

Mediaeval Oxford as it is

IT IS TOLD OF PROFESSOR FREEMAN THAT WHEN AN AMERICAN friend asked to be shown the oldest historical monument in Oxford, he escorted the visitor to Port Meadow, a dank waste on the outskirts of the town. This is a pasture held in common by the freemen of Oxford ; it was so held in common at the time of Domesday, which also records that it brought in 6s. 8d. yearly ; and if one went back another nine hundred years before Domesday, in all probability Port Meadow was held in common then.

Some limits must be placed upon the search for antiquities. In the cathedral, for example, there are fragments of the original chapel of St. Frideswide, burnt down with a party of Danes inside it in the year 1001 ; but they are not worth a pilgrimage. The Saxon mound is a noticeable object on the way to or from the railway station ; but one could build as good a mound or better in one's own garden. The Castle Tower, less conspicuous, is a pure Norman edifice ; but few people will go to the length of troubling the Prison Governor for leave to examine its depressing precincts. In search of real antiquity you need go no farther than the Cornmarket, the central shopping street of Oxford and one of the ugliest streets in England. At its north end, beside where used to stand the north gate, is the tower of St. Michael's Church, associated with the name of Robert d'Oily. Its rough, thick walls, the round-headed windows, narrow and defensive, the stout balusters which divide them, all suggest a Saxon work, perhaps repaired by the lavish Norman. The body of the church is nothing like as old, and has suffered at the hands of George Edmund Street.

Walking south down the Cornmarket between a double file of commercial eyesores, you come to Carfax, the very heart of Oxford. The two southern corners of this crossing have lately been set back and rebuilt in chaste symmetry. How narrow it once was can be estimated by realising that the present tower is that of St. Martin's, whose chancel projected into the road and was quite recently removed. The tower is not that which Canute observed on his

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Oxford visit, but a successor. It is, however, probably the same tower from whose belfry the town was called to arms on St. Scholastica's Day, and whose battlements were lowered on account of the mean practice of the townsmen in pelting the scholars with stones.

Southwards of Carfax towards Folly Bridge, where the oxen forded the Thames, runs the broad street called St. Aldate's: and though there is even a St. Aldate's Church on the right, it is a curious fact that no saint of any such name existed, while the name of neither street nor church is ever pronounced by any Oxonian as anything but "St. Old's." The truth of the matter is that the Old Gate spanned this road, and because Englishmen then spoke with what is now called an American accent, the name became corrupted, as did that of Aldgate in London. But it was characteristic of Oxford to canonise its own back door.

A hundred yards down this lovely slope, under Tom Tower and on the far side of Tom Quad, you see the spire of the cathedral, one of the oldest spires in England. The cathedral entrance is an inconspicuous double arch in the east wall of the vast quadrangle. This cathedral was originally part of the priory of St. Frideswide. As cathedrals go, it was never very large; and Cardinal Wolsey made it smaller still by lopping off three bays to the west in order to have Tom Quad as large as he intended. The building had been finished, apart from its spire, in the year 1180; but it was started before the arrival of the scholars from Paris. The eastern half was begun first, and is typical round-arched Romanesque work; the nave was finished several years later, by which time the influence of the Early English builders had been felt. The transition is subtly shown in the lighter and more elaborate piers and the pointed arches above them. Unfortunately all the piers have split capitals, springing arches of different heights, a form of architectural cheating which is extremely displeasing to the eye and mind. The much purer Romanesque of the east wall, with its wheel window above, its arcade of interlaced arches, and two great round-headed windows below, is a product of the bold imagination of Sir George Gilbert Scott, and was introduced in 1871. But the splendid feature of the building is the choir roof, a stone-vaulted roof of the sixteenth century, admirable in effect and unique in the manner in which square vaults have been attained by thrusting the whole structure forward from the walls upon a row of pendants, from which the traceried fans are made to radiate.

Already this account is straying from the confines of the Middle Ages. The cathedral abounds in Civil War monuments and Victorian windows, which need no guide. It is time to visit the first of the colleges—Merton, which lies to the east of the cathedral on the straight line of the city wall.

Because it is the first of colleges, Merton is also the most untidy.

