

Original Documents.

SURVEY OF THE ABBEY OF ST. MARY DE PRATIS, NIGH LEICESTER, TEMPORE HENRY VIII.

Communicated by Mr. J. BURTT, Assistant-Keeper of the Public Records.

THE ruins of this once important and very interesting establishment are in a very unsatisfactory condition to the antiquary. Without going into the question of the "why" or "wherefore" of the great change in the sixteenth century, which ruthlessly swept from the surface of the land the establishments which the piety and religious feeling of our ancestors had planted on so many a fertile spot and among such picturesque scenery, the intelligent inquirer into the earlier condition of our country loves to be able to trace the true outlines of such structures when wandering among their ruins; to know the exact site of the sacred building in which public worship was performed, and to be tolerably certain of the appropriation of the locality to the domestic comforts and the social needs of the institution.

Several of the religious orders followed precise rules in the arrangement of their establishments, modified, of course, at intervals, and by circumstances. So, one such establishment found fairly complete is a key to all others of the same rule. But the buildings devoted to the uses of the Canons Regular of the Order of St. Augustine, to which Leicester Abbey belonged, followed no such regular plan.

Shortly after the dissolution, the site of the abbey of Leicester came to Sir William Cavendish, one of the commissioners for visiting and receiving the surrenders of religious houses, and a mansion was built upon the spot out of the ruins of the abbey. This mansion was destroyed by fire and never rebuilt, and the site probably lay waste for some time. It has for a considerable period been occupied by nurserymen, and the surface soil has received great additions. To these circumstances may be ascribed the difficulties in rightly ascribing the different portions of the site—difficulties which the document now brought forward will, it is hoped, contribute much to remove.

In a memoir upon the abbey, read in Leicester, in May, 1854, Mr. James Thompson, the able historian of the town, reported that "even in a century after the date of the dissolution of the abbey, the very site of the church had become conjectural;" and he continued, "It is necessary to be premised that no vestige of the abbey church, cloisters, or domestic offices remains at the present day above the ground." The writer of the memoir then described the result of excavations made upon the spot, which seem to have gone a very small way towards re-

moving the existing state of uncertainty, and a conjectural appropriation of the locality is then given in this last attempt to elucidate it.

The application of the following document will doubtless be a labour of love to the inhabitants of the county of Leicester, and not without interest to a much wider circle. It is a complete survey of the "Situation, as it is called, of the "late Monasterye of Leicester." It comes from that portion of our Public Records which is so rich in documents illustrative of our local and general history, and the marvel is how it has so long escaped attention. It is without a date, but it reports the church and the domestic buildings as in "good repayr," and was most probably made very soon after the surrender of the house.

"The View of the Scytuation of the late Monasterye of Leycester.

"The Scyet conteynyth xv akers & inclosyd all about with a wall of stone, parte bryke, standyng halfe a myelle from Leycester towardys the Northe all invieorned one the south parte with a freysche water ryver curraunt by the same wherein ys ffysche of all kyndes with medowes and large opyn comen felde of arrable land yerly sawen with corne, and of the north with good battyll & fruytfull pastures & wodes there with the parke wherein ys deer parcell of the demeasnes within xl perches of the scyet, parte hygh & champyon ground vere comodyouse & parkely nygh adjoynyng to the grett woodes & pastures called the Fryth & Beemond Leeyes, the new parke, the forrest of Leycester & two other parkys perteynyng to the Duche.

"The Church, the mansyon houses & other buyldynges standyth in the myddyst of the scyet. And a halt way cast out of the north parte thereof inclosyd with hyghe walles of stone & inbattelyd leydyng into the seyde scyet, and to a basse court of barnys stabbeys & other housses of husbondrye, & to a small gate house with one turret opeynyng into an other bascourt & with a squayr lodgyng of ayther syede the gatehouse wherein be v chaumbers with chymneys & large wyndowes glasyd, the walles of stone and coveryd with leyd & foure turrets of stone at the foure corneres of the same. In the southe-est parte of the seyde court standyth the backhouse brewhouse & ij stables, all of stone & coveryd with tyell. On the west parte standyth the Church conteynyng in leynght cxi fote & in bredyth xxx fote with a large crose yell in the myddyst of the same conteynyng in leynght c fote & xxx fote in bredyth & nygh to the hyght of Westmynster church, with a hyghe squayr tower stepyll standyng at the west ende of the same wherein ys a great dorre & a large windowe glasyd openyng at the entre into the seyde scyet, and a great square house leydyng from the west ende of the seyde church to the west end of the Frater, wherein be iii great chaumberes with chymneys & large wyndowes parte glasyd, with stayres of tymber leydyng uppe to the same, the walles parte stone & coveryd with leyde, which wolde be much more comodyouse yf yt werr performed after an uniforme all with stone to the prospecte and view of the same. The Frater ys a great large house and well proporcyoned, with a large wyndowe glasyd opeynyng in to the court, the dorter standyng at the est end thereof of lyke proporcyon, with stayres leydyng on hygh to the same & valted under & belowe, wherein be gret large selleres. The Church, with they foreseyd housses, Chapter house & librarye, be all of stone &

coveryd with leyd, & buyldyd squayr about the Cloyster yerde, & a entree leydyng furth of the Cloyster in to the hall & chaumberes & other houses of offyce buylded squayr about a yarde adjoynnyng to the seyd cloyester, parte stone & parte tymber, parte coveryd with leyd & parte with tyell, with gallerees leydyng above & belawe to the same hall, chaumberes, keychyn, and other housses of offyce. And at the entree out of the bascourt to the same standyth a tower the forefrunte all bryke with a turret well proporcyoned callyd the Kynges lodgyng, wherein ys two fayr chaumberes with wyndowes glasyd, with chymneys & two inner chaumberes with chymneys, and belawe a parler with two inner chaumberes of lyke proporcyon, and a gallere leydyng from the seyd tower belawe to iij chaumberes with chymneys & to the hall, all of stone and coveryd with tyell, and to serten chaumberes above and belawe for offycers, and a hyghe galere above leydyng from the foreseyd tower at the gate to iiij chaumberes above with chymneys, and to the gret dynyng chamber standyth¹ on hyghe at the upper end of the Hall well sealyd above with the out caste of large bey wyndowes, and within the same one fayre lodgyng chaumber with an inner chaumber with chymneys and wyndowes glaysed the walles stone & coveryd with leyd. And ane lawe galere leydyn from the Halle to the kechyn and housses of offyce & to vj chaubmers for offycers, and an entree leydyng owt of the same to the fermore housses, whereof parte ys newly and lately buyldyd wherin be vj chaumberes with chymneys.

"And there be in the utter court dyvers chaumberes for servauntes in severall placys, and all the foreseyd houses with the churche be in good repayr

"There ys within the Scyet a pond yerd wherein ys x pondys, parte large and gret with a fayr orchard."

¹ *Sic*, for standing.