

REMARKS ON ELY PALACE, HOLBORN,

ACCOMPANYING SOME ORIGINAL DRAWINGS OF THE SAME, MADE IN 1772,

*Kindly given by the REV. CHARLES RUCK KEENE, of Swincombe House,
Nettlebed, to SIR GILBERT SCOTT, R.A., F.S.A.*

A controversy has recently arisen as to whether the existing chapel is or is not the veritable chapel of Ely Palace, dedicated to St. Etheldreda. Those who take the negative view imagine that, by a process somewhat similar to that attributed to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the old hall was converted into a chapel when the palace was removed, and has been ever since received as the genuine one.

They appear to ground their ideas on the following arguments:—

1. Bishop Arundell, in the reign of Richard II., is said to have rebuilt the greater part of the palace, and it has been assumed by several writers that he rebuilt the chapel; in which case it ought to be of the style of his time, whereas it is really of that of Bishop De Luda, who built the palace about 1295.

2. That the floor of the chapel is of timber, and is supported in the crypt below by a central range of timber posts;—whereas such a timber floor is unique for a chapel, and the division of a crypt beneath a chapel into *two* parts is unknown, but is common under halls.

3. That the east and west end windows are alike in importance and width, while the cill of that at the east end is low—not very much higher than that of the west window.

4. That there is no apparent mark of an altar arrangement or accompaniments.

I would reply to the first argument that the works of Bishop Arundell are not (so far as I am aware) particularized, excepting the gatehouse facing Holborn; and, anyhow, this great building, whatever it may have been, was *not*—as it is clear from its style—rebuilt by

him, and that this exception is no greater, whether it was the chapel or the hall ; so that a general statement that he almost rebuilt the palace does not in any degree affect the question. If the statement had been that he *wholly* rebuilt the palace, the style of this building would prove it to be false ; but, as it says "almost," this building only proves itself to have been an exception, whether it were chapel or hall ; and a very large exception it is.

To the second objection I would reply, that we, every now and then, find unique features in ancient buildings ; and, if this is proved by other evidence to have been the chapel, the material and arrangement of the crypt would simply fall into the list of such abnormal features. Possibly the crypt was not, as is more usual, used for a chapel, and consequently was not arranged, as is customary, with reference to a central altar ; or, again, it may have had *two* altars.

To the third argument I simply reply, that the cill of the east window, though not high, *is* a good deal higher than that of the west window ; and that the raising of the east window very high above the altar was not so usual in this country in the middle ages as at present.

To the fourth argument I reply, that the wall beneath the east window having been cut away in modern times to a depth of nearly three feet, all marks of the altar are necessarily obliterated ; but that there are fragments of sedilia in the usual position, which I have laboriously investigated, and found to have been of three stages ; probably corresponding to the steps to the altar. These sedilia had been contemplated and provided for while building the crypt below ; a projection having been made in its wall for their support. The projection can be traced against the east wall of the chapel above as high up as the string course. It is now cut rudely off (as is the front of the sedilia). This eastern part of the projection no doubt contained the piscina, of which I fancy a mark of the gable can be traced. In fact, wherever the wall is not cut away, traces of the accompaniments of the altar are visible.

I think these remarks meet the *negative* arguments I have stated. Let us see if we have not some arguments to add on the *positive* side.

1. The building has, since the removal of the palace, always been called the chapel ; and no doubt till now has, that I am aware of, been expressed as to its being the old chapel, nor any hint given that the hall was at that time converted into a chapel.

2. Its position and its level agree with that of the old chapel, as

shown in all existing plans that I have seen, and with the descriptions by such writers as speak of its position while the palace was standing.

