

PITT AND THE SOCIAL CENTRE

While the bounty of old Pembroke men is sternly spent in draining the swamps of Red Buildings and preparing cosmetic restorers for an ageing New Court, the other activities of the Buildings Committee may look a bit frivolous. Lacking the resources to be frivolous on the scale of K***s or T****y, we have set out more modestly on some practically entertaining improvements to the College amenities.

'Social centre' is a name to which the Dean rightly objects, but it exists only for building purposes. Under it go on a miscellany of architectural activities in and about the Old Master's Lodge. They have been done together for reasons of economy and elegance and to minimise long-term disruption, although it doesn't feel like that to those of us in the middle of it. The centrepiece is perhaps the new bar near the Junior Parlour, and certainly the whole project arose from the frustrated desires of the drinking men. But there is now a lot more to it, as will emerge.

In olden days, about eighteen months ago, the College Office prepared to move to its new site in Ivy Court, which the builders thoughtfully flooded before they left. The old office was in a room at the bottom of 'N' staircase and the Bursar, a man opposed to bars in those days but very fair-minded, asked me if I would care to investigate its prospects as a bar. The architect, Donald McLeod, who had previously converted a derelict Old Reader at a modest cost into Cambridge's best intimate theatre, came to look at it. He said that nobody would go into it, cut off as it was from the Junior Parlour by the hospital corridor leading from 'N' staircase to New Court. So we began to think of glass doors and of pulling down walls, and perhaps of other sites. And these trains or, more accurately, spreading patches of creative thought, once released, could not be stopped before they covered the whole ground floor and basement of the old Lodge, and out into the wasteland between 'M' and 'N'.

There were two useless backyards surrounded by Pitt Buildings, separated by a pointless wall and filled with coal, dustbins and bicycles. The ground floor of 'M' was a throughway with depressing toilets off it and no baths. The room outside the Junior Parlour had nothing but notices on its walls and chaos in its middle. In the passage outside the sick bay were sixteen lockers for over a hundred people living out of College. In the wine cellar basements of the old Lodge were spiders,

May Ball poles, little-used timber for burning when we went Head of the River, and an armour-plated office desk complete with typewriter turret. No ladies' toilets, no telephones, no music or games rooms, and of course no bar. A lot of lumber, high, wide and potentially handsome Waterhouse spaces, a lot of needs and opportunities, and not much money.

It would be tedious and anyway, without detailed plans, impossible to trace the stages by which the present jigsaw scheme has got fitted together. Instead let me sketch briefly how (I hope) things will be when you read this. The corridor from 'N' to New Court has vanished. Instead, across the whole original lobby of the old Lodge there stretches a bar, with the entrance at the foot of 'N' staircase. It will be there for food, coffee and sitting about, as well as drink, and how much of each will go on in it remains to be discovered. Outside, in New Court, a paved area stretching to the croquet lawn, with new borders and a low wall to sit about on with beer in the long hot days of Summer...

But the new bar is not to be a throughway, and one now comes into 'N' from a new door facing the rockery. From it one enters a gallery round two sides of the old notice-board room. The rest of that room's floor has gone, and one looks from the gallery down into the old cellars, in which we expect such rituals as bar billiards to be enacted. To get there one turns right at the linen-room door which now faces the rockery entrance, and goes down new stairs into the basement. There, apart from the cockpit visible to upper sight, are hidden a music room, soundproofed against the megabells of modern groups, some 160 lockers for all who live out, a darts alley, and coat-hooks lined along the original barrel-vaulted corridor.

