

Glastonbury Abbey.

(THE "LORETTO" CHAPEL.)

NINTH REPORT ON THE DISCOVERIES MADE DURING
THE EXCAVATIONS.

BY F. BLIGH BOND, F.R.I.B.A.

IN 1915 appeared the Eighth Annual Report, followed in 1916 by a supplementary paper (*Proc.*, LXII, 113-115) dealing with the Plan of the Edgar Chapel found in Colonel William Long's collection, and a short study of the measures and proportions of the Lady Chapel (*Proc.*, LXII, p. xxxviii).

As no excavation was undertaken during the war, the series of reports was suspended. But the resumption of the work of digging in the past summer has enabled the writer to add to the chronicles of the Abbey an item of interest perhaps equal to that of the recovery of the Edgar Chapel; namely the discovery and disinterment of the foundations of the greater portion of what is believed to be the 'Loretto' Chapel built by Abbot Richard Bere some time after his return to England from Italy in or about 1503.

Apart from a casual note by Eyston in the XVII Century, to the effect that he had succeeded in recovering the position of this Chapel, we have nothing but Leland's note, which runs as follows:—

"Bere cumming from his Embassadrie out of Italie made a Chapelle of our Lady de Loretta joining to the north side of the Body of the Church."

The obvious sense of the words seems to be that of a building in structural contact with the wall on the north side of the nave—otherwise the 'body' of the church. But the de-

scription is vague in the extreme and might embrace a variety of possibilities, among which may be mentioned the following:—

- (1). An interior Chapel on the north side of the Nave beneath one of the arches to the North Aisle; answering in position and character to Bishop Bubwith's Chantry at Wells.
- (2). A screened Chapel in a western aisle to the North Transept, corresponding to that which is now the Vestry of the Vicars-Choral at Wells.
- (3). A Chapel attached to the north-west Tower or north-west angle of the Nave, opposite to the position prescribed by Leland for Bere's other Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre. This would make Bere's work symmetrical.
- (4). A Chapel adjoining the eastern part of the North Aisle wall of the Nave; between the great North Porch and the Transept. This would imply an actual new structure external to the main building and not a 'screened' chapel as (1) or (2).
- (5). That local tradition spoke correctly in placing the Chapel of this dedication in the North Transept itself, in the still existing Chapel next the north wall of the Choir. Such a supposition would however make Leland's note not a little inaccurate. Bere's work would in this case be confined to internal screenwork and adornments, as the Chapel in question is part of the XII Century or XIII Century structure.

These manifold possibilities, each fairly arguable, but mutually contradictory, no doubt may have passed through the minds of those eminent antiquaries, including Professor Willis, who, during the latter half of the past century, made such a careful study of the Abbey. But Willis, never content with dubious speculation, does not even mention his view of the position of this Chapel, though he devotes some pages of his work to the probable site of the Edgar Chapel.

Many ideally-conceived theories are relegated by the common prudence of their authors to the limbo of obscurity for want of incontestable facts to support them, and to give

them cohesion and substance. Yet every enquirer must have some working hypothesis upon which he can try to build, and when it ceases to bear the weight of argument, it goes, and makes room in his mind for another. So it was with the writer. The first dawning of opinion inclined him rather to an analogy to the plan of the Cathedral at Wells, for it is an undoubted fact that in many instances the ideas and arrangements of the builders of Glastonbury Abbey do reflect those of Wells. And hence it seemed not impossible that that rather rare feature in a Benedictine church, namely a western aisle to the North Transept, might have existed at Glastonbury and, if so, that it might have contained a screened chapel as at Wells. Therefore, when in 1907, he was invited to prepare a sketch (on artistic lines) of the interior of the Abbey in its prime, he took the artist's licence and drew his perspective from a hypothetical point beneath an arch on the west side of the North Transept, looking through that arch not only towards the transept itself, but by a side view on the right, looking also over some screenwork into the nave. And in the space here, he placed tentatively an altar which might be supposed to be an altar of the Blessed Virgin (see *Rood-screens and Roodlofts*, Vol. I, Plate v).

