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**Martin Dubois \***

\* University of York

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Surprisingly little has been written about Gerard Hopkins’s interest in the work of the architect William Butterfield. Only Ellen Eve Frank’s chapter on Hopkins in *Literary Architecture*, and a few slender articles in Hopkins journals (Storey, Bremer and White, “Hopkins and All Saints’ Babbacombe”), have given attention to the nature of the connection between the poet and his favourite architect. Yet the terms in which Hopkins discussed Butterfield are revealing, and inform his comprehension of the role of popular opinion in determining aesthetic norms. In 1877, the year he was ordained a Roman Catholic Priest, Hopkins wrote to Butterfield, lauding his “beautiful and original style”:

I do not think this generation will ever much admire it. They do not understand how to look at a Pointed building as a whole having a single form governing it throughout, which they would perhaps see in a Greek temple: they like it to be a sort of farmyard and medley of ricks and roofs and dovecots. And very few people seem to care for pure beauty of line, at least till they are taught to (qtd. in Storey 3).

The innovator misunderstood and overlooked in his own day, a search for unified form which goes unappreciated by contemporaries: this account comes remarkably close to describing Hopkins’s own case, and it would not be too much to speculate that its frustration with popular opinion might be derived from the experience of repeatedly seeing one’s work cause bafflement among its readers, as well as being refused publication on account of its impenetrability. Pressing the comparison further, Hopkins might well have applied the terms he used in an appraisal of his own craft (in an 1879 letter) to Butterfield: though he “err[ed] on

the side of oddness”, this was the necessary adjunct to the “virtue of design,” the quality of its “distinctiveness” (Letters to Bridges 66). For Butterfield, the Gothic revivalist and quintessential exponent of High Victorian, was also (at least by others) characterised by means of his unconventionality. Though a leading member of the Ecclesiological Society, and one of the most prominent architects of his day, Butterfield’s designs became increasingly eclectic as his style developed – and he was correspondingly known and criticised for idiosyncrasy in his later designs. As Norman Shaw put it, “we are all in much the same boat, except Butterfield, who is in a boat of his own all by himself” (qtd. in Saint 219). One can imagine some of his early readers saying something similar of Hopkins.

The comparison has its limitations. Whilst never achieving unqualified acclaim in his own time, Butterfield enjoyed a good deal of success and recognition; Hopkins, of course, never saw the major part of his work in print and, moreover, endured the repeated incomprehension of his small circle of readers. And if Hopkins felt Butterfield had encountered an unduly hostile reception in his own day, the architect has if anything fared much worse since his death, to the extent that twentieth-century critics have described a “sadistic hatred of beauty” (Clark 250) in his work. The contrast with Hopkins’s critical reception through the same period could not be more marked.

Yet Butterfield’s work was a keen interest of Hopkins and an abiding one: while critics have been hampered by the last of the surviving Hopkins journals ending in 1875, and thereby providing a much more complete version of the concerns of early years rather than later, the survival of Hopkins’s letter confirms that he maintained his appreciation of Butterfield at the time of his ordination and beyond. As an early Anglo-Catholic at Oxford, it is perhaps unsurprising that Hopkins should have been inspired by Butterfield – he was, after all, “the architect of the ‘High Church party’” (Hill) – but this was one enthusiasm which survived his conversion in 1866. The absence of later journal entries means we have little idea of what Hopkins thought of the churches he served in and visited as a priest. What he made of Scoles’s Farm Street church in Mayfair, or of the several

churches designed by Joseph Hansom he was posted to in Oxford, Lancashire and Sheffield, we cannot know. But Butterfield's prominence in the journals and letters mean we can be sure of Hopkins's admiration. More certain still is Hopkins's profoundly visual imagination, evidenced by the countless drawings, notes and observations of the journals and letters. Hopkins was powerfully influenced by architectural forms and, as Ellen Eve Frank has shown, he regularly deployed architectural terms in explicating his poetic technique (54-7). His notebooks are filled with drawings of tracery and capital foliage, most probably copied from a popular glossary of the time.[1]

