

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WEST FRONT OF ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL

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It is probably true to say that the west front of Rochester Cathedral is not one of the more memorable or imposing of those that survive from the Romanesque period. No doubt many would find it less majestic, less grand, than the façade of Durham Cathedral, with its twin western towers rising imposingly above the cliffs of the River Wear, or that of Lincoln Cathedral, due to its three giant recesses and two western towers; or, perhaps, even that of Tewkesbury Abbey, with its multi-ordered giant arch dominating the relatively small structure. Compared to these or others more nearly its contemporaries, such as Worksop Priory and Southwell Minster, both of which are situated less dramatically than Durham or Lincoln, and are more prosaic in their surroundings like Rochester, the façade of Rochester may seem disappointing in its squatness, devoid as it is of prominent motifs such as tall towers or giant arches.¹ It is, however, richly decorated with architectural arcading and ornamental forms, and, in addition, figurative sculpture. In spite of not being immediately impressive or arresting, a close examination of the façade does reveal a structure that is highly interesting in terms of its architectural form, that is of considerable curiosity in regard to its sculptural decoration, and which is altogether very individual and was possibly unique in Romanesque England.

THE WEST FRONT AS IT PRESENTLY EXISTS

As it stands today, Rochester Cathedral's west front appears to be one

¹ The assessment of J. Newman, *West Kent and the Weald (The Buildings of England)*, 2nd Edn. (1976), 475, is kinder: 'The west front is logical, balanced, and well-proportioned, which can be said of very few Norman façades in England'.

of the most complete to remain from the Romanesque period. The Perpendicular west window is the only obvious major alteration and, in spite of its great size, does not seem inordinately damaging in its effect on the earlier work, or to be, indeed, totally unsympathetic or out of place.

The twelfth-century design is composed of five major elements. The most important and the largest is the central section, corresponding to the nave; it is flanked by two smaller, narrower sections relating to the aisles; and there are large turrets, one at each corner, which together seem to contain and enclose the composition. A clear division is maintained between the main section of the façade and the lateral ones: this is created, not through the use of projecting buttresses, but, instead, by recessing the wall in front of the aisles slightly behind the faces of the nave-end wall and of the turrets. The angle turrets are, in fact, small stair-towers, and project somewhat beyond the exterior aisle walls, as well as into the interior space of the aisles. Except for a high bare dado, the façade is completely covered by tiers of tall narrow bays of arcading.

The south stair-tower rises square for three stages: the first is plain; the second and third are decorated with tall narrow arcading, four or five bays to a face, with tiny multi-scallop capitals and roll moulded archivolt; a nook-shaft is placed at the corners. The upper two stages are octagonal with three bays of arcading on each face: they have shaft-rings, multi-scallop capitals and arches with banded rolls or chevrons. By contrast, the north stair-tower is square for its full height. Its first three stages are equal in height to those of the south tower; the upper two stages are lower than the ones below. The details are similar to those of the south stair-tower: arches with either roll/hollow mouldings, radial chevron or scallops.

The narrow aisle-ends are each completely filled by a tall arch with thin jamb-shafts and double-scallop capitals: each archivolt is roll-moulded, and there is a double label composed of sawtooth and dogtooth *motifs*. A window of two orders is placed in its back wall; the outer order is shafted with double-scallop capitals, and the inner one is roll-moulded with chevroned arches; a reticulated diaper pattern, now preserved only on the south side, fills the wall surface below. On each side, a bare stretch of wall, pierced by a small window, intervenes between the top of the arched recess and the arcading of the demi-gable corresponding to the slope of the lean-to roof over the aisle. A small portal, with a pointed arch, which penetrates the wall below the north aisle window is obviously a later insertion: there were no aisle portals originally.

The nave-end has a lower plain dado, followed by three tiers of arcading; then flanking turrets rise free for three more stages. The

tiers of arcading do not correspond in level with those on the stair-towers. The original gable must have been at a lower level than the existing one, which, with its low pitch and crenellations, is a consequence of the insertion of the eight-light Perpendicular window. The west portal, of five orders, is the only surviving portal in England still to have column figures – there are only two – as well as a tympanum, and a carved lintel. The lintel is not a single beam but eight stones ingeniously interlocked. It does not quite fit into place, as it is positioned so that the bottom of the tympanum and the last voussoir stone of the inner order project over it. The three outer jamb-shafts of the portal have carved shaft-rings which also occur on the upper stages of the turrets; the innermost jamb is formed by a large demi-shaft. The figure columns are on the fourth pair of shafts, a male figure on the north, a female figure on the south. The capitals, abaci and label of the portal are all elaborately carved with a variety of foliage patterns which are inhabited on the capitals. Each voussoir of the archivolt is separately carved with a variety of foliage patterns or monsters; only the innermost order has a continuous radial pattern of palmette foliage. Flanking the west portal are two flat niches, barely contained within the height of the dado; their jambs are continuously roll-moulded.

The archivolt of the portal rise completely through the first tier of arcading which is of tall, narrow bays with shafts that rest on carved corbels above a string-course with palmette medallions; its capitals are multi-scallop or volute and its arches are carved with a palmette pattern. The second tier, which follows after a short space covered by a diaper pattern consisting of medallions containing four-petalled flowers, was squat: three bays now survive on each side of the west window. They are unusual, as the columns support a continuous lintel, small tympana and arches. The lintels are carved with a zig-zag with pellets decorating the triangles; the capitals are double-scallop or volute, the arches are chevroned, and small grotesque animals or foliage fill the tympana. Above a narrow zone decorated with lattice diaper pattern, is the tall third stage: four bays now remain on each side of the Perpendicular window; once again there are chevroned arches, this time with intersecting arches decorated with billets over them. The string-course below this stage, and the label over the arches below, have a curious design of lozenges and pellets.

