

Recent Discoveries on the Site of the Grey Friars, Great Yarmouth.

I.—THE CHURCH OF ST. FRANCIS.

COMMUNICATED BY

JOHN BATELY, M.D.

DURING the first week of this year, 1896, the Corporation workmen engaged in cutting a trench along Queen Street, wherein to lay a new sewer, came upon many items of interest in connection with the Church of the Grey Friars, which once stood upon that site. On a line with the front of the houses at the west end of the street, and a few inches beneath the crown of the roadway, a rubble wall, with flint facings, running north and south, was uncovered. It was 3 ft. in thickness and 6 ft. in depth to the bottom of its foundation. It was apparently no part of a building, both sides being similar, and, standing in the position indicated, it seems to have been the western wall of the precinct of the Convent. Its massiveness also suggests that it might have been something of a retaining wall to the soil within, and a defence against the tides without. The structure of the wall was not so dense, neither was its mortar so hard as that in other walls found later. Possibly saturation with salt water may have produced the latter condition.

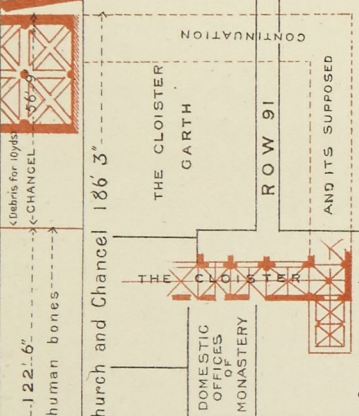
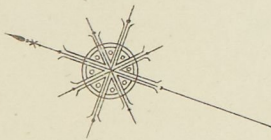
Plan of the remains of the
GREY FRIARS MONASTERY, G^T YARMOUTH,
 and of the walls of the **CHAURCH of S^T FRANCIS,**

QUEEN STREET

SOUTH QUAY

← 39-ft. →
 ← 10ft →
 ← 37 yds, yielding human bones →
 N A V E. — 122'-6" —
 ← Closets for 10yds →
 ← CHANCEL →

← Entire Length of Church and Chancel 186' 3" →



Graining on level with floor of rooms over the Cloisters

MIDDLEGATE STREET

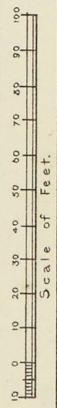
ROW 90

ROW 93

From a plan prepared by
HENRY - OLLEY
 ARCHITECT
 G^T YARMOUTH.

