

# *Fidelis ad Mortem*: John Chessell Buckler, an Oxford College Architect

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## SUMMARY

*This essay considers the work at Oxford carried out by John Chessell Buckler (1793–1894) of the well-known, but hitherto largely unchronicled, dynasty of artists and architects. Buckler took striking possession of the Oxford colleges with which he was involved in the capacity of ‘college architect’, namely at Magdalen, Brasenose, Oriel and Jesus. This work was mostly small-scale repair work, or essays in the Collegiate Gothic or more specifically Old English idiom. By examining these projects of ‘maintenance architecture’, the essay expands existing narratives of the Gothic Revival in Oxford that tend to focus on works of more obvious creative originality. The article seeks to understand Buckler’s project. In alluding to his debt to the eighteenth-century Carter School of antiquaries, it finds meaning in the analogy between topographical drawing and architecture, on the one hand, and in the notion of the architect as a protector of the integrity of medieval buildings, on the other. The family motto, fidelis ad (usque) mortem [faithful unto death], is insightful in discerning Buckler’s peculiar professional motivations.*

John Chessell Buckler (1793–1894), of the antiquarian dynasty of artists and architects, published *Sixty Views of Endowed Grammar Schools* in 1827.<sup>1</sup> As suggested by his well-known drawings of medieval buildings, Buckler was motivated by the desire to create a record.<sup>2</sup> He also sought to appeal to a concern with origins.<sup>3</sup> The book had, therefore, many subscribers at the Oxford colleges, perhaps especially since it anticipated the insecure years of liberalism and modernisation surrounding the Reform Act (1832).<sup>4</sup> That the wealth of tradition in the ancient institutions had to be maintained, often symbolically, and not least by the associative power of Collegiate Gothic, has been well claimed.<sup>5</sup> John Chessell Buckler helped ‘maintain’

<sup>1</sup> J.C. Buckler, *Sixty Views of Endowed Grammar Schools* (1827). For the dynasty: G. Tyack, ‘Buckler, John (1770–1851), Artist and Architect’, *ODNB*; J. Mardell, ‘The Buckler Topographical Collection: A Dynastical Reading’, *British Library, Picturing Places* (2017) [<https://www.bl.uk/picturing-places/articles/a-dynastical-reading-of-the-buckler-topographical-collection>]. In October 2015, the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board and the Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society fixed a plaque in Buckler’s memory on the house at 58 Holywell Street where he lived from c.1861–89.

<sup>2</sup> J. Munby, ‘J.C. Buckler, Tackley’s Inn and Three Medieval Houses in Oxford’, *Oxoniensia*, 43 (1978), pp. 123–69; Bodleian Library, *Drawings of Oxford by J.C. Buckler* (1951).

<sup>3</sup> It is much humbler in its treatment than Rudolph Ackermann’s folio which is limited only to the grand patrician schools. R. Ackermann and W. Combe, *History of the Colleges of Winchester, Eton, etc.* (1816).

<sup>4</sup> If pre-empting a widespread turn to the Gothic in educational building types, it was in advance of specialized literature such as H. Kendall, *Designs for Schools and School Houses, Parochial and National* (1847).

<sup>5</sup> P. Aspin, ‘Architecture and Identity in the English Gothic Revival 1800–1850’, University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis (2013), although Aspin argues that Collegiate Gothic was nonetheless conceived as modern architecture serving modern needs; E. Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’, in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition* (1992), pp. 1–14.



Fig. 1. The Buckler family arms and motto, *Fidelis ad Mortem* (c.1843). BL, Add MS 36402, f. 1.

tradition in a nuanced, at times a literal way, in work characterized both by its humility and by its conventional adoption of the Collegiate Gothic archetype.<sup>6</sup>

This essay will examine Buckler's work as 'college architect' at Magdalen, Brasenose, Jesus, and Oriel colleges, sometimes in partnership with his son Charles Alban Buckler (1824–1905).<sup>7</sup> With recourse to a detailed, though not comprehensive, survey of Buckler's work, the essay seeks to identify the architect's project. Perhaps the Buckler dynasty's motto, *fidelis ad mortem* [faithful unto death], is illuminating? It might allude to the dynasty's dedication to their antiquarian project, as indomitable archaeological Goths, but might also help us understand John Chessell's professional motivations. His was a peculiar professionalism that rested on the idea of an architect's moral duty as a protector of the (medieval) buildings of his forefathers.

<sup>6</sup> As maintained, in fact, over the three generations, such as J. Buckler's elementary school at Hawarden (Flints., 1834), J.C. and George Buckler's Diocesan Training College, Chester (1836–42, now incorporating the University of Chester), and C.A. Buckler's grammar school at Chipping Campden (Glos., 1863).

<sup>7</sup> Buckler likely worked at other colleges, too, such as Merton, as an 1856 testimonial from J.J. Randolph (fellow of Merton) suggests (Staffordshire Record Office, Jerningham Papers, D641/245). Not mentioning specific work, Randolph may have been referring to Buckler's repairs to the chancel of St Peter-in-the-East, of which the college was patron (Merton College Archive, minutes of governing body for 1859). The Merton College Register (30 Oct. 1862) records 'That Mr Buckler's bill of 40 £ for Architectural Drawings be discharged' (information from Peter Howell). Nicholas Olsberg has suggested that the drawings Buckler was paid for might have been for renderings related to William Butterfield's Grove Building (Olsberg, personal communication, Aug. 2017 and March 2018). There was further work in the college livings, such as Buckler's restorations of the churches at Adderbury and Saham Toney church (Norf.) for New College.

## DEVELOPING A DYNASTY: MAGDALEN COLLEGE

The Buckler dynasty was established in Oxford when John Buckler senior (1770–1851), aged 15 in 1785, moved from Calbourne, the Isle of Wight, to Magdalen College to become clerk to the college steward. He was soon after appointed bailiff of the college's Southwark and Essex estates. Before long, owing in no small part to the unflinching support of his employer at Magdalen, the Revd Dr Martin Routh, John senior could volunteer his mature knowledge of medieval architecture to the college. He thereafter developed a career as a leading topographical artist, and, for a shorter time, as an architect. He became a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1810 where he was associated with the preservationist faction led by Richard Gough and John Carter. This proved formative. Gough, Carter and their followers sought both the amelioration of an accurate record of medieval buildings and a forceful critique of historically unfaithful alterations (as symbolized by the 'Innovations' of James Wyatt).<sup>8</sup> In spite of these successes, however, John senior loyally continued his quotidian role as bailiff at Magdalen for nearly half a century until his retirement in 1849.

The senior Buckler relayed his passions to his son, John Chessell, who soon professed of Magdalen that he 'had nothing to learn with respect to the leading features in the history of the college, and he was familiar with almost every stone of its buildings'.<sup>9</sup> John Chessell, however, accompanied his inherited skills and Gothic feeling with a rhetoric and force of his own. He declared himself an 'antiquary of the School of John Carter', whom he knew personally, at a young age, through his father's connection.<sup>10</sup> Following the part-demolition, in the summer of 1822, of the north range of the Old Quadrangle of Magdalen College, John Chessell evinced a fierce protest in the form of a 182-page pamphlet, necessarily anonymous.<sup>11</sup> *Observations on the Original Architecture of Saint Mary Magdalen College* (1823) was quite in the polemical tradition of Carter, that most vociferous critic. Positioning himself as an 'authority of antiquity', Buckler produced the pamphlet 'in the hope of stimulating the Guardians of Magdalen College to preserve inviolate its splendid Architecture'.<sup>12</sup>

Buckler's active interest in the longevity and spatial development of the colleges continued throughout his lifetime. For instance, when St Mary's Hall proposed to build new provost's lodgings in the 1870s, Buckler was among its early detractors, anxious that the plans, by the introduction of a new road leading from the High Street to Bear Lane, would necessitate the destruction of the medieval Swan Court:

I regret very much that for the sake of Swan Court, the finest range in the High St. is to be destroyed by a Street which will lead to nothing: it will open to view the blank & lofty wall of Christ Church. It is a Builders plan [sic], & will be more profitable to him than to the College. The fine plot of ground admits of a better arrangement.<sup>13</sup>

He may have influenced the college's retraction of these plans.

