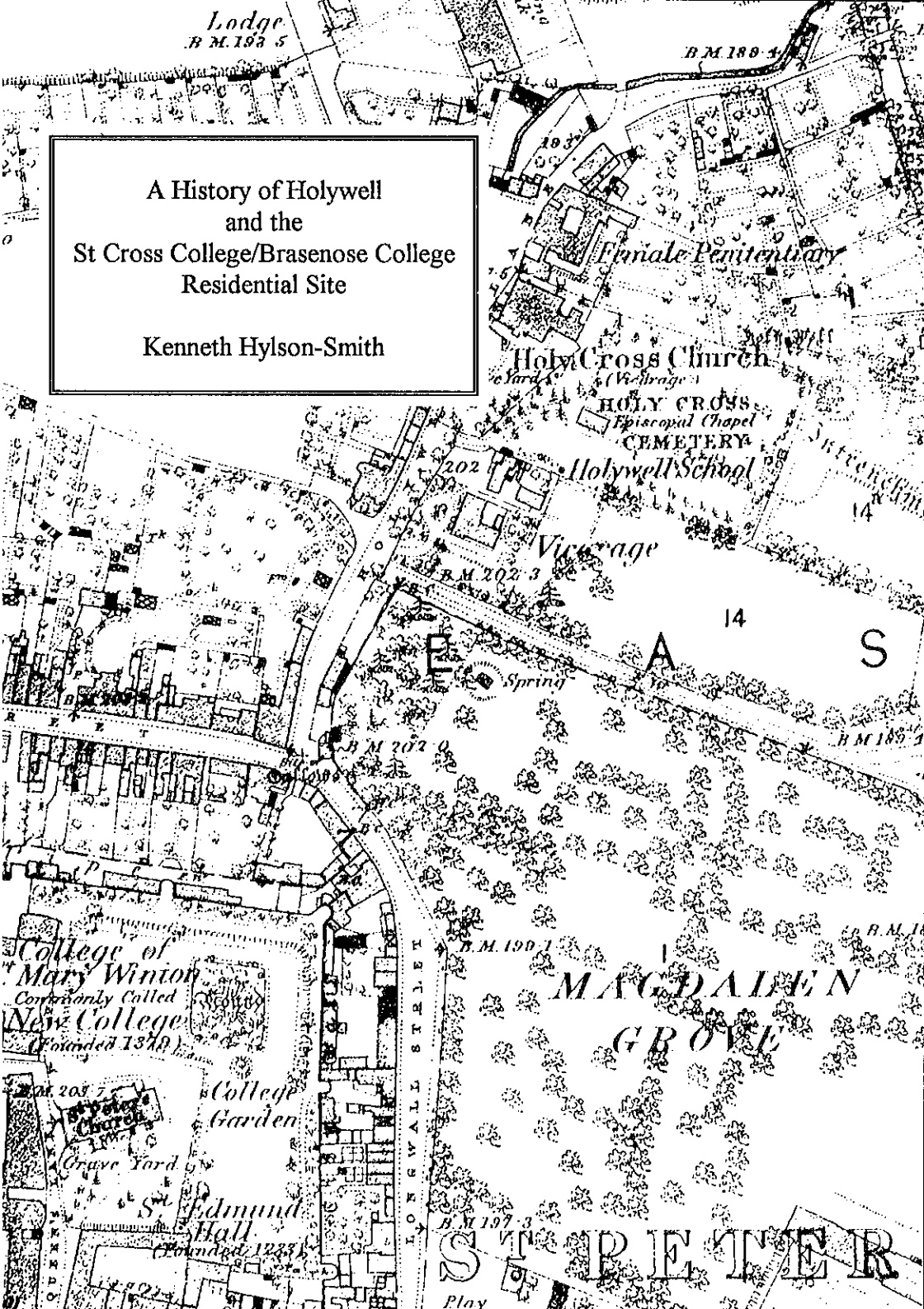


Lodge
B.M. 193 5

B.M. 189 4

A History of Holywell
and the
St Cross College/Brasenose College
Residential Site

Kenneth Hylson-Smith



Ennals Penitentiary

Holy Cross Church
(W. Strage)

HOLY CROSS
Episcopal Chapel
CEMETERY

Holywell School

Vicarage

Spring

College of
Mary Winton
Commonly Called
New College
(Founded 1379)

College
Garden

St. Edmund
Hall
(Founded 1227)

MAGDALEN
GROVE

ST. PETER

Play

This booklet is published as a contribution towards the celebrations for the opening of the St Cross College and Brasenose College residential buildings at 10 St Cross Road on 25 September 1996.

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The Friends of Holywell Cemetery for Fig.5

Cover illustration:

The first (1875) Ordnance Survey map of the Holywell area.

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**A History of Holywell
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Residential Site**

Kenneth Hylson-Smith

From the Norman Conquest to the sixteenth century

Throughout the Middle Ages the area to the north of Magdalen College Grove was known as Holywell Green or Common. It appears to have been a settlement which, in fact if not in law, was a suburb of Oxford. From the eleventh century the main features were the church of Holywell or St Cross, which was a chapel of St Peter-in-the-East; a Manor-House, which seems to have been quite distinct from Oxford in 1086; and the holy well or spring, from which the area took its name, which appears to have been located immediately to the north of the church (although at various times it has been assigned to as many as four different sites), and to have been a place where miracles were alleged to have occurred.

