

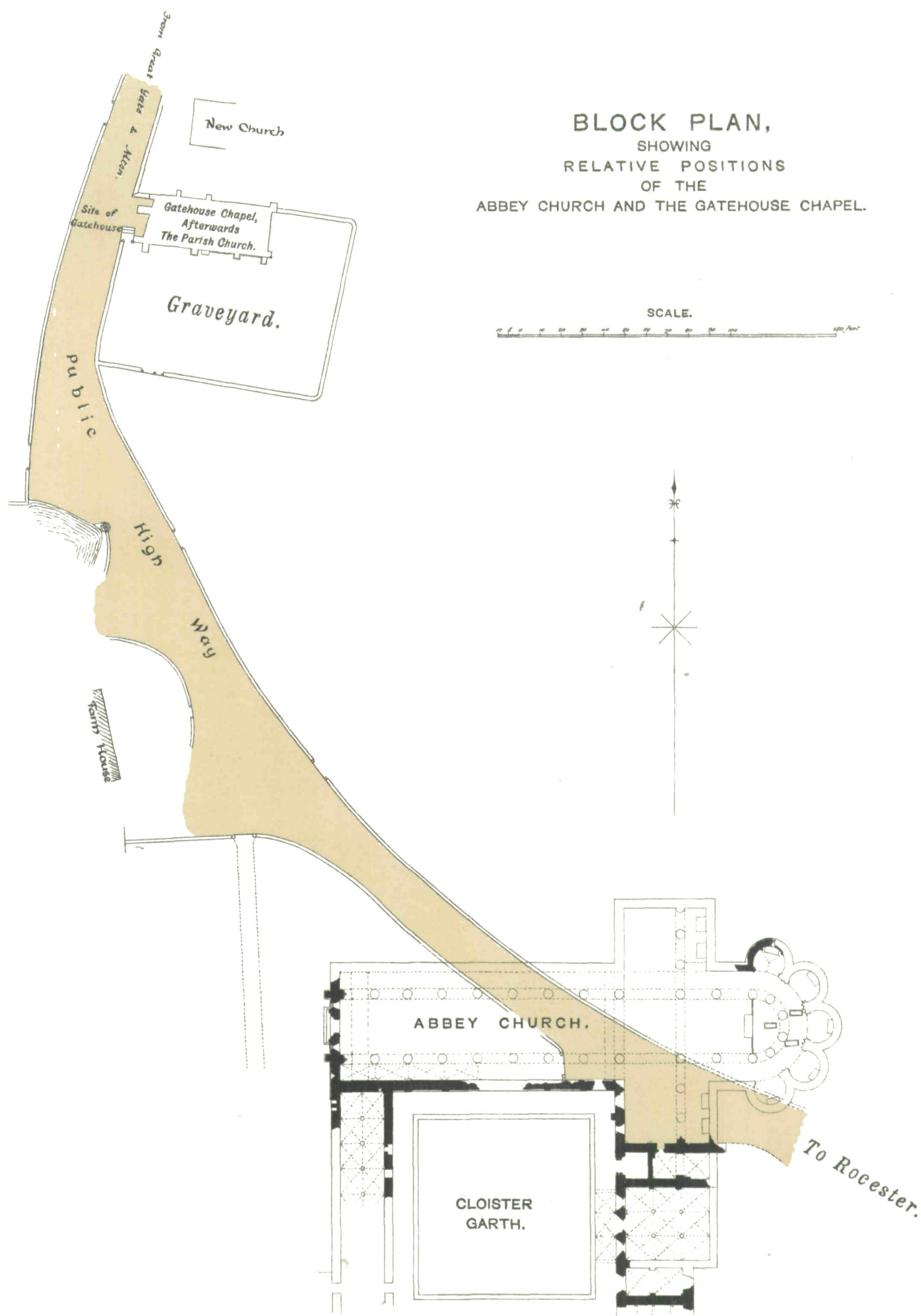
XVII.—*The gate-house chapel, Croxden abbey, Staffordshire.* By GEORGE YOUNG
WARDLE.

