

The west portal and its sculpture illustrated

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One of the files which I have posted on this page is a reproduction of a published article – a short piece about the west portal of Rochester cathedral (Flight 2003). The article is illustrated with an excellent photograph, retrieved from the cathedral archives, which shows the portal in its unrestored state, circa 1880. That was the editor's, Bob Ratcliffe's, contribution, not mine. I am grateful to him for it; it seems to me that everyone else who cares about these things should be grateful to him too.

In looking at the article again, I have thought that it might be useful to assemble a supplementary file containing images of some of the published views of Rochester cathedral – some which show the whole of the west front, some which show just the portal. The original drawings are of very variable quality, but only one of them is unforgivably bad. The images available to me are not all as good as they might be, but at least they will serve to identify the views that exist. If anyone has better images, or can tell me of other views which ought to be added to the dossier, I shall be delighted to hear from them.

King for Dugdale (1655) and King (1656). A view of the west front, seen from straight ahead, drawn and engraved by Daniel King. First published 1655. Dedicated to Sir Roger Twysden. Volume 1 of the 'Monasticon Anglicanum' (Dugdale 1655) contains some good illustrations, drawn and engraved by artists (Wenceslaus Hollar among them) who knew what they were doing. Unhappily the views of Rochester cathedral are the work of an artist who did not.¹ There are two of them. One is this view of the west front; the other is a bird's-eye view of the whole church, seen as if from slightly west of north. Both are amazingly inaccurate.

Badeslade for Harris. A view of the whole church, seen from slightly north of west, drawn by Thomas Badeslade and engraved by John Harris. Published in 1724.² This is one of a series of 39 plates commissioned from Badeslade as

¹ The inclusion of these plates in the 'Monasticon' appears to result from some bargain struck between King and Dugdale's publisher, Richard Hodgkinson. Dugdale himself had a very low opinion of King. 'This Dan. King, who was a pitiful pretender to antiquities, was a most ignorant, silly fellow, (as sir Will. Dugdale hath informed me by letters,) an errant knave, and not able to write one line of true English' (Wood ed. Bliss 1817:503).

² A small version of the same drawing was published in 1719. It forms one of the marginal insets in Badeslade's panoramic view of the city of Rochester (Harris 1719, facing p. 251). The panorama itself includes a bird's-eye view of the cathedral, seen from a rather different angle (slightly south of west).



Fig. 1. Detail from Russell's map of Rochester (1717).

illustrations for John Harris's 'History of Kent'. (Not the same John Harris: the author is the Rev. Dr. Harris, the engraver plain Mr. Harris.) Most of these plates were included in volume 1, published (after much delay) in 1719; a few were held back, because they were intended for volume 2, and Harris died without getting that volume finished. Within the next few years, the Badeslade plates, published and unpublished, were acquired by the bookseller Joseph Smith, who squeezed what profit out of them he could. This view of Rochester cathedral was eventually published in the third volume of Smith's 'Nouveau theatre de la Grande Bretagne' (1724).

Badeslade's is a much better drawing than King's, but one does not have to look very hard before one starts to discover its defects. Perhaps on purpose, perhaps not, it omits the gate – later removed (see below), but at this time still in place – which was attached to the south turret of the front (Fig. 1).

Baker for Fisher (1772). A view of the west front, seen from straight ahead, drawn by F. Baker. The engraver's name is not given. Published in 1772. This plate was made for Thomas Fisher's 'History and antiquities of Rochester' (1772); the pocket-size format cramped the engraver's style. The map of the city which forms the frontispiece to this book was also drawn by Baker: 'F. Baker, Surveyor – A plan of the city of Rochester – from the bridge, to the Victualling Office.' Beyond that I know nothing about the man, but he seems to have been competent enough. Some of the details are not quite right, but some are very carefully observed: the blocked niches in the tier of arcading aligned with the arch of the portal, the broken shaft further to the right in the same tier. (This can be seen in some later drawings too.)

The same drawing, differently engraved, was published in London in January 1773, in the supplement concluding vol. 42 of the 'Gentleman's Magazine'. (Some binders, misled by an instruction which ought to have been deleted, have inserted this plate to face page 516; in fact it belongs at page 576.) Baker's name is not mentioned. The engraver, B. Cole, was no great artist, but he managed to fit more of the image onto his plate than Fisher's engraver had done.

The pity is that Baker did not make this drawing ten years sooner, before

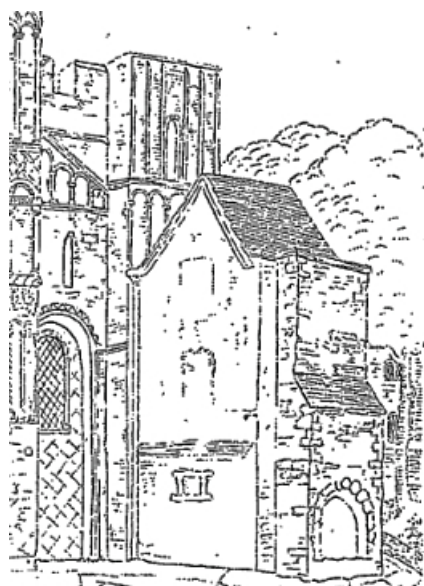


Fig. 2. Detail from J. Schnebbelie for Thorpe (1788).

the front was subjected to some very heavy-handed repairs. The north turret – ‘the foundation of which had been disturbed by burying too near it, and the walls shaken by carriages constantly passing under it’ (Denne 1788:184) – was demolished in 1763, and rebuilt from the foundations over the next few years, but only to half of its original height, ‘in a curious imitation of Norman work’ (Hope 1898:284). The south turret was still intact, but did not remain so much longer. Though Denne does not mention the fact, the octagonal pinnacle shown in Baker’s and earlier views is known to have been removed in about 1780.³

The building on the right, projecting from the south turret, is the surviving portion of the gate at the entrance to the priory. The gateway itself had been taken down some time before, in or after 1744 (Hope 1900:28), but the gatekeeper’s lodge remained in place. It is shown more clearly (Fig. 2) in the view of the cathedral contributed by Jacob Schnebbelie to Thorpe’s ‘*Custumale Rof-fense*’ (1788, pl. XXXV). It formed part of the fifth prebendal house, the rest of which stood alongside the south nave aisle. That house, we know for a fact, was demolished in 1800.⁴ A drawing by Thomas Hearne, which shows the lodge still in place (Byrne 1796–1807, pl. XXVIII), must have been made some years before it was published.⁵ In a view of the cathedral drawn by Robert Blemmel Schnebbelie (Jacob’s son), published in 1806 (Hughson 1808, pl. 14), the south

³ While the second volume of Hasted’s ‘*History of Kent*’ was passing through the press (Hasted 1782, additions and corrections, p. 66).

⁴ It was ‘pulled down last Summer’, says the dean, Dr Dampier, writing in April 1801 (British Library, K. Top. 17.8).

⁵ The plate is dated 1804. I have not seen the letterpress which goes with it. Possibly that gives the date when the drawing was made.



Fig. 3. Detail from R. B. Schnebbelie for Hughson (1808).

turret is unobstructed (Fig. 3).

Bayly for Thorpe (1788). An elevation of the west portal, drawn and engraved by John Bayly. Published in 1788. This is one of the illustrations commissioned from Bayly for the ‘*Custumale Roffense*’ (Thorpe 1788, pl. XXXVI).

