1

UTTERING a prayer for one of Bellamy's pork pies (or according to another account for the state of the country he left) William Pitt the Younger passed away on 23 January 1806. Only thirty-three years before, a delicate boy of fifteen, he had come up as an undergraduate to Pembroke and had resided there, on and off, till 1780. He moved thence to chambers in London, entered Parliament in the following year, and in 1783 became, by the fortune of politics, England's youngest Prime Minister, before or since. A year later he was elected one of the Burgesses for the University, which he continued to represent till his death.

The impression his political character and ability had created was revealed by the growth of clubs in his name all over the country. The University Pitt Club at Cambridge, later than most, was founded in 1835. A monument to the "Great Commoner" was erected in Westminster Abbey at the State's expense, and another by the Common Council of London in the Guildhall. The proceeds of a subscription in Cambridge were used for the commission of a statue

by Nollekens which was placed in the Senate House, and for establishing a University scholarship in his name.

As early as 1802 a public fund had been started to provide some national monument in his honour, but he asked that nothing should be done in this respect so long as he lived. The subscriptions were accordingly lodged with trustees to accumulate in the Public Funds. The task of arranging for their allotment eventually devolved upon the Committee of the Pitt Club of London, and it was decided to erect a statue by Chantrey in Hanover Square. A handsome sum still remained for disposal. The need for enlarging the premises of the University Press at Cambridge had been under discussion for some time, and it is Dr James Henry Monk (Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, Professor of Greek from 1808 to 1823 and Bentley's biographer) who is credited with the suggestion that Mr Pitt's name should be associated with the extension proposed.

The Marquis Camden, Chairman of the London Pitt Club Committee, visited Cambridge and discussed the matter with the Vice-Chancellor, John Lamb, Master of Corpus Christi College. Subsequently he wrote a formal letter to Mr Lamb in the following terms:

Letter from Lord Camden

ARLINGTON STREET, *May 25th*, 1824.

Sir,

I have the Honor to inform you that I am just returned from a Meeting of the Committee appointed to consider of the disposal of the surplus of Money subscribed, many years ago, for the Erection of a Statue to the memory of Mr Pitt.

I am, now, authorized by that Committee to state to you, Sir, that which I had the Honor of personally communicating to you at Cambridge: "the disposition of that Committee to recommend to a general Meeting of Subscribers to the Fund above-mentioned the Disposal of a considerable Sum of Money for the Erection of an handsome Building connected with the University Press at Cambridge"; but, as it will be necessary to state to the general Meeting how far the University is disposed to find and provide a proper Scite for the erecting such Building, near or opposite to Pembroke College, I now trouble you on that subject, and I request you will have the goodness to inform me how far I may be authorized to inform the General Meeting of the Disposition of the University to find and provide a proper Scite as above-mentioned for the erecting of an handsome Building, which the Committee is desirous should be erected on such a scale as to be a distinguished Ornament to the University, and tend to perpetuate the Name and Memory of Mr Pitt.

I have the Honor to remain, Sir,

Your most obedient humble Servant,

CAMDEN.

P.S. The general meeting is appointed for the 11th of June.

There was no lack of a site, for in 1821 the University had bought from a certain James Nutter a piece of land which forms a considerable part of the present site of the Press. Before 1804 the works had been situated for a century and a half on the north side of Silver Street, on land bought from Queens' College and now belonging to St Catharine's. In that year it moved across the street where a warehouse had been erected some years before—the beginning of a gradual absorption of various properties lying between Silver Street, Trumpington Street, Mill Lane, and the river. So far as public houses are concerned, the process of expansion has been ruthless, no fewer than six having been cleared away.

The most notable of these was a part of Mr Nutter's messuage. The *Cardinal's Hat* or *Cap* faced on to Trumpington Street and was the first hostelry in the town encountered by travellers from London. Its frontage roughly corresponded with the central portion of the Pitt Building which replaced it, and it was no doubt this site which the University originally had in mind for the erection of a dignified entrance to the Press. The author of the article on the Press in the *Cambridge Portfolio* (1840) states that "Mr Pitt's Committee, at his *first* contested election, sat in a room at the Cardinal's Cap". He

also records the popular saying of the time that "the intended tower to Mr Pitt's memory, by a singular coincidence, *would rise on the very spot whereon he first set his foot when he entered the University*".

