

# Three mausolea and a church: the drawings of James C. Murphy for his book on Batalha of 1795

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MICHAEL McCARTHY

JAMES CAVANAH MURPHY PUBLISHED TWO BOOKS IN 1795 – *PLANS, ELEVATIONS, Sections and Views of the Church of Batalha* and *Travels in Portugal ... in the years 1789 and 1790*.<sup>1</sup> At the conclusion of the preface to the latter, he wrote:

As it was principally through the munificence of the Right Honourable William Burton Conyngham that I have been enabled to collect the material of this work, as well as those relating to the description of the Royal Monastery of Batalha, I feel it my indispensable duty most gratefully to acknowledge the many obligations I owe to his constant patronage and friendship.

One of the subscribers to the book on Batalha was the director of the Society of Antiquaries of London, Richard Gough, author of *Sepulchral Monuments of Great Britain*, the second volume of which was published in 1796.<sup>2</sup> In the introduction, Gough repeated his constant encouragement of the recording of the monuments of the Gothic period, and cited Murphy's book as a model, 'done by a single artist, under private patronage, in a most perfect manner, for the monastery of Batalha, which owed its foundation to an intermarriage with a princess of England, and to an English architect' (Plate 1).<sup>3</sup>

Twelve members of the Society of Antiquaries were subscribers to *Batalha*, including its patron and dedicatee, who had been elected fellow in 1790. This is recorded in the sixth volume of John Nichols' *Literary Illustrations of the Eighteenth Century*, where a tribute to William Burton Conyngham from the

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1 – *Plan of the church and mausolea of Batalha*

*The chapter house is on the north; the mausoleum of the founder on the south; the unfinished mausoleum on the east.*  
(from Howard Colvin, *ARCHITECTURE AND THE AFTERLIFE* (Yale UP, 1991) 181)

*European Magazine* of 1794 precedes an account of the life of James Cavanah Murphy and a transcription of five letters from the architect to his patron written from Portugal in 1789 and 1790. Nichols had copied these from a copybook in the possession of Thomas Crofton Croker. This author, too, was a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London, to which he had presented in 1830 ‘the original drawings of Mr. Murphy’s magnificent work on Batalha’,<sup>4</sup> which are the subject of this essay. Their presence in the library of the Society has been noted in the literature of the Gothic Revival and in biographical notices of the architect, but they have not previously been examined in detail, nor in the context of the letters of the architect and the antiquarian studies of the patron.<sup>5</sup>

William Burton Conyngham enjoyed a more than modest reputation as a collector of studies of antiquity. The tribute in *European Magazine* reads:

The collection of drawings relating to Irish churches, abbeys, and castles, in his possession is esteemed the most valuable extant, and there are but few objects of antiquity in Spain and Portugal of which he had not drawings, as he travelled through these countries accompanied by three ingenious artists he employed for that purpose.

This was the immediate context for Murphy’s book on Batalha, in the preface to which the artist wrote: ‘My first knowledge of this venerable pile, was derived from seeing some sketches of it in the possession of the Right Honourable William Conyngham, taken by himself and two other Gentlemen who travelled with him through Portugal in 1783.’<sup>6</sup> In the first of his letters to his patron, dated simply March 1789, he wrote: ‘Your elegant sketches of this fine Building often led me to think on the grandeur of the original, which I think is one of the finest pieces of Gothic architecture in Europe.’<sup>7</sup> Those sketches have not come to light, but they were sufficiently informative to enable Murphy to leave in Dublin a large plan of the church and monastery of Batalha before he had ever seen it (referred to in the same letter). This early study may account in part for the brevity of the period of thirteen weeks it took him to compile the album of drawings now in London, without shirking on details. ‘Where any part is executed with uncommon judgment, difficulty or elegance,’ he wrote, ‘I have drawn it with the minuteness of a Desgodetz.’<sup>8</sup> He also studied a diary kept by his patron on his visit to Batalha, and translated from it *An Account of the modern establishment of the Royal Convent of Batalha*, written in French by one of the friars for William Burton Conyngham.<sup>9</sup> The other literary source he mentions is the account of the buildings given in 1622 by Fr Lewis de Sousa in Portuguese, which Murphy was later to translate for inclusion in his book, ‘from forty-five pages of large quarto, which I esteem the more as you charged me to collect as much of the history of this convent as possible’.<sup>10</sup> His one reference to the earlier travel account in English by Richard Twiss is dismissive,

justifiably, since Twiss declined an invitation to lodge in the monastery, ‘as I saw they had little or nothing to eat, and less to drink’.<sup>11</sup> Murphy seems to be correct in noting the absence of any earlier drawings of Batalha other than those his patron had collected in 1783 and 1784.

There was, however, an earlier written description in manuscript, well known to the fellows of the Society of Antiquaries of London, that made in 1760 by Thomas Pitt, later Lord Camelford, who was also a subscriber to Murphy’s book. The original has not come to light, but there is a transcription of it by William Cole, the antiquary from Cambridge, who had travelled in Portugal with Pitt’s uncle, Temple West, in 1737 and 1738.<sup>12</sup> Another of Pitt’s uncles was the president of the Society of Antiquaries of London, Bishop Charles Lyttelton, a pioneer of the study of the history of Gothic architecture, and recipient of the only letter known to have been written by Thomas Pitt from Portugal, dated 24th March 1760.<sup>13</sup> The Iberian diary of his nephew was passed eagerly among the fellows of the Society, and the copy made by William Cole in 1772 had been given to him by Michael Tyson, who had, in turn, received it from Richard Gough, director of the Society. As we have noted, he too was a subscriber to Murphy’s book and was the first to single it out as an exemplar for the study of Gothic monuments.<sup>14</sup> This antiquarian background is the most reasonable explanation for the difference between Murphy’s early outline for the book in his letter of March 1789 and the work that was published in twenty-five plates from 1792 to 1795.<sup>15</sup>

The outline had listed nine drawings in all, the first four of which were plans. Of these, only the first, *A General Plan of the Church and Monastery*, was realised in the earliest plate, published on 17th May 1792. The three drawings that followed were elevations of the south, north and west fronts, of which only the north was realised fully in the second plate, published ten days later. These were double-page plates engraved by Samuel Porter, who was responsible also for *West Elevation of the Church*, on a single page, and *The West elevation of the Refectory*, also on a single page. The final two drawings were to have been sections of the entire building from east to west and a separate section of the unfinished mausoleum at large, neither of which was realised.

One senses a shift from enthusiasm for the specifically Portuguese character of decoration at Batalha – the Manueline style of its latest phase, evident in the unfinished mausoleum – to the architecture of the earlier church and monastery, which has more in common with the Gothic architecture of England and France. One-third of the drawings listed in the outline are of the unfinished mausoleum. None was realised. However, three-and-a-half plates of the book are devoted to the mausoleum of King John and his English wife Queen Philippa, not mentioned in that list. The chapter house is ignored also in the outline, though Murphy’s admiration of its structural daring cannot be doubted;<sup>16</sup> in the book it receives a separate

plate and it shares with the mausoleum of King John the details of the plate *Ornaments, Mottos &c.*

William Burton Conyngnam's election to fellowship of the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1790 may well account for this major shift in emphasis. He was, perhaps, in London for his election, and may have been introduced to the Pitt account of travels in Portugal and Spain by Richard Gough or other fellows of the Society, who would have been aware of his very recent publication in the current issue of *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* on the theatre at Saguntum in Spain, and inscriptions found there.<sup>17</sup> James Cavanah Murphy was certainly in London at the end of October 1790 at the conclusion of a brief tour that included the study and sketching of Gothic architecture in York, Cambridge and Ely.<sup>18</sup>

Thomas Pitt's first reaction to the sight of Batalha was one of wonder and amazement – 'the most elaborate and exquisite Gothic architecture I ever saw', he wrote. 'It requires the pencil of a painter, rather than the pen of description, to give an idea of it, to one who has not seen it.' He gave a brief but admiring account of the great west front, 'adorned with a multitude of decreasing mouldings, in pointed arches without columns; the mouldings being filled with little images in tabernacle work, which being continued in the moldings of the arch seem suspended in air.' He also emphasised the connection with England:

the Founder, John I and his wife, Philippa, daughter to our John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, lies in a most lovely Chapel ... the pillars with clustered columns, & ribbing of the vaulting, are the last degree of lightness & elegance, particularly the centre stone, which is the finest open lace-work I ever saw. The Building, for the honour of our Country, was executed by an Englishman, who lies in the nave, with an inscription over him

His account of the unfinished mausoleum makes reference particularly to the 'most curious' architecture of the entrance arch:

A trefoil of prodigious size with different foliage of the most beautiful kind imaginable. The variety of the work is surprising, as well as the skill in the execution of it being quite hollow. Tho' carved in the same stone, the tabernacles for images carved quite into the middle of the stone, where one would think no tool could reach, without spoiling the rest.<sup>19</sup>

It is unnecessary to labour the point that the plates devoted to the unfinished mausoleum in James Murphy's book, confined to discrete parts such as the entrance, arches, and *Columns, Ornaments and Hieroglyphics*, conform far more closely to the written description of Thomas Pitt than do the plans and section at large of the outline proposed by Murphy in 1789. So too does the amount of attention given to the mausoleum of the founder and its tombs, not mentioned in that outline. The

change of emphasis would have special appeal for the director of the Society of Antiquaries, who had authored a first successful volume of *Sepulchral Monuments* and was about to produce its sequel. Murphy's book on Batalha must be seen at least in part as inspired by the agenda of the Society of Antiquaries of London at the end of the eighteenth century, under the direction of Richard Gough.

Another fellow of the Society of Antiquaries who was of first importance to William Burton Conyngham during these years was Francis Grose, author of several books on the antiquities of the British Isles, who had died in Dublin in 1791 when extending his research into the antiquities of Ireland. His work was continued textually by Edward Ledwich, and published in two volumes between 1791 and 1796, using the drawings in the collection of William Burton Conyngham as illustrations.<sup>20</sup> The second volume was dedicated to Conyngham in recognition of his generosity in making the drawings (mostly by Gabriel Berenger) available for engraving by Samuel Hooper in London. It includes one plate, *View of the Lavabo at Mellifont Abbey*, stated to be by James Murphy, who presumably kept a watchful eye on that publication during the process of engraving in London, which coincided with the engraving of his plates for his book on Batalha.

William Burton Conyngham died at the end of May 1796. It is to be hoped he lived long enough to appreciate the dedications to him of these major works which owed so much to his generosity. His energy and persistence in the promotion of the recording and publication of Irish antiquities has long been recognised: 'Through his membership of the antiquities committee of the Dublin Society, his presidency of the Hibernian Antiquities Society, and his founding membership of the Royal Irish Academy he played an important facilitative role in the advancement of antiquarian scholarship,' James Kelly has written. 'He was deserving of the accolade of *superior patriot* bestowed on him by Charles O'Connor.'<sup>21</sup>

While this is true, its emphasis on the Irish dimension of his achievement may well obscure the impetus his patronage gave to the Gothic Revival internationally in providing the Society of Antiquaries of London with an exemplar for monographs on medieval monuments at a time when this body of scholarly literature started to flourish under the direction of Richard Gough. 'It was the first volume illustrative of medieval antiquities comparable in standard to the great volumes on classical antiquities published earlier in the century.'<sup>22</sup> It neglects also the theoretical dimension of James Murphy's book on Batalha, the aspect to which foreign editors were particularly attracted. A translation in German of Murphy's *Introductory Discourse on the Principles of Gothic Architecture*, with twelve plates, appeared in Leipzig in 1813, and his book was already well known to propagandists of the Gothic Revival in that country.<sup>23</sup> The impact of the book upon the practice of architecture of the Gothic Revival, evident particularly in the work of James Wyatt and his nephew and associates, several of whom were subscribers to *Batalha*, is a fur-

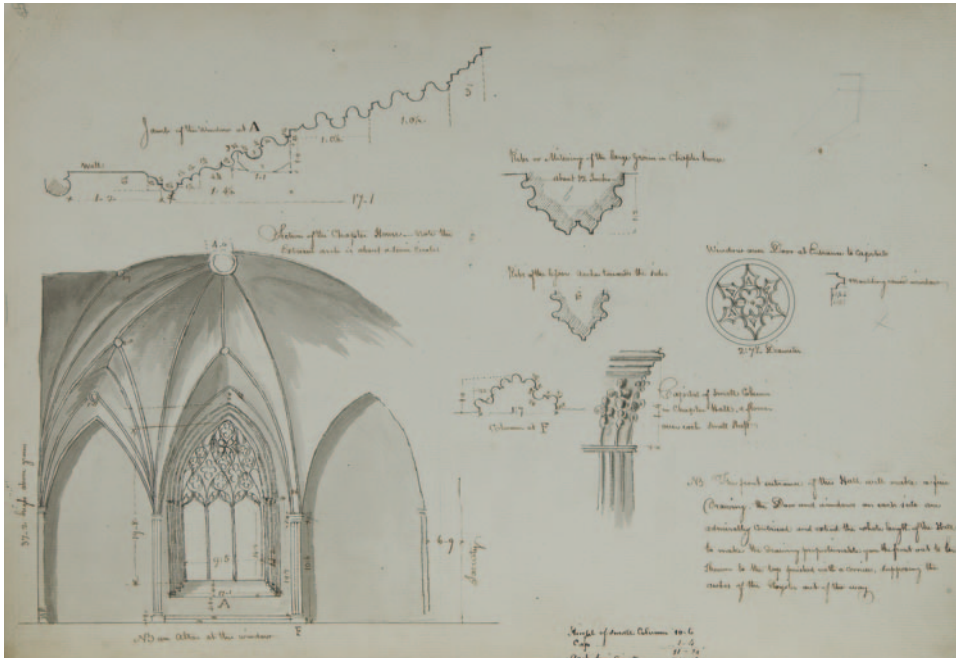
ther dimension of the patronage of James Burton Conyngham that is overlooked in the emphasis on his contribution to Irish antiquity.<sup>24</sup> These will be the subject of a later study.