Above this level the turrets originally must have risen free. Their first stage is square with two twin bays of arcading to each face; a concentric chevron pattern runs continuously up the jambs of the bays and the background is diapered with diagonal crosses (north) or swirling rosettes (south). The two upper stages are octagonal, with two bays on each face; the upper arcade columns have shaft-rings.

The columns are alternately thick and thin, or more accurately, thick-thin-thick-thin-thick-thin, etc.

As on the exterior, the inside of the west wall is arcaded. The lower section of the wall containing the west portal is equal in height to the nave arcade. The west portal itself is nearly the height of the nave arcades and is flanked by two tiers of arcading of three bays each: the lower tier has columns, the upper one moulded jambs. Above this, to either side of the Perpendicular west window, are remains of two more tiers corresponding in height to the triforium, and, presumably, to the first clerestory. The original arrangements of the façade windows have been completely effaced by the later west window.

The details of the inside are as elaborate as those of the exterior. On the main portal, these are a thin jamb-shaft, double-scallop capitals and an archivolt with a cable moulding instead of a roll; a pyramid *motif* forms the surround. The first tier of arcading has multi-scallop capitals, moulded arches and a billet label; on the second tier are jambs carved with chevron placed concentrically, a scallop pattern between and around each bay, and a billet label; of the third tier a half bay is now all that remains, with a double-scallop capital and a moulded arch; between the third and fourth tiers is a horizontal chevron string; finally, the fourth tier, of one surviving bay on each side, has multi-scallop capitals and a chevroned arch.²

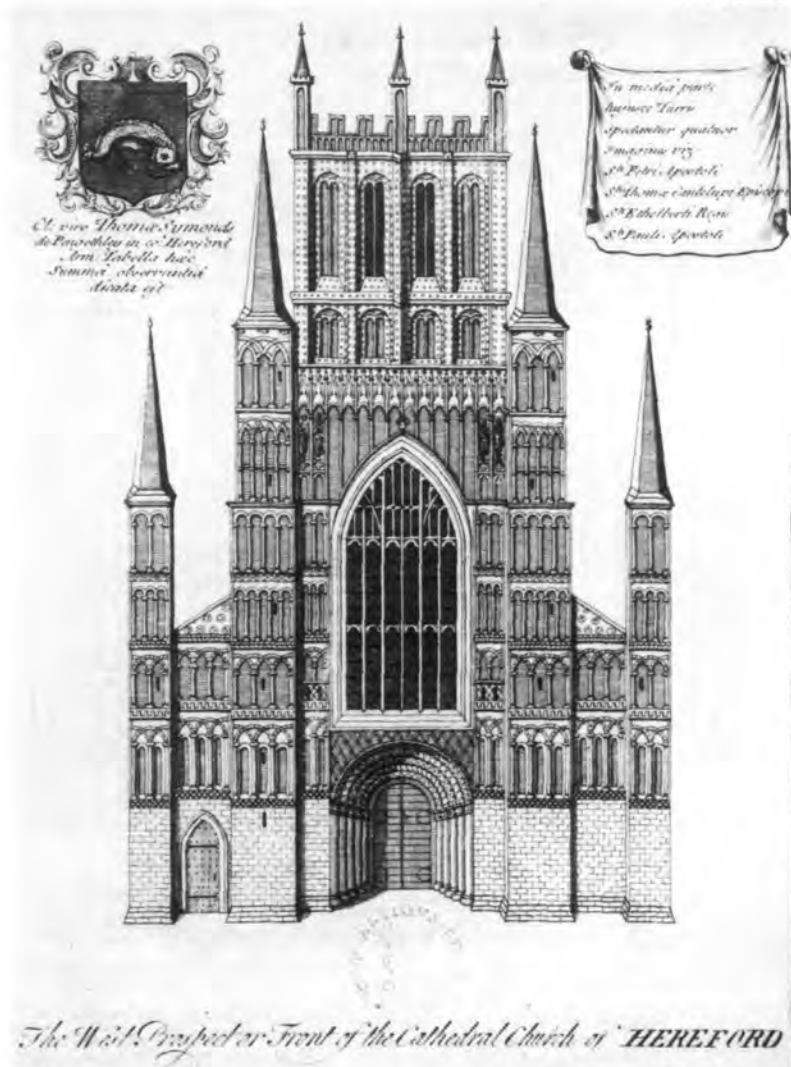
In general, the bays of arcading are tall and narrow, usually with thinly-moulded archivolt, and with capitals tiny in proportion to their shafts, which together create a linear effect that, however, does not quite negate the plasticity of the parts. Excluding the west portal, double- or multi-scallop capitals and roll-moulded arches predominate, but, as can be gathered from the foregoing description, the architectural forms are richly carved with a considerable variety of *motifs*. There are cable mouldings, billets, scallops, lozenges, pellets, as well as zig-zag or sawtooth and dogtooth; intersecting arcades, tympana, shaft-rings, and a number of different mural diaper patterns are also used. Although the chevron occurs in several varieties, they are not used very emphatically, nor with the same enthusiasm for the *motif* demonstrated by other buildings of the same period.

