

## WARRINGTON FRIARY.

THE DISCOVERIES OF 1931.<sup>1</sup>*By Geoffrey Owen, F.R.I.B.A., and F. H. Cheetham, F.S.A.*

THE first attempt to lift from obscurity the Augustine Friary of Warrington was made in 1872 by the late Mr. William Beamont, whose short *History of Warrington Friary* was included in a volume of *Miscellanies* printed by the Chetham Society in that year.<sup>2</sup>

For two centuries or more the actual site of the buildings was unknown, but was indicated by names of streets and lanes such as St. Austin's Lane, Friarsgate, Friars Green, and Friars Lane,<sup>3</sup> all of which lay in close proximity to Bridge Street, the chief thoroughfare of the town. From time to time, however, fragments of masonry had been found near to what is now known to have been the site of the friars' church, and in 1886 Mr. Beamont again interested himself in the Friary when, by the demolition of buildings on the west side of Bridge Street, consequent on its widening, an open piece of ground offered itself in which excavations could be made. His suggestion to the Warrington Corporation that the site should be explored was accepted, and a small sum of money was set aside for the purpose. The excavations were carried out by the Corporation, and were watched by Mr. Beamont and Mr. J. E. Worsley; Mr. William Owen, F.R.I.B.A., undertaking to make the necessary records. The result of the discoveries then made Mr.

<sup>1</sup> The substance of a paper, since re-written, read to the Society on 10 November, 1932, by Geoffrey Owen, F.R.I.B.A.

<sup>2</sup> Chet. Soc., vol. lxxxiii; *Chetham Miscellanies*, vol. 4, (iv), "History of Warrington Friary," 7 chapters, 80 pages.

<sup>3</sup> A plan of the site, on which all these are shown, is in *Trans. Hist. Soc.*, xli, 179.

Owen embodied in a paper, "Warrington Friary and the Recent Discoveries there," read before this Society on 14 November, 1889, and afterwards printed in its *Transactions*.<sup>1</sup> The present paper should be read in conjunction with and as a continuation of that paper. The plan of the church (part of which was unavoidably of a conjectural nature) it is now necessary to revise as a result of the recent exploration. The plan of 1889 having been used in 1907 by the editors of the *Victoria History of Lancashire* (vol. iii, p. 315)<sup>2</sup> to illustrate a short account of the building,<sup>3</sup> and having thus become more widely known than would have been the case had it been confined to the *Transactions* of a provincial Society, it is the more necessary that the revised plan of 1932<sup>4</sup> should have the same initial publicity as that of its predecessor. It is accordingly reproduced here by the courtesy of the *Warrington Examiner*, in whose columns it first appeared,<sup>5</sup> and it should now be considered as superseding the former plan,—with which, however, it should be compared.

At the close of 1886 the foundations of a large part of the Friary church were located, and a little later the chancel and crossing were fully exposed. Further investigation in 1887, made possible by the courtesy of the adjoining owners and tenants, led to the location of other walls and three complete pillar bases, together with a portion (one-quarter) of a fourth base, but it was realized that the greater part of the nave lay under an

<sup>1</sup> *Trans. Hist. Soc. Lancs. & Chesh.*, xli (N.S. 5), 175-94.

<sup>2</sup> Prof. Tait's short history of the Friary is in vol. ii (1908), p. 162.

<sup>3</sup> This was written by Sir Charles Peers and was based on Mr. William Owen's paper. "The evidence for some part of the plan is slight," it was said, "but there seems no doubt that Mr. Owen is correct in his reading of it. . . . The details point to c. 1280 for the earliest work, and the large north transept seems to be little, if at all, later than the rest of the building."

<sup>4</sup> It records the excavations of 1931, but is dated 6 February, 1932.

<sup>5</sup> On 27 February, 1932. It was afterwards reproduced, accompanied by a brief note, in the *Antiquaries Journal*, xii, 448 (Oct. 1932).

old candle factory in Friars Green, and that it was not possible to explore further until the factory was pulled down. The opportunity came in the summer of 1931, when the owners, Messrs. Greenall, Whitley & Co., Ltd., decided that the building should be demolished in order to make room for an open garage.

