THE PRIORY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN AND SAINT JAMES, BIRKENHEAD.

By Charles Aldridge, F.R.I.B.A.

Read 20th March. 1890.

AS an architect resident in Birkenhead for nearly twenty years, I have naturally taken considerable interest in the one relic of antiquity in that most modern of English towns. What greater contrast can be found than between the picturesque ruins of the ancient Priory, dating back to the middle of the 12th century, and the large town surrounding it, in which nearly every building has been erected since 1820? A town of over 80,000 inhabitants has been built in less time than the monks of the Priory took to complete their home and church, to accommodate only sixteen people. To the historian, the archæologist, the architect, and the lover of the picturesque and antique it is no wonder that, amidst all the modernism and ugliness of such mushroom growth, this one relic of antiquity, this connecting link with the past, should be so doubly interesting and valuable. Prior to the commencement of this century, the ancient history of Birkenhead is centered solely round the Priory and

its property; for even so recently as the year 1818 there were only four or five houses, a few cottages, and the ferry-house: the inhabitants numbering about fifty!

I well remember, on first coming to Birkenhead, enquiring of a friend whether there were any antiquities, and being told, after some hesitation—"oh, I believe there are some ruins, but they are "not up to much." However, I persuaded my inappreciative informant to conduct me to them, and from that day I have always made a point of taking any of my friends from a distance, who may chance to visit the "city of the future," to see what is left of the old Birkenhead Priory.

The early history of Birkenhead commences with the foundation of the Priory, there being no record or mention whatever of the locality prior to the Norman conquest. We can, however, easily picture to ourselves the neighbourhood as chiefly forest, part of which forest—that part between New Brighton and Hoylake—we know was at some time submerged by the sea. At the Conquest this portion of the peninsula of Wirral formed part of the extensive barony of Dunham, and became the property of the Masseys; the first baron having, it is said, come over with William I, and been a staunch adherent of Hugh Lupus, Earl of Chester, son-in-law of the Conqueror. After using it for two generations as a "happy hunting ground," it is generally supposed that the third baron, Hamon de Massey, in the year 1150, founded this Priory for sixteen monks. The abbey at Chester, now the cathedral, which was originally founded by S. Werburga, daughter of Wulphere, King of Mercia, about the end of the 7th century, was, after the Conquest, handed over to the regular order of Benedictines. The only other religious house in the hundred of

Wirral was the Cistercian Abbey of Stanlaw, situated higher up the river Mersey, towards Runcorn. It is not easy to say why this site should have been selected for Birkenhead Priory, except for its proximity to Liverpool, to which, in the year 1207, John granted a charter; though it is possible that even from the first the monks had the ferry in view.

It is much to be regretted that there is no absolutely authentic record of the conditions under which this Priory was founded; we are unable, therefore, to say with certainty whether it was an institution separate and complete in itself, or whether, as some have imagined, it was under the sway of the Abbot of Chester. The only evidence in support of the latter theory is its close proximity to Chester and the fact of its belonging to the same religious Order, and having in consequence—although on a much smaller scale—a somewhat similar plan. In the absence of more definite proof, I myself do not, for several reasons, uphold this view. In the first place, if the Abbey of Chester had really possessed an offshoot or dependency of such importance as the Priory of Birkenhead undoubtedly was, it seems incredible that there should be no record of the fact. Again, the Earl of Chester had no part in the foundation of the Priory, as would probably have been the case had it been only a branch of the parent stem of Chester, endowed by him. It was founded and endowed by one of the barons of his Palatinate, without any extraneous help or interference whatever.

It is also a matter of history that the monks of Birkenhead were granted the privilege of electing their own priors, first by the barons of Dunham, and subsequently by permission of the Pope; and it is scarcely probable that the Birkenhead

monks would have exercised this authority had the Priory been in any way under the jurisdiction of Chester. The priors had their seat in Parliament, and were of considerable importance; enjoying dignities and privileges inconsistent with their being subject to the control of a neighbouring abbey. As barons of the Palatinate they had their chamberlains and marshalls, while many knightly houses round supplied eager aspirants for the coveted office of seneschal.

Hamon, third Baron of Dunham, endowed the Priory with lands in Claughton, Moreton, Tranmere, Higher Bebington, Saughall Massie, Backford, and Bidston, and with the advowsons of the two last-named places. Later on, Hamon, the fifth Baron, added the advowson and vicarage of Bowdon, and the manor of Davenham. The Charters for these gifts are printed in Dugdale's *Monasticon*, the following being an English translation :—

THE CHARTER OF HAMON MASSIE OF THE CHURCH OF BOWDON.

To all the faithful in Christ by whom this present writing shall be seen or heard, Hamon Massie, son and heir of Hamon [the fourth] greeting in the Lord: Know all of you that for the salvation of my soul, and of the souls of my ancestors, I have given, granted, and by this my present Charter confirmed, and for myself and my heirs, have in every way quit-claimed to God and Blessed Mary and Saint James, and to the Prior and Community of Birkened, there serving God, in pure and perpetual alms, half an acre of land in Dunham, which is situate between the selion of the Church of Bowdon, and the selion of John bailiff of Dunham, and one acre of land in . . . Lach-acre, at the head of the croft of John the son of the bondsman Thomas, the cryer, together with the advowson and donation of the Church of Bowdon, with all things appurtenant: To have and to hold to the aforesaid Prior and Convent and their successors for-ever. Witnesses:—Sir Gunseline of Badlismere, Justiciary of Chester, Sir Symon, then Abbot of St. Werburgh of Chester,

Sir Urian of St. Peter, Peter de Arderne, Patrick of Heselwall, Roger Domvyle, Godfrey the clerk, Richard de Massie, then Sheriff of Chester, William Lancelin, Robert de Pulle [Poole], Bertram de Mell [Meols], and many others.

ANOTHER CHARTER OF THE SAME HAMON.

To all the sons of the Church of Saint Mary, especially to their heirs and friends, and all their men, laymen and clerics, present and future, Hamon de Massie greeting: Be it known to you that to the Monks of Birkenhead I have granted, and by this my present Charter have confirmed, this privilege concerning the Election of Prior, that, when a Prior of that place shall die, another out of the same congregation may succeed him in his office, and that Prior may be appointed whom all the chapter of Saint Benedict shall canonically choose: This distinction and power of choosing a Prior to the above-named Monks, for their peace and quietness, I have given, not only for myself but also on behalf of my heirs, according to the license which Pope Alexander hath granted to them, and confirmed by his authority. [Names of witnesses not given.]

It is probable that very soon after the foundation of the Priory, if not from the very first, a Ferry was established between some point on the bank of the river or of Tranmere Pool and the opposite shore close to the town of Liverpool, as we find that in the year 1318, 11th year of Edward II, the king granted a licence to the Prior and convent of Birkenhead, giving them permission to erect sufficient houses on their own proper ground at Birkenhead, for the lodging and entertainment of travellers crossing the ferry.

For some years the monks enjoyed a monopoly of the ferryage from Birkenhead to Liverpool, which, apart from the growing importance of the trade with Liverpool, was much increased by the various invasions and expeditions to Ireland—which commenced soon after the foundation of the Priory—and the consequent traffic through Liverpool across the Mersey to the Dee, from whence ships sailed to Ireland.

The route also from the Mersey to Chester was of great importance, on account of wars in Wales.

The fares levied by the monks were 2d. for a man and horse, laden or unladen, and one farthing for a man on foot, except on the Liverpool market-day (Saturday), when they were raised to one halfpenny for a man, and one penny for a man and what he could carry. These charges, however, were objected to as being exorbitant, and in the year 1354 one William de Braos appeared for the Crown, and objected that these charges were excessive, and the matter was reserved for a proper jury. At the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536, the ferry brought in about £4 6s. 8d. per annum, equal to nearly £90 in the present day, whilst the 78 acres of arable land only brought in £6 4s. per annum, or according to our money about 30s. per acre.

The ferry from Liverpool formed a part of the rights and revenues of the Duchy of Lancaster for centuries, and after the dissolution we find several references to the "fferrie boats" in the proceedings of the Liverpool Corporation. Before leaving the subject of the ferry, I should not omit to mention the ferry houses on either side of the river. And first as to that in Birkenhead:—there is little doubt that the monks had a ferry house on the north side of Tranmere Pool, where they kept their property and received the tolls. After the dissolution this ferry was continued for many years, indeed until quite recently, under the name of the "Monks' "Ferry."

