ON THE CHARACTERISTICS AND CLASSIFICATION OF THE CHURCH TOWERS OF SOMERSET.

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*** *This paper is amplified from materials drawn up from one read before the Members of the Somerset Archaeological Society at their Annual Meeting held in July*, 1904.

SOMERSET CHURCH TOWERS.

(*Abstract of Paper.*)

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION.—Somerset towers (*i.e.*, square western towers) unrivalled.

(*a*) Relatively few of exceptional excellence.
(*b*) All of one period, Perpendicular, and mostly late.
(*c*) Strong family likeness in the groups, with individual differences.
(*d*) Causes : 1 : good stone abundant in great variety.
2 : influence of Glastonbury and other abbeys.
3 : example; emulation.
(*e*) Why *towers* (for peals of bells?) and not chantries?

II. CHARACTERISTICS.

(*a*) Elaboration of parapets.
(*b*) Clustered pinnacles : pilaster-pinnacle work.
(*c*) Niches and niche-work.
(*d*) Diagonalism in upper part of buttresses, in pinnacles and in pinnacle-work.
(*e*) West doorways and west windows.
(*f*) Grotesque animal figures.
(*g*) External stair-turrets, nearly always prominent.
(*h*) Window panelling.
(*i*) Tower arches.

III.—CLASSIFICATION.

(*a*) Freeman's : usually accepted, but unsatisfactory. His three classes practically depend on the character of the stair-turrets and not on the chief features of the towers themselves.
(*b*) Proposed classification according to the treatment of the belfry stage.

1. GROUP A. *Cheddar Valley type.* Triple windows in each face of belfry stage and not in the stage below.
Examples (first-rate) : Shepton Mallet; Cheddar (Banwell); Winscombe; Weston Zoyland; Bruton.—Axbridge (central), and Bleadon.

2. GROUP B. *Taunton Dean type.* Double windows in belfry stage and not in the stage below.
Examples (first-rate) : N. Petherton; Huish; Kingsbury; Bps. Lydeard, Taunton St. James; Ile Abbots, Staple Fitzpaine, Kingston.

3. Group C. *Bristol and Channel district type.* Single belfry windows, wholly contained in belfry stage.
Examples : Dundry ; Backwell ; Publow ; Portishead ; Wraxall, Kilmersdon.—Brislington.
4. Group D. Consisting of three subdivisions. Connecting characteristic : uniformity of treatment above nave roof.
(α) *Wrington type :* Only one—very tall—stage above the body of the church.
Examples (all first-rate) : Wrington, Evercreech ; St. Cuthbert's, Wells ; Batcombe.
(β) *Chewton Mendip type :* double or triple windows both in the belfry stage and in that below.
Examples (all first-rate) : Chewton Mendip ; St. Mary's, Taunton ; St. John's, Glastonbury ; Leigh-on-Mendip (Mells) ; and (central) Ilminster.
(γ) *Shepton-Beauchamp type :* belfry stage divided by string from that below, but connected with it by tall single windows partly in one stage and partly in the other.
Examples (none first-rate) : Shepton-Beauchamp ; Hinton St. George ; Norton-sub-Hamdon : Curry-Rivel ; and (central) Crewkerne.

R. P. B.

Introduction.

Of all the countries of the world, England is pre-eminent for its parish churches ; and of all the counties of England, Somerset is pre-eminent for its church towers. Other counties may claim superiority in respect of the greater magnificence of their churches as whole buildings, or in respect of the greater excellence of individual features of them ; but with regard to *towers*, the claims of Somerset admit of no rivalry, and its supremacy is acknowledged to be beyond intelligent dispute.

By *towers* must be understood square, western towers, designed to be complete in themselves, and not surmounted by lanterns or spires. For though octagonal towers are so frequent in Somerset as to be almost a provincialism, and though central towers are far from uncommon, the examples of both are for the most part plain and insignificant, and they rarely exhibit those distinctive traits of design or ornament which are peculiarly characteristic of the finest western towers ; And the few which carry spires are in no way specially remarkable ; certainly they cannot be compared with those of some other districts, such as North Northamptonshire or South Lincolnshire.

This pre-eminence of the towers of Somerset rests on the exceptional splendour of the relatively few which

have won for the county at large its high reputation. For only a small proportion is of unusual excellence; the greater number, so far from rising above the average level of merit, usually fall below that attained in some other parts of England—Norfolk, or Suffolk, for instance, or even East Anglia generally.

Further, Somerset maintains its pre-eminence, despite the fact that its most magnificent and notable towers were all without exception erected during one period, the Perpendicular era, and many of them towards the close of it. As a consequence of this fact, similarity, if not sameness, might be expected in them: what we find, however, with all the strong family likenesses in the different groups, is an astonishing variety, due not to any difference of style, but solely to individuality of treatment. Abundant evidence is shown of the versatility and resource of the builders, all the more striking as being displayed at a time when Gothic architecture was already on the wane, and when its decline had actually begun elsewhere.

The achievement of these masterpieces was doubtless the result of many causes combined. Excellent material was ready to hand in the fine building stone which might be quarried almost anywhere. This is of many kinds, varying greatly both in texture and in colour; a circumstance which largely contributes to counteract any tendency to monotony. For example: there is the dark toned, brownish oolite used at North Petherton (Plate III); the warm red sandstone of Taunton Deane; the hard, grey freestone of Doulting and of Wedmore; the mellow oolite of Ham Hill; the purple conglomerate of Draycott; and the blue lias of the neighbourhood of Langport and elsewhere; all, except the last named, which was used for walling only, and only rarely for quoins or for moulded or carved work, of good quality, readily cut, and durable.[1] In some towers (*e.g.* North Petherton, Huish Episcopi (Plate IV), etc.) the contrast between the light blue walling, and the dark brown, red, or yellow worked stone is very striking—perhaps more striking than satisfactory. Somewhat similarly in Mid-Northamptonshire alternate

[1] Cf. a paper by B. E. Ferrey on "The Somerset type of Church," in the *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological Society* for the year 1883.

bands of dark ironstone and light freestone are often found in the same building.

