3
Conservative Attitudes: Walter Gropius in Cambridge and Maxwell Fry in Oxford

Alan Powers

Fig 1. E. Maxwell Fry, New Building for All Souls College, Oxford, 1938 (Courtesy The Warden and Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford)

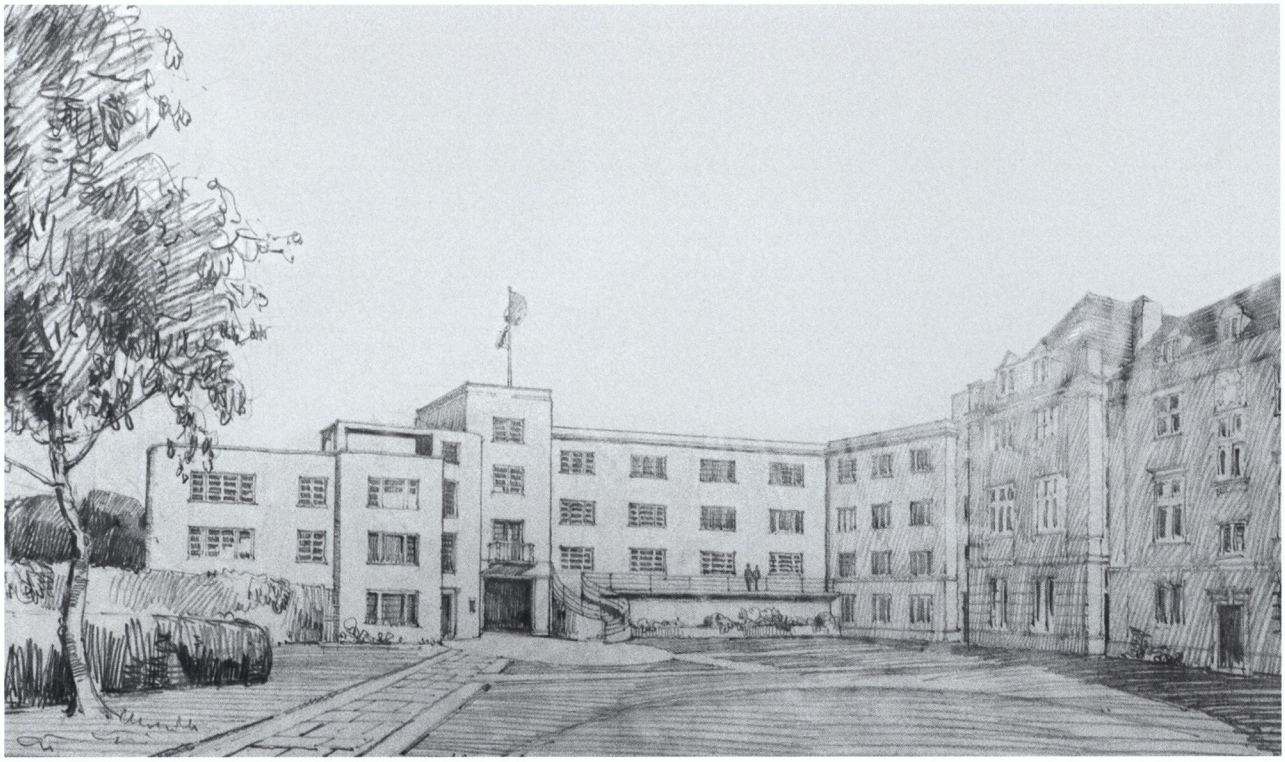
Within a few weeks of his arrival in Britain in October 1934, Walter Gropius told his sister about his first visit to Cambridge. 'There is no doubt that this is a centre of culture with very old humus which could not easily be replaced', he wrote. 'Now I understand the conservative attitude of the Englishman, which makes it difficult for him to recognize anything new.'[1] Jack Pritchard, his host at the Lawn Road flats, introduced him to the County Education Officer, Henry Morris, who became his patron for Impington Village College (1936–39).

About a year later, one of the younger Fellows of Christ's College, the biologist Conrad Hal Waddington (1905–75), invited him to visit, in connection with a scheme for a new building at the College. Waddington met him at the station with the architect and planner (Margaret) Justin Blanco White (1911–2001), who in the following year became his second wife. She was a recent graduate of the Architectural Association, and had already met Gropius 'in connection with a book on housing'.[2]

The invitation was in the context of a decision in 1934 to use a special reserve fund for a new building at Christ's. The first architect engaged by the College was Oswald P. Milne (1881–1968), a pupil of Lutyens, designer of houses including Coleton Fishacre, Devon (1926) and buildings for Bedford School, Highgate School and for the Dartington estate, including the main school building, Foxhole, in 1934. Milne advised the College to choose the site for their new building to make a north side to Third Court, backing on to Hobson Street, where the only existing building was a tutor's house standing in the western corner. The brief was two fellows' sets and as many undergraduate sets as possible, with lock-up shops on the ground floor. The cost was not to exceed the £40,000 available in the fund.[3]

A new Master of Christ's, Charles Galton Darwin, a physicist and grandson of the pioneer of evolution, took up his position in 1936 and the building project developed with 'sketch plans' requested from Percy Morley Horder (1870–1944, one of whose best works, originally Cheshunt College, was built in Bateman Street in 1913) and Gropius & Fry, in addition to Milne.[4] Horder only sent a block plan, and was not considered as a competitor, while Milne's proposals were similar in style and typology to the 1934 St Michael's Court for Gonville and Caius by Easton and Robertson, traditional in their masonry elevations although slightly modern in their horizontal steel windows and ornamented with heraldry.[5]

Milne's project went up to the site boundary in Hobson Street with a return block joining on to the 1889 building by J. J. Stevenson and closing Third Court. Gropius by contrast aligned his main block at right angles to Stevenson's building, leaving a gap between them, and added a curved wing extending westwards to the boundary with additional shops. The effect was to add a triangle of land to the street by taking down the college's historic boundary wall. Some plane trees, then standing inside the wall, would