The profusion and character of the ornamental details suggest that the actual construction of the façade was during the third quarter of the century. Building of the church had been initiated by the second Norman bishop, Gundulf of Bec (1077–1108). His project was enlarged when a successor, Ernulf (1115–24), formerly of Canterbury

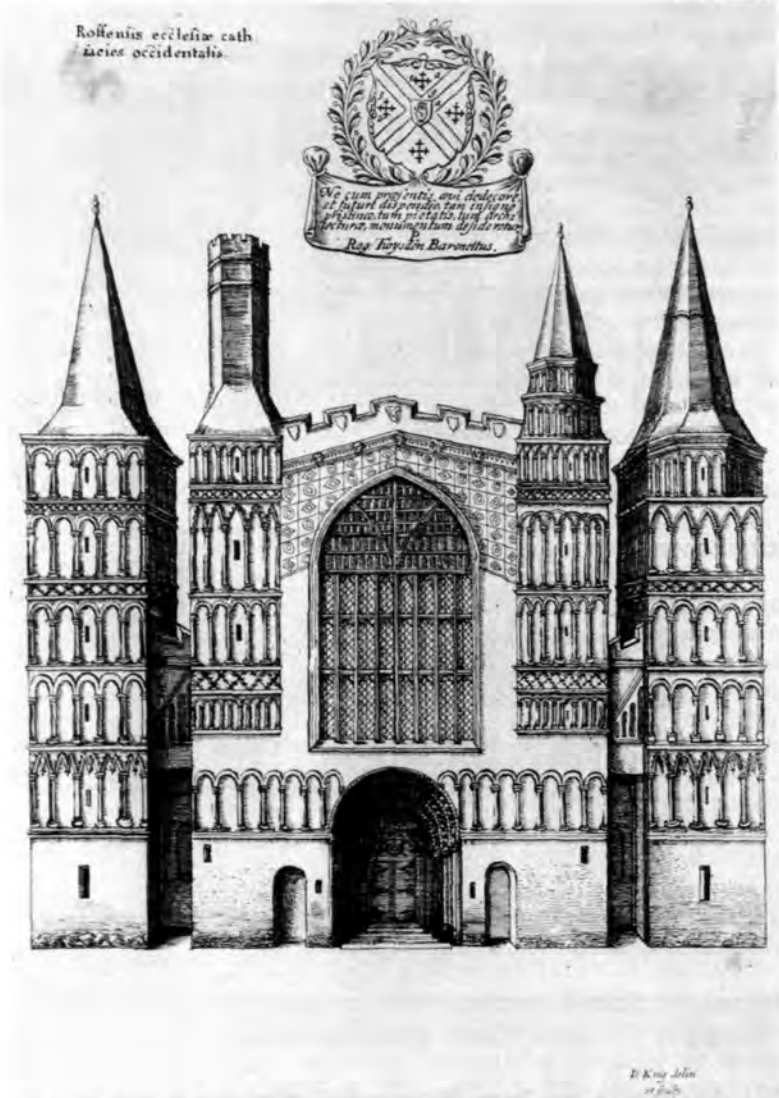
² These side bays have been tampered with when the west window was inserted.

THE WEST FRONT OF ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL

PLATE IA



Rochester Cathedral, west Front. Engraving by D. King, from R. Dodsworth and Wm. Dugdale, *Monasticon anglicanum*, I (1655) between pp. 24 and 25 (Photo: Courtesy Courtauld Institute of Art, London).



Hereford Cathedral, west Front. Engraving by G. Merricke and J. Harris, from B. Willis, *A Survey of the Cathedrals of York, etc.* (1727), opposite p. 499 (Photo: Courtesy Courtauld Institute of Art, London).

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Cathedral and Peterborough Abbey, began the rebuilding of the east end, and possibly started work at the west end.³ Despite a consecration on 5 May, 1130,⁴ during the bishopric of John of Canterbury (1125–37), the church could not have been complete at that time. A fire is recorded in 1137.⁵ The present façade structure is probably due to work carried out after that date under Bishops John of Séz (1137–42), Ascelin (1142–48) or, most likely, Walter (1148–82).⁶

ALTERATIONS AND RESTORATIONS

The decorative *motifs* of Rochester now seem peculiarly harsh and dry, small in scale, shallow in depth of carving. This in part may be due to the deadening effect of later restoration and recutting. The façade has actually undergone more extensive alterations and restorations than is immediately apparent. The first change still visible was relatively minor – the introduction of a door into the end wall of the north aisle, dated to 1327.⁷ The second was larger in scale and more significant in its effect: this was the insertion of the Perpendicular west window. Its construction was accompanied by the remodelling of the gable, north gable turret and the half gables at the end of the aisles, all appropriately crenellated (Plate IA).⁸ About 1763 the north flanking stair-tower was taken down and, before 1772, rebuilt to half its height, reproducing the original composition slightly shortened. At the same time, the detail of the north aisle-end, above

³ The fundamental architectural histories of Rochester remain: G.H. Palmer, *The Cathedral Church of Rochester* (Bell's Cathedral Series, 1897), especially 9–10, 43–48; W.H. St. John Hope, *The Architectural History of the Cathedral and Monastery of St. Andrew at Rochester* (1900), particularly 22–34, which supersedes his earlier articles. See also: Newman, *op. cit.*, in note 1, 470–81.

⁴ Gervase of Canterbury, *Opera Historica*, (Ed.) Wm. Stubbs (*Rolls Series*, LXXIII, 2 vols., 1870–80), ii, 383.

⁵ Gervase, *op. cit.*, in note 4, i, 100; see also Palmer, *op. cit.*, in note 3, 10 or Hope, *op. cit.*, in note 3, 34.

⁶ G. Webb, *Architecture in Britain: The Middle Ages* (1956), 49, pl. 43B; Newman, *op. cit.*, in note 1, 472, mid-twelfth century: cf. Palmer, *op. cit.*, in note 3, 9; Hope, *op. cit.*, in note 3, 25, 33–5.