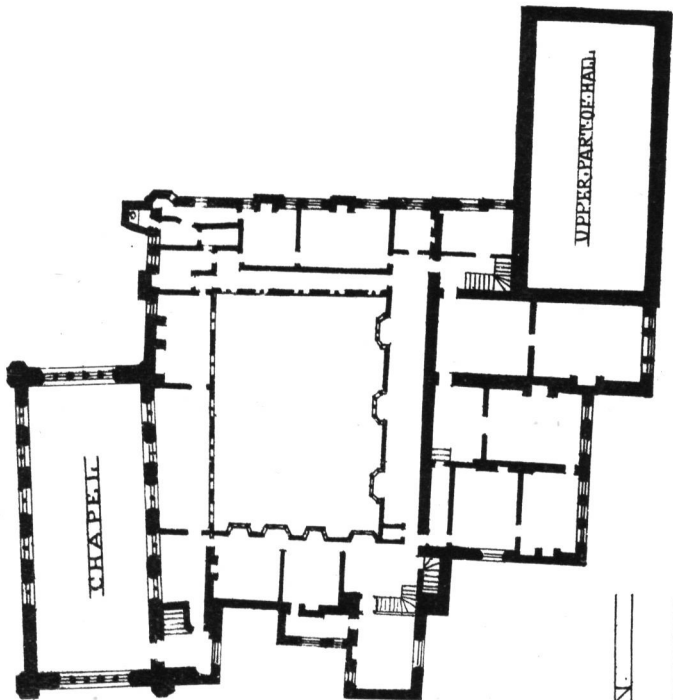
The plans and sketches of the old palace which I now have the honour of presenting to the Society of Antiquaries were made in 1772, shortly before the demolition of the palace. They have been preserved in the family of Bishop Keene, the last bishop who occupied it, and were most kindly given to me by his grandson, the Rev. Charles Ruck Keene, of Swincombe House, near Nettlebed, Oxfordshire.

They show the palace as mainly consisting of a cloistered quadrangle of two stories, the lower one being the cloister proper, and the upper story consisting mainly of rooms.

There are two great buildings adjoining it, or nearly so; the one at the south-eastern and the other at the north-western part of the cloister. The former is on the ground level, or the level of the cloister—the latter on the upper level, approached from the north-western corner of the cloister by steps, its lower story forming a crypt. There are other apartments south and west of the cloister, as well as on the east side of the ground. There is a considerable space and a gatehouse to the south, and a larger space towards the north, behind which is a building, apparently stables.

The drawings are four in number. The first contains plans of the ground and upper stories, and is endorsed "Ground Plan of Ely House, Holborn." These plans are very carefully drawn, but the scale is not given, nor are the names of the apartments written; so that the *primâ facie* impression would be that they throw little light on the question. These two defects are, however, remedied; for the dimensions of the chapel are given on the back of one of the drawings, which agree with the external dimensions of the existing building, and show that the scale is a quarter of an inch to ten feet. These drawings have clearly been, to a great extent, the originals of those given by Grose, who adds to them the names of the leading parts; showing the hall to be towards the south in the direction of the gatehouse, and the chapel towards the north. Both my ground-floor plan and that given by Grose show, not the chapel itself, but the crypt below it, with its central range of timber posts, on which Grose writes "*under the chapel*;" my plan showing also the upper floor, giving on that level the chapel itself, and both upper and lower plans show the steps leading up to it.

