

Glastonbury Abbey.

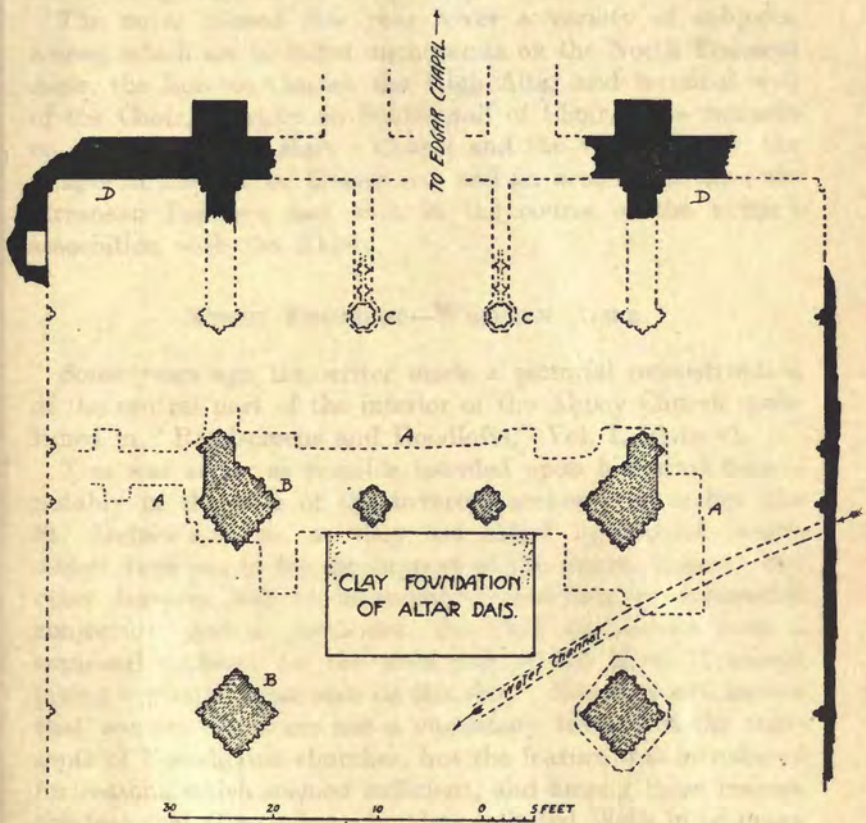
EIGHTH REPORT ON THE DISCOVERIES MADE DURING THE EXCAVATIONS.

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

THE season's work though full of interest, and likely to prove very valuable in the future, has not reached a conclusive stage, and cannot therefore be the subject of a complete report this year.

In the circumstances, the writer was glad to avail himself of a suggestion thrown out by the Excavation Committee, that the space usually allotted to the Report should this year be given to a discursive article in the course of which sundry matters of interest which have not yet been published, but which have accumulated from year to year, might be touched upon. The suggestion seems most opportune as the unpublished residuum of notes has now attained large dimensions, and it is in fact a good deal more than can be disposed of in a single communication.

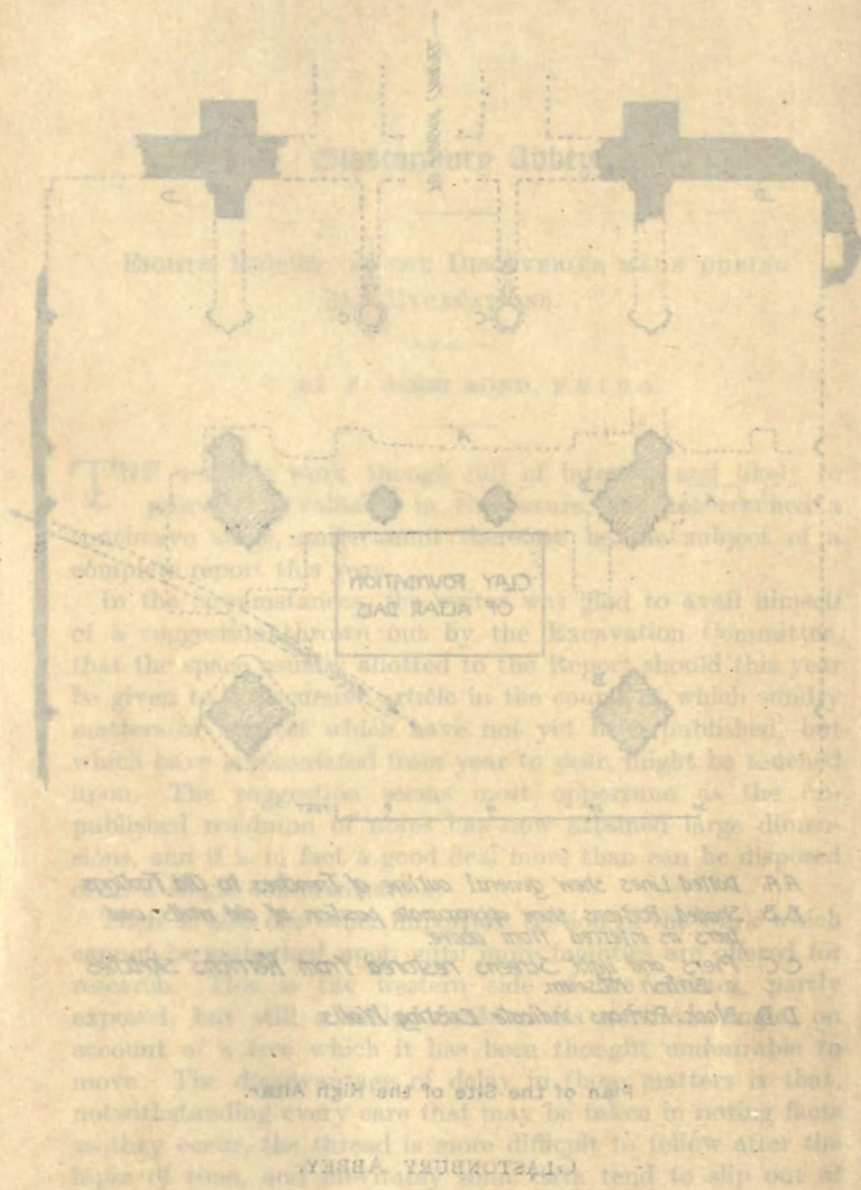
There is also one other important section of the work which cannot be embarked upon until more facilities are offered for research. This is the western side of the cloister, partly exposed, but still a sealed book at its northern angle, on account of a tree which it has been thought undesirable to move. The disadvantage of delay in these matters is that, notwithstanding every care that may be taken in noting facts as they occur, the thread is more difficult to follow after the lapse of time, and inevitably some data tend to slip out of



