

EXCAVATIONS AT TALLEY ABBEY.

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ON the main road from Llandeilo to Lampeter, about seven miles from the former place, stands the village of Talley, situated in a narrow valley on the watershed of two small streams, one flowing into the Cothie, northwards, and the other southwards into the Towy.

In the churchyard are the ruins of what is left above ground of the church of the Abbey of Talley, consisting of two arches of the central tower and a fragment of the wall of the north transept. The eastern face of the tower remains fairly complete to its summit, and on its northern side it rises above the water-table of the north transept roof. A portion of the internal walls of the presbytery could also be traced; but with these exceptions nothing more was to be seen before the excavations were commenced.

At the recent meeting of the Cambrian Archæological Association I read a paper descriptive of the ruins, and my friend Mr. Edward Owen also contributed an account of so much as is at present known of the history of the Abbey. Mr. Edward Owen said "that of none of the Welsh religious foundations of the Middle Ages had there been preserved a clear and connected history, or the graphic chronicles that imparted human interest to the story of several English houses." "Talley was more than usually unfortunate, the only published documents relating to it being those contained in the last edition of Dugdale's *Monasticon*. Even the religious Order to which it had belonged had been a subject of dispute. Dugdale thought it had been a Benedictine house, and his latest editors had not troubled to inquire into the point for themselves. A Cambridge MS. styled it Cistercian. Leland thought it had belonged to the Præmonstratensian Order, an opinion in which Bishop Tanner concurred. It would now be settled for good that Talley was "Præ-

monstratensian from its foundation (with a slight intermission) to its fall." I cannot say that I entirely agree with Mr. Owen upon this point.

"Of its founder, of the date when its inmates were introduced into Carmarthenshire, or the Abbey buildings commenced, no fresh documentary evidence could be adduced. It had been conjectured, and, no doubt, rightly, that it was founded by Prince Rhys ab Gruffudd, who received the title of Justiciar of South Wales from Henry II, and who died in 1196 or 1197. He was the founder of Strata Florida, and a large benefactor to Whitland, both Cistercian abbeys.

This was the popular monastic Order in Wales, and they might have been recommended to the Princes of Wales, not alone because of their religious austerity, but also for their devotion to agricultural pursuits. The Præmonstratensian Order, an offshoot from that of the Augustinian Canons, was introduced into England in 1143.

The Austin Canons were distinguished from the monks in being in Holy Orders, and in being attached to particular churches. The naves of all their churches were parochial. The monks were originally no more than laymen, bound by vows spontaneously assumed; but when the appropriation of parochial churches commenced, it became customary for some of them to take priest's orders; and at a still later period it was usual for all monks to become priests.

The Præmonstratensians resembled the Cistercians in their love for solitary places, and in their attention to agriculture. Talley occupied a typical Cistercian site, the arrangement of its buildings being more after the regular Cistercian plan than was usual with Præmonstratensian houses. Their early foundations always comprised separate houses for men and women; and though it was not possible to show that canonesses had ever lived at Talley, the likelihood of such a thing was greatly strengthened by the reference in early Welsh genealogies to an abbess of Talley.

It was unfortunate that Giraldus Cambrensis did not mention Talley in his account of his journey through Wales with Archbishop Baldwin in 1187, and he (Mr. Owen) thought it showed that Talley was not then in

existence. It must, however, have been established before Giraldus' death, which took place in 1223, because in his last written work, *Speculum Ecclesiæ*, he gave an interesting account of the high-handed proceedings of the Abbot of Whitland against a "poor house of Canons of the Præmonstratensian Order", culminating in their forcible ejection and the seizure of their house by the Cistercians. The Canons appealed to Hubert Archbishop of Canterbury, and afterwards to the Pope, and eventually regained their possessions. Now Hubert died in 1205, and as he (Mr. Owen) considered the house could not have been founded before 1190, it brought the exact date of that foundation within narrow limits, and also showed that the Cistercians had not remained long in possession.

In 1208 they came upon the first express mention of Talley, in which year King John confirmed to it a grant of lands in the modern parish of Llanegwad. In 1215 the Abbot, Gervase or Iorwerth, was elected Bishop of St. David's. He was probably the Abbot during the troubles with the Cistercians.

In 1291 the income of the house was £8:16:6 per ann. (about £230 of our money), compared with over £2,600 for Strata Florida, and nearly £1,200 for Whitland.

The Abbey fared badly during the struggles that terminated with the complete conquest of Wales in 1282, and in the 13th of Edward I it was placed under the "paternal jurisdiction" of Welbeck, the chief of the English Præmonstratensian houses. In 1332 it obtained several important gifts in the parishes of Llansadwrn, Llansawyl, Cynwil Caio, and the Grange of Cerrig Cennen; but its chief wealth lay in the tithes, or in the sums produced by their ferm of the many churches which had been appropriated to the Abbey. Of these, the church of Llandeilo was the most important; and several small chapels were also mentioned in the *Inspeximus* Charter published by Dugdale, which seemed to have been abandoned before the Abbey itself was dissolved.