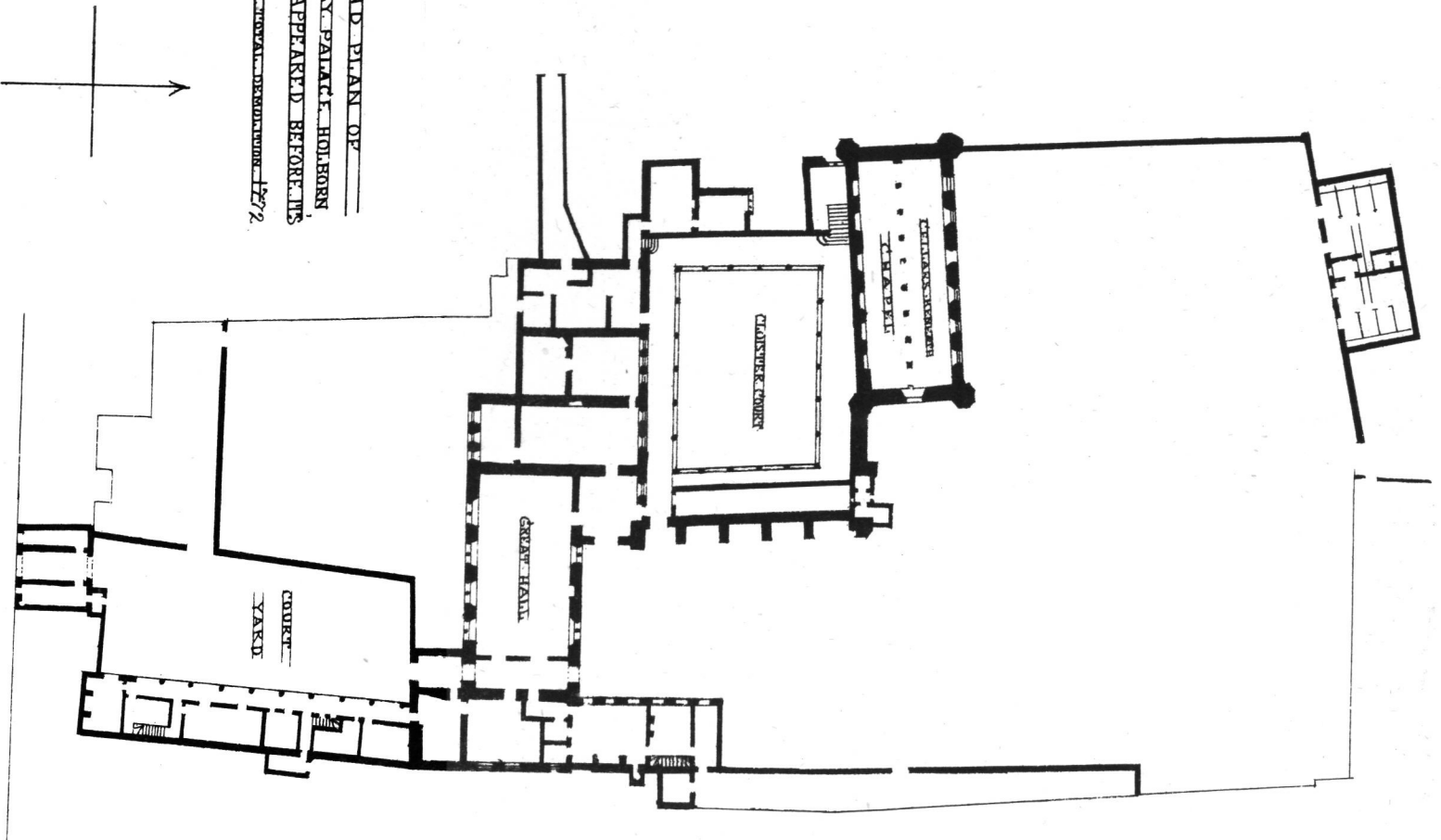
I have next two small views, which again have been Grose's



UPPER PALACE, HOLBORN.

UPPER PALACE, HOLBORN.

PRINTED BY C.F. KELL, LONDON E.C.



GROUND PLAN OF
THE PALACE OF HOLBORN,
AS IT APPEARED BEFORE ITS
ABOLITION BY PARLIAMENT IN 1772.

PRINTED BY C. F. KELL, LONDON E.C.

George H. Bond
del.

originals, or copies from the same sketches. One is taken from just within the gatehouse, showing the south side of the hall. This is entitled on my drawing, "A South View of Ely House, Holborn"; but Grose says of his copy of it:—"This view shows the courtyard, colonnade, and south side of the old hall, with the great door, or chief entrance, over which is carved the arms of the See of Ely." He adds, further on, "This drawing was made April 27, 1772." The very day on which one at least of my views was taken. This identifies the building shown as the *hall*—and it is on the ground level, not raised on a crypt, and bears no resemblance to the existing chapel.

