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Photo Essay: Painted Masonry and Ornament in English Romanesque Architecture

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PEREGRINATIONS

JOURNAL OF MEDIEVAL ART AND ARCHITECTURE
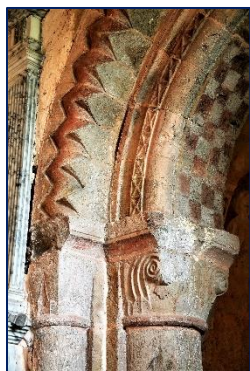### VOLUME VIII, NUMBER 2 (AUTUMN 2022)

Photo Essay: Painted Masonry and Ornament in English Romanesque Architecture

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Investigation into English Romanesque wall painting has concentrated on figurative art programs. Yet there remain many details of painted architectural articulation that deserve to be better known especially as they give us a clearer insight into the original appearance of the buildings. What follows is a collection of images that I have photographed over the last fifty years that provide an introduction to the topic. A few of the examples are well-known but, even when that is the case, they appear here for the first time in color. Most of the examples have not been published before. Bibliographical references are given for individual examples and related material.

On the technical side, the photographs are taken on Canon 35mm equipment, two Canon EOS Mark II bodies with 17mm, 24mm and 45mm perspective-control lenses and zoom lenses ranging from 28 to 500mm. Older images are digitized from slides taken on a Canon F1 with Kodachrome 64 and Fuji Provia 100.film. Support for the cameras and big zoom lenses is provided by a Manfrotto tripod. All photographs are by Malcolm Thurlby.

1. **Blyth Priory (Nottinghamshire)**, a Benedictine house founded in 1088. S nave arcade, E respond with painted fictive masonry and foliage capital. The fictive ashlar is remarkably uniform and looks forward to such regularity in actual ashlar in the nave arcades of Durham Cathedral, Worcester Cathedral chapter house, and elsewhere.[1]

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[1] Malcolm Thurlby, "Anglo-Saxon Reminiscences and other aspects of the Romanesque Fabric of Worcester Cathedral," *Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society*, 26 (2018), 113-148. Reference: Peter Coffman and Malcolm Thurlby, "Blyth Priory: A Romanesque Church in Nottinghamshire," *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, 105 (2001), 57-72.

88

2. **Blyth Priory**, S nave wall, detail of painted fictive ashlar above the 13th-century vault.


3. **York Minster**, painted Romanesque masonry, exterior S transept of Archbishop Thomas of Bayeux's church.

89

4. Great Malvern Priory (Worcestershire), a Benedictine house commenced in 1085, arch from S nave aisle to S transept, detail of red mortar joints achieved with Roman brisk dust or red ochre.

5. Worcester Cathedral, N presbytery gallery, W respond of Romanesque arcade immured in the 13th-century respond. Different from the painted red fictive mortar joints on the nave wall at Blyth where the paint has nothing to do with the real mortar, in the near-contemporary work at Worcester (1084-1089), the actual mortar joints are enhanced with raised pointing.
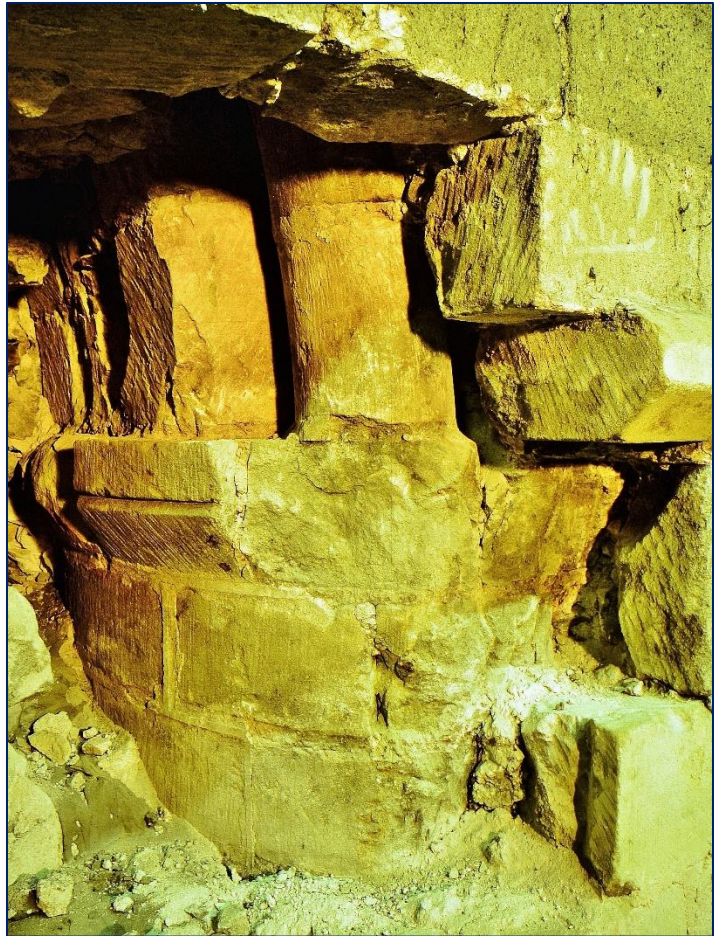
6. Heath Chapel (Shropshire), E wall of nave including the S springer of the chancel arch, detail showing white fictive mortar joints mainly covered by later whitewash.

