

# CONISHEAD PRIORY CHURCH.

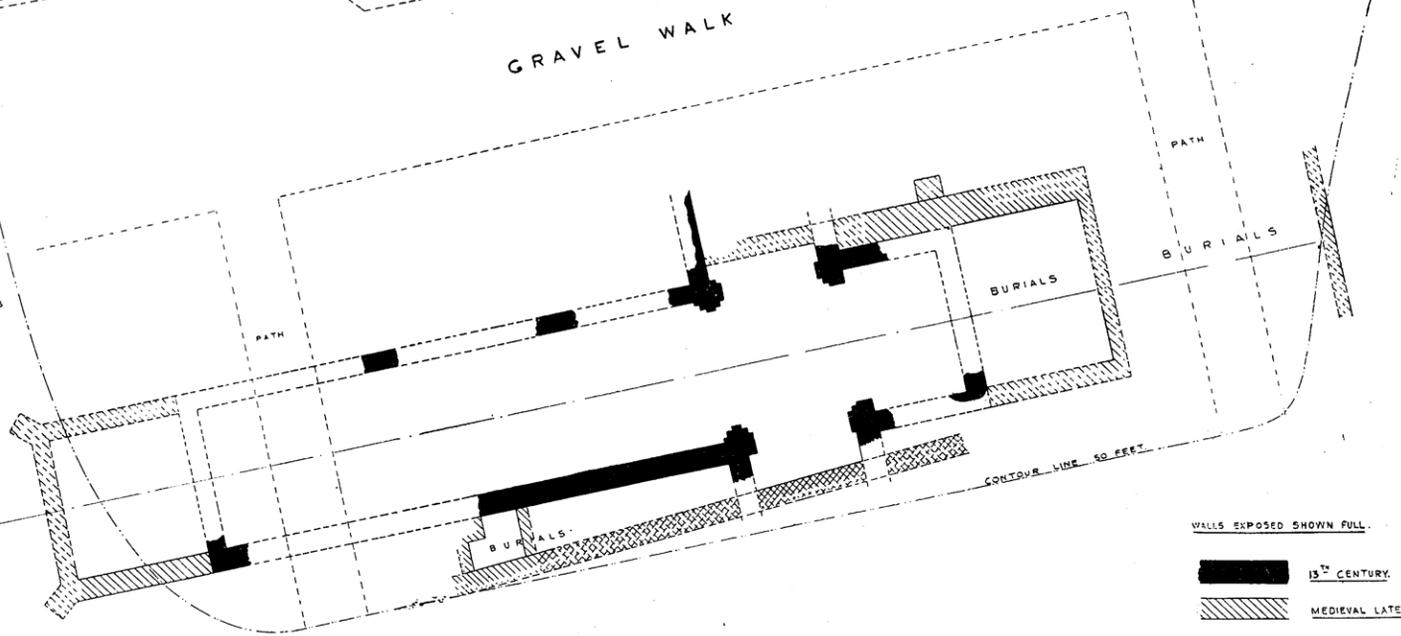
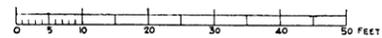
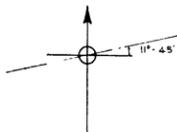
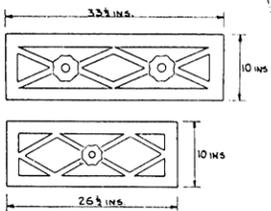
## PLAN OF FOUNDATIONS.

CONISHEAD PRIORY MANSION.

APPROXIMATE POSITION OF  
THREE ARCH CULVERT OF WATER  
SUPPLY OUTFALL.  
DIRECTION NOT KNOWN.

GRAVEL WALK

SKETCHES OF CARVED STONES  
BUILT INTO SOUTH WALL OF  
MANSION AT POSITIONS MARKED X



BOWLING GREEN

WALLS EXPOSED SHOWN FULL.

- 13<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY.
- MEDIEVAL LATER
- DOUBTFUL

T.G. SEPT. 1929.

TO FACE PAGE 149.

ART. XVII.—*Excavations at Conishead Priory.* By P. V. KELLY.

