



Exeter College

OXFORD



Exeter College, Oxford

Exeter College takes its name not from a man but from a diocese. Its founder, Walter de Stapeldon, bishop of Exeter, was born about 1266, probably at the hamlet which still bears his name, near Holsworthy, in the remote country of north-west Devon. His family, moderately well-to-do farmers, too grand for peasants and too humble for gentry, had long been prominent in the social life of their locality, but they carried no weight in the county and had probably never been beyond its boundaries. From these unprivileged origins Walter de Stapeldon rose to become not only a bishop but also the treasurer of England, the confidant of King Edward II and eventually the victim of Edward's enemies. The obscurity of his family circumstances makes it impossible to trace the early stages in this adventurous career. We know only that he was an Oxford graduate, rector of Aveton Giffard in South Devon during the 1290s, canon of Exeter Cathedral by 1301 and precentor of the Cathedral by 1305. After his election as bishop in 1308 he made rapid progress in the king's service as a diplomat, archivist and financial expert; and it was his position near the centre of power in a particularly oppressive government which cost him his life in 1326, when Edward II lost his throne and Stapeldon his head.

When in 1314 he established Stapeldon Hall, as the College was first known, the bishop's motives were doubtless mixed: piety, the safety of his soul, and the education of the prospective clergy of his diocese were probably his chief concerns. But for a long while his foundation remained a place of no great eminence, to judge by its reputation in the University and the paucity of learned men it produced. For this there were two chief reasons, both of them in a way linked to Stapeldon's original intentions. First, the College was poor. Stapeldon had originally endowed it with the tithes of the Cornish rectory of Gwinear, the tithes of Long Wittenham in Berkshire, and some urban property in Oxford, and these remained its largest sources of income until the sixteenth century. By comparison with the landed property given by another bishop, Walter de Merton, to his foundation fifty years earlier, this was not generous. Secondly, the College's statutes, which governed

*Exeter College
seen from Turl
Street*



its corporate life and which Stapeldon had himself drawn up, were very restrictive. The twelve fellows of the College, all of whom were to come from the diocese of Exeter, were obliged to study for the Arts course, centred on grammar, rhetoric and logic. Except in the case of the Chaplain, there was no provision for the study of Theology and Canon Law, subjects which the University reserved for higher degrees. This meant that there was no possibility of Exeter's becoming the type of "research institute" into which Merton, for example, developed. Exeter's case was unusual: of the other Oxford and Cambridge colleges then existing, only Balliol failed to provide for higher degrees. No fellow could reside for more than thirteen years, and the fellows' allowances of 10d (4p). a week for maintenance, plus 10s (50p) a year, were not such as to encourage them to want to do so. Even in the early fourteenth century, when eggs were 4d (2p) a hundred and 8s (40p) would buy a cow, this was hardly lavish.

Policy, not meanness, probably lay behind the College's poverty. It was never Stapeldon's intention to create a set of "decent easy men who supinely enjoyed the gifts of the founder", as a later undergraduate of Magdalen described the fellows there in his day. Instead, he wanted to ensure a supply of well-trained graduates for the country parishes of his diocese: men who would not linger at Oxford, but return where there was work to be done. In this he was successful. Until 1404, when Bishop Stafford of Exeter endowed two fellowships for the diocese of Salisbury, the fellows of Stapeldon's college came exclusively from Devon and Cornwall. The connection with those counties remained very strong until the nineteenth century and has lasted in an attenuated form until today. Many of the fellows had names which spoke of their West Country origins - Stephen de Pippacot, John Tresilian, John Mattecotte, William de Polmorva - and most went back to benefices in the countryside of their birth when their days at Exeter were over. Those with scholarly ambitions had to migrate to other colleges in order to fulfil them, and in fact some of the most distinguished Exonians made their academic reputations only after they had left the College. Such, for example, were Walter Liart, the son of a miller from Lanteglos by Fowey, who went from Exeter to become fellow and Provost of Oriel and eventually, in 1446, bishop of Norwich; or John



1446, bishop of Norwich; or John Trevisa, fellow from 1362 to 1365, who later became a fellow of Queen's College, chaplain to the baronial family of Berkeley in Gloucestershire, and a famous translator of Latin works into English. But these men were the exceptions.

In the later Middle Ages the College was in almost every way unlike its modern successor. It was very small: never more than a Rector, Chaplain, fourteen fellows and, towards the end of the period, a few students to whom the College offered rooms. Within it the modern division between dons and undergraduates hardly existed. A fellow was elected to study for his B.A., then for his M.A. This took some eight years. Once he had passed the latter hurdle he might remain for a year or two as a lecturer, but he had the same allowance as the most recently elected fellow, who would be an undergraduate and ten or twelve years his junior, and the same share in the election of the Rector. This democracy of young men, most of them lacking any private income, most of them in their twenties, most of them students rather than teachers, most of them in orders and looking forward to the benefices which would provide them with a living, and all of them supervised by an older Rector, constituted Exeter College.

The financial standing of this small society remained very precarious for 250 years after Stapeldon's endowment. The fifteenth century brought particular difficulties, as it did to many landlords, corporate and individual. It was a time of economic depression, which caused a fall in rents and a decline in tithe income. As a result, the fellows' allowances were cut back, expenditure on the College's one extravagance, the annual feast, was sharply reduced, and essential maintenance and building work were deferred. The most expensive project undertaken between 1440 and 1470 was the construction of a new lavatory at a cost of £4 12s. This prolonged recession almost certainly affected the daily life of the College and its fellows with greater severity than any of the more recent crises in university financing. The bishops of Exeter remained generous patrons, but they did nothing to augment the College's regular income. Only in 1479, when Exeter was given the Cornish rectory of Menheniot, worth £20 a year, was there any substantial addition to Stapeldon's original benefaction and a return to modest prosperity.





