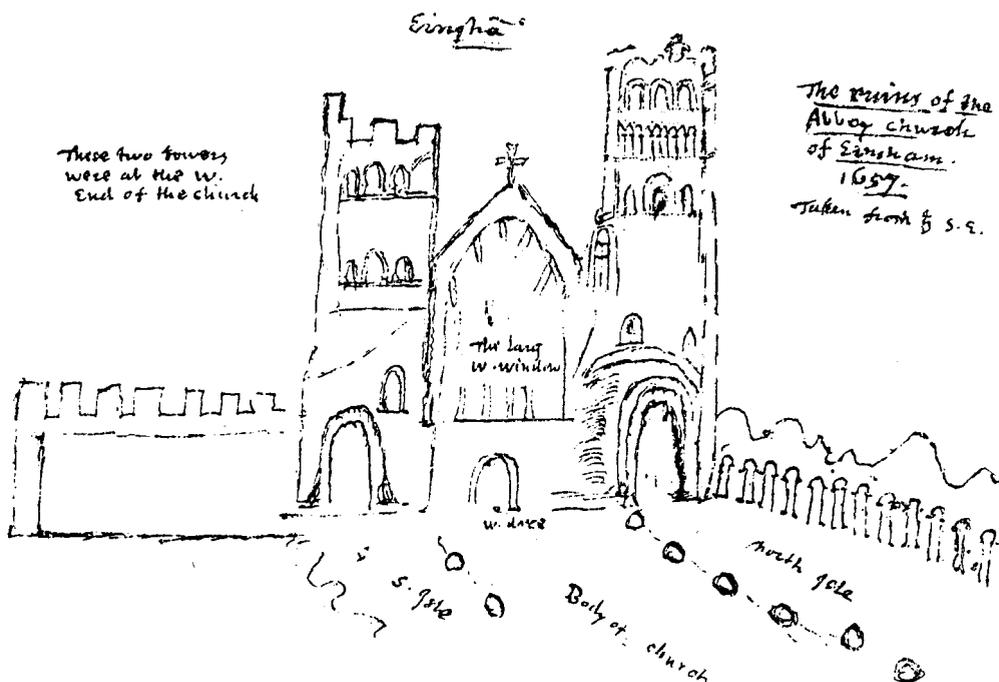


Visible Remains of Eynsham Abbey

FOUNDED 1005 — DISSOLVED 1538/9



"The ruins of the Abbey church of Einsham. 1657"¹

As the site of Eynsham Abbey has not been excavated*, it is only vaguely known to be south of the Parish Church.

Sadly the visual remains of the Abbey are extremely fragmentary, none on the actual site, and the majority in private hands. However, there are some which the general public can view without difficulty.

(a) The most prominent is the mid-fourteenth century Market Cross in the Square, undoubtedly erected by the monastery; this is dealt with more fully in the leaflet issued by the Conservation Area Committee.

* This publication (dated 1980) should be read alongside later reports, of course

b) Nearby, over the doorway of the early 18C. Market House (known as the Bartholomew Room), has been inserted a stone shield “per pale, on the dexter a bugle-horn, and on the sinister a lion rampant”, which may have been the arms of a benefactor of the Abbey, for the arms of the convent are not recorded at the College of Heralds, and a bugle-horn and a lion are decidedly non-ecclesiastical charges. This carving was rescued some twenty years ago from a demolished barn in Back Lane. Unfortunately the colours have not been recorded, but a herald’s visitation report by Richard Lee in 1574 lists the stained glass in the Parish Church as including a gold lion on a red shield. This has not survived, although Anthony Wood and Richard Rawlinson mention it a century or so later.

c) In adjacent Abbey Street there is a duplicate shield under the guttering of No. 6, unfortunately wrongly set on its side. There is a theory that the pair adorned the Abbey Gatehouse, which stood hereabouts, and that they were the arms of Æthelmar, Earl of Cornwall, the 1005 founder, even though heraldry had not yet been established in his time. Medieval heralds were not above granting arms posthumously to historical personages, Charlemagne for instance, Julius Caesar and Adam and Eve were all given shields. The nave roof of Standlake church has two supporting corbels bearing similar charges, even more crudely carved.

d) The largest collection of architectural fragments is to be found in the Vicarage garden; permission to view is readily granted by the Vicar. The main item is an early Tudor archway, which in 1843 was removed from the garden wall of No. 2 Abbey Street (actually in Swan Street). Drawings of 1813² and 1826³ by J.C. Buckler show it *in situ*; one spandrel depicts a wyvern-like creature in foliage, the other has two mythical monsters combatant. Below the arch are two corbel heads, one human, one demoniac, both very worn and repaired with cement, and a smaller cusped arch alongside with a cusped lunette. (Above are the achievements of an earl of the Brydges family, possibly those of James, Earl of Carnarvon, later to become the first Duke of Chandos in 1719. Joseph Skelton suggests that the panel comes from North Leigh Manor, and thus having obviously nothing to do with the Abbey.) Through the arch is a collection of many fragments, cresting, mouldings, capitals vaulting springers, etc.

e) A few yards up John Lopes Road, on the right-hand side, the keen-eyed can discover on the south wall of the Catholic Apostolic Church a small stone lightly carved with a vaulting springer, best viewed with side lighting.

f) The same conditions are required to spot a small piece of 12C. foliage on No. 7 Newland Street, and (g) a strip of nailhead ornament of the same period on No. 13.