As Birkenhead increased in importance, an hotel was built, somewhere about the site of the old ferry house, called "The Birkenhead Hotel," which may still be remembered by a few. However, when the Birkenhead ironworks were formed, the hotel was pulled down, and nothing now remains to mark the

spot of the original ferry but an old toll house, the site of which is in the hands of the Royal Mersey Yacht Club.

Turning to the Liverpool side: there is little doubt that at high water the monks landed their passengers on the north or Liverpool side of the pool, where most probably they had a ferry house; for until comparatively recent times, long after the pool was filled up, an old house stood near the south-west angle of St. Peter's Church, now the Pro-Cathedral, which went by the name of the "Monks' Ferry "House." There is a view of this in Herdman's "Views of Old Liverpool." A lane, called Pool Lane, led from the ferry house direct into the heart of the town.

In connection with the "Monks' Ferry," I must not forget to mention the Guest House, which has already been alluded to, and for the erection of which the prior and monks obtained a special charter. I have shewn the probable position of this house on the map as being about where the present schools stand: it was outside the priory walls. At the dissolution it is recorded that the whole of the property belonging to the prior and monks and the ferry was granted by Henry VIII to Ralph Worsley, keeper of the lions in the Tower of London, which Ralph was third son of William Worsley of Worsley Maines, county Lancaster, by his wife Anne, daughter of Adam Birkenhead, of Manley, county Chester, and having married Jane, daughter of Sir John Pike, of the City of London, knt., died 27th December, 1573, and was buried in the church of St. Mary, at Chester. Col. Sir Thomas Powell, who subsequently inherited this property, built in place of the old Guest House (which had up to this time (1628) been used by the owners), a new house, which was, however, dismantled by the Parlia-

mentary forces in 1644. It stood, however, until the year 1706, when it was re-built by the owner, Sir Thomas Powell. It became afterwards successively a farm house, boarding school, temporary chapel, lodging house, and private residence, but was eventually demolished, and the site is now covered by a school and small houses, many of which are doubtless built of the materials.*

The monks of the Priory had also considerable dealings with Liverpool in grain, &c., and had granaries or granges, as we know, at Claughton and other places, each with a bailiff who superintended operations. In Liverpool they rented a warehouse or granary in Water Street. In the *Moore Rental*, Chetham Society series, p. 36, we read, as to Jonathan Hunter's house :—"This very "house, being formerly the granary belonging to "the priory of Birkitt in Wirral, where such corne "as they left unsold on the market day was carried "up those back stares of stone into an upper room, "and there lay till next market day." "This house "called the Granary to Birket Priory was sold "after the dissolution of abbeys by that very name, "and my father, John Moore, bought it."

The Prior had a yearly sum from the Crown in the reign of Edward I. for keeping the king's waggons in his sheds. *(Pipe Rolls.)*

Some years ago, when navvies were excavating for some work in connection with the Birkenhead docks, on the old line of roadway between Birkenhead and Bidston, a most interesting archæological discovery was accidentally made by one of the engineers. Several feet below the surface of the road a portion of an old wooden bridge, about 100

* This house is shewn on some old sketches by John Calveley, dated 1780, which have been reproduced to accompany this paper.

feet long, was discovered, in a wonderful state of preservation. The design was of the simplest description, consisting merely of several large oak beams, each about 18 inches by 9 inches and 33 feet long, parallel to each other, resting at either end on the rock, and on intermediate stone piers; across these beams there were doubtless smaller timbers on joints upon which planks were nailed to form the floor. This bridge evidently crossed one of the small streams or tributaries of the river Birket, now converted into the Great Float, and was in all probability the work of the monks of the Birkenhead Priory. In course of time the stream became filled up, and the bridge was buried beneath the roadway. A bridge is marked on a map by Yates and Perry, 1768: from time immemorial this part was named after the bridge "Bridge End Field."

Ormerod, in his account of the dissolution of the Priory, states that the monks made an effort to conceal their treasures at this period, and that there was a tradition that a subterranean passage existed leading from the Priory (whither he does not state), and that this was taken advantage of by the brethren to carry away their plate during a visit of the Commissioners. The historian goes on to say, that a large well-balanced stone occupied the centre of the passage as a door, but during the flight of the monks it gave way, killing one, and cutting off the retreat of another, whose bones are supposed to lie hidden with the plate in the tunnel. No indication, however, of the passage and the hidden treasure has yet been discovered. Another historian improves upon this story, by stating that the tunnel was under the river Mersey and communicated with Liverpool. What a pity that this tunnel was not discovered by the engineers of the Mersey railway!

The seal of the Priory was in the form of a vesica, and represented the figure of S. James standing on a bracket; over his head is a Gothic canopy, and below the bracket a kneeling figure. The motto is—"S. COMMUNE PRIORATUS S'CE "IACOBI DE BIRKENEVED COM. CESTRI." The background is diapered. This seal is carved over the beautiful doorway leading from the cloisters to the prior's apartments, and can be clearly made out.

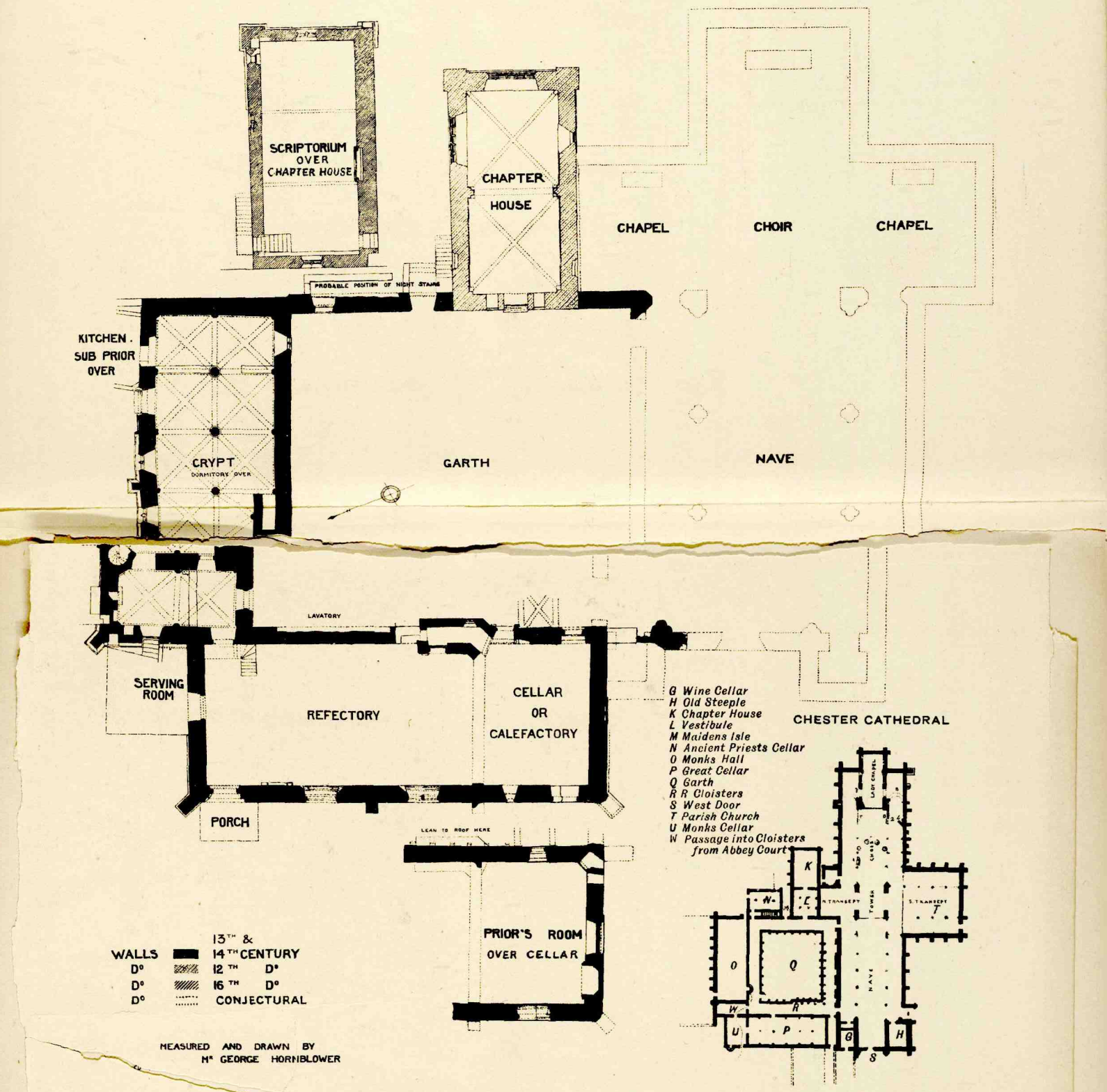
The following is a list of all the Priors whose names history has handed down to us:—

LIST OF KNOWN PRIORS.

