

The Restoration of Iffley Parish Church

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SUMMARY

Iffley parish church first became known as an important and relatively unspoiled example of English Romanesque architecture in the mid 18th century. This article traces the long and complex process of the restoration of the fabric and the rearrangement of the interior from 1807, when the first interventions were made, until the mid 1870s, when the process was completed. The restoration of the church is related to the growing scholarly understanding of the architectural history of the Middle Ages in the first half of the 19th century; to the changing social character of the village; and to changing patterns of worship. It identifies the main participants in the process, and modifies the somewhat simplistic view of the subject in which 'heroes' (John Ruskin, William Morris and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings) are ranged against 'villains' (mostly architects and clergymen). In so doing it attempts to contribute to a more balanced and nuanced understanding of 19th-century church restoration as a whole.

In the literature of English church architecture the word 'restoration' is a loaded and often emotive one. After the publication of John Ruskin's *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) the idea gradually took root that alterations to historic buildings should be confined to an absolute minimum, and that the task of those entrusted with them was, as far as possible, to conserve them in the state in which they were found.¹ This idea was publicised with great energy by William Morris and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and it still forms the core ideology of the modern conservationist movement.² It grew up as a reaction against the alleged excesses of early Victorian church restoration, in which, it was argued, many of our finest historic buildings were mauled, often to the point of destruction, through the misplaced zeal of clergy and patrons, the ignorance of the public and the greed of architects. Yet restorations were often much less destructive than Ruskin and Morris implied, and they cannot be understood without proper consideration of the practical concerns which the lapsed Evangelical Ruskin and the agnostic Morris chose to ignore or belittle in their polemics. Such knowledge can only be gained through a minute consideration of the circumstances in which individual restorations took place.

The church of St. Mary, Iffley, is one of the most complete and most impressive Romanesque parish churches in England. Built, probably between 1175 and 1182, on the edge of a hillside above the River Thames two miles or so to the south of Oxford, it is a long, narrow building consisting of an aisleless nave, central tower and aisleless chancel, to the east end of which was added, in the first half of the 13th century, a square-ended sanctuary in the early Gothic style.³ Some of the original windows were replaced in the 15th century by traceried windows in the Perpendicular Gothic style, and at some stage, probably in the early 17th century,⁴ the nave roof

¹ See especially 'The Lamp of Memory' (Everyman edn. 1907), 199. This point of view is even more eloquently stated in the chapter entitled 'The Nature of Gothic' from the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* (1853).

² C. Miele, 'The Conservationist', in L. Parry (ed.), *William Morris* (V & A exhibition catalogue, 1996), 72-9.

³ The most detailed descriptions of the building are in *Royal Commission on Historic Monuments: Oxford* (1939), 151-4; *V.C.H. Oxon.* v, 203-4; N. Pevsner and J. Sherwood, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (1974), 658-61.

⁴ The date 1612 is carved on the crenellation on the southern side of the nave, though it is possible that this refers to the replacement of an earlier lowered roof.



Fig. 1. The church from the south-east c. 1800, artist unknown (Oxfordshire County Council Photographic Archive 3301).