Mackenzie for Brayley (1808). A view of the portal, seen from slightly to the right, drawn by Frederick Mackenzie and engraved by R. Roffe for Britton and Brayley’s ‘*Beauties of England and Wales*’. Published in 1808. The imprint reads: ‘London. Published by Vernor, Hood & Sharpe, Poultry, Febr. 1st. 1808.’

The original drawing is in the Paul Mellon Collection, Yale Center for British Art <<https://collections.britishart.yale.edu/catalog/tms:10978>>.

Varrall for Storer and Greig (1812–13). Two views – a view of the portal, seen from slightly to the left, plus a close-up of the tympanum – drawn by I. Varrall and engraved by John Greig. Published in 1812. The imprints are the same: ‘Engrav’d & Publish’d by J. Greig Sepr. 1. 1812. from a Drawing by I. Varrall.’ I know nothing about the artist.⁶ The engraver, John Greig, began his career in partnership with James Storer.

Coney for Ellis (1815–30). A view of the portal, seen from low down to the left, drawn and engraved by John Coney. Published in 1818. This is one of a

⁶ Unless he is the same man as the engraver John Charles Varrall (1795–1855).



Fig. 4. Detail from Coney for Ellis (1815–30).

series of 143 plates produced by Coney for the new edition of the ‘*Monasticon Anglicanum*’. They add up to an impressive achievement, more valuable, in the long run, than the book that they were made for.⁷ This view of the portal at Rochester is a stunning piece of work; it makes all the other drawings look amateurish or insipid. Because of the unusual angle, it shows very clearly the botched junction between the lintel and the innermost order of the arch (Fig. 4). What Coney thought this meant is anybody’s guess; but I know what I think it means. It means that the lintel (with the tympanum which rests upon it) was inserted later (perhaps much later) into an arch which was originally just an arch.

Caveler (1835–6). Measured drawings of the portal – elevation, vertical section, plan – are contained in a collection of specimens produced by an architect named William Caveler in 1835–6. These drawings have been generally overlooked. Though I had thought that I was fairly familiar with the literature relating to Rochester, I do not recollect ever seeing any mention of Caveler’s book; I had never heard of it before I happened to find it cited as the source for

⁷ ‘As an accurate architectural designer he has never been surpassed; his drawings, of what is called the Gothic, exhibit all the minutest details without the appearance of labour, yet with a neatness that is truly surprising. The works of this industrious, but too little rewarded artist, are now beginning to be appreciated as they deserve; and he, who in his life-time felt the mortifications of neglect, or of supercilious patronage, will be rewarded with posthumous fame’ (Stanley 1849:180). But later editions of this book are less effusive. Eastlake, I think, puts it well. These etchings, he says, ‘will scarcely satisfy those who look for minute attention to the detail of Gothic ornament. But in breadth of effect, and in treatment of chiaroscuro, they will bear comparison with Piranesi’ (Eastlake 1872:9).

a few of the illustrations in Bond (1905).⁸ About the author I have only some fragmentary information.⁹ This book of specimens was his ‘first publication’ (address issued with part 1); he was hoping to produce a further volume ‘in which the subjects will be selected from the finest examples of Collegiate Architecture now remaining unpublished’ (preface issued with part 4), but nothing came of that. The book was published in four parts,¹⁰ and the illustrations of the Rochester portal were included in the final batch of plates. The elevation consists of a double plate (plates IV–V), i.e. two plates designed to be joined together; the section and plan (plate VI) are on a smaller scale. All the drawings were made by Caveler. Plates IV–V were engraved by E. Kennion,¹¹ plate VI by Caveler himself. It was not his intention to show the portal as it existed in the 1830s; he drew it as he imagined it might have looked in an unweathered, undamaged state. So he restored the heads of the statues, supplied the missing shaft on the right, and made various other improvements. But he stopped short of replacing the modern plinth. The images available to me are of poor quality. I have chosen the best that I can find, and made some attempt to enhance them; but the results are far from satisfactory. Even so, I hope they will be useful, till better copies turn up. (I note, by the way, that there are also five plates of the chapter-room doorway, issued in part 2 (Caveler 1835–6, plates XLVII–LI). They show the doorway in the shape in which it was left after Cottingham’s restoration.)

Browne for Winkles and Winkles (1836–42). A view of the portal, seen from slightly to the left, drawn by Hablot Browne and engraved by Benjamin Winkles. First published in 1836.¹²

Smirke (1838). The architect Sydney Smirke wrote a paper for the Society of Antiquaries in 1838 ‘on the mode adopted by masons . . . in forming a straight head over an aperture’.¹³ One of the examples cited (Smirke 1838:384) is the

⁸ But I see now that Caveler’s plates are also cited by Keyser (1904:38).

⁹ It appears that he was born in 1814. By 1835 he had an office in London (at 16 Cross Street, Hatton Garden). His book was supposed to earn him money, as well as reputation; instead (if I read the signs right) it drove him into debt. He disappeared from London; for several years he disappeared from the architectural scene. By about 1845, he was working his way back into the profession. In 1847 he got a job in Margate, as surveyor to the town commissioners (my thanks to Anthony Lee for this information), and in Margate he attained some prosperity and some local prominence – surveyor to the Pier and Harbour Company, town councillor, president of the Literary and Scientific Institution. By 1867 he had moved to Birmingham; he died in Cheltenham in 1879 (*Birmingham Daily Post*, 19 Feb. 1879, p. 8).

¹⁰ The parts were reviewed, as each came out, in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* (Jan., Jun., Oct. 1836, Mar. 1837); the reviews are unsigned but reportedly by E. J. Carlos. I have only seen parts 1 and 4. Easier to find are copies of the ‘second edition’, published by the bookseller Martin Taylor in 1839. (This means, I suppose, that Taylor had bought the copyright.)

¹¹ Not a well-known name. There was a landscape painter called Edward Kennion who died in 1809 (ODNB): possibly this engraver was that man’s son.

¹² The plate was reused in 1887, in a revised edition of ‘Winkles’s Cathedrals’ published by Ward, Lock and Co. (1886–9).

¹³ Just recently, Smirke had designed the buildings for the Rochester Bathing Establishment.

lintel over the west door of Rochester cathedral, and the plate illustrating this paper includes a measured drawing of the upper part of the doorway (pl. XXVII, no. 4). It omits all the decoration: it simply shows the shape of the component pieces. The drawing was Smirke's; the plate was engraved by James Basire.

Thomas Hollis for Hollis and Hollis (1840–2). Separate views of the two column-figures (supposed to be Henry I and his queen), drawn by Thomas Hollis and engraved by (his father) George Hollis. Published 1 June 1840. The imprint for the first plate is: 'Published by J. B. Nichols & Son, 25. Parliament St. Westminster, & by G. Hollis, 4. Gloucester Buildings, Walworth. 1840.' That for the second is the same, except that it has 'Street' instead of 'St.' 'Beautiful and accurate engravings' (Hope 1898:224).

