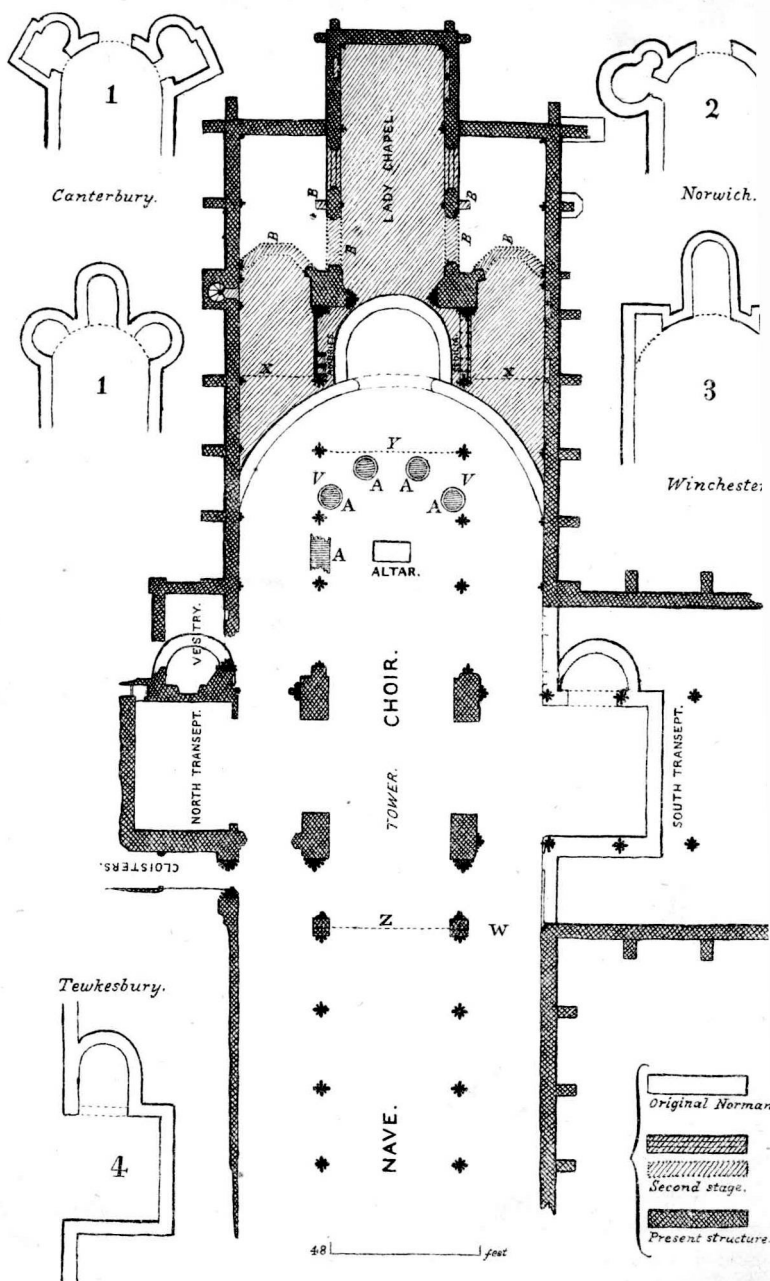


To face



CHESTER CATHEDRAL.

Chester Cathedral.

COMMUNICATED BY R. W. HUSSEY.

16, King William-street, Strand, London,
November 28, 1851.

MY DEAR SIR,—I have found a copy of the paper in the *Archæological Journal* on Chester Cathedral, which I send you herewith, (appended to this communication,) and you will see that I have endeavoured to make the plan explain the former state of the building more clearly by sketches in different shades. The lighter parts shew the original Norman structure; and for the whole of this, with the exception of the additional apse at the east end, (which we may call the Lady Chapel,) there is pretty clear authority. The Norman portions existing about the nave shew that this part of the building retains its original dimensions; the north transept has Norman walls, and it is to be presumed that the southern was of the same size, as I have described it by the light shade. In large churches of this date the transepts very commonly, or, I may say, most commonly, have apses on the east side; and I think I am correct in saying that there is an imperfectly stopped archway in the north transept shewing that such was the case in your Cathedral. I have, therefore, drawn apses on the plan; but whether they were shallow projections, such as I have made them, or of greater depth (see fig. 4), cannot be determined. The Abbey Church at Tewkesbury has transepts and apses exactly agreeing with the plan as I have drawn it. The length of the church eastward, and the form of it, so far as the main walls are concerned, is determined by the discovery of the foundations of the Norman pillars. For the Lady Chapel, as described in the plan, no authority can be given; but it is usual to find an adjunctive chapel of this kind in large churches of this date, and there probably was one here. Winchester Cathedral, as originally built, and the Abbey Church at Bury

