



Fig. 1 The group in the Library of Cuddesdon, slightly disturbing some of the students using the Street furniture

## Cuddesdon College and its Furniture

With the Law Courts (now The Royal Courts of Justice) on the Strand being George Edmund Street's (1824–81) final and most ambitious commission, it was at one of his first commissions, Cuddesdon Theological College, that our Research in Progress day was held.

Following training in the architectural office of Winchester architect Owen Brown Carter (1806–59) and then working for five years in London with George Gilbert Scott (1811–78), Street set up his own practice in 1849. He was appointed architect to the Diocese of Oxford in 1850 and so left London to live in Wantage, Oxfordshire.

In April 1853 the first stone at Cuddesdon College was laid. This building is regarded as the first major commission that heavily influenced the rest of his career. Today, it is Street's influence on others that makes him stand above most Gothic revival architects of his day. His architectural offices employed, at various times and among others, William Morris, Phillip Webb, John D. Sedding (who in

turn trained Ernest Barnsley and Ernest Gimson and others) and Richard Norman Shaw (who then, for example, trained Sidney Barnsley, William Lethaby,).

The Street highlights of our whistle-stop tour started in the Library where, surrounded by Street designed castellated bookcases, Nicholas Shrimpton explained the mid-19th century Gothic Revival, putting it into context with the rest of Europe and our current surroundings. (Fig. 1)

Following the Library we saw one of numerous dormitory bedrooms sparingly furnished with a gem of a hanging waterfall bookcase clearly following a traditional mahogany design but executed in oak with Street's trademark generous chamfering, though sadly now with later additions and white gloss paint.

With limited time we finished in the common room and were able to look closely at one of the famous circular tables that we had seen in use by one of the students in the Library. Because much of Street's output was the restoration of churches, domestic type furniture from his drawing board is rare. The best of these, in my opinion, is





**Fig. 2** One of a number of G. E. Street designed round oak tables



**Fig. 3** The underneath of the table in Fig. 2

his design for this table. Incredibly simple in design it is lifted by the pinched or waisted lines of the feet tips and through tenons and the, now familiar, liberal chamfering of the top. The design of this prompted William Morris, in 1856, to pen his first design for furniture, the resulting table (now in the collection of the Wilson Art Gallery Cheltenham) exhibits the two main details discussed above and is also very typical of early Morris & Co. furniture designed by another Street pupil, Philip Webb (Figs 2 and 3).

Following lunch a small group of us walked beneath an impressive beech tree, possibly planted when building work for the college was completed in June 1854, into the Principal's lodgings. Here we saw a beautifully simple staircase decorated only with chamfered corners, strongly bringing to mind the Cotswold school of furniture making, spearheaded by Ernest Gimson and Sidney and Ernest Barnsley.