It was not until the reign of Elizabeth, however, that Exeter was put on an entirely new footing, its statutes rewritten, its membership expanded and its finances reinvigorated. Responsible for these changes was a man as remarkable as Stapeldon himself: Sir William Petre. Both men, the founder and the refounder, had much in common. Both were the sons of prosperous Devonshire farmers, both were almost certainly the first members of their families to have an Oxford education, both rose high in the service of the Crown, and both made their benefactions towards the end of long lives and from wealth probably accumulated in "by -paths and indirect crooked ways". Petre was about 14 years old when he came up to Exeter College in 1520 from his home at Torbryan, a village which lies in the rich pastoral country between Newton Abbot and Ashburton in South Devon. It was a time when the College was taking in an increasing number of young men who were not on the foundation (i.e., were not

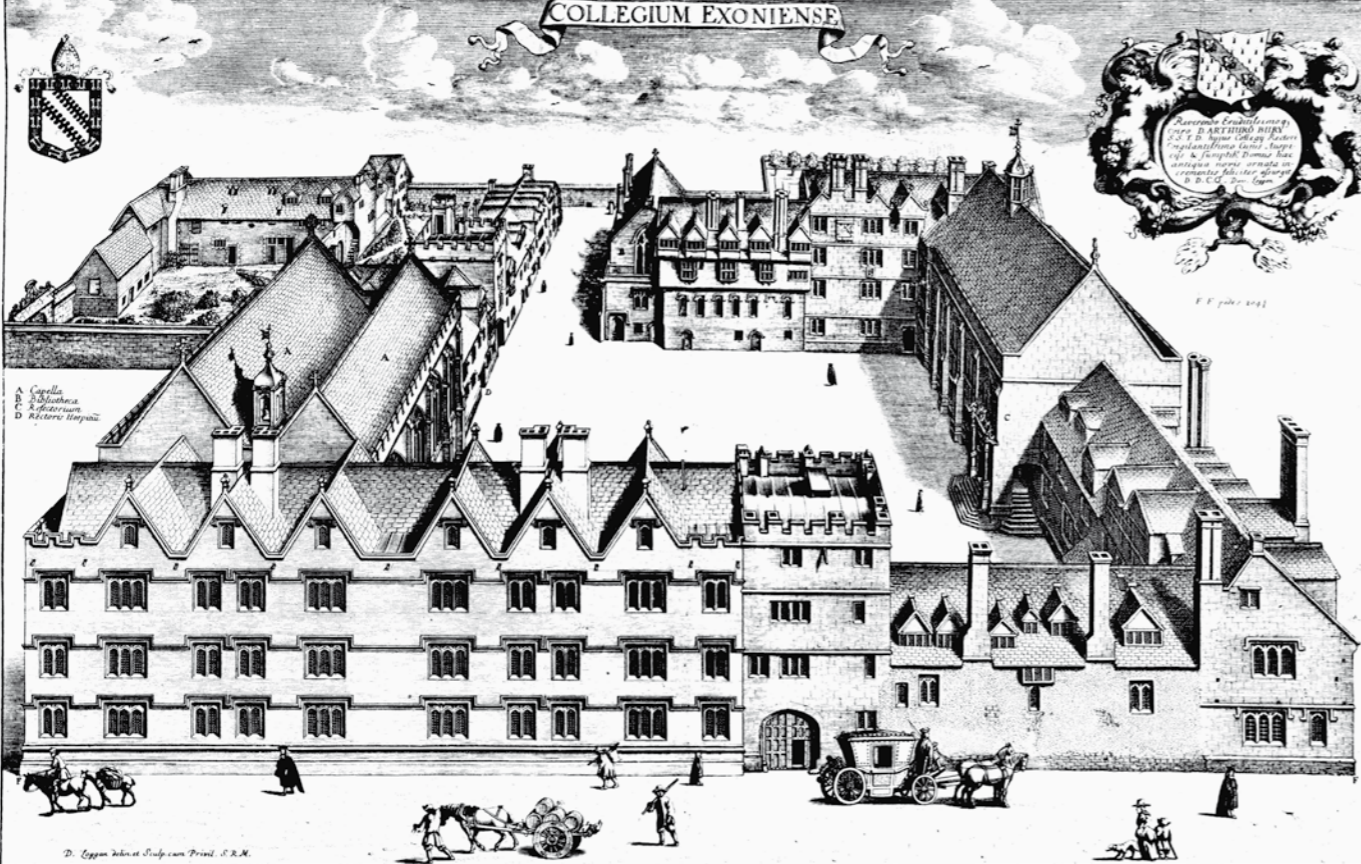


fellows) but for whom the College provided accommodation and some teaching. They formed the nucleus of the later undergraduate body of commoners. Petre was among them, and from these beginnings his progress was rapid. His first position as tutor to Anne Boleyn's brother, George, gave him the entrée to Henry VIII's court, where he won the favour of Henry's chief minister, Thomas Cromwell. In the 1530s he was active in the suppression of the monasteries and he continued to hold high office under Henry's son, Edward. When Catholicism was restored under Mary he turned about, remained prominent on the council, and was even adept enough to secure a papal bull confirming his possession of the monastic lands which he had gained earlier. He was still employed on state business under Elizabeth, but in 1566 bad health took him out of politics and from then until his death in 1572 he lived quietly at his Essex manor of Ingatestone, itself a former monastic property and still the home of his descendant. It was during these last years that his charitable enterprises came to occupy his mind.

