# Christopher Codrington and the Library:

The Building and the Statue

1. The College decides to build

By 1710, the year of the Codrington bequest, the College had been contemplating a major rebuilding for nearly a decade. The medieval cloister to the north of the Chapel (right) had been demolished in 1703, and between then and 1710 the College commissioned a series of designs for a spacious new quadrangle on the northern half of its site.
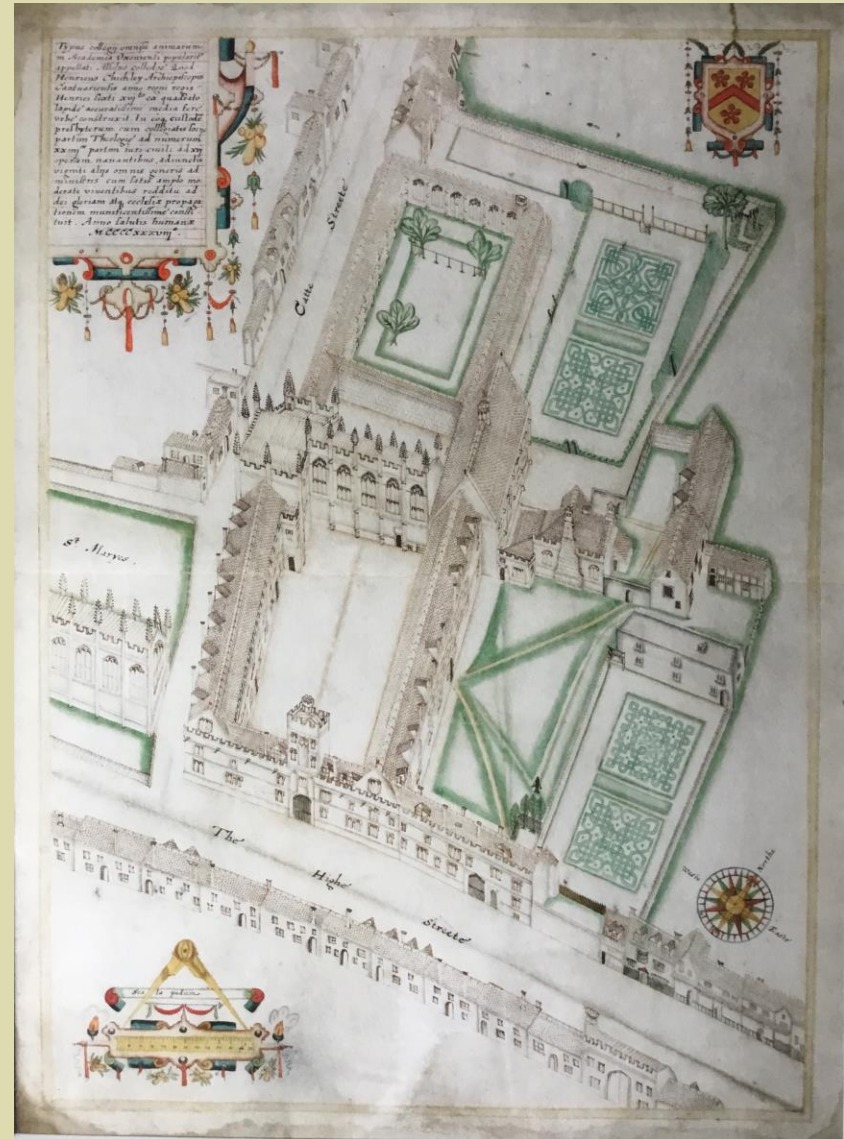
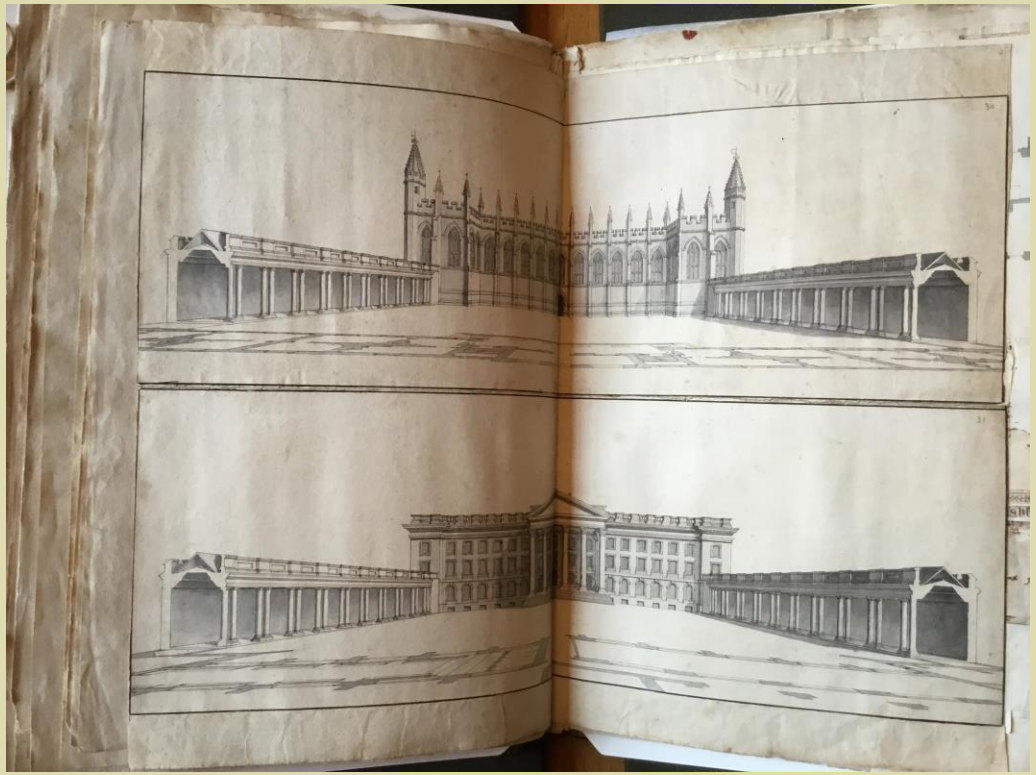Several individuals submitted designs, including:

