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PART II.—PAPERS, ETC.

Further Notes on the Somerset Church Towers

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YEARS ago it was my intention not to publish any classification of the Somerset Towers until my acquaintance with the subject should be so complete that I should never have to retract a statement, though I might add subsequent observations. But in 1902, when I had already worked at the subject for more than twenty years and had made a great quantity of notes and photographs, my friend Mr. R. P. Brereton entered the same field of work: and, as he decided to publish his results in 1904, I was obliged to publish a paper simultaneously, in order to assert my priority; although I knew that several more years of work were necessary before my classification could attain the standard of accuracy at which I aimed.

As I foresaw at the time, it has been necessary to modify

my views in some respects. In my former papers (see the *Proceedings*, vols. L and LI, 1904-5) I made the arrangement of the windows the primary basis of classification of the towers: but a more extended acquaintance with the towers has shown me that, although the window arrangement is important, it is only the secondary distinguishing feature. The true basis of classification is the schools of builders, each of which left its characteristic features on the towers which it built. I imagine that the schools of masons, attached to Wells Cathedral and to the various abbeys and priories, competed with each other in the production of fine towers; hence the high degree of perfection attained in this county.

My attempts to identify the schools of builders are only speculative, and open to correction: but I believe that the reality of the "groups" will be corroborated by further research, even if opinions differ as to the exact relationship of those towers which combine features of two or more groups.

The following are the eight principal groups of towers:—

1. The Cathedral group (Fig. 1).
2. „ West Mendip „ (Fig. 2).
3. „ East Mendip „ (Fig. 3).
4. „ Quantock „ (Fig. 4).
5. „ North Somerset „ (Fig. 5).
6. „ South Somerset „ (Fig. 6).
7. „ Devon „ (Fig. 7).
8. „ Brislington „ (Fig. 8).

Each group appears to be the product of a particular school of masons; but in the absence of certain knowledge about the schools it is best to name the groups of towers according to their geographical situation. Each group, except No. 8, belongs to a definite area; though a few towers, especially on the confines of the areas, show the influence of two or more schools.

The two Mendip groups and the Quantock group are all three closely related, being all developed from one model.

The other groups are more distinct in form and detail, (though not so high in quality,) and probably had independent origins.

Although the *grouping* which I now present is somewhat different from that given in my former papers, the former *descriptions* of the towers require hardly any alteration beyond the corrigenda given in the second paper. (*Proceedings*, LI, 1905).

In the former papers the single-window towers were not classified; therefore in the present paper these are more minutely described than the multiple-window towers, which were previously considered.

The Stair Turret.—The presence or absence of this is not distinctive of any school. In nearly all the towers of the County a stair turret is a prominent and beautiful feature. In three towers,—St. Cuthbert's, North Petherton, and Lyng, —it ceases below the middle of the tower: at Wrington and Lympsham one of the turrets is larger than the rest, to accommodate the stair: at Mells, Leigh, Chewton, Evercreech, Glastonbury St. John's, and Wells Cathedral, the stair does not affect the form of the tower.

In three of the accompanying illustrations, namely Bruton, Bishops Lydeard, and Norton-under-Hamdon, the stair turret does not appear, though it is present in each of these towers.

(I.) The Cathedral Group.

1. *Triple-windowed, i.e. having three windows abreast in the top-stage.*
   Cathedral Central Tower.

2. *Double-windowed.*
   Cathedral Western Towers, Wells St. Cuthbert's.

The idea of producing distinguished towers evidently originated at Wells, and in fact at the Cathedral itself.

The Central Tower, built early in the XIV Century, set a model which was afterwards repeated with modifications in

several other towers. Looking at this tower, we may note that each face of it is divided into three tall compartments, containing windows above, the tracery of which is *continued*[1] downwards so as to form blind panels in the lower portion. I have called this arrangement the "long panel": it causes the two upper stages together to appear outwardly as a tall single stage.

The original features of the central tower are somewhat concealed by the alterations of a later period, when the window-openings were partially filled, and much small ornament was added.

The WESTERN TOWERS of the Cathedral were imitated from the central. Harewell's, the southern of them, was built about 1386; and Bubwith's, the northern, was copied from it about 1424. Both of these have two tall compartments with long panels, but their outline differs widely from that of the central tower, owing to the different arrangement of the buttresses and the absence of corner turrets.

