

THE CRYPT OF CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL.

First Report of a Committee appointed "to make an Antiquarian Investigation of the Cathedral."

TO THE DEAN AND CHAPTER OF CANTERBURY.

In presenting our first report, we deal only with explorations that have been carried out in the CRYPT.

There is, at the west end of the Crypt, an accumulation of earth, to the average depth of 18 or 20 inches, covering the bases of the vaulting shafts. This accumulation lessens in depth as we proceed eastward; so that at the Lady Chapel it does not exceed six or eight inches.

THE WEST WALL OF CRYPT IS PROBABLY PRE-NORMAN.

When the accumulated earth had been cleared away, from the base of the central portion of the *west wall*, there was found upon the wall a remarkably fine smooth facing of hard plaster, which extended some 2 feet beneath the present surface. The masonry beneath the plaster was mainly of Kentish ragstone.

This facing, of plaster, exists also behind the columns of Prior Ernulf's westernmost vaulting shafts, which, to the eye, had seemed to be "engaged shafts." The plaster, and that part of the wall which it covers, must therefore have been *in situ* before A.D. 1096. Ernulf certainly found the wall and plaster there, and he retained them. Probably Archbishop Lanfranc had done so likewise in A.D. 1070.

The squared masonry, of Caen stone, in the upper portion of this western wall, so strongly resembles Lanfranc's masonry, still to be seen in the lower part of the walls of the nave, that it may very probably be considered as his work.

In that case the *lower* portion of the west wall must have been part of the *pre-Norman* crypt; and the character of the plaster seems to suggest the possibility that it may have formed part of the original building, granted to St. Augustine, by King Ethelbert.

ARCH BLOCKED UP AT NORTH-WEST CORNER OF CRYPT.

On the north side of the west end of Ernulf's crypt (a few feet from the west wall) there is a large Norman arch, which we believe to have been blocked up after Ernulf's time.

A stone was removed from the centre of this blocking wall, and entrance was then obtained to a considerable cavity, 12 feet long by 4 feet wide; within which, however, nothing was found.

PROBABLE END OF LANFRANC'S CRYPT.

In the central alley of the Crypt, immediately to the east of the fourth pair of detached columns (counting from the west), excavations have laid bare traces of the foundation of a thick wall composed of fragments of Caen stone, flints, and a little travertine, embedded in a large proportion of pure mortar. This foundation which has a (doubtfully) apse-like curve, occurring as it does at about the place to which the crypt of Lanfranc is believed to have reached, may well be accepted as marking the eastern termination of his crypt.

THE LADY CHAPEL IN THE CRYPT.

An examination of the Lady Chapel has shewn that its eastern floor is composed of slabs of the stalagmite which (according to Professor Willis) formed the pavement of Conrad's choir before the fire in 1174.

The foundations of the altar have been traced, extending from the east wall.

Cardinal Morton's ledger stone, stripped of its monumental brass, was not disturbed, but the sounds produced by blows upon its surface prove undoubtedly that his vault lies beneath it; although his monument stands at some distance away, south-west of this ledger stone.

ERNULF'S EASTERN RECTANGULAR CHAPEL.

Eastward of the Lady Chapel, the furthest extremity of Ernulf's crypt has been traced. It terminated in a *Rectangular Chapel*, as shewn upon Professor Willis's Plan (opposite page 39 of his *Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral*).

The middle of the outer face of its east wall (which is 4 feet wide) touches the western side of the circular base of the easternmost vaulting shaft of English William's central arcade, erected in A.D. 1180.

PROBABLE POSITION OF BECKET'S COFFIN FROM 1170 TO 1220.

Between the west face of the above-mentioned wall, of the Rectangular Chapel, and the next vaulting shaft of English William, westward, nothing of any importance was discovered; but a hollow, extending about 3 feet below the surface and filled in with rubble, seemed to indicate the position occupied by the coffin of Archbishop Becket from A.D. 1170 until A.D. 1220 when it was translated to the Shrine, east of the Choir. It will be remembered that the *Tomb* of Becket stood upon this site from A.D. 1170 until A.D. 1538.

FRAGMENTS OF STAINED GLASS.

In the earthen floor at the south side of this place were deposited very many fragments of stained glass, of various dates and patterns.

STEPS OF APPROACH TO "ALTAR OF THE TOMB OF ST. THOMAS."

Around the circular base of the westernmost of English William's central vaulting shafts, we discovered two long steps of Purbeck marble. They were broad, but very thin.

The *upper* step was so chiselled as to fit closely round the eastern half of the circular base. The *lower* step fitted the western half thereof in like manner. These were originally steps of approach to the "Altar of the tomb of St. Thomas" in the Middle Ages.

STONE COFFIN (a).

About 4 feet west of the lower step, in a direct line (from east to west) with the central vaulting shafts, the narrow end, or foot of, a stone coffin was discovered. The coffin, which was 6 ft. 2 in. long, was broader at the west end than at the east. It was hewn out of a solid block of Portland oolite, and was covered with a thin slab of Merstham or Reigate fire-stone, utterly unfitted for such a purpose.

FRAGMENTS OF WROUGHT MASONRY.

The earthen floor on all sides of this coffin—as in the entire area of the Rectangular Chapel—was full of large fragments of wrought masonry, which had formed small arches, elaborately moulded in the Early English style (circa A.D. 1220—1230). Small round shafts with their caps and bases were also discovered there, as well as other fragments, less in number, that had been parts of Norman arches.

AN EFFIGY.

The head and the base of a Bishop's or Archbishop's effigy beneath a canopy have also been found in this same place. They are sculptured in Purbeck marble, in high relief.

AN EARLY FLOOR.

The section of an early floor, composed of white plaster half an inch or an inch thick, was clearly traced while excavating these blocks of stone. It was about 6 inches below the level of the present surface.

THIS PART OF THE CRYPT WAS WALLED OFF FROM 1546 TO 1838.

This portion of the Crypt received unique treatment, soon after the dissolution of the Monastery of Christ Church. It was walled off from the rest of the Crypt, and became completely private in A.D. 1546. It was in that year appropriated to Richard Thornden, the

second Bishop of Dover, under the name of the "Vault called Becket's Tomb." Thornden had been a monk of the Priory of Christ Church from the year 1512 until its dissolution, when he became one of the Prebendaries of the Cathedral.

As this "Vault called Becket's Tomb" was used as a private cellar (from which the public were excluded between the years 1546 and 1838), the moulded masonry in its earthen floor must have been placed there before A.D. 1546. The labour of making a level floor out of such masses of masonry must have been very great.

STONE COFFIN (*b*).

When the above-mentioned stone coffin was examined, it was found to contain human bones, not placed in any regular order, but gathered together near the middle and upper portion of the coffin, and mingled with much earthen *debris*. No member of your Committee saw the coffin until the upper portion of the lid had been removed, if indeed the lid had remained complete until the time of this exploration.

CONTENTS OF COFFIN.

At the head of the coffin was a boulder-like stone, hollowed on its upper surface, as if to form a pillow. It had been broken across the middle.

It was found that nearly all the bones of a complete human body were present in the heap. They were those of an adult of full stature, and of at least middle age. But there is no distinct evidence to shew to whom they belonged.

CONCLUSION.

In concluding this our first report, we may be permitted to thank the Dean and Chapter for giving us permission to make these explorations (which are of undoubted historical and antiquarian interest), and also Mr. H. G. Austin for his valuable and cordial assistance.

We are, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servants,

CHARLES F. ROUTLEDGE.
J. BRIGSTOCKE SHEPPARD.
W. A. SCOTT ROBERTSON.

April 28th, 1888.