

## NOTES ON THE CHURCH OF HOLY TRINITY MINORIES

by F. J. COLLINS, A.R.I.C.S.

The convent of St. Clare was founded in 1293 by Blanche, Queen of Navarre, wife of Edmund, Earl of Lancaster, as an order of *Sorores Minores*, or Little Sisters, from which the name of Minories has survived to the present day.

At the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1538 the chapel of the convent was allotted to the inhabitants of the district. It was partly rebuilt in 1568 and again in 1706, when the vaults were inserted. The floor level of the church was lowered 3 ft. 9 in. to allow the insertion of two vaults giving a new raised level 6 ft. 3 in. above the old floor of the church.

The parish was united with that of St. Botolph, Aldgate, and the church closed on 1 January, 1899. A fire in 1904 exposed the outside of the north wall of the church and enabled photographs to be taken of that side for the L.C.C. The church was used as a parish room until it was destroyed in the last war, when only the medieval north wall was left standing (see fig. 1, p. 162).

This wall was demolished and the site cleared between October, 1956, and July 1958, disclosing a number of interesting features. Firstly the brick filling of the two-light window, at the west end of the wall, fell out, exposing the lath-and-plaster filling put in when buildings were erected against the north wall in 1768. The internal jambs of the window were decorated with a pattern of painted "stonework joints" in red on white. The north side of this window was photographed after a fire in 1904 (pl. 2 (a)).

The wall, which was constructed of chalk and flint rubble in a greyish white mortar, was demolished to the level of the floor above the brick vaults of 1706, revealing the impression of two blocked windows in the mortar of the adjoining wall erected in 1904. The easternmost one was a two-light window in the perpendicular style and both were probably blocked at the Dissolution, the filling being ragstone and chalk rubble in a yellow mortar.

