

CATHEDRAL INNOVATIONS

JAMES WYATT, ARCHITECT, AT DURHAM
CATHEDRAL. 1795-1797

By Professor R. A. Cordingley, M.A., F.R.I.B.A.

THE name of James Wyatt (1746-1813) is infamous in the guide books of four great cathedrals; Hereford, Lichfield, Salisbury and Durham. He came to be known to antiquaries of his time as "The Destroyer", from the iconoclastic restorations he carried out at each of these churches. It seemed as though his intention was as much to remodel them to accord with current architectural ideas and fashionable taste, as to effect necessary repairs. Work at the first three cathedrals commenced much about the same time; Hereford and Lichfield, 1788; Salisbury, 1789. Durham's turn followed later, in 1795,¹ but there the scheme of innovations was arrested when scarcely begun, owing to the storm of indignation raised by antiquaries, and particularly, by the bitter and scathing opposition of one, John Carter, an architectural draughtsman and writer. Some of Durham's finest monuments, destined for destruction, drastic re-modelling or other form of "improvement" consequently were saved. Illustrating this article are six original drawings, prepared by Wyatt or in his office, not hitherto published, which help to show what these abandoned intentions had been. They confirm, in the main, that Wyatt's schemes for Durham followed the same general lines as those already carried out at the other three cathedrals, but also they contribute some fresh evidence for the history of the structure. The whole remarkable story of the events which led to the climax at Durham appears very clearly from correspondence and articles in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and it is this source which here is largely followed.

To-day, it is a matter for wonder that the fabric and monuments of our ancient cathedrals should ever had been regarded so lightly as Wyatt's schemes to show. Yet to begin with at least, before his methods had settled into personal mannerism, he no more than represented the general attitude of his day. The first phase of the Gothic Revival, a superficial and sophisticated phase, was scarcely under way, and he was, in fact, its

¹ The periods during which Wyatt was in charge of restoration works at the various cathedrals appear to be: Hereford, 1788-1795; Lichfield, 1788-1790; Salisbury, 1789-1792; Durham, 1795-1797.

most brilliant, pioneer exponent. Most buildings were, of course, in the Classical style, then usually known as the "Grecian", and in this his supremacy was unchallenged even by the dissident Gothic antiquaries. But increasingly, he adventured too in the new expression, and by 1804 was "in the habit of Gothic".¹ He was unquestionably an originator in the design of Gothic mansions, and at the time with which we are here concerned, already was completing Lee Priory, Kent, (1782-90), and had begun that famous but ill-fated work, Fonthill Abbey, Wilts, of which the tower collapsed partially during construction and irrevocably some twenty years after its termination. His adversaries among the antiquaries maintained that they would have been well content had he confined his activities to new work: the fact that opposition arose at all is indicative of the growing knowledge of mediaeval monuments, which out-moded Wyatt's drastic methods of cathedral restoration by the time they were about to be applied at Durham.

At the outset, his ecclesiastical work was almost universally approved, and even in the Durham controversy, his critics still were relatively small in number, though well informed and extremely vocal. After their successful intervention there, cathedrals were treated with somewhat greater respect, though the same cannot be said about parish churches.²

It is odd how, when his work at the Cathedrals is in question, Wyatt has come to be regarded as an isolated phenomenon, utterly devoid of feeling or ability, though to the fashionable public of his day he was "our modern Palladio".³ Nor can the church dignitaries who commissioned him have regarded his schemes as in any way vicious. On the contrary, they must have looked upon them as enlightened advances in the contemporary taste. Manifestly, the projects were not foisted upon them; they sanctioned them and they held the purse strings. The Hon. Shute Barrington, who became Bishop of Durham in June, 1791, came from Salisbury Cathedral and must have been well pleased with the works then concluding there to have at least tacitly approved, four years later, the invitation to Wyatt to come and do likewise at Durham.⁴

Yet it is no less odd how rarely the church authorities are held to blame for the depredations: Wyatt bears the whole brunt. So long as the sun of

¹ *Farington Diary*, 2nd edition, 1923. Vol. 2, p. 180.

² Beginning desultorily in the present, late eighteenth-century phase, in the next phase of the Gothic Revival, which reached its peak in the third quarter of the nineteenth-century, perhaps one-third of the parish churches of this country were either completely rebuilt or so drastically "improved" (the term remained current) as to leave little semblance of the original structure. Very few indeed retained their mediaeval structure, monuments and fittings wholly intact. A rough, sample computation of the parish churches of Somerset shows 156 of a total of 425 to have been rebuilt or extensively restored in the nineteenth-century.

³ *Gent.'s Mag.* 1790, p. 787.

⁴ *G.M.*, 1795, p. 924.

public approbation shone, it was they who secured the superior credit; "great, very great praise is due to the Dean and Chapter (of Lichfield) and very active Chapter Clerk";¹ but as adverse criticism mounted, their reticence became correspondingly marked. Indeed, at Durham, we find the Dean, Lord Cornwallis (1794-1824), turning coat to join the opposition. Frightened by the storm raised in antiquarian circles over the initial "improvement" there, the demolition, in 1796, of the greater part of the Norman Chapter House, (Fig. 16) he falsely pretended not have been present at the meeting at which its fate was decided, and never to have been consulted.² He went even farther: the Durham innovations having been abandoned as a consequence of this same clamour, at a point when the lead-work in the Galilee Chapel at the west end of the Cathedral had been already stripped in preparation for its removal, he had the audacity to boast repeatedly afterwards of having saved the latter from Wyatt's destroying hand³—an absurd claim, for who, if not the Dean and Chapter, could have authorized the work? Thus Wyatt, who never deigned to defend his actions publicly, so far as now appears, became the historical scapegoat even while his cathedral works were in progress; and in the course of time, many architectural indiscretions have been attributed to him with which he had nothing whatever to do.

Looking at the picture broadly, the facts are that by the mid-eighteenth century, churches generally had fallen into an extreme state of disrepair. Mediaeval architecture was almost forgotten by the fashionable world, or if remembered, despised. The growth of the Romantic movement brought it to mind again, but it was a condescending recognition. The interest, such as it was, was in its capacity to stimulate the more devastating emotions, to command awe, gloom, despair, solemnity; or prettily to adorn a landscape. For these ends, mouldering ruins were preferable to entire, well-kept buildings; moonlight or a gathering storm superior conditions for viewing them to the broad light of day.

Romantic interest mounted, at length awaking antiquarian curiosity and with it, conscience and pride in the Gothic heritage. Emulation commenced too; at first only in the most trivial and superficial way. By 1790 it was possible to say "the solemn though imperfect architecture called 'Gothic', so far from hastening out of fashion is becoming more simple, more perfect and more worthy of being fashionable".⁴ Yet to the end of the eighteenth century and beyond, there was never anything fundamental about the Revival. Classical ideas prevailed; being old, the

¹ *G.M.*, 1789, p. 401.

² *Guide to the County of Durham* (n.d., c. 1892) Boyle, p. 209, quoting earlier authorities.

³ Boyle, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

⁴ *Gent.'s Mag.* 1790, p. 787.



FIG. 1
"A North West View of Durham Cathedral showing the intended Lanthorn and Spire, designed by James Wyatt, Sept. 25, 1795."

General note to illustrations—The Wyatt drawings are those shown in Figs. 1, 2, 9, 13, 14 and 15. They presumably are a set, or part of a set, made to illustrate his "Survey" of the Cathedral and attendant buildings, made for the Chapter in 1795.