Remains of wall of Precincts

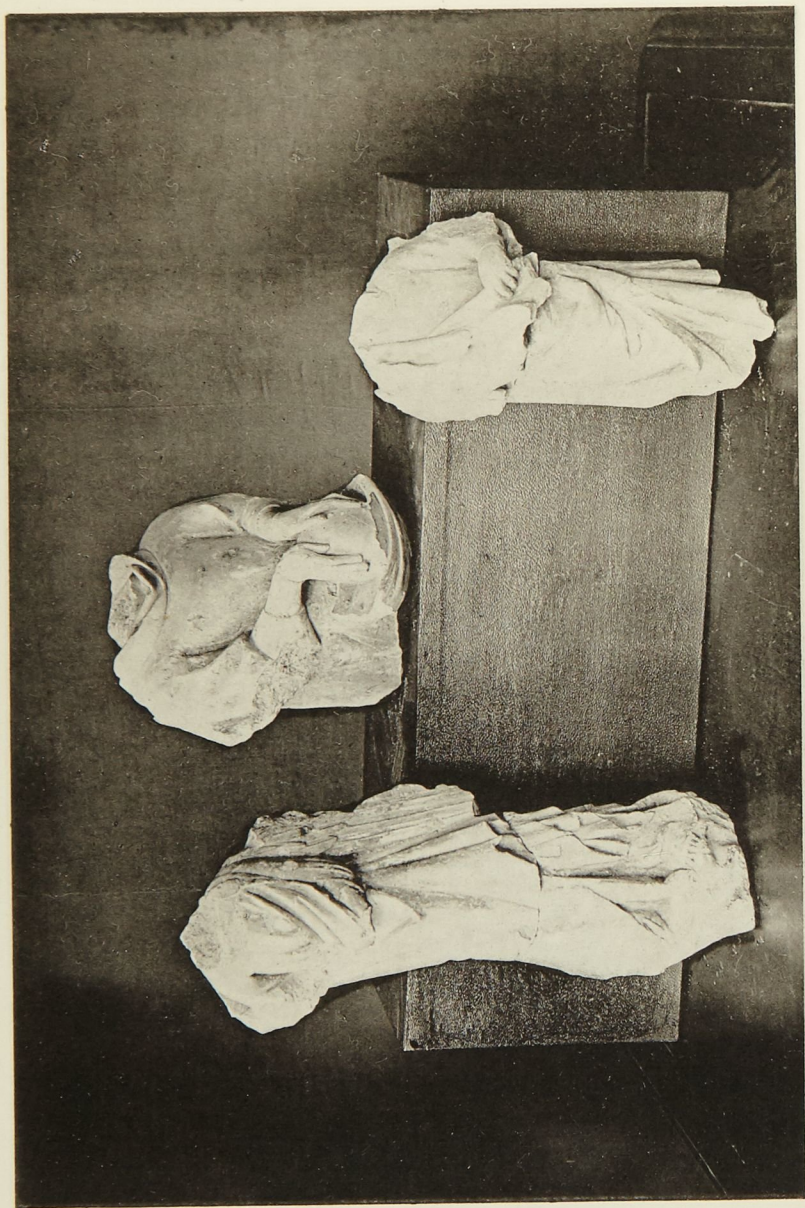
North wall of Priors Lodge



Scale of Feet.

At a distance of 39 ft. to the eastward of the wall just described, the workmen came upon another wall of rubble, running north and south, faced with cut flints on the west side, and rendered smooth with pointing on the other, which evidently formed the inside of some building—most probably the Church of St. Francis. This wall was more massive than the first one, being 3 ft. 6 ins. thick and 9 ft. 6 ins. from the top, *i.e.*, from just beneath the crown of the roadway to the under side of its foundations. At about 3 ft. down a freestone plinth ran along the west face of the wall, the wrought stones of which were not at all decayed. And when this western side of the wall was quite uncovered and viewed intact, the whole fragment of wall had an appearance of newness and freshness which was surprising considering its age and the length of time it has been buried. Assuming the plinth to have been originally a foot or a foot and a half above the then ground level, I think we have good reason for saying the present surface of the west end of Queen Street and the Quay adjoining is between four and five feet higher than it was in the thirteenth century. The wall was exceedingly well built, and required much labour with sledge hammer and iron wedges to break through it.

Commencing about 10 ft. eastward of this second wall, and thence onwards for about thirty-seven yards up Queen Street, the workmen dug through what was evidently a burying place, turning out human remains so plentifully that it was impossible to collect the bones, and they went again into the soil with the filling of the trench. The foreman tells me he thinks they probably dug out thirty-five entire skeletons at least, and portions of many more. They were all quite 6 ft. in depth in the soil, face downwards, with heads generally at a higher level than the feet, and, although more or less



FRAGMENTS OF STATUARY FOUND ON THE SITE OF THE
GREYFRIARS' CHURCH, GREAT YARMOUTH.

towards the west, no regularity was observable, and very few were lying true to that point. There was no evidence of their graves having ever been disturbed, and with one exception there was no suspicion of the bodies being buried in coffins. Around one skeleton was a dark, crumbling material, which the workmen declared had been wood; but nothing in the shape of lead or stone coffins was discovered. As I stood by the side of the trench, I saw a workman uncover two skeletons lying side by side, with the feet towards the north-east, and so closely together—the skulls actually touched each other—as to suggest burial in one winding-sheet. I examined many of the bones, and they all appeared to be portions of people of middle age and fine stature. I did not recognise any of very aged, or very young persons. The teeth in many of the heads were very fine, generally in full complement and sound.

At the end of the 37 yds. of cemetery, *i.e.*, about two-thirds up the street from the Quay, and opposite Mr. Durrant's door, the nature of the soil changed. No more bones appeared, but from the next ten yards of excavation much broken building rubbish was thrown out. Many wrought stones, some with ornamental work on them, and others which proved to be portions of broken images, were here brought to the surface. Among them were the remains of three small statues. It will be seen from the accompanying illustration how finely they are chiselled. Remains of colour and gilding may be recognised in places on them even now.