This immature theory gave way however to the view (4)—that of a structural chapel external to the main building, and located in the elbow of the Nave Aisle and the North Transept. For there were some difficulties in the first notion. At Glastonbury there is a drop of about 3ft. or more between the level of the transept and that of the nave floor, and it is difficult to see how a transept aisle *quâ* aisle could be worked where the floor drops or rises in this way. And although Leland says *made not built*, in speaking of this work of Bere's—whereas in speaking of Edgar's Chapel he says Bere *buildid* it,—yet knowing the large ideas of this great builder it seemed reasonable that his Chapel would be found to be a really structural one and not a mere partitioning of space already existing. So we come to the second phase.

In 1910, the writer published the second and fuller edition of his "Architectural Handbook of Glastonbury Abbey," in which he included a reproduction of a drawing published in



From a Photograph by Mr. C. T. Compton.

LORETTO CHAPEL (presumed), GLASTONBURY ABBEY. South-West Angle of Foundations.



1817 by Coney (*see* Plate 2 of the Handbook). In reference to this he says (pp. 32-33) :—

“Some fragments of building on the north side of the nave were surviving as recently as 1817 when Coney’s drawings were published. In one of these we see a wall with a row of windows having a rather unusual detail in the heads. This would be near the site of the ‘Loretto’ Chapel built by Abbot Bere. Carter, writing some few years later, tells us that the ‘Loretto’ Chapel was then standing and if he be correct, it must have been a substantial piece of masonry exterior to the church and not a light internal structure as has been conjectured. But he may have been referring to the chapel of Saint Thomas the Martyr in the north transept, which has sometimes been miscalled the ‘Loretto’ Chapel.”

and in a footnote on p. 33 the writer adds :—

“A sketch plan in the Cannon MS. shows a group of ruins in an apparently similar position, and he records the tradition of a very magnificent building at this point which he terms the ‘Chapter House.’ However erroneous this designation we may at least accept his record as corroborative of the existence of a richly-ornamented building of some special nature (as distinct from the body of the church) at the junction of the Nave Aisle and North Transept.”

In 1911, the writer dug all along the northern edge of the site of the north aisle wall of the Nave, from the North Porch eastward as far as the North Transept, but for a space of nearly 100ft., that is for five out of the six bays of the nave eastward of the porch, there was not a trace of any connecting wall. On approaching the last bay, however, the foundation of a massive wall was encountered, running out northwards from the aisle footing and abutting upon its edge at the point of junction. And this foundation proved to be of the extraordinary width of 12ft. 6ins. It was laid bare for a distance of some 18ft. to the north, and the space between it and the site of the transept wall proper was also uncovered and shown to be full of natural clay to a level but just below that of the grass. Hence this great platform of masonry (or what was once masonry, since most of it had been taken away and its place filled with loose *débris* of freestone and mortar) marks again a drop in the levels of the footings of the Abbey from east to west. And from the superior height of the clay on the east side of it, there was nothing but a shallow difference of filling along its eastern edge to show the line of demarcation. But along its western edge there was a good deal of rough masonry left. Lying among the *débris* upon the surface of

the wall-platform were a few pieces of worked freestone, one of which was a section of XV or XVI Century fenestration ; a richly-moulded window-mullion quite of Bere's period. This was covered when found with a smooth white coat of the finest limewash.

But the residue of space left between the platform of walling and the Transept was so narrow that the idea of a chapel at this point, lying within so circumscribed a space, seemed hardly tenable. Nothing therefore was said as to this excavation in the Fifth and Sixth Reports (for 1912 and 1913), though the 1911 excavation, which included the North Porch, was dealt with in the 1914 Report. But the state of the writer's knowledge and opinion in and after 1912 is reflected in a general plan of the Abbey which accompanies the Sixth Report, and this shows the result of his discovery of the platform, in the shape of a western aisle to the Transept, against which he has written the words "supposed site of the Loretto Chapel." It is not until 1916, when the Eighth Report was published, that further allusion is made to this site, and readers are referred to this Report (*Proc.*, LXI, 129-131). It deals with the theory of the 'Loretto' Chapel, and mentions the Tudor window-mullion. But it is necessarily inconclusive. In the large folded plan accompanying the Eighth Report, the angle of the Nave and Transept is again marked as "Probable site of the Loretto Chapel."

