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PAPERS, ETC.

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The Documentary Evidence Relating to the Early  
Architecture of the Cathedral.

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AT each meeting of our Society at Wells—in 1851, 1863, and 1873—references have been made to the registers and documents in the possession of the Dean and Chapter, and to the Bishop's registers, as containing a mine of information respecting the fabric of the church of Wells.

Professor Willis, in his lecture in 1863, made important extracts from the registers between the years 1286 and 1337, and he urged upon the Cathedral body the prosecution of further enquiries. At the last meeting of the Society at Wells, in 1873, the Right Rev. the President—your Lordship, whom we rejoice to see again as our President to-day, after an interval of fifteen years—laid a charge upon the Dean and Chapter to bring to light the history lurking in those unpublished manuscripts.

Since 1873, the Dean and Chapter have done something to fulfil their duty and to answer to your Lordship's recommendation. In 1880, mainly through the care of Canon Bernard,

the Chancellor of the church, the official keeper of the archives, a great mass of original documents, long neglected, were arranged and catalogued by experts from the British Museum, at some cost to the Chapter. In 1881 permission was given to Mr. Reynolds to make extracts from the Liber Ruber and from Chyle's manuscript history, for his work on Wells Cathedral. In 1883 the three great register books of the Chapter, Liber Albus i, ii, and Liber Ruber, were put into the hands of your present laborious Secretary, the Rev. J. A. Bennett, and as the result of three years' patient industry and antiquarian enthusiasm, without any cost to the Chapter or to the Society, the contents of these ponderous volumes have now been calendared and printed.

A report of the Historical Commission, which can be obtained for 2s., now contains a summary of every manuscript document in the registers and ledger books of the Dean and Chapter, and every one can see what is there and what is not. For the search after what one expects and hopes to find therein of local history is often disappointing. As in other mining operations, a great deal of digging is often necessary before a vein of good ore is struck. The documents in the registers do not lie there in order of time or subject. Many of them are undated, and their date can only be fixed by the names of attesting witnesses. They require to be arranged and sorted before a chronicle of any particular period can be drawn up.

Happily, there is in the Library a manuscript book, in Latin, of a Canon of Wells, Edmund Archer, Archdeacon successively of Taunton and Wells, who died in 1739—a contemporary of Thomas Hearne and Dr. George Hicks—who has left us a trustworthy chronicle of our early history down to Bishop Drokensford's death in 1329, based upon a careful examination and citation of the whole field of the registers, which corrects and supplements the meagre and inaccurate summaries of the so-called Canon of Wells of the 15th century, and of Bishop Godwin's *De Præsulibus*. Following

the guidance of Archer's manuscript, and examining the original documents cited therein, I have gleaned some matter bearing upon the early history of the Church, down to the end of Bishop Jocelin's episcopate, which I now lay before you.<sup>1</sup>

The Canon of Wells is the title given in Wharton's *Anglia Sacra* to a composite document, two anonymous manuscript tracts of the 14th and 15th centuries, found in the Register No. 3, which Wharton has woven together to form one continuous history of the earlier episcopates, down to Bishop Bubwith's time, 1406 to 1424.

If Professor Willis had made a study of the earlier documents in our archives, and if he had published his own account of the fabric, there would have been little more to say. But he does not make any direct quotation from documents earlier than 1286, and the reports of his several lectures on the church in 1851 and 1863 are often so contradictory as to be hard to understand. For the early history we have hitherto had no other authority than Godwin, and the Canon of Wells in Wharton's *Anglia Sacra*.

According to these writers, there is a blank in the history of the church, between Bishop Robert, by whom the church was consecrated in 1148, and Bishop Jocelin, whose episcopate extended from 1206 to 1242. Godwin describes the church to which Bishop Jocelin succeeded "as ready to fall, notwithstanding the great cost bestowed on it by Bishop Robert." He says, "he pulled down the greatest part of it, to witte, the west ende, and built it anew from the very foundation." No mention is made of any work or of any worker on the fabric between the time of Bishops Robert and Jocelin. But it is highly improbable, in the first place, that there should have been this blank of 40 or 50 years in this active period in the

(1). I am indebted to Chancellor Bernard for introduction to Archer's manuscript some years ago, and latterly to Bishop Hobhouse, for kind assistance in many difficulties in interpretation of original manuscripts. I deeply regret the absence of one, the historian of Wells and of so much else, who would give a judgment I should highly value—how much of my matter is new, how much of what is new is true.

history of the Church, or that the church should have been allowed to fall into ruins during the episcopate of Bishop Reginald, successor to Bishop Robert.

