

REMARKS ON THE MEDLÆVAL ARCHITECTURE OF THE CITY OF WELLS.

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THE CATHEDRAL.

According to tradition there was a church at Wells connected with Glastonbury in the first century of the Christian era, but all that relates to S. Joseph of Arimathæa is of very doubtful authority.

That King Ina founded a church here in 704, in honour of S. Andrew, the patron of Holy Wells, is probable, and may almost be considered as certain. The well of very pure water said to have miraculous (or in other words medicinal) properties still remains in use, close to the east end of the church, and the water still gushes out there very abundantly, and soon fills the moat round the Bishop's palace, which has long served as a reservoir to the inhabitants of the city.

That King Alfred founded a Bishop's see in 903 there is no good reason to doubt, nor that King Edward the Elder built a church or chapel on the site of the present choir, but it is probable that this building was of wood only.

In 1135 Bishop Robert built a church here; no doubt this was of stone, and probably of the same size as the present church, for the Norman churches of that period generally are of the largest size, at least the plan is laid out and the work begun on that large scale; the choir was built as soon as possible, a dedication then took place, for it was the choir only that was consecrated. In the Latin of the twelfth or thirteenth centuries the word *ecclesia* means the choir only; the nave was called the vestibule, and frequently was not built till long afterwards, sometimes not at all, if the funds were not forthcoming. We have a record of a dedication in 1163, still under Bishop Robert. The interval of twenty-eight years from

the foundation indicates that a great work was being executed. When Mr. Ferrey stripped off all the white-wash from the walls, he found that the greater part of the existing walls was of the Norman period up to a certain height. The same thing was found at Exeter in the same manner, although there are no signs of Norman details visible. At Wells the north porch is of late Norman character, and may probably be of the date of 1163; probably a part of the north aisle was then preserved, from the porch to the choir, for the convenience of the clergy in the Close; and the Dean, who is likely to have had a house at that period on the same site as the present Deanery, which is much later; but the existing nave is not of Norman character, nor even Transitional.

In the time of the great Bishop Joceline the present magnificent west front, with its admirable sculpture, was begun and to some extent completed, but not entirely. The lower parts of the two towers which form part of the western front are of the same period, but the upper parts were not built till long afterwards. At the same time the lower part of the walls of the nave on both sides, to the height of about ten feet from the ground, were built, as is shewn by the courses of stone, which continue all along; but the upper parts of the walls were not built till after the west front, as is shewn by the junctions of the masonry, and the insertion of mouldings of the nave in the south tower of the west front.

There was another dedication in 1239, still under Bishop Joceline, and it is probable that the Norman choir had then been rebuilt, or altered according to the fashion of that period. Bishop Joceline must have had enormous funds at his disposal: he built the Bishop's Palace, that is to say, the magnificent structure now inhabited by the bishop, some of the details of which are identical with the west front. Joceline died in the year 1243, the third year after the dedication just mentioned. The nave, to fill up the space between the choir and the west front, was built at three periods, all during the thirteenth century; the details of the three parts are not exactly alike.

The crypt of the chapter house (which is in itself a fine

¹ The income of the see was £214 14s. 6d in 1212, but that is equal to quite £5000 of modern money.

structure) is recorded to have been built between 1275 and 1292, this proves that the choir and the north transept were finished before that period. The upper part of the chapter house was built between 1293 and 1302: it is one of the most beautiful buildings of that very beautiful building era, with its vault resting on a central column, and its vestibule with the fine stairs leading to it from the north transept.

The Lady-chapel was built between 1309 and 1326, and was again one of the most beautiful buildings of that time, when many consider that Gothic architecture was in perfection. It is usually said that the choir is also of that time, but it is probably earlier.

The central tower was in substance part of the work of Bishop Joceline, but this is much disguised by later work, and it was only made out by Mr. Irvine by a very careful examination of the construction and the details, such as could only have been made by a practical architect of experience; he has found details of four periods in this central tower. The work of later period is a mere casing. It was in progress in 1316, and the roof was being put on in 1321. The inverted arches were found necessary to support the tower about fifty years after it was built—similar arches would have prevented the fall of the spire at Chichester. The upper part of the south tower of the west front was executed by Bishop Harewell, begun in 1361, ended in 1386, but was made to harmonise with the lower part.

The north tower of the west front was built by Bishop Bubwith, begun in 1407, and finished by his executors about 1426. He also built the organist's house, originally the house of the "Master of the choristers," and connected at the back with the chambers on the western walk of the cloisters, in which the choristers practised their chanting, adjoining it, which served as an excellent foil to shew the massive grandeur of the cathedral by comparison with an ordinary dwelling-house standing close to it. Unfortunately this building has been destroyed, having been long neglected, and Mr. Ferrey had propped it up with a view to its restoration, when the props were wilfully destroyed in the night, in 1869.

