

The 12th-Century Church of St. Frideswide's Priory

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SUMMARY

No documentary or direct chronicle evidence exists for the 12th-century church of St. Frideswide's Priory. Although regular Augustinian canons were established on the site of the old minster associated with St. Frideswide by 1122, none of the present church can be dated on stylistic evidence to much before c.1160. However, remaining parts of the cloister are clearly earlier, the chapter-house doorway sculpture being attributable to an Oxfordshire Romanesque workshop of c.1140-50. The chancel was built prior to the translation of St. Frideswide in 1180, the transepts and nave following quite quickly, but on an enhanced scale to the original conception. The plan of the church c.1200 can be reconstructed with aisled transepts and a seven-bay nave, with a N.E. chapel presumably associated with the cult of St. Frideswide. Analysis of architectural details, especially the capital sculpture, demonstrates an awareness of architectural work well beyond the Thames Valley. The use of a 'giant order' elevation of some sophistication suggests that this form of elevation could have once been more common than is realised, perhaps associated earlier in the 12th century with the royal patronage of Henry I and his court.

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps because of its small scale, perhaps due to its seclusion behind Tom Quad, or perhaps simply because it is so difficult to categorise, Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford,



Fig. 51. The chapter-house front. (R.C.H.M.: Crown copyright reserved.)

has not received as much attention from architectural historians as most other English cathedrals. This is all the more odd because it is a remarkably rich mine for those interested in that much-studied period, the Transitional style in England, when the insular (but highly developed) late Anglo-Norman Romanesque architectural style became infused with northern French, early Gothic ideas and motifs.¹

Two of the most recent authoritative architectural accounts have suggested that the church of St. Frideswide's Priory was built after 1190. Pevsner, in the absence of documentary dates, reaches this conclusion from an analysis of the capital types;² the *V.C.H.* relies on the entry in the Oseney Chronicle recording for the year 1190: 'Combusta est ecclesia Sanctae Frideswidae cum maxime parte civitate Oxenfordi'.³ Both presume an earlier rebuilding sometime after the establishment of the Augustinian

¹ Jean Bony, 'French Influences on the Origins of English Gothic Architecture', *Jnl. of the Courtauld & Warburg Institutes*, xii (1949), 1-15, established the basic principles, perhaps over-emphasising the role of the Cistercian Order at the expense of other patrons, whose buildings have not survived in such numbers. Typically Oxford Cathedral is not mentioned!

² J. Sherwood and N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (1974), 113-18.

³ *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv (1979) 364, 369; The Oseney Chronicle in *Annales Monastici* iv, ed. H.R. Luard (Rolls Ser. xxxvi, 1869), 43.

canons (confirmed by Henry I c.1122, cf. below, p. 227), and believe that the triforium-level window in the W. wall of the S. transept comes from that church.

Both authors also believe that the 12th-century church was built quickly, endorsing the 1939 R.C.H.M. statement that it 'must have been completed within twenty years after this date'.⁴ But the date the R.C.H.M. refers to is that of the translation of St. Frideswide (mistakenly given as 1181) and the start of building is given as 'after the middle of the 12th century . . . the E. part of the church probably completed . . . in 1181'. Alfred Clapham was then the Secretary to the Commission, and he had written of the cathedral that 'the character of its mouldings and decoration insist upon a period not earlier than 1170-80'.⁵ Finally, Peter Kidson, in describing the Romanesque work as being the 'ultimate sophistication' of the Anglo-Norman style, suggests c.1160.⁶ It is one of the aims of this paper to re-establish the pre-1180 date for the chancel.

Despite the attempts of some antiquaries to locate visual evidence for either Frideswide's 8th-century nunnery or Æthelred's church of 1004, there is nothing visible on the site today that can be stylistically dated earlier than c.1120; indeed, very little material clearly earlier than the mid 12th century is associated with the Priory. Given the usual pattern in England, a re-building of the secular canons' minster can be expected in the first few decades after the Conquest, and certainly in connection with the establishment of a regular Augustinian house c.1111-1122.⁷ William of Malmesbury's comments of c.1125 (written after visiting the church) give Roger, bishop of Salisbury, the credit for establishing the Augustinian priory and appointing Prior Wimund, but make no mention of buildings; this is possibly of some significance in view of Malmesbury's praise elsewhere for Roger's architectural patronage.⁸ The lack of any mention of new buildings in documentary sources cannot of course be taken as evidence that there was no building activity. But the lack of both documentary and material evidence, combined with the certainty that this not-very-wealthy house rebuilt its church c.1160-1200 (a long period for a fairly modest priory church), does suggest that the new canons made do with the existing buildings (presumably built in stone by Æthelred after the burning of the minster in 1002), possibly remodelling the E. end for their own liturgy.⁹

There is some evidence for a stone church existing before the present structure and roughly on the same site. Most obvious is the existence of the chapter-house doorway and slype, the former (Fig. 51) decorated with motifs paralleled elsewhere in mid 12th-century Oxford, Oxfordshire and Berkshire Romanesque work, probably derived from Reading Abbey founded in 1123 (see Appendix). During Scott's 1871 restoration work a 'muniment room' which had been built within the 15th-century N. cloister walk was removed, involving an almost complete rebuilding of the S. nave aisle wall. J.C. Buckler was constantly in attendance, and recorded that a 'large amount of ornamental work of the meanly reduced cloister [his term for the 15th-century work] . . . was executed upon the handsomer and more highly wrought capitals of Early Norman

⁴ R.C.H.M. *Oxford*, 35.

⁵ A.W. Clapham, *English Romanesque Architecture*, ii (1934), 97.

⁶ P. Kidson, P. Murray and P. Thompson, *A History of English Architecture* (2nd edn., 1979), 37.

⁷ The exact foundation date is not known; see below, p. 227 note 45, for a discussion of the problems.

⁸ William of Malmesbury, *De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum*, ed. N.E.S.A. Hamilton (Rolls Ser. lii, 1870), 213, 315. For Roger of Salisbury see R.A. Stalley, 'A 12th-century Patron of Architecture; a Study of the Buildings Erected by Roger, Bishop of Salisbury.' *J.B.A.A.*, 3rd ser. xxxiv (1971), 62-83.

⁹ David Sturdy might have found part of this putative early 12th-century church in his excavations; see above, pp. 91-2.

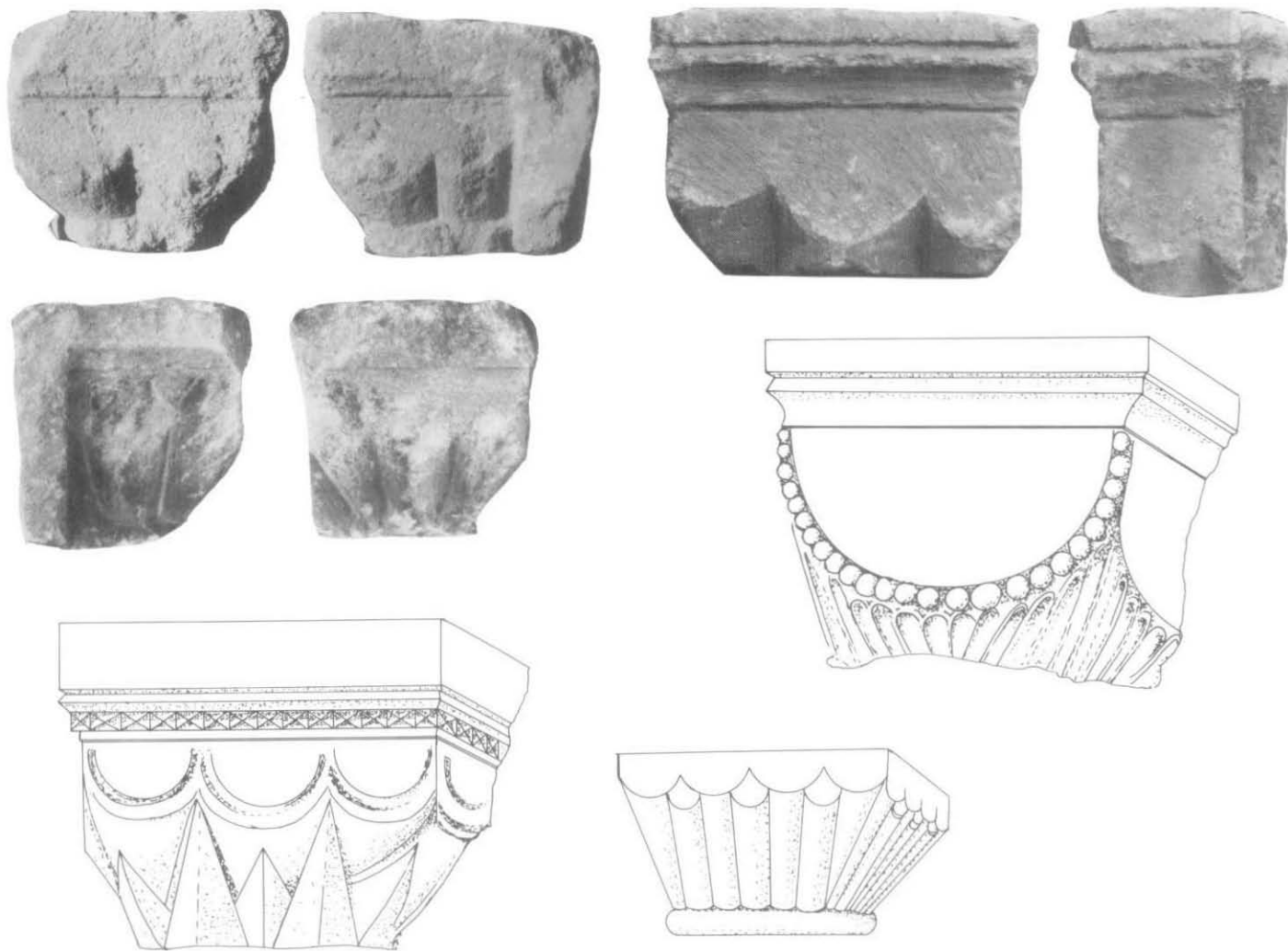


Fig. 52. *Ex situ* capitals. Scale 1:6. (The three items photographed are stored by the County Museums Service; the other three, now lost, are re-drawn from Buckler's sketches in B.L. MS Add. 27765E, enlarged to scale according to Buckler's dimensions. Phh. John Blair.)

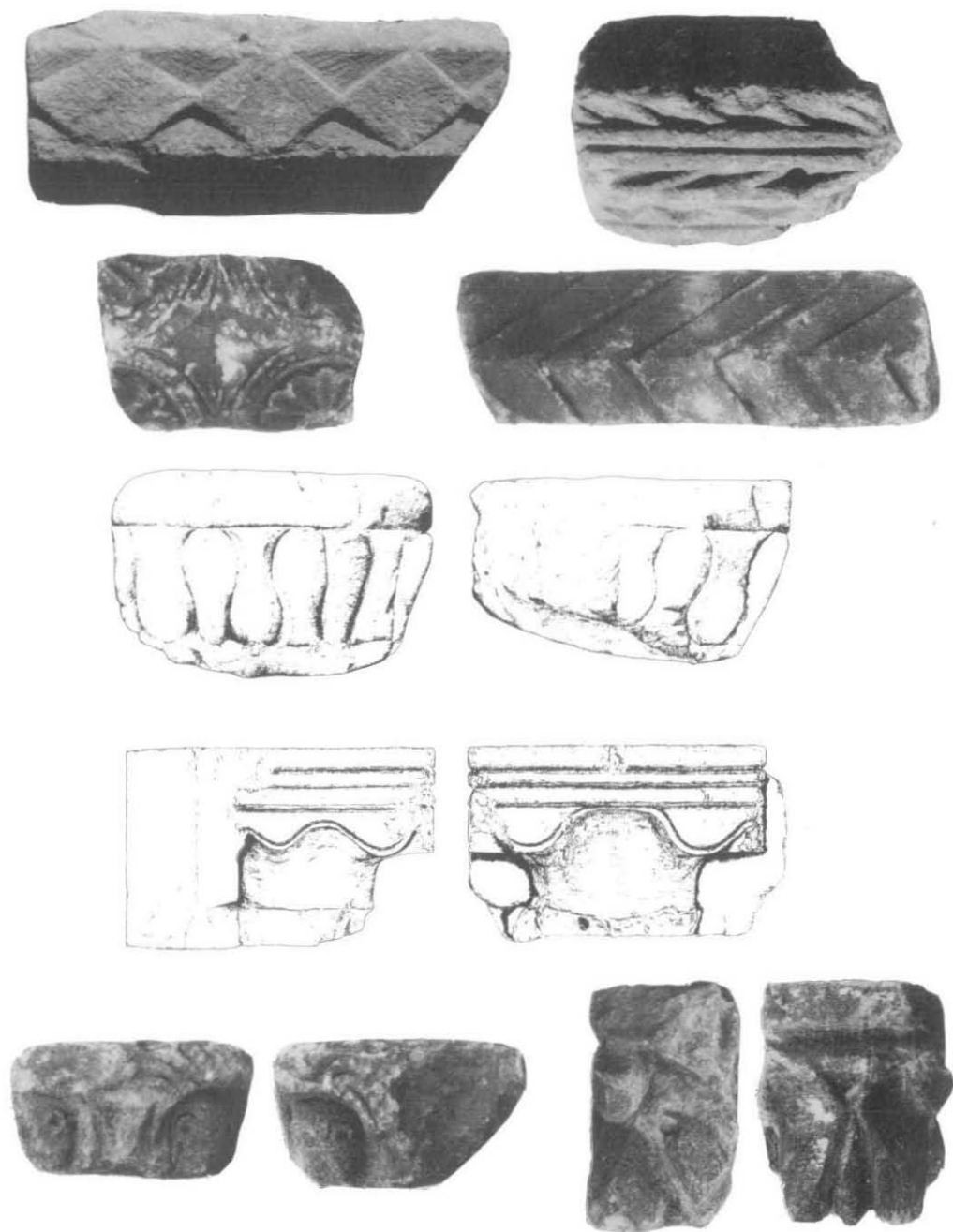


Fig. 53. *Ex situ* string-course fragments, capitals and corbel. Scale 1:6. (Stored by the County Museums Service. Phh. John Blair, drawings by Sarah Blair.)

date'.¹⁰ The more elaborate of these capitals cannot now be located, and as there are few pieces of old stone within Scott's work they have presumably been lost, but luckily Buckler drew three of them. The known examples (Fig. 52) show the full range of the 12th-century English scallop capital designs, from the simple decorated cubic shape to the multi-fluted scallop only otherwise seen on the internal lantern passage arcade of the central tower. Later in his account, Buckler notes: 'Other fragments of anglo-norman workmanship were countless, but of a structural character – not sufficiently instructive to be copied. The former cloister is without the slightest recognisable representation among the numerous discoveries which have been made.'¹¹ It is most unfortunate that the 'structural character' of the 'countless' fragments was not described or drawn in more detail. Buckler presumably means pieces of shaft, plain ashlar blocks and perhaps string-course fragments and arch sections (as found in the E. wall of the chancel, Fig. 53, upper).

Some pieces which he does depict can be identified with stones among the collection from Christ Church now stored by the Oxfordshire County Museums Service. One such piece 'found in the cloister walls' is a springing stone from blind arcading (Fig. 54, left), with a raised zig-zag and with a base width of about a foot (30 cm.); it could therefore fit onto one of the capitals that Buckler illustrates. On the same page of drawings is a 'fragment of a small arch [i.e. a voussoir] . . . from the walls of the cloister' with this same zig-zag and accompanied by the note 'This pattern is profuse'.

From the existing chapter-house doorway, the location of this re-used work, the size of the capitals and the other material, it is reasonable to suggest that a cloister was being erected around the middle of the century. It is doubtful, in fact, that the Priory could have expanded or funded any expansion until the mid 12th century. From charters made shortly before his death, it seems that Bishop Roger had retained control of many of the choicer endowments of St. Frideswide's, presumably from the foundation of the Priory (cf. below, p. 227).¹² The rapid rise of Oseney Priory (founded 1129), a remarkably adjacent 'alternative' Augustinian house heavily patronised by local families (especially the castellan d'Oilly family), would also suggest that St. Frideswide's was not popular.¹³ Comparison of royal and papal confirmations does indicate that after a slow start, patronage increased substantially after the middle of the century and, more obviously, after the translation of the relics in 1180.

As argued below by John Blair (pp. 236–7), it seems likely that the S. range of the cloister lies across the line of the original S. city wall. Charters of the 1120s confirm that there was a road near the wall touching the canons' land, and that the canons were permitted to restrict access to a gate and to have access to their garden beyond the wall.¹⁴ Given the *Gesta Stephani* description of Oxford as being 'very securely defended' when Queen Matilda was being besieged by King Stephen in 1142,¹⁵ it is highly unlikely that the walls were breached much before the later 1140s. With the stylistic evidence, then, it can be confidently suggested that a new cloister was added to an existing church

¹⁰ British Library MS. Add.27765 E, f.98.

¹¹ Ibid. f. 86.

¹² *Cart. Frid.* i, 17, No. 13; *The Cartulary of Oseney Abbey*, ed. H.E. Salter, ii (O.H.S. xc, 1929), ii, 233–4, Nos. 793–4.

¹³ Oseney was founded in 1129, its first prior Ralph being a canon of St. Frideswide's. It was elevated to abbatial status in 1154, having absorbed the rich secular college of St. George-within-the-Castle in 1149: *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 90, and *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 365.

¹⁴ *Cart. Frid.* i, Nos. 6, 12 and 514.

¹⁵ *Gesta Stephani*, ed. and trans. K.R. Potter (1935); 90–1; an interpretation of the attack can be found in *V.C.H. Oxon.* i, 437.



Fig. 54. *Ex situ* voussoirs and springer. The item illustrated bottom-right comes from the E. wall, above the E. window. Scale 1:6 (Stored by the County Museums Service. Phh. John Blair.)

from the late 1140s, the walled area of the city being extended to take it (cf. Figs. 92-5). This follows the appointment in the late 1130s of Robert of Cricklade (known as Canutus) as prior.¹⁶ If St. Frideswide's was ever associated with the establishment of a scholastic community in Oxford it must have been now, and a cloister would surely have been essential to this learned and devout man.¹⁷

Two further aspects of the existing church might suggest that the present building replaces an earlier structure on the same site: the S. transept and the eastern arm.

THE S. TRANSEPT

Although both N. and S. arms of the transept are of three bays, and have a similar length at clearstorey level of 14.325 m. (47 ft.), the S. transept has only two complete bays at ground level as the southernmost leaps across the slype. Measuring between the centres of the main arcade upper capitals, this bay has a colossal 5.283 m. (17 ft. 4 ins.) width. The remaining space between the slype and the crossing piers had to be divided evenly into two bays, only 3.96 m. (13 ft.) in width (column centres), narrower than either the chancel bays with an average width of 4.23 m. (13 ft. 10½ ins.) or the nave bays with a width of 4.388 m. (14 ft. 4¾ ins.). As the horizontal levels obviously had to be maintained, the upper main arcade of the southernmost bay describes a very flat segmental arch, luckily only seen from the top of the S. transept gallery.

¹⁶ For a consolidated list of references to Robert see Blair, 'St F.', 80, notes 8 and 9.

¹⁷ Soon after his arrival, Robert gave a mill to the priory; could this have been his donation? *Collectanea*, ii, ed. M. Burrows (O.H.S. xvi, 1890), 161.



Fig. 55. S. transept, W. wall, glazed triforium in middle bay. (Ph. John Blair.)

References to a tower in the miracles associated with St. Frideswide's relics eight years before the translation of 1180 have been taken by a number of authors (reasonably enough) as evidence for Æthelred's church of 1002–4 having a tower, probably over the crossing.¹⁸ As the great majority of Romanesque cloisters have their E. range aligned with the transept of a cruciform church, the likelihood of the existing chapter-house and slype being aligned (as now) with the southern arm (or *porticus*) of the 1002–4 (or post-1111) church lends some support for the existence of at least a cruciform church by the later 1140s.

A number of authors have suggested that the 'glazed triforium' in the middle bay of the W. wall of the S. transept (Fig. 55) is part of an earlier church (of either 1002–4 or c.1120), usually in an effort to explain the giant order elevation.¹⁹ (An externally similar window, without internal arches, exists in the southernmost bay, lighting the room above the slype; it is now all Scott's work.) The single-scallop capitals can be dated to the first half of the 12th century; their closest parallels exist in the chapter-house, within

¹⁸ Though Canon Bright, *Handbook to the Eastern Cathedrals* (1862), 5–6, interpreted this entry as evidence for the present tower having been completed in 1172.

¹⁹ J. Park Harrison in various articles, but especially *Proc. O.A. & H.S.* n.s. v (1886–93), 88–108, was keen to establish this window as the clearstorey of the 1004 church. His c.1888–91 protagonist, J. Parker, thought it part of the early 12th-century church, faced-up later in the century to create the 'Giant Order' elevation. Pevsner (op. cit. note 2, 117) considers the features *retardataire* work and belonging 'to the building of 1122'. The *R.C.H.M.* (op. cit. note 4, 35, 40) believes these features to be re-used material, but without discussing when or where from.

the partly-revealed side wall arcading. Other examples of this common type of capital can be seen amongst the *ex situ* material in store (Fig. 52). The central capital is not decorated on the side facing the glass, where it has a hacked surface. The shafts have been cut as though for the insertion of glazing, though these grooves do not align with each other in the present positioning of the shafts. Parts of this two-bay arcade are irregularly reddened, presumably by fire, but not in their present position, and there have been substantial piecing-in repairs (presumably by Scott). The bases have no parallels in the rest of the buildings and the variety of their bulbous mouldings and their upright form suggest a date in the first decade or so of the 12th century.

