The Augustinian Priory, Adare.

By R. F. Hewson.

This priory has been described by various writers, but as a number of interesting features and facts, some of which throw light on the date of the buildings and the restorations which have taken place since the suppression of the Priory, have come to light recently, I have been asked to describe them.

The only reliable record we have of the date of the foundation of this priory is a Crown Patent dated 1317, which is given in full in Memorials of Adare. This confirms a former grant of land "which John, the son of Thomas, Earl of Kildare, formerly granted to these brothers (the Brothers of the Hermits of the Order of St. Augustine of Adare), and which Thomas, the son of John, present Earl of Kildare, confirmed to them." (Memorials of Adare, p. 88).

This would place the foundation of the Priory some time previous to 1317. The architectural details of the chancel and nave would seem to me to point to the very beginning of the fourteenth century. The Sedilia and Piscina are of Early English design and similar to ones in Caskel Cathedral and Cobham Church in Kent. The east window (a fine large five-light one) would appear to be transitional between Early English and Irish interlaced. The mullions and interlaced head are of the common Irish type, but the linked shafts with rectangular vertical ribs and caps and bases, which support the moldings, are of typical Early English pattern.

It may be noted that this window is very crooked: the whole head leans over to the north, the apex of the top of the arch is 8 or 10 inches north of the apex of the centre light. This is not caused by settlement but by errors in stone cutting: it would appear as if it were a first attempt at that type of window. All these features would, in my opinion, date the chancel as very early fourteenth century. The three south windows of the chancel are of similar type and have the same remarkable hollow chamfer moulding round the return arch and splay.

When the bad nineteenth century plaster on the interior of the chancel and nave was removed during renovations in 1936-37, a number of masons' marks were uncovered, and the close examination which ensued revealed many more which up to then

Masons' marks on stones of the Nave & Chancel
of the Augustinian Priory Adare

Masons' Marks. Reference to numbers on plate.
1. Repeated all over nave and chancel on doors, windows, sedilia, buttresses, also on quoin stones and voussoirs of the west pier and arch of aisle.
2. Probably a consecratoin cross; very similar to several I have seen on altar slabs. Only found on jamb of doors, windows, and on two buttresses, and only once on each.
3. Noted only once—on the jamb of door between vestry and chancel.
4. Noted only on both jamb of same door.
5. On two buttresses.
6. Twice on the small window in the north wall of the nave, and on the north-east buttress of the chancel.
7. Noted only once—on the jamb of the vestry door.
had been unnoticed. These marks revealed the fact that the chancel and nave were of the same period, as the same marks appear on the windows and buttresses of both. Another very interesting fact came to light, viz: that the nave had a south aisle when first built (the present aisle is late fifteenth century). The east pier and arch of the aisle arcade—the only one that has survived nineteenth century alterations—have the same masons' marks on the coign stones and voussoirs; this aisle was probably a small lean-to one.

A point to be noted is that masons' marks only appear on the axe cut stones of the early fourteenth century work: the later fifteenth century additions, viz: the Tower, South Aisle, Cloisters, and Refectory as well as the other remains of conventual buildings, have punch cut stone dressings and no masons' marks visible(2).

Among other features that came to light was a fine squint in the north wall of the chancel, about 9 feet from the ground. This is very similar to the one in the south wall of the chancel of Cashel Cathedral. It would appear to have been viewed from a dormitory in the second storey of the long building which stood at the east side of the cloisters. The east wall of the modern vestry blinds the opening from the outside. Another opening in the north wall of the chancel also appeared about 4 feet from the ground and half way between the north door and the tower. This is a rectangular opening, about 24 inches high by 5 inches wide, with chamfered, punch cut stone dressings, and has no marks of having been glazed. It opened into a cavity in the thickness of the wall which would appear to have been communicated with a door between the cloisters and sacristy. The cloister wall appears to have been breached at this point and repaired. Another interesting problem that appeared was a narrow blocked-up door in the north wall of the nave at the extreme west end. This is about 8 or 9 feet above the ground and must have led out of the upper storey of the building which formerly stood on the site of the modern mausoleum at the west side of the cloisters. It may have been opened on to a musicians' gallery, as a number of joist holes appeared in the north and west walls at this point. This door must have been blocked up at or before the seventeenth century restoration, as the masonry had bits of ivy still stuck to it under the nineteenth century plaster.

The removal of the modern plaster in the aisle exposed considerable areas of the original hard white plaster, which in places exhibited traces of mural decoration (see plate). Unfortunately, this plaster had been badly hacked all over to give tooth to hold the nineteenth century plaster: this destroyed the continuity of any design. The removal of plaster also showed that the cill of the east window of the aisle had been recessed or cut back probably for a reredos behind the altar which must have stood there(2).

The remaining original respond of the east arch of the aisle arcade showed marks of a parclose screen having closed this arch. This would, I think, point to the east end of this aisle having been used as a Lady Chapel. This aisle is an interesting building, and would appear to be the latest portion of the Priory to have been built. Of the windows the east and two south ones are of similar design to the older windows in the chancel and nave, but the details are much later. The mullions are chamfered and stopped off to rectangular bases, not mitred to the cill as in the older windows. The hood moulding or dripstone of the east window is finished off with returns and pendants of well executed conventional foliage, and all the stone dressings are fine punch cut. The west window is quite different to any other in Adare. It is a two-light window of Flamboyant Decorated Gothic design very well executed; it has a hood moulding with returns and pendants outside and a cut stone return arch soffit on the inside: all others in the church are rubble and plastered.

