

THE CLUNIAN PRIORY OF ST. PANCRAS AT LEWES.

By W. H. ST. JOHN HOPE, M.A.

At the meeting of the Royal Archæological Institute at Lewes in August, 1883, I had the honour of reading a paper on the architectural history of the Clunian Priory of St. Pancras at Lewes, with special reference to certain excavations that had lately been made upon the site by Mr. Somers Clarke and myself.

The excavations in question were confined to the sub-vaults and other remains of the great dorter range on the east side of the cloister; and in the account of them, which was eventually printed in *The Archæological Journal*¹ and in *Sussex Archæological Collections*,² I had occasion to point out that there still remained to be investigated the site of the monks' infirmary in the field to the east of our late excavations.

The desirability of continuing the excavations in this direction has been several times considered, but from one cause or another it has always been postponed. In the summer of 1900, however, through the energy of Mr. H. Michell Whitley, then Honorary Secretary of the Sussex Archæological Society, all difficulties were overcome, and by the consent of Mr. E. B. Blaker, the owner, and Mr. F. G. Courthope, the tenant, with the aid of a fund raised by the Society, the long-looked-for exploration was begun. After some weeks' work the remains of a large twelfth century chapel, of most unusual plan, were unearthed, and in the following year completely explored. During the few days between 30th December, 1901, and 3rd January, 1902, the foundations of a great hall and other buildings south

¹ Vol. XLI. 1-34.

² Vol. XXXIV. 71-106.

of the chapel were uncovered by Mr. Harold Brakspear and myself, thus completing the whole of the infirmary plan. Further investigations were made by Mr. Whitley with satisfactory results in the spring of 1902, and eventually the chapel was levelled and turfed and laid open permanently. The entire group presents so many points of interest that no apology is needed for submitting an account of them to the Society.

The monastic infirmaries in this country, like the houses for the accommodation of guests, were purely domestic buildings, and therefore followed more or less closely in plan and arrangement the ordinary dwelling-house of the period. In the larger monasteries the infirmary took the form of such a great hall as may have formed the house of a Saxon thane, or the quarters of a Castle guard, or the hall of a King's palace, like the great hall of William Rufus at Westminster, but as befitted an adjunct to a house of religion it differed from these in having attached to it a chapel.

We find accordingly at Christchurch, Canterbury, at Gloucester, Ely, Peterborough, Fountains and elsewhere, a great hall divided by pillars into a nave and aisles like the body of a church, with a chapel opening out of it on the east. The addition of a kitchen and other necessary offices made the building complete in itself.

As these infirmaries were not only for the sick and infirm, but also for the temporary lodging of the *minuti*, or those who had been blooded, and for any other of the brethren who were released from strict observance of the Rule, the great halls were none too large when the monastic fervour was at its height. Moreover, since most of the inmates lived a common life, these halls were used in a similar manner to the domestic halls from which they were copied; that is, the hall itself served for exercise and for meals, and had a fire in the middle in cold weather, while the beds were laid along the aisles against the walls. In later days the aisles were fitted with cubicles, and finally became converted into sets of chambers, but the hall continued its original use more or less to the end.

In the lesser monasteries the roominess of the hall type of infirmary was not needed, and a building on the lines of an ordinary manor house, of which a chapel also formed part, served all purposes.

Now the Priory of Lewes, at its first founding, was but a small thing; there was accordingly no need to build for the monks an infirmary of any size. Where it stood or what it was like we do not know, and not improbably it was a temporary structure largely built of timber.

Towards the middle of the twelfth century the buildings at Lewes underwent extensive enlargement, an eastern transept, with an apse and chevet of five chapels, being added to the church, which was also lengthened westwards, while the dorter range was increased to nearly twice its original length and breadth. (See Plan, Plate VI.)

These changes point to a considerable addition in the number of inmates, for whom the first infirmary must have afforded too little room. At the same time, therefore, that the dorter was extended eastwards and southwards a new and enlarged infirmary was built on the level plateau east of it, and they are the remains of this that have lately been uncovered and planned.

The new infirmary consisted of two separate blocks, a chapel to the north and a great hall, etc. to the south. (See Plan, Plate VI.) The two buildings are not quite parallel, the axis of the chapel being deflected 9° north of that of the hall.

The chapel itself is a very remarkable structure, both for its unusual plan and the massive manner in which it was built. It consisted of a nave, 29-ft. wide and $68\frac{1}{2}$ -ft. long, with north and south doorways and probably a principal entrance on the west, but the wall here has been completely destroyed. The eastern end of the nave opened directly into a transept or cross alley, 50-ft. 10-in. long from north to south, but only 9-ft. wide, with a square chancel and two semi-circular apses on the east, separated from the transept by an arcade of three wide arches, resting on two circular pillars and probably on



EAST END OF THE INFIRMARY CHAPEL OF LEWES PRIORY.

corbels in the north and south walls, since there are no responds.

The chancel was $16\frac{1}{2}$ -ft. wide and 18-ft. long, and had two square lockers in the north wall and another in the south. There was a step at the entrance, and the altar stood upon a platform 10-ft. long and 5-ft. broad, a little in advance of the east wall. The shafts in the eastern angles show that the chancel was vaulted. (Plate III.) From the fragments found it is evident that the original east window had been replaced by a larger of several lights, and about 11-ft. wide, in the fifteenth century.³ The apses were 13-ft. wide and $11\frac{1}{2}$ -ft. deep. Each had two steps within the entrance arch and a large locker in the wall under the arch, and contained an altar. That in the southern apse has gone, but the northern altar, though it has lost its covering slab, is fairly perfect, and consists of a block of masonry 5-ft. long and $2\frac{1}{2}$ -ft. wide, with chamfered plinth, standing quite free from the apse wall. Each apse had an eastern window and was, no doubt, covered by a domed vault. The transept has on the west side of its south end a circular stair or vice to the upper works, and in its south wall a small doorway from without. It also probably had a window in each gable and was vaulted. There cannot, too, be any reasonable doubt, from the great thickness of its side walls, that the nave was also vaulted. The chapter-house at Durham, built, or at any rate finished, by Bishop Geoffrey (1133-40), has a span of $34\frac{1}{2}$ -ft. and had a groined vault with transverse arches and diagonal ribs. The Norman chapter-house of Reading Abbey, on the other hand, with a span of 42-ft., was covered with a barrel vault, divided into bays by transverse arches. The buttresses at Lewes show that the vault was divided into three bays, but whether it was a barrel or a groined vault there is nothing to tell.

The massive character of the building is well shown by the thickness of its walls, that of the chancel and transept being between 4 and 5-ft. and of the sides of

³ Despite the massive construction of the building it is clear, from the added buttresses north and south of the east front, that the insertion of this larger east window had seriously weakened the wall.

the nave over 7-ft. The walls are strongly built of concrete, largely composed of flints and chalk, faced throughout with Caen stone. (Plates III. and IV.)

