

HEREFORD CATHEDRAL: THE BISHOP'S CHAPEL OF ST. KATHERINE
AND ST. MARY MAGDALENE

By NORMAN DRINKWATER

A centrally planned two-storey building of the late 11th century in England is sufficiently remarkable to warrant the most careful study; all the more surprising is the comparative neglect of the Bishop's Chapel of St. Katherine and St. Mary Magdalene in the precinct of Hereford Cathedral when it is remembered that this is the only Anglo-Norman chapel of the kind known to have been built in this country.¹

The Chapel no longer stands; the only surviving fragment is the north wall, which remains almost to the full height incorporated in and forming part of the south wall of the south walk of the abbey cloister. To this entirely functional use it owes its preservation. The rest of the building was quite deliberately demolished, and with little reason, by Bishop Egerton in about 1737.

The purpose of this paper is to reconstruct the Chapel in plan and elevational section from the accounts of the 18th-century topographers, with the surviving fragment as a basis for measurement and a yardstick by which to check the accuracy of the topographer's drawings.²

The building presents peculiarities of form which are baffling if read solely in an English context. Only by adducing Continental parallels does the form become explicable. It is also to our present purpose that the process shows the reliance that may be placed upon the sketches of one of our greatest topographer-antiquaries, William Stukeley.

First, something must be said of the sources of the design and the reason for the adoption of it at Hereford. Direction is given to our enquiries at an early stage by William of Malmesbury, in his *Gesta Pontificum*, who tells us that Robert of Lorraine, proficient in the arts, succeeded to the bishopric (at Hereford) and built there a chapel after the pattern of that at Aachen.³

The Bishop's Chapel, as reconstructed in the following paper, exhibits all the features of the Rhineland 'doppel-capellen', the double chapels that are found especially in that area and only most rarely elsewhere.⁴ Robert held the See from 1079 to 1095, therefore the building is closely dated; it is in fact the second earliest surviving example of the kind to which a definite date is assignable. William of Malmesbury was writing in 1125 only forty-six years after the event; thus archaeological and near-contemporary evidence are allied.

¹ A. W. Clapham, *English Romanesque Architecture*, ii, 112.

² Sir Alfred Clapham had the kindness to suggest the possibilities of this enquiry to me.

³ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum* (Rolls Series, 300). 'Non multo post acceptit sedem illam Robertus Lotharingus qui ibi

ecclesiam tereti edificavit scemati Aquensem basilicam pro modo imitatus suo. Omnium liberalium artium peritissimus abacum praecipue et lunarem compositum et caelestium cursum astrorum rimatus'.

⁴ A. W. Clapham: *Romanesque Architecture in Western Europe*, 173.

The prototype at Aachen is the minster built by Charlemagne towards the end of the 8th century as a palace chapel and tomb house. It was octagonal, with ambulatories on two floors surrounding a central octagonal well, the walls of the well being continued up the equivalent of two storeys in height above the upper ambulatory roof. The well, thus in all four storeys high, was domed, and the vaults of the ambulatories were groined.¹ On the west was a tower-porch with two circular stair-turrets; on the east was a rectangular projecting bay, now destroyed, containing the altar.

Robert's Chapel, though only of two storeys, was presumably planned round a central opening lit in the main from a cupola or lantern on the roof. At Hereford the Aachen stair-turrets are echoed in the vices flanking the deeply-recessed west entrance, and the rectangular projection on the east is repeated.²

Based also on Aachen is the two-storey chapel of Ottmarsheim,³ built in the second quarter of the 11th century and so placed that Robert of Lorraine may well have seen it. A third building, the double chapel of Neuweiler of c. 1060, was also accessible to him; though not centrally planned, in cross-section⁴ the building shows close parallels with Hereford, even allowing for the sectional view of a clerestory in the first and a lantern in the second.⁵