Read March 19th, 1885.

THE little building which forms the subject of this paper was, until the summer of last year, one of the very few examples left to us of the adjuncts to the gate-house of a monastery. It is now utterly destroyed, not one stone being left on another. There is no published account of it, and the only plan which shows its relation to the other conventual buildings is, I believe, the one which accompanies this paper. I have prepared the following account in the belief that the Society of Antiquaries, though powerless to prevent the destruction of the ancient buildings of the country, will not hear of their demolition without wishing to preserve for its members authentic memorials of their existence. I am indebted chiefly to Mr. Charles Lynam, of Stoke upon Trent, for the drawings which enable me to place the features of the building plainly before you.

Croxden abbey is about two miles from Alton, in Staffordshire. It was a Cistercian house, founded by the second Bertram de Verdun, who also built the castle at Alton. The abbey buildings were begun about 1181, but the church was not dedicated until 1253. The church was the burial-place of the de Verduns, who always showed great affection for the convent. The principal gate of the monastery was undoubtedly that which closed the road from Alton. Tradition places its site exactly at the western end of the little building, which was lately the parish church, and is now the subject of this paper. Dr. Garner, who wrote a short history of Staffordshire about forty years ago, says the remains of the gate-house might then be seen adjoining the parish church. On the other side of the gate tradition places the old stables of the abbey. The road now passing through

BLOCK PLAN,
SHOWING
RELATIVE POSITIONS
OF THE
ABBAY CHURCH AND THE GATEHOUSE CHAPEL.