## THE CHAPTER HOUSE

There is no mention in the account by Thomas Pitt in 1760 of the chapter house of the monastery, which had served as repository for the tombs of King Alphonso V, who died in 1481, and his grandson Prince Alfonso, both removed to the west wall of the mausoleum of the founder in 1901. Richard Twiss, however, had described its principal architectural features: 'a cube of twenty-three paces ... The roof of this chapel is vaulted in the shape of a star with eight points, and is without support.' He specifies that the bodies lay 'in two chests'.<sup>25</sup> Three altars for the celebration of masses for the deceased were also in the room, but they were removed at some time before it was dedicated to its present use in 1924 as the repository for the national Tomb of the Unknown Warrior to commemorate the Portuguese dead of the First World War.<sup>26</sup> Neither chest nor altar, this is a slab in the floor, which does not obstruct the view of the marvel of structural engineering that is the vault, with its slender ribbing springing elegantly from the walls to the starred centrepiece without any intervening support. This has attracted legends from the start, which, like the inscriptions on all the tombs, are recorded by Murphy at second-hand from the Portuguese of Fr Lewis de Sousa in his book on Batalha.<sup>27</sup> But it evoked spirited drawings and admiring comments from him, and he wrote the following description in his *Travels in Portugal*:

In point of construction the Chapter-House might be considered a masterpiece of architecture. Its plan forms a square, each side of which measures sixty-four feet, and is covered with a vault of hewn stone. The principal ribs spring from slender shafts, and branch out in different directions as they approach to the centre, where all the radiating nerves, in the form of a star, encircle an ornamented patera.<sup>28</sup>

Six drawings are devoted to the meticulous measuring of the structural and ornamental features of the chapter house, the inscription of which reads: 'Note the extrem arch is about a semi-circle' (Plate 2). The dimension of the arch is 31:6, noted with the height of the small columns and their capitals, 10:6 and 1:4 respectively, to give the 'Whole height from floor to crown of center part 43:4'. On the same sheet is a detail of the capital of the small columns, noting a flower over each shaft, and a second detail outlines the tracery of the circular window over the entrance. In the lower-left of the sheet is the admiring comment: 'N.B. The front



## 2 – Section and details of the chapter house (f.45)

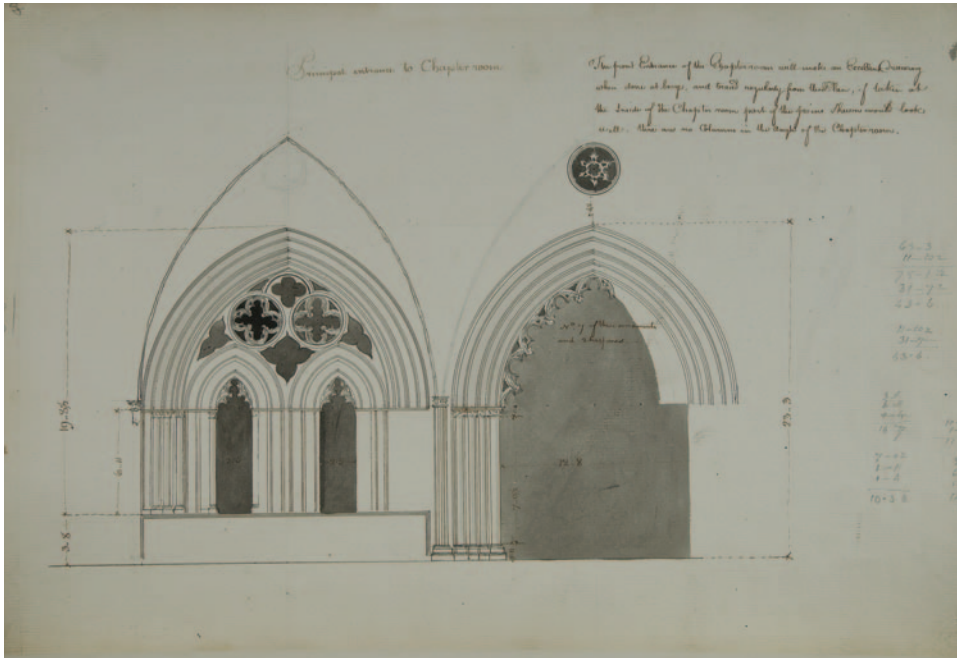
(Unless otherwise stated, all illustrations are by James Cavanah Murphy from the album *BATALHA*, ORIGINAL DRAWINGS in the library of the Society of Antiquaries of London, ref. MS 260. All are pen and wash over pencil on paper, each 36 x 26 cm, except where noted differently. Reproduced by permission of the Society of Antiquaries of London.)

entrance of this Hall will make a fine drawing. The Door and windows on each side are admirably contrived and extend the whole length.' This is the preparatory drawing, therefore, of the plate *A Section of the Chapter House at Batalha*, engraved by Wilson Lowry, though for the plate it is combined with f.49, titled *Principal Entrance to Chapter room*, an elevation drawing taken from the cloister, the inscriptions of which repeat the sentiments of f.45 (Plate 3).

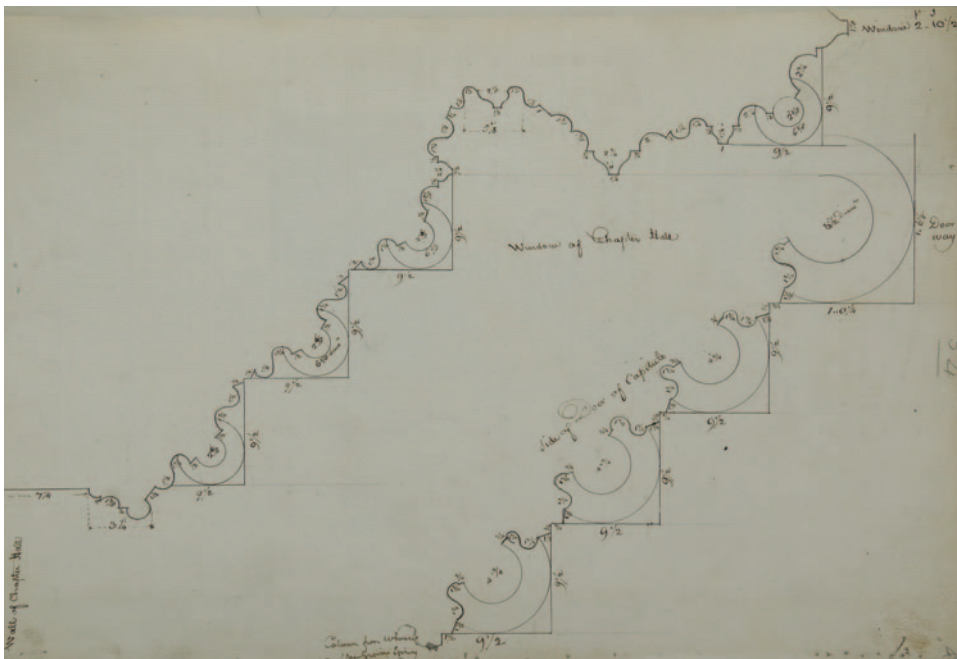
The most extensive sheet of measured profiles of mouldings rendered with hatching are devoted to the chapter house (ff. 47, 48), the first of which carries the note: 'N.B. the columns at the door at E the same height as the columns in Cloyster and 10in. diameter. The top of the small columns ranged with those at the door.' The right-hand of the sheet bears the measured profiles of the bases of the small columns to the windows and the larger columns at the entrance. This folio is shorter than the normal sheets, 35 x 22 cm as opposed to 36 x 26 cm, and the profiles are repeated at large and without hatching, but minutely measured, on the following sheet, f.48 (Plate 4).

The chapter house also occasioned the finest sheet of bases and capitals rendered in wash on f.46. The architect-artist was struck by the delicacy and depth of





3, 4, 5 – Chapter house  
Entrance (f.49), profiles of columns (f.48), and (opposite) details of columns (f.46)







above 6 – Figure in the south-east corner of the chapter house, said to represent the architect (f.50)

left 7 – Sepulchral effigies of King John I and Queen Phillipa (f.23)

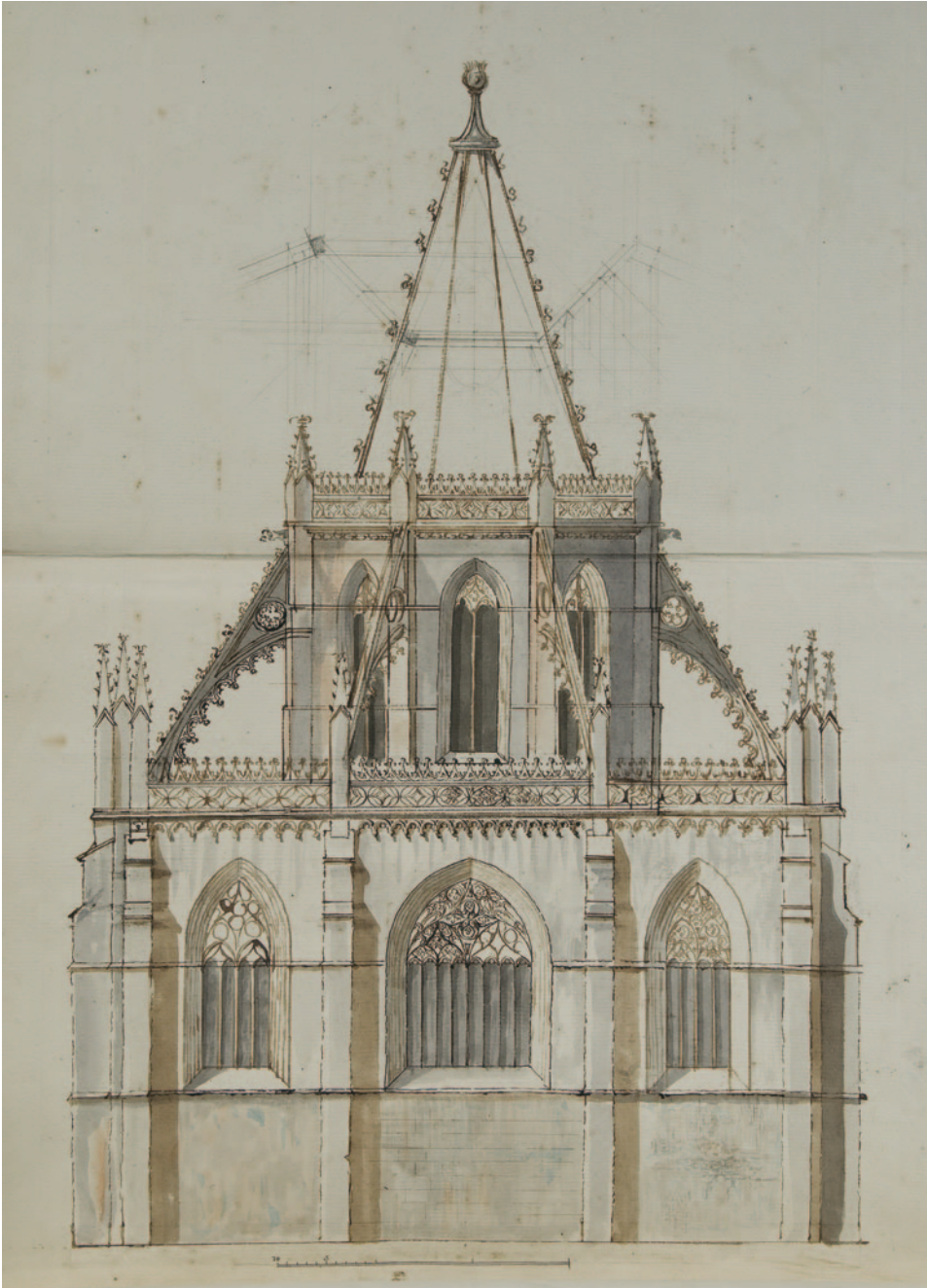
carving of the floral ornament of the capitals, remarking of the capitals of the columns on each side of the entrance: ‘Flowers raised from one and a half to two inches’, and of the capitals of the three-quarter columns on the sides of the entrance: ‘Relieved 2 inches’ (Plate 5). A detail from the chapter house is drawn on f.50, labelled: ‘Figure in the SE corner of Chapter House placed under one of the ribs of the Groins, supposed to be the architect of the Church’. He is described with a wash-shadow and bistre accents in the drawing, holding a measuring rod with an alert and lively expression. That was unfortunately lost in the engraving found on the plate titled *Ornaments, Mottos &c.*, out of place among the details from the mausoleum of the founder in one sense, but not in the sense that it represents the master builder, probably named Huguet, who designed and supervised the construction and ornament of both memorial spaces (Plate 6).