<sup>8</sup> N. Heringman, *Sciences of Antiquity: Romantic Antiquarianism, Natural History, and Knowledge Work* (2013). David Clark has recently challenged the degree of 'accuracy' in the representations of J.C. Buckler: D. Clark, 'Beware of Buckler: Attention to Detail', unpublished University of Oxford seminar paper (5 Jan. 2014).

<sup>9</sup> J.C. Buckler, 'Rough Notes Concerning the History of the Hospital of St John the Baptist' (Magdalen College Archive (hereafter MCA), facsimile edition of BL, Add. MS 27963 (1858), p. 63. John senior presented the drawings of his eldest son to the college when the latter was aged 17, in 1810 (MCA, MS John Buckler, 26, letter from J. Buckler to the Revd Dr [Richard] Bloxam, 26 July 1810).

<sup>10</sup> Buckler, 'Rough Notes', p. 141.

<sup>11</sup> J.C. Buckler, *Observations on the Original Architecture of Saint Mary Magdalen College, Oxford* (1823). Buckler reflected in 1858 that, 'the writer foolishly published it anonymously, but no one for a moment doubted the author' (Buckler, 'Rough Notes', p. 98). See: C. Eastlake, *A History of the Gothic Revival* (1978), pp. 110–111; T.S.R. Boase, 'An Oxford College and the Gothic Revival', *Journal of the Courtauld and Warburg Institute*, 18 (1955) pp. 145–88; H. Colvin *Unbuilt Oxford* (1983), pp. 78–104.

<sup>12</sup> Buckler, *Observations*, pp. vi, vii.

<sup>13</sup> Oriel College Archive (hereafter OCA), WB 2 (unsorted correspondence), letter from J.C. Buckler to D.P. Chase (31 Oct. 1870); J. Catto (ed.) *Oriel College: A History* (2013), p. 584.



Fig. 2. J.C. Buckler, drawings proposing basic alterations to elevations facing the Chaplains' Court, St John's Court, and the High Street (the range along the High flanked at each end by the porters' lodge and the tower), n.d. BL, Add MS 36979, f. 67.

John Chessell, in common with his father, carried out small-scale work at Magdalen quite in spite of his prominence as an artist and architect undertaking commissions country wide. By 1826, for instance, he was employed to rebuild the seat of the Stafford-Jerninghams at Costessey Hall, Norfolk, whilst 1836 brought him the *éclat* of winning second premium in the Palace of Westminster competition. Early work at Magdalen, conversely, included: drawing up specifications for restoring unsound areas of stone on the site; furnishing designs for a credence table for the chapel; and, preparing plans for an organ over the screen in the hall.<sup>14</sup> He was also involved in small-scale maintenance work to college fabric, such as is shown in one of his surviving drawings, in which he sketched proposals for adding dormers and lengthening windows on the north and south elevations facing the Chaplains' Court, St John's Court, and the High Street.<sup>15</sup>

It was a Magdalen connection that led to the commission to design furniture for John Henry Newman at Littlemore. Newman was the vicar of the university church, St Mary the Virgin,

<sup>14</sup> MCA, FA1/3/1A/3 (1 Aug. 1854); W.D. Macray, *A Register of the Members of St Mary Magdalen College, Oxford: From the Foundation of the College*, 8 vols. (1894–1915), vol. 6, pp. 47–8; MCA, college acta (31 July 1843).

<sup>15</sup> The range runs from the site of the Porters' Lodge (added in 1885) as far as the tower, that can be identified at the right-hand edge of the drawing (identified by Robin Darwall-Smith).

to which the benefice of Littlemore belonged until 1847. He commissioned Henry Jones Underwood (1804–1852) to build the new church in 1838, but his curate John Rouse Bloxam (1807–1891), an influential figure at Magdalen, asked John Chessell to ‘design me a couple of Altar Chairs, somewhat after the pattern of the one preserved at Winchester Cathedral’.<sup>16</sup> The year before the Society for the Promotion of Gothic Architecture was founded in Oxford, then, Buckler was engaged within the heart of the Gothic school in the city. He also received two significant commissions through Magdalen patronage: the restoration of St Nicholas, Old Shoreham (Sussex) and the commission for a new schoolroom for Magdalen College School.

The church at Old Shoreham had pre-Conquest origins, but dates largely to the mid twelfth century.<sup>17</sup> When John Mason Neale (1818–1866) – who had just co-founded the Cambridge Camden Society – wished to carry out repairs to the church in 1839, expenses were defrayed largely by the patrons of the living, Magdalen College.<sup>18</sup> Routh saw to it that the restoration would be undertaken, ‘under the care of their own architect’, John Chessell Buckler.<sup>19</sup> The latter’s association with the Camden Society in this case was accidental as it came in Neale’s aid only later, when funds from the college pool ran low. Chris Miele has suggested that Neale’s role in comparison with Buckler’s was somewhat desultory: ‘He might easily have talked over the details with Buckler, even made a few rudimentary sketches.’<sup>20</sup> Critically, Buckler’s was a light restoration, and, as we would expect, it resisted the temptation to restore the whole church to one preferred period of Gothic. In its spirit of conservatism, it was akin to the recent work of the Camden Society at St Benet’s, Cambridge, much less the radicalism associated with their restoration of the Round Church (1841) nearby that much overshadowed it. Like his assessors in the Palace of Westminster competition, Buckler was acknowledged for his archaeological erudition; of his works of restoration at Old Shoreham, the *Gentleman’s Magazine* declared that ‘his name is a sufficient guarantee for their fidelity’.<sup>21</sup>

Sherwood and Pevsner described the New Library at Magdalen College (built 1849–51) as ‘a very attractive, compact little job’.<sup>22</sup> They credited it to John Chessell, though Charles Alban assisted his father. ‘Compact’ may have made reference to the building’s tight position in the corner of Longwall on the far west extremity of the college’s site; it is a five-bay building of 70 x 25 feet.<sup>23</sup> The slight irony *apropos* ‘little job’ is that it was the biggest job the Bucklers would get to carry out in their favourite city. Though Giles Gilbert Scott converted the building into a library for the college in 1930, it was built as the schoolroom for Magdalen College School, and although for general use, was termed by Buckler the ‘choristers’ school’. Plans to build new school accommodation had started in the early 1840s, when the buildings on the site (dating from 1480 onwards) were demolished.<sup>24</sup> John Chessell and Charles Alban’s finished design of 1844, hung at the Royal Academy, was ‘unanimously accepted’ by the college.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>16</sup> J. Patrick, ‘Newman, Pugin and Gothic’, *Victorian Studies*, 24 (1981), p. 189; P. Howell, ‘Newman’s Church at Littlemore’, *The Oxford Art Journal*, 6 (1983), pp. 51–6. Bloxam was a probationer fellow at Magdalen from 1835, and later bursar and vice-president. Buckler also produced a design in 1854 for a reading desk in the chancel of St Mary the Virgin (the drawing is in OCA, not quite as executed). Information from Peter Howell.