The functional feature of the palace and Castle chapels descending from Aachen was the provision of an upper storey for the use of the family, while the ground floor was used by the servants. Such chapels are in the castles at Nürnberg, 1152-1191,⁶ Eger (Bohemia), 1180,⁷ Freiburg a.d. Unstrut,⁸ and Landsberg,⁹ in the Archbishop's palace at Mainz, 1130-1137¹⁰ and, on a more elaborate scale, at Schwartzrheindorf, c. 1150.¹¹ The rare examples outside the Rhineland include, in addition to Hereford, those in the Bishop's palace at Laon (France), 1155-1174,¹² and Ledöje (Denmark).¹³ Sir Alfred Clapham says 'that Aachen minster greatly impressed men of its own age and later ages is proved by the continued copying of its form in later buildings'.¹⁴

The remains of Bishop Robert's chapel are so scanty that only with the topographer's help is a diagrammatic reconstruction possible. It is only necessary to note the references to it by Leland in his *Collectanea*¹⁵ and by Thomas Dingley in his *History from Marble*¹⁶ compiled in Charles II's reign, for both depend upon William of Malmesbury. The prime source

¹ G. Dehio und G. von Bezold: *Die Kirchliche Baukunst des Abendlandes*, Pl. XL.

² See reconstructional drawings, p. 134.

³ Rudolph Kautzsh, *Der Romanische Kirchenbau Im Elsass* (1944).

⁴ *Idem*.

⁵ See reconstructional drawings, p. 134.

⁶ Leo Bruhns, *Hohenstaufenschlösser* (1942).

⁷ *Idem*.

⁸ G. Dehio und G. von Bezold, *op. cit.*, Pl. CLXX, fig. 19.

⁹ *Idem*, Pl. CLXX, fig. 21.

¹⁰ *Cong. Arch. de France* (1924), 193; also *idem* 6, Pl. CLXX, figs. 14, 15, 16.

¹¹ A. W. Clapham, *Romanesque Architecture in Western Europe*, 161, 174.

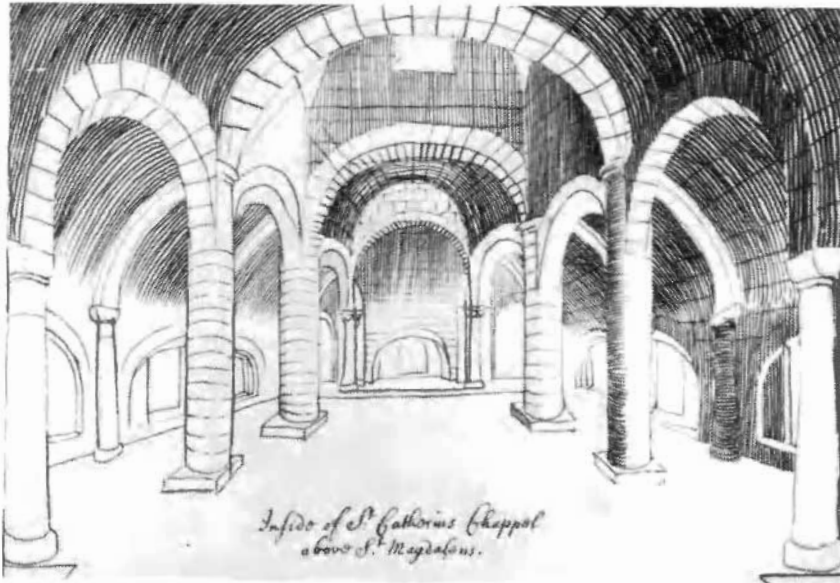
¹² R. de Lasteyrie, *L'Architecture Religieuse en France* (1926).

¹³ F. Beckett, *Danmarks Kunst*, 180.

