

The façade of the chapter-house illustrated

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By July 1558, the demolition crew sent in by Lord Cobham had finished their work. The priory buildings converted into a palace for Henry VIII had vanished from the face of the earth. Eastwards from the east wall of the medieval cloister, nothing whatever was left – nothing but heaps of rubble and rubbish which no one wanted to buy (Hope 1900:77–80). But the cloister wall itself had been left in place, because, at the time, it formed the party-wall between the palace and the college, the portion of the old priory assigned to the new dean and chapter. To that accident we owe the preservation of some sad fragments of the twelfth-century cloister – the west front of the chapter-house, two storeys high, and of the dormitory sub-vault to the south of it.

In comparison with the west front of the cathedral, these ruined remains of the cloister did not attract much attention from artists. They were, for one thing, not so easily accessible. Throughout the nineteenth century, when this wall was the boundary between the fourth prebendary's garden and the deanery, one needed the prebendary's permission to get up close to it. And when one did that, one found that the sculpture was so eroded that the details were hard to make out. Already in the eighteenth century, people were lamenting the state of it – and hoping (in vain) that the dean and chapter might do something to protect it.

Despite these impediments, some useful drawings exist. (I do not claim to have found them all. There may be published drawings which I have overlooked; there may be unpublished drawings.) Nevertheless, I should not have thought it worth putting this paper together if I had not, by accident, in searching for something else, come across a batch of drawings by Samuel Prout (1783–1852) which I do not recall ever seeing or ever seeing cited before. They deserve to be brought back into circulation.

Thorpe 1769. There are only two illustrations in Thorpe's *Registrum Roffense* (1769) – the portrait of Dr Thorpe which forms the frontispiece, and this vignette on the titlepage, 'Ruins of the Antient Chapter House at Rochester'. It shows a view from inside the chapter-house, looking west across the cloister garth.

One of the illustrations in Fisher's *History* (1772), 'Ruins of the Ancient Chapter House at Rochester' (opp. p. 96), was copied (with some variation) from this vignette.

Thorpe 1788. Thorpe's *Custumale Roffense* (1788) has numerous illustrations, of very uneven quality. Some are good; some are embarrassingly bad. Among the good ones are the two which I reproduce here. Plate XXXVII is

a measured elevation of the chapter-house façade: ‘Remains of the Colonades of the Cloyster on the East side, with the three West Windows of the antient Chapter-House of the Priory, taken A[nn]o 1769.’ Plate XXXVIII is a close-up of the figurative sculpture on the arch over the central doorway: ‘Elevation of the Door Way from the East Cloyster into the Old Chapter-House, with the figures of the Arch in relievo. Taken A[nn]o 1769.’ There is nothing to indicate the name of the man who measured and drew these plates. Neither of them has a scale.

Samuel Denne refers to this plate in the following passage: ‘A plate is given (XXXVII.) of the remains of the west front of this room. Within the walls it is in width 33 feet; its length cannot be determined because the east wall was taken down on the building of a stack of chimneys to the deanry-house. . . . The three arches under the west windows here represented communicated with the cloyster; there seems, however, to have been within the arches a portico or vestibule, where was the entrance into the room.¹ . . . These arches are much embellished. In the History and Antiquities of the city of Rochester,² it was offered as a surmise that the signs of the zodiack had been carved on the compartments which form the fascia of the centre arch; but it appears more probable that there was an exact correspondence in the figures on each side. The whole is, however, so much impaired by age, or has been wantonly defaced, as not to admit of a discovery of the design of the artist’ (Denne 1788:161–2).

A comment by Thorpe is appended: ‘The stone used was brought from Normandy, and is of a dusky red colour, thick set with micæ of a silvery tale,³ as appeared from an examination made by Mr. Thorpe of the inward broken columns and arches that had fallen down before the drawing was made.’

Prout 1810. This is a set of four plates, engraved from drawings by Samuel Prout, published in March 1810. Plates 1–2 were etched by J. Tyrel,⁴ plates 3–4 by J. Tidd; these are not well-known names. The caption for plate 1 reads thus: ‘REMAINS OF ST. ANDREW’S PRIORY, ROCHESTER, KENT. / Drawn by S. Prout. / Etchd. by J. Tyrel. / Published March 1. 1810. by Wm. Clark,⁵ New Bond Street. / Plate 1.’ Barring the requisite changes, the other captions are identical.

