

since the date of my two lectures on this subject, attended a meeting of the Liverpool Historic Society, where I heard Mr. Mortimer, and others, refer to a variety of circumstances which they had themselves verified. Mr. Picton has also kindly forwarded to me, in support of my views, a most able disquisition of his own, read in 1849, before the Literary and Philosophical Society of Liverpool; in which he refers also to the Rev. Dr. Hume, and others, as coinciding in opinion, and from which I should certainly have quoted largely, had I known of the pamphlet before I gave my last lectures.

*End of Part I. To be continued on a future page.*

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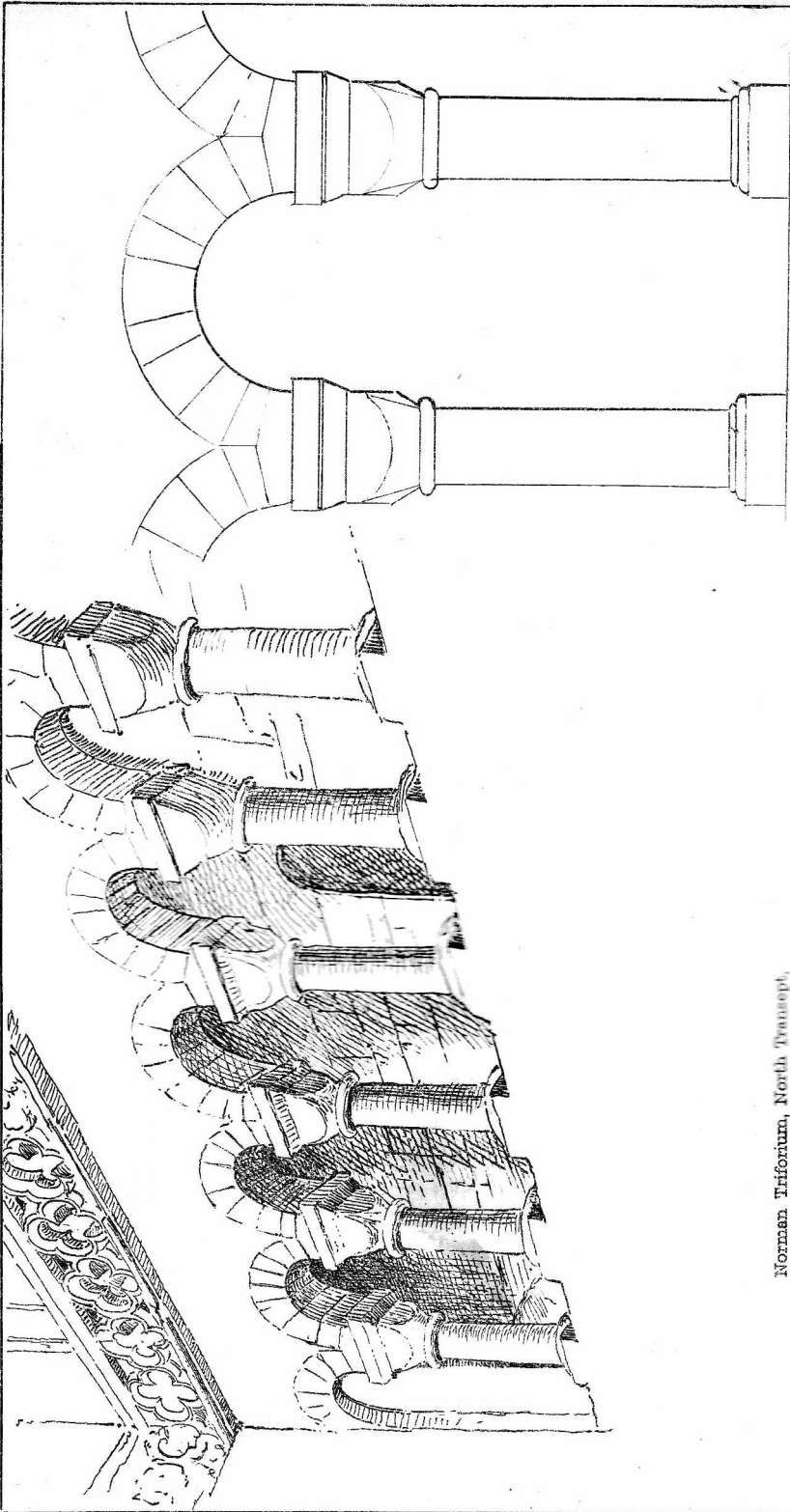
## The Norman Remains of Chester Cathedral.

BY WILLIAM AYRTON.

*Read at the Meetings of the Society, April 1st, and May 6th, 1850.*

IT was remarked by Mr. Ashpitel, in his lecture delivered at the Chester Congress of the British Archæological Association, that the Cathedral of Chester was rendered peculiarly rich and interesting as a study for the archæologist, from the variety of existing styles, distinctly marking the different periods of their erection, and assigning to each century its portion of a building, commenced as early as the reign of William Rufus, and added to during the succeeding ages, until it was scarcely completed by the alterations and additions for which it was indebted to the wealth and influence of Cardinal Wolsey. Of these varied portions, not the least interesting are no doubt those which remain of the Norman edifice. They are interesting from the very obscurity of their history; interesting from their character, their severe, simple, massive grandeur, alike indicative and illustrative of the age to which they belong; and which, if we were entirely at a loss for written authority, would tell us no less plainly the very era of their erection: interesting from the perfect state of preservation in which, after the lapse of so many ages, we still find them, and from the obscurity in which they have some of them remained so long buried, known only by report to the antiquarian, and entirely hidden from public view.

The records we have of the Abbey of St. Werburgh previous to the Conquest testify to the existence of a very important building, of which,



Norman Triforium, North Transept,  
Chester Cathedral.

W.F.

1 2 3 4 feet



indeed, we might even now expect to find some traces, were it not that their absence is fully accounted for by the fact that the Abbey had, in the beginning of the eleventh century, fallen into a state of great dilapidation; so much so, that in 1057, Leofric, Earl of Chester, when he visited the city, made the necessary repairs at his own expense.

In 1093, as shewn by the date of the original charter, Hugo d'Avranches (Hugh Lupus), then Earl of Chester, performed one of those acts by which the nobles of his day thought to atone for a vicious life, and laid the foundation of a magnificent building, the remains of which form the subject of the present consideration.

