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BISHOP'S PALACE, WELLS. NORTH VIEW.

J. R. Johnson, Lith.


The Bishop's Palace at Wells.

BY JOHN HENRY PARKER, F.S.A.

THE City of Wells is one of the most interesting in Europe to the student of Gothic Architecture, and not to the student of architecture only, but to the student of the History of England also. These two studies should never be separated; the study of architecture is not merely the study of bricks and mortar, or the art of constructing buildings, but the history of those admirable structures which our ancestors have bequeathed to us (and which we have so shamefully neglected), and which form an essential and important part of the history of our country. The city of Wells illustrates this close connection between history and architecture in a very remarkable degree; it brings vividly before our eyes an important chapter in the history of Europe, about which we have all read a great deal and understood very little. I mean the long-continued struggle between the regulars, or monks, and the seculars, or the parochial and cathedral clergy. The monks, as we all know, were persons who had devoted themselves to the service of God in a religious life,

separated from the world and its ordinary duties, worthy excellent people originally, enthusiastic in a good cause, proceeding upon an erroneous principle from the common cause of so much error—the taking particular texts of Scripture too literally and isolating them from other texts which explain their true meaning. These good men did great service to the cause of religion at a certain period when such establishments were necessary; but afterwards, in the course of centuries, abuses crept in, and they became as really worldly and selfish as any other class, and their continually increasing wealth and power threatened to absorb the whole property and power of the country. Then came the long struggle to keep them under, which was only finally settled by their entire suppression under Henry the Eighth, the first necessary step to the reform of all other abuses in Church and State.

The seculars, on the other hand, were, as I have said, the parochial clergy, headed by their Cathedral Chapters, originally the canons, *chanoines*, or chanters in the church of the bishop, the head church in the diocese. These canons were parochial clergy; each was a parish priest who lived the greater part of the year in his parish; he only took his turn in performing the services of the cathedral, assisted the bishop with his advice, and his services when required. He often served for a time as an itinerant popular preacher, under the direction of the bishop, for the ordinary parish clergy were too ignorant to be allowed to preach. The license to preach granted by the bishop was then a reality, and was granted only to those who *could* preach; now it has become a mere form and a matter of course, and the methodists have been allowed to run away with this part of the church system. But I am digressing. The monks then lived together in *common*;



they had their common dining hall, or refectory, and their common dormitory, or sleeping hall, divided by wooden partitions into small cells, or sleeping rooms, one for each monk. So many of our finest churches belonged to these monasteries, that ignorant people commonly suppose they *all* did, and call Gothic architecture a monkish style, and the houses of that style fit only for monks to live in; but this is merely betraying their own ignorance of the subject. Gothic architecture is just as applicable to any other purpose as to churches or monasteries, and was in fact applied to castles and houses, and any other purpose for which a building was required; it is simply the style of building used by our ancestors for *every* purpose.

The buildings of Wells are not monastic at all; here we have no dormitory, no refectory, none of the buildings essential for the monastic system. Each canon had his separate house from the beginning; these establishments for the secular clergy were distinctly opposed to the monks. An attempt had been made in Wells to establish the monastic system in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The monks of Glastonbury had struggled hard to obtain possession of it, and to make the bishop one of their own body, but they had failed, and before the commencement of the present buildings the matter had been settled. The monastic buildings which had been erected at Wells were destroyed, the bishopric remained independent of the monks, and the monks of Glastonbury were obliged to give up to the cathedral chapter, or the bishop's council, certain manors. These were Winscombe, Pucklechurch, Blackford, and Cranmore, which were ceded to Bishop Joceline and his successors for ever, and the addition of these important manors supplied the chapter with funds to enable them to commence their new buildings.

Bishop Joceline, who then ruled the diocese, was a native of Wells, and had been a canon before he became bishop. He was a truly great man, in advance of his age, a man of great prudence and foresight, and who had formed most magnificent ideas of the fortune of his great diocese, which was now permanently united with both Bath and Glastonbury. To correspond with this great accession of territory, of importance, and of wealth, he considered that suitable buildings were necessary to support the dignity of the bishop and the seat of his chapter, the head-quarters of the diocese ; and he formed the plan of the magnificent series of buildings, of which so large a part has fortunately been preserved to our time. The splendid cathedral is only a portion of his grand design,—it is the centre of a group of buildings fit to accompany and support it.

To give an account of all these buildings would be to write the history of the city of Wells, which would require a volume, and which has been already done often enough. The cathedral alone is a subject for a volume, and this also has been already done, and well done, especially by Professor Willis, the first architectural historian of the day, and more recently in Mr. Murray's Handbook of the Cathedrals. The Lady Chapel, the Chapter-house, the Deanery, the Archdeaconry, the houses of the Vicars in their Close, the Gatehouses of the Precincts, the Prebendal Houses in the Liberty, each of these is a subject for a separate essay, though all are closely connected, and form parts of the system. The Bishop's Palace, though also part of the same magnificent group of buildings, is more detached and more complete in itself, and to that I now propose to call your attention, and hope to give you such a history of it as will make you all feel an additional interest in this, which is really one of the earliest, and has been one of the finest houses in England.