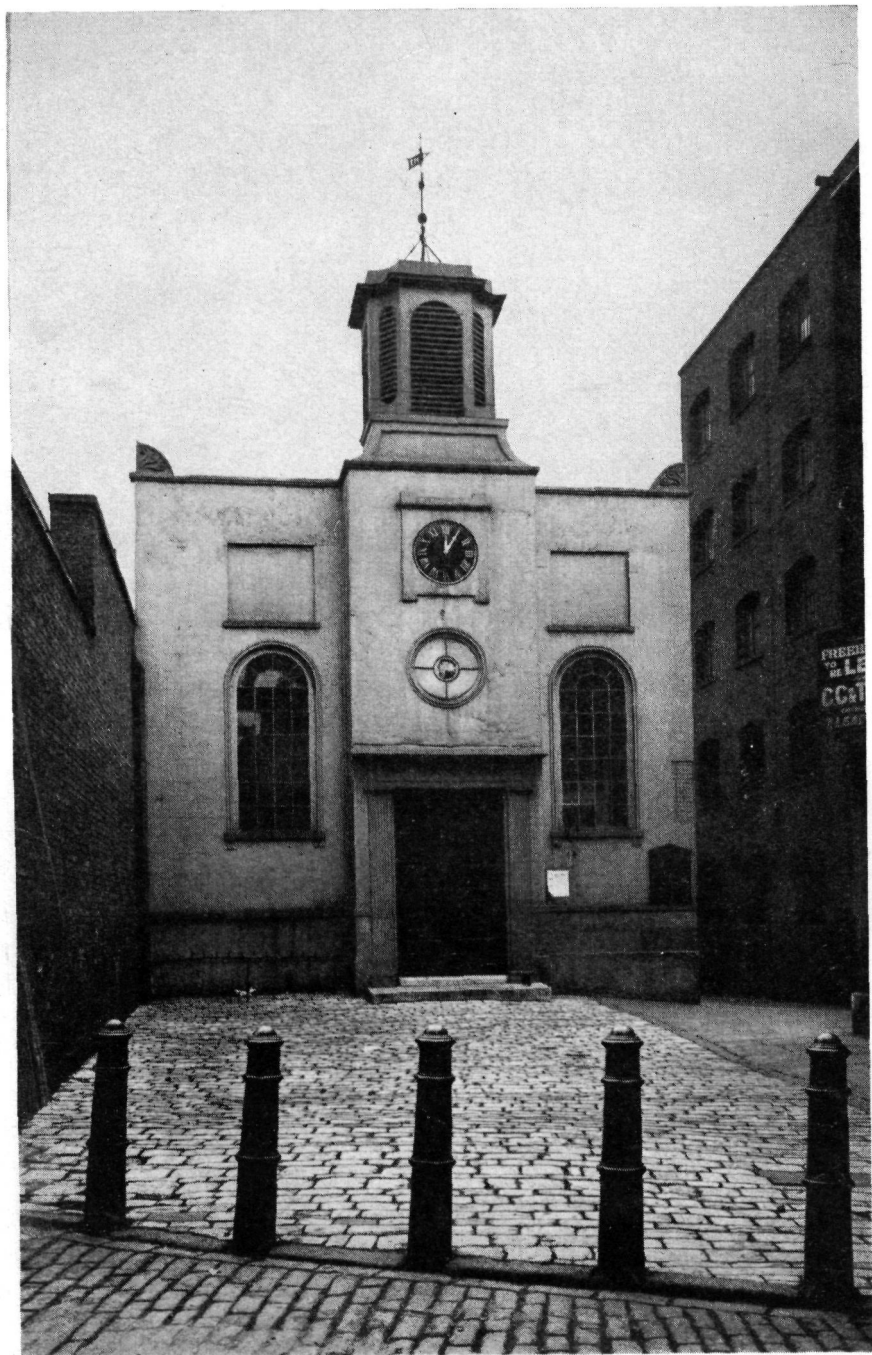


Photo : London County Council

HOLY TRINITY MINORIES.  
WEST FRONT (c.1913).

Plate I



Photo: London County Council

HOLY TRINITY MINORIES

Plate 2(a) EXTERIOR OF WINDOW AT WEST END OF N. WALL (AUGUST 1904).

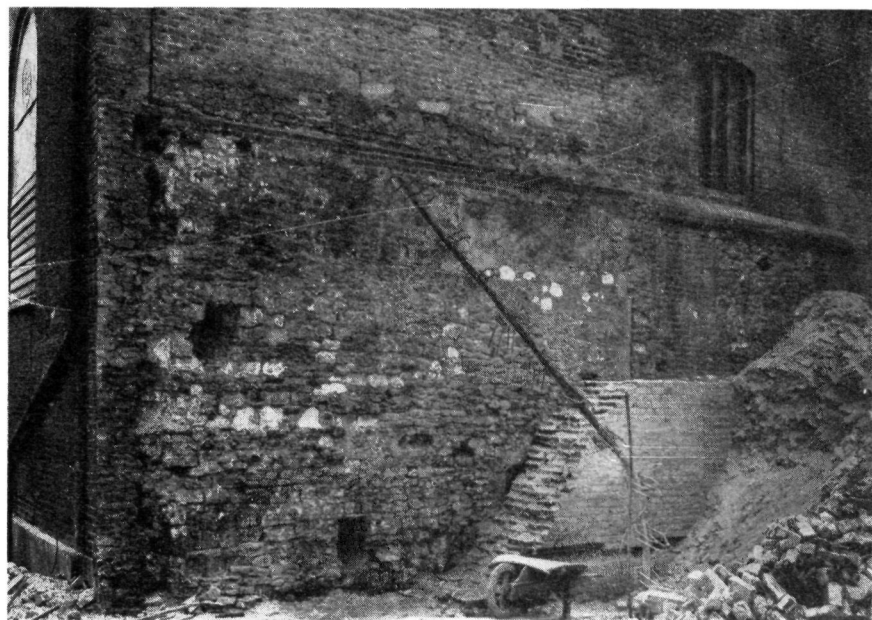


Photo: London County Council

HOLY TRINITY MINORIES

Plate 2(b) EXTERIOR OF N. WALL, SHOWING SQUINT (AUGUST 1904).

When the vaults were demolished the medieval wall was exposed in very good repair. A blocked doorway (pl. 3 (a)) and the smaller end of a squint (pl. 3 (b)) were found in the eastern part of the wall and along the whole length of the wall it was possible to trace two distinct medieval floor levels.

The wall around the squint was decorated similarly to the jambs of the westernmost window and appeared to have been rebuilt at some period prior to the Dissolution.

The squint cut into what appeared to be a putlog hole, for scaffolding, as there were traces of similar roughly arched holes along the wall at the same level. The squint was blocked with 2 in. bricks at the south face but the other side, photographed in 1904 (pl. 2 (b)), was open.

The worked stone reveals to the blocked opening were rebated for a door with hinges on the east side and showed traces of an iron catch on the west side. Some of these stones were from an earlier window sill with sockets for iron bars. The sill to the door was heavily worn in the middle, as it was 4 in. above the earlier floor level in the church and 6 in. above the lower level in the opening and consequently would be stepped upon by everyone passing through the doorway.

A later floor of tiles, set in mortar on a filling of clean sand, had been inserted in this doorway. These tiles,  $5\frac{3}{8}$  in. square and  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. thick, were very heavily worn and had lost nearly all trace of their original glaze.

The splayed sides of the opening were plastered and decorated with painted joints similar to those mentioned previously. The arch over the further side of the opening was very flat and part was found lying in a cavity at the back of the filling. A corner of this arch appears in one of the photographs taken in 1904 (pl. 2 (b)).

