

ART. VIII.—*Carlisle Cathedral and its development in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.* By C. G. BULMAN.

Read at Penrith, July 10th, 1947.

TWELVE years ago¹ I described, as far as the remaining evidence will allow, the small Norman minster which was originally set out on the site of the present cathedral in Carlisle, the remnants of which form the nucleus of the existing building. The present paper describes the developments, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, by which the cathedral choir assumed its present form, and discusses some of the problems which still remain. Carlisle cathedral is a product of a period of burning vitality in the history of the art of building, and we shall understand it all the more clearly if we leave aside the mere catalogue of architectural detail, and look for the underlying causes for all the changes and extensions—and think for a moment of the very able men who grappled with, and solved, the practical problems which arose.

It must be stated at the outset that the architectural history of the eastern limb at Carlisle is curiously complex, and still presents as nice a problem to the architect as any which still remains in connection with the greater churches of England. To begin with, almost all documentary evidence has vanished, and we must depend largely upon the internal architectural evidence of the building itself. We have certain clues derived from building appeals issued by bishops of the diocese during the middle and latter part of the

¹ CW2 xxxvii, 56-66.

fourteenth century; but I shall show later that the two sources of evidence, as generally interpreted, conflict with one another.

There are four main problems which require consideration:—

(a) At what date was the first, or “Early English,” choir begun, and under which bishop?

(b) Why is there a curious variation in the window design to the exterior of the north and south choir aisles, in the second bay from the east? (Here, instead of the four equal divisions of the wall space between the buttresses, as in the other window-bays, there are three equal broad divisions and a very narrow one squeezed in against the buttress on the west side).

(c) Why is the great east window not in the middle of the gable, and what is the reason for the other irregularities at the east end?

(d) What is the date of the east window and of the east front as a whole?

To all these problems solutions can be offered, or at least attempted, but (a) and (d) still present difficulties, and it will be seen that there is still room for further research.

The first rebuilding period opens somewhere towards the beginning of the thirteenth century, but it is not certain precisely when this reconstruction was undertaken. We have seen that the Norman priory church at Carlisle was of moderate size and of simple design.² It had no features which could not be matched elsewhere throughout the land, nor had it any of the architectural grandeur which distinguished its great contemporaries at Durham and elsewhere. Its details and plan were purely Romanesque (or, to use the more familiar term, Norman), and could be found in scores of churches, great or small,

² CW2 xxxvii 66.

all over England. The nave was of eight bays only and the eastern limb, as usual for churches of this date, was short, consisting of two bays and terminating eastward in an apse. The canons had their stalls in the crossing and the two eastern bays of the nave, the structural choir being large enough only to contain the sanctuary. Fig. 1 shows this Norman plan.

For about a hundred years the canons were content with this arrangement, but after the beginning of the thirteenth century they decided to sweep away their small and gloomy Norman choir and replace it with a new one, on a much larger scale and with more opulent detail, in the Early English style then rapidly developing. The reasons, no doubt, were mainly practical. The old choir must have been very cramped, and little light can have penetrated through the small windows in the massive walls. Once the turbulent years of the twelfth century were over, there was a possibility for the priory to gain stability and to increase the size of the convent. There was urgent necessity for more room for altars, where each canon could say his daily Mass. There may have been a very human desire, too, not to be outdone by their neighbours at Lanercost, Holme Cultram and Hexham, all of whom had built or rebuilt their churches in the new style: a cathedral should not have less architectural dignity than an abbey or a priory. Nor must we forget that building was "in the air"; all over England cramped Norman choirs were being torn down and replaced by vast new extensions, resplendent with all the art that the new technique of building could afford. Whatever the reason or reasons, the canons of Carlisle decided that a new choir was within their resources, and they determined to build a new eastern limb of great length.

Now these long eastern extensions are peculiar to England, and their extreme length affords a contrast

to the churches of France and of the Continent as a whole, where a short choir, terminating in an apse, is the normal eastern planning. The fashion in England was initiated at Canterbury as early as 1130, when a large eastern limb was set out with a length of no less than nine bays and an apse; at the time it must have been by far the longest choir in western Christendom. The reason for this great extension at Canterbury is stated to have been the accumulation of the relics of canonised archbishops, for whose shrines accommodation had to be provided. But there was another reason, perhaps a more important one: it was necessary to have numerous altars, at which each of the hundred or more monks could say his individual Mass; and it should be remembered that at all times the English Church made great use of processional ritual. Whatever the cause, Canterbury set the fashion in the planning of the long structural choirs which soon became so great a feature in English churches of the first rank; and before long most of the greater English churches built long eastern extensions, and the clergy transferred their stalls from the eastern bays of the nave to the western bays of the choir.

So the canons of Carlisle, like the Benedictine monks of Canterbury, wished to remove their Norman choir and to build a long eastern limb. It is here that the first problem presents itself: at what date and under which bishop were these building operations really begun? It is usual to give the credit to Sylvester de Everdon, who held the see from 1247 to 1255. But I have long suspected that this date is far too late, and that an earlier bishop must be given the credit for initiating the reconstruction. The beginning of Everdon's episcopate is surely too late for the type of Early English work which is still to be seen in the choir aisles today: for by the middle of the thirteenth century Early

English Gothic had already reached and passed its meridian. Already at Westminster (1245), Binham Priory, Norfolk (before 1244) and old St. Paul's (1240) there had appeared large windows with bar tracery, a sure sign of the approach of the next Gothic phase, the "Decorated" style. As early as 1255 Lincoln began to rebuild its presbytery, the famous "Angel Choir," in fully developed "Geometrical Decorated" Gothic with large traceried windows. All the great works of the first pointed style were put in hand long before the middle of the century, and many were completed before that date: we may note Lincoln choir (1192-1200), Lincoln nave (c. 1200-1255), Salisbury (begun 1220), Worcester choir (begun 1224, completed soon after 1250), Lanercost (completed c. 1250), Hexham (c. 1230) and Fountains Abbey east transept (1220-1247). At Durham the Nine Altars chapel, begun in 1242, was not completed until 1280; but even here the original style was modified to comply with later developments, and a large traceried window occupies the great north gable.

From the foregoing examples it must be clear that the work of rebuilding the choir at Carlisle was well in hand before the middle of the century—otherwise we should have to assume that the new choir was begun in or shortly after 1247 and designed in the purest Lancet style (with all the details and mouldings of that period), when the traceried window had already made its appearance elsewhere; and we should have to accept the equally unlikely supposition that the change in design still to be seen in the south aisle windows (the grouping of three lancets under one arch, and the approach to plate tracery) only made its appearance at Carlisle when the building was well advanced, probably three quarters of the way through the thirteenth century—for the north aisle and east end were completed first—, although that development had taken place elsewhere well before 1250.