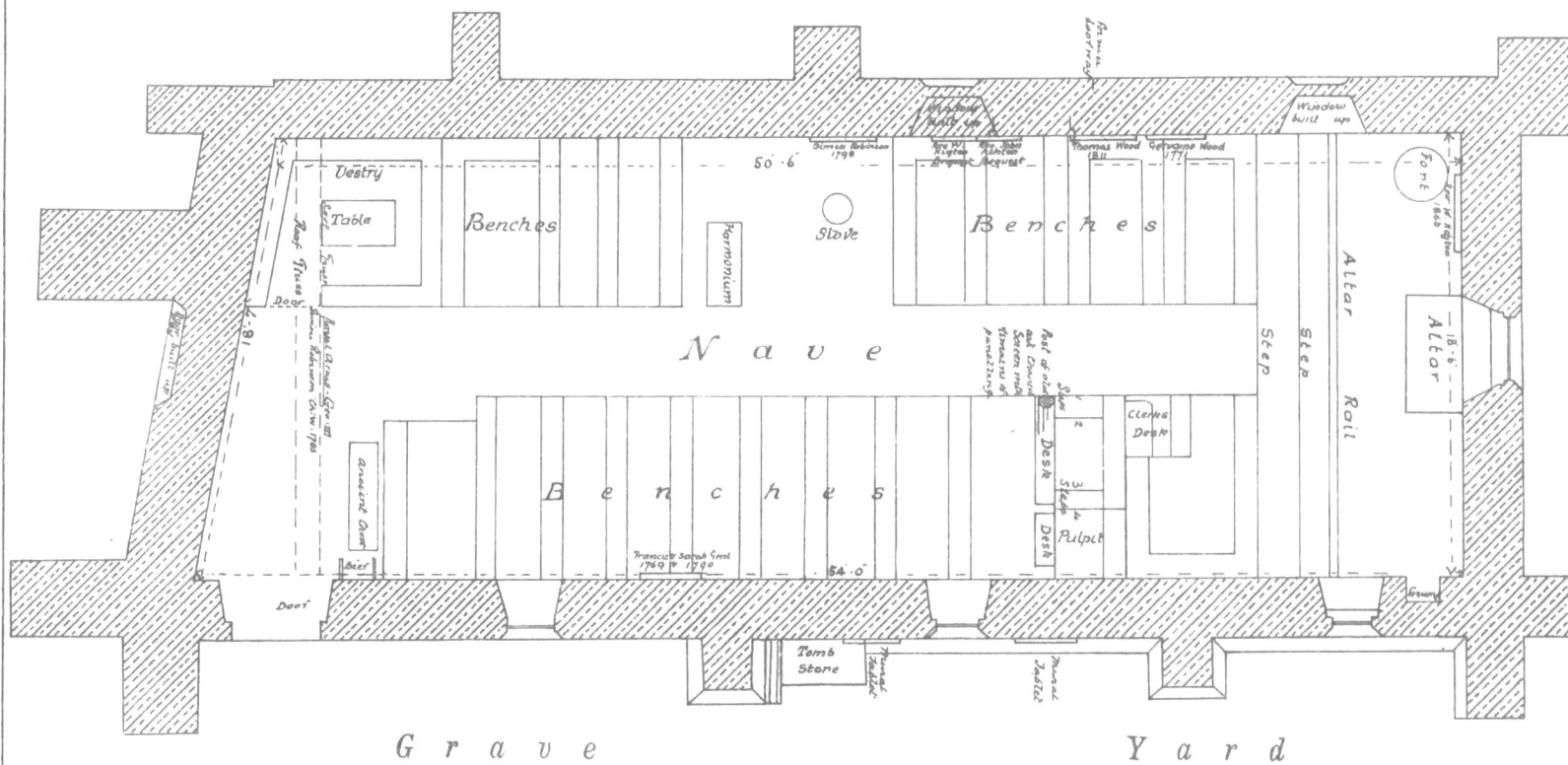


THE GATEHOUSE CHAPEL, CROXDEN ABBEY. PLATE I.



GATEHOUSE CHAPEL, CROXDEN.
FROM SOUTH EAST.

O r c h a r d



G r a v e

Y a r d

GATEHOUSE CHAPEL, CROXDEN.
GROUND PLAN.

SCALE, 8 FEET TO AN INCH.

the abbey church was made to connect the Alton road with a bye-road leading indirectly to Rocester and Uttoxeter. The block-plan (Plate I.) shows the position of the building upon the end of the Alton road. It was set rather askew to the line of road and to the gate: presumably to bring its axis parallel to that of the great church. Plate II. shows the plan and a view of the building. The width was 18 ft. 6 in., and the length 54 feet on the south side, and 50 ft. 6 in. on the north. It had two doorways, one to the west, which in later days was walled up, and one to the south. The south door was partly rebuilt in 1789, that date, with initials, being on the keystone. Three of the earlier jamb-stones were allowed to remain in their places, and show that the opening was original.

The jambs of both doorways are figured on Plate III. The building, which we will now call the chapel, to distinguish it from the great church, had six windows remaining, three in the south side, one at the east end, and two, blocked up, to the north. These windows were not exactly alike, but they were all lancets with proper jambs, sills, and rear arches. The east window was longer than the others. They differed from the lancets of the church only in the section of the rear arches, which are square in the church, but in this chapel were chamfered. A drawing of the sill of one window is given on Plate III. and sketches of the window-heads.