There was at the Record Office a petition of Rhys ab Meredydd ab Rhys Gryg, who was executed in 1291 as a rebel, asserting that his father, the founder of the

Abbey, had always received the homage of the Abbot ; but that the King's bailiffs of Dynevor had diverted the suits done by the Abbot from the said Rhys, for which he prayed justice. This claim of the founder could only have meant that Meredydd ab Rhys was of the founder's family, and was the patron of the house.

The Canons of Talley no doubt suffered from the economic disturbances produced by the "Black Death".

In 1382 Richard II issued a commission to inquire into the losses sustained by the Abbey, the restoration of its property, and the repair of its buildings. This commission was renewed in 1392.

Notwithstanding the lawlessness of the times the Canons clung to their property, and in 1429 obtained a confirmation of the charter of Edward III. It had been stated that the Abbot of Talley was the chief instrument in determining the adherence of Sir Rhys ap Thomas to the cause of Henry of Richmond, afterwards Henry VII."

The above brief synopsis of Mr. Owen's excellent paper gives all the documentary evidence of the history of Talley Abbey at present known ; but it is hoped that further researches may bring to light other documents which may illustrate more fully the annals of one of the most important of the Welsh monasteries.

Until the year 1772 the Abbey church, or some part of it, was used as the parish church of Talley ; but being found too large for the purpose, and having become much dilapidated, the parishioners took down the greater portion of the building, and with the materials erected the present church, which stands on the north side of the site of the Monastery. The demolition of the Abbey church resulted in the entire structure falling into decay, and, as in nearly every similar case, it became a quarry from whence the neighbouring buildings were erected. Wherever there was a piece of freestone, in buttress, angle, pier, or arch, there the crowbar was at work wrenching it away ; and gradually, piece by piece, the entire fabric, with the exceptions already mentioned, disappeared, and all that remained was a mass of crumbling *débris* overgrown with brambles and trees, whilst some portions of the structure had been levelled, and forms a part of the existing churchyard.

It was early in February last that the Vicar of Talley, the Rev. J. H. Lloyd, and the two churchwardens, Sir James Drummond of Edwinsford, and D. Long Price, Esq., of Talley House, invited the writer of this paper to inspect the site of the Abbey, and advise as to its excavation. Great credit is due to these gentlemen for having taken the initiative in the exploration of the ruins.

We commenced operations by exploring some portions of the Abbey church, which, with a part of the cloister-garth, is nearly all within the area of the churchyard, in this respect resembling Strata Florida. Nearly the whole of the conventual buildings are outside the churchyard; and the site of these being occupied by a modern farmhouse and homestead, they have entirely disappeared.

We first of all traced the line of the north transept, and found that from 3 to 8 ft. in height of the walls still remained covered over with the fallen *débris* of the building. Subsequent excavations revealed that in the north transept there were three chapels, and it is probable that there were the same number in the south transept. The internal and external walls of the north transept have been all cleared down to floor-level, and so far as regards this portion of the building the excavation is complete.

The results obtained by the excavation of the north transept are most interesting and encouraging. In each of the chapels have been found the bases of altars, and portions of the original tile-pavements of plain red, blue, and buff glazed tiles. The foot-pace in front of the altars has had the tiles laid diagonally to the lines of the building, the remainder of the floors of the chapels being laid in parallel lines to the north and south walls. The whole of the north transept has apparently been similarly paved, but the tiles have all been removed.

In the north-east angle of the north transept we discovered a newel-staircase, which was the approach to the ringing-loft of the tower and to the triforium. The nave was lighted by clerestory windows. A similar staircase in the larger chapel apparently led to a chamber over. In this chapel we found the splay of the east window, and a recess with a pointed freestone arch, probably used as an aumbry; and there is an opening into the presbytery, which has been subsequently blocked up.

The lengthening of this chapel, and the insertion of the staircase, is apparently a later addition, the eastern wall not being bonded into the north wall of the presbytery.

Against the western wall of the north transept is a mass of masonry which looks like the base of an altar-tomb, and the two smaller wing-walls north and south of it may have carried some portion of the canopy. If not for this purpose, it is somewhat difficult to say what else it was intended for.

In tracing the external face of the east wall of the presbytery, the angle-buttresses were found, with boldly splayed bases, the splay being continuous round the external walls of this portion of the church. We also found the foundations of two buttresses dividing the east window into a triplet. It had probably narrow lancet-lights and a roll-moulding round the jambs and arches. Several fragments of this moulding were found among the *débris*.