Francis Bond suggests a date about 1225 onwards for the Carlisle choir,³ and this is very much more reasonable. It may be remembered that the see of Carlisle was vacant for over thirty years from 1186; there is a bishop Bernard mentioned in the interval, but there is little evidence that he ever visited his diocese; but in 1218 Hugh of Beaulieu was appointed to the vacant see. A date soon after this would be appropriate, on stylistic grounds, for the beginning of the new work; and it may be noted that Hugh, before his appointment to Carlisle, had been abbot of Beaulieu in Hampshire, where the abbey founded by King John in 1204 was not completed until 1246. If Hugh left a fine new Early English church in progress at Beaulieu to come to a small, dark and old-fashioned one at Carlisle, he might well wish to set on foot the building of a choir in the new style here, similar to that with which he had been concerned as abbot; and there is at least a hint that building was in progress at Hugh's death, for on 1 August 1246 Henry III ordered the keeper of the bishopric of Carlisle to cause the prior and convent of Carlisle to have twenty marks out of the issues of the bishopric for the work of their church.⁴ In any case the architectural evidence must rule out Everdon, and it seems to me almost certain that Hugh of Beaulieu is the man to whom Carlisle owes the foundation of the new choir.

Whatever the exact date, which must in any case fall within the second quarter of the thirteenth century, a new and greatly enlarged choir was set out and proceeded with. To its planning I must give some attention here, for it has an important bearing upon the building-period which followed after the fire of 1292,

³ *Gothic Architecture in England*, 1906, 116 f.

⁴ *Cal. Liberate Rolls* i, p. 70.

and upon the architectural puzzle at the east end. The planning of a great medieval church was the outcome of a carefully worked-out scheme. An eastern limb, properly designed, had to allow room for the stalls of the clergy, a spacious presbytery and sanctuary, with a procession path behind the latter, and a chapel or chapels provided for important saints and for the Veneration of the Virgin Mary.⁵ There were various planning variations to allow for all these things. A favourite arrangement in the south of England was to have the procession path and projecting Lady Chapel built with the roof at a much lower level than the choir roof, and arches opening from the choir proper into the procession path; this arrangement can be seen at Salisbury and at Wells. But in the north it was usually preferred to carry the main roof unbroken at full height to the end of the eastern wall, as at York: and so it was at Carlisle, where the roof was maintained at full height from the crossing to the east end. The exact length of this fine new Early English choir is perhaps a matter for conjecture, for it had not long been completed when it was partly wrecked by fire, in 1292, and what remained undamaged was incorporated in the rebuilding which followed.

It is here that I must depart from the usual and generally accepted version of the architectural history of the cathedral, according to which the Early English choir was set out with a length of seven bays (not the eight which we see today), and that the eighth or easternmost bay is a totally new extension, built in the reconstruction after the first of 1292. I shall show reason to suppose that the Early English choir had a length of seven bays plus a short aisleless chancel, which projected to the east on the site of the present east

⁵ The cult of the Virgin grew enormously in importance during the thirteenth century, and large eastern chapels in her honour were very frequently provided

window; that is to say that this E.E. choir was exactly the same length as the present building, and that it is not true that the choir was lengthened by one bay after the fire of 1292: the only difference was in the length of the aisles, and these terminated one bay to the west of the present east end.

There are two reasons for this interpretation. Firstly, if we examine the present choir we shall notice that the westernmost bay, nearest to the tower arch, is a narrow one—only 8 ft. 8 in. from pier to pier; and the easternmost bay, beneath the east window, is equally narrow, to all intents and purposes identical in width with the western bay, being 8 ft. 10 in.: the normal bays are 13 ft. wide. I cannot see why, if this eastern bay had been constructed *de novo* after the fire of 1292, it should so closely resemble the western bay in width; one might have expected it to have been wider, conforming to the design of the normal bays, or at least some variation might have been expected. I therefore infer that the width of this eastern bay was determined by existing circumstances, and that the circumstances were the planning of the E.E. choir; this, I presume, was set out as follows—first a narrow bay adjacent to the crossing, then six normal wide bays, and finally at the east a short aisleless chancel, of the same width as the narrow western bay.

Secondly, there are those curious irregularities which many visitors to the cathedral have noticed and puzzled over: the east window is slightly out of centre with the gable, and so is the triangular window in the gable; and in the interior there are some vaulting springers in the responds on the east wall which break off suddenly and support nothing. These features have never been explained in any satisfactory way, and to my mind the only adequate explanation of the irregularities is that there was some obstacle in the way when the east end

was remodelled. I suggest that the key to the mystery is the existence of this short chancel on the site, when the rebuilding of the east end took place, after the fire. We shall return to this point later on.

This supposition is strengthened by the fact that such a plan was in existence elsewhere and would not by any means be an innovation at Carlisle. We see it on a large scale at Beverley (1225-1245) and Worcester (1224), both about contemporary with Carlisle; on a smaller scale at Lanercost, and elsewhere. Indeed, so popular was this plan, with its short eastern aisleless presbytery carried through at full height, that it has been given the technical name "Canons' Ending."⁶

Fig. 2 shows what I consider to be the lay-out of the E.E. choir as originally constructed. It is not necessary to say more than a few words about the new choir; it was not only far in advance of its Norman predecessor in length and in height, but it was twelve feet broader. It could not be widened on the south side, because of the existence of the priory buildings and cloister, and so the extra width was gained on the north. I do not intend to describe the details, for little more than the aisles remain visible now, all the rest having vanished during the reconstruction after the fire; but we can say that the work was uniformly good, showing all the details of the E.E. style; it apparently began on the north side, and continued eastward and round the east end as funds allowed. The main window design of the aisle bays is of four lancets to each bay, the two middle ones pierced as windows, the outer ones blank. The elevation is exceedingly graceful, with slender columns, deeply undercut mouldings and rich decoration, particularly to the interior; this is the main design, but the E.E. style developed during the progress of the work, and on the south side a change of design is apparent:

⁶ C. E. Power, *English Mediaeval Architecture*, 1923, 136.

the two-lancet design is abandoned, and three lancets are grouped together under one arch. In the western aisle-bays on the south side the window spandrills are pierced and plate tracery develops. This second design, though interesting architecturally, is much inferior artistically to its predecessor, nor is the detail so good.

Here our second problem appears. If we go outside the cathedral and examine the elevation of the second bay from the east, we shall notice that, instead of the four equal divisions of the normal bay design, we have three broad lancets and a very narrow one. It is obvious that the reason for this is a structural one: it proves that the aisles of the E.E. choir went so far and no further; at this point the return eastern wall of the aisle was constructed, and the thickness of this wall had to be allowed for on the exterior; this threw all the lancets of the bay out of centre, with the result which we now see. It is exactly the same on the north side, and if we look at the later eastern bay, with its two-light "Decorated" window, we shall see that it, too, is out of centre for the same reason. This piece of construction shows us where the choir aisles originally terminated; the end wall was of course removed when the aisles were extended the full length of the choir in the rebuilding after the fire, but this piece of evidence remains—though the junction with the new eastern bay was very skilfully done, as an examination of the interior of the aisle at this point will show.

The great new Early English choir was finally completed and roofed in, at what date we do not know, but the masterful Bishop Irton (1280-1292) immediately after his accession to the episcopate, held a synod to which he summoned all his clergy and demanded from them contributions towards the completion of the fabric.⁷

⁷ Bouch, *Prelates and People*, 1948, 57.

