



Fig 1 above: The hall range from Front Court, with the hall oriel to the right. Fig 2 right: The gatehouse. The three light windows in the left-hand range belong to the former chapel

Creating the Cambridge college

Queens' College, Cambridge, part I

The President and Fellows of Queens' College

In the first of two articles, John Goodall looks at the early history of the college that helped defined the tradition of academic architecture in Cambridge

Photographs by Will Pryce

IT has long been appreciated that the main courtyard of Queens' College represents a new departure in the architecture of Cambridge. For the first time in the history of the university, this building, rapidly constructed between 1448–50, brought together in coherent architectural form all the chief elements—the gatehouse, hall, services, chapel and lodgings—of a college. What is not generally understood, however, are the origins of this remarkable design, as suggested by the complex early history of the foundation.

During the late summer and autumn of 1446, a group of wealthy burgesses in the parish of St Botolph's, Cambridge, made gifts of property towards the site of a new college in the

city. They were undoubtedly encouraged in their generosity by their energetic parish priest, one Andrew Dokett. He had recently fought a legal battle to release St Botolph's Church in the city from the controlling hand of Barnwell Priory and been confirmed as its rector. He also had some connection with a student lodging in the city known as St Bernard's Hostel (he has been described as its governor, but it's not clear what the evidence for this is). As originally conceived, the new college was almost certainly intended as an aggrandisement of this institution.

The immediate spur to Dokett's project was probably the wholesale transformation in the wider fortunes of Cambridge and its university brought about by the foundation →





here of King's College by Henry VI in 1441. This began its existence as an isolated institution and grew by stages in ambition through the 1440s. Hitherto, Cambridge University had been a poor relation to Oxford with its great collegiate foundations of Merton, New College (COUNTRY LIFE, *October 16 and 23, 2019*). With the example of royal patronage to encourage new donors, however, from the 1440s, Cambridge began rapidly to redress the balance.

Perhaps because of his interest in King's College, Henry VI was pleased to support the process of establishing Dokett's new site. As part of the legal formalities, Dokett was granted the parcels of land that made up the proposed site of the new buildings off Trumpington Street. Then, by a royal charter of foundation sealed on December 3, 1446, the King bestowed them on the corporate body of 'St Bernard's College', comprising a president, Dokett, and four fellows, 'or more or less', depending on the resources available.

‘The most surprising thing about the charter is its glittering list of noblemen. A local initiative was becoming much grander’

Within a few months of securing this licence, however, Dokett's plans had changed. He acquired a new building plot for the college between the River Cam, the Carmelite Friary and what is today Silver Street, part of the present site of Queens'. In August 1447 he secured a new foundation charter that not only relocated St Bernard's College to the new site, but authorised the institution to hold an endowment in perpetuity up to the value of £100 per annum (a very costly concession, the associated payment probably costing five times that sum).

Perhaps the most surprising thing about this charter, however, is its glittering witness list of noblemen and courtiers. What had begun as a local initiative was developing into something grander.

Explanation for this is undoubtedly to be found in Henry VI's patronage of King's College, Cambridge. In 1443, he formally linked this institution with another college he had founded, at Eton, next to his birthplace at Windsor Castle. His intention was that boys would pass from the school attached to the college at Eton to university at Cambridge (an idea first enshrined institutionally in the pioneering late-14th-century foundations



Fig 3 above: The Combination Room. Fig 4 left: The entrance front of the college, with its turrets. Fig 5 below left: The Silver Street façade of Queens' incorporates diaper brick decoration. Fig 6 facing page: The magnificent hall interior, looking towards the high table and oriel window

of William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester). Work to both royal colleges was under way when they were connected, but Henry VI's ambitions for them soon outstripped what had been accomplished. Incredibly, in early 1448, he determined to start them both afresh on a much grander scale.

Henry VI's new architectural proposals were set out in an indenture known as 'The King's Will', dated March 12, 1448. This directed that the new buildings at both Eton and King's should be realised 'in more notable manner than any [others] of my said realm' and described plans to match. To help realise this stupendous vision, each institution was promised £20,000, to be paid in annual installments over two decades.