(h) Further arrangements of pieces have been put together to form the apex of two gateposts in Hawthorn Road, a few yards on the east side, and leading into the garden of Newland House. They include

12C. foliage, diamond patterning, roll-moulding, and perhaps a tiny consecration cross, looking very like a face.

i) Opposite the foot of Queen Street, south end, there is a newly reconstructed barn, in the east and west gables of which have been inserted fragments of 14-15C. tracery, unfortunately set upside-down in 1978.

j) Opposite on No. 2 Oxford Road a few fragments have been assembled in a triangular shape in 1959-60.

k) In the west gable of No. 27 Acre End Street there is some 15C. tracery.

(1) Finally a section of 15C. cresting is to be found on the ground by the south door of the Parish Church, matching those in Vicarage garden.

The great majority of the architectural fragments in private hands would indicate that the Abbey church and monastery were in the Romanesque style, and this supposition is confirmed by the only authentic representation of the buildings which survives. It is a rough sketch by Anthony Wood, dated 1657, now in the Bodleian Library, and reproduced by permission on the front of this leaflet. A fuller account of the Wood drawing is in preparation by Bishop Eric Gordon. Later engravings, notably that of 1729 by the Buck brothers, contain many mistakes and are not trustworthy, for the towers had already fallen by 1684, long before the prints were issued.

A coloured postcard may be bought at the Bodleian Library, reproducing the main illumination of the Virgin and Child from a mid-twelfth century Commentary on the Psalms by Saint Augustine, which belonged to the monastery.⁴ After the Dissolution the volume found its way into Saint George's Library, Windsor, but in 1612 the Dean and Canons gave it to Oxford.

In the British Library are two Parliamentary Rolls of 1512⁵ and 1515⁶ containing the dissimilar arms of Miles Salley, twenty-sixth abbot of Eynsham, as bishop of Llandaff, for he held both offices concurrently. The 1512 Roll shows him walking in procession with his peers, and this must be the earliest portrait of an Eynsham personality that has survived. His fine tomb at Bristol bears his monumental effigy in full canonicals, but being in the sanctuary of Saint Mark's Chapel, permission must be sought from the verger to view it properly.

The tomb slab of John of Cheltenham, abbot of Eynsham 1317-30, survives somewhat mutilated in Elsfield church, having been purloined by one Michael Pudsey for his own use in 1645. When Buckler drew it in 1820 it was in the chancel of the church and the inscription was intact; in translation it read "HERE LIES BROTHER JOHN OF CHELTENHAM ONCE ABBOT OF THIS PLACE ON WHOSE SOUL MAY GOD HAVE MERCY".⁷ The slab is now on the vestry floor, truncated and much battered.

The Ashmolean Museum displays some remains of the

Abbey: two corbel heads of 15/16C., one reputed to represent a leper, and two flooring tiles, with a spirited mounted knight of early 14C. bearing sword and shield on one, and the other, quite small, with a pale greyish-green glaze. The County Museum at Woodstock has a fine rectangle of 15C. tracery, which until 1962 adorned a barn sited behind the present post office. Also on view are dragon and goat gargoyles, a primitive trinity of flat faces over a gable, and a more sophisticated carving of a demi-angel, 16C., holding a shield; the latter can be seen in another Buckler drawing⁸ lying in the churchyard with, presumably, some abbots' tombstones in the background, only one of which remains *in situ*. In 1823 the angel carving formed part of an archway in the Vicarage garden, together with two cusped stones (which remain), and were engraved by Joseph Skelton. The angel was still at "the old rectory" in the 1870s when it was sketched by Alfred Cobb (*vide* tailpiece).⁹ The present Archbishop of York, Dr. Stuart Y. Blanch, formerly Vicar of Eynsham, wears a pectoral cross based upon the design on one of these tombstones, and it has become known as the Eynsham Cross.

Readers may be misled by three other items in the village: two well-preserved Gothic Revival pinnacles in St Peter's churchyard once stood in the gardens of Newland House, and previously, it is said, on an Oxford building. The third item, visible from Newland Street over an arch at the side of Yew Tree Cottage, is a carved trefoil, which came from the nearby demolished Methodist Chapel of c.1820.

It is hoped these few notes will inspire the production of a more scholarly appraisal of the remains of St Mary's Abbey of Eynsham.

W.B. 1980

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| 1. Bodleian MS. Wood E.1. | f.45 |
| 2. Bodleian MS. Top. Oxon | a66, f.250 |
| 3. Bodleian MS. Top. Oxon | c551, f.113 |
| 4. Bodleian MS. 269, f.iii | |
| 5. BL. Add. MS. 22306 | |
| 6. BL. Add. MS. 40078 | |
| 7. Bodleian MS. Top. Oxon | a66, f.237 |
| 8. Bodleian MS. Top. Oxon | a66, f.256 |
| 9. Bodleian MS. Top. Oxon | d514, f.27b |

