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**The Two Chapels in the Tower, of London**

by G. H. Birch  
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# THE TWO CHAPELS IN THE TOWER OF LONDON.<sup>1</sup>

By G. H. BIRCH, F.S.A.

## I.—THE CHAPEL ROYAL OF S. JOHN THE EVANGELIST WITHIN THE WHITE TOWER.

It seems passing strange that a man who was a monk, and by the favour of his sovereign afterwards Bishop of Rochester, a man supposed to be of peace, should in this place and in others be found to be associated with a building certainly not erected for peaceful purposes. Gundulph, formerly an inmate of the Abbey of Bec in Normandy, followed William, the first Norman King, to England; and from his superior skill in that mode of architecture practised in Normandy was extensively employed by William, and was ordered to erect this Keep of the White Tower after a fashion then prevalent in Normandy and France, of huge square enclosures, with walls of enormous thickness and of great height, with smaller towers and walls at their base, access to these central masses being only by one small door, and at a good height from the ground, so that in the case of the outer works being taken, the garrison could retire to this as a stronghold. These Keeps were generally kept well stored with provisions, and possessed a well within their own walls. London, Dover, Norwich, Rochester and Newcastle, soon possessed Keeps which for strength and size could rival those at Loches, Arques, Chauvigny Roche, Guyon, and Etampes. Gundulph, although he is credited with the erection of Rochester Keep, was not really the builder of it. It was later; but here in London he certainly

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was employed. Can we, then, attribute the size and importance given to this chapel to the fact that his feelings as a Churchman triumphed over those of the military architect, and that we find here a feature which we do not find anywhere else to anything like the same extent?

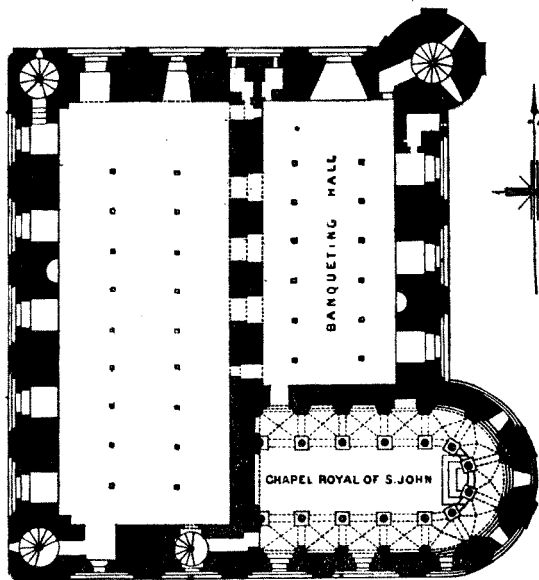
London having at once submitted to William, and having been peacefully confirmed in its rights and privileges by a special charter, offered no possible resistance; but the size and importance of the city made William reflect, that although he experienced no resistance then to his authority, it might develop at some future period, and that a stronger residence than the old palace at Westminster, which had contented the weak and feeble Edward, would be a fitting place for a monarch who might have to enforce his authority on subjects who had peacefully received him as the appointed successor of Edward, but who knew very little about him. He decided at once to build some sort of strong fortification, and probably added to the then existing *Arx Palatina*, which was of Roman origin, and defended the city and commanded the river to the east. These works were most likely deep ditches and palisades, for it was not until twelve or fourteen years later that this Keep was commenced, and was so large and massive and so enormously strong that it received the name of *the Tower*, and has retained it ever since. Gundulph lived to the age of eighty-four, and did not die until the year 1108, the ninth of Henry I., and a little more than thirty years after his death we find him mentioned in the *Textus Roffensis*, "*Gundulfus ex præcepto regis Wilhelmi Magni præset operi magnæ turris Londoniæ.*" This Tower then, and a few buildings at its base, surrounded by walls and towers, and a ditch enclosing the dwelling of the so-called Conqueror, was the first nucleus around which, in the reigns of succeeding monarchs of Norman and Plantagenet stock, sprung up other Towers, wider walls, and the present ditch. William Rufus, his son and successor, increased the strength and added to the fortifications, and it became a matter of discontent to the citizens,

when they saw, little by little, the Tower and its defences assuming proportions that looked like a standing menace to them, which instead of defending them was likely to threaten and overawe them.

