

ON SOME REMAINS OF THE WORK OF WILLIAM OF  
WYKHAM, AT WINDSOR CASTLE.

THE name of William of Wykham has always been held in the highest estimation in connection with the mediæval architecture of this country, and his works are referred to and valued as forming an important era in the history of that art. This interest has been considerably increased in consequence of the recent visit of the Archæological Institute to Winchester, and the investigations which took place on that occasion with reference to Wykham and his works, under two of its most distinguished members, (Professors Willis and Cockerell,) a circumstance which will doubtless render any addition to the list of his acknowledged works an acceptable contribution to this interesting subject. Under this impression I presume to bring under the notice of the Institute what I consider to be a genuine and beautiful fragment still existing, though in a very dilapidated state, within the precincts of the castle at Windsor.

Before however entering upon the description of this fragment, I will premise, that as the great change in the style of the pointed architecture from the Decorated to the Perpendicular took place during the time this prelate presided over the royal works, there is every reason to believe that this change was owing in a great measure to his genius and instrumentality. I am induced to form this opinion from the fact of there being, I believe, no well authenticated example of the latter style previously to his period, whereas a progressive change was going on which appears to have commenced with that period, and ended before his death in the complete establishment of the new style to the exclusion of its predecessor<sup>a</sup>. I am aware an opinion is entertained that the west windows of the nave of Winchester Cathedral are the work of Bishop Edington, Wykham's predecessor, and that documentary evidence is in favour of this opinion. To me however it appears quite incredible that windows so ultra Perpendicular in all their forms and details, and which are not supported by one single analogous well authenticated example, not only of the same period, but for a period long subsequent, can safely be referred to Eding-

<sup>a</sup> Edington died 1366, when the Decorated style had scarcely passed its zenith. Wykham died 1404, when it had altogether

disappeared, and the Perpendicular style was fully established.

ton. I am more disposed to suspect that the evidence referred to does not convey the full truth, and that something yet remains to be discovered, which by transferring them to a period more in accordance with their style, will relieve us from a most perplexing difficulty, in judging of dates by the analogies of style; a principle which has long been established, and which in most cases we have reason to hope and believe has led to correct conclusions. Such a complete revolution however in the style of the pointed architecture, as I have above referred to, could scarcely have been effected in so short a period, had it not been encouraged by the powerful example and influence of a distinguished practitioner in the art of architecture, and we know of no contemporary whose influence was so great, or so likely to fully accomplish such a change, as this prelate.

Of Wykham's acknowledged works there remain at the present time the two noble foundations at Oxford and Winchester, and the adaptation of the style which I conceive he had introduced upon the existing Norman nave of Winchester Cathedral. It is further on record that he was largely employed on the works carried on under his patron Edward III. at Windsor: but owing to the great changes which have taken place in this royal fortress and palace, particularly within the present century, little remains of an architectural character which can be ascribed to this prelate. Some of the vaultings in the basement may probably have formed the substructions on which his more finished works rested; but beyond these almost everything has disappeared. I cannot help thinking that the north transept of Merton College Chapel, Oxford, may be safely added to the list of his works, as it certainly belongs to the same period, has some details which correspond exactly with those of his college in that University, and is beyond all question one of the most beautifully designed elevations, both in its general arrangement and particular details, to be anywhere met with. This however is mere conjecture, as we have no documentary evidence to establish the fact.

As Wykham's great works at Windsor are said to have added much to his reputation as an architect, the architectural antiquary naturally pries most anxiously into every part of this vast fabric, in the hopes of detecting some out of the way morsel indicative of the genius of its architect, but in vain; either such fragments do not exist at all, or they are so com-

pletely buried in the more modern alterations as to be beyond the reach of redemption. The cloister of St. George's Chapel, represented in the accompanying drawing, furnishes however, in my opinion, one exception. This cloister consists of a quadrangle, of four compartments on each side, looking into a court placed at the east end of the chapel, and on the north side of Wolsey's tomb-house. Each of these compartments is filled in with tracery, the general characters whereof belong to the Perpendicular style, but there are two or three touches which belong decidedly to the preceding or Decorated period, and which I conceive therefore to bring it justly within the denomination of transition work. The four solid angles of the quadrangle have on each of the internal return faces a panel filled in with a canopy of light and beautiful design; the style of these canopies belongs most unquestionably to the time of Edward III.; they abounded in St. Stephen's Chapel, Westminster, and are rarely, I believe I might say never, to be met with subsequently to Wykham's period. These canopies taken in connection with the transition character of the tracery, and the further connection of Wykham with the buildings at Windsor, convince me that this cloister is the genuine work of the great architect. Beyond these particulars it has little to recommend it to attention, the ceiling is plain, and the doors leading into it have no particular merit considered architecturally, but the little that remains of Wykham's work gives great value to this solitary specimen at a place which is so intimately connected with his fame. In stating, however, that there was little to attract attention beyond Wykham's screen, I ought to have made an exception in favour of some arches of an earlier date, partly buried in the more recent erection of the wall of Wolsey's tomb-house, which are very good in their details, and perhaps some of the earliest work remaining at Windsor. The same observation applies also to the door of entrance from the cloister into St. George's Chapel, with its beautiful and elaborately wrought covering of iron work.

As before stated, this cloister, at least the portion of it which I have ventured to ascribe to Wykham, is in a state of great dilapidation; I fear I may add, that it is not altogether free from danger, as the foundations have in part very much given way. It is therefore most desirable that some steps should be taken before long, to preserve it from further injury and ultimate destruction.

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