

# The Belfry at Christ Church

E.G.W. Bill

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## SUMMARY

*As a result of G.G. Scott's restoration campaign, the bells were moved out of Christ Church Cathedral's bell tower. The college's search for an adequate new home for them prompted one of the best-known architectural competitions in Victorian Oxford. E.G.W. Bill's detailed account of this only partially successful endeavour sets it in the context of the personalities and rivalries that dominated the college in the mid nineteenth century.*

For almost 200 years after the completion of Wren's tower in 1681, the Great Quadrangle, or Tom Quad, at Christ Church underwent no external change of importance. But within less than a decade extensive alterations then transformed it virtually to its present state. While many of the changes which took place at this time were inspired by a deliberate attempt to Gothicize the quadrangle, the most important, the erection of Bodley's belfry at the south-east corner, came into existence by what can only be described as an accident, or indeed as a succession of accidents. It is probable that no belfry would have been built at all but for an unforeseen consequence of Sir Gilbert Scott's restoration of the cathedral, and when the decision to build had been taken it seemed for a time that instead of the belfry as we know it today there would soar into the sky a tower 170 feet high.<sup>1</sup>

Until 1872, the cathedral bells were hung in the cathedral tower. Their removal had been advocated by Scott in his *Report* on the cathedral in 1869 because of the dangerous state of the tower, and because he wished to open the lantern. As this involved the removal of the ringing chamber, it would have meant that the bells could be chimed but not rung if they remained in the tower. Although at this time he did not consider the tower structurally too insecure to contain the bells, he found its condition deteriorating rapidly, and on 18 March 1871 he wrote to the dean, Henry Liddell, that, 'Its structural condition is very unsatisfactory, and its external decay progresses with such rapidity as not only to threaten the loss of much of the design but to increase the weakness of the structure.'<sup>2</sup>

On 9 June 1871, he again wrote to the dean, stating that:

[Editor's note: For the history of this article and the principles adopted in editing the text, see above, E.G.W. Bill, 'Sir Gilbert Scott's Restoration of Christ Church Cathedral', p. 127. There are two versions of this article in the archives at Christ Church; the text reproduced here is the longer, and almost certainly later, version (MR i.b.1). I am most grateful to Peter Howell and Judith Curthoys, archivist at Christ Church, for a great deal of help.]

<sup>1</sup> The earlier history of the tower is discussed in two articles, M. Biddle, 'Wolsey's Bell-Tower', *Oxoniensia*, 53 (1988), pp. 205–10, and M. Batey and C. Cole, 'The Great Staircase Tower at Christ Church', *Oxoniensia*, 53 (1988), pp. 211–20. The sole modern account of the competition is H. Colvin, *Unbuilt Oxford* (1983), pp. 137–40. For the competition in its broader context, see P. Howell, 'Oxford Architecture, 1800–1914', in M.G. Brock and M.C. Curthoys (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford, Vol. 7, Nineteenth-Century Oxford, Part 2* (1994), pp. 747–8.]

<sup>2</sup> CCA, MR i.b.1; DP vii.c.1.

The condition of your central Tower is clearly such as to demand immediate action. Its stonework is hopelessly decayed, and every winter considerable portions come down upon the adjoining roofs – so much so that the architectural design is in danger of being irrecoverably lost. There seems to be a constant movement going on and new cracks forming. The stair-turret is in a dangerous condition having three fissures from bottom to top besides smaller ones, while its walls are so weatherworn as in many places not to exceed five inches in thickness.<sup>3</sup>

Scott may be acquitted of exaggerating the decay of the tower in order to get his own way over the lantern, for the governing body had decided to remove the bells to their present position on 3 May 1871, that is before the second letter was written, and his findings are also confirmed in a report by Robert Castle, the college agent, on 21 January 1876, where it is stated that,

Some time since it was found that the Tower and Spire, in which the large peal of Bells belonging to the College were hung, was in a very dangerous state, and that although it was possible to repair and keep it up, it would always be unsafe to use it for the purpose of a Bell Tower. The old Tower and Spire have since been repaired, but the Bells were obliged to be removed, and they are now hung in a temporary wooden Belfry, until a proper Bell Tower can be provided. As the cost of taking down and rebuilding the old Tower and Spire in a sufficiently strong manner to carry this large peal of Bells would be much greater than the cost of erecting a Tower, simply for the purposes of carrying the Bells, in a position over the Staircase and entrance Hall originally intended and constructed to carry a Belfry, it is proposed to meet the requirement in this case by adopting the last named plan.<sup>4</sup>

On 15 June 1871, the governing body finally agreed to remove the bells, ‘according to Mr. Scott’s suggestion’, to what was already called ‘Wolsey’s Campanile’,<sup>5</sup> and here early in the following year they were hung in a wooden frame 22 feet square,<sup>6</sup> which speedily became known as the Meat-Safe. In Fig. 2, the wooden bell chamber, in which the bells are hung, is shown rising from a sloping roof supported by the walls of the tower. Inside the tower itself is the ringing chamber, the floor of which is approximately 20 feet below the floor of the belfry.

The full consequences of adopting Scott’s suggestion do not appear to have been fully appreciated by the governing body, and the surviving evidence suggests that when the decision to move the bells was taken there was no intention of constructing a large tower or belfry. That this was the case is stated quite unambiguously in C.L. Dodgson’s well-known letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1874, where he writes:

During the restoration of the Cathedral, when the bells had been removed from the tower, which had become too weak to support them, it was proposed to hang them outside the cathedral in a wooden belfry, which we were assured would be quite inoffensive, as it would hardly be visible from any point of the compass. In an evil hour we consented, and the resulting erection, which cost about a thousand pounds,<sup>7</sup> speedily made us famous for having inflicted upon Oxford the ugliest and most conspicuous monstrosity that probably she has ever seen. This, and the great expense already incurred, forced on us the conviction that we must now erect a stone bell-tower.<sup>8</sup>

As erected, the belfry rises to a height of about 30 feet above the level of the original tower, and,

<sup>3</sup> CAA, MR i.b.1; DP vii.c.i.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. GB xv.c.14/2/1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. GB i.b.2.

<sup>6</sup> *Jackson’s Oxford Journal*, 12 October 1872.

<sup>7</sup> Symm’s tender, dated 7 November 1871, is for £875. Scott’s fees were £150. [CCA, DP vii.c.1, f. 169.]

<sup>8</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 31 October 1874, reprinted in E. Wakeling (ed.), *The Oxford Pamphlets, Leaflets and Circulars of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson* (1993), pp. 101–3.]