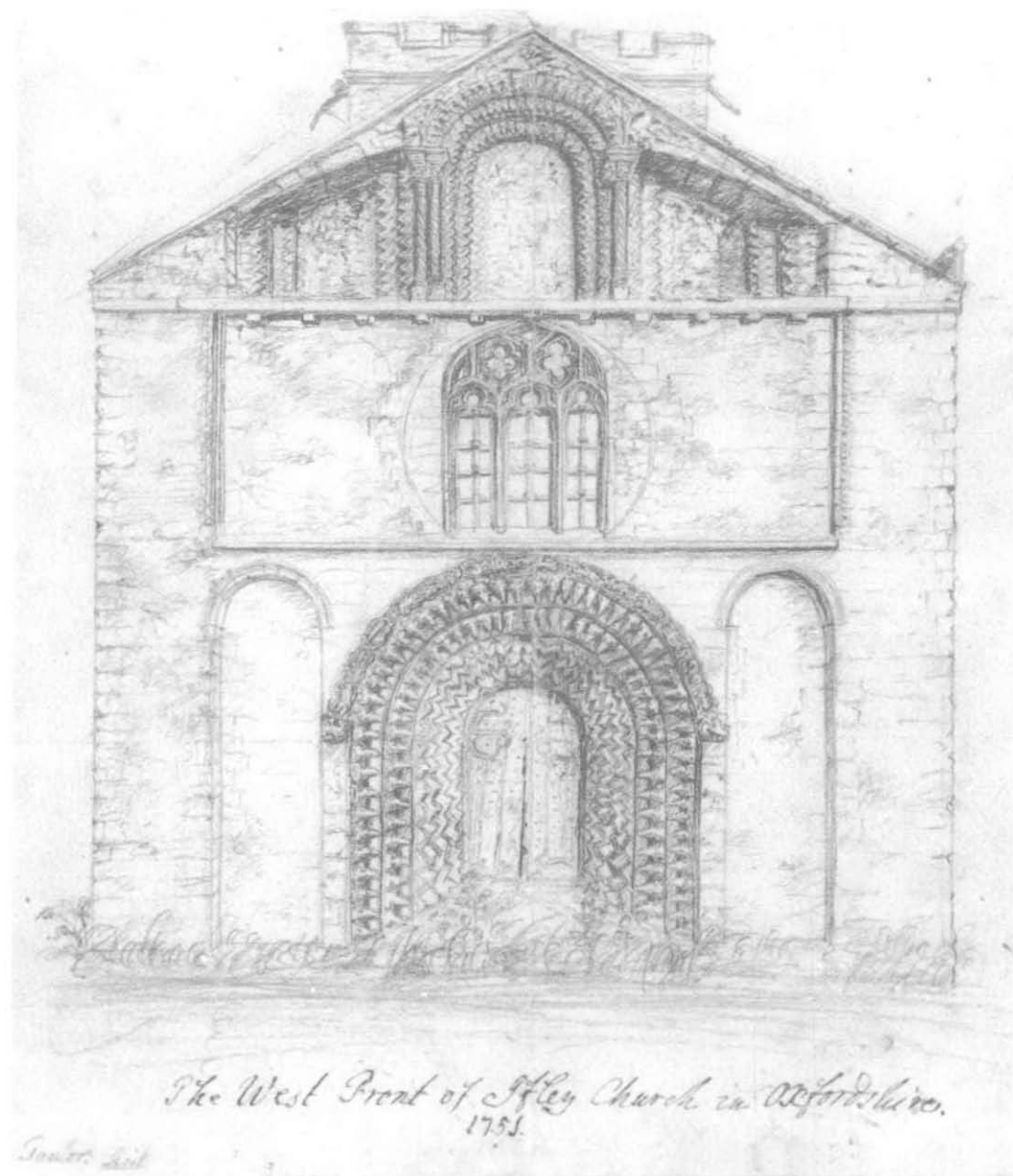


Fig. 2. The west front in 1751, drawing by Isaac Taylor (Society of Antiquaries of London).

was lowered, spoiling the magnificent west front in the process, and a south porch was added, obscuring the beautifully carved south doorway (Fig. 1). But the massive rubble-stone walls survived intact, as did the ribbed vaulting of the chancel and sanctuary and the fanciful carving around the west and south doorways. Partly because of its relatively good state of preservation and partly because of its attractive situation close to Oxford, the church became well known to antiquarians and seekers after the picturesque in the second half of the 18th

century. This in itself made it highly unlikely that it would remain in the 'unrestored' state regarded as so desirable by Morris and his many followers.

In any church restoration, aesthetic concerns vie with practical and liturgical considerations: typically the need to house more worshippers and the desire to cater for changing patterns of worship. At Iffley the process started with a growing appreciation of the historic fabric which can be taken back at least to 1751. In that year a pencil drawing by Isaac Taylor of the west front in its truncated state was included by Charles Lyttleton, dean of Exeter cathedral and later president of the Society of Antiquaries of London, in a 'Book of Drawings of Saxon Churches' (Fig. 2).⁵ A pioneer in the appreciation of the architecture of the 11th and 12th centuries, Lyttleton focused on buildings 'executed in the Style of Architecture which prevail'd here in the Saxon or first Norman ages, before the introduction of the Gothic', and in doing so he helped establish a canon of important English Romanesque buildings of which Iffley church came to form a part.⁶ In a letter to Lyttleton of 1753, the antiquary William Borlase expressed the hope that the 'sadly mauled' façade could be reconstructed to the original design:⁷ the first known plea for the restoration of the building.

A few years later, in 1767, one of Lyttleton's protégés, Andrew Ducarel, included an engraving of the west door in his *Anglo-Norman Antiquities*, a publication largely devoted to the Romanesque architecture of his native Normandy, which he described as 'the architecture used by the Romans, greatly corrupted and loaded with uncouth ornaments, in a mode peculiar to [the] northern people'.⁸ Then in 1787 the church was included, and illustrated with an engraving of 1774, in the fifth or supplementary volume of Francis Grose's *Antiquities of England and Wales* (1787), where it was described as 'a very good example of the stile commonly called Saxon'. Grose drew particular attention to the quality of the carvings around the doorways, and on the arches and vaulting inside the church, and to the massive 12th-century font: all of them the subjects of close study by later antiquarians and architectural historians.⁹

The first datable drawings of the interior show it divested of all its furnishings: presumably exercises designed to demonstrate its architectural qualities. One, dated 1799, is by the topographical artist John Buckler, and shows the view looking west from the chancel;¹⁰ the other, by an unknown artist, and of about the same date, is taken from the nave looking east, with the stonework of the nave walls clearly visible (it is now covered by plaster) and the mouldings around the two massive and richly carved tower arches seemingly as crisp and sharp as they are today (Fig. 3).¹¹ In reality, much of this detail was

⁵ Society of Antiquaries, *Drawings of Saxon Churches*, f. 22. English Romanesque architecture was commonly called 'Saxon' in the 18th century.

⁶ For Lyttleton, see T. Cocke in *English Romanesque Art* (Hayward Gallery, London, exhib. catalogue 1984), 362, and S. Smiles, 'Data, Documentation and Display in Eighteenth-Century Investigations of Exeter Cathedral', *Art History*, xxv (2002), 500-19; I owe these references to Bernard Nurse, Librarian of the Society of Antiquaries.

⁷ BL, Sloane MS. 752, f. 752, quoted in Cocke, *Eng. Romanesque Art* (1984), 374.

⁸ A. Ducarel, *Anglo-Norman Antiquities considered in a Tour through part of Normandy* (1767), plate facing p.101. For Ducarel, a former gentleman commoner at St. John's College, Oxford, see Cocke, *Eng. Romanesque Art*, 362.

⁹ F. Grose, *Antiquities of England and Wales*, v (1787). A much cruder drawing of the west front was included in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1791.

¹⁰ BL, Add. MS. 36,373, f. 145. I owe this reference to John Steane.

¹¹ Centre for Oxfordshire Studies, photographic collection no. 3304; the whereabouts of the original is unknown. The drawing shows two blind pointed-arched openings of unknown purpose in the north and south nave walls, on either side of the tower arch, now covered by plaster.