The Manor House was sited at the junction of the modern Manor Road and St Cross Road. In the fourteenth century the buildings, which were surrounded by a wall, included a hall, solar, chamber and kitchen, a separate oven or bake-house, and outhouses including two granges, one built in 1292. A vinery was mentioned in 1292, and a dovecote near the kitchen in 1338. At least four gates led into the area, one of them the great gate with a room over it. In 1086 the Manor was owned by Robert d'Oilly, but was held by St Peter-in-the-East and passed to successive rectors until it was appropriated by Merton College in 1294. Throughout the fourteenth century the college kept Holywell in its own hands, and administered it through a bailiff, but from at least 1403 the demesne was leased to farmers.

The Manor had considerable jurisdictional powers, and in 1337 a thief was condemned to death by the Manor court and hanged. There was a manorial prison in 1292, at which time two prisoners died there; but as other prisoners were taken to Oxford Castle jail, it appears that Holywell prison, as with other manorial prisons, could not keep prisoners for more than about three days. There were some cases where the town was involved in judicial matters, as in 1383 when the coroner of North Gate Hundred held an inquest on a friar found dead in Holywell field, but it was not until 1667 that it was decided by the Kings Bench that Holywell was part of the City.

The parish bounds, first described in 1315, ran from Smithgate to the junction of the modern Parks Road and Norham Gardens; then to the river Cherwell and along the river to the garden of St John's Hospital; and from there to Crowell at the north-east corner of the town wall, and along the line of the wall back to Smithgate. Crowell (crow's spring) was a pond located at the point where Holywell merged into Longwall Street. The inclosure of Magdalen College Grove in the later fifteenth century caused the southern boundary of Holywell to be moved slightly further north to follow the line of the new wall. The section of the boundary along the town wall was frequently in dispute. In 1337 it was agreed that forfeitures arising between the outer bank and the inner wall of the town defences should be shared between the town bailiffs and those of Holywell. In 1383 the Mayor swore not to interfere in the affairs of Holywell.

Other landmarks in medieval times included a cockpit, which was a circular building with a steeply pitched roof, to the north-east of the Manor House, beside the river; gallows in Longwall; and a pillory, probably located on the north side of Holywell Street, perhaps at the corner of Longwall Street and St Cross Road where the stocks stood until the nineteenth century. The land on which the Brasenose College and St Cross College buildings are located, together with the adjacent cemetery, was the village green. Longwall Street and St Cross Road led from outside the east gate of the town to the church. Holywell Street and

its eastward extension, Benseval, led to Holywell mill. At the cross roads there was a stone cross.

A further feature of the parish was Holywell mill. Henry Simeon granted a moiety of Holywell about 1200, to William Hosar, who soon afterwards granted it to Osenev Abbey. Between 1266 and 1279 Osenev granted it to Merton College. In 1336 Merton claimed that, working day and night, it ground ten quarters of corn a day. It presumably served the tenants of the college in Holywell until the city lost its monopoly of grinding freemen's corn in the seventeenth century.

The rural nature of the area is shown by the activities of its few inhabitants. In 1068 twenty-three men held gardens in Holywell, presumably supplying the Oxford market. Domesday Book states that the land on which these gardens were located was quit of geld. The word, 'hortuli', to describe the plots of land and their use, may be the earliest reference in English history to market gardening. In 1086 there was land for one plough in Holywell. In the mid-fourteenth century there were three ploughs to serve a nine furlong plot and three smaller pieces of land between the Cherwell and the modern Parks Road. It was not divided into fields, but at least one furlong seems to have been left fallow each year, and some system of crop rotation was probably followed. The main crop grown on the demesne was barley; one furlong was usually sown with wheat and one with rye, and small quantities of peas, beans and vetch. The sale of corn was the major element in the economy of the Manor in the fourteenth century. It was normally sold in Oxford.

The population of the parish was never very large. In the thirteenth century there were houses on the corner of the modern Parks Road and Holywell Street, along the north side of Holywell Street, and in Benseval Street, along the edge of the town. Most of the tenants of the Manor and of St John's Hospital in the parish were cottagers cultivating their own gardens of about half an acre adjoining their houses, where they grew corn, vegetables, and herbs, and kept a few animals. A few of them held acre or half acre strips in the fields, mainly in the mill croft by the mill, and other places in the south-east of the parish. A majority of the tenants kept pigs, there being as many as fifty-four recorded in 1337. By the fourteenth century sheep and cattle were also kept, and sheep became increasingly important in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. In most years meat, cheese, eggs, butter and milk were sold to Oxford residents.

From the sixteenth century to the present day

The present Manor House dates from the early sixteenth century, with the original indenture dated May 1516.