This enclosure of the White Tower is, roughly speaking, a square, shorter from north to south than from east to west; its dimensions are 107 feet from north to south, and 118 from east to west. The ground it stands upon slopes towards the south or river side, the ground on the north being 25 feet higher, so that the basement, which is level on the higher side, is considerably above the ground on the other. Its western angles are square, the south-eastern projects in a semi-circular bow which forms the apse of the chapel 42 feet in diameter. It never seems to have possessed a lower building, as at Dover, Norwich and Newcastle, to protect the entrance and staircase; nor is it now perfectly certain, with the great changes which have taken place on the exterior, by modern facings, &c., where this original entrance was.

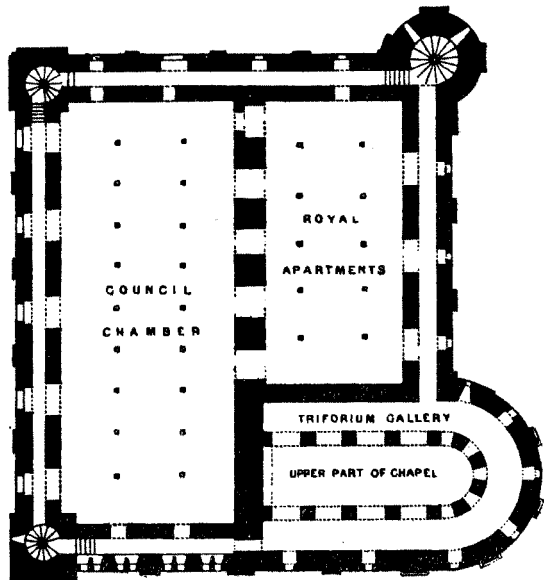
The height to the battlements is 90 feet, and the staircases at the angles are carried up as turrets, 16 feet higher. The principal staircase, which is at the north-east corner, communicates with the principal floors, and descends to the basement. Internally this area is divided by a wall from north to south, the whole height, 10 feet thick, but in unequal proportions, the western being the widest. The eastern division is again subdivided by a transverse wall from east to west, so that every floor is divided into three chambers of unequal size. The exterior walls are 15 feet thick. The basement, which, as I have said, is some 25 feet above the ground on the south, and level on the north, consists of three chambers, the smallest of which, over where we are standing, is called the "Little Ease," and forms really the sub-crypt of the chapel, 15 feet wide by 47 feet; the east end is semi-circular, and very little light ever entered. It is vaulted with a rough barrel vault; the larger chamber on the west is 91 feet by 35 feet, and was used as a

storehouse, and also the other chamber 67 feet by 28 feet. These last two have been subsequently vaulted in brick. The next floor, which we will call the ground floor, although considerably above that level, is divided in the same manner, but the dimensions are a little larger, in consequence of the external walls being only 13 feet thick. Under the chapel is the crypt proper, 39 feet long, circular ended and 13 feet 6 inches wide; it is traditionally called Raleigh's prison. Out of this, at the north-east angle, is a cell 10 feet by 8 feet, only entered by a low door, and with no external light. These gloomy vaults have all been used for prisons, and on the sides of the door leading to this cell are carved inscriptions. The windows of the crypt and the other windows have all been altered from the original narrow loops to wider modern openings, and the two larger rooms have been converted into armouries and wainscoted, so that all external marks of antiquity have been obliterated. The crypt is vaulted, but the other apartments have double rows of oak posts supporting the beams of the ceiling. The first floor in the proper division, really the third—the one we are now on,—is similarly divided as those below; but here the Chapel of S. John is subdivided into a centre and aisles, the arcade is supported by twelve cylindrical piers and two responds, six of which form the apse, the aisles being vaulted with a plain groined vault, the arches are plain without any mouldings and rest on singularly massive caps, which are not all similar. The abacus is simply moulded, and so are the bases, which rest on square plinths, with a plain chamfered sub-base. The windows have been modernised. Above the arcade is a triforium gallery, the arches of which correspond to the arches below, and are absolutely without any enrichment. The whole is covered with a barrel vault, the triforium stage being level with the uppermost floor, and communicating with it. This gallery is also barrel-vaulted, and lighted by windows on the southern and eastern sides. We now arrive at the floor over this, which has two large rooms—one called the Council Chamber—and it