## THE MAUSOLEUM OF KING JOHN I

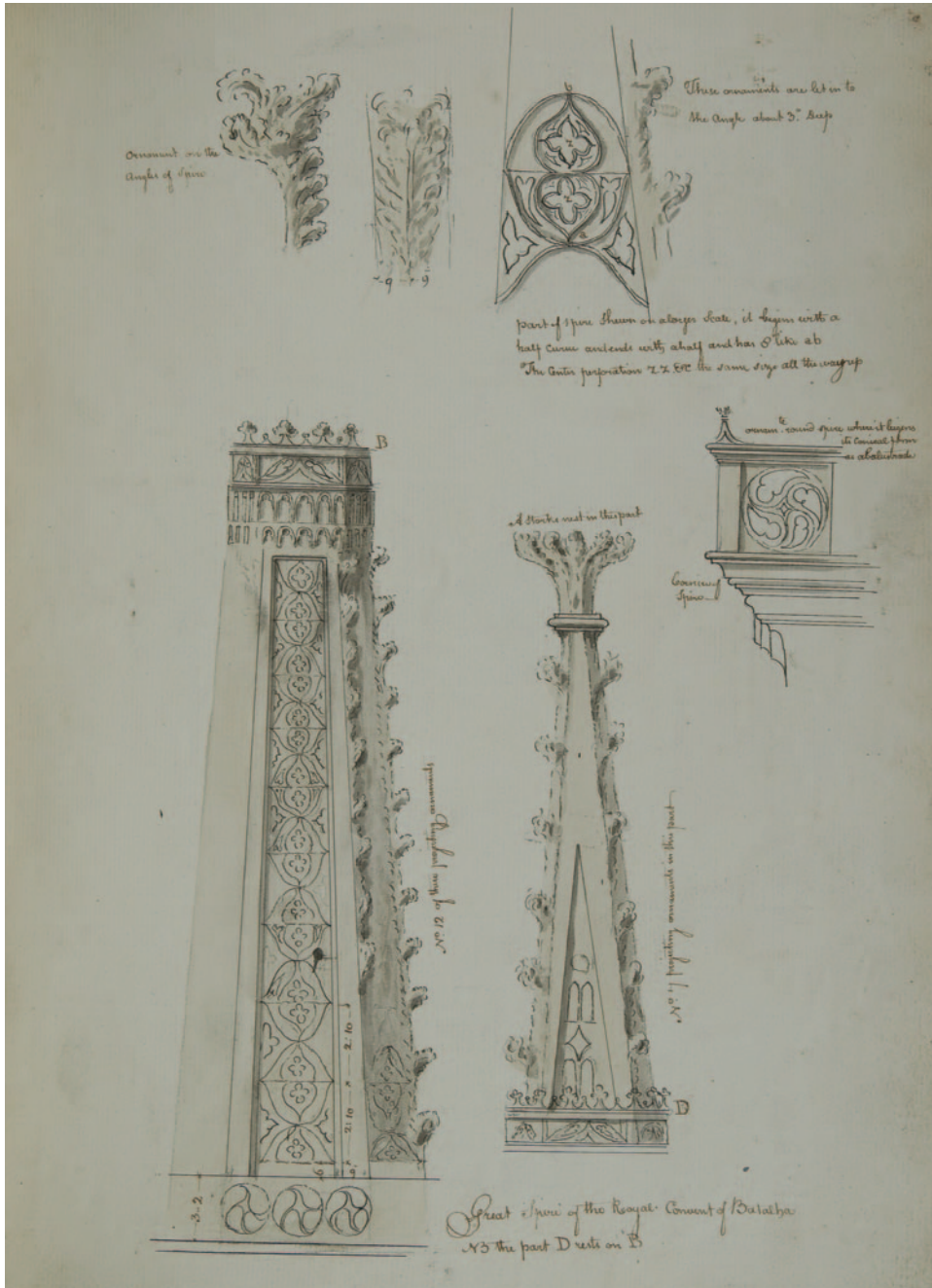
THE INTERIOR OF THE MAUSOLEUM OF KING JOHN IS REMARKABLE FOR ITS COMBINATION of spatial complexity and geometric simplicity. An octagonal core of clustered columns rises within a square chamber through two storeys to a star vault, the ribs of which collect the energies of the upward movement of columns and arches in an area filled with light from the eight windows of the walls of the octagon. This is supported by flying buttresses that transfer the weight to the buttresses of the lower walls, allowing those walls, too, to be pierced by windows originally filled with stained glass. Beneath the vault of the octagon is placed the tomb of the founder, King John I, shown recumbent and with his hand in that of his wife Queen Philippa (f.23), a drawing in ink and wash that differs from the engraving in the book, *Effigies of King John and Queen Philippa*, mainly in the absence of the canopies over their heads, described as ‘a triple canopy of curious workmanship, in the Gothic manner’ (Plate 7).

Surprisingly, there is no further verbal description of the mausoleum of the founder, though admiring accounts had been written by Thomas Pitt and Richard Twiss, who had each mentioned the connection with the English queen. Inscriptions on the tombs are given at length in *Batalha* and repeated in *Travels in Portugal*.<sup>29</sup> The external elevation from the south is shown in one of the plates, and the similar west elevation is on the right side of the engraving by Samuel Porter titled *West Elevation of the Church*, for which f.2 is the preparatory drawing. Both show the structure completed with an octagonal spire of pierced stonework with ornamented ribs, though no such spire exists today. Nor did it exist in 1789, because it had been destroyed in the aftermath of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. The preparatory drawing for these plates is f.21, exceptional in being a gatefold sheet (45 x 33 cm), bound into the volume (Plate 8) The non-existent spire is sketched without its perforations and with only two ribs ornamented. The architect-artist could not resist the temptation to restore this structure, and he claims to have taken the design ‘from an old painting in one of the windows of the Church’.<sup>30</sup>

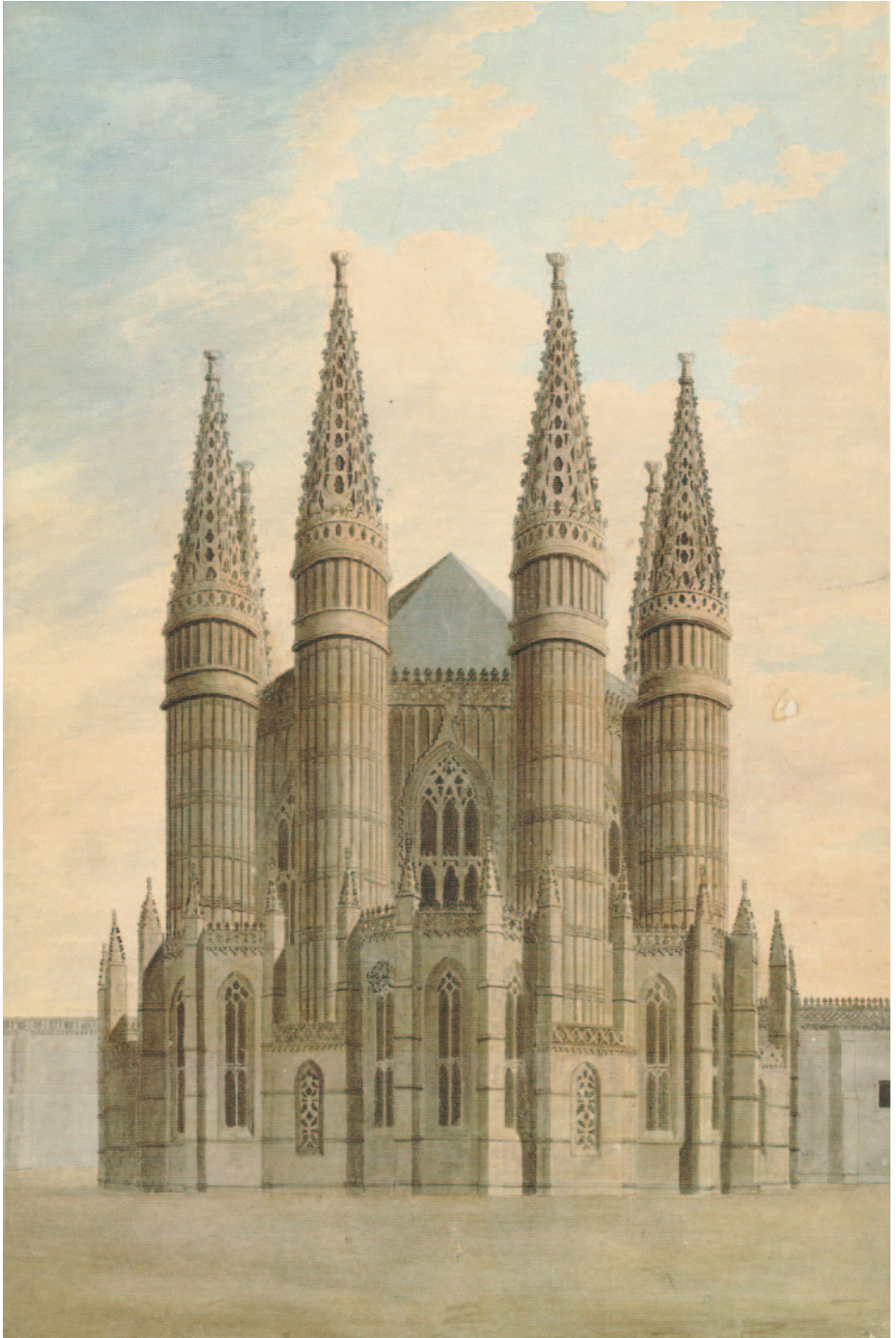
No such window exists today, and it is probable that for his reconstruction Murphy looked to the structure of the Great or Stork Tower adjoining the chapter house in the royal cloister. This tower also suffered in the calamity of 1755, but had since been repaired. It is the subject in plan, elevation and section of the plate titled *The Spire of the North end of the Transept*. This is based on f.44 for the plans of the three storeys of the tower and ff. 40 and 41 for the elevations in outline and detail (Plate 9). Ornamental motifs are described at large in ff. 42 and 43, the last inscribed ‘Ornament running up the angle of the Great Spire taken on the spot’, indicating that his study of the details was made at some danger to life and limb for the architect. His reconstruction of the upper stage of the founder’s mausoleum is

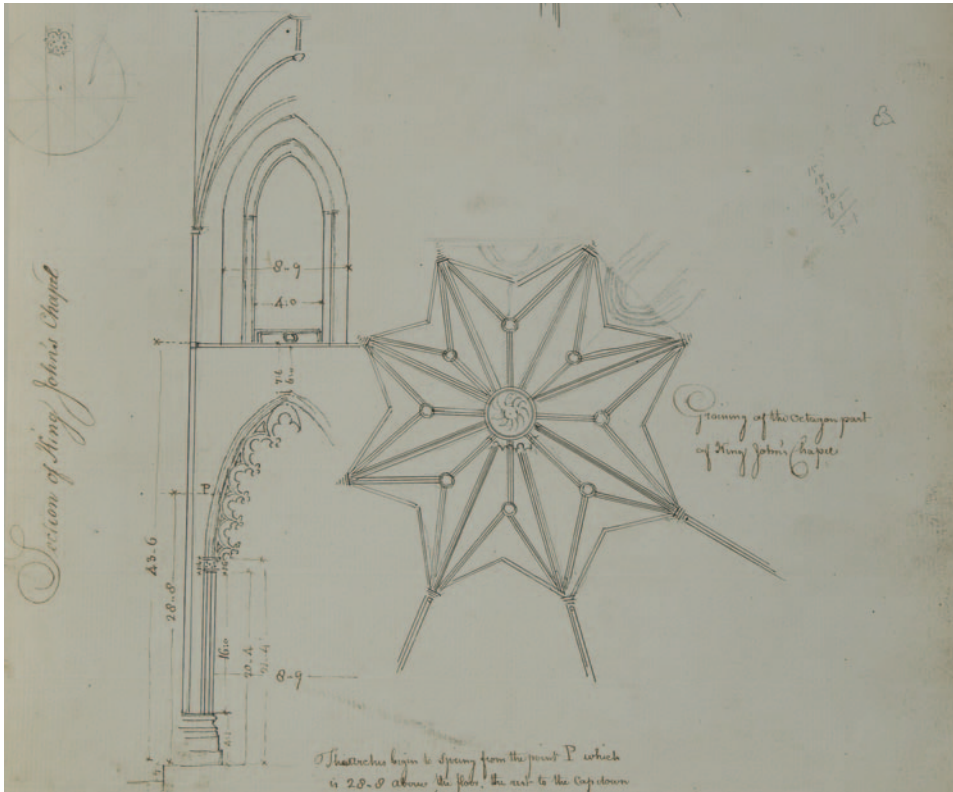


8 – South elevation of the mausoleum of the founder with restored spire, 45 x 33 cm (f.21)



9 – Elevation of the great spire of Batalha with details (f.41)





