

A Survey of Lilleshall Abbey,  
Shropshire; A Second Interim Report

by

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'The spirit of religions, coming down to dwell in the dust, has abandoned the sacred places.'

Louis Aragon. Paris Peasant, 27.

### Introduction

The remains of Lilleshall Abbey (SJ 738142), situated approximately two miles to the north-west of Telford in north-eastern Shropshire, today form an impressive monument to the piety of the high medieval dead. Under the care of the Department of the Environment and now English Heritage the ruins are being consolidated and displayed to the public. In tandem with the programme of repair has run a survey of the monument, the first stage of which was a detailed photogrammetric survey undertaken by York University in 1983. The second stage, utilising the York drawings, was an interpretative survey of the monument by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit. The first season of this work has been reported on in an interim account (B.U.F.A.U. 1988), the interpretations offered in that report now being superceded by those offered below which take into account the results of a second season of survey in 1989. The text is deliberately discursive as definitive interpretation must await the completion of the survey of the whole monument. References to Figure Numbers have been kept to a minimum to avoid constant repetition; a full list and description of figures appears at the end of the report.

### The 1989 Survey

The methodology used for the survey was that adopted in 1987, involving the production of interpretative overlays (supplementary to the stone-by-stone photogrammetric tracings) on which were marked significant architectural details and recognisable individual incidents of building work. The drawn record was backed up by pro-forma recording sheets describing all

Structural Elements (SE; numbered in continuous sequence from SE1000), that is, each discernible building activity be it a major constructional phase or a mason's rise, and Architectural Elements (AE; numbered in sequence from AE1), that is doors, windows, putlog holes etc. The use of such forms is intended to standardise the approach towards a non-interpretative paper archive and to ease the reference in text or on drawings to particular features or particular parts of a building. Their use should also allow for easy comparison between constructional techniques in one part of a building or complex and another, and between one building and another.

The second season of survey saw the completion of the recording of the Abbey Church itself, a task involving the preparation of a stone-by-stone drawing of the outer face of the north wall of the Quire (a number of trees close to the wall face prevented its recording by photogrammetry), in addition to the standard recording procedures summarised above. Profiles of mouldings from architectural features were taken around the whole Abbey complex, not only in the church, and a catalogue of window types likewise completed for the whole monument.

The field drawings, recording sheets, and negatives for c.250 black-and-white photographs supplementing the record are held as an archive at B.U.F.A.U.

### Description and Analysis

The standing walling (Figure 1) remaining at Lilleshall today represents only a small part of the Abbey complex, principally the church and some of the claustral buildings to the south and the south-east. Walls and foundations of other buildings were recorded in the late Nineteenth century and were mapped by Rigold in his short guide to the monument (Rigold 1969, 8-9).

The Abbey Church consists of an aisleless nave, c.130 feet (40 metres) in length up to the Crossing and c.27 feet (8.5 metres) wide. The width of

the church remains consistent into the Crossing and the Quire. The length of the Quire is c.57 feet (17.5 metres), giving a total length of the church, from the inner face of the west wall of the Nave to the inner face of the east wall of the Quire, of c.224 feet (69 metres). The Transepts are both, like the Nave and Quire, c.27 feet (8.5 metres) wide and approximately 100 feet (31 metres) in length from the inner wall face in the south to presumed position of the now destroyed inner wall face to the north. Chapels are clustered to either side of the Quire.

It is now possible to discuss the building of the Church in a chronological sequence, and though this sequence broadly corresponds with the scheme of dating put forward by Rigold there are a number of places where the two interpretations differ.

The earliest period of build is undoubtedly found at the east end of the Church where the Quire and the Transepts can be seen to be of a unified style though of two distinct phases. The inner north and south Quire walls mirror each other to a great degree, but not all the features here are contemporary, the most obvious later insertions being the two recesses (AE8 in the north wall, AE84 in the south), cut presumably to take tombs (Rigold notes that one contained 'the effigy of an abbot', the other 'a cross-legged knight in white limestone' but they are both now empty), and two doorways (AE7 in the north wall, AE85 in the south) that lead into the side chapels. The eastern wall of the Quire has little surviving of its original build, this having been largely destroyed by the later insertion here of a huge window (AE55) but some details of the early arrangement of windows here can be gleaned from an examination of the stonework to the sides of AE55.

A major constructional break in the Quire build is seen on both the north and south inner wall faces, towards the eastern end, marked by the abrupt termination of the lower moulded stringcourse (SE 1097) which can be seen to have also run across the east wall where it is now truncated, and higher up the faces by the stepping of the upper stringcourse (SE 1008, SE1096). While it could be argued that this break merely reflects an internal division of the east end of the Church into a Quire and better-lit

Presbytery to the east, the fact that building breaks can also be seen at the same points on the outer wall faces argues against such an interpretation. The break in build on the outer faces corresponds to the line of the north-south walls forming, in both cases, the eastern walls of the side Chapels. However, examination of the lower part of the outer face of the northern Quire wall reveals that the chamfered and stepped foundation coursing of this wall (SE 1206) continues along the whole length of the Chapel's eastern wall, though the truncated portion of the foundation to the east of the Chapel wall is so heavily weathered or damaged that a subtle difference in profile or finish to the stonework to the west may not be readily apparent.

This would all seem to indicate that the eastern end of the Quire represents a secondary stage of building, the rest of the Quire and the Transepts and the side chapels being of the primary build, reflecting a change in the groundplan of the Church as originally envisaged. While there is absolutely no evidence to support the theory, it is possible that the first Church could have been planned to have an apsidal east end. The closeness in style of the two Quire builds suggests that they are not separated in time by many years, and thus will now be described in detail together.