⁷ Palmer, *op. cit.*, in note 3, 44; Hope, *op. cit.*, in note 3, 81–2.

⁸ The engraving of D. King for R. Dodsworth and Wm. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, I (1655), between 24 and 25, which shows the façade in this state, is the earliest depiction of the façade. Unfortunately, it is by no means accurate in regard to the general proportions of the major parts and their relationship to each other, or very particular about the details of the arcading. Other obvious deficiencies are also present: the reverse depiction of the wall above the recess of the south aisle; the reverse slope of the crenellation over both the aisles; and the absence of the fourteenth-century north aisle portal.



Poitiers, Notre-Dame-la-Grande, west Façade, Detail of Arcading (Photo: Courtesy Courtauld Institute of Art, London).



Villesalem, Priory Church, west Façade, Detail of Arcading (Photo: Courtesy G. Zarnecki and Courtauld Institute of Art, London).

the window, was altered. Aisle-end and stair-turret were 'finished off' with a continuous horizontal, battlemented parapet. After 1772 the top of the south stair-tower, which had been octagonal, was lopped off to match the abbreviated north stair-tower.⁹ It was left crudely truncated, and was linked to the corner of the nave above the original slope of the aisle roof by a roughly built wall which was given two crenellations. In 1825–26 the great west window was renewed by L.N. Cottingham who took occasion to remove the diaper pattern from the surrounding wall. Restorers of the later nineteenth century completely dismantled the eighteenth-century work and rebuilt the various stair-towers and turrets, including the fifteenth-century north gable turret. The restoration of 1888, by J.L. Pearson, attempted to return the façade to its appearance before the demolitions of the eighteenth century and the alterations of the Late Medieval period.

THE SCULPTURAL DECORATION AND ITS SOURCES

The façade of Rochester contains a variety of references to the decorative traditions of several areas of France. In fact, it seems to be a mixture of ideas combined to form a design that may owe its various elements to a number of sources but its totality only to an English mind. It is among the tiers of arcading that we find decorative details which lead directly to western France. The second tier of arcading on the nave-end is highly individual, and is distinguished from the other registers where more or less conventional English *motifs* appear. What is unusual about this second row of arcading is the small tympana under the arches, carved with grotesques.¹⁰ Such small tympana are a well-known feature of Notre-Dame-la-Grande at Poitiers,¹¹ where they are found under the arches of the first register of arcading. At Villesalem, also in the Poitou (Deux-Sèvres),¹² the arches flanking the portal are subdivided, and have two small

⁹ The above dates are from Palmer, *op. cit.*, in note 3, 45–7, and Hope, *op. cit.*, in note 3, 91–3; they are repeated in summary form in Newman, *op. cit.*, in note 1, 472, 476.

¹⁰ Reading from north to south, the subject matter of the tympana is: two birds flanking a vase; a man with his arms under his legs holding two fish; a snake-tailed bird; foliage; a snake-tailed bird? (very eroded); foliage.

¹¹ A. Rhein, 'Poitiers: Notre-Dame-la-Grande', *Congrès archéologique*, lxxix (Angoulême, 2 vols., 1912), I, 279–90; G. Dez, 'Notre-Dame-la-Grande de Poitiers', *Congrès archéologique*, cix (Poitiers, 1951), 9–19; R. Crozet, *L'Art roman en Poitou* (1948), 108–9, 113, pl. XXIX; Y. Labande-Mailfert, *Poitou roman (La Nuit des Temps, 1957)*, 63–8, 85–91, pls. 14–23.

¹² Crozet, *op. cit.*, in note 11, 97–9; F. Salet, 'L'Église de Villesalem', *Congrès archéologique*, cix (Poitou, 1951), 224–44.

tympana with grotesques, as at Notre-Dame-la-Grande itself. However, even in the Poitou such small tympana seem to be a rather rare feature.¹³ These tiny tympana placed under the rows of arches should not be confused with the considerably larger tympana, of greater iconographic pretensions, which are more frequently found under the large arches flanking the portals, as at Parthenay-le-Vieux (Deux-Sèvres).¹⁴ The motifs of the Rochester tympana are very similar but not identical to some of those found at Notre-Dame-la-Grande (Plate IIA) and also to a tympanum at the church of Villesalem (Plate IIB), particularly those of a long-tailed, serpent-like bird which twists its neck back under itself and two birds drinking out of a jug.

In contrast to this similarity, none of the *motifs* of the archivolts, lintels, capitals or diapering of the wall are derived from, or even remotely parallel those found at churches of the Poitou. The archivolts have that most definitely non-west French *motif*, a chevron placed concentrically, which is also repeated as a flat design on the lintels. In addition, the manner in which a lintel runs continuously between the capitals and below the arches of the arcading, as well as the position of the tympana, which are not recessed under the arches but instead are placed flush with their outer surfaces, are methods of assemblage not paralleled among the monuments of the Poitou. Indeed, they appear absolutely unique, as there are no parallels in England either. Notwithstanding these differences, the relationship to the sculpture of western France once again is asserted by the archivolts of the west portal itself. Because of the radial arrangement of the voussoirs and the various *motifs* which appear on them, there can be no doubt of the connection.¹⁵ Thus, it is a surprise to see that the same portal also possesses both a tympanum and column figures, elements which are not associated with the west of France,¹⁶ but

¹³ For tympana in the Poitou, see Crozet, *op. cit.*, in note 11, 239. Small tympana under arcades are not strictly limited to the Poitou: for example, similar ones are found at Jussy-Champagne (Cher) in Berry, and formerly at Ronsenac (Charante) in the Angoumois. In England, a similar use of small tympana decorated with grotesques and foliage trails appears at the Cluniac priory of Castle Acre, pointed in shape because they occur under the arches of a register of intersecting arcading.