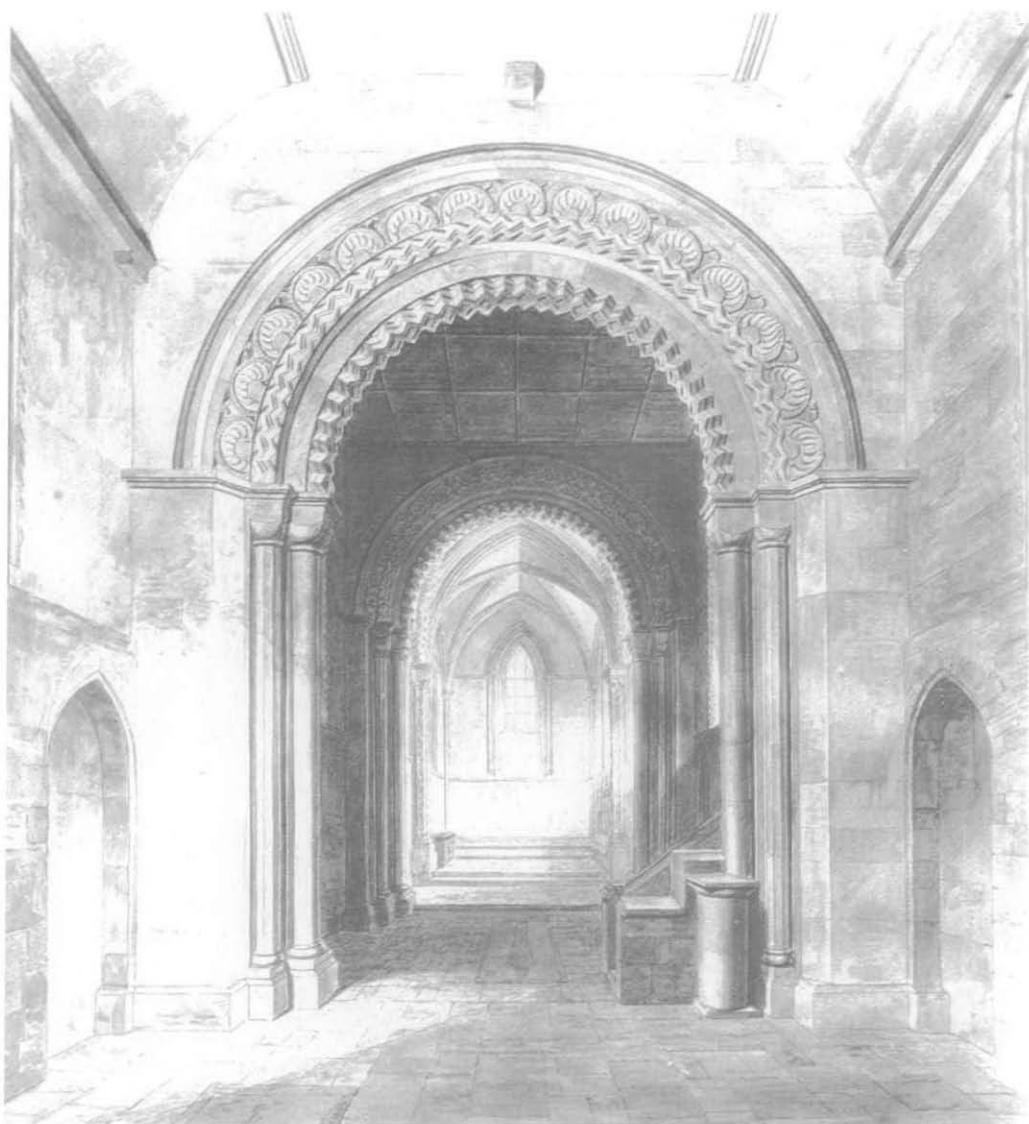


Fig. 3. The interior looking east without furnishings *c.* 1800, artist unknown (Oxfordshire County Council Photographic Archive 3304).

invisible to visitors and worshippers. A late medieval rood screen filled the lower part of the eastern tower arch, and against the western arch there was a Jacobean pulpit and reading desk from which the services were taken. Box pews filled the nave and the 12th-century chancel, and, most intrusive of all, a ringing chamber occupied the space under the tower, blocking the majestic vista through the church and cutting the chancel off from the nave (Fig. 4) – a state of affairs offensive both to lovers of architecture and to future liturgical

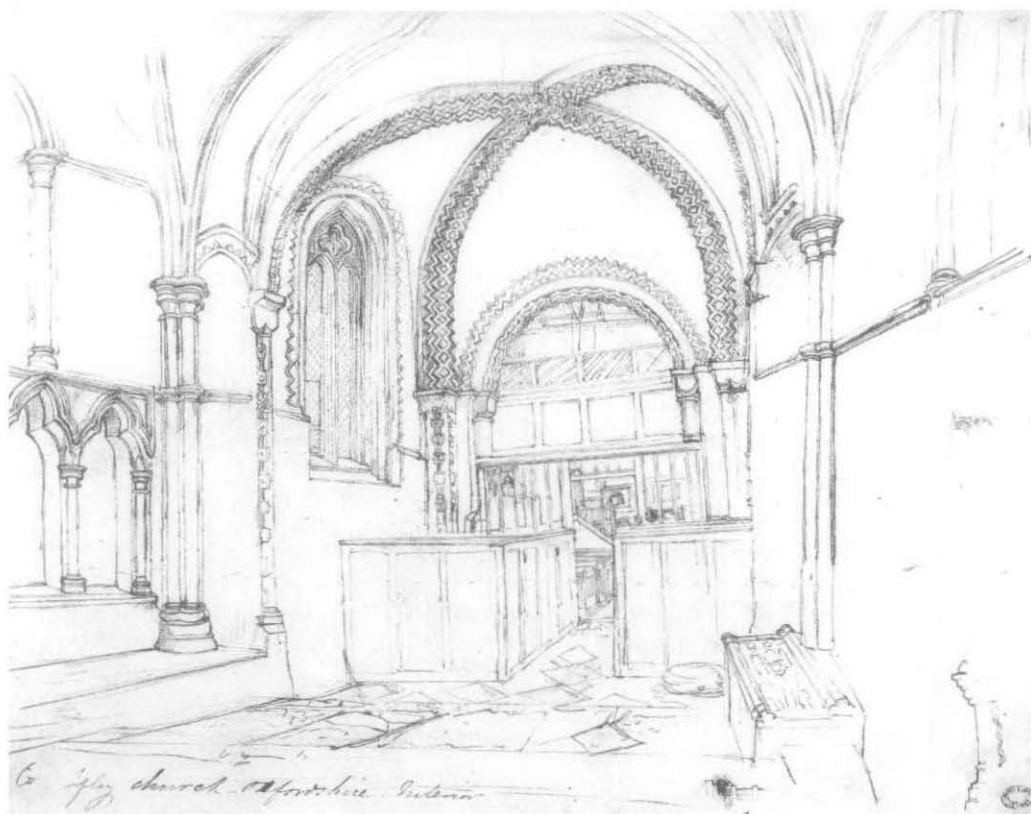


Fig. 4. The chancel looking west at the beginning of the 19th century, artist unknown (Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. a.39, f. 12).