The Quire walls survive to a height of c.39 feet (12 metres) above the present level of the interior of the church, virtually to the height of the eaves. An engraving of 1731, made by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck, shows part of the vaulting for the Quire still in situ but none of this now survives and, in fact, can be seen to have been destroyed or to have collapsed by 1822 when another drawing of the monument was made by Samuel Ireland (Shropshire Local Studies Library, Shrewsbury). The interior is lit by an upper tier of four windows in each main face (AE1-AE4 in the north wall, AE88-AE91 in the south wall) and at the eastern end by two smaller windows in the same style in each face (AE5 and AE6 in the north wall, AE86 and AE87 in the south). These windows have internal angled jambs and splayed, rising sills to channel light into the interior. Four of these windows are now blocked (AE3, AE4, AE90, AE91). Interestingly, on the interior faces, around the upper windows, can be seen halos of stone

infilling, bounded by slightly raised edges which, in addition to the vertical lines of small square putlog holes cut into the wall face between each window, testify to the construction of wooden frames around each opening before the construction of the window arches themselves.

In the east wall of the Quire the original arrangement of windows is less certain, for reasons already detailed above, but it would appear that on the lower level there had been three small windows, fragments of the outer jamb and arch of two of these still being visible (AE65 and AE249), the probable central window having been totally obliterated. Above, again two arch fragments survive (AE66 and AE67) but here so spaced as to limit the possibility of there having been a third, central window on this level. Interpolation of the arches, and measurement up from the string coursing that forms their sills, suggests that the upper windows were of a similar size to windows AE5 and AE6 in the north wall and AE86 and AE87 in the south.

The general appearance of the Quire is plain and understated, the only decorative embellishment being the discreet scalloped caps on the stepped corbels (AE9, AE10, AE11, AE250, AE251, on the north internal wall; AE93, AE94, AE252, AE253, AE254 on the south internal wall) and scallops again, on the capitals of the columns clustered together to form the piers at the Crossing. This fact, together with the distinctive Type 2 stringcoursing (see below for definition of Types) being present on the upper part of the surviving original Transept walling, testifies to the contemporaneity of the Transepts with the primary build of the Quire. The south, and part of the west, wall of the South Transept has quite evidently been rebuilt, and will be further considered below, while the west wall of the North Transept has again been remodelled, the Crossing piers being here partially enclosed within the later build. These pier bases are substantial (Figure 12) and it was noted by Rigold that though they are sizeable enough to have carried a tower over the Crossing their irregularity of plan and the absence of a staircase rather argues against the presence of such a tower. Whatever, there is evidence for substantial stone arches having spanned both the width of the North Transept at its junction with the Crossing, and that of the South Transept again at the junction with the Crossing. A third arch

must have also spanned the width of the Nave at the same junction but apparently no arch came across the west end of the Quire.

Because of their fragmentary nature it cannot confidently be stated how the Transepts were lit; however, it is likely that there would have been a considerable number of windows in each end (as in the east end of the Quire, perhaps, in its original form), these - to stretch the hypothesis further than perhaps one should - possibly being subject to replacement by single large windows at the same time as the rearrangement of the lighting provision in the Quire. As for the sides of the Transepts the arrangement can be reconstructed from the upper part of the east wall of the South Transept where there can be seen portions of two windows (AE218 and AE220) with angled jambs and splayed sills as on those windows in the Quire, such a pair of openings presumably having been present on each stretch of side walling in both Transepts.

The question must now be asked, what further builds could be contemporary with the Quire and Transepts? Rigold suggested that the easternmost end of the Nave could be part of this Twelfth-Century Phase of construction and indeed the stringcoursing along the lower, outer face of the north Nave wall is of Type 1b (see below), a type otherwise found exclusively on those parts of the Quire and Chapel build associated with the extension of the original plan. This stringcourse on the Nave wall finishes with a chamfer die-out stop at a point which corresponds to a major vertical break in construction seen also on the inside face of this wall and on both faces of the southern Nave wall. It seems likely that this break represents the western limit of the first, squat, cruciform Church, constructed over a span of perhaps sixty to seventy years, the style of the so-called Processional Door (AE70) that leads from the Cloister into the Church being towards the end of this period, in the later Twelfth Century, though the general area of disturbance around this door might suggest that it was an insertion into an already standing stretch of wall. The presence of such a doorway, with its elaborate Romanesque chevron and dogtooth decoration, obviously indicates the existence of a Cloister to the south of the Abbey Church at this period, even if only laid out on the ground as a guide to future construction work or built entirely of timber.

Before considering the phasing of the complicated side Chapels leading off from the earliest Church it would, perhaps, be best to describe the second major period of Church building, involving the extension of the Church to the west with the construction of the long Nave, which addition almost doubled the total length of the building. The construction of the Nave is undoubtedly a single act, giving the building stature without height. The Nave today has been heavily robbed of its facing stones, a fate that the Quire seems to have largely escaped perhaps because of the use there of less well-finished and more irregular blocks of stone. Without reference to the records detailing the more recent renovation work it is difficult to tell how much of the Nave's south wall has been repaired and consolidated. The north wall remains unrepaired and stripped bare of facing stones almost down to foundation level with isolated areas surviving intact only in a few places, essentially those beneath the corbels that acted as bases for the springing of the rib-vaulting, around the newel staircase to the west and around the external buttresses at the west front, where robbing would have been most perilous an undertaking. This would seem to suggest that most of the robbing took place when the building was standing to some height. Nevertheless, today the walls along the length of the Nave still stand to a height of c.19-23 feet (6-7 metres) and the projecting tower to the north of the west front to c.35 feet (12 metres).

