

The Restorations of the Westminster Abbey Chapter House

Steven H. Wander

Volume 4, numéro 2, 1977

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1077358ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1077358ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (imprimé)

1918-4778 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Wander, S. H. (1977). The Restorations of the Westminster Abbey Chapter House. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 4(2), 78–90.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1077358ar>

The Restorations of the Westminster Abbey Chapter House

Steven H. Wander

Aedificavitque ibidem dominus rex capitulum incomparabile: thus Matthew Paris describes King Henry III's magnificent chapter house for Westminster Abbey.¹ The king undertook the reconstruction of the Abbey church in 1245; the chapter house must have been begun soon thereafter. John of St. Omer was already at work on its lectern in 1249.² Temporary canvas filling for the windows was purchased in 1253, suggesting that the structure had already been roofed and the tracery was probably in place; in the same year, taskwork was being done on the chapter house entrance.³ By 1259 the extant mediaeval floor was finished, the surplus paving tiles having been removed from the belfry and consigned to St. Dunstan's Chapel.⁴ The flying buttresses on the exterior were added only considerably later, apparently in 1377/78 when "6 boatloads of stone were used up *circa batellament' ecclesie et super pinnacul'*

dom' capitular' et in al' locis in ecclesia."⁵ According to a letter of 1725 from the Dean and Chapter, the buttress at the northeast corner was removed by Christopher Wren; it was afterwards replaced by George Gilbert Scott.⁶

Although a chapter house normally served only as the daily meeting place of a Benedictine monastery, the one at Westminster, situated across from the king's principal residence, rapidly acquired additional governmental functions. Edward I may have used the crypt or undercroft of the chapter house as a royal treasury, and the spacious upper chamber of the double-tiered octagon accommodated royal convocations such as that of 1257 when clergy and laity gathered to discuss King Henry III's Sicilian expedition.⁷ By 1352 the lower house of Parliament was meeting in the chapter house, and until its removal to St. Stephen's Chapel during the reign of Edward VI, the Commons frequently assembled there.⁸

Although abandoned by Parliament, the upper chamber of the chapter house remained under government control, and by at least the end of the 1560s the chapter house had begun to serve as a record repository. On 19 December 1569 Lewis Stockett, Surveyor of Works, received £174 6s. 3d. in part for

¹ Matthew Paris, *Abbreviatio Chronicorum Angliae*, ed. F. Madden (Rolls Series, XLIV, 1869), III, 318.

For the restorations of the Westminster Abbey chapter house, see especially George Gilbert Scott, *Gleanings from Westminster Abbey*, 2nd ed. (Oxford and London, 1863), 39–46, 195–97; Scott, "The Chapter-house of Westminster," *Old London* (London, 1867), 141–57; W. R. Lethaby, *Westminster Abbey and the Kings' Craftsmen* (London, 1906), 37–54, 241–43; Lethaby, *Westminster Abbey Re-examined* (London, 1925), 98–132; J. G. Noppen, "Westminster Chapter-house," *Country Life*, CVI (16 September 1949), 841–44; Department of the Environment Official Handbook, *The Chapter House and the Pyx Chamber Westminster Abbey*, written by J. G. Noppen (1935), revised (1952) and then rewritten (1976) by S. E. Rigold; and J. Mordaunt Crook and M. H. Port, *The History of the King's Works 1782–1851*, VI (London, 1973), 535–36.

² *Close Rolls of the Reign of Henry III (A.D. 1247–1251)*, 203, 245.

³ H. M. Colvin, ed., *The History of the King's Works: The Middle Ages*, I, (London, 1963), 141–42.

⁴ *Close Rolls (1256–1259)*, 377.

⁵ R. B. Rackham, "The Nave of Westminster," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, IV (1909–10), 39, n. 1. Since Scott added the present pinnacles, Lethaby's hypothesis associating this document with the flyers is all the more suggestive (*Re-examined*, 130).

⁶ See *infra*, nn. 19, 40.

⁷ H. R. Luard, ed., *Annales Monastici* (Rolls Series, XXXVI, 1864), I, 386.

⁸ I. M. Cooper, "The Meeting-places of Parliament in the Ancient Palace of Westminster," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, N.S., III (1938), 115–16.

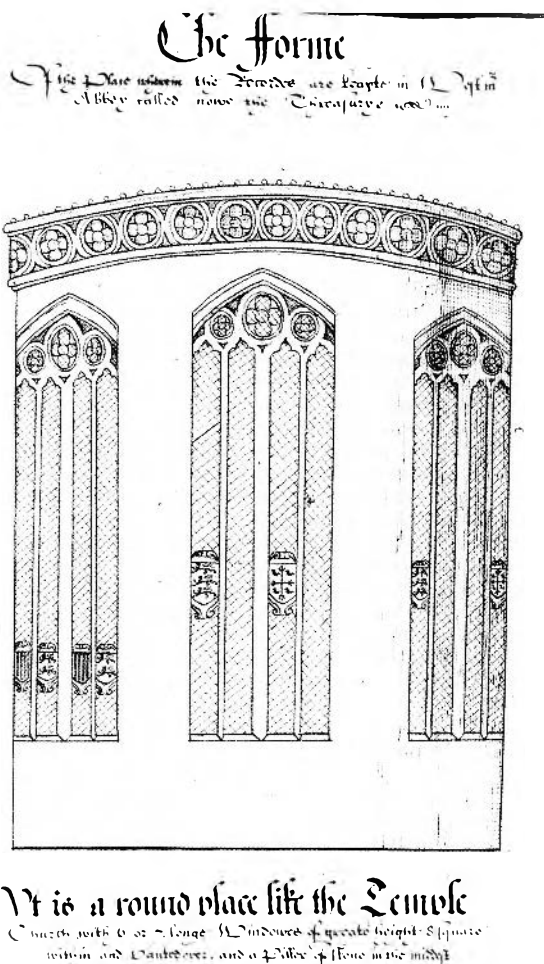


FIGURE 1. Chapter House, Westminster Abbey, early 17th century. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS. C. 704, f. iii.

“Works on the Arches of the Round house of Records, adjoining the college, Westminster.”⁹ Eighteenth-century drawings show the arches of the chapter house flying buttresses as being bricked-up, and Stockett’s payment may have been for this construction. Subsequently, a letter of 1573 mentions that a treasury for records within Westminster Abbey, which can be identified with the chapter house, “wanteth Reparatyons bothe in Glasse and Leade.”¹⁰ A drawing of the new record office in an early

seventeenth-century manuscript (Fig. 1) includes a description: “The forme of the place wherein the Records are keapte in Westm. Abbey, called nowe the Threasure. Yt is a round place like the Temple Church, with 6 or 7 longe windowes of greate height, 8 square within, and vaulted over, and a pillar of stone in the midst.” The shields-of-arms in the windows depict with some inaccuracies the arms of King Henry III (*gules three leopards or*), Saint Edward the Confessor (*a cross paly between five martlets or*), and Count Raymond of Provence (*or four pales gules*).¹¹ These escutcheons may copy original grisaille glass from the chapter house, but the tracery of all three windows shows a large quatrefoil head rather than the sexfoil depicted in later views. This inconsistency casts doubt not only on the authenticity of the window designs but also on the quatrefoil band encircling the building which is not illustrated elsewhere.