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It awaited the genius of Wykeham to contrive the neat collegiate plan, and Merton in particular is laid out anyhow. From Merton Street you enter by a gateway which, together with the whole street front, was sadly knocked about by an early Victorian architect named Blore; while in the hall, which faces you, you confront once again the staggering self-confidence of Gilbert Scott. However, in his rebuilding Scott did retain the massive basement and flight of stairs which distinguish this as the first communal building in Oxford; and there is some remarkable original iron-work on the great oak door. Passing under a small arch to the right of the hall, you find a strange box-like building with a steep, smooth stone roof. This is the Treasury, built strong and fireproof to protect the college exchequer against just such contingencies as that of St. Scholastica's Day. Beyond the Treasury is the first of Oxford quadrangles, known to all generations for some unknown reason as Mob Quad. A spot more tranquil both to the ear and eye it would be hard to find. On the first floor, the south and west sides of this quadrangle comprise the library, whose tiny lancet windows date from the 1870's. The big comfortable dormers in the roof above were added in the Jacobean age, after eight generations of readers had complained about the lighting. It is worth penetrating into this library if possible, for it is the oldest in Oxford and its cramped and studious atmosphere is impressive. Originally all the books were chained to the shelves.

Over the north-west angle of Mob Quad towers the chapel, whose choir was built about 1294. The style of that epoch was the Decorated, in which lancet windows began to be grouped into multiples to form a larger, composite window of variable size. The cold, greyish glass in the side windows is equally old; not so the east window. Originally the chapel was intended to be immense, with a nave to counterbalance the choir; but the building made slow progress. The antechapel, which in this instance should more correctly be called "the transepts," was not built till over a century later, by which time the Perpendicular style was dominant. Finally the noble Perpendicular tower was added in 1450-1. Then the nave was dropped. For one thing, it was not wanted. Secondly, by this time, as will be explained elsewhere, William of Wykeham had contrived the regular T-shaped plan for a college chapel, to which the existing building conformed. Thirdly, the founders of Corpus made an offer for the site. But to this day the rough stone on the west wall shows where the opening of the nave was meant to be.

At the south-east corner, outside the chapel and formerly connected with it by a squint, is the vestry, which the Victorians used as a brewhouse. Returning to the front quad, if quad it can be called, you find beyond the hall a very wide archway with a fine elaborate vault, built about 1500 and ornamented with the arms

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of Henry VII and the signs of the zodiac. Through here is the Fellows' Quad, a prim affair only notable for its rather tiresome Jacobean sham tower, showing the various "orders" of architecture. The great room over the arch itself is called the Queen's Room because it was occupied by Queen Henrietta Maria during the Civil Wars. Charles I was lodged in Christ Church, and she is said to have had a private route from one college to the other contrived by passing through the vestry and chapel. The Warden of Merton at this time was a Parliament's man, so Charles I removed him and put in William Harvey, the discoverer of the circulation of the blood. Charles II also deposited his queen at Merton more than once; and not only his queen, for Lady Castlemaine and the beautiful Miss Stuart were given rooms in Fellows' Quad, where the former gave birth to a future Duke of Northumberland. But in spite of all these royal womenfolk, Merton remained fundamentally unsound in politics compared with other colleges.

A less historic atmosphere prevails among the remaining buildings of Merton. The farther quadrangle to the east stands on the site of St. Alban's Hall, more commonly known as Stubbins, an institution which maintained its honoured independence until 1882, when in accordance with the policy of that time its existence was merged in that of its powerful neighbour and landlord. The present St. Alban's Quad is easily recognisable as the work of Basil Champneys. It commands a fine aspect of the gardens, which were formerly a famous place of resort for courtiers and courtesans, until in 1720 the fellows decided that their amenities were so much abused that they should be closed; and they have remained closed ever since. The raised terrace along the side of the garden is, of course, a portion of the city wall, beneath which on the other side runs the ill-famed Dead Man's Walk. In front of the buildings of Fellows' Quad the wall has been cut down and replaced by a fine iron railing. The view from Merton Fields to the south, which are accessible by a passage between Merton and Corpus, is certainly the most attractive view of Merton, embracing all the harmonious lines of the two older portions. There is an independent block of buildings in the foreground which was formerly one of the great eyesores of Oxford. It was built in 1864 by Butterfield, who fancied his own style so much that he even proposed to demolish Mob Quad in order to extend the scope of his improvements. Its pristine appearance can be judged by comparison with other works of Butterfield's which will later be encountered. This specimen proved so offensive to a later generation that in 1930 it was refaced and otherwise civilised at great expense and with much skill; but it is still a thousand pities that it should be there at all.

