

The Medieval Buildings of University College, Oxford

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SUMMARY

Although University College has a complex early architectural history, its pre-1630s buildings have been little studied in detail until now. For several decades, the Fellows of University College lived in Little University Hall (now part of the site of Brasenose College), and did not move to their High Street home until the middle of the 14th century. Even then, the College seems merely to have made use of an existing building, Spicer Hall (renamed Great University Hall), and did not begin to create new buildings until the 1390s. The construction of the College's first quadrangle was a slow and intermittent process, which appears not to have been complete at least until the third quarter of the 15th century. Evidence for the appearance of the quadrangle is provided by drawings by John Bereblock and Antony Wood, and Wood also described the quadrangle in some detail before its demolition. However, some inventories and accounts from the College archives also shed important light on the residential portions of the quadrangle from the late 16th and early 17th century. In the 1630s, work on a larger and grander new quadrangle began, but it was not completed until the 1670s. During this period, the College had to live somewhat uncomfortably with two half-complete quadrangles, for it seems that some parts of the medieval buildings were standing at least until 1674/5.

The architectural history of University College before the construction of its Front Quadrangle in the 17th century has not been examined in any detail, arguably since the days of Antony Wood, and certainly not since A. Oswald's brief account in his chapter on the College for Volume III of the *Victoria County History of Oxfordshire*, written half a century ago.¹ However, although only two depictions of the old quadrangle of University College survive, neither very satisfactory, and no archaeological investigations have ever been carried out in this area, several documents in the College archives, especially title deeds, accounts, and inventories of College rooms from the late 16th and early 17th centuries, all help to reveal an unusually complicated story which is worth examining in detail for the light which it sheds on the attempts of a small College to find and then create a home.

This story will be split into four parts. The first one will consider the prehistory of the medieval quadrangle, when University College moved from its original home to the site of its new one; the second will sketch out what is known about the construction of the quadrangle; the third and longest part will set out what is known about the appearance of the quadrangle, and its possible use and occupation; and the fourth and final part will tell the story of the final demolition of the quadrangle, as it made way for its successor.

THE PREHISTORY OF THE MEDIEVAL QUADRANGLE

For over half a century University College was not actually on its present site (few, if any, other Colleges in Oxford or Cambridge have taken so long to find a final home). Its origins are traced to 1249 when the University of Oxford received a bequest of 310 marks from William of Durham, a Paris theologian who had ended his days as Rector of

¹ A. Oswald, 'University College', *V.C.H. Oxon.* iii, 61–81.

One presumes that the earliest Fellows of what was to become known as University College took over one of the three properties which had been purchased with William of Durham's money, and it is possible to deduce which one. A document datable to 1304–6,⁴ records a dispute over the use of a property called 'the hall called of the University of Oxford situated in the Street of the Schools of Arts' (*aula dicta universitatis Oxon in vico scholarum artium*). Protests had been made that this property was no longer being used as a school, in defiance of university statutes that buildings once used for this purpose could not change function. However, it was argued that a special exemption had been made for the 'scholars of Master William of Durham', under which houses owned by them could cease to become schools. Indeed that exemption is recorded in the College's first statutes. Furthermore, in 1318, a gift of land was made to University College under the name of 'The Masters and Scholars of the Hall of the University of Oxford'.⁵ Such evidence suggests that the building which came to be called University Hall was the first home of University College.

University Hall is an attractive candidate for the College's first home for another reason: H. E. Salter's sketch map of medieval Oxford from his *Survey of Oxford* (Fig. 1) shows that it was significantly smaller than Brasenose Hall.⁶ Because the College comprised a mere four Fellows, it made good sense to live in the smallest of its properties, and lease out the larger ones to obtain the best income from its endowment. That was certainly an argument employed by William Smith, the first and greatest historian of University College, who first argued for University Hall. He himself admitted that he was 'proceed[ing] upon Probabilities', but his conjecture has been generally followed.⁷

The name 'University Hall' or 'The Hall of the University of Oxford' needs some explanation here. During the early years of University College, the University as a whole had considerable powers over the College, performing all the functions of what would later be called a Visitor,⁸ such as the arbitration of disputes, and the right of veto over the appointment of Fellows. Therefore, for the dwelling place of the Fellows of University College to acquire such a name was not surprising. The name of the building then extended to the name of the institution. For the early Fellows of University, according to its statutes of 1292 and 1311, were originally supposed to have been called 'the Scholars of Master William of Durham'.⁹ But, as we have seen, they were also being named after their residence as early as 1318. By the 1360s, some documents are combining the usages, to come up with 'The Hall of Master William of Durham, usually called the Great Hall of the University of Oxford', and eventually, William of Durham's name disappeared altogether, especially once the legend of the College's foundation by King Alfred, first promulgated in the 1380s, began to take root.¹⁰

What could have persuaded University College to move elsewhere? The exact course of events is unknown, but certain details can be picked out. During the first two decades of the 14th century, University began to acquire some more houses in Oxford, including 83 and 84

⁴ UC:E/A1/D/6.

⁵ UC:E1/2D/2.

⁶ See also H. E. Salter, *Survey of Oxford*, ed. W. A. Pantin and W. T. Mitchell (2 vols Oxf. Hist. Soc. new ser. xvi 1964, xx), vol. i, 67–9.

⁷ W. Smith, *The Annals of University College* (1728), 56–7.

⁸ Indeed, the University of Oxford remained the Visitor of the College until 1727.

⁹ The texts of these statutes are preserved only in the University Archives: copies of the 1292 set are to be found in the Chancellor's, Senior Proctor's and Junior Proctor's Books (ref. OUA NEP/Supra/Registers A-C), and the original text of the 1311 set in OUA WPB/I/10.

¹⁰ Deed of 1368: UC:E/B1/D/2; deed of 1374: UC:E/B5/L/2.

High Street, and was given some lands at Paull in Yorkshire, near Hull.¹¹ Then, in the early 1330s, it would appear that the College had come into some money, for the Fellows went on something of a spending spree. In June 1332, the Fellows bought, for 'a certain sum of money', a house called Selverine Hall or Spicer Hall, which lay on the south side of the High Street, and which was later to be called Great University Hall, as we shall see. Not long after, in the summer and autumn of 1336, they bought three properties around Spicer Hall, namely Rose Hall and White Hall to the south, and Ludlow Hall to the east.¹² Another of H. E. Salter's maps (Fig. 2) shows the relative situation of these properties.¹³ Great University Hall and Ludlow Hall are easily visible; Rose Hall and White Hall appear to be in the uncertain group of properties below numbered 217–221 by Salter.¹⁴

This is an impressive block of buildings – certainly more extensive than the site of Brasenose Hall and Little University Hall – and it would appear that, at some stage over the next few years, the Fellows of University College decided to make their official residence Spicer Hall. This assumed the name of 'Great University Hall', if only because it was rather larger than the University Hall in Schools Street, which therefore became known as 'Little University Hall'. I write 'at some stage' because it is not known when the move took place. A deed of 1343 still talks of a property called Spicer Hall, but another deed of 1374 calls it 'University Hall'. At the same time, a deed of 1368 refers to a 'Little University Hall' in Schools Street, which suggests that the change of name – and thus the move – has taken place. It is therefore reasonably certain that Fellows moved to the High Street site some time between 1332 and 1368, but one cannot go much further than that.¹⁵