Storage space in the record office soon proved inadequate, and on 13 July 1703 Christopher Wren was asked “for an estimate of the charge of building a gallery in the Chapter House in Westminster Abbey.”¹² It has often been stated that Wren, unwilling to injure the ancient fabric, refused to build such a gallery; however, on the 29th of October following, his estimate for repairs of £781 7s. 6d. received official approval.¹³ The actual construction may have been postponed, for restoration of the chapter house was still under discussion almost a year and a half later. Prior to 8 March 1706, Wren “reported to the Lords’ Committee for inspecting the Public Records, that the necessary repairs of the shell only (which must be done in the first place before any conveniences can be made within for better placing the records) will amount to £1447 10s. 0d.”¹⁴ This work was indeed put in hand, and on 29 April 1707 William Lowndes directed Charles Dartiquenave, Paymaster of the Works, to pay £1531 2s. 9d. “for repairing the Convocation House adjoining Westminster Abbey.”¹⁵

It is difficult to assess the extent of Wren’s restoration. In 1719 a parliamentary committee found

⁹ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series (Addenda, 1566–1579)*, 312.

¹⁰ John Stow, *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster*, ed. J. Strype (London, 1720), II, Bk. 6, 52–53. This treasury, like that in the “ould Chapter House of the Abbey,” contained writs of the King’s Bench and Common Place; see Arthur Agarde, “The Compendium of the Records in the Treasury (1610),” in F. Palgrave, ed., *The Antient Kalendars and Inventories of the Treasury of His Majesty’s Exchequer* (London, 1836), II, 329–32.

¹¹ In additions for *Monumenta Westmonasteriensia* (London, 1683), Henry Keepe notes the arms of Henry III, Provence, and Richard of Cornwall in the chapter house glass (Cambridge, University Library, MS. Dd. VIII. 39, 115).

¹² *Calendar of Treasury Books* (hereafter CTB) 1703, XVIII, 336.

¹³ London, Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), T. 27/17, 270; cf. CTB 1703, XVIII, 437.

¹⁴ PRO, T. 27/18, 190; cf. CTB April 1705 to September 1706, XX, pt. 3, 599.

¹⁵ CTB October 1706 to December 1707, XXI, pt. 2, 252. See also Stephen Wren, ed., *Parentalia* (London, 1750), 298.

that “from the Outward Door leading to the *Chapter-House*, and within the said *Chapter-House*, there is a great deal of Room, and it is altogether very Lightsom to receive many more records; as may be seen if Your Lordships please to direct a Survey to be made thereof, and also of the repairs of the top of the same.”¹⁶ An indistinct bird’s-eye view from before 1720 reveals few details besides the presence of the large windows.¹⁷ Additional repairs were requested in 1719 and again in 1725. After viewing the chapter house, the Office of Works concluded on 28 July 1725 that “the charge of repairing in a substantial manner the said building, preparing the proper and necessary conveniences for the reception not only of the records that are at present repositied therein, but for making conveniences for such additional records as are intended to be placed there may amount to about the sum of 1488 pounds.”¹⁸ During construction the Dean and Chapter protested that workmen were “rebuilding a flying arch for the support of His Majesty’s Record Roome, antiently called the Chapter House, which arch was many years since taken down by order of Sir Christopher Wren, and which if rebuilt would be a great inconvenience.”¹⁹ In place of this buttress the Office of Works ordered on 22

December 1725 “that the Record Roome at Westminster be secured by a cirb [crib?] or iron chain.”²⁰ Scott discovered later that “on the top of the capital is a systematically constructed set of eight hooks of iron, for as many cross-ties”; these may be the remnants not of mediaeval construction, as has often been supposed, but of this second eighteenth-century restoration.²¹

It would seem that a gallery now existed in the chapter house, for on 24 May 1737 the Office of Works reported that Mr. Lawton, keeper of the records in the chapter house, “desires another gallery to be made and presses all round on the side for the reception of other records.”²² In examining the building at this time, the Office of Works discovered that “from the decay of the buttresses and from the want of one many years ago taken away for the convenience of a passage into the Abbey the roof, which is an arch of stone, is in great and imminent danger of falling in.”²³ Repairs including “taking off the stone roof and making a timber one, leading the same, repairing the parrapett and other walls decayed, and making another gallery with presses in the inside” were proposed at a cost of 776 pounds.²⁴ Again on 23 December 1740 the Office of Works

¹⁶ *The Report of the Lords Committees, appointed by the House of Lords to view and consider the Publick Records* (1719), 93–94.

¹⁷ Stow, *Survey*, II. Bk. 6, between 62 and 63.

¹⁸ PRO, T. 56/18, 222; and Works 6/15, 106–107.

¹⁹ PRO, Works 6/15, 113.

²⁰ PRO, Works 4/3.

²¹ Scott, *Gleanings*, 40; see the reconstruction with tie-beams in Lethaby, *Re-examined*, 99.

²² PRO, Works 6/16, fols. 58r, 73v.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

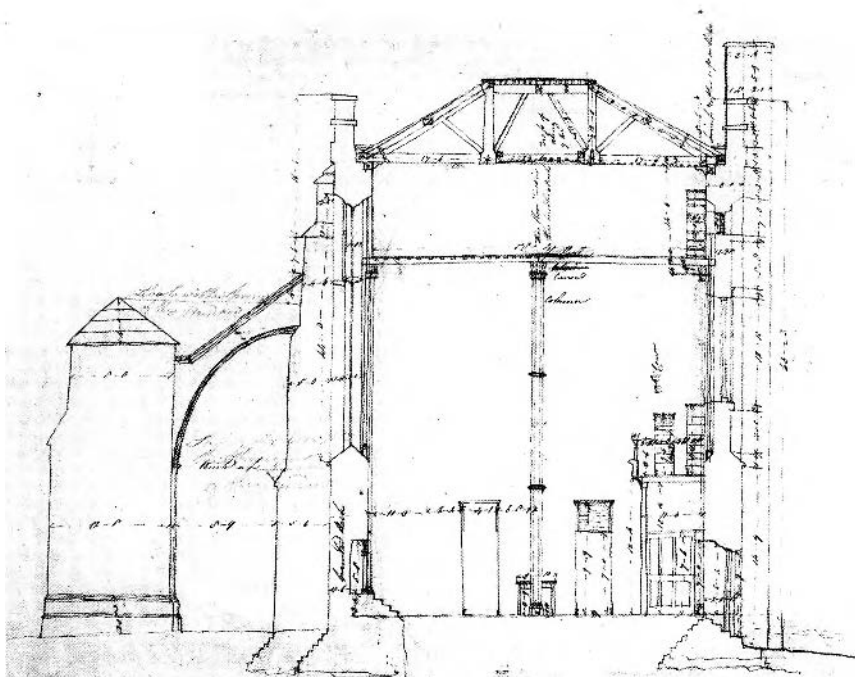


FIGURE 2. Chapter House, Westminster Abbey, Section, late 18th century. London, Royal Institute of British Architects Drawings Collection, J7/48.

reported on the ruinous condition of the roof, and as a result shoring was approved.²⁵ In response to a complaint from Drs. John Nicoll and John Hume, two prebendaries of the Abbey, that “great stones are frequently falling down,” the Office of Works proposed on 4 October 1744 repairs amounting to £625 16s. 0d.²⁶ This construction was undertaken only after 13 March 1751, when Richard Morley, keeper of the records, reported that “the late high winds have done so much damage to the chapter house, which is in a very ruinous condition, that we apprehend the building to be in danger, part of the wall of the west side having tumbled in.”²⁷ The cost for “new flating and repairing the roof” came to £802 16s. 5¹/₂d.²⁸

A measured section along the east-west axis of the chapter house (Fig. 2) shows the effect of these successive restorations. A truss ceiling has replaced the mediaeval vaulting, and an attic storey now rests on the original vault springing. A raised passageway has been constructed around the interior, and both here and in the attic are presses for the records. Although not drawn in, the large mediaeval windows were closed by this time to provide additional support for the attic floor. In each of the six bays open to the outside a pair of round-headed windows and a lunette

replaced the original tracery. The openings for these windows, along with their dimensions, are indicated on the right-hand edge of the building; even the projecting bottom sill of the round-headed windows is shown. The recessed eastern arcade is inscribed “painted back” while the flying buttress is described as “bricked-up.” An exterior view (Fig. 3) clearly shows both the bricked-up windows and the buttresses along with the additional entrance that had been pierced through the north chapter house bay for direct access to the record office in 1755/56.²⁹ Both this view and the section must date from before 1800. In that year James Wyatt was commissioned to add a building to the chapter house for additional office space.³⁰ As shown in section and plan from the *General Inventory of all the Records and other Public Documents preserved in the Chapter House at Westminster* of 1807 (Figs. 4, 5), Wyatt erected two offices with pent roofs and round-headed windows against the eastern and northeastern bays of the chapter house, sandwiched between the projecting wall buttresses.