My next drawing—also apparently the original of one of Grose's engravings—is entitled, "The North View of Ely House, Holborn, with the View of the Chapel." It shows towards the foreground the east end and two north bays of the existing chapel, and in the background the north side of the building, which is shown in the view before named, and called by Grose "The Old Hall," over the roof of which appears the parapet of a tower. Between these are the buildings shown on the plans as surrounding the cloister. On the back of this view is written:—

" Chapel—dedicated to St. Etheldreda,
Length 91 ft.
Breadth 39 ft.

This view was taken April 27th, 1772."

Of his copy of this view, Grose says:—"This view shows the north side of the great hall, over which appears St. Andrew's church; the back of the east, and part of the north side of the cloisters; as also the east end and north side of the chapel. It was drawn the 27th of April, 1872."

The above evidence is conclusive as to Grose's opinion about which was the chapel and which the hall; and he, speaking in the present tense, was no doubt describing what he saw as existing when he wrote.

My fourth drawing is a larger view of the east end and northern side of the existing building, with the cloisters, and a part of the north side of the other building, called by Grose "The Old Hall," but it is simply entitled "A North and East View of Ely House, Holbourn," and is not engraved by Grose.

Grose's descriptions of his engravings do not, however, by any means exhaust his evidence.

Speaking of the injuries the palace received in the seventeenth century, he says, "Ely House was reduced to a very dark and incommodious habitation, without any remains of its ancient splendour and magnificence, except the chapel and ancient hall."

The following is his description of the palace:—

"This house stands on the north side of Holborn, almost opposite to St. Andrew's Church; the entrance is, through a large gateway or porter's lodge, into a small paved court; on the right hand are some offices supported by a colonnade, and on the left a small garden, separated from the court by a brick wall. In the front appears the venerable old hall, originally built with stone; its roof is covered with lead. Adjoining to the west end are the chief lodging-rooms and other apartments.

"The inside of this hall is about thirty feet high, thirty-two feet broad, and seventy-two feet long. The timber of the roof forms a semi-dodecagon. It is lighted by six gothic windows—four on the south and two on the north side. The floor is paved with tiles. At the lower end is an oaken screen, and near the upper end there is an ascent of one step, for the high table, according to the old English fashion.

"To the north-west of the wall is a quadrangular cloister, its south side measuring ninety-five, and its west seventy-three feet; in the centre is a small garden. The east side is at present shut up, and has been converted into a kind of lumber-room or cellar. Over these cloisters are lodging-rooms and galleries, where are several ancient windows; but not above two small pieces of painted glass, and these neither beautiful nor curious.

"Adjoining to the north side of the cloister, in a field, containing about an acre of ground, stands the chapel. This field is planted with trees and surrounded by a wall. On the east side, next the hall, are the kitchens; here were several other offices, which have been taken down within the memory of persons now living.

"The exact time when the chapel was built is not known; it is dedicated to St. Etheldreda, and is a right-angled parallelogram—in length ninety-one, and in breadth thirty-nine feet—having at each angle an octagonal buttress or turret, crowned with a conical cap or pinnacle. The east window is large and handsome; on each side of it,

as well as of those on the north front, are niches with pedestals for statues. The ornaments seem to have been carefully finished, but the whole building is at present greatly defaced by time and the weather. The inside is still very neat, and seems to have been lately repaired.

“The floor is about ten or twelve feet above the level of the ground, and is supported by eight strong chesnut posts, running from east to west under the centre of the building. This forms a *southern* or crypt, the size of the chapel, having six windows on the north, answering to as many niches on the south side. At present several windows are stopped up. The entrance into this place is through a small gothic arch under the east window.”

This accurately describes the present building, and agrees with my plans, &c. ; but if the existing building were the old *hall* there would be no agreement at all.

