

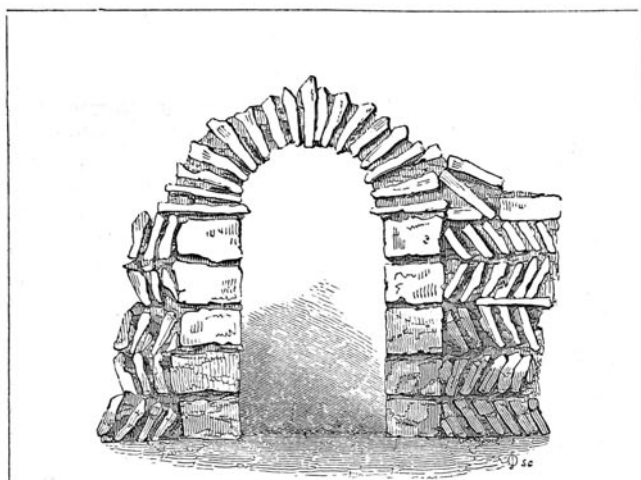
Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08270-9 - The Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture: With an Explanation of Technical Terms, and a Centenary of Ancient Terms: Volume 1

Matthew Holbeche Bloxam

Excerpt

[More information](#)



Roman Arch and Masonry, Castor, Northamptonshire, (now destroyed).

INTRODUCTION.

ON THE ORIGIN, PROGRESS, AND DECLINE OF GOTHIC OR
ENGLISH ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE.

AMONGST the vestiges of antiquity which abound in this island, are the visible memorials of the different nations which have succeeded one another in its occupancy.

To the age of the Celtic race, the earliest possessors of the soil, may be ascribed the erection of those rude structures, of all but primeval antiquity, the Monoliths, or unhewn stones of memorial; Cromlechs, or sepulchral monuments; walls of unhewn and dry masonry, and Stone Circles or Temples which lie scattered over its

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08270-9 - The Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture: With an Explanation of Technical Terms, and a Centenary of Ancient Terms: Volume 1

Matthew Holbeche Bloxam

Excerpt

[More information](#)

surface: and these latter are conceived to have been derived from the enterprising Phœnicians, whose merchants probably first introduced amongst the aboriginal Britons the arts of incipient civilization.

The prototypes of these ancient relics appear, described in Holy Writ, in the pillar raised at Bethel by Jacob, in the altars erected by the Patriarchs, and in the circles of stone set up by Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai, and by Joshua at Gilgal. Many of these structures, perhaps from their very rudeness, have survived the vicissitudes of time, though some have been wantonly destroyed, whilst of the numerous buildings erected by the Romans the vestiges are comparatively few; yet it is from the constructive features of Roman edifices that we derive, and can trace by a gradual transition, the origin and progressive advance of that peculiar kind of architecture called Gothic, which presents in its later stages the most striking contrast that can be imagined to its original precursor.

In the latter part of the first century of the Christian era, the Romans, whilst still engaged in the conquest of the southern provinces of Britain, began to impart to the natives a taste for civilized pursuits and usages, and thus early, with their assistance, as Tacitus informs us,^a commenced the erection of temples and other public edifices in their municipal towns and cities, though such must doubtless have been much inferior to those at Rome. The Christian religion was also early introduced,^b but for a time its progress was slow; nor was it

^a Ut templa fora domus extruerent;—*Vita Agricola*, cap. 21.

^b Tempore, ut scimus summo Tiberii Cæsaris, &c.—*Gildas*.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08270-9 - The Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture: With an
Explanation of Technical Terms, and a Centenary of Ancient Terms: Volume 1

Matthew Holbeche Bloxam

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

3

till the conversion of Constantine, in the fourth century, that it was openly tolerated by the state, and churches were publicly constructed for its worshippers; though even before that event, as we are led to infer from the authority of Gildas, the most ancient of our native historians, particular structures were appropriated for the performance of its divine mysteries: for that historian alludes to the British Christians as reconstructing the churches which had, in the Dioclesian persecution been levelled to the ground. St. Chrysostom also adverts to the churches and altars in this island.^c The Hierarchy was Episcopal, and certain of the Bishops of the early British Church were present at the Council of Arles. In the fifth century, Rome, oppressed on every side by enemies, and distracted with the vastness of her conquests, which she was no longer able to maintain, recalled her legions from Britain. The Romanized Britons, for ages accustomed to foreign domination, being left to themselves, were unable to withstand the incursions of the northern barbarians, to whom they fell an easy prey; in their extremity they invited the Saxons to assist them, some bodies of which people came over and drove back the Caledonian marauders, but the Saxons then became unwilling to return to Germany, and perceiving the defenceless condition of their allies, turned round upon them, and, ere long, made a conquest of their country. In the struggle which then took place, the churches were again destroyed, the priests

^c Καὶ γὰρ καὶ ἐκκλησίαι,
καὶ θυσιαστήρια πέπηγασιν.

ΧΡΥΣΟΣΤΟΜΟΥ ὅτι Θεὸς ὁ Χριστὸς.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08270-9 - The Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture: With an Explanation of Technical Terms, and a Centenary of Ancient Terms: Volume 1

Matthew Holbeche Bloxam

Excerpt

[More information](#)

slain at the very altars,^d and though the British Church was never annihilated, Paganism for a while became triumphant.

