

THE FRIAR-PREACHERS, OR BLACK FRIARS, OF
KING'S LYNN.

By the Rev. C. F. R. PALMER.

Before the Reformation the town of Lynn Regis, or King's Lynn, in Norfolk, was called Lynn Episcopi, or Bishop's Lynn; for it was wholly subject to the spiritual and temporal jurisdiction of the bishops of Norwich, who had a palace here. But Henry VIII deprived these bishops of this feudal superiority, took the fief entirely into the hands of the crown, and gave the town its present name. The priory of the friar-preachers here was founded by Thomas Gedney, a person of great consideration in those parts at the end of Henry III's reign. Some authors say that it was established about the year 1272, whilst others carry it back to about the same time that the friar-minors settled here, which was before the year 1264; and the latter opinion seems to be the more probable one. Leland states that in his time the house was in the patronage of Thomas Earl of Rutland.¹ This nobleman was Thomas Manners, eighteenth Baron Ross of Hamlake, who received the earldom in 1525, and died in 1543. It is difficult to proffer any other conjecture for his being the patron besides the one put forth in Blomefield's "History of Norfolk," that the right must have passed to the Earl as Lord of Wrongay. In the thirteenth century the manor of Wrongay or Wormgay was held by William Lord Bardolf, and he was at least a great benefactor to this house.

The priory stood in the east part of the town, between Clow lane and Skinner lane, and not far from Clow bridge spanning one of the fleets or narrow streams which run through the town. The church was dedicated to St. Dominic, and the house accommodated upwards of forty religious, for there was that number here at the beginning of Edward I's reign. A comparison of the possessions of the friars at the dissolution of their community with all that was acquired after the establishment leads to a conclusion that the first site was not considerable in extent; but no calculation can be definitely made, unless it is made clearly evident that the additions to the landed property subsequently contemplated were actually carried into effect. An inquisition taken, June 16th, 1310, at Lynn, returned that John de Thorneden and Murielle his wife might be allowed to assign a plot of land to the friars. In the writ for the enquiry dated May 28th the plot is described as 180 ft. long, while the jurors of the inquisition estimated it at 183 ft.; but both writ and jury agreed in saying that it was 21 ft. broad: it was held of Robert de Lenn, heir of Nicholas Countur, by the yearly service of a clove, and was valued

¹ Leland's Itin., vol. i.

in all issues at 18*d.* a-year: Robert de Lenn held it of the bishop of Norwich and the bishop held it of the king.¹ A mortmain license for the transfer of the plot does not appear on record; but a royal license was granted, July 26th, 1356, for the fine of 13*s.* 4*d.* to William Duraunt of *Seeche* (Setchy), Robert Braunche, Robert de Cokesford, Clement de Aldeburgh, and Reginald de Sisterun, burgesses of Lynn Episcopi, to assign a messuage comprising land 18 perticates 10 ft. in length, and 10 perticates 2 ft. in breadth, to the friars for enlarging their home-*stead.*²

The priory was supplied with fresh water from a spring called Brokwell at Middleton, about four miles distant from the town. This spring, with two acres of land in which it was situated, was given to the friars by William Bardolf, who has been already mentioned. In 1293 it was found by inquisition taken April 22nd, at Fly...aburg, (in answer to a writ of April 4th) that the friars might retain this spring and make a conduit from it to their house;³ so the royal license was granted, May 17th, according to the tenor of the enquiry.⁴

As these friar-preachers belonged to a mendicant order, they partook of the largess of kings, the bounty of their fellow-townsmen, and testamentary gifts. A few instances of such alms fall under especial notice. Edward I being at Gaywood, Mar. 19th, 1276-7, sent them 13*s.* 4*d.* for a day's food, and also 12*s.* for another day.⁵ John de St. Omer, while he was mayor of Lynn, gave, on the part of the town, wine to the value of 11*s.* for the feast of St. Dominic (Aug. 5th); this appears to have been in 13 Edw. I (1285), in which year the friar-minors had also, for their Feast of St. Francis (Oct. 4th) six flagons of wine which cost 18*d.*⁶ The executors of Queen Eleanor of Castile, shortly after Michaelmas, 1291, gave 100*s.* for this convent to F. William de Hotham provincial, through J. de Berewyk.⁷ At the beginning of May, 1300, Edward I passed through Lynn, and on the 16th, being again at Gaywood, sent an alms of 15*s.* through F. William de Lynn, for a day's food.⁸ Edward II arriving at Lynn, Feb. 8th, 1325-6, gave 15*s.* to forty-five friars of this house, through F. Robert de Elme, for a day's food.⁹ Edward III in passing through the town, Sept. 18th, 1328, gave 14*s.* 8*d.* to the forty-four religious here, by the hand of F. Henry de Wysebech.¹⁰