The Bishop's Palace.

The palace was originally built by Bishop Joceline, between 1205 and 1244, and appears to have been a quadrangle, the east side of which was formed by the present dwelling-house of the bishop; the north by the kitchen and offices, which have been much altered, and partly rebuilt at different times; the south by the chapel rebuilt by Bishop Burnel; and the west by a gatehouse, now destroyed, with a piece of curtain wall to connect it on each side with the other buildings. There is no distinct evidence of the fourth side of the original quadrangle, but there is great probability of it from a comparison with other houses, and the old drains found by the bishop by digging in this part of the court in 1860, seem to confirm it. They appeared to have been carried round the two turrets of a gatehouse. In Buck's view of the palace, taken about 1700, a square tower is shown at the west end of the north wing, opposite the corner of the chapel, which would have been at one corner of the original quadrangle. Bishop Beckington is said to have added to the palace that "middle tower or gate," under which is the passage going from the great gate to the house, as also that cloister which heretofore joined thereunto, and reached to the end of the great hall, as does, and did appear by the coat of arms and rebus thereon. This middle tower must clearly have been at the place indicated by the drain, and the cloister was, no doubt, against the western wall, connecting the middle tower on one side with the tower at the north-west angle, shown in Buck's view, and on the other with the west door to the chapel, and the small door into the hall; marks of it may be distinctly seen over that door, and over the west of the chapel. The

cloister must have been covered with a flat lead roof, and there is a doorway in one of the western turrets of the chapel, which must have opened on the top of it. There is also a similar doorway in the north-east turret, showing that the cloister was continued along on the north side of the chapel in its original state. The foundations of the north wall of a similar cloister have been found along the south side of the servants' wing also, so that the quadrangle of Bishop Joceline's palace must have had a cloister on three sides of it, running into the present internal cloister, or entrance gallery of the palace.

The present dwelling-house or palace, which remains to a great extent perfect, though with many alterations of a minor kind, has the lower story vaulted with a good Early English groined vault, with ribs, carried upon slender pillars and corbels; the pallelogram is divided lengthwise by a solid wall at about one third of the width, the outer or narrow part of which now forms the entrance hall and passage to the staircase at one end and the chapel at the other. In this vestibule is a fireplace of the time of Henry VIII., which has probably replaced an original one. The entrance doorway has been moved one bay southward, and a modern porch built over it. The buttresses have been restored in this front. The entrance or gallery has originally been divided by a thick wall into two apartments of nearly equal size. This may be seen by the break in the vaulting ribs, and the transverse arch.

The wider space has a row of small pillars down the centre to carry the vault. There is no fire-place in it, and it was probably divided by wooden partitions into store-rooms and cellars, or it may have been used as a servants' hall. At the north-west corner of the building there is a square projection on the north side, the walls in the ground

floor of which are of immense thickness, and it was probably intended for a tower, which the situation seems to indicate. The ground room is vaulted like the rest of the substructure. The room over this (now the bishop's study) has had an oriel window thrown out at the end, and a newel staircase, made in the angle, formed by the projection and the main building. The windows on the east side in the ground floor are plain single lancets, well played; those on the west side are of two lights, trefoil headed; these may, perhaps, have been altered.

The upper story of this long range of building is divided in the same manner as the lower one by a solid wall running the whole length, and separating one third of the width as a long gallery, in which there are two modern fireplaces, the chimnies of which are probably original; this upper gallery has also been originally divided into two rooms. The larger division is divided into three apartments, the partitions are all modern or modernised, and as the roof and ceilings are also modern, there is no guide as to what the original arrangements were, but it seems probable that they were the same as at present. The side windows on this floor are each of two lights, trefoil headed, with a quatrefoil over them, and each has a very elegant inner arch, trefoiled and richly moulded, with blue marble shafts in the jambs, having capitals of stiff-leaf foliage and moulded bases. The end windows are remarkably fine, especially the one at the north end, now the bishop's dining-room; it is of four lights divided into two pairs, each with a quatrefoil in the head, and in the gable over the centre of these two sub-divisions is another larger quatrefoil, originally open to the hall,—though now concealed by the modern ceiling, the arches are cusped and the points of the cusps ornamented

with sculptured foliage. The jambs are also enriched with shafts having capitals of sculptured foliage, and the drip-stone, or hoodmould, over the arches, is terminated by heads. It will be perceived that by this beautiful arrangement the whole of the north end of the hall formed one magnificent Early English window of the richest description. At the north end of the building the same arrangement is followed, and the window is equally fine, though rather plainer, the end of the cusps not being carved. If the whole of this range, was really one great hall, with the large window at each end, and the range of windows on the east side, it must have been one of the finest halls in Europe; finer even than Westminster Hall. The side windows, however, do not continue the whole length, but have a blank space at each end, corresponding with the partition walls, and this makes it more probable that the present divisions are original.