ST. CUTHBERT'S church tower (Fig. 1) is made up of details borrowed mostly from the Cathedral towers. It has the long panel arrangement: the prominent buttresses were perhaps suggested by the western towers, and the corner turrets are developed from those of the central tower. Thus St. Cuthbert's carries on the traditions of the Cathedral towers, and may be a later work of the men who produced Harewell's and Bubwith's.

(No other tower can be certainly attributed to the same school. Nevertheless the long-panel device was borrowed by the East Mendip builders for Batcombe and Evercreech, and by the North Somerset builders for Wrington. Ilminster tower is a distant imitation of the Cathedral central tower, by a later school of builders.)

1. Contrast with the *discontinuous* tracery at Ilminster, Leigh, Mells, Chewton, Glastonbury St. John's, and the Gloucestershire towers.

(II.) The West Mendip Group.

1. *Triple-windowed.*

Shepton Mallet (Fig. 2),	Wedmore (central),
Winscombe,	Bleadon,
Banwell	Weare,
(Illus. in *Proceedings*, li),	Mark,
Cheddar,	Brent Knoll.
Axbridge (central),	

2. *Double-windowed.*

Locking,	Hutton.

3. *Single-windowed.*

None truly characteristic, though several single-windowed towers have points of resemblance to the group; *e.g.* Kewstoke, Dinder, Pylle.

This is the next in antiquity of origin to the Cathedral group. It is the most homogeneous of all the groups, and may safely be attributed to a school of builders attached to Wells, possibly a section of the Cathedral school employed on parish churches rather than on the Cathedral.

The earliest extant of this group is the tower of Shepton Mallet, which appears to be the oldest of the great parochial towers of the County, and it would be interesting to know when this tower was built. A possible clue to the date is afforded by the form of the tracery in its windows. This tracery occurs in nearly all the towers of this group, and in several towers in North Somerset and South Gloucestershire: it was also inserted (in the Perpendicular period) into most of the Early English windows at Wells Cathedral. Otherwise this form of tracery is uncommon. It does not occur, I believe, in adjacent parts of England; but it prevails in the towers of the East Riding of Yorkshire, especially in that of the chapel at Skirlaugh, near Hull, built by Walter Skirlaugh, a native of the said village, who was Bishop of Bath and

Wells from 1386 to 1388. It is possible that under Walter Skirlaugh's rule this form of tracery was introduced from Yorkshire into Somerset or vice versâ,[1] and the West Mendip towers may have been begun soon after 1386. The towers of Shepton Mallet and Banwell, also Winscombe except its later parapet and pinnacles, have other early characters in addition to the Skirlaugh tracery, so that it is reasonable to suppose that these three were built before the year 1400. Cheddar and Axbridge towers are probably not much later.

The early tower at Shepton Mallet has the beginning of a spire. The slightly later tower at Banwell has squinches prepared for a spire which was not added. During the building of these two towers the spire went out of fashion, and all the later towers are spireless.

Parapet.—All the characteristic members of this group have a straight parapet without battlements, pierced with quatrefoils or trefoils, or in one instance (Wedmore) with an arcade.

Window Tracery.—The Skirlaugh form of tracery occurs in all except Brent Knoll, the latest of the group.

Buttresses.—Those at Shepton Mallet are very prominent and very complex, rectangular below, but becoming diagonal at the top. In the later towers the buttresses become progressively simpler. Their lower portion is placed rectangularly in most cases, the only towers with entirely diagonal buttresses being Bleadon, Locking and Hutton.

(III.) The East Mendip Group.

1. *Triple-windowed.*
   Bruton (Fig. 3),
   Weston Zoyland,
   Cranmore,
   Mells, . . . } with windows in Double Tier,
   Leigh-on-Mendip, }
   Batcombe, . . Long-panelled.

1. The latter is more probable, since the Perpendicular style originated at Gloucester.



BRUTON.



BISHOPS LYDEARD.

2. *Double-windowed.*
   Middlezoy,
   Evercreech, . . Long-panelled
   (Illus. in *Proceedings*, L).

3. *Single-windowed.*
   Nunney.

