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The medieval library (to *c.* 1450)

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Most 'medieval libraries' were not a single physical entity: rather they comprised a number of collections, often physically discrete, whose contents might shift from one to another, or be reconfigured, in response to changing needs and local conditions. The first library rooms – chambers in which books were not only stored but also consulted – usually held only a portion of the total collection, other parts being stored elsewhere. Throughout our period, where the collections were kept, how they were stored and the principles underlying their organisation were directly connected to their size, function and use. Nevertheless, other, less practical factors, ranging from inertia to the wishes of benefactors, could also come into play. In all but a few of the major religious communities, book collections were usually small, numbering hundreds rather than thousands; and in many institutions a proportion of the books would always be in the hands of individual members, reducing the number for which storage space was required. Most collections grew comparatively slowly (albeit in fits and starts), encouraging a series of *ad hoc* measures and expedients rather than radical restructuring. Thus, once a particular store had been settled upon, it was likely to have a long life. More dramatic change, when it came, was a response as much to new concepts of use as to the practicalities of storage.

Specific details about the practical arrangements for keeping books are frustratingly elusive. The physical evidence is particularly exiguous. Hardly any medieval book-stores (whether chest, cupboard or chamber) or library rooms survive intact. Still less remains of their furnishings.[1] The gaps in the material evidence are only partially remedied by written sources.[2] Few of

1 The material evidence has yet to be fully collated and assessed. The fullest treatments remain the pioneering studies: J. W. Clark, *The care of books* (Cambridge, 1901); B. H. Streeter, *The chained library: a survey in the evolution of the English library* (London, 1931).

2 The most important body of which is being newly (re-)edited for the Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues (CBMLC).

the extant medieval booklists and catalogues were intended to act as finding lists, and not many before the fourteenth century provide information about the location of the books. Moreover, such documents are rarely a comprehensive account of all the collections possessed by a community, and by their nature (a record of one particular moment in time) give an artificially static view of those they do list. In addition, the precise meaning of the terms used to describe the places where books were kept is often unclear.

The term most commonly found from the twelfth century onwards is *armarium*, which can refer to a single cupboard, either free-standing (a press) or a wall-recess (aumbrey), but was also used to refer more generally to a collection of books (housed in one or more presses), and even perhaps to a book-room.[3] The word is used in one or other of these latter senses in an inventory of the books of the Cistercian abbey of Meaux, compiled in 1396, part of which comprises a list of books *in communi almario claustri* ('in the common *almarium* of the cloister'), further sub-divided into different *thecae* (cases or cupboards), one above the door, one opposite the door and others evidently against the other walls.[4] Although nothing survives above ground on the site of the abbey, the description is sufficiently detailed to indicate a narrow room within one of the cloister ranges, such as is found at several English Cistercian houses. In other records, however, the mention of a *communis armarium claustri* might refer to a collection accommodated, not in a room, but in recesses built into the cloister wall or in free-standing presses backed against it.

The term *libraria* (or *librarium*) also lacked a single, precise usage. In the fifteenth century, *libraria* was the most commonly used term for a library room, but during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries it was used in a more general way to refer to a collection of books. A booklist of 1202 from Rochester Cathedral Priory, for example, records the main collection of the works of the Fathers under the heading *Librarium Beati Andree* (the titular saint of the house); this is followed by other collections each also called *librarium*: the *comune librarium*, an *aliud librarium in archa cantoris*, and a *Librarium Magistri Hamonis*.[5] Here, the *archa cantoris* is probably a specific storage space, although of what kind cannot be determined, for while the word itself might lead one to expect a chest, the large number of volumes in the cache in question implies some other form of repository.

3 R. W. Hunt, 'The library of the abbey of St Albans', in Parkes and Watson, *Medieval scribes*, 259; A. J. Piper, 'The libraries of the monks of Durham', in *ibid.*, 217–18.

4 CBMLC III, Z14, nos. 50–363. 5 CBMLC IV, B79.

Book-stores and their location

Reliable evidence for the nature of book storage before the twelfth century is scanty in the extreme. Little relevant physical evidence survives, and only one of the handful of extant booklists records the location of the titles in question. A list from Bury St Edmunds in the time of Abbot Leofstan (1046–65) shows that ten volumes (nine service books and a copy of the *Vita S. Edmundi*) were then kept in the abbey church, eleven liturgical books were in the hands of seven named individuals, while a further thirty books (of unspecified content) were in the keeping of Leofstan himself – for which a single chest or cupboard would have sufficed.[6] Such grander collections as existed prior to the eleventh century are poorly documented, if at all, with the notable exception of that accumulated by Benedict Biscop (d. 689) and Ceolfrith (d. 716) for the twin monasteries of Monkwearmouth and Jarrow.[7] Some impression of the extraordinary number of books they gathered can be gained from the sources used by Bede, but how they were stored and organised is unknown – apart from two of the massive pandects (complete, one-volume bibles) commissioned by Ceolfrith, which he 'had placed in the churches of his two monasteries so that it should be easy for all who wished to read any chapter of either Testament to find what they wanted'.[8] The depiction of an open book-cupboard that appears in the portrait of the Prophet Ezra in a third pandect commissioned by Ceolfrith (the Codex Amiatinus)[9] cannot safely be used as evidence for how books were stored at Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, because the image derives from a continental exemplar (perhaps from Cassiodorus' Vivarium); one can do no more than speculate that the emulation of Mediterranean objects cultivated at Monkwearmouth-Jarrow by Biscop and Ceolfrith might have extended to the imitation of such an item. Be that as it may, and with due regard for artistic purpose and conventions, the image does shed valuable light on the nature of such furniture. Though clearly a substantial cupboard, equipped with five shelves, it does not hold many books; the volumes lie flat on their sides. Both points remain true in later (albeit non-English) depictions of book-cupboards.

From the twelfth century, references to the location of books – especially to *armaria* – begin to multiply. At Ely in 1143, for instance, Bishop Nigel found 'a large number of books in an *armarium*';[10] this may have been a

6 Lapidge, 'Booklists', 33–89, no. VII. 7 See below, 92, 100.

8 C. Plummer (ed.), *Vita Ceolfridi auctore anonymo*, c. 20: *Venerabilis Bedae opera historica*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1896), I. 395.

9 Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Amiatino 1, fol. 'V'r'; K. Weitzmann, *Late antique and early Christian book illumination* (New York, 1977), pl. 48.

10 E. O. Blake (ed.), *Liber Eliensis*, Camden Third Series (London, 1962), 294.

free-standing chest or cupboard, or perhaps the twelfth-century wall-recess (of which a fragment is still visible in the north range of the cloister) which was replaced in the thirteenth century by a larger and more elaborate *armarium*.[11] One point that the fuller documentation makes abundantly clear is that books were stored in a variety of locations. Volumes used in the performance of the liturgy or for public reading, for example, were kept in or close to the places where they were used. The list of books that Henry of Blois 'had written for Glastonbury' (where he was abbot from 1126 to 1171) states that a couple of lectionaries were in the chapter house, one breviary was in the infirmary and another in the guesthouse.[12] The catalogue of 1396 from Meaux records eight volumes at the high altar of the church, over seventy in the choir (including thirty-eight small processionals), and seven service-books in the infirmary chapel, 'not counting the other psalters, breviaries and collectanea for the private use of the abbot, the office-holders and the monks'.[13] The late fifteenth-century catalogue from the Augustinian abbey of Leicester offers further precision, listing each volume that lay on the high altar, at ten other altars, at each of the canons' stalls, in the choir, and on the pulpitum, as well as the *cantica organica*, the service-books in the infirmary and those at the abbey's cell at Ingwarby.[14] Texts used for 'public' reading in the refectory sometimes formed a separate small collection, whose contents might change over the course of the year in accordance with the cycle of lections. A rare inventory of such books from Reading Abbey, dating from the late fourteenth century, states that they were kept ready to hand in the dormitory;[15] and volumes marked as belonging to the refectory survive from Bury St Edmunds, Peterborough and elsewhere.[16] At Fountains Abbey there is a small recess in the walling at the entrance to the stairway that leads up to the pulpit within the west wall of the refectory, which may have been the cupboard for the books that were read there.[17] The church itself was sometimes the location for other specialised collections. The Meaux catalogue lists two small caches of manuscripts *in ecclesia* a collection of texts fundamental to the conduct of Cistercian monasticism

11 CBMLC IV. 128; *VCH Cambridgeshire* IV. 79; II. 205–6. 12 CBMLC IV. B37.

13 CBMLC III. Z14, nos. 1–21.

14 CBMLC VI. A20, nos. 1699–862. For a similarly detailed list, see the 1506 inventory from Exeter Cathedral: G. Oliver, *Lives of the bishops of Exeter and a history of the cathedral* (Exeter, 1861), 320–76.

15 CBMLC IV. B74; A. Coates, *English medieval books: the Reading Abbey collections from foundation to dispersal* (Oxford, 1999), 66–7, 84–6.

16 E.g. Cambridge, St John's Coll., MS B.13 ('de refectorio monachorum sancti edmundi'); and CCCC, MS 160 ('liber refectorii burg.').

17 For three surviving books from Bury St Edmunds labelled *de refectorio* by Henry de Kirkestede in the mid-thirteenth century, see CBMLC XI. xlix.

which was kept *in communi almario in ecclesia*, and another small group, mainly comprising key texts for biblical study and a four-volume passional, kept 'in aliis almariis officii cantoris in ecclesia'.[18] At St Albans Abbey, the magnificent set of glossed books of the Bible commissioned by Abbot Simon (1167–83) was displayed in a painted cupboard near the tomb of Roger the Hermit (an arched recess in the south wall of the abbey church leading to the cloister), where they commemorated that abbot's love of Scripture.[19] Some books, especially those in precious bindings, were kept in the treasury with other valuables: such was the case at Ely, whose mid-twelfth-century inventory of their treasury includes some eighteen gospel books with lavish bindings.[20] The main collections for personal spiritual reading and study, however, were usually located within the cloister, and are discussed below.

An unusually complete picture of the shifting character of the multiple collections of books created by a religious community to serve its various needs is provided by the surviving records and books of Durham Cathedral Priory.[21] In addition to the various caches sent to its numerous monastic dependencies, over ten collections are documented within the priory itself, in or around the cloister. By the mid-fourteenth century, the principal collection of 'working' books was located in the cloister, while a second major group (comprising volumes that had become outdated and were little used) was kept in the Spendement, a store-room adjoining it; by 1418 a library room had been added above the parlour in the eastern range of the cloister, which was provisioned with books taken from both the cloister and Spendement collections. Volumes continued to be transferred between these three collections, to meet changing needs, over the course of the fifteenth century. Other, smaller caches were similarly fluid. Books to be read at the evening collation formed a separate group in the mid-twelfth century; by the mid-fourteenth century a collection of books to be read aloud in the refectory was kept in a cupboard round the corner from the refectory door, beside the entrance to the infirmary at the south end of the west side of the cloister. Texts for the novices (known from a list of 1395) were kept in the cloister; the collection of archives, once held in the Spendement, were by the Dissolution located in a 'Register' close to the prior's lodging; Prior Wessington (1416–46) held various volumes in a chapel in his lodgings, while the feretrar who looked after the shrine of St Cuthbert had his 'own' cache of books by the late fourteenth century

18 CBMLC III. Z14, nos. 22–49. Such cases must be judged individually, since the word *ecclesia* might sometimes be used to refer to the monastery as a whole.

19 Hunt, 'Library of St Albans', 258. 20 Blake (ed.), *Liber Eliensis*, 290–1.

21 Piper, 'Libraries of the monks of Durham', 213–49, esp. fig. 17.

if not before. Finally, there were the service-books variously located in the cathedral, with additional collections of such texts held by the sacrist and in the infirmary.

The cloister collections

As the focus of their non-liturgical activity (including reading), the cloister was where monastic communities kept their main collections of books for personal study until at least the fifteenth century. The first proper cloister known to have been built in England is that of Edward the Confessor's Westminster Abbey, whereafter it became a standard feature of English monasteries; the earliest reference to lockable *armaria* there appears in the 'Monastic Constitutions' of Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury 1070–89.[22] Recesses of different dimensions, suitable for housing books, are found in twelfth-century fabric in approximately the same location (the north end of the east wall of the cloister, beside the south door of the church) at various religious houses in Britain, including the Cluniac priories of Castle Acre and Monk Bretton, the Augustinian abbey of Lilleshall, the Premonstratensian abbey of Dryburgh, and the Cistercian abbeys of Fountains, Kirkstall and Rievaulx. The example at Dryburgh, which is set about 3ft above floor level, is 6ft 8in. wide and 2ft 8in. deep and rises to an internal height of 5ft 4in. at the apex of its gently arched top. Grooves and gouges in the stonework show that the cavity originally had a first shelf 21in. above its base level, with a second shelf 22in. above the first (fig. 1). The stone is also 'rebated' to receive doors.