7. Yorkshire Museum, painted plaster from St Mary's Abbey, York, founded in 1088 by King William Rufus. Notice the scribed guidelines for the painted fictive masonry joints, a feature encountered in other examples illustrated here

8. Yorkshire Museum, painted plaster from St Mary's Abbey, York. Inscribed guidelines for the painted pattern are again in evidence.

9. Durham Cathedral, N nave arcade, pier 3, detail.[2] One of a number of examples of the same motif in painted and sculptural decoration.
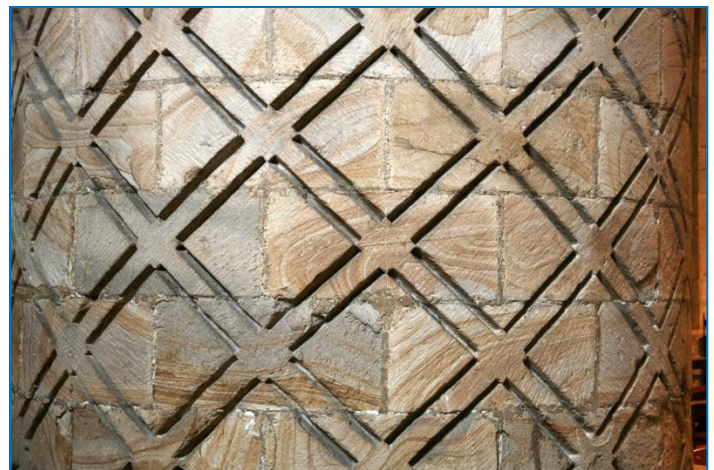
[2] R.A. Cordingley, "Norman Decoration in Durham Cathedral," *Archaaeologia Aeliana*, 4th series, 10 (1933), 133-139; Jean Bony, "The Stonework Planning of the First Durham Master," *Medieval Architecture in its Intellectual Context: Studies in Honour of Peter Kidson*, ed. Eric Fernie and Paul Crossley, London and Ronceverte (1990), 19-34, 60.

10. Gloucester, St Peter's Abbey (now cathedral), crypt, detail of a respond added in the reinforcement of the original Romanesque fabric.³ What is illustrated here, and in the other images from Gloucester, ranges from the simple red vertical joint, like the single red line in the plaster from St Mary's Abbey York but applied directly to the ashlar.

11.   Gloucester, St Peter's Abbey (now cathedral), crypt, rib vault detail. Red fictive mortar joints on a rib and an early example of a vault boss.

³ See. F.S. Waller, "The Crypt of Gloucester Cathedral," *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 1 (1876), 147-152. Romanesque painted decoration at Gloucester is better-known than many examples in England thanks to Carolyn Heighway and Richard Bryant with Malcolm Thurlby, *The Romanesque Abbey of St Peter at Gloucester* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2020).

12. Gloucester, St Peter's Abbey (now cathedral), treasury N blind arcade detail shows much more elaborate painted treatment of the arches with alternating patterns of voussoirs – note the incised guideline.

13. Gloucester, St Peter's Abbey, treasury N blind arcade

94

14. Detail of #13, soffit. Alternating pattern including fictive marble.

15. Gloucester, St Peter's abbey, treasury, blind arcade capital – red chevon on the abacus. a symmetrical flower on the right scallop and part of one on the left scallop.