Although the government administered the record office, the chapter house precinct remained under Abbey control. As shown in a view of September

²⁵ PRO, Works 6/16, f. 122r.

²⁶ PRO, Works 6/16, f. 169.

²⁷ PRO, Works 1/3, 65–66; Works 6/17, f. 74r.

²⁸ PRO, Works 5/141, December 1751 to December 1752.

²⁹ PRO, Works 4/11, 28 October 1755, 18 November 1755, 17 February 1756, 1 July 1756.

³⁰ *Reports from the Select Committee, appointed to inquire into the State of the Public Records of the Kingdom* (1800), 9, 52.

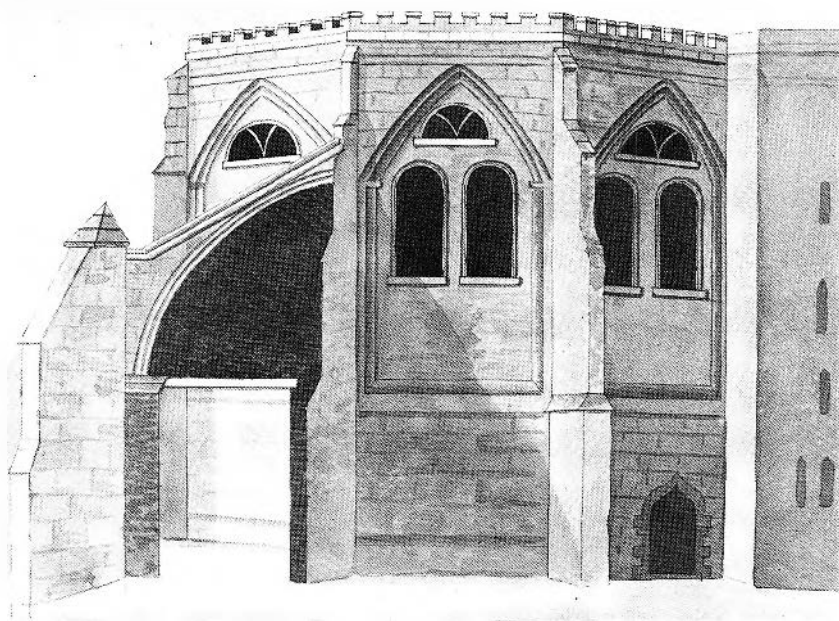


FIGURE 3. Chapter House. Westminster Abbey, late 18th century. London, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, *Pennant*, III, 82.

SECTION OF THE CHAPTER-HOUSE
WESTMINSTER

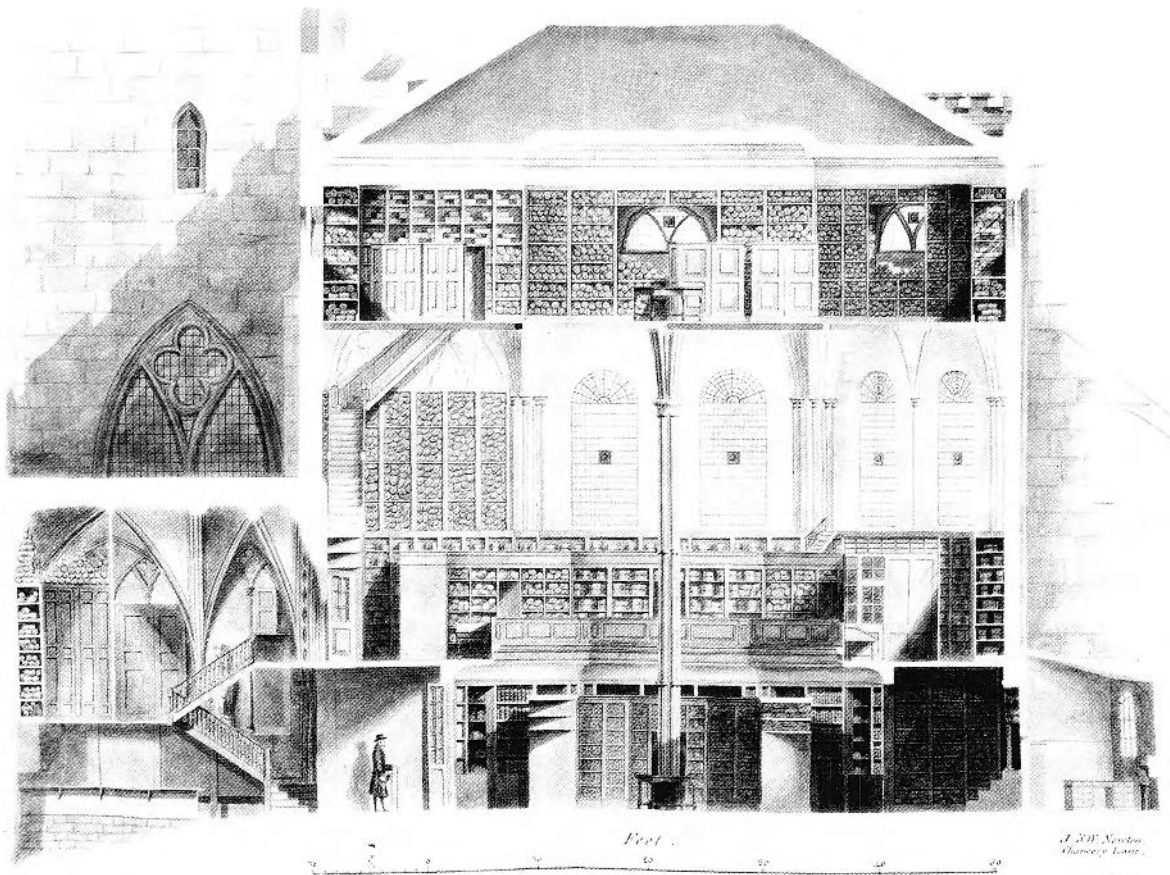


FIGURE 4. Chapter House, Westminster Abbey, Section, 1807. London, Public Record Office, MPB 2/99/1 (formerly OBS 692).

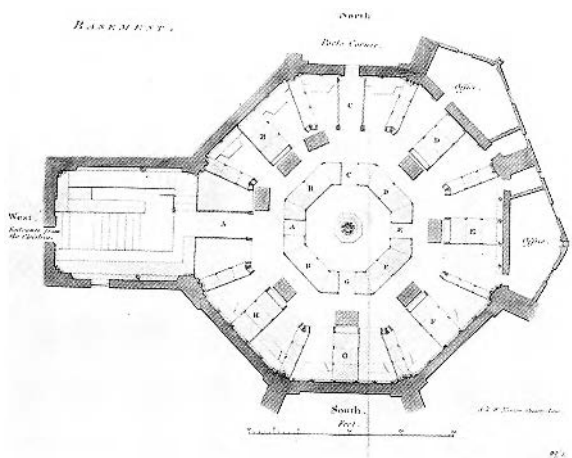


FIGURE 5. Chapter House, Westminster Abbey, Plan of the Ground Floor ("Basement"), 1807. London, Public Record Office, MPB 2/99/2 (formerly OBS 692).