Thomas de Wynghfeld (lord of Lethingham) July 17th, 1378, bequeathed five marks to each convent of mendicants in Norfolk and

¹ Inquis. ad. q. d. 3 Edw. II, No. 57. Jurors: Lambert de St. Omer, Pet. Lomb, John de Keteleston, Elias de Warham, Tho. de Barston, Geoffr. Baud, Pet. le Berchere, Pet. Dice, Will. Ty..., Will. de Whinebergh, Rich. de Dersingham, and Will. de Barston.

² Pat. 30 Edw. III, p. 2, m. 9. Rot. fin., 30 Edw., III, m. 2.

³ Escaet., 21 Edw. I, No. 71. Jurors: ... le Clerk of Wotton, Hen. de Woken', Geoff. de Geycon', Rog. le Hyriche of Wotton, Walt. de Petgrave of Wygenh', Steph. Fitz Walter of Tylneye, John Skot of Grymeston', Rog. de Langham of

Avende, Nich. Swetyne of Clentherwaricon, Nich. fitz John of Wygenh', Phil. de Boynake, and Will. de Bosco of Mid-delton.

⁴ Pat. 21 Ed. I, m. 17.

⁵ Rot. garder. de oblat. et elem. regis, 5 Edw. I.

⁶ Blomefield.

⁷ Rot (garder.) liberat. pro regina etc., 19-20 Edw. I.

⁸ Lib. quotid. contrarot. garder., 28 Edw. I.

⁹ Rot. garder. de part. expens. forinsec. 19 Edw. II.

¹⁰ Contrarot. cust. garder. regis, 2 Ed. III.