As critics have shown, Hopkins was not the only Victorian poet to be influenced by architectural forms. Isobel Armstrong has argued for a new sense of the Grotesque – emerging in association with Ruskin's theories – in the work of Morris and Browning (232-51; 284-317). Armstrong applies the Grotesque ideologically and enlists the term in her conception of the “double” poem, believing it to be “the embodiment of distortion” (241). Thus in *The Ring and the Book*, “The Grotesque vision [...] distorts to investigate the anti-aristocratic, pro-aristocratic and ‘neutral’ positions of the popular voice, the exploitation of privilege in the voices of the lawyers, the Pope’s attempt to use power judiciously” (317). Building on Armstrong’s work, the Grotesque has been the subject of extensive critical scrutiny, most notably in Trodd, Barlow and Amigioni’s *Victorian Culture and the Idea of the Grotesque*. Wider explorations of the gothic in Victorian literature have also appeared (see Robbins and Wolfreys, for instance) – and have drawn particular focus on the place of the gothic in Hardy’s fiction. All this has contributed to an understanding of how (in Kate Flint’s words) for literary texts of the period, visibility was “a continual point of return” (311).

Yet Hopkins’s fascination with Butterfield has not received much critical attention.[2] This paper argues that close reading of Hopkins’s architectural judgments can inform the comprehension of the interplay of innovation and conformity in his poetry. Hopkins’s appreciation of Butterfield was rooted in a belief in the value of originality and uniqueness in form – though one which must

interact with and which acknowledges traditional precedents. I argue that the revisions and explorations of form which Hopkins aimed at in his poetry bears relation to Butterfield's own development and interpretation of High Victorian architecture. Finally, I examine the apparent inconsistency of Hopkins's critique of Butterfield's most important church, All Saints', Margaret Street.

### **“Following out the old work”: Hopkins and Oxford**

Despite a strong preference for revivalist Gothic, Hopkins nevertheless did not fall into the common fallacy of believing that medieval Gothic styles could be re-created without the mediation and intrusion of modern design and thought. By the time he went up to Oxford in 1863, he believed rather that the prospects for development of a “spontaneous modern gothic” (Journals and Papers 13) were good, and his notes on the principal sights for the visitor to Oxford are notable for their partiality towards modern Victorian Gothic work (White, “Hopkins’ Drawings” 53). While the fierce debates over the new college buildings at Oxford raged during his time there, Hopkins's observations are notable for their openness to the new styles that had emerged. One of the most prominent among the architects undertaking new projects at Oxford was William Butterfield, and it would have been in Oxford that Hopkins first encountered Butterfield's work in concentration. The second sonnet of Hopkins's series “To Oxford” (1865) is based on Butterfield's college chapel (1857):

Thus, I come underneath this chapel-side,  
So that the mason's levels, courses, all  
The vigorous horizontals, each way fall  
In bows above my head, as falsified  
By visual compulsion, till I hide  
The steep-up roof at last behind the small  
Eclipsing parapet; yet above the wall

The sumptuous ride-crest leave to poise and ride.

None besides me this bye-ways beauty try.

Or if they try it, I am happier then:

The shapen flags and drillèd holes of sky,

Just seen, may be to many unknown men

The one peculiar of their pleased eye,

And I have only set the same to pen. (15-28)

