

ON THE GEOMETRICAL PERIOD OF GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE,

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WE have been so long accustomed to speak of our national architecture in the terms and according to the classification bequeathed to us by Mr. Rickman, and those terms and that classification are so well understood, and have been so universally adopted, that any proposal to supersede the one or to modify the other, requires somewhat more than a mere apology. To disturb a nomenclature of long standing, to set aside terms in familiar use, and to set up others in their place which are strange, and therefore at first unintelligible, involves an interruption of that facility with which we are accustomed to communicate with one other on any given subject, that is only to be justified by reasons of a cogent and satisfactory nature.

The sufficiency of Mr. Rickman's nomenclature and divisions, and their suitableness at the time and for the purpose for which they were made, are best evidenced by the fact, that, although the attempts to supersede them have been both numerous and persevering, they have remained for nearly half a century the principal guide to the architectural student; and Mr. Rickman's "Attempt to Discriminate the Styles of Architecture in England" is still the text-book from which the greater part of the popular works of the present day have been compiled.

In referring, however, to these attempts to supersede Mr. Rickman's system, it is proper to remark that one observation applies to the whole of them; although they propose to change the nomenclature of his different styles, or to subdivide them, his main division of English architecture into four great periods or styles, is adopted by all, and still remains undisturbed. No point, therefore, has been hitherto proposed to be gained by these alterations beyond a change of name: and this may be taken as a sufficient reason why none of these attempts have been

successful. Men are not willing to unlearn a term with which they are familiar, however inappropriate, in order to learn another, which, after all, means the same thing.

Although, however, Mr. Rickman's simple division of Church Architecture into four periods or styles, may perhaps have been the one best suited to his time, and to the elementary state of the knowledge of the subject possessed by the best informed archæologists of his day, it may with propriety be questioned how far such a division is suited to the exigencies of writers of the present day, or to the present advanced state of knowledge on the subject. It behoves us to consider well, (perhaps more especially at the present moment, so great an impulse having been recently given to the study of church architecture,) whether Mr. Rickman's system fulfils all the conditions essential to one calculated for popular and universal use, and whether we should therefore seek to confirm and to perpetuate it, or whether the time has not arrived for the adoption of a more detailed and accurate division of the long and noble series of buildings which contain the history of our national architecture from the Heptarchy to the Reformation.

An enquiry of this kind forms the subject of a little work which is now in the press, in which I have ventured to recommend a nomenclature and a classification differing somewhat from that of Mr. Rickman, and a division of church architecture into *seven* periods instead of *four*. The object of the present paper is more particularly to describe and to illustrate one of those periods, which, for reasons that will be obvious to many of my hearers, and which can be made, I think, intelligible to all, I propose to call the GEOMETRICAL PERIOD of English Church Architecture; and I have selected this for our consideration, because I conceive that no country possesses in greater abundance the materials necessary to illustrate and define it than this country, and that no building in the kingdom contains a nobler example of it than Lincoln Cathedral.

In Mr. Rickman's simple classification his Norman style comprises the whole of those buildings in which the circular arch was used, whilst those in which the pointed arch was employed were divided into three styles or classes, namely, the Early English, the Decorated, and the Perpendicular. The titles of the two last mentioned, namely, the Decorated and

the Perpendicular, Mr. Rickman professed to derive from the character of their windows, conceiving, no doubt justly, that no part of a building exhibits peculiarities of style in so prominent and characteristic a manner as its windows. In strict accordance with this rule, which may be assumed to be a correct and valuable one, I propose to show that had Mr. Rickman gone a step further and classed the whole of the buildings of pointed architecture, according to the forms of their windows, under four heads instead of three, he would have obtained a classification equally simple but more intelligible and consistent: he would have obviated much that is confused and indefinite, and therefore perplexing, to the architectural student, in his description of buildings which belong to the class to which we are now referring; and would have enabled us to compare the buildings of our own country with those of corresponding character, and nearly contemporaneous date on the Continent, in a manner that would have established an analogy between them, which, according to the present classification, has no apparent existence.

Every one who is acquainted with Mr. Rickman's descriptions of the buildings of the Early English style, is aware that he did not limit the buildings of that period to those in which the lancet window only appears, but included many others in which windows occur of many lights, containing heads filled with tracery consisting of foliated circles, and other simple geometrical figures. In thus admitting traceried windows of whatever kind, within the category of Early English work, he appears to have had some difficulty occasionally in his descriptions, and to have been at a loss in fact to know where to draw the line between Early English and Decorated work. Thus in speaking of the presbytery of Lincoln Cathedral he describes it as a sort of "transition to the Decorated style," and of many other similar buildings which may be ranked as amongst the finest in the kingdom, as belonging to the same class.

