

The Old Archdeaconry, Wells.

BY EDMUND BUCKLE, M.A.

THE existing remains of this house (which faces the north porch of the Cathedral) comprise a hall and two chambers all under one long roof. The hall dates from the thirteenth century, though it has been much altered since. The chambers were added subsequently, and there is nothing to show that they are older than the end of the fifteenth century; but of these little besides the walls remain.

The hall is 46 feet long by 25 feet wide. The early doorway on the north side remains entire and a great part of the corresponding doorway on the south side. These two are very similar. Each has a plain molded arch externally and a graceful cinquefoiled rear-arch within; but they are not quite opposite each other. The south doorway was of course the principal entrance; that on the north side must have opened into the kitchen court. Adjoining the northern doorway and quite in the corner of the room was another doorway of apparently the same early dates leading presumably to the buttery or other offices. This doorway is very curiously planned; it does not pass straight through the wall, but takes a sharp turn to the east, cutting away the corner of the building, which consequently has a straight joint finished with quoins on the west side about 2 feet 3 inches from the angle. And this joint is carried up considerably higher than the head of the old

doorway, a fact which adds to the difficulty of explaining the history of this corner. The door opened inwards and a square recess was formed in the western wall to receive the door.¹ There is also one doorway in the east wall which belongs to a comparatively early date. This presumably led to the kitchen; it is fortunately perfect down to the old floor line, though it has lost its head and is now covered with a plain stone lintel; and its external face was completely altered in the fifteenth century. This is the most southerly of the three openings in the east wall. It appears that the old floor line at this point was 2 feet below the present floor. Since the present floor is only just above the ground in front of the building and below that at the back, it seems to follow that all the ground in this part has been artificially raised, including the present roadway and the terrace along the side of the Cathedral Green. Over the northern doorway remain traces of a window, which from the splay of the jambs seems to have been a lancet and therefore a part of the early work. Its place has now been taken by a modern two-light window. In the east gable is a round window in which was some wooden tracery which had the reputation of belonging to the thirteenth century. But when it was taken down this tracery proved to be modern deal, and the round window clearly contained originally stone tracery. There is also at the north end of the dais a small low early window with a trefoil head.

Nothing more remains of the early work. But in the fifteenth century a great alteration was made, amounting almost to a rebuilding. In Chyle's History² occurs the following passage: "There was also heretofore peculiar houses appropriated to the severall Dignitaries in this Church. As to the Archdeacon of Wells, That faire house over against the North Porch of the Cathedrall. This I gather from those

¹ This recess and the internal elevations of most of the doorways are now hidden by the modern book-cases.

² See Reynolds' *Wells Cathedral*, liij.

Monkish Verses, which are yet remaining round about the Roof of that Hall, viz :—

“ Hæ referens recoles dum sit Comes hic tibi Vita.
Andreas Holes quando fuit Archi Levita
Occiduum grandem Cameram stabulumque Coquinam
Hanc Aulam tandem loca cætera passa ruinam
Passim dejecitque erexerat et nova fecit.
Ut Successores tutos faceret residentes
Muros atque fores statuit novitate recentes
Canc. llos veteres binos pater iste refecit.
Hæ moneant Te res Orare quod in Requite sit.”

Andrew Holes was Archdeacon of Wells at least from 1457 to 1468, but died before 1471. The inscription appears to be commemorative of him after his decease. For it seems improbable that he would have described himself as *pater iste*, or that he would have used such phrases as *quando fuit Archi Levita* or *quod in Requite sit*. If this is so we may assume that his rebuilding was not quite finished at the time of his death and that it took place about 1470.

It will be convenient to take the hall first as more of that remains than of any other part. New windows were inserted on both sides, tall two-light windows without tracery, and finished at the top either with square lintels or with four-centred arch-heads to each light; of these a good deal remains especially on the inner faces of the walls, but there is no indication of the level of the sills. A bay was formed at the south end of the dais, of which part of the foundations remain, as well as of the arch in the main wall and some of the weather course over the roof. The side walls of the modern bay stand upon the old footings, but the old bay was square on plan, not octagonal, and was covered with a steep-pitched roof, forming a sort of transept to the main building. On the east jamb of the wall arch is a broken corbel, intended to carry an image or a lamp. The fine oak roof is also of Holes's date. “Round about” it, probably in the position of the present text, ran the rhyming inscription quoted above. In two of the collar beams are iron hooks from which were hung the chandeliers.

