

In a letter to the Master of Trinity John North outlined what he wanted to do.

Dear Sir -

When I called some time ago and unfortunately found you engaged I was anxious to mention that as my son had just married and that the accommodation at the Abbey was so limited and the Kitchen and the Offices and Servants Rooms are so very bad Lady North & I are anxious to add a wing to the house which will contain Rooms for Mr & Mrs. North, a new Kitchen, Offices and Servants' Rooms and some additional accommodation for friends.

As altho' we have much restored and embellished the old part of the Abbey we have hitherto never added to it and as we now propose so to do I think it right to inform you of our intentions of making the addition ...⁴⁹

Left unfinished by John or William Pope, Francis North in the late seventeenth century had baulked at completing the house, and the 1st Earl had preferred to spend his money on redecoration and on improving the grounds. In 1858, probably after they had completed most of the redecoration of the principal rooms, the Norths employed the architect John Gibson to bring the house up to date and – effectively – to complete it by building the long missing south range. Gibson was not the most distinguished of Victorian country-house architects. Other work of his has been described as ‘remarkably unappetising’ and as ‘big and charmless’.⁵⁰ It is not known why the Norths employed him, although it may be because he had worked at Charlecote in Warwickshire for the Lucys some five or six years before where, similarly, an Elizabethan house was in need of enlargement and modernisation. But in any case, what was done at Wroxton, although substantial in terms of its effect on the appearance of the house, was not architecturally demanding. Gibson designed the new southern range to match the northern and to provide up-date kitchen and other service rooms and further bedrooms, and by so doing completed the symmetry of the house which had been left awkward and lop-sided two hundred and fifty years before.

⁴⁹ TC, Old Bursary cupboard drawers, Wroxton, John North, 7 April 1858.

⁵⁰ Mark Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, 2nd edn., 1979, 404, 415.