The remains which bear the appearance of earliest date, are those in the north transept of the Cathedral, on the east wall of which is part of a Triforium, consisting of seven arches,—four open, three blank. These arches are exactly semi-circular, springing from very plain capitals, and resting on plain cylindrical shafts, the bases of which are equally devoid of ornament, and unpossessed of well-proportioned character. The capitals, plain as they are, have been further mutilated to agree with the subsequent facing of the wall. The proportions are—

Width of each arch	...	...	...	...	2 feet 1 inch.
Length of shaft...	...	...	...	...	3 ,, 2 ,,
Length of pillar, including base and capital	...	...	...	...	5 ,, 4 ,,
Height of arch from the spring	...	...	...	...	1 ,, 0½ ,,

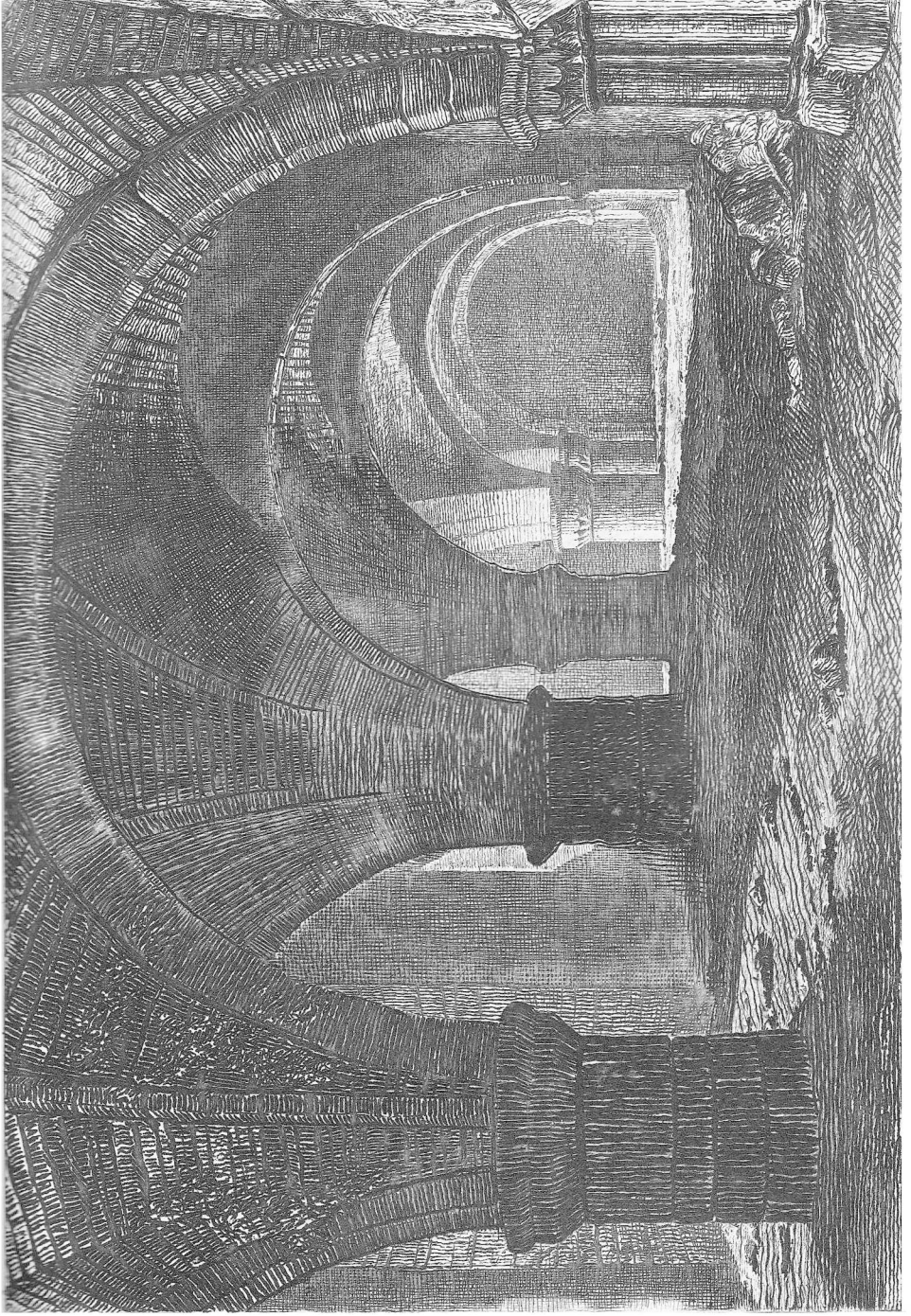
Access to this Triforium is at present obtained through an archway at the back of it, which corresponds in size and situation with the arch in front of it, and which appears to have been one of a double arcade, the remaining arches of which are now built up and hidden by plaster. On the opposite, the west wall of the transept, are three plain blank arches precisely similar, which are probably the remains of a corresponding Triforium, the front arcade of which has been removed in reducing the thickness of the wall for a subsequent design. In the east side of the east wall of this transept, and forming part of the present vestry, is a Norman arch springing from capitals, the mouldings of which are entirely lost in plaster, the shafts of the pillars being gone. This arch is very lofty and massive, being doubly recessed, the diameter of the outer arch being about nine feet, and the height to the centre of the arch from the present flooring about fifteen feet.

The part which may, perhaps, be safely considered as next in date, is what remains of the north-west tower, or rather the piers and arches intended to support it. These are exceedingly massive and bold in their proportions and relief, and would, if no other feature of the Norman building remained, alone convey an impressive idea of its pristine grandeur. They are strictly Norman, built in the small courses of masonry peculiar to the style. The intervals between the piers formerly open

to the south and east, are now walled up with solid masonry of much later date, in which existing corbels indicate a ceiling *then* built, even less lofty than the present one, which is yet not sufficiently so to prevent its interference with the Norman design, the arches of which it still breaks in upon and disfigures. In the south wall of the tower is a window, too devoid of character to claim a date, which looks into the west end of the Cathedral nave. In the north-west corner is a spiral staircase, now walled up, leading to the story above. This part of the building offers no ground for discussion or description. A few strokes of the pencil are sufficient to convey its simple design: its purpose is evident, and its character entirely agrees with the era to which it is ascribed,—the end of the eleventh century. One feature belonging to the piers is not so common in Norman architecture and proportionately interesting; the centre shaft of each pier supporting the south arch, instead of being cylindrical, forms an ellipsis of an acute angle.

On the west of the tower is an ante-chamber, on one wall of which has been a richly-ornamented Norman string course, of which only a fragment remains; it is the square nail-head ornament over a sort of scroll pattern.

We now come to a portion of the Norman edifice which has of late excited very great, and, perhaps, more than a proportionate interest. I mean the so-called Promptuarium, lately excavated. This chamber is a sort of gallery or cloister, on the ground floor, about ninety feet long, by forty feet wide, traversed in the centre by a row of pillars, (with one exception cylindrical), which divide it into six double bays, from which pillars, and from corresponding ones at each side, spring the intersecting arches by which the building is vaulted. I cannot pass by these pillars without calling your attention to their beautiful proportions, and their adaptation to the rude and ponderous roof which they support. They have been contrasted with similar pillars at Worcester and Canterbury; we may now compare them with others in the same building of which they still form part. It is interesting to find so great a variety in the specimens of Norman architecture which we possess in Chester Cathedral; and the variety is more striking when we see drawings of the different specimens brought together and closely contrasted. The pillars of the Triforium in the north transept are like those in the Crypt at Canterbury, rude and ill proportioned; the shafts small, the capitals heavy and overloaded, while in those of the Norman vault the very reverse is the case, each pillar being really beautiful in itself, and still more so when considered with reference to the vaulted roof which it supports. The side pillars are as entirely Norman in their character as the centre ones, being simply the square pier, on each face of which is the pilaster attached. The groining of the roof is without the finish of ribs at the joints, a finish characteristic of a later period.