Externally, the walling is faced in coarse rubble, of markedly poorer quality than the clearstorey walling above. Recent restoration has accentuated this difference in the wall-face and created a better defined stone frame for the glazing; previously the windows were of a thinner section. The only comparable windows are those in the lower tower walls flanking the flashings of the former steep roofs. Internally, the capitals and bases are not coursed into the surrounding fabric, as in other triforium openings.

The fabric evidence, then, indicates that the internal twin arches of the middle bay re-use stonework from elsewhere, and that the two windows are pierced through a wall which was not intended to be exposed to the elements. Such work could have taken place at two dates in the medieval period: c.1180 or c.1490.²⁰ If it were the earlier date, then this could be seen as further evidence to support the argument that the creation of both transept aisles was a late 12th-century afterthought to the original concept. However, it is highly unlikely that these ordinary and poorly finished capitals and bases would have been used late in the 12th century, and quite improbable that the small area of wall enclosed by the upper arch of the giant order would have been considered worth retaining.

The later date of c.1490 is more plausible, especially as the rebuilding of the cloister about that time would have made available a lot of 12th-century material (and Buckler documented much re-use of Romanesque material in the cloister walls). Whether the building of the new cloister removed a single-bay western 'aisle' from the S. transept or not (see below, pp. 149–52), its lower floor level and flatter roof revealed enough wall at triforium level to permit the creation of a window. The internal elevation was retained either out of respect for the unity of the interior or, more likely, because of the structural difficulties in making a larger contemporary window. Quite why the late 12th-century two-bay arcade could not have been voided behind the arches is unclear; perhaps it was simply too inconvenient for the site masons.

THE EASTERN ARM

There are many differences between the details of the eastern arm and those of the nave and transepts, indicating two separate campaigns, though since the basic elevation design remains constant it is likely that the campaigns overlap to some extent. Careful measurement of the five chancel bays suggest an E. to W. build. The bays next to the eastern crossing-piers have a width of only 2.74 m. (9 ft.) between the bases, whereas the

²⁰ Loggan's view c.1675, in *Oxonia Illustrata*, only shows a domestic-style two-light casement window to the southernmost bay (by that time converted to a house). Given the usual accuracy of these views, it must be considered possible that the middle-bay window was created in the post-medieval period. J. Storer's view in *History and Antiquities of the Cathedrals and Churches of Great Britain* (1817), iii, pl. I shows both round-headed windows in the walling, but both are blocked. The date of the glazing is not recorded; it is unlikely to be Scott's work (or Park Harrison would have known).

other chancel pier bases are a uniform 2.845 m. (9 ft. 4 ins.) apart and the bases of the western responds are less than semi-circles; this suggests that building of the E. arm proceeded westwards, the crossing-piers having a fixed position in line with the chapter-house doorway. The E. wall of the chancel was presumably built as close as possible to the city wall while allowing for an intra-mural roadway.

Mr. Sturdy has shown (above, pp. 89-90) that the sanctuary bay was built over a deep excavation into the natural gravel, so explaining its apparent instability in the past. However, as the foundations themselves are intact the re-facing of the upper side walls of the sanctuary bay can be attributed to the number of major fabric alterations in this area: the insertion of a big E. window c.1300; the vaulting of the whole chancel c.1480; and Scott's restoration work in 1870.²¹ Whilst Scott renewed most of the internal details, the capitals on the N. window might be original. They are more similar to the lower capital of the E. respond of the N. chancel arcade and the adjacent capital below the diagonal rib of the aisle vault, both of which are medieval, than to Scott's fancier E. wall capitals. The continuation eastwards of the abacus mouldings of the eastern responds of the main arcade and westwards of the westernmost capitals of these windows (Fig. 56), whilst awkward, is explicable in the context of this church. The abaci of the transept clearstorey capitals continue to the edge of the vault, and externally the abaci of the clearstorey window capitals continue to the pilaster buttresses. The thin mouldings of the latter (where still visible on the N. chancel clearstorey) also explain the thinness of the sanctuary bay abaci, inside and out. So, although the fabric might initially suggest that these windows are later additions, their details can be paralleled elsewhere in the chancel and the broken coursing attributable to restorations. But the existence of the keeled shafts at the lowest level of the E. buttresses is puzzling, as keeled sections otherwise only appear W. of the eastern crossing-piers.

There is a clear diagonal break in the stonework through the eastern crossing-piers, most clearly seen from the chancel aisles. Both piers were heavily rebuilt on the sides facing into the main area after the removal of Dean Duppa's high panelled stalls in 1856, so the lowest courses, at least up to the height of the lowest main arcade capital, cannot be used as medieval evidence. At triforium level, though, the coursing is consistent from the transepts, across the transept arch responds and along the crossing-piers to the 15th-century half-shaft below the western arch of the chancel vault. However, the capital sizes of the N. transept E. arcade S. respond and the W. respond of the N. chancel arcade differ, and the motifs on the crossing-pier capitals and frieze have their best parallels in the transepts and not the chancel.

I believe that the chancel and the immediately adjacent parts of the eastern crossing-piers were built together at least up to the clearstorey string-course. The vaults over the western chancel aisle bays could not be erected until the first column of each transept E. arcade was built, but their ribs were cut in readiness and the springing stones set with the same profile as the rest of the chancel aisle vaults. A temporary wall could then be made on the W. side of the first chancel columns E. of the crossing, leaving the new chancel free from building work. Access to the chancel from the cloister would then be via the slype and a small round-headed doorway, now only visible on the exterior of the S. chancel aisle wall, directly below the 'Bishop King' window (which doorway otherwise has no known purpose). This entrance could have been used for

²¹ The engravings published by J. Britton, *Cathedral Antiquities of Great Britain*, ii (1821), Pls. II, X show the side windows of the sanctuary bay blocked-up and the internal mouldings removed for the erection of the high panelling inserted by Dean Duppa c.1630, though externally the roll-moulded round arch and shafts are visible.



Fig. 56. Chancel N. side, to show awkward junction between abacus mouldings of arcade and window. (Ph. John Blair.)

anything up to ten years, depending on the speed of the campaign, but certainly long enough to merit its single order and hood-mould. Once the S. transept was built and normal access to the church obtained, this door was filled up; but the opening was only made good on the inside, the exterior work not, presumably, being worth the trouble of complete removal.

The principal differences between the eastern arm and the rest of the church can be summarised under five headings:

1. *The middle storey (triforium)*

This is the most obvious design change, the wall behind the small columns being voided in the chancel, but solid elsewhere. In the nave, moreover, this two-bay arcade seems to be taller; the main dimensions are the same, but this optical effect of greater height is evidently produced by thinner shafts with narrower capitals and reduced bases (Fig. 57). I use the term 'triforium' for convenience, although neither the open nor closed versions strictly fulfil the medieval use of the term (a wall-passage fronted by an open arcade). In the chancel this 'triforium' is really a very reduced pseudo-tribune, as can be seen in the giant order elevations at Romsey and Jedburgh. In the blocked version the middle storey should strictly be termed a 'blind arcade' or perhaps 'pseudo-triforium'; it resembles the middle storey of Burgundian/Cluniac churches. None of the versions at St. Frideswide's

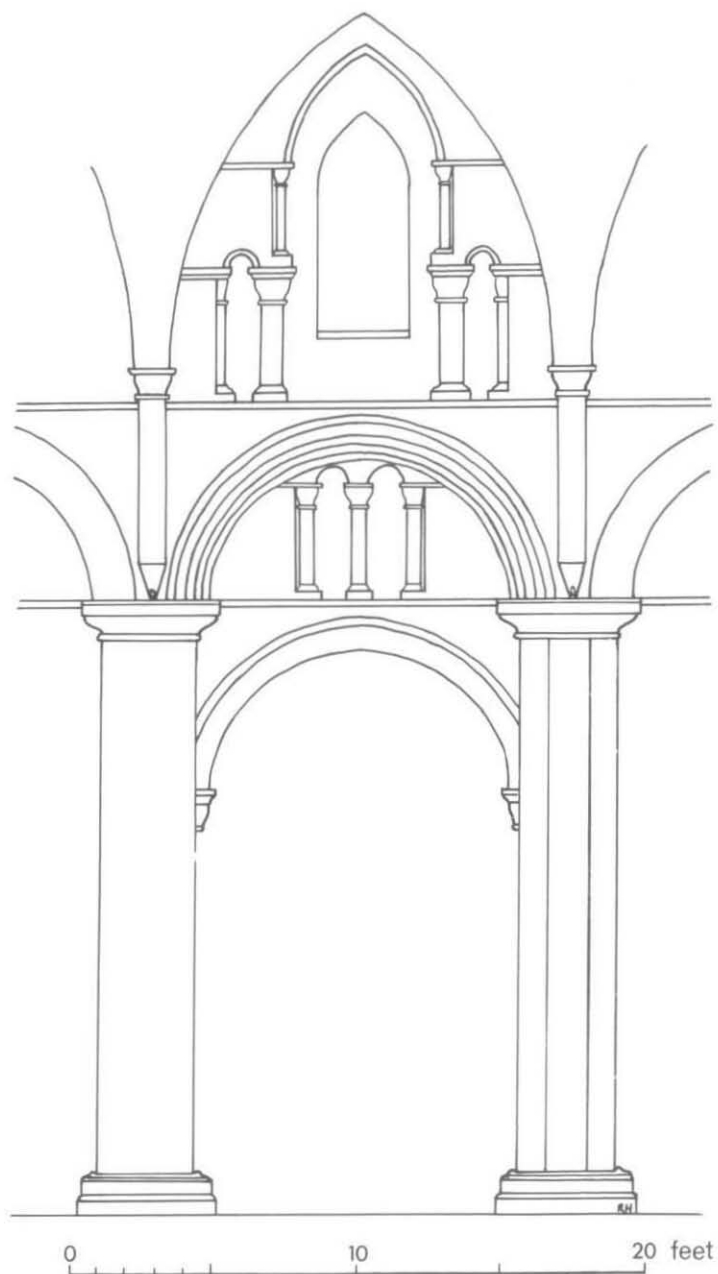


Fig. 57. Elevation of one bay on S. side of nave, illustrating the giant order system.

have passages or any sort of connection between them; indeed, there is no access to the aisle roof-spaces they front, except through the triforium arches where they exist.²²

The net result is a three-storey elevation, thus associating St. Frideswide's with the great abbeys and cathedrals rather than with the humble, two-storeyed parish church. After all, although not a rich foundation, the Priory was the largest and oldest religious centre in the city of Oxford and its church contained relics of some antiquity. If the giant order system had not been used, the triforium arches would have risen through the whole height of the middle storey, resulting in an elevation like New Shoreham (Sussex) or Worksop (Radford) Priory (Notts.).

2. Columnar piers

The piers of the nave alternate between round and octagonal forms. Arcades of octagonal piers became quite common in Gothic architecture, but in the 12th century octagonal forms are rarely used, and are then confined to a 'minor pier' position:²³ that is, the arcade has supports of alternating forms with the larger 'major' pier corresponding to important supporting positions, especially crossing-piers and responds. If the octagon was considered a 'minor' form at Oxford, this may explain why octagonal piers were not used in the three-bay transepts (Fig. 61): the northernmost respond would have taken the minor form. The nave most probably had seven bays, which again would have entailed a minor W. respond form. But if western towers were planned, then the penultimate piers would probably have been larger than a single drum and so could include semi-circular W. responds to the arcades.

More likely, though, the transepts were under construction before the decision to use alternation had been taken. The adoption of an alternating system can be directly attributed to the influence of the new choir at Canterbury Cathedral, begun in 1175. This derivation is confirmed by the design of the main arcade capitals on the octagonal pier immediately W. of the N.W. crossing-pier (Fig. 58), which are clearly modelled on capitals placed in position at Canterbury in the 1179 campaign (according to Gervase of Canterbury's account).²⁴ Generally speaking this distinctive, fleshy-leaved acanthus capital-type was not much copied beyond Kent and is certainly not present elsewhere in Oxford. Therefore, the transept arcades, which do not employ alternation or any Canterbury-type capitals, are unlikely to be later than the early 1180s. The use of alternation at Oxford was perhaps the result of a visit to Canterbury by the patron or master-mason of St. Frideswide's. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that Prior Philip made a pilgrimage to St. Thomas's shrine, and wished to emulate that setting for his own church around the shrine of St. Frideswide.

The influence of Canterbury could also explain the appearance of pointed-arch windows in the nave clearstorey. However, as so few original 12th-century windows survive, it is perhaps unwise to be too confident that the use of pointed arches only

²² It must be presumed that access to the roof-spaces was originally via external traps or dormers in the roofs, accessible from the parapet gutters.

²³ Although the architect of Peterborough Cathedral choir had experimented with alternating round and octagonal columnar piers after 1118 (probably inspired by the post-1096 choir at Canterbury), the concept had not apparently been taken up with much enthusiasm in the Midlands. The cloister arcades of Reading Abbey had both round and octagonal shafts, presumably alternating, and individual octagonal shafts are known throughout the 12th century, used particularly on doorways e.g. Iffley.

²⁴ Gervase of Canterbury, *Historical Works*, ed., W. Stubbs (Rolls Ser. lxxiii; vol. i. 1879-80), 21-2.



Fig. 58. Canterbury-derived capital in nave N. arcade. (Ph. John Blair.)

began in the nave. Nevertheless, the W. wall of the S. transept has round-headed clearstorey windows and in terms of stylistic chronology the S. transept seems to follow directly on from the chancel.

3. *Vaults*

It is clear from the evidence remaining in both transept arms that 12th-century quadripartite rib vaults existed over their main spaces, as well as over the aisles. It is virtually certain from this evidence that the chancel was also vaulted, but the physical evidence is not so conclusive for the nave. The 'shadow' of the S. transept vault is still quite clearly visible on the upper clearstorey walling and the *tas-de-charge* remain (partially restored) above the vault capitals. The N. transept walls have been better repaired after the removal of the vaults (probably by Wolsey, c.1525–9),²⁵ and the

²⁵ A loose voussoir that might have come from the main vault survives. As there is now little physical evidence for a stone vault over the nave comparable to that existing in the transepts, it is possible that it did not receive a stone vault in the 12th century. This would certainly be consistent with the poor-quality sculptural details. However, the upper walls might have been cleaned-up either when the nave roof was first erected c.1500 (and the vault shafts given new capitals in the manner of the chancel) or when it was 'renewed' in 1816.

There is no documentary evidence for the removal of the 12th-century transept vaults. *R.C.H.M. Oxford*, 39, suggests that the N. vault was removed for the erection of vaults 'similar to that in the presbytery' and dates

northernmost bay, refaced under the terms of the will of James Zouch (d. 1503)²⁶ retains the profile of a late 12th-century vault (and possibly some of the masonry still exists at high level above the 16th-century stonework).

As the upper parts of the chancel vault shafts and the internal clearstorey walls²⁷ were rebuilt for the present late 15th-century vault, no comparison can be made with the evidence to be seen in the S. transept.²⁸ However, all aisle rib-vaults survive more or less in their original form (the N. nave aisle ribs are of plaster or Roman cement but some apparently original springing stones exist). The rib profiles (Fig. 59) demonstrate a refinement between the chancel and the rest of the church, and this can also be seen in the manner in which the vaults spring from their supports. In the chancel aisles, the single aisle wall-shaft supports the transverse arch and the diagonal ribs spring from corbels attached to the half-shaft capital. Elsewhere, corbels are omitted and both diagonal ribs also spring from the half-shaft capital.

The use of corbels (as was common in the experimental vaults of the first half of the 12th century) and the generally clumsy appearance of the chancel aisle vaults suggest an inexperience or unfamiliarity with vaulting on the part of the mason. Columnar piers, especially within a giant order elevation system, are not easy to integrate with rib vaults (as the even clumsier solutions adopted at Romsey and Jedburgh Abbeys demonstrate). In the transept aisles there is a more rational approach to rib-vaulting, and even though the main vaults do not survive, the slight widening of the main spaces of the nave and transepts (in comparison to the chancel) and the addition of an extra shaft to the crossing-pier clusters in the nave and transepts to accommodate the main vault suggest that lessons had been learnt from the experience of the chancel.

the existing wooden roof to c.1510 (p. 41). Both the S. transept and nave roofs are dated to c.1500. The removal of vaults is an expensive and disruptive process, and although the canons may have been embarking on a concerted re-roofing campaign (beginning with the chancel in the late 15th-century), the transept roofs are very simple structures, given the frequent richness of timberwork c.1500/10, and the making good of the walls is shoddy. Why remove stone vaults to erect such plain roofs? Wolsey is known to have been preparing to demolish the Priory church as his new chapel rose on the N. side of the new college quad: the chancel remained in use as a temporary chapel but the steeple was scaffolded and payment made for the bells to be dismantled (see J.G. Milne and J.H. Harvey, 'The Building of Cardinal College, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, viii/ix, (1943-4), 148; see also above, pp. 67-72, and below, pp. 205-10, 220). I suggest that it was Wolsey who demolished the old roofs and vaults of the transepts after 1525, and that after his fall in 1529, Henry VIII, or rather one of his Deans, had the present roofs erected. However, there are apparently no records for such work and it might be expected that the roofs would contain some visual reference to Henry's patronage. If the nave roof is not work of Wolsey's time – and he did demolish much of the nave – then it must be seen as early 16th-century work by the Priory, attempting to enhance the nave to 'match' the chancel. It is of course, much less ambitious (the clearstorey was not re-modelled, for instance) and as a stone vault would be so expensive and disruptive to dismantle, I think it more than likely that c.1200 the nave only received a wooden ceiling, not a vault.

²⁶ The will of James Zouch, a local notary, proved 1504, requests burial in a tomb to be erected in the midst of the window 'which he had caused to be built' in the N. transept, and for permission to do so he bequeaths £30 'to the convent for the vaulting or adorning of that part of the church' and 40s. to the Prior (for the grave itself), and to the Convent and the University to say prayers for his soul. He was, in short, attempting to create a large chantry chapel for himself. £30 would hardly go far towards a new vault, so the end bay of the N. transept, forming a setting for his tomb under the N. window, was 'adorned' by being re-faced with tracery: *Trans. Mon. Brass Soc.* ix (1962), 509-11 (and see below, p. 256).

²⁷ Externally, though, the 12th-century pilaster-buttresses and much of the masonry around them still exists. Clearly all the ostentation was reserved for the interior.

²⁸ The cones at the base of these shafts are longer in the chancel than elsewhere, with a band of raised decoration marking the top of the cone and a grotesque head at the bottom of the shaft. The band is omitted in both the nave and the transepts and the heads (if used) are much smaller; the N. transept shafts sometimes terminate in sprigs of foliage.

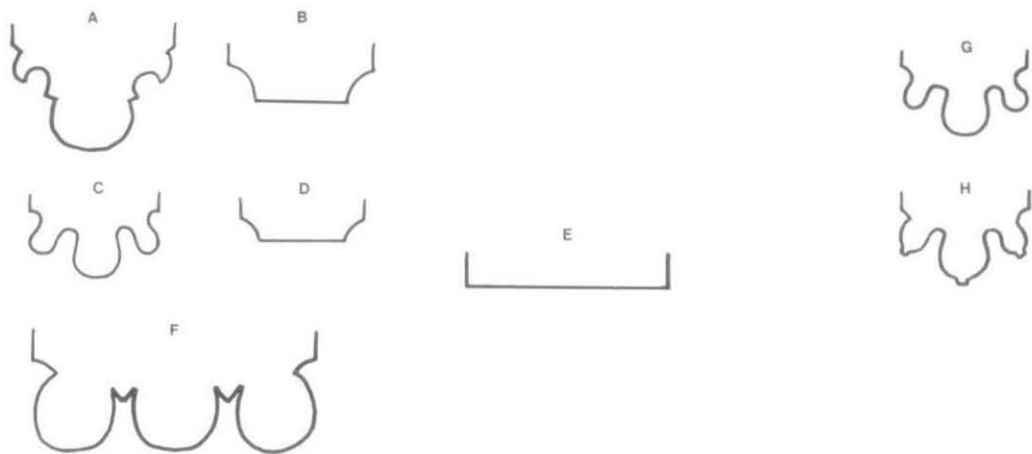


Fig. 59. Rib profiles (not to scale): A: chancel aisle, diagonal. B: chancel aisle, transverse. C: N. transept aisles, diagonal. D: N. transept W. aisle, transverse. E: N. transept E. aisle, transverse. F: S. transept main vault, tas-de-charge. G: N. nave aisle and E. bay of S. nave aisle, all ribs. H: S. nave aisle (except E. bay) and Lady Chapel, all ribs.

4. Mouldings and features

Generally speaking, the mouldings used in the nave and transepts are more refined in profile and scale than those in the chancel. Scope for radical change was of course limited, as the giant order elevation system was continued. Throughout the nave and transepts the roll-mouldings of the upper arches of the main arcades and the clearstorey string course are keeled, whereas their equivalents in the chancel are not.²⁹ Throughout the church, though, the plain, square-section lower arches of the main arcade have a normal roll hood-mould above them as their only decoration. All the crossing arches have round profile roll-mouldings too, except the hood-moulds of the (pointed) N. and S. arches which have a keeled section. As the capitals of the crossing-piers have their closest parallels in the transepts (in particular the use of a row of upright five-lobed leaves) it seems that the crossing arches, though obviously planned with the chancel, were built at about the same time as the transepts. That the eastern arch into the chancel was the earliest to be cut or erected is shown by its individual intrados moulding, which has a hollow chamfer (and broach stop) to the edges like the transverse arches of the chancel aisles (which also run N.-S.). The western arch intrados has round-profile roll-mouldings, but both N. and S. arches have plain square-section profiles.