Towards the close of the sixth century, when the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity was effected through the instrumentality of Augustine, Mellitus, and other zealous missionaries from Rome, and churches were wanting for the converts, St. Gregory, the head of the Papal Church, and the pious originator of the mission, recommended Mellitus to use the heathen temples as churches, after destroying the idols they contained. These, and such churches built by the Roman or British Christians as were then existing, and, though in a dilapidated state, capable of being repaired, may reasonably be supposed to have been the prototypes of the churches afterwards erected in this country.

In the early period of the empire the Romans, who derived their knowledge of classic architecture from Greece, imitated the Greeks to a certain extent in their public buildings of magnitude. Some of the constructive and decorative features of Roman architecture were however different to those of pure Grecian design; and a style was formed more meretricious in effect, and of greater richness in detail, but wanting in the chaste simplicity and severe grandeur of Grecian art. Columns of the different orders, with their entablatures, were by the Romans often employed to adorn rather than to give substantial support to their public structures; and in the fourth century, when the arts were declining, and

^d *Ruebant ædificia publica simul et privata, passim Sacerdotes inter altaria trucidantur.*—*Bede, Eccl. Hist. l. i. c. 15.*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08270-9 - The Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture: With an Explanation of Technical Terms, and a Centenary of Ancient Terms: Volume 1

Matthew Holbeche Bloxam

Excerpt

[More information](#)

the styles of classic architecture were becoming debased, some of the predominant features consisted of massive square piers or columns, without entablatures, from the impostes of which sprung arches of a semicircular form; and a rude imitation of this debased style is perceptible in the remains of Anglo-Saxon churches.

The Roman Basilicæ, or halls of justice, well calculated for the reception of a large assembly, and some of which were subsequently converted into churches, to which also the name *Basilica* was given, appear to have furnished the plan for the general internal arrangement of churches of a large size, being divided in the interior by rows of columns. From this division the nave and aisles of a church were derived: and in the semicircular recess at the one end for the tribune, we perceive the origin of the apsidal eastern termination, either semicircular or polygonal, apparent in three of our Anglo-Saxon,* and many of our ancient Norman churches.

Independent however of examples afforded by some ancient Roman or British churches, amongst which the old church of St. Martin at Canterbury is particularly mentioned, and such temples and public buildings of the Romans which were then remaining in Britain, the Anglo-Saxon converts were probably directed and assisted in the simple elements of architecture by those missionaries from Rome who propagated Christianity amongst them; and, during the seventh century, work-

* Brixworth Church, Northamptonshire, the foundations of the original semicircular apse of which were a few years ago discovered. Worth Church, Sussex, still retains the semicircular apse, and the whole of the ground plan of an Anglo-Saxon church; whilst at Wing Church, Bucks, the Anglo-Saxon apse, or chancel termination, is polygonal.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08270-9 - The Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture: With an
Explanation of Technical Terms, and a Centenary of Ancient Terms: Volume 1

Matthew Holbeche Bloxam

Excerpt

[More information](#)

men and artificers were sometimes procured from abroad, to assist in planning and raising ecclesiastical structures.^f The Anglo-Saxon churches were of rude construction, and, with few exceptions as far as can be ascertained from existing vestiges, of small dimensions; they were in general devoid of ornament, though in some instances decorative sculpture and mouldings are met with, and we learn from contemporaneous authority, that they were occasionally so adorned.^g From the repeated incursions of the Danes, in the ninth and tenth centuries, who, as the Saxon Chronicle informs us, “everywhere plundered and burnt, as their custom is,” and from accidental fires, in those ages of no unfrequent occurrence, so general was the destruction of monasteries and churches, which were rebuilt by the Normans in times when the country was no longer subject to such predatory attacks, that there are comparatively few churches now existing which contain portions of work which we may reasonably presume, or really know, to have been erected in an Anglo-Saxon age. Many however of the earlier writers on this subject have caused much confusion by applying the term ‘SAXON’ to all churches and other edifices contradistinguished from the pointed styles by semicircular-headed doorways, windows, and arches. But the vestiges of Anglo-Saxon architecture have been, until recently, so little noticed or studied, as to render the very existence of such a style with some a *voxata questio*, or matter of dispute. The peculiarities in detail of this presumed style, and

^f *Historia abbatum Gyrvensium*, auctore anonymo ante Bedam.

^g *Vita S. Benedicti*, auctore Ven. Beda.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08270-9 - The Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture: With an
Explanation of Technical Terms, and a Centenary of Ancient Terms: Volume 1

Matthew Holbeche Bloxam

Excerpt

[More information](#)

the evidence to be adduced in support of such presumption, will be treated upon in a subsequent chapter. As a general observation, however, this style may be said to have approximated in appearance much nearer the debased Roman style of masonry than the Norman, and to have been also much ruder than the latter. Certain features in construction are also noticed as almost peculiar to this style, and rarely to be met with in the superior masonry of that by which it was superseded.

