Gothic Legacies

Gothic Legacies:
Four Centuries of Tradition and Innovation in Art and Architecture

Edited by

Laura Cleaver and Ayla Lepine

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Four Centuries of Tradition and Innovation in Art and Architecture,
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—Laura Cleaver and Ayla Lepine
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INTRODUCTION

LAURA CLEAVER AND AYLA LEPINE

The distinction of coining the term Gothic to describe medieval art lies with Italian authors attempting to describe and explore the cultural shift that would come to be known as the Renaissance. In the fifteenth century the scholar and architect Leon Battista Alberti used the Italian term "*zotiche*" to suggest a rustic quality in sculpture.[1] In the same century, the writer Lorenzo Valla described "*codices gothice scriptos*", or Gothic writings, referring to what he considered to be a decline in Latin language and literature after the glories of the classical past.[2] Famously, however, it was the artist and author Giorgio Vasari, writing in the sixteenth century, who conflated the art and architecture of the Middle Ages, with its pointed arches and tall thin walls, with the works of Goths (of various kinds) and other barbarians responsible for the fall of Rome.[3] Yet despite the profound influence of Vasari's work on the development of art historical writing, the art and architecture of the Middle Ages inspired a remarkable range of responses in post-medieval visual culture. In his monumental study of Gothic art and architecture published in 1960, Paul Frankl thus identified Gothic as a style that spanned eight centuries.[4] However, whilst Frankl defined Gothic works on the basis of their style, the term Gothic was applied to a very diverse collection of objects and buildings. Indeed part of the term's popularity seems to have been linked to its flexibility, which allowed it to both evoke and problematize ideas associated with a diverse cultural heritage. The studies in this book thus take as their starting point the application of the term Gothic to works made over four centuries, from c.1550-c.1950. These include works in a variety of media from across Europe and North America. From these studies the importance of the reuse of medieval remains, the subtleties of language and the choice of Gothic as an alternative, even subversive, artistic decision emerge as key themes. The chapters that follow are organised into three sections on those topics (with the studies within each section arranged chronologically), to explore the diverse associations of the Gothic in post-medieval art and architecture.

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[1] Paul Frankl, *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries* (Princeton, 1960), pp. 259-260; Rocco Sinisgalli, *The New* De Pictura *of Leon Battista Alberti* (Rome, 2006), p. 198.

[2] Lorenzo Valla, *Elegantiarum Latinae* (Lyon, 1544), preface to book 3; E. S. de Beer, 'Gothic: Origin and Diffusion of the Term; The Idea of Style in Architecture', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* 11 (1948), p. 144.

[3] Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects,* (trans.) C. De Vere (London, 1912-1914), vol. 1, p. xliv.

[4] Paul Frankl, *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries* (Princeton, 1960).

The first section of this book, entitled *Spolia*, deals with responses to the physical remains of the medieval past. Throughout Europe traces of the art and architecture of the Middle Ages were available for artists and others to study. Unsurprisingly, their responses reveal much about their own time, but they also point to some common values associated with the medieval past. In the first chapter of this volume Matthew Woodworth addresses the significance invested in surviving architecture at Netley Abbey in Hampshire, England. He explores the history of this building from the Reformation to the nineteenth century and considers the ways in which medieval architecture continues to evoke particular ideas and concepts. He suggests that part of the appeal of Gothic forms is to be found in an elasticity of meaning, an idea developed in many chapters in this book. In chapter two, Laura Cleaver considers a very different monument: the medieval tomb-slab for the Frankish king Childebert and its reworking in the seventeenth century. She argues that the retention of a medieval object provided a link to a local history and a wider concept of national identity that was also repeatedly revised to suit changing political circumstances.

The following two chapters tackle the significance of the study and recording of medieval objects and buildings. Peter N. Lindfield-Ott's work explores the results of the collection and study of medieval art and architecture by antiquarians for the production of furniture in eighteenth-century England. This chapter again points to a tension between a desire for authenticity and contemporary taste. Finally, Anne Moignet-Gaultier explores different methods of recording medieval buildings, in her consideration of drawings of the cathedral at Laon. These records range from the thirteenth-century drawings of Villard de Honnecourt to nineteenth-century work produced as part of the restoration process at the cathedral. She addresses how the choices made in producing drawings shape and are shaped by the ways in which medieval architecture is perceived and understood.