But why would they have moved to this new home? There are two possible reasons. The first is the increasing size of the College. By 1340, thanks to its increased endowment, the College now comprised no less than seven Fellows.¹⁶ Furthermore, by now the Fellows did not have the College to themselves. Under a clause of the College's 1292 statutes, the Fellows were actively encouraged to welcome 'other decent men to live with them' (*alios honestos commorari*), because the Fellows, as the statutes said, 'do not yet have the means from which they can live usefully on their own' (*nondum habent unde per se solos utiliter vivant*), and it was thought that this innovation would be expedient. These people, while not actual Fellows, were to share in the daily life of the College in return for paying a rent. Other Colleges accepted such paying guests under the names of *commensales* or *commorantes*, and they are today generally known as 'Commoners'.¹⁷

¹¹ 83–4 High Street: UC:E/B2/D1/4; property near Hull: UC:E1/2D/5.

¹² Spicer Hall: UC:E/A4/D/1–4; Rose Hall and White Hall: UC:E/C1/D/5–6; Ludlow Hall: UC:E/B5/D/4–5.

¹³ To help get their bearings, those looking at this map should note that Horsmull Lane is now known as Logic Lane, and that St John's Lane is now called Merton Street.

¹⁴ Salter, *op. cit.* note 6, vol. i, 189–90 and 254–5.

¹⁵ Deed of 1343: UC:E/B5/D/6; deed of 1374: UC:E/B5/L/2; deed of 1368: UC:E/A1/D/7.

¹⁶ List of Fellows in UC:E1/L1/1.

¹⁷ Readers should remember that this was the original meaning of 'Commoner', and that it was not until the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries that the word assumed its modern meaning of a fee-paying undergraduate who did not have a scholarship. More information on these medieval Commoners can be found in A. B. Cobban, *English University Life in the Middle Ages* (1999), 97–106. At University College, which, as Cobban shows, accepted more known Commoners than any other College, they seem to have been known as *commorantes*, to judge from an account entry from 1430/1 (A. D. M. Cox and R. H. Darwall-Smith (eds.), *Account Rolls of University College, Oxford* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. new ser. xxxix–xl), vol. i, xv–xvi and 379).

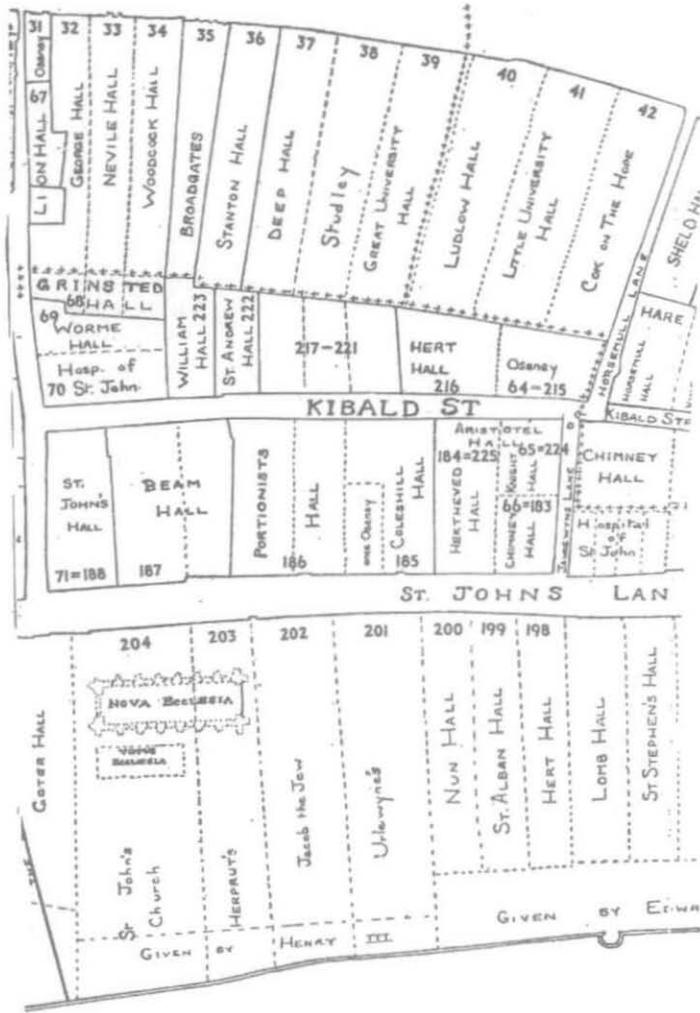


Fig. 2: Map by H. E. Salter of the area of Oxford comprising Great University Hall and other properties eventually subsumed into University College (from H. E. Salter, *Survey of Oxford*, ed. W. A. Pantin and W. T. Mitchell (2 vols Oxf. Hist. Soc. new ser. xvi 1964, xx), vol. i).

The 1292 statutes suggested Commoners could also be profitable, and this was certainly the case. By the 1380s, when the earliest extant accounts of University are preserved, we find that the College regularly received at least £5 a year from commoners, but an annual rent of about 33s. 4d. from Little University Hall. Once one has woken up to the commercial benefits of Commoners, it makes better economic sense to live in a larger building, and rent out as many rooms as one can.

The second possible reason for the move may lie in the possibilities for expansion offered by the new site. The College was continuing to purchase buildings in this area: in 1357, the College acquired Stanton Hall, slightly to the west of Great University Hall, in 1396 it acquired Hert Hall immediately to the south, and in 1400 it purchased two properties

directly adjoining Ludlow Hall known as Little University Hall and the Cock on the Hoop.¹⁸ Even if the College was not in a position to develop such places, at least it was in a position to do something with them.

Nevertheless, the College was apparently not closing off all options for its final home, as a re-examination of its houses in Schools Street shows. To the south of Brasenose Hall is a property labelled 'Salessury' on H. E. Salter's map in Fig. 1. Salter's work shows that this house was owned in the 1330s by the same family which had sold Spicer Hall to University. It would have not been impossible, therefore, for the College to have purchased 'Salessury' rather than Spicer Hall (instead, 'Salessury' came into the possession of a chantry at the church of St Mary the Virgin in 1349). After all, the College did acquire three houses adjoining Brasenose Hall during the second half of the 14th century, namely Oliphant Hall, Sheld Hall, and St Thomas Hall. However, there were two neighbouring other properties, called 'Ivy Hall' and 'St Mary's Entry', on Salter's map, which deserve note. In the 14th century, the former property was owned by Studley Priory, and the latter by the parish church of St Mary the Virgin, and it is possible that neither institution was willing to sell (the house to the west of Great University Hall was also owned by Studley, but this did not prevent the College's eastward expansion). It may also be significant that, very soon after its foundation in 1326, Oriel College became the rector of St Mary the Virgin, drawing its tithes, and maintaining its chantries. 'Salessury' would therefore have come within the orbit of Oriel College, and the possibilities of purchasing it would have diminished considerably. Nothing can be known for sure, but it is evidently the case that University need not necessarily have moved away from its Schools Street site.¹⁹

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MEDIEVAL QUADRANGLE

Instead, University College made its home on its High Street site, first of all in Great University Hall. No evidence survives for the appearance of Great University Hall, but it is possible to offer some conjectures about it, on the basis of studies of other academic halls in Oxford, most notably that made by W. A. Pantin.²⁰ These suggest that the typical hall had a fairly simple facade looking on to the main street, with a passageway from the street which emerged into a garden or yard from which various rooms led off, including a hall, the largest room in the building, and a buttery.

