'Rooms for the Torture and Shame of Scholars': The New Examination Schools and the Architecture of Reform

By William Whyte

SUMMARY

In the twenty years between 1867 and 1887 the University of Oxford was convulsed by debates about a building. The New Examination Schools was one of the most important structures erected in the city for a hundred years. Certainly, it was the most expensive. Regarded by contemporaries as a great triumph of late Victorian architecture, the New Examination Schools has been underrated by most modern scholars. This has meant that the implications of the Schools for the history of architecture and of education have been missed. As this study seeks to show, the Schools was a battleground for competing ideas about Oxford. The style of the building and its purpose were hotly contested as part of a wider debate about the university's future. By re-examining the campaign to erect new Schools, and exploring contemporary reception to the building, a new understanding of its role can be offered. In both its form and its function, its style and its use, the New Examination Schools was seen as a symbol of the reformed university. Only in this context can its importance be properly understood.

Oxford's New Examination Schools (1876-82) was once described as 'a place which few Oxford men have entered save under compulsion, and of which when entered, they have never studied the artistic merits'.[1] This was an accurate description in 1947, and the indifference expressed then remains active to this day. Remarkably little has been written on the Schools: the University of Oxford's biggest, grandest, and most expensive building in the 19th century; the 'largest job of these years of large jobs'.[2] Certainly, no sustained attempt has been made to analyze its importance. Rather, attention has remained fixed on two earlier edifices: Woodward and Deane's University Museum (1855-60), and Butterfield's Keble College (1868-82).[3] This is a shame – and a mistake. For the New Examination Schools is an important building, both architecturally and socially. It was the first great success for its designer, T.G. Jackson, the start of a career which would see him become the dominant influence on Oxford's architecture. It was the first non-Gothic structure erected in the city for a generation: an idea which seemed a 'profanation' to contemporary commentators.[4] In

[1] L. Rice-Oxley, *Oxford Renowned* (3rd edn. 1947), 30.

[2] There are two exceptions: J. Bettley, 'T.G. Jackson and the Examination Schools', *Oxf. Art Jnl.* 6:1 (1983), 57-66; R. Wilcock, *The Building of Oxford University Examination Schools, 1876-1882* (1983). These, however, offer little analysis or contextual comment. H. Colvin, *Unbuilt Oxford* (1983), 141-7 offers a more reliable short introduction. P. Howell in R. Whiting, *Oxford, Studies in the History of a University Town* (1993), 68-71 and in M.G. Brock and M.C. Curthoys, *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. vii (2000), 748-9, sets the Schools in its architectural context. See also J. Sherwood and N. Pevsner, *Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (1974), 265.

[3] H.M. and K.D. Vernon, *A History of the Oxford Museum* (1909); H.W. Acland and J. Ruskin, *The Oxford Museum* (1859); E. Blau, *Ruskinian Gothic* (1989); T. Garnham, *Oxford Museum* (1992); F. O'Dwyer, *The Architecture of Deane and Woodward* (1997), ch. 5; P. Thompson, *William Butterfield* (1971).

[4] W. Whyte, 'T.G. Jackson and the Rhetoric of Education: "the maker of modern Oxford"' (Oxford Univ. unpubl. M.St. thesis, 1998); J. Mordaunt Crook, 'T.G. Jackson and the Cult of Eclecticism', in H. Searing (ed.), *In Search of Modern Architecture* (1982); *British Almanac* (1860), 245.

its use and its appearance, it embodied the late Victorian reform of the university. This was, of course, precisely what it was intended to do. The story of the New Schools is the story of Oxford's reform – a powerful example of the often under-rated links between architecture and ideology; design and social change.

It is this wider context that has been ignored by many previous writers. In part this simply reflects their differing preoccupations. For those interested in the institutional development of the university, the architectural context seems irrelevant. W.R. Ward is typical in dismissing the battle over the New Schools simply as 'a comic chapter in the history of university patronage'.[5] Architectural historians, by contrast, have tended to ignore the institutional influences on the Schools. Described as a monument to late Victorian 'progressive eclecticism', the purpose of the building has been lost sight of and often disregarded.[6] Yet only by situating the Schools within its architectural and institutional context can a true picture of its genesis be conceived. The battle over the building – over its purpose and its style – was part of a much wider war. Oxford in the 19th century was divided into competing factions, each with its own ideas about the future of the university.[7] Although the issues and the people changed, the argument about Oxford's purpose never went away, and architecture was a critical aspect of this debate.

Buildings were a battle ground, a field in which ideas, ideologies and identities could be contested. Architecture was never neutral – and style was a crucial part of its importance. And so the Ashmolean Museum (1841-5) was built by C.R. Cockerell in an assertive neo-classical style: its Greek, Roman and Renaissance elements providing an eminently suitable home for the muses.[8] The Martyrs' Memorial (1841-3) was similarly symbolic, representing an attempt by evangelicals to confront and defeat the Tractarian movement.[9] Just as controversial – although for very different reasons – was the Oxford Museum (1855-60). The very model of a modern scientific institution; built at a time when religion and science were increasingly seen as rivals, this was a deeply divisive institution. Its architecture, though, was intended to disguise its radical purpose. It was designed to harmonise with 'the collegiate associations of Oxford'; and far from adopting a radical modernism, its founders chose a style 'best suited to the general architectural character of medieval Oxford'.[10] The growing schism between science and religion was also consciously bridged. Over the entrance of the museum was carved an angel holding an open book and three living cells. As Lionel Muirhead recalled, it signified the desire of the founders to 'bring future generations of men to the study of the open book of life under the guidance of a higher power'.[11] Each of these projects was different, but all shared a similar set of assumptions. Buildings were presumed to carry meaning; in their style and their ornamentation, they were as much symbols as they were places to live and to work.[12] Form, in that sense, was also function.

The battles that raged around buildings changed with time, of course. At Balliol in 1843, it was fear of a resurgent Catholicism that drove the reaction against Augustus Pugin's

5 M.C. Curthoys, 'The Examination System', in M.G. Brock and M.C. Curthoys, *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. vi (1997), 340; W.R. Ward, *Victorian Oxford* (1965), 292.

6 M.W. Brooks, *John Ruskin and Victorian Architecture* (1989), 261-5 and Bettley, op. cit. note 2; J. Mordaunt Crook, *The Dilemma of Style* (1987), 183.

7 See Ward, op. cit. note 5, and also *Hist. Univ. Oxf.* vi.

8 J. Mordaunt Crook, *The British Museum* (1979), 28.

9 Colvin, op. cit. note 2, pp. 120-1.

10 J.B. Atlay, *Sir Henry Wentworth Acland: a memoir* (1903), 207; Acland, op. cit. note 3, p. 28.

11 Quoted in Atlay, op. cit. note 10, p. 219.

12 G.L. Hersey, *High Victorian Gothic: a study in associationism* (1972).

rebuilding of the college.[13] In 1854, it was opposition to unscriptural science that led one divine to attack the Oxford Museum as a 'cockatrice's den'.[14] Keble College was attacked both for its appearance and its purpose. Butterfield's bricky building was condemned for its colour, its style, and its fabric: 'Keble will probably look rather well in about a thousand years,' observed one writer. But these aspects were only the external features of the High Church college's idiosyncratic ethos.[15] In this, as in many other cases, architecture formed the focus of a much wider debate: the question of Oxford's place in society, its purposes, position and power. It was a debate that never ended, and which dominated university life. The dons of Oxford, as Leslie Stephen observed, always seemed to be 'indulging in battles royal'.[16]

Broadly, three main parties contested Oxford's identity. The largest of these groups was made up of the academic liberals: members of the so-called 'party of progress'.[17] Their leader was Benjamin Jowett, who would become master of Balliol in 1871. He had observed that 'I should like to govern the world through my pupils', and he came very close to achieving his goal.[18] He and his allies focused on the importance of undergraduate teaching, and on making Oxford the nursery for Britain's future leaders. The university was to expand and extend its constituency, to include people from all creeds, classes and countries. Tutorial teaching, inter-collegiate lecturing, written examination and organised sports were to build better scholars and statesmen.[19] It was this party that made the modern university – and would also make the New Examination Schools.

