

MINSTER IN SHEPPEY.*

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THE CHURCH.

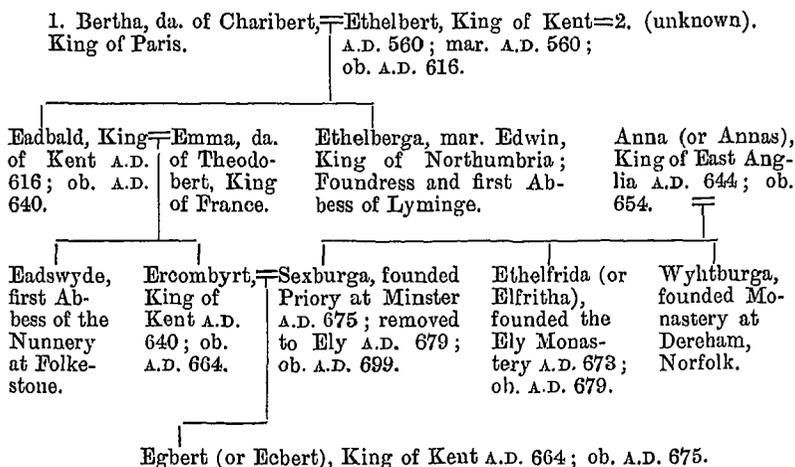
VERY different is the history of Minster Church from that of Cranbrook, where the Society met in 1895. As I then endeavoured to shew, Cranbrook Church could only claim a possible existence from the middle of the twelfth century (say 750 years ago), whereas this Minster carries us back over nearly twice that period. At the time when the Denes of the Weald were still night by night echoing the growl of the wolf and the grunt of the wild boar, as they roamed over what then was a "desart and a waste," here the walls of a Nunnery choir were already resounding with the voices of high-born ladies in chant and psalm.

The very name of its Royal Foundress and Patron Saint carries us back to the days of the Saxon Heptarchy. In that rude age, when life and property were alike of precarious tenure, when a royal or a noble widow became an object of desire to any unscrupulous baron, their only security seemed to lie in consigning themselves to the protection of the Church, and dedicating themselves to the service of God. Out of this state of society arose the prevailing custom of religious endowment and self-dedication, in which that age abounded. Thus it came that Ethelberga, the daughter of Ethelbert and Bertha, Augustine's royal converts, on the death of her husband Edwin of Northumbria, made for herself a sanctuary at Lyminge, an example soon after followed

* Paper read during the Archæological Congress of 1896.

by that goodly sisterhood, the three daughters of Anna, King of East Anglia; first of whom, Ethelfrida, and then Wyhtburga, giving preference in filial love to their father's kingdom, founded monasteries; the one at Ely, with which her name is indelibly connected, the other at Dereham, in Norfolk; while Sexburga,* on the death of her husband Ercombyrt, also King of Kent, and grandson of Æthelbert, devoted her widowhood and her wealth to promote the glory and the worship of God, by founding, on a site which her son Egbert had given her, a Monastery, or Nunnery, where devout ladies might find with her refuge from the snares and the perils of that turbulent and licentious age.† The date generally assigned to the pious dedication of this building was about 675. Here Sexburga became the first Prioress; but four years after, on the death of her sister Ethelfrida, she moved from Sheppey to take her place at

* PEDIGREE OF SEXBURGA.



† The character of this royal widow is thus drawn by Johannes Bromton (*Decem Scriptores*, p. 741): "Ista insignis regina ita crebro instinctu virum suum regem Ercombertum excitabat quod omnia idola quæ sub prioribus regibus adhuc erant residua ab universo regno suo cum omni ritu paganissimo funditus exterminavit, et monasteria ampliavit." Two lives of this eminent Abbess are preserved among the Cottonian MSS. in the British Museum (Caligula A, viii., f. 93 and 104), from the former of which this short extract may be taken: "Nemo illa inter delicias concinencior: nemo in Regis fastu humilior: nec spiritu pauperior: unde tanto necessest in suprema arce sublimior quanto fuit in terrena Deo subjectior." After which follows a further description of the graces of her form being as conspicuous as those of her mind.

Ely, when her own daughter Erminelda succeeded her first at Minster,* and then on her death in 699, at Ely also.

The site she selected had peculiar advantages and attractions. Its elevated position, insulated, delta-like, by the two branches of the River Medway, called the East and West Swale, with the expanded Thames flowing in front, made it a conspicuous object to every voyager on this great highway into the heart of England; and it also commanded the surrounding flat of the Island itself (the lordship of which was in her hands), the opposite coast of Essex in front, and the North Downs of Kent in the rear.

It is not without interest to trace the changes through which the name of this Island has passed. The fame of its pasturage is preserved in its old Saxon name of "Schep-eye" (the Island of Sheep), which in the harder language of the Norman was Latinized into "Scapeia"—while the monastic writers seem anxious not to lose the origin of the name, for they almost invariably add to it the explanation "*Insula Ovium.*" But St. Sexburga's religious house gave to it a new name, "*Monasterium Scapeiæ*;" this in the twelfth century was abridged into "Moynstre," and in a little time into "Menstre," and eventually into its present form of "Minster," retaining however the adjunct "in Sheppey" to distinguish it from the other Minster in the Isle of Thanet.

Here St. Sexburga planted her Abbey, and its Chapel, for her seventy-seven nuns. In the course of time there rose up by its side a Parish Church, for the use of the outside multitude, who would soon be drawn into its vicinity for the purpose of trade, or for security. Within that Chapel, with the ruins of the Abbey close by, we are now assembled.