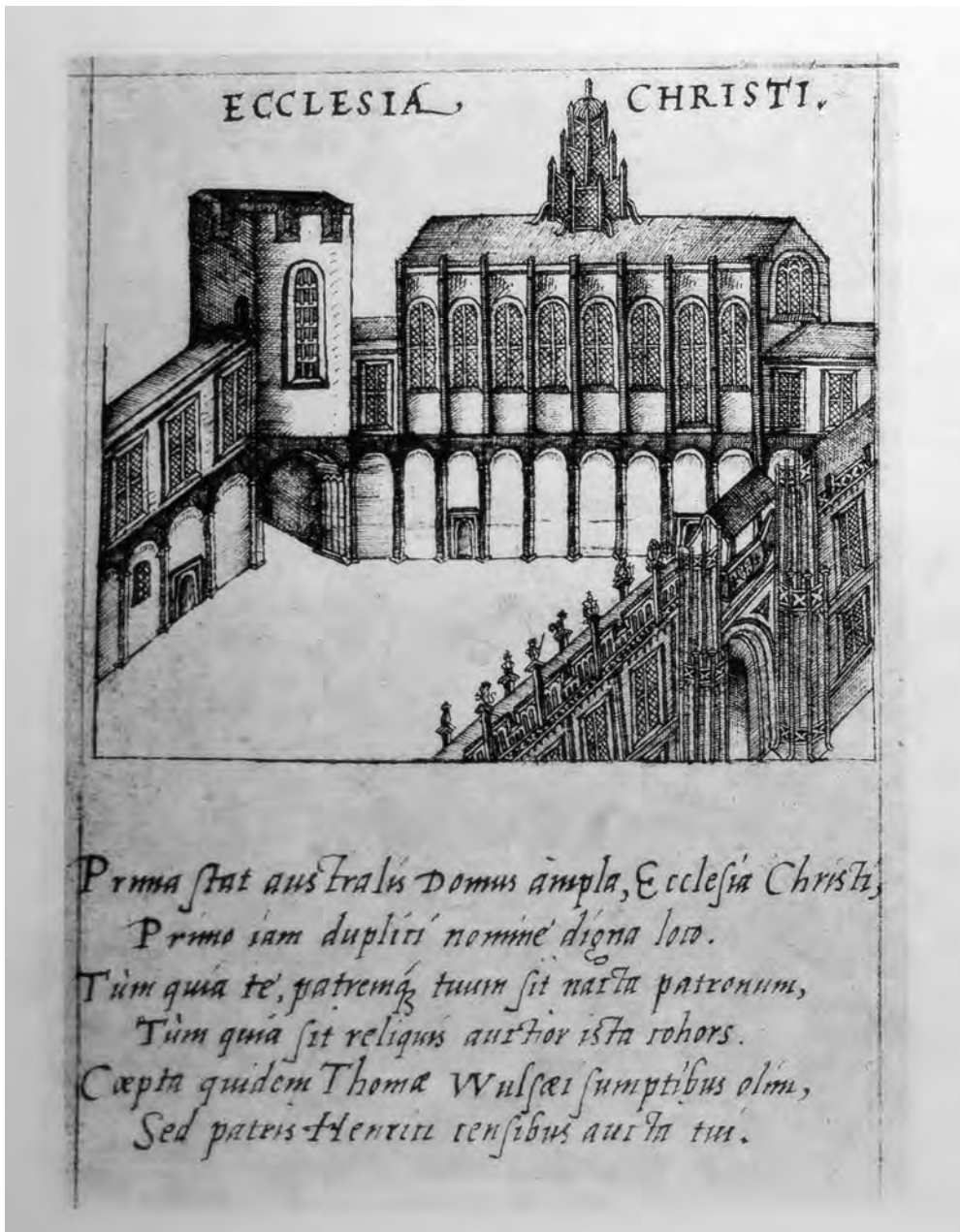


Fig. 1. A drawing by John Bereblock of Christ Church in 1566, showing the tower at the east end of the hall (Bodl. MS Bodley 13, f. 5v.).

bearing in mind the necessary length of the bell ropes, it is difficult to see how it was ever contemplated to reduce the height to such an extent that the belfry would hardly be visible from any point of the compass. But the substantial truth of Dodgson's account is vindicated when the critical state of the college finances at this time is considered. For a variety of reasons

they were barely adequate for the commitments of the college, and it was estimated that a noticeable improvement would not take place until 1878. The restoration of the cathedral, though financed mainly by voluntary subscription, had been a severe strain on the available resources, and it is hardly conceivable that the governing body should have intended to follow it up so soon with plans for the construction of a belfry involving an expenditure of several thousand pounds. When plans were eventually agreed on, partly as a result of Dodgson's famous pamphlet on the subject in 1872, the building itself was not started for some time afterwards, and even then the design was curtailed through lack of funds.<sup>9</sup>

It would be wrong to suppose that in writing his outspoken letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* and his pamphlet on the belfry, Dodgson was indulging a private feud with Liddell, occasioned by the dean's discouragement of his friendship with Liddell's daughter Alice. Although hostility to Liddell is implicit in both works and also in his pamphlet *The Vision of the Three Ts*, it may perhaps be attributed rather to Liddell's part in promoting alterations to Tom Quad, which were viewed with horror by a minority group in the governing body for whom Dodgson was spokesman.<sup>10</sup> In his diary, Dodgson specifically states that his letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* was supported by Barclay Thompson, Shute, Stewart and Sampson,<sup>11</sup> and it is well known that E.B. Pusey was a strong opponent of change. Liddell had been the prime mover in the restoration of the cathedral, and as a young man had forcibly stated his antipathy to post-Reformation ecclesiastical architecture. His desire to Gothicize Christ Church was shared for slightly different reasons by an able ally, the Revd T. Vere Bayne, censor, secretary to the governing body and a very active member of the cathedral restoration committee and later of the belfry committee.

Whereas Liddell was influenced by artistic and ecclesiological considerations, Vere Bayne's attitude was determined largely by a historical romanticism which led to very similar results. To a distaste for the Reformation, common to many High Churchmen of his time, he joined a profound but uncritical admiration for Wolsey, the founder of Cardinal College, and his admiration was shared by others. The cardinal cult is in fact a prominent feature in the history of the college in this period, culminating later in the century with the acquisition of a curious relic, reputed to have belonged to Wolsey, in the shape of a hat, venerated, it may be said, by Horace Walpole, sadly untroubled by historic doubts. When pious antiquarianism met the Gothic Revivalist passion for archaeological accuracy the outcome was sometimes startling, and at Christ Church it may be traced in the proposed extension of the nave of the cathedral to what was believed to have been its original length and the construction of the western entrance, which had been bitterly opposed by Dodgson, who here also spoke for others besides himself. The removal of the bells from the cathedral was the signal for an onslaught on the seventeenth-century additions to Tom Quad, designed to restore the quadrangle to what was thought to have been its state in Wolsey's time, and the controversy over the belfry should perhaps be seen against this background.

