NOTES ON THE ABBEY CHURCH OF GLASTONBURY.

By W. H. ST. JOHN HOPE, M.A., Vice-President.[1]

When the Royal Archaeological Institute visited the remains of Glastonbury Abbey in July last, I ventured to suggest the desirability of excavations being made with the object of learning, if possible, the extent and plan of the church that preceded the one of which the ruins still exist, and of finding some traces of the yet older churches recorded to have been built upon this historic spot.

The suggestion was most favourably received by Mr. Stanley Austin, the owner of the Abbey ruins, and on 15th September I was able to begin work with seven men whom Mr. Austin kindly placed at my disposal. The excavations were continued for about a week, with results presently to be described. But it will first be well to say a few words about the story of the buildings.

William of Malmesbury says there were at one time four distinct churches on the site :

> The first and oldest was that built by the twelve disciples of St. Philip, who came into Britain with Joseph of Arimathea in 63. This stood west of all the others.
>
> The second was built by St. David (*ob.* 546) in honour of the Blessed Mary, and stood eastwards of the oldest church.
>
> The third was the work of twelve anchorites who came here from the north shortly before St. Patrick's visit in 433, and also stood eastwards of the oldest church.
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> The fourth and largest was built by King Ine (689–728) early in the eighth century, in honour of the Saviour and of the Apostles Peter and Paul, to the east of the others, for the soul of his brother Mules.

[1] Read at the Monthly Meeting of the Institute, 2nd November, 1904.

Of these the third was at least a century older in date than the second, but apparently not its equal in importance.

Glastonbury had its share in the desolations of the Danes, and it was not until the days of Dunstan, who, by the help of Kings Edmund and Edgar, repaired all that the wars had ruined, that the place again become famous.

Dunstan was Abbot of Glastonbury from 940 to 957.

At the time of the coming of the Normans there seem to have been only two churches; the *vetusta ecclesia* of St. Mary, and the *major ecclesia* or greater church of Ine.

The first Norman abbot, Turstin (? 1077–1101) began a new church, but this was pulled down by his successor Herlewin, who was abbot from 1101 to 1120, because it did not correspond in magnitude to the revenues, and a new one begun, upon which he spent £480.

To Herlewin's church, Henry de Blois, who became abbot in 1126 and so continued until his death in 1171, notwithstanding his appointment to the bishopric of Winchester in 1134, added a bell-tower and the monastic buildings.

On 25th May, 1184, a fire consumed the whole monastery, except, apparently, the abbot's lodging and Bishop Henry's bell-tower; and both the wooden *vetusta ecclesia* and the great church were burnt.

The church of Our Lady was the first to rise from its ashes, and so quickly as to be consecrated by Reginald bishop of Bath about 1186.

The new work is said to have been committed to, and finished by Ralph fitz Stephen, the King's chamberlain, who is also credited with having repaired the monastic buildings and lastly laid the foundations of the great church. There is also extant the text of an oft-printed charter of Henry II. which begins:

> Because that whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap, I, in laying the foundation of the church of Glastonbury (which, while in my hand, had been reduced to ashes by fire) have decreed, by the persuasions of Heraclius patriarch of Jerusalem, Baldwin archbishop

[1] D. Wilkins, *Concilia Magnæ Britanniæ et Hiberniæ* (London, 1737), i. 489, "Citante Spelmanno"; W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum* (ed. Caley, Ellis and Bandinel, London, 1827), i. 63.

of Canterbury, Richard bishop of Winchester, Bartholomew bishop of Exeter, Ralf de Glanvill, and many others, that it be magnificently completed by me, or by my heirs.

This charter has been shown by the Rev. R. W. Eyton, to be a fabrication of the monks.[1] It is not dated, but purports to have been issued at Westminster, and to have been witnessed *inter alios* by Bartholomew, bishop of Exeter, who died on 15th December, 1184, by Baldwin, archbishop of Canterbury, who was not so elected until 16th December, by William, bishop of Rheims, who is not known to have been in England at the time, and by the patriarch Heraclius, who did not arrive in this country until 29th January, 1184–5. Mr. Eyton rightly draws attention to the strange form and abnormal provisions of the document as further evidence of its being spurious. To this it may be added that Henry II. is not known to have visited Glastonbury at any time during his reign. Further, I have myself been through all the Pipe Rolls of the reign of Henry II., and am able to say positively that from 1184 onward they do not contain anything to show that the Abbey of Glastonbury received any help from the Royal Exchequer. What induced the monks to forge the charter and set up the claim that the King began to rebuild the church, it is difficult to understand.