	Oliver ? died 1328. (Witness to a deed, *temp.* John. See Dugdale.)
1328	Robert Millenton.
1338	Robert de Betchinton (? Bebington).
1339	A monk, elected in room of last prior.
C. 1350	Hugh de Aston, second son of Sir Richard Aston, temp. Ed. II. and III.
1379	Roger.
1389	Roger de Tyddesbury.
1428	Robert.
1455	Thomas Bovere.
1459	Hugh Boner.
1460	Thomas Rainford (or Reynforth), died 1473. See stone on N. side of entrance, Chapter House.
1495	Nicholas, a monk.
1530	John Sharp, expelled at the dissolution.

This list covers a period of some 200 years, commencing about the year 1300, and extending to the time of the dissolution of the Priory, in or about the year 1539. History has not, as far as I know, told us of anything remarkable in the lives of these Priors. They were probably buried under the chapter house floor, and the stone which used to cover the grave of Thomas Rainford, who died in 1473, has been preserved and placed vertically in the west wall of the chapter house, on the left side of the doorway, the inscription on which is as

PLATE I.



MEASURED AND DRAWN BY
Mr GEORGE HORNBLOWER

BIRKENHEAD PRIORY.—PLAN.

SCALE OF FEET

follows :—"HERE LIES THOMAS RAYMEFORD, FOR-"MERLY THE GOOD VICAR OF THIS HOUSE, WHO "DIED THE 20TH MAY, IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD "1473, ON WHOSE SOUL MAY GOD HAVE MERCY."

Sir Thomas Poole, who had a fair hall, bearing his name, near Eastham, was the last Seneschal of the convent.

At the dissolution, Birkenhead was one of the first that fell. The dislodged monks were provided with 40s. and a new gown a-piece, and earned a livelihood, some by bookbinding, others by serving at Wallasey or Bidston Churches, and a few, perhaps, by menial employment, as best they could.*

The Priory Barn stood south-west of the Priory house or hostel. I understand it was a stone building of great length, and as it stood until a comparatively recent date, it is no doubt remembered by some of the old inhabitants. The range of cottages behind the school, called White Street, is no doubt partly built with stones from the Priory house and the Priory itself. The water mill belonging to the Priory probably stood near the top of Tranmere Pool.

I come now to the second and to an architect the most interesting portion of the subject, viz., the architectural history of the Birkenhead Priory. The foundation of the conventual buildings was, as I have stated, about the year 1150, or the latter part of the reign of King Stephen. It may be interesting to note a few of the principal contemporary buildings of the same period, viz., Iffley Church, near Oxford ; transepts, Peterborough Cathedral ;

* The following extract from the Liverpool Corporation Records (I. 37-44), *circa* 1544, may be of interest :—"Itm, it is agreyd by the Mayre and baliffs "wyth a full consent of the holle Assemblie of the burgesies of Liu'pll that "theare shalbe hired a Clercke that can syng his playne Song and prycke "Songe and playe on the Organs. V marcks."—EDITOR.

and Bayeux Cathedral, Normandy. The *only* portion, however, of the Priory belonging to this date is the building now called the Chapter House, or rather, the lower portion, for the room over it was built many years afterwards. The Priory was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and St. James.

The accompanying Plan shews the whole of the conventual buildings now standing, with distinguishing shading to shew the probable dates of their erection. I have also endeavoured to trace out the complete plan of the Priory Church as it stood before the dissolution, although of course this is to some extent conjectural.

The first point worthy of notice is the position of the Cloisters, which, as at Chester, are on the north, instead of, as is generally the case, on the south side of the church. The other similar instances of this arrangement in England, besides Chester, are St. Martin's, Dover; Canterbury Cathedral, Gloucester, Sherborne, and St. Augustine's, Canterbury. Whether the monks simply followed the arrangement at Chester, or whether, as some think, the Cloisters and conventual buildings were placed on the north side of the church, so that they might be sheltered from the winds blowing across the peninsula of Wirral, I must leave others to determine; although I think the position of the first building erected by them, viz., the Chapter House, had some influence on the position and arrangement of the subsequent buildings.

The Chapter House was, with the exception of two large perpendicular windows, which were inserted at a much later date, entirely Norman or Romanesque. It was severely simple, consisting on plan of two squares vaulted over with quadripartite vaulting, the dimensions being 38ft. 6in. by 18ft. There is only one of the original windows left, and the

PLATE 2.

BIRKENHEAD PRIORY.

VARIOUS DETAILS.

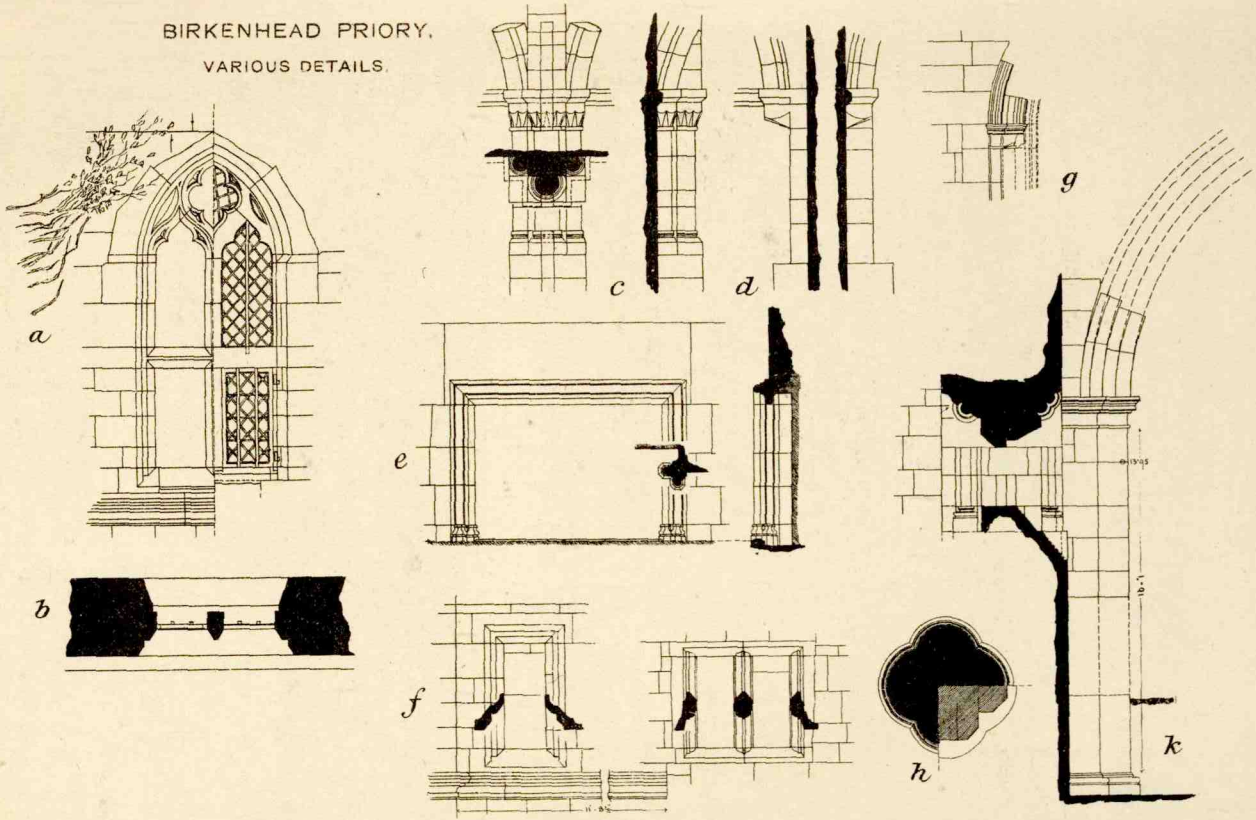


PLATE 3.