Fortunately the earliest extant accounts for University College, from 1381/2, are very informative about the rooms which were in Great University Hall.²¹ The Account suggests that the College had three or four Fellows, but also several rooms which were leased out to Commoners. Eight chambers are identified: a 'principal chamber' (*camera principalis*), one next to it and another one underneath, two chambers above the garden, one of these next to the hall, a chamber with a hall, a chamber opposite the well, and a chamber next to it. The accounts also mention a latrine, a kitchen and a courtyard. The 1381/2 accounts do not mention a Chapel, but there are allusions to one from later in the decade. Nevertheless,

¹⁸ Stanton Hall: UC:E/A5/D/2; Hert Hall: UC:E/C2/D/1 Little University Hall and the Cock on the Hoop: UC:E/B6/D1/6-7. See too Salter, op. cit. note 6, vol. i. 188, 190-1 and 254. Confusingly, this Little University Hall in High Street was known under this name as early as 1384 (UC:E/B6/D1/2).

¹⁹ Ivy Hall, 'Salessury', and St Mary's Entry: Salter, op. cit. note 6, vol. i. 60, and 66-7; Olyfaunt Hall: UC:E/D1/D/3-8; Sheld Hall: UC:E/D2/D/1-4; St Thomas Hall: UC:E/D3/D/3. On the links between Oriel and St Mary the Virgin, see W. A. Pantin, 'Oriel College', *V.C.H. Oxon.* iii, 120-1.

²⁰ W. A. Pantin, 'The Halls and Schools of Medieval Oxford: an Attempt at Reconstruction', in *Oxford Studies presented to Daniel Callus* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. new ser. xvi), 31-100.

²¹ Cox and Darwall-Smith op. cit. note 17, vol. i, 2-3.

'Chapel' may be too elevated a term for this space: a document of 1370 alludes to a 'chapel or oratory' built inside the College, whose construction had recently been permitted by the Bishop.²² The description of the place strongly suggests that this was not a separate building, rather a room specially converted for worship. Furthermore, University lagged behind other Colleges: Balliol was granted the right to build a Chapel in 1293, and Walter de Merton had gone one better, acquiring the neighbouring church of St John the Baptist, and beginning its gradual transformation into a College Chapel.²³

Of the three properties around Great University Hall in 1381/2, Rose Hall would appear already to have ceased to function as a Hall, for no rents are ever recorded from it, while White Hall is still mentioned as a separate building in 1381/2, but never again.²⁴ On the other hand, Ludlow Hall thereafter was still being rented out as a separate hall, but only until the accounts for 1389/91. In that same year just over eight pounds are spent on repairs to it and in 1391/2 the wall between it and Great University Hall is removed.²⁵ This suggests that some major conversion work is taking place. The next few accounts are missing, but when they resume in 1396/7, something extraordinary has happened: whereas in 1391 the College was letting seven rooms, with a rental of £4 6s., in 1396/7 it was letting no less than eighteen of them, with a rental of £9 8s. 4d. This increase must have been caused by the decision to incorporate Ludlow Hall into the main site of the College.²⁶

There was good financial sense to this: Ludlow Hall, as a Hall, had brought in an annual rent of £2 13s. 4d. By renting out its rooms to individual Commoners, the College had more than doubled this amount. This extra money came at an opportune moment. Much of the 1380s had been taken up with a long and complex legal dispute over some property, at the end of which the College had come to a compromise which involved it retaining the property, but also making a substantial annual payment to its opponent.²⁷ Transforming Ludlow Hall into an annexe of the College was a simple way of augmenting its income.

The architectural impact of incorporating Ludlow Hall was probably not great: one should imagine, at this stage, merely two houses very roughly joined together. However, more interesting things were on the way. At the southern end of the sites of Great University Hall and Ludlow Hall it was decided to erect a proper purpose-built chapel. The accounts for 1396/7 and 1397/8 show £5 and £14 respectively being spent on the chapel and other College expenses, and in the latter year the Fellows forewent some of their allowances in order to meet some of the construction costs. Finally, in November 1398 the Bishop of Lincoln permitted the College to consecrate the altar in the choir of the new chapel to the College's patron saint, St Cuthbert.²⁸

It is not clear whether the building of the Chapel required any demolition of existing buildings. What is clear, however, is that next few years saw little, if any, development of the site. The accounts for the early 15th century refer more than once to general repairs, but not to fresh building work, and we know of no outside benefactions designated for a building programme. We therefore must assume that most of the old buildings of Great University

²² UC:FA2/L1/1.

²³ J. Jones, *Balliol College: A History* (2nd ed. 1997), 13–14, and G. H. Martin and R. G. L. Highfield, *A History of Merton College* (1997), 28 and 39–41.

²⁴ Cox and Darwall-Smith, op. cit. note 17, vol i, 8.

²⁵ Cox and Darwall-Smith, op. cit. note 17, vol i, 81 and 102.

²⁶ Cox and Darwall-Smith, op. cit. note 17, vol i, 86 (1391) and 108–9 (1396/7).

²⁷ For more on this case, see Cox and Darwall-Smith, op. cit. note 17, vol ii, 554–8.

²⁸ Accounts for 1390s: Cox and Darwall-Smith, op. cit. note 17, vol i, 110 and 113–14; consecration of altar: UC:FA2/L1/2.

