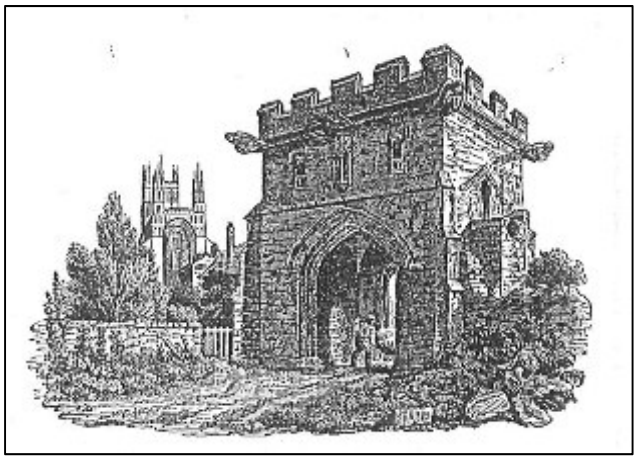
The Landmark Trust

THE ABBEY GATEHOUSE

History Album



Written by Charlotte Haslam, 1991

Re-presented in 2015

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BASIC DETAILS

Built: about 1500

Restored: 1849

Architect: James Medland

Builder: James Cull

Mason: Thomas Collins

Acquired by Landmark: 1986

Repaired and converted: 1990-1991

Architects: Rodney Melville & Partners

Builders: J. & G. Baylis of Ombersley

Building furnished: September 1991

Contents

Summary

In January 1540, on the orders of King Henry VIII, the Abbot of Tewkesbury and the monks of his Chapter accepted the dissolution of their monastery and surrendered their property. The buildings of the great Benedictine abbey were divided by the administrators (the 'King's Visitors') into two categories: 'superstitious buildings to be destroyed', and those that were 'convenient to be preserved.' The abbey church fell into the former group but was rescued by the townspeople, who declared that it was their only parish church; accordingly it was transferred to them for the value of its lead and bells – £483. The other 'superstitious' buildings were demolished.

The second group consisted of domestic and agricultural buildings that could foreseeably come in useful to a new owner. These included not only the Abbey's kitchen, pantry, bakehouse, brewhouse, stables, slaughterhouse and barns, but also the buildings called the Newark (the 'new work', dating from about 1500, which were incorporated with the abbot's lodging to form what is now the Abbey House) and the 'great gate entering the court, with the lodging over the same.'

Although a gatehouse must have stood in this position for centuries, in 1540 the one that survives today was relatively new: stylistic details indicate that it was probably built either just before or soon after 1500. The upper chamber served as a lodging, probably for one of the officers of the abbey, lay or monastic, or perhaps one of the 'guests' who crowded many abbeys of the time, elderly benefactors who looked on it rather like an old people's home. But little is known of its functions after the closure of the abbey: such buildings were often used for parochial or manorial purposes, perhaps as a courtroom or a lock-up, but there is no written record of how the Gatehouse was used during this period.

Engravings of the late 18th century show that it was by then a roofless ruin, and it remained so until about 1849. The 19th-century Age of Restoration was just beginning, and the then owner John Martin, a Ledbury man who was M.P. for Tewkesbury, courageously undertook its rescue. Under the careful direction of the architect James Medland, undesirable outbuildings were removed, and much of the masonry of the walls was taken down and rebuilt, the stones being replaced precisely in their former positions. A new carved timber roof with stone corbels and new lead was provided, the vault over the gate passage was rebuilt, and a few years later the massive oak doors were set in place.

After its restoration the Gatehouse seems to have settled back into its previous ornamental but empty existence, serving as a rather grand lodge to Abbey House. The latter was given a new south front in 1825, together with 'alterations which modern ideas of comfort could not fail to suggest' and later became the Vicarage. The Gatehouse was thereafter put to various parish uses: the Girl Guides met there, and at one time an artist used it as a studio. It was reroofed again in the 1970s, after which a new occupier was sought, but the awkward access up the narrow winding stairs to the upper room made this difficult (as it must always have done).

Then a neighbour of the Gatehouse suggested that the Landmark Trust might be interested in it; she knew that difficulty of access would not deter it from taking on a good building – and she was right. A lease was duly negotiated, and Landmark took over the Gatehouse in 1986.

Restoration by the Landmark Trust

When the Trust took on the Abbey Gatehouse, its principal task was to make it habitable. To fit in a kitchen, a bathroom and space in which to eat and sleep, all comfortably within a single room to which no addition could be made, required some ingenuity. Under the direction of the architect Andrew Brookes of Rodney Melville and Partners, the solution of a gallery, appearing like an organ case within this rather ecclesiastical space, gradually evolved.

This was just the beginning, however. The nearly-new roof was already leaking; a new roof was designed, which allowed for greater insulation and better ventilation now that the building was going to be inhabited. The ribbed stone vault over the entrance arch was showing signs of weakness, and inside the main chamber the floor tiles were coming loose because the mortar in which they were set was crumbling. The two problems were solved together: the tiles were carefully lifted, the old fill was dug out (part of a gravestone was found in it), and then the stones of the vault were secured by fixing stainless steel ties to the back of the ribs. Lightweight reinforced concrete was then poured on to provide a firm base for the tiles.

Several of the Victorian iron window casements needed repair; much of the existing glass was of an unsatisfactory quality, so this was replaced with hand-made French glass, together with new leadwork. A new oak entrance door was provided, but that at the top of the stairs, opening into the main chamber, is old.

The whole of the plaster was covered with six coats of limewash. Some of the original stones of the chimney breast had been left exposed in a previous restoration, but it was decided that they should now be limewashed along with the rest of the wall. The fireplace lintel was badly cracked, and had to be carefully pinned. A new hearthstone was provided, and then the new stove was fitted.

An unexpected problem proved to be the installation of services, both water and electricity, in an invisible way, without unsightly pipes draping the exterior of the buildings. The architect's solution was to drill ducts diagonally up through the core of the wall, a job that proved extremely tricky but was ultimately satisfactory.

Now the gallery could be fixed, and then it was possible to re-lay the tiles that had been taken up when work started. Many of them were worn, so the whole floor was given a polish with beeswax and turpentine. There was some debate concerning the colour of the ceiling: plain wood and red lead were both considered, but the final choice was as close as possible to the blue with which the Abbey chancel had recently been limewashed, which itself was matched to a fragment of early paint.

A major problem now presented itself: how was furniture to be taken into the building? The stairs were too narrow for all but small objects. The larger pieces had to be carried upstairs in bits and then assembled inside the upper room; the armchair and sofa had to be upholstered there too. It is hoped that they never have to leave.

The restoration was a complex task but the builders, John and Geoff Baylis and their men, together with specialist subcontractors all working to the highest standards of craftsmanship, have achieved a wonderful end result – a building that looks as if it has hardly been disturbed. So now you may stay where the 16th-century monks walked and feel yourself part of a world long gone, yet somehow here not dead.

Background

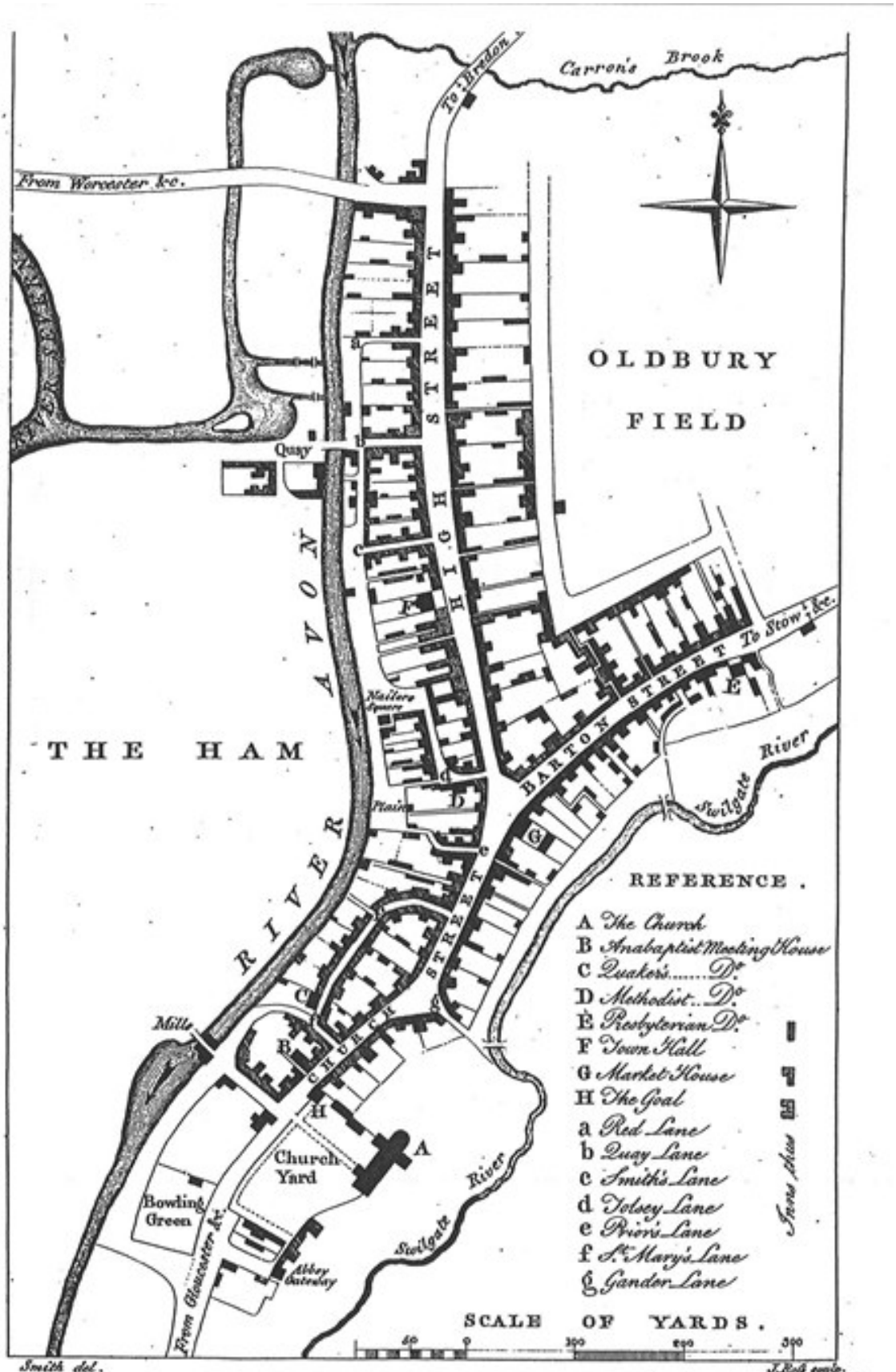
In January 1540, John Wakeman, abbot of Tewkesbury, and the monks of his Chapter, accepted the dissolution of their monastery and surrendered their property to the King's Visitors. A full inventory was drawn up, together with a list of the pensions that would have to be paid, and a plan of action for the buildings. There were two categories: those buildings that 'were convenient to be preserved'; and 'superstitious buildings to be destroyed, as the Church, chapels, etc.' Fortunately, the people of Tewkesbury stepped in to save the abbey church itself, declaring it to be their only parish church, and ensuring its transfer to them for the value of its lead and its bells - £483.

The two lists provide a detailed picture of a great Benedictine abbey at the close of the Middle Ages, with its variety of activities, charitable, educational, medical and hospitable, beyond the obvious ones of religious observance and the housing and feeding of a community of as many as 150 people. Although there were only some 30 monks, abbeys housed in addition priests, schoolboys, guests and above all numerous lay servants. There were 144 servants on Tewkesbury's pay roll; some would have been attached to three small dependant priories, but anything between 80 and 100 could have served in the abbey itself, carrying out a whole variety of menial tasks from the stable to the kitchens; and others at a more senior level. Some officers, such as the sacristan or the cellarer, were monks; others, such as the chamberlain or the bailiff, might be laymen, living in the Abbey with their families.

Those buildings specifically ‘deemed to be superfluous’ were the Church, with Chapels, Cloister, Chapter-house, Misericord (dining-hall); two Dormitories; the Infirmary, with the chapels and lodgings within it; the Work-room, with another house next to it; the Kitchen; the Library; the old Hostery or guest-house; the Chamberer's lodgings and new Hall; the old Parlour adjoining the Abbot's lodging; the Cellerer's lodging; the Poultry-house; the Granary; the Almonry. An inducement to their demolition must have been the value of the lead with which several of them were roofed, all carefully assessed by weight.