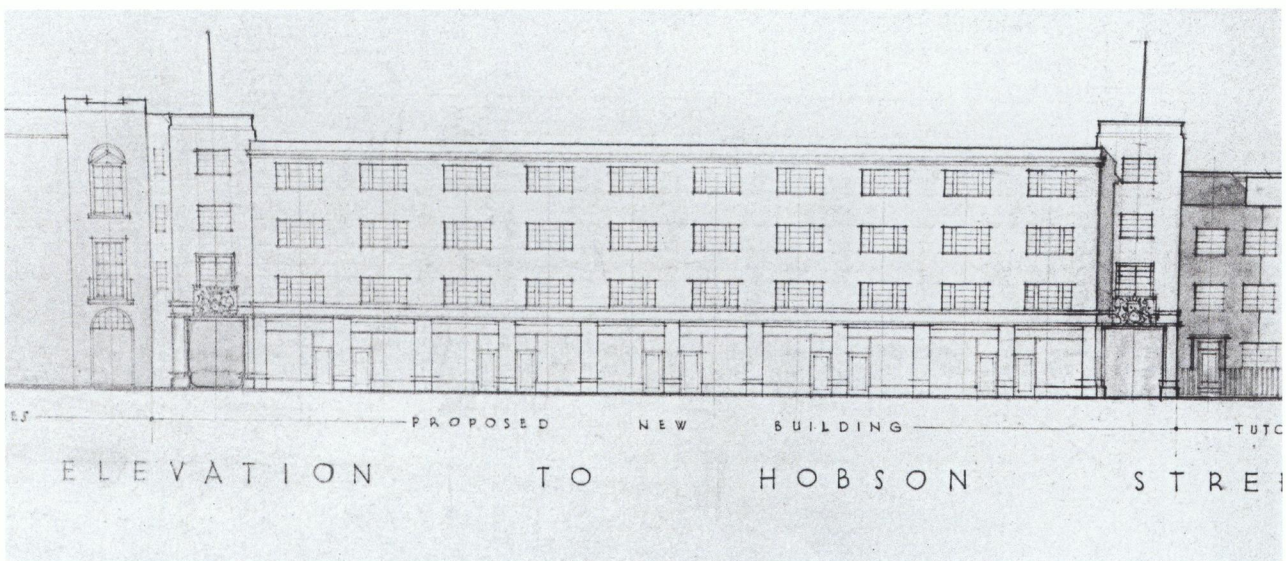


Fig 2. Oswald P. Milne, Proposed New Building for Christ's College, Cambridge, 1936. Perspective. (Courtesy Christ's College)

Fig 3. Oswald P. Milne, Proposed New Building for Christ's College, Cambridge, 1936. Elevation to Hobson Street. (Courtesy Christ's College)

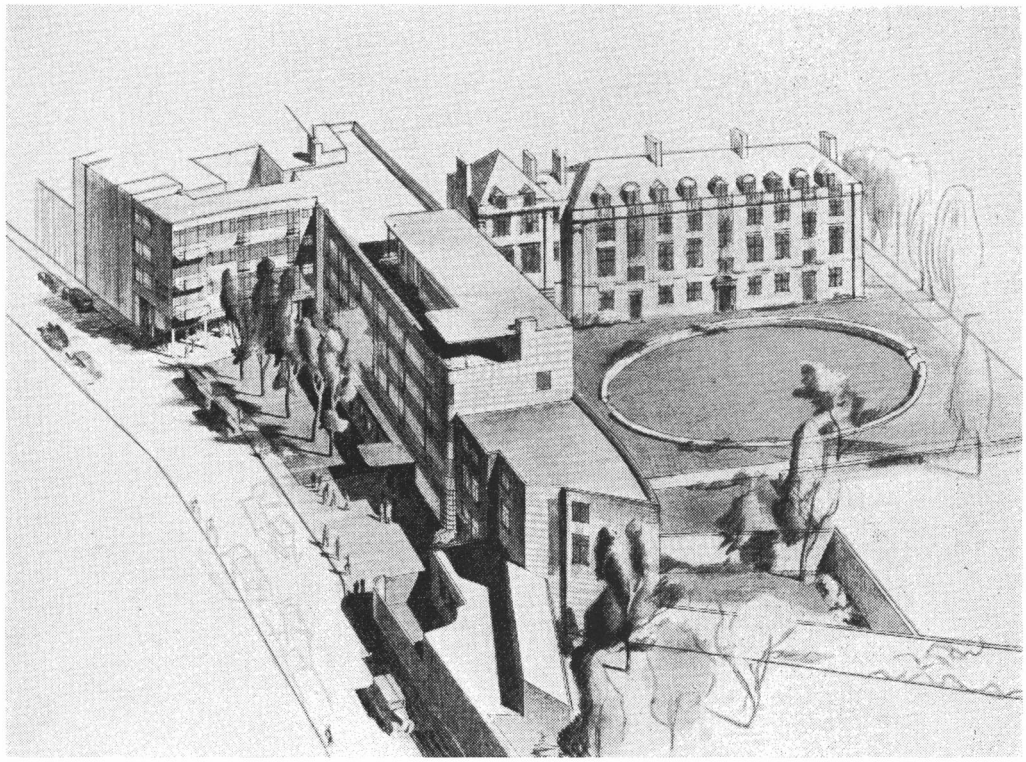


Fig 4. Walter Gropius and E. Maxwell Fry, Proposed New Building for Christ's College, Cambridge, 1936. *Architects' Journal*, 3 February, 1938. (Architectural Press Library/RIBA Robert Elwall Photographs Collection)

thus become part of the public space in front of the shops, with a pedestrian entrance. Both schemes included a replacement for the existing tutor's house at the south end of the site in the form of a building attached to the main body of the scheme but more domestic in character and lower in height.

The two architects were offered £200 each to develop their schemes. Darwin was persuaded by the RIBA Secretary, Sir Ian MacAlister, that some professional opinion on the actual costs of the projects would prevent the Fellows from accepting an unrealistic proposal, and invited Milne and Gropius to chose someone. Charles Holden accepted their invitation, explaining that 'he would like to make a report which could be shown to the competitors' rather than picking one or the other.[6]

In his own report Milne explained his position between Modernism and historical styles. 'It is considered that the design of the new building should be of its date rather than a copy of the existing buildings, but a building self-conscious in its Modernism would be equally out of place. The design submitted is, therefore, modern in conception but in the English tradition, deriving its quality from good materials and dependent for effect on good massing and proportion rather than ornamental detail.'[7]

On his Hobson Street elevation, Milne tried to remain 'in keeping' with recent Neo-Georgian buildings adjoining, while giving his own building horizontal metal windows in a plain wall. The elevation is flanked by stair towers with gates beneath, over which carved coats of arms are shown, these being the only forms of ornament apart from plain cornice mouldings. A similar elevation treatment is shown on the College side of the building, composing the different blocks with masses of different height, indicating a flat roof on the tutor's house with a modern-looking terrace shelter.

In his report, Gropius explained that seven or eight alternatives had been considered, in line with his belief that design should proceed from researching all possible options. He justified the planning strategy in terms of the economic use of the site, with more sets, shops and parking spaces, and better conditions for shoppers. As he wrote, 'a line of trees is saved and an open space of some charm and dignity is formed to make a fitting boundary to the College and a welcome addition to the small open spaces

of the town'. Putting the main block at an exact right angle to the Stevenson building would 'make a more suitable completion of the garden space', while by moving the bulk of the building inwards from the site boundary, it would effectively mask 'the unsightly illuminated dome of the cinema in Hobson Street', an unwelcome intrusion of Modernity.[8] The report notes that the beds in the undergraduate sets would be fitted, and 'pivoted at each end and counterweighted, in order to make it easy for an elderly person to make up', a gesture towards the legion of college 'bedmakers' who undertook this task together with cleaning the rooms.

The structural steel frame was based on equal bays corresponding to the grouping of sets, with hollow tile floors and roofs. The external walls would be faced in Ketton stone, matching that of St John's College, while the ground floor towards Third Court would be faced with glass block, behind which ran a service passage to the shops. The top storey of the main block contained two fellows' sets divided by a spine wall, sharing a sheltered roof terrace to the north. The tutor's house at the southern end of the block was slightly curved to meet an existing angled wall square on, and the continuous vertical glazing of the staircase was slightly bowed outwards.

