# EARLY RECOLLECTIONS OF WESTMINSTER HALL.

BY

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Up to 1818, the Courts of King's Bench and Chancery were held in a cancellated wooden inclosure, erected on a raised platform at the south end of the interior of the Hall. It projected nearly forty feet from the south wall, and occupied the whole width of the southernmost bay of King Richard II.'s building. The two piers beyond the southernmost side windows and the arch resting on them, once contained a large window similar to that at the north end of the Hall. These features were thereby its southern end, which it is well to note at this point. The alterations are due to the additions made by Sir Charles Barry.

This wooden inclosure rose to a little above the springing line of the south window. It inclosed two large courts, between which was a passage, reached by a flight of steps, opening into the two courts east and west, with a higher ascent southward beneath the great window, thus connecting the Hall with the Houses of Lords and Commons.

For additional access southwards and on the floor of the Hall were wide passages against the walls, through two openings in the thick-end wall, communicating with other passages, one leading into Old Palace Yard.

The inclosure presented a pseudo-Gothic front, answering to what is now called the Batty Langley style, A.D. 1700. In the centre was an arched doorway, and on each side a semi-octagonal breast, having three windows and two storeys. Taken altogether it was by no means bad of its kind. I well remember its demolition in 1820, and afterwards I myself helped to remove the massive flight of steps which remained *in situ*, till the preparations in the Hall began to be made for the coronation of King George IV.

At and previous to that time the Hall was surrounded on three sides by buildings. At the south end were the parliamentary buildings. On the east side were the Cloister Court of St. Stephen's Chapel, the Speaker's House and Court, and some official houses. The north front had been cleared of attachments which had once spoiled it. The west side was invested by some ancient Elizabethan buildings used as offices of the Exchequer, and south of them were the Courts of Law, with apartments forming the long western frontage of the King's Bench Record Office.

This western frontage had been erected by William Kent, the architect of the Board of Works, about 1740. It was a range of buildings in the Italian style, with a handsome frontage towards St. Margaret's Street, having five windows. It had also a flank façade towards Old Palace Yard, extending to the

older front of the Houses of Parliament. At the junction of these façades was a square corner tower, with western and southern windows. The great fire of 1834 destroyed the tower and the flank buildings.

Kent's building was evidently designed for subsequent extension northward, by adding two bays and a square tower similar to that at the southern end, and a flank building to connect that tower with the northern front of the Hall. This is indicated, so far as the tower and connected bays are concerned, by a pretty drawing made in 1793, as engraved in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which shows the frontage as far as Kent had carried it, but leaving a large area occupied only by the judges' stables and coach-houses, of which the drawing shows the wooden gates and tiled roofs. This spot became occupied by a pediment central breast and the intended third bay and tower, built by Soane eighty years afterwards.

The old Courts of Law inside and west of the Hall had become unfit for the constantly increasing judicial business of the great Metropolis. In 1820 Mr. Soane (afterwards Sir John) was appointed by the Government as architect of the new Courts of Law. He at once made a plan and designed an elevation in the Italian style, and proceeded to carry it out, having probably previously obtained the approbation of the judges and law officers. But this plan and elevation were criticised by some influential Members of Parliament. This led to the appointment of a small "Committee of Taste," as it was called, and to a reduction of the plan and an alteration of the design, of which only the northern square tower and its connections