In Mr. Gardner's wonderful collection are several drawings of the old palace. Among them are some by Carter ; one is a ground-plan of the lower story, which in most respects agrees with mine, though it differs in some details. It is entitled in his own writing—though later than the drawing—as follows :—“Ground-plan of the Pallace of the Bishops of Ely, taken 1776, since which time the whole (excepting the chapel, which has been repaired and much altered) has been pulled down, and on the ground a street is built, called Ely Place.”

The crypt on this plan is described—“Undercroft, or place below the Chapel.” The other large building towards the south-east is described “Hall,” and the screen and its two doors towards the east of this building are shown ; also, two doors in the east wall like buttery hatches, one leading to a room called “washhouse,” and the other into a room called “kitchen.”

A tomb is shown at the extreme north-east corner of the cloister, called “Ancient Monument,” of which a sketch is given, called “Monument in east end of North Cloister belonging to the Chapel in Ely House, Holborne, taken in 1776, since pulled down.” The frieze is like that recently found in the building, and is described—“remains of letters, but imperfect on this label ;” a description equally applicable now.

There is also a beautiful sketch, by Carter, of the palace, taken from the north-east, to which is written in the same hand :—

“View of the Pallace of the Bishop of Ely, in Holborn, London.

Taken 1776, being a short time before it was pulled down. At present on the site is built a street called Ely Place. Description: at the right is seen the Chapel which is still standing, but much altered and repaired. In the centre is y^e outside of the Cloyster, to the left is the Great Hall, before y^e end of this Hall is seen part of y^e Kitchen, above, part of St. Andrew's Church."

There is also a sketch of a part of the crypt, entitled, "View of the Undercroft of Ely House, taken 1776." Carter made an etching from this, which he entitled, "View in the Undercroft of the Chapel of Ely Palace, Holborn; drawn 1776, engraved and printed Jan. 1st, 1786, by J. Carter, Wood Street, West."

Mr. Gardner has also an undated plan of the upper story of the palace, probably taken earlier, and purchased by him at the sale at Strawberry Hill. It shows the upper arrangement as much as my plan shows it, and, like it, without writing; but the building, which agrees with the existing chapel, has the altar marked upon it at its east end, defined by a cross, and with a line showing the super-altar, on which are two dots, probably for candlesticks.

I have, since the present chapel has been dismantled, taken much pains in working out the evidences of the sedilia, and have found that they were of unusual projection, and that that projection continued in a solid form to the east end of the chapel, where are the marks where it abutted. This plan shows the sedilia and their solid continuation, just as I had found them to be.

In the same plan the other building (marked in Carter as "Hall") is shown with the high table at its west end, and three longitudinal tables with forms at the south side, and also the screen and eastern doors, and a north-eastern porch, which must have been removed before Carter's time.

I omitted to mention that Carter gives a section of the hall-roof, and the eastern gable internally—called "geometrical elevation of the profile of the roof at the east end of the hall." The gable has two two-light windows in it, which is not the case with the present chapel."

He also gives a drawing of a handsome door, which he describes as "elevation of a door to a doorway in the great hall, giving admittance to the grand staircase," a description agreeing with the plan, which shows such a door on the north side of the hall.

I may also add that in Carter's plan he marks in the garden the

point from which he took his general view, which he designates as "spot where I stood to take a view of the whole building." The view, as taken from this spot, agrees with his general description, which states the chapel to be on the right, in the centre the outside of the cloister, to the left the great hall, and before the end of it part of the kitchen, and above it St. Andrew's church.

There is a curious piece of evidence given in Malcolm's "London." While speaking of the encroachments on the palace at some time in the seventeenth century, he says: "One half of the crypt under the chapel * * * was then a drinking-place, and the intoxication of the people often interrupted the offices of religion above them." Again, "Such were the encroachments of the new buildings that the Bishop had his horses brought through the great hall, for want of a more proper entrance."