¹⁴ Crozet, *op. cit.*, in note 11, 76-8, pl. XXX.

¹⁵ Observed by E.S. Prior and A. Gardner, *An Account of Medieval Figure-Sculpture in England* (1912), 198, and specifically compared to Notre-Dame-la-Grande. They also felt (194-5) that some corbels and capitals of the arcading revealed influence, but less purely, from the same general region (Poitou, Charente; Angoulême, Saintes, Angers). See also A. Gardner, *A Handbook of English Medieval Sculpture* (1935), 91-5.

¹⁶ Tympana in western France were not placed over doorways.

rather are typical of the Ile-de-France and Burgundy.

The column figures are only two in number and they are rather small. Nonetheless, in their iconography and style they are a direct reference to the grander schemes of the west portals of the towered façades of St.-Denis and Chartres, a decade or two earlier. The tympanum has the subject of Christ in Majesty, represented in the Burgundian manner with a mandorla supported by two angels, surrounded by the beasts of the Evangelists. The Apostles are carved on the lintel, as is the case at Chartres.¹⁷

The sculpture of the façade of Rochester has been well-studied, especially that of the main portal. This is not so much because of its quality; rather, it is a consequence of its being there at all. Generally, English Romanesque façades are distinguished by the absence of sculpture, except for geometric ornamental motifs applied to archivolts. Rochester is the rare exception to this 'rule' and has few parallels among major cathedral or abbey churches of the period. Lincoln Cathedral is the only other known example of a major church whose façade received some kind of figurative sculpture during the Romanesque period.¹⁸ In this respect, the English façades as a group stand in sharp contrast to those of many regions of France, including, most notably, those already alluded to, Aquitaine, Burgundy, the Ile-de-France, to which may be added the Languedoc and Provence. While the sculptured ensembles of many small – parish – churches have long been recognized as being heavily influenced by developments in France, this aspect of French façades seems by and large not to have made much impression on those responsible for building the larger churches in the British Isles. While it can be seen that the interesting sculpture of Rochester does not relate to Insular traditions, nor appear to have started new ones, it remains to be seen in what directions an analysis of the architectural framework leads. The

¹⁷ Both tympana and column figures have long been considered as later insertions; see Prior and Gardner, *op. cit.*, in note 15, 199, 201–2; Gardner, *op. cit.*, in note 15, 95; G. Zarnecki, *Later English Romanesque Sculpture, 1140–1210* (1953), 39; L. Stone, *Sculpture in Britain: The Middle Ages* (1955), 85; they date them 1180, after 1140 to before 1180, 1175, and, ' . . . soon after the middle of the century' respectively. A.W. Clapham, *English Romanesque Architecture* (1934), II. *After the Conquest*, 143, dated the tympanum to c. 1160–70.

The tympanum is not quite properly assembled: the mandorla around Christ is cut off under his feet and the top part is discontinuous with the curve of the side sections, as if there was not enough height. However, Zarnecki no longer believes that the tympanum and column figures were later insertions: he has suggested that the interlocking voussoir construction of the lintel would make a later insertion impossible.

¹⁸ See: G. Zarnecki, *Romanesque Sculpture at Lincoln Cathedral* (Lincoln Minster Pamphlets, 2nd Ser., No. 2, n.d. [c. 1963]).

rareness, if not uniqueness, of the tympana, column figures, and some of the archivolt designs of Rochester have attracted more attention than the forms to which they are attached.

THE ARCHITECTURAL FORM: SOURCES AND SIGNIFICANCE

At first, it would appear that the façade of Rochester Cathedral (Plate IA) was of the sectional type, similar to that, of about the same date, that formerly existed at Hereford Cathedral (Plate IB),¹⁹ a type quite common among English Romanesque churches. However, upon closer examination the turrets at the angles of the façade are seen to be noticeably larger than most angle turrets, appearing more like little towers. Indeed, they can more accurately be described as stair-towers, for their insides are completely filled by newel-stairs. On the exterior, the result is a bold individualisation of a feature formerly frequently hidden behind pilaster-buttresses. Instead, at Rochester, the stair-turrets have been enlarged to form a conspicuous feature of the façade, vigorous and prominent, almost squeezing the aisle-ends out of sight. In addition to projecting beyond the aisle-ends, the stair-towers also project beyond the aisle walls.

In its basic architectural form, the façade of Rochester is now and would appear to have been unique, certainly within the British Isles. Because its original profile would have revealed the height of the aisles and their relationship to the nave, it is technically a sectional façade. However, this basic shape is complicated by several features that were not normally a part of a façade of this type, as can be seen by comparison with the original façade at Hereford. The nave-end is distinguished both by its lack of buttresses, as well as by its forward projection, as if in substitution, beyond the plane of the aisle west walls. Yet at the top, where the nave rises above the aisles, the angles are transformed into turrets, as if there indeed had been buttresses below, or newel-stairs within. The aisle-ends are squeezed between the mass of the projecting west wall of the nave and the equally projecting stair-towers, attracting attention because of the large recesses that rise to a height slightly greater than that of the west portal and which initially sheltered no more than a window. These

¹⁹ The Romanesque façade was destroyed in 1786 when a fourteenth-century tower that had been built behind it collapsed. Its design was preserved in the engraving of G. Merricke and J. Harris for B. Willis, *A Survey of the Cathedrals of York, etc.* (1727), opposite p. 499. This engraving served as the basis for the restoration drawing of G.G. Scott, 'Hereford Cathedral', *Arch. Journ.*, xxxiv (1877), opposite p. 329. The present façade of 1904-8, by Oldrid Scott, has nothing to do with the original design.

