

## Recent Discoveries at St. Mary's Priory, Hurley.

By COL. C. N. RIVERS-MOORE.

**T**HE property including the remains of St. Mary's Priory, now known as Ladye Place, was purchased by the present owners, Col. and Mrs. Rivers-Moore, in the year 1924. Full accounts of the buildings and the histories connected with them can be found in books written by the former Vicar of Hurley, the Rev. F. T. Wethered, entitled "HURLEY AND LADYE PLACE" and "HURLEY CHARTERS AND SEALS."

For the benefit of readers who cannot obtain these books I give a chronological summary of the principal points.

1. An important ford existed at Hurley in the fifth century, and appears to have been defended by an earthwork still to be seen in the grounds of Danesfield house on the Buckinghamshire side of the river.

(The name of Harley-ford House still remains).

2. In the year 870 the Danes came 'up by the Tamese' and a battle was fought at Danesfield in which the English were defeated and the church at Hurley doubtless destroyed.

3. Domesday Book tells us that the Hurley Manor belonged to Easgar, Master of the Horse to King Edward the Confessor, and that a church (but apparently not a Priory) existed at that time. A charter dated 15th year of Richard II also refers to the fact that Editha, sister of King Edward, lies buried at this place.

4. Easgar's lands were given to Geoffrey de Mandeville by William the Conqueror. Geoffrey founded a Priory in the year 1086 in memory of his first wife, and presented it to the Abbey of Westminster. Some of the existing buildings and most of the church date from this time. The original foundation charter still exists and is preserved in Westminster Abbey.

5. The Priory remained in the hands of the Benedictine monks till the dissolution in 1535, when it was valued at £121.

6. The land passed through different hands and eventually



was purchased by the Lovelace family. Richard Lovelace erected a great Elizabethan mansion here in the year 1600, and was created first Baron of Hurley. A full description of this mansion can be found in the Gentleman's Magazine.

7. Amongst the distinguished owners of Ladye Place will be found the name of Kempenfelt, brother of the unfortunate Admiral who was drowned in the "Royal George."

The house eventually fell into bad repair and was demolished in 1837.

8. The church underwent considerable 'restoration' in the year 1850. Many interesting features were ruthlessly torn out and 'Norman' work replaced. A very full account of the church before this change appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine for 1839.

#### THE EXISTING BUILDINGS.

(SEE PLAN A.).

The buildings standing to-day are grouped around a courtyard which partly occupies the site of the original cloister garth. On the south side of the court is the parish church, approximately 100 feet long by 20 feet broad. This is now a simple aisleless nave with small round-headed Norman windows on either side. The east wall is a reconstruction of 1850.

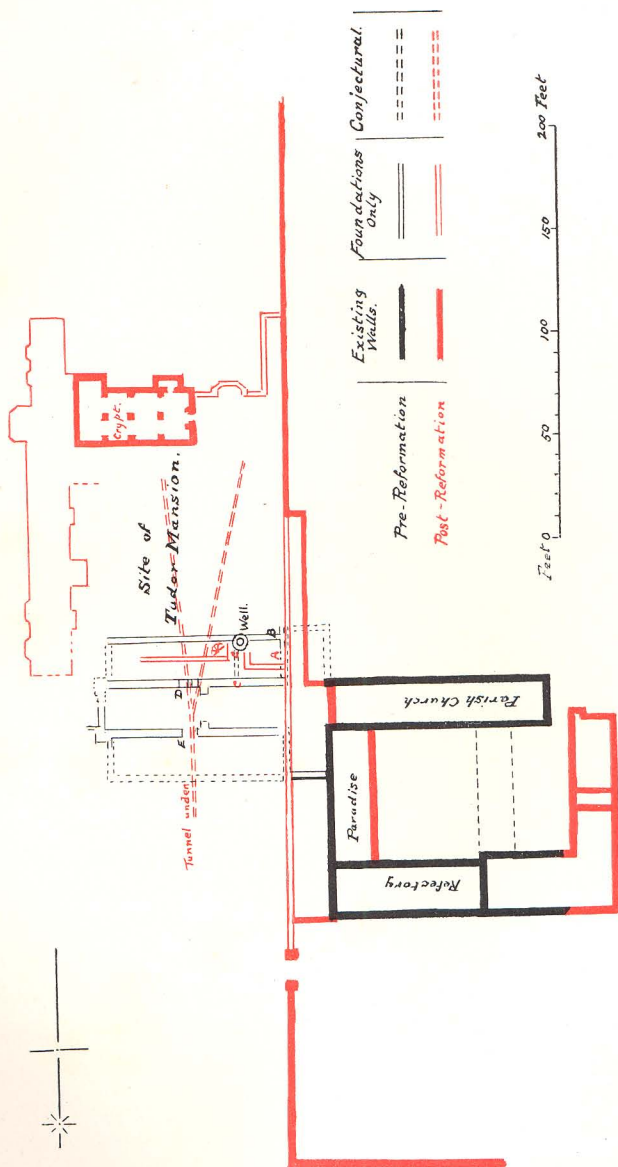
On the opposite (north) side of the court is the refectory. Probably this was part of Geoffrey de Mandeville's original Priory, but the great pointed windows on the north side must have been inserted at a later date. The south wall of the refectory is a reconstruction, made after the dissolution, when the refectory was converted into stables for Lovelace's mansion and a large hay loft inserted.

