The great principle to start upon, is, to preserve the greatest possible amount of ancient work intact; never to renew a feature without necessity, but to preserve everything which is not so decayed as to destroy its value as an exponent of the original design; never to add new work except in strict conformity with the evidences of its original form; never to work over or smarten up old work for the sake of making it conformable with new; never to “restore” carved work or sculpture, but to leave it to speak for itself; and generally, to deal with an ancient work as with an object on which we set the greatest value, and the integrity and authenticity of which are matters which we view as of paramount importance. These principles are, however, much more readily laid down than acted upon; so much so, that to one who holds them the process of restoration is one of continual disappointment, vexation and regret; for, labour as you will to act up to first principles, innumerable hindrances stand in the way of their realization. Sometimes the stone is found to be so utterly disintegrated that it is with the utmost difficulty—here a bit and there a bit—that you can trace out by laborious study what were the original details; and to attempt to keep these bits seem all hopeless as to preserve a body which falls to dust as you look at it. Sometimes, when this is by no means the case, a barbaric builder, or clerk of works, or an over-zealous clergyman interferes in your absence, and destroys the very objects you have been most labouring to preserve. A conscientious representative having been blamed for incurring extras in one place, makes up for it in another by introducing, before one is aware of it, a sweeping clause which condemns quantities of work one meant most religiously to preserve; and from one cause or another, one is always finding one's intentions more or less frustrated. Still, this is better than acting on no principle at all, or rather, as is too often the case, acting on the principle of preserving as little as possible and renewing as much as possible. To labour hard for the right principles, with whatever amount of shortcomings, must be better than openly to advocate and act upon those which are directly wrong. However this may be, there is no doubt that our churches and old buildings are everywhere losing their value, through reckless, or at least overdone, restoration; that it is high time that some public protest be made against it, and some course adopted for its prevention, and that each of us in his own practice should institute a rigorous examination as to what he has done and is doing, with a view to a stern falling back upon true principles; that the churches yet unspoiled may yet be saved. Here, again, I would suggest the Vigilance Committee already hinted at. It could do much, though the works in this case are so many and so widely spread that it seems impossible for all to be watched. After all, then, we must look to the architects employed. If they will not labour in the right direction, I fear there is but
little hope; and yet, without some stern supervision, I believe that the majority of them will not do so, and that they will always be able to adduce such plausible and practical reasons for their destructiveness as to convince their employers that they are in the right.

I am, however, uncertain whether we do not all go upon a wrong principle in our dealings with ancient churches. I could almost wish the word "restoration" expunged from our architectural vocabulary, and that we could be content with the more commonplace term "reparation." We have got into the way of assuming that the "restoration" of a church must in its own nature be the signal for pulling it to pieces from top to bottom. Not only must substantial repairs be attended to; the foundations underpinned; the strength of the walls looked to; decayed timbers spliced, or new ones here and there inserted; the most decayed stones carefully cut out and replaced; the covering made reliable; and the fittings put in seemly order, following and retaining every remnant of what is ancient; the stone-work cleaned from its thick coatings of whitewash, and the roofs divested of the concealment of modern ceilings; but, beyond all this, everything must be meddled with—the seating all taken up, floors removed, plastering stripped from the walls, the whole church left for months at the mercy of the elements by the removal of its roofs, windows which do not please the clergyman or the squire replaced with more pretentious ones; indeed the whole thing radically re-formed from top to toe. We all of us, however conservative our views, adopt something approaching to this as the necessary view of a restoration; and the chief difference is, that if the architect be at heart earnestly conservative, the church comes out from the ordeal with a certain amount of its ancient self remaining, but with very much of a new garb, or very much of its ancient look and very many of its interesting ancient features gone; but if his feelings are not conservative, so much the more is there of novelty instilled, and so much the less of antiquity retained in the restored church. [...]

