

CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN, SYDE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

(FIGS. 43-4)

This parish comprising 628 acres today is among the smallest and most ancient in the kingdom, and its very small church is mainly of 12th-century construction, so far as visible features of the masonry testify. The nave roof is set relatively high, in a manner suggesting an even earlier, and possibly Saxon, origin; and its crown-post roof is a most deceptive example of its kind. These crown-posts, which are three in number, are of that type which is generally accepted as archaic, having straight purlin braces which spring from points close to the feet of the posts, but without any decorative features that can indicate their age with any precision. A protracted examination, however, reveals that there are closely datable features—notched lap-joints. The roof in its general appearance is shown in FIG. 43, and the peculiarly 13th-century details of its construction are shown in FIG. 44, at A, B, C, and D.

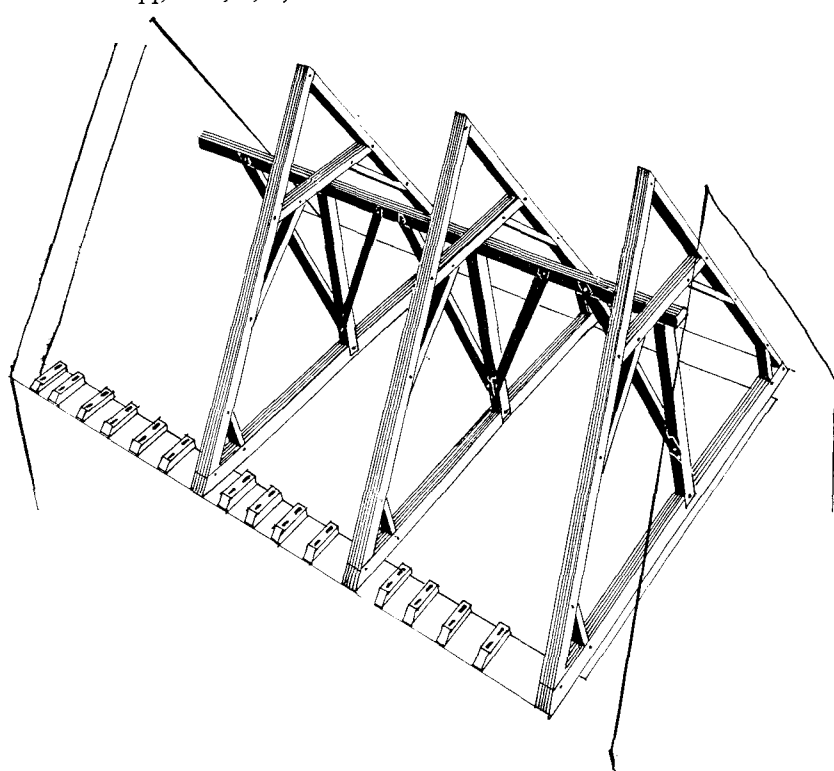


FIG. 43

CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN, SYDE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Complete frame of nave roof (p. 115)

The most recent researches in cathedral carpentry have established that the important change from open to secret notched-laps must have occurred at Wells during the years of the Interdict. This same Interdict was responsible²⁰ for the famous 'break' in

²⁰ L. S. Colchester in *Report of the Friends of Wells Cathedral for 1969* (Cathedral Publications, Wells, Somerset), p. 20.

