

NEWSTEAD ABBEY; THE CLAUGHTON WATERCOLOUR AND THE SÈVRES PLATE

by

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In our recent publication *Newstead Abbey, A Nottinghamshire Country House its Owners and Architectural History 1540–1931* we suggested that all the Gothick style additions made to the Abbey were built for the 5th Lord Byron between 1749 and 1770.¹ However, closer study of the evidence has revealed that this is not entirely true. In fact, though the bulk of these Gothick additions, such as Folly Castle and Kennels Castle, were undoubtedly built for the 5th Lord some smaller additions appear to have been made at a later date.

These later additions are shown in two paintings. Firstly, in the view of the west front of Newstead Abbey now known as the Claughton Watercolour

c.1815 (Plate 1) and secondly in one of the six Sèvres Plates painted by Maria Wildman showing a similar view of the Abbey in 1818 (Plate 2).² Both these images show the west gable of the service wing with a steep crow-stepped gable topped with a cross finial and containing what appears to be a large pointed-arched window with elaborate tracery plus a number of smaller windows (Plates 4 and 5). They also show battlements added to the unusual curved forecourt walls built originally in the early 18th century. Neither of these features appears on any of the early views of the Abbey including the large number of drawings and watercolours by Samuel Hieronymus Grimm dating from around 1773.

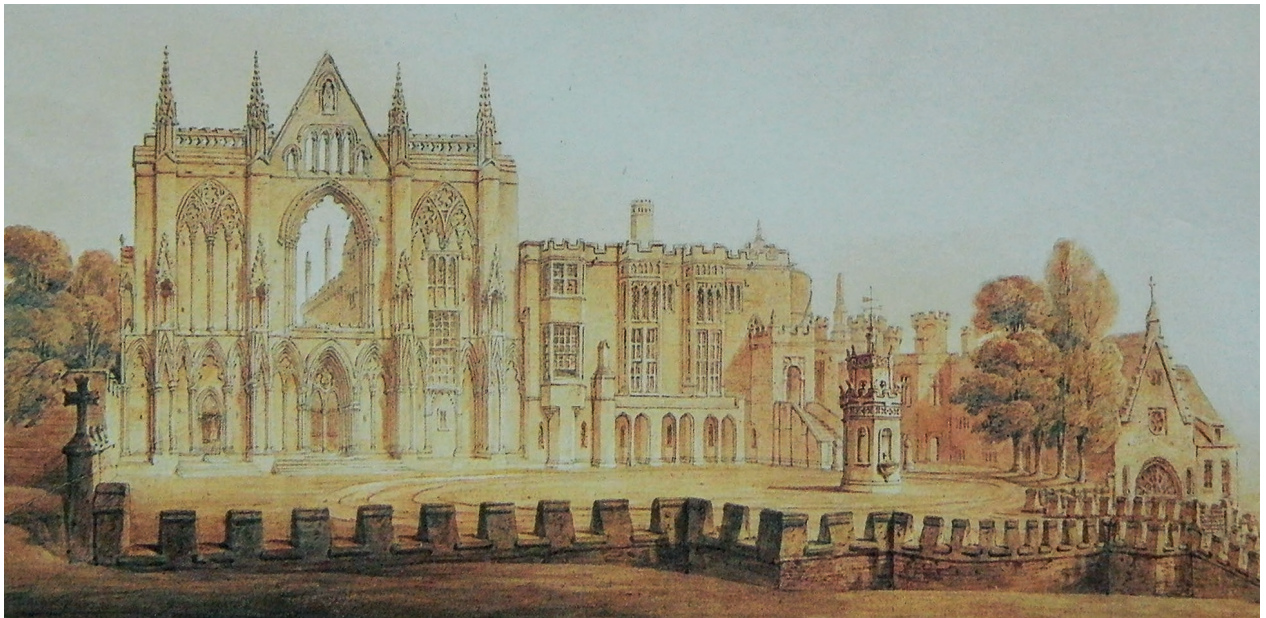


PLATE 1. The Claughton Watercolour, showing the west front of Newstead Abbey c.1815.
Nottingham City Museums and Galleries (NCMG/NA)



PLATE 2: Maria Wildman. The Sèvres Plate painted with a view of the west front of Newstead Abbey as it was 1818. (NCMG/NA)

