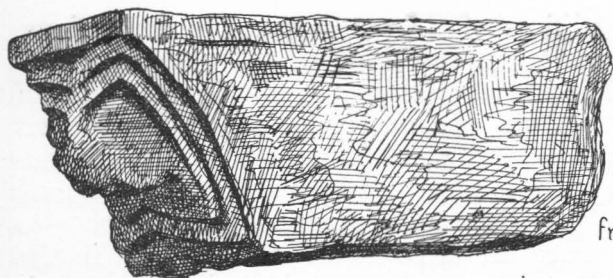


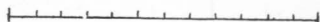
ANCIENT STONES FOUND IN RINGMER.

By W. HENEAGE LEGGE.

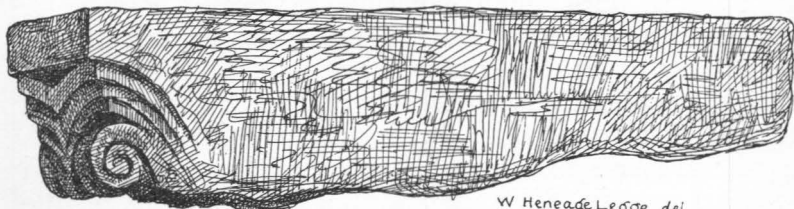
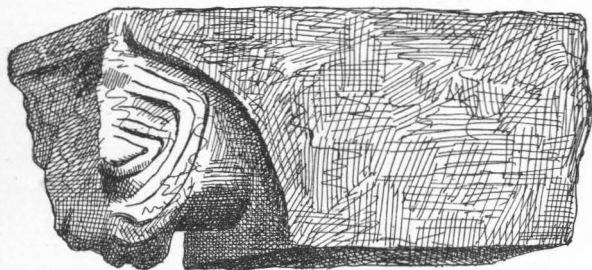
“WHAT has become of all the stones of Lewes Priory?” was a question asked a year or two ago at one of the annual meetings of the Sussex Archæological Society. What, indeed! In a general sense the answer is, of course, obvious; and in Lewes literally so, for in its high streets and its bye-streets the stones which once edified the church and monastery of St. Pancras are evident in places too numerous to mention. But we must guard against presuming that every ancient carved and moulded stone thus seen came from Lewes Priory. For in pre-Reformation times the town possessed no less than 14 churches, of which four only survive until to-day. Not one of these superseded or destroyed churches would have been destitute of carved or moulded stones in some part or other of its structure; and these stones, we may be sure, were utilised in subsequent buildings. Yet there must have been immense quantities of stone resulting from the destruction of so large a group of buildings as was comprised within the precincts of the Priory. We know that at the dissolution of the monasteries, both small and great, their materials at once began to be used for secular edifications; and the neighbourhood of each came to look upon these remains as a quarry to be drawn upon when needed. One of Thomas Cromwell’s agents in destruction, indeed, recommends this practice in so many words, when he advises that all bells and lead be sold, but “let the wals stand and charge some with them as a quarry of stone.” But to pass on now to the main object of this paper, that is to refer briefly to the great quantity of these stone relics which are to be found in Ringmer. Here, too, as well as in Lewes, we must beware of too hastily concluding that all such came from the destroyed Priory. Not only were there those other



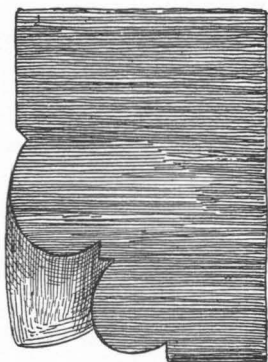
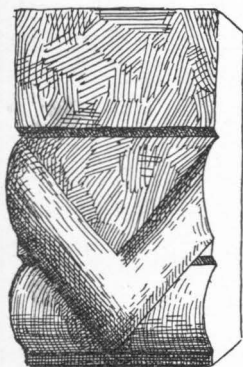
Gargoyles,
or
Corbel-table stones
from Ashton Cottage



Scale of inches



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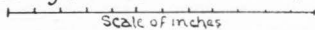


Section.



