

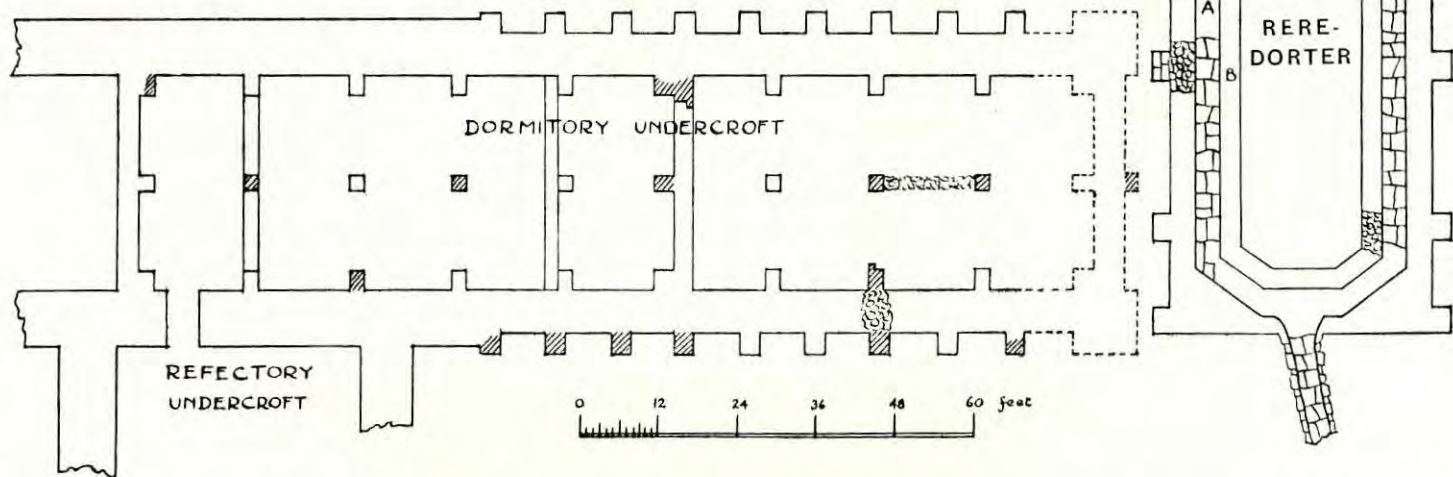
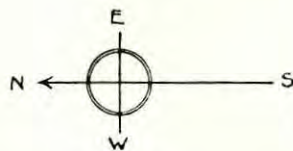
Glastonbury Abbey Excavations, 1934

BY THE DIRECTORS, SIR C. R. PEERS, KNT., C.B.E., *Hon. Vice-Pres. Soc. Antiq.*; ALFRED W. CLAPHAM, C.B.E., *Sec. Soc. Antiq.*; AND THE VERY REV. PRIOR HORNE, F.S.A.

THE completion of the excavation of the dormitory and the rere-dorter last summer gives the opportunity of providing a plan (Plate XI) and description of the whole of this part of the monastic buildings. While the south end of the dormitory has been located exactly, as well as its side walls on east and west, the north end is at present somewhat uncertain. In many cases when the actual foundations of a wall have been removed by those in search of stone, the position of such foundations is generally easy to trace as the trench in which they stood remains, owing to the clayey nature of the soil. Unfortunately the ground at the north end of the dormitory has been so dug over and disturbed by those looking for stone when the abbey was used as a quarry, that all traces of foundations at this point seem to have been obliterated. It is likely however, when the walls of the Chapter House can be defined, that they will form a limit beyond which we can say the dormitory will not have extended. Taking provisionally what appears to be the northern end of this building, the dormitory would have measured externally 156 feet and in width would have been 48 feet. Of its height we know nothing, but we may conclude that as the foundation walls were 6 feet in thickness and as they had external buttresses every 10 feet, the dormitory may well have been a fairly high and substantial building.

The ground floor or undercroft of the dorter is what has been exposed by excavation and, as well as the side walls and their buttresses just mentioned, there is a series of pillar bases that passes up the centre of the building from end to end. These bases are 14 feet apart, and an internal buttress projects

GLASTONBURY ABBEY



THE DORMITORY UNDERCROFT AND RERE-DORTER, GLASTONBURY ABBEY

from each side wall, in a line with these central pillars. This is exactly the same arrangement as in the undercroft of the refectory close at hand, where we have still in existence the vaulting ribs that once spanned the space from these central pillars to the buttresses at the walls. They are not *in situ* now but have been laid out on the ground to give an idea of the undercroft and its stone roof. And there are also sufficient remains of the side walls to show where the vaulting ribs sprang from, and hence it is possible to gauge with a fair amount of accuracy what must have been the internal height of this sub-vault. But we have no remains whatever to assist us in forming any idea of the roof of the dormitory undercroft. No piece of vaulting rib has been found on the site, nor pieces of *tufa* which were generally freely used, as being light, for filling in between the ribs. The absence of any indication of a stone roof here, makes it perhaps possible that this undercroft had only a wooden one. Beams could have been carried from the central pillars to the side buttresses, and planks laid on these would have formed the roof, and at the same time, the floor of the dormitory overhead. Whether such was really the arrangement here, we can now only conjecture.