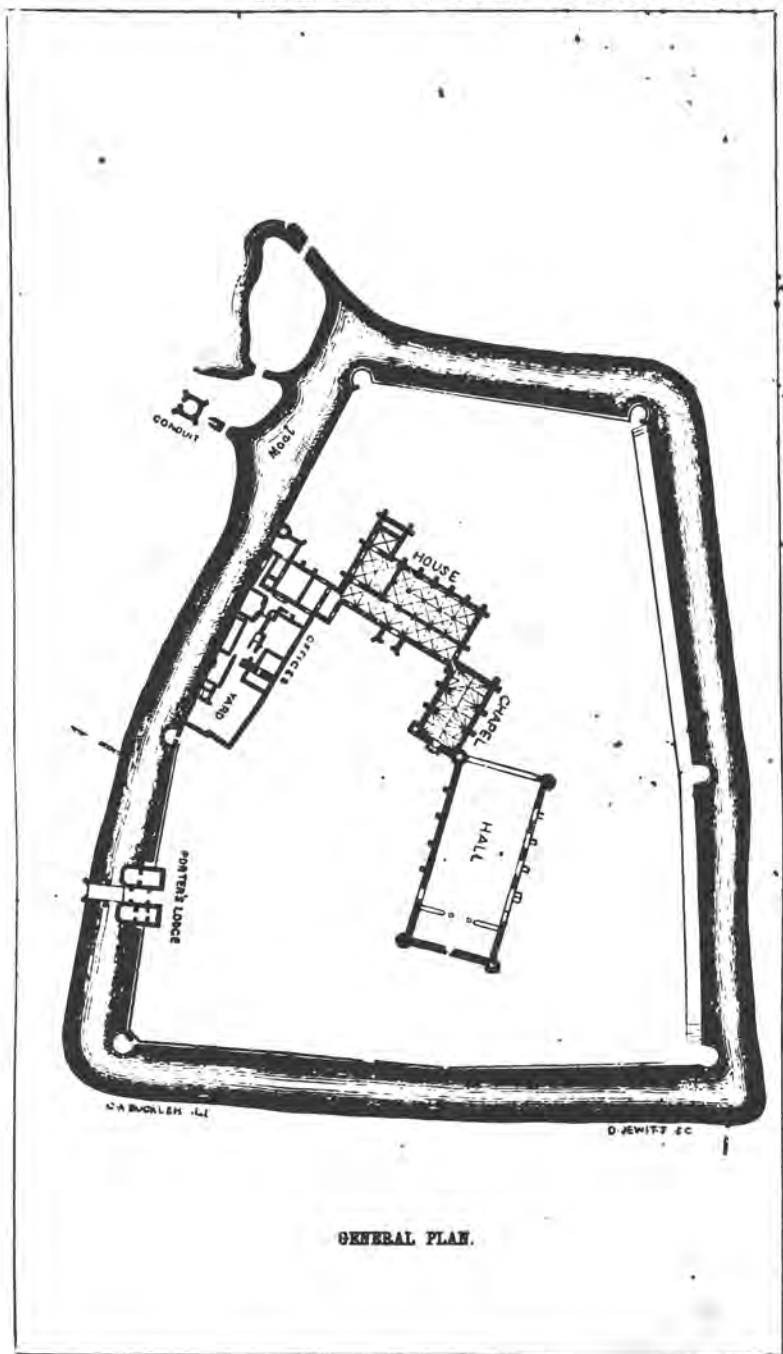
As I find that a common notion prevails that these beautiful windows are nearly all modern, copied from one or two old ones, I take this opportunity of mentioning that such is not the case. They are commonly said to have been made by Mr. Ferrey, in the time of Bishop Bagot, but Mr. Ferrey has very kindly lent me his drawings shewing all that he did in the palace, and he assures me that these beautiful windows are nearly all original, the arches and heads had been entirely hidden and filled up with brick and plaster, and square sash windows introduced below the springing of the arch, but most fortunately the original window-heads had all been preserved, and it was only necessary to clear out the rubbish with which they had been filled up, and restore the mullions. Mr. Ferrey also wishes it to be known that he is not in any way responsible for the modern ceilings or other internal