I would distinguish between the Nuns' Chapel, now the north aisle, and the Parish Church. For many years it would have remained the only Church in the Island. In

* "Ermenilda filia S. Sexburgæ nupsit Wlfero Regi Merciorum, filio Pendæ Regis. . . . Præfato Wlfero post xvii annos ad eterna regna migrante, Ermenilda Regina apud Cantiam in Monasterio de Shepeia confugit; ubi genitrix sua Sexburga Choris virginum præluxit; et sub ea habitum religionis suscepit." (*Thomæ Eliensis Historia; Anglia Sacra*, vol. i., p. 596; Dugdale's *Monasticon*, vol. ii., p. 49.)

process of time it planted other daughter chapelries, now separate parish churches, east, and west, and south, East-church, Queenborough, Warden, Leysdown. The nomination of the priest first lay with the Abbess, and eventually the right of presentation was granted to the Abbot and Convent of St. Augustine's, Canterbury; from whence came the two monks, the one as chaplain and confessor for the Abbey, the other as Vicar of the Parish Church. The apartments they were said to have occupied are still pointed out in the eastern gable of the "gatehouse" adjoining.

The Abbey has had a chequered existence. For well nigh two hundred years its inmates may have enjoyed a peaceful period for the undisturbed exercise of daily prayer and praise and good deeds, when in the ninth century came the Danes, swooping down on the seaboard of Kent, making two attacks on the Abbey, and here as elsewhere desecrating the sacred place. Then again in the eleventh century it fell a prey to the sacrilegious bands of the banished Earl Godwin, whose followers committed further devastation.* Thus it came that William the Conqueror in the later part of that century found the Abbey almost empty, and transferred to it the sisters from Newington Abbey, who had lost their devoted Prioress, murdered in her bed.†

After the Conquest the first mention of "Menstre" occurs in the reign of Henry I., when, in 1130, Archbishop William Corboil, after having held his grand dedication of Canterbury Cathedral,‡ rescued the Abbey Chapel from ruin, and probably added to it the Parish Church; and what had hitherto been known as the Monastery of Scapeia became by the terms of its dedication, perpetuating thereby the name

* The first attack of the Danes was said to have been made in 851, and the second in 855, while Earl Godwin's was in 1052.

† W. Thorn's Chronicle (*Decem Scriptores*, p. 1931): "Apud Manerium de Newyngton fuerunt quondam Moniales: . . . contigebat quod Priorissa ejusdem Manerii strangulata fuit de coco suo nocte in lecto suo. . . . Quo comperto, cepit dominus Rex (Willielmus) Manerium illud in manum suam, et tenuit illud in custodia sua, cæteris Monialibus usque Scapeiam inde amotis."

‡ "Ecclesiam Cantuarie a Lanfranco fundatam et consummatam, sed per Anselmum auctam, iij non Maii anno mxxx. cum honore et munificentia multa dedicavit. Huic dedicationi interfuit Rex Anglorum Henricus. . . . Rex etiam Scotie David. . . . et omnes Episcopi Anglie. Non est audita talis dedicatio in terra post dedicationem templi Salomonis." (*Gervasii, Actus Pontificum, Decem Scriptores*, p. 1664.)

of its founder, "the Minster Church of St. Mary and St. Sexburga."

The next benefactor of the Abbey was a Northwode, a descendant of Jordanus de Scapeia, and as such "Lord of Sheppey," who took his name from his Manor of Northwode. It is from a private history of this family, preserved among the Surrenden MSS., that we learn that Sir Roger, who died in 1286, had so "great affection for the Minster which had fallen into ruin . . . that with no sparing bounty he relieved it from great poverty, wherefore among the servants of God there (the nuns) he was called the restorer of that house;" and that "he was buried before the altar at Menstre."*

In the middle of the next century (1322) a sad event befell the Minster. It is vaguely alluded to in an entry in Archbishop Reynold's Register at Lambeth, where it is said that both Church and cemetery suffered "pollution from bloodshed,"† and the Archbishop was entreated to grant a Faculty for holding a special "Service of Reconciliation" there.

When we reflect that above twelve centuries have passed since the pious Sexburga founded this Abbey—that the invasions of the Danes and of Earl Godwin, the legalized spoliation of the Tudor in the sixteenth century, and the fanatic destructiveness of the Puritan in the seventeenth, and (added to these) the ceaseless exposure to the elements on this exposed height, have all had their share in demolishing it—one can hardly hope to find a single vestige of the original building.

Yet, high up in the south wall of this Chapel, above the bays which separate it from the adjoining Parish Church, may still be seen the rude circular arches of the old Saxon clerestories composed of Roman tiles, springing from rough stone jambs; while on the outside of the north wall may be

* The MS., of which Mr. Larkin has given a translation in *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. II., pp. 9—42, seems to be no longer forthcoming. It is not among the other portion of the Surrenden MSS. referring to Cumbwell Priory, which are preserved at the College of Arms.

† "Ecclesia vestra sanguine, ut dicitur, polluta est cum Cimiterio," etc. (Archbishop Reynold's Register, f. 128 b.)

also detected traces of corresponding openings, half a similar arch cut in two by a Perpendicular window.*

Here, too, between the tower and the first buttress, are at intervals of about six feet apart pieces of ancient pottery, which carry back the mind to a still earlier period. These our able Secretary, Mr. George Payne, pronounces to have been Roman flue-tiles, of a hypocaust, belonging to a Roman *balneum* or bath, still retaining on their sides the traces of the old maker's marks. On a recent restoration of this building it was seen that these went through the wall, with a wider mouth inside, which unhappily the contractor, devoid of archæological taste, had plastered over, thus robbing us, so far as he could, of any clue to the possible or probable object of their insertion with such methodical regularity in this wall. Yet the fact remains, and the regularity shews that it was no hap-hazard arrangement, but that it had an object, and a use. Now, what was it? Could it not have been for an acoustic purpose? Bearing in mind that the "Garth" or garden of the Nunnery lay on the north side of the Chapel, still retaining the traditional name of "The Nuns' Walk," and the cloister ran under its wall (of which some trace may still be detected), is it an utterly ludicrous inference that these were used as sound-conductors placed here for the benefit of the nuns, who, spending much of their time in their daily avocations of teaching or embroidery, sitting here under the cloister, might the more easily hear, and in spirit join in, the services of the Chapel within?

