

ORIGINAL RESEARCHES ON THE SITES OF RELIGIOUS  
HOUSES OF IPSWICH: WITH PLAN OF EXCAVATION.

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The history of Ipswich, including that of its Religious Houses, has been repeatedly written, and to give even a *résumé* of all that has been said on this subject would be merely to express lamely what has been so well put together from time to time.

Instead, therefore, of attempting to go over the same ground again, I will confine my remarks to the results of some original research made on the sites of one or two of the convents of Ipswich.

As little or nothing beyond a fragment of wall here and there is left above ground, it has been difficult to ascertain at all positively the exact position of the various houses. In order, therefore, to get a clearer idea of their whereabouts for working purposes, I have attempted roughly to construct a composite map, subject, of course, to revision as fresh light is thrown upon the matter. I do not know whether this plan has already been made use of by others, but as I have found it of great service, it may be worth while to explain the method adopted. Taking an Ordnance Survey map, which is printed in black, I have laid down upon it in colours, first of all the probable outline of the ancient city wall and ditches, which will in a general way mark out the older portions of the town, and then the areas occupied by the Priors and Friaries and other ancient buildings, as far as they are at present ascertained. Thus it will be seen at once that Trinity Priory, upon the site of which Christchurch Mansion now stands, was without the city walls, as also was Grey Friars in St. Nicholas Parish, while the house of the Carmelites, the Black Friars and the Priory of St. Peter and St. Paul were all included within it. By a careful comparison of ancient maps and pictures of Ipswich from Speede's map, dated 1610, to Pennington's, 1778, the various changes may be traced as old buildings fell into decay and were superseded by later

structures, or new roads intersected or replaced the picturesque but narrow streets of the old town.

Working in this way, it is not only easy to realise over what spots sacred to past memories we are treading, but we know what to expect to find when fresh excavations are made for building or other purposes. For want of some such system much has already been lost to our town, and little or no record kept of the position of underground walls, which marked the foundations of the old Religious Houses.

When, for instance, James Street and Edgar Street were made, was it realised that the whole of the site of the Grey Friars Church was laid open? Doubtless the workmen who picked up the strong foundations were aware that they had come upon ancient work, for they know this substantial underground masonry pretty well by this time, and much trouble it gives them, but workmen are not sentimental and their one object is, of course, to remove the obstruction as expeditiously as possible. It is, alas, too late now to redeem those splendid opportunities which are lost for ever to the antiquary, but of the little that remains we may at least gather up the fragments. It was my good fortune a month or two ago to have a visit from a working-man, who brought with him a few broken pieces of Roman (?) pottery. On learning that they had been found behind the Grand Hotel in Butter Market, where Mr. Walter Cowell is building new premises, a reference to the composite map at once showed this to be the position of the old Carmelite convent, long since razed to the ground. Here was an opportunity not to be lost of visiting the interesting site so soon to be built over and effaced for ever. In Dugdale's *Monasticum Anglicanum* the position of the convent is described as being "about the middle of the town, in the parishes of St. Nicholas and St. Laurence." Taylor, in the *Index Monasticus*, further states that "it was of considerable extent, reaching, according to Kirby, from St. Nicholas Street to St. Stephen's Lane, and that a portion of the building was after the dissolution used as the county gaol," and these two descriptions are supplemented by Wooderspoon, who speaks of land occupied by this convent as reaching "from St. Stephen's Lane to Queen Street on the south side of