95

16. Leckhampstead (Buckinghamshire), Assumption, S doorway. An interesting combination of sculpture and painting with fictive marble above the carved tympanum and the alternation of red voussoirs. The non-radial arrangement of the fictive voussoirs owes more to an Anglo-Saxon tradition than to Norman practice. The iconography of the tympanum has been variously interpreted.[4]
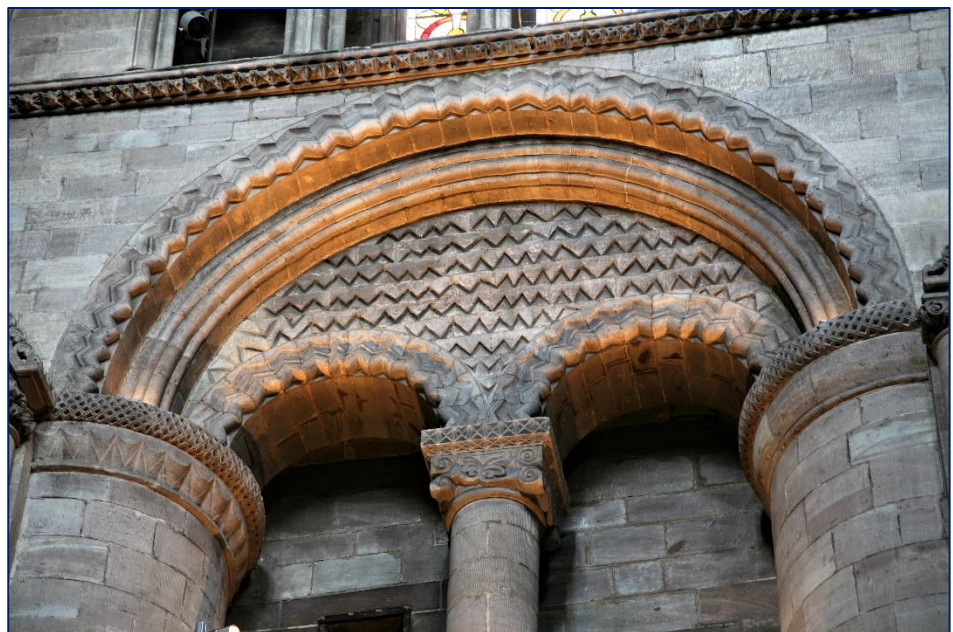
17. Kempley (Gloucestershire), Old St Mary's, chancel arch and east wall of the nave – fictive chip-carved wall pattern.

18. Hereford Cathedral, commenced 1107 – 14, presbytery, N gallery, bay 2, showing a carved variant of the fictive chip carving above the Kempley chancel arch.

19. Kempley, Old St Mary's. detail of chancel arch with fictive marble on the chamfer of the hood mould, red paint on the roll of the chevron and the chip-carved saltire crosses and the line of the outer edge of the first order.

20-21 Kempley, Old St Mary's chancel arch, left and right responds showing the chequer- board pattern on the soffit. The sculpture is an example of the so-called Dymock School.[5]

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[5] See Eric Gethyn-Jones, *The Dymock School of Sculpture* (Chichester 1977); Malcolm Thurlby, *The Herefordshire School of Romanesque Sculpture (with a History of the Anarchy in Herefordshire* by Bruce Coplestone-Crow) (Almeley [Herefs.]: Logaston Press, 2013); and individual sites on https://www.crsbi.ac.uk/

98

22 Kempley, Old St Mary's, chancel arch detail from E

23 Hereford Cathedral, S nave arcade, detail Pier 4, with stepped pattern on the capital scallops in relation to Kempley chancel arch.


99

24 Kempley, Old St Mary's, chancel, interior to E. Note the continuous roll molding with carved bases in the E window, in contrast to the squared jambs with red and white ribbons of the N and S windows.

25. Kempley, Old St Mary's chancel vault, E end, chevron ornament, also used at the W end of the barrel vault. A complex three-dimensional variant of chevron which should be seen alongside contemporary patterns in carved chevron as in the crossing of Hereford Cathedral in the next image.

100
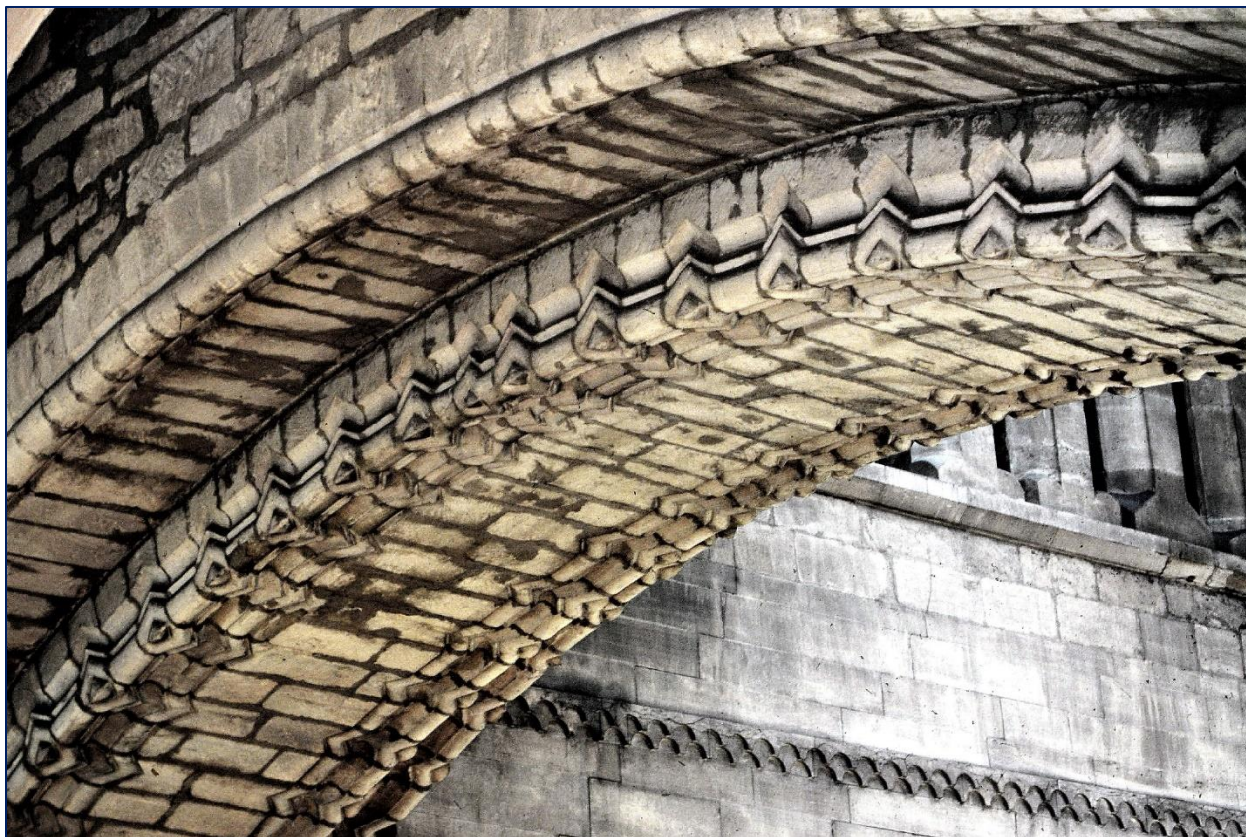
26 Hereford Cathedral, E crossing arch.