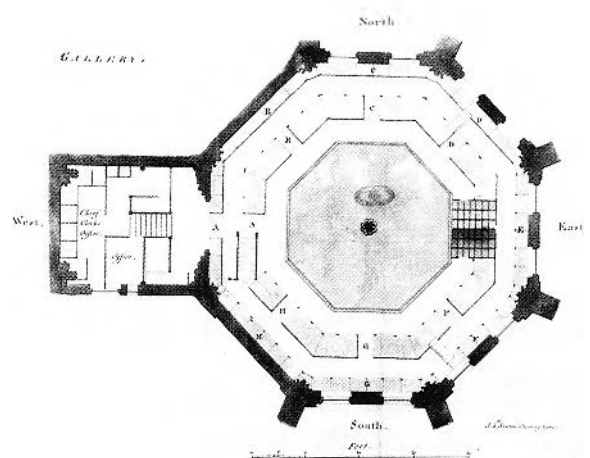


FIGURE 6. Chapter House, Westminster Abbey, Plan of the Gallery, 1807. London, Public Record Office, MPB 2/99/3.

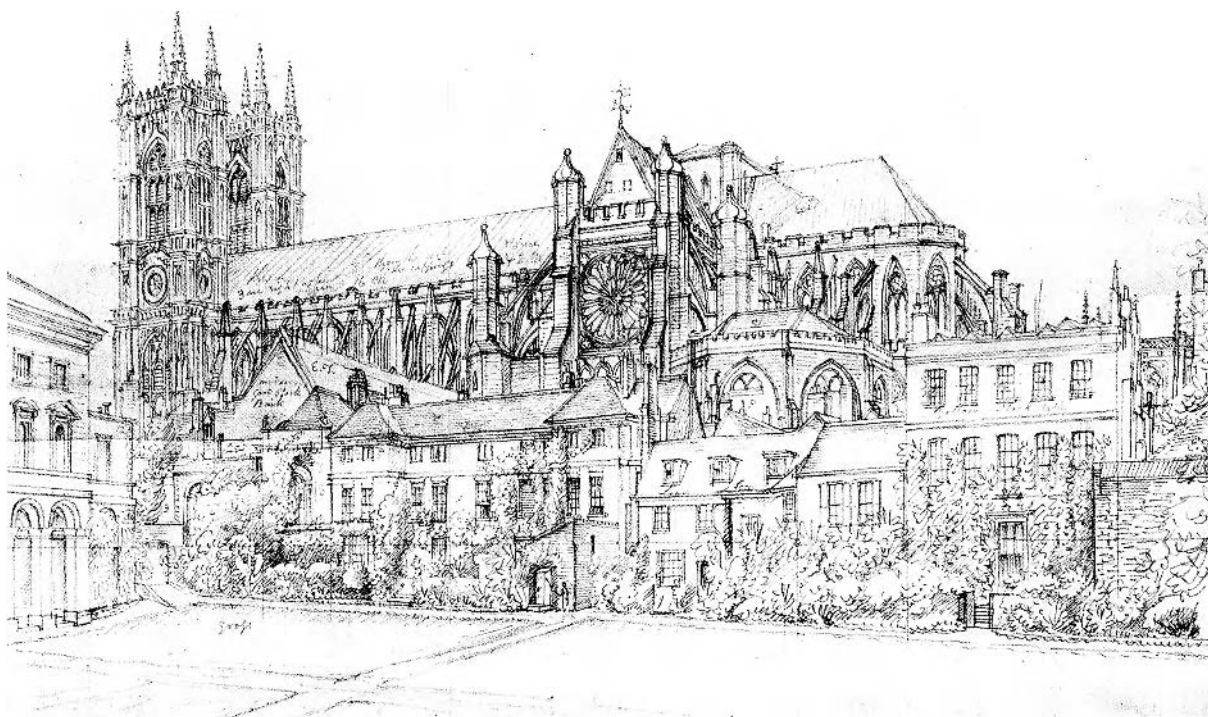


FIGURE 7. William Capon, *Westminster Abbey*, 1819. London, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, *Crace Views of London*, portfolio XIV, no. 86.

CHIEF CLERK'S OFFICE.

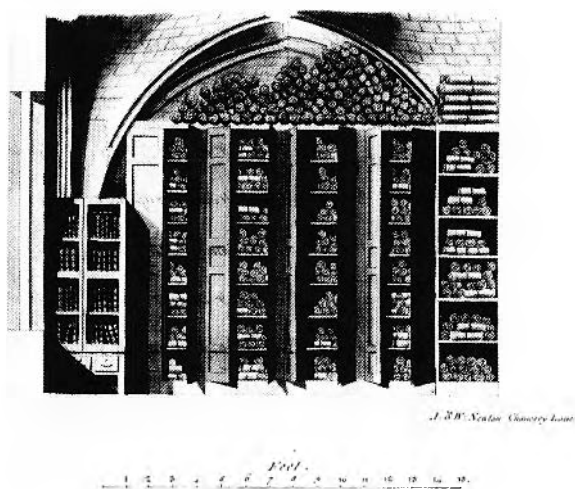


FIGURE 8. Chapter House, Westminster Abbey, West Wall of the Inner Vestibule, 1807. London, Public Record Office, OBS 692.

1819 by William Capon (Fig. 7), houses flanked the southern edge of the chapter house, and by the beginning of the eighteenth century outbuildings of the prebendal houses along the north walk of the Little Cloister already abutted against the walls and buttresses of the chapter house.³¹ The plan of these outbuildings is included in a report by John Soane from 20 May 1825 (Fig. 9). Soane recognized that these outbuildings posed a serious threat of fire to the contents of the record office "from the materials with which some of them are constructed (*viz.* wood, and lath and plaster) and the manner in which the chimnies of most of them are situated with respect to the windowes of the chapter house."³² According to a letter of 31 December 1832 from Edward Blore, architect to Westminster Abbey, the most dangerous outbuildings were taken down in 1826,³³ but since

³¹ "A General Plan of the Common Orchard, Dean's Yard, and the Buildings contiguous thereto (5 June 1719)," *Wren Society*, XI

³² PRO, Works 1/13, 347. For additional remarks and two preparatory sketches for the chapter house plan, see London, Soane Museum, corresp. 2, xii, G (I) 6; and Drawer 35, set 5, 19 and 35. Cf. PRO, Works 19-15/2, 1-4.