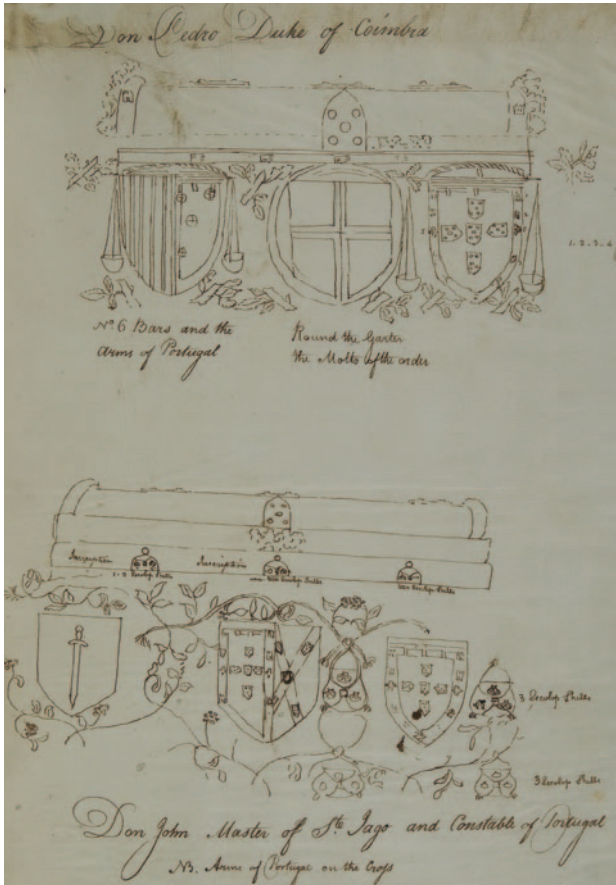
11 – Section of the mausoleum of the founder with groining of the octagon (f.11)

opposite 10 – Proposal for the completion of the unfinished chapels or mausoleum of King Emmanuel  
pen, ink and watercolour on paper on board, 472 x 308 cm (British Museum, Prints and Drawings, 16AN216076)

quite convincing, but his use of the same motifs in the later reconstruction of the upper stages of the buttresses of the unfinished mausoleum – seen in the plate *Design for completing the mausoleum of King Emmanuel* – is less happy. The preparatory drawing for this plate is in the collection of the British Museum (Plate 10).<sup>31</sup>

A measured elevation of one bay of the internal core of the mausoleum of the founder is described in an ink drawing titled ‘Section of King John’s Chapel’ on the left of the sheet, f.11, and ‘Groining of the Octagon point of King John’s Chapel’ on the right (Plate 11). It is a beautiful drawing in displaying the admiration the architect-artist clearly felt for the integrity of the architecture and its ornamental features. These are elaborated in coloured wash in f.22, inscribed ‘Centre part of King John the First Chapel’, followed by dimensions and the remarks: ‘The centre part is covered with a cobweb under which is to be seen a shield with a figure on each side. The whole has a beautiful effect, the incisions are very much sunk, which gives it





12 – Drawing by J. Taylor Jnr of coats of arms from the mausoleum of the founder (f.24)

great relief.’ Below are detailed drawings of three smaller bosses, labelled ‘Pateras in the groining of the side ailes of King John’s Chapel – the leaves are coloured red, yellow, green &c.’ All these are reproduced in the plate *Ornaments, Mottos &c.*, which also shows the helmet, battleaxe and sword on the same sheet, and the variety of floriated capitals of the columns of the mausoleum, shown with measured profiles in ink and wash in f.12 and itemised on page 20.

The plate titled *Section of the Mausoleum of King John I* shows the four tombs installed against the east wall, with the names and coats of arms of their occupants. The preparatory drawing is f.15 in ink and wash, with dimensions, inscribed ‘Sketch of the Tombs in K. John’s Chapel. Note the four are alike except in the arms cut on the Dado part’. These arms are drawn on light onion paper glued to the sheets of ff. 24 and 25, and the legend of the plate reads on the right ‘Etched by the author. Finished by J. Taylor’, who is also mentioned on the title page of the book, where he was responsible for the figures (Plate 12).

## THE UNFINISHED MAUSOLEUM

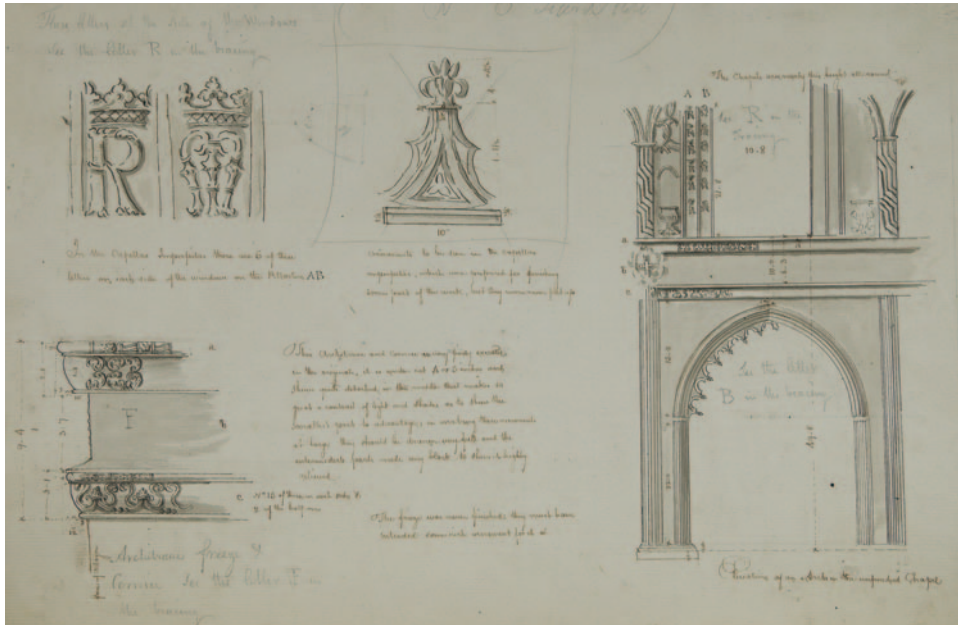
‘HAD IT BEEN FINISHED, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN THE RICHEST PIECE OF GOTHIC work in Europe’, Thomas Pitt had exclaimed on examining the mausoleum of King Emmanuel or *Capellas Imperfectas* at the east end of the church.<sup>32</sup> Richard Twiss had expressed admiration for the carving, but had offered only a summary description – ‘a spacious octagon chapel without a roof, as it was left unfinished’.<sup>33</sup>

There are five preparatory drawings in pen and ink for doorways and arches of the unfinished mausoleum on the same light paper glued to ff. 58, 59 (which has subtle touches of wash), 60, 61 and 64. Two further drawings devoted to the unfinished mausoleum are technical in character and delineated in outline – f.63 titled ‘Plan of the Second Story’, which also contains an outline of an arched doorway and several ornaments, and f.78, ‘Groins of the Capellas Imperfectas’. But in ff. 51-55 and f.62, a grey wash is used sensitively to convey depth in larger structural features – in f.55, for instance, ‘Elevation of an Arch’ (Plate 13) and f.54, ‘Column of Capellas Imperfectas externally’ (Plate 14), as well as in details such as the architrave and cornice of the arch to the right of the former drawing, with the remark:

very finely executed in the original. It is undercut 4 or 5 inches and shews quite detached in the middle that makes so great a contrast of light and shade as to shew the smallest part to advantage: in making these ornaments at large they should be drawn very full and the intermediate parts made very black to shew it highly relieved.

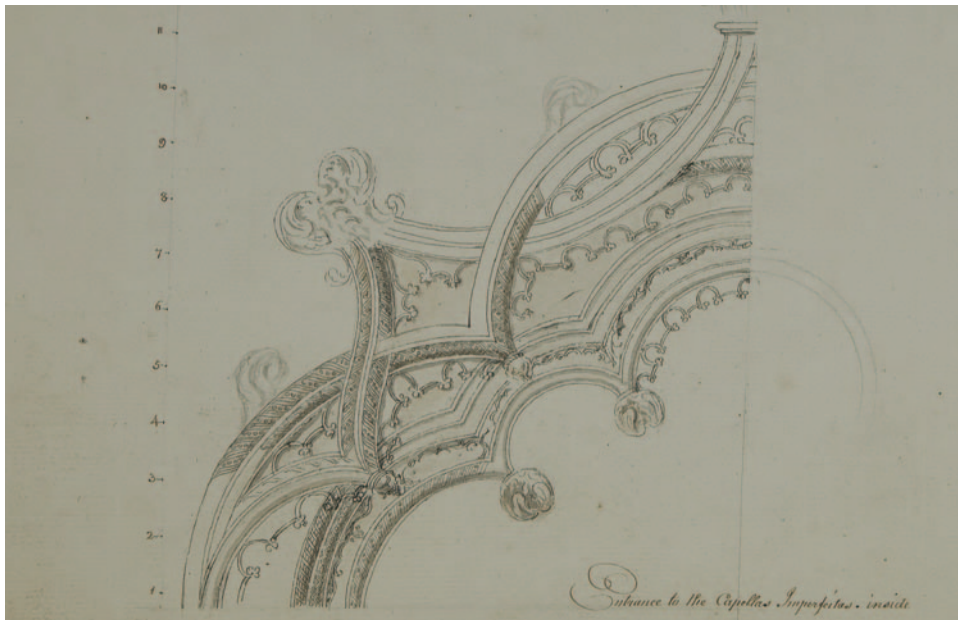
Such enthusiastic admiration for the art of the sculptor responsible for the decoration of the cornice is echoed in the crispness of the engraving by James Walker in the lower-left of the plate titled *Columns, Ornaments, and Hieroglyphics in the Mausoleum of King Emmanuel I*. It compensates a little for the draughtsman’s rueful comment: ‘The frieze was never finished. They must have intended some rich ornament for it.’ The crowned letters RM are also on that plate, as are mottoes and ornament from f.62. The delicately ornamented columns above these are from a subtle wash drawing of a half-elevation of the entrance, marked TC in the upper right of f.59, to which f.58 is preparatory and bears the warning: ‘Do not depend on this. Look at TC drawing’. Unfortunately the delicacy is lost in the engraving by Wilson Lowry and the otherwise unmentioned assistant (one Clare), *The Entrance of the Mausoleum*, the plate dedicated to the Prince of Brazil, the future King Jaoa VI.

The upper curve of the inside of the entrance arch to the mausoleum is a very graceful composition of intersecting segmental and triangular arcs outlined in ink in ff. 60 and 61. The left half of the arch is drawn in f.52, ‘Entrance to the Capellas

