

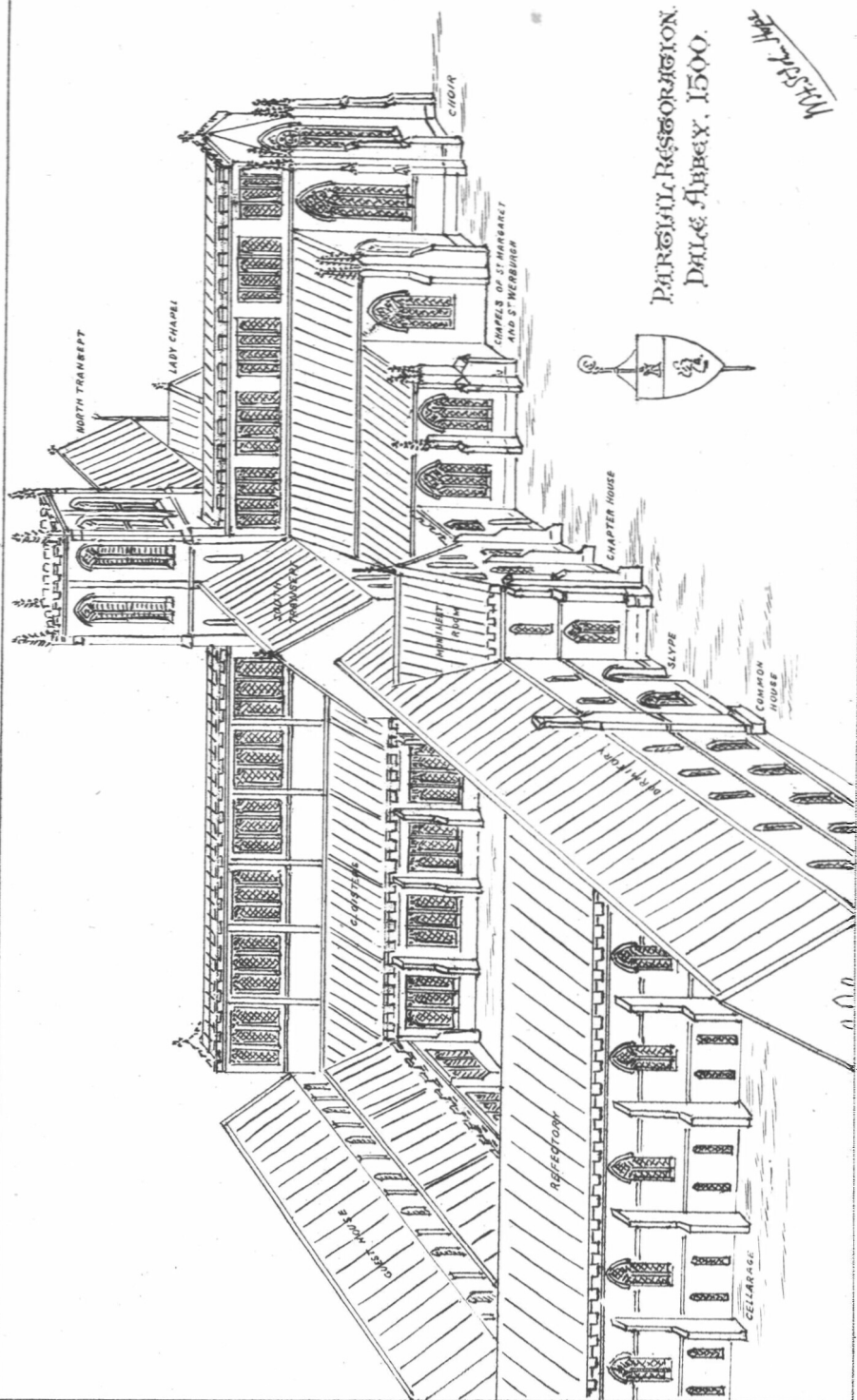
## On the Excavations on the Site of Dale Abbey, Derbyshire.

BY W. H. ST. JOHN HOPE.