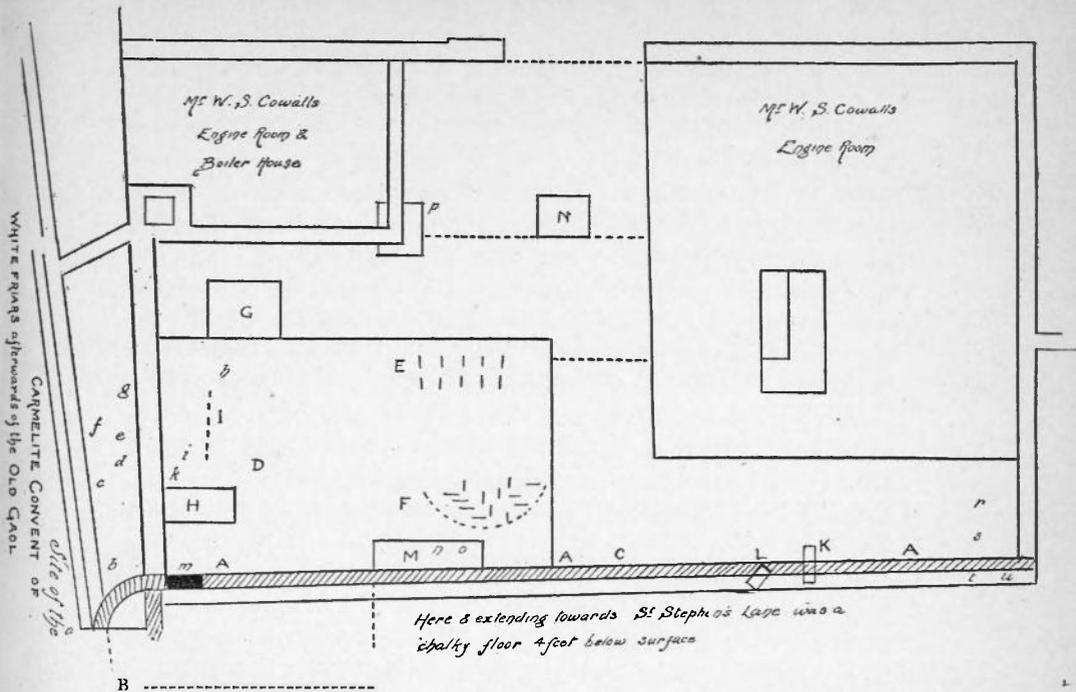
the Buttermarket." By piecing these accounts together and finding from old maps the position of the county gaol, we are able to locate the house of the Carmelites with some degree of certainty, but I am not aware that any portion of the building itself has been visible since the destruction of the old gaol, until these recent excavations disclosed the foundations of an ancient wall of the convent. Although I was not in time to see the whole length of the wall, which had been almost entirely demolished by the workmen, sufficient was still left for examination, and I made a plan of the excavation to procure a record of its position. The portion left standing was rubble, of massive masonry, and the wall stretched southward from the back of the houses in Butter Market, turning off at right angles towards St. Stephen's Lane (A).<sup>1</sup> Beyond the angle there appeared to have been an archway measuring 9 feet across and opening in the direction of the Old Cattle Market. (See B on plan.)

With the kind permission of Mr. Cowell, the owner, I have spent a great deal of time examining the locality and taking notes of the position in which the various objects were found.

The excavation was carried out to a depth of 23 feet. A section through it showed generally from 8 to 12 feet of made-up earth, which points to a depression in the land, which had been filled up. Below this was some 2 feet of loamy sand resting on soft gravel, and here and there a substratum of clay became visible. As might be expected, relics characteristic of many different periods came to light. Among those that may perhaps be associated directly with the Carmelite convent, the most interesting are an ornamental glazed tile, a broken mug of quaint pattern, and a delicately sculptured figure in white marble (C). It is robed in rich garments with girdle and tassels, and is doubtless of ecclesiastical design. Unfortunately, having been fractured, the head and upper part of the figure are missing. This sculpture has now, I believe, been presented to the Ipswich Museum.

While I was watching the spadefuls of earth as they were thrown out by the workmen, two or three Nuremberg tokens came to light, and near to them a fragile metal

<sup>1</sup> See plan, on which the wall is marked.



EXCAVATIONS ON THE SITE OF THE CARMELITE CONVENT,  
IPSWICH, 13TH APRIL, 1899.

- A. Wall of Carmelite Convent, discovered during excavation and entirely demolished.  
 B. St. Stephen's Lane.  
 C. Marble figure, discovered at a depth of 4 feet.  
 D. Medallion: Our Lady of Pity, discovered at a depth of 13 feet.  
 E. Two orderly rows of skeletons, discovered at a depth of 7 feet.  
 F. Skeletons irregularly placed.  
 G. Pit, 20 feet long, alternate layers of lime and black mould.  
 H. Pit, 20 feet by 8, 17 feet deep, alternate layers of lime and decomposed animal matter with bones to a depth of 10 feet, below that 4 feet of rubbish, below that to a depth of 8 feet the same alternate layers, below that undisturbed clay.  
 I. Oyster shells, lying at a depth of 10 feet.  
 K. Grave, 6 feet by 2, 15 feet down. In it many Roman burial urns, jaw of animal with teeth and grey pottery.  
 L. Grave, 4 feet by 2, 11 feet down, full of fragments of urns.  
 M. Section at side of cutting: Made earth, 12 feet; loamy sand, 2 feet; soft gravel, 9 feet.  
 N. Shaft: Horn knife or comb, 4 feet, stag's antler with tines sawn off, at a depth of 8 feet.
- a & b. Rubble arch, about 9 feet wide.  
 c. Piece of jug, hole in side, at depth 15 feet.  
 d. Fragment of thin red pottery.  
 e. Piece of glazed mug, at depth 15 feet.  
 f. Large jug, 12½ inches high, 9 inches across, yellow-green glaze.  
 g. Jug cover, yellow-green glaze.  
 h. Fragments of very coarse urns, 10 feet, 15 feet, 17 feet below surface.  
   Grey rim with spout, 17 feet below surface.  
   Red rim with spout, 10 to 13 feet below surface.  
   Pigs' jaws and tusks and pottery, Roman?  
 i. Fragment of fresco, 13 feet below surface.  
 k. Three tokens, 13 feet below surface.  
 l. Two Bellarmine jugs, 10 feet below surface  
 m. I saw this piece of wall still standing.  
 n. Bone needle, horn awl.  
 o. Two horn implements, two animals' jaws, a few bones.  
 p. Shaft, 6 feet square, 17 feet deep, bones at bottom.  
 r. Antler, 22 feet below surface.  
 s. Lead weight, 7¼ ounces, 10 feet below surface.  
 t. Fragments of glazed pottery, horn of Bos longifrons, 23 feet below surface.  
 u. Yellow pottery with pattern.

