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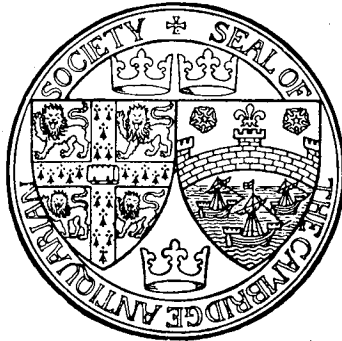
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DENNY ABBEY: THE NUNS' REFECTORY

JEM POSTER and DAVID SHERLOCK

Of the two surviving buildings at Denny one is the large farmhouse with remains of the three earlier religious houses incorporated in it, namely those of the Benedictine monks, the Knights Templar and the Franciscan nuns (Poor Clares); while the other, which lies thirty-five metres to the north of it, was the nuns' refectory, turned into a barn after the Dissolution. Both these buildings and the surrounding ground were, as an ancient monument, placed in the guardianship of the then Ministry of Works by Pembroke College, the owners, in 1947. Unfortunately, while much time and effort were spent on the elucidation and conservation of the house, the refectory was largely neglected (Christie and Coad 1980). By the time the house and grounds were opened to visitors in 1977 the barn was a roofless ruin, its wall-tops gathering vegetation and its south wall leaning dangerously. With the object of arresting further decay and particularly to protect some remains of painted wall-plaster and the soft clunch window tracery, it was decided in 1979 to re-roof the building. Excavations were to be undertaken within to see what else remained, with the presumption that the re-roofed and re-glazed refectory might serve as a museum for the history of Denny and the display of the interesting finds made elsewhere on the site. As it turned out, the excavation uncovered much of the original flooring and evidence for the dais and seating, thus rendering alternative uses for the building very difficult if these features were to remain exposed. The new roof, of asbestos to match the adjacent farmyard buildings, while protecting the excavated remains, came on too late to save any of the internal wall-plaster except for a few small patches which are now without their painting. What follows is a record of the excavation and its results preceded by a description of the building and its history.

HISTORY

The history of the nuns at Denny and their buildings is to be found in the official handbook to the Abbey (Coad 1984) and therefore need only be summarised here. The Poor Clares' nunnery was founded in the years 1339–49 as an act of piety by Mary de Valence, widow of the earl of Pembroke, mainly by her transferring nuns from Waterbeach and closing down that nunnery, which had been founded a few years earlier on a site that proved unsuitable (Cra'ster 1966). At Denny the buildings which the Templars had abandoned were adapted once more to suit the needs not only of the nuns but also of the Countess of Pembroke who seems to have converted some of the 12th-century church for her own use (see Fig. 1). The nuns' dormitory was built to the north of this with night stairs leading via the old north transept into a large new church to the east. To the north of this was an open courtyard with the nuns' cloister and refectory to the north again (see Fig. 1). In 1947 and 1955 trial trenching by Mr Denys Spittle, a member of Pembroke College and subsequently of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments Cambridge office, allowed the extent of the church and the layout of the nuns' cloister to be conjectured (Spittle 1967, 233 and personal communication). From 1968 to 1975 Mrs P.M. Christie excavated the features to the north of the earlier church (Christie and Coad 1980, fig. 8). A chapter-house range located along the east side of the cloister walk is possible but the ground has never been investigated.

In 1379 there were forty-one nuns at Denny but the average number seems to have been about twenty-five. The abbey continued to receive new endowments until c. 1400 but in 1459 the abbess wrote to a friend that the sisters had no money to pay bishops' fees, that