Those ‘assigned to remain undefaced’ were those domestic and agricultural buildings which could foreseeably come in useful for a new owner: the Lodgings called the Newark, leading from the gate to the late Abbot's lodging (and thought to be part of the present Abbey House), with Buttery, Pantry, Cellar, Kitchen, Larder and Pastry adjoining thereto; the late Abbot's lodging; the Hostery or guest-house; the great gate entering the court, with the lodging over the same; the Abbot's Stable, Bakehouse, Brewhouse and Slaughterhouse; the Almonry Barn, Dairyhouse; the great barn next to the Avon; the malting house, ‘with the granaries in the same’; the Ox-house in the Barton gate; and the lodging over the same.

Apart from the church itself, it does seem that the demolitions were carried out and that before very long only the range of buildings running west from the church to the gatehouse, and the group of Almonry buildings, remained. No great mansion was built on the site, incorporating the abbot's lodging and the Newark, which in any case was probably the size of an ordinary manor house. This, known as Abbey House and let to a series of tenants over the centuries, appears to have been little altered, until it was given a new south front in 1825 together with (according to James Bennet, historian of Tewkesbury in 1830) ‘those alterations which modern ideas of comfort could not fail to suggest.’



PLAN of TEWKESBURY. W. Dyde 1787

The site of the abbey, with its buildings, land and rights, was acquired by William Read, first on lease and then outright in 1544. In 1612, his grandson sold it to Baptist Hicks, later Viscount Campden, who was then building his great house with its East and West Banqueting Houses in Chipping Campden, who in turn settled it on his daughter, Mary. She left it to her grandson, Sir Henry Capell, who became Lord Capell of Tewkesbury, and it passed from him to his nephew, Algernon Capell, Earl of Essex. It descended in that family until 1824, when the property was sold. Abbey House appears to have been bought by John Terrett (a John Terrett was Bailiff of Tewkesbury in 1807) who sold it in 1847 to John Martin, Member of Parliament for the Borough of Tewkesbury.

The Terretts may have lived in their remodelled house, but from 1847 it was once again a rented property. John Martin, whose family came from Overbury, lived himself in Ledbury. In 1883 the Abbey House estate, with 35 acres of land, came on the market again, put up for auction by the Trustees of the late John Martin's will, which had stipulated that on the majority of his youngest son, his Tewkesbury property should be sold.

The feeling had grown throughout the 19th century that the Abbey and its surroundings should be cared for and preserved. In 1883, Sir Gilbert Scott's controversial restoration was still in progress. So when the Abbey House was put up for sale that year, the current Vicar, Hemming Robeson, and Thomas Collins, a local builder, bought it for £9,500 (which they afterwards recovered by subscription) and settled it on Trustees. Under the terms of the Abbey House Trust, the house was to be made available for the vicar to live in, if he chose, or to let if he preferred.

This situation continued until the 1960s, when a more formal arrangement was made by which the Abbey House was firmly designated as the Vicarage and transferred to the Diocese, and the Abbey House Trust was wound up.

The Gatehouse

The great gate at the entrance to the Abbey courtyard was among those buildings 'assigned to remain undefaced' in 1540. There must always have been a gatehouse in this position, regulating the comings and goings into the precinct, just as there was another gatehouse across the Gloucester Road, watching over the entrance to the abbey farm on the banks of the river.

The gatehouse standing in 1540, however, which is basically the one surviving today, had only been there for a short time. From stylistic detail, on the windows and main arch for example, it would seem that it was built either just before 1500 or more probably slightly after. A plea to the Bishop in the 1490s that the abbey's buildings were in ruinous condition due to lack of funds, resulted in 1500 in the grant of two new parishes and their tithe income, and some rebuilding seems then to have taken place. The gatehouse, therefore, may have been contemporary with the 'Newark', or new-work.

The stone used for facing the walls of the gatehouse, and for the carved detail, is oolitic limestone, expensively transported from the Cotswolds. Wherever possible, therefore, in the core of the walls for example and anywhere else that was not too visible, the local, but poorer quality, rubble lias limestone was used, being more readily available and therefore cheaper.

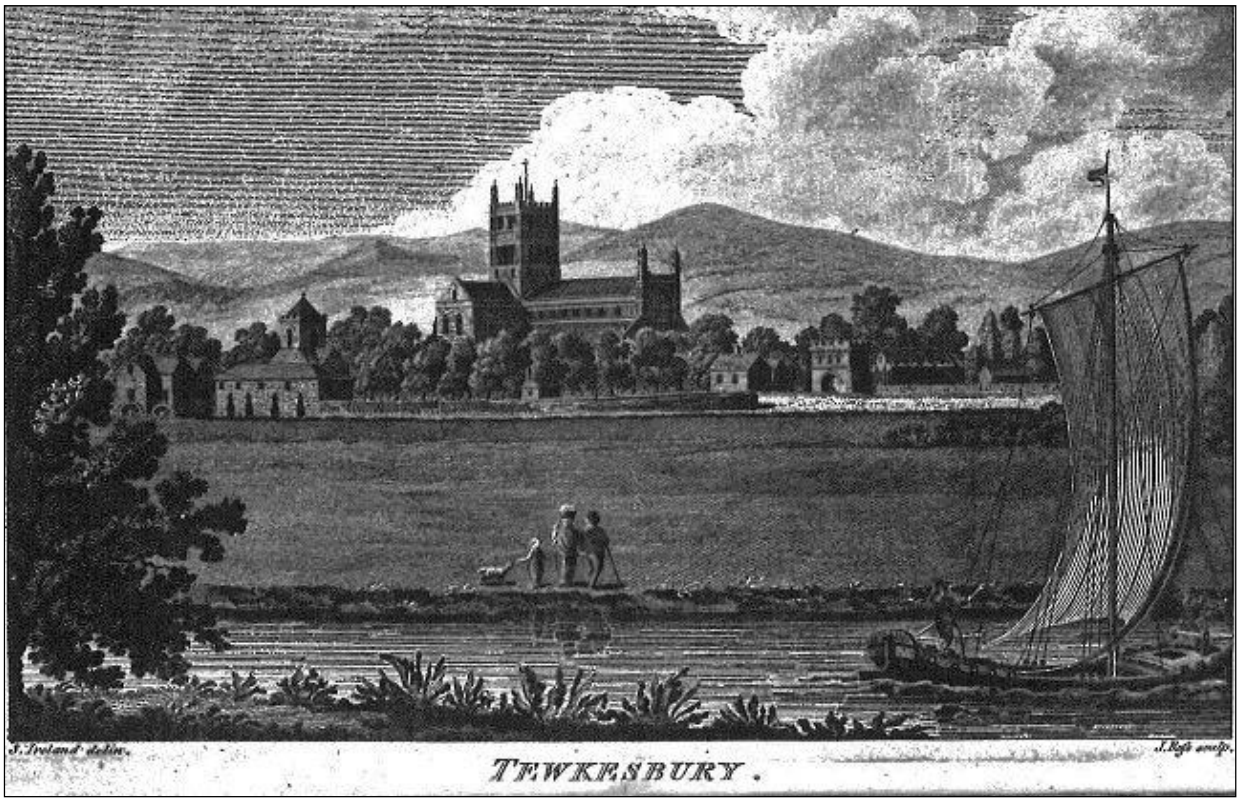
As was very often the case, the upper chamber of the gatehouse served as lodging, probably for one of the officers of the abbey, lay or monastic. Alternatively, it could have housed one of the frequently permanent 'guests' with whom many abbeys found themselves crowded by the end of the Middle Ages, elderly benefactors who looked on them rather like an old people's home. Here, in what seems always to have been a single large room, they would sleep and spend the day, while going across to the main Guest-house for their meals.

Apart from its survival, we know nothing of the gatehouse's fate after the closure of the abbey. It does not feature at all in a Survey of 1632, which lists the tenants of the 'site of the Abbey' in some detail. Often, such buildings were made use of for parochial or manorial purposes, as a court-room perhaps or, as in the case of the abbey's belfry, as a lock-up. Two historians of Tewkesbury, William Dyde (1787) and James Bennett (1830), quote Browne Willis, who in his *History of the Mitred Parliamentary Abbeys* (1718) notes that the 'spacious gatehouse' was 'made use of for a Prison'; but Dyde, at least, demurs at this, saying that it is uncertain that it was ever applied to that purpose. Willis was probably confusing the gatehouse with the belfry, which served as prison until 1816, when it was pulled down.

The gatehouse is also mentioned by Atkyns in *The Ancient and Present State of Glostershire* (1712) but only as a survival. We find nothing on its physical state before the late 18th century, when engravings show it as a roofless ruin, with broken windows. It had been listed among those buildings roofed in lead in 1539, an asset quickly realised in most cases. If not at once, then at some point before 1700, it is likely that the lead from the gatehouse roof was sold, after which it would have deteriorated quickly until, as noted by Dyde in 1787, it lay 'in a state of unregarded dilapidation.'

It was still admired, however. Dyde describes it as large and handsome, 'the arch is finely proportioned and is much admired by connoisseurs.' Bennett, after commenting on the 'flying figures', says that 'the arch is a fine specimen of the Saxon style.' Writing in 1830, he also has some fierce comments to make on the building's condition:

> The Gatehouse has withstood the ravages of time, though it has not only been long neglected, but also exposed to the despoiling hands of tasteless individuals. We are perfectly satisfied, however, that the present owner will preserve it from further dilapidation and we indeed anticipate that the decayed portions will be restored, and the excrescences with which it has been deformed will shortly be swept away.



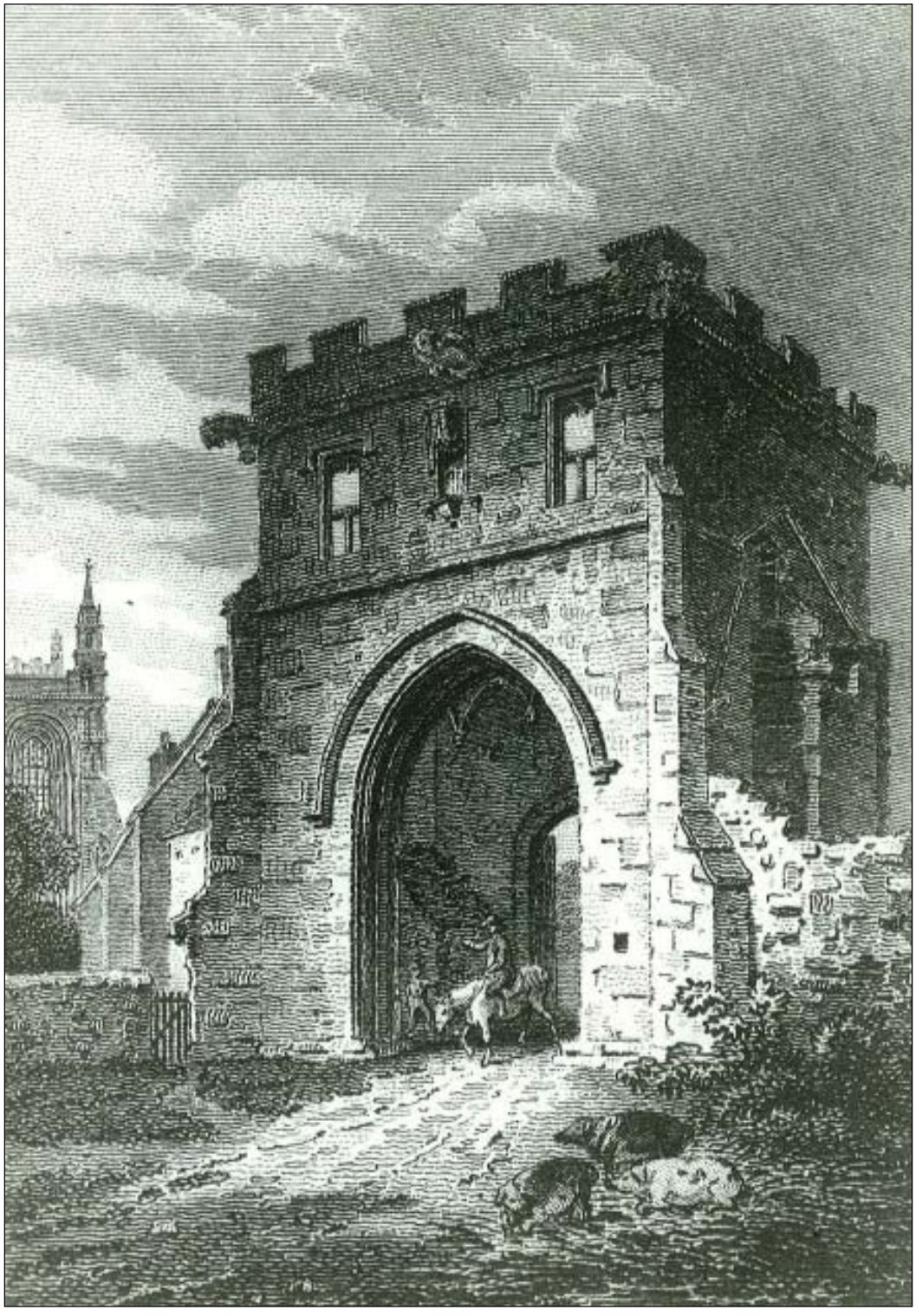
From William Dyde *History of Tewkesbury* (second edition 1798)

The age of Restoration is beginning. The excrescences may be the lean-to shown in one view under the gate passage, or buildings against its east side. The 1791 views show none on the west, although the line of a roof shows that there was a building there at some point.