Apart from a modern residence for the warden, erected on the other side of the road on the scale of a bishop's palace, that is all



13 New College Chapel



14 The Reynolds Window at New College (*Ackermann's "Oxford"*)

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there is of Merton, one of the richest and most renowned of colleges. Making north by Grove Street, you come out into the High opposite to St. Mary's Church, the University Church which has figured so largely in the mediæval history of Oxford. The body of the church was rebuilt in the fifteenth century; and the actual mediæval portions are the tower and spire and the additions on the northern side. From this side the great height and gigantic strength of the tower appear as an almost staggering testimony to the faith of the infant university of the year 1290. It must be acknowledged that the spire itself owes a good deal to later alterations, and hardly a stone of it can have heard the bells ring out that called the scholars to arms. In 1850 a Mr. Buckler raised the pinnacles; but this measure added so dangerously to their weight that six years later Sir George Gilbert Scott had to make drastic alterations in the structure. A few years later the old statues were condemned and new ones substituted by Frampton. The original statues are now housed in the Old Congregation House, which should be entered by a door beside the foot of the tower.

This Congregation House, as has been said, was built in 1320 as a meeting-place for the heads of the university, and served that purpose for three centuries. Since then it has been put to every sort of odd use, and is strangely tenanted to-day. It is a bleak, depressing crypt, but full of memories. On the floor above it is a rather lovely room which served as the university library before the spacious days of Duke Humphrey. Now it is used as a parish room, in which earnest discussions are held upon the plight of Ethiopia and China. As for the church itself, it is so intimately linked with a later period of history that it would be well to include it in a later survey.

All Souls, lying beneath the shadow of St. Mary's spire, is some thirty years younger. New College, farther to the east, is a few years older. For history's sake let us first search the windings of New College Lane for its unobtrusive gateway. And in case the necessity arises of asking the way, it is well to know that New College, alone of all the colleges in Oxford, is invariably spoken of as "New College," and never in any circumstances as "New."

William of Wykeham embarked upon his great scheme with the most cut-and-dried conceptions both as to its architectural form and its educational method. His statutes are as admirable in their planning and forethought as his buildings. Over the entrance arch he provided a lodging for the warden, who could thus keep an eye upon the comings and goings of his students. In the days when boys went to Oxford at the age of eleven or twelve, this was a characteristically sound idea. Most later colleges copied it, and placed their head in an oriel above the gate; but at later periods they have all abandoned this arrangement save New College.

The front quadrangle has undergone two great alterations since it was built. Sash windows have taken the place of mullions and an extra storey has been added. Otherwise the whole stands almost as it did in 1887, when the builders left. There is a curious feature in the fenestration, which is due to Wykeham's minute planning of what were then dormitory rooms. In early times the students slept in common and studied apart. Wykeham provided big rooms for four beds facing upon the quad, and small, separate studies at the back. This scheme also was followed in other plans. But the increasing luxury of college life led to a reversal of the use. The undergraduates claimed their own bedrooms, for which they used the small back rooms; and by the eighteenth century they expected each to have a large room as a living-room. This naturally involved a considerable expansion of the accommodation of the colleges; and hence it is that so many colleges have at some time added an extra storey to their buildings. It is a pity, for this addition always dwarfs the importance of the entrance-tower and increases the feeling of confinement. Without its third floor, the New College quadrangle would be marvellously spacious and the height of chapel and hall would be enhanced.

