

DISTRIBUTION OF THE BUILDINGS OF THE DISSOLVED
MONASTERY AT ELY.

By REV. D. J. STEWART, M.A.

The monastery at Ely was surrendered to the King on November 18th, 1539—the thirty-first year of his reign—and in 1541 its church became the cathedral church of the Holy and Undivided Trinity of Ely, and the old foundation was succeeded by “the Kings newe College at Elye,” to which Henry VIII. assigned a considerable income to support a dean and eight prebendaries, “eight peticanons, four students in divinitie, xxiiij scolers to be taught Grammar, six aged men decayed in the King’s warres or Service,” and to provide a staff for the management of the estates of the new corporation. The whole site of the dissolved monastery, and all the buildings on it except “the Bishops’ Mansion House,” were to be converted into gardens and dwelling places for the various officers of the college; and four commissioners, viz., the Bishop of the diocese, Thomas Goodrich, Sir Robert Payton Knight, Philip Paris. and John Goodrich, Esquires, were appointed by Letters Patent, dated September 10th, 1541, and ordered to assign to the Dean and Prebendaries their several stalls in the choir, to put them “and the other Ministers and Persons above named into possession of their several Houses,” and finally to certify under their seals to the Chancellor and Council of the Court of Augmentation of the Revenues of the Crown that the instructions issued to them had been carried out.

The original award has not been discovered either at the Record Office or in the register of Bishop Goodrich at Ely; but there is a copy of it in the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge,¹ which is now printed at full length with the consent of the College. This document was bequeathed to this library by the Master of the College, Matthew Parker, who was the first Prebend of

¹ Nasmith’s Catalogue, Art. 27.

the second stall of the King's new corporation: it is unpagcd, and begins abruptly as follows:—

assigned to the deyns lodging

all the edifices & grownd from the gret hall to y^e galery wall westward, and from y^e olde hall with y^e kechyn called the priours kechyn with chappel & galery southward with y^e soyle of y^e same, except the stuff of y^e kechyn & except j parcell of the kechyn vnder the chappel chambre.

The gret hall to be for y^e petit canons with all the other menysters & officers to dyne and sup in with the ¹ voltes vnderneath y^e same & also the covent kechyn & the litel buttre adioynnyng to the same, with suffic' Implementes of kechyn stuff botry and napry.

doctor cox:

The celerers logeng from the fermary northward with all y^e edificez both beneth & above as far as y^e buyldyng goth south ward with the garden extending to the dorter. westward prouiso for the olde man logging: dur' vita /

dene of stoke

The paynted chamber from the firmar⁹ of the south to the outtermost part of the buyldyng northward & from the churchyard westward with all the edifices beneth & above wthe chamber annexed to y^e same called cottis chamber wthe chirchyard therto adioynnyng, and half the garden with the yle adioynnyng therto &c'

doctor meye

The blacke hostre from the firmary of the north with all the edificez both beneth & above southward with the chamber somtyme the celerers annext therto of the east & the garden annexed to the same sumtyme the firmaris with a kichen del firmar⁹ with the nether part of y^e chamberhous beryng half the charge of y^e coueryng of y^e same with the orchyard agaynst the same /

Mr. Custons

Sent hall with all the edifices both beneth & above from the firmary chappel north wall of y^e north & the wall of y^e garden of y^e said hall with the garden adioynnyng to y^e same of the south and from mr hamondes lodgyng of the east to the black hostry of the west with chamberer house viz le ouer part beryng half the charges of the coueryng &c'.

Mr ayer /

m^r hamondes lodging from the firmary of the west wthe edificez both above & beneth with garden & orchyard annexed to y^e same / & the litte chappel in the fermery church except the leade² &c.

¹ The word "wells" (or "walls") is in the MS. here, but crossed through. ² sic.

Mr hamond

The almerý with all the edificez courtes & gardens belonging to the same lacking ij chymnez wyndous &c /

doctor lyson

The sextre hall as it is compassed houssez yardes & gardens &c /

m̄r ward

The newe hall with the audite chamber and the chappel chamber called m̄r lee chambre with the houf & vautes ther about with the litle garden & pultre yard & the pondes ther & the chappel chamber & parcell of the kechyn vnderneath the same lacking one pair stayres &c.

