Chapter I

The Great Hall

No visitor to Sydney should think of leaving it without seeing this seat of learning. It is not only the finest specimen of architecture in the Colony, but it is one that would do honour to England.

J. Waugh, The Strangers' Guide to Sydney, 1858

The Great Hall of the University of Sydney, which was Edmund Thomas Blacket's masterpiece, was inaugurated in 1859. Why was the Gothic Revival style of architecture chosen for this 'magnificent pile'? Was the choice incidental or deliberate and was the significance of the architectural style directed solely to members of the university or was there a hidden agenda, designed to achieve far-reaching effects?

plate 1

The imposing and ornate stone building, replete with gargoyles and battlements, sat isolated and splendid, prominently situated on the brow of a hill surrounded by the neglected cattle-grazing pastures of Grose Farm. It was outside the toll gates in Parramatta Road, like an outpost guarding the city. Because of its isolated position two miles from the city centre, the university was distanced from its undistinguished aspects, far from convict penitentiaries, barracks, slums and the disorder of the mercantile port. It was, however, clearly identifiable from Sydney to the east and from vantage points miles to the north, south and west.

When the Grose Farm site was granted to the university in 1855 there were only seven enrolled students and forty years passed before the enrolment exceeded one hundred. Yet the buildings erected were so expansive and so expensive as to deplete funds intended for teaching. One of the university's founders, F.L.S. (Futurity) Merewether, asserted that the buildings were intended 'not for present requirements, but ... for a great future'. That may explain the commodious proportions of the buildings, but their ostentatious style suggests that the founders' intentions were directed beyond mere teaching. Yet how could an almost empty building have any effect at all upon society?
T.J. Clark may provide a clue:

We usually mean by the word 'society' ... a set of means for solidarity, distance, belonging and exclusion ... orders of this sort appear to be established most potently by representations or systems of signs.

Could it be that the Great Hall of the University of Sydney was more than the sum of its parts and if so, what was its significance?

The Great Hall can be seen as a manifestation of art which is apparently straightforward and stable, but about which there is the irony of the enormous, highly decorated building intended for a university yet minus the appropriate number of students; but is this apparent straightforwardness an illusion?

In this chapter the Great Hall will be discussed in terms of its symbolic meaning, as an object which functions as a sign because of conventional or habitual associations understood by the viewer when the object (the Great Hall) is seen in a particular context. Broadly speaking the symbolic meanings of the fabric of the buildings will be discussed in relation to culture, civilization and knowledge. The ideological implications of the building will be discussed in terms of justifications which mask the self interest of a particular group of society. To be more specific it will be argued that whilst ostensibly designed to educate the youth of the colony, the building served the interests of a few elite who were successful leaders in colonial society and who desired to establish not only their political authority but also their cultural authority within the colony as well as in British society. At the same time this elite section of colonial society wished to rid the colony of the stigma of its foundation upon convict labour and yet still retain close ties with the mother country. It will be suggested that the Gothic style of the Great Hall had a part to play in these ambitions.

The isolated but prominent site chosen for the Great Hall has already been described, but what was the style chosen for this building, thought to be the finest specimen of architecture in the colony? The initial recommendation was for an Elizabethan style to be constructed in brick with stone mullions and coigns; only
the necessary parts of the building were to be erected. Edward Deas Thomson, the Colonial Secretary, and the politician William Charles Wentworth, both members of the university building committee, were instructed to procure plans and specifications from England. The reason for the switch to Edmund Thomas Blacket as architect later in 1854 is not recorded, but Blacket's 'great ability and taste in medieval architecture' particularly his expertise in the 'later Tudor' style was noted. Blacket's first plan was considered 'much too insignificant for the site' and a more extended façade of much greater architectural pretension was ordered. Details of the Early Victorian Gothic Revival plan for the Great Hall and eastern face of the quadrangle and its origins, which were modern but embellished with correct archaeological details have been described elsewhere, but for the purposes of this thesis it is appropriate to note that various features of the Great Hall were borrowed from Westminster Palace, particularly the hammer beam roof.

To illustrate his plan Blacket presented the building committee with a Presentation View of the Proposed University Building of 1854. The elevation was drawn by Blacket himself but he engaged the most outstanding landscape artist then in Sydney to supply the picturesque foreground and embellishments. The painting shows an imposing and ornate Gothic building, from the principal entrance of which one could command a vista of a future avenue of trees. Later the extended plan was further aggrandized by the change of building material from the utilitarian brick to the more impressive sandstone. The original intention of building only the most necessary parts was completely abandoned. It was agreed that the first section of the university to be built would be the magnificent Great Hall.