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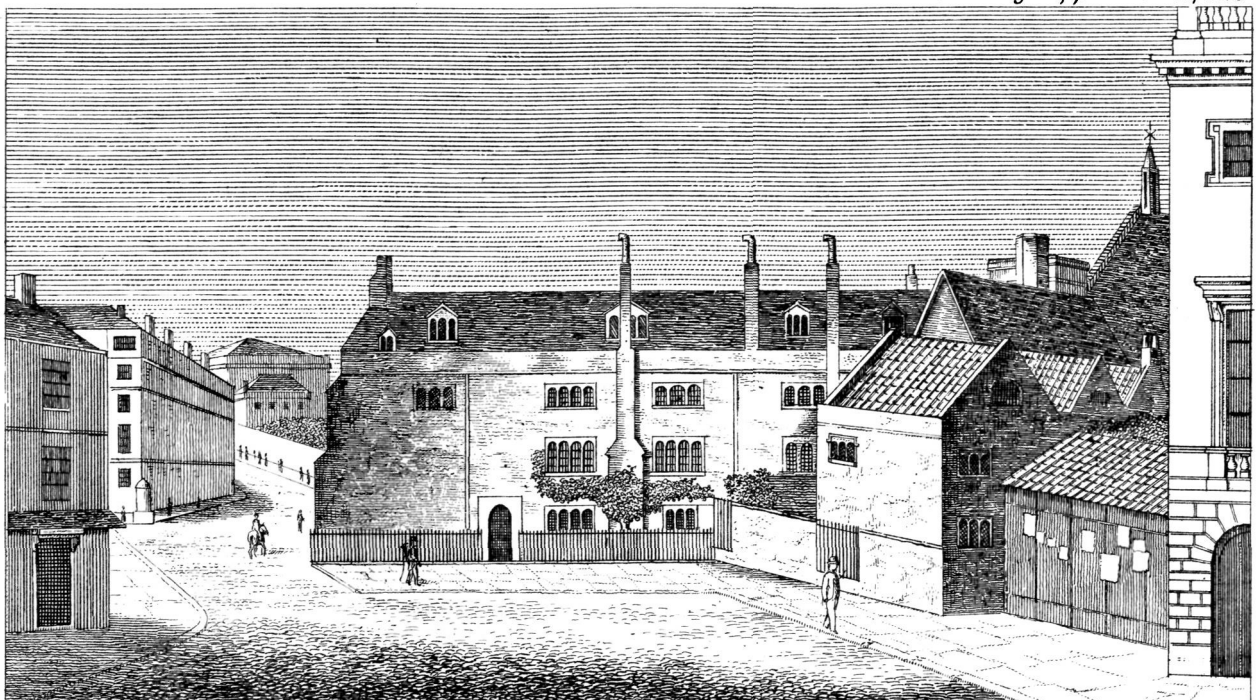

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WESTMINSTER HALL IN 1793.

(From the Gentleman's Magazine)

J. & W. Fmelin lith.

were retained for the sake of symmetry with Kent's southern building. The remainder of the elevation was altered from the Italian to the Gothic style of King Richard II.

This was thought at the time to be a severe rebuke to Mr. Soane, for it at once led to a demolition of much of the building, which he had carried up on his own plan and in the Italian style. Soane was certainly not the man to bear calmly any interference. I well remember seeing him gently thrust aside a chief clerk in the Foreign Office who ventured to make a suggestion while he was planning, with his clerk of the works, some important alterations to the building in Downing Street, when Canning was succeeding Lord Castlereagh as Foreign Minister.

It is not unlikely (and I think I remember a rumour) that other assistance was obtained by the "Committee of Taste" for the Gothic elevation beyond the square tower. The elder Pugin was then becoming well known; and he, about two years afterwards, published a beautiful drawing of the building as it was carried out; it therefore seems probable that this was the original design approved by the said Committee of Taste. This engraving is now to be seen in Crace's collection of prints in the King's Library at the British Museum.

Between the back of the buildings of Kent and the west wall of the Great Hall, Soane was required to build the new Law Courts, on a space of about 240 feet long and 60 feet wide. With this very limited area, between high buildings on all sides, he overcame difficulties in respect of light, ventilation, and

access to the Courts, which at the conclusion of the works became a theme of approbation and admiration. All the interior was of the Italian style, and had his own individuality stamped upon it, and it was well suited to the purposes and dignity of the Courts, although it seems to have had few imitators. His models and his drawings were excellent. Many of the former, of the most refined character, I have seen and admired in the works of Mr. Palmer, the modeller and plasterer of Smith Square, and also his models for the grand royal entrance to the House of Lords, which he executed only a few years afterwards.