They were, however, faced with determined opposition. There were at least two other competing visions of Oxford. One came from Jowett's former friend and ally, Mark Pattison, the rector of Lincoln College from 1861. He had gradually become convinced of the necessity for research to predominate within the university. Oxford was to become an oasis of the intellect: a beacon of light in a darkening world. There was little or no room for undergraduates in Pattison's new Oxford.[20] Indeed, he defined the difference between himself and Jowett in precisely these terms: a distinction between 'science and learning v. school keeping'. Ably supported by C.E. Appleton, a fellow of St. John's, he formed a small group to argue for the 'endowment of research'.[21] Together, these 'Researchers' or 'Educationalists' were to prove persistent and effective propagandists, and able opponents of the party of progress.[22] In this opposition – though in little else – they were joined by a third group of combatants. The 'Non-Placet Society', as it came to be called, was opposed to almost all change. They were united by a distaste for what they believed to be 'progress: falsely so-called'. Pattison was damned as a 'troglodyte', and Jowett condemned as a 'poseur' and 'ruthless seeker after notoriety' who 'represented all we disliked'.[23] Their leader, James

[13] J. Jones, 'The Civil War of 1843', *Balliol College Record* (1978), 60-8.
[14] Atlay, op. cit. note 10, p. 210.
[15] *Oxford Journal*, 15 Oct. 1871, 6; *Oxford Magazine*, 1 (1883), 407; G. Rowell, '"Training in Simple and Religious Habits": Keble and its first Warden', in *Hist. Univ. Oxf.* vii.
[16] [L. Stephen], *Sketches from Cambridge by a Don* (1865), 138.
[17] T.G. Jackson, *Recollections* (ed. B.H. Jackson, 1950), 29.
[18] R. Symonds, *Oxford and Empire* (1986), 24.
[19] G. Faber, *Jowett: a Portrait with Background* (1957), 43, 196, 347, 389-90.
[20] J. Sparrow, *Mark Pattison and the Idea of a University* (1967), 194; M. Pattison, *Suggestions on Academical Organisation* (1868), 127, 137.
[21] J.H. Appleton and A.H. Sayce, *Dr. Appleton, His Life and Literary Relics* (1881), 10-20; D. Roll-Hanson, *The Academy 1869-1879, Victorian Intellectuals in Revolt* (1957), 57, 61, 73-90.
[22] A.H. Sayce, *Reminiscences* (1923), 88.
[23] *Oxford Magazine*, 5 (1887), 271; C. Oman, *Memories of Victorian Oxford* (1942), 209-10, 232, 234, 239.

Bellamy, the president of St. John's from 1871, was a 'conservative of conservatives'; he would stop at nothing to frustrate reform. The Non-Placet Society railed against reform, and saw itself as the defender of an unchanging university against an invasion of the Greekless, the Godless, and – worst of all – women.[24]

As if these competing parties did not make university government difficult enough, Oxford's endlessly complex structure made consensus vital and often impossible to achieve. Every college, ruled by its fellows in an autonomous governing body, was a law unto itself. Even within the university, power was split between several competing institutions. Legislation originated with the Hebdomadal Council. This was made up of the chancellor (who rarely attended), the vice-chancellor, two proctors, and eighteen elected officials, chosen by Congregation. This body was made up of all Oxford MAs living within a mile and a half of Carfax. Its job was to approve legislation proposed by Council. Once this was done, the statutes passed to Convocation for final clearance. Any MA, whether resident or not could vote at Convocation. And whilst amongst the residents, as a reformer smugly explained, 'Liberalism has become co-extensive with intelligence,' Convocation remained the last bastion of the backwoodsmen.[25] Conflict was always possible, and rarely avoided.

By the late 1860s the storm clouds were looming once again. Oxford had entered what F.T. Palgrave called a '*plastic* period, [one of] those very rare and precious epochs' when 'radical changes are possible'.[26] Old debates were restarted; new arguments arose. Everything seemed capable of redefinition. Unsurprisingly, this process coincided with a re-evaluation of Oxford's built heritage. In the first half of the 19th century, Oxford had become a Gothic city again. The neo-classicism which had dominated the university for a hundred years was abandoned: 'the cry was for Gothic, the whole Gothic, and nothing but Gothic, in church, chapel, gaol, county court, school, and city dwelling'.[27] Gothic was increasingly fashionable, and was believed to be suitably English and wholesomely Christian.[28] With time, though, it became old-fashioned, and the medievalizing of the mid-Victorians came to seem anachronistic. Oxford's 'mellow old colleges, standing as they ever did and will – staunch old Tories' were increasingly resented by the progressives.[29] The Gothic Oxford –'whispering from her towers the last enchantments of the Middle Age' – now seemed to symbolize an 'oasis in a desert of change'.[30]

Still more importantly, many liberals believed that Gothic architecture in itself was damaging. In 1858 Goldwin Smith had explained the university's conservatism by reference to 'celibate fellowships, mediaeval buildings and the statutes of mediaeval founders'.[31] The party of progress sought to reform all three. They intended to 'strike off the fetter of medieval statutes from [the university] and the colleges, set it free from the predominance of ecclesiasticism, recall it to its proper work, and restore it to the nation'.[32] This reform of

[24] E. Barker, *Age and Youth* (1953), 42; R.B. Mowat (ed.), *Letters to the 'Times' 1884-1922, Written by Thomas Case* (1927), 22, 31-4, 53, 81.

[25] [C.A. Fyffe] 'Study and Opinion in Oxford', *Macmillan's Magazine*, xxi (1870), 186; Ward, op. cit. note 5, p. 291.

[26] M.G. Brock, 'A *Plastic* Structure', in *Hist. Univ. Oxford*, vii, 3.

[27] H.M. Colvin, 'Architecture', in L.S. Sutherland and L.G. Mitchell (eds), *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. v (1986); E.A. Greening Lamborn, *The Story of Architecture in Oxford Stone* (1912), 82.

[28] 'R.P.', *Oxford in 1888* (1838), 20, 57, 64; E.G. Bruton, *Private Halls and Collegiate Additions: their architecture and ecclesiology* (1854), 7-8, 12.

[29] *Oxford Journal*, 14 Oct. 1871, 6.

[30] M. Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* (1865), p. xviii; *Oxford Journal*, 14 Oct. 1871, 6.

[31] G. Smith, 'Oxford University Reform', in *Oxford Essays* (1858), 266.

[32] E. Abbott and L. Campbell, *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett* (2 vols. 1897), i. 177.

the statutes, the admission of dissenters, the widening of the curriculum, and the expansion of the university would all require new buildings. Smith implied that this would require a new style. His vision was to be embodied in the New Examination Schools; a building that came to symbolize the reform of the university.[33] It was also a monument to the ideas and ideals of the party of progress.

Ostensibly, the problem of the New Schools was simple to define and easy to solve. As early as 1858 Hebdomadal Council had acknowledged the inadequacy of its provision for accommodating students sitting exams.[34] This was obvious to all. Candidates were scattered across the city, sitting exams in any available room, however inappropriate. Even the ostentatiously reactionary Charles Oman accepted that something must be done. He, for one, never forgot the horror of taking Moderations in a wintry Old Ashmolean. 'With frost-covered windows, and amid very perceptible draughts,' he recalled, 'we shivered, but wrote on as best we could'.[35] And the problems just kept getting worse. In the second half of the 19th century, undergraduate numbers at Oxford more than doubled.[36] These students were sitting more examinations and in a wider range of disciplines, too. The expansion of the curriculum to include science, history and other new subjects coincided with a renewed emphasis on the importance of obtaining a degree. The result was an unprecedented increase in the pressure on space.[37] At the same time, the Bodleian was seeking to expand. It desperately needed expanded accommodation and the Old Schools Quadrangle was the obvious place for it to grow.[38] Unfortunately, this was also used for university examinations. This situation was evidently intolerable, and likely only to worsen. Disregarding Lord Westbury's helpful advice that the Bodleian's books should be wheeled into the University Parks and burnt, Council decided in 1862 that steps must be taken to find more room for examinations.[39] Nothing was done for five years. But in 1867 the situation was so bad that it was resolved to engage an architect to design new accommodation.[40] It was then that the problems began.

The New Schools was soon seen as the pet project of the party of progress. Their desire for an expanded student population, attending large lectures and sitting written examinations, made the building a necessity. But as a result, the project became an important symbol of the battle for Oxford. The New Schools was violently opposed by the Researchers, who regarded examinations as an 'instrument of mere torture', and saw lecturing as 'incompatible with research'.[41] The Non-Placet Society saw the emphasis on examination and lecturing as synonymous with the 'modern university', and, as such, thoroughly bad.[42] It was this opposition which was to make the search for New Schools such a debacle. The location was no problem: the site of the old Angel Hotel at the eastern end

[33] As G. Tyack, *Oxford: an architectural guide* (1998), 249, notes.

[34] Bodl. U[niversity] A[rchives], HC 3/1/1, 'Committees of Council, 1837-73', 10.

[35] Oman, op. cit. note 23, p. 78.

[36] L. Stone, 'The Size and Composition of the Oxford Student Body, 1580-1909', in L. Stone (ed.), *The University in Society* (2 vols. 1975), i, 65.