³³ PRO, Works 14/4/1, 14-15.

others were left intact, the threat of fire remained. On 29 December 1831, Sydney Smirke reported that “towards the South, there are some old buildings in contact with two sides of the chapter house; these buildings contain bedchambers etc., belonging to two prebendal houses adjoining, and are chiefly of wood.”³⁴ He suggested their removal, but these outbuildings were still in existence as late as 22 July 1854 when James Pennethorne included them on a plan for the enlargement of Old Palace Yard.³⁵

Like the precinct, the crypt below the record office remained under the supervision of the Abbey. In his report of 1825, Soane noted that the crypt was being used as a storeroom for the prebendal house then occupied by Mr. Longland.³⁶ The entrance to the crypt from what would be Mr. Longland’s garden appears on a “South [actually southeast] view of the Chapter house of Westminster Abbey” which is drawn on a sheet together with a plan of this undercroft (Fig. 11). Although informative, this plan suffers from several glaring errors. Entrance *A* is not due south, but is southeast. Thus, the doorway for corridor *F* is due west; and recess *E*’ with piscina and aumbry — apparently for an altar — is, as expected, oriented. In addition, the plan omits the right-angle turn in corridor *F* leading to Poets’ Corner *G* and includes one too many flyers. Another sheet by the same hand, which may be that of William Capon, entitled “West view in the Undercroft of the Chapter house of Westminster Abbey” (Fig. 12) shows a figure descending into the crypt from entrance *A*. Dirt fill, which Scott was later to remove,³⁷ had been allowed to collect in the crypt, raising the floor level almost to the sill of the window embrasures and obscuring the bases of both the central column and the wall shafts which together carry the stone vault. The boarded enclosure at the far left hides recess *E*’. An engraving of 1881 by H.W. Brewer (Fig. 10) shows the interior of this recess with piscina to the south and aumbry to the north. Rather than being evidence of a lost altar screen, as has been assumed, the marks on the arch intrados are apparently scars left behind from the now dismantled wood boards shown in the “West view.” In response to Soane’s report, the Dean and Chapter offered in a letter of 8 May 1826 to have the undercroft blocked up so that no person might enter it without their special permission,³⁸ and on 14 Feb-

³⁴ PRO, Works 14/4/1, 8.

³⁵ PRO, Works 38/230.

³⁶ PRO, Works 1/13, 346.

³⁷ Scott, *Gleanings*, 46.

³⁸ PRO, Works 1/14, 277.

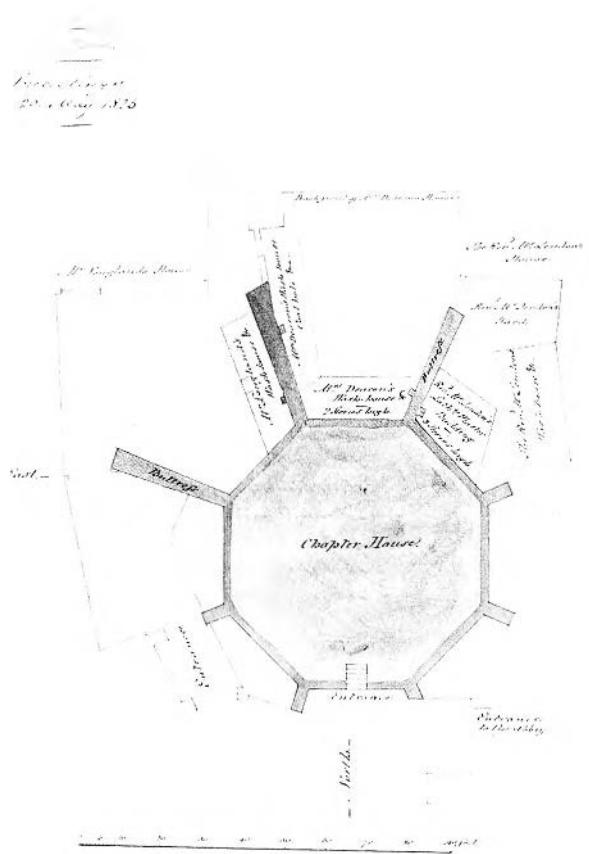


FIGURE 9. John Soane, *Chapter House Precinct Plan, Westminster Abbey*, 1825. London, Public Record Office, Works, 1/13, 348.

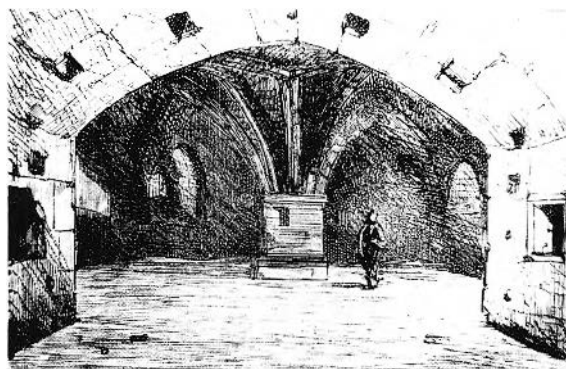


FIGURE 10. H.W. Brewer, *The Chapter House Crypt, Westminster Abbey*. From *The Graphic*, 13 August 1881.

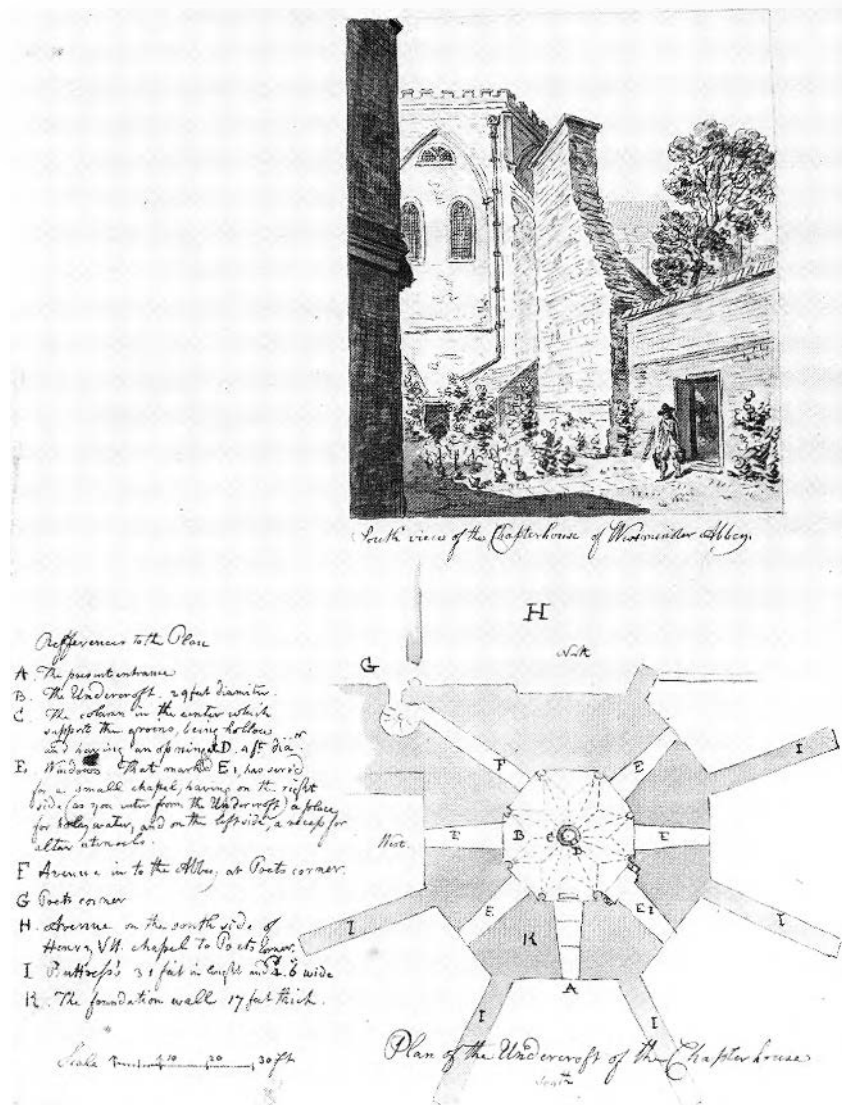


FIGURE 11. William Capon (?),
South [actually southeast]
view of the Chapter house of
Westminster Abbey and Plan
of the Undercroft of the
Chapter house. London,
Westminster Abbey Library,
Drawer 7, IIB, 6 (Photo:
courtesy the Dean and Chap-
ter of Westminster Abbey).