Scharf for Fergusson (1855). A view of the portal, seen from straight ahead, drawn by George Scharf and engraved by Robert Branston. First published in 1855. This is one of three views of Rochester cathedral commissioned as illustrations for James Fergusson's 'Handbook of architecture' (1855): the west portal (no. 682), the crypt (no. 683), the chapter-room doorway (no. 705). The view of the crypt is credited to Scharf in the caption; the others are signed with his initials, at bottom left. Robert Branston is identified as the engraver in the preface (1855:xi).¹⁴

The wood-blocks made for this book have a history of their own. Only one of them – the chapter-room doorway – was reused in Fergusson's 'History of architecture' (1867, no. 594). Before that, however, all three had been recycled as illustrations for King's 'Handbook' to Rochester cathedral (1861). Scharf's drawing of the west portal was turned into the title page: for this purpose the block had the words 'ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL' added in the middle of it. The crypt is King's plate V; the chapter-room doorway is King's plate III. The second edition of this book (King 1876) used all the same illustrations as the first one. The common element here is the publisher's name: King's books, like Fergusson's, were published by John Murray. Some twenty years later, when Hope was assembling the illustrations for his architectural history of Rochester cathedral (Hope 1898–1900), he borrowed from Messrs Murray (John Murray's sons and successors) the wood-blocks that had been made for Fergusson's book (Hope 1900:84). Scharf's view of the crypt became Hope's figure 13; Scharf's view of the chapter-room doorway became Hope's figure 33. The view of the west portal was not made use of by Hope, presumably because the added title had rendered it unsuitable.

Whymper for Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co. (1877). A view of the portal, seen from the right, engraved by Josiah Wood Whymper for the second volume

¹⁴ As far as the portal is concerned, Kahn (1987:130) reports the existence of a batch of eight drawings by Scharf in the collection of the Society of Antiquaries; she reproduces part of one of them.

of 'Picturesque Europe' (Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co. 1877).¹⁵ I assume that Whymper was working from a photograph.

Langton (1880). A view of the portal, seen from the right, engraved by Robert Langton. First published in 1880. I assume, again, that Langton was working from a photograph.

Clifford for Palmer (1897). A view of the portal, seen from the right, drawn by H. P. Clifford. First published in 1897. This shows the state of the portal just after its restoration. 'Mr. Clifford's beautiful drawing of the doorway . . . is especially valuable as he was able to take exact measurements of all its parts while the repairers' scaffolding was still standing. The doors that he pictures have since been replaced by a more elaborate pair with richly scrolled hinges and strengthening bands of iron' (Palmer 1897:47–8). I include this view because it was drawn from very nearly the same angle as Langton's: taken together, they form a useful before-and-after pair.

Keyser (1904). This book contains a good photograph of the tympanum and lintel (fig. 126), not dated but taken before the portal was restored. I cite the book because of something it says – that 'there are traces of the whole [tympanum] having been enriched with colour and gilding' (Keyser 1904:lxvi). As far as I remember, no one else ever claimed to have noticed such traces; but Keyser had many years of experience in studying medieval sculpture, and it would not be surprising if he had seen something which other observers had missed.

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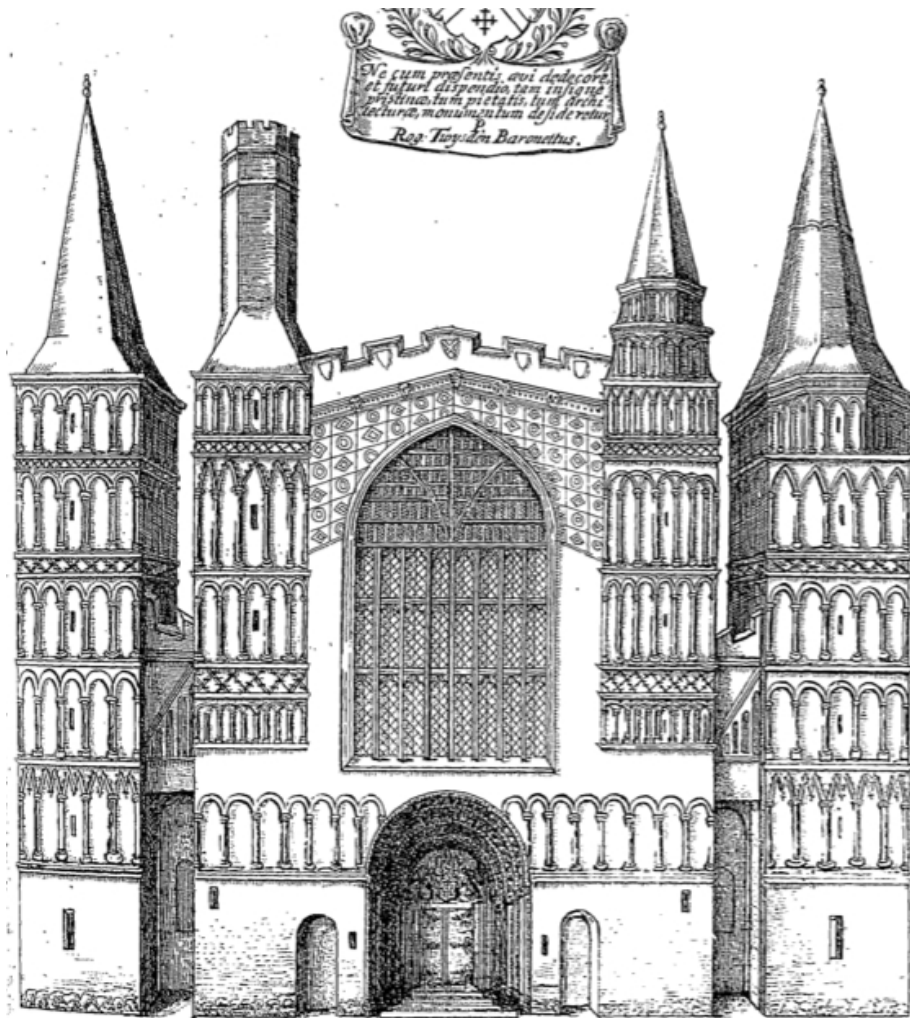
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¹⁵ The book is undated, but I find it reviewed, with other 'Christmas books', in the *Times*, 3 Dec. 1877, p. 3.