In addition to the survival of buildings and objects from the Middle Ages, from the fifteenth century the term "Gothic" appeared in art-historical discourse as a means of condemning works of art and architecture as crude and barbaric, and in opposition to works in a classical style. Yet the characteristics of Gothic art remained loosely defined, enabling later writers to interpret the term in different ways. The three chapters in the section *Language and Literature* concentrate on early twentieth-century responses to medieval art, which were filtered through the medium of both earlier scholarship, notably John Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* (1851-1853), and a literary tradition stemming from the Gothic novel, which offered alternative, emotive responses to medieval remains. Thus Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey,* written in the final years of the eighteenth century, included a description of the abbey of the title, tempered with an observation that imagination often outdid reality. Of her heroine's response to the pointed Gothic windows of the abbey Austen wrote, "to an imagination which had hoped for the smallest divisions, and the heaviest stone work, for painted glass, dirt, and cobwebs, the difference was very distressing".[5] Charlotte de Mille's work in chapter five explores the combination of these strands of thought about the Gothic in the music and designs for Benjamin Britten's opera *Death in Venice*, based on Thomas Mann's novella of the same name. In chapter six Caroline Levitt also addresses intersections between art and literature in her study of André Derain's illustrations for a text by Guillaume Apollinaire. Here she considers the significance of the Gothic for Surrealists, in both texts and images, as an alternative to Cubist classicism. Camelia Darie's work in chapter seven also addresses the role of the Gothic in shaping Surrealist thought, with particular reference to the Gothic novel, in her discussion of the work of the Romanian artist Victor Brauner.

The idea of Gothic as an alternative to another style unites the chapters in the third section of this book; *Oppositions*. Although ideas of barbarity and darkness were embraced by some artists in their engagement with the medieval past, in many cases these are not readily apparent in works labelled Gothic. In addition, the resemblance of neo-Gothic objects and architecture to medieval remains was often slight. In chapter eight, Owen Hopkins explores the ideological significance of the Gothic for eighteenth-century critics and architects, concentrating on Nicholas Hawksmoor's Gothic projects. Similarly, Niamh Nic Ghabhann addresses the role of contemporary politics in the heated discussions about the use and preservation of medieval buildings in early nineteenth-century Ireland. Jeong-Yon Ha's study considers late Victorian responses to the Gothic style by focusing on London's iconic Tower Bridge. She explores the controversy over the bridge's design, arguing that although it departed from both medieval and modern architectural technologies, it was intended to present a vision of contemporary life defined, in part, by a connection to the city's past. Many of the studies in this book stress the variety of artistic responses to the notion of Gothic and the importance of artistic choice in engaging with the ideas associated with the term and surviving objects. Ayla Lepine's work considers how the British architect George Frederick Bodley and American sculptor Frederick Hart drew upon theological ideas identified with the Gothic past in producing designs for Washington National Cathedral through the twentieth century. Finally, Niccola Shearman examines the woodcuts of Ernst Barlach as a cipher for the spirit of the age. She addresses the place of the individual in broad cultural discourses, arguing that even when Gothic can be seen as a popular style, artists adopted it for particular ends.

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[5] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey,* ch. 22.

Thus from amongst the diverse examples of artistic responses to the Gothic past presented in this volume, themes emerge to explain why artists, architects and critics have repeatedly returned to medieval remains and the term Gothic in the centuries since the Renaissance. The survival of medieval buildings and objects, often as a dominant part of the landscape, and sometimes in continual use, provided a lasting source of inspiration and materials for artists and architects, and prompted discussions about their preservation, function, and significance. Simultaneously, Gothic concepts and connotations became part of a literary discourse in which the term was applied in many contexts and adopted both by scholars and novelists. Ideas about the Gothic thus arguably gained meanings largely separate from medieval culture, which were in turn applied reflexively to works of art and architecture old and new. By the nineteenth century, with its associated debates on style, identity and historicism, artists and architects had a diverse, and compellingly contradictory, body of material to draw upon in their explorations of the Gothic. From the end of the Renaissance until the last decades of the twentieth century, Gothic ideas and forms were employed to serve both dominant and alternative cultural discourses. As interest in the Gothic grew, individuals capitalised on the elasticity of meaning associated with the term to produce potent and diverse works, many of which are discussed in depth for the first time in this collection of new research.

PART I:

SPOLIA

CHAPTER ONE

THE AFTER-LIVES OF ENGLISH GOTHIC

MATTHEW WOODWORTH

> "Time passes, and little by little everything that we have spoken in falsehood becomes true".
> —Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* [1]

When Henry VIII declared himself Supreme Head of the Church of England in 1534, few abbots or priors foresaw the disastrous decade that awaited them. No one could deny that the monastic heyday of the eleventh and twelfth centuries was long past: many houses were understaffed, their spiritual authority corroded by the mendicant orders, and contemporaries increasingly viewed monks and nuns as relics of an obsolete past.[2] But immense wealth, land holdings and great antiquity gave English monasteries an illusion of inviolability. This same cash value was also their downfall. In 1538, Erasmus's account of the gold and jewels at Canterbury and Walsingham exhausted his ability for hyperbole.[3] Nor was this restricted to the country's two greatest shrines. Around the year 1500, an anonymous Venetian traveller reported that in England, "the decorations of those enormously rich Benedictine, Carthusian, and Cistertian monasteries [...] are, indeed, more like baronial palaces than religious houses".[4] Their assets were so legendary, he claimed, that many of them even "possess[ed] unicorns' horns of extraordinary size".[5]

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[1] Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past,* (trans.) C. K. Scott Moncrieff et al. (7 vols, New York, 1981), vol. 3, p. 462.

