

# AMPLEFORTH ABBEY CHURCH

Fr Edward Corbould

*Ampleforth Journal* 66 (1961) 163-181

FOR ITS FIRST FIFTY YEARS AT AMPLEFORTH the community was without a proper Abbey Church; it had for its use a chapel in the west wing of the Old House. In 1835 the Swale family of Heslington, near York, petitioned the Council of the monastery that some money which had been given to the community to house one of their family should be set aside as a building fund for a church, that member of the family having died. The Council gladly gave their consent and at once issued an appeal for the extra money which would be necessary. The total estimate was £3,000. Work on the new church, designed by Charles Hansom, was begun in 1855, and in 1857 the consecration took place. It was a small two-cell Victorian Gothic church built with the local stone which was quarried from behind the monastery (Fig. 1). Its architectural merit was sufficient to enhance the already considerable reputation of Charles Hansom, and that of his brother Joseph who was responsible for much of the internal decoration. This church fulfilled the needs of the community and school for over sixty years, until a shortage of space demanded that a more extensive church should be built. But even as early as 1903 the small size of the Church was felt. Dom Cuthbert Almond wrote in that year: 'it is certainly inadequate to the wants of the present day, but it is not yet, nor ever will be, inadequate as a house of God'.<sup>1</sup> From 1905 onwards there was animated discussion about a new church and this was not damped by the First World War. By the end of the war the problem had become urgent, and various minor architects were considered. In 1919 a member of the community was so bold as to suggest that Mr Giles Gilbert Scott<sup>2</sup> should be approached; he was a Catholic and already famous for his designs for the Anglican Cathedral at Liverpool. The suggestion once made seemed obvious and was welcomed unanimously. In May 1919 Scott was approached and agreed to produce plans;<sup>3</sup> so began Ampleforth's long and far-reaching association with that great architect.

Many designs were produced for the church but all were basically similar in style.<sup>4</sup> The building contract was signed on the 31st May 1922,<sup>5</sup> and two foundation stones (one for the choir and one for the Memorial Chapel) were laid on the 1st August of the same year. The first part of Scott's design, consisting of a retrochoir, High Altar and four crypt chapels, was finished by 1924. Lack of money prevented the immediate completion of the plan, but in the early 1930's the growing numbers of the school and the accumulation of an appreciable sum of money in the building fund caused the question of completing the Abbey Church to be reopened. New plans were prepared in the years 1933-5 and again in 1937-9, but no action was

---

1 *The History of Ampleforth Abbey*, 1903, p.346

2 He was knighted in 1924.

3 The first correspondence with Scott is dated 5th May 1919.

4 The writer is indebted to the late Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's partner, Mr F. G. Thomas, for putting at his disposal the plans, drawings and correspondence concerning the Abbey Church.

5 The contractors for this first piece of building were Holloway Brothers of London. The contractors for the second and main part of the building were William Birch and Sons of York.

taken. Money was still short, but as important as this in holding up the work of completion was the lack of agreement over the plan and size of the Church. Many people felt that the Church as planned was not large enough; and of course money was not available to build a larger one. The Second World War temporarily suspended activity, but fresh plans were called for in 1948. The difficulty of getting a permit from the government to build, together with Scott's own dissatisfaction with the plans, were added to the old difficulties, and nothing could be done. Another set of plans was prepared in 1952. Finally, in 1954 the problem had become so urgent that action had to be taken. Sir Giles Gilbert Scott then drew up a sixth set of plans.<sup>6</sup> These were accepted, and the work of pulling down the old church was begun in January, 1957. Later in that year the foundations of the new building were begun, and the first stones were laid in April, 1958. The old difficulties had not disappeared: they were met. Without any fundamental change being made, the plan of the church was altered to accommodate an increased congregation, and the financial problem was overcome by making an appeal to the Old Boys and friends of Ampleforth. Ampleforth's connections with the United States through Portsmouth and St Louis Pories greatly helped the fine organization of the appeal which was based on methods used on the other side of the Atlantic. The response to the appeal was magnificent, and enabled the church to be completed in September, 1961.<sup>7</sup>

This chronicle of events makes it clear that the greater part of the Church is the product of careful thought over a long period by an architect mature in years and experience. But Scott did not work *in vacuo*; he had the suggestions and needs of the community to bear in mind, and it is to his great credit that he was so patient in giving them heed. 'A building fails as a work of architecture', it has been said recently, 'if it does not provide a suitable environment for those who are to use it.'<sup>8</sup> Scott has done well to provide this suitable environment and make it beautiful.