Physical and documentary evidence confirms the longevity of the use of the cloister as the place for the main reading collection. Four recesses are found in the east range of the cloister of the Augustinian priory of St Andrews, Fife, fabric which probably dates from the early thirteenth century.[23] When the east walk of the cloister at Norwich Cathedral Priory was rebuilt in the early fourteenth century, three elaborately decorated niches were included by the door to the church. In the same position at Worcester are substantial twin recesses, which had been renewed when the cloister was rebuilt in 1372; the floor of these recesses projects forward about a foot, forming a bench-table 16in. above the ground.[24] The custumal of the Augustinian canons of Barnwell (1295×6) is

22 D. Knowles (ed.), *The Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc*, rev. C. N. L. Brooke, chs. 83–4 (Oxford, 2002), 114.

23 S. Cruden, *Scottish medieval churches* (Edinburgh, 1986), 96–7.

24 Thomson, *Cat. Worcester*, xxxxii, pl. 1.

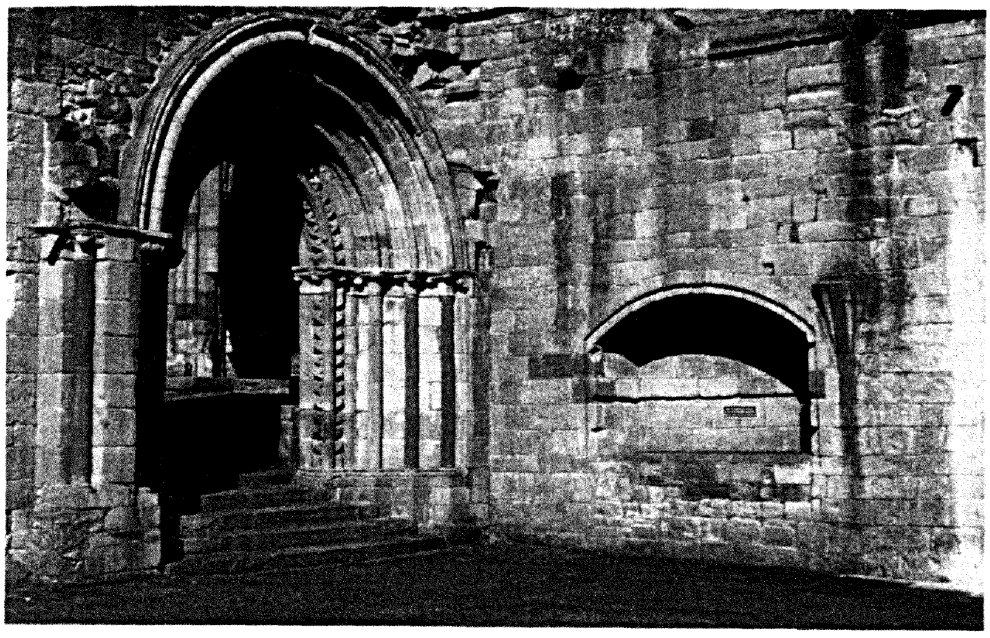

Figure 1 Dryburgh Abbey, north-east corner of the cloister, showing the doorway into the abbey church and the aumbrey in the wall beside it. (Photo, Gameson)

unequivocal that the cloister (along with the church) is the place for books.[25] The fourteenth-century custumal of St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, makes the same assumption.[26] The use of free-standing cupboards and chests as supplements to, or instead of, wall-recesses is apparent from the account of the 1327 incursion into the abbey of Bury St Edmunds, which records that when the townsfolk 'entered the cloister, they broke the chests (*cistulas, id est caroles*) and the cupboards (*armoriola*) and carried off the books along with everything else that was found in them'.[27] Books were subsequently replaced in the cloister, since at least nine surviving Bury volumes contain the location note 'de armario claustri' in the hand of Henry de Kirkestede, librarian at Bury in the mid-fourteenth century.[28] The description in the *Rites of Durham* shows that free-standing *almaria* 'all full of bookes' remained in the north range of

25 J. W. Clark (ed.), *The observances in use at the Augustinian Priory of S. Giles and S. Andrew at Barnwell, Cambridgeshire* (Cambridge, 1897), 64.

26 E. M. Thompson (ed.), *Customary of the Benedictine monasteries of Saint Augustine, Canterbury and Saint Peter, Westminster*, 2 vols., HBS 23, 28 (1902–4), I. 421.

27 T. Arnold (ed.), *Depredatio abbatie Sancti Edmundi*, in *Memorials of St Edmund's Abbey*, 3 vols., RS (London, 1890–6), II. 330; see also III. 38; CBMLC XI. xlii–xliii, xlvii–I.

28 CBMLC XI. xlvii.

Figure 2 Durham Cathedral, north-west corner of cloister. Free-standing *almaria* were in the north range, backing against the south wall of the cathedral; the door to the Spendement is in the west range, close to the corner. (Photo, Gameson)

the cloister there (backed against the south wall of the cathedral nave) up to the Dissolution (fig. 2).[29]

An invaluable description of how the cloister aumbries were fitted out for books is found in the late thirteenth-century Barnwell custumal.

> The press [*armarium*] in which the books are kept ought to be lined inside with wood so that the damp of the walls may not moisten or stain the books. This press should be divided vertically as well as horizontally by sundry shelves on which the books may be ranged so as to be separated from one another, for fear they be packed so close as to injure each other or delay those who want them.[30]

These regulations, combined with the evidence of surviving aumbries and medieval bindings, permit rough calculations of the numbers of books that

29 J. T. Fowler (ed.), *Rites of Durham*, ch. 41, Surtees Soc. 107 (Durham, 1903), 83.

30 Clark (ed.), *Observances at Barnwell*, xlii–xlvi, 64–5. As Clark noted, the wording is closely similar to that in the twelfth-century *Liber ordinis* of the influential Augustinian abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris: *Liber ordinis S. Victoris Parisiensis*, ed. L. Joqué and L. Milis, *CCCM* 61 (Turnhout, 1984), 78–9; see below, 224.

could be accommodated. The presence of titles on the spines of some twelfth- and thirteenth-century bindings concords with other evidence to indicate that books were generally laid flat, with the spine outwards.[31] The Barnwell account gives the impression, even if it does not state so explicitly, that books not only were placed foot to head along each shelf (hence the need for vertical partitions) but were also laid on top of each other; the number of titles listed in a given section of a 'press' in certain library catalogues supports this interpretation. If one allows for the space taken up by the wooden panels and partitions, the Dryburgh recess (fig. 1) might have accommodated some fifty average-sized books – and more, if they were double-stacked. The more substantial twin recesses in the eastern range of the cloister at Worcester, which are 6ft 8in. in height, just over 11ft wide, and 2ft 5in. deep, and might have held five shelves, provide room for some 200–250 volumes each – over 400 in all.[32]

Book-rooms

Some twelfth-century English Cistercian houses, echoing arrangements in certain of their French counterparts, created a book-room in the cloistral complex between the chapter house and the entry to the church (normally at the north end of the eastern range of the cloister); the chamber in question was usually either combined with, or adapted from part of, the sacristy or vestry.[33] At Rievaulx, the room comes off the north-east corner of the cloister, next to the aumbrey, exactly filling the space between the south wall of the south transept and the north wall of the chapter house (fig. 3).[34] Its contents (some 225 volumes) are recorded in a late twelfth-century booklist.[35] At Buildwas, whose

31 G. Pollard, 'The construction of English twelfth-century bindings', *Library*, 5th ser., 17 (1962), 1–22, at 17–18, pls. 1–2; M. Gullick, 'The bindings', in Mynors and Thomson, xxvii, pl. 21. The implications for the form of storage of books with overcovers (the remains of which are found, for example, on many Hereford bindings of different dates), straps and metal furniture, such as clasps and bosses (the latter found on some twelfth-century Cistercian bindings), has yet to be fully considered.

32 Thomson, *Cat. Worcester*, xxxii.

33 For a detailed account of the various structural arrangements made within this area at Bordesley Abbey during the later middle ages, by comparison with those at other Cistercian houses, see S. Hirst and S. M. Wright (eds.), *Bordesley Abbey II: second report on excavations at Bordesley Abbey, Redditch, Hereford-Worcester*, British Archaeological Reports, British Ser., 111 (Oxford, 1983), 116–22. See also M. Aubert, *Architecture cistercienne en France*, 2nd edn, 2 vols. (Paris, 1947), 1. 39–51. On the Continent, a designated book-room associated with the cloister can be traced back at least as far as the early ninth century, as at Saint-Wandrille: *Gesta sanctorum patrum Fontanellensis coenobii*, XIII. 5.55: P. Pradié (ed.), *Chronique des abbés de Fontenelle (Saint-Wandrille)* (Paris, 1999), 170.

34 The rear two-thirds of this oblong space was apparently divided off to form a vestry.

35 CBMLC III. Z19.

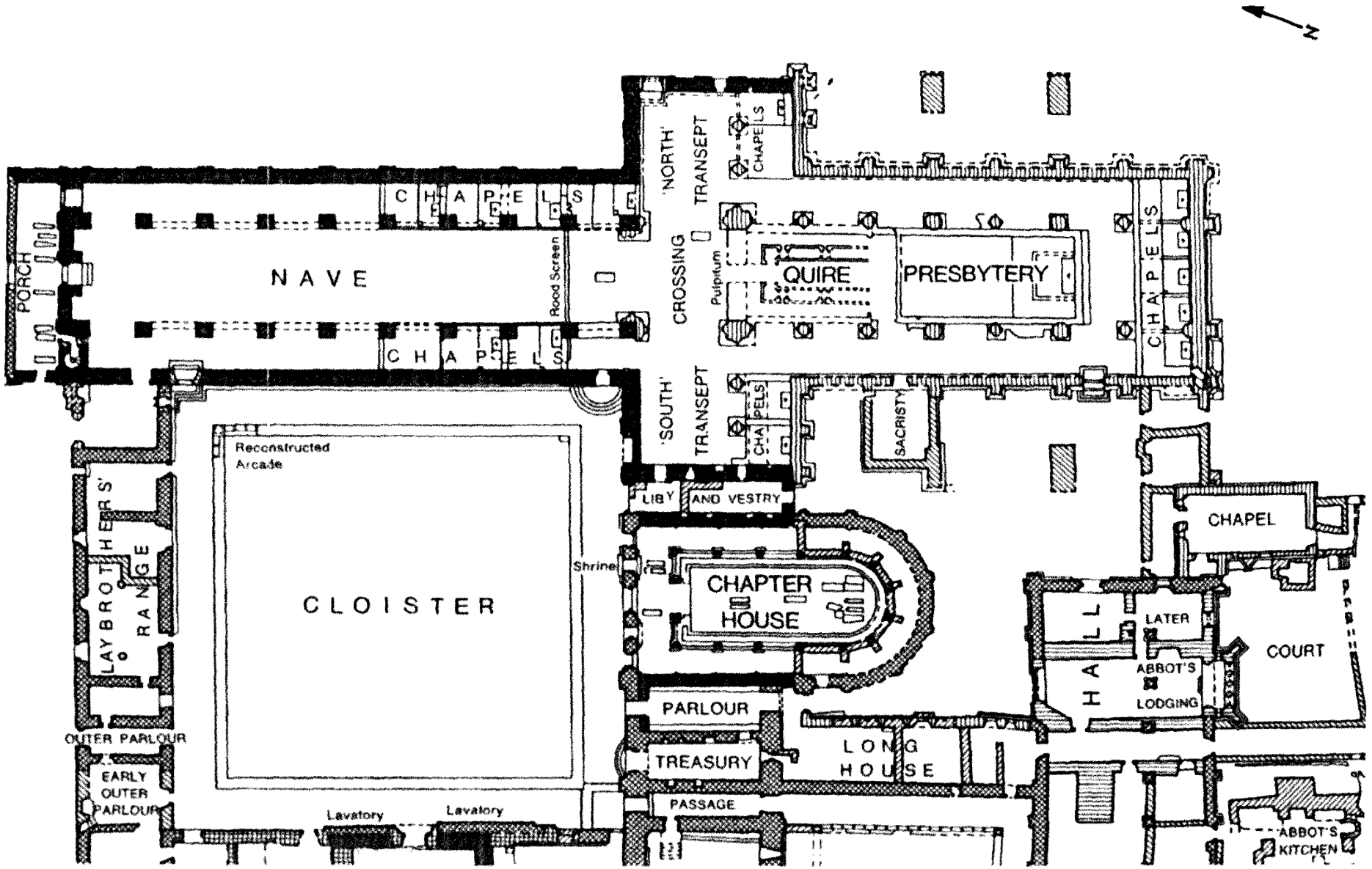

Figure 3 Rievaulx Abbey, plan (detail). The book-store is the small chamber between the south transept and the chapter house. (After

cloister was to the north of its church, the arrangement was a mirror image of this. Similar provision was made a generation later at Kirkstall, Roche and Strata Florida (fig. 4), and continued (with modest variations reflecting local circumstances) into the thirteenth century, for instance at Tintern, as also at the Premonstratensian house of Dryburgh. Only at the Cistercian abbey of Cleeve does evidence survive of a purpose-built barrel-vaulted library the full depth of the east cloister range, between the sacristy and the chapter house. A variation on the theme was effected at Fountains during the twelfth century, and at Furness in the thirteenth, where a pair of walk-in cupboards was incorporated into the west end of the chapter house (flanking its vestibule) (fig. 5). The earliest known non-Cistercian house in Britain to introduce a store-room for its books was Christ Church, Canterbury, where, some time between 1160 and 1220, the slype (a passage from the east walk of the cloister running beside the north wall of the north transept) was blocked off and roofed to form a chamber for books.[36] The minimal natural lighting afforded in all these rooms confirms that they were used for storage, not for consultation *in situ*.