Again, no one who has paid much attention to the buildings of the Decorated style, or who has consulted the descriptions of such buildings given in Mr. Rickman's Appendix, can fail to have observed that the windows of this style are divisible into two classes: one in which the leading lines of the tracery are of simple *geometrical*, and the other in which they are of *flowing* character. Nor is this

distinction the only one which exists between these two classes of windows. We shall find, if we examine further, that they differ also materially in other respects—in their mouldings and plan, as well as in their sculpture and ornaments. We shall find, in fact, whether we consider their general design or their detail, that the points of difference which distinguish Perpendicular windows from Decorated windows are not greater than those which separate these two classes of Decorated windows from one another. We have only to carry our enquiries a step further in order to satisfy ourselves that these points of difference are not confined to the windows alone, but extend also to the buildings to which those windows respectively belong; and having arrived at this point, we shall not be long in coming to the conclusion that there exists a large and important class of buildings, characterised by the geometrical forms of their window-tracery, which has hitherto been treated as belonging partly to the Early English and partly to the Decorated styles, but which is, in reality, distinct from both, and pre-eminently entitled, from the number and beauty of its examples, to separate classification. To this class of buildings then I propose to assign a Period, embracing the latter portion of Mr. Rickman's Early English Period, and the earlier part of his Decorated Period, commencing at the point where tracery, properly so called, began to be used, and terminating at the point where the leading lines of that tracery began to be no longer circular but flowing. Supposing this period to be adopted as that of a distinct style, we then have the buildings of Pointed architecture divided into four classes, which are characterised by their windows, and therefore easily distinguished. We have 1st, those in which the lancet window only appears; 2ndly, those which contain windows having simple geometrical tracery; 3rdly, those which have windows of flowing tracery; and 4thly, those in which the leading lines of the window tracery are vertical and horizontal.

To designate any of these periods except the last, by any of the terms hitherto in use, appears to be objectionable, as tending probably to cause confusion and misapprehension; and to retain the last if the others be abandoned, and a better and more appropriate term can be found, appears to be still less desirable. At the same time it is much to be

preferred that the terms we use should not be altogether strange, and, if possible, self-explanatory. These two conditions are such as to render it difficult to find terms such as to be in all respects perfectly satisfactory, and perhaps no system of nomenclature could be framed so perfect as to be entirely free from objection. Until, however, a better be suggested, I propose to denominate these four periods as follows:—I. The Lancet Period. II. The Geometrical Period. III. The Curvilinear Period. IV. The Rectilinear Period. In thus adopting the term *Geometrical*, I should wish to be understood as using it in the conventional sense in which it has been applied by Mr. Rickman and his followers, and understood by all archæologists of the present day; and the term *Curvilinear*, as conveying more satisfactorily perhaps than any other word the undulating form both of the tracery and mouldings of this period, in which the curve of contra-flexure, or the ogee, as it is commonly called, is the characteristic feature.

It remains still for me to fix the limits, in point of time, to be assigned to each of these periods.

Mr. Rickman commenced his Early English Period with the year of our Lord 1189, and ended it with the year 1307, whilst his Decorated Period commences A.D. 1307, and terminates A.D. 1377. Or, in other words, he made his Early English Style coincide with the reigns of Richard I., John, Henry III., and Edward I.; and his Decorated Style with those of Edward II. and Edward III.

It is clear that an objection may be taken to this mode of making the duration of a style coincident with the life of a monarch, the death of the one having not the remotest connection with the close of the other. These dates, therefore, are not to be looked upon as precisely and historically fixed by any particular architectural fact, but as indicating simply the time about which the style became changed. A preferable course appears to be to fix the commencement of a style by one or more examples of sufficient importance and of well authenticated date, or, where this is impossible, to fix it by the collective testimony afforded by buildings of authentic date somewhat earlier and somewhat later than that of the supposed change.

In this manner, and upon evidence of this kind, I propose to fix the commencement of the Lancet Period at or about

the year of our Lord 1190 ; that of the Geometrical Period at or about the year 1245 ; that of the Curvilinear Period at or about the year 1315 ; and that of the Rectilinear Period at or about the year 1360.

It will be seen that I assume a period of seventy years to be the duration of the Geometrical Style, whilst to the Lancet I assign a period of fifty-five years, and to the Curvilinear a period of only forty-five years.