As early as May 1873, the lowering and narrowing of the terrace and the provision of two flights of steps on the east side was considered by the governing body, and the work on the terrace began in the following year. The remains of buttresses apparently intended for a cloister were then discovered and the possibility of completing it was taken up with enthusiasm. This possibility had already, it is perhaps needless to say, occurred to Sir Gilbert Scott, and the triviality of his western entrance to the cathedral is partly explained by his retention of a central column from which to spring the vaulting. Although reason triumphed when it was shown that a cloister

[<sup>9</sup> Dodgson's 'famous pamphlet' is *The New Belfry of Christ Church Oxford, A Monograph by D.C.L.* (1872), reprinted in Wakeling (ed.), *The Oxford Pamphlets*, pp. 67–79.]

[<sup>10</sup> Dodgson's 1873 pamphlet was an attack on the 'Tea-Chest' (the belfry), the 'Trench' (the gap opened up by the removal of the parapet connecting the hall to the staircase tower) and the 'Tunnel' (the new entry into the cathedral from Tom Quad). It is reprinted in Wakeling (ed.), *The Oxford Pamphlets*, pp. 80–100.]

[<sup>11</sup> E. Wakeling, *Lewis Carroll's Diaries, Vol. 6 (1868–1876)* (2001), p. 366.]

would make the ground-floor rooms intolerably dark, an unsatisfactory compromise was reached whereby the existing foundations were embalmed in stone and new foundations founded where necessary. In 1873 also the first steps were taken to replace Fell's balustrade with battlements on the inside of the quadrangle, the armorial shields being chosen by the dean, the treasurer and Vere Bayne. In 1876 the hall parapet and pinnacles were approved.<sup>12</sup>

The sequence of events suggests that alterations to Tom Quad were first considered at a time when it still seemed possible that Scott would design a belfry, but in fact the work began after Scott's original designs had been rejected but before Bodley and Garner's had been accepted, and it would therefore seem that they were not intended to harmonize with a particular design, or contribute, except in a general sense, to its effect.

On 21 May the governing body resolved by sixteen votes to nine to complete the belfry, and a committee was appointed to obtain plans. It consisted of the dean, Dr Bright, J.B. Mozley, T. Prout, R.G. Faussett, Vere Bayne, H.L. Thompson, A.G.V. Harcourt and Scott Holland. After inconclusive negotiations with Sir Gilbert Scott, a new committee was appointed on 18 December with full power to choose a plan. Its membership was unchanged except that Dr. King and Stephen Fremantle replaced Mozley and Prout. Having failed to procure an acceptable design from Scott, the committee resolved at a meeting on 4 February 1874 to widen its choice by throwing the design open to competition. This decision was a bitter blow to Scott, and when he met the committee on the following 11 March, armed with three of his sketches, he not unnaturally inquired in what way his design had been unsatisfactory. The committee informed him that opinion in the governing body had been so varied that it was not possible 'to give such an answer to Sir G.G. Scott as might be taken to represent the opinion of the G.B.'<sup>13</sup> Although Scott declined to take part in a competition, he submitted further drawings in his capacity of architect for the alterations to the cathedral.

But the committee's troubles were only just starting. The architects initially invited to compete were A.W. Blomfield, William Burges, Basil Champneys, T.N. Deane, J.W. Hugall, G. E. Street and Alfred Waterhouse. On the grounds principally that the college was already committed to Scott, all refused except Champneys, Deane and Hugall. Disappointed by the result, the committee decided a week later to approach G.F. Bodley, T.G. Jackson, J.L. Pearson, Anthony Salvin and Henry Woodyer, but of these only Bodley and Jackson accepted.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless a quorum of architects had been obtained, and on 21 February the conditions of the competition were decided, and its purpose defined as that of finding, 'the best method or methods of masking or ornamenting the present Bell structure so as to harmonize with the Hall, Cathedral Spire and Quadrangle generally'.<sup>15</sup> Designs were to be completed by 17 May, and were to include an elevation showing the end of the hall and the cathedral spire, and two perspective sketches, one from the east corner of the steps on the north side of the quadrangle, and the other from the east end of Merton Meadow.

It is not surprising that Scott's designs had not proved satisfactory and that the college had resorted to the unusual step of holding a competition. The problem to be solved was a difficult one because it required the assimilation of existing data of a diverse and perhaps incompatible nature. Basically it was to reconcile the claims of Wolsey's foundations, of the existing belfry, of Wren's tower and of the cathedral. The question of Wolsey's intentions for this part of the quadrangle, and the extent to which the existing remains represented their fulfilment, could

[<sup>12</sup> The 1876 changes were part of a sequence of alterations to Tom Quad by Bodley and Garner; see note 42, below.]

<sup>13</sup> CCA, minutes of the belfry committee, xlix.a.1.

[<sup>14</sup> There is, however, no evidence that Salvin and Woodyer were actually approached; in the minutes of the belfry committee (*ibid.* 11 February 1874) it was recorded that Woodyer's address could not be found. Both Bodley and Jackson had been pupils of Scott (Bodley was also related to him by marriage), and presumably they sought his consent before accepting the invitation.]

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*



*Fig. 2. Tom Quad in about 1876, before work on Bodley's belfry had begun, showing the 'meat-safe' erected to house the cathedral bells and a 'mock up' of a gable for the high-pitched roof then under consideration (by kind permission of the governing body of Christ Church, Oxford).*

not be evaded by Scott and his competitors. It is clear that Wolsey intended to build a tower and that the work was left unfinished when he fell from power, but its anticipated size on completion and the exact stage it actually reached are not known, and it is by no means certain that they are shown in John Bereblock's well-known drawing [Fig. 1].<sup>16</sup> In 1555, Thomas Palmer, the college auditor and a man of substance, bequeathed to the college the sum of £20,

towards the buyldinge of the gate house or Tower over the great gate besides the Lodgeinge of Mr. Doctor Tresham in Christechurche in Oxford or towards the buyldinge of the Tower over the greates steares leadinge into the greate hall there, whych of them shall be first in buyldinge.<sup>17</sup>

Gaps in the Treasurers' accounts make it impossible to say whether this bequest had been used according to Palmer's wishes by the time of Bereblock's drawing, which appears to have been made some years later. This shows an abbreviated tower rising approximately to the level of the hall roof. Its existence was masked in the seventeenth century, partly no doubt at the time of the building of the fan vaulting over the hall stairs, by the removal of the north window, the erection of a curtain wall joining it to the east end of the hall, and by the replacement of the battlements by a classical balustrade. The rest of the tower remains, together with the staircase entrance from the south-east corner.