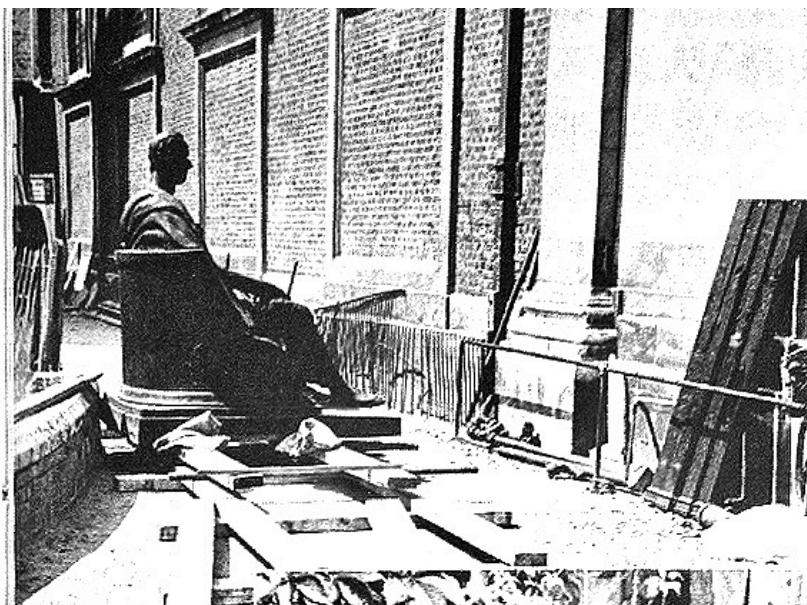
If, rather, one carries on at ground floor level round the gallery towards the Junior Parlour and the new bar, more items appear. A pair of telephone boxes, even a ladies' toilet, and a new men's place, cunningly but doubtless ineffectively decorated against graffiti. Mundane items, maybe, though I think all elegantly done, but they weren't there before. The Junior Parlour itself and the TV room beyond it are unchanged, except that the Parlour now stops at the arch between it and the pigeonholes, and all the rest is open public space, with notice-boards, Columbian pine, ribbed rubber floors and all the other appurtenances of a self-respecting airport terminal.

Turn the other way, left, from the linen room, out of the end of the old 'N' corridor into what was the backyard of the old Lodge, and

another change appears. The old dividing wall, the coal, dustbins, cycles—all gone. Instead a new court appears, newly paved and lit, leading via the archway under Pitt building into Ivy Court. It will never be one of Cambridge's great courts, but it needs a name. I call it 'Chimney Court' from its most prominent feature, but others have called it 'Garbage Court', rather unkindly I thought. We are open to more elevated suggestions. . .

Then there is Pitt. Behind him hangs a tale. In order to pay for the War, I gather, Pitt invented the National Debt. In a fit of subsequent remorse, he invented the National Debt Office to look after it. Then he died. Some time later, in 1817, there was subscribed a large bronze statue of our William to sit in the entrance to the Debt Office. After World War II, when the Office was rebuilt following bomb damage, there was no room for the statue and it was unceremoniously removed to Hyde Park. There it sat for twenty years, not in the public gaze, but in the middle of a Ministry of Public Building and Works nursery in which plants are grown for all the Royal parks. And throughout that time Pitt was, I regret to say, according to the foreman, the idlest man on the site. Last year the Ministry wanted to extend and rebuild its nursery, but William wouldn't move (and as he weighed two tons, who shall blame him?). So the National Debt Office offered him to us, on indefinite loan, and paid most of the cost of bringing him here. We had an elegant plinth made between the Old Reader lobby and the Library clock tower, and on Friday, 13 June Pitt arrived at the gates between Red Buildings and the Chapel (providentially removed for the restoration work). It took him a couple of days to travel sedately to what we hope will be his last resting place, where he is now a great adornment, we think, to the College. Statuary has not been a great feature of Pembroke or of other Colleges, for fairly obvious reasons, but Pitt is a better proposition than most. At two tons deadweight, he is not readily transported by enthusiastic undergraduates. Dressed discreetly in a toga, he affords less than usual scope for ingenious apparel. Being bronze, he will soak up paint less readily than would stone or concrete. I dare say we may have underestimated the ingenuity of our carefully selected Pembroke men, but we hope that apart from the odd beard, hat, banner and slogan, Pitt will continue in much his present form to lend a calm distinction to the College courts until such time as the National Debt is repaid.

D. H. M.



On the way



In position