The various partitions, or portions of them, that have been uncovered, show that the undercroft was cut up into sections which formed probably store rooms and the like, and perhaps even dwelling rooms, as some of the partitions towards the northern end, appear to have been fairly solid. There are no remains of a floor, and if it was either flagstone or cobble, it would have been valuable to those who came here for materials.

THE RERE-DORTER

The rere-dorter, or sanitary block, is situated at the end of the dormitory and hence occupies the position usual in the lay-out of Benedictine monasteries. While the position is the usual one, the plan is altogether different from that of any other of which we have remains. Externally the building measures 80 feet by 40 feet, and it is placed at right-angles to the end of the dormitory, so that while the western faces of the two buildings are in the same line, the rere-dorter extends some 30 feet beyond it on the east side.

The external wall of this building is marked C in the plan (Plate XI). Internally, what would correspond to the ground floor in an ordinary building is on a level with the undercroft of the dormitory, but it was not an open space, but was filled with solid clay, contained by the inner wall B. The wall B will have risen to the height of the dormitory undercroft roof, so that the floor of the rere-dorter itself was on the same level as the dormitory floor. That the undercroft of the rere-dorter was enclosed and filled up entirely with clay, as has been said, was clearly proved by the portions of the containing wall B that remained. The internal face of this wall was left in its rough state, and the clay was filled in up against it as the wall went up. There was therefore no *ground floor* to the rere-dorter, except the open channel or sewer A which was about 3 feet 9 in. across, in most places. The bottom of the channel was made of flagstones, and as will be seen from the plan, much of this is perfect. The sides of the sewer were also large slabs of stone and the junction of sides and bottom show a careful piece of building.

A stone channel bringing a large stream of water to the rere-dorter is intact for about 40 feet to the east of the building. At this point there were probably hatches for turning the water in to one or other of the two existing channels, for there is considerable disturbance of the ground showing that stone, etc., has been removed in some quantity. After the divided water had travelled down the two channels the streams met together again at the west end of the rere-dorter and ran out and down the main sewer, which having passed in the direction of the Abbot's lodgings and the great kitchen, found its way eventually into the mill-stream and so to the river Brue. There is a fall of 14 in. in the channels as they run through the rere-dorter before entering the large sewer. This sewer is complete with its cover-stones beyond the rere-dorter for a distance of 30 feet where it has collapsed, but some years ago it was intact again further on.

Of the rere-dorter itself, which was the upper story of the part just described, we have no remains at all. It was probably on the same level as the dormitory and must have been connected with it by a covered bridge, as there is no other way

of entrance from the dormitory. In most of the existing sanitary blocks of this description, the drain generally ran down one side or the middle of the lower story, and hence the seats in the rere-dorter overhead were in a single line against the wall or a double line back to back, down the centre of the building. In this Glastonbury example, the seats must have been all round the walls, as the channel below is in this position, and this arrangement appears to be quite unusual.

During the removal of the clay that filled the under-croft of the rere-dorter, some pieces of Roman pottery of the first and second century were found, also a Roman ear-scoop, and two undefined iron implements of early date. There was also a half-groat of Henry VIII, and a sterling penny struck in the Low Countries in imitation of an English penny of Henry VIII, the design purposely made rather badly so that the coin would pass current without question. It is not clear enough for the mint to be identified. A crowbar that had been used apparently when the building was destroyed and a small pair of brass compasses were the only other finds, during the last excavation, except numerous fragments of tiles, some of which enabled former fragmentary patterns to be completed.

It will be felt that a most satisfactory piece of work has now been brought to a conclusion, and that interesting parts of the monastic buildings have been plainly revealed. A great deal more has yet to be excavated if a complete plan of this great monastery is to be obtained. The Directors are of opinion that the Chapter House, near to the south transept of the church, should next be explored, for at present little or nothing is known about this important building, and they venture to hope that the Trustees will continue to support further excavations with the same generosity that they have shown in the past.

In conclusion the Directors would like to place on record their appreciation of the work of Mr. C. E. Clayton during these excavations, in exposing and laying out in so satisfactory a manner the buildings described above. Without his constant care and supervision, this would have been impossible.