Suffolk, to celebrate for his soul : will proved Sept. 27th. *Sir John de Platz* (of Weting, Norfolk, who died June 2nd, 1388) June 22nd, 1385, bequeathed to all the houses of friars in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and Cambridgeshire, to every house five marks : will *pr.* July 16th, 1389. *Robert Howard*, knt., in 1389, bequeathed 20s. to the friar-preachers of Lenn : will *pr.* in July. *John Elvered*, rector of Oxburgh, Oct. 1st, 1416, bequeathed 20s. to every order of friars at Lynn. *Elizabeth widow of William Elmham, knt.*, Dec. 1st, 1419, assigned forty marks to the convents of friars in the counties of Suffolk, Norfolk, and Cambridge, to perform the trental of St. Gregory for her soul, and for the souls of all to whom she was beholden : will *pr.* Feb. 14th, 1419-20. *Katharine Braunch*, Aug. 3rd, 1420, bequeathed 40s. to the Augustinian friars of Lenn, and 20s. to every house of friars in the town : will *pr.* Sept. 5th. *Richard Peverell* of Tylneye, esq., Mar. 15th, 1423-4, bequeathed 6s. 8d. to each convent of mendicant friars in Lenn and Southlenn, to pray and celebrate for his soul, and the souls to which he was beholden : will *pr.* May 15th, 1424. *Nicholas Beaupre* of Outwell, Sept. 24th, 1428, bequeathed 4*l.* to the four orders of friars at Lenn, to celebrate eight trentals of St. Gregory for his soul ; and 40s. to F. Thomas Draytone, of the order of friar-preachers, to celebrate for his soul : will *pr.* Mar. 9th, 1429-30. *Simon Parche alias Tyler* of Watlington, Norfolk, in 1442, willed to be buried in the chancel of the friar-preachers or black-friars of Lyn, and gave 16*l.* to the fabric of the stalls to be new made. *Jane lady de Bardoff*, widow, Sept. 7th, 1446, assigned five marks to each order of friars within the diocese of Norwich, for the souls of her parents, benefactors, and especially for her deceased husband mercifully to obtain grace for his soul : will *pr.* Apr. 3rd, 1447. *Henry Inglose*, knt., June 20th, 1451, bequeathed 20s. to every house of friar-minors, preachers, Carmelites, and Augustinians in Norfolk : will *pr.* July 4th. *Thomas Shuidham* of Narburgh, Jan. 15th, 1471-2, bequeathed 6s. 8d. to every order of mendicant friars in Lenn : will *pr.* Apr. 14th. *Thomas Constantyn* of Lenn Episcopi, gent., Oct. 8th, 1476, bequeathed to the four orders of mendicant friars in Lenn and Suthlenn to each house by itself four rams : will *pr.* Nov. 14th, 1477. *John Heyden*, Mar. 24th, 1476-7, bequeathed to each house of mendicant friars in Norwich, Lenn, Brunham, Walsyngham, Thetford, Blakeney, and Jerne-muth, five marks for five years, for an anniversary by their convents : will *pr.* June 20th, 1480. *Cecily Weyland* of Oxeburgh, Mar. 28th, 1484, bequeathed 15s. to the friars of the order of preachers of Lenn Episcopi : will *pr.* Sept. 6th. *Margaret Odeham* of Bury Seynt Edmunds, widow, Oct. 8th, 1492, bequeathed to every house of friars in Cambrege, Lynne, Norwiche, Thetford, Clare, Sudbury, to each of these houses 6s. 8d. : will *pr.* Nov. 8th. *Elizabeth Clere* of Takeueston, widow of Robert Clere, esq., Jan. 13th, 1492-3, bequeathed to every house and convent of friars in Norfolk, 20s., and also every order and convent of the four orders of friars in Norfolk were to say dirge and mass by note for two years, on her year-day or within three days after in their own churches, for her soul and the souls of her husband and her friends to whom she was beholden ; every order to have therefore 10s. a-year : will *pr.* Mar. 6th. *John Byrd*, parson of Old Lynn, by will in 1505, gave "a rede dole in Geywode to the black friars of Lynn."¹

¹ Harl. MSS., cod. x. Blomefield. Wills munds (Camden Society.)
from the commissary of Bury St. Ed-

The provincial chapters, which frequently assembled in various priories for the good government of the friar-preachers of England and Wales, were celebrated at Lynn, in 1304, at the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, in 1344 and 1365, at the Assumption; and without doubt would be found here in several other years, if the records of these assemblies could be brought to light. The expenses of the three chapters were partly defrayed by the pension which was regularly paid out of the royal exchequer. Edward I gave, July 8th, 1304, twenty marks, being five marks more than the usual allowance, on account of the number of friars to be present being doubled.¹ Edward III gave, July 9th, 1344, 15*l.*; and May 21st, 1365, 10*l.*²

The priory of Lynn lay within the division of the Dominican province called the visitation of Cambridge. Very few names of the priors can be collected. F. William de Bagthorpe or Bakthorp, who governed the community in Richard II's reign, was a man of note in his time. He was appointed by the master-general of the order, Apr. 1st, 1393, visitor of the visitations of Cambridge and York, for suppressing some discontents which had been stirred up, on account of private favours granted and ordinations promulgated by the master: by the master's letters of Apr. 4th, he was released from his priorship, as soon as they were read in chapter before the assembled brethren, while at the same time he was assigned to Lynn (as he had been elected prior from another house) and was also confirmed in the favours and cell conceded for his use here. If thus deposed, Bagthorpe was immediately reinstalled in the office; and being S. Th. Mag. was also professor of Sacred Scripture to the students of the house. As commissary of the master-general, he was deputed, Nov. 29th, 1395, to institute enquiries into nine articles charged against the provincial, F. Thomas Palmer, and Feb. 4th following, was empowered to displace him, if six of the articles were proved, being then also made vicar-general in case the province became thus deprived of a head. Palmer was removed, June 28th; and Bagthorpe ruled the province till another provincial, elected August 15th, 1397, at Newcastle-on-Tyne, was confirmed, Oct. 20th, by the master.³ In 1488, F. John Braynes occurs as prior.⁴