The design of this group is derived from that of West Mendip; but its towers, being later in date, are generally more florid. Those of Bruton, Weston Zoyland, and Middlezoy, are extremely alike, Weston Zoyland being a florid copy of Bruton, and Middlezoy a simplified copy, smaller and with double instead of triple windows. The towers of Mells and Leigh-on-Mendip are elaborate developments from the Bruton design without extraneous influence. Batcombe tower shows the West Mendip influence in its straight parapet; Evercreech the South Somerset influence in the form and position of its buttresses; Middlezoy and especially Weston Zoyland the Quantock influence in the window tracery, which has an admixture of ogee curves; also in the form of the gargoyles, which are placed in the Mendip positions at Middlezoy, but in the Quantock positions at Weston Zoyland.

Cranmore tower is a small plain imitation of that at Shepton Mallet; but it has the battlemented parapet and the depressed arches and window tracery of the East Mendip group.

The geographical distribution of this group is peculiar, most of the towers being near Bruton, while two are near the Parret and detached from the rest. This seems to indicate that the towers were built by the school of masons attached to Bruton Priory, the Taunton Priory masons collaborating in the two towers by the Parret.

Parapet.—All the East Mendip towers, except Batcombe, have a battlemented parapet, in which feature they differ from the West Mendip, and resemble the Quantock towers. The

parapet is generally perforated, the exceptions being Mells and Cranmore.

Window Tracery.—This is of the Skirlaugh form, but somewhat modified by having flatter curves than that of the West Mendip windows. An admixture of ogee curves at Middlezoy and Weston Zoyland has already been mentioned.

Buttresses.—These are generally similar to those in the West Mendip group. They are rectangular below in nearly every case: the only exception is the single-windowed tower at Nunney, which has entirely diagonal buttresses. At Evercreech the buttresses have an arrangement somewhat resembling that in the South Somerset towers, for which see below.

(IV.) The Quantock Group.

1. *Double-windowed.*

Bishops Lydeard (Fig. 4),
Taunton St. James (rebuilt),
Lyng,
Ruishton,
Chedzoy,
Ile Abbots (partly rebuilt, illus. in *Proceedings*, XL),
Kingston-by-Taunton,
Staple Fitzpaine,
Huish Episcopi (illus. in *Proc.* XL),
Kingsbury Episcopi (illus. in *Proc.* L),
North Petherton.

Taunton St. Mary Magdalene, with double windows in triple tier (rebuilt).

2. *Single-windowed.*

Hatch Beauchamp.

A few other single-windowed towers have the Quantock form of window tracery, but are otherwise not truly characteristic; *e.g.* Lydeard St. Lawrence.

(Chewton tower, with double windows in double tier, shows the influence of this group. See "Residual Towers" below.)

As in the case of the East Mendip towers, the design of this group was derived from that of West Mendip. The earliest tower of the group, Bishops Lydeard, has a composition intermediate between those of Shepton Mallet and Bruton, the prototypes of the Mendip groups, but its *details* are distinctive. In the towers on the borders of the Parret the details show the influence of the East Mendip builders.

There can be little doubt that the towers of this group were built by the school of masons of Taunton Priory: but the merely geographical name "Quantock Group" implies no assumption in the absence of direct evidence; and besides, the name "Taunton" as a class designation has acquired a dubious meaning, having been applied by Freeman, and afterwards by Brereton, to artificial groups including towers obviously built by other schools.

Parapet.—Always battlemented and pierced. The gargoyles slender, generally shams not transmitting water, and placed one at each corner and one at the middle of each face of the tower. (See further under *Pinnacles*).

Window Tracery.—This differs widely from that of the East and West Mendip types. In the early towers all its curves are of the ogee form. In the late towers other forms are occasionally used.

Buttresses.—Nearly resembling those of the two Mendip groups, but simpler in section: usually rectangular below and diagonal above: entirely diagonal at Hatch Beauchamp only. At Bishops Lydeard and Lyng, the earliest towers of the group, they are continued as pinnacles: at Chedzoy and Kingsbury Episcopi they cease below the parapet. In the more ornate towers a number of little pinnacle-shaped pilasters are attached to the surface of the buttresses.