Exeter owes much to Petre's piety and interest in learning, both of them deep, and to the unheroic agility which kept him afloat and prosperous through the religious changes of his times. His plans for his old college, which came to fruition in 1566, brought three important changes to its corporate life. First, he endowed seven new fellowships, to be held by men from the counties in which he or his heirs held land, originally Devon, Somerset, Dorset, Oxfordshire and Essex. The College could thus draw its senior members from a much wider area than that envisaged by Stapeldon, though it remained a relatively restricted one. The costs were met by Petre's gift of four Oxfordshire rectories, which he had purchased from the Crown for the very large sum of £1376; and with these four parishes of Kidlington, Merton, South Newington and Yarnton the modern College has continuing ties.

Secondly, the College's constitution was revised. The Rectorship, filled annually under Stapeldon's statutes,

The College Library with the University's Seventeenth Century Convocation House on the right



Loggan's view of Exeter College in 1675

now became a life appointment, and the fellows too were now admitted for life, with certain provisos. The fluctuating group of mainly young men which had supervised Exeter's affairs in the later Middle Ages was thus replaced by a more permanent body. Under the Rector a hierarchy of college officers was established, headed by the Sub-Rector, to whose post the succession has been continuous since Petre's day.

Finally, formal arrangements were made for the tuition of the College's undergraduates. A Dean and a Lector were appointed to take charge of their teaching and a timetable was drawn up for the day's work. It began, perhaps with more optimism than realism, with logic lectures at 6 a.m. and ended with logic disputations at 6 p.m. That this arduous routine was not unrelieved is suggested by other clauses in the new statutes which forbade the keeping of hunting dogs, ferrets, rabbits, hawks and horses inside the College and prohibited shooting within its boundaries. Even in the sixteenth century the rowdy undergraduate was already baying for broken glass.

Petre's generosity created the bones of the modern College. He widened its area of recruitment, saw to the teaching and discipline of its undergraduates, and above all endowed it with the moderate wealth without



which it might have foundered. His benefaction, worth about £90 a year and spent very largely on the allowances of the new fellows, more than doubled its annual income. Nor was it money alone that he gave, for a large number of his books also came to the College. Among those that still remain here is the College's greatest treasure, the so-called Bohun Psalter, a fourteenth-century illuminated manuscript made for Humphrey de Bohun (1342-73), earl of Hereford and given to Petre by Queen Elizabeth herself. It had by then been long in the possession of the royal family, for it bears the signatures of both Henry VII's queen, Elizabeth of York, and Henry VIII's first wife, Katherine of Aragon. Doubly valuable for its beauty and its associations, this masterpiece is Exeter's most tangible link both with Petre and with the dynasty whose patronage enabled him to restore the fortunes of the College.

During this time of religious upheaval Exeter remained strongly Catholic in its sympathies, partly no doubt because it drew most of its members from the conservative counties of the far west, where Protestantism was slow to gain ground. This tendency was reinforced after the "refoundation" of 1566, when Petre's religious convictions, never easy to chart, seem finally to have moved in the direction of Roman Catholicism. At any rate, several fellows whom he appointed became prominent defenders of the old faith, some became missionaries in its service, and two died for it: Ralph Sherwin and John Cornelius, executed respectively in 1581 and 1594. Sherwin, canonised by Pope Paul VI in 1970, is the only fellow of the College so far to have been declared a saint. So notorious in fact were Exeter's Catholic sympathies that Elizabeth's government intervened to correct them. In 1578 the College was visited by the Queen's commissioners; several fellows were removed and a new Rector, Thomas Holland, appointed from outside. This purge, combined with the gradual shift in West Country allegiances during the late sixteenth century from Catholicism to



The Bohun Psalter. Fourteenth-century illuminated manuscript



Exeter Hall
1814

Protestantism, changed the whole character of the College. By the early seventeenth century it had become notable for the Puritan inclinations of its membership.

Holland owed his rectorship partly to Queen Elizabeth, who showed her usual powers of judgement in his choice. He was a fine scholar, Regius Professor of Divinity and one of King James's translators of the Bible, and his rule inaugurated the most distinguished period in the College's history before the nineteenth century. It became prosperous, well ordered, a home for learned men, and a school for lawyers and politicians as well as divines. The benefactions which it attracted, both for buildings and scholarships, the growth in its numbers and the increase in the volume of its records, were all marks of its new eminence. The undergraduate body, 183 strong in 1612, was considerably larger than it would be in the eighteenth century and was not exceeded until the late nineteenth century. The present hall, built for them in 1618 remains as a monument to the expansion and rising fortunes of those years.