The Chronicler of Lanercost has little good to say of this bishop but there would appear to be little doubt that it was owing to the exertions of Bishop Irton that the E.E. choir was completed. It was not destined to remain intact for very long, for the great fire which consumed a great part of the city of Carlisle in 1292, also burnt the newly-completed choir. The disaster was indeed tragic, for it is obvious that the canons had decided to rebuild the whole of their church, and some preparations for the erection of a new north transept had been made. The fire compelled them to start again, and so deprived us of the spectacle of new transepts and probably nave and tower as well—a transformation which would have given us a much more harmonious building than the cathedral which we see today.

Some doubts have been expressed at times as to whether this great choir was ever completed, so completely has the greater part of it vanished; it has even been suggested that the work had not advanced beyond the roof of the main arcade but was covered, at that height, by a temporary roof. We cannot, of course, prove that it was in fact completed, but several indications support the inference that it was. In the first place, had the choir not been properly completed and roofed in, it is doubtful if the fire would have caused as much damage as it did, for it was probably the great roof timbers which in their fall so shattered and calcined the columns of the main arcade that their rebuilding was necessary. And reference may be made to a paper by John A. Cory, read to this Society in November 1866:—

“ About three months ago, in pulling down the houses eastward of the Cathedral, a large number of detached shafts were found buried beneath the soil, carefully piled up as if reserved for future use. These, I believe, formed part of the outside

clerestory windows (*sc. of the E.E. choir*); that they had been used is proved by lime being attached to their ends."⁸

We may therefore be reasonably sure that the choir was in fact completed.

The original eastern gable may have had two tiers of lancets and a pierced opening above them. Among the Corporation muniments there is an impression of the common seal of the Priory of the Cathedral Church at Carlisle on a document dated 1484; in that year Prior Gondibour and his brethren had a controversy with the citizens about the tithe, in connection with the grinding of corn at the city mills. The seal is not oval, as is usual, but round, and contains a representation of the Virgin and Child, and beneath them two ecclesiastical figures. There is also some architectural design of two arches, and on each side is the gable end of a church with two pinnacles. It is just possible that this is meant to be a representation of the east end of the cathedral, and although it might be merely conventional, it may well reproduce the main features of the actual building. To judge by the design and the details of the seal it probably dates from the thirteenth century, and so we may have here the earliest representation of the cathedral.⁹

We have now reached the stage when our great Early English choir has been set out, completed and then, alas, burnt and shattered, in 1292. It is from this date that our troubles really begin; it is an exceedingly complex business to disentangle the architectural puzzle which now faces us.

With their fair new choir in ruins, the canons had to abandon their great design for the reconstruction of the whole of their cathedral church. Their first task must have been to call in a master-builder to advise them

⁸ CW1 i 32.

⁹ This seal is reproduced in CW1 vii 330.

what to do. We must abandon the idea, so widely prevalent, that the bishops, abbots, priors and monks designed and erected these great buildings themselves. The clergy provided the funds no doubt, but the building craft was a highly specialised and technical one, carried out by the masons' guilds; the designers were the master-masons, who had spent their lives in the craft and who were responsible for the whole execution of the particular work for which they were engaged. The master-mason was an important individual, and was looked upon as such: there are many references to these personages in medieval documents, though a great deal of research remains to be done before their individual contributions to the development of the Gothic style can be assessed.

From the style of the rebuilding at Carlisle we must, I think, assume that the master-mason whom the canons summoned to their aid at this juncture was a Yorkshireman, or at least trained in the Yorkshire school of builders. As in the Norman and E.E. periods, there were various local types and varieties of building design in the middle Gothic period, but the northern examples of "Decorated" exhibit a richness and an exuberance which surpass the other varieties:—

"These Yorkshire builders built with great windows of flowing traceries; with big projecting buttresses, crowned with solid crocketed pinnacles, and gables elaborated with pierced parapets and niches full of statues; their whole art opulent and florid in comparison with the rather lean elegance of the London style and the rather mechanical constructions of the west."¹⁰

All the details mentioned in the above extract can be seen in the east end at Carlisle.

That there was a local school with an independent master-mason it is impossible to believe. Cumberland was poor and remote, and there was little opportunity

¹⁰ E. S. Prior, *The Cathedral Builders in England*, 1905, 76 f.

there for rich building. The evidence of architectural specimens is wholly lacking in this area, but Yorkshire affords parallel cases.

When at last the new "architect" examined the ruined and fallen choir, what did he see? The roof had completely gone, the clerestory walls were probably shattered and unsafe, and the great piers of the main arcade had been damaged by the falling debris and the frames of the burning timbers; only the choir aisles and outer walls remained in safe condition. What then did he advise the canons to do, for safety and for economy? Firstly the triforium and clerestory walls must come down as far as the string-course above the arches of the main arcade; the shattered columns below the arches must be rebuilt for the sake of security. But for economy's sake he decided to retain the main arches; they were sound enough in themselves (as a glance at their present condition will show), but the deciding factor must have been the state of the vaulting to the aisles. These were reasonably intact, for their stone vaulting had protected them; and had the main arches of the choir arcade been sacrificed also, then the aisle vaulting would have had to come down and be rebuilt as well. To retain the undamaged vaulting of the choir aisles necessitated the retention of the great arches; this is actually what was decided upon, and the extraordinary feat of underpinning the great arches was undertaken. It cannot have been an easy task to remove the damaged columns and insert new ones, but the feat was somehow accomplished, and the work above it stands solidly to this day; it is a tribute to the skilled and resourceful master-mason who was employed.

At the same time it was decided to remodel the east end completely, in accordance with the later ideas of planning and detail. The aisles were taken one bay eastward, to bring them into line with the eastern wall

of the projecting aisleless chancel of the E.E. choir, while this chancel was itself rebuilt and incorporated in the new east front, so as to give us the east end as we see it today. This planning, with the square east end and the aisles taken the full length of the choir, was the final and ultimate form of the greater English churches, and even of many parish churches; it has been given the technical name "Northern Episcopal,"¹¹ for it was a favourite form in the north, and made its appearance there at an early date.¹¹

This dislike of intricate planning was noticeably English; the separate needs of procession path or saint's chapel were met by screens. Externally it is a form of great magnificence, with the high unbroken roof-line running from end to end of the church; internally it has been ruined by the destruction of the screens. The easternmost bay frequently formed the Lady Chapel, as it does today at York with the same plan, with the ambulatory one bay to the west, between Lady Chapel and high altar. The internal arrangement at Carlisle was similar, except that the chapel beneath the east window would not be the Lady Chapel, for the whole church was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. Fig. 3 shows this development of the cathedral at its fullest extent; the church stood in this final form until the Civil War period, when the greater portion of the nave was removed.

