XI. *A further Account of the original Architecture of Westminster Hall. In a Letter from SYDNEY SMIRKE, Esq. F.S.A. to Sir HENRY ELLIS, K.H. F.R.S. Secretary.*

Read 2nd February, 1837.

DEAR SIR,

12, Regent Street, January 1837.

SINCE the date of my last communication to you respecting the restoration of Westminster Hall now in progress under the direction of my brother, Sir Robert Smirke, the interior of that building has been completed, and the exterior is now under the hands of the mason. You will remember, that in the course of the internal repair, I stated that a vast number of carved stone fragments of the older Norman Hall were met with, which had been used in some cases as ashlar for the new face given to the walls from the string-course upwards in the reign of Richard II., but in most cases merely as rubble for filling up and rendering solid those parts which had been previously void. Some of these fragments of the original building, however, had remained undisturbed in their proper positions; for it does not appear that those who were employed in renovating the Hall at the last mentioned period gave themselves the trouble to move more stones than was absolutely necessary in order to effect their alterations. By means of these undisturbed remains it has been an easy task to compose a complete restoration of one side of the Norman Hall, a drawing of which I have the pleasure to forward to you.

Very little of this restoration is imaginary; for, except the position of one or two of the arches, there were seen either on one side of the Hall or the other, stones enough in their original places fully to bear out all I have attempted to show on this drawing. The remarkable irregularity in the position of the smaller arches would be scarcely supposed probable, if the evidence of it was not decisive and indisputable; but I must own myself at a loss to account for

such apparently gratuitous deviations from uniformity ; although it is possible that the situation of adjacent pre-existing buildings, or perhaps indeed some internal arrangements of the Hall, of which we have now no knowledge, may have caused the anomaly.

With regard to the north and south ends of the Hall, the immense windows formed at the close of the fourteenth century have obliterated the greater part of the original work. At the north end no trace of Norman work presented itself ; although I should add, that, as it was not found necessary to repair much of the masonry at this end, the interior of the Hall here did not undergo so searching an examination as the other parts of the Hall underwent.

At the south end there was unquestionable evidence that the clerestory, and the arched passage on a level with it, was originally continued along this end, uniformly with the two sides of the Hall ; above these there were also found remnants of another arched passage obtained in the thickness of the wall, at this south end, and connected with the turret stair at the south-east angle of the Hall, adjacent to the north-west angle of St. Stephen's Chapel. It is not very apparent what was the use of this last mentioned passage ; the floor of it was at, or about, the level of the top of the side-walls when at their original height ; therefore it seems scarcely possible that this passage could have had any connection with the interior of the Hall. It seems the most probable conjecture that, as the roof of the Hall was no doubt gabled either in *one* great span, as at present, (which is not likely,) or in *three* spans, (which appears to me most probable,) this passage may have been merely destined to give a ready means of communication between the gutters on the two opposite sides of the building.

I have shewn on the accompanying section, the moulded cornice on the top of the wall, which was found pretty nearly entire : its mouldings forbid us to ascribe them to the earliest work of the Hall ; but, as the ashlar facing of the fourteenth century was built up against it, and in a great measure concealed it, it is to be inferred that the cornice is of some date intermediate between the early Norman work and the restorations in Richard the Second's reign.

I will now proceed to notice the partial restorations in progress on the exterior of the building :

In removing the decayed stonework of the great buttresses, and of the out-

Longitudinal Section of Westminster Hall.

Shewing a conjectural restoration of the East Side as it appeared previously to the alterations in the 14th Century.

The portions of Stone-work distinguished by a strong Tint are those which have been found in situ and which have suggested the restoration of the remaining parts. Additional evidence is afforded by similar portions on the opposite side.