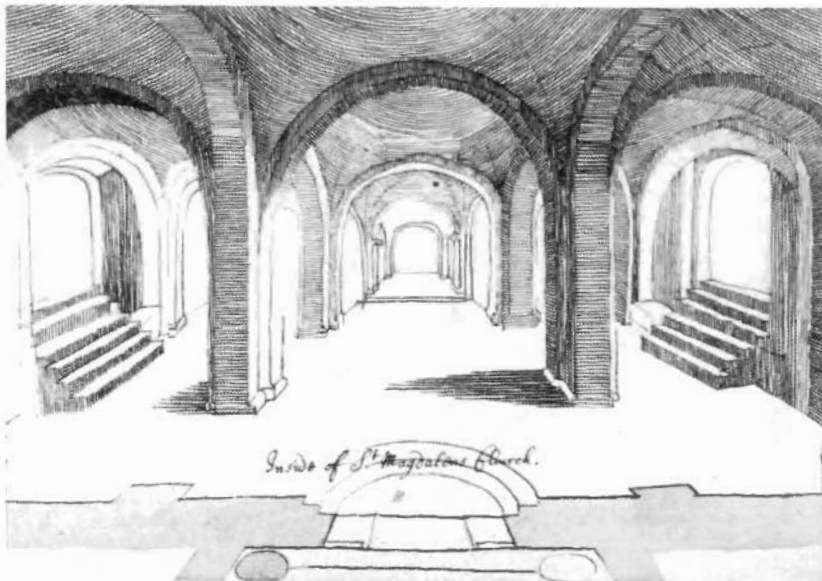
¹⁴ A. W. Clapham, *Romanesque Architecture in Western Europe*, 11.

¹⁵ John Leland, *Collectanea*, vol. iii (1770).

¹⁶ Camden Society, Thomas Dingley, *History from Marble* (1867).



A. Interior of First Floor Chapel, by William Stukeley
(By kind permission of the Bodleian Library : MS. top. gen. d 13)



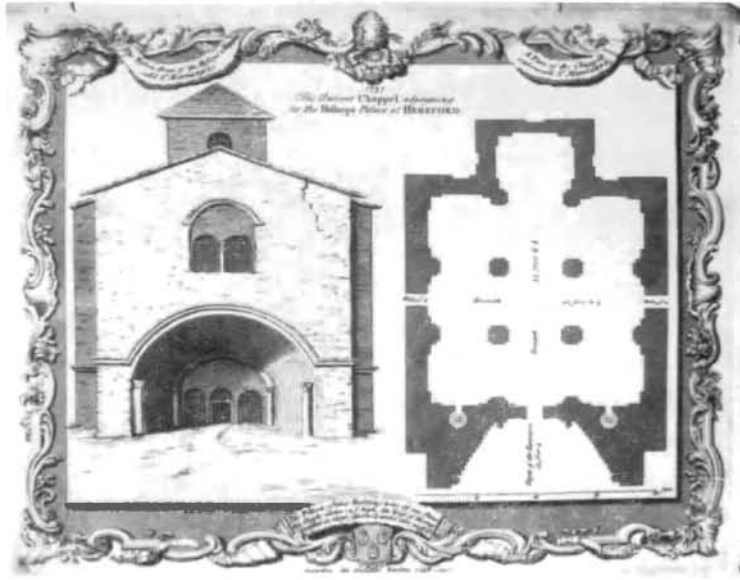
B. Interior of Ground Floor Chapel, by William Stukeley
(By kind permission of the Bodleian Library : MS. top. gen. d 13)