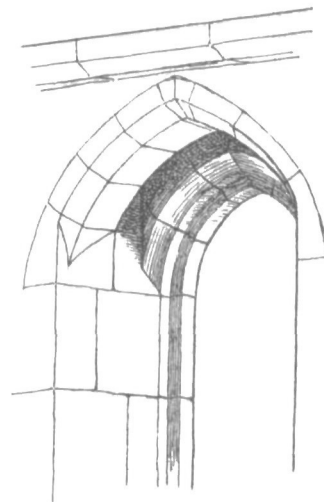
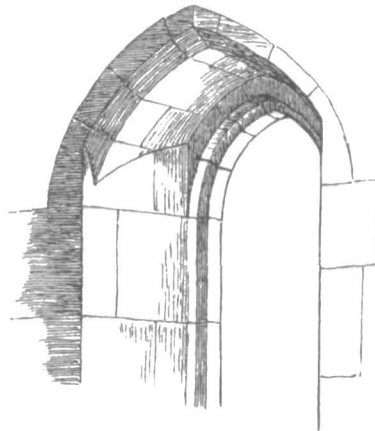
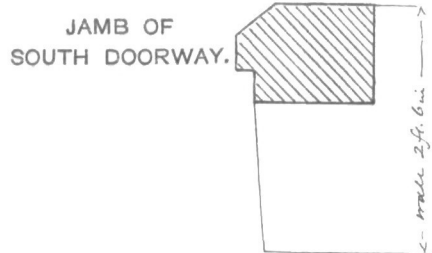
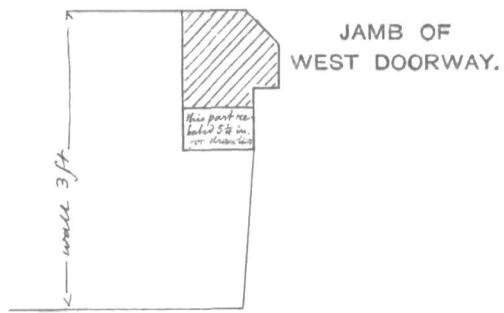
Under the windows, inside, was a string-course. Only the scars of it remained. It was possibly cut away when the last pewing was done. At 16 feet from the east wall the half of an oak screen had been allowed to remain between the pews and the clerk's desk. It stood on an oak sill, of which the part under the screen only remained, the rest had been sawn off close to the post. On the face of the sill were sunk quatrefoils, of which, I fear, no drawing was made. The post, panels, and rail are figured on Plate III. Between the east wall and the first south window was a small recess with trefoil head. The margin of the recess was boldly rebated for a shutter, and at the spring of the trefoil was a half-inch groove in the sides and back for a wooden shelf. There was no sign of a drain. The exact dimensions are given on Plate III. I have not learnt whether any traces of a piscina were found. The aumbry or credence was hidden, until the destruction of the building began, under a thick coat of modern plaster. During the removal of the plaster at least two series of wall-paintings were found. The first or medieval series was chiefly in red, on a very thin hard ground. I am describing it from the fragments which adhered to the jamb-linings and arch-stones. A border of red paint of a bricky tint, varying in shade, and about two inches wide, was traceable on the window-arches and on the

face of the aumbry. There was a picture of the Virgin and Child on the south wall, between the first and second windows; this was chiefly brown and red. Over these red paintings was the second coat of whitewash, and on it the paintings were black and buff. Sacramental texts were written in black letter on scrolls on either side of the east window. Between the second and third windows, on the south side, was the Apostles' Creed in a framing of scroll-work. On the next wall-space was the Lord's Prayer, in a similar border, and on the west wall a figure of Death, with a spade, and standing on a grave.

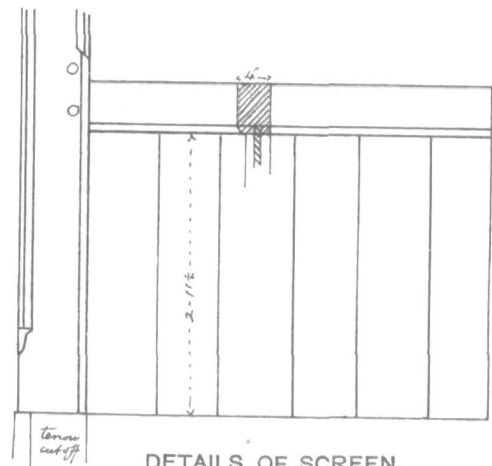
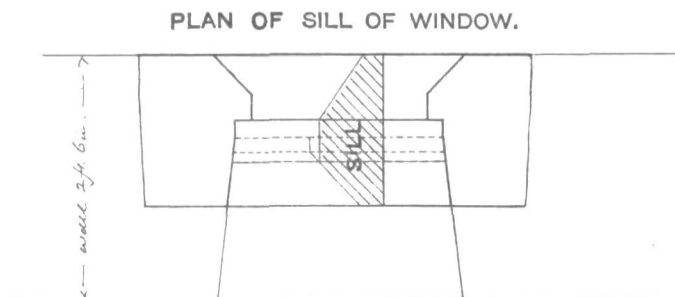
The roof had five roughly-shaped trusses—tie-beam, collar, and struts. They rested on a chamfered stone cornice. Two of the trusses supported at the west end the wooden bellcot, in which hung one bell, 13 inches diameter at the mouth. It had the initials *WR. MR. RO* and the date 1588. The pews were of various dates; some had stopped framing and Jacobean scroll-work, the greater number had mitred mouldings and raised panels, and some were of deal.