The Committee of the Warrington Municipal Museum having obtained permission to excavate from the owners of the site, the builder of the garage, Mr. Harry Fairclough, kindly suspended work for a time after the demolition of the factory, so as to allow the Museum authorities to make their investigations, and he himself gave every possible assistance. The work of excavation was carried out under the supervision of the late Mr. G. A. Dunlop, F.S.A. (Scot.), Director of the Museum, and Mr. Geoffrey Owen was asked to assist him in making records, thus continuing the work begun by his father more than forty years before. The results of this latest investigation were interesting and valuable, and though in no way definitive have materially enlarged our knowledge of the building.

In the accompanying plan the black portions show the extent of the stonework found in its original position in 1886-7. The whole of the choir is not shown as nothing further came to light in 1931 affecting the plan of that portion of the building, the new discoveries being chiefly in the western part of the nave.

The plan of 1889, based on the exploration of 1886-7, showed a choir 58 feet long by 24 ft. wide, an oblong crossing about 23 feet by 14 feet,<sup>1</sup> a nave 86 feet by 27 feet, and a very large north transept 62 feet by 44 feet, all these measurements being internal, but though the evidence for the choir and crossing was ample, that for

<sup>1</sup> Mr. William Owen (*op. cit.*, 184) gave the dimensions of the crossing, "measuring over the walls," as about 21 feet from north to south, and 18 feet from west to east.

the nave and transept was to a certain extent conjectural, and on Mr. William Owen's plan the distinction is made clear. From the crossing westward the finds were made under great difficulties in buildings then standing. The portions of wall and of the buttress on the east side of the transept were located under the floor of a bakery, the position of the portion of walling shown at the transept's north end was only described by a drain-layer who had cut through it in carrying out his work. The west end of the nave was located by probing through the floor of the candle factory, and this applies also to the line of the south wall of the nave, over which still stands a row of cottages, the lower part of the walling of which is built of stones taken from the Friary buildings.

The 1931 excavations, undertaken in the first instance to fix if possible the foundations of the nave, confirmed the position of the west wall, a considerable portion of whose masonry was exposed in July in the place shown on the former plan, but the foundations of the north wall of the nave at its west end were found in December to be some 13 feet farther to the north than had been conjectured, indicating a total width of over 40 feet,<sup>1</sup> and the quarter-pillar, which Mr. William Owen thought had formed the angle of the nave and transept, was found to be part of a complete pillar-base, the foundation of which was now exposed. This quarter-pillar base was not seen in position by Mr. Owen, and when he made inquiries about it nobody remembered in which direction it faced when found.<sup>2</sup> He admitted, therefore, that if it had faced northward or westward, "in all likelihood there was in this position another perfect pillar, which would point to the probable existence of a north aisle,"<sup>3</sup> and this is now found to have been so, for although no other pillar base was found farther west,

<sup>1</sup> Or nearly equal to the width of the transept.

<sup>2</sup> *Trans.*, xli, 186.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

it is not unreasonable to suppose that the arcade of which this and the two pillars to the east of it formed part, extended the full length of the nave in a series of six bays.<sup>1</sup>

The plan of the church as now revealed shows it to have been more in line with the general character of friars' churches in England than was before supposed, although the presence of a transept—the plan of which is still, however, not wholly determined—places it outside the common tradition.

In the churches of the English friars (writes Mr. A. W. Clapham, F.S.A.) a marked peculiarity is at once apparent in the general absence of a transept—a large-aisled nave, an aisleless choir with a belfry between them is the usual and typical form. In a few cases, such as the Austin Friars, Warrington, and the Franciscans at Richmond (Yorkshire), a transept was added on the side opposite the domestic buildings, but the presence of both arms of the cross is very rare. In the Irish friaries the one-armed cross is more the rule than the exception, but here again the complete cross is almost unknown.<sup>2</sup>

This was written when the nave of Warrington friary was thought to have been narrow<sup>3</sup> and aisleless, and therefore very unlike the naves of other English friars' churches. It is now found to have been aisled on the north side, bringing it more or less into line with the great aisled preaching-naves of such churches as those belonging to the convents of the Franciscan, Carmelite, Dominican and Austin friars in London.<sup>4</sup> The evidence of a north aisle to the nave necessarily carries with it a reduction in the length of the transept, making the latter a less dominating feature of the plan. The transept probably supplied the space provided in other English

<sup>1</sup> The position of the quarter-pillar base is midway between the east and west walls of the nave, allowing for three arches of equal span on each side of it.