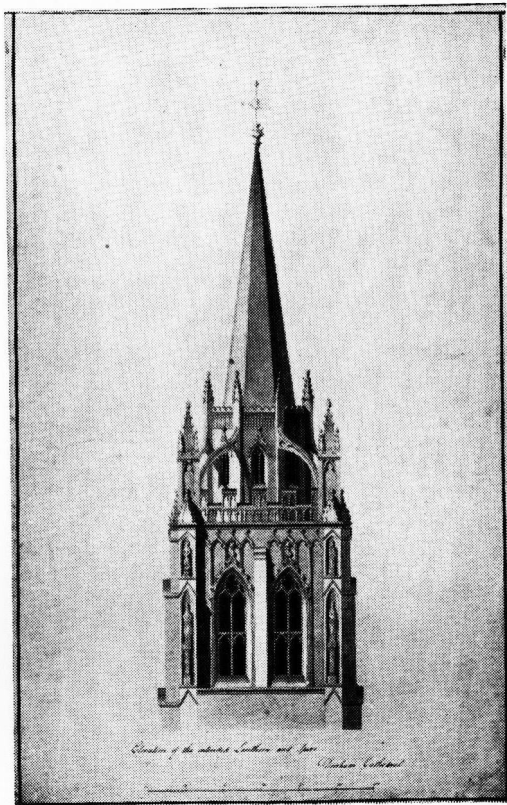


FIG. 2
"Elevation of the intended Lanthorn and Spire, Durham Cathedral". by James Wyatt.

*Elevation of the intended Lanthorn and Spire
Durham Cathedral*

Gothic could not, in the eighteenth century view, but be the work of inferior minds. Conviction on this point was whole-hearted and sincere: "The sacred buildings erected during these tempestuous waves of savage power, having a savage manner in their execution, were called 'Gothic'.¹ Hence when eighteenth century interest and conscience had been sufficiently provoked, and money could be attracted to the long overdue repair of Gothic churches, there was an accompanying ambition to "improve" or "new-model" them, and the greater the monument the more worthy as a subject for improvement. The chief object of improvement, commonly held, and not new with Wyatt, was simple; it was to give unity of the classical kind to the entire internal effect; no integral part was to be shut off visually from the main body of the church, and solid obstructions were to be removed or destroyed. The framed or partially-screened view was legitimate, as in the classic idiom. As there was only the haziest idea about the successive phases of mediaeval architecture—all round-arched work was "Saxon" in the view of even most enlightened antiquaries up to and well beyond the end of the century—any necessary new work was unlikely to be faithful to the character of the old. As we shall see, Wyatt overcame this difficulty by re-forming elements of demolished monuments or accessories in the new positions required by his personal interpretation of the system.

Cathedral authorities had the reputation of being lax in this matter of repairs, but it was perhaps the disastrous collapse of the Western Tower of Hereford Cathedral on April 17th, 1786 that stirred them to spirited action. Within two years afterwards, as we have seen, Lichfield as well as Hereford had put comprehensive schemes in hand and Salisbury followed suit one year later. The choice of James Wyatt as architect, in each case, is not surprising. He was by then a very famous man, at the height of his career and the most fashionable architect in the country, on excellent terms with the Royal family. He was eighteen years younger than Robert Adam and outlived him by twenty-one years. He had an enormous practice; indeed it is clear that he undertook more work than could possibly be given adequate personal attention, especially in view of the time that must have been absorbed in travel by carriage between the widely dispersed sites. (We learn from the Farington Diary, that professionally he charged 2/6d. per mile for expenses, including his own time.² It was by being thrown from a carriage that he met his death.) The care of new buildings in progress doubtless could be deputed to underlings without much detriment, but precarious and vital operations in the structural repair of the great Cathedrals demanded more supervision

¹ G.M., 1782, p. 480.

² Farington, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 90.

than they actually received. Wyatt was present—and the Bishop—when an ancient great oak beam, placed across the east end of the choir of Salisbury Cathedral to resist the pressure of the side walls, was taken down in November, 1789. The beam was eighty feet long and four feet square. It weighed several tons and was not at all decayed. Wyatt celebrated the successful operation by giving a “handsome entertainment” to the Clerks of the Works and the fifty workmen employed.¹ He was not present however, when the crass stupidity of the operatives occasioned a second great disaster at Hereford on January 30, 1790. The collapse of the western tower, to which the restoration was initially due, had destroyed a neighbouring portion of the nave vault and weakened the rest, so that it was Wyatt's purpose to take down the whole vault. But, in the words of the correspondent reporting the affair, “Instead of having a hanging platform or stage, suspended from the (roof) timbers above the groined work, for the men to stand on—by the advice of the director, sixteen workmen stood upon the top of four large heavy scaffolds erected from the ground, and, upon the moving of a single stone, the whole of that part on which they were placed sunk, and exhibited a scene shocking beyond description”.² Three men were killed and five seriously injured.

This disaster gave excellent material to the first of Wyatt's notable opponents, who a few months previously had entered the lists against him. “When a single architect undertakes every parish church and every cathedral in the kingdom, and, besides attending to the desperate cases where immediate help is required, amuses himself with hazarding adventurous criticism in the alterations and new-modelling others, which, at most, want only new furbishing up, the consequences must be, as in the present instance, a neglect of the more important matters”.³

This correspondent supplies only his initials, “R.G.”, but almost certainly is to be identified as Richard Gough, an antiquary, one-time Director of the Society of Antiquaries, and author of *The Sepulchral Monuments of Great Britain* (amongst other works)—the which latter interest at once explains why he appears as so violently antagonistic to Wyatt, who shifted, altered or destroyed sepulchral monuments with carefree abandon in his absorbed pursuit of unity and order. Gough's first letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, of October, 1789, anent Salisbury, betrays this special interest and also supplies an illuminating commentary on Wyatt's methods. “Under pretence of giving uniformity to the building by laying the Lady Chapel into the choir, (he) has removed the monuments from the Chapel, broken into the graves between them,

¹ G.M., 1789, p. 1042.

² G.M., 1790, p. 172.

³ G.M., 1790, p. 217.

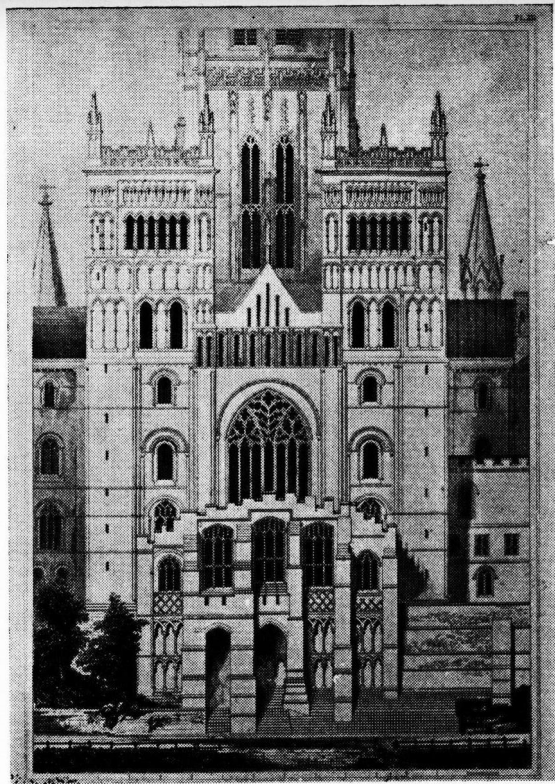


FIG. 3
 The Galilee Chapel and West Front of the Cathedral as in
 1843 and at the present date. (Billings, Pl. XII).