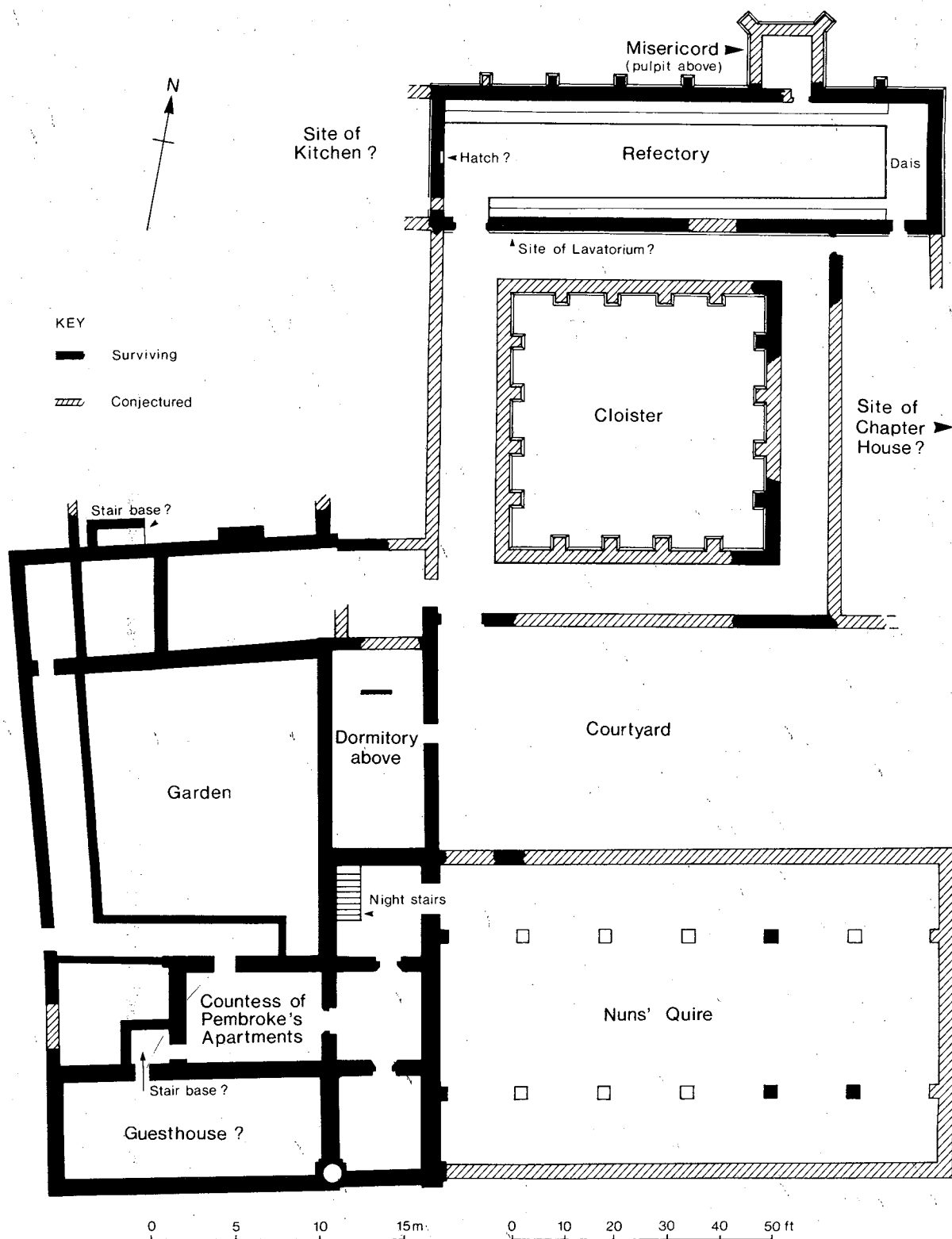


Figure 1. Denny Abbey, plan of the Franciscan nuns' buildings.

their buildings ('places') were derelict and their jewels all pawned (Bourdillon 1926, 30). Otherwise there is almost nothing to indicate the financial fortunes of the abbey or its occupants and no reference to actual building works. The only surviving household accounts are summarised in an appendix to this report. The abbey was dissolved in 1538 or 1539, the King's commissioners having reported only six nuns there when they inspected in 1536. After the Dissolution the nuns' quire was pulled down but the earlier church was converted into the farmhouse that survives today. Part of the dormitory is shown on James Essex's drawing of 1773 (reproduced in Coad 1984, 16). The refectory had, by then, been converted to agricultural use. Dame Elizabeth Throgmorton, the last abbess, retired to her family home at Coughton Court, Warwickshire, with a memento in the form of the carved wooden dole-gate which must have once been near the kitchen (Barnard 1927). By historical accident Denny was acquired by Pembroke College (which the Countess had also founded) in 1928 (*VCH* forthcoming).

EARLIER RESEARCH AND DESCRIPTION

The earliest surviving description of the refectory was made by James Essex who visited in June 1773 and wrote:

This was a large handsome room, 93 ft 6 ins long and 22 ft 6 ins wide. On the north side there were six handsome windows which made it very light and cheerful. At the east end was a large window between two smaller and above it a quatrefoile. At the west end was another window but less than the opposite. On the south side there were windows next the cloister but not like the opposite; but as the wall on this side has been partly rebuilt only one of them remains now. Between the 4th and 5th windows on the N. side is a square projecting building with a small door inwards. In the middle of the W. end was a recess for the laver; and in the angle a small door leading to some appartment at that end. There was likewise a door leading to some appartment at the east end. The walls of the refectory were wainscoted part of their height and the rest was plastered and painted in imitation of a tracery much used

in the time of Edward 3 [Br. Library, Add. MS 15977, f. 44v].

The refectory actually measures internally 28.20 m by 6.88 m (92 ft 6 ins by 22 ft 6 ins). The walls are mainly of clunch and rough stone, still partly rendered on the north side in a shelly plaster. Barnack stone was used for the offset plinth, buttresses, heads and sills of windows and the lower parts of the jambs. Clunch was used for window tracery and for most of the inside walls. One of the original north windows was destroyed when barn doorways were inserted, at about the time when the projecting building on the north side was demolished and its openings into the refectory carefully blocked up with salvaged materials (Plate 1). This projection is clearly shown on the Bucks' engraving of 1730 (reproduced in Coad 1984, 22), Relhan's watercolour of c. 1800 (Plate 2) and an engraving of 1828 (reproduced in Coad 1984, 23). It had windows on two levels suggesting a first floor. The other windows in the north wall were originally of two trefoiled ogee lights beneath a quatrefoil in a two-centred segmental head. They were later blocked and part-shuttered for farm use. The original north buttresses are each of two stages on a chamfered plinth which was continued all along the wall. The east windows which Essex described can just be seen in the Bucks' engraving but only the central sill and lower splays now remain. The exterior shows signs of the lean-to shed which is shown on the 1828 engraving. A barn door was later inserted in the central window (Plate 3). The only window on the south side is a blocked 16th-century one of three lights with four-centred heads under a common square head; the mullions and inner heads have gone except for the springing of the outer lights. The insertion of this window appears to be the only major alteration to the refectory carried out in its life-time as a refectory. Outside and just east of this window there is a projecting jamb for a doorway leading into a room at the east end of the east range of the cloister. The small blocked doorway at the east end of the same wall would have also led here. West of the blocked window is a corbel that may have once supported the cloister walk roof. West of the barn doorway the south wall has been rebuilt but the lowest jambs of the original west doorway from the cloister are just visible



Plate 1. The refectory from the north, July 1951. Copyright H.B.M.C.



Plate 2. The refectory from the north, c. 1800, watercolour from the Relhan Collection.
Copyright Cambridge Antiquarian Society.



Plate 3. The interior of the refectory looking east, May 1957. Copyright H.B.M.C.



Plate 4. The interior of the refectory, looking north-west, July 1951. Copyright H.B.M.C.

from both outside and within. The thickness of the original Franciscan wall remains as an irregular offset at ground level outside, as indicated in Fig. 4. Part of the rebuilt wall which was leaning outwards dangerously was shored in 1955 and jacked upright again in 1983. The west wall (Plate 4) was entirely rebuilt in brickwork of c. 1800 but founded on the earlier wall (see below, excavation report) so there is now no trace of what Essex called the 'recess for the laver' which could conceivably have been a partially blocked serving hatch (as for example at Horsham St. Faith Priory, Norfolk), or perhaps a niche to house an image, because 'lavens' or wash basins were invariably built outside refectories in the cloister. Indeed, the Poor Clares' Rule stated that they should wash their hands before they entered the refectory (Seton 1914, 102). Nor is there any sign of a west doorway leading into the kitchen.

The refectory may have been originally roofed with tiles like some of the Templars' buildings (see Christie and Coad 1980, pl. IX B) but it has been thatched since the 18th century as the early engravings show; the documents suggest the church also was thatched (see Appendix below). The roof frame which is shown in Plates 3 and 4 is probably of the 18th century, incorporating some re-used timbers. In June 1957 'the temporary tarpaulin sheets were removed; the roof was stripped of thatching; and roof timbers were removed and stacked ready for inspection and further instructions' (Department of the Environment file AM 46317/04 part 1).

