

John Gibbs, Stone Mason, Architect & Author

"...an architect of considerable eminence, the designer of the celebrated Banbury Cross and a gentleman not unknown in literary circles." [Jackson's Oxford Journal, 1861]

b. 1827 St Clements, Oxford, s/o John Gibbs (occ. Stone Mason) and Alice.

1841

Apprentice Stone Mason at High Street, St Clements, Oxford (parental home).

1848

Carver at Wigan Parish Church.

1851

Member of Liverpool Architectural Society.

1852

Publishes 'A Series of Designs for Gothic Monuments: Churchyard Crosses, Sepulchral Slabs, and Head Crosses; Together with Remarks on Some Modern Erections, and Their Assumed Connection with Ecclesiastical Buildings--Pagan Symbolism--Unchristian Character--Position--Inscription, Etc., Etc.'

1853

Publishes 'Designs for Gothic Ornaments & Furniture, After the Ancient Manner, for Ecclesiastical and Domestic Purposes, for the use of Architects, and Workers in Metal, Stone, Wood, etc., etc.', George Bell, 186 Fleet Street, London, 1853

22.02.1854

'Designs for Gothic Ornaments & Furniture, After the Ancient Manner, for Ecclesiastical and Domestic Purposes, for the use of Architects, and Workers in Metal, Stone, Wood, etc., etc.' paper read before Liverpool Architectural and Archaeological Society.

1854 - 1855

In partnership with the sculptor/architect Charles Holt (Gibbs and Holt) and based in Wigan

1854 Mannex's History of Topography and Directory

John Gibbs, sculptor and architect (Gibbs and Holt), Standish Gate, Wigan, Lancashire
Charles Holt, sculptor and architect (Gibbs and Holt), Standish Gate, Wigan, Lancashire.

1855

In Longsight, Manchester (publishes 'Designs for Gothic Ornaments & Furniture').

1855

Publishes 'English Gothic Architecture, Or, Suggestions Relative to the Designing of Domestic Buildings, Ornaments, Church-yard Memorials, Chimney Pieces, and Alphabets', Published and sold by John Gibbs, at his office, Longsight, and Charles Simms and Company, 50, Pall Mall, King Street, 1855, 13pp plus 20 lithographed (including frontis in colour). 4to.

1855

Makes a lithograph of Napoleon I "From the original painting, taken immediately after the death by Captain Ibbetson, R. E / now in the possession of the Rev. J. P. Pitcairn, M. A. Rector of Longsight", dated 06.09.1855 [British Museum].

1856

Working alone in Manchester, Charles Holt begins work on Tonge Cemetery in Bolton.

1858

Exhibits a cast of an Early English capital from Lichfield Cathedral at the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society, 11.03.1858.

1858

Elected member of the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society and presents paper on 'Street Architecture', 28.04.1858.

1858

Proposes unrealised 'Memorial Fountain in Oxford to Alfred the Great', Oxford.

1858 - 1859

Designs Banbury Cross to commemorate the marriage of Queen Victoria. Contractor Henry Cowley of St Giles, Oxford. Contract 10.12.1858 [National Archives BOR/2/XXVI/i/1].

1860

Publishes 'Studies in Architecture and Ornament: Chimney-pieces, Windows, Doorways, Porches, String-courses, Entrance-gateways, Foliage, Ornaments, Fountains, Piers, &c'.

1861

Publishes 'The Old Parish Church: with the Ghost of the Merton Hall', London, Oxford.

1861

Marries Annie Stone at Oxford.

1864

Publishes 'Designs for Memorials for Church-yards and Cemeteries'.

1864 - 1865

Designs Monument to Prince Albert, Albert Park, Abingdon, Oxford. Dated 1864, erected 1865.

1865

Proposed monument to Shakspeare, Stratford on Avon, illustrated The Builder 07.10.1865.

1868

Publishes 'Designs for Christian Memorials'.

1868

Publishes 'Domestic Architecture and Ornament in detail: Designs for the use of Architects, Builders, Sculptors, Carvers, Masons'.

1869

Publishes 'Studies for Art Designers and Manufacturers'.

1869 - 1870

Contributes to Robert Minton Taylor: 'Designs for Encaustic & Geometrical Tile Pavements, part 2' [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, ref: 53.642.6]. Other contributors included John Pollard Seddon, Edward Welby Pugin, and George Eyre.

The architect was John Gibbs, an Oxford man, who had attracted attention in 1859-60 when he designed the new Banbury Cross. Jackson's Oxford Journal describes him in 1861 as 'an architect of considerable eminence, the designer of the celebrated Banbury Cross and a gentleman not unknown in literary circles.' He had previously lived for some years in the north, first at Wigan and then at Manchester, and while there had become a member of the Liverpool Architectural Society and had published three books of designs for Gothic monuments and furnishings."

In 1863 Gibbs won the competition for the memorial to the Prince Consort at Abingdon. In this and the following year he was also successful in two other competitions for memorials, one to Sir George Cornwall Lewis at New Radnor and the other to Sir Tatton Sykes at Sledmere in Yorkshire. More important from the Oxford point of view, he had begun in 1863 the rebuilding of St. Alban Hall, since absorbed into a new quadrangle of Merton College, and had taken part in Bruton's refitting of the interior of St. Martin's Church, for which he designed the reredos. He had a reputation for economy, fostered no doubt with an eye to employers who, as Bruton had complained, showed unwillingness to go to any expense'. The cost of his work at St. Alban Hall, which was borne by the Principal, was said to be 'unusually small'; and much the same remark is made with regard to 'Laleham House', now the core of the Wycliffe Hall buildings at 54 Banbury Road, which Gibbs built in 1866 for Thomas Arnold, son of Dr. Arnold of Rugby, who was then settling down in Oxford with the idea of taking pupils in what Jaclaon's Oxford Journal calls 'one of the largest private buildings' in the city.

'Norham House' and 'Laleham House', like 'Glebe House', South Leigh, which Gibbs built in 1871, are in a style which he describes as 'a development of the ancient Romanesque'. They are in red brick faced with stone. Since 'Norham House' was for private occupation, it is more modest in size than 'Laleham'. It remained in the possession of the Walsh family for more than forty years.

'WYKEHAM HOUSE', No. 56.

When he built this house for Mr. Henry Hatch in 1865-66, Gibbs made use of the fashionable Gothic style and no doubt himself inspired the writer of the architectural article in Jackson's Orford Journal to declare that 'when fully carried out' it was 'the style best adapted for buildings of a similar description' and 'can be treated as economically as its rival, the classic '. Two of the features of the house mentioned in this account are still to be seen, the 'richly carved chimney-pieces with marble columns' and the statue of 'that illustrious man', William of Wykeham, on the outside, the setting up of which was said to have been suggested by the name given to the house. 'The figure', we are told, 'is upwards of 6 ft. in height and stands beneath a simple but effective canopy.' It was carved by W. Forsyth, of Worcester, who had worked with Gibbs on both the Cornwall Lewis and Tatton Sykes memorials.

...

Though the latest occupants of the house are quite ignorant of John Gibbs' theories as to the advantages of the Gothic style in domestic architecture, they have apparently learnt by experience to appreciate its comforts and are dismayed by the prospect of the demolition of the house. So far at any rate Gibbs has been justified.

– E. O. Dodgson: 'Notes on Nos. 56, 58, 60, 62 and 64 Banbury Road', Oxoniensia, 1967

David Patten: 06.05.2013 (revised 2015)