[37] M.C. Curthoys, 'The Examination System', in *Hist. Univ. Oxford*, vi pt. i (1997); see also A.E.W.M. Herbert (ed.), *The Sacrifice of Education to Examinations* (1888).

[38] E. Craster, *The History of the Bodleian Library, 1845-1945* (1952), 61.

[39] Abbott and Campbell, op. cit. note 32, ii, 133; Bodl. UA, HC 1/1/3, 'Committees of Council', 23-4.

[40] Bodl. UA, HC 1/2/2, Minutes of Hebdomadal Council 1866-79, 74.

[41] Pattison, quoted in A.J. Engel, *From Clergyman to Don: the rise of the academic profession in 19th-century England* (1983), 143; A.H. Sayce, 'Results of the Examination System at Oxford', in C.E. Appleton (ed.), *Essays on the Endowment of Research* (1876), 139.

[42] Oman, op. cit. note 23, p. 239.

of the High Street had been purchased in 1865, and was ideal.[43] Rather, the divisions within the university made it impossible to reach a consensus about the buildings, the architect, the style, or the cost. Most Victorian architectural competitions were badly run; they were a constant source of complaint throughout the century.[44] But it took a particular genius to produce the chaos Oxford was to witness.

Two architects were invited to compete for the Schools contract in 1867: G.E. Street and T.N. Deane. Street was the diocesan architect, a national figure both as an artist and as an author.[45] Deane was the designer of Christ Church's Meadow Building (1862-6), and had just produced plans for additions to his father's University Museum.[46] Two more promising prospects could scarcely be imagined. Yet for two years, between 1867 and 1869, a committee of Council entirely failed to resolve the rival merits of their competing designs.[47] When they finally selected Deane, it was only to tell him to redraft his designs. On 6 December 1870, three years after the competition had begun, two plans were put before Convocation – and rejected. Both of Deane's designs were disregarded. Oxford had escaped a 'rather gloomy-looking pile', but it had also failed to resolve its problems of accommodation.[48] The party of progress waited another two years before mounting another attack, but in 1872 they tried again.

The failure of 1870 had been the result of a battle between Council and Convocation.[49] Perhaps hoping to avoid a repeat performance, the second attempt involved the MAs at an earlier stage. A joint delegacy was established, with members drawn from both houses.[50] But if the liberals were hoping for a swift resolution to their problems, they were to be disappointed. It took a year to organise a new competition, and the list of competitors was a curious and perhaps ill-advised one. Deane and Street were re-invited, and to their names were added three others. Alfred Waterhouse was the architect of Manchester Town Hall (1868-77) and the Natural History Museum (1877-1908). His additions to Balliol (1868-77) were much admired – not least by Jowett.[51] Sir Arthur Blomfield was a hugely well-connected establishment architect: a son of the reforming bishop of London, he had built the church of St. Barnabas in Jericho (1869-72) and would later design Selwyn College, Cambridge (1882-9).[52] John Oldrid Scott, the youngest of the five men, was the scion of a great architectural dynasty. The son of Sir Gilbert Scott, he was beginning his name as a sensitive neo-Goth; an intelligent heir to his father's practice.[53] All seemed set for a successful conclusion, but within weeks the plans went awry. Street and Waterhouse declined to compete.[54] Blomfield and Deane were soon rejected by the delegacy – leaving Oldrid Scott

43 Bodl. UA, HC 1/2/1, Minutes of Hebdomadal Council 1854-66, 462-3.

44 R.H. Harper, *Victorian Architectural Competitions* (1983), pp. xiii-xviii; J. Bessin, *Architectural Competitions in 19th-century England* (1984), 16.

45 D.B. Brownlee, *The Law Courts: the architecture of G.E. Street* (1984).

46 Bodl. UA, HC1/2/2, 56.

47 Bodl. UA, HC 3/1/1, Minutes of Committees of Council 1857-73, 102, 211; Bodl. G.A. Oxon. 4° 119 (2), 'New Examination Schools, by One of the Committee' (1870), 1.

48 *Oxford University Gazette*, 1 (1870), 1; *British Almanac* (1870), 172.

49 By 1870, Hebdomadal Council had a liberal majority: C. Harvie, 'From the Cleveland Commission to the Statutes of 1882', in *Hist. Univ. Oxford*, vii, 93.

50 Bodl. UA, 1/2/2, Hebdomadal Council, 317; *Oxford University Gazette*, 3 (1872), 247-8.

51 C. Cunningham and P. Waterhouse, *Alfred Waterhouse* (1992); Faber, op. cit. note 19, p. 348.

52 R. Fellows, *Sir Reginald Blomfield, an Edwardian Architect* (1985), ch. 1.

53 J. Heseltine (ed.), *The Scott family, a catalogue of the drawings collection of the R.I.B.A.* (1981).

54 Whether from loyalty to Deane or fear of rejection, or both, is unclear. See Jackson, op. cit. note 17, p. 134; *The Builder*, 31, p. 452; C.J. Faulkener, in J. Brandon-Jones, 'Letters of Philip Webb and his Contemporaries', *Architectural Hist.* 8 (1964), 61.

the clear winner. His plans were then swiftly accepted by Council.[55] However, despite offering to make 'any modification, either in plan or design, or even style, that....may appear desirable', Scott was defeated in Convocation. On 23 May 1873 his plans received only 20 votes in favour – and 54 against.[56]

What had gone wrong? To lose one competition may be considered unfortunate; to lose two seems like carelessness. Indeed, the party of progress had been both dilatory and disorganised. They had also been incompetent in their management of Convocation. A coalition had grown up against the Schools, and had proved strong enough to thwart the liberals' intentions. As St. John Tyrwhitt was forced to acknowledge,

> when spending money is the subject of its deliberations, a Convocation of residents invariably divides itself into the party who ask for money for the prescribed purpose, and those who want it for other purposes. There may be added to these a floating balance of gentlemen who habitually oppose any vote of money whatever.[57]

As a leading liberal and advocate of the New Schools, Tyrwhitt's acuity was born of frustration, for this was indeed precisely what had happened. The divisions within the university had deepened.[58] The Non-Placet Society had remained resolutely opposed to the project. The Researchers had their own ideas. Rather than building expensive Examination Schools, they wanted to use any available resources to erect a new Bodleian Library.[59] Mark Pattison and his great ally George Rolleston even commissioned an engineer to prove that a Bodleian built in the Parks would 'fulfil every required condition for a great university library'.[60] This was entirely consonant with their emphasis on research, and utterly inimical to the progressives' plans. Both the obstructiveness of the conservatives and the ambitions of the Researchers threatened the very existence of the Examination Schools. Together, they conspired to stop the project before it had even started.

Worse still, the party of progress was fundamentally divided. The intensely liberal G.W. Kitchin found himself unable to support Deane's designs of 1870.[61] C.J. Faulkner, a powerful progressive within the university, was similarly unimpressed with Scott's plans of 1873. Indeed, he co-wrote the pamphlet that destroyed Scott's hopes of success.[62] Their criticisms were three-fold. They opposed the cost, deplored the sense that examination was becoming the sole purpose of the university, and – above all – they rejected the style of the putative Schools. No record remains of the 1867-70 competition, but it is clear that both Street and Deane offered Gothic designs. G.E. Street believed that only the Gothic Revival was appropriate for building in Oxford; only that style was 'indigenous, natural, real, and suitable'.[63] Thomas Deane appears to have agreed. Certainly, his 1873 entry continues in this mode. 'Fussy and overcrowded' it may have been – but it was solidly medieval, clearly

[55] Bodl. UA, HC 1/2/2, Hebdomadal Council Minutes, 341.

[56] Bodl. G.A. Oxon. b. 138 (86), J.O. Scott, 'New Examination Schools' (1873), 2-3; *Oxford University Gazette*, 4 (1873), 341.

[57] Bodl. G.A. Oxon. c. 33 (181), R. St. John Tyrwhitt, 'A Letter to the Vice-Chancellor' (1875).

[58] E.S. Roberts, *Sherborne, Oxford and Cambridge* (1934), 87.

[59] Craster, op. cit. note 38, pp. 131-2.

[60] *Oxford University Gazette*. 5 (1874), 290.

[61] *Oxford Journal*, 10 Dec. 1870, 5.

[62] The pamphlet, signed C.J.F., C.A.F. and E.J.P. was evidently the work of three liberal fellows of University College: Faulkner, C.A. Fyffe and E.J. Payne. No copy exists, but it is condensed and criticised in Scott, op. cit. note 56.

[63] G.E. Street, *An Urgent Plea for the Revival of True Principles of Architecture in the Public Buildings of the University of Oxford* (1853), 5.