West of the refectory is now a large Tudor barn, occupying the site of the earlier kitchens. It can be seen that the walls have been raised to their present height in Tudor times and many fragments of monastic work inserted in the new part.

Joined on to this building is a later group now used as a garage and schoolroom, forming the west side of the courtyard.

The eastern range is now occupied by a building known as the Paradise, which is believed to have been re-erected on the

PLAN A.



*Ladye Place, Hurley.*

*General Plan of Buildings and Excavations to May, 1934.*

actual cloister foundation. The upper rooms at both ends of this building have windows (now blocked) looking into the church and the refectory respectively.

Detached from this group of buildings is the remaining portion of the crypt, believed to have formed part of the monastery before the dissolution, but used as the cellar of Ladye Place by Lovelace. Its date cannot be earlier than the 16th century and it may have been the undercroft of the infirmary. It was here that the plotters met to arrange for the dethronement of James II and his succession by William of Orange. The main drain tunnel (which still exists), leading from the cellars to the moat, was used as a secret means of access by the revolutionaries.

The present dwelling house has been arranged round the old farm house of the Priory, parts of which date from the 16th century. Other interesting buildings still standing are the tythe barn and dove-cote, both still perfect and said to date from 1306.

#### THE EXCAVATIONS.

The study of the recorded histories by the owners occupied several years and no serious excavation was attempted beyond a trial pit against the north east corner of the church, to see if there was any indication of an extension at that point. Beyond a flat floor or pavement of hard chalk at a depth of about three feet nothing of interest was found on this occasion.

It should be noted that the ground around the church and the actual church floor itself were raised two or three feet at the last restoration because of flood trouble. This fact adds considerably to the labour involved in finding the early walls.

In August, 1930, however, the writer received communications pointing to the existence of an old well in the vicinity of the east end of the church and after much consideration it was decided to make a new investigation. The plan of the Tudor mansion of Lovelace had already been fairly accurately traced out, as it appeared through the turf of the lawn during an exceptionally dry season (see plan A).

It was recognised that there must have been a well somewhere in the courtyard of this house and that some relics of interest might be found in it.

The first attempt was made on August 24th close to the church yard wall at the south east corner of the church and almost immediately sundry brick and chalk foundations of the Tudor mansion came to light. (see 'A' on Plan). These proved to include a fireplace with a brick hearth, badly burnt up, and below this hearth another about one foot deeper. In the back wall between these two levels appeared a small brick arch, roughly blocked up. This may have been the door of a bread oven behind the fire place.

Still lower at the same point, at a depth of about five feet, was found the foot of a skeleton, buried facing the east in the usual manner.

A few feet from this point was later brickwork which proved to be the base of a brick cistern, the floor being constructed of two layers of hard bricks with six inches of stiff clay between.

On August 26th was found an entirely different type of wall from those previously encountered ('B' on plan). This was well faced with good flints and about four feet in thickness. Also it was noticed that the alignment of this wall was not the same as those of Lovelace's mansion but that it was exactly parallel to the south wall of the church, and of similar construction. This was therefore taken to be the south wall of a south transept or chapel. Against this flint wall at a depth of two feet was found a small portion of tile flooring, badly broken but in its original position. This was carefully taken up and cemented together and is now in the private museum.

Following along the new line thus found for twelve feet a break occurred and for a time the excavators were nonplussed ; but after some patient exploration the top curve of a well head appeared in view cutting into the line of the Norman wall.