Whatever stage Wolsey's buildings had reached when he fell, the vast width of the foundations would seem to indicate that a tower of considerable height was contemplated, and, this is partly confirmed by the tradition that Wolsey intended to demolish the cathedral. Bodley and Deane, on the other hand, thought that the walls were unsuitable for carrying any great weight, and evidence to the same effect was discovered by J. Wolfe Barry, who was employed

<sup>16</sup> MS Bodl. 13, f. 5v. See L. Durning (ed.), *Queen Elizabeth's Book of Oxford* (2006).]

<sup>17</sup> CCA, MS Estates 80, f. 177.

by the governing body in the final stages of the competition to examine the foundations. In his report, which is dated 16 June 1874, he stated that he had made excavations on the north, east and south sides of Wolsey's edifice but not on the west side, which adjoins the hall. He found that the tower rested on a bed of sand and gravel, and that on the north side there appeared to be a base 10 feet wide, and on the south side a base 8 feet wide. Although the excavations went down a distance of 11 feet, on neither side was the bottom of the wall reached. But in the east side there was practically no set-off, and the bottom of the wall was only 18 inches below the paving of the cloister. He concluded from this that since no building acted as a buttress against the east wall, Wolsey cannot have intended to erect a high tower at this corner of the quadrangle.

Barry drew a convincing conclusion from the evidence before him, but if we consider what Wolsey may reasonably be supposed to have intended, apart from what he actually achieved, the picture alters. Although the foundations, without a buttress on the east side, were certainly too shallow to support a building of great height, it may be argued that if the college buildings had been completed, the desired buttress of buildings would have been provided. In view of the size of his college indicated in Wolsey's statutes, it is evident that all its members could not have been accommodated in three sides of Tom Quad, the fourth side being destined as the site for a chapel, and one or more quadrangles were, therefore, probably envisaged. The ground-level to the south was too low to permit extensive building, and since Wolsey never acquired Peckwater Inn or Canterbury College it is doubtful if there was sufficient room on the north. This left the east as the most promising direction for expansion, and a beginning might well have been made but for the existence of the cathedral, the demolition of which was perhaps postponed until the new chapel to the north was ready.<sup>18</sup> Until this was done, the college, many of whose members had been appointed, required a place of worship. It is possible that Wolsey's inability to commence this further quadrangle was one of the causes contributing to the incomplete state in which the tower was left at his fall. But whether he planned a large tower or a small one, the architects who competed in 1874 were as unaware of the implications of Barry's findings as they were of the fact that Bereblock's drawing might not have represented the extent of the remaining original work.

The question was not one of antiquarian interest only, for, apart from the importance which it had for members of the belfry committee, the wooden belfry in which the cathedral bells now hung had also to be considered in relation to it. This was a small structure of much less diameter than the walls on which it rested, and the instructions to the competing architects, which have already been described, show that what they were required to design was principally a shell to cover it. The financial plight of the college prevented the governing body from undertaking the considerable expense involved in rehangng the bells in a tower specially built for the purpose and committed them to the retention of the Meat-Safe, which they had optimistically assumed would be almost invisible. Important architectural and aesthetic considerations followed from this difference in scale. For if the wooden belfry were taken as the nucleus of the design, the most satisfactory and economic building would be one which was proportioned to its site and position, and this would seem to suggest, as it did to some of the competitors, an octagonal lantern developing from inside the tower, or some variant of this form. But if, on the other hand, these foundations were taken as the starting point for the building, and the belfry were to remain in its existing position, it was perhaps impossible to use the interior space in an economic manner, and the resulting erection would in some degree be a sham tower.

<sup>18</sup> The mysterious foundations in the Cloister Quadrangle, which had been uncovered by Scott, may represent an abortive start to the new quadrangle. Excavations by David Sturdy in 1958 revealed fragments of masonry which suggest that it dates from Wolsey's time or later. A difficulty in the way of this hypothesis is that the foundations are not aligned with Tom Quad. [The excavation was published in D. Sturdy et al., 'Recent Excavations in Christ Church and Nearby', *Oxoniensia*, 26-7 (1961-2), p. 29. Sturdy's work was superseded by an excavation in 1985, reported in C. Scull et al., 'Excavations in the Cloister of St Frideswide's Priory, 1985', *Oxoniensia*, 55 (1988), pp. 21-73, where the foundations are interpreted as the footings of Wolsey's temporary bell tower.]

This problem was accentuated by the third factor in the situation. Not only had Wolsey failed to demolish the cathedral spire, but Wren had added a second tower to Christ Church. With the aid of prints and photographs it is possible to see how Wren's tower dominated Tom Quad before the nineteenth-century alterations were made. It provided a central and unifying feature for the horizontal planes of the even skyline – unbroken by Bodley's belfry or the additions to the deanery – and the symmetrical sweep of the terrace, then unpunctured by stone serrations. Although the decision to Gothicize the quadrangle, already taken by the governing body in 1873, had destroyed its stark grandeur and to a great extent dictated the style of the projected belfry, the important question of scale remained. The basic problem, therefore, in 1874 was to design a building on a scale which would reconcile the conflicting demands of the existing towers, of Wolsey's foundations and of the bell frame. Much of the interest of the various solutions which were proposed lies in the different emphasis which the competing architects placed on these inharmonious elements.

Discussion of their designs is hampered by the fact that some of them have disappeared. There survive at Christ Church an elevation in colour of Bodley's successful design, two perspective sketches by Jackson – one from Tom Quad, and the other from Merton Fields – and one of Scott's, but no trace has so far emerged of designs submitted by Deane, Champneys or Hugall.<sup>19</sup> However, the written reports which accompanied all the designs have survived, with the exception of Deane's, and are in the archives at Christ Church. They cast considerable light on their authors' intentions and the reasons for them. The complexity of the problem is illustrated by the variety of solutions propounded in these reports, the octagonal lantern, the gateway and the tower all having their advocates.