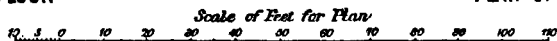


*\* stairs communicating with Palace at base*

PLAN OF THIRD FLOOR

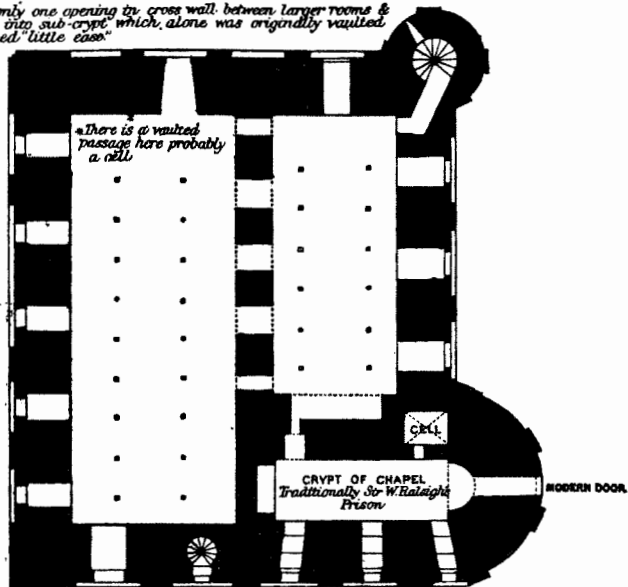


PLAN OF FOURTH FLOOR

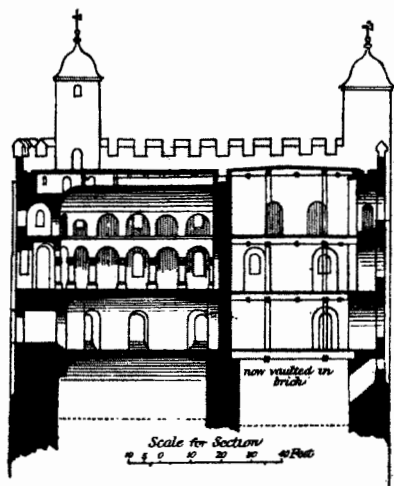


**N.B. THE FIRST FLOOR IS SIMILAR. OUTSIDE WALLS ONE FOOT THICKER.**

*There is only one opening in cross wall between larger rooms & one again into sub-crypt which, alone was originally vaulted & is called "little ease"*



**PLAN OF SECOND FLOOR**



**SECTION FROM EAST TO WEST.**

THE WHITE TOWER.

was this floor that was occupied by the monarch, and the smaller apartment properly subdivided. The King attended the services in the chapel in this triforium; the floor below was occupied by his retainers and household. The whole building of this chapel is excessively plain, and it is not until the reign of Henry III. that we hear of decoration, when he had it painted and stained glass was inserted. Its severity has given rise to a widespread opinion that these early Norman buildings were, at first, utterly devoid of all ornament; but the nave at Waltham Abbey, earlier than this, and portions of the Confessor's original church, discovered at Westminster, prove that no analogy can be drawn between what was really a domestic chapel, built in a central keep of a strong castle, and built also in haste, and the architecture of wealthy foundations such as Waltham and Westminster, where time and money were of no object. In the upper floor the thickness of the walls is lightened by mural galleries for convenience of access to different parts, but the same arrangement of posts supporting the beams of what now becomes the roof existed and still exists.