For these achievements the College owed its greatest debt to John Prideaux, Holland's successor. Prideaux was its head for thirty years from 1612 to 1642 a span beaten by only one other Rector in Exeter's history. He was a leading figure in both the Church and the University, and his impressive tally of offices - Regius Professor of Divinity, canon of Christ Church, chaplain to Charles I, twice Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, and eventually bishop of Worcester - shows just how far a poor but able man might go with a university education behind him. Like Stapeldon and Petre before him, Prideaux made his way to Oxford from rural Devonshire, but his circumstances were almost certainly humbler than theirs had been. He came from Stowford, on the southern edge of Dartmoor, and was the fourth son of a yeoman, whose early death left Prideaux's mother with eleven children to bring up. Without support from home, he had to work his undergraduate passage through the College by service in the kitchen before he gained the twelve-



The College and Bodleian Libraries from the Rector's Garden

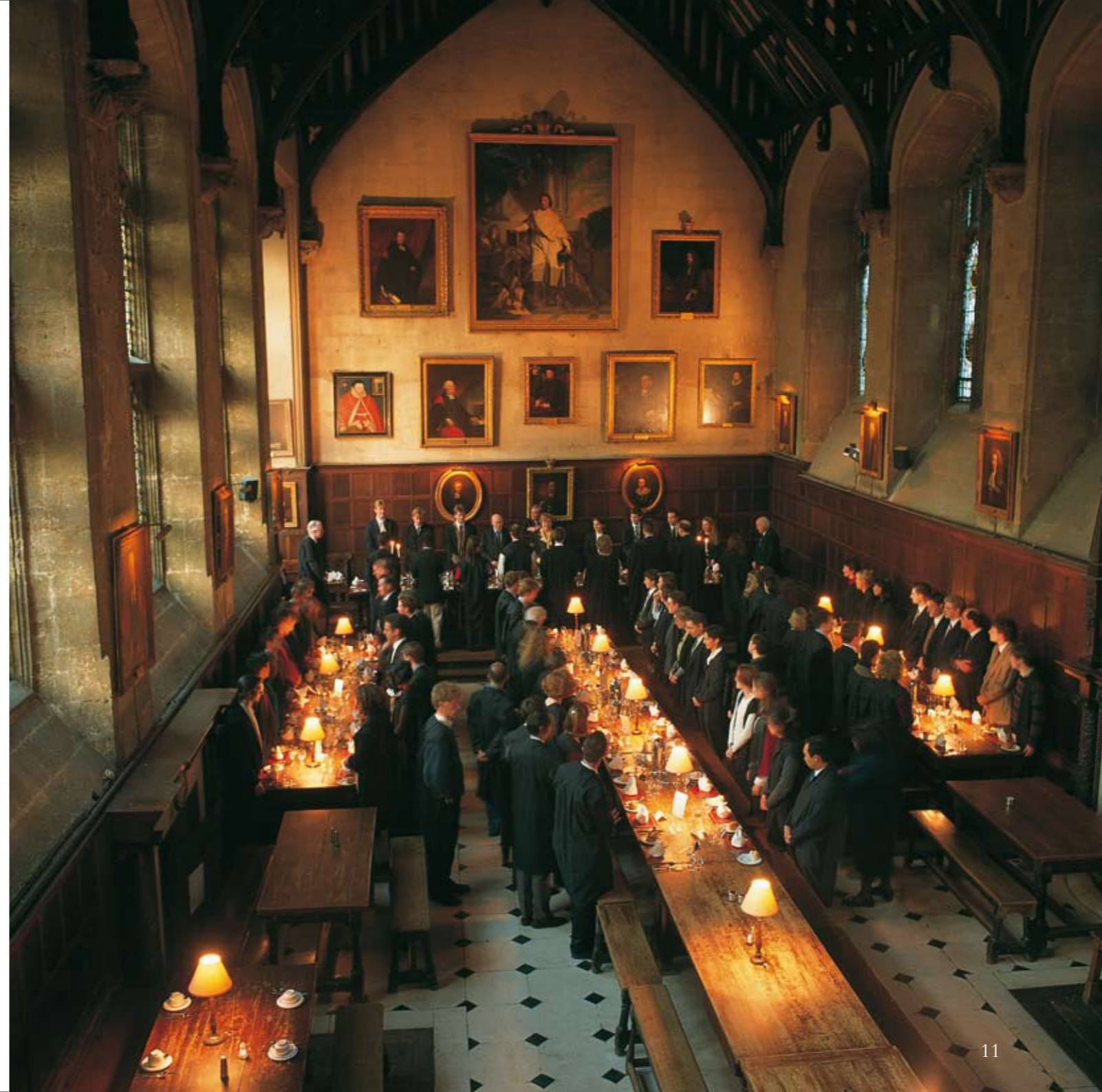


year fellowship which preceded his election as Rector. Prideaux combined high intellectual powers as a theologian with a notable humanity. He was a man of "plain and downright behaviour", as a contemporary noted, who enjoyed the easy relations with the young which is one mark of a good Rector and who never forgot his country origins nor his parents, to whom he was devoted. The brass which he erected to their memory can still be seen in the Devonshire church of Harford. A puritan and moderate Calvinist in religion, he was often in opposition to the high churchman William Laud, Charles I's archbishop of Canterbury and political ally, and a man who, as Chancellor of Oxford from 1630, was in a position to enforce his views. But despite these antagonisms, Prideaux's promotion to the bishopric of Worcester in 1642 suggested that he had not lost the confidence of the king. His appointment came at an unfortunate time. During the civil war which followed he lost his see, was reputedly forced to sell his books to provide for his family (though a large number still remain in the library of Worcester Cathedral), and in 1650 died an impoverished man in the Worcestershire village of Bredon, where he is buried. His portrait, the first of any of the College's Rectors, hangs behind the high table in Hall.