In the ruined condition of the building there is nothing to show how it was arranged, and I shall presently have to revert to the manner in which it was destroyed.

As regards its remarkable plan the Lewes infirmary chapel at present stands alone in this country, no other building at all resembling it having so far been noticed.

The infirmary hall at Lewes was about 50-ft. from the chapel and stood nearly due east and west. It has been so completely destroyed that little else than its foundation is left. The hall was 145-ft. long, with a total width of $63\frac{1}{4}$ -ft., and was divided by a double row of pillars into a hall proper, with north and south alleys. The building was divided lengthwise into five bays of about 29-ft. from centre to centre, but the westernmost bay was walled off from the rest of the hall to form a kind of vestibule, or it may even have been an open court. The divisions of the remaining bays are marked by strong rubble foundations, 9-ft. long from east to west and from $7\frac{1}{2}$ -ft. to 8-ft. broad. These are far too large for the biggest conceivable wooden posts, and they must therefore have carried composite piers for a stone arcade. Even then the span of the arches must have been at least 22-ft. The builders of Lewes Priory did not, however, hesitate to do big things. We have already seen that they spanned the infirmary chapel with a vault of 29-ft., and in the added dorter sub-vault the middle compartment had a groined vault 22-ft. wide and of $27\frac{1}{2}$ -ft. span. At the west end of the infirmary hall the abutment of the arcade was probably taken by a fifth arch, while at the east end the thrust was met by the massive walls of a series of chambers there. Owing to the wholesale clearance of the site not a stone is left to give any clue to the nature or design of pillar, arch or superstructure. There was apparently an entrance from the vestibule on the west, and another towards the north-east, opposite the doorway in the transept of the



NORTH APSE OF THE INFIRMARY CHAPEL OF LEWES PRIORY.

chapel. The quadrant-shaped projections in the corners of the north alley seem to have been the bases of later fireplaces, and that to the west has in front of it a bed of tiles laid on edge, hearth fashion. No trace was found of a hearth in the middle of the hall. A rough foundation across the south alley from the second pillar probably belongs to a later sub-division.

At the east end of the hall there seem to have been three chambers of unequal sizes. The northernmost was about 31-ft. long and 15½-ft. wide, but originally formed two smaller chambers, separated by a massive cross wall. The middle division measured originally 24-ft. in width and was 28-ft. long, with a wall 8-ft. thick bounding it on the east. In later days it seems to have been reduced to only half its former length. The southernmost chamber was 14-ft. wide and 27-ft. long, with a wall 8-ft. 5-in. thick on the east. Both this and the other massive wall in line with it may have contained fireplaces, belonging to a kitchen or kitchens. The southernmost chamber had beyond it to the south another of at least equal size, which from it being traversed by the drain of the first rere-dorter probably served as the *domus necessaria* of the infirmary.

In the thirteenth century extensive changes were made at this end of the block. The three great chambers seem to have been taken down and their areas thrown into a large space of the full width of the hall and extending eastwards from it for 95-ft. A good deal of the wall wherewith this was enclosed is still standing. There are traces of a building against the south side, and in the east wall, towards the north, is a cupboard; but to what use, other than a garden, this new enclosure was put it is difficult to say. Outside it on the south, and reached from it by a descending flight of steps, was a vaulted cellar of the same date, of two bays, abutting westwards on the *domus necessaria*. Both on this side, at the south-east corner, and on the east side the enclosing wall has curiously rounded rubble buttresses. In the north side near its east end is a doorway that led into a contemporary room of uncertain length. Only part of

the foundation of its west side is left, with a few stones of the jamb of a door going west, and the lower hook for the door itself. Whatever the building was it was replaced in the fifteenth century by another about 20-ft. wide and 36-ft. long, of equally uncertain use. Outside the western end of the thirteenth century enclosing wall, at its juncture with the hall, was a contemporary chamber, measuring 17-ft. by 15-ft., with entrances in both its west and north sides. The east wall, which has been continued northwards for some distance, has a wide opening leading into another chamber of later date. This was 15½-ft. wide and 37-ft. long and had a large fireplace on the north. The position of this somewhat to the west suggests that the room was sub-divided, and not improbably it and the ante-room or checker westward formed the *camera* or lodging of the infirmer. From this *camera* there seems to have extended westwards along the whole length of the hall a covered alley or pentise, no doubt with branches to the two south doorways of the chapel. At some late date, probably in the fifteenth century, this arrangement was altered by building a wall across the interval between chapel and hall from between the two doorways; another wall was also built from the flying buttress at the east end of the chapel to the corner of the infirmer's checker. There are fragments of other walls, apparently of much the same date, to the west of the chapel, but it is difficult to connect them. They clearly, however, belong to a pentise or gallery extending northwards from the great hall, past the front of the chapel, to a passage beyond leading into the church, and there was also a branch gallery extending westwards directly towards the cloister.

The arrangements of the dormer, frater and other of the monastic buildings have been so fully dealt with in my former paper that I need only here refer to one recent discovery in connection with them.

To the north of the site of the frater, in the garden now occupied by Mr. Courthope, is the small underground vaulted chamber, entered originally by a passage from the frater sub-vault, over which stood the cloister

conduit and lavatory. Mr. Brakspear was so fortunate the other day as to find part of the foundation of its enclosing wall, showing that the building was circular and 19-ft. in diameter within. At the sister house of Wenlock, Salop, there are in the same position, projecting into the cloister garth opposite the frater door, the remains of a similar conduit, but octagonal instead of round, and 20-ft. in width. The arrangements of such conduits, and a note of examples at Durham and elsewhere, formed the subject of a communication to the Society of Antiquaries by Dr. Fowler and myself in June, 1903.⁴

It is now time to revert to the question of the demolition of the infirmary chapel. The story of the destruction of Lewes Priory has never yet been fully told. It appears from a letter dated 4th November, 1537, from the Duke of Norfolk to Crumwell, that some arrangement had been made between them as to the partition of the lands of Lewes Priory and of its cell at Castleacre, provided they could obtain the grant of them. Norfolk accordingly tells Crumwell, as the result of an interview he had had with the King :

After that I thanked him for being content to give us Lewes, if we might conclude a bargain, rehearsing of your service to him, as I told you in your garden, and saying I was content you should have two parts. He said, "as ye shewed unto me," he thought it well bestowed.⁵

Some secret arrangement had also apparently been made with the Prior of Lewes, for in a letter of 12th November, 1537, Henry Polsted writes to Crumwell :

The Prior affirmed that the Duke of Norfolk promised him to have all the goods and one-half of the debts of the monastery.⁶

On the 16th November the Priory was formally surrendered by Robert the prior and the convent, and on the same day pensions were assigned to the subprior and 22 other monks.⁷ The complaisant prior was seemingly otherwise provided for.