Again, the example and influence, if not the patronage and assistance, of the powerful and wealthy Abbey of Glastonbury, probably in many cases acted as a stimulus to building on a grander scale and in a more sumptuous manner than would otherwise have been attempted. The precedent set in one church would doubtless be followed in others; and the less important Abbeys of Cleve, Hinton, Muchelney, and Woodspring would probably help their dependencies in the same way so far as they could.[1]

Further, here, as elsewhere, ambition and emulation must have been powerful incentives towards the erection of many of these splendid buildings. One village would make a grand effort to raise a tower that should be the admiration and envy of all the country side; the adjoining village would strain every nerve in a supreme effort to beat the rival over the way. Stories of clever apprentice and jealous master, frequent elsewhere, are repeated here; as, for instance, at Huish and Kingsbury; stripped of the fabulous, there is probably a substratum of truth in them, based upon the keen competition between two neighbouring places to have, at all costs, the finer structure.

Some such causes, among others, were apparently at work to effect the contemporary building—or rebuilding—entirely from the ground, of so many glorious towers.

Why *towers* rather than other parts of churches were chosen for this extraordinary display of grandeur in scale and in ornamentation, is not at first sight very evident. For special fervour of piety and special outbursts of liberality a century or so earlier would most likely have found vent in enlarging or beautifying the choirs or chancels (which are often comparatively small and poor in even the finest Somerset churches) or in erecting chantry chapels and endowing priests to sing in them. But the great movement which was destined ere long to arrest all church building in England was already, perhaps, foreshadowed, if it was not actually being

[1] All the finest Somerset Towers (except Batheaston) have western doorways, which often mark connection with some religious house.

felt: and it has been suggested[1] that a prudent generosity rather exercised itself in rearing splendid monuments of taste and skill which should be allowed to remain for all time the pride of the county, than in founding chantries and endowing altars for rites which were even then beginning to lose their paramount importance, and which were doomed to an eventually certain, and probably long foreseen, abolition. But another, and very practical, motive for the erection of large towers may be found in the fact that towards the close of the fifteenth and in the early years of the sixteenth century peals of bells were beginning commonly to come into vogue. Previously, most village churches had two or three small and light service bells, rung separately, not together; and for these, in many cases, bell-cots would have been sufficient. But with the introduction of "tuneable peals" of heavy bells for musical change ringing or chiming, ampler accommodation would be needed; and towers would naturally be erected to meet the want.

Special Characteristics.

I. *Elaboration of Parapets.*

The parapet in Somerset is not merely a wall erected to protect a pathway along a roof, and finished (as usual elsewhere) either with a plainly moulded coping, or with battlements, originally designed for defence, and afterwards retained for aesthetic reasons; but it assumes a definite and important place of its own in the scheme of decoration, and is often the most highly ornate part of the whole tower. In the finest examples it is usually pierced with geometrical and other patterns, and exhibits an exquisite combination of richness and elegance. It may be remarked, however, that many highly elaborate parapets have but slight connection with the magnificent towers which they crown; and, fine as they are in themselves, they often appear as independent or even incongruous superstructures. In some cases they do

[1] Cf. a paper by F. Warre, "On the Perpendicular Towers of Somerset," printed in the *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological Society* for 1852.

not fit, but are obviously too large for the belfry storeys on which they stand; in others, the merlons of their battlements are confused with the corner or central pinnacles; in others, again, the latter project at the extreme angles, standing upon nothing, instead of forming the natural termination of buttresses below them. The excessive height and strongly emphasised verticality of some parapets (such as those of the towers of Dundry (Plate VI) and S. Mary's, Taunton) form a striking contrast to the equally emphasised horizontal stringcourses or panelled bands which divide the stages of the towers themselves. They form, too, a striking contrast to the marked horizontality of other parapets (such as those of the towers of Yeovil and Wedmore) unrelieved by any vertical outlines, and even devoid of corner pinnacles.

II. *Pinnacles.*

Pinnacles are naturally connected with parapets; and apart from the ease with which they lend themselves to independent ornamental treatment such as panelling, carving, and crocket-work in almost infinite variety, their chief function is to give the appearance of lightness, and to break up the horizontal lines which would otherwise be too pronounced in the parapets of square towers. A local (and very beautiful) peculiarity is their employment at the corners in clusters, usually four smaller pinnaclets, in some cases attached, in others detached, being grouped round a larger central pinnacle rising high above them. Less commendable are the pinnaclets supported on brackets thrown outward from the angles from some parapet cornices, and connected by small flying buttresses to the sides of corner pinnacles. They have an air of perilous insecurity, and they unduly extend the apparent width of the parapet.

As well as pinnacles proper, *i.e.*, complete, detached pinnacles, attached half-pinnacles (usually set diagonally) are much employed in many different positions. This pilaster-pinnacle work, as it may be called, is sometimes found in other localities, but there it is usually confined to the sides of doorways and tomb-recesses. In Somerset it is largely employed to decorate the upper

stages of buttresses, and to relieve plain wall surfaces; and its bold projections are the more valuable as much of the panelled ornament is shallow work, and has a somewhat flat appearance.

III. *Niche-Work.*

Elaborate towers in other districts are often ornamented with canopied niches; but nowhere is this mode of decoration so frequent and so abundant as in Somerset. In Somerset towers the niches often have miniature groined roofs; and the canopies, which have pinnaclets at the sides, are crocketed and terminate in boldly carved finials. The bases are generally supported by projecting brackets with characteristic foliage cut in low relief, sometimes by angel figures with outspread wings, and the brackets are frequently borne by semi-shafts—or pilaster-pinnacle work—carried up from the stringcourse next below. These niches are to be found on all faces of towers and in all stages (except the belfries); occasionally, even in parapets, where they occupy the place of a central merlon or pinnacle. As for instance, at—

Wraxall,
Tickenham,
W. Pennard,
Brislington.