The Christ's scheme has much in common with Gropius's design for the Ben Levy house at No. 66 Old Church Street, where the main rectangular body of the building has a number of picturesque appendages and curves to offset it and create more interesting spaces relating to the street and the garden. Some of these characteristics can also be found in the Impington design, shaped around existing trees with a curved adult wing also containing bow windows. Little consideration has been given to the question whether Gropius developed an 'English style', although Giulio Carlo Argan wrote in 1951 of the transformation that Gropius underwent in England, as:

> A way of returning to the sources of the very ideological tradition itself, of rediscovering confidence in the 'progress' which in Europe, after its first rich flowering, was so quickly corrupted by the aggressive egoism of the ruling classes. In this country, and during these years, faith in industry and in the educational mission retained their undeniable legitimacy. ... It is probable that the collaboration with Maxwell Fry had helped Gropius to rediscover, in the few works of the English period, a simpler and more cordial accent, an easier and more spontaneous contact with the things of the world. There was no longer an ideal to defend to the death, but a programme to be developed.[9]

Gropius's English work has generally been undervalued in relation to the rest of his career, and a major building in Cambridge might have altered history's perception of it.

Early in 1937, Gropius accepted the invitation from Harvard to take up a professorship at the Graduate School of Design. A letter from Waddington prior to the College vote assumed that he would win the commission, which could be carried out by Fry in his absence, as happened with Impington. He added the warning that this circumstance might be used as 'an excuse for those people who do not want a modern design but do not see how they can get out of it', but added 'actually I am nearly certain that there are very few, if any, such people. All those with even partially open minds have been convinced by your designs, while others would never be convinced under any circumstances.' Waddington was hoping to get a majority for Gropius, although 'something may still depend on Holden, whose report is not yet in'.[10]

Holden prefaced his report of 15 January by stating 'I have not attempted to make any statement with regard to aesthetic considerations, except so far as these considerations had a definite bearing upon the convenience of the building in occupation and upon the life of the structure'. This evasion was perhaps predictable, and if Holden failed to win posterity's praise for recommending Gropius unconditionally, he did not reject him either. He was suspicious of steel-framed buildings, warning the College that it might last no more than 100 years, and

pointing out that while Milne's design could be built with conventional load-bearing construction, it would be hard to adapt the one by Gropius.

Holden praised Milne's 'quiet outlook' and the ease of cleaning the 'windows of adequate size', and the usefulness of chimney flues, provided in addition to the requested central heating, for purposes of ventilation. He was more critical of the Gropius scheme, being unconvinced by his arguments about the economical use of the site. He called the addition of space towards Hobson Street 'an attractive feature and a real amenity as far as the town is concerned', although 'it would mean a corresponding loss to Third Court'. His attitude was generally pragmatic: how would the windows be cleaned? Would the down draught from the windows mean the writing desk would be moved away from them? Would the balconies in line above each other be used 'in rowdy escapades, especially where there are glass canopies over the shops?' He concluded by pointing out that no construction system other than a steel or reinforced concrete frame would permit such large windows, and any alternative would require 'entirely recasting the elevations'.[11] In fact, Holden had very little positive to say about the value of this particular example of Modernism.

On 23 February, the College sent Gropius and Fry a list of questions apparently based on a comparison between their design and Milne's. These indicate the suspicions among some of the Fellows, not only in stylistic terms but also in respect of the opening out of the College towards the town. In reply, Gropius showed how vital this planning move was to the whole concept, justifying the set-back in Hobson Street in terms of better sun and air, the retention of the trees, the reduction of noise from the street and the ability to add more undergraduate sets, because it would be possible for them to face either way from the central corridors. Gropius and Fry argued that

> The set-back plan … substitutes spaciousness for narrowness, … is more desirable aesthetically, and pleasanter to live in. In our opinion the courtyard is of greater benefit to the college, quite apart from any value due to the shops, than it is to the Town. It is likely nevertheless to be regarded by the Town as a public spirited work if planned.[12]

In addition, they had selected this scheme as providing more undergraduate sets than any of their alternatives. The dons apparently remained irked by the outward signs of Modernism, asking: 'To what extent and in what manner would you be willing to modify the façade of the building facing the Third Court?' The architects responded by citing

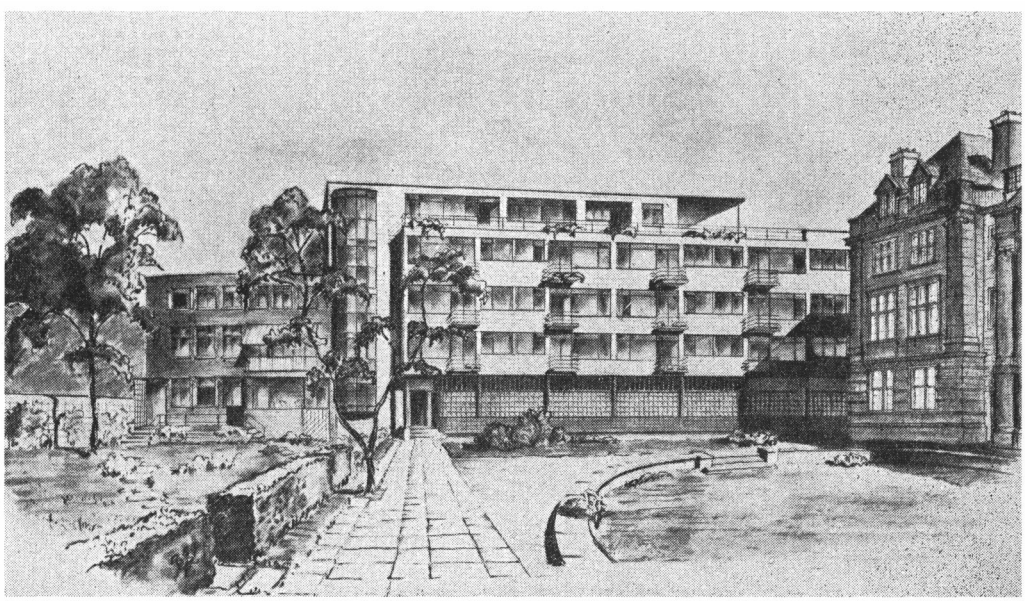


Fig 5. Walter Gropius and E. Maxwell Fry, Proposed New Building for Christ's College, Cambridge, 1936. *Architects' Journal*, 10 February, 1938. (Architectural Press Library/RIBA Robert Elwall Photographs Collection)