In 1531 Merton College leased the Manor to Edward Napper or Napier, in whose family it remained until the end of the seventeenth century. The Napiers were a Roman Catholic family, and throughout their tenancy the Manor was a well-known refuge for their persecuted fellow Catholics. George Napier, a son of Edward, was born in the Manor House, became a Roman Catholic priest, was captured, convicted of treason and hanged at Oxford in 1610. The name, Napier, is preserved by the small bridge over Holywell millstream, at the bottom of Manor Road, which is still known as Napper's Bridge.

In the early part of the eighteenth century the Manor was administered by bailiffs, some of whom lived in the Manor House. Later the demesne was leased to absentee landlords.

The seventeenth century was a time of considerable development in the parish. One group of houses towards the west end of Holywell was built by the University soon after 1612 to re-house those made homeless by the building of the Schools quadrangle. Between 1620 and 1640 at least twenty-two houses were constructed in the parish. One interesting seventeenth-century resident was William Byrd, the Oxford stonecutter and mason, who had his yard in Holywell. It was Byrd whom Wren appointed as 'carver to the Sheldonian Theatre', and who fashioned the original emperors' heads, erected in 1669.

During this period there were slight signs of a more lively communal life than in former times. In 1641 a picture of Edward Gollidge, or College, 'a great puritan' who was holding frequent conventicles in his house in Oxford, was placed in a tub on the top of a maypole in Holywell and fired by some of the revellers. Cock-fighting had become a fashionable spectator sport by the later seventeenth century, and Holywell had two principal pits close to one another. One was a polygonal building with a conical roof associated with the Cardinal's Head at the corner of Holywell and St Cross Road, and the other was a semi-circular stone building by the north side of the Manor House, which had become the Cockpit by 1750.

Nonetheless, the rural aspect remained (see map of 1675 - Fig. 1). By the mid-seventeenth century there were only eight remaining operational mills in Oxford, and two of these were at Holywell. The others were Osney, Castle, Hinksey, Iffley, Sandford and Botley. It is worthy of note that the stream on which the Holywell mills stood was a medieval man-made cut on the Cherwell, between Parsons Pleasure and Magdalen Bridge; and that the last of the Holywell Mills was still working in 1976, although it had been converted into a house by 1900. A further indication of the rural nature of the area was the development of market-gardening, especially in the Commonwealth and Restoration periods. Indeed, the parish was still largely agricultural by the middle of the nineteenth century. It was not until the early twentieth century that most of the parish had been built up or was used as playing fields.

During the Civil War cannon were positioned at Holywell. There was a defensive wall about two hundred metres away from the city wall, and between that and the city wall there were entrenchments (see 1675 map - Fig. 1, and also Fig. 2). Inside the defences were 'guards' at Holywell and Holywell mill. The fortifications consisted of ditches and ramparts designed by Sir Bernard Gomme, a Dutch engineer. The distance from the bottom of the ditch to the top of the rampart was about five metres. Sharpened sticks (storm poles) were embedded in the rampart, projecting downwards to deter attackers climbing the sides. The ramparts were lined with turf or hurdles and behind them would have been a raised walkway (firestep) from which a defender could see the enemy and fire his musket.

During the eighteenth century the most notable developments were an increase in the number of houses along the western side of Holywell Lane; the addition of a second bowling green on the west side of the river, to the east of the church; and the use of the old Manor House as a workhouse (see Fig. 2).

The St Cross Road site was the focus for two important and related nineteenth-century developments: the parochial alignment with the Oxford movement in its second phase, and