The statues which once filled them have generally, in Somerset as elsewhere, been destroyed; but in this county a comparatively large number have escaped destruction or serious mutilation; at Ile Abbots, for instance, and at Kingsbury Episcopi, nearly all remain intact.

IV. *External stair-turrets.*

These are almost universal in Somerset. In other fine architectural provinces, such as East Anglia, or South Lincolnshire and North Northamptonshire, tower staircases are arranged not to be visible from outside, in order that they may not interfere with the general symmetry of the tower; they are placed in the thickness of the walls at one corner, the angle of which is filled with masonry internally to afford room for the winding stairs. But in Somerset they are deliberately planned

to be plainly visible on the outside; and they are made a prominent—in some districts *the* prominent—feature of the general design. They are usually placed at, or near a corner—in most cases the north-east; occasionally, as at Wellington, one is seen in the middle of one side of a tower. In shape most are octagonal, or semi-octagonal; but often the lowest or two lowest stages of them are rectangular. Some, *e.g.*, are hexagonal—

Hutton,
Shepton Beauchamp.

One or two are irregular polygons—

Ilminster (Plate IX),
Weare.

The large majority are of bold projection, and rise high above the tower parapet. Some are finished with parapets of their own (usually embattled); others with spirelets, which in the richer and more important examples are ribbed and crocketed with handsome finials, and are flanked by pinnaclets rising from each angle. In a few instances only they are partly hidden between pairs of angle buttresses, and such die away into the tower and become internal in the upper stages; for instance—

Wrington (Plate VII),
Evercreech (Plate VIII),
Lympsham,
Wells.

In two instances of important towers there is no visible external turret or thickening of the wall for the staircase—

Leigh,
Mells;

while in one (happily, only one) case (at Yatton) the turret is thrust away at arm's length, so to speak, by being placed outside a diagonal corner buttress, and thus emphasised with a vengeance!

We may observe that stair-turrets in other parts of churches are often made prominent features of them in Somerset. Thus there are fine rood-turrets at—

Banwell,
Winscombe (Plate II),
Burrington, etc.;

and similar stair-turrets are used with equally good effect, to afford access to roofs, as at—

Yatton,
Crewkerne, etc.

The relative gain or loss, artistically, resulting from an internal and concealed, or an external and obtruded, tower staircase, is a matter of taste and of individual opinion; but we may fairly presume that it is the smaller, plainer "merely picturesque towers of no great architectural pretensions"[1] that gain most from a well-developed and ornate turret as their prominent feature; especially if it rise at one angle, there being single diagonal buttresses at the other three, as is usual in the less important examples. For this reason, doubtless, Brislington has been pronounced "a very gorgeous tower" (Parker, *Introduction*), and "a rich Somersetshire tower" (Parker, *Glossary*). Its rather fine parapet and very fine turret spirelet form an elegant and even striking finish to a plain little tower of quite ordinary merit.[2] Similarly Dundry, though in all respects a grander structure, depends upon its elaborate crown for its fame. Great skill has been shown in many of the finest towers by the turret being so arranged as only to modify, and not spoil, the designs on the side where it is placed. The north faces of the following towers are cases in point—

Shepton Mallet (Plate I),
Cranmore,
Bruton,
Winscombe,
Bishop's Lydeard,
S. Mary's, Taunton.

The belfry windows are in some instances narrower, in others fewer, than on the other faces; but they are not thrown out of centre, nor is there any marked or unpleasant want of symmetry. At Axbridge alone, the corner stair turret does not in any way affect the design of the belfry windows on the sides adjacent to it.

In octagonal towers, on the other hand, external stair-turrets seem obviously misplaced. Not only are there no

[1] Cf. E. A. Freeman, *Som. Archaeol. Soc. Proceedings*, 1851.

[2] Chew Stoke and Batheaston are finer examples.

SHEPTON MALLET.

buttresses at the angles of such a tower large enough to mask or to balance the turret, but it necessarily interferes much more noticeably with the general outline (as for example, at Somerton).

V. *Diagonalism.*

In all counties the larger and more important towers have as a rule buttresses set in pairs at right angles near their corners ; and the smaller and less important ones (if built during or after the fourteenth century) have single buttresses at each angle set diagonally. But whether double or single, buttresses elsewhere usually keep the same relative inclination in all their stages, and their sides from bottom to top form an angle of 90 or of 135 degrees respectively with the adjacent sides of the tower. They are sometimes finished with gablets, but far more commonly with plain weather-slopes which die away into the walls of the tower somewhere in the belfry stage.

But in the finer Somerset towers buttresses are not finished in either of these ways. At the base of the belfry stage, if not below it, they pass either into flat pilaster-strips usually ornamented with pinnacle-shafts, set diagonally attached to their faces, or into thin slips of walling set diagonally at the angles, of greater or less projection according as the belfry stage is more or less set back from the stage below it, also faced with, or surmounted by, pinnacle shafts. The crocketed pinnaclets which rise from the shafts are usually free and terminate below the parapet cornice.

The thin slips of walling above mentioned are an especial Somerset peculiarity. Their purpose is twofold : utilitarian, in holding the shafts securely in position ; and artistic, in preventing daylight from appearing too low down between the shafts and the tower walls. The former object is sometimes attained when the latter is not desired by little flying arches connecting the pinnacle-shafts with the tower instead of by the wall slips. All this diagonal setting of pilaster-strips, pinnacle-shafts and pinnacles, not only above buttresses, but also generally on the faces of towers, is a notable and strongly marked local characteristic.