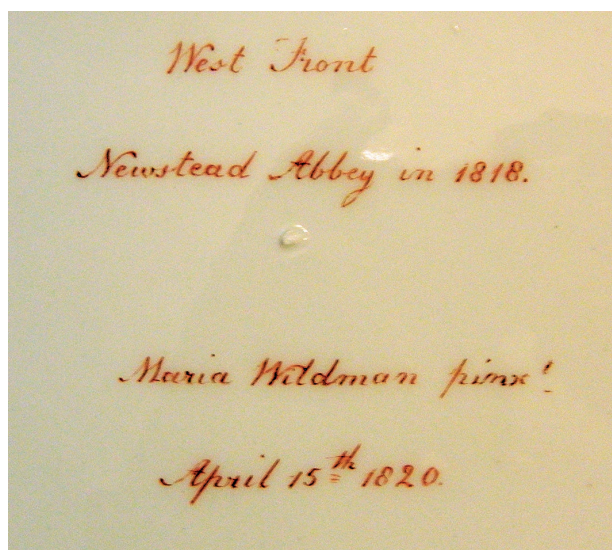


PLATE 3. Maria Wildman. The inscription on the reverse of the Sèvres Plate. (NCMG/NA)

In fact, only four of the known early views of Newstead Abbey show the gabled west end of the service wing and they all confirm that originally it had a plain, steep and slightly irregular gable with a small upper floor window.³ This is most clearly

seen in Peter Tillemans' drawing of 1724.⁴ (Plate 6) Similarly the battlements on the curved forecourt walls are not seen in any of the early images of the west front of the Abbey by Tillemans or by Grimm, nor are they shown in two engravings published later in the 18th century. Though both engravings were taken from drawings made earlier and their date cannot be relied upon.⁵ Neither of these engravings shows the gable to the service wing.

The service wing was radically altered by the architect John Shaw for the Abbey's new owner Colonel Wildman from 1819 onwards and the resulting changes are recorded in two sketches by Thomas Wildman dating from the 1860s and at least two photographs from c.1890.⁶ (Plate 8) They show a far less steep crow-stepped gable and a small two-light upper floor window.⁷ The service wing was again altered, even more drastically, in around 1899 probably by the architect John Morley. This is the wing which survives today.⁸

The only corroborative evidence which confirms the existence of these Gothic additions appears on John Shaw's plan of proposed alterations to Newstead Abbey dated 1818.⁹ A detail of this plan



PLATE 4. Detail of the Cloughton Watercolour showing the west end of the service wing with its steep crow-stepped gable and large pointed-arched window c.1815. (NCMG/NA)

(Plate 9) shows the then existing service wing with a number of proposed alterations high-lighted in black ink. It shows a large pre-existing four-light window in the west gable of the service wing at ground floor level which would appear to be the pointed-arched window shown in the Cloughton Watercolour and on Maria Wildman's Sèvres Plate. The other pre-existing window openings shown on this plan, a series of two-light and three-light windows on the north front, appear to be confirmed by the limited and largely obscured views known of this front.¹⁰ There was certainly no four-light window in this gable shown in any of the pre-1800 illustrations (Plates 6 and 7) and it was most definitely removed by Shaw as can be seen in a plan of the house taken after his alterations were completed (Plate 10) and in the later views (Plate 8).¹¹

From all this evidence we can deduce that the steep crow-stepped gable with its large pointed-



PLATE 5. Maria Wildman. Detail of the Sèvres plate showing the west end of the service wing in 1818. (NCMG/NA)



PLATE 6. Peter Tillemans. The west front of the service wing, 1724. (NCMG/NA)



PLATE 7. Samuel Hieronymus Grimm. The west front of the service wing, c.1773. (NCMG/NA)



PLATE 8. A photograph of c.1890 showing of the west end of the service wing as altered by John Shaw from 1819. (NCMG/NA)

arch window and the battlements to the forecourt walls shown in the Claughton Watercolour and in Maria Wildman's Sèvres plate can only have existed between c.1773 and 1819 when Shaw began his remodelling. Since the 5th Lord Byron was in serious financial difficulties, selling off property from 1772, it seems most unlikely that he was responsible for any constructive alterations to the Abbey between this date and his death in 1798.¹² After this, during the 6th Lord Byron's minority, the house, reputedly in a somewhat ruined state, was let first to a Miss Launders 1802–03 and then to Lord Grey 1803–08, neither of whom is recorded as having carried out any building works.