The more authentic account of this is found in the Harleian MSS. No. 3789, 15, *et seq.* which seems to be an abstract of a case submitted to Chancery, where it is stated that "Sir Ch^r. Hatton entered into and enjoyed the premises demised, and also several other rooms and ground not demised, and particularly some consecrated ground under the chapel, and turned the same into buttereys and other offices." Later on it says: "Even half of the vault or burying-place under the chapel is made use of as a public cellar (or was so very lately) to sell drink in, there having been frequently revellings heard there during Divine Service." Again, "The Bishop is fain to own as a courtesy and kindness the bare convenience of a back gate to convey away the stable dung, and is always forced to bring his horses through the great hall whenever he uses them."

Now, of two buildings, one ten or twelve feet above the ground, and the other on a level with it, it would seem strange if a public cellar to sell drink in was formed beneath the latter, and the Bishop's horses were constantly led through the former!

The evidence which I have cited is, I will assume, sufficient to prove that the existing chapel is the veritable chapel of St. Etheldreda, which from the days of Bishop De Luda, who built the palace, to those of Bishop Keene, in whose time it was by Act of Parliament compulsorily sold to the Crown, was the chapel of the London palace of the Bishops of Ely. Indeed, this fact seems so clear that it would not, I think, have been called into question but for the difficulty of bringing scattered evidence to focus upon a special point.

I may add that in leases of the ground adjoining the chapel it is spoken of as a building "called or about to be called Ely Chapel." It was no doubt previously only called "the Chapel of Ely Palace," as that at Lambeth is called "the Chapel of Lambeth Palace," but when the Palace was destroyed it required an independent name.

Returning to the subject of existing drawings of the palæe, I will mention that in the Print Room, at the British Museum, there is a copy of Pennant's "London," profusely illustrated by the insertion of prints, drawings, &c., by Mr. J. Charles Crowle.

It contains three drawings of Ely Palace, by N. Smith; purchased at Captain Grose's sale at a guinea each drawing.

These are clearly either the originals or copies, or drawings from the same sketches with three of my views.

They are as follows:—

1. A large water-colour drawing, endorsed :
 "The South View of Ely Palace, Holburn,
 Capn. Gross's sale, 1791."

It is like my south view, excepting that it is about three times the size, that it is in colours, and more finished.