A favourable answer having therefore been returned to Lord Camden's letter, a meeting of subscribers to the Fund was summoned by public advertisement to the Thatched House Tavern on 18 June 1824, with Lord Camden in the chair. There it was proposed by the Lord President of the Council, seconded by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and unanimously resolved "that the surplus of the Fund, after defraying the expense of the statue in Hanover Square, as resolved at the former meeting on the 11th instant, be applied to the erection of a handsome and appropriate building at Cambridge, connected with the University Press; such building to bear the name of Mr Pitt". Lord Camden reported the decision of the subscribers to Mr Lamb.

"They feel", he wrote, "that it will be a most flattering addition to the character and reputation of Mr Pitt that his name should be connected with that Press from which emanate works of enlightened literature and profound science, and they trust they shall be enabled to add to the magnificent improvements now proceeding at Cambridge by the erection of a building which will adorn and decorate the University. They also trust that the University will feel a high degree of

satisfaction in enrolling the name of Pitt among its benefactors, more especially as that eminent person mainly attributed his success in public life to his education within its precincts."

A Syndicate had been appointed in May 1824 "to consider what practicable improvements in the Town of Cambridge would be beneficial and ornamental to the University", and to this body the Senate referred the subject of the Pitt Memorial Building. It recommended that possession should be acquired of the houses on each side of the *Cardinal's Hat*, so that the proposed building might occupy the whole stretch along Trumpington Street between Silver Street and Mill Lane. A sum of £5000 was voted for this purpose, later increased by another grant of £3000. The purchases eventually cost a sum in the neighbourhood of £12,000 and were completed with some difficulty. It was not until 1831 that the last section of the site fell into the University's hands.

Probably on account of these delays the Committee deferred the preparation of plans until 1828, but in that year they approached seven architects and asked them to submit designs in accordance with the then available site. There is no record of the names of six of these seven, nor the nature of proposals, if any, they subsequently made. No doubt a Gothic conception was uppermost in the Committee's mind. Out

of the architectural aspirations of eighteenth-century England, so wavering, confused, but marvellously ambitious, the new Gothicism had triumphed over its many rivals. Cambridge had resisted any inclination to dabble in the Moorish, Muscovite, or Chinese styles, and had accepted the pinnacles and mullions of Mr Wilkins and his peers with such enthusiasm that only financial stringency saved Gibbs's building in King's from similar encrustation.

Edward Blore was one of the protagonists of neo-Gothicism. His book on *The Monumental Remains of Noble and Eminent Persons* contains a number of his drawings, many of them engraved in steel by his own hand, and bears witness to his delight in Gothic form and detail no less than to his precious skill as an artist. His greatest monument is Abbotsford, which he designed and built for Scott. He was official architect successively to William IV and Victoria, and apart from a prolific output of new buildings, including some overseas, he carried out a great deal of restoration in cathedrals and churches all over the country. The Pitt Press is his only building in Cambridge. He was a little over forty years of age when the Committee invited him to submit drawings and finally chose him to carry out the work.

The selection made, Mr Blore travelled to Cambridge bearing a letter of introduction from Lord Camden to the Vice-Chancellor. The Superintendent of the Press, Mr Parker, had already met him in town to discuss the practical side of the undertaking. There was, of course, no question of such considerations interfering unduly with aesthetic ones, but the Committee, after stipulating "that an handsome room should be included in the design, together with a staircase leading to it", were obliging enough to grant that "any accommodation could be given to the Press in the building to be erected which did not interfere with those parts which they thought should be ornamented". On their side the Syndics were most amenable to the Committee's aims, abandoning a proposal for lodging rooms on the first and second floors so that the façade could be made uniform. They suggested that the pinnacles on the tower should be of one height (Mr Blore had shown the two towards the street being taller than the others) and they expressed some doubt about the lighting of the entrance hall. Otherwise they "all concurred in opinion as to the beauty of the elevation" which the architect had laid before them.

There followed consultations in Cambridge and London. Progress was held up while the University

Edward Blore