Champneys stated plainly that his first object was 'not to detract from the effect of the existing buildings,' and that the bell frame should therefore be 'screened by a structure of the smallest dimensions and the lightest effect which could be designed'. Accordingly, he submitted a design for an octagon of timber sheathed with 'sweated' lead, and he tried, he said,

to develop the design in a manner appropriate to the material by avoiding large plain surfaces which might be dignified and effective in a stone construction, at the same time keeping the general outline broad and bold.<sup>20</sup>

This leaden octagon was surmounted by a 'skeleton dome or crown...well known in the latest character of Gothic'. The result was unkindly described by Vere Bayne as 'a Mayday Garland'.<sup>21</sup> The cost was estimated at £5,500 to £6,000. A similar design was produced by J.W. Hugall, which was described in these words,

The Bell Tower I would propose to form of stone by first bridging over the angles of the present base of the Tower and building thereupon and upon the main walls an octagonal pierced screen but of much less diameter externally than that of the tower itself, and thus I might be enabled to erect a building of moderate height only but yet sufficient to hide the Bell-box.<sup>22</sup>

The cost was estimated to be £3,500.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Michael Champneys informs me that on his father's retirement, his office was closed, and none of his early work is known to have survived. Apart from occasional survivals, Scott's designs have since perished. [When Bill wrote his article, the very large surviving archive of Scott's drawings was still in family hands. It is now in the Drawings Collection of the Royal Institute of British Architects in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. It includes one drawing for the cathedral but none for the bell tower.]

<sup>20</sup> Report by Basil Champneys, CCA, GB xv.c.i, ff. 103–10.]

<sup>21</sup> Minutes of the belfry committee, *ibid.* xlix.a.1.

<sup>22</sup> Report by J.W. Hugall, *ibid.* GB xv.c.i, ff. 101–2.]

<sup>23</sup> Hugall included in his report an attempt to fill up what Dodgson called the Trench. 'The space', he wrote, 'which has recently been made between the Hall and the Tower, being an unsightly feature, I have filled in, in such a form that a Gallery, opening into the Hall, may be erected and approached by a newel staircase of wood in the



It is perhaps not now possible to describe Deane's work in detail in the absence both of drawings and report. But basically he seems to have favoured an 'Italian Campanile' of medium height, though there may have been a second design incorporating an arcade.<sup>24</sup> He explained that he had followed what he believed to have been Wolsey's intentions, though he interpreted them differently from some of his rivals. 'Bearing in mind', he wrote, 'the large proportions of the base of the tower with its walls of moderate strength, it is unlikely to have been the intention to raise it to any considerable height.'<sup>25</sup> The estimated cost of £8,000 was rather high.

Earlier in the year, Scott had submitted five drawings, which included several variants on the idea of a tower. The east elevation of one of these has survived [Fig. 3], and shows a building of approximately the same height of the hall with four pairs of windows above two two-light Perpendicular windows. A similar sketch appears to have had two long Perpendicular windows on each face. With these he included a design for a 'square wooden Tower covered with lead, flying buttresses. Three Perpendicular Windows (3 lights) on each side – Wolsey's Tower carried up only a little higher than Hall. Two 2 light Windows like those of Hall on each face.'<sup>26</sup> In a letter to Vere Bayne, dated 9 March 1874, Scott wrote,

I confess I do not think you could do better than adopt (subject to any modification of details) that [design] which assumes the form of a leaded lantern rising from within the main walls of the Tower.

Either of the other designs would look very handsome in the abstract, but their fault is excess of scale beyond that of the surrounding objects. This fault cannot be corrected by any design which carries up the ancient walls to the full height of the tower. It is an inherent fault in the original design, if that design was intended to be so carried up, and no treatment would obviate it unless it be one which, at a certain moderate height, reduces the bulk of the tower. Now the framework of the present belfry suggests, and that quite naturally, such a diminution, for it is large enough to contain the bells, and all excess of diameter in the tower beyond is clearly wasted as far as utility is concerned, and aesthetically dangerous. My advice, therefore, is that the framework of the belfry being taken as a nucleus, it shall be so clothed with architectural forms and details as to form it into a decorative lantern, rising from within the walls of the tower, and thus reducing the tower to a reasonable size, something decidedly smaller than that of the Cathedral, instead of being enormously larger, as would be the case if the outer walls should be carried up.<sup>27</sup>

In his report in the following May, Scott returned to these designs while adding others. He then submitted two different designs for square stone towers without a lantern, and these are numbered 1A and 1B in the committee minutes. Design number 2 seems to have been a tower with a square lantern of lead and wood; number 3 a very ornate octagon of lead and wood with an open crown of flying buttresses, and number 4 was a development of this design, with the square tower giving way to a second storey consisting of an octagon, the crown of flying buttresses being retained. Scott himself preferred the last design (number 4), because it was 'more airy and cheerful', and declared that it was based on the parish church at Hillesdon, Buckinghamshire, which at this time he was restoring, giving his services gratuitously. The committee reserved the designs numbered 1A, 3 and 4 when it met on 20 May, and eliminated the remaining two.

The only architect to submit a design which openly clamoured for comparison with the

vestibule' [Colvin, *Unbuilt Oxford*, p. 137, suggests that Hugall was asked to produce a design as he was then working on two Berkshire churches, at Easthampstead and East Garston, that were both Christ Church livings.]

<sup>24</sup> CCA, minutes of the governing body, 18 June 1874, GB i.b.2.

<sup>25</sup> T.N. Deane to Vere Bayne, 16 May 1874, *ibid.* GB xv.c.i.]

<sup>26</sup> Memorandum by Vere Bayne in Christ Church Treasury [jotted on the back of a copy of a letter from Bayne to G.G. Scott, 13 February 1874, *ibid.*]

<sup>27</sup> G.G. Scott to Vere Bayne, 9 March 1874, *ibid.*]