Wykeham set his lofty chapel and hall on the north side so as not to keep the sun from his quadrangle. He also put the two under one continuous roof to secure the harmonious unity which it was left for Sir George Gilbert Scott to interrupt. In his chapel Wykeham introduced the Perpendicular style, which was only conceived at Gloucester some fifty years before. He also devised the famous T-shaped plan adopted by so many colleges. By setting at right angles to the choirs a wide ante-chapel of almost equal size, he secured two advantages: first, he had an east wall long enough for a group of altars for private worship, and secondly he had a large room where the college could meet for theological debate or instruction without slighting the high altar, and where ceremonial processions could have space to form. Both parts of this chapel are noble pieces of Gothic. There is no east window, owing to the position of the hall adjoining. Its place is taken by a wall of sculptures. These were destroyed at the Reformation, and the present work was restored in accordance with Wykeham's design under the supervision of Gilbert Scott. The chapel roof has also undergone much change. Wyatt destroyed the original hammerbeam roof and made one of plaster; Scott in his turn destroyed this and most regrettably decided to substitute one of steeper pitch. The great west window of the ante-chapel embodies a remarkable design, painted on the glass after a cartoon by Sir Joshua Reynolds. The upper lights represent the Nativity and the Adoration, the lower lights represent the Virtues, a row of figures of somewhat buxom charm. The other windows of the ante-chapel contain extremely fine original glass, which only survived the

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ravages of the Reformation because the college pleaded that it had no money at the time to substitute plain glass.

Beyond the chapel to the west lie the incomparable cloisters, standing apart. Two years after the opening of New College William of Wykeham bought this extra plot of land to serve as a burial ground to the members of his foundation; and in 1400 the cloister was consecrated. Nowhere in England do the years stand still as they do in this silent and holy spot. A single entrance, the shade of a single ilex, a single tower standing guard, a single window overlooking the solitude. In a corner stands a curious fire-engine, and round the walls are monuments—curious inscriptions to the memory of "Scroggs Goad" and many others. The tower was built by Wykeham as a belfry, to stand clear of the chapel; but as it filled the place of one of the bastions in the city wall, he agreed to fortify it as well. During the Civil Wars it did service as a gunpowder-mill, while munitions were stored within the cloister.

From the great quad you reach the hall by a flight of stairs beneath another tower which balances the ante-chapel. This is the Muniment Tower, designed like that at Merton to keep marauders and incendiaries at bay. Its strongly barred windows still protect a collection of treasures which is well worth viewing. The hall, forming as it does a single range with the chapel, is of similar size but smaller height; this also was considerably altered by Scott.

Leaving the quad by an archway on the east side, beneath the library, you come into an eighteenth-century court known as the Garden Quad, although it lacks a fourth side. This was added by William Bird about 1684, at which time there was a reaction against closed quadrangles, partly on hygienic grounds and partly as a matter of architectural fashion. Between this quad and the garden itself is a superb iron screen of the same date.

New College garden is something of a show place, on account of the fine stretch of the old wall which shelters it. When Wykeham bought his land in the north-east corner of the city wall, he was allowed to build upon it on the condition that he kept the wall in good repair. This stipulation is honoured to this day, with the result that the old defences are here seen in their perfection. At the permitted hours it is very agreeable to make the circuit of New College garden. The clump of trees in the centre of the lawn conceals the remains of a great mound erected here in Tudor times, when a mound was regarded as an amusing feature in an enclosed garden.

In summer you will find the garden well tenanted with studious and sedate young men. An air of decorum and regularity broods over lawn and trees and walls, and is exemplified in the familiar inscription over the iron gates: "Manners Makyth Man." The personality of the founder has made itself felt from generation to

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generation. A man who has been to Winchester is almost always recognisable by his modest and serious deportment; a man who has been to Winchester and New College in succession is frequently so modest and so serious that he may be overlooked entirely. Wykeham's foundations produce many distinguished civil servants, many bishops, many judges, many successful men in any safe and reputable walk in life. It cannot be said that they are nurseries of great political gifts, of demagogy, of military or naval glory. No Waterloos have been won on this trim and sheltered sward.

Until less than a century ago every scholarship or fellowship at New College was reserved to Winchester alone. The relaxation of this rule has brought a great expansion to the college. It has spread to the north of its wall, where if you care to look you will find a great block of buildings by Gilbert Scott, which are also a prominent disfigurement to Holywell Street beyond. New College is distinguished in every branch of university life, though it still adheres closely to the Winchester connection. A characteristic son of Wykeham's two foundations is the present Warden, Mr. H. A. L. Fisher, who is due to retire in the present year. His predecessor, Dr. Spooner, owned another sort of fame, having given birth to the "kinkering kongs" type of joke. Nor let us fail to do honour to an earlier warden, well named Dr. Shuttleworth. This witty and ingenious man contrived a famous apparatus by which decanters of port could be transported across the open end of a horseshoe table in the senior common room without human aid. An "inclined mahogany railroad" does the business, enabling a ceaseless clockwise circulation to be maintained. This labour-saving contrivance remains in daily use. If a Warden of Merton discovered the circulation of the blood, a Warden of New College helped it on its way.

