

THE GATEHOUSE.



THE GATEHOUSE AND TUDOR WING, FROM THE SOUTH.

*From drawings by S. H. Grimm, 1784.*

# Sussex Archæological Society.

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## MICHELHAM PRIORY.

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BY WALTER H. GODFREY, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A.

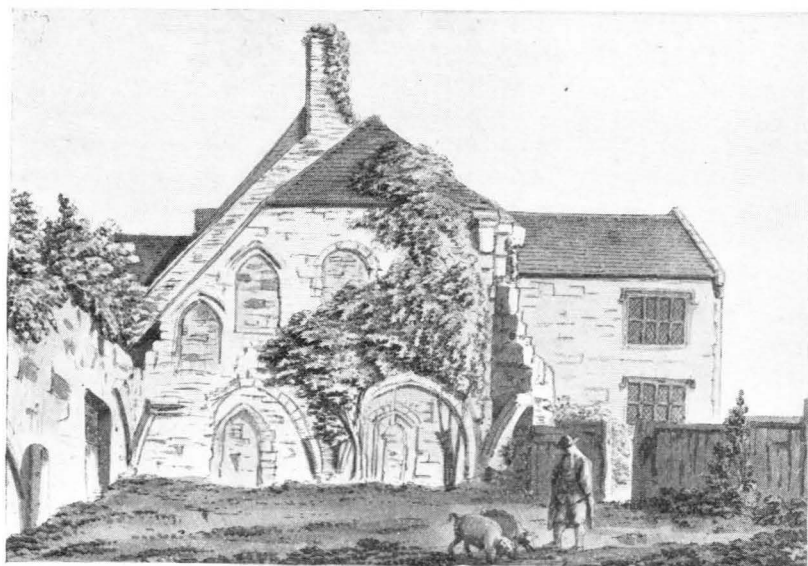
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THE history of the House of Augustinian Canons at Michelham has been the subject of a previous paper in the SUSSEX ARCHÆOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS,<sup>1</sup> and has been fully treated by Mr. L. F. Salzman in *The History of the Parish of Hailsham*, etc., Chapters XIV., XV., and XVI. The buildings have not so far been fully investigated and it was with the object of putting on record the architectural remains that the writer visited the Priory some years ago with Mr. Alfred W. Clapham, at the invitation of the late Mr. Rupert Gwynne. Since then, by the kind permission of Colonel R. V. Gwynne and the present owner, Mr. R. B. Wright, I have been able to prepare the accompanying drawings. Mr. Wright has recently converted the Priory into a residence, and during the alterations he has been good enough to grant me access to the works, when a closer examination of many of the constructional features was made possible. Mr. Wright's intention has been to preserve intact all that remained of the medieval building, but I have thought it better to record the structure as it appeared *before* alteration, so that as much as possible of its architectural history antecedent and subsequent to the dissolution might be put on paper.

<sup>1</sup> *Michelham Priory*, by Rev. Geo. Miles Cooper, S.A.C., Vol. VI., pp. 129-163.



PART OF AN UNDERCROFT.



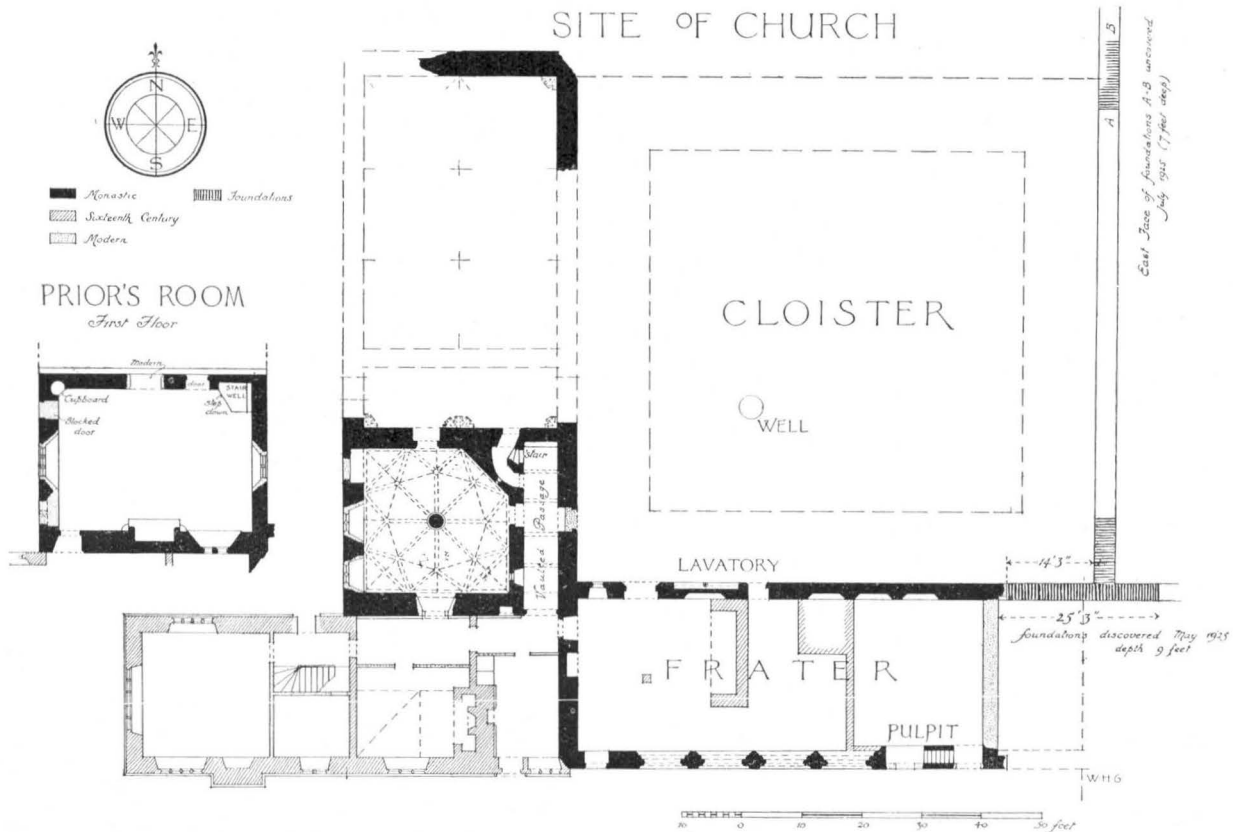
PART OF WEST CLAUSTRAL RANGE, LOOKING SOUTH.