The chamber at y^e hall dore to be for an awditt chamber /

for petit canons

Knightes chambre . / waut vnderneath f John corbet /

iiij chambers in y^e gatehouse for viij synging men

The ij porter his chambre and y^e gayl house

The shryne chambre . cottes

In the fermery

j chambre next to y^e grownd

f John bury

j chambre aboue /

f William Sewal

the lady chappel chamber /

f John spirard

f John skeel

3 chambers vnder one roof

f John Stoneham

f thomas mawndes

f Nicholas duxford

2 chambers one aboue an other f W. Withred

The malt garner ~~ouer the stable~~¹ / The schole house, the schole master chambre the vshers chambre y^e chambre for y^e childer

The cator ouer the backhouse dore

The chambre next to the stayr hede for y^e ij sextens /

The vj beedmen in the new dorter q^{ousq}

The wax house

The old hall at y^e hall dore

The brewhouse & the backhouse

Malting howse

long dorter with the privi dorter

The chamberers chambre

Milhouse with the scholehouse in y^e almerý

The olde hall in y^e sextry

The garner in y^e sextry next to y^e chirchyard

The bougry hall

The stones thorough in y^e churchyard

The butler to have a chambre in y^e volt

The stable & garner aboue.

The petteneyaris

The frayter

The chapter house to be chonged

¹ sic.

The necessary reparacion & edificez to be done wher most necessary is & most nede first bi the holl agrement of the commiss' dean & chapter bi¹ ij of the prebendarys to be assigned both to pluck down & sell & reserue for necessary buyldyng & that bi bills assigned bi the hondes of y^e commyssyoners or y^e most part of them and the same to be acomptable before the same commyssyoners or dene & chapter iiij tymes in the yere / & for defawt in y^e expenditure, or for easyng them that have y^e charge, yt shalbe lawful to y^e said commyssyoners vpon Informacion made to them bi the dene & chapter or y^e more part of them to elect other ij from tyme to tyme ones a yere bi the discretion of y^e more part of the said commyssyoners.

Mr dene of Stoke and m^r ward elect pro hoc tempore

[this is the copy of the commyssioners order wryte bi m^r John goodrik]

According to this distribution document, five of the new Prebends were housed in extensions of the Norman Infirmary—one in the Almonry, one in the Sacristy, and the eighth in “the newe hall” which had been added to one which was probably as old as the transept of Abbot Symeon A.D. 1081. The Dean was provided with a fairly extensive residence, which has lately been assigned to the Head Master of the Grammar School.

How all the other buildings enumerated were appropriated to the members of the new corporation is not stated; but the power “to pluck down & sell” which the Royal Commission possessed, together with the proceedings of surveyors acting under the authority of the House of Commons in 1649, and the conversion of part of the site of the monastery into gardens, may explain the total disappearance of various official habitations common to all Benedictine monasteries.

The new “edificez” constructed out of the old ones do not seem to have been always so planned as to be easily adapted to the requirements of modern Society. Dr. Peplow Ward, who was collated to the first stall in 1771, built himself a new prebendal house; Dr. Waddington, who became the fifth Prebend in 1793, followed Dr. Ward's example; later still the private chapel of the Prior was turned into bedrooms, and the deanery expanded under Dr. Pearce.

Two distinct structures, the one without the church and the other within it, met with exceptional treatment.

¹ bi is indistinct in the MS.

² The part in brackets [] is in a different hand to the document itself.

The Bishops' mansion was withdrawn from spoliation by the award, and the shrine of the foundress was somehow rescued from the operation of Bishop Goodrich's injunctions by friends whose names are unknown.

The shrine has very little history: a new and costly *coopertorium* was suspended over it from the vault with a counterpoise in 1455, and was probably sacrificed to pacify the zeal of the Bishop's agents; but the greater part of the shrine was taken down and rebuilt on two other sites in connection with the high tomb of Bishop John de Hotham before it was placed where it now stands.

Several of the gardens allotted to the Dean and Prebends of "the King's newe College" occupied in 1842 what is now the park on the south of the Cathedral, and within some of these walled enclosures were the remains of the fish-tanks of the monks. Fish preserves were usual in monastic and collegiate establishments: A *piscina*, as it was called, was part of the system of water distribution at Canterbury; there was a *vivarium* in the grounds of St. Peter's College at Cambridge, and a fish pond-close with nineteen tanks at St. John's College in the same university. The Ely preserves were arranged where the ground falls naturally from the level of the Prior's residence and chapel to that of the old "Brod lane," and were fed by a stream which flowed through them to the river. The highest of the series belonged originally to the Priors' establishment, and was assigned in the sixteenth century to Dr. Ward, the last Sacrist of the monastery, who became the holder of the eighth stall. The Commissioners awarded to him, along with the new hall, "the little garden & pultre yard and the ponde ther."