The whole of the work was carried out in the idiom of the "Decorated" style, that "luxurious, spendthrift art" of the early fourteenth century, the period when our English Gothic reached its apogee, and design and detail alike were at their best. As one eminent authority puts it:—

"In fact, the architecture of England between 1250 and 1350

¹¹ Power, *English Mediaeval Architecture*, 1923, 140.

was, although the English do not know it, the most forward, the most important, and the most inspiring in Europe . . . But whereas the result in France is lean and reactionary, England went on inventing new forms with amazing profuseness, forms merely decorative. The most perfect expression of this new spirit is the kind of tracery which is called flowing."¹²

We may note, incidentally, that this remodelling of the Carlisle choir into the Decorated style has a curious resemblance to the remodelling of the choir at Gloucester into the Perpendicular style a little later on.

It was during this rebuilding and remodelling of the east end that the irregularities occurred which we see now. The great east window and the window in the gable over it are out of centre, while the great buttresses have been placed so as to make the pediment appear irregular, and the cross on the apex seems in consequence not to be in the centre of the choir. On the interior we can see that the window is not symmetrically placed, and on the eastern wall there are some vaulting ribs on the responds of the arches which break off abruptly and have no function. The easternmost arch on the north side rises a little too high, and the string-course has been lifted a few inches to accommodate it.

As I have pointed out above, it is my conviction that these irregularities are the result of the previous existence on the site of the east end of the projecting chancel. This work was in the way, and in process of being demolished, while the new work was in hand: there is no other explanation I know which would fit the facts. From what I have already indicated, the master-mason who was called in to rebuild the shattered choir at Carlisle was a very able man; he was competent enough to remove the Early English columns without disturbing the arches. Must we assume that he was not

¹² N. Pevsner, *An outline of European Architecture*, 1948, 55-6.

capable of setting out a new east end from the foundations without making such a series of blunders? I cannot think so; there must have been some practical reason, such as that which I have given.

We cannot now be certain of the exact date when the new work began. The fire was in May 1292. Some time would be needed for temporary repairs, and to await the arrival of the master-mason; funds, too, would have to be accumulated for so ambitious an undertaking. But in October 1292 Edward I paid his first visit to Carlisle, and with this visit opens the city's most distinguished period; with the arrival of the king and his army, and all his feudal train, funds must have been easier to obtain, and the canons showed their optimism by embarking upon a slightly enlarged choir. The work was probably in hand well before 1300, and proceeded with over a period of years, with great richness of detail. Edward was in Carlisle again in 1298, when he held a Parliament here, and in June 1300 he and his queen stayed at the monastery of the Blackfriars in Carlisle, and one of the most brilliant armies that England put into the field assembled here. In 1306 Edward was again in the north, staying this time at Lanercost, and Parliament was summoned to meet him in Carlisle. The assembly was a brilliant one: Cardinal d'Espagnol with a splendid retinue attended as the Pope's representative, the Prince of Wales was present, as were the Archbishop of York, nineteen bishops and nearly sixty abbots, the most prominent barons and all the great officers of state; on 28 February 1306 the king was at worship in the cathedral, and at that service Robert Bruce was solemnly cursed by Cardinal d'Espagnol. During these years contributions and gifts to the building fund must have been comparatively easy to obtain, and the poorer townsfolk, who must have shared in the prosperity of the time, would have money to spare to give to their cathedral.

On 7 July 1307 Edward died at Burgh by Sands, and on 18 July the Prince of Wales received in Carlisle castle the homage of the great magnates. With the death of his father, however, Carlisle's brief period of prosperity came to an end, and in a few years an evil time set in on the Borders, especially after Edward II's defeat at Bannockburn in 1314. The period of that unhappy monarch's disastrous reign brought many tribulations to Carlisle. In 1314 the countryside around was laid waste by the Scots, in 1315 Bruce himself besieged the city for eleven days, and in succeeding years Cumberland was many times invaded and desolated. It is not hard to imagine that during those anxious days funds for the rebuilding of the cathedral choir were difficult to obtain, and we have evidence (which shall be discussed later) that the work was suspended altogether for a considerable period.

However, from *c.* 1300 onward the reconstruction of the choir went forward and continued, though with some intermissions, until late in the century. Over this long period more than one master-mason must have been employed, but the design of the east end does not break or change: it is perfectly homogeneous, and shows the "Decorated" style at its best. We have at Carlisle, in our eastern façade, a supreme achievement; it is a masterpiece, and has been well called a piece of poetry in stone. It was built in the golden age of our English Gothic, before ornament had become stereotyped to run riot over wall, buttress and window alike. The great window is properly framed in by the plain stonework which provides an admirable foil to it, while the buttresses are given just that amount of ornament and statuary necessary to relieve their massiveness and to combine the whole into one homogeneous design; the cresting along the gable is unique, and is a welcome change from the usual embattled parapet.

Of the great window itself there is little to say which is new. The only other window which resembles it in scale and beauty is the great west window of York Minster; this was erected before 1330 and was glazed in 1338. The master at Carlisle may well have known of the York window, for he avoids in his design the unfortunate duality which is evident in it. At Carlisle there are three main divisions, and we may note somewhat critically that the centre-piece of the tracery does not flow smoothly in the leaflike or reticulated form that we might have expected at this date. Indeed, instead of flowing quatrefoils, there is a retrogression to the previous phase of design, and three geometrical quatrefoils are introduced—to the critical eye, not too harmoniously, for the bottom circle of the centre-piece is poised on the apex of the window-light below, thus breaking a definite rule in the designing of tracery, namely that a circle should not be poised on the apex of an arch, but should be placed in the spandril between two arches.

There was, of course, a reason for these intrusive quatrefoils, and an examination of the ancient glass, fortunately preserved, reveals it to us. When the tracery was actually in process of design, some consultation between the architect, the canons and the glass-makers must have taken place, and the subject of the glass which was to fill the head of the window decided upon; the actual position of some of the panels was then determined. The subject was to be a "Doom" or Last Judgment, and the glass-maker desired two large round quatrefoils, in which to portray the Holy City ("B" on diagram of Window Tracery) and the Procession of the Blessed thereto ("A" on Window diagram); another large quatrefoil lower down was required, in which he could display the medieval idea of Hell ("C" on diagram), with suitable punishments for the Damned. This last-mentioned panel, with its vivid portrayal of

Hell, was also given the same thickness of tracery stonework as the main ribs between the chief compartments of the window, thus at once emphasizing its subject and cutting it off from the other panels adjoining—a further proof that the subject of the glass was determined upon before the stonework of the window was cut. This co-operation between the crafts of masonry and glass-making became common in later times, but this instance of it at Carlisle must be an exceedingly early case of consultation between the two.

The actual construction of the window tracery displays the highest technical skill, and for an appreciation of this I cannot do better than quote the following passage from Billings, *History of Carlisle Cathedral* (1840), p. 61:—

“From the annexed diagram of the masonry it will be seen that the tracery is composed of eighty-six pieces. Some of these, particularly those forming the great divisions of the tracery, and numbered from twenty to twenty-six, are very large, between four and five feet in length.

“The admirable manner in which it is jointed is fully equal to the design, and a great number of the stones might be removed without causing the least inconvenience to the general construction; as, for instance, the *whole* of the four side compartments: and there is scarcely a single stone, except those of the principal rib, numbered 1, 7, and 20 to 26, that might not be removed singly.”

Billings goes on to state that the number of centres necessary to form the design of the window tracery is no less than 263.