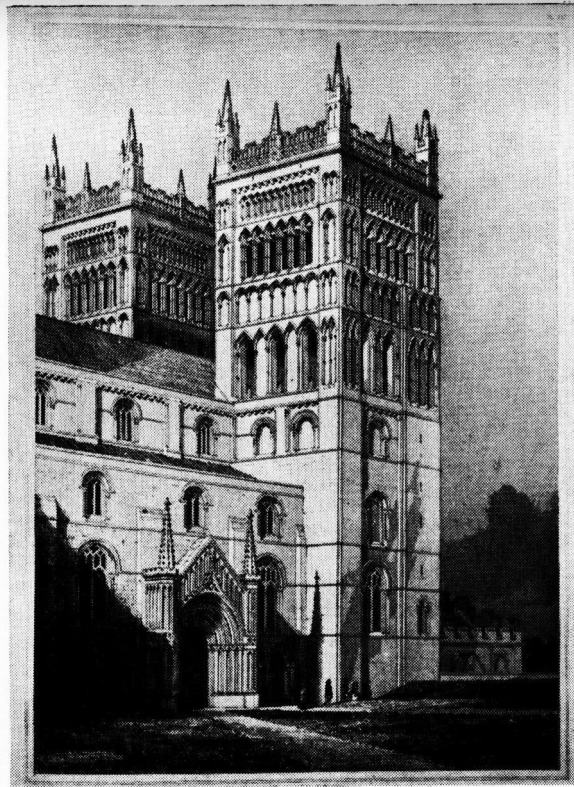


FIG. 4
 North West Angle of Cathedral, showing North Porch (c.
 1780) and parapets (c. 1790) to western towers as designed by
 George Nicholson, Archt. (Billings, Pl. XXV).

raised the floor of the Chapel so as to bury the bases of the slender clustered columns at least eighteen inches, which are to be supplied by new bases of the former design added around them". He goes on to say how "the rage for reformation" has, among other enormities, doomed to destruction the two side chapels flanking the choir, the remains of that of Beauchamp to be reorganized as a reredos to the high altar sited in a revised position. From another source,¹ commendatory this time, we learn that the mediaeval choir-screen was pulled down to make way for a new "organ-screen, composed of different ornaments, selected from the chapels removed, where they were but little noticed; the organ case, designed by Mr. Wyatt, is in the same style".

Gough was soon joined by other dissident antiquaries, bitterly objecting to the "fantastic improvements" which Wyatt was making, but there was no lack of supporters who believed with Wyatt, that "everything that interrupts unity of design cannot be otherwise than a blemish". The particular importance of Gough, however, is that he was the first great patron of John Carter (1748-1817) who was to prove instrumental in bringing Wyatt's cathedral-reforming career to an end.

Carter was the son of a London sculptor and in his early teens made working drawings for his father's sculptures.² At the age of sixteen, after his father's death, he took up employment with a London surveyor and mason, and at the same time, for his own pleasure and enlightenment began sketching antiquities. Four years later (1768) he was engaged to make drawings for Henry Holland, and in his leisure hours, for others, including, from 1774, an arrangement with *The Builder's Magazine*, until the Magazine ceased publication in 1786, he in the meantime having prepared 185 engravings of all kinds of architectural subjects. In 1780, the Society of Antiquaries first commissioned him to record ancient mediaeval buildings, and it was in this same year that he began his long and significant connection with Richard Gough, for whom he made a number of drawings reproduced in that gentleman's *Sepulchral Monuments of Great Britain* and other publications. Carter no doubt acquired or was confirmed in his rigid and partisan views on the subject of mediaeval antiquities by this association. He also came to know Sir John Soane, the Hon. Horace Walpole, afterwards Lord Orford, and the Rev. Dr. Milner—the latter to prove another rabid antagonist of Wyatt—and found other firm friends and patrons with similar tastes and opinions to his own. In subsequent years he published personally several series of collections of drawings; *Specimens of Ancient Sculpture and Painting*; *Views of Ancient Buildings in England*; *The Ancient Architecture of England*—incomplete at

¹ G.M., 1793, p. 444.

² The particulars of John Carter's career are from his obituary notice, G.M., 1817, p. 363.

his death; and for the Society of Antiquaries made collections of drawings of particular monuments, including the Cathedrals of Exeter, Durham, Gloucester and Wells. Carter was elected a member of the Society in 1795.

It was in this year that Carter spent three months at Durham Cathedral, and whilst making his drawings there, learnt of the report and scheme of innovations which Wyatt had prepared at the Chapter's behest. Carter must have officiously broadcast the news immediately on his return to London, for one "Viator", writing in October, 1795, says, "Enough has been said about the cathedrals of Salisbury and Hereford to check, one would think, the spread of this reform in Gothic Architecture. But if I am not misinformed, it is extending to the church of Durham, one of the finest samples of the early stages of Gothic architecture, where there were so many curious and interesting varieties, all on the point of vanishing before this magic art".¹ Farington too, has the entry in his diary for November 25th of that year: "Carter, the Gothic draughtsman, has been at Durham lately, and is much dissatisfied with alterations making by Wyatt in the Cathedral: who, instead of restoring, which is all that Carter thinks ought to be done, is introducing parts quite out of character".² The ensuing fury of protests from antiquaries reached responsible clerical ears at Durham, in the following year, soon enough, as we have seen, to arrest the demolition of the Galilee Chapel but too late to save the Chapter House.³ Wyatt had nothing to do with the latter matter, save that he had in his general survey reported the building to be in "a ruinous state", which might have referred to the masonry, rather than the condition of the structure. It served as a pretext for its substitution by a smaller, and warmer, room, after plans prepared by Mr. Morpeth, the Chapter architect, who was entrusted with the work at a meeting on 20th November, 1795.

Carter must have become still less endeared to Wyatt over the events in London of 1797. Wyatt was put up for election at the Society of Antiquaries, and in the period of weeks that his nomination was posted in the meeting room, Carter was advancing to the Society, piecemeal, and with accompanying lectures, the drawings he had been instructed to prepare at Durham. There is no doubt that he took this opportunity of stigmatizing Wyatt and his Durham schemes, as he himself tacitly admits, later on (1801), when writing to disclaim animus in the affair: "It was rather extraordinary that the candidate at this time was engaged in making his

¹ *G.M.*, 1795, p. 924.

² Farington, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 113.

³ Billings, *The Cathedral Church of Durham* (1943), p. 48, erroneously gives the date as 1799 instead of 1796.

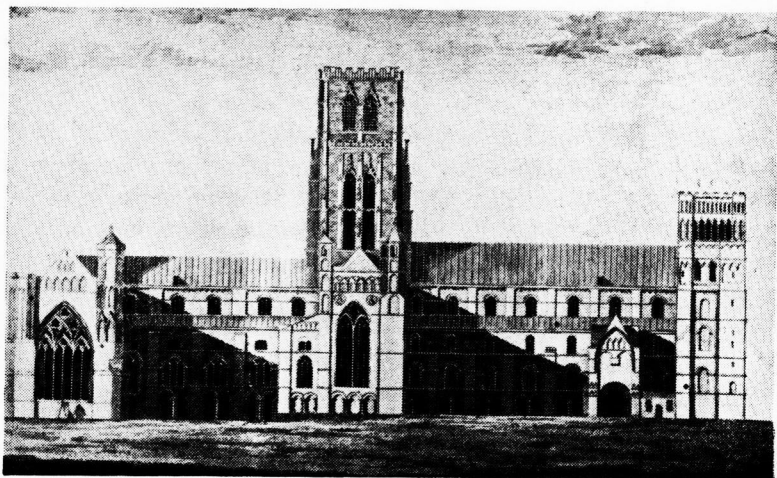


FIG. 5
 North Front. Drawing made by Nicholson in 1780, showing state prior to his alterations.
 (*Hutchinson*, p. 224).

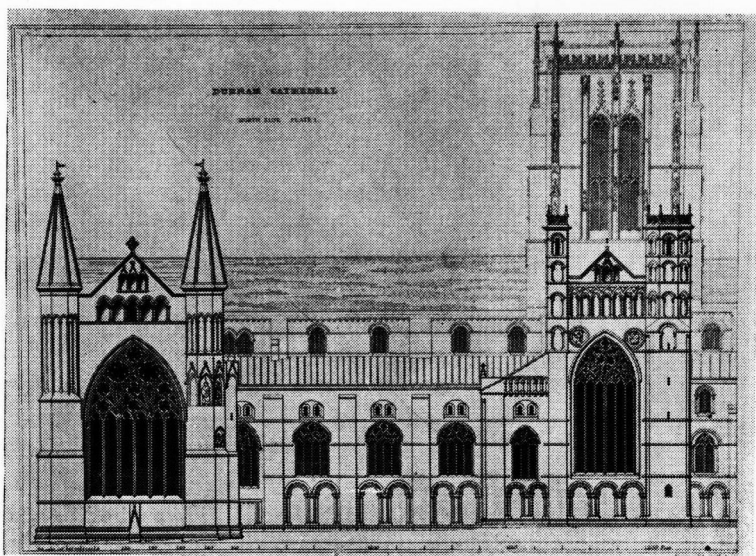


FIG. 6
 North Front. Nine Altars Chapel, choir arm and North Transept in 1842,
 illustrating alterations made by Nicholson, completed prior to 1795. See Fig. 4
 for western portion.
 (*Billings*, Pl. VI).