The Church is centrally planned on an East-West axis (Fig. 1). There is a series of three domes, 32 feet in diameter,<sup>9</sup> linked by short sections of pointed barrel vaulting, and an addition at the East end which is barrel vaulted and includes a gallery. The North and South transepts externally are of equal length and are barrel vaulted. The central space is occupied by the High Altar and sanctuary. The nave and choir are aisled and there are four chapels to the south of the nave and choir: twenty-five chapels are in the crypt. In plan, the Church forms neither a Greek cross nor a Latin cross: it is a compromise. The tower is central but the transepts are shorter than the choir and nave. The reason for such a plan must be considered.

When the choir was built in 1922-4 it had to be placed to the West of the old church if the latter were to be utilized, and it could not be extended in front of the monastery. Only a moderate-sized church was required at that time, and this seemed an obvious solution: but it tied the hands of the architect for the future if he wished to maintain the East-West axis, for he could not extend the Church too far eastwards without blotting out the Old House (the

---

6 For convenience, the plans of the Church may be divided into six sets: 1922, 1933-5, 1937-9, 1947-8, 1952 and 1954 and after. They represent plans which were submitted to the community as being suitable for building. In fact, Scott was always experimenting with the plans and hardly a year went by without some fresh drawings being made.

7 The debt of gratitude is acknowledged in an inscription above the crypt window of the South Transept and in a *Liber Benefactorum* in the North Nave Aisle.

8 Frank Jenkins, *Architect and Patron*, 1961, p. xiii.

9 The central dome is, in fact, only 30 feet in diameter.

present St Oswald's). The question arises, did Scott actually want to extend the building farther eastwards? Here we have a definite answer. In 1948 Scott was asked to answer the following questions : first, 'if in 1937 you had known that the original building now shored up would be pulled down and rebuilt, would you then have extended the nave by another dome or two domes, and retained a much smaller transept in the South?'; secondly, 'if an affirmative answer is given to this question is it possible that even now you would prefer this course rather than put a considerable number of the congregation in the South transept?' It is worth quoting at length his reply. 'I am not in favour of extending the nave eastwards', he said, not only because it sterilizes the building space behind (where St Oswald's now stands), but also because the external grouping of the Church with the surrounding buildings would be better with a more or less symmetrical arrangement around a central tower . . . As I have now planned it the East, West and South arms are all about the same length grouped around the tower, with a short North arm, and this gives a balanced centre-piece to the whole group of buildings forming the South front.' In answer to a suggestion that greater length was needed to obtain a fine effect, Scott replied: 'I do not feel that length, or rather the effect of length, is an essential ingredient for a fine interior effect. It is certainly a characteristic of medieval Gothic, but there are two factors to our problem that suggest we rely upon other characteristics to obtain a fine effect. First, there is the practical need of getting the congregation as near the altar as possible; this is a modern requirement the medieval builders did not have to face. It can best be achieved by a compact plan grouped around a centre. . . The problem now is to make a fine interior without the use of long-distance vistas. St Paul's fails because it is a compromise. Wren's original design was far finer with the same length of arms, all fairly short, grouped around a central dome.<sup>10</sup> His attempt to satisfy the preference of the authorities for a long medieval type of plan led him to a half-hearted attempt to getting length in one arm only, which not only detracted from the dominance of the central dome, but was not long enough to achieve the long-distance effect. The same fault is found in St Peter's. I have not seen Sancta Sophia's but I can well imagine from drawings that a magnificent effect is produced here with space only and no apparent length.' Scott added: 'there is another factor, however, to be borne in mind at Ampleforth, which I have already mentioned in this letter, namely, the exterior grouping of the Church with the surrounding buildings. These buildings require a dominating centre-piece, which is rather spoilt if the tower is not more or less the centre of the Church's length.' The point is that Scott saw that the Church must be planned to suit its environment and this demanded a centralized building, centralized at least from its southern aspect. The length of the Church consequently has little to do with the buildings immediately to its East, and little to do with finance; for Scott it was an aesthetic necessity. His mention of the practical need of getting the congregation as near the altar as possible seems to be an argument *ex convenientia*.<sup>11</sup> Scott here was no slave to tradition. Perigordian churches which, as we shall see later, so much influenced the style of his architecture in the Church, were as a rule not centrally planned. Many, such as Angouleme, Solignac and Souillac, were Latin cross in plan; others, such as Cahors and Saint Avit Senieur, were without transepts; indeed only St Front,

---

10 This was the Great Model of 1673. The Warrant Design, like the executed plan, was a Latin cross.

11 This may be too harsh a judgement, for in a letter dated as early as the 15th August 1919 Scott proposed a central altar, as an alternative to an altar against the west wall, in order 'to get a large number of boys near the altar and yet keep the choir in front. The disadvantage lies in the boys being divided.'