The floor was at this time raised to its present level, two feet above the original level; it was paved with stone, in squares of about 15 inches, set diagonally with wide borders round in straight courses of various widths. A step found at the ancient doorway in the east wall proves that the kitchen offices were left still at a lower level. Two new openings were formed in the east wall. A new doorway was cut through, and apparently it was immediately afterwards closed up and (on the kitchen side) converted into a pair of recesses by the insertion of a stone shelf at mid-height. Adjoining this is another similar recess with a stone shelf across, but there is no indication on the inner face of the wall that this opening was ever cut clean through the wall so as to make a doorway. The closed doorway is very low, the point of its arch being only five feet above the floor; and I offer the following suggestion to account for these peculiarities. Possibly it was intended to close up the two old doorways to kitchen and buttery, and to replace them by two new ones, symmetrically placed in the centre of the end wall. But after one of these had been completed and the other partially formed, it was determined to raise the floor of the hall two feet. The effect of this was to take two feet off the height of the new doorways and so to render them useless. The old doorways were however of great height and were still practicable in spite of the change of level; these were accordingly retained and the new doorways converted into cupboards. At the same time the old doorway in the east wall received a new outer arch.

At the north end of the dais is a curious arrangement. The small early window in this position has been already mentioned; its internal arch consists of a half arch only, which butts up against the lintel of a doorway which occupied the extreme north end of the west wall of the hall. A part of this lintel with Perpendicular mouldings remains; probably the internal arch of the window was altered when this door was

inserted, but the whole arrangement may be original. (See Plate 3.)

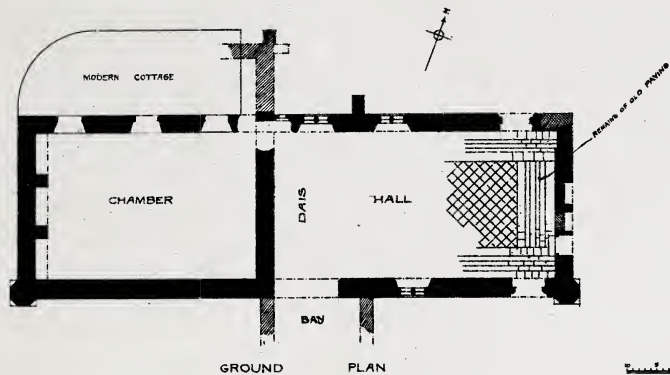
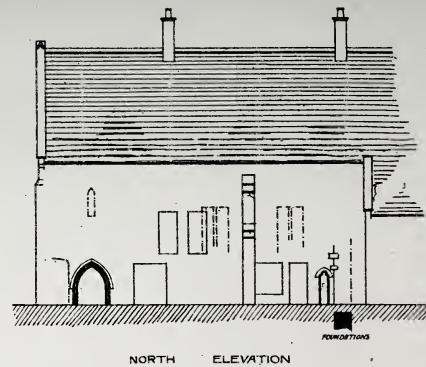
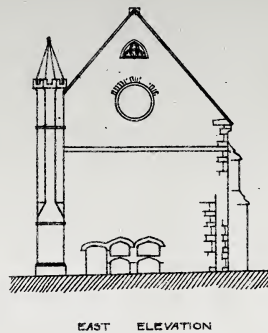
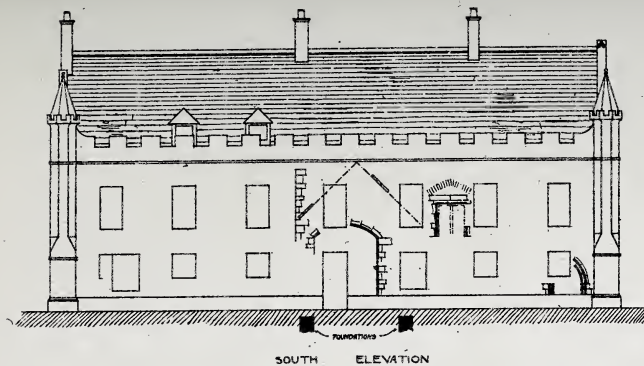
The western part of the building always contained two stages as it does at present. This was an addition to the hall, from which it was separated by a straight joint on the south front. Unfortunately an over-zealous foreman destroyed the external evidence of this joint, because it interfered with the neatness of his pointing. Of the windows on the south side no fragment remains, but on the north there are indications of three windows in the positions shewn upon the plan. The floor of the lower room still retains the older floor level, and is now in consequence considerably below the ground outside. This room has been a kitchen for the last 200 years, but what was its original purpose does not appear. A cellar is commonly found in this position, but this seems to have been something better. Over it was the great chamber "*occiduum grandem cameram.*" There was at one time a building on the northern side of these chambers; its junction with the existing building can be traced on the north elevation, and the plinth of a buttress was found as shewn on the plan. The wall running northwards was a continuation of the west wall of the hall, and the plaster on its west face was found to run right through the north wall of the chambers, shewing that the latter was of a subsequent date, and bolted up against the former. When the present wall was built, it is difficult to say what was done to the doorway in the north-west corner of the hall.