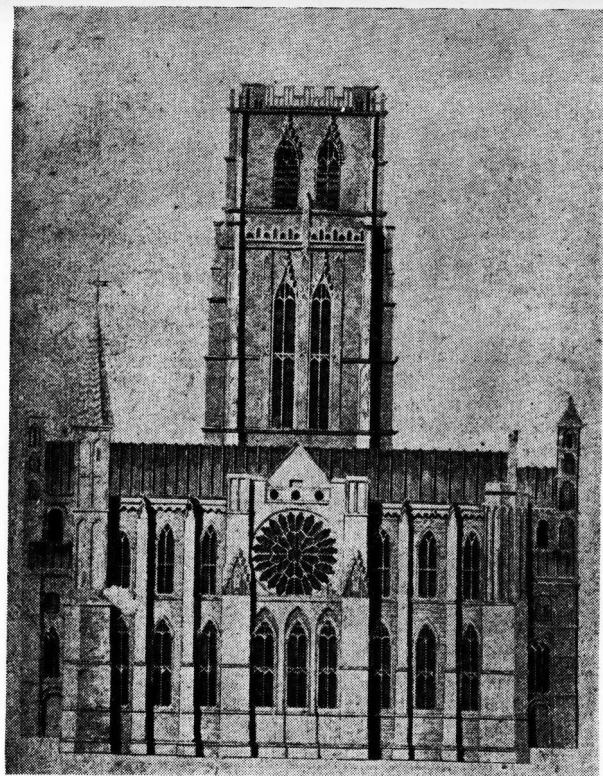


FIG. 7
 East Front. Drawings made by George Nicholson in 1780,
 showing state prior to alterations made by James Wyatt.
 (*Hutchinson*, p. 225).

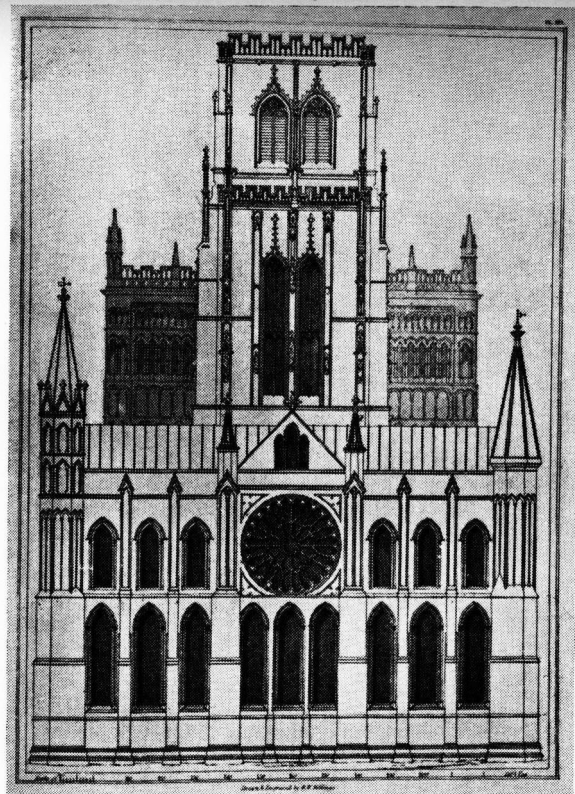


FIG. 8
 East Front. State in 1842, illustrating alterations made by
 James Wyatt in 1795-1797. The Northern turrets had pre-
 viously been completed by Nicholson.
 (*Billings*, Pl. XXI).

alterations and modern conveniences at Durham Cathedral, after the same system as he had manifested at Salisbury and Lichfield Cathedrals".¹ Further, when the Durham plates were eventually published in 1801, a member of the Society, sympathetic to Carter, found the text much more subdued than Carter's readings to the Society had been, and invited him to publish a personal statement, as "we all know that the present heart-burnings and animosities among our learned body owe their origin partly from such readings and from the introduction of *new* ideas and practices among them".² Carter accepted this invitation, and in that year and the next, published an account of Durham which is a principal source of our information about the events at the crucial period.³

The outcome of this fresh publicity inspired by Carter was that Wyatt was black-balled at a meeting of the Society held in August, 1797; there being 16 votes in his favour but 11 against him. He was forthwith nominated again by 19 of his friends. There was much excitement at the Society and violent exchange of views. The Rev. J. Milner, staunch ally of Carter, offered to the Society in early November a paper entitled "A Dissertation on the Modern Style of altering Cathedrals", a compendium of strictures on the vandalism of innovations, with special reference to Wyatt's procedure at Salisbury in 1789. This paper, quite rightly, was withheld, unread, and in the following summer returned to Milner, who published it on his own account.⁴ The furore drew an unprecedented attendance of the 600 members of the Society to the meeting of December 7th, 1797, when the second ballot was to be taken, a record since the Society's institution. The position was soundly reversed: of 163 present, 143 voted for Wyatt and only 20 against. The voting gives some indication of Wyatt's status among knowledgeable people, and of the balance of current opinion regarding his work at the Cathedrals.

Carter suffered severely for his pains in defending antiquity. He was thought to have been offensive and presumptuous in criticising the Dean and Chapter of Durham and held to be the cause of Wyatt's being black-balled in the first vote. He had accused Wyatt directly of pulling down the Galilee; "falsely, as now appears" writes Farington in 1801, though it was Carter's own propaganda that had saved it. Carter himself was still uncertain whether it had been pulled down or not, as late as 1802. He lost favour with the greater part of his fellow members, and special measures were taken by the Society that had the object of ensuring that he should not again, uninvited, bring his drawings and essays before its

¹ *G.M.*, 1801, p. 613.

² *G.M.*, 1801, p. 1000.

³ *G.M.*, 1801, p. 1091: 1802, pp. 30, 133, 228, 399, 494.

⁴ *G.M.*, 1798, p. 1107.

gatherings. Wyatt was enigmatic, as usual, but betrayed his spleen when, in his capacity of Surveyor to the Board of Works he excluded Carter from admission to St. Stephen's Chapel, Westminster, when the latter wished to take advantage of a restoration proceeding there under Wyatt's charge, to add to drawings he had made for the Society in 1791. His appeals to higher authority were in vain, and Wyatt himself made the drawings in question. Yet Durham was Wyatt's last cathedral commission.

This background has to be borne in mind when using Carter's evidence regarding the happenings at Durham. He was writing six or seven years after the events and, to say the least, with no great love for Wyatt. Also, he possessed a fanatical respect for the architecture of the middle ages, so that almost any repair was likely to be regarded by him as a major crime. Between September, 1798 and his death, nineteen years later, he wrote 212 articles for the monthly issues of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, under the general title of "Pursuits of Architectural Innovation", at times with a pen dipped in vitriol. He made tours of the monuments and described them with ability and affection, but woe betide anyone who had made the slightest gesture towards "improvement". Very rarely indeed does he spare a grudging word of approval for new work. He wrote under the nom-de-plume of "An Architect", but was not above responding to protests, however mild, evoked by his more offensive tirades, not merely in his own series but also under other pseudonyms or his own name, particularly when he appeared to be finding himself in a minority of one. He was "bigoted to an opinion when once fully formed; so that no man created more adversaries, if not enemies, by his writings". Despite his calling himself an architect, he did very little building work: so exacting were his standards that, in the opinion of his biographer, he was not fitted to superintend the erection of a great fabric, and even a small building would have been an undertaking for his life.¹

Turning now more specifically to Wyatt's doings at Durham. Modern guide books are in error when they attribute to him certain works of questionable propriety executed there before 1795.² Carter, for one, is quite conclusive on this point, and he is not likely to have missed any opportunity for discrediting Wyatt. The works begin with the erection of Prebend's Bridge, 1772-1777, by George Nicholson, a Durham architect, in place of an old footbridge, which had been destroyed in a flood of 1771.³ Though Carter gibes at it as "a modern decaying bridge

¹ *G.M.*, 1817, p. 366.