BIRKENHEAD PRIORY.

VARIOUS DETAILS.

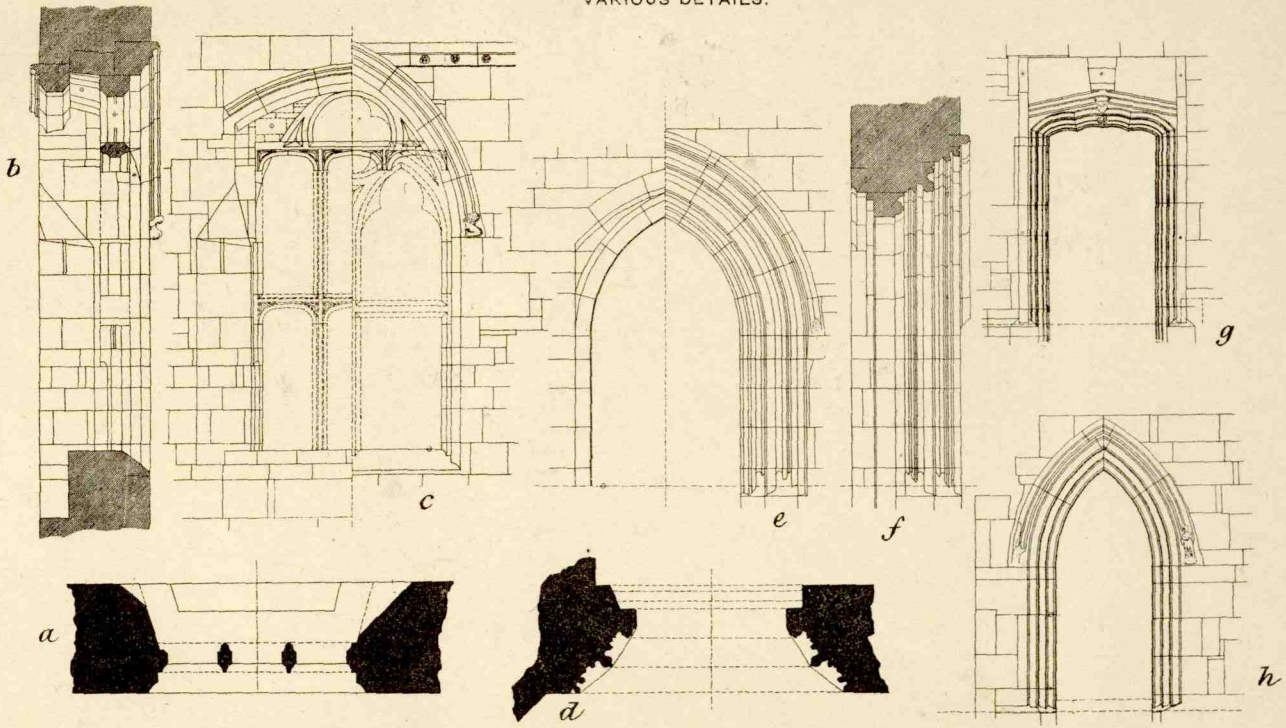


PLATE 4.

BIRKENHEAD PRIORY.

DETAILS.

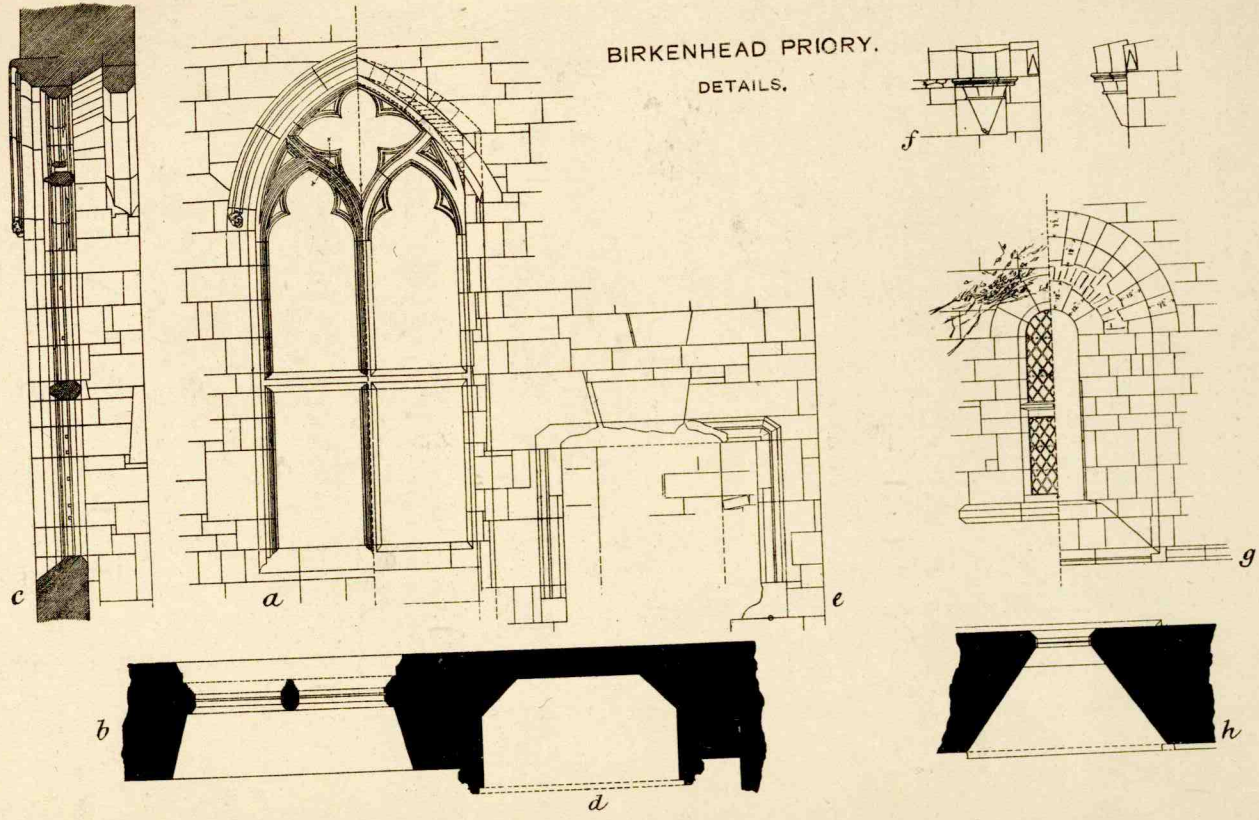
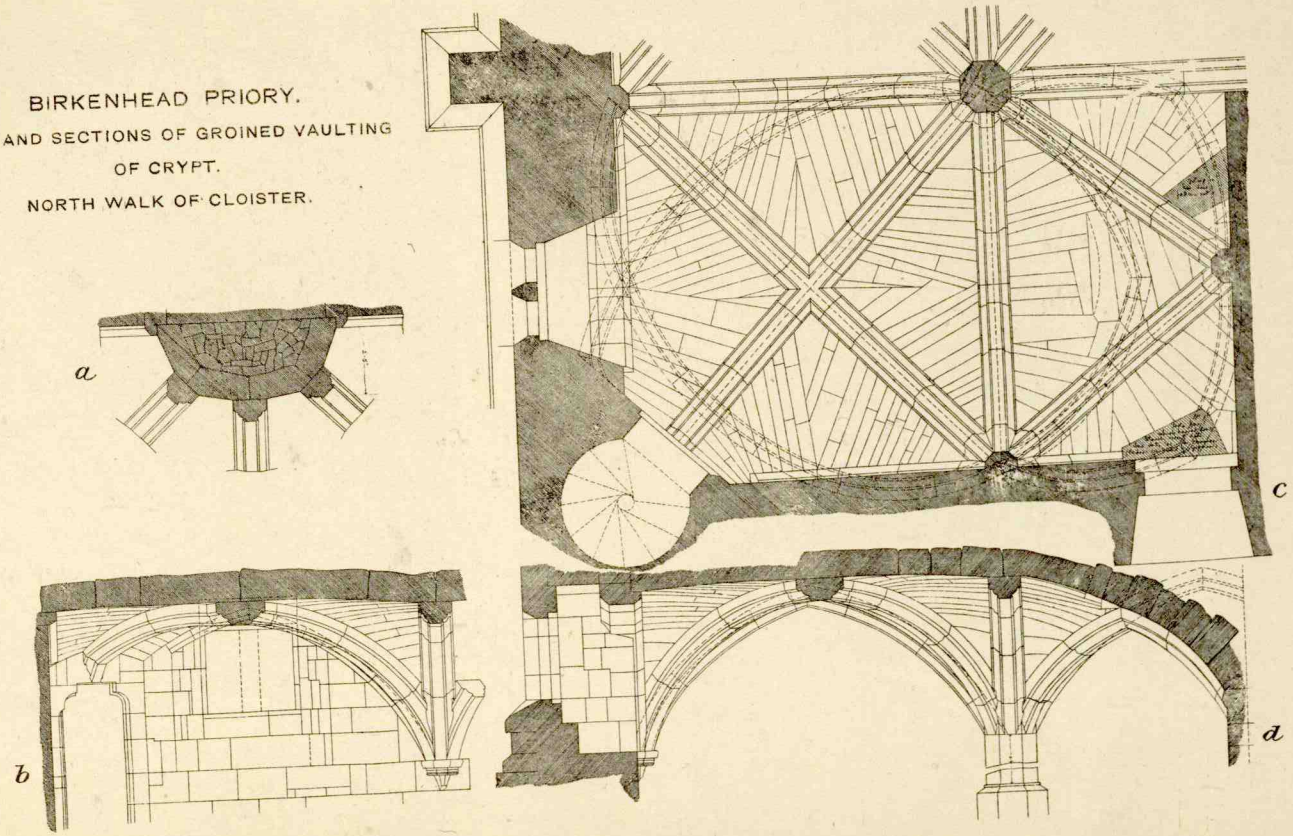