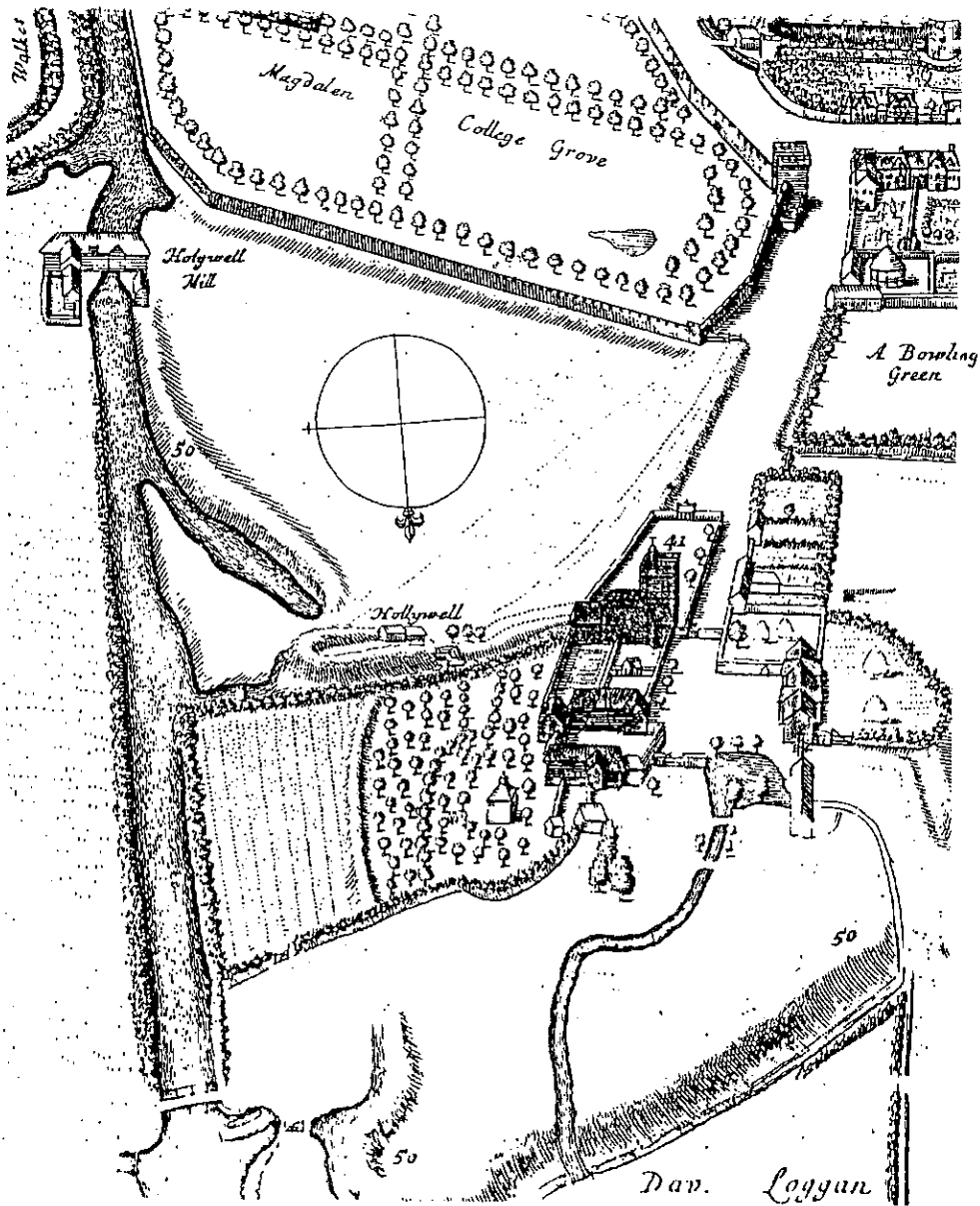


Fig.1. Holywell in 1675 - a plan by David Loggan.

