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The Church and Monastery of Abbey Dore

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THE CHURCH AND MONASTERY OF ABBEY DORE, HEREFORDSHIRE.

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THE exact date of the foundation of the Cistercian Abbey of Dore is somewhat uncertain, but the generally-received date is 1147, its founder having been Robert, Lord of Ewyas, grandson of the Conqueror. In the same year Robert Fitzhamon, Earl of Gloucester, founded a Cistercian abbey at Margam, near Swansea, and in one or two details these abbeys have points in common.

The architectural history of Dore must be chiefly obtained from the buildings themselves. In 1260 building operations had apparently come to a standstill, and Peter d'Aquablanca, the then Bishop of Hereford, issued a letter granting an indulgence to all who would contribute to the completion of the church. A consecration took place in the time of Bishop Cantelupe (1275-82), so that by the end of the thirteenth century the building was in all probability complete. Whether any subsequent additions were made is uncertain, but judging by the work that has been found during the past few years, this does not seem probable.

The abbey was suppressed in 1535, and was afterwards granted to John Scudamore; but it was not until 1633 that John, Viscount Scudamore, restored the transepts and presbytery as a parish church, and built the tower now standing in the angle formed by the presbytery and south transept. It was reconsecrated in 1634. Scudamore inserted some fittings, the full extent of which, however, we do not know; but the existing chancel screen is of his date, and some of the woodwork of the pews, probably also the west gallery, and the

south porch. The vaulting having in all probability quite disappeared, Scudamore reroofed the church and ceiled it with a flat plaster ceiling.

Beyond some minor additions and alterations—general repairs to the roofs and fittings—nothing had been done to the church between 1634 and 1895. In that year I made some excavations with a view of finding, if possible, the extent of the nave and chapter-house, and since that year the work of exploration has been continued from time to time. The result has been to determine the extent and arrangement of the nave, and also the planning of the chapter-house and its vestibule.

Between October, 1901, and June, 1903, the paving of the church was taken up and relaid on a bed of concrete; the upper part of the tower, which had become dangerous, was made secure, and a system of drainage laid round the exterior. During the progress of these works many objects of interest were found, and additional light thrown on the arrangement of this part of the building. The Presbytery was re-opened for Divine Service, June 29th, 1903.

Apart from the few documents which deal mostly with gifts to the church in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the confirmation of these gifts by Henry III., the foregoing notes constitute practically all that relates to its architectural history.

The church and monastery as originally planned undoubtedly followed the usual Cistercian plan—a long nave with narrow aisles, divided in many places by screens of wood and stone; a transept with (in this case) *four* chapels (two in each wing), and an aisleless presbytery. The conventual buildings were, as at Tintern and Buildwas, on the north side. The cloister court, on the north side of the nave, had the sacristy, chapter-house and subvault of the dormitory on its eastern side; the warming-house, refectory and kitchen on its north side; and on the west, separated by a "lane" or open court, a range of buildings running north and south, probably devoted to the *conversi* or lay-brethren,

who here had their own refectory and dormitory, and also a separate entrance to the church.

At a little distance from the church to the north-east was probably the infirmary, and the mill-stream (now filled up) formed the main drain of the abbey, being diverted from the main stream of the Dore above the mill and rejoining it further south beyond the monastery.

The *nave* was of *nine* bays, 138 ft. in length and 54 ft. in breadth. The columns were circular, 3 ft. 6 in. in diameter, with caps of Transitional character, some having Norman, others Early English detail, or a combination of the two. The arches of the arcade were pointed, and there was no triforium, but a clerestory with a single lancet in each bay, having a deep inner splay, similar to those in the existing church. Colour was in some instances introduced to throw the carving on the caps into greater relief. There was probably *no west door*, but there were two doors on the north side. The westernmost of these was to give access to the church for the *conversi*, the other was the only direct communication between the church and the cloister. The *structural nave* (that is, everything west of the "crossing") was divided transversely into *three* parts. The first part extended from the west wall to the fifth or central bay of the arcade; and here was a stone screen with an altar in the centre, flanked by two doorways, the wall being slightly thickened behind the altar to carry the reredos. This formed the church of the *conversi*, who approached it through the doorway in the north wall already mentioned.

The aisles of the nave were divided from the centre by stone screens placed under the arcades, and pierced at intervals for doorways. This arrangement, peculiar to Cistercian churches, is still very clearly marked at Tintern, Buildwas, and other abbeys of the order; and at Dore the walls were found standing in two bays on the north side, about 2 ft. in height. In the central bay, behind the nave altar, the side-screen walls were pierced by doorways; these gave admittance to the *second* division of the nave, which

formed a retro-choir 33 ft. in length. The eastern boundary of this was the wall of the pulpitum, 5 ft. 6 in. in thickness, extending right across the church. Two altars stood against it under the arcades, and there would have been a doorway in the centre leading into the *third* division. This third division was the choir of the monks, and their stalls were returned against it, and probably extended eastward for the remaining two bays of the nave and half-way across the "crossing."