The west front is worth considering first as it would have acted as an introduction to the status, hopes and aspirations of the Abbey when first approached by visitors. The front now appears squat and attention is immediately focused on the large doorway (AE201) that forms the main entry into the Church. This Gothic doorway with its great depth, three moulded orders and capitals that would have formerly rested upon detached shafts, survives in much the same state as depicted on the Buck engraving of 1731. This illustration serves to show that stone robbing has subsequently denuded the west front, particularly above the doorway and to the south of the wall face. The projecting clasping buttresses (AE203 and AE204), to either side of the doorway, with their stepped and chamfered foundations, testify to the former presence over the west end of a tower or, more likely, of two flanking towers of differing sizes, as reflected in the differing proportions of the buttress foundations. Indeed, part of the



first stage of the north tower survives, with a blind niche at its centre (AE202), fronted by a three-light opening with trefoil-headed arches, a style that dates from the mid to late Thirteenth Century. Reconstruction would carry such niches up the face of both towers, introduce windows to light the interiors above the level of the Nave vaults, and put a timber doorway with wicket gate or gates into the inner recess of AE201, a square hole (AE222) in the north inner jamb face cutting back c.11 feet (3.5 metres) in to the masonry and marking the position where a wooden bar could be slid to facilitate the opening of the large doors.

Projecting out from the outer face of the north Nave wall is a small square tower that carried a newel staircase (AE34), lit by a lancet window (AE255), and gave access to the tower or towers over the west front. It is possible that a second stairtower could have existed to the south of the Church but this would have intruded into the Cloister and is therefore unlikely. Certainly a matching buttress appears on the south wall, and part of it has been utilised to form a door jamb for entry into a structure that runs off southwards, at right angles to the Church, and is obviously a later construction. While the doorway (AE83) through the Nave wall to the east of this buttress is probably an original opening its jambs have been reset, probably also as part of the later activity. A doorway towards the west end of the north Nave wall (AE43) probably formed the entrance into the Church reserved for layfolk. Rigold suggested that there may once have been a start made on building, or at least laying out, an aisle to the north of the Nave but evidence on the ground does not support this theory.

As has already been mentioned the interior of the Nave has either been heavily robbed, the north wall's core gapingly displayed over much of its length, or consolidated, as with the south wall; some clues to its original appearance are, however, preserved. A number of fluted corbels, forming the bases for the ribs and springing of a vault over the Nave, survive on the north wall (AE21, AE26, AE30), while paired corbels for all three (AE71, AE74, AE75) and for a (?)fourth remain on the south. As detailed in the first interim report it is possible to suggest the existence of five pairs in total. Of the ribs that arched across the wall faces as blind arcading only three portions survive, two springing from

corbel AE21 at the east end of the north wall and the other on the south wall rising from the capital of the clustered columns opposite the newel stair. The position of the latter certainly suggests that the Nave vaulting was continuous right down to the west entrance. While still generally understated the new building elements do contain more flourishes of decoration than seen previously in the Church, for while some of the new corbel bases are plain others are decorated with splayed foliage. The column shafts, both in the two opposed clusters inside the west end of the Nave and those associated with the great west door have roll-and-fillet decoration (see below).

The Nave was lit by a series of windows down either side, the remains of the basal sills of four, and possibly the position of a fifth, (AE69, AE79, AE81, AE82) can be seen along the south wall, and while that portion of upper walling does not generally survive on the north wall it can be assumed that windows here were paired with those on the opposing face. A single elaborate window (AE40) does survive at the upper level towards the east end of the north wall, but this is a later insertion and will be considered below.

It is difficult to say much of value about the exterior wall faces of the Nave, that to the north being heavily robbed and that to the south being perhaps not fully understandable until the interpretative survey has been completed for the whole of the Cloister. In the interim; the west end of the south wall is complicated, in that the clasping buttress at the south-west corner of the Church has been heavily robbed and so constructed as to respect a structure built up against the wall face here but now no longer standing. Here also, at a height of c.18 feet (5.5 metres) from the present ground level, the stonework of the wall is stepped into three tiers as if to facilitate the erection of timbers here, something further suggested by the number of putlog holes cut into the wall face below. It is possible that there could have been a stair tower here and indeed Rigold suggested that there may have been a passage through a west range at this point leading into the Cloister. Were the west range to have been built on two floors this explanation would be feasible. While Rigold assigns a

Fourteenth-Century date to the stone walling now surviving in the area of the west range it seems more likely that this is, in fact, much later and associated with post-Dissolution activity. Some of the walling here was drawn during the survey but this has not been reproduced as part of the present report.

As has already been mentioned, the central part of the outer face of the southern Nave wall formed the north wall of the Cloister and along this stretch is found a distinct type of stringcoursing, Type 4 (see below), which, if viewed in association with numerous square putlog holes cut into the wall face beneath, must have helped support a wooden structure covering the walkway around the Cloister. Some of the more randomly placed putlog holes may be associated with later building work or even with the erection of scaffolding to facilitate the robbing of the wall in the post-Dissolution Period. Two angled grooves seen above the stringing in the north-east corner of the Cloister indicate the roof height of the walkway cover. The Type 4 stringcoursing can also be traced along a length of the east Cloister wall.

The outer Nave wall to the north is heavily robbed though the fine stone facing of the projecting stair tower survives more-or-less intact to a height of c.21 feet (6.5 metres). A buttress (AE36) projects out from the central part of the Nave wall and can be seen to be an integral part of the same build by its identical chamfered foundation. Further east is a truncated wall stub (AE49) that again would appear to be a contemporary build and forms part of the west wall of a possible side Chapel. The Chapel, and others leading off the Quire, is fragmentary and thus difficult to understand. The two Chapels off the Quire mirror one another both in size and in position, which must certainly suggest their contemporaneity. The appearance on the southern and eastern walls of the south Chapel of the moulded stringcoursing Type 1b suggests its construction to be broadly contemporary with the extension eastwards of the Quire after alterations had been made to the original Twelfth-Century plot. It is not possible to be completely confident of this with regard to the northern Chapel for its east wall is badly truncated and its north wall a low, fragmentary stub. Thus it cannot be seen whether stringcoursing Type 1b was ever present.