*Read at the Site, September 11th, 1929.*

### I. THE PRIORY CHURCH.

BESIDES the Abbey of Furness there were, as West observes, two other religious houses in the small division of Low Furness: a hospital at Bardsea, and a priory at Conishead. The latter house was founded by William de Lancaster, Baron of Kendal, between the years 1180-1187, as a hospital of Canons Regular of St. Augustine, for the relief of the poor, and for lepers, in the environs of Ulverston. The actual year is not known because the foundation charter is lost, and we only know it in an abbreviated form from the *Inspeximus* of Edward II, of the Prior's evidence (Farrer, *Lanc. Pipe Rolls*, p. 356). The endowments and grants made to it, as collected by Dugdale, are given in detail in West's *Antiquities of Furness*, pp. 186-195. Practically the whole of their possessions consisted of estates held outside the district, for the Furness monks were jealous of the existence of another religious house so near to their own, and they took care that the priory should play a subservient part to the abbey, and not in any way compete with it. To this end, in 1208, the canons were constrained to sign a deed by which they agreed not to accept grants of land over which the monks exercised control, excepting within their own territory of Ulverston, and that even such grants must not exceed in total one-third of the whole manor, without the consent of the abbot. Furthermore, by the same agreement they bound themselves not to allow the number of canons at the priory to exceed

thirteen (*Furness Coucher*, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 437). In spite of their lowly position, however, the canons enjoyed the patronage of the principal families in Furness. The Haryngtons of Muchland were their greatest benefactors, and it was through the good offices of the Marquis of Dorset, the lord of Muchland, that the threatened suppression of their house by Wolsey in 1525, in order to bestow its revenues on one of his new colleges at Oxford, was averted. It was eventually dissolved by the Act of February, 1536, at which time there were 8 canons and 48 servants in residence. The revenues of the priory at the Valuation in 1535 were entered at £97, but on the re-valuation after the dissolution this was increased to £161. 5s. 9d.

The process of destruction began almost immediately after the suppression, for in 1540 a considerable portion of the priory church was taken down, and the stones carted away to rebuild the parish church at Ulverston, which had been almost destroyed by a gale. Many of these dressed yellow sandstone blocks can still be recognized in the tower of that church. The site was acquired from the Crown by William Sandes, bailiff of the Liberty of Furness in 1548, from whom it descended by marriage to the Doddings, and afterwards to the Bradyll family. The present mansion which was built in 1823-24 is the second house which has occupied the site of the conventual buildings. The earlier one was in existence before 1774, and is described by West in his *Antiquities of Furness*. There were apparently some portions of the priory church still visible at that time, according to a little MS. *History and Antiquities of Furness*, written in 1777 by William Fell, of Ulverston, a schoolboy aged 11 years, now preserved in the Barrow Public Library, which says, "There is near Ulverstone a Priory of ancient Form, but one side built anew by the curious Architect Hird." Probably the side built anew would be artificial ruins intended to

embellish the grounds in the curious taste of that Gothic age. Jopling writing in 1843 (*Sketches of Furness and Cartmel*, p. 161) says, "No part of the ancient priory is now visible, but under the lawn to the south of the present structure, the foundations of the church have been traced, and the position of the high altar, with tombs, and the pillars of the central tower ascertained. The church appears to have been about a hundred feet in length, and judging from its width at the eastern end it is probable that there were aisles to the church. In a tomb in the south wall near the high altar, several skeletons were found on digging for the foundations of the present building, and among them, those of a man, a woman, and a child. From the general appearance of the tomb, and the pieces of gilt coffin-plates found, it would seem to have been the burial place of some family of distinction. Another tomb also was discovered in the same wall a little further to the west. The conventual buildings were situated to the north of the church, upon the site of the present mansion. The last portion of the ancient Priory was removed about twenty years ago." These meagre details constituted all that was known about the Priory of Conishead until the autumn of 1928, when, as the turf of the tennis lawn had become weedy and poor, and several large stones were beginning to show through, Dr. Wishart of the Conishead Priory Co. decided to re-turf it, and at the same time to make an effort to trace the foundations known to be there. Digging began on the 2nd October, and was continued with much interruption by wet weather, until the end of the year. A considerable area of the site was dug over, many trial pits were sunk, and from the foundations discovered it is now possible to recover, in some measure, the ground plan of the church. This plan has many uncommon features, most of which appear to be due to the difficulties presented by the site. The transepts are unusually short, and there

are no aisles. On the other hand, the nave is very long in proportion to its width. The absence of aisles was referred to by the churchwardens of Ulverston, who in their petition to the Crown in 1540, for permission to take dressed stones from here said, "there are no pillar stones at Connyghshed, because the said Church 'hade never no pyllers' in it before the suppression, but there are enough stones in the manor of Furness to build 5 or 6 churches." (*Lanc. & Chesh. Record Soc.*, vol. 35, p. 149).

The site of the monastery is on an elevated plateau, the sides of which slope steeply to the east and west, and less steeply to the south. On the east is a small ravine in which is a watercourse, with an ornamental lake and artificial waterfalls. To the south the ground has been terraced to form a bowling green on a lower level. The lawn occupies all the southern end of the plateau. A more beautiful site, or one enjoying a more delightful climate, it would be difficult to find in the North. Work commenced at the south-west corner, and at a depth of 10 inches the footings of the south wall of the nave were uncovered, and traced for some distance to the east. To the south of this, at a distance of 7 feet, and on the crest of the slope, another similar wall was found, seemingly extending the full length of the church. The space between contained quantities of human remains, mixed with lime, in properly constructed burial vaults.