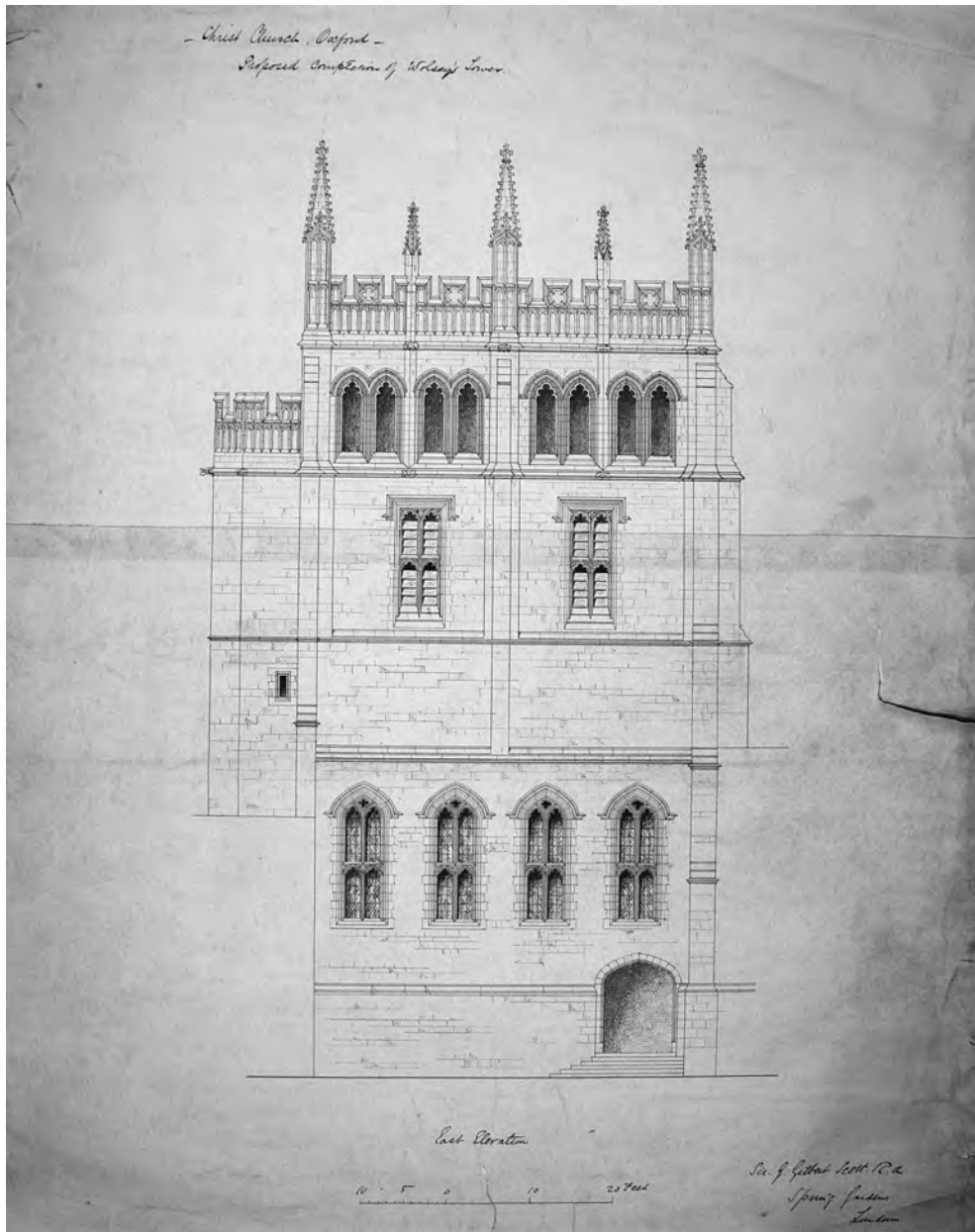


Fig. 3. Design for the belfry by Sir Gilbert Scott, 1873 or 1874 (by kind permission of the governing body of Christ Church, Oxford).

cathedral spire and Tom Tower was Jackson. 'I boldly soared aloft,' he wrote in his posthumously published *Recollections*, with a lofty tower such as I felt sure Wolsey had prepared for with his massive substructure.<sup>28</sup> With immense assurance he designed a tower 170 feet high [Figs. 4 and 5]. In his report he describes his attempt to find a suitable solution in these words,

[<sup>28</sup> N. Jackson (ed.), *Thomas Graham Jackson: Recollections, The Life and Travels of a Victorian Architect* (2003), p. 105.]



Fig. 4. Design for the belfry by T.G. Jackson, 1874: view from Tom Quad (by kind permission of the governing body of Christ Church, Oxford).



Fig. 5. Design for the belfry by T.G. Jackson, 1874: view from Merton Meadow (by kind permission of the governing body of Christ Church, Oxford).

My first intention was to design something which, while it should be of sufficient architectural importance to be worthy of Christ Church should not be so large or high as to seem to rival the other towers and spires of Oxford...

But after making several sketches of octagonal and other structures of stone, and of lantern towers of timber and lead in the manner of Ely, I found that owing to the size of the substructure the new bell-tower would remain, in spite of all I could do to reduce it, one of the most conspicuous features in every view of Oxford of which I have been able to get a photograph.

I found also by experiment that no Tower of an unusual or peculiar character, such

as I have above described, really seemed at home among the other buildings, or really like Oxford, where all the buildings are of simple outline and a restrained method of design. Nothing seemed to be so appropriate to the place as a square Tower, and to this I found myself continually returning.

For these reasons, of which the latter seemed to me to especially conclusive, I determined that it would be best to design boldly a Tower on such a scale as was no doubt intended by Wolsey and in such a style as would be concordant with the surrounding buildings and group well with them, it being obviously of much less consequence to consider which member of the group ought to be most important than to ensure that the effect of the whole grouping should be satisfactory.<sup>29</sup>

He stated that the load would be six tons and four cwt per square foot of the supporting surface, and the cost £11,300.

Bodley, approaching the problem from a quite different point of view, produced at least five designs on the theme of a gateway, in style 'strictly English & of the date of the Founder'. In his report he stated his intentions as follows:

To attempt to erect a Tower of tall proportion, considering the very large dimensions of the square of the fabric, would be unwise. Nor, indeed, were it desirable, would it be safe on practical grounds; for the existing walls are not prepared for carrying any great weight. Again, any great elevation would not compose well with the Cathedral spire. Sufficient height must, however, be attained or the effect will be heavy.

The proportion must not be unreasonably low. The stone work, therefore, on our design, is carried up to a moderate height and a good deal of this elevation is obtained by an enriched parapet, the weight of which would be inconsiderable and its effect light looking.

The Belfry stage would have windows in each compartment, for the tower is divided vertically into two bays, an arrangement that will give the effect of height without any great actual dimension. It must be borne in mind that the height in reality will be a good deal foreshortened, and there may be a danger of the tower looking too low unless the stone stage has sufficient height...

Above the stone belfry stage there would be an octagonal finish of timber work covered with lead – or the covering could well be of copper. A few parts – e.g. the roses in the upper part, could perhaps be gilded. A crown like effect would be obtained and the effect could be made very beautiful...