Outside, the architectural features were extremely simple. A single chamfered cornice like that inside rested on the heads of the lancets. A very broad splay formed the base of the walls. There were six buttresses, not counting the four abutments at the west end. The external splays of the windows agreed in character with those of other windows of the abbey, differing slightly in size. The walls were three feet thick at the foundations. The stones were well but not very finely worked with the chisel. On the north side few original details remained; there was a built-up doorway, not medieval, in addition to the two built-up windows. The wall was least original towards the west, where a third window may have been, and the west wall had been very largely rebuilt. Its heavy buttresses had the look of ancient walls sloped off and weathered with whatever came to hand, mostly with chamfered angle-stones from the ruins, but there were some undoubtedly modern stones among them. On the south side were also some evidences of rebuilding, chiefly about the doorway, but extending to the first buttress. There was also a straight joint in the upper part of the east wall near the south angle buttress, and another in the west wall, also at the south side.

These signs of rebuilding, and the absence of the original roof, suggest that there may have been an interval between the dissolution of the monastery and the conversion of the chapel into the parish church, and within that time it may have been unroofed with the other buildings of the abbey. If that were so most of the irregularities in the walling would be accounted for. I do not attempt to account for all. In the course of six hundred years so many whims and accidents alter

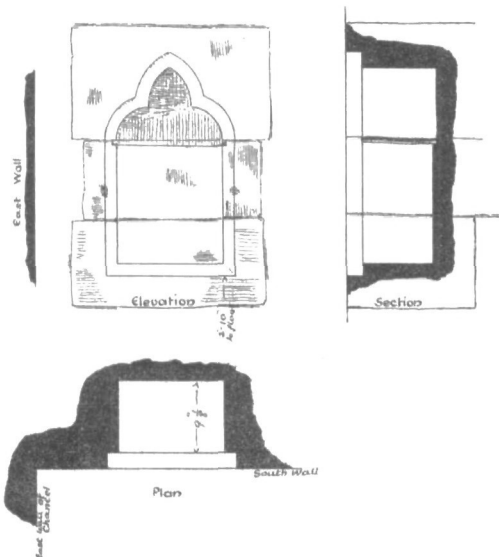


WINDOW HEADS.

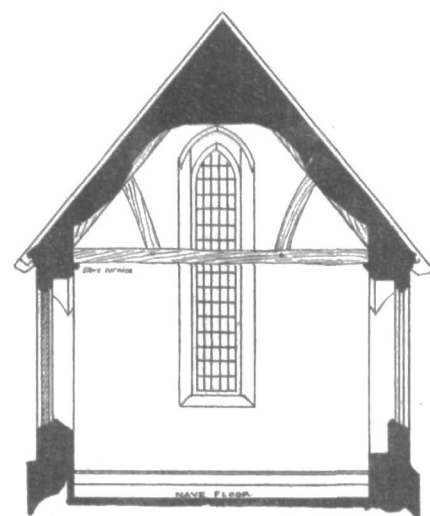


DETAILS OF SCREEN.

SCALE HALF INCH TO A FOOT.



DETAILS OF AUMBRY.
SCALE, HALF INCH TO A FOOT.



