

On the Position of Church Doorways.

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NO one can use his powers of observation together with those of his reason on any subject without trying to reduce to rule the results of what he has seen, and so build up a theory in harmony with those observations, even though, to the un instructed, what he has seen may seem to be details of absolutely no importance.

It was such a cultivated and reasoned observation that enabled the famous Professor Owen to build up the entire structures of some of the extinct inhabitants of the earth from a few fossilized bones. Is it not therefore possible for us in the field of mediæval architecture, guided by the numerous traces that exist, to build up theories by which we can elucidate the original structures of our ecclesiastical buildings—buildings that under a continuous existence *in regular use*, have undergone the process of re-building, re-arrangement, enlargement and general transformation?

In such an attempt the Doorways of our Churches are, I have reason to believe, especially helpful, because it is self-evident that though almost everything else might be altered, the means of access to a building *in constant use*, would only be changed for some most weighty reason, and therefore (like the chancel arch of our parish churches, that marks the boundary between the rights and responsibilities of the rector and the parishioners), we may look upon the positions of the doorways of any church as sure records of the original building on

that site. The building may have been widened or lengthened (or both), and thus the *actual* position of the doorways have been changed, but it is only relatively—a few feet N, S, or W., on the same lines.

Let us now, after these preliminary explanations, consider the different types of churches that we find throughout England, and take note of any apparent rules in the several positions of their doorways, and thus, by comparative anatomy, so to speak, draw our conclusions as to similar buildings that by accident or the destructive hand of the so-called restorer have had these features obliterated.

We may take it as a general axiom that throughout the greater part of England the civilization and christianity of the Romanized Britons gradually died out after the withdrawal of the Roman legions about A.D. 410, so that to a great extent when St. Augustine came on his mission in A.D. 597, there was little left of the old christianity, though I cannot believe it was entirely wiped out, even in East Anglia. If the faith taught by the Jesuit missionaries in Japan has still survived the fearful persecutions of the past two hundred years, one may well believe there was a like survival here after the interval of the two centuries of which I am speaking. Besides, the Romans wherever they went were great builders. Some of their secular buildings survive amongst us to this day. May we not therefore feel sure that when St. Augustine landed, their churches, though possibly roofless, were dotted about the country almost as they are now? St. Martin's, Canterbury, was in use, and probably the ruined church in Dover Castle, and Lyminge, near Folkestone. These are existing instances, and up and down the country there are traces of these early buildings to be found if carefully sought for, *e.g.*, St. Piran's Church (Perranzabuloe), in Cornwall, and the little known chapel of St. Trillo (now on the sea shore, but up to the XIV Century in the midst of the forest). The parish is known as Llandrillo yn Rhos—the church of St. Trillo in the forest

—between the Little Orme's Head and Colwyn Bay. (Mr. M. H. Bloxam assured me it dates back to the early VI Century, long before St. Augustine's mission). The influence of these early buildings prevailed alongside of later influences, and has given us types of ground plans, as I hope to point out presently.

Mr. Ferguson in his most useful "Handbook of Architecture," makes the very just observation that in the churches of the Latin races the principal doorway faced the high altar, whereas in those of the Teutonic races lateral ones mostly prevailed. As we might expect from our past history these two arrangements are found striving for the mastery, and often combined in the same building.

We may classify the various types of Churches as follows :

A. Secular Minsters. *B.* Benedictine Abbeys. *C.* Cistercian Abbeys. *D.* Augustinian Abbeys. *E.* Parish Churches. There are various other types of churches, *e.g.*, Carthusian, Premonstratensian, Franciscan, Dominican, etc., which it would take too much time to survey. The classes I have mentioned will be quite enough for our purpose.

In the larger buildings, comprising classes *A. B. C.* and *D.*, the doorways may be divided into three main groups, with certain exceptional instances to be noted hereafter. These are: (*i.*) Western. (*ii.*) Lateral, *i.e.*, flanking the nave. (*iii.*) Transeptal.