The 14th-century wall painting mentioned by Essex survived into the early 1970s in patches of plaster on the east wall and adjacent parts of the north and south walls. The suggested reconstruction of a portion of the

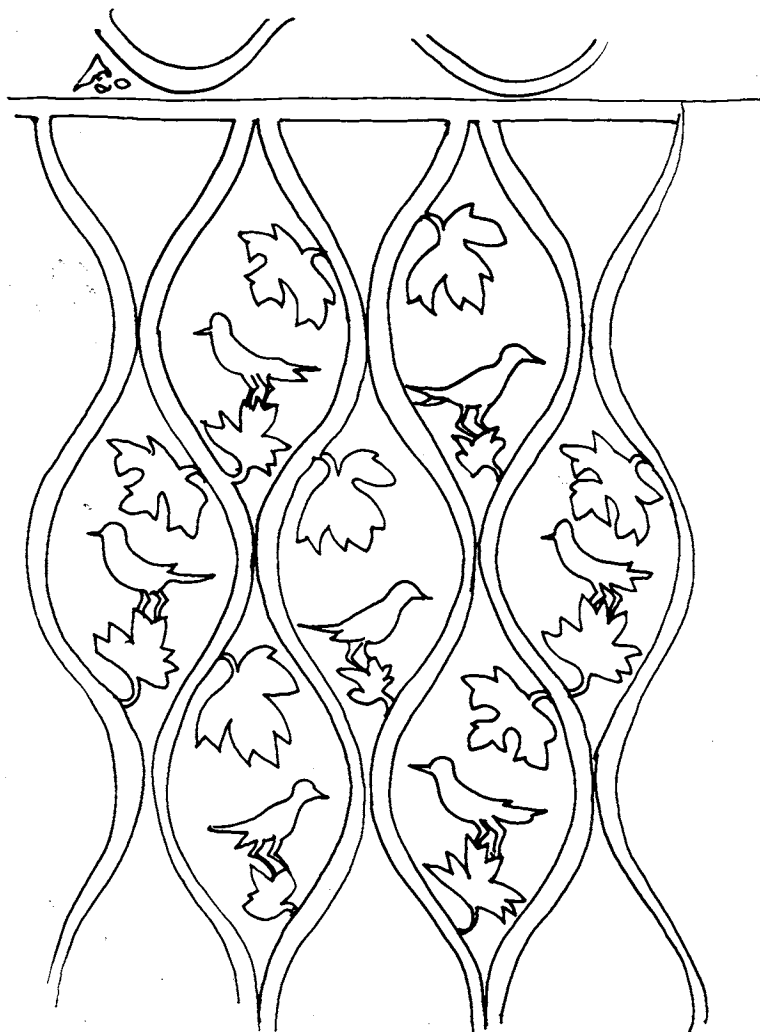


Figure 2. Suggested reconstruction by T.W. Ball of lost wall painting in refectory.

lost painting shown in Fig. 2 is based on official photographs taken in 1958 and a sketch by Denys Spittle since deposited with R.C.H.M. It consisted of a pattern of ogee lozenges in Decorated style, each lozenge delineated by double red lines and filled with 'birds and ivy leaves in black(?) or red also'. Possibly this black was decomposed vermilion. The scheme may be contrasted with the 13th-century preference for a pattern of imitation masonry, often also with double red lines, filled with rosettes, as for example at Bushmead Priory, Beds. (Park 1986, 72).

The wooden panelling which Essex also mentions has not survived but there is evidence for its fixing on the original wall face, chiefly in short lengths of chasing either side of the windows which cut through the plaster and into the soft clunch. The chasings measure about 50 mm wide and up to 25 mm deep and have holes at intervals presumably for fixing batons onto which the panelling was nailed. On the east wall there were two rows of chasings which can be seen in Plate 3, the lower one on a level with the window sill (and continuing at roughly this level in the north and south walls) and the upper one about 0.85 m above it, showing that the panelling was higher at this the 'high' end of the refectory.

EXCAVATIONS IN 1984 AND 1985

Excavations were carried out over the period May 1984 to September 1985, primarily to establish the original floor level within the refectory. Apart from the re-excavation of a relatively modern trench against the exterior of the refectory's west wall, excavations were confined to the interior and were, moreover, deliberately limited to the removal of post-Dissolution levels and features: this is not therefore an account of a comprehensive investigation, but an assessment of the significance of such evidence as became available in the course of this small-scale programme of works.

The refectory is known to have been used for many years as a farm building, and much of the material overlying or disturbing its original floor level related to this usage. Close to its west end were found the remains of a substantial brick-built structure: the presence of sizeable lumps of coal in the immediate vicinity, together with evidence of heat

damage to some of the bricks, suggested that the remains represented the basis of a hearth or kiln, while the absence of any of the kinds of debris one might expect to see in an industrial context lent strength to a strictly agricultural interpretation: a corn-drying kiln seems the most likely possibility. To the east of this kiln and extending across the width of the building from north to south and eastward to a point approximately halfway along its length, a series of stone sleeper walls was revealed (Plate 5): these were crudely constructed, mainly of rough stone, though a number of dressed or moulded stones, almost certainly from the abbey fabric, were also used. On the evidence available, it would appear that these walls were used to support timber flooring, again in association with the agricultural use of the building.

What is beyond doubt is the relationship of both the kiln and the stone sleepers to the original floor level; for that level exists largely intact, in the unequivocal form of neatly-laid tiles, over a large proportion of the area of the building. The kiln (which clearly disturbed these tiles) and the sleeper walls which lay directly on them are unmistakably defined as post-Dissolution features, as is the general overburden of rubbly soil cut by their construction.