Pinnacles.—In all the towers later than Bishops Lydeard the pinnacles are more or less independent of the buttresses.

At St. Mary Magdalene, Taunton, the pinnacles and parapet are of Gloucestershire origin, being imitated with exaggeration from the tower of Gloucester Cathedral.

(V.) The North Somerset Group.

1. *Single-windowed.*

Chew Magna,	Portishead,
Yeovil,	Nailsea,
Winford (Fig. 5),	Publow (illus. in *Proc.* XLVII),
Batheaston,	Dundry.

2. *Double-windowed.*

Blagdon,	Bristol Temple Church.

Wrington, long-panelled (illus. in *Proc.* XLV),
Lympsham, derivative of Wrington, without long panels,
Backwell, with top stage reconstructed in 17th century.

The towers of this group are formed on a model which differs from that on which the Mendip and Quantock towers are formed. The main difference is in the shape and position of the buttresses: the arrangement of the windows is different also. The distribution of the towers leads one to surmise that they were built by the masons of Bath Abbey, collaborating in some instances with those of St. Augustine's Abbey at Bristol. The influence of Bath Abbey may account for the building of a tower of the North Somerset type in so distant a place as Yeovil.

The Yeovil tower appears to have been built soon after 1380,[1] and is possibly the earliest of the group; unless Chew

1. Robert de Sambourne, incumbent, who died in 1382, left by his will a bequest of money "to the work of Yeovil Church begun by me." This is taken as referring to the present church, of which the body and tower are homogeneous in masonry, though differing in window tracery, either as a matter of convenience or as the result of the employment of different schools of masons.

FIG. 5.

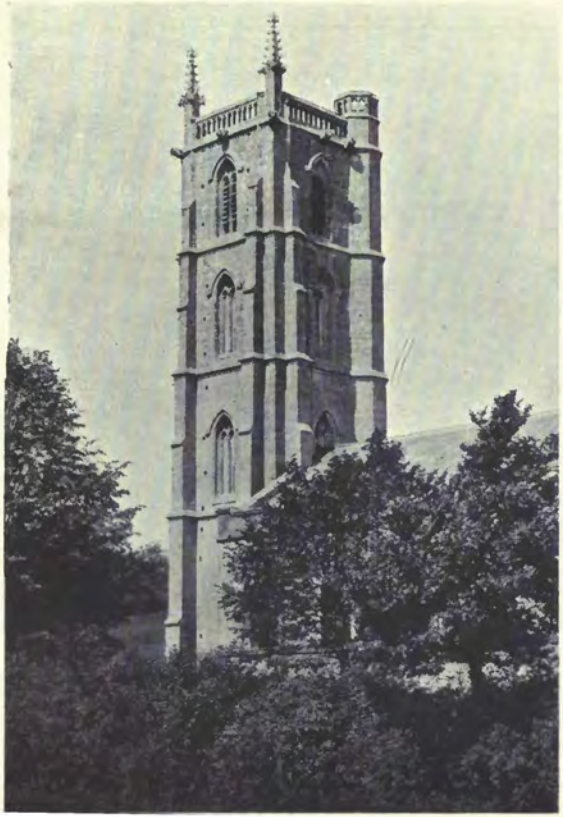
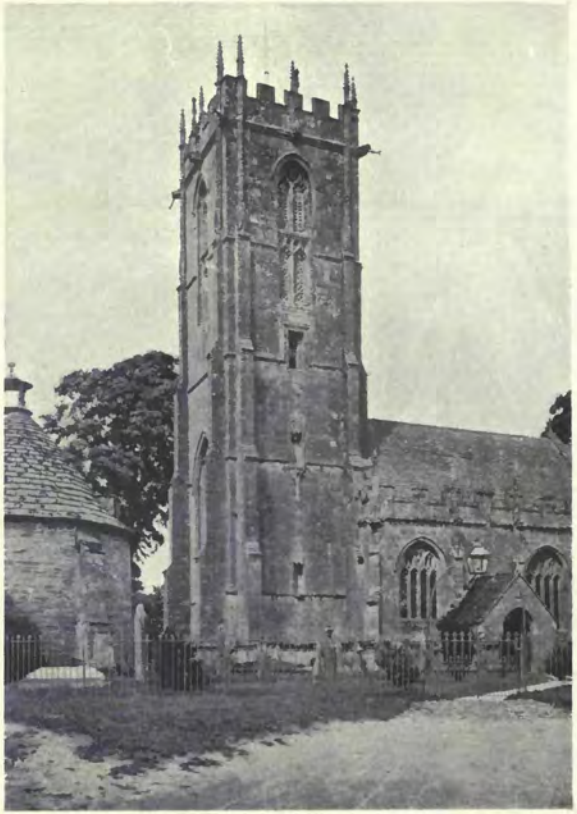


FIG. 6.