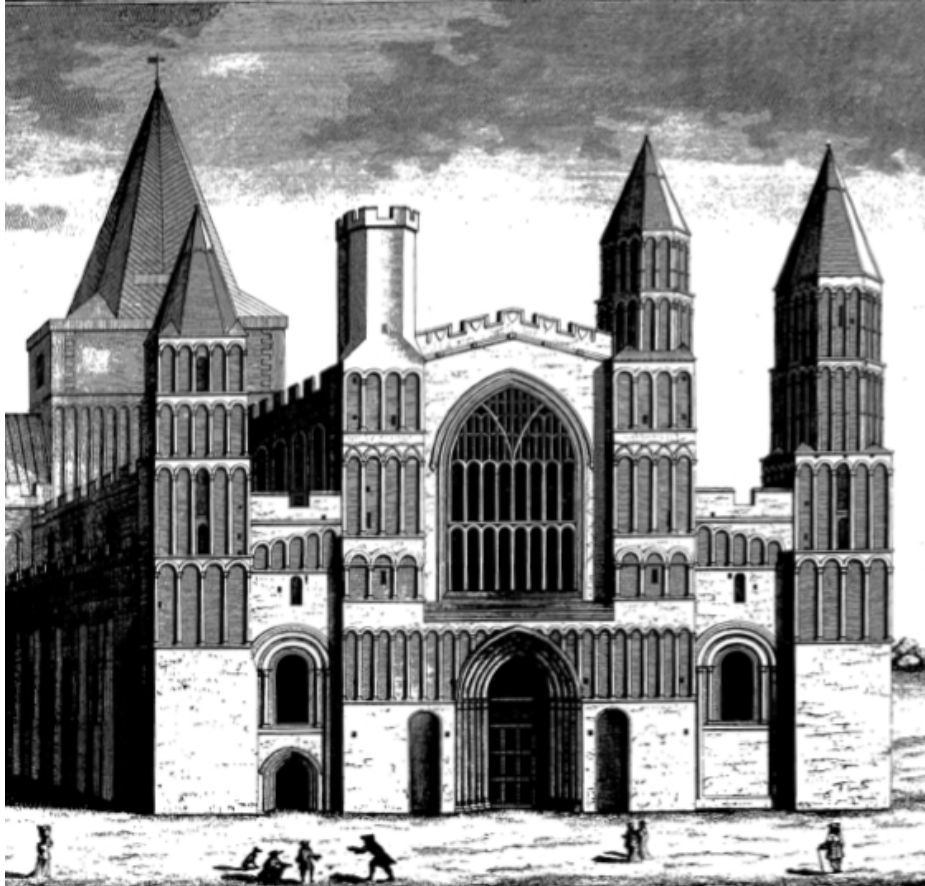
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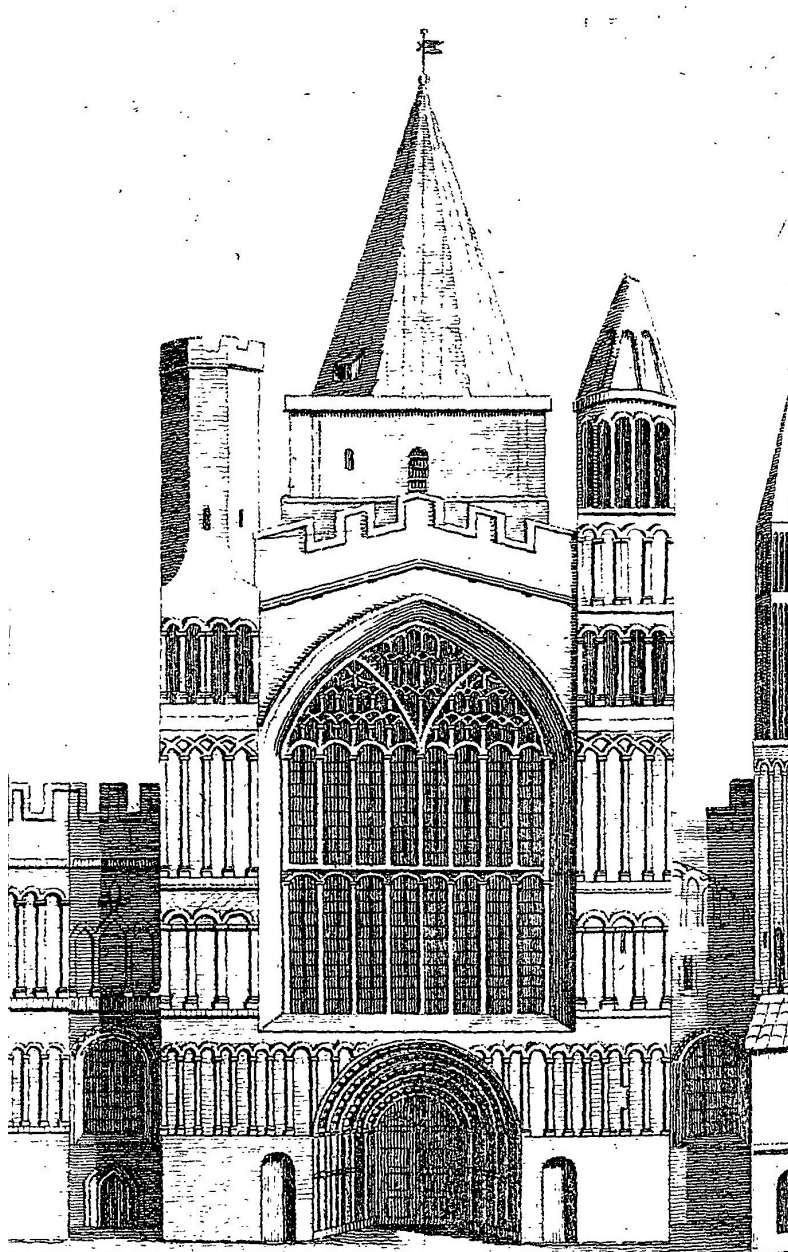
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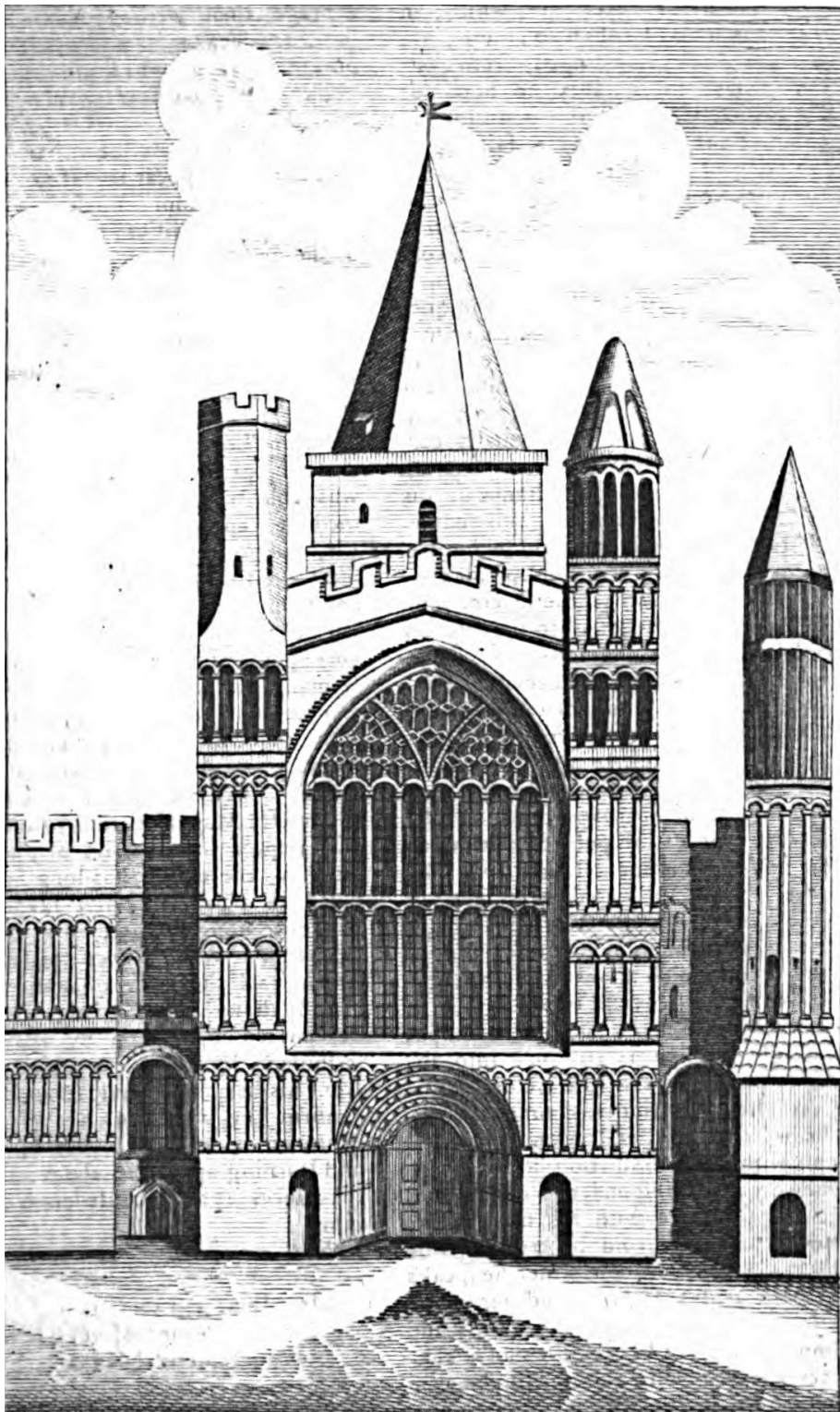
King for Dugdale (1655) and King (1656).