<sup>17</sup> N. Pevsner and I. Nairn, *The Buildings of England: Sussex* (1965), pp. 285–7.

<sup>18</sup> St Nicholas, Old Shoreham became an advowson of Magdalen College, acquired with Sele Priory, in 1471 (MCA, 2.2.2): J.M. Neale, ‘An Account of the Late Restoration of St Nicholas, Old Shoreham, Sussex’, *Transactions of the Cambridge Camden Society*, 1 (1839–41), pp. 28–40.

<sup>19</sup> *The Christian Remembrancer*, 1 (April 1841), p. 315; MCA, MP/1/93.

<sup>20</sup> C. Miele, ‘Re-Presenting the Church Militant: The Camden Society, Church Restoration, and the Gothic Sign’, in C. Webster and J. Elliott (eds.), *A Church as It Should Be: The Cambridge Camden Society and Its Influence* (2000), pp. 262–3.

<sup>21</sup> *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 169 (June 1841), p. 640.

<sup>22</sup> J. Sherwood and N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (1974), p. 155.

<sup>23</sup> Earlier schemes for the building, including Buckler’s, had been much more sprawling.

<sup>24</sup> R.S. Stanier, *Magdalen School: A History of Magdalen College School, Oxford* (1940); R. Darwall-Smith, ‘Before the New Library: the Archivist’s Story’, *Magdalen College Record* (2013), pp. 75–92.

<sup>25</sup> BL, Add MS 37122.





Figs. 3 and 4. J.C. Buckler's sketches of extant condition and projected restoration at the church of St Nicholas, Old Shoreham (1839). BL, Add MS 36443, ff. 13, 15.



Fig. 5. 'View of the intended Choristers' School', Magdalen College, Oxford, by J.C. and C. Buckler (1844), exhibited at the Royal Academy annual exhibition. BL, Add MS 37122 A, f. 2.

Shortly thereafter, though, the Bucklers were suddenly dropped from the project.<sup>26</sup> This was likely owing to the ever-influential Bloxam, who inevitably tried to persuade the Fellowship to favour his friend A.W.N. Pugin with the commission.<sup>27</sup>

In short, in 1849, the college, following an aborted competition, asked Buckler again to draw up plans.<sup>28</sup> Unlike earlier work, it was now decided to resuscitate the origins of the school as prescribed by the college founder William Waynflete. Rather than a school comprising choristers as well as fee-paying private students, it was to remain a free grammar school. Buckler, perhaps wishing to communicate this in his architecture, went so far as basing his new design on the founder's grammar school at Wainfleet, Lincolnshire.<sup>29</sup> The choice of Perpendicular, in deference to the founder, was quite appropriate. Tall transomed windows under a battlemented parapet characterize the south side along the High, whilst the northern elevation is broken by a central porch with a book-room above, and an octagonal bell-turret receiving a crocketed pinnacle. John Chessel discussed the design with Routh and 'the tall and slender compartments, the beauty of which has often been pointed at and admired, were adopted by his desire'.<sup>30</sup> However compact, the building is characterized by its loftiness.

<sup>26</sup> No. 1180, 'View of the intended Choristers' School, St Mary Magdalene, College, Oxford: J.C. and C. Buckler', *Gentleman's Magazine*, 176 (July 1844), p. 75. Cf. J.C. Buckler's drawing in BL, Add MS 36443, f. 294.

<sup>27</sup> Bloxam seems to have commissioned Pugin as a letter from Pugin to Bloxam (27 Sept. 1844) suggests: M. Belcher (ed.), *The Collected Letters of A.W.N. Pugin*, 5 vols. (2001–15), vol. 2, p. 242.

<sup>28</sup> Colvin, *Unbuilt Oxford*, p. 99; R. Darwall-Smith, 'Thomas Allom and the Building of Magdalen College School', *Magdalen College Record* (2002), pp. 85–97.

<sup>29</sup> The designs no longer included a dormitory for the choristers, or a master's house which was to be accommodated at No. 57 High Street.

<sup>30</sup> Buckler, 'Rough Notes', p. 36.



Fig. 6. Line and wash sketch of the west end of the Choristers' Hall, designed by J.C. and C.A. Buckler, n.d. c.1851. BL, Add MS 36979, f. 67.

The choristers' school was opened in May 1851 and all three generations of the Buckler dynasty were in attendance at the opening ceremony.<sup>31</sup> Though for the school, not the college, the building of the schoolroom might, retrospectively, represent a valedictory lament for the Bucklers, as the Routh years ceased with the president's death in 1854, shortly after John senior's own, in December 1851; the Bucklers incorporated their coat of arms (with others) in the stained glass windows.<sup>32</sup> It is symbolic of the end of the popularity of the Bucklers' school

<sup>31</sup> J.R. Bloxam, *A Register of the Presidents, Fellows, &c., and Other Members of St Mary Magdalen College, Oxford*, 8 vols. (1853–85), vol. 3, p. 290.

<sup>32</sup> Extract from the *Churchman's Companion* (vol. 9) in Bloxam, *A Register of the Presidents &c.*, vol. 3, p. 290. In 1931 the coloured glass from the east and north windows, that must have contained the heraldry, was replaced with white glass (MCA, Acc 00/111/15 (no. 8). Brian Taylor has claimed that J.C. Buckler carved an abbreviated form of his family motto into one of the roof corbels: B. Taylor (ed.), *The Catholics of Sutton Park* (2005), p. 136.



of archaeological Gothic, as new forms of historicist expression, generally given the epithet 'High Victorian', advanced. At a post-Routh Magdalen, furthermore, John Chessell regretted how 'Collegiate Architecture... is no longer regarded within the walls'.<sup>33</sup> He went elsewhere as other colleges opened their doors, as we shall now examine.

#### PROFESSIONAL HANDIWORK: JESUS, BRASENOSE and ORIEL

Buckler's most sustained contribution to the Gothic Revival in Oxford was the work he carried out in capacity as 'college architect' (elsewhere 'college surveyor') at Jesus, Brasenose and Oriel colleges – 'professional handiwork', as Eastlake put it.<sup>34</sup> In 1864, for instance, whilst Thomas Deane was overseeing the erection of the Meadow Building at Christ Church and William Butterfield those at Merton, John Chessell was 'faithfully' and 'with great care' restoring the early sixteenth-century gateway and tower over at Brasenose.<sup>35</sup>

The position 'college architect' implied a new corporate sensibility on the part of the colleges. It was, however, a model of employment that we would have recognized much earlier, with a non-corporate structure. Buckler's was an honorary position that, scarcely lucrative, carried neither fixed responsibilities nor financial guarantees. For instance, in 1863 the Fellowship of Brasenose College

Resolved – That, in acknowledgement of the assiduous attention, taste and skill bestowed by Mr. J.C. Buckler upon the recent renovation and decoration of the interior of the college chapel, he be requested to accept the thanks of the Society, together with an honorarium of Twenty-Five Guineas.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, we learn that Buckler served both as Surveyor for the County of Oxford – although, critically, 'not as their salaried officer' – and as honorary architect to Lincoln Cathedral.<sup>37</sup> To paraphrase Buckler in reference to his role at Lincoln, he likely thought of himself as holding 'the defensive shield' over his colleges, assuming an inherent duty, as an architect, to protect.<sup>38</sup>

The nature of Buckler's work in Oxford might be seen in line with the eighteenth-century 'medievalizing spirit' at the colleges, mostly 'cosmetic in character'.<sup>39</sup> By the nineteenth century, the colleges were in an increasing state of disrepair, especially owing to the failure of certain materials used by the college's founders, such as Headington stone, that had proved to

<sup>33</sup> Buckler, 'Rough Notes', p. 26. For instance, George Gilbert Scott restored the Founder's Tower and decorated the president's room in 1856. In 1858, Buckler prepared plans for an infant school at Wainfleet, a parochial school for the parish of St Ann, Wandsworth, and for the restoration of the middle school at Brackley (Northants.): Macray, *Register*, vol. 6, pp. 47–8; BL, Add MS 36423, ff. 34–6.