fittings; he was employed to restore the stone-work only, which he has done most conscientiously and admirably. An ignorant upholsterer from Bath was employed by Bishop Bagot to do the rest of the work, and did much mischief. All the principal apartments of the palace are still, and were from the beginning, on the first floor, and the entrance to them was always by a staircase in the same situation as the present one, although that is Jacobean work. The omission of the end bay of the vaulting, and the existence of a square pier on one side and none on the other, where the end of the vault is carried on a corbel only, proves that the original state staircase was in this situation and ascended by a sweep round this end of the entrance-hall. The square tower by the side of this, and in the north-east angle of the court, contains the servants' staircase. The present staircase is modern and the tower is an addition to the original work, but it does not seem to be much later; the doorway is of the fifteenth Century and the porch modern, but the windows are very like Joceline's work, and are clearly not modern. The kitchen and offices were partly rebuilt by Bishop Bagot, but on the old site, with some of the old walls and the old chimney-stack remaining. There have evidently always been some rooms between the kitchen and the staircase. The buttery and pantry are usually on a level with the hall even when that is on the first floor and the kitchen on the ground floor, and there is then a straight staircase from the hall to the kitchen, passing between the buttery and the pantry, as at St. Mary's Hall, Coventry, and many other ancient houses. But in this instance it appears that there was a screen only at the servants' end of the hall, and that these offices were downstairs. The partitions in this part of the palace are entirely modern,

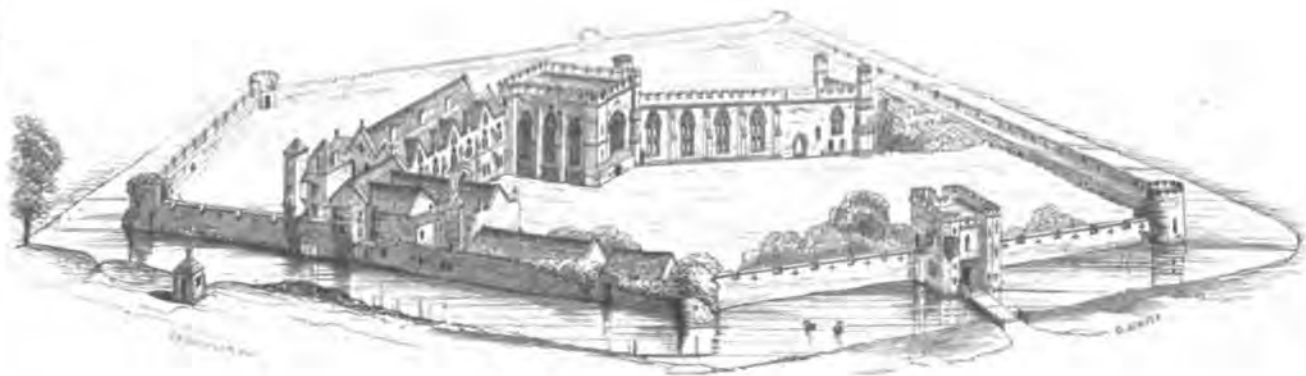
and I have not been able to obtain any plan of the old arrangements, so that I can only guess what they were.

Over these original chambers others were added and oriel windows thrown out by Bishop Clerk, who succeeded to Wolsey, and was bishop from 1523 to 1540. His arms are carved on the bosses of the oriel windows. This corner of the palace seems to have been almost rebuilt by him, and the old wall of enclosure of Bishop Ralph was built upon, and had windows pierced through it. The internal arrangement of this part of the house was entirely altered in the time of Bishop Beadon, about 1810, when the floors were taken out and what had been two stories made into three. The square tower at the angle, with a stair turret, is part of the work of Bishop Clerk in the time of Henry VIII. An upper story was also added to the whole of the west front over the long gallery by Bishop Bagot, about 1840, to contain additional bedrooms, and the present dormer windows were then added by Mr. Ferrey with so much ingenuity and in good taste that it is almost impossible to distinguish them from the old work, and the effect of the front is thought by many persons to have been improved by the alteration. The buttresses were then restored, but Mr. Ferrey states that the tothing of the old buttresses remained quite distinct in the walls when the rough-cast was taken off.

The south wing of Bishop Joceline's palace, occupying the site of the present chapel, appears to have been originally of two stories, like the rest of his work, and probably had also a vaulted substructure, with a chapel on the upper floor. The site does not appear to have been exactly coincident with the present walls, the east end has been extended several feet. The staircase turret at the angle connecting the main range of Bishop Joceline's work



GENERAL PLAN.



Bird's-eye View of the Bishop's Palace.



East or Garden Front of Bishop Jocelyne's Palace, A.D. 1205—1244.
(The Oriol Window inserted.)



West Front of Bishop Jocelyne's Palace, A.D. 1305-1344.
(The upper story and Porch added.)