The footings were 4 ft. wide, being made of limestone rubble, with undressed blocks of yellow sandstone. Attention was next directed to the east end, and here the south wall was again met with together with its accompanying outer wall. Here was found the return of the east wall of the chancel, which was followed to the northwards, and terminated in a wall of exceptional thickness, about 6 ft. thick, running east and west. Outside these massive foundations but not bonded into them, and in a line with the east chancel wall, was the

base of a great buttress, 4 ft. square. The purpose of this thick wall is difficult to understand, because it is not in line with the north wall of the nave which was afterwards found, and it appears also to run into the north transept. The floor of the chancel which was completely destroyed had been constructed of lime concrete, and laid with enamelled tiles, bearing graceful diamond-shaped and floral patterns of the 13th century. At the east end, both north and south, were also found many burials. Beyond the lawn to the west, the south wall was traced down the slope, and here the return of the west wall of the nave was found, but extending only a few feet. These foundations were on a much lower level than elsewhere, and the floor of the nave must have been raised inside to bring it up to the general level, and if there was an entrance at this end it would have to be approached by means of steps. No trace of the north wall was found in any of the trial pits. So far there were no signs of the transepts or the piers of the crossing, and after the first fortnight, work had to be entirely suspended until the middle of December, owing to the excessively wet weather. Only about four or five facing stones had been found, and these were all of yellow sandstone chamfered on one edge. The only red sandstone were fragments of what appeared to be monumental slabs with short projecting arms, and a capital of a pilaster with a Runic *sgraffito* in excellent lettering on one of the inner faces. Roofing slates with holes for wooden pegs were met with in great abundance. Among the small finds were large numbers of quaintly shaped, but broken, glass flagons with an iridescent coating, medieval potsherds, carved bone handles, and teeth of elk, deer and other animals.

With the resumption of digging after nearly six weeks of idleness many interesting discoveries were made. The most important was the uncovering of the four bases of the piers of the crossing of the nave and transepts. Attached

to these piers were short stretches of the north wall of the nave, and the walls of the transepts, which enabled the width of those portions of the church to be determined. The south wall of the nave was also bared from the crossing, for practically its whole length. There were three courses of dressed stones above the foundations, for a length of 15 ft., and a chamfered plinth extended along the outside. The portion of the north wall attached to the pier was only 3 ft. in thickness, while the south wall was 3 ft. 6 ins. thick. The reason for this thickened wall became apparent when amongst the fragments of dressed stones was found, one, being a portion of a rib of vaulting, with a radius of 7 ft. The only part of the church which could have been vaulted was that space between the south wall of the nave and the outer wall. Jopling's statement about tombs found in the south wall in 1823, and the large quantities of human remains found here during these diggings, suggest the theory that this outer wall was built to form a narrow aisle, containing mortuary chapels for benefactors to the priory. We know that the Haryngtons of Gleaston Castle and the Bardseys of Bardsea Hall had their family burial-vaults and monuments at Conishead. William Lord Haryngton, who died in 1457, desired his body to be buried in that church, and provided two glazed windows in the chapel, a lead roof, an altar there with an alabaster slab (*tabula*), a missal, and a marble image of St. Mary to stand at the foot of his tomb, together with a churchyard cross (*Lanc. & Chesh. Historic Soc.*, vol. 74, p. 152). Christopher Bardsey, in his will dated 1528, gave his body to be buried within the priory of our Blessed Lady of Conyshed, on the south side of the church in a place called 'ye prior Qweyr' (these *Trans.* N.S. xii, 223). The increased thickness of the south wall would therefore be necessary to support the vaulting.

The bases of the chancel arch piers have only the chamfered plinth remaining, but fortunately on the south-

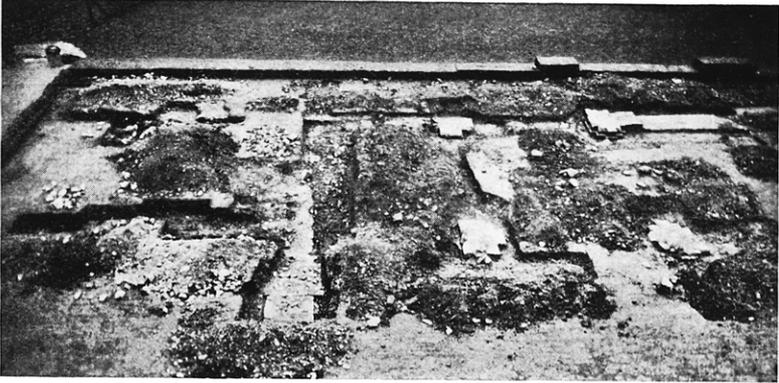


PLATE I, A.—GENERAL VIEW OF EXCAVATIONS.