I should mention that over the vaulting of the chapel, and under the leads, is an apartment, the whole length of the chapel, and about seven feet high, and lighted by windows. There seems to be only one fireplace, which is in the eastern side of the eastern room, communicating with the ground floor of the chapel, and which might have been the King's presence chamber.<sup>1</sup> There are three garde-ropes on this floor. The coldness of this royal lodging, in winter, must have been intolerable, and no amount of hangings and charcoal brasiers could have surmounted it; therefore, it is not surprising that Henry III. considerably enlarged and extended the palace at the south side, and that these apartments were abandoned for more genial quarters below, but the chapel and Council Chamber were still frequently used. In 1240, Henry gave particular directions that the chapel should be repaired and ornamented, and among other

<sup>1</sup> Another has since been discovered.



decorations, he ordered that three stained-glass windows were to be made, one towards the north, with a little Mary holding her child, and two others towards the south, representing the most Holy Trinity and S. John the Apostle and Evangelist. The Cross and the Rood were also to be painted well, and in good colours, and there were likewise to be made and painted, where they could be best seen and most properly done, two fair images, one of them of S. Edward holding a ring and presenting it to S. John the Evangelist, in accordance with the well-known legend. We also hear in his reign, *horribile dictu!* of a thing which we always thought belonged to the age of churchwardens only: he orders that the whole of the chapel of S. John should be **WHITEWASHED!** There are frequent allusions to the outside walls of the Keep being whitewashed, and it was to this circumstance it probably owed its name of the White Tower.

The chapel was dismantled in 1550, by an order in Council, August 22nd, directing all such crosses, images, and plate of gold as remained, to be melted down. In 1553, the bootless recantation of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, took place in this chapel, on the day before his execution.

At the foot of the staircase leading to the passage into the south aisle, in Charles II.'s reign, were discovered the supposed bones of the two princes, Edward V., and the Duke of York, who were traditionally believed to have been murdered in the Bloody Tower, or Garden Tower, and secretly buried. These remains were removed to the east end of the north aisle of Henry VII.'s Chapel, at Westminster.

I ask you before leaving this historic spot to look around, and try to realise the ancient splendour of this Royal Chapel within this grim fortress, and to remember that from yonder gallery looked down the ruthless William and his cousin-wife Matilda of Flanders; William the Red and his brother; the learned Henry and his Saxon bride, the heiress of the

Saxon line, Maude; her daughter Maude, the Empress; Stephen; Henry II. and his richly dowered, but unloved and unloving wife, Eleanor of Guienne; Richard of the Lion Heart and Berengaria; the weak and corpulent John; the art-loving Henry III.; Edward and his devoted wife, Eleanor of Castille, and their royal successors; and here on the floor where we are assembled, the doughty Earls and Barons, who gained for us Magna Charta; and here in silent watch and prayer, feebly illumined by the twinkling altar tapers, knelt the Knights of the Bath, previous to their installation; and here knelt Brakenbury at his prayers when he was bidden to go and murder the innocent; the meek and pious Henry VI., sighing as he turns his book of hours, and wondering how long it will be before he is again whirled along in tumult to a palace instead of a prison; and here laid out in pallid death, and surrounded by the glow of tapers in gorgeous state, Elizabeth of York, while prelates pray, and chaplains chant *Dirige* and *Placebo*. Shadows, all shadows, who have flitted across the floor of this Chapel Royal, and who have played their part in history, and have faded and died away like the echo of their own voices beneath this vaulted roof.

#### II.—S. PETER “AD VINCOLA” APUD TURRIM.

Although there may be nothing to particularly distinguish the architecture of this church, presenting as it does the appearance of an ordinary city church, such as existed before the great fire, it possesses a claim to our interest and attention far beyond any other, because it is a living page in our national history—a page also smeared with blood, much of it innocent, and dimmed also with tears of the captive.