My principal task then is to name to you some of the principal buildings of this Geometrical Period ; to point out to you those peculiarities which entitle them to separate classification, and to explain those points of resemblance and contrast which, on the one hand, assimilate them, and on the other distinguish them from those of the preceding and following styles.

The leading and most characteristic feature of the buildings of this period, as already stated, is the form of the tracery of their windows, to which, as consisting generally of the simplest geometrical figures, the term *Geometrical* has been given. It is distinguished in this respect, therefore, from the *Lancet* Period, in which tracery was never employed, as well as from *Curvilinear*, in which the forms of the tracery are almost invariably of a flowing or undulating character.

Taking this rule, then, as our principal guide in determining the duration of the Geometrical Period, we have first to find out if possible the precise time when tracery of whatever kind began to be used ; and secondly, the precise time when flowing tracery began to be practised : the interval will be the proper measure of the duration of what we have ventured to call the Geometrical Style.

There appears to be little doubt that the first important building of authentic date in which tracery, properly so called, began to be practised, was the Abbey Church of St. Peter at Westminster, the foundation stone of which was laid with great pomp and ceremony by King Henry the Third, in the year of our Lord 1245. The choir and transepts were constructed within a few years of this date, and exhibit throughout the whole of their details a strong assimilation in their forms to those of the Lancet Period. In their windows, however, a remarkable difference is to be noticed : in the greater part of them the plain lancet head has vanished, and in its place is to be seen, in the lowest and highest windows,

a foliated circle, carried by two trefoiled lancets, and in the middle, or triforium stage, a foliated circle enclosed within a spherical triangle, the whole of the window-head being, in all cases, pierced through to the plane of the glass, so as to leave no solid space or surface in the spandrels, thus fulfilling all the conditions of a traceried window.

In this, the first building in which tracery appeared, and in which, in most of its other details, little advance or departure from the usual form of lancet work is to be seen, it will not be a matter of surprise that we should find many of the windows still exhibiting the early form. This is the case in the transept ends, in which two rows of plain lancet-headed windows appeared; the doors below them, and the windows on each side of them, in the east and west walls, exhibiting nevertheless the new fashion of geometrical tracery.

In the Chapterhouse of the same building, which was commenced A.D. 1250, the new style entirely predominates, and the windows are large and fine examples of geometrical tracery of simple but striking pattern; they are engraved in the last part of Mr. Van Voorst's *Decorated Windows*. It is on the authority which this building affords, therefore, that I have adopted the year 1245 as that of the commencement of the Geometrical Period; and although it is possible that some little time may have elapsed before the example thus set in this noble metropolitan church was universally or even generally adopted; and although it is probable that a building or two containing lancet windows may be proved to have been built subsequently to this date, yet I think that it cannot be denied that Westminster Abbey furnishes us with sufficient authority for assuming that the appearance of geometrical tracery was one of the earliest indications of the impending change of style, and therefore one of the fittest marks by which to characterise the new period; or that the commencement of this period may be stated to be at least as early as the year 1245.

With respect to the termination of this period and the introduction of flowing tracery, evidence of the same precise nature does not exist. We have, however, sufficient testimony of the negative character before referred to, to enable us to conclude that it was not in use before the year 1310, and yet in full perfection in the year 1320. We have nume-

rous examples constructed according to historical record, during the first ten years of the fourteenth century, which display in their windows the formal outline of geometrical work—such as the Chapterhouse of Wells Cathedral, built by William de la Marche, who ruled from 1293 to 1302; Queen Eleanor's Crosses, built soon after the year 1300; the South Aisle of Gloucester Cathedral, built by Abbot Thokey, about 1308; the Gateway of St. Augustine's Abbey, at Canterbury, built in the year 1309; the Tomb of Crouchback, in Westminster Abbey, built 1307; the Screen of Canterbury Cathedral, built by Prior Henry d'Estria in 1304. At the same time we have Prior Crauden's Chapel at Ely, and the Lantern of the Cathedral, commenced at or about the year 1321, containing windows of excellent flowing tracery. If we are to trust the chronicle which states that the reconstruction of Hingham Church, in Norfolk, which contains a series of fine curvilinear windows, with here and there a lingering geometrical form, was commenced by its Rector, Remigius de Hethersete, and its patron, John-le-Marshall, in the year of our Lord 1316, we have almost the very example of which we are in search. On the conjoint testimony, however, of various buildings rather than upon the evidence of this single example, I am disposed to take the year 1315, the mean, in fact, between 1310 and 1320, as that of the commencement of the Curvilinear Period, premising, however, as before, that it is quite possible that a few windows of geometrical outline may be found in buildings constructed after this date.