THESE most interesting excavations were resumed on July 2nd, 1879, and brought to a conclusion during the first week of the ensuing month. The work done comprised the clearing the site of the nave and its aisle,—at least, as much as was included within the ground rented by the Society—the following up of the western wall of the Transepts, and parts of the Common House and Cloisters. The slype and western portion of the Chapter House had been cleared during the spring by the man in charge, under proper superintendence. The discoveries include portions of the tile paving of the cloister alley, at two different levels; a drain and fire-place in the Common House; the two processional doors into the nave; a very considerable portion of the nave pavement *in situ*; and numerous finely-carved and moulded stones.

The ground plan is now complete, except on the south and west sides, where gardens prevented more than trial holes being dug, and even this could not be done on the west side, owing to the unwillingness of the tenant to allow it. As it is, the plan of Dale Abbey is one of the most remarkable in England, and the Society is to be congratulated on having made so valuable an addition to our knowledge of monastic arrangement. From documentary and other evidence which has come to light since last year, we are enabled to give a more accurate apportionment of the various buildings. First as to the Church; the six altars mentioned in the



PRIORY, RESTORATION.  
DALLÉ, ABBEY, 1500.

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square. The garth was enclosed by a wall pierced with windows, whose foundations were 5 feet thick. From the Visitation Book\* of Bishop Redman, Visitor-General of the Premonstratensian Order, 1475-1501, we learn that this cloister was "newly begun" in 1478, and "almost built" in 1482. Whether the Sacristy had an entrance from the cloister, cannot be ascertained, the whole of its western wall having been removed.

Of the Chapter House and its fine series of monuments, we have much to say. The remarkable effigy of a Canon is still a *crux*. Mr. Bloxam, after a personal inspection, pronouncing it to represent an Abbot, and the Rev. F. M. Geudens, of Crowle, Doncaster, who is himself a Canon Regular of the Premonstratensian Order, suggesting it is the figure of a Cantor, with a Service Book. My own investigations have, however, led me to adopt still another theory. I will first state my objections to the other three: (*a*) the figure is not a Lector,† as no such personage would be found in a conventual establishment, though, if in a parish church, the effigy would doubtless represent one. In this view, Mr. Bloxam concurs. (*b*) The figure can scarcely be a Cantor, as that officer was not of sufficient importance to be commemorated by an effigy in the Chapter House. (*c*) If an Abbot, where is his pastoral staff? For, although the Premonstratensians avoided the use of episcopal insignia, yet the pastoral staff was as much abbatial as episcopal, and many of the seals of abbeys, of the same order as Dale, bear the figure of an Abbot, holding a book in the left hand, and pastoral staff in the right, *e.g.*, Coverham, Newhouse, Alnwick, Torre, etc., and the pastoral staff occurs on slabs at Dale, Welbeck, Blanchland, and other Premonstratensian houses. It is quite certain, too, that our effigy never had a staff which is now broken away.

From a comparison with seals and other representations, I have come to the conclusion that we have here the effigy of a *Prior*. There were two classes of Priors,—Claustral and Conventual. The

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\* Bodleian Library, Oxford. Ashmole MSS. 1519.

† The *Lector*, who read during dinner, was appointed weekly, and was not an officer of a monastery.

latter ruled over a *Priory*, as Repton, Bridlington, Bolton, etc., and were entitled to bear the pastoral staff, *vide* the figure of a Prior of Bridlington in painted glass at Morley Church. The Claustral Priors, on the other hand, were subject to an Abbot, and did not bear a pastoral staff. On their seals they are represented holding a book only, *vide* those of Henry, Prior of S. Augustine's, Canterbury; of John Fossor, and Richard, Priors of Durham; of Norwich Cathedral Priory; and of John, Prior of Lewes.\* In each instance we have a Prior holding a book on his breast with *both* hands. I therefore submit that this effigy represents a Premonstratensian Prior in the white cassock and rochet—the habit of the Order.