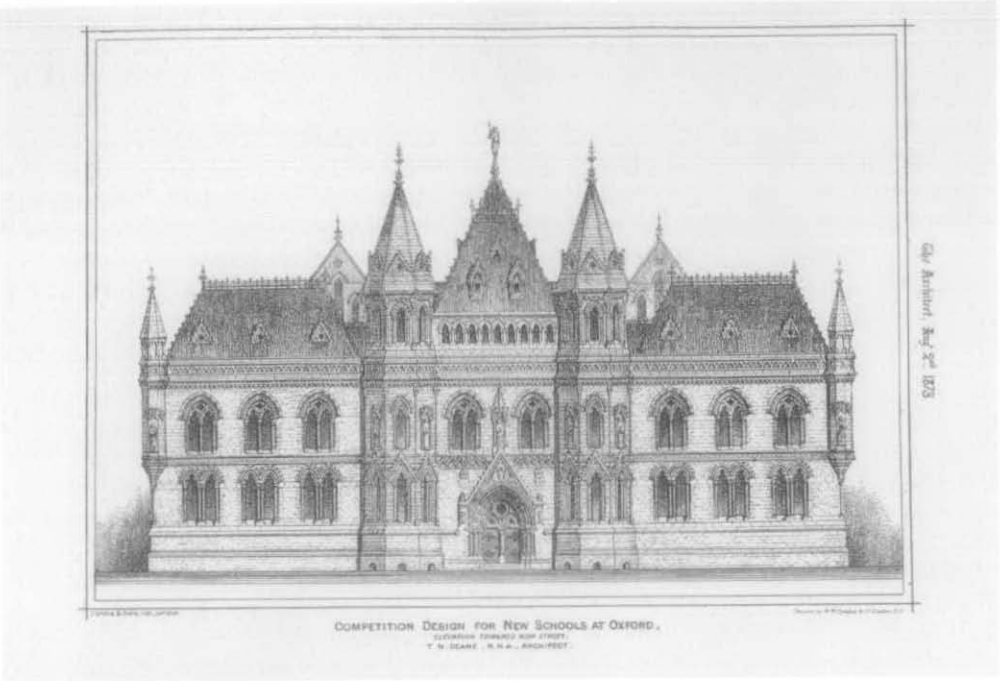

Fig. 1. T.N. Deane's New Schools (R.I.B.A. Drawings Collection).

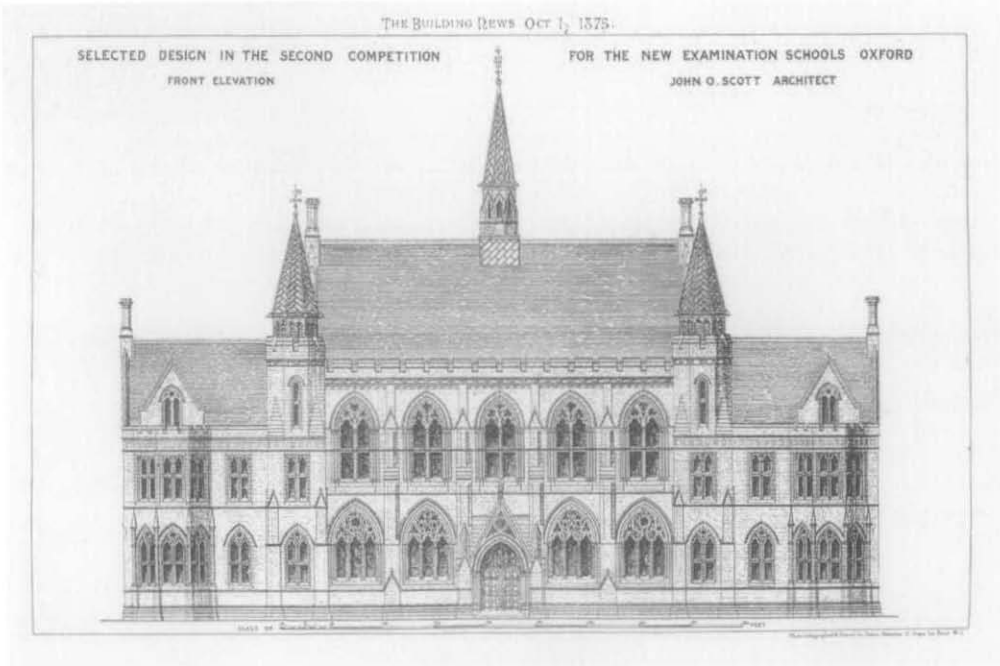

Fig. 2. John Oldrid Scott's New Schools (R.I.B.A. Drawings Collection).

drawing on his father's work at the Oxford Museum and adding a slight French twist (Fig. 1).[64] As this implies, the second competition brought with it few surprises. Scott's winning design was also wholly Gothic, a style which he believed to be the 'most perfect that mediaeval art ever attained'. Fashionably, this was a later and more English idiom than Deane had proposed. Somewhat improbably, the architect insisted that it was derived from the Bishop's Palace at Wells (Fig. 2).[65] Whatever its genesis, though, its life was short. There was simply not enough support for the project or the plans.

'The unfortunate New Schools, of which so much has been said,' observed the *British Almanac* in 1874, 'appear to be at a dead lock'.[66] Nor was there much hope of this changing. Jowett and his allies were faced with two main problems. In the first place, they had to defeat the Researchers. Secondly, they had to unite the progressives. It took two years, but they were ultimately successful. The Researchers were a small and marginalised group, led by a man crippled with indecision.[67] Jowett's attack on the plan for a new university library was sharp, unfair, and devastating. In early 1875, the Bodleian curators abandoned the idea of moving.[68] At the same time, he worked hard to sustain his supporters. Jowett was 'trying to get the liberal party together here', and the results would reveal just how successful he had been.[69] In April 1875, a new delegacy was appointed. The progressives, beginning the slow process of reorganisation, captured control of it. Charles Launcelot Shadwell, a liberal proctor, organised at least two of the nominations – those of William W. Jackson and John A. Godley.[70] It seems likely that he facilitated others.

Certainly, it is true to say that not a single person opposed to the New Schools was even nominated. Council elected three liberals: Henry Liddell, Dean of Christ Church; Professor H.J.S. Smith, Jowett's greatest friend and ally; and the vice-chancellor, James Sewell, warden of New College and the first man to propose the building of the New Schools. Convocation elected Edward Moore, R. St. John Tyrwhitt, George E. Thorley, William W. Jackson, Alfred Robinson, and G.W. Kitchin – now convinced of the need for new Schools.[71] All these men were liberals. They were also rather more knowledgeable about contemporary aesthetics than their predecessors. 'The university may feel confident in the good taste and business capacity of this delegacy,' enthused the *Architect*, 'and it is to be hoped that their labours will not be as thankless and unfruitful as those of the former delegacy'.[72] Thanks to the superior organisation of the party of progress, this hope was to be fulfilled. Oxford was finally to get its New Examination Schools.

Despite the disasters of the last eight years, this liberal delegacy narrowly resolved to hold yet another competition. As Colvin notes, 'nearly every eminent Victorian architect' might be found on the initial list of possible competitors. George Gilbert and John Oldrid Scott, Norman Shaw, Basil Champneys, Alfred Waterhouse, Philip Webb, John Prichard, Richard

64 Colvin, op. cit. note 2, p. 141.

65 M. Hall, 'The Rise of Refinement: G.F. Bodley's All Saints, Cambridge, and the Return to English Models in the Gothic Architecture of the 1860s', *Architectural Hist.* 36 (1993), 103-26; Scott, op. cit. note 56, p. 3.

66 *British Almanac* (1874), 192.

67 Sayce, op. cit. note 22, pp. 85-6.

68 Craster, op. cit. note 38, pp. 131-3.

69 Abbott and Campbell, op. cit. note 32, ii, 96.

70 Bodl. G.A. Oxon. c. 33 (34), letter from W.W. Jackson to Shadwell.

71 *Oxford University Gazette*, 5, Supplements to No. 188; H.L. Thompson, *Henry George Liddell: A Memoir* (1899), 198-200; Abbott and Campbell, op. cit. note 32, ii, 238; H. Rashdall and R.S. Rait, *New College* (1901), 227-30; Bodl. UA, HC 1/2/1, p. 380 (17 Nov. 1862).

72 *The Architect*, 13 (1875), 289.

