

King Henry III and the chapter house of Westminster Abbey

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Ut rosa flos florum sic est domus ista domorum

As the rose is the flower of flowers, so is this the house of houses

So runs the inscription on the tiled floor of the chapter house of Westminster Abbey (fig 40). The claim to pre-eminence is, and always has been, absolutely justified. Matthew Paris, who saw the chapter house in its first beauty, rightly described it as 'incomparable'. The comment was not lightly made. It comes, as is well known, in a summary of the notable events of the fifty years between 1200 and 1250, and is thus eloquent testimony to the chapter house's fame. But there is something more about the testimony which has not been appreciated. When Paris first wrote his account of those events, probably early in 1251 (in his *Chronica Majora*), he mentioned the rebuilding of the abbey, and the new feretory for the Confessor, but said nothing about the chapter house.¹ The same was true when Paris wrote out

the list again in his *Historia Anglorum*, probably between 1250 and 1255.² It was only when Paris had a third stab at the list, 'very likely after 1255' in his *Abbreviatio Chronicorum*, that the chapter house features.³ Clearly he had now seen the finished building and been moved to include it in the roll of honour. Paris also did something else. He stressed that the chapter house was the work of the king: 'and the lord king built there the incomparable chapter house'. It is this statement which is the point of departure for this paper. There has perhaps been a tendency to regard the building of the chapter house as merely an adjunct to the building of the abbey. It says little about the king, being simply the room where the monks would hold their daily meetings. There was far more to it than that. Henry had built a house for the monks,



Fig 40 Chapter house floor: inscription I in the tile pavement: 'Ut rosa flos florum sic est domus ista domorum'. Photograph: © Dean and Chapter of Westminster 2008

certainly, but he had also built a house for the realm, and, even more, a house for himself. Put another way, Henry saw the chapter house from the first as a place where he and his spokesmen would address the realm surrounded by architecture which at every turn proclaimed and enhanced the dignity and splendour of his kingship.⁴ Once this is appreciated, much about the design and decoration of the chapter house falls into place.

Before developing this theme, it may be helpful to put the chapter house in context by saying a little about the king and his age.⁵ Henry III succeeded his father King John at the age of nine, in 1216, and he reigned for fifty-six years until his death in 1272. Henry's reign was a period of momentous change. The spiritual life of the country was transformed by the arrival of the friars and by the work of pastorally minded bishops. The population increased rapidly so that, according to some calculations, it neared six million by the end of the century, three times its size at the time of the Domesday Book. The population of London around 1300 approached perhaps 80,000.⁶ Meanwhile, the money supply rocketed, and a new network of markets and fairs came into place.⁷ The wealth of England was displayed in the sumptuous rebuilding of great churches: Salisbury Cathedral and the angel choir at Lincoln stand beside Westminster as testimonies to this vibrant age. Henry III left England more beautiful than he found it.⁸

Yet if these are 'good' things, there was another side. The English had a far stronger sense of their national identity by the end of the reign, but it was an identity often expressed in virulent hatred of foreigners. Indeed in 1263, during Simon de Montfort's period of power, a 'statute' expelled all foreigners from the country.⁹ The rise in the population, meanwhile, was outrunning the ability of the land to sustain it, creating growing numbers of peasant smallholders living on the edge of subsistence and starving to death in years of bad harvest. There were other sufferers. The king both broke the financial back of the Jews through heavy taxation and sanctioned the belief that they crucified Christian boys in macabre parody of the crucifixion of Christ. The way was thus prepared for the eventual expulsion of the Jews in 1290. At Lincoln the angel choir was being planned in 1256 at the very time that the city's Jews were being persecuted for the supposed murder of 'Little Saint Hugh'.¹⁰ The sculpture in Westminster Abbey encapsulates the extremes of the age: on the one hand, the censuring angels in the south transept are graceful, confident, humane; on the other, the heads in St Faith's chapel have pinched cheeks and bared teeth, as though grimacing in agony.¹¹

Politically, it was Henry's reign that saw the

establishment of Magna Carta, with Henry's version of 1225, not John's of 1215, becoming the definitive text.¹² It saw too the emergence of what was, in important respects, a new type of national assembly to which a new name indeed was given: 'Parliament'. The first Parliament so named in an official record met in 1237.¹³ Its central place in the constitution was affirmed in 1258 when the Provisions of Oxford laid down that three Parliaments should meet each year 'to treat of the common business of the realm and of the king together'.¹⁴ With this development of Parliament, as we will see, the chapter house was intimately connected.

In the first phase of his reign, Henry, though possessing a will of his own, ruled with the great ministers inherited from his father by his side. What historians have sometimes called his personal rule began in 1234 and lasted down to the great revolution of 1258.¹⁵ It was a rule in which an increasing part was played by Henry's queen consort, Eleanor of Provence.¹⁶ At the time of her marriage in 1236, no queen had been involved in English domestic affairs since Eleanor of Aquitaine in the 1160s. Eleanor of Provence changed all that. Indeed, her place beside her husband was proclaimed in the large parallel heads of king and queen, Henry and Eleanor, sculpted and painted in the muniment room at the abbey, a room which Christopher Wilson has argued was intended as a royal pew.¹⁷ Henry's personal rule was a period of peace for England (though not for Wales) and it was that which made the rebuilding of the abbey possible, allowing him to devote both time and resources to it. Beginning in 1245, the eastern part of the church, the transepts and the chapter house were all completed, or nearly so, by 1258. Thereafter, as England plunged into the period of revolution, reform, rebellion and civil war that lasted down to 1267, progress was much slower, although it was still made, thanks in part to the way the baronial reformers were prepared to sustain the work.¹⁸

Both the calm and the conflict of Henry's reign owed much to his personality. *Vir simplex erat et timens Deum*, he was a 'simplex and God-fearing man', opined the Osney Abbey chronicler, picking up two of Henry's most pronounced characteristics.¹⁹ The term *simplex* – frequently used of holy men, in the sense of honest, uncomplicated and pure of heart – is intended here as a compliment, but the word could also be used to mean naïve or, indeed, plain stupid, and of simplicity in that sense Henry was often accused. Certainly – product perhaps of his long minority – he found it very difficult to judge the effects of his actions and calculate how to get from A to B. Other characteristics served both to aggravate and ameliorate this failing. Henry was warm-hearted, and

passionate about things he wished to achieve. Thank heavens, contemporaries might have said, when it came to the building of Westminster Abbey. They were less appreciative of other cherished objectives, like the establishment of his foreign relatives in England and the making of his second son king of Sicily. Henry was quick to anger, and in his rage could accuse and threaten like the best of his Angevin predecessors. But, as was often noted, his anger was short lived, and his basic temperament was generous and conciliatory. He also liked an easy life. Instead of his father's hectic gyrations round the country, he spent his time at his favourite palaces in the south, improving their comforts and enhancing their splendour. All this helped Henry's relations with leading nobles, whom he was often ready to appease, but hindered reform of the realm, which, unlike his brother-in-law, Louis IX of France, he lacked the will to drive through in the face of vested interests.²⁰ Hence reform had to be forced on him in 1258.²¹ In the end, a king who at heart wished to create harmony, dispense justice, and uphold the rights of the crown lacked the skill and determination to achieve these objectives, given the competing factions at court, the demands of the Sicilian project and the difficulties of reforming local government. The king who wanted peace ultimately created war, or, to put it more fairly, created conditions in which Simon de Montfort could make war.²²