The interval, then, between these limits—that is to say, the period of seventy years intervening between the years 1245 and 1315—I propose to call the Geometrical Period of English Church Architecture.

To the Geometrical Period belong some of the most exquisite, as well as many of the noblest buildings in the kingdom: the choir, transepts, and part of the nave of Westminster Abbey Church, as well as its chapterhouse and cloisters; the chapterhouse and cloisters of Salisbury Cathedral; the nave of Lichfield Cathedral; the north transept of Hereford Cathedral; the Lady-chapel and choir of Exeter Cathedral; the eastern portion of the choir of Ripon Cathedral; the greater part of the nave of York Minster and its chapterhouse; the chapterhouse of Wells Cathedral; the

presbytery and cloisters of Lincoln Cathedral ; the south aisle of Gloucester Cathedral ; the Lady-chapel of Chichester Cathedral ; as well as detached parts in Chester, Carlisle, and some other Cathedrals ; the remains of Bridlington Priory, and those of Newstead, Thornton, and Guisborough Abbey Churches ; the whole of Tintern, and the greater part of Netley Abbey Churches ; the nave and transepts of Howden Collegiate Church ; the eastern portions of St. Alban's and Romsey Abbey Churches ; the central towers of Salisbury, Hereford, and Lincoln Cathedrals ; the gateway of St. Augustin's, at Canterbury ; and Queen Eleanor's Crosses, together with numerous fine examples amongst numerous parish churches, constitute a splendid series of buildings, which may be said to surpass that of any other period of our national architecture ; and compared with which, the buildings of the so-called Decorated Period, reduced to those of true Curvilinear character, become almost insignificant, Ely and Carlisle being the only cathedrals which exhibit even any considerable detached portions of work in this style, its principal representatives being the fine parish churches, of which so large a number, and such beautiful examples, exist in this county. If we turn for a moment from the buildings of our own country to those of the Continent, we shall at once see that what has been said with reference to the necessity of acknowledging this Geometrical style in England, applies with much greater force to foreign buildings. Here we have two distinct and well-defined periods, preceding and following that in which circular tracery prevailed. Abroad, the transition from plain Romanesque to pure Gothic architecture was so rapid, that lancet windows hardly appear at all ; and no sooner was the circle abandoned in traceried windows than flamboyant outlines almost at once superseded all other descriptions of Curvilinear tracery. During the reign of the circle, however, what a noble series of buildings sprang up in the centre of Europe ! Amiens, Beauvais, Abbeville, Tours, Orleans, the aisles of Notre Dame and St. Denis ; Metz, Rheims, Strasburg, —and, to crown all, matchless Cologne, owe all their glories to this Geometrical Period.

I do not propose, however, to travel so far from the county of Lincoln to illustrate the leading points of difference between these three periods of church architecture, possessing, as

we do, within this immediate neighbourhood buildings of sufficient character and importance to illustrate the subject fully; and having mentioned to you the principal buildings of the style in the kingdom, I will endeavour to explain more fully to you its minuter characteristics by reference to the different diagrams which I have prepared for that purpose.¹

NOTICE OF A SAXON BROOCH, FOUND IN WARWICKSHIRE.

IN the Museum formed during the meeting of the Institute at Bristol, a remarkable fibula of gilt bronze was exhibited by the Rev. W. Staunton, recently found at Myton, near Warwick. No precise account of the discovery could be ascertained; the ornament was deposited with human remains, apparently a single interment, one skull only being found, the teeth in a very perfect state. With the fibula was found a large perforated crystal of quartz, of which a representation is here given; also, a slender band of silver, ornamented with small heart-shaped punched impressions, and forming a spiral ring, apparently for the finger. It was broken into several pieces, and its original intention may be doubtful.

These interesting relics of the Saxon period have been deposited in the Warwick Museum. The brooch, although unfortunately fractured by the finder, is a specimen of uncommon size and elaborate workmanship; it presents the rare, if not unique, peculiarity, of vitrified ornament, or coarse enamel, fixed by fusion in cavities on its surface. The chased design represents monstrous heads of animals, combined with foliage, in bold relief. Fibulæ of this type, sometimes termed cruciform, have frequently been described both in England and in Germany. I am not aware that any example has occurred in Scotland or Ireland. It may be questionable whether their form was influenced by any allusion to the Christian emblem of the cross. There is, moreover, no distinct evidence regarding the position in which they were attached to the dress. There is evidence for the



¹ The rest of the paper consisted of a detailed description of the Presbytery of Lincoln Cathedral, and a comparison of

its principal features with those of the choir and nave of the same Cathedral, and with those of the Choir of Ely Cathedral.