Henry VI was directly involved in preparing these proposals (and actually continued fiddling with them subsequently). Notes and even perhaps a drawing (COUNTRY LIFE, *November 15, 2001*) that informed the associated discussions still survive. The final designs presumably drew on a spectrum of professional advice, but they were probably framed by his principal mason, Robert Westerley, and—as the King knew and had visited Cambridge—were substantially discussed at Windsor and viewed through the prism of Eton, which, by degrees, became Henry VI's particular obsession. All this is relevant →





Fig 7 above: The medieval library. Its original desks have been heightened and adapted.
Fig 8 right: St Margaret and St Bernard appear in the bosses of the entrance vault

to Queens' College because it must explain an undated petition drawn up by Henry VI's queen, Margaret of Anjou, now held at Queens'.

The petition notes the recent establishment of Dokett's college and observes that Cambridge University had 'no college founded by any queen of England hithertoward'. Margaret, therefore, asked to be given the 'foundation and determination' of this institution, which would be 'called and named the Queen's College of St Margaret and St Bernard' (**Fig 8**) so that, with King's College, it would provide for the 'conservation of our faith and augmentation of [a] pure clergy... like as [the] two noble and devout Countesses of Pembroke and of Clare founded two colleges in the same university called Pembroke Hall and Clare'. The activities of the college, the Queen proudly observed, would redound to the 'laud and honour of [the] sex feminine'.

The King assented to the terms of his wife's petition and issued yet another foundation

charter, dated March 30, 1448. Events now moved incredibly fast. On April 8, the Queen issued a writ from Windsor Castle directing that the foundation stone be laid on her behalf by her chamberlain, Sir John Wenlock. He performed the task a week later, placing a stone at the south-east corner of the chapel. It bore a Latin inscription: 'Our refuge will be in the power of our lady Queen Margaret; and this stone is in sign of this.' To celebrate this event, the Queen issued her own foundation charter dated the same day, April 15, 1448.

The foundation stone must have been laid with a full knowledge of the design of the college, because the day before it was set in place—on April 14—Dokett contracted for carpentry of the lodging ranges of the present main court. The contract is unusual, taking the form of a bond for £100 that had to be repaid if the work wasn't completed by June 24 following. Even before that contract had expired, on March 6, 1449, another one was





Fig 9: The Cloister Court, with pump court visible beyond the 15th-century covered walk. By tradition, the scholar Erasmus occupied rooms above the kitchen to the centre right

drawn up between the same parties and in the same form for £80 to roof the hall, furnish it with benches and fit the kitchen, buttery and pantry and the remains of the courtyard ‘in as hasty wise as they may goodly after the walls of the said houses be ready’.

Final payment for the second carpentry contract was due on September 14, 1450, by which time it seems reasonable to assume that the front courtyard had been completed. The layout imitates the arrangement of a grand house of the period, but is regularised to a striking degree. In time-honoured institutional fashion, the gatehouse incorporated the muniment chamber of the college (**Fig 2**). Its vaulted entrance passage directly faces the door to the screens’ passage across the courtyard (**Fig 1**). To the left of the passage are doors to the kitchen and services and to the right the hall, its interior lit with a richly detailed oriel window (**Fig 6**).

Opening off the dais is a parlour, the Combination Room (**Fig 3**). Subsumed within the volume of the north range are the library (**Fig 7**) and chapel (now also a library), the latter arrangement a striking point of contrast to the monumental chapels of Eton and King’s. The remainder of the court is encircled by accommodation. Beyond the main courtyard, towards the river, is a subsidiary court overlooked by the president’s lodgings (**Fig 9**).

The carpentry contracts of 1448 and 1449 have conventionally been cited as evidence that Dokett took sole responsibility for the construction of the college. Also, by extension, that the Queen had little further to do with her foundation. Yet building a college

in two years flat implies access to resources far beyond those available to Dokett working alone. Added to which, the crucial stages in the process of design evidently took place in a short window of time—March and early April 1448—which precisely coincides with the redesign of King’s College and Eton by Henry VI. The idea that the Queen didn’t take a direct interest in the architecture of her own college at this particular moment, therefore (and after having just founded it), is almost incredible.

