

ART. X.—*An ancient doorway at Nunnery, Armathwaite.*
By C. G. BULMAN.

Read at Kendal, April 21st, 1960.

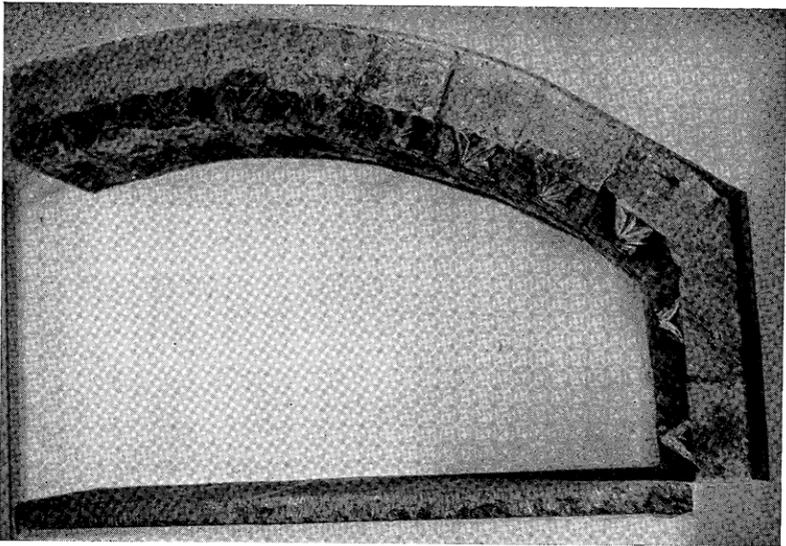
THE little that is known of this ancient and obscure convent in the Eden Valley is given in a paper by T. H. B. Graham in CW2 xvii. Of the actual buildings of the community practically nothing remains and little is known. They can never have been very extensive owing to the smallness and poverty of the convent, and in addition they suffered much from the successive invasions of the Scots. At the Dissolution there were only three nuns besides the prioress in residence and the income was only £18. 18s. per annum.

The convent and its possessions were granted in 1552 to William Grayme, and in 1694 they came into the possession of the Aglionby family. The ancient conventual buildings were almost entirely demolished by Henry Aglionby (1684—1733) who was alderman and later mayor of Carlisle; M.P. for the city 1721-2; and sheriff of the county 1733. According to Hutchinson (i 196) he demolished the conventual buildings in 1715 and erected the present mansion of Nunnery on the site.

So thoroughly were the medieval buildings destroyed to make way for the new house that very little ancient masonry is now to be seen and the lay-out of the convent is extremely uncertain. It was with great interest, therefore, that I received a report from Colonel and Mrs W. J. Shannon that an ancient doorway had been discovered in their house. The back wall of the building displays the only ancient masonry now to be seen at Nunnery and the doorway uncovered is in this wall. The old wall is constructed of rather small blocks of local red sandstone, much weathered and differing entirely in character from



Nunnery — the main front.



Nunnery — 13th-century arch.

Photo: Robert Hogg

the fine ashlar of the remainder of the mansion and there can be little doubt that this wall is a remaining fragment of the original conventual buildings. The external outline of the door can still be seen blocked up. When this ancient doorway was filled in and plastered over, a wall was built against it internally, dividing it into two unequal parts. It is the larger part, now in the kitchen, which has been uncovered.

When built this doorway was some 7 ft. wide. It is spanned by a segmental arch about 5 ft. 9 in. internally at the springing and rising to 7 ft. 2 in. at the highest point above the present floor level. The original floor level would be considerably lower of course. It is competently constructed, and moulded internally with a hollow chamfer. Each jamb-stone and voussoir is decorated with what is technically known as "dog-tooth" ornament, a low, square pyramid, cut to produce the semblance of a four-leaved flower. This is a development of the Norman zig-zag and it developed further into the naturalistic four-leaved flower of the Decorated period. This particular ornament is extremely common in the Early English period of architecture and is often lavishly used. It appears on a smaller scale on the great arches of the main arcade at Carlisle cathedral, and it enables the Nunnery door to be assigned to the E.E. period, possibly *c.* 1250. These ornaments at Nunnery are large; 4 in. x 4 in. in size, and they vary slightly, showing that more than one workman may have been employed in the erection of the door. It is tempting to suppose that the doorway might have been constructed by some of the workmen who were employed on the erection of the E.E. choir of Carlisle cathedral, then in course of erection.

The carving is in excellent condition and as sharp as the day when it was executed. It has obviously never been exposed to the weather and it may have led from one of the domestic buildings of the convent into the cloister. So complete has been the destruction of the

ancient buildings previous to the erection of the existing mansion that even the position of its most important feature, the chapel, is unknown.

The existing mansion is a fine and — for Cumberland — an early example of full Classical design, well proportioned and solidly constructed, and is worthy of illustration in its own right.

The Society is indebted to Col. and Mrs Shannon for drawing attention to this ancient door, and for their care in preserving it. I am indebted to Mr Robert Hogg and Miss K. S. Hodgson for the excellent photographs.