In all his trials and tribulations Henry had one pre-eminent saving grace. As the Osney Abbey chronicler – and virtually everyone else – noted, he was indeed God-fearing.²³ In all the turmoil after 1258, there was no attempt to murder or depose Henry as there had been to murder and depose John. Matthew Paris quoted both Llywelyn the Great and Louis IX as saying that Henry's alms-giving and masses would preserve him from all shames and dangers.²⁴ Henry was indeed assiduous at attending mass, and fed 150 paupers at court every day, increasing the number to thousands on the feast days of his patron, Saint Edward the Confessor.²⁵ Henry's devotion to the Confessor was, of course, absolutely central to his piety, and to it we owe Westminster Abbey. I have argued elsewhere that it developed between 1233 and 1238, at the start, that is, of his personal rule.²⁶ Essentially, during a period of political disaster Henry embraced the Confessor as a saint of mighty power who would succour him in this life and conduct him to the next. He also hoped to imitate the lawful and conciliatory rule for which the Confessor was famed.²⁷ The abbey, begun in 1245, was a gigantic offering to the saint, designed to win his favour and persuade him to intercede with God on Henry's behalf. It was also a gigantic public statement. The great church, the church of Henry and Edward, was growing up

at the centre of the realm, where, more than anywhere else, Henry lived and Parliament met. It dwarfed the surrounding buildings and was visible from far and wide, visible indeed as soon as the travellers from Dover came over the top of Shooters Hill and saw London spread before them. The abbey proclaimed that the Confessor stood behind Henry and his dynasty. It also proclaimed Henry's care for the community, for the last thing he wanted was to keep the Confessor just to himself. Rather the abbey was an offering to the realm, inviting everyone to enter and be helped by the Confessor's miraculous power, while, of course thanking Henry in the process.

The chapter house was very much part of the first build at the abbey and was evidently nearing at least structural completion in 1253 when canvas was ordered for its windows and the six steps from the vestibule to the entrance were being built.²⁸ It was certainly in use by 1257 when the first recorded meeting within it took place. The chapter house was, of course, built for the monks, but it was also, as I have suggested, planned from the start as a place where king and councils might meet to discuss the business of the realm. To understand why this was, we need to look at the previous history of the abbey buildings.

By the time Henry decided to rebuild the abbey church in 1245, the conventual buildings had long been used for royal meetings. In 1244 itself, a great council of lay and ecclesiastical magnates met in the abbey's refectory alongside the south cloister.²⁹ Later, during the same assembly, the bishops alone assembled in the infirmary chapel of St Catherine where they were joined by the king.³⁰ A few years earlier, during the Parliament of 1237, it had again been in the infirmary chapel, in the presence of the king (and, doubtless, assembled magnates) that the bishops excommunicated all violators of Magna Carta, Henry having just confirmed the charter in return for taxation.³¹ Either on this, or on another occasion, in 'a certain *colloquium* of the king in the chapel of the blessed Catherine at Westminster', king and barons had sought absolution from an earlier sentence of excommunication.³² The king had been in the same chapel in June 1222, discharging purely secular business, for it was there that he ordered William de Ferrers, earl of Derby, to surrender the castle of the Peak.³³ This use of St Catherine's chapel for council meetings goes back to the twelfth century, as indeed does the use of the old chapter house. It was thus in the chapter house in 1184, 'many clergy and people having been congregated', that Henry II accepted, after much debate, the right of the monks of Canterbury to elect the new archbishop.³⁴

Kings, therefore, had used abbey buildings for meetings long before 1245, but the need to do so

intensified during Henry's personal rule. This was because assemblies of the good and great met at Westminster more frequently (and probably for longer periods) than they had ever done before. Such assemblies were also far more significant than before in negotiating relations between the king and his subjects, which made it all the more desirable that they should meet in what the king would think an appropriate setting, which meant, of course, a setting likely to be helpful to himself. Westminster, home of the Exchequer and the Court of Common Pleas, had long been the administrative capital of the realm. But Henry lived at Westminster far more than any previous king. Part of this was due to the loss of Normandy in 1204, which meant that he spent most of his time in England, whereas his predecessors had spent half of theirs shuttling round the continent. It was also because of his attachment to his sainted predecessor, Edward the Confessor, which meant he wished to spend as much time as possible beside his patron's shrine. Westminster thus became easily Henry's favourite residence. If we take the years between 1234 and 1258, then he was there for roughly 30 per cent of his time, as against 11 per cent at Windsor and 7 per cent at Woodstock, his next most visited homes.³⁵ This makes a startling contrast to John who, even when in England, spent a mere 3 per cent of his time at Westminster. Even if we add in the Tower of London, the Temple and Lambeth (places in which Henry never lived during his personal rule) the figure only rises to 9 per cent.³⁶

Where the king was, so too were great councils and parliaments. Between 1235 and 1257 there is evidence for some fifty-four parliamentary-type assemblies, of which around forty met at Westminster, some for considerable periods of time.³⁷ The frequency and length of such sessions was not surprising because great assemblies now enjoyed a power they had never before possessed: control of the purse strings. Henry's predecessors had been able to do without general taxation. Henry – if he was to be mighty in war and magnificent in peace (or as magnificent as he would like) – could not: the gradual alienation of the great landed estate which the king of England had gained at the Conquest, together with the restrictions of Magna Carta, saw to that. It was also clearer than ever before that such taxation needed the sanction of an assembly that was representative in some way of the realm. Magna Carta in 1215 had laid down that taxation could only be levied 'by the common counsel' of the realm, and although the clause was omitted from Henry III's versions of the charter, in effect it remained in force. Both the need for taxation and the need for consent thus gave such assemblies a new power. During his personal rule, Henry came to them again and again, begging for supply. After 1237 the reply

again and again was that he could have it only if he allowed the assemblies to choose his chief ministers, conditions which, denuding him of power, he refused to accept. So there was deadlock. The importance of these assemblies may also have meant they were larger than ever before. The first known occasion when knights from the shires were summoned to Parliament (in the vain hope that they would consent to taxation) was in 1254.³⁸ It is also likely that the issue of taxation encouraged many of the lesser tenants in chief to attend on an unprecedented scale.³⁹ On his ability to get his way at these gatherings, to which increasingly the name of Parliament was given, Henry must have felt the whole future of his kingship depended, as indeed it did. His ultimate failure to manage the Westminster Parliament of April 1258 brought his personal rule crashing to the ground.