PLATE 5.

BIRKENHEAD PRIORY.

PLAN AND SECTIONS OF GROINED VAULTING OF CRYPT.

NORTH WALK OF CLOISTER.



principal door leading into the Cloisters, which was no doubt originally more ornamental, is much modernised. At the foundation of the Priory, this building was no doubt the Chapel of the Convent. The room was evidently at one time divided into two by a wooden partition, grooves for which have been cut in the centre of the vaulting shafts. This partition may have been put up when the Chapter House was used for Divine Service, to separate the monks from the laity, or it may have been inserted when the west end of the room became a passage-way from the Cloister or Dormitory into the Church. I think, however, there is more probability in the former. It is interesting to note that this Chapter House occupies exactly a similar position on plan to that at Chester, viz., immediately adjoining the north transept of the Priory or Abbey Church. There is also a similar division at Chester across the Chapter House.

For convenience of reference and comparison, I have introduced a small ground plan of the abbey or cathedral at Chester, with the conventual buildings, shewing the many points of resemblance in the arrangement and position of these structures with similar structures at Birkenhead.

It is interesting to note that after the dissolution, and for many years, the Chapter House reverted to its original use, and until the building of St. Mary's Church was the only place of worship in Birkenhead. On the building of the Priory Church, some fifty or sixty years afterwards, this room, in my opinion, became the Chapter House, and doorways were made on the north and south sides leading into the Church, that on the north side being connected with the night stairs leading to the Dormitory. These doorways are now built up. The room over the Chapter House, which was probably used as the Scriptorium, was added about the year 1420, at the

same time probably that the large windows were inserted in the room below. This room, which is a little larger than the Chapter House, owing to the walls being thinner, is lighted by windows at each end and two smaller windows on the north side. There were of course no windows on the south or church side, but there is a small opening in the wall connected with the Church, which I think may have been used for watching the Altar and lamps.

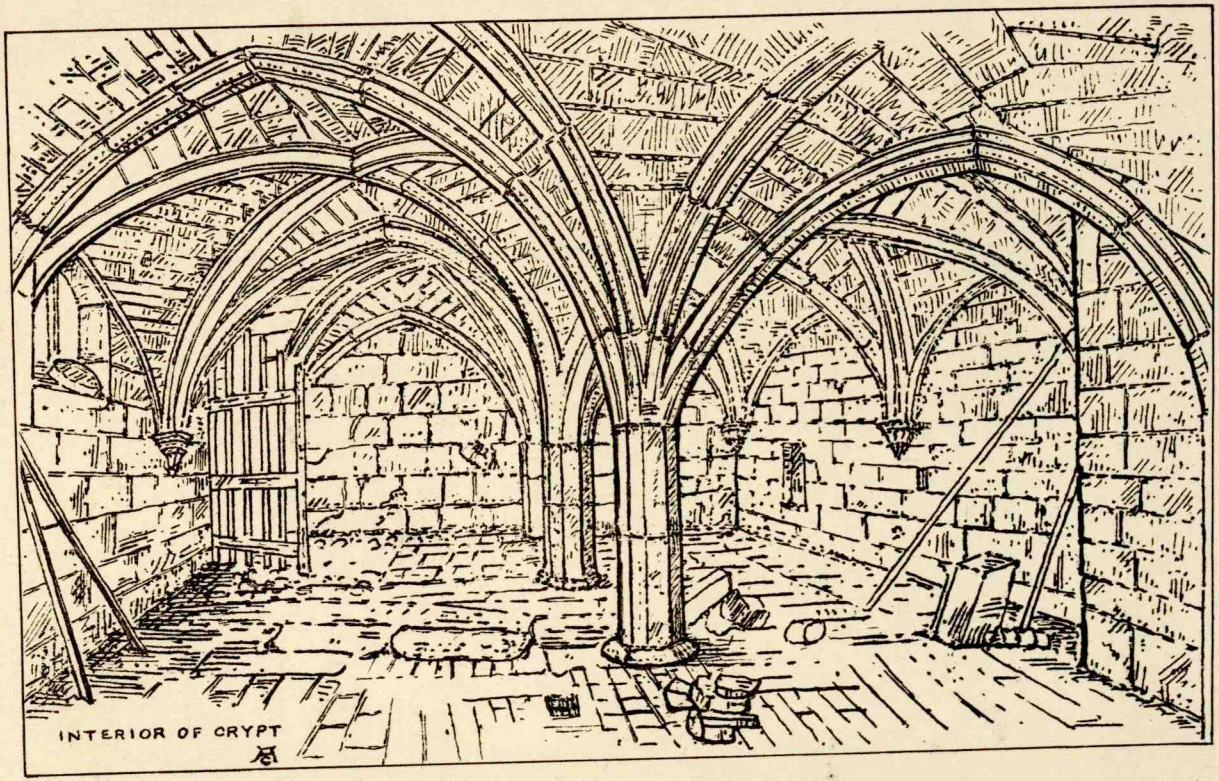
There is a large fire-place on the south side, similar and of the same date as that in the Prior's apartments. The original roof has been replaced by a very common modern one, but the corbels for the old tie beams are still *in situ*.

The Church dates back to the early part of the thirteenth century; all that remains at the present time is a portion of the west wall of the north transept, with part of the jamb of the north doorway leading into the Cloisters. At the west end the west respond of the north arcade is to be seen, also the remains of one of the piers. I have shewn in the general plan the probable dimensions of the Church, the length of which is defined on the ground, and all the old sketches agree in shewing a nave with three arches. Bearing in mind the number of monks and the smallness of the surrounding population, it is unlikely that the Priory Church could have been of larger dimensions. Of course there would be side altars, in addition to the High Altar dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and St. James; these were most probably in the north and south transepts as shewn. It is interesting to note that the Prior had a separate entrance into the Church, leading from his apartments; this can be clearly traced.

The earliest drawing of the ruins is in King's *Vale Royal*, dated 1656. This shews the whole of the north side of the nave arcade of the Church, a large

PLATE 6.

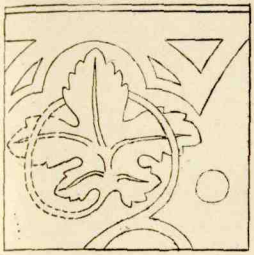
BIRKENHEAD PRIORY.