...all the sketches are intended to give the effect more of a gateway, more or less rich, rather than of a tower. The gateway, with its surrounding panelling, heraldry and carvings, will have a proportion somewhat tall and elegant, and the low broad, massive, and I hope, impressive, tower will contrast with it while, I think it will harmonise also with the lines of the Hall. The completion of this building affords an opportunity, very favourable, for a really beautiful work of late English Gothic & may set a good example in Oxford where, if one may say so, there have been too many buildings – examples of inharmonious foreign elements of design, ignoring the 'genius loci'.<sup>30</sup>

The estimated cost of Bodley's gateway was £6,000–£7,000. Of his five designs, the committee reserved two, of which one was described as 'a leaden structure with 4 Turrets at the corners', and the other 'makes the Tower into a College gateway, and leaden Pepperbox on top'.<sup>31</sup>

[<sup>29</sup> Report by T.G. Jackson, CCA, GB xv.c.i, ff. 72–7.]

[<sup>30</sup> Report by Bodley and Garner, *ibid.* Although the report is in Bodley's handwriting, and is signed by him alone, it is headed 'Bodley and Garner' and it likely that the design was worked out in collaboration with Thomas Garner, with whom Bodley had been in partnership since 1869. The design was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1878 under both their names.]

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* minutes of belfry committee, xlix.a.1.

From this summary of the reports it would appear that all the architects were agreed on the importance of a design which would harmonise with the existing towers, and most of them concluded that this was achieved by making the belfry physically smaller than the surrounding towers. This argument was reinforced in some cases by the belief, well expressed by Scott, that a building which did not closely circumscribe the original bell frame was practically and aesthetically bad. But the consequences of taking the bell frame as the nucleus of the design was that the octagonal form and other forms suited to the purpose could not develop satisfactorily from Wolsey's massive but low foundations, and it therefore became very difficult to design a building which was an architectural unity. It was, after all, impossible to treat Wolsey's foundations as if they did not exist. Other competitors accepted the need to use these foundations and in so doing relegate the bell frame to a subordinate position. Bodley and Deane, taking the view that Wolsey had not intended a building of great height, produced designs which, certainly in Bodley's case and probably in Deane's, were well scaled to the existing towers. But by ignoring the bell frame they were open to the charge of having designed buildings that were internally wasteful and to that extent artistically faulty. They had, however, done precisely what they had been required to do by the terms of the competition, and the responsibility should therefore be laid on the shoulders of the governing body, who failed to realise, or if they did had inadequate funds to implement the knowledge, that the bell frame and the belfry building must be treated as a unity. But the question of removing the bells from their temporary frame was never seriously considered.

When the belfry committee met on 22 May 1874 to decide the winner of the competition, it was faced with at least fifteen designs, but their number was speedily reduced to two of Bodley's, three of Scott's, and those of Jackson and Deane. On the 22nd, the committee met again, and voted six to three in favour of Jackson's design, 'subject to a Report from a competent Engineer that the Foundations will bear this weight'.<sup>32</sup> It was also resolved by eight votes to two that if Jackson's tower proved structurally impossible, Bodley's design number 5 should be accepted as the basis of the building. In his minute of this meeting, Vere Bayne recorded that, 'The Dean did not vote, but was understood to admire Jackson's design most – failing that he prefers Bodley (5)'.<sup>33</sup> Despite the apparently conclusive nature of the vote in favour of Jackson, however, the committee proceeded to change its mind when it met a fortnight later on 8 June – before an engineer had been approached, far less had reported. At this meeting a vote was again taken on Jackson, and this time went five to five and so was lost. The two members to cause the volte-face were Prout, who now joined the dissentients, and the dean himself, who exercised a casting vote. But although the committee was not in favour of Jackson, it was at this time even less in favour of Bodley, for when a vote was taken on the two designs it went 5 to 4 in favour of Jackson, Prout, who was obviously very undecided, abstaining. Unable to reach a definite decision, the committee decided to pursue its previous intention of obtaining 'an engineer's report' on Jackson's design, but 'a hazy general view was thought to prevail that the idea of a Gateway might come to something by way of solving the difficulty'.<sup>34</sup> It seem probable that the main objection to Bodley's design was the inclusion of a lead octagon, and by rejecting this and also Scott's octagon, it seems evident that although the committee was unable to recommend a clear preference they accepted the principle that the successful design should be one which built confidently and squarely on Wolsey's foundations.

In the ten days before the governing body met to consider the question, Wolfe Barry was commissioned to examine the designs submitted by Bodley, Jackson and Deane, and particularly that of Jackson. In his report, to which reference has already been made, Barry made his calculations on the basis of the weight which would be imposed by Jackson's tower,

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. Dean's Minute Book, DP ii.a.3, p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. minutes of belfry committee, xlix.a.1. [Bayne voted for Jackson and notes that he would accept Bodley's design 'only as a last resort']

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

by far the heaviest of the proposed buildings. He found that the maximum stress at the weakest point of the existing structure, the north-west corner, would amount to seven tons per superficial foot, which, he believed, could be carried safely. The load on the gravel below the foundations would be four-and-a-half tons per superficial foot, except on the east side, where it would be as much as six tons. Although this could be equalised by underpinning, and a stress of this magnitude would not render the construction of the superstructure dangerous, he concluded, 'I am bound to say that the load is a high one.'<sup>35</sup> It would seem, therefore, that, with reservations, Jackson's tower was a practical possibility.

On 18 June the governing body met to consider the designs, and the 'hazy general view' of the committee. 'We had a meeting,' Dodgson recorded in his diary, 'and talked for about five hours about the belfry.'<sup>36</sup> The proceedings started inauspiciously with a motion from the opponents of change that, in view of the unsatisfactory nature of the designs and the difference of opinion on the committee, the governing body should enquire whether the bells could be not be put back in the cathedral tower, 'on the understanding that in this position they can be chimed only and the present floor need not be lowered'. But the motion was lost by six votes to nineteen. Separate votes were then taken on the designs of Jackson, Bodley and Deane, and nine votes were cast in favour of Jackson, two in favour of taking Bodley's gateway as the basis, seven in favour of asking Bodley for a fresh design wholly in stone, and five in favour of adopting Deane's arcade. As this voting gave no absolute majority, a straight vote was taken between Jackson and Bodley, and went in Bodley's favour by seventeen votes to nine. He also had a clear majority over Scott and Deane, but a vote to get him to work with Deane, if possible, was also carried. From this account, it will be seen that Jackson's version of the events in his *Recollections* contains some misrepresentation. 'The governing body', he said, 'were, I think, divided for and against my design, and it was lost by the casting vote of the Dean, if I am rightly informed, who did not like his Cathedral spire to be challenged.'<sup>37</sup>

Vere Bayne at once wrote to Bodley informing him of the desire of the governing body that he should co-operate with Deane. In his reply, Bodley wrote,

I do not understand the purport of your note of yesterday. I do not at all know who Mr Deane is. If he is your clerk of works, I shall be happy that he should superintend the work, and should be glad to confer and act with him on the subject of the construction and all matters relating to the building. I must, however, after arranging the matter of the design with the authorities, be responsible for all the drawings and details. My partner, Mr Garner, would act with me in the usual superintendence that Architects should give to their works. I mention this as it occurs to me that my being lame may have led to your question as to Mr Deane.<sup>38</sup>

[<sup>35</sup> J. Wolfe Barry to Vere Bayne, enclosing his report, 17 June 1874, CCA, GB xv.c.i, ff. 94–103.]