PLATE I, B.—SOUTH WALL OF NAVE.

FACE P. 154.

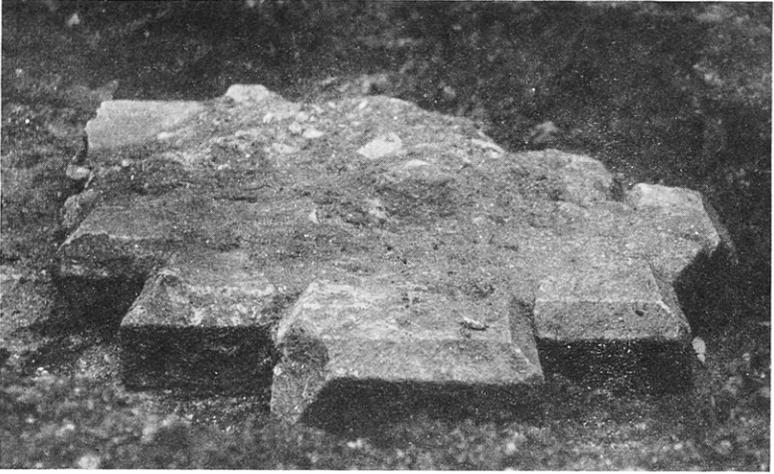


PLATE II, A.—CHANCEL ARCH PIER, S.W.

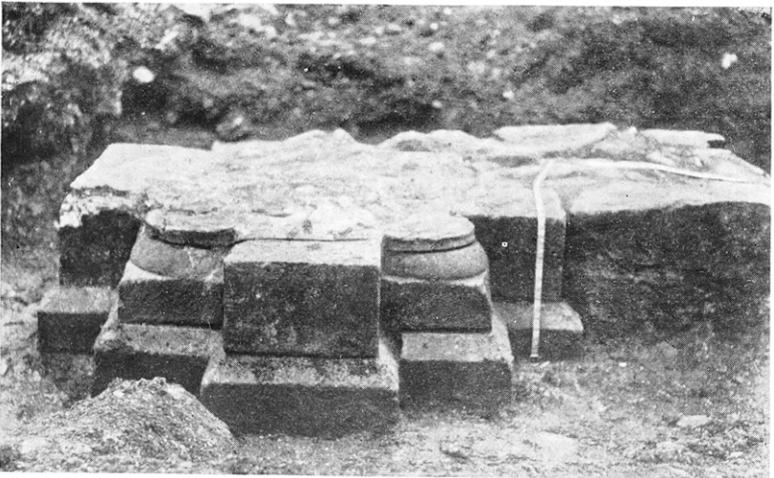


PLATE II, B.—BASE OF NAVE ARCH PIER, S.W.

FACE P. 155.

western base of the nave arch, there is an additional course, consisting of the moulded bases of the shafts carrying the arch. There were also found two of the voussoirs of the arch, and these with the bases of the shafts enable us to form some idea of its style and date. The arch consisted of two orders of a sectional thickness of 2 ft. 6 ins. The inner order was carried on a plain rectangular pilaster 13 ins. by 8 ins. with square corners rising direct from the plinth without base moulding. The arch was probably semicircular, or slightly pointed, and would spring from square bevelled capitals, and both edges of the voussoirs were chamfered. The arches of the outer orders were similar but chamfered only on one edge, and were carried upon cylindrical shafts with torus-moulded bases, with a slight hollow above. The transept arches consisted only of one order, of a plain rectangular section, 28 ins. thick. From the style of the mouldings, it is evident that the crossing belonged to a date not earlier than the middle or late 13th century. The piers of the nave crossing seem to be on a lower level than those of the chancel arch, which might indicate a slight difference in the time of construction. The width of the crossing of the nave and chancel is 17 ft. 2 ins. and of the transepts 14 ft. 2 ins. The length of the nave is 100 ft., and of the chancel 15 ft. the width of both being 21 ft. The orientation of the church is not quite due east and west, the actual bearing of the longitudinal axis of the nave and chancel being  $11^{\circ} 45'$  north of due east. The width of the transepts is 16 ft., but the length could not be ascertained as the ends have been destroyed. As however, the outer south wall crossed the end of the south transept this could not have been more than about 9 ft. The thick wall on the north east appeared also to run into and cut off the end of the north transept, just beyond the piers, but the foundations here are very confused and difficult to decipher.