J. Basire, sculp.

Capitals belonging to the Norman Building of Westminster Hall.

side face of the main walls, many more remnants of the old Hall were discovered, which had been used and built in with their carved and moulded parts inwards, and their squared backs or beds outwards, exactly as I have formerly described similar fragments to have occurred within the Hall. I send you some of the more perfect of these fragments, for the inspection of the Society. One of the capitals represents an armed man assailing a castle; at least that seems the most probable explanation of this rude sculpture: the subject of the carving on the other capital appears to be taken from Æsop's fable of the dog and the ass; on one side is the dog fauning on his master, who is leaning over and patting him, and two attendants are looking on; on the other face of the capital is seen the ass putting his fore legs on the master's shoulders, the latter turning to escape from the unwelcome caress, whilst of the two attendants one is beating the ass with a stick. The third fragment is a rather elegant fret, in so good a state of preservation as to lead us to believe that in its original position it had not been exposed to the weather: no similar carving has occurred in any part of the walls, and I have no clue whatever to its former position.

The outside of the Norman Hall was not entirely destitute of ornament. I mentioned in my former letter that the reveals of the windows were decorated with the usual Norman column and impost, resting upon the carved string-course, a representation of which is given in the last volume of the *Archæologia*; and the subsequent progress of the work has fully confirmed my former observations.

Besides this ornamental clerestory, recent examinations of the external masonry of the south end have laid open decisive indications, considerably higher than the clerestory, of one of those series of recesses, or arcades in relief, which so commonly occur in Norman and other Romanesque architecture. The extensive repairs done to the south end in the seventeenth century had nearly effaced this arcade, but at the east angle enough remained undisturbed to establish its existence. Parts of the shafts of two small columns, with their bases, were found untouched, the diameter of each being about six inches. The face of the wall between the columns was found to have been reticulated work, similar to that which occurs on the west end of Rochester cathedral, and in other buildings of corresponding date both

in England and on the Continent, and which is one of the most cogent evidences of the classic derivation of the Romanesque style. The stones which composed this reticulated work are about seven inches square, varying in depth on their bed from seven to nine inches. They are alternately of Caen stone and Reigate stone, so that, as the former is a bright-coloured material, and the latter grey, the work when new must have had a chequered appearance, resembling, although in a less degree, the parti-coloured masonry observable in the medieval architecture of the north of Italy.

It is worthy of notice here, that in 1822, when the exterior of the north end of the Hall was undergoing restoration, Mr. J. C. Buckler informs me, that behind the ornamental porch which was built up against the old north wall at the end of the fourteenth century, he observed portions of three large arches. The centre one had been nearly cut away in forming the great doorway, but the two side arches had their circular heads but little disturbed; they appeared to have been blank, and to have been filled in with reticulated masonry like

*N. Front. — Westminster Hall.
March, 1822.*

that which I have stated to have been recently exposed to view at the south end; these three arches were soon again concealed from view by the progress of the restoration, but Mr. Buckler availed himself of the opportunity thus temporarily afforded him, of making a slight sketch of this part of the Norman Hall in its earliest state, a copy of which, kindly communicated to me by him, I beg to exhibit to the Society.

In concluding this short notice, I cannot refrain from congratulating those who are interested in the architectural history of this country, on the timely and substantial repair which the liberality of Parliament has bestowed upon this great monument.

Time, and a series of alterations executed without due caution, had put this Hall in greater jeopardy than a superficial view would have led one to suppose. The side walls were in some places considerably out of the perpendicular; and formidable fissures cleft the whole substance of the walls, both at the north-east angle and near the south end of the west side. At the latter spot a hollow space was found to have been left in the masonry, capacious enough to admit several men, almost exactly over which was imposed one of the huge trusses of the roof. These defects, added to the indifferent execution of the original masonry throughout, had produced, and were producing, effects which at no distant period might have been attended with serious consequences.

There is now no reason to doubt that posterity, for many years to come, will have the gratification of contemplating Westminster Hall in all its integrity; unless, indeed, the contiguity of the proposed Parliamentary buildings should render necessary those very extensive alterations to which it is, I believe, intended to subject this Hall.

I remain, dear Sir,

very faithfully yours,

SYDNEY SMIRKE.

SIR HENRY ELLIS, K.H., F.R.S.
Secretary.