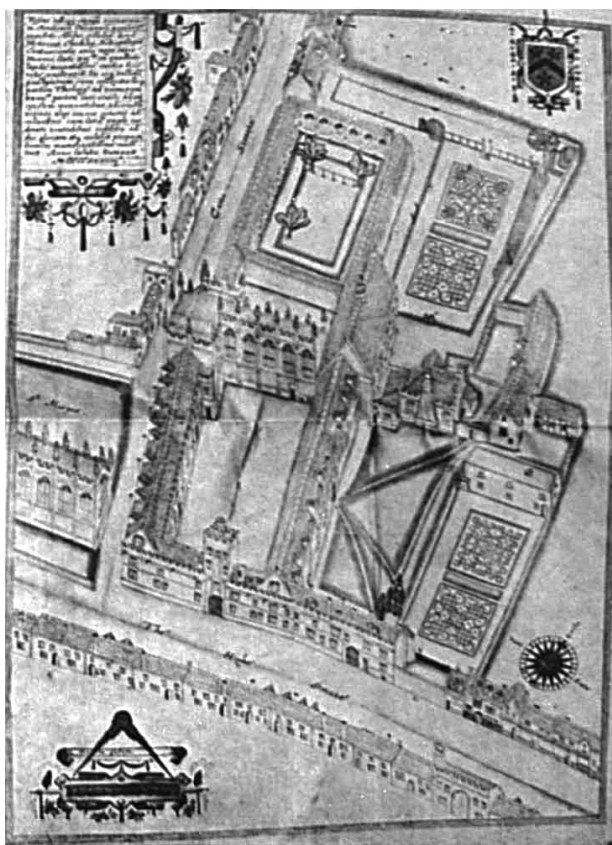
And now to All Souls, across a gap of fifty years. The entrance to All Souls is in the High Street, where now a lethal flood of buses and bicycles hurtles past. Formerly it was the duty of the porter at All Souls at the beginning of each Michaelmas term to sally into the High Street and pull up the weeds which had accumulated during the Long Vacation.

The front of All Souls has been refaced, but the small quadrangle within remains exactly as it was finished off in 1444. No extra storeys have been added here, and for the reason that All Souls is the only college which has never exceeded the scope of its founder's intentions. It was built for a warden and forty fellows; to-day it has a warden and fifty-four fellows. No such thing as an undergraduate disturbs its repose; whence its renown as a place of scholastic purity and refinement.

It is evident how closely the admirable plans of William of Wykeham were copied in this, the next college but one to be built



15 All Souls : the Hall Quad



16 A Plan of All Souls in 1598



17 St. Mary's from the North

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after his. Here is the enclosed quad ; here is the gateway tower ; here is the T-shaped chapel ; here are the hall and chapel ranged along the north side of the quad ; here are the separate staircases, independent and apart.

This chapel is simply a small edition of the other, reredos and all. This reredos is also a substitute for one destroyed at the Reformation on account of its profane profusion of statues. When the sculptures were gone, the wall was plastered up and a voluptuous painting of the Resurrection, "full of nakeds," took their place. But in Victorian times a praiseworthy effort was made (again by Sir George Gilbert Scott) to reconstruct the old masterpiece. Alas, though the money was there, the talent was not ; and the present work, for which the fellows of the college lent themselves as models, is merely grotesque. There is a hammerbeam roof, which gives an idea of what New College chapel lost by Wyatt's reconstruction ; and the classical screen, falsely ascribed to Wren, was certainly fortunate to escape the pure Gothic zeal of Scott.

The hall of All Souls was originally a small affair set at right angles to the east wall of the chapel ; but an ingenious warden, Dr. George Clarke, rebuilt it on the true Wykehamist plan in 1729, extending the lines and proportions of the chapel in an easterly direction. He also contrived a charming buttery for the fellows to have lunch in. Nor was this the limit of Clarke's admirable innovations. In 1710 there died one Christopher Codrington, a fellow of All Souls who resided in Barbados. He left a large collection of books to the college, and Dr. Clarke set to work to provide a room for them. Having formed a single unit of the chapel and hall, it was decided to balance this with an enormous library as big as the two put together. This scheme provided two sides for a new and spacious quadrangle, which is reached by a passage underneath the chapel.