Its exterior walls were the last thing on earth that their sorrowful eyes looked upon, and [into its sacred precincts were borne their headless bodies, when tyranny had done its worst. At the western extremity of the City stands that

noble fane, with its high embowered roof and storeyed windows richly dight, where, in all the pride of heraldry and pomp of power, the mighty of this world sleep their last sleep, amid heroes and kings, and the pealing anthem swells the note of praise above their mouldering dust; but here, shut in within the walls of a gloomy fortress, discrowned, dishonoured, in nameless and unmarked graves, lay the bodies of royal and noble victims of tyranny, bigotry, and hate, sleeping their last sleep alike until judge, accuser, prisoner, and victim await a verdict from the Great Judge of all. Surely, in no Church throughout the length and breadth of England can there be possibly attached more significance or meaning to that beautiful suffrage in the Litany, "That it may please Thee . . . to show Thy pity upon all prisoners and captives," than in this place and within these walls.

It is difficult to assign a date to its first foundation; it may not be quite so old as the Royal Chapel of S. John within the Norman Keep, but we know that it existed in King John's time, and was in all probability first erected by Henry I., when he considerably enlarged the area of the Tower, and it was deemed necessary for the convenience of a numerous garrison of men-at-arms, who could not well have been accommodated within the Chapel of S. John, which, as we have seen, was in close communication with the royal apartments. If it had been parochial we might have perhaps learnt the date of its foundation, but at its first erection it was not parochial, and a serious contention about this lasted for several centuries.

I have alluded to its probable foundation by Henry I. His brother and predecessor, William Rufus, had increased the fortifications of the Tower, and Henry, soon after his accession, still further added to them, to the great discontent of the citizens, and finding the White Tower but a cold and cheerless place to live in, had begun the buildings to the south and east, afterwards enlarged and extended by his successors, and added also this chapel. It had been in

existence for some time before Henry III.'s reign,<sup>1</sup> for in 1241 we find him giving directions for the decoration of both the chapels, and his instructions about S. Peter's were very minute. He orders the stalls in the chancel to be repaired, ornamented, and painted for the use of himself and Queen, and that the little Mary, with her tabernacle or shrine, and the figures of SS. Peter, Nicholas, and Katherine should be newly coloured, all with the best colours, the beam beyond the altar of S. Peter, and the little cross and images to be refreshed with good colours, another statue of the Blessed Virgin to be made beyond the altar of S. Peter on the north side, and a statue of S. Peter in a solemn archiepiscopal vesture on the south, all in the best manner; and there was also to be made and painted in the said church, when it could be better and more decently done, an image of S. Christopher holding and carrying Jesus. Two fair tables or pictures of the best colours, containing the legends of SS. Nicholas and Katherine, were likewise to be painted before the two altars, and two fair cherubim, "with cheerful and pleasant countenances" ("duos scherumbinos cum hyllari vultu et jocoso") were to be placed on the right hand and on the left of the great cross. A marble font was to be made with marble columns well and decently carved. The Latin original of these instructions is very quaint in its wording and spelling; and is important for the reason that it clearly establishes the existence of a church very similar in plan to the present one, as it speaks of the "cancellum Beatæ Mariæ in ecclesia Sancti Petri et cancellum Beatri Petri in eadem ecclesia," showing the existence of the two chancels. A few years afterwards we find him ordering two bells for it, and in 1272, the year of his decease, a chaplain was appointed for fifty shillings a year to pray for his soul.

<sup>1</sup> In 1210, Osmund, a knight, bound for Poitou, received a grant from King John in the eleventh year of his reign, ten marks and one hundred shillings, to buy a horse. The grant was given from the Church of S. Peter at the Tower of London.

In Edward I.'s reign, considerable alterations and reparations were again made, and it is reported that remains of this building are to be seen in the crypt, which extends beneath the north aisle. From the words of the original addressed to Ralph de Sandwich, Constable of our Tower of London, it seems to have been an entire rebuilding, because the said Ralph is to be reimbursed for the various sums expended in the construction of our chapel within the Tower. From these various documents still preserved, you can judge that the chapel in the White Tower was not the only one honoured by the royal presence, and that the King and Queen worshipped among the garrison and men-at-arms in the Chapel of S. Peter quite as often, if not more so, than in that beautiful Norman chapel we have lately visited.