Holes also added a buttress on the north side of the hall, and two angle turrets on the south front. As he left it the house had a roughly symmetrical front. The parapet ran unbroken from turret to turret; nearly in the middle of the length projected the gable containing the window of the bay; but on the one side of this bay were the tall windows of the hall, while on the other were the chamber windows in two storeys. Compare the front of the Deanery; this being flush with the wood had no central projection, but the treatment of turrets and parapet

is very similar, and as at the Archdeaconry the windows alone broke the symmetry of the front. Apparently at the Deanery alternate bays were occupied by large windows, although the number of these bays is even.



But we are told that Holes also re-built the stable, kitchen, and "loca cætera." The kitchen and offices must certainly have been at the east end of the hall, where all the doors are grouped, and a setoff in the east wall indicates the level of the roof over these buildings. Still there is great difficulty in seeing how room can have been found for them here, for there is only about 17 feet between the end of the hall and the back of the Vicars' Close. And there is little doubt that the back wall of the Close is an ancient boundary. For the whole space from the Deanery to the East Liberty is divided up into four strips or "ribs," the Chancellor's, the Archdeacon's, the one occupied by the Vicars' Close, and that containing the Tower House. The Vicars' Close being bounded by two straight walls seems to take the place of an older prebendal house. And in any case Bekynton's executors must have been busy upon the Close at the very time that Holes's alterations were going on; for Bekynton died in 1466; so that from Holes's time at least, the Archdeaconry cannot have extended further in this direction than it does now. And then there is a further difficulty. It is said that there used to be a passage between the Archdeaconry and the Close, called the Canons' Walk, and leading almost direct from the north porch of the Church to the Canons' barn, and the boundary wall of which still exists for the greater part of its length, forming a long narrow slip at the back of the Close. After the formation of this passage, no space whatever would have been left for the Archdeacon's kitchen at the end of the hall. When was this passage made?

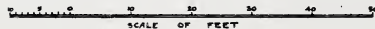
The small pavilion in the garden behind the house is a reconstruction of an old stable, which, in its quoins and gable ends, had the aspect of a medieval building. Possibly this was the Archdeacon's stable. Of Holes's walls and gates perhaps



OLD ARCHDEACONRY — WELLS

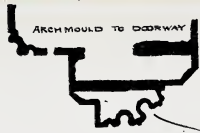
No. 1

These drawings show the actual state of the buildings in 1890.
 Remains of ancient foundations no longer existing are shown by dotted lines.
 On the Plans portions remaining in foundations only are single hatched. 
 The ancient filling of old doorways shown cross hatched. 