The good condition of the plaster on the two side-faces of this doorway and the existence of a squint suggest that there was a room or covered way behind the door and squint. This is borne out by one complete and one damaged corbel shown in the last-mentioned photograph. There was also a hole where a third corbel might be expected almost in line with the east wall of the church. A "reverse cast" of the complete corbel was seen in the adjoining wall of 1904 when the medieval wall was demolished.

Fig. 1 (to same scale as ground plan on fig.2)

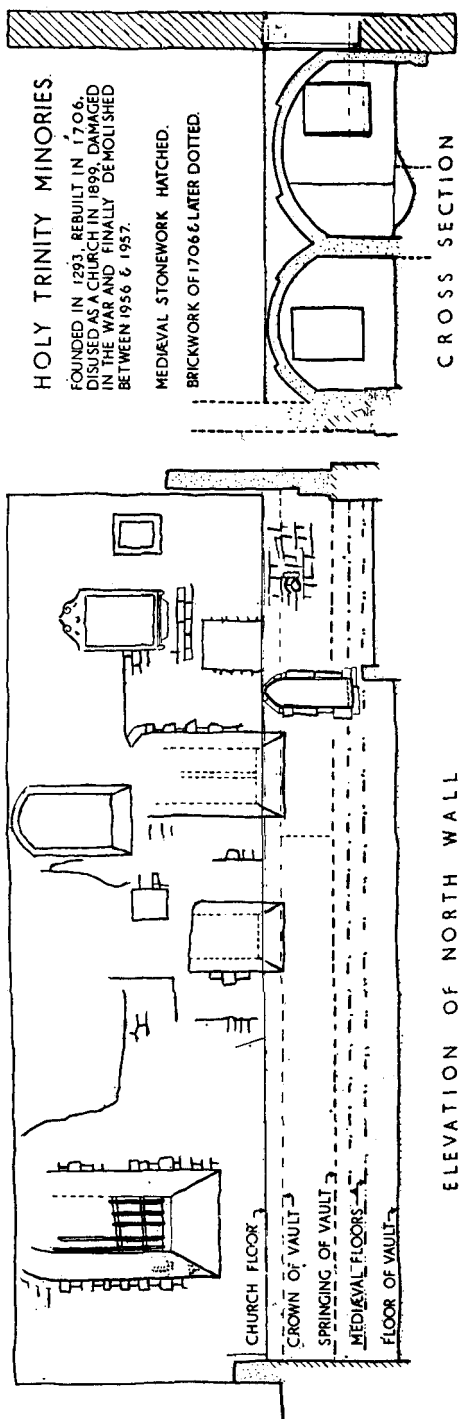
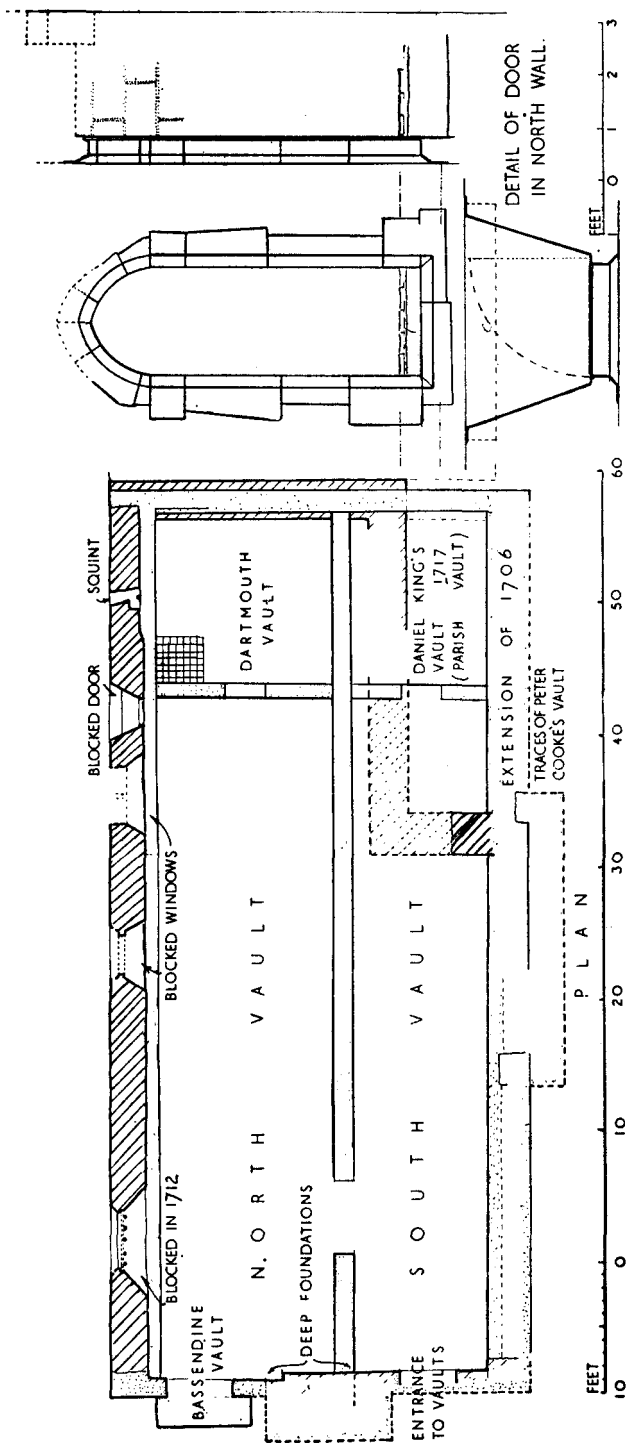


