

XXIII.—RECENT EXCAVATIONS ON THE SITE OF THE CARMELITES, OR WHITE FRIARS, AT NEWCASTLE.

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BETWEEN the years 1066 and 1216 more than 400 religious houses were founded in England, whilst in the reign of Henry III., when the establishment of monasteries was on the wane, no less than 52 houses, apart from those of the various friars and other minor orders, were built. It was during this reign that the various orders of friars appeared in this country, and in 1256 these orders possessed 49 houses, containing in all 1,242 brethren.

The arrival of the friars initiated a new religious movement among the people. The Dominicans, or Preaching Friars, abandoned the seclusion of the cloister for a movable pulpit in the street or the market place, and, living upon alms and in voluntary poverty, stood out in strong contrast to those who occupied the monasteries, with their rich possessions and grasping dispositions.

Newcastle was singularly rich in religious houses. Of these, that of the Friars of the Sac, or, as they were sometimes called, Friars of the Penitence of Jesus Christ, is the subject of these notes. This order, of which only nine houses were established in England (at Cambridge, Leicester, Lincoln, London, King's Lynn, Newcastle, Norwich, Oxford, and Worcester), was very short lived. It was introduced in 1258 and suppressed in 1307. I believe that no remains of their buildings are extant in any of the places enumerated; unless the fragments shown in the accompanying drawings were constructed by them. I think, however, that I am justified in asserting that the architectural character of these fragments, which are slight in extent, is of this period, and thus in claiming for Newcastle the distinction of being the only place where any structural evidences of this order remain.

Tanner says:—"The right style of this order was 'Friars of the Penance of Jesus Christ'; but they were more commonly called Friars of the Sac, from their habit being shaped like a sack, or made of the coarse cloth called sackcloth."¹

Their first establishment in England was at Cambridge,² where they owed their settlement to the benefactions of Richard Heckingham and others, although Henry III. is spoken of as their founder. They afterwards desired to settle also at Oxford; and, to accomplish this purpose they made application to Henry III. begging a small plot of land to build thereon a house and chapel. This they obtained, as well as the church of St. Michael, which stood on the ground granted to them. After this they bought an adjoining field from Walter the goldsmith, having received a benefaction for this purpose from Ela, 'the most pious Countess of Warwick.'

'This order of Friars,' says Anthony à Wood, 'gathered many good scholars and multiplied in numbers exceedingly, until the suppression of this order at the council of Lyons in 1307, when all mendicant orders were suppressed excepting only Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians, and Carmelites.'

The Friars of the Sac were established in Newcastle before 1268, in which year Henry III. granted to the brethren of the Pénitence of Jesus Christ a certain place called Constable Calgarth, in the town of Newcastle-on-Tyne, and which was contiguous to the garth or place of the said brethren in that town. 'On the 8th January, 1300, Edward I., on his arrival at Newcastle, gave two shillings by the hands of Walter de Carleton of the brethren of the Sac in this town for their pittance for two days.

¹ Dufresne defines *Saccus* as a garment used by monks, and said to be a sort of mean cloak which is worn in addition to the other garments or vestments, and which differs from the *cilicium* or tunic, from being woven with goats' hair, which adheres to the naked flesh.

² Brand, Vol. I. p. 58. This order is said to have commenced in Provence, A.D. 1245, when the General Council of Lyons was sitting, by means of an expelled novice. It was confirmed by Pope Nicholas the Fourth. They are reported to have admitted both sexes, who were allowed to have property. If they were married persons, they were to continue so; and although they could not lawfully or regularly marry after admission, yet, if they did, the marriage was still reputed valid. It was not a perfect, or complete religion, and has been accounted not a true order, so that, though its members were esteemed ecclesiastical persons, authors are not agreed whether or not they enjoyed the personal and real privileges of clerks and religious.—*Hospinian de Monachatu*.