The well was completely filled with building debris, and this was gradually removed. For the first two feet below the surface the well was lined with alternate layers of brick and chalk, but

below this it was lined solely with chalk blocks. The internal diameter is three feet. Water was struck at a depth of ten feet (approximately the level of the Thames) and at about fourteen feet work had to be stopped. A further attempt was made in 1933 to get the water pumped out and to reach the original bottom of the well. The Marlow Fire Brigade arranged to come on a practice evening and found it necessary to pump at the rate of over 300 gallons per minute to keep the water down. Unfortunately before the bottom had been sunk more than two feet further a fire call came and the Fire Brigade had to leave hurriedly.

It had been hoped that relics might be found at the bottom of the well which would fix its date of construction. So far only one broken teapot of fairly late date has been brought up.

Near the well a new wall appeared running northward only about eighteen inches wide and built of fragments of old chalk blocks, many being carved. (C.C. on plan).

Many fragments of floor tiles of 12th or 13th century date also appeared from time to time. In one spot near the well a portion of pavement of weak mortar was found, clearly showing the impression of the floor tiles which formerly lay there, laid diagonally. This confirmed the original level of the church floor at two feet below the lawn level.

The work at this point was considerably confused owing to the different floors laid over the Norman levels by Lovelace and later occupants of the mansion. In some cases three distinct floors had to be removed. The top one consisted partly of brick on edge and partly of flag stones. One of these when turned over proved to be a large portion of the base of a Norman column with a 'claw' ornament in the angle. The shape of this base showed that the column must have been erected against a wall.

This find was the more surprising as all the other parts of the Norman structure were composed of clunch and flint, stone having been evidently very scarce or difficult to collect.

The narrow wall was followed northwards for 15 feet when it came to a broken end and was lost. Further careful search

eventually revealed a different wall of chalk faced with flints running east and west, and almost in line with the south wall of the existing church. This wall was five feet thick at the footings and apparently stepped back to about four feet at the floor level.

A break occurred in this wall at a distance of 55 feet east of the east wall of the church and it was thought at first that the end had been reached, as it turned distinctly to the north ; but here again another break was found only three feet beyond the angle. Subsequently the true reason for these breaks was discovered. Plan A. clearly shows the positions at D and E where the Tudor builders had cut through the old footings in order to construct their main drain tunnels.

Gradually nearly the whole of the Priory Church chancel was cleared down to the floor level and it was found that all the tiles or flags (if any) with which it had been covered had been removed, leaving only a thin layer of rammed chalk or poor lime mortar on which the tiles formerly lay.

The east wall has completely disappeared at the southern corner, where Lovelace's mansion had crossed it, but near by was found a large portion of the window jambs, cut out of clunch, and also some small fragments of the painted glass and a scrap of the lead work which probably belonged to this same window.

Following round the north side of the chancel the foundation walls were more distinct and at three points the original plinth stones of a north chancel door were disclosed in position. ('E' on plan). Plate I. Just outside this door the excavators were fortunate enough to find a large portion of coloured tile flooring still in position though crushed and broken in places. Some of these tiles show heraldic designs as indicated in the illustrations. (Plate II.).

After clearing the centre as far as possible an attempt was made to establish the position and size of the north transept. This had been already attempted in the case of the south transept where the work originated, but at that side there was much confusion owing to the later house having been superimposed.



RECENT DISCOVERIES AT ST. MARY'S PRIORY, HURLEY.

PLATE I.