INTERIOR OF CRYPT

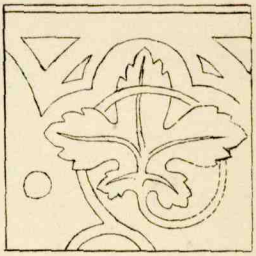
BIRKENHEAD PRIORY.

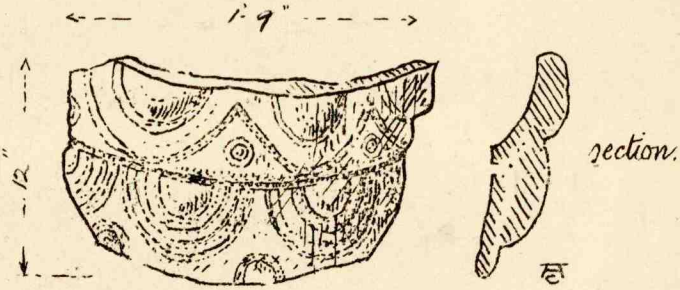
FLOOR TILE, PROBABLY IN PRIORY CHURCH.



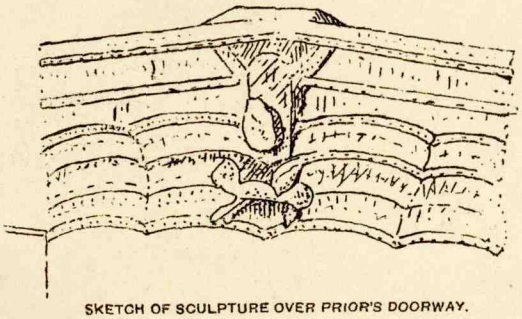
PRIORY SEAL.
14 RIC. II. (HARL. MS. 2074)

FLOOR TILE, PROBABLY IN PRIORY CHURCH.





FRAGMENT OF OLD FONT.



SKETCH OF SCULPTURE OVER PRIOR'S DOORWAY.

portion of the west front, with doorway and space occupied by large west window, also slope of roof over nave, and indication of clerestory wall, the north and south gable walls of refectory, and entire roof over dormitory; the whole of the buildings being surrounded by a wall. The next drawing, dated 1727, taken from Buck's *Views*, also shews the complete triple arcade on the north side of the Church, and portion of the west wall, with doorway for Prior's entrance. The next drawing, from Grose's *Antiquities*, dated 1770, is an interior view of the Refectory looking south, shewing the walls, &c., much in the same condition as at the present time. The last two views are reproduced from some interesting drawings of the ruins by John Calvely, dated 1780, kindly lent by Macgregor Laird, Esq., shewing the whole of the buildings at that date, with the large house on the south, built on the probable site of the original guest house. One of these views shews the gable walls of the Dormitory.

As mention is made of a bell in the Inventory of the Priory, it is possible that there may have been a centre tower over the choir; but this, in my opinion, is very doubtful. Probably the bell was in a smaller belfry.

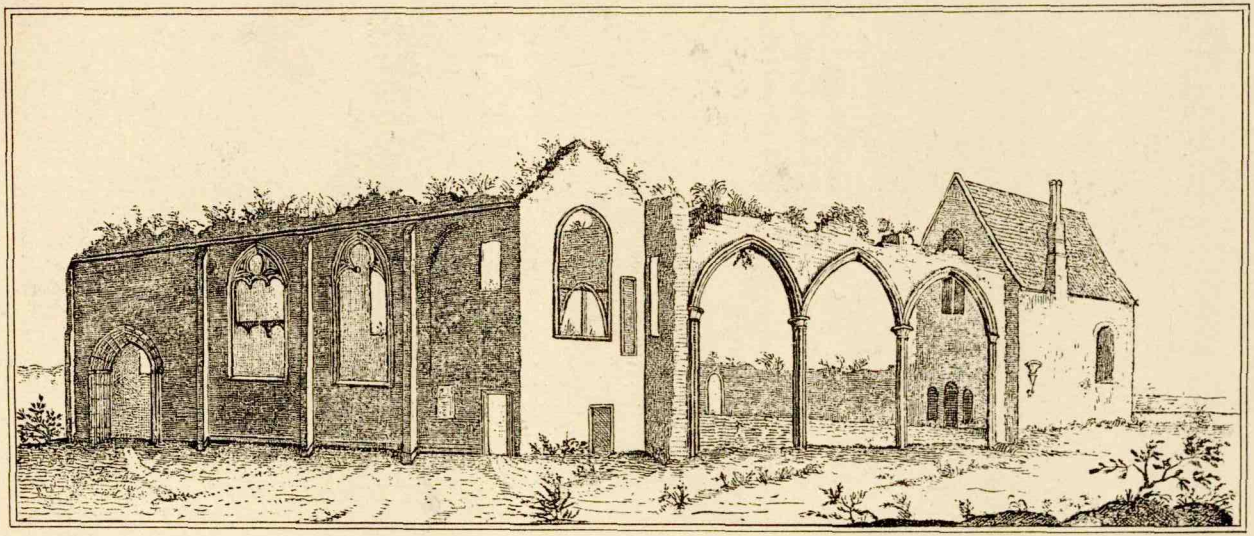
The principal dimensions of the Church would appear to have been as follows:—Nave, of three bays, about 63ft. long and 27ft. wide; north and south Transepts, the former communicating with the Chapter House; adding the Choir to the nave, the total length would be, from east to west, about 120ft.; total width, from north to south, about 52ft. The style of architecture belongs to the best period, about the middle of the thirteenth century, a century later than the building of the Chapter House.

The Refectory, contrary to the usual custom, has its axis north and south, partly, no doubt, to shelter the cloister from the strong westerly gales, and also in order that the Prior's apartments might adjoin the Church. There are no windows on the east side, the light being obtained entirely from two large windows in the west wall. The total length (exclusive of the Prior's apartments) is 53ft.; total width, 28ft., which dimensions would be ample for the accommodation not only of the monks, but also for the lay brethren and guests. The Refectory adjoins the cellar and kitchen offices, with which it has direct communication. On the west side there is a beautiful external doorway, which probably had a wooden porch attached.

The Prior's apartments at the south end of the Refectory consisted of two rooms, each about 28ft. by 20ft., one above the other, the upper room being about 6ft. above the floor of the Refectory, which was reached by steps in the north-east corner. The Prior had also a separate entrance to the Church, as before mentioned, in the south-east corner of his apartment. There is a well-preserved fire-place in the south side, which is similar to that in the Scriptorium, and must have been inserted at the same time. The room is well lighted by two windows on the east and west sides, also by a large window on the south side, which is still standing, and is shewn on the accompanying sketch. The room underneath may have been used either as a separate kitchen or cellar for the Prior, or Calefactory for the monks, as it is probable there is a fire-place, although now hidden. The floor is about 2ft. below that of the Refectory, and about 8ft. below the Prior's room. There is a small window on the west side, a double window on the south (now blocked up), and two doorways opposite to each

PLATE 8.

THE SOUTH-WEST VIEW OF BIRKENHEAD PRIORY, IN THE COUNTY OF CHESTER.



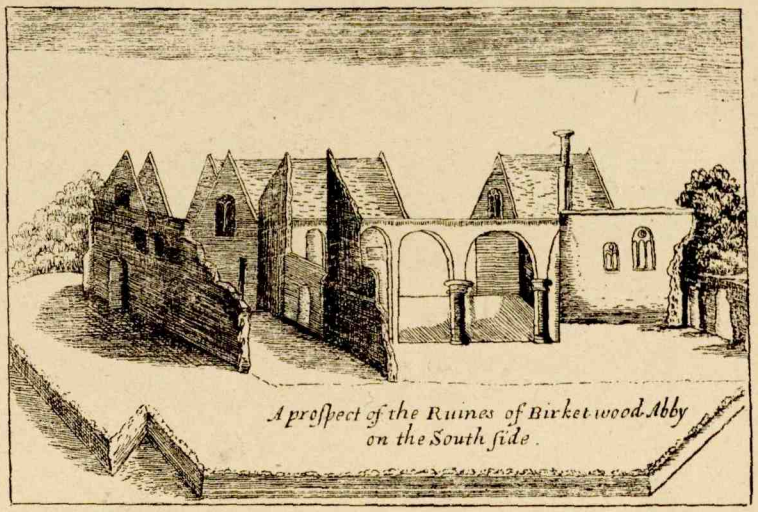
This Monastery of Black Canons was founded by Hamo de Massey to St. Mary and St. James. He endow'd it with lands and granted (as Pope Alexander had done) to the Prior, Monks, and their successors, power and liberty, upon a vacancy, to chuse their own Prior among themselves. The present owner is John Cleaveland, Esq.