The foundations of both altars against the pulpitum were discovered, but the central doorway had disappeared and the wall was ruined to its foundations.

We come now to the *transepts*, and within the walls of the existing church. (Viscount Scudamore walled up the west arch of the "crossing" and the arches into the nave aisles.) The total length of the transepts is 94 ft., their breadth is 28 ft. In the north wall are two doorways: the lower one leads to the sacristy; the other one, at a higher level, led to the monks' dormitory, and was reached by the "night stairs" in the north-west angle of the transept.

The south transept has a doorway in its south wall, and its southern half and the chapel eastward of it were screened off from the rest of the church. The mortices for these screens still remain.

On going eastward from the transepts we enter the presbytery, and here we find a change in the architecture. The westernmost bay of the three is decidedly earlier in date than the other two, and the junction of the newer work is clearly marked just east of the first wall shaft. The section, too, of this wall shaft is of earlier form.

The greater part, if not the whole, of the portions of the building so far described is work of Transitional character, the date varying from the first foundation in 1147 to the end of the century. We have no record, unfortunately, as to whether the presbytery was completed; but judging from the general practice of beginning at the east end in order to have the high altar in position, and from foundations

discovered lately, there seems little doubt but that the first presbytery coincided with the present one, but it was, of course, without aisles.

We know, however, that benefactors to this church were numerous, and they were members of important families. The Plokenets (or Plunkets), of Kilpeck Castle, about five miles away; the Cliffords, who had a castle a few miles north on the Wye; the Sitsylts (ancestors of the Cecils)—not to mention the descendants of the founder, De Ewys, and the families with which they and the other families became connected by marriage—not only gave lands and made other bequests to the monastery, but in more than one instance were buried within the walls of the church; so that even if the presbytery *was* completed as originally designed, it undoubtedly for this reason became necessary to enlarge it. To do this the eastern walls of the two inner chapels of the transepts were pierced and an aisle or ambulatory was taken all round the then existing presbytery. Beyond the eastern ambulatory a range of five chapels was built, and the existing presbytery was transformed by having its side and end walls pierced by arcades. This is what is now seen, and it provided great additional accommodation for burials and tombs, without necessitating the disturbance of the high altar.

We can now identify the positions of thirteen altars—the high altar, five at the east end, two in the south aisle, two in the transepts, and three in the nave. Doubtless others existed, but no trace of them remains.

During the repaving of the church we have found what are no doubt the original foundation of the presbytery, the site of the high altar with its reredos, and the foundations of the five altars at the eastern end, with the bases of the screen walls that divided the chapels from one another. In five places we have found traces and remains of stone graves or bases of tombs—two on the north side of the presbytery, one on the south side, one in the south aisle, and one in the north aisle. There were no remains of tombs in the eastern

chapels, and the few traces of interments found were either of later date or had been considerably disturbed. Traces of the sedilia were discovered south of the high altar. The total length of the church (interior measurement) was, when complete, 238 feet.

The detail of the building generally is, as we may see, very simple, although a good deal of carving appears on the caps, some of it of very curious character, exhibiting that mixture of Norman detail and Early English foliage so characteristic of Transitional work. There are few interiors that could surpass in dignity the presbytery of Dore, and now that the temporary screens are removed something of its original fine effect has been restored to it.

Of the many important monuments and tombs the church must have possessed but few remain, and only slight traces have come to light during the progress of the repairs. Two mutilated effigies, now under the arches north and south of the altar, are said to represent Robert de Ewyas, the founder, and Roger de Clifford. A third effigy, small in size, is generally considered as having covered a heart burial. There are several local instances of heart burial. Bishop Aquablanca's heart was sent to his birthplace in Savoy for burial, Bishop Cantelupe's to Ashridge, while that of Margaret de Clifford was sent to Aconbury in 1260, and that of Lady Clarice de la Warr to Ewyas Harold about 1300.

During the excavations three slabs were found and a few fragments of effigies, including a fragment of considerable size belonging to the effigy known as that of Roger de Clifford, still retaining considerable traces of bright-blue colouring on the surcoat, which may possibly have been treated heraldically. Considerable fragments have been found from time to time in various parts of the site, some distance apart, which appear to have all belonged to a very beautiful shrine. A large portion of the canopy was found a few years ago near the site of the west end, and more recently some tracery elaborately coloured and gilt, caps and bases with delicate mouldings, and other fragments have been

unearthed. It was evidently an object of considerable sanctity, and special care seems to have been taken to thoroughly dismember it. When perfect it appears to have been about six feet in length and eighteen inches in width.