⁴ See *Archæologia*, LVIII. 437-460.

⁵ Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII., XII. ii. No. 1030.

⁶ *Ibid.* No. 1052.

⁷ *Ibid.* No. 1101. Close Roll, 29 Henry VIII. part i. m. 9.

On 1st December a partition was made between Thomas, Duke of Norfolk, and Thomas, Lord Cromwell, of the lands of the late Priorities of Lewes and Castleacre,⁸ and by letters patent dated 22nd December, the Priory of Castleacre, with all its Norfolk manors, was duly granted to the Duke.⁹ For some reason it was not until the following 16th February, 1537-8, that the monastery of Lewes and all its possessions, except those in Norfolk, were formally granted to Thomas, Lord Cromwell, Keeper of the Privy Seal.¹⁰

Among Cromwell's "Remembrances," which are, unfortunately, not dated, are the following:

- (i.) To set order for making ready of Lewes and to have a book made of the stuff that shall go thither.
- (ii.) To send to Williamson to prepare and provide carriage for the stuff for Lewes.¹¹

It is clear from these memoranda that Cromwell intended converting some part of the monastic buildings into a residence for himself, and on 5th March John Husee, writing to Lord Lisle, says:

Mr. Polsted goes into Sussex to dissolve my Lord's house at Lewes, and will be away 14 days.¹²

Preparations in view of this "dissolucion," for which we may, I think, read "destruction," had already been made, as may be seen from certain payments entered among Cromwell's accounts for 1537-8.¹³

f. 123.]	gyven to the Italyon that went to Lewes	The xiiij of January gyven to him by Mr Rycharde hande	} xl s.
	payed for the coste of the same Italyon	The same day delyvered to Phillip Hoby for the coste of the saide Italyon [<i>sic</i>] to Lewes and agayn	} xl s.
John Williamson	The xiiij th of the same moneth [February] delyvered to hym for the byldynge at Lewes		} x li.

⁸ Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the reign of Henry VIII., XII. ii. No. 1154.

⁹ *Ibid.* No. 1311 (30).

¹⁰ In Cromwell's accounts, under date 3rd December, 1537, is a payment of £164. 19s. 4d. to the Duke of Norfolk, through Vincent Mundy, in full discharge of certain reckonings concerning the late Priory of Lewes.

¹¹ Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the reign of Henry VIII., XII. ii. No. 1151.

¹² *Ibid.* XIII. i. No. 421.

¹³ P.R.O. Exch. Treasury of Receipt. Miscellaneous Book, 256.

These items are followed by others referring to the matter in hand.

f. 123.] Mr Gregory	The xj of Marche delyvered to hym by my Lord ^e commandement at his going to Lewes	} xx li.
	The same daye payed to Portynary & other Italyons for their charge to Lewes & for suche necessaries as they must occupye there	} vj li.
Blounte & Lytton	The same day gyven to them at their goynge to Lewes with Mr Gregory	} xl s.

The Mr. Gregory here mentioned was Crumwell's son and heir, who was evidently sent down to Lewes to take possession of his father's latest acquisition.

With regard to Portinari there has long been known to antiquaries a letter purporting to have been written by him to Crumwell, giving a description and measurements of the church of Lewes Priory and an account of the way in which it was destroyed. This document, the original of which is in the British Museum,¹⁴ has many times been printed. It is, however, in the handwriting, not of Portinari, but of Richard Moryson, one of Crumwell's agents, and is, moreover, written in English.

I have only lately discovered that this well-known epistle is merely a translation, for what reason made is not apparent, of a holograph letter in Italian from Giovanni Portinari to Crumwell, which, with a hitherto unknown earlier letter referred to in it, is preserved in the Public Record Office.¹⁵

Of the writer, Giovanni Portinari, very little is known. Letters of Denization, in which he is described as "from parts of Italy," were issued to him on 14th February, 1536-7.¹⁶ He was in Crumwell's service early in 1537, when he is mentioned in his lord's accounts as riding on his business, etc. and he was probably selected to supervise the destruction of the great church at Lewes

¹⁴ Cott. MS. Cleopatra E. iv. 232.

¹⁵ Letters and Papers, Henry VIII. Vol. XIII. i. Nos. 554, 590.

¹⁶ Patent Roll, 28 Henry VIII. pt. 5, m. 13.

on account of the work being carried out by Italians, whom he was able to direct. He is mentioned late in 1538 in a list of Crumwell's gentlemen who were "mete to be preferred unto the King's Majesty's service,"¹⁷ and in the following year he was made one of the King's new body-guard.¹⁸

The two letters written by Portinari, which I have myself transcribed, are both of unusual interest. The first contains sundry bits of information that are new to us, while a comparison of the second with Moryson's translation shows that his version is but a paraphrase of the original, and that he has left out several items of importance.

No apology is therefore needed for laying the letters before you. As, however, they are somewhat difficult to follow, owing to their discursive style and the way in which the writer runs his words together, I here give, beside the original text, a translation, for which I have to thank my friend Mr. George E. Fox, F.S.A.

The first letter was written from Lewes on 20th March, 1537-8, and is in the following terms:

f. 94.] Illustrissime S^r a v^ra. s. umilmente miracomando questa prex^{te} p dir a. v. s. Come qui arivammo et abbiamo visto lachieza laquale abbiamo trovato daltra sorte non sipensaua cioe ingrandezza lungezza egrosezza inlaquale cie da fa^r assai tamen Colaiuto diddio non facciamo dubbio alchuno che tutto sitirera atterra quando fussi dua volte altanto / eprima p ciertifica^r. v. s. laqualita Deldetto sito si he lalungezza verge 140 sono piedi 420 elalargezza allentrare dentro sihe verge 23 eumezzo piede sono piedi 69½ elalargezza nelmezzo cioe nel corpo della detta chiesa sihe verge 50 sono piedi . 150 ., laltezza sihe verge 21 sono piedi 63 / indetta chiesa sono pilastri . 16. p banda sono intt^o pilastri . 32. infraquali . ciene otto principali elagrosezza diciascuno sono . piedi . 14 . erestanti chesono pilastri . 24 . sono piedi . 10 . grossi ciascuno Lafacciata davanti lagrosezza Delmuro sihe piedi . 10 . epiedi . 10 . He la grosezza delmuro del campanile quale he posto suruno Canto della chiesa Dalla facciata davanti chesiregge sopra quatro pilastri equali sono la grosezza diciascuno piedi . 14 . / elamuralgia dalle bande didetta chiesa sihe piedi . 5 . grossa / eptanto avertisco la . s . v . achausa che el tutto intenda Venardi mattina si comincio ataglia^r lamuraglia didretto Dalalta^r maggio^r Dove eposto cinque Cappelle chevano allo intornno ecosi quatro Colonne chere gono una tribuna cheviene sopra detta