Magna, which most resembles it, be yet earlier. I have given reasons for supposing that the West Mendip towers (which have the same form of tracery) originated about the same time.

Windows and Tracery.—These towers make a great show of windows, but most of them in the middle-stages are shams,—mere blind ornaments. The tracery is of the Skirlaugh form in the earlier towers (Chew Magna, Yeovil, Winford, Blagdon, Bristol Temple Church) but variable in the later ones.

Buttresses.—Always of very simple form, rectangular, ceasing at some distance below the parapet, and placed at a few inches from the angle of the walls, so that the corner of the tower is seen from base to summit. The string-courses of the walls are generally continued right round the buttresses, a Gloucestershire feature.

Pinnacles.—Independent of the buttresses. Simple in the earlier towers; absent at Yeovil and the Temple Church; ornate at Portishead; imitated from St. Cuthbert's, Wells, at Wrington and Lympsham; of Gloucester pattern at Dundry.

Parapet.—Generally straight. Pierced with arcade in most cases, with trefoils at Portishead and Wrington (West Mendip or Wells influence). At Dundry the parapet and pinnacles are of the elaborate Gloucestershire form, being most nearly related to those at Bristol St. Stephen's, Thornbury, and Cardiff.

Wrington, in adopting the long panel and other features from the Cathedral group, departs widely from the physiognomy of its neighbours; nevertheless the buttresses and corners of the tower indicate its origin from the North Somerset school. Lympsham, following Wrington, is also very divergent, and possibly the latest of the group: from Mr. Bligh Bond I learn that it was partly reconstructed in the 17th century.

(VI.) The South Somerset Group.

1. *Single-windowed.*
   Norton-under-Hamdon (Fig. 6),
   Crewkerne (central),
   Curry Rivel (rebuilt),
   Shepton Beauchamp,
   Hinton St. George.

2. *Double-windowed.*
   The influence of the South Somerset builders is shown in the two undermentioned towers, for which see further under "Residual Towers."
   Muchelney,
   Glastonbury St. Benign's.

The conspicuous feature of this small group of towers is the form of the top windows. The arrangement of the buttresses and pinnacles, though less striking, is equally characteristic.

Buttresses, Pinnacles, and Parapet.—These resemble the corresponding parts in the principal towers of Dorset, namely the group which includes Wyke Regis, Fordington, Dorchester St. Peter's, Piddletrenthide, Beaminster, and others. The buttresses are rectangular, and placed a few inches from the corner of the tower: they cease several feet below the parapet, and from the top of each buttress a triangular pilaster runs up the wall and through the parapet, and terminates as a pinnacle. Thus these pinnacles stand, not *at* the corner, but *near* it, a pair for each corner: but at Hinton St. George, also in the Dorset towers, a third pinnacle is added *on* the corner. The parapet is battlemented, and has an extra pinnacle placed medially on each side of the tower. Hinton St. George has a Quantock parapet, with the pierced ornaments and slender gargoyles characteristic of that district.

Windows and Tracery.—The conspicuous feature of these towers (already mentioned) is a very tall window extending

through the two upper stages on each side of the tower. The tracery is variable. Each window is divided about mid-way by a thick transom, which is supported by a little extra tracery. The only other windows are the great west window and a vent-hole to the ringing loft. The tendency to tallness in the top windows is seen in the related Dorset towers, especially at Dorchester St. Peter's, the windows of which are fully as tall as any in the South Somerset group.

I cannot find any definite evidence as to the school which produced these towers. Their Dorset affinity is suggestive, and Forde and Sherborne were the nearest Dorset abbeys. Muchelney and Glastonbury were their Somerset neighbours.