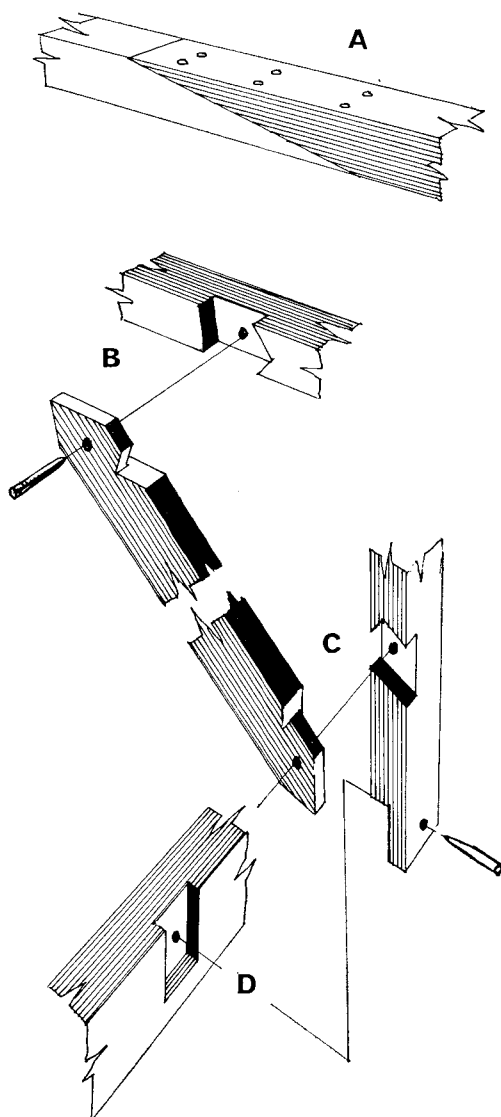


FIG. 44

CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN, SYDE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE (pp. 115, 117)

A. Through-splayed scarf visible on collar-purlin; B. Open notched lap-joints securing upper ends of braces to collar-purlin; C. Open notched lap-joints securing braces to crown-posts; D. Stop-housed lap-joints securing feet of crown-posts to tie-beams. D, if not simply archaic, may mean that crown-posts were used in an earlier and possibly butt-notched roof framed in seven cants.

the construction of the nave of that cathedral, and it is dated 1215-1220 by reliable documents. The change in the masonry occurs at the sixth pier, going westward from the central tower crossing, and the use of the secret notched-lap in the roofs above the vaults in both triforium-aisle and nave proper coincides exactly with this. It appears, therefore, that the adoption of covered notches is exactly dated between 1215 and 1220 in a great church of first quality, and that the roof over the nave at Syde Church was constructed before this change took place. The immediate importance of this discovery is that the use of crown-posts with collar-purlins can be shown quite definitely to have begun a little before 1250, an assumption previously disputed by a majority of students of such matters; and secondly it may be possible to shorten the hypothetical time-lapse between structural modifications in great cathedrals and tiny parish churches.

C. A. HEWETT

PLANT REMAINS IN THE 15TH-CENTURY CLOISTERS OF THE COLLEGE OF THE VICARS CHORAL, HEREFORD (PL. XII)

During 1970 alterations were commenced at no. 1a, The Cloisters, Hereford. This forms part of the building of the college for the vicars choral, who first received their charter in 1395,²¹ and the building dates between two and three years after 1474, when the land was given by the bishop for the erection of the cloisters. Underneath the 19th-century plaster on the inner wall of the cloister-walk, upright timber framings have been exposed with wattle-and-daub between (PL. XII). Owing to the foresight of Mr. F. C. Morgan, the cathedral lay-librarian, samples of the wattle-and-daub were saved for analysis.

The main timbers were constructed of *Quercus robur*, the oak, as were the pegs inserted into holes or grooves in the upright timbers. The wattle was composed of hazel switches, *Corylus avellana*, which sometimes measured over two metres in length.

The daub consisted of mud (Old Red Sandstone marl) mixed with 'straw'. The plants were well preserved, and by careful separation in water it was possible to identify the species. All the plants were grasses and the following species were noted with their relative amounts:

	dry weight %
<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>	61
<i>A. tenuis</i>	10
<i>A. ? canina</i>	2
<i>Poa pratensis</i>	18
<i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>	6
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	3

These species would be present in rough grasslands, probably waterside meadows. All the plants were vegetative apart from the remains of old inflorescences of *Poa*, and this suggests that the grass was cut before the summer. No caryopses were present.

Embedded in the daub was a plum-stone. Although the possibility cannot be ruled out that the stone came from a seedling hybrid plum that existed in the wild, the stone closely resembles those of the Reine-Claude de Moissac in general shape, although their facial ridge is not as well developed as on the Hereford stone. It had however similarities with several Reine-Claude cultivars, and these were among some of the earliest plums introduced into this country.

The Reine-Claude plum is known in Britain as the Gage plum. It originated in the region of Armenia, and was carried across the Mediterranean into Europe via Italy. The name Reine-Claude was given because it was thought to have been introduced

²¹ G. Marshall, 'The college of vicars choral in Hereford and some recent discoveries', *Ann. Report Friends of Hereford Cathedral*, vi (1939), 20-28.