Perigueux, was centrally planned and this was a Greek cross. Scott had considered a Greek cross for the Abbey Church, as is seen in the plans of 1937-9, but in his later plans he dropped the idea even though he admired Wren's Great Model for St Paul's and Bramante's St Peter's without Maderna's extension to the nave. Perhaps there was too much of the medievalist in Scott for him to dispense with the idea of a main East-West axis. If the transepts were of the same design and scale as the nave and choir, then some change would have to be made in the High Altar which was not designed to be viewed from all angles. This Scott was loath to do for he regarded it as a masterpiece, a jewel for which a setting had to be designed. Even the Italian architects of the High Renaissance to whom anything but a centrally planned church was unthinkable, found great difficulty with the siting of the altar; though here there was the added question of symbolism.<sup>12</sup>

The transepts were of little importance to the general interior design of the Church; they were merely a practical necessity for seating. The lengthening of the South transept in 1959 was for more accommodation, it made but little difference to the aesthetic effect. The transepts, however, were important for the exterior appearance; they gave a rather short high building a sense of greater solidity and stability. The four chapels and the addition to the nave are not essential to the architectural plan; they are necessary practical additions. The need for more space for the congregation made the addition to the nave and its gallery necessary. This could not be built to the full height without upsetting the exterior proportions of the building, and so it has a low barrel vault and is covered by a flat roof.<sup>13</sup> The large number of chapels necessary in a monastic church are for the most part in the crypt and, consequently, affect to a minimum the actual plan of the Church. The four chapels at nave and choir level could not have been added as radiating chapels at either the East or West end without interfering with other buildings or upsetting the exterior proportions of the Church, and so were added South of the nave and choir aisles.

Lastly, as regards the plan of the Church, the existence of a retrochoir must be explained. It is tempting to see the reason for its existence in the influence of the liturgical movement requiring that the congregation should be near the altar. Certainly the whole problem had been made more real by the Victorians who determined to make the Church one unit (which a great medieval church never was), and hence advocated the knocking down of organ and choir screens and the doing away with nave altars, with the result that the congregation was farther away from the altar than it ever had been. Was the retrochoir the result of a reaction against this? It was not. The question of a retrochoir had been raised in 1918 by Father Dunstan Pozzi, but was rejected by the building committee; consequently the Church was planned with the altar against the West wall of the choir. The building of the choir already had begun when it was realized that the choir would be split by the large piers supporting the dome. The Procurator, Father Bede Turner, wrote to Scott on the 27th January 1923, saying that the chancel arch would divide the choir 'and hide one monk from another so much that recitation and chanting may be rendered very discordant'. The Council of the monastery therefore proposed, either that there should be a retrochoir, or that the new stalls should begin nearer to the Abbot's throne. The second alternative did not solve the problem because it was agreed that about eighty choir stalls should be provided, and these still would

---

12 Cf. R. Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, 1952, p. 11. Even to-day the siting of the altar remains a problem. Cf. Peter Hammond, *Liturgy and Architecture*, 1960.

13 The 1947 plan has the extension to the nave built to the full height.

be cut by the chancel arch if the sanctuary was to be at the West end of the choir.<sup>14</sup> Scott acted quickly, and on the 19th February 1923, sent a plan with a retrochoir; and, in a letter dated the 2nd March 1923, said that he preferred the retrochoir arrangement. Opinion in the community was evenly divided, and it was by the closest of margins that in the spring of 1923 it was decided to adopt the arrangement of a retrochoir. It was at this stage that the precedent of continental churches and the effects of the liturgical movement helped to clinch the matter; but in the first place it was the style of architecture which had been responsible.<sup>15</sup> Of course a domed church with its necessary regular divisions is eminently suited to a central altar and retrochoir. One further change was made in the position of the High Altar when, in August 1960, it was moved eleven feet eastwards in order that the congregation in the transepts might see it.

