Public access description

The galleried display areas of the Royal Architectural Museum located in Tufton Street were covered with casts of sculptural details taken from Gothic buildings, including the cathedral of Notre Dame, Paris and Westminster Abbey. By the 1970s, Bedford Lemere & Co. was granted permission to photograph the RAM collection, winning an award for the series at the 1873 International Exhibition at Vienna.

The photographs are mostly of casts; many of them are identified (Chartres, Rouen, Amiens, St. Albans, Wells, Hereford, Ely, Lincoln, etc). The casts include capitals, bosses, finials, brackets, rosettes, spandrels, etc. Many of the photographs are enhanced by signs wired onto the wall stating the source of the cast and name of the photographer. Bedford Lemere & Co. catalogue numbers scratched into the negatives are also occasionally visible. They were sold as sets (either mounted or unmounted), or singly, and marketed to architects, students and 'art-workmen'.

The V&A took a leading role in the reproduction of art works to serve as models for artists and designers. When the South Kensington Museum (as the V&A was first known) was established in 1852, casts and photography were regarded as an essential part of the collection. They were viewed as educational tools, extending the visual resources of the Museum to artists and students of art and design.

The South Kensington Museum purchased from Lemere two duplicate sets of 30 unmounted photographs on 18 January 1873. The selection appears to have been made to order rather than a pre-selected set seen in volumes in other collections. A later purchase was made 10 June 1875 of two duplicate sets of 60 unmounted photographs (again with a made to order selection).

Descriptive line
Photograph of plaster casts of architectural details from choir stalls in St. Albans (and elsewhere). Photographed by Bedford Lemere & Co.

Physical description
Mounted sepia coloured photograph showing a display of casts.

Dimensions
Height: 10 in paper, Width: 12 in paper

Museum number
79390

Object history note
The Royal Architectural Museum (RAM) was established in 1851 by a group of architectural professionals led by George Gilbert Scott (1811-1878). The Museum was formed for the purpose of improving the education of architectural art-workers. Its collections were made up primarily of plaster casts of European gothic architectural ornament, together with original examples of decorative ironwork, tiles, woodcarving, sculptural stonework, stained glass and architectural models, plans and drawings. The Museum's first home was in Canon Row, Westminster, London where, from 1852 until 1854, it incorporated a School for Art-workmen.

Under the patronage of Prince Albert (1819-1861) the RAM expanded rapidly and in 1857 moved to the new South Kensington Museum (now Victoria and Albert Museum), where it retained its independent status and name. In 1869 it moved to 18-20 Bowling Street (renamed Tufton Street), Westminster, London.

A 1876 catalogue record holdings in excess of 6000 items. But by 1904, enthusiasm for the Gothic had waned, and the RAM was taken over by the Architectural Association. The AA's architecture school co-existed within the RAM buildings until 1915 when it was decided that conditions were too cramped and the collections dispersed, some gifted, others purchased, primarily to the Victoria and Albert Museum. The collection now forms part of the reconstituted Cast Court.

This photograph by Bedford Lemere was found in the Sculpture Section among archival material relating to the V&A's celebrated Cast Courts. Its discovery is part of the ongoing programme to reunite photographs scattered among the various departments of the Museum with the rest of the Photography Collection.

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