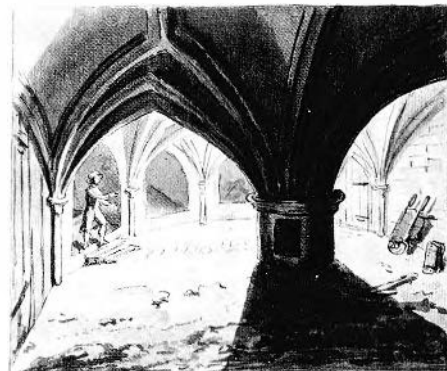


FIGURE 12. William Capon (?),
West view in the Undercroft
of the Chapter house of
Westminster Abbey. London,
Westminster Abbey Library,
Drawer 7, IIB, 7 (Photo:
courtesy the Dean and Chap-
ter of Westminster Abbey).

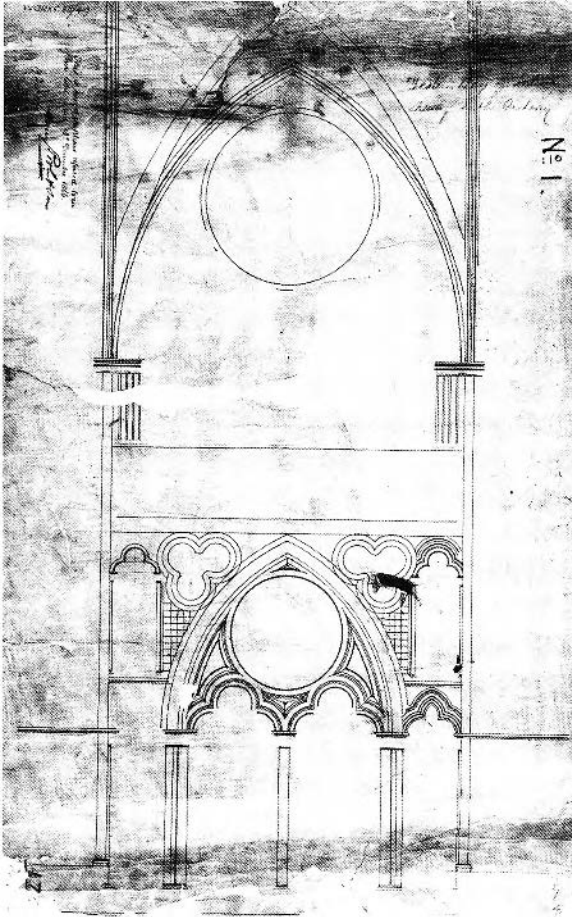


FIGURE 13. G.G. Scott, Chapter House, Westminster Abbey. Entranceway, 1866. London, Public Record Office, Works, 38/49.

ruary 1832 Sydney Smirke was able to report that “the crypt under the chapter house I find to have been bricked up on all sides, except on that next the Abbey, where there is a wooden door communicating with the north transept, and opposite to it, has been left an aperture for light.”³⁹

The documents stored in the chapter house were removed to the new Public Record Office in Chancery Lane upon the completion of that building. Consequently, George Gilbert Scott was asked on 29 January 1866 to furnish an estimate for the restoration of the chapter house:

The estimate is to include the cost of rebuilding the buttress which has been removed and of rendering the walls and roof thoroughly and permanently secure, of restoring the central shaft to its perpendicular, of replacing the windows in their original form and filling

³⁹ PRO, Works 14/4/1, 10–13.

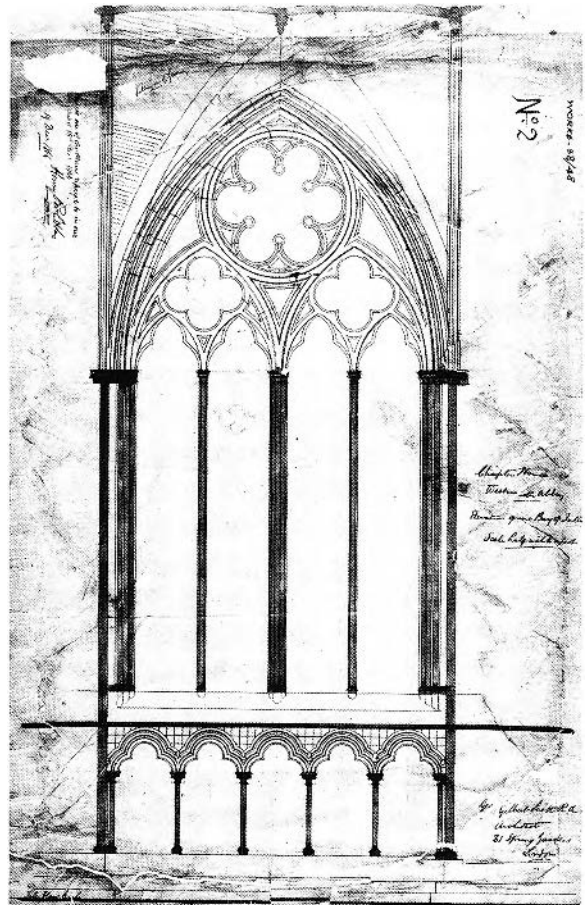


FIGURE 14. G.G. Scott, Chapter House, Westminster Abbey. Interior Elevation, 1866. London, Public Record Office, Works 38/48.

them with appropriate stained glass, and of restoring as far as possible the original lines and forms of the building.⁴⁰

Five drawings for the “Proposed Restoration of the Chapter House Westminster Abbey,” signed by Scott and by his principal contractor, Henry Poole, and dated 18/19 December 1866 (PRO, Works 38/46–50) received official approval. In letters of 19 December 1866 Scott and Poole were requested to proceed with the work.⁴¹ The first drawing (Fig. 13) shows the elevation of the entrance bay. The shortened tracery window above the entranceway is left blank. In this location, Scott had discovered fragments of a five-light tracery design, perhaps a restoration by Abbot Byrcheston,⁴² but he decided to

⁴⁰ PRO, Works 1/80, 440.

⁴¹ PRO, Works 1/83, 80.

⁴² George Gilbert Scott, *Personal and Professional Recollections* (London, 1879), 286. Byrcheston served as Abbot between 1344 and 1349.