[<sup>36</sup> Wakeling, *Lewis Carroll's Diaries*, Vol. 6, p. 340.]

<sup>37</sup> In fact, this appears to be an account of the proceedings in the committee of 8 June. The governing body had rejected his design by a large majority. Jackson continued [Jackson (ed.), *Thomas Graham Jackson*, pp. 105–6]: '...Dr Acland said "it was the finest thing ever rejected" and the designs were bought by two of the governing body and hung in the Common Room (where perhaps they still are)'. [The watercolour of the tower from Tom Quad] was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1875 (Graves, iv, p. 230) and at a later date hung in the Treasury. It was subsequently stored in Tom Tower, and finally removed to the Muniment Room. It was reproduced in *The Architect* on 18 September 1875. Bodley's successful design was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1878 (Graves, i, 218), and now (1960) hangs in the Treasury. [This watercolour was painted by H.W. Brewer for exhibition, and is not one of the perspectives submitted by Bodley and Garner for the competition, which have not survived. All these drawings and watercolours are now in Christ Church Picture Gallery.]

<sup>38</sup> [G.F. Bodley to Vere Bayne, 19 June 1874, CCA, GB xv.c.i. Bodley was surely being disingenuous when he claimed not to know who Deane was. He had been a friend of Benjamin Woodward (1815–61), with whom Deane had been in partnership, and Bodley's comment in his report on the need to respect the 'genius loci' was a veiled criticism of Deane's Meadows Building at Christ Church. It seems very unlikely that he would not have known the identity of its architect.]



*Fig. 6. Bodley and Garner's design for the belfry, as finalised in February 1875. This watercolour, by H. W. Brewer, was painted for exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1878 (by kind permission of the governing body of Christ Church, Oxford).*

On 18 November Bodley was instructed to furnish alternative designs wholly in stone, but on 3 February 1875, his final design was accepted complete with its elaborate lantern, by fourteen votes to five with three abstainers [Fig. 6].<sup>39</sup> The cost was not to exceed £7,000, and on 11 March 1876, Bodley informed the committee that of this sum, £4,000–£5,000 would be

<sup>39</sup> The voting was: in favour, the dean, Bright, King, Prout, Faussett, Bayne, Thompson, Harcourt, Madan, Sampson, Paget, Baynes; against, Pusey, Dodgson, Moberly, Stewart, Shute; abstained, Liddon, Salwey, J.B. Thompson (CCA, minutes of belfry committee, xlix.a.1).



Fig. 7. Christ Church from Merton Meadow in about 1880, showing Bodley and Garner's newly completed belfry (centre). By kind permission of the governing body of Christ Church, Oxford.

for the stonework, and £2,500–£3,000 for the timber and metal. Symm's estimate for the stonework was accepted on 26 April 1876, and by late 1877 this part of the design was completed. At this point either courage or the finances of the college gave out, and although Bodley now assured the governing body that the lantern would cost no more than £2,000, he was instructed to finish the stonework of sufficient strength to take the lantern if it should be decided on at a later date.<sup>40</sup> In the course of this tribute to Wolsey it was unfortunately found necessary to move his statue to the St Aldate's front.<sup>41</sup>

Bodley's belfry is now an accepted and generally admired part of the Oxford landscape, and, given the terms in which the problem was defined for him, his solution is effective and satisfying [Fig. 7]. The parapet of the belfry rises to a height of about 30 feet above the level of the old

<sup>40</sup> *The Building News*, 27 June 1879, contains this comment: 'The upper part of the belfry it is intended to have carried out at a future time. It would be of open work constructed with timber covered with lead or copper, and is an essential part of the design. The four turrets need this central feature, and indeed without it the design is wholly incomplete. Such a finish is much needed in order that the belfry should compose well with the lead dome of the entrance gateway, and with the spire of the cathedral.' [As late as 1899 Henry L. Thompson wrote that 'it is hoped that this design may yet be carried out' (H.L. Thompson, *Henry George Liddell DD, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford: A Memoir* (1899), p. 159). Bodley then still had an involvement with Christ Church, as in 1903 he designed the scheme for the electric lighting of the hall: GB i.b.4, 56 (information from Judith Curthoys).]

<sup>41</sup> The statue, by Francis Bird (1719), formerly over the entrance to the hall stairs from Tom Quad, had been moved in 1872. Bodley replaced it with a new statue of Wolsey by Farmer and Brindley in 1878, shortly before the scaffolding was struck from the new bell tower. With some difficulty he obtained Liddell's agreement to add flanking statues of two angels, also by Farmer and Brindley. They were paid for by H.P. Liddon, whose correspondence with Bodley and Liddell on the subject is in the Liddon papers at Keble College, Oxford (correspondence, April–June 1878).]



walls, which finish at the level of the walls of the hall. But the join between old and new stonework is obscured by the refacing of the old, thereby providing a uniform surface. By this means, together with the four corner turrets, the ornamented parapet and the vertical division of the stonework, he succeeded in giving the belfry an appearance of greater height than it actually possesses, for the parapet rises no higher than the top of the 'Meat-Safe'. At the same time, its general character fitted in well with the newly Gothicized quadrangle.<sup>42</sup>

[<sup>42</sup> Bodley and Garner carried out several other commissions in Tom Quad, including alterations to the steps leading down from the terraces into the quad (1874), the restoration of the pinnacles on the inner face of Tom Tower, the erection of pinnacles and battlements on the parapet of the hall, the addition of wall ribs around the quad and the heightening of Killcanon Tower (1875). In addition, they designed the cathedral's high-altar reredos (1878) and font (1882; cover, 1903) and restored the chapter house (1879–80). In 1876 they designed walls and a gateway for the college on Oriel Square: Howell, 'Oxford Architecture', p. 748, note 60.]

