A STATUE FROM THE MINORIES

By JOAN EVANS AND NORMAN COOK

In 1293 Blanche of Artois, widowed Queen of Navarre and wife of Edmund Duke of Lancaster, Leicester and Derby, brother of King Edward I, founded a house of Franciscan Minoresses in the ward of Portsoken, just outside the walls of the City of London. The first nuns were French, and the house continued to follow the Rule of ' The Humility of Our Lady ' followed at Longchamp near Saint Cloud, which had been instituted by Blanche of Artois' aunt, Isabella of France.[1] They were ' rich ' Clares, as opposed to the Poor Clares, in that, though vowed to personal poverty, they could hold endowments as a community. They found many benefactors in England, notably the husband and kin of the Foundress, and merchants of the City of London[2] and their wives. At the Dissolution they held property with an annual value of £418 8s. 5d. as well as funds for specific purposes.

The London house of Minoresses was dissolved the day after Palm Sunday, 1539, and the nuns ejected.[3] Their property reverted to the Crown, and Henry VIII granted it to John Clerk, Bishop of Bath and Wells, who died only a year later.[4] In 1552 the chief building of the nunnery, presumably the living quarters, was acquired by Henry Duke of Suffolk.[5] Ten years later the Crown repurchased it for use as a ' store-house for armour and habiliments of war '. to ease the pressure on space in the near-by Tower.[6] Then during the Commonwealth a ' great workhouse ' was established in the Minories for the poor of London. The former conventual buildings suffered in a fire in 1797, but the royal ' Liberty ' of the Minories continued until it was merged in the Corporation in 1894.[7]

The church, which Stowe[8] records to have been in use as a small parish church, had suffered in a fire in 1519, but had been repaired.[9] It escaped the Great Fire, but was rebuilt in 1709 in brick,[10] the medieval north wall being retained. This second church, which by then was in use as a parish room, was severely damaged by enemy action in 1941, and it was decided not to rebuild it.

Mr. Collins, of the Historical Records Section of the Architectural Department of the London County Council, was engaged on a study of the medieval wall of the church, which appears as the second part of this paper, when, on November 23rd, 1956, he discovered two pieces of a female figure in the rubble that had been used to fill in one of its doors,

[1] Called the Isabella Rule. See A. F. C. Bourdillon, *The Order of Minoresses in England*, Manchester 1926, 3.
[2] See Bourdillon, *op. cit.*, 50.
[3] *Wriothesley's Chronicle* ed. Camden Society, 94.
[4] Bourdillon, 84 ; A. R. Martin, *Franciscan Architecture in England*, Manchester, 1937, 268.
[5] Strype, *Eccles. Mem.* II 2, 229.
[6] Stowe, *Survey of London*, ed. Kingsford.
[7] See E. M. Tomlinson, *History of the Minories*.
[8] Stowe, *op cit.*, I, 126.
[9] A. R. Martin, *op. cit.*, 268.
[10] R. C. H. M., *London*, V, 82.

presumably when the original church was divided off from the monastic building after the Reformation. We are greatly indebted to his care and acumen in recognising their interest. A third piece,—the hand—was found a fortnight later when all the rubble from the wall was being carefully investigated.[1] The fragments were deposited in the Guildhall Museum for examination, and have now been deposited there on permanent loan by the Church Commissioners.[2]

The statue is unfortunately headless. In its present state it measures 2 ft. 11 ins. in height and a foot across at the angled base. It is in almost full relief, but the back has never been finished; clearly it was intended to occupy a niche of some kind. It is of an unidentified limestone, originally painted all over on a very thin and delicate coat of gesso.[3] The young and almost unbreasted body sways strongly to the left. A *bliaut* or undergarment just appears beneath a gown, apparently of heavy cloth, painted vermilion and powdered with small daisy plants, each showing flower head, stem and two leaves, all in gold leaf. Over this the figure wears a mantle, represented as being of lighter stuff. It is painted a dark purplish red, *semé* of fleurs-de-lys, and is held together below the neck by a broad gilt band sculptured to represent embroidered or jewelled rosettes. The cloak is edged with a band of gold leaf, outlined in black. The feet are bare. The right hand—found, as has been said, later than the rest, but unmistakeably joining—has traces of its original flesh-coloured paint; the mortar on the broken face shows that it was detached from the statue before it was used as rubble. The figure holds a flat object with a fold in the middle, about two inches thick. This is right-angled at the bottom; the top is broken away. The remains of paint shew that each leaf of the object had a margin of gold; the middle was painted black. It is impossible to say if there were any overpainting on the black. About half way down the left thigh of the statue there is a long narrow scar where something has been broken away; the shape suggests that it was of the nature of a rod.

The statue shows a remarkable similarity of style with that of the Synagogue which stands beside the door of the Chapter Room of Rochester Cathedral. There are the same S curves of drapery, the same cross-wise folds at the waist, the same fold carried across to the foot.