*From drawings by S. H. Grimm, 1784.*

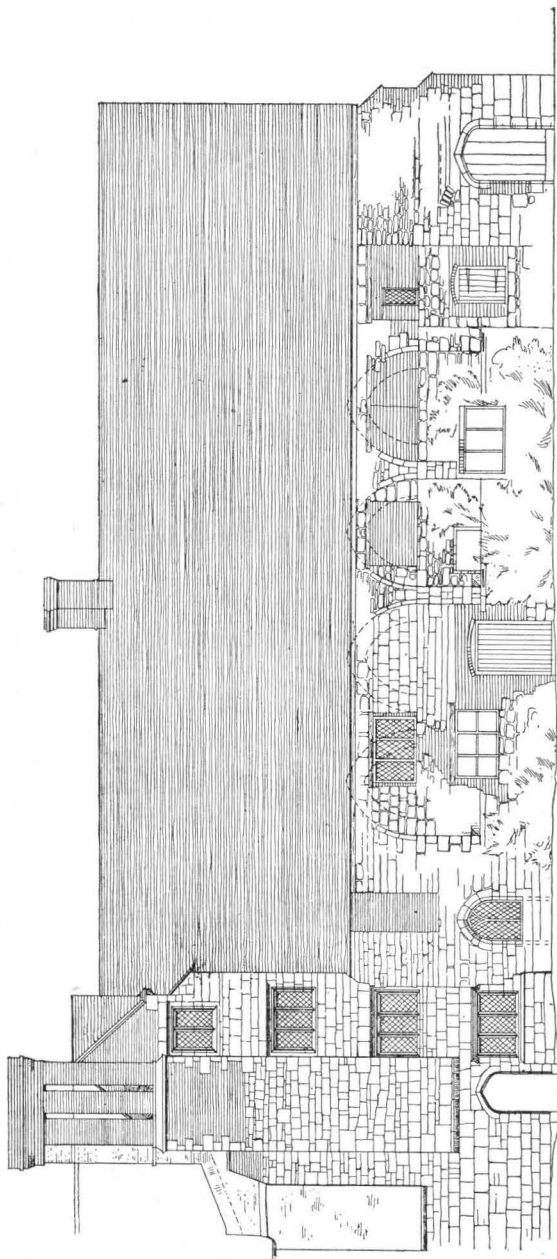
The Priory was founded by Gilbert de Aquila in 1229, and the royal licence for its foundation is preserved in the Patent rolls, 13<sup>o</sup> Henry III. m. 7. It was suppressed in 1536 with the lesser monasteries, and the value was assessed at £191 19s. 4d. It was never a large house, and the number of Canons seems to have sunk at times to less than half-a-dozen.

The architectural remains of the Priory, as will be seen from the plan, consist of the Frater and a part of the western cloister range (at its south end), the latter being probably a portion of the Prior's Lodging. The remainder of the western range can be seen in ruins in the drawings by S. H. Grimm in 1784, reproduced here from the Burrell Collection. A fragment of the north wall, which evidently formed the south wall of the Church, has been preserved *in situ*, and the springers of the vault of the undercroft are still to be seen in the north-east angle. During the recent alterations portions of the foundations of the Eastern cloister range and of the prolongation of the Frater buildings, eastwards, were discovered, but no foundations that could be recognised as those of the church could be found. Some trenches were dug across the site of the church recently without result, but it is possible that they were not taken deep enough, since the footings of the eastern range are found fully 9 ft. below ground level. These footings continued northwards beyond the northern boundary of the cloister and seem to prove that there was no transept and that the eastern arm of the church was aisle-less. The cloister measures 86 ft. east to west, and 84 feet north to south.

It will be seen from the plans that the western wall of the Frater and the southern wall of the Prior's Lodging adjoined a court, which was occupied by a low building communicating no doubt with the kitchen. Either just before or just after the Dissolution this court was enclosed and occupied by a building of four storeys in height, which was further extended westwards when the Priory was dismantled to form



PLAN OF MICHELHAM PRIORY BY WALTER H. GODFREY.



MICHELHAM PRIORY, SOUTH WALL OF FRATER IN 1925.

Measured and drawn by Walter H. Godfrey.

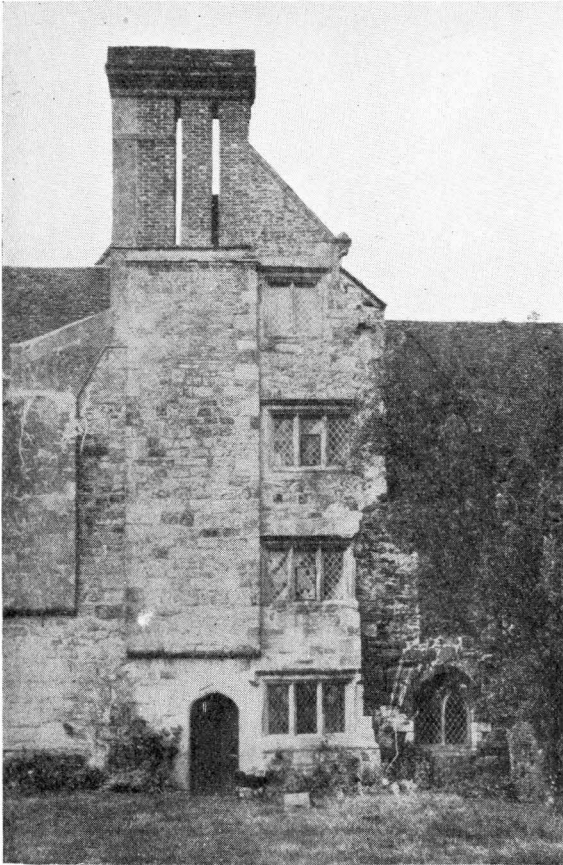
the principal rooms of the later dwelling-house. These rooms occupied in part the site of a building which ran south from the Prior's Lodging and which at some time previously had been enlarged, for the position of the roof is accurately given by deep chases cut in the stonework of the upper part of the south wall of the western range (see drawings).