The principles governing the organisation of the books upon the shelves of the cloister cupboards and book-rooms before the late twelfth century are undocumented. The late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century list from Rievaulx is the earliest known English example in which the books are recorded under a sequence of classes (from A to Q), no doubt reflecting their physical arrangement in the book-room.[37] Catalogues of this kind survive in some number only from the second half of the fourteenth century. That of the Augustinian house of Lanthony-by-Gloucester, compiled in the 1350s and subsequently augmented and amended, provides a clear illustration of the organisation of a medium-sized reading collection.[38] The volumes were divided between five *armaria* with differing numbers of shelves (five, four, four, six and one respectively).[39] The fifth *armarium*, for which only one shelf was itemised, may have been of a different form, or might have been only partly filled at the time the

36 N. Ramsay, 'The cathedral archives and library', in P. Collinson, N. Ramsay and M. Sparks (eds.), *A history of Canterbury Cathedral* (Oxford, 1995), 350.

37 CBMLC III. Z19; R. Sharpe, 'Accession, classification, location: shelfmarks in medieval libraries', *Scriptorium* 50 (1996), 282–3.

38 CBMLC VI. A16.

39 The last leaf of the catalogue (fol. 11) starts with a section headed by the rubric 'libri de phisica continentur in quinto gradu III Armarii'. The three upright strokes probably signify 'III', though one might just argue that they are a sloppily written 'IV'. Be that as it may, the position of this list (out of sequence), allied to the fact that the hand which wrote this leaf is modestly different from that responsible for the main body of the text, implies that it represents an early addition or afterthought.

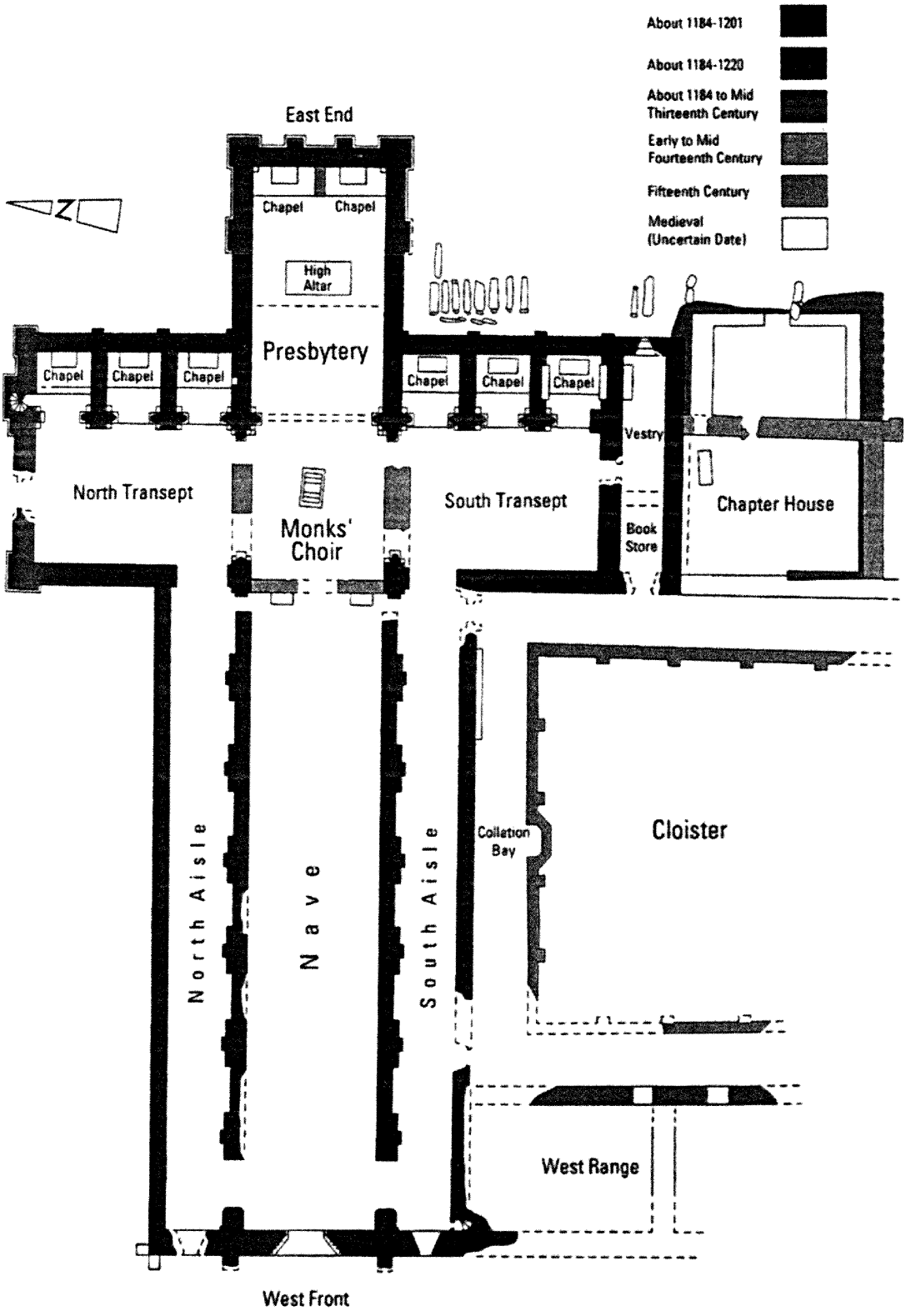

Figure 4 Strata Florida, plan (detail), including book-store between south transept and chapter house. (After Robinson and Platt 1992)

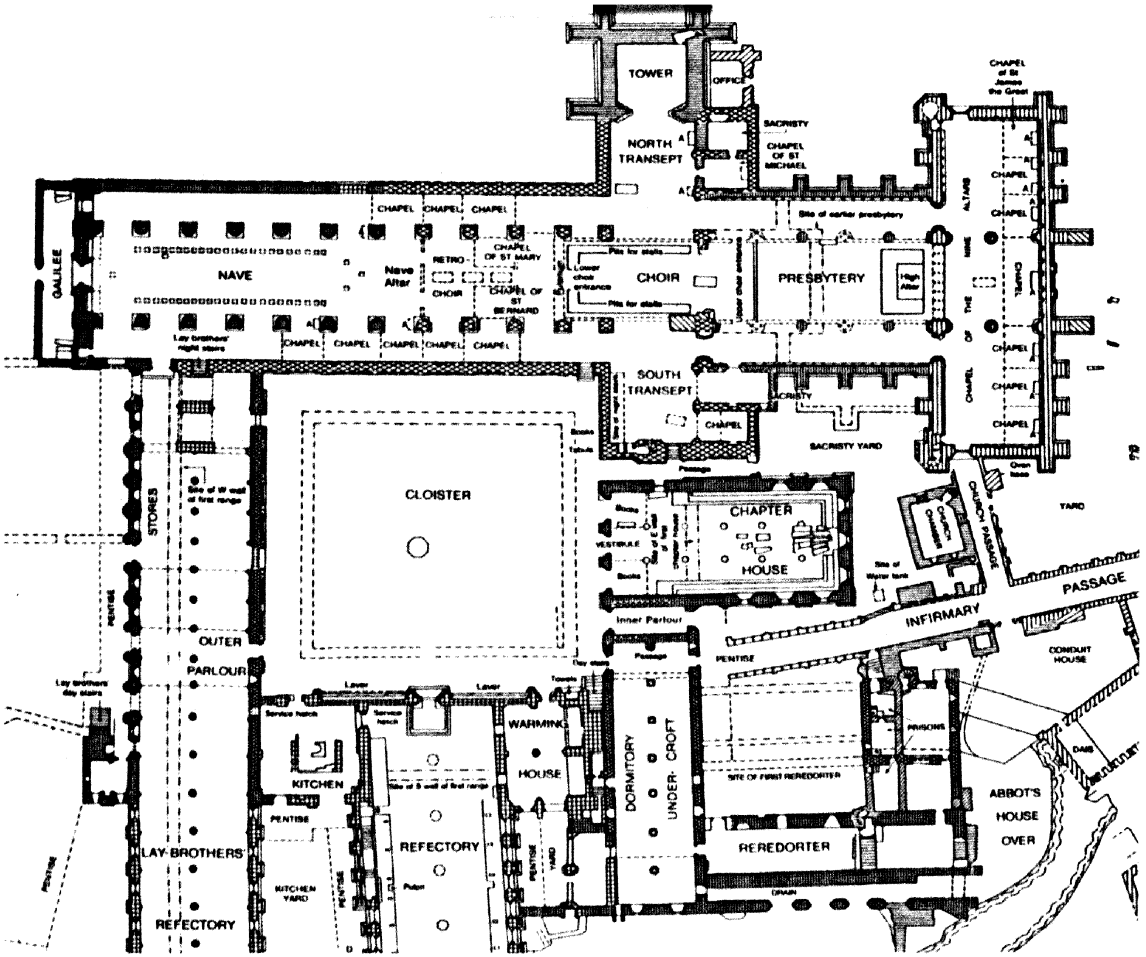

Figure 5 Fountains Abbey, plan (detail), including book storage space flanking the entrance to the chapter house. (After Gilyard-Beer 1986)

catalogue was compiled. Manuscripts of the work of a single author or on a related subject were generally kept on the same shelf. The catalogue describes almost half of the books as either 'large' 'medium-size' or 'small', revealing that whereas books of all sizes appear on the bottom four shelves of most presses, the fifth and sixth shelves – where they occur (namely presses I, IV and possibly also III) – have small and medium volumes only, some of which, moreover, were not in formal bindings. Accordingly, while most of the lower shelves held between twelve and thirty-eight volumes, the fifth and sixth shelves of presses I and IV had forty-five to fifty. The shelf with the largest number of volumes (seventy-two) was the fourth shelf of the fourth *armarium*, which accommodated schoolbooks and works on the liberal arts, typically small-format books; only one volume here is described as 'large'.

The content of the books was clearly the primary factor determining their arrangement, which followed a well-recognised hierarchy of importance reflected in other catalogues: priority was given to the Bible and its study, followed by the works of the Fathers; then came other religious works and canon law, and lastly the secular arts. The first (and undoubtedly the lowest) shelf of Lanthony's first press held bibles; the second and third shelves were devoted to glossed books of the Bible and biblical commentaries; the fourth shelf had glossed psalters and psalter commentaries, and the fifth included less bulky glossed books and other aids to the study of the Bible. The first shelf of the second press contained the works of Clement of Lanthony, an appropriately prominent place for the house author; the other three shelves primarily contained patristic texts. In the third press, the first two shelves were devoted to Augustine, above which are found letter collections and other material, then, on the fourth shelf, sermons and the works of the Augustinian scholar, Hugh of Saint-Victor. The bottom two shelves of the fourth press held canon law, above which were hagiography and *pastoralia*, then (primarily) texts related to the study of the liberal arts, followed by works on grammar, and finally (on the sixth shelf) writings on the quadrivium and a collection of custumals. The single shelf that was recorded for the fifth press held a grand bible, a large two-volume homiliary, and a large passional, together with Peter the Chanter's *Historia scholastica* and sermons, some key grammatical textbooks, a commentary on the Augustinian rule, and books relating to the Office. This might have comprised a 'rapid reference' collection, duplicates of items kept elsewhere, 'outsize' volumes, or some combination of all these. A collection of medical texts appears to have been added shortly afterwards, either to the fifth shelf of the fourth press, or perhaps on an additional fifth shelf in

the third press. The arrangement of the collection, considered as a whole, is sufficiently orderly, and the number of volumes sufficiently small, to permit a particular book to be found easily, especially since the various additions, deletions, notes and marks in the catalogue indicate the presence of attentive librarians.[40]

From the fourteenth century also, location marks recording the press (in some cases the shelf as well) were added to the books by certain librarians.[41] For some religious houses, these press-marks can be combined with the evidence of a catalogue to shed light upon the arrangement of the books, although there can also be a puzzling lack of correlation between the two, as a comparison of the catalogue of the books of Christ Church, Canterbury (drawn up by Prior Henry of Eastry, d. 1331), and the press-marks in the books themselves reveals.[42] The unusually detailed catalogues of Dover Priory (1389) and Titchfield Abbey (compiled in 1400) articulate a well-developed concept of a monastic library in which book-room, furniture and the way the volumes were ordered were co-ordinated and carefully recorded both to facilitate finding particular titles and to draw attention to their importance as a spiritual resource.[43] The compiler of the remarkable Dover catalogue, the precentor John Whytefelde, makes this explicit: his catalogue was to 'supply information to the precentor of the house concerning the number of the books and the complete knowledge of them . . . to stir up studious brethren to eager and frequent reading . . . and to point the way to the speedy finding of individual treatises'.[44] The Titchfield document has the added interest that it provides specific details about the nature and location of the four presses (*columnae*): 'there are in the library (*libraria*) of Titchfield four presses in which to place books, of which two (the first and second) are on the east wall; on the south wall is the third; and on the north wall the fourth; and each of them has eight shelves (*gradus*) marked with a letter and number . . .'[45]

In those communities to whose life the cloister was less central, the books might always have been stored elsewhere. For York Minster, which did not have a cloister, this is self-evidently true. But even at Wells, a secular cathedral that did have one, the main book collection seems to have been housed in the

40 Items were added by several hands into the fifteenth century; various volumes, especially on the first shelf of the fourth press, were noted as missing, and several items (especially on the first, second and fourth shelves of the fourth press) are marked with a cross.