After planning, the post-Dissolution structures and levels (for levels see Fig. 3) were removed to reveal the disposition of features relating to the original usage of the refectory. Most striking of these was the floor itself, constructed of glazed tiles and arranged in the pattern shown on the plan (Fig. 4). Similarly significant is the evidence, provided by footings still in situ, of the refectory's seating and tabling arrangements. The seating is represented by footings offset from the main wall on both the north and south sides of the building, while structures running parallel to these at a distance of approximately 0.50 m from them seem to represent all that survives of a narrow platform, or foot-pace: boards resting on this structure and extending back to the base of the benching would have created a feature similar to that upon which the nuns' feet rest in the illustration of the Poor Clares at table (Plate 7). What is not entirely clear, from the evidence available at Denny, is the relationship of the table to this structure. Plate 7 shows what is almost certainly a free-standing system of tabling ranged against

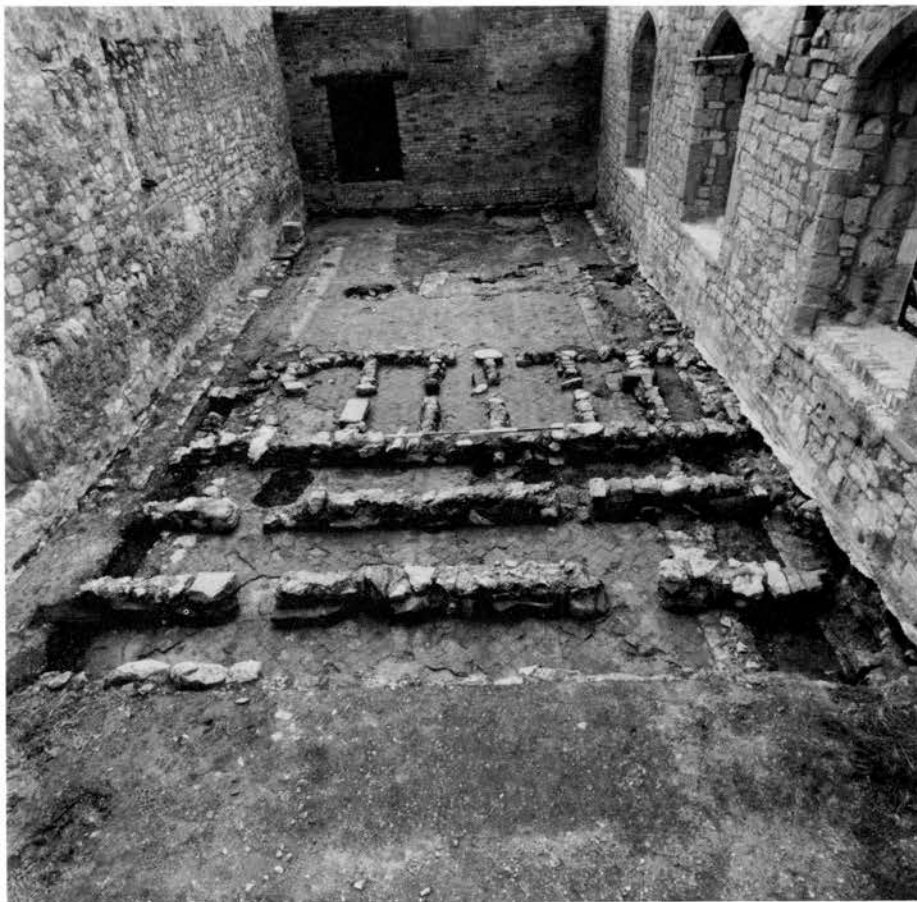


Plate 5. Remains of sleeper walling for a granary floor overlying the original tiled floor, as half excavated, July 1984. The west end wall is of brick of c. 1800. The square stone block in the south wall is just in front of the east jamb of the former doorway into the cloister. Underlying the granary footings and running parallel with the north and south walls are the footings for the foot-pace; the footings offset from the main wall and representing the benching are also clearly visible. Two-metre scale. Copyright H.B.M.C.

the foot-pace; but the distance involved at Denny would seem to necessitate an abnormally (though not impossibly) wide surface to the table in order to bring its edge within easy reach of those sitting on the fixed benching. It therefore seems possible that the tabling here was set or socketed into the stone foundation for the foot-pace: although there is no evidence for this in the stonework itself, it is apparent that the structure originally stood at least one course higher than it does at present, and the evidence might well have been lost in the process of demolition.

At the east end of the building, surviving footings suggest the original presence of a dais. Raised approximately 0.30 m above the level of the main floor and served by the adjacent doorway, this clearly represents the basis for a 'high table'. A few tiles remaining

on the threshold of this doorway imply that the surface of the dais was itself tiled. Although post-Dissolution disturbance has destroyed most of the tiling at this end of the building, one should also note the vestigial presence of a few edge-tiles neatly defining the inner boundary of the dais as indeed they define the boundary of the foot-pace throughout much of the remainder of the building.

Several interesting minor details also emerged from examination of the interior of the refectory. The clear-cut cessation of the footings and corresponding extension of the flooring into the area of the doorway at the west end of the south wall make it clear that this doorway constituted part of the original layout of the building. A change in the character of the flooring immediately within



Plate 6. East end of north wall of refectory showing doorway into misericord and blocked pulpit above. Metre Scale.



Plate 7. Poor Clares at table. The nun reading from the pulpit above is Beata Umilta and therefore shown haloed. From the Sarum Breviary, French, c. 1424-35, Paris, Bib. Nat. MS Lat. 17294, f. 497r.

SECTION A A

SOUTH WALL

NORTH WALL

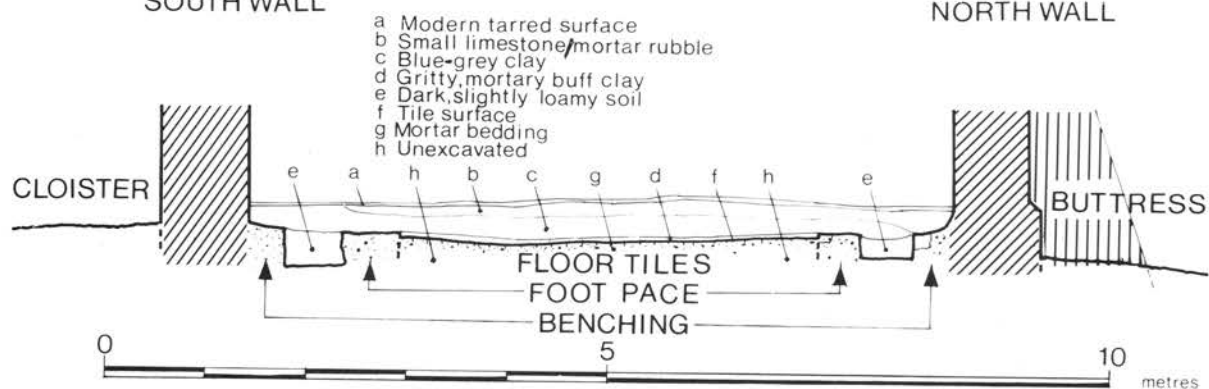


Figure 3. Section north-south near centre of refectory, during 1985 excavation.