The Queen’s involvement has a bearing on the central question of who designed the college. It’s usually attributed to the master mason Reginald Ely, who, by 1444, was in charge of the works at King’s College and, from at least 1446, was a parishioner of Dokett’s in St Botolph’s. Certainly, it’s quite clear that the two men knew each other well and it seems plausible that Ely contributed in some way to the new college; indeed, his will of 1463 grants property to the foundation. The attribution to Ely places Queens’ in a tradition of Cambridge building and explains its regularised plan as an evolution of ideas already present in the city and university.

Assuming the involvement of the Queen, however, the context of the design looks radically different. The debates that framed The King’s Will largely took place at Windsor and, although Ely presumably contributed to these, the senior professional who must have directed them and been physically present was the King’s master mason, Robert Westerley. Would it not have been with him, therefore, that the Queen devised and signed off the

plans for her college? If so, the Cambridge precedents for Queens’ are an irrelevance and its design should instead be understood as a wholesale importation to the university.

That interpretation—and Westerley’s involvement—might explain several surprising features of Queens’. For example, the walls (built of clunch) are faced in high-quality brick that is detailed in stone and ornamented with patterns of brick burnt black in the kiln, termed diaper (**Fig 5**). This combination of materials is most obviously prefigured at Eton in the 1440s (and in Westerley’s lost work at Syon, Middlesex) rather than in any Cambridge building. Indeed, the use of brick in the 1440s is itself a mark of court-connected architecture. Similarly, the main façade incorporates miniature turrets (**Fig 4**), an architectural borrowing from Eton that is probably derived—as is the gatehouse of Queens’—from the 14th-century remodelling of the Upper Ward at Windsor Castle.

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Whatever the provenance of its design, the remarkable speed at which the college was completed would itself prove important. In 1450—when construction was drawing to an end—a sequence of political crises culminated in the popular uprising known as Jack Cade’s Rebellion. Three years later, after a period of steadily mounting political tension, the King had a mental collapse and the kingdom slid into the internecine struggle familiarly known as the Wars of the Roses. Work to Henry VI’s colleges lapsed, leaving their chapels as vast, roofless and incomplete shells.

The same political difficulties probably account for Margaret of Anjou’s seeming lack of interest in her college in the 1450s and Dokett, ironically, lived to secure the support of her Yorkist rival, Elizabeth Woodville, as the titular founder of the college; hence the plural form of its name.

Despite Lancastrian misfortunes, however, Queens’ did stand physically complete and it offered a much more realistic model for future imitation in Cambridge than King’s. In the process, it shaped the whole tradition of architecture in the university. We will look further at the subsequent development of its buildings next week. ↪



...and **D**omine, et tu das escam illorum in tempore opportuno. aperis tu manum tuam, et implebis...

Benedictio et sanctio nomen Domini in saecula saeculorum Amen





A Gothic revival

Queens' College, Cambridge, part II
The President and Fellows of Queens' College

In the second of two articles, John Goodall looks at the architectural evolution of the college into the late 19th century and its outstanding hall by William Morris and G. F. Bodley

Photographs by Will Pryce

ON November 4, 1484, Andrew Dokett, the founding President of Queens' College, died after more than 30 years in office. He had achieved a great deal in that time. As we discovered last week, he not only managed the complex arrangements of establishing this institution in the 1440s, but secured the patronage of the Lancastrian Queen Margaret of Anjou and, with her help, brought to completion the first college buildings—what is now Front Court—in 1450. Thereafter, during the political difficulties of the next two decades, he steadily built up the foundation. When the Yorkist Queen, Elizabeth Woodville assumed to herself the title of 'true founder' of the college in 1475 and promulgated the first set of governing statutes, the original

community of four fellows had grown to 12 and, in addition, possessed three scholars.