[2] David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England: A History of its Development from the Times of St Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council, 943-1216* (1st edn., Cambridge, 1950), pp. 83-375; Philip Hughes, *The Reformation in England* (revised edn., New York, 1963), pp. 40-49; R.W. Hoyle, 'The Origins of the Dissolution of the Monasteries', *The Historical Journal*, 38 (1995), pp. 275-305; for a more positive and nuanced view of English monasticism on the eve of the Reformation, see Eamonn Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (2nd edn., New Haven and London, 2005).

[3] Desiderius Erasmus, *Pilgrimages of Saint Mary of Walsingham and Saint Thomas of Canterbury,* (trans.) J. G. Nicholas (Westminster, 1849).

By the Second Act of Suppression in 1539, every monastery in England had been dissolved with brutal efficiency.[6] Some institutions continued on a reduced scale as parish churches, while others were spared in the reshuffling of English dioceses that created six new cathedrals at Westminster, Gloucester, Peterborough, Chester, Oxford and Bristol. But the majority were soon stripped: tombs and shrines ransacked, and all remaining valuables sold to the highest bidder in what must have been some of the most extraordinary "car boot" sales ever conducted.[7] Manuscripts, sculpture, Paschal candlesticks, and even doors and hinges all had to go at "bargain basement" prices; as Michael Sherbrook noted in the late 1560s, "every Person had every thing good cheap".[8] That these auctions took place in the cloister or chapter house—formerly the heart of community life—must have seemed a grotesque end to Catholicism's hold over England for nearly a millennium.

Henry VIII initially ordered the total destruction of every monastic building, but soon learned that to "pluck down ye churche" (his euphemism of choice still has a dainty, poetic ring to it) was time-consuming, expensive, and indeed life-threatening.[9] In the end, he could only require that buildings be made unfit for resumption of the liturgy. And that is where this chapter begins. What happened to England's monasteries, the dominant feature of the country's landscape for more than five centuries? Many buildings simply mouldered away, becoming quarries or sites of plunder. In the twenty-first century, their stone can still be found strewn within a five-mile radius of most former abbeys: in walls and farmhouses, as deluxe paper-weights, and even pulverised into gravel for car parks. But portions of 121 monastic sites still remain in some form of use today, the legacies of perennial adaptation, neglect, occupation and reinvention. A full treatment of their survival could easily run to 50 volumes. Here, I can only race through the centuries to examine one building as a test case of monastic resilience, which I will then use as a springboard for some thoughts on the meaning of “Gothic” in the postmodern era.

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[4] Charlotte Sneyd (trans.), *A Relation, or Rather a True Account, of the Island of England* (London, 1847), p. 29.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

[6] The literature on the Dissolution is voluminous. The classic study is David Knowles, *Bare Ruined Choirs: The Dissolution of the English Monasteries* (Cambridge, 1976); see also A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (2nd edn., University Park, 1989), pp. 167-191; J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 85-108; David Pill, *The English Reformation, 1529-58* (Totowa, 1973), pp. 73-99.

[7] For the clearing of valuables, see Knowles, *Bare Ruined Choirs*, especially pp. 266-272; Margaret Aston, 'English Ruins and English History: The Dissolution and the Sense of the Past', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* 36 (1973), pp. 238-243.

[8] A. G. Dickens (ed.), *Tudor Treatises* (Wakefield, 1959), p. 123.

[9] See for example Joyce Youings, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries* (London, 1971), pp. 160-63, 166-67, 173-175, 180-84, 187-90.

Tudor conversion, architectural inversion

Anyone alive in mid-sixteenth-century England witnessed one of the most bizarre “bull markets” in the history of real estate. Virtually overnight, nearly a thousand purpose-built church complexes became available for public consumption. Those with enough disposable cash decided to seize the day. Henry VIII was not the single-minded destroyer that he is often made out to be, hell-bent on littering England with the rubble of his destruction.[10] Up-front purchases were encouraged, and the king bestowed many buildings on his followers (with their physical fabric, if not their contents, intact) as guarantees of future loyalty. Monasticism had a new clientele, the elite class of ambitious noblemen on the “fast track” to the upper ranks of court.[11] It was at precisely this time, in the 1540s-1550s, that royal functionaries scrambled to acquire ever-more-lavish country homes in order to proclaim their wealth and show up their rivals; as William Harrison noted in 1577, “Everie man almost is a builder”.[12] Abandoned abbeys were their ideal raw material, converted into grand-scale domestic architecture with relative speed and ease.[13] The Suppression of the Monasteries and the advent of the English country house were, therefore, mutually reinforcing phenomena. The one was impossible without the other.

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[10] See for example R. W. Chambers, *Thomas More* (London, 1976), p. 107; Youings, pp. 103-108, 248-252.