Against this background, it seems highly likely that Henry conceived the chapter house from the outset as being for the business of the realm as well as for the business of the monks. Certainly that was a function it came to play, not merely in the fourteenth century when, as is well known, it was a chamber where the Commons sometimes met, but also in the reign of Henry III.⁴⁰ Thus the first evidence for the chapter house being in use comes from April 1257 when 'before prelates, clergy and people congregated in a great multitude', the archbishop of Messina, on Henry's behalf, solicited support for the Sicilian enterprise.⁴¹ The second known use of the chapter house took place during Simon de Montfort's great parliament of 1265, the first to which knights from the shires and burgesses from the towns were both summoned. It was thus in the chapter house on St Valentine's day that the king's oath not to revenge himself on his opponents, and his confirmation of both Magna Carta and the Montfortian constitution of June 1264, were announced.⁴² These are, of course, only two instances, but given that we have no official record of when and where assemblies met in this period, and are almost totally dependent on exiguous and erratic references in chronicles, we may well think that there were many more.

Neither the Burton Abbey annalist, the source for the meeting of 1257, nor the London alderman, Arnold fitzThedmar, the source for that of 1265, say anything about the king being present, let alone of his speaking. But that Henry expected to speak in the chapter house, and did so, is suggested by a good deal of circumstantial evidence. As Michael Clanchy was the first to appreciate, Henry was indeed a speech maker. In 1250 and 1256 his speeches at the Exchequer were recorded officially in the Exchequer records.⁴³ He also addressed great assemblies. In 1244, at Westminster, according to Matthew Paris, Henry begged

the assembled magnates for financial aid '*ore proprio*' ('in his own voice'), and then went on to make an impromptu speech to the bishops, a speech also recorded verbatim in a newsletter.⁴⁴ Four years later Paris himself quoted verbatim from Henry's speech to a 'great parliament' at Westminster where he defended his right to choose his own ministers.⁴⁵ Certain episodes take us a little closer to Henry speaking in the chapter house itself. Henry certainly *did* speak to assemblies within the abbey precincts because his 1244 efforts were made in the abbey's refectory and the infirmary chapel of St Catherine.⁴⁶ Henry also spoke in chapter houses, because in 1250 it was in the chapter house of Winchester that he delivered a *sermo* to the monks 'as if preaching', urging them to elect his half-brother, Aymer de Lusignan, as their bishop.⁴⁷

A final pointer in the same direction is provided by Henry's remarkable interest in the lecterns to be placed in the Westminster chapter house. The first of these he commissioned from the carpenter, Master John of St Omer, in September 1249, instructing him to make it 'similar to the one in the chapter house at St Albans, and, if possible, even more handsome and beautiful.'⁴⁸ Accordingly, John and his assistants actually worked at St Albans where they are found receiving their wages in 1253.⁴⁹ By May 1256 they were evidently finished, for in that month (a piece of evidence that seems to have escaped even Colvin's eagle eye) Henry ordered the lectern 'which he had caused to be made at St Albans' to be transported safely in chests to Westminster, which may well mark the moment when the floor and glazing were finished and the chapter house was ready for use.⁵⁰ In the same order, Henry also said he wanted a cloth and cope of samite to be ready for his arrival at Westminster at the feast of Pentecost; doubtless he inspected the lectern at the same time. Whether he actually used it, is another matter. The lectern (from which the readings took place at the monks' daily meetings) was probably placed somewhere in the middle of the chapter house facing the president's seat in the centre of the eastern bay.⁵¹ Thus when the knight, Peter de la Mare, made his speech at the Good Parliament of 1376 he 'arose and went to the lectern in the middle of the chapter house so that all could hear and, leaning on the lectern, began to speak.'⁵² Would, however, Henry have spoken from the same place, and thus looked up at the president's seat? Surely not. He would have spoken from the president's seat itself, as indeed he did at Winchester in 1250.⁵³

If, however, Henry spoke from this position at Westminster, did he find something unsatisfactory about it? For the fact is that he went on to install a *second* lectern in the chapter house, one specifically described as

lectrinium regis, 'a lectern of the king'. This was under manufacture in March 1259 when the king ordered John [of Gloucester], his master mason at the Abbey, 'without delay to cause to be made the iron work of the lectern of the king at Westminster according to the ordination of Master William, painter of the king.'⁵⁴ Presumably, then, the lectern that William designed was composed of wrought-iron leaves, scrolls and spirals like those found on contemporary doors, grilles and gates.⁵⁵ If, moreover, as seems likely, it is this lectern that the king's goldsmith, William of Gloucester was working on between 1258 and 1261, then it may also have been gilded.⁵⁶ Although still in separate pieces, the iron lectern was evidently ready by September 1260 when Henry ordered it to be assembled 'without delay in the new chapter house at Westminster so that it is ready and prepared for the next arrival of the king there.'⁵⁷ This time, therefore, one can be almost sure that Henry went into the chapter house to see his new lectern. It is hard to believe that he did not also intend to speak from it. Whether this was because Henry liked to read his speeches we do not know, although those he gave at the Exchequer were detailed and would have been helped by a text.⁵⁸ There was, in any case, more to it than that. Henry surely felt that standing before a lectern, especially the regal one he had commissioned, accorded far more with his dignity than standing exposed to his audience. This, after all, was a king who had ordered a new porch to his palace at Westminster so that he could dismount from his palfrey 'with befitting dignity'.⁵⁹ Perhaps, too, if the lectern was to be placed on a platform in front of the president's seat, thus projecting further into the middle of the chapter house, Henry hoped the acoustics would be better than at the seat itself, in the same way as the knights evidently thought they would be better heard from the central lectern than from the benches around the side.⁶⁰

In 1260, having ordered the installation of his lectern, Henry arrived at Westminster on 11 October, just in time for the anniversary of the Confessor's translation two days later when he fed 5,016 paupers, spent most of £229 on a great feast, and listened to water music played on the Thames by an orchestra sent by the Cinque Ports.⁶¹ It was the opening of one of the most important parliaments of the reign, one in which Henry hoped desperately to break free from the restrictions placed on him by the Provisions of Oxford. All his eloquence at his new lectern in the wonderful setting of the Westminster chapter house would be required to do that.⁶²