2. A slight drawing in line and india ink, endorsed :
 "Ely Palace, Middlesex,
 Capn. Gross's sale, 1791."

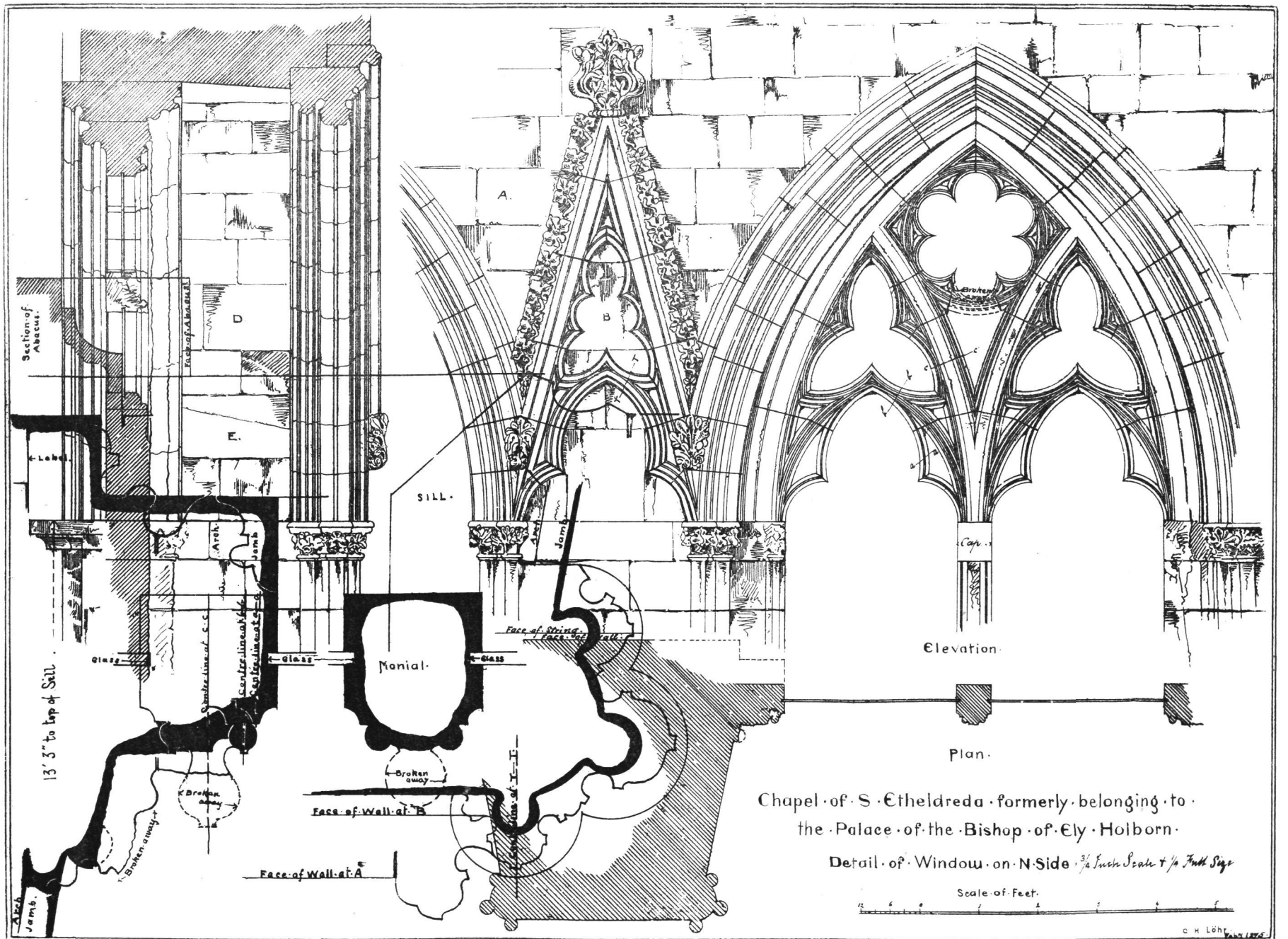
This seems to be either a copy or the original sketch of my north-east view, but slighter. The size is about the same.

The roof of the chapel, which ought to appear, is omitted in both. The trees are not finished, and some details are omitted which are in mine.

In some cases words and letters are put for guides to making a more complete drawing; as "lead" to the hall roof, which in mine is shown as lead, but not filled in, in this sketch; "stone" in another part, where it is drawn so in mine; in another place "flint," and in others "b" for brick.