27 Kempley, Old St Mary's, interior splay of chancel S window.

28 Kempley, Old St Mary's, chancel, N wall detail. The architectural setting reflects regional practice; the segmental arches appeared in the former Bishop's Chapel at Hereford Cathedral built by Robert of Lotharingia (1079-1095), and the roundels in the arch are paralleled in a chancel N Window at Tarrington, St Philip and St James (Herefordshire).
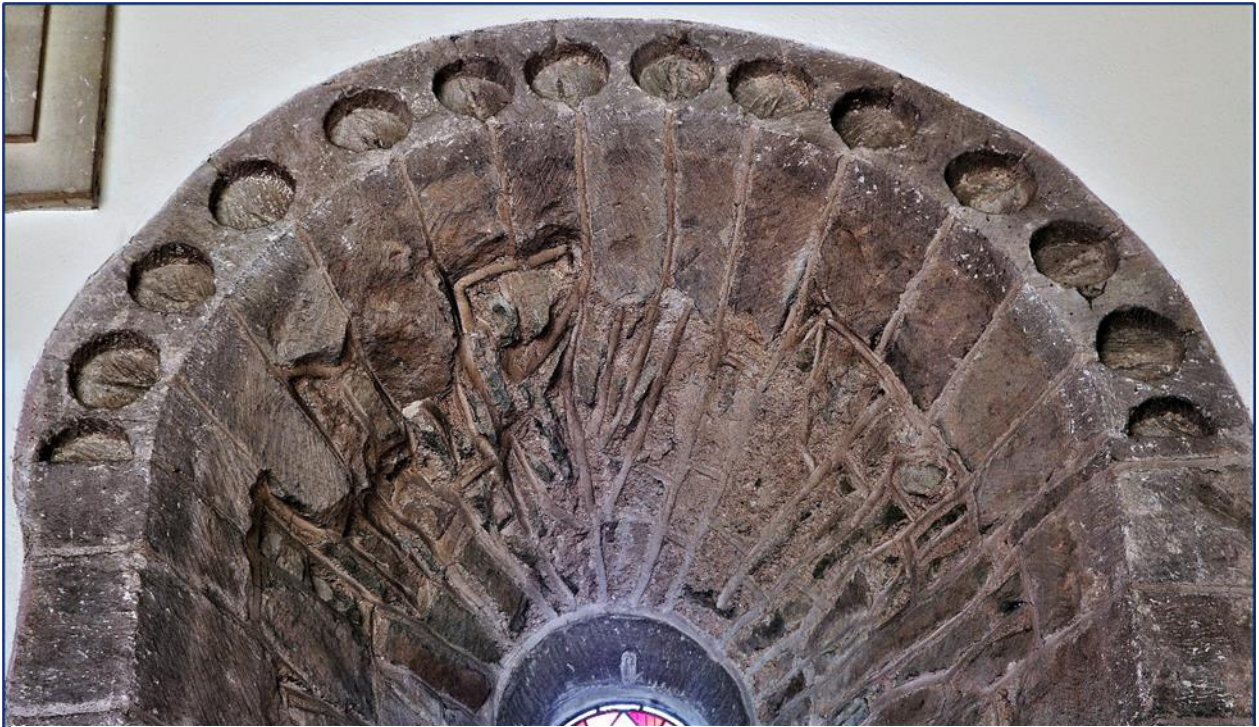
29 Tarrington (Herefordshire), St Philip and St James, chancel, interior N wall, window.
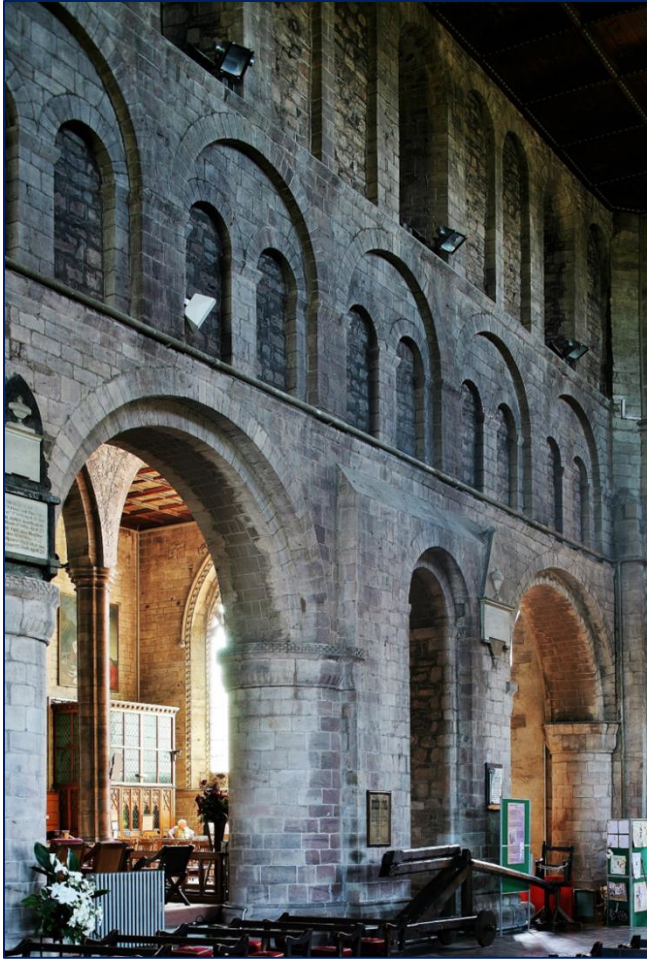
30 Leominster Priory (Herefordshire), founded by King Henry I in 1123, S nave elevation, W bays. Originally intended to be vaulted either with domes.[6] The plan for high vaults was abandoned in favor of the present simpler elevation with false gallery and plain clerestorey windows and flanking blind arches, and a wooden roof.