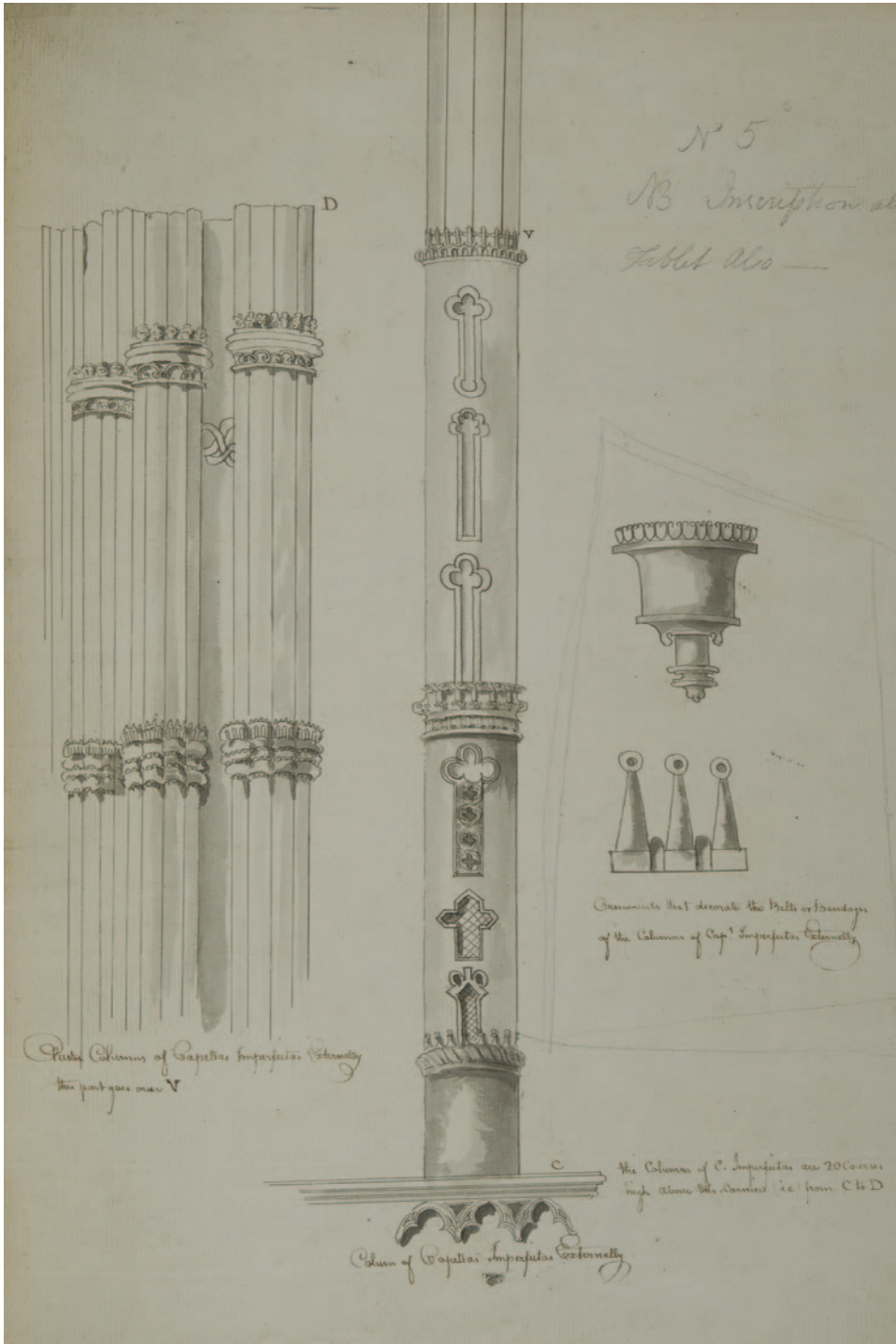


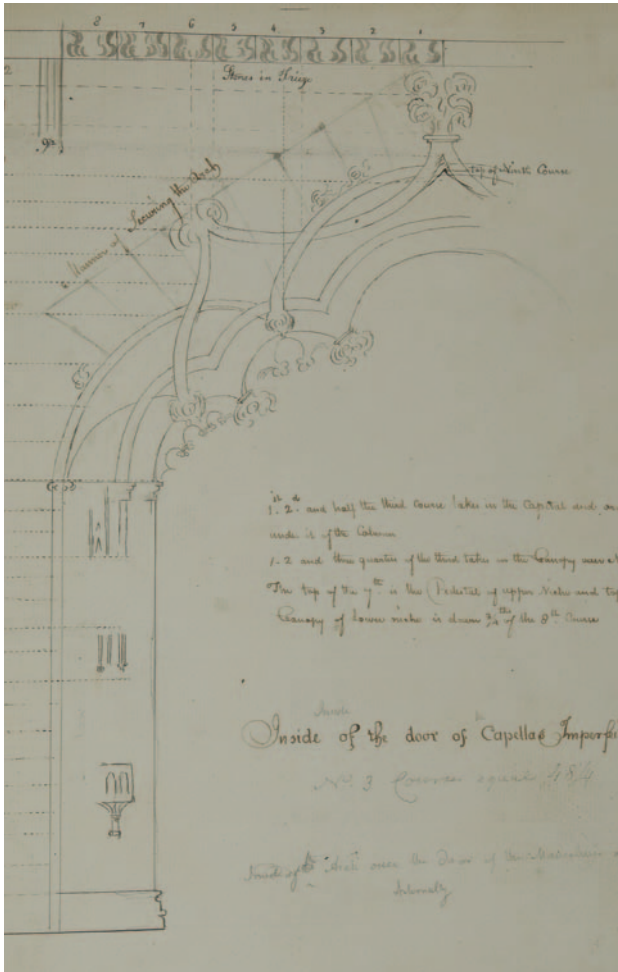
*The unfinished mausoleum*

- 13 – Arch, with details of ornament (f.55)
- opposite 14 – Columns, with details of ornament (f.54)
- 15 – Arch detail in entrance door (f.52)



THREE MAUSOLEA AND A CHURCH



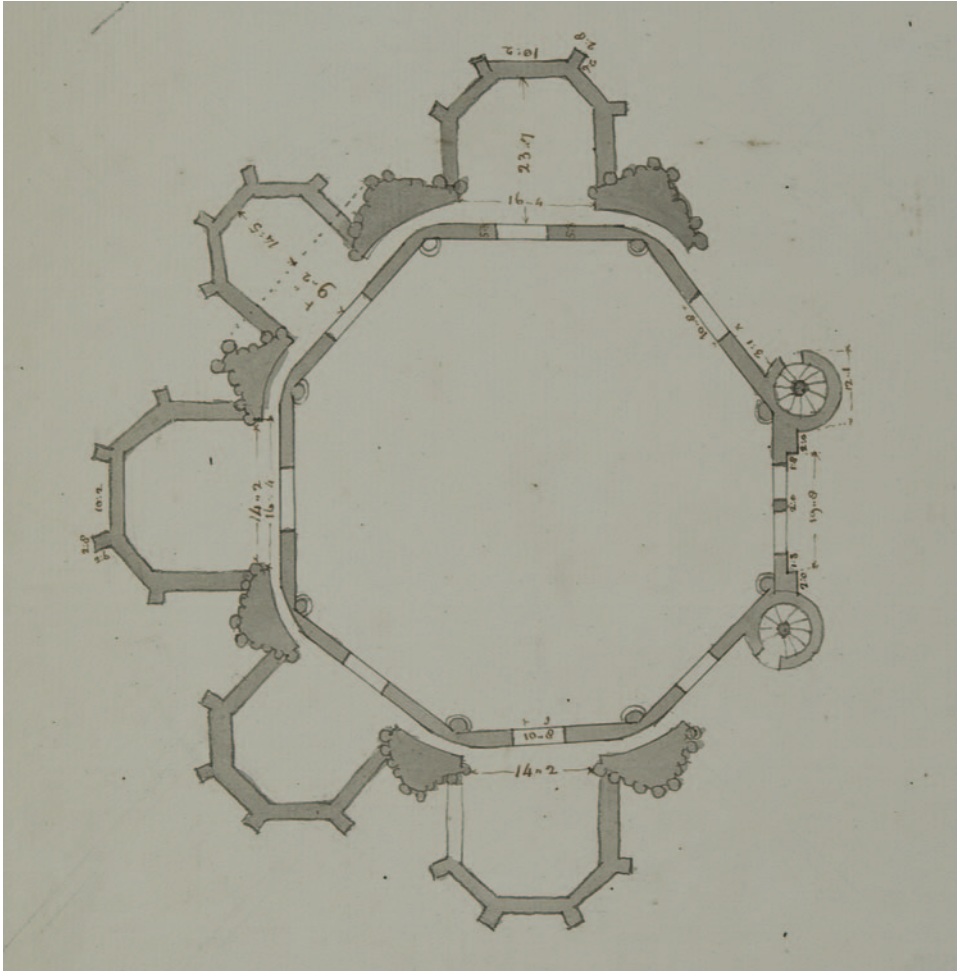


*The unfinished mausoleum*

16 – Interior of the door (f.53)

opposite 17 – Plan (f.51)

Imperfectas. Inside' (Plate 15). This is one of the most attractive renderings in wash of the energetic movement of the springing of the elaborately decorated composition. The print in the upper part of the plate titled *Arches appertaining to the Mausoleum*, the engraver of which is not named, deadens the design, alas, by inking in the interstices. Fortunately, the same error was not made in the lower part of the plate, a doorway whose purpose puzzled the architect, as is has other commentators, but whose artistry compelled his admiration: 'It would make a fine effect from the body of the Church', he wrote.<sup>34</sup> There are two drawings for this doorway, f.53 for its internal elevation (Plate 16) and f.51 for the exterior, the one fancied to make a grand impression (Plate 18). It is shaded with differing densities of wash in the turn of the arch, and neat hatching gives the meticulous measurements of the profiles of



the clustered columns, which are also rendered in outline to the left with their floriated capitals.

The plan of the unfinished mausoleum is in the upper-right of the double plate, *A General Plan of the Church and Royal Monastery of Batalha*, for which f.57 is a preparatory drawing in ink and wash, scaled and with measurements (Plate 17). There is also a measured plan in outline of the second story of the mausoleum, which was not engraved, although originally an engraving was intended. No elevation drawing of the exterior is known, though f.56, which is of the exterior of the chancel and apse of the church, is misleadingly titled in the hand of the author, 'Capellas Imperfectas' (Plate 19). The elevation of the mausoleum is at the extreme left of the double plate engraved by Samuel Porter, *The North Elevation of the*



18 - Exterior of the door of the unfinished mausoleum (f.51)

*Church of Batalha.* The author gives a verbal description in *Travels in Portugal*:

At the rear of the church is an unfinished Mausoleum of a curious form, wherein the architect has exhibited no superficial knowledge of geometry, or the principles of sound and elegant design. In point of workmanship, neither the pen nor the pencil is adequate to express its real merits; for, though most objects, when transferred to the canvas appear to advantage, this, on the contrary, though delineated by the most ingenious artist, upon examination, will appear more beautiful than any representation of it. And for these reasons, the marble is polished, the sculpture in many parts detached from the centre of the block, and so minutely carved, that to preserve all the expressive marks and touches of the chisel, it is not possible to condense them into a smaller compass: so that, to convey a true idea of the whole, the picture would require to be as large as the prototype.<sup>35</sup>

#### THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF VICTORY

THE CHURCH TO WHICH THESE SPLENDID MAUSOLEA ARE APPENDED IS RELATIVELY unadorned internally, though we and the architect-author are not privileged to witness its former glories since the destruction wrought to the stained-glass windows by the earthquake of 1755. Whatever ornaments are employed in it', wrote Murphy,

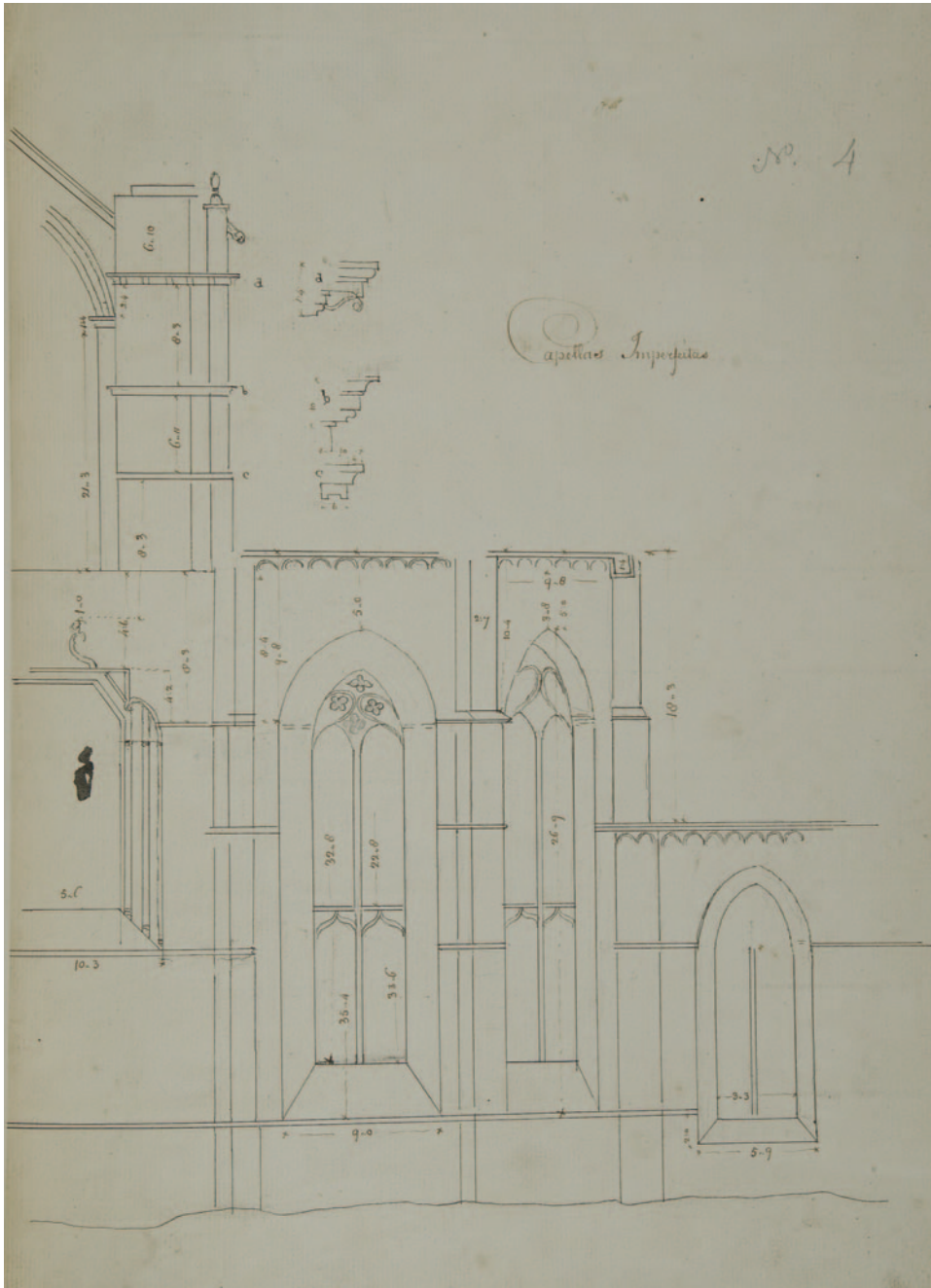
are sparingly, but judiciously disposed; particularly in the inside, which is remarkable for a chaste and noble plainness: and the general effect, which is grand and sublime, is derived, not from any meretricious embellishments, but from the intrinsic merit of the design.<sup>36</sup>

The forms of its mouldings and ornaments are also different from those of any other Gothic building that I have seen. The difference chiefly consists in their being turned very quick, cut sharp and deep, with some other peculiarities which cannot be well explained in writing.