The beautiful west front was tampered with under the

idea of improving it, under Bishop King, in the time of Henry VIII. A few of the figures are of his time, but the sculpture of them is not at all equal to that of the original statues, a few of which were wanting before the recent restorations. The whole has now been very carefully repaired.

The cloisters on the southern side of the nave are at present chiefly work of the fifteenth century, but there had been previously a wooden cloister, and another was begun in the thirteenth, as all the doorways are of that period. The two doorways from the church into the cloister, and the one from the cloister at the south end of the western walk, leading to the Bishop's Palace, are all of very beautiful Early English work. There are also remains of a doorway about the middle of the east side, which may have led to an earlier chapter-house belonging to the Norman church. The foundations of an octagonal building were found by Mr. Irvine, and buried again, but he does not think them Norman. On the outer walls towards the Bishop's Palace there is a fine series of buttresses. The gate-house of the Bishop's Palace, built by Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury in the fourteenth century, is immediately opposite this.

Mr. Irvine's opinions on the subject of the date of the walls are by no means to be despised; he is a very careful and accurate observer, and as a practical architect he is often able to give information on details which others have overlooked. All that he says about Wells is true as far as it goes, but it is one side of the question only, and when he tries to persuade us that the existing walls are of the Saxon period,¹ I am sure that he is mis-

¹ He now says he has been misunderstood, and that he did not say this; but both the late Sir Gilbert Scott and Mr. Ferrey, as well as myself, had understood him to mean this. I am, however, glad to find that he really agrees with us that there is no exception here to the general history of architecture.

Mr. Irvine's observation that the lower courses of stone in the side walls of the nave are earlier than the upper part, perhaps half-a-century, confirms what I had observed myself many years ago, when I first examined the architectural history of this cathedral, long before I again examined it with Mr. Freeman, after Pro-

fessor Willis's Lecture, when we found that the Professor had been rather too hasty in his examination of it, and had not observed that the west front is earlier than the side walls of the nave, which is clearly shown by the jointing of the masonry at the junction where it is visible in the cloister-court. The upper part of the side walls being of the thirteenth century, it follows that the lower courses of stone are likely to be of the twelfth, and therefore of Norman character, but not *Early* Norman, for the masonry is *fine-jointed*, and *Early* Norman masonry is always *wide-jointed*.

taken; the general history of architecture, grounded upon the close observations of Rickman, perfected by Professor Willis, and confirmed by scores of instances both in England and France, is decisive on this point. We have several other instances besides Wells of elaborate descriptions of buildings of the Saxon period, which our fathers or our grandfathers applied to the existing buildings. This was perfectly natural when the principle of comparison had not been established; but we know that many of these buildings, of which we have the most elaborate descriptions, were entirely swept away by the Normans within a century afterwards, as being either too small, or too low, or too badly built to be worth preserving. Perhaps the most decisive instance of this of which we have a record is Winchester, where we have a very elaborate bombastic description of the Saxon cathedral, and yet we have a record of the transfer of the relics of the saints from the old cathedral to the new one at the time of the consecration of the new building, the old one being then left standing in the old churchyard, and it is believed that the foundations of it still remain, but have not yet been excavated. Wolstan's description of the Saxon building was written in A.D. 980, the new building by Bishop Walkelyn was just about a century after this. There are several other instances of the small old Saxon church having been left standing in the same churchyard with a much larger Norman church. At Bradford-on-Avon the small but very interesting Saxon church, which is still standing, with the exception of the south transept, and which probably is of the eighth century, was in the same churchyard as the Norman church of the twelfth, although they are now separated by a modern road. At Wantage, a small earlier church was standing in the churchyard of the present church in my remembrance, the old church having been turned into a school-house, and when a new and larger school-house was built, the old one was unfortunately destroyed.