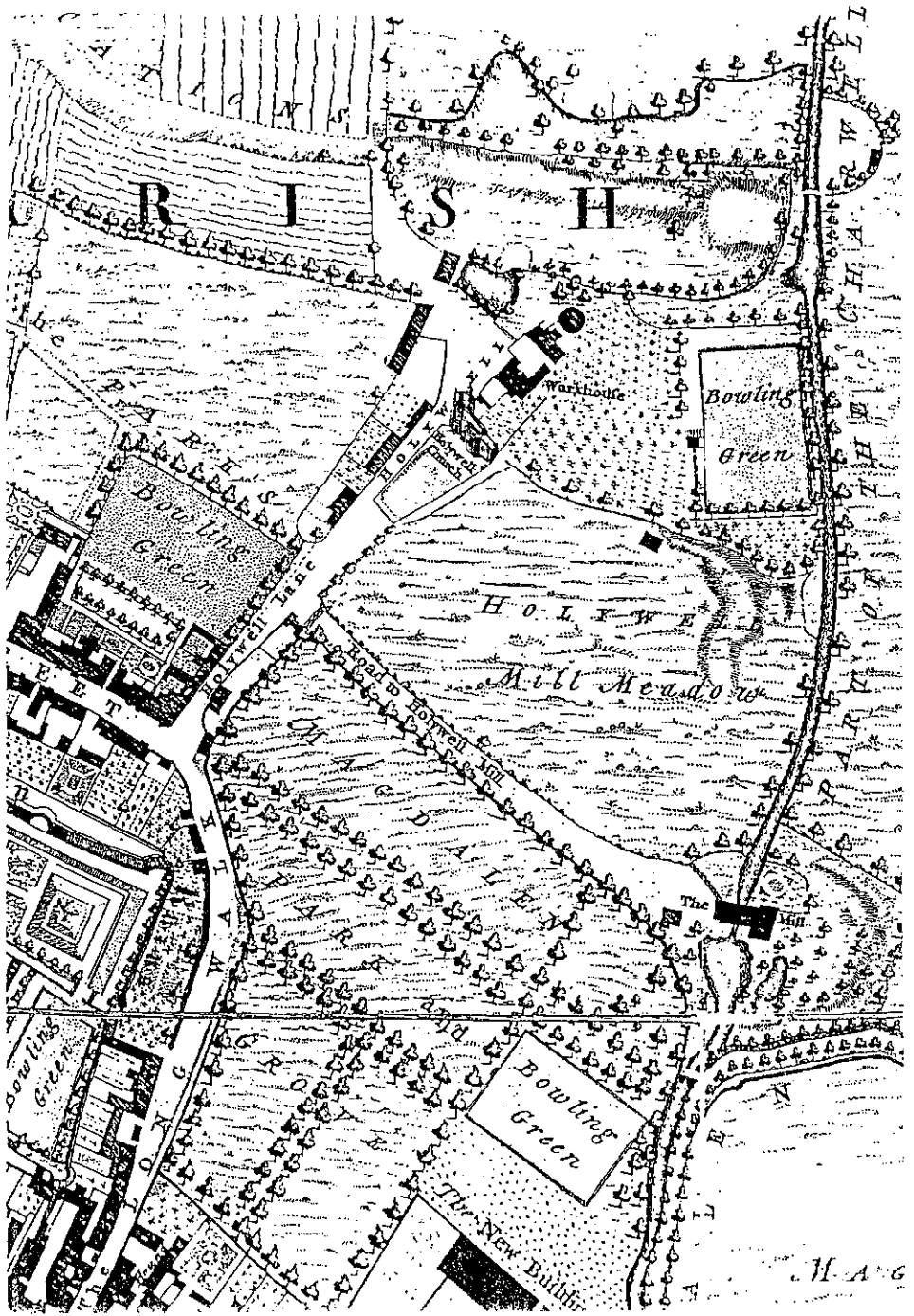


Fig. 2. Holywell in the late eighteenth century.

the attempt to provide more adequately for the educational needs of the parish, and of Oxford in general.

After John Henry Newman seceded to the Roman Catholic Church in 1845 Oxford ceased to be the central focus for the Tractarian or Oxford movement of which he had been a leader. Its principles were adopted by various parishes throughout the country. Holywell identified itself with the post-Oxford movement development and stressed the external signs of the catholicity of the Church of England. The appearance in the church from 1849 onwards of crosses, candles, altar frontals, and some vestments, the teaching of the doctrine of Eucharistic sacrifice, the encouragement of devotion to the Virgin Mary, and auricular confession, all caused an outcry, particularly in evangelical circles. This identification of the parish with a High Church tradition was reinforced in 1862, when a community of Anglican Sisters from the convent of Clewer made a home in the Manor House and devoted themselves to the work of reformation and charity. They remained in the Manor until 1930 and then moved to a site at Littlemore.

The nineteenth-century O.S. map (Fig. 3) shows that the modern St Cross Road was still Holywell Lane; and that there was a small Episcopal Chapel in the cemetery grounds.

The church was closely identified with the provision of education in the parish, especially from the mid-nineteenth century. Holywell was one of the areas in which dame schools and small private schools were concentrated in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. But in 1818 there was no educational provision in the parish for the children of the poor, eleven of whom were attending the National school in the city. Five schools were mentioned in 1833, one supported by subscriptions, the others wholly at the parents' expense. By the middle of the nineteenth century the parish was considered to be predominantly middle class, and Holywell continued to be a favourite area for private schools. This brings us to the important changes in the use of the St Cross Road site in the mid-nineteenth century, which are still evident today, and to the very interesting schoolhouse on the site.

The earliest part of the building is the north porch, once a lychgate. This is dated 1848. Then came the adjoining cemetery lodge, which was built in 1850. The intriguing and puzzling aspect of this older part of the building is the tile hung gables; for Victorian tile-hanging was still extremely rare about 1850. It is one of only two known examples in Oxford (the other being St Paul's School in Walton Street) of the pioneer efforts of the nineteenth century Oxford sculptor, Thomas Grimsley, to construct buildings without using timber. Over one hundred years later the distinguished painter, John Piper, made replica tiles to replace some that were missing. Grimsley's use of structural terracotta to support a roof can still be seen today.

The school room that Grimsley built onto his cemetery lodge was pulled down in 1858 to make way for a larger school room constructed of more conventional materials, designed by the Victorian architect Charles Buckeridge, who was also responsible for a number of churches, schools and other buildings in the Oxford area in the second half of the nineteenth century. The building is of coursed rubble stone with ashlar dressings and is gothic in style. In these early years of the use of the site for a school, the school room annexed to the lodge was for boys and girls, and there was a separate building for infants. A Vicarage was constructed to the south of these buildings, with the surrounding area being used as a garden. (For the layout of this site and the schoolhouse see the Fig. 4) The cost of constructing the