<sup>2</sup> "The Friars as Builders," in *Some Famous Buildings and their Story* (1904), p. 243.

<sup>3</sup> Only 3 feet 6 inches wider than the choir.

<sup>4</sup> Greyfriars, Whitefriars, Blackfriars, Austinfriars.

friars' churches by the south aisle,<sup>1</sup> these churches being built in the main for preaching, and as much floor space as possible was therefore required for the congregation.<sup>2</sup>

In the plan of 1889 a circular staircase was shown on the north side of the crossing, but this has been omitted from the present plan. Evidence is said to have been found in 1887 of the existence, on the north side of the crossing, of "a narrow doorway,"<sup>3</sup> which Mr. William Owen judged could not have been for any other purpose than to have reached the belfry, or steeple. A circular stair, or vice, was therefore shown on the plan in the angle formed by the east wall of the transept, and covering about half the length of the north wall of the crossing. This was, of course, entirely conjectural, and further consideration of the probable plan of the building hereabouts, based on the analogy of other friars' churches, makes it unlikely that a stone stairway of this character would occupy such a position. Usually there was an external doorway at each end (north and south) of the crossing,<sup>4</sup> and although the evidence at Warrington of a doorway at the north end, equal in importance to that at the south, appears to be wanting, it does not necessarily follow, given the fragmentary character of the masonry, that no such opening originally existed. Concerning the usual disposition of the tower in friars' churches Mr. Clapham writes :

Situated between the choir and the nave, the steeple rested on two parallel walls which ran north and south across the

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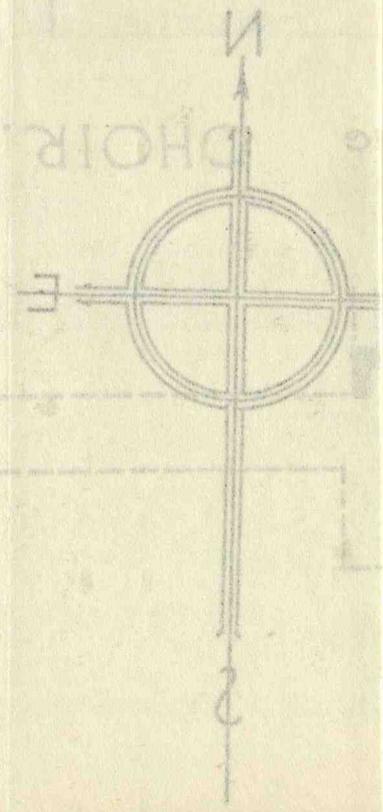
<sup>1</sup> But the possibility of there having been a south aisle at Warrington should not be ruled out until a proper examination can be made of the foundations on that side.

<sup>2</sup> Clapham, *op. cit.*, 243.

<sup>3</sup> *Trans.*, xli, 184.

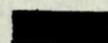
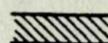
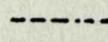
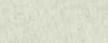
<sup>4</sup> "The space beneath the tower was commonly continued in the form of a passage right across the church, and served as the chief means of communication between the cloister and the outside world": Clapham, *op. cit.*, 246. At Warrington the cloister and conventual buildings were almost certainly on the south side of the church, as at the houses of Blackfriars and Whitefriars, London.