Upon this east front the canons had lavished their resources and the masons their skill; but the disturbed and desolate state of the Borders after 1314 must have made funds difficult to obtain and, as has been noted already, there are indications that the work was wholly suspended for a time. The triforium and clerestory are both of them bare and poor, although the design of the clerestory windows, with the flowing traceries of the period, is varied and interesting; the inner arcade of the clerestory is of the barest character, nor is the stonework

of the walls so good. Moreover, a vault was found to be too expensive and was omitted. No provision had been made for a high vault from the very beginning, for no exterior buttressing system had been constructed, and it is possible that a wooden roof of some kind had always been intended; hammerbeams were constructed for a roof of the type which we find so magnificently developed at Westminster Hall—and very fine indeed it might have looked had it been properly carried out—but this in turn was abandoned, and the wooden barrel-roof was constructed on the lines which we see today.

The restored choir, with its pointed windows, would be complete by 1380 or perhaps a little later. In one window, in the south clerestory, are some coats of arms which are restorations or reproductions of some old glass which had been laid away in a box but which originally came from the clerestory: in the centre are the arms attributed to Edward the Confessor (which were assumed by Richard II also); next come those of Richard II impaling those of his first queen, Anne of Bohemia. The arms of John of Gaunt also appear, impaled by those of Castile and Leon.¹³ The first mention of Richard II assuming the Confessor's arms is a Royal Warrant of October 1395, and they were first publicly impaled with the king's in 1397-8;¹⁴ it would therefore appear that the windows of the clerestory were not ready for glazing before the closing years of the century.

By then our choir was once again rebuilt, completed and roofed in. The canons must have been glad to see the end of the building operations, which had been in almost continuous progress since about 1225, and had now, after many vicissitudes, been brought to so

¹³ John of Gaunt laid claim to the throne of Castile and Leon through his marriage to Constance, elder daughter of Pedro the Cruel, and did not abandon his claim until after the peace of Bayonne in 1388.

¹⁴ M. V. Clarke, *Fourteenth Century Studies*, 1937, 275.

magnificent a conclusion; they could look with joy and satisfaction upon their beautiful new choir, particularly to its east end, where the lovely curves of the great east window and the jewelled splendour of the new painted glass formed a fitting background for the solemn services of the church, offered at the altars below. But the resources of the priory must have been exhausted, and no effort was subsequently made to carry out the grand design for the rebuilding of the whole church. When Bishop Strickland (1400-1419) rebuilt the tower over the old crossing¹⁵ and on the more modest scale of the older parts of the church, it was obvious that the great building days were past.

In the above account of the building of the east end, and of the Decorated work generally, I have purposely omitted any reference to exact dates, for that is a question of considerable complexity, a concrete solution to which cannot yet be offered; for there is a direct conflict between the scanty documentary evidence and the evidence provided by the architectural details of the building itself.

We saw that, after the great fire of 1292, a rebuilding of the shattered choir was undertaken and that it was probably in progress before 1300. On the wall arcade on the easternmost bay of the south choir aisle, the new bay, there are two heads, carefully carved and finished: one is that of a king, with a crown, which may represent Edward I; the other, also a male head, has a kind of "turban" head-dress — a way of wearing the hood — which was in vogue about the beginning of the fourteenth century: and that would seem to confirm the generally accepted date given to this part of the cathedral. From the evidence of the details and carving and the tracery we should normally assume

¹⁵ Leland, ed. Hearne (1770), vol. i, ii, 346.

that the whole of the work at the east end and upper parts of the choir was complete before the advent of the Black Death in 1350, an event which marked a turning point in the development of English Gothic architecture. After that date the new Perpendicular style made its entry and spread rapidly throughout the kingdom. What is astonishing, therefore, is to find that Bishop Welton (1353-1362) issued building appeals in April 1354 and January 1356, for the cathedral, and that these were renewed yearly until 1362; and as late as 1363 Bishop Appleby obtained an indulgence for the cathedral, extending over ten years, for penitents who visited it on the Five Feasts of the Blessed Virgin, or who lent a helping hand with the fabric.¹⁶ Here we have evidence of extensive work going on at Carlisle, presumably beyond 1370; and, as we have seen from the evidence of the old coats of arms in the choir clerestory, the choir in all probability was not completed and roofed in until after 1390. The work for which the appeals were made must therefore have been the completion of the choir, for there is no evidence of any other great works going on in that period.

A bequest in the will of John de Salkeld of Maughanby, proved on 20 January 1359, suggests work on the windows:—

“ Item fabrice ecclesie Abbathie Karl. c.s. Item ad fabricacionem cujusdam fenestre de novo in Cancelllo ibidem xl s.”¹⁷

It is here that we come to the crux of the problem. The Decorated style in England was almost completely over by the middle of the fourteenth century. Mr John H. Harvey has recently shown¹⁸ that the Perpendicular style was almost certainly the invention

¹⁶ *VCH Cumberland* ii 43.

¹⁷ *Testamenta Karleol.*, p. 20

¹⁸ *Henry Yevele*, 1944, 7.

of the royal masons in London, and he names two of these craftsmen, William de Ramsey, master-mason, and William Hurley, carpenter, as the actual inventors of the new style; he shows that, as early as 1332, the chapter house and cloister of old St. Paul's had distinct Perpendicular detail; other instances of the new technique, at the same early date, are the upper portions of the octagon at Ely (1334) and the retro-choir and central tower at Wells (c. 1330). The first great building in the Perpendicular style is the choir of Gloucester (1337). It is possible, according to Mr Harvey, that the revolutionary design at Gloucester was the conception of the same royal mason, William de Ramsey, and that he was lent to Gloucester by Edward III in order to transform the abbey church into a mortuary chapel for the king's murdered father, Edward II, whose body had been received into that church.

When compared with the Decorated style, the work of the Perpendicular period is mechanical, completely lacking the poetry of its predecessor; it is frequently lean, wiry and angular, and some of it has the frigid appearance of girdering in stone. Nevertheless it must have made instant appeal to something in the English mind, for it was taken up with enthusiasm after 1350, and soon spread to the furthestmost parts of the kingdom, becoming the national style. I have always felt it an artistic disappointment that our Decorated style was abandoned so early, before its possibilities had been really developed, in favour of this more mechanical style.

As early as 1361 York began the great task of rebuilding her presbytery, and the work is in fully-developed Perpendicular. As we have seen, there is little doubt that the Carlisle masons were of the York school, for it is in the highest degree improbable that a local school had

developed at Carlisle, and the east end as it stands has all the peculiarities of the York type. Are we to assume, then, that the masons at Carlisle went on building in the Decorated style right through the middle of the fourteenth century and on towards its close, when all the rest of England, including York itself, had abandoned the Decorated tradition and was designing in the new Perpendicular style? I have examined the east end and upper portions of the choir, and I can find not the slightest trace of Perpendicular feeling in the whole building; and I cannot, therefore, think it reasonable to believe that Decorated work was being designed and built in Carlisle after the middle of the fourteenth century. This, then, is the dilemma: the documentary evidence shows work in progress well after the middle of the fourteenth century, but the architectural evidence leads us to believe that the work was accomplished before 1350.