medallion (D), the pattern of which it was difficult at first to determine. Presently, however, as verdigris appeared upon it, the beautiful design became apparent. It represents the Virgin sitting or kneeling and supporting the dead Christ. In the background is a cross with the nails and scroll, and round the margin runs a cable pattern, though this is partially destroyed. A medallion very similar to this was found when removing the stalls of St. Mary's church at Bury, and a copy of it may be seen in the *Proceedings of the Bury and Suffolk Archæological Institute* for December 14th, 1848. Though in this case also the design is a piëta and is surrounded by the cable pattern, the two delineations are not identical. As was to be expected, a large number of human remains were found within the precincts of the convent. Two orderly rows of skeletons, about ten in number, lay in their old burial ground 7 feet below the surface (E), and a few feet lower in another part skeletons were again found, placed in irregular positions (F). Indeed, there were tokens on every hand that the greater part of the area opened had been devoted to the purpose of burial.

In more than one place other methods to dispose of the dead had been employed, and large pits could be traced, which had been dug to a depth of 17 feet, filled with alternate layers of lime and black mould, in which latter occasional human bones were discovered. The upper part of one of these pits measured 20 feet by 8, and the lower part 8 feet by 5 (G, H).

When the friars dug their graves and laid the foundations of the Friary wall they broke into ground which had been previously occupied by earlier folk, possibly Roman, for a large quantity of broken pottery of very coarse material and rude ornamentation was found at depths varying from 10 to 23 feet. Much of this lay immediately below thin layers of oyster shells and surrounded with very dark mould (I), but many fragments of pottery were found heaped together in two graves dug in the gravel below the foundations of the convent wall. These graves measured respectively 6 feet by 2, and 4 feet by 2, one of them being 11 feet below the surface and the other 15 feet (K, L). In one of these, besides many fragments of urns, or perhaps, more correctly speaking, household

utensils used for burial purposes, the spiral stem of a somewhat massive vessel was found, and in the other a roughly shaped leaden weight. The finding of a similar weight and two leaden discs is mentioned in the guide book to Roman remains found at Wilderspool, near Warrington. It would take too long to describe individually all the rest of the relics which came to light. Two rims of vessels with spouts are among the most interesting, and the core of a stag's horn with several of the tines sawn off.

Horns of *bos longifrons* and jaws and tusks of pigs were also lying among the pottery. Some of the fragments are unusually thick and heavy, and in a few cases hand-made pottery seems to point to a very early period.

I have compared many of these specimens with incontestably Roman pottery in Colchester Museum, and have found nothing corresponding exactly to them. As the area excavated was of considerable extent and carried to a depth in some parts of 23 feet, it is possible that among the finds are some of pre-Roman date.

Several bone and horn implements were discovered in the gravel below the foundations of the convent wall. These were at a considerable distance from the pottery, and were imbedded in gravel which appeared to have been undisturbed, at a depth of 23 feet below the surface (M). A section at this spot showed 12 feet of made-up earth resting on 2 feet of loamy sand, below which was soft gravel to a depth of 9 feet, which was as deep as the excavation was carried. There was no dark earth surrounding the implements, as was invariably the case where pottery was found. The objects found here consist of a bone needle or bodkin with broken eye, a horn awl, another horn implement partly hollowed and grooved, perhaps to be more firmly held in position, and a horn implement with holes bored in it. It has been suggested to me that this was used for making the meshes of nets. Associated with these were one or two fragments of bone which appeared to be extremely old.

Nearer to the surface, and on the other side of the cutting, a portion of a bone knife or comb with rudely ornamented handle was found lying near to a skeleton (N). This was at a depth of 4 feet, but here the ground had not, I think,

been made up. In another part two broken Bellarmine jugs came to light, one bearing arms and crest.