THE WEST FRONT OF ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL

PLATE III



Le Mans Cathedral, west Façade (Photo: Courtesy Courtauld Institute of Art, London).

large recesses are echoed, rather modestly, by the shallow, flat-backed niches placed to either side of the west portal. Over these different planes are spread the tiers of arcading, which, as has been described, do not keep to one level across the façade, as at Hereford, but change height according to the size of the area on which they are placed.

Can it be coincidence that the only building which apparently offers a precedent or prototype for the architectural form of Rochester has a similar, even if less extreme, reduction of the iconographic scheme of the west portals of Chartres Cathedral?

Admittedly, the famous column figures and tympanum of the cathedral of Le Mans belong to a south porch, not to its west façade.²⁰ Like Rochester, the façade of Le Mans (Plate III) has at its angles stair-towers – or had, as only one survives – which, although not quite so majestic as those of Rochester, are clearly a similar idea. Another similarity is the arched recesses flanking its west portal. At Le Mans they are taller in proportion to the west portal and shallower than those at Rochester: essentially, it is the same *motif* placed in the same way. At Le Mans, however, the deep recesses of the aisle-ends of Rochester are absent; there was at first simply a window. Both façades, therefore, originally lacked portals in the aisle-ends. One additional similarity can be brought forward. At Le Mans there is a certain interest in ornamental patterns, especially reticulated ones formed by decorated stonework, which also appears at Rochester under the aisle windows.

What has been added to the original design at Le Mans are the massive and rather ugly buttresses placed in line with the nave arcade. The façade of Le Mans, created by Bishops Hoel and Hildebert de Lavardin, had been completed in its initial grim and austere style by about 1120; only later, when the nave arches were rebuilt to receive vaults by Bishop Guillaume de Passavant, that is sometime before 1158, were the buttresses added against the façade.²¹ It is certainly possible and quite logical that an English traveller on his way to or from the Poitou could have passed through Le Mans sometime during this period.

Whether or not these similarities can be considered proof of the derivation of the Rochester façade from that of Le Mans Cathedral, or are admitted as evidence of some dependence, there can be no doubt of the originality of its architect. The significance of Rochester

²⁰ Prior and Gardner, *op. cit.*, in note 15, 199, have already singled out the Le Mans portal for particular comparison with the Rochester figures.

²¹ G. Fleury, *La Cathédrale du Mans (Petites monographies, n.d. [1908?])*, 78–82; F. Salet, 'La Cathédrale du Mans', *Congrès archéologique*, cxix (Maine, 1961), 34–7.

in England, if indeed it actually had any direct influence, may reside in the introduction of the prominent stair-towers which eventually became part of a different façade type, the screen façade. Although not a screen façade in the manner of that built a few years later at Malmesbury Abbey, the disposition of the stair-towers at Rochester does create a greater width than is actually present behind it. As equally important is the accompanying rejection of either twin-towers and/or the angle-turrets of a normal sectional façade, both of which façade types seem to have been actually contemplated at various times by the succession of architects at Rochester.

It was during the extensive late nineteenth-century restorations, first about 1872 under the supervision of Sir Gilbert Scott, and again in 1888 by J.L. Pearson, which included the underpinning of the west front, that the two earlier intentions for the west façade were discovered. The first façade was probably never completed. It was of simple sectional type with a central portal of two jamb-shafted orders and pilaster-strip buttresses projecting eight inches. It survived above the foundations for about two and a half feet and was plastered on the inside.²²

At the same time, heavier foundations were found under the north flanking stair-tower 'consisting of great blocks of tufa and rag stone' similar in character to those found earlier by J.T. Irvine in front of the north aisle west wall.²³ These blocks have been interpreted as evidence of preparation for west towers. Similar preparations were not found on the south side. This evidence perhaps explains why the westernmost nave piers are larger in their east-west dimensions than are the other piers of the nave: these western piers are an elongated octagon in plan, with no attached shafts. In façades of the twin-tower type, as can still be seen at Durham, Worksop or Southwell, the piers under the towers are always heavier than the others of the nave arcade.

The sectional façade seems to be associated with the original building phase initiated by the second Norman bishop, Gundulf; the towers may be connected with a rebuilding begun shortly after Gundulf's death by Ernulf, and probably interrupted by the fire in 1137. The present façade would then date from a third building campaign started sometime after 1137, perhaps as late as c. 1150 (? Bishop Walter, 1148-82). These facts suggest that the particular form of the stair-towers eventually built was a conscious compromise between these two other types of façades.

²² G. M. Livett, 'Foundations of the Saxon Cathedral at Rochester', *Arch. Cant.*, xviii (1889), 261, 274-5.

²³ *Ibid.*, 277-8; Hope *op. cit.*, in note 3, 28.