SECTION OF CHAPEL LOOKING EAST.
SCALE, 12 FEET TO AN INCH.

the physiognomy of a building that its minute history is seldom to be traced. The broad facts of this one are however clear enough. We had a building of medieval proportions, with lancet-windows of true section, a string under the windows, and a true medieval cornice to the wall. This could not be other than a medieval building, and of no other time than the middle of the thirteenth century. No difficulty in reading the history of the building is at all commensurate with the difficulty, the impossibility, of calling it modern. I am sure no one here can doubt for an instant that it was one of the original buildings of the abbey.

I have the misfortune, the shame, and regret, to state, that after all that has been done for the study of architecture and of ecclesiastical antiquity, this little building has been pulled down in the belief that it was not ancient, and that it had no historical value.

I will not say another word about its age, but I think it worth while to offer a few remarks on its value as belonging to a class of building of which few examples remain among the ruins of so many monasteries.

Of all the parts which belonged to a complete monastic establishment the secular or semi-secular buildings are those which have been the most completely destroyed. The cloister and its adjuncts had a more elaborate and beautiful architecture, which was in some sort a protection even in the worst times. Carved and moulded stones would be less useful to the depredator than the material of the smaller and plainer buildings. Whatever the cause, the detached and subordinate buildings were among the first to disappear, so that the ordinary knowledge of monastic architecture is confined almost to the dispositions of churches, chapter-houses, refectories, and the other buildings grouped round the cloister. Guest-houses, with their chambers and stables, the true inns of the middle ages, are very rare. The stables at Croxden were pulled down within the memory of man, and now this little building, the last on the secular side of the abbey, is destroyed. From what I have said of its position, it will be agreed that it was probably the gate-house chapel. It stood close to the gate, and while that was set square to the road, the chapel was, for the sake of orientation, I believe, set so oblique that between the north wall and the south was a difference in length of three feet six inches. It had a communication through the western door with the gate-house, and by its south door with the abbey-court. This would be the proper arrangement if it were the guest-chapel. Then, that being its use, it was probably also the chapel for the lay brethren and the serfs of the monastery. There was no parish church at Croxden. Some place would be provided where

the wives of the farm-labourers and the bailiffs could hear mass and confess. From its position on the west side of the church, as far as possible from the monastic parts of the establishment, it must certainly have had some secular or semi-secular use, and, with the paintings on the walls, that of the Virgin and Child being perhaps not the only one, it is difficult to imagine the other use to which it was applied, if it was not what I have ventured to call it. However, with the uncertainty or without, such as it was, this building might twelve months ago have told its own tale. It was there to speak of some ancient use, to be explained perhaps by other examples elsewhere. It might in its turn have shed light upon them. It has actually gone to increase the great popular ignorance of medieval life. For those who ought to have been its guardians it had no value, and they boldly declared it was better out of the way.

I am tempted to draw a parallel between this last destruction at Croxden and the first. In looking at the plan of the monks' church, one cannot help being struck by the quite unusual shape of the choir (Plate I.). Here is a thirteenth century English church, very English in all its details, but it has a rounded end and round chapels, and, stranger still, this church is Cistercian. Who would have expected that? I do not know the whole of the authority for the lightly tinted parts of the larger plan, it was made many years ago, but the chapel tinted black still stands. Now if the first possessor of the dissolved abbey, who, I presume, made the road from gate to gate, had gone a little more to the left, we should have lost all evidence of this curious exception to the almost universal Cistercian plan. He left this chapel because it did not come in his way; he pulled down all the rest because he saw in it nothing unusual or valuable, nothing interesting. We cannot blame *him*. No one in the sixteenth century had the idea there could be historical evidence in the shape of a building, or in the details of its ornament; neither could he guess that 300 years later human beings would be found so foolish as to care how their ancestors lived, or what were their ways of building. It is chiefly in the nineteenth century that this interest in the past life of the world has been developed. It has become to us almost a new sense giving us a pleasure and an education our ancestors did not enjoy. With this new knowledge comes a new duty. We are under obligations to each other and to posterity to protect every relic by which the knowledge of past times may be increased. Henceforth we are not at liberty to destroy an ancient building because we fail to find in it the value it may have for others, and that it has, whether recognised or not, in the history of its own time.