

ART. X.—*Cartmel Priory Church.* By JOHN F. CURWEN,  
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*Read at Cartmel Church, June 18th, 1919.*

WILLIAM Mareschal, who became Earl of Pembroke in 1189, by right of his marriage with the heiress of Strongbow, was the foremost man in England when King John died. For thirty years he had been a tower of strength to the Crown. He stood by the aged King Henry II. against Prince Richard, whom he unhorsed (1189), and yet by sheer strength of character he received both pardon for this action, and promotion, when Coeur de Lion came to the throne. Ten years later his influence induced the Normans to acknowledge John as Richard's successor; he was the staunch supporter of his king in the wars of Normandy; he conciliated the barons at the conference which preceded the signing of the Great Charter; and, although he frequently came into collision with John, his loyalty never wavered. When well over eighty years of age the great Marshal was unanimously chosen Regent (1216) after the coronation of the baby King Henry III., and a year later, by his military prowess, he defeated the rebellious barons and their French troops, at Lincoln. He died in 1219, and Philip of France, the father of his chief adversary, pronounced the fitting epitaph:—"The Marshal was the most loyal man that I have ever known, in any place where I have been."

It is a good thing to know and record the history of a man who in the days of his strength founded this Priory, and a nice thing to realize that he did so, during the year of his marriage, for the health of the souls [inter alia] firstly of King Richard and secondly of his young bride Isabel de Clare.

It would seem that Marshal brought a number of Black Canons \* from the Priory of Bradenstoke, co. Wiltshire, and granted to them all his land and rights in Cartmel wherewith to form a settlement here. He directed that the house should be a Priory for canons regular, of the Order of St. Augustine, that it should be free and released from subjection to any other house, and that it should never be raised to the dignity of an Abbey. The charter concludes by saying: —“ This house have I founded for the increase of holy religion, giving and conceding to it every kind of liberty that the mouth can utter, or the heart of man can conceive; whosoever therefore shall cause loss or injury to the said house or its immunities, may he incur the curse of God, and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of all the other saints of God, beside my particular malediction.”

That a *parish* church existed before this foundation is proved by the Furness Abbey charters, for among them we find several deeds of an earlier date, that are witnessed by ecclesiastics of Cartmel. Thus about 1135, fifty-three years before, one is attested by “ Willelmus, clericus de Kertmel ”; and another about 1155 by “ Ucchelman, persona de Chertmel.” The revenues of this ancient church with all its chapels were merged, by the Marshal’s gift, into those of the Priory, so that from the very first the parishioners had a right to certain attention from the canons. But the new buildings would take many years to erect, and there is every reason to believe that the ancient church was allowed to remain to serve the canons, while they proceeded, with care and at leisure, to build up their domestic quarters and finally their new church. Indeed I have a strong conviction that this building was still in course of erection in the year 1230, when the Abbot of York granted an

\* Their garb consisted of a long black cassock, with rochet above it, and a black cloak and hood over all. Though this order had a previous existence, yet its rules were first imposed by Pope Innocent II. in 1139.

indulgence of 20 days' pardon to all who should charitably give of their goods to the fabric of the church of St. Mary of Cartmel. Moreover, three years later (1233) Pope Gregory IX. issued a bull to his beloved children, the Prior and monks, stating that he had taken the church of the Holy Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, of Karmel, under his Papal protection.

Now if this supposition be a correct one, it at once takes us into the Early English period of architecture. Therefore, if we are told that Norman, or more properly speaking Romanesque, work exists here, I must ask you to hesitate before accepting the statement. It would be far safer to look upon any such details as of the late Transitional period, details that were still kept and copied because they were liked and amalgamated with the new Gothic by the Early English builders.