At the end of these 10 yds. of church *debris* the trench struck another wall. This was also of rubble, but only 2 ft. 3 ins. thick, and ran down deeper than it was necessary to excavate. Upon removing the soil on the east side, its face was found smooth, and by extending the width of the trench, the workmen uncovered

a massive jamb attached to the east side of the wall, with the springer stone still at the top whence groining arches had once sprung in different directions. In point of fact we were into the crypt, and amongst the *debris* thrown out were many pieces of the ribs and groins that had supported the pavement above. By carefully examining the contour of the curved wrought stones and continuing it, we found the stones were portions of arching that would span about 12 ft. We could not ascertain the depth of the crypt, for although the workmen were desirous of entirely removing the foundations of the wall, and went down 9 ft. for the purpose, neither the floor of the crypt nor the base of the wall were reached.

In continuing the trench eastward another wall of rubble was encountered at a distance of 25 ft. from the last one, and this was evidently the east wall of the crypt and chancel. It was very massive, being 3 ft. 6 in. thick, which was exactly the thickness of the west wall of the church we examined at the west end of the street. On its smooth internal surface it had a shafting or jamb to support the groining similar to that found attached to the opposite wall of the crypt which I have already described. Arches springing inward from each of these walls, and spanning 12 ft. each, would meet and dip midway across. A pillar undoubtedly at this point would support the internal ends of the arches, and if we allow a foot for the width of the springer stone on the top of the pillar, we thus cover the distance of 25 ft. But in addition to the arches or groining running across the crypt, others would run at right angles to them and be of similar span. If this were so, and I verily believe it was, one pillar in the centre of the crypt would support four main arches or groins, each bridging to the middle of the wall opposite. This would seem to tell us that the crypt was a square

apartment, 25 ft. long and 25 ft. broad. Inasmuch as the walls forming three sides of the crypt, viz., the north, east, and south, would be continued up as the walls of the chancel, I think we may reasonably assume the chancel was 25 ft. wide. It is worthy of notice that this measurement is just the width of the east end of Queen Street from house to house, and I should not be surprised to find the front walls of these houses built upon the side walls of the chancel.¹

Three feet eastward of the crypt wall, and quite in a line with the east wall of the house at the north-east corner of Queen Street, the workmen uncovered another rubble wall, which was 2 ft. 6 in. thick, and ran down lower than the trench, so its entire depth was not ascertained. This was the east boundary wall of the monastery, and corresponded with the first wall encountered at the west end of the street.

Having thus dug through the church of the Greyfriars we will now return over the ground, applying the measurements we have noted, and possibly get an idea of the size and magnificence of this once beautiful edifice. It would seem three-fifths of the length of Queen Street is in point of fact the site of the chancel and nave. Their united length, inside the end walls, made 179 ft. 3 in., and they had a uniform width of 25 ft. For outside measurement add 7 ft., the thickness of the end walls, to the length just given, and we get 186 ft. 3 in. It is curious to note that the length

¹ But Mr. Olley doubts this, as he obtained a springer stone from the south-west corner of the crypt, and noticed the south wall of the same standing some feet in advance of the fronts of the houses on the south side of the street. The accompanying plan shows the crypt as extending partially under the house on the north side, but the south wall of the cellar of this house, which bears its south front, is of rubble and great thickness, and quite corresponds to the walls which were cut through in the street.

of St. Margaret's Church at Lowestoft is 182 ft. 8 in., and there is a crypt under the high altar there very similar to that we discovered in Queen Street. Another coincidence is in the length of the naves and chancels. I mentioned that after breaking through the west wall of the church for the first 10 ft. nothing remarkable was thrown up, then we passed through about 37 yds. of cemetery, after which no more skeletons were found. This distance, to be exact, was 122 ft. 6 in., and ended opposite Mr. Durrant's door. This, I believe, was the nave, as all the ground, eastward of this point, had been ransacked and filled up with church debris. St. Margaret's nave is 126 ft. in length. To my mind it is quite plain that the graves of the notables (and there were several buried at the Greyfriars' Church), were under the floor of the chancel, and these the Vandals violated, for the sake of the lead coffins, but they did not trouble to quarry the nave, as there was nothing there to repay them. So, assuming—and I think we may fairly do so—that Mr. Durrant's door marks the chancel steps, I find the length of the chancel was 56 ft. 9 in. St. Margaret's chancel is 56 ft. 6 in.