The extracts from the Fabric Rolls at Wells¹ agree perfectly with the general history of architecture, but not with Mr. Irvine's supposed views. If he had been content

¹ Read in the Chapter House by Canon Bernard, when the Institute visited Wells, August 11th, 1879.

with dating the present structure about the year 1190, I should have been disposed to agree with him, for I have long said that the last ten years of each century belong rather to the following one in architectural history, but the exact resemblance even in details of the nave of Lincoln Cathedral with Wells may be considered as proof that they were built by the two brothers, one of whom was Joceline of Wells, who was bishop from 1206 to 1239, and who also built the Bishop's Palace, some of the details of which are identical with those of the west front of the cathedral. That this magnificent west front was really built by him appears to me to be matter of demonstration, and Mr. Irvine himself now agrees in this. St. Hugh's choir at Lincoln was built between 1192 and 1200, and we might have put the west front of Wells to that period; but Savaricus, who was then bishop, does not appear to have carried on any great work: his time and his funds were otherwise occupied; and if he had built at all, it would have been at Bath and not at Wells. The time of Reginald Fitz-Jocelyn, 1171 — 1191, was contemporaneous with the rebuilding of the choir at Canterbury by William of Sens, but that work is entirely of Transitional Norman character, and not purely Early English, as is that at Wells. The work of William the Englishman, who completed that of William of Sens, is indeed almost as much advanced as Wells and Lincoln, but still retains more of the Norman character, and that was building in 1184. We may hope that Canon Bernard will publish the interesting records of which he has told us the substance, and these will probably decide the long-disputed question. I do not admit of *any exceptions* in architectural history: the architectural character of each *generation* was always the same, unless there is a difference of nationality, or of the building material.

The construction of buildings of the Saxon period is very distinct from that of the Norman. In the Saxon church at Deerhurst, the date of which is ascertained by a contemporary inscription to be 1053, is almost or quite contemporary with the Norman buildings of Edward the Confessor at Westminster, but the construction is very different. At Deerhurst the tower, which is the most perfect part of the old building, has walls of herring-bone

work, with long and short work at the angles and at the east end, where part of the original construction also remains ; the construction is the same, and the doorways are triangular-headed, and some of them are square-headed, quite different from Norman work—at Westminster, on the contrary, we have the usual Norman masonry. It has been shewn that in the lower parts of the walls the masonry at Wells is Norman, although the general appearance belongs to the following century and the Early English style ; there is certainly none of it earlier than the twelfth century. It was probably begun in the time of Bishop Robert, 1135-1166, but there is no reason to suppose that any of it is earlier.

The cathedral church of Wells is the only one in England which is quite complete, with all the parts and proper appurtenances, and all belong to the original design of Bishop Joceline. The plan of the church is, as is usual in large churches, cruciform, and what is not usual, the same style of architecture prevails throughout. We have the central tower, with the transepts north and south, the choir with its aisles, and eastward of that the presbytery behind the altar, and the Lady-chapel beyond that ; the last is the latest in date, and belongs to the last division of the Early English style, or it may be called Early Decorated. Westward of this central tower we have the nave with its aisles, and the western front with its two flanking towers. Southward of the nave there are the cloisters. The cathedral library is over the east walk of them, and the singing school of the choristers over the west walk. These cloisters serve as a covered passage leading to the Bishop's Palace, which is also of the thirteenth century, and part of Bishop Joceline's work. Northward of the choir we have the chapter-house, which also belongs to the later division of the same style.

Beyond that is the Vicars' Close, added in the fourteenth century by Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury, and partly rebuilt in the fifteenth century by Beckington and his executors. Northward of the nave we have the Deanery, rebuilt in the fifteenth century on a grand scale, and slightly fortified, with its own gatehouse. Eastward of this are two of the Canons' houses, which have

been rebuilt, then the Archdeaconry, modernized in front, but having the interior still mediæval; on the first floor is a fine hall of the time of Edward I.; at the east end is a small round window with tracery of wood only, which is a rare feature; a doorway of that period still remains below. The wall that encloses the Close has three gates, one at the north-west corner, called the Dean's Gate; another at the north-east, called the Chain Gate, with a passage on a bridge over the street, leading from the Vicars' Close into the cathedral; the third is at the south-east corner leading from the market-place, in which there is a cross that has been restored. On the eastern side of the market-place is a fine gate-house, with the arms of Bishop Beckington, who added an outer wall to the palace, with this gate in it, outside the moat. This was an addition in the fifteenth century to the original palace of the thirteenth. There is also a fine barn of this period outside the moat, but near to it. Several of the canons' houses are in THE LIBERTY, outside the Close, on the north-east, and parallel to the Vicars' Close. Some of these houses are of the fourteenth, others of the fifteenth century; they have been modernized externally by the successive inhabitants, but nearly all have considerable remains of the old work, and the original plan of each can easily be made out.

THE BISHOP'S PALACE.

The most important of the buildings not strictly belonging to the church is obviously the Bishop's Palace, built by Bishop Joceline for his own residence, and still inhabited by the present bishop. But the parts occupied seem to be only the three sides of what was once a quadrangle. Some excavations made in the time of Bishop Auckland brought to light the foundations of a gate-house in the middle, with a wall extending to the kitchen on one side and the chapel on the other, with a moat and drawbridge on the outside. The present more extensive moat and fortification were made by Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury in the fourteenth century, who also built the existing gate-house, from which there was a drawbridge over the moat until quite a recent period.