Some alterations were subsequently made to the Chapels and it would appear that these were linked to the major phase of building that saw the construction of the Nave. The evidence for this link is provided by the presence, along the upper outer Quire walls, both to the north and south, of the distinctive Type 4 stringcoursing also found around large stretches of the Cloister, which is thought to have had a specific structural purpose. The North Chapel best illustrates the nature of the alterations. The east wall of the Chapel is obviously of two builds, the lower being well constructed and finished, the upper, which steps in, is poorly built and not properly bonded to the stonework of the outer Quire wall face. The line of the upper part of this wall partially intrudes over the build of the arch of window AE2. The insertion of the Type 4 stringcoursing, to help facilitate the fixing of a lean-to roof arrangement, involved considerable further rebuilding and also the blocking of windows AE3 and AE4, whose lower portions are simply not visible on the outer face because of the rebuilding under the stringcourse. Two semi-circular scars (AE246, AE247) left on the wall face by the removal of the barrel vaulted ceilings of the original low chapel, probably date from the period of rebuild as it would be difficult to conceive the arrangement of the higher chapel if they had been left in situ. The creation of the doorway AE7, leading directly from the Quire into the Chapel probably now took place, the arched entranceway from the North Transept now being blocked, at least across its lower part. The small, plain book locker or cupboard (AE245) in the south wall of this Chapel is probably an original, early feature.

These changes are mirrored almost exactly in the South Chapel, with the insertion of Type 4 stringcoursing, the blocking of two windows (AE90, AE91), the demolition of two former barrel vaults to leave scars (AE140, AE142), the creation of a new doorway (AE85) from the Quire, and the blocking of the arched entry from the South Transept. Unfortunately the upper part of the east wall of this Chapel does not survive to further test the theory of a rebuild identical to that taking place to the north. Too little survives of the small square Chapel, again leading off to the South Transept, to the south to know whether this too was affected by the rebuilding, but it is likely that it was. The Chapel to the west of the

North Transept may also have received alterations, with the blocking of its doorway from the Transept being, perhaps, part of this process.

The later building history of the Church is more piecemeal and thus more difficult to understand. Most noteworthy is the insertion of a huge window (AE55) into the eastern end wall of the Quire (Figure 8). Taking up, as it does, virtually the whole of the wall face it has destroyed most of the evidence for the earlier window arrangement here. The raising of the roof lines of the side Chapels, with the subsequent blocking of four windows giving light to the Quire, would have, if an isolated incident, considerably darkened this end of the Church. The creation of the new vast window would have made the Church clear and light and less mysterious. Logic dictates that the two incidents, blocking and new building, may have been part of the same phase of work. In the new window little of the bar tracery survives but the Buck engraving of 1731 shows that the lower portion was divided into four by three vertical bars, now no longer present as the sill of the window has been subsequently destroyed. Towards the top of the arch some decorative tracery survives and this will allow a tentative reconstruction to be offered in association with the evidence from the broken ribs around the frame. The tracery, where elements survive, is distinctly curvilinear in style and therefore is perhaps to be assigned a Fourteenth Century date though a more definite date may be obtained once parallels have been sought for the moulding of the window jambs (Figure 9). A series of masons' assembly marks appear on the stones that form the jambs but the heavy weathering of the upper part of the frame means that these could only be recorded up to the eighth course; the marks are generally consistent, though they show the hand of more than one mason, and curiously some can be seen to have been made in situ as they spread across two blocks.

Rigold suggested that further building activity took place in the Fourteenth Century with the construction of the west range of the Cloister but this is uncertain; if it were indeed the case, seeing as there is evidence for only one roof line over the Claustal walk, then this could mean that the work associated with the provision of stringcoursing Type 4 along the north and east walls of the Cloister rather than being associated

with the Thirteenth Century phase of building and the extension of the Church, could be later and of the Fourteenth Century, with the implications that this would also have for dating the work on the Chapels off the Quire. Definitive conclusions must await the completion of the interpretative survey for the whole monument.

As has already been mentioned there survives only a single window (AE40) at the upper level in the Nave and it can obviously be seen to be a later insertion into the main Thirteenth Century build. Unfortunately it is not possible to tell whether this was an isolated alteration, which would seem unlikely, or whether other such windows had been built at this level right along the length of the Nave. The date of this window, on the style of the mouldings, is probably later Fourteenth Century.

The Post-Dissolution Period saw the start of the robbing and subsequent decay of the building, especially the Abbey Church, though occupation on part of the site continued in some form, as can be seen by the construction of a number of walls which, though not closely dateable, are so positioned as to make their identification as non-ecclesiastical quite certain. These include the walls forming what Rigold called a Porch, impinging into the north west corner of the Cloister, the fragmentary wall across the width of the Nave and butted up against the western crossing pairs, and probably the ragged cross wall further to the east. It is likely that a number of the walls in the western range are post-monastic and numerous irregular putlog holes in the face of the north Cloister wall, not seemingly connected with the covered walkway, may have been connected to a timber structure built up against this wall. The robbing of stone in the Church cannot have been so advanced by the time of the Civil War that the building could not easily be fortified to withstand a brief siege; it was this attack that was doubtless responsible for the destruction of most of the North Transept and its associated side Chapels and probably for the damage to the South Transept end wall which, as it now stands, can be seen to be almost completely rebuilt.

## The Mouldings; a Summary Account

### Introduction

This report focuses on the use of the architectural mouldings to phase the building construction at Lilleshall Abbey, not only within the Abbey Church but over the monastic complex as a whole.