St. Edmunds, may be referred to as examples. Other chapels are frequently found attached to the east end, as at Canterbury (fig. 1), or as at Norwich (fig. 2), and at Winchester the old east end was as fig. 3 and it is quite possible that other adjuncts may have existed, beyond what I have marked, at the eastern end of your Cathedral; but there is no evidence of anything of the kind, and a consideration of the manner in which the alterations in this part appear to have been carried on, rather disposes me to think that only one (Lady) Chapel has existed; as this chapel is hypothetical, its dimensions must be purely imaginary. I may here correct an error in the paper in the *Archæological Journal*, in the case of the word *choir*. It is there employed to signify the eastern arm of the cross, the portion of the building eastward of the transepts, for which it is by no means a correct term; for, in large Norman churches, the choir, properly so called, very generally extended *westward* of the transepts, into the part which, in later buildings, was given up to the nave; and I imagine that in this instance the choir extended to the dotted line *z*, one bay westward of the transept. In Norman times, the altar was not placed against an east wall but at some distance from it; and in that age the ancient custom was continued of placing the seats of the dignitaries behind the altar. The original position of the altar in your Cathedral is likely to have been at or near the spot marked *altar*.

I now have to refer to the alterations of the original fabric, and in speaking of them it will be frequently necessary to hazard a few conjectures, more especially as I have *not* examined the building with minuteness to ascertain whether any indications can be discovered to throw light on the progress of these changes, or on the manner in which they have been effected. I do not suppose that more than very slight assistance could be gained (and very possibly none whatever) by an examination of the structure, but until the experiment has been made, one always hopes to glean some evidence from an investigation of the masonry. It must be borne in mind that the mediæval system of carrying on large buildings was not, like ours, to begin with the entire foundation, and to raise the walls uniformly throughout the whole circuit, but to build small portions at a time, making each, with its roof, complete before another portion was commenced. By this mode of proceeding a church might be gradually prolonged during successive years.

The parts most eastern, in a middle shade, form the first existing addition to the original building. It is likely that the new Lady Chapel and the polygonal ends of the aisles, including the eastern pillar on each side of the present choir, which could be raised without, in any degree, interfering with the older work, may have first been undertaken; and I imagine them to have been carried on with reasonable expedition, and that as soon as it was necessary to raise the second pillars of the choir (at

the ends of the dotted line *y*), the old aisle roof was broken through, and the new work, comprehending the two eastern bays of the existing choir, was completed as far as the dotted line *y*; a temporary inclosure of the Norman arches round the eastern side of the altar would have prevented the services of the church from being interrupted during the progress of the works, and as soon as they were roofed in, and the new roofs connected with the old ones, the additions to the building might have been thrown open. It is possible that the new Lady Chapel may have been built before anything else was set about; and you will see by the plan that this may have been done without disturbing any of the earlier work, and a way might have been made into it through the east end of the original Lady Chapel; but I see no strong reason for supposing this to have been the case. After the completion of this first stage in the alterations there appears to have been a pause of some years, and I have not examined the building closely enough to venture to hazard a conjecture as to what was the next undertaking. If my memory is correct, not only the whole of the choir, but the south transept, and, at least, the lower part of the tower, are all in the decorated style, so that there cannot be any great difference in their ages; and as the two eastern bays of the choir, which we have already accounted for, belong at least as much to that style as to the preceding, the interval which elapsed before the resumption of the works cannot have been so long as in some other cases; and considering how much was done during the prevalence of the decorated style, the Monks must have been then blessed with very liberal friends. I think we may assume that the new works were carried on consecutively from the east, and that on their resumption after the pause which followed the completion of the parts eastward of the line *y*, the renovation of the choir was proceeded with; but whether this was really the case is certainly doubtful, for it is quite *possible* the south transept may have been rebuilt before any further alteration was made in the choir, or the transept and choir may have been carried on together. Some light might possibly be thrown on this point by a very close examination of the building. If my supposition, that the original choir extended westward to *z*, is correct, its size must have been sufficient for the uses of the monastery without further enlargement, because it was as long as it was afterwards left on the completion of the new choir, which comprised the space between the *eastern* piers of the great tower, and the west end of the present Lady Chapel, and in which state it remained until the recent alterations were made. From this circumstance it seems clear that the most *useful* alteration for the Monks to have made, after having provided the additional chapels at the east end, must have been the enlargement of the transept: they may, therefore, have allowed the original choir to remain until after the south transept was rebuilt; but whatever may have been the

order of proceeding, these works seem to have been carried on in close succession, if not simultaneously.