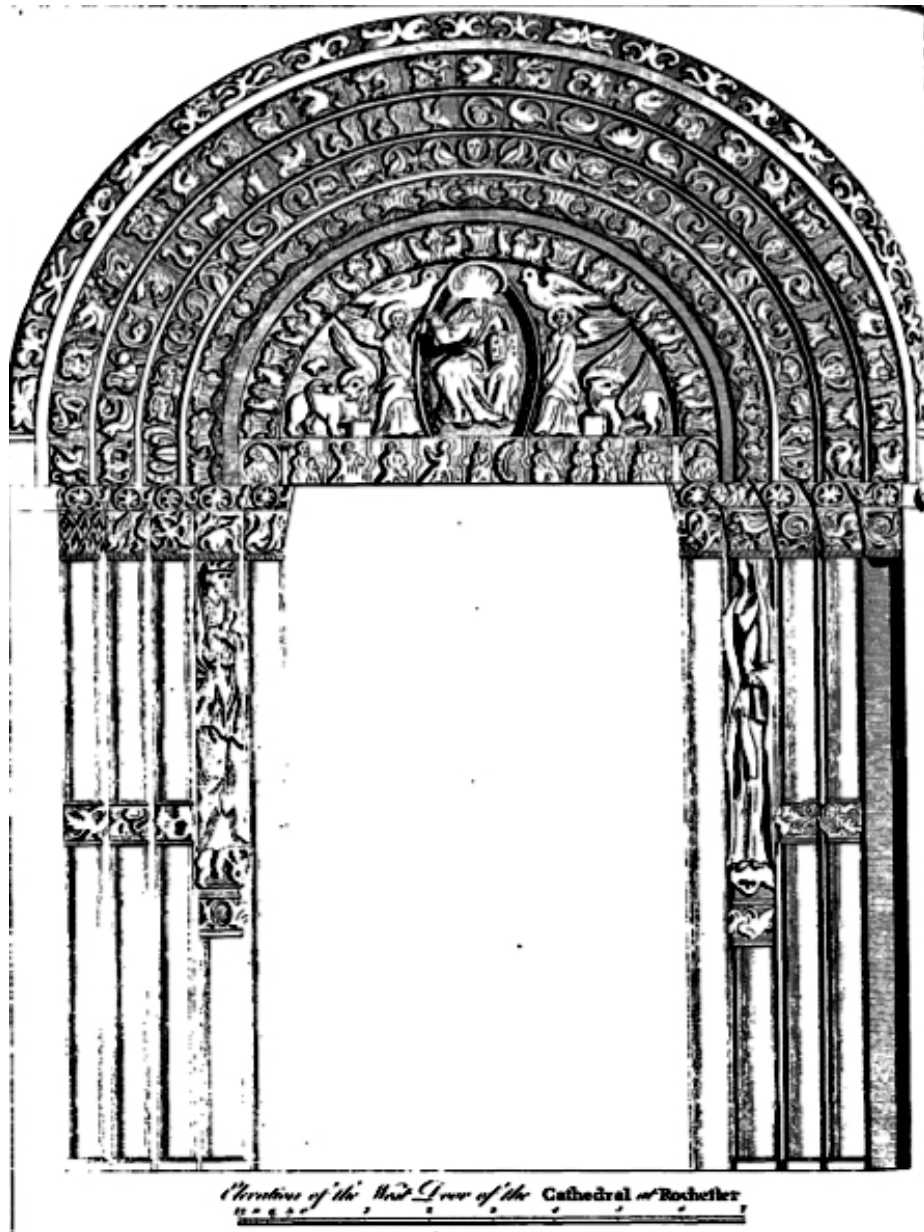
Detail from Badeslade for Harris (published in Smith 1724).



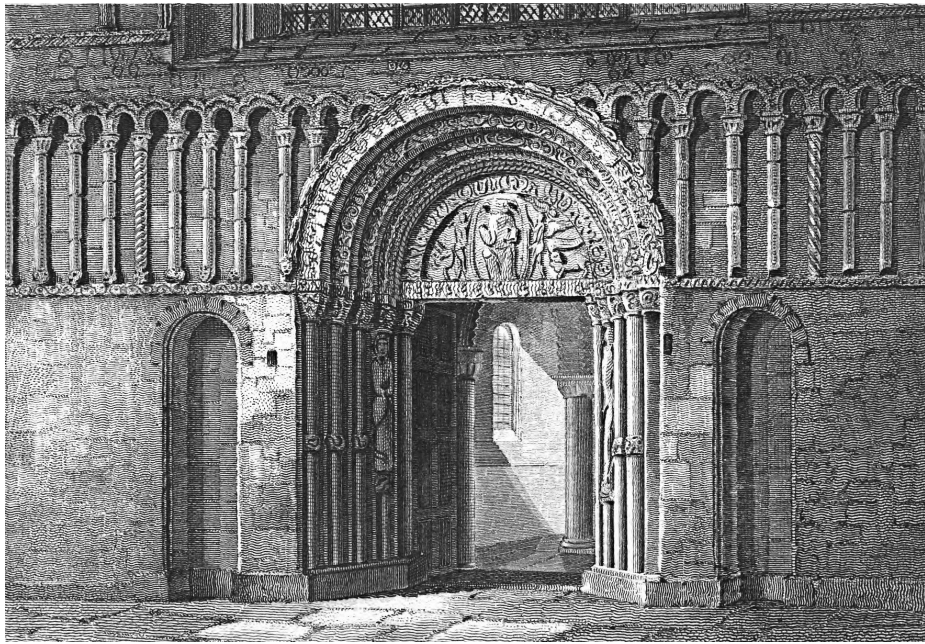
Baker for Fisher (1772).



Baker's drawing re-engraved for the 'Gentleman's Magazine'.