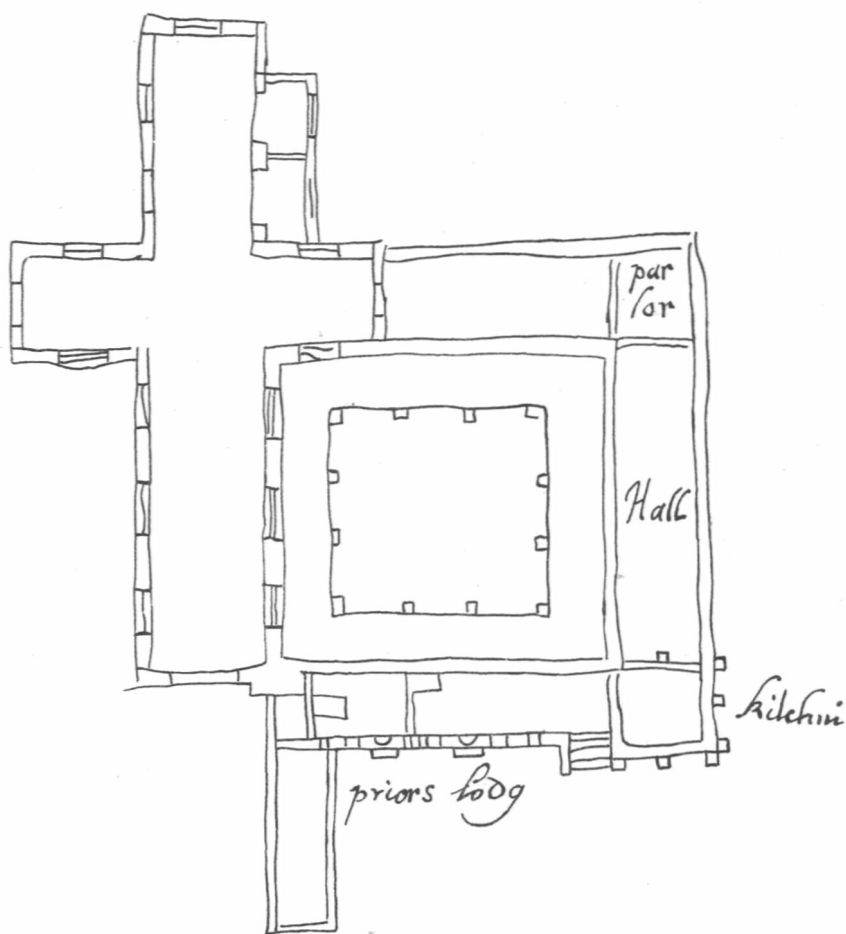
As the figure apparently covered a vault, and had been maliciously displaced by some person during one night, it was resolved to take the opportunity to examine the grave for any evidence as to whom the memorial was laid down. The squared stones beneath the figure were merely a bed whereon to rest it, and did not form a vault as was thought. After digging down about three feet, and removing several large rough slabs, a bed of clay was reached which covered a *wooden* coffin. This was of oak, and quite sound and perfect; the only injury being that the lid had given way down the centre groove, owing to the superincumbent weight. On removing the lid, appeared the larger bones and skull of a man of small stature: the lesser ones had decayed. No relics, whatever, were buried with the body, but beneath it was a quantity of *leaves*, still green and pliant, although the interment took place over 500 years ago!! They much resembled those of the Common Privet in size and shape, but were so much mixed up with mud and clay, that but a few were preserved as specimens. Is any other instance known in which leaves were placed, at that date, under a body before burial? The perfect condition of the coffin enabled the following measurements to be taken: length, 5 ft. 9 ins.; breadth, at head, 1 ft. 8 ins.; at foot, 1 ft. 2 in.; depth 11½ ins. The boards of which it was made were 1 inch thick, and the bottom and lid were each formed of two pieces tongued and grooved down the middle. Having

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\* All the Cluniac Priors were subject to the Abbot of Clugni.

satisfied ourselves that nothing more was to be learnt, the lid was replaced, and the grave reverently filled up. In digging down it was ascertained that the slab of a Knight, which lay by the effigy, covered a skeleton, but without a coffin.