Mr. Soane began by making several doorways in the western wall of the Hall, opening into a corridor outside of that wall, extending the whole length of it, and under the arched flyers between the attached buttresses and the wall. In connection with this corridor he built, most ingeniously, eight courts on the ground floor, with other courts and rooms above. The six large buttresses sadly obstructed his operations, but he managed to retain them, and to case them in as walls. Probably all the pinnacles of these buttresses had been removed before.

In the formation of the long corridor the whole outer surface of the western wall between and above the doors was lined with thin ashlar. Wherever an ancient Norman buttress came in the way that also was cased with thin ashlar. By this means a series of piers was made,* and their tops were formed as abutments for large arches, segmental and pointed.

* These piers and arches have been found since this was written to be ancient work of King Richard II.

Thus was gained a wall surface consistent with the ancient work; and while it appeared as a wall arcade it served as a support to the flat which covered the corridor. In some cases the Norman buttresses have had their lower parts cut wholly away, and the parts above have had massive stone corbels inserted to support those upper parts. In some instances the Norman buttress has wholly disappeared.

The removal of the buildings on the west side of the Hall has revealed parts of the long hidden detached buttresses of King Richard II. Five of the flyers of the connected arch buttresses appear to be in fair preservation and tolerably complete. The restoration needful will be considerable, but it may probably be effected without the removal of any one of the structures. The pinnacles of all are entirely lost; but Brayley and Britton's excellent work, *The Palace of Westminster*, shows a corresponding buttress then existing in the Speaker's Court on the east side of the Hall, with the pinnacle included; this buttress was necessarily removed by Sir Charles Barry, as it was useless and in the way of his works of the New Palace. At present none of the lower parts of these buttresses are exposed, for the Contractor has not been allowed to approach too near to the ancient structure.

Of the five Norman buttresses which were intermediate with the detached buttresses of Richard II. only two remain; and of the others against which the arched flyers abutted the lower parts have been destroyed and their upper parts have been left, and

in most cases converted into corbels through which the flyers interpenetrate and are incorporated.

It is satisfactory to find that the archivolts of the flying buttresses are in good condition, and that their springers are exposed. The archivolts rest on moulded corbels, under which are grotesque animals with wings or legs, and seem to be almost perfect, or requiring but little repair. It may be hoped that the sixth, and southernmost detached buttress will be found in part, at least its footing.

One of the doorways cut through—that under the second window from the north end—has been abandoned, and so (the wall surface in the Hall having been restored) the opening has been concealed.

The question naturally arises now as to what will be done with the large area about to be cleared, and what will be done towards the completion of the wall and other parts.

The external display of the windows on the western side, joined to what remains of the five arched flying buttresses, is already very grand; and when the windows are in the evening dimly illuminated from the gas-lights within the Hall, the effect is most pleasing.

The parapet of the wall has been lowered, in former times, to the greatest extent possible; it is now apparently but a little above the gutter, and it is covered by a common coping of stone. Thus the enormous surface of the roof of slate has become fully exposed from ridge almost to drip, except that there are the modern excrescences of dormer windows, which, although useful in throwing light into

the interior and on to the timber-work inside the roof, are, whether seen from the outside or from within, inconsistent and intrusive.

The absence of a proper parapet is the cause of this unsatisfactory appearance of the building on both west and east exteriors.

The authority for a restoration of the parapet is to be found in Hollar's prints. In these the parapets are shown adorned with grand battlements, resting evidently on a bold string course of stone. These two features at once give propriety as well as beauty to the roof, and there seems to be no alternative but to carry out that restoration.

The same old drawings show that the ancient roof was covered with lead in wide sheets with roll junctions. This fact is confirmed by a censorious letter, written in 1750, to the *London Gazette*, protesting vigorously against the removal of the lead from the roof of Westminster Hall, and the substitution of slate for it, as proposed by the Board of Works. Nevertheless in August of that year the lead was removed and its weight of 10,000 pounds was reported. The writer in the *Gazette* charged the authorities with bad motives.

The restoration of the Norman buttresses should also form a portion of the new work.

The full restoration of the wall must of necessity take place, inclusive of the filling with ashlar all Soane's doorways, both outside and inside. It might be desirable to retain one of those doorways as a western access. A similar access to the nave of the Abbey from the north green is an improvement to the front towards the public way.