Not the least interesting among the small finds in the

vicinity of the chancel and choir, are the many fragments of carved stones, which chance has so fortunately preserved, and which have helped to throw light upon the construction of the church. Amongst these fragments we have samples of stones illustrating most of the architectural features. These include, besides the piece of vaulting rib, and voussoirs of the crossing arches already noted, a fragment of moulding with dog-tooth ornament, probably from the principal doorway, another with 14th century foliage, possibly from a tomb, and several additional pieces of the red sandstone slabs with chamfered projections, together with other small capitals and corbels of the same material, similar to that bearing the runic lettering. These latter fragments were very puzzling, and could not be pieced together into a coherent whole until they were examined by Mr. J. Martin of the Office of Works at Furness Abbey. He recognized in them portions of an altar, and from amongst these fragments found enough to reconstruct in skeleton form what had been apparently the High Altar referred to by Jopling. This altar had been in all likelihood executed by some skilled craftsman employed for the purpose, as the quality of the work is much superior to anything else in the church. As reconstructed it is in the form of a rectangular table of masonry 5 ft. long, 3 ft. wide and 3 ft. 6 ins. high. The front face was divided into panels by four flat pilasters rising from the projections of the base slab, and surmounted by capitals with a roll and fillet moulding on the top, and divided from the pilasters by a bead moulding. Between the capitals are three corbels, similar in design but smaller and forming with them a cornice which supported the upper slab. The bead moulding which is repeated on the corbels forms with that on the capitals a continuous string across the top of the panels. Upon the upper slab would be the altar stone of marble hollowed out to contain the relics of saints



PLATE III.—RUNIC INSCRIPTION.

FACE P. 157.

which were the venerated possession of every monastic church. The front panels, of which only a small fragment remains, were ornamented with a diamond-shaped pattern of alternate rounds and hollows. The character of the moulding and ornamentation suggests 13th century work, and probably contemporary with the earlier part of the church.

What then is the explanation of the Runic letters? If they are contemporary with the moulding, we have here an inscription of much later date than that on the Pennington tympanum. They are cut on one of the inner faces, and obviously were not intended to be seen, and this will account for their freshness, and absence of weathering. When it was recognized that the letters were runes, rubbings and sketches, and later on, photographs were submitted to Mr. W. G. Collingwood, our President, who had no difficulty in reading all but the first rune. If we accept this to be R, we have the reading ROTBERT, the 12th century personal name which afterwards became our Robert. But Mr. Collingwood sent photographs to Professor Haakon Shetelig of Bergen, who communicated them to Dr. Lis Jacobsen of Copenhagen, for an opinion on the reading. Dr. Jacobsen kindly writes that "the first rune is certainly D, and not R. The sign is common on the early Danish coins with runic inscriptions, which have not yet been properly published. The mason's name should then be Dotbert. The first rune is only known in Denmark and not in Norway. The others are common to both countries." The inference seems to be that the carver was a Dane.

On each of the overhanging faces of the capital and corbel projections is cut an incised Gothic small letter i, which might be intended for a mason's mark.

To the east of the gable wall of the chancel there are foundations of rough masonry, enclosing a rectangular space of 18 ft. 6 ins. by 24 ft. These are difficult to

account for, as the only building permissible here would be a small Lady Chapel with a roof sufficiently low, as not to obstruct the light to the east window of the church. These foundations therefore can only be those of what was probably a low wall surmounted by a rail or other fence, which enclosed a special portion of the cemetery, nearest the church, reserved for the burials of priors or other persons of distinction.

Still further to the east, in spite of the unfavourable nature of the ground, the slope had been used as the cemetery, and here were found many burials. Great care was taken to disturb these as little as possible beyond noting the general appearance of the tombs, although the ground had been clearly disturbed before. The tombs were large chambers of rough masonry containing several interments, and were covered with undressed slabs of stone. The cemetery seemed to have been enclosed in a roughly built wall, and there were also partition walls of similar character. The partition walls probably enclosed a special part of the cemetery which was reserved for the burial of lepers. After this area had been explored, the surface was restored, and made into a rock garden, but the footings of the boundary wall were left exposed.

During Easter week of 1929, a little further digging was done, with the object of obtaining more information on the puzzle of the north transept. The thick wall north of the chancel was followed along its outer edge, to where it seemed to end inside the transept. An outer facing of ashlar extended from the buttress westwards for about 7 ft., after which only the core remained. In the transept it is impossible to tell whether this is really a wall or a pavement. The core of a wall answering to the transept west wall was found, extending 15 ft. to the north from the base of the pier. This, however, is not like the corresponding wall of the south transept. It is

set 8 ins. further back, and had apparently no plinth on its outer face. Beyond this wall would be the cloister garth. The foundations of the north wall of the nave were also traced for about 50 ft. to the west, but there were no facing stones, and no signs of buttresses dividing the nave into bays. The most interesting find of these later diggings was the return of the original west wall, bonded into the south wall of the nave. The masonry is of the same period, 13th century, and the mortar is identical in composition. This makes the length of the original nave 71 ft. from the piers. The later west wall of the extension measured over 4 ft. in thickness, at the return of the south wall which seems to point to the existence of corner buttresses. This measurement only refers to the core, as there were no facings. The church appears to have been built entirely of yellow sandstone probably from the neighbourhood of Lancaster, and the only use which has been made of the local red sandstone has been for interior mouldings, tombs, and the altar, which would be protected from the weather. The inner face of the walls had no plinth, and had been covered with plaster.