- A.A.*: Dotted Lines shew general outline of Trenches to Old Footings
B.B.: Shaded Portions shew approximate position of old walls and piers as inferred from above.
C.C.: Piers and light Screens restored from Kerrich's sketches in British Museum.
D.D.: Black Portions indicate Existing Walls.

Plan of the Site of the High Altar.

GLASTONBURY ABBEY.



CLAXTONBURY ABBEY.

sight. Let us hope that in this case the opportunity will not be too long deferred of completing the story of the cloister.

The notes offered this year cover a variety of subjects, among which are included memoranda on the North Transept Aisle, the Loretto Chapel, the High Altar and terminal wall of the Choir, Sacristy on South wall of Choir, some remarks on the Well in St. Mary's Chapel and the well-chamber, the Chapel in the Monks' Graveyard, and an account of the Subterranean Passages met with in the course of the writer's association with the Abbey.

NORTH TRANSEPT—WESTERN AISLE.

Some years ago the writer made a pictorial reconstruction of the central part of the interior of the Abbey Church (published in "Roodscreens and Roodlofts," Vol. I, Plate v).

This was as far as possible founded upon historical data—notably in the case of the inverted arches—the arches like St. Andrew's Cross, as they are called by Leland—which Abbot Bere put in for the support of the central tower. But other features had to be supplied according to reasonable conjecture, and in particular, the view was shown from a supposed archway on the west side of the North Transept giving a glimpse of an aisle on this side. Now it is well known that western aisles are not a customary feature of the transepts of Benedictine churches, but the feature was introduced for reasons which seemed sufficient, and among these reasons the fact that Glastonbury builders imitated Wells in so many respects, coupled with the probability that in so large and important a house as Glastonbury, extra features of this kind might be expected, seemed to offer grounds for the inclusion of an aisle. Nevertheless the writer was attacked for his venturesome step.

But some time later, the opportunity having arrived for an exploration of this part of the site, the foundation of the west wall was exposed, together with a section of the north wall of the nave, and it was found that a second line of foundations ran out northward from the nave footings, about as far westward of the transept wall as would be necessary to form the

width of an aisle, which in the case of Glastonbury would be 13 feet or thereabouts. This foundation, broad and solid, ran parallel to the aisle wall and northward for the same distance, turning at length to form a perfect junction with the north end-wall of the transept. Thus the existence of something in the nature of a western aisle was proved, the only difficulty being to decide at what level such an aisle could have been floored, for, be it remembered, there was a difference in level of Nave and Transept at Glastonbury of some 4 feet.

The chance preservation of a small patch of floor-tiling *in situ* gives us the level of the transept floor at a point close against its west wall, and this is the higher level. If the western aisle communicated with the nave it seems stretching probabilities to assume a difference of level at their junction. But perhaps the difficulty may be met if we bear in mind the arrangement of the earlier plan. Before the time of Abbot Monington the choir was short—of four bays only—and although a few years previously Abbot Walter had completed his fine stone screen in the choir arch, and the stalls must from that time forward have occupied the structural choir and freed the transepts and crossing; yet before his time we have no warrant for supposing that the arrangement of the stalls would have been other than we find them generally in the older monastic churches—namely, within a screen placed at some little distance to the west of the crossing. We may thus suppose that in the church as originally planned, the transept level extended westward for a short distance into the nave, sufficiently to cover the point of junction with the transept aisle on the north and the door of access to the cloister on the south. Where a marked difference of level exists, as at Glastonbury, the whole width of the church, both nave and aisles may be supposed to have been solidly screened at the point of division.