The eastern piers of the nave (at the ends of the line z) are very different from the others, and I think I remember there is a vertical joint in the masonry, shewing not only that the eastern and western parts of them were built at different times, but also that the eastern half was built first. This leads me to suppose that the original choir ended here, and that the rebuilding of the nave was not commenced until the new choir was finished, the last arch on each side of the choir being supported on a half pillar or pier abutting against the older Norman work, and fitting up to the ends of the screen at z . I must add, as another reason for thinking the choir originally came to z , that the form of the lower part of the large piers which support the tower, implies that they were not to be exposed to sight, and that as wide a space as could be made was desired between them from N. to S. The last consideration would apply equally or nearly so, whether the space under the tower was appropriated to choir or nave; but if this space had, when the tower was built, formed part of the latter, I think the mouldings and bases would have been prolonged down to the floor, and not have been made to stand on solid plain masses of masonry, as they now do. When the new choir was completed, with its western end (as we have supposed) at z , the length from thence to the Lady Chapel was greater than necessary for the performance of the services of the church, and a portion of the eastern end must necessarily have been parted off to give access to the Lady Chapel; but *where* the eastern screen stood is doubtful; but it may be imagined either at y , or between the two next piers towards the east. Its most probable situation, I think, is y ; because this leaves the choir as long (rather longer) from z than the original choir, which, as before stated, was sufficient to satisfy the wants of the monastery, and would allow of two very good chapels being enclosed at the ends of the aisles, by the erection of screens from E. to W. in the eastern arches of the choir (now occupied on the S. by the Sedilia, and on the N. by the Ambries), and from N. to S. at xx , still leaving one archway clear between the screen at x and y , for access to the Lady Chapel. It must, however, be remembered that it was by no means a universal custom to enclose the subordinate altars in these parts of churches within screens, and the ends of the aisles may very likely have been left open to the rest of the building. For the reasons given in the accompanying printed paper, the Sedilia and Ambries could not have occupied their present positions until the aisles were added to the Lady Chapel, and I will not venture to express an opinion as to the date of their alteration. The groining looks very much like decorated work; the windows are clearly perpendicular, and have no appearance of being insertions into older walls; and the original cornice of the Lady Chapel is weather-worn to an extent

proving it to have been an *external* feature for a very considerable period. These circumstances always rather puzzled me, and not having made any *very* close scrutiny of the building, I am by no means qualified to speak to its date. If the construction will admit of it, it is possible that these aisles may formerly have had roofs, different from the existing roofs, which left the original external cornice of the Lady Chapel exposed. Assuming *z* to have been the western termination of the new choir when first completed, I should conjecture that the S. transept was not enlarged until the choir was finished; because at the period at which this work was done, it was customary (and had been so for some time), though the practice was certainly not universal, to throw the transepts open to the nave, and keep the choir in the eastern arm of the cross; and, I think, it is possible that if so spacious a transept had been raised before the new choir was finished, the desirableness of throwing it open, instead of leaving the sole approach to it by a small archway at *w*, must have been so manifest, that this consideration, coupled with a knowledge of the prevailing custom, would have induced the Monks to make their new choir *then* terminate at the eastern side of the great tower, instead of postponing this alteration to a later time. If we suppose (and, I believe, there is nothing about the building which may not be reconciled with such a supposition) that the choir remained for a considerable period, until the decorated style was exploded or had lost its purity, with its western termination at *z* and its eastern at *y*, or some other point short of the Lady Chapel, the Sedilia and Ambries must originally have been erected in situations different from those they now occupy, because they are pure decorated work. Perhaps they may have stood in the archways marked *vv*, but there is nothing to help us in arriving at a satisfactory conclusion on this head, unless there should be signs in the masonry of the piers of other work having been attached to them. If the aisles were added to the Lady Chapel while the decorated style prevailed, the sedilia and ambries may be supposed to have been erected originally in their present situations, and the west screen of the choir to have been then built in the position it occupied until the commencement of the recent alterations. I think it cannot be doubted but that the western end of the choir was removed towards the east at the same time that the eastern end was carried up to the Lady Chapel; so that evidence of either of these changes would amount to proof of the date of both. Any signs there may be of a screen having been attached to the piers at the ends of the line *z*, will not prove that the present organ screen ever stood there; because, as I have already pointed out, it is to be supposed that these piers may have been built against the ends of an older screen.

There is another peculiarity to refer to, viz., the levels of the original paving of the existing building. If my memory is correct, it was found,

by laying open the bases of the pillars, that the paving of the present choir is not much above the old paving, and that the original floor of the Lady Chapel was at a considerably lower level. In this there is nothing very remarkable, and it is a mistake to suppose that the floors of different parts of churches were invariably raised in succession as they advanced towards the east. Our forefathers took the ground as they found it, and if the eastern part was the lowest, and they had no good reason for raising it, they were certainly not in all cases reluctant to have it left the lowest. I think I clearly remember that the original paving of the present choir was something above the Norman paving (how much I cannot say); but the Lady Chapel seems to have been as low as the Norman choir, if not lower; so that there must have been steps down to it. These I conjecture to have been either just west of the large arch between the choir and Lady Chapel (so as to leave the bases of the jambs clear), or else between the two first piers at the east end of the choir.