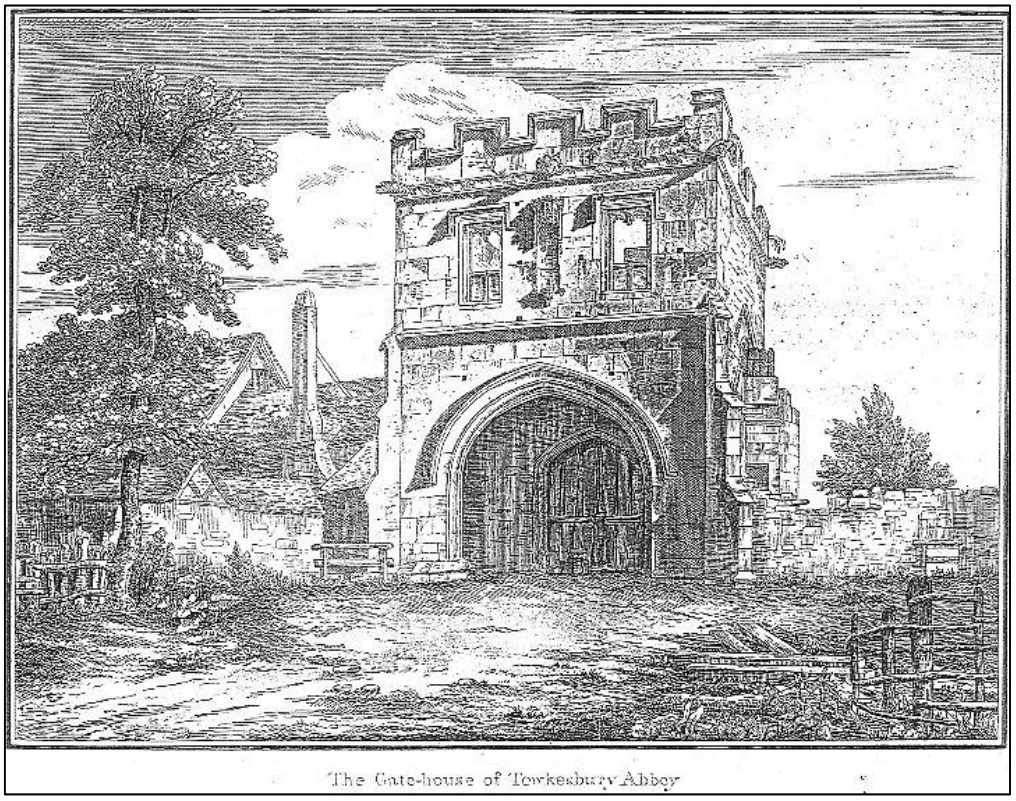
Bennett's hope that the present owner would repair the gatehouse proved unfulfilled. This was to be the initiative of the next owner, Mr Martin. On 3rd March, 1850, *The Builder* was able to report that the major part of a planned restoration had taken place, under the direction of Mr Medland, architect. The total cost thus far had been about £440 'which has been liberally expended by Mr Martin, with the view of preserving this interesting relic.' The builders were Messrs Call and Collins of Tewkesbury.

A considerable portion of the walls was taken down and rebuilt - the stones being replaced precisely in their former position, and the whole of the stonework thoroughly repaired. The building has been roofed with wrought timbers in panels with curved and moulded brackets, supported by stone corbels with carved heads and shields bearing appropriate devices. The roof is covered with lead, forming an area from which a commanding view of the surrounding country can be obtained.

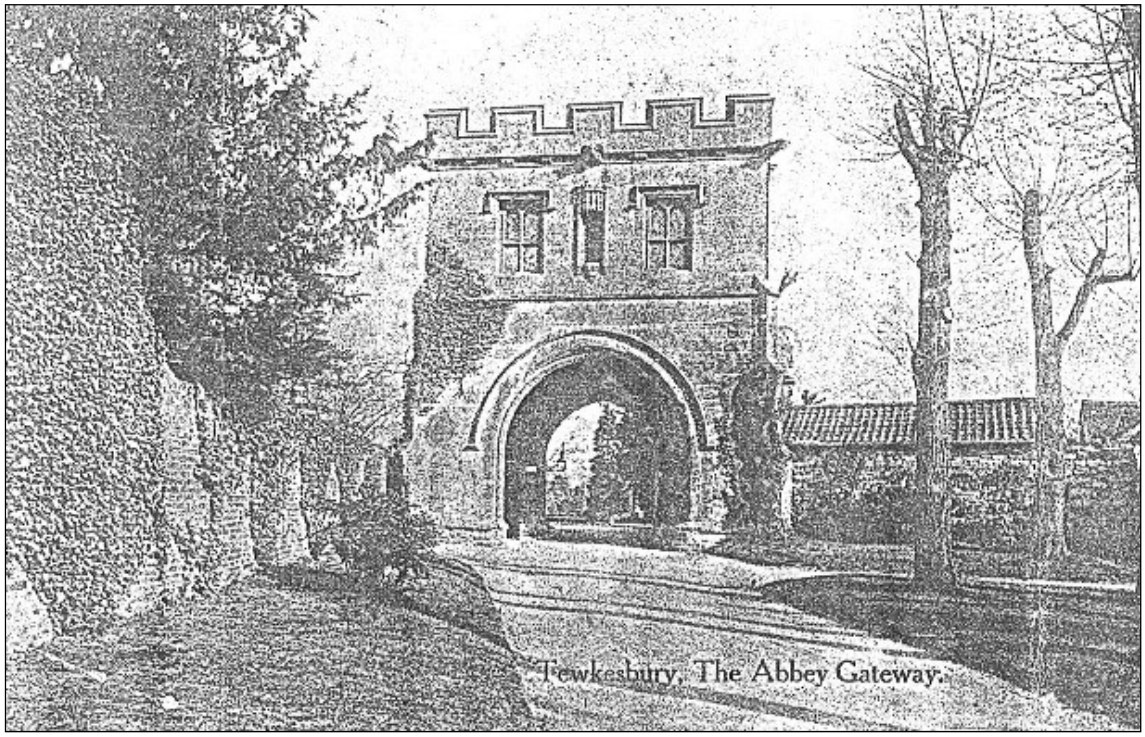
The rebuilding, perhaps with some medieval masonry, included the vault over the gate passage, which in 1990 was found to be partly constructed with 19th century bricks. *The Builder* noted that 'some further restorations' were still planned. These might have included the plastering of the walls with a cement render, likely to date from the later 19th century; also the 'massive carved oak doors' which a Victorian guidebook says were added in 1855.



From Lyson's etchings of Views and Antiquities in the County of Gloucester 1791.



The Gatehouse of Tewkesbury Abbey from Lyson's etching 1791.



The Gatehouse c1908 (Gloucester Record Office)

(British Library)

Later History of the Gatehouse

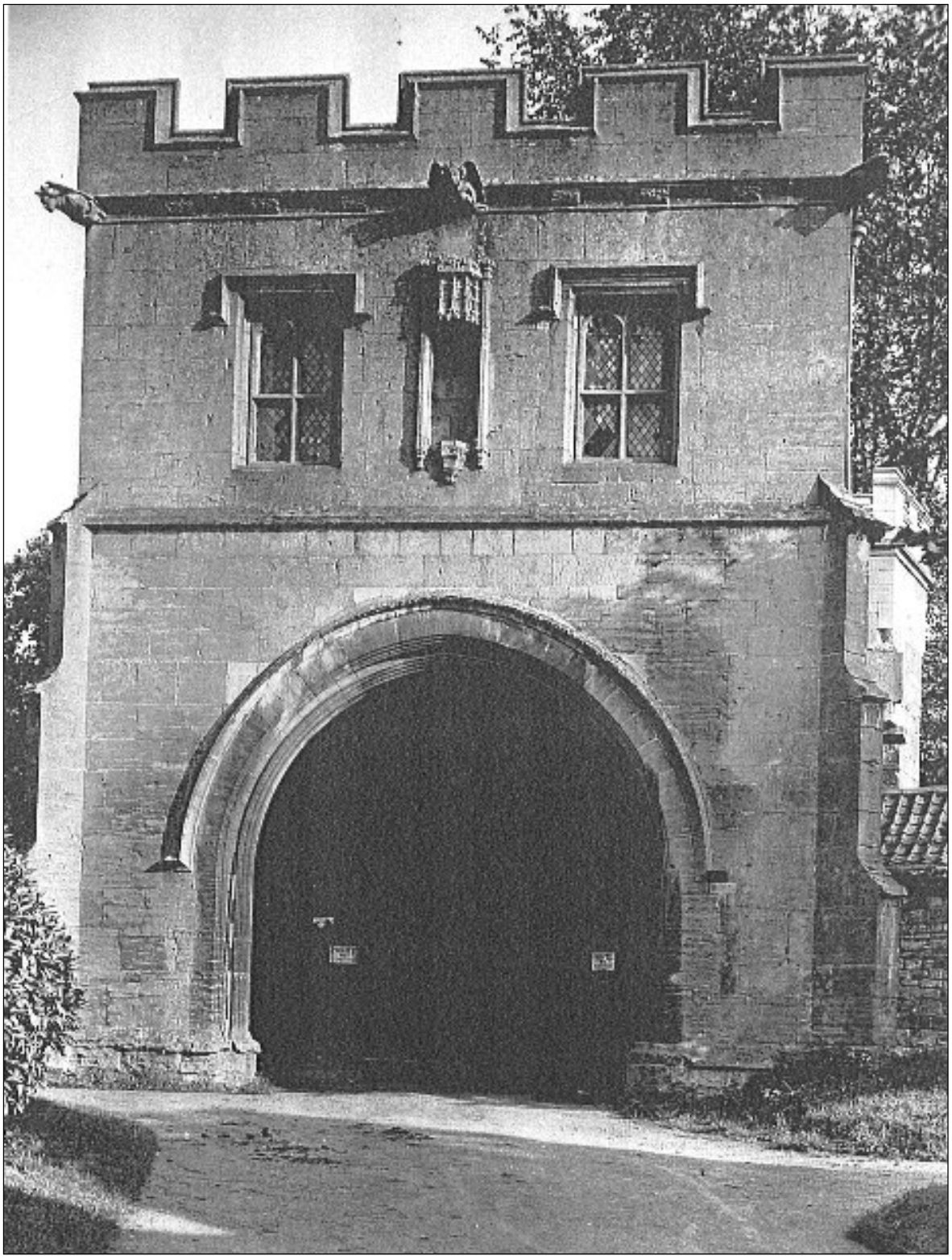
After its restoration, the Gatehouse seems to have settled back into its previous ornamental but empty existence, serving as a rather grand lodge to Abbey House. The 1883 Sale Particulars announce that this was 'approached from the main road by an avenue of trees and that fine stone built structure, the much admired Abbey Gateway.' The trees show in photographs taken in the early part of this century, but had gone by 1950.