The comparative shallowness of the footings at the point investigated also suggests that they were carried higher before the floor-level was arrived at. Those who have seen St. David's Cathedral will be able to realise the sort of partition suggested. There would have been a central doorway leading to the choir below the crossing, and on each side, in the north

and south aisles of the nave, another door giving access to the space behind the stalls, in which area would be included the transepts and the western aisle in question. At the later date indicated by the writer's sketch, all this space would be thrown into the crossing which would be cleared of obstructions.

The south transept had no western aisle, nor could it have had, since the angle of the cloister walk occupies its place.

LORETTO CHAPEL.

Leland says with regard to this that it was the work of Abbot Bere (1493-1524). We quote from him 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 Chapel had long since disappeared and had faded from memory, but the old gardener at the Abbey, recently deceased, was always positive in his assertion that a wall of fine freestone used to lie in the bank on the north side of the nave, and was there until taken out by the former proprietor. The bank was cut into in one or two places but no positive indications were found. However the Cannon MS. seemed to offer additional evidence of a former building at this point, as the author gives a sketch of the general appearance of the ruins as he saw them, and he shows a rough pile of masonry here which he calls “chapter-house.” There is also another reference extant—but at this moment we cannot place it—by some antiquary of the old school, who describes this “chapter-house” as a fine piece of work.

But the walls, alas, are gone, and we doubt if even further research could give us the missing lines of the plan. All that now remains as evidence of Bere's fine work is confined to a few broken mouldings, the best being a section of a window-mullion, richly moulded, which was taken outward by the angle of the nave wall where it joins the western aisle of the transept. This section was of a character that accorded well with all that we know of Bere's work.

SITE OF THE HIGH ALTAR, AND EAST END OF THE CHOIR.

After the discovery of the Edgar Chapel, and the completion of the work of marking out its walls, attention was turned to the eastern extremity of the Abbey Church, as to the internal plan of which no reliable data existed. Readers may be reminded that Abbot Monington in the middle of the XIV Century, caused the Choir to be lengthened from four bays to six, and thus threw the retro-choir and processional avenue further east. The plan of this part has already been dealt with so far as the five chapels are concerned.

On opening the ground about the site of the east wall of Monington's choir, remains of stone footings were speedily found, and the two large masses marking the situation of the great angle-piers of the east wall were fairly well defined, in part by stonework, but more definitely by the clay matrix, which, here as everywhere, has proved the best of guides. Between these was a narrower line of masonry as for the support of a reredos wall, and at two intermediate points a greater width and convexity of outline bespoke the situation of two intermediate shafts, giving evidence of an original trio of arches behind the High Altar.

This was rather what had been expected, as it accords with Wells, and Monington's work seems from other indications to have been influenced in design by Glastonbury's nearest neighbour, as well as by the work at Gloucester. We do not doubt therefore that the triple arcade at Glastonbury would have taken very much the form of the Wells design, although there is reason to think that Monington's east window may have been more ambitious in scale than that of Wells, and from its magnitude, a source of weakness.

