

## The Somerset Type of Church compared with that of some other Counties.

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BY B. EDMUND FERREY, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A.

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IN France, Spain, or Italy we are frequently whirled for two or three hundred miles, through very flat country, with but little variety in the trees, or crops, or architecture. In England, on the contrary, there are great changes even in a short journey of fifty miles. To account for this we must examine below the surface of the ground, and then find that it is the geological formation which is the main-spring of these changes; and that from these diverse formations we get our treasure house of many types of architecture. Perhaps there is scarcely a single county in England with greater variety of *landscape* than Somerset. Look at its most marked natural features—the great ranges of hills. There are the sterile, mountainous, and stony heights of Mendip; the lofty, wild range of the Blagdens; the soft-looking, wooded Quantocks. Then there is another variety—the peculiar green molehills, island-like, thrown up amid the broad and not inconsiderable alluvial plains, as those about Bridgwater, Glastonbury, and Langport; or another phase, the very undulating country with incessant “ups and downs” in the vicinity of Bath, round Wincanton, and in this very neighbourhood of Wiveliscombe. Though there is some soil in the county suitable for the manufacture of bricks and tiles, there are not many mediæval

examples remaining, for the sufficient reason that admirable building-stone of different kinds was always to be quarried bountifully in nearly every part. But at the present day the Bridgwater tiles, bricks, drain pipes, and pottery, have obtained good reputation; as have those at Pool, near Wellington, manufactured not longer than some ten or fifteen years; there are others made at Weston-super-Mare. If the ecclesiastical or other architecture of the different English counties is examined, it will, as a rule, be found, and very intelligibly too, that where the best building stones are available, there is the best architectural type. Glancing at the far north in Northumberland and Durham, we have the beautiful stone of which Durham Cathedral and Hexham church are built, and the splendid sandstone of Morpeth. Here, too, in the border county are found the low square towers, evidently built for defensive purposes or for refuge. Yorkshire possesses a grand array of building stones, a rival to Somerset in that respect; different, however, in composition, as they are mainly sandstones and magnesian limestones. There is the Benedictine Whitby Abbey, as well as many fine churches, built of Whitby crag moon-stone, much used in the county. Lincolnshire has its warm-coloured Ancaster stone, an oolite, besides an abundant supply in the neighbouring county of Nottinghamshire, where there is a remarkable group of limestones and sandstones at Mansfield. Derbyshire has its magnesian limestone at Bolsover and also the millstone grit. There is Northamptonshire, with the beautiful freestones of Barnack and Ketton, the possession of which must have encouraged the growth of its fine series of parish churches, generally crowned with spires.

In Bedfordshire are also many fine churches built of the fine-grained Totternhoe limestone, a material much used in the midland counties, but which unfortunately has not stood the test of weather, and is best employed internally.

Passing over the adjoining county of Wiltshire, with its three splendid oolites of Chilmark, Tisbury, and Wardour, we come

to Somerset. Though some of the quarries of the "Bath" stone are not actually in Somerset, they are so near the border that, with the others, they take their name from it. In the county is the Doulling stone, used at Wells Cathedral and Glastonbury Abbey, a wonderfully durable material. Ham-Hill stone, ruddy-looking in its youth, calm-looking and grey, covered with lovely tinted lichens in its old age; the red sandstone of Bishop's Lydeard and that neighbourhood; the sober-coloured blue lias, too often, alas! treacherously undurable, but forming the excellent paving stones and steps of Keinton and Street; and the Pennant, quarried near Bristol. The blue lias also produces that splendid material, the lime of Watchet, almost equal in strength to Portland cement. Then there is the white lias, such as is found in the neighbourhood of Wells and Shepton Mallet, resembling Caen stone in its white colour and texture. This is the stone employed in the sculpture of the arch mouldings to the west front of Wells Cathedral. Then, last, though not least, there is that rich purplish-red conglomerate, or pudding-stone, called Draycott, which will take a half-polish like marble; and the semi-freestone of Wedmore may be added.

Here certainly is a goodly list for one county. My contention is that this is one of the main causes of Somerset architecture being so good. As one of the objects of our Society is to study Natural History, this little geological disquisition must be pardoned.

Looking at the number of old roofs, panelled ceilings, bench ends, and screens, there cannot have been formerly any stint in the supply of oak. As roads for wheel-carriages scarcely existed, and everything had to be carried on pack-horses, it is unlikely that it was brought from any great distance. Unless there was water-carriage we do not find that building materials were ever conveyed very far. Thus, Caen stone, from Normandy, was much employed in Essex, where freestone is very scarce; on the opposite shore of the estuary of the Thames,

chalk was to be had, and in the 15th century Kentish rag was used, procured from near Maidstone.