If the arguments developed above are accepted, then much about the chapter house's structure and decoration falls into place, as we have said.⁶³ The great four-light windows which, in Lethaby's words, made the house 'a vast

vessel of light' have often excited comment, being double in their design those found in the abbey.⁶⁴ The latter were modelled on those at Reims and may thus have been thought appropriate, as Christopher Wilson has suggested, for what was also a coronation church.⁶⁵ Free from this imitative restriction, the decision to go for much grander and more up to date tracery in the chapter house becomes all the more explicable if it was to be a house for the king as well as for the monks.⁶⁶ The same is true of the complex vaulting of the cloister bay opposite the entrance, the scrolls of foliage in the tympanum of the doorway, and the exquisitely carved roses in some of the wall arcade diaper, all of it without parallel in the actual church.⁶⁷ Naturally, in the eastern bay the upper bench was higher than in the other bays, thus setting king as well as senior monks above those below and around them.⁶⁸ And how appropriate and inspiring for Henry, as he spoke, either from his lectern or the president's seat, to look up at the Annunciation statues either side of the inner doorway, with the Archangel Gabriel delivering to an awestruck Virgin the most famous speech in history.

None of this work specifically announced Henry himself; but the chapter house certainly did that, and in emphatic fashion, which brings us to its most famous feature, its tiled floor.⁶⁹ As Clayton observed, the tiles run in bands east to west 'so as to lead the eye up to the eastern row of seats' where the abbot and, as we have suggested, the king would sit.⁷⁰ By far the grandest and most strategically placed of these bands are the two depicting the king's coat of arms, which start to the left and right of the entrance and run right across the floor, either side of the central column, to terminate at each end of the eastern row, thus marking it out (fig 41 and Plan 2). The three leopards of the royal arms, splendidly virile and fearsome, are placed within a shield supported by centaurs, each coat measuring 500 mm by 500 mm and being made up of four tiles, so that 248 tiles in all were needed to make up the sixty-two shields in the two columns, thirty-one in each.⁷¹ The next largest of the floor designs (including that with the rose window) only measure 360 mm by 360 mm, so the coat of arms is easily the largest. Henry had long been in the habit of placing his arms on objects with which he wished to be associated.⁷² But here he was doing so on an extraordinary and unprecedented scale. The contrast with the nave of the abbey – where Henry's arms featured once (the leopards turgid in comparison with those in the chapter house) alongside the shields of the king of France, the emperor and assorted English barons – was striking indeed. The nave of the abbey was for the community.⁷³ The chapter house, although he might address the community there, was the king's.⁷⁴ Whether Henry spoke



Fig 41 Chapter house floor: the arms of England, composed of four tiles (designs 10–13, band 11). The arms, which occur sixty-two times in the floor, are arranged in two parallel lines running east to west. Photograph: © Dean and Chapter of Westminster 2008

from the president's seat or his lectern, he was supported on either side by his coats of arms, the light reflected from the shimmering glaze of the tiles rising up in protective and empowering rays around him. Who could resist the king's eloquence in such a setting? And who in such a setting would dare to question the royal word?

To all this, Henry added one final touch. After its first lines declaring the chapter house to be the house of houses, the inscription went on to associate 'King Henry' directly with it.⁷⁵ Proclaiming his responsibility in this way was absolutely typical.⁷⁶ Few kings were more sensitive to their name and fame. When Henry came to St Albans in August 1251 he asked how many silken cloths he had given to the church and was told thirty-one. He then asked whether they had all been inscribed as he had ordered and was told that 'yes they had'; all bore 'indelibly' the name 'King of the English Henry III', *Rex Anglorum Henricus III*.⁷⁷ Likewise in the Abbey itself the inscription on the new shrine of the Confessor declared 'man if you want to know the cause [of the shrine], it was King Henry, friend of this present saint' ('*homo causam noscere si vis / rex fuit Henricus, sancti presentis amicus*').⁷⁸ On the chapter house floor the precise wording of the inscription is lost and subject to debate, but one thing is clear: namely that Henry described himself as 'the friend of Holy Trinity' (fig 42). If one asks why he appeared thus, rather than as 'the friend of the Confessor',⁷⁹ the answer might lie in the passage from the



Fig 42 Chapter house floor: inscription II in the tile pavement: 'Rex Henricus Sancti Trinitatis amicus'. Photograph: © Dean and Chapter of Westminster 2008

Book of Revelation (iv: 1–11) that was read on Trinity Sunday. This conjures up a remarkable vision of the throne of God and, 'in circuitu' around it, twenty-four seats with twenty-four elders (*seniores*), who fall down and worship before him 'sitting on the throne'.⁸⁰ How Henry must have wished his councils were like that!

At Westminster, then, in the reign of Henry III, councils and parliaments had a variety of settings: the great and lesser halls and the king's chamber in the palace, the chapel of St Catherine, the refectory and the chapter house within the precincts of the abbey. Such a range of options was helpful given the frequency, length, size and importance of the meetings. It was up to the king to decide whom he met and where, playing what I have called 'the ritual of the rooms', and suiting session to setting.⁸¹ Here, there may even have been a relationship between the chapter house and the 'royal pew' in what is now the muniment room. Wilson has suggested that, having appeared in the chapter house, Henry may have used the pew 'as a kind of "retiring room"', and perhaps it is not altogether fanciful to go further than that.⁸² It was frequently Henry's practice, during his long parliaments, to combine large well-attended sessions with a series of individual meetings.⁸³ Can one then imagine him, after a *colloquium* in the chapter house, leading individuals up the roomy and well-lit turret stair from the cloister,⁸⁴ out through the doorway beneath the great heads of himself and his queen, and thence into the 'pew' itself, where the

intimacy of a royal chamber was combined with a unique and magical view across his abbey?⁸⁵ What better setting in which to bend individuals to his will?

With such a variety of halls and chambers to choose from, what then was the especial role of the chapter house? One problem here is that we have very little evidence as to the size and composition of the various meetings which took place during Henry's parliaments. How large was the 'great multitude' which heard the archbishop of Messina speak in the chapter house in 1257? Clearly the chapter house did not have anything like the several-thousand capacity of Rufus's great hall where, before 'innumerable people', Henry commanded the Provisions of Westminster to be read in October 1259.⁸⁶ Its capacity must also have been less than the abbey's refectory, which measured some 45.7 m by 11.5 m (150 by 38 ft).⁸⁷ Nonetheless the chapter house could still hold a sizeable gathering; the commons that met there in 1376 seems to have been over 250 strong, in which case many must have stood or squatted.⁸⁸ If, on the other hand, we think of people seated with space and comfort, then the capacity, given the seven bays with two tiers of seating, would have been around sixty-three, quite sufficient to embrace the leading lay and ecclesiastical magnates upon whom, above all, Henry's future depended.⁸⁹ If the magnates (or some of them) did not mind sitting close together, the seating capacity would have been over a hundred. Henry had specially designed the chapter house as a building in which he would speak.