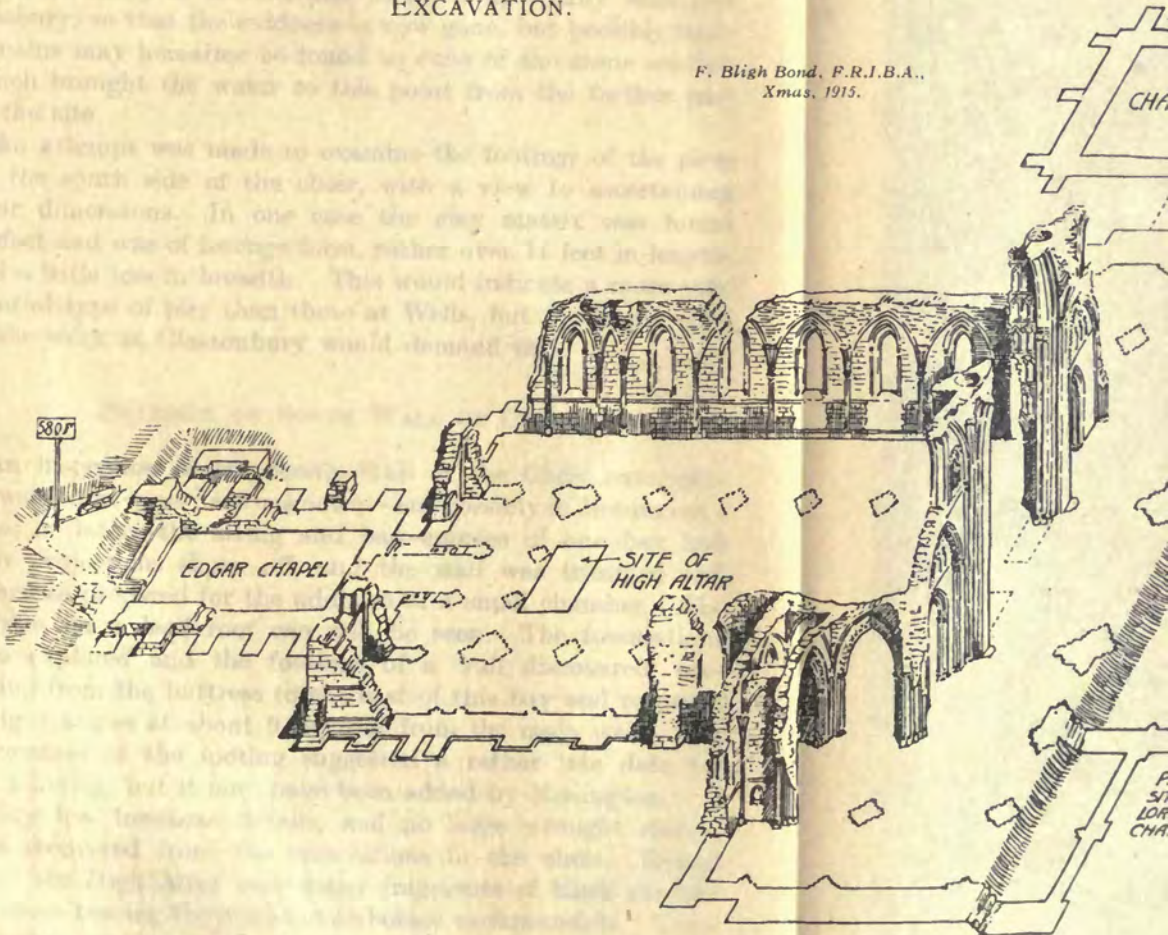
Just west of these footings the rectangular dais of the High Altar could be traced. Its dimensions were 20 feet by 12 feet for the actual platform of clay, and around this were some slight remains of a footing wall for steps.

There were signs that the last bay of the choir on the south had been occupied by a screen wall for the usual requirements of the sanctuary. Close to the south-west angle of the altar dais was a water-channel, of which the bed remained, and this

GLASTONBURY ABBEY.

PLAN IN PROJECTION SHOWING ELEVATION OF RUINS AND THE POSITION OF THE PRINCIPAL FEATURES DISCOVERED BY EXCAVATION.

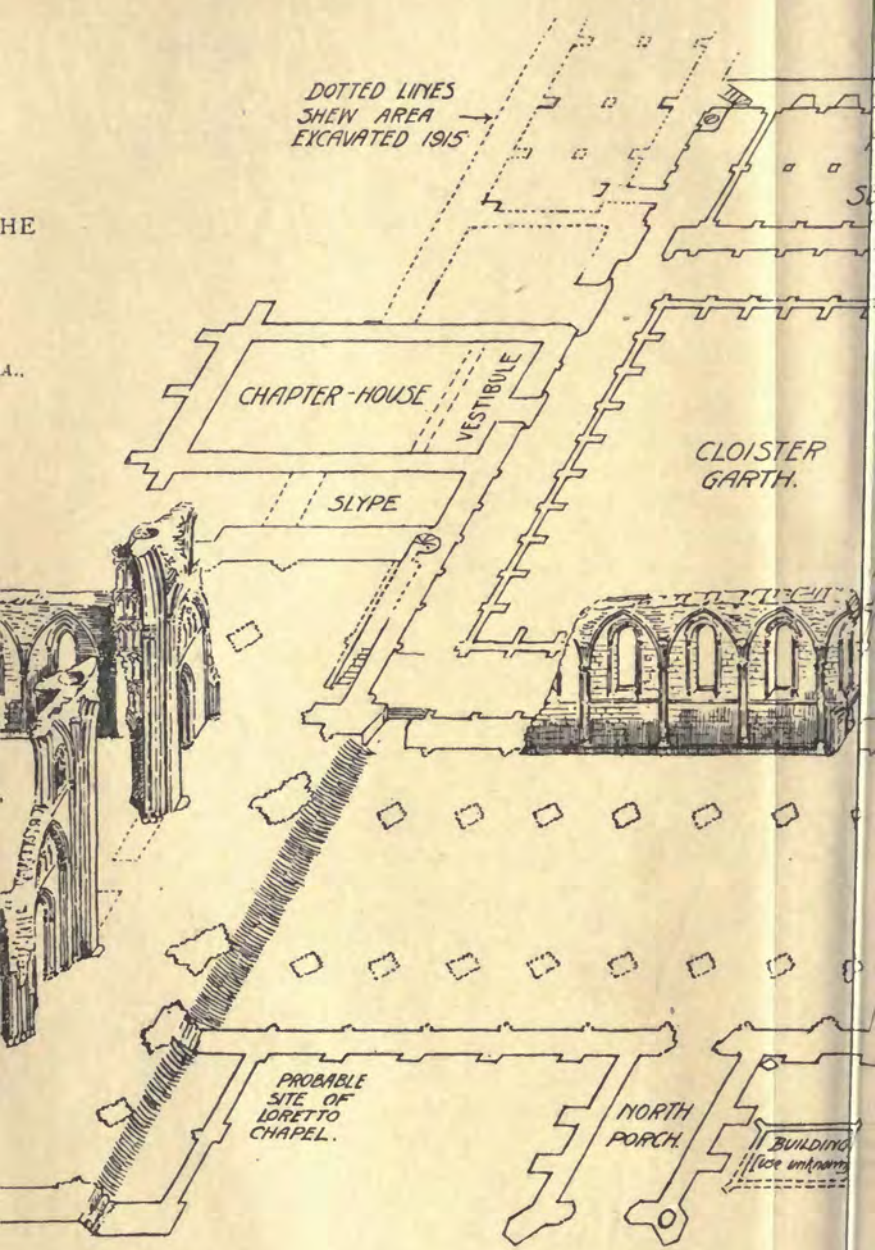
F. Bligh Bond, F.R.I.B.A.,
Xmas, 1915.