In the mountainous districts of Great Britain, as might be expected, the churches are on a smaller scale, and the architecture less worthy of attention. This doubtless arises from the difficulty of working the stubborn mountain limestone, and the difficulties of transport. The scarcity of freestone has set its mark very determinedly on the Sussex, Kent, and Surrey type of church. In Sussex the flints, so abundant, have given us a form of simple, but effective, ecclesiastical architecture, peculiar to that county, singularly unlike that of Somerset, though equally beautiful in its way. There are the long grey walls, rarely with buttresses; the simple lancet windows, the modest-looking towers and spires, covered with oak shingling; the trussed rafter, and open-timbered roofs. The stone from Caen, previously mentioned, is also frequently found. Instead of the stone gable copings, so universal in Somerset, the profuseness of oak has led to the use of barge boards, while the towers are often constructed, as is also the case in the neighbouring county of Surrey, of massive timbers rising straight from the ground. The porches frequently have rich open-work tracery panelling. In fact, I do not suppose there is one county in England differing more from Somerset, in its architecture, and the materials employed, than does Sussex. Yet one point of similarity must be mentioned; the use of stone external covering to the roof, in the one case Horsham, in the other Ham Hill; each equally of a heavy description, very unlike the lighter stone employed for the same purpose in Oxfordshire and in Lancashire. These materials have not well stood the test of experience, and so, in the present day, are generally replaced by plain tiles, or slates.

How widely different to this county which, with all its lovely scenery, has no chalk within its borders, so that such a church as I have endeavoured to shadow forth would look curiously out of place!

The Dorsetshire churches approach the Somerset type in the

bodies of the buildings, but in respect of the towers, they are certainly not so fine, though of the same great period, the Perpendicular. The low-pitched lead-covered roof, with tie-beams, filled in with rich tracery above, and the panelled parapets, are characteristic of both counties. Dorsetshire has its chalk downs, and so we find flints used in its churches. But it possesses a freestone, better known and more famed, perhaps, than any other in England, *i.e.*, Portland. The marble from the Isle of Purbeck has stamped its impress upon many a mediæval cathedral and church, and there are capital specimens of it in the interior of the Cathedral of this Diocese. The Swanage rough stone also is useful and durable.

Still further west, the county of Devon is reached, where, as a general rule, the churches are smaller and less interesting. The grand tower, to a great extent, disappears. But there are several points of similarity; the wagon-headed ceiling, with its carved bosses; the richly-panelled or carved bench ends; and the rood-screens, often painted. In freestones used in building, Devon is not so rich as this county, either in extent or variety. Beer stone, of which Exeter Cathedral and many other fine buildings are constructed, is the most important. Granite is also used, and, naturally, has had the influence of making plain churches. In the neighbourhood of Plymouth the celebrated marbles are quarried; these, however, have not had much effect on the architecture of the Middle ages. In the north-west part of Somerset, a peculiar type of small carved capital is seen, exceedingly like that of Devon, generally of late 15th, or even 16th century work. Sculptured figures of angels to each cardinal point of the capitals frequently occur, each bearing emblems of the Passion, or perhaps some musical instrument.

The Cornish churches have several points of resemblance to the Somerset; and here I must beg pardon if I repeat what has no doubt been said much better by others. Like those of Somerset, the earlier Cornish churches were cruciform. These early ones are built of sandstone; the later

ones, erected during the same period as so many in Somerset, are built of granite. In plan, the normal 15th century Cornish church takes a considerable departure from those of this county, and is certainly monotonous. Three span-roofed aisles of nearly equal width, prolonged from the west to the east—the latter walls frequently flush the whole width—constitute a plan not equal to the more usual Somerset type. Indeed, the lead-covered aisle roof, of low inclination, with parapet, affords more variety than the compass-shaped roofs, with eaves, of many of these Cornish churches. The nave and chancel being generally under an unbroken, continuous roof, the effective feature of a chancel arch is wanting, though its place is to some extent supplied by an oak rood screen. The roofs internally are not unlike a type of the Somerset, having the collar-beam trusses, with curved braces under them, and the wagon-headed ribbed and panelled ceiling. In some parts of Cornwall the mediæval architects seem to have endeavoured to emulate their brethren here, regardless of the fact that they had to deal with a substance very different to the facile working stones of Somerset. At Launceston, and in the parish church of Truro,—parts of which, I believe, are now being incorporated in the new Cathedral,—many granite blocks, placed externally, are carved in an extraordinary way with foliage, scarcely a spot of plain surface being left. The ornamentation cannot be called diapering; for although the same pattern is often repeated, there are considerable minor variations in the design. In its external roof covering, Cornwall has a decided advantage over many other counties. It possesses a good durable slate, small in size, of a pleasing grey, or sometimes greyish-green hue; so that the eye is not offended, as it may be by the large, cold blue Welsh slate. The Delabole slates obtained their wide reputation years before the Welsh and Westmoreland slates became so much in use.