This analysis therefore suggests that these Gothick style alterations must have been commissioned by the 6th Lord Byron after September 1808 (when Lord Grey moved out) and prior to June 1809 when he left for the continent. The 6th Lord Byron is known to have made a number of the internal alterations to the Abbey at this time. 'Rendering the mansion habitable' so that the house was 'filled with workmen and undergoing a thorough repair' as he, himself, put it; though he makes no specific mention in his letters and journals of any external additions or alterations.¹³

All the evidence examined here means that we were wrong to include the west gable front to the service wing and the battlements to the forecourt

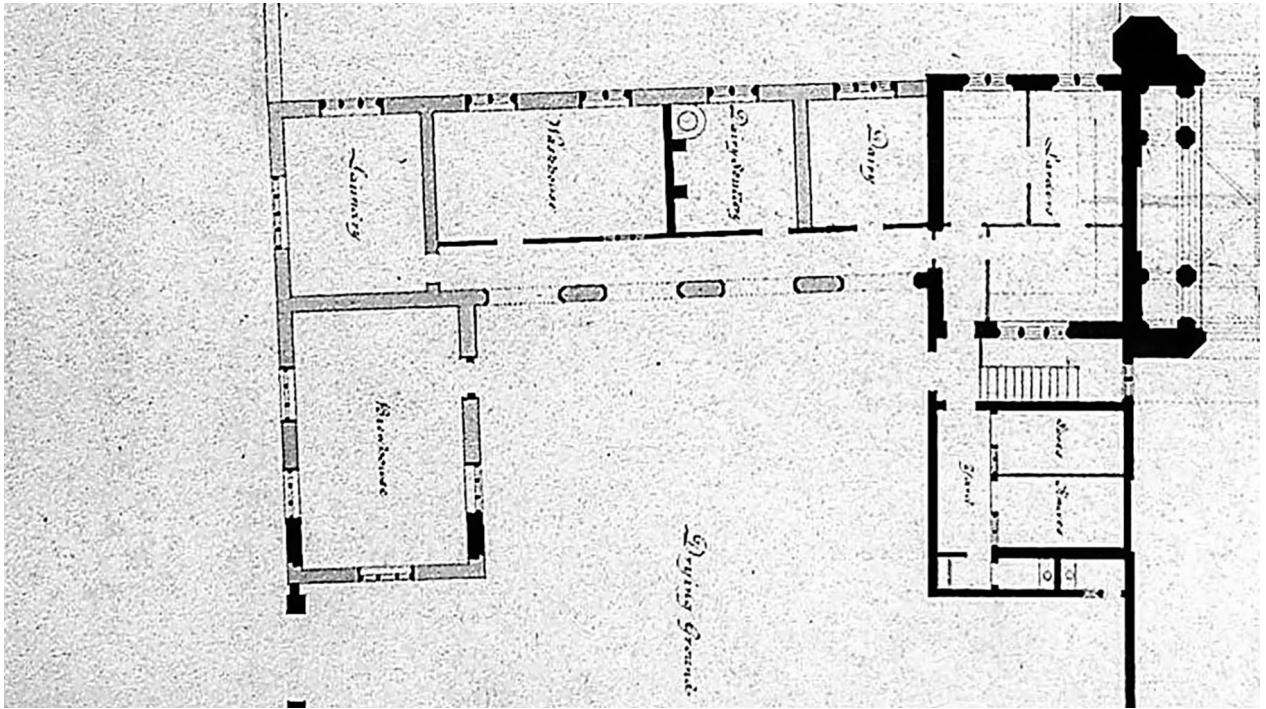


PLATE 9. John Shaw. Ground floor plan of service wing with his proposals high-lighted in black ink, 1818. The four-light window in the west gable is visible at the top left. (NCMG/NA)

walls as part of the Gothick style alterations made by the 5th Lord Byron as stated in Chapter 5 of our book. If the Claughton Watercolour and Maria Wildman's Sèvres Plate are true representations of Newstead Abbey as it existed in 1812 and 1818 respectively, as now seems likely, then these features

must have been commissioned by the 6th Lord Byron in 1808–09. The addition of such theatrical and cosmetic additions to his newly acquired seat would have attuned well with the young poet's romantic ideas about his newly acquired ancestral seat of Newstead Abbey.