A. W. Front and S. Elevation, from Taylor's Map of the City of Hereford, 1757

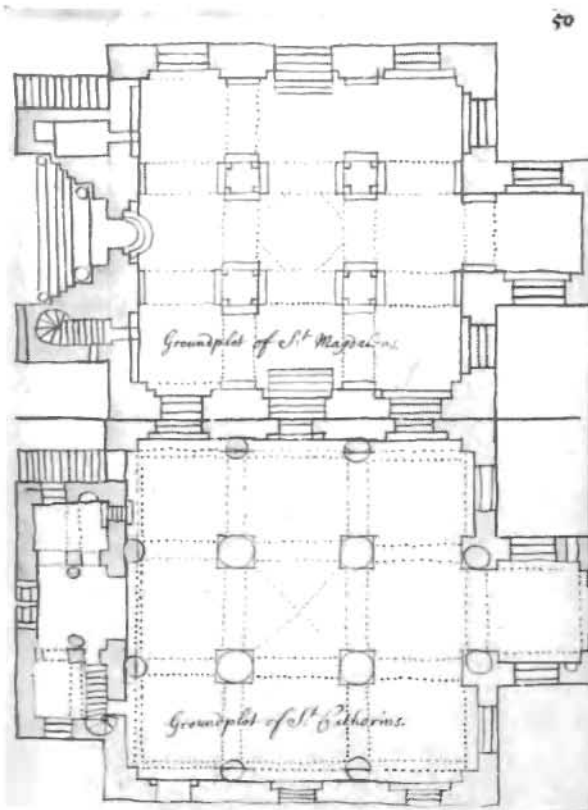


B. Existing N. wall of the Bishop's Chapel



A. W. Front and Ground Floor plan

(Engraving from a drawing prepared for the Society of Antiquaries of London, 1737 ; published in *Vetusta Monumenta*, 1719-47)



B. Plans of Ground and First Floor Chapels, by William Stukeley

(By kind permission of the Bodleian Library : MS. top. gen. d 13)

C. Detail of easternmost window in N. wall, with plaster-work having painted design

of original information is the account by William Stukeley accompanied by sketch plans and interior views of the two storeys. He visited the Cathedral in 1721, and presumably his notes were made then, together with those on the Chapter House; the latter are the main source of information for the second part of the present paper, which will be published in *Arch. Journ.* CXII. His sketches (Pls. XIIA, B, XIVB) are the only ones known of the interior of these buildings.

Stukeley's account of the Chapel is here quoted in full, for it emphasises points upon which there is divergence of evidence, particularly between his drawings and the survey of the building commissioned at a slightly later date by the Society of Antiquaries of London.

'Between the cathedral and the episcopal palace is a most venerable pile, exceeding it in date, as I conjecture from its manner of composure; built entirely of stone, roofed with stone; it consists of two chapels, one above the other; the ground-plot is a perfect square, beside the portico and choir; four pillars in the middle, with arches every way form the whole; the portico seems to have a grandeur in imitation of Roman works, made of many arches retiring inwards; two pillars on each side consist of single stones; the lowermost chapel, which is some steps under ground, is dedicated to St. Catherine, the upper to St. Magdalen,¹ and has several pillars against the wall, made of single stones, and an odd eight-square cupola upon the four middle pillars: there have been much paintings upon the walls: the arched roof is turned very artfully, and seems to have a taste of that kind of architecture used in the declension of the Roman empire'.

In 1737 the Society of Antiquaries was sufficiently perturbed by the proposed demolition of the Chapel to have a scale drawing prepared (Pl. XIVA). This, of the west front and the ground-floor plan, was reproduced in volume I of *Vetusta Monumenta* (1747). The original is held by the Society. The rococo frame of the plate contains notes of the dedication and the building materials. It is dated 1737 but unsigned. In comparison with Stukeley's plans it appears almost wholly lacking in verisimilitude.

The Minutes of the Society refer to the Chapel as follows: 'Mr. Willis presented the Society with a Section of the Chappel at Hereford and a plan of the upper storey as also the following account:

'This most venerable structure adjudged to be ancients than the famous Grymbalde vault in St. Peter's Oxford² is undoubtedly of Roman Architecture to have been built abt the end of the eight century and having no combustible matter escaped when the cathedral was burnt down anno 1056 by the fury of ye Welsh.