² The misapprehension appears to derive from Billings, *op. cit.*, who is at fault in interpreting his authorities.

³ Hutchinson, *History and Antiquities of Durham* (1787), gives the date of the bridge as 1781. (p. 317). Robert Mylne served as consultant.

(if opening joints and perishable materials can make it so)", it is only now (1955) that a restoration is being undertaken. About 1773, the tracery of the Cathedral cloisters was restored out of all recognition, in "a neat Gothic style"; by whom it is not clear, but presumably by Nicholson, for he definitely appears, about 1775, as having been entrusted with the repair of the decayed stonework on the western and northern sides of the Cathedral. Also, although the fact does not appear to have been historically recorded, the same method of stone repair was used on the western wall of the Chapter House and the adjacent Deanery facing into the east walk of the cloisters as was employed by Nicholson on the cathedral proper, strongly suggesting a common authorship. The stone repair consisted of paring off up to 4 inches of masonry from the wall faces, to expose a new surface, with the result that the Norman mouldings were utterly falsified. Billings calculates that some 1,100 tons of masonry were so removed, and the cost, including other reparations on the two fronts, ran to nearly £30,000.

The cathedral as it stood before Nicholson's works is shown by his own indifferent drawings (Figs. 5 and 7), published in Hutchinson's *History and Antiquities of Durham* (1787), which can be compared with those in Billings (1843) (Figs. 6, 4 and 8). Nicholson's works on the west front are said to have preceded those he carried out on the north face. He added parapets to the twin western towers, where there had been none before, above an Italianate cornice; and on the north, pulled down the Norman north porch, renovated in Elizabethan times, and built a new one in "a barbarous mixture of Norman and Gothic", to use Carter's description; altered the gable and adjacent turrets of the north transept; and did similar remodellings to the north face of the Nine Altars Chapel (1242-1280) at the east end of the Cathedral, supplying a pair of stone pinnacles there, the original turrets having been lacking. Just when these various projects were completed is very difficult to say. The north porch is attributed to 1780 (though it is unaltered in Nicholson's drawings of that date), and the north transept and the north face of the Nine Altars must have been nearly done when Hutchinson wrote, for although he is ambiguous, he speaks of new sculptures on both as finished,¹ and no sane builder would renew sculptures whilst there was still serious building work to do above them. A view of the Prebend's Bridge in Hutchinson, dated 1783, shows the western tower parapets still to be lacking.

However, all this work was quite complete when Carter arrived on the scene in 1795. Nicholson, "who had laid his dressings over the west and north fronts" had already departed, "given place to his rival" Wyatt,

¹ The two roundels above the great window of the north transept and the "Dun Cow" relief in a panel in the lower part of the north-west turret of the Nine Altars.

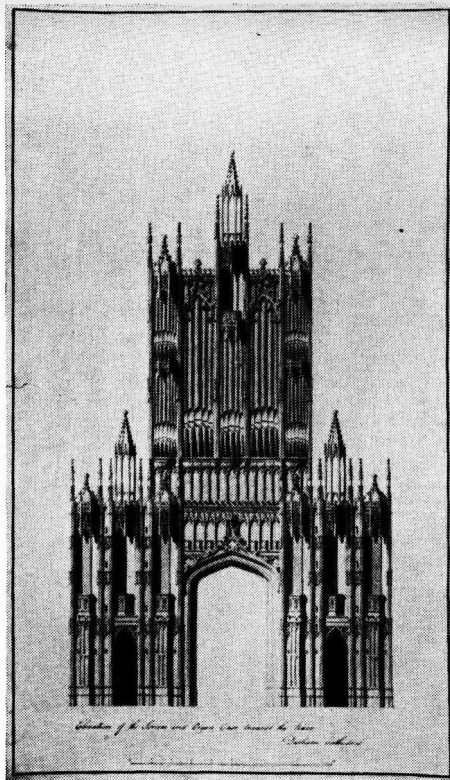


FIG. 9
Wyatt's drawing of 1795, showing his proposed
"Elevation of the Screen and Organ Case
towards the Nave. Durham Cathedral."

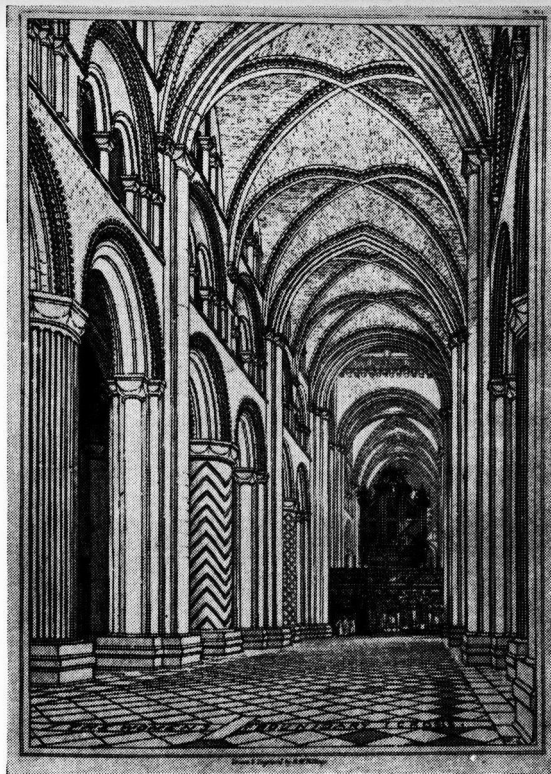


FIG. 10
The nave in 1841 showing the late seventeenth century
choir-screen and organ case, which Wyatt proposed should
be replaced with the design in Fig. 9; not actually removed
until 1846.

(Billings, Pl. XLI).

whose workmen Carter found had begun to take down the upper tiers of the east front "to make room for alterations as per new plan". A cathedral private record also speaks of considerable restorations on the east front between 1795-1797.

There is no need here to speak in detail of Wyatt's east front. It is uncommonly dull, but can be seen by comparisons (Figs. 7 and 8) not to have departed excessively from the main lines of the original, except about the central gable and in substituting two southern, stone octagonal turrets for the square-based pyramidal ones of timber, covered with zig-zag lead work, that he found there: these made an approximate balance with Nicholson's two turrets on the north front. The St. Catherine's window, placed centrally on the front and completely renewed by Wyatt, was by no means so unsuccessful as Carter makes out. The tracery of the remaining east windows, a fifteenth-century insertion, was removed, and the ancient glass by carelessness dispersed or destroyed, except for miscellaneous fragments replaced in the wheel window.¹

If Wyatt only commenced working at Durham about 1795, it is a significant circumstance that the Galilee Chapel, though extremely dilapidated by all accounts, was omitted from the external repair operations, which in this vicinity had been commenced some twenty years earlier. Carter draws the reasonable inference that the omission was due to the intention to destroy the Chapel,² but he fails to deduce that the project could not therefore have been initiated by Wyatt. The purpose of removing it was to make a carriageway—a "Saint Cuthbert's Promenade", as Carter sarcastically calls it—from the Castle, on the north, to the College or Cathedral close on the south side, as well as to provide a direct approach to the great west door of the church. The regular approach to the close was, and is, awkward and constricted. The demolition of the Chapel was, however, definitely a part of Wyatt's schemes, as is shown by its absence from his drawing (Fig. 1), where the line of the old defensive wall is carried right across the west face of its site, the former position being marked only by some buttresses, and an archway which presumably was to lead to steps to the higher level. But there is certainly no support given by this drawing to the contention, advanced in recent times, that the Monks' Dormitory was to have been destroyed. It appears there, intact and entire, beyond the western towers. The misapprehension perhaps is due to a wilful flight of melancholy fancy of Carter's; "The Dormitory, unaltered; yet whether it is to be 'reformed' or new-faced, or taken down to give a view of country to the Deanery, or to add more space to the

¹ It is sometimes represented that the surviving fragments of old glass were not replaced until 1873, but Billings mentions the fact; p. 29.