Hall and Ludlow Hall were retained, especially those ranges facing the street. In any event, there was certainly no 'quadrangle' as such. One rather significant piece of evidence shows that this is how the Fellows of University viewed matters. Although the College accounts for the 15th century frequently refer to a garden in the College, they never explicitly mention a quadrangle until 1487/8.²⁹

It is not until 1434/5 and 1435/6 that there is any allusion to fresh building activity. These accounts for these years mention the construction, and then repair, of a 'new chamber' in the College, which cost just over sixteen pounds. Then the accounts for 1441/2 and 1442/3 make reference to building a new house and a new storehouse in the College. These entries do not make clear whether either the 'new chamber' nor 'the new house' were separate buildings, or parts of residential ranges? Nevertheless they show that something was happening in the College.³⁰

The next piece of building activity is easier to interpret: work on the construction of a new Hall is recorded in the accounts from 1448/9 until 1450/1. The new Hall was built running north-south, situated to the east of Great University Hall, and almost on the exact site of Ludlow Hall.³¹ A small College is unlikely to have had the resources to erect a large building like this out of its own funds, and although University did spend some of its own money on it, it seems that much money came from elsewhere. Antony Wood, who was able to examine this Hall before its demolition, certainly thought that it had been built 'partly at the College's Charge and partly by the benevolence of well-disposed people', basing this assumption on various inscriptions and coats of arms which he described as having seen there. There was, for example, a window which commemorated John Chedworth, a Commoner of the 1430s and later Bishop of Lincoln, as a benefactor to the College. Wood also noted the coats of arms of Robert, Lord Hungerford and Molyns (who had shared a room with Chedworth, no doubt as his personal pupil), and of a canon of Lichfield who had rented a College property in the late 1420s.³²

Proof that University College could and did attract benefactions for building purposes is provided by a covenant of June 1458, in which the Master and the Fellows of University College record the receipt of a bequest from a certain Joan Danvers, to be set aside for building a tower and main entrance to the College. The reason for Danvers' gift is unknown, but a tower was certainly in place by 1465/6, when repairs were carried out on it.³³

It is worth pausing to take stock of the preceding events. Within two decades University College has managed to erect a Hall, a High Street frontage, and an unspecified amount of residential quarters. This amounts to the construction of at least two sides of a quadrangle – and certainly the destruction of the last remains of Great University Hall and Ludlow Hall. The College would have been utterly unrecognisable to a Fellow of the 1380s. One may reasonably ask what has produced this flurry of building activity. The answer almost certainly lies in the figure of John Martyn, Master of University in 1441–73. Martyn is one of the most significant figures in the early history of the College: holding office longer than the Head of just about any other College before 1500, Martyn used his position to make

²⁹ Cox and Darwall-Smith, *op. cit.* note 17, vol ii, 132.

³⁰ Cox and Darwall-Smith, *op. cit.* note 17, vol i, 421 and 428 (new chamber), and 496 and 505 (new house).

³¹ Cox and Darwall-Smith, *op. cit.* note 17, vol i, 559 and 572.

³² A. Wood, *The History and Antiquities of the Colleges and Halls in the University of Oxford*, ed. J. Gutch (Oxford, 1786), 59–61.

³³ Covenant: UC:BE5/L1/1; repairs of 1465/6: Cox and Darwall-Smith, *op. cit.* note 17, vol i, 703.

himself a figure of some consequence within Oxford. From c. 1447/8 until 1457, he was on the committee appointed to oversee the building of the new divinity schools; and a letter from the Mayor of Oxford to the Mayor of Bristol dating from the 1460s described him as 'a man off grete worship and of noble fame within the Universite of Oxford and eke withoute'.³⁴

Martyn also possessed that gift essential to every modern Head of House, namely that of successful fundraising. Under Martyn, the College received a rectory from Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, and cash gifts from Henry, Cardinal Beaufort, and the College's most eminent former Fellow, Edmund Lacy, Bishop of Exeter. Percy's gift was especially welcome, because it gave the College enough income to endow three fresh Fellowships.³⁵ I therefore have very little hesitation in giving John Martyn much of the credit for the great mid-century building activity at University College. By the time of his death in 1473, all the public rooms within the College were in place. There was even somewhere for the Master in the new Tower. In other Colleges, such as New College or Magdalen, the Tower above the main entrance was set aside for the Head of the College, because it was such a good vantage point from which to see members' various comings and goings. We know that the Tower of University College was occupied by the Master in 1531, and it may well have been built specifically for that purpose.³⁶

THE APPEARANCE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE MEDIEVAL QUADRANGLE

By the time of John Martyn's death in 1473, then, the first quadrangle of University College was more or less complete, and it is time to consider what is known about its appearance and its functions. As regards its appearance, only one depiction of the complete quadrangle is known to exist, namely that which appears in the collection of drawings produced by John Bereblock to adorn a book of mediocre verses about the Colleges of Oxford which was prepared for the visit of Elizabeth I to Oxford in 1566 (Fig. 3).³⁷ Unfortunately, Bereblock's testimony needs to be treated with some caution. When one examines his depictions of Colleges whose buildings have changed little since then, such as Magdalen College, one finds that he may have altered the number of windows in a tower, or got his proportions rather wrong. Nevertheless, Bereblock's Magdalen is fairly recognisable as such, and it is not unreasonable to presume that the same could have been said of his University College.

Certain parts of the building are easy to interpret. On the north side, facing the High Street, is the tower built with Joan Danvers' money and once housing the Master. The rest of this north range would appear to have been residential. Once inside the quadrangle, there appear to be more residential quarters on the west range here. The large windows in the east range show the position of the Hall, whilst the large windows of the Chapel are easy to spot on the south range.

³⁴ Martyn and the divinity school: H. E. Salter (ed.), *Registrum Cancellarii Oxoniensis 1434-1469*, (Oxf. Hist. Soc. xciii-xciv), i. 183-4, ii. 252, 256 (some accounts of 1452/3 for the building of the Divinity Schools probably owe their presence in the College archives [ref. UC:P61/F1/1] to this involvement); letter from the Mayor of Oxford: H. E. Salter (ed.), *Munimenta Civitatis Oxoniae* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. lxxi), 224.

³⁵ Percy's gift of a rectory: UC:E4/2D/1-8; gift of cash from Beaufort: UC:BE4/L1/1; gifts of cash from Lacy: Cox and Darwall-Smith, op. cit. note 17, vol i, 513, 567, and 602.

³⁶ The tower as the Master's Lodgings in 1531: UC:GB3/A1/1, p. 7; use of towers by other heads of houses: J. H. Harvey, 'Architecture in Oxford 1350-1500', J. I. Catto and R. Evans (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford, Vol. II: Late Medieval Oxford* (1992), 754.

³⁷ Bodl. MS Bodley 13, f. 10v.

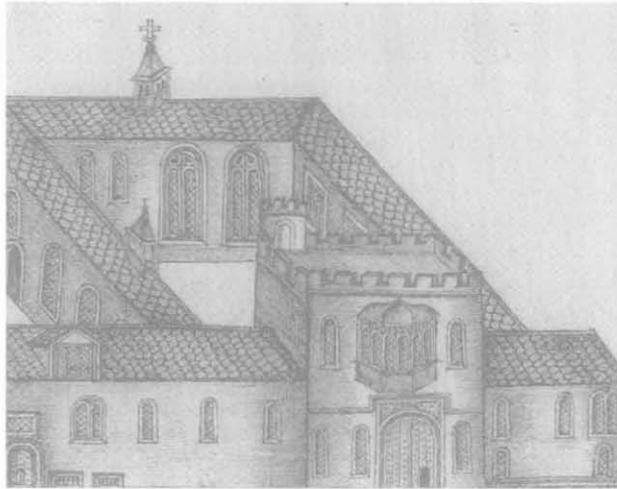


Fig. 3: Drawing of University College made by John Bereblock in 1566 (Bodl. MS Bodley 13, f. 10v).