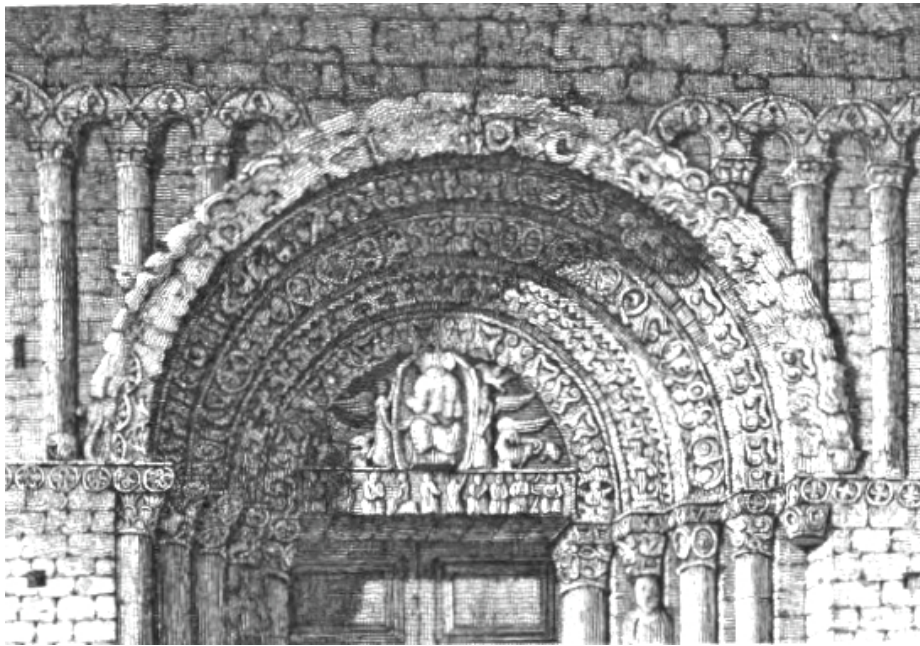
Bayly for Thorpe (1788).



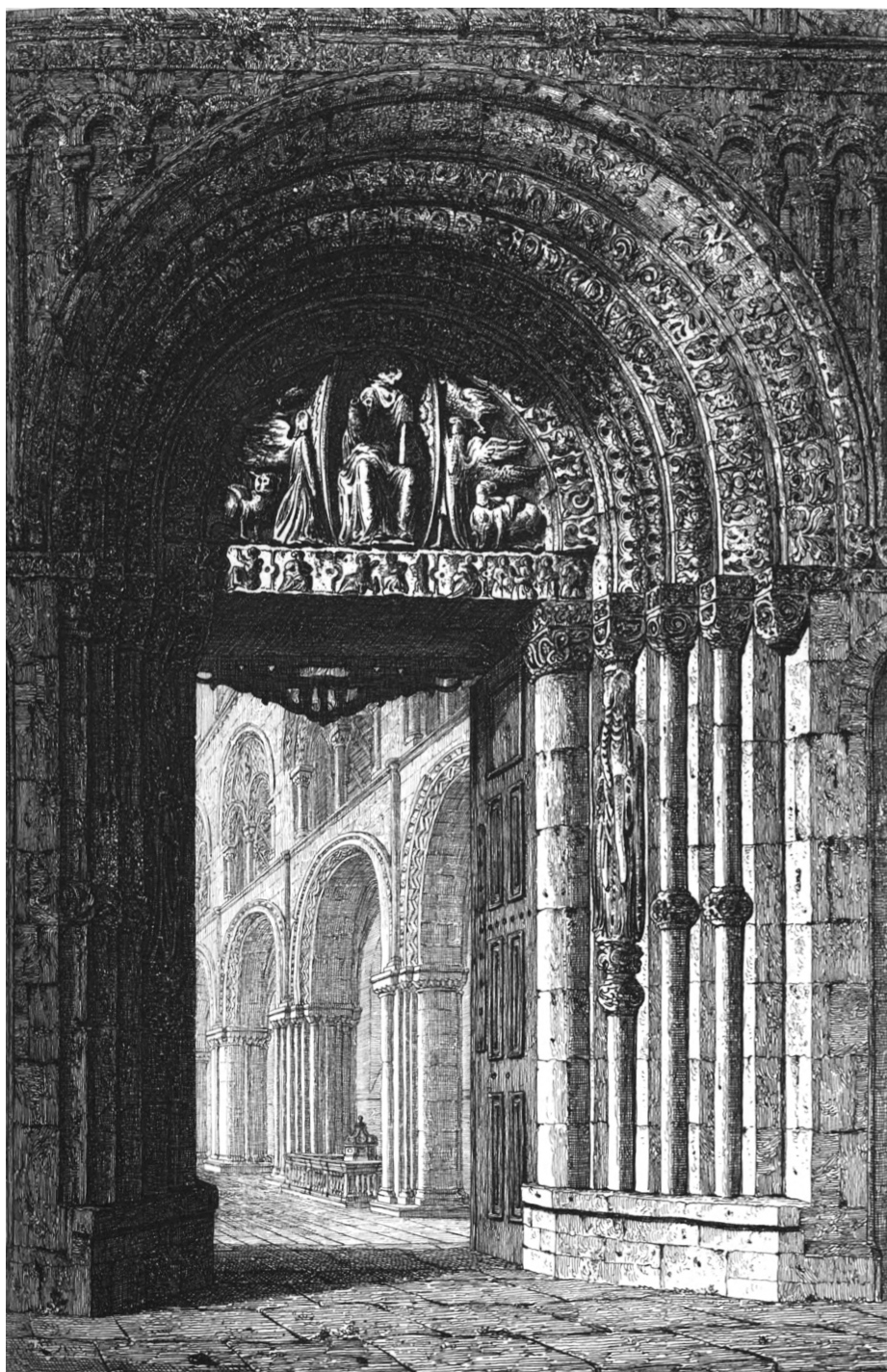
Mackenzie for Brayley (1808).



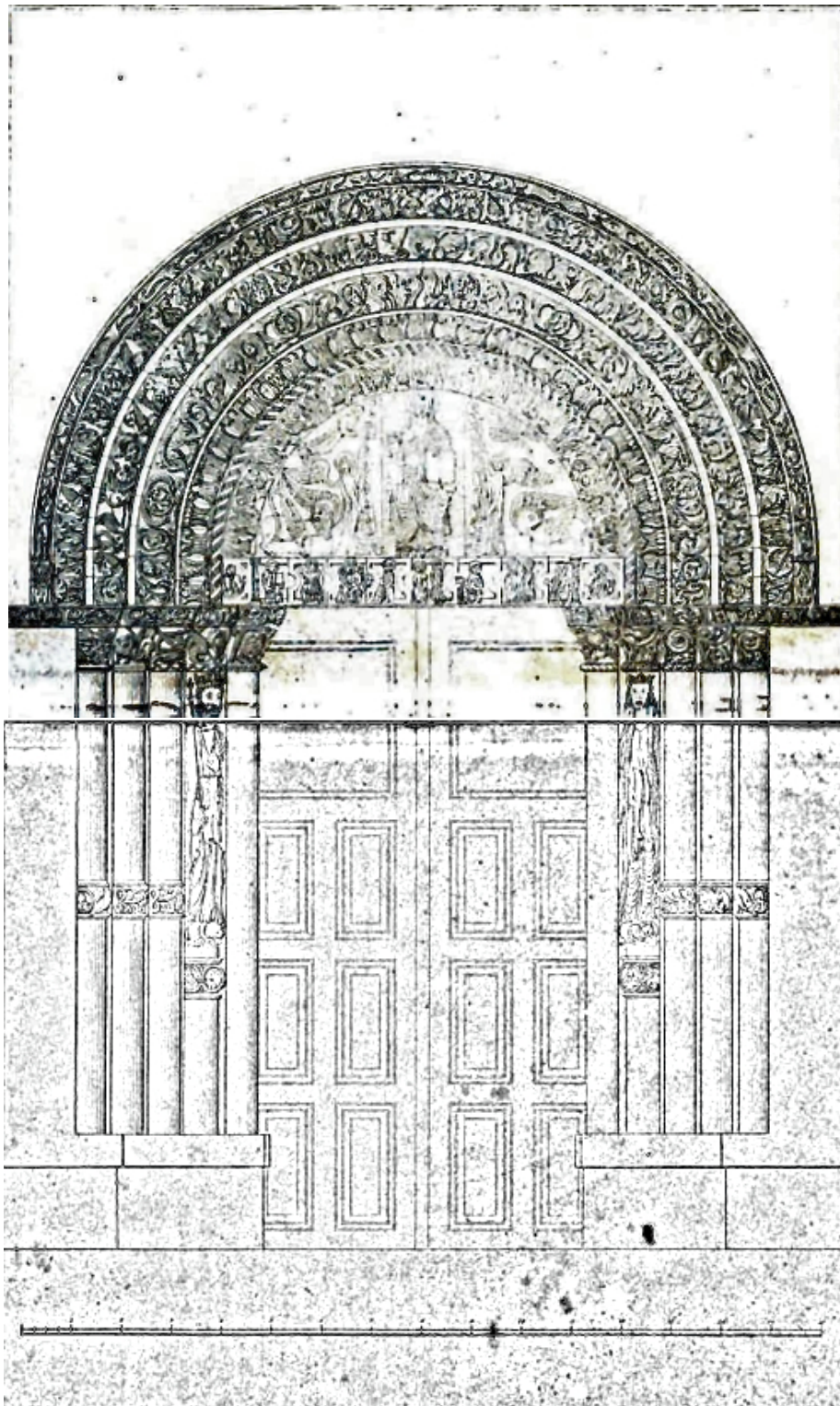
Varrall for Storer and Greig (1812–13).



