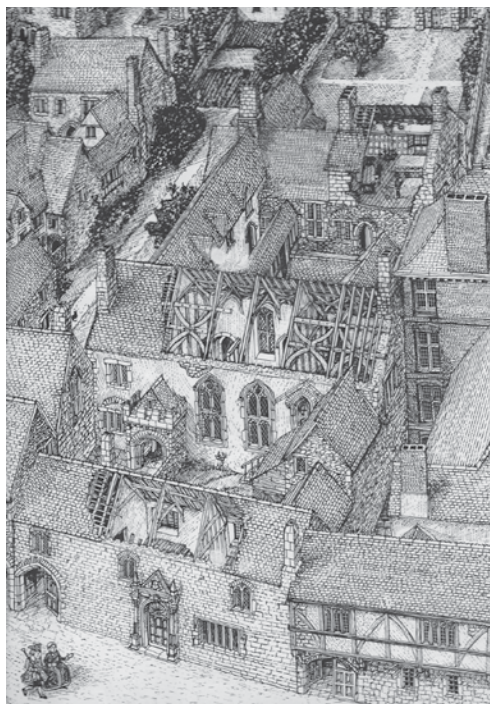




RAISING THE ROOF: THE BUILDING'S HISTORY

The tenement now occupied by the Devon and Exeter Institution was probably first laid out in the late 12th or 13th century, when the site was developed to provide a house for one of the cathedral canons. During the reign of Charles II the house was acquired by the Courtenay family and remained in their possession until the early 19th century. These reconstruction drawings explain the development of the building on this site from the 12th to the early 19th Century.



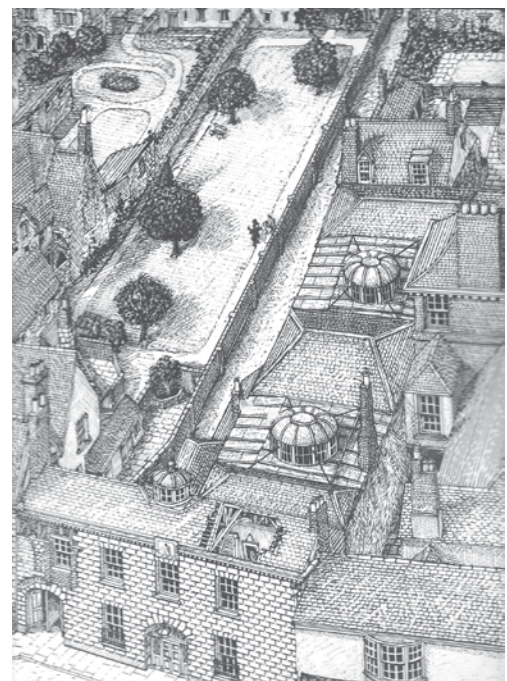
No 7 Cathedral Close c.1750

This house included a gatehouse and entrance court; a large hall with chambers and possibly a chapel adjoining; kitchens and cellars in a range beyond a further court and gardens and stabling to the rear of the site. The present building retains the outermost elements of the medieval house; the gatehouse and the kitchen wing. The present inner and outer libraries occupy the site of the hall, chambers and of the two small courtyards. The house was improved by the addition of several superb plaster ceilings in the early 17th century illustrated below.