While these excavations were being carried on behind the Butter Market, I paid occasional visits to College Street in St. Peters, where some old houses were being pulled down to make room for other buildings. In digging down below their foundations the old river bed was reached, for it is well known that this was originally part of the quay. Here, lying beside the remains of a female skeleton, which had been thrown out by the workmen, I found two bones of very different appearance, which I at once saw had been roughly shaped, though for what purpose it was difficult at first to conjecture. These, with the kind help of Dr. Laver and Mr. Spalding, Curator of Colchester Museum, I have since identified as bone skates. They are, however, without the usual holes bored through them by means of which they could be attached by thongs to the boot. An account of such skates given by Fitz-Stephen in his *History of London* describes the manner in which they were used in Henry II's reign.

"The young men fastened the leg-bones of animals under their feet, pushing themselves by means of an iron shod pole. Imitating the feats of the tournament, they start in career against each other, meet, and use their poles for a blow, when one or other would be hurled down." Skating by the help of bones was well known in Holland, and a quaint picture is given in Chambers's *Book of Days*, Vol. I, p. 138, showing a child using the jawbones of a horse as a kind of sledge. The child is seated upon them, and is propelling itself by means of a pointed stick in either hand.

Bone skates are dredged up from the bottom of the Thames, and are also found in Holland, Scandinavia and Sweden, and, I believe, are still in use in Iceland.

The Convent of Black Friars, which was situated in St. Edmund-a-Pountney Lane, now Foundation Street, covered an area of very considerable extent, and much of the original building was standing when Kirby made his sketch of it in 1746. This, however, has long since disappeared, and nothing remains but a portion of the Refectory wall with some early English arches, which may still be seen forming the boundary wall of the Girls' Endowed

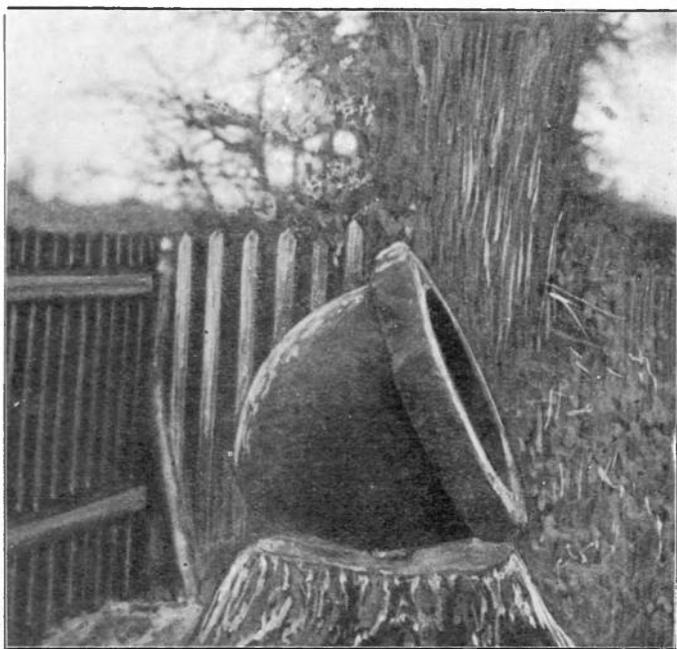
School. I made considerable excavations on this site in August of last year, with the result that a portion of the west wall of the Refectory was found, also a floor of pinkish red tiles, some of which had formerly been glazed, lying at a depth of 4 feet 5 inches below the surface. The tiles had been arranged in a pattern, there being alternately one large tile and four smaller ones. Having traced the foundations of the old Refectory wall across School Street, I found it continued again in the yard of a house opposite (No. 9, School Street), and this gave the length required for the room, which was considerably more than 100 feet.

Nearer to Foundation Street and running obliquely across School Street, I came upon the foundations of the walls of the old Friary Church, which apparently stood north and south instead of east and west. The walls were of rubble with masses of hard mortar, and measured 40 inches across. Here a small piece of lead light was thrown out, also a glazed tile, but beyond this nothing of special interest was found. In marking out the probable position of the Friary on my map, I have been guided by the descriptions given in various histories, which correspond with the plan to be seen on Ogilby's map of Ipswich, dated 1674.

Before closing, I should like to take this opportunity of exhibiting a large stone vessel, which I found in a farm-yard at East Bergholt, near Ipswich, a few months ago.<sup>1</sup> There have been many opinions expressed about it, but up to the present time none have been given with any degree of certainty. It has been suggested that it is a mortar, but against this the softness of the stone and the unusually pointed base are objections. Others have concluded that it was a font, but the porousness of the stone is a difficulty. To Mrs. Mellor, of Ipswich, I am indebted for the suggestion that it might be an ancient drip-stone or filter, and an experiment with a canful of water soon shows that it would have been suitable for this purpose, for the water filters slowly through. The stone is a soft red sandstone, which turns grey on the exterior.

<sup>1</sup> See illustration.

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**STONE VESSEL FOUND AT EAST BERGHOLT.**

Height from rim to base, 22 inches ; circumference of rim, 69 inches ; greatest diameter of rim, 22 inches ; diameter of mouth of vessel, 14 by 14 inches.