Let us try and picture this first Priory Church. To begin with, at the east end, there were originally six lancet windows, three above and three below, with the triforium or passage in the thickness of the wall, passing between them. External traces of these windows can still be seen, as also the foundations of the broad flat buttresses that ran up the gable separating each light. Then on either side of the chancel there was a single lancet window, and this proves that the side chapels were at first shorter than they are at present. In Benedictine and Cistercian churches the chancels were usually *aisled*, so as to allow of processions around the sanctuary, but the Augustinians, not wishing or expecting to have a concourse of pilgrims, adopted the plan of having an *unaisled* sanctuary—an arrangement that allowed of side windows just at that spot where light was the most essential.

A large choir was the chief need, where all the monks would continually assemble, for the recitation of the canonical hours. On either side, the chapels were separated

from it by two semicircular arches, and although these at first sight appear to be Romanesque in shape, yet the label, the capitals, and other features, show them to have been built by the Early English builders. Curiously enough, at the western end of the northern chapel we find an exact opposite, namely a pointed or Early English arch ornamented with Romanesque details. This Transitional stage from the Romanesque to the pure Early English style is apt to be very confusing, until we remember that the masons, when left to themselves, naturally copied details that they were accustomed to, and avoided, as far as possible, the new-fangled ideas of the coming school. One can almost imagine their dread, should the Prior go on a visit to Carlisle, Lanercost or Hexham, lest he should return with some new fancies of slender shafts, deeper-wrought mouldings and new ornaments, to baffle them. Or again—shall we say their pleasure?—if some wandering freemason should arrive and show them how easily the simple square “nail-head” ornament, could be expanded, cut into four delicate leaves, and become what we now call the “dog-tooth.”

What marks the Early English period even more than the pointed arch, was the discovery and introduction of the rib vaulted roof; and here in the north chapel we find it, in its simple and earliest form.

The south chapel likewise had at first a ribbed vaulting, and two corbels, that supported the ribs, are still visible. That the chapel was originally of the same width as the northern chapel is determined by noticing, in the south-west corner, the external plinth of the transept and its commencement to turn eastward.

The south transept had no windows in the end wall because the domestic buildings abutted up against it. Within the transept a staircase led up to the dormitories on the first floor, and this was always used by the canons

when going to or returning from the night services of matins and lauds. There is an original lancet window in the east wall, but a Romanesque one in the west, as, by being of a squatter form, it could be more readily placed above the cloister-arcade outside. The small square windows, that once lighted the triforium, can be seen blocked up on the external face.

The north transept was lighted at the end by four lancet windows, two above and two below the triforium. A round-headed doorway now pierces one of them, an insertion that was made when the dormitories, for some reason or other, were transferred to the northern side of the church. In the west side wall there still remains a lancet in its original form, and a staircase leading up to the triforium will be found in the north-west corner.

So far as the Priory was concerned this completed their church, but as I have said, the Prior had also to attend to the needs of the Parish. So we find attached to the church, but entirely cut off from it by a stone screen, a short nave. We can see from the external walls that this nave could only have measured some 27 feet in length, and probably it consisted of two small bays, now demolished. A separate doorway gave access to it, direct from the town and without intrusion into the monastic quarters. A separate altar stood in front of the screen, which would be served by a secular priest, and doubtless there would be a chapel or two in the aisles. It was an uncomfortable arrangement, however, for the chanting of the monastic offices must have interfered frequently with the parochial services. All over the country this combined sort of church led up to bitter quarrels and it is not surprising to read that, in many places, the trouble was only settled by the building of twin churches within the precinct, such as at Rochester, Coventry, Evesham, Bury St. Edmunds and at Carlisle.

A curtain wall separated the Priory from the outer

world. Just within the gateway were placed various buildings such as the kitchens, the storehouses, the almonry and the guest-house—premises in which the Priory came into necessary contact with secular affairs. The canonical buildings were further secluded within and around a cloister-garth, situated in the warm and sheltered angle between the nave and the south transept. This was the *heart* of the Priory, and the open arcade against the church wall was practically the living-room where the canons would sit on stone benches in the sunshine. On their left hand the arcade gave entrance to the chapter house and library, with the dormitory above, abutting on to the transept. Facing them was the fraternity, where they took their meals, and behind that the infirmary. On their right hand the arcade was continued to the inner gateway with the kitchens, buttery and a certain amount of accommodation for the lay-brethren.