The wall tomb at the east end of the south wall of the aisle (one of four in the church) would appear to be unfinished, as the crocketed finials of the usual upright buttressed shafts on either side were never put in place. Could Silken Thomas's rebellion have been the cause of this?

1. I was informed by a mason working on Canterbury Cathedral this year that in England masons' marks continued to be used, but were cut on the bottom or head surface of the stones and are not visible unless the stone is removed. He showed me some defective stones removed from "Bell Harry" tower which was finished only forty years before the Suppression: these stones had masons' marks on their bases.

2. The two altar slabs which are now in the small chapels off the south transept of the Franciscan Friary in the Manor grounds belong to the Augustinian Priory, having been removed to their present position when the Priory was restored for use as a Protestant parish church in 1811—not 1807 or 1808 as usually stated.
The outside of this aisle has, just under the parapet, a very interesting cornice with a number of carved bosses of fabulous animals, conventional foliage, and the head of a man, and—of all things in an Irish church—a Tudor rose! These bosses are remarkable in their resemblance to the carvings on the Misericord stalls in St. Mary's Cathedral, Limerick: some of the beasts and foliage are nearly identical. The centre boss (removed by nineteenth century vandals to allow a rain water pipe to be put in exactly the middle of the wall) is preserved in the chancel, and shows an angel holding a shield with a cross on it. This angel also is remarkably like one in the St. Mary misericords. Other features on the outside south wall of this aisle that have come to light in recent years, when old ivy was removed, are two consecration crosses scribed in the plaster when it was fresh.

A large area of the field to the west of the present church bounds is full of the foundations of buildings. All are enclosed by a perimeter wall which passes eastward a few feet south of the church boundary fence, and turns north towards the river about 20 feet from the public road. The ground inside this enclosure was levelled, and the marks of a gateway are clearly visible south of the church. Augustinian priories were

MURAL DECORATIONS. Reference to letters on plate.

A. Appears to be portion of inscribed consecration panel. Found on the original thin plaster when it was removed from the east wall of the aisle.

B. On same wall. Appears to be portion of a mural painting of a crowned female figure in black, red and yellow.

C. On south wall of aisle, between windows and under the west one. Appears to be portion of series of inscribed arches which were decorated with diaper work in black, red and yellow. There were also portions of rectangular figures, but these were so hacked and imperfect that it was impossible to make anything of them.
Fourteenth Century Work
Fifteenth Do. do
Modern

Undercroft of Refectory

Cloisters

Site of Chapter Room

Site of Sacristy

Modern Vestry

NAVE
Site of pier removed in Nineteenth Century

Chancel

Aisle

PLAN OF AUGUSTINIAN PRIORY ADARE
usually enclosed by a high wall. Tradition has it that all these walls and buildings were used as building material when the modern village was built about the beginning of the nineteenth century.

From the size of the Chancel and Refectory and the number and extent of the conventual buildings, one would be led to infer that there was a very large community living in this Priory.

Another interesting point I have noted in the cloisters is that the north arcade has remains of iron bars or fixings in the openings to the garth; the other sides are without them. When visiting Canterbury this summer (1838), I noticed the same bars in the north arcade of the cloisters. Their purpose, I am informed, was to hold glass to shelter the study desks usually placed in the north arcade of the cloisters for the use of the novices. They were called carrels, and are intact in the Gloucester Cathedral cloisters.

A point to be particularly noted is that a long two storey building stood at the east of the cloisters, and that portions of it still exist. The gateway into the schoolyard, with the Kildare and Desmond coats of arms on shields over it, is part of this building, and so is the small ruin between the school mistress's house and the river. The mark of it is still visible on the chancel near the ground, also the offset on the gable of the Refectory was where the gutter ran. The small offset that carried the floor can be noticed on the cloister wall: this wall was the west wall of the building but was considerably higher—in fact it came up to the gutter offset on the refectory gable. The portion of this building next the chancel of the church would be the sacristy; the modern vestry is on portion of the site of this sacristy. The next part would be the Chapter House. The walled up door from the cloisters into this is still visible. The next part would be the Gate House, and then probably the Prior's lodgings was in the portion between that and the river. A Dormitory would have been over the sacristy, chapter room and gateway; the portion existing over the gateway shows the usual little wall recesses or cupboards seen in these dormitories.

The removal of this building has completely spoiled the appearance of the church from the road as you come across the bridge. The ugly straight line of the roof would have been broken by the roof and gable of this building. The removal of the plaster also showed that the original ridge of the roof was 18 inches lower than the present one: this and the fact that the church had crenellated battlements on the chancel and aisle must have made the appearance quite different. Some of these battlements can be seen on the gables of the refectory and also on the top of the east wall of the cloisters where they are quite out of place. Architects have much to answer for in their restorations of ancient churches.

Another interesting feature has come to light—that is that the oak door between the vestry and chancel came from the old parish church of St. Nicholas when it was abandoned on the restoration of the Augustinian Priory Church. The other of its two doors was sold by auction with the other fittings, as per a note in the Parish Vestry Book.

There is a reference to the seventeenth century restoration in the Civil Survey of Limerick, just published. In dealing with the Black Abbey (the Augustinian Priory), the Survey mentions that "the said Black Abbey house is repayred at ye State charges." *(Civil Survey, p. 143)*.

**FOOT NOTE.** On a flyleaf of a mid nineteenth century Vestry Minute Book is a note that at the time the chancel was restored (in 1854) three stone coffins containing skeletons, that were one on each side of the altar and one in front, were buried in a vault under the chancel; the chancel sounds in one place when stamped on.