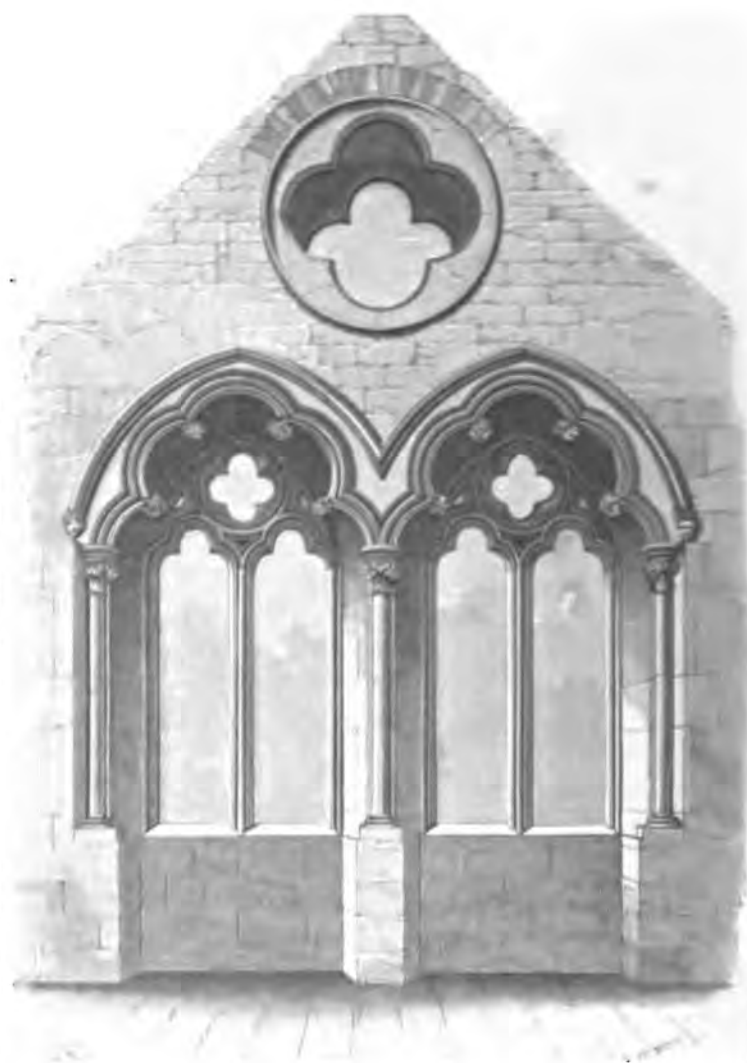


Servants' Hall.

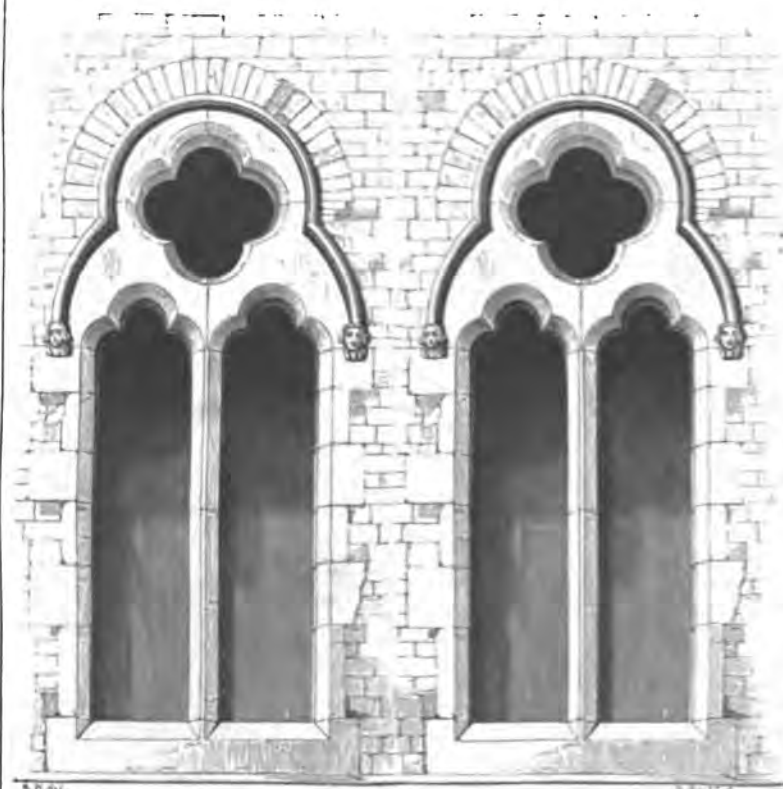
The work of Bishop Jocelyne, A. D. 1205-1244.



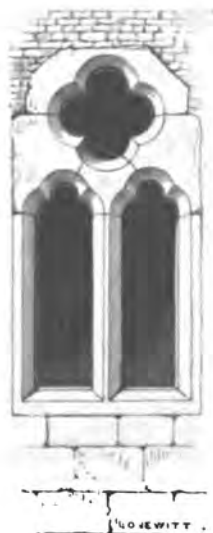
Entrance Hall.



Interior of Window, A.D. 1205—1244.
North End of Bishop Jocelyne's Hall, (now the Bishop's Dining-room).



Exterior of South Window of Bishop Jocelyne's Hall, A.D. 1205—1244.



Exterior.

Side Windows in the Long Gallery, on the first floor.