Other marks, too, of the whilome presence of Roman buildings in this vicinity are to be found. Not only in the arch of the Saxon clerestory and in the flue-tiles, but in the entire length of the north wall, especially near its eastern end, are traces of Roman tiles inserted promiscuously, which have happily escaped the contractor's plaster, and proclaim that Roman buildings must at one time have stood in this

* In the *Archæological Journal of the "Institute,"* vol. xli., p. 54, Mr. Park-Harrison gives an interesting account and a sketch of the outer windows, similarly constructed of Roman tiles, before the over-zealous contractor had hidden them under his layers of plaster.

neighbourhood, from which the Saxon and subsequent builders freely helped themselves.

It is at the east end of this Chapel (where under a lofty Early English arch, spanned by a rood-screen of three or four mullioned tracery, once stood the Sanctuary) we find what may be called the chief enigma of the building; which I would with much diffidence endeavour to solve. Here the masonry of the north wall, both inside and out, differs from the more western portions of the Chapel, and evidently belongs to a later period. This Chancel must once have extended some distance beyond the present east wall, for the two-seated stone *sedilia* are now close to that wall, and leave no space for *piscina* and *credence* beyond; and the *piscina*, having been preserved, has been inserted into the east wall; where also have been introduced other portions of carved stonework, which most certainly were not here originally. In the centre is a triplet of recessed niches, once surmounted by a richly decorated canopy, crocketed and finialed (now all chiselled away), the middle one more deeply recessed and containing the mutilated remains of an image; while on the outside have been built-in three ogee-pointed arches of stone, sadly pulverized, which might once have formed parts of a row of Decorated arches, or windows; and inside are the jambs and arch of a doorway inserted in the north corner. This Chancel, too, appears to have been originally flat-roofed, for the east wall retains marks of the resting-places of massive beams, while the outside distinctly shews more recent masonry in its upper portion.

Here we must digress a little from the details of the Church to trace the changes which came over the Manor of Shurland, with which the Abbey seems to have been so closely connected, and to mark how these changes materially affected the Chapel itself. Sir Robert de Shurland, whose monument in the south wall of the Church will be noticed hereafter, left an only daughter, who married Sir William Cheyne of Patricksbourne, into whose family the Shurland estates then passed; and with their descendants they remained till the time of Henry VIII., when Sir Henry Cheyne sold the Manor to Sir Humfrey Gilbert, who again

exchanged it to Elizabeth, who bestowed it on her kinsman Sir Edward Hoby. In this transfer seems to have been included the right to a certain family mortuary chapel of the Cheyneys, for the demolition of which, and the removal of the tombs and coffins, a Licence was granted by Archbishop Grindal in 1581.*

The question then arises, Which Chapel was this? and where did it stand? In different Wills, and in the Inventory of the goods of the Monastery, taken in 1536 (27 Henry VIII.), † mention is made of three Chapels, one of St. Mary, another of St. Katherine, and a third of St. John Baptist. The latter is expressly stated in the "Inventory" as "standing in the Churchyard." Now local tradition seems inclined to place that of St. Katherine at the Chancel of the Parish Church; and at first sight this seems natural, as that of St. Mary might be expected to be in the Nunnery Chapel; but it must be borne in mind that the name of the Virgin does not seem to appear in connection with the building until Archbishop Corboil restored the then ruinous church, and united the name of the Virgin with that of Sexburga the real foundress. Prior to that time it had always been known as the "Monastery of St. Sexburga."

On the other hand, the Chapel of St. Katherine is distinctly connected with the Cheyney family as their burial-place. Sir William Cheyney in his will, dated 1441, expresses the wish to be buried in it, as being the place where his ancestors lie, and leaves a legacy for its repair. The

* The record of the application for the removal is thus given in English (Grindal's Register, f. 245): "There is in a small Chappell nere unto the Parish Church of Minster . . . buried the father and divers of the auncestors of the Lorde Chayney, which Chappell is with other landes thereabout lately sold by his Lordship unto Sir Humfrey Gilberte forasmuch as he is desirous to remove the cophins and bodies of the said auncestors out of the said Chappell," etc.

The licence granted by the Archbishop is worded as follows: "In parte honorandi viri Henrici Domini Cheyney . . . quod corpus tam pie memorie Domini Thome Cheyney per nobilis Ordinis Garterii, Militis, etc., quam etiam nonnullorum aliorum antecessorum dicti honorandi viri in quadam vicina sive adjacenti parva Capella Ecclesie Parochialis de Minster, inhumata et sepulta exhumare et ab eadem Capella reverenter amovere et ad ecclesiam Parochialem . . . transferre et ibidem in loco idoneo inhumare liceat," etc. Datum Octob. 23, 1581.

† Mackenzie Walcott, in a Paper bearing on the "Inventories of Religious Houses in Kent" (*Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. VII., pp. 292-3), expressly mentions as being at Minster Church, "S. Katherine's Ile, Our Lady Chapell, and S. Johns Chapell in the Churchyard."

very wording of that will connects the Chapel with the Nunnery, "within the Abbey of SS. Mary and Sexburga." His son, Sir Thomas Cheyney, expresses a similar wish, in 1559,* and desires "a tombe to be made nygh to the place where my late wyef Frydeswyth do lye in my chapel at Minster." It is evident that the Chapel which was removed by Sir Humphrey Gilbert under the licence from Archbishop Grindal lay at the east of the Nunnery Chapel, now the north aisle. Most unfortunately that licence only says "a certain small chapel," giving no name, and describing it as being "near or adjacent to" the Church of Minster. The Abbey Chapel must have projected farther eastward, as already noticed; and here, whether as a part of, or detached from, the Chapel, must have lain the family mausoleum of the Cheyneys. Is it not probable that, when this was sold to Sir Humfrey Gilbert (who, as we know, pulled it down and sold the materials), the present east wall was run up, cutting short the once goodly chapel beyond, and that then, too, its miscellaneous fragments—the arches, the triple niche, the doorway (which probably had been the "Priest's Doorway" in the north wall, giving entrance to the chaplain from the Abbey grounds adjoining)—were built up as interesting relics on the inside, while the stone tracery archwork was inserted on the outside? Such a suggestion certainly seems to find some support in the presence of Perpendicular tracery in the window which appears in the north wall: this would palpably have been an insertion of that period, and no doubt formed part of the changes then introduced here.