HE

A.

DOTTED LINES
SHOW AREA
EXCAVATED 1915



CHAPTER-HOUSE

VESTIBULE

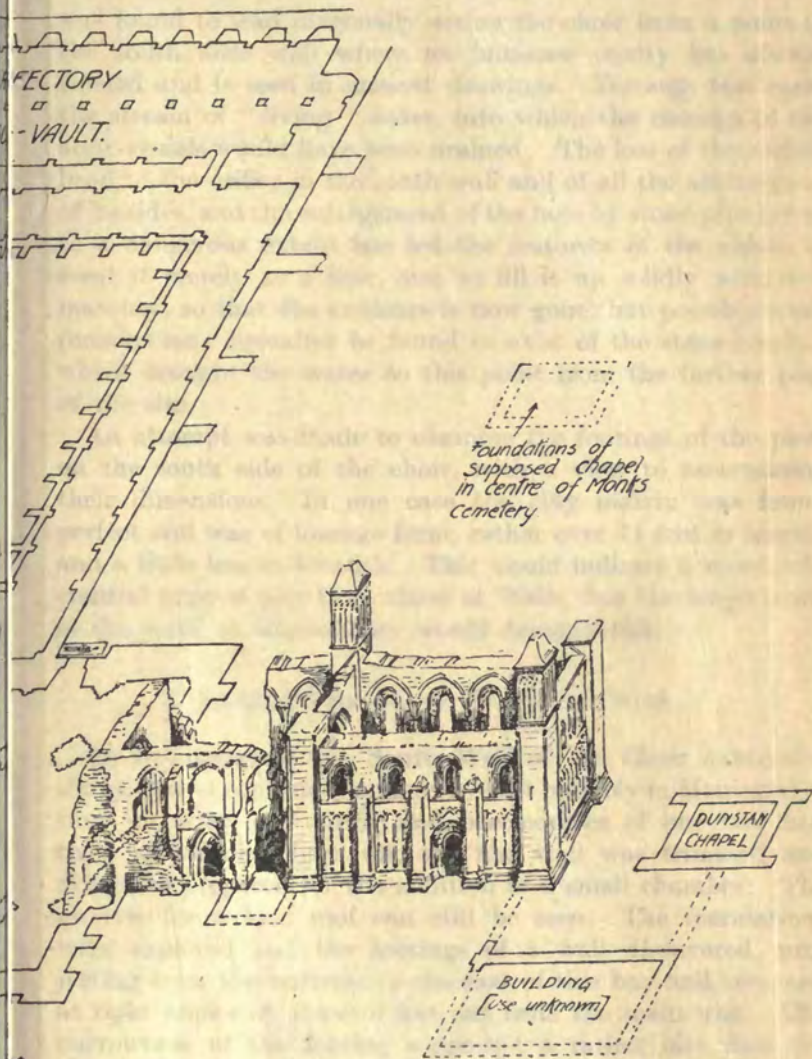
SLOPE

CLOISTER
GARTH.

PROBABLE
SITE OF
LORETTO
CHAPEL.

NORTH
PORCH.

BUILDING
(see unknown)



GLASTONBURY ABBEY

PLAN IN PROJECTION SHOWING ELEVATION ON R.I.X.
POSITION OF THE PRINCIPAL FEATURES DISCOVERED

EXPLANATION



was found to lead diagonally across the choir from a point in the south aisle wall where an immense cavity has always existed and is seen in ancient drawings. Through this came the stream of "living" water, into which the rinsings of the altar-vessels would have been drained. The loss of the arched head to the orifice in the south wall and of all the ashlar-work of its sides, and the enlargement of the hole by stone-plunderers to a dangerous extent has led the restorers of the abbey to treat it merely as a hole, and to fill it up solidly with new masonry, so that the evidence is now gone, but possibly some remains may hereafter be found to exist of the stone conduit which brought the water to this point from the farther part of the site.