¹⁷ Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the reign of Henry VIII., XIII. pt. ii. No. 1184.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* XIV. ii. No. 783.

altař maggioř etutto questo primamenti vogliamo tirař in terra inel modo e forma che .v. s. intendera /

Prima sitaglia dabasso insulfondamento e sitaglia laltezza Duna verga eunquarto achausa cheuno homo vi possa stař sotto alauraf esipassa dalaltra banda etagliato che he circha verge una emezo odua simette sotto tavole grosse dita tre datutte adua lebande evisimette daciascuna banda uno puntello lungo verge uno ovelcirca ecosi siva sequitando dimano imano tagliando epuntelando esimilmente lequatro Colonne didentro che ciascuno astare sopra Dua puntegli . equando dette Cappelle e Colonne fieno tagliate epuntelate daquella banda vorete uadi erovini a terra quepuntegli da quella banda sola sabruoceranno o confuoco oconpolveř come meglio giudiceremo ecosi pensiamo rovinera a terra : equesto cipare elmiglioř breve epui sicuro modo chesia eciascuno cheavisto questo principio giudica che tutto riuscira : e fra octo odieci giorni alpiu lungo speriamo questa parte sia in terra / Dipoi si seguira Continuamente esperiamo Dicontentare esadisfař alla volonta Della s. v. ecosi Delseguito .v. s. siterra del tutto avertito : alla quale umilmente mira comando pregando iddio quella Conservi emantenga insanita e felice / alleus alli xx Dimarzo 1537.

Servidor Di .v. s.

Giovanni Portinari

In dorso :

Allo Inll^{re} S^r S^r tomaxo Cromuello

Endorsed in another hand :

John Portinary

Marche xx^o.

TRANSLATION.

Most illustrious Sir.

I humbly commend myself to your Lordship.

This letter is to tell your Lordship how we have arrived here and have seen the church, which we have found different from what was thought of it, that is in size, length and bigness, in which there is much to do. Notwithstanding, with the help of God we make no kind of doubt that all can be pulled down to the ground, even were it twice as much.

And first to certify your Lordship of the nature of the said site.

The length is 140 yards, that is 420 feet, and the breadth within the entrance is 23 yards and half a foot, that is 69½ feet, and the breadth in the middle, to wit in the body of the said church is 50 yards, that is 150 feet. The height is 21 yards, that is 63 feet.

In the said church are 16 pillars on each side, that is in all 32, among which are 8 principal and the thickness of each is 14 feet, and the remaining 24 pillars are 10 feet thick each.

The forefront, the thickness of the wall is 10 feet, and 10 feet is the thickness of the wall of the steeple (*del campanile*), the which is set

upon a corner of the church to the forefront that is upheld on four pillars which are each 14 feet thick. The wall of the sides of the said church is 5 feet thick.

And therefore I advertize your Lordship that you may understand everything.

On Friday morning we shall begin to cut the wall behind the high altar where are placed five chapels that go round about it, and so four columns which uphold a vault (*tribuna*) that is above the high altar, and all this we wish in the first place to level to the ground in such manner and form as your Lordship will understand.

First we shall cut away the bottom of the foundation and cut it away to the height of a yard and a quarter so that a man may get under to work and pass to the other side, which is about a yard and a half or two, and put beneath planks of a thickness of 3 inches from one side to the other and put on each side a prop a yard long or thereabouts; and so one goes on, following by degrees, cutting and propping, and similarly the four columns within so that each can stand upon two props. And when the said chapels and columns have been cut and propped on that side and you wish to bring them to the ground the props on that side only will be burnt either with fire or with powder, as we may judge best, and so we reckon to bring them to the ground; and this it appears is the best, short, and certain manner that may be, and everyone who has seen this beginning judges that all will succeed; and it will be that in eight or ten days at longest we hope all will be down.

Afterwards it will be followed continually, and we hope to content and satisfy the wishes of your Lordship, and so of the sequel.

Your Lordship shall be advised of everything, to whom humbly I commend myself, praying God that he may preserve and maintain (you) in health and happiness.

At Lewes the 20th March 1537.

Your Lordship's servant,

Giovanni Portinari.

The second letter is dated the 24th of March, 1537, which was a Sunday, and recounts the progress made since Portinari's report of the preceding Wednesday:

f. 125.] Inll^{me} S^{re} mio a^{ra} S^{ria} humilmente miracomando lutima mia che Io scripsi alla .s.v. fu alli xx stante pmano Dim^o guglielmoson: epdetta mia averti .v.s. Della qualita delsetto cioe Della grandezza elungezza sua / esimilmente averti la .s.v. Del principio dato alavorare ptirar aterra el tutto: et ancora laforma emodo siteneva . et come digia sera cominciato / come plaltra dissi a v .s. labanda drieto alalta^r m[a]ggio^r che sta sotto una tribuna chesiregge sopra quatro Colonne tonde . edidrieto aqueste sono cinque Cappelle che circondano Detta tribuna lequale Capelle e tribuna circondono difuora lamuraglia verge lxx sono piedi CCx. ettotto questo Colnome diddio edibuono principio se tirato tutto aterra Chevenne esibutto indua volte chefu giovedi evenardi

che fuō addi xxj° e xxij stante / edipresente tireremo abasso una tribuna altissima cheviene poco piu avanti delaltra laquale siregge sopra quatro grossi pilastri lagrossezza Dequali ciascuno epiedi . xiiij° elacircumferenza girano intornno piedi xxxv. equesti sara p laseconda volta Come sispera indubitamente ediquanto sequira Deltutto . v . s . ara notitia // eachausa che . v . s . intenda conquanto numero Dipsone sefatto questo . v . s . intendera Come apresso / Da londra partiūo Con [homini xvij cioe *struck through*] Diciasepte homini infraquali sono tre Carpentieri Duā fabri Dua piombieri uno chefalafornacie enoue lavoranti / econquesti enōpiu sefacto tutto Come a . v . s . disopra sidice / epche el tutto Distintamente . v . s . intenda. Come fabri piombieri e colui chefalafornacie ciascuno diquesti attendeva alofito suō . e solamente, Condoci cherestano sitagliava lamuraglia infraquali vera tre Carpentieri equesti sono asegniati et attendano afaē epuntegli epuntellarē eresto cherestono nove lavoranti sono stati alavoraē erompeē la muraglia equali sono homini esercitati euagliano piu assai diquesti qui del (?) paese . eptanto cienebisogniera haveñ Delli altri esimilmente alcune altre Cose chep questo infra giorni Dua otre verro Costi edel tutto a . v . s . abbocā referiro / Martedi sicomincera a fondeē el piombo che buona parte digia setirato abasso . esifondera Conquella diligentia erispiarmo emen Calo cifa possibile Disorta speriamo Deltutto . v . s . Dinoi siterra Contentissima allaquale umilmente miraComando pregando iddio quella felice Conservi alleus alli xxiiij° Dimarzo 1537.//.

