

Glastonbury Abbey Excavations, 1929

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THE results of the present season's excavations have not been spectacular, but they have been of the utmost importance in the reconstruction of the general plan and arrangement of the complex of churches which occupied the site before the Norman Conquest. It may, indeed, be said that the existing remains illustrate and to a certain extent confirm almost every statement made by the early chroniclers of the abbey, and indicate the soundness of the topographical traditions on which they relied.

This being the case, it will be convenient, before describing the actual results of the excavations, to give a short precis of the contemporary or traditional information afforded by the chroniclers. The major part of this information is to be found in the thirteenth-century recension of William of Malmesbury's *De Antiquitate Glastoniensis Ecclesiae*, but further information is provided by the same author's *Life of St. Dunstan* and other sources.

The earliest church on the site was the *Vetusta Ecclesia*, a wattled church of unknown antiquity which was covered with boarding and lead by St. Paulinus, after his flight from Northumbria (633). It had a pavement of polished stone, in which were stones designedly interlaid with triangles and squares and set with lead ; it also contained various memorials of saints and other distinguished persons.

This church undoubtedly survived until the great fire of 1184, its traditional dedication by Christ Himself to His Virgin Mother preserving it from any attempt at re-building. The same cause led to its immediate re-building after the fire, on the same site and of nearly the same dimensions (60 ft. by 26 ft.), according to all the accounts, as its predecessor. The existing chapel of St. Mary may thus be taken to represent the plan and position of the *Vetusta Ecclesia*.

The next church, in point of date, is that connected traditionally with twelve anchorites who came from the N. shortly before St. Patrick's visit in 433. It is only recorded that this church was of stone, was dedicated to SS. Peter and Paul, and stood to the E. of the *Vetusta Ecclesia*.

The next church is connected with St. David (*d.* 546), who learning by a vision of the divine consecration of the old church built another to the E. of it and consecrated it himself. It was described on the pillar, set up to the N.E. of St. Mary's chapel, as a kind of chancel on the E. side of the early church. This pillar was originally set up to mark the junction of the old church with this added chancel.

The fourth church was built by Ine, King of Wessex (689–728) in honour of the Saviour, St. Peter and St. Paul for the soul of his brother Mules. It nearly adjoined the old church on the E., the two being connected by a passage or entry. Ine's church was subsequently enlarged by St. Dunstan, who was abbot 940–957; he is stated to have 'greatly enlarged it, adding a tower, and to make its width square with its length he added aisles or porticus as they call them'.

St. Dunstan built also the fifth church, which stood to the W. of the old church and was dedicated to St. John the Baptist.

Of these statements, those relating to the position of Ine's church and the *Vetusta Ecclesia*, Dunstan's additions and Dunstan's chapel of St. John the Baptist, are on the direct authority of William of Malmesbury who, in all probability, saw all of them standing. He reports the repair of the *Vetusta Ecclesia* as by tradition of the elders, and the statements as to the church of St. David and that of the twelve hermits, though perhaps not mentioned by William himself, may be ascribed to the same source.

Thus, while the ascriptions of the various buildings to St. Paulinus, St. David and the twelve hermits are of no great authority, there is no particular reason to doubt the topographical tradition, that is to say the former existence of such buildings and their relative positions.

Let us now turn to the actual results of the excavations. It will be remembered that last year's excavations established the position of the eastern part of Ine's church with its porticus, and a rebuilt chancel of later date which was distinguished by the use of a mauve-coloured mortar. A square addition to the E., with massive walls and enclosing an earlier crypt, was assigned with every probability to Dunstan, who apparently filled in the crypt, having collected the bones of those buried there and placed them together in a large stone coffin which he deposited in the middle of the former staircase leading down to the crypt.

This year the story of Dunstan's additions has been completed by the discovery of the E. and W. walls of two buildings to the N. and S. of the main building, and representing without doubt the aisles or porticus of Malmesbury's account. These walls were traced up to the foundations of the aisle walls of the mediaeval nave but not beyond them, so that there can be no doubt that the terminal walls lay under these aisle walls, and were destroyed when the mediaeval nave was built. The recorded burials in the Saxon church show that the N. porticus was dedicated to St. John the Baptist and the other to St. Andrew. The strict words of Malmesbury's record would also seem to imply that the central building was actually the base of the tower which he added, thereby enlarging the building.

