

“A palace within a Palace”: the Speaker’s House at Westminster, 1794 to 1834

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Abstract

The thesis provides the first detailed study of the original Speaker's House within the Palace of Westminster. In 1794, the Speaker of the House of Commons appropriated a large mansion which stood immediately adjacent to the Commons chamber. During 1802–08 the house was extensively remodelled by James Wyatt. It remained the official residence of the Speaker until 1834, when the old Palace of Westminster was effectively destroyed by fire.

This interdisciplinary thesis will explore the history of the house from both political and architectural perspectives. It will examine how successive Speakers used the house to support their political role, with particular emphasis on its vital part in their hospitality and sociability, both official and unofficial. It will also explain how successive Speakers used the increased prestige of their office to support their personal ambitions for social advancement. It argues that the Speaker's House helped the Speaker to consolidate their position as the symbolic figurehead of the House of Commons.

Architecturally, this thesis will concentrate on Wyatt's decision—which was fully embraced by his patron, Speaker Abbot—to adopt a Gothic style for his alterations. It will consider the reasons for his choice, and the long-term impact of his work. It will also consider the Speaker's House in relation to contemporary debates about architectural conservation, for which the Palace of Westminster was a significant flashpoint. This thesis presents the Speaker's House as a case study of changing attitudes to architectural style and conservation in early nineteenth-century Britain. It argues that Wyatt's interventions changed the architectural destiny of the old palace, creating a newfound sense that Gothic was the 'proper' style both for the Palace of Westminster as a complex of buildings, and for Parliament as an institution. This newfound sensibility ultimately determined the design of the present Palace of Westminster.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author. I gratefully acknowledge that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Elizabeth Hallam Smith generously supplied digital copies of various documents from the National Archives, the Parliamentary Archives and Westminster City Archives, as a means to mitigate the impact of archive closures. Where I found any ambiguities or omissions in these digital copies, I returned to the archives to view the original documents for myself, when it became possible to do so. All the interpretations I have placed on this material are my own.

This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

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I owe a substantial debt to the many academics and experts who have advised and supported me over the last three-and-a-half years. Most importantly, I must thank my supervisor, Prof. Anthony Geraghty, who has guided me with patience and wisdom throughout the project. As members of my Thesis Advisory Panel, Dr John Cooper and Dr Elizabeth Hallam Smith have also offered considerable advice and support. I must particularly thank Liz for supplying advance copies of her various publications, as well as digital copies of several primary sources which she has discovered during her own research. It is no exaggeration to say that, without her help, the closure of archives during the pandemic would probably have brought this project to a halt. Dr Mark Collins of the Parliamentary Estates Department has also been generous with both advice and practical help, particularly in facilitating access to the cloisters, the undercroft, and the present Speaker's House. I am also grateful for the support and insights I have received from various members of the St Stephen's Chapel Project team, particularly Prof. Tim Ayers and Dr Elizabeth Biggs. I must also express my thanks to my fellow postgraduate researcher, Kirsty Wright, who has shared many insights from her parallel research project on the Auditor's House.

I am equally indebted to the hard-working staff of the numerous archives and libraries I have visited over the course of this project, particularly The National Archives, The British Library, The Parliamentary Archives, the Devon Heritage Centre, and the Gloucestershire Archives. I am especially grateful to the numerous staff at the UK Parliament who have responded to my various enquiries, including Katy Barrett, Ciara Costello, Lily Hosking, Mary-Jane Tsang and Melanie Unwin. Sue Palmer and Frances Sands of Sir John Soane's Museum have also been particularly helpful in facilitating access to the vast collection of Westminster drawings from Soane's office.

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On a personal level, I owe an enormous debt to all my friends and family for their emotional and practical support. They are far too numerous to name individually, but I am genuinely grateful to them all. If there is anybody I have inadvertently overlooked, I offer my sincere apologies, and I can assure them that I am sincerely grateful for their help.

Above all, I must thank my parents: this project could never have been completed without their unfailing love and support. I dedicate this thesis to them.

Introduction

Monday 20th [June, 1814].... Upon my return—I found the Emperor and Grand Duchess in the Gallery of my house—the Emperor took me by the hand and made fine speeches. Wilberforce took his coffee with us—whilst we dined below upon the preparations made for the Royal Visitors.¹

It is a remarkably understated diary entry. Most people would be astonished if they came home from work to find the Tsar of Russia on their landing; still more so if one of the most famous MPs of the day then dropped by for a cup of coffee. Yet for Charles Abbot MP, Speaker of the House of Commons 1802–17, episodes like this were—quite literally—all in a day’s work. In June 1814, the Allied sovereigns had gathered in London to celebrate—prematurely, as it turned out—the end of the Napoleonic wars.² It was probably no surprise to Abbot that some of these royal visitors—Tsar Alexander I (r. 1801–25), his sister the Grand Duchess Catherine Pavlovna (1788–1819), and King Frederick William III of Prussia (r. 1797–40)—decided to visit the House of Commons and witness the spectacle of a parliamentary debate.³ When one realises that the Speaker’s House was literally next door to the Commons, it becomes less surprising that Abbot found the Tsar waiting for him when he came home. All the same, the Speaker’s terse diary entry fails to convey just how momentous this meeting must have been for him on a personal level. Unlike so many of his political contemporaries, Abbot was not a scion of an aristocratic family: he was the son of an obscure clergyman and a draper’s daughter. It would be stretching a point to say that his was a rags-to-riches story: he had had a respectable education at Westminster School and Christ Church, Oxford, before being called to the Bar at the Middle Temple.⁴ This achievement was followed by a lucrative legal career.⁵ Nevertheless, it must be remembered that Britain had a rigid class hierarchy in the long eighteenth century; even relatively wealthy middle-class individuals often found social advancement difficult.⁶ If Abbot, during his boyhood, had seriously imagined that he would one day be shaking hands with emperors, then he would have been an unusually ambitious—and optimistic—little boy. His meeting

¹ London: The National Archives (TNA) PRO 30/9/35, Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester: papers, Journal, with interpolated correspondence etc., 1811–15, f. 378.

² E. A. Smith, *George IV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 148–53.

³ PRO 30/9/35, f. 378. Unless otherwise stated, the birth and death dates of all individuals referred to in this thesis (and the regnal dates of monarchs) have been taken from the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter *ODNB*), <https://www-oxforddnb-com>; or, for foreign nationals, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/>. [Both accessed 05/09/2023.]

⁴ C. Wilkinson, “Abbot, Charles, first Baron Colchester”, *ODNB* (2008), <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref/odnb/3> [accessed 05/10/2022].

⁵ *Ibid*, n. p.

⁶ R. Porter, “English Society in the Eighteenth Century”, reprinted in F. Fernández-Armesto (ed.), *England in the Eighteenth Century* (London: The Folio Society, 1998), p. 52.

with Alexander I was made possible by virtue of the office he held. The Speakership gave Abbot a position of political importance and social prestige, in which meetings with royalty were not merely possible, but expected. Moreover, the office of Speaker afforded Abbot a fitting venue in which to host such meetings. Twenty years before the Tsar's visit, Abbot's predecessor as Speaker, Henry Addington (in office 1794–1801), had appropriated a large mansion immediately adjacent to the House of Commons. This gave the Speaker an official residence for the first time, and successive Speakers continued to live in this house until the old Palace of Westminster was ravaged by fire in October 1834.

Besides Alexander and Catherine, many other royals and nobles crossed the threshold of the Speaker's House during this forty-year period. Yet the house was not just a venue for grand state occasions: it was also a family home and a place for entertaining close friends. Hence, the visit of William Wilberforce (1759–1833), veteran MP and abolitionist leader, seemed no more remarkable to Abbot than that of the Tsar. Indeed, Wilberforce was a near-neighbour of the Abbots, having leased a house in Old Palace Yard; and, since he was famously hospitable to fellow MPs, Abbot would surely have had no hesitation in returning the favour.⁷ Indeed, Addington had also played host to Wilberforce at the Speaker's House during the 1790s.⁸

Abbot was a meticulous record-keeper. His diaries contain an extraordinary daily record of everybody who visited or called on him at the Speaker's House, whether socially or on business, throughout most of his fifteen-year tenure. Understandably, these diary entries are usually brief, often recording no more than the name of the caller; but the Tsar merited a more descriptive entry. Nevertheless, on this occasion Abbot provides no description of the building in which their encounter took place. By 1814, he had been living at the Speaker's House for twelve years; it had thus become an everyday sight, requiring no special comment. However, twenty-first-century readers might not have the contextual knowledge of the old Palace of Westminster which Abbot took for granted. The space which he describes merely as "the Gallery of my house" was, in fact, the upper storey of St Stephen's Cloisters, an exquisite example of Perpendicular Gothic architecture dating back to the reign of Henry VIII. Indeed, one contemporary antiquary—John Carter (1748–1819), who will figure prominently in this thesis—described the cloisters as "the most beautiful

⁷ A. Wright and P. Smith, *Parliament Past and Present: A Popular and Picturesque Account of a Thousand Years in the Palace of Westminster, the Home of the Mother of Parliaments*, vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson & Co., c. 1902), pp. 69–70.

⁸ R.I. Wilberforce and S. Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, vol. 2 (London: Seeley, Burnside and Seeley, 1838), p. 140. Abbot mentions in his diary (PRO 30/9/35, f. 378) that a debate on the slave trade had originally been scheduled for that day, but was cancelled due to Lord Castlereagh being ill.

specimen of Gothic architecture which this country has to boast of".⁹ Even more remarkable is the fact that—despite the ravages of the 1834 fire, and the sweeping rebuilding programme that followed—these cloisters still survive. Hemmed in between Westminster Hall, St Stephen's Hall, and the new House of Commons buildings, they are invisible from outside the palace; and, since they have never been opened to the general public, most visitors to Westminster remain unaware of their presence. In recent decades they have been used as offices, but in the late 2010s they were cleared to facilitate restoration works (Fig. I.1).¹⁰ Unfortunately, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this work; it is not yet clear when it will be completed, nor what use the cloisters will eventually be put to.

⁹ J. Carter, *Specimens of the Ancient Sculpture and Painting*, vol. 2 (London: J. Carter, 1780), pp. 28–29.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Hallam Smith, "The "Gothic Slum": MPs and St Stephen's Cloister, Westminster, 1548–2018", *Parliamentary History* 41:2 (2022), pp. 279–302.



Fig. I.1: St Stephen's Cloister (lower west walk), Palace of Westminster, photographed in 2021. © UK Parliament/Estates Archive.

The cloisters might fairly be described as the jewel in the crown of the Speaker’s House, but they were not its only remarkable feature. The house also incorporated part of the medieval undercroft of St Stephen’s Chapel. Following the Reformation, the upper storey of the chapel had been converted to serve as the House of Commons’ debating chamber. The ground-level undercroft was subsequently put to a variety of uses but, during the Speaker’s occupation of the cloister house, its eastern end served as his State Dining Room. Indeed, it may have been in this space that the “preparations for the royal visitors” were laid out on the day of the Tsar’s visit. Like the cloisters, this undercroft survives: it was restored in the nineteenth century as a chapel for both Houses of Parliament (Fig. 1.2).¹¹



Fig. 1.2: the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft, Westminster. © UK Parliament/Estates Archive.

The Speaker’s House was not just an assemblage of historic structures: it also contained more modern elements. In 1802, Abbot instigated a major reconstruction of the entire house, which saw much of its existing fabric pulled down and replaced. The architect in charge of this project was James Wyatt (1746–1813). Today, his name might not be immediately familiar, except to specialists in Georgian architecture; but to Abbot and his contemporaries, he would have needed no introduction. Wyatt was undoubtedly the most fashionable and sought-after architect of late

¹¹ E. Hallam Smith, “St Mary Undercroft, 1548–1870: “a dull sort of ecclesiastical lumber-room?” (forthcoming).

eighteenth-century Britain, and the personal favourite of King George III (r. 1760–1820).¹² In 1796, Wyatt's status was cemented by his appointment to the highly-prestigious office of surveyor-general and comptroller of the King's works.¹³ Previous surveyor-generals had included such architectural titans as Inigo Jones (1573–1652; in office 1615–43) and Sir Christopher Wren (1632–1723; in office 1669–1718).¹⁴ In the King's own words, Wyatt's appointment recognised his status as "the first Architect of the Kingdom".¹⁵ Perhaps Wyatt's greatest gift was his stylistic versatility. He began his career as a neoclassicist, and proved himself equally capable of imitating both the highly-decorative Adam style, and the more restrained manner of Sir William Chambers (1723–96; surveyor-general and comptroller 1782–96).¹⁶ However, in his later years Wyatt became increasingly interested in Gothic architecture, and it was this style which he adopted for his work at Westminster.¹⁷ The significance of this choice will be one of the major themes of this thesis. Given the historical and architectural interest of its fabric, and its connection to such an illustrious architect as Wyatt, it is doubly surprising that the old Speaker's House is now all but unknown beyond a tiny handful of political and architectural historians. This thesis will attempt to tell the story of this house and, more importantly, to demonstrate its significance within wider histories of politics and architecture in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain.

Literature review

The Speaker's House sits at the intersection of several political and architectural subjects which have all been comparatively neglected by historians. Firstly, there is the Speakership itself. Arguably, Philip Laundy's *The Office of Speaker* (1964) is, to date, the only attempt at a comprehensive history of the office, as opposed to the individual office-holders.¹⁸ James Alexander Manning's *The Lives of the Speakers of the House of Commons* (1850) and Arthur Irwin Dasent's *The Speakers of the House of Commons* (1911) have a principally biographical focus.¹⁹ Edward Lummis's *The Speaker's Chair* (1900) is a lightweight work, essentially anecdotal rather than historical.²⁰ There has been more interest in the Speaker in relation to House of Commons procedure: contemporary manuals of

¹² J. M. Robinson, *James Wyatt: Architect to George III* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 37, 247.

¹³ H. M. Colvin (ed.), *The History of the King's Works, Vol. VI: 1782–1851* (London: HMSO, 1973), p.47.

¹⁴ H. M. Colvin (ed.), *The History of the King's Works, Vol. III: 1485–1660 (Part I)* (London: HMSO, 1975), p. 406; and *Vol. V: 1660–1782* (London: HMSO, 1976), p. 469.

¹⁵ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, p. 257.

¹⁶ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 39–43; Colvin, *King's Works* 6, p. 673.

¹⁷ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 219–47.

¹⁸ P. Laundy, *The Office of Speaker* (London: Cassell, 1964).

¹⁹ J. A. Manning, *The Lives of the Speakers of the House of Commons* (London: E. Churton, 1850); A. I. Dasent, *The Speakers of the House of Commons* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1911).

²⁰ E. Lummis, *The Speaker's Chair* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900).

procedure, particularly John Hatsell's *Precedents of the Proceedings in the House of Commons* (1785) and the first edition of Erskine May (1844) contain many valuable insights. Edward Porritt's *The Unreformed House of Commons* (1903) considers the Speakership in the context of the wider history of the House of Commons up to 1834.²¹ Peter Thomas's *The House of Commons in the Eighteenth Century* (1971) gives a much more up-to-date analysis of the Speakership from a procedural and political-historical point of view; yet, curiously, it largely neglects Addington and his successors.²² In 2010, the journal *Parliamentary History* published a special issue entitled *Speakers and the Speakership*.²³ This provided some useful case studies, but again, it largely neglected the specific Speakers—Addington, Mitford, Abbot and Manners-Sutton—with whom this thesis is principally concerned. In 2013 Matthew Laban published *Mr Speaker: the Office and the Individuals since 1945*. As its title suggests, this book focuses primarily on the recent history of the role, but it provides a useful overview of the present-day duties and expectations of the office.²⁴ Nevertheless, all these works have largely failed to address the Speaker's duties outside the Chair of the House of Commons except in regard to very recent decades. In particular, there has been little discussion of the Speaker's oversight of the Commons' administrative staff, and the pastoral responsibilities associated with this. Moreover, none of these works has addressed the social history of the Speakership in any depth. There are significant gaps in our knowledge of the Speaker's official social functions, particularly his levées and parliamentary dinners. Even less attention has been paid to successive Speakers' informal social interactions with other politicians.

The latter problem is compounded by the notable shortage of biographies for the Speakers of our time period. This thesis is primarily concerned with four Speakers: in addition to Addington and Abbot, these are Sir John Mitford (in office 1801–02) and Charles Manners-Sutton (in office 1817–35). A three-volume *Life and Correspondence* of Addington was published by his son-in-law, George Pellet, in 1847.²⁵ This was followed by an edited version of Abbot's *Diary and Correspondence*, published by his eldest son in 1861.²⁶ Since then, the only stand-alone biography to appear has been Philip Ziegler's work on Addington (published 1965).²⁷ The *Oxford Dictionary of*

²¹ E. Porritt, *The Unreformed House of Commons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), pp. 445–88.

²² P. D. G. Thomas, *The House of Commons in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

²³ P. Seward (ed.), "Speakers and the Speakership: Presiding Officers and the Management of Business from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century", special issue *Parliamentary History* 29:1 (2010).

²⁴ M. Laban, *Mr Speaker: the Office and the Individuals Since 1945* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2013).

²⁵ G. Pellet, *The Life and Correspondence of Henry Addington, First Viscount Sidmouth*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1847).

²⁶ Charles Abbot, 2nd Baron Colchester (ed.), *The Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot, Lord Colchester, Speaker of the House of Commons 1802–1817*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1861).

²⁷ P. Ziegler, *Addington: A Life of Henry Addington, First Viscount Sidmouth* (London: Collins, 1965).

National Biography provides entries for all four Speakers, but these are relatively brief.²⁸ The relevant volumes of the *History of Parliament* provide detailed entries for all four individuals, but their focus is principally on their activities within the House of Commons, rather than their personal lives.²⁹

Fortunately, there is a substantial body of eighteenth-century social history which can provide context for the social aspects of the Speaker's role. As hinted above, one topic this thesis will explore is the exploitation of the Speakership as an aid to social mobility. Roy Porter's *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1982) arguably remains the clearest exposition of Britain's social hierarchy, and the barriers to social mobility, in this era.³⁰ Penelope Corfield's *Power and the Professions in Britain* (1995) provides a case study of the social status of lawyers in the long eighteenth century; this is relevant because all the Speakers of this era began their careers in the legal profession.³¹ Hannah Greig's *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (2013) provides a particularly good introduction to Georgian Britain's metropolitan elite: in other words, precisely the social group that middle-class Speakers like Addington and Abbot were attempting to break into.³² To date, however, the role of politics in social mobility during the long eighteenth century has received relatively little attention. This thesis therefore presents the office of Speaker during the late Georgian era as a case study.

Another relatively neglected aspect of the Speaker's role is their administrative responsibilities within the House of Commons. Some work has been done on the administrative and housekeeping staff of the Houses of Parliament during the period of this thesis, including Orlo

²⁸ Individual articles are as follows: J. E. Cookson, "Addington, Henry, first Viscount Sidmouth (1757–1844)" (2009), <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/150>; D. S. Greer, "Mitford, John Freeman-, first Baron Redesdale (1748–1830)" (2008), <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/18857>; Wilkinson, "Abbot, Charles" (op. cit.); W. M. Jacob, "Sutton, Charles Manners- (1755–1828)" (2006), <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/17964>. [All accessed 29/09/2022.]

²⁹ The most important entries are those from the 1790–1820 volume, as follows: "ADDINGTON, Henry (1757–1844), of Woodley, nr. Reading, Berks. and White Lodge, Richmond Park, Surr.", <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/addington-henry-1757-1844>; 'MITFORD, John (1748–1830), of Lincoln's Inn, Mdx. and Batsford Park, Glos.', <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/mitford-john-1748-1830>; "ABBOT, Charles (1757–1829), of Kidbrook, Suss.", <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/abbot-charles-1757-1829>; "MANNERS SUTTON, Charles (1780–1845), of Lincoln's Inn, Mdx.", <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/manners-sutton-charles-1780-1845>. For Addington's early career see his entry in the 1754–90 volume: <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/addington-henry-1757-1844>. For Charles Manners-Sutton's later career see his entry in the 1820–32 volume: <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/manners-sutton-charles-1780-1845>. [All accessed 29/09/2022.]

³⁰ Porter, "English Society in the Eighteenth Century", pp. 49v93.

³¹ P. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 70v94.

³² H. Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Williams's book on the clerical organisation of the House of Commons (1954) and Sir John Sainty's article on the serjeant-at-arms' staff (2006).³³ However, the Speaker's relationships with these officials—whether formal working relationships, or informal social ones—remain largely unexplored.

Turning to the architectural side of this thesis, there is already a large body of work covering the old Palace of Westminster. Above all there is the magisterial *History of the King's Works*, edited by Howard Colvin and published between 1963 and 1982. Volume six (1782–1851), co-authored with J. Mordaunt Crook and M. H. Port, is the most relevant to this thesis.³⁴ Other general sources for the old Palace include Orlo Williams's monograph *The Topography of the Old House of Commons* (1953); the introductory surveys to the relevant volumes of the *History of Parliament*; and Mark Collins's article for the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*.³⁵ However, some aspects of the old Palace have been researched more thoroughly than others. In particular, St Stephen's Chapel has been very thoroughly researched thanks to the recent St Stephen's Chapel Project (UK Parliament/University of York). This work still awaits publication at the time of submitting this thesis, but the author has had access to advance copies of the most relevant essays, particularly Elizabeth Hallam Smith's work on St Stephen's cloisters and the chapel undercroft. The pre-Reformation history of St Stephen's College has been covered by Elizabeth Biggs's book.³⁶ Kirsty Wright's ongoing PhD project will address the history of the St Stephen's buildings from the dissolution of the college until their appropriation by the Speaker in 1794; she has already published some information through the *Virtual St Stephens* blog.³⁷ These works provide many useful details about some of the individual buildings which made up the Speaker's House; but there remains scope for a more detailed history of the house as an entity. To date, there have been very few works devoted specifically to the Speaker's House. Such literature as is available generally focuses on the present, post-1834 house rather than its Georgian predecessor. Arthur Oswald described the 'new' house in

³³ O. C. Williams, *The Clerical Organisation of the House of Commons, 1661–1854* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954); J. C. Sainty, "The Subordinate Staff of the Serjeant at Arms, 1660–1850", *Parliamentary History* 25:3 (2006).

³⁴ Colvin, *King's Works* VI (op. cit.). For the old Palace of Westminster see pp. 496–537.

³⁵ O. C. Williams, *The Topography of the Old House of Commons* (unpublished monograph, 1953); M. Collins, "The Topography of the Old Palace of Westminster, 1510–1834", in W. Rodwell and T. Tatton-Brown (eds.), *Westminster Part II: The Art, Architecture and Archaeology of the Royal Palace* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 210–44. The most relevant volumes of the *History of Parliament* are 1790–1820 by R. G. Thorne (<https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/research/surveys/surveys1790-1820>, 1986); and 1820–32 by D. G. Fisher (<https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/research/surveys/surveys-1820-1832>, 2009). [Both accessed 06/10/2022.]

³⁶ E. Biggs, *St Stephen's College, Westminster: A Royal Chapel and English Kingship, 1348–1548* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2020).

³⁷ K. Wright, *St Stephen's College and the Palace of Westminster, 1554–1698: Politics, Patronage and Space* (PhD thesis, University of York, forthcoming). For the VSS blog see <https://www.virtualststephens.org.uk/blog> [accessed 19/10/2022].

an article for *Country Life* in 1951.³⁸ This was followed by Alexandra Wedgwood's official guidebook, which appeared in 1994.³⁹ Colvin provided a very brief history of the old house in the *King's Works*; while its ultimate fate was described in Caroline Shenton's micro-history of the 1834 fire.⁴⁰ Christine Riding's and Jacqueline Riding's *The Houses of Parliament: History, Art, Architecture* (2000) includes a brief overview of both the old and new houses.⁴¹ Other recent works have honed in on particular aspects of the old house. In 2003, Hugh Roberts wrote an article on the Gothic furniture Wyatt designed for the house (discussed in Chapter Two).⁴² Then in 2019, Stephen Daniels published his research on Humphrey Repton's remodelling of the Speaker's Garden.⁴³ These works have made useful contributions to our knowledge of the house, but there is still a clear need for a comprehensive history.

Several architects worked at the Palace of Westminster over the years, and most of them have been well-researched by historians. Caroline Shenton's history of the construction of the new palace (2016) explores the respective contributions of Sir Charles Barry (1795–1860) and A. W. N. Pugin (1812–52).⁴⁴ The latter has also benefitted from an excellent biography by Rosemary Hill.⁴⁵ Sir John Soane was involved in numerous projects during the last years of the old palace; these will be discussed in Chapters Two and Three. However, Sean Sawyer's PhD thesis (1999) has comprehensively examined Soane's involvement with Westminster; the present work will not attempt to duplicate this.⁴⁶ Instead, this thesis will focus principally on James Wyatt, whose career was long neglected by historians. To date, John Martin Robinson's monograph (2012) is undoubtedly the most detailed and balanced account of Wyatt's life and work.⁴⁷ Prior to this, Wyatt had benefitted from only a single stand-alone biography, published by Anthony Dale in 1956.⁴⁸ Neither of

³⁸ A. Oswald, "The Speaker's House, Westminster", *Country Life*, 30 November 1951, pp. 1796–99.

³⁹ A. Wedgwood, *Guide to the Speaker's House* (London: HMSO, 1994).

⁴⁰ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, pp. 532–35; C. Shenton, *The Day Parliament Burned Down* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). It was Shenton who dubbed the Speaker's House a "palace within a Palace" (pp. 158–59).

⁴¹ C. Riding, D. Church and C. Garibaldi, "The Speaker's House", in C. Riding and J. Riding (eds.), *The Houses of Parliament* (London: Merrell, 2000), pp. 195–212.

⁴² H. Roberts, "James Wyatt's Furniture for the Palace of Westminster", *Furniture History* 39 (2003), pp. 99–108.

⁴³ S. Daniels, "From the Speaker's Garden: Repton's designs on Westminster", *The London Gardener* 23 (2019), pp. 74–85.

⁴⁴ C. Shenton, *Mr Barry's War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁴⁵ R. Hill, *God's Architect: Pugin and the Building of Romantic Britain* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).

⁴⁶ S. Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster: Civic Architecture and National Identity, 1789–1834* (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1999). See also Sawyer's published articles on Westminster: "Sir John Soane's Symbolic Westminster: The Apotheosis of George IV", *Architectural History* 39 (1996), pp. 54–76; and "Delusions of National Grandeur: Reflections on the Intersection of Architecture and History at the Palace of Westminster, 1789–1834", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13 (2003), pp. 237–50.

⁴⁷ Robinson, *James Wyatt* (op. cit.). See also Robinson's history of the Wyatt family, *The Wyatts: An Architectural Dynasty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

⁴⁸ A. Dale, *James Wyatt* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956).

these works discusses the Speaker's House at length, although they briefly cover Wyatt's other works at the Palace of Westminster.⁴⁹ The earlier historiography of Wyatt's architecture is discussed in Robinson's Introduction, and need only be briefly summarised here.⁵⁰ Suffice to say that Victorian and early twentieth-century historians—where they discussed Wyatt's work at all—generally adopted a dismissive or derogatory attitude.⁵¹ To some extent this prejudice against Wyatt reflected wider attitudes to the Gothic architecture of the Georgian era. Victorian historians tended to judge the quality of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic buildings according to their archaeological accuracy.⁵² Consequently, Wyatt's Gothic work received faint praise because it did not achieve the level of archaeological accuracy demanded by later, Victorian Gothic Revivalists.⁵³ As an example of this attitude, Charles Eastlake's *History of the Gothic Revival* paid Ashridge, Hertfordshire (Wyatt's last major country house; built 1808–14), a backhanded compliment by saying that its "design exhibits no obtrusive faults".⁵⁴ In the early 1980s, the archaeological accuracy of Wyatt's buildings was reassessed in a series of articles by John Frew.⁵⁵ In his view, projects such as Wyatt's "improvements" to New College Chapel, Oxford (1788–94), indicated that Wyatt was capable of a higher degree of "authenticity" than previous critics had been prepared to credit.⁵⁶ In recent years, Peter Lindfield and Matthew Reeve have continued this line of argument, citing Lee Priory, Kent—designed by Wyatt for Thomas Barrett in the early 1780s—as an advance on the level of accuracy achieved by Walpole at Strawberry Hill.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Victorian prejudices against Wyatt have continued to filter through to more recent assessments. Historical judgements of his work tend to be dismissive at best and derogatory at worst. For example, Andrea Fredericksen claims that Pugin's approach to Gothic in the design of the new Palace of Westminster was "more serious" than Wyatt's had been—thus implying that Wyatt's approach was not "serious".⁵⁸ Sawyer described Wyatt's interventions as an "aesthetic and administrative debacle", whilst Shenton described his House of Lords façade as "gimcrack" and "cheap and nasty".⁵⁹ (Even Robinson made no attempt to defend this

⁴⁹ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 273–74; Dale, *James Wyatt*, pp. 119–25.

⁵⁰ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. ix–x.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. ix–x.

⁵² M. Hall (ed.), *Gothic Architecture and its Meanings, 1550–1830* (London: The Georgian Group, 2002), pp. 9–15.

⁵³ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. ix–x; Hall, *Gothic Architecture and its Meanings*, p. 7–10.

⁵⁴ C. L. Eastlake, *A History of the Gothic Revival* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1970), p. 75.

⁵⁵ J. M. Frew, "Some Observations on James Wyatt's Gothic Style 1790–1797", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 41:2 (1982), pp. 144–49; and J. M. Frew, "Gothic in Transition: Wyatt and Bernasconi at New College Chapel, Oxford, 1788–94", *The Burlington Magazine* 126 (1984), 678+683+685–89.

⁵⁶ Frew, "Gothic in Transition" pp. 683, 689.

⁵⁷ M. M. Reeve and P. N. Lindfield, "'A Child of Strawberry': Thomas Barrett and Lee Priory, Kent", *The Burlington Magazine* 157 (2015), pp. 836–42.

⁵⁸ A. Fredericksen, "Parliament's Genuis Loci: The Politics of Place after the 1834 Fire", in Riding and Riding (eds.), *The Houses of Parliament*, p. 104

⁵⁹ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, p. 274; Shenton, *The Day Parliament Burned Down*, p. 13.

façade, saying that it “achieved the feat of looking cheap while costing a mint”.⁶⁰) Whilst the criticisms of Wyatt’s management of the rebuilding project, and the constructional quality of his new buildings, are probably not unjustified—as will be discussed in Chapter Two—it does not necessarily follow that Wyatt put no thought into his initial designs for them. This thesis makes a serious attempt to understand and assess the underlying intentions of Wyatt’s Gothic vision, whilst acknowledging that this vision may not have been perfectly executed.

The Georgian phase of the Gothic Revival was neglected by historians for many years. Georgian Gothic had been discussed in various works dealing with the Gothic Revival as a whole; Chris Brooks’s *The Gothic Revival* (1999) remains probably the best recent overview.⁶¹ Michael J. Lewis’s 2002 book is similar in scope, though slightly smaller.⁶² However, the last two decades have witnessed a significant increase in scholarly interest; many new works have appeared dealing specifically with Georgian Gothic architecture and furniture. Of these, Peter Lindfield’s *Georgian Gothic: Medievalist Architecture, Furniture and Interiors, 1730–1840* (2016) is probably the best general history of the subject. The more recent *Cambridge History of the Gothic* covers the long eighteenth century in its first volume, but its focus is primarily literary and cultural rather than architectural.⁶³ Perhaps the most important contribution to the re-evaluation of Georgian Gothic came from Michael Hall’s edited volume, *Gothic Architecture and its Meanings 1550–1830* (2002). Hall challenged the continuing tendency of historians to judge Gothic buildings according to their archaeological accuracy, a bias unconsciously inherited from Victorian Gothic Revivalists like Eastlake.⁶⁴ As noted above, Frew had already attempted to defend Wyatt against charges of archaeological inaccuracy; but Hall was now challenging the underlying assumptions which had prompted those criticisms in the first place.⁶⁵ He argued that the archaeological inaccuracies of Georgian Gothic buildings might not, in fact, be errors, but deliberate choices, made in a conscious effort to adapt the style to suit the needs of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century world. This argument has been taken up by subsequent historians, notably Christopher Webster in his recent work on Georgian churches.⁶⁶ However, there has still not been any serious attempt to apply

⁶⁰ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, p. 273.

⁶¹ C. Brooks, *The Gothic Revival* (London: Phaidon, 1999).

⁶² M. J. Lewis, *The Gothic Revival* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002).

⁶³ A. Wright and D. Townshend (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Gothic, vol. 1: Gothic in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 18.

⁶⁴ M. Hall (ed.), *Gothic Architecture and its Meanings, 1550–1830* (London: The Georgian Group, 2002), pp. 11–14.

⁶⁵ Frew, “Some Observations on James Wyatt’s Gothic Style” (op. cit.); Frew, “Gothic in Transition 1788–94” (op. cit.).

⁶⁶ C. Webster, “Late Georgian Churches: “Absolutely Wretched” or the Triumph of Rational Pragmatism?”, *Architectural History* 60 (2017), pp. 147–181.

this analysis to Wyatt's Westminster buildings, and particularly the Speaker's House. This is all the more surprising because the choice of Gothic for the new palace in the 1830s has been the subject of considerable discussion among historians: it has been analysed in books and articles by W. J. Rorabaugh, M. H. Port and Caroline Shenton.⁶⁷ Sawyer addresses the stylistic debates surrounding the old palace during its final decades, but his principal interest is in Soane's Classical schemes rather than Wyatt's Gothic masterplan.⁶⁸ There is a need for a more detailed analysis of Wyatt's scheme which considers his ideas on their own terms, rather than as a counterpoint to Soane. Moreover, there has not yet been any detailed analysis of the Speaker's input, both as Wyatt's client for the Speaker's House project, and as the representative for the House of Commons when considering Wyatt's broader schemes.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, debates about the Gothic style were inextricably linked to disputes about architectural conservation. Indeed, contemporary antiquaries—particularly Carter and John Thomas Smith (1766–1833)—provide important contemporary descriptions of the Speaker's House, as well as critical commentaries on Wyatt's alterations.⁶⁹ In turn, these antiquaries have themselves become the subject of historical enquiry. Rosemary Sweet's *Antiquaries* (2004) and Rosemary Hill's *Time's Witness* (2020) provide excellent overviews of the history of antiquarianism in Britain.⁷⁰ Crook's *John Carter and the Mind of the Gothic Revival* (1995) provides a short biography of Wyatt's chief antagonist, whilst Hill's article "Proceeding Like Guy Faux" focuses specifically on antiquarian activities at Westminster.⁷¹ However, existing histories of antiquarianism are usually written from the antiquaries' perspective, and Wyatt is invariably framed in a negative manner because he made controversial alterations to several important medieval buildings. His enlargement of the House of Commons within the former St Stephen's Chapel (1800–01), and his restorations of Salisbury and Durham cathedrals (1787–93 and 1795–1805 respectively) have proved particularly

⁶⁷ W. J. Rorabaugh, "Politics and the Architectural Competition for the Houses of Parliament, 1834–1837", *Victorian Studies* 17:2 (1973), pp. 155–175; M. H. Port (ed.), *The Houses of Parliament* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Shenton, *Mr Barry's War* (op. cit.).

⁶⁸ For Sawyer's discussion of Wyatt's design philosophy and changing attitudes to Gothic see *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 214–16.

⁶⁹ J. T. Smith, *Antiquities of the City of Westminster; The Old Palace; St Stephen's Chapel (now the House of Commons) &c. &c.* (London: T. Bensley, 1807). Carter refers to the Palace of Westminster in numerous letters and columns in the *Gentleman's Magazine*; his detailed descriptions of the Speaker's House can be found in his "Pursuits of Architectural Innovation" columns, Nos. XXV (70:1 (1800), pp. 129–31), XXVI (70:2 (1800), pp. 723–25), CX (77:2, 1807, pp. 623–24) and CXI (77:2 (1807), pp. 733–35).

⁷⁰ R. Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004); R. Hill, *Time's Witness: History in the Age of Romanticism* (London: Penguin, 2020).

⁷¹ J. Mordaunt Crook, *John Carter and the Mind of the Gothic Revival* (London: W. S. Maney, 1995); Rosemary Hill, "'Proceeding like Guy Faux': the Antiquarian Investigation of St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster, 1790–1837", *Architectural History* 59 (2016), pp. 253–279.

contentious.⁷² It is certainly true that Wyatt's alterations involved the destruction of many important medieval features, notably the wall paintings of St Stephen's Chapel; and it is equally true that his actions attracted heated criticism from some of his contemporaries, particularly Carter.⁷³ Wyatt's controversial restorations have given rise to the oft-repeated epithet of 'Wyatt, the destroyer'.⁷⁴ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to give a full history of this moniker, but it certainly reflects the language Carter, and later Pugin, used to describe Wyatt. For example, one of Carter's articles about the Speaker's House refers to "the destroyers' part".⁷⁵ (The plural should be noted, however: this indicates that Carter saw Wyatt as merely one among many architects and patrons who took a similar approach to historic building restoration in this era.) Similarly, Pugin described Wyatt as "destructive" in his 1841 book *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*.⁷⁶ The 'destroyer' epithet has been used by several historians in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and it even appears in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.⁷⁷ By perpetuating this label, historians have, arguably, implicitly reinforced Carter's pejorative characterisation of Wyatt and his architectural practice. Similarly, whilst Wyatt's destruction of the St Stephen's Chapel wall paintings was undoubtedly regrettable, historians have tended to embody Carter's personal antipathy to Wyatt in their own writings. The destruction of the St Stephen's wall paintings has often been framed as an act of revenge motivated by malice against Carter and the Society of Antiquaries (particularly in response to Carter's previous blackballing of Wyatt from the Society).⁷⁸ Maurice Hastings writes that "It almost appears as if his whole purpose was to put the Society of Antiquaries and John Carter to the torture".⁷⁹ In "Proceeding Like Guy Faux", Hill claims that "Wyatt took the opportunity to revenge himself for his humiliation by the antiquaries".⁸⁰ Crook also uses the word "revenge" when describing this episode.⁸¹ Whilst the destruction of the paintings was certainly regrettable, none of these critics have ever explained how Wyatt could have fulfilled his brief—namely, to enlarge the House of Commons within its existing shell—*without* destroying the paintings.⁸² In any case,

⁷² Hill, *Time's Witness*, pp. 52–55, 62–63, 79–81.

⁷³ For an overview of the antagonism between Carter and Wyatt see Crook, *Carter and the Mind of the Gothic Revival*, especially pp. 23–40.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Hill, *God's Architect*, p. 70; Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, p. 252; Crook, *Carter and the Mind of the Gothic Revival*, p. 23.

⁷⁵ J. Carter (writing as "An Architect"), "The Pursuits of Architectural Innovation" No. CXI, *Gentleman's Magazine*, 70:1 (1800), p. 734.

⁷⁶ A. W. N. Pugin, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (London: John Weale, 1841), p. 62.

⁷⁷ See, for example, K. Clark, *The Gothic Revival* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 108; R. Hill, *God's Architect*, p. 69; Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, p. 252; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/James-Wyatt> [accessed 06/10/2022].

⁷⁸ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 227–29.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 110–14.

⁸⁰ Hill, "Proceeding Like Guy Faux", p. 260.

⁸¹ Mordaunt Crook, *John Carter and the Mind of the Gothic Revival*, p. 37.

⁸² See also pp. 125–26 of this thesis.

Robinson has already made the point that it is unfair to single Wyatt out for ‘destructive’ tendencies. As he puts it, Wyatt was “no more radical and interventionist in his approach than George Gilbert Scott and other Victorian restorers”.⁸³ More importantly, the ‘revenge’ narrative clearly cannot explain the creative aspects of Wyatt’s work at Westminster. It would be futile to deny that Wyatt had some significant personality flaws, notably his chronic disorganisation which (as discussed in Chapter Two) certainly had an impact on his work at Westminster.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the perpetuation of Carter’s highly partial characterisation of Wyatt has served to discourage an open-minded assessment of Wyatt’s new Gothic buildings at Westminster. This thesis will not ignore Wyatt’s destructive actions, but it will place a greater emphasis on his creative vision and make a genuine effort to understand this on his own terms.

As well as the stylistic history of the Gothic Revival, the Speaker’s House also needs to be viewed within the architectural and social context of the London town house. This is yet another subject which was, for many years, comparatively neglected. Sir John Summerson’s *Georgian London* (first edition published 1945) traced the architectural evolution of the classic terraced town house, and situated it within the urban context of London’s developing West End.⁸⁵ Dan Cruickshank and Neil Burton further developed this analysis in *Life in the Georgian City* (1990), which went some way to setting the London townhouse into its social context.⁸⁶ Until recently there had been few case studies of individual houses, but the last few years have seen an upsurge in interest. Recent works have included Adriano Aymonino’s monograph on the 1st Duke and Duchess of Northumberland, including a substantial section on Northumberland House (2021); and Manolo Guerci’s work on the Strand Palaces (also 2021).⁸⁷ Most of these works, however, are concerned with a slightly earlier time period than this thesis, focusing primarily on the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries rather than the early nineteenth. There is also a recent edited volume by Susanna Avery-Quash and Kate Retford, *The Georgian London Townhouse: Building, Collecting and Display* (2019), which addresses the importance of townhouses as sites for display of artistic and other collections. However, the role of the townhouse in sociability—and particularly political sociability—remains relatively under-researched. It is also important to remember that the Speaker’s House was, in some

⁸³ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, p. x.

⁸⁴ For assessments of Wyatt’s personal failings see Colvin, *King’s Works* 6, pp. 49–55; and Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 303–12.

⁸⁵ J. Summerson, *Georgian London* (London: Pleiades Books, 1945). This book went through several editions; the most recent, edited by Howard Colvin, was published in 2003 (New Haven, Yale University Press). The original version has been used in the preparation of this thesis.

⁸⁶ D. Cruickshank and N. Burton, *Life in the Georgian City* (London: Viking, 1990).

⁸⁷ A. Aymonino, *Enlightened Eclecticism: The Grand Design of the 1st Duke and Duchess of Northumberland* (London: Paul Mellon Centre, 2021); M. Guerci, *London’s “Golden Mile”: The Great Houses of the Strand, 1550–1650* (London: Paul Mellon Centre, 2021).

ways, atypical of London townhouse development. It was not a purpose-designed building, and it was unusual—at least among Georgian and later townhouses—in being remodelled in the Gothic, rather than the Classical, style. Moreover, it was obviously exceptional in being an official residence located within the precincts of the Palace of Westminster. As such, it requires a dedicated history which, whilst situating it within the wider context of townhouse development, also recognises its peculiarities.

The Aims of this Thesis

The Speaker's House was a building in which architecture was intentionally harnessed for political purposes. Successive Speakers consciously exploited the house to serve their own political and social agendas, and, where necessary, they modified it to better suit these requirements. This thesis will therefore adopt an interdisciplinary approach, considering both the political and the architectural history of the house, and exploring the connections between these themes. It must also be acknowledged that neither politicians nor architects operate in isolation from wider society. Therefore, it is inevitable that this thesis will touch on elements of social history, too.

In political terms, this thesis will attempt to address two broad questions. Firstly, how did successive Speakers use the house to support their political duties? This analysis must not be confined to a narrow interpretation of such duties as being purely the management of debates in the House, or even the administrative aspects of the Speaker's role. The Speaker's sociable activities—whether that be his official parliamentary dinners, his impromptu meeting with the Tsar, or even his informal cup of coffee with Wilberforce—must be considered as an integral part of his political role. After 1794, the Speaker's House provided the venue for many of these occasions. This thesis will therefore explore how the building was used to support all aspects of the Speaker's political work. The second question follows logically from the first: how did the Speaker's House contribute to the evolution of the Speakership? Did the availability of this new facility prompt any changes to the duties the Speaker undertook, or to the way they were conducted? Just as importantly: did the Speaker's new house change perceptions, among both MPs and the public, about exactly what duties the Speaker *should* be performing, and how they should perform them? To use an anachronistic term: how did this prestigious official residence change the Speaker's public image? In turn, how was such change connected to individual Speakers' personal ambitions for social advancement; and what does this tell us about the link between politics and social mobility in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain?

In architectural terms, Wyatt's reconstruction undoubtedly constitutes the most significant phase in the history of the old Speaker's House. The Speaker's House was always large and grand, and the Picturesque potential of its historic spaces had been recognised long before Addington moved in. Nevertheless, in 1794 the house lacked a consistent visual identity, and its architecture and decoration had not been specifically tied to the office of Speaker. With Abbot's backing, Wyatt attempted to impose a coherent architectural vision on the house; his use of the Gothic style was the most obvious manifestation of this. Any history of the Speaker's House must address the question of style, for two reasons. Firstly, much has already been written about the choice of Gothic for the new Palace of Westminster: this poses an obvious question as to the extent—if any—to which this choice was influenced by Wyatt's earlier work. Secondly, the question of style featured prominently in contemporary debates about Westminster's architectural future, even before 1834. Why, then, did Wyatt choose Gothic for his work at Westminster, and for the Speaker's House in particular?⁸⁸ What role did his patrons play in this choice, and what were their attitudes to the style? In turn, how did contemporary observers—whether parliamentarians or the wider public—react to Wyatt's work, and what does this tell us about changing attitudes towards architectural style in the early nineteenth century? Did later architects at Westminster—particularly Soane and Barry—adopt the Gothic style because of Wyatt, or in spite of him? Because the Speaker's House incorporated elements of historic fabric, it is also essential to consider the question of architectural conservation, and particularly the conservation of medieval Gothic buildings. Indeed, this is another subject which has become unavoidable in any discussion of Wyatt's work at Westminster, due to the aforementioned antagonism between Wyatt and Carter. What do Wyatt's alterations, and contemporary reactions to these, tell us about attitudes to architectural conservation at this time? How did these attitudes change over the lifespan of the Speaker's House, particularly in the decades following Wyatt's alterations?

It is important to clarify a few points regarding the overall scope of the present work. Firstly, this thesis is not a biographical work: it will investigate architectural and political issues that are bigger than any single individual. Nevertheless, it is inevitable that certain individuals will feature very prominently, particularly the four Speakers of this era. Speaker Abbot is the most prominent of all: firstly, because he was the instigator of Wyatt's rebuilding project, and secondly, because he has left by far the most extensive collection of source materials, in the form of the Colchester Papers at the National Archives. It must be acknowledged that the coverage of the Speaker's wives and families in this thesis is somewhat uneven: this reflects both the significance of particular individuals

⁸⁸ As discussed in Chapter Two (pp. 124–25), the available evidence clearly indicates that it was Wyatt, rather than Abbot, who initially made this choice, although Abbot fully embraced it once he became Speaker.

to the story of the house, and the availability of information relating to them. Ellen Manners-Sutton, in particular, features more prominently than Mrs Addington or Mrs Abbot. This is partly because her exploitation of the house for her own political and social ends was particularly interesting; but it is also because information about her is readily available, thanks largely to Elizabeth Hallam Smith's recent research.⁸⁹ The family histories of these Speakers remain an under-researched topic, but the present work must be confined to the episodes that shed most light on the political and architectural history of the house. Finally, it must be emphasised that broad issues like architectural conservation and style cannot always be isolated to the Speaker's House itself. Whilst the latter is the primary subject of this thesis, its history would not make sense if it were not situated within the wider context of the Palace of Westminster during the early nineteenth century. As such, it is necessary in places to discuss the many other building or rebuilding projects which took place during this era; particularly Wyatt's other designs for the palace, both executed and unexecuted.

The Structure of this Thesis

This thesis adopts a thematic structure whilst also maintaining a broadly chronological narrative. The latter is necessary for the sake of coherence, since the story of the first Speaker's House has never been told in any depth. Nevertheless, the history of the house was determined by the changing needs and priorities of its successive occupants: thus, each chapter will emphasise the particular political or architectural concerns which dominated each Speakership. The three chapters of this thesis reflect the tenures of the three principal Speakers of this era: Addington, Abbot and Manners-Sutton. The first chapter will have a political focus, concentrating principally on Addington's political and social motives for acquiring an official residence. The second chapter, dealing with the Abbot-Wyatt rebuilding project, has a more architectural focus: it will discuss the objectives of both client and architect in using Gothic architecture, and the specific devices they adopted to achieve these goals. The final chapter is also primarily architectural, but now concentrating on the reception of Wyatt's work. It will consider the longer-term legacy of his Westminster scheme, and the impact it had on public opinion regarding future developments at the palace. In the context of these debates, issues of architectural theory surrounding the choice of Gothic—particularly the Vitruvian concept of propriety (or decorum)—come to the fore. Finally, there is one thread which runs more or less evenly through the whole thesis: the social role of the Speaker's House, particularly its use for official and unofficial entertaining, a practice which was common to all three Speakers.

⁸⁹ M. Takayanagi and E. Hallam Smith, *Necessary Women: The Untold Story of Parliament's Working Women* (forthcoming).

J. T. Smith, in the introduction to his *Antiquities of the City of Westminster* (1807), laments that it is a “common fault” among antiquaries “to consider Antiquity alone as a sufficient claim to attention, and to bring forward objects which have neither beauty in themselves, nor adequate importance, to introduce new, or correct former opinions”.⁹⁰ This thesis aims to demonstrate that the Speaker’s House is, indeed, of “adequate importance” to merit a detailed study. Its history binds together an extraordinary range of people, events and ideas; and these stories can certainly help to “introduce new, or correct former opinions” concerning the histories of politics and architecture in early nineteenth-century Britain.

⁹⁰ Smith, *Antiquities of Westminster*, Preface (n. p.).

Chapter 1: The Origins of the Speaker's House, 1794–1802

In 1794, Speaker Henry Addington moved into a large townhouse immediately adjacent to the House of Commons. The first chapter of this thesis will attempt to answer the most basic questions about this house: why was it created in the first place? Who occupied it before Addington, and how did he gain possession of it? What did it look like, and how was it laid out? As will become apparent, the answers to these questions are not straightforward, and there are significant gaps in the available information. Nevertheless, it is abundantly clear that the Speaker's House was a very singular townhouse; and, by appropriating it, Addington was laying the foundations—figuratively speaking—of a significant political institution. This chapter will begin by contextualising the house within the wider landscape of the old Palace of Westminster. It will then consider the political context of Addington's Speakership, and attempt to ascertain how he managed to appropriate the house in 1794. Finally, it will make a detailed examination of the form and layout of the house at this period in its history, and the ways in which Addington made use of it during his tenure.

The Buildings of St Stephen's College

The early history of the Palace of Westminster is well known, and need not be repeated here.⁹¹ The particular group of buildings which this thesis is concerned with—namely, those which ultimately became the Speaker's House—were situated on the eastern side of the complex, between Westminster Hall and the River Thames. They owe their origins to St Stephen's College, a religious foundation which was based within the Palace during the late-medieval period, when Westminster was the King's principal residence. The college was founded in 1348 and dissolved in 1548, due to the religious changes of the Reformation.⁹² At its height, however, the College had been an important institution, so a sizeable group of buildings had been provided for it. The easiest way to make sense of them is to study a plan of the Palace drawn in 1793, just before the Speaker was first granted his official residence (Fig. 1.1). It was drawn by the office of John Soane (1753–1837), who had been the Office of Works' clerk of works for St James's, Westminster and Whitehall since 1791.⁹³

⁹¹For a detailed history of the old Palace see W. Rodwell and T. Tatton-Brown (eds.), *Westminster Part II: The Art, Architecture and Archaeology of the Royal Palace* (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2014).

⁹²For a full history of the college, see E. Biggs, *St Stephen's College, Westminster: A Royal Chapel and English Kingship, 1348–1548* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2020).

⁹³H. M. Colvin (ed.), *The History of the King's Works, Vol. VI: 1782–1851* (London: HMSO, 1973), p. 674.

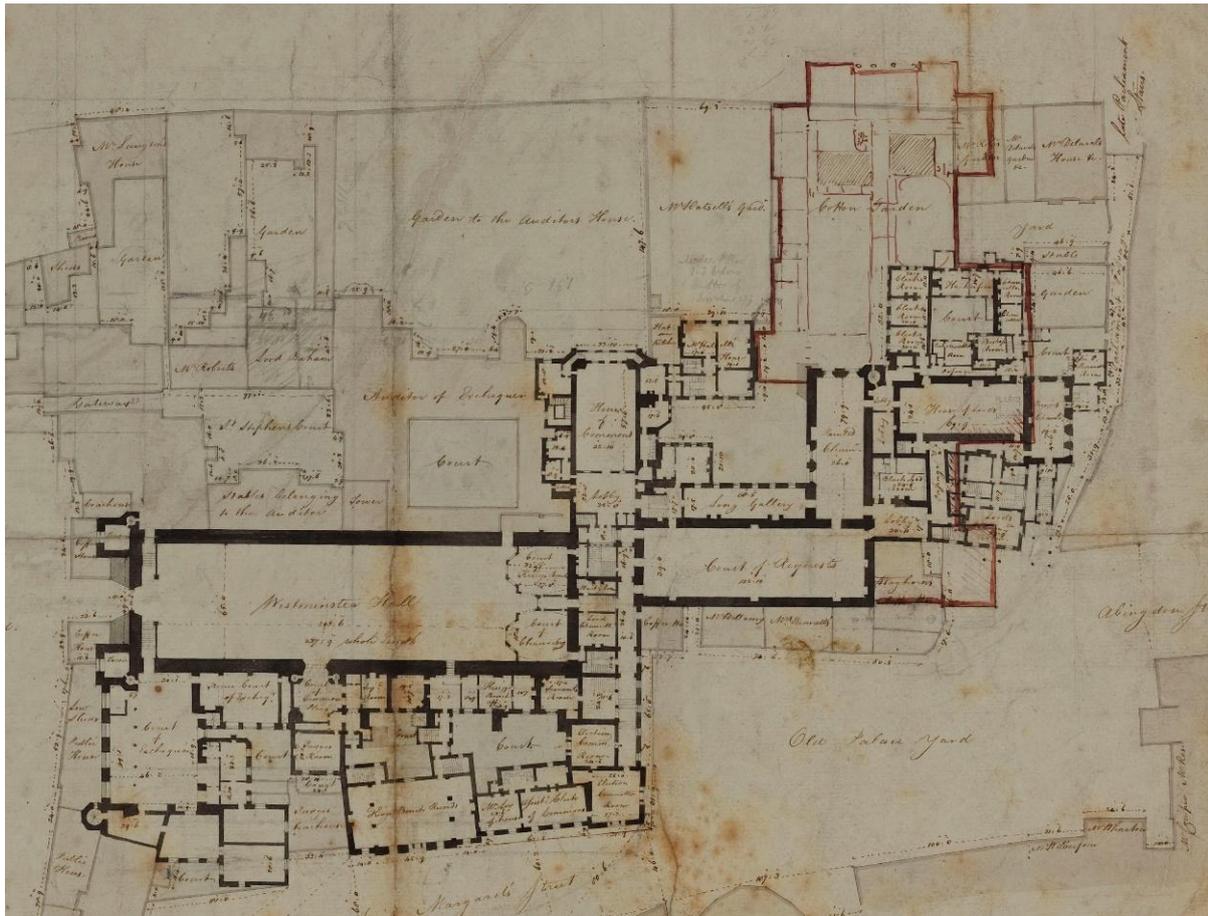


Fig 1.1: Office of John Soane: *Survey of the Palace of Westminster with design for alterations overlaid*, 1793 (detail). Ink on paper, 492mm x 603mm. London: Sir John Soane's Museum (SM 37/1/21).

In this plan, the Thames—the eastern boundary of the Palace—is to the top of the page; New Palace Yard is at the bottom left and Old Palace Yard at the bottom right. The very large building to the left of centre is Westminster Hall (built c. 1097); this was the earliest permanent building on the site, and the rest of the palace complex had grown up around it. The centrepiece of the former college, however, was St Stephen's Chapel (substantially complete by 1348).⁹⁴ This sits just to the south-east of the Hall and at ninety degrees to it, pointing out towards the river. It was originally designed as a two-storey building, the main chapel being on the first floor, with a vaulted undercroft—known today as St Mary Undercroft—at ground level. Following the dissolution of the College, the chapel's principal storey was granted to the House of Commons, thus becoming their

⁹⁴ J. Hillson, *St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster: Architecture, Decoration and Politics in the Reigns of Henry III and the three Edwards (1227–1363)* (PhD Thesis, University of York, 2015), pp. 152–56.

first permanent meeting-place.⁹⁵ It remained in use as the Commons' chamber until its destruction in 1834.

To the north (left) of the chapel is an oddly-shaped building with an open courtyard at its centre, labelled "Auditor of the Exchequer". This, in fact, is the footprint of the large mansion which was shortly to become the Speaker's House. The label refers to the fact that the house had, for many years previously, been the official residence of the auditor of the Exchequer; their role will be examined in due course. However, it is important to understand that the 'Auditor's House' was not really a single building, but a combination of structures built up over many years. Its different parts are delineated in a more detailed ground-floor plan, also dated 1794 (Fig. 1.2). Although headed "J. Soane Esqre.", the drawing has been signed at the bottom right by John Thomas Groves (c. 1761–1811), who replaced Soane as clerk of works at Westminster in June 1794.⁹⁶ Like Soane, Groves would play a significant part in the subsequent history of the Speaker's House.

⁹⁵ A. Hawkyard, "From Painted Chamber to St Stephen's Chapel: The Meeting Places of the House of Commons at Westminster until 1603", *Parliamentary History* 21:1 (Feb 2002), pp. 77–78.

⁹⁶ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, p. 674. For a full account of Soane's clerkship and the circumstances of his resignation, see S. E. Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster: Civic Architecture and National Identity, 1789–1834* (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1999), pp. 128–46.

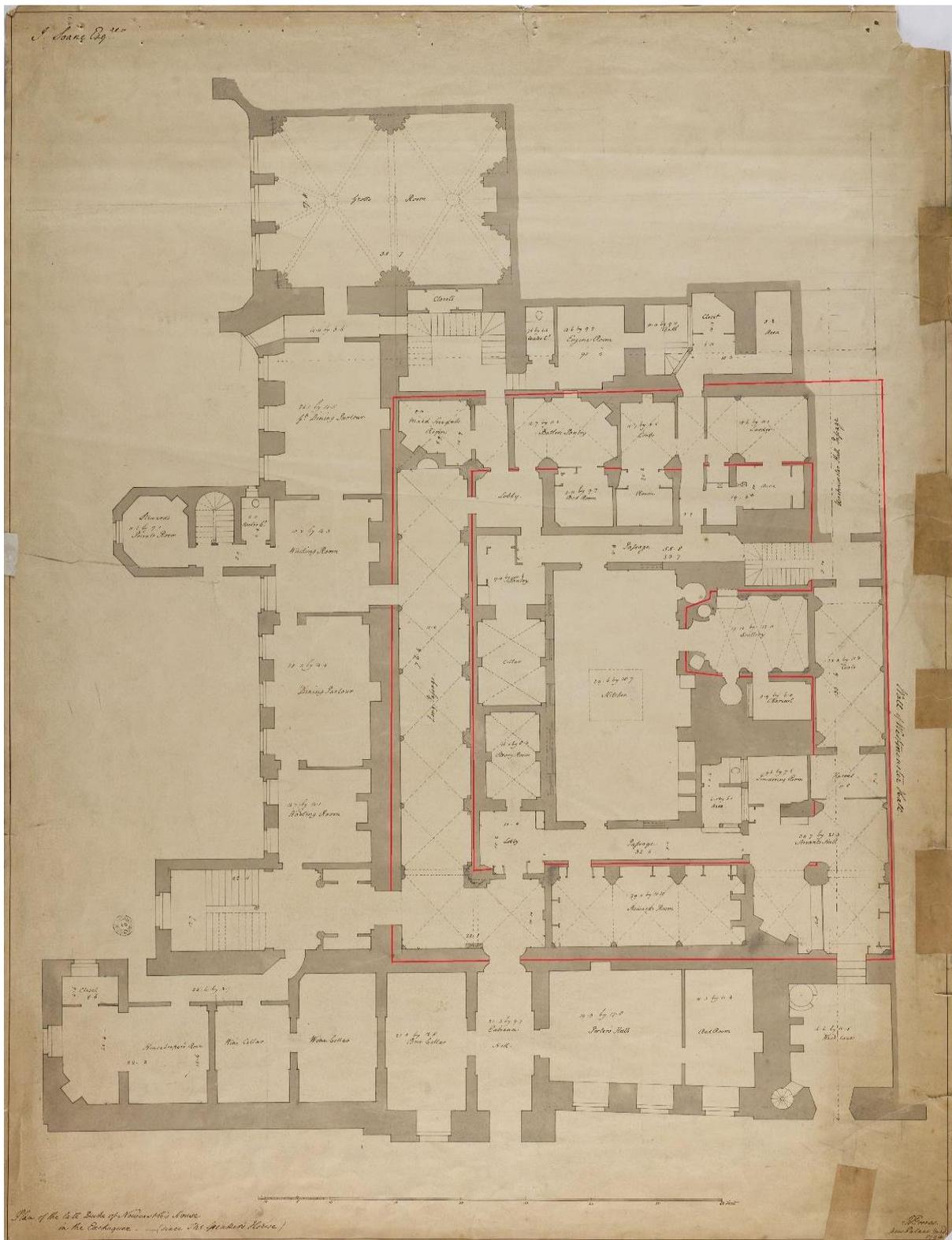


Fig 1.2: John Soane/John T. Groves: *Plan of the late Duke of Newcastle's house in the Exchequer – since the Speaker's house.* Ink on paper, 492mm x 603mm. London: Sir John Soane's Museum (SM 37/1/28).

At the core of this group of buildings are the former cloisters of St Stephen's College. By 1793, so many alterations and additions had been made to their structure that their original outline is barely discernible on Soane's plan; hence, red lines have been digitally added to Fig. 1.2 to indicate their original extent. Construction of this two-storey quadrangle was begun c. 1514 (replacing an earlier set of cloisters), and was certainly complete by 1529.⁹⁷ Its elaborate Perpendicular Gothic style, with fan-vaulting, echoed the Henry VII Chapel at nearby Westminster Abbey. Originally, the cloisters enclosed an open courtyard; a small, two-storey oratory projected into this space from the western range. By 1793, however, the courtyard had been roofed over (although only to a height of one storey, as discussed below). The enclosed space was filled with various rooms, the largest being a kitchen. To either side of the oratory, the projecting buttresses of Westminster Hall can also be discerned, their presence being indicated by unusually-thick sections of solid wall. The new buildings within the former courtyard have been awkwardly fitted around them.⁹⁸

Adjoining the cloisters on their northern and eastern fronts (at the bottom and left of the Soane/Groves plan) are two additional ranges of rooms. The construction dates of these wings are not certain, but they seem to have occupied the sites of the former Vicars' Hall and houses which had existed in the days of the College.⁹⁹ It is possible that one of them might be the two-storey office block built for John Bingley, Remembrancer of the Exchequer, during 1611–12.¹⁰⁰ Alternatively, the house also underwent an extensive refurbishment during 1673–74 at the behest of Sir Robert Howard (1626–98), then auditor of the Exchequer (in office 1673–98).¹⁰¹ Thus, one or both of these wings might date from that period. Squeezed in between the northern wing and Westminster Hall was a bell-tower, built during the reign of Edward III; note the thick wall which separates it from the other rooms on this front.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ M. Collins, "The Topography of the Old Palace of Westminster, 1510–1834", in Rodwell and Tatton-Brown, *Westminster Part II*, pp. 210–11; Biggs, *St Stephen's College*, pp. 172–77.

⁹⁸ The position of the buttresses is also marked on the Clarke plan (Fig. 1.10).

⁹⁹ E. Biggs, *The College and Canons of St Stephen's, Westminster, 1348–1548*, Vol. 1 (PhD thesis, University of York, 2016), p. 74; E. Biggs, *St Stephen's College*, pp. 22, 80–83.

¹⁰⁰ H. M. Colvin (ed.), *The History of the King's Works, Vol. IV, 1485-1660 (Part II)* (London: HMSO, 1982), p. 199; TNA E 351/3246, Exchequer: Pipe Office: Declared Accounts, Works and Buildings: Surveyors and Paymasters: A. Kerwyn (n. p). The author is grateful to the St Stephen's Chapel Project team for supplying him with Stephen Neal's transcription of the E 351 documents.

¹⁰¹ TNA WORK 5/25, Office of Works, Accounts: Ordinary and Extraordinary, 1675–76, ff. 374–387. These accounts make clear that "severall [sic] new rooms for S[i]r Rob[er]t Howard" were built at this time, but they are vague as to exactly how many, or where they were located. For Howard's biography see J. P. Vander Motten, "Howard, Sir Robert (1626–98)", *ODNB* (2011), <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/13935> [accessed 05/09/2023].

¹⁰² Biggs, *St Stephen's College*, p. 87.

At the southern end of the complex is a large space marked “grotto room”. This, in fact, is the eastern end of the Chapel’s undercroft, which had been annexed and incorporated into the Auditor’s House, probably in 1661-62.¹⁰³ By the 1790s, two of the western bays had been appropriated to house a heating boiler for the House of Commons above.¹⁰⁴ The final, westernmost bay had—together with the southern end of the western range of the cloisters—been used to create a corridor linking Westminster Hall to Old Palace Yard.¹⁰⁵ Part of this passage can be seen at the right-hand edge of the Soane/Groves plan. At the northern end of the passage, a doorway has been knocked through from the former cloister into Westminster Hall. The bricked-up remains of this doorway were rediscovered in 2018, hidden behind twentieth-century panelling.¹⁰⁶ Finally, the plan also shows a few small rooms squeezed into the spaces between the cloisters and the undercroft, punctuated by the buttresses of the chapel. These infill structures were later additions which did not form part of the original college buildings. Above them were the Speaker’s Withdrawing Room (discussed below), and offices for various House of Commons officials.¹⁰⁷

Returning to Soane’s larger plan, to the north of the Auditor’s House is another courtyard known as St Stephen’s court. On its eastern side lay another private house: on Soane’s plan it is marked for its then-occupant, Lord Bayham, one of the tellers of the Exchequer. The buildings on the north side of St Stephen’s Court, separating it from New Palace Yard, were the offices of the Exchequer of Receipt.¹⁰⁸ After the dissolution of St Stephen’s College, the Exchequer eventually took over most of the surviving college buildings. In the years that followed, the cloister and adjoining buildings were divided up to create convenient residences for the senior officials of the Receipt, namely the auditor and tellers. By about 1612, the cloister and its adjoining wings had been consolidated into a single, large house for the auditor.¹⁰⁹ Three of the tellers moved elsewhere, leaving the fourth to occupy the smaller house in St Stephen’s Court.

¹⁰³ E. Hallam Smith, “St Mary Undercroft, 1548–1870: “a dull sort of ecclesiastical lumber-room”?” (forthcoming).

¹⁰⁴ E. Hallam Smith, “Ventilating the Commons, Heating the Lords, 1701–1834”, *Parliamentary History* 38:1 (2019), p. 81.

¹⁰⁵ Hallam Smith, “St Mary Undercroft”, forthcoming.

¹⁰⁶ B. Wheeler, “Secret doorway in Parliament leads to historical treasure trove”, BBC News, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-51630630> [accessed 10/04/2020]. This doorway may have been blocked off during Addington’s tenure, as in 1803 Abbot’s diary mentions seeking authority “to open a door” from the western cloister into Westminster Hall (TNA PRO 30/9/33: Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester, Papers: Journal, with interpolated correspondence, etc, f. 222).

¹⁰⁷ H. M. Colvin (ed.), *The History of the King’s Works, Vol. V: 1660–1782* (London: HMSO, 1976), pp. 406–09.

¹⁰⁸ Biggs, *St Stephen’s College*, pp. 5–7, 37.

¹⁰⁹ E. Hallam Smith, “The “Gothic Slum”: MPs and St Stephen’s Cloister, Westminster, 1548–2017”, *Parliamentary History* 41:2 (2022), p. 281.

Official Residences at Westminster

To twenty-first-century eyes, it might seem odd that there should be private houses located within the Palace of Westminster; even more so that they should be allocated to relatively obscure officials like the auditor and tellers. Yet there were, in fact, several parliamentary officials who had accommodation in or near the palace at this time. Understandably, some lodgings were allocated to housekeeping staff who needed to be ‘on call’, such as the domestic housekeeper of the House of Commons.¹¹⁰ However, some senior parliamentary or government officials also enjoyed official residences as a perk of the job, and several of these are visible on Soane’s plan. Among the most important was the Clerk of the Commons’ House, immediately to the south of St Stephen’s Chapel. It had been built at the request of Jeremiah Dyson, then the incumbent clerk, in 1759–60; from 1768 it was occupied by John Hatsell.¹¹¹ At the southern margin of the palace the plan shows a building labelled “Mr. Delaval’s house”. This was not, at first, an official residence, but a purely private house: it had been built c. 1772 by Edward Hussey Delaval, who had leased the plot from the crown.¹¹² However, in 1816 it was appropriated for the use of Black Rod, the Crown official responsible for controlling access to, and order within, the House of Lords.¹¹³ There were also some official houses that lay just beyond the modern boundaries of the palace. Soane’s plan shows the house of Henry Cowper, clerk assistant to the House of Lords, on the west side of Old Palace Yard.¹¹⁴ Later, in 1800–03, the clerk of the journals also gained an official residence at 1 Abingdon Street, on the southern corner of Old Palace Yard.¹¹⁵

To date, there has been no sustained historical analysis of the process by which official houses were allocated at Westminster—if, indeed, there was a system. Surviving records suggest that the Treasury had responsibility for allocating houses at Westminster; at any rate, a memorial to the Treasury board appears to have been the usual method of application. It was by this process that Dyson successfully applied for his official house in 1759–60; the serjeant-at-arms deployed the same tactic in 1794, as discussed below.¹¹⁶ Whilst the surviving evidence is limited, it is conceivable that the influence and forcefulness of individual office holders may have been more important in

¹¹⁰ O. C. Williams, *The Topography of the Old House of Commons* (unpublished monograph, 1953), p. 8; Hallam Smith, “Ventilating the Commons”, p. 77; London: Sir John Soane’s Museum (SM), 51/6/5, 51/6/6 and 51/6/15.

¹¹¹ Colvin, *King’s Works* 5, p. 408; T. Cooper and C. Wilkinson, “Hatsell, John”, *ODNB*, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12602> [accessed 30/03/2020].

¹¹² Elizabeth Hallam Smith, “The King’s Bridge and the Queen’s Bridge, 1189–2021”, *London Topographical Record* 32 (2021), pp. 18–20.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 18–20.

¹¹⁴ Colvin, *King’s Works* 6, pp. 524–25; J. C. Sainty, “Cowper, Henry”, *ODNB*, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/6505> [accessed 09/04/2020].

¹¹⁵ Williams, *Topography of the Old House of Commons*, p. 20.

¹¹⁶ Colvin, *King’s Works* 5, p. 408. See also p. 56 of this thesis.

determining the allocation of official houses than any objective assessment of need. Certainly, the auditor and tellers were able to retain their official houses long after their practical need for them had declined. By about 1700, the auditor's and tellers' roles had degenerated into sinecures, a symptom of the "Old Corruption" which historians have long recognised as a pervasive feature of Britain's eighteenth-century political system.¹¹⁷ By the mid-eighteenth century, the practical functions of the Exchequer had largely been superseded by the Bank of England; yet this was not reflected by any reorganisation of the Exchequer itself.¹¹⁸ Before the 1780s there was no political will to abolish or reform sinecure offices; on the contrary, most politicians of this era simply wanted to obtain such posts for themselves.¹¹⁹ In these circumstances, the Auditor's House must surely have been a very attractive 'perk'. Certainly, the large sums of money expended on the house by successive auditors—usually taxpayers' money, rather than their own—suggest that they wanted the house to project wealth, status and influence. The aforementioned refurbishment by Sir Robert Howard cost £2,500 (almost £400,000 at 2019 prices).¹²⁰ Robert Walpole, Baron Walpole and 2nd Earl of Orford (1701–51; auditor 1739–51) used the house to show off his collection of antique Roman sculpture and Van Dyck paintings.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ The term "Old Corruption", referring to the widespread abuse of government pensions, sinecures and other emoluments, originated with early nineteenth-century radicals like William Cobbett. W. D. Rubinstein dates the emergence of this phenomenon to the early eighteenth century. See Rubinstein, "The End of "Old Corruption" in Britain 1780–1860", *Past and Present* 101 (1983), pp. 55–86; and P. Harling, "Rethinking "Old Corruption"", *Past & Present* 147 (1995), pp. 127–158.

¹¹⁸ J. E. D. Binney, *British Public Finance and Administration 1774–92* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 5, 222, 229, 258–59, 269.

¹¹⁹ R. Porter, "English Society in the Eighteenth Century", reprinted in F. Fernández-Armesto (ed.), *England in the Eighteenth Century* (London: The Folio Society, 1998), pp. 58–59.

¹²⁰ Colvin, *King's Works* 5, pp. 412–13. Throughout the text, historic prices will be accompanied by approximate twenty-first century values. These figures have been calculated using the Bank of England's online inflation calculator (<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator> [accessed 30/03/2023]). As R. D. Hume explains, determining the present-day equivalency of historic currency values is highly problematic, for several reasons (see "The Value of Money in Eighteenth-Century England: Incomes, Prices, Buying Power—and Some Problems in Cultural Economics", *Huntington Library Quarterly* 77:4 (2014), pp. 379–80). Nevertheless, even a very approximate conversion may help to give the reader a sense of the enormous sums of money which were expended on the Speaker's House during this era. Due to the economic disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, 2019 values have been taken as the benchmark.

¹²¹ W. S. Lewis (ed.), *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937–83), vol. 17, pp. 299–300; and vol. 18, p. 249. The author thanks Elizabeth Hallam Smith for this information. The 2nd Earl of Orford should not be confused with his father, Sir Robert Walpole, 1st Earl of Orford (1725–42), who is generally acknowledged as Britain's first *de facto* prime minister.

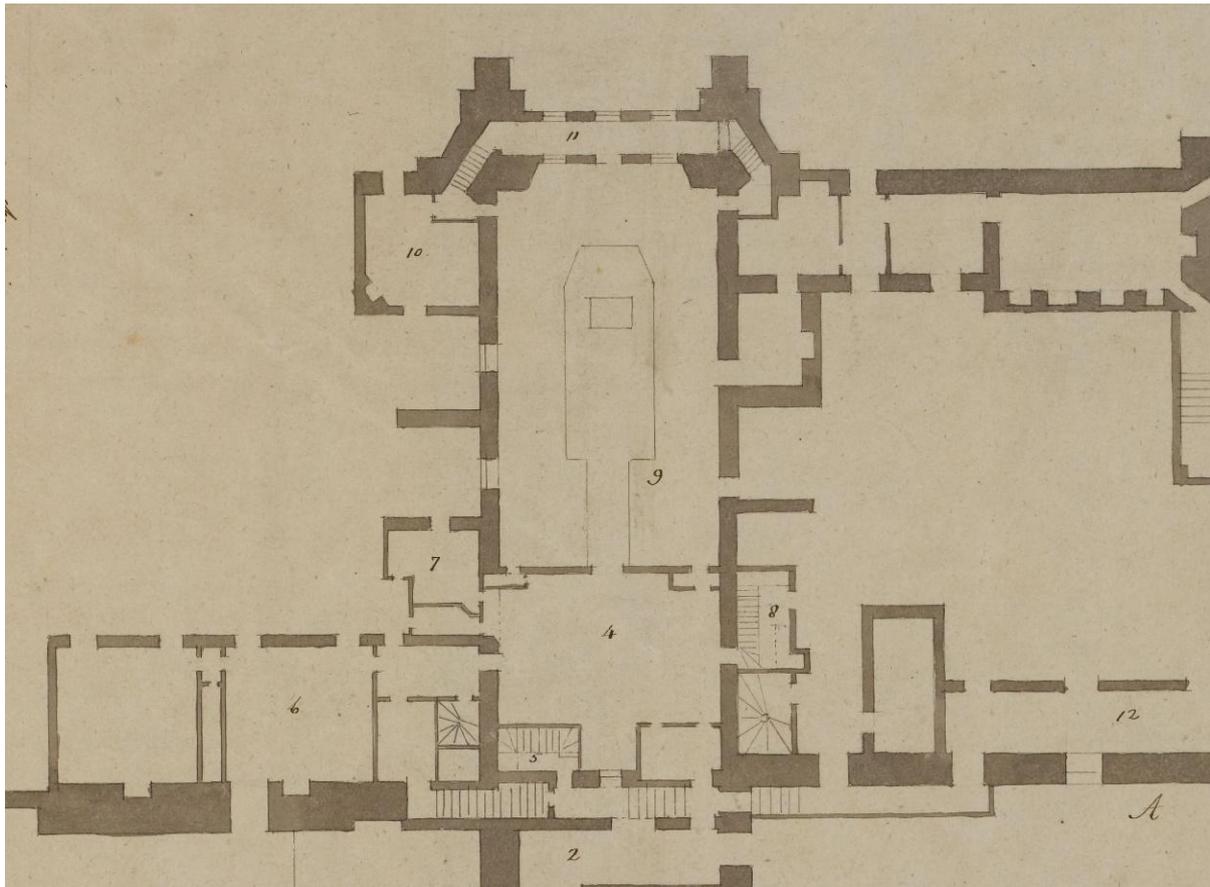


Fig. 1.3: Office of Works, Plan of the Palace of Westminster, copied from the original by William Benson c. 1718, 1793 (detail). Ink on paper, dimensions unavailable. London: Sir John Soane's Museum (SM 37/1/25).

No evidence has been found to suggest that any Speaker attempted to obtain an official residence before 1794. By the early eighteenth century, however, the Speaker had managed to gain the use of two small spaces within the palace: these were marked on a 1718 plan by William Benson, of which a later copy survives (Fig. 1.3). The Speaker's "Withdrawing Room" (marked 10 on Benson's plan) was a small room inserted between the two easternmost buttresses on the north side of St Stephen's Chapel (partially filling the space between the chapel and the cloisters).¹²² It was intended principally as a space for the Speaker to retire to when the House was in Committee; it was certainly in use by 1692.¹²³ By 1718 there was also a "Speaker's Chamber", which comprised a pair of rooms constructed above the upper storey of the cloisters at their south-western corner (marked 6 on

¹²² Office of Works, Plan of the Palace of Westminster, copied from the original by William Benson c. 1718, 1793 (detail). Ink on paper, dimensions unavailable. London: Sir John Soane's Museum (SM 37/1/25).

¹²³ Colvin, *King's Works* 5, p. 406; E. Porritt, *The Unreformed House of Commons: Parliamentary Representation Before 1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), p. 476; Williams, *Topography of the Old House of Commons*, pp. 7–8.

Benson's plan).¹²⁴ Little is known about the early history of the Speaker's Chamber; more research is needed to establish exactly how these rooms came to be associated with the office of Speaker. However, the existing literature suggests that these rooms were intended principally for the Speaker to conduct business, rather than as private spaces. It is known for certain that, from the 1690s onwards, the Speaker's Chamber became the regular meeting place of Commons committees; Wren was asked to create a doorway and passage so that it could be accessed directly from the gallery of the House.¹²⁵ The chamber certainly did not constitute a fully-equipped dwelling-place, though Colvin suggests that the Speaker "may on occasion have eaten or slept" there.¹²⁶ At any rate, the grant of the Speaker's House gave the Speaker custody of a much larger portion of the palace than he had ever previously enjoyed. The remainder of this thesis will demonstrate how successive Speakers exploited this space to enhance both their personal stature, and the political stature of their office. First, however, it is worthwhile to briefly consider why the long-standing connection between the cloister house and the auditor of the Exchequer came to an end.

After Britain's defeat in the American War of Independence (1775–83), a group of reforming MPs known as the "Rockingham Whigs" began a concerted campaign—spearheaded by Edmund Burke—for "economical reform" of the royal household and government departments.¹²⁷ Their precise motives for these reforms are a matter of debate, but they certainly resulted in the abolition of numerous sinecure offices in the royal household.¹²⁸ To this extent, the reforms can be seen as an early attempt to tackle "Old Corruption". The Exchequer—and particularly the Receipt—was an obvious target for the reformers. In a 1783 Parliamentary committee William Pulteney (1729–1805), then MP for Shrewsbury, openly declared the auditor's and tellers' offices to be "absolute sinecures".¹²⁹ The reformers' efforts culminated in the Receipt of the Exchequer Act 1783: this abolished several "unnecessary" roles within the department, but stopped short of abolishing the auditor's or tellers' posts.¹³⁰ It did, however, curb the emoluments associated with these posts,

¹²⁴ SM 37/1/25, n. p.

¹²⁵ Williams, *Topography of the Old House of Commons*, pp. 7–8. These new committee rooms largely superseded the earlier committee room above the Inner Lobby of the House, which then became the Smoking Room.

¹²⁶ Colvin, *King's Works* 5, p. 406.