OLD ARCHDEACONRY WELLS

No 2



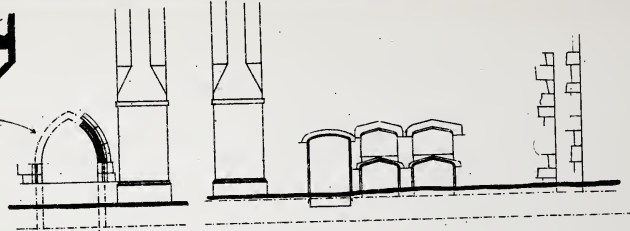
ARCHMOULD TO DOORWAY



PLAN OF WINDOW N. WALL

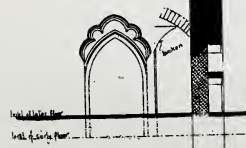
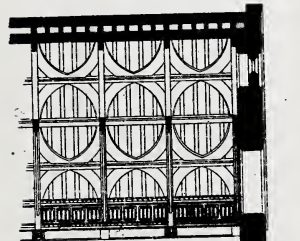


SECTION ON LINE EF.

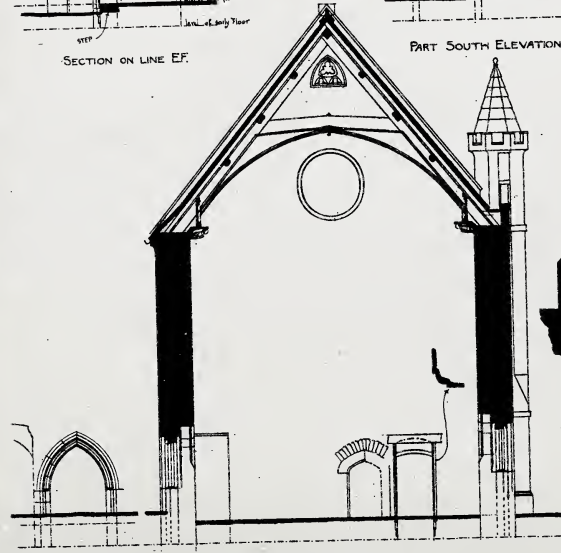


PART SOUTH ELEVATION

LOWER PART OF EAST ELEVATION

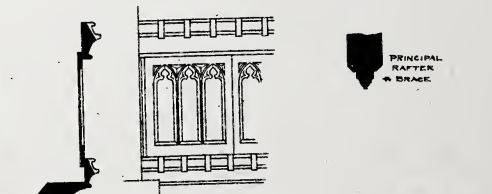


SECTION ON LINE A.B.



SECTION ON LINE C.D.