Besides F. William already mentioned in 1300, there were two other religious who bore the family name of Lenn or Lynn. F. John de Lenn, in 1320, was a black-friar of London. From 1329, F. Thomas de Lenn was the companion of F. Nicholas de Herle who, being in favour with Edward III, was employed in state affairs and embassies; in 1335, going to the Holy Land, F. Thomas had a gift of 40*s.* from the king, Apr. 25th, for the expenses of the way, and thus he disappears from view. F. Richard *Wisbu* (*Wisbech*?) was assigned to this house at Lynn as lector, June 20th, 1397, by the master-general. In a similar manner, at the same time, F. John de Merton was made a conventual here, and was not to be removed without the consent of F. Master William Bagthorpe.⁵

Among religious were found a scanty few, who led a more ascetic life

¹ Lib. garder. (elemos.) 32 Edw. I: Addit. MSS. cod. 883*f.* Exit. scac. pasch. 32 Edw. I. m. 3.

² Exit. scac. pasch. 18 Edw. III. m. 16, and 39 Edw. III, m. 11,

³ Reg. mag. gen. ord. Romæ asservat.

⁴ Blomefield.

⁵ Lib. garder. 14 Edw. II. Rot. garder, 3-4 Edw. III. Contrarot. garder. dni regis. 8-9 Edw. III. Reg. mag. gen. ord.

than the rest of the brethren, and amidst a community united to their rule the seclusion of the anchorite. Hence sprang the usage of constructing a solitary cell in the midst of a cloister. Such an anchoretage existed in the Dominican priory at Lynn; and about the year 1440, it was occupied by F. Richard Fraunces, better known (probably under a *nom de plume*) as "Galfridus Grammaticus dictus, frater ordinis S. Dominici." He was bred if not born in Norfolk. Tanner thinks his name might have been Geoffrey Starkey; but *he* was probably only a former owner of the codex which fell into Tanner's hands. This F. Richard Fraunces, "inter quatuor parietes pro Christo inclusus," spent his spare time in writing and compiling several works chiefly of a philological character. He produced the following:—*In doctrinale Alexandri, lib. 3.* *In Joannis Garlandi Synonyma, lib. 1.* Garland's Synonyma was printed by Richard Pynson in 1496, 1500, 1509, "cum expositione magistri Galfridi Anglici;" and by Wynkyn de Worde in 1500, 1505, 1510, 1514, 1517, 1518. *In Æquivoca ejusdem, lib. 1;* printed as *Multorum Verborum Equivocorum Interpretatio*, by W. de Worde in 1490, 1506, 1514; and by Pynson in 1514. *Expositiones Hymnorum, lib. 1.* *Hortus Vocabulorum, lib. 1,* printed by W. de Worde, in 1500. *Medulla Grammatices, lib. 1,* which is a Latin-English Dictionary. *Præceptiones Pueriles, lib. 1.* His English-Latin Dictionary was printed by Pynson in 1499, and has again appeared among the publications of the Camden Society: *Promptorium Parvulorum sive Clericorum*, *Lexicon Anglo-Latinum (Dictionarius Anglo-Latinus) Princeps, auctore fratre Galfrido Grammatico dicto e prædicatoribus (ex ordine Fratrum Prædicatorum) Lenne Episcopi, Northfolciensi (circiter) A.D. circa MCCCCXL olim e prelis Pynsonianis (ex officina Pynsoniana) editum, nunc ab integro, commentariolis subjectis, ad fidem codicum recensuit Albertus Way (A.M.), Londini: sumptibus Societatis Camdensis.* The first vol. was published in 1843, the second in 1853, and the third (with the variations in the title bracketed above) in 1863; containing altogether 563 pages, 4to. This work is the earliest English-Latin Dictionary in existence, and is invaluable to the archæologist in explaining obsolete English words and curious provincialisms. The direction of F. Geoffrey's literary labours seems to point to the conclusion that the Dominicans of Lynn taught a grammar school as they did at Yarm, and probably at other houses. In 1497, F. John Lot was the recluse.