Butterfield's design was much criticized even at the time, mostly for its polychromatic stone exterior, but in "To Oxford" the emphasis on the visibility of the structure, the openness with which the "mason's levels" and "vigorous horizontals" of the building are shown, suggest that Hopkins understood a key element of Butterfield's method. Following Ruskin, Butterfield believed that, in the interests of "truthfulness" and "reality", "structure should be seen and understood" (Thompson, Butterfield 128). Pugin too had argued similarly in *True Principles*: "Pointed architecture does not conceal her construction, but beautifies it" (3). A structure acknowledged and exposed could provide a greater sense of that "pure beauty of line" – as Hopkins's letter has it – than the obscuring involved in classical design. Thus it was that in Balliol chapel "although most of the walls were covered by alabaster, the banded stonework was shown in the window splays" (Thompson, Butterfield 140). Perhaps the most prominent feature of Butterfield's design, the exotic red and buff stone horizontal stripes, feature as the "horizontals" of the poem, but that they are "falsified / By visual compulsion" perhaps indicates Hopkins's unease with the obtrusiveness of this revelation of structure. However, the meaning is unclear: "falsified / By visual compulsion" might simply describe the normal process of visual experience as the viewer approaches the church and the courses in the stone work begin to fall below eye-level (this is the explanation put forward by Bremer, 119-134). Perhaps more convincing than either of these readings is the possibility that Hopkins is

experimenting with viewpoint and visual effect, with the horizontals appearing to make an arch and the parapet hiding the roof. Hopkins shared the Victorian fascination with optics (see Flint 25-33) and it seems plausible that the lines denote a willingness to compose by changing the point of view.[3]

In any case, with the poem turning on the question of whether the experience is “peculiar” to Hopkins or not, the poem might already be considered a part of the poet’s burgeoning concern with the distinctness of the self – what was later to develop into an isolating divergence from others, where “To seem the stranger lies my lot, my life” (1 of the same titled poem). Though the connection is admittedly an indefinite one, it does seem significant in this respect that Balliol college chapel embedded the impression that Butterfield was becoming less conventional, more eclectic, in his designs. When it came to choosing Alfred Waterhouse to design Balliol’s new front in 1866, Benjamin Jowett’s rationale contained an implicit critique of Butterfield’s exotic colour-scheme for the chapel: “In choosing Mr. Waterhouse we hope to avoid eccentricity and un-English styles and fancies. Simplicity and proportion and not colour always seem to me to be the great merits of architecture” (qtd. in Howell 283-4). This would have been the majority view on Butterfield’s chapel and Jowett’s thoughts on the matter were widely known. As Hopkins notes in his diary in 1866, “Waterhouse is to do the new buildings of the college. Ernest Geldart is up on the business. Jowett had him and the other man into his rooms and held forth about proportion – after rejecting Butterfield” (Journals and Papers 136). If Jowett found Butterfield’s work “eccentric”, Hopkins valued the latter’s inventiveness and was untroubled by general opinion on the architect; writing to his mother about Butterfield’s new buildings at Merton college of 1864, Hopkins commented: “The new buildings at Merton are finished externally and are beautiful and of course universally maligned” (Further Letters 87). There is a relish in opposing the current of opinion here that provides a clue to Hopkins’s interest in Butterfield: as someone who himself was often accused of “Oddity and Obscurity” (Bridges) in both his personal life and in his poetry, it is possible that he saw in Butterfield a struggle for originality that was akin to his

own. Certainly he regretted Jowett's choice of Waterhouse as architect for Balliol's new front, complaining to his mother in 1867 that "There seems to be no conservative spirit at all in the buildings that are to be" (Further Letters 100).

It was Butterfield's fidelity to the "conservative spirit", to traditional forms, that won Hopkins's approval in another Oxford chapel. Butterfield's project previous to Balliol chapel had been the restoration of Merton chapel, and Hopkins's notes reveal he had not realised the extent of the work undertaken by the architect:

I was wrong about Merton. The sexton says the font, with its cover and bracket, the reredos, the choir-screen, gates and metal-work, everything in fact except the pulpit were designed by Butterfield. The quatrefoils etc in the stalls at first to have been open. Of the sedilia only the first two bays, that is a walled-up door and a narrow arch, and the spring of the next arch are old: the rest was razed to the level of the wall and blocked up by the monument now placed in the bay of the intended S. aisle. All but the parts named above therefore are by Butterfield, carefully following out the old work. (Journals and Papers 59)