Apart from this there can be no doubt, from the existing remains, that the church was begun to be rebuilt before the close of the twelfth century, and as I pointed out upon the spot, the architectural evidence is quite in accordance with the story told by the abbey chroniclers.

The church that we are familiar with consisted originally of an eastern arm of four bays with aisles, which were returned across the square east end, a central tower, north and south transepts each of three bays with eastern aisles and chapels, and a nave and aisle of nine bays with probably two western towers. Between the western wall of the nave and the eastern end of the rebuilt Lady Chapel, and connecting them, was a Galilee or porch of three bays, which was also the principal entrance into the church.

[1] R. W. Eyton, *Court, Household, and Itinerary of King Henry II.* (London, 1878), 262, note 3.

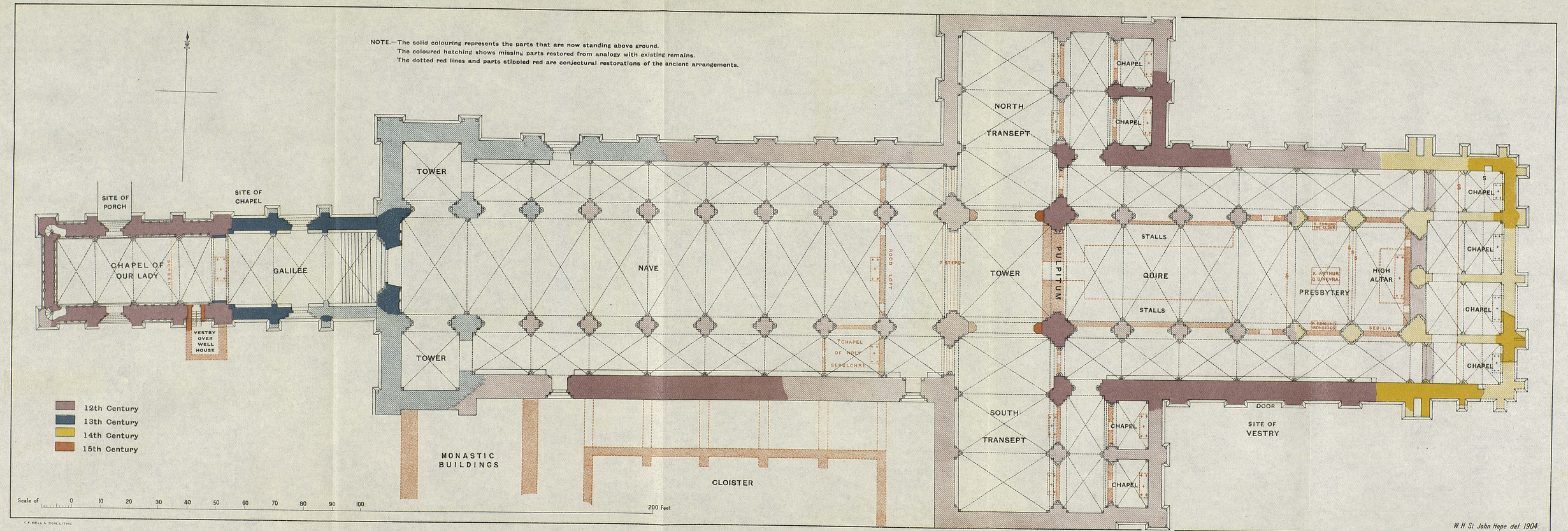
Although there is such a difference between the work of the eastern parts and the west wall as might be reasonably expected in a large church which was a long time in building, there can be little doubt that the plan is the work of one mind. Had we, too, more of the building than the few isolated fragments that are left to us, I think it would have shown, like the neighbouring minster at Wells, that the work was slow but uninterrupted from end to end.

The church must have been completed structurally early in the thirteenth century, and the only important addition to it was the elongation of the presbytery by two bays by Abbot Walter Monington, who ruled from 1341 to 1374. He also, probably in compensation for what he destroyed, further lengthened the church by a procession path and row of chapels behind the reredos of his new high altar.

One of the peculiar features of the plan of the church is the disposition of the parts eastward of the transepts. The usual arrangement of the time is an aisle opening out of the transept by two or three arches and divided into chapels by screens or thin cross walls. Here, however, the aisle is not subdivided, but has the chapels opening out of it instead.