¹²⁷ R. Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) pp. 421–22.

¹²⁸ Colvin, *King's Works* 5, pp. 1–4; Binney, *Public Finance and Administration*, pp. 270–72.

¹²⁹ Hansard, *Parliamentary History* vol. 23, pp. 1063–65; M. M. Drummond, "PULTENEY, William (1729–1805), of Westerhall, Dumfries.", *History of Parliament Online* (1964), <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/pulteney-william-1729-1805> [accessed 17/08/2023]. The offices of auditor and tellers of the Exchequer remained in existence until finally abolished in 1834 (Sainty, *Officers of the Exchequer* pp. 203–04, 209).

¹³⁰ Receipt of the Exchequer Act, 1783, 23 Geo. 3 cap. 82.

including their official houses. Rather than force the officers to surrender their houses immediately, the Act declared that they would revert to the Crown upon the “death, surrender, forfeiture or removal of the present officers”.¹³¹ This provision was no doubt an expedient means to deter vested interests from opposing reform; however, the downside was that it served to slow the pace of change. It was not until 22 February 1794 that the incumbent auditor, Henry Pelham-Clinton, 7th Earl of Lincoln and 2nd Duke of Newcastle-under-Lyne (1720–94; in office 1751–94), died.¹³² Almost exactly a month later, on 21 March, the chancellor of the Exchequer presented the House of Commons with a message from the King, which was duly read out by the Speaker:

His Majesty thinks proper to acquaint the House of Commons, That His Majesty has given directions, that the House, lately occupied by the Auditor of the Exchequer [...] shall be appropriated for the use of the Speaker of the House of Commons for the time being.¹³³

It is clear, then, why the house was removed from the auditor. To understand why it was now given to the Speaker, it is necessary to examine the development of the Speaker’s role during the eighteenth century.

The Speakership in the Eighteenth Century

As explained in the Introduction, the historical development of the Speakership has been comparatively neglected by historians. As such, it is difficult to determine how lucrative the role was during the eighteenth century, or how much prestige it carried. However, it has been firmly established that the Speakership was not politically neutral and non-partisan in the way that it is today. The present convention is that the Speaker should sever all party ties and refrain from expressing any political opinion.¹³⁴ However, by the standards of the British constitution this is a relatively recent innovation. After about 1680 the Speaker was no longer chosen directly by the Court; but rather than evolving into a truly independent role, the Speaker instead became embroiled in the emerging party system.¹³⁵ One early eighteenth-century Speaker, Sir Spencer Compton (later 1st Earl of Wilmington; c. 1674–1743), even went on to become prime minister; he had maintained

¹³¹ Receipt of the Exchequer Act, 1783 (n. p.).

¹³² Sainty, *Officers of the Exchequer*, p. 209.

¹³³ *Journal of the House of Commons* vol. 49, 1794 (London: House of Commons, 1803).

¹³⁴ Laban, *Mr Speaker*, pp. 3–4.

¹³⁵ S. K. Roberts, “The Reputation and Authority of the Speaker and the Speakership in the House of Commons, 1640 to 1660”, *Parliamentary History* 29:1 (2010), p. 78; Laundy, *Office of Speaker*, pp. 232–41, 244–45; Porritt, *The Unreformed House of Commons*, pp. 437–43; P. Seaward, “The Speaker in the Age of Party, 1672–1715”, *Parliamentary History* 29:1 (2010), p. 100.

his allegiance to the Whig party throughout his Speakership.¹³⁶ Several historians have argued that political neutrality facilitates the dignity and deference afforded to the Speaker: by standing above the political fray, they are able to retain the respect of all parties in the House.¹³⁷ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to assess this claim in detail but, if true, it would suggest that the Speakers of the early eighteenth century did not enjoy the same level of dignity they do today.

Arthur Onslow, the “Great Speaker” (1691–1768; in office 1728–61), has traditionally been cited as the model for the totally neutral and non-partisan Speakership of today.¹³⁸ It is true that Onslow achieved ‘independence’, in the sense of not having to rely on ministerial support for his re-election, but he certainly did not maintain total political neutrality: he often aired his opinions in committee, even on controversial topics.¹³⁹ Nor was he truly independent of the ministry in a financial sense. He famously resigned the lucrative office of Treasurer of the Navy in 1742 in order to counter claims of political influence; but he did not repay the significant emoluments he had accumulated from this post over the previous eight years.¹⁴⁰ His successors generally did not accept offices under the Crown, but they had to resort to unsatisfactory expedients in order to fund the expenses of the role. Sir John Cust (1718–70; in office 1761–70) supported himself from private means.¹⁴¹ Sir Fletcher Norton (1716–89; in office 1770–80) and Charles Wolfran Cornwall (1735–89; in office 1780–89) were able to retain legal sinecures which they had held before appointment to the Chair.¹⁴² However, William Wyndham Grenville (later 1st Baron Grenville; 1759–1834) continued to hold the Government post of Paymaster-General of the Forces, as well as seats on the Board of

¹³⁶ A. A. Hanham, “Compton, Spencer, earl of Wilmington (c. 1674–1743)”, *ODNB* (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/6036> [accessed 08/12/2022].

¹³⁷ P. Laundy, *The Office of Speaker* (London: Cassell, 1964), pp. 7–8.

¹³⁸ A. I. Dasent, *The Speakers of the House of Commons* (London: The Bodley Head, 1911), p. 259; Porritt, *Unreformed House of Commons*, p. 454; Laundy, *Office of Speaker*, pp. 261–62; M. Laban, *Mr. Speaker: the Office and the Individuals since 1945* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2013), p. ix.

¹³⁹ P. D. G. Thomas, *The House of Commons in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 299–306.

¹⁴⁰ Dasent, *Speakers of the House of Commons*, p. 258; Laundy, *Office of Speaker*, p. 264; Porritt, *The Unreformed House of Commons*, pp. 437, 449–50; C. E. Vulliamy, *The Onslow Family: 1528–1874* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1953), p. 110.

¹⁴¹ Sir L. Namier, “CUST, Sir John, 3rd Bt. (1718–70), of Belton, Lincs.”, *History of Parliament Online* (1964), <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/cust-sir-john-1718-70> [accessed 27/11/2022].

¹⁴² J. Brooke, “NORTON, Fletcher (1716–89), of Grantley, Yorks. and Womersley, Surr.”, *History of Parliament Online* (1964), <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/norton-fletcher-1716-89>; J. Brooke, “CORNWALL, Charles Wolfran (1735–89), of Barton Priors, nr. Winchester, Hants.”, *History of Parliament Online* (1964), <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/cornwall-charles-wolfran-1735-89>. [Both accessed 27/11/2022.] See also Thomas, *House of Commons*, pp. 288–89.

Control and Board of Trade, throughout his brief Speakership (January–June 1789).¹⁴³ In most respects the Speakership was relatively accessible to middle-class professionals—especially those with legal training—but the lack of a regular salary remained a barrier.

For those who could obtain the office, however, the benefits lasted a lifetime—and beyond. From the middle of the century, it became customary to grant a generous pension to a retiring Speaker; and by 1800, the grant of a peerage was also becoming routine. Onslow was the first Speaker to be awarded a retiring pension: he received an annuity of £3,000 not only for his lifetime, but also that of his son.¹⁴⁴ In later years, the younger Onslow attracted some criticism from Radical commentators for accepting this pension.¹⁴⁵ However, Speaker Onslow’s action must be understood in the context of eighteenth-century British society, in which the offices and emoluments of the state were often jealously guarded by aristocratic families.¹⁴⁶ In these circumstances, it is understandable that Onslow seized this opportunity to give his descendants the best possible life chances. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when the Speaker’s retirement peerage became an established tradition. Thomas argues that it began with a deathbed promise to Speaker Cust in 1770, that his son would be granted a peerage in the next round of peerage creations, which was duly honoured in 1776.¹⁴⁷ However, a cursory examination of Cust’s immediate successors makes clear that this practice did not immediately become established as a custom. Norton was not ennobled until two years after his retirement; even then, his peerage was not granted in direct recognition of his services as Speaker (although, as Thomas points out, this was not widely known at the time).¹⁴⁸ Cornwall died in office, and had no children, so no peerage was created for him.¹⁴⁹ Grenville initially remained in the Commons after his brief Speakership; he was only ennobled in November 1790 so that he could become Leader of the House of Lords, at the prime minister’s behest.¹⁵⁰ Addington also remained in the Commons for several years following the end of his Speakership: he finally accepted a viscountcy in 1805.¹⁵¹ Thus, Sir John Mitford (or Lord Redesdale, as he became) was actually the first Speaker to be ennobled immediately upon leaving the Chair. Nevertheless, in a later

¹⁴³ M. M. Drummond, “Grenville, William Wyndham (1759–1834)”, *History of Parliament Online* (1964), <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/grenville-william-wyndham-1759-1834> [accessed 27/11/2022].

¹⁴⁴ Thomas, *House of Commons*, p. 354.

¹⁴⁵ Rubinstein, “Old Corruption”, p. 67.

¹⁴⁶ Porter, “English Society in the Eighteenth Century”, pp. 58–60.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas, “Cust”, n. p.

¹⁴⁸ Laundry, “Norton”, n. p.; Thomas, *House of Commons*, pp. 325–26.

¹⁴⁹ Wilkinson, “Cornwall”, n. p.

¹⁵⁰ P. J. Jupp, “Grenville, William Wyndham, Baron Grenville, 1759–1834”, *ODNB* (2009), <https://doi.org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/11501> [accessed 25/10/2014].

¹⁵¹ J. E. Cookson, “Addington, Henry, first Viscount Sidmouth, 1757–1844”, *ODNB* (2009) <https://doi.org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/150> [accessed 25/10/2022].

memorandum Mitford claimed that, during their negotiations over his appointment in 1801, Addington had assured him that the Speakership “led to a Peerage”.¹⁵² Perhaps Addington, realising that Mitford would not accept the Speakership without a ‘sweetener’, found it expedient to present the Speaker’s retirement peerage as an established tradition, despite the dubious precedents. Previous historians of the Speakership have overlooked Mitford’s memorandum, but it is extremely important in demonstrating the importance Addington and Mitford attached to the retirement peerage. Mitford was reluctant to accept the Speakership, and Addington explicitly used the peerage as a bargaining chip. He appealed not only to Mitford’s personal vanity, but to his duty to provide for his relations: “altho’ I had no family, yet, for the sake of my brother & his children [... the peerage] might properly be an object with me”.¹⁵³ For a middle-class lawyer like Mitford, dynastic considerations were undoubtedly a strong incentive. As Porter put it, “peerages were just about the one thing not for sale in Georgian England”.¹⁵⁴ Mitford’s legal practice had been financially lucrative, but no amount of wealth could, in itself, buy him entry into the closed circle of the British aristocracy.¹⁵⁵ The importance Mitford attached to his peerage clearly supports the view that social advancement was a major objective for the Speakers of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

Again, existing histories of the Speakership offer no clear judgement as to how much prestige the Speaker enjoyed in the eyes of wider society before the eighteenth century. However, it is clear that, by the middle of that century, some visible aspects of ceremony had begun to accrue around the office. Nowadays, one of the most famous rituals associated with the Speaker is the daily “Speaker’s Procession” into the House of Commons at the start of the day’s business.¹⁵⁶ It is not clear when this first became a daily ritual, but recent research by Kathrin Strauss shows that, as early as the 15th century, it was customary for the Speaker to process to the Commons behind the mace after his initial appointment by the monarch.¹⁵⁷ The Speaker’s distinctive costume—namely, black-and-gold robes and a full-bottomed wig—was also well-established by the late eighteenth

¹⁵² Gloucester Archives (GA) D2002/3/1/11: Memorandum on his acceptance of Speakership of the Commons, 1802, ff. 4–5.

¹⁵³ GA D2002/3/1/11, ff. 4–5. In the event, Mitford later had a son of his own, who eventually inherited his peerage.

¹⁵⁴ Porter, “English Society in the Eighteenth Century”, p. 52.

¹⁵⁵ D. S. Greer, “Mitford, John Freeman-”, first Baron Redesdale (1748–1830)”, *ODNB* (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18857> [accessed 08/12/2020].

¹⁵⁶ Laundy, *Office of Speaker*, p. 10–11.

¹⁵⁷ K. Strauss, “The Ceremonial Mace in the House of Commons and Great Maces of Cities and Boroughs in the 16th and Early 17th Century”, *Parliamentary History* 41:3 (2022), p. 400.

century.¹⁵⁸ Admittedly, this outfit was never unique to the Speakership: successive chancellors of the Exchequer wore similar robes until the 1850s, and certain senior judges continue to wear them to this day.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the robes and wig have come to be strongly associated with the Speakership.¹⁶⁰ As early as the 1640s, Speaker Lenthall was depicted wearing his robes in two portraits.¹⁶¹ Surviving portraits of Onslow, Cust, Norton and Cornwall show all of them wearing both gown and wig.¹⁶² The fact that successive Speakers chose to be portrayed in their official costume implies that it was widely-recognised and strongly associated with the office. This, in turn, indicates that the Speaker already enjoyed widespread public recognition long before Addington's appropriation of the Speaker's House. Another very visible accessory of the Speakership is the Speaker's State Coach. It is not certain when the Speaker first obtained possession of this, but some of its painted panels have been attributed to G. B. Cipriani, which would date them to the period 1755–85.¹⁶³ The iconography of these panels—which depict allegorical figures representing Eloquence, Discretion, Loyalty and Learning—seems very apt for the office of Speaker.¹⁶⁴ Therefore, it is quite possible that the coach was already in the Speaker's possession during Onslow's tenure.

Previous historians of the Speakership have also failed to establish exactly how and when the Speaker's official social functions were initiated. Riding, Church and Garibaldi suggest that they may have begun as early as the late seventeenth century.¹⁶⁵ Vulliamy claims that Onslow hosted dinners and levées at his own townhouse, Fauconberg House, Soho Square, but sadly he provides few details of these events.¹⁶⁶ However, in 1770 Speaker Norton's Sunday evening levées were

¹⁵⁸ During John Bercow's Speakership (2009–19), a simplified form of dress was adopted for everyday use, but the traditional black-and-gold gown is still worn on ceremonial occasions. The wearing of wigs was abandoned after Speaker Boothroyd's election in 1992. (Laban, *Mr Speaker*, pp. 177, 274–76.)

¹⁵⁹ "Robe", National Trust Collections, <https://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/429167>; "History of Court Dress", website of the Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, <https://www.judiciary.uk/about-the-judiciary/history-of-the-judiciary-in-england-and-wales/history/>. [Both accessed 21/11/2022.].

¹⁶⁰ Lummis, *The Speaker's Chair*, pp. 6–7; Laundry, *Office of Speaker*, p. 10

¹⁶¹ Attributed to E. Bower, *Speaker William Lenthall (1591–1662), and His Family*, c. 1643–45, oil on canvas, 2705 x 2440mm, London: Parliamentary Art Collection (PAC), WOA 4187; Attributed to H. Paert, *William Lenthall Esqre., Speaker 1640–60 (1591–1662)*, 18th century, oil on canvas, 940 x 1219mm, PAC, WOA 2712.

¹⁶² Sir J. Thornhill and W. Hogarth, *Speaker Arthur Onslow calling upon Sir Robert Walpole to Speak in the House of Commons*, oil on canvas, 991 x 9270mm, Guildford: National Trust (Clandon Park), 1441463; Sir J Reynolds, *The Hon. Sir John Cust, 3rd Bt of Pinchbeck and 6th Bt of Humby (1718–1770) in Speaker's Robes*, 1767–68, oil on canvas, 3390 x 2520mm, Grantham: National Trust (Belton House), NT 436062; W. Beechey, *Sir Fletcher Norton (Speaker 1770–80), Baron Grantley (1716–89)*, date unknown, oil on canvas, 1118x1422mm, PAC, WOA 2705; T. Gainsborough, *The Rt Hon. Charles Wolfran Cornwall (1785–1786)*, date unknown, oil on canvas, 2280 x 1485mm, Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1204-5.

¹⁶³ A. Wedgwood, "Speaker's Coach: A Parliamentary Puzzle on Four Wheels", *The House*, 5 December 1994, p. 25.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 25. See also pp. 129–30 of this thesis.

¹⁶⁵ C. Riding, D. Church and C. Garibaldi, "The Speaker's House", in C. Riding and J. Riding (eds.), *The Houses of Parliament: History, Art, Architecture* (London: Merrell, 2000), pp. 197–98.

¹⁶⁶ Vulliamy, *Onslow Family*, p. 127; Dasent, *Speakers of the House of Commons*, p. 256

advertised in the *London Evening Post*.¹⁶⁷ This indicates that regular entertaining was now an expected part of the Speaker's duties, albeit one probably sanctioned purely by custom rather than by any formal instructions. The *London Evening Post* also mentions that William Murray, 1st Earl of Mansfield (1705–93), the acting Speaker of the House of Lords, would hold a levée at the same time as Norton's.¹⁶⁸ (Mansfield was temporarily serving as the Lords' Speaker whilst the post of lord chancellor was in commission.)¹⁶⁹ This tends to confirm that these functions were officially recognised and co-ordinated parliamentary events, rather than purely private hospitality. Moreover, at the time of Addington's first election the Speaker's perquisites included "two hogsheads of claret annually", in addition to his official service of silver plate (discussed below).¹⁷⁰ The official provision of alcohol and tableware constituted a tacit acknowledgement that hospitality was an expected part of the Speaker's official duties.¹⁷¹ Lady Elliot also mentions "dinners and levees" in her 1789 letter on the Speakership (discussed below).¹⁷²

Given that the office already had certain material trappings and regular social functions associated with it, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Speakership already carried a certain level of prestige by 1789. Nevertheless, existing biographies of the late eighteenth-century Speakers suggest that the political stature of the Chair at any given moment depended greatly on the character of the individual office-holder. Clearly, Onslow was held in great respect by his fellow parliamentarians; but his immediate successors were, arguably, somewhat undistinguished. Cust lacked procedural knowledge and struggled to maintain order in the House.¹⁷³ Norton, though deemed "shrewd and able" by Laundy, is generally remembered as a "coarse, gross" man who did nothing to bolster the dignity of the office.¹⁷⁴ Cornwall has traditionally been written off as "drunken and bored", although Hunt and Wilkinson give a more generous assessment of his capabilities in the Chair.¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the Speakership arguably reached a low ebb in 1789, when Grenville resigned

¹⁶⁷ *London Evening Post*, 17–20 February 1770, p. 4.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁹ J. Oldham, "Murray, William, first earl of Mansfield (1705–1793)", *ODNB* (2008), <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/19655> [accessed 19/06/2023].

¹⁷⁰ Laundy, *Office of Speaker*, p. 284. See also pp. 78–79 of this thesis.

¹⁷¹ Thomas, *The House of Commons*, pp. 399–400.

¹⁷² Elliot-Murray-Kynynmound, Emma, Countess of Minto, *Life and Letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot, First Earl of Minto*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1874), pp. 255–56.

¹⁷³ Laundy, *Office of Speaker*, p. 274; P. D. G. Thomas, "Cust, Sir John, third baronet (1718–1770)", *ODNB* (2009), <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/6974> [accessed 25/10/2022]; Thomas, *The House of Commons*, p. 358.

¹⁷⁴ Dasent, *Speakers of the House of Commons*, p. 275–78; Laundy, *Office of Speaker*, p. 275; Sir W. McKay, "Nothing Could Exceed the Badness of his Character Even in this Bad Age", *Parliamentary History* 29:1 (2010), p. 130.

¹⁷⁵ Laundy, *Office of Speaker*, pp. 282–83; W. Hunt and C. Wilkinson, "Cornwall, Charles Wolfran (1735–1789)", *ODNB* (2004), <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/6335> [accessed 24/04/2023].

after just five months, having been offered the more attractive post of Home Secretary.¹⁷⁶ This was seen by some contemporaries as a measure of the Speakership's decline since Onslow's day.¹⁷⁷

Further evidence of the Speaker's diminished stature can be found in a letter written by Lady Elliot, whose husband, Sir Gilbert Elliot (later 1st Earl of Minto; 1751–1814), stood against Grenville for the Speakership. She “laughed heartily” when her husband told her of his candidacy:

I cannot compose my muscles when I think of you riding in the state-coach with your flowing wig [...] I am sure your constitution is by no means equal to the confinement, sedentary life, and constant bore, of being Speaker... Consider how tired you would be of sitting to hear all the proings in the House of Commons, and how much more so with all the great dinners and levees [sic]. What is the use of superior talents if you are to sit still and say nothing? [...] Be anything *but* Speaker [...]¹⁷⁸

Lady Elliot's disparaging assessment of the Speaker's role— “to sit still and say nothing”—is unfair. Admittedly, eighteenth-century Speakers had less influence over the conduct of parliamentary business than their twenty-first century successors. (The Speaker's powers were significantly augmented by major changes to the standing orders from the 1880s onwards.¹⁷⁹) Nevertheless, Georgian Speakers could still influence the conduct of debates in subtle but significant ways. As Thomas points out, they often exercised these powers to the government's advantage. For example, the Speaker would usually call on the relevant minister to open any debate; and at the end of the debate, he would usually “give the decision on the question in favour of the administration, throwing the responsibility for forcing any division on the opposition”.¹⁸⁰ Eighteenth-century governments understood the value of a sympathetic Chair, and they were careful to nominate Speakers who they thought would remain loyal to them. Indeed, Grenville was nominated because Pitt deemed it particularly important to have a close ally in the Chair during the regency crisis of 1789.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, Lady Elliot's flippant remark reflects an enduring perception of the Speakership. In the twenty-first century, Laban has argued that the Speakership is generally overlooked by the public because “people are usually more interested in the players than they are in the referee”.¹⁸² Lady Elliot's perception that the Speaker did “nothing” suggests that at least some

¹⁷⁶ Dasent, *Speakers of the House of Commons*, pp. 286–89.

¹⁷⁷ P. Ziegler, *Addington: A Life of Henry Addington, First Viscount Sidmouth* (London: Collins 1965), p. 59.

¹⁷⁸ Minto, *Life and Letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot*, vol. I, pp. 255–56.

¹⁷⁹ P. Seaward, “Urgency Motion”, *History of Parliament Project Blog* (2019), <https://historyofparliamentblog.wordpress.com/2019/03/27/urgency-motions/> [accessed 27/10/2022].

¹⁸⁰ Thomas, *The House of Commons*, p. 284.

¹⁸¹ Jupp, “Grenville”, n. p.

¹⁸² Laban, *Mr. Speaker*, p. x.

observers held a similar attitude in the 1780s. Lady Elliot was, however, undoubtedly correct that the role required physical and mental stamina. This was an age when Commons speeches could last for hours; late-night sittings were frequent, and no Deputy Speakers were appointed.¹⁸³ Indeed, the pressures of the role are thought to have contributed to Cust's premature death.¹⁸⁴ What is perhaps most striking about Lady Elliot's letter, though, is her attitude to the visible trappings of the role: the wig, gown and State Coach. Whereas twentieth-century commentators saw these as embodiments of the Speaker's dignity, Lady Elliot appears to view them as sources of embarrassment.¹⁸⁵ This may, in part, be the consequence of changing fashions. As previously noted, the origins of the State Coach are unknown, but stylistic evidence suggests it was probably built in the early eighteenth century; hence, it may have looked outdated by 1789.¹⁸⁶ However, an old-fashioned appearance was not necessarily a drawback. By the time Laundy wrote his book in the 1960s, the Speaker's antiquated wig and costume were seen to enhance his dignity.¹⁸⁷ They rooted the Speakership in tradition; and by then, tradition was seen to convey authority. Addington, and his successor Abbot, were probably the first Speakers to consciously exploit this idea. In Chapter Two, this thesis will demonstrate that James Wyatt's historicist remodelling of the Speaker's House after 1802 was consciously linked to this strategy.

Whilst biographies of individual Speakers are available, to date there has been little attempt to analyse the social standing of the eighteenth-century Speakers as a group. This question must be considered within the wider context of the social composition of Parliament in the eighteenth century. Existing histories of Parliament indicate that, whilst it might be an exaggeration to say that aristocratic and noble families dominated the House of Commons in this era, they certainly had a disproportionate influence. In 1790, the total membership of the House of Commons was 558; this increased to 658 after the 1801 Union with Ireland.¹⁸⁸ In the years to 1820, the Commons contained, on average, 170 Members who either held Irish peerages, or else were the sons of peers or peeresses.¹⁸⁹ In other words, this was typically 25-30% of the total membership of the House. Yet even this is not the full picture: there were many other MPs who had a connection, either by blood

¹⁸³ Paul Seaward, "Time and the Commons", *History of Parliament Project Blog* (2014), <https://thehistoryofparliament.wordpress.com/2014/10/23/time-and-the-commons/>, [accessed 24/04/2023]; Laundy, *Office of Speaker*, p. 121.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas, "Cust", n. p.

¹⁸⁵ Laundy, *Office of Speaker*, pp. 9–10.

¹⁸⁶ London: Parliamentary Archives [PA], ARC/VAR/58: Speaker's House (1993); "The Speaker's State Coach", National Trust Collections, <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/272956.1> [accessed 28/10/2022]. In his diaries, Abbot dated the coach to 1701 (TNA PRO 30/9/33, f. 16).

¹⁸⁷ Laundy, *Office of Speaker*, pp. 7–12.

¹⁸⁸ R. G. Thorne, "Introductory Survey, 1790–1820, III: The Members", *History of Parliament Online* (1986), <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/survey/iii-members> [accessed 08/12/2022].

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, n. p.

or marriage, to a titled family. Some of the leading aristocratic dynasties were able to send multiple family members to the Commons. For example, between 1790 and 1820 the House hosted eight MPs named Spencer—the family name of the Dukes of Marlborough.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, Members with aristocratic connections were more likely to secure government office. Whilst the country gentry were well-represented in the Commons, they tended to be associated with the back-benches rather than the cabinet.¹⁹¹ The House was not totally inaccessible to self-made middle-class men: Thorne estimates that there were “well over 100” self-made Members in the Commons during the 1790–1820 period.¹⁹² This was certainly higher than in previous decades but, in relation to the overall size of the House, it remained a relatively low figure.

It seems that, for these self-made men, the Speakership was a more easily-attainable position than a cabinet post. There was a long, albeit intermittent, tradition of appointing lawyers to the role.¹⁹³ The law was considered a respectable profession both for aspiring middle-class men, and for the younger sons of the nobility.¹⁹⁴ Porter notes that the lord chancellorship could provide a “fast route” for aspiring lawyers to obtain a peerage.¹⁹⁵ However, such senior legal posts were highly sought-after and were not easy to obtain.¹⁹⁶ Thus, if a lawyer could enter the House of Commons, they must surely have realised that the Speakership was another role which they could aspire to. It was perhaps not a lucrative role; but, given the material trappings and social functions outlined above, it seems probable that it would have given them a measure of prestige and public recognition. At any rate, all the Speakers of the later eighteenth century hailed from relatively modest backgrounds, although some of them had advantageous family connections. Onslow was the son of an excise commissioner; but he was also the nephew of Sir Richard Onslow (later 1st Baron Onslow; 1654–1717), a prominent parliamentarian who had himself served as Speaker from 1708–10.¹⁹⁷ Sir John Cust was the son of a baronet; but his uncle, Sir John Brownlow (1690–1754), had been

¹⁹⁰ Thorne, “The Members [1790–1820]”, n. p.

¹⁹¹ Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 58–60.

¹⁹² Thorne, “The Members [1790–1820]”, n. p.

¹⁹³ Laundy, *Office of Speaker*, p. 94; P. Seaward, “Qualifications for the Speakership”, *History of Parliament Project Blog* (2019), <https://historyofparliamentblog.wordpress.com/2019/10/27/qualifications-for-the-speakership/> [accessed 08/12/2022].

¹⁹⁴ P. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 70–71, 74; Porter, “English Society in the Eighteenth Century”, pp. 73–74.

¹⁹⁵ Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 52.

¹⁹⁶ See, for example, Mitford’s unsuccessful attempt to obtain the post of Master of the Rolls, discussed on p. 91 of this thesis.

¹⁹⁷ P. Laundy, “Onslow, Arthur (1691–1768)”, *ODNB* (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20788>; K. Ellis, “Onslow, Richard, first Baron Onslow (1654–1717)”, *ODNB* (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20794>. [Both accessed 08/12/2022.]

created Viscount Tyrconnel in 1718.¹⁹⁸ Little is known about Sir Fletcher Norton's family background, but Cornwall's parents were commoners.¹⁹⁹ All four of these men had trained as lawyers.

Nevertheless, there were still certain barriers to middle-class men who aspired to the Speakership. The most obvious of these was the expenses associated with the role. Despite the annual grant of claret, the cost of providing food and drink for the Speaker's dinners could be enormous (as discussed below).²⁰⁰ The Speaker's elaborate costume was expensive, too. It seems that the gown itself remained private property, being purchased by each Speaker from his predecessor: Addington sold it to Mitford for £100 at the conclusion of his Speakership.²⁰¹ The length of the gown necessitated a trainbearer to accompany the Speaker when processing to and from the House of Commons. To date, there has been little historical study of this role, but it appears that Speakers in this era had to pay their trainbearers from their own pocket. Charles Manners-Sutton certainly did so, as he discusses this in an 1825 letter to Sir Robert Peel (1788–1850).²⁰² The State Coach had to be purchased by each Speaker from his predecessor. Addington sold it to Mitford for £300; Mitford in turn sold it to Abbot for £1060 in 1802.²⁰³ Abbot's diary mentions that the coach had been repaired in 1801—presumably at Mitford's own expense—which may explain the increase in price.

These expenses did not deter Henry Addington from standing for the Speakership in June 1789. Despite his wife's disapproval, Sir Gilbert Elliot was sufficiently attracted to the role to stand for a second time; but, as the government candidate, Addington won a comfortable victory.²⁰⁴ It seems that Addington allowed himself to be nominated at Pitt's behest; the prime minister had known him since their schooldays, and he wanted another ally to replace Grenville in the Chair.²⁰⁵ Addington had previously been a rather quiet Member, and there was some initial scepticism when he was first nominated.²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, it seems that Addington soon realised the opportunities offered by his new role; and, over the next twelve years, he would make it his own.

¹⁹⁸ Thomas, "Cust", n. p.

¹⁹⁹ Hunt and Wilkinson, "Cornwall", n. p.

²⁰⁰ See p. 92 of this thesis.

²⁰¹ GA D2002/3/1/3: Letters personal and political, including letters from Pitt and Addington; letter from Addington to Mitford, 3 May 1801.

²⁰² British Library (BL) Add. Ms. 40378, f. 127: Charles Manners-Sutton to Sir Robert Peel, 17 May 1825.

²⁰³ GA, D2002/3/1/3: Letters personal and political, including letters from Pitt and Addington; Addington to Mitford, from Downing Street, 3 May 1801; TNA PRO 30/9/33, f. 16.

²⁰⁴ Ziegler, *Addington*, pp. 57–59.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 57–59.

²⁰⁶ M. H. Port, "Addington, Henry (1757–1844), of Mortimer, Bucks.", *History of Parliament Online* (1964), <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/addington-henry-1757-1844> [accessed 08/12/2022].

The Speakership of Henry Addington, 1789–1801

On the basis of existing scholarship, it seems clear that Addington wanted to enhance both his personal stature, and that of his family. His parents had originated from the minor gentry of Oxfordshire; but his father Anthony (1659–1729), being a younger son, inherited no estate of his own.²⁰⁷ Instead, he built a successful practice as a physician; his clients included many wealthy and well-connected individuals, most notably the prime minister William Pitt, 1st Earl of Chatham (better known as Pitt the Elder; 1708–78).²⁰⁸ By 1780, Anthony had saved enough money to buy a country estate, Upottery, in Devon; this effectively secured his family’s position among the gentry.²⁰⁹ It now fell to Henry, as his eldest son, to consolidate Anthony’s achievements, and perhaps to climb the social ladder even further. Like many middle-class sons, Henry initially trained as a lawyer, being called to the Bar at Lincoln’s Inn in 1784.²¹⁰ He entered Parliament in the same year with the encouragement of Chatham’s second son, William Pitt the Younger (1759–1806), who had recently been appointed prime minister.²¹¹

Addington’s middle-class origins were always treated with a degree of condescension by the Georgian political elites, and some of this snobbery has filtered through to subsequent historical assessments.²¹² His relatively brief spell as prime minister (1801–04) has been overshadowed by the career of Pitt the Younger, who both preceded and succeeded him in that office. His subsequent tenure as Home Secretary, though longer lasting (1812–22), has been heavily criticised because of his reactionary policies.²¹³ Until the 1960s, historians tended to dismiss Addington as a “mediocrity”—albeit, as Dasent put it, a “genial” one.²¹⁴ However, in more recent decades there has been a greater acknowledgment of Addington’s qualities in the Chair.²¹⁵ Indeed, Ziegler declared that he was “an uncommonly good Speaker”.²¹⁶ He argues that Addington had a naturally conciliatory nature, which made him better-suited to a role as a neutral arbiter rather than a partisan political office-holder. This, coupled with “his skill in drafting and in finding formulae acceptable to everyone, made him something close to the ideal mediator”.²¹⁷ Moreover, since first

²⁰⁷ F. Espinasse and C. Nutt, “Addington, Anthony, 1713–1790”, *ODNB* (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/149> [accessed 31/10/2022].

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, n. p.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, n. p.

²¹⁰ Cookson, “Addington, Henry”, n. p.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, n. p.

²¹² *Ibid.*, n. p.

²¹³ Ziegler, *Addington*, p. 11.

²¹⁴ Cookson, “Addington”, n. p.; Dasent, *Speakers of the House of Commons*, p. 290.

²¹⁵ See, for example, Cookson, “Addington”, n. p.

²¹⁶ Ziegler, *Addington*, pp. 60–61.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.

joining the Commons in 1784 he had assiduously studied parliamentary procedure.²¹⁸ Following the undistinguished Speakerships of Cust, Norton, Cornwall and Grenville, Addington had all the necessary qualities to restore the prestige of the office. Addington initially stood for the Speakership at Pitt's behest.²¹⁹ Whilst Addington's conduct within the Chair itself was expected to be impartial, there was no firmly-established expectation that he should sever his personal connections with his former parliamentary allies.²²⁰ If anything, Addington's installation in the Chair actually strengthened his personal relationship with Pitt: by the 1790s, the Speaker had become one of the prime minister's closest confidants and advisors.²²¹ In turn, Addington's friendship with Pitt ensured that he maintained a close relationship with the administration.²²² Addington never lost the confidence of the Opposition, thanks partly to the context of the French Revolutionary Wars, which provided an excuse for him to work closely with the prime minister.²²³ Nevertheless, the exceptionally close relationship between Pitt and Addington would be unthinkable for any twenty-first-century Speaker.

Some important steps were taken to modernise the Speaker's office during Addington's tenure. Most importantly, the Speaker was granted a fixed salary.²²⁴ It is not clear whether Addington himself took the initiative to revive this proposal. It is known that he was not granted an official sinecure when first elected, although the reasons for this are a matter of debate.²²⁵ At any rate, by 1790 there appears to have been a consensus in the Commons that the time was right to grant a salary: whilst opposition MP Frederick Montagu proposed the motion, Pitt's response made clear that he was already aware of his intentions and supported them in principle.²²⁶ Thus, in March 1790, the House voted a fixed salary of £6,000 for the Speaker (about £540,000 at 2019 prices).²²⁷ This was not quite so generous as it might appear, for Addington was already receiving an income of about £2–3,000 a year in fees; his official salary merely 'topped up' these fees to a total of £6,000.²²⁸ It had long been recognised that the Speaker's income was no longer sufficient to cover the expenses of the role, but it is nevertheless a tribute to Addington's popularity, and his early success

²¹⁸ Cookson, "Addington", n. p.; Ziegler, *Addington*, pp. 58–59.

²¹⁹ Ziegler, *Addington*, pp. 56–59.

²²⁰ The relationship between Speaker and government during the eighteenth century is a complex subject, discussed at length by Thomas (*The House of Commons*, pp. 282–330). Laundry argues that Manners-Sutton's unseating from the Chair in 1835 finally established the principle that a Speaker "once elected, should cease to have any connexion with a political party" (*The Office of Speaker*, p. 304).

²²¹ Ziegler, *Addington*, pp. 31–32, pp. 70–71.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 60

²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²²⁴ This was not a new idea: it had first been suggested by Onslow back in 1758 (Thomas, *The House of Commons*, pp. 289–90).

²²⁵ For different interpretations see Ziegler, *Addington*, p. 61; and Thomas, *The House of Commons*, p. 289.

²²⁶ Thomas, *The House of Commons*, pp. 290–91.

²²⁷ Ziegler, p. 72; Thomas, *The House of Commons*, pp. 289–91.

²²⁸ Seaward, "Qualifications for the Speakership", n. p.

in the role, that the measure passed so smoothly.²²⁹ Indeed, the original proposal was for only £5,000, but Addington was held in such affection that an amendment moved in the House for an extra £1,000 was passed overwhelmingly.²³⁰ Ironically, the transfer of the Speaker's House in some ways undermined the grant of the salary. Supposedly, Addington's refusal to accept a sinecure ensured his independence from the Crown; yet the Speaker's House constituted a very valuable emolument granted by the government. It could therefore be argued that Addington's acceptance of the house was a regressive move: a visible symbol of his cosy relationship with Pitt's government, and a sign that "Old Corruption" was alive and well. However, no evidence has been found to suggest that any of Addington's contemporaries voiced such concerns. Besides, it would probably be unduly cynical to assume that Addington's motives for acquiring the house were purely financial. Addington already owned a London house and he could afford to live independently in the capital.²³¹ This suggests that his decision to stake a claim to the Auditor's House was motivated more by prestige than money. Admittedly, Addington does not explicitly discuss the grant of the house in any of his surviving correspondence; as such, his precise motives for seeking an official residence can only be a matter for speculation. It is possible that he was influenced partly by the potential suitability of the house for the Speaker's official entertaining: after all, the Auditor's House had previously hosted large-scale social functions, such as Lincoln's grand soirée in 1756 (discussed below).²³² For his part Pitt the Younger, as prime minister, took a pragmatic attitude to patronage. Despite his earlier commitment to "economical reform", he knew that patronage was necessary as a means to maintain support among his fellow parliamentarians.²³³ He made no attempt to abolish the office of auditor after Newcastle's death; instead, he granted it to another of his closest political allies, the former Speaker Lord Grenville.²³⁴ Grenville may have been rather disappointed to miss out on the Auditor's House, but the Act of 1783, which separated the house from the office, would have been difficult to reverse. Pitt had little choice but to find somebody else to grant the house to. Again, his precise motives for choosing Addington can only be a matter for speculation, but their close

²²⁹ Thomas, *The House of Commons*, pp. 288–91.

²³⁰ G. Pellew, *The Life and Correspondence of the Rt. Hon. Henry Addington, First Viscount Sidmouth* vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1847), pp. 69–70.

²³¹ Upon his marriage Addington's brother-in-law, James Sutton, gave him a furnished house in Southampton Street (TNA PROB 11/1189/299: Will of Anthony Addington, Doctor of Physic of Reading, Berkshire, f. 112). Nevertheless, Pellew mentions that he took a house in Lower Brook Street at Christmas 1787 (*Henry Addington* I, p. 52). Addington also kept his father's house in Clifford Street following Anthony's death in 1790. He then moved into this house after leaving Downing Street in 1804 (Pellew, *Henry Addington* 1, p. 3; GA D2002/3/1/17, John Freeman-Mitford, 1st Baron Redesdale: correspondence and professional papers, letter from Henry Addington to Lord Redesdale, 17 November 1804). Addington may well have supplemented his official salary by letting this house whilst residing in the Speaker's House.

²³² See pp. 73–74 of this thesis.

²³³ M. J. Turner: *Pitt the Younger: A Life* (London: Hambledon and London, 2003), pp. 91, 109, 126–7.

²³⁴ Jupp, "Grenville", n. p.

friendship must surely have been a factor. Nevertheless, it was made explicit from the outset that the house would be granted to the office of Speaker, rather than to Addington personally; so it is possible that Pitt had some conception of the potential value of the house to the Speakership beyond Addington's tenure.²³⁵

It has proved impossible to ascertain the exact process by which the prime minister secured the house for the Speaker. The 1783 Exchequer Act specified that the house was to be "vested of His Majesty" upon Newcastle's death, but—as discussed above—in practice it seems to have been the Treasury, rather than the king or his household, who allocated official houses at Westminster.²³⁶ As noted above, the usual method of application—at least officially—was to send a memorial to the Treasury board. It is therefore puzzling that the Treasury minutes for 1793–94 contain no record of any discussion regarding the former Auditor's House.²³⁷ Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Pitt was ultimately responsible for the grant; he was, at this time, chancellor of the Exchequer as well as prime minister, and he therefore had personal control of Treasury patronage.²³⁸ The lack of records in the minute books suggest that Addington never made any official application for the house. Indeed, it is conceivable that the initiative may have come from Pitt rather than Addington; this can only be a matter for speculation. Either way, it seems plausible that Pitt could have obtained verbal agreement from his fellow Treasury Lords, without leaving any paper trail. Turner argues that Pitt always preferred to approach individuals directly in order to get business done quickly, and that the French wars accentuated this tendency.²³⁹ At any rate, the Treasury Board must have made a decision on the matter and presented it to the King for his formal approval some time before 21 March, when Addington read out the King's proclamation in the Commons. When he did so, MPs were presented with a *fait accompli*: they never actually had a chance to debate or vote on the proposal. This proves beyond doubt that, despite Addington's popularity among MPs, the initiative in granting the Speaker's House came not from the Commons, but from the government. Nevertheless, the announcement provoked no dissent from the MPs present, who merely resolved that the Privy Council should present an address of thanks to the King.²⁴⁰ No doubt this was largely a reflection of the personal respect for Addington which existed on both sides of the House. However, it also suggests that, in this era, it was not generally considered problematic for a Speaker to maintain close personal relations with the government. It is difficult to see how the transfer of the

²³⁵ Receipt of the Exchequer Act, 1783, 23 Geo. 3 cap. 82.

²³⁶ See pp. 38–39 of this thesis.

²³⁷ TNA T29/66, Treasury Board: minute books: Treasury: minute books, June 1793–June 1794

²³⁸ Turner, *Pitt the Younger*, p. 93.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

²⁴⁰ *Journal of the House of Commons* vol. 49, 1794, p. 361.

Auditor's House to the Speaker could have taken place in an age of totally non-partisan Speakers. The lack of official records relating to the grant implies that Addington relied on informal, probably verbal, discussions with Pitt in order to secure the house. This, in turn, would mean that the transfer of the house resulted largely from Addington's friendship with Pitt; and that friendship could only be maintained in an age before the Speaker was expected to sever all party ties. The irony is that the grant of the Speaker's House was only possible in an age when the modern conception of the Speakership had not fully evolved: and yet, as the remainder of this thesis will argue, the house ultimately helped the Speakership to evolve into the form we now know.

Thus, the Auditor's House became the Speaker's House; but the smaller house next door remained occupied (at least nominally) by the sinecurist teller of the Exchequer, John Jeffrys Pratt, Viscount Bayham (later 1st Marquess Camden; teller 1780–1834).²⁴¹ However, on 22 April the Treasury board received a memorial from Edward Coleman, the serjeant-at-arms. The serjeant was—and still is—responsible for keeping order within the Commons and its precincts, and therefore probably had as strong a claim as any other Commons officer to a residence on the premises. However, in another sign of the haphazard provision of official houses, the serjeant had never been granted such a residence—even though, as Coleman pointed out in his memorial, his deputy was apparently provided with a house “near the House of Commons”.²⁴² Coleman's memorial appears to be a pro forma document; once again, the true motives behind his application can only be a matter for speculation. At any rate, on 31 May Charles Long wrote from the Treasury to the Office of Works, explaining that the Teller's House had been appropriated for the serjeant-at-arms, with Bayham being paid compensation.²⁴³

The Fabric and Layout of the Speaker's House, 1794–1801

In 1794, then, the Speaker and the serjeant-at-arms took possession of their new residences at Westminster. What, exactly, had they inherited? Sadly, very little information is available regarding the layout or furnishings of the Serjeant-at-Arms' House during this period. The Soane plan (Fig. 1.1) shows the footprint of the building, but no detailed floor-plans have been traced. The eastern façade of the house was also omitted from Soane's river-front elevation drawing (Fig. 1.4). Fortunately, there are several sources available which shed light on the fabric and layout of the Speaker's House itself. For the purposes of this thesis, the most important of these is the ground-

²⁴¹ S. M. Farrell, “Pratt, John Jeffreys, first Marquess Camden (1759–1840), *ODNB* (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/22705> [accessed 10/08/2020].

²⁴² TNA WORK 6/22, Office of Works and Successors: Miscellanea, Memorials (1790–96), f. 161.

²⁴³ TNA: WORK 6/22, f. 161.

floor plan already noted (Fig. 1.2). There is also a series of records left by antiquarian researchers, who were drawn to the Speaker's House—along with the rest of the palace—because of its medieval and Tudor architecture. As mentioned in the Introduction, John Carter was probably the most important of these researchers. His philosophy of architectural conservation, and his attitudes to Wyatt's work at Westminster, will be discussed in Chapter Two. For now, it is sufficient to note that he published two articles discussing the Speaker's House in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The first of these appeared in February 1800, but was apparently based principally on a site visit made in 1791.²⁴⁴ It seems that this was not his first visit, however, as there is also a floor plan which he apparently made in 1788 (Fig. 1.8).²⁴⁵ Carter was a respected draughtsman, but there are several inconsistencies between his written accounts and the other available sources. His 1788 sketch plan also differs from the Soane/Groves plan made five years later. However, other antiquaries also made records of Westminster's medieval architecture. J. T. Smith made a particularly important contribution with his book *Architectural Antiquities of Westminster*. This book was originally prompted by a desire to record the medieval wall paintings in St Stephen's Chapel before their destruction in 1800.²⁴⁶ Yet Smith was conscious of the increasing interest in medieval architecture at the time; hence, by the time the book was published in 1807 he had expanded its scope to include as much information as possible about the old palace.²⁴⁷ Thomas Pennant gives a brief description of the Speaker's House in his 1791 book *Some Account of London*, but this provides little information which cannot be found elsewhere.²⁴⁸ These antiquarian sources provide a great deal of information; but for the purposes of this thesis, their major limitation is that they are far more interested in the medieval fabric of the structures than their contemporary usage. Hence, they reveal very little about the interior decoration and furnishings of the house during the 1790s. This gap is partially filled by an inventory of the publicly-owned furniture within the buildings, prepared in October 1797.²⁴⁹ The list of rooms that it provides is clearly incomplete; this, in turn, indicates that not every room in the

²⁴⁴ J. Carter (writing as "An Architect"), "The Pursuits of Architectural Innovation, No. XXV: The Antient Palace of the Kings of England at Westminster, Continued", *Gentleman's Magazine*, 70:1 (1800), pp. 129–31; and "The Pursuits of Architectural Innovation, No. XXVI: The Antient Palace of the Kings of England at Westminster, Continued", *Gentleman's Magazine*, 70:2 (1800), pp. 722–26.

²⁴⁵ John Carter, Plan of the Remains of Old Palace at Westminster (detail), 1788. Pen, ink and wash on paper, dimensions unavailable. Poughkeepsie: Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, 1864.2.2787.

²⁴⁶ J. T. Smith: *Antiquities of the City of Westminster; The Old Palace; St Stephen's Chapel (now the House of Commons)* &c. &c. (London: T. Bensley, 1807), pp. vi–xi.

²⁴⁷ Rosemary Hill, "'Proceeding like Guy Faux': the Antiquarian Investigation of St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster, 1790–1837", *Architectural History* 59 (2016), pp. 261–64.

²⁴⁸ Thomas Pennant, *Some Account of London*, 5th Edition (London, 1813), pp. 126–27.

²⁴⁹ TNA PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. o4, Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester: Papers: Miscellaneous Papers: Parliamentary, *An Inventory of the Household furniture Belonging to the Public at the Right Hon[ourable] the Speaker of the House of Commons [sic] in St Stephens [sic] Court New Palace Yard Westminster October 1797.*

house contained publicly-owned furniture. Nevertheless, it provides some indication of the rooms in the upper storeys, which were not covered by the Soane/Groves plan.

There are two good visual sources for the appearance of the house's eastern façade at this time. Being visible from the river and Westminster Bridge, this would have been the most prominent elevation of the house to the general public. Soane's records include an elevation drawing, dated October 1794, which shows the east front of the house, along with the end of St Stephen's Chapel and, to the south of this, Clerk of the Commons' House (Fig. 1.4). There is some doubt about whether this is a survey drawing of the house as it stood, or whether it includes proposed alterations by Soane. In particular, Sawyer suggests that the Serlian window shown at the east end may have been an unexecuted proposal intended to make the Speaker's House—and possibly the adjoining Exchequer Offices—conform with the Stone Building on the other side of Westminster Hall.²⁵⁰ However, Smith's book contains an engraving of the eastern end of St Stephen's Chapel apparently based on an earlier drawing by Paul Sandby (Fig. 1.5).²⁵¹ The southern end of the Speaker's House is visible and, in most respects, the engraving seems to confirm the details of Soane's elevation. The major discrepancy is that Sandby depicts the small projecting bay in the foreground as a square block with windows only on the end wall, whereas Soane depicts a semi-octagonal end with small windows on each face. Given that the Soane/Groves ground plan of the house (Fig. 1.2) shows the same arrangement, it seems probable that this was a modification executed after Sandby's drawing.

²⁵⁰ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, p. 262, fn. 73.

²⁵¹ The original watercolour is now in the British Museum collection (1880,1113.1290).

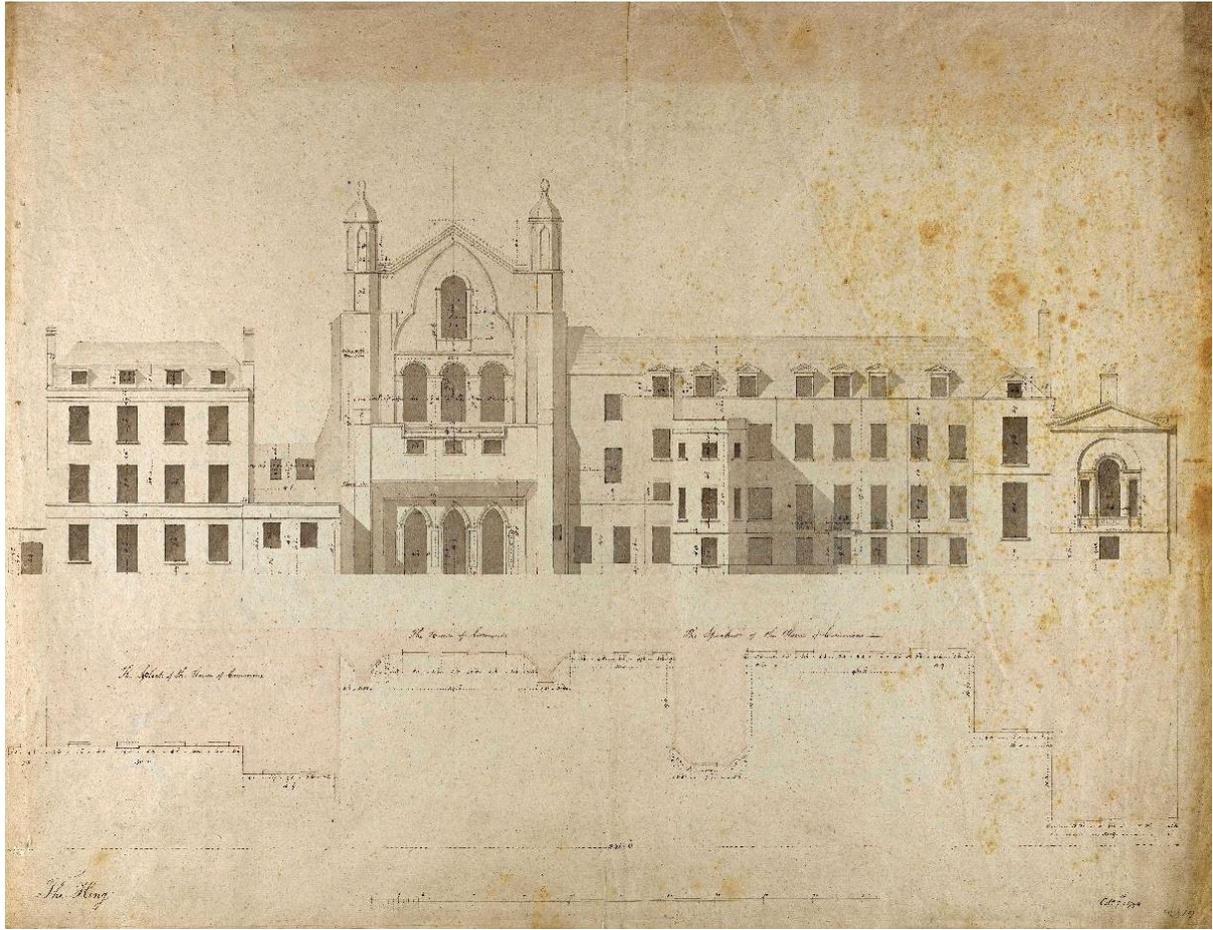


Fig. 1.4: Office of John Soane, *Survey drawing of the House of Commons and adjoining buildings, 1794: Elevation of the east (River Thames) front as modified by Wren [sic] and outline plan.* Ink on paper, 53.8 x 69.2cm. London: Sir John Soane's Museum (SM 51/6/19).

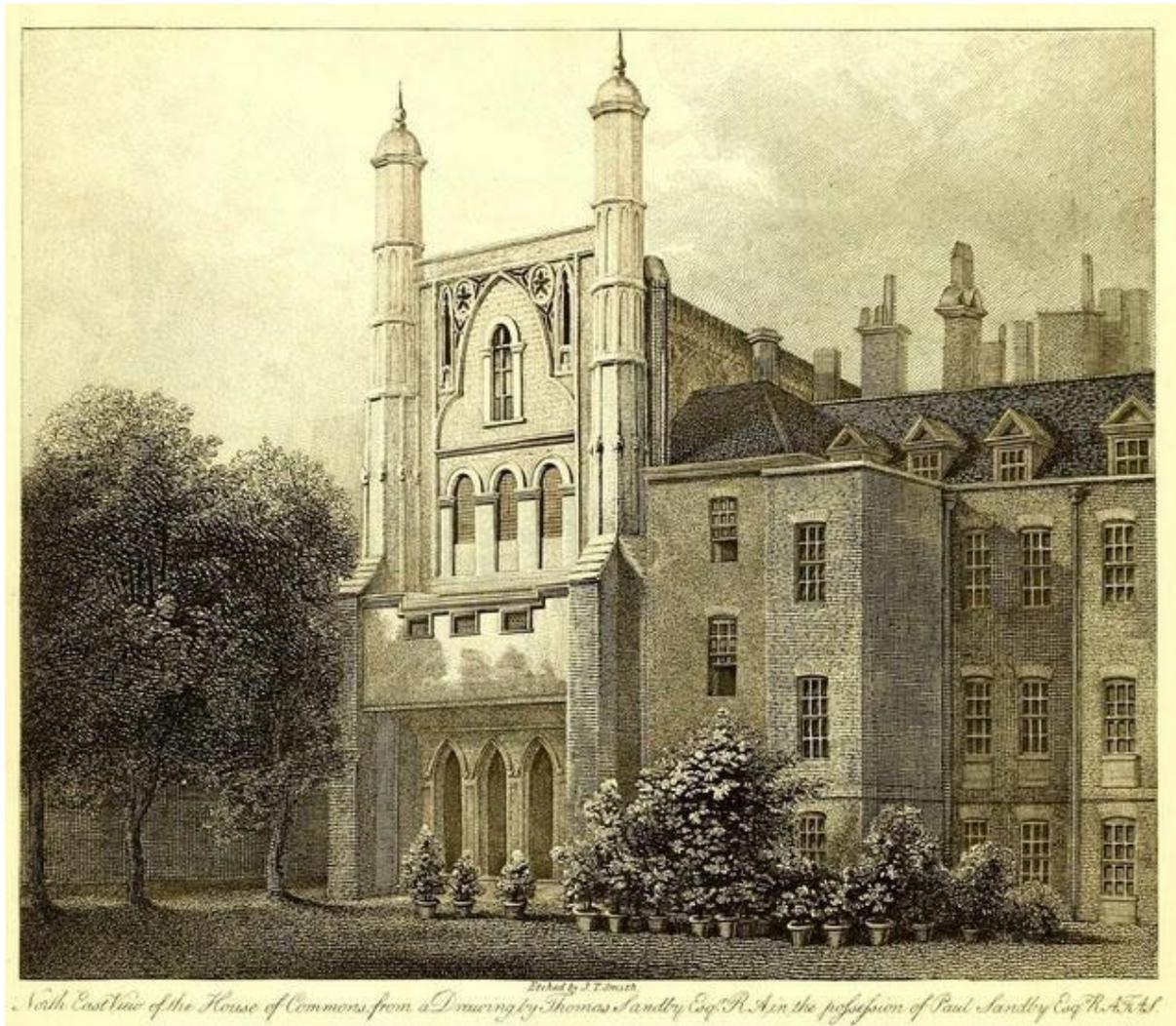


Fig. 1.5: John T. Smith after Thomas Sandby, *North East View of the House of Commons*, reproduced in Smith, *Antiquities of Westminster*, facing p. 145.

The eastern range of the house had a plain brick façade with a hipped roof, a style typical of late seventeenth- or eighteenth-century town houses.²⁵² As noted above, this riverfront range may have been newly built, or heavily remodelled, during Sir Robert Howard’s upgrades of 1673–74. However, stylistic analysis suggests that the façade may have been further altered after this date. The roof is partially obscured by a parapet and the window frames appear to be slightly recessed with a visible reveal of brickwork. Both these building practices had been prompted by the Building Act of 1707, which aimed to reduce the risk of fire ‘jumping’ between facing buildings.²⁵³ The illustration also shows that this tall block—three storeys plus an attic—was high enough to completely obscure the two-storey cloister behind.

²⁵² J. Summerson, *Georgian London* (London: Pleiades Books, 1945), pp. 49–53.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

At the northern (viewing right) end of Soane's elevation, the Serlian window and Classical pediment mark the end of the northern wing of the house. It was this northern wing that faced into St Stephen's Court. As noted above, it occupied the site of the former Vicars' Hall; the building had obviously been either totally replaced or extensively altered since the dissolution of St Stephen's College. One of J. T. Smith's engravings (c. 1807; Fig. 1.6) shows work commencing on Wyatt's alterations to the bell tower (discussed further below); this shows heavy quoins around the doorway, and a bulky, dentilled cornice, which gives this part of the building a slightly earlier appearance than the eastern façade. Carter describes it simply as "a modern front for common apartments".²⁵⁴ This section of the house is apparently lower than the riverfront wing—only two storeys—but Smith's illustration suggests that it was still high enough to obscure the cloisters behind it.²⁵⁵ The two buildings to the north (viewing right) side of the tower were used as "stables, coach houses &c."²⁵⁶ Smith's book also includes a slightly earlier view of the bell tower from the south, before the alterations began (Fig. 1.7). Carter remarks that "the various windows and parapet of this tower have been modernised"; Smith's south-east view suggests that the hipped roof and parapet may, indeed, have been 17th- or 18th-century additions, although the windows retain their Gothic character.²⁵⁷ Smith's engravings also give a good indication of the cloisters in relation to their surrounding buildings, the former being easily distinguished by their ogee mouldings. Note also the prominent chimney stack which rises just north of the oratory; this was almost certainly connected to the kitchen range.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ Carter, "Pursuits" XXV, p. 129.

²⁵⁵ The fact that it was only two storeys high suggests that it might have been the office block built for John Bingley in 1611-12. See Colvin, *King's Works* 4, p. 299.

²⁵⁶ Carter, "Pursuits" XXV, p. 129; see also Soane ground plan (Fig. 1.1) and Carter sketch plan (Fig. 1.8).

²⁵⁷ Carter, "Pursuits" XXV, p. 129.

²⁵⁸ See Clarke plan (Fig. 1.10) below, which clearly shows the position of this range just to the north-east of the former oratory (marked a).

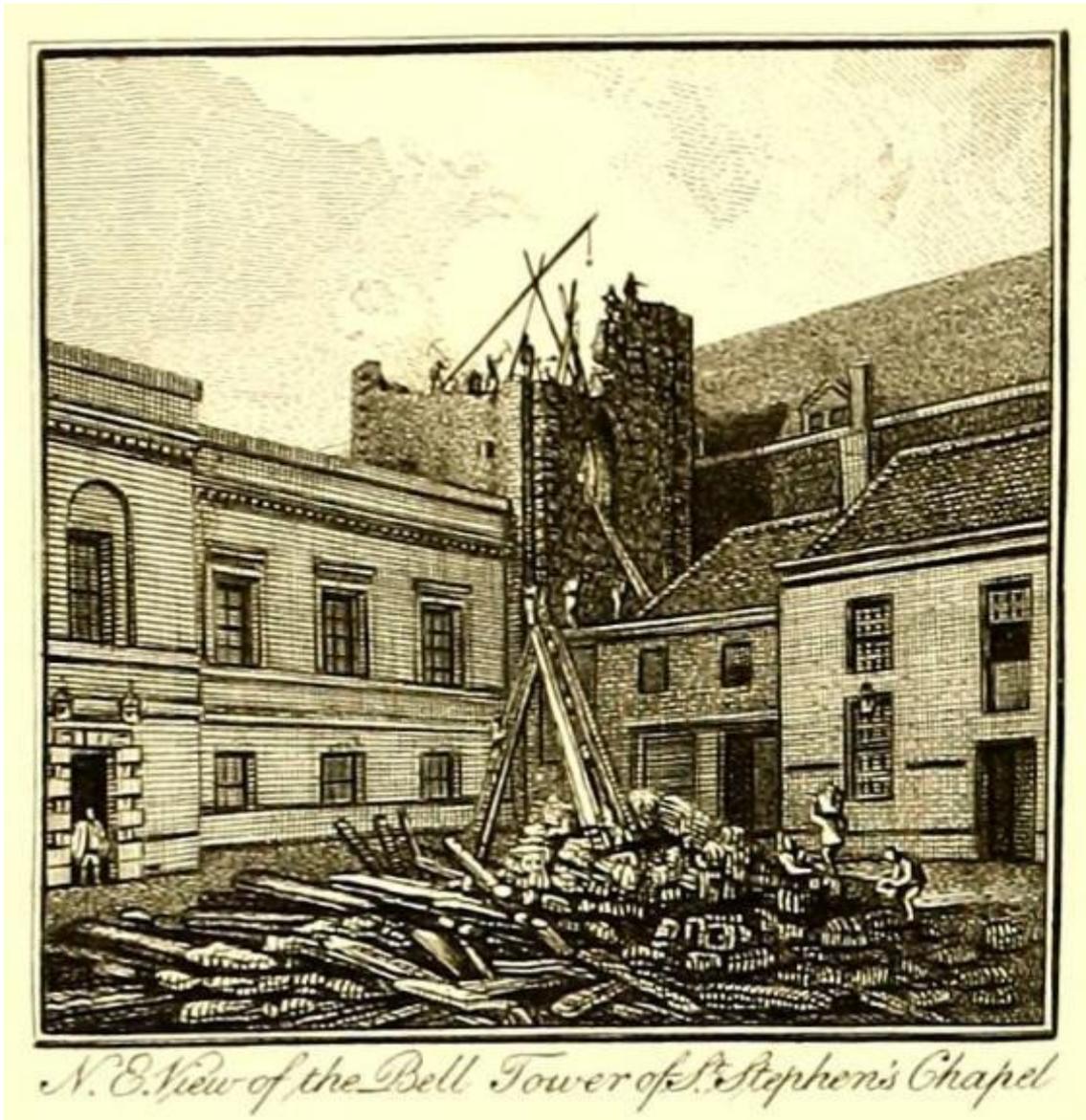


Fig. 1.6: John T. Smith, *N.E. View of the Bell Tower of St Stephen's Chapel*, reproduced in Smith, *Antiquities of Westminster*, facing p. 45.

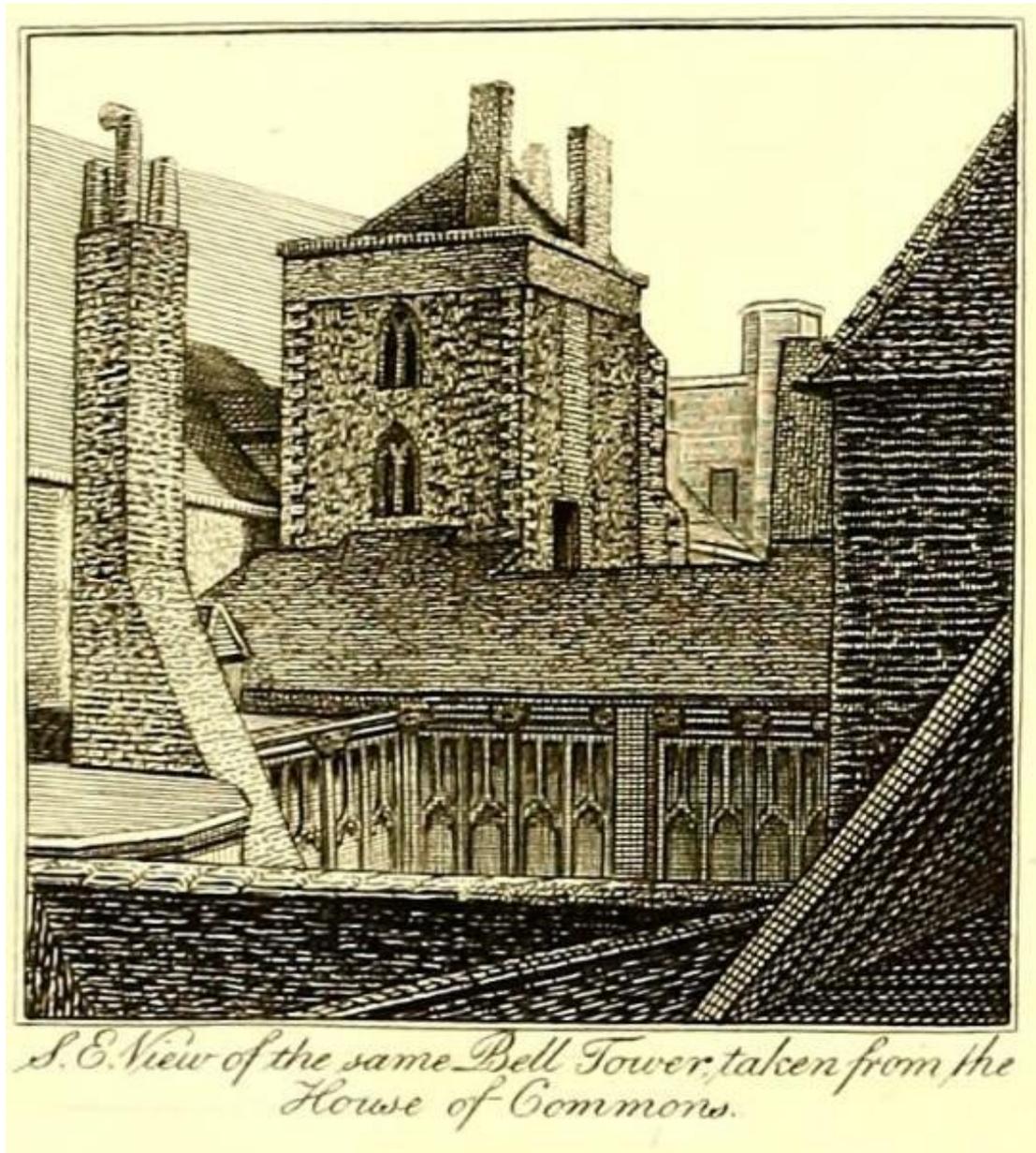


Fig. 1.7: John T. Smith, *N.E. View of the same Bell Tower, taken from the House of Commons*, reproduced in Smith, *Antiquities of Westminster*, facing p. 45.

The best way to understand the relationship of these façades to the internal layout of the house is to compare these perspective illustrations to Soane's plans of the house prepared at about the same time. The Soane/Groves plan of the ground floor (Fig. 1.2), and Carter's sketch plan of 1788 (Fig. 1.8), have already been noted.²⁵⁹ As previously mentioned, there are several differences between the two plans, particularly in the layout of the north wing. The Soane/Groves plan is probably more reliable, because there are several inconsistencies between the Carter plan and other

²⁵⁹ The author thanks Elizabeth Hallam Smith for making him aware of this plan.

known sources. In particular, the small projecting bay on the east front is missing and the Grotto Room is shown to occupy three of the five bays of the undercroft. However, Carter's own article in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1807 makes clear that the Dining Room had only recently been extended into the central bay of the undercroft "to give length to the eating-room".²⁶⁰ This corresponds with the Soane/Groves plan (Fig. 1.2), in which the State Dining Room is shown to occupy only the two eastern bays of the undercroft, with a fireplace on the partition wall at the western end.

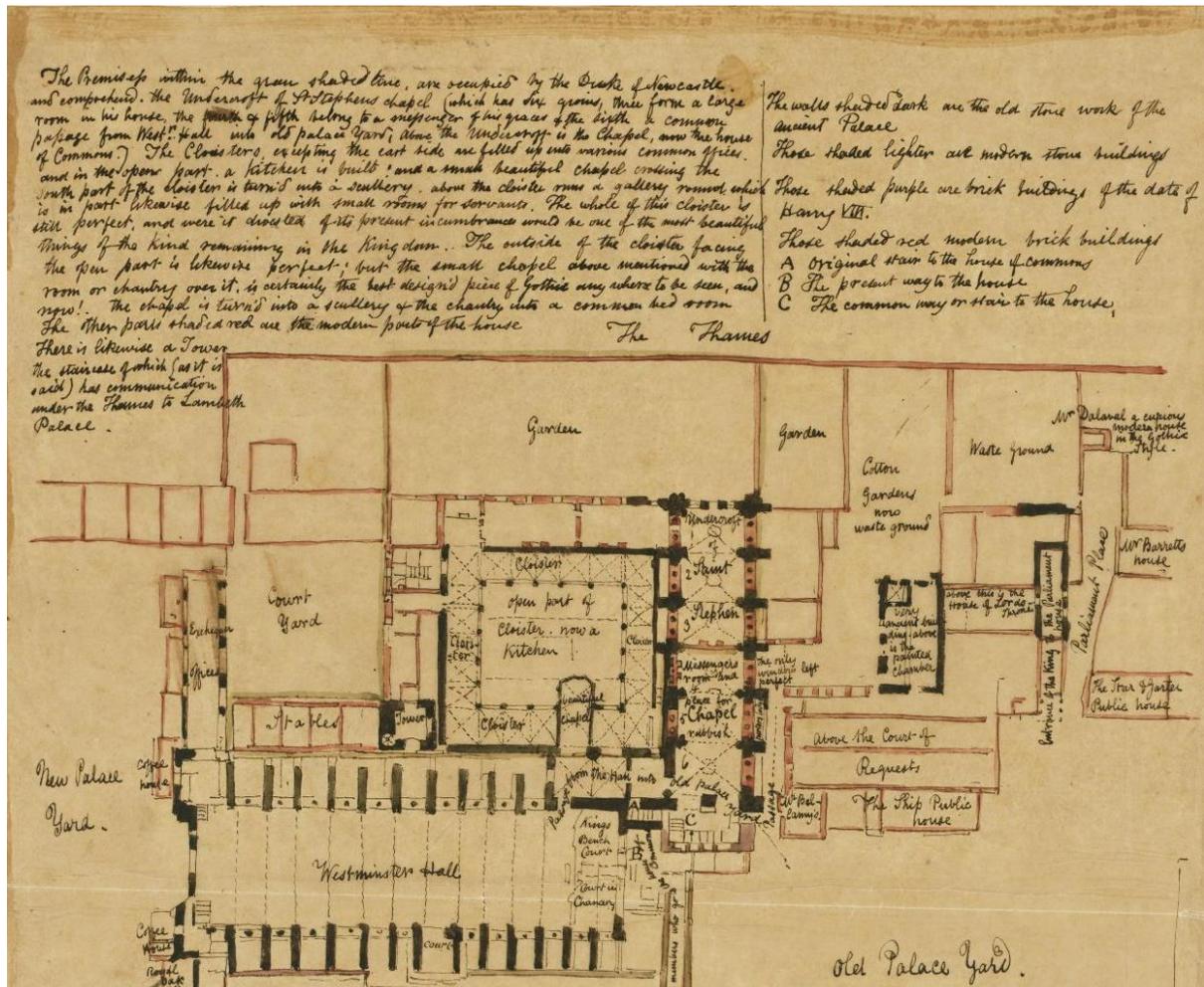


Fig. 1.8: John Carter, *Plan of the Remains of Old Palace at Westminster* (detail), 1788. Pen, ink and wash on paper, dimensions unavailable. Poughkeepsie: Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, 1864.2.2787.

Unfortunately, no plans of the second floor, or the attic, of the east wing have been discovered. However, there is a plan of the upper storey of the cloisters (Fig. 1.9) and adjoining

²⁶⁰ Carter, "Pursuits" CXI, p. 735.

buildings, apparently prepared by the Office of Works in “about 1803”.²⁶¹ This date seems dubious, because the second phase of Wyatt’s alterations to the house had apparently begun in 1802; but the drawing does not reflect the changes he made. For example, it does not show the introduction of the staircase in the former belltower or the removal of the lath-and-plaster partitions from the west cloister.²⁶² On the other hand, the projecting bay on the east front is drawn with a square, rather than a semi-octagonal, end; this would correspond with Sandby’s earlier drawing, but not with Soane’s floor plan or elevation. Possibly this is an earlier plan which has been misdated; or perhaps an office draughtsman, unaware of recent alterations, simply copied an earlier drawing. Nevertheless, this is the most detailed source available for the layout of the first floor of the house at any time during the Speaker’s occupation.

²⁶¹ Office of Works: Plan of the house of the Speaker of the House of Commons, c. 1803. Ink on paper, 518 x 364mm. London: Sir John Soane’s Museum (SM 37/1/27).

²⁶² Colvin, *King’s Works* 6, p. 533; Smith, *Antiquities*, p. 29; TNA PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. o., Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester: Papers: Miscellaneous Papers: Parliamentary: Memoranda for Mr Wyatt, June 24 1802—Speaker’s House Repairs, n. p.

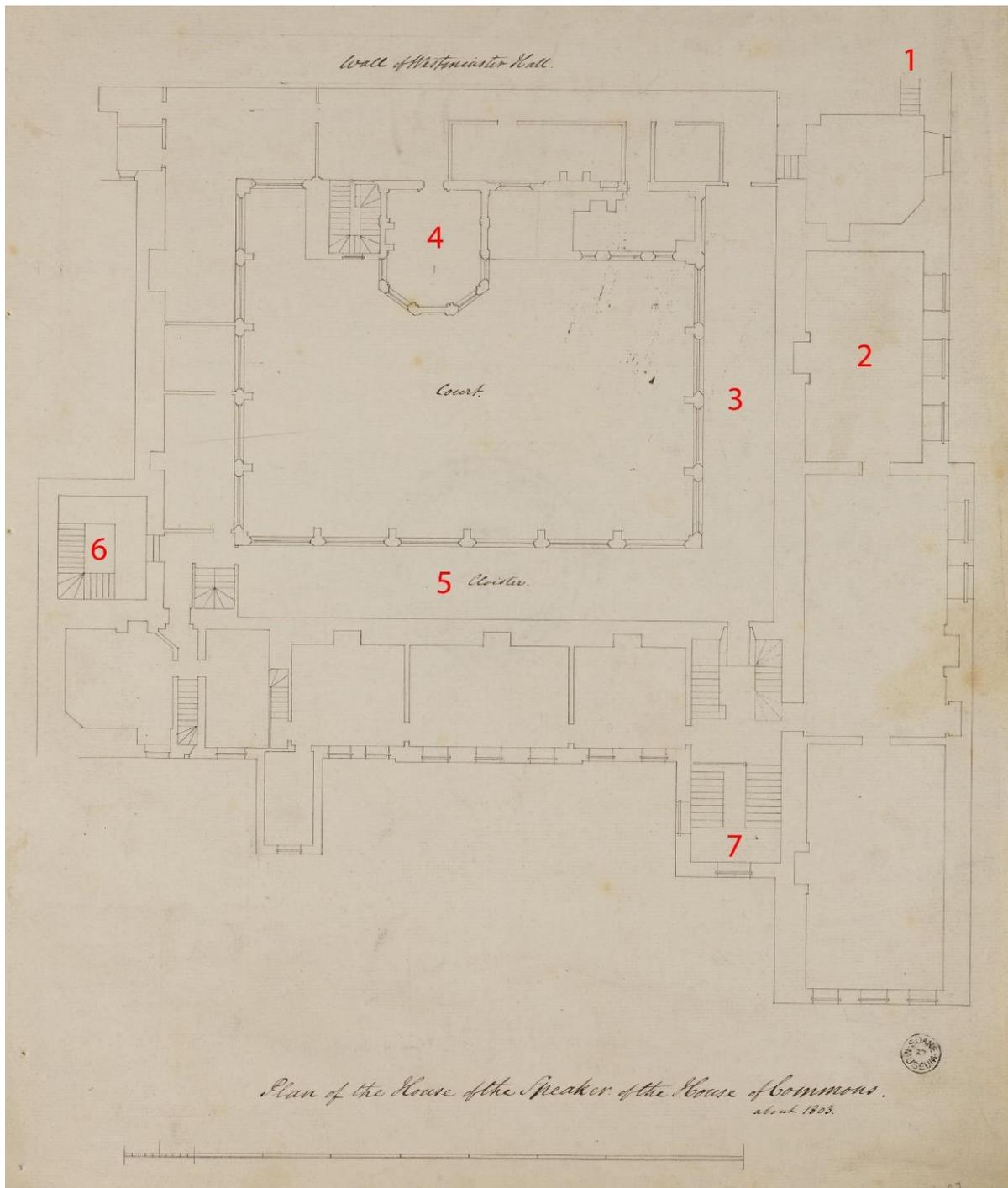


Fig. 1.9: Office of Works: Plan of the house of the Speaker of the House of Commons, c. 1803. Ink on paper, 518 x 364mm. London: Sir John Soane's Museum (SM 37/1/27). Numbers in red text (added digitally) relate to possible room names/uses discussed in the text.

The lack of detailed information for the first floor makes it difficult to assess the layout of the family rooms. However, the placement of the two Dining Parlours on the ground floor, close to

the service areas, was not unusual in the eighteenth century.²⁶³ Their placement in the eastern wing was probably intended to give them a view of the garden and the river. It is puzzling, however, that these two Dining Rooms are listed in addition to the “Grotto Room” in the undercroft. This may indicate that the latter was not used as a Dining Room before the Speaker took over the house; although Mrs Delany’s account (discussed below) makes clear that it was used for social functions.²⁶⁴ Between the dining rooms are two rooms described as waiting rooms. As discussed in Chapter Two, Wyatt’s later Waiting Room in the former upper oratory was positioned very close to the Speaker’s Library, which suggests that it was intended for the use of callers who were waiting to discuss business with the Speaker.²⁶⁵ On this basis, it is reasonable to assume that these two rooms fulfilled the same purpose for callers wishing to speak to the auditor during the latter’s occupation of the house. However, it is not clear why two rooms were necessary, nor why they were positioned adjacent to the dining rooms.

The main entrance hall was in the centre of the north wing. To provide access to the dining rooms—and, via stairways, to the other family areas—the eastern range of the cloisters, along with the eastern half of the north range, were left intact, and used as a “Long Passage”. Carter was delighted that these sections were left “entirely free from all innovations [...] uncontaminated by any modern intrusion, one entire range of antient splendour”.²⁶⁶ However, he was dismayed to find that the remainder of the cloisters had been filled with various “menial apartments”—in other words, service rooms. The layout of the service rooms was far from ideal, and reflects the difficulty of adapting the cloisters to serve a very different function from their intended purposes. The former courtyard had been roofed over to create space for a kitchen. This infill was only one storey in height: Smith’s illustration of the bell tower (Fig. 1.6) clearly shows the external mouldings of the upper cloister. Moreover, the surviving first-floor plan (Fig. 1.9) shows no additions within the quadrangle. It made sense to place the Scullery adjacent to the Kitchen if at all possible: this was achieved by converting the former lower oratory. In order to provide direct access, the end wall of this structure had been knocked through, destroying an important section of the historic fabric. Large chunks of the side walls were also cut away to provide space for storage and kitchen

²⁶³ Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (London: Book Club Associate 1979), pp. 160–61.

²⁶⁴ Augusta Hall, Baroness Llanover (ed.), *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delaney, vol. III* (London: Richard Bentley, 1861), pp. 416–17.