Prideaux's reputation did much for the College. In his time, according to Anthony Wood, the contemporary Oxford diarist, "it flourished more than any other house in the University". Its new standing was marked by the diversity of the undergraduates whom it attracted. Although there was still a preponderance of West Country men, many now came from other parts of England, from Scotland and from the Continent. Foremost among them (by his own account) was Anthony Ashley Cooper, later first earl of Shaftesbury, Lord Chancellor to Charles II, and founder of the Whig party, who was a gentleman commoner at Exeter in 1637-8. With the unaffected immodesty of the aristocrat, he tells us that he owed his leadership of the undergraduates to "my quality, proficiency in learning, and natural affability". It was to be demonstrated in one racy episode. When the senior fellows of the College tried to dilute the college beer, then notorious for its strength, it was Ashley Cooper and his friends who foiled the projected outrage by threatening to withdraw their names from the college books. This early precursor of the "rent strike" jeopardised the income of their tutors, who chose the lesser of the two evils: strong beer carried the day.

Many of those who came up to the College under Prideaux were prominent in the events preceding the Civil War and in the war itself. On the parliamentary side Exeter produced Sir John Eliot, a leading

*Exeter Hall
in the late
Twentieth
Century*





parliamentary critic of the Crown in the 1620s; William Strode, one of the Five Members whom Charles I tried to arrest in 1642; and John Blackmore, one of the regicides who signed the king's death warrant. The king's men were almost certainly more numerous, as they were in most Oxford colleges. Although this reflected in a general way the colleges' social composition, Exeter had particular reasons for its loyalties. Charles I had been its benefactor, endowing fellowships for scholars from the Channel Islands; Charles I's chaplain was its head; and its membership was still largely drawn from the royalist west. In the College Hall hangs the portrait of William Noy, Charles's attorney-general and the possible initiator of ship money, who was here in the 1590s. Sir Bevil Grenville, an undergraduate of a later generation, was killed leading the royalists at the battle of Lansdown in 1643; and William Prideaux, the son of the Rector himself, died fighting for the king at Marston Moor.

In the divisions and losses which it suffered during these years the College was a microcosm of English society. They were accompanied by other disasters. During the war the college plate was commandeered by the king, despite the prevarications of the fellows; the college rents fell into arrears; and ten of the fellows, informed on by their colleagues, were ejected by the parliamentary visitors in 1648. Prideaux's successor as Rector, George Hakewill, another Devon man, was 64 years old when elected in 1642 and sat out the war on his Devonshire living of Heanton Punchardon. Ageing and absent, he could do little for his

B.G. Nevinson's room circa 1873



College. Its fortunes recovered temporarily but markedly under the next Rector, John Conant, a moderate Puritan in religion, an expert orientalist and a strict disciplinarian. If he lacked Prideaux's easy rapport with the young, he nevertheless maintained Exeter's name for scholarship and increased its numbers.

He was the last for many years of whom this could be said. The period after the Civil War was the most dismal in the College's history: its rectors were incompetent, its



fellows divided, its undergraduates famous only for "drinking and duncing", and its reputation "rude and uncivil", according to contemporary observers. Under Rector Maynard, Conant's successor, Exeter was described as "much debauched by a drunken governor". "He is much given to bibbing; and when there is a music meeting in one of the fellows' chambers, he will sit there, smoke and drink until he is drunk and has to be led to his lodgings by the junior fellows." Rector Bury, who followed Maynard in 1666, was a more active force for harm. Although he was a generous benefactor, he mismanaged the college finances, suspended five of the fellows from their fellowships only to have his decisions reversed by the Vice-Chancellor, shut out the Visitor, the Bishop of Exeter, when he tried to enter the College, and published a theological treatise which was condemned as heretical. In this heady career he was abetted by the college Chaplain until 1690, when the progress of both men was cut short by the Rector's expulsion and the Chaplain's excommunication.



A modern study bedroom

Exeter's history in the seventeenth century shows with unusual clarity what has indeed always been true: that the tone of the College is partly set both by the manners and aspirations of society at large and by the character and abilities of the Rector. Until the Restoration of 1660 the intellectual and religious climate, serious, devout and disputacious, was mirrored in the men whom the College produced: men who often went on to become heads of other colleges, doctors of divinity and professors, as well as politicians and lawyers. After the Restoration theological controversy declined and discipline slackened, in Exeter as in other colleges. Few remarkable men were educated here in these years; Narcissus Marsh, who became Archbishop of Armagh and Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, was perhaps the only one of real achievement. Throughout this time the College remained small and cohesive enough for successive rectors to set their marks on it. It was no coincidence that Exeter rose under Prideaux, held its place under Conant and sank under Bury. Each of these men, by a process often intangible but always discernible, did much to mould the College in his image.



Post-Schools
(Final Exams)
1951

(From left to right)
Ken Stowe,
Jim Collis,
Rex Williams,
and
Corelli Barnett

In the eighteenth century it is hard to see such a clear pattern in Exeter's fortunes. Its rectors were usually worthy without being distinguished. Two of them, Conybeare and Atwell, attempted to amend the teaching arrangements by seeking to limit non-residence by the fellows, by enforcing attendance at lectures and by ensuring that lecturers were properly paid. The learning of its fellows often justified their comfortable circumstances. Many wrote sermons; two, Stinton and Milman, became Fellows of the Royal Society; one, Stackhouse, was a noted naturalist; another, Kennicott, came from Totnes grammar school in Devon to become perhaps the greatest Hebrew scholar of his time. (His idiosyncratic liking for figs is commemorated by "Kennicott's fig tree", which still enhances the college garden.) These names mean little in the twentieth century, but they were respected in their day and in the small world in which they moved. There was no figure of real intellectual distinction among them, but that was true of most colleges in the University. Those whom they taught had in many ways changed little over the centuries. They still came preponderantly from the West Country, studied the Dialectics, Philosophy and Rhetoric which their ancestors had studied and

often returned as clergymen to their native counties. Despite the great changes in the College since the days of the founder, the progression was still one which Stapeldon would have recognised.