By this date, the architectural bones of Cloister Court, which lies beyond Front Court, had also probably been created. This was enclosed on three sides with covered walks and that to the west—overlooking the River Cam—was integrally constructed with a brick range, possibly accommodation for guests. Queen Elizabeth's involvement with Dokett may, in turn, have encouraged the generosity of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, her brother-in-law, towards the college. Having succeeded to the throne as Richard III in 1483, his wife, Anne Neville, became the third Queen to act as its patron.

The Battle of Bosworth in 1485 briefly turned these Yorkist associations to the disadvantage of the college, which was stripped of some of its endowments. That financial reverse, however, was off-set by generous early Tudor benefactions to the wider university from the 1490s. The crucial figure in this process was the King's mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort. She not only persuaded Henry VII to complete King's College Chapel in the spectacular form we see today, but founded both Christ's College in 1505 and

then St John's from 1511–16. It was due to her influence, moreover, that the future Catholic martyr and Bishop of Rochester, John Fisher, was appointed President of Queens' from 1505 until 1508.

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Desiderius Erasmus, to come to the college between 1511 until 1514. During this time, Erasmus worked on his important editions both of St Jerome and the Greek New Testament. His connection to the college is today celebrated in architecture by the Modernist Erasmus Building, student accommodation to the north of Front Court designed by Sir Basil Spence and completed in 1960. The membership of Queens', meanwhile, continued to grow and, in 1529, new statutes increased the number of fellows to 18. Soon afterwards, in 1531–32, the hall was richly wainscotted, a fashionable replacement for domestic hangings.

The Reformation offered Queens' its first significant opportunity to expand physically. In 1544, the college managed—after a failed attempt—to buy the buildings and precinct of the Carmelite convent, or Whitefriars, that stood immediately to its north. →

Fig 1: The hall and its oriel, the decoration inspired by 15th-century fabric designs. The inscriptions were painted freehand



Fig 2: The President's Lodge gallery range. The terminating spires of the projecting turrets and the pediments along the wall head were trimmed off in the 18th century

The site was subsequently cleared and divided into four walled garden compartments interconnected by a curious central gateway. All that survives from Whitefriars today is a set of glass roundels that perhaps came from its cloister. The colleges of Cambridge themselves narrowly escaped suppression, but, in 1549, the statutes of Queens' were once again revised by Edward VI and the fellowship emerged from the upheavals of the period as a solidly Protestant body.

During the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I, a series of well-connected Presidents governed a flourishing institution. Their independent wealth, and the fact that they were now allowed to marry, perhaps prompted

the expansion of the President's Lodge. The original rooms occupied by the President at the head of the hall were now connected with the western range of Cloister Court by means of a gallery constructed above its northern walk (the present structure may have replaced or adapted a more modest predecessor). To the rear, the gallery overlooked the gardens in the former friary precinct. The Cloister Court elevation bore resemblance to a great house façade (**Fig 2**), with an open arcade in place of a loggia and a symmetrical arrangement of pediments and towers rising like spires above it.

The gallery range was possibly constructed by William Chadderton, President in 1568–79,