²⁶⁵ See pp. 172–73 of this thesis.

²⁶⁶ Carter, “Pursuits” XXVI, p. 722.

equipment.²⁶⁷ These alterations are clearly delineated in a 1798 plan by Charles Clarke, now in the Bodleian library (Fig. 1.10).²⁶⁸

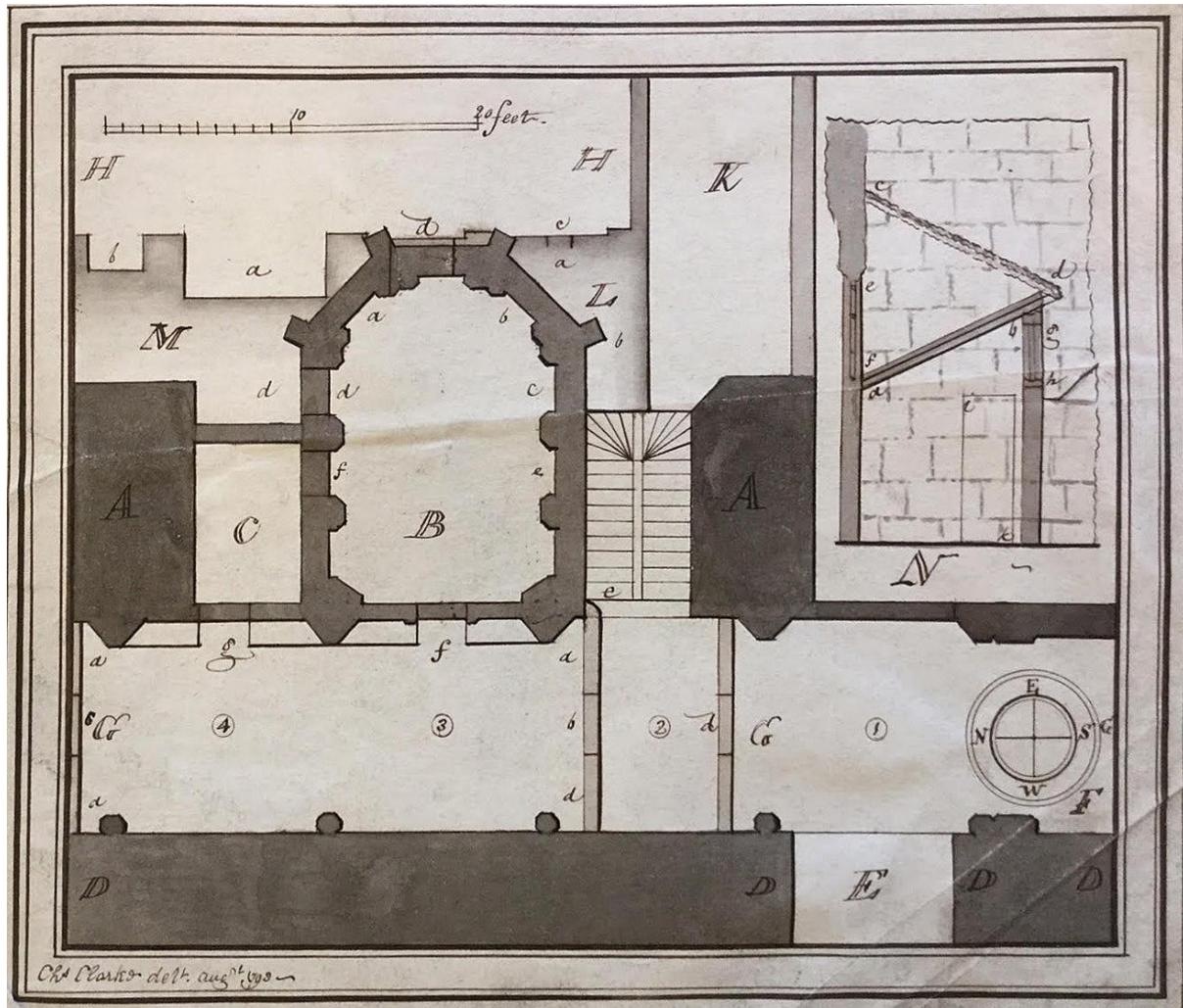


Fig. 1.10: Charles Clarke, *Plan of the Chapel of Our Lady of the Pew [sic] with the adjoining cloister*, 1798, ink on paper, dimensions unavailable. Oxford: Bodleian Library, Gough Drawings, a.2 no. 51. Reproduced under a CC-BY-NC 4.0 licence.

In most respects, this plan conforms to the earlier Soane/Groves plan. The principal difference is that the earlier plan appears to show round niches projecting from the north-eastern and south-eastern corners of the oratory in order to create two small alcoves, whereas Clarke's plan shows straight walls akin to the original form of the chapel. The written description accompanying Clarke's plan, however, mentions that there were coppers positioned at these corners. It therefore seems

²⁶⁷ Carter, "Pursuits" XXVI, p. 722.

²⁶⁸ Although mistitled "Chapel of Our Lady of the Pew", the references to Westminster Hall in the accompanying description prove conclusively that this plan shows the lower oratory of St Stephen's cloisters. The author thanks Elizabeth Hallam Smith for drawing his attention to this plan.

probable that the alcoves marked on the Soane/Groves plan were built to accommodate these coppers, but that Clarke has omitted them in order to give a clearer delineation of the original, medieval form of the chapel. At any rate, Clarke's description makes clear that much of the historic mouldings and decoration had been removed in order to make way for these coppers. Carter's written description of the Oratory corroborates Clarke's account:

The windows to the right and left give place to two coppers; of the two windows in continuation on each side, one makes way for an oven, and the other is decorated with a stone cistern placed against it. The rich compartments, filling up the divisions of the North and West sides, have been cut away for doors, shelves, the hanging-up of wicker bottles, skewers, and pudding-cloths. The West side is an entire blank, all the parts having been demolished.²⁶⁹

These descriptions suggest that Scullery doubled-up as a Still Room: the coppers were probably used for jam-making. The space between the oratory and the northern buttress was roofed to create a charcoal store (illustrated in section on the Clarke plan); a coal store was located in the adjacent, centre section of the west cloister. To the south of the oratory, the southern range of the cloister had been extended to accommodate a Cook's Room and Larder.²⁷⁰

The steward and housekeeper had been given rooms on the east side of the house, overlooking the garden.²⁷¹ To create sufficient space for a Servants' Hall, the north-western corner of the cloister had been extended; it appears that the former external walls had been demolished, leaving a column awkwardly positioned in the middle of the room.²⁷² This room presumably had to accommodate a reasonably substantial household. It is not known how many servants Addington employed, but in his 1802 memo to Wyatt, Abbot requested a hall for at least twenty servants.²⁷³ On the other side of the Servants' Hall was the "Wash Room" in the former bell-tower.²⁷⁴ This room opened directly on to St Stephen's Court, which must have been convenient for the maids when taking washing outside to dry. Yet however convenient the service rooms may have been, the alterations had clearly had a damaging impact on the historic fabric of the cloisters—particularly the brutal alterations to the oratory discussed above. However, in view of the widespread conservationist criticisms of Wyatt, it is important to emphasise that the Soane/Groves plan clearly

²⁶⁹ Carter, "Pursuits" XXVI, p. 723.

²⁷⁰ John Soane/John T. Groves: Plan of the late Duke of Newcastle's house in the Exchequer—since the Speaker's house. Ink on paper, 492mm x 603mm. London: Sir John Soane's Museum (SM 37/1/28).

²⁷¹ SM 37/1/28, n. p.

²⁷² *Ibid*, n. p.

²⁷³ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, ll. §.4.2. o, n. p. See also pp. 133–34 of this thesis.

²⁷⁴ SM 37/1/28, n. p.

shows that sections of the oratory walls (including the doorway to the kitchen) had already been removed by 1794—in other words, two years before Wyatt became surveyor-general.²⁷⁵ On the other hand, Carter’s 1800 article claims that the fate of the oratory had been “much aggravated” since his 1791 visit; this comment might imply that further alterations were made to the oratory during Addington’s tenure.²⁷⁶ Either way, in his 1802 memo to Wyatt, Abbot specifically asked the architect to move the Housekeeper’s Room closer to the Kitchen—meaning that the scullery would have to be moved elsewhere.²⁷⁷ This suggests that Abbot was consciousness of the historic importance and architectural merit of the cloisters, and wanted to restore something of their original dignity. Wyatt’s challenge was to achieve this whilst also creating a convenient and comfortable residence for the Speaker.

In the absence of a labelled plan, it is all but impossible to ascertain the layout of the family rooms on the first floor of the Speaker’s House; moreover, no plan at all is available for the second floor. However, the 1797 inventory and Carter’s articles can fill in some of the gaps. Carter, for example, mentions that

we notice over them [the cloisters] a continued gallery [i.e., the upper cloister], the whole work remaining nearly in its first order. The interior of the gallery has undergone (excepting the windows) an entire modern change, [with] bare walls and a coved ceiling [...]²⁷⁸

Presumably this space can be identified with the “Long Gallery” referred to in the 1797 inventory.²⁷⁹ Carter’s description seems to imply that it was on the first floor of the western range of the cloister. However, the Office of Works’ plan (Fig. 1.9) shows the western and southern ranges of the upper cloister to be partitioned, whereas the northern and eastern ranges are intact. The northern range of the upper cloister was apparently filled by the Tapestry Room at this time (as discussed below), making the eastern range (numbered 5 on Fig. 1.9.) the more likely candidate for the Long Gallery.²⁸⁰ Carter claimed that the upper oratory (numbered 4 on Fig. 1.9) had become “a sleeping-room for servants”.²⁸¹ In the eighteenth century, it was still common practice to have servants’ bedrooms on the first floor, adjoining the family rooms, so that they could easily be called during the night if required.²⁸² This arrangement was particularly common for the principal bedroom, which might

²⁷⁵ SM 37/1/28, n. p.

²⁷⁶ Carter, “Pursuits” XXVI, p. 724.

²⁷⁷ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, ll. §.4.2. o, n. p.

²⁷⁸ Carter, “Pursuits” XXVI, p. 723.

²⁷⁹ TNA: PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, ll. §.4.2. o4, n. p.

²⁸⁰ TNA PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, ll. §.4.2. o., n. p.

²⁸¹ Carter, “Pursuits” XXVI, pp. 723–24.

²⁸² M. Waterson, *The Servants’ Hall: A Domestic History of Erddig* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 98.

indicate that the “Speaker’s Bed Room”—mentioned in the 1797 inventory—was on this floor.²⁸³ The location of the latter can only be a matter for speculation, but seems reasonable to suppose that it would have been placed in the east wing so as to enjoy a view over the river. The small rooms in the west cloister, immediately adjacent to the oratory, be the “Lath and Plaister [sic] Servants Bed Rooms” adjoining the bell tower, which were mentioned in the 1802 memo from Abbot to Wyatt.²⁸⁴ Several other rooms are mentioned in the 1797 inventory which must have been on the first, second or attic floors of the house. By definition, the “Maid’s Garrett” [sic] must have been in the attic.²⁸⁵ The “Nursery” may also have been in there; it was certainly common for children in this era to be accommodated at the top of the house.²⁸⁶ At this time, the “Tapestry Room” was apparently located directly above the Steward’s Room in the north cloister (numbered 3 in Fig. 1.9).²⁸⁷ (It would later be moved, as discussed in Chapter Two.)²⁸⁸ To judge from the quality of the furnishings—which included eight gilded tapestry armchairs and two matching sofas, a chandelier, two pier glasses and a fitted Wilton carpet—the Tapestry Room was probably the principal drawing-room of the house.²⁸⁹ Also mentioned in the inventory are an “Anti Chamber”, “Library”, “Octagon Room”, “Sitting Room” and “Next Room”; but there is no information to indicate how these were arranged.²⁹⁰ It seems that the Library was located in the northern range of the building, overlooking St Stephen’s Court. Abbot’s 1802 memo from Abbot to Wyatt asks the architect to “make a clear passage to the House of Commons, by removing the Lath and Plaister [sic] Servants Bed Rooms—in a line from the present Square Tower at the end of the Library—to the Lobby of the House”.²⁹¹ The tower in question must have been the former bell tower. Since the western range of the cloisters was apparently occupied by servants’ bedrooms, the only other room immediately abutting the tower was the westernmost room of the building’s north range (numbered 2 on Fig. 1.9). This room later became part of Abbot’s Picture Gallery.²⁹² There is also an 1803 letter from John Rickman to Abbott which refers to “the intended library”; this supports the theory that the library was moved to a new location during

²⁸³ TNA: PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. o4, n. p.

²⁸⁴ TNA: PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. o., n. p. See also p. 133–34 of this thesis.

²⁸⁵ TNA: PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. o4, n. p.

²⁸⁶ TNA: PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. o4, n. p.; Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, p. 286.

²⁸⁷ Abbot’s memo to Wyatt, 1802 (PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. o): “Steward’s Room—q[ue]re] under the Tapestry Room as at present”.

²⁸⁸ See p. 149 of this thesis.

²⁸⁹ TNA: PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. o4, n. p.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid*, n. p.

²⁹¹ TNA: PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. o., n. p. See also p. 133–34 of this thesis.

²⁹² See J. T. Smith, *Foundation Plan of the Ancient Palace of Westminster* (detail), dated 1807. Published in *Antiquities of Westminster*, facing p. 125 (Fig. 2.23 of this thesis).

Wyatt's post-1802 alterations.²⁹³ Both the ground- and first-floor plans show a large staircase at the junction of the east and north wings of the house (numbered 7 on Fig. 1.9). Presumably, this was the staircase used by the Speaker and his family. Later sources, written after Wyatt constructed his new staircase in the former belltower (see Chapter Two), refer to the "Old Stone Staircase" or "Speaker's Common Staircase"; this might well be the staircase in question.²⁹⁴ There also appears to be an exit from the first floor of the bell-tower (numbered 1 on Fig. 1.9). This must have led directly into Westminster Hall; presumably, it was used when a temporary first-floor gallery was erected in the Hall on special occasions (as discussed below).²⁹⁵

Carter's reference to "bare walls and a coved ceiling" provides a tantalising insight into the interior decoration of the Speaker's House at this time. It suggests that, apart from the ground floor cloisters and undercroft, most of the house was furnished in a plain style with basic classical trimmings. It would appear that the nearby Stone Lobby, visible in Carter's cross-section of St. Stephen's chapel, was also decorated in this way (Fig. 1.11). Nevertheless, the Gothic character of the cloisters and undercroft remained inescapable. Long before the Speaker took over the house, successive auditors had already begun to exploit the dramatic scenic potential of these spaces in order to enliven their entertainments and impress their visitors. It may be significant that the aforementioned Robert Walpole, 2nd Earl of Orford, who held the office of auditor from 1739–51, was the elder brother of Horace Walpole, creator Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, the famous mid-eighteenth century Gothic villa.²⁹⁶ It was probably Robert who converted the "Grotto Room" in the undercroft from a fuel store to a domestic apartment during the 1740s.²⁹⁷ Carter's later description of the undercroft mentions a "Batty Langleyan" fireplace.²⁹⁸ Langley first published his book of "improved" pseudo-Gothic designs in 1742, so the fireplace might well date from this era.²⁹⁹

²⁹³ TNA: PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. d5, Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester: Papers: Miscellaneous Papers: Parliamentary: letter from John Rickman to Charles Abbott, Jan[uary] 29 1803.

²⁹⁴ PA HC/LB/1/32, "Westminster Palace, St Stephen's Chapel and the House of Commons" [unpublished MS] by J. T. Smith, n. p.; PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. q: progress of works questionnaire, dated 9 September 1805. See also p. 155 of this thesis.

²⁹⁵ See pp. 92–93 of this thesis.

²⁹⁶ Sainty, *Officers of the Exchequer*, p. 209.

²⁹⁷ Hallam Smith, "St Mary Undercroft", forthcoming.

²⁹⁸ J. Carter, "The Pursuits of Architectural Innovation No. CXI: Royal Palace, Westminster", *Gentleman's Magazine* 77:2 (1807), p. 735

²⁹⁹ P. Lindfield, "Serious Gothic and "doing the Ancient Buildings": Batty Langley's *Ancient Architecture* and "Principal Geometric Elevations", *Architectural History* 57 (2014), pp. 141–42.

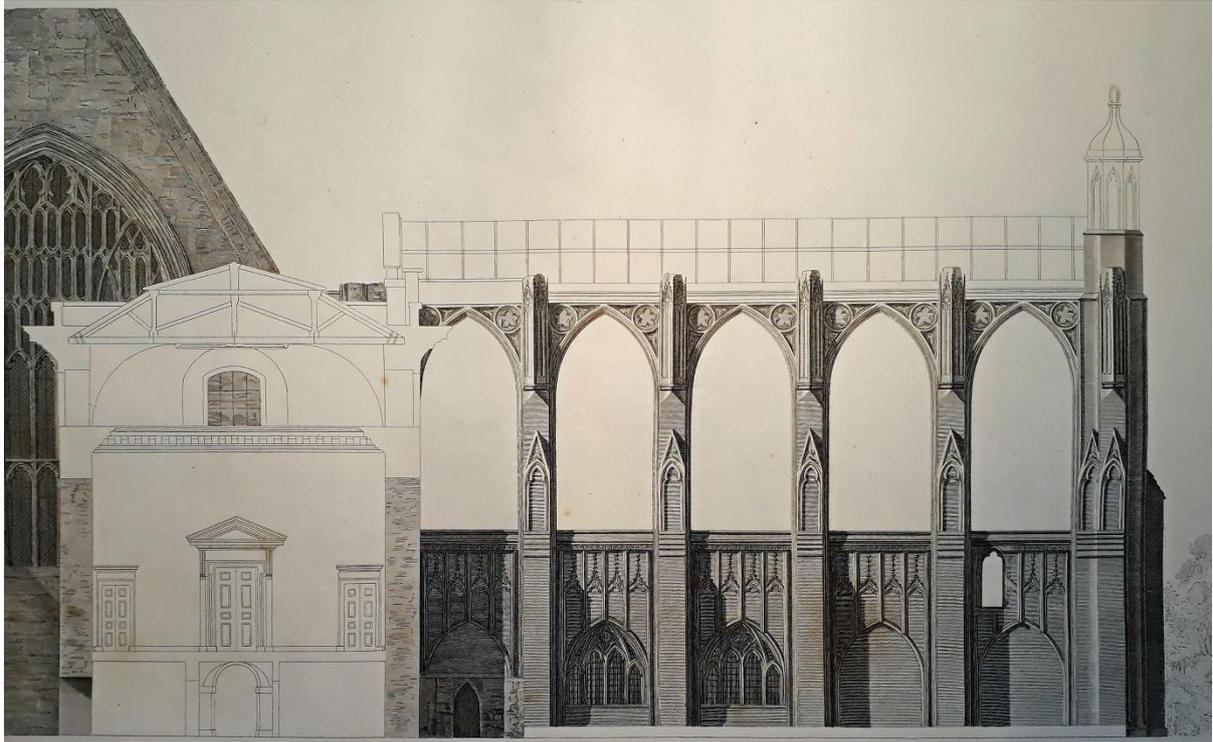


Fig. 1.11: John Carter, Cross section of St Stephen's Chapel, showing later additions, and the South end of Westminster Hall, reproduced in J. Topham, *Some Account of the Collegiate Chapel of St Stephen's, Westminster*, Plate V.

Walpole's successor, the aforementioned Earl of Lincoln (Duke of Newcastle from 1768), used his Gothic rooms to particularly good effect at a grand soirée in 1756. He even managed to exploit Westminster Hall itself, which he illuminated and used as an entranceway for guests arriving in sedan chairs. Horace Walpole himself attended, and was suitably impressed by the presentation of the cloisters: they had been specially lit using lamps placed inside Volterra (white alabaster) vases. He described it as "the prettiest sight in all the world".³⁰⁰ The bluestocking Mrs Delaney also gave a favourable account in one of her letters, though she must have been reporting second-hand information as she apparently did not attend the event herself. Her description of the lighting in the cloisters accords with Walpole's; and she also mentions "a fine old Gothic room", probably the undercroft, which she supposed must have once been part of a monastery.³⁰¹ She drew a poetic contrast between the room's solemn past and its glittering present:

The employments of its inhabitants could not have been more different than their dresses—the woollen robe, the covered neck, the solemn veil, what a contrast to the enormous

³⁰⁰ W. S. Lewis (ed.), *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, vol. 37 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 453–54.

³⁰¹ Llanover, *Mrs. Delany* 3, p. 416.

hoops, gold and silver brocade, exposed necks and shoulders, and the numberless adornments for the head!³⁰²

These accounts show that, even in the 1750s, Gothic architecture had the power to stir the imagination and evoke associations of the medieval past. Chapter Two will demonstrate how, during Abbot's tenure, those associations were actively exploited to serve specific political agendas.

Repairs and Alterations During Addington's Tenure

There is considerable uncertainty as to the extent of repairs and alterations carried out during Addington's tenure. On 20 June 1794 Charles Long, Junior Secretary to the Treasury, wrote to the Office of Works, requesting an estimate for any repairs and alterations necessary to allow Addington to move in.³⁰³ Clearly, the Treasury expected that the Office of Works would take responsibility for the future maintenance of the Speaker's House. The Office certainly paid for various alterations during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.³⁰⁴ Yet an 1802 memo by Groves claims that these buildings were only placed under the Office's care in 1780.³⁰⁵ By the 1790s, it seems that even the relevant officials were unsure about the situation. In July 1797, at Rose's request, the Treasury belatedly issued an explicit instruction that the Office should "undertake the care" of any repairs to the houses.³⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Wyatt later claimed that he had not received this instruction, prompting a testy exchange with Rose and a delay in paying some of the tradesmen's bills.³⁰⁷

This confusion may help to explain why expenditure at the Speaker's House is not consistently recorded in the Office's accounts during this era. In 1797–1800, the Speaker's House is explicitly listed in the Office's debt books; in other years there is no mention of it.³⁰⁸ It is possible that expenses incurred in other years were subsumed under the broader heading of the Palace of Westminster. However, it must be remembered that not all of the money spent on the Speaker's House was drawn from the Office's usual budget. The Office of Works, being technically an office of the royal household, was funded through the Civil List; but in 1798 a special parliamentary grant of £2542 10s. 6d. was made to cover the costs of recent repairs and alterations to the Speaker's and

³⁰² Llanover, *Mrs. Delany* 3, pp. 416–17.

³⁰³ TNA: WORK 6/22, f. 162.

³⁰⁴ Colvin, *King's Works* 5, pp. 412–13.

³⁰⁵ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. I, Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester: Papers: Miscellaneous Papers: Parliamentary, *Speaker's House & furniture. By whom to be repaired or supplied? March 31 1802. Minute by Mr Groves*, n. p.

³⁰⁶ TNA: WORK 6/23, Office of Works and successors: Miscellanea, Memorials 1796–1805, ff. 65–66; and PRO 30/9/14, II. §.4.2. hh. a., Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester: Papers: Miscellaneous Papers: Parliamentary: letter from Rose to Calvert, 11 July 1797.

³⁰⁷ TNA: WORK 4/18, Office of Works, Minutes: 1793–99, f. 255; and WORK 6/23, ff. 38, 42, 65–66.

³⁰⁸ TNA: WORK 5/107, Office of Works, Accounts: Debt Book, 1808–20.

Serjeant-at-Arms' Houses.³⁰⁹ This seems to have been a tacit admission by parliamentarians that the Office's budget was insufficient to meet the demands of preparing the houses for their new occupants. Surprisingly, it seems that the Serjeant-at-Arms' House accounted for the greater part of this expenditure. Coleman's memorial to the Treasury claimed that the house was unoccupied and specifically requested that it be "put in a proper state of repair to be inhabited".³¹⁰ On 13 June 1794 Sir William Chambers, then surveyor-general, gave the Treasury an estimate of £1,985 for repairs and alterations, quite a substantial sum for a relatively small residence.³¹¹

It appears that the Speaker's House was in a better state of repair, as there is no record of any major works being carried out during 1794. Nevertheless, Addington evidently decided that alterations were necessary, and he eventually submitted "a plan for rendering [the house] more convenient" to the Treasury in August 1795.³¹² Unfortunately, the full details of this plan have not been traced. For some reason the Treasury did not respond until September the following year, when George Rose, the senior secretary to the Treasury, wrote to the Office of Works requesting "an Estimate of the Expence [sic] attending the execution of the said plan".³¹³ Chambers had died five months earlier, so Rose's letter was addressed to the new surveyor-general, James Wyatt. Wyatt's association with Speaker's House, however, had actually begun a month earlier. Whilst the plan of alterations made its stately progress through the Westminster bureaucracy, it seems that Addington pressed ahead with buying new furniture for the house. He evidently hoped to recoup at least some of the cost of this from the taxpayer. On 12 August 1796 Wyatt told Rose that he had been asked to examine the bills "for various articles delivered" to the Speaker's House, "and to report what part of these ought to be considered as belonging to the premises".³¹⁴ His judgement was "that all such articles as are fitted to particular places, or are particularly adapted to the Style and Character of the House [...] (whether moveable or not), should be considered as fixtures".³¹⁵ He proposed that an inventory of these fixtures should be made and kept at the Office of Works, "if it is their Lordships pleasure that these buildings shall be under the charge of that department".³¹⁶ The abstract of bills totalled £646 7s. 3d.; when added to the cost of repairs to the Serjeant-at-Arms' House, this would

³⁰⁹ House of Commons Journals, Vol. 53, 1797–98, p. 493. For the funding of the Office of Works in this era see Colvin, *King's Works* 6, pp. 3–26.

³¹⁰ TNA: WORK 6/22, f. 161.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, f. 162.

³¹² TNA: WORK 6/23, f. 4.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, f. 4.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 1.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 1.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 1.

seem to account for the £2,500 specially voted by Parliament in 1798. Long approved Wyatt's suggestion for an inventory but, in the event, this was not carried out until October 1797.³¹⁷

Meanwhile, it seems that Addington's scheme of alterations was finally been given approval towards the end of 1796. This may partly explain why, on 30 December, Wyatt appointed a new team of artificers for the house.³¹⁸ Nevertheless, it appears that these men were intended from the outset to be a permanent team for the ongoing care and maintenance of the house; certainly, many of them re-appear during Wyatt's later alterations for Speaker Abbot (discussed in Chapter Two). The most notable name among them was Thomas Gayfere Jnr, the mason who also worked on the restoration of Henry VII's Chapel and Westminster Hall.³¹⁹ The new team must have set to work rapidly, for the alterations and repairs apparently began "during the Christmas vacation" and were substantially complete by Lady Day (25 March) 1797.³²⁰ Sadly, though, very little information is available regarding the nature of the alterations carried out. The only specific change mentioned in Wyatt's correspondence is the "making [of] a Communication betwixt the Speaker's House and the House of Commons".³²¹ It is not clear whether this new connection was added at ground- or first-floor level, but the latter seems more likely. The Soane/Groves plan (Fig. 1.2) suggests that, even before Addington moved in, there was already a doorway at ground level allowing access from the cloisters into the passage from Westminster Hall.³²² By contrast, the Office of Works plan of the first floor (Fig. 1.9) shows no doorway from the upper cloister into the Commons' lobby.³²³ However, a connection was certainly made later: it is shown in a later plan of 1826 (Fig. 1.12) and, as already discussed, the "1803" date of the first-floor plan may be incorrect. Either way, Abbot's 1802 memo makes clear that it was not until after that date that the western range of the upper cloister was cleared to allow the latter to be used as a passageway to the Commons.³²⁴

³¹⁷ TNA PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. o4, n. p.; WORK 4/18, f. 196; WORK 6/23, f. 1-2.

³¹⁸ TNA WORK 4/18, f. 216.

³¹⁹ TNA WORK 4/18, f. 216; Colvin, *King's Works* 6, pp. 502, 504, 517; "Thomas Gayfere", website of Westminster Abbey, <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/thomas-gayfere> [accessed 25/04/2023].

³²⁰ TNA: Work 6/23, ff. 65–66. Some minor decorating work may have continued into the autumn, as the Lord Chamberlain's bill book mentions the supply of some "green worsted line" for the house on 31 October (TNA: LC 9/349, Lord Chamberlain's Department: Accounts and Miscellanea: Miscellanea, Day Book 1796; 1806, f. 7).

³²¹ TNA: Work 6/23, ff. 65–66.

³²² SM 37/1/28, n. p. Carter's sketch plan of 1788 (Fig. 1.8) also shows a doorway here. However, it appears that the doorway was blocked up during Wyatt's 1802–08 rebuild, allowing this corner of the cloisters to be incorporated into the Speaker's House. See *The Times*, 23 October 1806, p. 3.

³²³ SM 37/1/27, n. p.

³²⁴ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. o., n. p. See also pp. 133–34 of this thesis.

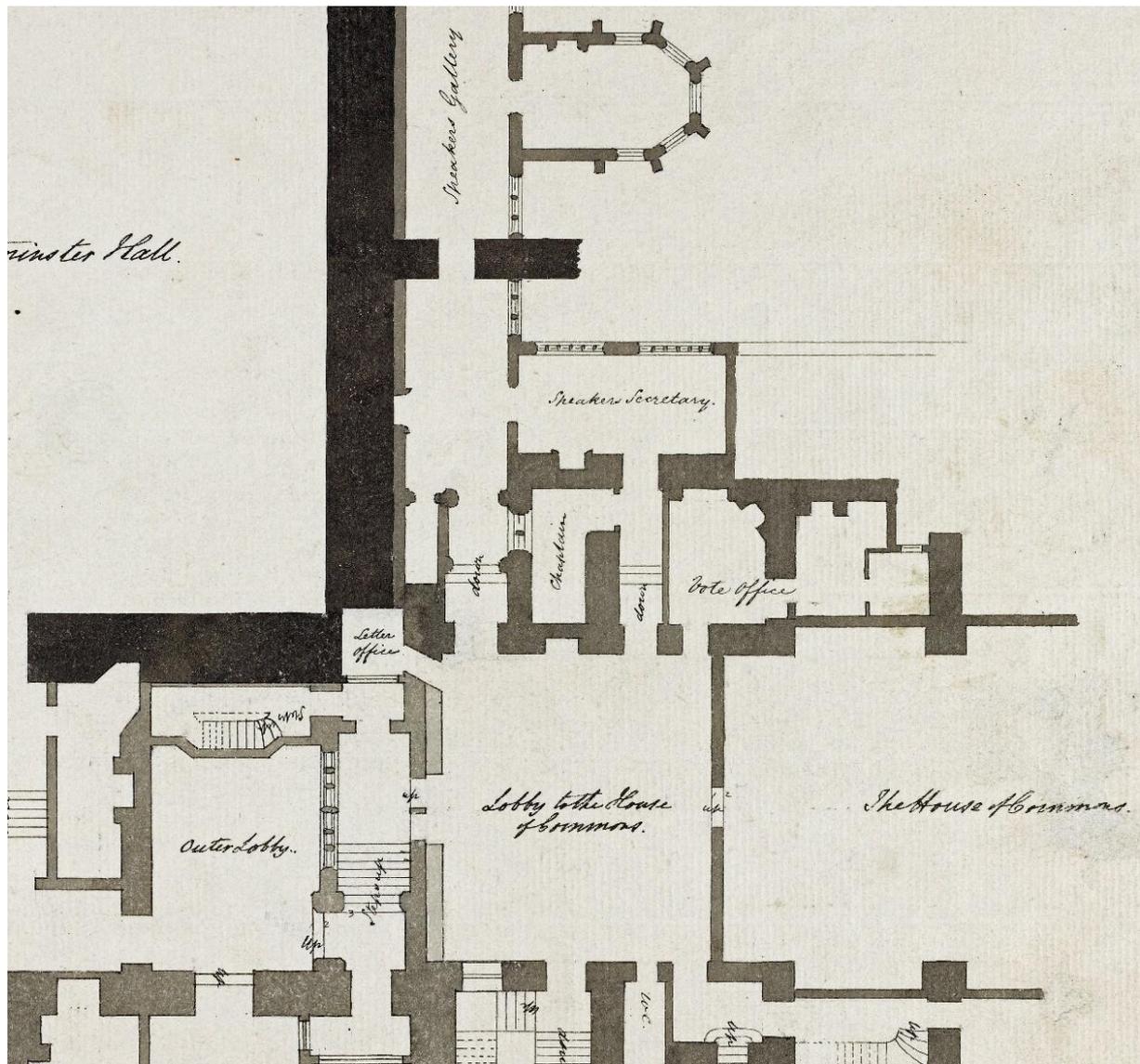


Fig 1.12: Office of John Soane, *Plan of the One Pair Floor*, 1826 (detail). Ink on paper, 28.7 x 47.7 cm. London: Sir John Soane's Museum (SM 51/6/3).

Wyatt's alterations for Addington cost £680 in total (almost £60,000 at 2019 prices), a not insignificant sum.³²⁵ Nevertheless, the house continued to suffer from significant damp problems, probably due to its proximity to the river and, perhaps, inadequate foundations. Certainly, Abbot's records of the 1802–08 rebuilding project place considerable emphasis on the foundations of the house, and the drainage arrangements in the Speaker's Garden, as discussed below.³²⁶ The damp problem was apparently severe enough to affect the health of the Speaker and his family. Several years later, Addington confided to Abbot that "he had never been ill before or since he lived there—

³²⁵ TNA: WORK 6/23, f. 34.

³²⁶ See p. 135 of this thesis.

but in Palace Yard he had had three fevers—and his children never were well”.³²⁷ This problem would ultimately provide the pretext for a more ambitious reconstruction of the Speaker’s House during Abbot’s tenure. Incidentally, it is worth noting that Abbot refers to the house by its location, “[New] Palace Yard”, rather than as “the Speaker’s House”. In the same way that 10 Downing Street is often abbreviated to just ‘Downing Street’, it appears to have been common practice among all the early-nineteenth-century Speakers to refer to the Speaker’s House simply as “Palace Yard”.³²⁸

Furnishings During Addington’s Tenure

To date little, if anything, has been written about the furnishing of the Speaker’s House before 1802. Archival sources suggest that Addington inherited much of Newcastle’s furniture when he took over the house. According to an 1802 memo by Groves, preserved among Abbot’s papers, the Treasury had provided some furnishings during the Duke’s tenure. Upon his death, the Treasury then “purchased certain Articles of Principal Furniture in the State Apartments” from his executors.³²⁹ This implies either that Newcastle had either paid for additional items from his own pocket, or else that items previously purchased by the Treasury had been given to him as a perquisite at some point. After 1794, however, it appears that the Treasury refused to purchase any more furniture for the house. Instead, they looked to the Office of Works, and its parent body, the Lord Chamberlain’s Office, to take over this responsibility. Wyatt’s 1796 correspondence with Rose regarding bills for “various articles” delivered to the house has already been noted.³³⁰ According to Groves’ memo, the Lord Chamberlain’s Office eventually supplied some items for Addington, “such as Hangings, Carpet, Side-board and Chairs in the Great Dining-Room”.³³¹ Nevertheless, Wyatt and Rose evidently failed to reach a lasting settlement: as late as 1802, Groves noted that “it is by no means settled to what extent it is his [the Lord Chamberlain’s] province to supply such Articles”.³³² At any rate, it appears that relatively few new furnishings were supplied during Addington’s tenure. In 1804 Abbot claimed that the Speaker’s House had “not [...] been completely new furnished since the year 1782”.³³³

It is already well-known that, by longstanding tradition, the Speaker was provided with an official silver service to support his political entertaining. Unlike most of her European contemporaries, the British government had a long tradition of providing official plate for

³²⁷ PRO 30/9/33, f. 254.

³²⁸ For other examples of this practice, see PRO 30/9/33, ff. 107, 564; and Balliol College Archives: 65, Box 22, VB. 1: letter from Charles Manners-Sutton to Henry Jenkyns, 6 February 1822.

³²⁹ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. I., Speaker’s House repairs & furniture: by whom to be repaired & supplied? —Minute by Mr Groves.

³³⁰ WORK 6/23, f. 1.

³³¹ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. I., n. p.

³³² *Ibid*, n. p.

³³³ PRO 30/9/33, f. 463.

ambassadors, colonial governors and certain key officers of state.³³⁴ It is not clear exactly when or why the Speaker first became eligible for this perk, but by the late eighteenth century they were allowed 4000 oz. of white plate upon their first election to the office; they were also allowed to claim a new service at each re-election.³³⁵ It is intriguing that the Crown granted official silver to the Speaker, given that, unlike the ambassadors or governors, he was technically a representative of Parliament rather than the government. The grant of plate seems to constitute a tacit admission that Parliament, though nominally independent of the Crown, was nevertheless a national institution, and its representative therefore needed to present the same level of dignity as government officials. Originally, official silver services were granted as “indenture plate”, loaned by the government to the office-holder for the duration of their appointment.³³⁶ However, by the early eighteenth century it had become customary for the plate to be “discharged” to the office holder after a discreet interval.³³⁷ Indeed, some of Cust’s official silverware survives at Belton House, Lincolnshire.³³⁸ It would be easy to see this lucrative perk as symptomatic of “Old Corruption”, and there was certainly scope to abuse the system or bend the rules in various ways. Nevertheless, Rothwell points out that it was in some ways a progressive policy: it opened up many Crown offices to men of the middle classes, who would not have been able to supply their own plate.³³⁹ As well as being a recognition of the Speaker’s official hospitality, this grant of plate may have also have been an unspoken acknowledgment that many Speakers were drawn from the middle classes, especially because lawyers were traditionally favoured for the role.³⁴⁰ In 1790, Addington was supplied with an enormous quantity of silverware, including six dozen “Table Plates”, and eight dozen knives and forks.³⁴¹ Thich testifies to the scale of the official dinners which the Speaker was expected to host, and the consequent expense of the Speaker’s official entertaining.

Unfortunately, the 1797 inventory gives only brief descriptions of the “public” furniture of the house, and gives no clues to the stylistic character of any items. To date, no visual records of any decorative schemes in the house during this era have come to light. It is therefore impossible to ascertain whether Addington consciously exploited the furnishing and decoration of his official

³³⁴ J. Rothwell, *Silver for Entertaining: The Ickworth Collection* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2016), p. 34.

³³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 43.

³³⁶ H. Jacobsen, *Luxury and Power: The Material World of the Stuart Diplomat, 1660–1714* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), p. 14.

³³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 15.

³³⁸ National Trust Collections, <https://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/436562>;
<https://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/436563>;
<https://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/436564>;
<https://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/436561>. [All accessed 15/11/2022.]

³³⁹ Rothwell, *Silver for Entertaining*, p. 34.

³⁴⁰ Seaward, “Qualifications for the Speakership”, n. p.

³⁴¹ TNA LC 9/45, Lord Chamberlain’s Department, Accounts and Miscellanea: Delivery Book, 1732–96, f. 335.

house to try to shape public perceptions of the Speakership. The interiors were certainly grand, however. In a July 1795 letter, Mitford gently teased Addington about the extravagance of “the fine curtains & red & gold figures of the great room under St Stephens [i.e., the undercroft], not to mention the gilt armed chairs, & sprawling Figures in the tapistry [sic] above”.³⁴² Indeed, the State Dining Room in the undercroft is probably the best-documented interior at this time. As previously noted, the undercroft had a Batty Langley-style chimney piece, which suggests that some attempt had been made to decorate the space in accordance with its medieval character.³⁴³ (It is not known when this fireplace was installed but, as discussed above, it must have been after 1741–42 when the first edition of Langley’s book *Ancient Architecture* was published.³⁴⁴) In his account of one of Addington’s dinners, Abbot notes that “the middle of the table was filled with a painted plateau ornamented with French white figures and vases of flowers”.³⁴⁵ The 1797 inventory refers to a “Great Dining Parlour” but it is not clear whether this refers to the State Dining Room, or the separate dining room shown on the 1794 plan.³⁴⁶ Whichever room it was, it was richly decorated, featuring a “Turkey Carpet”, “Two Mahogany side boards with two Patent Lamps”, “Three silk and worsted window curt[ain]s with Gilt Cornices”, and “Three window Blinds with green Baize”.³⁴⁷ Unfortunately, the number of curtains and blinds offers no clue as to which room is being referred to: the 1794 Soane/Groves Plan of the ground floor (Fig. 1.2) shows that both the “Grotto Room” (later the State Dining Room) and the “G[rea]t Dining Parlour had three windows.³⁴⁸

Whilst the State Dining Room was clearly the centrepiece of the house, the inventory makes clear that the other rooms were also very impressive. The Tapestry Room, with its tapestry chairs and sofas, chandelier and pier glasses, has already been noted.³⁴⁹ The “Passage and Staircase” contained three painted pedestals with lamps on top; possibly the “Passage” in question was the eastern range of the cloister.³⁵⁰ Even the “Anti Chamber” contained a chandelier and a fitted Wilton carpet.³⁵¹ However, it was not just decorative pieces that were supplied at public expense: the inventory also lists functional items including stoves, grates, fenders and fire irons.³⁵² Even the

³⁴² Devon Heritage Centre (DHC), 152M/C1795/F/7, Political and personal papers of Henry Addington, 1st Viscount Sidmouth: correspondence and papers for the year 1795, letter from Sir John Mitford to Henry Addington, 6 July 1795.

³⁴³ Carter, “Pursuits” CXI, p. 735.

³⁴⁴ Lindfield, “Batty Langley’s *Ancient Architecture*”, pp. 141–42. See also p. 80 of this thesis.

³⁴⁵ See Appendix One, p. 248.

³⁴⁶ SM 37/1/28, n. p.

³⁴⁷ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, ll. §.4.2. o4, n. p.

³⁴⁸ SM 37/1/28, n. p.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid*, n. p.

³⁵⁰ The Sitting Room and the “Next Room” also featured Wilton carpets (PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, ll. §.4.2. o4, n. p.)

³⁵¹ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, ll. §.4.2. o4, n. p.

³⁵² *Ibid*, n. p.

service rooms were sometimes equipped with purpose-built furniture: for example, there was “A Large Dresser” for the kitchen, a “folding down side board” for the Housekeeper’s Room, and a “Deal fix’d washing and dress stand” for the Powdering Room.³⁵³ The government evidently recognised that public support for the Speaker’s dignity had to extend beyond the most visible elements of his official entertainments, such as wine and decorative furniture.

The Speaker’s House in Use, 1794–1801

It is already well-known that Addington used the Speaker’s House as a venue for his official dinners.³⁵⁴ However, in light of recent scholarship on the conduct of politics in the eighteenth century—particularly Hannah Greig and Amanda Vickery’s research into MPs’ typical daily routines—there is now scope for a more detailed assessment of Addington’s use of the house. His surviving correspondence, along with contemporary press reports, makes clear that the Speaker’s House was more than just a venue for the showpiece parliamentary dinners: it had a much wider role in facilitating his day-to-day interactions, both formal and informal, with other MPs. In part, the importance of the Speaker’s House stemmed from the inadequacy of the wider Palace of Westminster: by the eighteenth century, the palace no longer had enough space to accommodate all the activities associated with preparing legislation. The growing volume of Bills under discussion caused a chronic shortage of committee rooms; and it was not until the 1820s that the palace finally gained dedicated library facilities for both Houses.³⁵⁵ This shortage of space forced MPs to conduct much of their political business in spaces beyond the physical boundaries of the palace—including their own homes.³⁵⁶

The Speaker’s House could hardly have been more convenient as an ‘office’ for Addington. Its proximity to both the House of Commons and the Law Courts made it an ideal place for other MPs to call on him. Abbot, in particular, regularly visited the house to discuss the various parliamentary committees they were involved with.³⁵⁷ Indeed, it is possible that the Speaker’s House itself was sometimes used as a venue for committee meetings. For example, on 23 July 1795, *The Telegraph* reported that the “Commissioners [...] for liquidating the Prince of Wales’s debts, held a meeting on Thursday last, at the Speaker’s house [...] They are to meet again tomorrow at the same

³⁵³ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. o4, n. p.

³⁵⁴ See, for example, A. Wright and P. Smith, *Parliament Past and Present: A Popular and Picturesque Account of a Thousand Years in the Palace of Westminster, the Home of the Mother of Parliaments*, vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson & Co., c. 1902), p. 58.

³⁵⁵ Greig and Vickery, “The Political Day”, pp. 120, 122; Colvin, *King’s Works* 6, pp. 527–30.

³⁵⁶ Greig and Vickery, “The Political Day”, pp. 108, 120.

³⁵⁷ Colchester, *Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot*, I, p. 42–43; TNA: PRO 30/9/31, Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester: Papers, Journal, with interpolated correspondence, etc., 1757–1796, f. 250.

place".³⁵⁸ This was one of the committees which Addington led, so it is plausible that he may have chosen to host the meeting at his own house.³⁵⁹ On the other hand, it is conceivable that the meeting actually took place in the former Speaker's Chamber above the cloisters. The latter certainly continued in use as committee rooms after 1794: they are marked thus on Soane's plans of 1826 (Fig. 1.13). The former housekeeper's lodgings above the Speaker's Chamber had also been converted into committee rooms by that time.³⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Abbot's diary refers to a meeting of the Record Commissioners taking place "at the Speaker's House" on 19 December 1800; as a regular visitor to the house, it seems unlikely that he would have confused it with the Speaker's Chamber.³⁶¹ In later years, after Abbot himself became Speaker, his diaries mention that the Westminster Bridge Commission met "at my House" on at least one occasion.³⁶²

³⁵⁸ Untitled article, *The Telegraph*, Thursday, July 23, 1795, p. 4.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁶⁰ Williams, *Topography of the Old House of Commons*, p. 8.

³⁶¹ Colchester, *Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot* 1, p. 214.

³⁶² TNA: PRO 30/9/35 Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester, Papers: Journal, with interpolated correspondence, etc, f. 289.

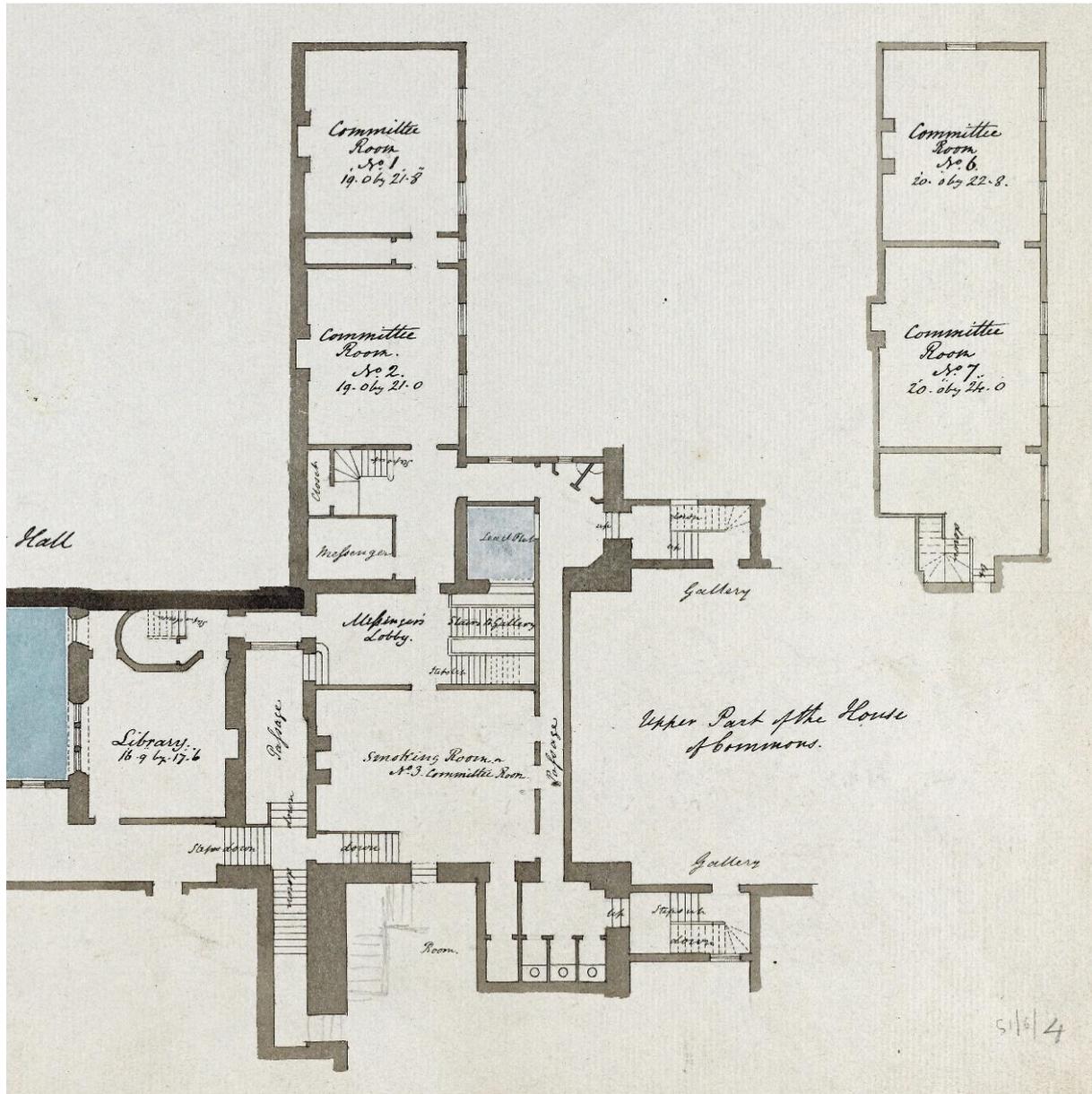


Fig. 1.13: Office of John Soane, *Plan of the Two Pair Floor*, 1826 (detail). Ink on paper, 28.7 x 47.7 cm. London: Sir John Soane's Museum (SM 51/6/4).

It must also be remembered that the conduct of politics in the Georgian era was not confined to the formal proceedings of debates or committees in the two Houses of Parliament. In recent years, historians have increasingly recognised that informal contacts outside Parliament were (and arguably still are) just as important as the formal activities that take place within it. This has given rise to the concept of 'political sociability': in essence, the idea that manners and polite sociability were vital mechanisms through which members of the political system displayed and

exercised their power.³⁶³ Political sociability was particularly important for groups, or individuals, who were excluded from the formal political system, including women: they could use social rituals and events as a means to influence those in power, thus gaining a degree of political agency and participation.³⁶⁴ Social rituals such as visiting or letter-writing, or events such as dinners, salons and assemblies, are now recognised as being vital opportunities for political networking, displays of allegiance, and the exchange of news and ideas.³⁶⁵ It was inevitable, then, that the Speaker's House would play a part in such activities. Indeed, Addington's appropriation of the house must surely have been motivated, at least in part, by an instinct that a bigger and more conveniently-situated townhouse would better equip him for these vital political activities. The social role of the Speaker's House must also be understood in relation to the wider social roles of town and country houses for wealthy families in eighteenth-century Britain.³⁶⁶ In the eighteenth century, MPs were invariably gentlemen of means; working men were effectively barred by the fact that MPs received no salaries.³⁶⁷ It was common practice for MPs to own both a country house—the seat of the family's landed estates—and a townhouse for use whilst in London.³⁶⁸ Alternatively, if they could not afford to buy a townhouse, they might rent temporary accommodation in the capital for the duration of the political 'season'.³⁶⁹ If they could afford it, they might also have a suburban villa on the outskirts of London: this allowed them to escape from the city at weekends, in an age when travelling times to their country seats were often prohibitive.³⁷⁰ The Addington family's country seat was at Upottery, Devon; but in 1790 Henry also acquired a suburban villa at Woodley, Berkshire.³⁷¹ Once he took over the Speaker's House in 1794 it became, in effect, his London townhouse. It is interesting to compare Addington's houses to those of his close friend, Pitt the Younger: the latter also had access to three houses, and it is easy to see how these, too, might fit into the model of townhouse, villa, and country house. As prime minister, 10 Downing Street was Pitt's London residence; and he

³⁶³ For the historiography of this trend in political history, see A. Vickery, "Introduction", in A. Vickery (ed.), *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 3; V. Capdeville and A. Kerhervé, *British Sociability in the Long Eighteenth Century: Challenging the Anglo-French Connection* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2019), pp. 3–4; and Grieg and Vickery, "The Political Day", pp. 101–03.

³⁶⁴ E. Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 77–81.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 81–97, 100–05.

³⁶⁶ For context see Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, pp. 2–12; S. Avery-Quash and K. Retford, *The Georgian London Town House* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), pp. 1–26.

³⁶⁷ MPs were first paid salaries in 1911 (House of Commons research briefing SN/PC/05075 (2009), p. 2).

³⁶⁸ P. Hunneyball, "Pride of Place: Chief Ministers and their Houses in Early Modern England", *History of Parliament Project Blog* (2020), <https://thehistoryofparliament.wordpress.com/2020/05/15/pride-of-place-chief-ministers-and-their-houses-in-early-modern-england/> [accessed 01/11/2022].

³⁶⁹ Grieg and Vickery, "The Political Day", pp. 110–11.

³⁷⁰ J. Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530–1830* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 372–33, 519–20; D. Arnold (ed.), *The Georgian Villa* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1996), pp. ix–x.

³⁷¹ Cookson, "Addington, Henry", n. p.; Ziegler, *Addington*, pp. 68–69.

owned a suburban villa at Holwood, Bromley.³⁷² As Chatham's second son, Pitt had inherited no country estate of his own; but Walmer Castle, Kent—his official residence as the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports—might be regarded, in effect, as his 'country' house.³⁷³ (The post of Lord Warden was granted to Pitt as a personal favour from the King, partly to augment his prime minister's precarious personal finances.³⁷⁴) Examining the surviving correspondence between Pitt and Addington during the 1790s, it appears that the two men were constantly moving back and forth between their various houses, and paying each other reciprocal visits. A letter from Pitt to Addington, written from Downing Street in September 1797, gives a good impression of their hectic schedules:

It will not be possible for me [...] to leave Hollwood [sic], before next Friday or Saturday [...] I must be here again on Wednesday, for the Levee, but shall return to Hollwood for dinner, and shall be very glad to see you there within that day or Thursday or either of the two following days. I would propose coming to you, but I have shirked a Dover Session on the Ground of Business near Town, and should be afraid of being detected near Woodley just at that time.³⁷⁵

This letter appears to indicate that Pitt and Addington escaped to their villas regularly, even during the parliamentary session.³⁷⁶ Other letters confirm that these houses could be venues for work as well as leisure; indeed, sometimes it was actually beneficial to have a working environment far removed from callers and other distractions. In an August 1796 letter Pitt, wishing to discuss some weighty topic, suggests meeting at Holwood rather than in London because "we should have much more leisure for such a subject" there.³⁷⁷ Clearly, the physical proximity of the Speaker's House to the House of Commons—though often useful—could be a double-edged sword. More importantly, this correspondence shows that Woodley, though not an official residence, played an important complementary role to the Speaker's House. The latter needs to be seen as part of a network of houses, both public and private, at varying degrees of remove from London, where politicians like Pitt and Addington could live, work or entertain as circumstances demanded.

³⁷² J. P. W. Ehrman and A. Smith, "Pitt, William (known as Pitt the younger) (1759–1806)", *ODNB*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/22338> [accessed 22/11/2022].

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, n. p.

³⁷⁴ J. P. W. Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt: The Reluctant Transition* (London: Constable, 1983), pp. 189–90.

³⁷⁵ DHC/152M/C1797/OZ/10: Political and personal papers of Henry Addington, 1st Viscount Sidmouth: correspondence and papers for the year 1796, letter from William Pitt to Henry Addington, 28 September 1797

³⁷⁶ The parliamentary session had begun on 27 September that year, the day before Pitt's letter ('1796', *History of Parliament Online*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/parliament/1796> [accessed 08/09/2023].

³⁷⁷ DHC: 152M/C1796/OZ/4, Political and personal papers of Henry Addington, 1st Viscount Sidmouth: correspondence and papers for the year 1796, letter from William Pitt to Henry Addington, 15 August 1796.

Sadly, nothing is known of Woodley's interiors or furnishings; the building itself is now demolished, and no documentary records have yet come to light.³⁷⁸ The house was certainly more modest in scale than the Speaker's House, but it must have been sufficiently well-appointed to maintain Addington's social pretensions. In one letter, Mitford gently teases Addington about the grandeur of his State Dining Room at Westminster, and suggests that he "may be content with humbler things [...] such as pea-bread, & ewe-milk-cheese" when at Woodley.³⁷⁹ Yet if the house lacked grandeur, its idyllic rural setting more than compensated for this; many of Addington's correspondents mention their visits to Woodley with genuine affection. For example, in a 1798 letter, Pitt told Addington that "few things could have done me more good than some quiet days at Woodley".³⁸⁰ It seems that Woodley offered both men a chance to relax and escape some of the formalities of London life. Humphrey Repton—the landscape gardener who later remodelled the Speaker's Garden – had the chance to observe Addington and Pitt together at Woodley. He paints a touching portrait of them, describing "Pitt romping with Addington's children—rolling on the carpet or the lawn with them—while the fond father laughingly looked on with proud affection".³⁸¹ The secluded surroundings of Woodley gave Pitt and Addington the space—both literally and figuratively—to maintain and nurture their friendship, which, in turn, facilitated their political cooperation.

The advantage of the Speaker's House, however, was that its proximity to the House of Commons offered considerable scope for spontaneous, informal entertaining. For example, on 25 January 1798, Addington wrote to Abbot from the house, asking him to call the following morning so that he could inform him of the King's voluntary subscription to the war effort.³⁸² Abbot's diary explains that that "Mr. Pitt was dining alone with the Speaker when the King's letter came, and with Mr. Pitt's approbation the Speaker had written his note to me".³⁸³ This suggests that Pitt and Addington made good use of the house as a convenient place to dine and discuss business immediately before or after their sittings in the Commons chamber next door. It is also another reminder of just how close the two statesmen were at this time. Nevertheless, the prime minister was not the only MP to benefit from Addington's spontaneous generosity. For example, Wilberforce's diary notes that in February 1796, after a Bill on Abolition passed its first reading, the

³⁷⁸ D. Nash Ford, "Woodley House, Woodley, Berkshire", *Royal Berkshire History*, http://www.berkshirehistory.com/castles/woodley_lodge.html [accessed 01/11/2022]; G. Tyack, S. Bradley and N. Pevsner, *Berkshire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 492.

³⁷⁹ DHC: 152M/C1795/F/7, Political and personal papers of Henry Addington, 1st Viscount Sidmouth: correspondence and papers for the year 1796, letter from Sir John Mitford to Henry Addington, 6 July 1795.

³⁸⁰ DHC: 152M/C1796/OZ/5, Political and personal papers of Henry Addington, 1st Viscount Sidmouth: correspondence and papers for the year 1798, letter from William Pitt to Henry Addington, 18 October 1798.

³⁸¹ BL Add. MS 62112: Repton memoirs, ff. 58–59.

³⁸² TNA: PRO 30/9/31, f. 212.

³⁸³ Colchester, *Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot I*, p. 133–34.

“Speaker asked me and Pitt together to come and sup [...] I staid too late, and in my feeling too little of sacred joy and humble gratitude”.³⁸⁴ Such gestures no doubt helped Addington to build rapport with individual MPs, which would then have helped to smooth the conduct of business in the Commons.

No evidence has been found of Addington inviting guests to stay the night at the Speaker’s House. This is not surprising: most of his political colleagues would have had their own London houses, and Woodley was undoubtedly a more pleasant venue for longer visits. Intriguingly, however, Pitt occasionally invited Addington to stay at 10 Downing Street, despite the fact that the two houses were only a few minutes’ walk from each other. The disruption caused by the 1796–97 building works was one reason for this. For example, on 13 January 1797 Pitt asked Addington to call at Downing Street the next day, and added: “If your house is not prepared for your Reception, perhaps you will do more wisely to take a bed here”.³⁸⁵ This indicates that the Addington family’s servants moved with them between their different houses, as was common practice at the time; consequently, the Speaker may have had nobody to receive him if he returned to the capital at short notice.³⁸⁶ In a January 1794 letter—shortly before the grant of the Speaker’s House—Pitt had written to Addington, telling him that if “you have not Servants in Town, I can furnish you with a bed here [at Downing Street]”.³⁸⁷ This provides another example of the frequent contact between the two men, and the importance of their official houses in facilitating this.

Informal and spontaneous sociability were clearly integral to Addington’s political duties. However, this does not detract from the importance of Addington’s official political entertaining. There can be no doubt that the Speaker’s parliamentary dinners and levées were as much about politics as sociability.³⁸⁸ As noted above, there is clear evidence that these events were already well-established traditions by the time Addington took the Chair.³⁸⁹ Abbot visited one of the official dinners in 1796, and he wrote a lengthy description of it in his diary. Though it has been reproduced before, it is such an important source that it has been quoted in full (see Appendix One).³⁹⁰ There was a consistent pattern for the dinners, as Abbot explains:

³⁸⁴ Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *Life of William Wilberforce* III, pp. 496–97.

³⁸⁵ DHC: 152M/C1797/OZ/6, Political and personal papers of Henry Addington, 1st Viscount Sidmouth: correspondence and papers for the year 1797, Pitt to Addington from Downing Street, Friday 13 January 1797.

³⁸⁶ Although some eighteenth-century grandees retained servants at their London houses all year round, this was an expensive practice and would probably have been beyond Addington’s means. See H. Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 13.

³⁸⁷ DHC: 152M/C1794/OZ/4 (op. cit.), n. p.

³⁸⁸ Ziegler, *Addington*, p. 61; Dasent, *Speakers of the House of Commons*, pp. 292–93.

³⁸⁹ See p. 46 of this thesis.

³⁹⁰ Reproduced in, for example, Wright and Smith, *Parliament Past and Present* 1, p. 59.

The rule is for the Speaker to give his first Saturday's dinner to the Ministers and their friends in office, who are Members of the House of Commons. His first Sunday is for the Opposition, and afterwards his parties are promiscuous; chiefly his private friends and those who visit his levee [sic] on Sunday evenings.³⁹¹

Abbot goes on to explain that these gatherings took place in the State Dining Room in the undercroft.³⁹² His account also makes clear that Addington's levées continued to be held regularly on Sunday evenings, just as they had been in Norton's time.³⁹³ As noted above, in those days the Speaker and the lord chancellor apparently held their levées on the same night; this practice appears to have continued into Addington's tenure.³⁹⁴ Abbot's diary records that, on 19 February 1797, he attended the lord chancellor's levée before going on to the Speaker's afterwards.³⁹⁵ Ziegler claims that Addington later moved his levées to Saturdays following an intervention by the devoutly-Christian William Wilberforce.³⁹⁶ However, in a later memorandum Mitford recalls attending Addington's levée on 8 February 1801, which was a Sunday.³⁹⁷ This must have been one of the last levées that Addington held, perhaps even the very last, for Mitford himself was elected Speaker shortly afterwards.³⁹⁸ This suggests that Addington continued to hold his levees on Sundays until the end of his Speakership. On 7 March 1801, however, Wilberforce recorded in his diary that the Speaker's levée had been changed to Saturday night, and that he had attended that day.³⁹⁹ Hence, it might actually have been Mitford, not Addington, who was persuaded to change the day.

There is little information about how these the levées were structured at this time. Indeed, levées remain an under-researched aspect of eighteenth-century political life, although they were quite common in the earlier years of the century; many prominent politicians, including prime ministers Walpole and Pelham, held them.⁴⁰⁰ The Speaker's levées endured far longer than most, continuing well into the twentieth century.⁴⁰¹ Sadly, there are no known images of the levées prior

³⁹¹ See Appendix One, p. 248.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 248.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

³⁹⁴ See pp. 46–47 of this thesis.

³⁹⁵ TNA PRO 30/9/32, Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester: Papers: Journal, with interpolated correspondence, etc., 1797–1800, f. 35.

³⁹⁶ Ziegler, *Addington*, p. 62.

³⁹⁷ GA: D2002/3/1/11, n. p. Admittedly, Lord Bexley (née Nicholas Vansittart) later recalled that both the Speaker and Lord Chancellor held their levées on a Saturday at the end of the eighteenth century (Pellew, *Henry Addington* 1, p. 368). However, Bexley was writing in 1845, many years after the events he describes; it is possible that his memory had failed him on this point.

³⁹⁸ Greer, "Mitford, John Freeman-", n. p.

³⁹⁹ R.I. Wilberforce and S. Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, vol. III (London: Seeley, Burnside and Seeley, 1838), p. 7.

⁴⁰⁰ Greig and Vickery, "The Political Day", pp. 113–16.

⁴⁰¹ Riding, Church and Garibaldi, "The Speaker's House", pp. 197–98.

to the completion of the new Speaker's House in 1859. By then it appears that they had become stiff, formal affairs, in which visitors solemnly queued up to be presented to the Speaker (Fig. 1.14).⁴⁰²

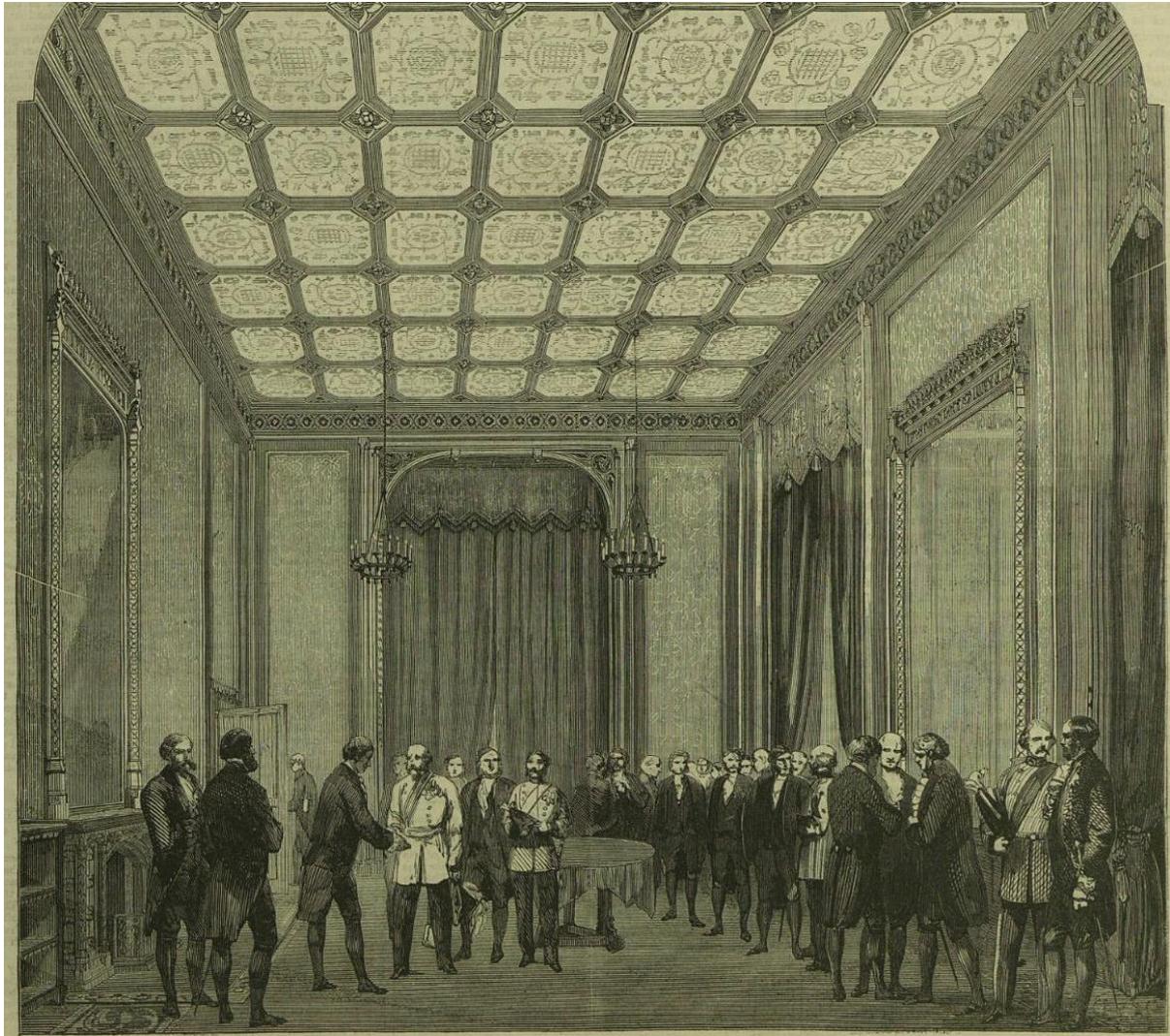


Fig 1.14: *The Speaker's Levée in the Morning Room of his Residence in the New Palace of Westminster*, published in *The Illustrated London News*, 34:970, 23 April 1859, p. 393. Image from The British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk); © 2023 Findmypast Newspaper Archive Limited.

Yet the levées may have been rather different during the eighteenth century. The concept of the levée had originated in the royal courts of Europe, its most famous exponent being Louis XIV of France (r. 1643–1715). In its original form, it consisted of an intimate audience with the monarch while they dressed.⁴⁰³ However, the idea began to be copied by senior politicians, and indeed by

⁴⁰² Seaward, "Qualifications for the Speakership", n. p.

⁴⁰³ Greig and Vickery, "The Political Day", p. 114.

almost anyone with pretensions to social status, as parodied by Hogarth in his *Rake's Progress* paintings.⁴⁰⁴ Although relatively few details of the Speaker's and lord chancellors levées have been established, it is apparent that their format differed somewhat from the traditional definition of a levée. Firstly, levées were originally conceived as morning events; but surviving references make clear that the Speaker's and lord chancellor's events took place in the evening.⁴⁰⁵ Secondly, levées were ostensibly intended strictly for discussion of business, rather than as a social occasion; hence, no refreshments were served.⁴⁰⁶ (Greig and Vickery describe levées as "an early form of office hour and political surgery", as well as an opportunity for political leaders to rally and discipline their supporters.⁴⁰⁷) However, in a later letter to George Pellew (Addington's biographer), Lord Bexley (née Nicholas Vansittart) hinted that the Speaker's and lord chancellor's levées may have had a social element as well. He actually described them as "evening parties, misnamed levees [sic]"; but unfortunately, he does not elaborate on this.⁴⁰⁸ It is not known, for example, whether any refreshments were served. Nor is it known for certain whether attendance was restricted to MPs and Peers, or whether their wives and other guests were also admitted. However, a later newspaper report from 1833 provides a guest list for one of Charles Manners-Sutton's levées.⁴⁰⁹ Only male names are listed, which appears to suggest that wives and daughters were not admitted. It is reasonable to assume that the same rules would have prevailed in Addington's day.

There is clear evidence that Addington used his levées to as an opportunity to network and build rapport with fellow MPs. Abbot's 1796 account of Addington's dinner specifically states that, after the initial government and opposition dinners, the Speaker's dinner guests comprised "chiefly his private friends and those who visit his levee [sic] on Sunday evenings".⁴¹⁰ This strongly implies that—despite the Speaker's status as a nominally-independent political figure—he had a loyal circle of friends and followers who regularly attended his levées. For Addington and his regular guests, these levées must have provided a sense of camaraderie. Moreover, Abbot's account confirms that attendees at the official dinners were required to wear court dress with bag-wig and sword; it is reasonable to assume that the same rules applied at the levées.⁴¹¹ This was certainly the case during Manners-Sutton's Speakership (see Appendix Two); and the Victorian gentlemen illustrated in Fig

⁴⁰⁴ William Hogarth, *A Rake's Progress II: The Levee*, 1734, oil on canvas, 630 x 755mm. London: Sir John Soane's Museum, P41. For more context, see the painting's catalogue entry on the museum's website (<http://collections.soane.org/object-p41> [accessed 22/11/2022]).

⁴⁰⁵ See, for example, Pellew, *Henry Addington 1*, p. 368.

⁴⁰⁶ Greig and Vickery, "The Political Day", p. 115.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 115.

⁴⁰⁸ Pellew, *Henry Addington 1*, p. 368.

⁴⁰⁹ "The Speaker's Dinner-Party and Levee [sic]", *Morning Post*, 25 March 1833, p. 3.

⁴¹⁰ See Appendix One, p. 248.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 248.

1.16 also appear to be wearing court dress. (Note that most of them appear to be wearing stockings rather than trousers, and some are clearly carrying swords.) Court dress was considered old-fashioned in the eighteenth century; but it nevertheless carried an element of prestige and grandeur, derived from its association with the court.⁴¹² The Speaker's levée might not be the place for guests to show off the latest fashions, but there was nevertheless an element of display.

Regardless of the prevailing atmosphere on these occasions, attendees certainly used the levées as an opportunity to discuss political business. Quite apart from any spoken conversations, these large gatherings provided a useful opportunity for politicians to 'read the room', sometimes literally. Bexley, for example, recalls attending one of the Lord Chancellor's levées in January 1801:

[...] perceived by the countenances and manner of the persons assembled that something extraordinary had happened [...] After some time Mr [Spencer] Perceval [1762–1812] took me aside and said, "You seem not to be aware of what has happened, and I wish you would let me take you home to Lincoln's Inn in my carriage."⁴¹³

On the ride home, Perceval broke the news of Pitt's resignation. This incident illustrates that, whilst the levées were useful for the exchange of political news, they also had limitations: they were too public to allow confidential news or gossip to be exchanged freely. This problem is also apparent in Mitford's recollections of Addington's levée just a few weeks later, on 8 February 1801:

I waited by his [Addington's] desire till everybody should have left the room; but to my surprise the Master of the Rolls [Charles George Perceval, 2nd Baron Arden; 1756–1840] also stayed after the rest of the Company were gone, & at length called Mr. Addington aside, & spoke to him for some time in an adjoining room. When Mr. Addington returned to me, he hinted that the Master of the Rolls' application to him [?] was for the Common Pleas [...]⁴¹⁴

Mitford made a point of recording this exchange because he later came to believe that Addington had lied to him about his conversation with Arden.⁴¹⁵ Mitford wanted to become Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, but Addington was trying to convince him that the job was not available, and thereby pressure him into accepting the Speakership. Despite his supposedly neutral position, in practice Addington could never completely rise above political manoeuvring, particularly once his transfer to the premiership was in sight. The sudden change of Speakers in February 1801

⁴¹² H. Greig, "Faction and Fashion: The Politics of Court Dress in Eighteenth-Century England", *Appearance(s)* 6 (2015), <https://journals.openedition.org/apparences/1311> [accessed 07/11/2022].

⁴¹³ Bexley to Pellew, 11 July 1845. Cited in Pellew, *Henry Addington* 1, p. 368.

⁴¹⁴ GA: D2002/3/1/11, n. p.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid*, n. p.

caused some disruption to the Speaker's official functions: Addington was unable to move out of the Speaker's House until Pitt was ready to leave 10 Downing Street. Hence, it appears that Mitford held his first levée in his own house at the Adelphi; at any rate, Abbot visited him there on Sunday 15 February, and he noted that Pitt and Addington were also present.⁴¹⁶ Mitford also hosted at least one meeting of the Record Commission at the Adelphi in March.⁴¹⁷ Meanwhile, Addington hosted his first Cabinet dinner as prime minister at the Speaker's House.⁴¹⁸ He finally moved into Downing Street in early April.⁴¹⁹

More research is needed to understand whether the Speaker's and lord chancellor's "evening parties" were typical of levées in the late eighteenth century.⁴²⁰ Nevertheless, the above information certainly adds nuance to our understanding of such events at this time, and proves beyond doubt the political significance of the Speaker's events. Nevertheless, Addington must have been conscious of the strain these events placed on his salary. Despite the official provision of a hogshead of claret, it seems that successive Speakers still had to spend large sums on alcohol out of their own pockets. After he had handed over the chair to Mitford, Addington sent him a letter requesting payment for his share of a "Hogshead of Claret, half of which was left for your Use in Palace Yard".⁴²¹ It seems that Mitford, in turn, left some alcohol behind when he moved out; in 1803 Abbot estimated the value of the wine in the house—"Ld. Redesdale's cellar & my own"—at £2,000.⁴²² This, of course, represented a third of the Speaker's annual salary. On the other hand, the house's proximity to Parliament and the Law Courts brought Addington some unexpected perks. In particular, the epic seven-year impeachment trial of Warren Hastings (1788–95) was approaching its climax at the time he moved in.⁴²³ Temporary galleries were erected in Westminster Hall for major occasions such as this, and it seems that, by custom, the auditor of the Exchequer had enjoyed the use of the East Gallery.⁴²⁴ The first-floor plan dated 1803 marks an exit from the bell-tower, which presumably gave access to this (Fig. 1.19; numbered 1). The royal proclamation which officially granted the Auditor's House to Addington made no mention of the gallery, and the Speaker

⁴¹⁶ PRO 30/9/33, f. 87.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, f. 120.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, f. 91.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid, ff. 113, 127.

⁴²⁰ Pellew, *Henry Addington 1*, p. 368.

⁴²¹ GA: D2002/3/1/3: John Freeman-Mitford, 1st Baron Redesdale: correspondence and professional papers, Henry Addington to Sir John Mitford, 3 April 1801. A hogshead is a barrel containing about 300l when full.

⁴²² PRO 30/9/33, f. 203.

⁴²³ J. Bernstein, *Dawning of the Raj: The Life and Trials of Warren Hastings* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), pp. 254–58.

⁴²⁴ W. S. Lewis (ed.), *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937–83), vol. 9, pp. 279–80.

therefore found himself drawn into a tussle with the new auditor, Grenville. There was enormous demand for seats to view the trial; on 4 April, Addington wrote to the Lord Great Chamberlain to formally request the use of the Gallery.⁴²⁵ He was duly granted a block of seats, but Grenville must have negotiated with him subsequently; Addington generously gave up half his seats in order to make space for Grenville's party, and he even allowed the latter to access the gallery through the Speaker's House.⁴²⁶ This episode serves as another reminder that, despite the undoubted professionalism of his conduct in the chair, Addington was not immune to the appeal of 'perks'.

The End of Addington's Speakership

The above evidence clearly shows that the Speaker's House helped Addington to enhance both the prestige of his role, and his personal reputation. The most important proof of his growing political stature during the 1790s is the increasing attention being paid to him by the King. Addington had met George III for the first time in March 1788; but at that time there was no reason for the King to take much notice of him.⁴²⁷ By 1799, however, Addington's performance as Speaker had earned him the prestigious accolade of a royal visit to Woodley. The pretext was a royal inspection of the Woodley Cavalry, a local troop which Addington had taken command of as a patriotic gesture during the war.⁴²⁸ After reviewing the troops, the royal family sat in Addington's Drawing Room before touring the gardens and taking dinner in a marquee.⁴²⁹ The King must have been suitably impressed by his reception at Woodley, for the following year he paid a visit—albeit only a brief one—to the Speaker's House. On 11 November 1800, *The Porcupine* reported that

Yesterday in the forenoon HIS MAJESTY went to inspect the places prepared for the reception of the two Houses of Parliament, until the necessary alterations in their usual places of meeting shall have been completed. HIS MAJESTY staid [sic] at the Speaker's house until the arrival of the LORD MAYOR at Westminster Hall, attended by a considerable

⁴²⁵ Bernstein, *Dawning of the Raj*, p. ix; Parliamentary Archives (PA): LGC/5/1/152, records of the lord great chamberlain (1558–1980): miscellaneous documents (1558–1820), memo regarding seats in the East Gallery in Westminster Hall by the deputy lord chamberlain, 1794.

⁴²⁶ PA: LGC/5/1/148, records of the lord great chamberlain (1558–1980): miscellaneous documents (1558–1820), a grant of the use of the East Gallery in Westminster Hall by the lord great chamberlain, 1790s; LGC 5/1/149, letter from Lord Grenville to the lord great chamberlain requesting the use of a gallery in Westminster Hall during Warren Hastings's trial, 13 April 1794; LGC/5/1/150, letter from the Speaker of the House of Commons respecting the East Gallery, with the deputy great chamberlain's reply, 4 April 1794; LGC/5/1/151, letter from the Speaker of the House of Commons (to the deputy great chamberlain) respecting seats in Westminster Hall during Warren Hastings' trial, 13 April 1794; LGC/5/1/152 (op. cit.).

⁴²⁷ Ziegler, *Addington*, pp. 52–53.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁴²⁹ DHC: 152M/C1799/F/1, Political and personal papers of Henry Addington, 1st Viscount Sidmouth: correspondence and papers for the year 1799, letter from Henry Addington Jnr. to Master Hoskins, 4 August 1799.

number of the populace [...] Palace-Yard [sic] was nearly filled with the people, when the KING left the SPEAKER'S to return to the Palace.⁴³⁰

Undoubtedly, the motives for this visit were partly practical: the Speaker's House must have provided a warmer and more comfortable waiting-room for the King than the notoriously cold Westminster Hall.⁴³¹ Nevertheless, the fact that Addington played host to the King suggests that the Speaker was expected to act as Parliament's representative on ceremonial occasions. It is also a vivid demonstration of Westminster's transition from a royal residence to a parliamentary domain: Addington was playing host to the King even though Westminster was still, theoretically, the King's palace.