From the north-west angle of the western range, a thick buttressed wall, which is so much ruined as to present no definitely recognisable features, proceeds in an irregular line towards the north-west. It may have formed part of some building bounding the court lying before the western front of the church. The gatehouse is intact, but it is not my purpose to examine this building in the present paper.

I will now describe the buildings in detail. The south front of the existing house, before the late restoration, presented a strikingly picturesque façade of weathered (and in some parts, decaying) sandstone. The frater on the right, the early sixteenth century house on the left, and between them the tall gabled Tudor building (with a lofty chimney-stack partly corbelled over the entrance), made a most effective group; and behind stood the great gable of the Prior's Lodging. The original roof of the frater, which must have been equal in height to this gable, has disappeared, and the present roof, which is much lower, dates probably from the seventeenth century. When the roof was lowered the upper part of the old windows was removed and casements of wood within brick dressings were inserted. Before this, but after the dissolution, the original windows seem already to have been blocked with stone when the larger part of this building was probably converted into a barn.

The frater appears to have been built towards the end of the thirteenth century. It measures now 67 ft. by 25 ft. internally, but its eastern wall has been rebuilt, and its original length is thus uncertain. In the south wall is a doorway to the west and a range of four windows, the cills and springing being

respectively about 8 ft. and 12 ft. from the floor. The windows as well as the doorway are of a deep red sandstone, and the former were probably of three

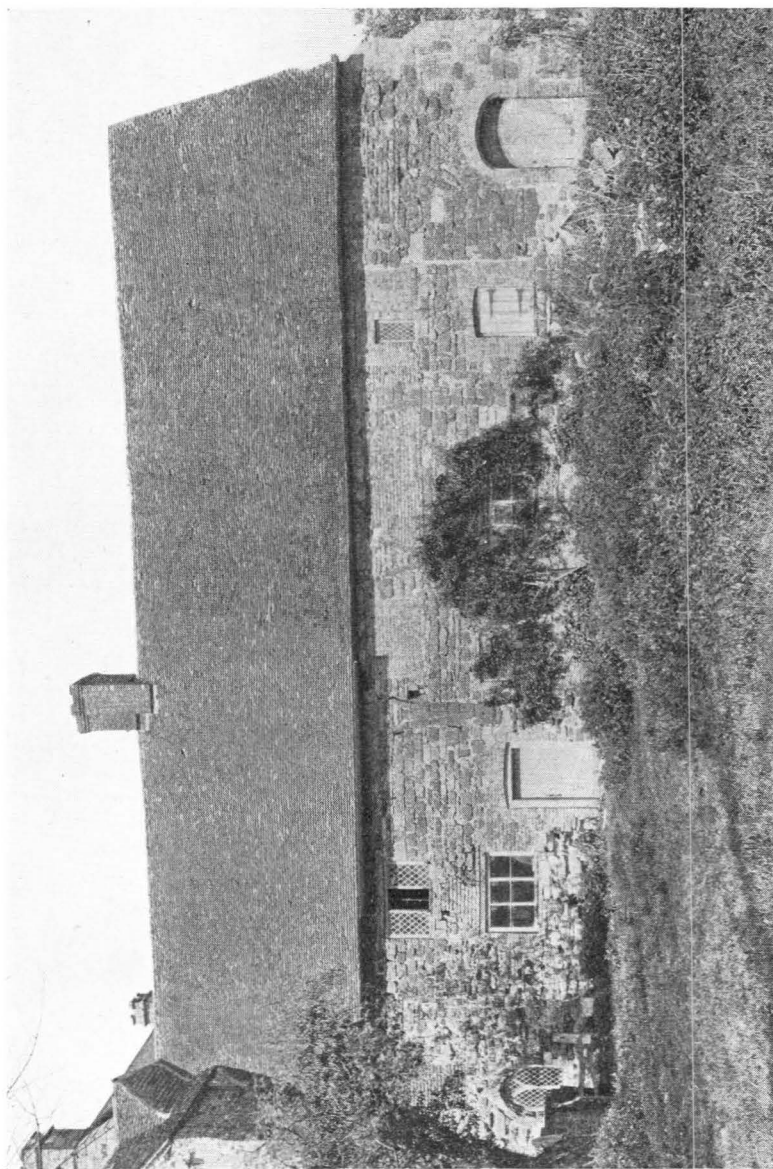


[Photo W. H. G.]

SOUTH GABLE OF TUDOR BUILDING.

lights within a two-centred arch, with splayed reveals on the outside and two chamfered orders (the inner one a hollow) on the inside. The rear arches both died on to a wide internal splay. The wall-face between the window recesses measures 18 ins. outside, and less



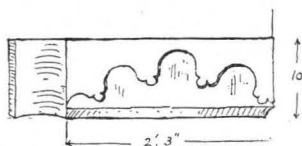


*Photo Watshams Ltd.*

**SOUTH WALL OF FRATER, MICHELHAM PRIORY, 1925.**

than 12 ins. within the building. The drawings show how much remains of these windows in the wall which has been altered, rebuilt and patched at several different periods.

