens for the Viceroy's House at New Delhi and also used in his last great classical house, Middleton Park (Oxfordshire), built for the Earl of Jersey in 1937; with its small carved bells at the top of the capitals, the order may have been intended to allude here to the early work of St. Francis Xavier and other Jesuits in India.<sup>50</sup> But despite this hint of the exotic – comparable to the South African allusions at Rhodes House – the overall effect of the east range, as of the garden elevations of Rhodes House, is tranquil and unassertive.

Like Baker at Rhodes House, Lutyens remained true to the Arts and Crafts tradition by devoting great care to the internal detailing of Campion Hall. Not only are all the architectural details his; so too are the fittings, down even to the movable stairs in the library and the ingenious napkin holder in the refectory. He was, as he told Walker in July 1935, 'rather fussy about curtain rods and hangings', and this attention to detail pervades the whole building.<sup>51</sup> According to D'Arcy:

<sup>49</sup> Campion Hall Papers, Lutyens letters 9 Feb. 1934.

<sup>50</sup> *Country Life*, lxxix (1936), 679.

<sup>51</sup> Campion Hall Papers, Lutyens letters 10 July 1935.



Fig. 9. The north range and part of the east range of Campion Hall from the eastern end of Brewer Street (Campion Hall archives).



Fig. 10. The central doorway in the east range of Campion Hall.

'Every detail . . . came out of Lutyens' fertile brain. The door handles were some distance from the side, so that a special spiky instrument was needed to pierce the wood. The mantelpiece in every room had a wood design of its own. The clocks were in accordance with the dimensions of the room, but even the fingers of the clock were specially designed'.<sup>52</sup> The overall mood is one of simple comfort, in contrast to the rather spartan grandeur of the older colleges. Both the refectory and the library are intimate and domestic rooms, long and low-ceilinged in accordance with Lutyens's own preferences; after lowering the height of the refectory ceiling, Lutyens told Walker in May 1935: 'The low ceiling is infinitely better. The ceiling as it is will eventually get on your nerves and you will cease loving me'.<sup>53</sup> Lack of funds meant that the refectory was never appropriately decorated, but more care and expense was devoted to the fitting up of the wood-panelled library – used from time to time as a common room – where Lutyens designed the bookcases and the bolection-moulded stone fireplace with a wooden clock of unusual design above. Woodwork of excellent quality can also be seen in the staircases, jointed with pegs as at Rhodes House, and of broadly 17th-century type, though with characteristic Lutyens mannerisms like the curious upturned bells which adorn the newel posts of the staircase leading from the main entrance in the north range to the chapel.

The most impressive interior at Campion Hall is the chapel (Fig. 11). Plain, aisleless and barrel-vaulted, with an apsidal sanctuary at the east end and a small Lady Chapel to the south, it has something of the air of a private oratory, removed from the clamour of the outside world. As in England's finest Roman Catholic church, the cathedral at Westminster, the pervasive presence of the round arch imparts a subtly ultramontane feeling. The chapel is entered from the west through an ante-chapel separated from the main part of the building by a wooden screen which supports electric strip lights in Baroque frames. Facing the entrance there is an altar in memory of the celebrated 'Sligger' Urquhart, a Roman Catholic don at Balliol College immortalised – as was D'Arcy – in many memoirs of the period, and above it is a painting of St. Thomas More by Daphne Pollen, for whose sister Lutyens had designed a house in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea.<sup>54</sup> The seating in the main part of the chapel faces forwards and not inwards, as in most college chapels (though Butterfield had done the same at Keble College 70 years earlier), and the pew ends rest on bases painted bright red for no very obvious reason (Lutyens told Walker: 'The red is my blood! you so love to tap!!').<sup>55</sup> Lutyens's celebrated wit comes close to self-parody in the electric light fittings, encumbered with red tassels reminiscent of those on cardinals' hats; these may allude to the fact that Jesuits were – and are – not expected to aspire to English bishoprics, but they may also reflect the friendly relationship between Campion Hall and nearby Christ Church. After these frivolities Sir Frank Brangwyn's Stations of the Cross, reproduced by a lithographic process, instil the appropriate note of seriousness, and Lutyens's superb wooden baldachino over the main altar, its arched canopy held up by four columns of the Delhi order, terminates the vista with complete assurance.<sup>56</sup>