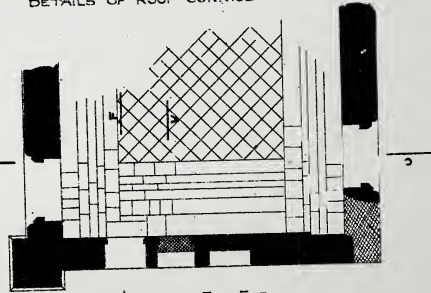
EXTERNAL ELEVATION OF DOORWAY



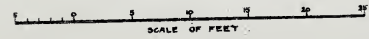
DETAILS OF ROOF CORNICE



PRINCIPAL RAFTER & BRACE

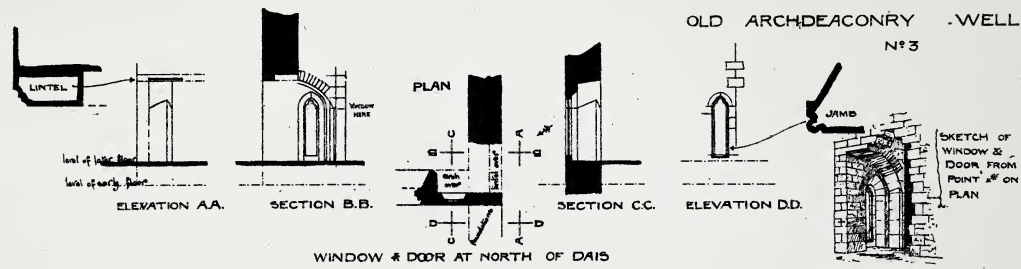


PLAN OF EAST END

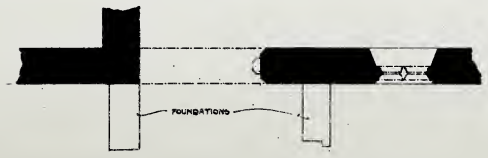
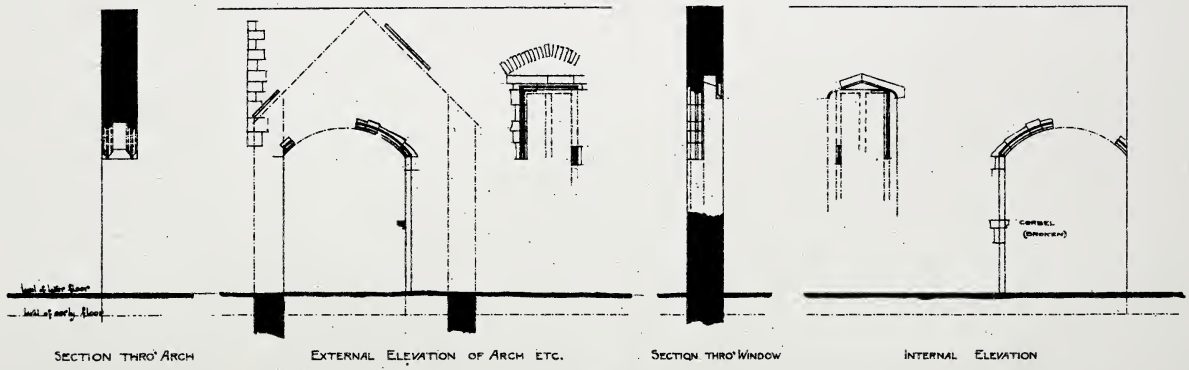


SCALE OF FEET

OLD ARCHDEACONRY WELLS
N° 3



WINDOW & DOOR AT NORTH OF DAIS



also we have some remains. The boundary walls of the area are all substantial, and especially that along the North Liberty (in which is a small Perpendicular doorway), and that on the east side which cuts off the narrow strip spoken of as the Canon's Walk. These are about three feet thick, and the last returns at a distance of about a hundred feet behind the house across the Canons' Walk, to join the back of the Vicars' Close. In this cross wall is a gateway, which was once protected by a portcullis. The position is very peculiar, and indeed seems unaccountable. The last work enumerated has not at present been explained, "*Cancellos veteres binos pater iste refecit.*"

Polydore Vergil is reputed to have sold the house during the period when he held the Archdeaconry³. Afterwards the front, like the front of the Deanery, was made absolutely symmetrical by the insertion of two ranges of sash windows. It has since been used for an assembly room, and for a brewery, but it has now been restored to the Church, and after being freely altered to suit its new purpose, it has become the home of the Wells Theological College.

THE DRAWINGS.

On the accompanying drawings the hard lines shew the existing remains, dotted lines are used to indicate parts which have perished; these dotted lines are only inserted in cases where the evidence seems pretty clear.

On the plans the parts singly hatched signify foundations only remaining; the portions cross hatched are the ancient fillings of still older doorways.

The paving shewn on the plans is all that remained in 1889; this has now been taken up.

On Drawing No. 1 are plan and elevations, shewing both the ancient and modern openings, etc., as they existed in 1889. The windows shewn by dotted lines on the back elevation did

³ See vol. XII, ij, 43, Serel's *Notes to Parker's Ecclesiastical Buildings of Wells.*

not shew outside, but their position is indicated upon this drawing as fixed by the rear-arches within.

Drawing No. 2 shews the east end of the hall with the numerous doorways, drawn out to a larger scale.

On the upper part of Drawing No. 3 will be found particulars of the small window and doorway at the north end of the dais; below are details of the bay and one window of the hall.