reformers.¹² Though the medieval vaulting of the chancel and sanctuary survived, the nave roof timbers were hidden by a coved plaster ceiling, probably dating from the 17th century.¹³ Against the west wall there was a wooden gallery, which provoked an irritated response from an anonymous writer of 1808: 'These singing galleries have of late become very numerous, and there is now scarcely a place of worship that does not exhibit one crowded with motley performers, to the great annoyance of the more sedate part of the congregation, who are wholly excluded from this part of the service, by the vociferous and discordant jargon of these pretenders to harmony'.¹⁴

¹² Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon a.39, f. 12; the artist is unknown. The gallery is mentioned in a printed account of the church from the *Antiquarian and Topographical Repertory* (1808), included in the collections of William Plowman on the history of Iffley, Littlemore and Sandford: Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon c.78, ff. 39-47. It is also mentioned in a series of notes on local churches compiled by J.E. Robinson of Chieveley, Berks: Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. b.220, f.150.

¹³ It is shown in a drawing of 1816, in the possession of the vicar.

¹⁴ *Antiquarian and Topographical Repertory*, in Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon c.78, f. 43.

The dilapidated state of the interior reflected the relative poverty of the living and, perhaps, the lack of a resident squire. Until the end of the 19th century, when the advancing suburbs of Oxford first lapped over its borders, Iffley was an entirely rural parish. The manor had belonged since 1383 to Donnington Hospital, near Newbury, the living to the archdeacons of Oxford, who were, along with Lincoln College and Donnington Hospital, the main landowners in the parish. The substantial stone-built house to the north of the church, now called the Rectory, was the rectorial manor house, often leased out and by the end of the 18th century uninhabitable.¹⁵ As rectors, the archdeacons were responsible for appointing perpetual curates to serve the living, most of them fellows of Oxford colleges who chose to live in the comfort of their colleges, sometimes delegating their duties to ill-paid assistant curates; in 1790 the living yielded just £19 a year.¹⁶

The first attempt to divest the fabric of its later accretions occurred in 1807, when the south porch¹⁷ was removed by the incumbent, J.C. Cockle, a fellow of Brasenose College, and one of the churchwardens, William Nowell, a captain and later admiral in the Royal Navy.¹⁸ Their intervention incensed the villagers, who apparently objected to the loss of their right of sanctuary. But, in the words of a contemporary commentator, 'the minister and his colleague, rightly judging that the interior of the Church was the most likely place to excite sentiments of devotion, proceeded with their work'.¹⁹ The removal of the porch also temporarily damaged the top of the arch of the south door, as can be seen in one of four drawings published in the *Antiquarian and Topographical Repertory* in 1808. But the carvings around the doorway were at last revealed – presumably the main object of the exercise – and in 1837 they were said to be 'as fresh and perfect as when newly erected':²⁰ something which remains true today. Not long afterwards, and certainly by 1816,²¹ the ringing chamber under the tower was also removed, thus paving the way for the opening up of the interior and enabling the Romanesque tower arches to be clearly seen (Fig. 5).

The Nowell family were the forerunners of a stream of middle-class immigrants into the village who slowly transformed both its architectural and its social character. This development became particularly apparent in the years following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, when a number of villas were constructed as retreats for Oxford tradesmen and academics.²² A by-product of this influx was a growing appreciation of the church as a historical monument to be cherished; another was a growth in the resources available to

¹⁵ Oxfordshire Record Office [hereafter ORO], MS. Oxf. Archdeaconry papers, Oxon. b. 25, ff. 4-7.

¹⁶ Ibid. The figure had trebled by 1831: *Rep. Comm. on Ecclesiastical Revenues* (Parl. Papers 1835); E. Marshall, *An Account of the Township of Iffley* (2nd edn. 1874), 80-1.

¹⁷ Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. b. 220, f. 150v.; MS. Top. Oxon. c. 78, f. 41. The porch was shown in a crude engraving of the south front dating from c. 1750-70 dedicated to Edward Rowe Moores, fellow of Queen's College: Bodl. Gough Maps 26, f. 66. See also BL, Add. MS. 36,373, f. 134, and Centre for Oxfordshire Studies, photographic collection no. 3301.

¹⁸ Nowell was the nephew of a former principal of St. Mary Hall, Oxford, whose widow founded the village dame school in 1822; the family leased the manor of Iffley from Donnington Hospital and lived first at the so-called Manor House – originally the farmhouse for the Lincoln College estate – and, after it was damaged by fire in 1810, at Court Place, a large house to the south of the church: P. Reynolds, *A Stroll in Old Iffley* (1991), 33-7, 49-52.

¹⁹ Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. c. 78, f. 41.

²⁰ J. Ingram, *Memorials of Oxford*, 5.

²¹ Drawing by J. Coney in possession of the vicar.

²² E.g. Grove House, the home of John Henry Newman's mother: see Reynolds, op. cit. note 18, *passim*. In June 1784 Dr. Johnson and James Boswell had gone to visit Dr. Nowell, the principal of St. Mary Hall, 'at his beautiful villa at Iffley, on the banks of the Isis' [the Manor House]: R.W. Chapman (ed.), *Boswell's Life of Johnson* (1953), 1294.