After Abbey House became the Vicarage for the Abbey, the room over the gateway was, no doubt, put to a variety of parish uses. Certainly Girl Guide meetings were held there at one time. More recently, it was rented by an artist as a studio.

In the 1960s, when the Abbey House Trust was wound up and Abbey House itself transferred to the Diocese, the Gatehouse was transferred to the Abbey Lawn Trust instead. This had been formed in 1939 to protect the Abbey and its setting. The Trust organised the reroofing of the Gatehouse in the 1970s, and then set about finding an occupier, but the awkwardness of the access to the upper room, up the narrow winding stair, made this extremely difficult - as it must always have done. One suggestion, for example, was to use it for choir practices, but it proved impossible to get a piano in.

Then a neighbour of the Gatehouse suggested the Landmark Trust. She had formerly worked for Landmark, and knew that difficult access was not something to deter it from taking on a good building - and she was right. A lease was duly negotiated and Landmark took on the Gatehouse in 1986, unfortunately in the middle of what turned out to be an exceptionally busy period, so that it was not until 1989 that a scheme for the Gatehouse was prepared, and another year before work started on the building.

The Gatehouse in 1947 (NMR)



The Gatehouse in 1947 (NMR)

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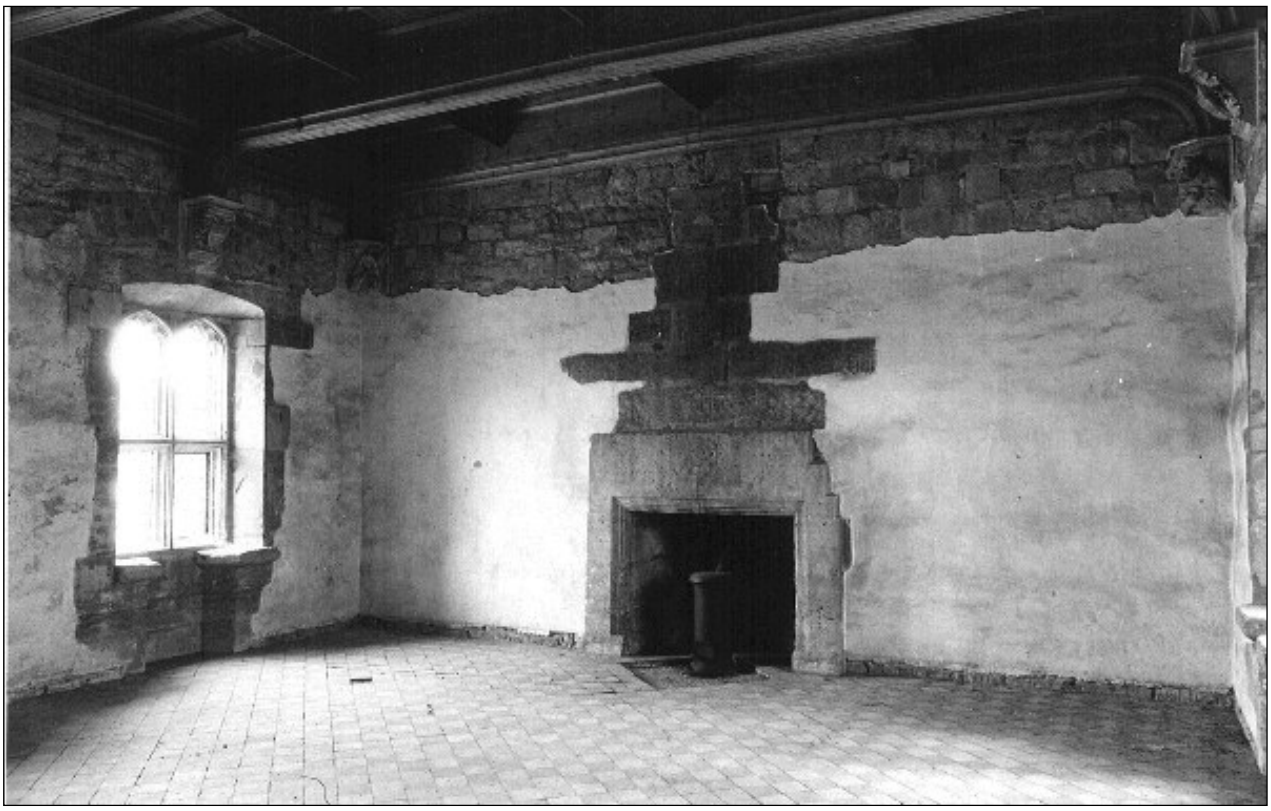
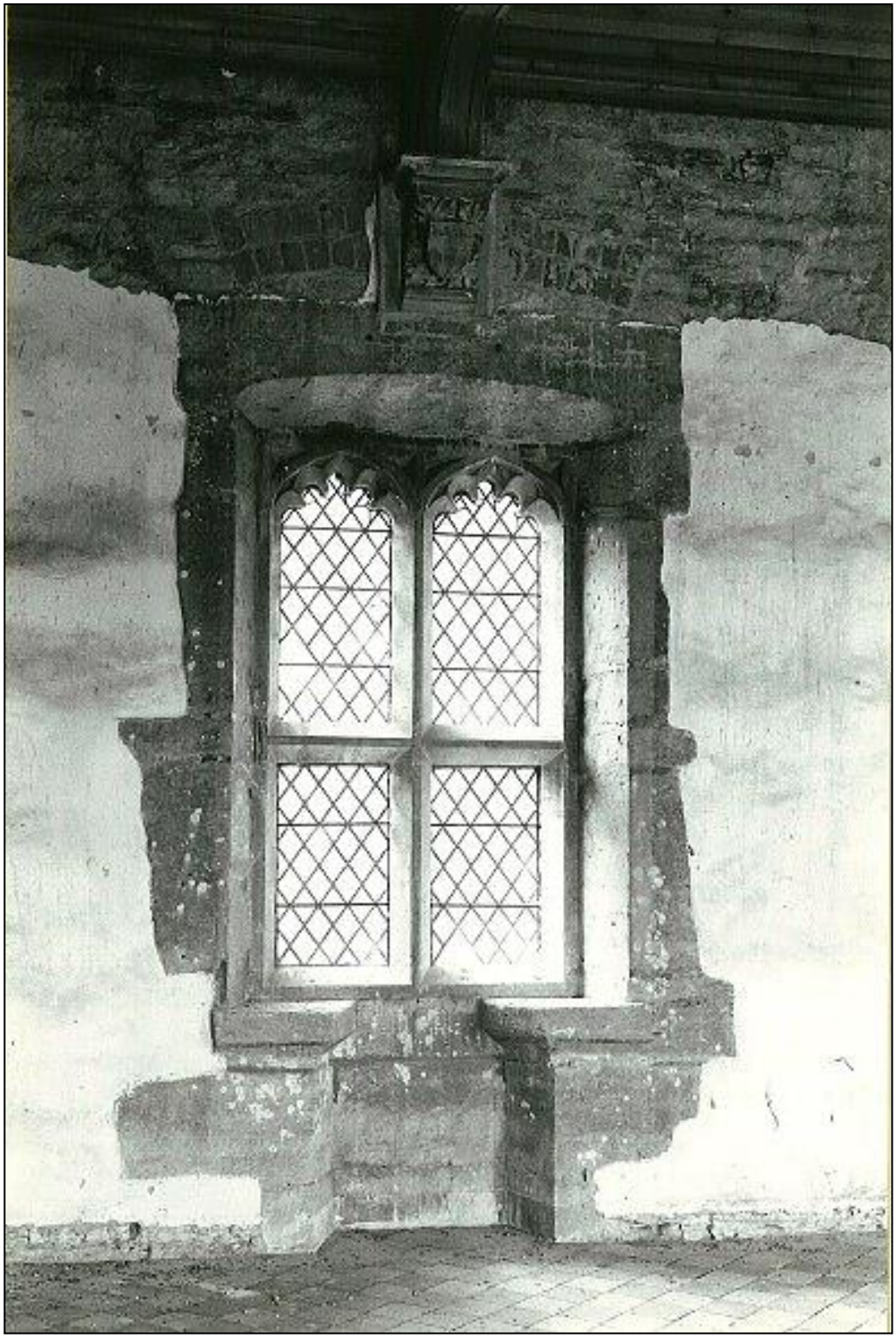
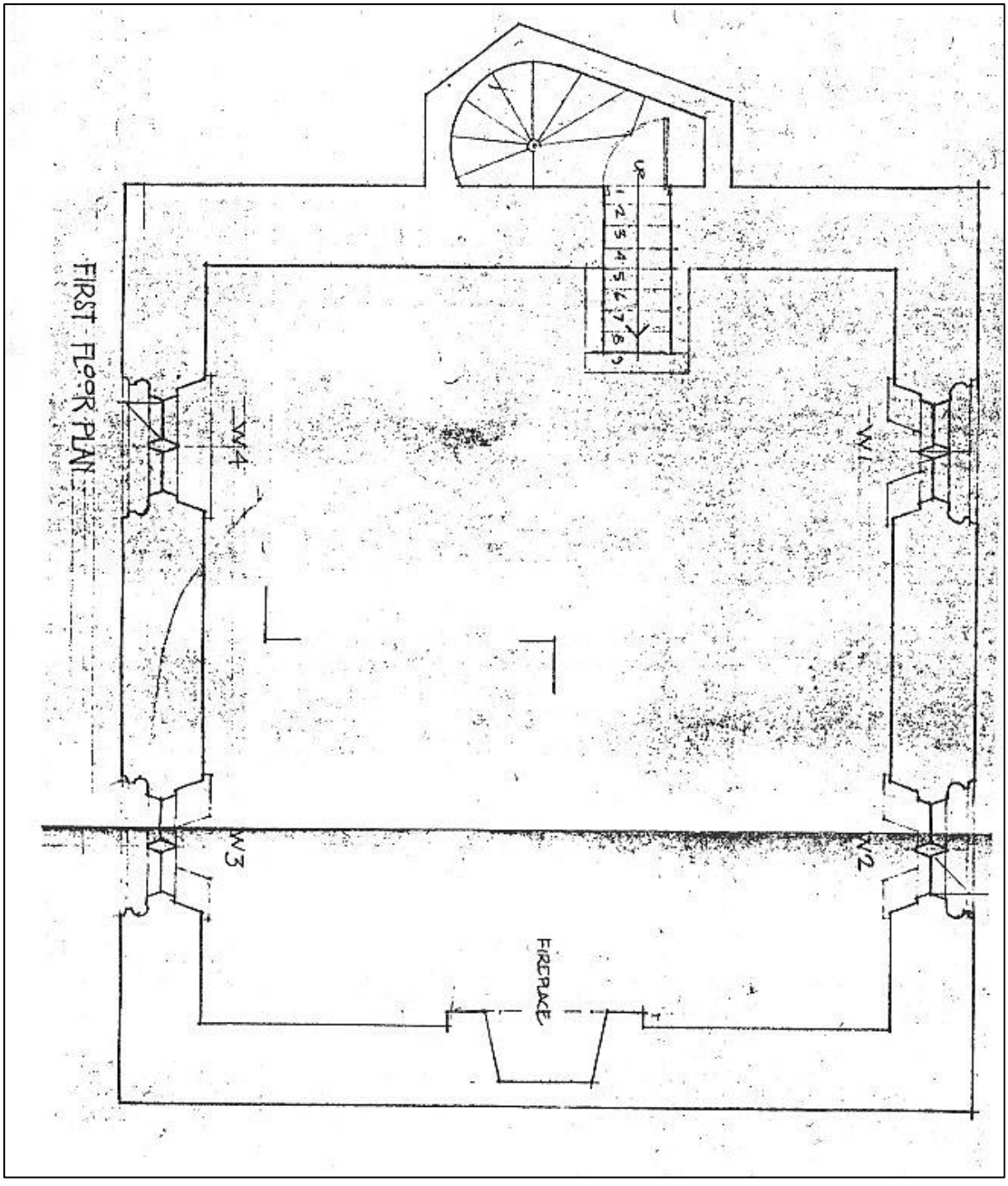
The Gatehouse (outside). The avenue of trees lining the drive had gone by 1950.