<sup>34</sup> D. Sturdy, *A History of Knowles & Son: Oxford Builders for 200 Years, 1797–1997* (1997), pp. 51, 55; Eastlake, *Gothic Revival*, p. 110.

<sup>35</sup> E.C. Alden, *Alden's Oxford Guide* (1890), p. 48; J. Parker, *A Hand-Book for Visitors to Oxford* (1875), p. 91.

<sup>36</sup> Oxford, Brasenose College Archive (hereafter BCA), vice-principal's register (hereafter VPR) (10 Dec. 1863). They had the exact same arrangement with Buckler when he repaired the Tower Gateway (BCA, VPR, 19 Dec. 1861).

<sup>37</sup> John Chessell Buckler's letter to Richard Ward Esq. (20 July 1859) says he has been Surveyor of Oxfordshire for seven years (inserted in Joshua Mardell's copy of J.C. Buckler, *The Abbey Church of St Alban's* (1856)). He was architect to the local police committee until c.1856. He extended the Warneford Hospital (then Oxford Lunatic Asylum) in 1852.

<sup>38</sup> J.C. Buckler, *A Description and Defence of the Restoration of the Exterior of Lincoln Cathedral* (1866), p. 214. Compared to Buckler's book on Magdalen College aforementioned, this was another landmark book in the polemical tradition, not least in its sustained attack against Sir George Gilbert Scott's church and cathedral restorations.

<sup>39</sup> P. Howell, 'Oxford Architecture, 1800–1914', in M.G. Brock and M.C. Curthoys (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 7 (2000), p. 730.

be notoriously unstable.<sup>40</sup> A quiet programme of fabric repairs, therefore, was ongoing, often supervised by leading architects including George Basevi at Balliol (as his bigger ambitions were frustrated), Edward Blore at Merton and Philip Hardwick at Brasenose.<sup>41</sup> Then there were the repairs of the Divinity School by Douglas Galton, and after him T.G. Jackson, from 1876.<sup>42</sup> Where Buckler is, perhaps, different, is in his peculiar dedication. As he wrote to Hugo Daniel Harper, principal of Jesus College, in 1879, aged 85, 'I like the work, indeed all the work I am called upon to undertake in my three Colleges'.<sup>43</sup>

### *Jesus College*

The association between John Chessell and Jesus College started in May 1852. The architect who had been favoured there, Underwood, had taken his own life that spring, owing to 'a nervous breakdown or an act of insanity'.<sup>44</sup> John Chessell was brought in as his successor. Underwood had recently been engaged in surveying the seventeenth-century manor house of Plumpton on land owned by the college near Towcaster (Northants.). Buckler visited the manor in June 1852 and – perhaps voluntarily – laid before the principal Henry Foulkes and the fellows, a finished report of its state of repair. Underwood, although inspecting it on the request of the bursar, William Dyke, 'with a view to reparation', had recommended the manor's complete destruction.<sup>45</sup> Buckler, *qua* an antiquary, offered a contrary prognosis, reporting, 'I feel it my duty, notwithstanding the present insecure condition of the building to recommend the restoration it deserves in preference to its reconstruction, which is needless, & would prove considerably more expensive'.<sup>46</sup> He suggested meanwhile, a more thorough survey, and, although we hear no more about Plumpton, Buckler's intervention likely saved it.

The first major expenditure on restoration at the college for several decades, was the re-facing, by Buckler, of the south front along Market Street (1854).<sup>47</sup> With Charles Alban's help, he completed the work by re-facing the east front along Turl Street the following year.<sup>48</sup> Both fronts homogenise with the surviving sixteenth-century façades to the west and south of the quadrangle, that, though dating to 1571, still used a Perpendicular vocabulary.<sup>49</sup> The Bucklers' frontispiece, though, replaced wholesale an eighteenth-century one, and was essentially street architecture like the other re-edifying enterprises along Turl Street at Exeter College (1833–4) and Lincoln College (1824).<sup>50</sup> Skelton's oblique view of Jesus (for the 1806 *Almanack*), with Exeter, recorded the extent of the Gothic advance in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In their front to Jesus College, the Bucklers retained the Elizabethan structure contemporary to the college's foundation, but replaced the sashes with square-headed mullion windows, with three- or four-lights where appropriate.<sup>51</sup> The chimney shafts project, as Pugin had prescribed they should; the earlier fronts of Lincoln and Exeter are much flatter for the lack of them.

<sup>40</sup> A. Clifton-Taylor, 'Building Materials', in Sherwood and Pevsner, *Oxfordshire*, pp. 406–10; W.J. Arkell, *Oxford Stone* (1947).

<sup>41</sup> Howell, 'Oxford Architecture', pp. 735–6, 765–6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p. 749.

<sup>43</sup> JCA, FA.3.3 (f), letter from J.C. Buckler to the principal H.D. Harper (18 Aug. 1879).

<sup>44</sup> H. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1600–1840*, 4th edn (2008), pp. 1065–6.

<sup>45</sup> Oxford, Jesus College Archive (hereafter JCA), NH 4.2.8, letter from Henry Underwood to the Revd William Dyke (14 Aug. 1850).

<sup>46</sup> 'Buckler's Report on Manor at Plumpton' (3 June 1852), JCA, NH 4/2/9, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> JCA, annual bursary reports, see sections 'In Donis et Eleccmosyuis' and 'In Reparationibus'.

<sup>48</sup> The bursar's records mention only John Chessell, whilst an elevation drawing of the east front is signed 'J.C. and C.A. Buckler'.

<sup>49</sup> See Mackenzie and Le Keux's print (c.1836) in James Ingram, *Memorials of Oxford* (1837) (classical elements appeared later, for example a pedimented and columnated entrance of c.1625). The bill included the stripping, repair and reslating of the roof (JCA, F A 3 1 (F)).

<sup>50</sup> G. Tyack, *Oxford: An Architectural Guide* (1998), p. 221.

<sup>51</sup> J. Whessell and T. Bartlett, *Oxford Delineated* (1831).



Fig. 7. J.C. Buckler, sketch of Plumpton Hall, Northants., n.d., possibly part of his 1852 survey for Jesus College. BL, Add MS 36439, f. 273.