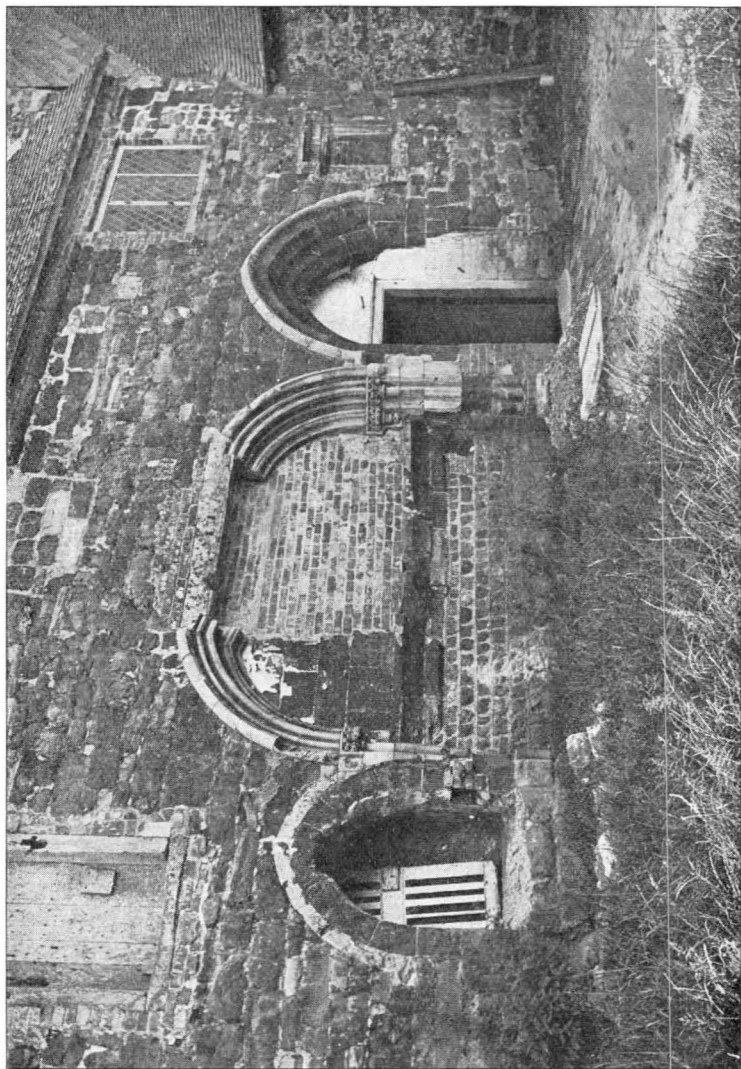
Eastward of the range of four windows are two vertical straight joints in the stone work about  $6\frac{1}{2}$  feet apart. These correspond with a deep recess in the wall some 5 ft. above the floor, approached by a stair in the thickness of the masonry, which still retains some of its original steps. This recess is the frater pulpit, and it apparently projected from the south front in the form of an oriel. The stone head over the



LINTOL OVER STAIR TO  
FRATER PULPIT.

opening from the stair to the pulpit is carved with a cinquefoil panel, sunk on its surface, but the original arch which spanned the pulpit itself has disappeared. East of the pulpit is a stone doorway of the Tudor period which has been refixed here from some other part of the building.

The north wall of the frater has not suffered as much as the south. It is chiefly of roughly coursed sandstone ashlar which in places is little better than rubble. The projecting string course that protected the cloister roof is still preserved for the greater part of its length, just below the present eaves. The original entrance door to the frater from the cloister is intact and is of two chamfered orders on the outside (dying on to a splay) and a moulded label. Adjoining it to the west is a small square-headed window of Tudor date, and to the east is a beautiful thirteenth century lavatory in the form of twin arches recessed in the wall. The arches are of two moulded orders, with label, the outer one being carried on banded shafts and the inner one on corbels. The capitals of the shafts and the corbels are carved with thirteenth century foliage under a circular abacus, and are beautifully executed. The central part of this arcade, where the arches join one another, was for some