The fundamental plan of the Church, once its site had been decided was determined largely by its external aesthetic requirements. Practical needs played a part, but it was a subordinate part which was never allowed to upset the idea of a centralized church. The necessary additions were used dexterously by Scott to make an impressive build-up to the central tower (Plate 1).

The style of the architecture is derivative, at least as regards the interior of the Church. In 1924, *The Builder*<sup>16</sup> gave a brief description of the choir: it said, 'an early type of Gothic has been adopted, with a suggestion of Romanesque feeling, though no round arches have been employed'. This is misleading. Gothic architecture is something more than pointed arches; it is even more than cross-ribbed vaults. Technical innovations never make a new style. Dr Pevsner makes the point clear: 'the features' he says, 'which make up the Gothic style are well enough known, too well in fact, because most people forget that a style is not an aggregate of features, but an integral whole.'<sup>17</sup> There are some Gothic features in the Church, there are also some strictly Romanesque features; but taken as a whole the interior of the Church is basically Romanesque. There are the large unbroken wall spaces; there are the large barrel vaults; there is the lack of connection between the bays, in this case necessitated by the domes. How utterly inconceivable is a dome in Gothic architecture ! It is true that there are lancet windows, but even here the point is somewhat blunted. The pointed arch is used in supporting the domes and in the aisle arcades, but the great Romanesque churches of Burgundy such as Cluny and Autun used it as well. The Perigordian churches used the pointed arch to support their domes, and at Souillac the arches of the arcade are also pointed. Even the design of the piers and the capitals belong to the Romanesque tradition. But over and above the details there is a simplicity and a grandeur quite foreign to Gothic architecture.

It is not by chance that the interior of the Church belongs so much to the Romanesque tradition, for Scott deliberately used the inspiration of the Perigordian (or more strictly, Aquitanian) churches of the eleventh and early twelfth centuries. He had visited Southern

---

14 For those unfamiliar with the Abbey Church it should be explained that the Church is not orientated. The choir and High Altar are at the West end of the Church.

15 It is of interest to note that recently a few cruciform medieval churches have been modified by Anglicans under the influence of the liturgical movement, the altar being moved forward from the chancel to the crossing. This was done at Cuddesdon, near Oxford in 1941, and more recently at Charlestown, Cornwall. Cf. Peter Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 137ff.

16 9th May 1924.

17 Nikolaus Pevsner, *Outline of European Architecture*, 1954, p. 60.

France shortly after the First World War and was deeply impressed by these churches and the great fortified towns. The situation of Ampleforth demanded a building in the same austere tradition. These Aquitainian churches are indeed remarkable. There were seventy-seven from Fontevault on the Loire to Agen on the Garonne (Fig. 2), but mostly in the Perigord, which were built with domed vaults. Sixty of these still stand. The stylistic origin of these churches has been debated for more than a century, and still the problem is not solved. People looked to St Front, Perigueux, as the most outstanding church, saw clearly Byzantine influence, and concluded that the domed churches of Aquitaine were the result of Byzantine influence. They were aided in this belief by the serious misdating of St Front. In 1851 Felix de Verneilh published *L'Architecture Byzantine en France*, and in it stated that St Front, Perigueux, was built shortly after 984 and was copied from St Mark's, Venice, which in turn was an imitation of the Church of the Holy Apostles, Constantinople. He may well have been right about its derivation, but he was wrong about its date. St Mark's, Venice, was not built with its five domes until 1063 ; and in 1120 the Church of St Front, Perigueux, was burnt down to be replaced by the structure with five domes that we know to-day.<sup>18</sup> Many domed churches which earlier were thought to have been derived from St Front now were seen to antedate it.<sup>19</sup> The whole problem of origins was again in the melting-pot.

Domed churches appeared in the Perigord more than a century before the domes of St Front, Perigueux. St Astier, nine miles from Perigueux, has domes and was completed in 1013, and the number increased rapidly as the eleventh century progressed. R. P. Spiers<sup>20</sup> made a careful archaeological investigation of the domes and pendentives, and noted that they were constructed in an entirely different way from those found in Byzantine structures. He also noticed that the technique improved so much during the eleventh century that Angouleme, which was begun c. 1105, had such good ashlar work that it could dispense with the plaster coating which up to then had been the rule. There is nothing conclusive in this, but it does suggest that the dome in the Perigord was something that was developed slowly and was indigenous to the country.<sup>21</sup>

The trend now is to see the dome as a practical utilitarian solution to a problem of vaulting.<sup>22</sup> Barrel vaults were insecure and anyhow demanded a great deal of abutment, whereas domes could be supported by piers and relatively thin walls, and, provided there was good stone, were in themselves more secure. The remarkable survival of these Aquitainian domes

---

18 This is not quite true, for the church was restored in the mid-nineteenth century by M. Abadie who practically rebuilt it, and in the process made several serious alterations, e.g. the domes which had been supported by pointed arches were built on round arches.