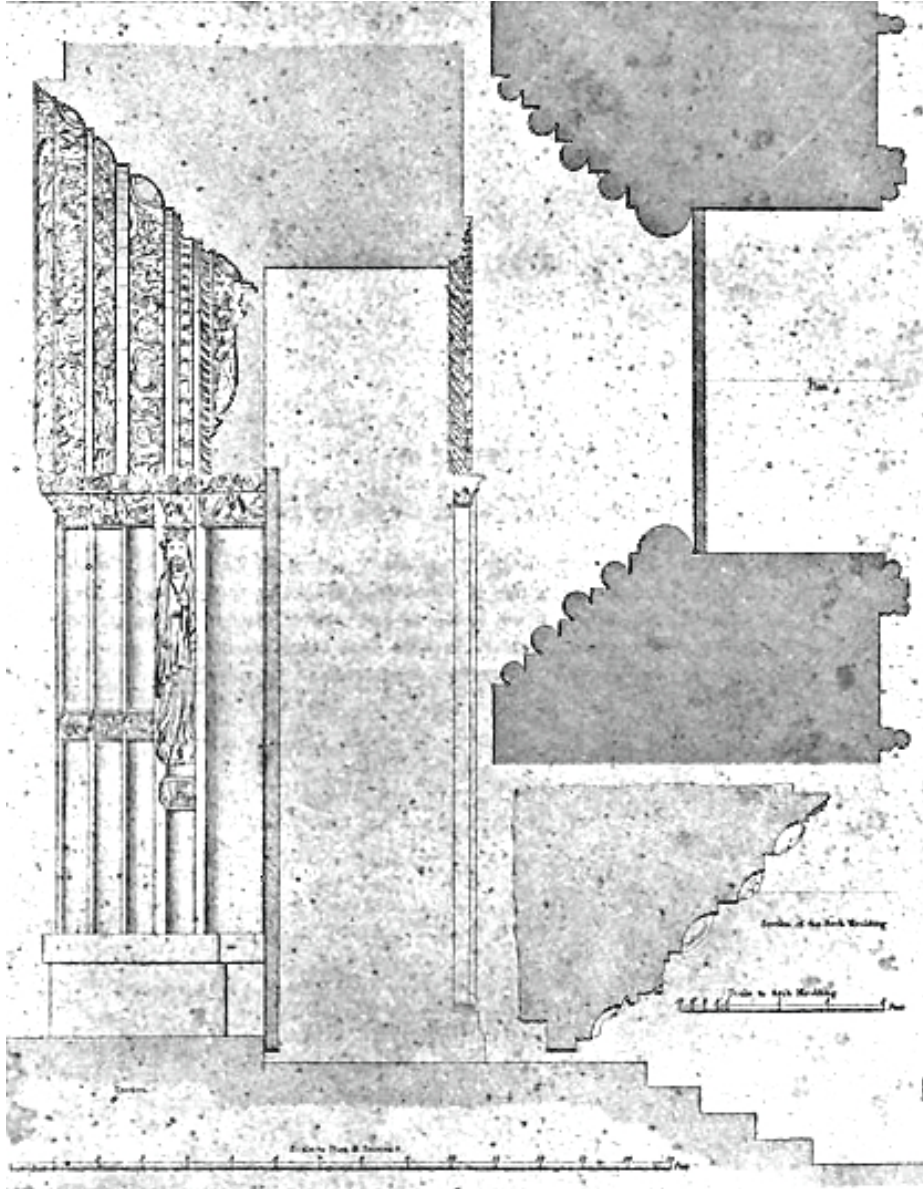
Varrall for Storer and Greig (1812–13).



Coney for Ellis (1815–30).



Cavaler: elevation (1835–6, pl. IV–V).



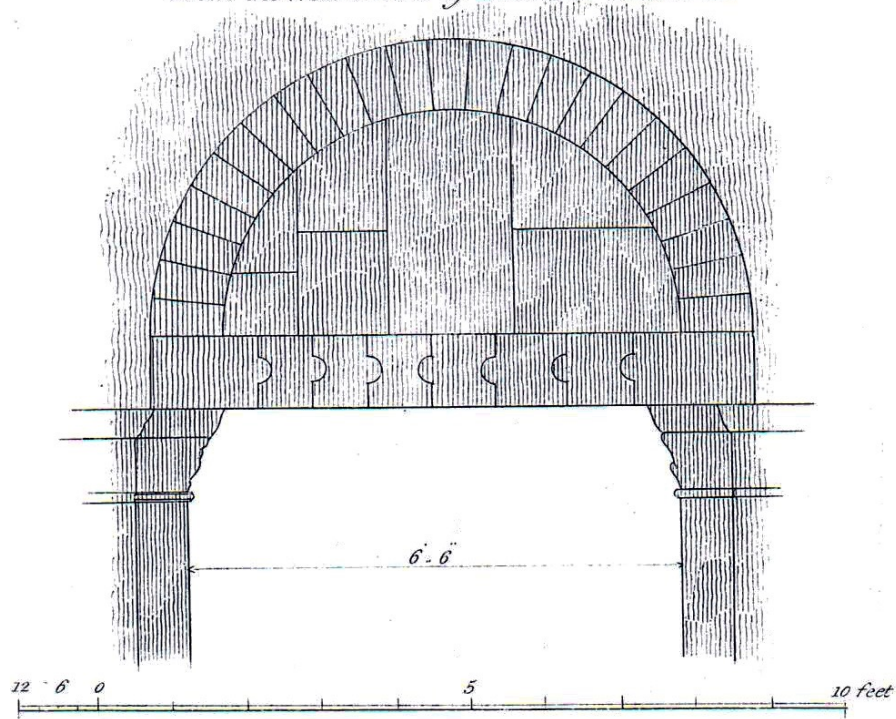
Caveler: section and plan (1835-6, pl. VI).