An attempt was made to examine the footings of the piers on the south side of the choir, with a view to ascertaining their dimensions. In one case the clay matrix was found perfect and was of lozenge form, rather over 11 feet in length, and a little less in breadth. This would indicate a more substantial type of pier than those at Wells, but the larger scale of the work at Glastonbury would demand this.

SACRISTY ON SOUTH WALL OF CHOIR.

An inspection of the South Wall of the Choir externally shows that at some date unknown—but possibly in Monington's time, or later—the string and base-courses of one bay had their projections shorn off, and the wall was trimmed and otherwise prepared for the addition of a small chamber. The grooves for a lead roof can still be seen. The foundations were explored and the footings of a wall discovered, projecting from the buttress to the east of this bay and returned at right angles at about 9 feet out from the main wall. The narrowness of the footing suggested a rather late date for this building, but it may have been added by Monington.

Very few freestone details, and no large wrought stones, were recovered from the excavations in the choir. Round about the High Altar were many fragments of black marble-like stone bearing the marks of elaborate workmanship. These appeared as though from the reredos or altar-canopy. A

small fragment of similar stone, part of the arm of a figure in chain-mail, was found under the soil a little west of the altar platform. This may be—who shall say—the sole surviving relic of the once glorious tomb of Arthur.

THE WELL BY ST. MARY'S CHAPEL.

The main access to the chamber containing the Well is now from the crypt beneath St. Mary's Chapel. This access was formed by a cut through the footings of the older wall when the crypt was made in the XVI Century. The date of the well itself is entirely a matter of conjecture, but it was doubtless there in very early days. The arched recess in which it lies is formed of sections of late Norman work similar to, if not identical with, the arched heads of the triple lights in the west wall of the chapel.

The only possible view as to the origin of these is, in the writer's opinion, that they came from the east wall of St. Mary's Chapel in which they occupied a similar position to those on the west until they were thrown out by the removal of the wall when the Galilee was merged in the chapel.

The well is artificially fed. In the course of excavation there was found beneath the floor of the crypt, right at the south-east corner, a properly-formed stone conduit, for water carriage.

This appears to have brought pure water from a source higher on the hill. Portions of a larger stone channel have from time to time been taken up by the local builders or roadmakers at points lying between the Abbey and Chalice Well. There is good reason to suppose that the water from this well was artificially led into the Abbey and thus diverted from its natural outlet to the meadows on the further side of the southern ridge which, on the south, separates the Vale of Avalon from the adjoining low lands.

The architectural traces on the south side of St. Mary's Chapel indicate a former access to the Well-chamber above ground from the Galilee, through the arched opening in the westernmost bay (now concealed by a brand-new and un-historical ashlar wall), and this gave access to a small building

attached on the ground level to the south side of the Galilee, whence, by a stone stairway the well-house was reached. This stair, for the first part of its length, skirted the Chapel wall, running westward alongside it, past the base of the s.e. turret, turning south to join with the newel-stair of which the lower part only now remains. At the point where the stair turns, a junction was formed by the narrow entry of XV Century date leading through the south wall into the chapel itself, and thus the intercommunication would be made complete.

Traces of the abutment of the flight where it ran along the wall from the Galilee are still discernible, but the architectural evidence is now rendered quite obscure as the whole of the last bay of the Galilee is covered by new work on quite original lines.

THE CHAPEL IN THE MONKS' GRAVEYARD.

Old records speak of a "Capella Sancti Michaelis" in the midst of the graveyard of the *Vetusta Ecclesia*, near which were buried Joseph of Arimathea and other saintly men.

Reference to this chapel may be found in an extract from the MS. in the "Tabula" preserved at Naworth Castle, the Latin of which is given in *Proceedings*, XXXIV, ii, 120, and from which we gather that this chapel was originally dedicated to St. Michael and the Saints who reposed in this cemetery. In the year 1382, the fabric then being almost consumed by age, was rebuilt (*de novo reparata*) by Abbot Chynock and dedicated in honour of the aforesaid Saints of whom the chief was Joseph of Arimathea.

It may be quite reasonably assumed that this added dedication was the origin of the name "St. Joseph's Chapel," popularly applied to the Chapel of St. Mary the Virgin.

It was assumed by the writer and his friend, Captain J. A. Bartlett, that the best place to look for remains of the chapel of St. Michael would be south of the south-eastern angle of the Lady Chapel, and, as nearly as could be computed, midway between that point and the site of the buildings of the Guest-House block, which could be fairly inferred

from other data in their possession. Here a sinking was made which turned out to be immediately over the south wall of a small and—to judge by the quality of the footings encountered—very ancient building. The remains were at a considerable depth, and consisted of the same ponderous yellow boulders—"Tor Burrs"—which had characterised some of the earliest footings encountered, and of which the "egg-stone" was a specimen.

This foundation was cleared to the s.w. angle and the return of the west wall cleared for a short distance in a northerly direction, but owing to the great depth, and the difficulty of digging—the whole ground being full of tree-roots—no entire excavation was possible.