In casting about for a possible reason for this unusual arrangement, apart from a desire to obtain more altar space,[1] I bethought me that the chapels might have been built outside the apsidal chapels of an earlier church. One of the first of my excavations was therefore devoted to cutting a trench down the middle line of the remaining chapel on the north side, from its east wall westwards into the transept. The trench was dug to a depth of 2 feet below the old floor level, in the chapel itself into a bed of undisturbed clay, and outside it into a layer of mere building rubbish with a few fragments of thirteenth century tiles. No traces of walls or foundations were met with, and it was also evident that neither the chapel

[1] It will be seen by reference to the plan that by intervening an aisle, entered from the quire aisle, between the transept and the chapels east of it, it was possible to have a number of altars in the transept itself against the screens that filled the eastern arches. The chapels otherwise would have been accessible only through the screens, and there would not then have been any altar room in the transept except against the pillars.



GLASTONBURY ABBEY CHURCH: PLAN SHOWING RECENT DISCOVERIES AND SUGGESTED ARRANGEMENTS.

nor the transept arcades had any sleeper walls between the piers; a fact which was further tested and verified under the arch into the quire aisle.

Two other trenches were also begun, one outside the extreme east end, the other across the western part of the quire. The object of the former was to seek for the foundations of a chapel which Professor Willis thought was built out from the middle of the east wall late in the fifteenth century by Abbots Beere and Whiting in honour of King Edgar. This trench was carried down 2 feet below the old level and further tested with a crossbar, but without revealing any signs of masonry, foundations or footings. Search was also made with a crossbar within the church across the lines of the eastern row of chapels, but nothing could be felt underground, not even westwards of and in line with the existing remains of the division walls. The cross trench in the quire began at the north wall in the last bay but one, and at the close of the first day had been carried down to a depth of 3 feet as far as the middle of the quire itself. Nothing was found on the line of the quire arcade, and no traces were met with of the foundation walls of the quire stalls. The trench at first cut through mere building rubbish, but in the quire it passed into a deposit of black soil containing bones of sheep, pig, and other animals, but no human remains. The trench was next continued across to the south wall and also deepened. The black soil was found to go down to a bed of clay 4 feet 7 inches from the surface, and to be confined to the quire proper, the building rubbish again reappearing in the south aisle. The black stuff did not contain any charcoal or burnt matter, but was just the kind of soil that could be dug out of a dried-up pond or stagnant pool.

Meanwhile two trenches had been started in the nave. One began at the remaining jamb of the west cloister doorway, and was run westwards in the hope of finding the width of the doorway itself, and the line of the west wall of the cloister. It was eventually extended nearly as far as the west wall of the nave without meeting any old walls or foundations whatever, and throughout its length it traversed only loose building rubbish. A roughly faced wall that was uncovered along its northern

edge turned out to be a mere boundary wall about 16 inches thick, built long after the destruction of the 8 foot wall on its line.

The other trench was begun a few feet in advance of the west wall of the nave, and carried southwards across the line of the south arcade in the hope of its revealing evidence of a south-west tower. As before, the result was *nil*, and the trench was cut to a depth of $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet without showing anything but the usual building stuff.

The next trench was cut right across the first bay of the nave, and showed as elsewhere that nothing remained below ground of anything on the lines of walls. The section also showed nothing but building refuse. At the point where the trench crossed the line of the south arcade there lay, half-hidden by the turf, a block of stone which seemed to be in place. It was accordingly dug round and found to be the plinth of a strengthening pier of the same character as those lying at the foot of the north and south cross arches of the central steeple, under which, Leland says, Abbot Beere made " 2 arches like S. Andres Crosse els it had fallen." It seems therefore that Beere also underbuilt the first arch of the nave arcade on each side. The stone in question is a half octagon, 5 feet $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches across, and 14 inches thick, and $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet below the level of the similar stones in the crossing. It is set upon a foundation of masonry which was followed down to a depth of at least 4 feet, when an inflow of water stopped our investigations.

Quite at the bottom of the excavation was found a large worked stone, but how it came there there was nothing to show, unless it be a broken " waster." The trench was continued at its greatest depth some feet into the nave, and also across the aisle into the cloister. Here it was returned eastward without finding any trace of the transept wall, then again carried southwards as far as the approximate site of the chapter house, always with the same negative result.

Other trenches were dug outside the north wall of the nave and parallel with it, in what proved a vain hope of finding traces of Professor Willis's supposed

porch ; also across the south aisle of the nave opposite the third vaulting shaft. This brought to light a few fragments of paving tiles and also cut through a grave.

After all these disappointments attention was again diverted to the eastern part of the church, and while a long trench was being cut down the middle line of the presbytery, several holes were dug at points along the south aisle wall.

One of these was under the third window, at the spot where the twelfth century bench table ends. At 1 foot below the plinth of the bench the natural clay bed was met with, but the footings of the aisle wall went down 18 inches deeper.

