

A Note on the discovery of Painted Beams at the Deanery, Norwich.

COMMUNICATED BY

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EARLY in the month of August, 1889, when the Deanery was undergoing repair, the flooring of two rooms over the large hall (now used as the kitchen) was taken up, and the joists exposed.

These were found to be beams ranging from 7 inches to 10 inches wide, and more than a foot deep, and they were set about 1 foot 10 inches apart. The soffit of these beams could not be seen, as it was concealed by the ceiling of the kitchen, but the sides, wherever visible, were found to have been completely covered with painted ornament in various patterns, of which the drawings here given show the best preserved.

No. 1 has a groundwork of chevrons, running the long way of the beam, alternately white and red, outlined with black. In this ground are set panels of a blue colour at intervals of 1 foot 4 inches apart. Within the blue ground of these panels are quatrefoils, ornamented with grotesque human heads on a gold coloured ground. Only two of these quatrefoils remained.

No. 2 is decorated with circles, alternately red and yellow, on a dark green ground; on each red one is a white lion rampant; on each yellow, a black eagle displayed.

No. 1.



No. 2.



One Foot.

PAINTED BEAMS. THE DEANERY, NORWICH.

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The opposite side of this beam had white fleur-de-lis alternating with some object which could not be made out; even the colour of the ground was not to be distinguished.

No. 3 had an arrangement of red quatrefoils on blue, with a broad outlining margin in white round each, and the quatrefoils were separated from each other by white upright lines. On the opposite side, also separated by white perpendicular lines, were white lions passant on a red ground, facing alternately to right and left.

No. 4 is the same in composition, only the lions follow each other, and are coloured red on a brownish black ground. The design of the opposite side could not be ascertained, as it was entirely hidden.

Besides these just mentioned, the sides of other beams showed varieties of the chevron pattern in black and red outlined in white, one being very bold in character. The points of the chevrons ran all the long way of the beams. One noticeable feature in the decorative arrangement was that no two patterns were alike, and that each beam had a different pattern on each of its sides.

The great room, now the kitchen of the Deanery, of which these beams form the ceiling joists, is lighted by two fine two-light windows of thirteenth century date. At some period, comparatively recent, a great re-arrangement has taken place, the ceiling beams having been lowered, and the heads of the windows blocked in consequence. The under side of the beams has also been ceiled with thin boarding, the entire re-arrangement being made for the purpose of forming a range of rooms above the kitchen.

Taking into account the beauty of the windows, and the number of these beams covered with such varied decoration, it would seem probable that the latter had formed part of a very elaborately coloured ceiling over a hall, which, according to Harrod, may have been the Prior's hall. The date of the windows and the painted beams appears to

No. 3.



No. 4.



One Foot.

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coincide, both being probably of the middle of the thirteenth century.

As the designs on the soffits of the beams cannot now be seen, and as the boarding which covered the spaces between them has completely disappeared, it is not possible to attempt a restoration of this roof, which, for its effect, seems to have relied entirely on its paintings. That it was, in its perfect state, rich and very varied in colour, there can be no manner of doubt. What remains of the decoration has a good deal of heraldic character about it, but the different forms are probably only used ornamentally.

It is an interesting circumstance to know that in the Sacrist's Rolls of Norwich Priory, sundry entries occur for colours, and that in one under date 1277, several painters and their works are mentioned. The work at the Deanery might very well have been from the hands of one of these painters, the record of whose labours will be found, copied from the Sacrist's Rolls, in the Norwich Volume of the Archæological Institute, 1847.