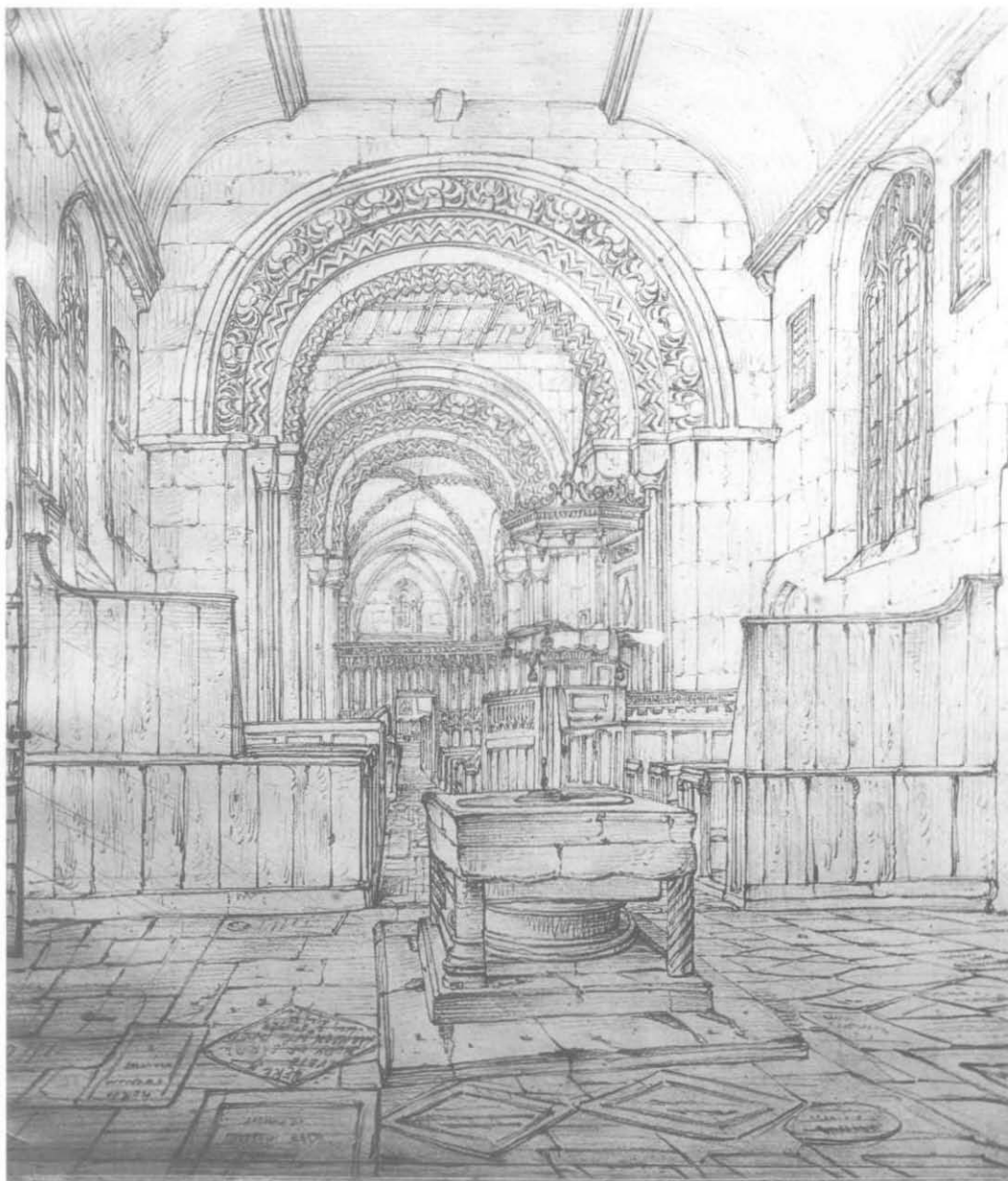


Fig. 5. The interior looking east in 1816, drawing by J. Coney (Vicar and churchwardens of St. Mary, Iffley).

fund further improvements without resorting to the church rates. The post-Waterloo years saw a spate of restoration work in Oxford, including the refacing of several colleges and the internal remodelling of the University Church and Magdalen College chapel.²³ A renewed interest in Iffley church is suggested by the fact that in 1818 C.F. Porden, nephew of the better-known architect William Porden, was commissioned to supply a plan and some detailed measured drawings for inclusion in the fifth and last volume of John Britton's *Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain*, which finally appeared in 1826 and which represented the most accurate account of the building to date.²⁴ One of the drawings showed the west front with its lowered gable,²⁵ and in the summer of 1823 Robert Bliss, a former bookseller in Oxford and resident of Iffley, and a dedicatee of one of Britton's plates, paid for raising the west gable to its original height, a process which involved rebuilding the tops of the outermost of the three round arches at the top of the façade.²⁶ The new work, apparently carried out under Bliss's own direction,²⁷ improved the appearance of the west front at the price of making the lowness of the nave roof even more painfully apparent (Fig. 6).²⁸

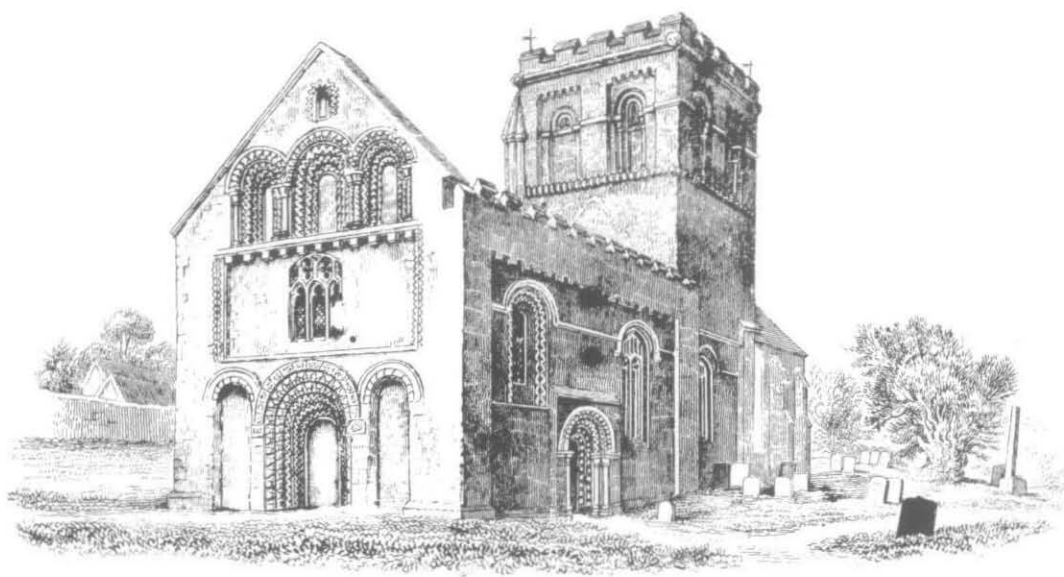


Fig. 6. The church from the south-west c. 1830, artist unknown (Vicar and churchwardens of St. Mary, Iffley).