How are we to resolve this dilemma? I confess that I do not know, but a theory can be put forward. As we have seen, after the fire of 1292 the canons must have called in a master-mason to survey the damage and advise them about the necessary rebuilding; and the fortunate presence of Edward I and a great gathering of English chivalry, almost immediately after the disaster, must have encouraged them in their work of reconstruction, for it must have brought some degree of prosperity to the cathedral and to the city generally; but the political scene changes abruptly a few years later, and the work begun so confidently and opulently ultimately dragged on for almost a hundred years before it was finally completed. During that period two or three master-masons must have been in successive charge of the works.

Let us assume, then, that the first master-mason, A, designs the main scheme of the rebuilding, from 1292

until about 1320 when, from death or old age, he disappears from the scene. He it is who designs the scheme as a whole, under-pins the great arches of the arcade, plans the lengthening of the aisles one bay to make them line-able with the remodelled east wall, and sets out the great east window, but leaves no design for the tracery. During the latter part of his period of activity it is possible that little was done, for after Bannockburn (1314) Carlisle and the diocese generally were in dire straits owing to the repeated invasions and devastations of the Scots.

After 1320 comes architect B, who designs the tracery and continues the work to the upper part of the cathedral, but before the form-pieces of the tracery for the east window are completed there comes an interruption of the work, either from lack of funds or for political reasons or possibly both. Work is now suspended over a period which must have been prolonged over the time of the Black Death, and when it is resumed under Bishop Welton in 1354, a new master-mason, C, either adopts the design of B or else simply assembles the partly worked stones which have been lying around unused and waiting for building operations to be resumed; the work is continued by Bishop Appleby, and the whole of the choir is completed in time to have the glass put in between 1390 and 1400. Such a hypothesis may seem a little strained, but it would fit the facts; and there is some definite evidence that the work was interrupted for a time; witness R. S. Ferguson, in his article on the ancient glass in the east window¹⁹:—

“ It is curious that the stonework of this window remained unfinished from the time of its erection up to the Restoration of the Cathedral in 1856-9. Up to that time the tracery in one compartment above the trefoils connecting the mullions had never been finished: the mouldings had never been worked—

¹⁹ CWI ii 296 f.

a fact which proves that, when the stonework of the window was near completion, the work was obliged to be suspended, and was never resumed for nigh 400 years. The restoration of 1856-59 obliterated this curious piece of the history of the window, but an equally curious piece still remains written on it."

Mr Ferguson goes on to quote from a letter by Mr Purday, who was clerk of works during the restoration of the cathedral:—

"The stonework of the window is curious: the jambs must have been carried up to the springing and there left for some time, without arch, mullions, or tracery, and, when the window was completed, it was evidently done in a hurry, nearly half the tracery having no mouldings worked on the inside . . . The jambs were built very early in the 14th century, the tracery &c., soon after Edward III began his reign."²⁰

It is obvious from the foregoing that building operations had been suspended over a period the duration of which is unknown, but it may have been considerable. The fact that the mullions of the east window had been left with much of the mouldings unworked suggests strongly to me that the stones had lain unused, but partly finished, until such time as the works should be resumed; and when the work was re-started, it was simply a case of using up tracery and details which had been lying half-finished since before the Plague: this would be done both for the sake of economy and also because there were no skilled craftsmen available, either to cut new tracery of a Perpendicular pattern or even to finish off the existing stones. It must have been very difficult to get a team of highly skilled men together at Carlisle, particularly after the Plague, when craftsmen were at a premium and masons had to be impressed for the royal works. I think we must admit, in any case, that the tracery was *designed* before 1350.

Perhaps it may be objected that it is to a high degree

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 298.

improbable that materials would be left lying about for as long a period as twenty years. But such things did in fact happen: at St. Stephen's chapel, Westminster, materials in both stone and timber were prepared before 1329, and not used up until 1346 or later; this is proved by repeated inventories with details, and finally by a statement whereby a clerk of 1348 "discharged" himself of the materials handed over to him, as expended on works of that year.²¹

There is, as I have shown, a certain dilemma present in the choir work at Carlisle, between the evidence presented by its architectural style and that afforded by the bishops' building appeals. The foregoing hypothesis would help to bring about some measure of agreement, and would at least provide an advance towards some future solution.

It is quite possible, of course, that the master-mason C, appointed after a long intermission of the work, by Bishop Welton in 1354, was a man trained in the tradition of the Decorated style of the York school, having little sympathy with the new Perpendicular influence then just coming in; such a man might conscientiously carry out the design for the completion of the choir which his predecessors had laid down, and might be glad to utilise any details which had previously been prepared but not erected. A glance at the east end of the cathedral will show that the whole front is harmonious: no sudden break in design is visible, and it would certainly appear that the conception of one mind was followed throughout the protracted building operations.

As far as the design of the tracery of the east window is concerned, we might place it at about 1340-1345: the great Curvilinear windows at York and at Durham

²¹ J. T. Smith, *Antiquities of Westminster*, 1807, 208 f.

seem from documentary evidence to be datable to about 1335 and 1340 respectively.

To the same period must belong the fine six-light window which was inserted into the end of the north transept and which is well shown on the old print which was published in the time of Dean Gibbon (1713-1716), and a copy of which is in the possession of the author. This window, curiously enough, appears to have been of the mixed "Geometric" and "Decorated" type of which we have seen traces in the great east window, and it may well have been by the same hand. It had a "Geometric" centrepiece and Curvilinear side pieces. By the beginning of the nineteenth century this fine window had vanished and had been replaced by the debased mechanical stone grid which is shown in Billings' work (1840). It probably disappeared at the time of the disastrous restoration of the cathedral by Bishop Lytton in 1764, when the Consistory Court was established in this transept and the woodwork and panelling installed on the wall beneath the window.

One important question remains to be considered, perhaps the most interesting question of all: who were these master-masons who in turn directed the works at Carlisle, and which of them was responsible for the design of the famous window? Far too often, in the past, the credit has been given to the bishop or other ecclesiastic who initiated the work but, though much remains to be done on the lives of these medieval architects, some research has been carried out, and some great names are beginning to emerge. In the Fabric Rolls of York Minster is the will of Master Simon le Masonn of York, proved in the Dean and Chapter's court in 1322, expressing the desire to be buried in the nave of the cathedral; there are several references to him at earlier dates, and he would appear to have been the designer of York nave, which was begun in 1291.

One wonders if he might be a candidate for the choir at Carlisle also; he may at least have advised the Chapter and furnished the designs. It was not unusual for these master-masons to travel considerable distances from their bases. Later in the century John Lewyn, the master builder at Durham cathedral who was also responsible for the erection of the remarkable intersecting vault of the prior's kitchen there, was working in Carlisle 1378-1383, and was given a contract to build a tower with a gate and a barbican at Carlisle castle, with authority to impress masons for the work.²² We may wonder if he took an interest in the work then going on at the cathedral, and whether his authority to impress craftsmen for his work at the castle was responsible for part of the delay in the roofing of the choir. Much more work remains to be done on such matters, and considerable further research may be necessary; and it is possible that the key to the Carlisle problem may lie at York. It would be an achievement of great value if we could discover the name of the craftsman who left this supreme example of his genius at Carlisle. He should not for ever remain anonymous.