[11] David Starkey, *The Reign of Henry VIII* (New York, 1985), pp. 37-51; Maurice Howard, *The Early Tudor Country House: Architecture and Politics, 1490-1550* (London, 1987), pp. 24-42.

[12] Malcolm Airs, *The Tudor & Jacobean Country House: A Building History* (Stroud, 1995), pp. 3-7; Neville Williams, *Henry VIII and His Court* (New York, 1971), pp. 13-99.

[13] Maurice Howard, ‘Recycling the Monastic Fabric: Beyond the Act of Dissolution’, in D. Gaimster and R. Gilchrist (eds), *The Archaeology of Reformation, 1480-1580* (Leeds, 2003), pp. 221-234; Airs, *The Tudor & Jacobean House*, pp. 27-30; Howard, *The Early Tudor Country House*, pp. 11-107.

An example of this kind of monastic "recycling" is the former Cistercian abbey at Netley in Hampshire, four miles southeast of Southampton (Fig. 1-1).[14] It was founded in 1239 by Bishop Peter des Roches of Winchester (1205-1238) and soon adopted by Henry III himself. As sole patron, the king dispatched his own masons to build at least two of the abbey's early campaigns, and his name is still visible at the base of the northeast crossing pier: H[ENRICUS]: D[E]I. GRA[TIA]. REX ANGL[IAE] ("Henry, king of England. Thanks be to God"). It is one of the strange ironies of English Gothic that Netley, despite its Cistercian affiliation, boasted some of the most cosmopolitan architecture in the kingdom. Its monumental east façade was one of the first to feature bar tracery, and its original window was a magnified, doubled-up version of a design used by Henry of Reyns, architect of Westminster Abbey between 1245 and 1253.[15]

Netley was suppressed in 1536. Its buildings and land were given to Sir William Paulet (1474/5-1572), Comptroller (and later Treasurer) of the royal household and the first Marquess of Winchester.[16] Like the composers Thomas Tallis and William Byrd, Paulet had a genius for navigating turbulent political regimes while others faced prison or lost their heads. Queen Elizabeth once joked that he was the only man in

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[14] For Netley, see John Hare, 'Netley Abbey: Monastery, Mansion and Ruin', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society*, 49 (1993), pp. 207-227; Angela Smith, 'Netley Abbey: Patronage, Preservation and Remains', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 163 (2010), pp. 132-151; Edmund Kell, 'Netley Abbey, with an Account of Recent Excavations and Discoveries', *Collectanea Archaeologica*, 2 (1871), pp. 65-92; A. H. Thompson, *Netley Abbey, Hampshire: Official Guide* (London, 1937); William Page (ed.), *The Victoria County History of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight* (5 vols, London, 1903-8), vol. 2, pp. 146-149, vol. 3, pp. 472-476.

[15] For Henry of Reyns, see Christopher Wilson et al., *Westminster Abbey* (London, 1986), pp. 26-28; Paul Binksi, *Westminster Abbey and the Plantagenets: Kingship and the Representation of Power, 1200-1400* (New Haven and London, 1995), pp. 13-27.

[16] For William Paulet's career, see J. D. Alsop and D. M. Loades, 'William Paulet, First Marquis of Winchester: A Question of Age', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 18 (1987), pp. 333-342; L. L. Ford, 'Paulet, William, First Marquess of Winchester (1474/5?-1572)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); online edn. http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21622 [accessed December 2010].

England she would ever marry, if only he were younger.[17] Paulet's diplomacy and charm seem to have been both envied and scorned; as Sir Richard Morison observed, he had "a tongue fit for all tymes, with an obedience redie for as many newe masteres as can happen in his dayes".[18]

Paulet's primary palace was located at Basing (also in Hampshire) and was evidently the "Versailles" of the early Tudor period—second only to Hampton Court itself in size and splendour. His remodelling of Netley Abbey was to become his somewhat less palatial second mansion.[19] It is a pity that architectural historians have not investigated these Tudor adaptations in greater detail. While the evidence is often fragmentary and difficult to disentangle, these are fascinating case studies, showing an extraordinary variety of responses to the topography, ground plan and material available at each site. Paulet's building accounts have not survived, but we can still be reasonably sure of his activities. The nave of the former abbey church was transformed into a massive entertainment complex featuring a kitchen in its four western bays and a great hall in the remaining space up to the great crossing.[20] A single hacked-out respond (fifth from the west on the south side) shows the location of the Tudor partition wall that once separated hall from kitchen. The doorway adjacent (whose location would have made no sense in a monastic context) led to the remodelled cloister, now the central courtyard of a sprawling domestic complex surrounding a tall fountain.[21] Paulet converted the south transept into a complex of sumptuous apartments by installing a second storey in the quasi-triforium; the footings for his floor joists can still be seen halfway up the elevation. He then demolished the north transept when he discovered that it prevented daylight from coming into his private dining room.