But, as Mr. Park-Harrison says, in his Paper already referred to,† there is another perplexing feature in this Church, viz., the seven square recesses in the upper part of the east wall. But whether they were the resting-places of beams supporting a flat roof, or a gallery for the use of the nuns, must, so far as I am concerned, remain an open question.

* The will of Sir Thomas Cheyney, 1559. Somerset House, Chayney, i.

† Page 149.

Let us now turn to the Parish Church portion of this building. When it was added there is no direct record. At what exact time, beside this Chapel, reared for the private devotions and the conventual services of the high-born sisterhood, rose the Church in which the poor might have the Gospel preached to them, is not known; probably not earlier than the beginning of the twelfth century, as already hinted.

The circular arch leading from the porch into the Church, which from the depth of its hood-moulding was clearly once an outer door, Norman in shape, but with finer and lighter shafts and dog-tooth ornament, points to the Transition Period which connected the Norman with the Early English style, and would belong to the time of Henry II. It is possible that (as has been conjectured from traces which were discovered at the recent restoration of the foundations of a massive doorway in the middle of the western bay of the north aisle) it originally stood here as the entrance door into the Monastic Chapel, and was removed to its present site when Archbishop Corboil entered on his great work of repair in the year 1130. The goodly array of lofty lancet windows, which must have ranged over the three sides of the Church, certainly belong to that time. Of these one remains on the west gable, two others having been sacrificed to make room for a three-light Perpendicular; three remain on the south; a fourth having given way to a four-light square-headed late Decorated one; while a graceful triplet, recently restored, adorns the east end. But of any earlier work, if such existed, not a vestige now remains in the Parish Church.

The next addition would apparently carry us over two centuries, when the Decorated window in the south wall, already mentioned, and the exquisitely graceful canopy of the Shurland tomb (of which more presently), were introduced.

The massively based tower, which stands at the west end of the Chapel, next demands notice. But before describing this, it should be noted that the tower seems to replace two campaniles or belfries which evidently existed here; one belonging to the Abbey Chapel, and the other to the Parish Church; both of which must have fallen into disrepair towards the close of the fifteenth century, as we learn from

Wills in the Archdeacon's Court at Canterbury, in which are frequent bequests for their repair. Among others is that of one Peter Cleve, who died in 1479, leaving among other legacies a sum of money for the repair of the Chapel of St. John Baptist, and two of £40 each, one for "the campanile on the priory side," and the other for that "on the side of the parish church."* This may account for the two spiral stairs, one on either side of the tower at its junction with the nave; and may help to assign the date for the addition of the tower to the Transition Period, as the character of the building suggests. The loftiness of the arch between it and the Chapel would point to the later years of the Decorated, while the capitals and bases indicate the incoming of the Perpendicular; and the features of the latter are still more pronounced in the square head, and the label, and shields in the spandrils, of the western doorway. Then, too, would have been added the buttresses with their hollowed plinths along the face of the previously plinthless north wall.

But the dark days for monasteries—for this Minster and its Chapel—were drawing near. The time was at hand when their reputed wealth, and also their reputed abuses, were becoming notorious, and helping to accelerate their downfall; when their suppression, and the transfer of their ample and too often misused revenues, were to seal their doom, and to enrich needy and unscrupulous courtiers.

That massive base, supported by double buttresses at each of the western angles, surmounted by a dwarf penthouse or capping tower of wood, tells of a design to erect a stately beacon tower, crowned it may be by a loftier spire, to guide the seafarer up the Thames by day and night; but it now stands as an unfinished monument of the practical munificence of the "monks of old," or rather the "devoted sisters" who had here made their home, and as one of the very many similar evidences of the rapacity of Henry VIII. and his Court.

* "Lego pro reparatione Capelle Sancti Johannis Baptiste xl. d. pro reparatione Campanille pro parte Priorisse xl. li. et pro reparatione Campanile Parochiarum xl. li." (Will of Peter Cleve, iii., 12.)

Before leaving the fabric of the Church, it will be interesting to note some allusions made in divers Wills to side-altars and images which once existed in the Church and the Chapel. There were the High Altar, the Altar of the Virgin Mary, and also of St. Katherine; there were images of "St. Mary le Pety," of the Holy Cross, and of St. James. These it seems now impossible to localize. Besides the three-fold recesses already mentioned as now inserted in the east wall of the Chapel, there are also two recesses in the east wall of the Church, one on either side of the east window, which no doubt were once filled with frescoes; that on the north side has been obliterated by plaster, while the one on the south still retains traces of a figure, and the letters NICH . . . LAI, indicating that it was designed to represent St. Nicholas, the Patron Saint of Sailors.

Nor must we omit to notice at an elevation of some twelve feet from the floor in the north wall of this Chancel two very elegant lancet-shaped recesses, which some think may have been openings through which the occupants of the supposed gallery in the east end of the Nuns' Chapel might have been able to see the Host in the Chancel of St. Mary; but as there is no trace of any opening extending through the wall, it is more probable that they were merely niches, either for images or for lights.

THE MONUMENTS.

The architectural features of this Church perhaps possess few points of interest in comparison with those of the Monuments. These are alive with local history. They tell us of the successive families of note which from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries were "Lords of Sheppey;" for each family has its representative here—Shurland, Northwode, Cheyney.

Taking them in chronological order, the one that claims priority in point of time, and also of artistic and historic interest, is that in the south wall of the Chancel. Here lies a knight in his shirt of mail, over which falls his loose surcoat, his head pillowed on his *heaume* or casque, his left hand still retaining its grip of the thong of his tapering

convex shield, on which he is lying; his gauntleted right hand (the arm broken away) resting on the hilt of his sword, as though he had just dropped it into its scabbard; his bannered lance laid down beside him, yet within easy grasp; his legs crossed Crusader-wise; while close at his feet (not under them, as in the case of a lion or a dog) sleeps his boy page, his head resting on his arm bent under him, ready to spring up at the slightest touch to attend his lord's behest. The whole group is a perfect study! The knight has fought his fight, and has laid him down to rest.*

Who is here represented might be a matter of conjecture but for a singular adjunct to the group in the shape of a horse's head in the background, rising up as it were out of the water, the waves almost touching his nostrils. That horse's head provides the clue, and tells its tale. Towards the close of the thirteenth century the Manor of Shurland was held by one Sir Robert of that ilk, who had taken part in the Crusade of 1271, under Prince Edward (afterwards Edward I.), by whom also he was created Knight-Banneret for gallantry at the Siege of Carlaverock, and rose to high honours. Now divers traditions connect him with a strange scene and a daring exploit on a favourite horse, which saved his life by swimming to shore, where an old woman, seeing him landing after his perilous adventure, in comment on his rashness, warned him that that horse would some day be the death of him.† This had so deep an effect on his super-

* It is commonly called "The Templar," but the absence of the cross-marked flowing cloak refutes the claim to that order.