Mouldings were taken of the string courses, columns, corbels, arches, and windows; a Type number being allocated to each. In some cases precise dating has not been possible due to the lack of comparative references; elsewhere, dates given are approximate, based on similar dated examples from other sites. Unfortunately very few sources describing the construction of Lilleshall Abbey have survived, which adds to the problem of precise dating.

### The Mouldings (Figure 11)

#### The Stringcourses

There are five main types of stringcourse, this number excluding types identical in shape but not size.

Type 1 is trapezoidal in shape, having a maximum height of c.7 inches, (18cms). It is very plain in style and is to be found within the east end of the Quire, as the lower level of coursing, and also within the Frater, again as the lower level course. The approximate date for this type is the mid 1100s, contemporary with the original Twelfth-Century construction.

Type 1b is, again, trapezoidal in shape, c.6 inches (15cms) in height, but otherwise identical to Type 1. These two types would therefore appear to be contemporary in date. This type of stringcourse is found on a number of stretches of the building, namely; the north wall, north face, of the Twelfth-Century Nave; the external east end of the Quire has two levels of this coursing, extending back as far as, and following, the east facing walls of both North and South Transepts; the internal wall of the South

Chapel; the higher level of coursing running along the external west front of the South Transept, Sacristy and Slype.

Type 2 is trapezoidal in shape, with a horizontal groove running at the base of the projecting vertical surface, showing some attempt at decoration. This appears to be a Romanesque element contemporary with the string course Type 1. It can be seen within the Quire, as the higher level of coursing above Type 1; in the North and South Transepts; within the east end of the Sacristy and within the Frater on the internal south wall as a moulding above the windows. Indeed, this particular type is also used as a moulding on several arches, for instance at the entrances to the Frater, the Slype and the North Passageway, and can be dated to approximately the mid 1100s.

Type 3 is a decorated form vaguely similar to Type 2, but with a flat top surface, a horizontal groove at the mid-height of the projection, and a concave undersurface. The elaborate design forms part of the Processional Arch through the south wall of the Nave, and is found only there. This type can therefore be dated to the late 1100s, c. 1170-1190, certain elements of the decoration being similar to arches at New Shoreham and Glastonbury.

Type 4 is plain and has a chamfered upper surface. Though this might have had some architectural significance, since this string type is mostly to be found in the vicinity of the Cloister, with putlog holes beneath it to perhaps support the Cloister roof beams, the roof itself resting on the sloped surface of the chamfer, a small stretch of this course exists elsewhere where the function of supporting a sloped roof is unlikely.

This type is found on the external south wall of the Nave at a height of c.15 ft (4.5m) from the ground, and is also found running along the external west face of the South Transept, Sacristy and Slype as a continuation of the above-mentioned Nave stringing. In the above two cases, there are putlog holes immediately beneath the stringing. The third stretch of this type is to be found as the upper level of coursing on the east face of the South Chapel (and presumably likewise on the North



Chapel), continuing briefly along both external north and south walls of the Quire at the same height.

Due to the simplicity of its style it is difficult to date this string type, but it seems probable that it is a Thirteenth-Century addition.

Type 4b is similar in shape to Type 4, though its chamfered upper surface is more pronounced and projects further out from the wall face. It seems to follow the course of a roof, and is only present on the external north face of the Frater and Day Room. It appears to be contemporary with Type 2a, putlog holes beneath the coursing perhaps suggesting a similar function.

Type 4c is a similar mould to Type 4, but has the chamfered surface on its underside, thus perhaps having the function of supporting horizontal floor beams. It would appear to date from the Twelfth Century, and can be found only within the Chapter House.

Type 5 is a form of roll moulding of Thirteenth-Century date. This type is found only on the external west face of the west wall, and inside the Thirteenth-Century build of the Nave.

### The Columns

What few columns remain in the Abbey are either circular or have roll-and-fillet mouldings. The circular columns are found within the Twelfth Century Transepts, whereas the roll-and-fillet moulded columns are all found within the Thirteenth Century Nave (for mouldings of similar date see Wood 1965, Fig.117). The roll-and-fillet mould is a characteristic of Early English architecture (post 1170) and of the Decorated style, but in this particular case the examples are Early English. The type series for the columns is arranged in order of diameter measurements.

### Circular Columns

Type 1 has a diameter of 11.3/4 inches (30cms) and is positioned in each Transept flanking a Type 2 column.

Type 2 has a diameter of 15.3/4 inches (40cms) and apart from the location described above, can also be found flanking a Type 3 column for the buttress support of the central Transept arch.

Type 3 has a diameter of 17.3/4 inches (45cms) and is only found on the buttress support for the central Transept arch.

#### Roll and Fillet Columns

Type 1 has a diameter of 4 inches (10cms) and is located inside the arch of the western doorway into the Nave.

Type 2 has a diameter of 6 inches (15cms) and is located immediately within the west entrance of the Nave.

Type 3 has a diameter of 8 inches (20cms) and is located internally in the angles where the Nave walls join the West Front.

Type 4 has a diameter of 17.1/4 inches (44cms). There are three of these columns butted internally against the north and south walls of the Nave opposite the stair tower.

#### The Corbels

There are two types of corbel, one of the Twelfth Century, the other of the Thirteenth. The Twelfth-Century, Type 1, corbels appear to support either wall posts or the wooden structure of the Clerestory, being thick, heavy and squat, and coming in three widths arranged symmetrically at the east end of the Quire.

The Thirteenth-Century, Type 2, corbels inside the Nave all have roll-and-fillet bases though the corbels on the external west facade show some evidence of having had foliage-style decoration. The internal corbels were used to support the vault ribbing for the church. Two of these corbels were also placed on the Twelfth-Century wall of the Nave, proving a later addition. The corbels on the external west face were used as capitols for the now missing shafts beneath the arch.

### The Arches

Mouldings were taken of three arches; that at the west entrance, at the south Processional Door and at the west entrance to the Slype.