George Clarke, a fellow of the college, who presided over the process;

Henry Aldrich, Dean of Christ Church;

the London-based architects John Talman and Nicholas Hawksmoor;

the Oxford mason William Townesend.

These early proposals share the same basic ingredients: a south range containing the retained chapel and a rebuilt hall (top); a north range containing a common room in the middle and accommodation for 14 fellows over three levels (bottom); and, to east and west, covered walkways linking the two main ranges. In all these schemes, the south range perpetuates the late medieval architecture of the founder's buildings, while the north range, with its classical portico and spacious accommodation, adopts an up-to-date classicism reminiscent of a large country house.

2. The influence of the Codrington bequest

The bequest had a transformative effect on these schemes, for two main reasons. Firstly, a major programme of rebuilding became a viable prospect. Six thousand pounds was a significant sum of money in 1710, enough to build a large country house. And while the eventual cost of the Library would rise to £12,101 0s. 5d., it was the Codrington bequest that enabled the start of work in June 1716. The additional cost was met through investing a portion of the original sum.

Secondly, the terms of the bequest forced a major rethink of the new quadrangle's intended function. Some of the early schemes had proposed the rebuilding of the college library on its existing site in the old quadrangle. But none of them had envisaged its wholesale relocation to the new quadrangle, as was now decided upon.

3. Hawksmoor's North Quadrangle.

It was at this moment, and in response to this change of brief, that the design for the new quadrangle was in effect turned through ninety degrees. The basic idea for this new configuration was probably Clarke's, but it was Nicholas Hawksmoor who was entrusted with working it through as a finished design.

FIG. 60. Plan of the College in 1987
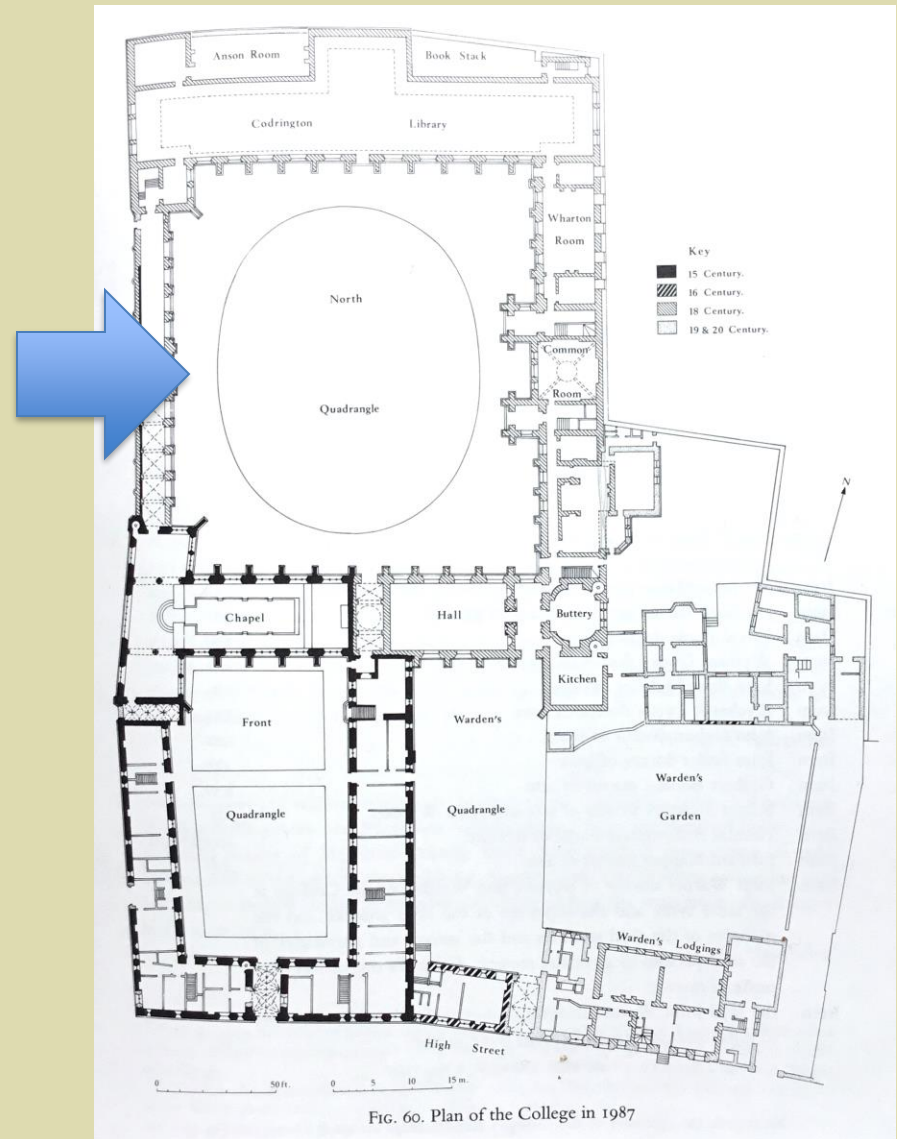
Nicholas Hawksmoor (c. 1661-1736) was an architect of compelling originality, best known for his spectacular churches in the east end of London, which he designed in the same decade as All Souls. He was a former pupil of Sir Christopher Wren — a one-time member of College — and he was well known in Oxford as the architect of the Clarendon Building (1712-15).

