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**Some Recent Discoveries at Flaxley Abbey, Glos., and their  
Relation to Mr. Middleton's Plan Made in 1881**

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SOME RECENT DISCOVERIES AT FLAXLEY  
 ABBEY, GLOS., AND THEIR RELATION TO  
 MR. MIDDLETON'S PLAN MADE IN 1881.

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SINCE the last visit of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society to Flaxley in the summer of 1881, no discoveries of any importance were made until 1912 and 1913, when it became possible to add further details to the account given by Mr. Middleton in his paper published in these *Transactions* 1881 (vol. vi, pp. 280-3), of the probable arrangement of the monastic buildings. The structure of the abbey as it stands to-day presents three distinct styles of building and decoration (1) the original monastic period dating from its foundation as a monastery in Stephen's reign about 1148 to its dissolution by Henry VIII in 1536; (2) the Boevey period from 1647, when William Boevey bought the property from the Kingston family, to 1777, when the whole of the northern half of the house, in which most of the principal rooms were situated, was destroyed by fire; (3) the period subsequent to that fire, when instead of rebuilding to the north, a new wing was added to the south, containing the present drawing-room, dining-room, etc., all built and decorated by an architect named J. Leck in the then fashionable Adam style.

All the discoveries of 1912 and after relate to the earliest period.

Part of the original south wall of the nave of the Abbey Church was found in 1912, existing as part of the back wall of the 17th century orangery in the garden, which wall (about 60 feet long, 6 feet high, and 3 feet 6 inches wide) contained remains of the south or processional doorway,

leading from the north end of the east walk of the cloisters into the nave. This doorway when opened was found to have been blocked up with some of its own arch-stones, amongst other debris, and there were sufficient of these to show that the head of the doorway had been semicircular in form and probably dated from 1200 A.D. or possibly earlier. Foundations of the south and west walls of the south transept have since been found.

In the present kitchen, which in the 17th and early 18th century formed the entrance hall of the house, and was then partitioned off from the rest of the lay brothers' refectory for that purpose, the original stonework of some of the refectory windows, hidden behind batten work plastered over, was uncovered in 1913, and disclosed the rather curious fact that these windows, although set in the same (west) wall, and adjoining each other, were of different shapes, one having a pointed arch, and the next one to it a round one, tending to show the experimental nature of the architecture of that period. That this refectory was considerably longer than the 65 feet now existing (at the north end of which Mr. Middleton's plan erroneously shows the partition-wall coloured black as original) is indicated by a stone corbel visible in a cupboard at the east end of this wall and the springing of another roof-arch to the northward. Also in Kip's engraving of the Abbey in Atkyns' *Gloucestershire* (1712) other long windows of a similar character to the refectory ones above mentioned are shown in the northern continuation of the wall destroyed by the fire of 1777.

The 8 feet thick east wall of the refectory, to which Mr. Middleton called attention, has since been shown to have contained a 4 feet stone staircase leading up from the side of the richly moulded archway of transitional character to the dormitory above. Of this staircase there are remains, discovered in 1913, of a stone archway, with iron hinges set in one side to carry a door or gate closing the stairway

near its foot, and further to the south on the floor above (where Mr. Middleton says "there appears to be no early work remaining") portions have been found of a stone landing 4 feet wide with 2 feet stone walls on either side, in the inner one of which is a doorway leading no doubt into the dormitory.

Further light has been thrown on the probable history of the "Abbot's Room" (at the south end of the dormitory on the first floor, and over the "Necessarium,") by the discovery in March, 1913, of four small 12th century arrow-slit windows in a complete state of preservation, and parts of two fine stone-traceried 14th century windows, all blocked up in the south wall. The different dates and styles of these windows tend to show that the room may originally have been used as a first-floor Necessarium, but that after the Black Death in 1349, when lay help was no longer available for the monastery, this room with the rest of the west wing (which had been exclusively occupied by the lay brethren) was altered and appropriated by the abbots for their own use and that of their guests. On the appointment of Richard Peyto as Abbot, in 1372, King Edward III made certain special grants of money to the abbey. It is on record that about this time he paid visits to Flaxley for the purpose of hunting in the forest; and it is conjectured that Peyto may have converted the room into a royal guest-chamber, by blocking up the small windows, opening up the large ones instead, introducing the fine open-beamed ceiling, and a large fireplace, which latter was disclosed in 1913, at the same time as the old windows were discovered and as far as possible reinstated.

