

Thursday 27th March 2008 Herefordshire

A couple of visits either side of a short job looking at a derelict 18th/19th house/inn at Michaelchurch Esceley.

Abbey Dore

A glorious sunny morning, and an intensely picturesque building. The church is the crossing and eastern arm of a 12th/13th century Cistercian abbey church, re-roofed and restored in the 1630s Laudian revival when a new tower was built in the angle of choir and south transept. It is now entered by a pretty little timber-framed porch on the gable end of the south transept. It has a square east-end, but with a vaulted ambulatory of five by two bays; very beautiful. The 17th century work is extremely attractive as well – screen, choir loft, stalls, and roofs with lots of carved detail. In the west wall the blocked arches to nave and aisles. The easternmost arch of the south arcade survives, and easternmost pier of the northern; the lower part of the north aisle wall seems to survive in a the substantial wall between churchyard and a sunken lawn on the north which marks the site of the cloister; there was apparently a western galilee chapel, overlapping the west end of the lay brother's range. The guide book plan shows quite a lot of detail here but from the churchyard it is difficult to make out much, other than the pilaster buttress at the south-west corner of the range. There is said to be more visible on the other side of the wall, where the ground level is much lower, but this part is now a farmyard full of cows and you would need wellies to wade in.... Attached to the north transept is the shell of the slype, and beyond just one corner of a ten-sided chapter house, with some nice detail in the springing of its vault. Other bits and pieces have been found by excavation but are covered up again; there may be more in the farm buildings on the site of the west range, but | did not explore.

Michaelchurch Esceley

An interesting parish church, although hard to date. The pretty tower is 19th century; what detail survives in nave and chancel is of simple late medieval character, and there is an old weathered timber archway to the south porch. Inside there is a good wagon roof - again late medieval (?) but the main feature is a much-faded painting on the north wall of the nave of Christ of the Trades – a very faint figure of Christ, in loincloth, showing wounds, surrounded by craftsmen's tools; apparently the message is a warning against working on a Sunday, with the implication that those who do so wound Christ again.

Craswall Priory

A Grandmontine house, in the headwaters of a remote valley close to the Welsh border. Found by following a farm road signed 'Park Farm' and then a gate with a board painted 'Abbey'; the farmer on his quad bike said 'you'll see a pile of stones'. The site is all big grassy mounds and gnarled old conifers, with the odd crag of grey rubble walling standing up. It has obviously been tidied up since I was last here, probably in the 1970s, but this was a while ago as the explanatory boards are now faded and the site hut a decaying shell. The church is the usual Grandmontine long rectangle with an eastern apse, this time with flanking chapels (the southern apsidal as well) and a north-western 'porticus' of which little survives. The east end of the

church has been excavated, and stone altar restored or replaced, and here there is some good architectural detail – a double piscine, and pairs of doorways into the chapels, as well as a jamb of one of the apse lancets. The cloister is on the south; I in the east range the slype beside the southern chapel is buried under an old tree, although it could still be largely there as the surface of the rubble mould must be 4 – 5 m above the level of the church floor. Then comes the chapter house, and this has been cleared; it has some good detail in the bases of the shafted jambs of its doorway and flanking windows, two pier bases, and the bases of the three windows in its east wall. The range beyond is grassy humps and rubble outcrops, although there is a tall mound over the sight of the day stair at the south-east corner of the cloister; at the south end of the range a wall of the reredorter projects to the east. Just beyond is the brook that winds around the south and west sides of the site. The plan shows south and west ranges, with a kitchen between them, but the stream now seems to cut across the site of this. The inner walls are clear – a big mound with some outcrops of stone – but little of the outer wall of the south range (one hump on the bank of the stream) and absolutely nothing of the west range.

A very peaceful and emotive site; what is unusual is that it would appear that the buildings were simply left alone and simply collapsed; time alone did its work, and there was never any utilisation as farm buildings or a later house; nobody seems too have bothered to rob stone (except perhaps from the outer walls of south and west ranges – if they ever existed). If the rubble mounds were cleared many walls would probably stand 2 – 3 m high .

Hay on Wye Castle

Just a brief look. The whole town is full of second-hand-bookshops; a day here could be unwise and expensive. The Castle seems to consist of a square keep (with one good 12th-century window on its inner face) with a length of curtain wall containing a gateway adjacent to the east, and a good 16th or 17th century house to the west. The outer face can be seen quite well, peering upwards, from the street, and the inner from a garden (admission 50p) although the ruins are allegedly unsafe and screened by a wire-mesh barricade. Kids however were getting in and running round the wall tops; in a fit of vindictiveness at not being allowed to do likewise (coupled of course with a proper concern for the young persons' safety) told the proprietor.