I. Western Doorways.

First in importance is undoubtedly the triple w. doorway—an importation from France about the middle of the XII Century. This is a happy combination of the useful with the dignified, which cannot be well surpassed. The sub-division of the central one by a shaft as at York, Winchester, Wells, and Lichfield, is a later French development. Whether it is merely to enhance the dignity or (as some hold) to denote the official dignity of each who passed through abreast is not for me to say. Should Royalty or a Papal Legate visit York,

he would enter abreast of the Archbishop, or should the Archbishop visit Wells, he would enter abreast of the Bishop through the adjoining doorway. This triple group is entirely confined to classes *A* and *B*, but even in these here, it is not the important feature it is in France; in fact at Wells they are positively insignificant—"mouseholes" according to Freeman. My reason for assigning the middle of the XII Century for the introduction of these w. doorways, is that the earliest example we have is at Lincoln Cathedral. Here the central portion of the w. facade is all that is left of the work of Bishop Remigius (1067-1092). From excavations made about 1880, it was conclusively proved that this façade had originally no doorways at all. The present magnificent ones are insertions by Bishop Alexander (1123-1148) at quite the end of his Episcopate. The original doorways being probably n. and s. under the Transeptal Gables that project from the w. towers.

At Ripon, to my mind the most beautiful group of all, the three are close together, and open into the very wide aisleless nave (the present aisles being additions of the early XVI Century), and are the early work of Archbishop Gray (1216-1255). Sometimes, as at Beverley, there is only one side doorway. At Southwell there is a single central one of late Norman character.

In *B* (Benedictine Abbeys), in early Norman days, there was no w. doorway, *e.g.*, Worcester (where the present w. front is XIX Century), and Romsey, but we find a single one at Rochester of most un-English type and of about 1150 date.

In later days we have triple portals at Peterborough (early XIII Century) beneath a portico, absolutely unique in design and grandeur. St. Alban's (an unfinished XIII Century design that survived, only to be murdered by Lord Grimthorpe), Winchester (late XIV, when the Norman nave was shortened by two bays by Bishop Edington), and Bath (a rebuilding of XVI Century). Durham seems to be another instance, but here the side ones were only pierced by Bishop Langley in

the XV Century, to give access to the Galilee (Lady) Chapel. At the same time the late Norman central doorway was blocked by a screen, as it remained till about 60 years ago.

In classes *C* (Cistercian) and *D* (Augustinian), the single w. doorway was, I believe, the invariable rule, but the naves in the latter class have been so frequently destroyed that one cannot lay down the rule with absolute certainty.

II. *Lateral Doorways flanking the Nave.*

These may be sub-divided into two groups, viz., those available for the laity, and those reserved for the clergy and officials.

In *A*, *B* (and to a certain extent in *D*), we find these people's doorways, as a rule, one of the grandest features of the church, and they would appear to be survivals of the early Teutonic custom of churches having no w. entrance at all, and sometimes having a w. apse, as there was once at Canterbury and as we can see now in the Cathedral of Mainz. These usually had a porch of two bays with a chamber above, to which various uses were assigned. At Durham, *e.g.*—the finest Norman example, destroyed about 1790 by the sacrilegious hand of Wyatt—it was used by two monks, whose duty it was to admit at any time those who claimed sanctuary. These porches are more usually on the n. side—the s. being the more sheltered and convenient site for the cloisters and other premises belonging to the clergy, especially in religious houses—but at Canterbury, Gloucester, Chester, Sherborne and Malmesbury, these positions for local reasons were reversed. At Canterbury the "Suthe Dure" in the same position as now is recorded long before the Conquest as the principal entrance. This porch is usually in the second or third bay from the w. front, but in *A* we sometimes find it half way up the nave—at Wells and Hereford even nearer the crossing—probably because the original nave was extended westwards when rebuilt, the doorway's site remaining unchanged. In monastic churches its position was governed by being always opposite that opening into the w. walk of the cloisters. In *B* we sometimes find

it in the first bay, as at Canterbury and Sherborne. Beverley Minster, a secular church that never had a cloister, is quite exceptional in having people's doorways both *n.* and *s.* as well as in each great transept and two in the *w.* front.

In *C*, to the best of my recollection, with the exception of Kirkstall, near Leeds, such lateral people's doorways are not found. We may account for this by the fact that Cistercian houses did not follow old English customs in the matter of ground plans, nor were the laity, beyond those immediately connected with the domain, according to the original design of the foundation, ever admitted to worship in their churches as a matter of right.

On the other hand the doorways communicating with the cloisters (facing the *e.* and *w.* walks respectively) are common to all buildings of *B*, *C* and *D*, and pretty nearly always hold the same relative position. The only exception I know of is at Canterbury, where the *e.* doorway opens into the *n.* transept (facing the *s.* walk), and is a mere postern; and at New Shoreham (Sussex), there is a doorway, now blocked up, in a similar position. This *e.* walk is always adjacent to the transept (or its *w.* aisle). At Westminster this seems, as it were, cut out of the aisle, with a loft above it opening into the transept, showing that originally there was no *w.* aisle. The western of the two doorways is governed by the size of the cloister garth, the nave extending several bays westwards, as at Norwich, Ely, Peterborough, and St. Albans.