the doorway – the tiles giving place to a small area of brick – probably represents patching of an area inevitably subjected to particularly heavy wear. It should be added that in the vicinity of the doorway on the north side of the building there is no equivalent cessation of the foot-pace foundations (though there is a break, probably original, in the bench footings) nor any suggestion of tiling leading up to the doorway; one might reasonably postulate a break in the tabling at this point, but it would seem that provision for passage to the pulpit and/or the misericord (see discussion below) was more rudimentary than for passage through the main south doorway.

Running north-south across the width of the refectory, and passing through the footings on either side, was a narrow drainage channel, stone-sided and stone-based, with a flat stone capping. This was picked up only because of heavy disturbance along its line; where such disturbance has not taken place, the drain is overlain by the floor-tiles. It therefore clearly pre-dates the laying of those tiles, though whether it was built in conjunction with the refectory, or is an earlier feature accommodated by the refectory's footings, remains a matter for conjecture.

The excavation against the exterior face of the west wall was intended to demonstrate conclusively that the present west wall – a relatively late rebuild, of brick construction – was actually founded on the original footings. This proved to be the case; but the incidental emergence of a number of other significant details entails further comment.

The footings themselves were faced with a rendering of yellow mortar, this in turn having been coated with a thin skim of white plaster. Of the remaining fragments of this facing, some were found as low as the bottom course of the footings, a circumstance which suggests that the materials were applied while the construction trench was still open, though it is difficult to establish any convincing reason for such a procedure. The quality of this facing suggested the possibility that this was an interior, rather than an exterior, wall-surface; and this was confirmed by the discovery of two lines of footings, keyed into the refectory footings and running at right-angles to them, forming a continuation of the line of the refectory's north and south walls. Both lines of footings were truncated by a modern pipe-trench, and the stones at the northern edge of

the northern one had been robbed out, leaving only a line of mortar to show their original position; sufficient stonework remained, however, to make it clear that these were indeed wall-footings, and not merely – as the dimensions of the southern line had first suggested – footings for buttresses. It seems highly likely that they indicate the position of the kitchen which served the refectory, though further excavation would be necessary to confirm this hypothesis.

It is worth pointing out in this connection that the Bucks' engraving of 1730 (reproduced in Coad 1984, 22) actually shows a wall continuing westward from the west end of the refectory; ruinous but substantial, and pierced by an arched doorway and a square-headed window, this almost certainly relates to one or other of the two lines of footings revealed by these excavations. There are also details to be seen on Relhan's painting (Plate 2) and the 1828 engraving (Coad 1984, 23). Since the original west wall is represented only by subterranean footings, there is no surviving archaeological evidence either for or against a doorway connecting this building with the refectory. There were no footings for either benching or foot-pace along the west wall of the refectory.

FINDS

(a) *Floor Tiles*

The floor of the refectory was composed of tiles set in a chequer pattern of dark green or black and yellow glazes, set diagonally to the walls and divided by three long, parallel rows of single tiles. The diagonal pattern continued up to the west cloister doorway. The dais and dais doorway were also tiled. The tiles are about 10.5 cm square and 1.6 cm thick. Many have shallow diagonal or cross-shaped incisions which allowed them to be broken into halves or quarters if required. Their fabric is an orangey-red clay with small stone inclusions. In size and fabric they may be identified as a product of the tile-kiln at Bawsey near King's Lynn more noted for its decorated designs which may be seen today in Castle Rising Castle or Castle Acre Priory. All the Denny refectory tiles are now extremely worn but they appear to have been