In 1800 Exeter was thus an unreformed College in an unreformed University. The changes of the next hundred years, in constitution, membership, syllabus of studies and buildings, were to be the most far-reaching and rapid in its history, but they are to a large extent part of the general history of the University. Of these general changes perhaps the one which most affected undergraduates was the thorough reform of examinations. The old university examinations were farcical in their simplicity: they were conducted orally, followed entirely formal and predictable lines, and were so designed that failure was almost impossible. But in 1807 two honours schools were introduced in Classics and Mathematics, and those taking them were given a class. By the end of the century these two schools had been joined by Natural Sciences, Law and Modern History (1853) and Theology (1870); the less respectable disciplines of English and Modern Languages had to wait until the twentieth century for recognition. Although numbers of men continued to take the easier pass schools (a majority for much of the century), these reforms provided the essentials of the modern examination system.

The changes affecting the narrower world of the College were equally extensive. The numbers of undergraduates rose to just over forty a year by 1850; the modern entry, by comparison, is about one hundred. They now came increasingly from all over the country and for the first time in the College's history the west of England lost its numerical preponderance. In 1856 fellowships were no longer restricted by geographical area, as they had been under the old statutes, and were thrown open to competition. Ten of the 25 fellowships then existing were abolished and the revenues thus freed were used to found scholarships for undergraduates. Not until the 1960s would the College again have as many fellows as it had before this change. The fifteen survivors were still expected to take Holy Orders, but in 1881, after a dogged rearguard action, even this limitation was abolished. The College was thus no longer governed by a fairly large body of clergymen mainly from Devon and Cornwall but increasingly by a smaller number of laymen selected according to merit.

The tone of the College is more difficult to describe than its constitution. Mark Pattison spoke of it as "genteel but unintellectual". Another memoir-writer of the 1850s says that "it was an axiom that no



Antony Gormley
at the unveiling
of his sculpture
"Another Time"
on the roof of
the College

scholarly distinction was to be expected from Exeter" and ascribes its failings to the recruitment of its tutors from such a narrow circle. (This was before the changes of 1856.) Neither observation is entirely accurate and the first is probably less accurate than the second. Although the fellows in the mid-nineteenth century were as a group less distinguished than those of, say, Oriel, and its Rectors included no one of the abilities of Pattison at Lincoln or Jowett at Balliol, the College contained some remarkable men among its senior members: Ray Lankester, the pioneer biologist; J. A. Froude, the historian and one of the last of the great Devonians to be associated with the College; W. A. Sewell, the founder of Radley, who was said to be one of the best tutors in Oxford; F. T. Palgrave, poet and compiler of the Golden Treasury; and C. W. Boase, a fellow for over fifty years and the College's historian. These five very different figures, taken at random, suggest the variety of talents which found a home at Exeter.

It is still more difficult to generalize about the undergraduate body. It certainly included many who preferred rowing to reading and who gave Exeter its leading reputation as a sporting college. It was among the first to promote rowing (the Exeter boat first appeared in 1824); its boat club records, dating from 1831, are the earliest for any Oxford college; it was the third college to have its own cricket ground (in 1844); and in 1850 it mounted the first athletics meeting in the University. The growth of organized sport, general in



The sports
pavillion and
playing field

the nineteenth century University, introduced a new source of friction into relations between senior and junior members which was to persist in varying degrees over the years. "At Exeter College the Dons held the boat in abhorrence", wrote a Trinity man about the College in the 1830s; and Mark Pattison commented misanthropically that the main business of the University consisted in cricket and croquet, varied occasionally by a little reading and writing. What was new here was not the growth of sport per se: the eighteenth century undergraduate had hunted and shot as enthusiastically as his nineteenth century successor played cricket. It was the novel emphasis on work, self-improvement, learning and the rewarding of merit, whether in university examinations or in elections to fellowships – the whole evangelical and reforming ethos of the second quarter of the century – which made the immemorial pastimes of the young seem less respectable.

"Exeter", wrote Arthur Brodribb, who came up as a commoner in 1869 "was not a reading college, though it was courteously supposed to hold its own in the Schools.... As a matter of fact, the vast majority of its members were only pass men, who lived healthy outdoor lives, especially on the river, without any great consumption of midnight oil, at least for studious purposes." (The writer, who took a Fourth in Classics, was probably among them.) In terms of degree results Exeter was just above average, though, as Brodribb noted, many of its members still sat for pass degrees rather than for the relatively newfangled (but more



Exeter College gardens looking from the boundary wall against Brasenose Lane

demanding) honour schools. Yet if the temper of the College was hardly intellectual, its undergraduates had recreations which ranged well beyond sport alone. The minutes of the Debating Society, the Dialectical Society, the Church Society, the Literary Society and the Essay Club survive in the archives as a testimony to interests which were certainly more college-centred and perhaps more earnest than those of today. In 1871 the Debating Society discussed, inter alia, Home Rule for Ireland, and the failure of the Gladstone government; in 1880 the abolition of the opium trade in India; and in 1881 the Bradlaugh case. The Church Society in 1887 listened to papers on Christianity in China, on the popes of the fourth and fifth centuries, and on traces of the doctrine of the Resurrection in the Old Testament; while the Essay Club, a slightly later foundation, provided an audience for versifiers and prose writers.