Such then was the appearance of the Priory when in 1322, as the *Chronicle of Lanercost* puts it, "the Scots went further beyond the sands of Leven to Cartmel, and burnt the lands round the priory of the Black Canons, taking away cattle and spoil: and so they crossed the sands of Kent as far as the town of Lancaster, which they burnt, except the priory of the Black Monks and the house of the Preaching Friars." This is somewhat ambiguous, but it has been taken to mean that the Scots did not burn the Priory at Cartmel. And yet I want to point out that just about this time (the first half of the xivth century) architectural details show the arrangements of the Priory to have been entirely remodelled. The cloister-garth with all its domestic buildings was moved from the south, to the north side of the church; the curtain wall instead of enclosing an area to the south now only enclosed some 22 acres to the north; and a new gate-house was built with reveals for the gates to

open northward. Can any argument be found for such a great and unusual change, unless it be that the old buildings had been burnt to the ground?

At this time also the nave and aisles of the church were lengthened by the addition of two bays. The extent of this enlargement can be gathered at once by noticing externally, on the south side the abrupt commencement of the xivth century plinth, and on the north side the very rough cobble-walling. The two Carnarvon arched doorways are of this period.

Then again, the south chapel was enlarged to almost double its former width and made 21 feet longer. The interesting feature about this work is that the old stones (except those of the windows) were relaid throughout—the old plinth, the old ashlar facing and the old string-courses were re-used, the windows alone being of the Decorated style of architecture.

The introduction of the sedilia of this date justifies the surmise that the chapel was intended to be henceforth the Parish church, in lieu of the nave; indeed it has been known since this period as the Town Choir, and I would like to congratulate the late Vicar, upon the tasteful way in which he endeavoured to fit it up again, for some of the smaller services.

It was during this xivth century that a new belfry was needed; but instead of building one at the western end, as at Bolton, or raising the original walls of the lantern, as at Kirkstall, the builders constructed four diagonal arches *within* the upper part of the tower, springing from the middle point of each side. On these they erected with perfect safety, though in defiance of every principle in architecture, a belfry of moderate height, which stands a square inscribed within a square, diagonally to its base.

During the xvth century there is no progress to record. It was a period in which the monasteries, as a whole,

lost all their pristine ideals. Rightly at first, by abandoning the ideal of strict seclusion and by mixing in public affairs, they had served a great purpose, not only as distributors of relief to the poor, as inns for travellers, and as places of deposit for valuables, but also as pioneers in farming and as centres of learning and education. But as time passed and they became recipients of great wealth, discipline relaxed, sloth crept in, and with it immorality. At this time England was re-awakening in all departments of learning, art and enterprise, but instead of joining in with, and welcoming the revival of letters, the monastic orders as a whole repelled the new learning with uncontrolled obstinacy ; so much so indeed that they drew upon themselves the dislike of all right-thinking people, and ultimately their own doom. We have nothing to do here with the political side of the question, indeed I doubt if we could agree as to whether the Vicar General was actuated by a desire to remove a cancer, or by a desire for plunder, or whether he found that it was a necessary step—a vital corollary to the supremacy of the Crown and the freedom of the Church. As antiquaries, however, we must all agree in deploring the resultant effect upon the buildings.

Commissioners were appointed to report upon the various houses. They were furnished with 86 Articles of enquiry, which certainly contain the foundation for a stringent reformation ; but unfortunately the Commissioners elected were all biased. They appear to have been bent upon the discovery of damning evidence and certainly their methods and bearing were atrocious ; yet be it said, a strictly judicial investigation would still have revealed an appalling state of things.