Another hole was sunk in front of the vaulting shaft between the 4th and 5th bays on the line of the first gable, and showed that the aisle wall here went down to about $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet from the present surface. At the next vaulting shaft it does not go below the bench table, while at the next it extends 2 feet below it. Just east of the last vaulting shaft the long trench went down quite 5 feet below the plinth without reaching the base of the wall, but at the opposite end the clay bed was found 3 feet under the plinth.

The result of the trench down the middle of the presbytery was as follows :

From west face of east wall :

To 6 feet 6 inches, loose building stuff resting on clay at 1 foot 3 inches.

To 27 feet. Here a foundation 5 feet wide crossed the trench at a depth of 2 feet 4 inches.

To 44 feet 3 inches, rubbish on a clay bed at 11 inches.

To 51 feet 6 inches, soil and rubbish with occasional stones, resting on clay at 3 feet 7 inches.

To 63 feet 10 inches, a bed of dark clay, at a depth of 1 foot 9 inches. At 63 feet 6 inches from the start was a piece of a chamfered stone lying level at a depth of 15 inches. Another lay by it but loose.

To 74 feet 3 inches, where a layer of black soil 2 feet thick began, apparently the same as that in the quire a few yards westwards. It was here underlaid by clay.

Beyond this point the trench was not continued.

Apart from the chamfered stones, which may have formed part of the foundation of King Arthur's tomb in the middle of the presbytery, the only really interesting find was the 5-foot foundation. As the plan shows this must mark the eastern limit of the twelfth century presbytery; not of its gable, which was two bays to the west, but of the eastern wall of the aisle and chapels that were returned across it. As the gable itself was carried on piers like the arcades it had no foundation nor sleeper wall below them.

As it was desirable to know if the 5 foot foundation extended across the aisles, search was made for it at each end. On the south side it was found to be represented at a depth of $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet by a foundation only 3 feet 8 inches wide, but considerably east of its line, as shown on plan. On the north a foundation had been laid of the same width and on the same line as that on the south, but it had been completely removed, and only the chase for it in the clay was found, filled with loose rubbish. Why the aisle walls were not in line with the gable I am unable to explain.

These researches concluded all I was able to undertake, and it must be admitted that the results are both surprising and disappointing. Disappointing, by reason of the very little they have disclosed, and surprising because such disappointing results are so contrary to our usual experience. We are still without any information as to the older churches on the site, and the only practical outcome of the diggings is the fixing of the earlier east front of the church.

One of the most noticeable facts of the excavation is the thoroughness with which all the missing parts of the existing remains have been removed. On the lines of these remains, not only has every stone been taken away, but all the foundations down to the very footings.

Another curious feature is the apparent eradication by

the twelfth century builders of all remains of earlier structures. Owing to such remains being underground they usually have escaped the notice of the post-Suppression church-breakers, and it is odd that nothing of them has been found at Glastonbury.

The vast deposit of building rubbish is another unusual feature. It contains no charcoal or bits of charred wood, no stones reddened or scorched by fire, and practically no carved fragments nor worked stones. And it is evidently nothing more than the refuse of the masons who wrought the stones of the twelfth century church, and of the builders who set them in place. Whether it would be worth while to cut wide and deep trenches through it on the site of the nave in the hope of finding traces of older buildings beneath I am not prepared to say, but the mere cost of such a search would be considerable, without reckoning the labour of following up any walls met with.

I ought to add that I did not meet with any traces whatever of the recorded fire of 1184.

Before concluding my notes, there are one or two features of the plan exhibited upon which I should like to say a few words.

And first as to the nave. I think there can be little doubt, if attention be paid to the spacing of the surviving bays, that the front terminated after the Norman fashion, in a pair of western towers; and a reference to the plan will show how exactly they could have been arranged. It is a matter of regret that nothing remains above or below ground to tell us anything about them.

In Professor Willis's valuable monograph he has laid down on his plan, on the strength of a note of William of Worcester, a large porch on the north of the nave. William's words are :

> Porticus introitus ad magnam ecclesiam, continet ejus longitudo videlicet 15 virgas, et ejus latitudo 8 virgas.[1]

That is to say, its internal dimensions were about 45 feet by 24 feet. Now I find it hard to believe that a porch of such dimensions would have been attached to an aisle of which the bays were only 20 feet long, and the

[1] J. Nasmith, *Itineraria Symonis Simeonis et Willelmi de Worcestre* (Cambridge, 1778), 923.

interval between the buttresses barely 14 feet. And I would suggest that the porch to which William of Worcester refers was actually that at the west end of the church, between the nave and the Lady chapel, of which considerable remains still exist. Its width is exactly 24 feet, and its length 51½ feet, but part of this may have been occupied by the reredos and vestry of the Lady Chapel.