Carpenter, T.N. Deane, T.G. Jackson, G.F. Bodley, G.E. Street, and – later – E.M. Barry, were all considered by the delegates. Eventually, Deane and Oldrid Scott were reinvited, and (after a ballot) Barry, Shaw and Bodley were also asked to submit designs.[73] Both Norman Shaw and George Bodley flatly declined to participate, and in their place were invited Basil Champneys and T.G. Jackson. This was a profound indication of failure. These architects were scarcely stars. Champneys at least had an Oxford building to his name. As the son of a former St. Ebbe's curate, he was ideally placed for the rebuilding of St. Peter-le-Bailey (1874). Admittedly a church of very 'little interest', it did at least justify Champneys' inclusion in the competition.[74] Jackson's place was harder to explain. His only experience of work in Oxford was 'a number of unimportant alterations' to the Warden's Lodgings at Wadham. Indeed, he was best known for failing to win a competition for a bell-tower at Christ Church. But Jackson was well-connected: George Thorley, the delegate who nominated him, was a friend, and would be his best man. Still more helpfully, Jackson was a fellow of Wadham, a university examiner – and a university liberal.[75] 'My sympathies were all with the party of progress,' he recalled.[76] The progressives had found their man.

The competitors had seven months to prepare their plans. During February 1876, a succession of architects were called to the Ashmolean and questioned by the delegates. On 15 March the final decision was made. No votes at all were cast for either Deane or Scott. Basil Champneys came third with one vote. Bodley's plan received the support of two. But with six votes, T.G. Jackson gained an absolute majority.[77] Extraordinarily, the untried architect had been trusted with this most significant commission. The next hurdle was Hebdomadal Council, which accepted Jackson's plans on 29 May 1876.[78] Finally – and all-importantly – came Convocation. On 15 June, an unusually well-attended meeting was presented with the proposed New Schools. The decision was made in two parts: the first vote was for the Schools itself; the second, for the High Street frontage. This was, after all, 'a most important building in the chief street of Oxford'. By deferring the decision on the main façade, it was hoped that those with 'architectural crotchets' would be neutralised.[79] This reflected the last-minute pessimism of the progressives. But it was an unnecessary precaution. Disciplined by their party leaders, the liberals were by this point far too well whipped to be thwarted. Despite some token resistance from the Researchers, both parts of the resolution were carried – and with large majorities. By 106 votes to 16, and then 87 to 8, both parts of the plan were approved.[80] The progressives had won.

The great shock was not their success, though. The university liberals had, after all, had nearly a decade to prepare for victory. Rather, the surprise came from the fact that such an inexperienced architect had won, and that he had won with such a novel design. The 'unknown Mr. Jackson' was suggesting a non-Gothic style for the first time in a generation. Certainly, his fellow competitors had continued the medieval mode so strongly associated with the university.[81] Oldrid Scott submitted a Tudor Gothic design, replete with cloisters,

73 Bodl. UA, UC 3/1, New Schools Delegacy Minute Book, 15 and 19 May 1875.

74 A.J. Coignard, 'Basil Champneys, architecte 1842-1935' (Memoire de Maitrise, Paris, 1984); see also H. Stapleton, *The Model Working Parson: William Weldon Champneys, his forebears and descendants* (1976), 27-9; Sherwood and Pevsner, op. cit. note 2, p. 248.

75 *Oxford Journal*, 24 Oct. 1874, 7; *The Architect*, 14 (1875), 161; Jackson, op. cit. note 17, pp. 134, 174; *Oxford University Gazette*, 5 (1874), 106.

76 Jackson, op. cit. note 17, p. 105.

77 Bodl. UA, UC 3/1, 4, 8, 12, 16 Feb. and 15 Mar. 1876.

78 Bodl. UA, HC 1/2/2, 437.

79 *Oxford Journal*, 5 June 1876, 5; *The Architect*, 15 (1876), 408.

80 *Oxford Journal*, 24 June 1876, 8; *Oxford University Gazette*, 6 (1876), 441.

81 Jackson, op. cit. note 17, pp. 125, 135.

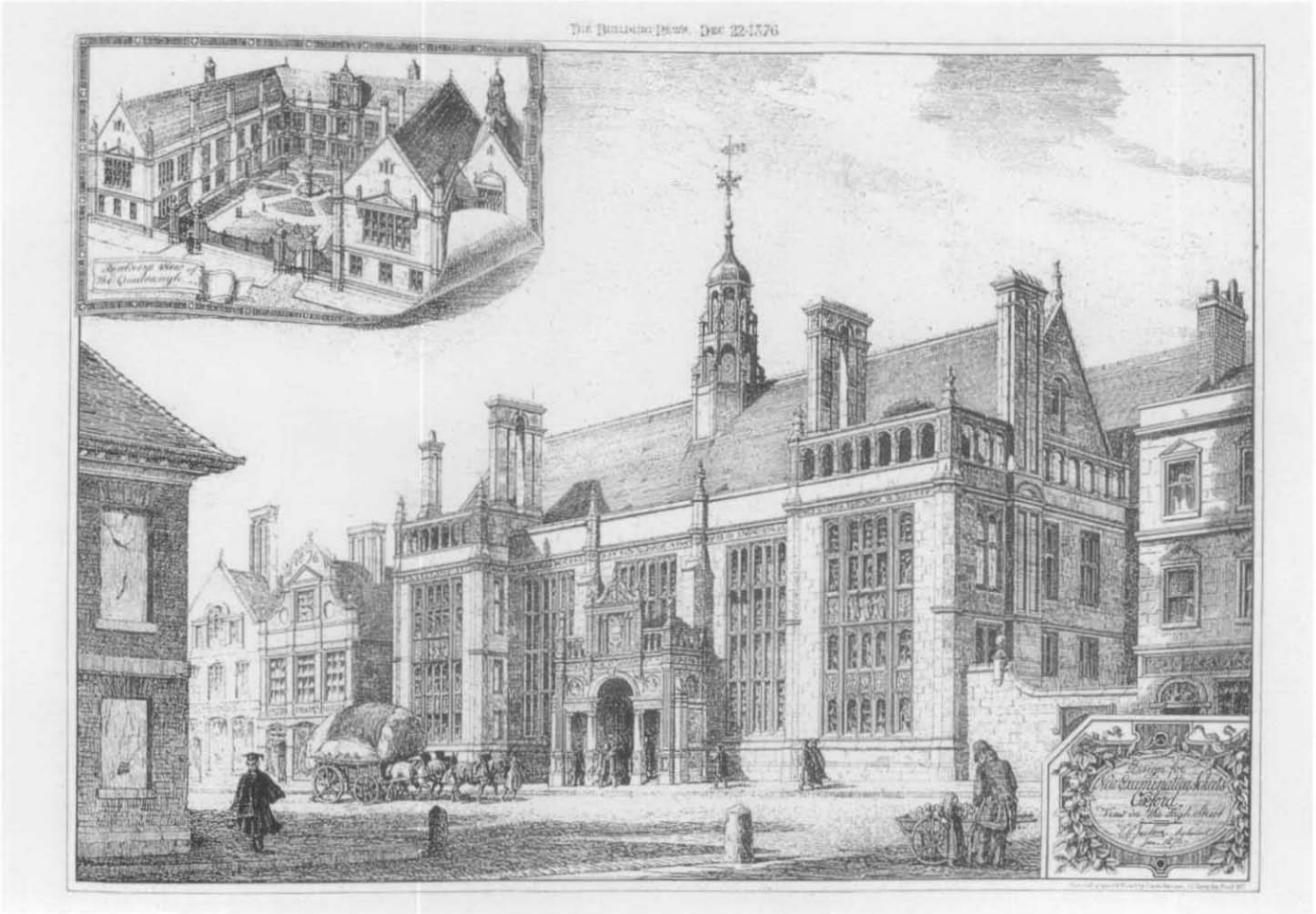

Fig. 3. T.G. Jackson's New Schools: High Street front (R.I.B.A. Drawings Collection).