19 St Etienne, Perigueux; Cahors; Souillac; Solignac; Angouleme) to name but a few.

20 R. P. Spiers, *Saint-Front of Perigueux, and the Domed Churches of Perigord and La Charante*, Journal of R.I.B.A. 3rd Series, 1896.

21 Emile Bertaux in *L'Art dans l'Italie Meridionale de la fin de l'Empire romaine a la conquete de Charles d'Anjou*, 1903, suggested that the tradition of dome-building was kept alive in S. France and Apulia by the existence of domed stone huts built by the local peasantry. It should be noted, however, that the domes of these huts sprang from circular walls, and not from a square plan as in the Aquitainian churches which demanded the use of pendentives.

22 J. Evans, *Art in Medieval France*, 1948, p. 52, or K. J. Conant, *Carolingian and Romanesque Architecture*, 1959, p. 169.

is proof of this.<sup>23</sup> However, even if the dome was a local product in Aquitaine, it must not be forgotten that St Front, Perigueux, at least was very much the product of Byzantine influence.<sup>24</sup> Its five domes set in the plan of a Greek cross and its pierced arches and domes are influenced undoubtedly directly, or indirectly, from Byzantium.<sup>25</sup> St Front, Perigueux, therefore, is the exception rather than the pattern among the domed churches of the Perigord. But the style and plan of St Front are perhaps not so fortuitous as it might seem. Up to the end of the eleventh century the centre of interest for the pilgrims and crusaders of southern France had been Spain, with its shrine of Santiago de Compostella, and its work of driving out the Moslems. After the success of the First Crusade in Syria in 1099 attention was diverted to a large extent to the Holy Land and stronger cultural contact with the Eastern Mediterranean at that time is only to be expected.<sup>26</sup>

The whole question of Byzantine influence on Western art is very complex and much disputed. Certainly there has been too ready a tendency to speak of Byzantine origins, and much which had been given an eastern origin is now found to have been based on antique western models, many of which have long since disappeared.<sup>27</sup> Bearing this in mind, it is possible that the domed churches of Aquitaine may have been inspired by antique western models. The nave of Autun Cathedral or the facade of St Gilles are enough to show that France had not forgotten its Gallo-Roman past. Perhaps it is more than a coincidence that an old Roman road joined Cahors, Perigueux and Saintes, and that Aquitaine is particularly rich in Roman sites. With the exception, therefore, of St Front, Perigueux, little or no Byzantine influence can definitely be traced in the architecture of the domed churches of Aquitaine. It seems that that unique school of Romanesque architecture was indigenous, and was developed because good material was at hand to be used for a more secure method of vaulting wide spaces, a method which very possibly was known to them through the western antique tradition.

Scott consciously borrowed much from these Romanesque churches of Aquitaine. The bay plan of the Abbey Church is strikingly similar to such churches as Cahors, Souillac and

23 The two most recent domes of the Abbey Church, made of wire-mesh coated with plaster and suspended from beams, do not inspire such confidence!

24 It is held by many that the earlier churches also were inspired from the East. R. Rey, *La Cathedrale de Cahors et les origines de l'architecture a coupoles d'Aquitaine*, 1925, puts the case strongly for the Eastern inspiration of Cahors and Angouleme. He holds that the large churches adopted domes for the practical reason of vaulting a large space, and these were copied in the small churches where domes were not necessary. He admits that the construction of the Aquitanian domes is very different from those in the East.

25 Here again, though all authorities are agreed on the Byzantine origin, there are differences of opinion as to how this came about. Some, e.g. R. P. Spiers, *op. cit.*, insist on its connection with St Mark's, Venice, then one of the wonders of the world, even though at the time it lacked most of its mosaics; others see a greater likelihood in Cyprus being the intermediary. C. Enlart pointed this out in *Les Eglises a coupoles d'Aquitaine et de Chypre*, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 5th Series, Vol. XIII, 1926. St Barnabas, Cyprus, certainly shows a very great resemblance in plan. Both Venice and Cyprus were on the pilgrim route to the Holy Land. Others, notably Strzygowski in *Die Baukunst der Armenier und Europa*, 1918, stress the relations with Armenia.