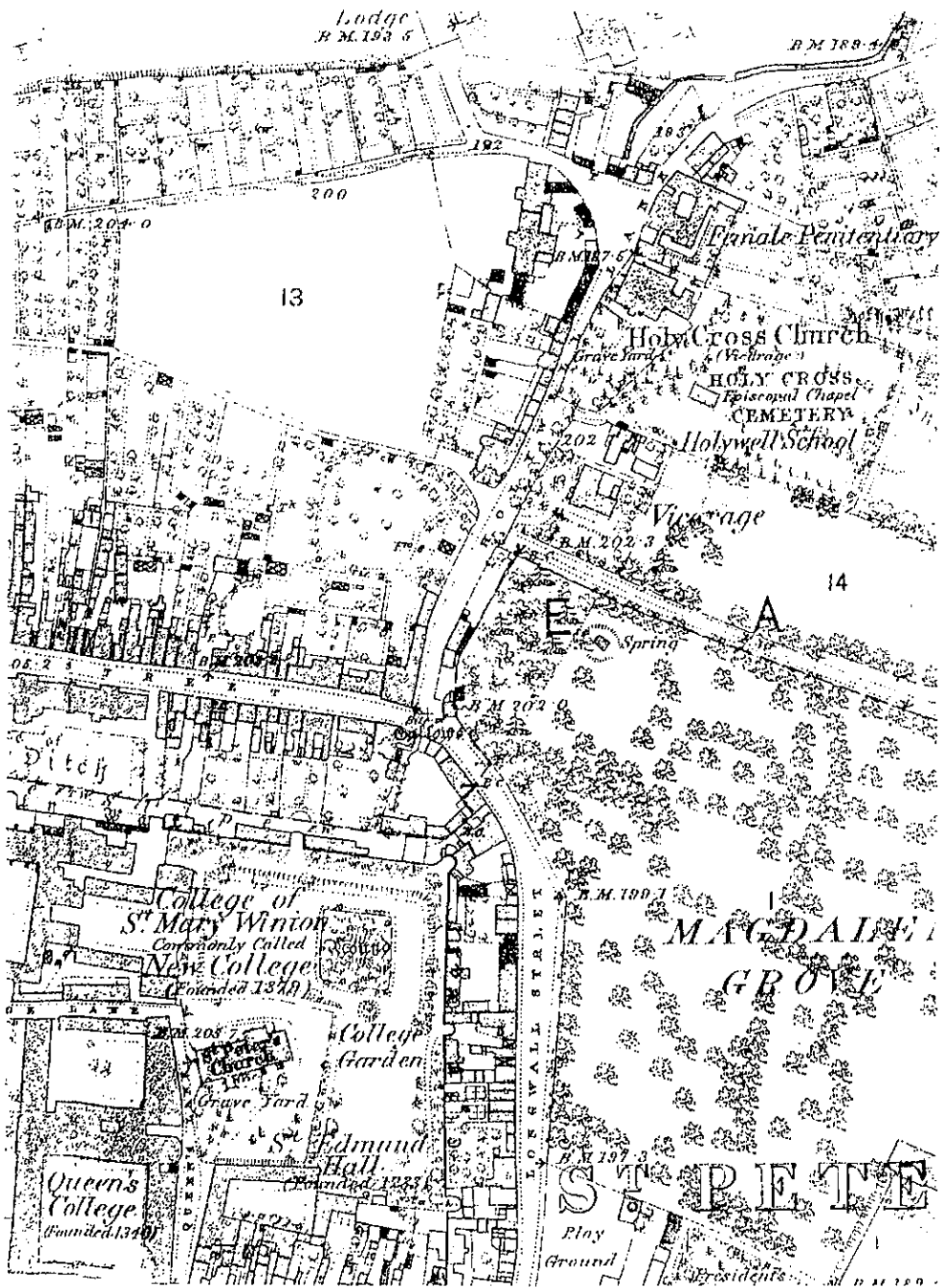
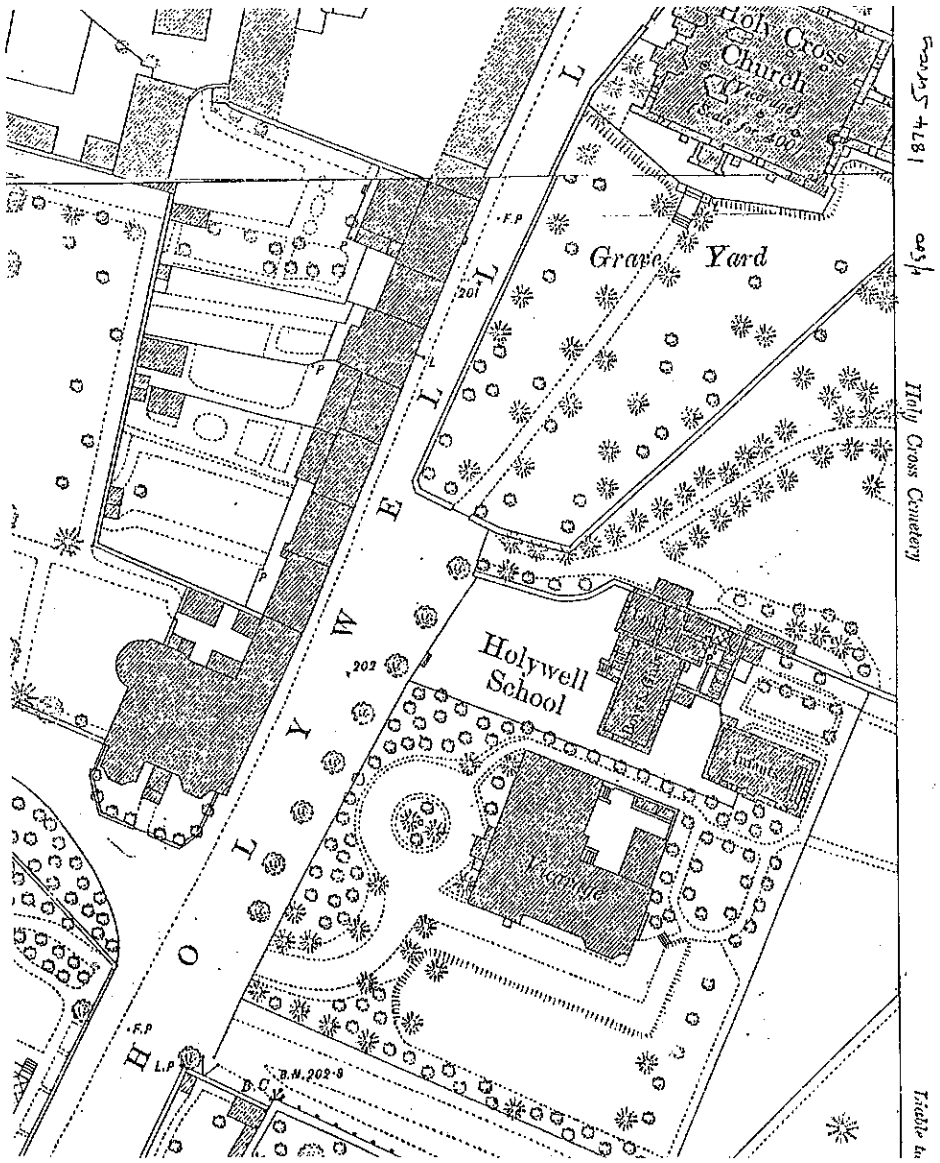