This attempt at a solution of the problems which still remain in our cathedral, and the obscure question of the dates, has given me much thought. My paper is necessarily tentative, but I hope that I have covered some new ground, and that what I have endeavoured to express here may be of value later on; I need hardly add that I should welcome any constructive criticism which readers may care to offer.

In conclusion, it may be asked how our choir compares with those of other cathedrals, and what standard of beauty it achieves, after its chequered career and misfortunes. I have visited most of our cathedrals and

²² J. F. Curwen, *Castles and Fortified Towers*, 1913, 101.

DIMENSIONS

NAVE. 145 FEET
TOWER 35. "
CHOIR. 80 "
260 (APPROX.)

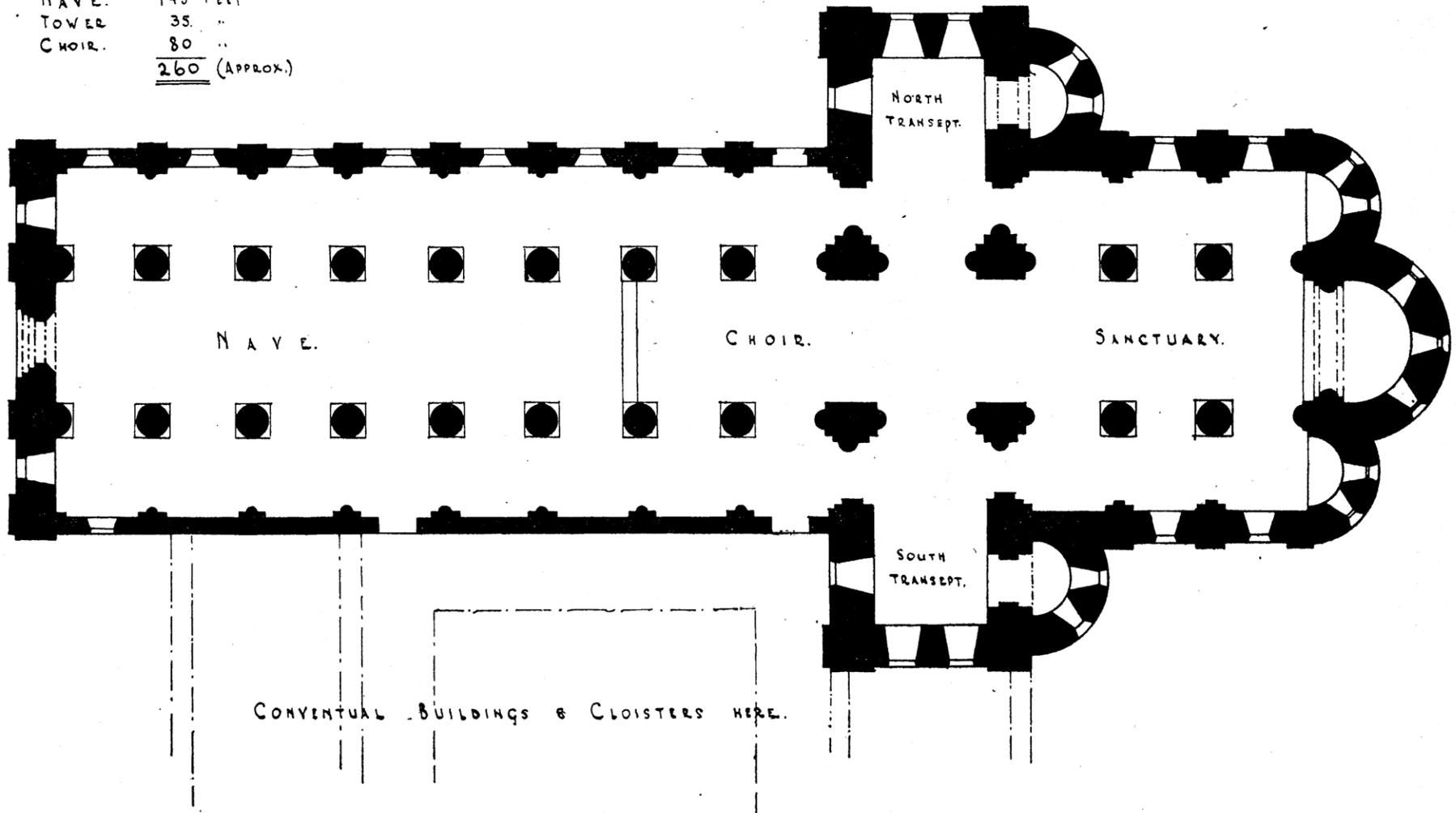
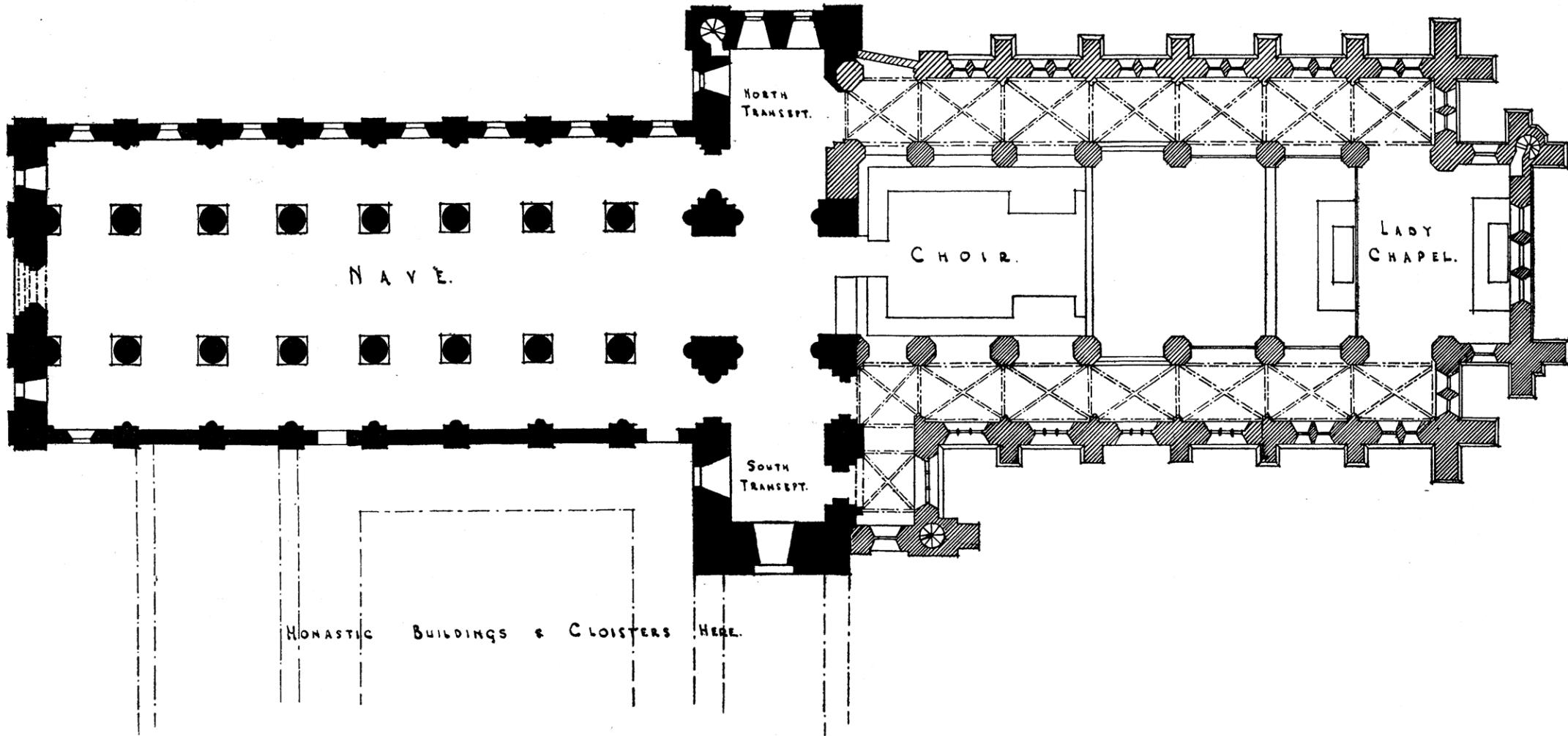