Until further material comes to light it is impossible to have certain knowledge as to which was responsible for influencing the design of St Front.

26 This emphasises the importance of the correct dating of these churches. This must be established before any final statement can be made on their stylistic origins.

27 Cf. W. Oakeshott, *Classical Inspiration in Medieval Art*, 1959.

Angouleme (Fig. 3), even more than to St Front, Perigueux. The use of barrel vaulting in addition to domes is perfectly consistent with this style of architecture, and finds parallels at Angouleme and especially at Souillac where the transepts, as at Ampleforth, are barrel vaulted. Even the conventional two-slope roof which covers the domes of the Abbey Church is not unique: Angouleme again provides a precedent. But to regard the Abbey Church as an uninspired work of revivalism would be quite wrong. A past style has been used, but used in such a way as to provide a living work of architecture. The interior, like the exterior, has a fine build-up which emphasises the volume and great height of the central space. Scott was quite right when he said that great length was not an essential ingredient of a fine interior. This build-up finds no parallel in Perigordian architecture, nor does the interplay of lines formed by the different arches and mouldings of the piers. It is finely conceived and beautifully balanced (Plate 2).

If the interior shows the Perigordian Romanesque style being moulded into an individualistic interior by an architect with a fine sense of proportion, the exterior shows the same qualities of the architect working in a decidedly English style. Nothing could be more English than the central tower and the general sobriety of treatment of the exterior elevations.<sup>28</sup> The impression given is of a medieval English parish church, such as Iffley or Minster Lovell, built much larger and more robustly.

The Abbey Church is 175 feet long and 140 feet across the transepts. The height of the tower is 122 feet. Inside, the height of the central dome above the floor of the sanctuary is 72 feet, and that of the nave dome from the floor of the nave is 61 feet. It is, therefore, a church of only moderate dimensions, capable of seating about eight hundred people in the nave and transepts, and equipped with choir stalls for eightv-seven monks. But the plain dimensions are a little misleading. for it is almost a two-storied building with a crypt which is large by any standards. The Church has been built in two stages, and, though the basic architectural design is the same throughout, there are differences between the two parts in materials and details. The choir on the outside is faced with Bramley Fall stone, which came from near Leeds. The interior of the walls is faced with rough plaster and the filling is composed of concrete and stone quarried from the hill behind the monastery. The arches, piers, courses, windows and door frames are of Blue Hornton stone from Hornton in Oxfordshire; thus the main constructional lines of the Church are articulated. When the Church came to be completed, the Hornton stone had to be omitted because of its great cost, and so the walls, which are of brick, are faced throughout internally with rough plaster, and externally with Dunhouse stone. The Dunhouse stone was quarried at Staindrop in County Durham, and was used because the Bramley Fall stone was not available in sufficient quantities. The grain of this stone is less coarse than that of Bramley Fall, the stone is more mellow in colour and is altogether more pleasing. The Church is paved throughout with York stone obtained from a number of quarries scattered about the North and West Ridings.

The architectural details have been simplified in the new part of the Church. The reason for this is threefold: in the first place, the plaster which replaced the Hornton stone demanded

---

28 This cannot be said of all Scott's drawings for the Abbey Church. A rough sketch of about 1922 shows an octagonal tower with a pitched roof which could well be of some twelfth-century Rhineland church. Slightly later he developed a fully drafted plan of a church with a tower which had a rather more steeply pitched roof of two slopes, also very Germanic in appearance. This plan had only one dome which was under the tower, the nave and choir being covered by a ribbed vault.

a more simple treatment; secondly, reasons of economy urged the reduction of string courses and carved stone; and thirdly, Scott himself saw that the severity of the architecture demanded a greater simplicity of detail. The result is most successful. Externally, the changes are small. The string courses at the foot of the building have been reduced from three to two; the pinnacled shafts between the aisle windows have been omitted, and the main East, North and South windows have been treated more simply than the main West window : there are no hood-moulds and the buttresses have no panels.