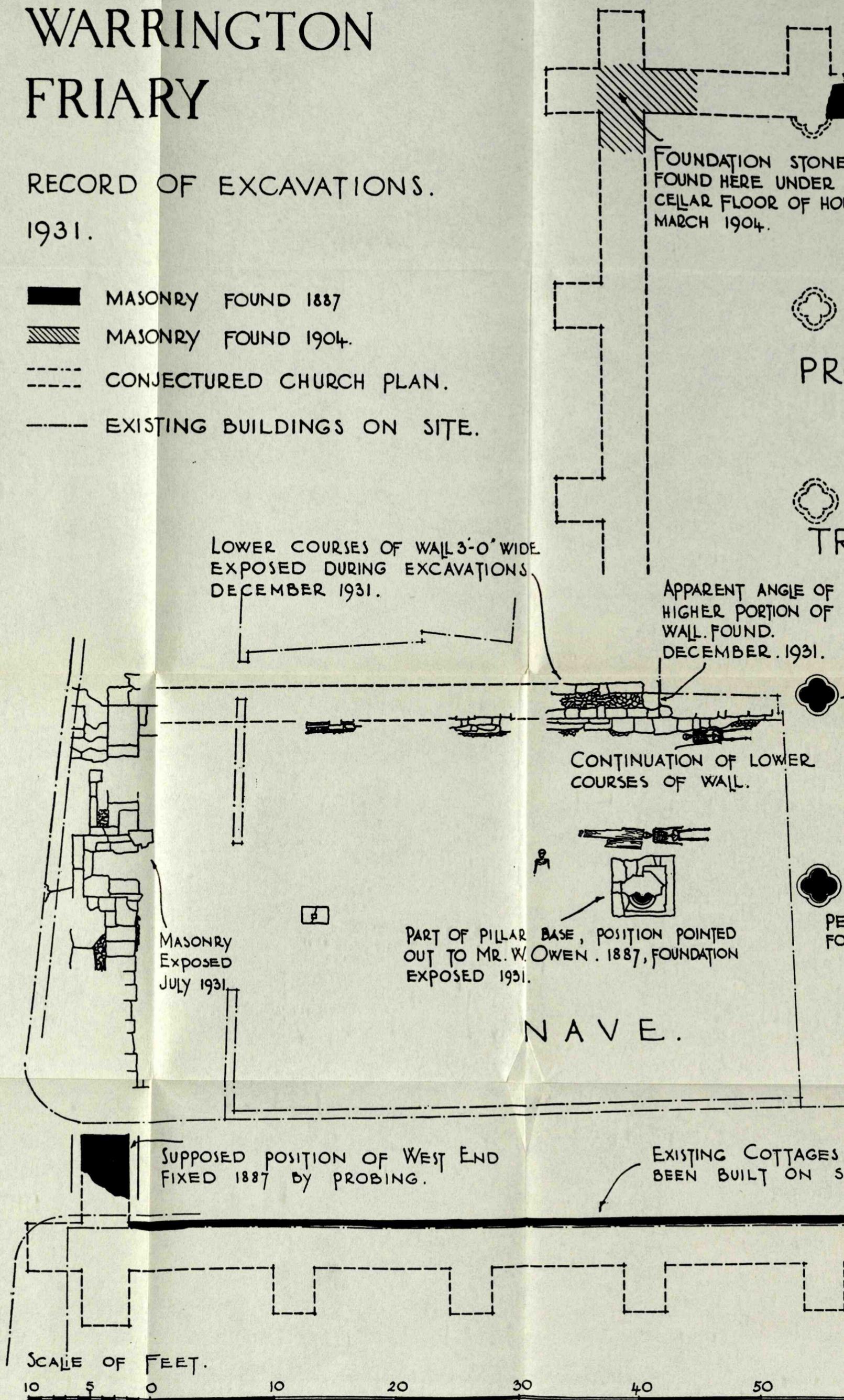
WALL CUT THROUGH FOR  
KIM BEFORE 1887.  
SECTION DESCRIBED TO  
S. W. OWEN.