A great quantity of tile paving has been found of thirteenth and fourteenth century date; also a fairly large quantity of the grisaille and coloured glass from the windows, some of which may be sufficiently sound for re-use.

The original levels were in almost all instances found, and the paving has been relaid at these levels. At Viscount Scudamore's restoration it is evident that the débris found on the site was roughly levelled, and that the paving was laid directly on it. Burials took place in the church until the early years of the nineteenth century, and a certain amount of disturbance of the soil resulted. Considerable subsidences had, however, taken place in recent years, and the church was very unhealthy in consequence.

On taking up the paving it was found that between it and the clay level was a considerable thickness of débris, tiles, glass, worked stone, rubble, earth, skulls and bones. This has all been carefully examined, all the skulls and bones re-interred, and, with the other interments, covered with lime concrete. The lowering of the paving has exposed the altars and screen walls at the east end, and the bases and plinths of the columns and responds, adding much to the general effect of the interior and restoring its ancient proportions.

The date of the consecration in Bishop Cantelupe's time—in the last quarter of the thirteenth century—implies that building was in progress at a later date than anything now remaining. The explanation is, I think, that the *vaulting* had not been completed; and, in fact, during the excavations the sections of the vault ribs found and the bosses have all been very fully-developed thirteenth-century work, and the three large bosses, now at the east end, are distinctly work of early fourteenth-century date.

On the outside of the south transept, at the junction of

the south aisle of the nave, is an Early English vaulting shaft and cap with very delicate detail. The wall here is thinner than on the north side (where the original Norman corbel remains), and it is clear that some portion of the south aisle was rebuilt, and that the whole of the nave was re-vaulted quite at an advanced period in the thirteenth century.

The nave of the church, like the transepts and presbytery, was probably lighted entirely by lancets, either single or in groups, with perhaps a triplet at the west end.

THE MONASTIC BUILDINGS.

From traces of a wall recently discovered the cloister appears to have been about 100 feet square. The only approach to it from the church was through the large doorway in the north-east angle of the nave, of which the lower part of the jambs are visible. There are considerable traces of destroyed buildings to be seen in the meadow and orchard north of the church, but of remains above ground there are only the walls of the *sacristy* north of the transept and a fragment of the once twelve-sided *chapter-house*.

The *sacristy* had a barrel vault of stone, and at its west end, divided from it by a thin wall and approached only from the cloister, was a recess, probably used as a *book cupboard*. There was a double archway here, the cill and jambs rebated for doors; the holes for the hinges remain, and part of the original paving. The paving of part of the *sacristy* also is still in position.

The *chapter-house* must have been very fine when complete. It had a diameter of about 43 ft., and was twelve-sided on plan. It is slightly later in date than the *chapter-house* at Margam Abbey, near Swansea (which is circular within and twelve-sided without). These are the only two examples known to have existed in England of twelve-sided *chapter-houses*, although examples having six, eight and ten sides exist still in either a perfect or ruined state. The original *chapter-house* at Dore probably projected but little

beyond the east wall of the sacristy, and would have been about 30 ft. square. When, however, in the thirteenth century the new chapter-house was built, the early one became its vestibule, and the arches between it and the cloister, and possibly the whole of the vestibule other than the side walls, were remodelled, so as to harmonise with the extension. The foundations of the entrance to the chapter-house have been found, and also some of the foundations on its south side. The base of the central column, the springer of the vaulting, and one or two of the caps from the interior angles have been discovered, and are now among the worked stones preserved in the church.

Recently the *west* wall of the *eastern* range of buildings has been traced as far as the bed of the stream. The existing kitchen garden stands on the site not only of the cloister, but of part of the refectory, warming-house, and kitchen. From traces recently found, the refectory appears to have been about 26 ft. in width. Its length has not so far been determined.

Of the western range, which was, as already stated, separated from the cloister by a "lane" or open court, only the south wall, near the west front of the church, remains above ground, and I am afraid that everything has been taken away, even to the foundations. Its width was 28 ft., and it extended certainly to the stream and perhaps beyond it.

There is a wall now forming the west boundary of the orchard, 120 ft. in length, which is undoubtedly of great age, but until the ground generally has been more thoroughly examined it is not possible to say what it formed part of.

At some little distance north-east of the church is the site of the *infirmary*, and there are also traces of the position of the *fishponds*. Of the entrance-gate to the monastery there are no remains: it probably stood to the south or south-west of, and at some distance from, the church.

It is hoped that before long it may be possible to repair the roof of the transept of the existing church, which is in

a very unsafe condition, and to introduce a system of heating the interior during the winter months. This fine fragment of mediæval work, which Viscount Scudamore preserved for us in 1634, will then, it is hoped, last for many generations to come. It is the only presbytery of a Cistercian monastic church at present in use in England for divine worship, and has thus an interest apart from the very beautiful detail which is to be seen on every side.