Excavations were also undertaken to the W. of the W. wall of the mediaeval N. aisle to obtain, if possible, some evidence of the western termination of Ine's church. The foundations, here uncovered, showed an angle immediately W. of the aisle foundation, the N. and S. wall running under the galilee, and also a wall extending westwards and just outside the line of the galilee buttresses; these foundations lined with those of St. Mary's chapel, which has a slight axial divergence from the axis of the main church. This line of walling was traced westwards as far as the western buttress of the galilee, beyond

which point it had been destroyed by modern underpinning and excavation. Near its western termination was a large patch of pavement extending over the wall which seemed to imply an entrance at this point. These walls were of curious construction, being built in a trench which was filled for a foot or so with mortar and small stones, below the actual beginning of the stone wall. The mortar employed was of the same mauve colour as that used in the rebuilding of Ine's chancel, and the constructions were presumably of the same date; that is to say, between the periods of Ine and Dunstan.

During the excavations of 1911,¹ Mr. Bligh Bond recorded the discovery of certain foundations at the corresponding point at the w. end of the s. aisle of the mediaeval church. These were at a low level, and he provisionally identified them with a certain chapel of the Holy Sepulchre which is known to have existed near this point. Apart from the fact that, for a chapel, they are quite unreasonable, the n. and s. and the e. and w. lines equate exactly with the foundations just described on the n. side of the galilee, the only difference being the greater projection of the eastern apartment. We are then justified in considering these foundations as belonging to the same scheme as the recently discovered walls on the n.

Let us then see to what conclusions these discoveries will lead. It may be reasonably concluded that the n. and s. line represents the line of the western termination of Ine's church, and setting this out on plan it will be seen that the resultant nave of Ine's church assumes precisely those proportions which are familiar to us from the rather earlier churches of the Kentish group, Canterbury, Reculver, Rochester, etc., from which it was no doubt copied. The resultant total length of Ine's church with Dunstan's additions would be 89 ft., which compared to the total width of Dunstan's additions (about 85 ft.) is quite sufficiently near to justify Malmesbury's statement that Dunstan made the church as broad as it was long.

It remains only to consider the lines of foundation extending westwards from the supposed w. line of Ine's church. These, if they extended as far as the e. end of the *Vetusta Ecclesia*, would enclose an area about 40 ft. square. The records would

¹ *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.* lviii, ii, 39.

lead us to suppose that the middle of this space was occupied by St. David's chapel of St. Mary, serving as a chancel to the *Vetusta Ecclesia*. There is no reason to suppose that this building was not standing 150 years after its supposed erection, when Ine built his church, or indeed that it did not survive to share the fate of the *Vetusta Ecclesia* itself in the fire of 1184.¹ Its presence provides a convincing explanation of the gap between Ine's church and the *Vetusta Ecclesia* with which it was connected by a narthex and porticus which, judging by the mortar, were added or rebuilt in the period between Ine and Dunstan. No actual remains of this church or of the *Vetusta Ecclesia* itself will ever be found, as all trace of them was finally destroyed when Abbot Bere excavated the crypt under St. Mary's chapel and the w. part of the galilee, early in the sixteenth century.

We have thus found remains of Ine's church with its porticus, probably after the Kentish fashion, short and overlapping the chancel and nave; of the rebuilding of Ine's chancel, the western extension of his porticus and the rebuilding or addition of porticus to St. David's chancel, and finally the nearly complete plan of the additions of St. Dunstan.

There remains only one unidentified building both—as revealed by the excavations and the records—the little crypt, pre-existing and now underlying the main addition of St. Dunstan, and the recorded chapel ascribed to the twelve hermits.

That these two buildings were identical is by no means improbable; the hermits' chapel was built of stone and lay to the E. of St. David's chapel; so far the accounts tally with the remains; is it possible that when Dunstan collected the bones and buried them in the great sarcophagus found last year, these unknown bones were popularly associated with the twelve hermits; if so an unreliable tradition again represents a topographical fact.

The position of the Saxon cloister has not yet been identified. It certainly lay on the s. of the church and King Edgar was first buried in the chapter-house, by the door which leads to the church, that same door, no doubt, by which the monks fled

¹ See note at end by the Very Rev. J. A. Robinson, Dean of Wells.

to the church when pursued by the archers of the first Norman abbot Turstin. Some further investigation remains also to be done on the s. side of the church before the investigation of the site of the Saxon buildings is complete. After this, it is hoped to investigate the remains of the Norman churches of Turstin and Herluin, which no doubt extend well to the E. of the limit of the present excavations.