Servidoř Di vřa S^{ria}

Giovanni Portinarj

In dorso :

Allo Inll^o Signioř S^r tomaxo

Cromvello.

TRANSLATION.

Most illustrious Sir,

I humbly commend myself to your Lordship. My last I wrote to your Lordship on the 20th instant by the hand of Mr. Williamson, and by my said (letter) I advertized your Lordship of the quality of the building, that is of its largeness and breadth; and similarly I advertized your Lordship of the beginning made of the work to pull down everything, and again as to the form and manner of so doing, and how already it had begun.

As by letter I told your Lordship of the side behind the high altar which stands beneath a vault (*tribuna*) upheld upon four round columns, and behind which are five chapels which surround the said vault. The which chapels and vault are surrounded on the outside by a wall of 70 yards, that is 210 feet. All this, in the name of God, and with a good beginning is plucked to the ground, and was thrown down in two turns which was on Thursday and Friday last, the 21st and 22nd instant. And presently we shall pull down a very high vault which is placed a little before the altar, the which is set upon four great pillars, the thickness of each of which is 14 feet and the

circumference going round about 45 feet. And this shall be for the second turn as may undoubtedly be hoped, and of what will follow in everything your Lordship will have notice.

In order that your Lordship may understand with what number of persons this is done, your Lordship will understand how from near London we set out with seventeen men, amongst whom are three carpenters, two smiths, two plumbers, one who keeps the furnace, and nine labourers; and with these and no more all has been done, as to your Lordship has been said above. And to the end that the more fully and distinctly your Lordship may understand how the smiths, plumbers, and he who keeps the furnace each one paid attention to his duty; and only with the twelve remaining was the wall cut, amongst whom there were three carpenters and these are appointed and attend to do the posting and propping, and the rest who remain, nine labourers, have been at work breaking up the wall, and these are men practised and worth much more than those of the country, and for that reason it will not be necessary to have others. Of such and similarly other things which notwithstanding in two or three days I shall see (you) of this and of all else, to your Lordship I will relate by word of mouth.

On Tuesday will be begun the casting of the lead, which for the best part is already down and will be cast with such diligence and saving as may be possible.

In such sort we trust in everything your Lordship will be most content with us, to whom humbly I commend myself, praying God that he may preserve you happily.

At Lewes 24th March 1537.

Your Lordship's servant

Giovanni Portinari

With Portinari's letters there is preserved, also in his handwriting, a schedule of the various dimensions of the church as given in his first letter. This list has also been translated by Richard Moryson, but in so doing he has not only suppressed a number of important words, but he has omitted, no doubt by accident, the two items stating the breadths and then given as the length of the church what is actually that of the transept.

The original text is as follows:

*f. 126.] A presso sara giustamente tutte lemisur
 Delle prioria di leus eprima
 La detta chiesa he dilungezza verge Cxl. sono piedi CCCCxx
 La largezza Dalla entrata fino a mezzo verge xxiiij emezzo piede sono
 piedi Lxviii emezzo
 La largezza nelmezzo dalla chiesa cioe nel corpo sie verge . L . sono
 piedi CL.

- Laltezza sie verge xxj° sono piedi Lxiiij
 Lacircumferenza tutta allo intorno gira Didentro verge . Dxxviii° emezo
 sono piedi MDLviiij emezo piede
 Lacircōferenza difuora gira verge Diiii° sono piedi MDxij
 Lafacciata Davanti La chiesa Lagrosezza Delmuro sie piedi . x .
 Lagrosezza Delmuro del campanile che posto sur un canto Dalla
 facciata Davanti sie piedi . x .
 Lagrossezza Delmuro Dalle bande p tutta la chiesa sie piedi . v .
 Sono indetta chiesa pilastri . xxxij . Datutte adua lebande equali sono
 tutti Spicati dalle muraglie infraquali uene otto grossissimi
 equali rēgano quatro Dessi. una altissima tribuna auso
 Dicampanile ealtri quatro una simile piu alta: che laltra .
 Dovestava cinque Campane et lagrosezza Diciascuno Didetti
 otto pilastri sono piedi : xiiij : et lacircumferenza girano
 intorno piedi . xlv .
 Lialtri xxiiij pilastri ordinari sono Digrosezza ciascuno piedi . x . et
 girano intorno piedi xxv
 Laltezza Duno depilastri grossi sono verge xiiij e tre octavi sono piedi
 xliij
 Laltezza Duno depilastri ordinari cioe De xxiiij° he verge vj sono piedi
 xviiij
 Laltezza Duna tribuna che uiene sopra Davanti laltar maggioř sie
 verge xxxj sono piedi Lxxxiiij.
 Laltezza Della tribuna dimezzo la chiesa dovestava cinque Campane si
 he verge xxxiiij esette octavi sono piedi cento cinque.
 Laltezza Del Campanile che he posto dalla facciata davanti si he verge
 xxx sono piedi Lxxxx

Endorsed in another hand :

Concerning Lewes.

TRANSLATION.

Underneath shall be justly all the measure of the Priory of Lewes,
 and first

The said church has in length 140 yards, that is 420 feet.

The breadth from the entrance as far as the middle 23 yards and half
 a foot, that is 69½ feet.

The breadth in the middle of the church, that is of the body, is 50 yards,
 that is 150 feet.

The height is 21 yards, that is 63 feet.

The circumference of all going round about within, 519 yards and a
 half, that is 1558½ feet.

The circumference going without 504 yards, that is 1512 feet.

The front before the church, the thickness of the wall is 10 feet.

The thickness of the wall of the steeple (*cāmpanile*) which is set upon
 a corner of the forefront is 10 feet.

The thickness of the wall of the sides throughout the church is 5 feet.

There are in the said church thirty-two pillars in all on both sides and
 they are all detached from the walls; among which are eight

very big, of which set four support a very high vault in manner of a steeple, and the other four one like it a little higher than the other, where are five bells; and the thicknesses of each of the eight pillars are 14 feet, and the circumference going round about 45 feet.

The other twenty-four ordinary pillars are each in thickness 10 feet, and going round about 25 feet.

The height of one of the greater pillars, of the eight, is 14 yards, that is 42 feet.

The height of one of the ordinary pillars, that is of the twenty-four, has 6 yards, that is 18 feet.

The height of a vault (*tribuna*) which comes above before the high altar is 31 yards, that is 93 feet.

The height of the vault (*tribuna*) in the midst of the church where there are five bells is 34 yards and $\frac{2}{3}$ ths, that is 105 feet.