His bust by Sir Henry Cheere is preserved at All Souls (right).

COLLEGIUM OMNIUM ANIMARUM

On 17 February 1715, Hawksmoor submitted six drawings of the design, with a lengthy written explanation. These were formally approved on 19 February. The executed design, seen above in a later engraving, is still focussed on the residential block, but this now occupies the east range, where the celebrated twin towers provide the focal point of the larger ensemble.

The north range was given over to the Library (L), which fell into place as the northern counter-part to the hall and chapel to the south (R).
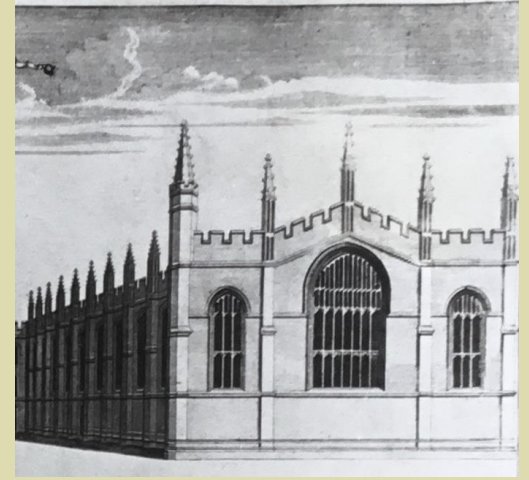
Symmetry dictated that the Library should be Gothic, to agree with the perpendicular architecture of the Chapel, which in turn suggested that the quadrangle as a whole should be Gothic. Hence the continuation of the buttresses and pinnacles across all three ranges, and the remarkable twin towers.

But the symmetry and regularity of the North Quadrangle also testify to Hawksmoor's belief in (as he saw it) the superior values of classical architecture. Indeed, the general configuration of the design, with its three main ranges prefaced by a lower, screened arcade, was based on a contemp-orary building typology - the French townhouse, or hôtel de ville.
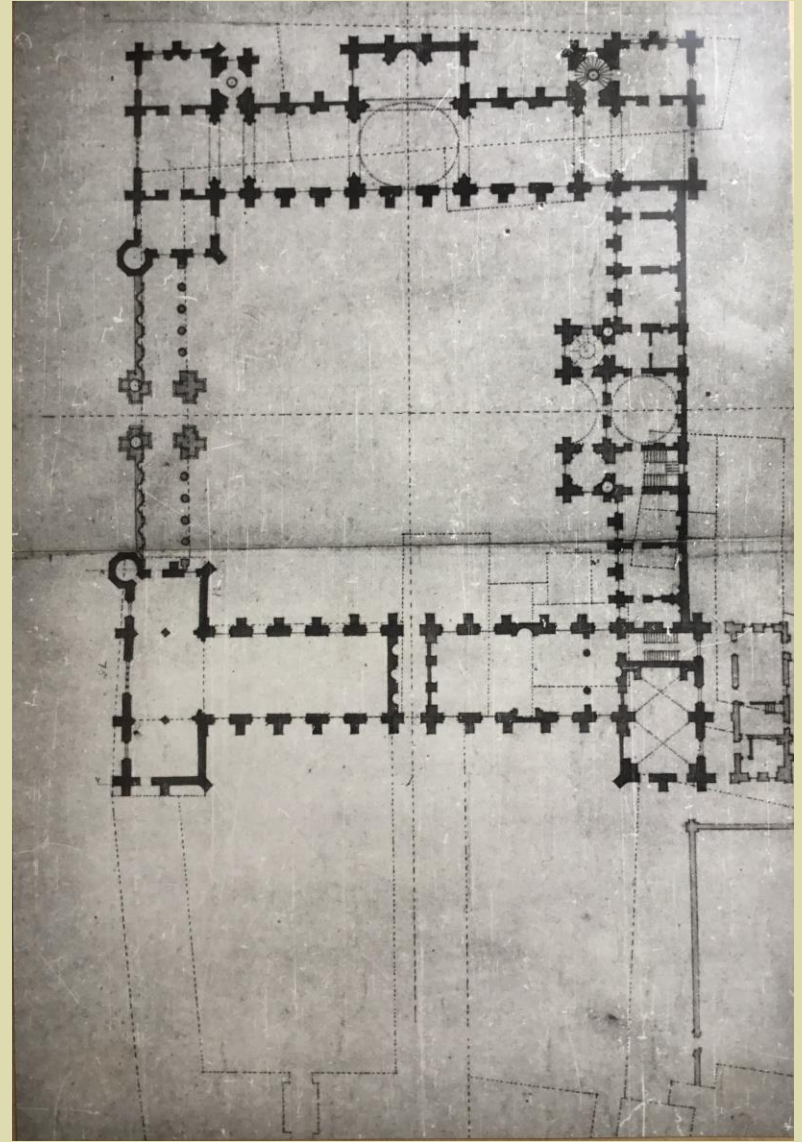
The constraints of symmetry also dictated that the Library should be on the ground floor, which was without precedent in Oxford or Cambridge.