It is not certain at what stage of the enterprise the assistance of Nicholas Hawksmoor was called in. Some of the fellows thought that these ambitious schemes of their talented Warden afforded a good occasion to demolish the whole college and start afresh on more commodious lines. Hawksmoor had lately done as much for Queen's next door ; but to his credit he set his face against the destruction of All Souls. What he did was to complete Clarke's excellent work by shaping it into a new quadrangle based upon the Codrington library. These were the days of open quadrangles, so Hawksmoor stopped short at three sides and joined up the fourth with a piazza. The whole composition is much ridiculed, particularly the mock-Gothic towers ; but of course in Hawksmoor's day the thread of the Gothic tradition had been wholly lost. His compromise is odd, but none of it is in the least offensive except to strict rules. Inside, the library is more like a cathedral ; it is

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open to all graduates of the university, being particularly rich in legal books ; among its treasures is a large collection of original drawings by Sir Christopher Wren, who was a fellow of the college. As a young man Wren designed a large sundial to go on the south wall of the chapel : this was moved on to the wall of the Codrington when it was built.

As you walk through All Souls you may observe some very familiar or illustrious names on the little boards at the bottom of each staircase. For the fellows of All Souls are a very remarkable collection of men. Every year one or two of the most brilliant undergraduates are chosen by examination, and are given £800 a year for five years without any obligation to reside at all. To most of them this bounty is merely a means to success in the law or elsewhere, and their rooms in college are occupied only at week-ends. Others remain in Oxford to pursue researches of unfathomable depth. At the end of the five years those who do not reside are reduced to £50, while those who remain in Oxford continue at the full rate until they marry. Other fellows are elected in later life in recognition of some special distinction or become members *ex officio* on appointment to one of a number of professorial chairs. Thus the senior common room at All Souls is distinguished above all others by the great brains which meet there and by the singular unfruitfulness of their collaboration. Among lawyers, Sir John Simon, the Master of the Rolls, and the Attorney-General are all members ; among churchmen, the Bishop of Gloucester. But it is not these who make the running. Rather is it the Editor of *The Times* and his circle of associates—men whom the public voice has called to no office and entrusted with no responsibility. These individuals elect to consider themselves as powers behind the scenes. The duty of purveying honest news is elevated in their eyes into the prerogative of dictating opinion. It is at All Souls that they meet to decide just how little they will let their readers know ; and their newspaper has been called the *All Souls Parish Magazine*.

All Souls was not always thus elevated above the intellectual level of mankind. Its founder, Chichele, had made it a provision that all who were related to him should have first claim to fellowships. Till the statute was abolished these " founder's kin " made full use of the privilege ; and they were a mixed lot. Here is a bit of scandal of 1675. The university press, writes one Humphrey Prideaux, " hath been employed about printeing Aretin's *Postures*. The gentlemen of All Souls had got them engraved, and had employed our presse to print them off. The time that was chosen for the worke was the eveneing after 4, Mr. Dean after that time never using to come to the theator ; but last night, beeing employed the other part of the day, he went not thither till the work was begun. How he tooke to find his presse workeing at

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such an imployment I leave you to immagin. The prints and the plates he hath seased, and threatens the owners of them with expulsion ; and I thinke they would deserve it were they of any other colledge than All Souls, but there I will allow them to be vertuous that are bawdy only in pictures. That colledge in my esteem is a scandalous place."

Again in 1707 we find "an abominable riot committed in All Souls College." It was an odd form of riot, however, consisting in two fellows of Whig views celebrating the anniversary of King Charles's execution with a dinner of woodcocks, "whose heads they cut off, in contempt of the memory of the blessed martyr." The cook, it seems, had refused to serve them with calves' heads, which would have been more insulting still. How far-fetched and remote it seems ; yet by Oxford's standards it was just the other day. As you leave All Souls, you will see that the High Street frontages terminate in a fine Queen Anne house, built by Dr. Clarke for the use of the Warden. This house was finished only the year before this abominable riot, and its still damp rooms must have reverberated with the scandal.