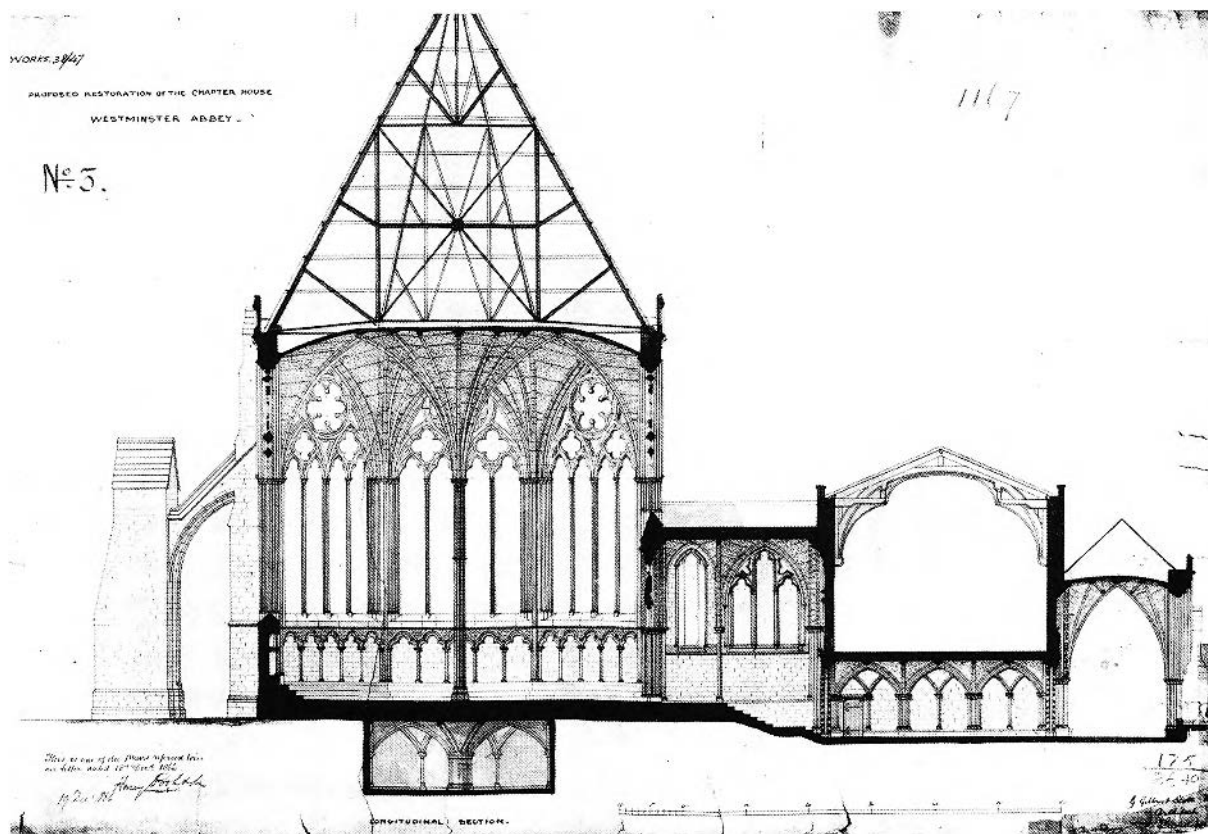


FIGURE 15. G.G. Scott, Chapter House, Westminster Abbey, Longitudinal Section, 1866. London, Public Record Office, Works 38/47.

rebuild the window with tracery identical to the other chapter house windows. The central shaft of the doorway (Figs. 4, 5) had disappeared, and Scott here introduced a pair of trefoil arches and oculus in which were eventually placed back-to-back figures of God the Father — no doubt to many the most disturbing feature of Scott's restoration. During construction Scott replaced these round trefoil arches with acutely pointed ones similar in profile to the arch at the right of the entrance. The arches and trefoils above contained the thirteenth-century *Annunciation* group with censuring angels which had survived *in situ* behind record office presses.⁴³

The second drawing (Fig. 14) shows the elevation of the other interior bays, the black Purbeck marble shafts being indicated with wash. Scott established the window design from original blind tracery which survived in the northwestern bay. In the section from the *General Inventory* (Fig. 4), blind tracery of four lights with quatrefoils appears clearly beyond the staircase while a portion of the sexfoil head peeks

from behind a door in the adjacent attic storey. In addition, some mediaeval tracery mullions survived, as for example the one shown bricked-up in the northeastern window. The *General Inventory* plan (Fig. 5) reveals that all the bases of the wall arcade shafts had survived, despite the openings made through the wall into Wyatt's offices and the North Walk.

The drawings numbered 3 and 4 show the longitudinal section and ground plan of the chapter house and vestibule (Figs. 15, 16). Scott had already removed the staircase leading to the chapter library from the northern aisle of the outer vestibule and rebuilt the destroyed vaults.⁴⁴ A view of 1782 shows that a portion of the wall arcade in the south aisle, along with the vaulting, had survived, and upon this Scott was able to base his restoration.⁴⁵ As shown in the section in the *General Inventory* (Fig. 4), original tracery with two pairs of twin lights and quatrefoils

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁵ John Carter, *Specimens of the Ancient Sculpture and Painting now remaining in this Kingdom* (London, 1786), I, facing p. 6.

⁴³ Scott, *Gleanings*, 41.

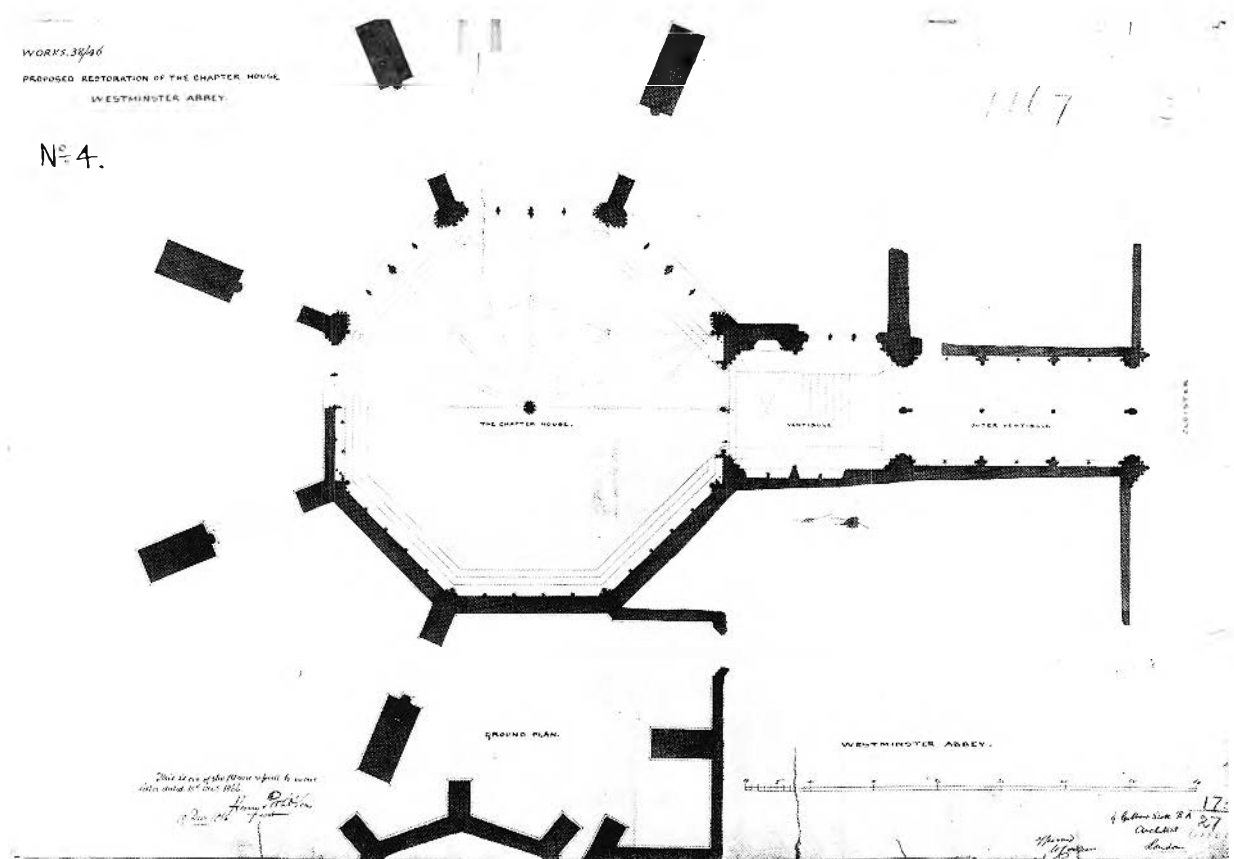


FIGURE 16. G.G. Scott, Chapter House, Westminster Abbey, Ground Plan, 1866. London, Public Record Office, Works 38/46.