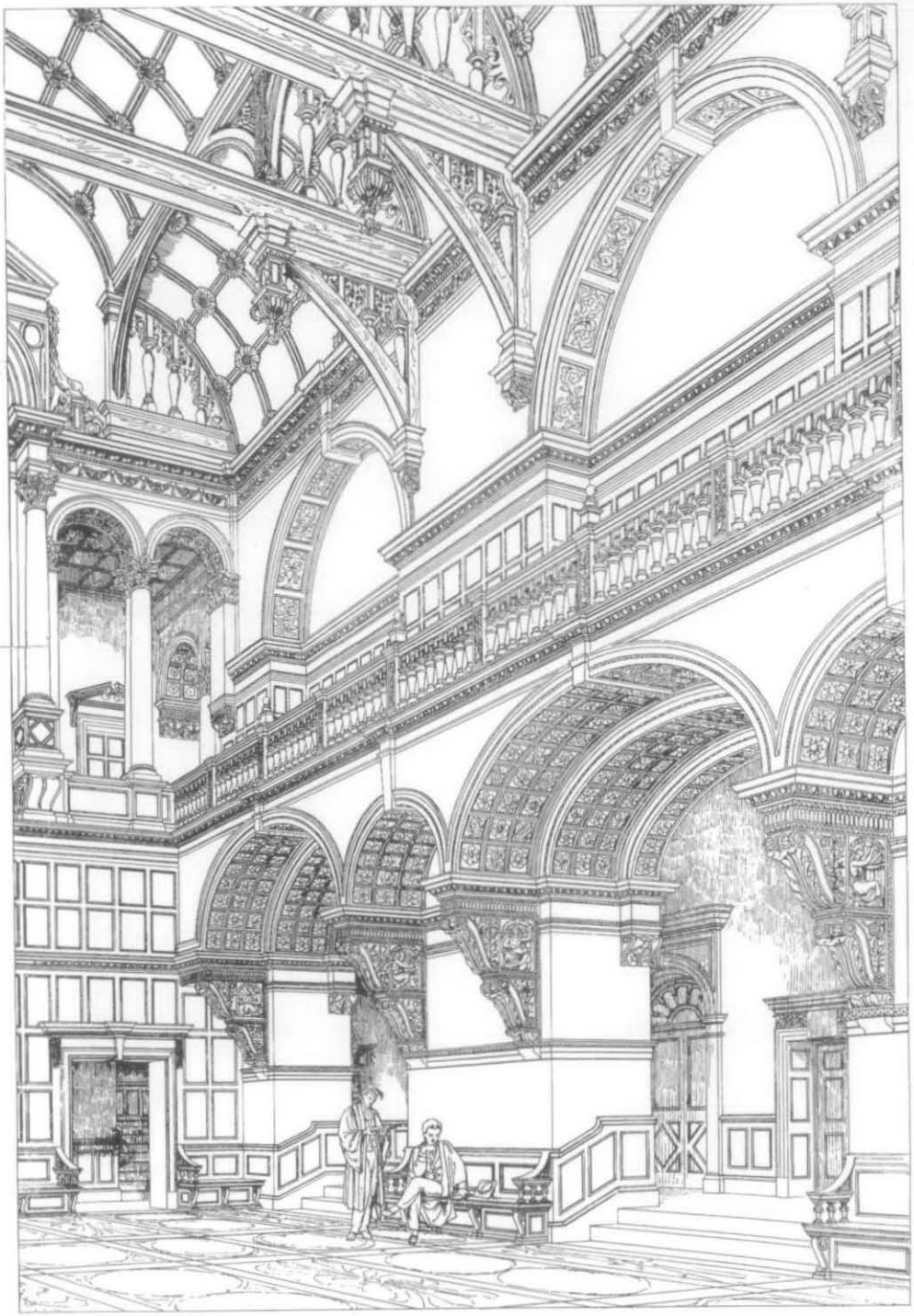

Fig. 4. T.G. Jackson's New Schools: Entrance Hall.

pinnacles and vaulted entrance hall.[82] Basil Champneys had selected the 'English third pointed' as a period 'thoroughly characteristic of Oxford', and 'by a close study of examples of this phase of architecture in Oxford itself' had sought to 'impart to the design a specially local character'.[83] G.F. Bodley also aimed to 'erect a building that would be in harmony with the ancient buildings of Oxford'. In his case, this meant selecting 'strictly English Gothic of the 15th century' which, he averred, would harmonise with 'the best examples of your beautiful collegiate buildings'.[84] Jackson alone eschewed the Gothic Revival. He derived his inspiration from the great Elizabethan mansions of Haddon and Hardwick, Kirby and Knole. Indeed, he later claimed that it was a 'haunting vision... of those long mullioned and transomed windows at Kirby Hall' that forced him to abandon a Gothic approach.[85] Whatever the truth of this romantic explanation, the Schools was certainly a novel building, unlike anything in Oxford built before (Fig. 3).[86] The three-sided 'quadrangle', with its pedimented windows, putti, and Jacobean frontispiece, showed the influence of Oxford, East Anglia, Italy and beyond. Inside, the inspiration is taken from all across Europe: there were Byzantine mosaics, Flemish chandeliers, Jacobean doorways, Italian roofs and marble work – and much else besides (Fig. 4). Even the Clipsham stone Jackson used was new to Oxford. This was radical stuff: a 'passionate challenge to what Oxford University architecture had been in the hands of Butterfield, Scott, Waterhouse, and the others', as Pevsner puts it.[87]

It took great confidence to propose such a controversial building, and to make it such a radical stylistic statement. But there was calculation here as well as bravado. The party of progress had been critically split over Deane's and Scott's proposals. Jackson's new approach united them. Progressives like George Kitchin, Charles Faulkner and Charles Fyffe had supported the Schools, but objected to the retrograde styles in which they were proposed to be built.[88] Fyffe spoke for many when he condemned Scott's designs. 'Not a feature but was a reduction and a parody of something else in Oxford', he complained. And not only was the architecture banal, it was also inappropriate. 'The elevation towards the High Street embraced with other elements that of a church. It did not harmonise with the other academical buildings of the High Street but faintly only with St. Mary's'.[89] This was the fundamental problem with the Gothic style: it had become synonymous with the church. For a reforming – and an increasingly secular – university, this was simply unacceptable.[90]

Just as the party of progress wished to 'strike off the fetter of medieval statutes' from the university and free it from 'the predominance of ecclesiasticism', so Jackson's architecture of progress sought to release Oxford's buildings from the 'yoke of mediaevalism' by reviving a domestic, secular, and Renaissance style.[91] He was not alone. The same decision was being

[82] *Building News*, 30 (1876).

[83] Bodl. G.A. Oxon. c. 33 (182), B. Champneys, 'Oxford Examination Schools Competition: Report' (1876), 3-7.

[84] Bodl. G.A. Oxon. 8° 164 (9), G.F. Bodley, 'New Examination Schools for the University of Oxford' (1876), 4-5.

[85] Jackson, op. cit. note 17, p. 134.

[86] Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. A. 19, T.G. Jackson, 'New Schools' (Plans).

[87] *The Builder*, 43 (1882), 535; W.J. Arkell, *Oxford Stone* (1947), 110; Sherwood and Pevsner, op. cit. note 2, p. 265.

[88] See note 62.

[89] *Oxford Journal*, 31 May 1873, 4.

[90] The religious tests for MAs were abolished in 1871. Increasingly, compulsory chapel was also being abandoned and fellowships thrown open to non-clerics. See Engel, op. cit. note 41.

[91] T.G. Jackson, *Modern Gothic Architecture* (1873), 56.

made in London, where E.R. Robson, architect to the School Board, argued for the abandonment of 'church-architecture' for non-denominational school-houses. 'In its aim and object,' he wrote, modern scholastic building 'should strive to express civil rather than ecclesiastical character'.[92] He achieved this by changing from a Gothic to a 'Queen Anne' Revival style – all brick-work and fancy gables, terracotta and white paint. Just as these new schools were seen as 'signs of change in a movement of social reform', so Oxford's New Schools was conceived as a symbol of the party of progress.[93] It was a monument to the reform of the university.

Of course the progressives were not all-powerful. Not only did they have to overcome the disapproval of two other academic parties, they had also to persuade the large number of non-aligned dons. As St. John Tyrwhitt recognised, it was vital that any proposal should 'have some chance of common-room approval'.[94] Fortunately, as Jackson discovered, 'the majority of the residents rather welcomed the rupture with strict Gothic precedent'.[95] Partly this was a simple change in taste. Already in North Oxford, a reaction against mid-Victorian 'mediaeval' villas had set in.[96] Partly it reflected Jackson's own rhetorical skills. Flying in the face of conventional wisdom, which suggested that 'a mediaeval style is, from the associations of the place, and the character of the buildings generally, especially fitted for Oxford', Jackson argued that his approach was more appropriate for the university.[97] 'My object has been to give the buildings a collegiate character which would harmonise with the traditions of Oxford,' he explained. 'I have consequently chosen that late eclectic form of Gothic of which Oxford and Cambridge contain examples so many and so well worked out in detail that they almost constitute an academical style themselves'.[98] Unlikely though it may seem, this flimsy excuse for architectural innovation may have convinced some people. The *Architect*, indeed, claimed to discern some parts of the building that were 'suggestive' of the Jacobean Wadham.[99] It was this supposed academical style – this 'Oxonian' idiom – that Jackson sold to the common rooms. And as a don himself, he had a good idea of his target market.