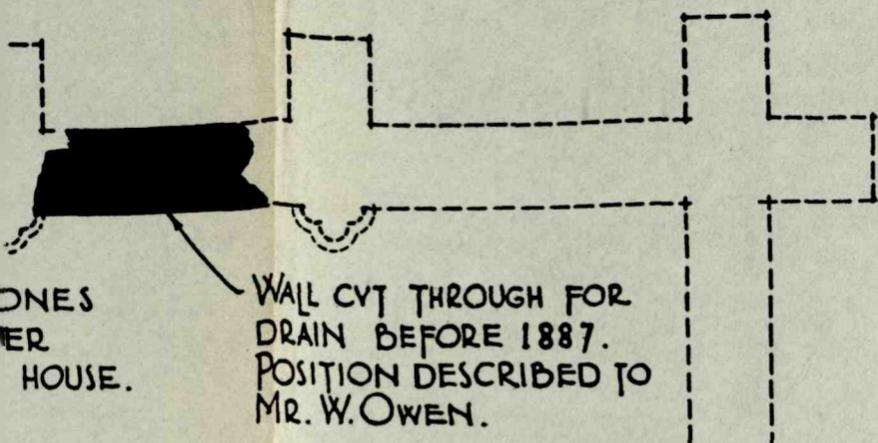


# WARRINGTON FRIARY

RECORD OF EXCAVATIONS.  
1931.

-  MASONRY FOUND 1887
-  MASONRY FOUND 1904.
-  CONJECTURED CHURCH PLAN.
-  EXISTING BUILDINGS ON SITE.





ONES  
ER  
HOUSE.

PROBABLE

FOUND 1887 UNDER  
BAKEHOUSE.

TRANSEPT

WALLING FOUND HERE  
INDICATING POSITION OF  
BUTTRESS AND BASE COURSES.  
JANUARY 1904.

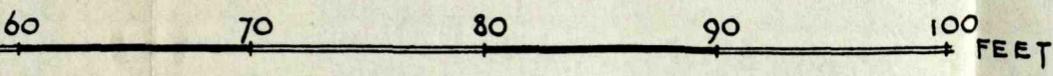
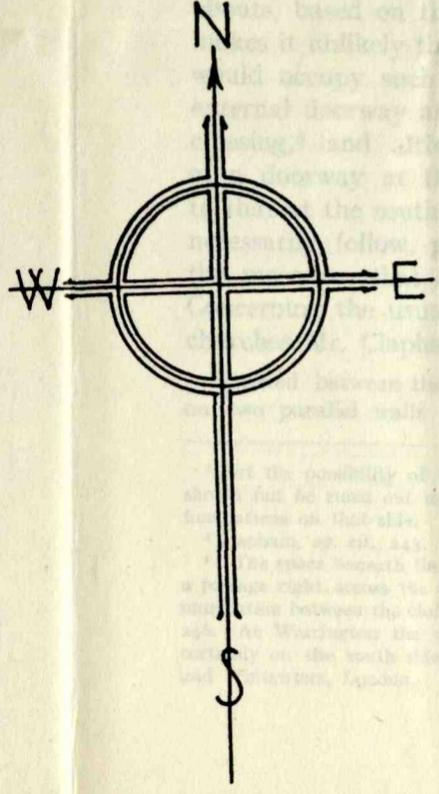
PERFECT PILLAR BASE  
FOUND 1887

PERFECT PILLAR BASES  
FOUND 1887.

CHOIR AND CROSSING  
FOUND 1887

CHOIR.

ASSES ASSUMED TO HAVE  
SOUTH WALL OF NAVE

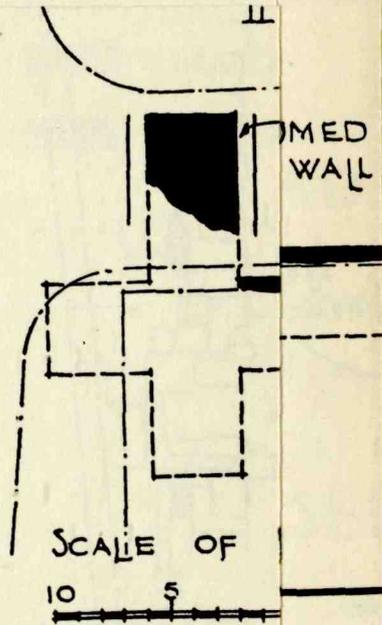


WILLIAM AND SEGAR OWEN.  
6 FEB. 1932.