¹ A discrepancy occurs between the relative positions of the two chapels in the account and in the plans. The late George Marshall (*The Cathedral Church of Hereford*) agreed with Stukeley's written account. It may, however, be noted that lofty sites were frequently chosen

for chapels dedicated to St. Catherine.

² Grimbald, Grimbold or Grymbold, Saint A.D. 820?-903. *Dictionary of National Biography*. See account of his life with Oxford associations, but he is not credited with the building of St. Peter's Crypt.

It consists of two divisions the uppermost of which comprised the ancient Parochial church of St. Mary Magdalen. Both storeys were arched and turned with fine mortar, cast into squares.

'The walls were 5 foot thick, the shafts of the pillars 10 feet high, and the walls so strongly cemented that it was with difficulty demolished even at a quarter expense that it might have been repaired for, the singular style of awful structure the most ancient & entire of its kind in the kingdom has thus recommended the preservation of it to the Society of Antiquaries London'.

In 1757, Taylor, when producing his large-scale map of the City of Hereford, included in the rococo surround a series of vignettes of local buildings. Among them is a 'View of the Chapel now taken down', clearly Bishop Robert's Chapel seen from the south-west (Pl. XIII A). This is the only known view of the south side, but the dependence upon the Antiquaries' drawing for the aspect of the west end is such that the accuracy of the rest of the vignette may be questioned. It suffers in comparison with Stukeley's far more circumstantial drawings.

Brayley and Britton in 1805 give an account summarising the information briefly reviewed above which may be included for the description of various structural features and of how the demolition of the Chapel was carried out under Bishop Egerton. 'A more glaring example of worse than Gothic barbarity of taste occurred here during the prelacy of Bishop Egerton,¹ who procured a commission from the Archbishop of Canterbury to inspect the condition of the Ancient Chapel, which stood between the South side of the Bishop's Cloisters and the Palace. This Chapel was unquestionably Saxon, and of very early date. Dr. Stukeley² has observed that the architecture of the roof bore resemblance to that which prevailed during the declension of the Roman Empire'.

Mr. Gough remarks it was not improbably antecedent to the Cathedral, as well as to the Palace :³ and Browne Willis supposed it Roman work'.⁴

It was wholly built of stone; the ground-plan independent of the choir, and the space occupied by the west front and its deeply recessed entrance formed a perfect square of about forty-two feet'.

The interior was divided into an upper and lower storey: the roof was constructed with much skill and supported by four massive columns rising from the ground, and from which arches were turned every way: above the roof rose a square cupola, terminating pyramidically'.

The upper storey, or chapel, was dedicated to St. Magdalen, and had several pillars against the walls, formed of entire stones: the lower chapel was dedicated to St. Catherine. The principal entrance was on the west, under a retiring arch, or series of arches, sixteen or eighteen

¹ Bishop Egerton, 1723-1746.

² William Stukeley, *Itinerarium Curiosum* (1776).

³ Additions to Camden, vol. ii, p. 452.

⁴ Minutes of the Society of Antiquaries, London, April 13th, 1738.

feet deep ; at the outward and inner extremities of which were columns of single stones ten feet high ; there was also an entrance in the middle of both the north and south sides : the walls were three feet and a half thick. This interesting specimen of architecture of remote ages was returned by the vandals who examined it and the commission as ' ruinous and useless ' . and orders were given by the Bishop for its demolition ; though ' it was well known at the time that less than £20 would have put it into as good repair as it had been during four hundred years ' :¹ and so strongly were the stones cemented together, that after one-third of the Chapel had been taken down the work of destruction was for that time relinquished on account of the expense, which had even then amounted to upwards of £50. Previous, however, to the year 1757, it must have been wholly destroyed ; as the engraving in Taylor's Plan of Hereford, which was published in the spring of that year, described it as ' a Chapel now taken down ' .

That the ' memory of such a venerable edifice might not be lost, a View of it was also engraved by the Society of Antiquaries, with a ground plan ' .