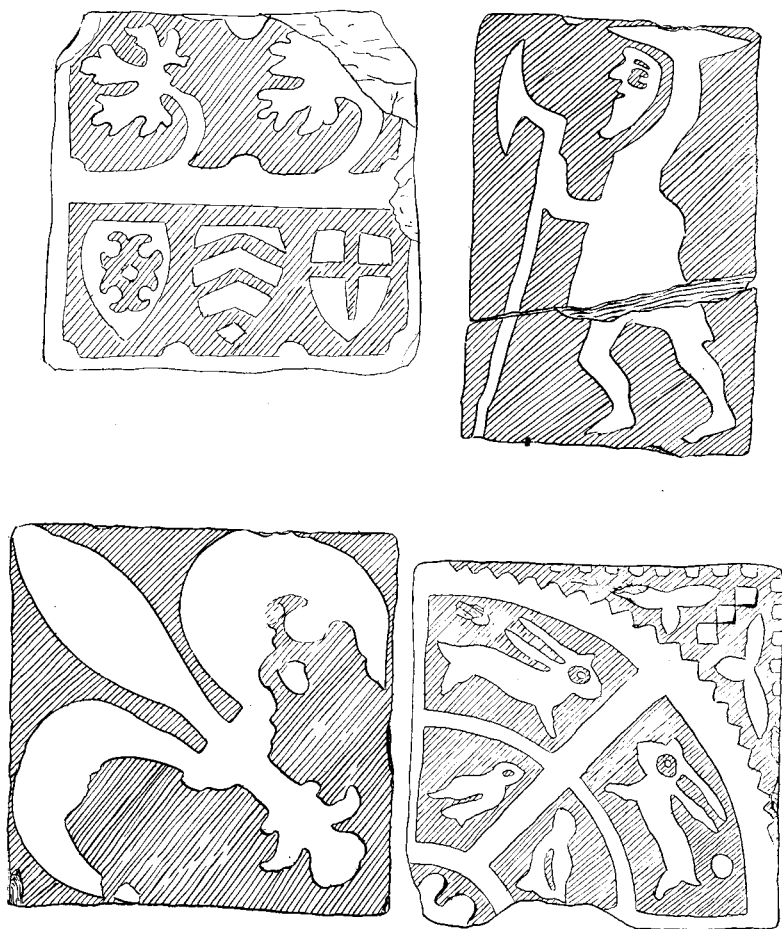
*North Wall of Chancel,  
showing corner stones of a north doorway.*



*Pavement of 12th century coloured tiles, found in North Aisle  
or Chapel.*

RECENT DISCOVERIES AT ST. MARY'S PRIORY, HURLEY,

PLATE II.



*Floor tiles from Chancel (much reduced in size).*

Eventually a wall, believed to be the north transept wall, was discovered joining on to the Paradise building at a depth of nearly four feet below the ground.

Subsequent digging showed that a south aisle or chapel had been added, reaching to the extreme east end of the church, and it may be that a corresponding aisle will be found on the north side. The existence of the coloured pavement shows that there must have been an aisle or chapel of some kind here.

Let us now make an attempt to arrive at a reconstruction of the Priory buildings in the light of the recent discoveries. (See Plan B.)

#### THE CLOISTERS.

The ends of the beams forming part of the cloister roof can still be seen in the north wall of the church, but the opposite wall to this (the south wall of the refectory) shows nothing as the visible portion is a reconstruction. It is possible that the part of this wall which is now included in the Paradise building would show the roof line of the cloister at this point if laid bare. There is a note left by the late Rev. F. T. Wethered which states that five lines of foundations were disclosed when a drain was laid across the courtyard, but unfortunately the plan which he made of these has been lost.

Both the church and the refectory have windows high up at the eastern end which are now blocked, and these would open into the bedrooms of the Paradise. Both these windows were obviously built as external lights and it is therefore probable that any structure which formerly stood on the site of the Paradise was without an upper story. The writer believes that this building actually occupies the position of the eastern range of the cloister and not the dormitory as was formerly thought to be the case. The fact that its western wall is built of mixed materials from older buildings supports this theory, and excavation under the floor of the dining room of the Paradise showed that the foundation of this wall was of heavy chalk blocks and extended to six feet below the present floor level.

The site of the western range of the cloister buildings is fairly certain; it stood just west of the path from the refectory door to the north door of the church (now blocked). The long window

in the north wall of the church would have been a door from the upper floor of this range into the church gallery.

The type of the cloisters is still uncertain, but during the excavation under the Paradise dining room small portions of columns of Purbeck marble were found which correspond to others dug up years ago and which fit on to double bases of the same material. This would indicate a cloister of Norman or Early English design supported on twin columns. It is hoped that further excavations may confirm this.

Floor tiles were found at a depth of two feet below the present surface in the north east corner of the cloister garth ; curiously enough all these were laid with the pattern downwards.

#### THE DORMITORY.

Following the theory that the Paradise occupies the site of the east cloister, the dormitory should be east of this again ; the present east wall of Paradise possibly being the actual west wall of the dormitory.

A trial pit was dug across the site and a good foundation came to light running east from the Paradise drawing room in the position which would be occupied by the north wall of the north transept. This was about four feet below the surface.

Further work on this part should disclose the CHAPTER HOUSE, possibly divided from the transept by a slype.