The author-artist is to be congratulated in the circumstances for his renderings of six capitals and the base of a column in f.36 (Plate 20). They are engraved on the top line of the plate *Ornaments, Mottos, &c.*, but with inevitable loss of liveliness in the detail. 'The flowers are so highly relieved', reads one inscription, 'that they appear detached from the capital.' These capitals reappear in measured profiles in the plate engraved by Wilson Lowry, *Elevation of one of the Pillars of the Church*, for which there is no preparatory drawing. Murphy concluded his account of the architecture:

Throughout the whole are seen a correctness and regularity, evidently the





*Church of Our Lady of Victories*

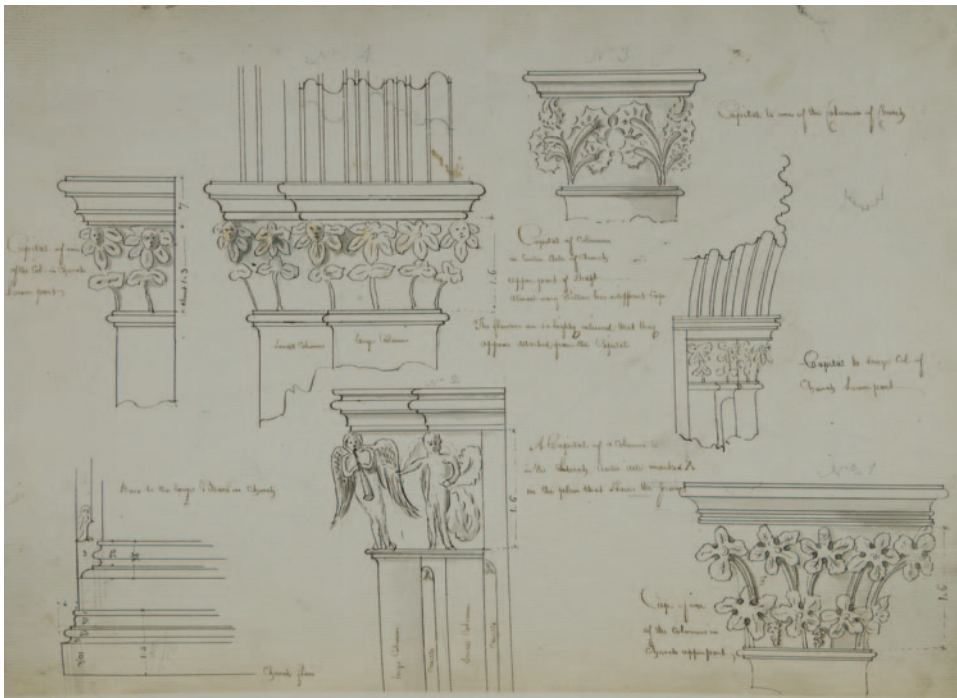
*19, 20 – East end (f.56) and (opposite) capitals of the columns (f.36)*

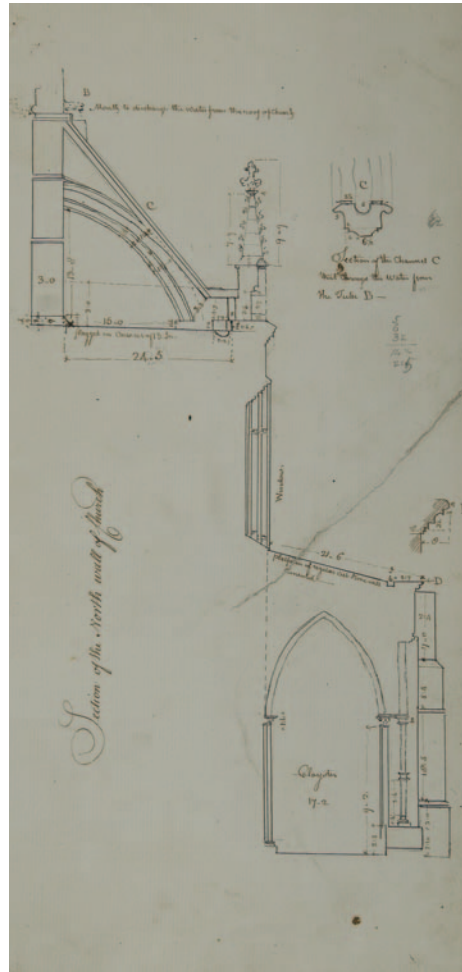
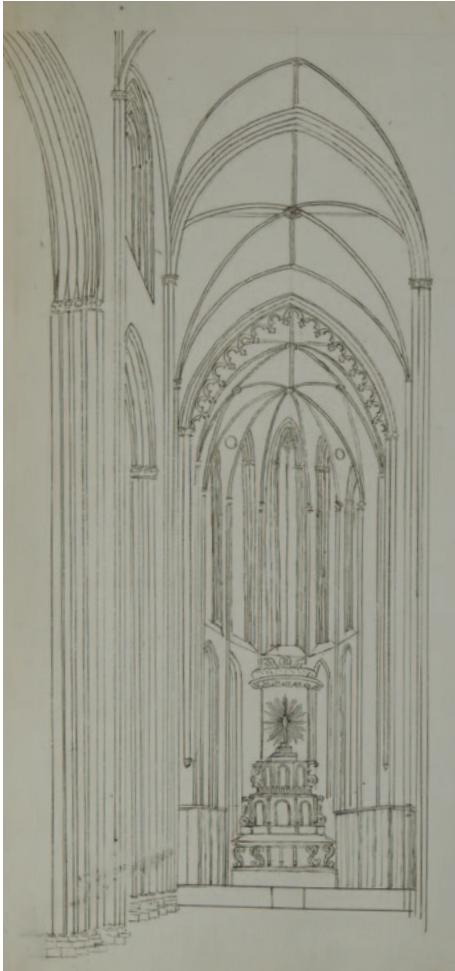
result of a well-conceived design: it is equally evident that this design has been immutably adhered to, and executed in regular progression, without those alterations and interruptions to which such large buildings are commonly subject.

This is a considerable analysis by comparison with that of Thomas Pitt, who asserted that Alcobaca had been the model for Batalha, or Richard Twiss, who wrote, ‘a very fine Gothic building, much like King’s College in Cambridge’.<sup>37</sup>

Justice is done to the size and consistency of the structure of the church and chancel in the plate *Longitudinal Section* by Samuel Porter, and two plates by Wilson Lowry, *The Elevation of the Chancel* and *Interior View* from the west entrance to the altar. This distance of seventy-four feet and four inches appears more lengthy and lofty because of the relative narrowness of breadth of the nave viewed in perspective through the series of eight columns to the chancel. This consists of five chapels – four of equal breadth, and the centre one, which rises uninterrupted through two storeys to the vaulted roof, slightly broader. That is the only part of the interior to which a drawing, taken from the front of the transept, is devoted, f.37 (Plate 21).

Since the south side of the church was obstructed by the monastery buildings,





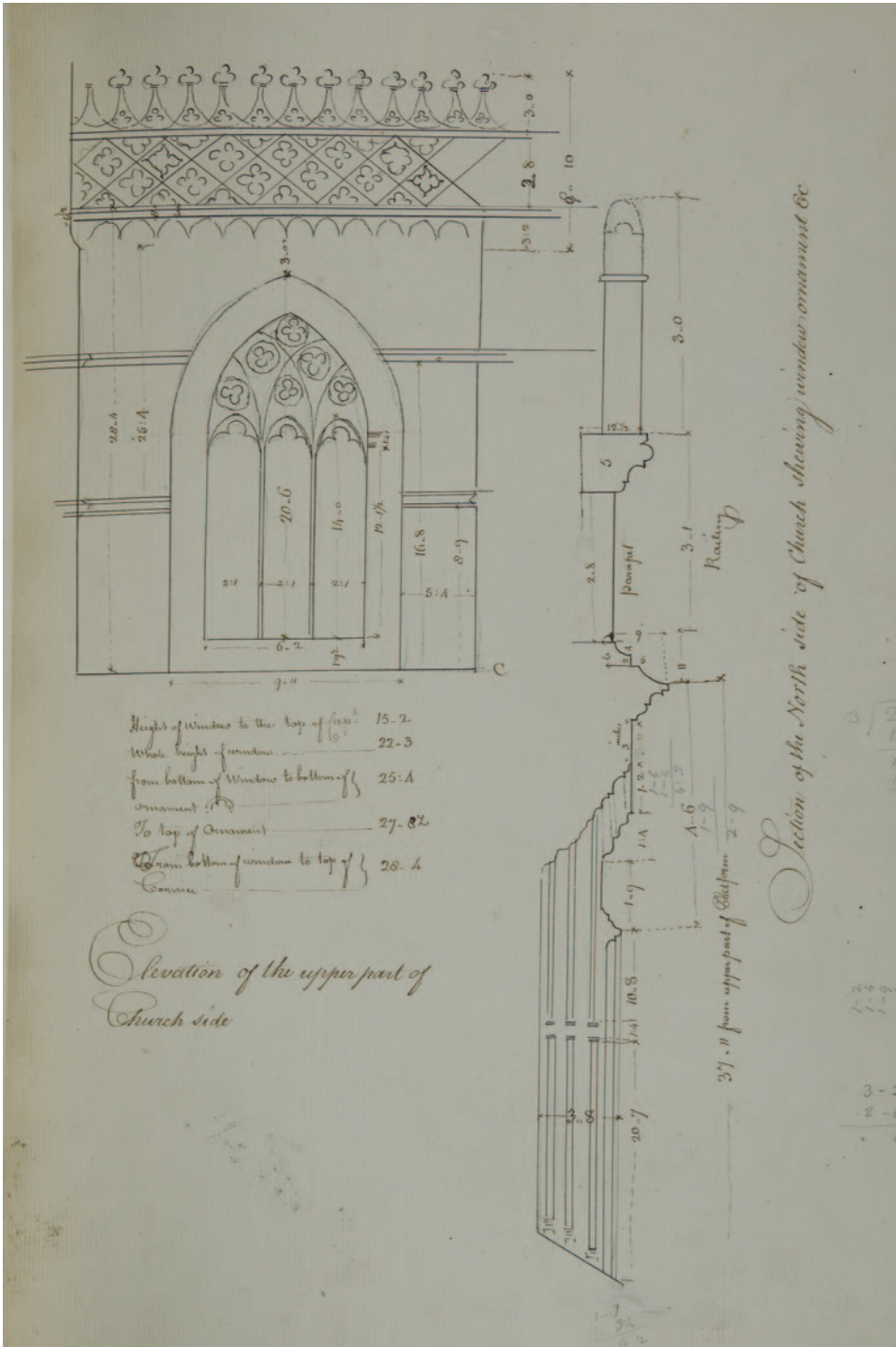
*Church of Our Lady of Victories*

*21, 22 – Interior view of east end (f.37) and section of the north wall (f.28)*

*opposite 23 – Section of the north wall, with details of ornament (f.33)*

the measuring was done on the north side. The lower part of the walls is detailed in f.28, 'Section of the North wall of the Church', which notes the channels for discharge of water from the roof to the ground at the buttress of the cloister. 'This is roofed', Murphy noted, with a 'platform of regular cut stone well cemented', while the level of the springing of the buttress is 'flagged in courses of 18 inches' (Plate 22). The factual recording of materials and dimensions is continued in f.33, 'Section of the North side of the Church showing window, ornaments &c' (Plate 23). Once the physical constituents of the structure had been itemised, the artist-architect was in a

THREE MAUSOLEA AND A CHURCH



position to reconstitute them in f.27, an ink drawing to the right side of the double plate by Samuel Porter, *North Elevation of the Church of Batalha* (Plate 24).

The comprehensiveness and care of Murphy's survey is particularly apparent in f.29, 'Section of the roof of the Church'. The upper part of the sheet has five sketches of technical details in ink and wash, with dimensions: 'manner of securing the fleur de luce ornament, manner of uniting the stones in the roof of K. John's Chapel, roof of church centre aisle: there is a strong cement in the joints', and 'form of ridge stones over the Church' (Plate 25). On the lower part of the sheet are 'Memorandums relating to the Height of Church':

Height of the column of Church. NB measured only as (triangle)  
 From cap of col to top of arch 28 feet  
 About 90 feet from the church to the bottom of upper groin  
 No. 128 steps from the church floor to the tops of the fleurs de luce ornament on the side of Church upper part. NB each step is 9, 1/2 in high.  
 66 feet 6 in from the floor of Church to the bottom window inside of Church – upper part of slope  
 101 f. 0. in. from the floor of the church to the top of the fleurs de luce ornaments on the side of Church upper part  
 71:8 Height of Col in Church from the base to top of cap  
 91:8 from the Church floor to top of arch of Church  
 121:8 to the part where the Steeple begins in conic form

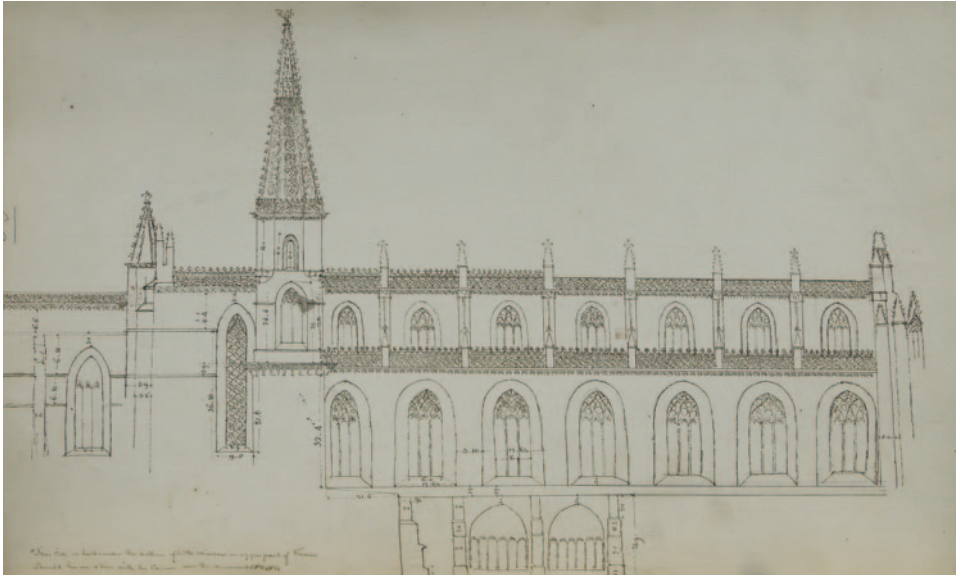
The mensuration complete, the author-architect was in a position to make the drawing for the engraving by James Walker, *Transverse Section of the Church*, for which the preparatory drawing is with the album but not bound in it, so it has been creased and is torn at the edges. It contains the outline figure of the Vitruvian man standing in the nave of the church. Above the roofs of the aisles are placed the diagrams of f.29 under different designations (Plate 26):

Longitudinal section of the roof;  
 form of the ridge tiles;  
 the manner of morticing the pinnacles into the acroterias; Section of the arch buttress at B; D water conduit.