The same principle of diagonalism is sometimes carried out still higher up with consummate skill and with admirable effect. The pinnacle-shafts that crown the corner buttresses pass through the parapet and terminate in free pinnaclets at the angles of the square corner pinnacles, which are set on diagonally. Excellent examples may be seen at—

Backwell,
Portishead,
Evercreech,
Wrington;

but perhaps the most instructive instance is Evercreech (Plate VIII), where the general design is almost a repetition of that of Wrington (Plate VII), but where the details are marvellously softened and refined by the diagonal treatment of them.

In this connection we may observe that occasionally (as, for example, at Long Sutton) medial pinnacle-shafts are carried through an embattled parapet, the pinnaclets appearing above the merlons. The effect of this arrangement is confused and unsatisfactory.

VI. *Grotesque animal figures.*

These forms of ornament, common in rich Perpendicular work everywhere, are especially common in Somerset: not only here and there as gargoyles, but in profusion as decorative breaks in the horizontal lines of parapet cornices, particularly at angles. Occasionally they are used to decorate stringcourses in the same way.[1] Many of the forms are lifelike, and portray animals in varied attitudes of sprightly playfulness, as for example at—

Kilmersdon,
Evercreech,
Staple-Fitzpaine (Plate V);

others are weird, hideous and repulsive monsters, of which perhaps the most frightful are to be seen at South Petherton.

[1] Sometimes angel-heads supported by outspread wings are similarly used: as, for example, at Chewton Mendip.

VII. *Panelling in form of Windows.*

Perhaps the chief distinguishing feature of the Somerset towers as contrasted with those of other districts is the "panelling in form of windows," as Freeman calls it, which is well-nigh universal. This localism is the more noteworthy, as panelling in the usual Perpendicular manner, *i.e.* the covering of the whole of flat surfaces with panel-work (as, for example, in the towers of Gloucester Cathedral and Evesham) is hardly ever to be seen *externally*,[1] though common enough inside churches, especially in the soffits of tower arches. In some examples these so-called windows are entirely blind, and are fitted with solid stonework, but oftener, especially in the higher stages, they are ornamented with geometrical designs in pierced stonework of great elegance. The belfry windows are naturally, as a rule, the most open, but even they are very seldom entirely so; generally the greater part of them is filled with similar pierced stonework, and they are very rarely fitted with the louvre-boards usual elsewhere.

VIII. *West Doorways and West Windows.*

The west face of a western tower is naturally the most important. It is the most elaborate, and is often built of better stone and with better masonry than the other sides. In Somerset all the finer towers have western doorways, which as a rule are comparatively insignificant, on account of the large size and low position of the west windows. The sills of these often join the labels over the doors; and in some cases, *e.g.* Brislington and Mells, they are actually below the apex of the doorway arch: for the function of the west window in most cases is not merely, as usual elsewhere, to light the tower, but also the nave. For, strangely enough, that peculiarly Perpendicular feature, the clerestory, is comparatively uncommon in the largely Perpendicular—or Perpendi-

[1] The upper part of the belfry at North Petherton is a very rare one, if not unique.

cularised—churches of Somerset. Where there is no western tower, and in consequence the whole of the west gable of the nave is available for the doorway and the window, as at Yatton and Crewkerne, the doorway assumes a more prominent position and a more dignified character.

IX. *Tower Arches.*

It has been said above that in spite of the general resemblance to one another of members of the same group, the individual towers in each group exhibit great variety. In one feature, however, this is not so. All the tower arches belong to one or other of two kinds, and the details of each kind are singularly uniform. Therefore, though they cannot strictly be called monotonous, since there are two quite distinct types equally common, they are certainly *ditonous*, if one may coin the word, and for that reason they are comparatively uninteresting. All the arches are either moulded or panelled. The moulded arches have almost invariably a casement hollow between two wave-mouldings. The panelled arches have little or no chamfer-plane, the angles being occupied by a roll or bowtel forming an attached angle-shaft (with or without a miniature cap and base); and in the soffit-plane are two rows of sunk panels of which there are usually two tiers in the jambs, and two above in the archivolt. Nearly all these tower arches are continuous. The entire absence of hoodmoulds over them, as well as other Perpendicular arches in Somerset, is a characteristic localism.

X. *Date.*

As has been remarked before, the range of date in the finest Somerset towers is coextensive with the Perpendicular era of English architecture—*i.e.* the whole of the fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth. Some few may have been begun a little earlier; some doubtless were not finished till later; but the large majority were built within those limits of time. As usual there are very few records of their building.

WINSCOMBE.

With the exception of the towers of Wells Cathedral, Bath Abbey, and Dunster conventual church (with none of which we are here immediately concerned) only two, so far as we know, Glastonbury S. John and Winscombe, have had dates assigned to them on documentary evidence. Glastonbury is stated to have been built by Abbot John Selwood in 1485; and though it has a later appearance, there is nothing in its architectural character inconsistent with such a date.

On the other hand, Winscombe is said to have been built by Bishop Ralph de Salopia, who died in 1362; but his building cannot be that which remains to-day, unless we are to reject all the ordinary criteria on which we rely to determine date. The writer of Murray's *Handbook to Somerset* says: (p. 475) "It must rank among the earliest triumphs of the new Perpendicular style"; but there is nothing either in the general appearance or in the details of this tower to differentiate it from many others of its type, or to warrant belief in any such precocity. We cannot suppose that the fully developed Perpendicular at Winscombe is earlier than the transitional and tentative forms at Edington, where Decorated influence is still very prominent; and we know that Edington church was begun as late as 1332, and that it was not dedicated till 1361.[1] Far more probably Winscombe church was completed in 1461, a date which remains on a piece of painted glass in the chancel (as mentioned by Rickman, 6th Edition, p. 412), and which might well be assigned to it on the evidence of its architectural style.

Classification.

