

NOTICE OF SOME  
Excavations made at Muchelney  
IN 1873 AND 1874.

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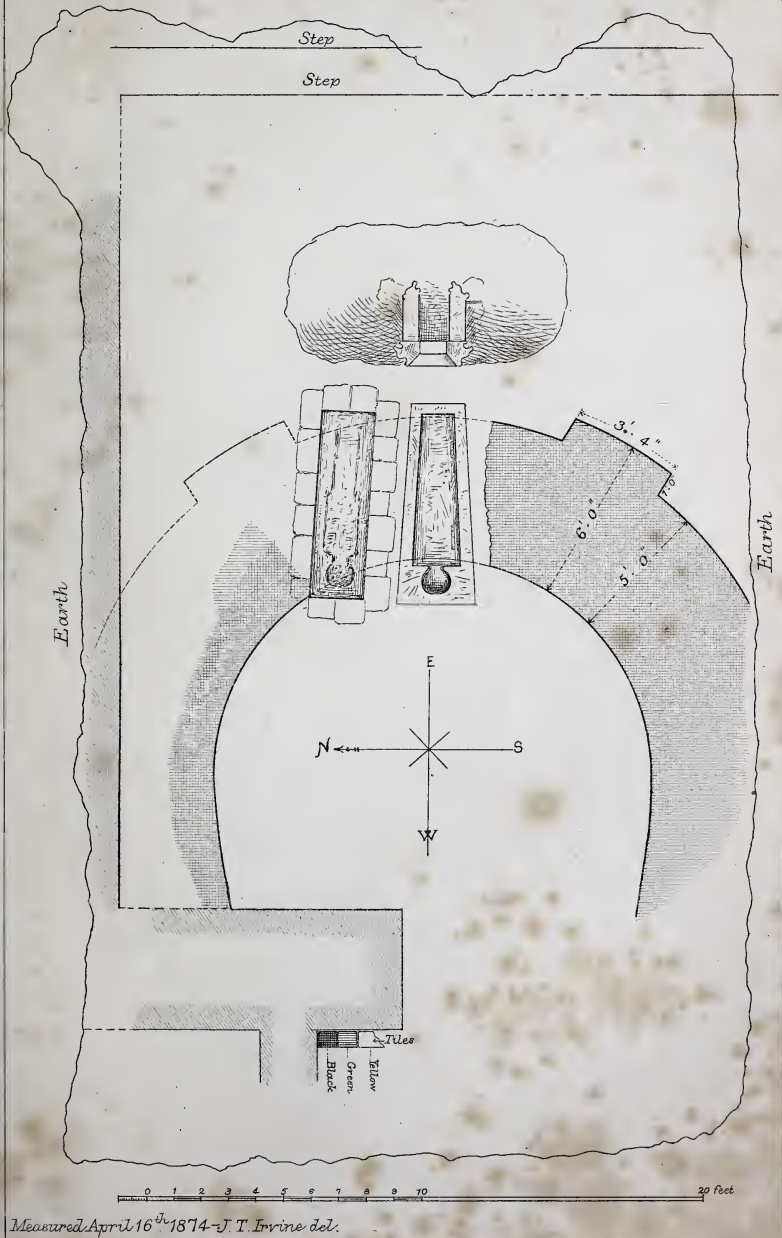
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THERE are, probably, few persons at all interested in the Archæology of Somersetshire, who do not know Muchelney, at least, by name. Full details concerning the history of the Abbey, and concerning the principal remains of the building, may be found in the volume of the Society for the year 1858, in an exhaustive paper by the Rev. Thomas Hugo, illustrated by some of Mr. Clarke's charming sketches. It may be just mentioned, that, with the exception of one outbuilding, and, perhaps, two windows, there was nothing to be seen, at the time when that paper was written, of earlier date than the 15th century. The discoveries since made are of earlier work, and are of considerable value and interest. Between the north side of the Abbey House and the present churchyard is an orchard, known to be the site of the cloister, as a portion of the south side still remains, and also of the Abbey Church, but as to the exact position of the church there was considerable difference of opinion.