These four plates formed part of the first instalment of a monthly publication which is noticed as follows in the ‘Gentleman’s Magazine’ for February 1810: ‘Mr. Samuel Prout will shortly publish the First Number of the Relicks of An-

¹ He is speaking of the fourteenth-century gallery which provided the monks with a short cut between the dormitory and the church (Hope 1900:39).

² The footnote here is wrong: it ought to cite Fisher (1772:96). (I note, by the way, that this is just one of several places where Denne disagrees, more or less forcefully, with the author of Fisher’s ‘History’.)

³ A misprint for ‘talc’, I suppose.

⁴ In both plates the last letter of the surname is indistinct. It looks to me like ‘r’ altered to ‘l’. Plate 1 is mentioned as a straggler by Upcott (1818:386); he also read the name as ‘Tyrel’.

⁵ The bookseller William Clarke (occ. 1790–1829) spelt his name with an ‘e’ at the end.

tiquity, or Remains of Antient Structures; with other Vestiges of Early Times in Great Britain. Etched from Drawings by himself, and accompanied with descriptive sketches' (p. 136).

From the dating of the plates, it appears that the plan was to publish eight each month; but the plan did not go smoothly. Prout seems to have pulled out before the plates for the fourth part (1 June) had been completed, and the publisher, William Clarke, after trying for a while to keep things going with drawings by other artists (two more for 1 June, two for 1 July), gave up on the project soon afterwards. By this time, therefore, 34 plates had been published: $8 + 8 + 8 + 6 = 30$ by Prout, $2 + 2 = 4$ by other artists.

Those 34 plates, with 14 new plates (including one more drawing of Prout's), were subsequently republished in an album with the same title (Clarke 1811). The titlepage says only that the book is being published 'for the proprietors' by a consortium of booksellers, William Clarke and four other firms.

Four of the woodcuts used as vignettes in the first volume of 'The antiquarian itinerary' (Storer and Storer 1815) are listed in the index as 'Part[s] of St. Andrew's Priory at Rochester'. They were copied from Prout's drawings, as they appeared in the album published by Clarke. (The vignette of Allington Castle, similarly, was copied from one of the new plates in the same book, 'Drawn & Etch'd by Miss Hawkesworth.') These vignettes are only there to fill up space: the woodcuts are small and crude, and there is no point in reproducing them.

Dadson for Wildash 1817. A sketch of the chapter-house façade by the local artist William Dadson (1788/9–1853), used as an illustration (opp. p. 86) in the revised edition of Fisher's 'History' published by William Wildash (1817). 'W. Dadson. Fecit. Engraved by S. I. Neele Strand.'

King 1861. A view of the north-east corner of the cloister drawn for the 'Handbook to the cathedrals of England' (King 1861, pl. VI). 'REMAINS OF NORMAN CHAPTER-HOUSE.' Possibly drawn and engraved by Orlando Jewitt (1799–1869), who made most of the new illustrations for the 'Handbook' series; but I do not see his signature here.

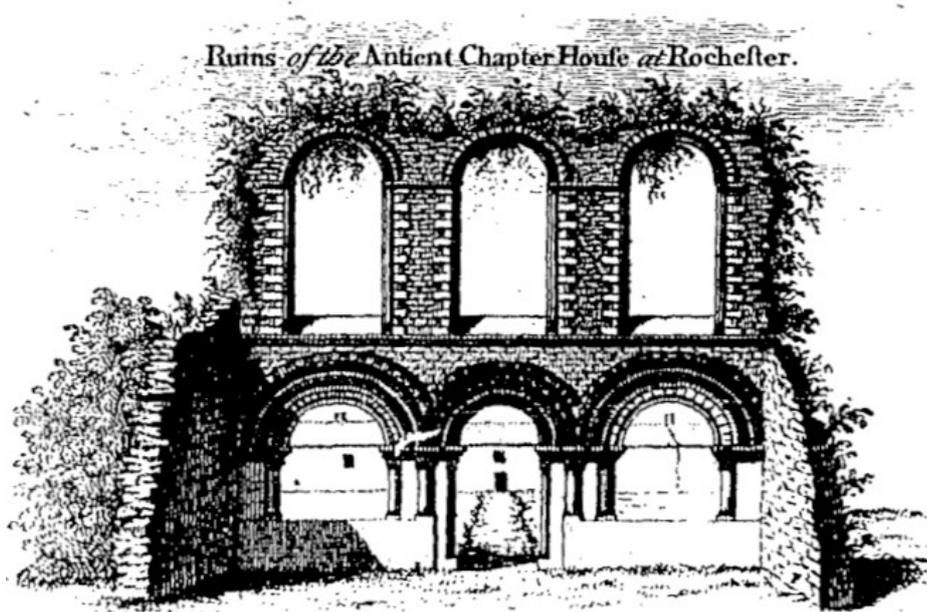
The same block, borrowed from the publishers Messrs Murray, was used to illustrate Hope's account of the priory buildings (Hope 1900, fig. 42).