In a paper "On the Perpendicular of Somerset," read before the Somerset Archaeological Society in 1851, Professor E. A. Freeman proposed a classification of the Church towers of the county; and he read a second paper on the same subject before the same Society in the following year. On the latter occasion, while adducing further instances and supplementing his former remarks,

[1] See *Rickman*, 6th Ed., p. 337, where Edington is called "one of the earliest dated examples"—not of Perpendicular, but—"of this transition," *i.e.* that from Decorated to Perpendicular.

he observed that he had seen nothing fresh in the interval to lead him to modify materially his former views. His classification was received with all the respect due to an eminent architectural authority, and an enthusiastic admirer of Perpendicular Gothic in general and Somerset examples of it in particular. It met with general acceptance, and when Somerset towers are mentioned[1] they are usually referred to one or other of the three heads under which Freeman grouped them. As his papers were not separately reprinted, and as the Volumes of the Society's Proceedings which contain them are now scarce and not readily accessible, in considering and criticizing his classification, it will be more serviceable to quote extracts than merely to give references. We must at the outset state our conviction that it was started on a false basis; that it is at once unsatisfactory, and incomplete; and that, if followed, it must lead to confusion. This criticism will be regarded as less presumptuous if it can be vindicated on Freeman's own showing, as we think it can.

He divides the more important towers into three main classes.

I. *The Taunton Type.*

In this "the height above the church is divided into numerous stages, and a staircase turret at one corner, most usually the north-east, is combined with double buttresses at all the four corners, while all the pinnacles are of equal height."

II. *The Bristol Type.*

Where "the turret is brought into prominence, crowned with a single large pinnacle rising above the rest."

III. *The Wrington Type.*

In this "the staircase-turret, as an important aesthetic feature, is entirely dispensed with, being only carried up

[1] *e.g.* by J. L. W. Page in *The Church Towers of Somerset* (Frost and Reed) by C. Wickes in *Towers and Spires*, by the writer of Murray's Handbook to Somerset, etc.

a little way above the roof of the church, and then finished off under the belfry stage. The whole portion of the tower above the church is thrown into one vast stage, panelled with two enormously lofty windows. . . . . This stage is recessed between two flat square turrets, or large pilasters, against which the buttresses are finished with their pinnacles just below the parapet. The pilasters are carried up and crowned with spires, forming four magnificent pinnacles to the whole tower, and rising as the natural finish of the pinnacles below. This glorious idea, which I have no hesitation in ranking among the very highest achievements of architectural genius, I have as yet seen completely realized in two cases only, Wrington (Plate VII), and St. Cuthbert's at Wells."

Now, as Freeman's last and most highly esteemed class consists of only two examples (though we may furnish him with two more, for Evercreech, which apparently he did not then know, should obviously be included; and if the *number* of the belfry windows be considered as immaterial to the classification, Batcombe also), all the rest of the finer towers must belong to either his first or his second class. And of them he says, "these two classes naturally run very much into one another, the only difference being in the degree of prominence given to a feature which exists in both cases. I should consider those only to be pure examples of the second (*i.e.* the Bristol type) in which buttresses are entirely absent from the corner occupied by the staircase turret, so as to give the latter its full importance. It is no wonder, then, that we meet with an intermediate class in which the turret stands out much more boldly than in the first class, but still has not entirely dispensed with the buttresses at that angle."

That is to say, the towers are only distinguishable by the arrangement and finish of a feature, and that a merely subordinate one, common to them all, namely their staircase turrets! And even so, there remains the "intermediate class" falling under neither category!

Again; in speaking of Ilminster (Plate IX), Freeman remarks: "the single angle turret breaks in upon the

regularity of the design more than is desirable in an erection of such great architectural splendour;" and in speaking of Portishead and Dundry, "when such a (staircase) turret is introduced, its predominance over the other pinnacles should be greater than it is in this case. My own view is very decidedly that this form" (*i.e.* the predominant staircase turret crowned with a lofty spirelet) "is only adapted to an inferior class of towers—those of the merely picturesque kind; and that in structures of the real architectural magnificence of Wrington and Glastonbury their designers judged right in making all their pinnacles on a level."

With all of this we may entirely agree, but in an attempt to classify the finer towers, why make their class depend on the treatment of an adjunct which is neither necessary nor desirable, one by which in many cases—to quote Freeman once more—"the uniformity of the structure is destroyed without any proportionate gain in picturesque effect"?

Confusion naturally arises from a system which would create arbitrary distinctions between towers almost identical in design. The family likeness among those belonging to the same groups in Somerset is so strong that it is often difficult in passing from one example to another to remember the points of difference. For instance, if after examining Cheddar we go on to Axbridge close by, we find a (central) tower very similar in design to the (western) one we have left. No one, unless resolved to apply a predetermined method of classification, could regard them as being of different types. In details as well as in general appearance the resemblance is sufficiently obvious; but Cheddar has a staircase-turret combined with buttresses, therefore it belongs to the Taunton class: while Axbridge has a turret standing free, with no buttresses at that angle; therefore it belongs to the Bristol class! Several other pairs of towers might be instanced which in spite of their clearly similar design and features would have to be separated according to Freeman's canon.

Doubtless, no classification could be proposed both simple and perfect; none, that is, which would at once enable us infallibly to assign to one or other of a few

main types all the towers with which we have to deal. In any system some would assert their individuality and independence of system, and would elude all efforts to arrange them. But all noble, well-planned towers have a definite physiognomy of their own; and in any attempt to group them, they can only be satisfactorily classed and distinguished, not by mere peculiarities in such accidental appendages as external stair-turrets, but by the most characteristic features of the towers themselves.

Now on first sight of a fine tower, after a preliminary glance at the whole in order to gain a general impression of its scale and proportions, our eyes naturally rest on the most important and distinctive part of it—the belfry stage, for there the ornamentation is the most lavish, and there the windows, which give the tower its chief expression, are usually larger if not also more numerous than those in the lower storeys. The belfry stage is in fact to the rest of a church tower what the face is to the rest of the human body; to it we instinctively look for the peculiar features which determine its character, and mark its likeness or unlikeness to other members of the same family.