† One story is that "having buried a priest alive, he swam his horse two miles through the sea to the king, who was then near the island on shipboard, to purchase his pardon, and having obtained it swam back to the shore." Another is that "having obtained a grant of privilege by charter to have 'wreck of sea' upon his lands confining on the sea-shore, the extent of his royalty being esteemed to reach as far into the water, on a low ebb, as a man can ride in and touch anything with the point of his lance," he had made the effort, and the sudden rise of the tide threatening to overtake him, he owed his life to his horse, which swam in with him to the shore. The third is a much less sensational one: that he one day made a wager that his horse would carry him across the Swale from the mainland, when the tide was strong. In each case the climax is the same, and the old woman's remark would be natural, as a warning against his recklessness. (Philipott's *Villare Cantianum*, p. 382; Seymour's *Survey of Kent*, p. 388; Brayley's *History of Kent*, p. 714.) Barham has appropriated the tale, and made Sir Robert the hero of one of his *Ingoldsby Legends*, "The Grey Dolphin."

stitious mind that to render the hag's prediction impossible he drew his sword and killed the horse on the spot. Some years after, seeing the skeleton lying on the shore, he gave the head a contemptuous kick, and in so doing bruised his foot, of which injury he eventually died; thus unconsciously fulfilling the prediction. To perpetuate the tradition a horse's head was placed on the tomb, and also on the vane of the Church spire; this explains why the Minster is sometimes called "The Horse Church."*

But the interest of this monument does not rest here. The figure lies on a base, and is covered by a canopy, of a much later date than that of Robert de Shurland's death. The elaborate panelling on the face of the tomb, and the bold yet very graceful tracery of the rich Decorated work above it, point to more than half a century after. Grand and beautiful it must have been when its heavily crocketed (but now broken) arch and massive finial rose up to the very roof, from imposts still retaining in wonderful perfection and sharpness the head of a veiled nun on one side, and on the other that of a man whose thick rolling curls suggests the times of Edward III., or Richard II. It has been thought that this tomb was probably designed for some very different effigy; it may have been for some high-born and distinguished Prioress, whose memory the sisters of the Priory desired to honour by lavishing on her tomb all the art and skill of that age. But it would seem that for some now unknown cause the original design was never carried out, and the tomb remained unoccupied, and that when the Chapel or mausoleum (whether it was that of St. Katherine or of St. John Baptist) was demolished, the figure of this grand old knight was found there among the ancestors of the Cheyneys; and it being noticed that the figure would exactly fit the vacant space under this canopy, it was introduced here. This is at best conjecture, but we have it on record that other tombs (that for instance of Sir Thomas Cheyney, of whom presently) were originally in that Chapel, and were removed into the body of the Church, where they

* Grose, *Antiquities* (Kent, 4to, p. 78), where he gives a rhyming account of this legend.

at present stand ; and this of Sir Robert Shurland might have been rescued in the same manner.

Next in point of time, and scarcely inferior in interest, are the two brasses which lie in the centre of the Chancel, on either side of the lectern. These, now on separate slabs, were until lately side by side on a large block of Bethersden marble (now hidden under the choir stalls), though no doubt they originally rested each on its own altar-tomb. Their general character—the clean cut outline of the figure inlaid in a corresponding indented matrix, instead of forming part of a large oblong unbroken plate, including effigy, canopy, shields, and probably inscription-scroll, as is customary with foreign brasses—would seem at first sight to lead to the inference that they were English work ; but a closer examination of the details—the finer lines, with the intervening spaces chiselled out, instead of the deep bold lines with which an English graver would produce the shading of the figures—indicate in both brasses a French or Flemish hand, and such they are pronounced by experts to be ; an opinion further confirmed by the style of dress of the female figure.

The question then rises, “ Whom are they supposed to represent ? ” Weever, in his *Funerall Monuments*, writing in 1631, says that in his day there lay at the foot of the figures, though it has now disappeared, the following inscription, “ HIC JACENT ROGERUS DE NORWOOD & BONA UXOR EJUS, SEPULTI ANTE CONQUESTUM.” The palpable anachronism of chain armour “ before the Conquest ” proclaims the utter valuelessness of this statement, while the character in which the letters were written proved also that they must have been of much later date. Still, while admitting the ignorance which is stamped on this inscription, it is possible to surmise the ground on which it was attributed to Sir Roger. The cross engrailed on a field *ermine* pronounced it to have belonged to a Northwode, and, as has been already shewn, Sir Roger had been a great benefactor to the Abbey and Church, and it was but natural that he should be supposed to be the one to whose memory, as a grateful recognition of his good deeds, this brass should have been placed in the Church in which it was known that he desired to be buried. Then again the

dress of the lady might be thought to confirm this view, for the ends of her mantle, drawn over her shoulders, and hanging down in front, exhibit a *vair-en-point*-like ornament, which might be thought to form heraldically a connection with the Fitz-Bernard family, to which Bona the wife of Sir Roger was known to belong.

But the armour refutes the theory that it was meant to represent a man who had lived in the thirteenth century, to say nothing of being "before the Conquest." The light bascinet, instead of the heavier heaume or helmet, the haubert of banded ring-mail, in the place of the simple chain armour, associated with the Crusader times, the plated shoulder-piece and elbow-piece, too—all mark the transition period of the earlier years of the fourteenth century, and combine to strengthen the claim of another member of the Northwode family, Sir John, the son of Sir Roger, who was even more distinguished in the annals of the country; who was also created a Knight-Banneret, and had by marriage allied himself with one of the most powerful and influential of Kentish families, the Badlesmeres.