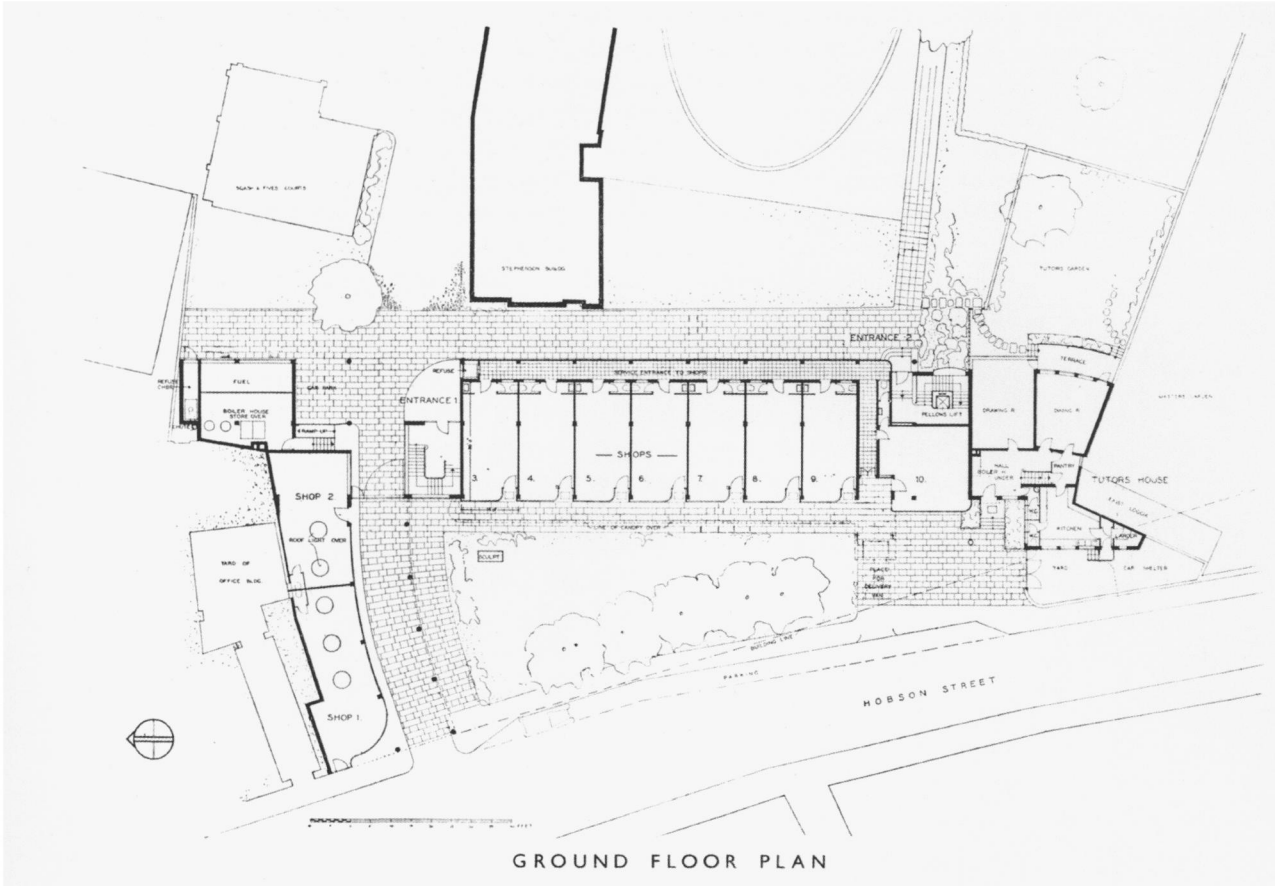


Fig 6. Walter Gropius and E. Maxwell Fry, Proposed New Building for Christ's College, Cambridge, 1936. Ground Floor Plan. *Architects' Journal*, 10 February, 1938. (Architectural Press Library/RIBA Robert Elwall Photographs Collection)

evidence of the effectiveness of lighting low-ceilinged rooms from ribbon windows, going on to state: 'We feel that it would be wrong to put the very well tested technique of modern building to the service of imitation of whatsoever past style and we find that the sense of congruity which binds building of many different dates and styles in Cambridge is due not so much to affinity in point of style but in the material and scale.' They hoped that the stone cladding would put these anxieties to rest.

Gropius and Fry argued in favour of the proposed flat roof as less of a fire hazard than a timber roof and available for use as a roof terrace. Asked whether it would be possible to have all the rooms facing inwards towards the college, they replied that this would use the site less economically. Finally, they explained why they had not attempted to join on to the Stevenson Building, because any projection to the north of it would be cut off from Third Court and deprived of southern light, while the angle made with a building running on the line of Hobson Street (the angle that Milne's scheme incorporated without any disguise) 'is an acute one and for this reason unsatisfactory aesthetically in the general composition of Third Court as completed'.[13]

On 2 March 1937, ten days before leaving for the USA, Gropius made a presentation of his scheme at the College. This was followed by a motion to appoint him 'architect of the new building forthwith' which, contrary to Waddington's confident prediction, was defeated by 13 votes to eight. The identity of the eight is not officially recorded, but Waddington named two other Fellows, Wyatt and Saunders, as supporters, to whom may be added W. A. W. Rushton, for whom Justin Blanco White was designing a house, and the scientist and future novelist C. P. Snow.[14] The meeting then voted by 14 to five to make an approach to Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, but nothing was done about this and on 11 May the Governing Body decided to postpone the project and disband the buildings committee.[15]

The reasons for this choice must remain largely speculative. For a start, Milne's scheme was the cheaper, at £33,761 compared to £37,494 (later revised to £36,016) for Gropius. In rejecting Gropius, the College did not choose Milne. The immediate vote for Scott suggests some prior lobbying in his favour and given his continuing work for Clare College, he could have been seen as a safe option, although potentially expensive, for the Building Committee noted that Clare paid about £1200 per set, compared to £500 for the recent Fisher Building at Queens' by Norman Drinkwater.

It is impossible to say whether Gropius's imminent departure for the USA tipped the balance. He wrote to the Master to announce this on 13 January 1937, assuring him that the scheme was already well worked out and that Fry 'would be perfectly well able to make any modifications that might arise, and in many respects he is better qualified than I to supervise the building process'.[16] Fry suggested that had Gropius been successful, the partnership might have carried on, and they waited until November before formally announcing its demise. They seem to have hoped for a reversal of the decision and the drawings were published in the *Architects' Journal* in February 1938, although Gropius's name was omitted owing to an editorial error.[17]

Reporting to the Warden of All Souls, who was about to undergo a similar exercise, Darwin warned that:

> The whole college was torn into fragments with passionate hatred of one or both of the two architects. The result has been that a third name was brought up and thrust on our committee without any due consideration. We have managed to get the business into calm waters at last, but mainly by taking the line that building costs are rising rapidly so that it would be folly to start now since they should come down in two years or so when all the aerodromes have been built; meanwhile we need not continue our quarrels over a house that is not to be built.[18]

After the war, Christ's did build, with Sir Albert Richardson, by then an Honorary

Fig 7. Richardson and Houfe, Chancellor's Building, Christ's College, Cambridge, 1948–50. Perspective. (Courtesy Christ's College)

Fellow of the College, and his partner Eric Houfe. Richardson, Gropius's senior by only three years, spent much of the war in Cambridge with the evacuated Bartlett School of Architecture and strengthened his contacts in the university. In 1948–50 he built the Chancellor's Building on the east side of Third Court at a cost of £80,000, followed by its companion in a simplified style, the Memorial Building, more or less on the site of the 1937 projects, in 1952–3. The Senior Tutor's house was left in place with the new building passing its back and screening it from view. The tower at the west end of the Stevenson Building was capped by a new roof and square lantern, a move applauded by Pevsner as 'an asymmetrical and piquant accent'. He was surprisingly tolerant of the twin buildings, praising their plainness and fine stone facings, but regretted that they lacked the mouldings needed for a convincing Georgian design. With the temporary west wall of the Stevenson Building the space towards Hobson Street feels like a backyard. While the College has had the benefit of a car park, there were no shops to contribute what could have been over 70 years of rental income.