The only building in the British Isles that appears to have anticipated the basic architectural form of the final façade design at Rochester – that is the enlargement of the newel-stairs into prominent stair-towers – was the slightly earlier priory church in the North at Lindisfarne.²⁴ The church is smaller than Rochester and might, in some respects, be regarded as a scaled down version of Durham Cathedral. Its façade, probably constructed c. 1140, and now in ruins, is characterized by miniature towers that are completely filled by newel-stairs, like the stair-towers at Rochester, rather than like the staged towers of Durham. These miniature towers flanked a façade wall which was all in one plane, and in a plane behind that of the tower's west faces: unlike Rochester, the west walls of the nave and aisles were not differentiated. Also unlike Rochester, the façade of Lindisfarne was rather plain and bare. There was no arcading on the towers and the west wall other than two bays of blind arcading flanking the west portal, which projected strongly from the west wall; otherwise, there were only two west windows, placed one above the other. The prominence of the stair-towers, and their relationship in terms of scale to the rest of the façade, at both Lindisfarne and Rochester, anticipate the very similar forms at Malmesbury Abbey where the stair-towers helped create a screen façade in a manner that provides a direct prototype for the façade of Salisbury Cathedral.²⁵ The appearance of a screen façade at Rochester was not created, as the west walls of the aisles were not carried up to the level of the nave eaves between the stair-towers and the nave-end, as is true at Malmesbury and, of course, Salisbury. The tiers of arcading, though, do give Rochester's façade a certain similarity to Malmesbury, and to the later, more plastic, Gothic forms of Salisbury.

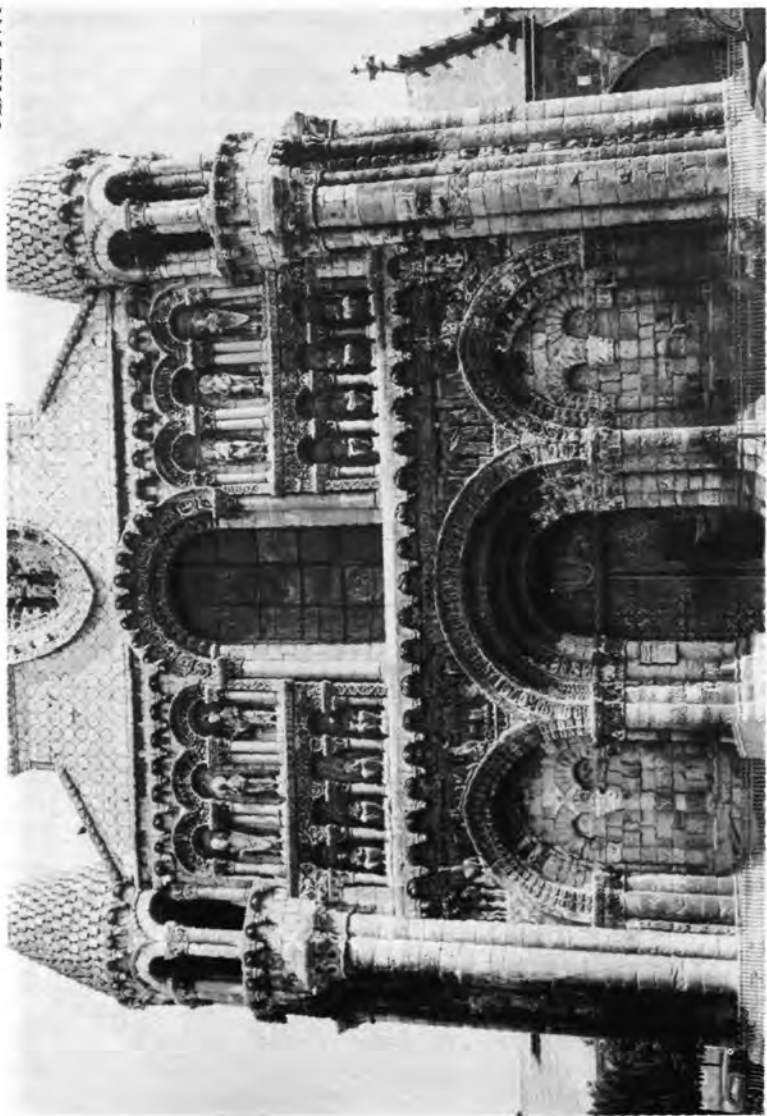
Thus, at Rochester we seem to have, in a façade on a major scale, the first appearance of a form that might be regarded as being intermediate between the small newel-stairs of a sectional façade, where they were hidden behind the angle buttresses of the west wall, and the full-scale, staged towers of a twin-tower façade, to which a newel-stair was normally attached. This intermediate form might then have been the source of inspiration for the development of a new façade type in the repertoire of the Romanesque British Isles, the screen façade. The façade of Rochester contained two out of three ideas fundamental to the new type, the arcaded surfaces minimally interrupted by verticals (buttresses) and the stair-towers.

²⁴ A. H. Thompson, *Lindisfarne Priory, Northumberland (Official Guide-book, 1949)*; N. Pevsner, *Northumberland (The Buildings of England, 1957)*, 185–7.