Keyser 1904. Keyser (1904, fig. 83) has a photograph of the tympanum over the entrance to the dormitory stairs. The sculpture is hardly decipherable from the photograph, but Keyser also gives a verbal description, more informative than any other that I have seen. 'This [tympanum] is, unfortunately, not only much corroded by the action of the weather, but has been further injured by the black smoke from the cement works on the opposite bank of the Medway. This is the more to be regretted, as the subject not only seems to be unique at this period, but the carving must have been also of unusual excellence. By careful examination the figure of Abraham with pointed beard can be discerned. He holds a sword behind him in his right hand, and the hair of the kneeling figure of his son Isaac with his left. In the right-hand corner is the ram caught in

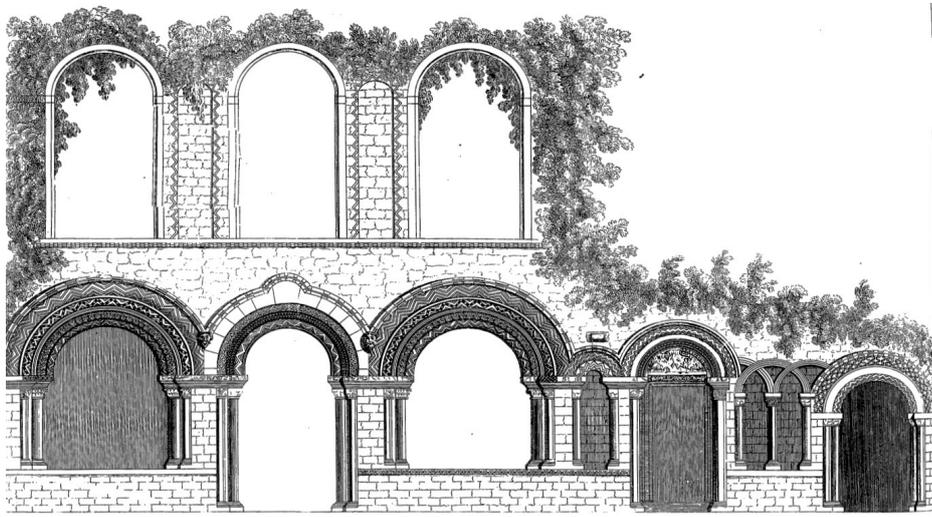
the thicket by its horns, and above, the hand of the Almighty emerging from the cloud. Behind the figure of Abraham are two small figures and portions of trees, perhaps intended for Abraham and Isaac on their way to Mount Moriah. On the moulding above can be deciphered part of an inscription, "Aries per cornua," in capital letters. There are bands of the beaded cable and foliage round the upper part of the tympanum and four dragons and foliage on the lintel below; the design is spirited, and the mouldings of this and the adjoining arches are clearly the work of a specially skilled hand. The date is probably not early in the Norman period. The tympanum seems to be composed of a different stone to that of the arch containing it' (Keyser 1904:xlvi-viii).

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- Denne 1788 Samuel Denne, 'Memorials of the cathedral church of Rochester', in John Thorpe, *Custumale Roffense* (London, 1788), 153–242.
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- Storer and Storer 1815 James Storer and Henry Storer, *The antiquarian itinerary*, vol. 1 (London, 1815).
- Thorpe 1769 John Thorpe, *Registrum Roffense* (London, 1769).
- Thorpe 1788 John Thorpe, *Custumale Roffense* (London, 1788).
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- Wildash 1817 William Wildash (publ.), *The history and antiquities of Rochester and its environs*, 2nd ed. (Rochester, 1817).