Between these doorways there is considerable difference in size and richness of ornament—the smaller, called the abbot's (or, in monastic cathedrals, the prior's,) door, being usually much smaller and more highly ornamented. Their relative position depends on the arrangement of the monastic buildings, *e.g.*, whether the monks' day-room (with dortor above) lay to the *w.* of the cloister, as at Durham, Worcester, Winchester and others, or to the *e.*, as at Westminster, Canterbury, Bath, Gloucester, Sherborne, Tewkesbury; the abbot's (or prior's) lodging being on the opposite side.

In *C* the w. cloister doorway was for the *conversi* (lay brothers, who were practically farm labourers). It admitted them to the w. part of the nave only. The e. door was for the monks. At Fountains a wall ran up the middle of the nave, so possibly the outside laity were admitted through the w. door to the n. part of the nave. The abbot had his own private entrance direct from his lodging e. of the great s. transept.

We must bear in mind that in *A* the cloister was an ornamental luxury, not an absolute necessity as in a monastery where it was the centre round which the community life was spent, and therefore in secular buildings (where there is a cloister) it follows no fixed rule as to position.

III.—*Transeptal Doorways.*

In France these are some of the most striking features of the larger churches, only slightly falling short of the grandeur of those at the w., e.g., Amiens, Paris, Rheims, Chartres; but in England where we do find them they are usually insignificant and for the most part quite subordinate features.

With the noteworthy exception of the n. transept of Westminster Abbey—a design French in character, but English in detail—we have no other instance in class *B* that I know of, except Selby. Perhaps the reason for this grandeur is that it was the royal entrance abutting on the king's palace.

In *A*, the usual position is not central, but adjoining the w. wall, except at Lichfield, York, and in many collegiate churches in that diocese. The earliest existing are Southwell c. 1150, Ripon c. 1180, and Hedon a few years later.

In *C*, transeptal doorways are unknown, I think, except a small postern at Rieveaulx, adjoining the w. wall of the s. transept, and the ground plan of Strata Florida in S. Wales, shows a central one in the n. transept, but it may not be original.

In *D*, these transeptal doorways are not uncommon, e.g. Carlisle, Bristol, Hexham, and are usually central.

At Wells and Salisbury there are doorways in the s.w.

angle of the transept communicating with the cloister, and at Lincoln the great Galilee porch is similarly placed.

In addition to these classified examples, we have exceptional ones, *e.g.*, the great s. doorway near the high altar at Lincoln—evidently the bishop's state entrance—and a smaller one opposite. At Chichester, there are doorways in the middle of the s. aisles of both nave and choir opening into the w. and E. walks of the cloister, which, like that at Wells, has no N. walk.

Besides, there are numerous small posterns to be found in { various positions in these great churches leading to buildings now destroyed or affording convenient means of access from the precincts.

In *E* (parish churches), there is an endless variety of arrangement, from the small village church, consisting merely of an aisleless nave and chancel to the large semi-collegiate or semi-monastic buildings which endeavour to combine under the same roof their double functions, thus adding much to their complexity of arrangement.

In all, however, in spite of marked exceptions of particular periods and districts, we find the lateral nave doorway as the principal one, though there may be a w. one as well, and even in moderate sized churches we find N., S., and W. doorways, almost co-eval. The position of the principal entrance, whether w. or lateral, depends very much on the date of the original foundation of the church, or of its rebuilding (practically re-foundation) on a much larger scale, *e.g.*, after the Norman conquest.

We must note that in the combined monastic-parochial or collegiate-parochial churches, the nave was usually the parish church. The transepts admitted the monks or canons to their choir, and it is for this reason we so often find transeptal doorways in these joint stock foundations.

We may say generally that the towers of parish churches before the reign of Edward the Confessor (the introducer of the Norman style), are almost always at the w. end of the

nave, central, and opening into it through a low narrow arch, but the w. walls of these towers are not pierced with co-eval doorways, and though it was often done afterwards, they never became the principal entrances.

There is one possible exception, viz., *St. Mary le Wigford*, in Lincoln, which was built by Colswegan early in the XI Century, and has a co-eval doorway in its west wall, but from a careful inspection of it the other day, I have come to the conclusion that it is the old s. doorway re-inserted when the church was re-built and enlarged in the XIII Century.

With the Norman style, w. doorways became the rule, and the towers were either placed between nave and chancel as at Iffley and Englishcombe, or on one side of the doorway, and so forming a shelter as at Newnham, near Basingstoke, or in the larger churches doubled (on either side of the w. doorway), but the older lateral doorway and porch was preserved as well, and in the end got the upper hand.