At the time of the suppression of this order the Whitefriars of Newcastle occupied what had become an inconvenient abode at Wall Knoll. The Friars of the Sac were reduced to one—the brother William de Carleton just mentioned. On the 26th May, 1307, Edward I. granted to the prior and brethren of the order of the Blessed Mary of Mount Carmel, in the town of Newcastle-on-Tyne, ‘the place in which the brethren of the penitence of Jesus Christ used to dwell in the same town . . . So nevertheless that the same prior and brethren of the aforesaid order of the blessed Mary shall find reasonable sustenance for brother Walter de Carleton of the aforesaid order of penitence, dwelling in that place, for the whole of his life, in a way suitable to his rank.’ Here the Whitefriars remained till the suppression of their house in 1539.

The remains comprise portions of two walls at right angles in the form of the letter **T**, the foundations of the stem being about 42 ft. 6 in. in length, terminating at the east end with a few courses of a return wall, and at the west end with a wall of uncertain length the foundations of which run north and south, the accumulation of earth being great and too costly to be removed. The old work above the ground covers only a portion of the foundations of the wall, which forms what I have called the stem of the letter **T**. It consists on the north side, which is the interior of an apartment, of several courses of ashlar masonry, with a moulded string of Early English character filleted on the face 10 feet above the probable floor level, and immediately below a window sill and jamb, chamfered on the exterior and widely splayed on the interior. A large portion of this wall, on the south face, has formed one side of an apartment, containing a fireplace with chamfered segmental arch and chamfered jambs. On the east of this apartment, and at right angles to the wall we are considering—blocking the lower portion of the window mentioned above—is a narrow pointed arch chamfered on both sides. Over the arch, on its west side, is a chamfered floor shelf. The wall forming the top of the letter **T**, of which the exterior faces the west, contains the chief feature of the remains. This is a pointed doorway of two chamfered orders, the outer chamfer having a casement or hollow. There are no capitals, and the mouldings are continued from the apex to the base. The inner order is continued across the sill or threshold. The rear

arch is flat, and its jambs are widely splayed, with indications of a bolt hole. A rebate for the door is worked on the back of the inner order. The doorway measures 3 ft. 4 in. in width, 4 ft. 9 in. to the spring of the arch, and 7 ft. 3 in. to its apex. On the north side, and contiguous to this door, is the sill or threshold of another opening. The floor on the exterior or west side of this wall is covered with rough glazed clay tiles five inches square and one inch thick, slightly bevelled for cement and laid diagonally; they are doubtless contemporary with the building. To the north-west of these remains several fragments have been found, including four capitals, a piece of string moulding, and a corbel. The capitals are octagonal, with vertically faced abaci and roll neck. They measure 3 ft. 1 in. across the top and 2 ft. 7 in. on the underside. The string moulding is a bowtell with a low fillet on its lower side. The corbel, which measures 20 in. \times 6 in. \times 6 in., has a chamfered roll on the underside. These fragments are all of early date; but in addition to them two pieces of window tracery have been discovered, which must be assigned to a considerably later period. The west face of the wall—the top of our letter T—is 143 ft. 4 in. from the town wall at a point between the site of the Whitefriars and Denton towers.

The establishments of the various orders of friars were very irregular in plan, being adapted to available sites in the midst of large populations. The churches of friars were invariably destitute of triforia—frequently simply a parallelogram, at other times with a single aisle or two alleys divided.

Despite, however, the very limited extent of the remains discovered here, we have sufficient to indicate that the buildings were of considerable extent. The four capitals—provided no undercroft existed, and supposing them to belong to the church—prove that at Newcastle the church had at least five bays with an aisle, or two aisles of three bays. The position of the church would most likely be on the north side of a cloister, the east side of which would be probably formed by the wall containing the door shown in the drawing; and it may be that the apartment on the north side of the adjoining wall was the chapter-house, whilst that on the south sufficed for the refectory or calefactory with dormitory above. This approximation of plan is conjectural on my part.

It is to be regretted that the investigation has not yielded more; yet, when so much in Newcastle has been irretrievably lost, the little found here may, I hope, lay claim to some interest, particularly as the extensions of the North-Eastern Railway Company may in a short time require the removal of these remains.

My special thanks are due to Mr. George Irving for his generous permission to open out, excavate, and remove walling and plaster work, and for his kindness in providing men to accomplish this work; and also to Mr. Lovegreen, the tenant, for his ready acquiescence in proceedings which entailed inconvenience upon him.