REFERENCES

- 1 Rosalys Coope and Pete Smith, *Newstead Abbey, A Nottinghamshire Country House its Owners and Architectural History 1540–1931*, Thoroton Society Record Series, Vol. 48, (2014) 61–85.
- 2 Nottingham City Museums and Galleries/Newstead Abbey (hereafter NCMG/NA), NA 803. Coope and Smith, plate 66. The Claughton Watercolour was gifted to Newstead Abbey by Mrs Winnifred Whittington, the grand-daughter of Thomas Claughton, in the 1959. Thomas Claughton offered to purchase Newstead Abbey from the 6th Lord Byron in August 1812 and it seems probable that he was given this picture of the Abbey by the 6th Lord as an enticement or sweetener at that time. As this sale fell through in 1815 it seems most unlikely that it dates from after this date. NCMG/NA 2009–105/1–6. The six Sèvres Plates painted by Maria Wildman were acquired with the assistance of the Arts Fund and with a transport grant from M.O.N.K.S. by Nottingham City Museums and Galleries in 2009. They are each clearly identified, signed and dated on the reverse. The plate referred to here (NCMG/NA 2009–106/5) is not only inscribed with the artist's name and the date it was painted, 'Maria Wildman pinx' April 15th 1820', it also specifically states that it shows the 'West Front Newstead Abbey in 1818'. This suggests that it shows the Abbey as it had been, intimating that it no longer looked like this, which is almost certain as John Shaw would have begun his alterations by April 1820.
- 3 The service wing probably survived in part from the later years of its monastic usage though it was altered in the sixteenth century. It appears from the few, often

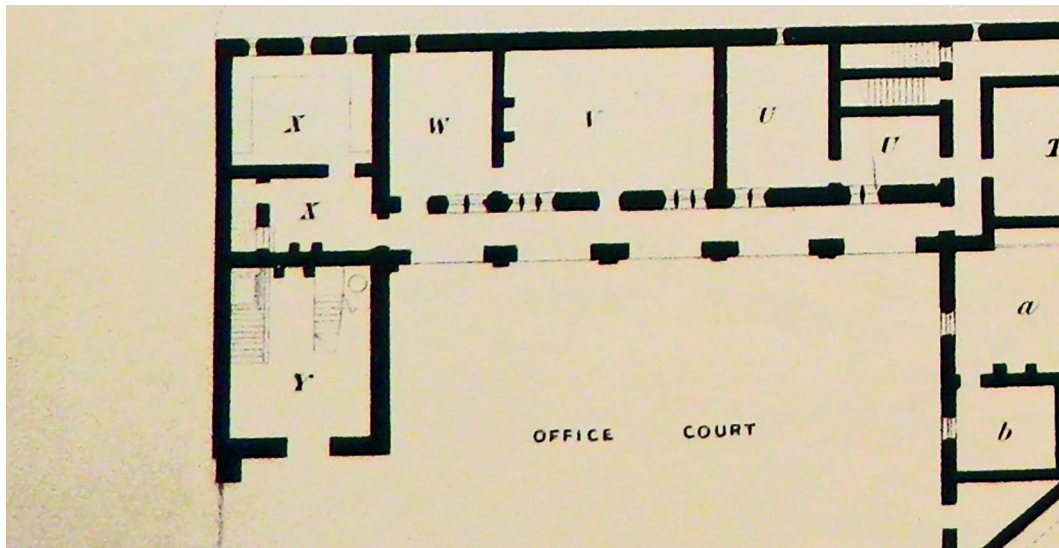


PLATE 10. Ground plan of the service wing c.1860. No windows are shown on the west gable. (NCMG/NA)

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| <p>partially obscured, views of this wing that it consisted of a two part, two-storey wing with a short single storey range attached at right angles to the south.</p> <p>4 NCMG/NA 23/2. The Tillemans drawing shows a door and a prominent buttress not seen on later views. The gable is also seen in Thomas Stothard's copy of an earlier view probably dateable to the 1760s, and in two drawings by Grimm from c.1773. BL, Add M 15544/82, Coope & Smith, Plates 50 and 58.</p> <p>5 The engraving of the West Front of the Abbey published in 1779 by G Kearsly, was taken after a drawing by Paul Sandby of unknown date, and the engraving of the West Front published in 1793 by J C Barrow is inscribed 'drawn from a correct sketch taken upon the spot by the late Frederick Byron' of a similarly unknown date.</p> <p>6 NCMG/NA 1086. Webb family photograph album c.1890.</p> | <p>7</p> <p>8</p> <p>9</p> <p>10</p> <p>11</p> <p>12</p> <p>13</p> | <p>It appears that John Shaw heightened the side walls of the upper floor of the service wing giving the roof and gable a much less steep pitch.</p> <p>Coope and Smith, plate 105.</p> <p>NCMG/NA 867. Coope and Smith, plates 80 and 81.</p> <p>A row of trees were planted in front of the north front of the service wing in order to hide it from view. The Buck engraving and the large painting by Tillemans and Byron show a series of two-light and three-light windows on the north front of this range. Coope and Smith, plates 26 and 31.</p> <p>NCMG/NA 992/6.</p> <p>Coope and Smith, 81–83.</p> <p>L A Marchand, <i>Byron's Journals and Letters</i> (1973), 1, 171.</p> |
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