Murphy could justifiably claim to his sponsor and patron William Burton Conyngham: 'I have endeavoured to penetrate into every part of the building, from the foundation to the top.'<sup>38</sup>

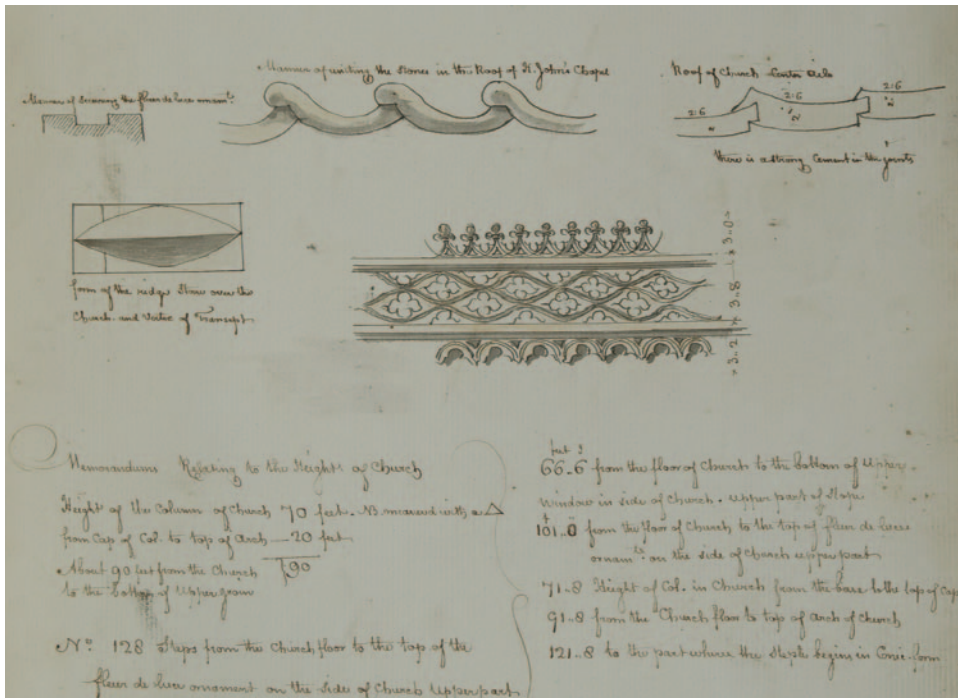
A separate plate engraved by Wilson Lowry for the entrance on the south side of the church is titled *Elevation of the Transept Entrance*. The preparatory drawing is a tipped-in sheet (f.38), which has been cropped to 35 x 27 cm. It is marked and measured in ink with inscriptions in pencil, and differs from the engraving princi-

THREE MAUSOLEA AND A CHURCH



Church of Our Lady of Victories

24, 25 – Elevation and part-section of the north of the church (f.27) and details of the roof (f.29)

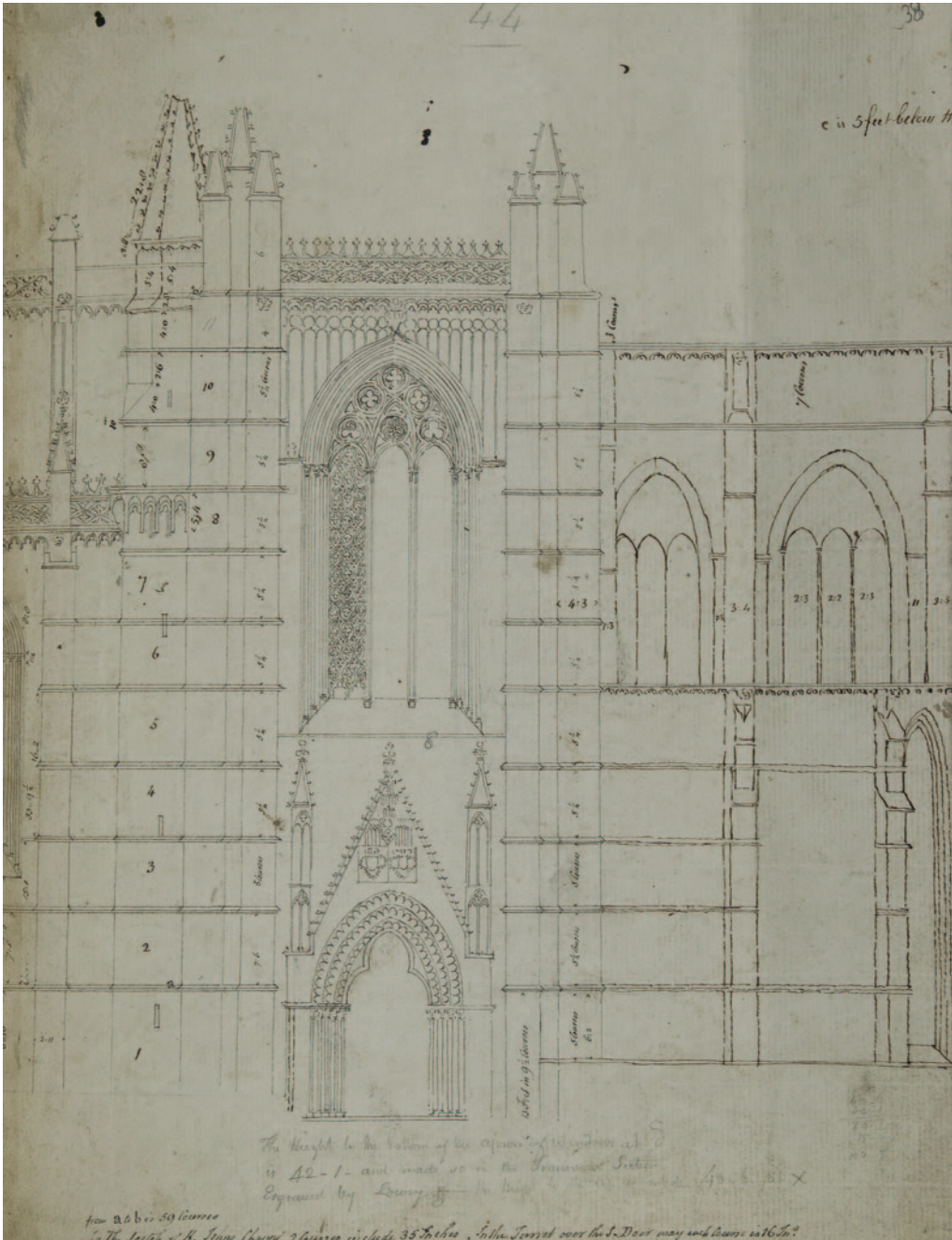




pally in simplifying the fenestration above the doorway. This is set within an arched and pinnaced porch of five receding columns. The only sculpture, however, is armorial in character, placed in the triangle above the entrance (Plate 27).

The principal entrance on the west, in contrast, is a veritable gallery of sculpture (Plate 28), described as follows in *Travels in Portugal*:

In every thing that constitutes the ornamental or the elegant, the principal Entrance certainly stands unrivalled by any other Gothic frontispiece in Europe. The Portal, which is twenty-eight-feet wide by fifty-seven high, is embellished with upwards of one hundred figures in alto relievo, representing Moses and the prophets, saints and angels, apostles, kings, popes, bishops, and martyrs, with their respective insignia. Each figure stands on an ornamental pedestal, beneath a canopy of delicate workmanship; they are separat-



Church of Our Lady of Victories  
 27 – Elevation of transept entrance (f.38)  
 opposite 26 – Section with the Vitruvian man inscribed in the nave (unnumbered)



ed from each other by an assemblage of mouldings, terminating in pointed arches.

Below the vertex of the inferior arch is a triangular recess, where there is seated on a throne, beneath a triple canopy, a figure with a celestial crown, his left hand resting upon a globe, the other is extended in the act of admonition. This figure represents our Saviour dictating to the four Evangelists who surround him, attended by their respective attributes.<sup>39</sup>

It is surprising that a separate plate is not devoted to the main entrance, which shares a plate, engraved by Samuel Porter, with the west elevation of the mausoleum of King John I (Plate 28). There are seven preparatory drawings, two of which are sheets glued to the page – f.5 of ink drawings of figure statuary and ornament, and f.8, inscribed ‘Plan of the side of the West Door of Batalha’. A measured elevation of the upper stage of the entrance front is given with details of mouldings and ornaments on f.4, whose title has been corrected from *South Front* to *West Front* (Plate 29).

The window over the great west door is the subject of ornamental details in wash on f.2, an elevation of the entire façade marked off in thirty-eight courses from ground to top for measuring purposes, and of f.6. ‘A large window of singular workmanship,’ wrote the author, ‘it consists of tablets of marble, formed into numerous compartments, whose interstices are filled up with stained glass’. Folio 7 has only a slight sketch of the arch of the door, but it is important in detailing the sculpture of the entrance. Titled ‘Memorandums relative to West Door’, it reads in part:

1st row 8 female saints; 2nd 7 martyrs; 3rd Moses at right David and Kings; 4th 6 Patriarchs; 5th 6 Angels with instruments ... clothed; 6th 5 Angels praying with their hands lifted up ... their bodies are naked.

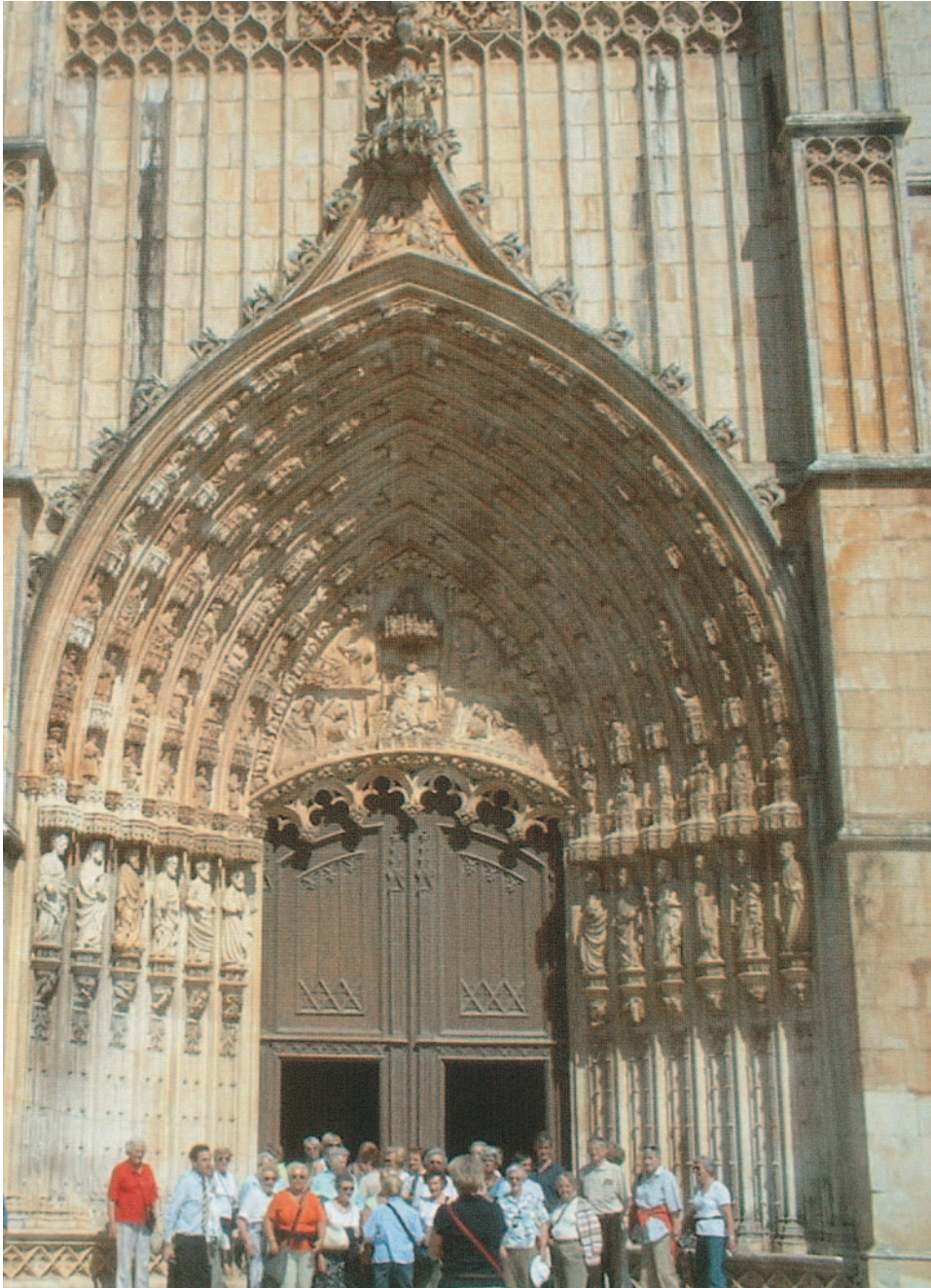
On right hand 1st a pipe; 2nd a pipe; 3rd diagram; 4th a Guitar, 5th a fiddle; 6th a cymbal.