The external appearance of the building is impressive; it is tall and massive, and is unspoilt by any fussiness in detail. Its situation adds to its appearance. The ground in front of it falls away, thereby emphasising its height, and it is flanked by buildings on either side which it is able to dominate. The best general views are from the South-East and South-West, for it is only by looking at the Church obliquely that the grouping of masses can be appreciated. This, indeed, is one of the outstanding features of the building. Scott's experiments with the elevation of the South transept were made with this in view. He was concerned also with making the sanctuary as light as possible. The result is that the transepts at clerestory level are very short and appear as gables protruding from the side of the tower, whereas the transepts proper are much lower. The South transept as originally<sup>29</sup> planned was shorter; its lengthening for reasons of accommodation is not altogether satisfying. It is dwarfed by the main body of the Church and looks altogether too much an appendage. The tower epitomizes Scott's treatment of the exterior; it is finely proportioned and noble in its simplicity.

The architectural detail of the exterior can be dealt with quickly. All the windows are rather blunted lancets with the exception of two simple rose windows at the East and West ends, which are not, in fact, visible from the inside. The lancets occur singly or in groups of two or more. The main windows have three lights; otherwise the number varies, the tendency being that the lower the window the more lights it has. The variations are more than just of number and size and this prevents a tedious repetition of a motif on the exterior. The aisle and chapel windows at the main floor level are recessed and covered by a hood-mould, the crypt windows are flush with the face of the wall and have no moulding, whereas the main West and South windows are deeply recessed and treated individually. Lancets also are used for the belfry openings; they are divided into three pairs on each face of the tower and are covered by elaborately moulded enclosing arches. The only other architectural details on the exterior are the buttresses. In keeping with the basic Romanesque style of the building, clamp buttresses are used throughout. They fulfil a practical need, but also an important aesthetic purpose; in plan they help to break up large areas of blank wall; in profile they taper so as to give an impression of great solidity to the building; this is especially noticeable in the tower. The steps leading to the main door in the South transept are of a dog-leg design, similar to those of the great twelfth-century pilgrimage church of Santiago de Compostella. It is of interest that Scott was determined that this type should be used, for he regarded it as being essential to the style of the building. Historically, he was correct. He rejected a suggestion for a plain flight of steps, but did experiment with variations of the dog-leg type. The steps that have been executed are much broader than those originally designed, and this permits a large window of nine lights for the main South transept chapel in the crypt which extends under them. It is a successful completion to a fine facade.

Enough has been said already about the architecture in general of the interior. The

---

29 i.e. in 1954.

omission of the Hornton forms the main difference between the choir and the new parts of the building. This has a double effect; it makes the Church light inside and it helps to focus attention on the High Altar and choir. If some of the carved stonework in the choir is rather over-elaborate for the simplicity of the architecture, the same cannot be said of the rest of the Church. Here the stonework, and hence the decoration, have been cut down to a minimum. This simplicity is demanded by the architecture, and for that reason the new building is more satisfying (Plates 3 and 4). The arches and piers have mouldings of the simplest kind (Figs. 4 and 5), and the pillars in the nave aisles are cylindrical. The vaulting in the aisles and chapels has been omitted. Two things give the nave arcades a very different appearance from those in the choir. The nave floor has been lowered a few feet below the level of the aisles in order that the people at the back of the Church may obtain an unimpeded view of the High Altar ; this makes the nave arcades higher in appearance. Secondly, the capitals of these cylindrical pillars are of a modified cushion type<sup>30</sup> which have no abaci (Fig. 6). The moulding of the arch continues straight into the capital and therefore gives the arch the appearance of being stilted. The arcade has an elegance which is lacking in the choir. The simplification is taken a step further with the capitals of the main piers which support the nave and sanctuary domes. These have been reduced to a continuation of the string course round the piers. Much the same was done at St Front, Perigueux, but the eleventh century crossing of St Alban's Cathedral gives a closer parallel; here even the pier mouldings are the same. The effect of this is to let the lines of the piers flow straight through into the arches and so give a sense of lightness to the domes and their supporting arches.