²³ G. Tyack, *Oxford: An Architectural Guide* (1998), 194-201.

²⁴ J. Britton, *The Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain*, v (1826), pp. 202-4. For Porden, see H.M. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840* (1995), 772.

²⁵ Another drawing, by Buckler, of the west front, dated 1813, was used as the frontispiece to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, lxxxviii (2) (1818).

²⁶ Marshall, op. cit. note 16, p. 97. Bliss's shop was 'near Queen's College' (catalogue in Centre for Oxfordshire Studies, OXFO 658.8 BLIS), and he was buried at Iffley on 8 April 1828 (ORO, Iffley parish registers). His relationship to Robert Bliss, a fellow of St. John's College and editor of Anthony Wood's *Athenae Oxonienses*, and dedicatee of another of Britton's plates, is unclear.

²⁷ J.H. Parker in *Archaeol. Jnl.* iv (1847), 218-25.

²⁸ Dated drawings by Buckler showing the west front before and after rebuilding are in BL, Add. MS. 35,356, ff. 135, 139.



Fig. 7. The interior looking east in 1834, drawing by Frederick Mackenzie from J. Ingram, *Memorials of Oxford* (Vicar and churchwardens of St. Mary, Ifley).

The raising of the west gable took place during the incumbency of Edward Marshall, a fellow of Oriel College and father of the first historian of the parish. He was appointed in 1819,²⁹ and he was presumably responsible for the removal of the medieval rood screen in or around 1823.³⁰ Like James Wyatt's earlier activities at Salisbury Cathedral and elsewhere, this act of apparent vandalism was probably carried out in order to complete the opening of the vista from the west to the east end of the church. But it also had the effect of making the chancel seem less distant from the worshippers in the nave, and the concurrent removal of some of the box pews made it possible to incorporate more seating (Fig. 7).³¹

By 1841 the population of Iffley had more than doubled, to 764, since the beginning of the century. A new church at Littlemore, built by John Henry Newman in 1835-6, served the inhabitants of the more distant parts of the parish, but in 1840 the churchwardens of Iffley reported in their annual presentment to the archdeacon that the seating in the church was still inadequate.³² In the following year therefore an appeal to fund a more thorough restoration, including the provision of new seating, was launched.³³ Its promoters were the archdeacon, Charles Clerk; the recently-appointed incumbent, William Woolcombe, a fellow of Exeter College; and John Parsons, senior partner in the well-known Oxford banking family, who owned a villa in Iffley which now belongs to Hawkwell House Hotel. By October 1841 the appeal had raised £700, with Parsons the largest single subscriber.³⁴ In applying in 1843 for a faculty to carry out the work, the promoters mentioned that only half the population could be accommodated in the nave, the chancel seating being reserved for pew-owners. They proposed the replacement of the seating by new and open sittings, in the process of which the Jacobean pulpit would have to be relocated against the eastern tower arch and the west gallery replaced. They also planned to undo some of the 'injurious alterations' to the 12th-century fabric, above all by raising the nave roof to its original pitch, a project which would increase the total cost to £1,120, or over half a million pounds in modern money. £890 of this had already been raised by subscription, and the rest was supplied by Parsons.³⁵

Parsons was the treasurer of the Oxford Society for Promoting the Study of Gothic Architecture (later the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society), which had been founded in 1839 in order to foster understanding of medieval buildings;³⁶ its members included John Ruskin, then an undergraduate at Christ Church, and also the incumbent of Iffley, William Woolcombe. Less dogmatic, though perhaps less influential, than the better-known Cambridge Camden Society, it offered the opportunity to share antiquarian information, and it also provided a forum for discussing questions of restoration. The Society's collections included plaster casts taken from the south and west doorways of Iffley church, and the architect chosen to carry out its restoration, R.C. Hussey, was an honorary

²⁹ Foster, *Alum. Oxon* (1888), 582. He was already the lessee of the rectorial estate.

³⁰ The screen is shown in an engraving in J. Skelton, *Antiquities of Oxfordshire* (1825), but Ingram, *Memorials of Oxford*, 7, said in 1837 that the screen was removed 'a few years since'. Henry Taunt's guidebook to Iffley church (c. 1900) says it was removed in 1823.

³¹ Seen in a view by Mackenzie of 1834, in Ingram, *Memorials of Oxford*.

³² ORO, MS. Oxf. Archdeaconry papers, Oxon. c.78, f.120.

³³ Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. a.39, f.14v.

³⁴ For Parsons, see L.F. Bradburn, *The Old Bank in Oxford* (1977), 42, 49-50. His house in Iffley is discussed in Reynolds, op. cit. note 18, pp. 12-13, and A.S. Symonds, *The Changing Faces of Iffley* (1999), 74.

³⁵ ORO, MS. Oxf. Diocesan papers c. 2169/1. The faculty itself is in ORO, MS. dd. Par. Iffley b.31 (g). Parsons gave the final cost as £1,180: ORO, MS. dd. Par. Iffley b.31 (h).