The lower arches of the main arcade are visually the least important in the elevation, and their lack of decoration compared to the upper arches (which do not even span an open space) does not focus any undue attention on them. The square section does nevertheless seem rather heavy for c.1170 work. Similar arches can be found in a number of contemporary churches throughout the country of similar scale and architectural pretension, e.g. Minster-in-Thane (Kent), St. German's Priory (Corn-

²⁹ Exceptionally, the lowest of the three rows of arcading on the external clasping-buttresses of the E. chancel wall contain keeled shafts (supporting intersecting round arches). The equivalent shafts on the clasping buttresses of the N. transept are, however, not keeled.

wall), Wisbech (Cambs.); churches with otherwise very decorated arcades sometimes have plain un moulded crossing arches, e.g. St. David's Cathedral, Winchester St. Cross. More locally, the arch leading into the choir of Dorchester Abbey has such a profile and, further afield, the intrados of the main arcades of the two western bays of Worcester Cathedral (c.1175) has a thick-square profile beneath keeled roll-mouldings.³⁰ However, the use of a square profile to the lower arch seems to be common to all the known English giant order elevations (except Romsey Abbey, where a thick soffit roll-moulding is added to the arch); it is also used at Notre-Dame, Etampes, c.1130-40.

The greater refinement of mouldings is best demonstrated at the junction of the chancel and transept responds to the E. of each of the eastern crossing-piers. In the chancel the abaci and capitals are deeper than those of both nave and transepts. As the upper part of the abacus of the higher main arcade capitals is continued between capitals as the string course below the triforium, it follows that this string is shallower in the nave and transepts. Much of the deeper chancel abacus is taken up by an un moulded block, or 'lower abacus', between the abacus/string and the capital sculpture. This feature is much reduced in the nave and transepts, but the area available for capital sculpture is not increased. The profile of the abacus remains the same throughout the church for all capital sizes (although the upper part of the large chancel capitals has a deeper moulding), except for the W. responds of the chancel upper arcades and the S.W. respond of the lower chancel arcade, which all have a deep abacus with an unusually complex profile.

Many of the bases and plinths, especially on the main arcades, were restored when the box pews were removed in 1856 and in 1870 and cannot be relied upon as dating evidence. As a general rule, the large bases of the chancel arcade are more upright in shape and less undercut than those of the nave and transept arcades, but both are tending to the water-holding type. There is a significant difference between the minor bases, though. The bases of the shafts at the E. end of the N. chancel aisle sit comfortably on their plinth, but the equivalent bases at the N. end of the N. transept W. aisle overhang the plinth on two sides. Some of the chancel triforium bases have little spurs, and the lower bases of the E. chancel windows have flat corner-leaf spurs too, but there are none present in the nave or transepts. The plinths of the chancel arcades are between 10 and 20 cm. (4-8 ins.) deeper than those further W. in the building. It would also seem from the chamfers present on the plinth (at a constant height from the top) that the chancel floor was about one step, say 15 cm. (6 in.), higher than the uniform transept and nave floor levels.

5. Capital Sculpture

The very diverse capital sculpture of St. Frideswide's requires a full study in itself.³¹ As Pevsner says, the capitals are 'of great variety and few are run-of-the-mill'. But because

³⁰ This combination of square arches and keels in a late Romanesque context could provide a source for the use of keeled profiles at St. Frideswide's, especially as Dr. Christopher Wilson has identified a number of parallels in the capital sculpture of Worcester and St. Frideswide's: 'The Sources of the late 12th Century Work at Worcester Cathedral', in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Worcester Cathedral* (Trans. of BAA Conference 1975, 1978), 84-5. Keels are not used at Canterbury, so did not accompany the concept of alternation. Dr. Wilson suggests a c.1170 starting date for St. Frideswide's.

³¹ There are very few recognisable 12th-century capitals remaining on the exterior. The replacements of c.1974 on the N. transept and N. nave clearstorey were inspired by internal capitals; the originals were very much simpler (like the capitals still surviving (1988) on the S. nave clearstorey).

he believed the frequency of 'crocket' capitals to be a late 12th-century phenomenon, Pevsner dated the whole building to 1190–1210.³² A detailed examination, though, shows that the chancel capitals have volutes in the classical manner, i.e. leaves curled in a spiral, and that crockets, i.e. leaves collected together in a looser configuration, are mainly used in the main capitals of the nave (with a few visible amongst the smaller upper capitals of the transepts). As Francis Bond pointed out, the basis of these forms can be found in classical capitals;³³ and as at Canterbury Cathedral (1175–9)³⁴ the breaking-down of classicizing foliate capitals to new capital types, using individual leaf forms, is readily discernible at Oxford.

There are enough small details in common between some of the capitals at Oxford and at Canterbury to suggest either a common prototype or at least a common background for the sculptors. That source will almost certainly be found in the Ile-de-France, as it was there that masons had been so assiduously dismembering the Corinthian capital from the 1130s.³⁵ In France, the process created a simple, almost spiky design also called the 'crocket' capital. In England, the 'stiff-leaf' capital emerges, usually quite animated and with much detail in the lobed leaf form. There are also many regional variations, dependent on the locally dominant workshop.

The process by which these stiff-leaf capitals emerge is harder to see in England because so few buildings of the 1140–1180 period survive. St. Frideswide's, although clearly not in the top class of architectural endeavour, is nevertheless a nearly complete building from those years: some elements of its capital sculpture can be paralleled in the known English recipients of French Early Gothic stylistic influences, like the Temple in London, St. Cross Hospital church in Winchester (both c.1160), and of course Canterbury Cathedral choir (1175–79).

However, there are also some capitals (in the chancel only) that show the Anglo-Norman interlace capital in its final form. The leaf forms are sparse and more like frilled lobes than anything natural. The interlace itself has become very tubular; with the degree of undercutting and occasional use of clips to group the tubes together, these capitals have a metallic quality to them. But they retain the bell-rim derived from the Corinthian capital and incorporate masks (and on one capital heads below the volutes), demonstrating their author's background in stone carving. These capitals have little to offer in the creation of the nave and transept capital types, and although of high quality they are not seen outside the chancel.

A smaller third group, again with a classical starting-point, also begins to be seen in the chancel, but is more influential on the development of the capitals of the nave and transepts. In this group, a 'coronet' of large upright leaves of roughly equal size rings the capital, with volutes (and in the transepts crockets) shooting out from behind the coronet to the underside of the abacus at each corner. The leaves in the chancel are derived from the anthemion, but in the nave and transepts the small 5-lobed leaf and the large, ribbed, plantain leaf are used. Sometimes, in the smaller chancel triforium capitals, two coronets are used with the leaves alternating or superimposed.

Pevsner's account also draws attention to the rarity of waterleaf. As the most obvious waterleaf capitals can be seen in the N. transept and as Pevsner believes

³² Sherwood and Pevsner, *op. cit.* note 2.

³³ Francis Bond, *Gothic Architecture in England* (1905), 420–9.

³⁴ J. Newman, *The Buildings of England: NE and E Kent* (1976), 180–1. See L. Stone, *Sculpture in Britain: The Middle Ages*, Pelican History of Art (1955), 102–3 for a comparison of Oxford and Canterbury capitals.

³⁵ Dr. Wilson (*op. cit.* note 30, footnote 38) suggests that some capitals in the chancel aisles 'might almost be the work of a French carver'.

waterleaf 'was popular to about 1190', he concludes that the capitals of the N. transept are the earliest. Consideration of the N. transept W. aisle vaults forces him to reject that conclusion (and ought also have raised doubts about the stylistic dating concepts on which it was based). The earliest waterleaf capital to be seen (if indeed it is medieval) is that on the exterior of the N. window of the sanctuary bay. Given the loss of all the other external capitals of the chancel at aisle and clearstorey level and the simplicity of external capital sculpture in comparison to the interior (still visible in the nave and transepts), there may well have been more waterleaf types originally. But there are few internally: the most obvious are in the N. transept, where two large capitals use waterleaf decoration, though the most numerically are found in the upper levels of the nave where the capital decoration becomes almost rudimentary in its simplicity.

The ubiquitous English multi-scallop capital is hardly seen in the church: most of the capitals to the passageway around the lantern (above the crossing arches) are of this form, and two-scallop capitals exist at clearstorey level in the S. transept. It seems then that this capital design was not welcomed.

In general, the quality of capital design declines in the clearstorey of the transept arms and W. of the first nave bay. Indeed, some of the nave clearstorey-level capitals are barely carved at all, and the westernmost medieval main arcade capitals (thankfully disguised by the organ casing) are extremely poorly carved. The best-quality work is found in the classicizing work of the chancel, and the wreathed head corbel in the N. chancel aisle (visible on Fig. 62) must be considered a first-class piece of medieval sculpture.

DATING EVIDENCE

The internal development of the capital sculpture suggests a building sequence of: chancel, crossing arches and lower levels of N. and S. transepts; upper transept levels, lantern, lower levels of eastern nave bay; rest of nave and clearstorey of first nave bay. Whilst difficult to date accurately, a starting date of *c.*1165–70, with the eastern nave bay being erected *c.*1180–5 (after an input of ideas directly from Canterbury),³⁶ would be acceptable on comparative stylistic grounds. The progressive refinement of the mouldings and the sequence of vault-rib profiles also support such date brackets, though keeling on its own is found as early as *c.*1160 in English Cistercian architecture (and uniquely, as early as 1133 in the Durham chapter-house). With so few of the local Benedictine monasteries (such as Abingdon and Reading) surviving, and with little known of the houses of the reformed orders like Cistercian Thame (*f.c.*1140) and Bruern (*f.*1147), or Augustinian Cirencester (*f.*1131), Dorchester (*f.c.*1140), Missenden (*f.*1133), Notley (*f.* by 1162) and Oseney (*f.* 1129 and created an abbey in 1154), it is difficult to determine accurately a context for the stylistic details at St. Frideswide's. The reformed houses in particular might be expected to show northern French influences in their architecture, though by *c.*1170 the larger Benedictine patrons would have been adopting French stylistic fashions.

Whilst St. Frideswide's was probably not right in the forefront of architectural fashion, the experimental and eclectic nature of the capital sculpture does suggest some adventure and sense of fashion, presumably on the part of the patrons. If those patrons

³⁶ See above and note 24. Although pilgrimages to Becket's place of martyrdom became increasingly popular in the later 1170s (and Prior Robert of Cricklade was one of the first to write of the miracles at the tomb, see note 16), the incomplete choir was first used by the monks on 19 April 1180 (according to Gervase, *op. cit.* note 24) and presumably only generally visible after then.

were successive priors, Robert of Cricklade and Philip, both learned and well-travelled men, it is reasonable to suppose that, despite the use of the giant order elevation system, St. Frideswide's church was built quite quickly in the decades on either side of the translation of the saint's relics in 1180.

This stylistic dating clashes with the only clear documentary reference to the fabric of the church, the Oseney Chronicle passage quoted at the beginning of this article. If the church really was burnt in 1190, the absence of fire-reddened stones inside the church (except the re-used material in the glazed triforium of the S. transept) would imply a later date for the whole fabric. Although this view has recently been accepted by the *V.C.H.* and Pevsner, it makes the building exceptionally *retardataire*, and this seems unlikely in the second half of the 12th century when fashions moved very quickly and when the translation of relics usually marked the successful completion of a building campaign. It is curious that the only fire-reddened feature *in situ*, the chapter-house doorway, was thought worthy of retention when the present splendid chapter-house was built some thirty years later.³⁷ If a Romanesque church suitable for so grand a translation in 1180 had been similarly affected but totally rebuilt, surely this not-very-special piece of Romanesque decoration would have been replaced too?

Two other documentary references to the condition of the church in the 1190s can perhaps throw further light on the Oseney Chronicle statement.³⁸ H.E. Salter prints in full a sermon preached by Alexander Neckam on Ascension Day:³⁹ 'How dreadful is this place of the church of St. Frideswide at this moment and horrible because of the ruin of its walls . . . for the holy church is without a roof and open to the assaults of the air and wind'. Salter suggests Ascension Day 1191 or 1192, following the fire of 1190; but nowhere in the sermon is a fire specifically mentioned as the cause of this sad state of affairs. In the St. Frideswide's Cartulary is a bull of Pope Celestine III, dated 2 June 1194, requesting alms from the faithful to enable the Prior and canons to rebuild their church, 'domos et officinalia . . . vehementis ignis incendio combusta'.⁴⁰

Clearly some intensive fund-raising was underway. The papal bull will obviously state the facts as reported by the beneficiaries, and will almost certainly exaggerate. It is unfortunate that none of the original external S. walls of the church exist, nor any part of the Romanesque cloister other than the chapter-house. Almost certainly, the cloister walks would then have been roofed in wood, and as the reddening is darkest at the putative original floor-level, the remaining fabric does demonstrate that there was a serious fire in the Romanesque cloister that could have taken place in 1190. It did not destroy the Romanesque chapter-house as the canons did not apparently rebuild it until after 1220; the stonework on the rear of the doorway is not reddened either.

The Oseney Chronicle entry was perhaps inaccurate in recording the damage to St. Frideswide's, as indeed it exaggerates the damage to the city: there is little other

³⁷ The date of the building of the chapter-house is, surprisingly, not recorded. Stylistically it can be dated to c.1220-40; it is of very good quality, with fine sculpture to the corbels beneath the vault shafts and on the vault bosses. Given its quality, it is indeed remarkable that the opportunity was not taken to create an equally splendid entrance. Perhaps this was going to be part of a re-building of the E. walk of the cloister - which did not in fact occur until 1489?

³⁸ The editor of the Oseney Chronicle (op. cit. note 3) used the British Library MS. Cotton Tib. A.9, which is written in one hand to 1233 and after that date in different hands.

³⁹ H.E. Salter, *Mediaeval Oxford* (O.H.S. c. 1936), 37.

⁴⁰ *Cart. Frid.* No. 39. The editor notes that this charter is not included in the most reliable copy of the cartulary of c.1415-50, but is included in the earlier copy of c.1310-20.

evidence to suggest that a greater part of the city was also destroyed.⁴¹ Whilst clambering over the roofs in late 1975, I did notice that another fainter roof-line 'shadows' the obvious mortar line of the 12th-century roof flashing. At the base of the N.E. tower 'turret' the ashlar around this fainter line was fire-stained. Although this faint line was outside the stronger mortar line on the E. face of the tower, it was inside the flashing on the other faces and no firemarks could be seen (although the ashlar of the other turrets may have been more thoroughly restored). Is it possible that the chancel roof (and any other roofs existing in 1190) was burnt off, but that the stone vault saved the new chancel? Neckam was accurately bewailing the 'roofless church' but he was referring especially to the unfinished nave and damaged chancel and/or transepts, using his oratory to loosen the purses of his audience!

However, the most convincing evidence against substantial fire-damage to the church is the total lack of references to the relics of St. Frideswide, so recently (and expensively?) translated with great pomp. Prior Philip, who recorded her miracles, was certainly alive in 1191,⁴² and a prior so concerned to promote the cult would surely have taken energetic steps to remedy any loss. As none of the documents mentions damage to the shrine, total destruction of the church in 1190 must be dismissed as an exaggeration of a cloister fire or a serious roof fire.

There can be little doubt that the monastery needed money. By c.1190, the excitement and income generated by the translation and Prior Philip's writings had probably evaporated and the canons were building a church of greater pretension than their funds warranted. Any further expense through fire-damage was no doubt most unwelcome after years of fund-raising. It is very evident from the surviving four nave bays that the high standards of the c.1170 chancel were gone: the work is of poor quality, and without that sense of experimentation visible in the eastern parts. It is also possible that the canons themselves had lost interest in building a nave that could hardly have been of much use to the community. Perhaps it was once intended to make it parochial (as in many other Augustinian houses founded in ancient minsters or colleges),⁴³ and the arrangements had foundered.

Nothing is known of the three nave bays demolished by Cardinal Wolsey, but the speed of his work would suggest that no substantial W. towers were destroyed. The existing central tower and spire are of modest scale for a cathedral, but the latter (Fig. 74) is of especial interest as one of the earliest stone spires remaining in England.⁴⁴ Once again, it is likely to be based ultimately on a French model, as many more stone spires had apparently been built in northern France than in England during the second half of the 12th century. This type of faceted spire (using tall corner pinnacles to effect the visual transition between the octagon and square and with gabled lucarnes to the base of each cardinal face) can be seen in Normandy during the later decades of the 12th century, for instance on the W. towers of St. Etienne at Caen.⁴⁵ There were probably

⁴¹ H.E. Salter (op. cit. note 39) suggests on rather flimsy evidence that St. Mary's church was also burnt, but quotes no other documentary evidence to support the Oseney claim. The 1846 edition of Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vi, 139, also notes that the event is not recorded 'in any other of our ancient chronicles, so that the fact is probably to be discredited'.

⁴² He witnesses a charter dated 4 July 1191 in the Oseney Cartulary (op. cit. note 12, iv, 89).

⁴³ See J.C. Dickinson, *The Origins of the Austin Canons and their Introduction into England* (1950), 233. The parish altar of St. Frideswide's was suppressed in 1298 (below, p. 256).

⁴⁴ Most authoritative accounts suggest a late 12th- or early 13th-century date for the spire: e.g. E.S. Prior, *A History of Gothic Art in England* (1900), 370, although he mistakenly states it to have been 'rebuilt by Sir G.G. Scott'. For a section and a plan of the spire, see *The Builder*, cxxvii (11 July 1924), 41.

⁴⁵ For other examples see E. Lefevre-Pontalis, 'Clochers de Calvados', *Cong. Arch.* lxxv, (1908), ii, 652-84.

more stone spires in England c.1200 than now exist, so it is equally likely that the spire of St. Frideswide's is based on a lost model. The parish churches of Witney and Bampton have 13th-century central steeples (and Shipton-under-Wychwood a W. tower) based on St. Frideswide's, suggesting either that the putative lost model was also in the Oxford area (at Oseney, perhaps?), or that St. Frideswide's had itself introduced the feature to the locality from further afield, even directly from France.

THE 12TH-CENTURY PLAN (Fig. 60; cf. Figs. 95, 97)

Before discussing the plan of St. Frideswide's, its state c.1200 state has to be established. This involves close study of three areas;

1. the W. end of the nave, demolished by Wolsey 1524-5;
2. the N.E. corner between the chancel and the N. transept, rebuilt in the 13th and early 14th centuries (discussed by Richard Morris below, pp. 169-82);
3. the S. transept, substantially altered when the cloister was rebuilt 1489-99, and during Scott's restoration, 1870-6.

Because most of the external walls have been rebuilt at various periods, the only accessible 12th-century walls remaining at ground level are the E. walls of the chancel aisles. The thickness of the 12th-century S. nave aisle wall cannot be determined as the cloister was built onto it in 1489-99 and again in 1870-6. Before he rebuilt the S. chancel aisle wall, Scott noted the thickness as 3 ft. 7 ins.⁴⁶ I have measured the nave and N. transept wall thicknesses at clearstorey level, finding a similar figure varying between 3 ft. 5½ ins. and 3 ft. 7½ ins. When Parker and Harrison were disputing the date and function of the little arches in the E. walls of the Lady Chapel and N. chancel aisle⁴⁷ these walls were carefully measured, and the published drawings give a thickness of 3 ft. 6 ins. for the aisle wall. Therefore, when restoring the exterior walls, I have given them a thickness of 3 ft. 6 ins. (1.067 m.). This figure is very close to the thickness of the round and octagonal piers of the main arcades, which average 3 ft. 5 ins. Published plans also give similar wall-thicknesses, excepting the three walls of the unaisled eastern sanctuary bay which are given a thickness of c.5 ft. 0 ins. by both the R.C.H.M. and the *Builder* plans.⁴⁸ The bases and abaci of the chancel arcades are c.4 ft. 10 ins. (1.27 m.) thick and the N. and S. walls of this bay appear to continue on the same plane as the interior.

1. *The W. end*

The Priory was suppressed in April 1524, and the foundation-stone of Cardinal College laid on 15 July 1525. By early 1526 the E. range 'be upon the outer side erect unto the old church door and in the inner side nigh as far as is required'.⁴⁹ Access to the cathedral church from 1526 to 1876 was via the cloister, through the door still existing in the S. nave aisle wall. The earliest plan I have located, of the early 18th century,⁵⁰ shows a

⁴⁶ In his sketchbook, now in Christ Church Library MS D.P. vii, a.8.

⁴⁷ *Proc. O.H.S.* n.s. v (1885), 88-108.

⁴⁸ *R.C.H.M. Oxford*, 35, and *The Builder* lxii (4 June 1892), drawn by Roland Paul. I have found the latter to be the most consistently accurate.

⁴⁹ L.F. Salzman, *Building in England down to 1540* (1967), 411. The reference to 'all this Christmas' suggests the letter was written early in the year.

⁵⁰ In the Red Portfolio for Oxfordshire in the Society of Antiquaries library dedicated to 'William Bradshaw, Bishop of Bristol' (1724-32) and reproduced in Browne Willis, *Survey of the Cathedrals of England* (1730), iii.