Why was the Gothic style chosen? When Blacket pointed out to the university senate that 'we shall have to determine which of all architectural styles shall be used whether, in fact, the new Building shall be Gothic or Roman or Greek', the committee had already expressed a preference for the 'Elizabethan' style, and Blacket himself recommended Gothic as suitable for a university building.
In 1850 Sydney's most important public building from a social and political view was Government House, begun in 1838 and supervised by Mortimer Lewis. The imposing, heavily crenellated and military-style Gothic structure was designed by the English architect Edward Blore who also designed Sir Walter Scott's Gothic Revival house Abbotsford besides contributing to Buckingham Palace. Whether Sir Charles Nicholson made Blore's acquaintance before or after the erection of the university building is not known but Nicholson possessed two watercolours of the University of Sydney by Edward Blore, one of the exterior and one of the interior of the Great Hall. The most important public buildings in England from a social and political viewpoint were the new Gothic Houses of Parliament by Sir Charles Barry and Augustus Welby Pugin, opened in 1852.

Both Nicholson and W.C. Wentworth who was on the senate of the university, lived in Gothic-style houses. Wentworth remodelled his Vaucluse House to include Gothic features similar to some included in Government House and Nicholson purchased Lindesay in 1845. Although austere it was the first domestic building in the colony to be labelled 'Gothick'. Nicholson's preference for the Gothic style was allied to his love for the novels of Sir Walter Scott which he read aloud all his life. It is clear from Nicholson's own comments about the Great Hall that he understood the theories underlying the resurgence of the Gothic style in England. Several possible contacts could have contributed to his enthusiasm for the style. By an interesting coincidence Nicholson attended the University of Edinburgh at the same time as Thomas Carlyle one of the great apologists for the Middle Ages, so presumably he would have been aware of Carlyle's ideas. It is also possible that Nicholson met John Ruskin through their mutual acquaintanceship with the Queen's physician Sir James Clark and the artist Adelaide Ironside. The third founder of the University, Francis Lewis Shaw Merewether, also wanted an 'English' style for the Great Hall, as his motto for the university indicates: 'Sidere mens eadem mutato'.

The prominence of the English Houses of Parliament and the colonial Government House in public life would have been a compelling model for the great new institution to be erected in the colony.
of New South Wales. Many issues arise from the choice of the Gothic style but it is difficult not to be aware that underlying all the issues was the personal ambition of the founders. If as Ruskin maintained a building is 'a kind of monument' to the owner or builder, then the university senate were immediately putting themselves on the vice-regal level by choosing the same style as the residence of the Queen's representative in the colony. The most obvious reason for the choice of the Gothic style is that it was very fashionable, but was there more to it than mere fashion?

Gothic was a style with which the entire world of European civilization was familiar, and its use for the university building was seen as a sign of the maturity of the colony. The great Gothic-style hall would indicate that the colony was now civilized, cultured, educated and up-to-date, no longer embarrassed by the brutality of convictism or the greed of the gold fever, but ready to make its debut on the world stage. Indeed, Nicholson did not hide his aims in this regard. His report to The Select Committee on the University of 1860 placed the buildings in an international spectrum. They were, he said, 'a suite of buildings which from their style and execution would form an ornament to any of the capitals of Europe ... The influence of the University extends', Nicholson claimed, 'through the whole colony (and) has raised the character of this colony throughout the world.' The lustre of the pretentious buildings enhanced not only the reputation of the university in the capitals of Europe but also the reputations of those associated with its planning. As chancellor of a university which from the appearance of the building was in the class of the great universities of England, Nicholson's personal prestige was enormously enhanced. It was the building, not the students or professors, which gave the university status.