This appears now to be a settled point. During the winter of 1872, the tenant of the Abbey, Mr. James Westlake, had his attention directed to a heap of lime rubbish in this orchard, about 120 feet east of the present termination of the cloister, and four feet from the churchyard wall. The rubbish was wanted for use on the farm. The men who were removing the heap had dug but a very little, when they came upon a quantity of blue stone, apparently lias, shafting, all more or less broken, and Ham Hill stone, and encouraged by this, at five feet depth, came upon a flat blue stone, 6 feet 3 inches in length, 3 feet 2½ inches across the top, 2 feet 8 inches across the bottom, and 4 inches thick. This stone was found to be a coffin lid, having on its face a rudely-cut pastoral staff, the crook turned to the left, with a Tudor rose in the head, but without inscription. This coffin lid was found thrown over on its face upon a tile pavement, extending, apparently, towards the east and west. Tidings of the discovery were sent to the owner of the property and parish, Walter J. Long, Esq., of Preshaw, Hants ; and all was covered up, and awaited his arrival. In July, 1873, Mr. Long came to Muchelney, and, setting men to work, carried on the exploration for a fortnight. The remains of a wall on the north of the pavement was found, and this wall was followed towards the east, until three steps up were found, with tiled fronts to the risers, and tiled tops. The men then dug 23 feet to the south, at which point three similar steps were found, these being evidently the remains of steps, now destroyed, all across the eastern end of the building, up to a higher platform. The wall was traced indistinctly down the south side of the excavation for 29 feet, and the whole was then cleared out. All the central

portion of the floor has been torn up, and only portions of the encaustic tiling remained in position round the walls, 4 feet in width at the widest spot, where the coffin lid had been thrown. The tiles are of a red-brown colour, with patterns of creamy-white. They had been laid down without regularity; elephants, knights, fleur-de-lis, shields of arms, being set within borders of black, with white corner squares, at random. It has been suggested that they had been relaid, on an enlargement of the building, perhaps in the 15th century. There were many human bones in the débris, pieces of pottery—red and green, and three small pieces of green-stained glass. In the centre of the excavation was found a large Early English groining boss, very much broken, and a quantity of foliage of the same date, and groining ribbing of the same; and at each of the western corners an early Perpendicular boss, in good preservation. These have been painted red. A considerable quantity of window tracery was found, some of Decorated, and some of Perpendicular design, and moulding of the same period, one piece having the ball-flower in a hollow. The tiles were carefully lifted, and have been relaid in the sacrum of the parish church, as nearly as possible as they were found. The coffin lid has been laid within the west door. When the tiles had been taken up, under their bed of concrete we found a semi-circular, or horse shoe-shaped foundation, about 7 feet wide, and in the centre of this foundation, at the east end, a Ham-stone coffin, 7 feet  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches long, 2 feet 8 inches wide at the shoulder. It has a hollow for the head, and is laid close to the surface. It had been rifled, and the human remains in the débris had been taken from it. By the side of this coffin, on the north, we found a grave, walled at the sides,

PLAN OF FOUNDATIONS FOUND IN THE ORCHARD AT  
MUCHELNEY ABBEY IN 1873.



Measured April 16<sup>th</sup> 1874 - J. T. Irvine del.

but not at the ends, and at the depth of 5 feet a skeleton, with folded arms, buried, apparently, without a coffin, though a few nails were found in the grave, with no remains of any dress, except two buckles of copper. The remains are those of a man of 6 feet in height, and the teeth, though sound, are much ground down. To the east of this early foundation the ground had been all broken up to a considerable depth, and a fire-place had been formed in a hollow at the foot of the coffin, of broken battlements, for the purpose of melting lead, much of which we found run into the loose earth. In July, 1874, the eastern platform was tried, but nothing was found. In digging at the south-west corner of the excavation made in 1873, we found a foundation, apparently of the same date as that found under the tiles, running from it in a curve to the south-west: on the north it appears to run in a similar way under the present churchyard. Foundations of corner buttresses are laid open about 64 feet to the south-west of the centre of the apse. We have also found the foundation of the north-east corner of a south transept, or of the cloister, and in the floor a walled grave, filled with mortar, and at a depth of 5 feet the skeleton of a tall man, about 6 feet in height, singularly narrow across the breast, and broad across the shoulders and hips. Near this a portion of cast lead pipe was found *in situ*, about 10 feet in length, leading, apparently, into the cloister from the church. There can be little doubt now as to the site of the Abbey Church, and we are almost sure as to its size and shape. We have the east end laid open, a small portion of the south side, and the south-east corner, probably of a south transept. We also know where the cloister stood, and its dimensions. The discovery is not a very large one, yet

it is one which is full of interest, and is valuable, as helping towards the tracing of the ground plan of this once important Abbey. Perhaps the reading of this paper may interest some one with knowledge of these things, sufficiently to move him to come down and solve some of the difficulties that we feel, so that valuable time and labour may not be wasted in digging holes at random and finding nothing.

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