

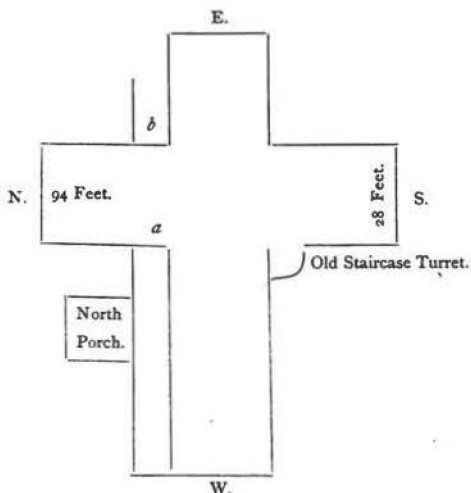
AN  
ARCHITECTURAL ACCOUNT  
OF THE COLLEGIATE CHURCH  
OF THE  
HOLY TRINITY,

*Stratford-upon-Avon.*

BY THE REV. E. H. KNOWLES.

FIRST AGE.

EARLY in the 13th Century,—for no evidence of stonework or (as it seems) of written record carries us further back,—the Church of the Holy Trinity, Stratford-on-Avon, was a fine cruciform building, with one aisle, (north) and a north porch, of



which one buttress remains. Let us make a note of what yet survives from this period.

The tower which, as the coinstones\* shew, was (not reckoning the spire) about as high as it now is, and of three stories, still retains its Normanesque panel-arches with their Early English lights (A.D., 1200), and the early windows in the roof spandrels below. The Eastern weather-moulding remains, and inside the staircase turret are fragments of the south nave wall, with some† other stones of the same age. The tower piers are cased over, as we shall see below.

There seems to have been no‡ south aisle at this time. That to the north opened into the transept by a well proportioned arch at (*a*), and a similar arch at (*b*) led probably into a north chancel aisle; but a change was made in the 15th Century; and the chapter house stood somewhere here, which seems in its ruinous old age to have been used as a charnel house, and was destroyed in 1800.

The transepts were lighted by two windows on each side, and had altars in their east walls under Segmental arches. They have high eave roofs, which were probably altered in 1589, (see stone over south window. Wheler's History,) and were restored not very judiciously a few years ago.

## SECOND AGE.

This Early English Church, which took a considerable time to complete, was much altered about the end of the 13th Century.

\* Some local Archæologist might probably discover from what quarries the two kinds of stone came, that are here used; the older has an iron-stone tint, and was given up for a better material, even in the early days of the chantry of Stratford. The plan given is not drawn to scale.

† Some are of great beauty.

‡ If there was one, it was closed at the east end with a Chapel; but the position of the staircase turret is rather a proof that there was not one, as it would otherwise have been placed at an unoccupied angle, as at S. Bees Priory Church, &c.

1. The piers of the tower were rebuilt or cased. (The present groined roof is modern). Its arches were remodelled. Its upper storey was almost wholly rebuilt. There were added a corbel table, and Decorated battlements with (most probably) a wooden spire (replaced by the present spire in 1764).

Note the<sup>‡</sup> traces of the early buttress now inside at the N.W. angle of the tower. And the discharging arches in the upper storey, providing for a spire.

Some of these changes were made shortly after the foundation of the chantry here, by the famous John de Stratford, in 1332.

To the same eminent man, before and after his elevation to the See of Canterbury, we may ascribe all other improvements of this age, or the gifts from which they were made

2. The south aisle of the Church is his work, with its Chapel of St. Thomas a Becket; (the beautiful sedilia of which still exist<sup>†</sup> in the churchyard), about 1320. About the same time the north aisle was widened.

As the tower was found to require fresh<sup>‡</sup> buttressing, the entrance of the N. aisle was blocked up, and made into the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin. Its present screen is of latish 15th Century work.

In the north aisle is a very fine 'honeycomb' window, (Early Decorated), which with the tower arches may be compared<sup>‡</sup> to work at Bunbury in Cheshire. The west window in this aisle is also early, and so is a plain door in the south aisle.

\* Of the circular windows in the tower, though they all are early 14th Century, the eastern one seems a little the latest, as the archivolt or rim-moulding of the others becomes here a hood-moulding.

The pinnacles may be more modern.

† Only as moss-grown fragments, alas! though they are the best wrought pieces I suppose, within 10 miles.

‡ The low transept walls may have proved insufficient.

3. The capitals, arches, and hood mouldings of the nave, are pure Early Decorated, but the angular soffit is a defect in them, as it is deficient in gravity.

\*The staircase turret is of this age, probably replacing an Early English one not far off, and outside the original Church.

The rest of the aisle work shews many changes, and its completion at the S.W. corner is advanced Decorated, (close of 14th Century). Some of the windows are of very doubtful character.

This improved Church only differed as to its ground plan from the present, in having a smaller (Early English) chancel, and no north porch, as the Early English one had been absorbed in the widened aisle.†

### THIRD AGE.

Henry 5th gave to the priests of this chantry, a new charter, and some additional privileges, and it became a College, and the Church a Collegiate one, in or before 1423.

Somewhere in the reign of Edward IV., the Warden, Thomas Balshall, pulled down the ancient chancel, and built the present choir, on a much larger scale, (part of the exterior walling of the transepts, is I think, visible inside).

The work here shows two distinct styles.

\* Some beautiful fragments of older work may be seen inside.

† Many benefactions are recorded as having been made by towns-folk and priests to this foundation in the 14th Century. Many houses, shops, and 'tofts,' or house-sites, and carucates or ploughland, (? 50 acres), were given.

Notice the differences in the jamb-stones of the aisle windows, the easternmost window of the south aisle is earlier than others, and its jamb-stones are smaller.

One Master Mason works in the local style, not unskilled in 'historiation,' and keeping to older models. It is he that carved the Piscina, Founder's tomb (Thomas Balshall died 1491) North and South doors, and probably the font, the bowl of which is in the south transept.

The other is more eccentric, more original, more self-conscious; he aims at novelty, and is at the pains to enlarge the resources of his bestiary from the lower worlds of air and water; he perches a paunchy toad on a buttress; or catches a dragon fly from the river, and as he struggles on a thorn, he holds him up to the admiration of the townsfolk, half insect, half demon, for ever.

Even his angels, who support the priests in their seats, ruffle their wings in a whimsical mood.

Our neighbours at Coventry were now building their churches on a princely scale; and Thomas Balshall's successor, Ralph Collingwode, seems to have gone to work on the nave in the closing years of the 15th Century.

A north porch was added, and the nave thoroughly remodelled. The low Decorated clerestory was removed; the walls pulled down to the crowns of the arches; rude angels (by some prentice hand), were *inserted* to carry the pilasters; and the wall was panelled with large lantern windows, and a flattish roof.

As it now stands, with the pretty accessories of its site and avenue, this fine Church would of itself amply deserve a visit both from the Archæologist and the Artist. Without magnificence of scale, or extreme beauty of detail, \*it has great dignity both inside and outside.

\* Except some of the fragments.

Its chancel indeed is very noble, as worthy a burial-place for the Great Poet as could well be found.

We must add that this fine fabric sadly needs repair, the tower especially being in a dangerous state; the stone spire of 1764 having increased the mischief.