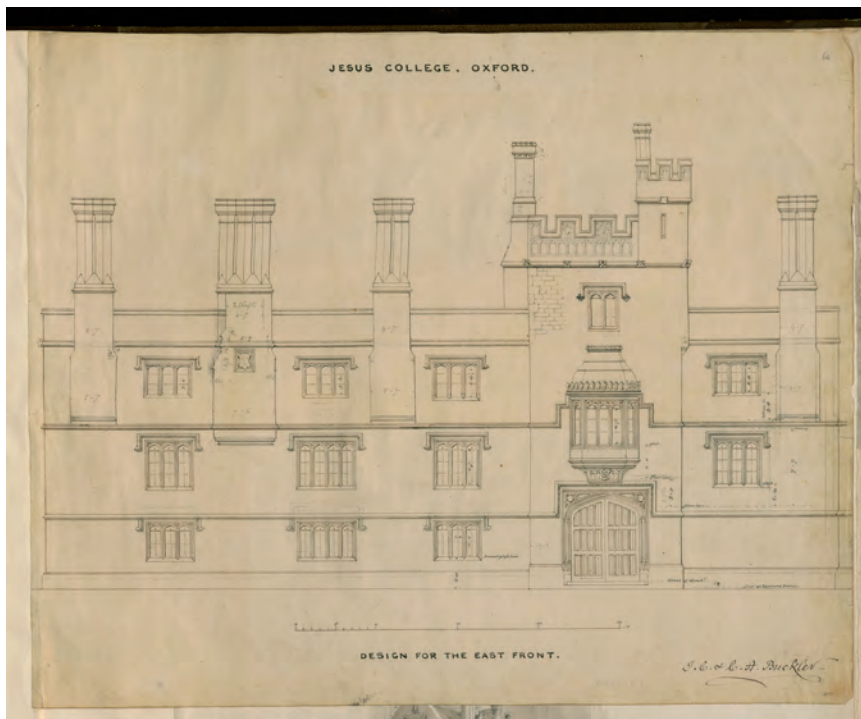


Fig. 8. J.C. and C.A. Buckler, design for re-facing the east front of Jesus College, c.1854–5. BL, Add MS 3697, f. 64.

There are a profusion of simple and characteristic labels and strings, but no battlements – if Lincoln College had followed the crenellating trend shortly before, the Bucklers did not, as the introduction of battlements at Jesus College was not part of its original phase of development. The Bucklers' new turreted gateway completed a trio of historicist gateways in Turl Street.<sup>52</sup> Here, with a programme of heraldic escutcheons, Buckler embellished the tracery of the spandrels, oriel, and embattled parapet and, as though verisimilitude was wanting, four structural brackets now flank the oriel.

The *Gentleman's Magazine*, among the less reactionary of the Gothic Revival's critical organs, in its 1856 survey of Oxford buildings, admired the Jesus front. Meanwhile, George Gilbert Scott had been constructing his own front, with gateway and tower on the north-side of Exeter College along with new Rector's Lodgings. These were both in the fashionable 'Middle Pointed' (late thirteenth-century) style, popularized especially by the Ecclesiological (late Cambridge Camden) Society. In reference to the trend, such as 'is obviously carried too far', the *Gentleman's Magazine* raised 'doubt whether the style of William of Wykeham is not better adapted for collegiate purposes than any other'.<sup>53</sup> The *Magazine* credited, therefore, the Bucklers' 'courage in resisting the stream, and following the style of the fifteenth century'. They would not so much have 'resisted' that stylistic stream (Middle Pointed), as merely provided what was to them a perfectly natural response to the problem, even if it made them rather aloof to the ecclesiologists' preaching.

The Bucklers, father and son, built an unassuming Collegiate Gothic archetype at Jesus, that now, in relation to the Grand Narratives of the Gothic Revival in Oxford seems hackneyed for its time. Two canonical buildings, Scott's chapel at Exeter College and Deane and Woodward's University Museum were being built contemporaneously. Other conservatives like Anthony Salvin, however, had recently been doing much the same thing. Even Salvin, though, favoured by the old-fashioned master Richard Jenkyns, designed his Balliol range without labels, a possible modernizing gesture. The Bucklers' work belongs to the plain Old English Regency tradition that was popular two decades earlier as Daniel Robertson refaced All Souls (1826–7) and Daniel Evans remodelled Pembroke (1829–30).

The Perpendicular and late-medieval styles should be viewed in terms of their persistence into the period which we are conventionally told was dominated by 'Middle Pointed'. Essential in this context were both the continuation of the appeal of the Picturesque, and the importance of 'Englishness' and 'national feeling'.<sup>54</sup> The remaining street-front of Jesus, to the north in Ship Street, was not refaced until 1905. It was undertaken by the appropriately named R. England, and was, as Sherwood and Pevsner put it, 'entirely of the medieval and Buckler tradition'.<sup>55</sup> This suggests that the Bucklers played a part in perpetuating an ideal of an Oxford college that remains – the new Grove Buildings at Magdalen by Porphyrios Associates (1994–98), for instance, was built self-consciously in the Oxford 'Collegiate Gothic' tradition.<sup>56</sup>

After the re-facing work of the fifties, John Chessell carried out much humbler work at the college. Bigger jobs went elsewhere, such as George Edmund Street's restoration of the chapel (1863–4).<sup>57</sup> Buckler remained, however, a loyal servant. As an octogenarian, in correspondence

<sup>52</sup> Brigid Allen speculated the outline of a tower in an earlier phase: B. Allen, 'The Early History of Jesus College, Oxford, 1571–1603', *Oxoniensia*, 63 (1998), p. 113.

<sup>53</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, 201 (Nov. 1856), p. 573. William of Wykeham (1320 or 1324–1404) was bishop of Winchester and founded New College, Oxford in 1379.

<sup>54</sup> For example: J. Ruskin, *The Poetry of Architecture: Or, The Architecture of the Nations of Europe Considered in Its Association with Natural Scenery and National Character* (1893) [orig. publ. 1837–8].

<sup>55</sup> Sherwood and Pevsner, *Oxfordshire*, p. 144.

<sup>56</sup> The adjoining Grove Auditorium is Neoclassical.

<sup>57</sup> The bursar's reports from 1858 record simply 'architect', whereas before they had made specific reference to Buckler, therefore there is the possibility that Buckler was involved in more building work than that recorded under his name. He carried out a basic programme of repairs at the chapel at Dumbleton (Glos.) for Jesus



with Principal Harper in 1879, he related how he was using no less than his 'remaining strength' to oversee unspecified maintenance work, whilst lamenting 'the mischief which occasions so many small repairs' under less conscientious supervision than his own.<sup>58</sup> He added, 'I hope I shall never forget any order I receive from you, or fail in its execution.'