Fig. 3. The first (1875) Ordnance Survey map of the Holywell area.



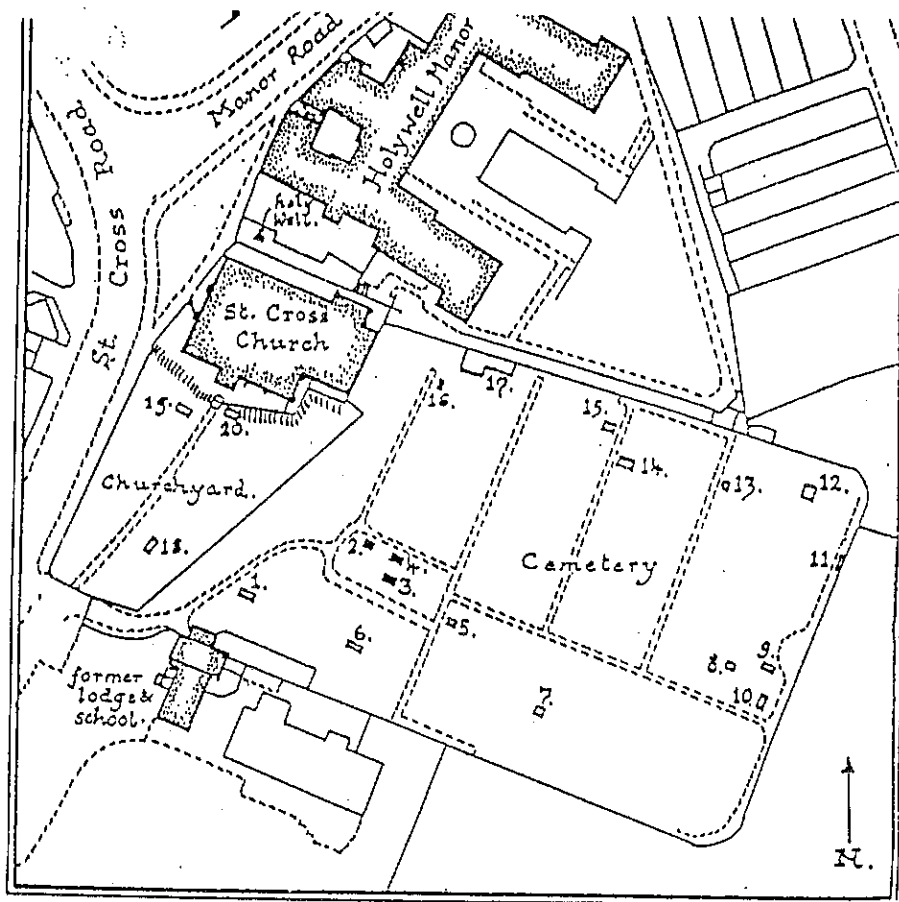
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Holy Cross Cemetery

Tribble &

Fig. 4. The Vicarage and the school in 1874.



KEY

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Kenneth Grahame (1859-1932) | 12. Sir Henry (1915-1900) and Sarah (1815-1878) |
| 2. Maurice Bowra (1898-1971) | 13. Hastings Rashdall (1958-1878) |
| 3. Kenneth Tynan (1927-1980) | 14. Table Tomb |
| 4. H.V.D. Dyson (1896-1975) | 15. Charles Williams (1886-1945) |
| 5. James Blish (1921-1975) | 16. Sir John Cairns (1896-1952) |
| 6. Theodore and Sibley, Drowned (1893) | 17. John Burgon (1813-1888) |
| 7. Sir John Stainer (1840-1901) | 18. Arthur Lloyd (d 1700) |
| 8. Walter Pater (1939-1894) | 19. William Merryman (d 1628) |
| 9. Montagu Burrows (1819-1905) | 20. Knowles Family |
| 10. Sir John Rhys (1840-1915) | |
| 11. Palmer and Poulton Family | |

Fig.5. Holywell cemetery.

school was met by the vicar of St Peter-in-the-East, Edmond Hophouse, to whom a rent of £16 a year was paid on the understanding that the parish would eventually buy the building. A public appeal raised £300 to clear the capital costs and provided £35 a year for running expenses.