An anonymous contributor to the *Christ's College Magazine* in 1953 resurrected the story of the Gropius scheme, commending it as 'honest in the expression of its function and yet classically satisfying in its proportions, free and comfortable in its layout and yet the composition of masses and relation of surfaces studied with scrupulous care'.[19] Richardson was faintly praised, apart from his site planning: 'inside the College, notice how, just as a well-mannered youth will show respect to his elders, Gropius's block retires modestly behind the blind end of the Stevenson building, unlike Professor Richardson's block which ruins the view of a whole staircase'. In a later issue, another writer replied to defend Richardson's buildings which 'are and will be in a century, more satisfying than a monument of the transient phase, which the Gropius design so typified'.[20]

The project by Maxwell Fry for All Souls, Oxford, was developed in tandem with the Christ's scheme, lagging about a year behind. In a similar fashion, it represented the fulfilment of an earlier project, in this case first mooted in 1930. All Souls is a unique college, without undergraduates, its membership entirely composed of Fellows. Some were full-time academics at Oxford involved with lecturing and tutorials, but the younger Fellows, especially those awarded Prize Fellowships by examination, were encouraged to make links with a wider world.[21] Many qualified in the law, although not all practiced, finding other ways of serving the country in the church or the diplomatic service. Several had businesses, such as the publisher Sir Geoffrey Faber (1889–1961), founder of the eponymous imprint, elected a Prize Fellow in 1919 and Estates Bursar from 1923 to 1951. In this role, he directed extensive and profitable building development on the northern fringes of London.

A. S. G. Butler (1888–1965) was the College architect, best known for editing the Lutyens Memorial volumes published in 1950. Butler was connected to Faber by marriage, but whether that was coincidence is unclear. It meant, however, that he wrote more openly to Faber than might otherwise have been the case, discussing the finer points of Cotswold Manor and Tudor styles and the benefits of Georgian windows for better light in relation to his project for a new building flanking two sides of the Warden's garden in 1930, concluding, 'after all, it is not style that matters but proportion'.[22] The site was the only part of the College where there was much space to develop. It abuts The Queen's College, and the project was a response to their building plans. Queen's soon abandoned their scheme and All Souls postponed theirs, although Butler produced a further scheme in 1932. The following year the building idea was revived by the new Warden, William Adams (1874–1966), an academic in his early life but also much involved in public affairs as a member of Lloyd George's secretariat, founder and editor of the *Political Quarterly*, a practicing farmer and a strong believer in smallholdings.

Thus in 1936, a new brief for 'two common-rooms, increased service accommodation, Manciple's quarters, garage, and six or more sets of Fellows' rooms, [with] three spare rooms for visitors' was drawn up for the south-facing boundary of the

Fig 8. A.S.G. Butler, All Souls College, West Elevations of the Warden's Quadrangle, 1930. (Courtesy the Warden and Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford)

Warden's Garden, where a new building would separate this from the smaller Fellows' Garden to the north.[23] The chief motive for development was explained by the Sub-Warden, Sir (Ernest) Llewellyn Woodward:

> From the point of view of the College as a society, it is most desirable that its junior Fellows not engaged in academic work in Oxford should spend week-ends here. Unless we can provide them with reasonable accommodation, they will be disinclined to come here as regularly as they have come in the past. We cannot hope to provide, in a building no part of which is less than two hundred years old, and some parts of which are five hundred years old, all the amenities of a modern house, but we cannot expect busy people to come here for week-ends unless we can give them a reasonable degree of comfort. In the opinion of the Sub-Warden, this degree of comfort means at least a share in a sitting room.[24]

Style seems to have been a contentious issue in the Building Committee from early on, and the minutes of an early meeting record that 'a discussion of an aesthetic nature having sprung up the Warden adjourned the Committee'.[25] One of the members, the historian Richard Pares (1902–58) is identifiable as a leader of the Modernist faction, suggesting Gropius, 'Villarde' (presumably F. X. Velarde), and Holden as contenders some three weeks after this event.

Faber in turn lobbied the Warden to continue with Butler, as someone capable of dealing with the complexity of the problem, able to receive criticism and engage in dialogue, describing him as: 'A man who will take infinite pains; he is ingenious; and he is quick to respond to criticism. He has also what seems to me very desirable for this kind of work, a special sensitiveness for "period" and "atmosphere".' Faber warned that 'an architect of a different type risks putting an ambitious building into an inappropriate context' and 'a slap-dash solution of the "internal" problems – which are, after all, the primary problems'.[26]

Another set of recommendations was sent to the economist Sir Hubert Henderson, a later Warden, by his brother-in-law, Hope Bagenal, the Librarian of the Architectural Association, on 1 February 1937. He wrote brief descriptions of H. S. Goodhart-Rendel (Slade Professor at Oxford 1932 and at the time the Principal of the AA School),

John Murray Easton (in partnership with Howard Robertson and an AA stalwart), George L. Kennedy (active in Cambridge under the patronage of Maynard Keynes and architect for the conversion of Holywell Manor for Balliol in 1938) and J. C. Shepherd, in practise with Elisabeth Scott, a fellow student at the AA in the 1920s and one of the team of three architects who worked on the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. Bagenal wrote, 'Shepherd is Miss Scott's partner, and an architect of great talent. In many ways he would be worth your while considering seriously. He is a thorough modernist in spirit yet with great appreciation of old work, and most careful to consider every aspect of a problem.' Bagenal clearly did not approve of the possibility of Gropius being selected, and wrote at the end of his letter, 'It is announced in the architectural papers that Gropius has been appointed Professor of Architecture at Harvard. You will probably understand that I would much prefer you to consider one of our own men, especially as there are a great many less well-known who have learned all there is to be learned from the modernists.' [27]

In March 1937 it was agreed that Butler's existing appointment be rescinded. Four architects were discussed: Gropius and Fry (which by then effectively meant Fry on his own), Scott, Shepherd & Breakwell (probably as a result of Bagenal's recommendation), Hubert Worthington (recently a Slade Professor in Oxford and designer of the Radcliffe Science Library, 1933–34), and finally A. S. G. Butler. C. H. Reilly, recently retired after 30 years as Professor of Architecture at Liverpool University, was suggested as an assessor, Holden having declined an invitation. Had Reilly been given this role, he would probably have supported Fry as an ex-pupil, but in fact the College did not make use of any professional help. The shortlist of architects must have been reviewed again, since Adams followed in Darwin's steps in seeking further advice from the RIBA on competition procedure and nominations. Sir Ian MacAlister produced a long list, writing, 'I have included A[myas] D. Connell, a brilliant young 'modernist' of the most extreme school. The others are all, I think, worthy of your consideration, although some of them are young and not very well known.'[28]

The Building Committee went on 8 June to look at photographs of works by various architects at the RIBA, and some of these were loaned for display in the College at the end of the year. At this point, the list included: A. S. G. Butler; W. G. Newton; Scott, Shepherd and Breakwell; Oswald Milne; Maxwell Fry; and Connell, Ward & Lucas. In October, the ones still in play were Connell, Milne, Newton and Shepherd. In an echo of Christ's shortlist, Woodward, the Sub-Warden, appears to have been lobbying for Morley Horder, although the committee refused to add his name.