The general conclusions which might be drawn from the information disclosed by these excavations, is that here we have the foundations of a small church, cruciform in plan, but occupying too cramped a site to allow of extension without altering the original design. On the inception of the monastery, the hospital and almshouses were accorded the chief consideration, and these were first erected on the most suitable portion of the site. The church came later, and would be built about the middle of the 13th century. The amount of available room left little scope for an elaborate building. There was insufficient space to allow of properly proportioned transepts, so that after the crossing had been put up, only nominal transepts were added. The nave was originally

71 ft. long, probably of 5 bays, and this with the choir and chancel would make up the 100 ft., as stated by Jopling to be the total length.

At a later period the nave was extended, and the broad foundations and buttress just beyond the chancel north wall were put in; but these later additions are very obscure, and further excavations are needed before their actual purpose can be made clear. The whole of the north-east corner should be cleared out, and the length of both transepts, if possible, determined, also the position of the west doorway. The outer south wall should also be followed its full length to find the returns at each end, and its thickness. This wall is very puzzling. It is not parallel to the nave, but appears rather to follow the crest of the slope, and although the west end is undoubtedly of medieval date, it is possible that some part of it was rebuilt to form a retaining wall when the tennis lawn was made. Owing to the limited area of the site there was great difficulty in disposing of the spoil, and this has added to the obscurity.

The conventual buildings were situated, as before mentioned, to the north of the church, on the site of the present house. Of these buildings, there is scarcely a trace, even of tradition, remaining. The place has been so long destroyed, that even those popular place-names, which are usually to be found in the vicinity of monasteries are absent, with the exception of the name of the house itself. I have however, through the courtesy of the Durham Miners' Welfare Committee, the new owners, been permitted, from time to time, to examine the walls in the basement, whilst they were stripped of plaster, during the alterations necessary to convert the house into a convalescent home, and I am convinced, after close examination, that a good stretch of the south wall, for 4 or 5 feet upwards from the foundations, is of medieval date. The outer face of this wall is of Bath stone,



PLATE IV, A.—ANCIENT ROAD: UPPER AND LOWER SURFACES.



PLATE IV, B.—ANCIENT ROAD: UPPER SURFACE, SHOWING RUTS.

FACE P. 160.

excepting that portion below the level of the present gravel path, which is faced with roughly squared limestone blocks, amongst which are several of the familiar yellow sandstones carved in low relief, with a diamond pattern, the intersections of which are adorned with roses. These stones have evidently formed part of a frieze, possibly of the chapter house or the frater.\* There was also found when the plaster was removed, in one of the walls, a brick oven, 4 ft. wide, and about the same depth, and 2 ft. high, with a very flat arch, slightly domed. This oven, which has since been built up, belonged however, I think, to the first house built on the site after the dissolution.

One very interesting feature, not however visible, remains. This is an underground watercourse which Dr. Wishart discovered a few years ago, when remaking the road to the principal entrance to the house. It runs in three distinct channels from under the house, each covered with a barrel vault. There was also found at the same time, when digging a flower bed, a stone slab, which when removed, disclosed a vertical shaft lined with masonry, which communicated with the stream. Doubtless the stream had served the monks as the main drain from their kitchen and other domestic offices. There appears to have been an abundant water supply to the priory, for the canons had licence to bring the water from a spring called "Trankelde," by means of a channel (*fossa*) 12 feet wide to their house at Conishead (*Furness Coucher*, vol. I, part ii, p. 423). The present stream from the spring at Trinkeld seems to disappear into the ground after a course of a few hundred yards, and it is probably the same stream which reappears in a spring on the opposite side of the Ulverston-Bardsea road, and forms the watercourse which flows through the

\* Note : See sketch of these stones on plan.

Priory grounds, and enters the Leven estuary near Chapel Island.

At the Spring Meeting of the Society held in Penrith this year, the hope was expressed that a list of religious houses with cloisters to the north of the church would be compiled. Such a list of 31 monasteries was printed by Mr. J. Swarbrick, F.R.I.B.A., in the *Trans. of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, vol. XL, pp. 174-175. This list is remarkable, in that it shows that the domestic buildings of the monasteries attached to most of our great cathedrals were so arranged. To this list should be added Cartmel Priory, which was rebuilt on the north side of the church after the destruction by the Scots in 1322 (these *Trans.*, N.S., xx, p. 111), the Dominican priory of King's Langley, Herts., and this priory of Conishead.