Fortunately, Bereblock's picture can be supplemented by the testimony of the only person who has left us any kind of written description of the old quadrangle. This is – perhaps inevitably – Antony Wood. Wood, born in 1632, was able to see much of the old quad standing, and to hear about the appearance of the rest, and he used this information in his *The History and Antiquities of the Colleges and Halls in the University of Oxford*. Wood made a general comment about the College's appearance, namely that it 'was not uniform in its windows, which shews that the quadrangle was not built all at one time, but at several, as they could procure benefaction.'³⁸ This is exactly the history of the quadrangle as deduced from the documentary evidence of the late 14th and 15th centuries. As for the north and west ranges, he wrote that these 'were the ancientest buildings in the College, being fallen into decay (and the pitching or pavement of the High Street raised by often reparation much higher than that of the College, for thereunto the passenger went down several steps).'³⁹ When one recalls that one must climb several steps to enter the current quadrangle, this is quite a remarkable reflection.

Wood also says of the residential portion of the College:

In most of the chamber windows of the little old quadrangle which was pulled down ... were divers inscriptions, arms and rebuses, put up in memory of the benefactors thereunto.⁴⁰

'Fictional benefactors' would have been more accurate. In the west range was a window depicting King Alfred kneeling before St Cuthbert, and one depicting St John of Beverley in a chamber to the east of the Chapel, but both Alfred and St John had only been posthumously appropriated as former members in the 1380s. Another room, on the front

³⁸ Wood, *op. cit.* note 32, p. 56.

³⁹ Wood, *op. cit.* note 32, p. 56.

⁴⁰ Wood, *op. cit.* note 32, p. 57.

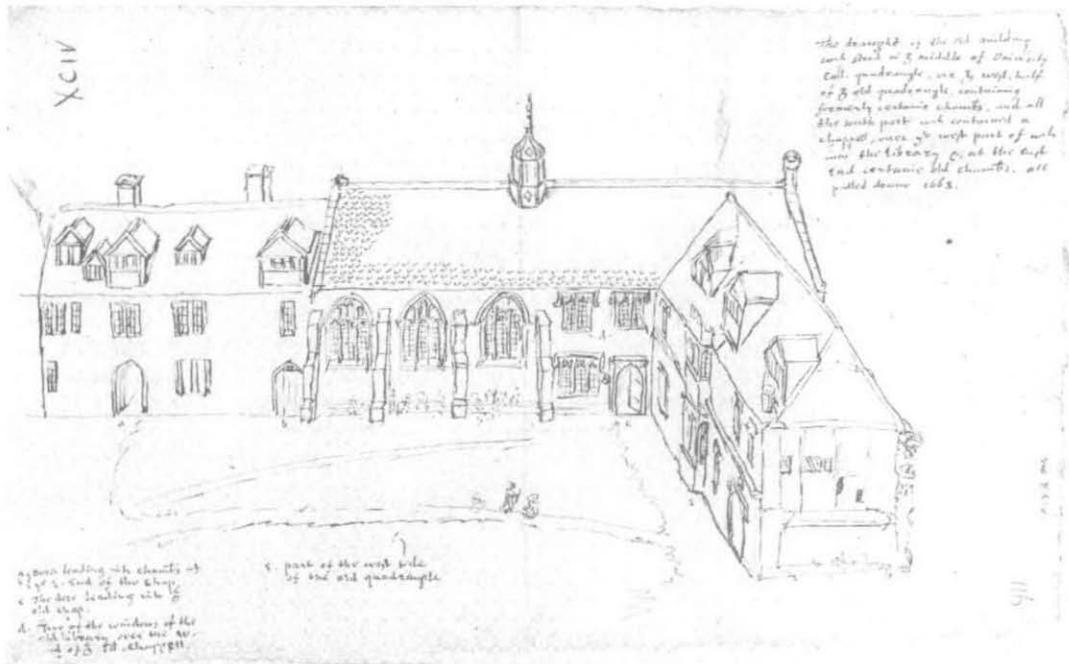


Fig. 4: Drawing of University College made by Antony Wood c. 1668 (Bodl. MS Wood 276B, f. 116).

range, showed Alfred with a model of the College in his hand, and the inscription 'Als fire make I the / As hert may thinke / Or eye may se'.⁴¹ Some of this decoration almost certainly dates from the 16th century, if not the early 17th, but other parts must come from the 15th, on account of the choice of names or coats of arms.

Antony Wood left a second precious gift for the historian of University College. In 1668, in the midst of the slow demolition of the old quadrangle (of which more later) he drew the south range and part of the west (Fig. 4).⁴² It is a much more detailed drawing than Bereblock's, and gives a clearer idea of the mixture of styles exhibited by the old quadrangle. On the south range, the Chapel can be seen at the west side, while the rest of this range, and all that remains of the west, are given over to residential quarters. Wood's drawing clearly shows on these parts some cocklofts – dormer windows which mark where roof space has been turned into extra rooms. These will be considered shortly.

For now, however, it is time to enter the Chapel. The College's accounts said that it was built in the 1390s, and the windows in Wood's drawing accord with such a date. It is also known from an extant fragment of a missal once used there, that, although the altar may have been consecrated in 1398, the Chapel as a whole was not dedicated until 1476.⁴³ Wood himself saw several memorial brasses and inscriptions in the Chapel, all dating from the 16th

⁴¹ Wood, *op. cit.* note 32, pp. 57–8.

⁴² Bodl. MS Wood 276B, f. 116

⁴³ Bodl. University College MS 178.

century, but there may have been were once earlier memorials.⁴⁴ It is clear that people were buried here: Wood could not name any interment before 1633, but he thought that there were burials from an earlier date. Although the position of the Chapel meant there could be no great east window, Wood noted that the windows to the sides were filled with stained glass, comprising the by now usual mixture of images of saints (St Jude, St Cuthbert, St John of Beverley) and some benefactors (William of Durham, Walter Skirlaw), and coats of arms of other benefactors. There is other evidence for the internal arrangements of the Chapel: a set of College statutes from 1478 refer to its having a choir, at whose entrance Fellows were expected to stand and recite the names of their founder and benefactors, and Wood mentioned the presence of a side altar.⁴⁵

However, the most unexpected aspect of the Chapel can be found at its entrance. Wood's drawing shows two storeys at this point. This was because, as Wood's captions explain, the two windows on the first floor are those of the College's first library. It must have made for a very poky antechapel, to say nothing of a very small library, especially when compared with the spacious early libraries of Merton or Magdalen.

The only two significant rooms whose positions are not known are the kitchen and buttery. One would expect to have found both rooms in Great University Hall, and indeed there are intermittent references in the College's accounts to a kitchen and buttery from the 1380s. However, there is no record of when replacements for either a kitchen or a buttery were built for the quadrangle, and neither Bereblock's drawing nor Wood's writings and drawing indicate where either room was situated. An inventory of both the buttery and the kitchen from 1423 survives, and there are more or less complete references to both rooms in the College's accounts from 1434/5 onwards, but nothing necessarily to suggest they were built around then.⁴⁶

Although details about the kitchen and buttery may elude us, fortunately it is possible to learn something about the residential quarters of the old quadrangle. First of all, there was the tower facing the High Street. In 1531, the Fellows of University College agreed to allow its then Master, Leonard Hutchinson, move out of the tower, and convert Little University Hall in High Street into the new Master's Lodgings.⁴⁷ The Hall had been rented out as a private house since the 1470s, and the College clearly felt that it could manage without the income. As we shall see, Little University Hall was to remain the Master's Lodgings for almost two centuries.