Nearly a year then elapsed, during which the Building Sub-Committee membership was partly changed, including a new Prize Fellow, the philosopher Stuart Hampshire (1914–2004), a supporter of Modernism in architecture.[29] The shortlist had been reduced to Fry, Newton and Shepherd, who provided schemes seen by the Building Committee in October 1938.[30] The drawings by Newton have not survived, but the two other sets are complete, together with Scott & Shepherd's report. Newton was generally a traditionalist, although in 1932–3 he designed a remarkable generously glazed concrete science building for Marlborough College that was built right behind his Memorial Hall of 1921–5, a pure work of classicism. It seems likely that on this occasion, the schemes represented a gradation between Modernism and tradition with Scott & Shepherd in the middle, rather as Milne was expected to be in the anticipated three-horse race had it included Morley Horder in Cambridge.

They 'expressed their preference' in a report and the final decision was left for a College meeting on 26 November.[31] This preference was for Fry by a margin of five to two. The Fry faction (Faber, Pares, Jones, Routh and Hampshire), issued a lengthy document, and the Shepherd faction (Woodward and Craster) a 'Minority Report' raising questions about Fry's design from a detailed planning point of view.[32]

The arguments in favour of Fry were based mainly on planning, less in relation to

Fig 9. Scott, Shepherd and Breakwell, New Building for All Souls College, Oxford, 1938. Elevation to Warden's Garden and Section. (Courtesy the Warden and Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford)

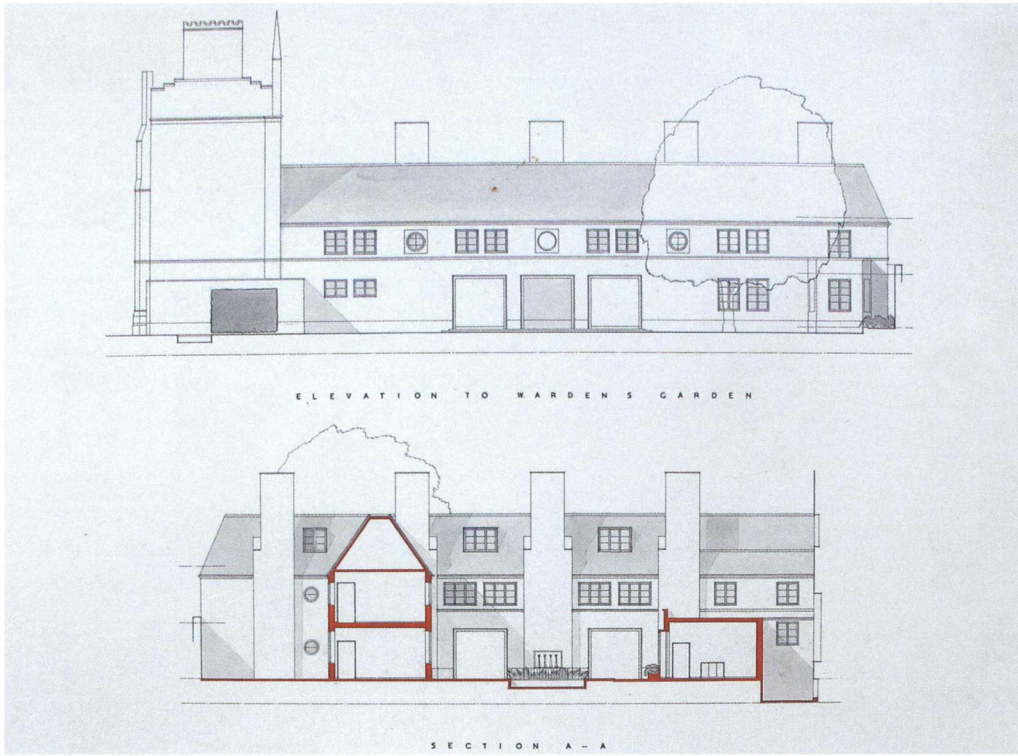


Fig 10. Scott, Shepherd and Breakwell, New Building for All Souls College, Oxford, 1938. Elevation to the Fellows' Garden west (Courtesy the Warden and Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford)

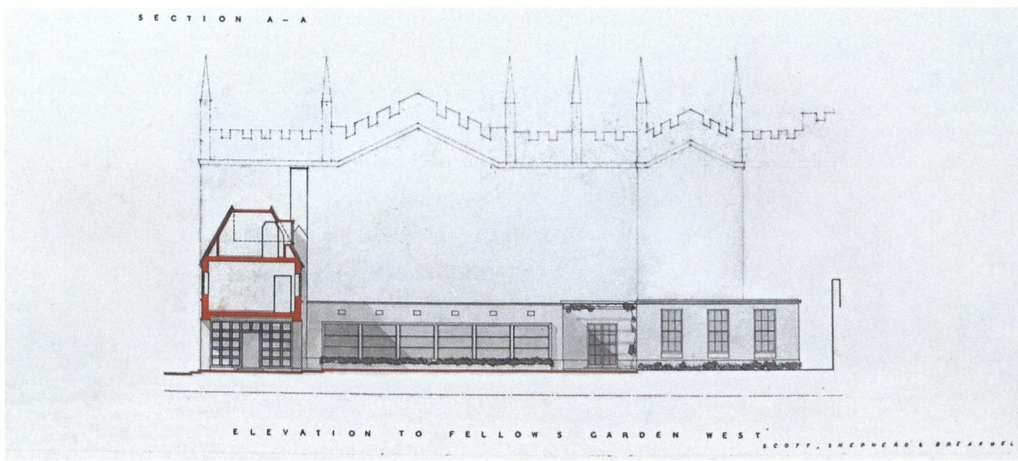
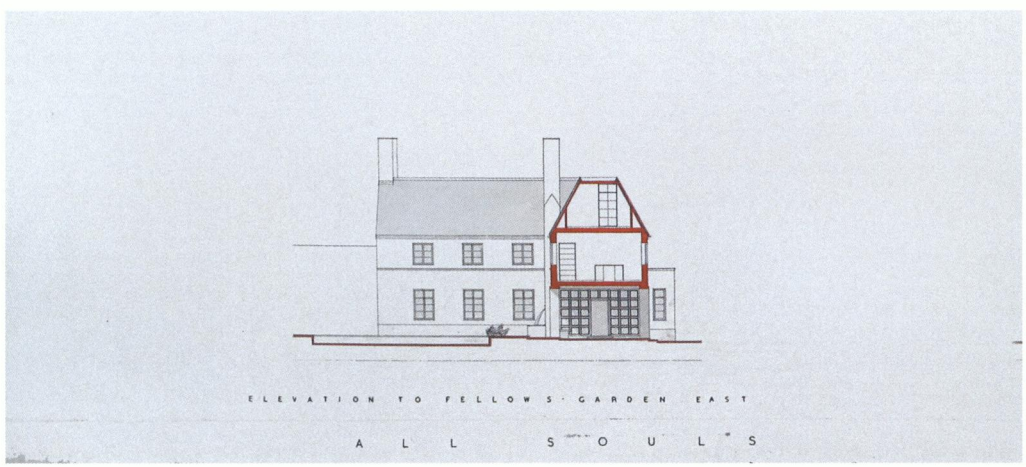


Fig 11. Scott, Shepherd and Breakwell, New Building for All Souls College, Oxford, 1938. Elevation to the Fellows' Garden east (Courtesy the Warden and Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford)



the scheme submitted but in respect of its possible further development, owing to his superior 'ability to plan a thing out in practical detail'.[33] Given Faber's support for Butler, it may seem odd to find him now supporting Fry, although his firm published Gropius's book, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus* in 1935, and in the following year *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius*, by Nikolaus Pevsner.