These adaptations sound dramatic and sweeping; indeed, previous scholarship has often characterised Tudor occupations of Gothic architecture as episodes of powerful upheaval and disruption.[22] For the most part, I cannot agree with this interpretation, as it is usually based on written descriptions that do not convey the realities of architectural practice. As this chapter will repeatedly show, narrative accounts give an illusory feeling of fragmentation to almost every phase of Gothic's extraordinarily long life. For places like Netley, these same descriptions ignore how vigorously architects attempted to harmonise their buildings with what came before, and they inconveniently flout cherished taxonomies of "Gothic", "Renaissance" and "proto-Baroque".

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[17] Rowland Broughton, *A Brief Discourse of the Life and Death of the Late Right High and Honorable Sir William Pawlet* (London, 1572), p. 27. Broughton was Paulet's servant and the story is, alas, probably apocryphal.

[18] John Nichols (ed.), *Literary Remains of King Edward the Sixth* (2 vols, London, 1857), vol. 1, p. ccxxvii.

[19] The most detailed treatment of the conversion is Hale, 'Netley Abbey', pp. 216-220; see also the citations above at n. 14.

[20] There is a diagram, unfortunately quite inaccurate, in Hare, 'Netley Abbey', p. 215, Fig. 6.

[21] The fountain was excavated in 1860, Kell, 'Netley Abbey', p. 76. For Tudor courtyards, see Howard, *The Early Tudor Country House*, pp. 59-107.

The relationship between Netley's medieval and Tudor incarnations was actually one of remarkable continuity. The loss of the north transept, while significant, was Paulet's only modification to the exterior of the building. The abbey's ground plan, and in fact the footprint of every part of the claustral complex, remained exactly as it had throughout the Middle Ages. The original walls and roofs were left intact and from many vantage points, Paulet's version of Netley appeared no different than it had for the previous three centuries. The "new" Tudor abbey still cut a decidedly Cistercian figure, covered in its original painted, pinkish-white ashlaring. Portions of this fourteenth-century veneer survive on the exterior of the northeast choir, proving that the architectural "signature" of the white monks was left untouched by Paulet's masons.

The interior changes at Netley were also less substantial than they initially seem. An engraving by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck from 1733 shows part of the original medieval vault still in place over the south transept, before its total collapse at the end of the eighteenth century (Fig. 1-2). Recent work by Angela Smith has shown that this vault, previously thought to have been built in the late fifteenth century, was actually constructed just before the Dissolution; in fact, it was still unfinished in the middle of 1529.[23] It is highly likely that the vault was part of a larger plan of refurbishment and that it extended into the nave of the church; its bosses, like those of the south transept, would have continued the heraldic line of Paulet's long-time allies, the Frost and Hampton families.[24] From both a logistical and political standpoint, demolition of this vault would have been unthinkable, and Paulet almost certainly retained it as the vast canopy for his new great hall. During state functions, many of his honoured guests would have been able to entertain themselves by spotting their own coats of arms looming high above. Likewise, Netley's original glazing was most likely left *in situ*. The Cistercian stained glass, as per custom, would have featured grisaille interspersed with heraldry—presumably that of the founder, Henry III, and Edward I, who ruled when the west façade was under construction.[25] The original windows would have been in fine condition (there would have been no need for iconoclasm, as they did not depict saints), and Paulet no doubt relished their ideological advantage, proclaiming a retroactive allegiance to the Crown stretching back 250 years before his birth. In addition, excavation work in 1860 uncovered so many medieval floor tiles that Paulet must have preserved all, or most, of Netley's original flooring.[26]

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[22] Airs, *The Tudor & Jacobean House*, pp. 27-30; Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People*, pp. 136-149; Howard, *The Early Tudor Country House*, pp. 136-162; Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven and London, 1978), pp. 11-12, 64-80; Richard Barnett, *Place, Profit, and Power: A Study of the Servants of William Cecil, Elizabethan Statesman* (Chapel Hill, 1969), pp. 147-153; Geoffrey Webb, *Architecture in Britain: The Middle Ages* (Baltimore, 1956), pp. 203-208.

[23] Smith, 'Netley Abbey', pp. 139-141.

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 134-141.

The remodelled nave at Netley, then, was not a violent usurpation of its Gothic predecessor. Arcades, vault, glass, sculpture, paint and floor tiles remained in place just as they had for the previous three hundred years. This should come as no surprise, as the primary advantage of converting an existing building was the ability to retain as much of it as possible. Aside from Paulet's hatchments (perhaps suspended in the arcades?) and the obligatory tapestries that decorated the great hall, there would have been few major structural or aesthetic changes between Netley's Gothic and Tudor schemes. Even the nave's new partition wall mirrored the fragmentation of the original medieval space, which would have been subdivided into chapels by tall parclose screens.