³⁶ W. Pantin, 'The Oxford Architectural and Historical Society 1839-1939', *Oxoniensia*, iv (1939), 174-8.

member.³⁷ An assiduous student of medieval buildings since the 1820s, he went into partnership in 1835 with Thomas Rickman, designer of many neo-Gothic churches and author of *An Attempt to Discriminate the Styles of Architecture in England*, first published in 1817, and in 1838 he took over Rickman's Birmingham-based practice;³⁸ he subsequently carried out several important church restorations, including the sensitive rebuilding of the chancel of the famous 12th-century church at Barfreston (Kent) in 1839-41.³⁹

Hussey's reordering of the interior of Iffley church (Fig. 8) involved the replacement of the remaining box pews by plain wooden seating, giving 250 'free and open' sittings – an addition of 90 – as well as a set of inward-facing choir stalls in the chancel.⁴⁰ He also raised the height of the ringing loft, closed up the old rood loft stairs and reconstructed the west gallery, on which was placed a new organ by William Picher of Pimlico 'peculiarly constructed ... so as not to interfere with the general effect of the church'.⁴¹ This enabled the incumbent to dispense with the rustic band of yokels who had formerly led the musical side of worship. And, in order to open up a view of the chancel to worshippers in the southern pews of the nave, Hussey also removed the Jacobean reading-desk and pulpit, together with the medieval stone stairs leading to the pulpit, and erected a new stone pulpit against the eastern tower arch, with a reading-desk opposite.⁴² With the focal point of the services thus shifted eastwards, the church was suitably furnished for the kind of eucharistic worship favoured by the Oxford Movement and the Cambridge Camden Society. By the early 1850s Holy Communion was being celebrated once a month as well as at festivals, with 60-80 communicants.⁴³

Hussey's replacement of the nave roof transformed the architectural character of the western part of the church. His steeply-pitched new roof is an impressive structure with tie beams supported on arched braces rising from the already-existing stone corbels, their spandrels filled with wooden tracery, as in the famous 13th-century roof of the Great Hall at Winchester Castle; upright king posts rise from the centres of the tie beams to the apex of the roof. This was not a re-creation of the original 12th-century roof, which would probably have been of the trussed-rafter type, but in its sturdy, robust character it admirably complemented the architecture of the building. Other structural changes included the addition of buttresses to shore up the outward-leaning east wall and the replacement of the brick floors by stone slabs; there was no mention of recarving the internal or external stonework in the specification, and comparison of the fabric as it is today with pre-Hussey drawings suggest that he left it alone – a tribute not only to his sensitivity but also to the skills of the medieval builders and craftsmen. The completion of the restoration in 1845 was followed two years later by the publication of a detailed account of the building in the

³⁷ *Rules and Proceedings of the Oxford Society for promoting the Study of Gothic Architecture* (1839, 1840): bound volumes in Bodleian Library.

³⁸ Colvin, *Dictionary*, 813; *Builder*, 52, 5 Feb. 1887, p. 215 (obituary). Hussey's notebooks are in the Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Gen. e.49, and there is a small drawing by him of one of the 15th-century windows at Iffley church, dated 24 April 1844, in MS. Top. Gen. f.15, f. 71v.

³⁹ J. Newman, *The Buildings of England: North-East and East Kent* (1969), 129.

⁴⁰ ORO, MS. dd. Par. Iffley b.35 (b) (plan dated July 1843). The builder was George Wyatt.

⁴¹ ORO, MS. dd. Par. Iffley b. 31 (d); R. Pacey and M. Popkin, *The Organs of Oxford* (1997), 107. The gallery is shown in an engraving of 1845: Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. c.78, f. 35v.

⁴² Hussey's pulpit was replaced by a wooden one by Ninian Comper in 1907, which was itself removed in 1995, to be replaced by a movable lectern; MS. notes in possession of the vicar.

⁴³ E.P. Baker (ed.), *Bishop Wilberforce's Visitation Returns for the Archdeaconry of Oxford, 1854* (Oxfordshire Rec. Soc. xxxv, 1954), 79; 130 people – about a sixth of the total population – attended the Sunday morning service at the time of the census of 1851: K. Tiller (ed.), *Church and Chapel in Oxfordshire 1851* (Oxfordshire Rec. Soc. lv, 1987), 54.



Fig. 8. The interior looking west in 1845, drawing by Frederick Mackenzie published by J.H. Parker (Vicar and churchwardens of St. Mary, Iffley).

Archaeological Journal by the Oxford bookseller and historian J.H. Parker, another stalwart of the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society.

Hussey's restoration constituted the biggest change to the church interior since the 17th century. But some post-Romanesque accretions still remained, to the vexation of the growing number of antiquarian and ecclesiastical zealots. Such people had been targeted by H.G. Liddell, the future dean of Christ Church, in an admirably lucid and balanced paper to the Oxford Architectural Society in 1841: 'Let us... not set our affections on one style only, or on absolute uniformity in each style. This is the pedantry of Architecture; this is the one-sidedness we must guard against... [The] alterations of old buildings are in great part their history, and however much you may restore, you cannot recover the original work'.⁴⁴ He went on to say that inappropriate 'insertions' such as the plaster ceiling over the nave of Iffley church could legitimately be removed. But he referred to a 'difference of opinion' over the wisdom of replacing the Perpendicular windows of the nave and west front, even though the outlines and some of the detailing of the original Romanesque window frames could be seen above and around them. Hussey agreed with his views, and the Perpendicular Gothic windows were left alone, on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence of what had been there before.⁴⁵

Hussey's cautious attitude was not shared by the next incumbent, Thomas Acton Warburton, barrister son of a landowner from Co. Galway and descendant of an ancient Cheshire family, who was appointed to the living in 1853.⁴⁶ The author of books entitled *Rollo and His Race, or Footsteps of the Normans* (1848), and, more prosaically, *The Equity Pleader's Manual* (1850), he followed the lead of the Cambridge Camden Society in condemning 'debased' later alterations to early medieval churches. In 1856 therefore he brought in a new architect, John Chessell Buckler, to remove the Perpendicular window which blocked the round Romanesque west window, a move which was vainly opposed by John Parsons, who took his objections to the bishop, Samuel Wilberforce.⁴⁷ The son of the topographical artist John Buckler, and architect of Magdalen College School (the present Magdalen College library) and the front of Jesus College,⁴⁸ the younger Buckler was a competent architect, deeply imbued with the medievalist spirit, and his reinstatement of the circular west window completed the process of returning the west façade to something approaching its original appearance (Fig. 9).⁴⁹ It also gave the opportunity of introducing stained glass by John Hardman, one of the best Victorian stained-glass artists, in memory of Warburton's brother Eliot Acton Warburton, a writer of historical novels who perished in a burning steamer in 1853; the window represents the Holy Spirit with rays symbolising the 'sevenfold spiritual gifts'.⁵⁰ Later in Warburton's incumbency stained-glass windows were also introduced into the chancel, possibly to the designs of Clayton and Bell, and under the tower, by a different artist.⁵¹ These, predictably, failed to please John Ruskin when he visited the church, for the first time for 30 years, in 1872 and 'found it pitch-dark with painted glass of barbarous manufacture'.⁵²

⁴⁴ *Proc. Ox. Arch. Soc.* 9 June 1841, pp. 18-19.