This hall is now the residence of the Regius Professor of Hebrew south of the deanery, and in the garden attached to it was one of the ponds. The next tank of the series was in an orchard a little further south, which had been attached to the same stall.

The road from the Great Gate House to the east transept of the Cathedral passes between the sites of these two preserves. A plane tree stands on the site of the third pond, a chestnut tree on that of the fourth, and on the level ground there was a fifth tank with some what smaller ones on each side of it.

All the tanks but the uppermost pair were embanked, and the supply of water to each was regulated by a sluice or "Stanch"; but when the walls of the gardens were pulled down in 1843 and the ponds filled up, their embankments were levelled and the stanches taken away. In making these changes, the remains of ancient drains were found, but their courses were not traced out.

The block of buildings set aside by the Royal Commissioners for the Dean's lodging, and the domestic accommodation required by the contemplated college, was practically the Prior's residence, and that had probably been built at different dates. "The gret hall" is traditionally the camera built by Prior Crauden in the fourteenth century¹ "*ex opposito capellæ . . . ad aquilonem*," and a gallery, or galleries, connected the chapel with a hall to the west of the great camera; but the west compartment of the vault of the "gret hall" is earlier in design than the eastern ones, and the walls not only retain fragments of early decoration, but are so unsettled by great age that they may easily be the remains of a Prior's residence whose history is entirely lost. The west wall of the present deanery is about eighteen inches out of the perpendicular, modern cement hides the cracks in it, and its north-west angle has been buttressed. The roof is an old one, about which two theories have been put forward. Some of its admirers argue that it is the work of Prior Crauden; but others regard it as an old one to which he added pendant posts with handsome stone corbels. The latter view was supported by Professor Willis, who could not believe that either the Prior or his architect would have put such a burden as a new roof on walls which were obviously failing.

The Infirmary consisted of a handsome hall 104 feet in length with side aisles, pier arches, and clerestory like the nave of a church, and a chapel at its east end similarly arranged, and separated from it by a solid wall with a central doorway. A chancel had been added to the chapel by some unknown benefactor. Nearly all the fine Norman pier arches have been preserved, as well as the walls that filled them up, and converted the side aisles into chambers for the infirm and other members of

¹ *Anglia Sacra*.

the house, but the roof of the central aisle has been destroyed. There was nothing unusual in the *domus infirmorum* at Ely. The infirmary of the monks at Peterborough occupied a similar position, and was built on the same plan with a chapel dedicated to St. Lawrence at its east end. Similar arrangements existed at Canterbury, where a large part of the south aisle of the hall became the camera of the sub-Prior before the fifteenth century, and a table hall, as well as seven adjacent chambers for infirm monks, were added to it between 1338 and 1370.

At Durham two such important members of the house as the Bowcer and Terror did "lye in the Fermery," and in the same building was the Lyinge house "a strong prysonne" for great offenders. The infirmary at Norwich was parallel to the refectory, but there is very little of it left. The hall was about 90 feet long with an aisle on the south, and the chapel added about 30 feet to the length of the building.

Ely had a resident doctor, a garden in which herbs were cultivated for his drug store by a special gardener, a hall for blood letting, and a bath house, which hale old monks and even young ones were allowed to use occasionally; but where the medical staff of the monastery was located has not come to light. The medical establishment at St. Gall is represented as being close to the *domus infirmorum*: at Canterbury the bath house was on its south side; and at Westminster the remains of one have been found on the east.¹ The Ely monastery had an *Ostium versus balnearium*, and a *balneator* appears in the list of those to whom mandata were periodically issued, but the site of this gate has not been found out. There is the same obscurity about the position of the bleeding house which William Powcher, who was Prior from 1401 to 1418, added to the infirmary.² This building is apparently that which is named in a Sacrist's roll of the reign of Henry VII:—"In stipendio duorum carpentariorum pro reparacione de le Tresaunce versus aulam minutionum per vij dies iijjs vijd," but the site of the tresaunce is uncertain.