had been built into the north wall of the inner vestibule. In the course of construction Scott reopened both two-light windows, providing indirect illumination for St. Faith's chapel. For the two unequal bays of the south wall, Scott proposed a tall lancet window and an unusual tracery design of three lights and two pointed trefoils. In *Gleanings from Westminster Abbey*, Scott asserted that he had discovered some clue to the design by cutting into the wall, but he there illustrated a rather different four-light window with a quatrefoil head.⁴⁶ As Lethaby later remarked, Scott "thought he had found some authority, but how much is doubtful."⁴⁷ Before restoration commenced in 1866, Scott noted that "the west wall of this inner vestibule, over its double entrance, is decorated with window-like tracery, in the openings of which were statues on brackets."⁴⁸ Although universally accepted as genuine, this tracery is not visible on the small section of wall exposed

in a view of the "Chief Clerk's Office" from the *General Inventory* (Fig. 8). Furthermore, a plan of the Chief Clerk's Office (Fig. 6), even though indicating other tracery mullions, shows no shafts on the west wall of the inner vestibule. If this arcading existed in 1807, it is difficult to explain why the draftsmen of the *General Inventory*, so sensitive to other tracery survivals, failed to record it.

In addition to the central pier with its eight detached shafts, large sections of the vault springing remained *in situ*. With the discovery of moulded ribs in the blocked-up entranceway window, Scott increased the evidence available for establishing the original design of the chapter house vault.⁴⁹ As shown on the section, Scott intended to suspend the vault from a complex truss roof within a steeply pyramidal shell. Although Scott believed that such a steep roof once covered the chapter house, all earlier views show an outer roof of much flatter profile.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Scott, *Gleanings*, 45 and pl. XIV.

⁴⁷ Lethaby, *Craftsmen*, 43.

⁴⁸ Scott, "Chapter-house of Westminster," 148.

⁴⁹ Scott, *Gleanings*, 41.

⁵⁰ Lethaby, *Craftsmen*, 44.

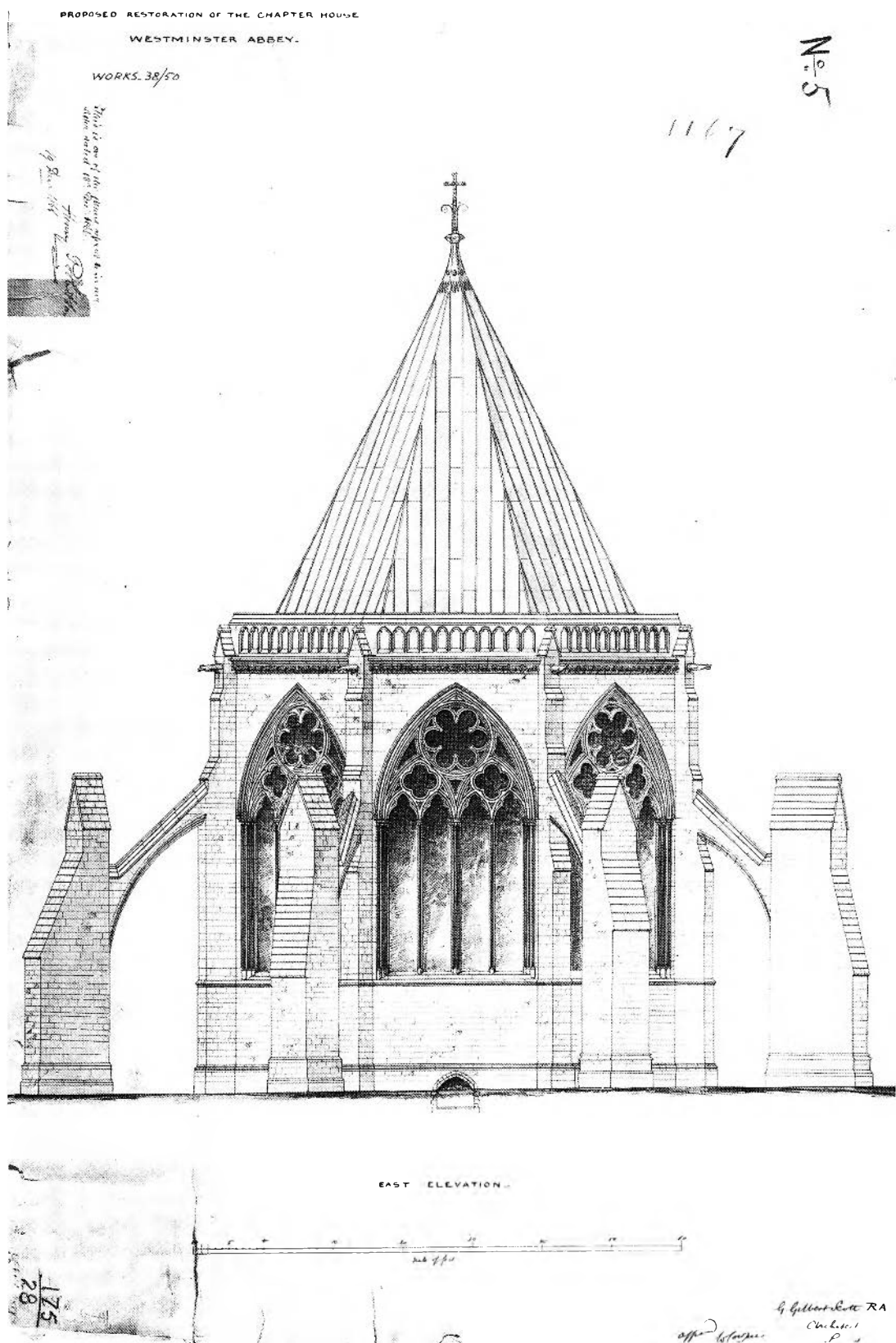


FIGURE 17. G.G. Scott, Chapter House, Westminster Abbey, East Elevation, 1866. London, Public Record Office, Works 38/50.

The fifth drawing of 1866 (Fig. 17) shows the eastern view of the exterior of the chapter house crowned by Scott's pyramidal roof. Scott reintroduced tracery into the blocked windows and, along with replacing the buttress at the northeast corner, redesigned the flyers. The wall buttresses were provided with elegant gable caps similar to those of the flyers and with water spouts in the form of gargoyles. At the summit of the wall, Scott substituted a parapet of blind arcading for the older battlements "of brick, with a stone coping."⁵¹ During the course of construction, Scott altered the design of this parapet by introducing diaperwork panels and adding tall pinnacles at the corners to continue the vertical lines of the wall buttresses.

Begun in 1866, the restoration of the chapter house continued for six years, terminating only in January

1872.⁵² Twenty-five thousand pounds were allocated for the work, but even with this generous endowment Scott found it necessary to request additional funding.⁵³

For Scott, as he himself admitted, the task was "a labour of love,"⁵⁴ and he showed no hesitation in restoring "as far as possible the original lines and forms of the building." By renewing so much of the stonework, however, Scott obscured the remnants of the building's complicated past. Evidence of its previous appearance disappeared, and is preserved now only in older and, for the most part, previously unpublished views. Thus it is that the early sketches and plans assembled here provide a record of the successive alterations to the fabric of the building. Pictorial and literary documents must now serve to chronicle the visual history of the Westminster Abbey chapter house.

*University of California
Irvine*

⁵¹ E.W. Brayley and J.P. Neale, *The History and Antiquities of the Abbey Church of St. Peter, Westminster* (London, 1823), II, 298.

⁵² PRO, Works 2/37, 940.

⁵³ PRO, Works 2/34, 20–21, 39; and 2/36, 29.

⁵⁴ Scott, *Recollections*, 285.