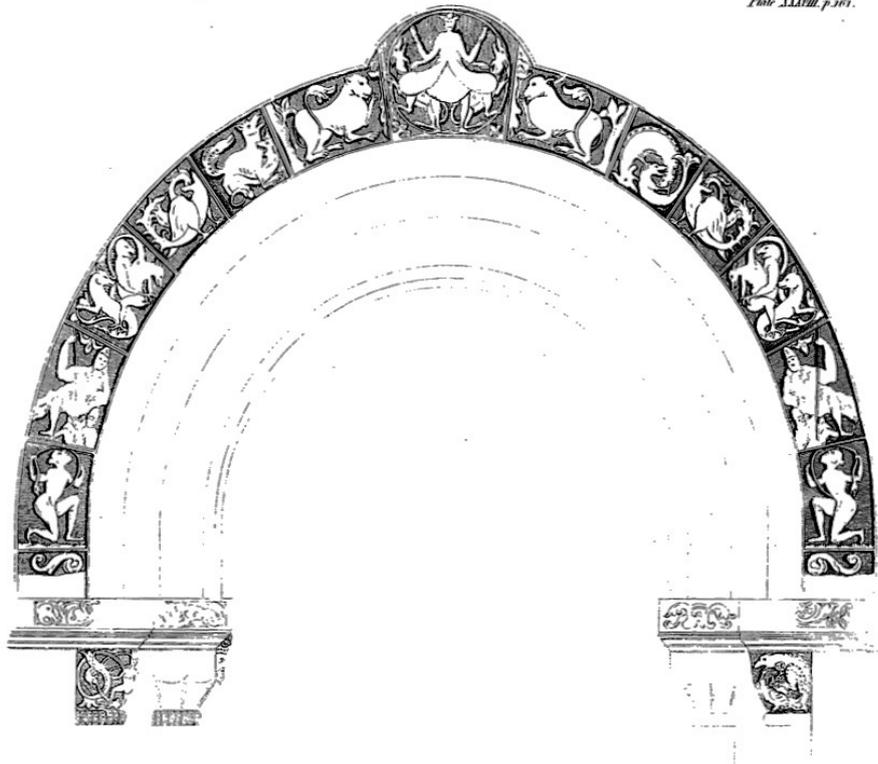


Thorpe 1769 – vignette from titlepage.