41 Sharpe, 'Accession, classification, location', 286–7.

42 James, *ALCD*, no. II, with xxxviii–xliv; N. Ramsay, 'Archives and library', 355–60.

43 CBMLC V (Dover); CBMLC III. P6 (Titchfield).

44 CBMLC V. 15. 45 CBMLC III. 183.

west aisle of the north transept of the cathedral church itself, while a few items, including legal texts, were kept in the treasury (under the chapter house).[46]

The library room

The stimulus to more fundamental changes in the physical setting for collections of books came from the needs of preachers and scholars during the thirteenth century. Many of the books that were owned communally by the convents of the mendicant orders were actually kept in the possession of individual friars for their personal use in preaching and teaching. Provision for scholars at the universities was largely dependent on personal initiative, gradually supplemented by collections of texts available for loan to members of a given college.[47] Over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, however, the concept of a fixed reference collection of essential texts available for communal consultation *in situ* – in addition to the loan collection – began to emerge among the mendicant orders. It was soon adopted by academic institutions, often under mendicant influence, though perhaps also in response to practical necessity.[48] Humbertus de Romanis, master general of the Dominican order (1254–63), had envisaged important works being kept in a convenient place within each convent for communal consultation.[49] In 1284, the Franciscan, Archbishop Peckham, enjoined Merton College, Oxford, to acquire three grammatical reference works, which were to be secured to a solid table in a place to which all the fellows would have easy access.[50] Such an arrangement was extended and formalised in the 1292 statutes of University College, Oxford, which stipulated two book collections – one for reference, the other for 'internal' loan.[51]

The formal introduction of a permanent reference collection brought with it a new kind of physical arrangement. Whereas the books available for annual or more extended loan could be accommodated in the traditional way in chests

46 W. H. B. Bird (ed.), *Calendar of manuscripts of the Dean and Chapter of Wells*, I (London, 1907), 162; and II, ed. W. P. Baildon (London, 1914), 46, 60, 221.

47 Parkes, 'Provision of books', 409–27, 449–58; see below, chapter 6.

48 See below, 166–8. For possible precedents, see D. Nebbiai-Dalla Guarda, 'La bibliothèque commune des institutions religieuses', *Scriptorium* 50 (1996), 254–68.

49 Humbertus de Romanis, *Opera de vita regulari*, ed. J. J. Berthier (Rome, 1888–9), II. 265; K. W. Humphreys, *The book provisions of the mediaeval friars, 1215–1460* (Amsterdam, 1964), 29.

50 C. T. Martin (ed.), *Registrum epistolarum fratris Johannis Peckham archiepiscopi Cantuariensis*, ep. DLXXXIX, 3 vols., RS (London, 1882–5), III. 813; see also J. R. L. Highfield (ed.), *The early rolls of Merton College, Oxford* (Oxford, 1964), no. 12, 225.

51 H. Anstey (ed.), *Munimenta academica or Documents illustrative of academical life and studies at Oxford*, 2 vols., RS (London, 1868), I. 58–9.

cupboards or other forms of book-store, the works for reference required not just a convenient yet secure place but an arrangement which permitted them to be consulted easily. The solution was a library room in which volumes were not only stored but also read. Consequently the rooms had to be equipped with sufficient windows to permit adequate light for reading, while the books were not shelved in presses but placed on lecterns ready for use. They were often chained to the lecterns to ensure that they were not removed. Nevertheless, the distinction in function and use between the two types of collection was not necessarily reflected in their location, for some library rooms were also used as places to store books in chests and cupboards.

The earliest documented example of such arrangements within a university context is at the Sorbonne, whose books were divided into two parts, the *magna libraria* and the *parva libraria*. Volumes from the latter could circulate among the masters, while the former (initially known as the *libraria communis*) was a chained reference library, established in 1289 'for the communal use of the Fellows'.[52] Its influence in England, however, should not be overstated, for here the practices of the friars may have been a more significant impulse. The 1292 statutes of University College, Oxford, likewise identified the need for a common yet secure place in which to keep the reference collection, and this requirement was addressed in the statutes and building activities of many of the foundations at Oxford and Cambridge thereafter.[53] The tortuous history of the Oxford University Library began in 1320, when Thomas de Cobham gave money for a Convocation House beside the University Church of St Mary, with a library room above; because of his straitened circumstances at his death seven years later and the consequent, lengthy dispute between the university and Oriel College, it was to be another ninety years before it finally opened (figs. 19–20).[54] Merton College, Oxford, had a *libraria*, a room in which books were chained, by 1338.[55] The 1350 statutes of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, envisaged a library room (*libraria*) in which 'the books of the Doctors of civil and canon law' (the focus of higher studies there) would be chained, while the legal textbooks that were stored in the same chamber might be available for

52 R. H. Rouse, 'The early library of the Sorbonne', *Scriptorium* 21 (1967), 42–71; rev. repr. in M. A. Rouse and R. H. Rouse, *Authentic witnesses: approaches to medieval texts and manuscripts* (Notre Dame, IN, 1991), 341–408; R. H. Rouse and M. A. Rouse, 'La bibliothèque du collège de Sorbonne', *Hbf* 1. 113–23.

53 Anstey, *Munimenta academica*, 1. 59. 54 Parkes, 'Provision of books', 470–72.

55 Merton Coll., MS 317, fol. 1^{r}: 'ex dono magistri Nigelli de Wauere . . . quem dedit ad cathenandum in loco communi et inde non transferatur ad usos priuatos'; F. M. Powicke, *The medieval books of Merton College* (Oxford, 1931), no. 270; P. S. Allen and M. W. Garrod (eds.), *Merton muniments* (Oxford, 1928), 33, line 7.

loan.[56] Those of *c.* 1365 for Canterbury College, Oxford (the university cell of Christ Church Cathedral Priory), specified a chamber (*camera*) for books and vestments, in which no volumes were chained, but consultation *in situ* was obligatory for any 'outsider'.[57] Queen's College, Oxford, had a *libraria* under construction in the 1370s;[58] Exeter College, Oxford, which had converted the founder's chapel into a book chamber in 1375, was building a new library room a mere eight years later;[59] and the King's Hall, Cambridge, had one by the 1390s.[60] Merton had meanwhile invested in a new library (the current 'Old Library' in Mob Quad), which was begun in 1371 and completed in 1379. Consonant with the size of the college's book collection, this was an unusually large room, occupying most of the south and west sides of the quadrangle at first-floor level, with a total floor space of around 2,300 square feet, built at a cost of not less than £600 (fig. 6).[61] The example of the mendicants was still apparently influential, for among the sites that the bursar (and later warden) of Merton (John Bloxham) and the master mason (William Humberville) visited in preparation for the project was London, whither they went 'with the purpose of viewing the library of the preaching friars'.[62]

The architectural design of the new facility at Merton was still retrospective in one important respect – the lighting. The windows, though numerous (seven pairs punctuate the west range, ten pairs the south one), are very small in relation to the size of the chamber, which they signally fail to illuminate adequately. Moreover, the spacing of the windows is such that, while a two-sided lectern would fit between them, there was room for only one bench between each pair of lecterns (fig. 7).[63] This aspect of design was remedied at New College, Oxford – the first college in which a library room formed part of the original plan. The college was founded in 1379 and the library seems to have been open within a decade (though construction work continued into the fifteenth century). A substantial first-floor chamber (70ft by 21ft) in the eastern range of the main quadrangle, the room was lit by nine windows on each long side; these faced east–west, thus maximising the light (fig. 8).

56 Willis and Clark, III. 391.
57 W. A. Pantin, *Canterbury College*, 4 vols., OHS, n.s. 6–8, 30 (1947–85), III. 167.
58 H. W. Garrod and J. R. L. Highfield, 'An indenture between William Rede, bishop of Chichester, and John Bloxham and Henry Stapilton, fellows of Merton College, Oxford, London 22 October 1374', *BLR* 10/1 (1978–82), 9–19, at 11.
59 C. W. Boase (ed.), *Register of Exeter College, Oxford*, OHS 27 (1894), xlvii.
60 CBMLC x. 316, 319, UC36. 61 H. W. Garrod in *VCH Oxfordshire*, III. 101.
62 Merton College Muniments, Rec. 4102b; J. Harvey, *English medieval architects: a biographical dictionary down to 1550*, 2nd edn (Gloucester, 1984), 153. See also below, 165.
63 Streeter, 13–14.

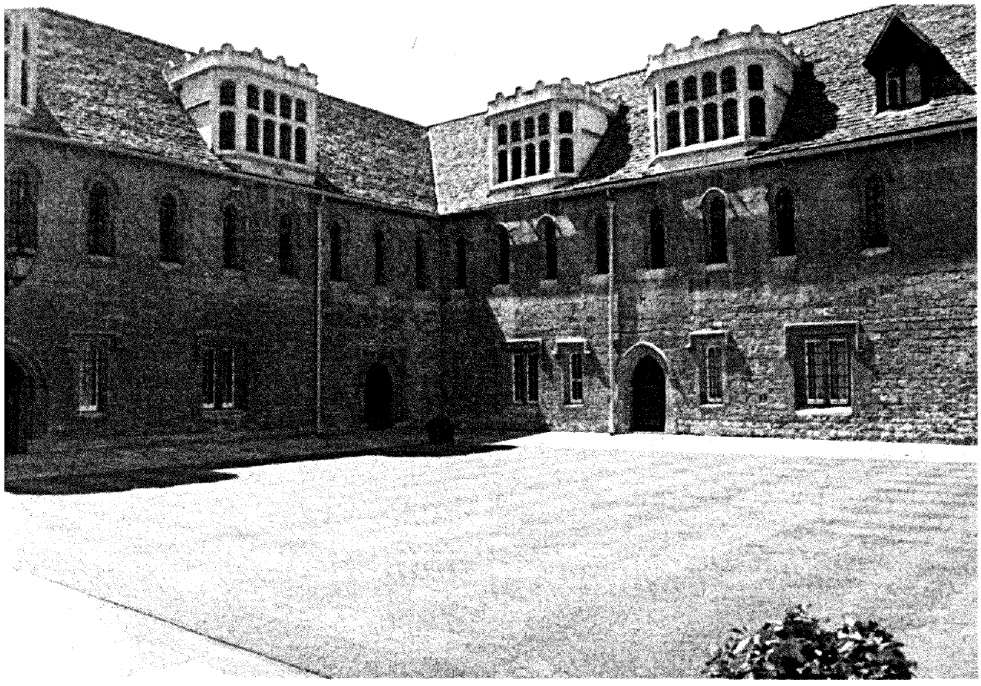

Figure 6 Merton College, Oxford, Mob Quad, north and east sides. The 'noua libraria' occupied the first floor of both ranges. (Photo, Gameson)

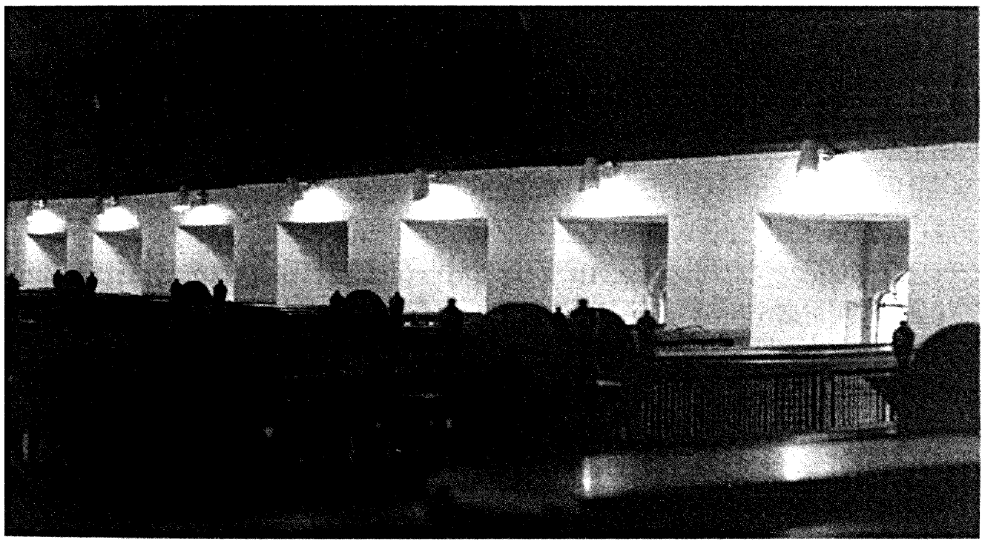

Figure 7 Merton College, Oxford, 'noua libraria', interior view across the top of the post-medieval presses, showing the relatively small spaces between the original window apertures and the small size of the actual lights therein. (Photo, Gameson)