We see all this in the spectacular perspective that Hawksmoor submitted to the College in February 1715, today in the Bodleian Library (right). The drawing imagines the North Quadrangle as seen from Radcliffe Square, which was conceived at exactly the same moment. We no longer see a medieval college of inward-looking buildings, but an outward-facing ensemble of monumental public buildings.

4. The new library

Although the library assumes a subsidiary role in the composition, it was in other respects the dominant element of the new quadrangle.

As such, it perpetuated the scale and ambition of the residential block as envisaged in the c. 1703 schemes. The footprint of the library is significantly larger than the adjacent residential block, while the vast scale of the interior is by far and away the largest interior space within the College.

Moreover, when first built, the library was the largest secular space in Oxford. At 192 ft by 30 ft, the interior is significantly bigger than the libraries at Queen's College (1693-94) and Church Church (1717-38). Its only British rival was Wren's 'great library' at Trinity College, Cambridge (1676-84), where Hawksmoor had worked as a young man and where the main interior dimension exactly prefigures that of All Souls (192 ft).
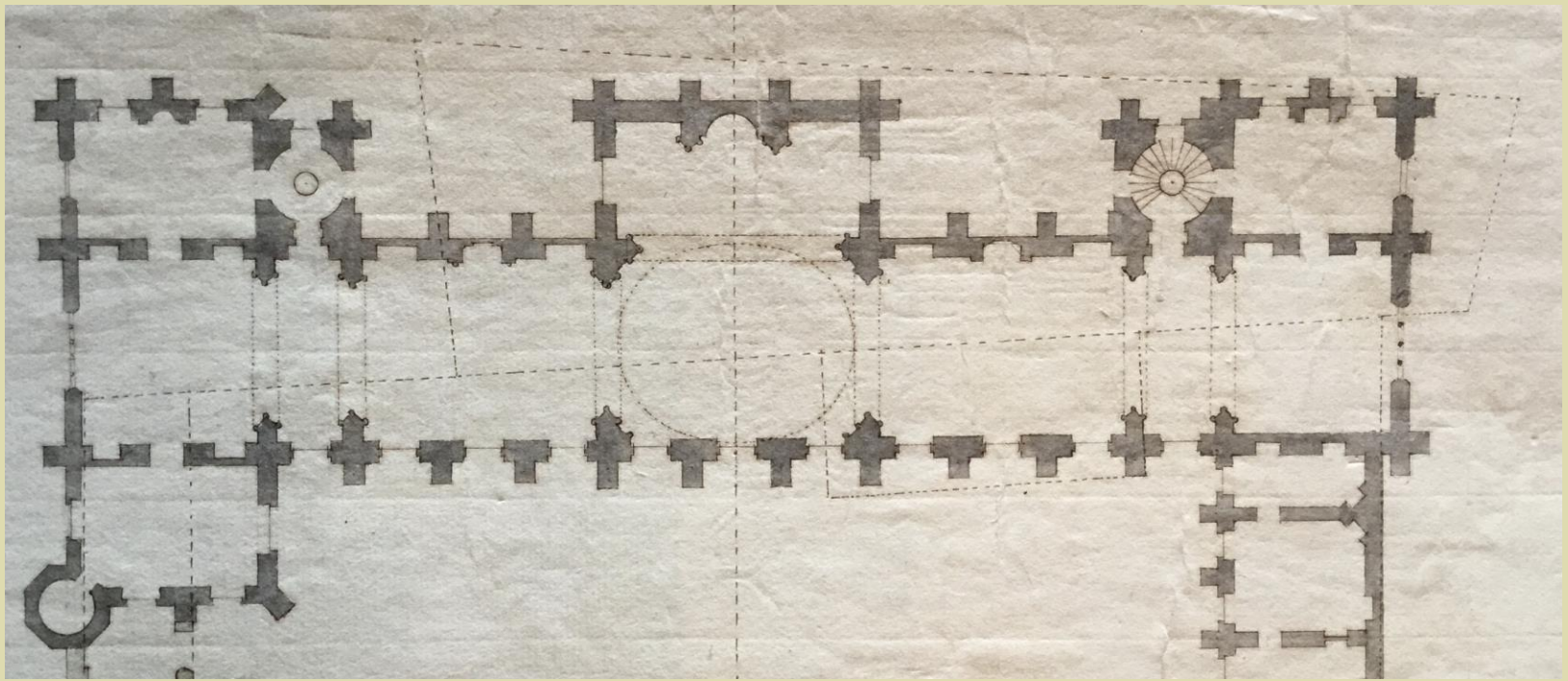
In February 1715, when Hawksmoor submitted his initial design for the quadrangle (above), he envisaged a Library that was Gothic all the way through. His original drawings show (albeit only in plan) a library interior in which the attenuated forms of the fifteenth-century antechapel were transplanted across to the library. Here they would have articulated, from west to east, a general configuration of five main sections, separated by a sequence of lofty Gothic arches.