Interior.



Interior of South End of Window, Bishop Jocelyne's Hall,
(now the Bishop's Library).



Window in the West Front of the Cathedral, A.D. 1205-1244.



West Door of Chapel, interior.



West end of the Chapel, with part of Bishop Jocelyne's House and Bishop Burnell's Hall.

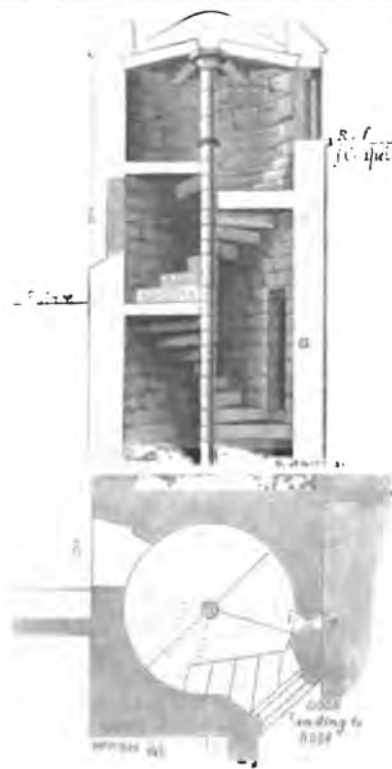


Part of the West End of the Chapel, shewing the Junction with the Hall.

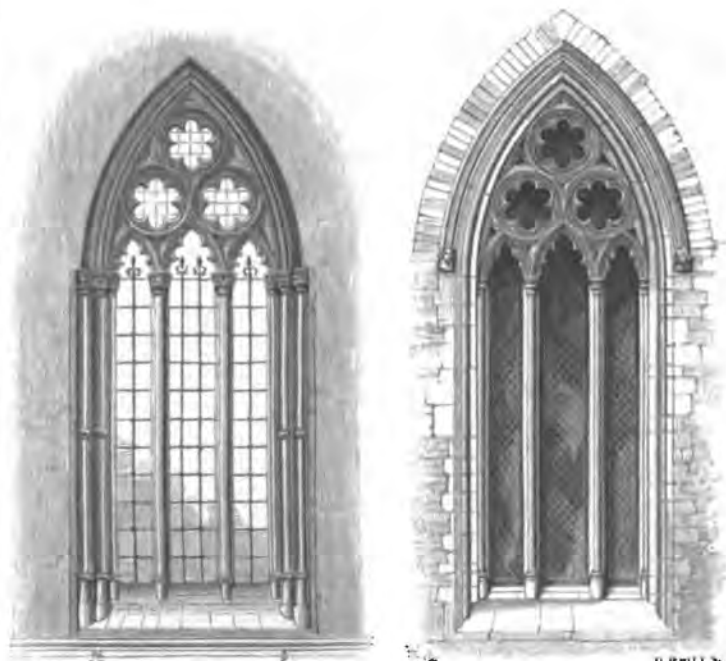


Scale of 1 2 3 4 5 6 feet.

Interior at the top of the North-west Stair-turret, showing the early Corbel-head used again.



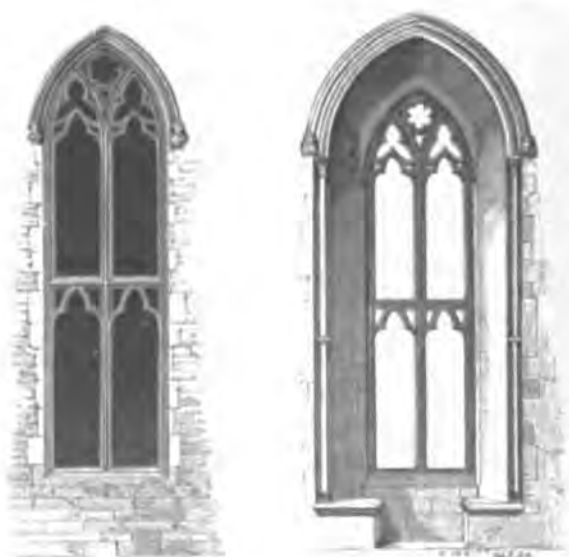
Section and Plan of Stair-turret at the north east corner of the Chapel



Interior.

Exterior.