Presumably it was Butterfield's meticulous "following out the old work" which had wrong-footed Hopkins as to the extent of the restoration of the chapel. The additions to the medieval chapel were in keeping with its original style, and the fittings – including the Gothic font introduced to the North Transept mentioned by Hopkins – were wholly in accordance with the Tractarian stipulation for fittings and decoration that accorded with the more elaborate ritual and ceremony favoured by the nascent Anglo-Catholic movement. In particular, the highly wrought choir-screen and gates would have fitted with the principles of the ecclesiological movement, which championed the return to an emphasis in design to altar and chancel, and away from the pulpit, and consequently from preacher to sacrament (Brooks 7). All would have been aware of the opulent ornamentation of the pre-Reformation chapel, with its Gothic screen and fine vestments, which added impetus to Butterfield's revivalist restoration. As well as being a question



of architectural unity between old and new, Victorian and medieval, the accord with the older, pre-Reformation style made an implicit theological, as well as explicit ecclesiological, statement.

This need for new building to be in keeping with medieval Oxford – and it should be remembered that the city was rapidly expanding in the second half of the nineteenth-century – forms the basis of Hopkins’s poem “Duns Scotus’s Oxford”. The first two stanzas are resonant with Hopkins’s enduring affection for Oxford and its architecture:

Towery city and branchy between towers;

Cuckoo-echoing, bell-swarmèd, lark-charmèd, rook-racked, river-rounded;

The dapple-eared lily below thee; that country and town did

Once encounter in, here coped and poisèd powers;

Thou hast a base and brickish skirt there, sours

That neighbour-nature thy grey beauty is grounded

Best in; graceless growth, thou hast confounded

Rural rural keeping – folk, flocks, and flowers. (1-8)

Hopkins makes palpable the fears of many that the expansion of Oxford would be ruinous to the easy interchange between urban and rural at its borders – and it is significant in this sense that the poem comes directly after the lament for the “Sweet especial rural scene” (25) of “Binsey Poplars”. It is perhaps ironic that Hopkins should alight on the “base and brickish skirt” encroaching upon the traditional grey stone of Oxford, for when Butterfield was commissioned to design Keble College (1868-1886) he chose brick as his principal material, incorporating an unusual polychromatic design that Pevsner found “actively ugly” (Oxfordshire 227). Hopkins visited the College on at least one occasion during

his time as a curate in the city in 1878, but does not record his response (Further Letters 151). Butterfield's "constructional polychromy" was brought out radically in his design, with its "bands, chequers, trellises, in buff stone, and on a smaller scale yellow brick and blackish-blue brick" (Oxfordshire 226-7). If Hopkins's preference would have been for something more in keeping with the traditional Oxford limestone, he would surely have had no truck with the principles which inspired Keble College: those of the Oxford Movement and a reprising of high ecclesiological principles – principles he would have been sympathetic to even as a Catholic.

### **Producing "oddness": Hopkins at "Babbicombe" and All Saints'**

Away from Oxford, Hopkins recorded that he first visited Butterfield's new church at Babbacombe (though he always referred to it as "Babbicombe"), Devon, in September 1867, but it is not until 1874 that he noted down a full record of his impressions:

It is odd and the oddness at first sight outweighed the beauty. It is long and low, only a foot or so, just to mark the break, between the nave and aisle (lean-to) roofs [...] Much marble is employed – pillars, font, pulpit, choir pavement, reredos, medallions round east window etc – and everything very solid and perfect. Pulpit beautiful, like a church or shrine and in three storeys, basement, triforium etc. Medallions by east window/alternate inscapes – all five-spoked wheels or roses – odd. Some of these patterns in the marble, as on the floor and on the stage or block by the font, were large and simple but not very striking. There was a more quarried look about the designing than he commonly has (in the cieling [sic] for instance). The nave roof-timbers and choir cieling [sic] were remarkably flattened: I liked this. The enrichment grows towards the altar, the choir cieling [sic] having two degrees of it. [...] Wrought brass chancel gates with a running inscape not quite satisfying, continued by deep marble party-wall (as at Margaret Street) pierced by quaterfoils (Journals and Papers 254-5).

