TEWKESBURY ABBEY CHURCH.[1]

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Within a circle of about twenty-five miles in diameter we have in this well favoured district six religious foundations of great size and importance:—Worcester, Gloucester, Pershore, Evesham, Malvern and Tewkesbury.[2] We have now arrived at the one which, in some respects, surpasses all of them. Not, indeed, in size, but in the exceeding solemnity of the interior, the majesty of the vaults, the richness of the tombs, the brilliancy of the glass, and the very striking Norman arrangement of the plan.

At Tewkesbury we have a plan which, in the main, retains the general features of a great Romanesque church, for we have the Norman nave, aisles, and transepts, in their original inception; and, inasmuch as the piers of the choir are also Norman, it is obvious that it was, as at present, surrounded by an aisle; consequently the only difference between the plan of the Romanesque church in its intirety, and the plan as we now see it, is such as has arisen from alterations in the size of the choir aisles, or ambulatory, and the addition of the chapels forming the *chevet*. The Lady chapel has been removed, but the general arrangement may be compared with the much larger church of Westminster where we have this peculiarly French plan. We are not called upon here to show how a large monastic church grew from a small one, but we shall eventually see, as we run through its history, how a large church grew into a larger.

[1] Read at Tewkesbury, August 13th, 1890.

[2] See The Abbey Church of Tewkesbury, by J. L. Petit, 1848.

Now, first as to documentary evidence; this is very limited, but we have two records:—The *Annals of Tewkesbury*, written about the middle of the thirteenth century, purports to give an account for each year of affairs connected with, or affecting the monastery. It begins with the Conquest (1066), and breaks off in 1263. But unfortunately, in its whole course, little light is thrown upon the church and monastery. The other record is the *Tewkesbury Register* which appears to be a copy of an earlier one, and written about 1545. This has value, and contains a summary of the foundation, as well as biographical notices of the Earls of Gloucester, and patrons of the abbey.

As to the architectural history of the church it is said that "Dudda" first founded a monastery here in 715, in conjunction with Odda. It is difficult to get at the exact truth, but Odda died in 1056, and both the *Annals* and the *Register* have mixed up, apparently, two periods and two persons. However, it is not of much importance now because there is nothing visible at Tewkesbury as early as 1056, and we are specially concerned only with what we can see.

From Mr. Blunt's excellent work on Tewkesbury Abbey we gather that the first church must have been of very slight importance, and by the latter part of the tenth centuay it had become a cell to the monastery of Cranbourn in Dorsetshire. In 1083, when Cranbourn passed into the King's hands, Abbot Gerald set about a re-construction of the Tewkesbury establishment.

Three years later, in 1087, Rufus granted the Honour of Gloucester, which included the Lordship of Tewkesbury, and the patronage of the monastery, to Fitz Hamon. There can be no doubt that now began the great work, and that the foundations of a church of the usual Norman type were laid, or decided upon. This plan consisted of a nave, aisles, central tower, transepts with semicircular apses, and an apsidal choir, not round, as at Peterborough, but polygonal, a form necessitated by the width of the pier arches, and in order to avoid that very unpleasing feature, the double curvature of the lines of the arch. All this we can see at the present day, and no doubt the Romanesque plan, with its characteristic long nave, was

completed by a north transept apse, and choir aisles or ambulatory running with the lines of the choir, and from which, perhaps, branched out other semicircular apses, which are now represented, to a certain extent, by the present chapels at the east end. It was a great undertaking which must have progressed slowly. The beginning of it is put down at 1102, by the *Annals*, and this date is important and seems to agree with the character of the work, which is very plain throughout.

Fitz Hamon was slain at Falaise in 1107 and could therefore hardly have seen the completion of any part of his great church. His remains were temporarily laid in the Chapter House, probably of the old monastic buildings.