Had this interior design been carried out, it would have pre-figured the neo-Gothic libraries of the north American universities by two centuries.

By 1716, however, it had been decided to make the interior classical, which was standard practice for Oxford college libraries by then.

The building we see today is therefore Gothic on the outside and Classical on the inside. This threw up the challenge of designing windows that were pointed on the outside but rounded on the inside — a challenge that we see Hawksmoor rising to in this remarkable pencil study for the large windows at either end of the building.
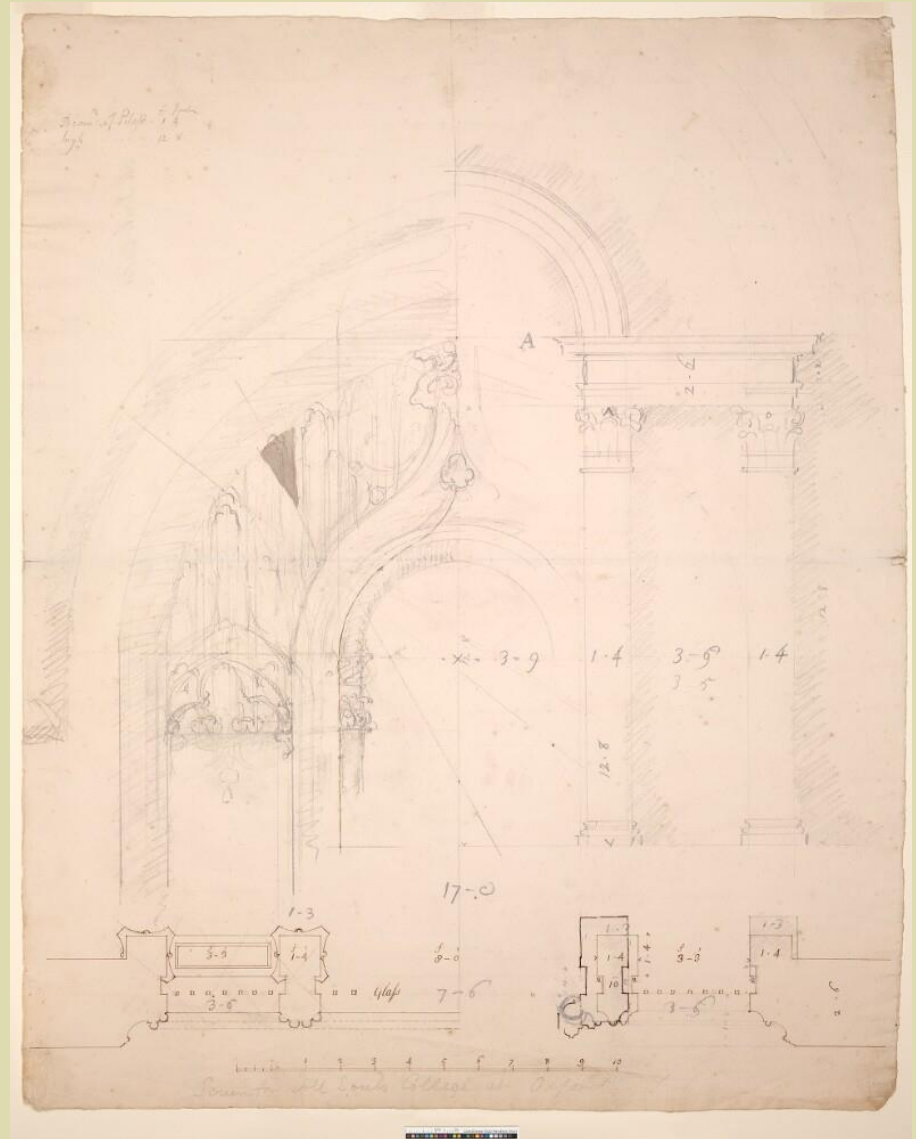
Within, the library is composed as a continuous gallery, with subsidiary rooms to the north and south (not all as built in the eighteenth century), and a large, centrally located alcove to the north (above). The latter feature, unprecedented in library architecture, increases the shelving capacity of the interior. But its function is primarily architectural, for it answers the position of the original entrance, which, very unusually for a library, is situated in the middle of the long façade.
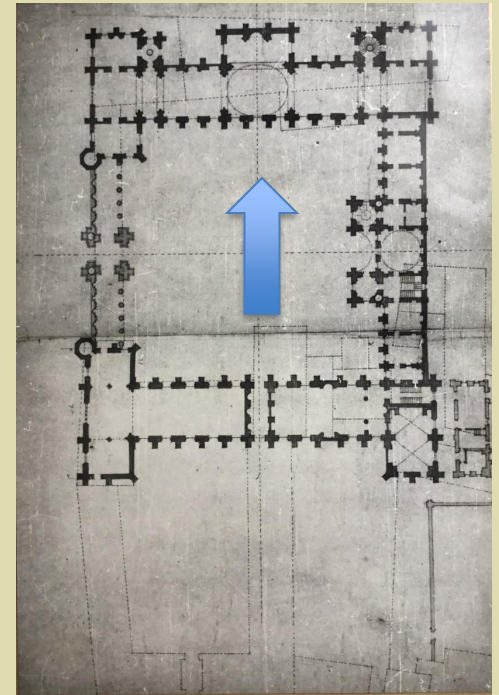
The principal entrance was, therefore, aligned with the main north-south axis of the college (as indicated on the above plan by Hawksmoor with dotted lines). This axis would have been even more pronounced, had Hawksmoor been allowed to build the central 'Turret' or 'Gothick lantern' (inspired by the Upper Ward at Windsor Castle) proposed in his drawings but omitted in execution. The sundial is a later addition, moved here from Old Quadrangle in 1870. As it is, the north-south axis of the college culminates in this full-height, interior alcove.
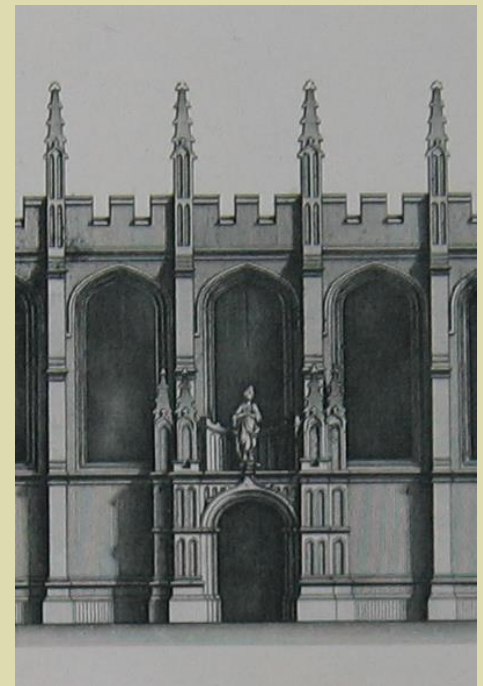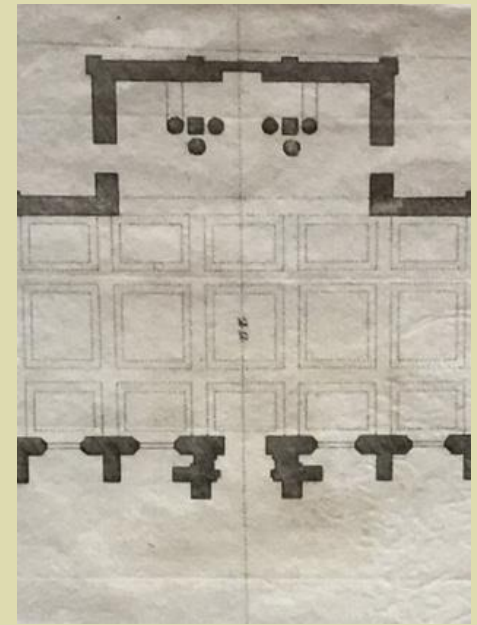
5. Commemorating Codrington