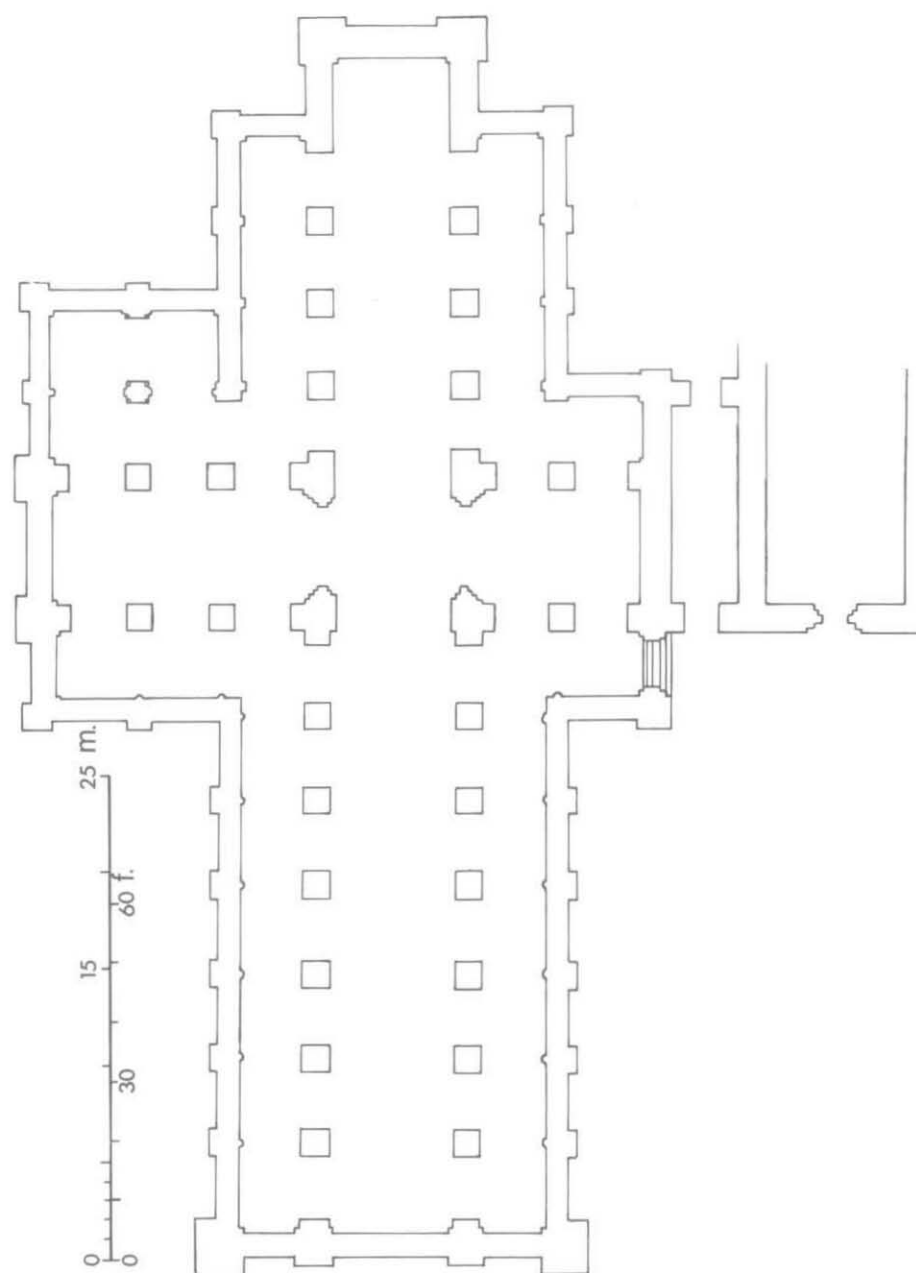


Fig. 60. Ground-plan c.1200.

large W. nave window but no W. door (as the E. range of Tom Quad was not pierced with the present double opening until 1872). Therefore the door mentioned in 1526 is that from the cloister and Wolsey's men had already demolished the medieval W. front. It can safely be assumed, from the shortness of the period, that there were no W. towers of any size and a reference to scaffolding the steeple must be to the existing central tower.⁵¹

Perhaps because four nave bays remained after Wolsey's activities (his new W. wall being built between the fourth pair of piers W. of the crossing),⁵² and perhaps because of the alternating pier system, some writers have thought that four bays were demolished. But most scholars have reckoned that only three bays disappeared, and there are substantial arguments to support this view.⁵³

Up to August 1871 two large foundation walls six feet wide and eighteen feet apart existed under the E. range of Tom Quad, which Buckler considered to be the remains of the W. range of the 12th-century cloister. 'This stubborn piece of Norman builders work was left wherever its room was not wanted. A length of eleven feet is still to be seen with the springers of the stone arch on the sides; the wall at its height is barely six feet.'⁵⁴ He goes on to regret that by August 1871, much old work in the basements of the E. range and under the Great Hall had been removed. The R.C.H.M. plan published in 1939 shows two pieces of foundation work which exactly correspond to Buckler's reported eleven feet of stonework.⁵⁵ New floors have been laid since but Mr. Major (Clerk of Works until 1975) assured me that all work had previously been levelled and nothing could be deduced from the remains.

If the W. foundation line marked on the R.C.H.M. plan is extended northwards, then the W. wall of the church can be determined and the nave completed with three bays. This presumes, of course, that the W. wall of the W. range was in line with the W. wall of the church. But the E. foundation wall is not so easily accounted for. If it is presumed to be the W. wall of the W. cloister walk (as the R.C.H.M. suggests), then the cloister was rectangular and the W. range barely 18 ft. in width. If it is the foundation of the arcade or the E. side of the W. cloister walk, then the cloister could be reconstructed as a square, but the other (westernmost) foundation must represent the eastern wall of the W. range, giving an overlarge W. cloister walk in comparison to the existing work and a W. range that lay completely beyond the W. wall of the church (in itself not without parallel). These walls cannot, therefore, be taken as unequivocal evidence for the site of the W. end of the 12th-century church. Indeed, Buckler himself was able to consider an eight-bay nave on the evidence of these walls and also to suggest a trapezoidal 15th-century cloister.

Further evidence (again not in itself complete proof) for a seven-bay nave comes from the paced dimensions of William Worcestre. In August 1480, this early architectu-

⁵¹ For this subject see above, pp. 70, 128-9 note 25, and below, pp. 205-7.

⁵² The top part of the W. wall and window can be seen in Loggan's c.1675 view, and the gap between the cathedral and the E. range of Tom Quad is visible in Agas's c.1580 view of Christ Church. The account in *The Ecclesiologist*, vii (1847), 47, says of the W. window 'it seems to have been built up again at the destruction of the west front, as well as a Romanesque string below it'.

⁵³ Browne Willis shows four bays in his plan (1730), and Scott promoted four bays in his 1869 privately-printed report. John Britton (1817) thought three bays had gone, and this view is the one most commonly held. Canon Bright (O.H.S. n.s. v, 1888, 109), thought two bays had gone and J.H. Harvey, editing *William Worcestre's Itinerary* (1969), 275, also suggests the nave may have had only six bays originally.

⁵⁴ B.L. MS Add.27765 E. ff 167-8.

⁵⁵ Dr. John Blair has told me (ex inf. Julian Munby) that part of a barrel-vault corresponding with the line of these walls still survives on the W. side of the cloister, where the visitors' toilets were created c.1980.

ral metrologist visited Oxford and paced-out a number of buildings. For St. Frideswide's he states 'Its length is 106 paces and its width 30 paces' (53 ft.).⁵⁶ The most recent editor of the Itinerary, John Harvey, deduces a length of 187 ft. 3½ ins. (57.086 m.) 'in proportion to the width' and so suggests a six-bay nave, with an even alternation system. He then points out the foundation evidence and suggests Worcester paced from the E. end of the S. chancel aisle and not the E. wall of the E. end. It is clear that Worcester usually measured the area beyond the chancel as a separate entity (as it was often a Lady Chapel, as at Oseney Abbey). The width paced was most likely the nave (possibly the transept) as there would be too many obstructions like screens or stalls in the chancel. The nave width averages 53 ft. (16.154 m.), making Worcester's pace 1 ft. 9¼ ins. (0.538 m.) and the 106 pace length, therefore, 187 ft. 3½ ins. (57.075 m.).

The length of the S. chancel aisle and crossing to the W. respond of the W. pier is 82 ft. 5 ins. (25.121 m.). The nave paced by Worcester would therefore be 104 ft. 10 ins. (31.957 m.) long, and if of seven bays each bay would be 14 ft. 11¾ ins. (4.565 m.) wide. The present nave bays average a width of 14 ft. 4¾ ins. (4.387 m.), a discrepancy over seven bays of over 4 ft. (1.22 m.), which is really too great. However, the N. nave aisle wall is late 15th-century work, most likely associated with the Zouch work begun in 1503, after Worcester's visit. At its base this wall is now thinner than any surviving 12th-century wall, and this, combined with the fact that Scott rebuilt most of the S. aisle wall, suggests that Worcester's 30-pace width ought to be based on an average of the chancel and transept widths, 51 ft. 9 ins. (15.773 m.), where more 12th-century walling survives. This dimension then gives a pace of 1 ft. 8¾ ins. (0.527 m.), a nave length of 100 ft. 5 ins. (30.610 m.) and an average bay width (assuming seven bays) of 14 ft. 4 ins. (4.369 m.), almost identical to the four bays that still exist.⁵⁷

2. *The N.E. Corner*

No documentary evidence is available for the development of the area between the N. transept and the N. chancel aisle (Fig. 61), but much structural evidence exists, amplified by the evidence of Sturdy's excavations. The following discussion uses the pier numbering system shown on Fig. 35 (p. 77), and should be read in conjunction with Figs. 36, 60 and 98-100.

The exterior buttress at the N.E. corner of the N. chancel aisle is identical in all respects to that now existing on the S.E. corner of the S. chancel aisle (from Buckler's drawing of c.1850, it is clear that Scott only rebuilt the upper portions of this aisle). It can therefore be identified as a corner buttress, not a flat pilaster buttress as it now appears. Within the church, enough 12th-century shafts and arches exist to give at least two single-bay chapels off the E. side of the N. transept. The very large and awkward central pier (II.3) of the arcade between the Lady and Latin Chapels indicates a substantially earlier, 12th-century core, which could be consistent with the existence here of an external pilaster buttress and internal respond. As the builders in both the 13th- and 14th-century campaigns went to such lengths to keep or re-use old work (rather than replace it), the lack of any 12th-century work in the easternmost pier of this arcade (II.2) strongly indicates that no work of that date ever existed here. David

⁵⁶ Op. cit. note 53. The 53 ft. measurement is presumably taken by Dr. Harvey from the *R.C.H.M.* plan.

⁵⁷ Worcester's pace is obviously a variable measure. Harvey op. cit., note 53 reckons that in 1480 the average was just under 1 ft. 8½ ins. (0.52 m.), which is the smallest average for three years 1478-80, 'a sign of old age?' (p.xviii).

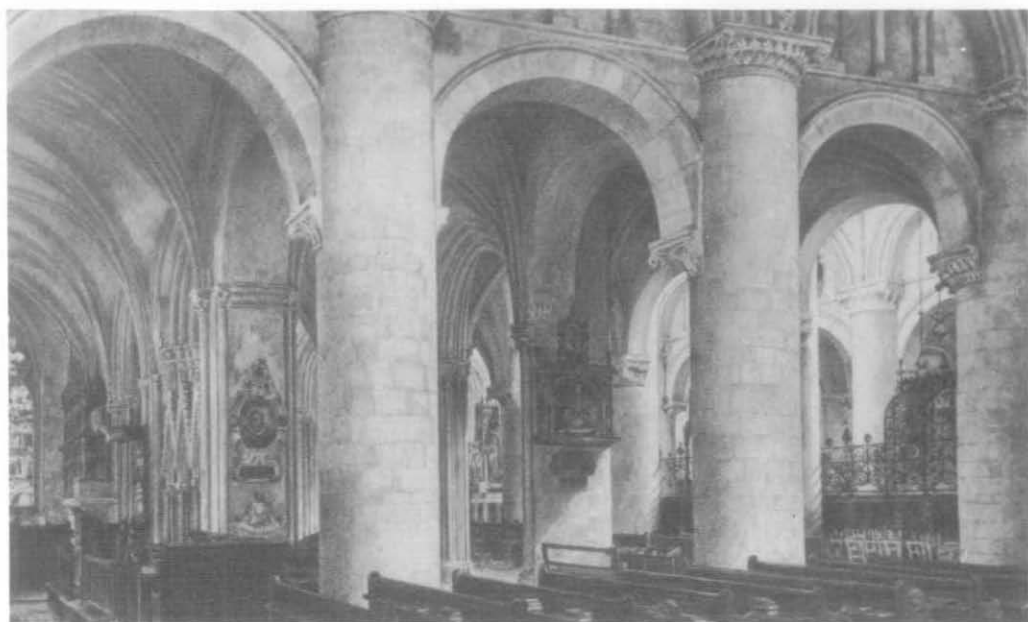


Fig. 61. The N.E. chapels, looking S.E. from the N. transept through its E. aisle. (Painting of 1889: R.C.H.M. Crown copyright reserved.)

Sturdy's excavations in the Latin Chapel and Richard Morris's study of the visible 13th- and 14th-century work (above, p. 94, below pp. 169-75), both reach the same conclusion.⁵⁸

As the 14th-century N. wall of the Latin Chapel has replaced all previous work, the northern extent of the 12th-century chapel is not apparent above ground, but Sturdy's excavations (Fig. 36) have uncovered an earlier foundation that indicates an E.-W. wall continuing the line of the end wall of the N. transept and another foundation running northwards from pier II.3. There is a shaft apparently of late 12th-century date on the N.W. corner of this pier, without a capital and with a 13th-century base. Its position might indicate that it is a nook-shaft, equivalent to that on the W. face of pier II.4. But it stands N.E. of a straight line between piers II.5 and II.4 and its apparently 12th-century stones are larger in diameter than the II.4 nook-shaft. More probably it was a corner shaft to receive the diagonal of a rib-vault (like the shaft existing to the N. of the N. chancel arcade E. respond at the E. end of the N. chancel aisle).

Generally speaking, the N. transept (and noticeably the E. arcade) runs at a N.W. angle to the chancel arcade. It seems from Sturdy's foundations (Fig. 36) and the existing fabric of piers II.4, II.3 and I.4 that the N.E. chapels and the N. chancel aisle were laid out with the chancel in the first phase of work, as they are parallel with the N. chancel arcade and not at right-angles to the E. arcade of the N. transept. However, the style of the capitals and friezes of piers II.4 and I.4 belongs with the second-phase work of the transept.

⁵⁸ It seems that these later campaigns were on a small scale, building the new outer walls first, then demolishing such internal walls as was necessary, using small 'barrow-holes' in the E. wall of the neighbouring chapel/aisle to dispose of the rubble. The outlines of these access points were, because of their crudity, mis-identified as Saxon fabric, especially by J. Park Harrison, *op. cit.* note. 19.

Whilst this slight discrepancy can be attributed to difficulties in laying out the new work while the old fabric still existed (as suggested above, there was probably a transept and 'crossing' tower between the new eastern arm and the 1140s cloister), the great discrepancies in alignment between the piers of the N. transept E. arcade and the E.-W. walls of the N. chancel aisle and chapels must result either from a major error or from a change of plan. The root cause would appear to be the introduction of a S. respond to the E. arcade on the northern face of the N.E. crossing pier. Whilst the vaults are arranged better in the three bays behind the other crossing piers, all involve extending a diagonal rib and/or swinging a transverse arch out of its true arc (at right angles to its springing points).

As the building is generally laid out well it must be assumed that these discrepancies arise from a change of plan, and the most likely alteration is the introduction of an eastern arcade to the transept arms. If the two northern chapels were planned to be two bays deep, running directly E. from an earlier N. transept wall on the line of the existing arcade, then they would be analogous to the transept chapels seen in many mid/late 12th-century monastic houses.⁵⁹ However, the great majority of these chapels are just one bay deep (like the Lucy Chapel off the S. transept) and there is some evidence to suggest that the N. chapels formed one square chapel of four bays around a central pier, II.4. (cf. below, pp. 143-5).

The similarity of the remaining Romanesque work in the N. and S. chancel aisles suggests that they were identical when first built and that the N. wall of the N. chancel aisle was solid throughout its length, i.e. from pier I.4 to I.1. As there is no evidence for a chapel earlier than the existing 13th-century work N. of the two eastern bays of the N. aisle, these bays were presumably only voided by windows, just like their counterparts in the S. aisle. The identical construction of the Romanesque half-shafts surviving on piers I.2 - I.4 strongly suggests that they were all bonded into a wall and none formed part of any sort of ashlar pier. Both aisles use corbels, throughout their length, to receive the diagonal ribs of the 12th-century vault, whereas shafts might be expected (at least on pier I.4 if it had always been a pier). The 13th-century masons seem to have treated all three N. aisle bays in an identical fashion and if there had been any Romanesque piers here (especially at I.4), those masons would surely have created more graceful and accomplished structures than the messy work that exists today.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ A Cistercian example is Fountains Abbey, where two single-bay chapels with solid walls flank a slightly longer inner chapel that connected to the chancel through a doorway; it was not an aisle as existed at St. Frideswide's. Augustinian houses tended not to have aisled chancels, but if aisles existed then there were fewer chapels. Some Benedictine houses founded in the mid to late 12th century reflected the reformed orders in adopting square-ended forms. Ewenny Priory (Monmouth), built and dedicated during the episcopate of Urban, Bishop of Llandaff (1107-34), has two eastern chapels to each transept arm but no chancel aisle: see H. Brakspear, *Arch. J.* lxxviii (1921), 392-3. A closer parallel for St. Frideswide's is the plan of the Benedictine nuns' church at Carrow, Norwich. The S. transept appears to have had two eastern chapels, and the chancel was flanked by a four-bay aisle that terminated in a square end, leaving an aisleless eastern sanctuary (probably of two bays). The abbey was founded in 1146 and the excavated remains suggest the E. end was built soon after: see E. Fernie in *Arch. J.* cxxxvii (1980), 290-1. Once again, the lack of information about the more local houses hampers discussion.

⁶⁰ I suggest that the 13th-century masons propped the N. chancel aisle vault, possibly with a solid 'wall' immediately to the S. of the original solid wall, and then demolished the fabric between the pilaster buttresses behind I.1 and I.2, including any corbel-table and parapet, rather than build an arch in the thickness of the wall below the vault or above any aisle window. Such a temporary wall could explain the over-deep N.-S. measurement of the Romanesque half-shafts. The area around pier I.4 and the creation of the western entrance arch to the new chapel was probably tackled last, given the more complex shoring needed and the different mouldings. These extra difficulties might explain why so great an error was made when placing the capitals on the E. side of pier I.4.



Fig. 62. Top of pier I.4 from the W., showing the thick transverse rib of the transept aisle vault, and the frieze of five-lobed leaves cut on the left by the 13th-century Lady Chapel work and on the right by the Goodwin monument. To the top-right is the undisturbed late 12th-century masonry of the S.W. corner of the pier. (Ph. John Blair.)

The W. end of the wall, now pier I.4 (Fig. 62), was presumably like its counterpart existing between the S. chancel aisle and the Lucy Chapel: a plain unchamfered mass of masonry (literally the W. end of the S. wall of the S. chancel aisle), with a length of decorated frieze beneath the springing of the transverse arch. Unfortunately, the rebuilding and repair which pier I.4 has undergone over the centuries (not least the insertion of the monument to William Goodwin, d.1620), has rendered detailed analysis of its stonework an almost impossible task. However, it would seem that the stonework to its upper S.W. corner (rising above the monument), between the transverse arch and the diagonal rib of the vault behind the N.E. crossing-pier (D on Fig. 36), is the original 12th-century work. The frieze of upright five-lobed leaves (virtually identical to those used in the equivalent position in the S. transept aisle) did not run all the way to the S.W. corner. The existing break to the left of the monument is so neat because the frieze was formed on two stones, as on the adjacent pier II.4 (where the leaves are slightly different in form on each stone and quite different to the leaf forms of I.4). It can therefore be presumed that there were no corner nook-shafts such as exist on pier II.4.

By analogy with its S. aisle equivalent, and as the end of a solid wall, the W. face of what is now pier I.4 should have been about 3 ft. 8 ins. (1.12 m.) wide. Its present width is nearly 5 ft. (1.51 m.), including an added 13th-century corner-shaft (E on Fig. 36) that supports the 12th-century diagonal rib of the middle aisle bay and part of the remaining 12th-century frieze. Although this diagonal rib has been extended by the 13th-century mason (in almost vertical stones) to more neatly meet the new corner shaft,⁶¹ it replaces

⁶¹ This diagonal rib has the same profile as the diagonal ribs of the vaults in the N. transept W. aisle, N. nave aisle (where the stone springers survive on the piers) and the eastern bay of the S. nave aisle.

the northern edge of the unmoulded transverse arch that has clearly been shaved away. This arch once sprang directly from the original plain ashlar N.W. corner, as can be seen in the equivalent position in the S. transept. The diagonal rib originally died away behind the arch, like the other 12th-century diagonals.

Therefore, the W. face of what is now pier I.4 must have had a width of at least 5 ft. (1.52 m.), which is surely too great a thickness for the solid wall proposed between the N. chancel aisle and the N. transept chapel, i.e. between piers I.3 and I.4. It is likely, then, that this part of the fabric was built unsymmetrical and with an awkward shape.

When creating his Lady Chapel, the 13th-century mason had numerous problems to solve at this point. His new capitals were at a lower level than the Romanesque; his chapel width was constrained by Romanesque work in piers I.4, II.3 and II.4; and his re-fashioning of the piers and walls was further constrained by the obvious need to support the existing vaults of the N. chancel aisle, N. transept E. aisle and, presumably, the pre-Latin Chapel. By setting the Lady Chapel entrance arch from the N. transept aisle behind the aisle vault, the structural stability of the surrounding vaults was assured without compromising the new work. The supporting triple-shafts probably replaced Romanesque half-shafts like that still existing on the N. aisle of pier II.4 at (F). The visual integrity of the new work was further enhanced by using a vault rib profile not dissimilar to that existing in the N. transept aisle.

Morris suggests (below, p. 173) that in building the Lady Chapel, early 13th-century masons 'cut through the former wall to the pre-Latin Chapel'. But the crude stonework above the 13th-century arch between piers II.4 and II.3 might also be read as the remains of a 12th-century arch. In particular, the square-edged stones at the springing-points on the Latin Chapel side seem too crude to be associated with either the Lady or Latin Chapel works. The rather poor correlation of the 13th-century capitals and their supporting shafts on the W. face of pier II.3 and the survival of the 12th-century nook-shaft suggest that more was done than simply piercing a wall. There was of course a rib-vault to the pre-Latin Chapel, probably similar to those of the E. transept aisle.