31 Leominster Priory, S nave false gallery, third bay from W, central pier with chevron and pelta ornament,

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[6] J.T. Smith, "The Norman Structure of Leominster Priory," *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society*, (1963), or groin vaults, Malcolm Thurlby, "Hereford Cathedral: The Romanesque Fabric," in *Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology in Hereford: British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions*, XV, ed. David Whitehead (1995), 15-28.

103

32. Leominster Priory,
S nave false gallery,
third bay from W,
right respond

33-34 Leominster Priory, S nave false gallery, third bay from W, left respond: and Bromyard (Herefordshire), St Peter, N nave doorway, detail E jamb – chevron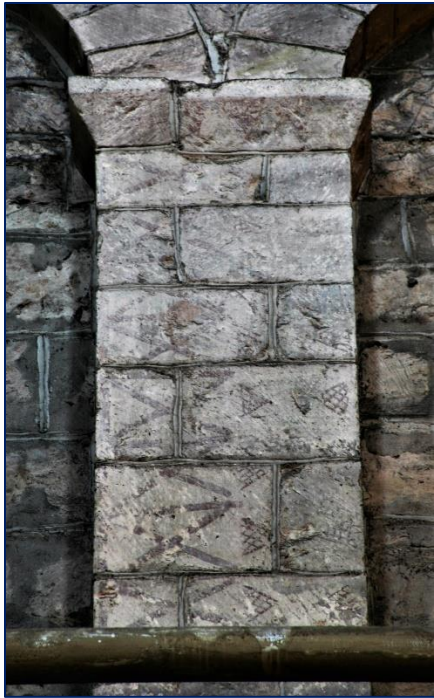. Leominster Priory, S nave false gallery, third bay from W, left respond and Bromyard (Herefordshire), St Peter, N nave doorway, detail E jamb – chevron.

35. Gloucester. St Peter's Abbey, 'bridge' from presbytery gallery to W gallery of the Lady Chapel, reused chevron for family resemblance in chevron pattern with the painted work at Leominster, and the next two images.