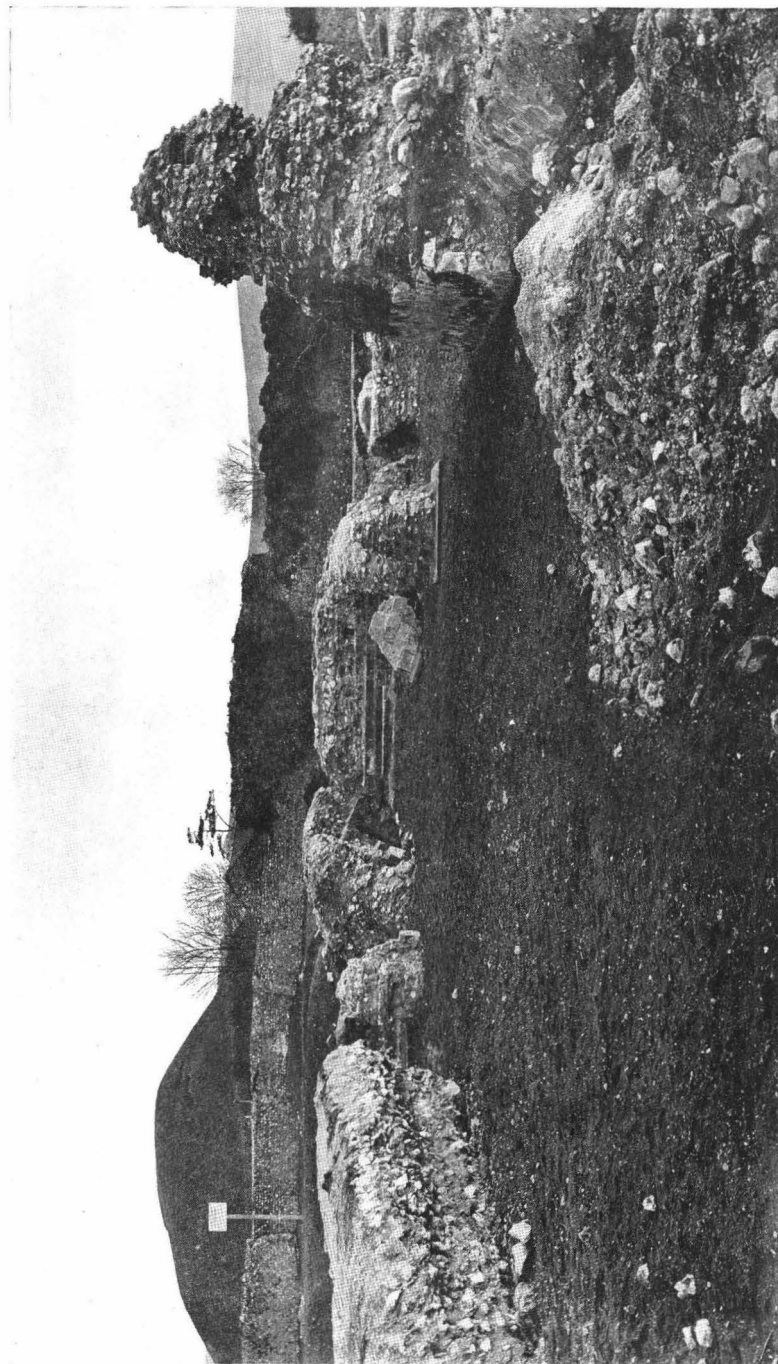
The height of the steeple (*campanile*) which is set by the forefront is 30 yards, that is 90 feet.

From Portinari's repeated assurances that he will advise his lord from time to time of all that shall happen, it is clear that his two letters form part of a series, of which the rest are missing. Had they been preserved we should have had a graphic description of the destruction, bit by bit, of the whole church, instead of its extreme east end only.

It is also evident from the careful explanation of the manner of the destruction that it was a most unusual proceeding. Such a method was no doubt familiar enough to military engineers bent on breaching walls or mining towers, but it was not the way in which churches were wont to be demolished, even "with the help of God" which the Italian invokes.

So far as my own experience goes, and many here present can probably corroborate me, there is no other ruin of church or monastery in this Kingdom of England which bears signs of such drastic treatment in the sixteenth century,¹⁹ nor have I met with any other documents than Portinari's letters which describe such a method or order its adoption.

¹⁹ Since the above was written Mr. Harold Brakspear has been excavating the site of Stanley Abbey, Wilts, and there found two pillars in the south transept treated in the way of Lewes and under the fallen material of the superstructure the bones of some unhappy man who had evidently been undermining them, with disastrous results to himself.



THE INFIRMARY CHAPEL OF LEWES PRIORY, LOOKING EAST.

Oddly enough it is evident from the extensive remains of the eastern range of buildings, which show no signs of other than the usual piecemeal destruction, that the system of sap and mine which was used at Lewes was confined almost entirely to the church. Apparently the object was to destroy it in the shortest possible time, or to convert it into a heap of ruins that could quickly be removed. This is the more probable when it is remembered that Crumwell had decided to convert part of the buildings into a residence for himself, and it may well be that he was anxious to get the great church out of his way. How the work was done can be made out fairly well from Portinari's letters, but so completely has the church disappeared that until lately his graphic description had to suffice.

It so happens, however, that the recently disclosed remains of the infirmary chapel furnish abundant evidence that that building was destroyed in precisely the same way as the church. Moreover, as its walls are still existing in places to a height of several feet, it is possible to see exactly how the destruction was brought about. The building was probably first stripped of its roofs, doors, windows and fittings. Vertical breaches were then made in the masonry, and through the heads of windows and doorways and other openings, and through the vaulting where necessary, so as to detach, as it were, from each other large sections of the walling. These sections were next undermined by the easy process of digging out the footings, and underpinning the walls with a continuous series of stout props. When all was ready one line of props was burnt or blown away, and the superincumbent mass then settled down into the hole beneath, in such fashion as to knock down any adjacent pillars or other standing portions and so help to complete the ruin. Such a cutting away as I have described may plainly be seen in the east wall of the chapel, just north of the high altar (Plate III.), in the walls north and south of it, and where the side doors of the nave were. The sections of the walling, too, are canted over at various angles, according to the depth of the holes into which they sunk. (See

Plates IV. and V.) From the rate at which Portinari's men seem to have worked, a very few days' labour would have sufficed to convert even so massive a structure as the infirmary chapel into a pitiful heap of ruins.