¹ *Journal of Archaeological Institute*, Vol. XXXIII, p. 36.

² Lambeth Palace Lobn. MS., 449.

The infirmary was obviously approached from the west by what the surveyors of 1649 called the dark cloister; but in the time of Henry IV carpenters made and mended a pentiz connected with it, of which no traces are left:—"Custus Cancelli dom' et muror'. In stipendio Johannis Reynes carpentarii et ij aliorum carpentariorum secum operantium per vij septimanas pro diversis in officio sacristariæ et tenementis in villa faciendis et emendandis, et etiam pro le pentiz in infirmaria faciend' et emend'"

"The celerers logeng," which provided a home for Dr. Cox, the Prebend of the first stall, was at the west end of the infirmary; but nothing is now left of it but some fragments of old walls, although late in the eighteenth century there were parts of it standing on the south side of the infirmary hall so considerable in extent and importance that Mr. Essex interpreted them to be the refectory and dormitory of "the old monastery of Etheldreda combined with her residence as Abbess."¹

Immediately to the east of Dr. Cox's residence was "The blacke hostre" assigned to Dr. Meye with the third stall. This hostelry was standing in the fifteenth century, as Sacrist Elyngham repaired its roof during the reign of Henry VI²:—"Reparacio domorum. In uno tegulatori cum suo servienti conducto per ix dies pro parvo dormitorio per loca tegulando et emendando, et super tectum de le Blake Ostrey per loca emendandum xijs vjd." It is pardonable to suspect that this building was the celerer's hospiciu, as there was a chamber on its east side, "sum tyme the celerers," which went with it to the possessor of the third stall. Dr. Meye shared the "chamberhous"—whatever that was—with a brother Prebend; and may have been influential enough to secure a liberal share of the monastic fabric; but about 150 years ago a large part of the residence attached to the third stall was pulled down, and the black hostelry came to an end. A path on the south of the site is now known as Oyster Lane, which is evidently a modern equivalent for the Ostre Lane which once led from the Cathedral across Baker's close—now absorbed in The Park—into Brod Lane.

¹ Bentham's *History*, I, Addenda, p. 10.

² 17 Hen. VI, 1 Sept., 1438, 31 Aug., 1439.

Mr. Custons, the first holder of the sixth stall, was the next-door neighbour of Dr. Meye, but his house—The Sent Hall—has shared the fate of the cellarium. This hall was standing when the Parliamentary surveyors visited Ely in 1649, and their report mentions “an entry and faire hall tyled with . . . and also a skrene cont’ in lo’ 30 ft lat’ 20 ft and one parlour & closett,” etc., etc.; but this document is merely an uninteresting catalogue of rooms “in occ’ of Thomas Clair.”

Mr. Ayer, who was appointed to the fifth stall, had “M̄r hamondes lodging” “and the little chappel in the fermery church,” so that the site of his house can be partly identified in spite of the summary proceedings of Dr. Waddington, which have been already pointed out.

Matthew Parker, Dean of the College at Stoke by Clare, for training secular priests, which he got through the interest of Ann Boleyn, was the first Prebend of the second stall, and had for his official residence the “paynted chamber” on the north side of the infirmary.

This building is no doubt the addition made to the infirmary by Alan de Walsingham and described in the following passage:—“*Construxit etiam unam cameram lapideam plumbo tectam pulcram valde contiguam in Infirmaria, habentem cameram superiorem cum duobus caminis et inferiorem cum uno largo camino et puteo aquæ cum parvo celario sub custodia Infirmarii qui tempore fuerit et dispositioni Prioris et conventus post obitum fratris Alani remansuram.*”¹

It is mentioned in a Sacrist’s roll drawn up during the reign of Henry VII:—“*Solut’ pro lateys ad fenestras pictæ cameræ et granarii in Sacristaria ijs viiij.*”

The camera thus described was the Mensa magistri infirmatorii, or Table hall, which was the special refectory of invalids and old monks, and seems to have been in course of erection in the eighth year of the reign of Edward III, when the roll of the Sacrist had the following special heading:—“*Custus teglarie et nove camere. Item. Solut’ Henrico Pavag’ pro stipendio suo una cum stipend’ aliorum cementariorum et operariorum pro dicta camera ut patet per parcelas xxiiijli xiijs xjd.*”

At Canterbury the table hall projected from the

¹ *Anglia Sacra*, I, 646.

infirmary hall on the south exactly as the Ely one did on the north; and at Westminster Mr. Micklethwaite remarks, "we may ascribe the buildings south of the chapel to the Master of the Infirmary."¹

The north aisle of the fermery is breached on the west side of Alan's camera; but it is terminated by a residence of which the following description is given in the Parliamentary Survey of 1649:—"The Lecturer's house called the old mans house lyeth between a prebends logeing called the Archdeacons loging and the organists Mrs loging & cont' in long' & breadth ."