The lodge was used as a residence for teachers, and the school was for the education of the poor according to the principles of the Church of England. Although there was room for a hundred and twenty-seven children, attendance never rose above sixty-five, and in 1872 only twenty-five children were being taught by a certificated mistress. A re-organisation took place in 1923, whereby St Cross became a junior and infant school which received twenty-four children from the parish of St Peter-in-the-East, and sent its senior girls to that parish. Senior boys attended various other boys schools in the city. In 1926 'refinement in manners and the elements of good taste' were considered to be the principal aims of the school. By 1935 only forty-five children were on the register and the school was closed in July 1938.

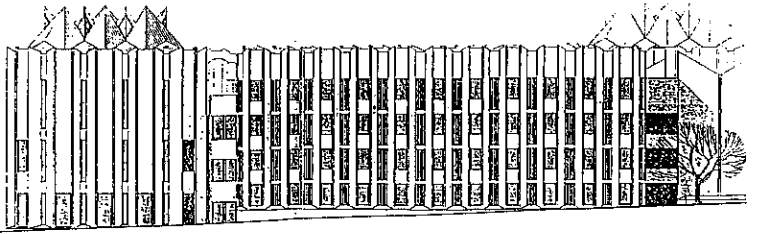
Adjacent to the schoolhouse, on the north side, there is the cemetery, which was one of three opened in the late 1840's to relieve the pressure on small central churchyards. As at Osney and St Sepulchre's, the chapel, which was constructed by H J Underwood in 1848, has been demolished. Holywell cemetery served the eastern half of the city, and its plan (see Fig. 5) shows the eminence of many University figures buried there, whose gravestones or memorials can be found among the profuse shrubs and mature trees.

In 1965 the plot of land previously occupied by the school and the Vicarage was purchased by the University from Merton College on behalf of St Cross College, with an additional, smaller, adjoining piece of land incorporated into the purchase in 1967. The Vicarage was demolished to make room for the use of the site by the College.

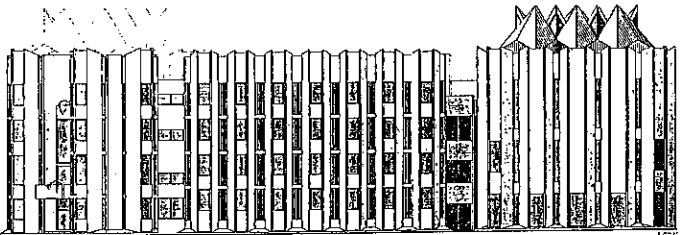
St Cross College use of the site

St Cross College was founded in 1965 and immediately took up residence on the St Cross Road site. The intention was to re-develop the site, and in 1966 the London architects, Stout and Litchfield, drew up plans for a £1m building (see Fig. 6). Lack of funds prevented the implementation of the plan, and the forty or so Fellows, together with a body of students which grew from five to about thirty-five in the ensuing fifteen years, when the College moved to a new site on St Giles, settled in to the little Victorian school room, which housed their library where Governing Body meetings were held, and the prefabricated hut behind it, which housed their offices, Common Room, kitchens, and the electronic consoles that linked them with the Atlas Computer thirteen miles away at Chilton. The College began a low profile development with the restoration of the exterior of the school room, and looked forward to the eventual construction of a range of modest, but elegant buildings along the street frontage designed to complement and offset the schoolhouse.

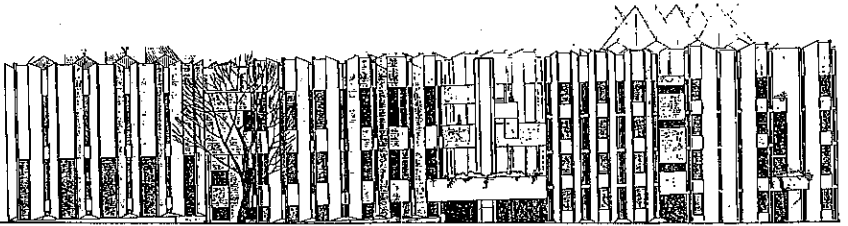
Such development became unnecessary when the opportunity to move to part of the Pusey House buildings on St Giles resulted in the College transferring to its new main site in 1981. For the next thirteen years the schoolhouse and the wooden hut were hired out to various organisations, and most notably to the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies which used the buildings as its base from 1986 to 1994.



NORTH ELEVATION - TO ST CROSS CHURCHYARD



EAST ELEVATION



SOUTH ELEVATION - TO LAKE



WEST ELEVATION - TO ST CROSS ROAD

Fig.6. The 1966 elevations for a possible building on the site.

In July 1995 construction work began on a joint scheme with Brasenose College to provide two residential buildings on the site, one for fifty students of Brasenose, and the other for forty-nine students of St Cross, with the schoolhouse being jointly used by both colleges. The old lodge part of the building provides residential accommodation for a caretaker, and the school room is divided into rooms for tutorial and other purposes. The new complex of buildings was opened on 25 September 1996, and the first students took up residence on 30 September 1996.

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