Reverting for a moment to the 1911 excavation, it should be said that, following a reminiscence of the old gardener of some freestone walling which he had taken out of the bank in early days at the instance of his employer, Mr. Austin, sen., the writer had caused two short trenches to be cut into the bank on the north side of the Nave, with a view to seeing whether any stone might be encountered. But neither cut showed any evidence of walling or foundation-trenches. So the quest was abandoned, and for some years even the hope of finding the site was given up as a forlorn one. All the possibilities it seemed had been canvassed, including one new one, which was this. Whilst digging for the North Porch in 1911, a section of ground opened to the north-west of the porch and not far from the north-west Tower foundation, had

revealed the footings of a rather late building of rectangular form (shown in the coloured plan accompanying the Fifth Report (*Proc.*, LVIII, pt. ii, Plate II); and the question naturally arose, "Could this be the 'Loretto' Chapel?" But it did not join the Nave, and, so far as could be seen, neither did it join the porch. Its presence served but to increase the difficulty of any sort of decision. But Captain Bartlett, who was working with the writer and was always interested in the work, several times reverted to the idea that this might possibly be the Chapel Leland had mentioned. And he held to this idea even so late as the spring and early summer of 1919.

More dominant in the mind of the writer as a controlling factor was always the wall and range of windows shown in Coney's drawing, and he mentally associated this with the note in Cannon's MS., and the rough masonry marked on his diagram somewhere in this place. If he had been asked to voice his feeling about the matter, he would have said that in all likelihood the wall shown in Coney's sketch would represent the north or external wall of the chapel, the south being the wall of the north aisle of the Nave, of which no trace remained above ground in Coney's time, or indeed, long before.

NEW THEORY OF THE SITE.

From the chaos of these conflicting views, now six in number, nothing emerged until late in 1916 when a new theory presented itself, and claimed at once the writer's earnest consideration.

This theory took account of certain small items of evidence which had not hitherto offered any constructive interpretation. The data in support of this theory are mainly as follows:—

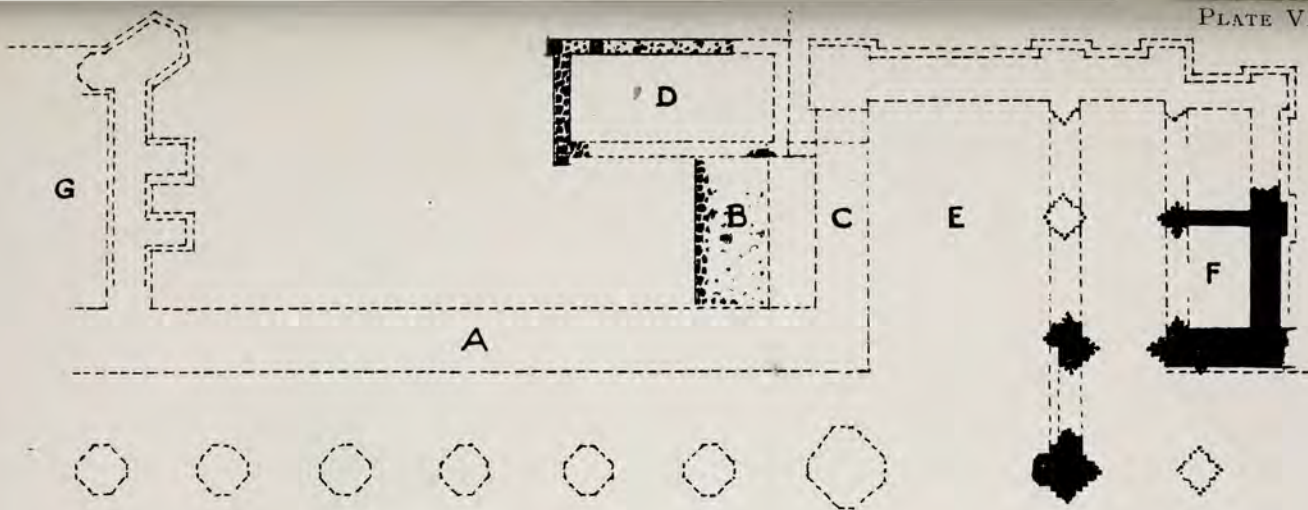
- (1). The narrowness of the space enclosed between the wall-footings discovered in 1911 and the Transept wall which ran parallel to it.
- (2). Coney's drawing as above-mentioned.
- (3). The suggestion of a difference of level in some of the old drawings, as between the floor of the Nave, and the ground on the north.