The arch of the large west door into the Church is an early English imitation of a Romanesque arch. The only Romanesque element is its round, low shape; the mouldings, however, are all contemporary with Early English architecture, especially the roll-and-fillet ribs and the foliate band of decoration above the arch. This arch dates to the Thirteenth Century, on style to c.1250.

The South Processional Arch is entirely Romanesque, dating to the late 1100s. It features some Norman elements, such as the columns of cable moulding, undercut chevrons (c.1170-1190), and a column of plain roll moulding. The arch itself is a combination of a segmental and semi-circular arch. Above the arch is a hood mould identical to the string course Type 5.

The arched entrance to the Slype is also a combination of a semi-circular and segmental arch, but of an earlier construction than the Processional Door, since it is much plainer in design and has a hood mould identical to string course Type 2. This same style of arch can also be found at the entrance to the Frater and at the North Passageway, suggesting a contemporary build, in the mid-1100s.

### The Windows

Type 1 represents the tall pointed Gothic openings on the West Front of the facade. These windows display bar tracery and have trefoil mouldings of the Thirteenth Century, in most cases dating to after 1250.

Type 2 is a smaller arched window found on the West Range, with a quatrefoil moulding, and plate tracery. This would suggest a date possibly earlier than 1250, and thus conflict with Rigold's interpretation of the wall as being a Fourteenth-Century feature.

Type 3 is a window found in the Frater on the south wall. It appears to be a later insertion cutting the line of string coursing (Type 1) and cutting into the base of the window (Type 4) above. It has a drop arch with undercut chevron moulding above it (on the internal face); the main element of the window though is a quatrefoil plate tracery design which suggests that the tracery was a Thirteenth Century insertion into an existing late 1100's build, the tracery being early to mid-1200s in date.

Type 4 is a tall semi-circular arched window found in the Quire and Frater. In the Frater it has a decorative band of stringcoursing (Type 3) following the curve of the arch and continuing as part of the main stringcourse of the wall. This indicates a contemporary build of window and coursing, dating to probably the mid-1100s.

Type 5 is a plain square window without any mouldings to help date it. It could possibly be post-Dissolution.

Type 6 is the fine, large Gothic East window at the east end of the Quire. According to Rigold, this is a Fourteenth-Century arch, but this is uncertain since little remains of its tracery. The style of the tracery as reconstructable is distinctly curvilinear though it retains some elements of the earlier geometrical tracery.

Book Locker This is a square opening found on the West face of the South Transept facing onto the Cloister, and has late Romanesque features. There is a mullion dividing the locker into two parts, the mullion having a vertical chevron projection. Above the opening is a semi-circular hood mould with undercut chevrons. This feature could therefore be contemporary with the Processional Arch, and window Type 3 mentioned above, dating to c.1160 or later.

### Conclusion

From examining the evidence of the stringcoursing alone, three discernible phases of building construction can be suggested. Phase One is of the mid-1100s, and represented by stringcourse Types 1, 1b and 2. Phase Two is

late-1100s and is represented by stringcourse Type 3. Phase Three dates to the Thirteenth Century and is represented by stringcourse Types 4, 4b and 5.

Evidence for Fourteenth-Century building construction suggested by Rigold is less clear, particularly since the East wall Gothic window could instead date to 1250-1300.

### Summary and Conclusions

The results of two seasons of survey and interpretation at Lilleshall Abbey, and an initial study of the mouldings from the whole of the complex, suggest the gradual evolution of the Abbey Plan. The first period of construction in the Twelfth Century would seem to consist of the building of a small, squat cruciform Church with a number of low side Chapels and related buildings to the south and south west. At an early stage plans would seem to have been altered and the Church was extended to the east and the Chapels completed. Towards the end of this composite phase the fine Processional Door was built, in the late 1100s, though no details about the layout of the Claustral area at this time are known.

The extension of the Church westwards occurred in a major, unified phase in the Thirteenth Century. The Nave, with its fine west front and towers, was now added. The Cloister was, perhaps, now completely laid out and major alterations made to the Chapels off the Quire. However, these later changes may instead belong to a Fourteenth-Century phase when the large east window was inserted at the end of the Quire.

Further alterations were made in the Nave, perhaps with a complete tier of new windows inserted, in the later Fourteenth Century. Post-monastic activity, that is stone-robbing, new building, and Civil War damage has contributed to the creation of the monument as it exists today.

### Recommendations for Further Work

1. The interpretative survey should be completed for those parts of the monument not recorded in 1987 or 1989.
2. Research should be undertaken into illustrative and photographic records (including post-war material that may help to shed light on the more recent incidents of renovation and repair), and into the documentary sources that can be used to supplement the survey records and provide a more complete history of the site.
3. Consideration should be given to mapping the earthwork features, including the ponds, many outside the Guardianship Area, that may be related to the Abbey Complex.

### Survey Staff

The survey was carried out in January 1989 under the supervision of Jon Sterenberg. Staff were Iain Ferris, Laurence Jones and Steve Litherland; Quentin Hutchinson undertook the recording of the mouldings and their subsequent interpretation, only a summary of which study (still in progress at the time of writing) appears in this report. The figures were prepared from the field drawings by Edward Newton, and the text typed by Ann Humphries.

The work was made much easier and more enjoyable by the help and advice of HBMC masons based at the site, to whom thanks are given.

I. Ferris  
Q. Hutchinson  
19.3.89

References

- Ferris, I.M. 1988 A survey of Lilleshall Abbey, Shropshire. B.U.F.A.U.  
Rigold, S.E. 1969 Lilleshall Abbey, Shropshire. Reprinted 1986 by  
English Heritage  
Wood, M. 1965 The English Medieval House. London

## List of Figures

Reference should be made to the First Interim Report for drawings of: the Nave, north wall, north face; the Nave, north wall, south face; the Quire, north wall, south face; and the North Transept, east wall, west face.