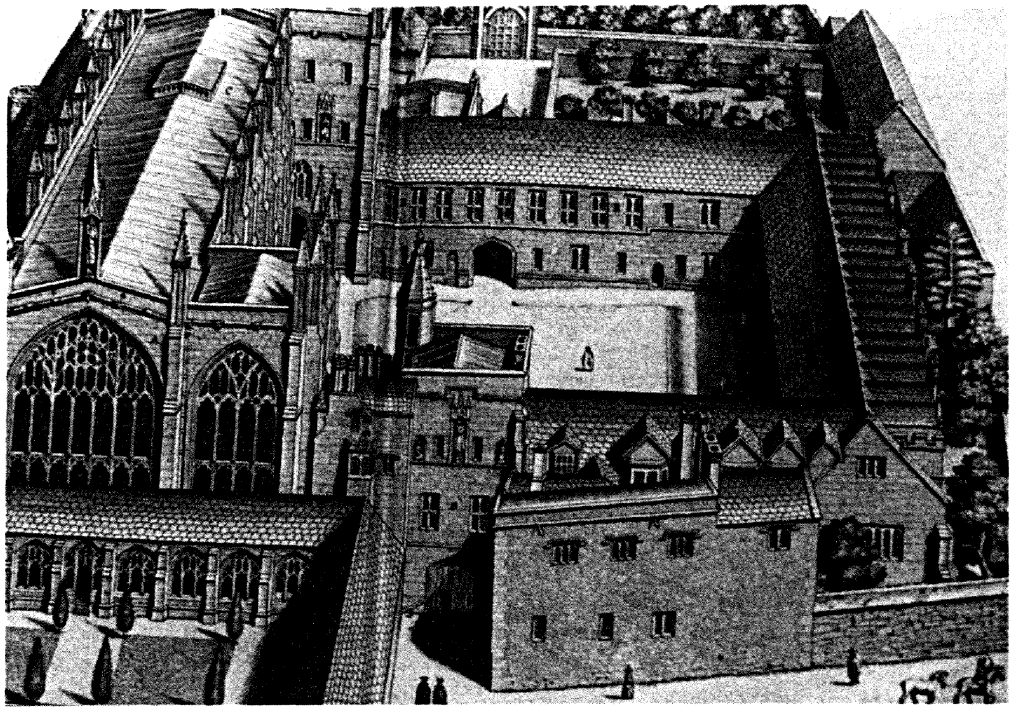

Figure 8 New College, Oxford, in 1675, looking east. The *libraria* occupies most of the first floor of the east range of the main quadrangle. (After Loggan 1675)

Two-sided lecterns, 5ft 6in. high, were fitted on either side between the windows, at right-angles to them, leaving an 'alley' down the centre.[64]

Library rooms continued to be built (or rebuilt) at Oxford and Cambridge during the fifteenth century. Durham College, Oxford (fig. 9), and King's Hall, Cambridge, built libraries (or in the latter case a *noua libraria*) in the second decade of the century; Clare Hall, Cambridge, in the third; Balliol, Oxford, and Gonville Hall and Peterhouse (a *noua libraria*), Cambridge, in the fourth; Queens' College, Cambridge, All Souls and probably Oriel, Oxford, in the fifth. The size of these rooms ranged from the modest 28ft by 18ft of Durham College (figs. 9–10) to the more typical 47ft 6in. by 19ft 6in. of All Souls and 60ft by 20ft of Peterhouse. Like the earlier library rooms, they were generally at first-floor level, and often, although not invariably, ran from north to south, thus having their long walls (with the main ranges of windows) facing east–west to maximise the light – as at Durham College and All Souls, whose long sides were pierced by four and eight windows respectively. As surviving catalogues

64 G. Jackson-Stops, 'The buildings of the medieval college', in J. Buxton and P. H. Williams (eds.), *New College, Oxford, 1379–1979* (Oxford, 1979), 147–92, esp. 182–3; R. W. Hunt, 'The medieval library', in *ibid.*, 317–45.

Figure 9 Durham (now Trinity) College, Oxford, 'Durham Quad', east range. The *libraria* is the first first-floor chamber to the right of the downpipe (cf. fig. 10). (Photo, Gameson)

show, the desks (some with, others without, a lower shelf) that projected into the room between each window held anything from five to nearly thirty books. These principles found their ultimate expression in Henry VI's designs for his foundations of Eton and King's College, Cambridge, projects of the 1440s.[65] The library at Eton was to be the centrepiece of the eastern side of the quadrangle at first-floor level; that at King's was to be a first-floor chamber on the western side of the court. The former was to measure 52ft by 24ft, the latter a magnificent 110ft by 24ft. In the event, neither was built to plan.

While the stone fabric of a number of the library rooms has survived more or less unaltered, the internal furnishings have, not surprisingly, almost entirely disappeared. Lecterns are well attested in documentary sources, especially accounts, which show, for instance, that carpenters from Ely made the lecterns for the new library at Peterhouse, that the carpenter-joiner Richard Tyllock was responsible for 'le deskes in libraria' at All Souls, and that the library at Lincoln College was equipped with some half- or single desks as well as double ones.[66]

65 Willis and Clark, I. 350–80, esp. 356, 360, 370, 374–5.

66 CBMLC x. 444; *VCH Oxfordshire*, III. 183; R. Weiss, 'The earliest catalogues of the library of Lincoln College', *BQR* 8, no. 94 (1937), 343–59.

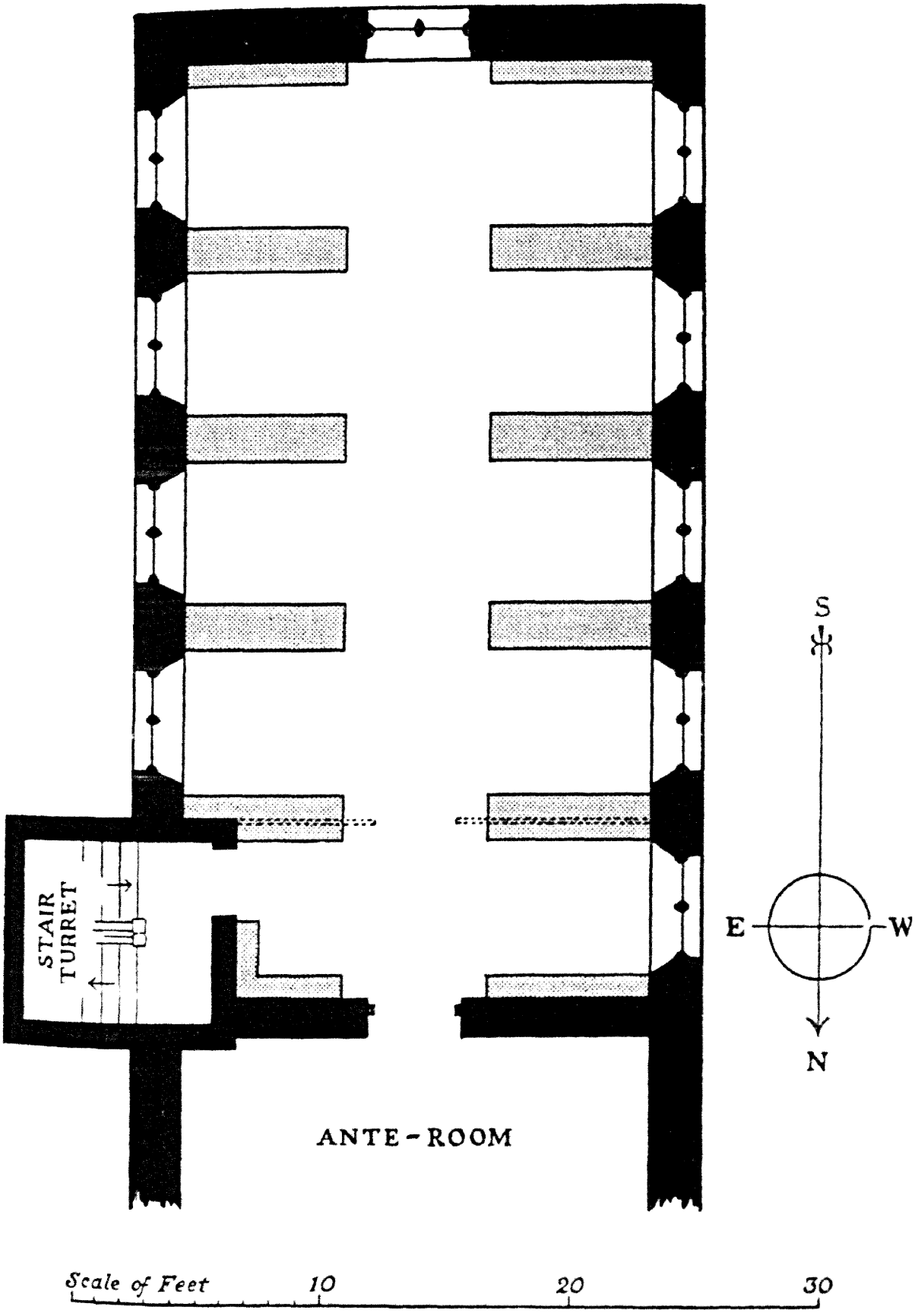

Figure 10. Durham College, Oxford, *libraria*, plan (cf. fig. 9). (After Streeter 1931)

No examples, however, are known to survive from a university context in England. Fortunately, three lecterns survive from the fifteenth-century library room at Lincoln Cathedral. These have a sloping desk on either side, rising to a shelf (where, presumably, chained books that were not being consulted could be temporarily stacked in order to make more space on the desk surface for an opened volume), with a bar running above, to which the chains were attached; a lower shelf was subsequently added to enable more books to be accommodated (fig. 11).[67] Each lectern would seem to have had a bench on both sides, joined to it by cills at floor level.

The books were laid flat on the desks, probably – to judge from the position of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century labels (sometimes covered with horn) that record titles and press-marks – with the lower cover uppermost. An early method of chaining, evident from the marks left by the chain-staples on the boards of the binding or the outermost leaf, involved fixing the chain to a staple near the lower edge of the upper board, usually towards its mid-point.[68] At Oriel and Merton Colleges, Oxford, however, the staple was commonly attached to the lower board; the lower board was also used at Peterhouse and Pembroke College, Cambridge, but the staple was located at the centre of it rather than at the foot.[69]

If chaining might seem an excellent way to preserve a coherent reference collection that was definitively distinguished from the volumes that could circulate among the fellows, this was by no means invariably its function. At New College in 1400, for example, the books to be chained were those left unassigned after the distribution among the fellows: the foundation may have had a fine new *libraria* (fig. 8), but it was being used in effect as a secure book-store.[70] Moreover, donors sometimes specified that their gifts – irrespective of subject-matter – should be chained. Bishop William Rede of Chichester (d. 1385), a former fellow, bursar and sub-warden of Merton and a great patron of Oxford college libraries, is a prime example of the phenomenon. He gave 100 books to Merton and New College, twenty to Exeter, and ten each to Balliol, Oriel and Queen's, expecting them to be 'securely chained' in the

67 Streeter, 16–23; but see also D. N. Griffiths, 'Unfamiliar libraries XV: Lincoln Cathedral', *The Book Collector* 19 (1970), 21–2; Thomson, *Cat. Lincoln*, pl. 1.

68 N. R. Ker, 'The chaining, labelling, and inventory numbers of manuscripts belonging to the old University Library', *BLR* 5 (1954–6), 176–80, repr. in *Books, collectors and libraries*, 321–6.

69 N. R. Ker, 'Chaining from a staple on the back cover', *BLR* 3 (1950–1), 104–7, repr. in *Books, collectors and libraries*, 327–30.