It is the extension of Butterfield's interest in varied textures and the "complexity" of the Babbacombe church as a whole that make it one of his most significant churches and one of the outstanding exemplars of "constructional polychromy" (Thompson, Butterfield 142). The muted colours of the nave are contrasted with the dazzling multicoloured marble shades of the font, pulpit and chancel; Butterfield was adhering to the purposeful simplicity of nave supported by many revivalists. In addition, the "quarried look" Hopkins describes exemplifies the "truth" Butterfield aimed at in his exposure of structure. Hopkins was also alert to another revision of medieval Gothic made by Butterfield at Babbacombe: the "very solid" mass of the church denotes the architect's fascination with the possibilities of solid mass as a principle of design. While Pevsner found the interior decoration "both fascinating and repellent", he agreed with Hopkins that much of the decoration and ornamentation could be characterized as "odd" (Devon 848). What is interesting about Hopkins's prescient observations about the church is the ascription of his term "inscape". This suggests that, as with the natural "inscapes" Hopkins also celebrated, it is the quality of the church's uniqueness, its particularity, that is of distinction. Along with "inscape" seems to go the word "odd" – a term that might be exchanged with Jowett's "eccentricity" or that could be associated with Hopkins's own admission of "oddness" in his own character.

Of course Hopkins cherished "All things counter, original, spare, strange" ("Pied Beauty", l. 7), and this originality is what seems to have attracted Hopkins in the Babbacombe church. But just as the curial sonnet form of "Pied Beauty" is at once "counter" to tradition, yet also a development of that same tradition, Hopkins did not believe in originality per se; rather, form must be in interaction with tradition, not an abandonment of it. Despite the radical innovations of his poetry, Hopkins's retention of a markedly strong sense of the rigours of poetic form – and fascination with one of the most traditionally inflexible of all, the sonnet – is evident. His repeated attempts to locate sprung rhythm within a tradition of English poetry, and to insist on its link to Milton, show that Hopkins did not

simply disavow tradition to formulate a wholly new style: rather it was a reformulation, and not a invention. Hopkins told Bridges: “I do not of course claim to have invented sprung rhythms but only sprung rhythm; I mean that single lines and single instances of it are not uncommon in English and I have pointed them out in lecturing [...] but what I do in the Deutschland etc is to enfranchise them as a regular and permanent principle of scansion” (Letters to Bridges 45). It seemed to Butterfield too that a personal re-interpretation of existing theories could be successful: as Thompson says, “in the details of the design Butterfield’s Victorian imagination frequently broke through his wide knowledge of architectural precedent” (Architectural History 78). This might suggest a disavowal, but “breaking through” was only made possible by Butterfield’s “wide knowledge of architectural precedent” – and thus was always in relation to that same precedent.

This applies equally to All Saints’, Margaret Street – the “model church” of the Ecclesiological Society, as well as Butterfield’s most important work, and much admired by Hopkins. The overwhelming polychromatic design, with its many-coloured bricks and tiles, combined in intricate patterns and shapes, is a masterpiece of High Victorian. Butterfield’s use of brick was largely inspired by Ruskin’s *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* – and in many ways Butterfield’s church might be said to follow Ruskin’s tenets. But Thompson makes clear that while “the external patterning of the brick, the theoretical idea of internal mosaics, and the internal use of granite and alabaster may be definitely attributed to Ruskin”, at the same time, Butterfield re-interpreted Ruskin’s theories rather than implementing them wholesale (Architectural History 76). This revision and renewing of precedent and confirmed norms, the willingness to explore and extend form, is a notable connection between Hopkins and Butterfield.