36 Hereford Cathedral, S transept E wall, blocked clerestorey window from above high vault.

37. Hereford Cathedral, nave arcade detail.

38. Leominster Priory, S nave false gallery, second bay from W detail central pier.

39. Leominster Priory, S nave false gallery, fourth bay from W, detail central pier.

40 Quatford (Shrophire), St Mary Magdalene, founded in 1086 as a collegiate chapel by Roger of Montgomery. Earl of Shrewsbury, chancel, N wall interior detail dado.

41 Quatford, detail of #40, fictive marble.

42 Coombes (Sussex), nave E wall with fictive marble and 'string course' with small hyphenated arches.

43 Steyning (Sussex), St Andrew and St Cuthman, clerestorey string course. To show a carved version of the motif in the previous image at Coombes.

44 Coombes, chancel arch soffit to S with atlas figure and pelta ornament.

45 Hardham (Sussex), St Botolph, N nave dado.[7]

46 Worcester Cathedral, chapter house, dado.

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[7] David Park, "The 'Lewes Group' of Wall Paintings in Sussex," *Anglo-Norman Studies*, VII (1984), 200-235.

111

47 Hardham, nave E wall, fictive herringbone masonry relates to contemporary masonry practice in late 11th-and early 12th-century England as in Archbishop Thomas of Bayeux's York Minster, Corfe Castle, Tamworth Castle, and numerous minor churches such as #48.

48 Ashleworth (Gloucestershire), St Andrew and St Bartholomew, interior, nave N wall, herringbone masonry for comparison with #47.

49 Hardham, nave east wall, painted lozenge masonry flanking scenes of the Annunciation and Visitation.

113

50 Christchurch (Twyneham) Priory, N transept, exterior from NNE, compare near-contemporary lozenge pattern in the masonry of the NE stair turret with image #49.

51. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, painted volute capital from Exeter, St Nicholas' priory, founded by William I in 1987.[8]

52. Ickleton (Cambridgeshire), St Mary Magdalene, N nave arcade, E bay.[9]

[8] See E.W. Tristram, *English Medieval Wall Painting: The Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944), 123-124, pl. 90, for black-an-white illustrations pf Romanesque painting from Exeter, St Nicholas Priory now lost.

[9] David Park, "Romanesque Wall Painting at Ickleton," *Romanesque and Gothic: Essays for George Zarnecki*, ed, Neil Stratford (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1987) 159-169.

115

53 Ickleton, S nave arcade, detail of red fictive voussoirs recalling Roman practice of alternation brick and stone voussoirs as in Constantine's Baths at Trier.

54 Duxford (Cambridgeshire), St John, W arch of central axial tower.

55 Clayton (Sussex), St John the Baptist, Christ above chancel arch framed in a broad, ribbon chevroned mandorla.

56. Stogursey (Somerset), St Andrew, interior to E from nave showing a carved version of ribbon-chevron.[10]

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[10] Malcolm Thurlby, "The Romanesque Church of St Andrew, Stogursey (Somerset)," *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 164 (2020), 150-172.

117

57 Ely Cathedral, S nave aisle painted vault with foliage patterns and groins emphasized with red lines, and foliage scrolls.

58 Ely Cathedral, detail of #57, foliage scroll.
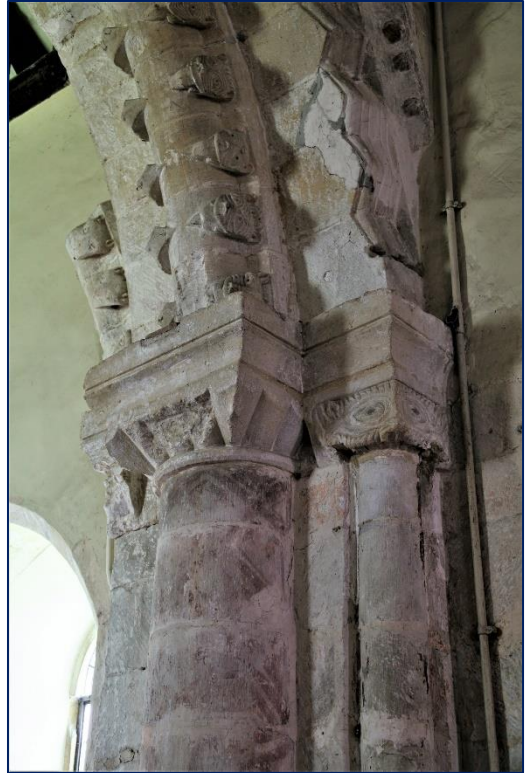59 Ely Cathedral, foliage scroll, detail of #57.

60 Ely Cathedral, Prior's Doorway, jamb detail for comparison with # 58 and #59.

61 Langford (Oxfordshire), St Matthew, E arch of central axial tower, detail of S respond.

119

62 Avington (Berkshire), St Mark and St Luke, detail of S respond of chancel arch.

63 Avington, detail of #62. [11]

[11] Roger Stalley, "A Twelfth-Century Patron of Architecture: A Study of the Buildings Erected by Roger, Bishop of Salisbury," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, ser. 3. 34 (1971), 62-83. Stalley convincingly related the sculpture and articulation of Avington with the work of Roger, Bishop of Salisbury (1102-1139), in particular the mask capital swallowing the shaft and the vault rib with a central roll flanked by beak heads.