² *G.M.*, 1802, p. 230.

intended St. Cuthbert's Promenade on this front of the Cathedral, I am not altogether instructed to declare".

His very next paragraph is equally typical of his malicious and perverse imaginings. Inside the upper chambers of the western towers, "I ever noted rents from top to bottom, in wide and yawning preparation for—perhaps, Reparation: who knows?"¹ These great fissures in the masonry are age-old, due to initial settlements of the ponderous structure, which on first acquaintance have given shocks of apprehension to every custodian of the Cathedral through centuries of time. Mischievously irrelevant too, was Carter's argument that the threatened Galilee performed a buttressing function to the west front of the Cathedral, as he must very well have known from the plain evidence. Serious measures have had to be taken from time to time to prevent this frail and ill-constructed Chapel of c. 1175 from collapsing into the river below: the mighty buttresses were added, c. 1420, by Bishop Langley to retain it, but proved not to be altogether sufficient. Billings, well qualified to judge, is one of the few writers who do not follow Carter's lead, by concluding that Wyatt was right, both as architect and artist, in adopting the removal of the Chapel; for whilst he admits its antiquarian value he regards it as an excrescence upon the original Norman building, disrupting the lines and obscuring the grand effect of its western front.²

The real purpose of Wyatt's perspective drawing is indicated by the inscription, "A North West View of Durham Cathedral showing the intended Lanthorn and Spire design'd by James Wyatt, Sept. 25, 1795". The drawing is not a very accurate representation of the facts, but is adequate to show that the grave fears of critics that it would ruin the grandeur of the Cathedral were unfounded; and Billings rightly dismisses as absurd the idea that the weight of a new steeple would bring the tower crashing in ruins to the ground. He contends that the builders of the upper stage must have intended a spire—or why were squinch arches constructed across the inner angles there—and that the walls and pier supports are far more amply strong than Salisbury, which has borne a 200 feet high spire for several centuries. The walls of the Durham tower are five feet thick at the summit and, he calculates, the total area of the supporting piers is above 600 square feet.³

The perspective view is supported by another drawing (Fig. 2) showing the proposed new additions to the tower in greater detail, and between them they disclose a hitherto unknown fact: the upper stage of the tower, dating from 1490, was to be drastically remodelled, if not re-built, as well

¹ *G.M.*, 1802, p. 229.

² Billings, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

³ Billings, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

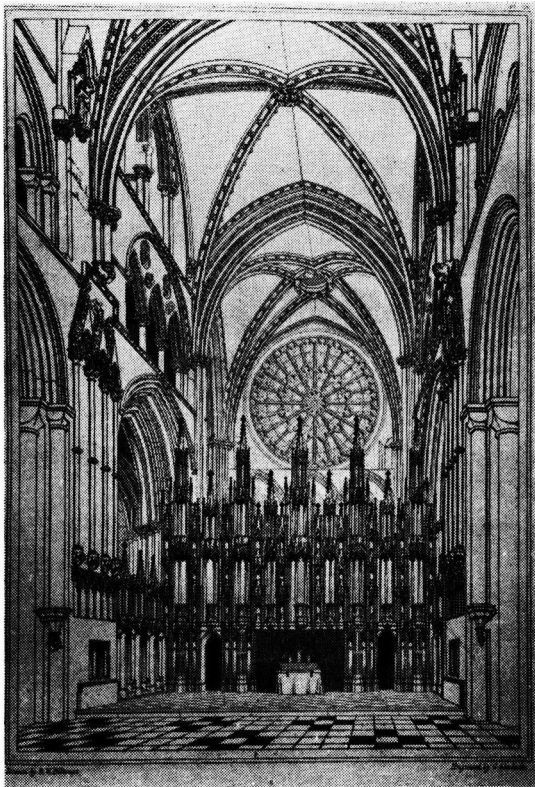


FIG. 11

Neville (Altar) Screen of 1372-80. Its demolition was proposed in Wyatt's scheme, its parts to be re-used as in Fig. 9 for a fresh organ screen.

(Billings, Pl. LV).

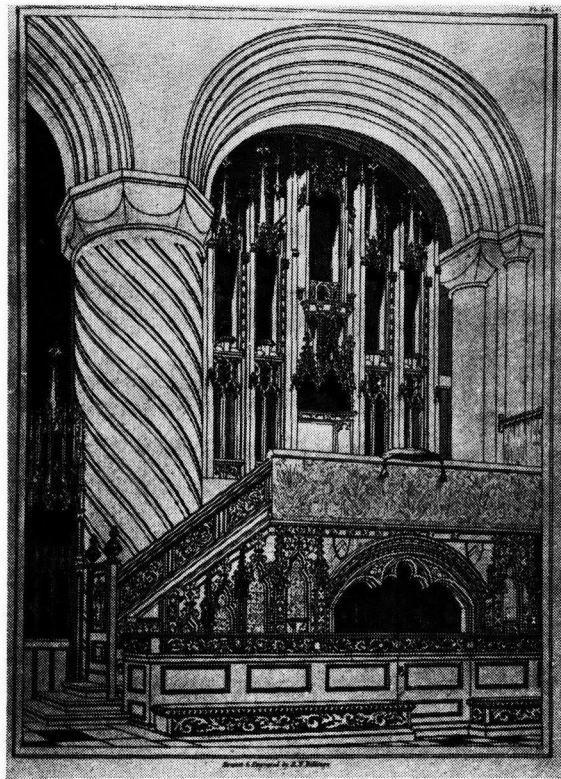


FIG. 12

The Hatfield (Bishop's) Throne of c. 1375. The balustrade and door at foot, in black oak, are alterations of the late seventeenth century.

(Billings, Pl. LVI).

as heightened by about nine feet. These intentions explain the use of the term "lanthorn", as well as of "spire" on both captions. ("Lantern", by-the-way, is a very old term for a central tower, descriptive of its true function of transmitting natural light to the central part of the church.) This second is a delightful drawing—like all the rest it is in line and wash, on soft cartridge paper—but in spite of its apparent precision is not a great deal more accurate than the perspective view. The width, on face, of the angle vertical buttresses is shown as about 4 feet instead of 2 feet 9 inches, which is nearer the truth, so that the twin windows between them do not appear to be as strongly paired as they actually are (compare with Fig. 8). The same falsity is notable on the perspective; and still farther from the truth is the circumstance that the windows of the lower tier are shown in vertical alignment with the upper, when in reality they seem very closely spaced, since they are narrower than the upper pair, and each pair is divided only by a central, subordinate buttress. Further, both tiers are shown as of equal height—an extreme exaggeration, but which is much diminished on the detail drawing.

Despite these manifest misrepresentations, the intention to heighten the upper stage is quite unmistakable. The extra height of nine feet is mostly taken up below the springing of the windows, which are very much more slender in proportion than the original, and the tracery is changed from a decisive "Perpendicular" character to a semblance of "Decorated", whilst a transome is added about half way down. There is too, an entirely new blind-arcading taking up the rest of the wall space. It was probably not the intention to dispense with the bell-ringers' gallery, between the two stages, although the drawings may appear to suggest it; neither was the lower tier to have been seriously disturbed—or it would have been shown on the detail drawing—though Carter is probably right when he says that the whole tower was to have been "new-faced".