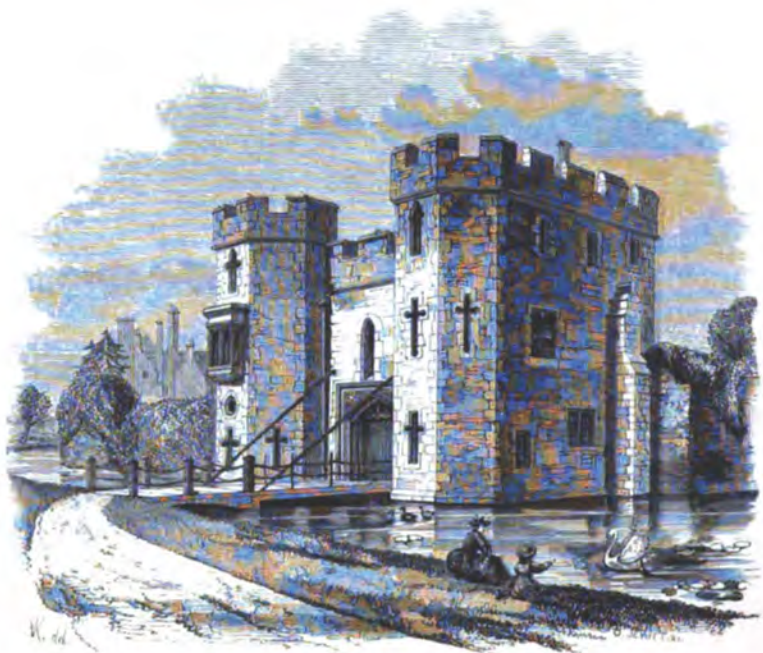
Side Windows of the Chapel, c. 1290?



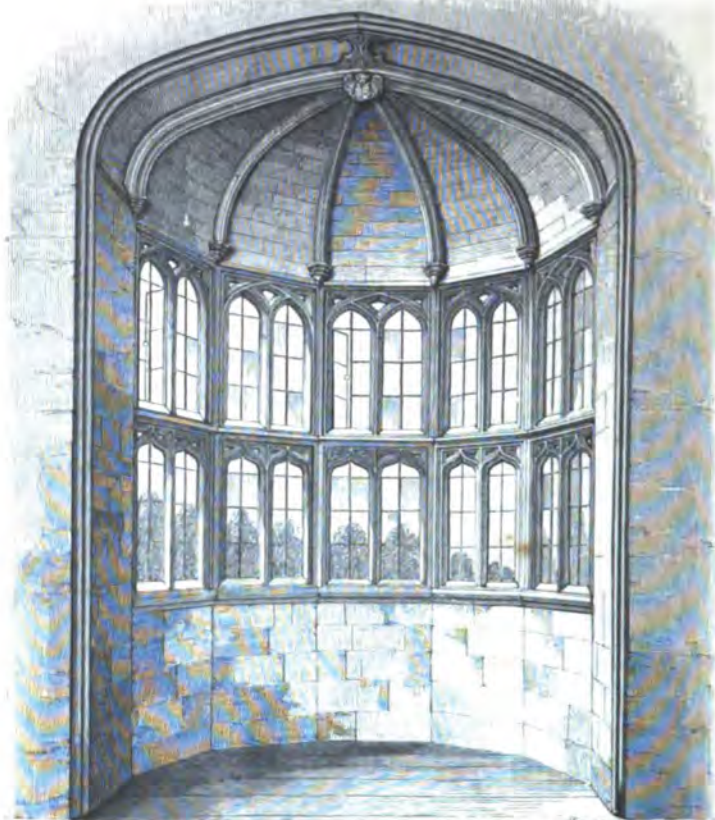
Exterior.

Interior.

Windows of Bishop Burnell's Hall, c. 1280?



The Gate-house, built by Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury, A.D. 1329 - 1363.



Oriel Window—Bishop Clerke, A.D. 1523—1540.



Boss—Arms of Bishop Clerke.

with this wing remains perfect and has a very good vault with a central pillar. This vault is, however, part of Bishop Burnel's work, the top of the tower having been rebuilt along with the battlement and cornice of the chapel. There were doorways from this staircase into the present palace, and also into the wing that has been rebuilt, one on a level with the first floor opening to an external gallery, which would cut across the present windows, the other above, to go on to the allure behind the battlement. A long loop window near the top of this staircase on the south side of the turret is blocked up on the outside by the east wall of the present chapel. At the opposite angle, or south-west corner of the present chapel is another of Bishop Joceline's stair turrets, equally perfect, with doorways in the same situations as in the other, showing that the wing of Joceline's palace extended to this point and rather beyond it, as a doorway opens westward, now leading to nothing, but probably issuing originally to the external gallery on the top of the cloister. Part of the old wall joining to this turret on the west side has been preserved and now forms part of the wall of the later hall, and the jamb of one of the early windows remains between the turret and the first window of the hall.