(VII.) The Devon Group.

1. *Single-windowed.*

Norton Fitzwarren (Fig. 7), Minehead, St. Decuman's, West Monkton, Cannington, Bradford-on-Tone, West Buckland.

2. *Double-windowed.*

Kingsdon, Wellington (*see* Frontispiece).

These towers belong to a very large and very uniform group which is distributed over West Somerset and the whole of Devon and Cornwall. In all this extensive area the towers conform to two or three models, or rather to one model which varies only in the position of the buttresses or the stair turret, and in the form of the pinnacles if present.

Buttresses.—These are very plain: in the larger towers they are placed rectangularly at a short distance from the corner, as in the South and North Somerset towers: in a few small towers they are set diagonally, as at Bradford and West Buckland.

Pinnacles.—Variable: sometimes absent, as at Norton

Fitzwarren: usually simple: sometimes grouped, as at Plymouth St. Andrew's: occasionally large and spired, as at Totnes, Widdecombe, Bishops Nympton, and Fowey.

Parapets.—Always battlemented.

Stair Turret.—Either at one corner or in the middle of the N. or S. side. The latter arrangement, so frequent in Devon, is found also at Wellington, Bradford, and West Buckland.

Windows.—As a rule these towers are curiously deficient in windows. The top windows are moderate or small; the main west window is variable; there is a vent-hole for the ringing loft; and the rest of the tower presents an expanse of bare wall. The tracery is variable.

Ornament.—Although many of the towers are conspicuous for their large size and fine outline, they are as a rule very plain in detail. Some of those in or near Somerset are profusely decorated with grotesque animals, *e.g.* Norton Fitzwarren, Wellington, and Broad Clyst. Cullompton and Chittlehampton are towers of the Devon form, with ornament borrowed from Somerset,—chiefly from Staple Fitzpaine and North Petherton respectively. The tower at Probus, Cornwall, is a near imitation of North Petherton.

The double windows and tracery at Wellington are imitated from the Quantock towers.

(VIII.) The Brislington Group.

All single-windowed.

Brislington,
Chew Stoke (Fig. 8),
Tickenham (very much restored),
Binegar,
Croscombe (with spire).

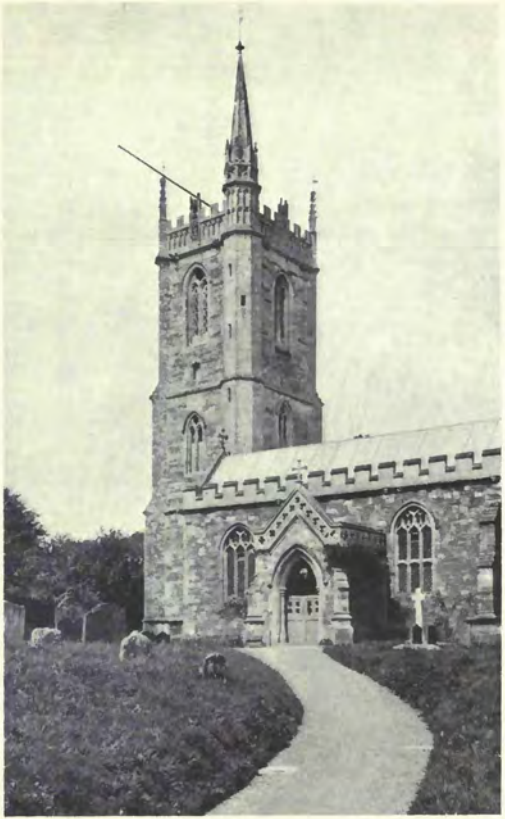
(Influence of the group apparent in the towers of Wraxall, near Bristol, and West Pennard.)

This group consists of only a few towers of small size; but

FIG. 7.



FIG. 8.



in beauty of detail they are second to none in the County. Their scattered distribution does not correspond with the sphere of influence of either of the great ecclesiastical institutions; but their very high quality suggests that they originated from the highest of all the schools, namely that of Wells. There is a slight resemblance between their details and those of the cathedral western towers and of St. Cuthbert's.

Buttresses diagonal, and continued upward as pinnacles.