Of relics known or believed to have belonged to Conishead, and still in existence, there is the Haryngton bell at Urswick Church, inscribed with the names of the donors (these *Trans.*, N.S., xxiv, 281), and the Haryngton Tomb at Cartmel Priory is also generally supposed to have belonged originally to Conishead (these *Trans.*, N.S., xxv, 373, *B.N.F.C. Proceedings*, xvii, 148, *Furness Lore*, 4). Then there is the fine 13th century manuscript of the Epistles of St. Augustine, formerly one of the cherished possessions of the canons, which was acquired by our Vice-President, Mr. H. S. Cowper in 1925, and is now at Tullie House (these *Trans.*, N.S., xxvii, 48). Finally, in the churchyard at Pennington, is a mediæval grave-cover with an incised wheel head cross, which has been described as a "Canterbury Cross," and a shaft of a sundial. Both of these stones are of the same yellow sandstone as at Conishead, and have been in all probability brought from here. The grave-cover until recently formed the lintel of the fireplace in the vestry, and the sundial shaft was found in the floor of the church during the recent restorations.

In the Public Record Office, among the few deeds belonging to Conishead, is one (*Duchy of Lanc., Ancient Deeds*, L, 400) to which were originally attached two seals, one of which is now wanting. The other is the seal of the priory, and appears to be the only one in existence. It is vesica shaped, of brown wax, bearing a fleur-de-lis, and the inscription “+SIGILL CONVENT [US DE CONING]ESHEFD.” (Farrer, *Lanc. Pipe Rolls*, p. 362). The Victoria County History of Lancaster, p. 143, contains a list of the Priors of Conishead. It is however very fragmentary, consisting mostly of initials, with very few full names. To this list should be added the name William Tunstall, Prior c. 1457 (*Trans. Lanc. and Chesh. Historic Soc.*, vol. 74, p. 152).

With the change in ownership of this property, it is sincerely to be hoped that the Durham Miners' Welfare Committee will consider the desirability of handing over the small plot containing the foundations of the church to the Nation, so that these newly recovered remains of a religious house in our district, which most people had given up as lost for ever, may be properly displayed and preserved for future generations.

## II. AN ANCIENT PAVED ROAD AT CONISHEAD BANK.

The old road across Furness from Conishead Bank to Roanhead, traditionally ascribed to the Romans, follows the line of a very ancient track, which had probably been in use from prehistoric times. It is the natural route across the Furness peninsula, entering the district by the best ford across the Leven, and leaving it by the only practicable ford over the Duddon estuary. This road continued in use until the time of the dissolution of the monasteries of Furness and Conishead, with the consequent rise in the importance of Ulverston, and hospitality being no longer dispensed at the guest houses

of these monasteries, travellers were compelled to resort to the towns on their way, so another road from the sands direct to Ulverston was made, and the old road was abandoned. It remained derelict for a century and a half until the rise of the iron ore mining industry, which began at Whitriggs near Dalton in the early years of the 18th century, when vast quantities of iron ore were carted over this road from the mines to Conishead Bank for shipment. So great was the traffic that in one year there were exported from Conishead Bank no less than 64,000 tons. The ore was carted all the year round, and stored in dumps on the roadside wastes, being shipped only during the summer months, so that the road became deeply stained with the red of the hematite ore, and became known as the Red Lane, which name it still bears. Towards the end of the century the quality of the Whitriggs ore deteriorated, and the shipments began to fall away until, by about 1825, the traffic had practically ceased. This was about the time when the present mansion at Conishead Priory was being built, and another form of traffic began on one section of the road, which was the carting of building material from the beach. Since then, however, the road has been abandoned, and is now quite overgrown with trees and vegetation. In laying out the grounds of the Priory, a considerable stretch of the pavement was taken up and the cobbles used for building fences; but, to mark the line, an avenue of sycamores was planted in its place. In other parts of the grounds the camber of the road may be plainly seen on the surface, flanked by ditches on either side.

In the early spring of 1928, Dr. Wishart decided to investigate this so-called Roman road, and for that purpose bared several sections, where it ran through his grounds. These sections show two distinct roads, one above the other, following the same line. The upper road occurs

about a foot below the present surface; it is loosely paved with small stones, and two feet below this is the lower road, a solidly constructed road, 25 ft. wide, paved with cobbles, with a central kerb or spina of large stones running down the centre, and dividing it into a double track. There is an outer paving of larger cobbles, and wide ditches on each side. Down the centre of each track are deep grooves or cart-ruts 3 ft. 10 ins. apart, the grooves on the west being worn much deeper than those on the other side of the *spina*. The road is solidly built upon several layers of large stones bedded in clay, and the surface pavement is set in what looks like a mixture of clay and lime mortar, but a close examination and chemical tests prove that the whitish appearance like lime is due to the presence of innumerable particles of sea shells. Upon this pavement is spread a layer about a foot thick of yellowish blue clayey silt mixed with sand and gravel, apparently brought from the beach close at hand. Above this are the cobbles of the upper road.