# WARR FRIAR

RECORD  
1931.

W  
D  
P  
M



church, and were pierced by two main arches opposite one another opening respectively into the nave and choir; these walls were placed close together, generally some ten feet apart, thus forming an oblong space under the crossing. Between them and high above the arches before mentioned two lesser arches were thrown across the open space (sometimes dying away into the walls and sometimes resting upon corbels projecting from them) to carry the north and south walls of the tower above. . . . The oblong thus became a square, and by this arrangement it was possible to raise a small stone tower in the centre of the church, while at the same time retaining the two arched openings between the nave and choir. Upon this base a light stone lantern was raised, which in England was generally octagonal in form, but in Ireland invariably square.<sup>1</sup>

How far the tower at Warrington conformed to the general character cannot of course be known, but the plan of the crossing is entirely to type, and in all probability the superstructure was of the form above described.<sup>2</sup> Access to the lantern was probably by a ladder, or from the gutters of the nave and chancel.

Enough has been said to show the importance and extreme interest of the 1931 excavation as regards the church fabric in the light of what is known of other friars' churches in this country. It remains to say something about the nature of the excavation itself and of the finds made.

The excavations were begun on 21 July and continued till the end of the month. Work was then suspended until December, when a very unstable yard wall on the north side of the nave (the existence of which had prevented further digging on that side) was pulled down and the exploration completed by 28 December.

The first thing done was to fix by measurement the position of the quarter-pillar base found in 1887, and it was located about 1 foot 10 inches below the level

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, 244.

<sup>2</sup> "The crossing was doubtless surmounted by an octagonal tower as in other friars' houses"; Sir Charles Peers in *V.C.H. Lancs.*, iii, 314.

of the kerb of the passage on the south side of the nave. This quarter-base, which when whole was 2 feet in diameter, was on a square sandstone slab 6 inches thick, resting on two courses of masonry respectively  $10\frac{1}{2}$  inches and 12 inches deep. This indicated that the base belonged to a free-standing pillar and not to an attached column as before supposed, but no traces of pillars were found westward of it. Digging was carried on some 14 feet northward, but being brought to a stop by the yard wall already mentioned, was continued towards the west wall of the nave. Here some re-laid stones, which had been used as a basement flooring for the candle factory, were found 2 feet 3 inches below the level of the kerb of the passage, and two large stones, each 1 foot  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches, by 2 feet 6 inches by 10 inches deep, were exposed; the upper one had a  $3\frac{3}{4}$ -inch by  $3\frac{1}{4}$ -inch sinking  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches deep, and lay 7 inches lower than the pillar base, and appeared to have been a base stone to a wooden post, possibly of a wooden screen.

When the excavation northward was resumed in December, following the demolition of the yard wall, what had at first appeared to be part of another base was found to be the projecting rough lower part of an old wall, 3 feet thick, the top remaining course of which was some 3 feet above the pillar-base level, and there were four courses of faced masonry with cobble and sandstone filling between. These courses averaged just under 12 inches in depth and were 10 inches below the level of the pillar-base. Under them were two rough courses with an average projection from the wall face of 12 inches, and below these again a layer of cobbles averaging in size 4 inches by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches, the bottom of which was some 3 feet below the pillar-base. Thus the position of the north wall of the nave, in its western half, was determined. The apparent angle of the nave and transept was found reaching to just below the floor of the nave.



QUARTER BASE

*Facing page 208]*



APPARENT ANGLE OF NAVE AND TRANSEPT

[Facing page 209

In the course of the operations in July, part of a coffin, a skull, and some bones were found close to the quarter-pillar base at the time the latter was uncovered.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently portions of two more skeletons were found in the positions indicated on the plan.

<sup>1</sup> The coroner for South-West Lancashire was notified of the discovery of the human remains, but decided that an inquest was unnecessary. The remains were re-interred in the Municipal Cemetery, in a coffin bearing the inscription, "Remains of an unknown friar, found in the Friary Church, Warrington, July 1931. R.I.P."