120

64. Avington, detail of chancel arch showing traces of paint.

65 Fritton (Norfolk), St Edmund, chancel arch, S jamb, detail.

66 Fritton, St Edmund, chancel arch S jamb to contextualize the previous
     image. The plain masonry below the painted ornament suggests that there
     was a wooden screen against the unpainted jamb.

122

67 Cowley (Oxfordshire), St James, chancel arch S jamb, painted spiral shaft and cushion capital.

68 Cowley, detail of #67.

69   Cowley, chancel arch, N jamb.

70 Tewkesbury Abbey, S transept, upper chapel, detail of painted vault boss.[12]

71 Dymock (Gloucestershire), St Mary, S doorway, Tree of Life tympanum for comparison with foliage in Tewkesbury boss in image #62.

[12] Malcolm Thurlby, "The Norman Church," in Richard K. Morris and Ron Shoesmith (ed.), *Tewkesbury Abbey: History, Art and Architecture* (Logaston, Herefordshire: Logaston Press, 2003), 89-108.
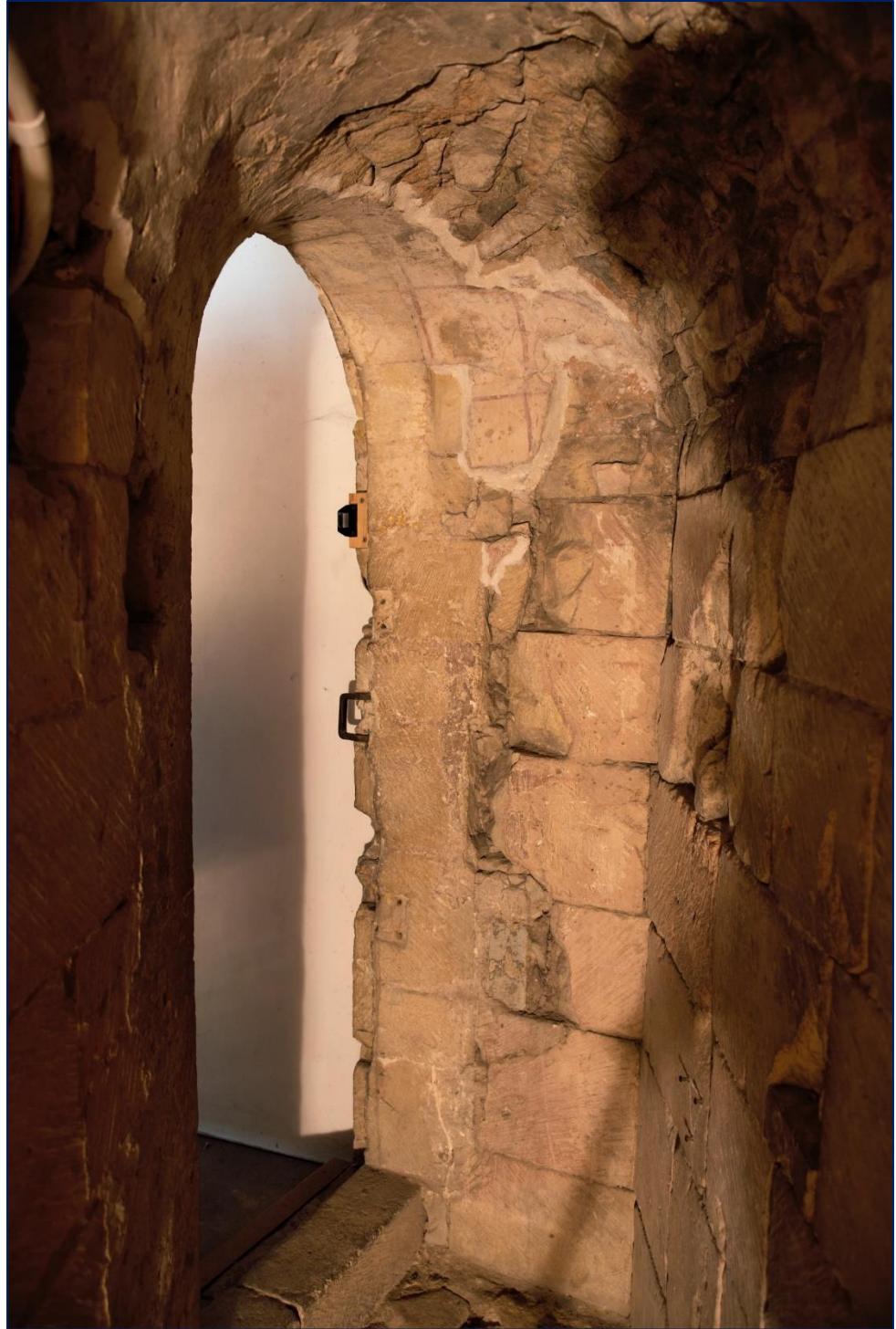
72. Tewkesbury Abbey, N nave arcade capital with painted chevron on abacus.