The New Examination Schools was required to fulfil many functions, and its plan reflected this fully (Fig. 5). The High Street front of the building was intended to shield the Schools from the noise of passing traffic. It also provided space for a great entrance hall, in which students could gather to await their tests. Behind this hall were ranged a series of specialized rooms. On the first floor were three huge writing schools: designed to hold over 500 candidates at any one time. By contrast, the ground floor housed a succession of rooms for more private *viva voce* examinations. The architect in addition provided rooms for the examiners to discuss their duties and to take lunch. Finally, there was accommodation for a porter and his family, a library, and for various other offices.[100] The result was not wholly

[92] E.R. Robson, *School Architecture* (1874), 321.

[93] M. Girouard, *Sweetness and Light: the 'Queen Anne' movement 1860-1900* (1977), 64-70; D.E.B. Weiner, *Architecture and Social Reform in Late-Victorian London* (1994), 1.

[94] Bodl. G.A. Oxon. c. 33 (181), Tyrwhitt, 'A Letter to the Vice-Chancellor'.

[95] Jackson, op. cit. note 17, p. 143.

[96] T. Hinchliffe, *North Oxford* (1992), 113-14.

[97] *British Almanac* (1860), 245.

[98] Bodl. G.A. Oxon. c. 33 (184), T.G. Jackson, 'Proposed Examination Schools for the University of Oxford' (1876).

[99] *The Architect*, 15 (1876), 364.

[100] Bodl. G.A. Oxon. c. 33 (183): Instructions for Architects (1875); ibid. (184), Jackson, 'Examination Schools'; *Oxford University Gazette*, 12 (1882), 239.

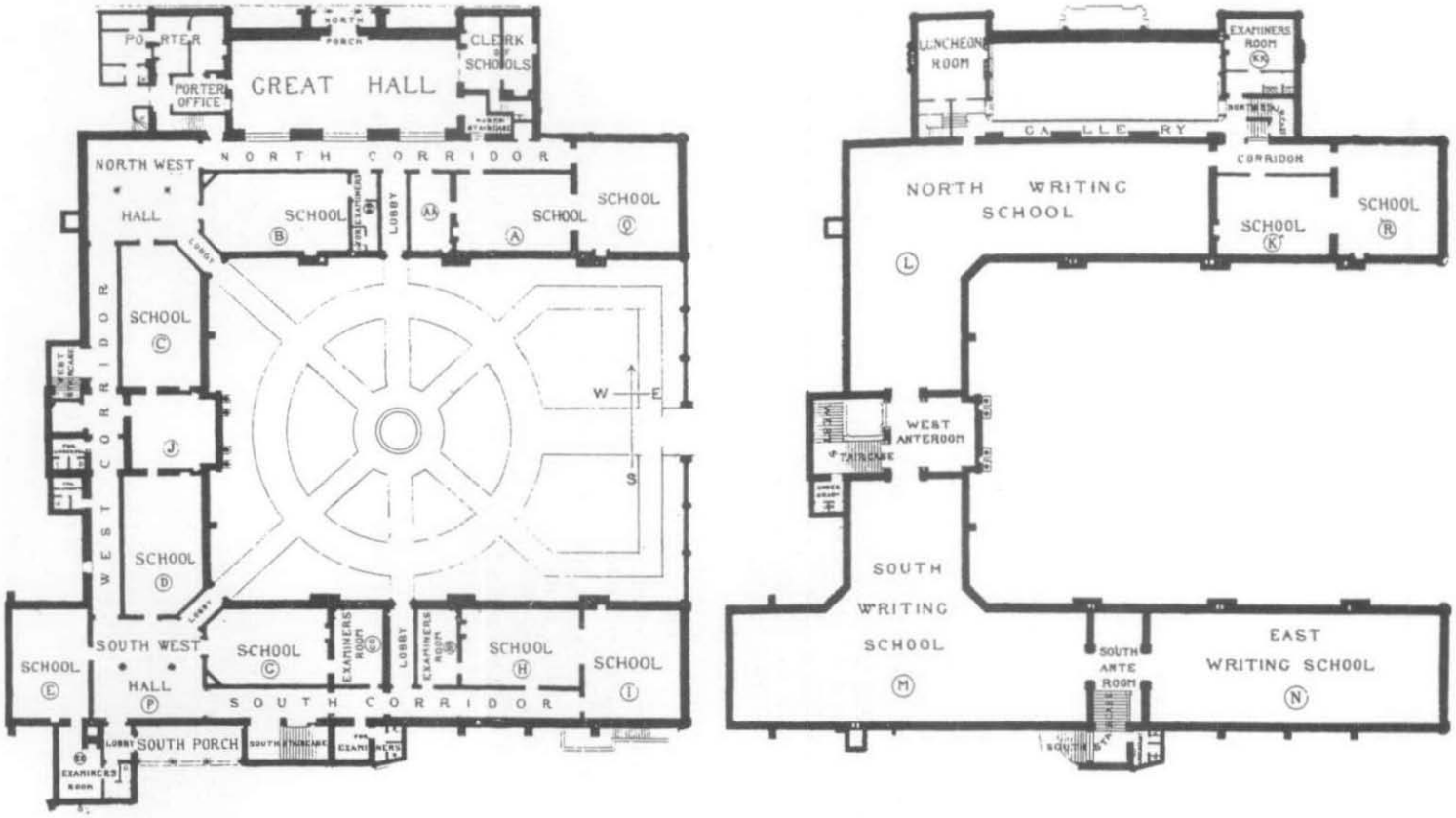

Fig. 5. T.G. Jackson's New Schools: plan.

convincing. T.G. Jackson was never known for the brilliance of his planning. Even 30 years later, clients would express disappointment that he did not put much 'ingenious scheming into his plans', but, as they recognized, in Jackson they had not chosen 'an architect who [took] an interest in doing this'.[101]

This was, of course, Jackson's first major project, and the planning was predictably poor.[102] With its long echoing corridor and inconveniently shaped rooms, the Schools could not be accounted a model of its type. Nor was it entirely clear how the Schools would be used when there were no examinations being taken. After all, for most of the year there was no great demand for examination schools. Nonetheless, for the party of progress this was an undoubted success. They had got their new schools – and could use them to further their reforms. Sure enough, the Schools was soon used for the new intercollegiate lectures, for concerts, and for grand university events. Significantly, they were also used to hold dances. 'It is a proof of the advance that has been from ancient usages,' claimed the *Oxford Magazine*, 'when university buildings are granted for so frivolous, though delightful, an amusement'. Everything the conservatives hated had come to the High Street.[103]

More than anything, then, the New Schools reflected the success of the liberals' cause and the triumph of the new university. The reaction of those opposed to the party of progress gives an eloquent testament to this fact. John Ruskin, growing increasingly unhappy with the Oxford to which he had returned, was particularly outraged. He correctly saw in the Schools a symbol of all that was hateful to him about the reformed university. He refused to enter the building whilst it was under construction, and once built he did nothing but hurl abuse at it.[104] This was evidently more than a defence of the ill-used Deane.[105] It reflected a powerful, ideological and insuperable objection to their purpose and their form. Ruskin attacked the Schools on two fronts. The first was aesthetic. He loathed the reversion to Renaissance, and condemned the Schools' eclecticism. Jackson's style was, he asserted, 'as inherently corrupt as it is un-English'. But this was more than a stylistic criticism. True to form, Ruskin saw the building as both corrupt and corrupting. He was not so much condemning the progress of architecture as damning the architecture of progress. He abjured these 'rooms for the torture and shame of scholars' and disparaged the decision to charge students 'for the ornamentation of their inquisition chambers'.[106]

In an unlikely alliance, Ruskin was joined by E.A. Freeman in this attack. Ostensibly a 'conservative reformer', Freeman found the university to which he returned as Regius Professor of Modern History in 1884 a less than congenial place. Siding with the Researchers, he believed that Oxford had become 'less and less a centre for study' and had sunk 'more and more into a mere educational machine'.[107] The New Schools seemed proof positive. Again, the attack began on purely aesthetic criteria. Freeman saw the Schools as 'an amazing piece of architectural perversity'.[108] But if in his mind it was stylistically suspect, this was nothing compared to its moral failings. In particular, Freeman objected to the

[101] Cambridge Univ. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology Archives, Box 123 MM2/1/3, Correspondence 1907-13, W.H. Macready (22 Dec. 1908).

[102] H.S. Goodhart-Rendel, *English Architecture Since the Regency* (1953), 176-7.

[103] *Oxford University Gazette*, 14 (1884), 513; *Oxford Magazine*, 1 (1883), 185.

[104] Jackson, op. cit. note 17, p. 92.