Nowhere else at Westminster had that distinction. It was, I suspect, in the chapter house, more than anywhere else, that Henry wished to address the realm.

And did it work? The answer to that question, as with so much about Henry III (at least in the realm of politics) is both 'yes' and 'no'. Matthew Paris, as we have seen, was bowled over by the chapter house and appreciated that Henry had built it. He also sometimes described 'the Westminster effect' very much as Henry would have wanted. Thus he recorded how the magnates attended the feast of Edward the Confessor on 5 January 1249 'out of devotion and love of the saint, out of veneration for the holy blood of Christ recently obtained and for gaining the indulgence conceded there, and out of reverence for the lord king who had called them.'⁹⁰ Yet, alarmingly, far from being impressed by the alms Henry gave to the poor, and the candles with which he illuminated churches, Paris could also record the complaint (made in the parliament of 1248) that Henry's 'unwise and immoderate' expenditure in these areas meant he had to seize goods from merchants.⁹¹ When it comes to the chapter house itself, the irony is that it was hardly completed before Henry's personal rule collapsed, which meant he had far fewer opportunities to use it than he would have liked. If it was indeed in the chapter house that Henry, in October 1260, urged the appointment of his own candidates for

justiciar, chancellor and treasurer, then he was completely unsuccessful, for the new appointees were foisted on him against his will, the new justiciar, indeed, being effectively the nominee of Simon de Montfort.⁹² Neither of the recorded occasions when the chapter house was used fitted the bill either. The arguments of the archbishop of Messina in 1257 about the Sicilian affair fell on deaf ears. The proclamation of 1265, in which Henry accepted the Montfortian constitution, was deeply humiliating and the complete opposite of what he really thought. Indeed, one wonders whether de Montfort's use of the chapter house on this occasion was deeply symbolic, the building that Henry had designed to adorn his kingship now witnessing its virtual suppression. Yet, in the end, Henry won through. The abbey was consecrated and the Confessor translated to his new shrine. On Henry's death, England was secure and Edward I, returning from his crusade, made no effort to hurry back to his kingdom. If, in the last years of his reign, Henry had entered the magnificent doorway in the cloister, walked along the vestibule, climbed up the steps into the chapter house, and approached his lectern, looking down at the gleaming floor with his coat of arms, and up at the Annunciation statues, the great windows and the high pitched vault, he must surely have felt amply justified. The chapter house was indeed 'incomparable.'⁹³

- drawing my attention to this reference.
- ⁹⁶ *Gent's Mag*, 1799, 69(2), 578. Called 'The pursuits of architectural innovation no. XII', this is one in a series of articles by 'An Architect' (J Carter) on Westminster Abbey.
- ⁹⁷ Carter 1786, 7–8, pl 29.
- ⁹⁸ Carter 1795–1814, I, 50, pl 70.
- ⁹⁹ Brayley 1823, II, 299.
- ¹⁰⁰ Caveler 1839, 60, pl 24. Herbert Minton's first pattern-book of encaustic tiles (1835) also included examples from the chapter house (MS in Stoke-on-Trent City Archives).
- ¹⁰¹ Summerly 1842, 42.
- ¹⁰² Summerly (*ibid*, 37) confirms that access to the chapter house by antiquaries was possible: 'permission to examine minutely its many great curiosities, both architectural, decorative and historical, can only be obtained from the authorities of the Public Record Office, at the Rolls House, in Chancery Lane'. See also Nichols 1842 and Minton 1842.
- ¹⁰³ Shaw 1858.
- ¹⁰⁴ Scott 1863, pl 9. See also Pearson 2000, app 3.
- ¹⁰⁵ One view looks west and shows a hexagonal table fitted around the central column; it also indicates a row of tiles with the arms of Henry III, but this is incorrectly orientated: the rows run east–west, not north–south, as implied by the drawing. Jewitt's second view is towards the north east and clearly shows the radial-segmental construction of the timber floor. Two versions of this exist: one shows Scott alone, with a measuring tape in his right hand; and the other shows two men conversing, one of whom is a cleric (perhaps the Dean).
- ¹⁰⁶ Smith 1807, 226n; Eastlake 1847, I, 123. Had the existence of the paintings been known in 1799, Carter (see above, note 96) would certainly have mentioned them.
- ¹⁰⁷ Although the painting is unsigned, pencil marginalia are unequivocally in Carter's hand; neither is it dated, but it cannot be after 1801, when parts of two panels were destroyed by the new doorways. The watercolour, measuring 628 mm by 265 mm, is owned by English Heritage (Accn 88291754). From at least the early 1920s, until 1998, it was displayed in a frame which was clipped to a heating pipe on the east side of the chapter house. It appears in RCHME 1924, pl 157; also noted in Lethaby 1925, 101. I am indebted to Robert Gowing for assistance with the study of this watercolour.
- ¹⁰⁸ Brayley 1823, II, 298–9. See also Waller 1873.
- ¹⁰⁹ Eastlake 1847, I, 123, 180–1.
- ¹¹⁰ Summerly 1842, front cover.
- ¹¹¹ Pennant 1790–[1820?], I, 79; II, 54. Now No. 2 Little Cloister.
- ¹¹² Brayley 1823, II, 299. Their description copied in part that of Ackermann (1812, II, 274).
- ¹¹³ WAM. The illustrations are not signed or dated, but the handwriting on them is distinctively Carter's.
- ¹¹⁴ The draughtsman failed to synchronize the relationship between the exterior and the interior, and thus he has the entrance passage opening into the north-west bay instead of the west.
- ¹¹⁵ WAM. Only the southern half of the chapter house is shown on this plan: the remainder appears on an additional sheet prepared by Hawksmoor in 1731, although that records less detail and omits minor structures.
- ¹¹⁶ Three mortices for the framing of the cupboard-front are preserved in the soffit of the wall-arch above the recess. Jewitt mistook these for evidence of a screen 'placed before the altar', as did Scott (Jewitt 1863, 195; Scott 1867, 156). There are also five smaller pockets in the soffit of the north-east bay, indicating that this too had had a timber cupboard-front erected.
- ¹¹⁷ Lethaby 1925, 127.
- ¹¹⁸ Published in Scott 1863, 195–7, pl 29.
- ¹¹⁹ At an unknown date, c 0.9 m of soil had been dumped in the undercroft; the consequent erosion line in the Purbeck marble of the central column is readily apparent.
- ¹²⁰ This chapter draws heavily on the collective knowledge of all who have studied the building, and I am greatly indebted to my fellow contributors for exchanging ideas and discussing aspects of the chapter house with me, in some cases over the course of many years. Jim Vincent, Clerk of the Works at Westminster Abbey, kindly arranged for the new survey drawings of the chapter house, vestibules, undercroft and tile pavement to be made by The Downland Partnership. Through the good offices of Jeremy Ashbee FSA, Anna Keay and Robert Gowing, English Heritage commissioned the cleaning of the tile pavement in 2008, thus enabling it to be studied more precisely. Angus Lawrence of Nimbus Conservation Ltd, who carried out the external conservation and repairs in 2009–10, kindly arranged access for me to study the chapter house from the scaffolding, and I am grateful to Tim Tatton-Brown for his observations on the geology of the masonry.