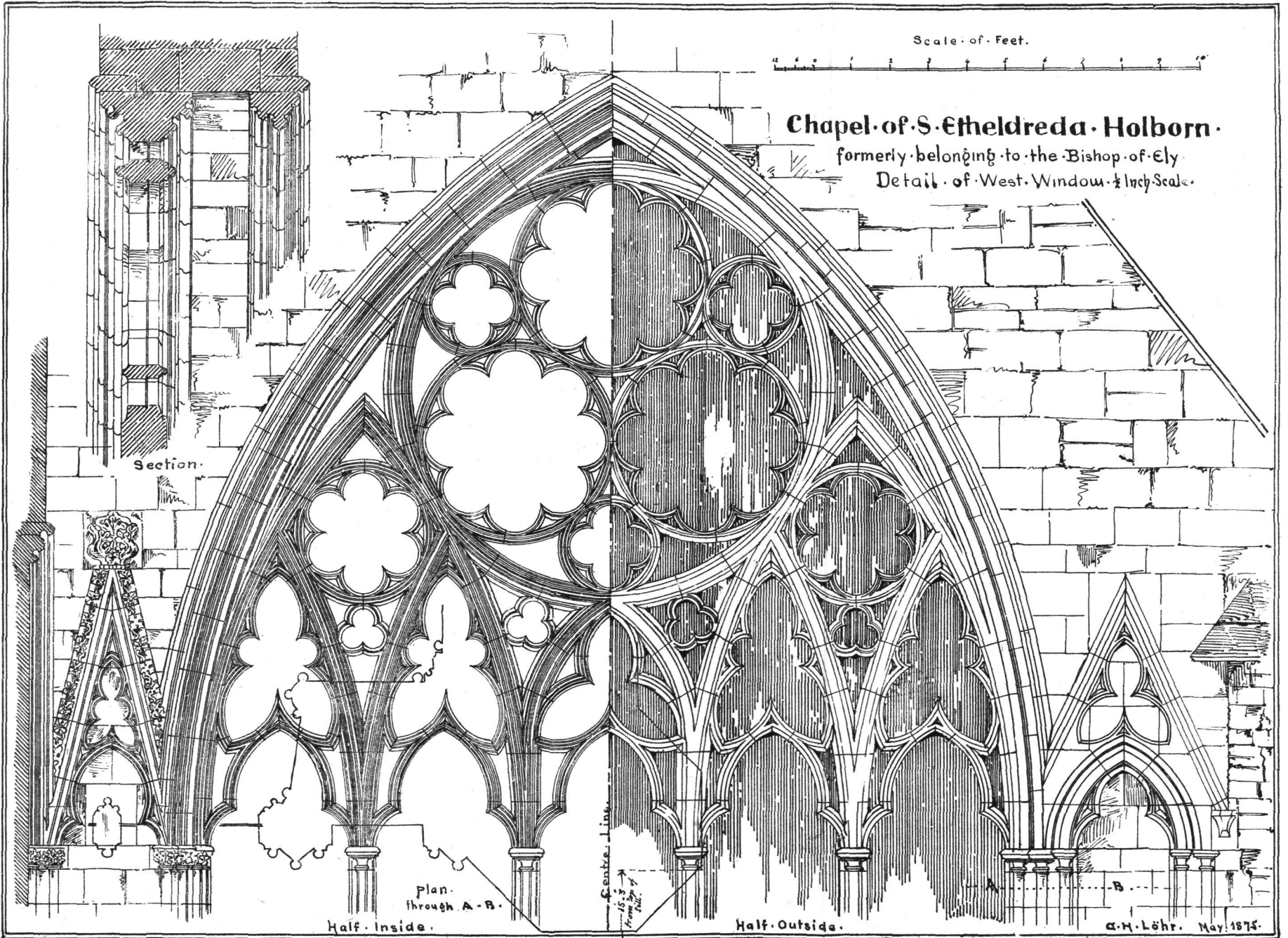
The tracery of the east window of the chapel is drawn similarly and untechnically in both.

3. A drawing in line and india ink, endorsed :
 "Ely Place, Middlesex, 1772,
 Capn. Gross's sale, 1791."



Scale of Feet.

Chapel of S. Etheldreda · Holborn ·
formerly belonging to the Bishop of Ely ·
Detail of West Window · 1/2 Inch Scale.



Section.

Plan
through A-B.

Half · Inside.

Half · Outside.

A.M. Löhr. May 1875.

This is like my north view, but about three times the size. The foliage of trees not filled in ; " b " for brick.

I have no doubt that N. Smith, whose name appears on all three, drew mine also from the same sketches ; possibly supplying them both to Captain Grose and to the Bishop.

There is, however, no plan in this set in the British Museum. That in my set is drawn with considerable technical skill.

GEO. GILBERT SCOTT.

December, 1877.

APPENDIX.

Of the drawings referred to by Sir George Gilbert Scott, only one showing the ground and chamber floors is given here ; the remainder are too well-known from Grose's engravings. The Council are much indebted to C. H. Löhr, Esq., for kindly allowing his careful drawings of Ely Chapel to be photo-lithographed for publication. Photographs of the remaining prints alluded to were kindly presented to the Society by the late Sir George Gilbert Scott, R.A., and Vice-President of the Society.