70 Willis and Clark, III. 392; Hunt, 'Medieval library', 318.

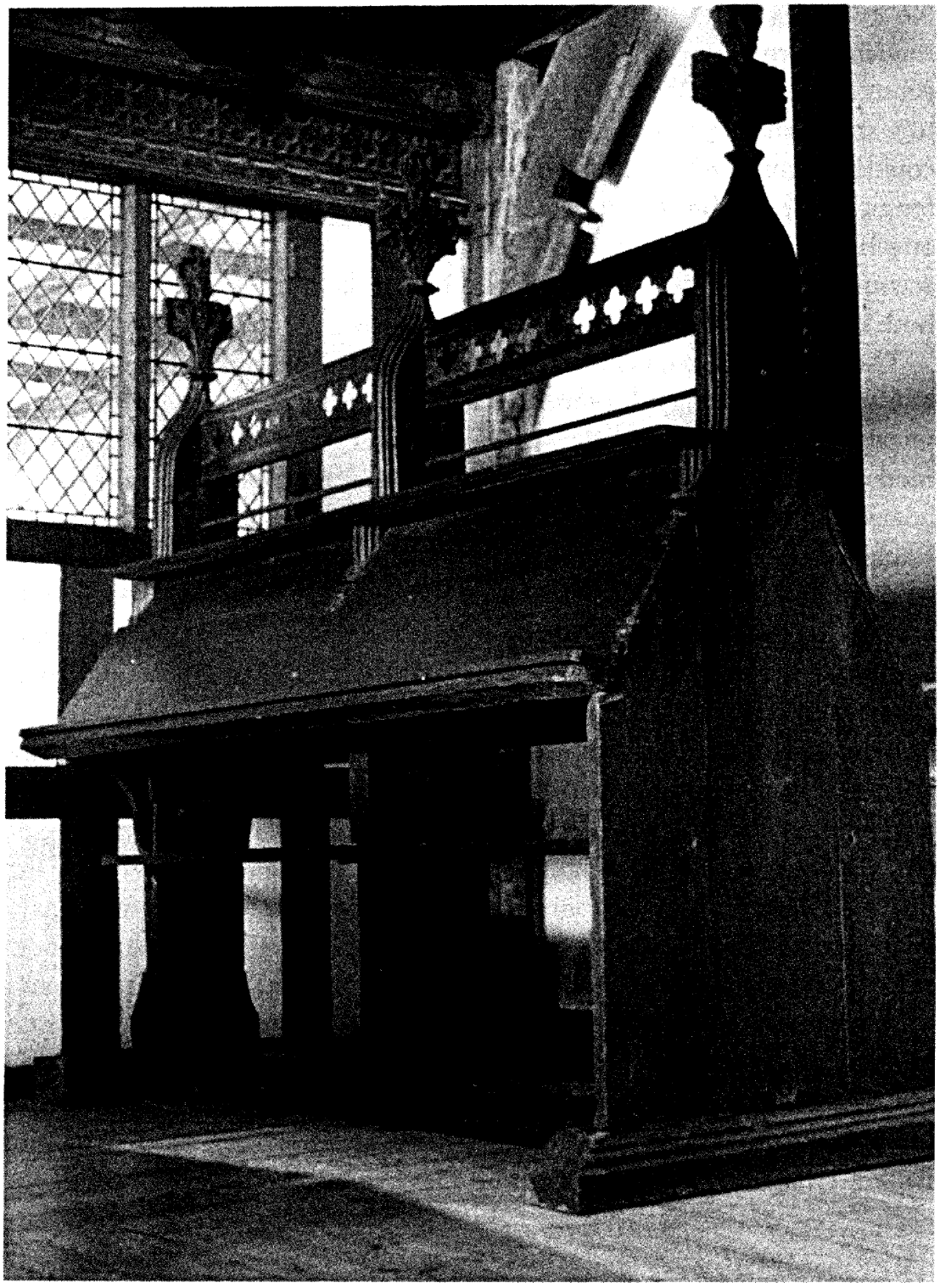

Figure 11 Lincoln Cathedral Library, medieval lectern. (Photo, Gameson)

communal libraries: indeed, he left the last four institutions money to do so.[71] The stipulation that volumes be chained owed more to the wish that the benefaction (and hence the spiritual benefit accruing to the donor therefrom) be preserved intact than to the desire to enhance the reference collection *per se*. This was the educational equivalent of a chantry.

Chaining was not the only provision made for the security of the books. In the setting of a university town where many people beyond the walls of a particular community would be interested in and aware of the value of its manuscripts – and those within its walls alive to the possibilities of pawning this valuable resource – measures for security and preservation both of the volumes in the library room (whether chained or not) and of those stored elsewhere were a high priority. The numerous references to locks and keys in college records reflect a preoccupation with security. Archbishop Kilwardby's injunctions for Merton of 1276 required that the books which might be loaned to fellows in return for an adequate security should be kept in a chest with three locks.[72] Similarly, the statutes of Peterhouse of 1344 specified that the books were to be held in 'one or more common chests, each having two locks, one key of which shall for greater security be deposited with the Master, the other with the Senior Dean'.[73] Similar provision was made to ensure the safety of the books in the library room. William of Wykeham's statutes for New College state: 'On the door of the . . . library there are to be two great locks with two different keys which are to be kept continually and carefully in the custody – the one of the Senior Dean, the other of the Senior Bursar, as is proper. A third lock commonly called the "clickett" is to be placed on the aforesaid door – of which lock every fellow of our college may have a single key. The door is to be locked every night with all the three keys aforesaid.'[74] Correspondingly, some of the earliest documented expenses in relation to the *libraria* of the King's Hall, Cambridge (1396/7), were for a lock and thirty-three keys – one each for the warden and thirty-two fellows – at a cost of 5s 8d.[75]

Chaining and library rooms outside the university

References to the chaining of books in cathedrals and religious houses can be found from the fourteenth century. It was undertaken for both practical and

71 Will printed: Powicke, *Medieval books*, 87–91; see also Garrod and Highfield, 'An indenture'. His wishes were sometimes echoed in inscriptions within the volumes themselves, as in New Coll., MS 120.

72 Powicke, *Medieval books*, I.

73 Willis and Clark, III. 390.

74 Willis and Clark, III. 397.

75 CBMLC X. 316.

spiritual reasons. One may contrast the precentor at Worcester, who, in 1387/8, paid for the lock and chain to fasten his own gradual in the choir (perhaps fed up with other people walking off with it),[76] with Elizabeth Darcy, who stipulated in her will (1412) that her breviary and great psalter be fixed with an iron chain in the chapel of Heynings, Lincolnshire (a priory of Cistercian nuns) and remain there.[77] When in 1369 Bishop Lewis Charlton requested that the glossed Bible, the *Catholicon*, the *Summa summarum* and a couple of other items which he had left to Hereford Cathedral be chained in the church, he was ensuring both their ready availability for reference purposes and their permanence as a memorial to him.[78] The need for such measures to preserve a bequest as intended – or at least to maximise the difficulty of changing it – is shown by cases such as the famous Ormesby Psalter, which was given by the monk Robert of Ormesby to Norwich Cathedral Priory in the late 1320s or 1330s to lie on the desk of the sub-prior in the choir of the cathedral, yet soon came to bear the press-mark 'A.1', indicating that it was subsequently relocated, being shelved as the first of the psalters in the main cloister collection.[79]

Despite the close connections between the major religious houses and the universities – which could extend to the establishment of their own colleges and halls for student monks – monasteries and cathedrals did not generally introduce library rooms into their own complexes until the fifteenth century, or even later. The change in function from the earlier store-rooms is evident from their location and design, for these new chambers were typically at first-floor level and equipped with generous windows. In many places, however, the long-established connection between books and the cloister was maintained. Thus the new library at Durham, constructed between 1414 and 1418 and one of the earliest outside the universities, was located over part of the parlour off the east range of the cloister.[80] During the second and third decades of the fifteenth century, library rooms were built over a length of the cloister at a number of major houses, including the secular cathedrals of Exeter, Hereford, Lincoln and Wells (fig. 12). In 1444–5 the cathedral chapter of Salisbury, apparently aware that they were being left behind, resolved to build 'certain schools suitable for lectures, together with a library for the safe-keeping of books and the convenience of those who wish to study therein, which library up to the

76 Thomson, *Cat. Worcester*, xxxiv.

77 A. Gibbons, *Early Lincoln wills: an abstract of all the wills and administrations recorded in the episcopal registers of the old diocese of Lincoln, 1280–1547* (London, 1888), 117–18.

78 Mynors and Thomson, xx.

79 Bodleian, MS Douce 366, fol. 2^{r}; B. Dodwell, 'The muniments and the library', I. Atherton *et al.* (eds.), *Norwich Cathedral: church, city and diocese, 1096–1996* (London, 1996), 335.

80 Piper, 'Library of the monks of Durham', 223–6, fig. 17.

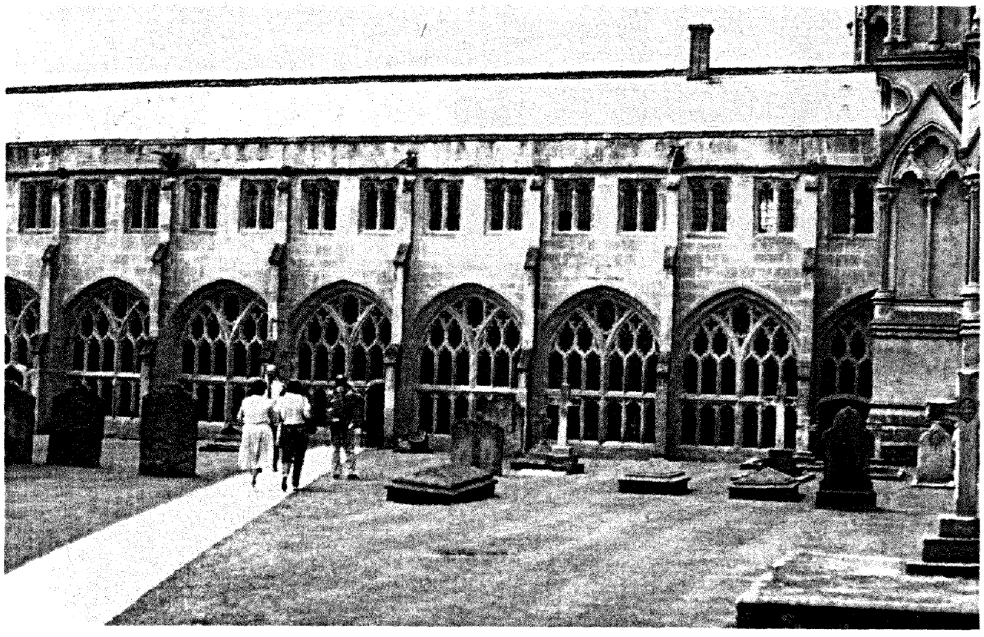

Figure 12 Wells Cathedral, cloister, *libraria* at the first floor. (Photo, Gameson)

present time they have been without. Such schools and library shall be built as soon as possible over one side of the cloister of the church.'[81] It will be noted that the chapter of Salisbury automatically assumed that the library would be a reading room.

Local circumstances sometimes determined that the library room was located elsewhere. At York Minster, a foundation without a cloister, the library (completed *c.* 1420) was the upper chamber of an annexe that projects west from the south transept of the cathedral (figs. 13–14), while that at Christ Church, Canterbury (completed *c.* 1444), was erected as an extra storey over the prior's chapel (itself above the south side of the infirmary cloister).[82] Abbot Curteys (1429–46) appears to have sited the *libraria* at Bury St Edmunds near to the prior's house, just north of the east end of the abbey church. When the London Guildhall also decided to invest in a library room (1423–5), it was built as a free-standing structure just south of the Guildhall; a chapel was subsequently attached to its northern side.[83]

81 Chapter Act Book 10 'Hutchins', 83. The part designed for lectures was demolished in 1753; for the original appearance, see T. Cocke and P. Kidson, *Salisbury Cathedral: perspectives on the architectural history* (London, 1993), ill. 34.

82 Ramsay, 'Archives and library', 364.

83 C. M. Barron, *The medieval Guildhall of London* (London, 1974), 33–5, fig. 2.

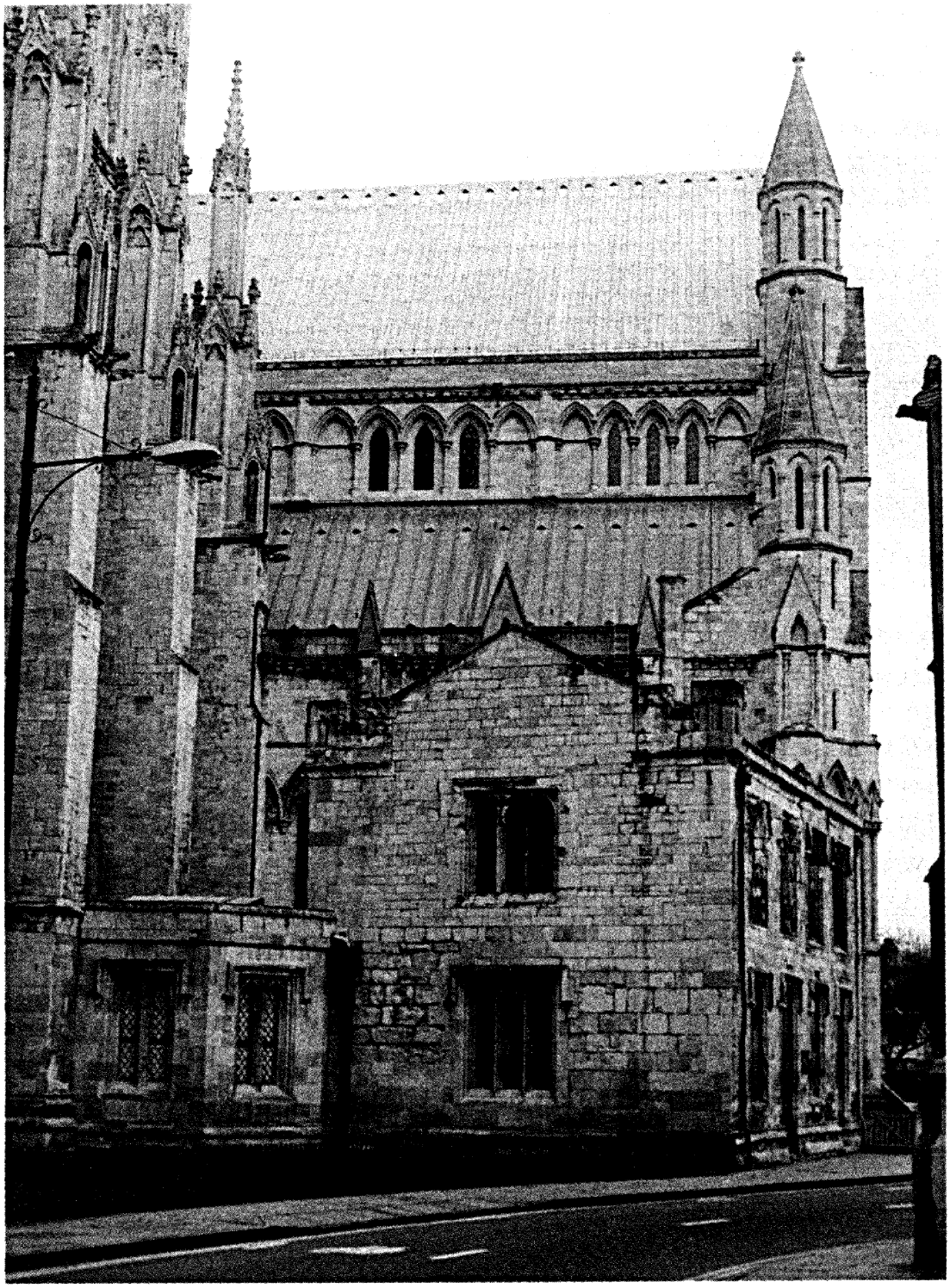

Figure 13 York Minster, looking east towards the south transept. The library occupied the first floor of the two-storey annexe (cf. fig. 14). (Photo, Gameson)