An absolute majority of the Fellows was required, and Woodward wrote to warn the Warden, that it was 'possible that none of these plans will obtain a decisive majority at a College meeting, and that, even if there is a majority for one set of plans, a considerable minority of Fellows will feel most uneasy and disappointed over a choice made by the majority'.[34] He continued to make the case for Horder, writing to Faber that he wanted to strengthen the chances of Scott and Shepherd against Fry, believing that their scheme was already ahead of the two others.

Fry's report on his scheme is not in the College Archives, but he recalled that, 'My design was based on a reinforced concrete frame with a facing of Portland stone which fitted unobtrusively into its surroundings, but with the benefit of a garage in the basement, reached without touching the famous tree that punctuates the sweep of the High, and communicating by lift with a roof terrace commanding one of the loveliest prospects in Europe: prime examples, both, of putting the machine to good social use.'[35]

Fry's scheme was more varied and picturesque than the project at Christ's College. It was formed from two interlocking solid blocks in an L shape, making the most of its southern aspect with balconies at each level, the first floor being a continuous one with an open metal balustrade. A broad open passageway with columns joined the Fellows' Garden to the rear with the Warden's Garden in front. On the east side, the new lodging for the Manciple was to the north in the base of the short arm of the L, with a Fellow's set facing south. The lift for access to the roof terrace was in the eastern half of the ground floor, and for Fellows wishing to move on there after dinner a short breath of fresh air was gained as they crossed the pillared area in the centre. The pro-Fry report reflected that while:

> On the one hand it is a nuisance to have to climb upstairs or take a lift between two stages of a dinner party ... we think the disadvantage is more than compensated by the light and the view, probably unrivalled in Oxford, which will be obtained from Fry's upper common-room and still more from his terrace outside it.[36]

Fry's recollection of Portland stone seems to be faulty, since the drawing suggests a yellower stone to match the existing buildings.[37] The upper levels were composed of solids and voids, with the Fellows' roof terrace partly beneath an overhanging canopy, of typically thin 1930s' profile, and, towards the centre, a cutaway section linked by a ribbon of concrete to the roofs on either side. In these compositional devices there are reminiscences of Fry's 1930s' house designs, as well as anticipations of post-war buildings such as Congress House and the Royal Festival Hall, all ultimately derived from Le Corbusier.

The 'Fry Five' grappled with the question of aesthetics at some length, but largely in secondary terms of its suitability in relation to the Hawksmoor block at right angles (to which Fry was planning to add a window on the south wall) and the fact that it was not 'ugly or bad in its kind'. They argued for taking a risk, asking, 'Fellows who disagree with us to make sure whether they object to Fry's style as bad, or only unfamiliar. If anything at all can be asserted about the future of taste in architecture, we think that future generations are more likely to accept this style than to condemn it: this seems to be a fair inference from the fact that, with certain exceptions, its supporters in the College are younger than its opponents.' Rather than pushing the difficult area of taste, however, they focused on practicality, arguing that, 'future generations of Fellows are

Fig 12. E. Maxwell Fry, New Building for All Souls College, Oxford, 1938. Perspective (Courtesy the Warden and Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford)

more likely to thank us for two excellent common-rooms, nineteen other rooms with south light, and garage for eight to twelve cars, than for a building which, though more universally inoffensive to our own eyes, provides much less of these amenities.'[38]

Taking a contrary view, Grant Robertson wrote that the bulk of Fry's building was too great for the size of the Quadrangle, while the contrast in styles was 'so violent as to make that part of the College an architectural freak'.[39] A. H. Campbell, a Fellow whom A. L. Rowse remembered as a close friend of Auden and Isherwood who 'shared their frolics in rollicking Weimar Germany', wrote to the Warden from Birmingham:

> I cannot as yet make up my mind about the plans submitted to the College. I feel that, as a building is intended to last for centuries, it is better to be magnificent than mean. I have no objection to a new style as such; Oxford can digest anything so long as it is good in terms of itself. I like big windows and sunlight and I think the idea of a roof common-room and terrace is genius; no other College has got a place where one can enjoy in comfort the view of roofs and towers which is one of the best things in Oxford. Yet I don't somehow like the looks of his proposed building; it doesn't seem a very distinguished example of its style.[40]

The scheme by Scott, Shepherd and Breakwell, which the documents suggest was mainly designed by Shepherd, was unobtrusive, with a long pitched roof concealing a flat roof at its peak to allow a wider footprint. This was interrupted on the north elevation by three massive chimneys, with two passageways either side of the central stack framed by square openings. On the south elevation, the rhythm of paired windows is interspersed with round windows. The whole effect is like a simplified design by Lutyens and not unlike the Pfeiffer Tower at Newnham College, Cambridge of 1938 by the same firm. The Shepherd 'Minority Report' felt that Fry's work would 'date', while their preference would not. They felt that the massing of the more extended L shape of the design was more

flattering to Hawksmoor and that 'the wholly southern aspect of Mr Fry's work is bought at too heavy a price', its height causing it to overlook and dominate the Warden's house.

As at Christ's, although there was a vocal group in favour of a modern design, the majority of Fellows rejected it. Fry wrote in his memoirs of his overnight visit to give a presentation: 'I led them up and down', he recalled, 'I expatiated on the practical benefits of the garage as on the celestial enjoyments of the roof terrace and all in vain, and as their politeness intensified itself I imagined a flight of steps opening in the floor and offering me a dignified exit, for the end, though as yet unannounced, was already predictable.'[41] He felt that this rejection was part of 'a blank wall of public prejudice' despite which the Modern Movement was 'gathering way'. Had Connell been among the contenders, he would surely have fared worse.

The administrative resolution was, as at Christ's, to defer the decision until June 1939, while seeking a further design from Morley Horder, at Woodward's urging, 'because I have been very much impressed by all the work – and particularly by the latest piece of work – which this architect has carried out at Somerville College, where the problem has been rather like our own – i.e. putting up buildings in a crowded and restricted site'.[42] A series of slightly farcical episodes ensued, involving Horder's failure to arrive at the meeting at which he was meant to present a scheme, blamed on a car breakdown. Although he did come a second time, on 22 June 1939, no record of his scheme remains; but it appears that the college held out the possibility of beginning it some time after June 1940. Horder died in 1944, and the new Committee was convened in June 1945. The Domestic Bursar reported that he had secured a supply of Clipsham stone. As at Christ's after the war, 'It was agreed that there should be no competition' and that 'the College should appoint an architect, furnish him with appropriate instructions and receive his drawings for consideration'.[43]

As Howard Colvin explained, 'by now the College had lost all enthusiasm for the "Modern Movement", and wanted a building "which would harmonize with the Warden's Lodgings and other adjacent buildings, perhaps of an "Annish" style."'[44] Their first choice of architect was C. H. James, who produced a very plain scheme, and in 1951, they went to Edward Maufe for a design. Both failed to receive building licences, and only recently the Manciple's house has been extended in this area to provide more rooms.