#### THE PRIORY CHURCH.

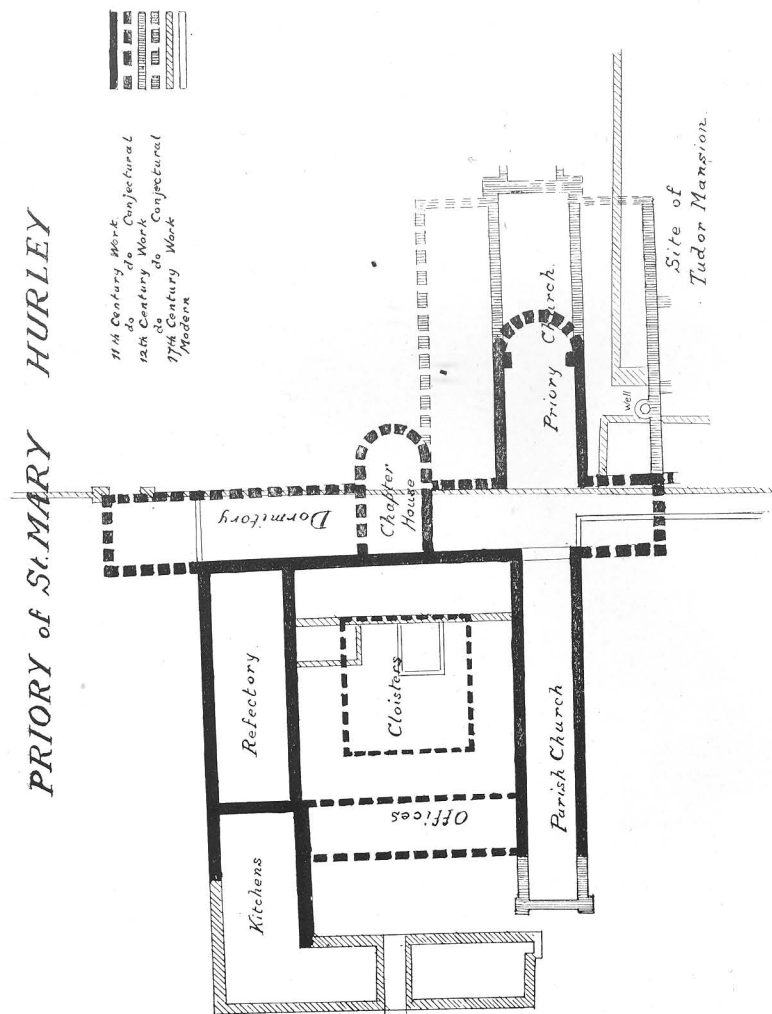
The date of the dedication (or re-dedication) of the church is definitely established as 1086, but this does not necessarily mean that the church was complete at that time. On the contrary it need only have had one usable altar at that date. The existing part of the church, which is now believed to be only the western part of the nave, is certainly early Norman work ; some authorities even maintain that part of it is Saxon.

On the other hand most of the fragments turned up in the recent excavations show characteristic work of the 12th and 13th centuries.

Taking a general survey of all the discoveries, I am of the opinion that the 11th century church dedicated in 1086 was

RECENT DISCOVERIES AT ST. MARY'S PRIORY, HURLEY.

PLAN B.



probably cruciform in plan and may not have extended as far west as it does at present. The transepts would have been just east of the Paradise building as already shown. Unfortunately the south transept has been much cut about by the builders of Ladye Place in the year 1600, and part of it would lie in the present graveyard so that it cannot be explored.

The chancel was probably about forty to fifty feet in length and may have ended in an apse; but here again the Tudor builders have cut through the Norman foundations to make the main drain tunnel which still exists.

This church must then have been considerably altered and enlarged at different periods. The apse, if it existed, was pulled down and the chancel lengthened to nearly ninety feet, and a south aisle or chapel of nearly the same length added. Most of the east wall foundations of these parts have been completely lost, but the cut blocks of clunch and fragments of glass found here indicate the type of the east window.

On the north side of the chancel was found a large part of a 12th or 13th century pavement of patterned tiles which is now preserved in the private museum. (Plate I.)

Work on this site is still proceeding and it seems that the aisle on this side was much narrower than that on the south, or it may be that this was only a sacristy or chantry chapel.

The floors generally seem to have been simply made of compacted chalk and soil over which a layer of tiles was placed; some portions indicate a slight layer of mortar below the tiles, which has preserved the impression after the tiles had been removed. If any flag stones ever existed they have all been robbed to make later buildings.