Havergal gives an account of the building, together with a plate showing the west front and ground plan ; but these appear to be copied from the Antiquaries' drawing. On the same plate is a series of capitals, now exhibited in the Cathedral, which he says, wrongly, came from the Chapel. They are mainly from the east arch of the presbytery and were removed at the time of the restoration.²

The Transactions of the Woolhope Club³ have included papers on the Chapel presenting various opinions upon its origin and purpose, but they remained inconclusive until Sir Alfred Clapham quoted William of Malmesbury in evidence. Only then were theories of a pre-Conquest origin finally dismissed.

The north wall of the Chapel stands and is shown here (Pl. XIII B), with the measurements it provides and with the help of Stukeley's drawings, the reconstructual plans and sections have been prepared (fig. 1). Sections are given, because the main interest of the building lies therein, and in the plan, rather than in the elevations ; moreover, by chance, the evidence for the interior is more reliable than for the exterior.

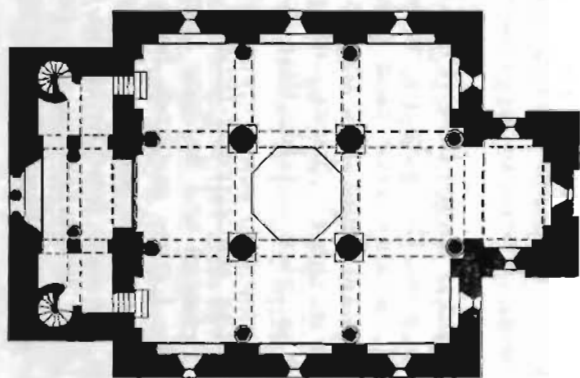
The surviving wall retains three of the semicircular-headed wall-arches of the lower chapel (Pl. XIV c). Between and flanking them the rough surface of the wall shows where the former responds have been cut away. In the east and west arches are original semicircular-headed windows with deep splays ; these last in the east window retain traces of 13th-century painted scrollwork in black line-work on the plaster. Stukeley's description, ' there have been much paintings upon the walls ' ,

¹ Duncomb's *Collections*, vol. i, 541.

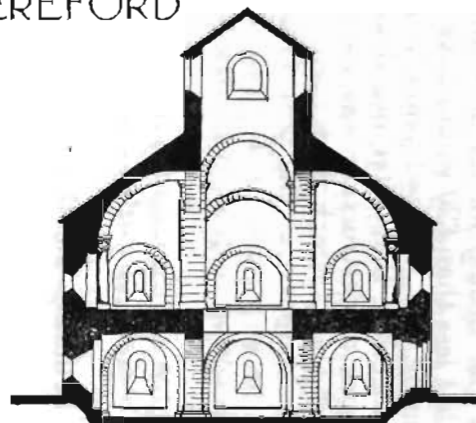
² R.C.H.M. (England), *Herefordshire*, vol. i, South-west.

³ Woolhope Transactions (1922, 1926).