Colvin argued that, despite Fry's claim that the stylistic clash involved in his design was 'no more violent than the change from medieval to Georgian in the High Street front of the college', the amount of glass proposed 'would have belonged to a different technological and aesthetic world altogether'.[45] He concluded that 'Fry's building would have been an alien architectural presence within the walls of All Souls, and the failure to build it need hardly be regretted'. It is perhaps significant, given Colvin's influence in Oxford as a pioneer patron of post-war Modernism, that the genre for new buildings in historic college settings by then involved a solider and heavier use of stone, even where there was a frame structure to support it. Christ's repaid its debt to Modernism by commissioning Sir Denys Lasdun in 1968 for a terraced set of rooms on the northern boundary of the site.

The benefits that modern architecture might confer failed to impress enough of the voting members of the Colleges, whether in terms of cost and impermanence at Christ's or scale and appropriateness at All Souls. These schemes can be considered as part of the history of patronage in each of their universities, reflecting the difficulty of making effective decisions within an academic body. Each has a minor mythical status in the tale of Modernism's heroic passage from pre-war failure to post-war success among institutional patrons.

1. Walter Gropius to Manon Gropius Burchard, London 6 November 1934, quoted in Reginald Isaacs, *Gropius*, Boston, Little Brown, 1991, p. 192.

2. Waddington to Gropius, 12 November 1935, 7/502, Bauhaus Archiv Berlin. In 1938, Justin Blanco White designed Shawms, a timber house in Conduit Head Road, Cambridge, for another Fellow of Christ's, Dr. W. A. W. Rushton. See Alan Powers, *Modern: the Modern Movement in Britain*, London, Merrell, 2005, pp. 52–3.

3. Barry Supple, 'The Two World Wars', in David Reynolds, ed. *Christ's: A Cambridge College over Five Centuries*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2005, pp. 170 *et seq*.

4. There is general agreement based on documents and oral history that schemes from the Gropius & Fry partnership were under the separate control of the two partners. Christ's was Gropius's project.

5. In 2011, the drawings by Milne, Gropius and a perspective of the post-war scheme by Albert Richardson, photographed by the author in 1985, could not be located.

6. ibid.

7. Oswald P. Milne, report to Master and Fellows, n.d., Christ's College archives.

8. Report by Walter Gropius, Christ's College archives.

9. G. C. Argan, *Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus*, Torino, Giulio Einaudi, 1951, translated by author from French translation by Elsa Bonan, *Walter Gropius et la Bauhaus*, Paris, Denoël/ Gonthier, 1979, p. 153.

10. Waddington to Gropius, 14 January 1937, 9/358, Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin.

11. Report by Charles Holden, 15 January 1937, Christ's College archives.

12. 'Reply of Messrs Gropius and Fry to Questions concerning Hobson Street Building', Christ's College archives.

13. ibid.

14. Waddington to Gropius, 14 January 1937; Maxwell Fry, *Autobiographical Sketches*, London, Elek, 1975, p. 150.

15. Supple, op. cit., p. 171.

16. Extract of letter from Dr Gropius to the Master, 13 January 1937, Christ's College Archive.

17. *Architects' Journal*, vol. 87, 3 February, 1938, pp. 202–3 and 10 February, p. 241.

18. Darwin to Adams, 29 April, 1937. All Souls archive.

19. 'The Gropius Building', *Christ's College Magazine*, Michaelmas Term, 1953, pp. 8–12.

20. *Christ's College Magazine*, no. 178, 1954, pp. 8–9.

21. See S. Green and Peregrine Horden, *All Souls and the Wider World*, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 1–12.

22. A. S. G. Butler report, of 11 May 1930, All Souls archive

23. Building Committee, All Souls archive. The Manciple is the official in charge of catering and supplies.

24. Sir Ernest Llewellyn Woodward, to the Joint Committee on 28 June 1936, All Souls archive.

25. Minutes of Building Sub-Committee, 8 November 1936. The other members of the committee were The Warden (William Adams), the Sub-Warden, (E. L. Woodward), Estates Bursar (Geoffrey Faber), Sir Charles Grant Robertson (then serving as Vice-Chancellor of Birmingham University where he was involved in many building projects), Sir Edmund Craster of the Bodleian Library (responsible for commissioning Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's New Bodleian), Ian Bowen, A. M. H. Jones, Sir Hubert Henderson, and D. A. Routh.

26. Geoffrey Faber to Warden Adams, 11 November 1936, All Souls archive.

27. Hope Bagenal to 'Hubert', 1 February 1937, All Souls archive. On Bagenal, see Alan Powers, 'The Classical Theory of Hope Bagenal', in Frank Salmon, ed., *The Persistence of the Classical, Essays on Architecture presented to David Watkin*, London, Philip Wilson, 2008, pp. 40–55.

28. Sir Ian MacAlister to Warden Adams, 28 May 1937, All Souls archive. The other names were: Scott, Shepherd and Breakwell; J. Hubert Worthington; A. S. G. Butler, A. E. Richardson, Amyas Connell, the Hon. Humphrey Pakington; W. G. Newton; R. Fielding Dodd; Edward Maufe; Verner O. Rees; Louis De Soissons; Anthony Minoprio; C. H. Holden; C. H. James; Maxwell Ayrton.

29. In *Unbuilt Oxford*, (London, Yale University Press, 1983, p. 161) Howard Colvin lists Hampshire as a supporter of Fry's scheme for All Souls. According to the DNB, at Princeton in the 1960s 'he found its pastiche Gothic painful'. As Warden of Wadham College he oversaw extensions by Gillespie, Kidd & Coia in 1971–2.

30. Minutes of Building Committee, 30 October 1938, All Souls archive.

31. Recorded in summary of the building committee's activities, All Souls archive.

32. The Minority Report is not in the College archives, but is referred to in a letter from A. H. Campbell to the Warden, 15 November 1938.

33. 'Report of the five members of the Committee who prefer the design submitted by Mr E. Maxwell Fry', All Souls archive.

34. Woodward to Warden Adams, November 1930.

35. Fry, op. cit., p. 153.

36. Report of the five members, loc. cit.

37. Portland stone was not used in Oxford before the work of Powell and Moya and the Architects' Co-Partnership in the late 1950s.

38. Report of the five members, loc. cit.

39. Robertson to Warden Adams, All Souls archive.

40. A. L. Rowse, *All Souls in My Time*, London, Duckworth, 1993, p. 181; Campbell, loc. cit.

41. Fry, op. cit. p. 154.

42. Woodward to Warden Adams, November 1938 (printed text of letter for circulation), All Souls archive.

43. Summary of Building Committee Minutes, All Souls archive.

44. Colvin, op. cit., p. 166.

45. ibid., p. 166.