### *Brasenose College*

'An eight-roomed house to the satisfaction of Mr Buckler' on college land in New Inn Hall Lane was not built.<sup>59</sup> Buckler may have, however, in the tradition of his father, carried out several surveys of college property at Brasenose.<sup>60</sup> At any rate, his architectural contributions to the college – founded and first built in 1509 – though not prominent, were far from insignificant. These included a report of observations on the condition of the chancel of Gillingham Church (Kent), a Brasenose living since 1579, which was submitted to the principal, Richard Harington, in March 1853.<sup>61</sup> Here, and in his follow-up specifications, Buckler prescribed only basic repairs to ensure the chancel's structural longevity, its condition being described as of a 'rude' and 'mutilated' state inside and out.<sup>62</sup> His remedies included new coping, pointing, weathering and water jointing, and a new roof retaining so far as possible the old tiles. He was careful in insisting that only 'exceedingly decayed' parts of the free stone were to be replaced.<sup>63</sup> A conservative prospectus of repair notwithstanding, certain of Buckler's recommendations at Gillingham raise surprise, especially in so far as the notion of 'honesty' still infects architectural discourse.<sup>64</sup> For instance, the ornamental work in the chancel was 'to be rendered & set in rough stucco tinted to match the Bath-stone work', whilst 'the whole of the timber work of the roof [was] to be stained with liquid asphalt in imitation of oak'.<sup>65</sup>

Back in Oxford, in June 1862, following a donation from the munificent senior fellow the Revd George Hornby, Buckler was entrusted to carry out overdue works of restoration on the college's tower gateway.<sup>66</sup> Architect Philip Hardwick had been asked in 1841 to submit a report on the state of the tower, library and chapel.<sup>67</sup> We learn that whilst the tower was 'perfectly sound', its wrought stonework was severely decayed.<sup>68</sup> Buckler, two decades later, replaced the founder's choice of stone from the Headington quarries, with the more resilient Taynton stone from nearby Burford.<sup>69</sup> His programme of works on the gateway also included filling the empty niches with new statues of St Hugh, St Chad and the Virgin and Child that served as reminders of the respective ecclesiastical sees of the college founders.<sup>70</sup> He also repaired the royal Tudor arms above the door, re-emblazoned the bosses, and re-plastered the groined entrance.<sup>71</sup>

In the eighteenth century, sashes had been introduced into the Gothic panelled screen fronting the Bursary Chamber on the outer side of the Tower, as John Buckler senior's

College (JCA, Book B1, 5, Fa(9)). The death of the long-standing principal Henry Foulkes (principal 1817–57) may have prompted a change in consulting architect.

<sup>58</sup> JCA, FA.3.3 (f), letter from J.C. Buckler to Harper (18 Aug. 1879). Buckler's underlining.

<sup>59</sup> BCA, VPR (19 June 1865).

<sup>60</sup> BCA, VPR (21 Dec. 1863).

<sup>61</sup> J.C. Buckler, 'Gillingham Church, Kent' [Condition Report] (9 March 1852), and J.C. Buckler, 'Specifications of Works Required to be Performed in the Restoration of the Chancel of Gillingham Church, Kent' [undated MS] (both in BCA: D0528).

<sup>62</sup> Buckler, 'Gillingham Church', p. 5.

<sup>63</sup> Buckler, 'Specifications . . . of Gillingham', pp. 9–10.

<sup>64</sup> For example, T. Brittain-Catlin, *Bleak Houses: Disappointment and Failure in Architecture* (2014), pp. 49–74.

<sup>65</sup> Buckler, 'Specifications . . . of Gillingham', pp. 10, 20.

<sup>66</sup> BCA, VPR (12 June and 26 June 1862). For further of Buckler's 'faithful restoration', see E.W. Allfrey, 'The Architectural History of the Buildings', *Brasenose Quatercentenary Monographs*, 3 (1909).

<sup>67</sup> BCA, D352.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> W. Kinniburgh, *A Dictionary of Building Materials* (1966), p. 253.

<sup>70</sup> J. Parker, *A Hand-Book for Visitors to Oxford* (1875), p. 91.

<sup>71</sup> BCA, VPR (21 Dec. 1863; 19 June 1865).



*Fig. 9. 1860s photograph of the tower gateway of Brasenose College, with the new statues accommodated in their niches, following Buckler's restoration. Cf. John Buckler senior's 1812 drawing. Brasenose College Archive, with permission of the principal and fellows of Brasenose College.*



Fig. 10. John Buckler senior (1812), line and wash drawing of the front of Brasenose College from Radcliffe Square, later published by George Hollis (sculpt.) (24 Oct. 1816).



Fig. 11. Henry Hakewill, 'Design for the windows of the Bursary, Brazen Nose Coll. Oxon.' (Dec. 1816), plan, section and elevation in ink and wash. Brasenose College Archive, with permission the principal and fellows of Brasenose College.

representation shows. By 1816, as Oxonians began to regain Gothic feeling, though, the sashes 'gave serious offence'.<sup>72</sup> The architect Henry Hakewill therefore replaced them, but with timber mullions 'sanded to look like stone'.<sup>73</sup> He also took the opportunity to insert an extra light into the blank tracery, thereby introducing an arrangement of four three-light panels, for which there was no analogy in the building's history. Hakewill's own spirited efforts, then, caused considerable offence to the more dogmatic Goths like A.C. Pugin, who soon after described how the screen had been 'barbarously broken into'.<sup>74</sup> Buckler, in 1863, replaced the sanded timber mullions for Taynton ones and returned the design back to a series of blank panels and four couplet windows, as per the medieval model – it had to be correct.<sup>75</sup> Buckler's careful medievalization extended to the interior of the Bursary, where he insisted, for instance, that 'the pattern of the original oak work [was] to be scrupulously adhered to in the new'.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, he oversaw: the cleansing of the plaster ornaments and ground work in the panels of the ceiling; the 'authentic' re-colouring of the royal badges; the re-emblazoning of the shield of arms; and the insertion of iron rods into the ceiling of the muniments room above, to stay settlement.<sup>77</sup>

Then, from 1863, there was the restoration of the seventeenth-century college chapel. Hardwick's report prescribed merely 'ordinary Repairs of Painting &c', and Buckler did essentially little more.<sup>78</sup> He refaced the masonry with 'ground Box' stone, and repaired the pinnacles in Taynton.<sup>79</sup> Inside, in the ante-chapel, he re-paved the floor with Minton tiles and devised a polychromatic scheme for decorating the vault and walls. With respect to the latter, he experimented with the colour schemes. Bay by bay, the roof panels were painted 'brilliant' blue – if at one point 'extremely Brilliant, a great too much' – whilst the edges of the ribs were gilded, and the sides coloured vermilion.<sup>80</sup> At any rate, then, Buckler retained the Perpendicular vaulted roof of 1659 – that was not only 'debased' but constructed of plaster – rather than reveal the early fifteenth-century hammer-beam roof that sits above it.<sup>81</sup> The sanction of the client aside (for there is no evidence), Buckler might have appreciated its reference to the fifteenth-century vault of the choir of Christ Church Cathedral nearby, or simply respected the worthy efforts of his seventeenth-century Gothic predecessor who built it. If, though, the sacrifice of medieval patterning for improved lighting in 1817 had offended Buckler's archaeological sensibilities, a 'debased' plaster vault had not.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Buckler prescribed as part of his colour scheme on the vault, against a blue ground, a pattern of stars 'cast in lead, gilt' and, 'fixed on, so as to look in relief', and for the beading of the vault to be coloured (not unlike Hakewill's mullions) to imitate stone.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Allfrey, 'The Architectural History', p. 44.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> A.C. Pugin, *Specimens of Gothic Architecture*, 3rd edn (1825), vol. 2, p. 18, also mentioned by J.M. Crook, *Brasenose: The Biography of an Oxford College* (2008), p. 18.

<sup>75</sup> BCA, VPR (21 Dec. 1863).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. and BCA, archivist's unpublished file on the tower (n.d.).

<sup>78</sup> BCA, D352.

<sup>79</sup> Allfrey, 'The Architectural History', p. 32.