The surviving 12th-century parts of pier II.4 (Fig. 63, left) suggest that this pier could have been free-standing. It differs from the western 'ends' of the chancel aisle outer walls by having corner nook-shafts, the northernmost 'supporting' the broad transept aisle transverse arch (with no sign now of where the diagonal rib of the end bay vault sprang from) and the southernmost supporting the diagonal rib of the centre aisle bay, which just clips the corner of the transverse arch. Between the shafts runs a length of foliage-decorated frieze.⁶² On the N. face of pier II.4 is a 12th-century attached half-shaft complete with its capital (F), now supporting a 14th-century vault-rib in the Latin Chapel, but for which an exact parallel exists on the west aisle wall of the N. transept. On the S. face of the pier, a presumed matching shaft has been replaced by the triple shaft of the early 13th-century Lady Chapel. Yet the short length of plain ashlar east of this triple shaft appears to be 12th-century, ending in a chamfer at the S.E. corner. Thirteenth-century shafts are now attached to the E. face.

If there was a solid wall between the Lady and Latin Chapels (as between the N. chancel aisle and Lady Chapel), why were the nook-shafts used? If pier II.4 is reconstructed as a square pier with nook-shafts to each corner and larger attached half-shafts to the N. and S. faces, the arch between its E. face and a reconstructed E.

⁶² At Fountains Abbey, similar nook-shafts disguise the lower level of the transverse arch springing-point compared to the adjacent main arcade. The Fountains piers would otherwise be a variant of the giant order column principle. Woburn Abbey was founded in 1145, directly from Fountains; might it have had a similar system?

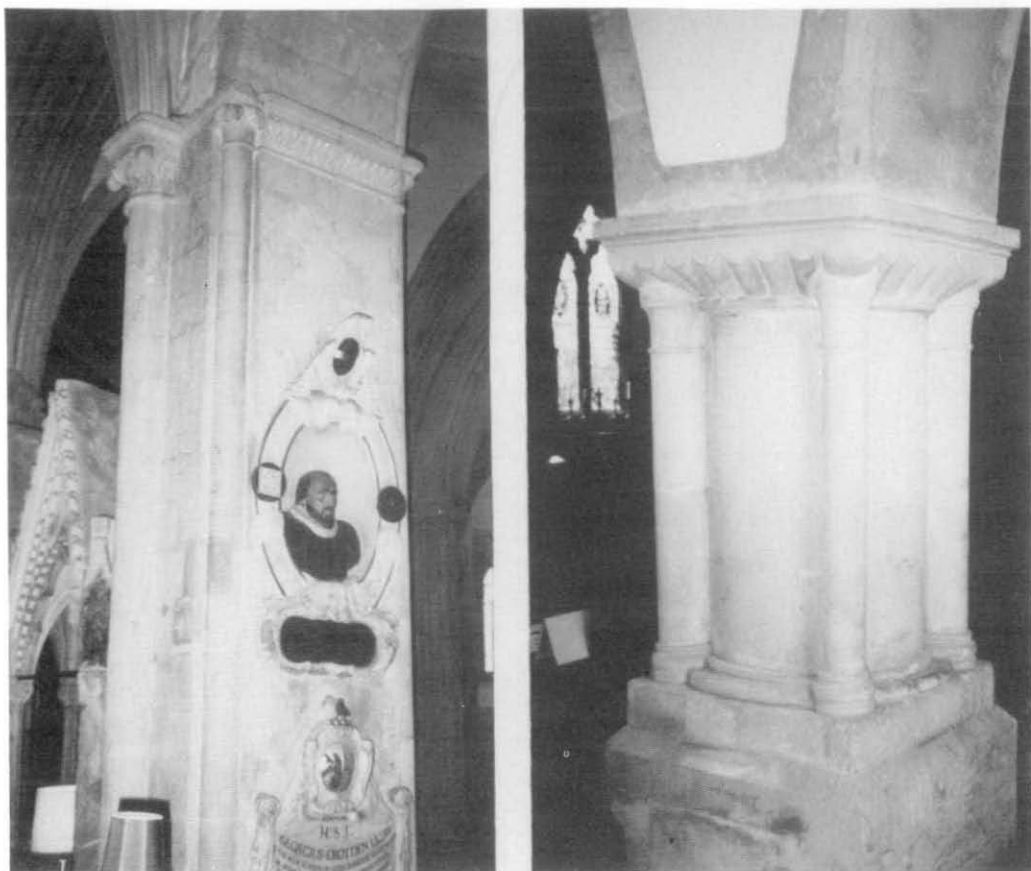


Fig. 63. Left: Pier II.4 from the N.W. Right: Islip, N. arcade pier. (Phh. John Blair)

respond on the W. face of pier II.3 (below the rough putative 12th-century arch) would span the same width as the arch between piers II.4 and II.5. Quite how the resulting double (or 4-bay?) chapel would work liturgically is difficult to conjecture. By c.1180 transept chapels are inter-connecting architecturally, even if sub-divided at ground level by substantial stone walls as at Ripon Minster.

The proposed reconstruction of II.4 is not a common pier-type for a major building, but excavations of the Augustinian Priory of St. Martin at Dover (founded by Archbishop William Corbeil in 1131 and reported as complete in 1139) also showed such a pier for the nave arcades.⁶³ The responds of the choir aisles at the point of entry to the transepts at St. Cross, Winchester (c.1150) and at St. Serge, Angers (c.1220) adopt a similar form, with nook-shafts linked by a length of frieze continuing the foliage of the nook-shaft capitals (i.e. just one half of the proposed Oxford pier). In parish churches, of course, this pier-type is more common, especially if the pier is the result of

⁶³ *Archaeologia Cantiana*, iv (1861), 1. The N. nave arcade of the Arrouasian Augustinian nuns' church at Harrold (Beds.) also has rectangular piers with corner nook-shafts. *V.C.H. Beds.* iii, 63, considers this arcade to be punched through an older wall.

an arcade 'punched through' an existing wall. There are examples local to Oxford at Little Missenden, Bucks. (c.1180) and Stanford Dingley, Berks. (c.1220).⁶⁴ Only seven miles from Oxford, at Islip church, a late 12th-century N. arcade includes an odd pier that may reflect that proposed at St. Frideswide's (Fig. 63, right).⁶⁵ It is a drum with four attached corner shafts; the E. and W. responds of the same N. nave arcade have flat faces with nook-shafts.

The thick, unmoulded semi-circular transverse arches of the two eastern aisles of both N. and S. transepts (Fig. 62) are identical to – if narrower than – the lower arches of the main arcades, and quite unlike the earlier transverse arches of the chancel aisles. Their uncompromising form demonstrates that the master-mason was still thinking in terms of building compartments to fill with vaults in the Romanesque manner, rather than considering all the major structural components of walls and vaults as integral parts of a single system. Yet in the chancel aisles, the N.–S. transverse arches are already of much thinner section with a hollow-chamfer edge. It can only be presumed (as with the crossing arches) that these square-edged, thick arches were considered appropriate to their E.–W. position, defining the principal compartments of the buildings.

Exactly when the decision was made to create aisled transepts is not clear, though it must have pre-dated the decision to use pier alternation in the nave. Such a date is certainly sustainable on stylistic grounds. The W. bay of each chancel aisle (that also forms the inner bay of the E. aisle of each transept arm) has the diagonal rib mouldings of the first-period chancel aisle vaults. The bay behind the N.E. crossing-pier is the most deformed, and this is directly attributable to the positioning of its N.W. springing-point, on the columnar pier I.5, much further N. (about 18 ins., 0.457 m.) than its N.E. springing-point, on pier I.4. So whereas the N.E.–S.W. arch describes the less-than semicircular shape common to all the chancel aisle diagonal ribs, the northern half of the S.E.–N.W. arch is much elongated to reach pier I.5. Something similar happens to the equivalent rib in the bay behind the S.E. crossing-pier, but it is less distorted because the S. transept E. arcade has narrower bay widths (13 ft. 3.96 m.) than the N. transept (14 ft. 4 ins., 4.388 m.).

From this evidence, it follows that the whole chancel arcade (including the W. responds) and the chancel aisle walls were far advanced before the change of plan was initiated. If the first-period campaign work was advancing W. onto an existing building, then it is likely that the external walls of the N.E. chapel were also well under way (although the discrepancy between piers II.5 and II.4 is much less obvious and as much attributable to the shift in axis between the N. transept and chancel as to the new arcade). The puzzling feature is the perverse use of these thick arches. They can hardly have been advanced much beyond the first springing stones on the eastern side of the aisle before the columnar arcade piers existed, given the significant inclination in their arc. The chapels and aisles might have been intended to have solid walls right up to the eastern wall of an aisleless transept arm (sited on the line of the present E. arcade). The thick transverse arches could then be the result of some demolition of solid walling. However, this seems improbable as surely the opportunity would have been taken to

⁶⁴ Little Missenden in *V.C.H. Bucks.* ii, 358–59; Stanford Dingley in *V.C.H. Berks.* iv, 112. Other examples near Oxford can be found at Wraysbury (*V.C.H. Bucks.* iii, 324–25), N. arcade c.1200; and at Turweston (*V.C.H. Bucks.* iv, 253), where there are compound piers of a similar type c.1190.

⁶⁵ A close parallel for the Islip pier can be seen in the undercroft of the E. range and in the chapter-house of Rievaulx Abbey (Yorks.), c.1150–60, which may indicate the possibility of a more local monastic source. Font supports also take a similar form, e.g. Iffley.

make a better job of pier I.4 and both it and the S. transept equivalent are apparently first-phase work.

I suggest that the original intention was to have arches exactly as those existing, but springing on the W. from decorated friezes inserted into either an existing E. transept wall or into square 'piers' similar to the western face of II.4. The western entrance arch to each chancel aisle would also spring from a length of frieze, or possibly a half-shaft (or two) attached to the rear of the crossing-pier.⁶⁶ The appearance of the transept elevation would then be like that still to be seen in many Cistercian or Augustinian houses, e.g. Fountains Abbey. Having decided on this formula, the columnar pier arcade was simply substituted for the original wall and frieze and the original idea of a 'transverse' arch retained. The vaults were subsequently erected within the spaces formed by these large arches.

Throughout the chancel aisles, the awkward springing-points on the main arcade piers and the extensive use of corbels indicates a greater familiarity with groin-vaults. The giant order system does not help, of course, but a tidier appearance could have been obtained (and was in the nave aisle vaults) by a master more experienced in rib-vaulting techniques. It is possible that groin-vaults were present in the prototype and envisaged at Oxford, the decision to use rib-vaults only being taken during construction. The solid walls of the transept and nave middle 'storey' disguise the higher apex of their aisle vaults, whereas in the chancel there is an odd sloping sill to the voided openings. As only one shaft rises up the main elevation, the high vault of the chancel may also have used corbels for the diagonal ribs, reflecting their use in the aisle vaults. The survival of the capitals in the S. transept shows that all the ribs of the high vault there sprang from one capital, reflecting the system of the nave and N. transept W. aisle.

The arcades of the transepts and nave have slightly larger average bay-widths than the chancel arcades. This alteration was probably made at the same time as the main space width between the arcades was increased to allow for the addition of a nook-shaft on each crossing-pier. But the additional shaft to the N.E. crossing-pier (marked G on Fig. 35) only exacerbated the difficulties in aligning column 1.5 of the second-phase N. transept E. arcade with the existing respond, the W. face of pier 1.4. In such a prominent position, the elevation of this bay could hardly be squashed-up without doing serious visual harm. The columnar pier 1.5 was therefore positioned to allow a uniform bay size, and all the re-alignments to match it to the existing first-phase work were made within the aisle bay. The result is a mis-shapen vault, messy springing-points, the very irregular pier 1.4 and an awkward junction between the half-column responds of the N. chancel and N. transept E. arcades (emphasized by the stylistic changes). Even without the nook-shaft, it is clear that no allowance had been made for a half-column respond (G) when the chancel was laid out, supporting the theory that the N. transept was not originally conceived with aisles.

The equivalent eastern chapel of the S. transept (St. Lucy Chapel) confirms the argument that the concept of an eastern arcade to the transepts was introduced when the first phase of work was nearing completion. The transverse arch between the first columnar pier S. of the crossing-pier and the end of the S. chancel aisle wall is skewed to the S.W. to rise more neatly from the latter. However, the bay sizes here are quite different (and smaller) than elsewhere, because of the existence of the slype and chapter-house, of late 1140s date.

⁶⁶ Twin attached shafts are used for the entrance arches to the chancel aisles of Gloucester Cathedral and Tewkesbury Abbey, the latter having a giant order and both using an elongated crossing-pier form. The square piers could have been further articulated to the W. with an attached half-shaft rising up the elevation (rather like the shafts on pier II.4).

3. *The S. transept*

The planning of this part of the church was complicated by the existence of at least an E. range, if not a complete cloister, no more than forty years old at the time of the translation in 1180 (and some buildings were probably barely finished). Obviously it was not intended to destroy this new work and perhaps the original plan was to have just a two-bay, aisleless S. transept. If the chancel was begun E. of an older church (as argued above), then the equivalent of a two-bay S. 'transept' presumably already existed. Once the decision was taken to rebuild the whole transept with aisles, the slype (with its lower floor-level) had to be absorbed into the body of the church. As previously explained, although on a ground-plan the N. transept appears to be one bay larger than the S., both have three bays in elevation. The southernmost bay of the S. transept at both triforium and clearstorey levels is carried over the slype passage, allowing the southern gable wall to rise up from the N. wall of the late-1140s chapter-house. Measuring from the centre of the crossing-piers to the outer walls, both transept arms are about 47 ft. (14.325 m.) in length.

The present Early English style of the N. wall of the slype and its upper chamber is by G.G. Scott, who had no evidence for either the style, the two openings or even for creating an accessible gallery. Evidence existed for the stairway up from the church to a room over the slype and the door from the church down into the slype, the slype floor level being over 4 ft. (1.22 m.) below the church floor. Despite the indignation expressed by the *Ecclesiologist* in 1847,⁶⁷ it was only in 1871 that Scott demolished the verger's house that had filled the last bay of the S. transept from floor to ceiling. He may have just re-faced some of the lower parts of the wall facing into the church, but otherwise all disappeared down to the level of the slype barrel-vault crown (about 5 ft. 6 ins. (1.676 m.) above transept floor level). The cloister end of the slype had been re-modelled when the present cloister was built in 1489-99, so Scott restored the barrel-vault at this end and removed the partition that had divided the slype passage.⁶⁸ While Scott's works were under way, J.C. Buckler took it on himself to provide a detailed record of the 12th-century evidence discovered (and frequently destroyed), and his drawings are invaluable for reconstructing the original appearance of this area (Fig. 64).⁶⁹

From Buckler's work, it is clear that Scott re-made the two 12th-century levels as he found them, and although the rib-vaulted room over the slype is a total re-build the original vault profiles etc. were followed. One or two original voussoirs are re-used, and an original typically early to mid 12th-century monster-head corbel was re-used and copied for the others. The door adjacent to the S. respond of the E. transept arcade was unblocked by Scott, and the staircase immediately behind (blocked when the verger's house was created and wooden staircases inserted) was re-opened to give access to the upper room. This seems to have been the only medieval entry. The steps from the room onto its roof, i.e. the gallery floor, are Scott's invention, and since there has never been any access to this gallery floor from the clearstorey passage it appears in the middle ages to have been a dead area, like the space over a chantry chapel.⁷⁰

There may have been a door in the S. wall of the rib-vaulted upper room giving

⁶⁷ 'In so vast a college, the hire of a single room cannot be dispensed with, but the House of God must be defiled', referring to the verger's house rising to the roof of the S. transept, with a large chimney built out of the S. gable window: *The Ecclesiologist*, iii (1847), 48.

⁶⁸ See the plan of 1820 in Britton's *Cathedrals*, op. cit. note 21, for the pre-Scott arrangement.

⁶⁹ B.L. MS Add. 27765 E and F.

⁷⁰ Access to the S. transept clearstorey is still gained today by means of a wooden ladder (of some age!).

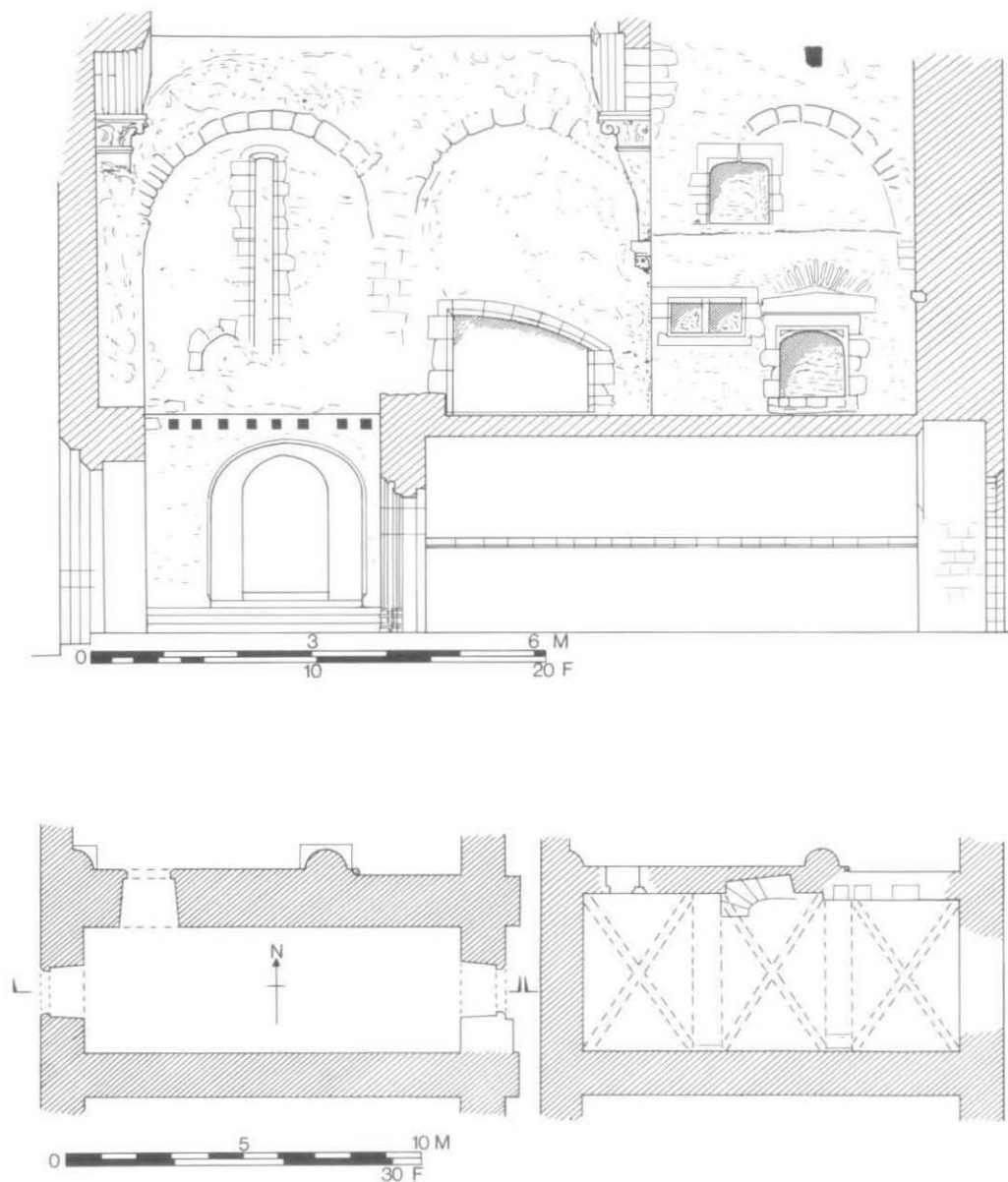


Fig. 64. The slype and vaulted chamber: section looking N. and ground-plans, by J.C. Buckler, 1870.
(Re-drawn from B.L. MS Add. 27765E ff. 56, 80^v by John Blair.)

access to the upper floor of the E. range, which was presumably a dormitory. A night stair might then have existed through the upper room and down the present stairway to the church; there is certainly much wear to the plinth of the E. arcade respond adjacent to the door, indicating heavier traffic than the occasional sacristan, if, indeed, the upper room did function as a sacristy.⁷¹ Such use, with its need for security, does not seem compatible with regular night-time access. Certainly there can have been no access across the W. end of the present chapter-house of c.1230.

Buckler concluded from the evidence in front of him that the S. transept was originally built complete up to the existing chapter-house wall, the slype passage and the room over it being built into the church 'shortly after its completion', i.e. very late in the 12th century.⁷² Apart from the contorted arguments he uses to support this idea – for instance, he omits to mention the huge width of the southernmost bay, patently forced to be of this size by the pre-existence of the slype – there is the problem of levels. The slype today has a concrete floor that is 4 ft. 2½ ins. (1.28 m.) below the church floor level; the apex of its barrel-vault is about 9 ft. 10 ins. (2.99 m.) above the floor, or c.5 ft. 6 ins. (1.67 m.) above the transept floor-level. The floor above the vault (i.e. the floor of the upper room) is c. 7 ft. 3 ins. (2.21 m.) above church floor-level. As the present paving of the 1489 E. cloister walk is another 1 ft. 1¾ ins. (0.349 m.) below the slype floor, it follows that there is now a difference of 5 ft. 4 ins. (1.625 m.) between church and cloister levels. It is clearly nonsense to suggest that the slype has been hollowed-out of the church foundations. The chapter-house floor has, like the others, been re-laid and the 12th-century entrance arch jambs have been repaired at their bases, so the 12th-century floor levels are strictly speaking, unknown. It is likely (as Martin Biddle has suggested, see below pp. 241–2) that the chapter-house door-jambs were lowered after the 1190 fire, suggesting that the original cloister level was some 18 inches lower than the church floor-level.