This memorandum, however, gives no hint of the nature of the buildings which originally occupied this part of the monastery.

"The newe hall" allotted to Mr. Ward, the last sacrist of the monks, is close to the Prior's chapel and evidently an extension of an old hall which may have been built by the first Abbot when he began the present church. The primitive vault which carries the old building has a much later construction added to it on the south; but the date of this addition is not known.

Portions of the Almetry and Sextry which the Commissioners awarded to Mr. Hamond and Dr. Lyson respectively still stand in High Street. "The almetry with all the edificez courtes & gardens belonging to the same" is now reduced to a long, narrow building facing the market place—a succession of vaults carrying what was once a hall with a kitchen at its west end.

"The Sacrist's office"—joining the Almetry on the west—"was," according to Mr. Bentham, "almost new built" by Alan de Walsingham, "who made several additional apartments in it, & encompassed the whole with a stone wall; in the North west corner of which he built a square building of stone & covered it with lead, part of this he appropriated to the use of Goldsmith's work & for other purposes relative to his office."² A sacristy planned and built by so remarkable a man would have been an attractive relic of the fourteenth century, but there is nothing left of that portion of the priory in which his

¹ *Journal of Royal Archaeological Institute*, Vol. XXXIII, p. 36.

² Bentham's *History*, Vol. I, pp. 221-2.

authority was paramount but the shell of a long, narrow building.

The Commissioners' award does not give the site of the "Knights chambre" assigned to the "petit canons"; but it was standing in 1649, and is treated in the report of that date as part of the residence of John Buckridge, who, as the eighth Prebend, had succeeded to "the newe hall":—"and one other lodging called the Knights Lodging in occ' of Tho^s. Towlne Jun consisting a kitchen and closette below stairs, and over it a chamber and a closett and a garrett seeled and tyled cont' long' 30 foot lat' 12 foot and a little garden cont' about 4 perches. All which is in occ' of Geo Stonrigg Esq or one of his assignees. Signed by Geo Conye."

At Peterborough the Knights' Chambers were in the gatehouse built by Godfrey de Croyland, the original gatehouse of the Abbot's residence, now the Bishops' palace, the great room of which is known as The Knights' chamber.

Edmund Cotts, John Bury, and William Sewal, who all signed the surrender of the monastery, had residences given them, and Cotts had a chamber "annexed" to the table-hall of the infirmary; but when that was assigned to the Dean of Stoke, he seems to have been transferred to the Shryne chamber, wherever that was. Bury and Sewal had each one chamber somewhere "in the fermery."

The open space on the north side of the nave was the burial ground attached to the parochial church dedicated to the Holy Trinity which once stood there, and is so described in a Sacrist's record of the rents he received for shops or stalls let to traders who attended the Ely fair:—"pro una selda in cimiterio sancte trinitatis."

"The garner in y^e sextry" was, in the language of the award, "next to y^e chirchyard," and graves have been found further east as far as the charnel house about halfway down the Fore hill.

Stone coffins have been discovered in the narrow space between "The Lady chapel and the Cathedral which is known as Napes' burial ground, or the Hundred acres": and they have come to light on the south as well as on the north side of the church. The distribution document of the Royal Commissioners implies that the residence

assigned to the Dean of Stoke was in a "chirchyard," and remains of interments have been found in the basement of "the paynted chamber" and the garden outside it, so that this burial ground was probably in use earlier than the years 1334-5, when the chamber was being built.

When the east wall of the south-east transept was underpinned, stone coffins and the contents of coffins were found close to the foundations; and the excavations of 1850 inside the church revealed not only closed, but lidless coffins between the memorial chapels of the two Bishops Redman and De Luda.

When the foundation was prepared for the present stone pulpit part of a stone coffin was seen in the adjoining lantern pier.