The recovery of Portinari's letters, and the statements therein contained as to the dimensions and architectural features of the church, have thrown new light upon several points which the shortcomings of Moryson's paraphrase had left obscure. We now know the exact length of the church, as well as the widths of the nave and transept. These dimensions necessitate a reconsideration of the somewhat conjectural plan submitted 23 years ago in illustration of my paper, which can also be corrected in another point, the arrangement of the west end of the church. It is evident that "the stepil at the fronte," described by Moryson, was not a single tower over the westernmost part of the nave, but one of a pair, the fellow of which had not been carried up, and it is rightly described by Portinari in his first letter as "*posto sur uno canto della chiesa,*" and in his schedule is "*sur un canto della facciati davanti.*"

In the hope of recovering, if possible, some traces of the original east end of the church, which was, of course, not destroyed by Portinari, but taken down when the eastern transept and its chevet of chapels were added in the twelfth century, Mr. Brakspear and myself have lately been allowed, through the kindness of Messrs. Kenward, to make excavations on the site. This is now a nursery garden, which, before the making of the railway, covered the whole of the site of the eastern half of the church, and still includes that of the middle portions and also that of the first presbytery. Owing to the presence of fruit trees and flower beds it was not possible to do more than sink holes, and though these revealed in many places the existence of strong concrete foundations, the general destruction had been too sweeping to leave anything definite behind. A small patch of tile flooring on the site of the south transept was practically the only interesting thing found, and I am afraid that it is hopeless

to expect any further discoveries, even if conducted on a larger scale.

Through Mr. Courthope's kindness some excavations have also been made in his garden. One of these, carried out by Mr. Whitley, has enabled us to lay down the lines of the south wall of the nave and the garth wall of the cloister. More recently some deep holes have been sunk on the line of the west wall of the church, but these have disclosed little else than the concrete core, with the opening of the west doorway and a fragment of the ashlar work at the north end. This last had evidently been undercut and sunk down into the pit that had been dug below. There are sundry other buried walls belonging to the western range, which show through the turf in very dry seasons, that one would like to trace, but as this would involve a temporary disturbance of a beautifully kept lawn, I am afraid the present state of things will have to continue.

From Crumwell's accounts and correspondence in the Public Record Office it is possible to follow the story of Lewes Priory for a little longer after its suppression and destruction.

In the accounts for 1538 are :

f. 124 b.]	Gennens at Lewes	The seconde of the same monethe delyvered to the Stewarde at Lewes by thand ^e of John Portynary	} C li.
f. 125.]	Portynary	The iij th of Aprill delyvered to hym in prest uppon his accompte	
f. 125 b.]		The xij th of Aprill payed for the cariage of certayn stuf from Stepney to Lewes to my Lady	} xvj s. iiij d.

As Crumwell was then a widower it is uncertain who "my Lady" was, but perhaps the wife of his son Gregory, who, as we have seen, had already been sent down to Lewes, and on the 11th April he writes to his father :

I have long deferred writing to you how my wife and I like this country till we had more experience of it. The house and situation please us much.

More payments occur later in the year :

f. 134.]	Jennyns	The same day [11th July] delyvered to him by thandes of M ^r Chaumbley ffor the provision of my Lorde howse at Lewes	} Cxxxiiij li. vj s. viij d.
f. 134 b.]	Arcane the Italyon	The same day [12th July] payed to him by M ^r Rychard ^e commaundement ffor his labo ^r at lewis	} xxx li.
f. 135 b.]	John Portynary	The xviiij th of the same monethe payed to him for certayn thinge by him donne at Lewes as by the particulers thereof dothe appere	} viij li. xij s. viij d.

It is unfortunate that no further details are given, but probably these payments were for breaking up and removing the fallen walls of the church.

Among Crumwell's receipts for 1539 are several items showing what he made out of his ill-gotten gains :

f. 71 b.]	Thomas Bysshope	Rec the vj th of July of him in parte payment of a more some for thinge solde at lewes	} ij ^c xxxij li. xviiij s. v d.
f. 78.]	Thomas Bushope	Rec. the same daye [24th November] of him for certayn venditions at lewes	} C ^{xx} iiij li. viij d.
f. 80 b.]	Rede & others	Rec xxij th of December of him & others in parte of payement of a moer some for leade & bellys bought at lewes dew unto my lorde at Cristemas next	} vij ^c xxvj li. iiij s. vj d.

What share (if any) of this plunder passed to the late prior doth not appear.

On Crumwell's attainder and execution in June—July, 1540, all his estates were forfeited to the Crown, and on 27th November Nicholas Jenney, yeoman, had, *inter alia*, a lease of the site of Lewes Priory, with certain reservations, for twenty-one years.

Here the story of Lewes Priory might be allowed to end, but for the fact that the setting out of the particulars in the lease are of some little interest. They, in fact, give us apparently a description of that portion

of the monastic buildings which formed the Prior's lodgings and was afterwards converted into a residence for Crumwell.

The site granted to Jenney included all houses, buildings, gardens, crofts, meadows and marshes within the precinct of the Priory wall, containing by estimation roughly 20 acres. But reserving to the King the church, the cloister, the house called "le Frater," and all other buildings which the King has ordered to be thrown down within a space of three years; together with all the lead, glass, iron, timber, stones, and tiles accruing therefrom, with free ingress and egress at all times to fetch them away.

Reserving also to the King:

"le great Gatehouse," with all the buildings in the same, and all upper buildings and rooms from the hall towards the west, viz. "le hall place" and "le pantry," with a little chamber opposite the pantry;

the room called "le Chappell," with "le hall place" and the steps downwards through the west door of the church;

two buildings called "Wynesellers;"

a lower room called "le Chequer," and "le old storehouse" under the steps, and also a building called "le countynghouse" above "le storehouse;"

also "le utter chamber," another chamber called "le greate Chamber," "le litell chamber" with "le entre" between the said "utter chambre" and "le grate Chamber;"

"le gallery" with the new buildings above and below on the north end and west of the said great chamber, with the steps in the south end of the same room;

also the priory kitchen and the bakehouse with free ingress and egress from the aforesaid new buildings through "le greate Malthouse" to the said kitchen and bakehouse.

Reserving also to the King:

the garden adjoining the said new buildings and "le Malthouse;"

also another garden and an orchard enclosed between "mill ponde" towards the said malthouse, and the gardener's house there;

also a moiety of the pigeon house in the north end, a stable and barn called "le Proctours barne and stable" with sufficient easement in a curtilage belonging to the same, all the house called "le Fisshe house" and "le ponde gardeyn" with free fishery in "le mill pond" and "le podpole;"