Left hand: 1st a viol with strings; 2nd a Harp; 3rd diagram; 4th a fiddle; 5th Stag; 6th Stag kneeling....

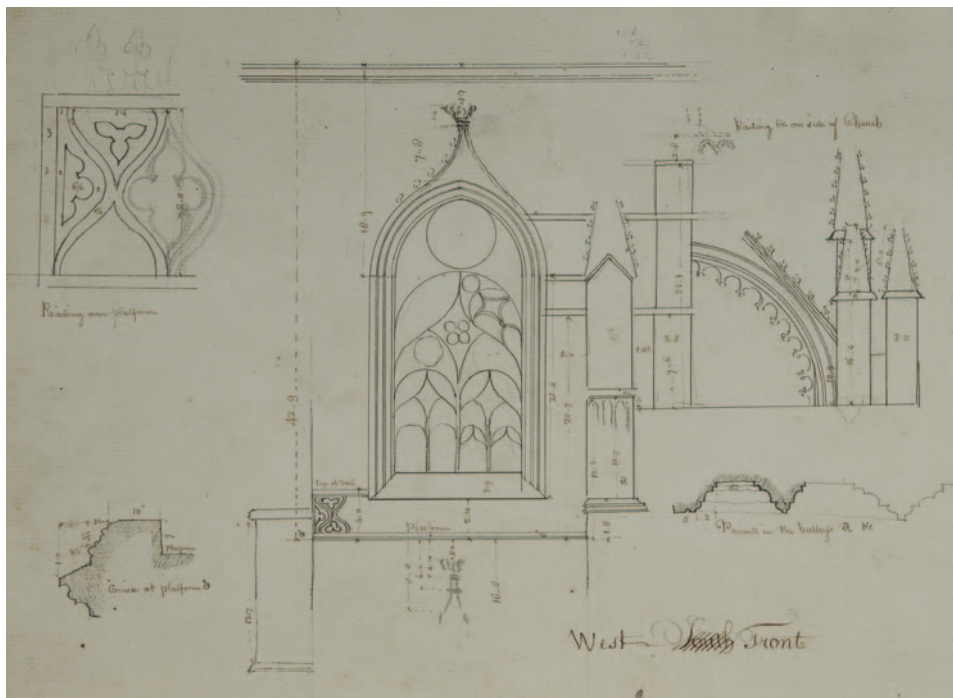
N.B. All the Kings with David sitting with globes on the right

Left hand: 1st with a Globe; 2nd with a Globe; 3rd young with a different crown and two books in his left hand; 4th with a large scroll on lap; 5th a scroll in right hand; 6th a scroll unfolded; 7th a scroll and book.

Such precision in itemising the figure sculpture leads one to expect a parallel exactness in draughtsmanship in the visual part of the book *Batalha*, but it is not present



28 – *The west door of the church of Our Lady of Victories*  
(photo the author)



29 – Elevation of the upper stage of the west front of the Church of Our Lady of Victories, with details (f.4)

there nor in *Travels in Portugal*, plate III of which shows the entrance from the north-west, with the wall of the refectory of the monastery abutting the great west entrance. That is the subject of a plate by Samuel Porter, ‘The West Elevation of the Refectory’, most notable for the gaiety of the railings on top of the wall, contrasting with the sobriety of the walls and buttresses. This feature is shown in the lower right of the plate ‘Rails, Cornices and Arched Modillions’. That plate receives no mention in the text, but the window openings are offered as an example of Greek architecture in no. 23 of figure 1 and cited on page 6 of the introductory discourse. Precision of detail was clearly of great importance to the architect-author, but he entrusted the figures of the title page of the book on Batalha to J. Taylor Jnr., so we may presume that figure-drawing was not one of the talents to which he laid claim.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Particular thanks are due to the Society of Antiquaries of London for permission to quote the text and reproduce the drawings of MS 260. The librarian, Bernard Nurse, was most helpful in discussion of the work, and Adrian James arranged for the photography, which was financed by the Irish Georgian Society and executed by Roy Fox. Oliver Grogan kindly provided me with a translation of the catalogue by Paolo Pereira, *James Murphy e o mosteiro da Batalha* (Instituto Portugues do patrimonio cultural, 1989), and Jonathan Carroll provided access to his MA dissertation of 1997 for UCD, 'James Cavanah Murphy: description of the palace of the Alhambra and related literature'.

## ENDNOTES

The following abbreviations are used:

*Batalha* James C. Murphy, *Plans, Elevations, Sections and Views of the Church of Batalha* (1795)

*Travels* James C. Murphy, *Travels in Portugal ... in the years 1789 and 1790* (1795)

- <sup>1</sup> For the bibliographic details of these books and their editions and translations, see Paul W. Nash et al (compilers), *Catalogue of the British Architectural Library Early Imprints Collection, Volume 3: M-R* (Bowker-Saur, 1999), 1198-202. I owe thanks to David Griffin, director of the Irish Architectural Archive, for this and other references in connection with this study, and for use of the Archive's copy of *Batalha*. Murphy was also the author of *A General View of the state of Portugal* (London, 1798), and *The Arabian Antiquities of Spain* (London, 1815-16).
- <sup>2</sup> For Gough and the importance of his *Sepulchral Monuments*, see Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: the discovery of the past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 2004) 273-76.
- <sup>3</sup> John Nichols, *Literary Illustrations of the Eighteenth Century*, VI (London, 1815-1817) 294.
- <sup>4</sup> This album of drawings is no. 260 of Pamela Willetts, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Society of Antiquaries of London* (London, 2002).
- <sup>5</sup> It was introduced to the literature in Megan Aldrich, 'William Beckford's Abbey at Fonthill: from the Picturesque to the Sublime', 117-35, of Derek E. Ostergard (ed.), *William Beckford, 1760-1844: an Eye for the Magnificent* (Yale UP, 2001). I am grateful to Megan Aldrich for an introduction to the drawings and for advice in the course of this study. For biographical notice of Murphy, see *The Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)*, XXIV, 1236.
- <sup>6</sup> James Murphy, preface to *Batalha*. The gentlemen are named in a footnote as Colonel Tarrant and Captain Broughton. The only Portuguese artist mentioned by him is in a passage on page 10 of *Travels*: 'Signor Glama was one of the artists employed by the Right Honourable William Burton Conyngham, when on his travels through Portugal, in making drawings and sketches of antiquities &c., which may be seen among this gentleman's valuable collection of papers relating to Portugal.' Atanasi Raczyński, *Dictionnaire historique-artistique du Portugal* (Paris, 1847) 112, names him as Jean Armand Clarma Strebel or Strabile, a German who came to Lisbon in the train of Queen Marianne of Austria. He lived in Oporto and was highly regarded.
- <sup>7</sup> The letter was partly quoted in the earliest extended biography of the architect and author Count Plunkett, *The Irish Builder and Architect*, 15th May 1909, 295-97. For the complete text

- of the letters of Murphy, see Nichols, *Literary Illustrations of the Eighteenth Century*, VI, 435-42. The most recent account of the architect-author is Michael McCarthy, 'Unpublished Drawings by James Cavanah Murphy', *Irish Arts Review*, Summer 2002, 114-17.
- <sup>8</sup> Antoine Desgodetz (1653-1728), author of *Les edifices antiques de Rome*, which was famed for the accuracy of its measurements. See Eileen Harris, *British Architectural Books and Writers, 1556-1785* (Cambridge, 1990) 180-82. Murphy's publisher, Taylor, was preparing an English translation of Desgodetz in 1795.
- <sup>9</sup> *Batalha*, 58.
- <sup>10</sup> Murphy gives an account of Fr Lewis de Sousa in *Travels*, 231-35.
- <sup>11</sup> Richard Twiss, *Travels through Portugal and Spain, in 1772 and 1773*, 2 vols (Dublin, 1775) I, 45-47.
- <sup>12</sup> British Museum, Add. MSS 5845, 111-46, published in part by the author in 'Art Education and the Grand Tour' in M. Barasch and L.F. Sandler (eds), *Art the Ape of Nature: essays in honor of H.W. Janson* (New York, 1981) 477-94. For the circulation of the manuscript and further drawings from it, see Michael McCarthy, *The Origins of the Gothic Revival* (Yale UP, 1987) 16-19. See also John Frew and Carey Wallace, 'Thomas Pitt, Portugal, and the gothic cult of Batalha', *Burlington Magazine*, 128, 1986, 582-84. A connection between the manuscript of Thomas Pitt on Portugal and the book of James C Murphy is suggested in the final paragraph of the review of *Murphy's Travels*, published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, XLV, October 1795, 848-55.
- <sup>13</sup> For Charles Lyttelton, see Sweet, *Antiquaries*, 249-55. The letter is British Museum, Stowe MSS 754, ff.48-49.
- <sup>14</sup> For the importance of Richard Gough, see John Frew, 'An aspect of the early Gothic Revival: the transformation of medievalist research, 1770-1780', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XLIII, 1980, 174-85.
- <sup>15</sup> For the printing history of *Batalha*, see Nash, note 1 above. The text of Murphy's letter of March 1789 is given in full in Nichols, *Literary Illustrations of the Eighteenth Century*, VI, 435. What I have called the early outline is the following passage:
- What follow are finished nearly on the same scale with the large plan I made for you in Dublin.
- A general Plan of the Church and Monastery
- Plan of the second story
- Plan of the Second story of Capellas Imperfectas
- Plan of the roof of the Church
- Elevation of the roof of the Church
- Elevation of the South front
- Elevation of the North front
- Elevation of the West front including the Refectory, Kitchen & being the extent of the ancient building
- A general Section from East to West, though Church, Chapel and Caps. Imperfs. Section of the Caps Imperfs.
- I have some views of the building yet to complete before I go to Alcobaca.
- <sup>16</sup> He has inscribed f.45: 'NB the front entrance of this Hall will make a fine drawing. The door and the windows on each side are admirably contrived.'
- <sup>17</sup> For Conyngnam, see now James Kelly's entry in *DNB*.

- <sup>18</sup> There is a diary in the Royal Institute of British Architects with drawings of his journey from 8th October 1790 to 25th October 1790, which ends with an ink sketch of a cornice in the house of Sir Joseph Banks, one of the subscribers to *Batalha*. See entry by Jill Lever in *Catalogue of the Drawings of the RIBA, L-N* (London, 1973) 98.
- <sup>19</sup> All quotations in the preceding paragraph are from the transcript published by Frew and Wallace, 'Thomas Pitt, Portugal, and the gothic cult of Batalha'.
- <sup>20</sup> For Grose and his relations with William Burton Conyngnam, see Peter Harbison, *Our Treasure of Antiquities* (Bray, 2002) 215-17.
- <sup>21</sup> *DNB*, s.v.
- <sup>22</sup> Frew, 'An aspect of the early Gothic Revival'.
- <sup>23</sup> Paul Breman (ed.), *The Gothic of Gothick*, Weinreb Catalogue 14 (London, 1966) items 168, 169.
- <sup>24</sup> Megan Aldrich, *Gothic Revival* (London, 1994) ch. 3.
- <sup>25</sup> Twiss, *Travels through Portugal and Spain*, I, 45-47.
- <sup>26</sup> For the history of the church and monastery of Batalha, I have relied on Sergio Guimaraes de Andrade, *Santa Maria da Vitoria, Batalha, Artes Graficas* (Lisboa-Mafra, 1992). See now also José Custodas Vieira de Silva and Padre Rodel, *The Monastery of Batalha* (London, 2007)
- <sup>27</sup> For the most recent version of the legend see the current guidebook *Batalha*, 24-25:  
 It was necessary to recall Alonso Domingues, who swore to complete the Chapter House. Now completely blind, the aging master builder gave instructions on constructing the new vault until the day arrived to remove the lead supports. These were duly taken away and Domingues, convinced that the vault would hold, sat beneath it. He stayed there for three days and three nights. This was the work of his life; either the vault was perfect, or it would kill him. And the vault never fell.
- <sup>28</sup> *Travels*, 36.
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 50-68.
- <sup>30</sup> Quoted from the letter-press of the plate 'The South elevation of the Mausoleum of King John I'. The same source is given in the preface to *Batalha*, where the date of the earthquake is mistakenly given as 1745. This is corrected in *Travels*, 33, where, however, the account of the damage is not as extensive as that given in the preface.
- <sup>31</sup> *DNB*, XXIV, 1236.
- <sup>32</sup> Frew and Wallace, 'Thomas Pitt, Portugal, and the gothic cult of Batalha', 585.
- <sup>33</sup> Twiss, *Travels through Portugal and Spain*, I, 45-47.
- <sup>34</sup> 'I think it was intended to receive an altar as there is a small recess near it used to receive the wine and water which they use at mass', Murphy wrote on the drawing (Plate 18). See De Andrade, *Santa Maria da Vitoria, Batalha*, 83-85, for the best description of the doorway, which is attributed to Mateus Fernandes and is considered the acme of Manueline architecture.
- <sup>35</sup> *Travels*, 37.
- <sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 33-34.
- <sup>37</sup> Twiss, *Travels through Portugal and Spain*, I, 45.
- <sup>38</sup> Quoted from the first letter of James Murphy to his patron. Nichols, *Literary Illustrations of the Eighteenth Century*, VI, 435.
- <sup>39</sup> *Travels*, 35.