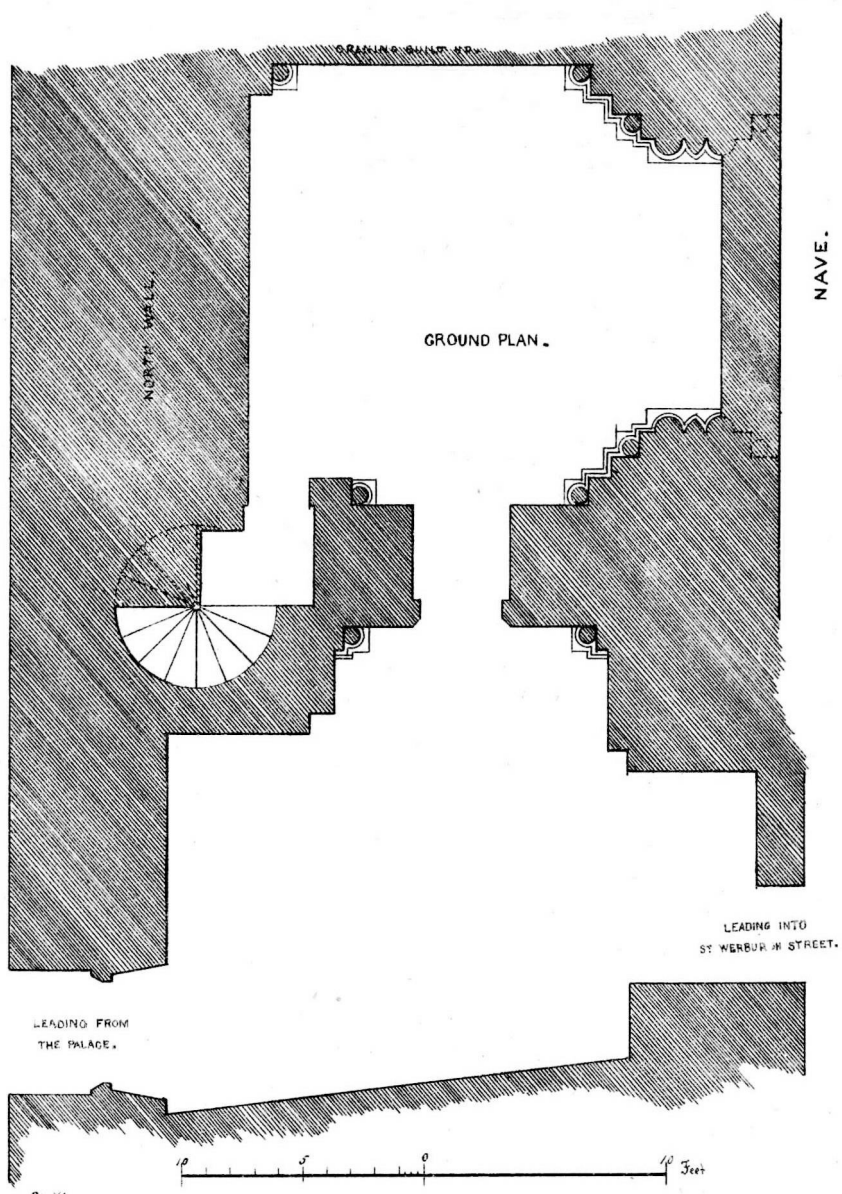
Norman Vaulted Cellar - Chester Cathedral







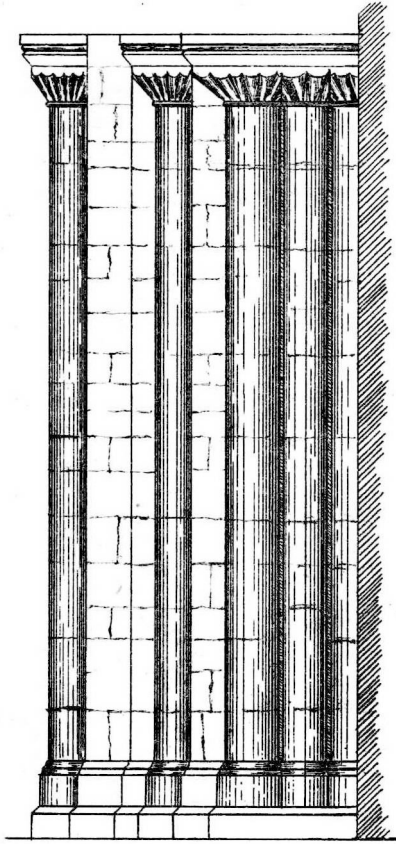
NORTH WEST TOWER CHESTER CATHEDRAL



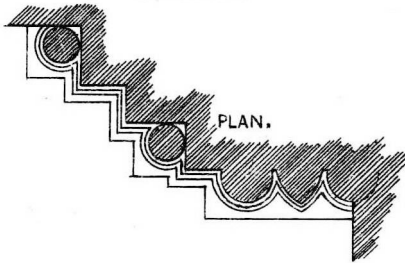
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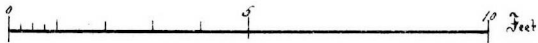
PILLARS IN THE NORTH WEST TOWER CHESTER CATHEDRAL 1886



ELEVATION .



PLAN .



James Harrison, del.

The chamber, which has at present only a borrowed light from the cloisters, on the east, was originally lighted from the west side by a window in each bay, except the second bay from the south end, in which was a principal entrance. This doorway and the windows are now all choked up by the adjoining garden. There are a few unimportant alterations of later date on the west side. On the same side, and at the north end, is a very large chimney and fire-place. A glance at the groining and arches at the north end informing us that the chamber did not formerly end here, I was induced to think, by this situation of the fire-place, that its length was originally very much greater. I have since found the termination of the chamber in the cellars of the present Registry, where the groining is supported by corbels, which shew that the vault extended there, but no further. One double bay, therefore, added to the present remains, gives us the entire length of the building,—about one hundred and five feet. In this last bay, on the east side, is a principal doorway, (four inches wider than the one on the west side), leading towards the Refectory. On the east side also, and near the north end, is a postern from the cloisters and a spiral staircase, partly constructed in the thickness of the wall, leading to the chamber above, of which there are now no remains. Two small archways at opposite sides of the chamber, precisely similar in form and size, and rising from beneath the level of the floor, seemed to indicate a subterranean passage connecting them. An excavation round each has, however, discovered no channel between them. In considering the character and situation of this vaulted chamber it should be borne in mind that though now apparently subterranean, it is only so with reference to the west side, the level of the floor being four feet above the level of the nave of the Cathedral. The ground which now rises above it on the west side is all *made* ground of late date, belonging to the Palace, the original level of which is identical with this chamber, as shewn by the area round the present Palace kitchens, and by those apartments belonging to the Abbot's residence, which yet remain.