Now let us consider for a moment what should be the beau-ideal of a restored church. First of all, the external stonework and all structural dilapidations would be so far repaired as to bring out the architectural forms, where seriously decayed and mutilated, and to render the structure of the walls and other parts sound and durable. This would be done, not on a wholesale principle such as could be described in a specification, but in a tentative and gradual manner; first replacing the stones which are entirely decayed, and rather feeling one's way and trying how little will do than going on any bold system. Every new stone would, thus be a perfect transcript of that which it replaced; and this would, so far as possible, extend to its dimensions and the mode of workmanship, for there is a character even in the proportions of Ashlar stones, still more in the mode of working them. Where a part is wholly or in any great degree wanting, it is questionable whether it would be supplied beyond the extent of existing evidence; when later features have been interpolated, it is yet more questionable whether they would be removed; such questions must depend upon circumstances, such as the merits of the original, and of the interpolation, whether the latter is in a state to demand thorough reparation, and whether the original features preponderate and give their character to the building. Such questions, too, would have been entered upon with a strong leaning against alteration. The interior would, it is true, be divested of its whitewash, but where this would not come off by fair means, it would be more or less left on, for a little discolouration of the stone is of infinitely less moment than the obliteration of the ancient tooling, so that in cleaning it no
hard tool must ever be brought to bear upon its surface. Where the stone work had been coloured or decorated the traces of this would be preserved with a loving care, no matter how indistinct or fragmentary they may be. The plastering might to some extent be renewed, but wherever the old colouring could be preserved portions of the plastering would be left, and the new would be, like the old, thin, and not projecting beyond the stone dressings. The roofs, if ancient, would have been studiously repaired so as to preserve every fragment which could be made to do its duty, even though the roofs might not be of the original date or pitch. The floor, though leveled and made free from damp, would retain all its monumental slabs in their true places, and the remainder would be made in a great degree subordinate to them, and of the material which, as far as can be ascertained, was before used, whether stone or tile. If old encaustic tiles remained, they would receive all due honour and protection, and new ones be founded on their patterns. The seating would probably be the carrying out of such parts of the old seating as may have remained, all old screens, etc., etc., being carefully preserved, and that in their own proper places. Where ancient features, as niches, etc., have been destroyed, they would have been carefully traced out, and either exposed to view and left to speak for themselves, or, if sufficient traces are left and fragments found (which is often the case) to warrant it, they would have been studiously restored to their original forms, no old part being disturbed, and every old fragment worked in. The fragments of old stained glass would retain each its own place, and if new glass be introduced where such remains exist, it would be made to carry out the design which they suggest. In a word, the old church would, by a studious and tentative process, have been brought into a seemly state without any smartening up of old weather-beaten surfaces, and without any loss of ancient or traditional character; while in such fittings or necessary features as there was no ancient guide for, it will be felt that the restorer united the ability to carry out the spirit of the old work with a desire to limit himself to the smallest possible sphere in the exercise of it. This seems the true ideal, but as I have before said, it is by no means easy, and often impossible to realize it. The extent of the decay of the materials, the shattered condition of the walls, the extent of barbarous mutilations, and the necessity for enlargement or other potential alterations to meet present wants, all militate more or less against it, yet the ideal suggests the spirit in which the work ought to be undertaken, even when it can only be partially attained, and I fear that it is not by any means the spirit with which such works really are undertaken. […]

1 There is an absurd custom, which is considered very clever, or jumbling together into a single window fragments of stained glass, of whatever date or design, from all part of a church, thus destroying all chance of identifying or tracing out their designs or original positions. The importance of not removing stained glass from its original position is a subject which has never received its proper amount of attention. Surely the fact that the glass was intended expressly for the window it occupies is not a thing to be ignored. Yet we find people who, in many respects think rightly enough on such subjects, feel no scruple in the world at removing the remains of an old window to make room for some memorial, and think the will or the donor is sufficient to override all claims of antiquity of association.
I will here offer a few suggestions which may, possibly, be of some utility. Firstly, I have found it in some degree useful to have a code of rules and suggestions drawn out and lithographed for the guidance of clerks of the works and builders who are engaged in restorations. They, however, are of little use unless constantly pressed personally upon the attention of the parties concerned. Secondly. The great enemies to careful restoration are contracts. The best course would be to carry them out by day work, feeling one's way in the most timid and careful manner, and always striving to do as little as is practicable. When contracts are necessary, a series of small contracts is better than one general one. Thirdly. It is highly desirable to avoid uncovering a roof all at once. When re-roofing or re-covering the roof is necessary, it is best to do it in small parts, and keep the rain out by temporary expedients as you go on. Fourthly. It is often the case that the exterior of window tracery is hopelessly decayed, while the internal half remains sound. In such cases I hold the proper course to be the renewal of the outer half alone, attaching the new work by plugs and cement. We thus retain one half in its original form, and ensure the correctness of the other half. Fifthly. Patching and piecing, if done carefully, are infinitely preferable to more wholesale renewal. The various cements which we now have at our command enable us to introduce the smallest pieces into decayed or mutilated mouldings which was formerly impracticable. Where the injury, however, is unimportant, it is better to leave it untouched. Sixthly. Never trust a clerk of the works or any unpractised hand to obtain the sections of mouldings, or the forms of other features to be restored. It is often difficult enough to persons whose eyes and whose instincts have been sharpened by the habit of studying ancient features through a long series of years; to those who have had no such advantage it is simply impossible; and one need not be astonished to find them, even with nearly perfect copies before them, producing forms scarcely resembling the original at all. I have often known them, even when they have passed a saw-curf (according to their somewhat barbarous custom), through a moulding, and ruled off its section, produce a result totally at variance with the old moulding. Seventhly. Where an ancient feature has been destroyed, never attempt its restoration till the parts round where the original existed have been thoroughly opened out and explored, and, where possible, in your own presence. Old fragments are in such cases nearly always discovered, and usually in great abundance, and near their proper sites. Thus fragments of a destroyed window are usually found in the wall which blocks up or surrounds the old opening. Blocked up niches, sedilia, or piscinae commonly contain each their own debris. Often, however, these are not quite sufficient to perfect a design, and the skill of the architect is taxed to the very utmost to judge what the rest would be. This resembles the labours of the palaeontologist who reconstructs the skeleton and the animal from a few broken bones, and, as in his case, the work is impossible to any but one thoroughly acquainted with his subject.

This is, indeed, a most important branch of the subject, and is by far the most interesting and cheering phase in restoration. In the hands of an experienced and painstaking restorer it often happens that a design which had been almost utterly lost is, in a very great measure, recovered; but this can only be done by long and patient study of the fragments discovered; and the work should be indefinitely postponed until these can be thoroughly explored and thoroughly studied. Too much stress cannot possibly be laid upon this. It is the very pith and marrow of restoration. […]