About the year 1456 the priory, which had become decayed and even partly ruinous by time, was also devastated by fire. The cause of this accident is unknown, but the extent of it must have been considerable, for twenty years later the buildings were not fully restored. The master-general, June 24th, 1476, empowered the prior for five years from that date to admit as many as he would to the benefits and suffrages of the order, provided that the alms thus accruing were applied to the repair of the convent.¹

The registers of the masters of the order, about this time, contain various notices concerning members of the community at Lynn.

Dec. 13th, 1475. F. Nicholas *Meryell*² who out of the alms of his

¹ Reg. mag. gen. ord.

² *M'yell*. But the contraction is the common one for *us*. It is often difficult to recognise proper names in these registers. The Italian scribe is guided either by his tongue or his eye: for instance, he

changes Fitzgibbon into Fissbone; and while studiously copying the alphabetical letters before him writes Sthronysbyrie, where he evidently has Schrewysbyrie (Shrewsbury) before him.

friends and kinsfolk has done much in the order, has this, that all the friends and benefactors, of whom according to his conscience he gives the names of a good many, are received, whether living or dead, to the participation of all the goods and suffrages of the whole order: and also the chamber, garden, and other goods conceded to him by the order are confirmed to him, and no one can occupy them without his leave; and all other favours justly granted to him are confirmed.

June 24th, 1476. F. John Hille, or de Monte, is assigned to his convent of Lenia Episcopi, and as long as he lives cannot be removed by anyone except the master-general; as he was assigned by the general chapter of the order, in 1468, to read the Sentences in the convent of Oxford, and has not yet complied with the decree, he is again assigned there "ad legendum sententias pro gradu et forma magisterii," according to the custom of his province and that convent. Master John Goldysborow has this grace, on account of the king and queen of England and other nobles, that he may accept any bishopric or dignity to which he may be chosen by the apostolic see, with the benediction, favour, and suffrages of the order; resigning, however, the goods of the order, according to custom, or giving security if he is allowed the use of them for life: and he may remain in the service of the king and queen at court.

July 8th, 1489. F. Robert Stephensum has license to eat flesh-meat, to wear linen, and to dwell in any convent.

June 20th, 1490. F. John Wetherell may dwell in any convent, with the good will of the president.

May 29th, 1491, F. John Londem, of the convent of London, is assigned here.

July 29th, 30th, 1497. F. Robert Stowerson has license to be "extra ordinem" (*i.e.*, in a benefice or chaplaincy.) The prior has license to dispense F. Thomas Lambard and F. Richard Cchersfort, for the priesthood. F. John Lot, the recluse, is empowered to choose a confessor, who may hear his confession once a month. The prior may, under the convent seal, receive and inscribe brethren and sisters to the suffrages of the order. F. William Videnhus prior cannot be forced to accept office. And under no date of day, F. John Beclys, with the license of the sovereign pontiff, is received into the order from that of the Cisterians, and is assigned to this convent.

In 1497, mention is made of a chapel of St. Catharine in this conventual church, and in the body of the church was an image of our Lady.¹

When the valuation of all ecclesiastical property in England and Wales was taken in 1535, F. Thomas *Lovell* being prior, the friar-preachers of Lynn held a tenement let at 10s. a-year, and a parcel of meadow at 8s.: total 18s. (not 18s. 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. as Speed says) a-year; the tenth to the crown being 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.² The community was destroyed in 1538, when the house was surrendered to the king by deed in 30th Henry VIII, but dateless as to day, which was executed by the prior and eleven religious. Willis gives the date of the surrender, Sept. 30th. The parties who subscribed the deed were, Thomas Lovett prior, Robert Skott bachelor, Thomas Rooss, Lawrence Curteys, John Harbard, Thomas Carton, William Bruester, Thomas Becke, Anketin Grays, John Tyndeale, Thomas Wincent, and Reginald Robynson.³

¹ Blomefield.

² Valor Ecclesiasticus, vol. iii.

³ Surrenders, Exchequer, No. 143.

