



LANERCOST PRIORY.

Photo. by Mr. W. L. Fletcher.

TO FACE P. 255.

ART. VII.—*The Priory of Lanercost*. By J. H. MARTINDALE,
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Read at the site, Sept. 10th, 1925.

WE are gathered together on one of those beautiful spots in our country so loved centuries ago by many of our ancestors who wished to retire from the turmoil of everyday life. The Priory of Lanercost was founded about the middle of the 12th century, say 1160-1170, for Augustinian Canons, by Robert de Vallibus or de Vaux. This Order was a very popular one in England, and at the Dissolution there were some 170 houses in England. The earliest foundation of the Order was at Colchester about 1100, and we have the same Order at Carlisle Priory about the beginning of that century. The Cumberland and Westmorland Society visited Lanercost in the very early days of the Society's existence (1868), and the history of this building is fully given in the paper read on that visit by the late Mr. Charles Ferguson and printed in the first volume of our *Transactions*, O.S. This paper can be read by you all; it is so full and complete that I do not propose to say anything about the history of the Priory, but simply as far as I am able, to try and point out the several architectural features and planning as you examine the buildings.

The importance of the house is shown, even in medieval days, by its guests. Edward I, and Queen Eleanor were here in 1280, and again he was here in 1306, staying from Michaelmas to Easter on his last journey, when he offered his litter in Carlisle Cathedral, mounted his charger and died on Burgh marsh. The Scots were here, but not as welcome guests, as their descendants are to-day, in

1296 and again in 1311. Again King David of Holland was here in 1346 and reduced and destroyed the buildings so that the House never after fully recovered. The last prior was John Robynson, and he surrendered the Priory in 1536.

The plan and arrangement of the buildings were settled at the foundation. We find no, or very slight, variations or additions to the first layout, and in this respect Lanercost occupies a similar place, in monastic remains, to Salisbury in Cathedrals: it is more or less of one date.

The Gate-house or main gate to the precincts on the west, no doubt, was on this side the extreme limit of the boundary, and very slight indications remain as to the precincts wall or its extent on other sides. This gateway has been groined, and probably had buildings on each side as at Carlisle, with rooms over. The west wall of the monastic church is some 400 feet inside the gate; at Carlisle, another Augustinian House, the west wall of the church was only 80 feet inside the gateway, so that the area included in the precincts at Lanercost was probably very much larger than at Carlisle.

As I said before, the Priory Church, as we see it, retains the original plan—a cruciform church, with single aisle to nave as was frequently, if not generally the case, in Augustinian Houses. Here it is on the north side, the conventual buildings being on the south. The transepts have chapels, with altars, on the east side, and there are short aisles to the choir both north and south.

The principal dimensions are:—total internal length, 178 ft. 6 ins., nave to crossing 99 ft. 3 ins. \times 25 ft. 10 ins.; north aisle 14 ft. 6 ins. wide; transepts from north to south, 91 ft. 4 ins., and 26 ft. 9 ins. wide; choir 52 ft. 6 ins., east and west by 23 ft. 8 ins. wide. The external walls are all about 5 ft. thick, except the walls of aisle and N. chapels.

The oldest existing portions of masonry are in the lower

part of the south wall of the nave, S. transept and choir, which are all of Transitional date. The north aisle, transept and choir, also the lower part of the Conventual buildings are Early English or 13th century. The Conventual buildings to the south of the cloisters, and the upper part of the western range were added to and transformed into a residence by the Dacres in the 16th century after the Dissolution and grant of the Crown.

There was no earlier parish church at Lanercost before the foundation of the Priory, or we most certainly should have had the advowson mentioned and bestowed on the Priory in the foundation charter with the other churches.

The external west front is a very fine composition, with a central door of five orders, not quite in the centre of the gable and above this is a trefoil-headed wall-arcade or gallery; and then higher, seven elegant lancets, the centre one being taller and wider. The three alternate ones, i.e., centre and second on each side, are pierced as windows the others blank wall spaces. The armorial panels in the gable are Dacre, and Dacre quartering Vaux, Multon and Morville, but they are insertions when some extensive repairs must have been done to the upper part of the gable.

Foliage carving has been very sparingly used in the whole building, but, in the nook shafts of the west door and in some of the inner arcade of the clerestory passage the carving is very fine and varied. In the nave the two processional doors in the south wall to the cloisters remain, but are both walled up.

The Rood Screen would probably be at the large pier, west of the first bay from the crossing, leaving three bays as the nave to be used by the lay brethren, the whole east end being devoted to the Canons. At Carlisle this broad pier is immediately west of the crossing forming the western piers of the central tower.