The full development of the six detached buttresses and of the ten Norman buttresses will necessitate the lowering of the ground, down perhaps to the level of the floor of the Hall, thus undwarfing the western wall and restoring its original height and dignity. The effect of a sunken garden or grass-plot will be quite as pleasing as that which surrounds the Natural History Museum at South Kensington.

There are many, perhaps, who would prefer to abolish the dormer windows because they are modern and intrusive. If they can be hidden outside to a great extent by the proposed battlemented parapet, it will be well. But the interior of the Hall requires as much light as it has at present, and the beautiful roof was, I remember, brought pleasantly into view when the diffused light of those twenty-four dormers was gained. The beautiful heraldic stained glass of Willament in the south window has darkened that end of the Hall by diminishing the daylight by more than one-half.

The grandeur of the view of the Victoria Tower at the extreme end of the north front, and the west side of Westminster Hall at the near end, with the intermediate buildings on the east side of Old Palace Yard, all as seen from the Parliament Street approach, has an effect upon the mind which warrants its being called "One of the finest sites in Europe."

This will doubtless lead eventually to an improvement of the eastern and northern sides of the church of St. Margaret, which now presents on all sides bald and mean façades, and these at a moderate cost

might be made harmonious with the improvements opposite and adjacent.

The appearance of Westminster Hall, when built by King William Rufus, may have been of the simplest character, with the present walls on the four sides, triplicate doorways at the north end, the central doorway being a grand one. When the north end was examined by Mr. Sydney Smirke, indications of this triple entrance were seen. There were in each side wall twelve large Norman windows, nearly in the positions of the present windows; and between these were twelve small windows, making altogether forty-eight. In the repairs carried out by Sir Robert Smirke, assisted by his younger brother Sydney (afterwards Sir Sydney), the interesting remains of the windows were brought to light. Mr. Sydney Smirke wrote a very elaborate account of them, accompanied by drawings, all of which have a place in the *Archaeologia* (of 1834-5-6). Every window was of the Norman type, having a circular head and pillared jambs.

The large windows had annulets in the middle of their jamb pillars. With the lower range of these pillars the small window pillars were coincident; each jamb of the small windows had two pillars in front, and two behind them. (See illustration, plate 40, page 492, Brayley.) The interior of this window wall was pierced by a low passage arched over, continuing through all the piers. This passage may have been continuous also throughout the north and south ends, for at the south-west corner there existed indications of a Norman arch which may have been one of a range of windows at the south end.*

* See Britton and Brayley, plate 39.

How the Hall of Rufus was covered there is no evidence. Shingles were used in other parts of the Palace. Sir Sydney Smirke has suggested that the roof was in three spans, supported by pillars. In such a case the middle span would be both wider and higher than the sides. The market halls of Rouen, of a little later date, are thus constructed, the intermediate floor and also the roof being upheld by a range of pillars.

The two Smirkes sought earnestly for some signs of supports under the floor, but with no result.

In the early history of the Hall it is related that there was at the south end and the west or Chancery side a large marble table twelve feet long and three feet wide, and over against it a marble chair was placed, both being on the floor. The Canterbury chair may be a type of this. When the two courts of King's Bench and of Chancery were erected on a raised platform the chair and table became disused and lost, for in 1666 search was made without any result. Probably the requirements in the repairs and decoration of the Palace may have led to both objects being used.

In Edward Hall's Black Letter Chronicles, 1548, in the passage following the account of "kynge Edward y^e^ fyfth borne in sanctuarye," it is related as follows:—"The Kentyshmen thys season, whose wittes be euer mouable at the chaunge of Prynces, came to the subberbes of London, & spoyled houses, robbed berehouses, and by the counsayll of Sir Geffray Gates & other sentuary men they brake up the kinges Benche, & deliuered prisoners, which fel

at Radclefe, Limehouse, & S. Katherines to burning of houses, slaughter of people," &c.