S: B: delin N: B: Sculp. 1727.

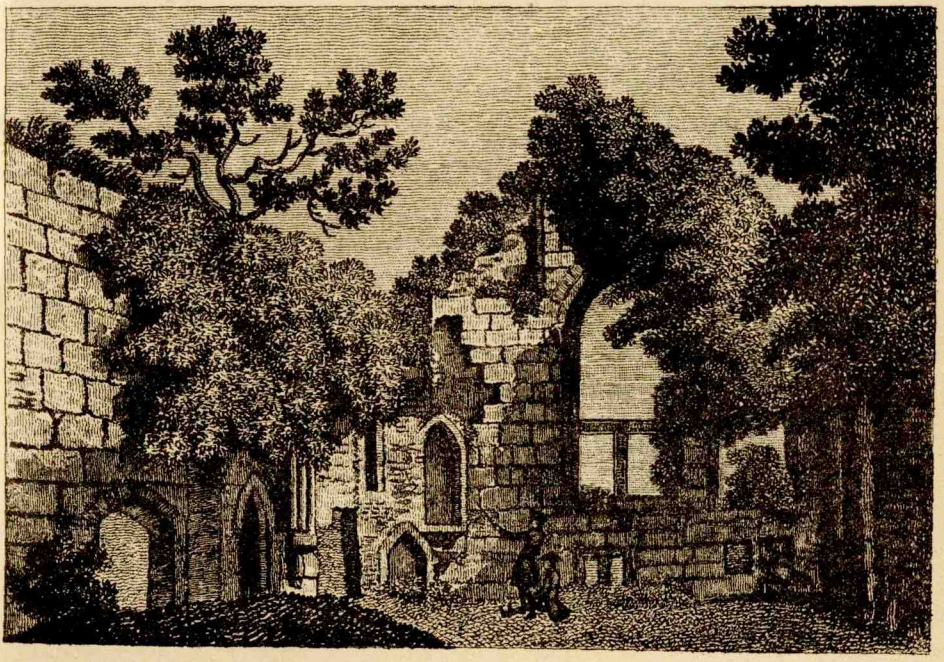
FROM BUCK'S "VIEWS," 1727.

PLATE 9.

BIRKENHEAD PRIORY.

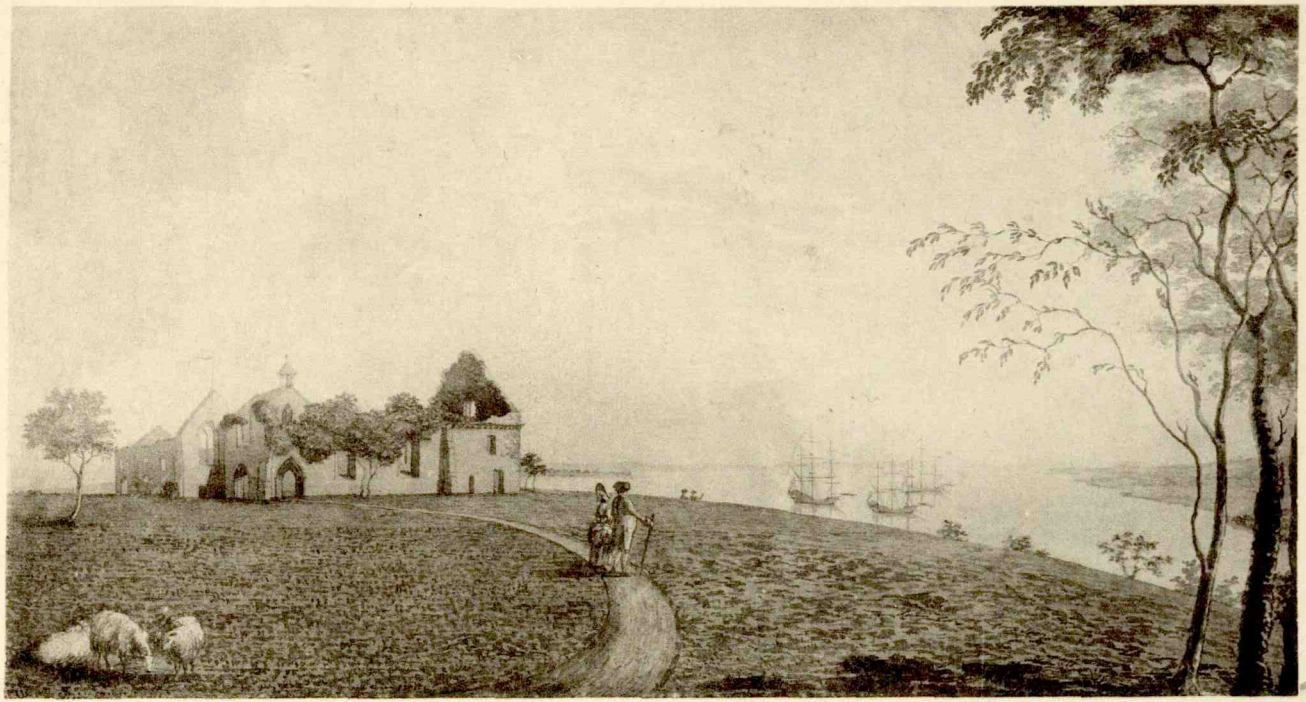


FROM KING'S "VALE ROYAL," 1656.



FROM GROSE'S "ANTIQUITIES," 1770.

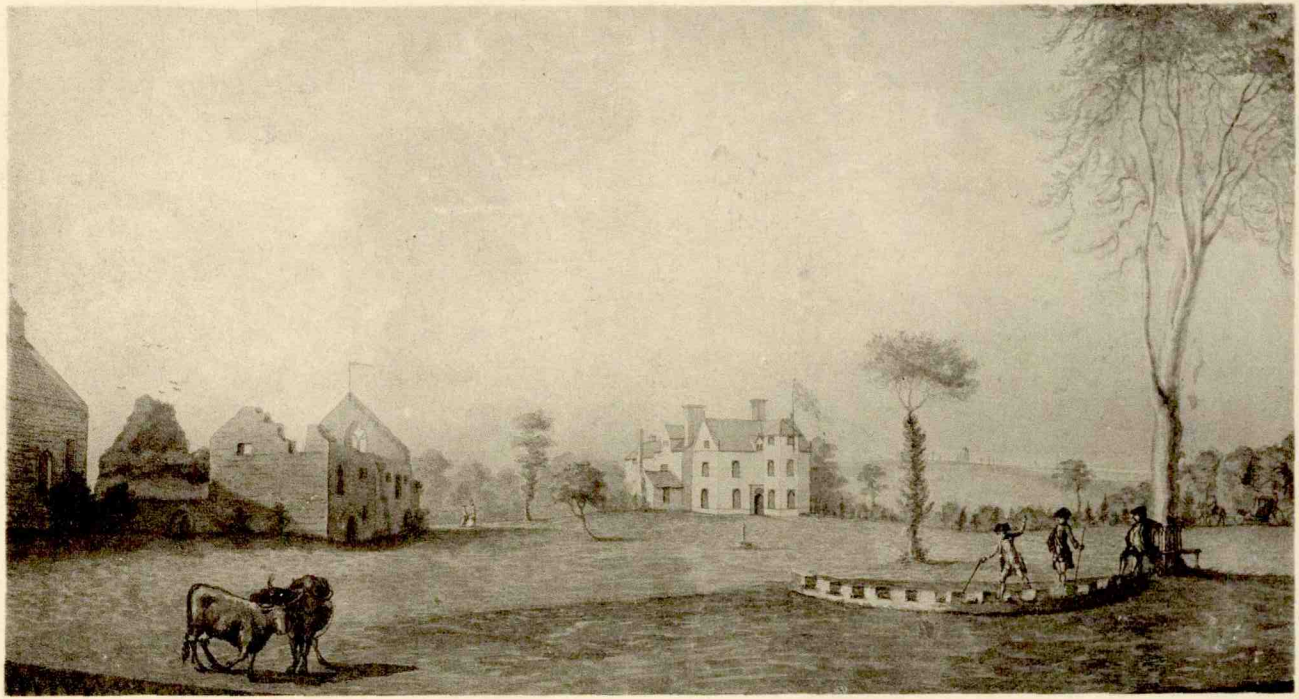
PLATE 10.