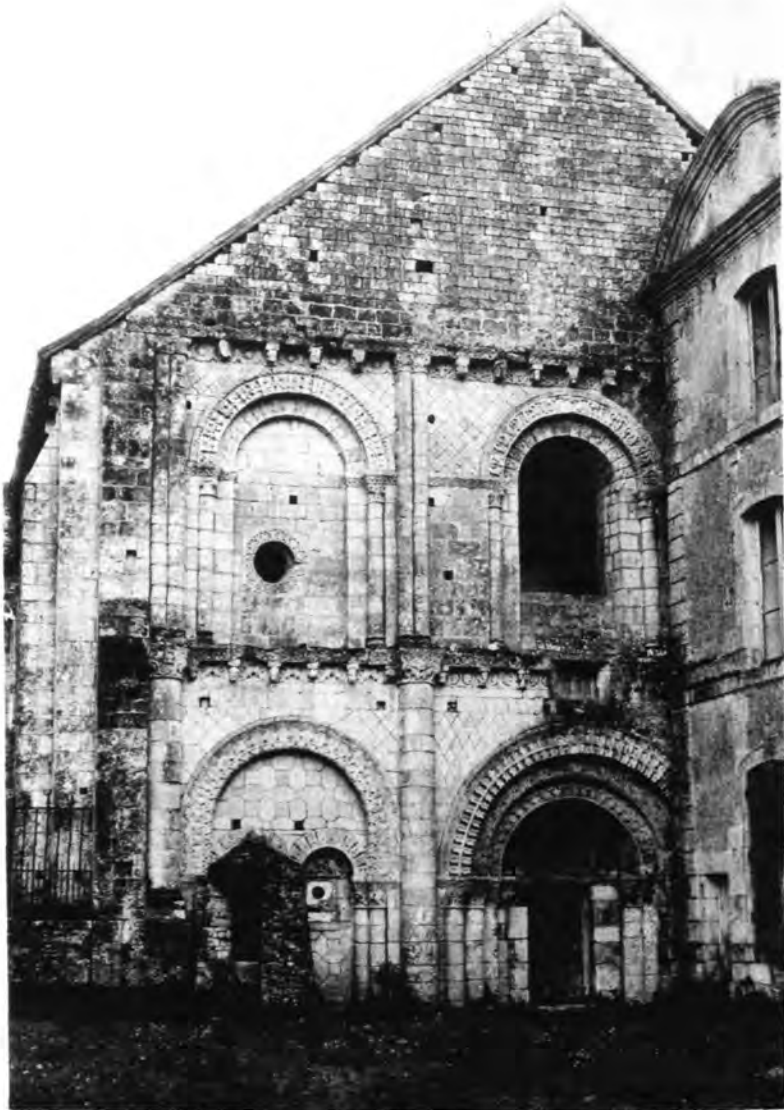
²⁵ Clapham, *op. cit.*, in note 17, 86; Webb, *op. cit.*, in note 6, 49; H. Brakspear, 'Malmesbury Abbey', *Archaeologia*, lxiv (1912–13), 419–20.

THE WEST FRONT OF ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL

PLATE IVA



Poitiers, Notre-Dame-la-Grande, west Façade (Photo: Courtesy G. Zarnecki and Courtauld Institute of Art, London).



Villesalem, Priory Church, west Façade (Photo: Courtesy G. Zarnecki and Courtauld Institute of Art, London).

THE WEST FRONT OF ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL

Only the later, however, was unique to Rochester, as by its date of construction many other façades shared or displayed an equal interest in arcading, as has been seen, for instance, at much the same period, on the façade of Hereford Cathedral.

The lavish use of arcading, combined with the sculptural motifs derived from the region of Aquitaine, may suggest that there was a similar relationship in the architectural form. A survey of the façades of the schools of the Poitou, Angoumois and Saintonge reveals that both the basic shape of the west wall and the system of decoration underlying the distribution of the arcading are very different.

Although the façades of the churches of this large region do not adhere strictly to a single formula, it is possible to notice and isolate certain habits and certain basic elements and units that were variously combined.²⁶ Perhaps the most important factor to observe is that none of the many façades have stair-turrets at their angles; indeed there are not even newel-stairs. A second factor, only slightly less significant, is that the west wall is usually treated as a single, vertical, rectangular field, spanned by one gable: this is generally true of aisled and unaisled churches alike. This vertical field is 'bordered' at the outer edges by narrow flat buttresses, slender shafts or nothing at all. In some cases, there are bundles of shafts which support round or octagonal, open, arcaded turrets with conical roofs. Within this framework, there is a very noticeable tendency towards two (or three) horizontal tiers of arcading. The ground stage is given the form of a triple arcade forming either a central portal flanked by blind bays, or three portals. The second tier is frequently a band of smaller scale arcading, often with a west window under the centre bay. An alternate scheme for the second, that is common among the larger façades, is a system of three large arcades frequently containing large windows. When a third tier is preserved, it resembles the system often used for the second tier: a series of small bays of blind arcading, sometimes with a window under a central bay. These horizontal orderings are frequently underscored by prominent and heavily decorated string-courses. They may also be accompanied by vertical divisions between the three ground-stage bays in the form of single or paired shafts, which divide the bands of arcading of the second stage into units, or effectively complete the grid of the façade when the second stage is composed of three large bays. In all cases, the total effect is very different from the façade of Rochester. In spite of the

²⁶ See especially L. Seidel, *Songs of Glory: The Romanesque Façades of Aquitaine* (1981), 17–34; and 85, 86, notes 15–17, for significant earlier bibliography; also Bibliography under Daras, Charles (134) and Hélot, Pierre (140).

fact that the Aquitainian façades are in one plane, they are more plastic in character. This is due to the fact that half-shafts are frequent, as well as to the multiple orders of doorways, flanking bays, and west windows. The arcading has a certain boldness, if not coarseness, and registers more strongly because in any one façade, and on any one level, its bays are more easily 'countable', than at Rochester which presents a greater all-over effect due to the numerous bays, all of much the same scale, which are not as varied or as strongly contrasted as in the Aquitainian façades. To choose two examples by way of illustration, two façades already mentioned because of their details may be conveniently regarded in their entirety: that of Notre-Dame-la-Grande (Plate IVA) contains typical elements, even if they are not combined in a totally orthodox fashion, whereas the façade of Villesalem is more representative (Plate IVB). It is clear, therefore, that in spite of the undeniable connections with western France in the sculpture, the design of the façade of Rochester was totally untouched by the architectural framework in which the French sculpture was placed. Apparently that framework did not have any significance to the British.

As a result of this analysis, it may be suggested that the façade of Rochester Cathedral, if not totally 'explainable', is of greater interest and, possibly, significance than its modest appearance might initially indicate.