As in the greater churches, so here we usually find these lateral doorways in the last or penultimate bay. Where they are further e., it is a sign of the church having been lengthened, the old site being retained, as otherwise a fresh walk would have had to be made.

As to whether the n. or s. was the principal entrance, where there are both, entirely depends on situation, accessibility to roads, etc., but for obvious reasons the s. was the commoner.

My paper has, I fear, wearied you with its very dry statistics, but I should like to apply part of what I have said to help towards clearing up some of the many difficulties that beset us when we try to make out the original ground plan of Bath Abbey church before its rebuilding in the XVI and XVII Centuries. In its present condition it is somewhat abnormal as to ground plan, and unfortunately we have few records to guide us as to its original design. Bishop de Villula's church had probably a w. entrance on the site of the

present one, flanked by the two turrets, now bearing the Jacob's ladders, but Norman in construction.

There was probably a people's porch on N. of the nave opposite to the present S. doorway. This S. doorway adjoined the ancient palace of de Villula (part of which still exists, and stretches as far as the Abbey Green). This palace afterwards became the prior's lodging, and its E. side was in part bounded by the W. walk of the cloister,—the doorway being technically "the prior's." The corresponding "monk's door" was that of the present vestry, just E. of the transept.

Now here comes in one of our difficulties. In all the Benedictine houses that I know of, the cloister lies close to the wall of the nave. If it did so here the transept would interfere. When I first considered the question, I believed that the N. walk of the transept held its way regardless of this transept; but I accidentally came across an old ground plan (early XVIII Century) that clearly marked out the square of the cloister—about 110ft. each way—its N. walk lying just clear of the transept, and connected with the church by short passages of which the present vestry is one. The E. walk, owing to the fall of the ground, was about 3ft. lower than the rest. This gives us the site and dimensions of the cloister. The popular idea is that the present church is only the nave of the old one, whose transepts, choir and lady chapel, extended right up to the city walls above the river.

Now this can hardly be the case for the following reasons:—

1st. In this case the E. end would be so near the wall, that it would be in danger of damage from outside, which is unlikely.

2nd. The two turrets flanking the present E. window are Norman—part of the original building, as one can see in the interior how the co-eval arches in the E. wall adjoining are pushed out of the line of the aisle to make room for them. We see the same displacement at Durham (though the turrets have gone), at Peterborough and Gloucester. In each case

they flanked the chord of the apse, as I fully believe they did here.

3rd. The position of the doorway E. of the vestry, can only be accounted for as that of the sacristy—a convenient site *if* the high altar was in its present position,—but most inconvenient if it stood (say) 100ft. or more further E.

4th. In the bays E. of this door, we find on the exterior wall the plinth raised some 18 inches, instead of falling with the dip of the ground. This would agree with the rise of the sacrarium floor: but if this were part of the nave it would either continue level or drop with the ground outside.

5th. The fact that the Norman turrets and arches were worked into the new building, makes it fairly clear that when this was done, the Norman apse was still standing, and was not removed till the new choir was complete. Then the arch across the chord of the apse—springing at the level of the second set off on the outside—as the break in the masonry shows—was removed, and the great E. window inserted as a makeshift to fill up the gap, as the straight-joint outside on either side shows. As by this time the monastery had been dissolved, and all need of a procession path and circlet of chapels at an end, all the church E. of the present building was destroyed, and the E. doorways inserted.

I do not believe there were any transepts E. of the present church, and the existing ones (which were not built above the window sills till the reign of James I), I believe replaced towers flanking the nave and choir as at Exeter and Ottery St. Mary. The choir transepts at York of somewhat earlier date, but very like these at Bath, took the place of towers that flanked the earlier and narrower choir of Archbishop Roger. When the church at Bath was in process of rebuilding in the XVI Century these towers were destroyed, and the present central tower erected.

The original circlet of chapels round the apse was removed about the end of the XII Century, and a large square-ended

lady chapel erected. One can still see the union of the earlier and the later work in the base mouldings on either side of the E. window on the exterior.

As far as internal arrangements went, the high altar stood where it does now. The choir extended across the present transept, and possibly one bay further w.

These remarks upon Bath Abbey may possibly seem to be all theory. I should call them comparative anatomy, the result of careful study of the building, and the comparing it with others of the same class.

I shall believe this is *the* solution of a very difficult problem until a better one is forthcoming. I am not a bigot. I seek for help from others more learned than myself.