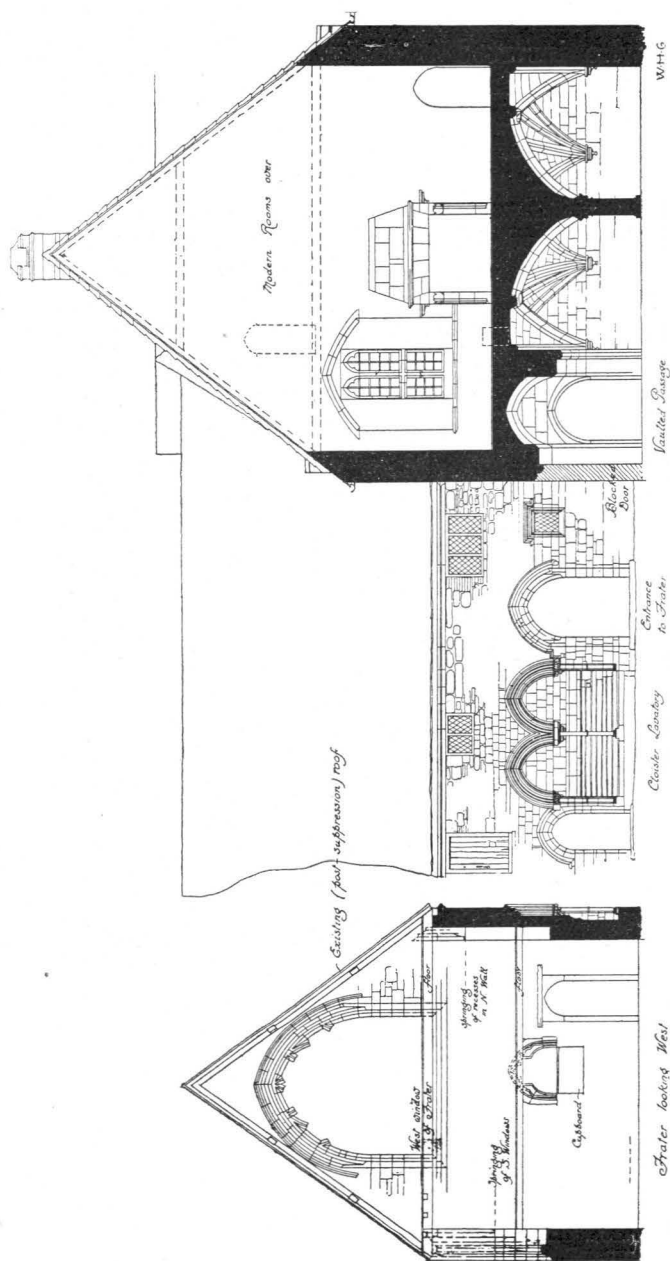


NORTH WALL OF FRATER, WITH LAVATORY—BEFORE RESTORATION.

time in ruins, and was restored by the late Mr. J. E. A. Gwynne, who inserted a central shaft where more probably was originally a corbel. At some time one of the carved heads forming the stops to the labels appears to have been displaced. The wall within the arches is further recessed, by means of a hollow corbel table, to give more room below the springing line. The moulded bases of the shafts stand upon a modern stone bench some 18 ins. above the ground. In connection with this lavatory it should be noted that the well is situated within easy reach in this angle of the cloister garth.

Adjoining the lavatory eastward is a smaller door into the frater, and the group formed by the two doorways, and the double-arched recess is a very delightful composition. The masonry further east has been reconstructed in parts. On the inner side of this north wall are a series of arched recesses similar in detail to the windows on the south side, but not corresponding with them either in height or position. They must have been arranged independently of the roof bays, and they are missing above the doorways, although there are indications that another arch stood west of the three shown in series on the drawing. The springing of the arches is 2 ft. 6 ins. higher than that of the windows, and it is possible that the apex of the traceried panel, if such existed, was pierced to admit light above an earlier cloister roof. They would however have been blocked by the roof which sloped away from the present string-course. The remains of the arches consist of little more than the springers (and the jambs below the springing line) of the inner order, which was hollow chamfered. The detail is similar to that of the frater windows and door, and a second order with blank or pierced tracery was probably present in the original treatment.

The west wall of the frater possesses several points of interest. It has been cut down in height to the slope of the present roof, but the great moulded arch and jambs of the west window are practically



SECTION THROUGH FRATER (LOOKING WEST) AND THROUGH WEST RANGE OF CLOISTER.

Measured and drawn by Walter H. Godfrey.

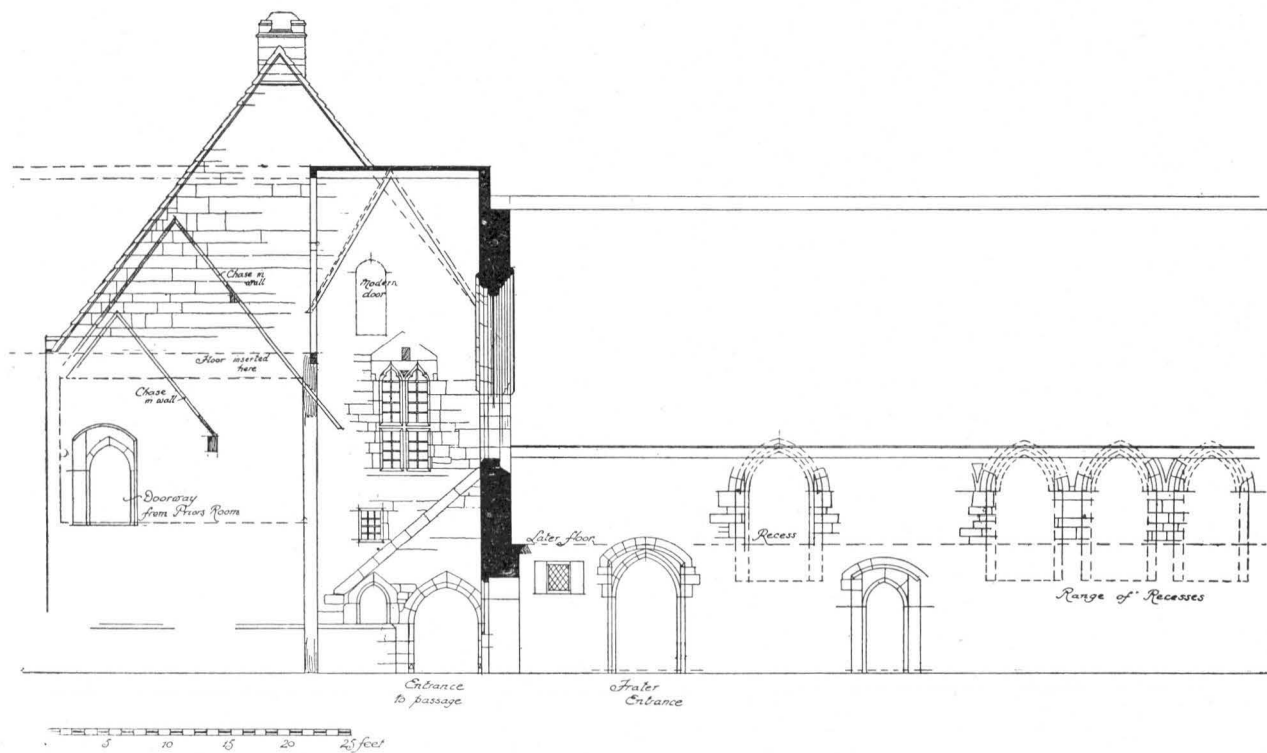
intact, and the junction of the tracery bars with the window arch is clearly shown by the projecting stones that remain. So far I have not been successful in arriving at any satisfactory solution of the original design of this tracery. Like the side windows it was



[Photo Walshams, Ltd.]