From Buckler's drawings, it is certain that the upper room above the slype was added to the main piers of the post-1180 work; yet both the original corbel and the profile of the vault-ribs are unparalleled within the church and could easily be up to fifty years earlier in date. Perhaps the vault has been re-used from a demolished structure (it could even have been originally built c.1150 in a similar room above the slype). Although not a happy compromise, this is not a very important part of the church; and it is obvious from the contrast between the nave and the high-level work in both transepts that money became tight and the initial quality was not maintained. The essential point is that the present S. transept was built onto an existing chapter-house and slype, the 'upper room' being built (probably as a sacristy) above the barrel-vaulted slype, whose floor was considerably lower than the new church floor-level.

At St. Frideswide's this issue is made more complicated by the evidence for the existence of a W. aisle to the S. transept from the late 12th century to the building of the present cloister after 1489. Both Buckler and Scott were convinced that a western aisle was built and demolished to make way for the present N. cloister walk, after 1489. Both suggested that there was no 12th-century N. cloister walk (at least once the present church was built), but Buckler proposed a two-bay W. aisle, therefore enclosing the

⁷¹ There are later 12th-century ground-floor vaulted rooms, most probably built as sacristies, at Ely (where the W. aisle of the S. transept was walled off), Peterborough (where a new building was added to the W. side of the S. transept), Hereford (where a sacristy was added to the E. side of the S. transept) and Old Sarum, though the large building at the N. end of the N. transept there is possibly more analogous to the Treasury Prior Wibert added to the N. side of the Canterbury Cathedral.

⁷² B.L. MS Add. 27765E, ff. 63–78.

slype entrance within the church proper, a rather unlikely solution in view of the different levels and the usual open corridor function of a monastic slype.

Buckler's drawings make it clear that the engaged column at the corner of the S. transept and S. nave aisle was built as a free-standing column and was subsequently enclosed.⁷³ This was surmised by a number of 19th-century writers⁷⁴ but not by the R.C.H.M.: 'the engaged cylindrical column of the transept arcade has the half-capital of its sub-arch cut into the wall of the aisle, which seems to imply that this wall is of earlier date than the general design of the church.'⁷⁵ However, the Commission's plan indicates the whole of the S. aisle S. wall and the W. wall of the S. transept to be of one 12th-century date. The text does not discuss the possibility of there having been a W. aisle, or the problem of the 12th-century cloister access.

Although there is a straight-joint between the wall and the column masonry, the tooling either side looks very similar, probably because of the 19th-century cleaning.⁷⁶ Both the windows of the two eastern bays and most of the walls and windows of the other two bays are Scott's work, as is virtually all the cloister side of the wall. There is no evidence for the R.C.H.M.'s 'earlier wall' and neither Scott or Buckler claimed to have seen one, although the latter did note that the walling on demolition contained many worked 12th-century stones, likely to have come from the first cloister. Further evidence in favour of this aisle wall being of 15th-century date, at least in its lower courses between the late 12th-century responds, is the remains of an internal low bench in the two eastern bays, only otherwise found along the 15th-century N. nave wall.⁷⁷ Finally, if not conclusively, there is no parallel in original medieval work for such a corner 'engaged column' and particularly not at St. Frideswide's. On the N. side, although the N. nave aisle wall is a 15th-century rebuild, the corner with the W. aisle of the N. transept is original late 12th-century work, the vault of this shared bay being undisturbed and of stone, unlike the plaster vaults in the rest of the N. nave aisle. There is no attempt even to chamfer the corner: like the corners between the transepts and chancel aisles, it is square and undecorated.⁷⁸

The conclusion to be drawn is surely that the S. nave aisle wall is abutting the column, its capital and base. The capital and its foliage decoration continue (as far as can be seen) on the obscured W. face, but the springing stones of the diagonal vault rib overlap it by a few inches. This cannot have been the original arrangement and once again, it seems that the rib has been extended and to a different curvature. It originally would have died into the angle formed above the capital between the transverse arch and the lower arch of the W. transept main elevation. As the S. nave aisle vaults seem on stylistic grounds to be the last to be erected, it is just possible (but in my view unlikely) that this change in curvature and the blocking-off of the S. transept W. aisle took place soon after the erection of the column, i.e. the aisle was intended in c.1180-90 when the S. transept was being built, but abandoned once the nave aisle came to be vaulted, c.1210-20.

⁷³ Ibid., ff. 54-5, 80v-81.

⁷⁴ See, for instance, John Britton's 1820 plan (op. cit. note 21) and Roland Paul's plan in *The Builder*, lxi (June 4, 1882).

⁷⁵ R.C.H.M. *Oxford*, plan 36, text 40-41.

⁷⁶ 'The interior stonework has been cleaned and made good' (*The Builder*, xxix, October 21, 1871). It is always possible, of course, that these are 12th-century ashlar re-used c.1489 and it is not known whether Scott revealed this junction in his restoration.

⁷⁷ A bench also exists on the S. chancel aisle wall, but this is apparently all Scott's work.

⁷⁸ Although all published plans (except the large College plan in R.C.H.M. *Oxford*) show an attached half-shaft to the nave wall, none exists - and presumably has not existed since the c.1500 rebuilding of the N. aisle wall.

If this W. aisle was built, then it is likely that there was just one bay S. of the nave aisle, its S. wall in line with the S. wall of the St. Lucy Chapel-cum-E. aisle. A door in this wall would then lead to a few steps descending to the E. cloister walk, finishing in front of the slype entrance (which was presumably an open archway). Although not symmetrical with the three-bay aisles of the N. transept, the S. transept arm with its two-bay aisles would at least have aisles that echoed each other. On the W. side of the S. transept, the existing infill wall (on which is mounted the 1683 wall monument to Edward Littleton, Lord Mounslowe) is set within an arch, with a hood-mould like all the other lower arches of the main elevation, which surrounds the abaci of the lower main arcade capitals. As neither the chancel or the transepts continue the giant order elevation on their gable walls, it is unlikely that such an arched feature would have been used here if a solid wall had been intended. Therefore, the column flanking the slype was presumably structurally identical to its equivalent on the E. side of the transept; that is, a quarter capital at the lower level, with an attached shaft to the aisle side and a complete upper capital.⁷⁹

It is not common to have steps up from a cloister into a transept, rather than into a nave aisle. For instance, both the surviving Romanesque cathedrals with aisled transepts, Ely and Winchester, have doors leading directly into the nave.⁸⁰ It is most unlikely that any eastern nave door existed at St. Frideswide's, as the chapter-house entrance is in line with the W. arcade of the S. transept and not its W. wall. If any 12th-century door and staircase had existed in the nave aisle wall, then it can be expected to have been retained or re-modelled when the present cloister was created after 1489.⁸¹ At that time, the slype was altered so that the S. transept could be reached from the E. cloister walk via its western end, and a flight of steps cut into the N. slype wall, an arrangement seen in pre-1870 plans. The ogee'd water-stoup carved out of the S. 'respond' of the W. arcade of the S. transept is adjacent to this door and consistent with a post-1489 date. It may replace a similar feature on the other side of this 'respond', now buried in the infill wall.⁸²

If it is accepted that the pre-1489 access to the E. cloister walk was through the S. wall of the W. aisle of the S. transept, then the N. walk of the cloister either had an 'elbow' bend around the S. transept, or came to a stop against the transept W. wall. Neither of these suggestions has a parallel; perhaps it was thought preferable to do away with the late-1140s N. cloister walk – if, of course, it had been built. A close parallel for such a cloister exists at Wells Cathedral (as both Buckler and Scott recognised), where both transepts have E. and W. aisles and the first Lady Chapel, sited E. of the E. walk, was aligned with the W. arcade of the S. transept, i.e. in the manner of the chapter-house at St. Frideswide's.⁸³ A doorway and a flight of five steps connects the

⁷⁹ The top of the upper capital abacus can still be seen, buried in the gallery floor: Buckler drew the battered remains of the decoration (B.L. MS Add. 27765E ff. 57–8).

⁸⁰ Ely also has a door leading into the S. transept W. aisle, but through the W. wall, and this aisle was made into a sacristy at about the same time as the door was built, c.1140.

⁸¹ Neither Buckler nor Scott reported finding any E. doorway when the N. cloister walk was rebuilt by the latter. I presume that there was a W. cloister door in one of the bays that Wolsey demolished, the present doorway having been made c.1526 to compensate for the lack of either a W. or N. entrance for the public. This door is now Scott's work, and I have found no illustration of its previous appearance. Britton's plan (op. cit. note 21, pl.I), like others, shows a porch with straight sides like the doorway itself, perhaps incorporating parts of the cloister. The staircase shown by Britton leading down to the E. cloister walk from Keene's Muniment Room of 1772 is precisely the form of staircase I propose existed in the late 12th century.

⁸² There may always, of course, have been a door between the slype and the 12th-century church, e.g. as at Roche Abbey (Yorks.), but such a door is never a principal entrance to the cloister.

⁸³ W. Rodwell, 'The Lady Chapel by the Cloister at Wells Cathedral and the site of the Anglo-Saxon Cathedral', in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Wells and Glastonbury* (Trans. of B.A.A. Conference 1978, 1981), 1–9.

W. aisle of the S. transept with the E. cloister walk and no N. walk was ever built. Wells was not monastic, but the secular canons needed a cloister for study and recreation and to reach the Lady Chapel. The Bishop also used the E. walk to reach his Palace. The Wells cloister was probably planned with the earliest phase of c.1180 and so may have been available as a prototype for St. Frideswide's (unless, of course, a destroyed church elsewhere also had such an arrangement). However, the actual doorway at Wells between the church and the E. walk has capitals closer in style to those of the nave than the transept, so was probably not built until c.1190.

Therefore, St. Frideswide's had a W. aisle of two bays to its S. transept and no N. cloister walk (or at least, none connected to the E. walk until after 1489). The eastern access to the cloister was through a door in the S. wall of the W. aisle. After 1489, access was obtained through the W. end of the slype, there were normal N. and E. walks to the cloister, as now, and the S. transept W. aisle was removed and the arcade blocked-up. To compensate for the loss of a lower-level window, the triforium of the middle bay of the W. side was pierced and glazed, reusing mid 12th-century material from the recently demolished cloisters. Access from the W. walk of the cloister was presumably through a door in one of the nave bays demolished by Wolsey: the existing door in the S. nave aisle wall was created c.1526.

MEASUREMENTS

It has long been known that medieval buildings were erected with the aid of geometry and the use of numerical ratios, but it is only since the last war that a more systematic study of the proportions used in English great churches has taken place. This has demonstrated that the $1:\sqrt{2}$ proportion is the most consistently used proportional system in early medieval architecture.⁸⁴ Geometrically it is simply generated, being the relationship of the side of a square to its diagonal. But arithmetical equivalents of this ratio had also been known since Antiquity, and these series of figures formed part of the mason's jealously-guarded craft secrets.⁸⁵

The clearest uses of the $1:\sqrt{2}$ ratio at St. Frideswide's are seen in the smaller elements. For instance, the columnar piers have an average diameter of 3 ft. 5 ins. (1.04 m.) and their bases a square of 4 ft. 9 ins. (1.44 m.); the average width of the chancel aisles is 11 ft. 2 ins. (3.40 m.) which multiplied by $\sqrt{2}$ gives the internal width of the aisle and the arcade, 15 ft. 9 ins. (4.80 ins.).⁸⁶ On a larger scale, the internal length of the single eastern bay is in a $1:\sqrt{2}$ relationship with its width, i.e. 14 ft. : 19 ft. 10 ins. (4.26 m. : 6.05 m.).

The important levels in the elevation are also in a $\sqrt{2}$ sequence. The height of the abacus of the lower arch of the giant order is 14 ft. 7 ins. (4.45 m.) above floor level; when multiplied by $\sqrt{2}$, the height of the upper capital abacus is reached, 20 ft. 6 ins. (6.25 m.). When this measurement is multiplied by $\sqrt{2}$, the result is 28 ft. 11 ins. (8.81 m.) the height of the main vault springing point. Used again, the $\sqrt{2}$ calculation gives 41 ft.

⁸⁴ The basic groundwork was laid by Prof. Peter Kidson in his unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, *Systems of Measurement and Proportion in Early Mediaeval Architecture*, University of London, 1956. Prof. Eric Fernie has measured a number of Romanesque buildings, but only his findings at Norwich and Ely have been published. 'The Ground Plan of Norwich Cathedral and the Square Root of Two', *J.B.A.A.* cxxix (1976), 77-86; and 'Observations on the Norman Plan of Ely Cathedral', *Medieval Art and Architecture at Ely Cathedral* (Trans. of B.A.A. Conference 1976, 1979), 1-7.

⁸⁵ L. Shelby, 'The Geometrical Knowledge of Mediaeval Master Masons', *Speculum*, xlvii (1972), 395-421.

⁸⁶ See Fernie, 'Norwich Cathedral', op. cit. note 84, 78-9 and (at Bury St Edmunds) 85.

(12.49 ins.) which is roughly the level of the crown of the vault.⁸⁷ Repeated once more, then the result 58 ft. (17.68 m.) could well be ridge level of the original steeply-pitched roof.

Of more interest is the apparent use of a basic unit of measurement equivalent to the diameter of the piers, 3 ft. 5 ins. (1.04 m.). The above elevation heights then become the sequence 44:6:8½:12:17. The latter, 12:17, is a well-used pair of numerical equivalents, an 'otherwise unlikely combination of numbers'.⁸⁸ Applied to the ground plan the length of the church (with a seven-bay nave) at c.196 ft. 3 ins. (59.82 m.) is virtually 58 units and its average internal width, 51 ft. 9 ins. (15.77 m.), 15 units. The crossing at 24 ft. (7.31 m.) square (column centres) is 7 units, and the E. cloister walk internal length of c.96 ft. (29.26 m.) 28 units.

Applying the 1: $\sqrt{2}$ ratio to the ground plan does not produce such a clear demonstration of its use. This is perhaps due to the changes in plan from the original conception c.1160-70 (or even c.1150?) to the end product c.1200. Taking the line between the chapter-house doorway to the western crossing-piers as the 'base-line' the total internal length of the new E. end is 98 ft. 2 ins. (29.92 m.), or nearly 29 units. This measure is in a $\sqrt{2}$ ratio to the internal length of the chancel measured from the W. responds to the E. wall of the single bay, 69 ft. 6 ins. (21.18m.) or 20½ units.

This putative base-line also marks the half-way point in the total internal length, which is surely more than a coincidence. In addition, 98 ft. 2 ins. (29.92 m.) is not much less than the internal length of the transept floor as it now exists (from the N. slype wall to the N. wall of the N. transept) and it would be almost identical to the internal length measured to a putative Romanesque N. transept N. wall. The E. walk of the cloister, at c.96 ft. (29.26 m.), is also close to this figure. In a general way, the number of nave bays is in a $\sqrt{2}$ ratio to the chancel bays, 7:5, and when converted to units of 3 ft. 5 ins. (1.04 m.) the ratio becomes 29:21, another frequently-used numerical approximation.

There is not as neat a relationship between the elevation and plan and between the various parts of the plan as has been demonstrated in other Romanesque buildings, and these discrepancies can probably be explained by the major change in plan, the addition of aisled transepts c.1180.⁸⁹ But there is clear evidence of the use of the $\sqrt{2}$ ratios to create important levels and the dimensions of very many elements. There also seems to be the use of a basic unit equivalent to the diameter of the columnar piers, which may have some bearing on the derivation of the giant order elevation from Vitruvius. Until more buildings are accurately measured and their units and ratios established, little context can be given for either the use of the $\sqrt{2}$ ratio or the basic unit of 3 ft. 5 ins. at St. Frideswide's.

CONTEXT

As has been said previously, our lack of knowledge of the greater churches near Oxford, most especially the really grand buildings of Reading and Abingdon Abbeys, seriously

⁸⁷ B. Singleton, 'Proportions in the Design of the Early Gothic Cathedral at Wells', in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Wells and Glastonbury* (Trans. of B.A.A. Conference 1978, 1981), 15.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 10. 29:41 is another of these approximations, these figures being the rounded measurements of the vault springing point: vault crown at St. Frideswide's. The same measures of 14 ft. 8 ins., 29 ft. and 41 ft. are used in the Wells elevation, *ibid.* 11.

⁸⁹ The slight changes in bay sizes and aisle widths between the chancel campaign and the nave transepts probably compound the 'inaccuracy' too.

hampers discussion of the context and source of the 12th-century architecture of St. Frideswide's Priory. Neither the scale of the building nor the revenue of the house suggest that any remarkable piece of architecture should be expected, though the craftsmanship seen in the chancel and transepts is certainly of a good quality in a period when both the mason's craft and design capabilities are frequently of a high standard. There are, though, four elements that need to be discussed: the aisled transept plan, the use of a giant order elevation system, the use of rib-vaults and the capital sculpture.

Although the giant order might not have been quite so unusual c.1180 as the few survivals suggest, the use of aisled transepts is most extraordinary. Transepts with both an E. and W. 'aisle' – even if in practice used as chapels – were first adopted in England in the late 11th-century cathedrals at Winchester (1079), Ely (1081–93) and Old St. Paul's (1087). Aisles were added to cross spaces in Early Christian times and the Duomo at Pisa, 1063/1089, can be seen as a continuation of this idea. But it was in 11th-century France that aisled transepts became a regular feature in the plan-forms of the grandest Romanesque churches like Tours (St. Martin) and Reims (St. Remi), and it is presumably from such buildings that the idea was taken up in England. To our certain knowledge, only Roger of Salisbury's extension to Old Sarum Cathedral, built in the first quarter of the 12th century, continued the idea,⁹⁰ possibly because there was little need for a western aisle (even if its use could create more grandiose spatial effects at the crossings). Old Sarum was not a large cathedral and although Bishop Roger virtually doubled its length to about 270 ft. (82.3 m.), the transepts were not as deep N.–S. as St. Frideswide's, though broader E.–W. He was presumably enhancing his cathedral and demonstrating his munificence by using a plan-form only otherwise used by the very greatest churches.

None of the major English churches of c.1120–c.1170 are known to have used aisled transept plans,⁹¹ whereas in northern France any church with any pretensions had aisled transepts, including of course the Early and High Gothic cathedrals. Then, about 1180, Wells Cathedral, St. Frideswide's Priory and the Cistercian Byland Abbey (N. Yorks.) all use aisled transepts⁹² (followed in the next century by York and Beverley Minsters and Westminster Abbey). All three buildings owe something to the Early Gothic architecture of northern France, at Wells and possibly at Oxford filtered through the churches of the reformed monastic orders; the plan-form might therefore be from that source. The use of aisles around the chancel and transepts at Byland has been explained in terms of the necessity for extra altars,⁹³ which might also be the case at Wells.

Although there would not appear to be a need for extra chapels at Oxford, extra space might well have been needed in connection with the boosted cult of St. Frideswide's relics. The fabric does show that aisled transepts were not envisaged when the new chancel was begun in the 1160s, and the decision to enlarge the re-building campaign seems to have been taken c.1180 when the saint's cult was at a peak. If the sites of the shrine, the 1002–4 church and the parochial altar were exactly known, the adoption of the grander plan with aisled transepts might be more explicable. The

⁹⁰ R.C.H.M. *City of Salisbury*, i (1980), 15–24.

⁹¹ The plan of Hyde Abbey, Winchester is not known and, given its location, the possibility that it had aisled transepts cannot be ruled out.

⁹² For Wells see L.S. Colchester and J.H. Harvey, 'Wells Cathedral', *Archaeol. Jnl.* cxxxix (1974), 200–14; for Byland see P. Fergusson, 'The South Transept Elevation of Byland Abbey', *J.B.A.A.* 3rd ser. xxxviii (1975), 155–76.

⁹³ C.R. Peers, *Byland Abbey* (H.M.S.O., 2nd ed., 1952).

awkwardness created by adding a western aisle to the S. transept shows that aisled transepts were thought to be essential, and whether this was for practical spatial reasons or to enhance the status of the establishment can now only be conjectured.

Unless a more local source existed in a church belonging to the reformed orders (and neither of the largest local churches at the Benedictine abbeys of Abingdon and Reading had aisled transepts), Wells Cathedral seems to be the closest and most recent example for this unusual plan. If status was the driving force, then an association with the older cathedral churches of Winchester, Ely and London, all with important Anglo-Saxon shrines, can be tentatively suggested.⁹⁴ But their example is hardly more obvious c.1180 than that of the numerous examples to be seen in the contemporary Gothic churches of Northern France. However, the lack of any other direct French references at St. Frideswide's does tend to suggest that the source of the aisled transept plan should be sought in England. Similarly, other ideas might be expected to accompany knowledge of the Wells plan, but apart from the use of keeled roll-mouldings (which were becoming quite widely used in England c.1180) and the omission of a N. cloister walk, there is nothing to further the claim for Wells as the source-building for the adoption of aisled transepts c.1180 at St. Frideswide's.⁹⁵

The choice of a giant order elevation system in the late 1160s is obviously a separate issue from the adoption of aisled transepts c.1180. In an earlier article on Tewkesbury Abbey (probably the first building to use a giant order in Romanesque England), I have outlined the likely existence of other 12th-century giant order elevations than those that exist now at Romsey (Hants.), Jedburgh (Roxburgh), and Oxford.⁹⁶ The fact that the dates of these four surviving buildings stretch over seventy years and that other buildings incorporate giant columnar elements within their elevations (like Dunstable Priory and Holy Trinity, Aldgate, London)⁹⁷ surely makes it probable that more giant order elevations existed. There is clear evidence for large-scale columnar piers being used in buildings throughout the S. and W. of England,⁹⁸ and circumstantial evidence for the existence of a giant order in the pre-Gothic churches of Glastonbury and Sherborne Abbeys.⁹⁹

Of the greatest interest to St. Frideswide's are the columnar piers used at both Abingdon and Reading. The site of the former was so thoroughly robbed after the Dissolution that very little can ever be known of the fabric. But it is known that Abbot

⁹⁴ Canterbury Cathedral was clearly not the source, as there are no aisled transepts there.