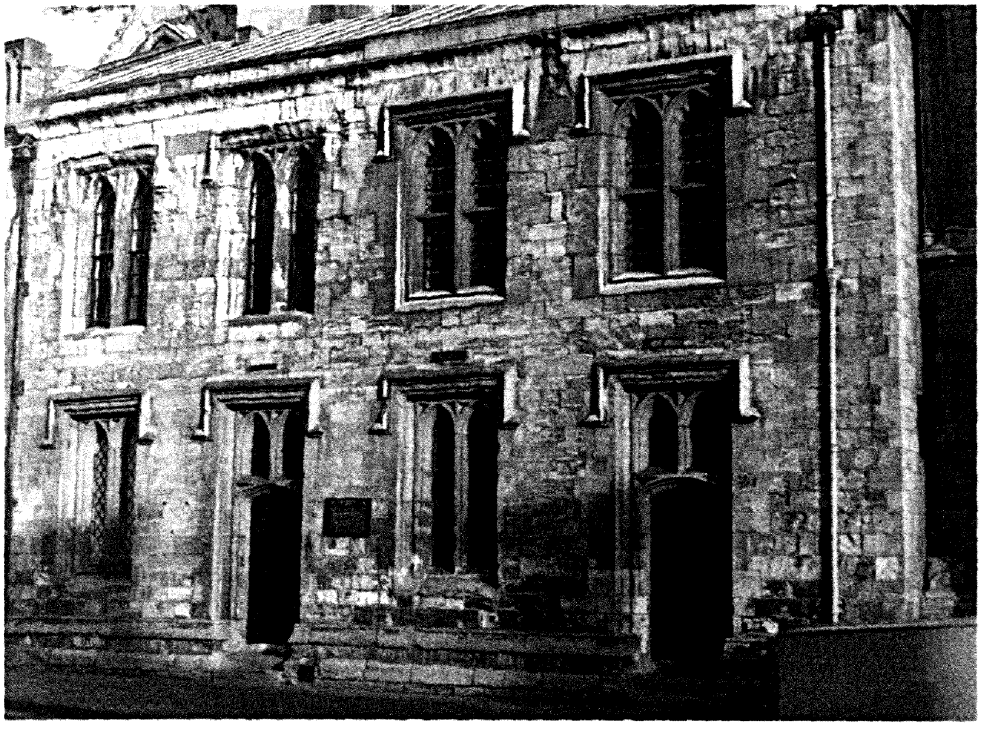

Figure 14 York Minster, the south side of the south transept annexe (cf. fig. 13). (Photo, Gameson)

In general conception these library rooms followed the design of those of academic institutions, being more or less rectangular with a line of generously sized windows piercing both long walls; and, like them, they were presumably equipped with lecterns between the windows, projecting 'inwards' at right angles to the long walls. The chambers varied in size and in the number of books they accommodated. The library room of York Minster measured only 44ft by 24ft, and was lit by four windows in each of its long north and south sides, plus a single larger one in the shorter west wall; in 1421–2 some forty volumes were chained there (figs. 13–14). Durham's library, by contrast, measured 60ft by 16ft 6in., and originally contained 150 volumes, although the number subsequently doubled. The survival at Lincoln of three medieval lecterns as well as three bays of the library that was completed in 1422 provides a unique opportunity to study both a room and its furniture (fig. 11). The chamber was originally of five bays, presumably accommodating eight double-sided lecterns, four on either side. As the lecterns are approximately 7 ft long, there was space for six or seven books per side, or about a dozen

per lectern, giving a possible total of around 100 books.[84] This figure accords well with the evidence of the fifteenth-century catalogue of chained books, which enumerates 109 items. A shelf was subsequently added to each of the Lincoln lecterns, below the desk, providing for a modest increase in capacity; volumes kept here were apparently chained to staples fixed in iron plates, the scars indicating that between six and eleven additional titles were thus accommodated. This is also reflected in a second, later set of staple-marks on some Lincoln bindings, near the spine at the top or bottom of the front board, which would suggest that these books were moved from the upper desk to the lower shelf.[85] The eight lecterns at Leicester Abbey must likewise have contained a lower shelf, since the late fifteenth-century library catalogue lists over twenty or thirty volumes for all but the eighth.[86] The same was probably true of the eleven *descae* (lecterns) in the *libraria* of Exeter Cathedral which, an inventory of 1506 reveals, then held a total of 327 volumes.[87] A rare English representation of a reading room, dating from the second quarter of the fifteenth century, shows a couple of desks, each with upper and lower shelves.[88] The substantial library at Christ Church, Canterbury, was furnished with sixteen lecterns, eight on either side of the room. Each had a desk and a shelf (or an upper and lower shelf of some sort) on both sides; since they are described as *sedilia* they probably – like those at Lincoln – included benches as an integral part of their structure.[89] Ingram's list of 1508 records between fourteen and twenty-seven titles per lectern, totalling 293 books in all.

The books were not invariably chained. At Hereford, whose library room was built over the west range of the cloister at an uncertain date in the fifteenth century, the evidence of an unusually large number of medieval bindings reveals that it was only in the early seventeenth century – when the books were stored upright in presses – that chains and chain-staples were affixed.[90] Binding evidence from Worcester indicates that only some of the cathedral priory's books were chained; from their contents they would appear to form a basic theological reference library, but whether this was the main collection in the library room or the theological library that formed part of the Carnery Chapel (rebuilt between 1458 and 1464), near the cathedral's north-west porch, cannot be determined.[91]

84 Thomson, *Cat. Lincoln*, xvii.
85 *Ibid.*, xix. 86 CBMLC VI. 360–80. 87 Oliver, *Bishops of Exeter*, 366–75.
88 BL, MS Cotton Tiberius A. vii, fol. 91^{v} (Lydgate, *Pilgrimage of the life of man*): Hagiography showing books to Pilgrim and Lady Lesson (*Survey*, V/i, 64; ii, no. 89).
89 James, *ALCD*, no. VI. 90 Mynors and Thomson, xxi–xxii.
91 Thomson, *Cat. Worcester*, xxxiv–xxxv.

The construction and equipping of the library rooms of colleges, universities and religious communities alike were extremely costly and could take many years to complete. At King's Hall, Cambridge, the building and furnishing of the *noua libraria* were relatively rapid. Work began in 1416–17; the accounts for 1416–18 suggest energetic building activity, those for 1420–1 imply that the chamber was then being roofed, while those for 1421–2, which all relate to fittings and fixtures (which occupied two carpenters for some fifteen weeks and a bookbinder and his assistant for ten), indicate the final installation of furniture and books.[92] Elsewhere, the process could be far more lengthy. Although the fabric of Durham College's library appears to have been finished in 1418, the room was furnished with 'descae et tabulae et alia necessaria' only in 1431 (at the cost of £6 6s 8d), and one window (most probably, therefore, the single south one) was glazed – or possibly reglazed – in 1436 (for £2 2s 8d).[93] The contract between Peterhouse and the mason John Wassinghale of Hinton, dated 1431, specified that the walls of the new library were to be finished within eighteen months; nevertheless, the fabric was still under construction at the end of the decade, fittings were supplied only in 1447–8, and it was not until 1449–50 that the books were finally installed.[94] The library of Balliol, which was also started in 1431 (after perhaps a quarter-century of fundraising), was plunged back into building work between 1477 and *c.* 1485, when four new bays were added to accommodate the books given and bequeathed by William Gray, bishop of Ely (d. 1478) (figs. 15–16).

The library rooms could be handsomely ornamented. Prior William Sellyng (1472–94) sponsored a handsome ceiling of some kind for the upper chamber at Christ Church; and be-feathered wooden angels still adorn the beams of the surviving portion of Lincoln's medieval library room (fig. 17). The *libraria* of All Souls was well paved with tiles and had magnificent stained glass: each of the sixteen windows contained a pair of figures, the eastern range being dominated by canonised archbishops of Canterbury together with the four Doctors of the Church and the founder, Henry Chichele, the western range boasting a sequence of kings.[95] Just as the windows of the library at All Souls thus articulated the founder's connection with the see of Canterbury, those of

92 CBMLC x. 316–17.

93 H. E. D. Blakiston, 'Some Durham College rolls', in M. Burrows (ed.), *Collectanea* III. OHS 32 (1896), 10, n. 32.

94 CBMLC x. 444.

95 F. E. Hutchinson, *Medieval glass at All Souls College* (London, 1949), 37–61, pls. XIX–XXXI.

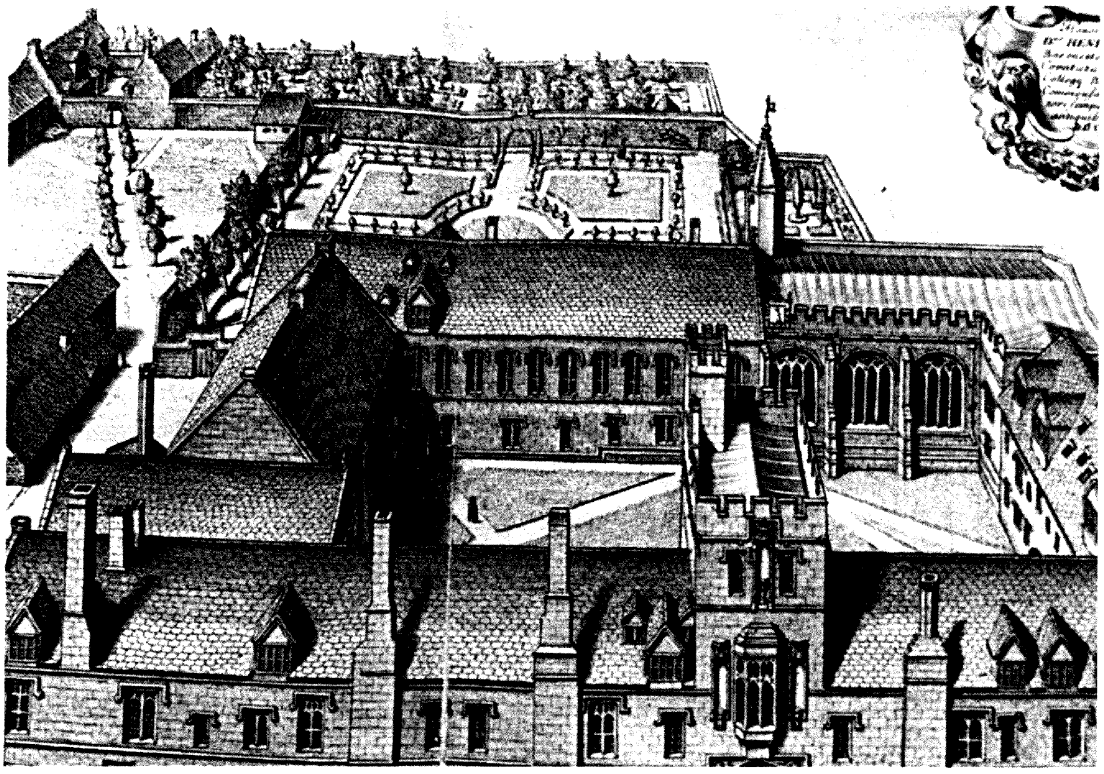

Figure 15 Balliol College, Oxford, in 1675, looking north. The library occupied the first floor of the north range of the main quadrangle (cf. fig. 16). (After Loggan 1675)