- (4). The position of certain rough masonry marked in Cannon's sketch plan of the Abbey ruins.
- (5). The gardener's story of a wall in the bank on the north side of the Nave.

The 'constructive interpretation' having suggested itself, it became possible to link together these strands of evidence somewhat in the following way.

- (a). That the narrow 'aisle' discovered to the west of the Transept was indeed no aisle, but a passage or short cloister leading from the Nave to Bere's Chapel.
- (b). That Coney's picture of a wall with four windows might represent the *southern* wall of a building outside the Nave, and independent of it, though joined thereto by the passage aforesaid.
- (c). That this building would lie within the area of the bank to the north of the Nave Aisle, and would hence be found at a distance of several feet from the same, with a clear space between rather in excess of the known distance of the bank from the site of the Nave Aisle wall. This would be well over 20ft., and might be considerably more.
- (d). That the building which Cannon describes as the "Chapter House" was here, and was in reality Bere's Chapel of the Loretto.

In August 1919, after a cessation of five years, excavation was resumed and a new cutting was made into the bank—this time at a greater depth within it, *i.e.* about 5ft. from its bottom edge. Within two hours of the commencement of the work, masonry was encountered, and in the course of the next day there was revealed the south-west angle of a building, in the form of a solidly-built foundation of rough stonework, having at its south-west extremity a short buttress on the southern face (Plate VII). From this point the wall running eastwards—that is to say, the south wall of the building—was followed for a few feet, but it was found to be roughly broken off, and it was impossible to seek its continuation at the time, as this would have involved the removal of the fixed bench provided here for visitors.



GLASTONBURY ABBEY.

DIAGRAM SHEWING THE GENERAL POSITION OF FOUNDATIONS DISCOVERED IN 1911 AND 1919 ADJOINING THE NORTH TRANSEPT ON THE WEST

10 5 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 FEET.

- A. FOUNDATION OF NAVE WALL FOUND 1911.
 B. BROAD FOUNDATION FOUND IN 1911 — RE-OPENED IN 1919
 C. SITE OF WEST WALL OF TRANSEPT.
 D. LORETTO CHAPEL (PRESUMED)
 E. TRANSEPT.
 F. TRANSEPT CHAPEL: G. NORTH PORCH.
- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| | SOLID STONE |
| | STONE DÉBRIS. |
| | CONJECTURAL [NOT EXCAVATED] |



Excavation was therefore continued in a northerly direction from the angle—*i.e.* along the west wall of the building, and after about a fortnight's delay, caused by the presence of an old chestnut stump with heavy roots, which had to be grubbed out and removed, the whole length of this west wall-footing was revealed, and proved the building to be of a width of 20ft. externally on the footings from north to south, not including the buttress projection.

There was no indication found of any projection on the north corresponding to that on the south face, but the whole north-west angle of the footings was covered by a massive slab of freestone of rectangular form marking with approximate accuracy the width of the north wall, and projecting to the westward about 2ft. beyond the general footings of the west wall itself.

The use of freestone in such a position is most unusual, as it was clearly below the old floor level of this building, as indicated by the sections of the subsoil visible in the walls of the trench.

It was by this time rather late in the season for excavation work. Nevertheless it was possible, before closing for the winter, to excavate along the line of the north wall for a total length of some 32ft. Although most of the masonry had been removed, sufficient stone was left *in situ* on the floor of the trench to establish the continuance of this wall to the extreme limit of the cutting.