BIRKENHEAD PRIORY IN 1780.

AFTER A DRAWING BY JOHN CALVELY.

PLATE 11.



BIRKENHEAD PRIORY AND HOUSE IN 1780.

AFTER A DRAWING BY JOHN CALVELY.

other, one leading into the Cloisters, the other outside.

There are indications of a small room at the north end of the Refectory, connecting it with the Crypt, which may have been a pantry, buttery, or serving room.

The large Crypt under the Monks' Dormitory is well preserved, notwithstanding the constant saturation of many years from the wet soaking through the vaulting. The Crypt is divided into two unequal divisions, the larger part is 46ft. 6in. by 23ft., the smaller 11ft. by 23ft. The former is lighted by two windows on the north side and one on the south side next the Cloisters; there are two doorways, one on the north side leading probably to kitchen offices, the other in connection with the smaller room; this latter has one window on the west side and two doorways, one leading to the Cloisters, the other into the Refectory; there are three recesses or cupboards in the walls of the smaller room, and a circular stair, leading to the Dormitory above, in the larger room. There is also a large cupboard formed on the south side of the larger room: from its strength, size (8ft. by 2ft. 6in.), and general appearance, this was probably used as a kind of treasury, for the safe keeping of valuable plate, &c. The Crypt is entirely of the latter part of the 13th or early 14th century, and is vaulted throughout, the character of the work being very simple and vigorous. There is a similar cellar at Chester, at right angles with the Refectory.

The Monks' Dormitory was over the cellar, and occupied the whole space. Little now remains beyond portions of the walls and a pretty little doorway at the east end of the north side, leading, no doubt, to a separate apartment for the Sub-Prior.

As at Chester, the night stairs for the Dormitory

were situated at the back of the east wall of the Cloister, and led from the Dormitory to a doorway in the north wall of the Chapter House (now blocked up). The monks would then pass through the Chapter House direct into the north transept of the Church.

There are no remains of any inner enclosure walls surrounding the Cloister Garth or Garden ; it is probable therefore, that with the exception of a small portion at the south-east end of the Refectory, the whole of the Cloister walks were covered by a wooden lean-to roof.

The Lavatory, of which there are indications, was probably placed along the west side. There were two doors leading into the Church, one at each end of the north aisle. On the west side of the Cloisters there is also the Prior's own door, with the arms of the Priory carved over it, leading to the Prior's apartments ; also two doorways on the east side of the Cloisters, one leading to the Dormitory, and the other to the Cemetery.

Thus, it will be seen that of this once beautiful building very little remains, and what survives can hardly last much longer, unless prompt means are taken to preserve it. Should the perusal of this paper lead anyone to help in so excellent a work, the writer will feel more than rewarded for any trouble he has been at in putting together these notes on the only ancient building in Birkenhead.

DESCRIPTION OF PLATES.

NOTE.—*Plates 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are fac-similies of drawings for which Mr. George Hornblower obtained a prize given by the Liverpool Architectural Society for the best set of measured drawings of Birkenhead Priory, and have been kindly lent by him to the writer of the paper. Plate 6 is from a drawing by Mr. Charles Aldridge. Plate 7 is from drawings by Mr. Aldridge, Mr. Hornblower, and Mr. J. Paul Rylands. Plates 8 and 9 are from prints in the British Museum. Plates 10 and 11 are from old drawings, the property of Mr. Macgregor Laird.*

PLATE 1.

PLANS OF BIRKENHEAD PRIORY, AND ST. WERBURGH'S ABBEY, CHESTER.

PLATE 2.—VARIOUS DETAILS.

(*a* & *b*) Elevation and plan of window in east wall of room over Chapter House, there being a similar window at the west end: traces of the ancient iron gudgeons remain: the lower portion of the window had shutters only: the elevation of the window shows half outside (to left), and half inside (to right).

(*c*) Front and side views of engaged piers in Chapter House.

(*d*) Corbels in Chapter House: front and side views.

(*e*) Elevation, section, and part plan of Fire-place in room over Chapter House: the kerb and hearth are in one stone.

(*f*) Elevation and plan of windows in north wall of room over Chapter House, both now blocked up.

(*g*) Front view of remaining portion of east jamb of north door to Church.

(*h*) Plan of Nave Piers, and of Arch above cap of Respond.

(*k*) Elevation of Respond and portion of Arch above it at west end of Nave of Church. The few voussoirs remaining in position have dropped as shewn; the dotted lines give continuation of Arch. Section of north jamb of west window of Church shows the small bases partly restored from fragments. The upper portion ot wall has slid westwards, as shewn. The bases of Respond were discovered by excavation, and verified from a fragment. The present ground level is about 3ft. 9in. above the original floor of the Church.

PLATE 3.—PLAN, ELEVATION, AND SECTION OF WINDOW IN WEST WALL OF REFECTORY, &C.

(*a*) Plan; to left, taken just above sill; to right, below spring of arch. Splays have been increased, as shewn by dotted lines, at later date. Mullions of fifteenth century work have now disappeared.

(*b*) Section; In stone marked × the groove for glass is not continuous, a cusp having been cut away. Stone marked + has been cut back when the later tracery was inserted.

(*c*) Elevation; dotted lines on left side of drawing—half inside—give restoration of tracery inserted in fifteenth century, those on right side—half outside—show tracery as it, possibly, originally existed. The adjoining window still retains this tracery, but the cusps, as in this case, have been cut away.

Plan, Elevation, and Section of West Door of Refectory.

(*d*) Plan.

(*e*) Elevation; half inside, half outside: the ground outside is now above the original level: the termination of the hood-mould is destroyed.

(*f*) Section.

(*g*) Elevation of Door to Prior's Apartment. Carved finials have probably fallen from the holes marked × ; the carving of the keystone is defaced ; there are traces of moulded projections at point marked ✳; the ground level has been raised.

(*h*) Elevation of Prior's Door into Refectory ; ground level has been raised.

PLATE 4.—Elevation, Plan, and Section of Window in south wall of Prior's Room, &c.

(*a*) Elevation, half outside and half inside : the tracery in the head of this window is probably not original.

(*b*) Plan : the mullion here is modern.

(*c*) Section : the hood is in one stone with voussoirs.

(*d* & *e*) Plan and Elevation of Fireplace in south wall of Prior's room. Some stones have fallen out ; the keystone and voussoir-shaped stone two courses above it are secured in their places by timber wedges ; the interior stone work is very rough and much defaced. The tops of corbels, (11½ inches deep,) supporting beams which carry floor of this room, are on a level with hearthstone, clearly showing subsequent alterations.

(*f*) Front and side views of Corbel in north aisle of Church.

(*g* & *h*) Elevation and Plan of Window in south wall of Chapter House. In the elevation, (half outside and half inside,) the windows are shewn ; the transom, cheek, and sill of the window are of wood, and modern.

PLATE 5.—Plan and Sections of groined vaulting of Crypt, north walk of Cloister.

(*a*) Horizontal section taken at 3ft. 6in. above springing of ribs.

(*b*) Elevation and Section of Vaulting on north side. At this end a doorway has been filled up, and the mullion of a window destroyed.

(*c*) Plan of Vaulting. The true elevation of ribs is shewn by dotted lines. The newel stair in the lower left-hand corner is shewn approximately only, the interior having been filled with earth and rubbish.

(*d*) Section of Vaulting : transverse section of *c*.

Note.—The breaks in curvature of some of the ribs are exactly as shewn. This is due, in two out of the three cases occurring in the portion of vaulting here illustrated, to the springers having been worked to suit similar curves throughout, regardless of the difference in space between the ribs. In the third case the change of curve is occasioned by its having been necessary to keep the rib up so as to clear the door to the staircase.

PLATE 6.—Interior of Crypt.

PLATE 7.—Seal, Tiles, Font, and Prior's Doorway.

PLATE 8.—Buck's View of the Priory in 1727.

PLATE 9.—View of the Priory in 1656 (King), and in 1770 (Grose).

PLATES 10 and 11.—Views of the Priory in 1780, after Calvely.