To realise such ambitions it was necessary to build in a clearly identifiable style, but there were other styles just as familiar to the public as Gothic, for instance the Greek style. The austere but dignified Sydney College buildings (now Sydney Grammar School) in which the university had its genesis are Greek style. Admittedly that style lost favour in the colony after 1845 although it was
still used for commercial and funerary buildings. Not only did Nicholson, for one, prefer the Gothic, but he did not like Greek style. 'A Grecian building', he said, 'is wholly unadapted for purposes such as those aimed at. The greatest difficulty is found in adapting a purely Grecian building to the ordinary wants of public institutions'. Nevertheless there was the example of London University which Wentworth originally proposed in 1849 as the model for the University of Sydney. From 1836 the University of London was partly housed in the Greek Revival-style Somerset House, the neo-Greek University College of 1827-28 was designed by William Wilkins and in 1870 the London University acquired a Greek Revival building in Burlington Gardens.

Once the Bill to Inaugurate the University of Sydney was passed by the Legislative Council in 1850 the founders of the university wanted nothing to do with London University, however, and there was no chance that they would choose an architectural style in any way similar to London's. Wentworth's use of London University as a model had been a ploy to get the bill through the Legislative Council. As the most powerful politician in the colony, Wentworth had taken up the cause of the university, but as a staunch conservative he had to use a number of devices to get the bill passed. He was at the time contemplating a system of colonial peerage or 'bunyip aristocracy', and as a graduate of Cambridge he would have favoured a colonial Oxbridge to train future conservative leaders of the country. Wentworth had to appeal to the conservatives to gain support in the Legislative Council, but his argument had to be radical enough to appease the democrats. He had to seem to lean left and so proposed an institution which would be colonial and cheap and also secular, the last point would upset the clergy and appeal to the radicals. His models were colonial universities in Canada and U.S.A. but the system proposed was based on London University's. His argument to the conservatives was that if the government failed to educate the colonial youth to their responsibilities in government they themselves would have failed as a government and he also stressed the problems of sending students overseas for higher education. Far from breaking down distinctions in society and restoring the natural equity of man as Wentworth had postulated, the institution was designed
to educate or even create the elite of the colony. 24

This aim had been revealed by Deas Thomson, the Colonial Secretary, before the bill was brought before the Legislative Council and it was to the Oxbridge tradition which the University of Sydney turned for a system to 'educate a body of men suited to fill the highest political office.' 25 In contrast to the commercial and scientific orientation of London University, Oxford and Cambridge produced graduates conscious of a nation (England) 'to which every hour gives wider authority over distant lands ... and (which) must finally regulate the industry no less than discipline the intellect of the human race.' 26

Apart from requiring the foundation professors to be graduates of the Oxbridge universities, a sure way to link the infant university with that English tradition was to house it in buildings which were associated in people's perception with the old universities of the mother country. This had always been the intention, as Nicholson admitted upon being questioned by the Select Committee of the University in 1869. 'The Elizabethan style, or rather the later Tudor style is eminently qualified for such purposes, being thoroughly English in its character and associations. The great academical institutions of the Mother Country all belong to that period.' 27

It was the principles of associationism which were called upon to provide the desired link. Nicholson was conscious that it was the process of historical evolution which had endowed the Oxbridge universities 'the great sanctuaries of learning in our native land', with their particular character, as opposed to the colonial institution, the main buildings of which were planned and built within five years. This was because, according to him, the new university was situated in a country where the citizens were 'unable to build upon the memories of the past, with no lineage of great names, without the prestige of local associations.' 28 Today the narrow mindedness and British chauvinism of this view is obvious but then it was accepted by sections of colonial society who either saw themselves as colonial aristocrats or who wished eventually to return permanently to the mother country as did Nicholson, Wentworth and Merewether.
All other heritages upon which the colony had relied for its foundation were ignored. In general aboriginal culture, if noticed at all, was regarded in terms of ethnography, the convict heritage was a source of shame and feats of exploration both before and after 1770 were ignored except for those of Captain James Cook.

The iconography of the Great Hall reflects this attitude. Of the thirty-six great English men depicted in the stained glass, only one, the Englishman Captain James Cook, had any connection with Australia. One of the stained glass windows was a donation of William Long, whose contribution was more than double that of other donors, although this was not acknowledged. William Long, although a graduate of Cambridge, was the son of a convict and it must be assumed that his larger contribution was related to a desire for respectability, but as neither this nor his other gifts to the university were adequately acknowledged it appears that he was written out of early university history because of his convict origins. Among the proliferation of gargoyles and heads representing English types which decorate the Great Hall there are a few examples of indigenous flora and fauna, but nowhere is there any reference to the Aboriginal people. Neither convicts, explorers nor Aboriginals would provide associations which could meet the aims of the founders. As stated above the aims included the linking of the University of Sydney not only with the Oxbridge tradition, but also with the British Crown, as well as elevating the reputation of 'this lately abject and despised colony, whose name was used in the mother country as an epithet of scorn and a bye-word of reproach' in the words of the first principal of the university, Professor John Woolley.