The style of the London statue seems slightly bolder and more mature than that of the Rochester Synagogue. This has been dated by Mr. Gardner to the years round 1330,[4] partly because of its close likeness to the sculpture on the tomb of Archbishop Meopham, who died in 1333. Sir William St. John Hope first dated the Rochester figures to c.1330[5]

[1] Careful search failed to produce the head.

[2] It has already been briefly described by the present authors in the *Times*, Jan. 16, 1957.

[3] See coloured frontispiece.

[4] *English Medieval Sculpture*, Cambridge 1951, 184. Mr. Lawrence Stone in his recent volume on English Medieval Sculpture in the *Pelican History of Art* (258; 160, note 14) dates the Rochester doorway to 1342.

[5] *Notes on the Architectural History of Rochester Cathedral Church*, 1884.

and then came to think[1] that they might have been part of a campaign of building which documents show was begun in 1359. The evidence of the Meopham tomb would seem to favour the earlier date.

When the hand with the attribute was discovered, the likeness to the Rochester Synagogue,[2] the attribute itself and the scar on the left thigh, indicating that the left hand held a rod or staff of some kind, inclined us to believe that the statue likewise represented a Synagogue,[3] doubtless paired with an Ecclesia. We are still of opinion that this is the true identification. Professor G. R. Owst has maintained[4] that it could not represent *Synagoge* since the Tablets of the Law are not shewn slipping from the figure's hand, as at Rochester, York and Bourges. Mr. Bernard Rackham has pointed out[5] that in the glass at Canterbury and Saint Denis the Synagogue was represented holding the Tables of the Law upright ;[6] and indeed there would seem no theological necessity for their being represented as falling, since the Ten Commandments were accepted by the Christian as by the Mosaic dispensation of the divine law.

If the identification of the statue as a representation of the Synagogue be not accepted, it must be considered what alternatives are possible. The fact that there are no traces of a veil or wimple on the shoulders, and the bare feet, suggest that the statue represents a personification rather than a real personage ; and the absence of a veil and the rich mantle-fastening preclude it from portraying a monastic saint, and indeed most other female saints.

Professor Owst makes the interesting suggestion that it may represent the Erythraean Sibyl, who appears alone on the Cathedrals of Auxerre and Laon[7] on the voussoir of the left portal of the façade. At Laon the Sibyl wears a rich mantle and holds tablets like the Tablets of the Law. She differs from the Minories statue in wearing shoes and does not carry a staff. 14th century representations of the Sibyl show her bearing not tablets, but a scroll. It is a further difficulty that the painting seems to indicate an interior site for the statue, whereas the Erythraean Sibyl normally appears on the façade ; moreover we do not know of her figuring in English iconography. As Mr. Nevinson has suggested to us,

[1] *The Architectural History of the Cathedral Church and Monastery of St. Andrew at Rochester*, 1900, 82.

[2] The London statue is 35 inches to the shoulder, the Rochester one 31. The Rochester statue is a true relief ; the relief of the London one is close to that of the Musicians on the Exeter Gallery, but is even nearer to *ronde bosse*. The London statue, indeed, though much smaller, is of exactly the same relief as the earlier Synagogue at Bamberg. Mr. J. L. Nevinson has pointed out to us that the strong sway of the body would not well accommodate itself to the side of an arch of any size ; yet it is little more marked than that of the Rochester statue which is so used.

[3] Mr. Lewis Edwardes who will shortly be publishing ' Some English Examples of the Medieval Representation of Church and Synagogue ' in the *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, Vol. XVIII, kindly tells us that it is uncertain whether *Synagoge* is usually represented barefoot or not, as her flowing draperies often hide the feet. He has an unrivalled knowledge of the Synagogue figures and is on the whole inclined to include the Minories statue among them.

[4] *Times*, Jan. 25, 1957.

[5] *Times*, Jan. 21, 1957.

[6] Mr. Edwardes informs us that this position is also found in certain illuminated MSS.

[7] E. Male, *Art religieux du XIIIe siècle en France*, 1902, 380.

CHURCH OF HOLY TRINITY, MINORIES
Statue found in 1956
(Reproduced by kind permission of the Courtauld Institute of Art)

inclusion on a bracket under a canopied niche in a row of saints on a reredos or screen would be a possible position for the statue ; but what saint is represented unveiled, unshod, wearing a rich mantle, and carrying tablets or a book ?