On the other hand, the changes to furnishings and personnel at Netley were epic in scale. Enormous banquet tables, three large fireplaces, throngs of musicians, esteemed guests in fine regalia and armies of bustling servants must have looked exceedingly strange against the backdrop that once solemnized the Cistercian liturgy and was meant to foster, as Bernard of Clairvaux urged, a "custody of the senses".[27] But even this revelry was, in a sense, a logical extension of the site's medieval predecessor. One of the leading justifications for the Suppression of the

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[25] My dating is based on the style of the Decorated tracery of the north aisle and aisle windows of the west façade (late Geometric with incipient intersecting motifs).

[26] Kell, 'Netley Abbey', p. 72 and plate 7 (adjacent).

[27] Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux,* (trans.) B. S. James (London, 1953), pp. 152-168, 244-245; the footings of the nave fireplaces were excavated in 1860, Kell, 'Netley Abbey', p. 74.

Monasteries was the extravagant lifestyle of abbots; many entertained guests from the social stratosphere while their sky-high budgets for food and wine pushed their communities to the brink of bankruptcy.[28] It is almost impossible not to romanticise an institution in its medieval prime and bastardise those who appear to have corrupted it. But the truth is that many deposed abbots would have viewed Netley's great hall with admiration and envy, not horror. On one level, Paulet succeeded only in doing what many religious leaders had probably fantasised about doing themselves. And of all the atrocities that took place in the naves of medieval churches—murder, animal slaughter and prostitution, to name only a few—an elegant banquet might have been considered quite an improvement by the buildings' new occupants.[29]

The first Gothic revival and the "Gothic" ideal

In 1704, after a long period of abandonment, Netley was once again transformed. Sir Berkley Lewis demolished the east end and some of the claustral buildings, and the site's Gothic reprieve was over.[30] Netley began a new life as a ruin, just as so many other abbeys had done two hundred years before. The timing was ideal. The eighteenth century's mania for Gothic had already begun, and ruins became exemplars of the transitory nature of existence and the impermanence of human pursuits. Gothic was now a scaffold for melancholy; visitors, later prompted by Wordsworth and Tennyson, were encouraged to allow feelings of loss and remorse to wash over them. A macabre twist of fate soon ensured that Netley became a pivotal monument of the Georgian zeitgeist. As Lewis stood in the midst of his wreckage, he was killed when one of the weakened presbytery walls collapsed on top of him.[31] No detailed eyewitness analysis of the accident survives, but some contemporaries clearly felt that the God of the Catholic rite had exacted his final revenge. There was an eerie, *quid pro quo* symmetry to Lewis's comeuppance: the perpetrator of architectural erasure had become his own victim. All of this turned out to be the proverbial blessing in disguise. Now armed with an aura of legitimate menace, Netley was propelled into fame as a fixture of the Gothic novel.

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[28] See the Henrician injunctions in Gerald Bray (ed.), *Documents of the English Reformation* (Minneapolis, 1994), pp. 175-183.

[29] The nave of Old St Paul's, London was a particular den of depravity. Caroline M. Barron and Marie-Hélène Rousseau, 'Cathedral, City and State, 1300-1450,' in D. Keene, A. Burns and A. Saint (eds), *St Paul's: The Cathedral Church of London, 604-2004* (New Haven and London, 2004), p. 38.

[30] Hope, 'Netley Abbey', p. 220.

[31] Browne Willis, *An History of the Mitred Parliamentary Abbies and Conventual Cathedral Churches, Shewing the Times of Their Foundations...* (2 vols, London, 1719), vol. 2, pp. 204-205.

In 1795, Richard Warner published his potboiler, entitled *Netley Abbey: A Gothic Story*, to wild acclaim.[32] His book recounts the adventures of Edward de Villars on his many visits to the abbey:

> This monastery [Netley] had become indeed one of his [de Villars's] most favorite walks; its situation (as is sufficiently evident from the present ruins) being extremely pleasing and picturesque [...] A religious awe now took possession of his soul, for the scene around was calculated to excite the serious emotions. He trod on consecrated ground, beneath which were quietly laid in eternal slumbers, many who had heretofore like himself, rejoiced in the vigour of youth, and glowed with the bloom of health.[33]

The portrayal of picturesque splendour is exactly what we might expect. But Edward's introspection soon gives way to terror and dread:

> A loud female shriek reached his ear, which appeared to have been uttered within the walls of the abbey [...] He lifted the massive knocker of the outer gate, and rapped loudly at it. The lengthened cloisters, and hollow vaultings of the pile reverberated the sound, and gave a noise like distant thunder.[34]

The narrative goes on in a rather predictable pattern. Edward encounters the whole cast of gothic characters, including knights in clanking armour, captive princesses, vampire women with surprising skills of seduction, and the obligatory ghosts of monks in chains. But it is the abbey's architecture—the style of ruined Gothic itself—that is the most threatening character of all, constantly drenched in the menace of full moonlight. The story is undeniably formulaic and bears an uncanny resemblance to low-budget horror films, but that is missing the point. "Gothic" was now a literary topos familiar to a very wide audience. Warner's book fast became the Georgian equivalent of a pulp novel, and the public's frenzy for Gothic turned Netley into an acclaimed destination.