Not all, then, were philistines; indeed, these records suggest a lively and vigorous undergraduate community, where politics, culture and religion were all taken seriously. From this community, mainly in the first half of the nineteenth century, were to come some scholars and writers of distinction. Sir Charles Lyell, "the father of English geology", was an undergraduate here from 1816 to 1819 and is one of three Exeter men to be buried in Westminster Abbey; Samuel Lysons, later famous as an archaeologist and



Exeter College Chapel (Left)

writer on Gloucestershire antiquities, was here in the 1820s; F.D. Maurice, the pioneering Christian socialist and eventually Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge, came up in 1829; R.D. Blackmore, author of *Lorna Doone*, was a scholar at Exeter in the 1840s; and William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones were both up in the early 1850s.

Until this time the College had produced few literary men: John Ford, the Jacobean playwright, and Joseph Glanvill, the late seventeenth-century philosopher, were perhaps the only two of its writers who won any reputation beyond the world of university scholarship. Morris was certainly the first major artist, as well as writer, to have been an undergraduate here. He lived in rooms which were on the site of the garden of the present Rector's Lodgings and which were swept away in the building works of the mid 1850s. He later remembered the College with affection and enriched it with his work. The edition of the Kelmscott Chaucer, one of the finest pieces of nineteenth-



Old Members Gaudy 2001 The high-table chairs shown in the photograph are the same as those shown in the 1814 print of the hall on page 8

century book production, was given by his widow to the Library; and among the miscellaneous relics which came to the College after his death were his pipe, spectacles and ink pot.

In the twentieth century one Exeter author has eclipsed all these. J.R.R. Tolkien came here from King Edward's School, Birmingham, in 1911, took a First in English in 1915, and returned to Oxford in 1918 after three years' war service. He was already a linguist of extraordinary abilities before his arrival in Oxford (he learnt Gothic and Anglo-Saxon while still at school) and it is in character that his one traceable entry in the Junior Common Room Suggestions Book should be a request for the purchase of "a good English dictionary". It stands out oddly among the multitude of facetious remarks about the college food, the misappropriation of the J.C.R. newspapers and the quality of the J.C.R. crumpets. Tolkien's early mythological writings took shape in a paper given to the Essay Club in 1920. It is safe to say that his later books have been more widely read than those of all the Exeter men since the fourteenth century and that he has almost certainly given more pleasure to more people than any other single member of the College.

Other old members of the College in the twentieth century have included, 'Tubby' Clayton, founder of Toc H (1905), Lord Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury (1906), Professor Sir Alister Hardy, zoologist (1914), Professor Nevill Coghill, author and scholar (1919), Professor Frederick Soddy, chemist and Nobel Prize



winner (1919), Liaquat Ali Khan, President of Pakistan (1921), Richard Burton, actor (1944), Alan Bennett, playwright (1954), Sir Roger Bannister, athlete and first four-minute miler (1946), Philip Pullman, author (1965), and Martin Amis, author, (1968).

The greatest change to the College in the second half of the twentieth century came with the admission of women in 1979, when the majority of Oxford's formerly all-male colleges 'went mixed'. Women had been eligible for Fellowships for some years prior to this more general shift. Among the first generation of women undergraduates was Imogen Stubbs, who read English and was later to achieve fame as an actress. In recent years the College has had an annual intake of about 60% men to 40% women (in 2009 363 men and 243 women). With the election of Professor Marilyn Butler, formerly Professor of English at Cambridge, as Rector in 1992 Exeter became the first former men's college to have a woman as its head; and with the subsequent election of Ms Frances Cairncross on Professor Butler's retirement in 2004 Exeter became the only former men's college to have elected two women in succession.

A second noticeable change came with an increased emphasis on the refitting and repair of the college buildings. Between 1980 and 2010 most of the staircases were refurbished and many rooms were provided with en suite facilities. Though this process was partly driven by the needs of the conference trade, an essential source of income for the College, undergraduates were the prime beneficiaries. Long gone were the days when, in the late nineteenth century and for much of the twentieth, a winter's early morning wash meant either crossing an icy quad or waiting for a longsuffering scout to produce hot water in a jug. An equally large-scale project, completed between 2005 and 2009, was the cleaning of the interior of the chapel and the renewal and recarving of the exterior stonework, left in a very poor and often dangerous state after 150 years' exposure to the Oxford weather. Both processes were judged to be a great success and the structure of the chapel now approximates to the state in which Gilbert Scott, its designer, left it. Term-time services continue as always to be held regularly in the Chapel, its once gloomy space now filled with light. At the same time the College has promoted ambitious plans for developments away from



The Morris Room, named after William Morris, artist. One of Exeter's illustrious "Old Boys"



Exeter College Library built in the 1850's

the central site. Not only has 'off campus' graduate accommodation in the Iffley Road been thoroughly refurbished and additional accommodation built, but an entirely new set of buildings, formerly those of Ruskin College, off Walton Street, was purchased in 2010 in order to provide additional undergraduate accommodation and other facilities within a few minutes' walk of the College itself.

Besides admitting women, the College has in recent decades branched out in another direction by forging new links with Williams College, Massachusetts. For many years Williams funded a scholarship for one of its students at Exeter, and in 1984 it established an Oxford campus as a residence and study centre for an annual group of some thirty of its students, many of whom were (and are) taught by Exeter tutors. Later, in 2003, the relationship went a step further when Williams students were admitted as full members of the College for their year in Oxford. They now use the college facilities – Library, J.C.R. etc – on the same terms as Exeter's home-grown undergraduates, eat in hall, and join in Exeter's sporting activities. American muscle has meant that the all round advantages to the College here have been only partly financial.