Reginald de Bohun was son of Jocelin, Bishop of Sarum, and nephew of Richard de Bohun, Bishop of Coutances. Reginald, a Norman, called also 'the Lombard,' from some Italian connection, was a great man with his master, Henry II, was employed in early life in political embassies, and took part in all the chief councils of the reign; he had seen men, and cities, and churches, in an age of building. Consecrated in 1174, on his way home from Rome in company with Archbishop Richard, the successor of St. Thomas at Canterbury, his first act was to induce Hugh of Burgundy—afterwards St. Hugh of Lincoln—to leave his cell in the Grande Chartreuse, to become Prior of the first house of the Carthusians in England, at Witham, in his own diocese at Bath; his next to consecrate a church to the newly-canonized St. Thomas the Martyr, in his uncle's diocese at St. Loe, which in its desecrated state still contains features of its semi-Norman architecture. Crossing into England with Archbishop Richard, the two arrived at Canterbury, on September 4th, 1174, the day before the great fire which laid in ashes the choir of Canterbury Cathedral. The rebuilding of Canterbury under William of Sens and William the Englishman, was going on during his frequent visits to Canterbury, and he himself succeeded to the See of Canterbury in 1191. During his episcopate, building was going on actively in his own diocese, at Witham, in the rise of St. Hugh's church and friary; at Bath, where he restored two churches and founded the hospital of St. John; at Glastonbury, where he consecrated the newly-built western Lady chapel, in 1187. It is not probable that this active-minded Bishop, who was following the footsteps of his predecessor in making Wells the centre of the diocese, and in building up the constitution of his church of secular Canons by the addition of fifteen new Prebends, and by the increased

endowment of the Canons, should have allowed the fabric of his church to fall into ruins.

On the other hand, we have positive documentary evidence that he was zealously promoting the building of the church, and that the Church was rising in his time. In a charter of early date, before 1180, attested by Richard the Dean, the Precentor, and 'almost all the Canons' of the church, he expressly recognises his duty as Bishop to provide "that the honour due to God should not be tarnished by the squalor of His house," and so in full Chapter, and with the assent and counsel of his Archdeacons, he makes a grant in support of the fabric, until the work be finished, of the proceeds of all benefices in the diocese so long as they shall be vacant.

This grant formed at once a large "fabric fund," at that time amounting on an average to an equivalent of several hundred pounds of our money. It was an act of great munificence, and supplied a precedent to Bishop Joceline and to later Bishops, and was appealed to by the Chapter when Bishop Roger, in 1245, and Bishop Drokensford, asserted their claims, and sought to appropriate these sequestrations for their own use.

2. Following this charter of Reginald's grant of a fabric fund, there are charters of gifts from individuals towards the church, which contain evidence that the church was being endowed and the fabric was being built. One charter there is, which it is very pleasant for a Canon of Wells to read, in which Nicolas of Barrow, in Ruridecanal Chapter at Castle Cary (in capitulo apud Kari), "in consideration of the good conversation of the Canons of Wells" (consideratâ canonicorum Wellensium honestâ conversatione), and of the admirable structure of the rising church (et surgentis ecclesiæ laudabili structurâ), gives up his life interest in the temporalities of the church of Lovington, of which the advowson had been given before to the church of St. Andrew by the Lord of Lovington, Robert de Kari. So then the church of

St. Andrew was rising and becoming an object of admiration, and drawing forth gifts from individuals in the time of Reginald.

3. There is another charter, which is dated "in the second year after the coronation of our lord the king at Winchester," most probably the second coronation of Richard I, after his return from captivity in 1194. If so, it will belong to the third and fourth year of Savaric, successor to Reginald. In this charter Martin of Carscumbe (Croscombe) gives three silver marks towards the construction of the new work of the church of St. Andrew, and two marks towards the repair of the chapel of St. Mary therein, "ad constructionem novi operis. . . . et ad emendationem capellæ beatæ Mariæ ejusdem loci."

So from these documents we know from Reginald's own words and acts that the support of the fabric was the object of his care and munificence; we know that in his time the church was rising and becoming a goodly structure; we know that new work and repair of a Lady chapel were being planned and carried out, to which offerings were made in the first year of his successor's episcopate, and we may safely conclude that the church was not neglected and falling into ruin, but that building was going on between 1174 and 1196. This evidence is sufficient to show that the Canon of Wells and Godwin, who make no mention of Reginald, are not to be considered ultimate authorities in this portion of the history of the fabric.