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Broyle Place

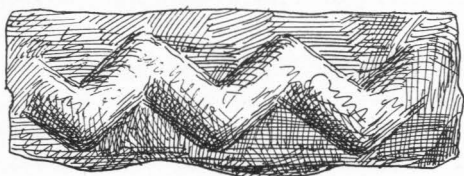


Scale of inches

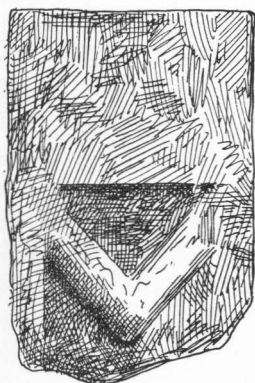
W Henegge Legge

ecclesiastical edifices of Lewes as possible derivations, but nearer Ringmer was the dissolved collegiate establishment of St. Michael at Malling; while in the heart of the village itself was the quarry of the fallen ancient tower of its church. When I first entered on researches into the history of this church and parish during mediæval times, I was pre-disposed — pardonably perhaps — to endeavour to trace all these stones to an origin in the destroyed or altered parts of the ancient church. But it soon became evident that a more probable source must be found for such quantities of carved and ornamented stonework. In the first place it is hardly probable that the tower alone would contain all the work dignified by decoration, while the rest of the edifice remained remarkably plain. For with the exception of a single corbel stone in the south aisle there is no single structural feature of an ornamental character such as we might look for in quite plain churches, in carved capitals or enriched mouldings. But of the great church of the monastery of St. Pancras we have enough relics to show that it was plentifully enriched with carved and decorated features. Further than this it may be said that there is a general correspondence of character between the worked stones found in Ringmer and the known relics of the Priory. The Norman types largely preponderate, though many of the Early English style occur side by side with them. Amongst them we may mention the ubiquitous chevron; the plain torus moulding; rounds, half-rounds and their usual groupings, as parts of piers, shafts and columns; the pellet; the cable; and combinations of them. There is one particularly pleasing enrichment, modifications of which I have located at two opposite parts of the parish, at Clay Hill and at Ashton Green. It consists of a central band of pellets slightly hollowed, on either side of which is a cable moulding, enriched on one side with a band of beads between each strand of cable.

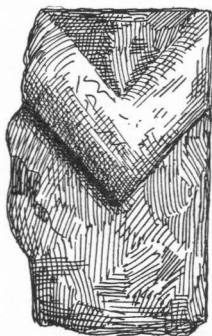
At Ashton Green, too, when the old Mill Cottage was pulled down a year or two ago, were found several long stones, variously sculptured at one end into forms