This central position was in due course occupied by the statue of Christopher Codrington, set up in 1734. But did the College intend to commemorate him in this place from the outset? The evidence is ambiguous.

Hawksmoor's presentation drawings of 1715 (right) include a large niche in the middle of the north recess, which might have contained a statue. There is no indication of this on the plan itself, however, and the niche, being very wide (10 ft), may have been conceived as a purely architectural feature.
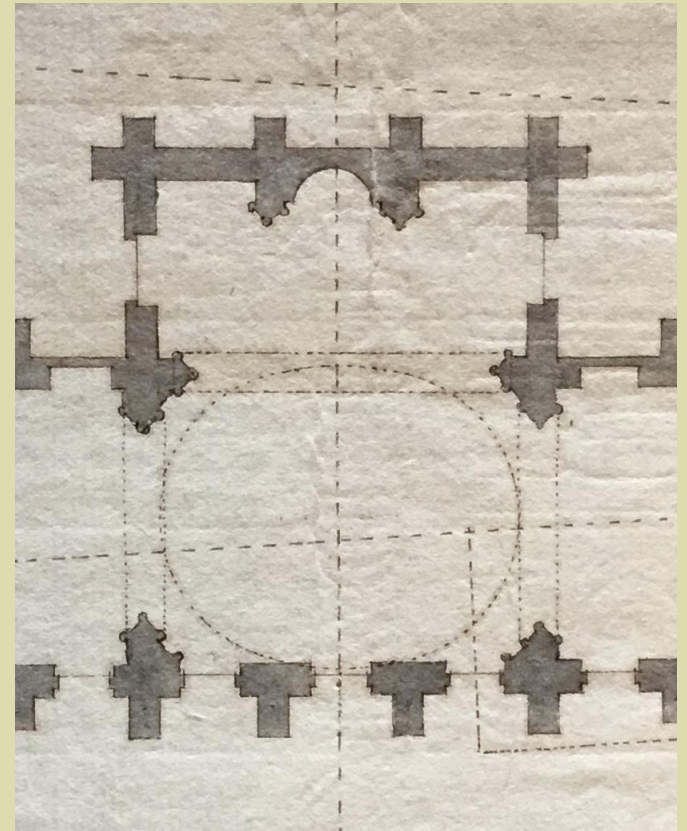
The next iteration of the design, engraved in 1716-17, includes a similarly architectonic feature in the alcove (above). This now takes the form of a screen of giant columns, which, to judge from the plan dimensions, would have risen the full height of the interior. Again, it seems unlikely that this was intended to frame a statue, since the same engravings show matching statues — probably Christopher Codrington and Henry Chichele, the founder of the College — over the external entrances to the Library (north range) and passageway from the old quadrangle (south range). At the ceremonial laying of the foundation stone in June 1716, Codrington was referred to as the 'second founder'.