As has been said, Scott regarded the High Altar as a masterpiece and determined that it should be given a fine setting, so he was very concerned about the crossing. The high central dome provided a fine space, but this had to be lit. This is done by holding back the transepts at clerestory level, providing them each with three tall lancet windows, and by piercing the walls next to the main piers with pairs of lancets, each pair being enclosed by a round arch. The object has been achieved, for the central space is very light. Likewise Scott was determined that the main entrance from the North should be in the transept so that 'a dramatic first impression' should be obtained. The first impression is certainly striking, but it is marred in some degree by the South transept which appears too much like a tunnel. It is low, but this is exaggerated by sinking the floor below aisle-level, and it appears too circular in cross-section. The curved line of the barrel vault is continued by the sloping window-sills and is reflected in the heightened central light of the triple lancet window. A similar impression is not given by the North transept which has horizontal sills and windows of equal height. The organ has been placed on the gallery in the North transept over the narthex. Scott insisted that the window should be visible, so the organ is split and is placed in two large sections to the sides of the window which leaves very little scope for the design of the organ case. At one time Scott had considered placing the organ in the gallery at the back of the nave; this in many ways would have been a better arrangement, but it would have cut out much light and would have split still further the congregation.

The crypt forms an unusually important part of the Church. Here there are two large chapels and twenty-three smaller ones. The round arch is used throughout for the structural

---

30 The cushion capital was used widely in English Romanesque (Anglo-Norman) architecture until the end of the twelfth century. It was unknown in Normandy until it was introduced from England. It seems likely that it was derived from Germany where it was quite common at the beginning of the eleventh century.

arches: this is only to be expected for it conveys a feeling of great solidity which is necessary in a low-roofed crypt. Furthermore it is in keeping with the architectural style of the rest of the Church. The simplification in the new portion is very evident: the Hornton stone has been omitted and there are no stone courses and capitals, nor is there any vaulting. A result is that the new crypt is much lighter than the original four chapels, though this is not entirely due to the absence of the Hornton stone. Many of the windows have three lights instead of the two in the original chapels, and the main chapels under the nave and South transept have eight and nine lights respectively. The crypt levels correspond with those of the main floor and this breaks up any monotony which might have resulted in the juxtaposition of arcades (Plate 5). A crypt demands simplicity and here it has it.

A catalogue of fixtures and fittings in the Church would be out of place here, but mention of some of them should be made. The High Altar arch which dominates the interior of the church was designed by Scott and built in 1925. An earlier design had a straight-headed arch reminiscent of many a motif at Liverpool Cathedral, but this obviously clashed with the pointed arch above it and was abandoned in favour of the present design. The carvings and statuary on the arch are the work of W. D. Gough, and their stylization is admirably suited to the severity of the architecture. Scott was responsible also for the design of the woodwork in the Church; this was executed largely by Robert Thompson of Kilburn, or, in the case of reredoses in the older part of the Church, by Watts and Co. of London. The organ case for the transept organ is the work of J. W. Walker and Sons, the organ builders, who modified a design by Scott.

The glass in the new part of the Church is all by James Powell and Son, of Whitefriars, with the exception of the Annunciation window in the Lady Chapel which is the work of Patrick Reyntiens. Powell's, who, with Charles Winston in the middle of the last century, did so much to produce a much finer stained glass, have used various tints of antique white glass. The normal diamond quarries are relieved by small strips of glass leaded parallel to them. These windows in themselves are satisfying but as a whole they admit so much light that the architectural detail of the interior is lost in the glare. The glass in the choir is more varied both in origin and quality. There is some medieval glass in the six lights in the North Choir Aisle. This was the gift of Captain J. G. Emmet and came from the chapel of Moreton Paddox, Warwickshire. The iconography is obscure, but the date of the glass is probably very early fifteenth century. This is suggested by the Plantagenet shield in the western window. Here the fleurs-de-lis of the Valois are quartered with the lions of England in the manner used by Henry IV and V. The roundels in the main crypt chapel under the South transept are also from Moreton Paddox and appear to be fourteenth century: some of the glass painting in these is particularly fine. The rest of the glass is modern. Herbert Hendrie of Edinburgh did the fine West window in the choir, but was less successful with the central window in the Memorial Chapel and the west windows of the choir aisles. Geoffrey Webb was responsible for the windows in St Benet's Chapel and the original four chapels in the crypt; James Powell and Son did the Eve window in the Memorial Chapel and Joseph Nuttgens, a pupil of Hendrie, supplied the remaining window there. The furnishings of the Church are not yet complete and anyhow lack the homogeneity necessary for a rapid survey.

The Abbey Church was begun in 1922 when taste and requirements were very different from what they are now, forty years later. This must be borne in mind before a judgement is passed on the new church. A building is not beauty in a shell, nor utility in a shed, but an answer to a particular problem. Since 1924 Sir Giles Gilbert Scott had a problem to face and the new Church is a successful answer to it.