⁴⁵ *Archaeol. Jnl.* iv (1847), 218-25.

⁴⁶ *DNB*, xx, 752-3.

⁴⁷ Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. b.31 (h), Wilberforce to Warburton, 22 July 1856.

⁴⁸ Colvin, *Dictionary*, 178.

⁴⁹ He was assisted by his own son C.A. Buckler, who was later converted to Roman Catholicism and was responsible for the rebuilding of Arundel Castle in its present form.

⁵⁰ Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. c.78, f.26; Pevsner and Sherwood, *Oxfordshire*, 661.

⁵¹ The tower windows are in memory of Robert Reid (d. 1875); Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. c.78, f.55.

⁵² J. Ruskin, *Collected Works*, 22 (1906), 205.



Fig. 9. The nave looking west (Thomas Photos, by permission of Oxfordshire County Council Photographic Archive).

In 1857 Buckler restored the ancient Rectory as a residence for Warburton, who, as a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, did not have an Oxford collegiate base.⁵³ Thus another of the Oxford Movement's cherished aims was fulfilled: that of providing suitable housing for a resident priest and his family in each parish. The churchyard cross was restored in the

⁵³ The drawings are held by the Church Commissioners, who took over the house and all but 71 a. of the rectorial estate from the lessee, the Rev. Edward Marshall. Photocopies of the drawings are kept by the present incumbent.



Fig. 10. The chancel in 1962 (Vicar and churchwardens of St. Mary, Iffley).

same year by the diocesan architect G.E. Street, with a new carving of the Lamb by his frequent collaborator Thomas Earp, and in 1858, a structural restoration of the chancel was carried out by the Church Commissioners' architect Ewan Christian.⁵⁴ This was followed in 1864 by the construction of the present Gothic stone reredos against the east wall, to Buckler's designs.⁵⁵ But Warburton was less successful in 1868 in forcing through the replacement of the 15th-century windows in the nave and under the tower – which he called 'Tudor blemishes' – by copies of the original Romanesque ones. He asked the opinion of several architects, but, despite the support of Street and also of Buckler, who hoped to do the work, he eventually gave way to determined opposition not only from his old antagonist John Parsons⁵⁶ but also from Edward Marshall, the parish historian, and from R.C. Hussey, who told him that 'ancient alterations such as these windows are, in buildings of higher antiquity, for me part of the history which the fabric carries in itself, and on this general principle I think they ought not to be supplanted without very cogent reason'⁵⁷ – words which would have been approved by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

When the west window was opened up in 1856 Warburton wanted also to remove the west gallery and organ, and to reinstate the west door as the main entrance to the church. This aim was not finally achieved until 1875, when the small organ on the west gallery was supplanted by a much larger instrument designed by William Hill, one of the leading English organ builders of his time.⁵⁸ Since there was no space in the narrow chancel – the usual place for Victorian organs – it was placed high on the south side of the nave, its console blocking the now superfluous south door and its heavy wooden case complementing the sturdiness of the architectural setting. A suitably robust accompaniment could now be given to the congregational hymns and psalms which were an important part of Anglican worship. Warburton resigned the living in 1876, his dignity hurt, it was said, by endemic opposition within the parish, and his successor, John Colyer, fared even worse, lasting only two years before being driven out by objections to his introduction of allegedly popish practices.⁵⁹ No fundamental changes were made either to the building or to its internal layout for another century.⁶⁰

To a greater extent than we perhaps realise, our perception of medieval architecture is filtered through the lens of the 19th century. It was estimated by *The Ecclesiologist* that about a quarter of all English churches were restored during the twenty years preceding 1854,⁶¹ and few of the rest escaped some sort of modification over the following 50 years. For much of the 20th century this was seen as a cause for regret, but today we are perhaps able to adopt a more balanced view and to see 19th-century restoration as part of a long process of change which any old building must inevitably undergo, and which each building undergoes in a different way. The story of the restoration of Iffley church shows how piecemeal and how long drawn-out this process could be. It also shows the dangers of treating the history of church restoration in a dogmatic or simplistic way: the removal of the late-medieval rood screen and the Jacobean pulpit were certainly regrettable, but who today would wish to

⁵⁴ Marshall, op. cit. note 16, p. 108.

⁵⁵ Pevsner and Sherwood, *Oxfordshire*, 661.

⁵⁶ Parsons described him in his diary as 'a most stiff cold Bore': Bradburn, op. cit. note 34, p. 49.

⁵⁷ ORO, MS. dd. Par. Iffley b.31 (h), Hussey to Warburton, 22 April 1868.

⁵⁸ Pacey and Popkin, op. cit. note 41, p. 107. It was donated by Major Ind of Court Place.

⁵⁹ Bodl. MS. Top. Oxon. c.78, ff. 141-2.

⁶⁰ See Friends of St. Mary's, Iffley, *Annual Report* (2003). The most important changes in the 20th century were the refacing of the tower and other stone repair and replacement in 1975-7 and the reordering of the interior, including the re-creation of a baptistery at the west end, in 1995.

⁶¹ J.M. Crook, *The Architect's Secret* (2003), 46.

reinstate the crude ringers' gallery under the tower or to replace Hussey's nave roof with the jejune plaster ceiling which it supplanted? Questions of this kind involve the exercise not only of aesthetic judgement but also a sympathetic understanding of the needs of those who use our ancient churches: qualities which are as desirable today as they were in the 19th century.

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