A detached building with a doorway from the exterior, abutting on the south wall of the presbytery, has been traced externally, but at present we cannot say if it communicates with the presbytery.

The south wall of the south transept has been traced so far as is shown in black on the plan, and sufficient indications to prove that there are probably three chapels in this transept.

All the chapels had plain, semicircular barrel-vaults, the spring of which, and some portion of the vaulting, are still remaining in both chapels adjoining the presbytery.

The whole of the face of the south wall of the south aisle has been excavated. The doorway opening into the eastern walk of the cloister has been found. It was blocked up when the Abbey was used as the parish church of Talley, at which time the doorway opening into the centre of the south aisle was apparently cut through, and the first four bays of the Abbey church, together with the space below the tower, formed the nave of the parish church. At the same time the whole of the eastern arch of the tower was blocked up with a thin wall, a chancel-arch built therein, with a window over, and the

small chancel erected within the presbytery, as shown upon the plan.

Continuing our excavations westward, we were fortunate enough to discover the south-western angle of the Abbey church, and the face of the buttress of the respond of the south arcade. The excavations have not yet been carried far enough to determine the position of the west doorway, or the north-west angle of the north aisle; and it is somewhat doubtful whether the north aisle was ever built. That it was a part of the original plan there can be no doubt, as there is still in existence, against the west wall of the north transept, the water-table of the lean-to roof and the projecting bond-stones of the north wall.

The excavations in the nave have been confined to tracing four of the piers of the north arcade; and it is found that the dimensions of the church, as determined by the length of the nave, give an arcade of eight arches. These piers stand about 6 ft. above the floor-level, being cut off just below the turf of the churchyard. The nave, therefore, when excavated, will have its arcade-piers and walls standing from 6 to 8 ft. high.

Between the piers of the north arcade is a thinner wall, which I am inclined to think was the screen-wall dividing the north aisle from the nave. At present we do not know if a similar wall exists in the south arcade. At Tintern such a wall exists, and it was also found at Strata Florida enclosing the choir of the *conversi*. Assuming that the north aisle was never built, this, in that case, was the external north wall of the church. Until the excavation of the whole of the west front and nave is completed, it is impossible to give an opinion upon this point.

The traces of foundations on the line of the north wall of the north aisle are also somewhat puzzling. Where the set-off is shown they are apparently the external wall of some building with a splayed base, but are in such a fragmentary condition that it is not possible to say whether they may not be the remains of some earlier building which stood upon the site before the commencement of the erection of the church of Talley Abbey.

It will be interesting to compare the dimensions of the

church of Talley with that at Strata Florida, and we find that—

	Total Length.	Length of Nave.	Breadth of Nave and Aisles.	Length of Transepts including Centre Tower.	Breadth of Transepts.	Square of Lantern of Tower.	Length of Presbytery.
Strata Florida Abbey	213 0 ..	132 6 ..	61 0 ..	117 3 ..	28 0 ..	28 0 ..	48 4
Talley Abbey	226 3 ..	143 0 ..	62 6 ..	112 3 ..	29 0 ..	29 0 ..	44 9

The nave-arcades at Strata Florida consisted of seven arches ; at Talley there appears to have been eight.



Talley Abbey.

Although the dimensions of Talley Abbey are, with the exception of the length of the transepts from north to south, and of the presbytery from east to west, in excess of those at Strata Florida, we have a complete absence of the magnificent transitional architecture, the lovely carving, the elaborate and beautiful tile-pavements,