WEST WINDOW OF FRATER FROM WITHIN.

formed of four chamfered orders, one outside and two inside the window itself, the innermost being a hollow chamfer. It had a bold label moulding on both sides, that within, of two convex members, the upper projecting beyond the lower, and that without of one convex member above a hollow. The cill stood



MICHELHAM PRIORY, LONGITUDINAL SECTION THROUGH FRATER, SHOWING NORTH WALL  
AND GABLE END OF WEST CLAUSTRAL RANGE.

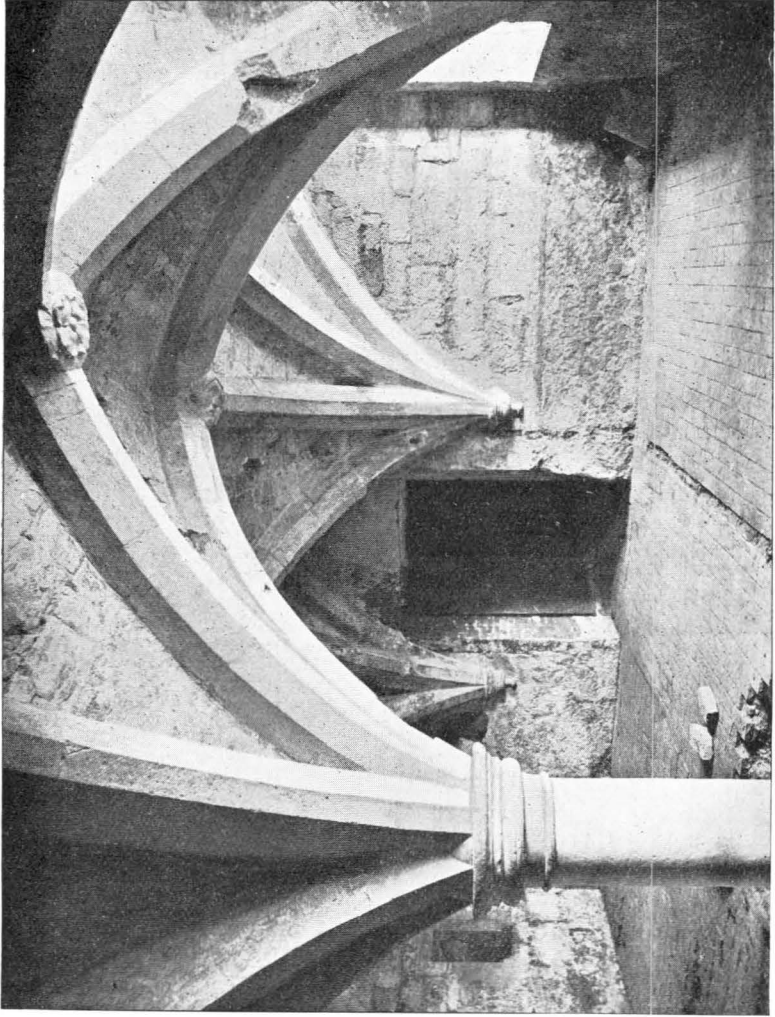
*Measured and drawn by Walter H. Godfrey.*

17 ft. above floor level, just above the point at which the lean-to roof of a low building adjoined the frater on the west. Below the window there were two other openings in the west wall. To the north an arched doorway led to the lean-to just mentioned. This door has a two-centred chamfered arch towards the west but its rear arch has disappeared. It seems to have been inserted after the wall was built and the joints of its stonework do not course with the adjoining door into the Prior's Lodging. The moulded stop to its chamfer is late in character. Towards the middle of the west wall (but not central) is an arched recess of somewhat unusual form, which seems to have been a cupboard or perhaps a serving hatch. Its base is a shelf about 4 ft. 6 in. from the floor and a second shelf stood above this. The recess is arched, the springing being a foot above the upper shelf, and the arch, which has a bead worked on the angle seems to have been in the form of a trefoil, and is slightly recessed from the wall face. It is contained within a roughly formed outer arch, also with bead, that commences at the height of the upper shelf, and has within its curve the fragments of what seems to have been a cinque-foil head, not unlike that already noticed over the pulpit stair. The cusps are formed of a pronounced bead or small roll with hollow, which is continued down the jambs as far as the upper shelf. The whole construction seems to have been the work of an amateur, but it is evidently contemporary with the rest of the building.

The west wall of the frater is continued northwards to form the western Cloister range. Of this building the southern section alone is standing. It consists of a vaulted undercroft, and a fine room with fireplace on the first floor, over which again are now some modern rooms. The views from the Burrell collection show the picturesque appearance of this building before it was restored by the late Mr. J. E. A. Gwynne.