Above the main cornice, all is Wyatt's own conception, except, apparently, that the open-work parapet was to have been re-used. A new, octagonal windowed stage appears as a base to the stone spire, affording a formal transition from the rectangular tower, and weighty tall angle pinnacles receive pairs of downward-tapering, arched flying-buttresses, very reminiscent of those of Newcastle-on-Tyne Cathedral. The spire would have added another 103 feet to the height of the central feature—measured to the top of the finial and excluding the weather vane—making a total of 320 feet from the pavement: very much short of the 400 feet of Salisbury, though Durham has the additional height of the eminence on which it stands. The inaccuracies of Wyatt's drawings indicate that they were prepared at speed, without meticulous preliminary measurements, as general indications of proposals rather than working drawings: though it

might be that the workman received little more than such to aid him, if Carter is to be believed. Reflecting on Wyatt's mode of procedure in the re-modelling of the east front of the Cathedral, Carter protests that when new works are in question, "professionalists" are profuse in plans, elevations and sections, but for the improvement of ancient buildings, "a small drawing or two of the principal characters is thought quite adequate", the rest being left to a clerk-of-works or the work-people themselves.¹ Wyatt's workmen at Lichfield, we learn from another source,² came from London, so doubtless it was usual for him to employ people trained in his own methods.

Three further drawings illustrate the proposals for re-modelling the internal fitments at the east end of the church. These proposals, according to Carter, were the taking down of the delicately-carved stone altar-screen,³ of 1372-80, usually known as the Neville screen (Fig. 11), and the throne built *c.* 1375 by Bishop Hatfield, above his own tomb, in similar workmanship. (Fig. 12.) The parts of these were to be mixed together and converted, with the aid of "modern-fancied work" into a new organ-case and loft.⁴ Carter does not say what was to be done about a new high altar and reredos screen, but he adds that the choir level was to be extended right across the Nine Altars Chapel as far as the east wall of the Cathedral, and as this would stand some six or seven feet above the pavement of the Nine Altars, it would obliterate the bases of the columns and the entire range of altars, and destroy the feretory. In general, the scheme for the re-modelling of the eastern half of the church followed the same lines as had changed the interiors of Salisbury and Lichfield. By way of authenticating his statements Carter says that he was told of these intentions and shown the drawings several times whilst on his long visit seven years previously.

It is to be noticed that, perhaps inadvertently, he does not mention a new choir-screen (only organ-case and loft), or that the old one, as well as that embracing the feretory, where it projects into the Nine Altars, were to be destroyed. He had no regard for either, for they were not mediaeval. The first, of ornate Jacobean style, had been surmounted in 1684 by a fine organ of Father Smith's design, the woodwork of both being black oak. (Fig. 10.) Though, as events determined, these were to survive Wyatt's day, they were replaced by the present "Scott" screen of 1870-6: their remnants now are exhibited on the wall of the nave south aisle.

¹ *G.M.*, 1802, p. 230.

² *G.M.*, 1789, p. 401.

³ The stone, apparently, is Dorsetshire clunch (Boyle), though it has at various times been identified as Caen stone or plaster-of-paris.

⁴ *G.M.*, 1802, p. 230.

The Feretory Screen, dating from *c.* 1686 similarly survived, but again only to be dispersed in 1846. In recent years it has been renewed, incorporating a recovered part of the original.

It is surprising to find that Wyatt's scheme for the choir-screen (Fig. 9) differed very little in essentials from that it was intended to replace. The arrangement and dimensions are similar, and there would only have been a little less sense of visual obstruction imparted by the new screen than by the old. Wyatt's central archway is rather wider—the old had folding doors, shown closed in Billings' drawing—and the backs of the upper tier of flanking niches are not enclosed. Evidently the rather flimsy reason for the change was that the old work was "Grecian" and was therefore deemed to be out of character and lacking in that "uniformity" so much to be desired. At Salisbury, where we have seen that the choir-screen was similarly rebuilt, and again at Lichfield, there was even less excuse for the replacements for the screens supplanted were Gothic.

Wyatt's Durham organ-screen design is clearly a re-assembly of elements of the Neville screen, and with no very great degree of change. The wings are identical, save that the tall, crowning canopies of the larger niches have been substituted by stumpy, domical finials. Other elements of the Neville screen appear in the organ-case, so that very little of it could have remained unused. There is, however, some of Wyatt's own "new-fangled" work; but nothing at all from the Hatfield tomb or throne. Thus Carter is quite a little in error here. The Lichfield organ and choir-screen affords a very close parallel, for it too, was compounded of parts of the demolished high altar-screen eked out with new work.

Two further drawings (Figs. 13 and 14) show the west and east sides of what is unmistakably a design for the new altar-screen, though no information whatsoever appears on the drawings, front or back. The screen was evidently intended to be essentially a three-sided, rectilinear structure, facing towards the choir. One of the traceried openwork panels of stone, of which it is composed, is placed at 45° across each of the two contained angles. The west elevation is shown in rather a peculiar way, for it is at the same time a vertical section, cut through a canopied open panel on each side, these of the same design as that seen in the centre of the screen. In the absence of any other details it is reasonable to infer that the sides of the structure had five panels, in addition to those at the angles, but including the canopied one presumably placed centrally astride them. A trial sketch plan seems to show that there could not well have been less, and a greater number would have tended to overpower the main series. Wyatt's scheme for the Salisbury high-altar was similar—though it has given place to an arrangement of 1876 by Scott. It had a

reredos of five niches of "curious workmanship", three behind the communion table and one on each side, the two last concocted of elements from the entrance to the Beauchamp and Hungerford Chapels that Wyatt had had destroyed.¹

In the Wyatt altar-screen for Durham no more than in that for the choir is any part identifiable with the Hatfield Throne and Tomb. This design is wholly eighteenth-century Gothic. It seems then that Carter is guilty of deliberate exaggeration. In these drawings there is nothing to suggest that the Hatfield monuments were to be in anyway disturbed.

The design for the altar proper has a funerary air, appearing almost a catafalque; but it has a similar, loosely-draped character in Billings' plates too.

In each of the other three cathedrals, Wyatt, though rebuilding the screens, maintained a firm partition between nave and choir: it was in the nineteenth-century (1846 at Durham) that the grand, end-to-end vista became popular. But he also endeavoured to lengthen the choirs, by various means, at Salisbury and Durham by placing the altar farther east than it had formerly been: the outcome at Lichfield was said to be "all seeing and no hearing". So in these present drawings we find the reredos thrown back astride the ultimate pair of columns joining the Choir with the Nine Altars (See plan, Fig. 16). It may not have been precisely axial with them, though it is likely—but was certainly approximately so, and by no means on the farther, eastern, wall of the Nine Altars. There are several circumstances supporting this statement; firstly, the deliberate conjunction in the drawing of the screen and the said piers; secondly, the rear elevation is treated far too elaborately not to have been intended to be seen; and thirdly, there are two extra steps on the rear or western elevation that return and stop against the piers, so that the approach level on that side is one foot lower than on the side nearest the Choir. Wyatt's intention is, in fact, plain; he wished the screen to give definition to the two spaces, Choir and Nine Altars, and increase the apparent perspective by using it as a distance-measuring silhouetted feature without seriously impeding the rays of vision. For the purpose, light and space behind the screen were essential. It would otherwise have lost itself to view against the dark background at the foot of the eastern windows.

Thus the intended site of the screen may definitely be said to be that of the present feretory, (embracing St. Cuthbert's shrine), which projects into the Nine Altars sufficiently far to afford an almost precisely-matching platform. Carter's statement that the whole of the Nine Altars was to be filled in to this level is again more than suspect, although by this new

¹ *G.M.*, 1793, p. 445. This account differs a little from that by Gough and appears to be more accurate.