I do not enter into the architectural puzzles of the building, or attempt to discriminate what parts belong to Bishop Reginald, in the 12th century, what to Bishop Jocelin, in the 13th. But I will ask you to remember this evidence bearing upon the fabric history of the latter part of the 12th century, and of Bishop Reginald's time, when you look upon nave and transepts, north porch, and the western arches of choir, which, as Professor Willis has said, bear an architectural character, "unlike that of any ordinary Early English building," "only

a little removed from the Early Norman style," and which, Britton says there could be little hesitation in ascribing to the reign of Henry II, 1154 to 1189, on architectural evidence, if it were not for Godwin's words.

I pass on to the documentary history of the fabric during Bishop Jocelin's time, 1206 to 1242. It is disappointing that there is so little. The documents are altogether silent about the fabric after 1196, during the years of Savaric's wandering and litigious life, and the early years of Jocelin's episcopate, down to 1219-20. Within that time Jocelin was being carried away into the current of political strife—himself an exile, and the property of the See confiscated (£200 a year, equivalent to not less than £4,000 to £5,000), paid yearly into King John's hands. After his return, in 1213, he was engaged in the civil war, and in the suit with Glastonbury.

One grant there is, during the time of Dean Ralph of Lechdale, 1217 to 1220, in which a Canon of Henstridge gives land and money, with the wish expressed that by his help the work may rise the more quickly. "Ut fabrica celerius ad optatam consummationem mea sedulitate consurgat." This is the only charter in our documents of a grant to the fabric during Jocelin's time. This charter shows that the work had recommenced at that date (1220). It appears that the Prebends had been assessed for the fabric, and in this case a voluntary offering is made over and above the assessment, to hasten the work.

Outside our documents, there are other evidences of building operations. The Close Rolls of Henry III contain grants to the fabric in 1220, of sixty large oaks (*grossa robora*), from the forest of Cheddar; in 1224, of one penny a day, remitted from the rent of Congresbury Manor; in 1225, of five mares annually for twelve years; in 1226, of thirty oaks; and of smaller wood (*frusta*) to repair the Bishop's houses at Wookey. But no mention is made of these grants in the Chapter documents.

While there is detailed evidence of the gifts of houses for the permanent residence of the Canons, and for the schools of the church, no more is said about the growth of the fabric until the statement in a charter of Bishop Jocelin, of the completion and dedication of the church on the day of St. Romanus, October 23rd, 1239. The date of this event is fixed by the charter of the grant of the Manor of Winscombe to the Canons, dated "on the morrow of St. Romanus, the day of the dedication of the church in honour of St. Andrew, the gentlest of the Apostles, *Apostolorum mitissimi*."

No further detail is given of the dedication, no description of the parts then finished and consecrated. But three years after, in the year 1242 (on November 19th), about a month before his death, Jocelin makes a concise statement of the building begun, continued, and completed by him. He speaks only in general terms, in the preamble of a charter in which he is making ample provision for the endowment of all the members of the Cathedral staff, as a duty no less binding than the support of the fabric. He records what he had done for the fabric of the church, which he says he found dangerous by reason of age, "*periculum ruinæ patiebatur pro suâ vetustate*." He had built, enlarged, and consecrated, "*ædificare cœpimus et ampliare—in qua adeo profecimus—quod ipsam consecravimus*." Then he goes on to say that the common revenues of the ministers of the church had hitherto been scanty, "*tenuis et insufficiens*," and to make the arrangements for their permanent augmentation.

With no other authority than these words of the preamble to Bishop Jocelin's charter of increased endowment of the Cathedral staff, the Canon of Wells, writing in vague language in Bishop Bubwith's time, that is 180 years later, asserts that Jocelin had pulled down and rebuilt the church, from pavement to vault.

Bishop Godwin (1616) affects more precision in his statement,—“The church of Wells being now ready to fall to the



ground, notwithstanding the great cost bestowed upon it by Robert, he (Jocelin) pulled down the greatest part of it, to witte, all the west ende, built it anew from the very foundation, and hallowed or dedicated it October 23rd, 1239." So Professor Willis has assumed, on Godwin's authority, that "Jocelin himself asserts in one of his statutes that he pulled down the church and rebuilt it."