Having now placed this remain before you as clearly as is in my power, allow me to inquire, has it been properly named "the Promptuarium?"

I do not raise the objection for the sake of an objection, or from an affectation of seeking to differ; but I really do not think there is any authority for it; and the more I consider it the more I do think that the style and size of the building bespeak a different purpose.

Let us see how far we have any authority for considering this building a "Promptuarium,"\* that is, a store-room, or buttery. All that Ormerod says of it is, that "it is a kind of crypt, consisting of a double row of circular arches, springing, with one exception, from short cylindrical columns. This building was probably used as a depository for the

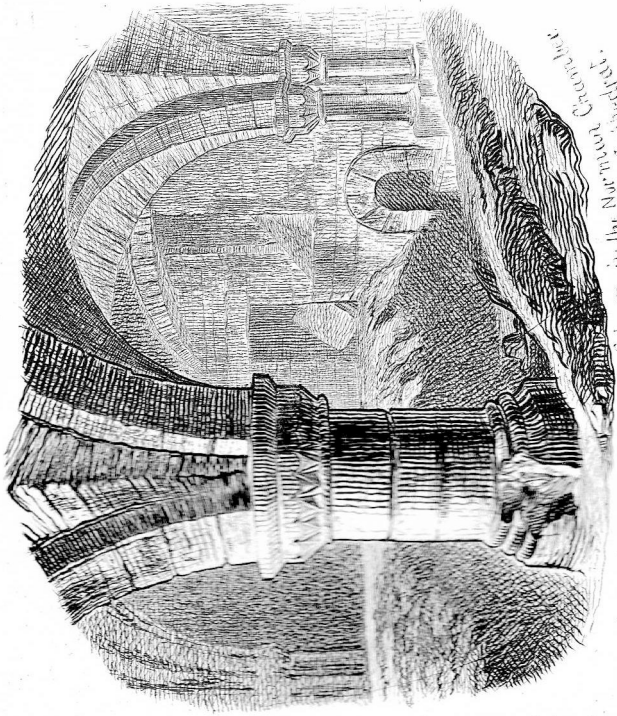
\* Promptuarium. *Ex quo aliquid depromitur*—a store room, buttery, or spence.

imported stores of the Abbey, of which we may form no mean idea from a charter from the King of the Isles to the Abbot of St. Werburgh, granting ingress and egress to the vessels of the Monks of the Abbey of St. Werburgh, with sale and purchase of goods toll free, and right of fishing upon his coasts." (Vol. I. page 218.) But he gives us no authority for the use ascribed to it; only his own unsupported supposition, hazarded when the building was not so far cleared or intelligible as at present. The name "Promptuarium" was bestowed on it by Mr. Ashpitel when it was cleared out and restored to its present condition at the expense of the British Archæological Association, under the direction of the Local Committee, preparatory to the Congress of 1849. He derives the name from a sentence in Henry the VIII.'s charter (dividing the properties between the Bishop and the Dean and Chapter,) and speaks of this building in the *plural*, which agrees with his reading of the charter, but does not agree with the fact. He says, in his lecture on Chester Cathedral, "These are vaulted apartments of early Norman work, and are described in the charter of Henry VIII., by which he divides the properties between the Bishop and the Dean as *Promptuaria et Pannaria*, the former derived from a word denoting a butler or steward, probably a buttery, and the latter from *pannus*, a cloth, probably the place for clothing."\* The sentence to which Mr. Ashpitel alludes, and which he applies to this building, is the one describing the chamber which was called the "*secunda aula*"—"nec non secundam aulam, seu interiorem cum suis pannariis, promptuariis, et ceteris ejusdem membris."

No doubt the hall, which was of great importance, had its *promptuaria* and *pannaria*, with its other appropriate offices; but I see no ground for applying these plural designations to a single chamber of such extent and character. We find the same terms used elsewhere in the charter with reference to other parts of the building, where there is no such chamber on which to bestow them.† I must also suggest that we do not elsewhere find in remains of this date buildings of such unbroken extent, magnitude, and continuous design, for such a purpose. Store-houses and offices there were attached to every conventual building of like importance, but we shall find them, I apprehend, always more equally quadrangular, more confined, and with a regard to convenience which predominates over the attention paid to style and effect. Here we have a chamber of vast extent (we have now ascertained its original length to have been 105 feet), in which the design has been kept carefully unbroken by the details or partitions necessary to offices such as the word "*Promptuarium*" describes. We see throughout the whole extent great attention paid to the

\* Journal of the British Archæological Association for October, 1849, page 5.

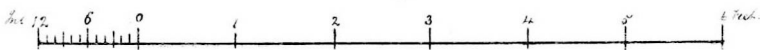
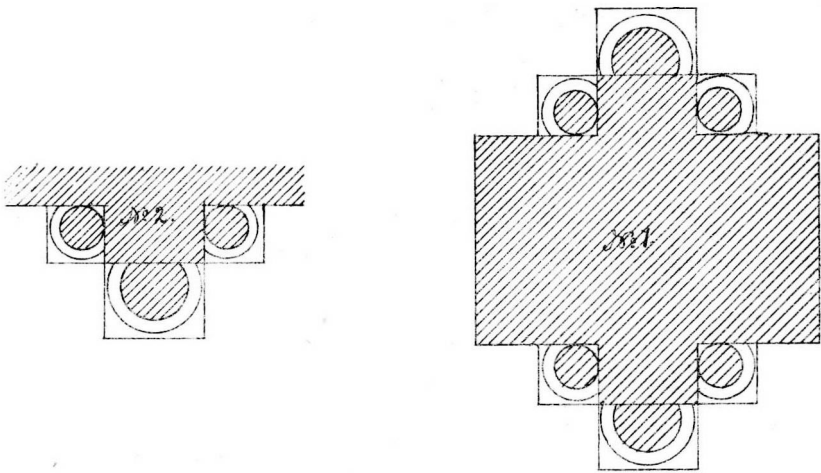
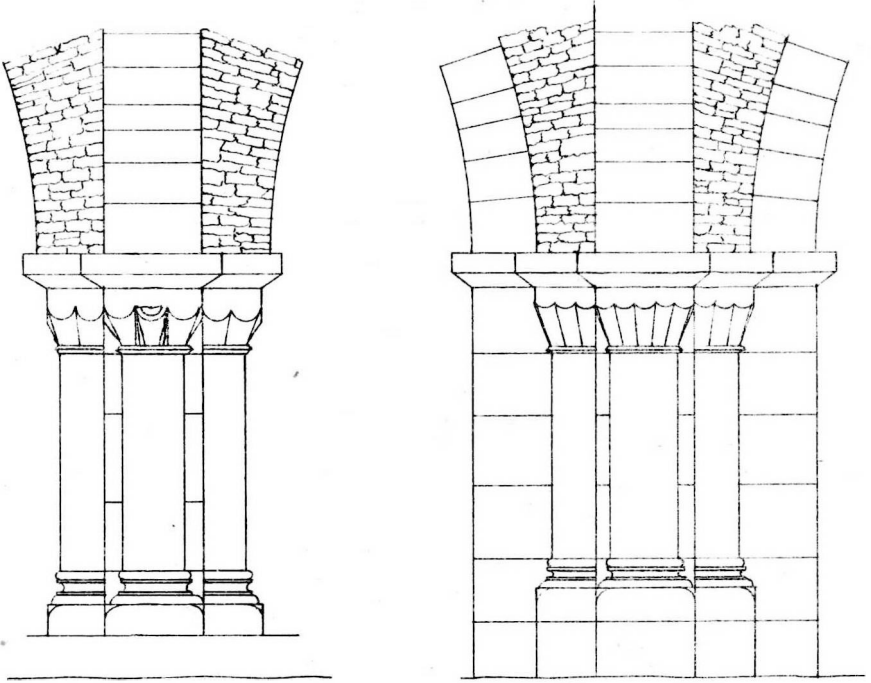
† "*Conclave unum publicum vocatum 'Abbot's Parlour' cum promptuariis et pannariis eidem adstructis.*"