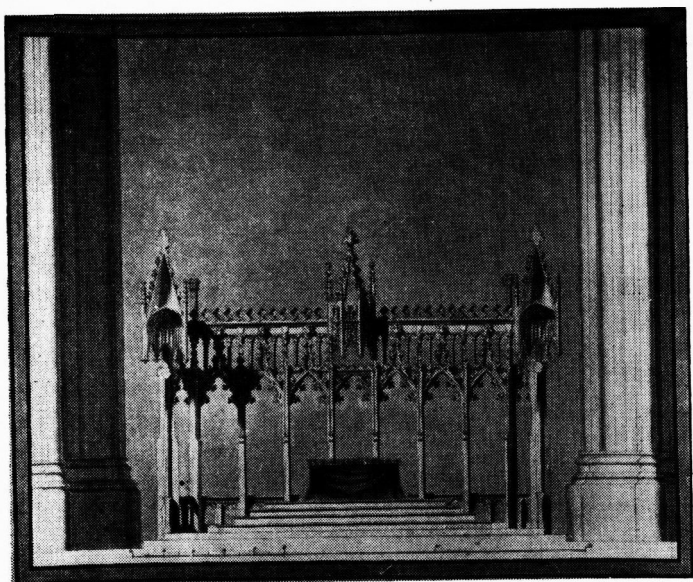


FIG. 13
Design by James Wyatt for a new altar screen, proposed to replace the
Neville Screen, shown in Fig. 11. West side.

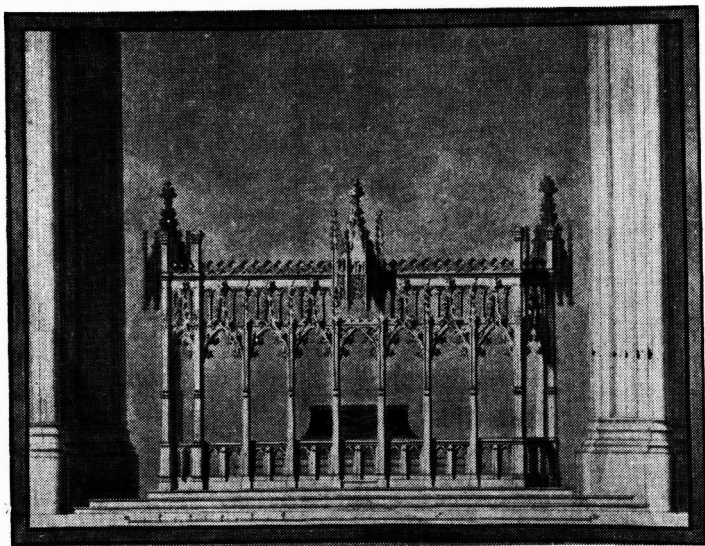


FIG. 14
Back or East side of Wyatt's intended new altar screen. It would have
stood somewhat further east than the Neville Screen.

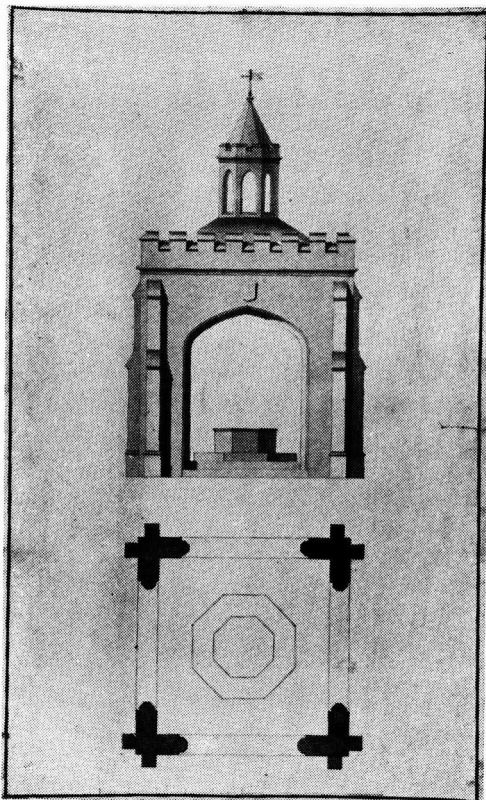


FIG. 15

An unidentified pavilion, included among the Wyatt drawings.

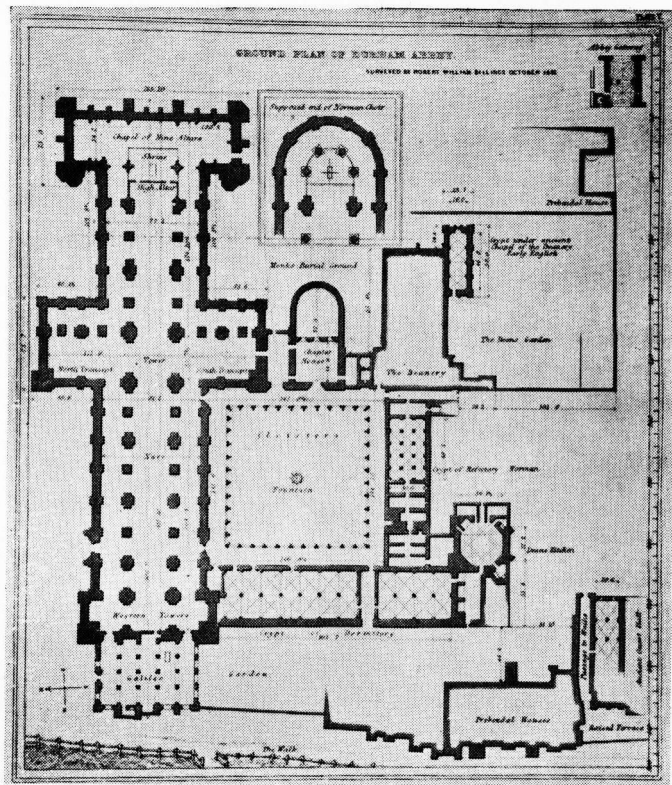


FIG. 16

Plan of the Cathedral and Monastic Buildings in 1843. It shows how the Chapter House was reduced by the demolition of 1796 to half its former size. (It was fully rebuilt to the Norman design in 1895).
(Billings, Pl. V).

evidence it cannot be said to have been conclusively disproved. It is difficult indeed to imagine what purpose could be served by such a measure, as the Nine Altars windows would then have become most inconveniently low, whilst the wall arcade of 1242 would have been so truncated as to be altogether impossible to retain. However, it is perhaps unsafe to apply logic to Wyatt's schemes, and there is some further evidence which appears to go some way in supporting Carter. The piers flanking the Wyatt altar-screen are shown on the drawing with bases five feet high, whereas at this level at present, there is a shallow base only to a trio of the shafts on each side, facing towards one another. It could be claimed that such new bases indicate a general proposal to apply them to all the pillars around the Nine Altars.

The sixth drawing (Fig. 15) is a problem. Again, it is completely devoid of information—even the vague scratching on the shield over the archway is illegible. It shows a pavilion of sorts, square in plan, with wide, four-centred arches on each face. What does it represent? It is evidently external, for it has a crowning turret capped by a weather-vane. There is no literary allusion, known to the writer, to such a feature. No indication of anything of the sort appears on Wyatt's drawing of the revised arrangements around the western front. It could scarcely be a substitute for the "Pant", an octagonal structure, still surviving in the College Close, which contains two super-posed lead tanks from which water, siphoned under the river from gathering grounds on the other side, from ancient times has been distributed to the Prebendal houses. There are two possible suggestions; one, that it was to be an ornament commemorative of the St. Cuthbert's Promenade and other improvements thereabouts, to stand perhaps in the centre of the Palace Green on the north side of the Cathedral; the other that it was to be located in the centre of the Cloisters in lieu of the remains of the Monks' Lavatory of 1432-3, represented now only by some stone fragments there. The latter are sufficient however, to show clearly that the original structure was octagonal; and on the plan the drawing the element inside the pavilion is not shown as hollow, like a well or basin. The pavilion is quite small; only eleven feet square inside. That the weather-vane would not function reliably, if at all, in the cloisters is not perhaps a matter that would have troubled Wyatt too much. These are pure speculations; the pavilion yet remains to be identified.