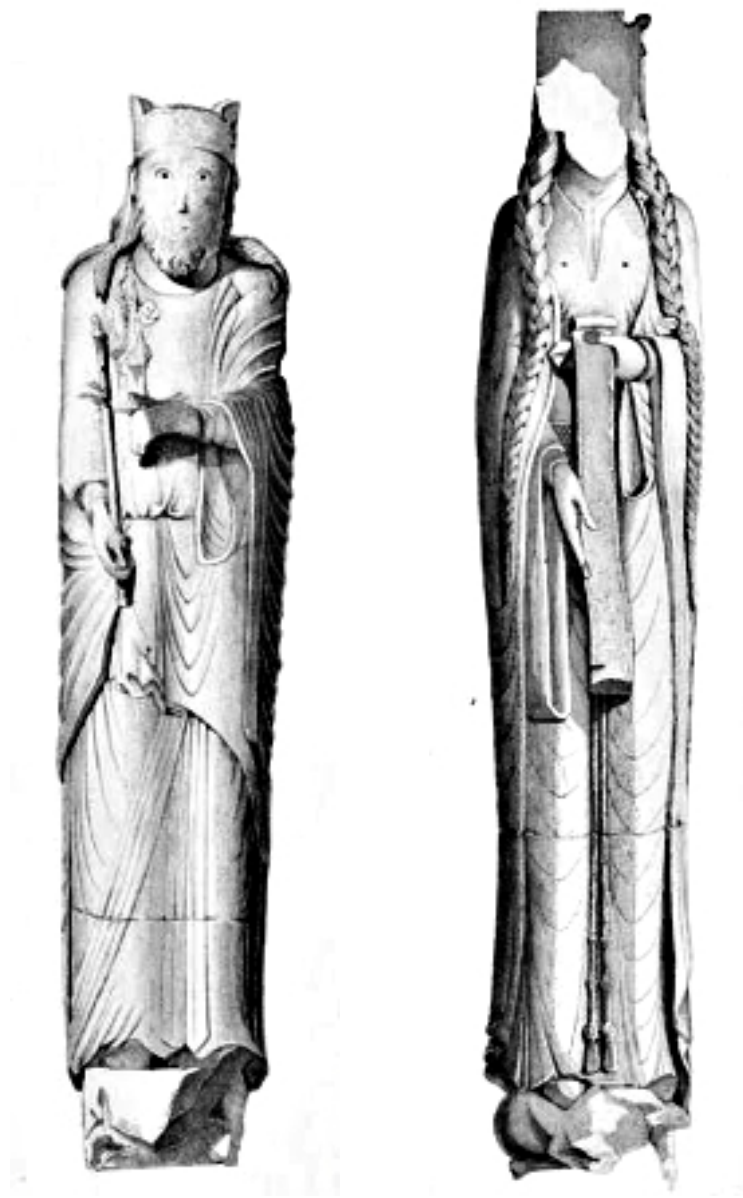
Browne for Winkles and Winkles (1836–42).

N^o 4.

From the West Front of Rochester Cathedral.



Smirke: schematic elevation (1838, pl. XXVII, no. 4.)



The column-figures drawn by Thomas Hollis (1840).



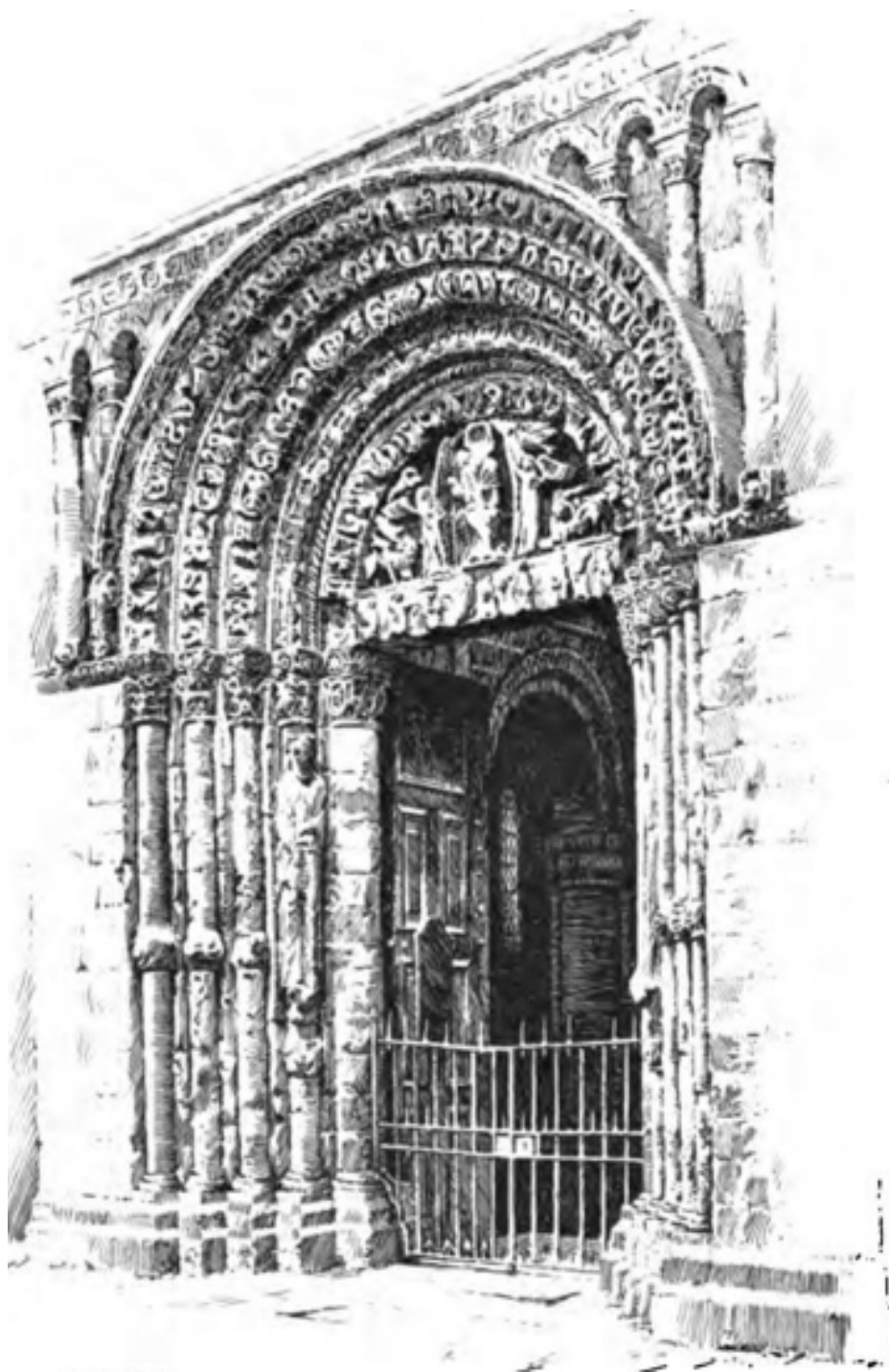
Scharf for Fergusson (1855).



Whymper for Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co. (1877).



Langton (1880).



Clifford for Palmer (1897).



Keyser (1904, fig. 126).