Accordingly, the classification which we propose to adopt is based upon the treatment of the belfry storey and particularly upon the number of its windows. The term *windows* in this connection must be understood to include dummy or blind windows, filled with solid stone panelling, as well as open windows and such as are filled with pierced stonework.

We shall divide the towers into four groups :—

GROUP A.—Characterised by three windows abreast in the belfry stage, and not in the stage below :

GROUP B.—Characterised by two windows abreast in the belfry stage, and not in the stage below :

GROUP C.—Characterised by single belfry windows in each face, wholly contained in the belfry stage :

GROUP D.—Characterised by uniformity of treatment above the roof of the nave.

Further details will be given in the fuller descriptions which follow of each of the separate groups.

The A Group, or Cheddar Valley type.

Unnoticed by Freeman as a separate class, this is perhaps the most characteristic and distinctive of all. It includes many first-rate, and many second-rate towers, differing from one another in size and richness rather than in character or design, and all bearing a strong general resemblance to the other members of the same group. The peculiar feature is a belfry storey with triple windows, the central one usually open, and the side ones either filled with solid stone panelling, or (more rarely) with pierced stonework. The storey below (in 4-stage towers) has one similar window, generally with a niche on either side of it in the richer examples. The storey next above the nave roof has either a window or a niche for a figure, but not both (except at Weston Zoyland). The parapet is usually pierced with geometrical patterns, and (except at Bruton and Long Sutton) has a horizontal, not embattled top. The corner pinnacles are single and slender, and intermediate pinnacles, though occasionally occurring, are infrequent. The buttresses are characteristic: they are very narrow, of small projection, and (with the single exception of Bleadon) set in pairs close to the angles, being in most cases so attenuated as to give the impression of being intended as merely decorative features rather than as strengthening supports.

Examples of this group are spread over a fairly wide area: but the home of it is the Cheddar Valley, where the type prevails. The prototype appears to be the tower of Shepton Mallet (Plate I),[1] built apparently about the end of the fourteenth century, and intended to carry a spire, of which only a few feet were ever completed. In consequence, no doubt, of this intention, the belfry stage is well set back, and the buttresses are substantial and of considerable projection, in order to carry out the idea of spire-growth from the ground upward. The only other tower that preserves these early characteristics (though there are no signs visible of an intended spire) is the very similar but much smaller one of West

[1] See a paper by Dr. F. J. Allen, *A Study of Church Towers*, with especial reference to those of Somerset, p. 5.

Cranmore close by. The rest of the group, built later, after spires had gone out of fashion, while retaining the other main features of the original, are hardly recessed at all at the belfry storey; and their buttresses are so attenuated and so little set off at each stage, that the towers appear very nearly as broad at the top as they do at the bottom.

In and near the Cheddar Valley towers of this kind are thick on the ground. The finest are—

Shepton Mallet, the parent of the type,
Banwell,
Cheddar, which (except for the position of its staircase turret) is almost a replica of it,
Winscombe (Plate II) (which only differs from the last two in a few unimportant details) the most graceful,
Weston Zoyland, the most majestic of the group,
Bruton, which has some modifications and peculiarities—such as an embattled parapet—but is, in all essentials, a grand example of the type.

Of the same group, fine towers, though smaller and less elaborate, are—

Axbridge and
Wedmore (both central),
Bleadon,
Brent Knoll,
Langport,
Mark,
Long Sutton,
Weare.

These are chiefly distinguished from the first class in the same group by having shallower-worked belfry windows set in the middle of their stage, so that their sills do not slope down to, and rest upon, the string at the bottom of it; but these remarks do not apply to Axbridge or Weare, which are only inferior examples in point of size. One, Bleadon, has single corner buttresses set diagonally, instead of pairs set at right angles at each corner, like the rest.

The B Group, or Taunton Deane Type.

This group is very important, as it includes a greater number of splendid towers than any other. Specimens are to be found in widely distant parts of the country; but the home and centre of the type is the neighbourhood of Taunton, where examples are at once more frequent and more magnificent than elsewhere. Such are the glorious towers of

North Petherton (Plate III),
Huish (Plate IV),
Kingsbury,
Bishop's Lydeard,
S. James, Taunton (rebuilt),

and, smaller, but no less beautiful, the three-stage towers of

Ile Abbots (rebuilt),
Kingston,
Staple Fitzpaine (Plate V).

In this group the belfry windows are double, and the stages are usually very distinctly separated by string courses of pronounced character, and are sometimes even more clearly marked by bands of decorative panelling.

The buttresses, set on in pairs a little way from the angles, are generally of bold projection.

The parapets are mostly pierced in geometrical patterns and embattled, and are ornamented with central as well as corner pinnacles, the latter being usually large and clustered. In the richest examples niche-work and pinnacle-work are abundant; the carved and moulded stone-work is generally of different material and different colour from the walling; and the whole scheme of decoration is elaborately carried out with consummate skill and with admirable effect.

Beside the eight magnificent towers above mentioned, there are in Somerset thirteen other examples of the type, somewhat plainer or smaller structures. These are—

Lyng,
Middlezoy and
Chedzoy, which have much in common;
Hutton,

NORTH PETHERTON.

HUISH EPISCOPI.

PLATE V.

STAPLE FITZPAINE.

DUNDRY.

Ruishton, low but elaborate ;
Glastonbury, S. Benignus ;
Muchelney, with its wide eyes and spreading top ;
Martock, massive but very plain ;
Kingsdon, still plainer ;
Wellington, eccentric and small-eyed ;
Lympsham, with its fine leaning tower, with details partly characteristic of this group, and partly of some towers in group D ;
Blagdon, a lofty, beautiful and symmetrical structure, unique in combining characteristics of the A and C groups with the belfry window arrangement of this group.

GROUP C, OR BRISTOL AND CHANNEL DISTRICT TYPE.