Other evidence of the existence of the former wall here is offered by the presence of the clay matrix of the trench. This is seen on both sides for a height corresponding nearly to that of the level of the clay underlying the nearer part of the nave. The trench itself, like all the other trenches excavated in former years, was full of the loose and powdery débris of freestone and yellow mortar; and in falling away, it left the vertical surfaces of the clay matrix clear and well defined.

The position of the west wall of the newly-discovered foundations is such that, assuming an external length of 40ft. for the building, a short space would remain to the east of it, and between it and the Transept, sufficient to allow of a connecting

passage or lobby linking together the Nave, the Transept and this building, and giving also the possibility of a door of egress to the north end of the passage. Such a plan, as will easily be seen, would readily lend itself to the convenience of ministrant clergy or others approaching it from the Church. Assuming this building, then, to have been the 'Loretto' Chapel, we may most readily suppose an entrance from the last bay of the Nave to the same, through a door in the North Aisle wall and northward by a small covered cloister into a small lobby connecting on the west with the Chapel, on the east by a few steps to the Transept whose floor would be about 2ft. higher, and again on the north with a door of egress to the open ground which bordered upon the cemetery of the laity. For public use we must almost necessarily assume also a west door to the Chapel, but the priests' door would give entrance to it close to the south-east corner. A plan (Plate VIII) is appended in illustration of what has so far been found, together with the writer's tentative theory of the features still awaiting discovery; and it is hoped that during 1920 it may be possible to offer a detailed plan together with a fuller account of the work.

No freestone architectural fragments of importance have been as yet recovered from the trenches, and from the complete denudation of the footings it seems sufficiently clear that here as elsewhere the freestone casings were removed and taken to some convenient distance for the purpose of sawing-up into ashlar blocks for local use.

The principal objects found include several lumps of lime stucco, whitened on the face, and marked out in rectangular lines of reddish ochre to imitate stone-jointings. The presence of a 'skew-back' on one of these suggests that it was applied to an arched or vaulted surface.

A small broken terra-cotta ornament, possibly a pendant, of a buff colour, was found. This is considered to be of XVI or XVII Century character, and is of the conventional 'pomegranate' form with Renaissance treatment.

The 'Casa Santa' of Our Lady of Loretto in Italy is stated by some writers to measure 36ft. \times 17ft., and by others 32ft. \times 13ft. These measures giving, as they do, an uniform

difference, may represent respectively the outside and the inside measures of the 'Holy House.'

Since the foundations now discovered at Glastonbury measure 20ft. in width (*i.e.* 17 + 3) a corresponding measure approximately 39 or 40 might be looked for, upon the assumption that Bere had followed in his work the plan and proportions of the Italian 'Casa Santa.'

The cultus of Our Lady of Loretto is heard of in England from the XIV Century onwards. There was a chapel or shrine at Walsingham Abbey to her honour, and this was of considerable importance.¹ Pilgrimage to the Italian shrine took place from England throughout the mediæval period subsequent to the founding of the Italian shrine in 1291.

NOTE. In Dugdale's "Monasticon" (see the enlarged and amplified edition of 1817) Coney's plate appears. The "Monasticon" is a compilation from many well-known sources and is unreliable without reference to these. For example, the familiar notes of Leland as to the 'Loretto' and Holy Sepulchre chapels are not given separately, but run into one, with the result of making it appear that the Holy Sepulchre was at the south end of the 'Loretto' Chapel. We quote as follows from the "Monasticon":—

"Bere constructed a chapel of our Lady of Loretto adjoining the north side of the Nave, and in the south end he made a chapel of the Holy Sepulchre" (Vol. I, p. 7),

and further (Vol. I, p. 8):—

"Some of the south wall of Choir is still standing, also pieces of St. Edgar's, St. Andrew's, and the Loretto Chapel with the two east pillars of the Tower."

The coupling again, of the 'Loretto' Chapel with the tower pillars makes the inference obvious enough that the compilers of the "Monasticon" had in view the transeptal chapel on the north side of the crossing, popularly known as the 'Loretto' Chapel.

1. See Sidney Heath's *Pilgrim Life in the Middle Ages*. Another chapel or shrine of the Lady of Loretto is cited at Musselburgh. Both appear much older than the Glastonbury dedication.