CHAPTER 2 (pp 32–39)

- ¹ Luard 1872–84, v, 195; Vaughan 1958, 65.
- ² Madden 1866–9, III, 94 (where, however, Paris adds a passage about the gifts Henry had conferred on the abbey); Vaughan 1958, 61.
- ³ Madden 1866–9, III, 318; Vaughan 1958, 113–14. See also chapter 3, n. 1.
- ⁴ I have here come independently and more emphatically to the same view as Christopher Wilson: 'it seems possible that Henry III always intended the chapter-house to be available for use by gatherings summoned on his orders to discuss public business', gatherings before which he himself might appear: Wilson 2008, 65. I hope this chapter may be seen as a small companion piece both to Wilson's article, which explores how Henry influenced the design of the abbey, and also to Binski 1986 (ch 2), which shows how the paintings in Henry's great chamber at Westminster reflected and proclaimed his ideas. See also Binski 2004, 15–26, 28–9, 32 and 185–92, for the decoration of the chapter house, including the 14th-century paintings.
- ⁵ For a general survey of Henry's reign, see Carpenter 2004, chapters 10 to 12 (with chapters 1, 2, 13 and 14 dealing, over the period between 1066 and 1300, with national identity, the economy, religion and society) and Prestwich 2005, chapter 4 with Part III on society and people. Mortimer 1994 covers politics, government, society and culture in the

- period 1154–1258. Binski 2004 explores art and imagination in England between 1170 and 1300. For a discussion of ritual, which relates to some of the points made in this chapter, see Weiler 2003.
- 6 Barron 2004, 238, and the works cited there. For Westminster itself, see Rosser 1989.
- 7 The transformation of the economy is discussed in the essays in Britnell and Campbell 1993. For markets and fairs see Letters 2003, i, 26–36.
- 8 Echoing Powicke 1947, ii, 588.
- 9 Carpenter 1996, ch 14; Maddicott 1994, 230–2.
- 10 CPR 1247–58, 506; Stacey 1988; Huscroft 2006, 101–2.
- 11 Thus one might seek to qualify Powicke's poetic final verdict: 'The old man left his kingdom greater than it was when, a fair-faced child, he rode from Devizes to be crowned at Gloucester. England was more united, more prosperous, more richly endowed, more beautiful in 1272 than it was in 1216'; Powicke 1947, ii, 588.
- 12 The definitive work on Magna Carta is Holt 1992.
- 13 Richardson and Sayles 1967.
- 14 Treharne and Sanders 1973, 111. For an introduction to the development of Parliament in this period, see Carpenter 1996, ch 19, where much other relevant work is cited.
- Understanding will be transformed with the publication of John Maddicott FSA's Ford lectures (see note 37 below).
- 15 Work on Henry's personal rule includes Stacey 1987; Maddicott 1994; Carpenter 1996; and Howell 1998.
- 16 For Eleanor, see Howell 1998.
- 17 Wilson 2008, 64–9.
- 18 Recent work on the abbey includes Wilson *et al* 1986; Binski 1995; Carpenter 2001 (for the period between 1258 and 1269) and Wilson 2008. H M Colvin in Brown *et al* 1963, i, 93–109 (on Henry and his works), 130–56 (on the abbey) and 141–3 (on the chapter house) is indispensable.
- 19 Luard 1864–9, iv, 77.
- 20 For Henry and Louis, see Carpenter 2005.
- 21 For the legislative reforms, see Brand 2003.
- 22 For de Montfort, see Maddicott 1994.
- 23 For recent work relating to Henry's piety, see Dixon-Smith 1999; Vincent 2001 and 2004; and Carpenter 2005.
- 24 Luard 1872–84, iii, 290; iv, 231–2.
- 25 Carpenter 2007a, 39–40. See Dixon-Smith 1999.
- 26 Carpenter 2007b.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 Colvin 1971, ii, 226, 236. The original steps in the inner vestibule do not survive, and there are now seven in the main flight and another two just inside the inner portal.
- 29 Luard 1872–84, iv, 362. For a further use of the refectory in 1252 see Bémont 1884, 342 (a reference I owe to John Maddicott FSA).
- 30 Luard 1872–84, iv, 365. Meetings in both St Catherine's and Maddicott FSA).
- 31 Luard 1872–84, v, 360–1 (this refers to 1237, not 1253 as is the refectory are noticed in Westlake 1923, ii, 329–31, 389.
- 32 Luard 1861, 230–1.
- 33 Duffus Hardy 1833–4, i, 502–2b. For this episode, see Carpenter 2008, 45.
- 34 Stubbs 1879–80, i, 324. St Catherine's was the scene of the farcical episode in 1176 when, in a dispute over seating between the archbishops of Canterbury and York, the latter was knocked to the ground; Stubbs 1867, i, 112–13.
- 35 I have calculated this (excluding the four years in which Henry was all or some of his time on the continent) from the tables compiled by Steven Brindle and included in his introduction to Craib 1923 (14–22); see also Brindle's own page 3 figures. One should add that the minority government between 1218 and 1227 spent a considerably higher proportion of time at Westminster and clearly based itself there, a point I wish I had appreciated when writing Carpenter 1990. Indeed Brindle (Craib 1923, 3) calculates that between 1220 and 1229 Henry spent nearly 50 per cent of his time at Westminster, although down to the end of 1223 this is really the time of Henry's ministers rather than of Henry himself, of whose whereabouts one cannot be sure. Henry travelled more once he began to emerge from the minority, but on nowhere near the scale of his predecessors.
- 36 I owe these figures (which are for the time John was in England, and exclude 1215 and 1216) to Julie Kanter, who is working on a thesis on the itineraries of the 13th-century English kings. For Henry's neglect of the Tower, see Carpenter 1996, ch 10.
- 37 I owe these figures to John Maddicott FSA who has kindly sent me his detailed list of parliamentary assemblies between 1235 and 1257, which will be printed as an appendix to his Ford lectures in Maddicott forthcoming. This list supersedes that in Fryde *et al* 1986, 536–40. I have assumed that the meetings said to be in London were, in fact, at Westminster. See also Maddicott 1999a, 25–6 and n. 46.
- 38 Close Rolls 1253–4, 114–15; see Maddicott 1999b.
- 39 For the composition of these assemblies, and for the suggestion that the summoning of lesser tenants in chief could bring to Parliament those of knightly status, see Maddicott 1999a.
- 40 For the Commons using the chapter house in the 14th century see Barbara Harvey, below, pp 110–11.
- 41 Luard 1864–9, i, 386 (where the editorial date of 1256 is wrong).
- 42 Stapleton 1846, 71; Maddicott 1994, 318.
- 43 Clanchy 1968, 215–16; Carpenter 1996, ch 7.
- 44 Luard 1872–84, iv, 362, 365. The newsletter has been discovered by Nicholas Vincent and will appear in a forthcoming publication. I am most grateful to Nicholas Vincent for allowing me to see a copy of his transcription.
- 45 Luard 1872–84, v, 20. That Paris has the gist of Henry's words correctly is suggested by the Song of Lewes; Kingsford 1890, lines 485–526.
- 46 Luard 1872–84, iv, 362, 365. Paris speaks of the meeting being in 'the infirmary, namely in the chapel of St John the Evangelist' but this is almost certainly a mistake as the infirmary chapel was St Catherine's. It did, however, contain an image of St John the Evangelist; Thompson 1902–4, ii, 246. The newsletter simply mentions the meeting as taking place 'in the chapel which you [the addressee] know'.
- 47 Luard 1872–84, v, 180 and 57 for a speech Henry made in