Parapets battlemented and carved with blind arcades. A niche containing a statue rises from the middle of the parapet on each side of the tower,—except at Binegar, where the niche is only on the west side.

Spire or Spirelet.—At Croscombe, which may be the earliest of the group, there is a central spire. At Chew Stoke, Brislington, and Tickenham, the spire is replaced by a very tall spirelet standing on the corner turret. At Binegar the pinnacles are unfinished.

Windows comparatively large, with good mouldings and elegant tracery.

Wraxall and West Pennard resemble the group chiefly in having the characteristic parapet, with four niches at Pennard, but only one at Wraxall.

Residual Towers.

Chewton.—The windows, tracery, and buttresses are of the Quantock form; but the parapet and pinnacles are a simplified imitation of the Gloucester Cathedral type. The blind windows in the middle stage may have been suggested by the panelling which occurs in that position in several of the Gloucestershire towers. This tower should be compared with the next described.

Glastonbury St. John's.—In this we see the Chewton design completely Glo'sterized. The parapet and pinnacles are obviously of the Gloucester Cathedral type. Other Gloucestershire features are the panelling in the middle stage

(compare Wotton-under-Edge, Dursley, and Cirencester,) and the continuation of the string-courses right round the buttresses.

Glastonbury St. Benign.—The buttresses resemble those of the South Somerset group in form and position; and the tall upper windows show the influence of the same group,—or of the related Dorset towers in which the windows are paired as at St. Benign (compare Dorchester St. Peter's.) The pinnacles have been incorrectly restored: the probable form of the original pinnacles may be seen at Norton-under-Hamdon, Crewkerne, Fordington, or Dorchester.

This tower was built by Abbot Robert Bere, whose rebus appears upon the church. It is strange that both this tower and St. John's are of exotic designs, from which it may be inferred that the Glastonbury masons had not a tower-building school.

Muchelney.—The buttresses and parapet are of the South Somerset form, the pinnacles modern and poor. The windows, unlike those of South Somerset, are short; but their tracery resembles that of St. Benign. The string-course continued as a hood-moulding over the windows is a Dorset feature. This tower may have been built by the masons of Muchelney Abbey.

Langport and Long Sutton.—Rather plain towers, their composition borrowed from the triple-window Mendip towers, while their tracery is related to that of Muchelney and St. Benign. I suspect that these four towers were produced by the same masons; they have features in common, and are the least successful of the ambitious towers of the County.

Martock.—Simpler and more dignified than the four above-mentioned, and yet having similar window tracery. Its double windows and overhanging parapet may have been suggested by the Quantock towers.

Kilmersdon.—By its geographical position this should be a work of the East Mendip school. The buttresses are related

to the East Mendip type; but the other features are of no particular school, though not foreign to Somerset.

Ilminster (Illus. in *Proceedings*, xlix).—The design is a reminiscence of the central tower of Wells Cathedral, but with altogether different details and of much later date. I find in this tower no evidence of the work of either school; and yet it may have been a wilfully divergent product of the Wells or the Taunton builders.

Worspring Priory (Illus. in *Proceedings*, li).—This simple but beautiful tower has no detail entirely characteristic of any of the above-mentioned groups: still less has it any relation to the towers of other counties. It is not improbably the work of the masons attached to the little Priory itself.

Wraxall.—A tower of apparently complex relationship. The windows, parapet and buttresses, are related to those at Chew Stoke, a member of the Brislington group: the pinnacles resemble those of Portishead and Backwell, except that the Wraxall pinnacles are placed rectangularly, and those of the two other towers diagonally: the string-courses are carried round the buttresses, as in Gloucestershire and North Somerset; but they are also carried as weather mouldings over the windows, as in Dorset and at Muchelney.

Bath Abbey.—A late member of a group of towers scattered through the counties bordering on the Thames. The other chief members of the group are Mere, Marlborough St. Peter's, Newbury, Reading St. Lawrence, Henley, and Magdalen College, Oxford. Their prominent characteristic is the possession of large octagonal buttresses, continued as turrets, and generally finished with spirelets. These towers are mostly plain: only Magdalen and Bath Abbey have enriched upper storeys and elaborate parapets. Spirelets were first added to the Bath tower early in the 19th century: the new ones by which they have been recently replaced are not so true to the type of these towers.