A pencil sketch of the plan of the foundations of the Chapter House, evidently contemporary with their discovery in 1788, shows that, though its position on Mr. Middleton's plan is correct, the Chapter House had an apsidal east end, and its arched roof was supported by a central column, the base of which was then found, and

now lies on the grass near its original position where a cypress-tree stands. In the sketch six coffin-lids are illustrated as having been then discovered, but only 3 of these remain *in situ*, whilst of the others and all the coffins they covered no trace is now forthcoming.

The following historical notes may be added :—

Sometime between the years 1148 and 1154, in King Stephen's reign, Flaxley Abbey was founded for monks of the Cistercian order by Roger, son of Milo, Earl of Hereford, in memory of his father who was killed, on the spot where it now stands, by an arrow while out hunting on Christmas Eve, 1143.

The Abbots of Flaxley were: (1) Waleran, resigned 1187; (2) Alan, elected 1187; (3) Richard, 1200; (4) William, 1277; (5) Nicholas, 1288; (6) William de Rya, 1314; (7) Richard Peyto, 1372; (8) William, 1426; (9) Berkeley, 1476; (10) John, 1509; (11) William Beawdly, 1528; (12) Thomas Ware, 1532.

In 1536, at the dissolution of the monasteries, King Henry VIII gave the ruined abbey and all the properties belonging to it, to Sir William Kingston, a personal friend of his and a knight of his Privy Council.

In the same year (1536) Sir William as Constable of the Tower of London, conducted Anne Boleyn there, where during her brief imprisonment Lady Kingston acted as one of her ladies in waiting. He was also present at her trial and superintended her execution.

In 1540 Sir William Kingston died, and was succeeded by his son Antony, who about the same time was knighted by the king, and appointed High Sheriff of Gloucestershire. During 1548-49, Sir Antony was Provost Marshal of the army and took an active part against rebels in the West of England, where his notorious cruelty caused him to be known as "the terrible Provost Marshal." Early in

1555 he was one of the officers appointed to carry out the execution of Bishop Hooper at Gloucester.

In 1556 Sir Antony became implicated in a plot to rob the Exchequer, and with the funds thus acquired to raise a rebellion against the queen. Several of his fellow conspirators were tried and executed, and he was summoned from Gloucestershire to take his trial. But on his way thither he died, either from a heart-attack induced by fright, or, as some say, by suicide. From Sir Antony Kingston, Flaxley Abbey and estates descended to his two sons, Antony and Edmond and their descendants, until in 1647 a William Kingston sold the property to William Boevey, a wealthy Dutch merchant, and his half-brother James.

Very little documentary evidence can be found to show that any of the Kingston family ever resided at the Abbey, but early 17th century manuscripts preserved there show that during some periods of their ownership a bailiff was installed in the house to collect the rents and do a certain amount of farming on his own account. The first Kingstons, Sir William and Sir Antony, appear to have lived at Painswick, where their monuments are to be seen in the parish church. In 1654 James Boevey transferred his share of the Flaxley property to William, and the latter assigned part to his half-sister Joanna, widow of Abraham Clarke (who died in 1615), and left the rest to his wife and other trustees to be sold at his death. In 1661 William Boevey died, and Joanna Clarke, buying from the trustees the remainder of the property, lived at the abbey until her death in 1664. She was succeeded by her son Abraham, but his children all dying in their infancy, he left Flaxley at his own death in 1683 to William, son of the above-mentioned James Boevey.

This William Boevey only shines in family history by reflected light as the husband of Catharine, daughter of John Riches, who, married at the age of 15 in 1685 and left

a widow 7 years later, became known throughout England for her beauty, talents, and wide-spread charity. Many famous men of letters were numbered among her friends, including Pope, Steele, and Addison. The latter penned a portrait of her in his fictitious essays in *The Spectator* on "Sir Roger de Coverley" in which she appears as the "Perverse Widow," ardently but hopelessly pursued by the gallant Sir Roger. Amongst other good works in which she took a lively interest was the Sunday School movement, and she was one of the promoters of the "Three Choir Festivals." There are monuments to her memory in the church at Flaxley and in Westminster Abbey.

At Mrs. Boevey's death in 1726 the Flaxley property passed, in accordance with her husband's will, to his cousin by marriage, Thomas Crawley, on condition that he "wrote himself Boevey." Since his death in 1769 the abbey has passed through the hands of six generations of Crawley-Boeveys. One incident only during all that time is of sufficient interest, as far as the abbey itself is concerned, to be recorded here, namely, the fire that consumed a considerable part of the building in 1777, and was followed, as before stated, by considerable reconstructions and alterations.