Next, as to the double marble slab in the centre of the Chapter House, which was suggested to commemorate a married couple. The Rev. E. Cutts, in his "Sepulchral Slabs and Crosses," p. 22, says of double coffin stones, that "they are generally placed over two successive abbats," and, as Abbots William de Horsley and Roger de Kirketon died in 1353 and 1356 respectively, this slab, doubtless, is their memorial. To ascertain whether it covered two graves, it was removed, and the ground beneath excavated, with this result: A little to the south was a much decayed wooden coffin, containing the remains of a skeleton, but not sufficiently preserved to enable an anatomist to determine the sex. North of this was a perfect stone coffin, without a lid or covering, also containing a skeleton. Nothing could be gathered in either case to throw light upon the subject, and the graves were therefore carefully filled up, and the slab replaced precisely in its original position. The stone coffin was 2 ins. thick, and measured 6 ft.  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ins. long within,  $10\frac{1}{2}$  ins. deep,  $20\frac{1}{2}$  ins. in width at the head, and  $10\frac{1}{2}$  ins. at the feet. The upper end was hollowed out in the usual manner for the head. To the north of the slab is another interment, also in a wooden coffin, the oak of which is still quite sound. No measurements were taken of this. The large double slab, at the south-west angle, has not been moved: a hole, dug beneath the end, disclosed the bones of a skeleton beneath the dexter half only. As they were not further examined, the question of the sex of the person, denoted by the shears, could not be ascertained. The removal of the earth from the west end of the Chapter House, shewed that the doorway had a double portal, and closely resembled the doorway into the Chapter House of Lichfield Cathedral. Over the Sacristy, Slype, Common House, and two western bays of the Chapter House, was the Dormitory, from which the Canons descended to say the night offices by a stone staircase into the South Transept, as at Torre, Bristol, Hexham,



The ground plan of Dale abby  
Dorset; 23 Sep. 1730.

*W. H. St. John Hope*

and all Cistercian Houses. The space above the eastern bay of the Chapter House was probably occupied, as at Easby, by the Muniment Room, which may account for the lower level of the pier beneath. The Slype had a door at each end, and, perhaps, served as the Parlour. From it a small door opened into the Common House, which was furnished with a large fireplace on the east side, where the Canons warmed themselves in winter, this being the only fire they were allowed. A window by the side of the fireplace has a well preserved drain in the cill, with a stone pipe running through the wall. This room was undoubtedly vaulted. On the exterior of the Common House is a very bold and well-preserved early English base-molding, carried most effectively round the projecting chimney. The octagonal top of the chimney itself was found when clearing away the earth. Nearly the whole of this apartment is beneath a garden which could not be disturbed without much expense; consequently, its limit southwards is uncertain. From near its south end two parallel walls, 3 feet apart, extend eastward, which doubtless formed part of the Gong or Garderobe. Of the Refectory, a portion of the north wall is standing, now forming part of a cow-house. On it may be traced the curve of one bay of the vaulting of the Cellarage, which Stukeley says was beneath it. The discovery of a fragment of the foundations on the south enables us to fix the width at 25 feet. On the southwest of the site of the Refectory is a large and singular mass of masonry, now attached to a cottage. It diminishes by several stages upwards, and has on its eastern face a door, or recess, with a stone vault inside. This block may have been part of the kitchen; but as no further examination can be made without pulling about the dwelling-house, we must be content to leave the question as it is. South of this part of the Abbey, and on the opposite side of the present road, I am told, remain foundations, perhaps of the buildings in the Base Court, which may have been here situated. The whole of the western side of the cloister is still unexplored, for reasons already stated. From Dr. Stukeley's plan, it is evident that this part was standing in 1730, as he is

careful to shew the position of the windows—early English lancets, possibly—and steps. The upper story of this range of buildings would contain the Guest House and Prior's Lodging.

The Gatehouse, which was greatly dilapidated in 1730, stood about 150 yards north-west of the Abbey Church. A vaulted apartment, locally known as the "Gaol," is all that is now left.

The site of the Abbey has now been handed over again to Earl Stanhope, the Lord of the Manor, who intends to preserve it as opened out by the Society, and erect a building to serve as a museum of the curiosities discovered. The whole area was drained and levelled before our tenancy expired, and a little watchfulness and care will tend to preserve this interesting relic of the past—which tells us such a sad tale of sacrilege and robbery—for many years to come. It is earnestly to be hoped that every precaution will be taken to prevent the precincts of God's House being profaned by picnics and other secular amusements.

The fac-simile of Dr. Stukeley's plan is taken from a tracing of the original.