This expression of the King's Bench seems to mean the large table of marble, which, by the violence of the Kentish men was thenceforward rendered useless, and perhaps was soon made into material for works at the Palace; and so the search made for it in 1666, as related by Dugdale, was fruitless.

As to what extent the Hall was decorated before the time of King Richard II. little is known. In the time of Edward I. there is a record of its being white-washed and decorated. And in Edward II.'s time there was placed a *dorsorium* of wool, wrought with the figures of the King and Earls. Perhaps large tapestries may have been suspended from the triforium gallery.

King Richard II. found the walls settled and unsound, the roof (perhaps shingled) racked and probably rotten; its supports unsafe, and the floor unpaved. He cleared away all the roof, made the walls thicker by the addition of one foot seven inches, and higher by the addition of two feet.* He then erected on the west side six detached buttresses, to give support to as many arched flying buttresses, which, with their straight tops, sloped up nearly to

* After this passage was written the stripping of the lower part of walls on its outside has shown that the alleged thickening of the wall to the extent of one foot seven inches has been misleading and is erroneous. The expression evidently applies to the thickening of the lower part only, by a series of wide piers between which arches are constructed; over all the wall is continued a little higher, and upon it rested roofs or floors of important buildings added by King Richard II. and his successors.

the top of the parapet. He treated the east side similarly, but with fewer buttresses, because of there being already buildings partly superseding the support of buttresses. He decorated and weighted the detached buttresses with large pinnacles.

He then proceeded to erect one of the finest timber roofs that has ever existed, spanning the whole width of the Hall, strengthened by hammer-beam trusses, ingeniously and beautifully formed. This roof he covered with thick lead, with rolls, as distinctly shown in Hollar's drawing. In carrying up the walls he abolished all the twenty-four small Norman windows, and changed the style of the twenty-four larger ones to that of his period. He carried up the enormous gable-ends, as became necessary for the high roof, with gable-turrets at the ends, and an intermediate lantern of wood to serve as a chimney for the log-fire, and to ventilate the interior. The parapets he surmounted with grand battlement work.

At the south end he introduced a grand window, having numerous compartments with elaborate tracery above. At the north end he made a similar window, and, abolishing the simple porch of Rufus, he erected in the thick wall the gracefully arched and groined porch which we now see.

And lastly he laid a pavement of Purbeck stone throughout the extent of the floor, first displacing the rude and primitive clay floor with its deposit of black earth accumulated, as Sir Sydney Smirke thought, by the strewing of rushes according to the custom of the three centuries since Rufus. This clearance of clay and black earth made the Purbeck stone floor some distance lower than the former floor.

He appears to have made all this complete, excepting a portion of the eastern tower, which his successor finished, so that the names of the two kings, Richard II. and Henry IV., have ever since been applied to these towers.

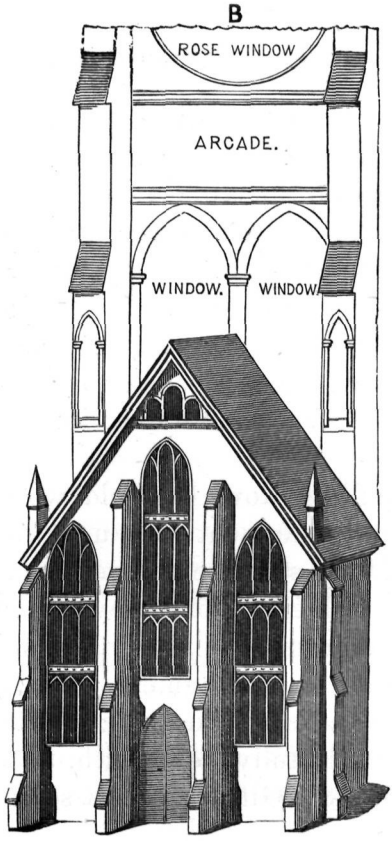
King Richard's quarrels and troubles culminated in his imprisonment in the Tower of London, where he made a formal renunciation of the throne, appointing as his successor Henry, Duke of Lancaster. On the next day, the last of September 1399, the two Houses of Parliament met in Westminster Hall, which King Richard had just before so lovingly restored, and by their vote confirmed his resignation and the appointment of King Henry IV. as his successor. His death in Pontefract Castle, where he was a prisoner, occurred in the following spring, and he was buried in Westminster Abbey, near the shrine of the Confessor, in the same tomb which he had made six years before for his wife, "the good Queen Anne" of Bohemia.