The BISHOP'S PALACE CHAPEL of
 ST KATHERINE & ST MARY MAGDALENE, HEREFORD

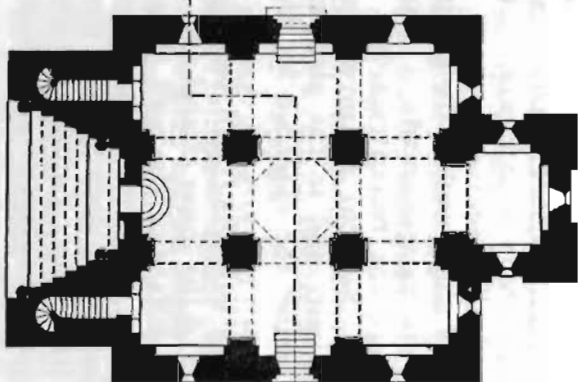


FIRST FLOOR PLAN

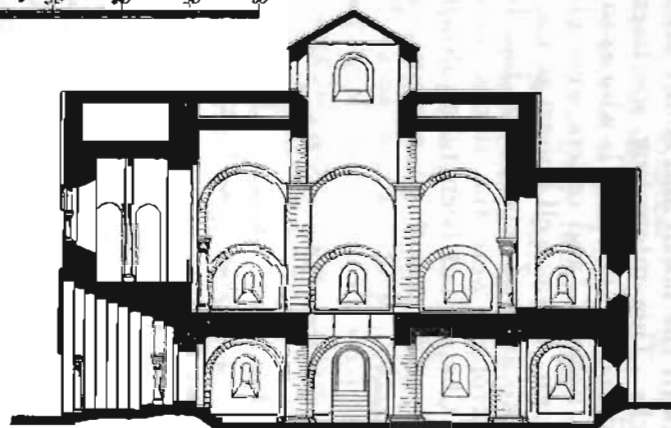


CROSS SECTION

Line of Cross Section. Scale of Feet



GROUND PLAN



LONGITUDINAL SECTION

W.D. & H.O. WILKINSON 1884

Fig. 1

suggests they were worn and faded in his day. In the middle arch is a blocked 15th-century doorway with four-centred head and sunk-chamfered jambs.

Above the wall-arches is a set-back of 7 ins. to 8 ins. to the wall-face of the upper storey and higher again is the clear mark of the floor-level of the upper chapel.

The three segmental-headed wall-arches of the upper chapel are sharply angled at the springing ; they are now filled in flush with the south wall-face, a large percentage of the filling being calcareous tufa. Visible on the north side of the wall are remains of 15th-century windows, which had superseded the original windows in these bays, and parts of the semicircular head of an 11th-century window remain in the centre bay.

The following description supplements the reconstructural drawings :—

The lower chapel was entered from the west through a doorway in the back wall of a deep segmental-headed porch-like recess. The recess was of several orders continued down the jambs, except for the outer and innermost that sprang from monolithic columns apparently with foliated and cushion-capitals respectively. The doorway seems to have been set between two wall-arches ; the three are shown similar in form in the Antiquaries' drawing, but the plan-form in the foreground of Stukeley's sketch of the interior of the chapel is more plausible : a doorway flanked by small recessed panels. A string round the building was carried over the entrance as a label.

The west window in the upper chapel was of two semicircular-headed lights divided by a colonette, all within an embracing round-headed arch with blind tympanum. The west end ended in an obtuse gable. The two engravings show an alarming fracture in the south end of the gable.

If Taylor's engraving is correct, the doorway in the middle of the south wall was original, of two orders, with detached jamb-shafts with cushion capitals, and the original windows had been superseded in the 14th or 15th century by two-light windows. He shows a low rectangular chancel-like projection on the east, with gabled roof, which is not confirmed by Stukeley's sketch of the upper chapel ; Taylor would seem to have relied upon his preconceived notion of the normal small English church, with nave and chancel. The authority for the form of the lantern must remain a matter for conjecture.

The central well is not shown by Stukeley, but the dotted lines in his sketches seem to suggest an octagonal well, perhaps by his time blocked.

The lower chapel was below ground level ; steps down into it are shown in Stukeley's drawings. The Antiquaries' drawing notes the breadth as $42\frac{1}{2}$ ft., and the north and south walls as $5\frac{1}{2}$ ft. thick ; measurement of the existing wall confirms the last dimension ; the length noted, $57\frac{1}{2}$ ft., included the east projection. It was divided into nine square

bays by ashlar cross-arches springing from rectangular piers and responds, each bay being covered by a groined vault. Willis' allusion to the vault of St. Peter's at Oxford may well indicate an appropriate comparison, although of slightly later date.