Column in the Norman Cathedral,  
Chester



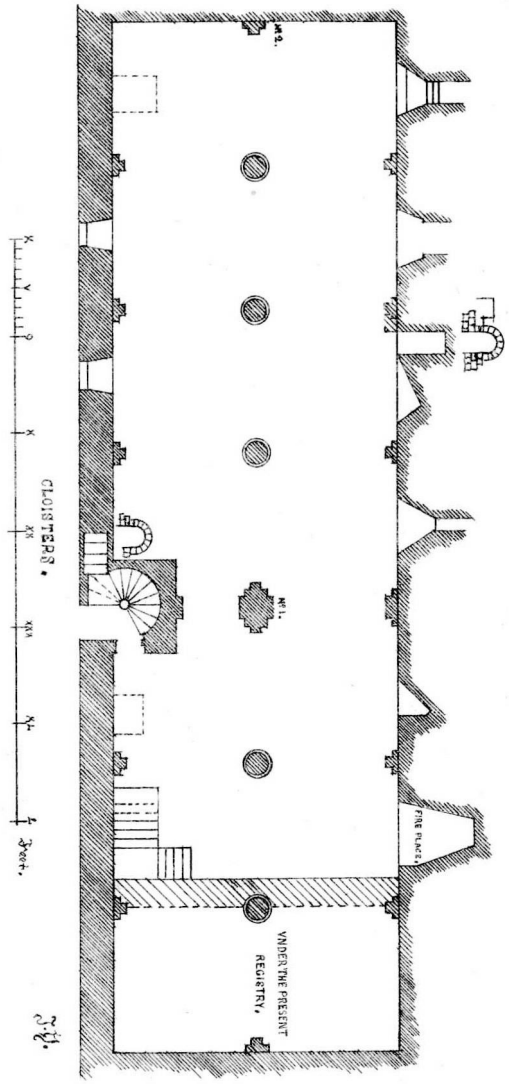
Piers in the Vaulted Chamber, Chester Cathedral.





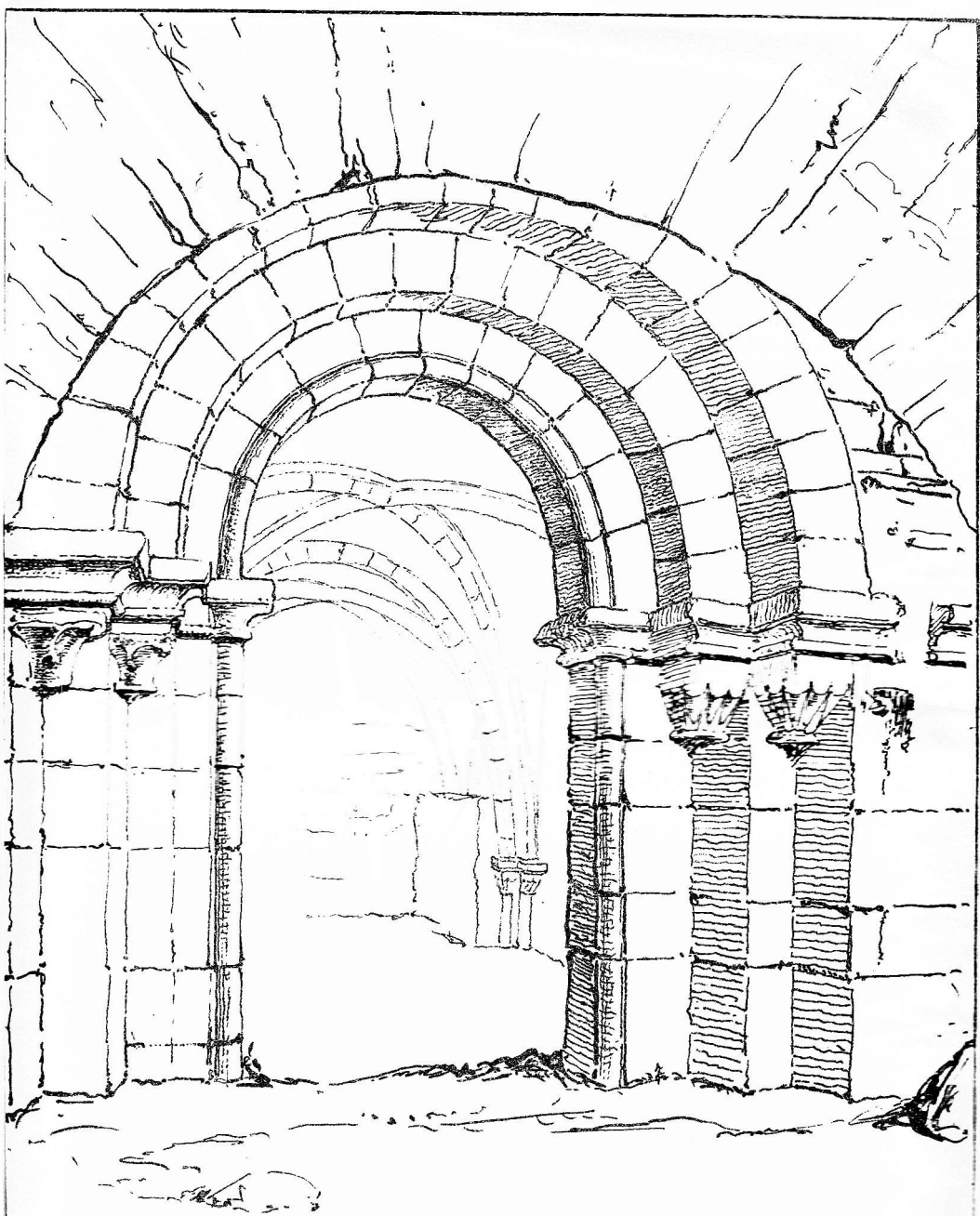


NORMAN WEALED CHAMBER CHESTER CATHEDRAL.