Robert Consul, Earl of Gloucester, a great man, and a great builder, who set his mark upon the Walls of Cardiff Castle, and who had married Mabel eldest daughter of Fitz Hamon, carried on the work, and in 1123, according to the *Annals*, the church was consecrated. It is improbable—impossible—that the whole church from the east end to the west front was finished at this early date, indeed, there are indications at the west end of a change in the plan at that part. It would be the choir, the *ecclesia* proper, that was consecrated in 1123; but the plainness of the Norman work throughout is noticeable, as is also the great height of the naves piers, as well as the remarkable smallness of the triforium, usually a considerable feature of a Norman church. The triforiums of Ely and Waltham are notable examples which occur to the mind. The great plainness of large Romanesque churches seems to imply, as Mr. Petit has pointed out, that simplicity and grandeur of design in abbey or cathedral superseded elaborate workmanship such as one finds in the parish church. Here, as at Ely, the same plainness of Norman was adhered to as the work progressed towards the west end.

The current of these observations has brought us to that very remarkable composition, the west front. With its unique arch it is still but a portion of a larger design the full consideration of which might induce a careful scrutiny of the composition of a great Romanesque church, not only in England and Normandy but

also in Germany. To put the matter in a few words, it seems that the architect of Tewkesbury, perhaps the second architect, found himself at first bound, by the original plans, to carry out a design which included not only a great central tower, but also two western ones. There are indications that western towers were contemplated, and Professor Willis has shown that this was the case at Winchester; and it will be borne in mind that the grouping of towers received much attention in Norman times. For some reason it was found necessary to abandon this scheme, and we may not much regret it because, while the change has left us a noble recessed Norman archway, it has also produced two elegant western turrets which, although their extreme upper portions are of modern date, group most admirably with the central tower, itself as Mr. Petit truly said "one of the grandest ever designed in the Romanesque period;" it is certainly the finest Norman tower in England. Perhaps it is to the adaptation of this peculiar outline at the west end, and the consequent saving of funds, that we owe the increased height of the central tower, of which the upper stages exhibit a composition and details that carry us to the verge of Norman proper. The pinnacles were put up in the seventeenth century, and have therefore a certain *romanesque* character which, for such inappropriate finishes of a Norman tower, harmonize well enough with the Romanesque of Norman times.

More particularly with regard to the west front, several theories have been advanced to explain what it was originally intended to be. One of these, which found some favour many years ago, was that it was originally designed to be a vast open entrance porch, or Galilee, with an inner wall through which a doorway would be pierced. The stone work, however, of the lower part of the west front, within the archway, has been more carefully examined in late years, and, a part of the modern casing outside having been taken down, conclusive evidence is given that the imposts of the great arch had seven shafts, the seventh stopping against a plain wall face with returning stones forming the angle, and giving the start to this wall. Within the church are evidences of the springings of the discharging arch of the Norman doorway, and no doubt the upper part of the great arch was pierced with a

series of small windows. But the joints of the nave walls, at the inner angles at the west end, do not hit those of the cross wall. This neither proves or disproves the question as to whether the great arch forms part of the first scheme or of the second; but probably of the first, if the plainness of the details are taken into account.

No excuse would be necessary for dwelling at length upon these Norman chapters, because, grand and imposing as the later work is, Tewkesbury would be nothing without its Norman work. Before leaving this topic it may be recalled that the three great arches of Remigius, at Lincoln's stern west-end, are three quarters of a century earlier, and the great striding arches of Peterborough, nearly a century later than that at Tewkesbury. They form a fine series for the study of persons who like wide arches. An astounding rumour has floated out from Northamptonshire that some wild people still have the wish, but fortunately not the funds, to extract from the central arch of Peterborough the little chapel that was planted into it in the fifteenth century.[1]

It will be observed that all the Norman windows have been altered throughout the church; the barrel-vaulted porch, with the tympanum of the church doorway filled in with three tiers of joggled voussoirs, remains intact. In its original state the nave must have been lighted by a row of small round-headed windows—there are slight indications of them between the roof and the vaulting of the nave—as at St. Peter's, Northampton, with long splays for expanding and softening the light, and covered by an open timber roof, or barrel-vaulted in wood, or, as at Peterborough, flat-ceiled. Such wide spaces were not vaulted in stone so early in England. No doubt the nave aisles were vaulted, but in what precise way is, perhaps, not apparent. Mr. Petit, whose opinion will always be received with the utmost respect, and nowhere more so than at Tewkesbury, thought they took the quadrantal form, and there are suggestions of this in the shape of the arches leading from the nave

[1] This is a grotesque revival of an old cry which was denounced a hundred years ago by John Carter.—See Gentleman's Magazine, 1798, Part ii., pp. 764-765.

aisles into the transepts. The nave has evidently lost its fine Norman proportion by the intrusion of the 14th century vaulting, but the conspicuous quality of the church is still, as in Norman times, its breadth. The Norman had this in his mind when he carried the imposts of the tower arch straight through in a line with the nave piers, and rested the arches upon brackets, or on the caps of short columns engaged high up in the imposts, as in the south transept.