If indeed it be a Synagogue, it is extremely unlikely that it originally stood in the church of the Minoresses. Franciscan churches, in England as abroad, were usually rich in sculpture,[1] though most of it seems to have consisted in small works of alabaster and, naturally, in the sepulchral monuments of benefactors. Practically none of it recognisably survives from any of the London houses. There is, however, no record of any statues of *Synagoge* and *Ecclesia*[2] being set up in a Franciscan church ; all the surviving statues come from Cathedrals—Amiens, Chartres, Lyons, Paris, Rheims, Strasbourg, Rochester[3] and Lincoln—except for one by the chapter door of the Abbey of Abondance in Savoy, dating from between 1331 and 1354.[4]

It would therefore be rash to assume that because the statue was found in the rubble used to block a door in the medieval wall of the Minoress's church, it must necessarily come from that building. In the years between the suppression of the minor religious foundations in 1538 and the ' purification ' of Protector Somerset in 1547, London must have been full of broken stone from the statues of its churches, and a cartload from another place may well have been used in the Minories.

It is not, perhaps, too hazardous to suggest that the great medieval Cathedral of St. Paul's lay only a mile and a half from the Minories, with easy access by river.[5] The unfinished state of the back of the statue from the Minories shows that it occupied a niche. The preservation of the paint on the statue suggests that it came from a sheltered position inside a building, or at least inside a cloister : can it have been from the door of the Chapter House of St. Paul's, begun in 1332 ?[6]

THE CHURCH OF HOLY TRINITY, MINORIES

By F. J. COLLINS

The convent church was partly rebuilt in 1568 and again in 1706 when the vaults were inserted so as to divide the interior into two com-

[1] A. G. Little, *Franciscan History and Legend in English Medieval Art*, Manchester, 1937, 103.

[2] The subject is also found in ivories, metalwork, enamels, frescoes and manuscript illumination, but these can be less precisely sited.

[3] The fact that a Benedictine priory was attached to the Cathedral at Rochester does not make it any the less a Cathedral.

[4] I should like to express my thanks to the Director of the Index of Christian Art in the University of Princeton for confirming this.

[5] After the Great Fire rubble was brought from Old St. Paul's to the city churches of St. George, Botolph Lane, St. Dionis Backchurch, St. Michael's, Wood Street, St. Mary Aldermanbury, St. Clare's Jewry, and St. Peter's, Cornhill. Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS. 389. We owe this reference to the kindness of Miss Rutter of the Guildhall Museum.

[6] Mr. John Harvey kindly tells me that the fabric rolls and other accounts give no relevant information.

partments. The original floor level of the church was lowered to form the floor of the vault and a new floor provided just above the arches of the vaults.

These vaults are of different widths. It is possible that they were intended to be equal but that after starting, it was decided to provide a thicker wall on the south side.

In 1768 the East India Company erected new buildings against the north wall of the church requiring the blocking of a twin light window in the west end of the north wall. The company provided a central lantern in the roof to compensate for this loss.

In 1796 the domestic buildings of the convent were destroyed by fire. The parish was united with that of St. Botolph, Aldgate, and the church closed on 1st January, 1899. It was used as a parish room until destroyed in the last war, leaving the medieval north wall still standing.

The recent taking down of that part of the medieval wall lying above the inserted vaults exposed the two-light window blocked in 1768 and shewed the jambs to have been decorated with a dark red pattern imitating masonry joints. Two further windows were revealed further east, about the middle of the wall.

When the vaults were demolished, the rest of the medieval wall was revealed in very good repair. Throughout the whole length it was possible to trace two distinct floor levels. A blocked doorway with pointed arch, and the smaller end of a squint, were found in the eastern part. The worked stone reveals to the doorway were rebated for a door, with hinges on the east side and traces of an iron catch on the west. The splayed sides of the opening were plastered and painted with masonry joints, as was the wall round the squint. The door sill was heavily worn in the middle. A later floor had been inserted, of tiles 5 inches square and so worn that nearly all traces of their original glaze was lost.

On the north side of the wall lay part of the four-centred arch that had spanned the further side of the opening. Its flat profile suggested a late date, as did the moulding at the spring of the eastermost blocked window.

The plastered reveals of the doorway and the position of the squint shew that there was a room or covered way north of the wall; this is borne out by two corbels and a hole probably representing a third that are shewn in an old photograph.[1]

The filling of the door provided two interesting examples of sculpture ; a quatrefoil enclosed in a triangle, probably the top of a shrine or sedilia, and the remains of the female figure discussed above. The quatrefoil contained a painting in black line of the Agnus Dei. This flaked off while the stone was being taken out of the wall.

[1] Taken from the N. after a fire in 1904. It is preserved in the library of the London County Council.

The floor of the vault and the infilling between the floor of the church and the haunches of the vaults contained a complete skeleton and a quantity of bones.

The north wall of the vault, built against the medieval wall, was erected on a foundation of worked stones from windows and chalk filling from the medieval buildings.

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The Institute wishes to acknowledge the generous gift by Dr. Joan Evans of the coloured plate (see frontispiece) recording the original appearance of the statue.