One other point about which there has been some controversy is the arrangement of the east end of the church.

William of Worcester in describing these arrangements writes :

In orientali parte altaris Glastonie.

Spacium de le reredos ex parte orientali magne altaris [est *erased*] sunt .5. columpne seriatim.

Et inter quamlibet columpnam est capella cum altare.

Et spacium capelle in longitudine continet .5. virgas.

Et spacium interceptum inter capellas et le reredos continet similiter .5. virgas.[1]

Here there are no difficulties as to measurements, for since the reredos of the high altar was set against the pillars of the eastern gable, 5 yards or 15 feet from it would take us across the procession aisle to the chapel screens, and another 15 feet would give us the exact length of the chapels within the screens. As to the number of chapels, William of Worcester tells us " there are five columns in a row, and between every column is a chapel with an altar." As he counts in the responds this gives us four chapels. Professor Willis argues from the position of one of the altars and some foundations shown in Wild's plan of 1813,[2] that William of Worcester is mistaken, and that there were five chapels, and he seeks to identify the middle one with " Edgares chapel at the Est End of the Church," which Leland says " Abbate Beere buildid . . . but Abbate Whiting performed sum part of it." The Professor has accordingly drawn five chapels in his plan, with the middlemost, or Edgar's chapel, projecting eastwards of the

[1] In Nasmith's edition (p. 294) the second word of the rubric is wrongly given as "occidentali," and there are other small errors in the entries that follow. Through the kindness of my friend, Mr. J. W. Clark, F.S.A., I am enabled to give the proper reading from the original MS. (p. 294), in the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

[2] In John Britton's *Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain* (London, 1814), iv. 195.

rest. One point which the Professor might have cited in his favour he has entirely overlooked, viz. that when William of Worcester visited Glastonbury, Abbot Beer had not yet begun to build nor indeed been elected. This does not, however, affect his theory, which other evidence shows to be untenable. In the first place there is nothing left above or below ground to prove that Willis's arrangement ever existed, and the altar on which he relies actually tells against him. The remains shown on Wild's plan are also merely described thereon as "the bases of two pillars of singular form and situation: probably part of the crypt."

Mr. James Parker, who has also tackled the question, in a paper read on the spot to the Somerset Archaeological Society in 1880,[1] rejects Willis's theory and substitutes one of his own, whereby, for the three middle chapels, each with its altar, he gets one large chapel containing three altars. As he has to insert two pillars in front of them to carry the vault, Mr. Parker, like Professor Willis, sets aside William of Worcester's plain statement, and shows on his plan four pillars and two responds, instead of three pillars and the two responds. It is evident also that Mr. Parker has not only misread some of the existing architectural evidence, but failed to understand how this part of the church was used, for he blocks up the procession way with the three great tombs, which Leland states were in the presbytery.

Now the evidence of the building, as I read it, is as follows:

Against the remnants of the east wall are fragments of three altars. That to the north was $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, and the chapel 14 feet $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide. A perpent wall 2 feet $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick separated this first chapel from the next. But of this second chapel only a fragment is left, owing to a wide breach in the east wall. The last chapel on the south was 14 feet $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide, and had an altar $6\frac{1}{2}$ feet long. A piece of the perpent wall is left that separated it from the next chapel, and beyond this is 7 or 8 feet of the east wall of the chapel itself. This shows part of the base of the altar, and the remains of some

[1] Printed in *Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society's Proceedings*, xxiv. 25–106.

late panelling between it and the south angle. Now if all these features be laid down on plan, it will be seen that this altar is further away from the perpent wall than the others, as if it belonged to a wider chapel, and it will also be seen that two such wider chapels with altars in proportion, and a perpent wall dividing them, will exactly fill the space between the two remaining chapels, and so conform to the arrangement described by William of Worcester. The panelling beside the third altar is also quite of Abbot Beere's date, and there is no special reason for supposing that the chapel which he "buildid" and Abbot Whiting "performid sum part of" was placed in the middle of the others at all. The four chapel arrangement then, as will be seen from the plan, is quite a reasonable one, and I see no need for questioning William of Worcester's statement.

In conclusion I must express my indebtedness to Mr. Roland Paul for a number of important dimensions which have enabled me to complete the plan, and I am sure I may again refer, on behalf of the Institute, to the most kind and substantial help for which we have to thank Mr. Austin.