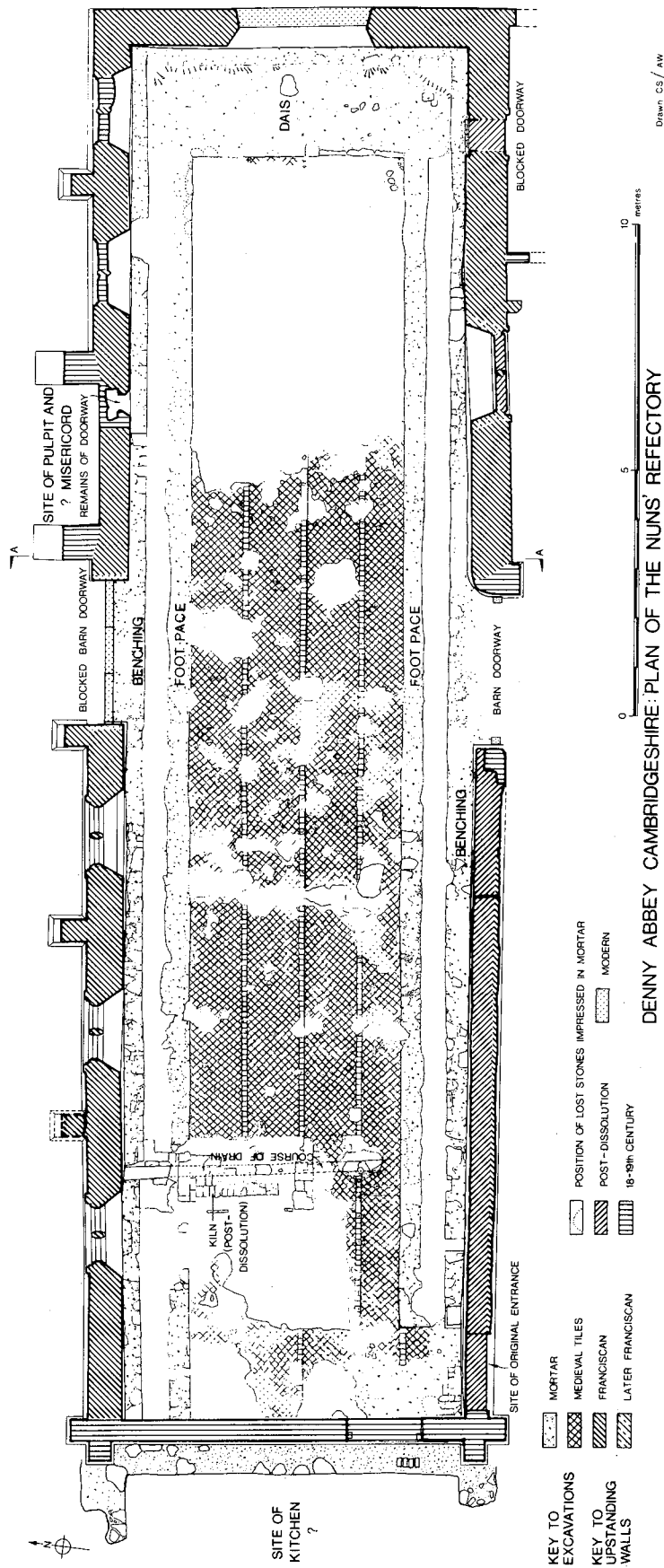


Figure 4. Denny Abbey refectory, plan following excavations 1984-85.

plain except for two randomly placed specimens which are decorated with Bawsey designs (Eames 1955, pls. 24 and 26, nos. v and xxiv). These designs were also amongst the sixteen Bawsey designs found in the small area of paving excavated at the west end of the Franciscan building inside the church (Christie and Coad 1980, 216–219). The refectory tiles, like those in the church, presumably date from the foundation of the abbey shortly before the middle of the 14th century.

About two metres from the centre of the west wall is a solitary tile 140 mm square with line-impressed decoration like those found in earlier excavations at Denny (Christie and Coad 1980, fig. 26, no. 3). This is normally dated rather earlier than the Bawsey tiles. It is presumably a crude repair.

A full report on the floor-tiles will appear in Drury and Norton, forthcoming.

(b) Fragment of Marble Panel (Fig. 5)

This is a small fragment of marble (presumably from the Mediterranean area) with an incised design of two curved strips between stylised leaves. Its maximum width is 50 mm and it is of an even 5 mm thickness. It is presumably part of a decorative panel, perhaps a reredos. It was found immediately above the tiled floor, where it must have lain since the Dissolution, near the centre of the room on the north side.

(c) Other Finds

These were all unstratified and merit only brief mention. The sleeper walls for the granary floor were made up of re-used monastic stone including both clunch and oolite 14th-century mouldings for window jambs and sills. There were numerous small fragments of late or post medieval pottery, stoneware and floor tiles, all unstratified.

All the finds from these and earlier excavations at Denny are now stored at Castle Acre Priory, except for the architectural stone which is on site and the precious objects which are stored in the Ancient Monuments laboratory in Fortress House, London, where the excavation archive is also kept.

DISCUSSION

The arrangements of Denny refectory were very similar to those of any other monastic refectory or indeed a medieval dining hall like that of Pembroke College, Cambridge, which the Countess also founded. At the ringing of the bell for meals the sisters assembled in the cloister and filed into the refectory via the west door having washed their hands in a lavatorium which was normally just outside in a recess beside this door. At Denny this portion of the refectory wall is of post-Dissolution date so we cannot say if there was

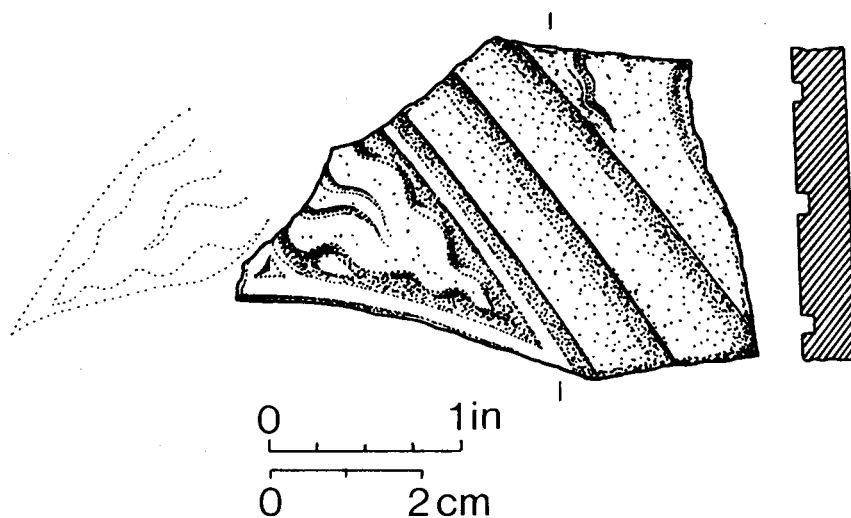


Figure 5. Fragment of carved marble panel, found 1984. Scale 1:1.

a lavatorium there but the drain found beneath the floor may have served one (see above, p. 76). The south side of the refectory probably had a lean-to roof supported by corbels in the wall, some of which still survive.

According to the Poor Clares' rule a lengthy grace was said or sung before and after every meal, during which the nuns knelt and 'sche whoche hath blessid the tabel schal turne here to the ymage if any be in the freytoure . . .' (Seton 1914, 111). If there was such an image at Denny it could have been on the north or south wall or in the 'recess' in the west wall (see above, p. 69) because the windows the east wall and the high panelling below them would have left little room for such a focus of special attention, although refectories with un-windowed east walls often had important religious wall paintings here (see, for example, Horsham St. Faith Priory, Park 1986, 75). The small marble fragment that was found in 1984 (Fig. 5) might conceivably have been part of such an image.

The dais at the 'high' end of the refectory was intended for the seating of the abbess, senior nuns and honoured guests such as the foundress herself who could have entered or retired to her private apartments via the small south-east doorway (now blocked). The rest of the nuns, their personal servants which the rule allowed them to retain (Seton 1914, 101) and any other permitted visitors sat on the stone benches with their backs to the north and south walls. Although the wall benches were continuous there must have been breaks in the tabling, as in college halls today, to allow for reasonably dignified access. A suggested reconstruction of the original appearance of the seating and tabling is shown in Fig. 6. The fixed tabling is modelled on what survives in the great hall of Winchester College (Eames 1977, pls. 70A and B). Wall seating was standard monastic planning and evidence for it can still be seen in many other surviving refectories, as for example at Thetford Cluniac Priory where, however, the dais was a good deal higher, or at Durham Cathedral where remains of the bench footings and tiled floor, together with the evidence for the basis of the foot-pace (in this case a wooden sleeper beam), were also revealed by excavation (Gee 1966). Bushmead Augustinian Priory, Beds., and Durham also have evidence for a central open hearth, which is absent at Denny and was

doubtless a luxury inappropriate to the tenets of the Poor Clares. Seating around the walls at Denny left a large empty space in the body of the room, much in excess of what was required for the serving of food to those seated.