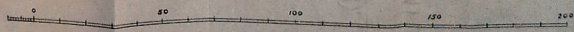
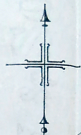
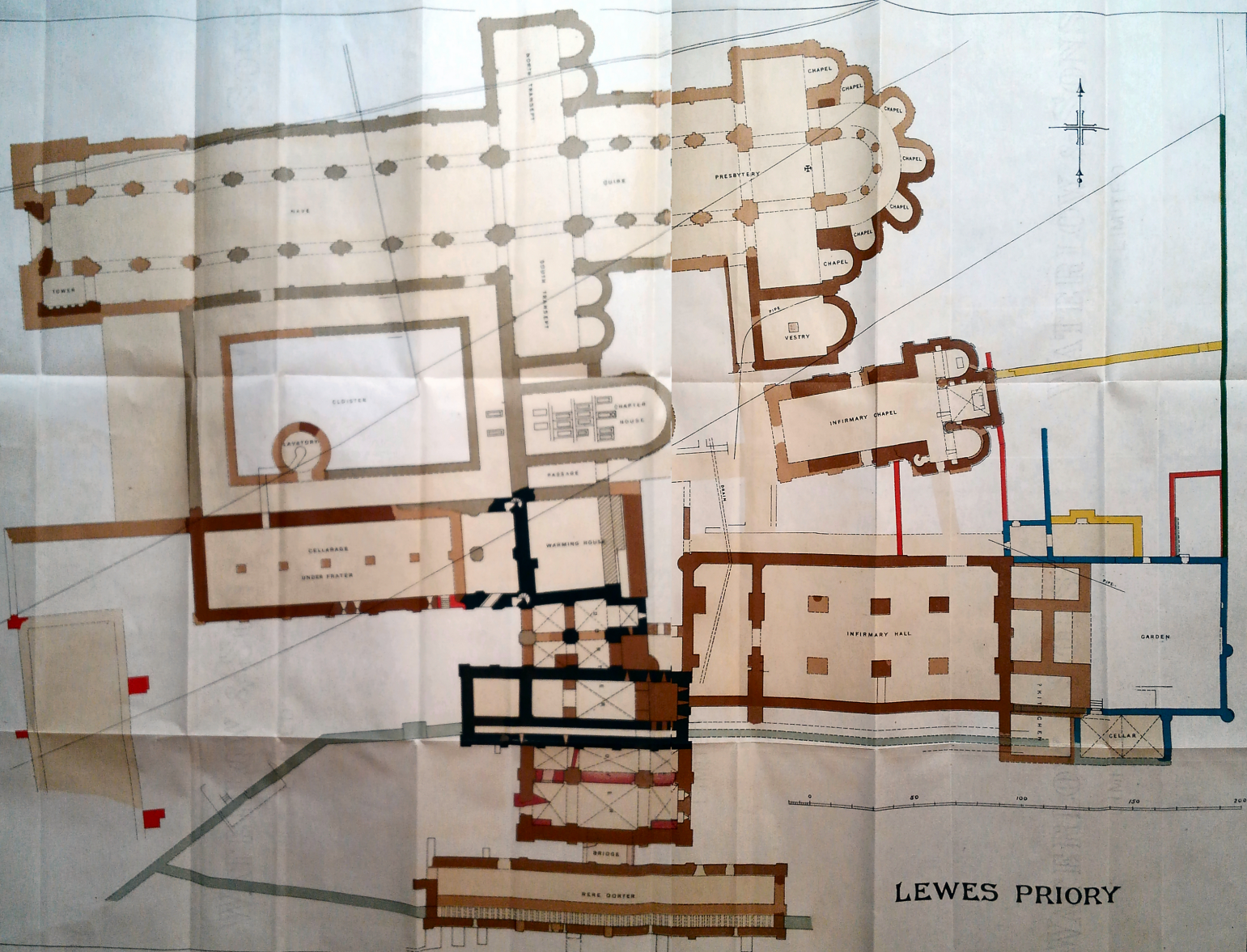
and all our swans and cygnets in the same ponds or elsewhere and hawks nesting in the premises.¹⁸

With a little ingenuity it is possible approximately to arrange these buildings in some sort of order, but as there is nothing of them left standing above ground, and we have no information as to their dimensions, it is useless to attempt a plan of them until excavations shall have revealed more about them.

What was their ultimate fate I have not yet been able satisfactorily to make out.

The Society is much indebted to Mr. E. B. Blaker, Mr. F. G. Courthope, and Messrs. Kenward for the facilities afforded by them with regard to the excavations, to Mr. Harold Brakspear for the accompanying plan of the Priory buildings, to Mr. J. C. Stenning for the three photographs reproduced in the plates, and to Mr. R. H. Brodie for collating the text of the Italian documents.

¹⁸ 27 November 32 Henry VIII. [1540]. Patent to Nicholas Jenney, yeoman, leasing to him *inter alia*: "totum Scitum nuper Monasterii de Lewes in Comitatu nostro Sussexie cum omnibus domibus edificis gardinis Croftis pratis et mariscis infra precinctum parietis dicti Scitus continentem Per estimacionem viginti acras sive plus inde fuerit sine injuris. Exceptis et omnino nobis heredibus et successoribus nostris reservatis ecclesia / Claustro / domo vocato *le ffrater* / ac omnibus aliis edificis que nos imposterum infra spacium trium annorum proximum sequencium prosterni mandaverimus / ac omnibus plumbo vitro ferro maieremio lapidibus tegulis inde provenientibus cum libero egressu et regressu omni tempore ad asportand et auferend dict. plumbum vitrum ferrum maierium lapides et tegulas. Exceptis eciam nobis heredibus et successoribus nostris *le great Gatehouse* cum omnibus edificis in eodem / ac omnibus superioribus edificis et cubiculis ab aula occidentem versus videlicet *le hall place* et *le pantry* / parvo cubiculo ex opposito ejusdem pantrie / cubiculo vocato *le Chappell* / cum *le hall place* / et gradibus deorsum per occidentalem ostium ecclesie / duobus edificis vocatis *Wynesellers* / inferiori cubiculo vocato *le Chequer* / et *le old storehouse* sub gradibus / ac eciam edificio vocato *le Countynghouse* desuper *le storehouse* / ac etiam *le utter chamber* / Alia camera vocata *le greate Chamber* / *le litell Chamber* / cum *le entre* inter dicta *le utter Chambre* & *le grate Chamber* / *le Galery* cum novis edificis superne et inferne in fine boriali et occidentali dicte magne Camere / cum gradibus in fine australi ejusdem cubiculi / ac eciam coquina privata et pistrino / cum libero egressu et regressu a predictis novis edificis per *le greate Malthouse* usque predictam Coquinam et pistrinum. Exceptisque nobis et successoribus nostris similiter reservatis horto adjacente predictis novis edificis et dicte *le Malthouse* / ac eciam alio horto et pomario sicut inclusis inter *mill pounce* versus dictam *le Malthouse* et domo hortulantis ibidem. Ac eciam et medietate Columbarii in fine boriali ac uno stabulo et horreo vocatis *le Proctours barne* & *stable* cum sufficiente easemento in curtilagio ejusdem spectante ac tota domo vocata *le ffishshehouse* & *le ponde gardeyn* cum libera piscaria in *le mill pond* & *le podpole* Ac omnibus Cignis et Cignellis nostris in eisdem stagnis seu alibi ac aucipitribus in premissis nidificantibus. Tradimus eciam et ad firmam dimittimus prefato Nicholao *le bruehouse* *le Watermyll* & *le horsemyll* cum eorum utensilibus infra dictum Scitum," &c., &c. (Rot. Pat. 32 H. VIII. pt. i. m. 24.)



LEWES PRIORY