No 7 Cathedral Close c.1800

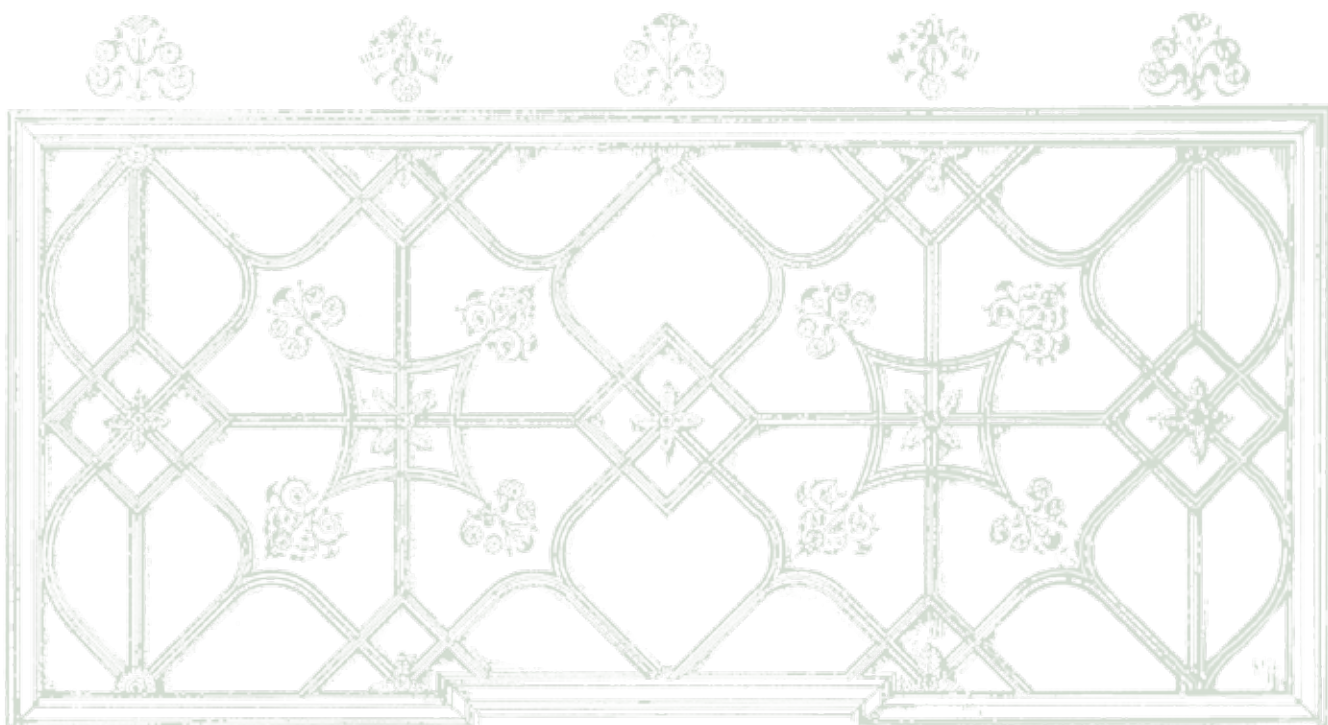
The house was partially demolished and rebuilt in c.1807. The rebuilt house had a staircase and a large dining room and a new kitchen and kitchen courtyard, all squeezed into the space between the remaining medieval gatehouse and kitchen wings.



The Devon & Exeter Institution c.1820

In 1814 the property was acquired by the trustees of the Devon and Exeter Institution for the promotion of Science, Literature and the Arts, and was again rebuilt, as part of an ambitious scheme to develop the whole site. The intention was to provide three large domed libraries, a small laboratory and a very large lecture theatre for demonstrations at the rear of the property. Only part of the project was undertaken. The early 19th-century dining room, staircase, kitchen and kitchen court were demolished and two domed libraries were constructed.

The construction of a third library, laboratory and lecture theatre - perhaps fortunately - never happened and the medieval kitchen wing was suffered to remain. It was converted into the Housekeeper's cottage and retains its plasterwork and panelling today.



RAISING THE ROOF: THE RESTORATION

The roof restoration (2016) relates to the reinforcement of the Georgian structure adjacent to the glazed cupolas. Examination of historic documents revealed that the distortion of the ceiling within both libraries had been evident since its original construction and throughout the 20th Century when ad hoc remedial repairs had been undertaken in almost every decade.

An archaeological survey in 2015 found that the timber structures of the walls, ceilings and roofs of the existing libraries were all made of reused timbers which have many redundant sockets, mortises and peg-holes showing that they previously formed part of a very different structure.



Failed timbers beneath the Inner Library cupola, 2014

Following an extensive survey and evaluation of the building fabric by conservation accredited Structural Engineers and Architects, it was agreed that the only practicable solution was to strip existing roof coverings and substrates to access the primary roof structure. This enabled a temporary stabilisation of the roof while a more informed and considered restoration was planned.

It is highly likely that these timbers were reclaimed from the parts of the building which had been constructed in 1807, and that the timbers were reused here to save on the costs of acquiring and transporting new material to the site. No reused medieval timbers were observed and it must be assumed that, apart from the surviving timber elements in the rear wing of the house, the timber structures of the medieval house have been entirely lost.



Templated steel encases the failed timbers, June 2016

The restoration involved the templating of manufactured steel to encase the failed timbers and hold them in a fixed position. The roof was reconstructed over the new steel skeleton, reusing materials where possible. The heavy lead cladding added in the 20th Century was replaced with copper, returning the roof to its 1813 splendour.



The copper cladding is fitted, September 2016

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The restored Library roof, December 2016