### **All Saints’ and the waning of “old enthusiasm”**

Hopkins’s admiration for Butterfield was not absolute. In June 1874, he revisited All Saints’:

I wanted to see if my old enthusiasm was a mistake, I recognised more certainly than before Butterfield's want of rhetoric and telling, almost to dullness, and even of enthusiasm and zest in his work – thought the wall-mosaic rather tiresome for instance. Still the rich nobility of the tracery in the open arches of the sanctuary and the touching and passionate curves of the lilyings in the ironwork under the baptistery arch marked his genius to me as before. But my eye was fagged with looking at pictures. (Journals and Papers 248)

The manner of Hopkins's disappointment is almost exactly opposite to his earlier praise for Butterfield's work: it is the "dullness", the lack of "zest" which counts against the architect, as traces of the inscapes and brilliant originality Hopkins found at Babbacombe are less apparent. But that Hopkins should alight on the "want of rhetoric and telling" in All Saints' provides a parallel with his thoughts on the essentially instructive nature of art:

What are works of art for? to educate, to be standards. Education is meant for the many, standards are for public use. To produce then is of little use unless what we produce is known, if known widely known, the wider known the better, for it is by being known it works, it influences, it does its duty, it does good. (Letters to Bridges 231)

Here then Hopkins's notion of the purpose of art can be linked to his disavowal of Butterfield: it is not enough to strive after uniqueness; art must also "influence", it must, in the end, "tell". Thus a certain rhetoric might seem to be required – a rhetoric analogous to the "oratorical" reach of the poetic rhythms Hopkins attempted, which, he told Bridges, "if you will study [...] you will be much more pleased with it and may I say? converted to it" (46). It is plausible that Hopkins expected the same from Butterfield: that his work should persuade, cajole, even convert. There is something of this in Hopkins's letter to Butterfield, quoted at the beginning: the implication from the letter is that if people, "till they are taught to", will lack architectural judgment, architects have a duty to undertake part of

the instruction. By 1874, it seems, Hopkins judged that All Saints' (and, the journal entry suggests, Butterfield's churches more generally) did not provide this vital educative element.

Considering its status as the "model" church of the Ecclesiological Movement, this is surprising; if nothing else, All Saints' is a forceful essay in ecclesiological correctness, designed to be an exemplar of High Victorian principles. It is evidently designed with the guiding principles of the Tractarian movement in mind and is an extension or development of, rather than a break with, Butterfield's previous work. Hopkins's criticism of All Saints' seems inconsistent with his earlier judgments and is not easily explicable. But some light might be shed on Hopkins's contradictory attitude by considering All Saints' in relation to the wider issue of Tractarianism in Hopkins's work. Margaret Johnson's substantial study, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and Tractarian Poetry*, does not touch on Butterfield, and the recent profusion of criticism on Tractarian poetics – including a book on Keble (Blair) and a special issue of *Victorian Poetry* – has not yet seen the drawing out of architectural influences. Yet All Saints' is a remarkable synthesis of aesthetic and religious theory (a "model" church) and bears relation to other Tractarian exemplars of artistic theory, such as Keble's *The Christian Year* or Newman's *Lyra Apostolica*. Hopkins's doubts over All Saints', therefore, have significant implications for his aesthetic views and might cause us to revise Johnson's inference that Tractarian aesthetics were "transposed comfortably into [Hopkins's] new faith" (229). A more layered understanding of the shaping of Hopkins's artistic thought, which does justice to the dislocation from his cultural background caused by conversion, would better account for the waning of Hopkins's enthusiasm for Butterfield's major oeuvre. It is possible that just as Hopkins felt his life in later years to be "Among strangers" ("To seem the stranger lies my lot, my life", 2), he also felt distant from his youthful architectural preferences – and from the aesthetic notions that had informed them.

### Endnotes

<sup>[1]</sup> Frank speculates that it may have been John Parker's *A Glossary of Terms used in Grecian, Roman, Italian and Gothic Architecture* (54), while White suggests Bloxam's *The Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture* as an alternative ('Hopkins's Drawings' 53). In his biography, White also infers that "Parker awoke his passionate interest in the work of Butterfield and Street" (27).

<sup>[2]</sup> Catherine Phillips's forthcoming *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Visual World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) may go some way to addressing this gap in Hopkins criticism.

<sup>[3]</sup> I am grateful to Professor Kelsey Thornton for suggesting this reading.

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### **First Response**

This is work of a very high standard: scholarly, original and thoughtful (and nicely written).