There is a great difference in the construction of the two roads. The lower pavement shows no signs of disintegration despite its nearly two years' exposure to the weather, but the upper level is crumbling away and deteriorating quickly. There are cart ruts on the upper road similar to those on the lower but 2 inches wider. Unfortunately there is an entire absence of dateable finds except such as could only belong to the period of the iron ore traffic.

There is a local tradition that by the time building operations began at the Priory, the older pavement had been worn out by the iron ore carts, so a new road was made on a higher level to facilitate the carting of building material from the beach. The upper ruts, however, show as much wear as the lower, and the carting of sand and shingle over it for a limited period could hardly

have worn such deep grooves. In this dearth of positive evidence for fixing a date, one is driven to conjecture, and the fact of the remarkably well-made character of the lower road makes it worth while to re-examine what evidence there is to support the persistent local tradition of a Roman origin. West, who seems to be the first to record the tradition, says "The Romans had entered Furness at Conishead Bank; in the perambulation roll of the parish of Ulverston, a record of high antiquity, it is called the Spina Alba, the White Thorn on Conishead Bank where the road they made use of quits the sands, and is in the same roll called the Street. Tradition proclaims it the same; which alone is sufficient to prove that it had been either formed, or repaired by the Romans."

The fact that this road was called the Street-gate is not, however, sufficient to prove that it was made by the Romans. Street is a fairly common place-name, and simply means a "paved way" of whatever origin; and many paved ways were made by the monks, of which there were excellent examples at Furness Abbey in the Outer Court. Although the road is not particularly Roman in appearance, yet, if there was any evidence of a Roman occupation of the district, there would be some ground for assigning it to the Roman period.

With this in mind I have collected every possible scrap of information bearing upon finds of Roman date in Furness, but these finds have been few indeed. With the exception of a copper vessel found at Urswick in 1774, horse shoes of ancient type found on this road near Roanhead in 1803, and a piece of lead inscribed with the letters SOL at Dalton in 1804, the only Roman finds have been coins. There is no record of any pottery being found in the district. The copper vessel, which afterwards came into the possession of the late Canon Ayre of Ulverston, was a medieval bronze skillet, and there is

nothing to show that the horse-shoes were Roman, whilst the piece of inscribed lead, like the coins, might have come into the district in the way of trade. The earthworks at Dalton which West supposed to be the ramparts of a Roman fort were investigated by Close in 1804, who found nothing to support the theory of Roman work in the trenches which he made, nor was there anything of this nature found when the mounds were levelled to extend the churchyard in 1850. There is no reason therefore to suppose that the Romans ever occupied the Furness district, and such being the case there was little need for a Roman road around the coast, especially as on the whole line of route between Lancaster and Ravenglass there are no indications of any Roman fort or halting place.

If therefore we rule out the theory of a Roman origin for this road, it cannot be earlier than the middle ages and was perhaps constructed by the Furness and Conishead monks. They had a distinct interest in maintaining a ready means of access to their possessions over the sands and in West Cumberland, and in addition the Conishead monks maintained a guide to the fords over the Leven estuary. The road does not lead direct to the priory, but keeps to the lower ground and passes the church about 100 yards to the south. Nor are there any traces of a branch road, but at this point is the section where the pavement has been taken up, with the consequent destruction of any branch from it. It is improbable that the double track road as we now see it was made by the monks. It is much more likely that the west side was the original road, possibly about 10 to 12 feet wide. Soon after the iron ore traffic had begun the road was doubled in width to accommodate the heavy traffic, and later, for some reason, the level was raised by two feet. Perhaps this low lying district was liable to flood, and had been waterlogged. The ruts have been made

by a narrower and more primitive type of cart than the present day farm cart. These latter average about 4 ft. 6 ins. in the width of track, and this standard seems to have prevailed since the time of the Inclosures, 1740-60 in Furness, when the provision of gateways and accommodation roads into the fields, made a standard of some sort desirable. West and Close record the discovery of other lengths of pavement of this road at various points along its line; at Mountbarrow, and in Bardsea Park in 1774; and at Goldmire in 1803. In each case there was the regular pavement of cobbles set in gravel, and the outside supported and bound by large boulders, but there is no mention of a double track or more than one level. Possibly the double track only occurs in this section near the loading jetty and storage dumps, where the traffic would be most congested. The only finds were made on the upper level, and consisted of a portion of an iron tyre of a cart wheel, a large iron bolt, a rounded stone ball similar to a Roman ballista stone, and quantities of iron ore in every variety. On the beach opposite Chapel Island there still remain many of the mooring posts, and a breast-work of wood of the 18th-century port where the ore was loaded.

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