⁹⁵ As the elevation was not changed, the use of triple-shafts or continuous and complex mouldings could not be attempted at Oxford. There is certainly no sign of the Wells capital and sculpture style either, and in fact the type of keel used at Wells is more ogee'd than that seen at Oxford.

⁹⁶ R. Halsey, 'Tewkesbury Abbey: some Recent Observations', in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Gloucester and Tewkesbury* (Trans. of B.A.A. Conference 1981, 1985), 27-9.

⁹⁷ Only the seven western bays of the nave survive at Dunstable and the form of the E. end is unknown: *V.C.H. Beds.* iii (1912), 356-66. John Carter included some drawings of Holy Trinity, Aldgate in *The Ancient Architecture of England* (1798), pl. xxi.

⁹⁸ Although large columnar piers are seen in the E. of England, e.g. at Ely, Bury St. Edmunds, Norwich and Peterborough, only St. Botolph's Priory at Colchester seems to have used them consistently and not just as occasional minor piers. There is, though, a columnar element in many East Anglian pier forms: see B. Cherry, 'Romanesque Architecture in Eastern England', *J.B.A.A.* cxxxii (1978), 1-29.

⁹⁹ The source of the interesting elevation at Glastonbury, which attempts to integrate a giant order and an articulated rib-vault, is hard to find. Is it possible that the monks there held the same conservationist sentiments about their Romanesque church, destroyed in the 1184 fire, as the monks at Canterbury felt for their church in similar circumstances a decade earlier? No evidence for the pier forms of Herlewin's church begun c.1120 has so far been reported from the numerous excavations. Sherborne Abbey has an essentially Romanesque core to many of its walls and arcades: if the chancel piers have a Romanesque core too, then a giant order could be hypothesised: *R.C.H.M. Dorset*, i, *West* (1952), xlvii-l, 200-6 and Supplement.

Faritius (1100–1117) built the nave, and William Worcestre said of the nave piers in 1480 that *columpne rotunditas in circuitu continet 5 virgas*,¹⁰⁰ roughly 5 ft. (1.52 m.) diameter.

Reading Abbey (founded 1121 and consecrated 1164)¹⁰¹ was more fortunate, in that less robbing took place, though various public enterprises on or adjacent to the site have removed or buried most of the fabric.¹⁰² However, two bases of the S. chancel columnar piers exist *in situ*, each with a diameter of 6 ft. 6 ins. (1.98 m.). Excavations in 1971–3 established a plan for the Romanesque choir, and this evidence (with that of J.C. Buckler) suggests that the Reading choir had a plan of similar form and dimensions to Tewkesbury.¹⁰³ The existence of large columnar piers does not of course mean a giant order elevation, but the Reading piers have an attached shaft to their aisle face that is less than a semi-circle on plan. An identical 'sunken' attached shaft can be seen on the aisle side of the nave piers of Evesham Abbey (built by Abbot Reginald of Gloucester, 1130–49), and the same type of shaft is added to the four cardinal points of the tribune piers of Gloucester choir.¹⁰⁴ By adding these shafts with their capitals, a visually neater junction can be achieved between the curving mass of the cylindrical pier and the arch or vault shaft springing from it (and there may have been some structural advantages too).¹⁰⁵

The enhanced integration of a pier with the arches and vaults it supports becomes a pre-occupation of mature Romanesque architecture (especially once rib-vaults are used), and the use of large scale columnar piers – particularly in a giant order system – exacerbates the problems encountered. One ungainly experimental solution can be seen on the aisle side of the single columnar giant order pier at the E. end of the S. nave arcade at Romsey Abbey (c.1140), where no less than three shafts are added beneath the diagonal and transverse ribs of the aisle vault.¹⁰⁶ Reading Abbey evidently had rib-vaulted transept chapels, and given the royal patronage and the 1120s date, it is most likely that the aisles were rib-vaulted too, perhaps in the manner of the contemporary Gloucester nave aisles. However, the shaft added to the aisle face of the Reading columnar piers is less than a semi-circle and unlikely therefore to be a full structural member in the manner of normal attached shafts seen within compound piers (or those used at Romsey). I suggest that it was being used in conjunction with a Tewkesbury capital-cum-corbel within a giant order elevation, integrating the transverse arch of the aisle vault with the columnar pier and creating a larger area at capital level for the springing of the diagonal ribs. (St. Frideswide's piers drop the shaft, but create a larger capital-cum-corbel to the aisle to receive all the ribs.) Even if groin vaults were used at Reading (as at the contemporary church of St. Bartholomew, Smithfield, London), this shaft would still stand beneath a transverse arch and be something of an advance on the awkward arrangements seen at Tewkesbury.

¹⁰⁰ M. Biddle et al., 'The Early History of Abingdon, Berkshire and its Abbey', *Med. Archaeol.* xii (1968), 26–69; Harvey op.cit. note 53, 282.

¹⁰¹ *V.C.H. Berks.* ii (1907), 62–3.

¹⁰² A Civil War fortification buried the nave, a new prison was built over the easternmost area of the church and various municipal activities (including clearance work by the unemployed in 1857) have taken their toll: *V.C.H. Berks.* iv (1923), 339–42.

¹⁰³ C.F. Slade, 'Excavations at Reading, 1971–3', *Berks. Arch. Jnl.* lxxviii (1975–6), 29–37. J.C. Buckler's notes of 1878 are in B.L. Add. MS. 36400 A and B. For a comparison of the measurements see Halsey, op. cit. note 96, fn. 86.

¹⁰⁴ For Evesham see *Vetusta Monumenta*, v (1835), pl. lxxvii (plan) and pl. lxxviii (piers). For Gloucester see C. Wilson, 'Abbot Serlo's Church at Gloucester (1089–1100): Its Place in Romanesque Architecture', in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Gloucester and Tewkesbury* (Trans. of B.A.A. Conference 1981, 1985), 52–83.

¹⁰⁵ See Cherry, op. cit. note 98, especially footnote 51.

¹⁰⁶ M.F. Hearn, 'Romsey Abbey, a Progenitor of the English National Tradition in Architecture', *Gesta*, xiv (i) (1975), 27–40.

If Reading and Abingdon did have giant order elevations, as well as huge columnar piers, then the 1160s chancel of St. Frideswide's can be seen as a local variant. The influence of Reading had already been felt in Oxford from the late 1140s, at least in the architectural sculpture, if not in the design, of the St. Frideswide's chapter-house (see below, pp. 160-7). Reading was only consecrated in 1164 (and surely the prior of St. Frideswide's would have attended such an occasion?), and although the details of the design conceived c.1121 may have seemed old-fashioned forty years later, a clear association with such a prestigious foundation could have been thought desirable.

Once it is accepted that Reading Abbey had a giant order system, then the apparently maverick use of such elevations at Romsey and Jedburgh becomes explicable in terms of prestige and status. Both abbeys had royal associations and Jedburgh in particular had reason to imitate Reading (the mausoleum of Henry I after his death in 1135) if the Anglophile King David of Scotland saw it as his own creation, as Henry created Reading.¹⁰⁷ However, Jedburgh was a re-foundation for Augustinian canons, and there is a discernible – if tenuous – interest in linked storeys at some larger Augustinian churches.

It is unfortunate that so little is known of the two most important early Augustinian foundations, at Holy Trinity, Aldgate (just inside the eastern boundary of the city of London), founded c. 1107-8, and Merton Priory (on the river Wandle S. of Wimbledon, S.W. London), founded by 1117.¹⁰⁸ Nothing is known of the internal elevations of Merton, but Carter's drawing of Holy Trinity suggests that a columnar element rose up from the ground, not as a giant order like St. Frideswide's, but like the piers at Dunstable Priory, another large Augustinian house.¹⁰⁹ The first prior at Dunstable, founded c.1125, was Bernard, brother of Norman, the founding prior of Holy Trinity, Aldgate, and an architectural link could be expected. Both houses had some links to the court too, but then so did St. Bartholomew's, Smithfield and St. Botolph's, Colchester, and although they both use columnar piers, neither have giant orders or linked storeys in their elevations.¹¹⁰

Master Robert of Cricklade, prior of St. Frideswide's in the 1160s, was a well-travelled and learned man.¹¹¹ If he was the patron who decided in favour of a giant order he may have been looking around locally for inspiration (at Reading?), or he may have looked to other Augustinian houses (and what did Oseney, raised to abbey status in 1154, look like?). The nave at Dunstable was still being built in the 1160s and the elevation that Carter drew at Holy Trinity, Aldgate is unlikely to have been much earlier than c.1140 (and so probably work done after the 1132 fire).¹¹² Not that these two options are exclusive: apart from Oseney, Notley Abbey (Bucks.), an Arrouasian Augustinian house, was begun about 1160¹¹³ and Missenden Abbey (Bucks.), again Arrouasian, was founded in 1133.¹¹⁴ Both are known (from fragmentary evidence) to be under construction around the middle of the 12th century, and indeed Notley uses

¹⁰⁷ There is no reason to suppose that David wished to be buried at Jedburgh, or create a dynastic mausoleum.

¹⁰⁸ Op. cit. note 97, and Dickinson, op. cit. note 43.

¹⁰⁹ Op. cit. note 97.

¹¹⁰ Norman, prior of Holy Trinity, came from St. Botolph's, having learnt the Augustinian customs at Mont-St-Eloi, north-east France: *V.C.H. London*, i (1909), 465.

¹¹¹ Blair, 'St. F.', 80, notes 8 and 9; and cf. above, p. 121.

¹¹² *V.C.H. op. cit.* note 10, 466.

¹¹³ *V.C.H. Bucks.* i (1905), 377-9, and W.A. Pantin, 'Notley Abbey', *Oxoniensia*, vi (1941) 22-43.

¹¹⁴ *V.C.H. Bucks.* i (1905), 369-76. Excavations and demolition following a fire in the 18th-century house have revealed many fragments that will be published by the Aylesbury County Museum shortly.

columnar piers in its c.1200 nave (the chancel piers are unknown). Further afield, very little is known of Robert's previous house at Cirencester, beyond the 'skeleton ground plan of the foundations' of the 12th-century church, though it was begun in 1117 and the first canons came from Merton to reform the old minster.¹¹⁵

On the other hand, Robert might well have read Vitruvius's description of his basilica at Fanum, which had a giant order of colossal size.¹¹⁶ The proportions of St. Frideswide's do not relate to those given by Vitruvius, and there is no use of pilasters or galleries as at Fanum. However, Prior Robert could have been attempting to commission a building to resemble the Roman basilica, as described by Vitruvius.

There is too little firm information to be sure even of the patron of St. Frideswide's, let alone his intentions. Despite its infelicities, the design of the elevation is surely not something that could have been conjured out of a none-too-clear classical text, and its generally sophisticated character equally suggests that the mason-architect was working to an established precedent. My belief is that the use of the giant order at St. Frideswide's follows its use at other 12th-century great churches, and the local abbeys at Reading and Abingdon are certainly known to have had columnar piers of large dimensions. Reading, in particular, seems to me to share enough features with the choir of Tewkesbury Abbey (which certainly did have a giant order elevation) to make such an elevation a probability.

Although the exact details are not certain, there can be little doubt that the main spaces of St. Frideswide's were originally rib-vaulted (with the probable exception of the nave),¹¹⁷ and that the elevation was designed to receive the ribs on shafts terminating above the abaci of the upper capitals. The normal Anglo-Norman arrangement was to terminate vault shafts at the base of the triforium – as at Durham or Gloucester, for instance – and the resulting emphasis on creating horizontal layers (rather than vertical bays in the French Gothic manner) was to continue in English Gothic elevations. St. Frideswide's is something of a compromise, in that the vault shafts, whilst not descending to the floor, do reach down as far as the abaci of the main arcade, as, for instance, at Canterbury choir (1175). It might be argued that since the triforium has been compressed into the main arcade by the use of a giant order, these shafts are continuing the Anglo-Norman arrangement. Yet their solid form gives them a strong visual function in continuing the verticality of the columnar pier upwards (and once, presumably, vice versa, bringing the rib-vaults visually down to the ground).¹¹⁸

Few large-scale vaults of the middle decades of the 12th century survive in England, though they are known to have been erected, for instance by Bishop Alexander at Lincoln Cathedral. Numerous smaller-scale vaults exist in parish churches or subsidiary monastic buildings, and Oxford has two such examples in the chancels of St. Peter's-in-the-East (c.1150) and Iffley. Both use ribs decorated with chevron, but it seems highly unlikely that chevron was used in the vaults at St. Frideswide's. It is not

¹¹⁵ P.D.C. Brown and Alan D. McWhirr, 'Cirencester 1965', *Antiq. Jnl.* xlv (1966), 240–54.

¹¹⁶ Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, Bk. V. Peter Kidson gives an interpretation of the text and its possible application at Tewkesbury in 'The Abbey Church of St. Mary at Tewkesbury in the 11th and 12th Centuries', in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Gloucester and Tewkesbury* (Trans. of B.A.A. Conference 1981, 1985), 13–15. See also my comments in the same volume, 24.

¹¹⁷ The areas between the nave clearstorey windows are less messy than those of the transepts, and no clear indication (or 'shadow') of a vault can be seen. See note 25.

¹¹⁸ The Dunstable piers are the result of imposing vault shafts onto a giant order, though it seems unlikely that the Dunstable main spaces were vaulted. Carlisle Cathedral nave elevation c.1160 includes a shaft that rises from the top of the abacus of the main arcade capital, but it does not rise through the tribune stage as built.

used elsewhere in the church, and the chancel aisle ribs have a simple profile, though one that is difficult to parallel (see Fig. 59).¹¹⁹

Once again, lost local monastic churches might have provided a context for the vaults. But on presently existing evidence, St. Frideswide's seems to demonstrate that the use of large-scale rib-vaults over main spaces was not unusual in England in the middle decades of the 12th century, and that there may well have been an English development of the rib-vault, evolving almost independently (or in parallel) to that in northern France. Whilst the reformed orders and French-inspired work like Canterbury Cathedral choir undoubtedly introduced new decorative structural forms (such as the sexpartite vault) to England, English Romanesque architecture was perhaps not as starved of rib-vaults as might be thought from the lack of survivors.

The same problems in tracing the local context bedevils any discussion of the capital sculpture, though again, the possibility arises that St. Frideswide's is demonstrating the existence of a more complex English mid 12th-century architecture than can be deduced from the surviving monuments. On present evidence, it seems that a small band of sculptors came to St. Frideswide's, bringing with them a wide variety of designs for capital sculpture, mainly using leaf forms culled from the debased form of Corinthian capital prevalent in Paris and the Oise Valley c.1135–50. The other (minority) designs (such as the interlacing tubular forms in the chancel) can be traced to the highly-developed, local late Romanesque style. From this base develops – as elsewhere – the Early English stiff-leaf capital, though earlier leaf-forms are not easily displaced and the waterleaf capital makes a strong appearance in the N. transept. An odd design, modelled on a capital erected in Canterbury in 1179, appears in the nave (Fig. 58), imported alongside the concept of alternating piers.

The most difficult question to answer, though, is where did the original workshop come from? St. Frideswide's was not a rich priory and cannot be thought a 'plum' job that attracted the best craftsmen from far and wide. But it was probably prestigious enough to attract a least a good-quality workshop from the surrounding region. Oxford is very centrally placed, of course, and good parallels can be drawn with capitals in places as far apart as Worcester Cathedral (N. transept), Winchfield (near Basingstoke, Hampshire), the church of the Hospital of St. Cross, Winchester and the Temple Church in London.

But equally, there are individual capitals in a number of northern French Early Gothic buildings that also look very similar to individual capitals in Oxford.¹²⁰ The lack of chevron decoration (or any other rich, later Romanesque decoration, beyond a few capitals) and the generally crisp and straightforward use of mouldings (again, without the superabundance of indigenous late Romanesque work) also point to a knowledge of the characteristics of French Early Gothic. The plan form (at least as originally conceived) and the use of rib-vaults throughout could also be thought sympathetic to contemporary French ideas, most especially in the architecture of the reformed orders. Once again, our lack of knowledge of the local Cistercian and Augustinian houses frustrates further discussion.

However, the most dominant and decisive architectural element at St. Frideswide's is the giant order elevation, which is much more difficult to place in contemporary France. The only surviving examples are of a previous generation (like Etampes, c.1125)

¹¹⁹ The sharply undercut 'rolls' flanking the broad central rib are very distinctive. Something similar can be seen in the rib profiles of the Temple Church, London: R.W. Billings, *Illustrations & Account of the Temple Church* (1838), pl.vii, no. 9.

¹²⁰ See notes 30 and 35.

or even earlier (like St. Germain, Auxerre, *c.*1070).¹²¹ Some interest was being shown in linking storeys within the elevation of some contemporary French buildings (e.g. St. Remi, Rheims), but the columnar pier of the giant order was not in favour – except on a spectacular scale at Bourges Cathedral, *c.*1185.

If I am correct in saying that the giant order at St. Frideswide's was selected for its association with local great houses of the previous generation, then the 'cloaking' of this established formula with modern French Gothic-inspired dress is contradictory, even confusing, in the sort of message the architecture is attempting to put across. Perhaps it was seen as a successful mix of new and old; perhaps it appeared as idiosyncratic then as it does now. An easy explanation would lie in hypothesising a building that had already combined these disparate elements; but that is stretching credulity. In my view, St. Frideswide's must be seen as a last attempt to re-vamp a trusted idea, the giant order, with new detail ultimately coming from N. France, perhaps through the buildings of the reformed orders. That the general disposition was acceptable is demonstrated in the continuance of the design throughout the extended campaigns that enlarged the transepts and rebuilt the nave. However, there appear to be no followers of St. Frideswide's either: Glastonbury Abbey, begun in 1184, is later in date, but there can scarcely be any direct link to St. Frideswide's.

CONCLUSION

The priory church of St. Frideswide's, built from E. to W. from *c.*1165 to *c.*1200, is a truly 'transitional' building, in that it uses architectural ideas developed in the previous Romanesque period, but with detailing that looks forward to the period now known as Early English Gothic. It was clearly conceived as a building of some pretension (appropriate to its function in housing the relics of a revered Anglo-Saxon royal saint) and the unknown patron(s) seem to have turned to a number of grander buildings for inspiration. It is frequently held that the lesser monasteries and grander parish churches looked to their local abbey and cathedral churches for an artistic and architectural lead. This is most probably true for St. Frideswide's, but the irony lies in the fact that only St. Frideswide's has survived – a little truncated – to give some idea of the appearance of the great churches of this area. Whatever the original patrons were attempting to say architecturally, it would seem that St. Frideswide's had no imitators; it is the last of a long line of giant order elevations in Romanesque England. Its architecture has a grace and impact of its own, but it failed to inspire further development – the first of Oxford's fabled 'lost causes'?

APPENDIX: THE CHAPTER-HOUSE DOORWAY AND THE MID 12TH-CENTURY ARCHITECTURAL FRAGMENTS IN THEIR LOCAL CONTEXT

There are three main sources of evidence for the date and form of the Romanesque work at St. Frideswide's carried out before the existing church was begun *c.*1165:

1. The extant chapter-house doorway with its flanking openings.
2. J.C. Buckler's drawings of carved work discovered in Scott's restoration, 1869–71, now in B.L. MS Add. 27765, especially volume E.

¹²¹ See Halsey *op. cit.* note 96, 25–7, and Kidson *op. cit.* note 116, 12.

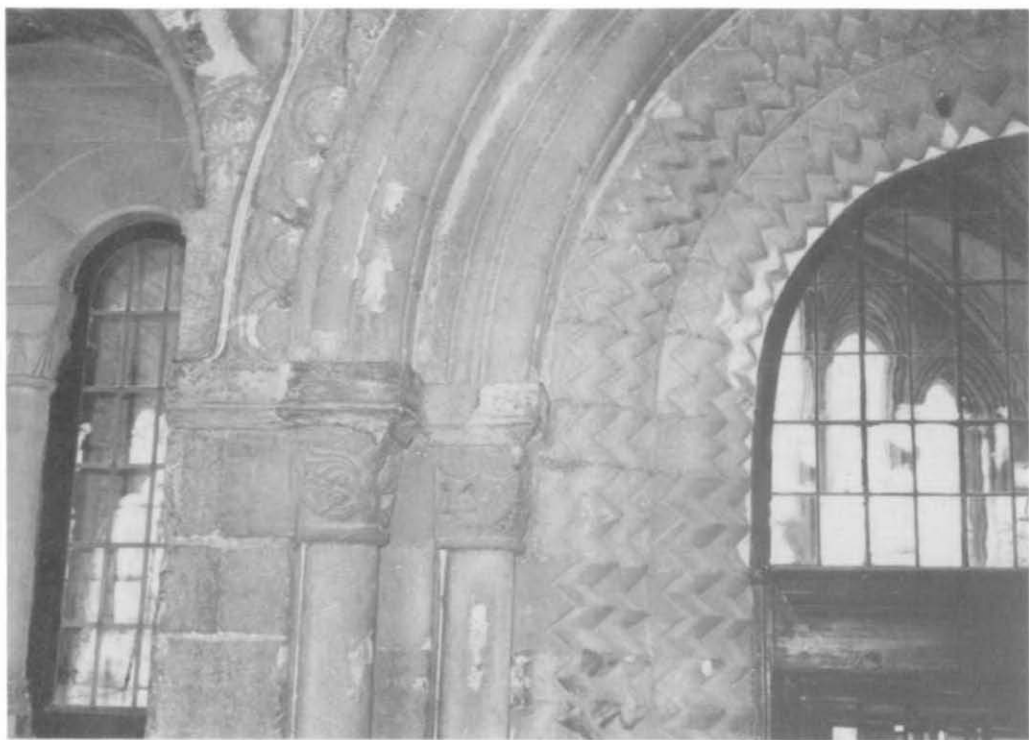


Fig. 65. *Above:* St. Frideswide's chapter-house front, N. side of doorway. *Below:* Ifley, W. front, N. side of doorway. (Phh. John Blair.)