As regards the rest of the College, there survives a series of inventories of the contents of College rooms, compiled at various times between the 1580s and the 1630s, which supply significant information on the residential parts.⁴⁸ They are simple lists of rooms in the Master's Lodgings (the former Little University Hall) and the quadrangle, with the furniture in each of them. Presumably they were drawn up in order to list furniture owned by the College rather than by individual occupants of rooms. Fortunately these inventories all list the rooms in more or less exactly the same order, for the sake of administrative convenience.

⁴⁴ Wood's account of the Chapel is given at Wood, *op. cit.* note 32, pp. 62–6.

⁴⁵ Statutes of 1478: UC:GB1/L1/4.

⁴⁶ Inventory of 1423: UC:FA1/3/MS1/1; accounts of 1434/5: Cox and Darwall-Smith, *op. cit.* note 17, vol i, 421.

⁴⁷ UC:GB3/A1/1 p. 7.

⁴⁸ The inventories are as follows: UC:EB1/A/1 fols. 372–7 (inventory of the whole College and Master's Lodgings, drawn up 1580–6); UC:FA1/3/MS1/2 (ditto, 1587); UC:FA1/3/MS1/4 (inventory of ground floor rooms only, 1620); UC:FA1/3/MS1/5 (inventory of first and second floor rooms only, early 17th century); and UC:FA1/3/MS1/6 (inventory of Master's Lodgings only, 1632).

They are given names, and indications of position. The most important rooms are called 'Chambers'. They have names like 'Tower Chamber', the 'Chamber over the kitchen', the 'Garden Chamber', the 'Library Chamber', the Chapel Chamber', or the 'corner chamber towards the street'. Many of these chambers are listed as having cocklofts above them. Then there is another group of chambers with names like 'the chamber under the garden chamber', 'the chamber under the library chamber', the chamber under the corner chamber', the 'chamber under the tower', and so on. This second group appears to be less important, because they all take their names from the chambers directly above them.

These inventories can be compared with Wood's drawing, which shows three storeys on the residential part of the quadrangle. Clearly the main chambers are situated on the first floor, with cocklofts above, and the lesser chambers are therefore on the ground floor. The inventories suggest that there were no more than nine residential staircases in the whole quadrangle, most containing access to a chamber on the ground floor, and a chamber on the first floor, and several having cocklofts inserted in the roof to create a third storey. On the basis of these inventories, the quadrangle appears to have contained in all roughly two dozen rooms, or sets of rooms.

Some of these named chambers may be identifiable on Wood's drawing. For example, the chamber adjoining the east end of the Chapel is a good candidate for the title of the Chapel Chamber, while the room to the right of the Library could be the Library Chamber. Then the chamber set over a passageway through to what is probably a garden, might be the Garden Chamber. Furthermore, the inventories specify that all of these chambers had cocklofts above and a chamber below, which is exactly what Wood's drawing shows. It would almost be possible to create a sketch plan of the old quadrangle, giving the names of all its staircases, but there are one or two rooms whose relative location cannot be deduced with sufficient confidence to make such a plan work. Nevertheless, it is clear that Wood's drawing can be made to work alongside parts of the inventories.

It is also possible to make deductions about the occupants of the rooms. Because of the prominence given them in the inventories, it is very likely that the first-floor rooms were the most important, and therefore worthy of the Fellows. We should now turn to the College's accounts from the Elizabethan period, which usually list in full those people renting College rooms.⁴⁹ These last five words are used advisedly, for this is a period when Commoners are gradually changing their nature. Some of the people renting rooms are certainly undergraduate Commoners in the modern sense of the word; but others are former undergraduates who have got their bachelor's degree, and are staying on, in some cases just before being elected to a Fellowship; and a few are people with no prior connection to the College. Most undergraduates, however, appear to have rented their accommodation directly from their tutor. We know this for University College, because the private account book of one Fellow, John Browne (Fellow 1575–1612), is preserved,⁵⁰ and this records payments from undergraduates directly to him for their chamber. Now it is interesting that the inventories all treat cocklofts as appendages of first-floor chambers, while the 'underchambers' are listed separately. This would make sense if, for administrative and financial purposes, cocklofts were seen as part of a Fellow's chambers which he rented out himself to undergraduates, while the ground-floor rooms would be rented to people willing to pay for comparative privacy.

⁴⁹ These accounts may be found in Cox and Darwall-Smith, *op. cit.* note 17, vol. ii.

⁵⁰ UC:S13/F1/1.

The accounts of the 1570s and early 1580s show that there were usually about a dozen people renting College rooms, and between six and eight Fellows. It so happens that these numbers match very closely the total number of first-floor and ground-floor rooms in the inventories. If the Fellows were living on the first floor, then the lodgers, for want of a better word, would have been living on the ground floor – or at least most of them would have been. For the wealthy lodger, there was something better. Since there were nine first-floor rooms, there were more rooms than Fellows, and indeed each year one or two lodgers paid up to twice the amount paid by the others, undoubtedly for the privilege of living in a room on the first floor.

In the early 17th century, at least, it is even possible to estimate how many people were occupying this quadrangle during term time. A Bursar's Day Book from 1616 lists 9 Fellows and 36 non-Fellows, both undergraduate and postgraduate, who are regularly resident in the College, and a census taken of the university in 1612, assigns to University College a similar total of Fellows and non-Fellows, but also some 19 'poor Scholars and Servitors' – members of that little-known subclass of students who appear to have taken lessons from Fellows in return for performing menial services, but very rarely matriculated from the university, and so remain generally invisible in the records.⁵¹ This suggests that the College had just over fifty people occupying a quadrangle with about two dozen rooms. Even if we assume that the wealthy lodger could to rent a room more or less to himself, we must assume that, in some cases, there were three or four people occupying a single room.

The use of the word 'room', however, is not wholly accurate. One should not assume that each first-floor chamber comprised a single room. The accounts record repairs to Fellows' so-called rooms, but regularly distinguish between different spaces therein, such as their studies and their chambers. We know from other Colleges that, at this time, rooms tended to be partitioned off into subdivisions, so that people had their own studies for work, with a communal bedroom for all. One cannot peer in through one of the windows in Wood's drawing to see the subdivisions in one of these chambers, but one can presume that there were such divisions here, as elsewhere.