But the work was carried eastward and showed the building to have had an extreme length, east and west, not much greater than 15 feet. At the s.e. corner a little of the superincumbent masonry was revealed, but no architectural character established.

Near this point, protected by a capping of rough slabs, appeared a lead pipe leading in an almost easterly direction from the south side of the wall, and this it was thought might have had some connection with the piscina of the former chapel. But, again, the care with which it was protected, and the length of its apparent run, seemed to suggest that its use was for bringing spring-water to this point.

Not far to the eastward and almost in line with this building appeared the foundation of another wall, terminating in a building of large dimensions, jutting out westward from the cloister. Here a considerable number of encaustic tiles were found, and the leaden Bulla already described in the *Proceedings*, LX, ii, 41-45, came to light. Among the small objects found close to the end of the chapel wall at its s.e. angle were a number of oyster-shells, which had been used by the monks as palettes for their colour work. One or two of these still contained traces of vermilion, others of azure, and others again the remains of black or neutral colours.

The colours were quite brilliant and a small portion of the azure was transferred to a support and used by the writer

as a pattern for colour work in chancel ceiling decoration in one or two Somerset churches.

This seems a fitting place for the acknowledgment of Captain J. A. Bartlett's services to the writer in the several years of his work at the Abbey. It was an old friendship and a community of interest which led to this association, and the sympathy of ideas—sometimes almost "telepathic" in its nature—which existed between the writer and his friend, undoubtedly laid the foundation of much of the success which all along so fortunately attended the work. An association of this nature is apt to produce a sub-conscious activity which, in combination with purely intellectual work, may sometimes yield exceptional results. More might be said on this subject, and possibly may, in its due time and place.

EVIDENCE OF SUBTERRANEAN PASSAGES.

Probably no ancient site in Britain has been without its traditions of secret passages of communication from some central point to the outlying district. These traditions attach themselves specially to our mediæval castles and abbeys, and it is noteworthy that in some instances their existence has been proved. Where a castle is in question their usefulness is sufficiently obvious, but the purpose of such subterranean channels in connection with a religious house would not be so easy to define.

The stories concerning these are frequently of the most fanciful description, and if founded on fact, have certainly not lost by being repeated from father to son since the close of the mediæval era.

Glastonbury was indeed no exception in this respect. The writer, during his six years' sojourn in the town, heard many of the tales current among the older folks, among which were two, possibly three, which appeared to have some probable foundation.

These were—

- (1). A communication from the Pilgrims' Inn to some point within the Abbey walls. This appeared well authenticated.

- (2). A passage underground from some point in the crypt either of the Lady Chapel or the Galilee, to some more or less distant point. With this story the typical legend of buried treasure had been mixed up.
- (3). A large underground passage on the south side of the Abbey, running approximately east and west.

Of the more fantastic stories it may be of interest to mention one which claimed the existence of a tunnelled way from the Abbey to the Tor Hill, or to the Chapel on the hill, and this was linked in the old peoples' imagination with No. 2. Another was to the effect that there existed a passage from Street to the Abbey, passing under the river Brue. This last being a little deficient in probability owing to the unfortunate nature of the subsoil in the marshes, there was grafted on it the legend of the dog. This accomplished animal it seems, having been put into the open end of the passage in Street, with great sagacity found its way out somewhere at the Glastonbury end.

Now as to story No. 1. There seemed some evidence for this but the Pilgrims' Inn had lost the obvious traces of it. There is a fine stone-vaulted cellar in this building approached by a spiral stone newel-stair on the east side, and there are traces of a second stair of access on the west. In the floor is a channel for the drainage of water which enters the soil under the High Street at the south end. The writer after tapping the wall at this end, was rewarded by discovering the orifice of the passage, which had been built up with brickwork, and the whole surface disguised with an uniform coat of whitewash. It was a low tunnel formed in well-cut stone with a pointed segmental roof, and furnished on each side with a projecting stone ledge, for an elbow-rest. The passage was found clear for some 20 feet south—or to about the centre of the road, where it was completely cut off by a brick sewer. What lies beyond is yet to be determined. The natural continuation would bring it to the near neighbourhood of the Abbot's Gateway where there was a porter's lodge.

The Pilgrims' Inn, now the "George," was built *temp.* Edward IV by Abbot Selwood, for the accommodation of

guests. It may perhaps be reasonably inferred that the quarters it provided would occasionally shelter some who in the guise of travellers were charged with special business of a confidential nature.¹

Such messengers would by means of the passage be able to enter the Abbey without publicity and transact their business unhindered by any curious persons.