The inside of the tower, originally designed as a lantern, now masked by the vaulting, exhibits arcading on the north, east, and south sides; this was specially arranged for the eastern point of view.

Robert Consul, or Fitzroy, died in 1147, and it may be taken that the work of the Norman church up to, say, the porch, and including the lantern, the plain portion of the tower, were carried out before his death. Being succeeded by his son William Fitz Count, who lived till 1183, it may be to this man that we are indebted, as we have suggested, for the west front, and it must be to him that we owe the completion of the tower, with its three externally decorated stages. Thus, the plain and the decorated parts of the exterior of the tower correspond respectively with the ornamental and the simple masonry within.

Earl William was a great builder, and founded the Abbey of Keynsham, which has now entirely vanished. His third daughter Amice, married Richard De Clare, Earl of Hertford, whose son Gilbert, succeeding on the death of his father, came in, as lineal successor of Fitz Hamon, to the earldom of Gloucester, on the death of Almeric Devereux, fifth Earl, in 1221, thus uniting in his own person the earldoms of Gloucester and Hertford. He was the first De Clare buried at Tewkesbury; he died in 1230. His son Richard succeeded at an early age, and died in 1262. During his time the only Early English parts of the Abbey now remaining were built, namely, the chapel of St. Nicholas, north-east of the north transept. The Decorated chapel of St. James adjoins it, occupying the site of an apsidal Norman chapel.

We learn from the *Annals of Tewkesbury* that in 1232 many cures were effected by means of the Relics, and that in 1235 it was agreed that there should be a service, night

and morning, "de Reliquiis." The chapel called of St. Nicholas consists now of a chancel only; the south wall has been removed in Decorated times in order to connect it directly with the chapel of St. James, but the Early English arcading remaining round the north and east sides, show it to have been originally a chancel complete in itself. The chancel arch consists of a wide double entrance divided by a central column, after the manner of an entrance to a chapter house, as at Westminster and Wells, and hence, it seems, the name this building long bore of "Chapter House." The double entrance leads into a nave now destroyed, and of which the south wall was the north wall of the north transept of the great monastic church. This chancel and nave formed, in fact, a small church planted against the large one. It is not improbable that this was the church or chapel of the Relics, and that these venerated objects were exhibited in the chancel to the faithful assembled in the nave.

The building of this little church was the first addition of any importance to the Norman work, and it appears to be the only thing that was done during the eighty years sway of the four De Clares, whose male line ended in 1314 with Gilbert, slain at Bannockburn.

On the death of Gilbert De Clare his estates went to his three sisters, and Tewkesbury, as part of the Honour of Gloucester, to the eldest, Eleanor, who married in 1321 Hugh Despencer "the younger." He was slaughtered in 1326, and his widow married William la Zouche of Mortimer, and died in 1337.

Again, these dates are very important, because, between 1321 and 1359 the choir, the most Norman part of the church in its plan, was rebuilt from the Norman capitals upwards, including the aisles and the chapels, replacing whatever Norman work stood upon their sites; and a Lady chapel was also thrown out, of which a small part only remains to attest its magnificence. At the same time the vaulting of the choir was begun, and followed successively by that of the transepts, nave, and tower, all of which great works were carried out in their entirety—including the vaulting of the tower, which just takes us into the fifteenth century—during the ninety-thre years stay of the five Despencers at Tewkesbury. Thes

men have left enduring marks indeed, not only upon the fabric of the Abbey Church, but in the windows and monuments which shall be touched shortly upon presently. The subject of vaulting is too large and intricate to handle at all now, so these stately constructions must speak for themselves. The vaulting of the tower bears upon the bosses the arms of Bryan and Despencer.