The NORMAN style succeeded the Anglo-Saxon about the middle of the eleventh century, and is distinguished by a greater display of geometrical science and constructive art. The masonry is massive, and the surface is relieved by projecting or receding members. Plain in its early state, though even then far from rude, this style is, in a more advanced stage, adorned with a profusion and considerable variety of peculiar mouldings admirably adapted to it, and though heavy and inelegant, it is often rich in ornament, and always interesting.

A common characteristic of the Norman style is found in the form of the arch, which is either semi-circular or segmental. This form may also be met with in the comparatively rare specimens of Anglo-Saxon masonry, but is in the latter of much ruder design and construction. The larger Norman churches appear to have greatly excelled in size the lowly structures of the Anglo-Saxons, and in cathedral and conventual churches the walls of the nave and choir, as also those of the transepts, were frequently carried to the height of three tiers, or rows of arches, one above another.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08270-9 - The Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture: With an Explanation of Technical Terms, and a Centenary of Ancient Terms: Volume 1

Matthew Holbeche Bloxam

Excerpt

[More information](#)

The Norman style, of which the remains are very numerous from the number of churches and monastic edifices originally built or entirely reconstructed within the century subsequent to the Norman invasion, continued in its general features, without any very striking alteration, except becoming gradually more enriched in the number and variety of mouldings, and ornamental detail peculiar to it, till about the middle of the twelfth century, when a singular change began to be effected; this was the introduction of the pointed arch, the origin of which has never yet been satisfactorily elucidated, or the precise period of its appearance clearly ascertained. But the lightness and simplicity of design to which the Early Pointed style was found to be afterwards convertible was in its incipient state unknown, and it retained till the close of the twelfth century the heavy concomitants of the Norman style, with which indeed it was often intermixed: and from this intermixture it has been designated the SEMI or MIXED NORMAN.

The change in the Norman style of building consequent on the introduction of the pointed arch, which was formed in many instances by the intersection of semicircular arches used in arcades, and often appears in juxtaposition with the semicircular arch, was not at first otherwise developed than in the mere form of the arch, for the common and ornamental details of Norman character, the zig-zag and other mouldings continued to be retained, together with the massive piers on which the arcades rested. But from the time of its introduction to the close of the twelfth century, the pointed arch was gradually superseding the semicircular; and

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08270-9 - The Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture: With an
Explanation of Technical Terms, and a Centenary of Ancient Terms: Volume 1

Matthew Holbeche Bloxam

Excerpt

[More information](#)

from about the commencement of the thirteenth century, as nearly as can be ascertained, the mode of constructing with semicircular arches, was generally, though not altogether, discarded.

In the thirteenth century the principles of construction, as well as the general architectural features, had become greatly, though gradually changed, and instead of thick walls with broad pilaster buttresses, massive piers supporting semicircular arches, and doorways ornamented with sculpture; walls of less substance strengthened with graduating buttresses, of less width but of greater projection than before, and pointed arches supported by more slender piers, were all but universally substituted. In minor details also the change was equally apparent; the zig-zag and other Norman mouldings were now abandoned, and a new series introduced, better adapted by their forms and combinations to the altered style; a peculiar kind of stiffly sculptured foliage was also much used in decorative work, but the tooth moulding, though sometimes found in late Norman or Semi-Norman buildings, may be considered as the most characteristic ornament of this period. The pyramidal, conical, or polygonal roof, or capping, to the church towers of Norman masonry, being much elongated, formed that beautiful termination the spire, which, both in this and subsequent ages, was added to many towers of earlier construction. The prominent features of this style are simple, elegant, and light, the decorative members comparatively few: it prevailed generally throughout the thirteenth century, and is usually designated the EARLY ENGLISH, though by some, from the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08270-9 - The Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture: With an Explanation of Technical Terms, and a Centenary of Ancient Terms: Volume 1

Matthew Holbeche Bloxam

Excerpt

[More information](#)

general form of the single-light windows, which were long, narrow, and lancet-headed, it has received, though hardly on sufficient grounds, the appellation of the LANCET POINTED style. By some Ecclesiologists it has also been termed the FIRST POINTED style.

Towards the close of the thirteenth century a gradual transition took place from the plain and simple Early English to a richer and more ornamental mode of architecture. This was the style of the fourteenth century, known by the name of the DECORATED ENGLISH; by some called the MIDDLE POINTED style; it may be said to have commenced in the reign of Edward the First, but chiefly flourished during the reigns of Edward the Second and Edward the Third, and in that of the latter it attained a degree of perfection unequalled by preceding or subsequent ages. The general proportions of the buildings in this style were admirably adjusted, the decorative details were elaborate and in perfect keeping, more enriched than before, and yet without redundancy of ornament, and triangular or pedimental canopies and pinnacles, hitherto comparatively plain, were now covered with crockets and finials. The stiffly sculptured foliage of the preceding style was superseded by a kind more closely approximating nature; the ball-flower, a peculiar ornament, prevailed so generally as to be considered a characteristic, and the mouldings increase in number. Some of the most prominent and distinctive marks of this style occur in the windows, which had become considerably enlarged, and were divided into many lights by mullions, with tracery running into various ramifications above, which formed