(2). The story of the secret passage associated with the Crypt of the Lady Chapel was widely believed. According to one old tradition, it led from somewhere near the eastern end—which would be under the Galilee—but the soil below the Galilee floor-level in the last bay to the east—just outside the crypt—was excavated by the writer some years ago, and the result disproved the possibility of the existence of such a passage as far as the east wall was concerned. Neither, it is clear, is there any evidence now of any opening underground in the north or south walls of the Galilee, though for a while a certain feature noted in the footings of the north wall gave rise to speculation. This is a massive relieving-arch in the wall under the north side of the stepped bench-table in the Galilee. It has been examined inside and out and its purpose is now clearly seen as a measure of prudence on the part of the builders who had at this point to carry their walls over a bad piece of ground. It seems that at this point a small depression existed, and this was full of water and soft blue clay such as we meet with in the low lands. Just east of this comes the great church with its massive west front, formerly furnished with towers, and the greater weight of this would render the connection with the lighter Galilee wall rather unstable from the inequality of the strains. Hence the relieving-arch would serve a useful purpose in allowing the two parts of the foundations to take their bearings independently.

But the story of the passage was repeated in a more definite

1. "Y^e George Inn (w^{ch} they say was the Abbot's Inn) being built of fine carved freestone of great antiquity, very beautiful. wth y^e arms of some of y^e Abbots as also y^e figures of Faith, Hope and Charity, with Charity's two daughters, it being a free Inn for strangers and pilgrims who came on any business to y^e monastery." Cannon MS., p. 208.

manner by an old inmate of the Women's Almshouse, who said that in her childhood she remembered the passage being still open at the end, and she had been down it for some distance and had seen iron hooks or brackets in the walls.

This woman declared that it ran from the well-chamber on the south side of the chapel.

But the hole in the ground where the passage abutted on the chapel was a source of danger to the sheep which grazed in the Abbey, and on one occasion a lamb fell in and was lost, so that the owner of the Abbey had it sealed up.

This sealing of the head of the well-chamber did as a matter of fact take place at about the time this witness would have been speaking of. As we see it now, there is a freestone wall terminating the passage of access from the crypt to the well, and overhead is a modern brick vault.

In view of this evidence, the writer cut a circuitous trench around the outside of the well-chamber, commencing close to the south wall of the chapel at some distance to the west of the chamber and taking a radius of between 20 and 30 feet from the same, curving round to the east as it went. This cutting was taken to a depth of from 8 to 10 feet.

It passed through the soil of the monks' graveyard and this loose rubbly material was alone in view until a point was reached which was nearly due south of the well-chamber and therefore, roughly, opposite to the bit of freestone wall bounding the space by the well.

At this point, however, the rubble suddenly gave place to a filling of clay, and it was noted that this filling appeared to occupy a trench with vertical sides. Nothing was seen of any walling, and nothing to suggest that a walled enclosure had formerly been there except the perpendicular line marking the boundary of the clay. Nevertheless it is quite possible to suppose that, if there had been such a passage here, the trace of the cavity left by the clearance of its masonry would be very much as this appearance suggested.

Assuming such a passage, what, it may be asked, would be the use of it? It may be taken to have run south across the graveyard, towards the group of buildings containing the

guest-hall and almonry (if tradition may on this point be trusted).

The use would be one connected with the service of the crypt and this would make it quite a late contrivance. The crypt was for the accommodation of shrines frequented by pilgrims and as it would, owing to the nature of the plan, be somewhat disconnected from the main avenues of thoroughfare, it would seem that a covered way from the monastic buildings direct to this point might be a desideratum.

(3). There were many stories of a big underground passage in the field to the south of the Abbey. In one place there had been a subsidence and the stone head of some channel was said to have been noticed. An old workman (Thyer) gave a description of a deep walled passage covered with flagstones, which he said he remembered having seen when it was opened many years before by Mr. Austin, the then owner, who used some of the flags, and filled in the part unroofed. But he could not exactly locate it and the search made in the direction he thought most probable revealed nothing at all. More recently however other evidence came to hand of the existence of a large stone-built channel traversing the orchard to a point in the western boundary some way south of the Abbot's Kitchen.

Opportunity was afforded of running a trench in this direction at the time when the search was being made for the footings of the Abbot's House, to the south-east of the Refectory.

The passage was found a little beyond the southernmost boundary of the Abbot's House and proved to be—as had already been anticipated—the main drain of the Abbey. It was of large size, large enough to admit of easy exploration and one of the writer's pupils ascended it for some 60 feet. The course of the drain was slightly to the south-west, the ancient exit being at the lowest point of Magdalen Street where once was a chain bridge, and probably a water-gate to the Abbey for the entrance of barges.

It must be remembered that the mediæval abbey was inevitably dependent upon a canal system for the maintenance of its chief communications with the outside world. A mari-

time link must be read into its jurisdiction on the Avon at Bristol. Control over its extensive territories in Somerset must have been effected in a great measure by water, and we do not doubt that in ancient days the Abbot's barges plied actively on the waterways which intersected the marshes.

A few remarks may be permitted in conclusion on the subject of the secret-passage tradition connecting the village of Street with the Abbey. A passage exists, and is a well-formed one of ample size. It leads in some unknown direction from an outlying building in the grounds of the old Manor House of Street.

But a complete exploration of this interesting passage cannot be made until the obstruction which now blocks it at some distance from its mouth has been removed. The present theory is that it commenced in the house and formed a secret exit to the stables.

As far as can be seen at present it has several turnings which appear to head for the house.