The Greyfriars Church might not have had transepts, but I rather suspect it had, although very short ones, as the cloisters behind Messrs. Bottle and Olley's office run up to within 30 ft. of Queen Street. I am inclined to think the nave had aisles, but possibly only narrow ones, for we see nothing in the fronts of the houses of the remnants of church walls. It was no uncommon thing, when the religious houses were converted to secular uses, to utilise an existing monastic wall, if it happened to stand handy, and the sides of the chancel and nave of this church, I believe, marked out the new street; but whether by arcading or walls I cannot say. Nevertheless, whichever they were, it is more than likely their foun-

dations were allowed to remain and the new elevations built upon them. At the back of some cottages on the south side, about half-way down Row 92, you may see an illustration of this arrangement, where the north wall of the Prior's apartments forms the back wall of some cottages in Row 96, and there are other instances of entire walls being so made use of within the area of this Grey Friars' Convent. I do not think there was any tower to this church,—we saw nothing in the course of our excavations to suggest such a structure, but there might have been a lantern carried on arches springing from the corners of the walls of the chancel, nave, and transepts, similar to that given by Harrod as having formerly existed on St. Andrew's Hall at Norwich.²

I trust we shall some day have a complete ground plan of the monastery, when further discoveries shall have told us more about the place. The one here given must be regarded as an instalment thereto, for which I thank Mr. Olley, and it is particularly noteworthy in indicating the cloister as attached to the south side of the chancel—a most unusual position.

NOTE BY F. DANBY PALMER, M.S.A.

“With respect to the extent of the site as to which Palmer (*Manship*, i. 49) had doubts, I have investigated this and find that as regards the northern boundary described in the deeds of conveyance from the Corporation in 1657 as a common lane or row, this is the row now numbered 83; as is clearly shown by the deeds relating

² As to the church not having a steeple, *vide* Cottonian plan in British Museum (Palmer's *Manship*, i. 257.)

An “abbey token” was found with the bones in Queen Street.

to the house and stable, the property of the late John Danby Palmer, the former of which to the north of such row (No. 4, South Quay) was erected by Benjamin Cooper in 1596 on the site of an ancient house, with no reference to the Priory title, while the stable, which was on the south side of such row, is stated to be a part of the Priory title. On the south, Row 96 was clearly the terminus of the priory precinct, as all the deeds relating to the property on the north side of it refer to the Priory title; while it is otherwise as regards those on its south side, *ex. gra.* No. 16, South Quay, these deeds (which William Hurry Palmer, Esq., has kindly produced) show that in 1713 Samuel Fuller purchased of William Patey, and no reference is made in them to the Priory title; and as regards the Turk's Head at the Middlegate end of such row (the deeds of which Mr. John Power kindly lent to me), there is again no trace of the Priory title, but on the contrary, so early as the 19th of August, 1613, Roger Drury enfeoffed this house to Thomas Green, and it seems shortly afterwards (if not then indeed) to have been turned into a public-house, and was known certainly as early as 1740 as the Dolphin, afterwards (1796) as the White Bear, and (in 1842) as the Turk's Head, the present sign, but there is no suggestion (as Palmer thinks) that it was ever known as the Town's Arms, which I contend it really adjoined to the south, and was on the site of the present Old Meeting House, which was clearly built on part of the late Priory estate."



A. Price, Photo.

Gt. Yarmouth.

REMAINS OF THE
GREYFRIARS' CLOISTER, GREAT YARMOUTH.

II.—THE CLOISTER.

COMMUNICATED BY

HENRY OLLEY, ARCHITECT.

IN a half Row leading from Middlegate Street, and between Queen Street and Row 92, will be found an interesting relic which was originally part of the Cloister of a Franciscan Convent. The Franciscans were called "Grey Friars" from their habit, a long grey coat, with hood and girdle of cord. According to Manship the order settled in Norwich in 1226, and through the exertions of Sir William Gerbrigge, a man of considerable local influence, and who filled the office of bailiff in 1271, came to Yarmouth in the latter half of the thirteenth century, and soon commenced building the convent of which this cloister formed a part.

