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The Crypt of Gloucester Cathedral

by F. S. Waller
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THE CRYPT OF GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL,
 BY
 F. S. WALLER.

Professor WILLIS, in his lecture addressed to the Meeting of the Archæological Institute held at Gloucester in 1860, after giving various reasons for believing that the Crypt dates back no farther than 1089 when the foundation stone was laid by Abbot Serlo, goes on to state that he was "*clearly of opinion that when the foundations of the Cathedral were laid, the Crypt was planned to receive the existing superstructure and no other.*"

I have, therefore, the very best authority with me in bringing the subject of the date of the Crypt before your notice, and I shall now endeavour to shew, with the assistance of diagrams, what I believe has hitherto been only imperfectly understood from written description alone.

The Crypt perhaps is the subject on which less has been written than on any other portion of the Cathedral. No correct drawings have hitherto been made of it, and therefore, there has been but little chance afforded of devoting that amount of study to its now peculiar plan and arrangements which is absolutely necessary to be enabled to read its history with anything like accuracy.

Many and various have been the opinions put forth as to the date of the Crypt; amongst others it is no uncommon thing to hear it spoken of as being Saxon; again as being Norman of a much earlier character than the superstructure, and indeed as being part of a former Church. My object in writing this paper is to endeavour to disprove these theories, and to establish for the Crypt a history coeval with the Norman work which rests

upon it, all of which I believe to have been built at one and the same period, with no more interval than was necessary between the building of the foundations and the upper stories of this or any other edifice.

The first and very necessary step taken was to make accurate Plans and Sections of all its parts and peculiarities, which on account of the great irregularity of the work was a very difficult undertaking; for though the general outline is a symmetrical figure, the walls have been very rudely set out and planned. These and the shafts and arches are much out of square, and strange to say, the old eastern Chapel inclines as much to the North of East, as the Lady Chapel above it inclines to the South of East.

A Plan has been made from the particulars taken, shewing the Crypt. 1st. As it was originally built. 2ndly. The second period (if I may so call it) of Norman work, and 3rdly. The later perpendicular additions. These latter, introduced when the present Choir was erected.

A section also was required to finish the study of the work, and it became necessary to add the section of the floor above to complete the evidence as I wish to lay it before you.

A reference to the plan and section will assist in explaining my views, and they are submitted, together with the following remarks, for your consideration.

As regards the "Saxon" theory. There may be stones in this Building which at one time may have formed part of a Saxon edifice, but if such do exist they are carefully concealed. I can see no vestige of Saxon work whatever in any part of the Cathedral below or above ground.

On entering the Crypt one of the first things that strikes an observer, is a generally patched and cobbled appearance, and it is difficult to arrive at an understanding of the various kinds of work and masonry, of which the walls and piers and arches are composed; but this arises solely from the alterations and

additions which have from time to time been made in the structure. The original Crypt was very simple, a polygonal figure with small apsidal Chapels. Soon after this original Crypt was erected a failure took place in the walls or vaulted roofs, or possibly in both, and they were strengthened by the addition of large semi-circular piers, which were built round the smaller early Norman piers, and on these large semi-circular piers, stone arched ribs were made to pass under the early Norman ribs, and at the intersection of the vaulting, thus giving the clumsy appearance before alluded to. Remove all this work and you will find underneath it exactly the same kind of construction as that which is seen in the small Chapels in the Crypt and in the 1st. and 2nd. floors above, viz., small half shafts attached to the walls, with bases, cushioned capitals, transverse ribs, and vaulting with the pinched up angle in the plaster, peculiar to early Norman work.

Again remove all the more recent work (erected in the 14th century) and now filling up the massive piers and arches in the centre of the Crypt, and these latter will be found to make a perfect arcade, similar to what now partially exists above, only of stouter proportions; they are in perfect unison one with the other, the Crypt and the Norman portion of the Choir above. As an argument in favour of the centre part of the Crypt being older than the other parts, much stress has been laid on the difference in the levels of the Floor, the centre part of which is the lowest, the ambulatories about 18 inches higher than this, and the Chapels again higher than these, all in fact rising gradually towards the East.

A reference to the section will shew that this difference of levels is only a repetition of the same thing above.

Is there not therefore the same intention and purpose in both?