Brief though it was, George III's visit to the Speaker's House constituted a tacit acknowledgement by the King that Addington had become a politician of stature, worthy to play host to the very highest in the land. It thus provided a vivid demonstration of the house's potential to boost both the professional and personal prestige of its occupants. As it turned out, the 1790s probably constituted the high-water mark of Addington's career. In February 1801, Pitt suddenly resigned as prime minister, having failed to win the King's approval for Catholic emancipation.⁴³² The King, knowing that Addington opposed emancipation, now urged him to form an administration; with Pitt's blessing, the Speaker accepted this invitation.⁴³³ The subsequent history of Addington's premiership (1801–04) lies beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is noteworthy that the King granted Addington a life tenancy at White Lodge, Richmond Park, in addition to his official residence at 10 Downing Street.⁴³⁴ This was a striking indication of the respect and affection the King had developed for the former Speaker. White Lodge effectively replaced Woodley, which was sold, and quickly faded into obscurity. It was eventually demolished in 1962.⁴³⁵

As for the Speaker's House itself, Addington had undoubtedly managed to obtain a very singular townhouse, which he now passed on to his successors in the office. However, the building's unique qualities were not immediately obvious to the outside world. Successive occupants had

⁴³⁰ Untitled article, *The Porcupine*, Tuesday, November 11, 1800, p. 2. The King returned to Westminster the following day to deliver his customary speech at the opening of the final parliamentary session (Hansard, *Parliamentary History* vol. 35, p. 495).

⁴³¹ For the draughty conditions in Westminster Hall in the eighteenth century see Colvin, *King's Works* 5, p. 389.

⁴³² Ehrman and Smith, "Pitt, William", n. p.

⁴³³ Thorne, "ADDINGTON, Henry (1757–1844), of Woodley, nr. Reading, Berks. and White Lodge, Richmond Park, Surr.", *History of Parliament Online* (1986), <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/addington-henry-1757-1844> [accessed 07/07/2023].

⁴³⁴ Pellew, *Henry Addington* 1, pp. 408–09; Cookson, "Addington", n. p.

⁴³⁵ Ford, "Woodley House", n. p.

recognised the dramatic scenic potential of the cloisters and undercroft, but their true historical significance was only appreciated by a relatively small circle of antiquaries. Moreover, the historical and Romantic associations of these Gothic structures were not being fully exploited. The cloisters remained hidden away behind anonymous red-brick façades; a casual observer, viewing the house from the river or Westminster Bridge, would probably never have guessed at its remarkable interiors. The house was undoubtedly grand, but it lacked an overall visual identity. In turn, this lack of visual identity made it harder for the house to develop a clear political identity: so far as can be ascertained, there were not yet any decorative features which firmly tied it to the office of Speaker. In 1801, the cloister house at Westminster was merely the house in the which the Speaker lived: it was not yet firmly established as the Speaker's House. It would take the "energy and ambition" of a subsequent Speaker—along with the creative vision of a brilliant, if mercurial, architect—to transform the Speaker's House from a mere building into a political institution.⁴³⁶ The next chapter will explore why, and how, the Speaker's House was extensively remodelled during Charles Abbot's Speakership; and it will explain how architect and client consciously exploited historicist architecture and furnishings in order to further elevate the political stature of the Speakership.

⁴³⁶ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, p. 533.

Chapter 2: Speaker Abbot and the Rebuilding of the Speaker's House, 1802–17

This chapter will consider, arguably, the most significant phase in the history of the old Speaker's House. It was during the Speakership of Charles Abbot (1802–17) that the Speaker's House was extensively reconstructed to the designs of architect James Wyatt. This project allowed the Speaker to totally rethink both the layout and aesthetics of the house; and it will be seen that, for the first time, he was consciously considering how architecture, furnishing and decoration might be exploited in order to boost the political stature of his office. This chapter will begin by examining Abbot's character and Speakership, and the circumstances which prompted the rebuilding project. Next, it will consider the architectural context of Wyatt's other works at Westminster, and the wider Gothic Revival. It will then give an overview of the progress of the rebuilding project, before considering the form and layout of the finished house in as much detail as is available. Finally, it will consider how Abbot made use of the house during the remainder of his Speakership.

The Speakerships of Sir John Mitford and Charles Abbot (1801–02 and 1802–17)

Once Addington had accepted George III's invitation to form a government, Pitt agreed to stay on for a few weeks to allow him time to assemble a new cabinet. Addington took it upon himself to recruit his own successor as Speaker, thus demonstrating the government's continuing *de facto* control over this nominally-independent appointment. Addington's choice fell upon his friend Sir John Mitford, who had been Pitt's attorney-general.⁴³⁷ Mitford himself was unenthusiastic.⁴³⁸ Despite the fixed salary secured by Addington, the role was not a financially lucrative one; after a successful legal career, Mitford now worried that the Speakership would reduce him "from real affluence to splendid poverty".⁴³⁹ However, it appears that Pitt pressured Addington into choosing Mitford for the Chair;

⁴³⁷ R. G. Thorne, "MITFORD, John (1748–1830), of Lincoln's Inn, Mdx. and Batsford Park, Glos.", *History of Parliament Online* (1986), <https://d6.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/mitford-john-1748-1830> [accessed 08/09/2023].

⁴³⁸ *Ibid*, n. p.

⁴³⁹ Gloucester, Gloucestershire Archives (GA), D2002 3/1/11, John Freeman-Mitford, 1st Baron Redesdale: correspondence and professional papers, Memorandum on his acceptance of Speakership of the Commons, 1802, n. p.

after much persuasion, Mitford eventually accepted the post.⁴⁴⁰ This was unfortunate, because there was another MP who, by then, had his heart set on the Speakership: Charles Abbot.⁴⁴¹

Abbot's most up-to-date biographies are his entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and the *History of Parliament*. Both of these cast him as a zealous reformer, determinedly pushing to modernise parliamentary administration and root out corruption, though inevitably hampered by vested interests.⁴⁴² However, this reforming zeal was tempered by a conservative desire to maintain the Hanoverian dynasty and the established Church. This desire was clearly manifested in his staunch opposition to Catholic emancipation, which he expressed in his controversial prorogation speech of 1813.⁴⁴³ Like Addington—and Mitford, for that matter—Abbot was essentially a middle-class lawyer. He was the son of a clergyman and a draper's daughter; beyond this, he knew little about his own ancestry.⁴⁴⁴ In his diaries, he did his best to concoct a suitably respectable lineage for himself: he suggested that he may have been descended from Sir Maurice Abbot, a notable politician of the late-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Maurice's older brothers included an Archbishop of Canterbury and a Bishop of Salisbury, which would have conferred further respectability on the family.⁴⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Abbot conceded that he was "by no means certain" of his connection to these worthies.⁴⁴⁶ As a younger son from a middle-class family, Abbot had to make his own way in the world. Fortunately, he found success as a barrister, eventually earning £1,500 per annum from his practice (about £130,000 at 2019 values).⁴⁴⁷ However, the death of his older brother in 1794 changed the course of his life. Charles took over his brother's sinecure office as clerk of the rules in King's Bench, with a salary of £2,700 per year (almost £250,000 at 2019 values).⁴⁴⁸ To put these figures in context, the best available estimates put the average income of a British family in 1803 at about £91; only about 2.5% of British families would have had an income of

⁴⁴⁰ Abbot, Charles, 2nd Baron Colchester (ed.), *The Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot, Lord Colchester, Speaker of the House of Commons 1802–1817, vol. I* (London: John Murray, 1861), pp. 226–27; Thorne, "Mitford, John", n. p.; GA D2002/3/1/11, n. p.

⁴⁴¹ R. G. Thorne, "ABBOT, Charles (1757-1829), of Kidbrook, Suss.", *History of Parliament Online* (1986), <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/abbot-charles-1757-1829> [accessed 08/09/2023].

⁴⁴² C. Wilkinson, "Abbot, Charles, first Baron Colchester", *ODNB* (2008), <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/3> [accessed 10/01/2023]; Thorne, "Abbot, Charles", n. p.

⁴⁴³ Wilkinson, "Abbot, Charles", n. p.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid*, n. p.

⁴⁴⁵ K. Fincham, "Abbot, George (1562–1633)", *ODNB* (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/4> [accessed 10/01/2023].

⁴⁴⁶ TNA: PRO 30/9/31, Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester: Papers, Journal, with interpolated correspondence, etc., 1757–1796, f. 3.

⁴⁴⁷ Wilkinson, "Abbot, Charles", n. p.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid*, n. p.

more than £500 per annum.⁴⁴⁹ This income enabled him to give up his legal practice and pursue a career in politics: he entered Parliament in 1795.⁴⁵⁰ In 1796 he made an advantageous marriage to Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Philip Gibbes, a wealthy Barbadian planter (and enslaver).⁴⁵¹ Sir Philip gave his daughter a marriage settlement of £5000 (over £375,000 at 2019 values).⁴⁵² Thus, by the late 1790s Abbot was well-placed to climb the social ladder.

It seems clear that Abbot set his sights on the Speakership very early in his parliamentary career. He showed an immediate interest in administrative reform and threw himself into committees dealing with expired and expiring laws, the promulgation of the statutes and the preservation of public records.⁴⁵³ This brought him to the attention of Speaker Addington, who became his political mentor for the rest of his career.⁴⁵⁴ Addington supported Abbot's reforming endeavours and Abbot must have realised that, should the Chair ever become vacant, the Speakership would enable him to continue these projects on his own initiative. Moreover, Abbot would have been very conscious of the boost the Speakership had given to Addington's social status. His mentor, like himself, had started out as an unassuming middle-class lawyer; Addington had used the Speakership to carve a niche for himself within the political establishment, winning the respect of MPs, peers and even the King himself. Previous biographers of Abbot have shown little interest in his social ambitions.⁴⁵⁵ This thesis, however, argues that such ambitions are key to explaining his grandiose rebuilding of the Speaker's House. They are clearly visible in his diaries, particularly in the short summary of his early life with which he opened the first volume in 1795.⁴⁵⁶ This was a document clearly intended to be read by future generations; which, in turn, implies that Abbot expected to make a name for himself. Another indication of his ambitions is the fact that, in September 1802, he acquired a country house and estate at Kidbrooke, Sussex. No doubt this was a very pleasant country retreat, but the acquisition of land was also essential to confirm his status as a gentleman. Chapter One of this thesis argues that the retirement peerage was a powerful incentive

⁴⁴⁹ R. D. Hume, "The Value of Money in Eighteenth-Century England: Incomes, Prices, Buying Power—and Some Problems in Cultural Economics", *Huntington Library Quarterly* 77:4 (2014), pp. 376–77.

⁴⁵⁰ Wilkinson, "Abbot, Charles", n. p.

⁴⁵¹ According to a 1780 document, Gibbes owned 109 enslaved people ("Sir Philip Gibbes Bart", *Legacies of British Slavery Database*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146643193> [accessed 20/07/2021]). Abbot had voted in favour of abolition before his marriage, but "took no further part" on the subject thereafter (Thorne, "Abbot, Charles", n. p.). This illustrates the conflict between Abbot's determination to cast himself as a reformer, and his desire to accumulate wealth in order to climb the social ladder.

⁴⁵² "Sir Philip Gibbes Bart", *Legacies of British Slavery Database*, n. p.

⁴⁵³ The latter recommended the establishment of the Record Commission in 1800. Abbot took a leading role in this body for the rest of his career. See Wilkinson, "Abbot, Charles", n. p.

⁴⁵⁴ Colchester, *Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot* I, p. 42; Wilkinson, "Abbot, Charles", n. p.

⁴⁵⁵ Wilkinson, "Abbot, Charles", n. p.; Thorne, "Abbot, Charles", n. p.

⁴⁵⁶ PRO 30/9/31, ff. 2–12.

for Mitford: it offered the prospect of establishing his descendants as a titled dynasty. So far as can be ascertained, Abbot never explicitly admitted to such an ambition; no doubt that would have been regarded as unseemly. Yet, as Porter notes, buying an estate and cultivating political connections were essential steps for anybody hoping to enter the ranks of the titled nobility.⁴⁵⁷ By becoming Speaker and buying Kidbrooke, Abbot had taken both of those steps: this strongly suggests that his motive was, at least in part, to establish his own dynasty and thus give his descendants better life chances. However, to truly win acceptance into the elite circle of Britain's ruling classes, one also needed lineage: no amount of money could, in itself, compensate for Abbot's obscure family background. Abbot would therefore have to seek more creative ways to entrench his new social stature.

The Speaker's House: The Decision to Rebuild

When John FitzGibbon, 1st Earl of Clare (b. 1748) died in February 1802, Mitford was raised to the peerage as Baron Redesdale and took Clare's place as Lord Chancellor of Ireland. His departure meant that Abbot finally secured his dream job, being elected as Speaker on 11 February, 1802.⁴⁵⁸ Upon taking up the post, he almost immediately had to consider the need for major alterations to the Speaker's House. As noted in Chapter One of this thesis, the house suffered from serious problems with damp, possibly due to inadequate foundations and drainage on the river front (discussed further below).⁴⁵⁹ Wyatt's works during the 1790s had failed to resolve the issues; it had therefore become clear that a more fundamental reconstruction of the house would be necessary. There is strong evidence that Mitford and Addington were, in fact, already discussing the possibility of major works during the former's brief Speakership. As early as March 1800 an article in *The Times*, announcing Wyatt's plans to remodel the two Houses of Parliament, declared that the Speaker's House was among the "buildings to be pulled down".⁴⁶⁰ In his 1809 report to the Treasury (discussed further below), Wyatt claims that he met Addington and Mitford at the Speaker's House during 1801, so that their proposals could be discussed on the spot. He claims that Addington sanctioned certain alterations at that time, but gives no details as to what these were, although he acknowledges that they were "not quite to the extent" of the work eventually undertaken.⁴⁶¹ It

⁴⁵⁷ R. Porter, "English Society in the Eighteenth Century", reprinted in F. Fernández-Armesto (ed.), *England in the Eighteenth Century* (London: The Folio Society, 1998), p. 52.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, n. p.

⁴⁵⁹ See p. 135 of this thesis.

⁴⁶⁰ Untitled piece, *The Times*, 4 March 1801, p. 2.

⁴⁶¹ TNA: PRO 30/9/14, Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester: Papers: Miscellaneous Papers: Parliamentary, Box 2, item I. §.1. 2. c: Copy of Report to the Treasury Relating to the Works Carried on at the Houses of Parliament and the Speaker's House, from Mr Wyatt, June 1809; and General Statement of Accounts for Works Done at the Houses of Parliament and Speaker's House, Between 1800 and 1807, n. p.

seems probable, however, that the three men agreed to press ahead with extending the State Dining Room. There is evidence (discussed below) that this work was essentially complete by the time Abbot took the chair.⁴⁶² Mitford was certainly considering further alterations, as he gave Abbot a list of “suggestions” upon, or shortly after, his resignation from the Chair. However, these proposals are trivial compared to the sweeping reconstruction which Abbot would soon embark upon. Mitford’s notes suggest making only minor alterations to the doors and passages leading into the State Dining Room, and a new doorway and fireplace in the cloisters.⁴⁶³

Once Abbot took the Chair, he seized the opportunity to alter the house to better suit his political and social objectives. In terms of his modernising political agenda, one of his most important objectives was to give MPs easier access to relevant information. His work on the Record Commission supported this aim, by facilitating easier access to historic records; but he also wanted to ensure that MPs could easily obtain more recent documents, particularly parliamentary papers such as Bills, reports and accounts.⁴⁶⁴ The House of Commons had been accumulating written records like these for more than two centuries, but there had never been a dedicated library space in which to house them. Some were stored in a warehouse in Abingdon Street, while others were scattered throughout the palace, in closets and wardrobes, wherever space could be found for them.⁴⁶⁵ The need for a dedicated library space had long been recognised: indeed, Soane’s 1794–95 proposals for a new House of Lords chamber would have included a joint library for both Houses.⁴⁶⁶ However, by the turn of the century no concrete steps had been taken to provide one. Eventually, Abbot resolved to set aside the western range of the upper cloister to create a dedicated “Public Library” for the use of MPs.⁴⁶⁷ Its location, immediately adjacent to the Commons’ chamber, would be convenient for MPs; and they would be able to access it without having to pass through the rest of the Speaker’s House. Although it is not mentioned in his initial instructions to Wyatt (discussed in detail below), he must have made this decision quite early on, as he discusses the creation of the

⁴⁶² J. T. Smith, mentions that the house was “further advanced in beauty and convenience” during Mitford’s tenure, which adds weight to the theory that some alterations were carried out at this time. See *Antiquities of the City of Westminster* (London: T. Bensley, 1807), p. 258. See also pp. 132–33 of this thesis.

⁴⁶³ TNA: PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. k.: Speaker’s House alterations suggested by Lord Redesdale, 17 Feb 1802, n. p.

⁴⁶⁴ TNA: PRO 30/9/15, Charles, 1st Baron Colchester: Papers, miscellaneous letters, letter from George Whittam to Abbot, 8 July 1809, n. p.

⁴⁶⁵ D. Menhennet, “The Library of the House of Commons: The First Sixteen Years,” in H. S. Cobb (ed.), *Essays Presented to Maurice Bond* (London: HLRO, 1981), p. 44.

⁴⁶⁶ S. E. Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster: Civic Architecture and National Identity, 1789–1834* (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1999), p. 172.

⁴⁶⁷ TNA: PRO 30/9/33: Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester, Papers: Journal, with interpolated correspondence, etc, f. 463.

Library in his end-of-year diary summary for 1803.⁴⁶⁸ Abbot's papers usually refer to this library as the "Public Library", thus differentiating it from his private library in the north cloister; but there is no evidence that it was open to the general public, and it seems far more likely that it was only open to MPs. Abbot's "Public Library" was an important innovation, but the cloister ultimately proved too small for the purpose. Investigations in the aftermath of the 1834 fire—in which about two-thirds of the Commons' library holdings were destroyed—make clear that many items remained scattered across odd corners of the palace (despite the construction of a dedicated Library building in 1828).⁴⁶⁹ It must also be noted that the Speaker's Gallery was not the only place in which printed materials were concentrated; indeed, there was sometimes a duplication of holdings across multiple locations. For example, a letter from George Whittam, clerk of the journals, to Abbot in 1809 mentions four copies of the pre-Union papers being printed: one for the Speaker's Gallery, one for the Journal Office, one for the British Museum and one for official house of the clerk of the journals.⁴⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Abbot's "Public Library" has a strong claim to be considered the first properly-organised library for the House of Commons; and it was certainly an important forerunner of the official libraries of both Houses. The likely role of the Speaker's House in hosting committee meetings has already been noted in Chapter One; Abbot's "Public Library" further expanded the house's practical role in facilitating the political business of Parliament.⁴⁷¹

However, there is also clear evidence that Abbot was attempting to elevate his social status and cement his family's place among Britain's ruling classes. Abbot's parliamentary work brought him into contact with many of the richest and most powerful men in the country; those from old-established families could usually boast an impressive family seat. When he first took the Chair, Abbot was not universally respected.⁴⁷² In part, this was because he had alienated many powerful people during his brief tenure as Chief Secretary for Ireland (1801–02).⁴⁷³ However, it seems that, in some cases, there was an element of personal snobbery as well. Lord Minto—née Sir Gilbert Elliott, Addington's old rival for the Speakership—commented that Abbot had "the *tourneur* of a clerk [...] rather than of a Speaker".⁴⁷⁴ If Abbot was to win the respect these critics, he would surely have wished to prove that he lived in a style befitting a gentleman. The Speaker's House offered the

⁴⁶⁸ PRO 30/9/33, f. 182.

⁴⁶⁹ Menhennet, "The Library of the House of Commons", pp. 46–48. For Soane's Commons Library see Colvin, *King's Works* 6, pp. 527–30.

⁴⁷⁰ PRO 30/9/15, letter from George Whittam to Abbot, 8 July 1809, n. p. Whittam's job title is confirmed by *The Royal Kalendar: and Court and City Register for England, Scotland, Ireland and America, for the year 1814* (London: J. Stockdale, 1814), p. 104.

⁴⁷¹ See pp. 81–82 of this thesis.

⁴⁷² Thorne, "Abbot, Charles", n. p.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid*, n. p.

⁴⁷⁴ National Library of Scotland: Minto MSS, 11054, fol. 14. Quoted in Wilkinson, "Abbot, Charles", n. p.

opportunity to make an impressive architectural statement; and, given its prominent location at Westminster, MPs could hardly fail to notice it. Moreover, a major rebuilding of the house would offer an opportunity to better equip it for the Speaker's official entertaining, and thus cement his position as the public figurehead of the House of Commons. Both these objectives, however, could quite easily have been accomplished by a mansion in a Classical style. To understand why a Gothic idiom was adopted, it is necessary to consider the broader context of Wyatt's career, architectural developments at Westminster and the progress of the Gothic Revival at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Wyatt's Gothic Vision: The Architectural Context

Wyatt's design for the Speaker's House formed only one part of a wider vision to completely remodel the Palace of Westminster. It had long been obvious that the medieval palace complex was no longer adequate for the requirements of the legislature. Ideas for remodelling or replacing it had been circulating for decades before Wyatt arrived on the scene, but successive politicians struggled to find the money—and the political will—to get these schemes off the ground.⁴⁷⁵ The most important proposals were a series of designs prepared by William Kent in the 1730s.⁴⁷⁶ These schemes were designed in the then-fashionable Palladian style (a strict interpretation of Classicism).⁴⁷⁷ Ultimately, only one Palladian edifice was actually erected at Westminster. This was the Stone Building, a relatively modest office block, designed by John Vardy and located immediately to the west of Westminster Hall. This was constructed in stages between 1755 and 1770.⁴⁷⁸ In the 1790s, its northern wing remained unrealised, as shown in a 1793 survey drawing by Soane's office (Fig. 2.1).

⁴⁷⁵ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 39–71.

⁴⁷⁶ H. M. Colvin (ed.), *The History of the King's Works, Vol. 5: 1660–1782* (London: HMSO, 1973), pp. 416–25; Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 31–32, 37, 39–50. Sawyer also discusses the Adam brothers' speculative projects for a new Palace (*ibid.*, pp. 80–85).

⁴⁷⁷ For a full history of the Palladian movement, and its distinction from the Neoclassical movement which followed it, see J. Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530–1830* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 317–46, 359–80, 407–13.

⁴⁷⁸ Colvin, *King's Works 5*, pp. 425–31.

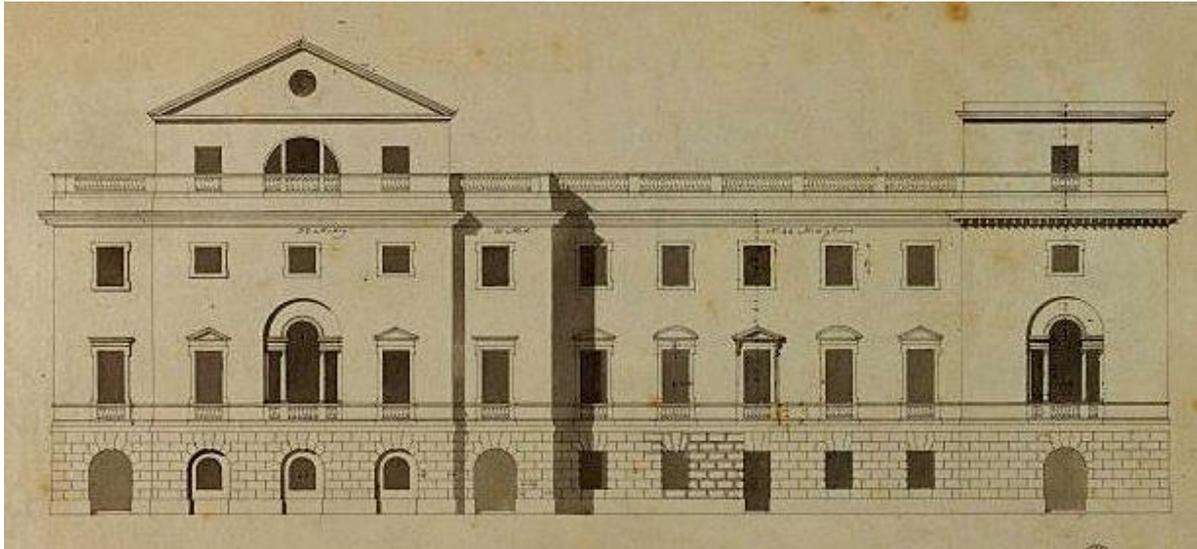


Fig. 2.1: Office of John Soane, *Stone Building, St Margaret's Street, Elevation of entrance front, 1793* (detail). Ink on paper, dimensions unavailable. London: Sir John Soane's Museum (SM 37/1/5).

During that decade, however, the idea of a wholesale reconstruction of the palace appeared to gather momentum. In 1794, a House of Lords committee commissioned Soane to make plans to enlarge their chamber.⁴⁷⁹ As Sawyer explains, the wording of the Lords' commission was highly ambiguous, and did not explicitly mandate any new construction.⁴⁸⁰ Moreover, Soane's later writings about the Lords' commission give a misleading impression about the scope of the project, implying the Lords envisaged a total reconstruction of the entire palace complex.⁴⁸¹ In fact, Soane's commission only related to the House of Lords itself; it was not part of his brief to make proposals to alter or replace the House of Commons, or any other part of the palace.⁴⁸² Nevertheless, it is well-known that Soane had a longstanding ambition to build a great parliament complex, and this drove him to put "the broadest possible construction" on the Lords' brief.⁴⁸³ He therefore began to develop ideas for remodelling the wider palace complex, including the House of Commons.⁴⁸⁴ However, the Lords effectively abandoned the project in 1795, most likely due to the economic

⁴⁷⁹ For the full circumstances of this commission, see Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 116–53.

⁴⁸⁰ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 148–49.

⁴⁸¹ See, for example, J. Soane, *A Brief Statement of the Proceedings Respecting the New Law Courts at Westminster, The Board of Trade, and the New Privy Council Office, etc., etc.* (London: James Moyes, 1828), p. 17; here he declares that his plans were intended to create "one uniform building".

⁴⁸² Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 148–49.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 91–92, 148–49.

⁴⁸⁴ Soane admitted this in his testimony to the 1833 committee on the Commons' accommodation, saying that he gave "large consideration to the capacity and situation of the House of Commons" at this time (Select Committee on the House of Commons' Buildings, *Report* (1833 269) p. 5). This committee will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

stringency caused by the war with France. Although Soane was apparently told that the project was being “deferred” rather than cancelled, there is little, if any, indication that the Lords showed any serious interest in reviving his schemes after this date, despite his continued lobbying.⁴⁸⁵

Nevertheless, Soane continued to develop his schemes on a purely speculative basis.⁴⁸⁶ These designs will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, but they were all in Neoclassical style, in keeping with Soane’s personal preferences.⁴⁸⁷ In light of the later conservationist criticisms of Wyatt’s work, it is important to note that Soane’s initial proposals would have involved radical alterations to some of Westminster’s medieval buildings, particularly the Painted Chamber. Dating back to the thirteenth century, this was situated towards the south-east of the palace complex, overlooking the river and close to the old House of Lords.⁴⁸⁸ At this time it was used as a conference chamber for the two Houses.⁴⁸⁹ Section drawings of Soane’s 1794–95 proposals indicate that he would have totally remodelled the interior in a Classical style (Figs. 2.3, 2.4).⁴⁹⁰ Admittedly, it was not known at this date that the chamber’s medieval wall paintings still survived, hidden under later whitewash.⁴⁹¹ Nevertheless, as Capon’s 1799 illustration shows (Fig. 2.2), the room still retained some visible historic features, particularly the door and window surrounds. Soane’s section view suggests that most, if not all, of these features would have been removed. In later years Soane—who was well aware of the antiquarian criticisms of Wyatt’s work—downplayed this element of his schemes, emphasising instead his intention to restore St Stephen’s as a chapel for the use of both Houses.⁴⁹² Nor, it seems, was Soane candid with Carter when they discussed the subject in the late 1790s.⁴⁹³ Although later historians have sometimes portrayed Soane as being more sympathetic to conservation than Wyatt, this evidence strongly suggests that his attitudes to conservation and

⁴⁸⁵ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 203–07.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 325–29.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 153–96.

⁴⁸⁸ P. Binski, *The Painted Chamber at Westminster* (London: The Society of Antiquaries of London, 1986), pp. 2, 9–11.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 2, 9–11.

⁴⁹⁰ For more detail on Soane’s proposed treatment of the interiors see Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 158–59. Sawyer also notes that Kent had previously proposed a scheme to classicise the interior of the Painted Chamber in 1730 (*ibid*, pp. 41–42).

⁴⁹¹ Binski, *The Painted Chamber* pp. 2–3; P. N. Lindfield, “John Carter FSA (1748–1817): A New Corpus of Drawings, and the Painted Chamber” (*op. cit.*), pp. 1–30.

⁴⁹² Soane, *Brief Statement*, p. 17.

⁴⁹³ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 218–19.

'restoration' were not so very different.⁴⁹⁴ This hypothesis is also supported by his demolition of the old House of Lords in 1823, a move which attracted some criticism from MPs.⁴⁹⁵



Fig. 2.2: William Capon, *Painted Chamber*, 1799: interior view looking east with Trojan War tapestries shown, 1799, watercolour on paper, 191 x 235mm. London: Parliamentary Art Collection, WOA 1648.

⁴⁹⁴ See, for example, R. Hill, "'Proceeding like Guy Faux': the Antiquarian Investigation of St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster, 1790–1837", *Architectural History* 59 (2016), p. 260.

⁴⁹⁵ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, p. 521.



Fig. 2.3: office of John Soane, *Palace of Westminster, House of Lords, Design, 1794: Section (detail), 1794, ink and wash on paper, 606 x 1010mm. London: Sir John Soane's Museum, SM (95) 16/6/1.*



Fig. 2.4: office of John Soane, *Palace of Westminster, House of Lords, Design, 1794: Section, 1794* (detail), ink and wash on paper, 612 x 1212mm. London: Sir John Soane's Museum, SM (95) 16/6/3

Carter was not the only enthusiast for medieval architecture in the 1790s. Over the course of the eighteenth century, Great Britain had witnessed a significant (though by no means universal) revival of interest in the Gothic style.⁴⁹⁶ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully trace the development of Gothic houses during this era, but it is important to acknowledge the influence of Horace Walpole. Strawberry Hill was long assumed by historians to be the first Gothic Revival house in England, but this is now known to be false: for example, Peter Lindfield has highlighted Henry Pelham's House, Esher Place, Surrey, designed by William Kent in the 1730s.⁴⁹⁷ Nevertheless, Lindfield acknowledges Strawberry as "an indisputably central moment to the early Gothic Revival".⁴⁹⁸ Wyatt's approach to Gothic architecture was undoubtedly influenced by Walpole, but there appears to be a consensus among historians that he developed Walpole's style and sought greater archaeological accuracy.⁴⁹⁹ This is particularly demonstrated by Lee Priory, Kent, designed by Wyatt for Thomas Barrett and built c. 1782–85; Walpole himself described it as "a child of

⁴⁹⁶ Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, pp. 51–104.

⁴⁹⁷ P. N. Lindfield, *Georgian Gothic: Medievalist Architecture, Furniture and Interiors, 1730–1840* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2016), pp. 2–3; P. N. Lindfield, "'Whig Gothic': An Antidote to Houghton Hall", in J. Coutou, J. Stobart and P. N. Lindfield, *Politics and the English Country House, 1688–1800* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), pp. 101–22.

⁴⁹⁸ Lindfield, "Whig Gothic", pp. 2–3.

⁴⁹⁹ M. M. Reeve and P. N. Lindfield, "'A Child of Strawberry': Thomas Barrett and Lee Priory, Kent", *The Burlington Magazine* 157 (2015), pp. 836–42; J. M. Robinson, *James Wyatt: Architect to George III* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 220–23; Summerson, *Architecture in Britain*, p. 404.

Strawberry prettier than the parent”.⁵⁰⁰ The relative paucity of visual evidence for the interiors of Wyatt’s Speaker’s House make it difficult to assess the full extent of Walpole’s influence, but there are two known features of Wyatt’s design which may derive from Strawberry. One is his use of lighting and atmospheric effects in the cloisters; the other is his extensive use of black lacquer furniture. Both of these are discussed in more detail below.⁵⁰¹

Wyatt—like other Gothic Revival architects—was also heavily influenced by Picturesque aesthetics. It is difficult to precisely date the emergence of the Picturesque as a clearly-defined aesthetic philosophy; Summerson argues that “the real Picturesque period” did not begin until the mid-1790s.⁵⁰² However, there can be little doubt that Downton Castle, Herefordshire, built c. 1772–78 by Richard Payne Knight (Fig. 2.5), was a house which embodied Picturesque principles.⁵⁰³ For the purposes of this thesis, the important point is that Picturesque theory championed asymmetry and irregularity, in contrast to the Classical ideals of symmetry and proportion.⁵⁰⁴ This allowed architects to experiment with inventive new forms of massing. At Downton the multiplicity of towers, of varying heights, widths and depths, creates a varied skyline and brings movement and variety to the façades. Robinson suggests that, during the 1790s, Wyatt began to place an increasing emphasis on massing.⁵⁰⁵ Belvoir Castle, Rutland (construction begun 1801; completed in 1828, after Wyatt’s death; Fig. 2.6) provides an excellent illustration of his ability to employ irregular massing on a grand scale. However, Wyatt was equally capable of contriving similar effects in smaller buildings. Consider, for example, his proposal for Shoebury Castle, Essex in 1796 (Fig 2.7). Although unexecuted, this design clearly shows how, in Robinson’s words, Wyatt’s later ‘castle’ designs relied on “asymmetry, irregular massing reflecting their internal plans, geometrical forms and simple castellation, rather than elaborate historicist detailing, to convey their Gothic spirit”.⁵⁰⁶ Although the Shoebury design remained unexecuted, Robinson argues that Norris Castle, Isle of Wight (1799) and Pennsylvania Castle, Dorset (1800) are comparable in their reliance on massing rather than ornament.⁵⁰⁷ Like Downton, Shoebury relies heavily on its three towers, of varying shapes and sizes, to achieve its Picturesque effect. As discussed below, Wyatt would use towers—or rather,

⁵⁰⁰ W. S. Lewis (ed.), *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937–83), vol. 12, p. 111.

⁵⁰¹ For discussion of lighting effects, see p. 184 of this thesis. For discussion of lacquer furniture, see p. 169.

⁵⁰² Summerson, *Architecture in Britain*, pp. 473–75.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid*, pp. 473–75.

⁵⁰⁴ Summerson, *Architecture in Britain*, p. 403; Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, p. 93.

⁵⁰⁵ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 231–32.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 231–32.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 232.

projections from the façade, styled as towers—to achieve a similar visual effect at the Speaker’s House.⁵⁰⁸



Fig. 2.5: unknown artist, illustration of Downton Castle, Herefordshire, c. 1880. Ink on paper, dimensions unavailable. Published in The Rev. F. O. Morris (ed.), *The County Seats of the Noblemen and Gentlemen of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 5 (London: William Mackenzie, c. 1880), facing p. 71.

⁵⁰⁸ See pp. 250–51 of this thesis.

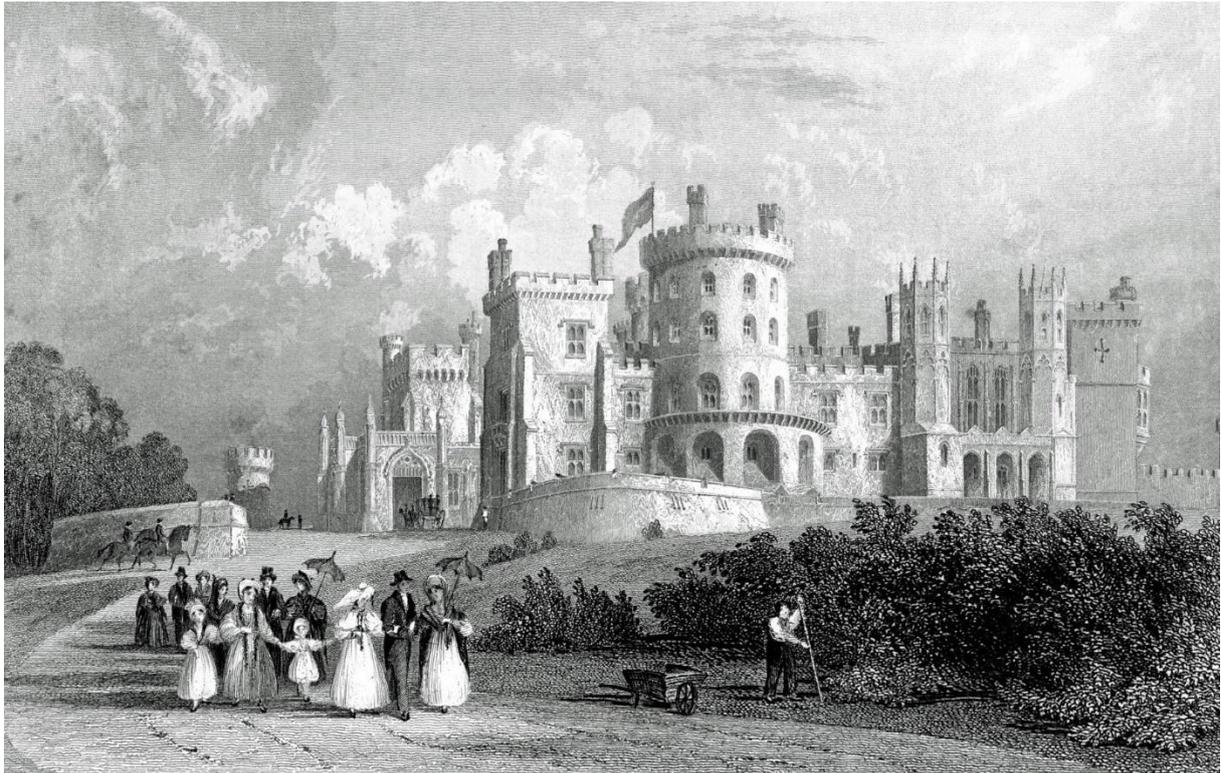


Fig. 2.6: M. J. Starling after T. Allom, *South Front of Belvoir Castle, Leicestershire*, published in The Rev G. N. Wright, *The Gallery of Engravings*, vol. 1 (London: Fisher, Son & Co. 1845), facing p. 17.



Fig. 2.7: James Wyatt, Shoebury Castle (Essex): Design for a castellated house, unexecuted, probably a remodelling, for Sir John Smith Burges Bart, 1797. Ink on paper, dimensions unavailable. London: RIBA drawings collection, SB71/WYJAS[13](1-2). © RIBA Collections.

Another influence on Wyatt’s Westminster scheme—not previously acknowledged by historians—is the University of Oxford. Wyatt undertook numerous building projects there from the 1770s onward; this would have brought him into contact with the austere late-medieval or Tudor Gothic style typical of many Oxford college buildings.⁵⁰⁹ The cloister of Magdalen College (c. 1474–80) is typical of the genre, with its simple crenelations, square-headed windows and minimal ornament (Fig. 2.8). In 1791 Wyatt proposed a new quadrangle for Magdalen; its style clearly derived from the original cloister, although it was much larger in size (Fig. 2.9).⁵¹⁰ By the end of the decade, Wyatt had evidently realised that this style could also be adopted as a suitable model for government buildings. All the new buildings Wyatt designed for Westminster—both executed and unexecuted—show clear signs of this collegiate influence, as discussed below.⁵¹¹



Fig. 2.8: the Cloisters, Magdalen College, Oxford, c. 1474-80. Photograph by Fr Lawrence Lew OP; reproduced under a CC BY-ND-NC 2.0 licence.

⁵⁰⁹ A. Dale, *James Wyatt* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956), pp. 81–87; Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 195–218.

⁵¹⁰ Wyatt also proposed a Tudor Gothic scheme for Balliol College at the same time; but ultimately, neither were executed. See H. M. Colvin, *Unbuilt Oxford* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 87–89, 107.

⁵¹¹ See p. 151 of this thesis.



Fig. 2.9: James Wyatt, design for the Great Quadrangle at Magdalen College, Oxford, 1791 (unexecuted). Watercolour on paper, 550 x 950mm. Oxford: Magdalen College Archive, FA16/2/1AD/. Reproduced by permission of the President and Fellows of Magdalen College Oxford.

Collegiate buildings like Magdalen provided a useful model for Gothic architecture in an urban context. Nevertheless, within the realm of domestic architecture the Gothic Revival had hitherto been confined almost entirely to country houses or villas. This is not to say that London townhouses of the period were exclusively Classical: for example, Daniel Garrett’s remodelling of the Strand façade of Northumberland House (completed c. 1752), has been described as an early example of Jacobean Revival.⁵¹² Nevertheless, only a single eighteenth-century London townhouse was constructed in Gothic throughout: the famous “Pomfret Castle”, No. 18 Arlington Street. Built in 1757–60, with design input from Sanderson Miller, Sir Roger Newdigate and Richard Biggs, the choice of Gothic in this case reflected the personal taste of the house’s owner, the Dowager Countess of Pomfret, who was a notable enthusiast for Gothic design.⁵¹³ Moreover, Classicism arguably remained the ‘default’ choice of style for royal and public building projects during the eighteenth century. Admittedly, Gothic had been adopted for some relatively minor projects: for

⁵¹² A. Aymonino, *Enlightened Eclecticism: The Grand Design of the 1st Duke and Duchess of Northumberland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), pp. 66–69.

⁵¹³ S. Freeman, “An Englishwoman’s Home is Her Castle: Lady Pomfret’s House at 18 Arlington Street”, *Georgian Group Journal* 20 (2012), pp. 87–102; W. Hawkes, “Walpole Right or Wrong? More on No. 18 Arlington Street”, *Georgian Group Journal* 21 (2013), pp. 204–11; P. Lindfield, “The Countess of Pomfret’s Gothic Revival Furniture”, *Georgian Group Journal* 22 (2014), pp. 74–94.

example, the rebuilding of the Clock Court at Hampton Court Palace in the 1730s.⁵¹⁴ Gothic had even been used at Westminster itself, where, also during the 1730s, William Kent had designed a ‘Gothick’ wooden enclosure to house the Law Courts.⁵¹⁵ The royal family were also beginning to cautiously experiment with Gothic. Between the 1770s and 1790s, Chambers remodelled the Queen’s Lodge at Windsor Castle as a summer residence for the royal family.⁵¹⁶ This house was finished—at least externally—in a stylar castellated Gothic, not dissimilar to Wyatt’s later work.⁵¹⁷ Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that Classicism remained the accepted style for major new-build projects. Arguably the most important public buildings constructed in the British Isles during the late eighteenth century were Somerset House in London, and the Custom House and Four Courts in Dublin: all of these were in Neoclassical style.⁵¹⁸ Thus, when Wyatt decided to remodel the Palace of Westminster in a Gothic style, he was making a radical break with recent tradition.

Nevertheless, the ideological groundwork for his choice had been laid during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Gothic architecture had deep roots in British history, and, even as early as the Civil War period, both Whig and Tory parties had begun to realise that they could exploit this historic style for ideological purposes. They evolved competing narratives to support their claims to the Gothic. For Tories, Gothic expressed the traditional authority of ‘throne and altar’; for Whigs, it was an embodiment of ancient ‘Saxon liberties’, the style of the medieval barons who had gradually curbed the Crown’s authority, particularly through Magna Carta.⁵¹⁹ From the early eighteenth century onwards, the landowning classes—particularly the Whig aristocracy—began to merge these competing narratives to support their own social position.⁵²⁰ These aristocrats used the Gothic style to portray themselves as the guardians of both liberty and stability: “Gothic’s dangerously democratic impulses were checked and balanced by the landed interest’s rooted concerns”.⁵²¹ As will become apparent, Abbot’s vision for the Speaker’s House was intended to convey exactly this message. Notwithstanding these ideological considerations, it must be acknowledged that Wyatt’s interest in Gothic predated the Speaker’s House project by many years.

⁵¹⁴ J. Allan, “New Light on William Kent at Hampton Court Palace”, in *Design and Practice in British Architecture: Studies in Architectural History Presented to Howard Colvin*, *Architectural History* 27 (1984), pp. 50–58.

⁵¹⁵ Colvin, *King’s Works* 5, pp. 389–90; Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster* pp. 64–65.

⁵¹⁶ Colvin, *King’s Works* 6, pp. 373–74.

⁵¹⁷ J. Harris and M. Snodin, *Sir William Chambers: Architect to George III* (London: Courtauld Gallery, 1996), p. 53.

⁵¹⁸ Summerson, *Architecture in Britain*, pp. 418–23, 445–48.

⁵¹⁹ M. M. Reeve, “Gothic Architecture and the Liberty Trope”, in Coutu, Stobart and Lindfield, *Politics and the English Country House* (op. cit.), pp. 79–99; Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, pp. 33–41, 41–46.

⁵²⁰ Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, pp. 45–46.

⁵²¹ *Ibid*, p. 45.

For example, he had remodelled Sheffield Place, Sussex, in a “Gothick” style as early as the 1770s; and in the 1780s he designed Lee Priory, Kent, as discussed above.⁵²² There can be little doubt that Wyatt’s choice of Gothic at Westminster was motivated partly by aesthetic considerations. One need only look at the bold, Picturesque silhouettes of Fonthill Abbey or Belvoir Castle (Fig. 2.6) to see that he was excited by the compositional possibilities that the Gothic style offered.

Wyatt had adopted a historicist style, but his vision was not—at least in his earlier years—a conservationist one. In Georgian Britain, the prevailing doctrine was that of “improvement”.⁵²³ Under this philosophy, it was seen as quite legitimate—indeed, probably a good thing—to alter historic buildings, in order to bring them into conformity with the aesthetic ideals of the era (such as brightness and symmetry).⁵²⁴ Hill argues that this attitude was not unique to Wyatt: it was the mainstream view among the wealthy, educated section of society from which he drew his clients. She notes, for example, that George III personally subscribed £1,000 towards Wyatt’s controversial cathedral restoration at Salisbury.⁵²⁵ This project involved the destruction of many important medieval relics, and provoked furious criticism from antiquaries like John Carter and Richard Gough.⁵²⁶ Yet at this time, these critics were very much in the minority. It was only during the 1790s that the French Revolution prompted a major cultural shift, and conservationist thinking began to enter the mainstream.⁵²⁷ Even then, it took time for attitudes to change: as Hill points out, it was not until the 1880s that the first statutory protection for ancient monuments was introduced.⁵²⁸ Moreover, it must be remembered that Wyatt’s cathedral restorations formed part of a long tradition: Robinson argues that the alteration and updating of church buildings was “hitherto non-controversial”.⁵²⁹ Indeed, earlier generations had introduced explicitly Classical design features into Gothic buildings: Inigo Jones’s alterations to old St Paul’s Cathedral in the 1630s constitute one of the best-known examples.⁵³⁰ Moreover, after Wyatt’s death many architects continued to take a creative—some might say cavalier—attitude to church restorations until well into the Victorian era.⁵³¹

⁵²² Reeve and Lindfield, ““A Child of Strawberry””, pp. 836–42; Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp.219–20. See also p. 107–08 of this thesis.

⁵²³ R. Hill, *Time’s Witness: History in the Age of Romanticism* (London: Allen Lane, 2021), pp. 53–55.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 53–55.

⁵²⁵ Hill, *Time’s Witness*, pp. 53–55; Robinson, *James Wyatt*, p. 345.

⁵²⁶ Hill, *Time’s Witness*, pp. 53–55.

⁵²⁷ Frew, John, “An Aspect of the Early Gothic Revival: The Transformation of Medievalist Research, 1770–1800”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980), p. 179.

⁵²⁸ Hill, *Time’s Witness*, pp. 53–55.

⁵²⁹ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, p. 226.

⁵³⁰ Summerson, *Architecture in Britain*, pp. 132–34.

⁵³¹ Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, pp. 251–52.

Compared to Wyatt's earlier cathedral restorations, the remodelling of the Palace of Westminster presented, arguably, a more complex challenge.⁵³² A cathedral is a single building, albeit a large and complex one; whereas the palace was a complex made up of myriad individual buildings. Both Soane and Wyatt now had to decide which—if any—of the existing buildings should be retained, and how any new work should be designed around them. This posed a question of aesthetic consistency. Should the new buildings be designed in Classical style, in accordance with Georgian taste; or should they be designed in Gothic style to harmonise with the older buildings? Several eighteenth-century architects—including prominent figures like Wren and Nicholas Hawksmoor (c. 1661–1736)—had already confronted this problem, particularly in ecclesiastical and collegiate projects.⁵³³ Both Wren and Hawksmoor were essentially classicists, but both were prepared to adopt the Gothic style in certain circumstances.⁵³⁴ On one occasion, Wren famously wrote that any attempt to combine Classical and Gothic styles would produce “a disagreeable mixture, which no man of good taste could relish”.⁵³⁵ However, aesthetic consistency was not the only consideration. In the eighteenth century, there was a strong—though not universal—school of thought that the Gothic style remained particularly appropriate for ecclesiastical and collegiate buildings. Several authors have argued that, in a general sense, Gothic was seen to embody the institutional continuity of the Church of England.⁵³⁶ Anthony Geraghty goes further, arguing that there was—at least in some quarters—a “decorum of typology” in which Gothic was considered to be the ‘proper’ style for these buildings.⁵³⁷ To fully understand this argument, it is necessary to examine the origin of the concept of architectural ‘decorum’ (or ‘propriety’).

In eighteenth-century Britain, most architectural theory ultimately derived from Vitruvius, albeit often mediated by Renaissance or early modern writers.⁵³⁸ The ancient Romans did not recognise a plurality of valid architectural styles—at least in the modern sense of that word—so Vitruvius never explicitly addressed the question of stylistic consistency. Nevertheless, the Romans

⁵³² For Wyatt's cathedral restorations, see Dale, *James Wyatt*, pp. 99–115; Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 224–30.

⁵³³ G. Worsley, “The Origins of the Gothic Revival: A Reappraisal”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 3 (1993), pp. 105–50.

⁵³⁴ A. Geraghty, “‘Gothick’ and ‘Sollid’: Hawksmoor's Work at All Souls Reconsidered”, in R. Darwall-Smith and P. Horden, (eds.), *The Unloved Century: Georgian Oxford Reassessed*, *History of Universities* 35:1 (2022), pp. 215–16.

⁵³⁵ Quoted in C. Wren Jnr., *Parentalia: or, Memoirs of the Family of the Wrens* (London: R. Dodsley and T. Osborn, 1750), p. 302.

⁵³⁶ P. Aspin, “‘Our Ancient Architecture’: Contesting Cathedrals in Late Georgian England”, *Architectural History* 54 (2011), pp. 213–32; Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, pp. 30–32.

⁵³⁷ A. Geraghty, *The Sheldonian Theatre: Architecture and Learning in Seventeenth-Century Oxford* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 44–45.

⁵³⁸ E. Harris, *British Architectural Books and Writers 1556–1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 28–31, 353–53, 363–65, 368–71, 464–66; Summerson, *Architecture in Britain*, pp. 54–56.

acknowledged four distinct orders of Classical architecture, and Vitruvius recognised that architects would need guidance as to which order they should choose in any particular context, and how to apply it correctly. He therefore articulated the concept of *decor*. This Latin word has been rendered differently by successive English translators. William Newton’s version—the only English-language translation available in 1798—renders it as “decor” or “decorum” in the body of the text; but, in a footnote, he explains that “decor, I judge to be propriety”.⁵³⁹ Gwilt’s 1826 translation renders “decor” as “consistency”; but Morris Hickey Morgan’s 1914 translation renders it as “propriety”.⁵⁴⁰ However it is translated, this word essentially conveys a notion that different orders are considered to be appropriate in different circumstances. This appropriateness might derive from three distinct factors: in the original Latin, these are described as “*dicitur, seu consuetudine aut natura*”.⁵⁴¹ The last of these, *natura* (or ‘nature’), meant choosing the right natural location for a building in terms of its air, lighting etc. This is not important for this thesis, since the geographical location of the Palace of Westminster had already been fixed. *Dicitur* has been translated as “station” (Newton), “circumstance” (Gwilt), or “prescription” (Morgan). In essence, this is the idea that the purpose of a building has a bearing on which style (or order) is most appropriate to it. For example, Vitruvius decrees that the Doric order would be most the most appropriate choice for a temple to Hercules, because its lack of ornamentation conveys strength and masculinity.⁵⁴² *Consuetudine* is rendered as “custom” by both Newton and Gwilt, or “usage” by Morgan. This, in essence, is the notion that each of the four orders has a fixed set of ‘rules’ which govern its proportions, decorative elements, and so on; and that architects should not deviate from these rules.

The concept of *decor* has remained a cornerstone of architectural theory and criticism ever since. Wyatt’s interventions at Westminster triggered a serious debate about which style of architecture—Classical or Gothic—was most appropriate for the palace. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, the word “propriety” often appears in these discussions. However, by 1800 the Vitruvian triad of *dicitur, consuetudine* and *natura* was no longer adequate to cover all the factors an architect should take account of when determining the ‘proper’ style for a building. As well as the

⁵³⁹ Vitruvius, *The architecture of M. Vitruvius. Pollio: translated from the original Latin*, trans. W. Newton (London: J. Dodsley, 1771), pp. 8–9.

⁵⁴⁰ Vitruvius, *The Architecture of Marcus Vitruvius Pollio*, trans. J. Gwilt (London: Priestley and Weale, 1826), p. 12; Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. M. H. Morgan (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1960), pp. 14–16. For the history of the English translations, see B. Thayer, “Vitruvius: On Architecture”, Bill Thayer’s website, <https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Vitruvius/home.html> [accessed 12/01/2022]; and Harris, *British Architectural Books and Writers*, pp. 464–66.

⁵⁴¹ V. Rose and H. Müller-Strübing (eds.), *Vitruvii: De Architectura, Libri Decem* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1867), p. 12.

⁵⁴² Vitruvius, *The architecture of M. Vitruvius* (trans. W. Newton), p. 8.

building's function, they now had to think about the historical and architectural context of the site on which it was being constructed. By the late-eighteenth century, there was a school of thought that, if a site had strong medieval associations, or surviving medieval architecture, then Gothic might be considered the 'proper' style for any new work. Wyatt's last major Gothic house, Ashridge, Hertfordshire, provides an excellent example of this philosophy: it was built on the site of an Augustinian college.⁵⁴³ There is a useful distinction to be made between what might be called 'contextual' factors—relating to the building's function, its built surroundings or the history of its site—and questions surrounding the accurate application of a style, which Vitruvius dubs 'propriety from usage'. This distinction becomes very apparent in contemporary discussions of style at Westminster. The different stylistic visions for Westminster proposed by Soane and Wyatt probably reflect their personal aesthetic preferences as much as anything else. However, since neither man could take the commission for granted, both would have to justify their choices to others: to the King, to parliamentarians, and increasingly to the wider public. It is the different rationales by which they justified their choices—and, later, the rationales by which others critiqued them—which are most revealing about contemporary attitudes to Gothic architecture, and how these changed between 1794 and 1834. In the eyes of their clients, and of other architectural commentators, the relative importance of 'prescription' and 'usage' in determining 'propriety' changed over time. The remainder of this thesis will attempt to chart this change in attitudes. For convenience, this thesis will group all of these 'contextual' factors under the heading of 'propriety from prescription'. Although Morgan's version of Vitruvius is anachronistic, his translations of *decor*, *dicitur* and *consuetudine* as "propriety", "prescription", and "usage" are probably the most easily comprehensible in the context of this thesis. Moreover, as already mentioned, the word 'propriety' appears frequently in contemporary writings on Westminster. Therefore, Morgan's terminology will be used throughout the remainder of this thesis.

During the seventeenth century, Gothic had always retained—in at least some minds—a strong association with ecclesiastical and collegiate buildings.⁵⁴⁴ The aforementioned Gothic additions at Hampton Court and Windsor Castle suggest that, during the eighteenth century, an association began to develop between the Gothic style and the institution of the British monarchy. Admittedly, the architectural context—i.e., the historic Gothic buildings already on those sites—may well have been the determining factor in these cases. Nevertheless, by perpetuating the historic Gothic style, these works can only have served to entrench the association between this style and the monarchy. The Picturesque remodelling of Windsor Castle by Sir Jeffry Wyatville (1766–1840)

⁵⁴³ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, p. 241.

⁵⁴⁴ Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, pp. 25–30, 34–36; Geraghty, *The Sheldonian Theatre*, pp. 44–45.

during the 1820s—incorporating earlier work by James Wyatt—might arguably be seen as the culmination of this process.⁵⁴⁵ However, in 1794 it appears that Gothic architecture was not firmly associated either with parliaments as a building type, or with the British Parliament as an institution. Admittedly, parliaments were a highly unusual building type, and there are few contemporary buildings which can be taken as comparisons. However, Classicism was generally the favoured style for public buildings in this era (as discussed above), and the Palace of Westminster would probably have been considered in relation to these. The Irish Parliament building in Dublin (construction begun 1729) was a Classical building; and the various eighteenth-century proposals for new parliament buildings at Westminster were all Classical.⁵⁴⁶ Moreover, the partial execution of the Stone Building indicates that nobody had any strong reservations—whether aesthetic or otherwise—about placing new, Palladian buildings alongside Westminster Hall and St Stephen’s Chapel. When Soane proposed his Classical schemes for the House of Lords in 1794–95, no evidence has yet been found that anybody seriously questioned his choice of style.⁵⁴⁷ All of this evidence suggests that Classicism was considered the ‘proper’ style for parliaments as a building type, and that questions of institutional history and aesthetic consistency were not generally regarded as significant considerations.

On the other hand, during the eighteenth century there were two small, but significant, examples of new Gothic work at Westminster. The first was Kent’s aforementioned alterations to the Law Courts in 1739. The second was the Delaval House (completed c. 1772), a small house at the southern end of the palace complex, which later became Black Rod’s official residence.⁵⁴⁸ Though this was initially conceived as a purely private house, rather than an official building, it is nevertheless significant that Delaval chose to build it in a Gothic idiom. As Samuel Leigh’s 1829 *Panorama of the Thames* shows, the exterior was in a plain castellated style, not dissimilar to Wyatt’s later work (Fig. 2.10). (The Delaval House is the small, grey building at the bottom left of the image.)⁵⁴⁹ The interior ornamentation, also in Gothic style, was apparently designed by Carter.⁵⁵⁰ Unfortunately, it has proved impossible to trace any images or detailed description of the interiors, but an 1816 inventory lists “Gothic pedestals” and “rich Gothic niches and canopies”, among other

⁵⁴⁵ Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, pp. 172–76. Wyattville was James Wyatt’s nephew; he was christened Jeffrey Wyatt but changed his surname in 1824 (Colvin, *King’s Works* 6, p. 386). For the sake of consistency, he will be referred to as Wyattville throughout the text.

⁵⁴⁶ Summerson, *Architecture in Britain*, p. 378; Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 39–71, 80–85.

⁵⁴⁷ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 196–207.

⁵⁴⁸ Elizabeth Hallam Smith, “From the King’s Bridge to Black Rod’s Stairs: The Palace of Westminster and the Thames, 1189–2021”, *London Topographical Record* 32 (2021), p. 18–19.

⁵⁴⁹ J. R. Inglis and J. Sanders, *Panorama of the Thames: A Riverside View of Georgian London* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2015), p. 114.

⁵⁵⁰ J. T. Smith, *A Book for a Rainy Day* (London: Methuen, 1905), pp. 173–74.

items.⁵⁵¹ The Delaval House and Kent's Law Courts suggest that, for at least a few minds, the palace's overall character was already determined principally by its medieval buildings, and it was therefore deemed contextually appropriate to perpetuate this style. It is conceivable that these buildings may have influenced Wyatt's decision to propose a wider Gothic scheme in 1799.

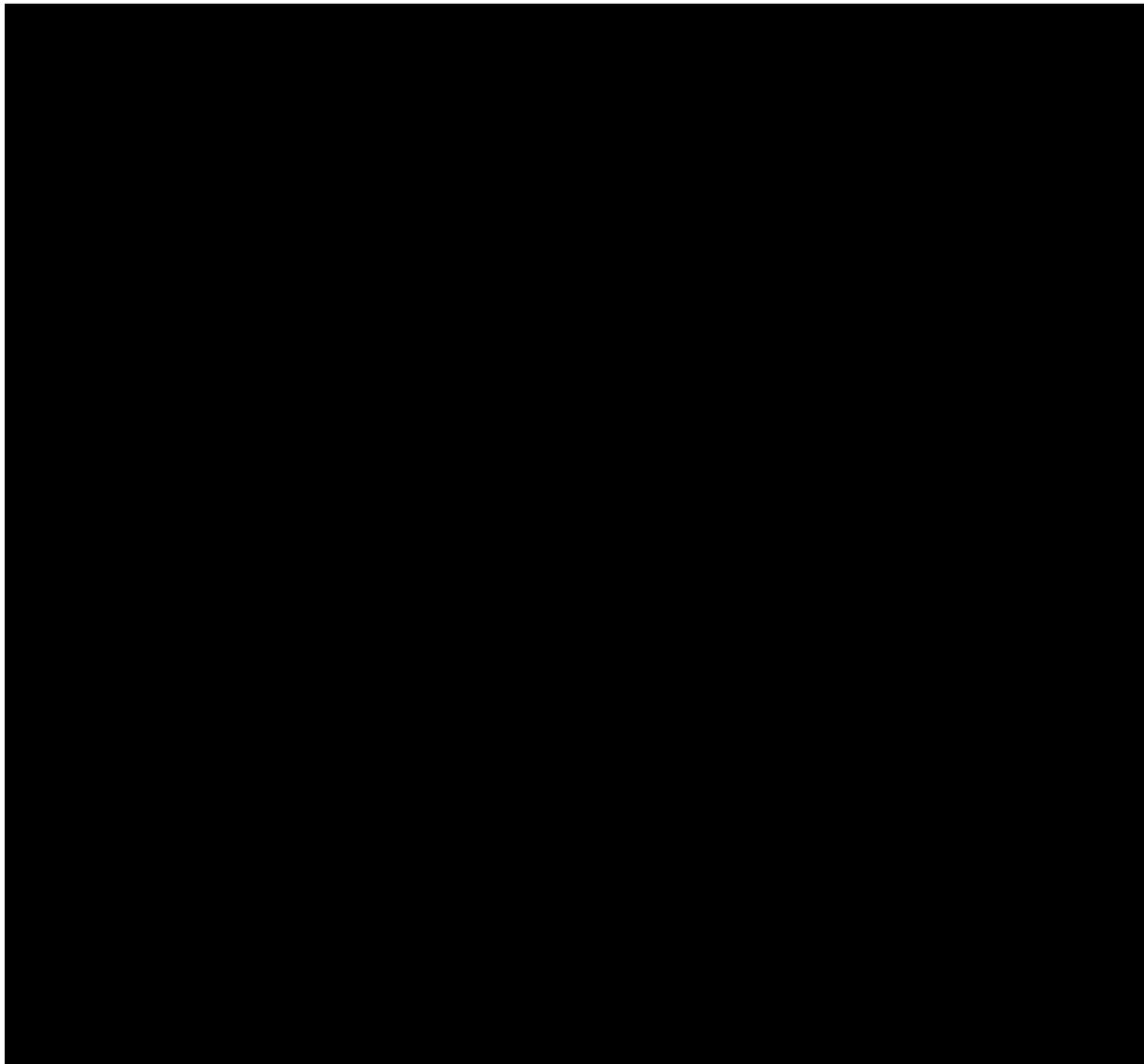


Fig. 2.10: Samuel Leigh, *The Panorama of the Thames from London to Richmond* (detail), c. 1829).
Reproduced in J. R. Inglis and J. Sanders, *Panorama of the Thames: A Riverside View of Georgian London* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2015), p. 4.

⁵⁵¹ TNA CRES 2/588, Office of Woods, Forests and Land Revenues: unfiled correspondence and papers, Cotton Garden: leases of a house, a particular of sundry ornamental articles belonging to Mrs Hussey Delaval at her late residence, Parliament Place, Westminster, March 1 1816, n. p. The author thanks Elizabeth Hallam Smith for supplying this source.

When the Lords decided not to proceed with rebuilding their chamber in 1795, they officially claimed that their decision was motivated by the economic difficulties caused by the war with France, rather than by any dissatisfaction with Soane's designs.⁵⁵² Their true motives are debateable but, in any event, the political situation changed during 1799. Following a major rebellion in Ireland, concrete plans were made for a Union between Great Britain and Ireland: the Irish Parliament would be abolished, and Irish MPs and Peers would instead be sent to Westminster. This would increase membership of the House of Commons by one hundred, and of the Lords by thirty-two.⁵⁵³ The government realised that the existing chambers were far too small to accommodate these numbers, and a substantial remodelling of the palace therefore became unavoidable. By this time, of course, Wyatt had been installed as surveyor-general. This did not, in itself, guarantee that the commission would be his: since the alterations would be funded by special parliamentary grants, they technically fell outside the remit of the Office of Works.⁵⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Wyatt evidently wanted the Westminster commission, and he decided to pre-empt any attempt by Soane to revive his 1794–95 schemes. Wyatt exploited his official position—which gave him ready access to the King and relevant ministers—in order to secure the commission for himself.⁵⁵⁵

Whatever the political aspects of the commission, it seems that Wyatt had a clear aesthetic vision for the project right from the start. He imagined, as Sawyer put it, “a Picturesque Gothic ensemble in which the authentic [medieval and Tudor] structures were set like jewels in a crown”.⁵⁵⁶ Cynics might suggest that Wyatt deliberately advanced a Gothic scheme as a tactical move, in order to differentiate his scheme from Soane's. Yet in fact, Wyatt clearly sensed that the King would have reservations about the use of Gothic, and it appears that he secured the commission *before* attempting to win the King's approval for his choice of style. It was on 4 May 1799 that the King formally commissioned Wyatt to prepare “plans for rendering the buildings of the House of Lords more commodious”.⁵⁵⁷ It was not until 5 July that Joseph Farington made the following note in his diary:

⁵⁵² Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, p. 204.

⁵⁵³ “The Union with Ireland, 1800”, *History of Parliament Online* <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/periods/hanoverians/union-ireland-1800> [accessed 12/01/2023].

⁵⁵⁴ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, pp. 525–26; Robinson, *James Wyatt*, p. 273; Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 208–14.

⁵⁵⁵ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 208–20.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

⁵⁵⁷ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, pp. 513–15; Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, p. 217. Note that, like Soane's earlier commission, Wyatt's brief officially referred only to the House of Lords. However, Wyatt's 1800 order from the Treasury to execute his plans explicitly refers to both Houses (TNA T 27/52: Treasury, General Out-letter Books: 1800–1801, f. 29).

Wyatt told us it is now in agitation to have all the new buildings including the House of Lords, of Gothic Architecture, so as to make a whole mass of that kind of building. The King and others approve of this idea.⁵⁵⁸

Wyatt's caution is not surprising. As a young man, the King had received architectural tuition from William Chambers.⁵⁵⁹ The latter had always advocated "serious Classical architecture" and, until Chambers's death in 1796, the King had always been happy to endorse this style.⁵⁶⁰ Thus, it could not be taken for granted that George III would immediately embrace a Gothic concept. Wyatt was evidently persuasive, though. The King not only backed his Westminster proposals, but subsequently commissioned two more Gothic projects from Wyatt: the aforementioned alterations to Windsor Castle during 1800–14, and the construction of a brand-new castellated palace at Kew.⁵⁶¹ In an 1803 letter to his daughter, the Duchess of Württemberg, the King hints at the arguments by which Wyatt persuaded him to adopt Gothic at Kew:

I never thought I should have adopted Gothic instead of Grecian architecture, but the bad taste of the last forty years has so entirely corrupted the professors of the latter, I have taken to the former from thinking Wyatt perfect in that style [...].⁵⁶²

It is highly likely that these ideas were put into the King's head by the surveyor-general, rather than being independent thoughts: Sawyer shows that Wyatt very skilfully manipulated royal opinion during his intrigues for the Westminster commission.⁵⁶³ This, in turn, suggests that—to use the Vitruvian terminology just discussed—Wyatt justified his stylistic choice to the King in terms of 'propriety from usage'. In other words, Wyatt argued that Neoclassicism had debased Classical architecture, and contemporary architects were no longer capable of designing archaeologically-accurate Classical buildings; whereas he could execute Gothic buildings with perfect accuracy. This was a questionable argument on both counts; but Wyatt evidently thought that it was the argument most likely to persuade the King. This suggests that typological propriety, aesthetic consistency and institutional associations were less important to George III than (perceived) historical accuracy. Nevertheless, Wyatt himself probably considered 'propriety from prescription' to be just as

⁵⁵⁸ K. Garlick and A. Macintyre (eds.), *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, vol. 4 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 1249.

⁵⁵⁹ J. Roberts (ed.), *George III and Queen Charlotte: Patronage, Collecting and Court Taste* (London: Royal Collection Publications, 2004), pp.93–94.

⁵⁶⁰ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 40–43.

⁵⁶¹ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, pp. 356–59, 375–80.

⁵⁶² A. Aspinall (ed.), *The Later Correspondence of George III*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 135; Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, p 266.

⁵⁶³ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 208–12. However, Sawyer also notes that the Duchess was interested in Gothic architecture and may have provided further encouragement (*ibid*, p. 266).

important as ‘propriety from usage’, if not more so. Admittedly, the lack of surviving writings from Wyatt means we have limited insights into his mindset; but it is telling that Farington’s diary entry refers to “a whole mass of that kind of building”.⁵⁶⁴ It is reasonable to assume that Farington was reporting Wyatt’s own explanation of his intentions; if so, it appears that aesthetic consistency was as the forefront of his thinking. This supposition is supported by Wyatt’s official justification for rejecting Soane’s schemes. According to Soane himself, Wyatt told him that his ideas were “were entitled to consideration, as examples of Classical architecture, but [...] good taste required the new structure to be of a character to harmonise and unite with the adjacent building”.⁵⁶⁵ Admittedly, Soane wrote this account many years after the event, so it must be treated with caution; but it adds weight to the idea that Wyatt was explicitly citing aesthetic consistency as a reason for adopting the Gothic style. Whatever Wyatt really said or thought at the time, his Gothic vision for Westminster opened up an architectural debate which would continue for the ensuing thirty years. On what grounds could any architectural style be deemed appropriate for Westminster? What mattered more: contextual suitability (‘propriety from prescription’), or archaeological accuracy (‘propriety from usage’)? Chapter Three will examine the changing emphasis which Soane, and other critics, placed on these arguments during, and after, the execution of Wyatt’s scheme. First, however, it is necessary to set out exactly what Wyatt created at Westminster, and how his scheme was executed.

Wyatt’s Proposals

Before turning to the Speaker’s House, it is helpful to give a brief overview of Wyatt’s wider plans for the palace complex. Soane had proposed to construct new buildings for the two Houses of Parliament, and there is evidence to suggest that Wyatt wanted to do the same (as discussed below). Ultimately this did not happen, probably because of the continuing financial stringency caused by the ongoing war with France. In any case, once the Act of Union was passed in July 1800, enlarged facilities had to be made available quickly. Curiously, no detailed instructions to Wyatt from the government appear to have survived: this probably reflects the fact that the work was funded through special parliamentary grants, and was therefore beyond the remit of the Office of Works.⁵⁶⁶ Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume that the government wanted the new facilities to be ready in time for the first meeting of the Union parliament in January 1801. As such, there was no time for Wyatt to undertake an ambitious new-build project: he had to find stop-gap solutions.

⁵⁶⁴ Garlick and Macintyre (eds.), *Diary of Joseph Farington* 4, p. 1249.

⁵⁶⁵ Soane, *Brief Statement*, p. 18.

⁵⁶⁶ Colvin, *King’s Works* 6, pp. 525-26; Robinson, *James Wyatt*, p. 257.

For the House of Lords, Wyatt found a straightforward and uncontroversial solution. He removed the Peers from their long-term home in the former Queen's Chamber and created a new chamber for them in the now-vacant Court of Requests building (originally the medieval Lesser Hall), immediately to the south of Westminster Hall.⁵⁶⁷ Initially, Wyatt's alterations were confined to the interior; it was only later, c. 1805–07, that he constructed a new office block on the western flank of this building, complete with a Gothic façade facing into Old Palace Yard (Fig. 2.11)⁵⁶⁸ Along with the façade of the Speaker's House, this became the most visible public 'face' of Wyatt's alterations at Westminster. The Lords office building combined a mixture of collegiate and castellar influences. The principal, northernmost portion of the façade was strongly collegiate: it was axially symmetrical, with a tall central block possibly intended to imitate the gatehouse of an Oxford college. However, the massing became more irregular and castle-like at the southern end of the building. Wyatt originally intended to construct a new royal entrance at the southern end of this complex, to be used by the King during the state opening, prorogation and dissolution of Parliament. Contemporary press reports suggest that construction of this entrance was actually begun; but by September 1808 work had stopped, and was never resumed.⁵⁶⁹ Sawyer suggests that the project was abandoned following a House of Commons debate in June 1808, in which Wyatt's building was savagely attacked: one MP famously compared it to a gentleman's lavatory.⁵⁷⁰ Indeed, during the course of this debate there were suggestions—apparently serious—that the brand-new building should be immediately demolished. The office block was also criticised in the press, being compared to a "cotton mill" by one correspondent in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.⁵⁷¹ The cessation of work left only a temporary structure of wood and canvas to serve as the royal entrance, a situation which persisted into the 1820s.⁵⁷²

⁵⁶⁷ J. Goodall, "The Medieval Palace of Westminster", in C. Riding and J. Riding (eds.), *The Houses of Parliament: History, Art, Architecture* (London: Merrell, 2000), p. 55.

⁵⁶⁸ *The Times* reported the commencement of work on 29 July 1805 (untitled piece, p. 3). The buildings must have been complete, or nearly so, by 11 August 1807, when Abbot inspected them with Lord Auckland (TNA PRO 30/9/34: Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester, Papers: Journal, with interpolated correspondence, etc, f. 211).

⁵⁶⁹ "Improvements in Westminster", *The Times*, 20 September 1808, p. 3.

⁵⁷⁰ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 1st ser., vol. 11 (1808), cc. 863–65; Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, p. 270; Colvin, *King's Works* 6, p. 519. Despite the criticisms, the Westminster Improvements Commissioners must have retained some regard for Wyatt's work, since they did not immediately abandon his proposals to rebuild the Exchequer buildings.

⁵⁷¹ Letter signed "Albion", *The Gentleman's Magazine* 76:2 (1806), pp. 1126–27.

⁵⁷² Colvin, *King's Works* 6, p. 519.



Fig. 2.11: Office of Works, Watercolour perspective drawing showing the east side of Old Palace Yard [including the new House of Lords office block and Wyatt's unexecuted proposals for the Law Courts], c. 1808. Watercolour on paper, 455 x 735mm. London: The National Archives (WORK 29/16).

The House of Commons posed a more difficult problem. No attempt was made to move the Commons out of their traditional home in St Stephen's Chapel, probably because no other suitable building was available.⁵⁷³ Wyatt therefore had to accommodate one hundred extra MPs within the shell of the existing chamber, whose capacity had already been pushed almost to its maximum by the addition of galleries. Wyatt therefore made his controversial decision to cut recesses into the thick medieval walls in order to squeeze in an extra row of benches on the north and south sides. As is well known, this involved the destruction of the medieval wall paintings, which survived behind Wren's 1690s panelling.⁵⁷⁴ However, there was also a constructive element to Wyatt's alterations: he attempted to restore the exterior of the building to a fourteenth-century appearance by adding new Gothic decoration in stucco.⁵⁷⁵ By the time he began work, the chapel's façades had been

⁵⁷³ Realistically, the only other potentially suitable building at Westminster was the Painted Chamber. Its overall floor area was similar to that of the existing House of Commons (SM 37/1/21 gives their measurements as 79' 9" x 26' and 57' 6" x 32' 10" respectively), so there would have been little to be gained by relocating. The Painted Chamber was, however, temporarily fitted for use by the Commons whilst Wyatt's alterations took place (Hansard, *Parliamentary History* vol. 35, cc. 495; "Houses of Parliament", *The Times*, 21 January 1801, p. 3.) It was probably these temporary arrangements which the King inspected during his visit to Westminster on 10 November 1800 (see Chapter One).

⁵⁷⁴ Hill, "Proceeding Like Guy Faux", pp. 260–61. See also pp. 26–27 of this thesis.

⁵⁷⁵ Untitled piece, *The Times*, 28 March 1805, p. 3.

largely stripped of any Gothic decoration they once possessed. Wren's alterations in the 1690s had produced a rather strange appearance, with small, round-headed windows—designed to suit his Classical interior—replacing the old east window. A new passageway behind the Speaker's Chair had been constructed beneath these windows, in a totally utilitarian style (Fig. 1.5).⁵⁷⁶ Wren's windows could not be easily altered, so Wyatt worked blind tracery around them in order to give the illusion of a large, Gothic east window. There are several illustrations of the chapel after Wyatt's alterations; these differ slightly in their details, but the engraving published by Alexander Beugo in 1810 (Fig. 2.12) conveys the overall visual effect of Wyatt's interventions. Wyatt's embellishment of the chapel suggests that, whatever his attitude to the wall paintings, he recognised the aesthetic value of the shell of the building, and he intended to make it a prominent feature of his wider scheme. Once Wyatt was asked to rebuild the Speaker's House, he consciously linked its façade with St Stephen's to form a broader composition (as discussed below).

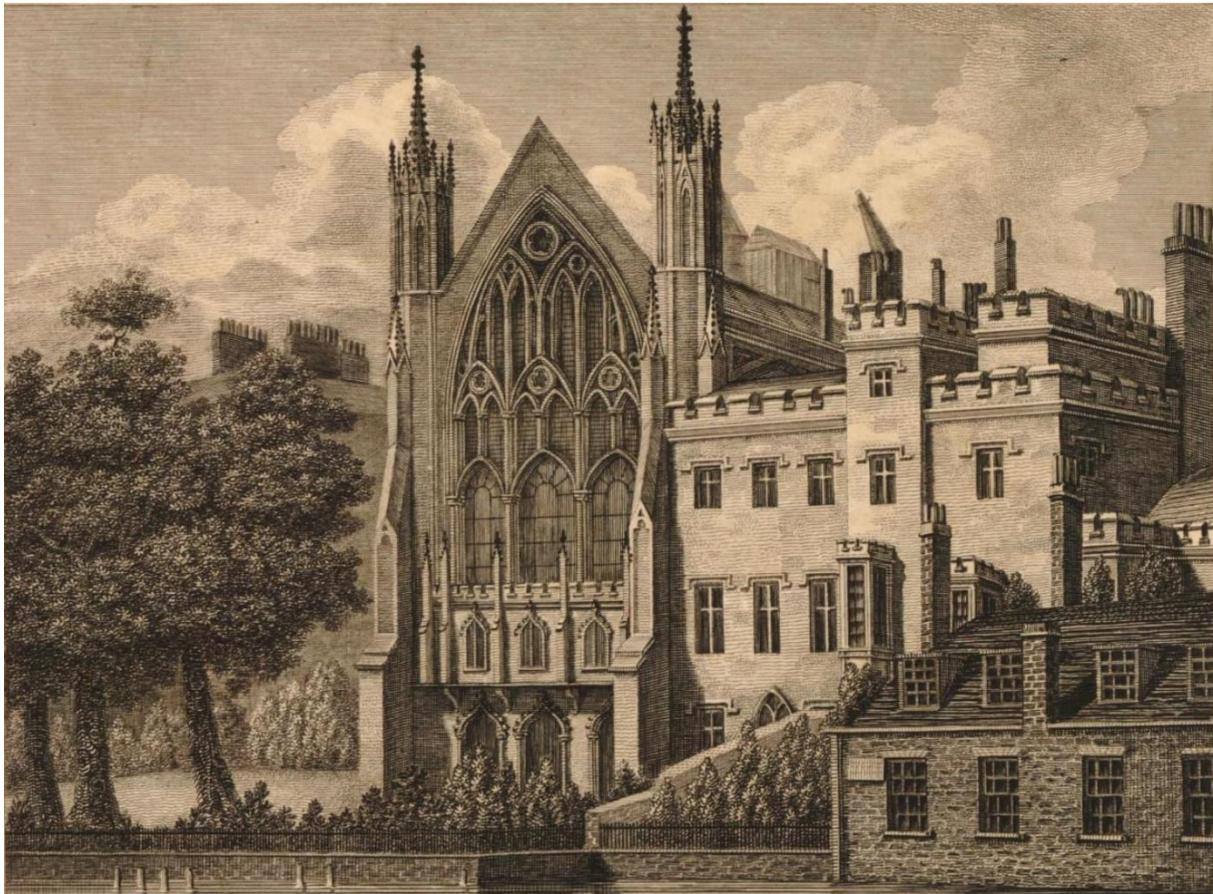


Fig. 2.12: T. Levens, *The Speaker's House, from Westminster Bridge* (detail), 1810. Ink on paper, 160mm x 182mm. London: British Museum (1880,1113.1293).