- the great hall at Winchester. For Henry III recalling how 'in his own person' he had entered the chapter house of Holy Trinity Canterbury and prohibited the prior and monks 'in full convent' from pursuing a plea in the courts Christian, see Hector 1979, no. 136D.
- 48 Close Rolls 1247–51, 203, 245 (Colvin 1971, 190–1).
- 49 Colvin 1971, 236–7, 266–7.
- 50 Close Rolls 1254–6, 416. This would fit with Paris having written his comment after 1255.
- 51 Clayton noticed that the tiles west of the central column retain an unusual amount of glaze and wondered whether this was because they had been protected by the lectern. However, he also observed that 'the convenience of the position is open to question' (Clayton 1912, 52); if the lectern was there it would have meant the central column was between it and the president. If, on the other hand, the lectern was placed east of the central column, then the reader might have had his back to some of the audience so this position too has its problems. See below, pp 104 and 227.
- 52 Galbraith 1927, 80–1. The translation is that found in Myers 1969, 118. For the readings at the lectern see Thompson 1902–4, II, 182.
- 53 Luard 1872–84, v, 180.
- 54 Close Rolls 1256–9, 366. John was also to convey the *patibulum* in the infirmary chapel to the house where Master William worked. Perhaps this was a frame used in the manufacture of the lectern. Brown *et al* 1963, II, 142 n. 5, mentions the second lectern but without comment.
- 55 Geddes 1987, 174–5 and nos 364–6, and, of course, more generally Geddes 1999.
- 56 In January 1259, the king told the Exchequer to give 50 marks to the keepers of his Wardrobe for work on an altar frontal, a lectern, the tomb of his daughter Catherine, and various pictures: CLR 1251–60, 448. The exchequer *liberate* roll and receipt roll show that the order was obeyed: TNA: PRO E 403, 1217, m.2 and E 403/ 17B, m.2 (references I owe to Richard Cassidy who is editing the Pipe Roll of 1258–9, and allied material, for the Pipe Roll Society). The wardrobe accounts reveal that between July 1258 and July 1261 the keepers passed £333 6s 8d to the king's goldsmith, William of Gloucester, for the lectern and these other works: TNA: PRO E 361/1, m.1. The accounts of William of Gloucester himself do not mention work on the lectern but they were rendered by his executors after his death and were far from complete: TNA: PRO E 372/ 116, m.32d, partly printed in Scott 1863, 113–14. In 1258 Henry possessed another lectern, made of silver. This was in the custody of the keepers of the Wardrobe and it remained there until the king's death in 1272: TNA: PRO E 361/ 1, m.1d E 372/ 116, m.1d. This lectern weighed under ten pounds, which, given its lightness, suggests it was not of full length. See also CLR 1251–60, 262. The Wardrobe accounts of the reign of Henry III have been edited by Dr Ben Wild and will be published by the Pipe Roll Society.
- 57 Close Rolls 1259–61, 112.
- 58 See note 43 above.
- 59 *Ad honestam frontem*, Close Rolls 1242–7, 273; Brown *et al* 1963, I, 503–4.
- 60 As Barbara Harvey suggests in Chapter 6, the *gradus* before which monks prostrated themselves was probably the lowest step in front of the president's seat. It was not, therefore, a structure which would have interfered with the positioning of Henry's lectern. The monks might sit to receive discipline, rather than lying prostrate (Thompson 1902–4, II, 191), but the bench on which they sat was probably movable. I am assuming that Henry's lectern was likewise movable and was not intended to be a permanent feature of the chapter house.
- 61 Carpenter 2007a, 43. The £229 was the cost of food, drink, stables and almsgiving on both the vigil and the day of the feast, but Henry fasted on the vigil (Luard 1872–84, v, 48) so the costs on that day would have been small.
- 62 Maddicott 1994, 200–1, and see Ridgeway 1988, 230, 241.
- 63 For Henry's contribution to the church as a whole, see Wilson 2008.
- 64 Lethaby 1925, 125. Lethaby suggests the glass was grisaille with 'a bright shield of arms set in each light' (see fig 30).
- 65 Wilson 2008, 79–80.
- 66 For the way the windows go beyond their French models in letting in light, see Wilson *et al* 1986, 86–7.
- 67 Lethaby 1925, 107–9, 120; Binski 1995, 190 and pl 248.
- 68 See note 89 below.
- 69 See chapter 12. For a different interpretation of the floor from that offered here, see Binski 1995, 187.
- 70 Clayton 1912, 51.
- 71 The plan of the floor in Clayton 1912, 49 (by J O Cheadle), is not exact. Warwick Rodwell suggests to me that there were thirty-one royal shields in each band as an allusion to the commencement of the chapter house in Henry's thirty-first regnal year (October 1246 to October 1247).
- 72 For example CLR 1226–40, 268; 1240–5, 205, 227; 1245–51, 151; 1251–60, 113; and see Binski 1995, 77.
- 73 For recent debate about the nave shields, see Wilson 2008, 92 n. 72.
- 74 If there were baronial shields in the windows of the chapter house, then that would have given visual testimony to the place of the community there. However the only recorded shield is that of Provence, and is in effect, therefore, the shield of the queen: Lethaby 1925, 125.
- 75 On the inscription see here chapter 12, pp 230–1 (inscription II).
- 76 A king and queen, presumably Henry and Eleanor, are also depicted in the two short bands of small portrait tiles in the floor: Clayton 1912, 49, 66–7.
- 77 Luard 1872–84, vi, 388. This was in line with the long cross coinage introduced in 1247 where the 'Henricus' which had appeared on coins since the reign of Henry II (including those of Richard and John) was now qualified by 'tercius' or 'III'.
- 78 Binski has argued that the date on this inscription is 1279 and I have accepted this, but I now suspect it is intended to stand for 1269 and is thus Henry's work: Binski 1990, 14–15, 22, 15 nn. 41 and 42; Carpenter 1996, 418–19.
- 79 The Confessor appears on one of the tiles giving his ring to the pilgrim: Clayton 1912, 49, 70. See tile design 33 on page 225.