The site and lands of this priory were soon all let to tenants. The site with the gardens, orchards, &c., was taken by Thomas Waters for 5s. a-year. The tenement already demised for a term of years continued to be held by John Hollis or Hills, at 8s. a-year; to whom also the conduit of spring-water had been leased for 13s. 4d. a-year. The meadow remained in the occupation of Cicily Some, for 10s. a-year, and the land in Middleton from whence the water-spring flowed was let to Richard Wall for 2s. 4d. a-year. Total yearly rents, 38s. 8d.¹ A lease of the whole (with the reservation of trees, woods, and superfluous buildings) was granted, Nov. 12th, 1539, to Thomas Ellys, of Attleborough, for twenty-one years from the previous Michaelmas, at the same rents.² The particulars for the grant of all the possessions of the black-friars of Dunwich and Lynn were made out, Nov. 10th, 1544, to John Eyre or Eyer, who soon completed the purchase; and the property was granted, Feb. 20th following, to him and his heirs and assigns, by fealty only and not in capite, with the issues from the previous Michaelmas.³

John Eyre, esq. was one of the king's auditors of the court of augmentations, and became a great receiver and trafficker in monastic lands. He married Margaret, daughter of Sir Thomas Blenerhasset, widow of Sir John Spelman, eldest son of Sir John Spelman, and died without issue. From Mr. Eyre the Blackfriars of Lynn passed to a priest, who conveyed it to Thomas Waters of, and he had a son Edward Waters, and a daughter married to George Baker. Edward died without issue male, and left it to his daughter Elizabeth, who was married, 1st, to Nicholas Killingtree, but was soon divorced; 2nd, to Edward Bacon who had issue by her; and 3rd, to Sir John Bolls or Bowles, bart., of Scampton, co. Lincoln. Sir John Bowles and Elizabeth his wife sold this Friary to Nicholas Killingtree, who left it to his son William, and he sold it to Henry Barkenham, miller, who sold it to John Rivet, about the year 1646. So far the descent of the property is traced by Sir Henry Spelman in his *History and Fate of Sacrilege*.

In the *Iconographia Burgi perantiqui Lennæ Regis*, Anno mdcxxv, the site of the Blackfriars is represented by an oblong piece of land, enclosed by four walls with a house in the north-west corner of them. In 1738, Mackerell, speaking of the religious houses of Lynn, says, "Here remains nothing now to be seen of these Friaries and Religious Houses, but Ruins and Rubbish, being long since utterly demolished, notwithstanding the Places of their Situation are still apparent, being separately walled in round, and commonly known at this Day by their several Denominations."⁴ In 1812, Richards says of the Blackfriars, "Of this convent (once perhaps inferior to none of the rest, if indeed it did not exceed them all, both in size and magnificence) nothing is now to be seen but some old walls, whose thickness and massy appearance seem to indicate that they once sustained a large and sumptuous fabric." "The said site at present is thought to be partly the property of the corporation, and partly that of the Carey family. About the garden of the chief mansion of that family are several

¹ Ministers' Accounts, 31-32 Hen. VIII, No. 118.

² Miscellaneous Books of Court of Augm., vol. ccxii, fol. 16.

³ Particulars for grants (John Eyre) 35 Hen. VIII. Pat. 36 Hen. VIII, p. 26, m. 38(12.)

⁴ Mackerell's Hist. and Antiq. of Lynn.

scattered remains of this ancient edifice."¹ The *magnificence*, which the imagination of this writer has conjured up, may well be called into question in a ruin painfully rebuilt through a long interval of time during the disastrous Wars of the Roses. In 1821, Taylor says, that the corporation of Lynn and sundry proprietors held the ancient site, and that "few traces of the original priory are now perceptible."²

About forty years ago, even these scanty remains were swept away. There is preserved, however, a ground plan of the walls of the cloistral cemetery, which was 115 feet long and 96 feet broad, and the kitchen on the north. On the same side too was probably the refectory, where the wall showed traces of groining. It may be conjectured that the church stood on the south side, as many stone coffins and bones have been found there from time to time; the dorter or dormitory with other offices was on the east. The gate-house points out the entrance from the street. A drawing of part of the west wall is interesting, as the square-headed window was probably inserted when the priory was rebuilt after it had been desolated by fire.

¹ Richards' History of Lynn.

² Taylor's Index Monasticus (of the Diocese of Norwich.)