⁵⁷⁶ See M. Tremellen, "The Wren Commons Chamber", in J. P. D. Cooper, T. Ayers, C. Shenton and E. Hallam Smith (eds.), *St Stephen's Chapel and the Palace of Westminster* (forthcoming).

Further evidence that Wyatt genuinely had a creative vision for Westminster can be found in the fact that, even after the completion of these ‘temporary’ arrangements for the two houses, he continued to develop ideas for the construction of new chambers. Little evidence of his thinking survives, but there is a very rough sketch plan, dated April 1802, among the Colchester papers (Fig. 2.13).⁵⁷⁷ The fact that Abbot kept this plan clearly demonstrates that he was deeply involved in Wyatt’s wider scheme for the palace complex, not just the Speaker’s House; a point which has consistently been neglected both by contemporary critics, and subsequent historians, of Wyatt’s scheme. As far as can be ascertained, this plan has never been published before; yet it is vitally important, for it is the only known visual evidence to indicate what Wyatt would have created had he been able to fully realise his vision.

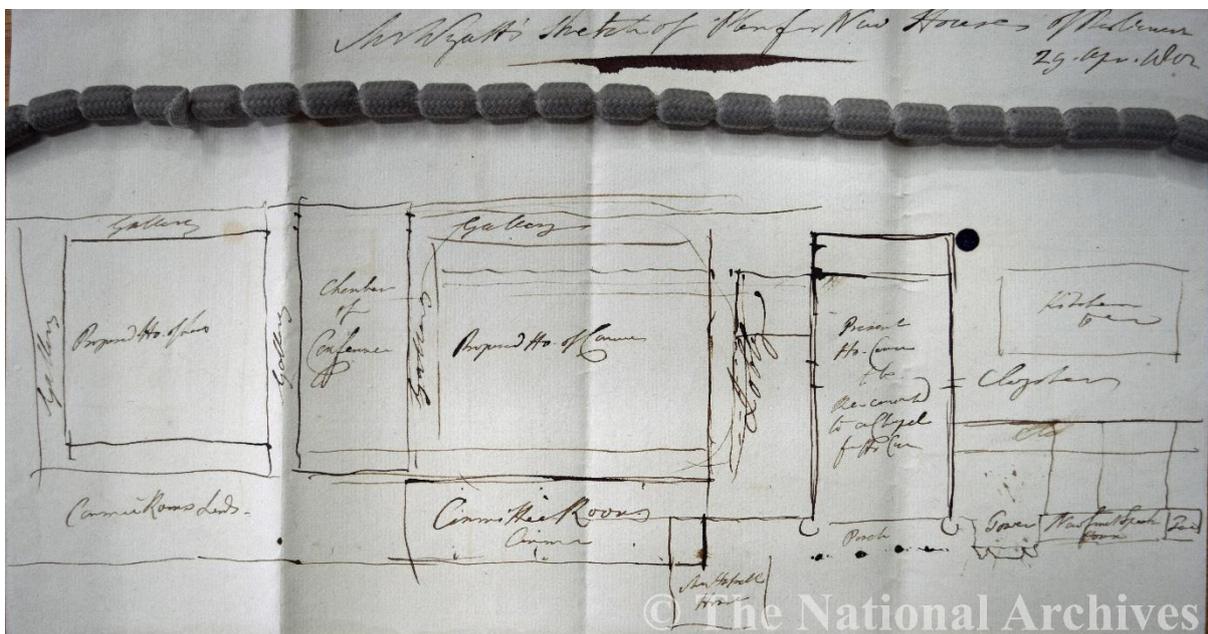


Fig. 2.13: James Wyatt, Sketch of Plan for New Houses of Parliament, 1802. Ink on paper, dimensions unavailable. TNA PRO 30/9/14: Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester: Papers: Miscellaneous Papers: Parliamentary, Box 2, item I. §.1. 2. C.

New chambers for the two Houses would have been built side-by-side to the south of St Stephen’s Chapel, with a “Chamber of Conference” between them, and committee rooms to the east, overlooking the river. St Stephen’s itself would have been restored as a chapel for the House of Commons, an idea which Wyatt may have stolen from Soane’s schemes.⁵⁷⁸ The Speaker’s House—including the cloisters—would continue to occupy the space to the north of the chapel. The Clerk of the Commons’ House awkwardly overlaps the new committee rooms at their north-eastern corner;

⁵⁷⁷ Colvin also asserts that the new House of Lords in the former Court of Requests was only intended as a temporary expedient (*King’s Works* 6, p. 515).

⁵⁷⁸ Soane, *Brief Statement*, p. 17.

it is not clear whether Wyatt intended to retain the existing building, or replace it. In every other respect, Wyatt's plan is simple and rational, clearly intended to prioritise functionality and convenience. The restored chapel, however, would have provided an element of Picturesque irregularity and would have served as a focal point for the design. The retention of both the chapel and the Cloisters—despite their functional irrelevance to the new layout—shows Wyatt striking a balance between pragmatic and conservationist/aesthetic impulses. Whatever Wyatt truly thought about the historic significance of these buildings, he clearly appreciated their aesthetic potential, and he believed that he could enhance his own plans by incorporating them.

In later years, Wyatt also made proposals to replace both the Law Courts and the Exchequer buildings. The Law Courts would have been removed from Westminster Hall and relocated into a purpose-built structure on the Hall's western flank; the existing Stone Building would have been demolished to make way for this. Wyatt accommodated the buttresses of Westminster Hall by proposing a design with four towers, which would rise up between them. This is illustrated in the Office of Works' watercolour of Old Palace Yard (Fig. 2.11). Unfortunately, it is not known how the Improvements Commissioners reacted to this design. Wyatt's proposal for the Exchequer buildings was designed as a direct continuation of the Speaker's House façade, as discussed below. For the purposes of this thesis, the important point is that Wyatt's Speaker's House was just one element in a much larger plan. It is equally important, when assessing the success of Wyatt's work, to remember that the works actually executed did not represent the full scope of his vision.

Abbot's Views on Architecture

Whilst the Speaker's House was an integral part of Wyatt's wider vision for Westminster, Abbot's role as client should not be neglected. As noted above, the first steps towards the rebuilding project were almost certainly taken before his election. Nevertheless, once installed as Speaker he fully embraced the project, and there is ample evidence in the Colchester Papers that he actively developed specifications for Wyatt (as discussed below). As previously noted, Abbot also took an active interest in Wyatt's wider plans for the palace. As a member of the Westminster Improvements Commission, he was also involved with various projects to improve the setting of the palace by clearing away neighbouring buildings and creating the open space now known as Parliament Square.⁵⁷⁹

Whilst Colvin acknowledges Abbot's role in initiating the rebuild of the Speaker's House, historians have hitherto shown little interest in Abbot's personal views on architecture.⁵⁸⁰ Evidence

⁵⁷⁹ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, pp. 515–16; Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, p. 255, fn. 743.

⁵⁸⁰ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, p. 533.

from his diaries and correspondence suggests that he genuinely admired Wyatt's architecture. In an 1806 letter discussing the possibility of a new Treasury building, Abbot imagined that Wyatt might "produce a very stately & ornamental decoration for this great approach to the Houses of Parliament, West[minster]r Hall, West[minster]r Abbey &c. &c."⁵⁸¹ Moreover, there is specific evidence that Abbot admired Picturesque aesthetics. In his diary he describes a series of temporary marquees erected for a ball at Burleigh House in 1814: he criticised them for being "in parallel lines & wanting variety & effect".⁵⁸² Clearly, he prized Picturesque variety and irregularity; Wyatt knew how to provide this, as demonstrated by recent projects such as Norris Castle and Pennsylvania Castle (discussed above).⁵⁸³ It seems clear that Abbot endorsed Wyatt's choice of Gothic architecture for Westminster. This is not to say that Abbot was exclusively committed to Gothic: Kidbrooke was a Classical house, and his alterations to it remained faithful to that style.⁵⁸⁴ Nevertheless, he did not try to push Wyatt into building a Classical house at Westminster; nor did he accept a Gothic shell and then fill it with Classical interiors. Gothic furnishings, historic portraits and heraldry were integral components of Abbot/Wyatt interiors (as discussed below).

There is clear evidence that Abbot had an interest in history and antiquities; this may well have influenced his attitude to the Gothic style. Although the conservation of architectural remains was still a contentious idea, by the end of the eighteenth-century interest in the medieval past was growing among the educated section of society.⁵⁸⁵ Abbot read numerous antiquarian books, including J. T. Smith's *Antiquities of Westminster*; his notes on this work survive among the Colchester papers.⁵⁸⁶ Admittedly, Abbot's interest in history was not purely recreational, as his work on the Record Commission illustrates.⁵⁸⁷ Nevertheless, history and antiquities were clearly a source of genuine enjoyment for him. He made occasional visits to historic sites, when his busy schedule permitted; for example, in 1823 he visited Arundel Castle and saw the Roman mosaics at Bignor.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸¹ Hampshire Record Office (HRO), 38M49/1/49: letter from Charles Abbot to William Wickham, 5 May 1806.

⁵⁸² TNA PRO 30/9/35: Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester, Papers: Journal, with interpolated correspondence, etc, f. 378. This ball took place immediately after the Tsar's visit to the Speaker's House, described in the introduction.

⁵⁸³ See pp. 108–09 of this thesis.

⁵⁸⁴ Kingsley, "Abbot of Kidbrooke Park", n. p.

⁵⁸⁵ Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, p. 156; Hill, *Time's Witness*, pp. 55–56.

⁵⁸⁶ PRO 30/9/14, Box 2, item I. §.1.1. a: Hawkins' and Smith's *Antiquities of Westminster: Extracts & Notes* (n. d.). For evidence of Abbot's other antiquarian readings see, for example, his 1822 diary summary (TNA PRO 30/9/37 Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester, Papers: Journal, with interpolated correspondence, etc, ff. 130–32), in which he mentions reading Ingram's translation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and buying a new edition of Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum* for his library at Kidbrooke.

⁵⁸⁷ Thorne, "Abbot, Charles", n. p.

⁵⁸⁸ PRO 30/9/37, ff. 173–77.

He is also known to have read at least some of Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* novels, although the first of these did not appear until after the Speaker's House was complete.⁵⁸⁹

However, Abbot's interest in history must be understood in relation to his political ethos. Unlike A. W. N. Pugin in later years, Abbot was not trying to revive the values—whether real or imagined—of a medieval, Catholic society.⁵⁹⁰ As discussed above, Abbot's political philosophy was in many ways a reforming and modernising one, albeit tempered by a conservative attitude to the Hanoverian dynasty and the established Church. As such, Wyatt's design for the Speaker's House had to express Abbot's views about the contemporary purpose and values of the Speakership, as well as the historic roots of the office. Abbot's ideas on this subject would appear to be founded on a Whiggish belief in defending the constitution as the guardian of liberty. He certainly expresses such sentiments in his surviving correspondence.⁵⁹¹ In turn, Abbot may have felt that the Speaker was the natural guardian of the constitution. This was not an entirely new idea: it had been expressed several decades earlier by the allegorical paintings on the Speaker's State Coach. One of these scenes depicts Britannia handing Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights to a throned figure representing monarchy (Fig. 2.14).⁵⁹² Through his friendship with Addington, Abbot may well have seen the coach and been aware of these images even before he became Speaker. Indeed, if they reflected his own constitutional ideals, then this may help to explain why he was attracted to the Speakership in the first place. Of course, the State Coach, reflecting the fashions of earlier years, made no attempt to align the constitution with Gothic design. Nevertheless, the gradual progress of the Gothic Revival over the course of the century would have made this connection seem far more natural by 1802. As Brooks puts it, Gothic "lined up with the establishment" in the wake of the French Revolution; yet the earlier Whig narrative, aligning the Gothic style with ancient "Saxon liberties" and political radicalism, did not completely disappear.⁵⁹³ Indeed, as Matthew Reeve has argued, the "liberty trope" was fundamental to conceptions of Gothic among key practitioners from the mid-eighteenth to early-nineteenth centuries, including Horace Walpole, Francis Dashwood, 11th Baron le Despencer (1708–81) and Charles Howard, 11th Duke of Norfolk (1746–1815).⁵⁹⁴ Gothic's "dual inheritance of

⁵⁸⁹ Abbot's diaries mention reading *Red Gauntlet*, *The Crusaders* and *Peveril of the Peak*, for example (PRO 30/9/37, ff. 130, 333–36, 391, 496).

⁵⁹⁰ R. Hill, *God's Architect: Pugin and the Building of Romantic Britain* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), pp. 103–04, 120–21, 155–57.

⁵⁹¹ In a 1798 letter to the Duke of Leeds, Abbot expressed his "settled opinion that the general system of the present government is that alone by which the safety of the country [...] can be maintained". He continues that "the language and conduct of the present Opposition...threaten the utmost danger to all orders of the State, and to the genuine liberties of the British Constitution". Published in Colchester, *Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot I*, p. 128.

⁵⁹² For more information on the iconography of the Speaker's State Coach see material in PA ARC/VAR/58.

⁵⁹³ Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, pp. 130–31.

⁵⁹⁴ Reeve, "Gothic Architecture and the Liberty Trope", pp. 87–98.

radicalism and conservatism” was perfectly suited the Speaker’s unique constitutional position, and Abbot cleverly exploited both its radical and authoritarian connotations.⁵⁹⁵ His Gothic residence proclaimed his loyalty to the traditional authorities of monarchy and established Church. Yet, by reminding viewers of the Speakership’s medieval origins, Abbot also asserted the antiquity—and therefore, the legitimacy—of his own office. He asserted a line of political continuity which connected him to the 1689 political settlement; to Speaker Lenthall’s defiance of Charles I; and, ultimately, to the medieval Barons who drafted Magna Carta.



Fig. 2.14: attributed to Giovanni Batista Cipriani, *Britannia and Monarchy* (side panel for Speaker’s State Coach), c. 1755–85. Media and dimensions unavailable. Arlington: National Trust Carriage Museum (on loan from Parliamentary Heritage Collection: WOA S170).

Beneath these noble political aspirations, however, there is clear evidence that Abbot also had a personal agenda. Most parliamentarians of this era—even in the House of Commons—were drawn from, or closely connected to, landowning families (as discussed in Chapter One). Abbot therefore needed to establish himself as their social equal. It is, perhaps, telling that a contemporary article in *The Times* claims that the alterations to the Speaker’s House were intended to “give it entirely the air of a *grand old dwelling*, of which the House of Commons will appear to be the chapel” (emphasis added).⁵⁹⁶ Whilst it is not clear whether this comment reflects an explicit statement from Abbot or Wyatt, it strongly suggests that Abbot consciously exploited Wyatt’s Picturesque Gothic architecture to emulate the ancient country seats of the aristocracy and gentry. His lack of personal lineage could, to some extent, be compensated for by highlighting the political lineage of his office. Abbot may also have hoped that emphasising his status as a landowner would

⁵⁹⁵ Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, p. 420.

⁵⁹⁶ Untitled piece, *The Times*, 28 March 1805, p. 3.

evoke old Whig ideas about the dual role of the “landed interest” as guardians of, but also a moderating influence on, democracy.⁵⁹⁷

The Rebuilding Project

Because of the extra-ordinary nature of Wyatt’s Westminster commissions, they are poorly documented among the Office of Works’ official records at this period. However, this absence is more than compensated for by Abbot’s diaries and papers, which contain an enormous volume of material relating to the rebuilding project. The present work is not primarily concerned with Wyatt’s working practices, or his working relationship with Speaker Abbot; rather, it aims to address wider questions concerning changing attitudes to Gothic architecture, as well as the evolving political role of the Speaker. As such, it is not possible to provide an extended narrative of the progress of the rebuild project; but what follows should suffice to give the reader an understanding of its chronology. Stephen Daniels’ recent article has already discussed Humphrey Repton’s concurrent remodelling of the Speaker’s Garden; hence, this thesis will predominantly concentrate on the house.⁵⁹⁸

Colvin and Robinson have argued that Wyatt was not lazy, but scatter-brained, disorganised and sometimes a little too easy-going.⁵⁹⁹ The evidence from the Colchester Papers appears to support this interpretation. His working relationship with Abbot appears to have begun well: indeed, in 1802 Abbot tried to solicit a job for Wyatt’s eldest son, Benjamin Dean (1775–1852). This clearly demonstrates that, despite his reforming ethos, Abbot played an active role in political patronage networks.⁶⁰⁰ However, Wyatt’s chronic disorganisation and increasing absenteeism soon put their relationship under strain, as will become apparent. As Wyatt began to neglect the project, his Office of Works subordinates—the clerk of works and the labourer in trust—increasingly took the lead.⁶⁰¹ As noted in Chapter One, J. T. Groves had been clerk of works at St James’s, Whitehall and Westminster since 1794. He was also surveyor to the Westminster Improvements Commission, so Abbot was in regular contact with him over many years.⁶⁰² Colvin paints Groves in an unflattering light, but Abbot evidently had a high opinion of him: he wrote him a glowing reference when he

⁵⁹⁷ Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, p. 45.

⁵⁹⁸ S. Daniels, “From the Speaker’s Garden: Repton’s Designs on Westminster”, *The London Gardener* 23 (2019), pp. 74–85.

⁵⁹⁹ Colvin, *King’s Works* 6, pp. 49–55; Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 247, 271–72.

⁶⁰⁰ PRO 30/9/15: letter from Charles Abbot to Viscount Castlereagh, 26 July 1802.

⁶⁰¹ Colvin, *King’s Works* 6, pp. 13, 31–32.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 674.

applied (unsuccessfully) for a promotion in 1807.⁶⁰³ It seems that the Speaker's House did not initially have a dedicated labourer in trust. In October 1800, however, one Edward Astley was appointed labourer in trust for the neighbouring Exchequer buildings; and it seems clear from subsequent correspondence that, in practice, his duties extended to the Speaker's House as well.⁶⁰⁴ He was dismissed due to negligence in August 1805: Groves accused him of failing to respond promptly to a flood in the cloisters, which had been caused by a leaking gutter.⁶⁰⁵ His place was taken by Charles Bacon (1784–1818), who had previously worked for Groves as an articled pupil.⁶⁰⁶

As previously noted, the possibility of rebuilding the house was almost certainly under discussion during Mitford's brief tenure. Indeed, it is quite possible that Addington was already considering the idea during the final months of his own Speakership. Interestingly, in his 1809 report to the Treasury, Wyatt claimed that his authority for the works on the Speaker's House and Houses of Parliament derived from a letter from the Treasury dated 18 August 1800, about eighteen months before Abbot took the Chair.⁶⁰⁷ In fact, this letter only orders Wyatt to proceed with his alterations to the two Houses of Parliament, and makes no mention of the Speaker's House.⁶⁰⁸ However, this does not rule out the possibility that Wyatt was asked to undertake various works on purely verbal authority. Certainly Wyatt, in his report to the Treasury, claimed that instructions were "often communicated verbally to me".⁶⁰⁹ Moreover, Wyatt's report goes on to claim that £3,955 15s. 8 ½ d. had been spent on the Speaker's House during 1800–01, which indicates that some significant

⁶⁰³ For Colvin's view see *King's Works* 6, pp. 59, 68. For Groves' application for promotion see PRO 30/9/15: letter from Abbot to Spencer Perceval, 17 September 1807.

⁶⁰⁴ TNA WORK 4/19, Office of Works: minutes, 3 October 1800, n. p.; PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. I., Speaker's House repairs & furniture: by whom to be repaired & supplied?—Minute by Mr Groves.

⁶⁰⁵ For details of the leak, see PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §. 4. 2. e5: letter from Groves to Abbot, 9 August 1805. In a subsequent letter dated 7 October (*ibid*, item II. §.4.2. r.) Groves reported that Astley had been "removed". Astley had previously been reprimanded by Groves in 1802 for misappropriating surplus building materials (Colvin, *King's Works* 6, p. 68, fn. 7).

⁶⁰⁶ Bacon's appointment is mentioned in a letter from Groves to Abbot, 14 September 1805 (PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §. 4. 2. c5). Colvin (*King's Works* 6, p. 71) describes Bacon's appointment as "irregular" and "semi-official". However, although the 1812 Inquiry into the Office of Works revealed that Bacon received a secret allowance in addition to his salary, it does not suggest that his appointment had not been officially sanctioned. See *Report from the Commissioners of Inquiry into the Conduct of Business in the Office of Works*, HC 258, 1813.

⁶⁰⁷ TNA: PRO 30/9/14, item I. §.1. 2. C, n. p. Wyatt had previously received instructions from the Lord Chamberlain's Office, dated 4 May 1799, to prepare plans for "rendering the House of Lords more commodious" (TNA LC 1/39, Lord Chamberlain's Department: Correspondence, entry books of out-letters, n. p.) Sawyer suggests that this, in effect, marked the start of Wyatt's Westminster commission (*Soane at Westminster*, p. 213); but it makes no mention of the Speaker's House.

⁶⁰⁸ TNA T 27/52, f. 29.

⁶⁰⁹ PRO 30/9/14, box 3, I. §.1. 2. C (op. cit.), n. p. The plausibility of this practice is supported by the fact that members of the royal family sometimes gave instructions directly to Wyatt, rather than communicating through the Treasury or the Lord Chamberlain as the regulations required (Colvin, *King's Works* 6, pp. 64–65).

alteration took place at this time.⁶¹⁰ The most likely explanation is that the State Dining Room was extended during the final months of Addington's tenure. When Addington moved in, this room only occupied two of the five bays of the undercroft (as discussed in Chapter One); whereas Carter's 1807 account makes clear that, by that time, it had been extended into the third bay.⁶¹¹ It would have made sense to complete this work before tackling the more extensive reconstruction of the east and north wings of the house. Furthermore, extensive refurnishing of the State Dining Room appears to have taken place during 1801–02. A complete set of thirty-six dining chairs was supplied by Richard Tait in 1801, followed by five dining tables the following year.⁶¹² A memo dated July 1802 requests "Mr Wyatt's directions" regarding various items of furniture and lighting.⁶¹³ It would make sense to purchase new furniture *after* any building works had been completed. Any substantial building works were probably complete by early 1802, since Abbot's diary records that the Dining Room remained "untouched" and usable during the 1802 Parliamentary session.⁶¹⁴

Once Abbot became Speaker, he was keen to rebuild the rest of the house as quickly as possible. On 22 June 1802 he sent a formal request to the Treasury, explaining the damp problems and requesting that the house should be "thoroughly repaired, & altered in such manner as may be necessary".⁶¹⁵ Curiously, no reply to this letter has been traced. Given the volume of letters which Abbot retained in his personal papers, this seems a surprising omission: it strongly suggests that Abbot and Wyatt ultimately proceeded on verbal authority alone. These murky proceedings seem at odds with Abbot's carefully-crafted self-image as a reformer and a punctilious record-keeper. Nevertheless, it is inconceivable that the work would have begun without the knowledge and approval of Addington and his Treasury board.

Meanwhile, on 24 June—just two days after his request to the Treasury—Abbot prepared a list of "memoranda" for Wyatt, setting out his specifications for the house.⁶¹⁶ Two main structural alterations were requested. The first was the demolition and replacement of the eastern (riverfront) wing. This would allow reconstruction on better foundations, with "a Trench in front of the House" which, it was hoped, would resolve the damp problems by allowing better drainage and creating a

⁶¹⁰ TNA: PRO 30/9/14, item I. §.1. 2. C, n. p.

⁶¹¹ J. Carter, "The Pursuits of Architectural Innovation No. CXI: Royal Palace, Westminster", *Gentleman's Magazine* 77: 2 (1807), p. 735.

⁶¹² TNA LC 9/421, Lord Chamberlain's Department, Accounts and Miscellanea: Miscellaneous Papers. Goods delivered for His Majesty's Service by order of the Lord Chamberlain's Office for the Speaker's Dining Room by Rich[ar]d Tait (n. n.).

⁶¹³ TNA: PRO 30/9/14, item II. §.4.2. vv.: Memorandum: Great Dining Room: Furniture for Mr Wyatt's consideration, 26 July 1802.

⁶¹⁴ Colchester, *Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot* I, p. 412.

⁶¹⁵ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. m: letter from Abbott to Hiley Addington, 22 June 1802.

⁶¹⁶ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. o., Memoranda for Mr Wyatt, June 24 1802—Speaker's House Repairs.

barrier between the house and the river.⁶¹⁷ Secondly, Abbot requested the demolition of the former college belltower to make way for a new staircase connecting the ground and first storeys.⁶¹⁸ In light of the later antiquarian criticisms of Wyatt, it is noteworthy that this destructive change to the medieval fabric was proposed by the client, not the architect. Abbot optimistically requested that the new riverfront wing should be roofed “before the end of October” to allow internal fitting-up over the winter.⁶¹⁹ Wyatt responded with an initial burst of enthusiasm. Within days, he had produced a draft plan of the proposed alterations. Unfortunately, this does not appear to have survived; however, Abbot refers to it in a second memo, dated 29 June.⁶²⁰ This clarifies his earlier instructions and suggests some further changes. In the meantime, Abbot minimised the disruption to himself and his family by annexing the neighbouring house in St Stephen’s Court which, only eight years previously, had been granted to the serjeant-at-arms, Edward Coleman. Abbot’s correspondence makes clear that this was initially intended as a temporary move; however, the Speaker’s annexation of this house ultimately became permanent, as discussed below.⁶²¹

By mid-August, work had started on site. On 11 August Wyatt wrote to Abbot, telling him that the demolition of the old eastern wing was nearly complete. Meanwhile, Wyatt had examined the belltower with Groves and concluded that the “expense” and “delay” of total demolition could be avoided.⁶²² Instead, he proposed to remove the existing circular staircase and strengthen the external walls before installing the new staircase within them.⁶²³ This letter strongly suggests that, although Wyatt had a clear design concept for the palace, the detailed design was—at least in part—being worked out as he went along. This improvisational approach may help to explain some of the subsequent problems with the project, in terms of both constructional weaknesses and budget overruns. This theory is supported by a letter to Abbot from his secretary, John Rickman, in October 1802, which confirms the internal dimensions of the new rooms on the eastern front. This would appear to indicate that Wyatt had not provided definitive measurements on his initial plans. Even the appearance of the external façades had not, it seems, been conclusively settled: Rickman told Abbot that “I believe some little appearance of Pediment is intended in the Middle to break the

⁶¹⁷ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. o., n. p.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, n. p.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, n. p.

⁶²⁰ ‘Memoranda, Speaker’s House, on Plan. 29 June 1802. For Wyatt.’, enclosed within PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. o.

⁶²¹ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. m; –, II. §.4.2. o. Wyatt’s 1809 report to the Treasury (PRO 30/9/14, box 3, I. §.1. 2. c) suggests that the decision to annexe Coleman’s house may have been taken by Addington before Abbot became Speaker. However, whilst the letter to Hiley Addington (II. §.4.2. m) makes clear that the house would be “delivered up” for use by some other official, it implies that it would not necessarily be returned to Coleman.

⁶²² PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. x.: letter from Wyatt to Abbot, 11 August 1802.

⁶²³ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. x., n. p.

appearance of sameness throughout the length”.⁶²⁴ Ultimately Wyatt did not employ pediments at the Speaker’s House, instead bringing variety and movement to his façades through his use of irregular massing, as discussed below.⁶²⁵ Abbot’s diary confirms that the new foundations were complete by the end of 1802. They were very substantial, being “twelve feet deep”, with “a side-wall ten feet deep [...] parallel to [...] and about six feet in front of them”.⁶²⁶ These were obviously intended as damp-prevention measures, but it appears that they ultimately proved insufficient. In January 1804 Wyatt’s elder brother, Samuel (1737–1807), called on Abbot to examine the foundations and offer further advice.⁶²⁷ Repton gave further advice on drainage during 1807, in connection with his garden landscaping works.⁶²⁸

Meanwhile, during the winter of 1802–03 it seems that the focus of the work shifted from the riverfront wing into the cloisters and service rooms; Rickman wrote to Abbot in January to update him on progress.⁶²⁹ During these works, it was discovered that the buttresses of Westminster Hall—which cut through the western range of the cloisters—had been weakened by earlier alterations. Rickman’s letter claims that these alterations took place in 1780, although it is not clear where he got this information from.⁶³⁰ At any rate, emergency works were required to secure them.⁶³¹ During 1803, Abbot secured approval from the Lord Chancellor to supply furniture for the State Rooms at public expense.⁶³² However, construction of the new riverfront wing appears to have stalled. At the end of each year, Abbot always wrote a brief summary of the major events of the year in his diary. His 1803 summary merely notes that the house “was this year in great confusion” due to the demolition of the old family rooms.⁶³³ Nevertheless, he notes that both the kitchen and the cloisters were re-roofed during the course of the year, and that the north and west ranges of the upper cloister had been fitted up for use as libraries.⁶³⁴

At this stage Abbot made a late alteration to the plans, possibly in light of his early experiences of entertaining in the house. There was only a single, narrow, passage through the Exchequer buildings to provide entry into St Stephen’s Court from New Palace Yard. This caused

⁶²⁴ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. n.: letter from John Rickman to Abbot, 9 October 1802.

⁶²⁵ See pp. 146–47 of this thesis.

⁶²⁶ PRO 30/9/33, ff. 16–17.

⁶²⁷ PRO 30/9/33, f. 334. Samuel also held the Office of Works’ carpentry contract for the palace (Colvin, *King’s Works* 6, p. 58).

⁶²⁸ PRO 30/9/15: letter from Repton to Abbot, 9 February 1807.

⁶²⁹ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. d5.: letter from Rickman to Abbot, 29 January 1803.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, n. p.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, n. p.

⁶³² PRO 30/9/33, f. 182.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, ff. 181–82.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, ff. 181–82.

congestion at busy times, particularly on the Speaker's dinner and levée nights, when many MPs and Peers would arrive by carriage. Abbot therefore resolved to cut a second carriage entrance through the Exchequer buildings. During 1803 he obtained Treasury sanction to do this, but Wyatt's absenteeism now became evident and, by the end of the year, work had still not begun.⁶³⁵ However, after he eventually visited the site on 9 December 1803, Wyatt devised a much more grandiose and expensive solution. He proposed to create a carriage entrance through Westminster Hall itself, effectively turning the latter into a giant *porte cochere*. Coaches would have approached the Hall from Old, rather than New, Palace Yard, a doorway being made "thro' the wall next to the Co[urt] of Chancery – in the blank corresponding with the present door at the corner next to the Co[urt] of K[ing's] B[ench]".⁶³⁶ This bold proposal reflected Wyatt's desire to create Picturesque effects on a grand scale; it invites comparison with the enormous entrance hall he was creating for Fonthill Abbey at about this time.⁶³⁷ No doubt this plan would have horrified the antiquarian lobby if they had ever got wind of it; yet Abbot initially agreed to Wyatt's plan.⁶³⁸ This provides further evidence that, despite his interest in history and antiquities, Abbot was not averse to making major alterations to historic buildings. Clearly, the 'improving' mindset of the eighteenth century was not dead yet. Nevertheless, Abbot eventually changed his mind, on the grounds that the long route into the state apartments from Westminster Hall would be "inconvenient", especially after dark.⁶³⁹

During 1804 it appears that Wyatt was preoccupied with completing his major refurbishment of Windsor Castle. In early October, the surveyor-general reported to the King that he was struggling to recruit skilled workmen for this project; it may well be that tradesmen were drawn out of the capital to work at Windsor, causing a knock-on delay to the works at the Speaker's House.⁶⁴⁰ Abbot's end-of-year summary complains of Wyatt's "negligence", but nevertheless reports that "the new apartments for the Family were nearly completed this year except the ground floor— Cloysters [sic]—& Tower-staircase—which remained as they had been for the 12 months preceding".⁶⁴¹ On 26 January 1805, Abbot wrote to the Lord Chamberlain's office to request items of furniture for the rooms which were nearing completion. In particular, he wanted to have the

⁶³⁵ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. cc: letter from Abbot to William Huskisson, 22 May 1805; PRO 30/9/33, ff. 182, 261.

⁶³⁶ PRO 30/9/33, f. 233.

⁶³⁷ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, p. 236.

⁶³⁸ Abbot's diary entry for 9 December 1803 described the new carriage drive as "settled" (PRO 30/9/33, f. 233).

⁶³⁹ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. aa.: letter from Abbot to Wyatt, 27 July 1804.

⁶⁴⁰ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, p. 377.

⁶⁴¹ PRO 30/9/33, ff. 463–64.

“stand[in]g lights for the angles and Chimnies [sic] of the great Rooms” in time for his first levée of the year, which was due to take place only a week later.⁶⁴²

With work at Windsor now complete, Wyatt was able to devote more attention to Westminster during 1805; but progress on the Speaker’s House remained uneven. The Library was almost finished; in March, Wyatt personally supervised the hanging of the paintings there.⁶⁴³ Yet in May, a memo sent to Abbot reported that windows were still being fitted in parts of the house, including the lower cloister. Stonemason Thomas Gayfere Jnr was at work on one of the staircases, which he promised to finish “with all speed”; apparently, he had only received the design for it a month previously.⁶⁴⁴ This provides another indication of Wyatt’s improvisational approach to the design of the house. Progress was also hampered by a continuing shortage of skilled workmen, particularly plasterers.⁶⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Abbot—along with the rest of the Westminster Improvements Commission—seemed optimistic that Wyatt would soon be able to move on to the next phase of his works at Westminster. On 28 May, Wyatt visited Abbot and Lord Auckland to show them his drawings for the new House of Lords office block.⁶⁴⁶

It was at this time that Abbot finally abandoned Wyatt’s proposal to create a carriage drive through Westminster Hall. In May, he wrote to the Treasury requesting permission to revert to the original scheme of cutting a second entrance through the Exchequer building. By this time, the original stables and coach house alongside Westminster Hall had apparently been demolished to allow sufficient space for coaches to approach the new entrance.⁶⁴⁷ This, in turn prompted the conversion of the former Serjeant-at-Arms’ House, on the opposite side of Speaker’s Court, into a new stable block. Work on this conversion had certainly begun by early the early autumn of 1805: in response to a questionnaire dated 9 September, one of the tradesmen reported that the roof and ground floor partitions had been removed.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴² PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II.4.2. ff: letter from Abbot to John Calvert, 26 January 1805.

⁶⁴³ PRO 30/9/33, f. 494.

⁶⁴⁴ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. p: memo from James Davis to Abbot, 21 May 1805.

⁶⁴⁵ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. b5: letter from Groves to Abbot, 22 July 1805; PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §. 4. 2. c5: letter from Groves to Abbot, 14 September 1805; PRO 30/9/33, f. 534.

⁶⁴⁶ PRO 30/9/33 f. 533. This, incidentally, gives the lie to Abbot’s later attempt to deny advance knowledge of these plans when Wyatt’s scheme was criticised in Parliament. See Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 1 ser., vol. 11 (1808), cc. 863–65.

⁶⁴⁷ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. cc (op. cit.).

⁶⁴⁸ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. q: progress of works questionnaire, dated 9 September 1805. It is not known who filled out this questionnaire, but it would appear to have been one of the less eloquent, lower-ranking tradesmen, rather than Groves or Bacon. The writer’s spelling errors suggest a Cockney accent: “had” is spelt “ad”, for example.

Parliament did not sit from July to December 1805; this allowed Abbot to retreat to Kidbrooke and give the workmen a clear run of the house for several months.⁶⁴⁹ It seems that many rooms were now reaching the interior finishing stage: on 22 July, Groves reported that paper hanging was in progress and fire grates were being installed.⁶⁵⁰ On the other hand, the aforementioned questionnaire dated 9 September reported that several rooms were still awaiting new windows; in other places, sashes had been installed but not yet glazed.⁶⁵¹ There was still much to be done when the Abbots returned to London in January 1806. They arrived to find “forty or fifty workmen in & about the house”, and “nothing finished”.⁶⁵² Nevertheless, by February the new Library and the belltower staircase must have been receiving their finishing touches, as Abbot wrote to the Lord Chamberlain’s office to request furnishings for them.⁶⁵³ Further applications for furnishings were made in July and October that year, suggesting that other rooms were now moving closer to completion.⁶⁵⁴

It is difficult to pinpoint a precise date when the rebuilding project was ‘finished’. Wyatt’s accounts in his report to the Treasury conclude in 1807; and it seems probable that major building works were, in fact, complete by this date.⁶⁵⁵ However, it appears that furnishing and decorating continued for some time longer: Abbot made further applications to the Lord Chamberlain’s office for new furnishings during July and August 1807.⁶⁵⁶ The office apparently spent £4,074 on furnishings for the Speaker’s House during the 1807–08 financial year (about £250,000 at 2019 values).⁶⁵⁷ Abbot’s diary records that the new “coffee rooms” were brought into use on 24 January 1808, for his first Parliamentary dinner of the season.⁶⁵⁸ It may well be that this was the last major work to be completed. Certainly, Wyatt’s report to the Treasury claims that “no works” had been “executed in the course of last year [i.e., the 1808–09 financial year], to any considerable extent”.⁶⁵⁹ It might also be significant that, during 1808, Abbot requested that the Lord Chamberlain’s Office

⁶⁴⁹ Groves took “final directions” from Abbot before his departure on 12 July (PRO 30/9/33, f. 564). Abbot paid two brief visits to London during August and November to move the family’s possessions out of the former Serjeant-at-Arms’ House (PRO 30/9/33 f. 572).

⁶⁵⁰ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. b5 (op. cit.).

⁶⁵¹ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. q (op. cit.).

⁶⁵² PRO 30/9/34, f. 8.

⁶⁵³ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. g: letter from Abbot to Lord Chamberlain’s Office, 6 February 1806.

⁶⁵⁴ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. hh: letter from Abbot to Lord Chamberlain’s Office, 23 July 1806; and *ibid*, item II. §.4.2. kk: letter from Abbot to Lord Chamberlain’s Office, 20 October 1806.

⁶⁵⁵ PRO 30/9/14, box 3, I. §.1. 2. c. (op. cit.).

⁶⁵⁶ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, item II. §.4.2. pp: letter from Abbot to Lord Chamberlain’s office 15 July 1807; and *ibid*, item II. §.4.2. qq: letter from Abbot to Lord Chamberlain’s office, 3 Aug 1807.

⁶⁵⁷ R. Wharton, *Accounts Explanatory of the Charge of the Fourth Class of the Civil List*, HC 156, 1812, p. 5.

⁶⁵⁸ PRO 30/9/34, f. 225.

⁶⁵⁹ PRO 30/9/14, box 2, item I. §.1. 2.c. (op. cit.).

make a new inventory of the publicly-owned furniture: this suggests that he was not anticipating any major acquisitions after this point.⁶⁶⁰ On the other hand, Groves later reported to the Committee on Public Expenditure that £916 had been spent on the Speaker's House under the head of "New Works" in the 1808–09 financial year, and another £172 in 1809–10. Unfortunately, it is not clear exactly what this money was spent on.⁶⁶¹ To muddy the waters further, a brief paragraph in the *Morning Post* on 6 January 1809 reported that "all the Gothic improvements" at the Speaker's House were "now complete".⁶⁶² The confusion may arise partly from the difficulty of drawing any clear divide between the end of the 'construction' phase and the commencement of running repairs. As early as August 1807, Wyatt called on Abbot to discuss "taking down the pictures in the State Rooms whilst repairing".⁶⁶³

Although the Speaker's House project was essentially complete, the wider project to improve the Palace of Westminster and its surroundings continued. As previously noted, the new House of Lords office block had been completed by early 1808, but the construction of the new Royal Entrance soon stalled. Nevertheless, in the following years Wyatt prepared a design to rebuild the Exchequer Buildings to the east of Westminster Hall.⁶⁶⁴ The Exchequer was immediately adjacent to the Speaker's House, and Wyatt clearly intended that his new building would directly extend its façade. This is clearly shown in his perspective view of this scheme, which survives in the Parliamentary Art Collection (Fig. 2.15).⁶⁶⁵ Sawyer has argued that Wyatt also took inspiration from the old Exchequer Court, a Tudor Gothic building on the opposite side of Westminster Hall, squeezed into the corner between the Hall's northern façade and the Stone Building. This building had an octagonal turret at the centre of its façade, and Sawyer suggests that this may have inspired the similar turret at the corner of Wyatt's proposed building.⁶⁶⁶ This turret certainly contributed to the

⁶⁶⁰ TNA: LC 5/16: Lord Chamberlain's Department, Miscellaneous Records: Lord Treasurer of the Chamber: warrant books, ff. 266–76; PRO 30/9/34, f. 270.

⁶⁶¹ *The Seventh Report from the Committee on the Public Expenditure, &c. of the United Kingdom: Buildings, Civil and Military*, HC 370, 1810, pp. 62–63. To further confuse matters, the same report mentions a further issue from the Exchequer of £8,960 to Wyatt in September 1809 for works at the Speaker's House, along with £12,100 for works on the Houses of Parliament (p. 155). It is not clear whether this money was issued to pay for works already completed.

⁶⁶² *Morning Post*, 6 January 1809, p. 3.

⁶⁶³ PRO 30/9/34, f. 211.

⁶⁶⁴ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, p. 499.

⁶⁶⁵ Wyatt was asked by the Commissioners to prepare designs for a new Exchequer on 6 February 1808 (PRO 30/9/34, f. 229). The watercolour is undated, so it may have been produced earlier than this. The Parliamentary Art Collection give its date as c. 1800. However, it shows the Speaker's House façade as executed, so it is more likely to have been produced after the latter was completed.

⁶⁶⁶ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, p. 273.

overall effect of Picturesque irregularity, which has been further enhanced by projecting the façade of the new building further east than the executed Speaker’s House façade.



Fig. 2.15: after James Wyatt: perspective view of St Stephen’s Chapel, Speaker’s House and proposed (unexecuted) new buildings for the Exchequer, undated. Watercolour on paper, 711 x 584mm. London: Parliamentary Art Collection, WOA 1980.

However, these plans never came to fruition. The Westminster Improvements Commissioners were now losing patience with Wyatt’s absenteeism: Abbot’s diaries record his repeated failures to attend meetings, or to produce drawings on time.⁶⁶⁷ Finally, in June 1808 the Commissioners decided on a complete change of policy and “resolved upon opening the E[ast] end of [New] Palace Y[ar]d to the river and not to rebuild the Exchequer at that spot”.⁶⁶⁸ Although the Commissioners’ report says that this decision was made on Wyatt’s advice, it seems likely that it was, in fact, used as a convenient means to remove him from the project.⁶⁶⁹ Subsequently, a

⁶⁶⁷ PRO 30/9/34, ff. 232, 235, 245–47, 249.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid, ff. 253, 260.

⁶⁶⁹ *Report from Select Committee on the Improvement of Westminster*, HC 328, 1808, p. 5.

competition was held to decide how to landscape the area around New Palace Yard: this was won by Humphry Repton's sons, John Adey and George Stanley.⁶⁷⁰ In the event, the Exchequer buildings were not rebuilt during Abbot's Speakership, but the subject would be revisited during the 1820s (as discussed in Chapter Three).

The Cost

In 1809 Wyatt, coming under increasing scrutiny from the Treasury, sent them a set of accounts for the rebuilding project, along with a brief report (already mentioned) defending his management of the project. He quoted a total expenditure of £68,919 during the 1800–07 period.⁶⁷¹ This corresponds with an estimate of £70,000 privately quoted by Groves to Abbot in May 1809.⁶⁷² However, as previously noted, Groves later testified to the Committee on Public Expenditure that money was still being spent under the head of "New Works" from 1809–11. It must also be remembered that the official furnishings for the house were funded separately, by the Lord Chamberlain's office. For this, two different datasets are available: there is a published set of figures for 1805–11, but there is also an unpublished set of figures preserved among Abbot's papers, covering 1800–08.⁶⁷³ These quote different figures for the overlapping years 1805–08; but, when added together, Abbot's total is only about £500 lower than the 'official' figure. If Abbot's figures are correct, expenditure on furnishings would have added another £9,840 to the total cost of the rebuild. This would make the true cost of the rebuild about £80,000—or about £4.8 million at 2019 prices. This excludes any further spending on "new works" or additional furniture after 1808. In 1814, George Saunders—the auditor appointed by the Treasury to examine Wyatt's Office of Works accounts—quoted a total of £85,000 expenditure on the Speaker's House between 1800 and 1812.⁶⁷⁴ In light of the figures quoted above, this seems plausible. Clearly, this was a significant sum of money, but it compared favourably with Wyatt's contemporary works for George III. It is estimated that £150,000 was spent on alterations to Windsor Castle during 1800–14, whilst more than £500,000 was spent on the construction of Kew Palace during 1801–11 (the latter project, of course, never actually being completed).⁶⁷⁵ Private patrons also spent enormous sums on Gothic houses during the early nineteenth century: for example, the remodelling of Eaton Hall, Cheshire,

⁶⁷⁰ Daniels, "From the Speaker's Garden", p. 83; PRO 30/9/34, f. 342.

⁶⁷¹ TNA: PRO 30/9/14, Box 2, item I. §.1. 2. c. (op. cit.).

⁶⁷² PRO 30/9/34, f. 339.

⁶⁷³ For the published set of figures see HC 156, 1812 (op. cit.), p. 5. For the unpublished figures, see. PRO 30/9/14, box 2, Item II. §. 4. 2. M5: Lord Chamberlain's Account of Expenditure for the Speaker's House, 1798–1808, 1809.

⁶⁷⁴ PRO 30/9/35, f. 335.

⁶⁷⁵ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, pp. 356

during 1803–12, is believed to have cost more than £100,000.⁶⁷⁶ (Incidentally, the architect for this project was William Porden, a former assistant of Wyatt's; his client was Robert Grosvenor, 2nd Earl Grosvenor, later 1st Marquess of Westminster.)⁶⁷⁷ In this context, Wyatt's expenditure on the Speaker's House appears relatively restrained.

On the other hand, there is clear evidence that Wyatt failed to administer the project's finances effectively. Colvin and Robinson have extensively discussed Wyatt's wider mismanagement of the Office of Works' finances; both the official records and the Colchester Papers provide evidence of similar problems in his handling of the Speaker's House project.⁶⁷⁸ During 1805, Wyatt failed to claim the Parliamentary grant money which had been voted to fund the project. This led to delays in paying the tradesmen and—according to Groves—served to further delay progress on site.⁶⁷⁹ The Treasury took a dim view of Wyatt's negligence. In the spring of 1806 William Wickham (1761–1840)—then a junior lord of the Treasury—wrote a private letter to Abbot, telling him it was “more than probable” that Wyatt would be dismissed from the project.⁶⁸⁰ However, on 8 May Wyatt turned up at the Treasury and made a grovelling apology to the board; on this occasion, they agreed to give him a second chance.⁶⁸¹ Nevertheless, they decided that the 1805 grant money would be imprested to Groves rather than Wyatt, both as a signal of their displeasure and to ensure prompt payment of the workmen.⁶⁸²

Although Wyatt's negligence undoubtedly exacerbated the situation, ultimately it was Abbot who had instigated the rebuild. Hostile politicians might easily have chosen to characterise it as an expensive vanity project. It is therefore significant that, on the whole, they did not. The only hint of public criticism came on 29 June 1808, when George Tierney (1761–1830), then MP for Bandon Bridge, successfully moved in the House of Commons for the publication of accounts of all expenses of building works and furnishings for the Houses of Parliament and Speaker's House since 1800.⁶⁸³ As

⁶⁷⁶ Lindfield, *Georgian Gothic*, pp. 195–97.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 195–97.

⁶⁷⁸ Colvin *King's Works* 6, pp. 77–81; Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 271–75.

⁶⁷⁹ PRO 30/9/14, box 3, item II. §.4.2. r: letter from Groves to Abbot, 7 October 1805; TNA T 29/86, Treasury: minute books, ff. 506–07.

⁶⁸⁰ PRO 30/9/15, letter from “W. W.” to Abbot, undated (“Friday evening, 30 m. p. 10pm”). Though this letter is only initialled, it obviously relates to other letters exchanged by Abbot and Wickham at this time. For Abbot's side of the correspondence see Hampshire Record Office (HRO), 38M49/1/9/34a and 38M49/1/9/36. For Wickham's biography see E. Sparrow, “Wickham, William”, *ODNB* (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/29350> [accessed 27/08/2023].

⁶⁸¹ PRO 30/9/15, letter from “W. W.” to Abbot, 8 May 1806.

⁶⁸² PRO 30/9/34, f. 83 (verso).

⁶⁸³ PRO 30/9/34, f. 282; PRO 30/9/14, box 2, item I. §. 1. 2. 6: Grants for alterations & repairs & works: two Houses of Parliament + Speaker's House, 1798–1808. Perceval promised that Abbot would be shown any accounts by the Treasury before publication (PRO 30/9/34, f. 273) but his diaries make no further mention of the subject. For Tierney's biography see D. R. Fisher, “TIERNEY, George (1761–1830), of Hertford Street,

already noted, a summary of the parliamentary grants issued to Wyatt was included in the Committee on Public Expenditure's 1810 report.⁶⁸⁴ Yet it appears that the accounts submitted by Wyatt to the Treasury in 1809 were never published.⁶⁸⁵ Wyatt's figures give a much clearer picture of when money was actually spent, as opposed to when it was granted; and, unlike the published figures, it clearly distinguishes between expenditure on the Speaker's House and the two Houses of Parliament. The subsequent failure of MPs to press Tierney's attack must reflect, in at least some measure, both deference to the office of Speaker and personal respect for Abbot.

The Finished House

Having analysed why, and how, the Speaker's House was rebuilt, it is now necessary to assess what Abbot and Wyatt actually created. Unfortunately, there are significant gaps in the visual evidence available for the house in this period. Wyatt's prominent riverside façade is well-documented, but there are relatively few known images of other parts of the house, particularly the interiors. Adam Lee (c. 1772–1843), labourer in trust at Westminster and Whitehall from 1806, painted a series of detailed watercolours depicting various parts of the old palace; he exhibited these as a "Cosmorama" from 1831.⁶⁸⁶ Yet frustratingly, out of the forty-three views he painted, only seven are known to survive, and only four of these give us any information about the Speaker's House (as discussed below). Fortunately, this lack of visual material is partially compensated for by written sources, such as Carter's lengthy descriptions in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.⁶⁸⁷ Abbot's 1802 memos to Wyatt are also significant, but they must be treated with a degree of caution because it is impossible to be certain that all the instructions given at the outset were actually executed.

The best-known image of Wyatt's riverfront façade is a painting by John Preston Neale, subsequently engraved by W. Radclyffe for publication in *The Beauties of England and Wales* (Fig. 2.16).⁶⁸⁸ The Parliamentary Art Collection also hold a watercolour which gives a more distant view of

Grafton Street and Old Burlington Street, Mdx.", *History of Parliament Online* (1986), <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/tierney-george-1761-1830> [accessed 25/08/2023].

⁶⁸⁴ HC 370 (1810), pp. 62–63. Spending by the Lord Chamberlain's department on furnishings for the house was published separately in 1812 (HC 156, 1812, p. 5).

⁶⁸⁵ PRO 30/9/14, box 2, item I. §.1. 2. C (op. cit.).

⁶⁸⁶ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, p. 674; M. Galinou, "Adam Lee's Drawings of St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster: Antiquarianism and Showmanship in early nineteenth-century London", *Transactions of the London & Middlesex Archaeological Society* 34 (1983), p. 231.

⁶⁸⁷ J. Carter (writing as "An Architect"), "The Pursuits of Architectural Innovation No. CV: Royal Palace, Westminster", *Gentleman's Magazine* 77:1 (1807), pp. 133–35; J. Carter (writing as "An Architect"), "The Pursuits of Architectural Innovation No. CX: Royal Palace, Westminster", *Gentleman's Magazine* 77:2 (1807), pp. 623–26; and Carter, "Pursuits" CXI (op. cit.), pp. 733–35.

⁶⁸⁸ The Rev. J. Nightingale, *The Beauties of England and Wales, Vol. 10 Part 4: London and Middlesex* (London: J Harries, 1815), between pp. 522–23.

the façade from the river (Fig. 2.17). The latter gives a better impression of the house in its wider setting, with St Stephen's Chapel to the left, the Speaker's Garden in the foreground and the Exchequer buildings to the right. It would appear to have been made for comparison with the aforementioned watercolour (Fig. 2.15) illustrating Wyatt's unexecuted proposals for a new Exchequer building. Finally, there is a drawing of the east front by John Carter, now at the Yale Center for British Art. Though it is only a rough sketch, it is particularly valuable in that it was almost certainly drawn 'on the spot' at Westminster.⁶⁸⁹ It also shows some decorative embellishment around the oriel windows, which is not clearly visible in the other illustrations. The YCBA catalogue dates this drawing to "between 1790 and 1802", but this is clearly incorrect; it would appear to have been drawn after Wyatt's alterations to the east façade were completed.⁶⁹⁰ As discussed above, it is difficult to suggest a precise date for when this stage of the project was reached, but the drawing must have been produced later than 1802, and it may not have been produced until after the end of major building works at the house c. 1807.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁸⁹ For more information on Carter's drawings at Yale see P. N. Lindfield, "John Carter FSA (1748–1817): A New Corpus of Drawings, and the Painted Chamber", *Visual Culture in Britain* 24 (2023), pp. 1–30.

⁶⁹⁰ YCBA Collections Online, <https://collections.britishart.yale.edu/catalog/tms:55018> [accessed 17/08/2023].

⁶⁹¹ See pp. 138–39 of this thesis.



Fig. 2.16: John Preston Neale, *Speaker's House*, 1815, 1815, watercolour on paper, 203 x 140mm.
London: Parliamentary Art Collection (WOA 2448).



Fig. 2.17: after original by James Wyatt, *Speaker's House in about 1800*, 1800, watercolour on paper, 711 x 591mm. London: Parliamentary Art Collection (WOA 2873).

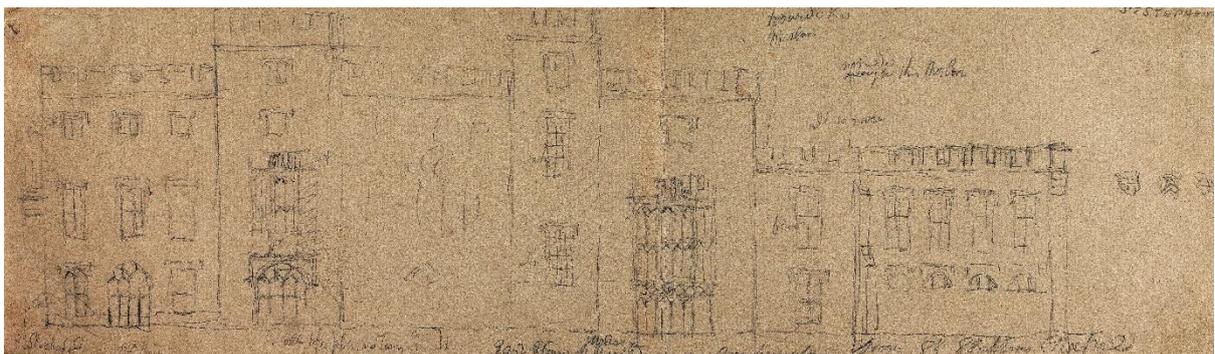


Fig. 2.18: John Carter, *East View of Modern Buildings in Continuation from St Stephen's Chapel*, 1800, watercolour on paper, 711 x 591mm. New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1977.14.22464.

The massing of the East façade is clearly a development from Wyatt's small castle houses of the 1790s. He cleverly achieves a Picturesque effect even within a limited space, through his

arrangement of asymmetrical, overlapping towers with varying heights, depths and window arrangements. A brief paragraph in *The Times* in March 1805, discussing Wyatt's external 'restoration' of St Stephen's Chapel, argues that his new Gothic detailing will "add extremely to the effect of the Speaker's House, and give it entirely the air of a grand old dwelling, of which the House of Commons will appear to be the chapel".⁶⁹² It is not clear who wrote this piece, nor whether this comment derived from direct conversations with Wyatt, but it seems likely that this effect was intentional. The composition of Wyatt's last great Gothic country house, Ashridge, Hertfordshire, was comparable, in that a chapel was used as an "asymmetrical counter-balance" to the main block of the house; although in that case, the chapel was separated from the main block by a long, low wing.⁶⁹³ However, the decorative treatment of the Speaker's House façade is more collegiate than castellar: the simple crenellations and square-headed windows might have been lifted directly from the Magdalen College quadrangle. Whilst the façade is certainly austere, it is slightly less so than most of Wyatt's castle designs (except for the most elaborate, like Belvoir). The bow windows and pointed doorways on the ground floor bring a small touch of decorative enrichment. Moreover, Wyatt's interiors drew inspiration from cathedral architecture: as discussed below, the ante-room to the State Dining Room was modelled on the octagon of Ely Cathedral, whilst some of his seat furniture employed decorative motifs taken from Westminster Abbey.⁶⁹⁴

Clearly, then, Wyatt freely combined elements from a range of historical sources and building types. As discussed in the Introduction, antiquarian critics like Carter tended to view such archaeologically-implausible combinations as 'mistakes'.⁶⁹⁵ Victorian and early twentieth-century historians unconsciously perpetuated this tendency to judge the quality of Gothic buildings according to their archaeological accuracy.⁶⁹⁶ In light of Michael Hall's reassessment of Georgian Gothic architecture, it is clear that this traditional view of Wyatt's architecture now needs to be reevaluated.⁶⁹⁷ As Frew, Reeve and Lindfield have argued, Wyatt was capable of archaeological accuracy when the occasion demanded.⁶⁹⁸ Nevertheless, it should now be obvious that to judge Wyatt's work solely by this criterion is to fundamentally misunderstand his approach to architecture, whether Classical or Gothic. As Robinson puts it, his objective was "original modern architecture

⁶⁹² *The Times*, 28 March 1805, p. 3.

⁶⁹³ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 241–44.

⁶⁹⁴ See pp. 162 and 166–68 of this thesis.

⁶⁹⁵ See p. 23 of this thesis.

⁶⁹⁶ See p. 23 of this thesis.

⁶⁹⁷ M. Hall (ed.), *Gothic Architecture and its Meanings, 1550–1830* (London: The Georgian Group, 2002), pp. 11–14. See also p. 23 of this thesis.

⁶⁹⁸ J. Frew, "Gothic in Transition: Wyatt and Bernasconi at New College Chapel, Oxford, 1788–94", *The Burlington Magazine* 126 (1984), pp. 683–89; Reeve and Lindfield, "A Child of Strawberry", pp. 836–42.

based on thorough knowledge of the sources and precedents”, be they Classical or medieval.⁶⁹⁹ This was perfectly consistent with the approach that Neoclassical architects had already applied to Classical architecture.⁷⁰⁰ Indeed, this philosophy was explicitly articulated during Wyatt’s lifetime by his friend and occasional collaborator, Humphry Repton: in an 1803 publication he used the label “Modern Gothic” to describe Wyatt’s style.⁷⁰¹ Nevertheless, Wyatt’s work at Westminster has hitherto struggled to escape the long shadow of Victorian architectural prejudice.⁷⁰² Previous historians have argued that Wyatt’s Gothic vision for Westminster was not “serious”; but it is, in fact, possible to interpret it as a bold, inventive, considered attempt to adapt historic architectural sources and produce an original building which would serve his clients’ needs.⁷⁰³

In contrast to the prominent east front, the north front of the house, and St Stephen’s Court, are very poorly documented. The only known illustration is a sketch by Carter, probably drawn prior to his 1807 article in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* (Fig. 2.19). The original sketch is accompanied by numerous smaller drawings of architectural details squeezed in at the top of the page. For this thesis, these details have been digitally removed to give a clearer image of the façade itself. Its overall appearance is generally similar to the eastern façade, except for the introduction of mock buttresses. These serve the same aesthetic function as the towers on the river front, injecting movement and variety into what might otherwise have been a rather austere façade. They also provide visual continuity with the external wall of Westminster Hall to the right; the latter is now exposed following the removal of the former stables and coach house. On the opposite side of the courtyard—only faintly sketched by Carter—is the former Serjeant-at-Arms’ House, its ground floor now converted to house the new stables and coach house (note the large doorways). Just out of the frame to the left there would have been another small house, the residence of the Speaker’s secretary.⁷⁰⁴

⁶⁹⁹ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, p. 299.

⁷⁰⁰ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 41–42, 145, 299. For an overview of the philosophy of Neoclassicism see Summerson, *Architecture in Britain*, pp. 407–10.

⁷⁰¹ H. Repton, *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, 1803; cited in Robinson, *James Wyatt*, p. 298.

⁷⁰² See p. 23 of this thesis.

⁷⁰³ A. Fredericksen, “Parliament’s Genuis Loci: The Politics of Place after the 1834 Fire”, in Riding and Riding (eds.), *The Houses of Parliament*, p. 104.

⁷⁰⁴ Labelled thus on the 1807 Lee plan (Fig. 2.20).



Fig. 2.19: John Carter, *Speaker's Court, looking south* (with extraneous details digitally removed), c. 1810, ink and pencil on paper, dimensions unavailable. London: Westminster City Archives, Gardner Box 58, no. 34.

Turning to the interior layout, Lee's watercolours include a ground-floor plan of the whole palace, dated 1807 (Figs. 2.20, 2.21, 2.22). This appears to be an accurate record of the Speaker's House at this time; at any rate, no evidence can be found which obviously contradicts it. Unfortunately, it does not always provide specific room names, particularly in the service areas. Another plan of the house was published in Smith's *Antiquities of Westminster* (Fig. 2.23). Unfortunately, this is less detailed than the Lee plan, but it confirms that the Picture Gallery and Tapestry Room were located in the north range. There are no definitive plans for the first and second floors of the house, although there is an 1820s plan in the Soane Museum which shows the second floor of the former Speaker's Chamber above the cloisters (Fig. 1.13).⁷⁰⁵ However, by taking the earlier plan of the first floor shown in Chapter One (Fig. 1.9), and digitally editing it based on the aforementioned written sources, it has been possible to prepare a tentative plan of the first floors (Fig. 2.24). This can only be considered speculative, but it is sufficient to give a broad idea of how the space was utilised. Known alterations to the fabric of the building—namely Wyatt's new staircase in

⁷⁰⁵ The Speaker's Chamber is also visible on the 1834 Chawner and Rhodes plans of the old Palace (TNA WORK 29/25: Pre-fire Buildings: House of Commons: No. 5 Two Pair Storey [second floor] of the House of Commons Buildings).

the belltower, new partitions in the cloisters, and new bow windows—have been marked in red lines. These alterations are discussed in more detail below. The numbers in red refer to possible room names/uses which are also discussed below.

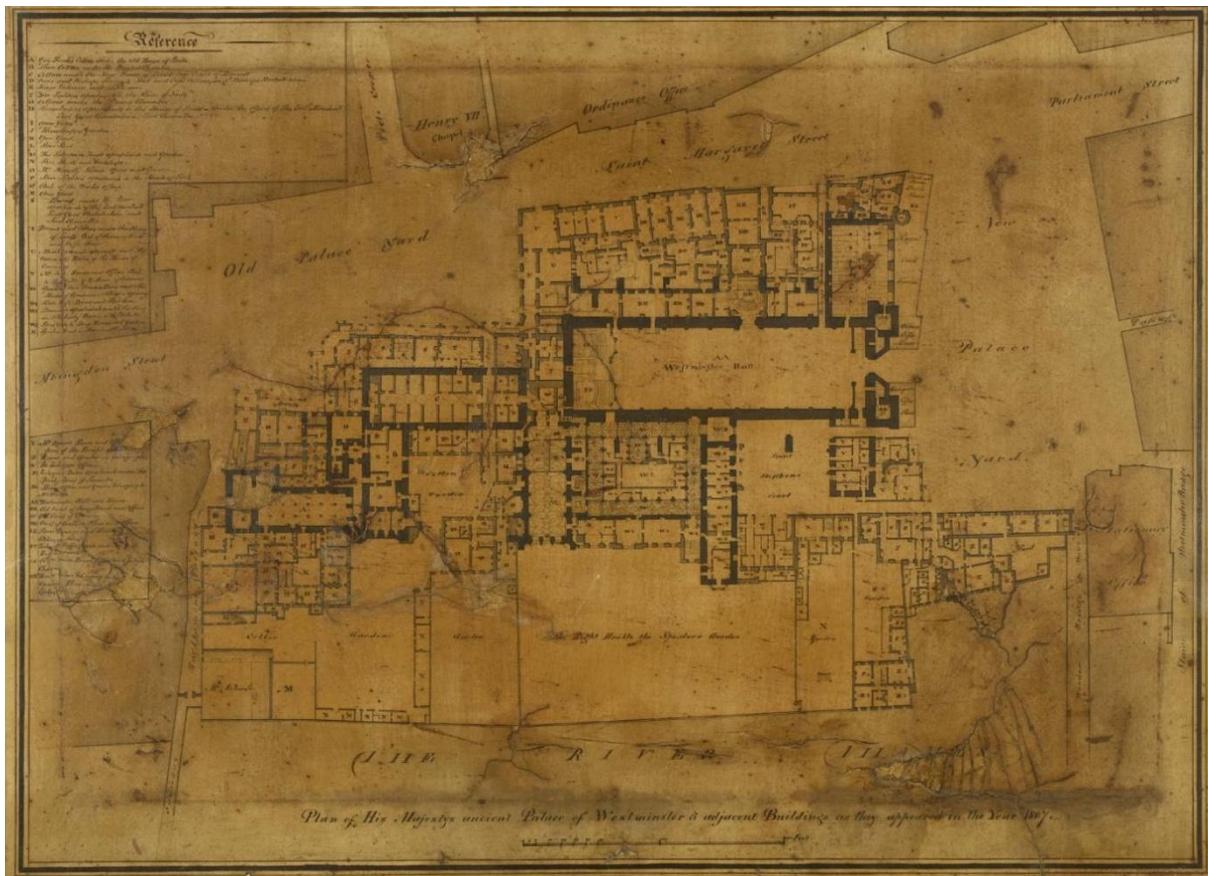


Fig. 2.20: Adam Lee, Plan of His Majesty's Ancient Palace of Westminster & Adjacent Buildings as they Appeared in the Year 1807, dated 1807. Ink on paper, 435 x 595mm. London: Museum of London, A15453.

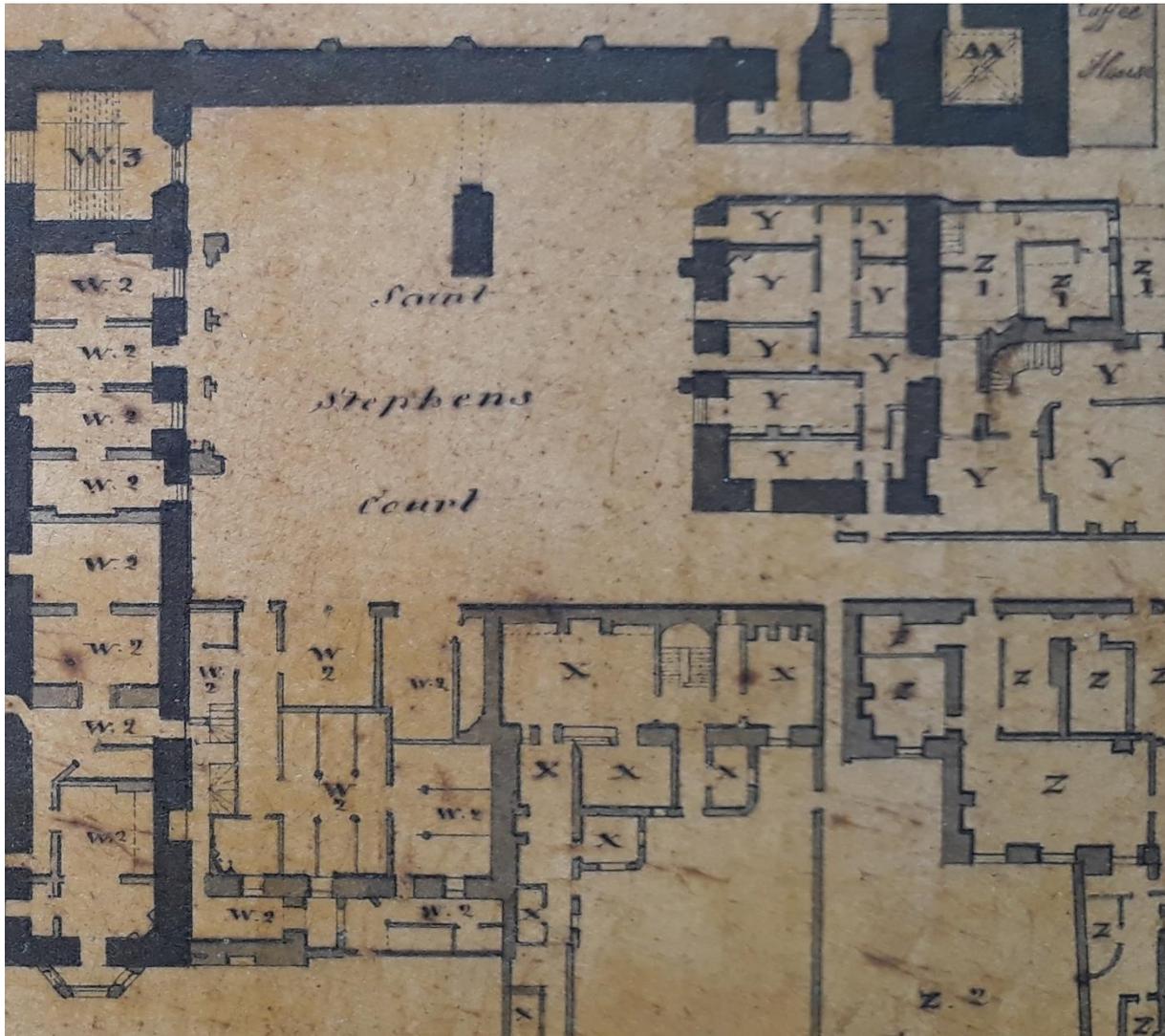


Fig. 2.21: detail of Fig. 2.20 showing (right to left): the Exchequer building, with carriage entrances cut through it; the Speaker's Secretary's House; the Speaker's Coach House and Stables; and the north wing of the Speaker's House.

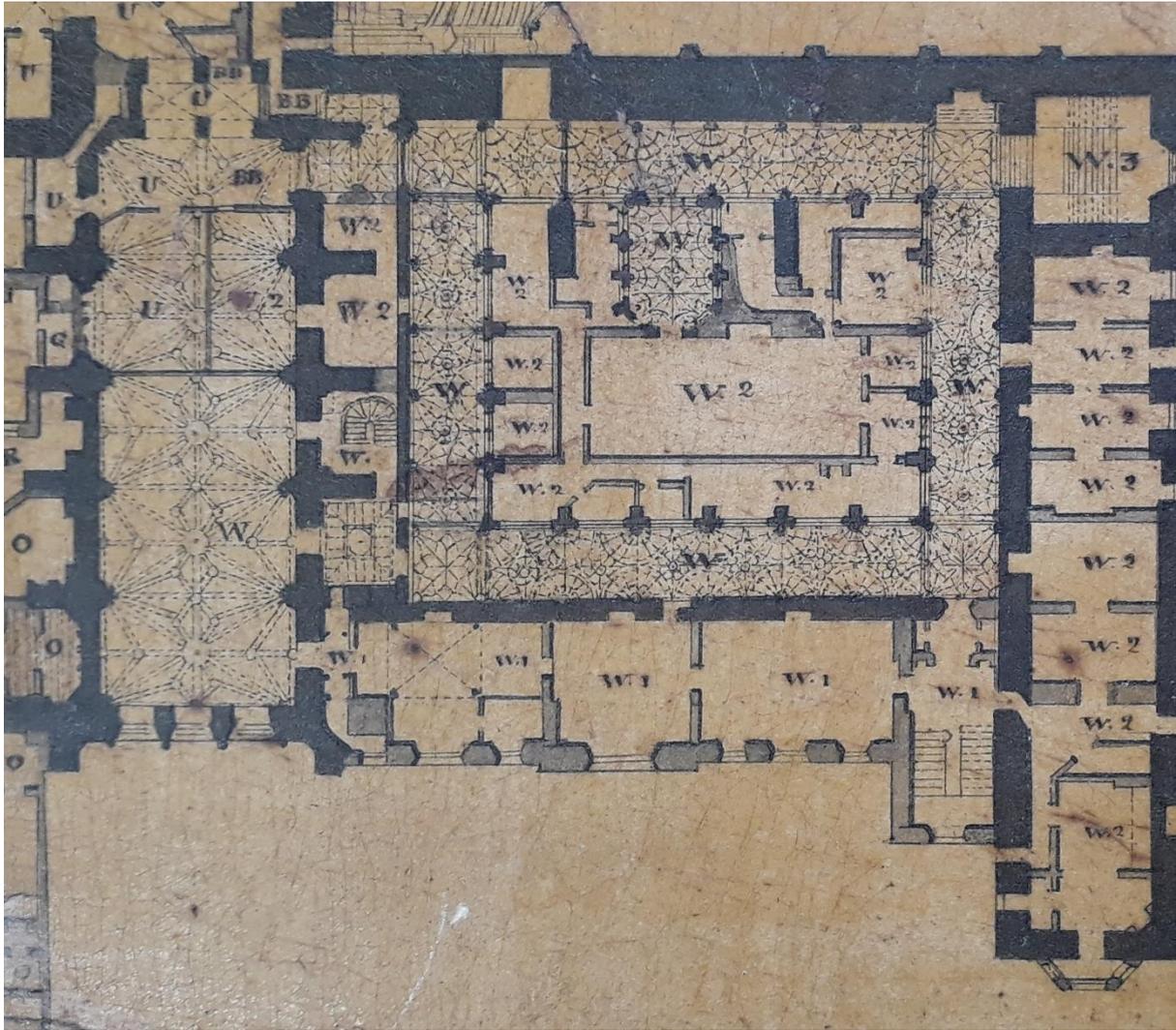


Fig. 2.22: detail of Fig. 2.20 showing the ground floor of the Speaker's House, with the cloisters in the centre and the State Dining Room to the left.

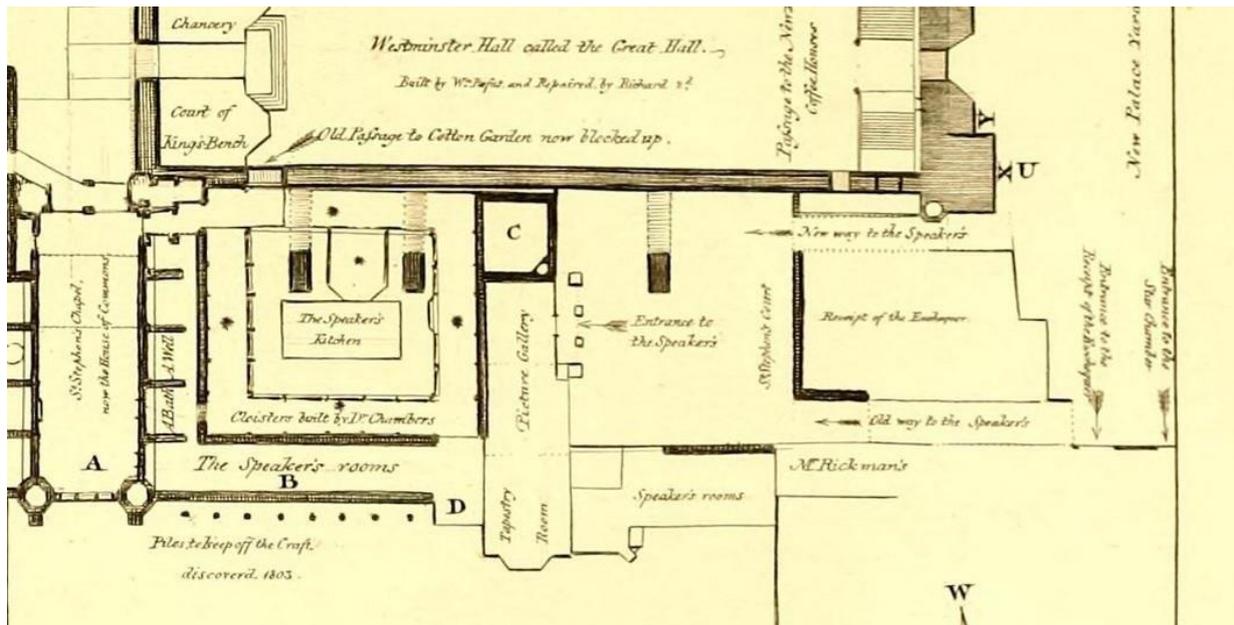


Fig. 2.23: J. T. Smith, Foundation Plan of the Ancient Palace of Westminster (detail), dated 1807. Published in *Antiquities of Westminster*, facing p. 125.

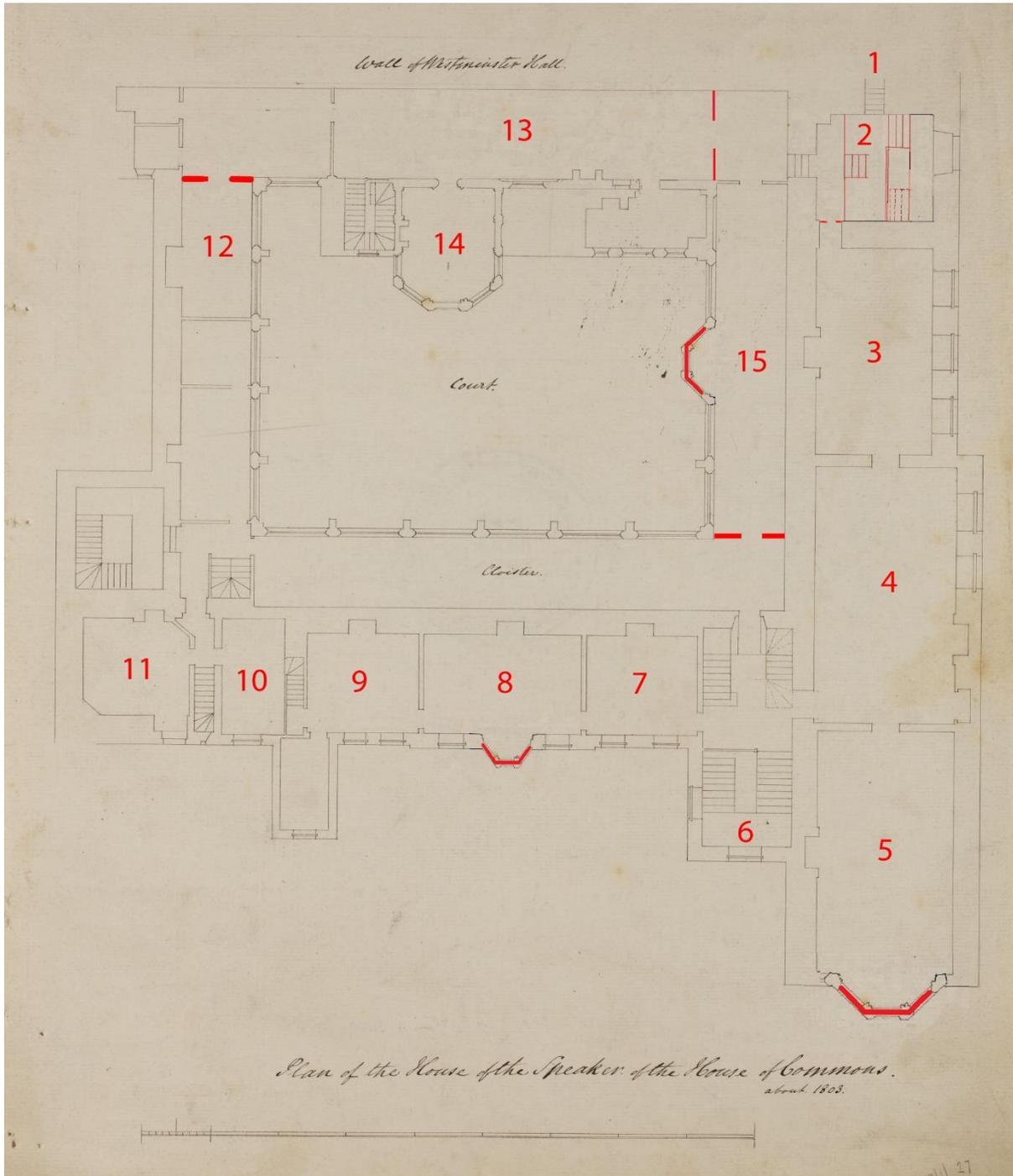


Fig. 2.24: speculative plan of the first floor of the Speaker's House after 1808, based on Fig. 1.9. Known alterations made by Wyatt (discussed in the text) have been marked in red. The numbers (red text) relate to possible room names/uses discussed in the text.