There were generally two meals a day, 'mete' and 'soper', which were eaten in silence. The use of 'signis religious and honestis' (Seton 1914, 88) were permitted while one of the sisters read to the gathering from a pulpit such as is also represented in Plate 7. Refectory pulpits were normally located in a north or south wall near the east end and constructed by thickening the wall at this point to allow access up a narrow staircase to the reader's pulpit. At Denny the blocking above the small north doorway (Plate 6) is probably where the pulpit was but the annex on the north side of the refectory shown on the early engravings but now totally gone (see above and Plate 2) is too large to have been solely for a pulpit as Gilyard-Beer suggested (1977, 18) and its windows suggest it contained a first floor.

The north annex to Denny refectory may well have served as the misericord, a special room where meat was permitted to be eaten. The small doorway in the refectory which necessitated a break in the seating and probably the tabling too (although the footings for the latter pass across this point) may therefore have led into a ground-floor misericord in which there was also access up to the main refectory pulpit. While the stairs and first floor remain conjectural the ground plan of this small refectory annex may be compared with a very similar arrangement of the mid 14th-century in Birkenhead Benedictine Priory, Cheshire, which has also been identified as a former misericord (Brakspear 1925, 121). Both rooms at Birkenhead were on undercrofts and there is no sign of the pulpit. At Jervaulx Abbey, Yorkshire, where the refectory lay north-south in the Cistercian manner, a small misericord with a fireplace was added on to the south end in the 15th century when the Rule was relaxed and meat was allowed three times a week except during fasting. A meat kitchen was built which could also serve the nearby infirmary (Hope and Brakspear 1911, 334). Another Cistercian misericord, about the size of Denny's, has recently been excavated at St. Mary Grace, London.

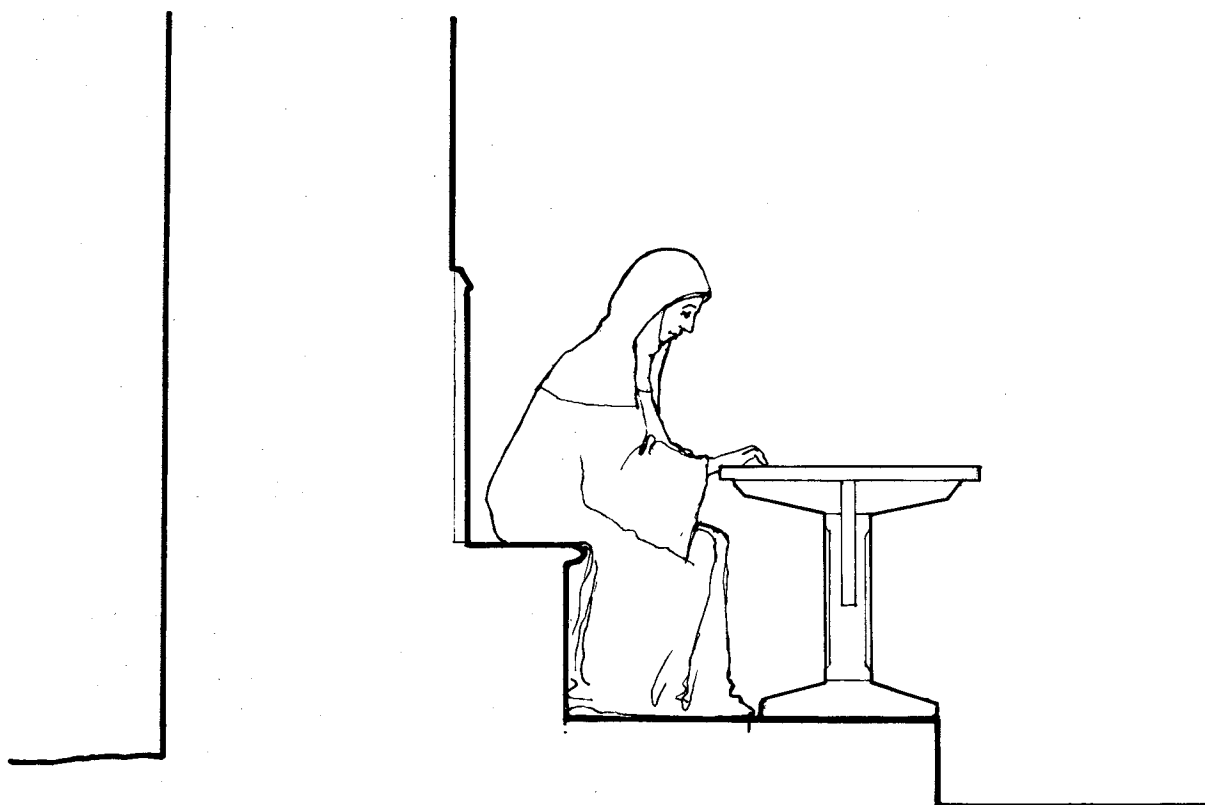


Figure 6. Suggested reconstruction by T.W. Ball of the tabling and benching along north and south walls of refectory.

The Poor Clare sisters were permitted to drink wine and to eat fish and milk products, but according to chapter 39 of the Rule of St. Benedict only the aged and sick were allowed to eat the flesh of a quadruped (Seton 1914, *passim*). Such sisters were normally cared for in an infirmary set apart from the claustral buildings, just as the misericord was normally a free-standing building away from the main refectory. Unfortunately we have no documentary evidence for either at Denny (see Appendix below) and the identification of the annex as a misericord must be regarded as tentative. It would have been an inconvenient arrangement in that meat from the kitchen would have had to be taken through the refectory (to the torment of the other nuns!). A storeroom for linen or for books for the pulpit above are simpler alternative uses.