The Gatehouse in 1988 (inside)







Plan of the First Floor in 1988

Repair and Conversion

The main task for the Landmark Trust in taking on the Abbey Gatehouse was to make it habitable. To fit in a kitchen, a bathroom, space to sleep and sit and eat, all comfortably within a single room to which no addition could be made, required more than usual ingenuity. The solution of a gallery, appearing like an organ case within this rather ecclesiastical space, was one which had been evolved for a very different building that the Landmark had sought to rescue some years before, the Mausoleum at Seaton Deleval (now in the care of the National Trust). It seemed equally suitable here.

Some structural work was also necessary. Although the roof had been renewed comparatively recently, copying exactly the Victorian work, it was already showing a tendency to leak. A new roof was designed, allowing for greater insulation since the building was now actually going to be inhabited, and also with better ventilation to prevent condensation and the danger of rot within the structure. The opportunity was taken to jack up the whole ceiling by about 8' to give more headroom on the gallery, by extending the brackets of the existing pine main beams which, with the deal ceiling boards, were retained.

The ribbed stone vault over the entrance arch was also showing dangerous signs of weakness. Inside the main chamber, too, the floor tiles were coming loose because the mortar in which they were set was crumbling. The two problems could be solved together. The tiles were carefully lifted and put on one side for re-use; the old fill was dug out (part of a gravestone and two moulded stones were found in it), and then the stones of the vault were secured by fixing stainless steel ties to the back of the ribs. A new, lightweight, reinforced insulating concrete was then poured on to provide a firm base for the tiles.

It had been hoped that an underfloor heating system could be fitted at the same time, but unfortunately there was not enough space between the top of the vault and the floor; instead the building has night storage heaters, and a solid fuel stove.

The only remaining work needed to the exterior of the building, which in any case remains the responsibility of the Abbey Lawn Trust, was the removal of an ugly metal ladder giving access to the roof from the top of the stair turret. A new chimney was provided, which remains invisible behind the parapet. New parapet gutters were formed as part of the new roof.

Several of the Victorian iron window casements needed repair, and in one window a new opening casement was provided instead of a fixed one. Added to that, much of the existing glass was of an unsatisfactory quality, so this was replaced with hand-made French glass, together with new lead-work.

A new oak entrance door was provided, but that at the top of the stairs, opening into the main chamber, is old. The old blocked doorway on the stairs had a window in the top of it, but it was decided that it would look better completely bricked up. The small window near to it was reglazed. Where the treads of the stairs were cracked or broken, minor mortar repairs were carried out. The walls and the stair risers were then limewashed.

In the main chamber, much of the plaster on the walls had been hacked off when the roof was previously renewed, and other areas were in poor condition. Unfortunately, instead of being a soft lime plaster, as we would expect, this was a really hard cement render, probably applied in the late 19th century. We would have preferred, for the long-term health of the building, to hack it all off and replace it with a lime plaster, but it would have been an extremely long and expensive job, and the walls might suffer worse damage in the process. Only where new plaster had to be applied, therefore, has lime plaster been used. The whole has then been covered with six coats of limewash.

Some of the original stones of the chimney breast had been left exposed in a previous restoration, but it was decided that they should now be limewashed, along with the rest of the wall. The fireplace lintel had a bad crack, which had to be carefully pinned. A new hearth stone was provided, and then the new stove fitted.

An unexpected problem proved to be the installation of services, both water and electricity, in an invisible way, without unsightly pipes on the exterior of the building. The architect's solution was to drill ducts diagonally up through the core of the wall, a job that proved extremely tricky but ultimately satisfactory.

Another problem lay in the fact that, as an empty building and part of a medieval monastery, the Gatehouse had been scheduled as an Ancient Monument. Although the works to make it habitable would lead at the end to its being de-scheduled, Scheduled Monument Consent had to be obtained for every detail of the work (separately), in addition to the Listed Building Consent required by it also being a Grade 1 listed building. This resulted in some delays, particularly over the electrical installation, because any change which required a new chase in the walls, meant a new application, which then had to make its way through the consent process.

When all this had been done, the upper room was ready for the gallery. The design had evolved since the first proposal, which had an open balustrade around the sleeping area, to consist entirely of panelling, behind which the beds would be hidden from the rest of the room. The panelling and cornice, the kitchen fittings and the stair were to be of oak, but the floor of the gallery and the boarded lining of the bathroom and lobby were finally of Douglas Fir.

The fireplace lintel had cracked right through

When the gallery had been fixed, it became possible to lay the tiles which had been taken up when work started. Some of these were broken, but it was hoped that with the area taken up by the bathroom and the kitchen fittings, there would be enough left for the rest of the room, perhaps leaving a small patch of screed to be covered by a carpet. In the end there turned out to be enough to complete the whole room. Many of the tiles had become worn, so the whole floor was given a polish of beeswax and turpentine.

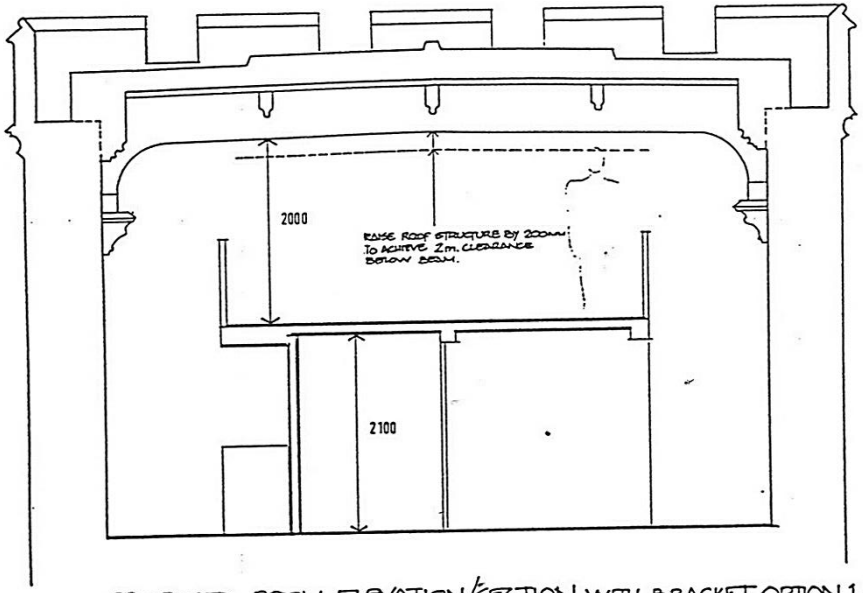
Finally the ceiling colour had to be decided. One solution was to leave this as plain wood, but being pine, it clashed rather with the oak of the gallery. Then it was to have been painted a red lead colour; the final choice was as close as possible to the blue with which the chancel of the Abbey was recently limewashed, itself matching a fragment of early paint; with a stone colour for the beams. The paint itself is a Sikkens microporous oil paint.

There was still one major problem to be confronted. How to get furniture into the building? The stairs were too narrow for all but small objects. All larger pieces, such as the table, had to be taken up in bits and then assembled inside the upper room; while the armchair and sofa had to be upholstered there as well. It is to be hoped that they never have to leave.

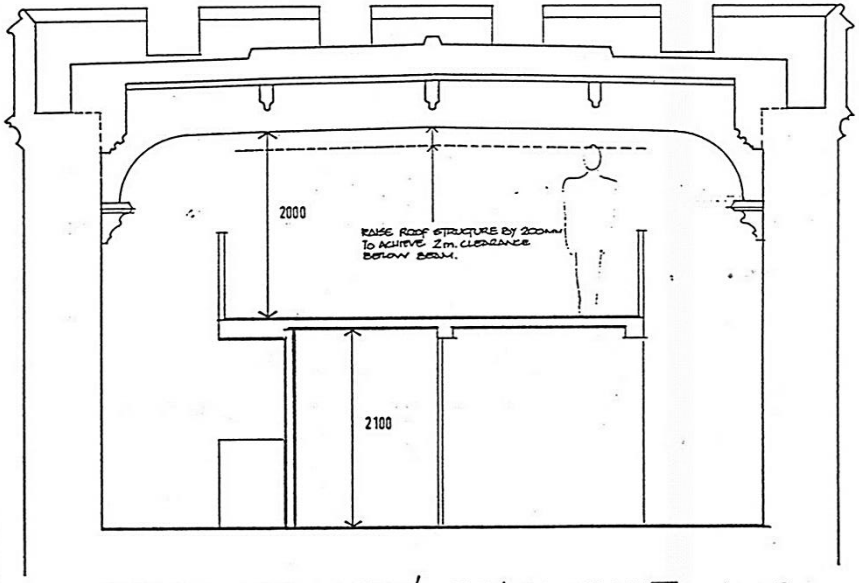
For a relatively small project, a large number of people were involved in the repair of the Abbey Gatehouse. The architect was Andrew Brookes of Rodney Melville & Partners, a firm which has carried out a number of jobs for Landmark; with Adrian Stenning of Bare, Leaning & Bare of Bath as Quantity Surveyor. D. J. Ascough was the structural engineer and P. Lawson Smith & Associates electrical and heating consultants. The joinery for the gallery was supplied by Spicers of Worcester, the glazing was carried out by Norgrove Studios, and other sub-contractors were employed to lay the lead roof and drill the ducts for the services. From English Heritage, who provided a grant for the repairs, there was the Historic Buildings Architect and the Ancient Monument Inspector for the

region; while a watching brief was kept on the work by the County Archaeologist for Gloucestershire.

Above all, the success of the project is owed to the main contractors, John and Geoff Baylis, and their men, who like James Cull and Thomas Collins a century and a half before, carried out all their work to the highest standard of craftsmanship and sailed over all the problems to achieve the best possible end result - a building that looks as though it has hardly been disturbed.



PROPOSED ROOM ELEVATION/SECTION WITH BRACKET OPTION 1.



PROPOSED ROOM ELEVATION/SECTION WITH BRACKET OPTION 2.

THIS DRWG. IS TO BE READ INCONJUNCTION WITH DRWG. NO. 2322/47.

