

Report from the *Art Journal* (reprinted in *Jackson's Oxford Journal* of 19 August 1854) on the reception held by Richard James Spiers, Mayor of Oxford, in the old Town Hall of Oxford on 22 June 1854

### **THE MAYOR'S RECENT RECEPTION.**

The Mayor of Oxford has commemorated his official year by an "evening" that will be long remembered in venerable Oxford, and by the many distinguished guests who enjoyed his hospitality, and that of the heads of colleges by whom he was so courteously and generously seconded. Mr. Richard James Spiers is a tradesman of his native city; neither less nor more: he deals chiefly in objects of Art, and to the taste and enterprise manifested by him in the various original works he has issued, we have borne frequent testimony. Moreover, he is, in the best sense of the term a gentleman – universally esteemed and respected – and deservedly so – not alone by those with whom he has had long intercourse, but by those who are comparatively strangers to him, but who estimate and value those courteous habits and conciliatory manners which confer dignity upon any rank. Hence, therefore, he was enabled to do that which probably no other citizen of exclusive and aristocratic Oxford could have done – to draw around his hospitable board all the leading authorities of the colleges, and to associate with them, in harmonious and profitable fellowship, not only men of science, art, and letters, but those comparatively humbler inhabitants of the city, who have hitherto been divided from them by almost impassable barriers. The result cannot be otherwise than salutary to all classes. It has been well said that the true "levelling system" is to raise up one order without lowering the other. While the scholars of Alma Mater lose nothing, the citizens gain much by occasions such as that to which we refer: and there can be no doubt that from the Mayoralty of Mr Spiers will be dated a far better feeling, a more real sympathy, and definitely more or practical good, in the ancient and venerable city, over which Mr. Spiers has so auspiciously presided. We imagine the "evening" referred to was suggested by the experiment of Alderman Challis, the late estimable Lord Mayor of London, who in calling together at the Mansion House the "celebrities" of England, departed wholesomely from a long established custom, which taught that the chief enjoyment of life consisted of eating and drinking. His example has been gracefully imitated by the Mayor of Oxford: the city of learning was, as it ought to have been, the earliest to take up so wise a plan: and, as we have intimated, Mr. Spiers was, for many reasons, the proper person to adopt it there. His evening was a great success. Upwards of one hundred and fifty distinguished ladies and gentlemen, all honourably associated with science, art, and letters, were invited by Mr. Spiers from London; arrangements had been previously made for their comfortable accommodation; the arts (with which we have chiefly to do) were represented by Mr. Knight, R.A., Mr M'Dowell, R.A., Mr. Frost, R.A, Mr. E. M. Ward, R.A., Mr Calder Marshall, R.A., Mr. Durham, Mr. Noble, Mr. Shaw, F.S.A., Mr. Fairholt, F.S.A., and others. These gentlemen were large contributors to the enjoyment of the evening. The Town Hall was fitted up with

an almost incredible number of works of art, sculpture, paintings, drawings, engravings, illustrated works &c. We have not space to enumerate, but certainly so extensive and valuable a collection was never brought together at any private “gathering”. A very large proportion of these were contributed by some of the college mandates; Dr Ellesley in particular sending many of his rare portraits, and his costly assemblage of drawings and sketches by ancient masters. It may also be added that some twenty-five of the copies from the pictures of her Majesty, – engraving for the *Art Journal*, – were also honourably conspicuous in one of the best rooms. The guests amounted in number to nearly eleven hundred; they composed nearly every gentleman of note in the city and its neighbourhood, with all the more prominent officers and scholars of the University.\* Nearly all the stranger-guests remained in Oxford for the two days succeeding; when, by previous arrangement, the Mayor “guided” his guests to all the objects of attraction in the city: the Bodleian and Ratcliffe Libraries, the Museum, and all the Colleges, with their beautiful walks and gardens. On the first of the two days, lunch was provided for the Mayor’s guests, in one of the venerable halls of Christ Church, and on the next day, in the large and beautiful hall of Magdalen College; the senior and junior proctors acting as hosts and their college associates joining with them in giving cordial and hearty welcome to the visitors. On the two evenings, entertainments were provided – by the Mayor at his private house, and by Dr. Daubeny at the Botanic Garden. During the various visits to the libraries and colleges the visitors were accompanied by the several authorities; every object of interest was exhibited to them; and it is not too much to say that both the hosts and the guests seemed to feel exceeding enjoyment, and to consider that a mutual compliment had been gracefully paid. It was impossible, indeed, that any visitors of any rank could have been treated with more courtesy or with greater attention: part of this pleasant issue was no doubt in consideration of the high and honourable positions which many of the visitors occupied in science, art, and letters; but a part also was the result of personal esteem and respect for the Mayor, which originated a desire to do honour to his guests and to prevent the possibility of disappointment arising from the visit. To the Mayor, this result must have been highly gratifying; it certainly was not less so to his guests: and we believe it was equally so to the authorities of the University, who bestowed so much time and so much hospitality, in the reception of the visitors. An impression was thus left which cannot fail to work well. An experiment has thus been tried – and successfully – that will no doubt lead to other receptions of the kind by other corporate bodies of England.

\* On the two days succeeding, admission to the rooms was freely given to all applicants, when, we understand, upwards of 20,000 persons passed through the rooms, examining the several works of Art which had been the enjoyment of the preceding evening. This was a very important feature; for thus pleasure and information were largely accorded to “the people” of the town.