There is some doubt about the suggested layout of rooms in the eastern wing in Fig. 2.24. The 1808 inventory provides a numbered sequence of rooms which are described as being on the "south front"; but this must surely mean the eastern wing.⁷⁰⁶ The house had only two 'fronts', to the

⁷⁰⁶ LC 5/16, ff. 273–74.

north and east; the south side was immediately adjacent to the buttresses of St Stephen's Chapel. The Smith plan (Fig. 2.23) shows that the northern wing was occupied by the Picture Gallery and Tapestry Room; hence, the inventory can only be referring to the eastern range. (This was geographically south of the Tapestry Room, which may explain the description.) In Fig. 2.24 the Tapestry Room has been numbered 5, the adjoining staircase 6, and the rooms on the east front 7–11. The first room listed on the 1808 inventory is described simply as "South front next the stair case No. 1 Rm."; logically, this should be room 7 on Fig. 2.24.⁷⁰⁷ The following rooms are then listed as "No. 2 Bed Room", "No. 3 Bow Draw[in]g Room", "No. 4 Small Anti Room", and "No. 5 Breakfast Room"; logically, on Fig. 2.24 these should be rooms 8, 9, 10 and 11 respectively.⁷⁰⁸ However, the Neale watercolour (Fig. 2.16) makes clear that Wyatt's new bow window (marked in red on Fig. 2.24) was in the centre of the eastern wing. This means that the Bow Drawing Room must surely be room 8 on Fig. 2.23. Rooms 3, 4, and 5 on Fig. 2.23 are the Picture Galleries and Tapestry Room, as shown on the Smith plan (Fig. 2.23). Adjacent to the Tapestry Room is a staircase (numbered 6). Presumably, this was the principal staircase of the house before Wyatt's new staircase was built; it is shown on the 1794 Soane/Groves plan of the ground floor (Fig. 1.2). It is also visible on a manuscript version of J. T. Smith's plan, now in the Parliamentary Archives; on this version it is labelled "the Speaker's Common Staircase".⁷⁰⁹ It might also have been known as the "Old Stone Staircase"; the latter term is used in the aforementioned 1805 questionnaire, and it seems logical that this would have been referred to as the "old" staircase, as distinct from Wyatt's new one.⁷¹⁰

Wyatt's new staircase in the former belltower is numbered 2 on Fig. 2.24. Fortunately, Adam Lee produced two watercolours of this staircase, which clearly show its layout (Figs. 2.25 and 2.26). The history of these watercolours is fully discussed below. At this point, it is sufficient to note that there is a door visible on the western side of the quarter-landing. Presumably, this provided the exit to any temporary galleries in Westminster Hall (as discussed in Chapter One; marked 1 on Fig. 2.24). The south-facing view also shows that a partition and door had been inserted at the junction between the north and west ranges of the upper cloister. (The partition is marked in red on Fig. 2.24). Similar partitions were inserted at the eastern and western ends of the north and south ranges of the upper cloister. These are visible in a third Lee watercolour, a section through the western range of the cloisters (Fig. 2.27). Again, this image is more fully discussed below. Unfortunately, the original image is now in a somewhat deteriorated condition; the image below has been digitally enhanced to

⁷⁰⁷ LC 5/16, f. 273.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 273–74.

⁷⁰⁹ PA HC/LB/1/32, "Westminster Palace, St Stephen's Chapel and the House of Commons" [unpublished MS] by J. T. Smith, n. p.

⁷¹⁰ PRO 30/9/14, box 3, ll. §.4.2. q (op. cit.).

try to make the details clearer. The final alterations marked on Fig. 2.24 are the new bow windows in the Tapestry Room (numbered 5) and the Speaker's Library (numbered 15). The former is clearly visible on the Neale watercolour (Fig. 2.16); the latter is referred to in Carter's 1807 article.⁷¹¹

⁷¹¹ Carter, "Pursuits" CX, p. 624.



Fig. 2.25: Adam Lee, perspective view of the south end of the Speaker's staircase showing part of the gallery leading to the Public Library, c. 1820s. Varnished watercolour on paper, 635 x 490mm. London: Museum of London, A15451.



Fig. 2.26: Adam Lee, perspective view of the north end of the Speaker's staircase, c. 1820s.
Varnished watercolour on paper, 635 x 490mm. London: Museum of London, A15452.



Fig. 2.27: Adam Lee, longitudinal section of the west cloister of St Stephen's Chapel (digitally enhanced), c. 1820s. Varnished watercolour on paper, 710 x 1260mm. London: Museum of London, A15455.

Very little information is available for the layout of the second floor. The only clue is an instruction in Abbot's 1802 memo to Wyatt, to provide "Upon the second floor: a compleat [sic] Suite of Rooms &c. for Nursery, and the grown up [sic] Children".⁷¹² The latter instruction was clearly intended to cater for future requirements, since Abbot's two sons were still young when he moved into the house.⁷¹³ It appears that there was also a third storey, at least on the eastern wing. The Neale watercolour (Fig 2.16) shows a very small window above the three main rows of windows in the southernmost tower. The Wyatt watercolour (Fig 2.17) also shows a garret window at the top of the tower containing the north-eastern staircase. Finally, Scharf's panorama of the palace after the 1834 fire, which depicts Wyatt's towers from the west, clearly shows that these towers had two rows of windows above the level of the upper cloister (Fig 2.28). Abbot's 1802 memo to Wyatt indicates that this floor was devoted to servants' bedrooms: it requests "Upon the third floor: Sleeping Rooms for the Men and Women Servants with separate Stair Cases".⁷¹⁴

⁷¹² PRO 30/9/14, II. §.4.2. o. (op. cit.).

⁷¹³ Abbot had two sons, born in 1798 and 1802 (Kingsley, "Abbot of Kidbrooke Park", n. p.).

⁷¹⁴ PRO 30/9/14, box 3, II. §.4.2. o. (op. cit.).



Fig. 2.28: George Johann Scharf, *Panorama of the Ruins of the Old Palace of Westminster*, 1834. Oil on canvas, 805 x 1400mm. London: Parliamentary Art Collection; WOA 3793.

Having established—so far as is possible—the interior layout of the house, it is now possible to step back and analyse the principles which guided Wyatt’s development of this plan. Of course, Wyatt had to take the existing structures of the cloister and undercroft as his starting point. Abbot seems to have recognised historic and aesthetic value of these buildings from the outset, and he evidently wanted to restore something of their original dignity. (Hence, he specifically instructed Wyatt to remove the scullery from the lower oratory.⁷¹⁵) However, if the cloisters were to be restored to anything close to their original form, then the options for their re-use would be limited: their long, narrow shape was not really suitable for use as bedrooms or drawing rooms. Of course, the principal uses of cloisters in religious establishments were as throughfares and as places to study. It appears that Wyatt now attempted to find the closest equivalents of these activities within a secular, domestic context. This would explain why two ranges of the upper cloister became ‘study’ spaces—the Speaker’s Library and the Speaker’s Secretary’s Office—while most of the remainder became corridors. In turn, these corridors provided a natural link between all the principal rooms of the house; and Wyatt evidently realised that this could be exploited to achieve Picturesque effects.

⁷¹⁵ PRO 30/9/14, box 3, II. §.4.2. o. (op. cit.).

The Picturesque demanded constant formal variety and irregularity, rather than uniformity.⁷¹⁶ In the field of landscape design, this idea had actually been appropriated from the earlier writings of Batty Langley, who famously argued that gardens should present “a continued Series of Harmonious Objects, that will present new and delightful Scenes to our View at every Step we take”.⁷¹⁷ In other words, gardens (or by extension, landscapes) should comprise of a series of distinct, varied scenes, rather than a single prospect that could be viewed all at once. Later, the Picturesque theorist Uvedale Price suggested that this approach might be applied to architecture as well. In his famous *Essay on the Picturesque* (1794), he argued that Classical buildings could not be considered Picturesque “till in ruin”, because their “chaste and noble style...does not admit of a number of sudden breaks and variations of form”.⁷¹⁸ By contrast, “Gothic buildings are full of breaks and divisions [...] the correspondence between the parts [...] being much less obvious than in Grecian [sic] architecture”.⁷¹⁹ Payne Knight had already adopted precisely this approach at Downton Castle (as discussed above); and it appears that Wyatt’s antiquarian critics were also coming to a similar conclusion by the late 1790s.⁷²⁰ Antiquary John Milner (1752–1826) had attacked Wyatt’s restoration of Salisbury Cathedral on the grounds that, by clearing away obstructions to create a single, unified vista of the building, he had destroyed its variety of spaces.⁷²¹ It seems likely that Wyatt would have been aware of these criticisms, and it is possible that his design for the Speaker’s House was directly influenced by them. At any rate, he clearly intended the Speaker’s House to function as a sequential journey with a series of distinct episodes. The cloisters became links in a chain of set-piece architectural experiences: the undercroft, the octagon, the coffee rooms, the grand staircase, the picture galleries and the Tapestry Room.

The easiest way to understand how Wyatt’s architectural sequence worked is to mentally walk through it. It is reasonable to assume that visitors to the Speaker’s House would usually enter through the ‘front door’ in St Stephen’s Court. They would then pass through the entrance hall and proceed straight ahead into the northern range of the cloister. The east end of this range, along with the whole length of the eastern range, continued to serve as a corridor to the state dining room, just

⁷¹⁶ M. Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989), p. 52; Hill, *Time’s Witness*, p. 65. See also D. Arnold, “Decimus Burton and the Urban Picturesque”, in D. Arnold (ed.), *The Picturesque in Late Georgian England* (London: The Georgian Group, 1995), p. 54.

⁷¹⁷ B. Langley, *New Principles of Gardening* (London: A. Bettersworth et al., 1739), pp. iii–ix.

⁷¹⁸ U. Price, *Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful*, vol. 2 (London: J. Mawman, 1810), p. 261. For further discussion of these issues see pp. 265–67, 269. The *Essay* was first published in 1794 (Summerson, *Architecture in Britain*, p. 473).

⁷¹⁹ Price, *Essay on the Picturesque*, pp. 261–62.

⁷²⁰ For discussion of Downton see pp. 108–09 of this thesis.

⁷²¹ Aspin, “Our Ancient Architecture”, p. 225.

as it had done in the 1790s.⁷²² If they followed this corridor to its end, they would then enter a small vestibule between the cloister and the undercroft. This vestibule must have been the “Saloon [... modelled on] the great octangular centre of Ely Cathedral”, mentioned by Carter in his 1807 article.⁷²³ The vaulted ceiling, with octagonal centre, is clearly marked on the 1834 Chawner and Rhodes plans of the ground floor of the palace (Fig. 2.29). The accompanying plan of the first floor (Fig. 2.30) also shows an octagon shape in this location, suggesting that the octagon was extended into the first storey to give additional height. However, it could not have functioned as a skylight because the Speaker’s Withdrawing Room sat on the second storey directly above it (Fig. 2.31). Although it may seem strange to use the name “Saloon” for such a small room, Wyatt’s Octagon at Fonthill Abbey was also described thus by Rutter.⁷²⁴ The octagon at the Speaker’s House was clearly on a much smaller scale; but it was nevertheless an integral part of Wyatt’s Picturesque sequence. Surprisingly, no visual record of it appears to have survived. Carter’s 1807 article provides the only known description: this tells us only that it was not an accurate replica of Ely; the design having been “put together ‘pon the simplifying plan”.⁷²⁵

⁷²² J. Carter (writing as “An Architect”), “The Pursuits of Architectural Innovation No. XXVI: The Ancient Palace of the Kings of England at Westminster, continued”, *Gentleman’s Magazine* 70:2 (1807), p. 723.

⁷²³ Carter, “Pursuits” CXI, p. 735.

⁷²⁴ J. Rutter, *An Illustrated History and Description of Fonthill and its Abbey* (London: J. Rutter, 1823), pp. 19–23.

⁷²⁵ Carter, “Pursuits” CXI, p. 735.

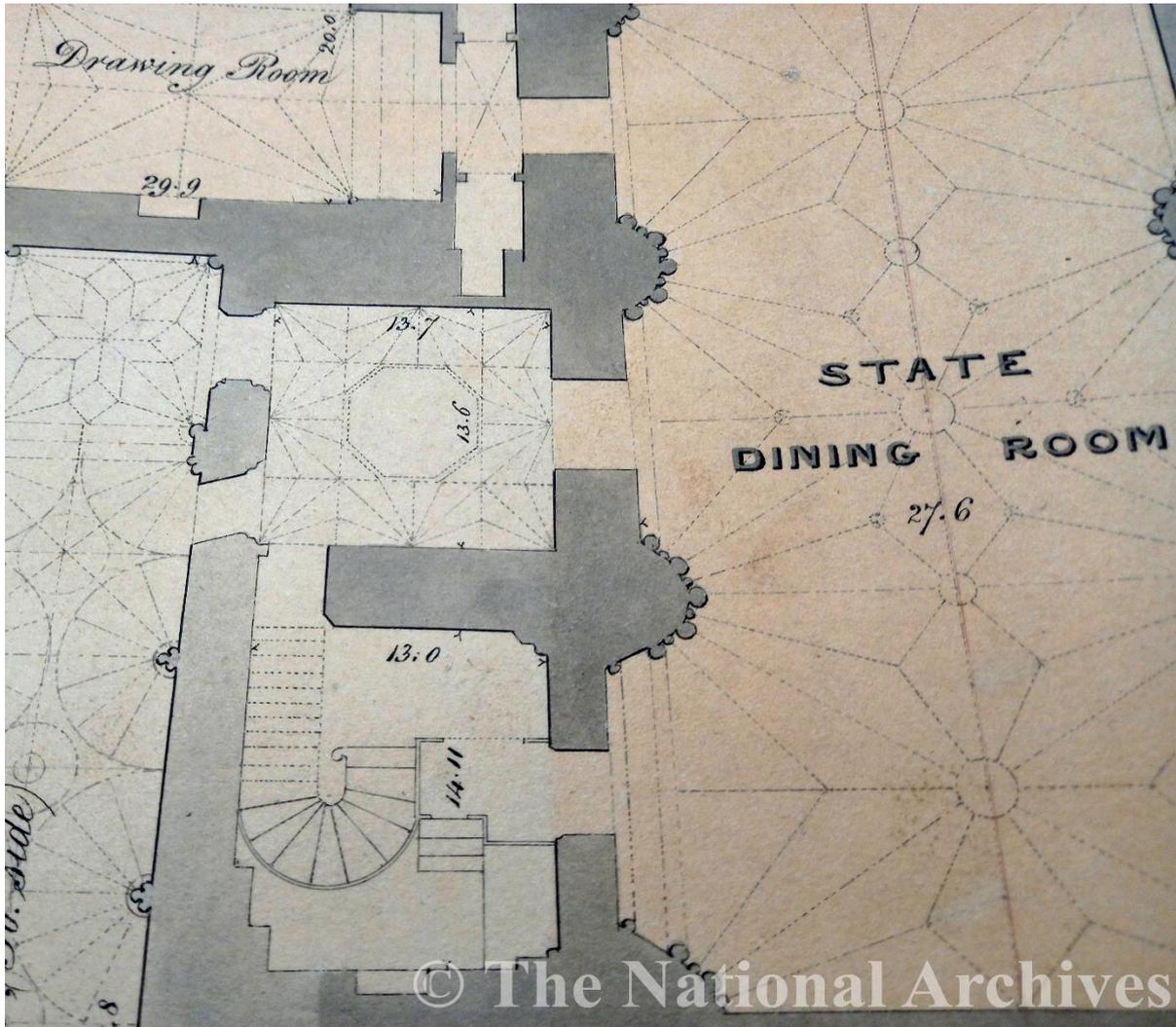


Fig. 2.29: Thomas Chawner and Henry Rhodes, Ground Story [sic] Offices of The House of Commons together with adjoining portions of The House of Lords and of other Public Buildings (detail), 1834. Ink on paper, dimensions unavailable. London: The National Archives (WORK 29/22).

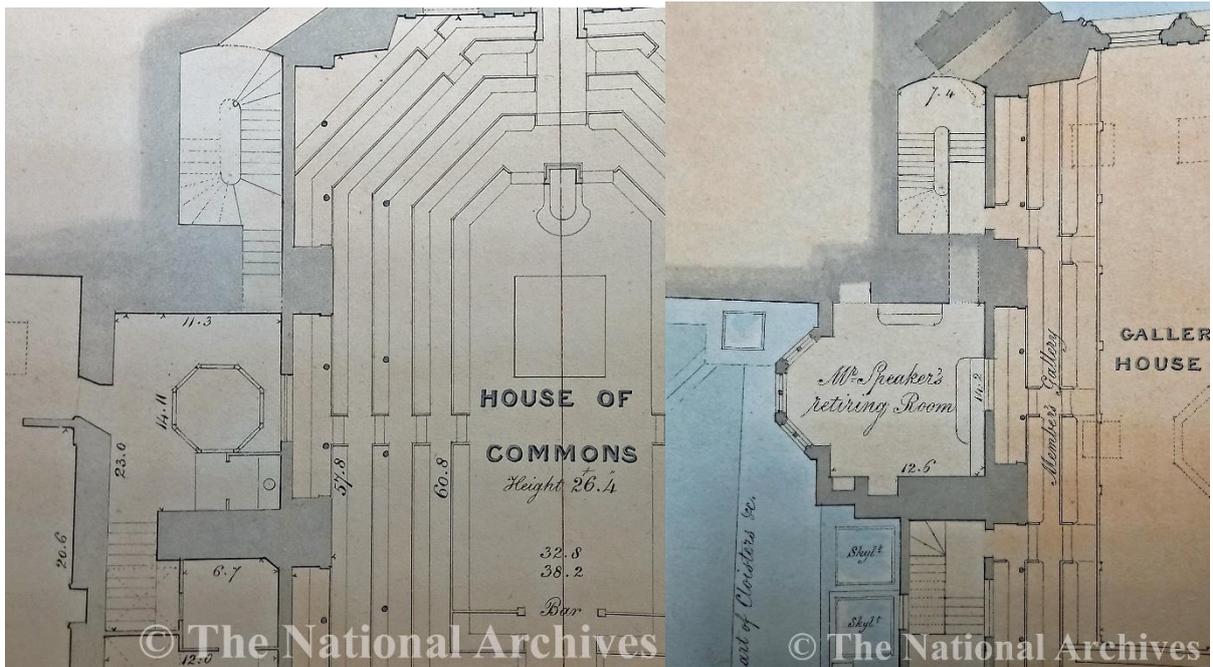


Fig. 2.30 (left): Thomas Chawner and Henry Rhodes, Principal Story [sic] of the House of Commons and appurtenant Offices, also of The House of Lords and portions of its Offices, together with adjoining portions of other Public Buildings (detail), 1834. Ink on paper, dimensions unavailable. London: The National Archives (WORK 29/23).

Fig. 2.31 (right): Thomas Chawner and Henry Rhodes, Two Pair Story [sic] of The House of Commons Buildings including adjoining portions of those of The House of Lords and of other Public Buildings (detail), 1834. Ink on paper, dimensions unavailable. London: The National Archives (WORK 29/25).

From the octagon, the visitor would pass into the State Dining Room itself. When the room was extended, the “Batty Langleyan” fireplace was moved onto the south wall; the windows on this wall were then blocked up.⁷²⁶ The room remained richly decorated: the east end windows were hung with scarlet cloth curtains, and the spandrels of the vault were covered with crimson broad-cloth.⁷²⁷ Indeed, black, red and gold seems to have been the overriding colour scheme for the house: red upholstery and black-painted or japanned furniture are much in evidence in the 1808 inventory.⁷²⁸ These colours are also prominent in the Lee watercolours of the staircase (Figs. 2.25, 2.26) already noted. The black japanned furniture was probably intended to imitate ebony: as Clive

⁷²⁶ Carter, “Pursuits” CXI, p. 735.

⁷²⁷ PRO 30/9/14, box 3, item II. §.4.2. n5: [Lord Chamberlain’s Office] Year Ending 5 July [1809] accounts and receipts; Carter, “Pursuits” CXI, p. 735.

⁷²⁸ For example, the inventory lists red leather chairs and sofas in the Coffee Room and upper cloister (LC 5/16, ff. 267, 271); scarlet tabby curtains in the State Apartments (ibid, f. 269); and black japanned furniture in the Oratory and Speaker’s Library (ibid, ff. 271-72).

Wainwright has explained, “turned ebony chairs were believed throughout the second half of the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth century to be of Tudor date and therefore entirely appropriate for the furnishing of ancient interiors”.⁷²⁹ This supposition is now known to be erroneous: Wainwright suggests that the misapprehension arose because Walpole saw a pair of ebony chairs at Esher Place, and mistakenly assumed them to be Tudor.⁷³⁰ Nevertheless, given the contemporary (mis)understanding of the origins of ebony furniture, Wyatt’s extensive use of lacquered furniture surely represents an attempt to bring an element of historicism to the furnishing, as well as the architecture, of the building. It also provides clear evidence that Wyatt’s approach to the interiors of the Speaker’s House owed at least some debt to Walpole. However, the house was not furnished exclusively with such pieces: as discussed below, other rooms employed furnishings which were explicitly described as “Grecian”.⁷³¹

It appears that guests usually retired to the state coffee rooms after dinner. Abbot’s aforementioned diary entry of 24 January 1808 mentions that the coffee room were brought into use on the night of his first parliamentary dinner that year.⁷³² A later newspaper report from 1829 also refers to “three coffee-rooms fronting the Thames, generally reserved for the use of the Speaker’s friends after his dinners”.⁷³³ These rooms could be accessed directly from the State Dining Room by passing through another doorway to the right (east) of the one through which they had entered (i.e., from the Octagon). The aforementioned newspaper report mentions three coffee rooms, and the Lee plan (Fig. 2.20) certainly shows that the eastern wing was divided into three rooms.⁷³⁴ However, the 1808 inventory only lists one “Coffee Room”, which suggests that two of the three rooms were known by other names. It is difficult to be certain which of the other room names listed on the inventory might apply to them. Nevertheless, it is significant that the Lord Chamberlain’s accounts refer to a suite of “3 Gothic Rooms”, with a subsequent reference in the same paragraph to a “Coffee Room”.⁷³⁵ This strongly suggests that the “Gothic Rooms” and the “Coffee Rooms” were one and the same. Regardless of their names, it seems likely that these three rooms were decorated and furnished as a Gothic ensemble, thus complementing the adjoining

⁷²⁹ C. Wainwright, “Only the True Black Blood”, *Furniture History* 21 (1985), p. 251.

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 250–51.

⁷³¹ See, for example, PRO 30/9/35, f. 100. For further discussion see p. 173 of this thesis.

⁷³² PRO 30/9/34, f. 225.

⁷³³ “The Speaker’s House”, *Morning Post*, 9 September 1829, p. 3.

⁷³⁴ Hugh Roberts argues that the Coffee Rooms were located on the first floor of the north wing, with the Picture Gallery and Tapestry Room being on the ground floor below them (“James Wyatt’s furniture for the Palace of Westminster”, *Furniture History* 39 (2003), p. 101). However, on the Lee plan the three rooms in the eastern range are clearly labelled as “State Coffee Rooms”, whilst those in the north range are labelled as “domestic apartments”, i.e., service rooms.

⁷³⁵ TNA: LC 9/368, Lord Chamberlain’s Department: Accounts and Miscellanea: Palaces: Ledgers: St James’s, Whitehall, Kensington (Princess of Wales), Cranbourne Lodge, Queen’s House; f. 108.

cloisters, undercroft and octagon. This theory is supported by the fact that the room nearest the undercroft appears to have had a vaulted ceiling: this is indicated on both the Lee plan, and the Chawner and Rhodes plans of 1834 (visible at the top left-hand corner of Fig. 2.29). Sadly, the official records give few other details of how the shells of these rooms were decorated, except for a reference in the Lord Chamberlain's accounts to "Gothic curtain pins".⁷³⁶ However, the 1808 inventory tells us that the "Coffee Room" contained two sofas, ten elbow chairs and fourteen single chairs, all in Gothic style.⁷³⁷ The Lord Chamberlain's accounts include payments for French stuffing six large Gothic sofas and twenty-six large Gothic chairs in the "3 Gothic Rooms".⁷³⁸ Roberts has established that a set of six sofas, twenty-six elbow chairs and thirty side chairs—all in Gothic style—was supplied to the Speaker's House in 1807.⁷³⁹ These were constructed by John Russell and upholstered by Charles Elliott. It is highly likely that some, or all, of the Gothic seat furniture in the Coffee Rooms was part of this set. Whilst the side chairs are not known to survive, five of Russell's sofas and twenty-three of the armchairs are now part of the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle (Figs. 2.32, 2.33). The sixth sofa is now at the Art Institute of Chicago.⁷⁴⁰ Very few items of furniture associated with the old Speaker's House are now known to survive; as such, these items provide a valuable insight into Wyatt's decorative scheme. However, Roberts notes that they have been reupholstered several times, and the frames are now completely gilded. Originally, they were upholstered in red Morocco leather, whilst the frames were Japanned, with the ornamentation picked out in gold: another indication of the overall red, black and gold colour scheme.⁷⁴¹ Whilst it is not clear where Wyatt found his inspiration for the decorative detail of the chairs and sofas, other items supplied by Russell and Elliott are known to have used architectural motifs from Westminster Abbey.⁷⁴² Roberts speculates that Wyatt may have chosen these motifs personally.⁷⁴³ This seems likely. Wyatt was a prolific furniture designer as well as an architect; and, as surveyor to the Abbey, he must have known its fabric intimately.⁷⁴⁴ This serves as a reminder that, whilst Wyatt freely combined and adapted details from many sources, his Gothic designs were based on extensive knowledge of genuine medieval architecture. (Frew, Reeve and Lindfield have convincingly

⁷³⁶ LC 9/368, f. 108.

⁷³⁷ LC 5/16, ff.267–68. Six of these chairs are referred to as being "in closet"; this may indicate that the room being described is the southernmost of the east range, in which a small closet is visible on both the Lee plan and the Chawner and Rhodes plans.

⁷³⁸ LC 9/368, f. 108b.

⁷³⁹ Roberts, "James Wyatt's furniture", pp. 101–05.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 108. Roberts also notes that two further armchairs were spotted in a London dealer's shop in the 1970s, but their present whereabouts are unknown.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 101–05.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 105–06.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 105–06.

⁷⁴⁴ Robinson, *James Wyatt* pp. 162–63, 247.

demonstrated this point in relation to other Gothic projects by Wyatt.)⁷⁴⁵ Moreover, his use of these details shows that he was considering the specific historical and architectural context of Westminster, and seeking to develop an interpretation of Gothic which was appropriate to both the building's location, and its purpose. In Vitruvian terms, Wyatt was—consciously or not—seeking 'propriety from prescription'.



Fig. 2.32: John Russell and Charles Elliott, settee, 1807. Gilt wood and velvet, 995 x 1990 x 700mm. Windsor: Royal Collection (28729). Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III 2023.

⁷⁴⁵ J. Frew, "Some Observations on James Wyatt's Gothic Style 1790–1797", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 41:2 (1982), pp. 144–49; J. Frew, "Gothic in Transition: Wyatt and Bernasconi at New College Chapel, Oxford, 1788–94", *The Burlington Magazine* 126 (1984), pp. 678+683-85+689; Reeve and Lindfield, "A Child of Strawberry", pp. 836–42.



Fig. 2.33 John Russell and Charles Elliott, armchair, 1807. Gilded beech, gilt bronze and velvet, 995 x 670 x 610 mm. Windsor: Royal Collection (28728). Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III 2023.

From the coffee rooms, guests could return directly to the east cloister and retrace their steps to the entrance hall. However, it would appear that Wyatt's Picturesque sequence comprised several stages, which could be used separately or in combination as required. This technique was commonplace in the "social houses" of the mid-eighteenth century, with which Wyatt would undoubtedly have been familiar.⁷⁴⁶ Moreover, it is certain that the Speaker's levées took place on

⁷⁴⁶ M. Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* (London: Book Club Associates, 1979), pp. 194–97.

the first floor of the house, because regular payments were made for the expensive carpet on Wyatt's staircase to be temporarily replaced on levée nights, presumably to minimise wear.⁷⁴⁷ Thus, it would appear that Wyatt's grand staircase should be interpreted as a part of a second phase of his Picturesque sequence, which was brought into use on levée nights, or on any other occasions when guests required access to the first floor. To reach the staircase, guests would continue along the north range of the cloisters. The western end of this range had previously been filled with service rooms, but the Lee plan shows that Wyatt had cleared them. At the end of the cloister, guests would turn right into the former bell tower, and ascend the grand staircase. Adam Lee was obviously impressed by this staircase, as he devoted two watercolours to it (Figs 2.24 and 2.25). These provide almost the only visual evidence we have for Wyatt's new-build Gothic interiors at the Speaker's House. As with the external façades, his treatment was restrained, perhaps even austere: the wall surfaces were left plain, the Gothic detailing being confined to the vaulted ceiling, window, doors and archways. This made a notable contrast to Wyatt's Gothic interiors for Lee Priory, where the walls and ceilings were enriched with extensive use of mouldings, the whole ensemble being painted and gilded.⁷⁴⁸ The Speaker's staircase is not totally devoid of decoration, however: the banister rail and the border of the carpet were decorated with a pointed-arch motif, a subtle means of 'Gothicising' them. These inventive Gothic references (along with the non-Gothic settle on the half-landing) reflect Wyatt's Neoclassical training, in which historical motifs could be freely adapted and reinterpreted. Carter dismissed the furnishings as "purely modern"; this was an unfair attitude, in light of the archaeologically-informed pieces discussed above.⁷⁴⁹ He also criticised the archaeological inaccuracies of Wyatt's architectural decoration: in particular, he noted that "flat Tudor arches" had been mixed with "other particulars [... in] the style temp. Hen. III".⁷⁵⁰ Yet the fact that Adam Lee took the trouble to produce such detailed and vivid images of this space strongly suggests that he thought it impressive, and that it would provoke interest among the visitors to his "Cosmorama".

In the south-facing watercolour, there is a doorway just visible to the east (viewing left), which would have led into the Picture Gallery and Tapestry Room. J. T. Smith's 1807 plan (Fig 2.22) portrays the Picture Gallery as a single space, but other evidence suggests that it was actually divided into two rooms. In 1824, when Abbot's own portrait was ready to be hung in the Speaker's House, he recorded in his diary that his successor intended to place it in "the first of the Picture

⁷⁴⁷ PRO 30/9/14, box 3, II. §.4.2. n5 (op. cit.) This carpet matches the description of the "Extra scarlet and brown Gothic pattern cut Wilton carpet body & border made up to fit Do." mentioned in the Lord Chamberlain's records (LC 9/368, f. 108). However, that carpet is listed under the "Gothic Rooms", rather than on the staircase. The 1808 inventory lists a "Claret Venetian carpet" on the "Grand Stair Case" (LC 5/16, f. 271).

⁷⁴⁸ Reeve and Lindfield, "A Child of Strawberry", pp. 837–41.

⁷⁴⁹ Roberts, "James Wyatt's Furniture", pp. 105–06.

⁷⁵⁰ Carter, "Pursuits" CXI, p. 734.

Rooms”.⁷⁵¹ The 1808 inventory lists the “State Aparts. 1 pair” (i.e., first storey) as “1st room”, “Centre room” and “Tapestry Room”, in that order.⁷⁵² Moreover, the list of items salvaged after the 1834 fire specifically refers to “Two Levee Rooms”.⁷⁵³ The Tapestry Room had moved since the 1790s, when it was apparently located in the north range of the cloister; Abbot’s 1802 memo to Wyatt indicates that he decided to move it at an early stage.⁷⁵⁴ In its new location the Tapestry Room represented the climactic culmination of Wyatt’s Picturesque sequence. Probably its most important feature was a portrait of the King, painted by the leading portraitist of the day, Sir Thomas Lawrence. This was installed in 1809.⁷⁵⁵ The portrait apparently depicted the King wearing his garter collar and parliamentary robes: a fitting choice for a portrait which was to hang in the Palace of Westminster.⁷⁵⁶ This portrait might possibly be identified with the one now part of the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle (Fig. 2.34), although this is not certain.⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵¹ PRO 30/9/37, f. 300.

⁷⁵² LC 5/16, ff. 269–70.

⁷⁵³ PA OOW 3, List of furniture preserved from the fire of the Houses of Parliament (1834), n. p.

⁷⁵⁴ PRO 30/9/14, box 3, ll. §.4.2. o (op. cit.).

⁷⁵⁵ PRO 30/9/34, ff. 271, 293, 381.

⁷⁵⁶ PRO 30/9/15, letters from Sir Thomas Lawrence to Charles Abbot: “Sat[urda]y the 4th”, year unknown [possibly February or March, 1809]; 8 January 1809; 17 January 1809; 29 January 1809; and 9 February 1809.

⁷⁵⁷ Only two Lawrence portraits of George III are known to survive; the other was commissioned for the City of Coventry. The Windsor portrait appears to match the details given in Lawrence’s correspondence with Abbot. However, Oliver Millar argues that it may have been painted by Lawrence as a gift from the King to Viscount Sidmouth (née Speaker Addington). See K. Garlick, *Sir Thomas Lawrence: a Complete Catalogue of the Oil Paintings* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1989), pp. 192–93.



Fig. 2.34: Sir Thomas Lawrence, *George III (1738-1820)*, 1809. Oil on canvas, 1723 x 1162mm. Windsor: Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 402405. Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III 2023.

The levée rooms were extravagantly furnished, but not entirely in Gothic style. The 1808 inventory lists cut-glass “Grecian” lamps, bronzed antique figures and vases, even “Grecian single chairs”. On the other hand, there were also “2 superb Gothic cheval screens”.⁷⁵⁸ This free combination of Gothic and classical pieces was perfectly in keeping with Wyatt’s “Modern Gothic” philosophy. His aim to was not to create an archaeologically-accurate Gothic castle but a comfortable, modern house with a confected patina of age. Mixing classical and Gothic elements assisted this illusion, by giving the impression of an old building that had been altered and adapted over time. Of course, in this case of the Speaker’s House, this was partly true; but Wyatt deliberately exaggerated the effect. More research is needed to ascertain the extent to which Wyatt used furniture to achieve similar effects in his other Gothic interiors. However, some of his Gothic houses are known to have contained a mixture of Classical and Gothic interiors: Sheffield Place, Sussex (c. 1775–87), one of his earliest Gothic houses, is one such example.⁷⁵⁹ Similarly, William Beckford used Wyatt’s Fonthill Abbey as a setting for an eclectic collection of furniture and artworks, ranging from Classically-inspired tapestries and vases to Persian and Chinese items.⁷⁶⁰ Perhaps the most telling evidence is a contemporary description of Lee Priory by topographer William Angus, who said the house conveyed “an idea of a small Convent, never attempted to be demolished, but partly modernized and adapted to the Habitation of a Gentleman’s Family”.⁷⁶¹ As discussed above, the Speaker’s House was a mixture of collegiate and castellar influences, and was probably not intended to be literally interpreted by viewers as a former monastic building; but it seems probable that Wyatt wanted to give an impression of gradual evolution over centuries.⁷⁶²

Returning to the top of Wyatt’s grand staircase, the final stage of his Picturesque sequence took visitors up the last, short flight of steps into the upper cloisters. To their left, they would have seen another doorway, giving entrance to the Speaker’s Library. Straight ahead they would have seen yet another door—visible in Lee’s watercolour—which opened into the western range of the cloister. This can clearly be seen in Lee’s watercolour section through the western cloisters (Fig. 2.27). In this section view, the foot of Wyatt’s staircase is visible at the bottom left, with the entrance to the upper cloister directly above it. At the opposite end of the upper cloister is the exit to the House of Commons’ lobby. Between them, three doorways are visible. On the left is the door to the Speaker’s private library. (The doorway to the picture gallery would have been out of the

⁷⁵⁹ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 219–20, 346.

⁷⁶⁰ Rutter, *Delineations of Fonthill* pp. 10, 29, 51–52.

⁷⁶¹ W. Angus, *The Seats of the Nobility and Gentry in Great Britain and Wales* (London, 1787–1815), pl. XLIII. Quoted in Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 222–23.

⁷⁶² See pp. 155–56 of this thesis.

frame to the left of this.) In the centre is the former upper oratory, now the Waiting Room. Presumably, anyone calling on business would wait here until the Speaker was ready to receive them, most likely in his Library. The final doorway on this floor led into the Speaker's Secretary's Office. This section view excludes the bookcases of the "Public Library", which would have lined the upper western cloister facing the windows.⁷⁶³ Unfortunately for the purposes of this thesis, Lee chose not to depict any of the contemporary furnishings in the visible rooms. The cloisters are presented as an empty space, probably because Lee wanted to give viewers a better idea of how they would have looked in their original Tudor form. On the other hand, Lee's depiction appears to show the embellishments which, according to Carter, Wyatt made to the walls: bare portions were enriched with new mouldings, apparently modelled directly on those in Henry VII's Chapel.⁷⁶⁴

Lee has also omitted the service rooms which remained in the western and southern ranges of the lower cloister (although they are labelled as such on his ground plan). Carter's description makes clear that—as per Abbot's request—the Housekeeper's Room had been moved into the Lower Oratory, replacing the Scullery. Carter specifically mentions that the doorway at the east end of the oratory was retained for easy access to the Kitchen; but this is not shown by Lee.⁷⁶⁵ Abbot's 1802 memos requested that a new Scullery be constructed immediately to the south of the former oratory, and a new wash-house immediately beyond this, just inside the south-west corner of the cloisters.⁷⁶⁶ The latter was necessitated by the removal of the wash-house from the belltower to make way for Wyatt's staircase. However, neither of these are shown by Lee.

There is another image which provides a tantalising glimpse of the furnishings of the cloisters at this time: a portrait of Abbot standing at his desk in the Speaker's Library (Fig. 2.35). The Lord Chamberlain's accounts record the supply of chairs and stools for the Library, which were "painted and japanned [with] ebony and ivory balls".⁷⁶⁷ The chair visible in the portrait matches this description. On the other hand, the portrait shows a conventional wooden desk, whereas in February 1806 Abbot had requested a "standing desk" from the Lord Chamberlain.⁷⁶⁸ Both the Lee section and the library portrait show the windows fitted with clear glass. This conflicts with Carter's account, which claims they were "stopped up to two thirds of their heights, and filled with opaque or ground glass, surrounding coloured ornamented compartments in the Roman or Grecian style".

⁷⁶³ PRO 30/9/35, f. 100.

⁷⁶⁴ Carter, "Pursuits" CXI, p. 734.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 734.

⁷⁶⁶ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §.4.2. o. (op. cit.).

⁷⁶⁷ LC 9/368, f. 108.

⁷⁶⁸ PRO 30/9/14, box 3, item II. §.4.2. gg: Application to Lord Chamberlain's Office for furniture: Lib[rary] steps, Desk, Screen, Lamps, Curtains, 6 February 1806.

This apparently produced a “sombre” lighting effect.⁷⁶⁹ It seems unlikely that Carter would have invented this detail; but in the absence of visual evidence, it is difficult for us to judge the resultant lighting effects. No doubt this alteration was intended to create a more dramatic atmosphere, in keeping with Wyatt’s Picturesque ideals.

⁷⁶⁹ Carter, “Pursuits” CX p. 625; and CXI, p. 733.

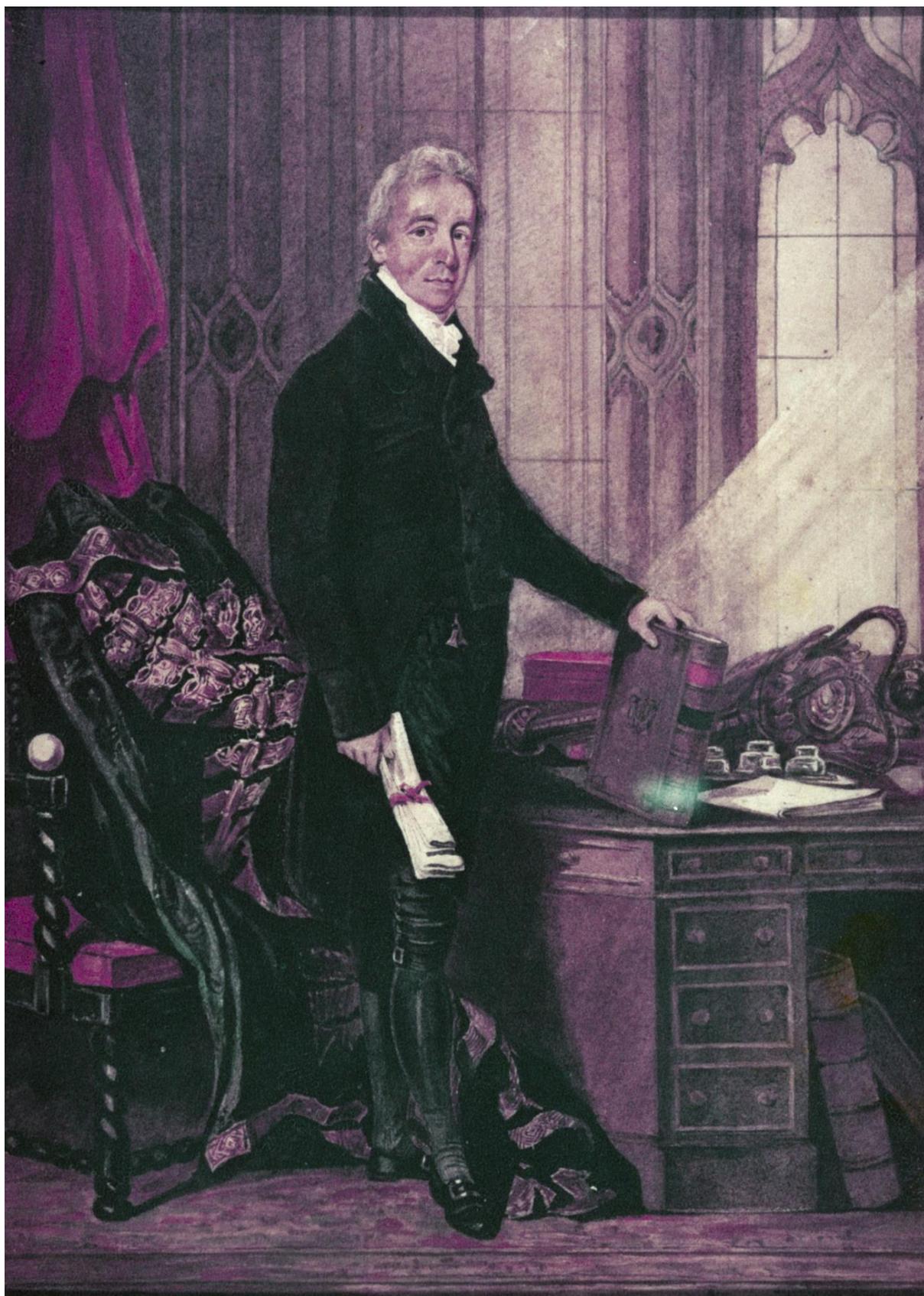


Fig. 2.35: S. J. Buck, *Charles Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester 1757–1829, Speaker, c. 1802–29*, date unknown. Watercolour on paper, 95 x 135mm. London: Parliamentary Art Collection, WOA 2393.

The direct exit from the upper cloister to the Commons' lobby—just visible at the right of Lee's section—meant that the Speaker's House could be used as a 'back entrance' to the Commons. This was useful both for the Speaker himself, and for any prestigious visitors who wanted a more discreet entrance than the public route through Westminster Hall. This augmented the Speaker's position as the ceremonial figurehead of the Commons: he received these distinguished visitors at his front door and effectively acted as their 'host' for the occasion. Direct access to the lobby had pragmatic uses, too: it enabled MPs to call on the Speaker's Secretary, or use the 'Public Library', without having to go through the Speaker's 'front door' in Palace Yard. However, the presence of the "Public Library" in the west gallery interfered slightly with Wyatt's grand processional route, particularly on ceremonial occasions. On at least one occasion (the visit of Princess Charlotte in 1812), the bookcases had to be removed to facilitate easier passage for an important visitor and their entourage.⁷⁷⁰ Another shortcoming of the "Public Library" was the lack of any obvious area for reading or working. It is not clear whether MPs were allowed to borrow items from the library and study them at home.⁷⁷¹ Either way, this illustrates the difficulties Abbot faced in trying to adapt a historic structure for his own needs, and helps us to understand why Wyatt adopted a pragmatic attitude to alterations.

As noted above, the first floor of the east wing probably housed the family's private rooms, including a bedroom, breakfast room and drawing room. It would certainly have made sense to isolate these rooms from the "Public Library" and Waiting Room in the upper west cloister. The Speaker's Library and his Secretary's Office would have formed a natural barrier to prevent MPs or other callers from straying into this part of the house. No information is available regarding the first floor of the former Serjeant-at-Arms' House during Abbot's tenure. However, the 1835 sale catalogue mentions a "coachman's bedroom over stable"; it is reasonable to assume that Abbot adopted the same arrangement.⁷⁷² The ground-floor service rooms of the house are also shrouded in uncertainty. The Lee plan appears to depict these rooms accurately; many of its details are confirmed by a later (c. 1820) plan at Westminster City Archives (Fig. 2.36). However, neither of these plans provide individual room names.

⁷⁷⁰ PRO 30/9/35, f. 194.

⁷⁷¹ It is possible that some working space was provided in the Waiting Room. According to the 1808 inventory (LC 5/16, f. 271) it was furnished with "A Black Japanned Table" and "8 Black Japanned Elbow Chairs". Moreover, a large mahogany table was salvaged from the oratory during the 1834 fire (OOW 3, n. p.); this has been identified with the surviving table, sometimes identified as the former Clerks' Table of the House of Commons, which remains in the present Speaker's House (PA ARC/VAR/123, draft catalogue of an exhibition commemorating the 150th anniversary of the 1834 fire, pp. 11–12).

⁷⁷² ARC/VAR/189, p. 87.

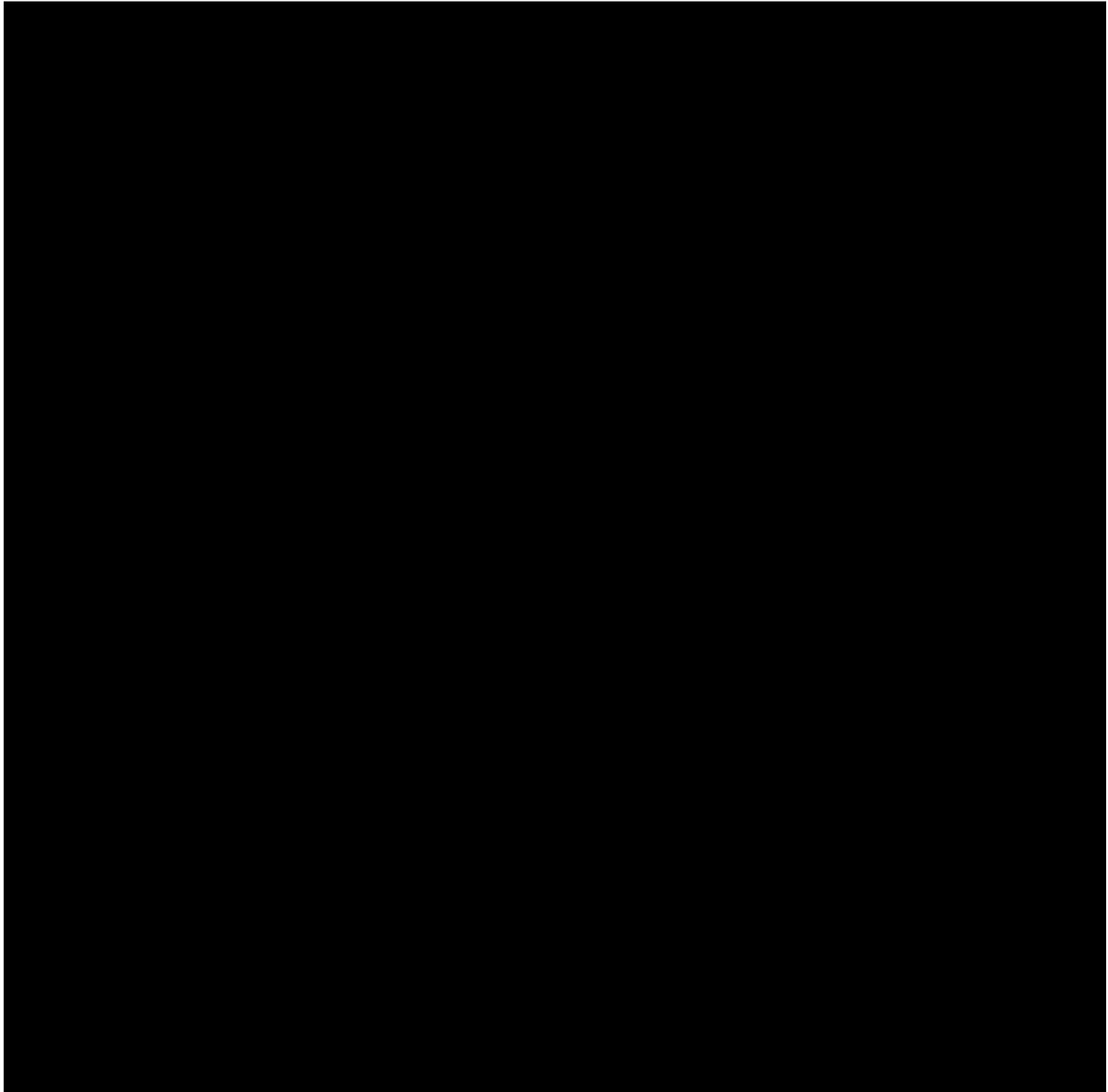


Fig. 2.36: Plan of Westminster Hall, The House of Commons, the Speaker's House as they now Stand, 1827. Ink on paper, dimension unavailable. London: Westminster City Archives, Gardner Box 56, no. 21.

Heraldry and Portraits

Whilst Wyatt undoubtedly played a major role in designing interiors and furnishings for the Speaker's House, it appears that Abbot made two important contributions on his own initiative. The first of these was the Speaker's portrait collection. In his 1803 diary summary, Abbot mentions that he had begun to collect portraits of previous Speakers "to be kept as heirlooms in the State

Rooms”.⁷⁷³ By 1807 he had collected twenty-five portraits.⁷⁷⁴ Abbot does not explicitly state his motives, but he surely intended these portraits to complement the Gothic architecture and furniture of the house, and create an aura of history and tradition around the Speakership. The inclusion of such illustrious Speakers as Sir Thomas More and William Lenthall supported Abbot’s political ambition to aggrandise the Speakership: they provided a gentle reminder of the Speaker’s constitutional role as a counterweight to monarchical power. His gift of the portraits as “heirlooms” for the house also bolstered his reforming credentials: it emphasised that the Speaker’s House was a long-term investment which would benefit future Speakers as well as himself. He probably hoped that this would help to deflect any criticisms of the large amounts of taxpayer’s money which had been spent on the house. However, the portraits were surely also intended to support Abbot’s personal agenda for social advancement. The portraits would have served as a substitute for the family portraits in a private house: they emphasised the antiquity of the Speaker’s professional lineage, and thus diverted attention from Abbot’s lack of personal lineage.⁷⁷⁵ Fortunately, these portraits survived the 1834 fire and they continue to decorate the Speaker’s House to this day.⁷⁷⁶ They provide one of the strongest elements of continuity between the new house and the old.

Abbot’s second contribution to the decoration of the house was—probably—heraldic decoration. Quite early in his Speakership, Abbot commissioned professional genealogist George Beltz to research the arms of past Speakers.⁷⁷⁷ By 1804 Beltz had produced an illustrated list, which survives in the Parliamentary archives.⁷⁷⁸ Admittedly, there is no definitive evidence of these arms being displayed in the completed house. However, among Abbot’s papers there is a list of past Speakers bearing the name and address of “Mr Sharp, herald painter”.⁷⁷⁹ This strongly suggests that Abbot had the arms painted onto panels for display in the house. This would have been quite in keeping with Abbot’s social objectives. Like portraits, heraldic displays were a common feature of country houses: they helped to emphasise their owners’ lineage. Such displays were already an established feature of eighteenth-century Gothic houses: they played an important role at

⁷⁷³ PRO 30/9/33, f. 181.

⁷⁷⁴ For the full list of portraits see Smith, *Antiquities of Westminster*, pp. 265–66.

⁷⁷⁵ For the history of dynastic portrait collections and their place in country houses, see S. West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 44–45; and S. Avery-Quash and K. Retford, *The Georgian London Town House: Building, Collecting and Display* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 5.

⁷⁷⁶ C. Riding, D. Church and C. Garibaldi, “The Speaker’s House”, in Riding and Riding, *The Houses of Parliament*, p. 203.

⁷⁷⁷ T. Woodcock, “Beltz, George Frederick”, *ODNB* <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/2071> [accessed 30/12/2022]. Beltz subsequently held the offices of Brunswick Herald (from 1814), Portcullis Pursuivant (1817–22) and Lancaster Herald (from 1822).

⁷⁷⁸ PA HC/LB/1/7: List of Speakers compiled by George Beltz for Speaker Abbot. See also PRO 30/9/14, box 3, item II. §. 4. 2. K4: notes of Speakers’ arms &c., 16 July 1804.

⁷⁷⁹ PRO 30/9/14, box 3, item II. §.4.2. i4: untitled document [list of past Speakers].

Strawberry Hill, for example.⁷⁸⁰ Heraldry also featured prominently in Wyatt's most famous Gothic mansion, Fonthill Abbey, which was under construction at the same time as the Speaker's House.⁷⁸¹ In both cases, Michael Snodin argues that the extensive use of heraldry was motivated by "genealogical insecurity" on the part of the owners, both of whom came from families that had only recently risen to national prominence.⁷⁸² In this sense, then, Abbot's use of heraldry was not unusual. However, what sets the Speaker's House apart is that the displays of heraldry were not based on his personal lineage, but on his professional lineage as Speaker. Beckford, for example, employed heralds (including Beltz) to identify his personal ancestors.⁷⁸³ No evidence has been found to suggest that Abbot commissioned any serious research into his own family; instead, he preferred to concentrate on establishing the details of previous Speakers. It is also noteworthy that the use of heraldry in the Speaker's House remains a living political tradition. Since the new Speaker's House was completed in 1859, the arms of all known Speakers up to the present have been displayed in its Corner Drawing Room and Dining Room (Fig. 2.37).⁷⁸⁴ It is quite conceivable that, like the portraits, this may be a tradition continued directly from the original Speaker's House.

⁷⁸⁰ M. Snodin, "Signs and Signification: Heraldry at Strawberry Hill", in F. Robertson and P. N. Lindfield, *The Display of Heraldry: The Heraldic Imagination in Arts and Culture* (London: The Heraldry Society, 2019), pp. 134–55.

⁷⁸¹ Rutter, *History and Description of Fonthill*, pp. 37–38.

⁷⁸² Snodin, "Heraldry at Strawberry Hill", pp. 134–35, 154–55.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 154–55.

⁷⁸⁴ A. Wedgwood, *Guide to the Speaker's House* (London: HMSO, 1994), pp. 15–20.



Fig. 2.37: the Crimson Drawing Room, [new] Speaker's House, Palace of Westminster, photographed in 2023. © UK Parliament/Estates Archive.

Aside from the portraits, however, no evidence has yet been found to suggest that Abbot collected antiques or historic artworks. As such, the Speaker's House does not, strictly speaking, fit Clive Wainwright's conception of the "Romantic Interior" of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Such interiors, according to Wainwright, were defined by extensive displays of historic artefacts; he makes a clear distinction from architect-designed interiors which employed predominantly new furniture, even if the latter was designed in historicist styles.⁷⁸⁵ On the other

⁷⁸⁵ C. Wainwright, *The Romantic Interior: The British Collector at Home, 1750–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 1–2.

hand, it could be argued that, in the case of the Speaker's House, the genuine (albeit altered) historic shells of the cloisters and the undercroft were, themselves, historic artefacts. Moreover, there is some evidence that Wyatt was attempting to use atmospheric effects, rather than just furnishings or architectural decoration, to give the house a historic character. At Strawberry Hill—which was cited by Wainwright as a “Romantic Interior”—Walpole famously used creative lighting effects in the Staircase Hall to create an atmosphere of “gloomth”.⁷⁸⁶ It would appear that Wyatt's use of stained glass in the cloisters (discussed above) was intended to achieve a similar effect. If so, it would appear that Wyatt and Abbot wanted the house to *feel*, rather than merely to *look*, historic. The Abbot-Wyatt interiors might not have been “Romantic Interiors” in the strict sense; but they were certainly informed by “a romantic self-consciousness of the significance of the Speaker in parliamentary history”.⁷⁸⁷ In turn, this emerging Romantic sensibility may help to explain Wyatt's “Modern Gothic” philosophy. As Rosemary Hill argues, Romanticism encouraged “a remarkably flexible attitude, by today's standards, to the concept of ‘authenticity’”.⁷⁸⁸ She explains that “what an object”—or, arguably, a building—“looked like and how it made one feel might count for as much as what, materially, it was”.⁷⁸⁹ The extent to which this Romantic sensibility had become established in British society by 1802 is debatable. Nevertheless, it seems clear that, to both Abbot and Wyatt, the overall visual effect of the house mattered far more than strict archaeological plausibility.

Reaction to the house

As explained in the Introduction, twentieth- and twenty first-century histories of Wyatt's work at Westminster have been strongly coloured by the writings of contemporary antiquaries, particularly John Carter.⁷⁹⁰ This is understandable, in view of the relative paucity of published source material relating to the house; indeed, Carter's articles in the *Gentleman's Magazine* constitute probably the most detailed contemporary descriptions of it. However, as noted above, recent scholarship suggests that Carter's strong antipathy to architectural ‘improvement’—in other words, to creative alteration and adaptation of historic buildings—was not necessarily representative of mainstream opinion in this era.⁷⁹¹ The history of Carter's career as a journalist, and his persistent public criticism of Wyatt's work, has already been explored by several historians; for the purposes of this thesis, it is

⁷⁸⁶ Wainwright, *The Romantic Interior*, pp. 97-100.

⁷⁸⁷ Riding *et al.*, “The Speaker's House”, p. 203.

⁷⁸⁸ Hill, *Time's Witness*, p. 4.

⁷⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 4

⁷⁹⁰ See, for example, Hill, “Proceeding like Guy Faux”, pp.26–61; Roberts, “James Wyatt's Furniture”, p. 99; C. Shenton, *The Day Parliament Burned Down* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 12–13, 23, 94.

⁷⁹¹ See pp. 122–23 of this thesis.

worthwhile to emphasise a few points.⁷⁹² Firstly, it must be acknowledged that Carter was not a lone voice. His regular columns in the *Gentleman's Magazine* would not have endured for as long as they did if there had been no readership for them. Nevertheless, the available evidence suggests that Carter's attacks on Wyatt did little, if anything, to damage the surveyor-general's standing among the wealthy political elites, who were his principal clientele. The roll-call of Gothic houses designed (at least nominally) by Wyatt during the 1800s is formidable. As well as showpiece commissions like Belvoir, Fonthill, or Ashridge, there were numerous smaller projects such as Bulstrode, Cassiobury Park, West Dean and Wycombe Abbey.⁷⁹³ Despite Carter's persistent campaign for archaeological accuracy, there was still a considerable market for Wyatt's "modern Gothic" designs—a point which previous historians of Wyatt's work at Westminster have generally overlooked. Importantly, the surveyor-general retained the confidence of George III, who commissioned the aforementioned restoration of Windsor Castle and the construction of the new, castellated Kew Palace during this period. Above all, the new evidence noted above, demonstrating Abbot's active role in proposing radical alterations to the historic fabric of the Speaker's House, clearly indicates that Wyatt's pragmatic approach to the restoration and adaptation of old buildings enjoyed the full support of his client.⁷⁹⁴ This, in turn indicates that creative adaptation of the former college buildings aligned perfectly with Abbot's objectives in remodelling the Speaker's House. Whilst the Speaker clearly wanted to root his new residence in history and tradition, he also wanted to create a comfortable, convenient and visually impressive space in which to live, work and entertain.

Despite his personal interest in history and antiquarianism, Abbot evidently had few compunctions about the destruction or alteration of historic features in the Speaker's House. In the long term, Wyatt's alterations to the cloisters and undercroft have proved far less contentious than his destruction of the St Stephen's Chapel wall paintings. Nevertheless, Carter was highly critical of Wyatt's alterations to the former bell-tower, an alteration which he claimed was unnecessary.⁷⁹⁵ Yet, as previously noted, evidence from Colchester Papers proves that it was Abbot, not Wyatt, who instigated these changes. It must also be remembered that Abbot initially supported Wyatt's astonishing suggestion to turn Westminster Hall into a giant *porte cochere* for the Speaker's House.⁷⁹⁶ A number of smaller features were also discarded during Wyatt's alterations, including an

⁷⁹² Hill, "Proceeding like Guy Faux", p. 256; J. Mordaunt Crook, *John Carter and the Mind of the Gothic Revival* (London: W. S. Maney, 1995); Dale, *James Wyatt*, pp. 121–25; Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 227–29.

⁷⁹³ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 219–44, 326–27, 349–50.

⁷⁹⁴ See p. 142 of this thesis.

⁷⁹⁵ Carter, "Pursuits" CXI, p. 734.

⁷⁹⁶ See p. 141 of this thesis.

oak door which was discovered behind later panelling when the State Dining Room was extended.⁷⁹⁷ As already noted, the extension of this room probably took place before Abbot became Speaker; indeed, he may have been in Ireland when the door was disposed of. Fortunately, Smith recorded the door before its destruction and published an image of it in *Antiquities of Westminster*. Interestingly, Abbot's notes on this book specifically query the fate of this door.⁷⁹⁸ This clearly shows that the Speaker had a genuine interest in the historic fabric of the buildings; but it is equally clear that he did not see his own alterations to the fabric as being incompatible with this interest. It should also be noted that not all antiquaries were as critical of Wyatt's work as Carter was. Joseph Nightingale dedicated Volume 10, Part 4 of Britton's *Beauties of England and Wales* series to Abbot, and explicitly praised his "exertions [...] to preserve and renovate the ancient architectural beauties of Westminster".⁷⁹⁹ This illustrates an interesting paradox which was no doubt caused, at least partly, by Abbot's social standing and the deference afforded to the Speaker. Nightingale appreciated the rebuilt Speaker's House, and gave Abbot the credit for it; Carter despised it, and gave Wyatt all the blame. Almost two centuries after Abbot's death, it is now possible to present a more balanced and critical assessment of his character; and, as set out in the Introduction, this thesis also attempts to move beyond nineteenth- and twentieth-century prejudices against Wyatt.⁸⁰⁰ On the basis of the new evidence from the Colchester papers, it is clear that both architect and patron(s) must take a share of responsibility for both the positive, and negative aspects of Wyatt's work at Westminster, particularly the Speaker's House.

Nevertheless, it is quite true that some MPs were openly critical of Wyatt's work: several of them vented their feelings during a Commons debate on the Westminster Improvements on 13 June 1808.⁸⁰¹ Other critics expressed their views in print, particularly through the correspondence pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Most of these criticisms were rooted principally in aesthetic concerns. During the 1808 debate, MPs avoided making any direct criticism of the Speaker's House, probably out of deference to Abbot (who was, of course, chairing the debate). However, they were forthright in their criticisms of Wyatt's newly-completed House of Lords offices. Of course, aesthetics are always, to at least some extent, subjective, and it was inevitable that Wyatt's work would not appeal to everyone. However, some of these critics alluded specifically to Wyatt's choice of style. For example, Charles Long condemned "the mock Gothic front of the House of Lords": "mock" is the

⁷⁹⁷ Smith, *Antiquities of Westminster*, p. 149. Smith did not offer a precise date for this door, but Hallam Smith identifies it as Tudor ("St Mary Undercroft, 1548–1870: "a dull sort of ecclesiastical lumber-room"?) (forthcoming)).

⁷⁹⁸ PRO 30/9/14, box 2, item I. §.1.1. a. (op. cit.).

⁷⁹⁹ Nightingale, *The Beauties of England and Wales* 10:4, p. vi.

⁸⁰⁰ See pp. 23–28 of this thesis.

⁸⁰¹ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 1st ser., vol. 11 (1808), cc. 863–65.

significant word here.⁸⁰² As we shall see in Chapter Three, Long would later play a significant role in opposing Soane's Neoclassical Law Courts at Westminster; hence, it is unlikely that he was objecting to the use of Gothic *per se*. Rather, his objection was that Wyatt's "mock" Gothic was not accurate enough. On the other hand, William Windham said the building "impress[ed] an idea of misery instead of grandeur".⁸⁰³ This implies that the Gothic style was inappropriate to an institutional context which required grandeur. Possibly he was alluding to the fact that Gothic was often deemed an appropriate choice of style for prisons in this era, because it was seen as intimidating and expressive of government authority.⁸⁰⁴ At any rate, Windham's objections can be put under the heading of 'propriety from prescription', whereas Long was objecting on the grounds of 'propriety from usage'.

Other criticisms were not concerned with style at all, but with the quality of the building's construction. Wyatt's use of stucco for the external façades attracted particular criticism. In June 1806 an anonymous correspondent in the *Gentleman's Magazine* condemned stucco as a cheap and nasty material, "composed [...] chiefly of street scrapings and other such rubbish".⁸⁰⁵ Interestingly, this correspondent specifically mentioned the Speaker's House in this letter, unlike the MPs in the Commons. It is certainly true that Wyatt's Westminster buildings were lightly built, and proved expensive to maintain. For example, a January 1813 abstract of bills details payments of over £1,000 to tradesmen working on the Speaker's House during the previous year (more than £70,000 at 2019 prices).⁸⁰⁶ Nor was this an exceptional year: a further £782 3s. 1d. was spent during 1815–16.⁸⁰⁷ For Soane—still smarting at the rejection of his own plans for Westminster—these constructional deficiencies became a convenient stick with which to beat Wyatt's designs. After Wyatt's death, he publicly condemned his Westminster buildings as "flimsy, paste-board erections", and claimed—correctly, as it turned out—that they presented a fire risk.⁸⁰⁸ Unfortunately, the available evidence is too limited to draw any firm conclusions about the extent to which opinions on Wyatt's choice of style were influenced by his poor-quality construction. If the façades had been executed in real stone, then some, at least, of the public criticisms of the Speaker's House might have been blunted.

⁸⁰² Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 1st ser., vol. 11 (1808), c. 864.

⁸⁰³ *Ibid*, c. 864.

⁸⁰⁴ Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, pp. 204–05.

⁸⁰⁵ Letter signed "A Lover of the Antient [sic] Architecture of England", *The Gentleman's Magazine* 76:1 (1806), pp. 495–96.

⁸⁰⁶ PRO 30/9/14, Box 1, n. n.: The Right Honourable the Speaker's House: Abstract of Bills for the year ending Jan[uar]y 4 1813.

⁸⁰⁷ PRO 30/9/14, Box 1, n. n.: Expenses of repairs, ordinary or extra, at The Speaker's House, 5 April 1815 to 5 April 1816.

⁸⁰⁸ Soane, *Brief Statement*, pp. 18-19.

Yet despite these problems, there is evidence—hitherto neglected by historians—that the rebuilt Speaker’s House was received positively by several contemporary observers. Evidence from the Colchester Papers suggests that Abbot’s colleagues on the Westminster Improvements Commission were highly satisfied with Wyatt’s work. In September 1805, Groves reported to Abbot that “the comm[itt]ee are really delighted with the house”.⁸⁰⁹ Indeed, they were so impressed by the work that they apparently agreed to support further funding for the project, despite the rising costs.⁸¹⁰ In 1808, shortly after the house was completed, Wyatt’s work received another vote of confidence when William Cavendish-Bentinck, 3rd Duke of Portland (1738–1809) sent his *valet de chambre* to “examine the furniture & fittings of the Gothic part of this house for the purpose of adopting the like in the new rooms now finishing at Bulstrode”.⁸¹¹ The Duke had been appointed Prime Minister the previous year, and his mansion at Bulstrode Court, Buckinghamshire, was yet another house being given a Gothic makeover by Wyatt at this time.⁸¹² Thus, the Duke must have been satisfied by the work at the Speaker’s House, and confident that Wyatt could replicate it for his own property. Perhaps the greatest tribute to the Speaker’s House can be found in the diary of William Wilberforce. After attending one of Abbot’s dinners in about 1810, he declared that it was “much the handsomest thing of its size I ever saw, and so say others who live in and see the most splendid houses”.⁸¹³ Indeed, the strongly-religious Wilberforce chided himself for being “intoxicated with the glitter and parade” of the occasion.⁸¹⁴ This, surely, is exactly the kind of reaction which the Speaker’s grand dinners, and Wyatt’s dazzling architecture, were intended to provoke.

The House in Use under Abbott

Despite the dramatic physical changes wrought by the rebuilding project, the evidence from the Colchester Papers suggests that the functions of the Speaker’s House remained broadly unchanged. In particular, it continued to host the Speaker’s regular social functions, most importantly the Parliamentary dinners and levées. During Abbot’s Speakership, the usual pattern was to host weekly formal dinners for about eight weeks from the start of the parliamentary session in January. Later

⁸⁰⁹ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, II. §. 4. 2. C5 (op. cit.) Although Groves does not explicitly name the Palace Yard Improvements Commission, given the reference to funding for the work it seems probable that he is referring to this body.

⁸¹⁰ Ibid: “we have the voice of the comm[itt]ee for the whole of the extent we ask; which I did not expect.”

⁸¹¹ PRO 30/9/34, f. 225. For Portland’s biography see D. Wilkinson, “Bentinck, William Henry Cavendish-, third duke of Portland (1738–1809)”, *ODNB* (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/2162> [accessed 27/08/2023].

⁸¹² Robinson, *James Wyatt*, p. 326. Wyatt rebuilt Bulstrode in Gothic style from 1805; but apparently the house was still unfinished in 1810. It was sold in 1811 following the 3rd Duke’s death. Thus, it is not clear whether Wyatt’s scheme was ever fully implemented.

⁸¹³ R. I. Wilberforce and S. Wilberforce, *Life of Wilberforce* (London: Seely, Burnside and Seely, 1843), pp. 323–24.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 323–24.

sources reveal that, by the early 1820s, it was considered customary for the Speaker’s dinners to be concluded before Easter (see Chapter Three and Appendix Two); it seems probable that Abbot followed this rule, although his diaries do not mention it explicitly. Typically, fourteen to sixteen parliamentary dinners were held each year, though the exact number varied. For example, in 1806 Abbot’s diary records that fifteen dinners were held between Saturday, 25 January and Sunday, 16 March.⁸¹⁵ Sometimes, consecutive dinners would be hosted on a Saturday and Sunday, whereas in other weeks only a single dinner would be held. In his end of year diary summary for 1816, Abbot noted that he had decided to discontinue Sunday dinners, citing poor attendance.⁸¹⁶

Abbot kept meticulous records of the numbers of dinners held and guests hosted during the early years of his Speakership, although this practice seems to have slipped in later years. The below table (Table 2.1), recorded in his diary in 1808, gives an insight into the scale of his entertaining over the previous six years. It suggests that the number of guests for each dinner was typically around twenty-five, though it certainly fluctuated. Interestingly, the total number of members invited each year—never more than 535—was somewhat lower than the total membership of the House, which was 658 after 1801.⁸¹⁷ This suggests that at least one hundred members were not invited each year, but it is not clear why.

Year	Number of dinners	Number of diners	Number excused	Total invited
1803	14	326	108	434
1804	14	358	70	428
1805	16	394	141	535
1806	15	329	131	459
1807	18	424	108	532
1808	16	364	104	468

Table 2.1: data of guests hosted at the Speaker’s parliamentary dinners, 1803–08.
Transcribed from TNA: PRO 30/9/34, f. 280

⁸¹⁵ PRO 30/9/34, ff. 18, 46. Easter fell on 6 April that year.

⁸¹⁶ PRO 30/9/35, f. 561.

⁸¹⁷ “Introductory Survey, 1790–1820, I. The Constituencies”, *History of Parliament Online* (1986), <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/research/surveys/surveys-1790-1820> [accessed 31/01/2023].

An earlier table, from 1804 (Table 2.2), gives a breakdown of the numbers of guests for individual dinners that year:

Dinner	Date	Dined	Excused	Total
1	February 4 th	24	1	25
2	5 th	20	4	24
3	11 th	22	2	24
4	12 th	18	8	26
5	18 th	23	4	27
6	19 th	28	2	30
7	25 th	24	6	30
8	26 th	25	5	30
9	March 3 rd	28	1	29
10	4 th	25	5	30
11	10 th	20	8	28
12	11 th	28	2	30
13	17 th	29	3	32
14	18 th	18	8	26
15	24 th	26	11	37
Totals		358	72	430

Table 2.2: data of guests hosted at the Speaker's parliamentary dinners, 1803–08. Transcribed from TNA: PRO 30/9/33, f. 370 (verso).

Not all members were keen on the Speaker's dinners. In February 1812, Abbot became so frustrated by Richard Brinsley Sheridan's repeated non-attendance that he stopped sending him

invitations. (Sheridan (1751–1816) was then MP for Ilchester.)⁸¹⁸ When Sheridan tactlessly enquired whether this snub was a “mistake”, Abbot replied that “Sheridan *having so often declined—or not come after he had accepted*, I was led to suppose the sort [sic] of Dinner was *disagreeable* to him”.⁸¹⁹ Part of the problem was that the Prince of Wales (later King George IV; r. 1820–30), a long-term political ally of Sheridan and the Whigs, was not always sufficiently respectful of the Speaker’s dinners.⁸²⁰ In January 1811, Abbot noted that

Sheridan told me to-day that the Prince of Wales had intended to give a dinner to him and all his parliamentary friends on Sunday next; but that my dinner would supersede that intention, as Mr Fox had decided long ago that the Prince's commands dissolved all other engagements *except* the Speaker's parliamentary dinners.⁸²¹

If true, it is highly significant that Fox considered the Speaker’s dinners to take precedence over royal ones. It shows the Speaker’s increasing stature as the figurehead of the House of Commons, and is evidence of the quasi-monarchical dignity proposed by Lummis and Laundry.⁸²² Nevertheless, Fox’s dictum was not always adhered to in practice. Despite his promise to the Speaker, Sheridan broke his engagement and dined with the Prince in January 1811.⁸²³ Nevertheless, incidents such as this appear to have been the exception rather than the rule: in general, the 1804 data suggests that the Speaker’s dinners were well-attended, with relatively few invitees asking to be excused.

It seems that the Speaker typically held five or six levées per year, usually in February and March. For example, in 1809, six were held; but in 1814, it appears that there were only four.⁸²⁴ Addington’s last levée was held on Sunday, 8 February 1802, but it is not clear whether Sunday remained the regular day during Mitford’s tenure, or during Abbot’s first months in the chair.⁸²⁵ From 1803 onwards, however, the available data suggests that the levées were always held on Saturdays. With a full suite of reception rooms available, Abbot could accommodate much higher numbers for the levées than for his dinners. Numbers of around sixty or seventy were typical, but

⁸¹⁸ R. G. Thorne, “SHERIDAN, Richard Brinsley (1751–1816), of no fixed address.”, *History of Parliament Online* (1986), <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/sheridan-richard-brinsley-1751-1816> [accessed 18/03/2021].

⁸¹⁹ PRO 30/9/35, f. 125.

⁸²⁰ Thorne, “SHERIDAN, Richard Brinsley”, n. p.

⁸²¹ Abbot, Charles, 2nd Baron Colchester (ed.), *The Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot, Lord Colchester, Speaker of the House of Commons 1802–1817*, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1861), p. 309 (emphasis in original).

⁸²² E. Lummis, *The Speaker’s Chair* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900), pp. 6–7; Laundry, *The Office of Speaker*, pp. 11–12.

⁸²³ Colchester, *Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot II*, p. 309.

⁸²⁴ PRO 30/9/34, f. 385 (verso); PRO 30/9/35, ff. 352, 354, 357.

⁸²⁵ PRO 30/9/33, f. 78.

attendance could fluctuate significantly. For example, on 14 February 1807, 122 people attended; by contrast, on 14 March only thirty-six visitors turned up.⁸²⁶ In Chapter One we noted that, on at least some occasions, the Speaker and Lord Chancellor held their levées on the same night. There continued to be some overlap during the 1800s, but the two events did not always coincide. For example, on 29 February 1812 Lord Chancellor Eldon held his first levée of the year, whereas Abbot was hosting his fourth.⁸²⁷ Abbot was sometimes frustrated in his efforts to co-ordinate with the Lord Chancellor. In 1807, Abbot wrote to Lord Chancellor Erskine “to fix our levée nights”.⁸²⁸ The two men agreed to hold their first levées on 6 February but, for some reason, Erskine unilaterally cancelled his event. Abbot blamed this for the low attendance of only 42 people at his own levée that evening.⁸²⁹ His frustration is understandable, as the levées involved a considerable amount of organisation, and expense. In 1808–09 Elliott, Son & Francis, the cabinet-makers, were paid £5 17s. 0d. for “Removing the lead weights & the stair carpet from the Grand Staircase & laying down the scarlet cloth 18 different times during the Levey’s” [sic].⁸³⁰

As well as his dinners for MPs, Abbot also held annual dinners for the parliamentary clerks and messengers. These took place at the end of the parliamentary session in July or August. It is not clear exactly when this tradition began. The earliest mention of them in Abbot’s diaries is in August 1803, when he simply noted that “The Clerks & Serj[ean]t at Arms &c. dined with me—17 in all”.⁸³¹ However, the following year Abbot hosted separate dinners for the clerks and the messengers, on 12 and 14 July respectively. On both occasions, he specifically describes the dinner as an “annual custom”.⁸³² Unlike the parliamentary dinners, there was no fixed day of the week for these events. Copies of the guest lists survive for the years 1812–15; these suggest that that typical attendance figures were 20–24 for the clerks’ dinners and 15–18 for the messengers’ dinners.⁸³³ The start times varied slightly over the years, and it appears that the messengers usually dined slightly earlier than the clerks. For example, in 1813 the clerks’ dinner began at 6pm, whereas the messengers’ began at 5pm.⁸³⁴ Abbot seems to have attached the same importance to these occasions as he did to the MPs’ dinners. In 1812, for example, he attended the clerks’ dinner despite feeling unwell, and was then

⁸²⁶ PRO 30/9/34 ff. 142, 165.

⁸²⁷ PRO 30/9/35, f. 125.

⁸²⁸ PRO 30/9/34, f. 135.

⁸²⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 229.

⁸³⁰ PRO 30/9/14, Box 3, ll. §.4.2. n5 (*op. cit.*).

⁸³¹ PRO 30/9/33, f. 205.

⁸³² *Ibid.*, ff. 429–30.

⁸³³ PRO 30/9/14, box 1, item ll. §. 6. 3. H: Speaker’s dinners, sessional, clerks and messengers.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.*, n. p.

too ill to go to church the next morning.⁸³⁵ Abbot's hospitality was generous: surviving menus for the 1812 and 1814 clerks' dinners suggest that two courses of about sixteen dishes each were the norm. The 1814 menu even included turtle soup, an expensive delicacy.⁸³⁶ To date, these dinners have been almost entirely neglected by historians, yet they have important implications for our understanding of the nature of the Speaker's role in this era. It is not clear exactly when the Speaker began to take managerial responsibility for the Commons' staff. In his 1781 book, Hatsell noted that the clerk of the Commons was still—officially at least—a crown appointment. In turn, the clerk appointed his own deputy and any other clerks “without doors”.⁸³⁷ Yet Abbot's diaries show that the Speaker was closely involved in the redistribution of the clerks' roles following the death of John Ley in 1814; and he successfully recommended his secretary, John Rickman, for appointment to the post of third clerk.⁸³⁸ Similarly, Abbot took a leading role in the appointment of a new serjeant-at-arms following Coleman's death in 1812. Again, the appointment officially had to be made by the Lord Chamberlain, but Abbot took it upon himself to seek the necessary authority for the deputy serjeant, Mr Clementson, to perform the serjeant's duties until a successor could be appointed. When the Regent proposed a Mr Tyrwhitt for the role, the latter asked Abbot to explain the duties and expectations of the role to him.⁸³⁹ Abbot might not have had the formal authority to appoint the Commons' staff, but it seems that he was taking an increasingly active role in their day-to-day management. By hosting annual dinners for the clerks and messengers, Abbot was firmly positioning himself as the leader and figurehead of the Commons' staff, just as he was the figurehead of the Commons' Members. Moreover, these dinners might be interpreted as a first step towards the Speaker accepting pastoral responsibility for the Commons' staff, something which has hitherto been understood as a twentieth-century development.⁸⁴⁰ Whilst it might be an exaggeration to describe these dinners as a pastoral duty in themselves, they suggest that Abbot showed a degree of concern for the wellbeing of his staff. Abbot's paternalism certainly had limits, however: there is no evidence that Abbot ever extended his hospitality to the labourers and craftsmen who worked on the reconstruction of the Speaker's House, even at the completion the project. Wyatt or Groves would occasionally dine privately with Abbot, however.⁸⁴¹

⁸³⁵ PRO 30/9/35, f. 172.