Below the floor level, at a depth of only about three feet, several burials have been found, and I have no doubt that the whole area of the church and much of the surrounding ground were filled with graves. So far no trace of any coffins or burial coverings have been seen.

The numerous portions of cut clunch which have come to light are very varied in style and section, but point generally to Early English type of architecture.

Only one large stone base of a column and a piece of chevron moulding showed Norman design. Many roof tiles are scattered over the area and these are of the common hand-made type with two holes for pegs. A few fragments show traces of a greenish glaze. There are, however, some bricks and tiles which are almost certainly of Roman origin. A few of these appear to have been built into the old walls, but whether they were brought from a distance or whether there was a Roman building close by, I am unable to say at present.

Hundreds of pot sherds have been found varying from possible Romano-British to modern times. A few fragments belong to small pipkins, and some have an early glaze with indented surface.

Two large bowls are ornamented with interesting thumb print moulding round the rim.

Besides these there are many fragments of "Bellarmine," one of which has a coat of arms quartering Warren, Clare, and de Mandeville, and another bears a Dutch coat.

All this pottery still awaits sorting and classifying before a full report of it can be prepared.

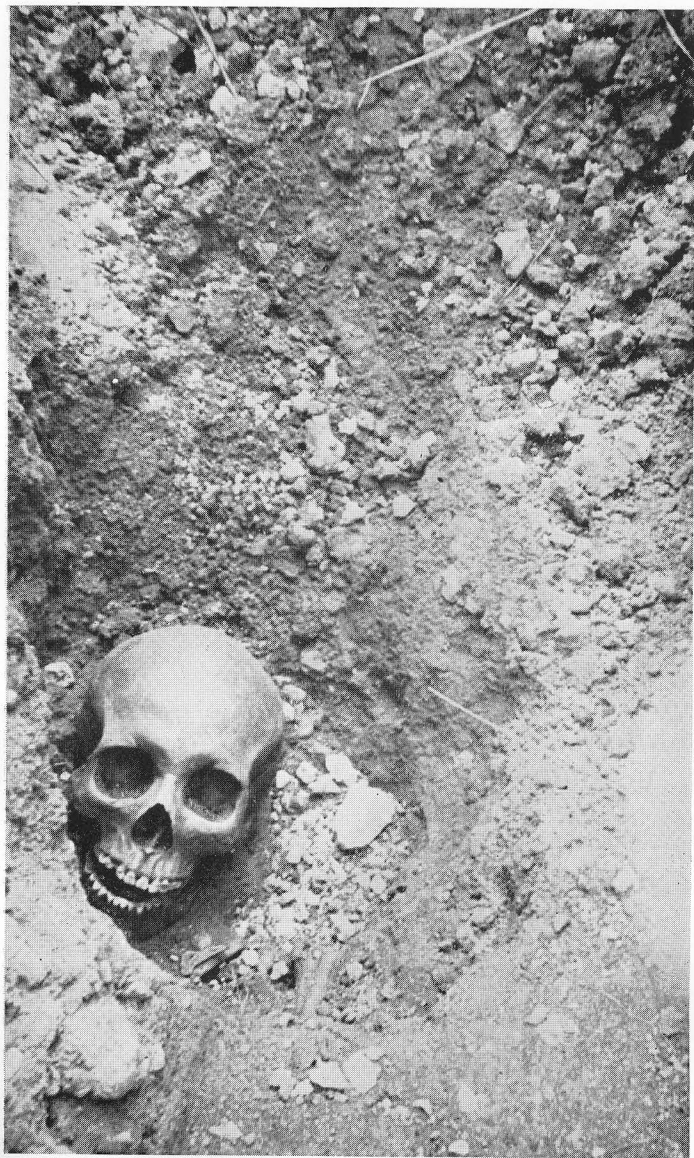
Another interesting find was that of a small bronze sun-dial, about five inches square, which was discovered about three feet below the surface in the north east corner of the cloister garth. The gnomon was detached, but was lying beside the base.

It will be realised from the preceeding notes that there is still a vast amount of work to be done before the whole of the Priory can be found and identified. This article must be taken to be in the nature of an interim report and not in any sense a complete record of the finds.

Anyone who is able and willing to help in the work of research or classification or recording will be welcomed.

RECENT DISCOVERIES AT ST. MARY'S PRIORY, HURLEY.

PLATE III.



*Interment under South Aisle.*