During the succeeding reigns, various schemes were started, but never carried into execution, by various monarchs, notably by Edward III. and Edward IV., to make this church collegiate as in the other palaces of Westminster and Windsor, and endow it for a dean and canons; and the last monarch actually instituted a dean and three canons, but his death occurring before the grant could be completed, it once more fell through. Early in the reign of Henry VIII., in 1512, we hear of a fire which did much damage to it, so that in 1532 the same King ordered a general repair, and it is to this period we assign the present appearance of the Chapel Royal of S. Peter ad Vincula, which now consists of a nave and chancel under one continuous roof, the nave of three bays and the chancel of one bay, with a sanctuary beyond, and a north aisle. The arcade is well proportioned, but the arches rather depressed, the east window a plain mullioned window of five lights, with cusped heads. The east window of the aisle is similar, but of four lights, and the remainder of the church is lighted by three-light windows. There is a small turret for the bells at the west end; the roofs now replaced with modern work were originally of very low pitch, almost flat, with moulded centre

ridge and principals and wall plate. The rafters before the "restoration" were concealed by a plastered ceiling. There is a hagioscope between the chancel of S. Mary and the chancel of S. Peter, now partly concealed by the Blount Monument, and a piscina.

About 1862, the first attempts were made towards improving the interior: the plaster ceiling was removed, the old moulded beams were exposed, a modern porch on the south side was removed, and the original west door, which had been concealed by plaster and bricked up, was opened, and the fragments of the west window which had been used for this purpose were reinstated in their former position, and the west window restored.<sup>1</sup> In 1876, her Most Gracious Majesty decided that the whole interior should be re-seated and re-paved, and the gallery removed which had been inserted in George II.'s reign for the accommodation of the garrison, and completely blocked the north aisle and west end. Although the drawings for the restoration were shown to Salvin, the repairs were executed by the Office of Works, who under Mr. Taylor have since executed all the restorations within the Tower. In consequence of the many interments of residents in the neighbourhood, the paving and floor were in a very sunken and insanitary condition, for many were within two feet of the surface. It was therefore decided to repave the whole, and remove the coffins into the crypt. Eventually the chancel was ordered to be repaved, and as it was known that the more illustrious victims of Tudor and Stuart tyranny were interred beneath, a very careful examination took place, and various bones and skeletons, some of them terribly misplaced and scattered by subsequent interments, were collected and placed in small square leaden coffers, and external coverings of oak, and then reinterred. A very careful medical examination established the identity of these beyond dispute. The large admixture of lime among the earth around some of them proved that means had been

<sup>1</sup> This window, as can be readily seen, dates from the restorations made by Edward I.

taken to destroy the bodies after death, and the bones of Queen Catherine Howard had nearly all perished. The bodies were generally interred without coffins. Queen Anne Boleyn was thrust into an old chest in which arrows had been kept, so that no coffin plates, which would further have identified the remains, were anywhere discovered.

A register was kept of burials, and the locality is generally mentioned as in the chapel; and Stow, Weever, and Machyn-give more minute accounts. The first-mentioned says: "Here lieth, before the high altar, in S. Peter's Church, two Dukes between two Queens;" so that there has never been any doubt as to their position. The so-called rebel lords—Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat, Lord Balmerino, and the Earl of Kilmarnock and the Marquis of Tullibardine, were all interred in the chapel: the three first at the west end under the gallery, but it is not known where the last was buried, except that it was in the chapel. Baron Wem, otherwise Lord Chancellor Jefferies, was first buried here, but afterwards removed to S. Mary's, Aldermanbury. Philip, Earl of Arundel, whose unmerited sufferings and long captivity will ever be accounted one of Elizabeth's greatest crimes, was, by permission of James I., removed to Arundel Church. Sir Thomas More was buried under the belfry, near to Fisher, Bishop of Rochester; and here also, after a long imprisonment, were buried the two poor brothers—Arthur and Edmund Pole, nephews of Cardinal Pole, and grandsons of Margaret, Countess of Salisbury, and great-grandsons of George, Duke of Clarence.