In Cornwall, as elsewhere in England, there are generally few interments north of the church, because of its sunless

aspect, and because in the middle ages this side was deemed the source of the cold wind and the haunt of Satan. At Wellcombe, near Morwenstow, there is an entrance called the Devil's door, adjoining the font, which was only opened at the time of the renunciation made in baptism, for the escape of the fiend.

Attention may next be drawn to the North Wales type, worth mentioning in comparison with our Somerset examples. Here, as in Cornwall and other parts where rain is frequent and abundant, and tempestuous weather no unusual experience, the nave and chancel are under one unbroken roof; the practical advantage being that there is one weak point less in the roof by which wet can enter; there is no more likely place for this than the junction between the slates or tiles and the stone gable coping. The churches are generally long, of little width, and no great height; commonly without aisles,—for the villages are small, and the population sparse. The nave has an open timbered roof; curved wind braces, profusely cusped, being frequently introduced to stiffen the roof laterally,—a feature not only constructionally good, but very pleasing, from the manner in which it so quickly makes a plain roof ornamental. The chancel has a polygonal-panelled ceiling; not a wagon-head, as in Somerset. Towers are the exception, not the rule; they are generally of a rude description, with scarcely an architectural feature, but picturesque, owing to their outline.

The great distinction between the Lincolnshire and Somerset examples is in respect to the dates when they were erected; for in the former there is much more work of the Early English and Decorated periods, and less of the later styles. The roofs of the Lincolnshire churches are usually of trussed rafter construction, quite unlike our local examples.

I never saw in any Somerset church so curious an intermingling of two very different coloured materials as at Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire. Some of the internal arches appear to have been built without any method whatever as to

the stone of which they are composed. Some are entirely of the yellowish Ketton stone, others with only a stone or two of this, and the rest a reddish iron-stone; while others have the proportion of half iron-stone, half Ketton.

The round towers so frequently found in Norfolk are non-existent in this county. The absence of parapets is a peculiar feature in the Norfolk churches; the line of overlapping lead defining the junction of the roof with the walls. It is curious that in Norfolk, as well as in distant Herefordshire, detached towers to the churches are found as a localism. Like Somerset, Norfolk is rich in screens and woodwork. Suffolk has a characteristic in its flush work, as it is technically called, formed of cut flints devised in patterns, with free-stone in parapets, etc., externally, of which the Lady chapel at Melford is an exquisite example.

The county of Bucks is poor in building stone, and this is probably the cause of the churches being usually plain, with very little delicate detail, and with rough walls. Like Somerset, it possesses very few spires, but has some capital specimens of towers, principally of the Perpendicular style.

Oxfordshire has many interesting churches, though small. There are but few rebuilt entirely during the Perpendicular period, as most of the examples are additions or alterations to older structures. Though the vicinity of Oxford has many building-stone quarries, much of it has unfortunately proved to be very perishable. Berkshire is not a county rich in fine churches, most of them are of small size; but there are many of them erected from the middle of the 12th to the middle of the 13th century, as at Wantage and Childrey, which possess much interest for the archæological student. Good building stone is scarce, so that flint and chalk are principally used. The wood-work is not equal to that of Somerset, Devon, Cornwall, or of the Eastern counties.

Let me now endeavour to draw attention more particularly to the architecture of the county wherein we are assembled,