I may mention by the way that Richard II.'s love for Westminster Abbey is shown by several marks left there. None, perhaps, more important, (though so little known,) than the enclosing wall, full of lofty and wide windows which he built to protect from the destructive effects of weather the famous "Solomon's Porch" at the north side of the Abbey. After the exposure of nearly a century and a half this porch must, in its delicate and intricate work, have suffered so much that no protection could have been so suitable as that simple and capacious inclosure which we see in Hollar's north prospect. With so large an amount of bright light thereby admitted the splendour of the

porch was hardly abated, and the utmost possible amount of light seems to have been secured, as well as the utmost protection. In those days the phrase "dim religious light" had not been coined; and, even if it had been, there would not have been the mistake made, as in these days, of darkening so many churches and cathedrals, which has dimmed the architecture and spoiled the light so much needed for the Church service. The dim religious light of the evening ought not to prevail throughout bright daylight.

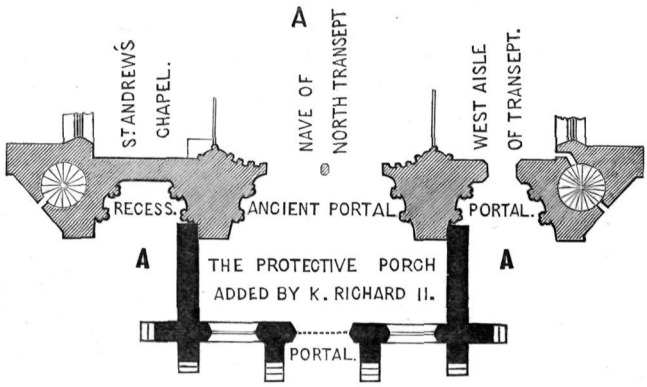
This protective building of King Richard's, shown in Dugdale's *Monasticon* or Dart's *Westminster*, north side of Abbey (and here annexed), was efficacious against external influences for perhaps 250 years; but in the same period the ravages of internal damp would have full force, as those who knew the Abbey before the heating apparatus was adopted can fully testify. The external decay of that long period would probably have so disintegrated the firestone, of which the not very substantial structure was composed, that its removal became necessary. The same period of internal decay from damp would have greatly injured the delicate work of the beautiful porch, so that when its protection was gone the whole became uncared-for by some, and despised by the multitude of that debased period, who, as iconoclasts, were much more disposed to mutilate and destroy such works than to preserve or replace them.

Under such circumstances Solomon's Porch was probably deprived of its beauties, and hammered away, so that when the next surveyors and architects came there was nothing for them to do but to smooth




PART OF KING HENRY III.'S NORTH TRANSEPT, BENEATH WHICH WAS SOLOMON'S PORCH.

KING RICHARD II.'S PROTECTIVE PORCH.




PLAN AND ELEVATION OF THE PORCH OF KING RICHARD II. ADDED BY HIM TO PROTECT KING HENRY III.'S PORCH, WHICH HAD DECAYED.

See Hollar's View in Dugdale's and Dart's works, and King's Plan in Dugdale's.

the mouldings and carvings away; thus all the refined characteristics were destroyed.

In this state it came into Sir Gilbert Scott's hands. His keen discernment and his great experience enabled him to discover the features which had appertained to such a porch as he had before him. He studiously sought in the ruined parts for some elements, and not without success, and then he proceeded to make the design which has been so successfully carried out by him.

In the course of pulling down the old work the utmost watchfulness and judgment were used to find ancient fragments. Many such were found, in every case confirming Sir Gilbert's fore-knowledge and design; in some cases determining a doubtful matter. There are several instances of fragments of ancient stonework being found *in situ* and in fair preservation; these have been faithfully dealt with, and can be seen, and will confirm Sir Gilbert's great solicitude and veneration.