73 Tewkesbury Abbey, S transept, upper chapel, detail of S jamb of W arch and adjacent doorway to wall passage.

74 Tewkesbury Abbey, detail of #73.
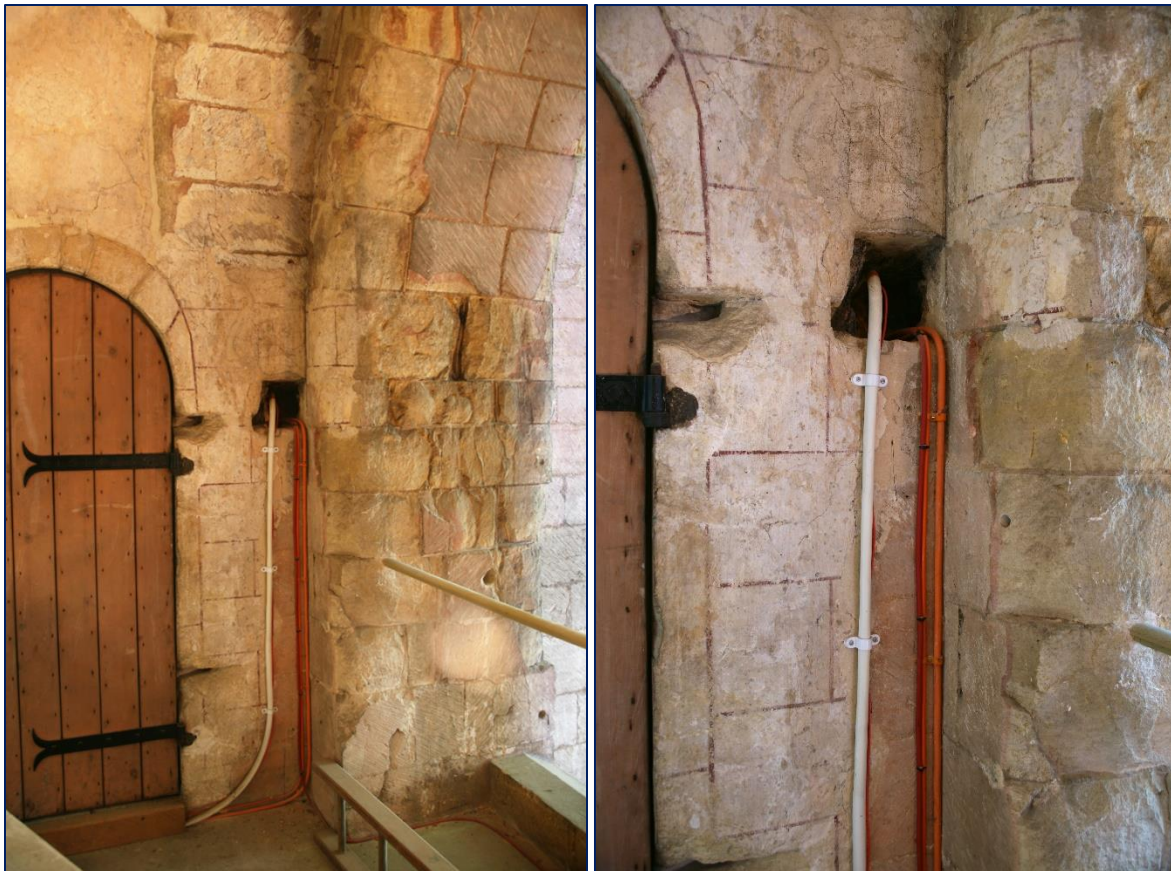
75 Tewkesbury Abbey, S transept, E wall, passage to upper E chapel showing
    the painted red mortar joints continuing from the wall to the barrel vault.

76 Stewkley (Buckinghamshire), St Michael and All Angels, chancel, interior to E
with scroll pattern on the vault "copied from remains found during the
restoration of the church."[13] ❦

FURTHER REFERENCE
Richard Gem and E. Howe, "A Romanesque Painted Arch *circa* 1100 at St Mary's
Church Old Linslade," *Records of Buckinghamshire* 58 (2019), 95-115.

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[13] C.E. Keyser, *A List of Buildings in Great Britain and Ireland having mural and other painted decorations, of
dates prior to the latter part of the sixteenth century, with historical introduction and alphabetical index of
subjects*, 3rd edn (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1883), 328.