⁸³⁶ PRO 30/9/14, box 1, ll. §. 6. 3. H (op. cit.).

⁸³⁷ J. Hatsell, *Precedents of Proceedings in the House of Commons*, vol. 2 (3rd edition; London, T. Payne, T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1796), pp. 240–41.

⁸³⁸ PRO 30/9/35, ff. 371–75, 424.

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.*, ff. 95–96, 105.

⁸⁴⁰ M. Laban, *Mr. Speaker: the Office and the Individuals since 1945* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2013), p. 24.

⁸⁴¹ Abbot makes at least two references to dining with Groves in his diaries (PRO 30/9/34, ff. 288, 339). There is also an 1802 letter from Wyatt in the Colchester papers asking to be excused from a dinner engagement (PRO 30/9/14, Box 2, n. n.: letter dated 24 June 1802).

At the other extreme, the Speaker's House occasionally played host to the most distinguished members of society, including royalty. Wyatt's alterations undoubtedly made the house more distinctive and noteworthy, and it is perhaps no coincidence that there are more records of VIP visits during Abbot's tenure. On the other hand, the inherent advantages of the house—namely, its proximity to the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Hall—also remained important. Addington had benefitted from this proximity during the Warren Hastings trial; and when Westminster Hall hosted the impeachment trial of Lord Melville in May 1806, Abbot apparently had his own box to view the proceedings.⁸⁴² This proved a valuable asset: on 8 May, by prior request of the Prince of Wales, Mrs Abbot played host to Princess Charlotte (1796–1817) in this box. Abbot proudly noted that his wife was the only person to sit with the Princess during the trial, except for her two attendants.⁸⁴³ Afterwards, the women adjourned to the Speaker's house for "some refreshment in the Tapestry Room", whilst the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Clarence (later King William IV; r. 1830–37) "went all over the house – into the Oratory—Great Dining Room—Library—Picture Room &c. &c."⁸⁴⁴ The visit was evidently deemed a success, for on 30 November 1812 Princess Charlotte returned to the Speaker's House, accompanied by Princesses Elizabeth (1770–1840) and Mary (1776–1857), the Duke of Clarence, and the rest of her suite.⁸⁴⁵ This time, they had come to Westminster to see the Prince of Wales—who had been appointed Prince Regent the previous year—speak in the House of Lords at the opening of the session. Afterwards, Abbot records that "Mrs. Abbot received and entertained them with a *"dejeuner dinatoire"* ['lunch dinner'] of twelve covers in the tapestry room; they remained about an hour, having previously walked through my library and the lower apartments".⁸⁴⁶ Once again, the Speaker's House had created an opportunity for the Abbots to meet and network with the very highest in the land. Even these visits, however, were relatively low-key compared to the events of 1814, when the Allied Sovereigns visited London. On 22 April, the Grand Duchess Catherine of Russia visited the House of Commons to watch a debate, and entered the palace through the Speaker's House. Abbot was on duty in the chair at the time of the royal visit, so Mrs Abbot met the Duchess and her party when they arrived at the front door at 5pm. The occasion was treated with a degree of ceremony: the royal party processed through the house, preceded by the Speaker's secretary and trainbearer, and then into

⁸⁴² The British Museum holds a printed ticket for the trial, headed "The Speaker's Box" and signed by Abbot (J,9.116); they also hold a similar ticket headed "The Auditor's Box" and signed by Grenville (J,9.117). The latter is marked "Through the Speaker's House", presumably indicating the means of entrance.

⁸⁴³ Colchester, *Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot II*, p. 58.

⁸⁴⁴ PRO 30/9/34, ff. 83–84.

⁸⁴⁵ PRO 30/9/35, ff. 194–96. The Princess also watched the "Vauxhall Rowing Match" from the garden of the former Serjeant-at-Arms' House in August 1806 (PRO 30/9/15: letter from Rickman to Abbot, 12 August 1806).

⁸⁴⁶ Colchester, *Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot II*, p. 412.

the House of Commons, where they took their seats in the Gallery.⁸⁴⁷ Wyatt's processional routes through the house were probably designed specifically to cater for occasions like this. The Grand Duchess returned to the Speaker's House with the Tsar on 20 June, as recounted in the Introduction.

Aside from these formal occasions, the private life of the Abbot family continued. Abbot's second son, Philip, was born on 10 June 1802, and christened on 10 July. Abbot notes that the boy was "Christened in Palace Yard" by the B[isho]p of London; but the party probably travelled the short distance to St Margaret's Church rather than holding the ceremony in the Speaker's House itself. The child's Godfathers were Addington and Philip Yorke, 3rd Earl of Hardwicke (1757–1834), then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.⁸⁴⁸ Other guests who joined the Abbots for dinner after the ceremony included Catherine Osborne, Duchess of Leeds (1764–1837; widow of Abbot's early patron, the 5th Duke of Leeds) and Richard Pepper Arden, 1st Baron Alvanley (1744–1804), the Chief Justice of the Common Pleas.⁸⁴⁹ This distinguished roll-call provides further evidence of Abbot's social ambitions and his successful networking during his early career. When they grew older, Abbot's children attended nearby Westminster School, and they occasionally used the Speaker's House as a venue for their own entertaining. On 20 June 1809 Abbot's diary notes that the "Ryder and Osborne children" were in the garden with young Charles.⁸⁵⁰ The grown-up Abbots also created opportunities to host their friends privately, in addition to the Speaker's official parliamentary functions. Their private dinner parties were smaller and more intimate than the parliamentary dinners, but they could still serve to reinforce important political connections. For example, on 14 June 1806 Abbot hosted Grenville, Lord Henry Petty (later 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne; 1780–1863), George Spencer, 2nd Earl Spencer (1758–1834) and Sir Samuel Romilly (1757–1818); these four had recently become prime minister, chancellor of the Exchequer, home secretary and solicitor-general respectively in the new "Ministry of All the Talents".⁸⁵¹ They were joined by Lady Spencer, Lord and Lady Hardwicke, Lady Anne Yorke (eldest daughter of the Hardwicks), and Mr and Mrs William Wickham.⁸⁵² This demonstrates that the Abbots' informal dinners allowed them to include wives and

⁸⁴⁷ PRO 30/9/35, f. 351.

⁸⁴⁸ J. M. Rigg and H. Rubenhold, "Yorke, Philip, third earl of Hardwicke (1757–1834)", *ODNB* (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30248> [accessed 27/08/2023].

⁸⁴⁹ D. Wilkinson, "Osborne, Francis, fifth duke of Leeds (1751–1799)", *ODNB* (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20876>; D. Lemmings, "Arden, Richard Pepper, first Baron Alvanley (1744–1804)", *ODNB* (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/634> [both accessed 27/08/2023].

⁸⁵⁰ PRO 30/9/34, f. 347.

⁸⁵¹ R. A. Gaunt, "Ministry of all the talents (*act.* 1806–07)", *ODNB*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/95330>; M. H. Port, "ROMILLY, Sir Samuel (1757–1818), of Russell Square, Mdx. And Tanhurst, Surr.", *History of Parliament Online*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/romilly-sir-samuel-1757-1818>. [Both accessed 06/04/2023.]

⁸⁵² PRO 30/9/34, f. 97.

daughters on the guest list, whereas the official parliamentary dinners appear to have been male-only affairs.

The End of Abbot's Speakership

Ill-health finally forced Abbot to resign the Speakership on 30 May 1817. He was almost immediately elevated to the peerage as Baron Colchester and granted a pension of £4,000 per annum for himself, and £3,000 per annum for his successor.⁸⁵³ As noted in Chapter One, his predecessor Mitford had been granted an automatic peerage upon his retirement from the Chair, despite the fact that there was no consistent tradition of ennoblement among his immediate predecessors. Fortunately for Abbot, his negotiations with the government regarding his retirement provision were handled by his old friend and mentor, Viscount Sidmouth (née Addington), in his capacity as Home Secretary. Having promised Mitford an automatic peerage, it would have been difficult for Addington to refuse the same honour for Abbot. Abbot's diaries are reticent about the subject, saying only that "the peerage was distinctly admitted".⁸⁵⁴ This is understandable: Abbot's diaries present a carefully-crafted self-image, and he would surely not have wished to appear grasping. It is also noteworthy that, upon his resignation, the government immediately recommended to the Prince Regent that Abbot should be ennobled; there was no prior debate on the subject in the House of Commons. This aroused some dissent once the decision was announced in the House; yet, such was the deference afforded to the Speaker's office, the opposition MPs insisted that their objection was only to the government's mode of proceeding, not to the peerage itself.⁸⁵⁵ Thus, Abbot escaped any serious controversy on this issue; and, despite his failing health, he could take satisfaction that his decades-long strategy for social advancement had been a total success. Not only was his own retirement now provided for, but he had secured a peerage for his heirs, and a generous financial provision for the first of them. Abbot had established his dynasty, and thereby secured the best possible life chances for his descendants. In so doing, he firmly established the Speaker's retirement peerage as a constitutional tradition.⁸⁵⁶ The Speaker's House had played a key role in helping Abbot to penetrate the closed circle of Britain's social elite. It enabled him to live in a manner befitting a prominent gentleman, and to play host to elite members of society, including royalty. Addington, of course, had also enjoyed these benefits; but Abbot was able to go further than his predecessor in exploiting architectural style and interior decoration to cement his place among the upper classes. Wyatt's Picturesque Gothic architecture created an aura of antiquity around the Speakership, whilst the

⁸⁵³ Wilkinson, "Abbot, Charles", n. p.; R. G. Thorne, "Abbot, Charles", n. p.

⁸⁵⁴ Colchester, *Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot II*, p. 616.

⁸⁵⁵ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 1st ser., vol. 36 (1817), cc. 884–88.

⁸⁵⁶ Laundry, *Office of Speaker*, pp. 117–20.

display of portraits and (probably) heraldry enabled Abbot to emphasise his professional lineage, thus diverting attention from his lack of familial lineage. The granting of his peerage was merely the final confirmation of Abbot's admission to the upper classes.

Wyatt's work at Westminster has traditionally been portrayed—to use Sawyer's phrase—as “an administrative and aesthetic debacle”.⁸⁵⁷ In light of the evidence presented above, there is a clear need for a more nuanced interpretation. Wyatt certainly had many critics in the 1800s, but the Speaker's House also provoked some very favourable reactions; it is reasonable to conclude that it was the most successful element of his Westminster works. It is also clear that Georgian attitudes to the conservation and ‘restoration’ of medieval buildings had not died out by 1808. Carter was vocal in his criticisms, but there is little evidence that his concerns were shared by the wealthy political elites who formed Wyatt's clientele. Indeed, Abbot was a highly-engaged patron who sometimes took the initiative in proposing major alterations to the historic fabric. It is difficult to draw wider conclusions about attitudes to architectural style at this time. Wyatt clearly judged that the Gothic style was appropriate for Westminster, and Abbot fully embraced this vision. Yet, surprisingly, until the 1820s few commentaries on Wyatt's Westminster work—whether favourable or hostile—specifically comment on his choice of style. Critics were generally more concerned about Wyatt's use of stucco than his choice of Gothic *per se*. Equally, there is no clear sense that Classicism was now considered *inappropriate* for Westminster, even among those who were favourable to Wyatt's Gothic work. The next chapter will show that attitudes had definitely changed by 1834. Wyatt had already passed into history by the time of Abbot's resignation: he died in a carriage accident in September 1813.⁸⁵⁸ Abbot, it seems, was unmoved: his diary for that year makes no mention of Wyatt's passing.⁸⁵⁹ Wyatt had not endeared himself to his client, but he had—eventually—delivered a house which amply fulfilled Abbot's social and political objectives. Together, Abbot and Wyatt had done far more than simply reshape the fabric of the building: they had firmly established the Speaker's House as a political institution. The final chapter will explain how, over the following eighteen years, Abbot's successor—and his wife—would consolidate this achievement.

⁸⁵⁷ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, p. 274.

⁸⁵⁸ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, p. 310.

⁸⁵⁹ PRO 30/9/35, ff. 262–64, 286–87.

Chapter 3: the Last Years of the Old Speaker's House, 1817–35

In contrast to Speaker Abbot's rebuilding project, the years 1817–34 witnessed relatively few alterations to the Speaker's House. It therefore seems reasonable to characterise these years as a period of continuity and consolidation. Having so recently undergone such a major reconstruction, it appears logical that the house would now be a low priority for further alterations. Moreover, the new Speaker, Charles Manners-Sutton (in office 1817–35), arguably had less to prove in social terms than either Abbot or Addington. Whereas those two had come from obscure middle-class families, Manners-Sutton was the son of the serving Archbishop of Canterbury, and a great-grandson of the 3rd Duke of Rutland.⁸⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Charles was, if anything, even more effective than his predecessors in exploiting the social potential of his official residence. Indeed, the house arguably reached its apogee as a social asset once Charles began his relationship with Ellen Home-Purves, whom he married in 1828. To an even greater extent than Addington or Abbot, Ellen was a social outsider, because of her marital history. Nevertheless, she would soon become—as Elizabeth Hallam Smith has put it—“a powerful, dominating and dramatic presence in the Palace of Westminster”.⁸⁶¹ Hallam Smith's research has already revealed much about Ellen's life and career; but this chapter will provide further analysis of the ways in which she exploited the Speaker's House to overcome resistance to her remarriage and carve a niche for herself among Britain's social and political elite. Meanwhile, debates around the future development of the Palace of Westminster intensified during this period. These discussions reveal much about contemporary attitudes to Gothic architecture; hence, it is in this era that the architectural impact of Wyatt's earlier work arguably becomes clearest. This chapter will begin by analysing the legacy of Wyatt's work and changing attitudes to stylistic propriety during the 1820s. It will then consider the changes made to the fabric and furnishing of the Speaker's House in this period, before considering the developing social and political role of the house under the Manners-Suttons. Finally, it will consider the demise of the old Speaker's House after the 1834 fire, and its influence on the design of the new Palace of Westminster.

⁸⁶⁰ W. M. Jacob, “Sutton, Charles Manners- (1755–1828)”, *ODNB* (2006), <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/17964> [accessed 08/04/2022].

⁸⁶¹ M. Takayanagi and E. Hallam Smith, *Necessary Women: The Untold Story of Parliament's Working Women* (forthcoming).

Wyatt's Gothic legacy

The Office of Works had been completely reorganised after Wyatt's death: the post of surveyor-general became a political appointment, and three "attached architects" were recruited to provide design expertise.⁸⁶² Wyatt's old rival, John Soane (knighted 1831), was one of them; he was given responsibility for the Palace of Westminster, along with several other buildings. His counterparts were John Nash and Robert Smirke (knighted 1832). They had no direct responsibility for work at Westminster, but Smirke was called on for advice in later years (as discussed below).⁸⁶³ Groves and Bacon died in 1811 and 1818 respectively.⁸⁶⁴ Edward Crocker II served as clerk of works from 1818 to 1829; Sydney Smirke then held the position until it was abolished in 1832.⁸⁶⁵ Thus, a new architectural team took the Speaker's House forward into its final phase; but they had no opportunity to implement any radical new ideas.

Abbot's carefully-crafted stylistic programme for the Speakers House—namely its Gothic architecture, furniture and decoration—remained largely undisrupted during Manners-Sutton's tenure. This, in itself, is testament to the success of the Abbot-Wyatt vision for the Speakership and the Speaker's House. What is striking, however, is that other MPs now began to realise that Abbot's historicising programme could be extended beyond the Speakership to embrace the entire institution of Parliament—or, at least, the House of Commons. Several major construction projects were undertaken at Westminster during this era, and Soane was able to deploy his preferred Neoclassical style for the interiors of some buildings, notably his Royal Entrance to the House of Lords (the famous "Scala Regia").⁸⁶⁶ Externally, however, all his buildings were ultimately forced to conform with Wyatt's earlier work.⁸⁶⁷ Given the earlier criticisms of Wyatt's castellated stucco façades, it might seem strange that MPs were now determined to perpetuate his vision of Westminster as a "whole mass" of Gothic buildings.⁸⁶⁸ This change in prevailing tastes might, in part, be due to a wider growth in popularity of Gothic architecture, although this is debatable. Peter Lindfield, for example, argues that Gothic was still "not particularly popular or approved of" in the early nineteenth century, despite the completion of several high-profile Gothic building projects—including Porden's rebuilding of Eaton Hall and Wyattville's alterations to Windsor Castle—during this

⁸⁶² From 1814–32 the post was held by Col. Benjamin Stephenson. H. M. Colvin (ed.), *The History of the King's Works*, Vol. 6: 1782–1851 (London: HMSO, 1973), p. 676.

⁸⁶³ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, pp. 108–10.

⁸⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 674, 676.

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 184–85, 674, 676.

⁸⁶⁶ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 387–416.

⁸⁶⁷ See pp. 204–08 of this thesis.

⁸⁶⁸ K. Garlick and A. Macintyre (eds.), *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, vol. 4 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 1249.

era.⁸⁶⁹ Either way, given the extent and visibility of Wyatt's work at Westminster, his architecture must surely have played a part in changing contemporary perceptions of the palace. Sawyer acknowledges that Wyatt's alterations "irrevocably altered the paradigm" for future work at Westminster; but he does not provide a detailed analysis of how, or why, public attitudes to style at Westminster shifted so dramatically after 1808.⁸⁷⁰ It is therefore worthwhile to step back from the Speaker's House and examine Soane's wider work at the palace during the 1820s. This will help to explain contemporary attitudes to stylistic propriety, and demonstrate how Wyatt's earlier work, including the rebuild of the Speaker's House, helped to shape these attitudes.

After 1815 there were four main priorities for new construction at Westminster. The first was for additional committee rooms; the second was to provide new libraries for both houses.⁸⁷¹ Abbot's "Public Library" in the cloisters had proved a valuable innovation, but it was never sufficient to house the Commons' large and growing collection of books and papers. Charles Manners-Sutton appointed the first Commons librarian, Benjamin Spiller, in 1818, effectively establishing the House of Commons Library as an institution.⁸⁷² The House of Lords followed suit by establishing their own Library in 1826.⁸⁷³ Charles initially appropriated a committee room to house the Commons Library, but there was a clear need for purpose-built facilities. The third priority was to erect a proper Royal Entrance for the House of Lords: Wyatt's 'temporary' wood-and-canvas structure still remained in place following the abrupt cancellation of his 1808 scheme. Finally, the 1821 Coronation banquet—the first such banquet for sixty years—had demonstrated the inconvenience of having to temporarily remove the Law Courts from Westminster Hall on such occasions. The government decided to resolve this problem by sanctioning the construction of new courtrooms to the north-west of the Hall.⁸⁷⁴

Soane had never given up on his dream of rebuilding the palace and, after losing his formal commission from the House of Lords in February 1795, he continued to produce a series of "unauthorised" new designs for the project.⁸⁷⁵ These proposals were purely speculative and,

⁸⁶⁹ P. Lindfield, *Georgian Gothic: Medievalist Architecture, Furniture and Interiors, 1730-1840* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2016), pp. 180–82

⁸⁷⁰ S. E. Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster: Civic Architecture and National Identity, 1789–1834* (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1999), p. 274.

⁸⁷¹ For the need for additional committee rooms see Colvin, *King's Works* 6, p. 527.

⁸⁷² Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 757–58; D. Menhennet, "The Library of the House of Commons: The First Sixteen Years," in H. S. Cobb (ed.), *Essays Presented to Maurice Bond* (London: HLRO, 1981), p. 44–45.

⁸⁷³ D. J. Johnson, "The House of Lords and its Records", in Cobb, *Essays*, p. 28.

⁸⁷⁴ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, p. 504.

⁸⁷⁵ For the context of Soane's "authorised" and "unauthorised" designs see "London: House of Lords, Palace of Westminster: unofficial (mostly domed) designs, 1793–May 1794 and after February 1795 (58)", *Sir John Soane's Museum Collections Online*,

arguably, never had any realistic prospect of being executed. On the other hand, they gave Soane more freedom to set out his ideal vision for the Palace as a whole, whereas the scope of his “authorised” proposals of 1794–95 was restricted purely to the House of Lords.⁸⁷⁶ Perhaps the most vivid expression of Soane’s vision is an undated perspective prepared by his assistant Henry Hake Seward (Fig. 3.1).⁸⁷⁷ In this view, none of the Palace’s medieval buildings are visible, except for the roofline of Westminster Hall. St Stephen’s Chapel and the Speaker’s House are entirely screened off from the river by the new, Neoclassical buildings and by lush vegetation beyond them. Of course, it is possible that this idealised view embodies a certain amount of artistic licence. It is also true that Soane was conscious of public opinion, and his public statements were always careful to acknowledge the historical importance of Westminster’s medieval monuments.⁸⁷⁸ Nevertheless, it is abundantly clear that Soane envisaged his new, Classical buildings—rather than the old, medieval ones—as the dominant architectural features of a remodelled palace.⁸⁷⁹

http://collections.soane.org/drawings?ci_search_type=ARCI&mi_search_type=adv&sort=7&t=SCHEME1308 [accessed 24/01/2023].

⁸⁷⁶ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 325–29.

⁸⁷⁷ For the attribution to Soane’s Office see *Sir John Soane’s Museum Collections Online*, <https://collections.soane.org/THES67418> [accessed 05/08/2023].

⁸⁷⁸ In his testimony to the 1833 committee on House of Commons Buildings, Soane described St Stephen’s Chapel as “a great national monument, that is the pride of the country” (*Report of the Select Committee on the House of Commons’ Buildings*, HC 269, 1833, p. 6). As Sawyer has shown (*Soane at Westminster*, pp. 687–88) Soane’s public statements regarding Westminster’s medieval buildings are sometimes disingenuous, and must always be treated with caution.

⁸⁷⁹ In *Designs for Public and Private Buildings in London and Westminster* (London: Priestley & Weale, 1828), Soane illustrates a similar concept, purportedly based on his 1794 designs, but viewed from the north-west (p. 25, plate 20). This envisages a similar treatment for the western flank of the Palace: i.e., screening off the surviving medieval buildings behind new, Classical ones. However, the purported “1794” date must be treated with caution. As Sawyer points out (*Soane at Westminster*, p. 746), Soane’s 1827 speculative scheme (discussed below) is dated 1794 but was certainly prepared much later.



Fig. 3.1: Office of John Soane: *Design for domed House of Lords with colonnade and with principal front facing the Thames: Perspective from the river with staffage (barge with sails, two rowing boats one with blue ensign)*, undated. Ink and coloured washes on paper, 568 mm x 1245 mm. London: Sir John Soane's Museum (SM (35) 16/3/16).

By the early 1830s, Soane's 'ideal' vision for Westminster had changed little, as witnessed by another speculative plan prepared by his office c. 1831 (Fig 3.2).⁸⁸⁰ It appears almost identical in its basic conception to the 1800 perspective; although, as Sawyer explains, in other respects it "clearly reflected needs and concerns of [the] post-1824" period.⁸⁸¹ Just like Seward's perspective, this plan would have presented a riverfront façade comprising two symmetrical blocks linked by a colonnade; this would have been achieved by constructing a large new building at the north-eastern corner of the palace, balanced by a reconfigured House of Lords complex to the south. The rows of round columns make clear that these buildings were intended to be built in a Classical style, just as in the 1800 proposal. The intended purpose of the new north-eastern building is not specified, but it would have entirely blocked the view of the Speaker's House from the river; indeed, most of the surviving medieval buildings would have been obscured, too. Soane was once again attempting to impose his Classical vision over the palace's medieval remains.⁸⁸²

⁸⁸⁰ For further commentary on this plan and the related SM (39) 5/3/35, see *Sir John Soane's Museum Collections Online* (<http://collections.soane.org/OBJECT7134> [accessed 14/03/2022]); and Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 750–51.

⁸⁸¹ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, p. 746. Sawyer does not give a date for this plan but *Sir John Soane's Museum Collections Online* (<http://collections.soane.org/OBJECT7134> [accessed 14/03/2022]) notes that it is drawn on paper watermarked 1831.

⁸⁸² For similar schemes (dated 1827) which would have preserved most of the medieval structures whilst encasing or screening them behind new construction, see SM 51/3/31 and SM (39) 5/3/35.

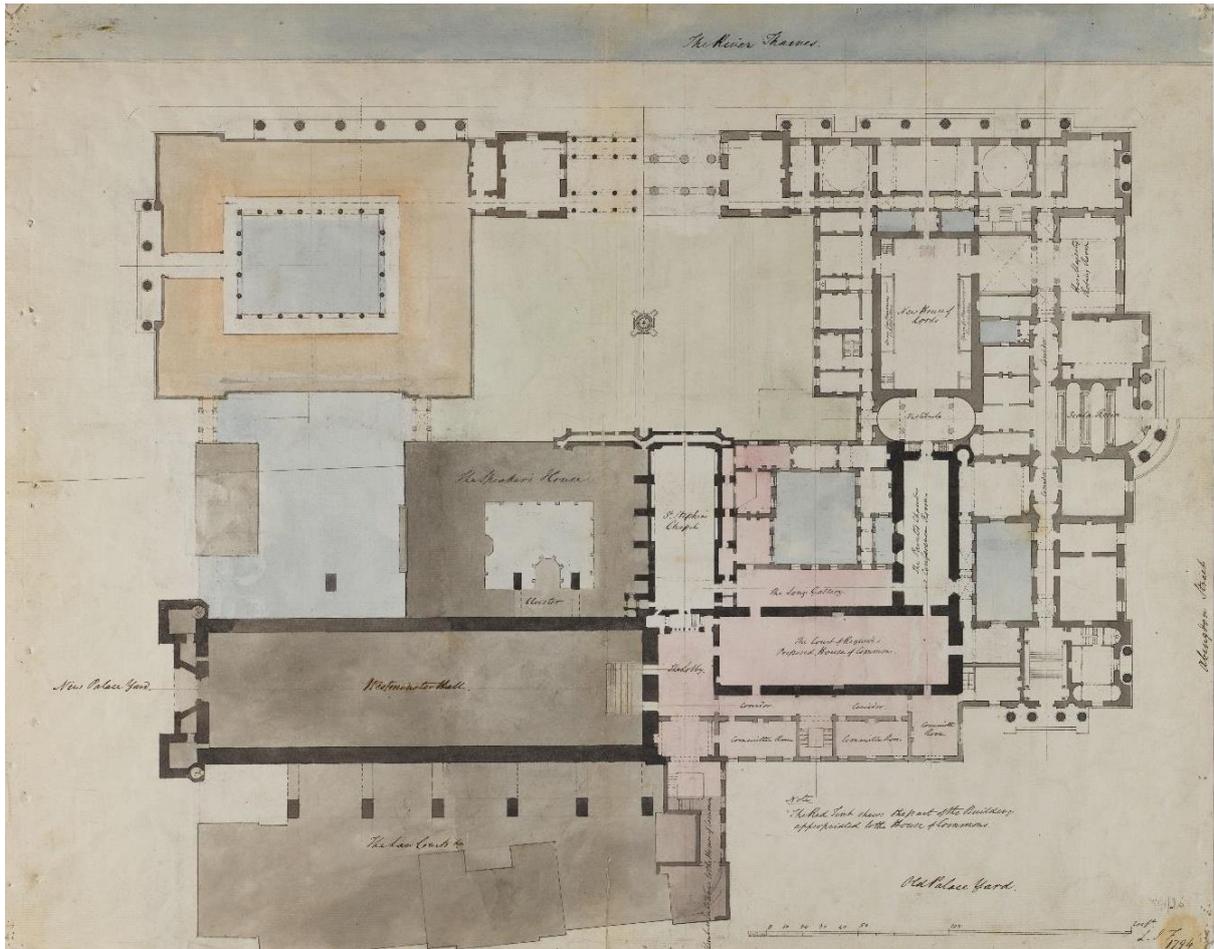


Fig. 3.2: Office of John Soane: *Designs for a House of Lords with House of Commons and Law Courts, drawn 1831 or after: Plan, a reduced alternative to 39, dated 1794 but watermarked 1831. Ink and coloured washes on paper, 464 x 588 mm. London: Sir John Soane's Museum (SM 51/3/36).*

Long before this plan was prepared, however, it had become apparent that Soane's Classical tastes were no longer universally acceptable among policymakers.⁸⁸³ This marks a significant change in opinion. Whilst it is difficult to be sure whether the Lords were ever really serious about implementing Soane's 1794–95 proposals, his decision to propose Neoclassical designs at that time appears to have been uncontroversial.⁸⁸⁴ There were certainly some contemporaries who criticised Soane's work on the grounds of 'propriety from usage': in other words, arguing that Soane's Neoclassical style did not conform to the strict definitions of the four orders as set out by Vitruvius. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter Two, Wyatt had persuaded the King to reject Neoclassicism and embrace Gothic architecture largely on these grounds.

⁸⁸³ See the Law Courts controversy discussed on pp. 204–08 of this thesis.

⁸⁸⁴ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 197–205, 234–35.

Wyatt himself, however, probably had a genuine belief in Gothic's 'propriety from prescription'; that is, he believed that medieval-style architecture was contextually appropriate for Westminster. Admittedly, it is difficult to assess whether Wyatt conceived of Gothic as being typologically appropriate for a legislative building. He never prepared any designs for legislative complexes other than Westminster, and he did not leave any writings on the subject. His sketch plan of 1802 (Fig. 2.13) gives no indication of the internal layout or decoration of his proposed new parliamentary chambers, though it is safe to assume that they would have been Gothic, at least externally. Nevertheless, Wyatt had begun his career as a Neoclassicist: he made his name with the Pantheon assembly rooms in London (1772), and subsequently designed country houses such as Heaton Hall, Manchester (1772) and the interiors of Heveningham Hall, Suffolk (c. 1776).⁸⁸⁵ Robinson has argued that late-career projects such as Doddington Hall, Gloucestershire (1796–1813; not to be confused with Doddington Hall, Lincoln), demonstrate a "continuing commitment" to Classical architecture, despite his growing enthusiasm for Gothic.⁸⁸⁶ It therefore seems doubtful that he would have totally rejected Classical models as inappropriate for a legislative context. As noted in Chapter Two, there can be no doubt that Wyatt's choice of Gothic for his Westminster alterations was heavily influenced by a desire for aesthetic consistency. Nevertheless, it seems likely that he was also influenced by the history of the site, and particularly by Westminster's official status as a royal palace. When his Westminster alterations are viewed in conjunction with his contemporary Gothic works at Windsor and Kew, it seems reasonable to conclude that Wyatt viewed Gothic as the most appropriate style for any site with royal connections, and especially so where there were existing medieval buildings on the site. Abbot saw the potential of Wyatt's medievalising vision and was happy to embrace it; but there is little indication of other MPs, from either party, actively supporting him during the 1800s. Despite the fact that both Whig and Tory parties had attempted to 'claim' the Gothic style (as discussed in Chapter Two), there was no consensus that Gothic was the 'proper' style for Westminster; and, just as importantly, there was no clear sense that Classicism was 'improper'. Nor did MPs and Peers express any strong desire for aesthetic consistency with the surviving Gothic buildings. As was discussed in Chapter Two, the critics of Wyatt's work were generally more concerned with Wyatt's use of stucco than his choice of style.⁸⁸⁷

From his part, Soane tried to justify his Classical scheme principally in terms of 'propriety from usage'. He certainly used this argument in his efforts to win over Wyatt's arch-enemy, John Carter. Soane's only hope of getting his speculative schemes adopted was to generate widespread

⁸⁸⁵ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 77–85, 89–95.

⁸⁸⁶ J. M. Robinson, *James Wyatt: Architect to George III*, p. 281.

⁸⁸⁷ See p. 184 of this thesis.

support among influential individuals; so, if he could persuade Carter to write favourably about his scheme in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, then that would be a significant coup for him. We do not know exactly when Soane first broached the subject with Carter, although Soane's notebooks record a meeting with him in May 1799.⁸⁸⁸ At any rate, Soane's argument was that contemporary architects did not have sufficient knowledge of Gothic architecture either to allow an accurate restoration of the surviving medieval buildings, or the construction of suitably authentic new ones to supplement them.⁸⁸⁹ He had some justification for this argument, since understanding of medieval architecture was still evolving at this time: it was not until 1817 that Thomas Rickman's famous *Attempt to Discriminate the Styles of English Architecture* presented the definitive typology for the various Gothic sub-styles.⁸⁹⁰ On the other hand, knowledge of Gothic architecture by this time had advanced considerably since Walpole began work at Strawberry Hill in the 1750s. As discussed above Wyatt's work at Lee Priory and New College Chapel, Oxford, shows a higher degree of archaeological accuracy than Walpole's work.⁸⁹¹ Soane clearly had a persuasive influence on Carter: as early as July 1799, the antiquary strongly hinted at his support for Soane's scheme in a letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine*. On that occasion, however, he justified his support on the grounds that Soane had promised to preserve the Painted Chamber.⁸⁹² It was not until his 1807 article on Westminster that Carter explicitly approved Soane's philosophy of constructing new buildings in a deliberately contrasting style to the existing Gothic work. Once again, Carter's arguments rest on the concept of 'propriety from usage'. He notes approvingly that Soane's Classical designs were to be "to be taken from models of the highest authority", thus stressing that the Classical orders could be applied correctly, based on well-understood historical precedents. Soane and Carter apparently agreed that such accuracy was impossible with the Gothic style:

[...] the several dilapidated parts of the Palace were gone past an *honest* restoration .

Indeed, he [Soane] humbly conceived, no man at this day was sufficiently studied in our

⁸⁸⁸ Soane Museum: Notebook 39, May 17, 1799. Cited in Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, p. 218.

⁸⁸⁹ Carter explained Soane's arguments in "Pursuits of Architectural Innovation No. CV: Royal Palace, Westminster", *Gentleman's Magazine* 77:1 (1807), p. 133. Soane must have conveyed these ideas to him some years earlier, because Carter was already writing sympathetically of Soane's scheme in his letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 17 July 1799 (69:2, p. 552).

⁸⁹⁰ C. Brooks, *The Gothic Revival* (London: Phaidon, 1999), pp. 136–37. See also Frew, John, "An Aspect of the Early Gothic Revival: The Transformation of Medievalist Research, 1770–1800", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980), pp. 174–85.

⁸⁹¹ J. Frew, "Gothic in Transition: Wyatt and Bernasconi at New College Chapel, Oxford, 1788–94", *The Burlington Magazine* 126 (1984), pp. 678+683-85+689; M. M. Reeve and P. N. Lindfield, "'A Child of Strawberry': Thomas Barrett and Lee Priory, Kent", *The Burlington Magazine* 157, pp. 836–42.

⁸⁹² J. Carter [writing as "An Englishman"], "Origin of Painted Chamber—Plan for a Parliament House" [Letter], *Gentleman's Magazine* 69:2 (1799), p. 552. For the attribution to Carter see J. Mordaunt Crook, *John Carter and the Mind of the Gothic Revival* (London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 1995), p. 80.

ancient architecture, as to be either qualified to restore them, or design elevations in so intricate, and to him so incomprehensible an art.⁸⁹³

However, Carter contradicts himself in the second part of this article, which makes a scathing attack on Wyatt's conversion of the former belltower into the Speaker's staircase:

[...] in this innovation a determined system is on foot to destroy [...] our antient works, without compunction or remorse. This procedure is, however, wise on the destroyers' [sic] part; as, the fewer examples left, the fewer evidences will arise to stare them in the face, for inability, or, more properly speaking, want of inclination, to imitate or preserve the antiquities of their country.⁸⁹⁴

In other words, Carter argues that the surviving examples of medieval architecture in Britain afforded sufficient evidence to enable Gothic buildings to be restored accurately, or even to build new (note the phrase "*imitate* or preserve"). This contradiction suggests that Carter was won over as much, if not more, by Soane's personal charm (and his position as Wyatt's rival) than by the logic of his argument. Indeed, it must be remembered that—as discussed in Chapter Two—Soane had initially envisaged some radical alterations to the Painted Chamber. Carter's assertion that Soane intended to 'preserve' the Painted Chamber strongly suggests that the architect was not completely candid with him about his intentions. Soane's theoretical justifications for his schemes must therefore be taken with a pinch of salt: he was probably seeking an argument to justify his pre-existing aesthetic preferences, rather than vice-versa.

There is no evidence that Soane's arguments, as relayed by Carter, were particularly influential among MPs during the 1800s. Although many insults were thrown at Wyatt's House of Lords offices during the infamous 1808 Commons debate, none of them made any explicit reference to style or conservation.⁸⁹⁵ Jack Fuller's infamous allusion to a gentleman's lavatory suggests that the calibre of architectural connoisseurship in this debate was not particularly high.⁸⁹⁶ George III and Carter, on the other hand, both possessed significant architectural knowledge. Hence, the fact that both Wyatt and Soane made their respective cases to these men in terms of 'propriety from usage' is, perhaps, a more revealing indication of contemporary attitudes to style and conservation among discerning critics. At any rate, it appears that, at this time, nobody was arguing that Gothic was the

⁸⁹³ Carter, "Pursuits" CV, pp. 133–35 (emphasis in original).

⁸⁹⁴ Mordaunt Crook argues that Carter was essentially an enthusiast and polemicist rather than a scholar (*John Carter and the Mind of the Gothic Revival*, pp. 59–65). His inconsistency in this case possibly indicates that he lacked the self-reflexivity to identify the discrepancies in his own writings.

⁸⁹⁵ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 1st ser., vol. 11 (1808), cc. 863–65.

⁸⁹⁶ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, p. 519.

‘proper’ style for Westminster, or that Classicism was ‘improper’. The stylistic debate—such as it was—was more concerned with archaeological accuracy rather than propriety. By the 1820s, stylistic and aesthetic attitudes had definitely changed. Amateur critics—including many MPs and Peers—were now less receptive to Soane’s Classical schemes, and more inclined to tolerate Wyatt’s work, despite its acknowledged failings. The archaeological inaccuracies of Wyatt’s buildings now mattered less than their suitability for the architectural and institutional context of Westminster—in other words, their ‘propriety from prescription’. The best demonstration of this change in attitudes was the infamous dispute over Soane’s Law Courts in 1824. This incident has already been discussed at length by M. H. Port, Sawyer and others: in short, Soane’s initial, Neoclassical, design for the Law Courts was rejected by a small, but vocal, group of MPs, who insisted on a Gothic design.⁸⁹⁷ However, there is scope for a deeper analysis of *why* these MPs were so determinedly pro-Gothic, and what this might tell us about their attitudes to stylistic propriety more broadly.

There was never an organised ‘pro-Gothic’ political faction at Westminster, but it is possible to identify a group of connoisseur MPs who, for convenience, shall be referred to as the ‘Westminster Tastemakers’. Most of them were members of the Commons’ select committee which reconsidered the design of Soane’s Law Courts in 1824. Of the members of this committee, Port singles out George Agar Ellis, Henry Bankes, Edward Cust, Sir Charles Long, and Col. Frederick Trench as being particularly influential.⁸⁹⁸ To this list we should add Sir James Mackintosh, who spoke in favour of conservation and against Classical architecture during the initial Commons debate on the Law Courts.⁸⁹⁹ Charles Hanbury-Tracy should also be included: he was a talented amateur architect who had designed his own home, Toddington Manor, Gloucestershire (1819–40) in a Gothic style.⁹⁰⁰ He had lost his Tewkesbury seat in 1812 and did not regain it until 1832; he was therefore unable to take part in the debates on the Law Courts. However, he took an active role in the 1833 committee on House of Commons accommodation, and the 1835 competition for the design of the new palace, as discussed below.⁹⁰¹ Although numerous other MPs contributed to Parliamentary debates on the Westminster buildings, and participated in the select committees of 1824, 1831 and 1833, these seven appear to have been the most knowledgeable about architecture, and the most vocal on the subject.

⁸⁹⁷ M. H. Port, “The Law Courts”, in Colvin, *King’s Works* 6, pp. 504–10; Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 582–627.

⁸⁹⁸ Colvin, *King’s Works* 6, p. 508.

⁸⁹⁹ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 2nd ser., vol. 10 (1824), cc. 623–30.

⁹⁰⁰ Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, p. 161.

⁹⁰¹ HC 269 (1833), p. 268; C. Shenton, *Mr Barry’s War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 43.

The continued use of Gothic architecture at Westminster during the 1820s was, to some extent, a reflection of the wider Gothic Revival in British architecture. Yet changing fashions are not sufficient in themselves to explain the Tastemakers' determination to maintain Westminster's medieval character. Although Gothic was increasingly popular, it never gained a monopoly on public, or indeed domestic, architecture during the nineteenth century. The Greek Revival also flourished during the 1820s, and George IV's major architectural projects in London—most notably Buckingham Palace and Regent Street—employed Neoclassical designs by Nash.⁹⁰² The Tastemakers were not exclusively devoted to the Gothic style, either. Trench's 1827 publication on Metropolitan improvements (discussed further below) contained several proposals for Classical buildings.⁹⁰³ Cust, in his 1835 pamphlet regarding the post-fire reconstruction of the palace, insisted that he did not intend to speak "disrespectfully" of "Grecian" architecture in itself, only of architects who applied it "without a thought of the fitness or *propriety* of its introduction".⁹⁰⁴ At any rate, the Tastemakers seem to have agreed that the architectural and political context of Westminster made Gothic the appropriate choice in this instance. Whilst the Tastemakers were a relatively small group, their views were evidently acceptable to a sufficient proportion of MPs that they were able to succeed in implementing their own vision, against the wishes of Soane and classicist MPs. It should be noted that, whilst the Gothic camp were in the ascendant during the 1820s and 1830s, there was still a significant body of MPs who favoured Classicism, either from aesthetic preference or political ideology. As Rorabaugh has shown, Radical MPs were the strongest supporters of Classicism because their reforming ideology favoured the republican connotations of Greek and Roman architecture. Rorabaugh identifies the Radical leader, Joseph Hume (1777–1855), as the most active champion of Classicism at Westminster in this period.⁹⁰⁵ By contrast, Gothic sympathies cut across party lines: this is hardly surprising since, during the eighteenth century, both parties had evolved competing ideologies in a bid to 'claim' the Gothic style for their own cause.⁹⁰⁶ Of the Tastemakers, Agar Ellis, Hanbury-Tracy and Mackintosh were Whigs, whilst the remainder were Tories.⁹⁰⁷

⁹⁰² J. Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530–1830*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) pp. 481–88.

⁹⁰³ Col. F. W. Trench, *A Collection of Papers Relating to the Thames Quay; with Hints for some Further Improvements in the Metropolis* (London: Carpenter & Son, 1827).

⁹⁰⁴ E. Cust, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel, Bart. M.P. on the Expedience of a Better System of Control over Buildings Erected at the Public Expense: and on the Subject of Rebuilding the Houses of Parliament* (London: John Weale, 1835), pp. 7–9 (emphasis added).

⁹⁰⁵ W. J. Rorabaugh, "Politics and the Architectural Competition for the Houses of Parliament, 1834–1837", *Victorian studies* 17:2 (December 1973), pp. 159–60.

⁹⁰⁶ Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, p. 46.

⁹⁰⁷ For full biographies of all the gentlemen concerned, see "Members, 1820–34", *History of Parliament Online*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/research/members/members-1820-1832> [accessed 08/04/2022].

Soane's design for the Law Courts has already been discussed at length, but it is helpful to recapitulate the key points.⁹⁰⁸ His brief was to provide new accommodation on the site of the former Exchequer Court. This was a corner site immediately west of Westminster Hall, and north of the (unfinished) Stone Building.⁹⁰⁹ Soane proposed to start by completing the unexecuted north wing of the Stone Building (see Chapter Two); but this would not be sufficient in itself to provide the required accommodation. Hence, Soane proposed to go beyond Vardy's original plan and extend the Stone Building further north, thus bringing its north front into line with the northern façade of Westminster Hall. The pre-existing juxtaposition of the medieval hall with the Palladian Stone Building meant that, even if all parties had agreed that aesthetic consistency was desirable, the choice of style would no longer be clear-cut. Unsurprisingly, Soane chose to design his new extension in the Palladian style to match the Stone Building. His final design was approved at a meeting with relevant ministers in March 1823 (Fig. 3.3), but his proposals were not circulated beyond this group.⁹¹⁰ Hence it was not until the spring of 1824, when the building was close to completion, that the Tastemakers became fully aware of the stylistic juxtaposition, and began to raise objections. Henry Bankes (1757–1834), then MP for Corfe Castle, was the first Tastemaker to attack Soane's Law Courts in the Commons.⁹¹¹ He specifically couched his objections in terms of aesthetic inconsistency: "the abominable taste in which new buildings of a different order had been grafted onto the old Gothic".⁹¹² His protests prompted the formation of a select committee to reconsider Soane's designs; its proceedings have been discussed in detail by Port and Sawyer.⁹¹³ The committee eventually forced Soane to redesign the northernmost portion of his building in Gothic style (although they agreed that the north wing of the Stone Building could be completed as originally planned; Fig. 3.4).

⁹⁰⁸ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, p. 506; Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 486–724.

⁹⁰⁹ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, p. 504–05.

⁹¹⁰ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, pp. 505–06. Long attended this meeting and did not object to Soane's choice of style, but he asked that the new building should not obstruct the view of Westminster Hall. This prompted Soane to modify his north front with rounded corners, as shown in Fig 3.3.

⁹¹¹ S. Farrell, "BANKES, Henry (1757–1834), of Kingston Lacy, Dorset and 5 Old Palace Yard, Westminster, Mdx.", *History of Parliament Online*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/bankes-henry-1757-1834> [accessed 07/08/2023].

⁹¹² Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 2nd ser., vol. 10 (1824), cc. 623–30, 633–35.

⁹¹³ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, pp. 506–09; Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 582–626.



Fig 3.3: Office of John Soane: *Exterior perspective of the New Law Courts, the New Palace Yard façade with curved corners, from the north west looking south east, as part executed, December 1826. Pencil and coloured washes on paper, 465 x 283 mm. London: Sir John Soane's Museum (SM 53/8/20).*



Fig 3.4: C. Burton after S. Russell: *View of Westminster Hall, Law Courts &c. from the North West, 1825. Coloured lithograph on paper, 432 x 235 mm. London: Parliamentary Art Collection (WOA 1420).*

Officially, the committee justified their stylistic choice on the grounds of ‘propriety from usage’. Their report argues that Soane’s extension of the Palladian work beyond Vardy’s original design effectively made the Stone Building asymmetrical, and thus constituted a violation of the accepted rules of the Palladian style.⁹¹⁴ Yet the Tastemakers’ objections clearly went deeper than just a pedantic application of the Classical doctrine of symmetry. They evidently felt that Westminster Hall should remain the dominant architectural feature of New Palace Yard: as their report puts it, “any new structure to be raised in its vicinity should be kept entirely subordinate”.⁹¹⁵ This decision implies a judgement about the *genius loci* of the palace as a whole. To the Tastemakers, the palace’s essential stylistic character was determined by its medieval monuments, not by any later additions. Hence, the Hall took precedence in any dispute about architectural conformity. This did not mean that the Tastemakers were uncritical of Wyatt’s buildings. Although Carter had died in 1817, other antiquaries continued to pour scorn on Wyatt’s Gothic designs: for example, John Britton described Wyatt’s House of Lords offices as “too puerile for comment” in an 1828 book.⁹¹⁶ By the 1820s, even Wyatt’s strongest admirers were sometimes critical of his work. Rutter’s account of Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire, whilst praising the building as a whole, criticises Wyatt’s detailing in several places.⁹¹⁷ Given their serious interest in architecture, the Tastemakers would surely have been aware of such criticisms. Indeed, they were equally critical of Soane’s attempts to perpetuate Wyatt’s style. In a Commons debate of March 1824, Bankes criticised Soane’s royal entrance, which had been specifically designed to match Wyatt’s House of Lords offices.⁹¹⁸ Nevertheless, in the Law Courts dispute they positively demanded that Soane should give them more of the same. This strongly suggests that the suitability of the Gothic design to its context ultimately mattered more to them than the detailed application of the style. In Vitruvian terms, ‘propriety from prescription’ now mattered more to them than ‘propriety from usage’. For the first time, there is a clear sense that Gothic was seen as the ‘proper’ style for Westminster, on account of the architectural, historical and political context of the site.

The Tastemakers also disseminated their views publicly through the press. In April 1824, *Knight’s Quarterly Review* published a satirical article, “The Sixth or Bœotian [sic] Order of

⁹¹⁴ *Report from the Select Committee on Public Buildings at Westminster*, HC 307 (1824), p. 3.

⁹¹⁵ *Report from the Select Committee on Public Buildings at Westminster*, HC 307 (1824), p. 3.

⁹¹⁶ J. Britton and A. C. Pugin, *Illustrations of the Public Buildings of London*, vol. 2 (London: J. Taylor, 1828), p. 268.

⁹¹⁷ J. Rutter, *An Illustrated History and Description of Fonthill and its Abbey* (London: J. Rutter, 1823). See, for example, pp. 10–12, 15–16, 22–23.

⁹¹⁸ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 2nd ser., vol. 10 (1824), c. 624; Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 388–91.

Architecture”, which was a thinly-veiled attack on Soane.⁹¹⁹ Although published anonymously, it seems probable that it was written either by one of the Tastemakers, or somebody closely connected with them. A few weeks before the article’s publication, Mackintosh had said in the Commons that an “honourable friend” had told him that “if it [Soane’s building] were Grecian, it must be of the Bœotian order”.⁹²⁰ Regardless of who wrote the article, its arguments are essentially negative in nature: that is, it concentrates on attacking Soane’s Classical architecture rather than making a positive case for Gothic.⁹²¹ It also contains some blatant contradictions, making criticisms of Soane’s architecture which could just as easily have been levelled at Wyatt’s. For example, it criticises Soane for archaeological inaccuracies in his Neoclassical designs, satirically arguing that “Bœotian” art should be “absolved from all obedience to established authorities”.⁹²² Given the aforementioned antiquarian criticisms of Wyatt’s work, it seems strange that the author chose to criticise Soane on these grounds. Such contradictions suggest that the Tastemakers shared an *instinct* that Gothic was the right style for Westminster, but that they struggled to articulate clear arguments to rationalise this view. Nevertheless, the key concept of ‘propriety from prescription’ is detectable in this article, although it is not very clearly expressed. The article’s final argument is that “Bœotian art” should prioritise “quantity and singularity of ornament” rather than “convenience, propriety, proportion and adaptation to its future uses”.⁹²³ Several ideas have been carelessly thrown together here, but the word “propriety” is key, because it conforms exactly—in its sense, if not in its literal translation—with the Vitruvian concept of *decor*. The ostensible target of this attack is the (supposedly excessive) decoration of Soane’s Neoclassical interior for the Royal Entrance. Yet in truth, the Tastemakers are not attacking ornament *per se*: rather, they are arguing that Soane’s ornamentation is inappropriate for its context. The Royal Entrance is satirically praised because it “rejects all the vulgar *associations of simplicity with Power*, such as were formerly considered *proper attributes of every thing [sic] belonging to the British Monarchy*”.⁹²⁴ The implication is obvious: for all its inaccuracies of detail, the austere simplicity of Wyatt’s Gothic work was eminently suitable for a site with royal connections, whereas Soane’s more elaborate Classical work was not.

⁹¹⁹ “The Sixth or Bœotian Order of Architecture”, *Knight’s Quarterly Magazine* vol. 2 (Jan–Apr 1824), no. 2. The exact publication date of this issue is not clear but its editorial is dated 30 March (p. 256). The article was published under the names of “Oliver Medley and Reginald Holyoake” but these are generally understood to be pseudonyms (see Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, p. 353).

⁹²⁰ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 2nd ser., vol. 10 (1824), cc. 627–28.

⁹²¹ The term “Bœotian” is itself an insult in this context. It refers to a region of Greece, but can also indicate a person “dull; obtuse; without cultural refinement”. The latter usage is principally found in American English, however. See *Collins Online Dictionary*, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/boeotian> [accessed 07/03/2023].

⁹²² Medley and Holyoake [pseuds.], “Bœotian Order”, p. 454.

⁹²³ Medley and Holyoake [pseuds.], p. 457.

⁹²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 458 (emphasis added).

In the final report of the Law Courts select committee, the Tastemakers explicitly argued that the suitability of Wyatt's buildings for their context outweighed their acknowledged deficiencies. Admittedly, at this stage it appears that the committee were considering 'context' primarily in aesthetic, rather than functional or symbolic, terms:

Your Committee being well aware how difficult and hazardous a task it is to place modern Gothic by the side of such a structure as Westminster Hall, and being almost deterred by the unsuccessful attempts in the neighbourhood of both Houses of Parliament, from venturing to recommend a second trial [... nevertheless] a general tone of uniformity and consistency will also be preserved [...]⁹²⁵

The committee also referred to the possibility of replacing the Exchequer buildings on the eastern side of Westminster Hall.⁹²⁶ This idea had been shelved following the abandonment of Wyatt's scheme, but was now under consideration again. To their minds, it was desirable that these buildings should match the Law Courts extension; and to build both in a Palladian style would only increase their "incongruity and discordance" beside the Hall.⁹²⁷

Both the article and the committee report clearly demonstrate the Tastemakers' belief that Gothic was now the "proper" style for the Palace of Westminster. More importantly, however, we can see them explicitly arguing that Classicism was now *improper*: they claimed that it lacked the requisite simplicity for the institutional context, and was discordant with the aesthetic context. This marks a very significant moment in the history of British attitudes to architectural style. As discussed above, Gothic had long been recognised as an appropriate choice of style—or at least, as a valid alternative to Classicism—in ecclesiastical and collegiate contexts.⁹²⁸ In light of the sheer number of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Gothic houses already discussed in this thesis—such as Esher Place, Strawberry Hill, Downton Castle and Eaton Hall—it seems reasonable to conclude that the style was increasingly accepted as a valid choice for domestic architecture, too.⁹²⁹ Nevertheless, the fact that Neoclassical country houses—such as Wyatt's aforementioned Dodington Hall, Gloucestershire—continued to be built during this era, clearly indicates that Gothic had not totally displaced Classicism within this sphere of architecture, either.⁹³⁰ What makes the Law Courts dispute

⁹²⁵ HC 307 (1824), p. 4.

⁹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

⁹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

⁹²⁸ See p. 115 of this thesis.

⁹²⁹ See also discussion of Wyatt's numerous castle-style houses, designed from the mid-1790s onwards, on pp. 112–13 of this thesis. However, Peter Lindfield argues that Gothic was still "not especially popular nor universally approved of" for houses even in the early nineteenth century (*Georgian Gothic*, p. 180).

⁹³⁰ Robinson, *James Wyatt*, pp. 281–87.

so significant is that the Tastemakers were now arguing that, in some circumstances, Gothic was not merely a valid alternative to Classicism, but the *only* valid choice of style. This thesis has previously argued that Classicism remained the ‘default’ choice of style for public building projects in the British Isles during the eighteenth century.⁹³¹ The evidence above proves conclusively that, by at least 1824, this was no longer the case: Britain had now entered an age of stylistic plurality. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that the new order was one of *plurality*, not of Gothic hegemony. There were still many MPs who supported the use of Classical architecture at Westminster, as will become apparent.

The Law Courts dispute was an important victory for the Gothicists; yet despite this, in the early 1830s it could not be taken for granted that future developments at Westminster would be Gothic in style. This was vividly demonstrated as the architectural debate now shifted to the House of Commons itself. Despite Wyatt’s alterations, the chamber remained cramped and uncomfortable; persistent efforts to improve the heating and ventilation had failed to yield any meaningful improvements.⁹³² Yet whilst the motivation for change was principally pragmatic, it was impossible to consider any major architectural project at Westminster without addressing the question of style; and that question was becoming increasingly politicised. Rorabaugh has already discussed the political forces which influenced the design of the new Palace of Westminster after the 1834 fire.⁹³³ He shows that politics affected not only the stylistic attitudes of MPs, but also the tactics they used to try to get their way. The outcome was ultimately determined as much, if not more, by the two sides’ capacity for political manoeuvring, rather than their ability to capture a broad consensus of opinion. This thesis will now argue that the politicisation of architectural style—and political manoeuvrings by the competing adherents of Classical and Gothic styles—were already visible in the architectural debates surrounding the Palace of Westminster before the 1834 fire. The evidence for this comes principally from the reports of two select committees, convened by the House of Commons in 1831 and 1833 to discuss their future accommodation. These committees will now be discussed in turn.

The 1831 committee on House of Commons buildings was proposed by the aforementioned Col. Frederick Trench (c. 1777–1859), then MP for Cambridge.⁹³⁴ (Henry Bankes, the leading figure in

⁹³¹ See pp. 112–13 of this thesis.

⁹³² E. Hallam Smith, “Ventilating the Commons, Heating the Lords, 1701–1834”, *Parliamentary History* 38:1 (2019), pp. 80–89.

⁹³³ W. J. Rorabaugh, “Politics and the Architectural Competition for the Houses of Parliament, 1834–1837”, *Victorian Studies* 17:2 (1973), pp. 155–75.

⁹³⁴ M. H. Port, “Trench, Sir Fredrick William (c. 1777–1859)”, *ODNB* (2004), <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/27699> [accessed 10/02/2023]

the Law Courts dispute, had lost his seat in 1826.)⁹³⁵ Although this committee did not explicitly discuss questions of style, it is striking that all the architects summoned to give evidence had some reputation for Gothic design. Significantly, Soane was not one of them. Although he was now seventy-eight years old, he officially retained his position as attached architect with responsibility for Westminster; the Committee's failure to summon him therefore appears to be a deliberate snub. Robert Smirke was summoned, but Nash had by now been suspended from the Office of Works. The two other architects summoned were both relatives of James Wyatt: his eldest son, Benjamin Dean Wyatt, and his nephew, Sir Jeffry Wyattville. None of these architects were exclusively committed—or even primarily devoted—to the Gothic style.⁹³⁶ Nevertheless, Smirke and Wyattville both had a proven track-record in Gothic design.⁹³⁷ Whilst Benjamin Dean was principally a classicist, his younger brother (and assistant) Philip (1785–1835) had inherited his father's flair for Picturesque Gothic design. Philip's remodelling of Conishead Priory, Cumbria, has been compared favourably to his father's work at Ashridge and Belvoir Castle.⁹³⁸ The Wyatt brothers also had a close personal association with Trench. In the mid-1820s, he commissioned them to prepare speculative proposals for several building projects in the Capital, which were detailed in an 1827 pamphlet.⁹³⁹ In 1824, at the height of the Law Courts dispute, Trench had also asked Philip to prepare an alternative scheme for Gothicising Soane's new building.⁹⁴⁰ Philip's proposals would have included an ambitious Gothicisation of the Stone Building (Fig. 3.5).⁹⁴¹ It appears that this scheme was not seriously considered by the rest of the committee; but this might be a reflection of Philip's dubious personal reputation rather than any judgement on the quality of his design.⁹⁴² Nevertheless, in 1826 Trench asked Philip to prepare a scheme for the new Commons Library, once again putting him in direct competition with Soane. The Speaker apparently supported Philip's proposal, but it failed to win over the rest of the committee.⁹⁴³

⁹³⁵ Farrell, "Bankes, Henry", n. p.

⁹³⁶ Summerson argues that Smirke cultivated Gothic as a "second language" (J. Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530–1840* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 509–10). For details of Classical work by the Wyatt brothers and Wyattville, see Robinson, *The Wyatts*, pp. 97–100, 105–22, 129–36.

⁹³⁷ Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, pp. 171–76.

⁹³⁸ J. M. Robinson, *The Wyatts: An Architectural Dynasty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 122.

⁹³⁹ Trench, *Thames Quay* (op. cit.).

⁹⁴⁰ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 608–09.

⁹⁴¹ There is also a lithograph of this scheme in the Parliamentary Art Collection (WOA 2543).

⁹⁴² Philip was, if anything, even more feckless and unreliable than his father. See Robinson, *The Wyatts*, pp. 101–05, 115–23.

⁹⁴³ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, p. 767.

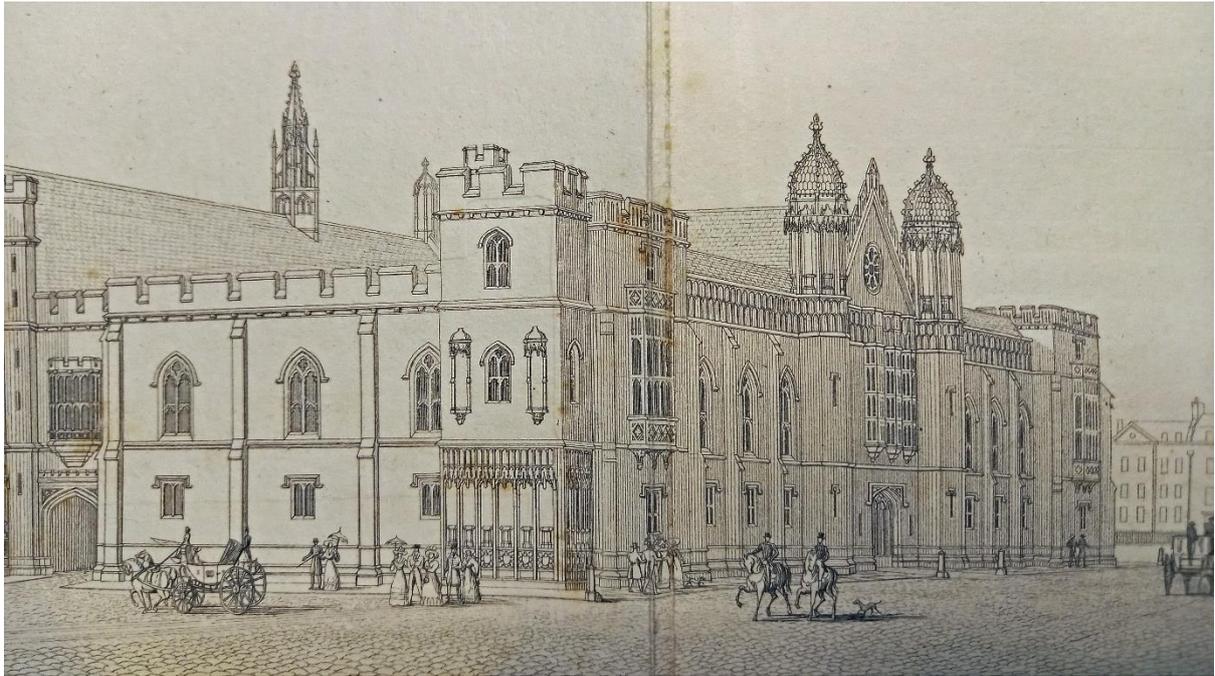


Fig. 3.5: T. Kearnan after P. Wyatt: Perspective View of the North and West Fronts of the Buildings Connected with the two Houses of Parliament and the Law Courts &c. Published in Col. F. W. Trench, *A Collection of Papers Relating to the Thames Quay: with Hints for Some Further Improvements in the Metropolis* (London: Carpenter & Sons, 1827), plate VII.



Fig. 3.6: I. Roffe after P. Wyatt: Perspective View of the North and East Fronts of the Buildings Connected with the two Houses of Parliament and Courts of Law. Published in Col. F. W. Trench, *A Collection of Papers Relating to the Thames Quay: with Hints for Some Further Improvements in the Metropolis* (London: Carpenter & Sons, 1827), plate VI.

In his 1827 *Thames Quay* proposals, Trench followed these ideas with a more comprehensive scheme for the Palace of Westminster (Fig. 3.6). The perspective view of this proposal is credited solely to Philip, which suggests that he was recognised as the Gothic specialist of the pair. Essentially, Philip's proposals would have extended his father's work along the riverfront to the south of St Stephen's Chapel, incorporating the eastern front of the Painted Chamber; the latter would have been embellished with small towers and other details. This proposal does not envisage a

reconstruction of the Exchequer buildings; instead, their site has been cleared, substituting only a small gatehouse and a wall to separate the north front of the Speaker's House from New Palace Yard. Philip's ornamentation is, in places, more elaborate than his father's, particularly in the porch which he proposed to add to the east front of St Stephen's. Nevertheless, the irregular massing, simple crenellations and square towers serve to create visual unity with the existing Speaker's House. Trench's patronage of Philip suggests that, despite all the criticisms of James Wyatt's Gothic work, his "modern Gothic" style still retained some admirers in the 1820s. Trench's proposals were politely considered by a select committee, but ultimately rejected.⁹⁴⁴ This may partly explain why Philip was not invited to give evidence at the 1831 committee. Nevertheless, the inclusion of his older brother reflects Trench's personal loyalty to the brothers; and one suspects that, if Benjamin's proposals had been accepted, Philip would have contributed to the final designs. Regarding the House of Commons, Benjamin Dean assured the committee that the existing chamber could be extended by annexing the lobby.⁹⁴⁵ Trench ultimately supported this option.⁹⁴⁶ However, both Smirke and Wyattville advised against it, and instead recommended construction of a completely new House.⁹⁴⁷ Against Trench's objections, the remaining members resolved in favour of the latter course; however, they deemed further discussion of this possibility to be beyond their remit, so the matter was referred back to the whole House.⁹⁴⁸ With the Commons preoccupied by the Reform Bill, the question had to be shelved. Nevertheless, the uncomfortable conditions in the chamber during the long, crowded debates on the bill ultimately strengthened the resolve of MPs to improve their accommodation.⁹⁴⁹

Trench lost his seat at the December 1832 general election; hence, it was Joseph Hume who, the following year, proposed another select committee on House of Commons accommodation.⁹⁵⁰ Hume was a Radical, and he favoured the construction of a Classical Parliament building inspired by the Republics of the ancient world.⁹⁵¹ It seems that Hume's new committee was much more sympathetic to Classicism than that of 1831. Hanbury-Tracy was the only pro-Gothic Tastemaker who managed to obtain a seat on it.⁹⁵² Moreover, a much wider range of architects was summoned:

⁹⁴⁴ *Report from Select Committee on Committee Rooms and Printed Papers*, HC 403 (1826), pp. 18, 28; Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 769–72.

⁹⁴⁵ *Report from the Select Committee on House of Commons Buildings*, HC 308 (1831), pp. 5, 18–19.

⁹⁴⁶ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., vol. 8 (1831), c. 556.

⁹⁴⁷ HC 308 (1831), pp. 18–19.

⁹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹⁴⁹ M. H. Port (ed.), *The Houses of Parliament* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 9.

⁹⁵⁰ Port, "Trench, Sir Fredrick William", n. p.; Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., vol. 16 (1833), cc. 371–74.

⁹⁵¹ Rorabaugh, "Politics and the Architectural Competition for the Houses of Parliament", p. 157.

⁹⁵² *Report from the Select Committee on the House of Commons Buildings*, HC 269 (1833), p. 2.

it is perhaps significant that Soane was the first to be called.⁹⁵³ This was in spite of the fact that the attached architect positions had been abolished in April 1832, following the merger of the Office of Works with the Office of Woods, Forests and Land Revenues. This meant that Soane no longer held any official position at Westminster.⁹⁵⁴ Smirke and Wyattville were summoned again, but the Wyatt brothers were not, probably due to their bankruptcy earlier that year.⁹⁵⁵ Also called to give evidence were George Allen (1798–1847), George Basevi (1794–1845), Decimus Burton (1800–81), Edward Blore (1787–1879), John Wilson Croker (1750–1857), John Deering (1787–1850), Francis Goodwin (1784–1835), Thomas Hopper (1776–1856), Adam Lee, James Savage (1779–1852), and Rigby Wason (1797–1875).⁹⁵⁶ This represented a much wider variety of talent than the 1831 committee, in terms of both professional stature and stylistic preferences.⁹⁵⁷ Blore, for example, was a noted Gothic architect and antiquary, whereas Burton was a prominent classicist.⁹⁵⁸

Unlike the 1831 committee, the 1833 committee asked architects to submit drawings of their proposed new buildings.⁹⁵⁹ Some took this opportunity to show their proposed stylistic treatment of their buildings, whilst others described their ideas verbally. Savage’s proposal appears to have been solely Classical.⁹⁶⁰ Burton apparently intended his scheme to follow Wyatt’s castellated Gothic style, at least externally.⁹⁶¹ Goodwin and Lee submitted hybrid proposals. Lee’s interior perspective shows plain Classical furnishings, but Gothic window-frames, suggesting a Gothic exterior.⁹⁶² Goodwin proposed a new House with a Classical interior, approached by a grand Classical staircase probably inspired by Soane’s *scala regia* for the House of Lords.⁹⁶³ However, he also

⁹⁵³ HC 269 (1833), p. 4.

⁹⁵⁴ Colvin, *King’s Works* 6, p. 184.

⁹⁵⁵ Robinson, *The Wyatts*, pp. 122–23.

⁹⁵⁶ For full biographies of these gentlemen see H. M. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1660–1840* (London: John Murray, 1954), pp. 40, 63–64, 78–82, 109–13, 222, 242–43, 299–301, and 528–29; W. Thomas, “Croker, John Wilson, (1750–1857)”, *ODNB* (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/6738> [accessed 05/04/2022]; M. Escott, “WASON, Peter Rigby (1797–1875), of Cable Street, Liverpool, Lancs. and 49 Lincoln’s Inn Fields, Mdx.”, *History of Parliament Online*, <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/wason-peter-1797-1875> [accessed 31/08/2023].

⁹⁵⁷ Two of these men were MPs rather than professional architects. Croker had been an MP until 1832, and First Secretary to the Admiralty until 1827 (Thomas, “Croker, John Wilson”, n. p.). Wason was MP for Ipswich; as Colvin notes (*King’s Works* 6, p. 532, n. 4), the plans he submitted were actually drawn by the architect William Bardwell. Colvin claims that Hanbury-Tracy also submitted designs to the committee, but the report of the committee’s proceedings (HC 269 (1833)) provides no evidence for this.

⁹⁵⁸ Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary* pp. 78–79, 109–10. D. Arnold, “Burton, Decimus (1800–1881)”, *ODNB* 2004, <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/4125> [both accessed 10/02/2023].

⁹⁵⁹ HC 269 (1833), plans 1–22.

⁹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, plan 5.

⁹⁶¹ For Burton’s description of his intended style see HC 269 (1833), p. 30.

⁹⁶² HC 269 (1833), plan 9.

⁹⁶³ For Soane’s Neoclassical interior for the royal entrance see Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 387–416.

proposed a Gothic-style ‘restoration’ and remodelling of St Stephen’s for use as a new lobby.⁹⁶⁴ Basevi, it seems, took his stylistic cue from Wren’s baroque interior for the existing House of Commons, rather than the building’s Gothic shell. He told the committee that he would furnish his new House in the “same style as the present, with the same description of seats and panelling”.⁹⁶⁵ Poignantly, Soane’s submission depicted plain, Wyatt-style castellated façades (Fig. 3.7). It seems that the elderly architect had finally given up on his lifelong ambition of constructing a Classical parliament house.⁹⁶⁶

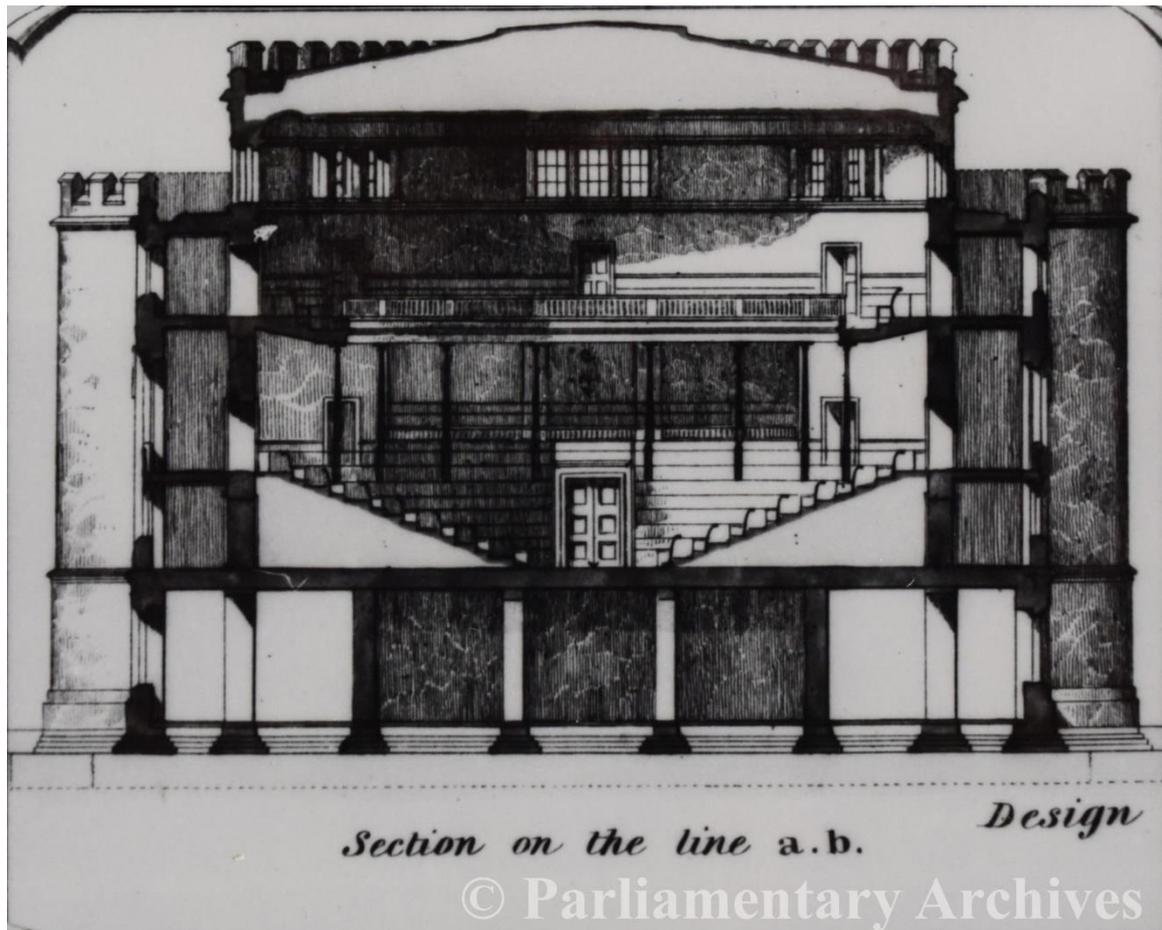


Fig. 3.7: Sir J. Soane: *Plan of a Design for a New House of Commons* (detail). Published in *Report from the Committee on the House of Commons’ Buildings*, HC 269, 1833. London: Parliamentary Archives, ARC/HCB.

The 1833 committee proves that the classicist lobby were not ‘down and out’ in 1833; but they were now fighting a rear-guard action. It was one thing to propose Classical designs in

⁹⁶⁴ HC 269 (1833), pp. 66-70 and plans 12, 13, 13a, 14.

⁹⁶⁵ Sawyer, Soane at Westminster, p. 41.

⁹⁶⁶ The interior, however, would have been in a stylar Classical mode, as shown by a perspective in the Soane Museum collection (SM 51/6/27: Palace of Westminster, House of Commons, Designs for a new house of Commons, Interior perspective, d: April 1833). See Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, p. 787.

committee, but after the experience of the Law Courts debacle, it is doubtful whether such proposals would actually have been approved by the House. Besides, the plurality of architects and drawings in the 1833 committee was, in itself, a marked contrast to the situation in 1794, when the Lords were content to accept designs from a single architect (Soane) in a single style (Neoclassicism).⁹⁶⁷ By 1833, Classicism was no longer the 'default' choice of style—at least, not at Westminster. Despite his own stylistic preferences, Hume must have realised that his committee would have no credibility if it was not prepared to consider both Classical and Gothic designs. Despite all the criticisms of Wyatt's alterations at Westminster, there can be little doubt that his buildings helped to shape attitudes to the palace during the 1820s and early 1830s. If Soane's scheme had been executed in the 1790s—when there was less resistance to Classicism—his work would have become an established part of the palace landscape by the 1820s. Hence, the introduction of further Classical buildings—or even the building of an entirely new Classical palace—would not have seemed like a radical break from tradition. By contrast, Wyatt's work served to entrench the medieval character of the palace; and, in an age which increasingly valued 'propriety from prescription', this made a change of style seem less palatable. Wyatt helped to create, if not a consensus, then at least a groundswell of opinion that Gothic was the most appropriate style for Westminster.

The Manners-Suttons

Having considered the impact of Wyatt's work, it is now necessary to consider the new occupants of the Speaker's House, and analyse their social and political objectives. Charles Manners-Sutton was elected Speaker, at the behest of Lord Liverpool's Tory administration, on 2 June 1817.⁹⁶⁸ Like his immediate predecessors, Charles had originally trained for the law, being called to the Bar in 1806.⁹⁶⁹ However, he must have set his sights on a parliamentary career at a fairly early stage, because he secured a seat in the Commons in the general election of the same year.⁹⁷⁰ He was subsequently appointed judge-advocate-general by Perceval's ministry in 1809; but he had

⁹⁶⁷ Chambers had originally proposed a limited competition, but Soane's machinations halted this. Whether this competition would have produced any Gothic entries can only be a matter for speculation, although it should be noted that Wyatt was among the architects originally invited to participate. See Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 135–47.

⁹⁶⁸ M. H. Port and R. G. Thorne, "MANNERS SUTTON, Charles (1780–1845), of Lincoln's Inn, Mdx.", *History of Parliament Online* (1986), <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/manners-sutton-charles-1780-1845> [accessed 10/02/2023].

⁹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, n. p.

⁹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, n. p.

otherwise done little to make a name for himself in the House.⁹⁷¹ His effectiveness as Speaker has been a subject of considerable debate, both during and after his lifetime.⁹⁷² Nevertheless, he proved resilient, remaining in the chair for almost eighteen years, and being re-elected no less than seven times.⁹⁷³ Whatever his professional abilities, his urbane manners and easy-going disposition generally helped him to retain the respect—and perhaps even the affection—of MPs.⁹⁷⁴ He was a committed Tory and had no desire to reform the electoral system—a fact which eventually contributed to his unseating from the Chair in 1835. Nevertheless, he made some efforts to continue Abbot’s modernisation of the Commons’ administration and facilities.⁹⁷⁵

Although he could boast aristocratic lineage, Charles was the son of a clergyman and had no prospect of inheriting a landed estate. Thus, the prospect of an official residence in London was probably an attractive one for him. Nevertheless, in social terms Charles probably saw the Speaker’s House as an aid to the consolidation of his social position, rather than a tool for advancement. For Ellen, however, it was a different story. Elizabeth Hallam Smith has discussed her early life in detail, but it is helpful to recapitulate the key points. She was born, as Ellen Power, into a minor gentry family in Co. Tipperary. She had married a Scottish gentleman, John Home-Purves, in 1810; but it would appear that, by 1823, their marriage had broken down.⁹⁷⁶ Meanwhile, Charles’s first wife had died in 1815, leaving him to raise three children on his own.⁹⁷⁷ It is not clear exactly when he first met Ellen, but they were certainly in a relationship by 1823.⁹⁷⁸ John Home-Purves accepted the situation and emigrated to Florida the following year; but he and Ellen remained married. Ellen’s strong personality and natural charm had been evident from her earliest years. In other circumstances, she would have been an ideal candidate to marry a public figure like the Speaker.⁹⁷⁹ However, the strict moral codes of the time meant that Charles and Ellen could not, at first, officially acknowledge their relationship. Nevertheless, they were sometimes seen together at private dinners and events; their relationship must have been widely known among the tight-knit world of Britain’s

⁹⁷¹ N. Gash, “Sutton, Charles Manners-, first Viscount Canterbury (1780–1845), *ODNB* (2010), <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/17965> [accessed 19/01/2022]; R. R. Madden, *The Literary Life and Correspondence of The Countess of Blessington* (London: TC Newby, 1855), pp. 440–41.

⁹⁷² Gash, “Sutton, Charles Manners-”, n. p.

⁹⁷³ Gash, “Sutton, Charles Manners-”, n. p.

⁹⁷⁴ Gash, “Sutton, Charles Manners-”, n. p; Madden, *The Countess of Blessington*, pp. 373–74.

⁹⁷⁵ For some proposed reforms supported by Charles, see British Library (BL), Add. MSS 40378: Peel papers, general correspondence, f. 127: letter from Charles Manners-Sutton to Sir Robert Peel, 17 May 1825.

⁹⁷⁶ Takayanagi and Hallam Smith, *Necessary Women* (forthcoming); Madden, *The Countess of Blessington*, pp. 375–79.

⁹⁷⁷ Madden, *The Countess of Blessington*, p. 374.

⁹⁷⁸ C. Dickens (ed.), *The Life of Charles James Matthews* (London: Macmillan, 1879), p. 80. See also Takayanagi and Hallam Smith, *Necessary Women* (forthcoming).

⁹⁷⁹ Madden, *The Countess of Blessington*, pp. 376–78.

upper class.⁹⁸⁰ John Home-Purves died suddenly in 1827, which enabled the couple to marry; but even this did not render their union respectable in the eyes of some of their contemporaries. Acerbic comments were made when Ellen was presented to the King in 1829, and again when she gave birth to a daughter later that year.⁹⁸¹ It seems reasonable to assume that, once her relationship with Charles began, Ellen would have become a regular visitor to the Speaker's House. However, it was only once they married that she could officially move in.⁹⁸² There is clear evidence that, in the years that followed, Ellen actively exploited the Speaker's House in order to establish herself as a fashionable hostess, and thereby rebuild her social standing. However, before discussing Ellen's activities as a hostess and member of the Westminster community, it is helpful to consider the changes made to the fabric and furnishing of the house during the Manners-Suttons' tenure.