This reconstruction of the appearance and functions of the old quadrangle has so far, rather self-consciously, considered it in some isolation. It is now time to consider how typical were the medieval buildings of University College in comparison with other early College buildings.⁵² Unfortunately the task is easier said than done: of the seven Oxford Colleges founded before 1400, only two, Merton and New College, have preserved much of their original fabric to a recognisable extent, but these Colleges were also a great deal wealthier than the others. In terms of the number of its Fellows, University has much more in common with Balliol, Exeter, Oriel, and Queen's. Of these Colleges, a few pieces of medieval Balliol survive, as does a fragment of old Exeter, but nothing remains of medieval Oriel or Queen's. Nevertheless, a certain amount can be deduced about them (and we are fortunate that medieval Queen's survived long enough for Loggan to depict it in 1675). We find that all four of these small Colleges endured a building history just as protracted as that at University with the same pattern of individual parts of the College built at different times, until a quadrangle was achieved – indeed, Exeter did not achieve a complete quadrangle

⁵¹ Bursar's book: UC:BU3/F1/1; census of 1612: Bodl. MS Tanner 338 fol. 38 rev. (printed in J. Walker (ed.), *Oxoniana Vol. II* (c. 1809), 247–56).

⁵² On this matter, see further Harvey, op. cit. note 36, pp. 747–68, for a general survey. For studies of individual Colleges, see J. R. Magrath, *The Queen's College* (1921), vol. i, 63–86, and Jones, op. cit. note 23, pp. 30–4.

until well into the 17th century. The result was, as with University College, something of a stylistic mishmash. It is therefore unfortunate that none of these medieval quadrangles survive: they would have reminded us of an important stage in the evolution of the architecture of the Oxford College.

Nevertheless, contemporaries might have begged to differ with the sentimental modern reader in search of the picturesque, and some of University's more ambitious members might have regretted that the oldest College in Oxford did not have finer buildings. In September 1566, during Elizabeth I's first visit to Oxford, Robert Dudley, Chancellor of the University, gave the Spanish Ambassador a tour of some of the Colleges of Oxford. Along their way, having seen All Souls College, they crossed the road to University College, where, according to a contemporary account, they saw its 'little Hall and little Chapel' (*Aululam et Sacellulum*), before moving on to Magdalen.⁵³ Little Hall and little Chapel: these words hurt all the more, precisely because they are not meant maliciously, but as a simple account of the truth.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE MEDIEVAL QUADRANGLE

After this attempted reconstruction of the medieval quadrangle of University College, it is now time to return to the early 17th century and to demolish it a second time. This was a period when other Colleges, such as Merton and Oriel, were beginning to expand or remodel themselves, and the splendid buildings of the newly-founded Wadham College were taking shape. Meanwhile, University College remained still confined within its little Hall and little Chapel. However, some there had begun to look to some kind of future: in 1559, University acquired the house immediately to the west of the quadrangle, and, for the time being, rented it out.⁵⁴ One member of the College in particular, namely John Browne, the same Fellow whose personal accounts have survived, seems to have striven particularly hard for a new building. In the 1590s he had a cousin leave the College money to go towards buying up the lease on the house to the west, so that it could be cleared away. By November 1606, enough money had been assembled for just such a purpose; the lease was bought up, and the house demolished. Browne then seems to have begun overseeing the purchase of timber, and in November 1610 he even entered into a contract with the masons currently working on the north side of a new quadrangle at Merton that they should build also a new quad at University College.⁵⁵

Unfortunately, Browne's plans came to nothing. In 1610, he failed in an attempt to be elected Master, and two years later he left the College to take up a living in Essex. No one else appeared to have the energy or resources to continue the project. It was not until the early 1630s that things began to move again. In 1631, the College received an exceptionally large bequest from an Old Member, Sir Simon Bennet. Bennet left a large estate in Northamptonshire, whose income was to support more Fellows and Scholars, but he also stipulated that the College could cut down and sell as much timber on this estate as it pleased to help pay for a new quadrangle.⁵⁶ Every College at any stage in its history yearns for Old

⁵³ Nicholas Robinson 'Of the Actes done at Oxford when the Queen's Majesty was there', in C. Plummer (ed.), *Elizabethan Oxford* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. viii), 180.

⁵⁴ UC:E/A7/D1/1-6.

⁵⁵ Browne's cousin's gift: UC:BE1/MS1/2 pp. 323-50; the surrender of the lease: UC:E/A7/D1/9; Browne's purchase of timber: UC:S13/MS1/6; his contract with masons: UC:FA3/1/L1/1-2.

⁵⁶ On Bennet's benefaction, see further A. D. M. Cox, 'Hanley Park', *University College Record* (hereafter UCR), vol. vi no. 1 (1971), 57-63.

Members like Sir Simon Bennet. Thanks to him, University could at last have its new quadrangle, and it commissioned Richard Maude, who had just built the north side of Canterbury Quadrangle at St John's College, as the mason to oversee the project.

The complex tale of the construction of the new quadrangle of University College has been told elsewhere⁵⁷, and for now, therefore, it will be told only from the perspective of the gradual falling-out of use and eventual demolition of the old quadrangle.

Sensibly enough, work started with the west range, because this could be built without the need to demolish any existing College buildings. Work began here in 1634, and was completed in the spring of 1635. Maude and his team then turned to the north range, facing the High Street. Joan Danvers' tower and the rest of the old range were now demolished, and its replacement was apparently completed by March 1637, with its great gate installed during the following year. They then moved to the south range, which was to include the Hall and the Chapel, and which was to be built behind the existing south range, so that the College could continue to use the old Chapel – and indeed the old Hall – until their successors were fully ready.

The College had a long time to wait for the next new buildings, for, when civil war broke out in England in 1642, work on the south range had to cease, with only the bare walls standing. For the next quarter of a century, University College found itself in the strangest architectural situation which it would ever suffer. During this period, the new quadrangle looked complete enough for passers-by in the High Street, but, had they walked in through the new gate, an unhappy surprise would have awaited them. The walls of the unfinished new south range might have just been visible, but blocking their view would have been the remains of the old quadrangle, still perforce in use. In short, the College had to make do with two half-complete quadrangles. The Fellows of University were to endure many problems during the English Civil War – and indeed in the years following – but one of the greatest was that they were living in the midst of a building site. An uneven building site at that: whereas, according to Wood, the entrance to the old quadrangle was lower than street level, the new entrance is several feet above the street. This would suggest that the new quadrangle was built generally at a higher level than its predecessor, which cannot have made it easy to get around the College when old and new buildings were not at the same level.

During the Commonwealth there was one attempt to move the new building programme forward, when a successful fund-raising campaign in 1655 and 1656 raised enough money to put a roof on the new Hall. Nevertheless, the accounts for 1659/60 include a payment 'for taking down the Eschuchcons & removeing the tables in ye old Hall', which suggests that the old Hall had remained in use for some three years after the roof was placed on top of the new.⁵⁸ It was not until after the Restoration that work could resume in earnest, this time with the new Chapel. More fund-raising took place, and on 20 March 1666 the new Chapel was at last consecrated. A month later, the College was formally permitted to demolish its predecessor.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See, for example, J. Honeyball, 'Seventeenth Century Rebuilding in Univ.' UCR vol. ix, no. 2 (1986), 65–9, and D. Sturdy, 'The Building of the Front Quad: (i) The west side', in UCR vol. x, no. 2 (1990), 63–71, and 'The Building of the Front Quad: (ii) The north side', in UCR vol. x, no. 3 (1991), 80–4, and, for the wider context, J. Newman, 'The Architectural Setting', in N. Tyacke (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford, Vol. IV: Seventeenth-Century Oxford* (1997), 135–77, especially 144–5, 146, 158–9, and 169.