When the Prior of Cartmel was summoned to give an account of the monastic income, he returned it at about £89 ; but not realizing the purpose of the Survey, and by not wishing to appear *too* rich, he made a great mistake



in returning so small a sum. For when the Act was passed confiscating all the smaller monasteries with incomes less than £200 a year, and not the wealthier ones, as he had supposed, the Prior and Monks petitioned for a new survey, on the ground that the former valuation did not contain all the sources from which they derived an income.

Accordingly other commissioners were sent down, to whom the Prior presented an account amounting to £212 12s. 10d., or a sum just above the £200 limit! This sum would be equal now-a-days to an annual income of £5,112, and it was claimed for the support of only ten young men—the Prior aged 41, the Sub-Prior aged 36, and the other eight with ages ranging down to 25 years.

But the efforts made to save the House were of no avail, for it was dissolved in the following year, being the 349th from its foundation. The Earls of Derby and Sussex were selected to carry out the royal mandate, and they effectually accomplished their task. The whole of the domestic buildings, with the exception of the gateway, and one or two small buildings, were pulled down completely. How the gateway escaped is not known, but the church was saved by the parishioners declaring with truth, that it was *parochial* as well as monastic. This remonstrance ultimately stopped the demolition, though not before the whole, with the exception of the Piper Choir, saved by its stone vaulting, had been unroofed and most of the windows broken.

For eighty years the church remained as a desolate ruin, and the interior sustained considerable injury from the action of the weather. It was probably at this period that the stained glass, containing the arms of the Priory and its founder, was removed from the windows and curiously pieced together in the east window of Windermere church. It has been badly shattered, but we can only be thankful that so much has been saved, even though it has been taken to another church.

The ancient fragments now in the east window and the Town Choir are supposed to have come from Furness Abbey.

In the year 1617, George Preston of Holker offered in consideration of two "twenty mark casts" (£26 13s. 4d.) to repair the church, and on the third of July, 1618, an agreement was entered into by him with the governing body. Mr. Preston seems to have carried out his part of the agreement in a liberal spirit, as the inscription to his memory in the Town Choir states, that beyond re-roofing the chancel and the south aisles, "he beautified it within very decently, with fretted plaister worke, adorned the chancel with curious carved woodworke and placed therein a pair of organs of great value." The canopies which he erected over the monks' seats are of the Renaissance period and are worthy of considerable notice. The stalls are elaborately carved with the emblems of our Saviour's Passion, and outside the gates he placed his coat of arms, on the southern side.

About this time also, the present east window was inserted, of Perpendicular design. It is 45 feet in height and, like the great east window in Carlisle Cathedral, it has eight mullions dividing the lights. It will be noticed that the lower part of the window is concealed by the reredos, so that its complete height can only be seen from the outside.

In the year 1623, it was ordered that the "bodystead of the church bee decently formed," and in 1626 the present porch was erected.

Although the district was the scene of considerable strife during the Civil Wars, there is no evidence that the church suffered at all from the Independents.

After the Restoration (1678) William Robinson of Newby Grange bequeathed a sum of £40 for the erection of the vestry, which is entered by a flight of six steps from the Piper Choir, and Thomas Preston, in 1692, furnished the same with some 300 books.

At the end of the 18th century, the fine appearance of the church was marred by a gallery that was erected across the top of the screen, in which was placed a large barrel-organ. Then across the north Transept and the first arch of the nave, another gallery was erected by privileged persons, not to secure further accommodation so much as to get away from the rot and general dampness about the floor.

Dr. Whittaker writing in 1818 says :—

In this fine church, after the lapse of nearly two centuries another Preston begins to be wanted. Indeed, about every conventual church still used for public worship, which I have seen, there is an appearance of something between a cathedral and a ruin. Damp floors, green walls and rotting beams ; shelter, just sufficient for owls and bats ; and light, augmented by broken panes, are the connecting links between the high and finished repair of the one and the total abandonment of the other.

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