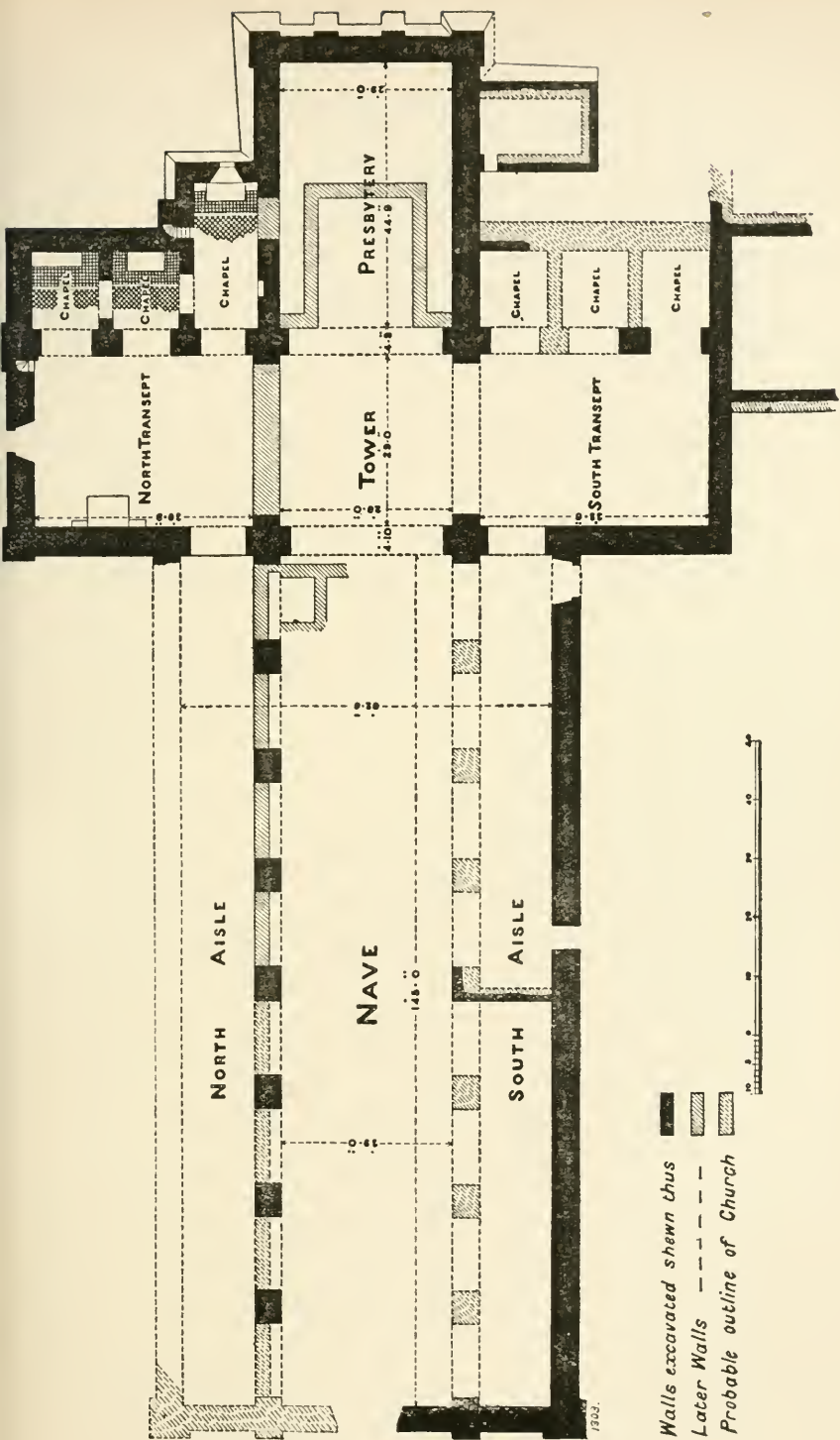
and the great variety of variously coloured freestone which distinguished the work at Strata Florida, and instead thereof we have plain, square piers and simple, pointed arches of rough rubble-masonry of the plainest possible character; and so far, not a fragment of carved work has turned up. The pavements are plain, glazed tiles of the commonest character; and only two specimens have yet been found of somewhat rude, incised tiles.

The only moulded, freestone work at present discovered are the angles of the north-eastern pier of the tower, which for a height of some 15 or 20 ft. from the base has a plain, three-quarter round moulding, stopped just above a plain, chamfered base of early transitional character. The east window of the presbytery appears also to have had a similar moulding carried round its external angles.

Some fragments of stained glass found during the excavations prove that the windows were glazed with painted glass, and the walls appear to have been plastered throughout, and decorated in colour.

Therefore, although Talley possessed one of the largest monastic churches in Wales, it was evidently of the plainest and most simple type of architecture; and its plain, pointed arches must have resembled those in the churches of Llandewi Brefi and Llanbadarn Fawr, in Cardiganshire, in their massiveness and simple severity of outline.

In the present early stage of the excavations it would be premature to draw conclusions from the results already obtained, but I would particularly wish to point out that the church was evidently designed upon the ordinary Cistercian plan; that whoever were the first builders, they commenced with the intention of building a church of more ornamental character than they were able to complete, as appears from the work in the lower part of the north-western pier of the tower, and in the quoins of the east end of the presbytery, which were all of finely dressed freestone. Evidently, as the work proceeded, funds did not come in as fast as was expected, and they were compelled to be satisfied with the local stone, abandon the use of freestone, dispense with the services of the freestone mason, and be content to complete their church with local materials, and possibly local labour.



Walls excavated shewn thus
 Later Walls
 Probable outline of Church

I would, therefore, venture to suggest the possibility that the first builders were the Cistercians, who for some reasons abandoned the work ; then came the Præmonstratensians, who completed it, and somewhat altered the Cistercian plan ; and after that the Cistercians may have endeavoured to resume possession about 1190 and 1200, as mentioned in Mr. Owen's paper, but were defeated in their object by the Præmonstratensians, who remained in possession until the Dissolution.