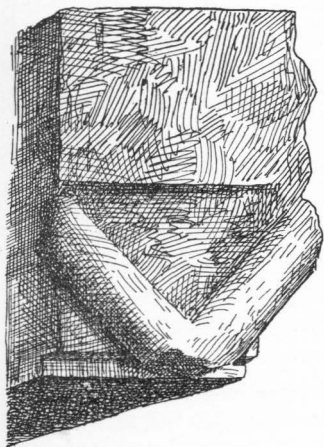
Ashton Cottage



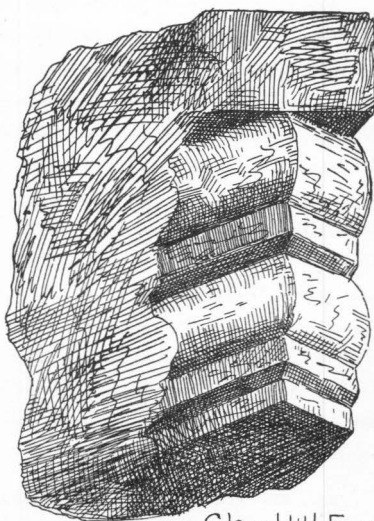
Ashton Cottage



Clay Hill Farm



Ashton Cottage



Clay Hill Farm

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Scale of inches

approximating to grotesque heads. Others terminated in curved mouldings in shallow recessed planes, supported on a kind of volute. All these were evidently portions of a corbel-table. At the same place were fragments of worked stone of a form of peculiar rarity in mediæval architecture. I mean the hollow fluting, common enough in classic and Renaissance buildings, but unusual in those of the Middle Ages. Similar fragments have been found at Lewes Priory, and more lately in the vicinity of Pelham House,¹ Lewes. This appears to connect indubitably the Ringmer stones with Lewes. Against this view we have, of course, the great difficulty of transport. Lying at a distance of three miles and more from the Priory at Lewes, we have only to call to mind Defoe's description of the state of Sussex roads during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to be enabled to imagine what they must have been one hundred years before, the period during which most of the Ringmer buildings in which the stones are found were built. In addition to these stones of Norman and Early English origin, I have also found worked stones of late Perpendicular and Elizabethan architecture. Of the former at Broyle Place there are the stone mullions of disestablished windows, now forming the coping of garden walls. Stones of the same period also served a like purpose on some premises in Goat Lane, now pulled down. Elizabethan stonework of a somewhat ornate character appears in some stones at Broyle Place, worked in the Renaissance style, such as voluted corbel and cornice stones; and doorway jambs, or pilasters, with narrow hollow flutings, the lower parts of which are occupied with round convex mouldings, in the manner of the later classic pillars. Kindred relics I have recovered from fragments ploughed up at Howells Bank, in Ringmer, where tradition has it that a house of some pretensions once stood. At the west end of Ringmer Church is a brass which commemorates members of the Howell

¹ Our Hon. Secretary, Mr. Michell Whitley, says that these are not from the Priory. This may be so; but the similar stones from old Ashton Cottage are quite like one relic at least of the Priory, which may be seen there to-day. One from Ashton may be seen here.

family who lived here in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I append a list of the various buildings and localities in Ringmer where I have found these worked stones:

WELLINGHAM.—Garden wall of Corsica House (the house now pulled down), various plain Norman mouldings.

HOWELL'S BANK.—Renaissance pilaster, &c.

BROYLE PLACE.—Norman shafts (portions) and chevron; Renaissance pilaster, volutes, &c.; late Perpendicular mullions.

CLAY HILL FARM.—Various Norman and Early English stones, chevrons, pellet and cable, &c.

ASHTON COTTAGE (now pulled down).—Norman and Early English chevrons, pellet and cable, portions of circular shafts, &c., grotesque and other corbel stones or gargoyles.

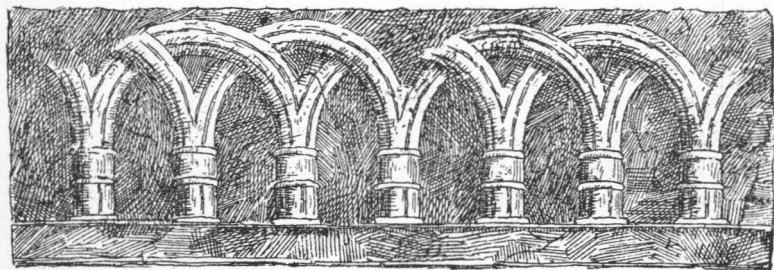
MILL PLAIN.—In a "hovel" near the windmill, late Perpendicular mullions, portions of circular Norman shafts, &c.

GOAT LANE.—Late Perpendicular mullions or jambs.

THE CHURCH.—In buttresses at west end (now removed), chevrons, portions of circular and half-circular shafts, &c.

NEAVES LANE AND MOOR LANE.—Cottages at (now pulled down), some of the stones from which having become mixed with those from the church buttresses cannot be certainly appropriated.

RUSHY GREEN.—Late Norman arcading.



Lintel of a cottage door, Rushy Green. W. Henning Legge.