

From the *Transactions* of the  
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

**Flaxley Abbey-The existing Remains**

by J. H. Middleton  
1881-82, Vol. 6, 280-283

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## FLAXLEY ABBEY—THE EXISTING REMAINS.

By J. HENRY MIDDLETON, F.S.A.

THERE are no remains whatever of the Abbey Church above ground, though the foundations probably still exist.

Of the monastic buildings, one block (or part of a block) only is still standing. This consists of a fine Hall, about 65 ft. long by 25 ft. wide, vaulted in five bays with simple chamfered groin-ribs, springing from corbels, about 5 feet above the floor. The whole is very solid and plain, after the usual Cistercian fashion, and appears to have been built about A.D. 1200. This room (*see Plan on Pl. XI.*) runs north and south. The windows, one in each bay, on the west side, are much modernised, but seem to be in the places of the original ones. At the south end of this Hall there are two narrow parallel rooms, with plain barrel vaults.

On the east side of the large Hall there is a fine richly-moulded archway of *Transitional* character, and another smaller doorway, further south. All the other openings appear modern, and are not shown on the plan.

It will be at once evident to any one who is acquainted with the Cistercian plan that this fine Hall cannot be the Monks' *Refectory*, or *Frater*, as mediæval writers called it (*see Rites of Durham, Cap. XXXIX.*)<sup>1</sup> The Cistercian Refectory opened out of the middle of the South Cloister walk, and was flanked on the east by the *Kitchen*, and on the west by the *Buttery*. It was set at right angles to this Cloister Walk, and not parallel to it, as was the case with the Refectories of other orders, the side of which generally occupies nearly the whole length of the Cloister from east to west.

<sup>1</sup> Some confusion has been made by certain modern writers, who have called the *Common-House* the *Frater*, without any authority whatever; in Cistercian writings the *Common-House* is called the *Calefactorium*.

In a Cistercian Monastery the cooking was done by the Monks themselves, who took this duty in turns: and not by regular paid cooks, as in most other monastic orders. For this reason, probably, the *Refectorium* was turned round, so as to allow room on each side of it for Kitchen and Buttery, close up against the main Cloister, which formed the living room of the Monks.

It is, I think, quite clear that the existing Hall, with its range of windows on the west, and its doors on the east, was part of that great western range of buildings which formed so important a part of every Cistercian Monastery.

This range has been called by Mr. Sharpe the *Domus Conversorum*, but it would be better I think to keep to the old nomenclature, and call it, as the Cistercians themselves did, the *Cellarium*.

The *Cellarium* was not one building, but a whole range of buildings, and was so called because it was under the special supervision of the *Cellerarius*, who, next to the Abbot, was the most important man in a Cistercian House. He managed all the worldly affairs of the Abbey, received all money, and bought the necessary supplies of food. Under his charge were all the *Conversi*, or working lay-brothers, and he was also the supervisor of all arrangements for the reception of guests.

The *Hospitium*, in fact, was part (*i.e.*, the southern part) of the *Cellarium*, while the *Conversi*, and the *Cellerarius* himself, with his officers, occupied the northern part—the division, that is, nearest to the Church.

Of this great range the existing Hall at Flaxley is certainly a part, but what its special use was it is now impossible to say; it may have been a *Refectorium* for the *Conversi*, or possibly a place where some of their indoor labours were carried on.

The narrow rooms at the south end of the Hall are probably a *Necessarium*; the drain with a stream of water being carried through the narrower of the two divisions. This precise arrangement may be seen in almost every existing Cistercian Abbey. It should be noticed that the east wall of the Hall is of the enormous thickness of eight feet, while that on the west is only about six

feet thick. The reason for this evidently was that, as the west walk of the Cloister came against the east wall of this Hall, it was impossible to have projecting buttresses. While the opposite wall was free, and so could have a thinner wall with a buttress to each bay.

Over the Hall itself there appears to be no early work remaining, but over the *Necessarium* there is a very fine room, about 40 ft. by 16 ft., with a handsome open roof of late 14th century work. This roof, which is very well preserved, has arched and moulded Principals, with braces curved and cusped, and wall pieces coming down on to small stone corbels.

There is a good cornice about 16 feet above the floor. At the West end of the room there is a large pointed window, which has lost all its tracery, and been much modernised. Tradition calls this the "Abbot's room;" but it is much more probable that it was the Refectory of the *Hospitium*, or Guest's Dining Hall. It is now fitted up as a library. In early times, that is during the 12th and 13th centuries, while the strictness of the Cistercian Rule remained in full force, the Abbot had no special rooms. He slept in the common *Dortor* with all his monks; and dined with the better class of guests in the Refectory of the *Hospitium*. In later times, when Cistercian Abbots began to have special apartments set apart for them, the place chosen for the Abbot's lodgings seems to have been far away to the east of the monastic buildings.

With the Cistercians, just as with the Benedictines, the *Infirmary Buildings* were a very large and important range, including a Cloister, large Infirmary Hall and a Chapel. Considerable remains of this range exist at Rievaulx, Fountains, and many other Cistercian Abbeys. There seems no doubt that the later Abbots occupied part of the Infirmary Buildings, which are always to the east of the main Cloister, and are reached from it by the passage which adjoins the *Auditorium* (see *Plan, Plate XI.*)

In the present garden there are three fine stone coffin-lids of 13th or 14th century work; two of them are carved with Abbots' croziers. These, and a quantity of vaulting shafts, are said to have been found at, or near, the spot where they now lie—marked

A on the plan—and this is traditionally the site of the Chapter House ; which it very well may be. It was the Cistercian custom to bury their Abbots in the Chapter House—no one under the rank of a Bishop being allowed to be buried in the Church. The monks were interred—never in the Cloister Garth, as some writers have asserted—but in their own cemetery to the east of the Church.

I should wish to record my thanks to Sir Thomas and Lady Crawley-Boevey for their kindness in allowing me to examine thoroughly their house in my search for remains of the Abbey buildings.

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