The conventual buildings extended to the river on the west, and over the ground now occupied by Queen Street to the north, near the centre of which was the church, having on the south a handsome cloister, of which this relic formed a part. The conventual buildings, including the chapter house, were mainly to the south of the cloister.

At the dissolution this convent with all its possessions was granted to Thomas Cromwell, the Vicar General, afterwards Earl of Essex, and then on his attainder in 1540 it was bestowed by the Crown upon Sir Richard Williams, who sold it, and it then fell into the hands of the Corporation, who appear to have been in possession in 1569, for in that year they ordered the estate to be conveyed to certain persons, all members of their body.

We read that the Town Arms were set up, and that the Train Band (the volunteers of the day) were drilled in the green space enclosed by the cloister, so that the clank of arms and the tramp of soldiers succeeded to the solemn chants and soft footings of the Friars.

In 1657 all the property was sold to Mr. John Woodroffe for £2,600, under the condition that he should cause a broad row (now Queen Street) and a narrow row (now Row 92) to be made according to a plan specified. It is curious to notice that at this late period rows were still made, Queen Street itself being called a broad row. The property was afterwards re-sold to various persons, and thus after four centuries these buildings were divided or pulled down, and the only parts now remaining intact are this remnant of the cloister, another bay in the cottage to the north, and a few fragments which are to be traced in adjoining properties.

This part of the cloister a few years ago was bought by Thomas Proctor Burroughs, F.S.A., of this town, who intended to open it up, but on his death it was sold, and it is now vested in the Tolhouse trustees. Up to the year 1888 it formed part of two cottages, and was divided into three small rooms, the floor levels of which were about 5 ft. above the original floor of the cloister, as will be seen by the stove in the modern chimney, which is about 4 ft. above the present floor. The groining was (perhaps happily) concealed by a low flat plaster ceiling. All this has been removed, and the soil lowered to its original floor line. In 1894 the Tolhouse trustees purchased the property to the north containing the fourth bay of the cloister, and this bay has been opened out and added to the other three bays. A narrow doorway was discovered in this fourth bay with a moulded arch, the mouldings of which die into

a plain chamfered jamb. The whole level of this part of the town has been raised 5 ft. since the thirteenth century, as shown by this relic, and by similar indications at the Tolhouse.

The date of this work is about the middle of the fourteenth century. It will be seen by the arrangement of columns on the walls of the bay next the present outer entrance, that this is the south-west bay of the cloister. On removing floors and digging out soil under the central bay, the original cill of one of the traceried openings into the cloister court was discovered intact; together with the original plinth below the same, and the mouldings of the outer jambs next the buttresses. From the cill we can see that the traceried opening was divided into three lights, and on looking at the north bay, we observe that the arch of the groining is struck from a different centre to that of the arch of the traceried opening.

It was hoped that sufficient remains of the tracery would have been found to have decided the designs; but though some few pieces have been found, they are not sufficient for this purpose. The mouldings of the mullions can be seen perfectly on the cill.

Two doorways, one on either side of a modern fireplace, were also discovered. The mouldings of one of the arches are fairly perfect, but the label mouldings have been knocked off. These doors, it is thought, led into small rooms, not into a Strangers Hall, as at Norwich. No remains of a lavatorium have been found here, although at Norwich it occupied a corresponding position in the cloister.

The groining, as may be seen, is fairly preserved; and the carving, though coarse, is good. The central boss to the second bay represents the Lord's Supper; that in the south-west angle bay is very much damaged,

but a hooded monk is plainly to be seen. It was thought that the central bosses illustrated the life of our Lord, but the hooded monk upsets that theory; unless the early carvers represented Apostles in monks' costumes (at Fressingfield Church St. Peter is represented with a monk's hood). It is hoped soon to carefully clean all the carvings, when perhaps more can be said on this subject.

In the adjoining premises, approached from Row 92, on the first floor, on a line with the south-west bay, and concealed by a flat ceiling, is another perfect piece of groining, springing from carved corbels. And further still at the back of some buildings in the rear of the Unitarian Chapel in the same row, some early Perpendicular work and a doorway are to be seen; these being also about the same level as the old floor on the top of this groining. These are the only portions of the conventual buildings remaining. Unfortunately the work over the cloister has disappeared, except the buttresses, which are perfect.