⁵⁸ UC:BU2/F1/1 p. 373.

⁵⁹ The ceremony is described at UC:MA30/1/L1/1, and the permit to destroy the old Chapel is UC:MA30/1/L1/2.

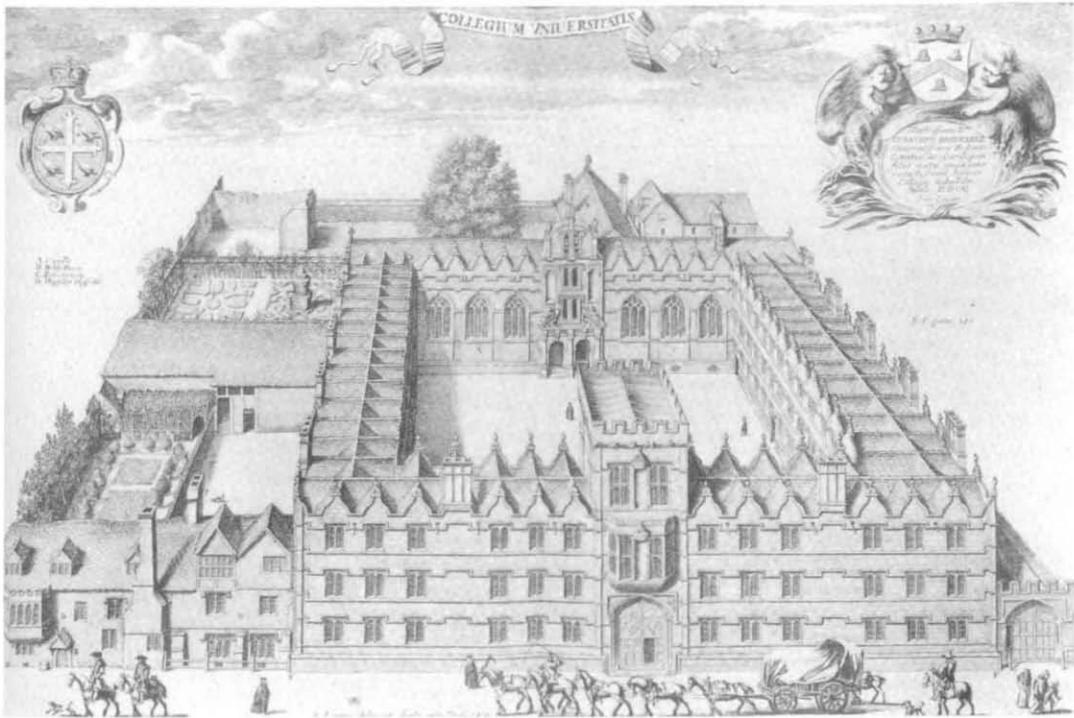


Fig. 5: Engraving of the new quadrangle of University College made by David Loggan in 1675 for *Oxonia Illustrata*.

The College could also start demolishing more of the old quadrangle, as the building programme at least began to regain some momentum. Building accounts record that in 1668/9 work began on 'pulling down parts of the Old College, laying the foundation of the inner wall of the East-side of the College, and building the Kitchen and Library'.⁶⁰ The kitchen and library were to go in a separate wing extending to the south of the quadrangle, with the kitchen on the ground floor and the library directly above it. The 'parts of the Old College' mentioned here were, on presumes, the ones which Wood drew just before they were demolished.

Wood's drawing, however, is not quite what it seems. Up in its top right-hand corner, he described it as 'The draught of the old building which stood in the middle of University Coll. quadrangle', comprising the south and west ranges, which, he writes, were 'all pulled down 1668'. It would be reasonable to assume from this caption that Wood had drawn the last fragments of the old quadrangle to be demolished, but other evidence would suggest otherwise. It took several years more to raise funds to build the east range of the new quadrangle: allusions in the correspondence of Humphrey Prideaux, a Student of Christ Church suggest that work on it did not begin until April 1675, and was only finished in August 1676.⁶¹ Wood's drawing does not include the old east range with the old Hall. Yet, if

⁶⁰ UC:MA26/F4/2 pp. 8–9.

⁶¹ E. M. Thompson (ed.), *Letters of Humphrey Prideaux to J. Ellis 1674–1722* (Camden Soc. new ser. xv), 40 and 50.

any of this range was still standing in 1668, there would be no need to demolish it until work started on its successor. Indeed, it appears that part of the old east range, including the old Hall, did survive after 1668: the College's general accounts for 1671/2 mention work carried out on 'the roofes of the old and new building', and in 'the old Hall', and even in the accounts for 1674/5 two shillings are paid 'for 2 dayes worke in the old Hall'.⁶² This rather suggests that the old east range was not demolished until just before work on the new began – and also that the old Hall was still in sufficient use to justify money being spent on its upkeep for up to seven years after Wood's drawing.

In spite of this final expenditure, the old Hall's time was up, and by 1676, University College at last had a grand new quadrangle, which Prideaux described as 'very handsom, and not inferior in beuty to any other in the University'.⁶³ A year earlier, David Loggan had depicted the almost-completed building in his *Oxonia Illustrata*, and his engraving (Fig. 5) would appear to mark the end of the tale of the College's medieval quadrangle.

Nevertheless, the tale will never be quite complete, as a detail on Loggan's engraving shows.⁶⁴ To the left of the fine new quadrangle is a quaint little old building. This is Little University Hall on High Street, the building which in 1531 had been taken over to be used as the Master's Lodging – which is undoubtedly why Loggan decided to include it – and was to remain standing until it was removed to make way for Radcliffe Quadrangle between 1716 and 1719. The lowness of the front door as depicted on the engraving suggests that, as with the west range of the old quadrangle, one had to descend from High Street to enter it. However, there is an even more curious detail. Just up against the easternmost tip of the new quadrangle, there appears to be a fragment of a window on the old Lodgings. What is this? Is one to assume that the new east range proved rather wider than expected, so that a little portion of the Lodgings had to be destroyed? Is it possible that the north range of the old quadrangle and the Lodgings had closer structural links than had been thought, so that when the former was removed, there remained this literal loose end?⁶⁵ However many aspects of the medieval quadrangle of University College can be deduced, this little architectural fragment shows how many others will remain uncertain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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⁶² 1671/2 accounts: UC:BU2/F1/2 fol. 17v; 1674/5 accounts: UC:BU2/F1/2 fol. 32.

⁶³ Thompson, *op. cit.* note 61, p. 40.

⁶⁴ This detail was pointed out to me by Julian Munby.

⁶⁵ Bereblock's drawing might be seen to hint at a fairly uniform facade covering both the quadrangle and the lodgings.