Of all these that I have mentioned there is, of course, no memorial whatever; their name was supposed to perish with them when their bodies were here buried in peace. But there are monuments here to others, perhaps, more fortunate in being the keepers and custodians of the Tower, than the poor wretches whose lives and liberties were committed to them. In the north-east corner of the aisle stands a very beautiful panelled altar-tomb, surmounted by two effigies of Sir Richard Cholmondeley and the Lady Elizabeth, his wife.

It has twice been moved. It stood, originally, in the centre of the nave in front of the chancel; it was then moved to the west end of the north aisle, and again to where you see it. The effigies are in alabaster, and are in a fair state of preservation, and have been originally coloured and gilt. Sir Richard is in plate armour. Over a coat of mail his head rests on a helmet, and his feet on a lion. His hands are joined in prayer; around his neck he wears the collar of SS., with a pendent rose; the hair is worn long, and cut straight across the forehead, no beard; on the right side he wears a short dagger; the gauntlets are laid on the tomb, by the side of the right leg. His wife is on his left hand: she wears a sort of pointed coif on her head, and a long kirtle; her head rests on a cushion, and round the edge of the tomb runs a Latin inscription, in black letters: "Here lie the bodies of Richard Cholmondeley, knight, and of the Lady Elizabeth, his consort (date left blank), on whose souls may God have mercy. Amen." He was lieutenant in Henry VII.'s reign, and probably erected this tomb in his own lifetime; he served under the Earl of Surrey at Flodden, and died about 1544, leaving no legitimate offspring, but he had a natural son, who became afterwards Sir Roger Cholmondeley, Lord Chief Justice of England. When this tomb was taken down, in 1876, to move it where it now stands, fragments of the old font were found packed inside it.

The monument on the north side of the chancel commemorates Sir Richard Blount and Sir Michael, his son, both lieutenants of the Tower during the worst period of oppression. The monument really consists of two, Sir Michael's being of a similar design, and placed immediately next to it, so that the design represents four arched recesses divided by Corinthian columns carrying an entablature. The easternmost represents Sir Richard in one compartment, kneeling, with two sons behind him; and his wife in the other with two daughters. Sir Michael is in the next compartment with three sons, and his wife, and one daughter; the whole has been richly coloured and gilt.



On the south side of the chancel is a black marble tablet to Sir Allan Apsley (Lieutenant of the Tower), died May 24th, 1630; next to this is a monument to George Taylor (Master Surveyor of the Ordnance) and Lady Maria Carey, his wife, and to their children. On the north wall is a tablet to Valentine Pine (Master Gunner), and others commemorating lieutenants. The brass tablet on the east wall of the chancel commemorates that grand old hero—Sir John Fox Burgoyne, who lies buried beneath; and the other tablet, Lord de Ros, the last of the Deputy Lieutenants of the Tower, the office now being abolished. During his lieutenancy the first attempts were made at treating the Tower more as an historic monument than as a building to be hacked and hewed about at anyone's will. Lord de Ros wrote the best of all the works on the Tower extant; and this book with Bayley's *Tower*, and my friend the late Doyne Bell's book on S. Peter's, give a complete history of the Tower; all three of which I have largely consulted in compiling this short notice.

## PLAN OF INTERMENTS IN THE CHANCEL.

From Doyne Bell's *Chapel of S. Peter ad Vincula*, 1877, p. 52.

### ALTAR.

Duke of Monmouth.

1685.

1	2	4	5	6	7
Lord Rochford.	Queen Anne Boleyn.	Duke of Somerset.	Duke of Northumberland.	Queen Katherine Howard.	Lady Rochford.  Countess of Salisbury.
1536.	1536.	1551.	1555.	1542.	1542.  1541.
8	9	10	11	12	13
Lord Guildford Dudley	Lady Jane Grey.	Duke of Suffolk.	Duke of Norfolk.	Earl of Arundel.	Earl of Essex.  Sir T. Overbury.
1554.	1554.	1554.	1572.	1595.	1601.  1613.

Sir R. Blount, 1564, Mary Blount, Sir R. Blount.  
 Lyster Blount, 1633. 1592.