The founders of the University of Sydney could have been confident that the ideas of associationism with which they hoped to invoke the Oxbridge tradition, were familiar to the citizens of Sydney. Every owner of a popular cottage ornée was, whether consciously or not, putting into practice the cult of nostalgia through associationism. Publications which dealt with these ideas were well known and in circulation in the colony from the time of the Macquaries who did much to popularise Gothick architecture, which was the precursor of the more archaeologically correct Gothic Revival style.
of the university. A copy of Archibald Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, first published in 1790 in Edinburgh, was bequeathed to the Australian Subscription Library in 1830. The Rev. William Gilpin's *Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty made in the Year 1772, on Several Parts of England; particularly the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland* (3rd edition, London, 1792) now in the Mitchell Library, Sydney was also available. 32 Blacket brought with him from England Pugin's pattern books of Gothic ornament, including *The Present State of Ecclesiastical Taste in England* now in Fisher Library at the University of Sydney (and endorsed with Blacket's name).

The constant use of the word 'association' in connection with the architecture of the university by Nicholson and his colleagues indicates a deliberate strategy or at the very least the presumption that the idea was commonly understood in the colony. At the inauguration of the Great Hall on 18 July 1859, Nicholson stressed the associational qualities inherent in the building, but at first he linked them to art, 'there is an intuitive and all pervading principle in our moral nature that enables us to find enjoyment ... in those abstract and often indefinite (but no less real) impressions that spring from and are associated with manifestations of art'. he pontificated, thus setting up the associational theme and putting the Great Hall into the category 'art'. After referring to abstractions such as 'higher destinies of mankind' and 'objects such as those which constitute the charm of the older countries', he became more specific when at the conclusion of his revealing speech he directed the students' attention to associations inherent in 'the whole circumference of this stately hall (in which) we are reminded of those who as princes, philosophers, poets, divines, orators and statesmen (significantly placed last for emphasis) have for a thousand years given such imperishable lustre to the name of Britain' (again placed last for emphasis and to be linked with "statesmen"). The message was clearly absorbed by one of the first graduates, William Charles Windeyer, who agreed that 'the associations connected with the great universities have had their influence on the characters of the men educated in them' and that 'good buildings (such as the Great Hall) have a great effect'. 33
It was publicly asserted by all those connected with the university that associations aroused by buildings in the style of Oxford and Cambridge would elevate and cultivate the taste of colonial youth. The importance attached to the Great Hall and its associational characteristics overwhelmed all other more practical considerations. The Great Hall was finished at enormous expense by 1860 but the university had no lecture rooms, locker rooms or reading rooms for students, which may account for the dramatic scarcity of students. The public emphasis was directed to the 'taste of colonial youth' rather than towards the true agenda of this associationism, which was to lock the colony into the conservative Oxbridge system of tertiary education which would perpetuate bonds with England, the mother country, by providing locally born administrators for the colony, yet administrators who were educated to be totally loyal and subservient to the interests of England.

The associationism of the Gothic style in the colony was generally understood in relation to nostalgia for the motherland. The Gothic style at the University of Sydney was likewise related to nostalgia but also to the artificial formation of an elite ruling class in the colony as shown above. In England the Gothic style encompassed more complicated issues, some of which applied to the colonial Great Hall. It is common knowledge that there were links between the English Gothic Revival and the twin fears of destabilization of society as a result of the French Revolution and fear of such a violent revolution in England, together with nostalgia for an idyllic past in the face of rapidly changing industrialized society which placed emphasis on the individual. The Gothic revival offered a model of a society based on the feudal values of medieval England. Patriotism, and social order and control would result. New South Wales, by the mid-nineteenth century, was not industrialised to any extent, therefore there was no call for the use of associationism in opposition to this aspect of society. But the two issues of allegiance to the Empire (wider than the training of future administrators, but vital for those whose fortunes and social position were dependent on the consanguinity between the colony and England) and law and order, were becoming a problem for conservative colonials in the 1850s.
Could the associationism of the Gothic Great Hall have any effect on these problems? For some colonials the example of the United States of America provided a more desirable model than England. J.D. Lang called for an Australian Declaration of Independence. Such ideas were seen as a threat by the conservatives debating the Constitution Bill in 1853. Wentworth, during the debate, called for a 'conservative one (constitution) - a British and not a Yankee Constitution'. 35 The discovery of gold which brought increased prosperity to individuals was only one of the destabilising influences in colonial society in the 1850s. With the prospect of self government there was dissension amongst the ruling classes, while at the same time there was idleness and drunkenness among the working classes. Disorder and violence resulted from religious, racial and industrial conflict. Political processions and obstruction of the streets around Parliament House were banned between 1846 and 1853. Members of the ruling class in Sydney were so harrassed by gangs that public meetings were called for the defence of 'life and property' in 1844 and 1850. 36 Neither church nor family exerted strong control over colonial society in the 1850s. Pardoned ex-convicts were no longer subject to the dictates of the church which preached duty and submission to the Government, nor was the family a strong controlling element, for most extended families were left behind in England.