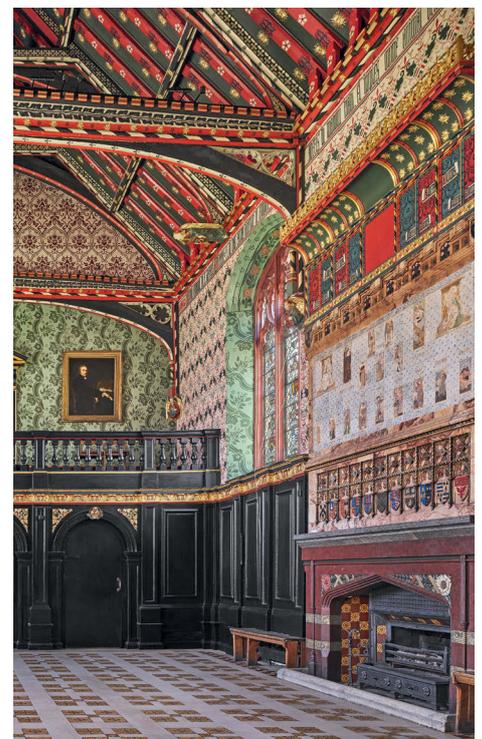


Fig 3: The hall chimneypiece with its tile overmantel by Bodley, Morris and Webb

who enjoyed connections through his wife to the royal works (although the towers don't appear on a survey by Hammond of 1592). It was certainly in existence by 1604—a date scratched into a door—and the interior was panelled by President Humphrey Tindall (d. 1614), at which time there was a slightly different pattern of fenestration.

The turrets have since been truncated and, in 1911, the external render was stripped off to reveal the timber framing beneath. C. G. Hare devised the present gallery ceiling after the example of Haddon Hall in 1921 (**Fig 4**), creating a space in sympathy with the predominantly Elizabethan and Jacobean character of several of the principal rooms today (**Figs 5 and 6**).

In 1616, a new lodging range was begun to accommodate the expanding community. It was erected on the former Whitefriars site as a northern extension of the Front Court gatehouse façade. Five years later, in 1621, the college head count was 230, a number not equalled until the 20th century. This period of growth was interrupted by the Civil War, when it suffered at the hands of the iconoclast William Dowsing. Despite its Puritan temper, the college showed a remarkable degree of loyalty to Charles I and the existing fellowship was dispossessed.

In a striking act of reconciliation in 1660, the restored President Dr Martin had the fellows appointed to Queens' during the Commonwealth elected as members of the reconstituted college. Dr Martin also restored the chapel, which was furnished with 'cedar'



Fig 4: The gallery of the President's Lodge. The plaster ceiling of 1921 incorporates heraldry that celebrates the history of the college

panelling. The use of fragrant and exotic timbers—often generically described as cedar—is a feature of Restoration interiors and reflects the increasing reach of Britain's international trade. He may have repaired the hall, too, which is shown with a 17th-century lantern and dormer windows (but, curiously, no chimney) in a view of the college by David Loggan published in 1690.

The buildings of Queens' made little impression on most visitors to Cambridge in the 17th and 18th centuries. Accounts of the university, such as that compiled by the diarist John Evelyn in 1654 or the discerning tourist John Loveday in 1731, don't even mention the college. The great Tudor university buildings—such as the main courts of St John's and Trinity—may have been partly inspired by the compact collegiate plan of Queens', but they dwarfed it. Added to which, they also boasted splendid modern buildings.

Queens' didn't have the resources to compete, but, in the 18th century, its buildings were modernised. In 1732–34, the hall was remodelled by the amateur architect James Burrough, a university figure widely consulted

on architectural proposals and later described as 'a very large and corpulent man, who lived freely and used no exercise'. He inserted a flat ceiling in the room and replaced the Tudor wainscotting within it (recycled fragments survive in the President's Lodge). The screen towards the kitchen and services was also renewed with a musicians' gallery.

‘As the chapel was being refitted, the tide of architectural taste was just beginning to turn: to Gothic’

Burrough's new wainscotting was installed by James Essex, a Cambridge carpenter. His namesake son, James Essex, wanted to establish his reputation as an architect and launched his career with a new bridge for the

college over the Cam in 1749, after a design by William Etheridge. This structure drew its inspiration from the proposed timber bridge at Westminster designed in 1737 by Etheridge's master, James King, in which—for ease of maintenance—each timber could be removed and reinstated without disturbing its neighbours. The Queens' bridge today is a replacement of 1905 after Etheridge's designs.

Essex was subsequently employed around the university and periodically returned to Queens'. In 1756, he planned a huge new river frontage to the college, 17 bays wide. The project was beyond the means of the college and only one wing was erected, broadly constituting Pump Court—between Cloister Court and Silver Street—in its present form. He also renovated the chapel in 1772–75, removing its Jacobean and Caroline fittings, laying a new floor, inserting a plaster ceiling and creating a gallery for the master and his family.