The great hall of Bishop Joceline is on the first floor,

with a vaulted substructure. In its original extent it must have been one of the finest halls ever built, judging from the magnificent windows at each end and along one side ; but as these side-windows do not extend the whole length, and there is a blank wall with space for two windows omitted at each end, these indicate partitions, but probably only to a moderate height ; the roof having been continuous above (as was usual in a dormitory), is now hidden by a modern ceiling. A projecting chamber, with a substructure of a later period, juts out from the south-east corner. The Bishop's Chapel is not part of the work of Bishop Joceline ; it appears to have been begun and left unfinished by him, as some of the details are of his time, but the general character is half a century later.

Beyond this chapel, and touching it at one corner, are the ruins of another still more magnificent hall, with its offices at the opposite end. This was the work of Bishop Burnell, towards the end of the thirteenth century. He seems to have been determined to outdo even the magnificence of Bishop Joceline, but of his great work only one wall and one end remain. In the wall is a series of windows of the Edwardian character. At the end opposite the chapel are remains of the buttery and the pantry, with the passage between them, which led to the kitchen. This has been destroyed, but the foundations remain ; it had been connected with the hall by a short wooden passage, as usual.

THE VICARS' CLOSE.

The Vicars' Close was built by Ralph of Shrewsbury in the fourteenth century, or perhaps only begun in his time, and left unfinished. It was either rebuilt to a considerable extent, or completed, by Bishop Beckington and his executors, in whose hands he left large sums for completing the various works that he had commenced, but had left unfinished. The arms of the executors are found in many places with those of the bishop. Originally each of the vicars choral, or singing men, had a separate small house, consisting of two rooms, one over the other, with the staircase and closet at the back ; the upper room was open above to the fine timber roof ; no ceiling was intro-

duced till long after, but these cottages were intended for single men, and when the vicars were allowed to be married, it soon became the custom to unite two cottages in one house, the number of the vicars being at the same time reduced to half. One, however, of the separate cottages has escaped alteration. From the time of Cromwell to almost the present day it had no roof and no floor, but all the main timbers remained sound. I obtained a lease of this from the vicar to whom it belonged, and restored the roof and floor, making no other alteration, so that this house, which is about the middle of the west side, is now *restored* to its original state. I suppose that the Anti-restoration Society would have thought it right to leave this cottage of the fourteenth century without a roof or floor because it had been so for two centuries; but I consider they carry a good principle too far and caricature it. Restoration, when properly done, is frequently very desirable, and sometimes quite necessary.

There was no kitchen or offices to any of these small houses. The vicars all lived together, and took their meals in the common hall, which is partly over the gateway at the entrance to the Close, at the end next the cathedral, and there is a covered passage from it over the chain gate to the cathedral. At the opposite end is the Vicars' Chapel, which is entirely the work of Beckington, except that some sculptured ornaments of the time of Joceline are used as old material. This makes it probable that this Close was part of the magnificent design of Bishop Joceline, carried on by Bishop Ralph, and completed by Beckington with such materials as he found ready for use.

The fine chimneys, so well known from Pugin's work, had nearly all been destroyed; one only remained perfect. From this I had moulds made for terra-cotta chimneys in facsimile, by Mr. Grimsley of Oxford, and gave them to those who were willing to put them up. Most of those now visible in the Close are of terra-cotta, which was used because we thought to get a better facsimile; we afterwards saw, however, that this was a mistake; Wells being in a stone country, with very skilful stone-cutters, the chimneys might have been copied in stone at almost the same expense as in terra cotta. I have little doubt

that all these chimneys will be restored by the next generation.

S. CUTHBERT'S CHURCH is a very fine one, and very interesting from the great changes that have been made in it. The west tower is one of those celebrated Somerset towers which are *commonly* of the time of Henry VII, but by no means always; there are a few examples believed to be as early as the time of Richard II. Mr. Serel has ascertained from documentary evidence that this one is of quite the early part of the fifteenth century. It can be seen that the piers in the nave have been lengthened and the arches stilted up, as at Canterbury, the church had been originally cruciform, with a central tower, before the present tower was built.

NOTE.

The Almshouses, of which the old Guildhall now forms part, are very interesting; a fuller account of the latter, and of the other domestic buildings of Wells, will be found in my *Architectural Antiquities of the City of Wells*, published in 1866, with wood engravings. The Cathedral is not mentioned, as there are so many works upon it, nor St. Cuthbert's Church, because Mr. Freeman has given a good account of it in the Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological Society.