Richard, the last of the Despencers, married but left no issue; his widow married the Earl of Northumberland, son of Hotspur. His sister Isabel, born in 1400, to whom Tewkesbury went, married Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Abergavenny; he was killed at the siege of Meaux in 1421, and in 1423 his widow married his cousin, the great Earl of Warwick, "Brass Beauchamp." This carries us into the history of another family, whose castle, monuments, and effigies we dealt with two years ago at Warwick.[1]

To Tewkesbury also attaches the interest of having been a divided church. The monks' choir, as was usual in Norman churches, was under the tower, and extended two bays into the nave. The remainder of the nave was the parish church, the two being separated by the rood screen. At the Dissolution the monastic church was mentioned by the Commissioners among "buildings deemed to be superfluous," and this part the men of Tewkesbury, to their lasting honour, bought from the king, and added to what was their own already.

The monuments divide themselves roughly into two kinds,—those with effigies, and those without. Attention may be called to the most important. In the north aisle of the nave is the effigy of a man of the middle of the fourteenth century. This has been commonly but wrongly attributed to Lord Wenlock who was killed at the battle Tewkesbury in 1471. The figure exhibits some curious points of costume. He wears a pointed bascinet with a camail of "banded mail," fastened with a lace in the usual way, and the thighs are protected by one of the numerous varieties of studded defence, of which the construction cannot be clearly made out. The feet are said to be naked, but this seems a mistake. Banded mail is constantly represented in MSS, brasses, glass, seals, &c., and it has long been one of the puzzles of antiquaries, for we cannot make

[1] See *Archæological Journal*, vol. xlv, pp. 238, 464.

out how banded mail was made, and only five sculptured examples are known in England, this being one of them.[1]

In a letter to the Rev. T. Kerrich, in the writer's possession, dated December 22nd, 1813, Mr. C. A. Stothard speaks of this effigy as follows:—"Among other curious things I have met with is a figure called by mistake Lord Wenlock, at Tewkesbury, which has some remarkable points about it, but for the discovery of which I devoted a whole day in clearing away a thick coat of whitewash which concealed them. The mail attached to the Helmet was of that kind so frequently represented in drawings and of which you have had doubts whether it was not another way of representing that sort we are already acquainted with. I am sorry that I know no more of its construction now than before I met with it, the lowest row of rings finish in the way I have represented, without the band or cord. I must advertise you that the original is but a coarse representation. I have an impression of a small portion where I found it sharpest. The cuisses of the same figure are remarkable."

The armorial bearings on the surcote, a chevron between three leopards' faces, seem to be those of "Monsire de Lughtburgh," whose name and arms occur in a Roll of Arms[2] of the time of Edward III.—"Monsire de Lughtburgh, de gules, a une cheveron d'argent, entre trous testes de leopardes d'or," but there is no record connecting this man with Tewkesbury.

The effigies of Hugh Despencer, who died in 1349, and his wife Elizabeth Montacute, lie under a magnificent canopy on the north side of the altar. The effigy of the man is tenderly sculptured in white alabaster, and shows him in a round bascinet which is not characteristic of this period. His widow married Guy de Bryan, and died 1359.

The figure of Edward Despencer, died 1375, represents him kneeling on a cushion, under a curious open canopy, on the top of the Trinity Chapel. This figure is quite

[1] 1. *Tewkesbury*, engraved in Stothard's Monumental Effigies; 2. Tollard Royal, Wilts, in Bowles' History of Chalk; 3. Newton Solney, Stafford, in *Archæologiical Journal*, v. vii, p. 360, paper by, Hewitt; 4. Kirkstead Lincolnshire, in *Archæological Journal*, v. xl, p. 296, paper by A. Hartshorne; 5. Dodford, Northamptonshire, in Monumental Effigies of Northamptonshire, by A. Hartshorne.