All this unrest called for an assertion of British authority and a re-imposition of the social hierarchy in which the Queen of England was supreme. It created the need for a symbol which would re-establish an allegiance to England, a symbol which embodied the authority of history, culture, education and civilization, which could be used in an associational sense as a stabilising example. Government House had provided one such symbol, but the erection of the Great Hall provided the opportunity to create another symbol particularly appropriate to the conditions of the 1850s. The Great Hall was isolated from the evils of the city, it was more recent than Government House, the references to history were more obvious in the resemblance to Westminster Hall (a reminder of the authority of the British Empire), in the stained glass windows depicting the rulers and great men
of English history, the angels and the gargoyles; and significantly the Great Hall was accessible to the general public (but only as sightseers) who flocked to see it. John Woolley recalled that 'every Sunday we have now, even in the worst weather, about a thousand people who come to the place to see and admire the buildings.' 37 A music festival held in the Great Hall in July 1859 attracted fourteen hundred people. 38 The Sydney Morning Herald summed up the significance to the general public of the Great Hall in its report of the opening:

The University Hall ... this noble building ... constitutes a memorial of the past as well as a promise of the future. It reminds us that we belong to a nation which for ages has possessed seats of learning where the highest attainments of which the human intellect is capable have been reached by thousands ... 39

The hordes of Sunday trippers make an ironic contrast to the scarcity of enrolled students. Yet in attracting the general population and confronting them with the huge new building designed in the Gothic style associated in the colonial consciousness with the authority of the mother country and the Oxbridge tradition, the Great Hall was fulfilling the covert purpose for which it was constructed, although with its lack of students its overt purpose appeared unsuccessful.

When justifying the expense incurred in erecting the Great Hall, Sir Charles Nicholson quoted the example of Toronto University, founded in 1827: 'I was rather struck to see how much more elaborate is the design of the University of Toronto', he said. 40 It is arguable that the heavily ornamented Gothic style used at Toronto was also a device related to nostalgia and associationism. The Toronto building is more like French than English Gothic. It could be suggested that the conservative and defeated French elements in Canadian society were endeavouring, through the use of the French Gothic Revival style, to reassert their hegemony over Canadian society, which had been lost in Wolfe's victory over Montcalm of 1757 in the neighbouring French stronghold of Quebec. After the Peace of Versailles in 1783 the importance of the English domination of Canada would have increased. It is only possible to speculate on whether Nicholson took Toronto and its significant style as an example
for the University of Sydney. From the wording of his comment it appears that he actually inspected Toronto University himself. 41

Did anyone question the instant history imposed upon Sydney University by the choice of the Gothic style? Did anyone see that the choice was linked to an attempt by certain leading citizens to mould the future of the colony and at the same time to take advantage of the social status conferred upon the designers of the edifice?