The refectory at Denny was large and spaciouly planned for only about fifty persons at most, but the scale of the building befitted the scale on which the foundress endowed this and her other foundations. In the summer of 1773 it seemed to James Essex to be a 'light and cheerful building' (above p.

69) and thus the foundress no doubt intended it to be. But in winter, with the wind from the Fens against the large north windows and with no heating, the panelling and painted walls must have seemed small consolation for the sisters sitting in silence immediately beneath those windows, eating their frugal meals and listening to lengthy readings.

DOCUMENTARY APPENDIX

While the main historical facts relating to the foundation and dissolution of the nuns' abbey are known, there are very few contemporary written references to its daily life and even fewer to the actual buildings. A 15th-century book of devotions which belonged to the last abbess is now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Hatton MS 18). We learn a little about economic and social life at Denny from the survival of a fragmentary notebook of 1366 that belonged to the Cambridge Franciscans (Moorman 1952, 356) and from other contemporary references published by Bourdillon (1926, *passim*) and Gibbons

(1891, 153, 145, 433). Only three actual accounts survive and as these have never been published their contents are here summarised. The buildings they refer to were mainly in the outer court or farm. They mention a gatehouse, dovehouse, bakehouse, buttery, kitchen, guest-house and in particular a chapel in the chancel of the church. The receipts and expenses relate mainly to rents, the repairs of farm buildings and the purchase of food. The considerable amount of meat in the form of pork, beef or mutton was presumably mainly for consumption in the guest-house and to a much lesser extent in the suggested misericord or infirmary.

I. A.D. 1324–1325

Extracts relating to buildings from the accounts of John of Mesdone, warden of the manor of Denny, for 21 September 18 Edward II to the day after Michaelmas 19 Edward II (PRO SC6/766/12).

Clearing a blocked gutter on the roof of the new chamber 16d.

Repair of certain sections of broken wall next to the stable and barn 4d.

Repair of ruined and fallen lean-to (*perjet*) of hay barn 13s and repair of broken cart shed; roofing, raising and plastering a certain wall between the outer gate and the cart shed; certain piece of wall between the said gate and porch roofed and rebuilt; cart shed roofed and raised on every side; old hall raised and all southern side of the same roofed; 2 walls on each side of the door towards the bakehouse roofed and built; 1 wall at head of bakery, 1 wall between garderobe, lord's chamber and dairy roofed and built; bakery completely built and all north side of *dom' pressor* roofed and rebuilt, and in unblocking a gutter on the small barn, inclusively 13s.

Accounts on the dorse also mention the bringing of *herba* into the manor for re-roofing of outbuildings and walls, and cleaning the gutter on the new chamber.

II. A.D. 1325–1326

Extracts from same account as last from day after Michaelmas 1325 to the same day 1326 (PRO SC6/766/13).

Amongst the expenses of the manor:

60 bundles of thatch on the roof of the lord's solar, the garderobe of the same and the granary where damaged by great winds, 8d.

For repairing all defects in the roof of the great barn everywhere, roofing the porch and gutter of the said barn and in rebuilding the same barn and both covered porches of the said barn, roofing the porches on every side, rebuilding and raising, roofing and building a certain wall between the cowshed and hay barn, roofing the said barn totally on the west side and making good all roofing defects in the said barn, rebuilding and reroofing the west side of the great stable and making good all other roofing defects, roofing and rebuilding a certain wall between the said stable and the main church, rebuilding the granary, plastering all walls and overhangs between the gate of the court and the main (*capud*) church towards the west; together with all defects of roofing in the kitchen and repairing (*ariund*); in total 13s 4d.

Payment for roofing the lord's solar, garderobe and pentice of the said solar on the side of (*vers'*) the church, and the granary which were unroofed by great winds, and repairing other defects in hall, kitchen and gutter.

III. A.D. 1412–1413

Extracts from the accounts of Richard Fleming, 14 October, 14 Henry IV to 8 December, 1 Henry V (PRO SC6/1257/2).

Receipts.

20s from John Day, cowman of Denny, for part payment for his rent for the year preceding.

6s 2d received from a tanner for hide sold to him.

57s 2d received from John Culling, cowman, for ox and bullock leather required in the guest-house.

Allowances to tenants for the repairs of the manor wherever the lord of the manor deemed necessary: for the repair of the roofs and walls of the manor 3s 4d; for the repair of the stone windows of the chancel of the church 10s; for the thatching of the barn there 5s; for straw bought for it 3s and for reed bought for it 4d; for oil bought for

the lamp in the chancel 16d; and for straw for thatching the church in various places 12d.

£12 15s 4d received from the lady abbess of the convent.

Total receipts: £68 18s 6d ob.

Expenses.

Carriage of corn from Wisbech to Denny for sowing 20d.

Paid to John Holm for threshing in the barn 12d.

1 gown of russet bought for Thomas the boy 20½d.

1 bronze bowl bought for the kitchen 4s 8d.

2 tankards bought for the buttery 7d.

Making of 1 gown and one tunic for the boy in the kitchen 5d.

Paid to master John Caple for 1 saddle 3s 4d.

Eggs bought at various times £1 16s 10d.

1 horse of grey colour bought 30s 4d.

Young pigs bought 18s 11d.

1 pike bought 17d.

Corn bought £5 10s 4d.

3 oxen bought £1 14s 4d.

Paid to Agnes Bury at the feast of the Nativity 20s.

Paid to Agnes Bury at other festivals 63s 11d.

For the repair of the door of the laundry 4d.

Expenses of the steward of the guest-house in going to Cambridge for hiring a carpenter for the repair of the tenement in Cambridge 10d.

For timber for the repair of the said tenement 20s.

Cows bought for the guest-house £1 3s.

Dried fish bought at Midsummer Fair, at Kings Lynn and elsewhere £2 17s.

Eels bought 15d.

Salted fish bought at Stourbridge for the guest-house £8 12s 2d.

Paid to the Abbess 40d.

Paid to the lady Agnes Bury 40d.

Paid to the bailiff in the autumn 20s.

1 key bought for the gate of the abbey 2d.

For stray beasts 2d.

34 sheep bought for the guest-house £2 7s 10d.

3 cows bought for the guest-house £1 3s.

2lb. of pepper 2s 10d.

2½ lb. of *coton* [quinces?] 2s 6d.

For ginger 20s.

For half a pound of saffron 5s 2d.

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