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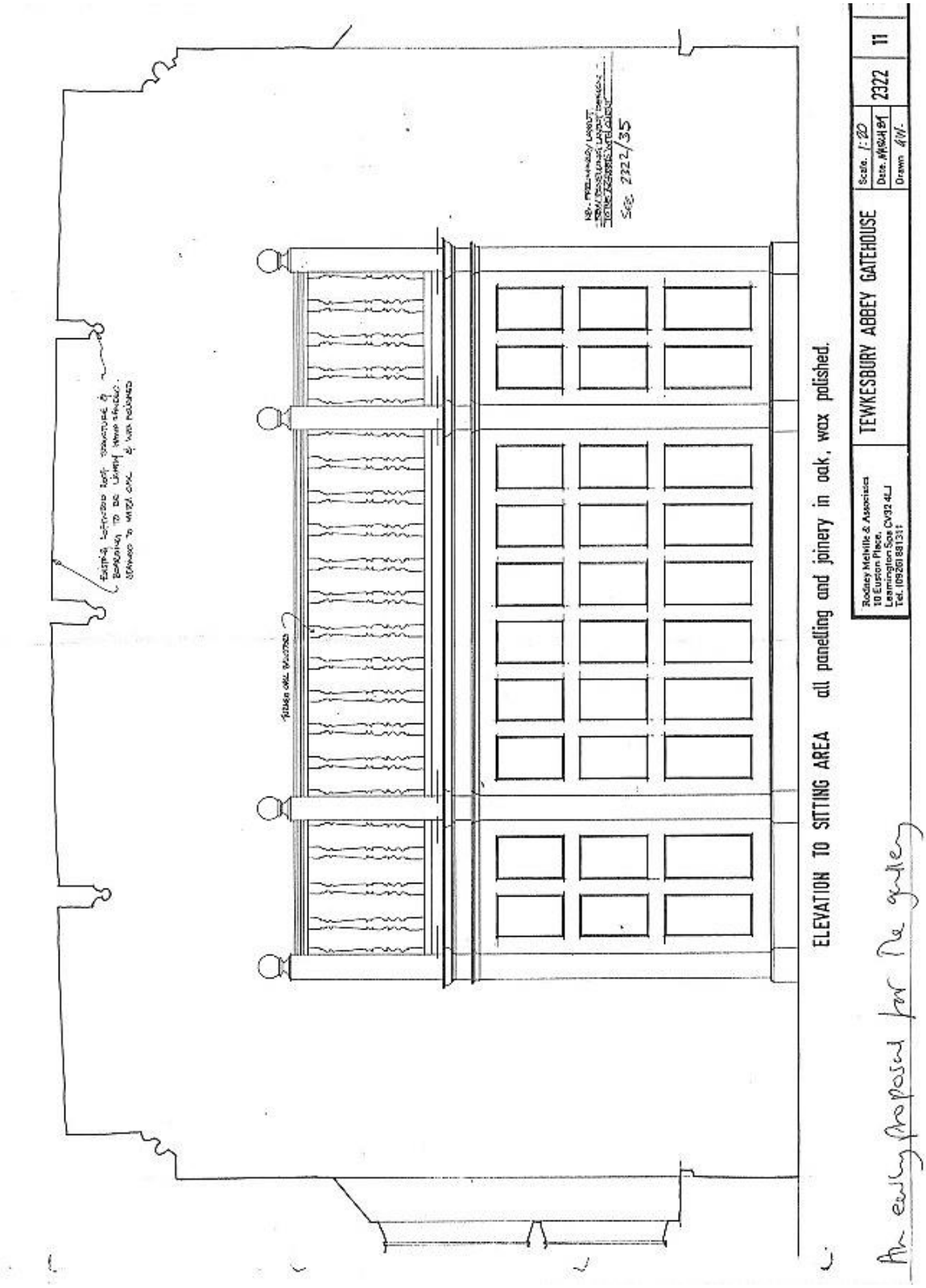
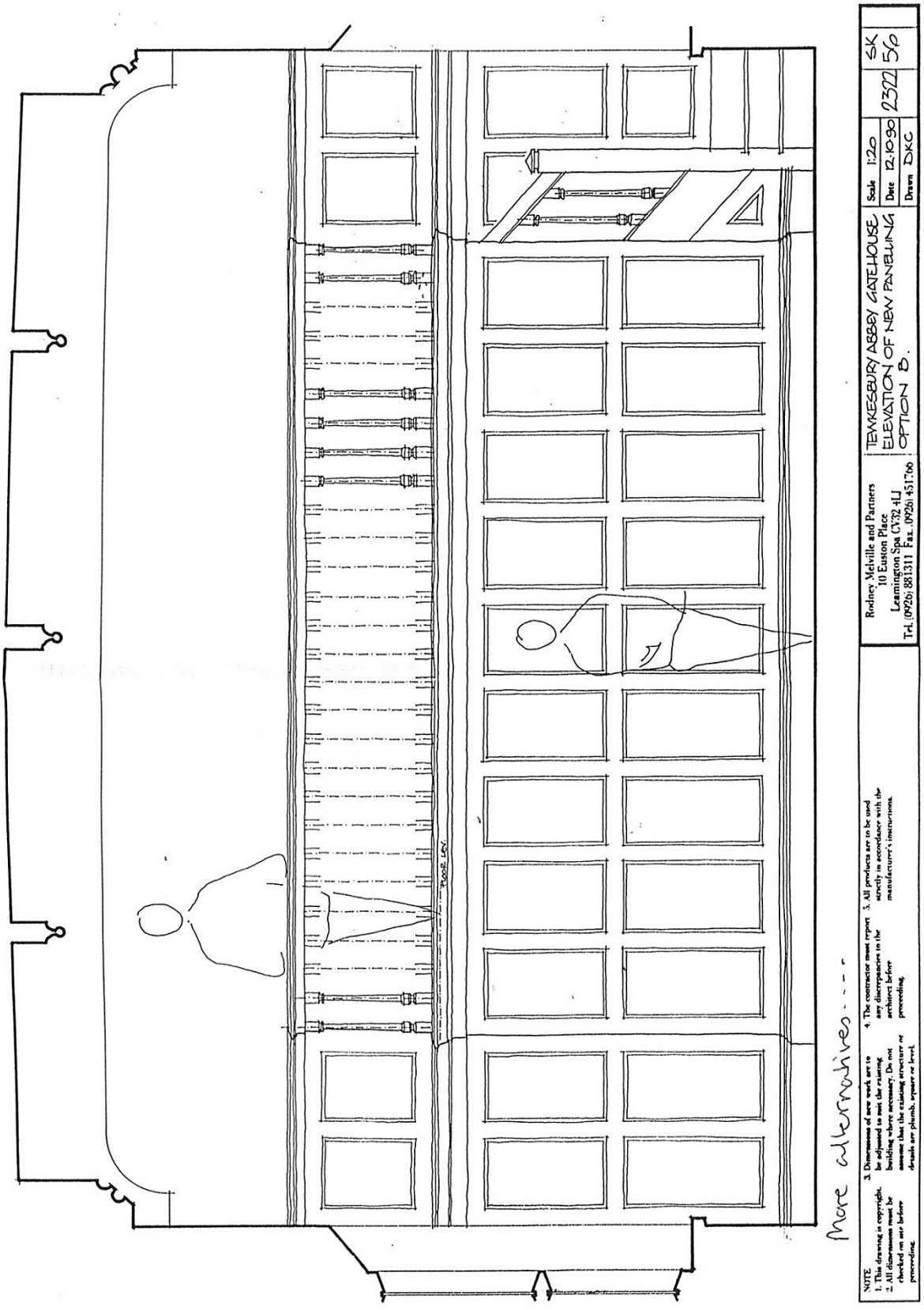
LANDMARK TRUST
TEWKESBURY ABBEY GATEHOUSE
COMPARITIVE ROOM SECTIONS

Scale 1:50
Date Sept. 90
Drawn P.R.D

2322 48


ELEVATION TO SITTING AREA all panelling and joinery in oak, wax polished.
TEWKESBURY ABBEY GATEHOUSE
Rodney Melville & Associates
10 Euston Place,
Leamington Spa CV32 4LJ
Tel. (0926) 881331
Scale. 1:20
Date. MARCH 87
Drawn AW.
2322
11
See 2322/35
An early proposal for the gallery


More alternatives - - -
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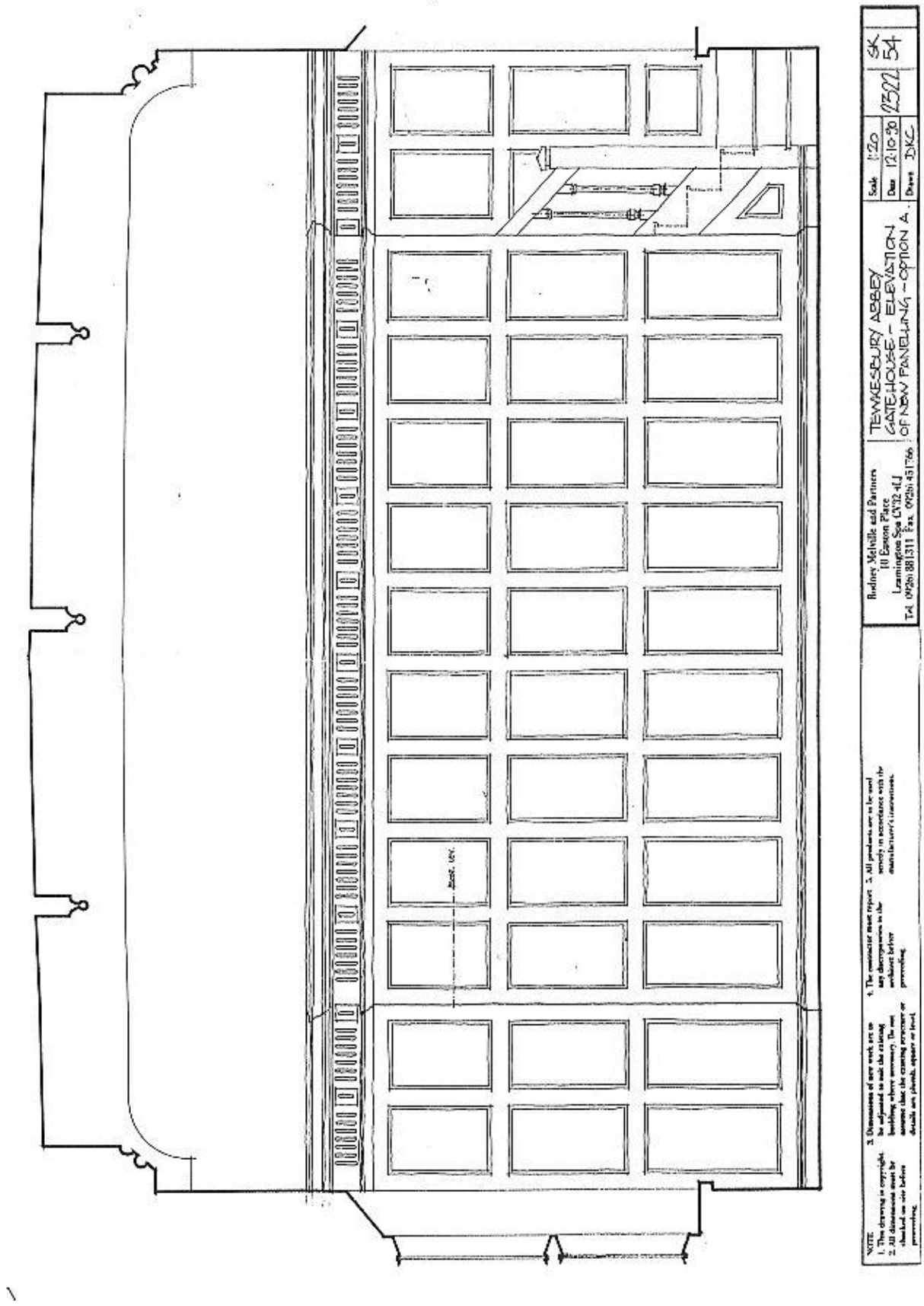
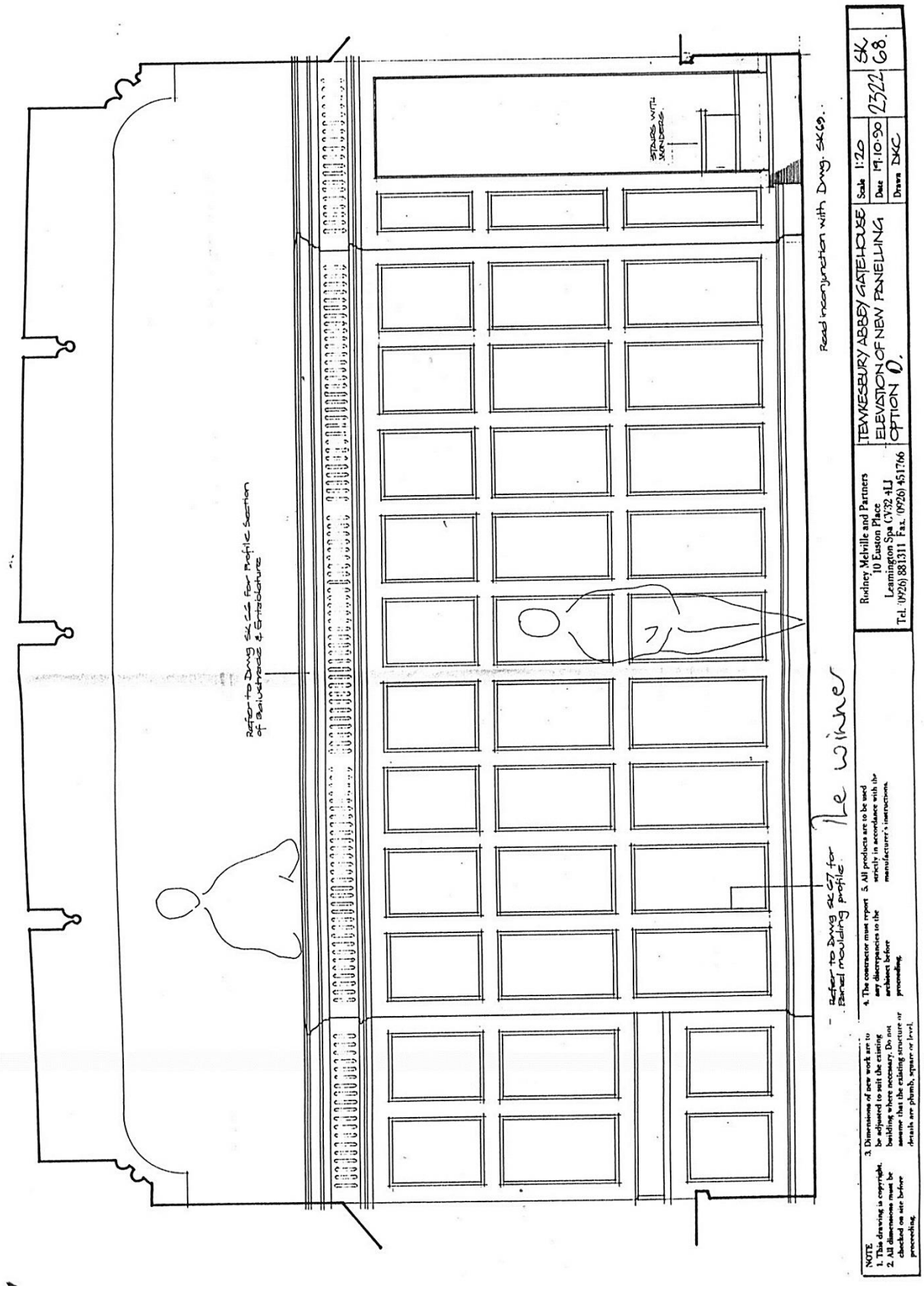
TEWKESBURY ABBEY GATEHOUSE
ELEVATION OF NEW PANELLING
OPTION B.
Scale 1:20
Date 12.10.90
Drawn DKC
2322
SK
5/0