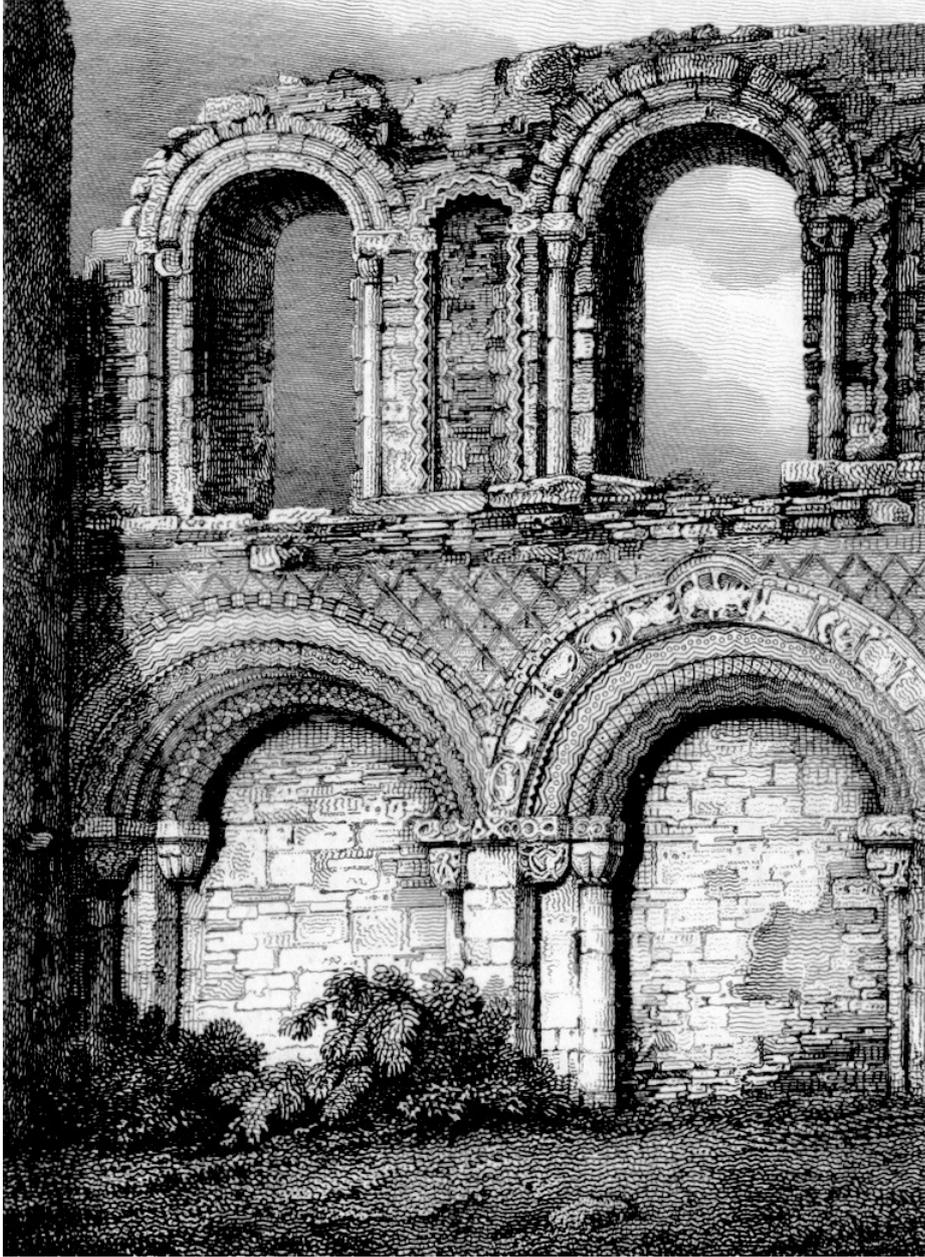


Thorpe 1788, pl. 37.

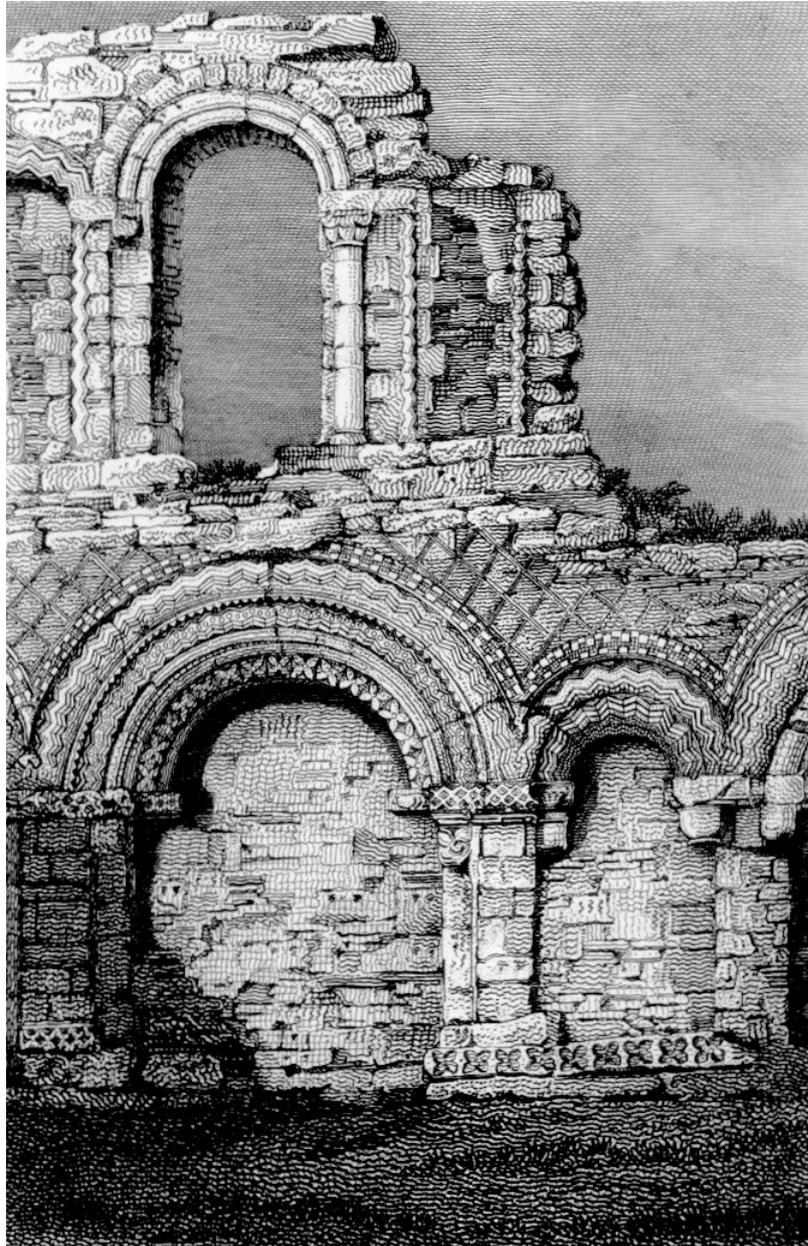
Plate XLVIII p. 161.