It seems that the Great Hall was understood in terms of nostalgia and as a symbol of England and culture by a proportion of the population to judge from the many comments on the building which compare it to the ancient universities of the mother country. It also seems that only a few people comprehended the idea that the university would be seen by the outside world as viable only or mainly because it had an imposing Oxford-like hall, and that a colony with such an edifice must therefore be seen as civilized, one that had sloughed off the identity of a penal settlement. Nicholson, Merewether and Woolley knew this. Nicholson spoke of the university as an edifice which 'should in its external and material aspects symbolise its moral ends and attributes.' 42

Such a comment hints at the contradiction between making a symbol and making meaning from a symbol. At the Oxbridge universities the meaning came first, the content or substance of the institution shaped the outer form, that is, the building. Both Oxford and Cambridge resulted from slow organic growth, both were founded in the thirteenth century, Oxford by a convergence of religious communities of Cistercians, Franciscans and Carmelites upon an already established eighth century nunnery of St. Fredeswide; the first building at Cambridge was a school of theology. As a result of a close association between church and scholarship, the buildings naturally followed the ecclesiastical model of the Gothic cathedrals, that is, the substance influenced the form. In Sydney, on the other hand, the form was created first and from that it was hoped to create the substance. The university Great Hall was only an imitation of all that it was supposed to stand for, used in much
the same way that Disneyland recreations are used today, that is, whilst the building seemed to stand for one thing there was an underlying meaning hidden from the casual observer.

William Sharpe Macleay was one who drew attention to the speedy erection of the Great Hall in comparison to the ages required for the evolution of Oxford and Cambridge and the Gothic cathedrals of England. He curtly asserted that the building had nothing to do with the education given in it, but at the same time confessed that he did not know what the objects of the founders were. Here Macleay was judging the building in terms of consequences, not significance, but perhaps he suspected that there were motives other than teaching involved. To the select committee appointed to enquire into the university the building symbolised extravagance. Daniel Deniehy who proposed the appointment of the select committee attacked the university in parliament as having a 'Twelfth Night cake and ginger-bread style of decoration'. He argued that the university should follow the simple American rather than the Oxford style of architecture and devote the money saved to promoting more professors, more books, more scientific apparatus, a sick and superannuation fund for professors, but more than all, travelling fellowships and scholarships. Deniehy made it clear that he understood what was really going on through his satirical play, How I Became the Attorney-General of New Barataria.

The ideological implications of the Gothic-style Great Hall were never spelled out of course and no contemporary or present historian has commented on them. Yet the Gothic building provided a framework for the new university which followed the conservatism of the old English universities and provided leaders for colonial society who supported the British empire. The Hall provided a location in the colony for ceremonies of pomp and circumstance and English ritual which impressed the people.

Nicholson, Wentworth and Merewether all left the colony to live permanently in England. The university, symbolised by the building, for without the building it would have been insignificant, provided Nicholson in particular with an entrée to fashionable
society. He met the Queen and Prince Albert when the University of Sydney stained glass windows were displayed for them at Windsor Castle. 'There was a large gathering of people of the Court, including the French ambassador and other political celebrities.' He received a baronetcy for 'educational advancement of the colony of New South Wales,' as well as honorary degrees of D.C.L. and L.L.D. from Oxford and Cambridge in 1856. When a large illustration of the interior of the Great Hall appeared in the Illustrated London News, Sir Charles was credited with the establishment of the university, and the university was credited with the development of the distinct resemblance which Sydney bore to the 'old world'. Many visitors to Sydney admired the Great Hall. Anthony Trollope wrote that it was 'the finest chamber in the colonies ... no college either at Oxford or Cambridge possesses so fine a one.' The Gothic style chosen for the Great Hall reinforced the link between the colony and the mother country and provided an instant though artificial heritage for the university.

The Gothic Great Hall is in many ways a monument to the founders of the university. It was their taste, their ambition for the colony and for themselves and their enthusiasm which saw it through. Whilst Nicholson gained much from his association with it, he also contributed a great deal in time and money and had a genuine and typically Victorian aspiration to improve society. The style of the Great Hall was intimately connected with the nineteenth-century portrait collection with which it was later decorated.

In conclusion, in this chapter it has been shown that the Gothic style was deliberately chosen for the Great Hall, although other styles were possible. The Gothic style was used to provide a symbolic link between the University of Sydney and the Oxbridge tradition, and through this it contributed to the continued subservience of the colony to the mother country at a time when other allegiances were being promulgated. The Gothic-style Great Hall was highly decorated to produce an edifice which would impress not only visitors to the colony, but also Europeans and English inhabitants, with the idea that Australia was a sophisticated, stable and civilized country, which had forever left behind its convict origins. While the
physical accommodation of the students was neglected, their aesthetic education was, it was hoped, being enhanced by the building. It was the Gothic-style Great Hall which represented the university rather than the students. Underlying all this lay the personal ambition of the founders. The impressive building provided a background for their own social aspirations in Britain as well as in colonial society.