Fabric and Furnishing of the House Under the Manners-Suttons

When the Manners-Suttons finally left the Speaker's House in 1835 (as discussed below), they auctioned all their privately-owned furniture, books, paintings and other items.⁹⁸³ The auction catalogue provides much more detailed evidence for the 'private' furnishings of the house than is available for Addington's or Abbot's tenures.⁹⁸⁴ However, it must be remembered that the furniture may have been re-arranged for display purposes prior to the auction; hence, the catalogue listings for individual rooms do not necessarily reflect the layout of the house when the Manners-Suttons were in residence.⁹⁸⁵ For our purposes, the important point is that the couple's furniture was an eclectic mix of styles: labels such as "Grecian", "Parisian" and "Louis XIV style" all appear frequently.⁹⁸⁶ There are also a number of chinoiserie pieces, including a "japanned bamboo pattern French bedstead", for example.⁹⁸⁷ However, as noted in Chapter Two, the free combination of furnishings in a mixture of styles was, in fact, quite in keeping with Wyatt's "Modern Gothic" philosophy.

⁹⁸⁰ Takayanagi and Hallam Smith, *Necessary Women* (forthcoming).

⁹⁸¹ Takayanagi and Hallam Smith, *Necessary Women* (forthcoming).

⁹⁸² After travelling on the Continent with Charles during 1823, Ellen initially stayed in her brother-in-law's house in Piccadilly. See Takayanagi and Hallam Smith, *Necessary Women* (forthcoming).

⁹⁸³ See p. 237 of this thesis.

⁹⁸⁴ Parliamentary Archives (PA): ARC/VAR/189: Catalogue of all the singularly elegant furniture and ornamental appendages of the Rt. Hon. The Lord Viscount Canterbury at the official residence of the Speaker in New Palace Yard, 1835.

⁹⁸⁵ Some of the family's possessions were certainly lost or destroyed during the fire and its aftermath: about £5,000 worth, by Charles's own estimation. See *Report from the Select Committee on the losses of the late Speaker and officers of the House by fire of the Houses of Parliament*, HC 493 (1837), p. 3.

⁹⁸⁶ ARC/VAR/189; see, for example, pp. 3–4, 11.

⁹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

There may have been some redecoration of rooms during Charles's tenure. For example, there are four entries in the Lord Chamberlain's accounts for "paper hanging" in 1824–25, although sadly we have no details of the wallpaper.⁹⁸⁸ However, it appears that the 'public' furniture of the house remained relatively unchanged during Charles's tenure. Admittedly, it is impossible to confirm this because of the difficulty of making direct comparisons between the 1808 inventory and the list of salvaged items made immediately after the fire.⁹⁸⁹ The Gothic chairs provide a good illustration of these difficulties. The salvage list, under the "2 coffee rooms and the Private Dining room [sic]" on the ground floor, records "29 gothic [sic] chairs with gilt caine [sic] bottoms and chintz covers".⁹⁹⁰ By contrast, the 1808 inventory lists only one "Coffee Room", containing "10 elbow Gothic chairs" and "8 single Gothic chairs", along with another "6 single Gothic chairs" in an adjoining closet, making only twenty-four in total.⁹⁹¹ The ten elbow chairs in the 1808 inventory are said to be "en suite" with "2 handsome Gothic sofas [with] backs and seats cover'd with red leather and outside cotton cases". Yet the salvage list records "6 black + gold carved sofas in scarlet leather + chintz covers" in the Coffee Rooms; and it does not explicitly describe these as Gothic.⁹⁹² The difficulty of trying to reconcile these differing quantities is exacerbated by the possibility that some items may have been destroyed or stolen during the fire and the chaotic salvage operation (see below). The 1808 inventory lists another "8 Gothic elbow chairs in black and gold [with] cushion & cases same as draw[in]g Room", and "5 single do. chairs with cases in [sic] suite" in an ante-room; some of these may have helped to make up the twenty-nine recorded in the salvage list.⁹⁹³

On the other hand, it is known that the surviving set of chairs and sofas from the Speaker's House, now at Windsor Castle (see Chapter Two), was made in 1807. Roberts has identified them in the accounts of their makers, Elliot and Russell, and he argues that they were probably transferred to Windsor when the Speaker's House was demolished in 1842.⁹⁹⁴ Thus, it seems likely that these items, at least, were carried over from Abbot's tenure into Charles's. Moreover, the Lord Chamberlain's accounts for 1820–27 record few new purchases of furniture.⁹⁹⁵ The most significant acquisitions occurred in 1825, when there is a mysterious pair of entries for unspecified "new

⁹⁸⁸ TNA: LC 9/372, Lord Chamberlain's department: accounts and Miscellanea, Ledgers: Whitehall, Westminster, yachts, Tower etc, ff. 25–26.

⁹⁸⁹ TNA: LC 5/16: Lord Chamberlain's Department, Miscellaneous Records: Lord Treasurer of the Chamber: warrant books, ff. 266–76; PA OOW 3, List of furniture preserved from the fire of the Houses of Parliament (1834), n. p.

⁹⁹⁰ OOW 3, n. p.

⁹⁹¹ LC 5/16, ff. 267–68.

⁹⁹² OOW 3, n. p.

⁹⁹³ *Ibid.*, f. 267.

⁹⁹⁴ H. Roberts, "James Wyatt's furniture for the Palace of Westminster", *Furniture History* 39 (2003), p. 105.

⁹⁹⁵ TNA: LC 9/372, f. 25–26, 41.

furniture”, supplied by Elliot & Co. at a total cost of £391 10s. 3d.⁹⁹⁶ This was a substantial sum—about £25,000 at 2019 prices—but relatively small compared to the £4,074 0s. 1 ¼ d. spent by the Lord Chamberlain during the final phase of Abbot’s rebuilding campaign in 1807–08.⁹⁹⁷ This tends to support the theory that the bulk of the “public furniture” supplied for Abbot remained in place.

There is, however, clear evidence that Charles shared in the prevailing tastes for antiquarianism and the novels of Sir Walter Scott. The contents of his library, set out in the 1835 auction catalogue, testify to this.⁹⁹⁸ The sale included numerous antiquarian titles, including Britton’s and Brayley’s *Beauties of England and Wales*, Scott’s *Border Antiquities*, and Hinderwell’s *History and Antiquities of Scarborough*. There were also numerous novels and poems by Sir Walter Scott, including medieval-themed works such as *Lord of the Isles* (1815), *Ivanhoe* (1819) and *Tales of the Crusaders* (1825).⁹⁹⁹ There were also several volumes on costume history which, as Rosemary Hill explains, was a longstanding area of interest for the antiquarian movement.¹⁰⁰⁰ Charles must, therefore, have clearly understood Abbot’s carefully-crafted narrative which rooted the Speakership in medieval English history; and it seems that he was happy to embrace it, rather than initiate radical changes. This assumption is supported by the fact that he apparently gave his approval to the speculative Trench/Philip Wyatt remodelling scheme for the palace in 1827, which would have sympathetically extended and enhanced James Wyatt’s Gothic interventions.¹⁰⁰¹

In line with Colchester’s wishes, his collection of portraits of past Speakers remained in place when Charles took over the house. Indeed, the collection was soon expanded with a portrait of Colchester himself. This established a precedent, and thus ensured that the portrait collection would not be merely a static entity, but an ongoing tradition. Like the portrait of George III in the Tapestry Room, Colchester’s picture was painted by the leading portraitist of the era, Sir Thomas Lawrence. Colchester departed on an extended continental tour soon after resigning the Chair, so he did not begin sitting to Lawrence until November 1822.¹⁰⁰² His portrait was completed early in the following year, and was then hung “over the chimneypiece in the first of his [the Speaker’s] public rooms”.¹⁰⁰³ It seems clear that the “public rooms” referred to were the first-floor levée rooms—which had already been arranged as a Picture Gallery—rather than the ground floor coffee rooms. In another

⁹⁹⁶ TNA: LC 9/372, f. 25–26, f. 25.

⁹⁹⁷ R. Wharton, *Accounts Explanatory of the Charge of the Fourth Class of the Civil List*, HC 156 (1812), p. 5.

⁹⁹⁸ ARC/VAR/189, pp. 45–70.

⁹⁹⁹ D. Hewitt, “Scott, Sir Walter (1771–1832)”, *ODNB* (2008), <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref/odnb/24928> [accessed 07/08/2023].

¹⁰⁰⁰ R. Hill, *Time’s Witness: History in the Age of Romanticism* (London: Penguin, 2020), pp. 2, 71–72, 77.

¹⁰⁰¹ Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster*, pp. 767–68.

¹⁰⁰² PRO 30/9/37, f. 234.

¹⁰⁰³ *Ibid.*, f. 255.

diary entry, Colchester tells us that his portrait was intended to hang in “the first of the Picture Rooms”.¹⁰⁰⁴ Either way, Charles was genuinely pleased with this new addition to the house; he wrote Colchester a very flattering thank-you letter expressing his “honour” at receiving this addition to “our collection”.¹⁰⁰⁵ His use of the plural indicates that, despite handing the collection over to his successor, Abbot still felt a degree of proprietorship over it.

Although Charles had no inclination to make radical changes to the Speaker’s House, a number of significant alterations were made during the 1820s. In part, these were intended to remedy the defects in Wyatt’s construction. These were already apparent in 1818, when Crocker was asked to estimate for the cost of creating a new drainage channel in front of the house, in order to prevent water damage to the ground floor timbers.¹⁰⁰⁶ Nevertheless, the most important changes took place after Charles’s relationship with Ellen began c. 1823. Hallam Smith argues that this may not be coincidental: some of the changes probably reflect her opinions regarding comfort and convenience.¹⁰⁰⁷ At any rate, in June 1824 Soane drew up a list of alterations which the Speaker had apparently requested.¹⁰⁰⁸ Minor adjustments were proposed to Wyatt’s carefully-planned circulation routes: these included the installation of a new staircase from the principal floor to the upper rooms, and “taking down and reversing the stair from the dining room into the state apartments”.¹⁰⁰⁹ Soane was also asked to remove a low archway on the first-floor landing, and make unspecified alterations to the attic rooms above. Finally, Charles requested that a new lobby be inserted in the north range of the upper cloisters, to separate his private Library from Wyatt’s grand staircase.¹⁰¹⁰ These alterations cost £2,646 to execute (about £200,000 at 2019 prices). This was £646 over budget: Crocker blamed the overspend on Wyatt’s defective construction, which had necessitated various remedial works.¹⁰¹¹

However, the most important alteration to the Speaker’s House during Charles’s tenure was the removal of the kitchen from the central courtyard of the cloisters. This change may have been

¹⁰⁰⁴ PRO 30/9/37, f. 300.

¹⁰⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 401 (verso).

¹⁰⁰⁶ TNA WORK 11/28/2: Office of Works and successors: Houses of Parliament: Registered Files, Speaker’s Residence and Garden: Repairs and alterations: Speaker’s House Estimate Westminster August 1818, n. p. Crocker’s works evidently failed to solve the underlying problems: in 1829 the coffee room floor boards were again found to be rotten, and had to be replaced (“The Speaker’s House”, *Morning Post*, 9 September 1829, p. 3).

¹⁰⁰⁷ E. Hallam Smith, “The “Gothic Slum”: MPs and St Stephen’s Cloister, Westminster, 1548–2017”, *Parliamentary History* 41:2 (2022), p. 285; Takayanagi and E. Hallam Smith, *Necessary Women* (forthcoming).

¹⁰⁰⁸ TNA WORK 1/12: Office of Works: General Letter Books: In- and out- letters, ff. 490–91.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Colvin, *King’s Works* 6, p. 534. The staircase in question was probably the small one in the infilled space between the St Stephen’s Chapel and the southern range of the cloisters, as shown on Lee’s plan (Fig. 2.20).

¹⁰¹⁰ Colvin, *King’s Works* 6, pp. 534.

¹⁰¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 534.

prompted by Trench’s speculative proposals of 1826–27, which envisaged converting the ground floor cloisters into “part of the Speaker’s living suite of rooms”.¹⁰¹² In his testimony to the 1826 Commons’ Select Committee on Committee Rooms and Printed Papers, Trench claimed that the Speaker was “obliged hermetically to seal his windows to prevent the smell of the dinner coming in”. Trench had therefore suggested that the kitchens be removed from Cloister Court, “and the Speaker acquiesced in the suggestion”.¹⁰¹³ There is no evidence that either Addington or Abbot had ever complained about smells from the kitchen; it therefore seems likely that this claim was merely a pretext. Whatever the truth of the matter, the kitchens were certainly removed during the winter recess of that year.¹⁰¹⁴ Replacement facilities were provided by constructing an extension at the rear of the Speaker’s Secretary’s House; this is shown on the Chawner and Rhodes plan of the palace prepared in 1834 (Fig. 3.8). According to the Office of Works’ annual report for 1828, this extension was only intended to be temporary.¹⁰¹⁵ Nevertheless, it appears to have endured until the 1834 fire, and possibly right up to the final demolition of the Speaker’s House in 1842.

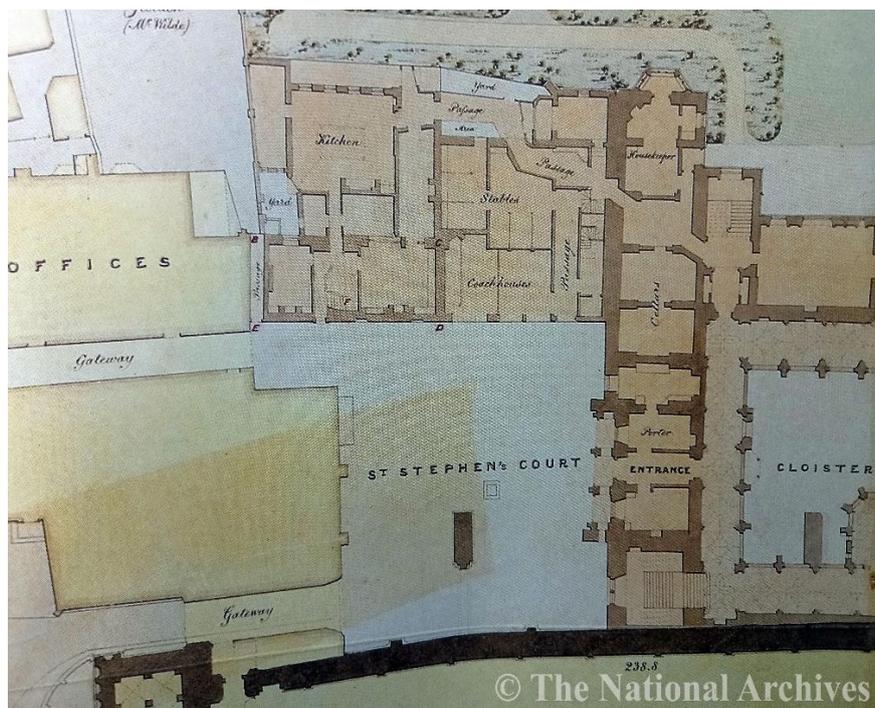


Fig. 3.8: Thomas Chawner and Henry Rhodes, General Ground Plan of Westminster Hall, the Houses of Lord and Commons and other Public Buildings situate between New Palace Yard on the North and Parliament Place on the South, (detail), 1834. Ink on paper, dimensions unavailable. London: The National Archives (WORK 29/21)

¹⁰¹² Trench, *Thames Quay*, p. 119.

¹⁰¹³ Trench, *Thames Quay*, p. 119.

¹⁰¹⁴ Colvin, *King’s Works* 6, p. 534.

¹⁰¹⁵ TNA WORK 1/16: Office of Works: General Letter Books: In- and out- letters, f. 86.

As the plan shows, a passageway had to be awkwardly forced through the stables in order to connect the new kitchen to the cloisters, and thence to the State Dining Room. This provides yet another illustration of the tension between convenience and conservation which has shaped the history of the cloisters since Carter first drew attention to their historic value. The removal of the kitchens helped to restore the dignity of the cloisters, by removing the “menial apartments” and returning their exterior walls to open view for the first time in many years. Quite possibly, this was the real motivation for making the change: as interest in Gothic architecture continued to grow, Charles and Trench may well have felt that the continued presence of “menial apartments” in and around the cloisters had become an embarrassment. Certainly, in their 1836 valediction to the old palace, Brayley and Britton praise Charles for his efforts “to preserve all the fine and beautiful parts of the cloister and crypt [...] from further injury and defacement”.¹⁰¹⁶ Charles had thus gained credit with the antiquarian lobby, but it had come at the expense of convenience: the kitchens were now remote from the Dining Room and the floor space of the stables had been encroached upon.¹⁰¹⁷

Dinners and Levées During Manners-Sutton’s Tenure

Unlike his predecessor, Charles did not keep a detailed diary; we therefore have far less information about the Speaker’s official social events during his tenure. However, the parliamentary dinners and levées were occasionally mentioned in the press; indeed, in 1822 the *Westmorland Gazette* published a short article on them. This provides so many useful details that it has been quoted in full (see Appendix Two). For example, it confirms that it was still customary for the first dinner of each session to be given for the government, and the second for the opposition. It is also the earliest known source to state explicitly that it was customary to conclude the dinners before Easter. It claims that it was “unusual” for the Speaker to hold his official dinners on Sundays, but “as Parliament was assembled so late in the season, while, on the other hand, Easter falls early in the year, the Speaker felt compelled to have two Parliamentary dinners instead of one in the course of the week”.¹⁰¹⁸ In fact, it appears that Sunday dinners—which had been discontinued by Abbot—once again became a regular fixture under his successor; subsequent press reports frequently refer to dinners being held on both Saturday and Sunday.¹⁰¹⁹ The *Westmorland Gazette* report claims that

¹⁰¹⁶ E. W. Brayley and J. Britton, *The History of the Ancient Palace and Late Houses of Parliament at Westminster* (London: J. Weale, 1836), p. 456.

¹⁰¹⁷ Incidentally, the Chawner and Rhodes plan also shows that the Housekeeper’s Room has reverted to its original position at the eastern end of the north wing, thus releasing the ground floor of the former oratory. It is not clear what, if any, use the Oratory was now being put to.

¹⁰¹⁸ See Appendix Two, p. 249.

¹⁰¹⁹ See “The Speaker’s Parliamentary Dinners”, *Morning Chronicle*, 11 February 1824, p. 2; “London”, *The Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 11 February 1826, p. 4. In 1824 the *Devizes and*

thirty-two Members were usually invited to each dinner.¹⁰²⁰ However, an 1824 report in the *Morning Chronicle* gives the usual number as “about thirty”, although only twenty-four were present for the first, Ministerial dinner.¹⁰²¹ The latter article also notes that the dinners usually started at 7pm, and the Speaker “rose from table” at 10pm.¹⁰²² The levées continued to be held directly after the dinners, and it appears that they were usually, if not always, held on a Saturday. For example, on 1 April 1833 the *Morning Post* reported that the Speaker had given both his last dinner of the session, and his last levée, the previous Saturday.¹⁰²³ The *Westmorland Gazette* report confirms that court dress was still worn at the dinners.¹⁰²⁴ It appears that, after the 1833 Reform Act, some newly-elected Radical MPs raised objections to this, but no action was taken.¹⁰²⁵ As late as 1835, the possibility of abolishing the requirement for court dress was still being debated in the Commons.¹⁰²⁶ Charles also continued to reward the clerks and messengers for their services at the end of each session. However, it appears that all the staff were now hosted together at a single dinner, rather than holding separate dinners for the clerks and messengers as Abbot had done. For example, a report in the *Morning Post* on 24 July 1823 reports that the “usual annual dinner on the close of the session, to the Clerks and Officers of the House” had been held the previous Monday, with “near forty persons present” including the Speaker, his secretary, and the chaplain.¹⁰²⁷

Charles’s dinners were sumptuous, if press reports are to be believed: in 1824 the *Morning Chronicle* commented that his “plate is splendid, his wines are choice and varied, and the dinners are aided by several French cooks”.¹⁰²⁸ Such generous hospitality can only have served to further enhance the Speaker’s social and political stature. An eyewitness account of one of Charles’s dinners can be found in the diary of John Cam Hobhouse, MP for Westminster 1820–33, who records visiting the Speaker’s “first opposition dinner” on Sunday 9 February 1823.¹⁰²⁹ Hume was also present, and apparently amused everybody “by talking his politics, particularly against the church, out loud”.¹⁰³⁰

Wiltshire Gazette published a (probably satirical) letter, purporting to be from the Bishop of London, chastising the Speaker for holding dinners on a Sunday (26 February 1824, p. 4).

¹⁰²⁰ See Appendix Two, p. 249.

¹⁰²¹ “The Speaker’s Parliamentary Dinners”, *Morning Chronicle*, 11 February 1824, p. 2.

¹⁰²² *Ibid*, p. 2.

¹⁰²³ “The Speaker’s Last Parliamentary Dinner”, *Morning Post*, 1 April 1833, p. 3.

¹⁰²⁴ See Appendix Two, p. 249.

¹⁰²⁵ Untitled piece, *Morning Post*, 21 February 1833, p. 3.

¹⁰²⁶ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., vol 28 (1835), cc. 578–80.

¹⁰²⁷ “Parliamentary Dinner”, *Morning Post*, 24 July 1823, p. 3.

¹⁰²⁸ “The Speaker’s Parliamentary Dinners”, *Morning Chronicle*, 11 February 1824, p. 2.

¹⁰²⁹ BL Add. MS 56547: Supplementary Broughton Papers, Vol. XXI: 16 November 1822–8 May 1823, f. 27. For Hobhouse’s biography see D. R. Fisher, “HOBHOUSE, John Cam, (1786–1869)”, *History of Parliament Online* (2009), <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/hobhouse-john-1786-1869> [accessed 21/02/2023].

¹⁰³⁰ Add. MS 56547, f. 27.

Clearly, the Speaker's official dinners remained a forum for serious political discussion, but in a relatively relaxed and convivial setting. The Speaker's levées, too, provided a valuable opportunity for politicians from across the spectrum to meet on neutral ground. On 15 March 1823, Hobhouse attended the levée with his friend and fellow radical Robert Knight, recently elected as MP for Rye.¹⁰³¹ Sadly his diary tells us little about the events of that evening, but he notes that Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington, the future Tory prime minister (1769–1852; in office 1828–40 and November–December 1834), was also present. Though Hobhouse's accounts of these events are brief, these hitherto-neglected descriptions provide a tantalising glimpse into the ways that the Speaker facilitated political discussion and networking outside the chamber of the House.

The 1821 Coronation Visit

Charles's tenure witnessed perhaps the most famous occasion in the life of the first Speaker's House: George IV's visit on the night of 18–19 July 1821, the eve of his coronation. Up to the reign of Henry VIII, when Westminster was the principal royal residence, it was natural that the monarch would sleep there prior to their coronation ceremony. Elizabeth I is also known to have returned to the old palace on the eve of her coronation in 1559, although the court had by then been transferred to Whitehall.¹⁰³² From at least the coronation of Charles II, however, monarchs slept elsewhere on the night before the ceremony.¹⁰³³ Thus, George IV was not following an established tradition by staying at Westminster. His coronation has already been analysed in detail by several historians.¹⁰³⁴ For the purposes of this thesis, the important point is that it was an overtly historicist occasion, with extensive use of pseudo-historic costumes and Gothic set-dressings in Westminster Hall.¹⁰³⁵ This provides another indication of the growing popularity of medievalism and antiquarianism at this time. It also suggests an ever-strengthening association between the Gothic style and the monarchy—an association which Wyatt had helped to foster through his work at Windsor Castle and Kew Palace.¹⁰³⁶ Nevertheless, the King's motives for staying at the Speaker's

¹⁰³¹ Add. MS 56547, f. 37. For Knight's biography see D. R. Fisher, "KNIGHT, Robert (1768–1855), of Barrells Hall, Henley-in-Arden, Warws.", *History of Parliament Online* (2009), <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/knight-robert-1768-1855> [accessed 06/04/2022].

¹⁰³² C. Riding, D. Church and C. Garibaldi, "The Speaker's House", in C. Riding and J. Riding (eds.), *The Houses of Parliament: History, Art, Architecture* (London: Merrell, 2000), pp. 200–01.

¹⁰³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 200–01.

¹⁰³⁴ See, for example, V. Cumming, "Pantomime and Pageantry: The Coronation of George IV", in C. Fox (ed.), *London: World City, 1800–1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 39–50; E. A. Smith, *George IV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 179–91.

¹⁰³⁵ V. Cumming, "Pantomime and Pageantry: The Coronation of George IV", in C. Fox (ed.), *London: World City, 1800–1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 42–46.

¹⁰³⁶ See pp. 121 and 201 of this thesis.

House appear to have been principally pragmatic. By the time of his accession his health was somewhat precarious, so it was prudent to reduce the physical burdens of the ceremony by minimising the distance he would have to travel to reach the Abbey.¹⁰³⁷ Moreover, the King anticipated—correctly, as it turned out—that his estranged wife, Queen Caroline, might try to disrupt the proceedings.¹⁰³⁸ The Queen enjoyed a degree of public support, and it was feared that her presence might spark disorder. Hence, there was a desire to limit the King’s outdoor appearances on the day of the coronation. The ceremony itself, and the subsequent banquet, would take place indoors, where unwanted guests could more easily be excluded.

Despite this pragmatic rationale, the King’s stay at Westminster was a great honour for the Speaker, and a highly significant endorsement of the rebuilt Speaker’s House. Nevertheless, the house’s role in the coronation proceedings was somewhat marginal. It seems that the King’s visit was not widely publicised, probably to avoid any unwanted attention from the Queen’s supporters. It seems that this policy was generally successful: a few people spotted and heckled the King while he was travelling to Westminster on 18 July, but otherwise there is no evidence of significant disturbances prior to the ceremony.¹⁰³⁹ Few—if any—of the contemporary accounts of the event even mention the Speaker’s House; their focus is entirely on the events in the Abbey and Westminster Hall, and the procession between the two. However, Charles found time to write a letter to his children the night before the ceremony. His servants were preparing tea for the King’s arrival; the latter had apparently requested “plenty of bread and butter, if you please”.¹⁰⁴⁰ Charles’s duties before the ceremony were demanding: he was required to “sit up until twelve o’clock to-night, and [...] be up at five o’clock tomorrow morning”.¹⁰⁴¹ He did not anticipate that the ceremonies would be over until at least 7pm the following day.¹⁰⁴² Croker paid a brief visit to the house the following morning, and found everybody busy with last-minute preparations:

[The King] was waiting, dressed in his underclothes, for the public officers to proceed. Even after he had put on his robes and hat [...] he had to wait full half an hour for the Great Chamberlain, Lord Gwydir, who, it seems, had torn his robes, and was obliged to wait to

¹⁰³⁷ E. A. Smith, *George IV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 179.

¹⁰³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

¹⁰³⁹ L. J. Jennings, *The Croker Papers: The Correspondence and Diaries of the Late Right Honourable John Wilson Croker, LL.D., F.R.S., Secretary to the Admiralty from 1809 to 1830*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, May 2012), p. 195.

¹⁰⁴⁰ PA HC/SO/1/20, Records of the House of Commons: Office of the Speaker: Miscellaneous Deposits, transcript of a letter from Charles Manners-Sutton to his children, 18 July 1821.

¹⁰⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴² In the event, the banquet in Westminster Hall concluded at 8pm (Smith, *George IV*, p. 190).

have them mended [...] His Majesty told me the story of the Queen's various attacks on the lines of circumvallation and her several repulses.¹⁰⁴³

The latter presumably refers to the Queen's well-known attempt to gain admittance to the Abbey on the morning of the ceremony; there is no evidence that she made any attempt to gain admission to the Speaker's House.¹⁰⁴⁴

George IV's visit was not forgotten by subsequent Speakers, but circumstances conspired against any further royal visits during the two ensuing coronations. William IV elected to hold a scaled-back ceremony in 1831, partly as a reaction against the excesses of his brother's reign.¹⁰⁴⁵ By the time Victoria was crowned in 1838, the old Palace of Westminster had become a fire-ravaged building site, and the Speaker's House was no longer available. Nevertheless, the first Victorian Speakers evidently cherished a hope that the 1821 coronation visit would be repeated, and perhaps even established as an ongoing tradition. When the new Speaker's House was finally fitted out in the late 1850s, it was provided with a dedicated State Bedroom and State Bed. It is not clear exactly who specified these, but it has traditionally been understood that they were intended to accommodate the Monarch on coronation visits.¹⁰⁴⁶ In the event, Edward VII did not stay at the house before his 1902 coronation; thus, the tradition failed to become established, and the State Bed remained unused.¹⁰⁴⁷ Hence, the 1821 coronation was, in a sense, a missed opportunity for the Speaker's House. Nevertheless, the creation of the State Bed allowed the Victorian Speakers to physically memorialise this event, arguably affording it greater importance and prestige in the eyes of posterity than it actually enjoyed at the time. It would appear that the State Bed was an attempt to build on Abbot's earlier efforts to establish an aura of antiquity and tradition around the Speakership, further emphasising its political legitimacy and burnishing its prestige.

Ellen's Residence: Politics, Patronage and Prestige

The coronation visit was a one-off event, but Ellen's exploitation of the Speaker's House to try to rebuild her social standing indicates the enduring social value of the house to its occupants. Hallam Smith has already explored Ellen's career as a socialite, but it is worthwhile to briefly examine the specific ways in which she exploited the Speaker's House in order to assert her presence within the

¹⁰⁴³ Jennings, *The Croker Papers* 1, p. 195.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Smith, *George IV*, pp. 188–89.

¹⁰⁴⁵ M. Brock, "William IV (1765–1837)", *ODNB* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/29451> [accessed 17/02/2023].

¹⁰⁴⁶ A. Wedgwood, *Guide to the Speaker's House* (London: HMSO, 1994), p. 22. However, Riding *et al.* acknowledge that the purpose of the present bed has never been certain ("The Speaker's House", p. 202).

¹⁰⁴⁷ Wedgwood, *Guide to the Speaker's House*, p. 22.

political life of Westminster, and the wider social life of the capital.¹⁰⁴⁸ She took full advantage of the relatively new facility for women to listen to Commons debates through the ventilator in the roof of St Stephen's Chapel.¹⁰⁴⁹ The ventilator was, in Sarah Richardson's words, an "ingenious fiction".¹⁰⁵⁰ Women had been officially banned from watching Commons' debates during the eighteenth century; but the ventilator allowed them to listen without being physically present in the chamber.¹⁰⁵¹ Ellen, however, made a mockery of the "ingenious fiction" by visiting the ventilator in an ostentatious, visible way, particularly when the debate was of notable importance. Of course, the ventilator itself was a largely invisible space, but Ellen could make herself visible during the short journey from the Speaker's House to the Commons. She did so by appropriating the Speaker's trainbearer and, in effect, mimicking the famous 'Speaker's procession' to the Commons. A contemporary newspaper report explains her tactics when attending the highly-charged Catholic emancipation debates in May 1829:

The Speaker's wife [...] has twice attended these discussions. On the first occasion she came from the Speaker's house through the lobby, officially attended by the Speaker's trainbearer; but as this made the matter somewhat too public, on her second visit she came in a carriage from the Speaker's House in New palace-yard [sic] to the general entrance to the Commons, in Old Palace-yard; being again, however, attended by the trainbearer, she was generally recognised, and of course attracted considerable attention. She was accompanied by her two daughters [from her first marriage], the Misses Purvis [sic].¹⁰⁵²

By drawing attention to her presence in the ventilator, Ellen was asserting her political engagement. Rather than being merely the Speaker's wife and hostess, it seems that she wanted to position herself as a political figure in her own right, at least to the limited extent that Georgian societal norms would allow. In addition, Ellen's visits to the ventilator allowed her to publicly show support for her husband, in both a personal and a political sense. In 1832, when Charles announced his intention to stand down from the Speakership, she was present in the ventilator to hear his farewell speech to the Commons. Though she was not visible to the MPs below, the press afforded her a kind

¹⁰⁴⁸ Takayanagi and Hallam Smith, *Necessary Women* (forthcoming).

¹⁰⁴⁹ The ventilator had been constructed as part of Henry Holland's alterations to the House of Commons' ventilation system in the early 1790s. See Hallam Smith, "Ventilating the Commons", pp. 80–82.

¹⁰⁵⁰ S. Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 129–30.

¹⁰⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 129–30.

¹⁰⁵² "LONDON, Monday, May 25", *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette*, 28 May 1829, p. 1.

of visibility by reporting her presence afterwards. The *Essex Standard* told readers that she was “deeply affected” by Charles’s speech.¹⁰⁵³

In the meantime, Ellen’s efforts to establish herself in society probably gave the Speaker’s House greater public prominence than ever before. Addington and Abbot had certainly hosted social gatherings for their friends, in addition to the Speaker’s official dinners and levées. However, it seems that both hosts and guests considered these to be essentially private gatherings, and it appears that they were not widely publicised; no mention of them in contemporary newspapers has so far come to light. By contrast, Ellen’s social events were considered to be “fashionable”, and consequently attracted press attention.¹⁰⁵⁴ For example, the *Kilkenny Moderator* of 12 May 1834 mentions a “sumptuous dinner” given by the Manners-Suttons: the guest list included the literary hostess Mary Boyle, Dowager Countess of Cork and Orrery (1746–1840), along with several peers.¹⁰⁵⁵ The dinner was apparently followed by “a select evening party”.¹⁰⁵⁶ It is interesting that Ellen, not Charles, is cited as the hostess for this function. This suggests that she was taking the lead in organising, and promoting, such occasions; in so doing, she was actively working to maintain and enhance the couple’s reputation and social standing. The press coverage of these activities must have turned Ellen into something of a celebrity—making her, perhaps, the first Speaker’s wife to attain this status. Like the prime minister’s wife, the Speaker’s wife has never had any official constitutional role; the degree of public recognition enjoyed by subsequent Speakers’ wives has depended largely on the individual initiative of the women concerned.¹⁰⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Ellen showed that, if a Speaker’s spouse wanted to make a name for herself, she could exploit the Speaker’s House in order to achieve this.

The Speaker’s House also enabled Ellen to undertake spontaneous, informal socialising, just as it had for Addington and Abbot. A good example came in May 1829 when the Irish poet Thomas Moore—an old friend of Ellen’s—visited the Commons to watch a speech by Daniel O’Connell. Moore recalls that he was

Sent for by Mrs Manners-Sutton at seven o’clock, to have some dinner; none but herself and daughters, Mr Lockwood and Mr Sutton. Amused to see her, in all her state, the same

¹⁰⁵³ “Retirement of the Speaker”, *Essex Standard*, 4 August 1832, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵⁴ “Fashionable Parties”, *Morning Post*, 12 May 1835, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵⁵ P. Edwards, “Boyle (née Monckton), Mary (Maria), countess of Cork and Orrery (1746–1840)”, *ODNB* (2004), <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/18942> [accessed 11/09/2023].

¹⁰⁵⁶ *Kilkenny Moderator*, 12 May 1834, p. 5. For more details of Ellen’s social events and public appearances, see Takayanagi and Hallam Smith, *Necessary Women* (forthcoming).

¹⁰⁵⁷ Elizabeth Gully (wife of William Court Gully, Speaker 1895–1905) is another Speaker’s wife who achieved a degree of public prominence. See Takayanagi and Hallam Smith, *Necessary Women* (forthcoming).

hearty, lively Irishwoman still. Walked with her in the garden [...] all was most Picturesque and striking.¹⁰⁵⁸

Moore's entry makes clear that the House was still sitting at that moment, so Charles would have been 'on duty' in the chamber.¹⁰⁵⁹ Just as Mrs Abbot had previously hosted dignitaries in her husband's absence, Ellen was now working actively behind the scenes, using her proximity to the Commons to find informal networking opportunities with MPs and prominent visitors to the House. Moore's description of Ellen "in state" makes clear that she was consciously using her grand official residence to maximise her personal status.

The 1834 Fire and Its Aftermath

On 16 October 1834 the Palace of Westminster was ravaged by a devastating fire. The events of that night have been fully described by Caroline Shenton, and need not be repeated at length.¹⁰⁶⁰ However, some events in the immediate aftermath of the fire can shed further light on the themes discussed in this chapter, and should therefore be considered briefly. Whilst the fire effectively destroyed the two Houses of Parliament—along with Soane's libraries and committee rooms—the Speaker's House escaped with relatively little damage. Having destroyed the upper storey of St Stephen's Chapel, the fire spread into the southern range of the cloisters. The extent of its reach is shown on a diagram drawn immediately after the fire by John Rickman (who was still living on site at Westminster; Fig. 3.9). However, the progress of the fire was successfully halted and the remainder of the house escaped largely undamaged. Nevertheless, the contents of the house—both public and private—suffered badly in the course of a chaotic salvage operation. Charles's eldest son—who, in his parents' absence, led the rescue efforts—later judged that the family lost as much from breakage and thefts as from the flames.¹⁰⁶¹ That said, a considerable quantity of furniture was successfully salvaged from the house; the surviving "public" items were recorded in an inventory now in the Parliamentary Archives.¹⁰⁶² After returning to London, Charles quickly ordered the house to be partially repaired, so that his family could move back in.¹⁰⁶³ Beyond this, there is little information about what happened to the contents of the house in the aftermath of the fire. There is, however, a memorandum—apparently scrawled in haste—attached to the aforementioned inventory, which notes that nine tapestries had been removed to "the Furniture Stores of HM

¹⁰⁵⁸ Lord John Russell (ed.), *Memoirs, Journal and Correspondence of Thomas Moore*, vol. 6 (London, 1854), p. 32.

¹⁰⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁶⁰ C. Shenton, *The Day Parliament Burned Down* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁰⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹⁰⁶² PA OOW 3: List of furniture preserved from the fire of the Houses of Parliament, n. p.

¹⁰⁶³ Untitled piece, *Morning Advertiser*, 30 October 1834, p. 2.

Com[issione]rs [of] Woods etc.”.¹⁰⁶⁴ Despite the vicissitudes of the fire, the tapestries were reported to be “in excel[en]t preservation & Colour [sic] good.”¹⁰⁶⁵ The memo also gives details of the total wall area that the tapestries could cover; this suggests that the Office was already eyeing them up for possible re-use elsewhere. Meanwhile, James Bailie MP played host to the Manners-Suttons until the Speaker’s House was ready for re-occupation.¹⁰⁶⁶

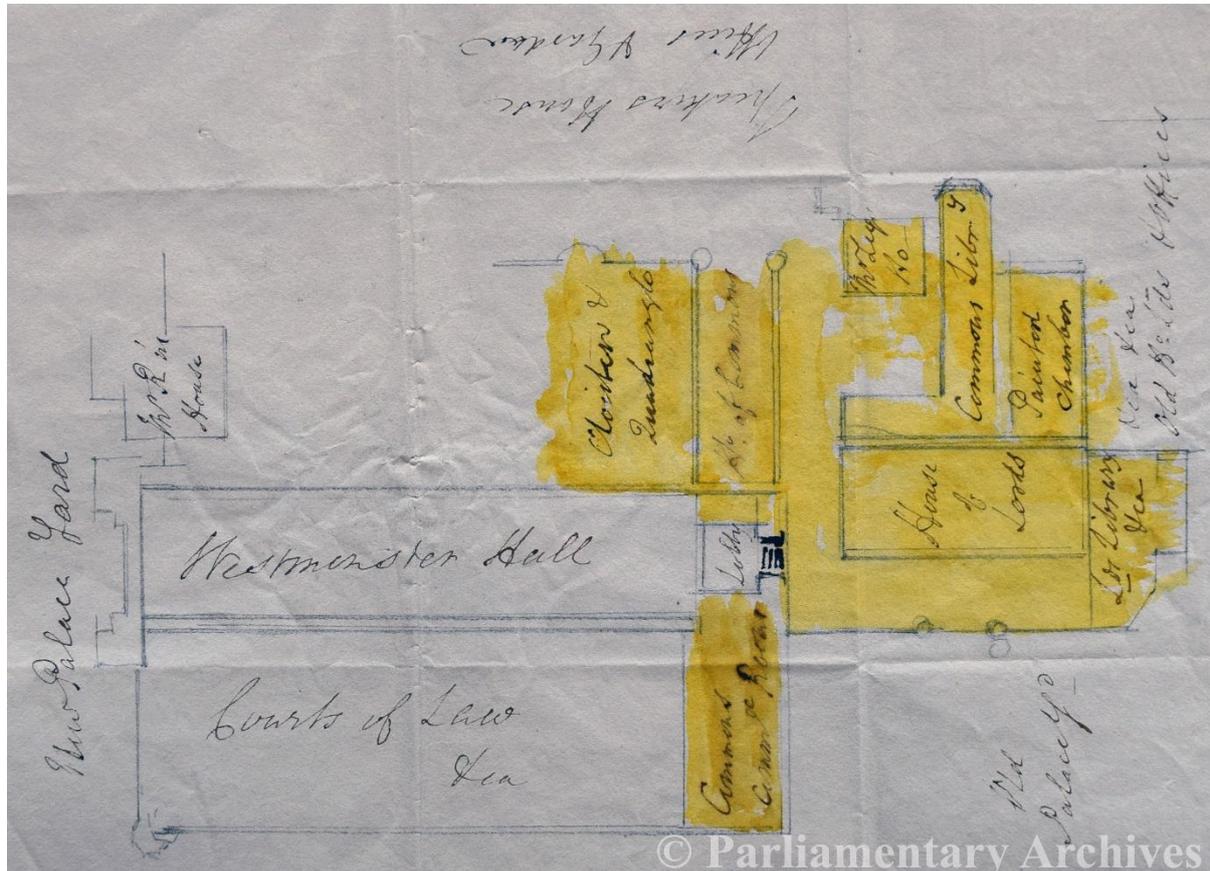


Fig 3.9: John Rickman, plan of destruction by fire of the old Houses of Parliament, 1834. Ink on paper, dimensions unavailable. London: Parliamentary Archives, HL/PO/LB/1/2.

The fire ended more than a century of political indecision: a total reconstruction of the Palace of Westminster was now unavoidable. The story of the ensuing architectural competition, and the eventual selection of Charles Barry’s design, is well known.¹⁰⁶⁷ However, contemporary commentary on the destruction of the old palace, and the competition for its successor, reveals some interesting insights into contemporary attitudes towards the Gothic style. These help to

¹⁰⁶⁴ PA OOW 3, n. p.

¹⁰⁶⁵ *Ibid*, n. p.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Untitled piece, *Macclesfield Courier and Herald*, 25 October 1834, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶⁷ C. Shenton, *Mr Barry’s War*, pp. 43-51; W. J. Rorabaugh, “Politics and the Architectural Competition for the Houses of Parliament, 1834–1837”, *Victorian Studies* 17:2 (1973), pp. 155–175; Port, *The Houses of Parliament*, pp. 20–52.

illuminate the prevailing attitudes to Wyatt's Gothic vision for the palace at the moment of its destruction, and the long-term impact of his work on popular attitudes. As is well known, A. W. N. Pugin—Carter's ideological heir—reacted with undisguised glee to the destruction of “Soanes [sic] mixtures and Wyatts [sic] heresies”.¹⁰⁶⁸ However, Pugin was an enthusiast for medieval architecture and his views were not necessarily representative of the wider population. Contemporary newspaper reports offer some insights into the opinions of those outside the architectural profession. An article in the *Bucks Herald* on 25 October, though penned anonymously, offers an extensive and knowledgeable critique of the architecture of the old palace as it stood in 1834. It merits quoting at length:

That the Painted Chamber and the Tapestryed Room [i.e., the interior of the former Court of Requests], in which the Peers assemble, should have been burnt we regret; we equally regret the destruction of part of the Speaker's House and the whole of Mr Ley's House [...] but the Hall and Abbey of Westminster being preserved, we do not mourn the loss of the other buildings, which were as in commodious [sic] (particularly the House of Commons) within, as they were irregular, awkward and ugly without. The House of Commons was as dull and dirty-looking in its exterior as Newgate [Prison], and the House of Lords [presumably referring to Wyatt's office block façade] was as ill-shaped and grotesque as an old china teapot. The design of both buildings was of the 'irregular order', without plan or elegance—in hodge-podge [sic] style of a corridor here, a turret there, a door at this end and a covered way at the other; every kind and manner, shape, sort, size and description of architecture, being blended in motley and incongruous mode [...] as a display of national architecture, with Westminster Abbey and the Chapel of Henry VII, contrasting with them face to face, and with the grand and pure olden style of the 'Hall of Rufus' [i.e., Westminster Hall] to the north, the Houses of Parliament, all mortar and millinery, were to these as a golden guinea to a copper counterfeit.¹⁰⁶⁹

It is interesting that the author specifically includes the Speaker's House in the list of buildings whose loss or damage they regret. However, the accompanying mention of Mr Ley's House (i.e., the Clerk of the Commons' House, built 1759–60; see Chapter One) suggests that this regret was motivated more by concern for the occupants than the architectural merits of these buildings. It is equally interesting that St Stephen's Chapel is criticised just as severely as Wyatt's House of Lords office block. This author seems to value aesthetics more than any historical value the buildings might

¹⁰⁶⁸ Quoted in R. Hill, *God's Architect: Pugin and the Building of Romantic Britain* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), pp. 128–29.

¹⁰⁶⁹ “Destruction of the Two Houses of Parliament by Fire”, *Bucks Herald*, 25 October 1834, p. 2.

possess: Wyatt's alterations to the former chapel made it, to their mind, just as bad as his new-build works, and therefore not worth saving. However, what is perhaps most revealing is the allegation that Wyatt's work lacked "plan or elegance". Even in 1834—although Picturesque aesthetics were well-established, and the Gothic style increasingly popular—there were still many who preferred Classical order and regularity. The author was certainly not hostile to Gothic architecture—Westminster Hall and the Abbey are admired—but Wyatt's work no longer satisfied. It is difficult to say how representative this author's views were, but it is striking that Barry's design was almost tailor-made to suit them: a building on a regular, Classical plan, but with more authentic and better-executed Gothic details.

Whilst the Tastemakers of the 1820s were now greatly diminished as a Parliamentary force, some of their number remained active. Rorabaugh has outlined Cust's instrumental role in setting up the architectural competition of 1835.¹⁰⁷⁰ These men had been largely supportive of Wyatt's Picturesque vision, if not of his detailed design. How, then, were they persuaded to accept Barry's very different Gothic vision? Firstly, it must be remembered that Barry's design took more than thirty years to execute, and his ideas evolved over the course of that time. Previous historians have rarely, if ever, acknowledged that Barry's original 1830s designs were aesthetically much closer to Wyatt's buildings than the final, executed version. In particular, the executed palace is famous for its rich Perpendicular exterior decoration, inspired by Henry VII's Chapel. The well-known Kearnan engraving of Barry's proposals (c. 1835) clearly shows that, in the original conception, this decoration was applied much more sparingly (Fig 3.10). This helps to explain why Barry's design was acceptable to the surviving Tastemakers, who had previously argued for "associations of simplicity with power" and had criticised the "excessive ornamentation" of Soane's Royal Entrance (as discussed above). Moreover, Barry's Perpendicular detailing was unquestionably appropriate to the context of Westminster, thanks to its use at the nearby chapel. The Tastemakers had also cited grandeur as one of their key criteria: Barry's design certainly has this, but it now derives from the simplicity and monumentality of the composition, rather than from lack of ornament. In addition, whilst its plan is much more regular than Wyatt's, Barry's building still maintains an element of Picturesque irregularity. Barry's carefully-considered balance of projecting and recessed planes ensures that the riverfront façade retains a degree of movement, as called for in the "Bœotian order" article.¹⁰⁷¹ His asymmetrical Victoria and Clock (now Elizabeth) towers added an element of variety and asymmetry, albeit more restrained than Wyatt's compositions. Barry's design was a

¹⁰⁷⁰ Rorabaugh, "The Architectural Competition for the Houses of Parliament", pp. 162–75.

¹⁰⁷¹ Medley and Holyoake [pseuds.], "Bœotian Order", p. 446.

clever compromise, designed to satisfy both the outright critics of Wyatt’s work, and those who had given his Gothic vision a qualified approval.



Fig. 3.10: T. Kearnan after C. Barry, *New Houses of Parliament: View of the Adopted Design as it Would Appear from the Surrey End of Westminster Bridge*, c. 1835. Ink on paper, 175 x 286mm. New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, B1977.14.22642.

It was a House of Commons select committee, during the 1835 session, which made the famous decision to insist that entries for the Westminster competition must be “Gothic or Elizabethan” in style.¹⁰⁷² Previous histories of Barry’s palace have generally overlooked Wyatt’s earlier work when discussing this decision. For example, Rorabaugh’s article does not mention Wyatt at all.¹⁰⁷³ Port emphasises wider changes in fashion—particularly the growing importance of historic associationism—without considering the role of Wyatt’s work in entrenching such associations.¹⁰⁷⁴ Caroline Shenton briefly acknowledges that Wyatt’s Picturesque alterations to the palace must have made an impression on the mind of the young Charles Barry.¹⁰⁷⁵ Yet she does not discuss the possibility that Wyatt’s work may have influenced the competition commissioners who, ultimately, dictated the choice of style. Although they do not quite say it in so many words, the repeated tendency of historians to overlook, or dismiss, Wyatt’s work gives the impression that the committee of 1835 adopted Gothic in spite of—or at least, without any influence from—Wyatt’s earlier work. This thesis argues that this decision was made, at least in part, *because* of Wyatt. For all

¹⁰⁷² *Report from the Select Committee on Rebuilding Houses of Parliament* [sic], HC 262 (1835), p. 4.

¹⁰⁷³ Rorabaugh, “The Architectural Competition for the Houses of Parliament”, pp. 155–75.

¹⁰⁷⁴ M. H. Port, (ed.), *The Houses of Parliament* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 30–32. See also pp. 11–13, 24–25.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Shenton, *Mr Barry’s War*, p. 18.

its acknowledged faults, Wyatt's work at Westminster is vital to understanding the genesis of Barry's new palace, which is now such an integral part of our national life. The Speaker's House was one of the most important elements of his scheme; by considering the full history of Wyatt's rebuilding project, it is now possible to gain a much better understanding of the intentions which informed his vision—even if that vision fell short in its execution.

The End of the Old Speaker's House

The lives of Charles and Ellen Manners-Sutton after 1835 have already been related by Hallam Smith.¹⁰⁷⁶ However, it should be noted that the couple made a brief return to the Speaker's House after the 1834 fire. Having previously announced his intention to retire in 1832, Charles had been persuaded to remain as Speaker by the Whig prime minister Lord Melbourne. Thus, once the undamaged portions of the house had been made habitable, the couple moved back in.¹⁰⁷⁷ In February 1835, following a general election, Charles stood for re-election as Speaker; but he was narrowly defeated by the Whig candidate, James Abercromby.¹⁰⁷⁸ The circumstances of his defeat are well-known and need not be related in detail; the key point is that he was unseated largely due to allegations of partisanship, having retained his connections to the Tory party throughout his Speakership.¹⁰⁷⁹ As Laundry and Laban have argued, the Speaker's present-day dignity is made possible partly by their non-partisan status: this enables them to command the respect of all parties in the House.¹⁰⁸⁰ Addington had maintained his party connections without any problems; Abbot had generally managed to do the same, apart from the controversy surrounding his 1813 prorogation speech.¹⁰⁸¹ This change in political mood—the fact that it was no longer considered acceptable for the Speaker to maintain *any* party connections, even when outside the Chair—may have occurred precisely because the Speaker's dignity had increased since 1794. If so, there can be no doubt that the Speaker's House contributed to that increase in dignity.

Charles quickly received his customary £4,000 pension and peerage (becoming Viscount Canterbury).¹⁰⁸² However, the couple failed to make a dignified exit from Westminster. Astonishingly, they made no arrangements to leave the Speaker's House: instead, they simply stayed put. This was probably due, in part, to their deteriorating personal finances; but it might also be that

¹⁰⁷⁶ Takayanagi and Hallam Smith, *Necessary Women* (forthcoming).

¹⁰⁷⁷ Untitled piece, *London Evening Standard*, 14 November 1834, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷⁸ P. Laundry, *The Office of Speaker* (London: Cassell, 1964), pp. 296–300.

¹⁰⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 296–300.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Laundry, *Office of Speaker*, p. 7; M. Laban, *Mr. Speaker: the Office and the Individuals since 1945* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2013), pp. 248–49, 277.

¹⁰⁸¹ Laundry, *Office of Speaker*, pp. 97–8; Wilkinson, "Abbot, Charles", n. p.

¹⁰⁸² Gash, "Sutton, Charles Manners-", n. p.

Ellen was reluctant to give up the prestige of her unofficial role as ‘first lady’ of the Westminster community.¹⁰⁸³ Admittedly, Speaker Abercromby had indicated that he did not wish to live in the old palace, and he was found accommodation elsewhere.¹⁰⁸⁴ However, the old Speaker’s House was urgently needed for use as temporary committee rooms. The press expressed considerable disapproval of the couple’s conduct, but it was not until they were given a formal notice to quit that they finally resigned themselves to the inevitable.¹⁰⁸⁵ As previously noted, they auctioned all their remaining private possessions, the sale commencing on 29 August 1835.¹⁰⁸⁶ It lasted six days; this vividly illustrates the quantity of material goods they still possessed, despite the vagaries of the fire. The sale apparently realised almost £4,700 (about £400,000 at 2019 prices); and it attracted considerable interest, including attention from the press.¹⁰⁸⁷ It is somewhat ironic that the Speaker’s House was thrust into the spotlight by its own demise.

Sadly, it has not been possible to discover the subsequent history of any of the items sold at auction. The only clue is a mention in Dasent’s 1911 history, that the Speaker’s Chair occupied by Charles at the time of the Great Reform Act was “preserved at Melbourne” —presumably meaning Melbourne Hall, Derbyshire, family seat of Viscount Melbourne. The subsequent fate of this chair is not known.¹⁰⁸⁸ The fate of the remaining ‘public’ contents of the house is also, in most cases, unknown. In the confused aftermath of the fire, it is possible that a few ‘public’ items of furniture were inadvertently included in the 1835 auction. For example, both the 1808 and 1835 inventories list a pair of pier glasses in the Tapestry Room, in two plates each, with gilt frames.¹⁰⁸⁹ It is therefore somewhat suspicious that the 1835 sale catalogue, in the list of items from the Tapestry Room, includes “2x pier glasses, two plates each, principals 71” x 24”, tops 23” by 24”, in gilt ornamented frames”.¹⁰⁹⁰ At any rate, only a handful of items from the old Speaker’s House are definitely known to survive today. The subsequent history of Wyatt’s 1807 Gothic chairs and sofas, and the possible survival of the Lawrence portrait of George III at Windsor Castle, has been discussed in Chapter Two. However, arguably the most important survivors are the official collection of Speaker’s portraits: these remain part of the present Parliamentary Art Collection. Indeed, they were re-hung in the new

¹⁰⁸³ Madden, *Countess of Blessington*, pp. 380–81; Takayanagi and Hallam Smith, *Necessary Women* (forthcoming).

¹⁰⁸⁴ Takayanagi and Hallam Smith, *Necessary Women* (forthcoming).

¹⁰⁸⁵ Untitled piece, *Caledonian Mercury*, Saturday 25 July 1835, p. 4; “Miscellaneous”, *The Spectator*, 22 August 1835, p. 11. However, *John Bull* defended the couple’s conduct (“London, July 19”, 19 July 1835, p. 228).

¹⁰⁸⁶ ARC/VAR/189.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Takayanagi and Hallam Smith, *Necessary Women* (forthcoming); “Close of the Sale at Lord Canterbury’s”, *Sun* (London), 9 September 1835, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸⁸ The author approached the Melbourne estate for information regarding this chair, but received no reply.

¹⁰⁸⁹ LC 5/15, f. 271; OOW 3, n. p.

¹⁰⁹⁰ ARC/VAR/189, p. 36.

Speaker's House when it was finally completed in 1859.¹⁰⁹¹ With the Manners-Suttons finally gone, the Speaker's House enjoyed a brief afterlife as temporary committee rooms for the House of Commons. Indeed, it was in the Speaker's House that the competition commissioners met, from December 1835 to January 1836, to review the many prospective designs for the new palace.¹⁰⁹² With the selection of Barry's entry, the fate of Wyatt's Speaker's House was sealed. Barry elected to retain the old cloisters, and the undercroft of St Stephen's Chapel, on account of their architectural merit.¹⁰⁹³ The new buildings were, accordingly, designed to incorporate them. Wyatt's east and north wings, however—along with the mutilated belltower—were not considered worthy of preservation. It took some time before Barry was finally ready to start work on this area of the palace: he first had to tackle the formidable challenge of embanking the Thames.¹⁰⁹⁴ In 1842, however—less than half a century after their completion—Wyatt's east and north wings were finally demolished.¹⁰⁹⁵

The Legacy of Wyatt's Speaker's House

Charles Manners-Sutton died in July 1845; Ellen outlived him by only a few months.¹⁰⁹⁶ One year earlier, in February 1844, Viscount Sidmouth—née Henry Addington – had finally passed away at the ripe old age of eighty-six.¹⁰⁹⁷ Colchester (née Abbot) had died in May 1829; Redesdale (née Mitford) in 1830.¹⁰⁹⁸ Thus, the principal tenants of the old Speaker's House did not live to see the completion of its successor. Their rapid disappearance was no doubt one reason why the old house faded so quickly into obscurity. However, the evidence examined in this thesis makes clear that, by 1834, the Speaker's House was no longer just a building: it was now a firmly-established political institution. In 1794, the house was an innovation; by 1834 it had become, in Robinson's phrase, "an immutable tradition".¹⁰⁹⁹ The proof of this can be found in the transcripts of the 1835 Select Committee on

¹⁰⁹¹ For details of individual paintings, see the UK Parliament Heritage Collections (<https://heritagecollections.parliament.uk/> [accessed 24/02/2022]). For details of hanging see *Guide to the Speaker's House*, pp. 6–14.

¹⁰⁹² Shenton, *Mr. Barry's War*, pp. 43–44.

¹⁰⁹³ Hallam Smith, "Gothic Slum", pp. 286–87.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Shenton, *Mr Barry's War*, pp. 71–113.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Colvin, *King's Works* 6, pp. 533–34. The subsequent history of the cloisters and undercroft has been covered by Hallam Smith ("Gothic Slum", pp. 286–302).

¹⁰⁹⁶ Madden, *Countess of Blessington*, pp. 374–75, 381–82.

¹⁰⁹⁷ E. Cookson, "Addington, Henry, first Viscount Sidmouth, 1757–1844", *ODNB* (2009) <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/150> [accessed 25/10/2022].

¹⁰⁹⁸ C. Wilkinson, "Abbot, Charles, first Baron Colchester", *ODNB* (2008), <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/3>; D. S. Greer, "Mitford, John Freeman-, first Baron Redesdale (1748–1830)", *ODNB* (2008), <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/18857> [both accessed 20/02/2023].

¹⁰⁹⁹ J. M. Robinson, *James Wyatt: Architect to George III* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 273.

Rebuilding Houses of Parliament [sic].¹¹⁰⁰ One of the objectives of this committee was to determine which officials should be provided with on-site accommodation in the new Palace of Westminster. The clerk of the commons and the serjeant-at-arms were questioned at length on the matter.¹¹⁰¹ This rational approach makes a notable contrast with the old, haphazard systems of allocation (discussed in Chapter One); it is a revealing indication of Britain's changing political culture after the Great Reform Act.¹¹⁰² However, the Speaker was not summoned to give evidence to this committee.¹¹⁰³ It would appear that the provision of a new residence for the Speaker was accepted by MPs without question. Nevertheless, the construction of the new Speaker's House was a relatively low priority within Barry's enormous building programme. The shell of the new building was complete by 1844, but it was not until 1857–59 that the rooms were fitted out to enable Speaker Denison to move in.¹¹⁰⁴ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the new house in detail, but it should be noted that some of its features directly reference the original house. Most importantly, its first floor—on which the State Rooms are located—is constructed around a reduced-size replica of the St Stephen's Cloisters (Fig. 3.11).¹¹⁰⁵ It is not clear whether the early Victorian Speakers had any influence on the provision of these cloisters, or whether they were designed entirely on Barry's initiative. Wherever the idea came from, it strongly suggests a degree of admiration for Wyatt's re-imagining of the original cloisters, at least on an aesthetic level. More importantly, it strongly suggests that Wyatt had succeeded in forging a connection between the Gothic architecture of the cloisters and the office of Speaker. If the Speaker's House was now an "immutable tradition", the cloisters were an immutable part of the house, and they therefore had to be perpetuated. This continuity is reinforced by the re-hanging of Abbot's portrait collection in the new house, and the continuing tradition of providing a new portrait for each successive Speaker.¹¹⁰⁶ Heraldic displays also remain an important part of the decoration; as discussed in Chapter Two, this may be another tradition initiated by Abbot.¹¹⁰⁷

¹¹⁰⁰ HC 262 (1835), pp. 4.

¹¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, pp. 12–15.

¹¹⁰² See pp. 38–39 of this thesis.

¹¹⁰³ HC 262 (1835), p. 6.

¹¹⁰⁴ C. Riding, D. Church and C. Garibaldi, "The Speaker's House", in C. Riding and J. Riding (eds.), *The Houses of Parliament: History, Art, Architecture* (London: Merrell, 2000), pp. 202–03.

¹¹⁰⁵ A. Wedgwood, *Guide to the Speaker's House* (London: HMSO, 1994), pp. 25–26.

¹¹⁰⁶ A. Oswald, "The Speaker's House, Westminster", *County Life*, 30th November 1951, pp. 1798–99; Riding et al., "The Speaker's House", p. 203. See also pp. 177–78 of this thesis.

¹¹⁰⁷ Riding et al., "The Speaker's House", p. 203. See also pp. 178–79 of this thesis.



Fig. 3.11: the cloister, [new] Speaker's House (south walk), Palace of Westminster, photographed in 2023. © UK Parliament/Estates Archive.

Thus, despite the ignominious end of Charles Manners-Sutton's Speakership, there can be no doubt that he and Ellen succeeded in consolidating the social and political role of the Speaker's House. In architectural terms, the physical construction of Wyatt's building had clearly been a failure; and its detailed design was, at best, only a partial success. Nevertheless, his underlying

Gothic vision—enhanced by Speaker Abbot’s enthusiastic involvement in the project—had a lasting influence. Wyatt’s work entrenched a change in architectural sensibilities; and, ultimately, it changed the architectural destiny of one of Britain’s most prestigious buildings.

Conclusion

In 1815, the Rev. Joseph Nightingale dedicated the Westminster volume of *The Beauties of England and Wales* to Speaker Abbot, observing that the “history and architectural antiquities of Westminster are closely connected with all that is great and durable in the British constitution”.¹¹⁰⁸ His observation perfectly encapsulates the interdisciplinary nature of this thesis. The Speaker’s House, as remodelled by Wyatt, was both a political tool and an architectural statement: it is impossible to understand one side of its story without considering the other. Nevertheless, it is helpful to consider these two aspects separately before attempting to draw overall conclusions.

In architectural terms, this thesis has revealed the importance of the Speaker’s House—and Wyatt’s wider alterations at Westminster—in changing attitudes to stylistic propriety at the turn of the nineteenth century. Previously, Wyatt’s work at Westminster was dismissed by historians as an “aesthetic and administrative debacle”.¹¹⁰⁹ Wyatt’s negligence and mismanagement of the project are undeniable; and his finished buildings certainly attracted considerable criticism, on both aesthetic and conservationist grounds. Nevertheless, this thesis argues that, whilst the execution of the work fell short of its promise, Wyatt’s underlying vision was highly significant. Along with his contemporary work at Windsor and Kew, Wyatt’s Westminster proved that Gothic could be an appropriate style for even the most prestigious royal and public buildings. In so doing, he effectively ended a generation of Classical dominance in this sphere of architecture, and ushered in a new era of stylistic plurality. This thesis has shown that, by the early 1820s, attitudes to architectural style among MPs had clearly shifted: increasingly, Gothic was viewed not merely as a legitimate alternative to Classicism, but as the only ‘proper’ style for the Palace of Westminster. There can be no doubt that, by entrenching the medieval character of the old palace, Wyatt’s work contributed to this shift in attitudes. Admittedly, wider changes in aesthetic tastes were also a factor: despite the acknowledged shortcomings of Wyatt’s work, his vision of a stylistically-consistent palace chimed better with contemporary taste than Soane’s rival vision of deliberate contrasts. Nevertheless, it is clear that Gothic was increasingly deemed appropriate to the *institutional*, as well as the aesthetic, context of Westminster. Speaker Abbot encouraged this trend by embracing and enhancing Wyatt’s Gothic vision. His use of portraits and (probably) heraldry maximised the historical associations of

¹¹⁰⁸ The Rev. J. Nightingale, *The Beauties of England and Wales, Vol. 10 Part 4: London and Middlesex* (London: J Harries, 1815), pp. v–vii.

¹¹⁰⁹ S. Sawyer, *Soane at Westminster: Civic Architecture and National Identity, 1789–1834* (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1999), p. 274.

the Speaker's House, asserting the venerability—and, therefore, the political legitimacy—of the Speakership.

Wyatt's approach to Gothic design—particularly at Westminster—has long been misunderstood by historians. It has been viewed predominantly through the lens of Carter's criticisms: it was an archaeologically-inaccurate interpretation of the style, and it was therefore no good. This thesis has argued that Carter's ideas were, in fact, ahead of their time. Instead, Wyatt's buildings need to be understood as a product of his "Modern Gothic" philosophy, an approach rooted in the Neoclassical practice of creatively reinterpreting historic styles. This thesis has presented a nuanced picture of public reaction to Wyatt's work: it has acknowledged the well-known criticisms, but it has also highlighted positive reactions from the likes of Wilberforce and Portland. Moreover, it has emphasised the distinction between contemporary popularity and long-term historical significance. For all its faults, Wyatt's Gothic masterplan for Westminster—along with his contemporary work at Kew and Windsor—should be viewed as a vital turning point in the progress of the Gothic Revival, heralding the complete rehabilitation of Gothic as a style for royal and public buildings.

In addition, this thesis has investigated changing attitudes to architectural conservation. Although Carter and the conservation lobby enjoyed growing support, Wyatt's pragmatic attitude to the alteration of historic buildings was by no means universally condemned at the turn of the nineteenth century. Indeed, this thesis argues that Wyatt's rival, Soane—sometimes portrayed as being more sympathetic to conservation—actually had quite similar attitudes regarding the destruction or heavy alteration of historic buildings. On the other hand, this thesis has highlighted the importance of Soane's Westminster schemes as an early articulation of later nineteenth- and twentieth-century conservation philosophy, which favoured the use of deliberately contrasting styles when altering or extending historic buildings. This is another subject which would merit further study. It would be useful to establish the extent (if any) to which the philosophy of later conservationist thinkers, such as John Ruskin and William Morris, was informed by Soane's attitude to aesthetic consistency at St Stephen's.

Turning to the political aspects of the present work, this thesis argues that the Speaker's House significantly enhanced the political stature and 'public image' of the Speakership. Clearly, the Speaker already enjoyed some degree of prestige and public recognition by 1794. The grant of the Speaker's House significantly boosted this prestige, embodying it in a physical, and highly visible, form. Nevertheless, Abbot evidently realised that, in order to maximise the political potential of the house, it needed a more distinctive and coherent visual identity: it had to be obviously recognisable

as 'The Speaker's House', rather than just another grand townhouse. He was shrewd enough to realise that Wyatt's historicist architecture—enhanced by his own additions—could be used to proclaim the legitimacy of his office, firmly rooting the Speakership in Britain's medieval past. Abbot's modernising and reforming impulses are well-known, but this thesis has emphasised that his reforming urges were tempered by a desire to preserve the Hanoverian dynasty and the established Church. The Speaker's House, as remodelled by Wyatt, perfectly expressed both the conservative and progressive sides of Abbot's personality. He evidently wanted his residence to convey an aura of history and tradition; but, beneath this superficial atmosphere, the house also had to be modern, functional and comfortable. Hence, both architect and patron took a pragmatic attitude to the alteration of historic structures, particularly the belltower.

In addition, this thesis has deepened our understanding of the role of sociability in politics, and particularly in relation to the Speakership. In some ways the Speaker's House forms a case study for the general use of private houses for political and social purposes by parliamentarians at the latter end of the long eighteenth century. However, the status of the Speaker's House as a prestigious official residence, located in the physical centre of political power, gave it an additional level of importance. In particular, this thesis has considerably enhanced our knowledge of the Speaker's official entertaining: a famous, but hitherto under-researched, parliamentary tradition. However, there remain many questions to be answered about the early history of the Speaker's official dinners and levées before 1794: this could prove a fruitful avenue for further study. The same could be said of the other ceremonial trappings of the Speakership, such as the origins of the robe and the State Coach. Admittedly, this would be no easy task: extensive efforts to discover the origin of the Speaker's State Coach, for example, have hitherto failed to produce definitive answers.¹¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, Strauss's recent article on the Speaker's processions suggests there might yet be further avenues for investigation.¹¹¹¹ Furthermore, this thesis argues that informal dinners and social events were an equally important part of the Speaker's political duties. Dining with close friends enabled successive Speakers to develop their rapport with individual MPs and strengthen their political networks. The Speaker's annual dinners for the clerks and messengers were an important step towards their present-day role as the administrative head of the House of Commons, and their assumption of pastoral responsibility for the Commons' staff.

¹¹¹⁰ Alexandra Wedgwood's correspondence with various historians on this subject is preserved at the Parliamentary Archives (ARC/VAR/58).

¹¹¹¹ K. Strauss, "The Ceremonial Mace in the House of Commons and Great Maces of Cities and Boroughs in the 16th and Early 17th Century", *Parliamentary History* 41:3 (2022), pp. 389–405.

Looking beyond Westminster, this thesis has situated the Speaker's House within the wider history of London townhouses. To date, historians have focused principally on the history of the London townhouse in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The history of the Speaker's House reminds us that the social and political importance of the London townhouse continued into the 1830s, and indeed beyond. Moreover, it provides an interesting example of the social role of the townhouse being officially recognised and institutionalised. There is scope to extend this analysis by considering the history of the new Speaker's House from 1859 onwards—although Hallam Smith's forthcoming work on Elizabeth Gully, wife of William Court Gully (Speaker 1895–1905), will address this to some extent.¹¹¹² The political history of the Speaker's House was significantly influenced by the social ambitions of its individual occupants. This thesis has argued that, in a society with significant barriers to social mobility, the Speakership offered a rare opportunity for middle-class politicians to advance their social position. The Speaker's House, with its prestigious architecture, its desirable location and its facilities for entertaining, significantly assisted Addington and Abbot in this process. Even Ellen Manners-Sutton—who, as a woman, was formally barred from participating in the political system—exploited the Speaker's House to carve a niche for herself within the male-dominated world of Westminster. As a final aside, this thesis has touched on the question of political emoluments and perquisites in the last decades before the Great Reform Act. The Speaker's House was, arguably, the ultimate 'perk'; and it was almost certainly Addington's cosy relationship with prime minister Pitt the Younger which enabled him to obtain it in the first place. However, the political mood had obviously changed by the time Charles Manners-Sutton lost the Chair in 1835: by then, the Speaker was expected to be totally impartial, even when outside the House.¹¹¹³ This thesis has suggested that the increasing prominence of the Speaker's House helped to bring about this change in attitudes. The house enhanced the Speaker's dignity, to a point where involvement in the sordid intrigues of party politics was no longer seen to be compatible with that dignity.

The story of the Speaker's House casts light on a wide range of political and architectural issues. If there is a single idea which binds together the diverse threads of this thesis, it is Robinson's assertion that the Speaker's House had, by 1834, become an "immutable tradition".¹¹¹⁴ The Speaker's House was, above all, an attempt to capitalise on the traditions of the past: both the architectural traditions of Westminster's medieval and Tudor buildings, and the political traditions

¹¹¹² E. Hallam Smith, "The Admirable Mrs Gully and her Gallery", in M. Takayanagi and E. Hallam Smith, *Necessary Women: The Untold Story of Parliament's Working Women* (forthcoming).

¹¹¹³ It is also noteworthy that Charles's son was the last to benefit from the reversion of his father's pension. Clearly, attitudes to the financial emoluments of the Speakership were also changing. (P. Laundry, *The Office of Speaker* (London: Cassell, 1964), p. 118).

¹¹¹⁴ J. M. Robinson, *James Wyatt: Architect to George III* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 273.

surrounding the Speaker (particularly his official hospitality). In 1794, these traditions were not “immutable”. The political traditions of the Speakership are living traditions which continue to evolve and develop; the recent simplification of the Speaker’s traditional costume constitutes a vivid reminder of this.¹¹¹⁵ It remains unclear exactly how the tradition of the Speaker’s official entertaining developed; but the movement of these events from the private townhouses of London into a new official residence undoubtedly constituted a significant innovation. Nevertheless, Abbot and Wyatt used historicist architecture and furnishings to make the house, and the activities it hosted, *appear* immutable. The prestige of the Speaker had waxed and waned during the eighteenth century, but the grant of the Speaker’s House in 1794 had provided a significant boost. Abbot no doubt hoped that Wyatt’s Gothic transformation of the Speaker’s House would consolidate this gain and secure the political stature of his office. The unquestioning acquiescence of MPs in providing a new Speaker’s House after 1835 testifies to the success of this strategy. Equally successful was Abbot’s personal strategy for social advancement. His historicist makeover of the Speaker’s House allowed him to substitute the political traditions of his office for the more concrete traditions of lineage and inheritance, making his place among the upper classes appear “immutable”. This undoubtedly smoothed the way for him to secure a peerage and establish a dynasty which, he no doubt hoped, would genuinely prove “immutable”.

Wyatt was equally adept at developing and exploiting old traditions. His “Modern Gothic” style was informed by historic precedents, but it was very much a living style. Rather than slavishly copy medieval models, Wyatt creatively adapted and reinterpreted them to suit contemporary requirements. In an age of emerging Romantic sensibility, Wyatt evidently felt that strict archaeological accuracy was not necessary in order to produce buildings which looked, and felt, historic. The Picturesque irregularity of his buildings, and the eclectic furnishing of their interiors, was intended to create the impression that they had grown up piecemeal over several centuries. He evidently intended that they should blend seamlessly with the genuine historic buildings on the site. Not everyone agreed that they did; yet in spite of the antiquaries’ criticisms, Wyatt’s architecture successfully entrenched the medieval character of the old palace. In 1794, Gothic architecture was certainly not an “immutable tradition” at Westminster; Soane’s Classical scheme for the palace was viewed as a credible proposition. By the 1820s, Wyatt’s architecture had fostered a newfound sense that Gothic was the ‘proper’ style, both for the palace as a complex of buildings, and for Parliament as an institution. This newfound sensibility ultimately determined the design of the new Palace of Westminster—which has subsequently become, in David Cannadine’s words, “one of the most

¹¹¹⁵ M. Laban, *Mr Speaker: The Office and the Individuals Since 1945* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2013), pp. 177, 274–76

famous and recognizable [sic] buildings in the world”.¹¹¹⁶ In turn, Barry’s buildings undoubtedly perpetuate the political narrative of the Abbot-Wyatt Speaker’s House. The present-day palace, with its perpendicular mouldings, pointed arches and encaustic floor tiles, continues to proclaim the venerability—and therefore the political legitimacy—of Parliament. The new Speaker’s House performs the same function for the Speakership. Architectural tradition continues to reinforce political tradition.

Wyatt’s Westminster buildings were supposed to embody “all that is great and durable in the British constitution”.¹¹¹⁷ Alas, the execution of his vision fell short of its promise. In 1834, his “composition [stucco] mullions & cement pinnacles”—as Pugin famously described them—proved to be anything but durable.¹¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, Abbot and Wyatt undoubtedly succeeded in consolidating the Speaker’s status as the ceremonial figurehead of the House of Commons, and establishing the Speaker’s House as an “immutable” political institution. Wyatt’s buildings may be gone, but the traditions they helped to establish—both political and architectural—continue.

¹¹¹⁶ D. Cannadine, “The Palace of Westminster as Palace of Varieties”, in C. Riding and J. Riding (eds.), *The Houses of Parliament: History, Art, Architecture* (London: Merrell, 2000), p. 11.

¹¹¹⁷ Nightingale, *Beauties of England and Wales* 10:4, p. v.

¹¹¹⁸ M. Belcher (ed.), *The Collected Letters of A. W. N. Pugin*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 42.

Appendices

Appendix One

TNA PRO 30/9/31: Chares Abbot, 1st Baron Colchester, Papers: Journal, with interpolated correspondence, etc., ff. 234-36

“Saturday Feb. 20th. [1796] Dined at the Speaker’s. We were twenty in number. Lord Bridport, Sir George Beaumont, Sir A. Edmonstone, Sir W. Scott, Lascelles, Colonel Beaumont, Mr. Adams, Sir H. G. Calthorpe, Bankes, Burton, Wilberforce, Powys, Parker, Coke, Metcalfe, E. Bouverie, Bramston, and Mr. Gipps and the Chaplain. We dined in a vaulted room under the House of Commons, looking towards the river; an ancient crypt of St Stephen’s Chapel. We were served on plate bearing the King’s arms. Three gentlemen out of livery, and four men in full liveries and bags. The whole party full-dressed, and the Speaker himself so, except that he wore no sword. The style of the dinner was soups at top and bottom, changed for fish, and afterwards changed for roast saddle of mutton and roast loin of veal. The middle of the table was filled with a painted plateau ornamented with French white figures and vases of flowers. Along each side were five dishes, the middle centres being a ham and boiled chicken. The second course had a pig at top, a capon at bottom, and the two centre middles were turkey and a larded Guinea fowl. The other dishes, puddings, pies, puffs, blancmanges, &c. The wine at the corners was in icepails during the dinner. Burgundy, champagne, hock, and hermitage. The dessert was served by drawing the napkins and leaving the cloth on. Ices at top and bottom; the rest of the dessert oranges, apples, ginger, wafers, &c. Sweet wine was served with it. After the cloth was drawn a plate of thin biscuits was placed at each end of the table and the wine sent round, viz. claret, port, madeira, and sherry. Only one toast given, “The King”. The room was lighted by patent lamps on the chimney and upon the side tables. The dinner-table had a double branch at top and at bottom, and on each side of the middle of the table. Coffee and tea were served on waiters at eight o’clock. The company gradually went out of the room, and the whole broke up at nine.

The rule is for the Speaker to give his first Saturday’s dinner to the Ministers and their friends in office, who are Members of the House of Commons. His first Sunday is for the Opposition, and afterwards his parties are promiscuous; chiefly his private friends and those who visit his levee on Sunday evenings. There were twenty-three persons at the Ministerial dinner. At the Opposition were three persons not in full dress, nor powdered, viz. Grey, Whitbread, and General Tarleton, but he came in his uniform. Fox was full dressed and powdered.”

Appendix Two

“Varieties”, The Westmorland Gazette, and Kendal Advertiser, 16 March 1822, p. 4¹¹¹⁹

“On Saturday and Sunday the Speaker of the House of Commons had his fifth and sixth Parliamentary dinners. It is unusual to have Parliamentary dinners on Sundays, but it is the etiquette to terminate them previous to Easter; and as Parliament was assembled so late in the season, while, on the other hand, Easter falls in early in the year, the Speaker felt compelled to have two Parliamentary dinners instead of one in the course of a week. It is the custom to invite the whole House in the course of the dinners. The present Speaker invites 32 to each dinner party. The first dinner was attended by the Minister and their most distinguished friends; the leading Members of the Opposition were invited to the second dinner, and the subsequent dinners have been attended without any very particular regard to party. In general most of those invited attend: there were twenty-seven Members present at Saturday’s dinner. The dining-room is immediately underneath the House, and has a curious Gothic ceiling. The Right Hon. Gentleman has seven French cooks in service. On Saturday evening, at [word missing] o’clock, the Speaker left the dining and proceeded to the drawing-room, and there held his first Parliamentary Levee [sic] this Session. It was very numerously attended: m[ost?] of the Ministers, and the chief Members of the Opposition, being present in the course of the evening. Members of Parliament attend the Speaker’s Levee, and a[??], in Court dress, with swords, &c.

¹¹¹⁹ Unfortunately, the author has only been able to access a poor-quality scan of this article, hence there are some missing words/letters in the transcription.

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LC 9: Lord Chamberlain's Department: Accounts and Miscellanea

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PROB 11: Prerogative Court of Canterbury and related Probate Jurisdictions: Will Registers

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T 29: Treasury: Minute Books

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WORK 5: Office of Works: Accounts

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