After a careful examination and study of the whole subject, I am led to believe that the earliest portion of the Crypt is of the same date as the two stages of Norman work above it:—

- 1st. Because each stage fits accurately over what is below it, pier over pier, arch over arch.
- 2nd. Because the character of the work is exactly similar in outline and in detail, viz., small semi-circular attached shafts, transverse ribs, vaulting alike, capitals, bases, &c., and the manner and character of the hammer dressed stonework identical.
- 3rd. From the repetition of peculiarities in construction, such as the capitals in the Crypt and Floors above being higher on the outer side of the ambulatories than on the inner side, and from the general levels of the Floors being alike, and finally from other similarities of a minor kind which also exist; but they would too much extend the length of this paper to allude to; they all however point to the same conclusion, viz., That the Crypt, ambulatory above it, and Triforium of the Choir, are all parts of one and the same Edifice.

One remark I must make, having reference to the centre part of the Crypt, in which are shafts with Capitals of an apparently earlier date than the rest of the Building, (some are almost classical in outline). They may be of older date, but if so, they must have been re-used from a former Building, because they carry stone ribs in conjunction with the shafts and cushioned capitals before alluded to.

The blocks of Masonry projecting into the ambulatories of the Crypt are the foundations of the "third pointed" or "perpendicular" Choir above.








The following remarks were then made by F. S. Waller on
 "THE PULLING DOWN OF OLD BUILDINGS UNNECESSARILY, AND
 THE WANTON DESTRUCTION WHICH PASSES UNDER THE NAME OF
 'RESTORATION.'"

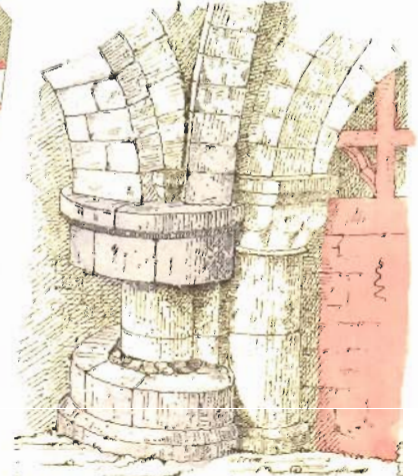
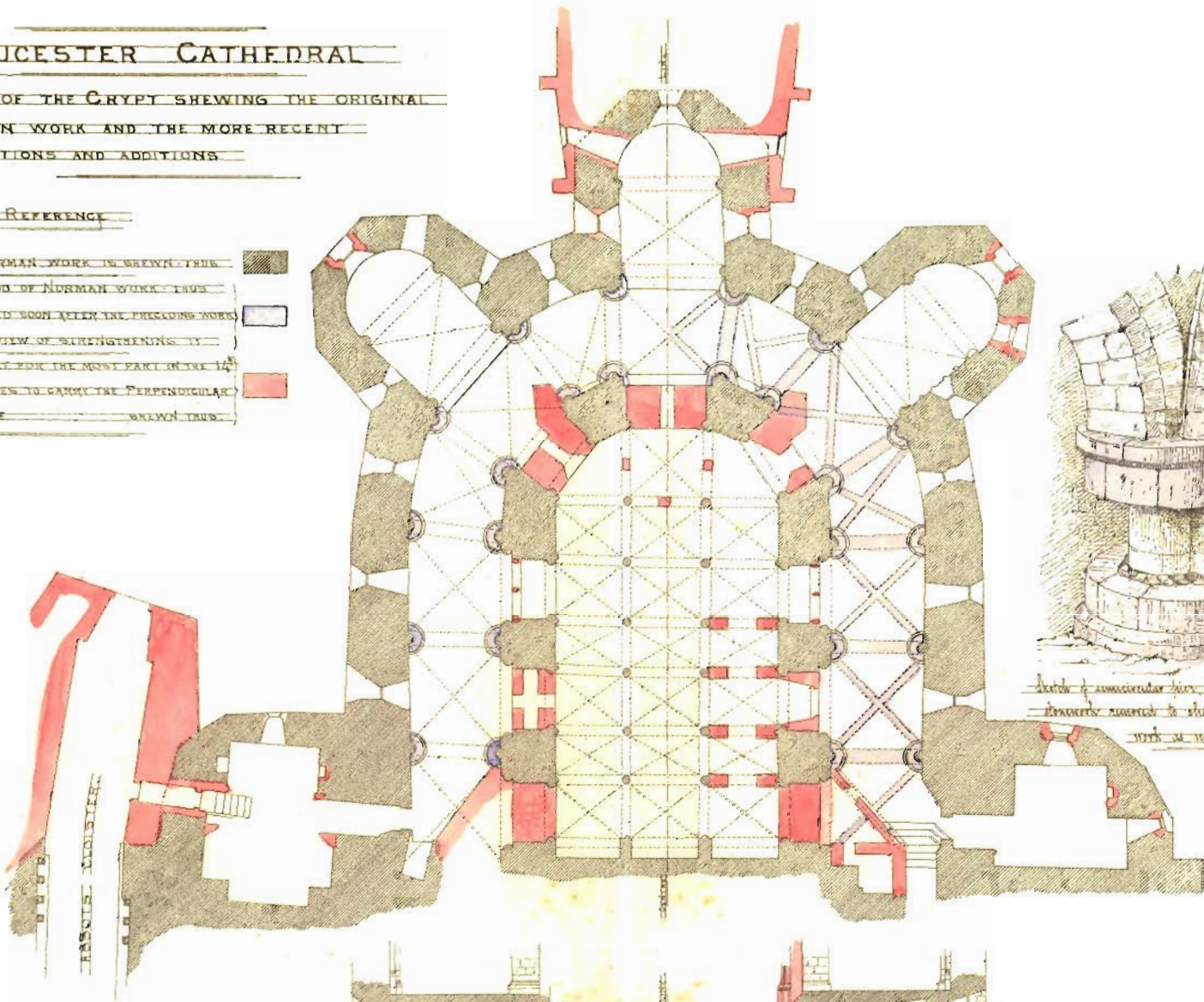
The special object of our Association being, as I take it, to find out and preserve all ancient remains, and arouse a feeling of reverence in the general public for the monuments of

GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL

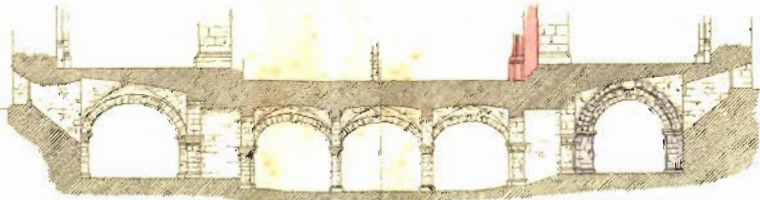
PLAN OF THE CRYPT SHOWING THE ORIGINAL
NORMAN WORK AND THE MORE RECENT
ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS

REFERENCE

- ORIGINAL NORMAN WORK IS SHOWN THIS 
- SECOND PERIOD OF NORMAN WORK THIS 
- THIS WAS ERIGED SOON AFTER THE PRECEDING WORK 
- AND WITH THE VIEW OF STRENGTHENING IT 
- MASONRY BUILT FOR THE MOST PART IN THE 14TH 
- AND 15TH CENTURIES TO GIVE THE PERPENDICULAR 
- WORK ABOVE SHOWN THIS 

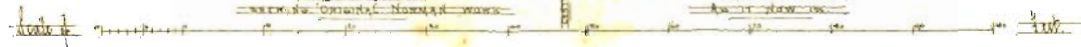


Detail of semi-circular pier, with part of
structure inserted to show the original
work as new structure.



Half Section of
work of Oriental Norman work

Half Section of
work of Perpendicular



Antiquity, whether in Churches, Houses, or Public Buildings, can its influence be better exercised than by offering advice to those who will accept of it, and by publishing and condemning the misdeeds of those who will not?

I have travelled in all parts of this and the adjoining Counties, I have seen Church after Church utterly ruined, glorious old work discarded, and new, spick and span, substituted; fine old Perpendicular Roofs removed to make way for high pitched modern ones; in one case a modern Perpendicular arcade carried across a fine Decorated Transept, the piers being taken right through into the Crypt below, and this because it was supposed, that our 15th Century ancestors intended at one time to commit this error.

In another case, an old Church removed, and parts of the old Building serving to ornament the house of the Clerk, who had the good taste to preserve the relics.

Old work here, there, and everywhere so cleaned and furbished up that none can recognise it—nor can tell where the old work ends and the new begins.

I could write sheet after sheet full of such great mistakes, not only done by men of small reputation, but by eminent Architects; in fact, to hear that a Building has been restored, is sufficient to make most antiquaries carefully avoid it, and the greatest treat that a lover of Antiquity can have, is to meet with a Building which has not been interfered with.

May I be permitted to suggest that a consulting Committee of the Society be appointed, who shall form a sort of Court of appeal, and whose duty it shall be to advise upon all work submitted to them and proposed to be taken in hand; such Committee to be formed of men of acknowledged taste and experience, whose opinions may be safely taken, and who, from the interest they have in such matters, would probably visit any Building about to be “restored.”

I believe that such a step would be of immense service in preventing destruction. Many would be only too pleased to have safe advice to work upon, and the fear of publication would act strongly on evil doers. I have myself prevented many an enormity by the following remark:—"If the Archaeologists hear of it, your name will be in every newspaper in the county."