All drawings are by Edward Newton unless otherwise specified.

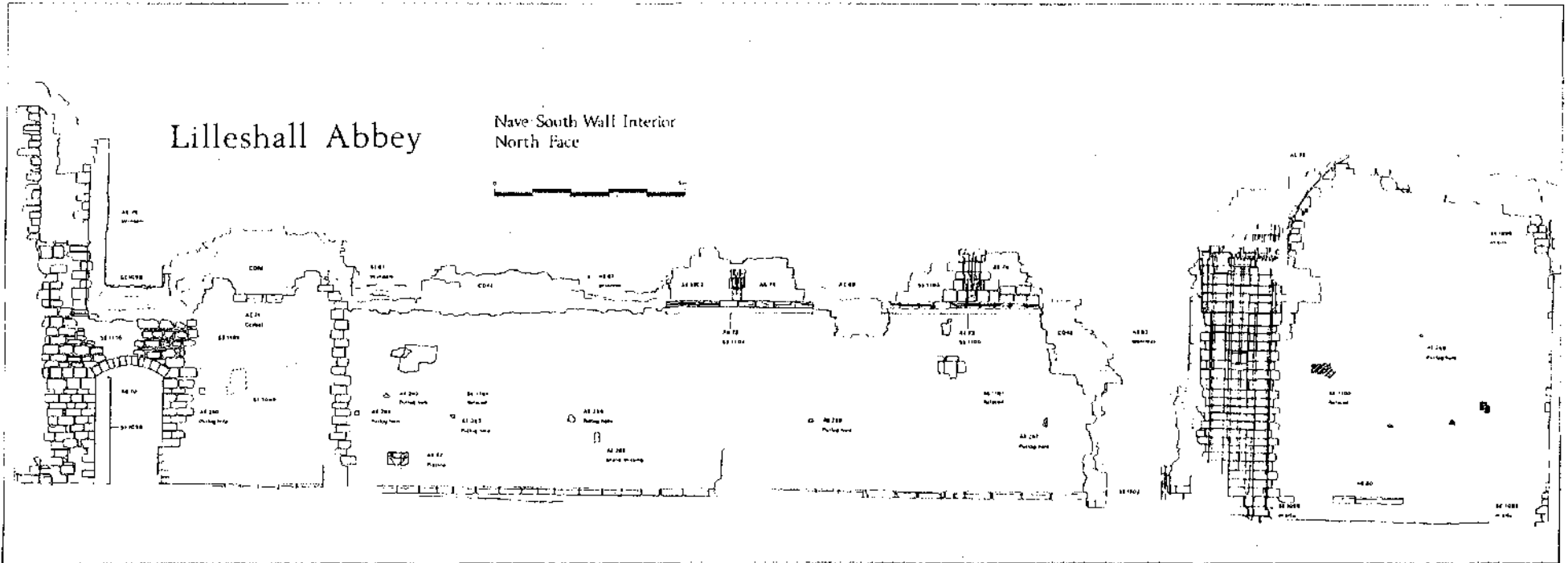
- Figure 1. Ground plan of the standing walls and location of stringcoursing. (I. Ferris).
- Figure 2. The Nave. South wall, north (internal) face.
- Figure 3. The Nave. South wall, south (external) face.
- Figure 4. The Quire. North wall, north (external) face. Stone by stone elevation. (I. Ferris).
- Figure 5. The Quire. North wall, north (external) face.
- Figure 6. The Quire. South wall, north (internal) face.
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- Figure 8. The East End. Internal and external faces.
- Figure 9. Window AE55. Moulding. (I. Ferris).
- Figure 10. The West Front. External face.
- Figure 11. Mouldings. Stringcourses. (Q. Hutchinson).
- Figure 12. The Pier Bases and Columns. (I. Ferris).