The foregoing report was read as a paper by Mr. A. W. Clapham, F.S.A., at a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries on 17 October last. At the conclusion of the paper, in the discussion that followed, the Very Rev. Prior Horne pointed out that some of the details of the plan they had just been considering rested on a statement attributed to William of Malmesbury, the authenticity of which scholars had challenged. Was it a fact that St. David had made and consecrated a chapel at the east end of the original wattle chapel, or was this story added to Malmesbury's account some centuries later? To show the difficulties that could be raised on this point he read :

A NOTE BY THE DEAN OF WELLS ON THE ABOVE REPORT.

The only secure authority for what stood at Glastonbury before the great fire of 1184 is the account given by William of Malmesbury of what he saw when he stayed there between 1125 and 1130. It is to be found in two books written at that time : the *Life of St. Dunstan* and the treatise on the *Antiquity of the Church of Glastonbury*. Of the latter we have only an enlarged edition of more than a hundred years after, and embellished with later legends of which he knew nothing. Happily he embodied large extracts from his *De Antiquitate* in the revised edition of his *Gesta Regum*, and it is on these extracts that our enquiries must be based. He is our one and only eye-witness : all else is legend or surmise.¹

¹ For the grounds of this statement reference may be made to my *Somerset Historical Essays* (Oxf. 1921), published for the British Academy. Precisely the same position has been reached quite independently of my essay by W. W. Newell (1903 : *Publications of the Modern Languages Society of America*, xviii, 459-512) and by Professor Edmond Faral (Paris, 1929 : *La Légende Arthurienne*, ii, 301-315).

When I wrote a preliminary paper in our Somerset *Proceedings* for 1927 as a summary guide to explorations, I purposely said nothing about St. David's Church, as William of Malmesbury never suggests that he had himself seen it. All that he tells us is this: that, when David had come with seven bishops and found himself debarred from consecrating the Old Church, 'lest he should seem to have come for nought, he quickly built another church and consecrated that'. We observe that he says nothing about its site, and we may infer from the speed of its erection that it was but a small structure, doubtless merely of wood with little or nothing of stone foundations.

But the tradition which he thus recorded lent itself to development in after ages. Thus in the enlarged form of *De Antiq.* (p. 54) it is said to have stood E. of the Old Church, which is likely enough. Yet farther E., we are told, stood another church, built by the twelve later arrivals (of whom William of Malmesbury knows nothing); and E. of all came Ina's great church.

This is not William of Malmesbury's writing, and the last statement is directly contrary to what he himself says: viz. that Ina's church was an appendix to the Old Church; that it was co-terminous with the Old Church; and that Abbot Tica's monument was in Ina's church over against the entry to the Old Church (*juxta introitam vetustae*). Hence we infer in William of Malmesbury's day St. David's church and the imagined church of the XII, if they ever stood E. of the Old Church, were swallowed up in Ina's stone building which adjoins the Old Church.

In the developed legend of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries St. David's Church is said to have been built as a kind of chancel (*quemdam cancellum*) to the Old Church. Probably the idea was suggested by the fact that by this time the E. wall of the Norman Lady Chapel had been demolished so as to get 'a kind of chancel' in the galilee which occupied the space of about fifty feet between the Lady Chapel and the W. wall of the great church. At any rate what we are told in the brass plate on the columns set up N. of the Lady Chapel in line with its E. wall, is that the object of its erection was to mark

permanently the division between the Old Church and St. David's addition. What it really marked was the division between the new Lady Chapel and the newer galilee which had by then been taken into it. It was a pretty fancy; but we need not take too seriously the instructions given to the mediaeval tourist.

We are now however faced with a grave problem. Accepting as we must William of Malmesbury's statement of what he saw in 1125, viz. that the Old Church and King Ina's church were coterminous, where are we to suppose that these two churches stood?

If the wall lately revealed by excavation be the w. wall of King Ina's church, it follows that the true site of the Old Church must be where the galilee is now. The only serious objection to be gleaned from our authorities is the statement of Adam of Domerham (c. 1290) that after the fire of 1184 the first thing done was the building of 'the church of St. Mary in the place (in loco) where originally the Old Church had stood'. We need not press the phrase too closely. How could he have known a century later the exact limitations of the old wattled church?

It was of course notorious that it stood w. of whatever church or churches subsequently arose. So long as the new scheme of building after the fire retained this essential feature, the Lady Chapel, though not actually corresponding in dimensions or position with what it was built to represent, might not unreasonably have been regarded 'in loco', in the place where the Old Church had formerly stood.

If this interpretation be rejected, how can we maintain that the wall recently revealed is the w. wall of Ina's church?

13 October 1929.