Thorpe 1788, pl. 38.



Prout 1810 – plate 1.



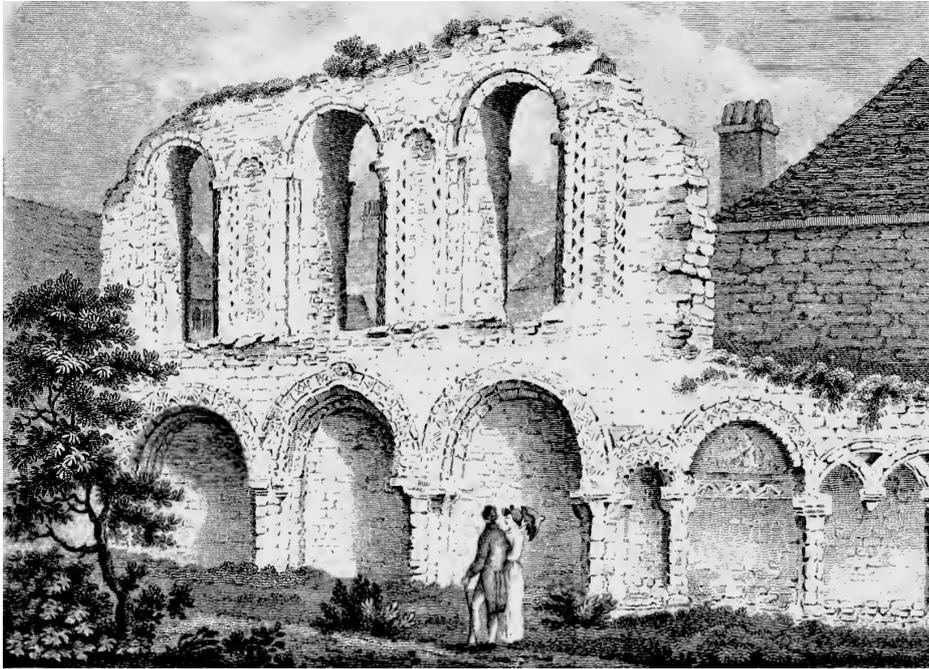
Prout 1810 – plate 2.



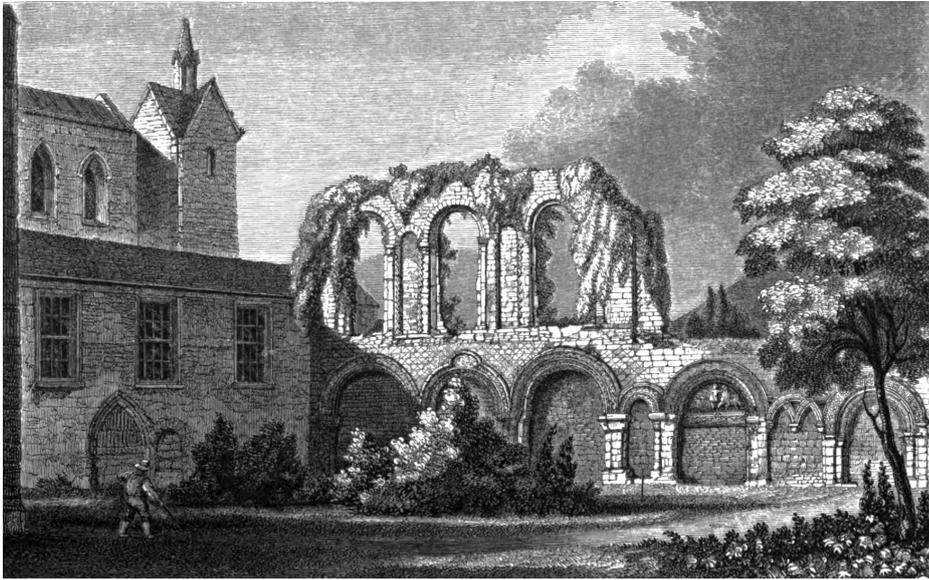
Prout 1810 – plate 3.



Prout 1810 – plate 4.



Dadson for Wildash 1817.



King 1861, pl. VI.



Keyser 1904, fig. 83.