Assuming then that these brasses represent Sir John Northwode and his wife Joan (de Badlesmere) we are able to fix the date of their deaths. Sir John died in May 1319, and she in the following June; she was thus spared the sorrow of knowing that her father, Bartholomew (Lord) Badlesmere, three years after paid the penalty of his refusal to admit Queen Isabella into Leeds Castle, of which he had been appointed Custodian by Edward II.

Now of the figures themselves, each was composed of two pieces; that of the lady has retained its original form; but the lower portion of the knight's brass has undergone more than one change. Until a few years ago there lay, as a drawing in Stothard's *Monumental Effigies** shews, a broad space between the middle of the shield and the grotesquely misshapen legs; this has been accounted for by the supposition that it was at one time proposed to lay the two figures on one stone; but the disparity of the height was met by applying the

* Stothard, in his *Monumental Effigies*, p. 54 (1811), gives a representation of the brass as it then appeared, with the "gaping interval."

Procrustean process, and cutting away enough from the middle of his body to reduce the excess of height, and to make it correspond with the female figure, which made the ignorant addition of the lower limbs the more ludicrous.

The research of the late Dr. Maitland,* while Librarian at Lambeth, brought to light an interesting entry in the Lambeth Registers, which enables us to conjecture the date of this strange suffix. In the year 1511 the Churchwardens of Minster made a presentation to the Archbishop (Warham) at his Visitation to this effect, "That wheare a long tyme agoo in the chapell a knight and his lady were buried, the pictures upon them were sore worn and broken," and they requested permission to remove them. But the Archbishop's Commissary "admonished them to implore his Grace for permission that they might be repaired."† It is most probable that the addition was then made; and that (utilizing as a palimpsest a portion of another brass, on which was engraved the drapery of a female figure) on the back of it was designed by some illiterate local workman what he fancied might have been the form of the cross-legged Crusader knight. The lapse of 200 years, and the ignorance of the engraver, would easily account for the gross incongruity, and also suggest the date when the old inscription was added, as, on old Fuller's shewing, the character would belong rather to the sixteenth than to the fourteenth century.

The next and the last step in the metamorphosis of the Northwode knight took place a few years ago, when the Church was being restored. A member of that family supplied the gaping interval between the upper part of the figure and the grotesque legs, by introducing a third piece, on which the remainder of the shield and the armour were engraved, with far more harmonious effect.

* *British Magazine* (1847), vol. xxxi., p. 547.

† This brass seems to have been the subject of another petition at an earlier date. The late Rev. R. C. Jenkins of Lyninge, in his *Dioc. History of Canterbury*, p. 234, gives, without stating his authority, the following account of the difficulty which its presence caused to the inhabitants of Minster: they petitioned the Archbishop "that they might remove the effigies of a knight and his wife, and lay in the place a plain stone with an epitaphy that the people may make setes and pews where they may more quietly serve God." He gives the fifteenth century as the date of this petition, but the writer has found no entry of it in the Lambeth Registers of that period.

The Northwode interest in Minster would seem to have continued for some generations.* The eldest son of this Sir John, also a Sir John, was buried here; again, the first wife of his eldest son, a Sir Roger, and their son, a Sir John too, who died in 1379,† found burial here.

The next monument to be noticed is that standing under the eastern bay of the colonnade which separates the Parish Church from the Abbey Chapel, and forms the most conspicuous monument in the Church. On a very massive tomb of Bethersden marble, with its sides and ends richly ornamented with sixteen escutcheons proclaiming the proud alliances of the Cheyney family,‡ lies an alabaster figure of a knight in full court costume of the later years of the sixteenth century, with the badge of the Garter lying on his breast, and the ribbon at his knee. It has been already said that on the death of Sir Robert de Shurland, the marriage of his only child Margaret with Sir William de Cheyney§ carried the Manor of Sheppey to the Cheyneys of Patricksbourne; and although the family pride and interest in the Sheppey estates flagged somewhat under the Cheyneys, yet it is clear that they looked to Minster as their ancestral burial-place.

This monument, as the now partially effaced inscription running round the verge still shews, was in memory of Sir Thomas Cheyney, who had been Knight of the Garter, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, Constable of Dover Castle, Treasurer of the Household to Henry VIII. and Edward VI., and Privy Councillor under Mary and Elizabeth. In spite of all his honours, his heart, as shewn by his will, reverted to the old family home, and like his ancestor Sir William,

* Other brasses of Northwodes mentioned in Philipott's *Church Notes*, in British Museum, Harleian MSS. 3917.

† Will of Sir John Northwode (Archbishop Sudbury's Register, f. 100 b) (1379): "Volo corpus meum sepeliendum in Ecclesia Monasterii Sancte Sexburge de Menstrye in Scapeya," etc.

‡ The tendency to emblazon their tombs seems to belong to the name of Cheyney, for a descendant of this Sir Thomas, Elizabeth, of the Gestling branch, who had married Sir Thomas Colpeper, and died in 1638, had a similar heraldic display of alliances on her tomb in Hollingborne Church.

§ Will of Sir William Cheyne (Chichele's Register, part i., f. 475) (A.D. 1441): "Volo corpus meum sepeliendum in Capella Sancte Katherine infra Abbathiam Sancte Marie & Sexburge in Insula de Scapeia. . . . Item lego ad pictum Crucis, & ad reparacionem Capelle Sancte Katherine in Ecclesia de Menstre xxs."

who had died in 1441, he left the following record of his wish: "I will (he said) that my bodye be buried in the Minster in the Isle of Sheppey, in a chapel there, wheare my late wyef Dame Frydeswith and divers of myne ancestors are buried." This wish was carried out in 1559; but his son, Sir Henry (created by Elizabeth in 1572 Lord Cheyney of Todington), parted with the Sheppey estates to Sir Humphrey Gilbert, who pulled down and sold the materials of what had been the family chapel of the Cheyneys; the one redeeming act in this sad transaction being that, though Lord Cheyney sold to a stranger the chapel his father had so loved, he had the grace to solicit from the Archbishop of Canterbury a licence to remove his father's tomb, and the remains of other ancestors, and place the tomb reverently in the body of the Church, where it now stands, having happily suffered very little disfigurement or mutilation. There lies the old knight in all the grandeur of his official robes, his hands clasped, his head resting on a pillow richly diapered, and supported by angels; the most striking if not the most interesting monument in the Church of a man more than once described in Rymer's *Fœdera* as "Strenuus Miles;" and by old Fuller in his *Worthies* as "a spriteful (? spirited) gentleman."