[2] Edited by Nicholas Harris Nicolas, 1829.

unique, and it is extremely valuable because it is painted all over to the life, and gives the back of the man as carefully finished as the front. With the exception of "Brass Beauchamp" at Warwick there is no other mediæval monumental effigy that does this. We gather one good piece of information from this figure, namely, that there was no hook or like support at the back to keep the baudric from slipping over the hips. These belts must, therefore, have been sewn on to the jupon, which, in this instance is beautifully painted, both back and front, with the arms of Despencer. The fields of the quarters are diapered. The latter decorations have not often been spared for us, because, being usually only painted, they have generally been washed off by the process of church cleaning. The double picture of arms on a jupon was the precursor of the four-fold representation in knightly tabards. The Trinity Chapel has further high interest in the painted fresco over the altar, representing the Holy Trinity flanked by angels swinging censers with graceful ease, while Edward and his wife Elizabeth are shown kneeling in adoration below.

The effigy of Guy de Bryan, died 1390, has some features in the armour that are rarely seen in English effigies. The mail hose covering the legs is strengthened and protected by strips of steel laid upon it, or imbedded in it, after the oriental fashion. The mail of the upper part of the arms shows a number of iron pegs taking the outline of a demi-brassart. They appear to have held in place actual brassarts of iron or *cuir-bouilli*. The fore-arm remaining shows a defense in parallel strips, gilded and silvered alternately. On both sides of the leg strips are wooden pegs at regular intervals, which have either held some decorative covering of the splints, or fastened horizontal bands at those points. It is a very curious example of mixed armour, and is rather a German than an English suit. The whole of the mail, which is of three sizes, the rings in the camail being the largest, has been worked in *gesso*, and the field of the arms diapered in the same way. Stothard has recorded that the armour, plate and mail has been covered with leaf silver; the effigy has also been painted, as well as gilded in parts. The vaulting of the canopy has trefoil-arched, instead of plain cells, which give an appearance of great intricacy.

The "founder's chapel" is plainer but contains the tomb with the matrix of a military brass, of the usual form, of the first years of the fifteenth century.

The chapel of Isabel, Countess of Warwick, has two stories with fan vaulting, and a very rich canopy. It appears probable that the upper story sustained two kneeling figures in wood looking towards the high-altar. This would have been an idea taken from the monument of Edward Despencer.

The monument attributed to Abbot Wakeman, last Abbot of Tewkesbury (1531-1539) must be a century earlier. The "lively picture of death" has reptiles crawling over it, which is a very unusual, if not a unique feature; it reminds us, rather too rudely, of our kindred with corruption.

There are several plain tombs of Abbots; and three canopied ones, side by side in the south aisle, show admirably the gradual growth of such memorials during about a hundred years. All the Tewkesbury tombs and chapels would require a thick volume to properly describe.

Happily, safe in two glass cases, are some beautiful fragments of small figures in armour, and other details, which are worthy of very close study. They apparently formed part of the decorations of the high altar.

The painted glass in the choir is quite unsurpassed for its brilliancy, and it is rendered still more interesting by the eight military figures contained in it. They stand under rich canopies, and all carry lances and wear ailettes. The mixture of mail and plate in their harness fixes the date of these effigies to the early part of the second quarter of the fourteenth century, the most important period of military costume. All the figures can be clearly identified by the heraldry on their surcotes; we have Robert, Earl of Gloucester, Fitz Hamon, four De Clares, a Zouche, and a Despencer.

The four effigies of De Clares are the memorials of the immediate ancestors of the widow of Hugh Despencer "the younger," namely,—Gilbert De Clare, died at Penros, in Brittany in 1230; Richard De Clare, died at Eschmersfield in Kent, in 1262; Gilbert De Clare, died in Monmouth Castle, in 1295, and Gilbert her father slain at Bannockburn in 1314:—all were buried in the choir of Tewkes-

bury. The figure with the Zouche arms represents William la Zouche, of Mortimer, and that which exhibits on the surcote the arms of Despencer impaling De Clare certainly represents Hugh Despencer "the younger," slaughtered with such shocking barbarity at Hereford in 1326. His mangled remains were gathered up and brought for burial to the abbey church;—as the *Register* has it—"Enormiter, pertitiose et crudeliter sine judicio et responsione, suspensus, distractus, et in quatuor partes divisus fuit; et in nostra ecclesia diu postea sepultus." No doubt these striking and precious memorials were put up by Eleanor, eldest daughter of the last Gilbert De Clare, widow of Hugh Despencer "the younger," and wife of William la Zouche of Mortimer.