As the chapel was being refitted, the tide of architectural taste was just beginning to turn. Essex himself was fascinated by Gothic architecture and, although the generation of Cambridge architects below him— →



Fig 5 above: The Audit Dining Room in the President's Lodge, named after its former function as an audit chamber, with its fine 15th-century, hooded fireplace. Fig 6 below: The drawing room. The painting may have come from the hall fireplace as installed in the 1730s

represented by figures such as William Wilkins —might be familiar today for their severe neo-Classical designs, they drew, surveyed and created Gothic buildings as well. Next came the Ecclesiological movement—represented in the university by the Cambridge Camden Society, founded in 1839—which gave the Gothic Revival strident intellectual and religious purpose.

To the eyes of an Ecclesiologist, fired by a desire to revive medieval forms and usage, Queens' in the 1840s looked less like an old building in need of modernisation than a Gothic one in need of rescue. If the college had been wealthier, the task of restoration might have been undertaken in one massive campaign, but, crucially, the work was incremental, with different programmes of renovation overlaying and augmenting each other.

In 1845, the chapel ceiling was removed, the medieval roof re-created and, a year later, the east window refilled with stained glass paid for by subscription. As that initiative got under way, the hall ceiling was likewise



removed and the medieval roof repaired under the direction of the architect Samuel Daukes. A Fellow, Robert Moon, paid twice over for new Gothic tracery in the hall windows (the first designs did not please him). He then restored the hall oriel and fitted new armorial stained glass throughout the room.

In 1858, the Gothic Revival architect G. F. Bodley was invited to improve the chapel and then, from 1862, the hall as well. Working in the latter, he renewed the floor and, in partnership with the taste-maker William Morris, installed the present fireplace overmantel (**Fig 3**). This includes heraldry by Philip Webb, figures of the two founding Queens of the college (actually added in 1873), its patron saints and personifications of the months, as well as Day and Night, involving Ford Madox Brown, Rossetti and Burne-Jones, as well as Morris himself. The 18th-century panelling, screen and backdrop to the high table were preserved.

Finally, in 1874, Bodley devised the hall's astonishing scheme of decoration after the example of late-medieval textile designs (renewed in the 1960s at the direction of Stephen Dykes Bower). This was executed by the Cambridge decorator F. R. Leach, with all the patterns drawn up as full-scale cartoons and pricked onto the walls (**Fig 1**). One of the craftsmen almost certainly involved was David Parr, whose modest house decorated in a similar vein remains one of the most unexpected sights of Cambridge (COUNTRY LIFE, *January 4, 2017*).



Fig 7 left: The present Dining Hall, which opened for breakfast on January 2, 1979. The chairs and tables are arranged for social distancing. Fig 8 above: Bodley's chapel, completed in 1891. The painted altarpiece was in the college by the early 18th century

With the hall complete, Bodley was invited back yet again in 1887, to design a new chapel for the college, the medieval one being considered too small (it is now a library). The original commission was for a freestanding building, but Bodley successfully added his chapel to the much re-worked 17th-century lodging range as the third side of Walnut Tree Court. Completed in 1891, the chapel speaks of the changing place and character of religious practice in the late-Victorian university: it is a tall and monumental building, but undemonstrative without distinguishing turret or tower. The interior (**Fig 8**) is fitted up in Anglo-Catholic style with the altar elevated on seven steps. Importantly, the 15th-century Flemish altarpiece was recycled

by Bodley from the college collection, where it had previously been valued as an antiquity, rather than a liturgical fitting.

From the 1930s, the development of Queens' has largely focused to the west of the Cam, where the porter's lodge—added in 2012–13 by James Campbell and Freeland Rees Roberts—stands today. It is here in Cripps Court, designed by Powell, Moya and Partners and realised in three stages between 1971–83, that the college gathers in its modern Dining Hall (**Fig 7**). It is an unexpected inversion of old and new that gives one of the most important historic colleges of the university a very contemporary face. 🐉

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