Here is another monument, which in point of time takes precedence of Sir Thomas Cheyney's, in far more lowly position, lying on the ground, with no raised altar-tomb, no sculptured recess, to give it dignity, with no inscription, nor any heraldic device by which it might be identified, the only clue to its probable date being the armour, a plated breast-plate and tuilles, without a trace of a coat of mail either above or below; this would indicate the earlier part of the fifteenth century. Its history, at least as much of it as is known, is strange. It was found buried in the churchyard, some five feet below the surface, in the year 1833, and here it lies in a vacant space against the north wall of the Chapel; a knightly figure of Purbeck marble, on a coped slab; the face and upper part of the body in fair preservation, but the feet and projecting portions of the thighs roughly chiselled away and sadly mutilated. There is no trace of sword or

daggers; the bare head rests on a pillow supported by two angels. The gauntleted hands are raised as in prayer, and here we meet with the most striking, it may be said "unique," feature of the monument; between the tips of the fingers is a very small oval-shaped concave plate containing a very diminutive figure of a man (probably meant to represent his soul); it is this figure which gives the archæological interest to the monument. Why he was so mutilated—why he was buried in the churchyard—why so long left there uncared for and perhaps unknown—must now ever remain a mystery; as also *who he was*. This can only be conjectured by supposing that he belonged either to the Northwodes or the Cheyneys; one who died in the earlier half of the fifteenth century. If a Northwode, it may have been the John Northwode who died in 1416; or if a Cheyney, probably Sir William, whose death is recorded in 1441.

There remains yet another monument to be described. It carries us on to a later period of England's history, and is connected with the Spanish Armada. Under a plain arched recess in the north wall of this Chapel we see a tomb, itself of much earlier date, with its front and the back of the recess composed of slabs of Bethersden marble richly diapered and panelled, probably belonging to the fifteenth century, and on it an alabaster figure of a knight in full armour of the latter part of the sixteenth, the chain shirt appearing at the throat above the plated cuirass, the head resting on a pillow supported by angels; on his breast lies an Order, attached to a narrow ribbon embossed with alternate small roses and stars; the Order itself so worn and effaced that it is difficult to identify it with any known Order. Local tradition has always assigned to it the title of "the Spanish Ambassador," but has never given it a name. He is so described in a rare coloured print by Livesay of the year 1791. It is amusing, and perhaps instructive, to mark the various forms of the name and office assigned to this worthy. For instance, Brayley, in his *Beauties of Kent*, gives the name as "CERINEMO," and says he was "taken by Sir Francis Drake 1588 and died a prisoner on board a ship at the Nore;" while in a Paper in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of

1798, under the signature of T. Mot, the name is spelt GERMONA, and he is styled, "Commander of the Land Forces on board the Spanish Armada, who died a prisoner on board the Guardship at the Nore." This account Mackenzie Walcott evidently copies in a Paper in *Archæologia Cantiana* on Kentish Priories, only calling him a "Spanish General," and describes the capture under similar circumstances. These varying accounts were no doubt based on a defective recollection of the entry in the Church Register, where among the burials, under date December 5, 1591, it appears thus: "Signior JERONIMO, a Spanish prisoner to Sir Edward Hoby, taken in the fight with the Spanish flete (1588)." Who then was he? The style of the armour, the costliness of the marble, the Order on his breast—all point to his having been a man of some mark, of some importance and dignity. But who? Among the treasures of the Record Office Museum is a letter from Robert Cecil,* afterwards Earl of Salisbury, written to his father, Lord Burleigh, on July 30th, 1588, describing the adventure of the *fire-ships*, which he facetiously calls the "fireworks," at Calais Harbour. He says that after Moncada, who commanded one of the largest galiases, had been shot on the deck of his stranded ship, "the second of account," whom he styles "a proper gentleman of Salamanca," was "taken and kept in one of the ships of the flete." Then C. F. Duro, the Spanish historian, in his work *La Armada Invincible*, says there was among the *Aventureros*, men no doubt of wealth and position, like the "Merchant Adventurers" of English History, one JERONIMO MAGNO. Is it too much to infer that possibly the Spanish grandee captured by Drake at the Calais Bar, and detained a prisoner on board one of the ships at the Nore in the custody of Sir Edward Hoby (at that time Constable of Queenborough Castle, and therefore commanding at the Nore), who was

* State Papers, Dom., Elizab., vol. cciii., No. 66, Record Off. Museum, a letter from Cecil to Lord Burleigh, July 30, 1588, runs thus: "I thought good to acquaint yow wth yt wch I have hearde of a Sp. Jentleman taken yesterday in one of ye Galeases wch was runn a shore at Calis and there is seised by Mosr. Gowrdan. The Captaine of this Shipp, named Moncadaa, one of ye greatest personages in the Fleete, was killed wth a small shott of a muskett yt persed both his eyes. The second of account in that Shipp is taken and kept in one of ye Shippis in her M'tie Fleete. This mann yt is here is a proper Jentleman of Salamanca," etc.; dated "From Douer, this 30th of July."

known probably chiefly by his Christian name of *Jerónimo*, with the recognized title of *Signior*, was the person who three years after died there, and was buried in this Church, and whose monument is now before us ?

There also lie on the floor of the Chapel two massive stone coffins, one with the lid bearing a foliated cross. These clearly carry back the mind to the earlier days of the Chapel, and may probably have once held the bodies of some noble if not royal prioress in Saxon times.