# ADDENDA.

The illustration is introduced to show the Elizabethan building (referred to on page 466) which extended in an oblique direction from the line of the north end of the Great Hall. In it is shown the extreme north-west corner of Kent's Palladian front, against which is seen the gate of the judges' stables. Then follows a building having a roof with three gables; beyond and above them rises another gabled roof. Then comes the north turret of the Hall, and the north end of the main roof with its gable and pinnacle. Westward stands a long building, the Exchequer Office, which must have caused a deflection of St. Margaret's Lane, always crooked and narrow also, because that against St. Margaret's church was a long line of offices and houses that much contracted the public way.

In Noorthouck's *History of London*, 1773, there is noticeable a further confirmation of the then existence of low buildings only, westward of the Great Hall, in an engraving by Benjamin Green, showing the west front of St. Margaret's church, above the roof of which nearly the whole length of the roof of the Hall is seen.

Over the south aisle is seen the backs of the houses then attached to the east end of St. Margaret's church, over which rises the southern end of Kent's Palladian front; the only other object intervening being a small chimney east of the north aisle, except the tower and body of the church, of which the apex of the latter coincides with the ridge of the Hall.

In this engraving it is interesting to see the plain and rude porch which preceded the so-called Runic Porch yet remaining. And still more it is to see the remains of the Turret which by means of its winding-stairs led to the ancient Rood Loft, of which there remain inside of the church unquestionable vestiges. Beyond this turret is a low building of two stories, which was probably the residence of the Rector of former days.

Between the three-gabled buildings and the Exchequer offices there existed some irregular areas, one of which had acquired the name *Hell* (one of several other such quaint names of fiction which had long clung to various spots of the ancient buildings). Within one of those areas was noticeable an ancient pump known by the name *Hell Pump*, which remained in its place until about 1824, for that place fell in very nearly with the new line of pavement kerb which was placed in 1803 when *Hell* itself was destroyed; but the name was yet applied to the pump when, in 1824, Mr. Adam Lee, the *Labourer-in-Trust* of the Houses of Parliament, recounted to me his knowledge of the pump and its place.

The appellation *Labourer-in-Trust*, just quoted, applied to officers who superintended the works and the weekly returns of those works. When I first became conversant with the office of His Majesty's (King George III.'s) Works and Public Buildings, in 1819, Nash, Soane, and Smirke were the attached architects. Below them were five clerks of works, and then a third class of eleven *Labourers-in-Trust*. Some of the latter number had official residences. Adam Lee had for many years a snug residence in Cotton Garden. But Cotton Garden was cleared to accommodate the Italian witnesses, brought over by order of King George IV, to give evidence against Queen Caroline on the trial at the House of Lords; and then, if I rightly remember, Adam Lee removed to his own residence within two doors of the dialled house on New Palace Yard Terrace, the latter being the exact spot of the ancient Clock Tower, built in 1365, *temp.* Edward III. About the time of Adam Lee's removal, the *Labourers-in-Trust* became dubbed *Clerks of Works*, and so the quaint, ancient, and honourable title died out.

Pumps in those days were quite essential to a supply of water to compensate for the short comings of the Chelsea Waterworks, then hardly emerging from the infancy of wooden water-pipes. Many houses, and all stable yards, manufactories, and inns, had their pumps, and many public places also had pumps for general use. Hell pump became one of them. Near, in St. Margaret's

churchyard, by the Grosvenor tomb, was another. A third public pump was Broken Cross, so called, but I never saw the cross. It was situate towards the south-end of Princes Street, and was in use incessantly by a multitude of inhabitants and wayfarers. It seemed to have acquired a superstitious reverence, for I have seen paralytic and sprained limbs pumped upon early in the morning, with real or supposed curative results. There was a fourth public pump also equally busily in use in the middle of the Broadway.

The advance of the Chelsea Waterworks, the increasing impurities of the wells, and the nuisance of pumps in the thoroughfares, combined to bring pumps into disrepute, and so they became abandoned, and ultimately disappeared altogether.

HENRY POOLE.

16 *September*, 1884.