TEWKESBURY ABBEY
GATEHOUSE - ELEVATION
OF NEW PANELLING - OPTION A
Rodney Melville and Partners
10 Easson Place
Leamington Spa CV32 4LJ
Tel 0926 881311 Fax 0926 451766
Scale 1:20
Date 12-10-90
Drawn DKC
SK 54


Refer to Dwg SK 05 for Profile Section of Balustrade & Entablature
STAIRS WITH WINDERS
Read in conjunction with Dwg. SK69.
Refer to Dwg SK 07 for Panel moulding profile
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Tel. (0926) 881311 Fax. (0926) 451766
TEWKESBURY ABBEY GATEHOUSE
ELEVATION OF NEW PANELLING OPTION D.
Scale 1:20
Date 19.10.90
Drawn DKC
2322
SK 68.

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY RESTORATION OF TEWKESBURY

Beginning with the Abbey Gatehouse

A town as rich in early buildings as Tewkesbury has seldom reached our own century without some help from the previous. A period of poverty in the earlier 19th century, with the collapse of the knitting industry, brought many houses nearly to dereliction. From this they were rescued by a handful of archaeologically-minded owners, and in particular by an enthusiastic builder of the town, Thomas Collins.

The first building in the town to be specifically restored, as opposed to being remodelled in a contemporary fashion (as Abbey House was in 1825) was the Abbey Gatehouse. The architect for the restoration was James Medland. He was the son of a London architect, and went to work in Gloucester as chief assistant to S.W. Daukes, designer of the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester and St. Paul's College, Cheltenham. In about 1849 or 1850, Daukes moved to London, leaving his former partner, Hamilton, to set up with Medland as Hamilton and Medland. Medland later became County Surveyor, with a wide general practice, including both restoration and new works. Those of his works singled out for mention in *The Buildings of England: Gloucestershire* are the entrance to the Eastgate Street Market, Gloucester (1856), the new facade of the Corn Hall, Cirencester (1862) and the remodelling of Tibberton Court in an Italianate style in 1852.

Two of his sons became architects, and one of them, John, after several years in Sir Gilbert Scott's office, set up with his father in Gloucester as Medland and Son. Together they enlarged Tewkesbury Town Hall in 1891, three years before James Medland's death in 1894 at the age of 86.

The job of restoring the Tewkesbury Abbey Gatehouse in 1849 must have been given to James Medland just before he became a partner of the firm, and he clearly approached the job conscientiously. Considering the derelict state of the building, he appears to have been rigorous in avoiding the temptation to renew more than was absolutely necessary of the surviving medieval stonework, Medland's new ceiling is competent, unshowy and, being carried out in pine, clearly of its period. The overall result is typical of ecclesiastical architecture of the period.

Medland was obviously well supported by his builders, and especially the stonemason. Berrow's *Worcester Journal* goes into rather more detail than *The Builder*, stating that 'Mr Medland's design for the restoration of this edifice was entrusted to Mr James Cull, builder, and Mr Thomas Collins, stonemason, and the admirable manner in which the work has been executed, reflects much credit on these Tewkesbury tradesmen.'

Thomas Collins and the Old Houses of Tewkesbury

Stonemason Thomas Collins was to become a notable figure in the architectural history of Tewkesbury, making a considerable contribution to its recognition during the Victorian period as an exceptionally well-preserved medieval and Tudor town. It is clear from late-19th century guide books that a number of buildings owed their survival directly to him, since he bought and restored many of them with his own funds. Timber-framing, in one case of 14th-century date, emerged from behind 18th-century plaster, greatly to the admiration of both archaeologists and tourists.

The Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society observed in 1902, soon after his death, that the preservation of Tewkesbury's houses 'owed much to the taste and influence of Mr Thomas Collins'; while H.P. and F. Moore, historians of *The Old Houses of Tewkesbury* (in North's *Guide to Tewkesbury*,1890) state firmly that 'archaeologists owe a deep debt of gratitude to Mr Thomas Collins (the well-known contractor for church building and restoration) for the fine state of preservation in which several of the more beautiful of the ancient buildings in his native town are now seen.' North himself wrote:

A Timely Restoration Movement

> Beautified as Tewkesbury now is by the way in which the numerous specimens of old-time architecture, which give so very picturesque a look to its three principal streets, are cared for, the time is well within the memory of many who are old residents of the town, when so little consideration was given to their preservation, that it appeared very probable that by the end of the century all except that next the Swan - which many had long desired should be preserved - would have disappeared to make way for shops and dwelling houses of modern style and construction. Happily, however, with a change of ownership came a change of feeling as to their value to the town as archaeological treasures. Many historical old buildings had gone, whilst most of those that continued were in a very dilapidated state, and irremediable decay was fast overspreading them; but the era of restoration arrived soon enough to save several of the best and most interesting that remained.

The 'earliest steps taken to preserve Old Houses' had been taken in 1865, when the 'handsome over-hanging house in Church Street, nearly opposite the Hop-Pole Hotel' was put in order. Others followed in the 1870s, 'the Black Bear and the Bell Hotels had the coatings of what the builders call 'rough- cast' removed, and were given back as much as convenient of the appearance they had in former days.'

> Following shortly on these, Mr Collins began the restoration of his property at the Cross: the ardour with which this gentleman has committed himself to the preservation of the many existing architectural features that link his native town with the far-off past has known no bounds, and the splendid and most interesting form which he has given back to this residence, inside as well as out, has made it a principal ornament of Tewkesbury.

North concluded:

> In recent years the work of restoration has continued; many of the house fronts which are now greatly admired examples of the domestic architecture of the Middle Ages were until quite recently roughly plastered over, and owe most of whatever points of beauty they present to the skill of the modern restorer.

Thorough restoration of the kind carried out by many Victorians was not even then to everyone's taste, containing as it too often did a great deal of guesswork and, similarly, a tendency to ignore the possible charm of a building that has grown and developed haphazardly. *The Buildings of England* uses the damning phrase 'much restored' of some houses in Tewkesbury on which Thomas Collins doubtlessly worked. A writer such as William Morris would no doubt have used far stronger language. But if the renovation of these minor buildings was enough to inflame Morris, it was to be the wholesale restoration of another, far greater, Tewkesbury building that put the match to the bonfire and compelled him to found in 1877 the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings: that of Tewkesbury Abbey itself, for which, inevitably, Thomas Collins was also the contractor, under Sir Gilbert Scott.

The Restoration of Tewkesbury Abbey and the foundation of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

A building such as Tewkesbury Abbey undergoes frequent, if not constant, repair and minor renewal, often carried out for urgent structural reasons. Since the dissolution of the Abbey, major phases of work include new roofs and the repair of the tower 1593-1603; of the choir in 1650; the addition of battlements and pinnacles to the tower in 1660, after the collapse of the wooden spire the previous year; the renewal of the great west window in 1686, after the collapse of the original in 1661; repair of the whole church in the 1720s, including the nave roof; and of the choir and transepts again in 1795-6, when galleries were inserted, and a new pulpit; another thorough overhaul of the structure took place in 1824-30, at a cost of £3,000. This time the roofs were again strengthened and repaired, as were the transepts and many of the windows; drains were made to draw water from the foundations; and inside, new pews were provided and 'the coloured vaulting yellow washed over.'

By the middle of the 19th century, therefore, the Abbey's interior, especially, had evolved a long way from its Norman beginnings. Its tall splendour had been cloaked and masked by work characteristic of later periods, and later church liturgy. But by then, too, study of medieval architecture had reached new and scholarly heights. Architects and antiquarians believed they knew with alarming certainty what such a building *should* look like - and from the 1840s on they were demonstrating this again and again, in practice, in the cathedrals and churches of England and Wales.

According to the account of Tewkesbury Abbey's restoration in the *New Guide and Handbook* prepared when it was nearing completion in the 1880s, the 'idea of a thorough restoration of the whole fabric' was first proposed in 1863. Sir Gilbert Scott, already renowned for his restorations of cathedrals such as Ely, Hereford and St. David's, was asked to make an examination of the building and

report on it to a newly-founded local Restoration Committee. 'It then transpired that the contemplated work, to be done effectively, was of a very stupendous character, and if undertaken as a whole would involve an outlay of from £8,000 to £10,000.' Stunned by this (particularly since, as Sir Gilbert Scott acknowledged himself at a later date, the work did not consist 'in any very large degree in heavy structural repair, for the structure is in the main strong'), the committee did nothing further for some years, while they set about raising money. It was not until 1875 that they felt able 'to undertake more active operations.'

> The services of the Church were transferred to the Nave and the whole of the portion eastward of the two easternmost bays of the Nave partitioned off and handed over to the contractor, Mr Thomas Collins.

The Chairman of the Restoration Committee, Sir Edmund Lechmere, reported on the progress of the works to a meeting on 3 March, 1877:

> The obstructive galleries, pews and organ loft were then cleared away, after which the walls, pillars and ceilings were thoroughly cleaned, by freeing them from many coats of whitewash which had effectually concealed their beauty. The modern flooring has also been entirely removed and a substantial foundation of concrete has been laid throughout these portions of the building, ready to receive a suitable pavement. Where the columns and walls of the Choir had been cut into and defaced for the purpose of supporting the beams of galleries or other modern erections, they have been carefully, soundly, and thoroughly repaired and portions of the responds which had been entirely cut away have been rebuilt; the partial colouring and gilding on the vaults of the Choir have been restored to their original state, as have also the beautiful, artistic and historical bosses in the Tower, the Transepts and the two bays of the Nave which have been taken in hand with the Choir. In the East wall of the South Transept and immediately over the apsidal chapel called the Baptistry, a chamber of great interest has been discovered, and by the removal of rubble which blocked up a fine arch, it has been opened out again into the Church. The 13th-century chapels, East and North of the North Transept, which had been completely built in and shut off from the Church by a thick wall of masonry, have once more been opened to the Church and when restored, will form architectural features of unusual beauty and interest. Lastly the three chapels of St. Margaret, St. Edmund and St. Faith have been

> thoroughly restored so far as the repair of the stonework, the re-opening of windows and decoration of ceilings are concerned.

Sir Edmund was speaking to a meeting at Lambeth Palace, called to launch a National Committee for the Restoration of Tewkesbury Abbey, and a national appeal for funds. Tewkesbury Abbey was recognised as a monument of national importance. The people of Tewkesbury and its neighbourhood had raised nearly the whole of the £5,000 spent so far, but they had nothing more to give. Another £6,000 was needed, which would have to come from farther afield. The works they still hoped to achieve were:

1. The removal of all plastering and whitewash from the walls, pillars, piers, arching and vaulting of the westernmost bays of the Abbey.

2. Repair of flooring in the Transepts, Ambulatories and Chapels.

3. The new-roofing and restoration of the beautiful 13th-century chapels off the North Ambulatory.

4. Provision of seats, screens, pulpit, reading desk, lectern etc.

5. The restoration of the Sedilla, of the Chapels and the preservation of the seven grand ancient windows of the Choir Clerestory where necessary.