Do Jocelin's words in this charter justify this assumption? They certainly do not to my mind—not even as read by themselves, much less when read in connection with Bishop Reginald's words and acts, and with the history of the time intervening between Reginald and the completion and consecration of the church by Jocelin in 1239–1242. The words themselves occurring in the preamble to a charter relating mainly to another subject, the better endowment of the church yet remaining to be done, are general, not precise, in their review of what has been done. As it seems to me the words do not necessarily demand a more definite meaning than that, having begun, he brought to an end, the work he had undertaken in the repair and enlargement of his church, which he found unfinished, old and ruinous in parts, and suffering from neglect and dilapidations of time.

Reconsecration was necessary from the changes and additions which had been made both by Reginald and Jocelin since Bishop Robert's consecration, nearly 100 years before, in 1148; and it was enforced at this time by the orders of the papal legate, according to which several other churches were consecrated about the same time.

The state of dilapidation and partial ruin in which Jocelin says he found the church might well have been the effects of some twenty or thirty years of neglect of an unfinished building, in such times, under the wasteful episcopate of Savaric, the confiscation of King John, the civil war, the intolerable exactions of papal legates, and the local quarrels with the great rival power at Glastonbury going on to 1218–19.

But we must not detract from Bishop Jocelin's greatness.

If contemporary documents do not justify the statements of Godwin, nor the general tradition that Jocelin did everything at Wells—that he pulled down and rebuilt the whole church—yet there is sufficient evidence that he did very much; quite sufficient to justify the tradition that he was in a true sense 'the maker' of Wells. He and his brother Hugh, afterwards of Lincoln, were "men of the soil," of Launcherley, of Wells, "wholly Wells" (as Godwin says) living through Reginald's episcopate, Hugh as Archdeacon, Jocelin as Canon of Wells, rising to honour as judges, and becoming by office and Royal grant possessed of riches, manors, and benefices. Hugh gave largely of his great wealth to his brother Jocelin for the church, and Jocelin gave all that he had to "the church he loved so well, in which he had been nourished from his infancy;" where, as his fellow Canons attested before his election, "he had lived in all good conscience among them hitherto."

Thus the two brothers, in a spirit of local patriotism and pious devotion, which will compare with that of Florentine citizens and builders of Italian towns, became the makers of their native town. The registers bear witness that after his return from exile, Jocelin was working steadily through troublous times to build up the constitution of his church of secular Canons at Wells, on the lines of his predecessors, Reginald and Robert—increasing the Prebends, remodelling the offices, giving full and definite duties and additional endowments to every member of the staff of the Church—providing hospital, schools, houses for the resident Canons, making and stocking his park at Wells, building and repairing houses and a chapel at Wookey. He was not the creator, but the remodeller, legislator, and finisher of the constitution. So as builder of the fabric he continued, and finished the work of his predecessors, repairing and rebuilding what was dilapidated or unfinished, adding largely new and original work, and when

sufficiently completed in interior arrangements and endowment, he consecrated his finished work shortly before his death.

Professor Willis has told us that the date of the consecration of the church by Jocelin, 1239, agrees "with that phase of Early English work, which the architecture of the west front presents," and that the west front "is built in the fully developed Early English style in which Salisbury is built." We know that Jocelin was a frequent visitor at Salisbury, while Bishop Poore was building; he was present at the consecration of the choir, in 1225; he was one of the Commissioners named by the Pope to pronounce on the merits of S. Osmund for canonization, in 1228. The architecture and contemporary evidence lead to the conclusion that the west front was Jocelin's special work, while repairing and completing the unfinished nave of his predecessors. If this was so, it would have been a noble achievement for the last twenty years of a troubled episcopate. If he did this, and no more than this, it would not be difficult to imagine how the tradition would have grown that he was the builder of the whole church. Amidst the obscurity attaching to the early building in the troublous times of the 12th century, Jocelin's fame as benefactor, legislator, builder of the west front, and the finisher of the church, would eclipse the fame of his predecessors, and invest him justly with the title of the "the builder of church," "as if there had been none like him, nor would be after him." But with these documents before us I claim that those who went before and prepared the way for Jocelin's achievement should not be forgotten.

"*Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona.*" Jocelin is first and foremost, but Reginald de Bohun ought to hold the second place of honour between Robert and Jocelin as one of the "makers of Wells;" one of the "first three" master builders of our holy and beautiful house of St. Andrew in Wells.

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