It were indeed ungracious and unjust to bring to a close this attempt to describe Minster Church as it now is without an allusion to what *it was* when the Rev. William Bramston, the present Vicar, entered on his duties here in 1877. It was then little better than a ruin: the roof leaking like a sieve, the walls dilapidated and overgrown with moss, the entire fabric a disgrace, its very appearance bringing into contempt the holy cause which it was supposed to represent. To his zeal and energy it is mainly due that out of that wreck has risen a restoration not unworthy of Him whom the Parishioners now delight to worship within its walls—a building of which they may be justly proud.

THE NUNNERY.

Passing from the Church and its Monuments, let us glance at what remains of the Monastery (or rather Nunnery) itself. Of its component parts all must now be conjecture. The gateway alone remains to bear silent witness to its former grandeur. It is unfortunately a case of "*Ex pede Herculem.*" We may, however, reasonably imagine that a religious house which had for its first and second Prioresses representatives of royalty, and in their successors ladies of high and often of noble birth, would have every portion of its *entourage* complete. There would have been its refectory, its dormitory, chapter-house, cloisters, and garth, as well as its chapel, all enclosed within a range of high walls. All this, except the gatehouse, is gone; nor does a trace remain, unless it be in the line of a high-pitched roof on the

west wall, where probably stood the spacious refectory. Even the gatehouse is altered; no longer does the wide-spanned arch open its door to receive the visitor. It has been long since built up. The old arched or square-headed windows of stone, and closely quarried glass, have been replaced by wooden frames and staring sashes; and the former abode of the devout sisters of the Benedictine Order is now utilized into tenements for the families of farm-labourers. It is only in the north-eastern corner that we can detect anything of the really old. Here are jambs of Early English windows, now blocked up; here is still the newel stair which once led up to the apartments of the two priests: but it has long since ceased to be used. It is scarcely possible now to say which were the rooms of the Confessor of the Nuns and the Chaplain of the Church.

Our only clue to the distribution of the apartments (and this probably confined to the gatehouse itself) is to be found in the "Inventory"* already noticed (p. 151). There were the apartment of the Lady Prioress, Alicia Crane; that of Dame Ursula Gosborne (p̄ Gisborne), who was called the sup-prior; those of Dames Agnes Browne, Margaret . . . locks, Dorothy Toplyve, Anne Loveden, Elizabeth Stradlynge, Anne Clifford, and Margaret Ryvers. In this Inventory are also included the most minute details of the "goods" which each contained, specifying not only the "clothys for the hangyngs," but also the "fetherbeds, bolsters," number of "pyllowes, blankattes, payres of shetes," etc., which each owned.

In Minster, as in the Benedictine Monasteries generally, the discipline of the house was under Episcopal jurisdiction: while the election of the Prioress lay with the sub-prioress and the nuns, it required the preliminary sanction and subsequent confirmation of the Archbishop. This is evident from an entry in the Lambeth Register, where Archbishop Stafford issues a Licence† to the sub-prioress and the convent to proceed to the election of a prioress on the death of the

* *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. VII., where the names are given of the occupants (temp. Henry VIII.) at the time of its suppression.

† Archbishop Stafford's Register, f. 107 h (A.D. 1450): "Emanavit licentia suppriorisse et Conventui domus Monialium Scapeie ad procedendam electionem future Priorisse . . . secundum consuetudinem."

last Prioress. The internal discipline, too, of the house came under the control of the Primate.

In the same Registers we have glimpses of the life these nuns were accustomed to lead; and they are not always favourable pictures. More than once it became necessary for the Archbishops to interfere, and sometimes to administer warnings and even rebukes and threats. Archbishop Peckham* in 1286 had to condemn the latitude which (as he had heard) allowed *mulieres seculares* (women who were not under the vow) to come inside the walls, and threatens them severely unless they mend their ways.

Ten years later Archbishop Winchelsea held a personal visitation, and found other grounds of complaint; he heard that in refectory and dormitory, in cloister, and even in choir, the rule of SILENCE was not observed; that the nuns are "said to be garrulous and quarrelsome;" and for such delinquencies he enjoins periods of solitary confinement in the cells (*in camera, carceris loco*), and warns them that if this disorder continues still more severe forms of punishment must be resorted to to maintain the good order of the house.†

Of the successive Prioresses it is now impossible to give a full and correct list, as the names only occur incidentally in various records. For instance, we read that one Agnes (whose surname is not given) was Prioress in 1139; that Johanna de Cobham filled that post in the middle of the fourteenth century, and that on her death in 1368 she was succeeded by Isabella de Honyngton, who had "professed" only a few months before.‡ These two ladies no doubt belonged to the old Kentish families of Cobham and Honington. Then in 1511 Alice Rivers was Prioress; and she very probably belonged to the family of which Elizabeth, the Queen of Edward IV., was a member. The last of the Prioresses was Alicia Crane, who held the office at the time of the suppression, when she was pensioned.

* Archbishop Peckham's Register, f. 119.

† "Injunctiones a Monialibus in Scapeia observandi. Robertus, etc., etc. In primis ut in locis silencio deputatis, et precipue in Choro, Claustra, Refectorio, & Dormitorio, silencium observetur: . . . Ita quod supe hoc non garulent nec contendant, etc., etc. Datum in Monasterio vestro Kal. Maii 4. d. MCCXCVI." (Archbishop Winchelsea's Register, f. 63.)

‡ Archbishop Langham's Register, f. 64-5.

We cannot better close this brief account of the Minster Nunnery than by referring to a highly interesting MS. in the British Museum (Cottonian MSS., Faustina, B. vi.), where a list is given of the "memorial days" of five of the Prioresses: this unfortunately gives only their Christian names, and consequently we are not able to identify them, or to give the years in which they died. The names occur in the following order:—

2 Id. Martii, ob. Johanna de Badlesmere, Priorissa de Menstre.

12 Kal. Maii, ob. Eustachina, Priorissa de Menstre.

4 Non. Octobris, ob. Agnes, ditto.

13 Kal. Octobris, ob. Christina, ditto.

11 Kal. Decembris, ob. Gunnora, ditto.



SEAL OF THE PRIORY OF MINSTER IN SHEPPEY, FROM A CHARTER OF THE DEAN AND CHAPTER OF CANTERBURY.