But neither statue was executed, and the question of commemoration was put on hold until 1732, when the College commissioned the marble statue of Codrington from Sir Henry Cheere. The cost was £105.

The decision to place a free-standing marble statue inside the Library was a major break with tradition, in Oxford or anywhere else. Institutional patrons such as Codrington were conventionally commemorated by statues in niches.

Free-standing sculptures of the kind we see at All Souls were almost always set up outdoors, sometimes in axial relation to a building. Codrington's statue, however, has a close connection to the exterior, due to its axial location and its immediate proximity to the entrance.

There was an important precedent for the placing of Codrington, however, and one that very likely influenced the college's thinking. This was Michael Rysbrack's statue of Queen Anne (right, above), which was set up in the Long Gallery at Blenheim Palace at exactly the same time. Although subsequently moved to a different position in the Gallery, the statue was originally placed in a large apsidal recess (below), which, as at All Souls, is located halfway down the Gallery and which, again as at All Souls, terminates the main secondary axis of a wider architectural configuration. Hawksmoor was architect of the Gallery at Blenheim, and he was probably the presiding influence in both places.
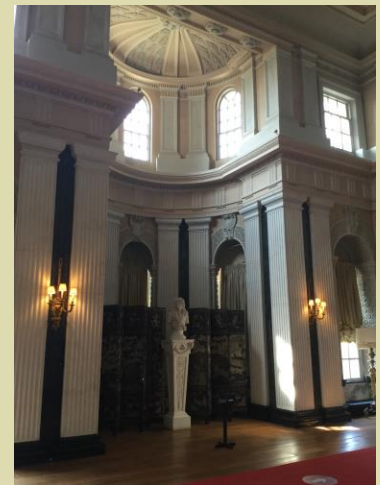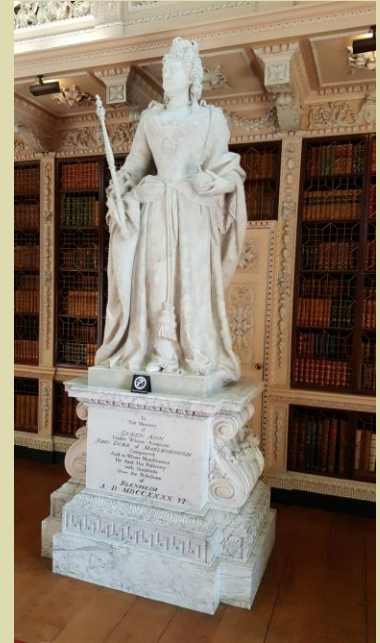
6. The statue

The statue shows Codrington dressed in Roman armour and holding a military baton. The basic format of Cheere's design — that of a standing male figure in military costume — was one normally adopted for monarchs and high-ranking aristocrats. Codrington, who was neither of these things, stands against a pile of books, which suggests his turn from scholar to soldier, and 'from the *vita contempliva* to the *vita activa'* (Malcolm Baker)*.* This change of career is given visual expression through the dynamism of the statue, with its shifting posture and head turned sideways. This dynamism, moreover, echoes the geometric logic of the surrounding building.
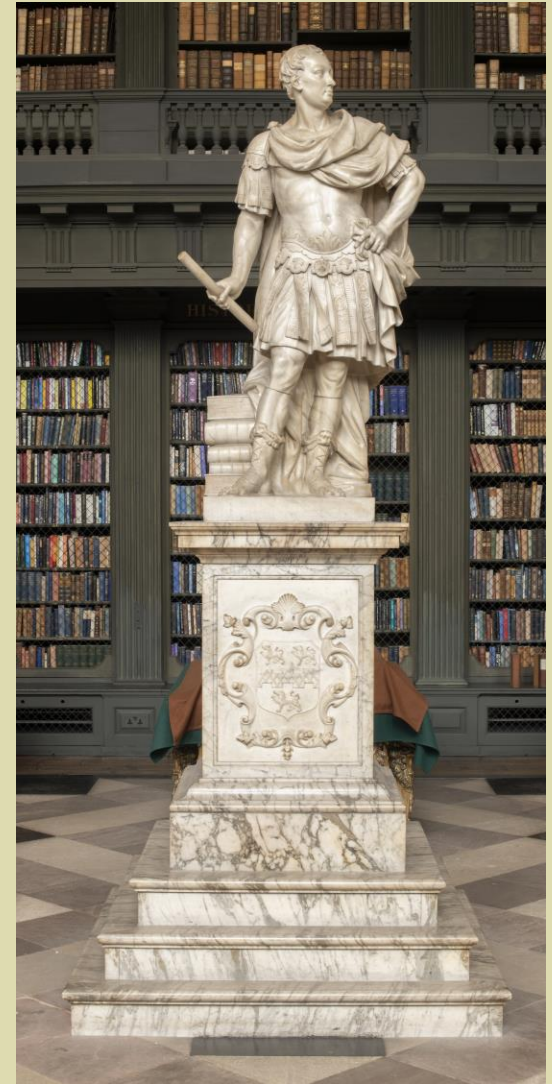
6. The completion of the fabric.