Hordes of tourists descended on the abbey in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, far more than the Cistercians or William Paulet could have ever envisaged. More alterations were made to the site, but a crucial turning point had arrived: from this point on, architectural modifications at

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[32] Richard Warner, *Netley Abbey: A Gothic Story* (2 vols, New York, 1974).

[33] *Ibid*., vol. 1, pp. 132-136.

[34] *Ibid*., vol. 1, pp. 91-92, 140-141.

Netley, as at so many other abbeys, were now subtractive, never additive. New construction as had occurred in the Tudor period was now unthinkable. Paulet's additions to the cloister, which he had constructed in brick, were now considered anathema to the site's medieval purity and were removed. Throughout the 1800s, owners such as Thomas Chamberlayne were scrupulous in stripping Netley of anything that post-dated the fifteenth century. Chamberlayne's clearance in April 1860 was "very considerable [...] furnishing sufficient stone to build a sea-wall of a quarter of a mile in length along the Southampton water".[35] The blocked windows of the chapter house were reopened, and much of Paulet's other brickwork had already been eradicated in the previous fifty years.[36] The physical structure of the ruins was now sacrosanct, a kind of lithic talisman to the site's medieval authenticity. The deletions made by Chamberlayne were a kind of reverse iconoclasm or "de-whitewashing": architectural redactions meant to re-Gothicise Netley back to what its original appearance "should" have been.

For the Georgians and early Victorians, "Gothic" was synonymous with stone construction, even when it was to become a vehicle for controlled wilderness or Romantic bathos. Building and setting were not to be confused, despite how intrinsically linked they were to each other and to the site's success. Propriety was flouted on nearly every front, but never when it came to the physical fabric of a Gothic monument. Trees and shrubs were planted in the nave to enhance its "scenic" qualities; ruins were engineered to be focal points of theatrical landscaping; and costume dramas performed on site were a deliberate pastiche of gothick anachronisms, but even so, the actual materiality of Netley's walls still needed to remain "genuine". The stone itself was the spolia of Gothic legitimacy. Strangely, no contemporary seems to have noted that this reverence for the architectural past was an uncanny throwback to actual medieval attitudes and practice. At Saint-Denis, Canterbury, and many other places, earlier parts of a building were venerated as relics in their own right and could only be remodelled after great feats of justification.[37] Even the Georgians could not escape the gravitational pull of Gothic's architectural sanctity, of the building itself as the repository of sacred authority. Despite the wild artificiality of eighteenth-century ruins and gardens, they were still predicated on a puritanical notion of what "Gothic" was, and was *supposed* to be.

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[35] Kell, 'Netley Abbey', p. 65.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 65; Hare, 'Netley Abbey', p. 217.

[37] Erwin Panofsky, *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and its Art Treasures* (2nd edn., Princeton, 1979), pp. 42-45, 48-53, 86-93; Francis Woodman, *The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral* (London, 1981), pp. 151-164, 169-188.

The Middle Ages had come full circle; but as so often happens, the story ends in supreme irony. Stripped of Paulet's and his successors' accretions, Netley's walls were the closest they had been to their original appearance since 1536. But at this point they were abdicated to the one power that no medieval abbot would have ever countenanced: nature. A hand-tinted photograph from the 1890s shows Netley as it was meant to be seen in its picturesque glory: thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Gothic in a mantle of green (Fig. 1-3). Ivy inches its way up the aisle responds and threatens to engulf the east façade. Thickets of shrubs have taken over the south choir aisle. Oddly, the site's authorities appear to have seen no inherent contradiction in these activities. Walls were to be purified back to stone and then surrendered to what could, unchecked, pulverise them into dust. We will never escape the paradox that Romantic ideals of disintegration and fragmentation are often the only reasons for a Gothic site's continued existence. Except for occasional antiquarian interest, the walls of Netley had become stage props for viewers' interiority and excitability. Their spiritual power, originally dedicated to the Virgin Mary, had now been consecrated to the sublime.

Postmodern "Gothic" and the commercial world

The transformation of English Gothic continued into the twenty-first century. Its legacy grows more visible every year.[38] As someone who studies medieval architecture for a living, I am probably the last person who can claim to make unbiased observations about it; but even so, I am often amazed at how frequently images of Gothic architecture appear in magazines, newspapers, and on television. English Gothic (as opposed to French) also has a strong Internet presence and comes up surprisingly often in casual web-surfing. The omnipresence of these media now means that Gothic reaches an exponentially broader audience than medieval builders, "picturesque" engravers or Gothic novelists could ever have imagined. If its frequency is really an indication of genuine interest (and it may not be), Gothic now has a popular appeal that even the Victorian revivalists would have envied.