This group has single belfry windows; and as it includes all the smaller and plainer towers, is of course far the most numerous and least important as a whole class. There are only a few towers in it of exceptional excellence. The best are relatively lofty, with sturdy buttresses of bold projection, and with high parapets. The latter, like the towers which they crown, are often plain and unpretentious ; but sometimes, as at—

Wraxall,
Brislington,
Tickenham,
Chew Stoke, etc.,

they are elegantly ornamented with central niches as well as handsome corner pinnacles and graceful turret spirelets, which give distinction to the whole tower. Especially is this the case with—

Dundry (Plate VI), where the parapet and pinnacles are extraordinarily fine drawn and elaborate ;
S. Mary's, Taunton, still more elaborate ;
Backwell, in spite of mutilation and ill-treatment in the seventeenth century, is a tower of great beauty ;
Portishead, in many respects very similar, is hardly less so ;
Chew Magna.
Kilmersdon,
Minehead,

Publow,
S. Decuman's,
Watchet,
Yeovil,

are all fine towers of some merit, but none of them quite attain first class rank.

Towers of this group are of course to be found everywhere; but the finest examples may be seen in the north and north-west of the county, in the neighbourhood of Bristol and of the Channel. They are built of one kind of stone throughout; and consequently uniformity of colouring is as characteristic of this group as variety is of the last.

As nine-tenths of the whole number of towers belong to this group, it is impossible to draw any hard and fast line between the first-rate and second-rate examples of it, or between these and the rest. The large majority are small and plain, and are no more important than small and plain towers in other counties. But naturally there are many that rise above the average and are worthy of attention: such are

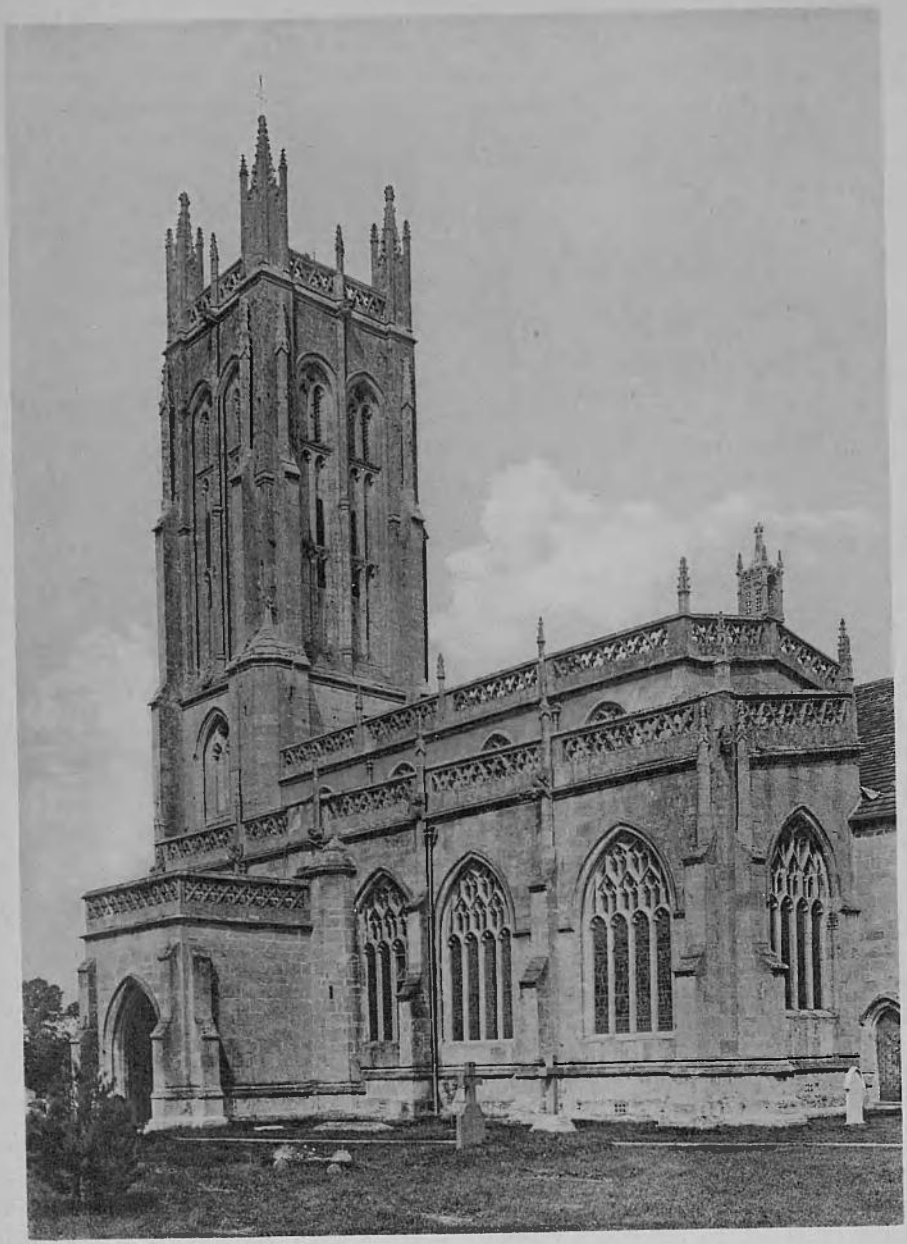
Batheaston, a fine tower having much in common with Dundry, Backwell, and Portishead;
Queen Camel and
Cannington, very plain, but fine tall towers;
Nailsea,
Easton in Gordano;
Montacute, ornamented with bands of quatrefoil panelling dividing the stages;

and several others which for one reason or another deserve notice.

Group D.

Though not a large one, this class has three subdivisions, in the first two of which are comprised all the rest of the principal or first-rate towers. The connecting characteristic is *the similarity of treatment in all that part of the tower which is above the nave roof.*

Subdivision (α) or Wrington type: in which the whole height above the body of the church consists of one very tall stage having double or triple very lofty windows. The examples are:



WRINGTON.

EVERCREECH.

ILMINSTER.