There are two external doors in the north aisle, both

blocked up. In one, the west, are the remains of a cross, described in these *Transactions*, O.S., ix. This is a smaller door and apparently led to some external chamber on the north, now quite obliterated. We now pass to the crossing and choir proper which are entirely cut off from the nave by the wall forming east end of present church. The door at the east end of the north aisle is an insertion, but is probably an old door removed from the cloister and rebuilt here. The north transept has a staircase giving access to the clerestory and tower, it is apparently the only staircase and there is one in an exactly similar position at Carlisle. From the clerestory level, the access to upper stages of the tower is by a straight mural stair in the north wall. This is not a very common arrangement. The windows in the eastern chapels are insertions, of the 15th century. There is an aumbry in the north wall of the chapel, and a piscina, in a rather uncommon position, viz., in the angle of the east wall. The chapels and aisle on the north side of the chancel are groined; those on the south side have had wooden ceilings and roofs: also the north side of the choir has the usual three stages in elevation including ground floor, arcade, triforium and clerestory, while the south side has lofty arches, and no triforium division, and the wall above the arches is thickened or corbelled out to gain the clerestory passage. There are portions of sedilia and a piscina in the south wall.

The tombs here are very fine. The one in north transept is the founder's, De Vallibus. The one in north aisle is to Humphrey, Lord Dacre, 1455. The next one east is not known. The South to Thomas, Lord Dacre, 1526, shows an early instance of the ribbon of the garter round the oval arms. There is an effigy in south wall, which has a modern inscription cut on the lower part, "John Crow of Longlands died March 23rd, 1708, aged 25 yers." Local tradition says he was a workman who fell from the clerestory and broke his neck, but Pennant, no doubt

correctly, says he was climbing the ruins at that date and fell with the consequences recorded (*these Trans.* o.s., xii, 335-6; in that article all the monuments and slabs are described. There is a Roman altar used as a lintel in the clerestory, and a number are to be seen in the crypt.

From this south transept the night stair would give access to the Dorter, of which nothing now remains. Entering the east walk of the cloister by the door in the west wall, where there is a stoup, we have only the main walls against the buildings remaining. None of the external walls of the ambulatories can be traced, but possibly the foundations may be below the ground. The cloister was roughly about 80 feet square. The Chapter House and buildings on the east side have disappeared, but it is possible in the near future that excavations may be undertaken, and no doubt very interesting foundations will be discovered here through the instrumentality of the Ancient Monument Dept. of H. M. Office of Works.

The lower story of the buildings on the south side of the cloister is perfect with the fine groined crypt or undercroft of the Fraternity. It is about 77 feet long and 26 feet wide, of six bays with a centre row of columns. This is almost exactly the same size and similar number of bays as at Carlisle, but here the crypt has been extended three bays at the west end, added in the 14th century with the floor at a lower level. At the east end is a solid block of masonry, but whether hollow or not is unknown, possibly the day stair was here. The upper part of the building is gone, and the groining is now covered with grass, it was a few years ago used as a garden.

The western range of buildings was very much altered land converted into a dwelling when the property was given to the Dacres, and though the remains themselves are very interesting examples of the period, they have entirely obliterated the conventual arrangement. Part of the lower story has again been altered in recent years. The

upper floor was converted into a fine room known as the Dacre Hall, which is about 100 feet long and the noble fireplace was inserted. At the north end, adjoining the church, is a small room with portions of oak panelling and a plaster frieze with the arms or badge of the Dacres; this is now used as the vestry. A small stair in the south west corner in the thickness of the wall gave access to a room over, and there are, or were, two small curious windows looking into the church from these rooms.

The Edwardian tower, now incorporated in the present vicarage is probably the only remaining portion of the "Utter Gate" reserved to the church of Lanercost in the gift of Sir Thomas Dacre.

In 1889 some excavations were made in the farm buildings at a portion known as the "Dairy" when three human skeletons were found and also the remains of two horses. This building was to the west of the present Vicarage and is marked "Dairy" on an old plan of 1743. It is also rather curious that on this 1743 plan the eastern part, or choir and crossing of the church, are marked "Cathedral." Some excavations were made on the "green" just inside the north wall, where an interment was found.

There is now only one bell in the so-called bell cote formed in the parapet of the once noble central tower. The terrier of 1749 mentions two bells, but by 1777 they are reduced to one. It is probable that the two medieval bells were recast into one by Pack and Chapman of London, the predecessors of Messrs. Mears and Stainbank as now inscribed in 1773 on the present bell.

I believe the only old plate is a silver chalice with the date letter, York, 1637. The Documentary remains are the Chronicle, and the Chartulary. Neither are here. The first is among the Cottonian MSS., and has been translated by Sir Herbert Maxwell; a copy of the latter is in the Dean and Chapter Library at Carlisle, and I hope will be published in our Chartulary series.

There are only six of the larger Monastic Houses in Cumberland,—St. Bees, Calder, Carlisle, Holm Cultram, Lanercost and Wetheral, and one in Westmorland, Shap. Lanercost I think, is the most perfect and also one of the most beautiful, and will repay a careful examination.