After some delays the building was finished in the spring of 1936, the east wing having been occupied since the autumn of the previous year, and an opening ceremony was held on 26 June, attended *inter alia* by Lutyens, Lady Horner, Evelyn Waugh, the celebrated Catholic apologist Ronald Knox, and the Duke of Berwick and Alba, a descendant of James II.<sup>57</sup> Six years later, in the middle of the Second World War, Lutyens produced a grandiose scheme –

<sup>52</sup> Typescript notes on Campion Hall, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Campion Hall Papers, Lutyens letters, 21 May 1935.

<sup>54</sup> *Country Life*, lxxix (1936), 680.

<sup>55</sup> Campion Hall Papers, Lutyens letters 20 Jan. 1936.

<sup>56</sup> The Lady Chapel was decorated with an attractive set of murals by the now largely forgotten artist Charles Mahoney in 1941–52: J. Christian (ed.), *The Last Romantics* (1989), 196–7.

<sup>57</sup> Brown, *Lutyens and the Victorians*, 226–7.



Fig. 11. The east end of the chapel at Campion Hall c. 1950. The tapestry behind the altar has since been removed (Oxford City Libraries, Centre for Oxfordshire Studies).

one of the last of his life – for a new west range stretching south from Micklem Hall and a south range alongside Rose Place, where he had earlier designed a garden gateway (Fig. 12). With a magnificent new hall and a much larger chapel, together with accommodation for 28 more residents, these buildings would have turned Campion Hall into a college of the traditional Oxford kind, with buildings disposed around a quadrangle and a cloister.<sup>58</sup> D'Arcy hoped that the enlarged hall would become 'a kind of centre for sabbatical years for the great scholars of the Society from all over the world ... like the Institute of Advanced Studies at

<sup>58</sup> A plan and some elevations are preserved at Campion Hall, and there are more plans in the drawings collection of the Royal Institute of British Architects: M. Richardson, *Catalogue of Drawings in the R.I.B.A.: Lutyens* (1973), 42 & Plate 85.