*Norman Doorway, formerly leading from the Abbot's apartments to the Cloisters,  
Chester Cathedral.*

1850

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arrangement, the regularity, and the ornamentation of the building; and we find the pillars, the capitals, shafts, and bases, unbroken and uninjured save by the hand of time, and, notwithstanding the friable nature of the stone, for the most part as sharp and well defined as they were left by the chisel of the mason. It appears to me impossible to reconcile all these particulars with the purposes assigned to the building by Ormerod, or by Mr. Ashpitel.\*

I may now perhaps be asked, "If this chamber was neither a store-room nor a promptuarium, what was it?" It is not without hesitation that I attempt to answer that question. From its length, its double bay of arches, and its situation between the church, the refectory, and the Abbot's apartments, I should have deemed it a cloister; probably *the* Norman cloister, when the ground occupied by the present cloisters was differently appropriated; but, unlike a cloister, it is closed on every side, and the existence of the fire-place does not agree with that assumption; added to which the original windows are all on the side belonging to the Abbot's apartments, the side to the church having been entirely closed with the exception of the postern. My belief is, that it was no other than the "Secunda Aula" itself, mentioned in Henry the Eighth's charter; a sort of spacious hall for the accommodation of the Abbot's friends and dependents, for the reception of strangers, and the exercise of that large hospitality which was dealt out so freely and bountifully in the eleventh and succeeding centuries in all important monastic establishments. That its claim to the title of the "Secunda Aula" has hitherto been overlooked, may arise from its having been erroneously considered (as by Ormerod) a sort of crypt, or subterranean building; whereas a little consideration of its level, and the ground around it, will shew us that it has only assumed that character since the sixteenth century.†

In the next vestige of Norman work which comes before us, we find undoubted marks of a later era. This is a vaulted passage running across

\* In venturing thus decidedly to dissent from Mr. Ashpitel, I should remark, that the limited time at his disposal during the Congress, and the many constant demands made upon it, gave him little opportunity for more than a very cursory view of the building; and I cannot but think, that had leisure permitted him to examine it as minutely and frequently as I have since done, his conclusion might have been different. I take this opportunity of acknowledging his kindness in assisting me with extracts from the original records, and other data relating to the history of the Cathedral. Neither can I forbear expressing the pleasure afforded to myself and others by his graphic and masterly lectures delivered during the Congress, especially the one undertaken at half an hour's notice, and given extemporaneously on the Church of St. John the Baptist.

Since the above remarks were delivered, a chamber has been discovered at Furness Abbey of almost identical character, and with a similar row of columns running down the centre, by Mr. Sharpe, who gives it the title of the Hospitium, and assigns to it purposes almost the same as I assume for the Secunda Aula.

the south end of the "Secunda Aula," and leading from the Abbot's apartments to the Cathedral. It is groined in exactly the same proportions as the bays of the Norman chamber, and the arches are circular, springing from pillars precisely similar, but the groining is ribbed, and not with cylindrical, but elliptical mouldings. These mouldings stamp a semi-Norman character on the work, being almost a transition to the early English style. Two beautiful Norman doorways gave ingress and egress from this passage, and still remain, though the one which opened to the present west cloister is closed, and sadly disfigured by the alterations of the sixteenth century. The other doorway, to the west, is yet perfect, excepting the shafts of the pillars, which are gone. The capitals supporting one side of the architrave are foliated, and of late character for Norman work.

The remains which stamp the Norman character on the lower part of the north wall of the Nave, are two rude arcades on the north side of the wall, which formed the south side of the present cloisters, and which mark the place of sepulture of the early Abbots. Only four Abbots are specifically named as buried here\* :—

Richard, first Abbot, who died in 1117, and was buried in the east end of the south cloister.

William, second Abbot, was buried at the head of Richard, 1140.

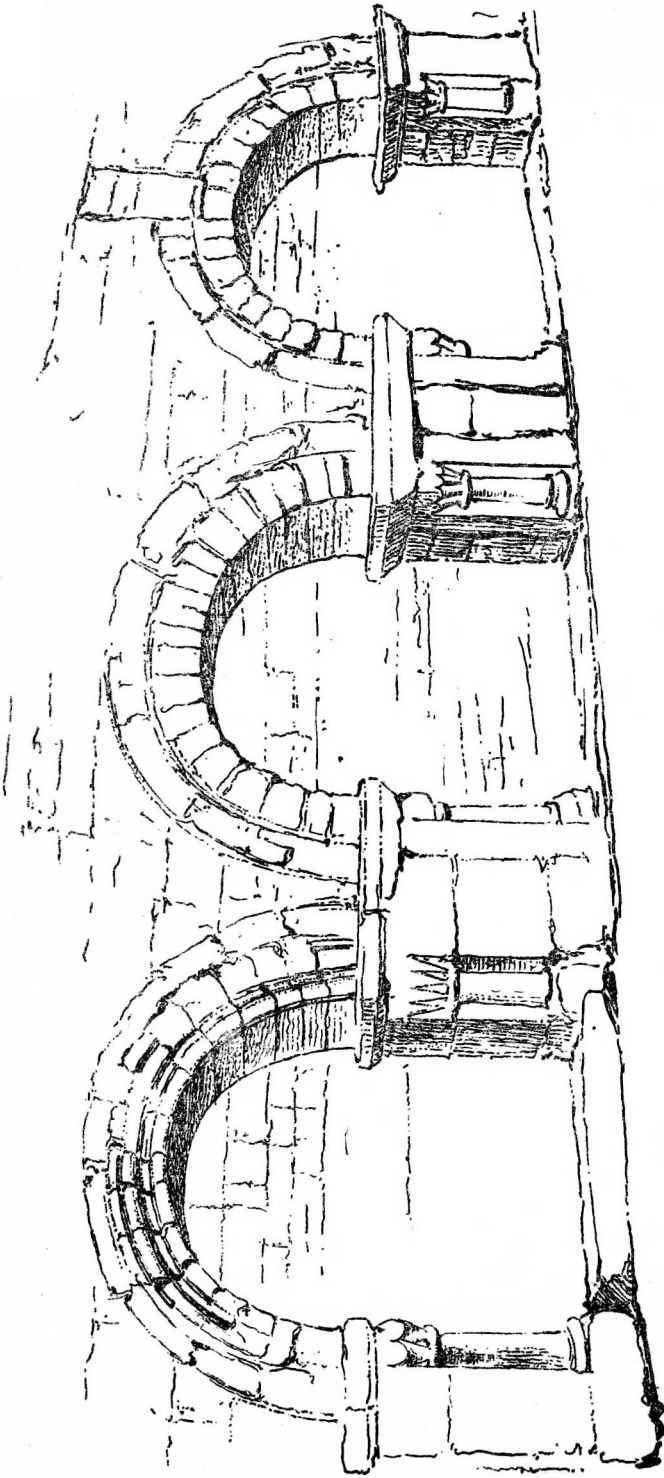
Ralph, third Abbot, was buried at the left side of William, 1157; and

Robert de Hastings, sixth Abbot, was buried at the head of William and Ralph.