FIG. 1. See p. 89 f.

facing p. 116.

NORMAN PERIOD
 EARLY ENGLISH



CARLISLE CATHEDRAL. SUGGESTED PLAN OF EARLY ENGLISH CHOIR.
 APPROXIMATE SCALE.

FIG. 2. See p. 95 f.

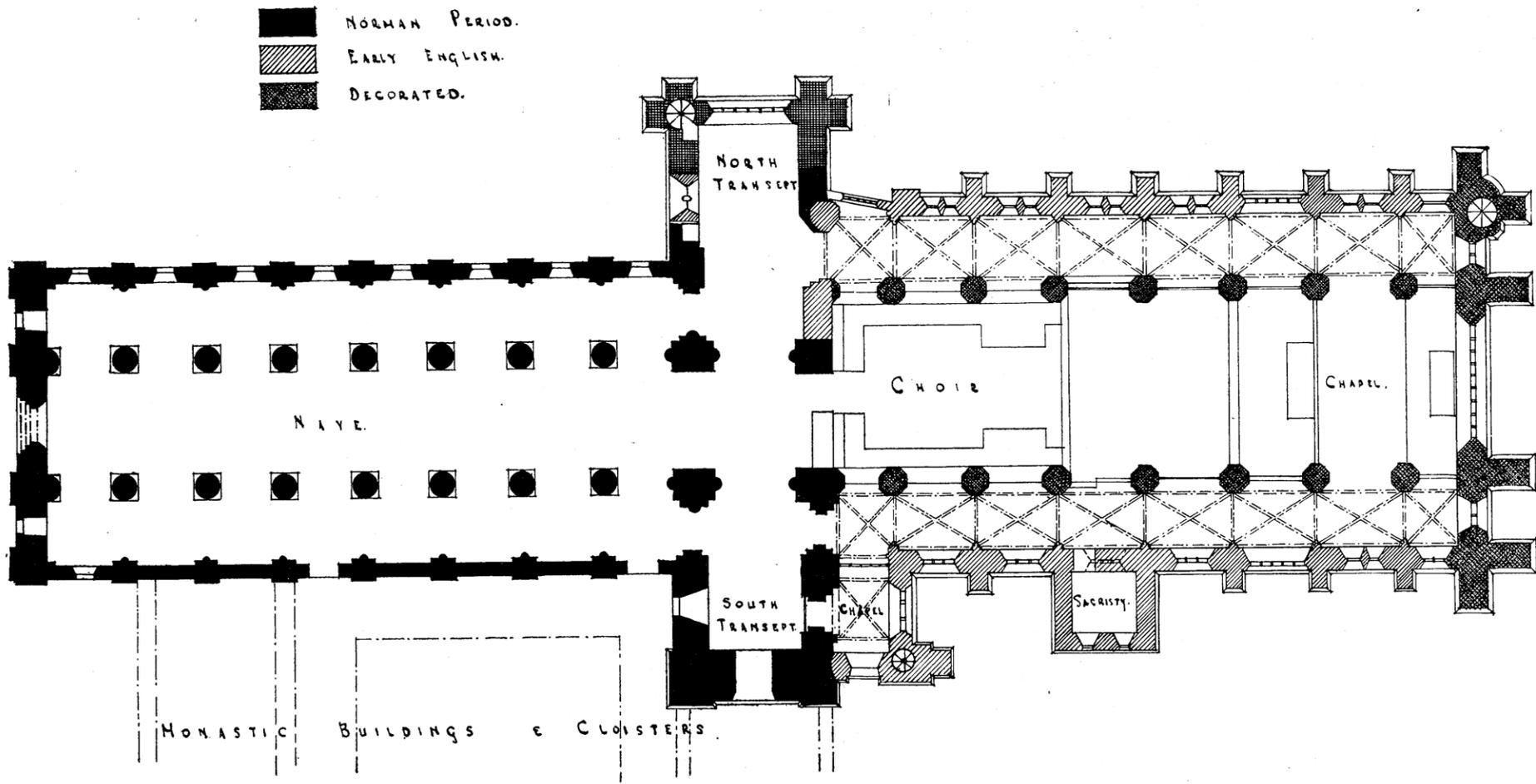


FIG. 3. See p. 101 f.

facing p. 116.

great churches, but though some are larger and others possess more opulent detail, I do not know of one with the same charm and sunny atmosphere. Carlisle cathedral should not be judged by its details, some of which (the clerestory, for instance) are bare by some standards; but to take it as a whole is a different story. It has been boldly conceived as a great hall, and although it lacks a high vault, and possesses none of the excitement of the high Gothic, yet it has a sense of spaciousness not surpassed by any other choir that I know. It gains much, too, by the dramatic contrast experienced by the visitor when he steps from the narrow, dark crossing and finds himself in the lofty choir, full of atmosphere and warmth; the warm tones of the red sandstone, the stained glass of the east window, and over all the blue and gold of the wooden ceiling, combine to give an exceptional effect of lovely colour.

At all seasons of the year and at all times of the day I have watched this choir, and the varying effects of the light in it have a fascination not easily described. To see it on a morning in summer, when the early sun throws a radiance through the great east window and revitalises the slumbering splendours of the painted glass and fills the east end with a shimmering light, is a sight not easily forgotten; or on an afternoon in late autumn, when the mellow sun throws long shafts of mote-filled, melancholy gold, slanting from the clerestory windows across the choir. Best of all, perhaps, is to stand in a dark aisle on a winter's evening, when the faint lights throw masses of mysterious shadow through the aisles and along the roof, while the young voices in the choir rise and soar and die away.

“ Now to the Sun-set again hast Thou brought us,
And seeing the evening twilight we praise Thee

Amen.”