J. R. MADDICOTT



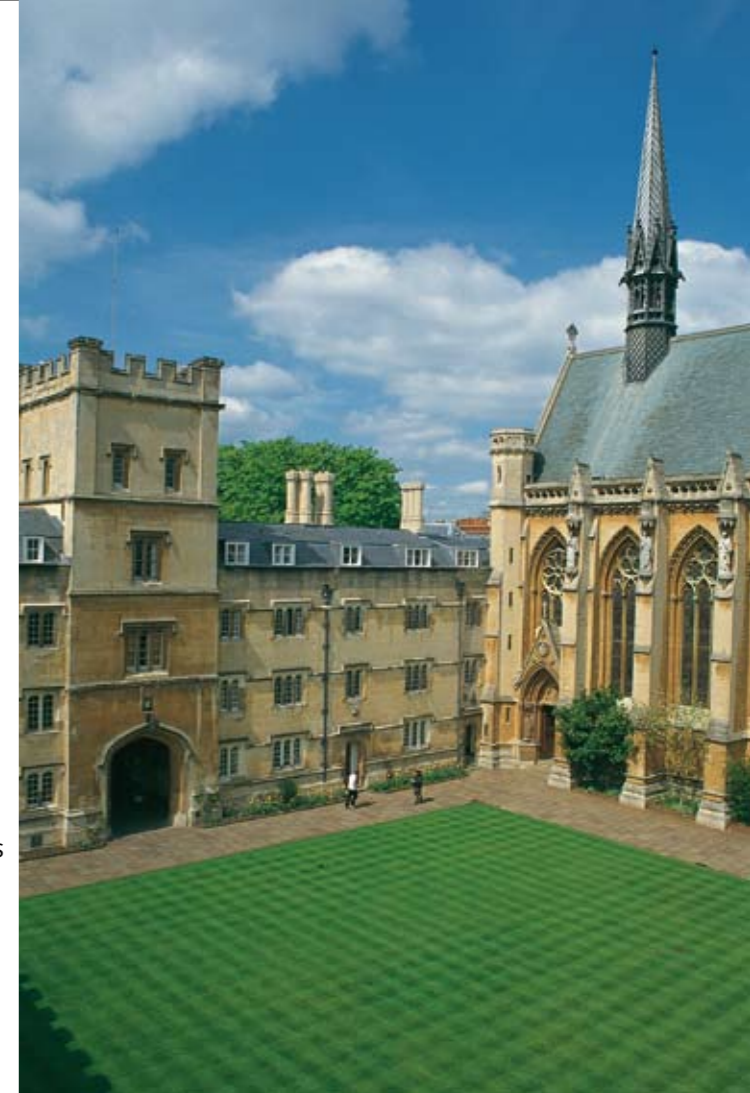
Architecture

Visitors enter the College by the Turl Street gateway whose handsome vaulted ceiling dates from the early eighteenth century. The gateway admits to the Front Quadrangle. This roughly is the site of the medieval College but of the earliest buildings only Palmer's Tower (1432) in the north-eastern corner still remains. The tower was once immediately inside the wall of the City and was the College's principal entrance. Its base now contains a Memorial to members of the College killed in the Second World War.

With the exception of Palmer's Tower and of the Chapel, the present Front Quadrangle was built between 1618 and 1710. First came the very beautiful Hall and, adjoining at the south-eastern corner, Peryam's Mansion, now Staircase 4. The Hall is virtually unaltered since 1618 though the shallow porch and the fireplaces were added in 1820. Next were the staircases, now No. 7 and No. 8, completed in 1672, which run from the gateway to the Chapel and then, in the years 1700 - 3, the gateway was linked southwards to the Hall.

Three sides of the present quadrangle were finally completed by the construction in 1708 - 10 of two staircases (Nos. 5 and 6) between Peryam's Mansion and Palmer's Tower.

At that time the fourth side of the quadrangle was occupied by an early seventeenth-century chapel, built a few years after the Hall, and by the lodgings of the Rector. These remained until the mid-nineteenth century when they were replaced by the present Chapel (1856 - 9) designed by George Gilbert Scott in the style of the Sainte Chapelle in Paris. In the Chapel there is the seventeenth-century lectern of the earlier chapel and a notable tapestry, The Adoration of the Magi, designed by Edward Burne-Jones and made



The Front Quadrangle, Exeter College



under the direction of William Morris, both former members of the College.

Beyond the Chapel is the Margary quadrangle. Its buildings lie outside the northern limit of the medieval College and date from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Underwood, a local architect, designed the staircase (No. 9) to the east of the gateway on Broad Street completed in 1834, George Gilbert Scott the tower and the two older staircases (Nos. 10 and 11) on its west side (1854 - 6). The Thomas Wood Building (staircases 12, 13 and 14), the work of Lionel Brett, was opened in 1964 and commemorates the 650th anniversary of the foundation of the College. Also in the Margary Quadrangle are the Rector's Lodgings (1857), of which George Gilbert Scott was the architect.

The College has a most pleasant garden which is reached by a passageway at the bottom of Staircase 5. The nearest building in the garden is the Library of the College (1856 - 7), the work again of George Gilbert Scott. The farther buildings, the Convocation House, the Divinity School and the Bodleian Library, though not the property of the College, add greatly to the garden's attractiveness.



*The Margary
Quadrangle built
in 1964*

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