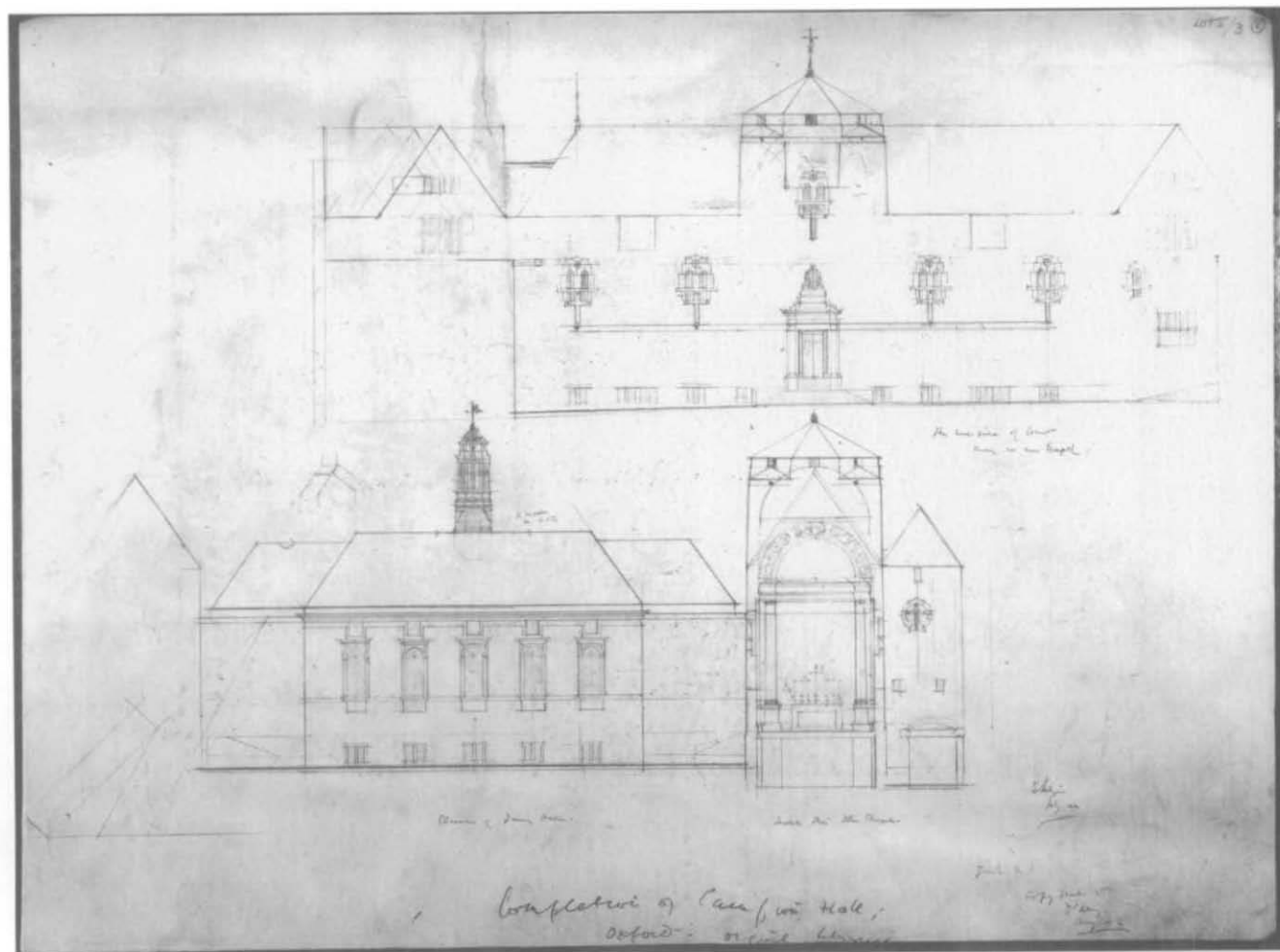


Fig. 12. Sir Edwin Lutyens's unexecuted designs of 1942 for new south and west ranges at Campion Hall (British Architectural Library, RIBA, London).

Princeton'.<sup>59</sup> But funds were lacking and, with Catholic triumphalism falling out of fashion in the post-war era, the plans were quietly shelved, a much plainer structure echoing Lutyens's east range being built alongside Rose Place to the designs of another architect in 1958. As it is, the original Campion Hall continues to serve its original purpose with admirable efficiency, and still stands largely untouched as the only Oxford building designed by the man who was arguably the greatest English architect of the 20th century.

#### CONCLUSION

Built at a time when many architects were ostentatiously cutting all obvious links with the past, Campion Hall and Rhodes House appeal to two of the most profound human impulses: the search for meaning and the capacity for memory. Both buildings were designed by architects nearing the end of their careers, and both are imbued with a sense of the past, yet both proclaim ideals which extend far beyond the parochial academic concerns of Oxford. These ideals still trouble many *bien pensant* minds, which may explain the slight sense of unease with which the two buildings – especially Rhodes House – are sometimes viewed in Oxford: an unease which goes beyond quibbles about the merits or otherwise of Bladon rubble. In the relativist cultural climate of the last decade of the millennium, buildings like Rhodes House and Campion Hall can easily be made to appear like echoes of a vanished age, irrelevant even in their own time. Yet in other respects they now seem less dated than many of the much-lauded university buildings of the 1950s and 60s. While the maintenance bills for these modernist dinosaurs rise inexorably, Rhodes House and Campion Hall continue to fulfil their functions efficiently and unostentatiously, bringing pleasure both to those who regularly use them and to the small numbers of architectural enthusiasts who bother to visit them. Perhaps there is a message here for the Oxford of the 1990s.

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<sup>59</sup> Abell, *Laughter and the Love of Friends*, 55–6.