This only accounts for three of the arches, supposing them to have been erected specially to mark separate tombs, but they all bear a late date for Norman work, as far as we can judge from what remains of the architraves, and were probably all built at the same time as the passage from the Abbot's apartments.

At the south end of the east cloister, and forming the present entrance from that cloister to the Cathedral, is a Norman doorway, of about the same date as the arcade adjoining it. The architrave is very ornate, bearing the billet ornament, accompanied by a bead which runs between the mouldings. Unfortunately the stone has perished more in this doorway from exposure than in those of the vaulted passage; but still more has been lost from the unmerciful treatment it has received at the hands of the plasterer. It is quite choked up with plaster and colouring, which might, with a little care and trouble, be all removed, and the door restored to something more like its original effect. The capitals of the pilasters are foliated, and identical with those already noticed in the Norman doorway of the vaulted passage.

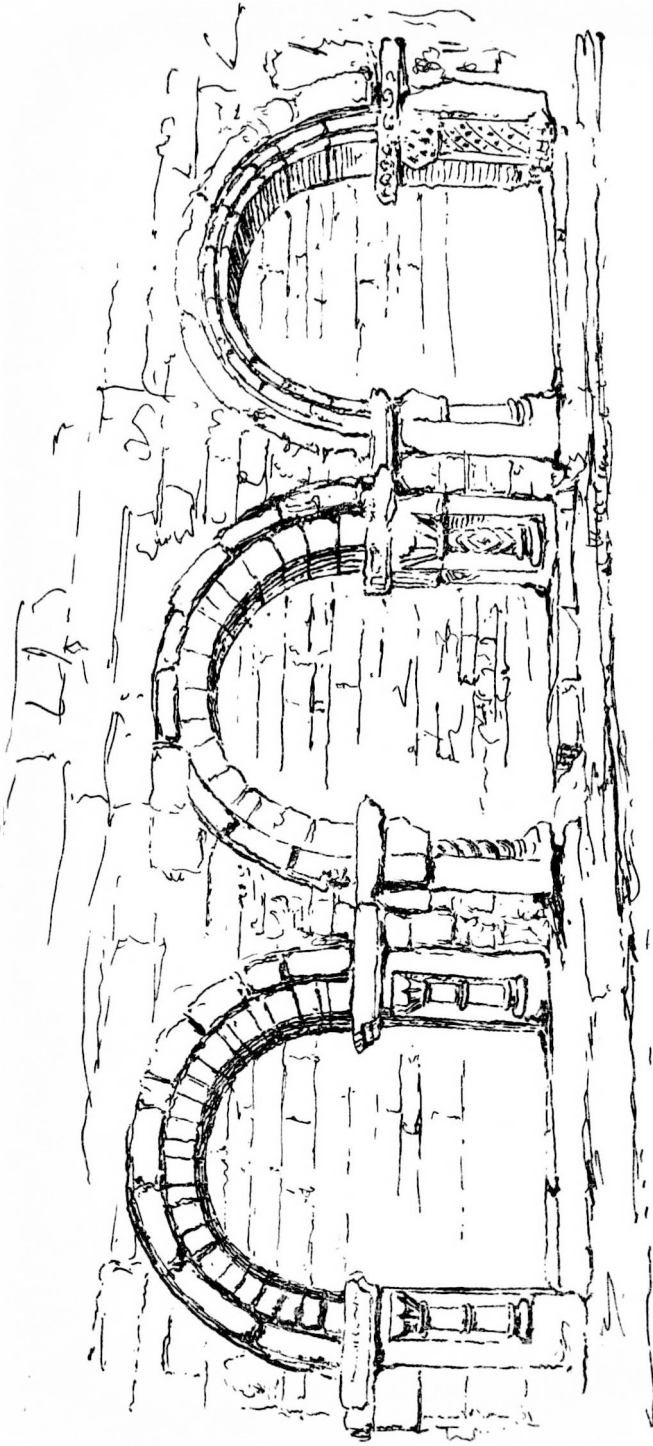
\* See a few lines endorsed on a M.S. bound up with the Red Book. Harleian Collection, No. 2671.



Norman Arcade in the South Cloister. Chester Cathedral.  
1850.