The probability that the stone vaults contained a percentage of tufa or travertine is suggested by the blocking of the upper wall-arches in the north wall, for evidently the material was available at the time of the demolition. This may indeed be the explanation of Willis' allusion, quoted above, to 'fine mortar, cast into squares'. A local quarry of tufa was evidently open, for several 11th and 12th-century churches in the neighbourhood of Hereford contain the material:¹ it seems to have been in the Bredwardine area of the Wye Valley, whence the stone could be brought with ease by land or water to Hereford.

Beside the recessed entrance and approached from the interior is a vice. Whether or not a vice once existed on the other side to balance the foregoing, as at Aachen, is impossible to determine. It may have been so, for although Stukeley shows the space empty, he includes alongside an external stair to the upper chapel which must surely have been a makeshift arrangement.

The altar-projection was entered through an east archway in each chapel and lit by windows within wall-arches in the side walls, and also, on the upper floor, by an east window; this last was flanked by a piscina in the south wall and perhaps a squint in the north wall.

The four lofty cylindrical piers in the upper chapel, superimposed on the square piers below, have square bases and moulded capitals. They support semicircular transverse arches, while the parallel arches spring from below the caps; the four arches support the lantern. Again from the lower level spring the semicircular arches flanking the end bays. This system of springings at two levels from the same pier has a parallel in the late 11th-century presbytery at Tewkesbury where arches spring from half-way up the piers of the main arcade to support the tribune.² Sir Alfred Clapham states that the Tewkesbury masons probably evolved and were the first to employ the feature. At Hereford the purpose is different, but the system the same, while the dates of the buildings equate.

The end bays of the central compartment of the upper chapel are covered by barrel-vaults, the side compartments by continuous half barrel-vaults from end to end; the latter have transverse half arches springing from responds against the north and south walls and rising to the cylindrical piers. All the responds on the upper floor seem to have consisted of monolithic columns with chamfered bases and cushion capitals.

¹ Bredwardine Church, dressing of white tufa; late 11th century. Letton Church, sandstone walls, some tufa; late 11th or early 12th century. Moccas Church; complete church; built of squared local white calcareous tufa; mid 12th century. Preston-on-Wye Church;

sandstone with some white tufa; late 12th century. Bridge Sollers Church; local rubble, some tufa; mid 12th century.

² *Arch. Jour.*, Supplement to vol. cvii. 'Memorial volume to Sir Alfred Clapham'.

On the Antiquaries' plate these columns are described as 'of one stone, the shafts above 12 ft. high'.¹ Stukeley seems to indicate an entasis on them, and it is possible that they may have been reused Roman material from Kentchester; but there is no certainty regarding the first, and no proof of the second. George Marshall puts forward this theory in his account of the building.² He is incorrect in saying that four free-standing piers of this type support the lantern; Stukeley shows their jointed masonry clearly, moreover, structural requirements preclude monoliths.

The height of rise in the arched orders of the huge splay of the recessed entrance seems to require a raised platform on the floor above to accommodate it, as the section shows. The existence of such a platform, or gallery, is further indicated by the involved arrangement of stairs shown by Stukeley on the first floor of the west projection. With variations, features of such a kind may be seen in the double chapels at Eger and Nürnberg,³ which may have been for use of the castle families or the bishop and his entourage.

Finality in these reconstructional drawings is not possible. They have been prepared from a correlation of information obtained from the surviving fragment, documents, and Continental parallels, with a view to indicating pictorially the character of a building unique in this country but almost wholly unknown.

¹ Monolithic columns of these proportions are rare in England. They may be seen in the nave-arcade of St. Mary Magdalene at Ickleton, Cambridgeshire, of the second half of the 11th century; these are without entasis and no

evidence exists to suggest they came from a Roman site.

² George Marshall, *op. cit.*, Appendix i, 171.

³ Leo Bruhns, *op. cit.*

I am indebted to Mr. F. C. Morgan for the loan of negatives of the Stukeley drawings.