3. Stones stored formerly at Christ Church, now in the Oxfordshire County Museums Service store at Botley.

The doorway (Figs. 51, 65 upper) is apparently complete in that there has been little replacement of stone, though it is possible that a further inner order once existed, though not a tympanum. However, the two inner orders of continuous overlapping chevron and the two outer orders of detached shafts have been extended downwards to the present, lowered, cloister floor by unreddened coursed stones, including simple bases of late 12th-century date (Fig. 96). As much of the stonework of the doorway has been stained pink by heat, it is most probable that this facade suffered from the 1190 fire reported in the *Oseney Chronicle*.¹²² However, the existing chapter-house must be dated at least thirty years later: was the Romanesque chapter-house undamaged, or patched up?

The two-light round-headed openings flanking the doorway are apparently contemporary (sharing similar capital designs and having common stone courses), but are more heavily restored. In 1847, they were described as 'elliptical'¹²³ but were by 1887 restored to their present shape, which is likely to be the original size.¹²⁴ The N. jamb of the N. opening must be original, since it bears a 12th-century wall-painting of a pointing male figure (below, pp. 268–70).

The two capitals of the left-hand jamb of the doorway allow a close derivation to be suggested for the sculptor, and therefore perhaps for the whole doorway. The use of an essentially cubic shape, with cats-heads to the corners and interlacing strapwork, links them to a group of capitals likely to come from the cloister at Reading Abbey. Indeed, Professor Stone goes as far as to suggest that the link was owed 'most probably to a transfer of a group of Reading masons to St. Frideswide's'.¹²⁵ Other elements of the Oxford work seen at Reading include the superimposed rows of chevron,¹²⁶ the use of lobed foils or semi-circles,¹²⁷ beakhead and similar scalloped capitals (Fig. 66, lower).

It was George Zarnecki who first documented the influence of Reading Abbey on the Romanesque sculpture of the surrounding counties.¹²⁸ The sculpture was then thought to be of c.1120–40 date on stylistic grounds, but more recently, Professor Zarnecki has confirmed a c.1125 date for those capitals and other carved fragments thought to come from the cloister.¹²⁹ Henry I laid the foundation of the new abbey on 23

¹²² For the fire reference see note 3. *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv (1979), 24, does also refer to other medieval fires.

¹²³ *The Ecclesiologist*, vii (1847), 47, states: 'In the west wall of the chapter-house is a splendid Romanesque doorway commonly said to have been removed from the west front of the church. There are certainly marks which seem to show that it is not at present in its original place; yet two elliptical Romanesque windows, one on each side, point the other way, and they can hardly have been removed.' The 'marks' referred to are presumably the c.1190 lower stones and the pre-restoration cloister roof which cut-off the top foot or more of the arch. J.C. Buckler thought the side windows 'originally circular, elongated at an early period and afterwards clumsily restored to their shape'; in 1870, then, they were still circular (B.L. Add. MS 27765 E, ff 130, 193).

¹²⁴ Their restoration is attributed to Bodley and Garner in 1881 by P. Metcalfe and N. Pevsner, *The Cathedrals of England (Southern)* (1985), 218. Although Scott had renewed the roof of the E. cloister walk by 1871, the chapter-house itself only underwent restoration in 1880–1, by Bodley and Garner.

¹²⁵ L. Stone, *Sculpture in Britain: The Middle Ages* (Pelican History of Art, 2nd ed. 1972), 242, ch. 5, note 8. A good example of this Reading capital group is illustrated in the exhibition catalogue, *English Romanesque Art 1066–1200* (1984), 168, illus. 127b.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 170, illus. 127n.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 174, illus. 129. The lobed foils of the Oxford chapter-house doorway hood are very similar to those running along the top of the Reading beakheads (Fig. 66 lower). A relic of St. Frideswide is listed among the Reading relics at the Dissolution: *V.C.H. Berks.* ii (1907), 70.

¹²⁸ G. Zarnecki, *English Romanesque Sculpture, 1066–1140* (1951). See also Stone op. cit. note 125, 59–61.

¹²⁹ Zarnecki in catalogue op. cit. note 125, 167.

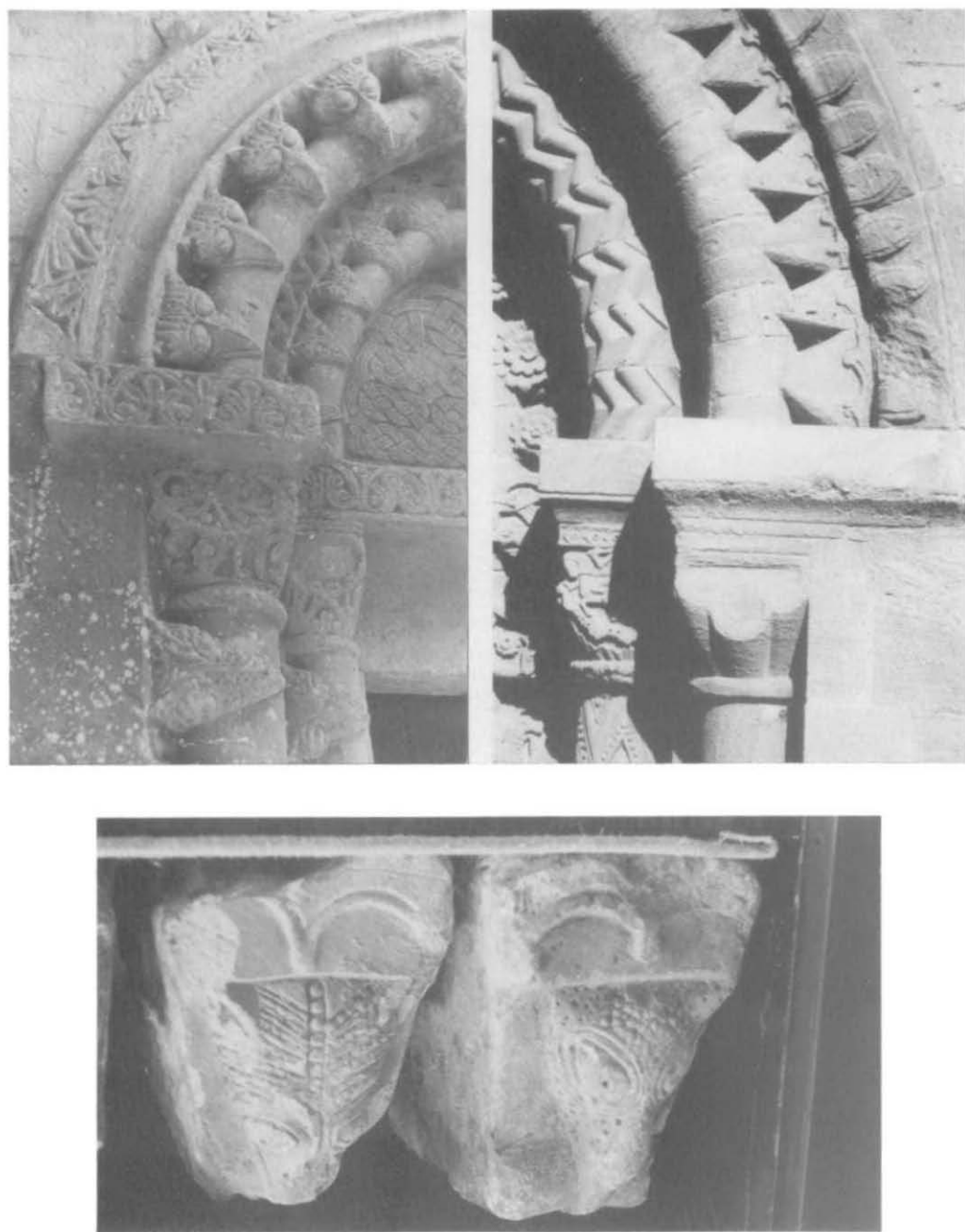


Fig. 66. *Above left:* Barford St. Michael, N. door, E. side. *Above right:* Iffley, S. door, E. side. *Below:* Beakheads with lobed foil decoration from Reading Abbey (now at Reading Museum).

June 1121, and in a charter of 1125 stated that he had built the monastery.¹³⁰ Even allowing for royal patronage, it would be safer to allow a date bracket of c.1120–1140 for the wide variety and great quantity of work surviving from a cloister no less than 145 ft. (44.2 m.) square. The chancel was at least complete by 1135 when Henry I was buried before the altar there, and it would be reasonable to think that the principal claustral buildings were well under way by then. The monastic church was finally consecrated by Archbishop Thomas Becket in 19 April 1164.¹³¹

The Reading chapter-house was huge, 42 ft. (12.8 m.) by 79 ft. (24.01 m.), barrel-vaulted and approached through 'three semi-circular arches with a window over each'.¹³² No ashlar, let alone decorated stonework, survives *in situ* today, and it is not known from where in the Abbey the surviving decorated stones come. The common motifs between Reading and St. Frideswide's could indicate that the latter's chapter-house doorway is a reflection of one of the Reading doorways, at least in its use of parallel orders of continuous chevron and lobed foils to the hood-mould. The Reading doorways had three orders and apparently were without tympana.

A distinctive sculpture workshop can be identified, working c.1140–70 in Oxford itself and a few parish churches nearby. Their primary works in the city are the chapter-house doorway at St. Frideswide's (and judging from the few fragments (Fig. 54) and Buckler's drawings, at least a blind arcade too); the church of St. Peter's-in-the-East; and St. Ebbe's W. doorway (now much renewed and re-set). Beyond the city are the churches at Barford St. Michael (Fig. 66 top-left) and Iffley (Fig. 65 lower, 66 top-right).¹³³ The simplicity of the decoration of St. Frideswide's suggests that this was an early work, the complexity of Iffley conversely suggesting a later, more mature expression. It was possibly the St. Frideswide's cloister project that attracted the workshop (perhaps just one mason?) from Reading and the other commissions followed (as well, no doubt, as others for which no physical evidence survives).

Unfortunately none of the buildings is securely dated; the following table summarises the published opinions.¹³⁴

	R.C.H.M.	Zarnecki I	Stone	Pevsner	Zarnecki II
St. Frideswide's (chapter-house doorway)	mid-late C12th	—	(c.1150)	'Norman'	—
St. Peter's-in-the-East	c.1140–50	—	—	{ crypt c.1130–40; church c.1160	—
St. Ebbe's (W. door)	mid-C12th	c.1150	(late 1140s)	c.1170	—
Barford St. Michael	—	1140–50	—	c.1150	—
Iffley	1175–82	1175–82	c.1175–82	c.1175–80	c.1175

A voussoir-shaped stone at Christ Church (Fig. 68 bottom-left), carved on three sides, could be a section of vault-rib. It is stained pink, like the stones of the chapter-house doorway, and could be a casualty of the same fire. It closely resembles the

¹³⁰ *V.C.H. Berks.* ii (1907), 62.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹³² Sir Henry Englefield, 'Observations on Reading Abbey', *Archaeologia*, vi (1779), 62.

¹³³ The Iffley sculpture has been linked to that of Reading Abbey by G. Zarnecki, *Later English Romanesque Sculpture, 1140–1210* (1953).

¹³⁴ *R.C.H.M. Oxford*; Zarnecki I (note 133); Stone (note 125); Pevsner (note 2); Zarnecki II (in catalogue note 125). The Stone dates in brackets are dates construed from the text, rather than categorically stated.

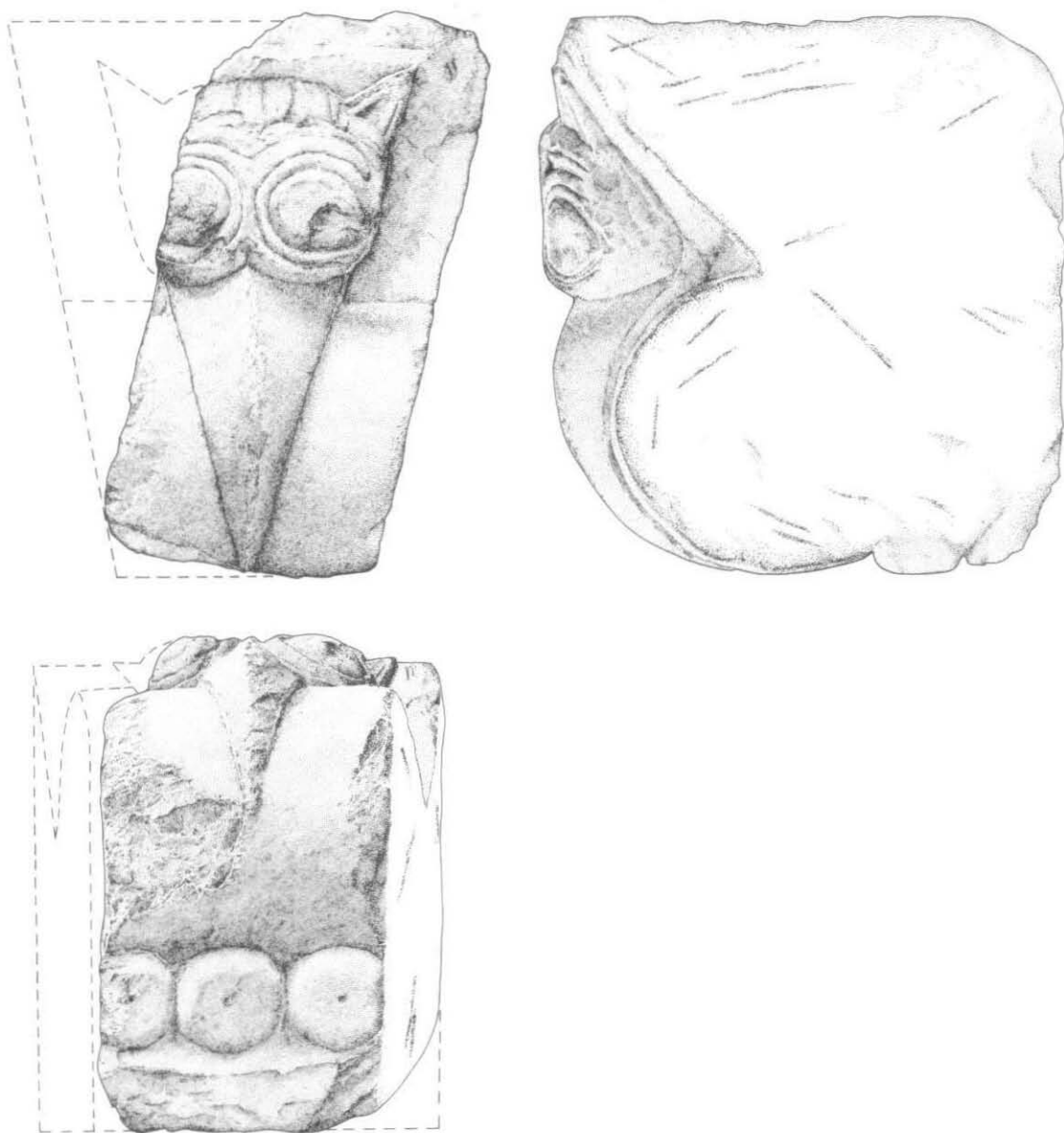


Fig. 67. Beakhead from St. Frideswide's. *Scale 1:3.* (Stored by the County Museums Service. Drawing by Sarah Blair.)

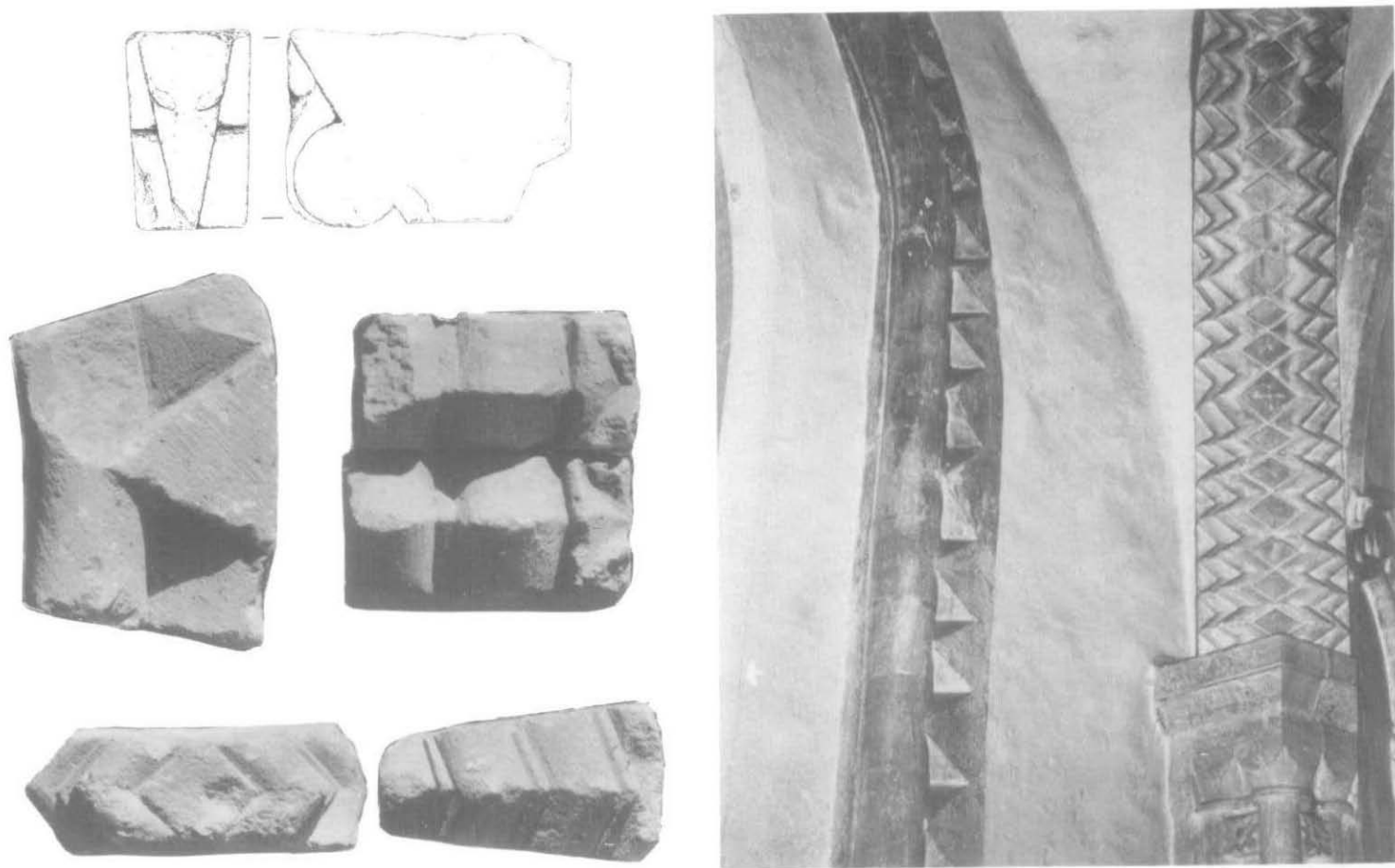


Fig. 68. *Left:* Beakhead and voussoirs from St. Frideswide's. *Scale 1:6.* (Stored by the County Museums Service. Phh. John Blair, drawing by Sarah Blair.) *Right:* Ifley, internal N.E. corner of chancel, showing window and rib voussoirs resembling the examples from St. Frideswide's. (Ph. John Blair.)

design of the Iffley chancel vault-rib (Fig. 68 right), with a lozenge on the intrados, flanked by two parallel rows of chevron. Another similarly fire-stained stone could also be part of a vault-rib, but of a profile closer to the transverse arch design at St. Peter's-in-the-East and certainly different to the Iffley section. Could these stones be from a rib-vaulted chapter-house?

Two carved beakheads at Christ Church (Figs. 67, 68 top-left), of different sizes and from unknown arches, presumably within the St. Frideswide's site, have their closest parallels at St. Peter's and St. Ebbe's. Other pieces with uncarved triangles breaking into a roll-moulding can be paralleled on Iffley's S. door and chancel windows (Fig. 68 middle-left and right). The 'chevron set on several planes'¹³⁵ is common to the door of St. Frideswide's chapter-house, the W. door of Iffley and the chancel windows of St. Peter's, although both the latter examples seem to be of a slightly better quality, with extra little ridges and beading between the rows of chevron. In this respect, they are close to the chevron work amongst the Reading Abbey fragments.

The scalloped capitals on the right jamb of the chapter-house entrance at St. Frideswide's (Fig. 51) are also distinctive, with strictly local parallels. The inner capital of the two, a cushion shape with spear-tips rising from the necking at each corner, has an exact parallel at Iffley in the capital on the right-hand marble shaft of the western tower arch. The outer capital, the restored capitals of the flanking openings (Fig. 65 upper) and two of the capitals found in the cloister walls (Fig. 52 bottom-left) have a two-scallop design to each face, with extra ridged wedges at the base of their cones, which can only be seen in Oxford at St. Peter's, in the crypt and on the chancel transverse arch capital.¹³⁶

Another capital that Buckler illustrates (Fig. 52 centre-right, now lost) has a decorated cushion form with a beaded row defining the shape and thin flutes rising from the necking to the edge of the cushion. The only direct parallel for this design in Oxfordshire is on the N. door of Barford St. Michael parish church, near Banbury. But a similar attitude towards capital design can be seen in the figured capitals on the S. door at Iffley, and on the left jamb-capitals of the St. Frideswide chapter-house, where the cubic shape is retained within the decoration. It is these capitals that in their form and detail most resemble capitals from the Reading Abbey site.

¹³⁵ Alan Borg, 'The Development of Chevron Ornament', *J.B.A.A.* 3rd ser. xxx (1967), 122-40.

¹³⁶ The extra wedge at the base of the scallop is quite commonly used elsewhere, particularly in the W. of England, but there is rarely an extra point between the wedges themselves.