still keeping in mind the title of my paper—a comparison. There can be nothing more beautiful and effective than the cruciform plan of many of the earlier churches, before the great wave of the Perpendicular style swept over the country. We there see the pleasing contrast of light and shade caused by the projecting arms of the transept, with the appropriate finish (at the intersection or the crossing) of the central tower, the almost invariable accompaniment in England of this form of church. However beautiful the latter developments of the architecture of the 15th and 16th centuries may be, their forms cannot rival this cruciform plan. Sometimes we find the remains of the earlier plan enclosed and incorporated in a larger church of a later period. I have already mentioned the western gable turret, so usual in the churches of North Wales, and in several English counties, but very rare here. It is generally met with only in the form of a sancte bell-cot over the east gable of the nave, as at Long Ashton and other places in that district, where it appears to be a localism. The grand Somerset towers, with their characteristics, have been already almost exhaustively treated. Of the towers of distant counties, perhaps the Norfolk examples most nearly approach them with their pinnacles, though generally inferior in height and size, and of plainer detail. The partly octagonal tower was certainly a feature in some parts of Somerset, anterior to the period of the great Perpendicular towers. In other counties, omitting Northampton, they are quite the exception. Somerton, Barton St. David, and Weston-Bampfylde, are good specimens of this type. In this county, I do not know a single instance of an ancient gable or saddle-backed tower. The form is rare in England, though usual enough in the North of France, and the examples are generally small and plain.

In many towers the stair turrets are a conspicuous decorative feature externally, giving variety to the general effect. In counties where there is little freestone, but where oak was abundant, as at Whitchurch, Hampshire, the stair turret is of

that material, standing inside the tower, just clear of the walls, and picturesquely treated, the enclosing framework being perforated and ornamentally cusped. While on the subject of turrets, the lofty octagonal rood-stair turrets existing in this county, which are not so prevalent elsewhere, must be mentioned, as well as the square-edged, slightly projecting rood stair-turret, gabled at the top, as at Portishead, the greater portion of the steps being in the thickness of the walls.

The splendid range of clerestories—two windows to each bay—so common in Norfolk, is very exceptional in this part of the world. There is a brilliant exception to this at Congresbury. The perforated stone panelling to the bell-chamber windows of towers, instead of oak louvres, is a very charming and well known feature of the Somerset churches,—almost peculiar to them,—though it is to be sometimes met with in Dorsetshire. Another characteristic of the 15th century here is the panelled arch and pier, scarcely ever occurring to the nave arcade, but very often to the tower or the chancel arch, sometimes to the arches separating the chancel from its chantry chapels. One of the best and boldest specimens in my experience is that to the tower arch at Evercreech. The kind of vaulting—approaching to fan-tracery in the ground storeys of towers and in porches—is also a characteristic. The pierced parapets are another peculiarity. The trussed rafter roof, with curved braces and moulded purlines, is more prevalent in this county than any other. The tie-beam principals, with pierced ornamental panels are found here and in Dorsetshire. The nearly flat ceiling, with massive moulded ribs, divided and sub-divided into panels, with elaborate carving and enriched cusps, deeply recessed, is found to perfection in the nave aisles of Bruton and Kilmersdon, and is quite characteristic of Somerset. In the nave aisles of Yatton and South Petherton are responds or attached columns next the outer walls, carrying the roof trusses—a rare feature where there is no vaulting.

In window tracery, Somerset cannot be said, either in the

earlier or later styles, to hold any position very superior to other counties. Roofs of stone, forming the external roof and internally the ceiling also, are uncommon in England, though more usual in Ireland and in Spain. There are examples at the Porch, Leverington, Norfolk, and at Barnack, and a few others. Abbotsbury chapel is an example in the neighbouring county of Dorset. The only instance I am aware of in Somerset is to an interesting chantry chapel or aisle to the north side of Limington church, near Ilchester, of the 15th century. Even in churches of the Decorated period, there is no Somerset example that has the profuse ball-flower ornamentations to be found in parts of Herefordshire, and in Gloucestershire.

I have already contrasted the Somerset and Northamptonshire churches, but for one moment would draw attention to a remarkable window in the interesting church of Oundle, in the latter county. It is of the Early Decorated period, very long and narrow; in fact, singularly un-English in its proportions—though in all other particulars English—more like German or French work.

Somerset is unusually rich, compared with other counties, in mediæval stone and wood pulpits, as might be expected from the preponderance of the churches built during the Perpendicular period. Some have the remains of the ancient colouring upon them, as at Cheddar. Stoups or benaturas are not infrequent, being either in the south porch or attached to the west doorway, if that were more used and nearer the town or village. In floor brasses, Somerset and other western counties have to yield the palm to the East of England.

It is one of the great advantages of the later churches that the wood fittings are so complete. In a 13th century building this is not the case. Screens, bench ends, and such like adjuncts, which so warm up and brighten the structures of the 15th and 16th centuries, are not present. There is, of course, considerable archaeological and historical interest in works of

several dates in a church, but an architectural completeness in an entire building, finished in one style, is the case in many of the examples in this interesting county.

Obviously I have but touched upon the fringe of a very small part of the large subject selected for this essay, but I trust it will be sufficient to show the value of comparisons.

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