In August 2010, I decided to conduct a thoroughly unscientific survey and count how many times in a month I came across references to English Gothic in everyday life, outside my own work. I was shocked at the results. There were a total of 59 occurrences, an average of almost two per day; and this is probably a low estimate, as I spent one of these weeks in the United States. Cathedrals and ruins seemed to pop up everywhere, in places that I never would have imagined, but where they had been all along: in special interest pieces about family holidays; interviews about favourite hide-and-seek spots; Council reports on budget cutbacks; advertisements for a school play; multiple commercials (in particular for the DVD release of *The Pillars of the Earth*); a documentary about the modern printing press; the background of a cricket match; three crossword puzzles; four podcasts about astronomy; two board games; five signs outside pubs; two T-shirts; four adverts for chocolate and cheese; and even a flyer at the post office for a dog-walking service. At a supermarket, an enormous cardboard display of a Gothic cathedral constructed in LEGO (complete with plastic "Purbeck" shafting and a quadripartite vault!) was admired by hundreds, perhaps even a thousand, people every day.[39]

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[38] Veronica Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* (London, 2006), pp. 225-235.

Why was Gothic chosen for these images? What was its function? What message was it meant to impart? The convoluted attitudes towards Netley's Gothic iterations seem straightforward in comparison. Even one month of "Gothic" in its modern incarnations is distressingly multivalent, offering a baffling array of media, functions and contexts. Its universality is very surprising; a kind of subliminal, neo-medieval barrage targeted to everyone and no one in particular, regardless of their conscious feelings about English Gothic, or whether they have any at all. These were not clever allusions for the *eruditi,* clutching their Pevsners in a parish church or attending academic conferences on pre-modern art. They were unavoidable to anyone going about their daily business and living a so-called "normal" life. From the mid-sixteenth centuy, Netley Abbey hungered for popular appeal, but people at least had to go to the trouble of seeking it out. What does it mean that Gothic is now thrust upon its audience, albeit fleetingly, whether they have any desire to see it or not? Why, among English architectural styles, has Gothic been singled out for special favour?

The topic is far too complicated to handle here, and is in fact the rationale for this entire book. There are hundreds of reasons why Gothic has been called back into duty, but it strikes me that its primary functions now revolve around several interrelated strands of meaning. The first is that Gothic seems to epitomise that which is ancient and time-honoured. It is a kind of short-hand for "old" and all the prestige that that entails. It conveys the notion of a deeply historicised past, not necessarily medieval in origin (in fact, usually not), but part of “the good ol’ days”, “the olden days”, or a bygone era “way back when”. Pages of text touting an object’s longevity can be scrapped when a simple picture of a cathedral tower will do the job with far greater force. In advertisements for print and television, English Gothic says: this food, this business, is venerable; it was esteemed long before you were born; like a Cistercian ruin, it has stood the test of time and prevailed. Unlike the Romano-British, Saxon or Anglo-Norman periods, Gothic is the earliest architectural style to have saturated public consciousness. Its aesthetic merit or qualities here are in fact largely irrelevant; what matters is its instant denotation of antiquity.

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[39] The display was at the Tesco superstore on Morton Lane in Beverley, Yorkshire. In July 2010, the store manager informed me that the LEGO display created a huge spike in children's toy sales that summer.

A second overarching theme is that of “Gothic” as a token of excellence. Snapshots of medieval architecture are now marketed as proof of quality and unyielding high standards. For clever consumers, “Gothic” is the imprimatur that separates a superior product from its slightly tacky competitors. The ultimate irony (and one often gets the feeling that advertisers are in on the joke) is that Gothic is often invoked for products that are decidedly low-brow or have no conceivable connection to the Middle Ages. Pre-packaged foods, even candy and pork pies, rely on Gothic as the image of luxury and decadence. Cheddar cheese is slightly believable as the modern ancestor to the monks’ dairy farms at St Werburgh’s, Chester; Gothic in this context makes some sense. But as an advertising ploy for margarine, brownies and disinfectant, its relevance is slightly more dubious. Paradoxically, that is why these images are so effective. When trying to select a dog-walker from a sea of anonymous posters, many people will instinctively choose the one that shows a sleek, soaring west façade. Gothic has given an unconscious boost over the generic or conventional. Our thought process is meant to run: if this product was good enough for the Blackfriars, why shouldn’t it be good enough for me?

A third meaning communicated by Gothic, and it is closely tied with this same promise of calibre, is its conferral of authenticity. In a sea of imitations, Gothic is the “real deal”: it separates the official merchandise from the ersatz and the bogus. Other brands of crackers, books, or clothing may look similar, but only Gothic can guarantee that one particular company’s product is the genuine article. Cachet and integrity are so closely juxtaposed that the results are often hilarious. A bicycle repair logo with black-hooded monks conjures up less an image of mechanical expertise than Benedictines racing in the Tour de France. “Medieval” children’s toys tend not to suggest quality, but rather a cloister full of water guns and stuffed animals. Nowhere is this conflation more bizarre