- ⁸⁰ Wickham Legg 1891–7, I, 388–9.
- ⁸¹ See, for example, the Parliament of 1244: Luard 1872–84, IV, 362–6; Carpenter 2004, 357.
- ⁸² Wilson 2008, 65.
- ⁸³ Eg Luard 1872–84, IV, 182, 366; V, 330.
- ⁸⁴ For the entrance from the east cloister turret, see Wilson 2008, 65; for its location, see Plan 1. I am grateful to Richard Mortimer FSA for accompanying me on an inspection.
- ⁸⁵ If Henry used the ‘pew’, I would see it as having this kind of function as much as being a place where he attended or viewed services.
- ⁸⁶ Stapleton 1846, 42. It was in the great hall in 1253 that sentence of excommunication against violators of Magna Carta was pronounced: Luard 1872–84, V, 375. For the capacity of the great hall, see Dixon-Smith 1999, 87.
- ⁸⁷ Westlake 1923, II, 387.
- ⁸⁸ Tout 1920–33, III, 291 and n. 1. See Loach 1991, 44 (a reference I owe to Barbara Harvey), which suggests that the Commons normally stood when meeting in the Westminster refectory.
- ⁸⁹ Including the upper tier from which the wall arcading springs, there are three tiers in six of the bays, and four in the eastern presidential bay as a result of the upper tier under the arcading being set higher than in the other bays. However, in the six bays, only the top two tiers are really usable as benches for sitting, the bottom tier being so low as only to permit squatting. The calculation of sixty-three assumes that five people sat on the upper tier, each under a separate arch of the wall arcade (of which there are five per bay), and four on the bench below, the smaller number being because of the dangling feet of those above. In the presidential bay it may be that no one sat on the tier immediately below the top seat, thus creating a fitting distance between the *seniores* there and those below. It would be good to make practical experiments today as to the capacity of the chapter house, not least to see the effects on the acoustics.
- ⁹⁰ Luard 1872–84, V, 48.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 6–7.
- ⁹² Maddicott 1994, 200–1.
- ⁹³ I am most grateful to Barbara Harvey FSA and John Maddicott FSA for commenting on a draft of this chapter.

CHAPTER 3 (pp 40–65)

- ¹ Madden 1866–9, III, 318. Because the reference occurs under the year 1250, it has sometimes been claimed that Paris wrote it then. However, the chronicle in question, the *Abbreviatio Chronicorum*, was probably compiled between 1255 and 1259 (Vaughan 1958, 114) and if the entry for 1250 was written in the late 1250s, as is very likely, Paris might by then have seen the eastern parts of the abbey church built to full height and been able to appreciate that they had a different character from the chapter house. Be that as it may, it is important to note that his writings contain not a single evaluative comment on the architecture of the rebuilt church. We can only speculate as to what

- exactly Paris intended by placing his notice that the king built an incomparable chapter house at Westminster under 1250. Perhaps he believed 1250 to be the year when the building reached structural completion. Such a dating would be compatible with the frequently cited reference to the temporary filling of the windows with canvas in 1253, and with the evidence that the adjacent and structurally integral south wall of the south transept was the part of the church which progressed most rapidly from 1246. The only other works of art to which Paris applied the epithet ‘incomparable’ were the early 13th-century shrine of St Thomas at Canterbury Cathedral and an early 12th-century two-volume missal at St Albans, both destroyed; Lehmann-Brockhaus 1955–60, I, no. 864, II, no. 3840. It can be assumed that Paris regarded these objects as being of quite outstanding quality and ambition.
- ² Between 1216 and 1245 Henry III had visited Worcester at least twenty-five times.
- ³ The literature on the Lincoln chapter house, as on the cathedral generally, is sparse. For the most recent account see Draper 2006, 141.
- ⁴ These visits took place on 6 January 1230 and 2 October 1236.
- ⁵ On the Abbey Dore chapter house see Harrison 1997 and Hillaby 1997. On the Beverley chapter house see Bilson 1895. Henry III is not known to have visited either Abbey Dore or Beverley and he certainly saw neither the dodecagonal-plan chapter house at Cistercian Margam Abbey in Glamorgan (which is a slightly later and more elaborate version of that at Abbey Dore) nor the octagonal example at Augustinian Holyrood Abbey, Edinburgh. The small and relatively undistinguished chapter house built on an elongated octagonal plan at Lichfield Cathedral around 1240 will doubtless have been known to the king, who had visited Lichfield several times before 1245.
- ⁶ Buttresses of this kind occur at Amiens and Salisbury cathedrals, both of which Master Henry had studied carefully, as his work at Westminster clearly reveals.
- ⁷ The fundamental problem in the planning of the Westminster chapter house was the fact that the 13th-century church at Westminster had transepts much longer than those of its 11th-century predecessor, a change which made the destruction of the north end of the 11th-century east claustral range unavoidable. Presumably it was not so much reluctance to demolish part of the fabric of the Romanesque east range as the desire that the chapter house entrance be close to the traditional position approximately at the centre of the east cloister walk which ruled out the possibility of setting the whole chapter house one bay further south, an option which would have avoided blinding the north-west window of the main room.
- ⁸ The vault responds and central pier rise to one-and-a-half times the height of their Lincoln counterparts. The utility of the Lincoln–Westminster comparison was demonstrated by Peter Kidson in Kidson, Murray and Thompson 1965, 99, 101.
- ⁹ Examples of single shafts carrying multiple ribs include the nave of the Temple church in London (late 1150s), the