The Great Hall, of which the ruins only remain, and the present chapel are both the work of Bishop Burnel in the time of Edward I., between 1274 and 1292, but not quite at the same time. There is an interval, probably of ten or twelve years, between them, and a slight difference in the character of the work. In the chapel it would appear that the materials of Bishop Joceline's chapel were used up to a considerable extent, but the beautiful groined vault and the elegant windows are Bishop Burnel's work; the west window is an alteration of a later date. The bell-

turret at the north-west angle is part of Bishop Burnel's work; the staircase is not so wide or so good as those of Bishop Joceline; and at the top of the turret one of the gurgoyles or large corbels with a very bold projection, as if to carry a water-spout, of Joceline's work is used to form the head of the staircase and support the bell-frame; the end of this is carved into a head of the character of the early part of the 13th century. At the west end of the chapel there appears to have been a rood-loft with a screen under the front inclosing the three doors and forming a sort of inner porch, the entrance to which was the great west door; at the north end was the door to the bell-turret, and at the south end the door to the vestry. Over the vestry was the priest's chamber, to which there was an entrance from the stair-turret, the doorway of which still remains. This being the bishop's private chapel, it was considered as all chancel, and no nave was required, and in the position which would be usual in the chancel of a parish church, just within the rood-loft, near the west end of the chancel, is the small low-side window, supposed to have been used for lepers or persons labouring under some infectious disease, who could be brought to the outside of the window and have the consecrated wafer, or Host, administered to them at the end of a cleft stick, according to the direction given in the rubric of some of the Roman missals, or could see the Host when held up for that purpose by the priest through the opening.

The great hall of Bishop Burnel has been a very magnificent piece of work, of which the north wall and west end, with the turrets at the angles, only remain. The windows are rather different from those of the chapel, and probably a few years later; the three turrets at the south-east, south-west, and north-west angles are closely

copied from the original one of Bishop Joceline, which remains at the north-east angle, connecting the hall with the chapel. At the west end of the great hall are the two doorways, showing the position of the screen and music gallery; the porch and the newel staircase to the solar or upper chamber have been destroyed, but marks of them remain. The windows of the solar remain, and are very elegant and highly finished, indicating a state apartment equivalent to a modern withdrawing room, the chimney remains, but the fire-place has been destroyed; there is no fire-place or chimney to the lower rooms, which have been the buttery and pantry only, and not a kitchen, as is commonly said; there are cupboards remaining recessed in the wall, a window blocked up and a doorway also blocked up at the west end, and which doubtless led to the kitchen, being at the end of the passage, between the buttery and pantry, according to the usual arrangement of mediæval halls and offices. The kitchen was a detached building, where the stables now are, and was connected with the hall by a passage only, according to the general custom of that age. The south-west turret contains a garderobe or closet on the first floor, with an entrance from the corner of the state apartment; this has a good groined vault, and the small loop windows are perfect; under is the square pit, into which a modern doorway was cut by Bishop Law through the wall, with a pointed head to it, but no arch. The rooms on the ground floor under the solar have been vaulted, as may be seen by the marks of the vaults in the walls, but the vaults have been all destroyed. In the north-west turret there is a staircase from the solar to the allure and the watch tower, but it rises from the solar or first floor room only, not from the ground. The north-east turret of the hall forms also the

south-west turret of the chapel, and in this there is a staircase from the ground to the allure.

The present gatehouse to the palace is plain work, of the 14th century, with square flanking turrets, a groined vault over the archway, the chains of a drawbridge, and the grooves of a portcullis. It was built by Bishop Ralph, of Shrewsbury, who also built the wall of enclosure and made the moat. This wall of enclosure has bastions, or towers, at intervals, with the usual allure, or passage, on the top of the wall behind the parapet, in which there are embrasures, or openings, and loopholes alternately. It was built for defence according to the most approved system of the age, and the gate-house is a very good guard-house of the 14th century, with vaulted chambers, loopholes, and windows widely splayed within, and with their heads formed of what is called "the shouldered arch," or square-headed trefoil, a very common form in the Edwardian period. There is a tradition that this fortification of the palace was made as a precaution against the monks of Bath, who threatened the life of the bishop, but there is no written authority for this. It is singular that the bishop's palace should have been so strongly fortified, while the precincts of the cathedral do not appear to have been fortified at all, or even enclosed with a wall, until a century afterwards, all the gatehouses of the close being the work of Bishop Beckington. But as the bishop was a sort of prince, or great noble of the district, it may have been considered necessary for his house to be fortified in the same manner as those of other nobles.

The peaceful character of this part of England is shewn in a remarkable manner by the absence of fortifications round the cathedral and its precincts; up to the middle of the 15th century they do not appear to have been fortified

at all, or even enclosed with a wall. During the Wars of the Roses, Bishop Beckington thought it necessary to erect a wall and gatehouses, but these fortifications appear to have been very slight, and the gatehouses more for show than for defence. The east end of the cathedral and the chapter house were outside the wall of enclosure, and though it is said that there was a wall round the chapter house, there appears to have been none round the lady chapel; and the vicar's close, though enclosed by a wall and gatehouse, can hardly be said to have been fortified. The larger district round the close, called the Liberty, was entirely outside the wall, and not enclosed at all, and yet in this district several of the prebendal houses were built before the end of the 15th century, and without any protection, unless the marshy character of the ground was considered sufficient. Of those other buildings of the chapter I propose to give some account in the next volume of the proceedings of the Society.