Fig. 2



The existence of a covered way or building to the north of the choir raises a problem with regard to the low level of the two blocked windows. The springing of the easternmost blocked window and the flat arch on the north side of the blocked doorway suggest a fairly late date but there is no evidence of a wall between the blocked door and the easternmost window (which one would expect if they are of the same date). The use of second-hand material makes it impossible to decide any order of building.

The filling of the door-opening included a *pinnacle* containing a quatrefoil, within which was a painting of the *Agnus Dei*, and a painted female figure from which the head and arms were missing. This figure, nearly 3 feet high, still retained some areas of paint and gilding on a thin layer of gesso. The outer robe was of Indian red powdered with gold fleur-de-lys and the under robe of vermilion powdered with gold marguerite flowers. The figure, now in the Guildhall Museum, was examined by Dr. Joan Evans, P.S.A., and Mr. Norman Cook, F.S.A., Keeper of the Guildhall Museum, and considered by them to date from about 1335 A.D. and to represent "Synagogue" or the Old Law. It would have been balanced by a statue of "the Church" or the New Law.

The north wall of the vault built against the medieval wall was erected on a foundation of worked stones from windows and chalk rubble.

Excavation along the south side of the site went down about 4 feet 6 in. below the floor level of the vault. The top 2 feet 6 in. of this was filled with remains of 18th and 19th century burials and the bottom 2 feet appeared to be virgin soil. The bottom of these burials would therefore be 7 feet 3 in. below the earlier medieval floor level and 8 feet 3 in. below the later medieval floor. Any medieval burials are certain to have been disturbed by these later burials if not removed during the construction of the vaults.

The infilling between the haunches of the vaults and the floor of the church also contained a number of human bones, including a Roman skeleton dug up during building operations in the neighbourhood and reburied under the floor. The excavations brought to light Henry Bassendine's vault of 1712 at the west end of the north vault and traces of Peter Cooke's vault south of the choir extension of 1706.



Photo : F. J. Collins

HOLY TRINITY MINORIES

Plate 3(a) DOORWAY SHOWING TWO FLOOR LEVELS IN N. WALL (DECEMBER 1956)



Photo : F. J. Collins

HOLY TRINITY MINORIES

Plate 3(b) SQUINT AND PUTLOG HOLE IN N. WALL (NOVEMBER 1956)



The final clearance of the site showed that the church, as reconstructed after the alterations of 1568 and 1706, was mainly on the old foundations but that the eastern end of the south wall had been moved 8 feet 9 in. southwards, so that the choir became the same width as the nave (see fig. 2, p. 163). The line of junction of the new extension to the south wall was matched by a vertical joint in the northern wall of the north vault, suggesting that the work was carried out in two stages owing to the presence of Lord Dartmouth's vault.

The original south wall appeared to have been thickened on the inside in 1706 when the vaults were inserted, as the foundation of the inner skin was made up of re-used worked stones. The outer skin appeared to be wholly of rubble. This may partly explain the difference of width between the north and south vaults, the former being 13 feet and the latter 9 feet 6 in. wide.

A seven foot length of the west wall, approximately in the middle, was carried down much deeper than the remainder of the foundations. This suggests the original building had some sort of turret or bellcote, but there was no opportunity of measuring its extent to the west.

Miss Helen Macdonald of the Geological Survey has identified the three types of stone used on the site as:—

- (1) "Hearthstone" from Upper Greensand at Betchworth, Surrey;
- (2) A slightly glauconitic limestone, probably Kentish "rag", similar to a specimen from the Lower Greensand at Hythe, Kent.
- (3) Chalk, no particular locality suggested.

The demolition and site clearance was carried out by Messrs. Frederick Wise of Dalston Lane, whose staff were most helpful.

#### REFERENCES

- The History of the Minories, London*, by Edward Murray Tomlinson, M.A., Smith, Elder & Co. 1907, and John Murray, 1922.  
 Photographs in the L.C.C. Collection.  
*Archæological Journal*, 113 (1956).  
*The Times*, 16.1.1957.