<sup>80</sup> BCA, VPR, letter to the principal from Frederick Menzies, vice-president (16 Aug. 1860). The colour scheme was replaced by C.E. Kempe (BCA, GOV 3 A1/A2).

<sup>81</sup> Sherwood and Pevsner, *Oxfordshire*, p. 107. Sherwood and Pevsner say c.1665, whilst BCA, VPR Clennell A3.20 records its installation specifically as 1659. Tyack, *Oxford*, p. 115.

<sup>82</sup> 'Debased' Gothic was acceptable, whilst classical was not: at the chapel of Magdalene College, Cambridge, Buckler removed all the early eighteenth-century work to revert back to a fifteenth-century appearance. Cambridge: Magdalene College Archive Order Book (25 May 1848). Conversely, it was J.N. Cottingham who ejected the eighteenth-century work at the chapel at Magdalen College, Oxford (1829–34).

<sup>83</sup> BCA, VPR, letter to the principal from Frederick Menzies, vice-president (16 Aug. 1860). These were suggestions.



*Oriel College*

John Chessel and Charles Alban produced, on the orders of Provost Edward Hawkins, a 'Report of a Survey of the present state of Oriel College, Oxford' in January 1852.<sup>84</sup> The general recommendation was that the seventeenth-century elevations of the exterior, including the hall and chapel, should 'be restored to a substantial condition, & exact conformity with the original design'.<sup>85</sup> Owing to the perpetual growth of decay to the college fabric observable to the Bucklers, there is a sense of alarm in the report, much like that attendant in some of John Chessel's sketches of decrepit buildings in Oxford. Such alarm was fortified by the use of a tested rhetorical formula reminiscent of his *Observations*: 'too much cannot be said in a case wherein dilapidation has advanced unchecked for a period of sufficient length to have given the building a more defaced exterior than will be seen in many which have long lain in the ruins into which they were hurried by the hand of violence'.<sup>86</sup> The over-arching diagnosis in the report was the failure of local Headington freestone, the choice of the college's first builders from 1616.<sup>87</sup> By 1852, the masonry was in such a poor state at Oriel, that it 'readily pulverizes with the touch'.<sup>88</sup> Weathering had been the principal factor, hastened, claimed the Bucklers, both by poor draining, and by seventeenth-century builders who failed to lay the stone in line with its natural bedding planes.

The Bucklers presented two options to the provost: 'casing' the walls, or 'refacing' them. The authors had no hesitation in advocating the former method. Casing, if more expensive than re-facing, would, they argued, be the most abiding solution for the college's longevity. Thus, a concern for the retention of original fabric was redundant; indeed, the new Taynton ashlar 'would present a surface of great[er] beauty... than heretofore'.<sup>89</sup> The fabric, the Bucklers argued, 'should be brought into an uniform & perfectly good state without infringing in the least degree upon the *characteristic detail* of the design'.<sup>90</sup> They sought to maintain the proportionate relationship between the wall planes and relieving elements, such as in buttresses and windows. Re-facing, that is 'chipping away the decayed surface' (and analogous to the contemporary practice of 'scraping'), was not recommended, less owing to a concern with the fabric's inherent materiality, than with despoiling its holistic aesthetic integrity:

a difficulty would arise with respect to the windows, which if not disjointed & wholly thrust back in order to regain the depth lost by the process named, would be impoverished in the form of the mouldings & in the measure of the section & thereby so considerably impaired as to injure the building in an architectural point of view.<sup>91</sup>

The Bucklers also restored the gateway at Oriel.<sup>92</sup> In the present report it was described as being in 'a miserable state of decomposition', and it was recommended that its surface should be entirely replaced.<sup>93</sup> The Bucklers' restoration was so much a facsimile that one can discern no difference between the gateway in Loggan's print of 1675 and the gateway in the present

<sup>84</sup> OCA, FB 1 A1/1, J.C. Buckler, 'Report of a Survey of the Present State of Oriel College, Oxford'.

<sup>85</sup> Buckler 'Report of a Survey', p. 1. Recommendations as to interiors were few, and mostly cosmetic. For Buckler's judicious work at the chapel, see: *The Building News* (29 Oct. 1858), p. 1084; *Ecclesiologist*, ns, 10 (Feb. 1859), p. 281; and OCA, FB 2 C1/3 and FB 2 C1/5. Buckler also undertook work at the chapel of St Mary Hall (incorporated into Oriel since 1902), now the library, and designed proposed alterations to the High Street frontages (OCA, FB 4 E2/1–5).

<sup>86</sup> Buckler, 'Report of a Survey', p. 16.

<sup>87</sup> Clifton-Taylor, 'Building Materials'.

<sup>88</sup> Buckler, 'Report of a Survey', p. 17.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12. Here Buckler is referring to the chapel exterior but is characteristic of the general approach. My emphasis.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>92</sup> In the event, the contract of works was not actioned until autumn 1864: OCA, FB 1 A1/2, letter from Fisher [contractor] to J.C. Buckler (26 Oct. 1864).

<sup>93</sup> Buckler, 'Report of a Survey', p. 8.

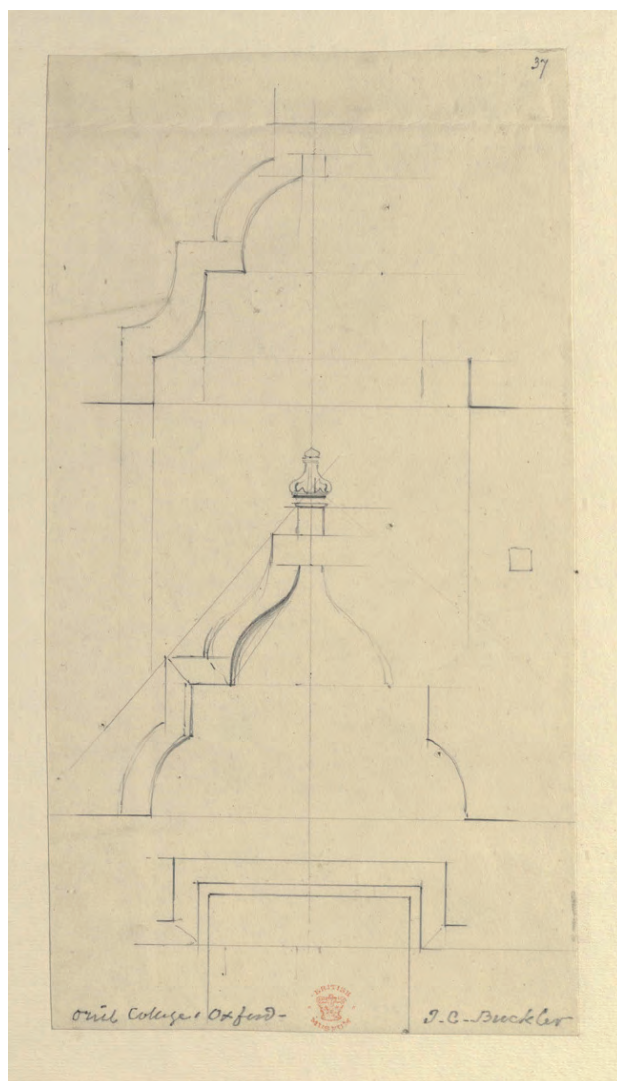


Fig. 12. J.C. Buckler, undated sketch of gables at Oriel College. BL, Add MS 36423, f. 37.

day. Indeed, the new stonework, so far as tone was concerned, was soon indiscernible, 'as its distant appearance would correspond with the masonry around it'.<sup>94</sup> The Bucklers advocated the complete renewal on all elevations, of quoins, plinths and weather mouldings, and a large proportion of the framework of doors and windows. Generally, however, the replacement of masonry was considered stone-by-stone rather than indiscriminately.