The undercroft has a fine square apartment, the vaulting of which springs from a central circular pier



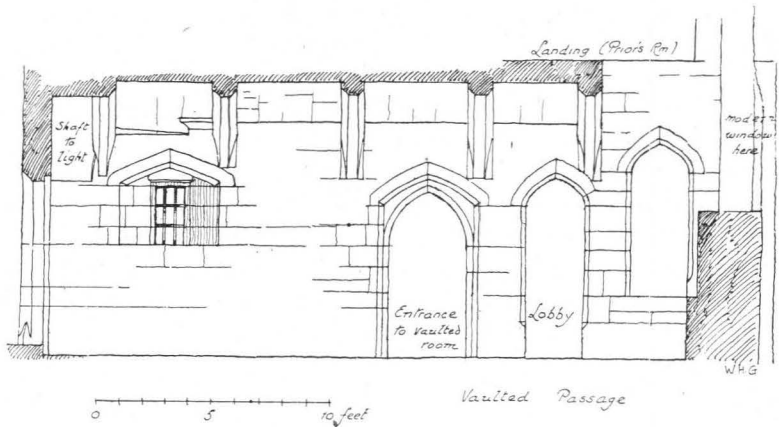


THE VAULTED ROOM, MICHELHAM PRIORY.

with thirteenth-century cap and base, and a vaulted passage between it and the cloister walk. The ribs of the large vault, which are chamfered, are arranged upon an octagonal plan, the eight ribs springing from the centre pair and meeting eight pairs of similar ribs springing from moulded corbels, two of which are furnished in each wall. Diagonal arches connect the two nearest corbels of adjoining walls and wall ribs connect the corbels, and the angles of the room. The north-east angle of the room is cut off by a wall on the line of the diagonal arch to admit of the entrance to the passage described later. This may have suggested the octagonal treatment of the vault, the subdivision of which by ribs gives a rich character to the design, which dates probably from the last quarter of the thirteenth century. The intersection of the three principal ribs of each vaulting bay is marked by a large stone boss, three only of which are carved. The subjects of these carvings are (a) a grotesque head, (b) a rose, and (c) a tripartite design which appears to have been intended for an emblem of the Trinity. The undercroft was entered apparently by three doors, one (now blocked) at the north end of the west wall, another in the centre of the north wall, communicating with the western claustral range, and a third in the centre of the east wall, giving on to the passage. The windows in the west wall are now modern, but their predecessors are shown in the Burrell drawings. There is a single light window, formerly fitted with wrought iron bars and perhaps a grille, between the pillar room and the passage. The opening is square, towards the outside with enriched ogee stops to the chamfer; inside the passage it has wide splayed reveals and a pointed rear arch. In the diagonal wall above mentioned there is a narrow slit giving light to the entrance lobby at the north end of the passage.

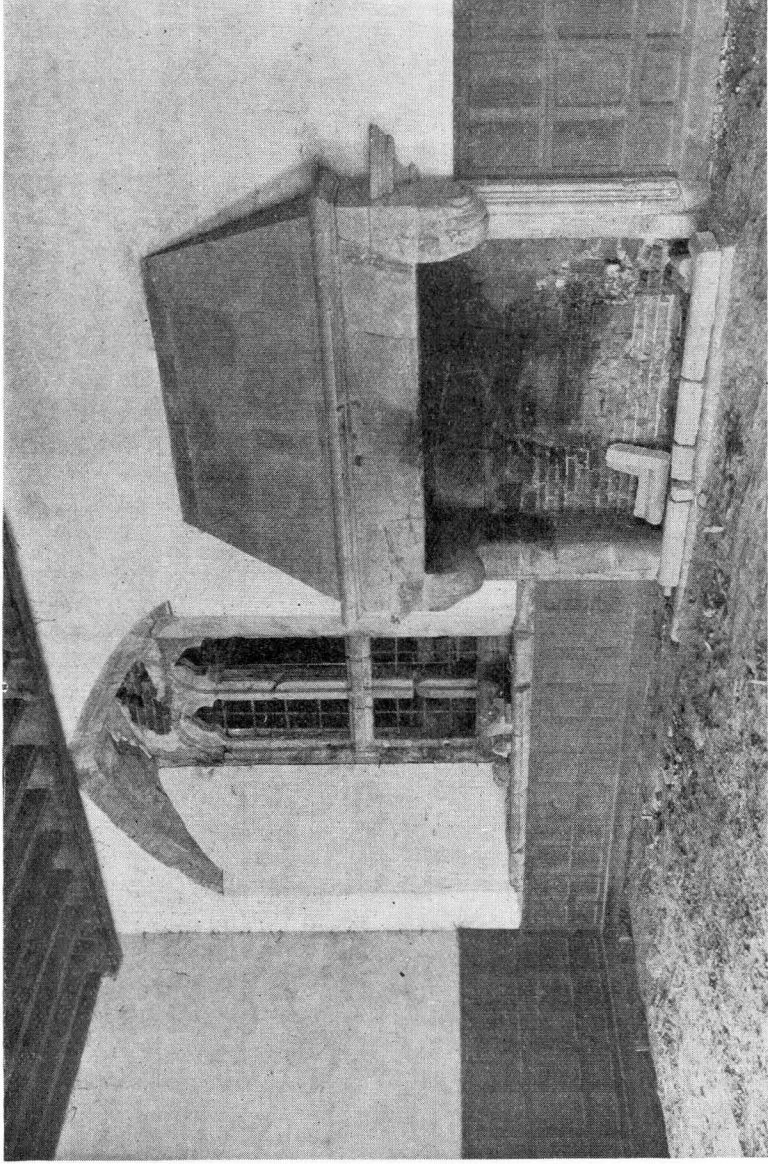
The vault of the passage is a continuous pointed barrel vault with intermediate transverse arches at intervals. In the centre of the east wall can be seen

the rear-arch and reveals of an entrance to the Cloister, now blocked up, but the original form of which can be seen in the Burrell drawings. At the south end a large stone doorway communicated with the lean-to building west of the frater; while at the north end there appears to have been a stair leading to the first



WEST WALL OF VAULTED PASSAGE.

floor of this building and perhaps direct to the Prior's hall above. To the west of the stair in the angle cut off from the Pillar room is continued a passage and a small doorway into the undercroft of the western cloister range. The presence of this door and also of the one in the adjoining room in the same wall, suggests that both communicated with a passage from the outer court to the Cloister, and indeed an archway can be seen in this position in early views of the priory. The stones of this archway were preserved by Mr. Gwynne. The exact arrangement of the stair is not at present easy to recognise, but its lowest steps, the arched entrance, and the landing step in the Prior's room above were sufficiently clear. The only light to this passage seems to have been from a square opening high up in the south wall, where the vault has been cut away in a long stepped recess for its



MICHELHAM PRIORY—PRIOR'S ROOM, 1925.