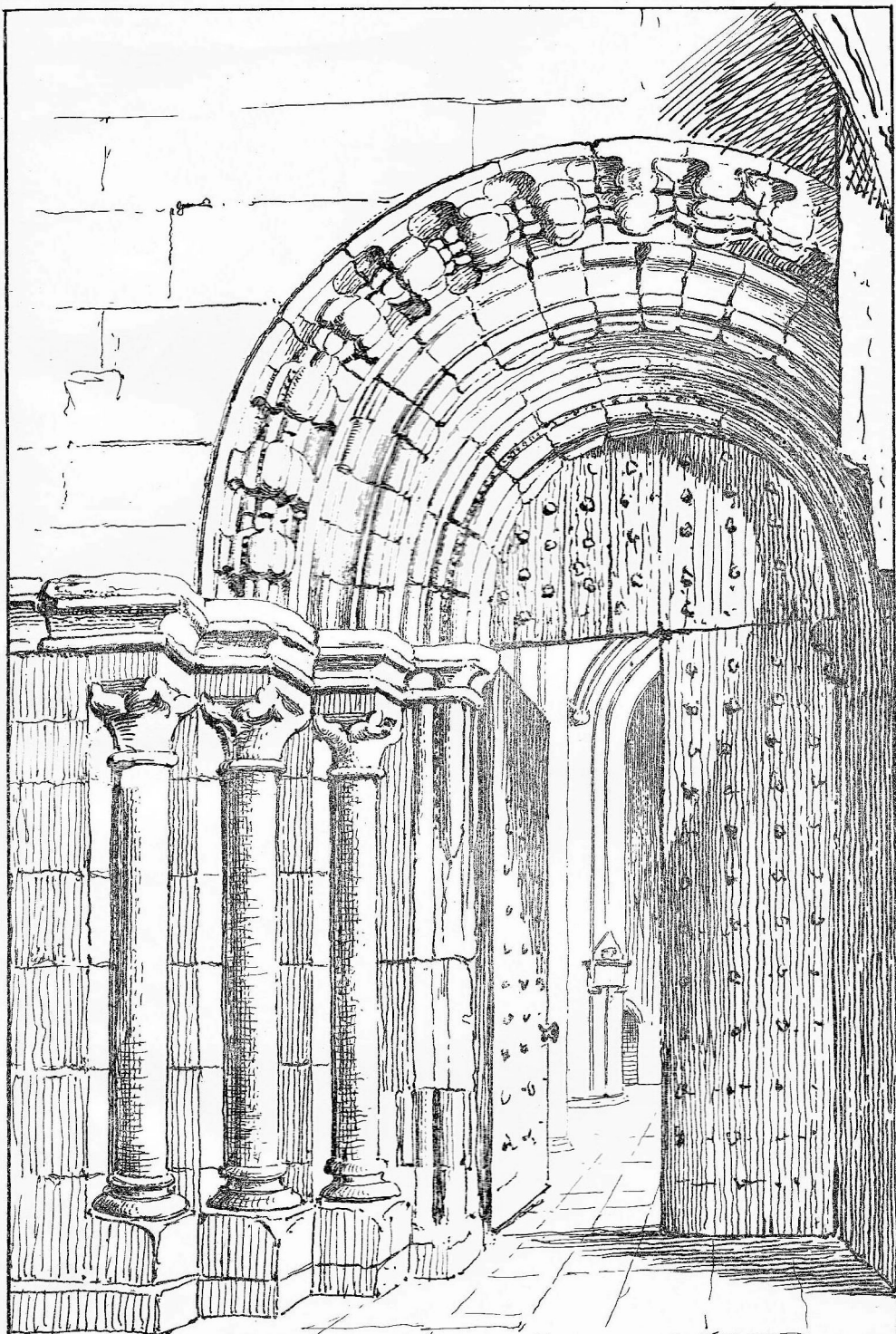






*South Chancel Chester Cathedral*

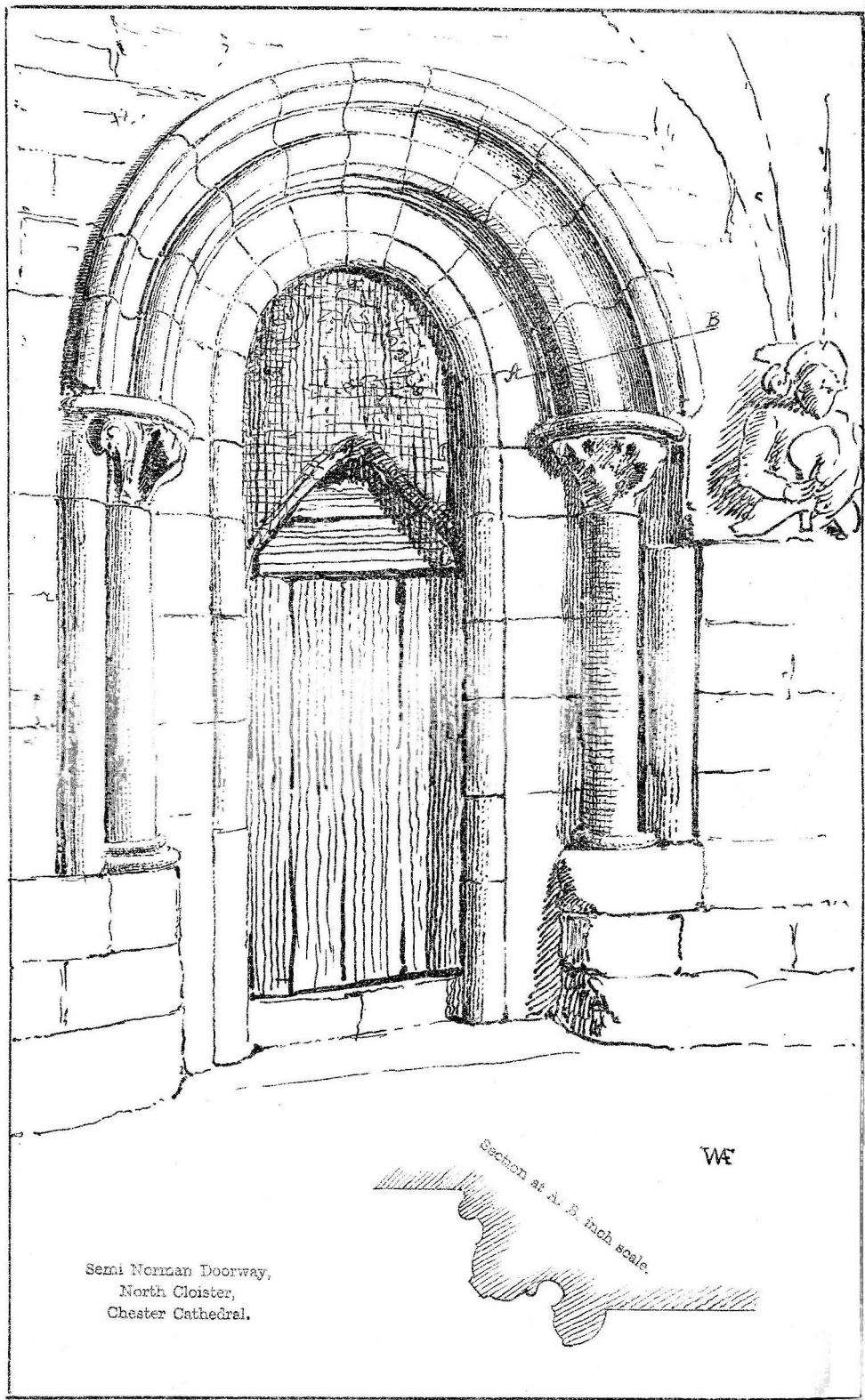




*Norman Doorway from the East Cloister into the Nave  
Chester Cathedral.*







Semi Norman Doorway,  
North Cloister,  
Chester Cathedral.

Section at 1/4" = 1" scale.

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We now come to a specimen of Norman work of so late date that it will very appropriately terminate our present subject. It would, indeed, as appropriately illustrate the commencement of another,—the Early English era. The Norman semi-circular architrave remains, but its mouldings stamp it as belonging to the transition from Norman to Early English. The capitals of the pillars are foliated, and, as far as their broken perished condition will allow us to judge, are of the “pear” pattern. This doorway belongs to a passage which appears to have run from the Abbey-square to the cloisters, across the west end of the refectory. A former opening to it at right angles with this door is also to be traced in that part of the Norman vault which is under the present Registry, and from the style and size of the doorway which remains, it has been a very principal entrance to that building. The corbels and vestiges remaining of this passage are all of later date even than the semi-Norman doorway, which is one entrance to it, being purely Early English.

In conclusion, I must express my obligations to Mr. Harrison and Mr. Penson, whose plans, measurements, and kind assistance may have given some value to remarks which would have been vague and indefinite without them.

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