I must add a word on a point which I have mentioned some distance back, viz., the one arch west of the great tower, and the vertical joint in the pillars at the ends of the line *z*. It may be urged that, at whatever period in the progress of the new works the tower was raised, there must have been a necessity (or something very nearly amounting to a necessity) for rebuilding this arch, as the masons would require "working room" all round the tower while they were engaged upon it, and that therefore the fact of this arch being rebuilt, and of there being a vertical joint up each pier, does not imply very forcibly that the choir extended to *z*. I mention this as a legitimate argument against what I have supposed to be the former arrangement of the building, though I am *by no means* satisfied that mediæval masons would have required any space round the tower as "working room;" and the other circumstances to which I have referred, seem to preponderate in favour of the notions I have ventured to propound.

As I am quite sure you must find your patience sufficiently taxed by the reading of this awfully long history, I will only add my best wishes for your success in deciphering it, and a hope that you may find something in it which may be useful to you.

I remain,

My dear Sir,

Yours truly,

RICHD. CHAS. HUSSEY.

Rev. G. B. Blomfield.

APPENDIX REFERRED TO AT PAGE 209.

NOTICE OF DISCOVERIES IN CHESTER CATHEDRAL,

ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE ORIGINAL ARRANGEMENT OF THAT STRUCTURE
IN NORMAN AND LATER TIMES.

EXCAVATIONS which have been made within the last few years in the choir of the Cathedral at Chester, in effecting certain alterations in the internal arrangements, have brought to light the foundations of some of the pillars of the Norman church, which are exhibited in the accompanying plan, at A A A. From this discovery it appears that, according to the custom usually followed during the prevalence of the Norman style, the choir was of much shorter proportions than is common in churches of later date, and that its eastern end was semicircular in plan. The round pillars were 6 ft. 9 in diameter, including the moulding of the base, which was a plain torus 3 inches in diameter. The large mass of walling at the junction of the curve with the straight part of the choir, on the north side, marked A^c, was 6 ft. broad, and extended over the whole space between the bases of the pillars of the existing church: a corresponding mass of walling was discovered on the south side of the choir before the other remains were laid open, but, as no precise dimensions of it were taken, it is not marked upon the plan; this last-mentioned piece of walling was found to have been partially disturbed by a grave which is excavated in it, but which has not at this time been opened. The other foundations have been almost entirely destroyed by the workmen.

As the north transept and the north wall and north-western angle of the nave of the present cathedral are of Norman date, this discovery in the choir completes the evidence which was wanting to shew the size and proportions of the entire original building.

In addition to the remains of the Norman church, the accompanying plan also shews the form of the present cathedral as first built, marked by the dotted lines B B and the middle shade. Most abundant evidence of the primary arrangement is visible in the parts of the fabric which have been altered; and the original external cornice of the Lady Chapel, considerably weather-worn by its exposure before the aisles were added, still exists between the vaulting and the roof of the aisles; it is enriched with large tooth ornaments. Several changes are to be observed in the work about the east end of the choir, which may be accounted for

by supposing that the present church was begun (as the style of the architecture indicates) with the Lady Chapel, and was gradually extended westward in such portions as could be most conveniently raised with least disturbance of the older building : this mode of proceeding was very usual in works of this kind, and it is not difficult to imagine how, in the first instance, a small Norman Lady Chapel, and afterwards the main structure of the former church, may successively have created temporary obstructions to the progress of the new work.

Previous to the erection of the aisles to the Lady Chapel, the high altar must have stood in advance (westward) of the archway at the eastern end of the choir, or it would have interfered with the communication between the chapel and the body of the building, and it must have remained in that situation until the aisles were added to the Lady Chapel in continuation of those of the choir. The sedilia and ambries which now occupy the eastern arch on each side of the choir, may be assumed to have been erected at the time the altar was placed in this part of the building ; their architectural details shew them to belong to the purest period of the decorated style : the original archway between the choir and the Lady Chapel may be assigned to the very commencement of the same style.

When the altar was removed to the east end of the choir, the floor of that part of the building was raised so that the bases of the adjoining pillars were buried to a considerable depth ; the present floor has been lowered, (as have also the sedilia to a corresponding extent,) but it is still at a higher level than was contemplated at the time the church was built, and hides an important part of the bases.

R. C. H.