[105] Brooks, op. cit. note 6, p. 262. Brooks's explanations are not helped by his entirely erroneous belief that Ruskin never commented on the Schools.

[106] J. Ruskin, *Collected Works*, ed. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, 1903-9), vol. 32, 363; vol. 33, 363; vol. 37, 477.

[107] W.R.W. Stephens, *The Life and Letters of Edward A. Freeman* (1895), i, 147, 312.

[108] E.A. Freeman, 'Oxford After Forty Years: II', *Contemporary Review*, 51 (1887), 816.

celebrations held on the Schools' inauguration. 'There was formerly some regard to the proprieties of things and places,' he wrote, 'now a ball in a college hall is a common thing; and we have seen a new university building solemnly opened by dancing'. This was all part of the progressives' plan. It was all part of the 'foolish imitation of London ways, London hours, and much that was unknown in the simpler days of old'.[109] It was all part of a reformed Oxford that neither Freeman, nor Ruskin, nor the conservatives, nor the Researchers could accept. They associated the 'fantastic and incongruous building' with a university which was now 'thoroughly bad'.[110]

This association between Gothic and conservatism, and between an eclectic Renaissance and reform, was soon seen throughout the university. The two neighbouring colleges of St. John's and Trinity are good examples of this process. Under the reactionary Dr. Bellamy, St. John's became a deeply conservative place. The leader of the Non-Placets, he 'made the college the centre of that cause'.[111] There should be little surprise, then, that when St. John's sought to expand, it did not turn to Jackson or to his Renaissance style, but rather to George Gilbert Scott junior, and a chaste, old-fashioned Gothic.[112] The St. Giles' front to St. John's (1880-1) is seen by Peter Howell as an 'instructive comparison' with the exuberance of Jackson's work – and indeed it is, though not quite in the way that Howell suggests.[113] Scott had in fact originally hoped to erect a building in precisely the 'early Renaissance Jackson was making his own'.[114] This was, however, clearly inappropriate for such a conservative college. In choosing Gothic, St. John's was asserting its rejection of modern Oxford, of the reformers and their style. The contrast with Trinity could not be more overt. Here, between 1883 and 1887, T.G. Jackson built an extensive addition to the college, in a still more exotic style. With its fancy gables, idiosyncratic carving, and Renaissance ornament, it was as unlike the St. John's building as possible (Fig. 6).[115] His client was John Percival, the 'extreme liberal' president of Trinity; Jowett's choice for the job, and a determined university reformer.[116] The aims of this project were decidedly progressive: to provide accommodation for all undergraduates; to give them a common room, a library and a magazine room, 'such as the best colleges have already added to their buildings'.[117] And the style was as progressive as the purpose. Thus these two colleges, only yards apart, continued the battle of ideas through their buildings. Architecture remained a crucial weapon in the war over Oxford, in the university and in the colleges.

In 1886 Goldwin Smith returned to an Oxford which he found reformed and revived. 'The improvement in education and in all that relates to the proper objects of the place,' he enthused, 'has been immense'. This was explicitly associated in his mind with the new direction in Oxford architecture. 'I am glad to see in the case of the Examination Schools and Trinity,' he wrote, 'a departure from that narrow addiction to the medieval which reigned under neo-Catholicism and Scott'.[118] As the liberals triumphed, so this new style was

109 E.A. Freeman, 'Oxford After Forty Years: I', *Contemporary Review*, 51 (1887), 609, 613.
110 Freeman, 'Oxford After Forty Years: II', 816.
111 Barker, op. cit. note 24, p. 42.
112 Colvin, op. cit. note 2, pp. 180-2.
113 Howell, op. cit. note 2, p. 71.
114 G. Stamp, 'George Gilbert Scott, junior, Architect, 1839-97' (Cambridge Univ. unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, 1978), 189.
115 *Oxford Magazine*, 4 (1886), 162.
116 W. Temple, *Life of Bishop Percival* (1921), 64-6.
117 Bodl. G.A. Oxon. c. 287, 48, 51, 'Papers Relating to Trinity College: Proposed New Buildings' (1882).
118 G. Smith, 'Oxford Old and New', *Oxford Magazine*, 4 (1886), 229.

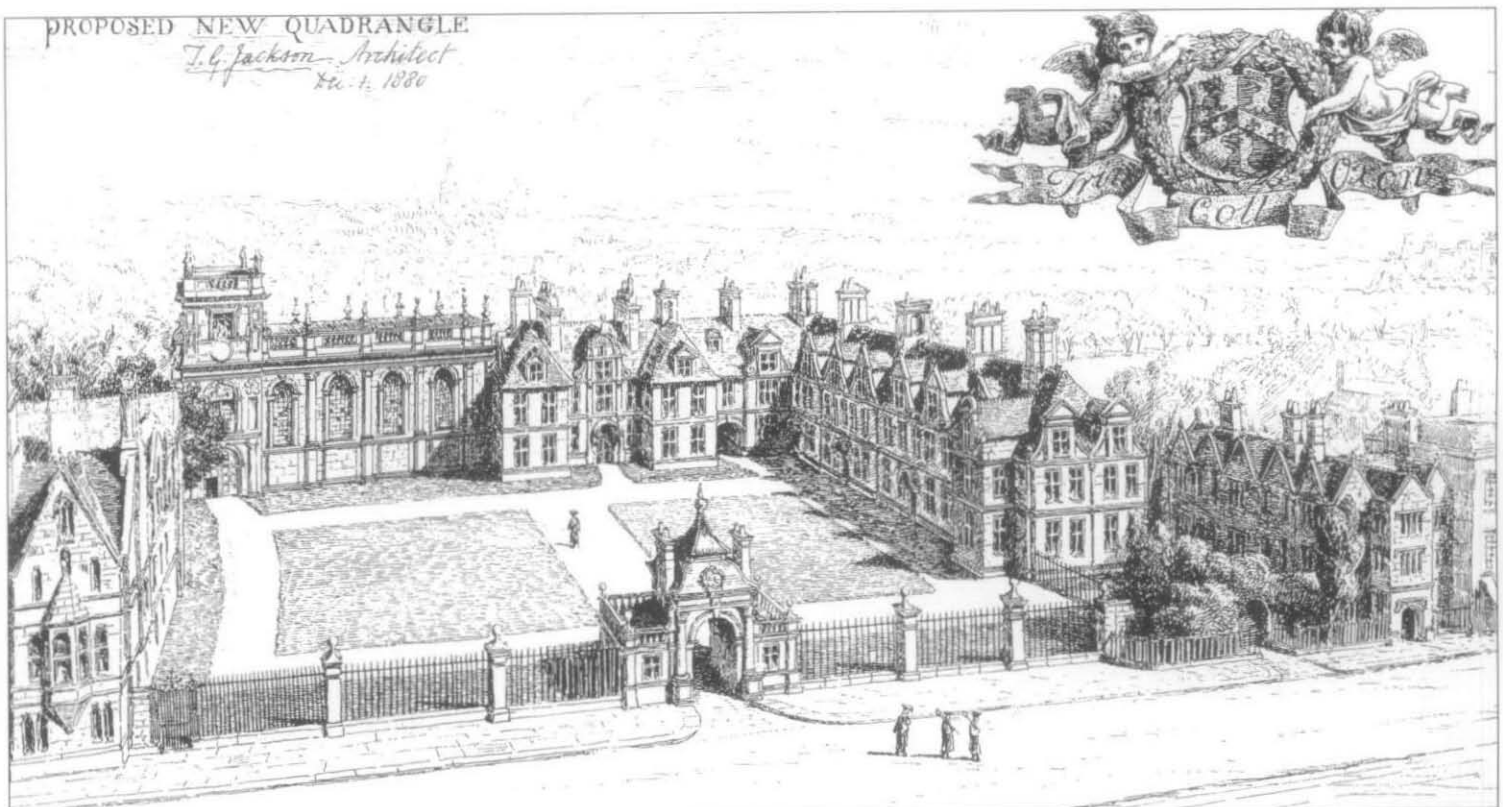

Fig. 6. Trinity College: Jackson Building and President's Lodgings.

found throughout the university. By 1887, Freeman was forced to admit that Magdalen and New College were 'the only two bodies who have not bowed the knee to Baal', and adopted the new eclectic Renaissance approach.[119] Oxford was a town transformed. The progressives had made good use of their majority, and the 'plastic period' in which they found themselves. The New Schools was just one part of this process – but an important one, symbolising their triumph and establishing the style in which they would articulate their identity. It was a key part in the making of a modern university. It symbolised reform and changed the face of Oxford. Its influence can be felt to this day.

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119 E.A. Freeman, 'Architecture in Oxford', *The Architect*, 38 (1887),