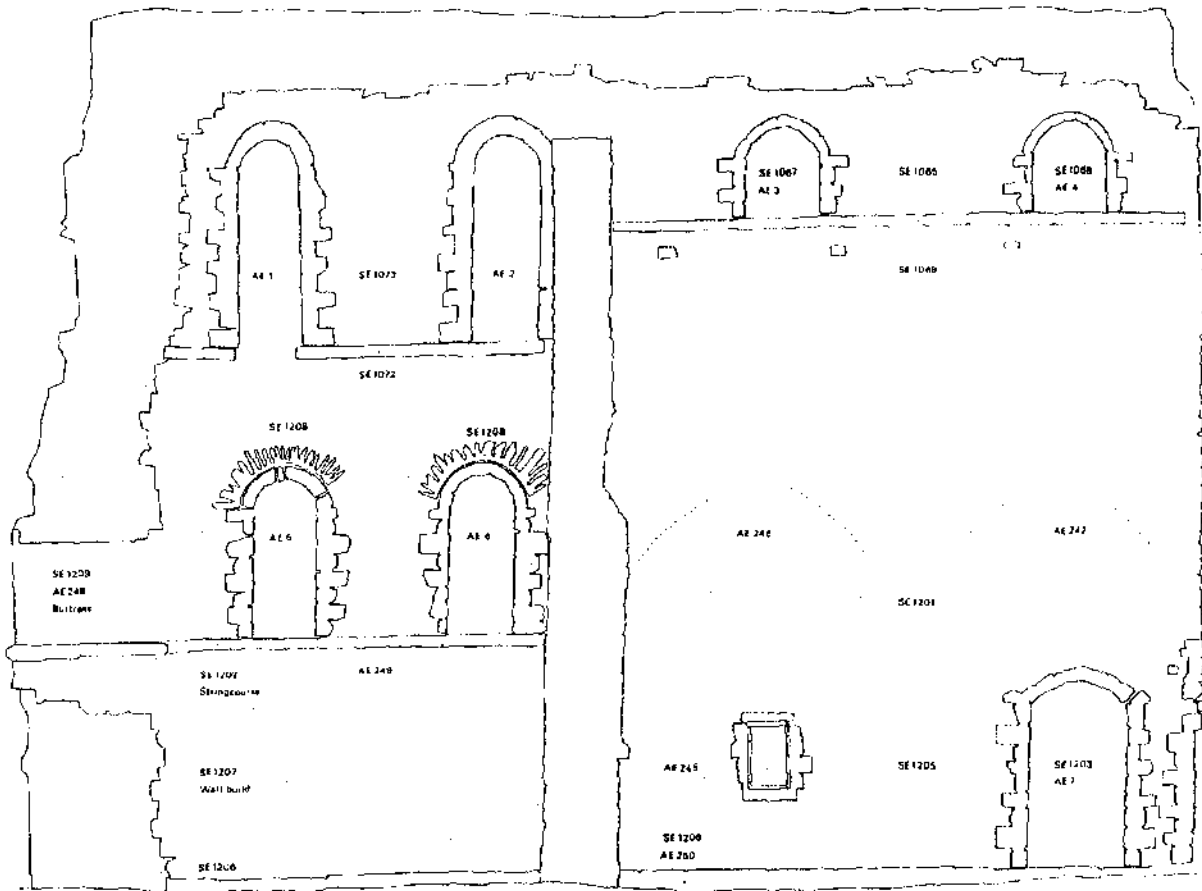


# Lilleshall Abbey

Nave South Wall Interior  
North Face



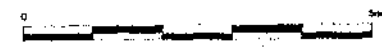




Lilleshall Abbey

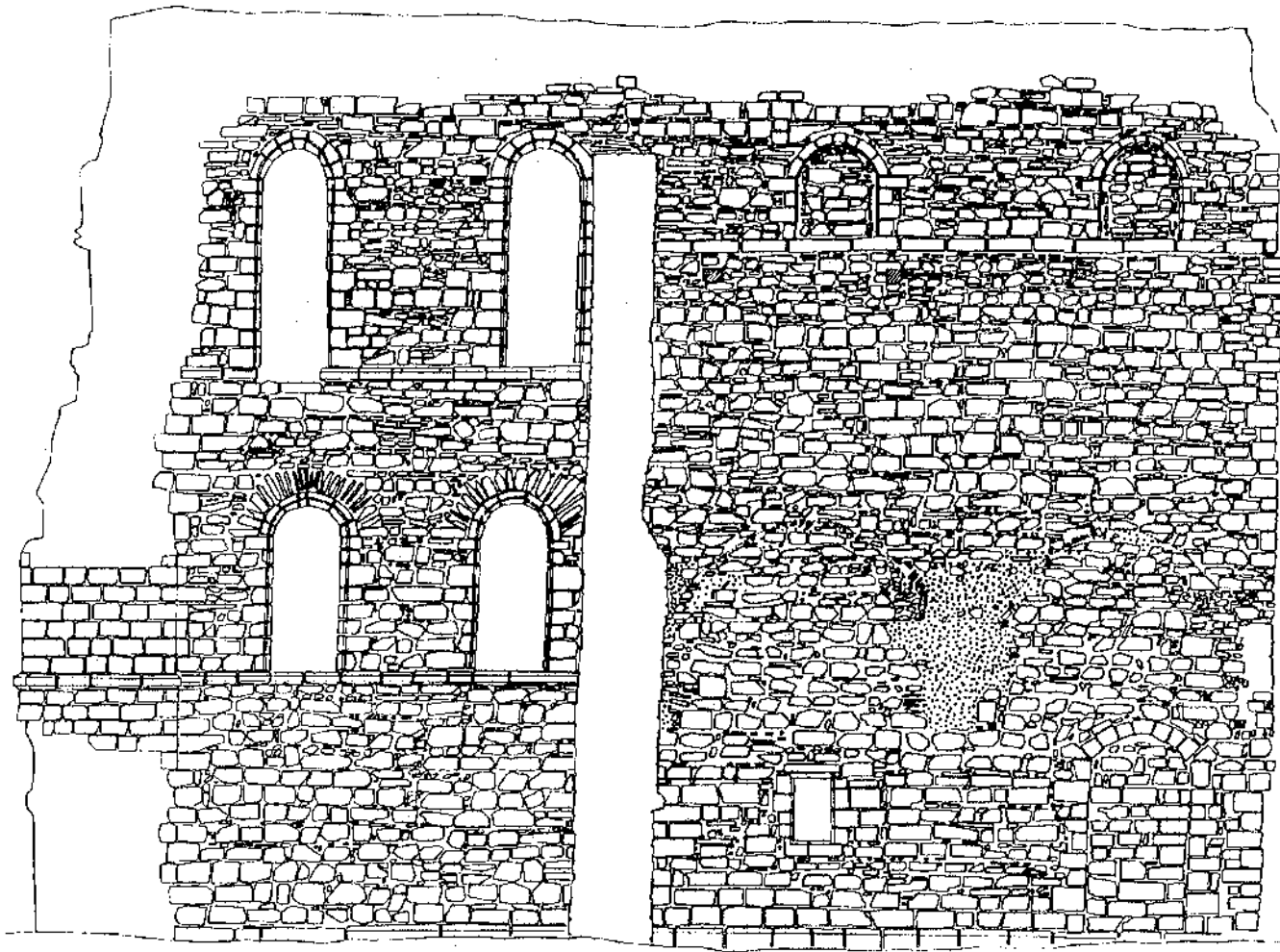
Quire

North Elevation  
North Face









Lilleshall Abbey

Quire North Elevation  
North Face