*Photo Watshams, Ltd.*

admission. This window and the recess looks down upon a spot directly in front of the doorway leading to the cloister.

Outside the south door, and to the west of it is an arched recess or cupboard, formed over the projecting plinth of the wall, and just beneath a long sloping stone band that marks the original set off protecting the roof of the lean-to building already referred to. The back of the recess has at some time been roughly cut away to communicate with the vaulted room and has again been bricked up.

Of the Prior's room on the first floor, certain only of its original features survive. Its southern wall is least altered, and here we can see a fine two-light transomed window with trefoil ogee heads (the latter badly fitting and perhaps re-fixed), within deep splayed reveals and a pointed segmental rear arch. The lights are rebated for shutters, and inside is a stone cill or seat with projecting moulded edge that was evidently continued along part of the wall. Adjoining it to the west is a fine early fourteenth century fireplace with stone hood carried on well-moulded corbels and jambs. An old engraving shows the opening sub-divided by a third corbel and stone division, but this was no part of the original treatment, having been apparently inserted where a partition dividing the room into two parts had been made. It should be noted that another corbel similar to the two which are in position, is set on the other side of the wall, doing duty now in the support of a ceiling beam. Each side of the hood is a circular-moulded corbel in the form of a three-quarter capital, intended to act as a shelf. West of the fireplace at the extremity of this south wall is a doorway which communicated with the upper part of the south wing, indications of which are seen in the marks of the gable already referred to.

In the west wall there seems originally to have been another window, now filled up, and north of it a doorway which communicated with the outer court



THE FRATER AND SITE OF CLOISTER, 1784.



TUDOR WING, AND PART OF WESTERN CLAUSTRAL RANGE (LEFT).

*Drawings by S. H. Grimm, 1784.*

by an external staircase, the direction of which can still be followed in the masonry. This door, which is now blocked, stood directly over the entrance to the undercroft below. In the north-west angle of the room is a little stone cupboard recess,<sup>2</sup> the plan of which is about three-fourths of a circle, finished above with three-quarter domicate ceiling, and ventilated by means of a small shaft with the outer air. The opening is rebated for a door.

A reference to the Burrell drawings will show that the north wall was pierced by three doorways, two at the level of the first floor and one (the easternmost) having its cell a couple of feet or so lower. This last doorway apparently opened from the stairway already described as having led from the passage below to the Prior's room. It is represented now by one or two stones of the springing, where is a modern window inserted by Mr. Gwynne. The middle doorway is intact and communicated with the upper floor of the western range. The western door, which, from the drawings, may possibly have been post-suppression in date, has been replaced by a modern window. The floor line is shown on the outside by an external set-off, and the wall below retains the wall arches and great springers of the ribbed vault which formerly continued northwards. The Burrell drawings show the more considerable remains of these buildings which existed at the end of the eighteenth century, and also the old hipped roof which Mr. Gwynne replaced by the present modern wall and gable. The east wall was largely rebuilt at the same time and a modern window inserted therein. The weather moulding over the cloister roof seems to have been removed, as no vestige now remains.

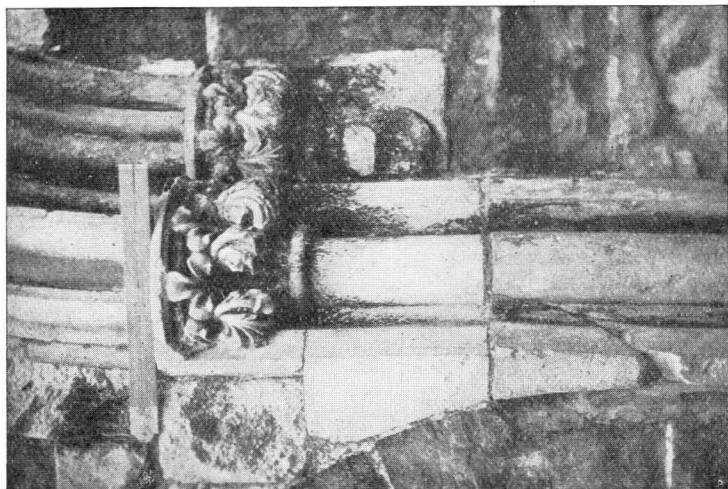
The gable on the south side of the Prior's room is original for its whole height and is finished at the apex by a chimney with crenellated parapet. It is

<sup>2</sup> This has the appearance of being contemporary, but Mr. Salzman informs me that he has reason to believe that it was inserted by Mr. Gwynne.





BOSS IN VAULTED ROOM.



DETAIL OF LAVATORY.



on the outer face of this gable that the deep chases can be seen for the gables of successive rebuildings of a south wing. The Prior's room seems to have been paved originally with stone and the old landing from the stair (now removed) is shown on the plan.

There is little more to add respecting the remainder of the buildings. The western wall of the four-storey Tudor block has a stone-chamfered plinth on its eastern (inner) face, and it may therefore represent a part of the earlier south wing. Moreover, the stonework on the south wall, in its evidence of patching and rebuilding, may be part of the south end of the same building. The former wall (which has been cut into by a large chimneystack) is of stone for the height of only one story. On the first floor it is of close oak studding with herring-bone brick nogging. Above this it was of open-spaced timber framing of the sixteenth century with plastered panels, and in the attic story it was finished with an oak cill and balustrade of sturdy oak-turned balusters that have now disappeared.

At my suggestion, Mr. Wright was good enough to commission Messrs. Walshams Ltd. to take several photographs of the building before the late alterations, and my acknowledgments are due for the permission to reproduce one or two of them here. The other views have been kindly lent by Mr. Salzman from his *History of Hailsham*.