The most characteristic and memorable motifs at Oriel College are the shaped gables topping the elevations of the front and middle quadrangles.<sup>95</sup> They too were subject to a condition survey by Buckler.<sup>96</sup> In a number of cases the tops of the gables were deteriorating

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>95</sup> The contractor refers to the shaped gables as 'gablets': OCA, FB 1 A1/2 July–Oct. 1864.

<sup>96</sup> OCA, FB 1, A1/2, July–Oct. 1864, report by J.C. Buckler on the state of the gables with condition survey sketches.

in advance of their coping. Though presenting 'the appearance of strength', the coping was often double the width of the gable itself, and rather served to oppress it. In other cases, gables had moved several inches out of their perpendicular orientation resulting in broken joints. Replacement of the tops of the fabric or complete repair was recommended by Buckler. Again, it was a case-by-case rather than wholesale prescription, as only fifty-five – shortly over half the full amount adorning the college – were specified as being in an 'unsafe condition' and requiring repair. Such were restored along with the labels of the upper tier of windows whilst the roof was 'made good'.<sup>97</sup>

The restoration of St Mary the Virgin, a benefice of Oriel, was confided on John Chessel in 1852. It should be mentioned here, if with great brevity, to conclude the survey. With Charles Alban's help, Buckler restored the church's fourteenth-century spire, the clustered pinnacles that flank it on all four corners, and the statues in the niches at their bases. It received general approval at the time – the Oxford Architectural Society even rejoiced – but was subject to severe and public professional criticism four decades later.<sup>98</sup> By 1891 Buckler's repairs, in Taynton, had failed and the collapse of masonry threatened further ruin. In short, though Buckler fared well with the Anti-Scrapes for his retention of the statues, it was the attendant issue of his archaeological competency that was challenged.<sup>99</sup> Lacking 'correct' medieval precedents for his arrangement of shaft, pinnacle and spirelet, his 1852 work was rejected as one of confusing conjecture.<sup>100</sup> When the new programme of restoration began, it eventually fell to a vote of the Convocation to sanction an appropriate scheme for their architect, T.G. Jackson, to oversee. Of four proposals, restoring the work on Buckler's model was quite the least popular.<sup>101</sup> 'On the occasion of my dear Father's entering his 100th year', then, as Charles Alban wrote in December 1892, the university were unforgiving of their most loyal 'college architect', as his pinnacles came down.<sup>102</sup>

## CONCLUSION

John Chessel, in capacity as 'college architect' was keen to contribute to Oxford's (re-) medievalizing project however he could, and found work at the small scale quite as honourable as any other part of an architect's *œuvre*. His work could be described as that of maintenance architecture, in engendering the characteristics recently described by Hilary Sample. 'Maintenance architecture', Sample claimed, 'represents an investment in the persistence of architecture – both as an image and as an ideal'.<sup>103</sup> John Chessel's humble repair works, seen in this light, enrich the conventional narrative of design work in the Gothic Revival. Maintenance architecture was an essential part of the colleges' neo-medieval projects as they sought to maintain their elite positions in a rapidly changing world.

Further to smaller works of repair, we have seen that from a variety of options on the market, one could also go to the Bucklers for restrained vernacular-rooted essays in the Old English idiom as an alternative to the fashionable Middle Pointed. A Buckler essay, indeed, might also have been cheaper, as John Chessel's Master's Lodge for Magdalene College, Cambridge (1835) replaced a more expensive design by Edward Blore.<sup>104</sup> Beyond economy, however, the Bucklers' work (such as the front of Jesus and the choristers' school), through

<sup>97</sup> The same year, Buckler oversaw the alteration of the roof of the Senior Library (OCA, FB 3 E2/3).

<sup>98</sup> *The Rules and Proceedings of the Oxford Society for Promoting the Study of Gothic Architecture* (2 July 1851), p. 46.

<sup>99</sup> The originals are now in New College cloister.

<sup>100</sup> Especially by T. Case, *St Mary's Clusters: An Historical Enquiry* (1893).

<sup>101</sup> *The British Architect* (9 June 1893), p. 395.

<sup>102</sup> OCA, Pro 1 C2/40, letter from C.A. Buckler to Drummond Percy Chase (15 Dec. 1892).

<sup>103</sup> H. Sample, *Maintenance Architecture* (2016), p. 7.

<sup>104</sup> Magdalene College Archive, Cambridge, E/P/5: The Master's Lodge. Blore submitted designs in March 1836.

its obvious link to the appearance of collegiate architecture as seen in the family's prints and drawings, could embody virtues which resonated immediately, where perhaps modern or 'High Victorian' architecture was too enigmatic. The language had to be legible, and the Bucklers, self-conscious scions of the school of Carter and Gough, could do legibility.

In the restorations too, they sought legibility in preference to picturesque decay. Under John Chessell at Brasenose, we identified the re-plastering of the gateway vault, the stars of the chapel vault in *faux* relief and its beading imitating stone. At Gillingham (for Jesus), similarly, the stucco ornamental work was tinted to match the stone-work, and cheap timber was stained to imitate oak. Puginian or Ruskinian honesty, whether to materials, function or surface, was somewhat neglected by Buckler. Not everyone subscribed to, or cared to, take a position on these trendy architectural concepts. Conversely, Buckler's historicism prioritised the 'characteristic detail' of the whole. As Sample argued, revealingly, and again fitting the analogy between the drawn and the built, 'maintenance is dedicated to safeguarding the holistic image of an architectural work'.<sup>105</sup>

The Buckler family motto, *fidelis ad mortem*, alludes to faith or to religion. It sheds light on the professional motivations of John Chessell at Oxford. It is analogous to the well-known work of Benjamin Webb and J.M. Neale. In the early Victorian period, Webb and Neale displayed anxiety about the notion of the professional architect in their time as a continual threat to the more organic relationship of a building and its custodian. They made their case by translating and re-publishing an essay of the thirteenth-century canonist William Durandus as *The Symbolism of Churches* (1843).<sup>106</sup> Beyond a concern with Catholic symbolism, they exclaimed in their introductory essay that 'an age of church-building such as this, ought to produce good architects'.<sup>107</sup> They analogised contemporary practice with the blossoming of Middle Pointed art, which, they claimed, had been dependent on medieval masons' duty-bound dispositions. Moreover, they argued that, as Chandler summarized, 'the Catholic architect must have a Catholic heart and live sacrificially', sacrificial so far as he stood for the 'purity and holiness' of the architectural profession.<sup>108</sup> Perhaps John Chessell at Oxford, who displayed an almost religious sense of professional duty (and who was consequently always rather impecunious) came close to Webb and Neale's ideal?

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<sup>105</sup> Sample, *Maintenance Architecture*, p. 7.

<sup>106</sup> B. Webb and J.M. Neale, *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments* (1843).

<sup>107</sup> Webb and Neale, *Symbolism of Churches*, p. xviii.

<sup>108</sup> M. Chandler, *The Life and Work of John Mason Neale, 1818–1866* (1995), p. 37; Webb and Neale, *Symbolism of Churches*, p. xxi.