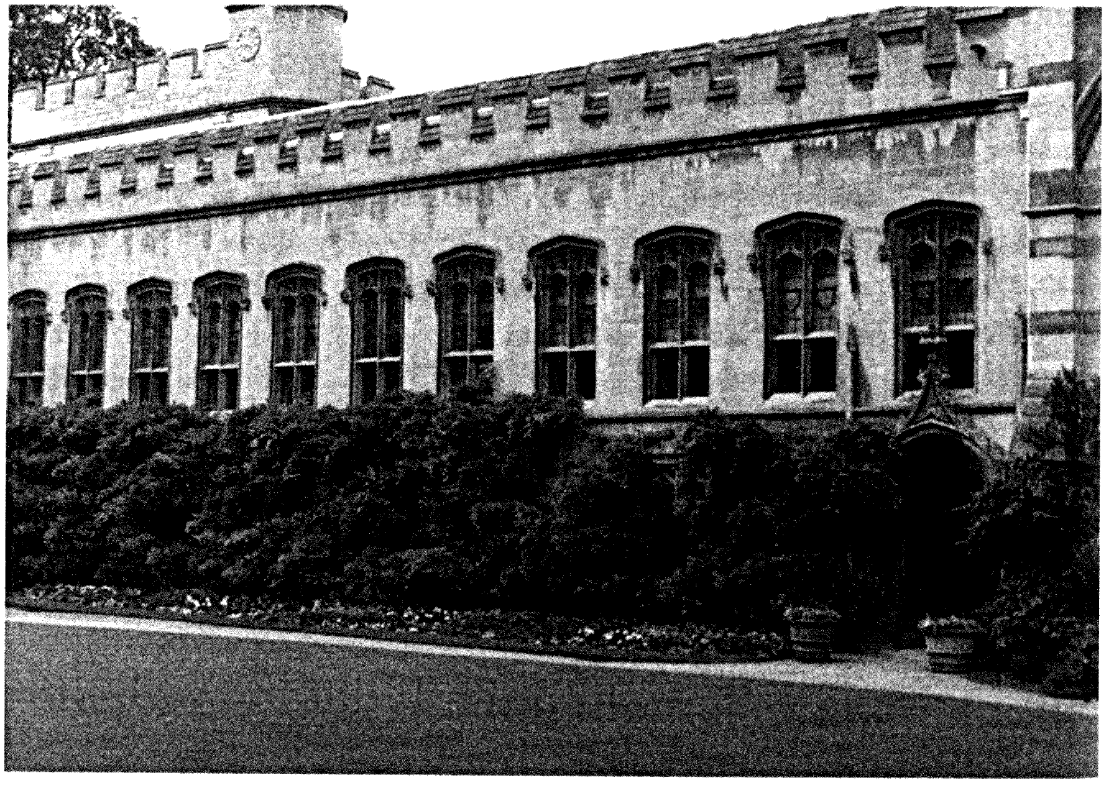

Figure 16 Balliol College, Oxford, from quad, north side, showing the elevation of the medieval library room. (Photo, Gameson)

Figure 17 Lincoln Cathedral, wooden angel decorating beam in the library room. (Photo, Gameson)

the library at Durham College reflected its northern affiliations, featuring a series of the canonised archbishops of York.[96]

The decoration of such chambers, no less than inscriptions in books, catalogues and on *tabulae*, might commemorate benefactors. The east window of Balliol College library showed Thomas Chace (Master 1412–23) and ten fellows kneeling before their patron saint (Catherine), while each of the side windows contained the coat of arms of a benefactor, including that of Chace, who was also identified as the founder of the building by an inscription.[97] Images of benefactors are documented in the library glazing of the neighbouring Durham College (now Trinity College), and the tracery light in the south window still contains angels bearing aloft the arms of Thomas Hatfield, bishop of Durham, who refounded the college in the 1370s (fig. 18). The arms of Thomas Rotheram were prominently displayed in the many windows of the library within the east front of the Cambridge Schools, which he underwrote in the 1470s. The same practice was followed outside the universities. The shields of arms in the windows in the library of York Minster included those of Thomas Haxley, treasurer at the time the room was built, who gave £26 13s 4d for its roof. The library at Wells Cathedral still preserves original glazing with the arms of its benefactor, Bishop Nicholas Bubwith (d. 1424), while the London Guildhall library was adorned with the arms of Richard Whittington and the initials of William Bury, the 'sponsors' whose executors initiated the project.

After a long delay, the ill-fated common library of the University of Oxford (above the convocation house beside St Mary's) had finally opened in 1412. Its normal hours were 9–11am and 1–4pm (when, even in winter, there would generally be some natural light), but this might exceptionally be prolonged to 'from sunrise to sunset' for VIPs (*notabiles personae*). The room, an uneven-sided rectangle of 45/50ft by 19 ft, was then lit by a range of seven evenly spaced windows in both long walls (the north and south) plus one in the east wall, and was equipped with at least sixteen desks, to which the books were chained (figs. 19–20).[98] Their titles were to be displayed (along with the names of benefactors)

96 R. G. Gameson and A. Coates, *The Old Library* (Oxford, 1988), 19.

97 R. A. B. Mynors, *Catalogue of the manuscripts of Balliol College, Oxford* (Oxford, 1963), xvi–xix.

98 University Archives, Registrum C, fols. 113^{v}–115^{r}: Anstey, *Munimenta academica*, i. 261–8. The original fenestration was suppressed when the room was comprehensively reworked in the late fifteenth century, the role of University Library having passed to Duke Humfrey's facility; photographs of its current appearance (e.g. Parkes, 'Provision of books', pl. xvi) are thus misleading.

Figure 18 Durham (now Trinity) College, Oxford, upper light of south window of the *libraria*, with three angels supporting the arms of Thomas Hatfield (azure a chevron or between three lions rampant). (Photo, Gameson)

'on a large and conspicuous placard, written in an elegant hand'. The number of books cannot have been very large (in 1457 the seventeen desks in the common library of the University of Cambridge accommodated 330 books)[99] and measures were deliberately taken to restrict the number of users, but even so the arrangement was not particularly practical: the complaint addressed to Duke Humfrey in about 1445, designed to win sponsorship for a new facility, was that readers got in each other's way.[100]

Thus, by the second half of the fifteenth century, many cathedrals, abbeys and colleges had a purpose-built library room with a permanent reference collection which could be consulted *in situ*. Indeed, the concept of a library room

99 CBMLC x. UC3. 100 University Archives, Registrum F, fols. 71^{v}–72^{r}.

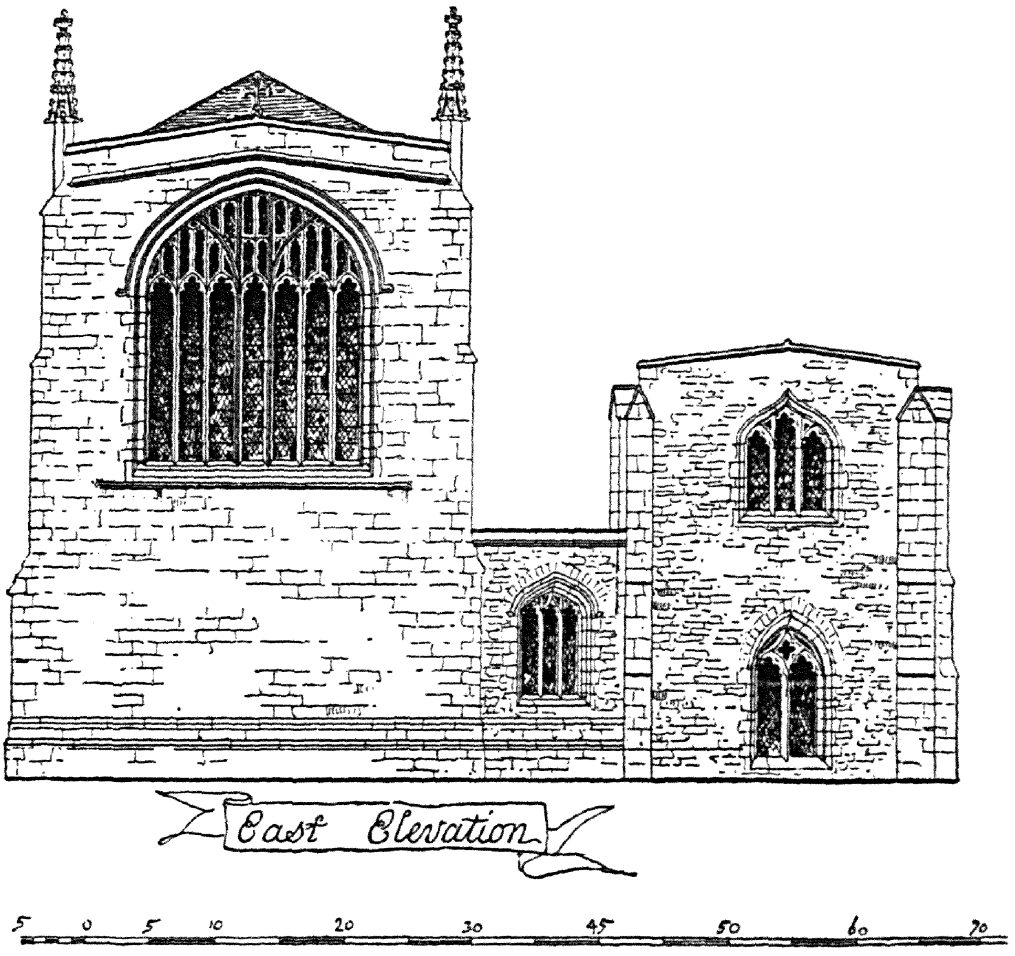

Figure 19 University Church of St Mary, Oxford, eastern elevation in 1896. The university library room was the upper chamber of the annexe – the convocation house – on the north side of the church. (After Jackson 1897)

was sufficiently well established that foundations without one could claim (exaggeratedly) that the lack of such a resource emperiled their books – as did a monk at Fotheringhay College in 1438.[101] With these fixed reference collections and a general store or stores of books available for loan, we might seem to be close both conceptually and physically to modern libraries. Yet in reality we have not moved so very far from where we began. The changes on which this chapter has focused were set against a backdrop of continuity and stasis. Reference collections were fairly small and, once chained, were cumbersome

101 A. H. Thompson (ed.), *Visitations of religious houses in the diocese of Lincoln, 2: records of visitations held by William Alnwick, AD 1436–1449*, 1, Canterbury and York Society 24 (1919), 98.

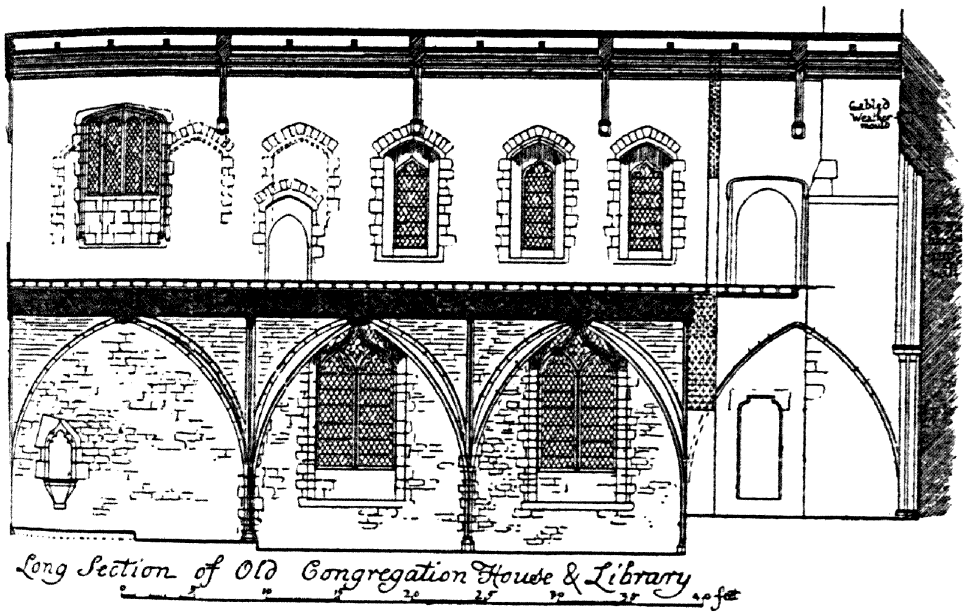

Figure 20 University Church of St Mary, Oxford, the convocation house, south side, elevation in 1896, showing remains of the original library fenestration. (After Jackson 1897)

(not to mention costly) to reconfigure.[102] In the long-established foundations like the cathedral priories of Christ Church, Canterbury, or Durham, which had accumulated more than 1,000 volumes over the centuries, large numbers of books were preserved, not in the library room, but in other stores, as had been the case previously. At the universities many books were still kept in chests; this was where the unwanted loan books at All Souls, for instance, remained.[103] The practices of most institutions, religious and academic, were marked by a fundamental conservatism. The physical organisation of the books continued to be based on the concept of a comparatively limited and stable body of knowledge, allied to the slow consumption of loaned material. Donations, which were fundamental to the growth of institutional collections, had as much to do with the benefactor's provision for his afterlife as with the needs of cathedrals and universities: symptomatic of this situation is the fact that the university librarian at Oxford was a chaplain who was to combine his oversight of the *libraria* with the duty of praying for the souls of benefactors to

102 See, for example, accounts for chaining and unchaining at King's Hall: CBMLC x. UC40, and below, 163–4, 166–7.

103 E. F. Jacob (ed.), *The register of Henry Chichele, archbishop of Canterbury 1414–1443*, II (Oxford, 1937), 411.

the library and celebrating the customary masses – with the result that on th days of university masses, the library was shut.[104] Equally, benefactors coul insist on the chaining of an eccentric selection of books. How would thes conservative practices stand up to new pressures in the age of printing?[105]

104 See n. 98.

105 I am very grateful to the librarians and archivists who kindly facilitated my inspection of the surviving library rooms discussed in this chapter.