Wrington (Plate VII),
Evercreech (Plate VIII),
S. Cuthbert's, Wells (with double windows),
Batcombe (with triple windows).

Subdivision (β) or Chewton Mendip type: in which there are two (in one instance three) stages above the body of the church with double or triple windows of the same, or very similar, design in each stage. The examples are—

Chewton Mendip,
St. John's, Glastonbury,
Mells,
Leigh-on-Mendip (with double windows in two stages),
Ilminster (Plate IX) (a central tower with triple windows in two stages),
Taunton S. Mary Magdalene, with double windows in three stages.

Subdivision (γ) or Shepton Beauchamp type: in which the height above the body of the church is partially divided into two stages by a string course which is interrupted in each face by tall single windows partly above and partly below the string. The examples are—

Shepton Beauchamp,
Hinton S. George,
Norton-sub-Hamdon,
Curry Rivel (rebuilt),
Crewkerne (central tower).

All these examples are in the same neighbourhood: and the peculiarity of the design—which cannot be regarded as a happy or satisfactory one—points to the hand or the influence of some one local architect. None of these towers is entitled to rank among the first class.

TABLE OF DIMENSIONS OF 60 REPRESENTATIVE SOMERSETSHIRE TOWERS.

Towers.	Width above base-mouldings.	Height to top of parapet.	Pinnacles extra above parapet.	Turret (if any) extra above parapet.
	ft. in. ft. in.	ft. in.	ft. in. ft. in.	ft. in.
Axbridge	20 0[1]	78 0[1]	7 0[1]	7 0[1]
Backwell	21 3	88 0	12 0	15 6[1]
Banwell	24 4	101 0	11 9[1]	16 0[1]
Batcombe	25 7 : 24 4	85 0	....	2 0
Batheaston	19 7	84 11	7 0	9 0
Bishop's Lydeard	24 10 : 23 10	94 6	12 6	....
Blagdon	?	100 6	....	16 0
Bleadon	19 8½	79 6	8 0	13 0[1]
Brislington	18 0	68 4	9 6	17 0
Bruton	23 6 : 22 2	92 0	10 6	....
Cheddar	22 5 : 21 5	97 8	8 4	16 0[1].
Chew Magna	22 11	88 7	11 0	....
Chew Stoke	17 9	?	....	....
Chewton Mendip	24 7	105 7	13 6	....
Churchill	17 4	?	....	....
Cranmore	18 2	64 10	6 6	....
Dundry	20 2	88 0	9 6	....
Evercreech	19 9	82 10	9 9	....
Hinton St. George	19 10	78 3	5 0 to 7 0	7 0
Huish Episcopi	23 4	90 5	9 6	....
Ile Abbots	21 8	72 10	8 0	....
Ilminster	19 9	74 3	9 10	spirelet 12 ft 3 in. above merlons.
Kilmersdon	18 10 : 17 6	85 0	11 0	....
Kingsbury Episcopi	22 6	91 5	7 6[1]	....
Kingston	22 3 : 21 9	74 8	9 6	11 0
Langport	19 6 : 18 5	72 8	7 6	....
Leigh-on-Mendip	17 0 : ?	83 6	8 0	....
Long Sutton	21 7	89 10	6 8	....
Lympsham	20 2	79 0	8 6[1]	....
Lyng	19 8	....	....	....
Mark	21 8	....	....	....
Martock	25 3 : 24 10	84 0	8 0	11 6
Mells	24 9	87 9	16 6	19 6[1]

TABLE OF DIMENSIONS OF 60 REPRESENTATIVE SOMERSETSHIRE TOWERS—*continued.*

Towers.	Width above base-mouldings.	Height to top of parapet.	Pinnacles extra above parapet.	Turret (if any) extra above parapet.
	ft. in. ft. in.	ft. in.	ft. in. ft. in.	ft. in.
Middlezoy	19 8	64 4	9 0	....
Minehead	26 0 : 24 6	89 8	stumps 2 6	....
Muchelney	17 8[2] : 19 0	71 0[1]	4 0	....
North Petherton	22 6	97 2	11 6	....
Norton sub-Hamdon	22 5	92 6	6 0	....
Norton St. Philip	19 3 : 18 3	68 0	8 0	....
Portishead	22 1	85 3	10 6	13 6 (spirelet)
Publow	19 10	83 0	8 6	10 0[1]
Ruishton	17 2	55 6[3]	....	....
St. Benedict	17 8 : 18 2[4]	....	....	....
St. Cuthbert, Wells	32 7	122 7	20 0[1]	....
St. James, Taunton	25 6	104 6	11 9	16 0
St. John, Glastonbury	25 2	124 11	9 6	....
St. Mary Magdalene, Taunton	30 1 × 29 11	131 6[5]	32 0[1]	....
Shepton Beauchamp	24 6 × 24 4	74 0	....	2 6
Shepton Mallet	20 10	88 5	8 0	12 0
South Brent	22 1[6]	75 0[1]	....	....
Staple Fitzpaine	21 5	70 2	9 6	13 6
Watchet	21 5 × 20 8	83 6	stumps 2 0	....
Weare	18 0	64 5	8 0 & 4 0	....
Wellington	22 9	92 7	8 0	12 0
West Pennard	21 10[7]	20 2[7]	....	....
Weston Zoyland	21 10	98 3	stumps 2 6	....
Wiuscombe	22 4	87 0	11 0[1]	13 0[1]
Wraxall	21 0 × 19 8	67 1	14 9	18 3
Wrington	22 0	99 6	12 0[1]	....
Yeovil	26 11	92 6	....	....

NOTE.—Owing to the serious indisposition of the author, this list (compiled from fragmentary MSS.) has not had the benefit of his revision.

[1] Approximate only.
[2] Without thickening.
[3] No parapet or pinnacles.
[4] West.
[5] 122 ft. 8 in. to bottom of pierced work of parapet.
[6] 20 ft. 1 in. without thickening.
[7] 20 ft. 2 in. without corner thickenings.