6. The erection of a Reredos, if one should eventually be thought suitable to the style of the Abbey.

Inevitably the meeting attracted publicity and notices in the paper. Not everyone was delighted. In *The Athenaeum* a week later a strongly worded letter appeared, under the heading 'Society for the Protection of Ancient Monuments':

My eye just now caught the word 'restoration' in the morning paper, and, on looking closer, I saw that this time it is nothing less than the Minster of Tewkesbury that is to be destroyed by Sir Gilbert Scott. Is it altogether too late to do something to save it - it and whatever else of beautiful or historical is still left us on the sites of the ancient buildings we were once so famous for? Would it not be of some use once for all, and with the least delay possible, to set on foot an association for the purpose of watching over and protecting these relics, which, scanty as they are now become, are still wonderful treasures, all the more priceless in this age of the world, when the newly-invented study of living history is the chief joy of so many of our lives?

Your paper has so steadily and courageously opposed itself to those acts of barbarism which the modern architect, parson, and squire call 'restoration', that it would be waste of words to enlarge here on the ruin that has been wrought by their hands; but, for the saving of what is left, I think I may write a word of encouragement, and say that you by no means stand alone in the matter, and that there are many thoughtful people who would be glad to sacrifice time, money, and comfort in defence of those ancient monuments: besides, though I admit that the architects are, with very few exceptions, hopeless, because interest, habit and ignorance bind them and that the clergy are hopeless, because their order, habit and an ignorance yet grosser, bind them; still there must be many people whose ignorance is accidental rather than inveterate, whose good sense must surely be touched if it were clearly put to them that they were destroying what they, or, more surely still, their sons and sons' sons, would one day fervantly long for, and which no wealth or energy could ever buy again for them.

What I wish for therefore, is that an association should be set on foot to keep a watch on old monuments, to protest against all 'restoration' that means more than just keeping out wind and weather, and, by all means, literary and other, to awaken a feeling that our ancient buildings are not mere ecclesiastical toys, but sacred monuments of the nation's growth and hope.

William Morris

It seemed that Morris's plea had struck a deep seam of feeling. Two weeks later, in its column of Fine-Art Gossip, *The Athenaeum* was able to report that 'Mr Morris's proposal to bring together those lovers of art and antiquity who desire to stay the ravages of the 'restorers' is likely to take effect, and a society is to be formed for the defence of our historical and artistic monuments, or so

many of them as may be still in existence.' The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, or SPAB, held its first meeting soon afterwards, with Morris as Secretary.

It was unlikely that the enthusiastic Restoration Committee for Tewkesbury Abbey would let such an attack go unanswered, and sure enough, on 31 March, there was a reply from Sir Edmund Lechmere:

> A letter, from Mr. William Morris, in your issue of the 10th inst., cannot, in justice to himself and his object, and to the many who, as members of the Society of Antiquaries and otherwise, take an active part and interest in our efforts for the restoration of Tewkesbury Abbey, pass unnoticed.
>
> In spite of Mr Morris's implied slur and quotation of the word 'restoration', and however applicable such implication may be, in some instances, to works of renovation on the old historical landmarks of Britain, I still venture to use that word in its exact signification, which is 'a replacing in a former state.' Such has been, and still is, our object at Tewkesbury Abbey. The utmost care has been, and will be, taken to obviate the suppression of any feature whatever in the original structure; but, by the removal of comparatively recent innovations, such as successive coats of yellow wash, modern galleries and pews, and obstructive partitions, and the careful preservation of every original trace of colour and general feature, even to mere fragments of carved stone, Tewkesbury Abbey will, with the assistance of a generous public, be again what it originally was - one of England's noblest specimens of mediaeval architecture.
>
> In view of the foregoing, we cannot but protest against such sweeping and unfounded assertions as those of Mr. Morris, assertions eminently calculated, at this critical moment, when, local effort being exhausted, we are making a most earnest appeal for public assistance, to seriously injure our cause.
>
> Allow me, in closing, to suggest that Mr. Morris, who, from the wording of his letter, is doubtless one of the 'many thoughtful people who would be glad to sacrifice time, money, and comfort in defence of those ancient monuments', should visit Tewkesbury, and investigate the work already done and our plans for further restoration. If the result be not a handsome contribution from that gentleman, I shall be more than disappointed.

This he was inevitably destined to be. William Morris's unanswerable reply was printed in the following week's issue:

> I am not quite sure that I should wish to see Tewkesbury minster 'replaced in it former state', or one of its many 'former states'; but as it is clearly impossible, when one comes to think of it, for ourselves or our buildings to live again either in the 15th century or the 12th, it is hardly worth while to say much on this merely hypothetical matter of taste. On the other hand, I am sure that I do not wish the minster to look like a modern building, and I think Sir Edmund Lechmere also would disclaim any such wish, though doubtless many others would not; and I assert that the more money is spent in altering its 'present state' in the year 1877 and onwards, the more modern it will look. In truth, I am afraid that it will look much more modern than Sir Edmund Lechmere hopes; for I am older in restorations than he seems to be, and pretty well know the value of strict assurances of strict care and such-like in restorations. They are always made even in the worst cases, and never kept even in the best; as, indeed, they cannot possibly be. Everybody who has had to do with old buildings knows what a perilous process is that business of stripping, so naively alluded to by Sir Edmund Lechmere, and how comprehensive a phrase 'comparatively recent' can be made, nay, must be made very often when alterations once begin in an old building.
>
> After all, the issue is narrow between Sir Edmund Lechmere and the restorers, and myself and the anti-restorers. Neither side wants a building to lose its ancient character; only the restorers think it will look even more ancient if it be worked all over under the 'care' of Sir Gilbert Scott to-day, - which opinion we cannot admit. The issue being thus narrow, and the consequence of error so serious to lovers of art, I think it is but reasonable for the minority, to which I belong, to appeal to the public to <u>wait</u>. This is all the more reasonable, since if we are wrong no harm will be done. The unrestored ancient buildings are wronging no one in Church or State, as they are now; and it is but waiting a few years, and they can be restored then. Whereas if the restorers are wrong and have their way, they will hopelessly destroy all that is left us of our ancient buildings.
>
> Prudence, we submit, should enlist the public on our side, for architecture is at present in a wholly experimental condition, as I suppose I need scarcely call on London streets to witness; and yet, such is the headlong rashness of our architects, that they have for the last thirty years made the priceless relics of mediaeval art and history mere blocks for their experiments; experiments which some of them must regret heartily, and sorely wish to 'restore.'

> In my belief there is no remedy for the spreading of this disease, but for the public to make up its mind to put up with 'comparatively recent' incongruities in old churches and other public buildings, and to be content with keeping them weather-tight; and if they have any doubts about the stability of the fabric, to call in an engineer to see to it, and let iron ties, and the like, do what they can. For my part, I cannot help thinking that they will soon find it easy to bear the absence of stained glass, and shiny tiles, and varnished deal roofs, and all the various upholsteries with the help of which our architects and clergy have striven so hard to 'replace' our ancient buildings in their 'former state', or, at any rate, in some 'former state' imagined by themselves to be super excellent.

There was clearly to be no agreement in a debate which is still running today. To many, as to Sir Gilbert Scott, it seemed a clear moral and aesthetic duty to aim, as he claimed he had at Tewkesbury, 'at the removal of disfigurements, such as the modern pews, galleries and whitewash, and the bringing of the interior back to something like a state of propriety and to some approach to its original beauty.' The historian of the Abbey, J. H. Blunt, speaking at the same meeting in 1877, was careful to point out that 'nothing new has been put in for the sake of newness, and all the old work has been treated with the greatest respect.' Scott did not, and does not seem to have wanted, to renew the 'comparatively recent' west window, for example, which other, less sensitive architects might have done; and the tower was not refaced until 1935.

On the other hand, we know now that the Victorians' powerful image of medieval churches existing in a bare, almost skeletal, state, was mistaken. Medieval churches were plastered, and the plaster was frequently decorated with wall-paintings, only later painted over with white-wash. So obeying Morris's plea to wait could have prevented losses now tragically irrecoverable. Moreover, Georgian pews and pulpits, when not swept away, are now seen as preferable, in many cases, to their Victorian replacements.

The Builder soon gave its verdict on the controversy, in a series of articles consisting largely of a detailed description of the Abbey. Then, in the final instalment, on April 21, 1877, its anonymous author comes to the 'actual work of restoration, and its effects, concerning which a good deal has been said in other quarters, wisely or unwisely.' He takes issue with details of the work - the method of pointing used, and the isolated gilding of the bosses and corbels against a plain red ground. But as to its overall benefit, he is quite unequivocal:

> There can be no doubt that what has been done internally gives us more idea of the original character and grandeur of the building than we ever could have had before; and to say, as some ultra-conservatives have been affirming, that the grandeur and truthfulness of the building are destroyed by such restoration is idle. Let the conservatives, who would preserve even whitewash, just look at the untouched part of the nave, and then walk round to the restored portion, and if that does not open their eyes, nothing will.

His support is conditional, however. He has seen no mention of work to the exterior of the Abbey, except for what is structurally necessary; but 'if any attempt should be made to tamper with the weather-stained but perfectly preserved and sound surfaces of the tower and the noble west front,... we do consider that a public protest should be made in such language as cannot be mistaken.'

Thomas Collins Again

The man in the background of this debate who, in spite of the overseeing role of Sir Gilbert Scott, must have been responsible for a fair share of the final result, was Thomas Collins. That he was committed heart and soul to the work is clear from the tributes paid to him at that same meeting in Lambeth Palace. The Bishop of Gloucester, in his introductory speech, remarked:

> Differing in this respect from the conventional contractor of the present day, our contractor, Mr Thomas Collins, will, we fear, be a great loser by work which he has performed in and for the sake of the old Abbey, which has no part in the contract, and in which his liberality has had no bounds.

Sir Edmund Lechmere explains more fully:

> The Committee are fortunate in having secured as their contractor Mr Thomas Collins, who has most satisfactorily carried out the work of restoration so far as it has gone; and they consider it due to Mr Collins to acknowledge his liberal conduct and public spirit in having at his own expense reopened the 12th-century chapel in the South Transept, and also the so-called Chapter House, as well as having done much other useful work not included in the contracts.

Thomas Collins' detailed knowledge of the building is born out in later editions of the new Abbey Guidebook, at the end of which appeared a Table of the Styles of Architecture of Tewkesbury Abbey, in which individual parts of the building are separated neatly into their distinct periods - Norman, Early Pointed, Middle or Late Pointed and so on - of which he was author.

Would Mr Collins and Mr Morris have been able to speak to one another? Was Mr Collins a hero or a villain in SPAB terms? Morris himself was certainly more inclined to blame those who directed the work, rather than those who did it with their own hands. On the other hand, as a stonemason by training, Collins would probably have been against plaster - Scrape rather than Anti- Scrape, even when unprompted by Sir Gilbert Scott. He certainly ‘scraped’ the timber-framed

houses of Tewkesbury. At the same time, he left the 18th-century interiors of these houses untouched, making no attempt to revert to one of Morris's reviled 'former states.' Many of the houses were undoubtedly in need of urgent repair, and if the plaster had to come off for this purpose, and there was no structural reason for replacing it, he was on solid ground in not doing so. The philosophy of replacement for purely historical grounds, which is so powerfully argued today, had not then been formulated.

In the many years of its existence, the SPAB has had a deep and beneficial influence on the practice of repairing old buildings, by encouraging the use of traditional materials, and methods which work with the existing structure rather than against it, by training architects in these methods and printing pamphlets about them for building owners; above all perhaps by stressing the importance of stopping to think before taking drastic action, and considering whether a building will really be the better for having all its wrinkles smoothed away and all its faults improved.

For the Abbey itself, the best possible combination might still have been to have had the undoubtedly gifted Sir Gilbert Scott as architect and Thomas Collins, in the tradition of medieval master mason, as contractor, but to have added William Morris as guide and advisor, to put a brake on the other two when the one became too scholarly and the other too enthusiastic.

Above all, Tewkesbury strikes us today as a town that has survived, rather than one that has been forcibly revived, and we are assured by his contemporaries that this survival was largely due to Thomas Collins. A tour of the Abbey under his guidance would surely have been fascinating. Moreover, I suspect that if he was here today, he would be employed by the Landmark Trust as contractor for its own building works.

Charlotte Haslam
November 1991