The statue of Codrington was set up before the walls of the Library had been shelved in readiness for books. Back in 1716-17, when the designs of the Quadrangle were engraved, Hawksmoor had envisaged bookcases from floor to ceiling (right). The cases were to be arranged in three stories, with upper and lower galleries. The bottom tier was conceived as a continuous basement, articulated with a Doric order, while the upper tiers were conceived (to the north) as a continuous wall of books—hence the perfunctory nature of the galleries, with their shallow treads and delicate iron railings.
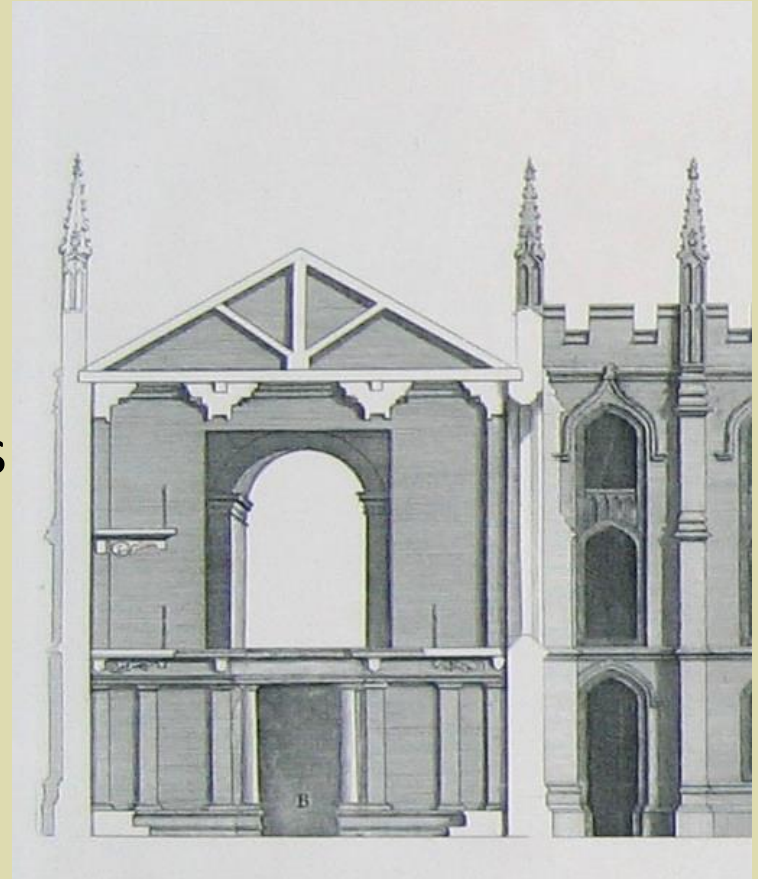
But following Hawksmoor's death in 1736, the College considered the matter of shelving afresh. In 1740, having taken advice from the architect James Gibbs, they decided to scrap 'the Attick and its gallery' and implement a scheme by Gibbs instead. This was completed in 1750, when 25 bronze vases and 24 bronze 'bustoes' of college worthies were set up over the cases. It was also at this time that the woodwork was first painted 'bright olive' green.

Codrington was not the only person commemorated on the north-south axis of the interior. A bust of Chichele by L.-F. Roubiliac was set up over the main door in 1751, while his archepiscopal arms were executed in plaster high up in the middle of the north recess.

Further reading:

Malcolm Baker, 'Henry Cheere's Statue of Christopher Codrington: Conventions and Setting', *The Burlington Magazine*, forthcoming

Howard Colvin & J.S.G. Simmons, *All Souls: An Oxford College and its Buildings* (1989)

Kerry Downes, *Hawksmoor* (1959)

S.J.D. Green & Peregrine Horden, eds., *All Souls under the Ancien Régime: Politics, Learning, & the Arts, c.1600-1850* (2007)

The Victoria History of the County of Oxford, III, *The University of Oxford* (1954)