

Fig. 1. HORTON PRIORY (WEST FRONT.)

MONKS HORTON PRIORY.

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THERE can be but little doubt that, in the original plan, the buildings of Monks Horton Priory surrounded a quadrangular courtyard, of which the remaining rooms formed the western range, and the chapel of the Priory its northern side, but there may be a doubt whether this court was cloistered. Probably it was; but, as there is no appearance of adjoining roofs on the eastern side of the present buildings, we have no proof of this.

In making our survey it will be convenient to commence externally, particularly as we shall find that the original design has undergone many altera-

tions, (not only in our own days to adapt the place to modern uses, but also in the middle ages, long before the dissolution of monasteries in the time of King Henry VIII.), and because it is only in the external walls that we see anything like the original Norman architecture.

The doorway which was once the front entrance to the Priory, although still to be found in a very perfect state, in the north-end wall of the present remains, is hidden from external view by the erection of a modern room. This door, at which all visitors to the institution had to knock for admittance, is of plain but bold Norman design, semicircular headed, and in the front singly recessed, in each jamb is a detached column, with a circular moulded base, on a square plinth; these columns have their capitals carved in the stiff foliage of the period, *circa* A.D. 1125, and have moulded abaci, square in plan, which carry a large torus moulding in the arch. On the western jamb of this entrance doorway, at about four feet above the floor, is a cross between the letters R. and H. very carefully incised into the stone work, and from the character of the cutting the date is clearly about A.D. 1340. The north wall, in which this doorway is placed, near its western end, is three feet six inches in thickness, and this was the door by which all visitors were admitted, whether they came for confession and absolution or to give alms, or for the charitable aid which at that period of our history was so often craved and given.

We will now take a view of the long western front, and here we can again trace the architecture of the old Norman building. This long façade is divided into six bays by flat pilaster-like buttresses, measuring three

feet wide by eight inches in projection; the masonry of the wall and of these piers is very plainly of the Norman date, as is also a moulded string-course along the whole length of the face of the wall, which passes round the buttresses; this string is about twelve feet above the ground level, and it is necessary here to remark that no window lights of Norman date are to be seen below the string, the windows which do appear there are fifteenth-century work. The eleventh-century masonry is continued above the Norman string-course, but a series of large and finely designed windows, five in number, have been inserted; these are very fine examples of the class of windows which were introduced in the fourteenth century into the more domestic parts of our monastic institutions. At about three feet above the lower string, on the face of the wall, we see the remains of another string, also of Norman date; this abuts against the sides of the Norman pilasters, but it has been cut away in the centre of the bays. This would be done when the large windows were inserted, and it would appear that the pedimental heads of the buttress pilasters were introduced at the same time.

Here a question arises; it is this: Did the original building, as erected by the Norman founder, consist of more than one story in height? As there is no appearance of anything like Norman window openings below the lower string-course, and as there is no approach by stairs of Norman date, in a turret, nor in the thickness of the wall, we may say that this western range of the Priory was a one-story building. Such an arrangement was very usual with our Norman builders, as we see at Dover to the present time.

Before the large fourteenth-century windows were

inserted, it is most probable that a row of semi-circular headed openings, one in each bay above the lower string, supplied light to the apartments, and the upper string-course was most likely carried over the arches of these windows by way of a hood-moulding or label.

We see on the ground level, at the north end of the eastern side of this range of building, the remains of a Norman door-opening, which was the way into the quadrangle; this is now filled with a modern window, and there are no other Norman features left in the eastern wall.

Before viewing the interior, let us inspect the small but very beautiful remains of the western end of the chapel (fig. 2). These consist of the western end of

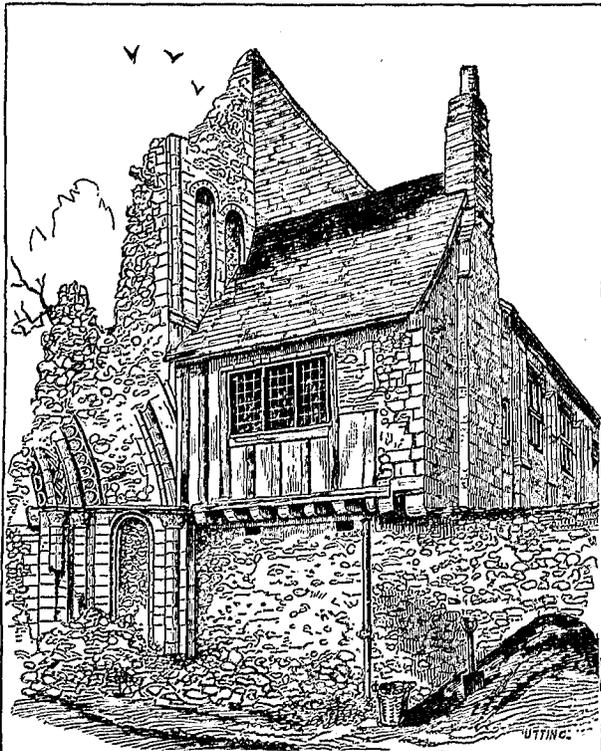


Fig. 2. RUINS OF THE WEST END OF THE CHAPEL, HORTON PRIORY.

the south aisle of the nave, with its western window, and some Norman niches, originally external, but now only to be seen from the interior of the modern building, at the northern end of the western range. The doubly-recessed south jamb of the great western doorway of the Chapel is all which is now left of what was once one of the finest pieces of Norman architecture to be seen in the county of Kent. The columns, with their finely moulded and carved bases and capitals, together with the carved voussoirs of the arch of this entrance (fig. 3), cannot easily be surpassed.



Fig. 3. MOULDINGS OF THE RUINED WEST DOORWAY OF HORTON PRIORY CHAPEL.

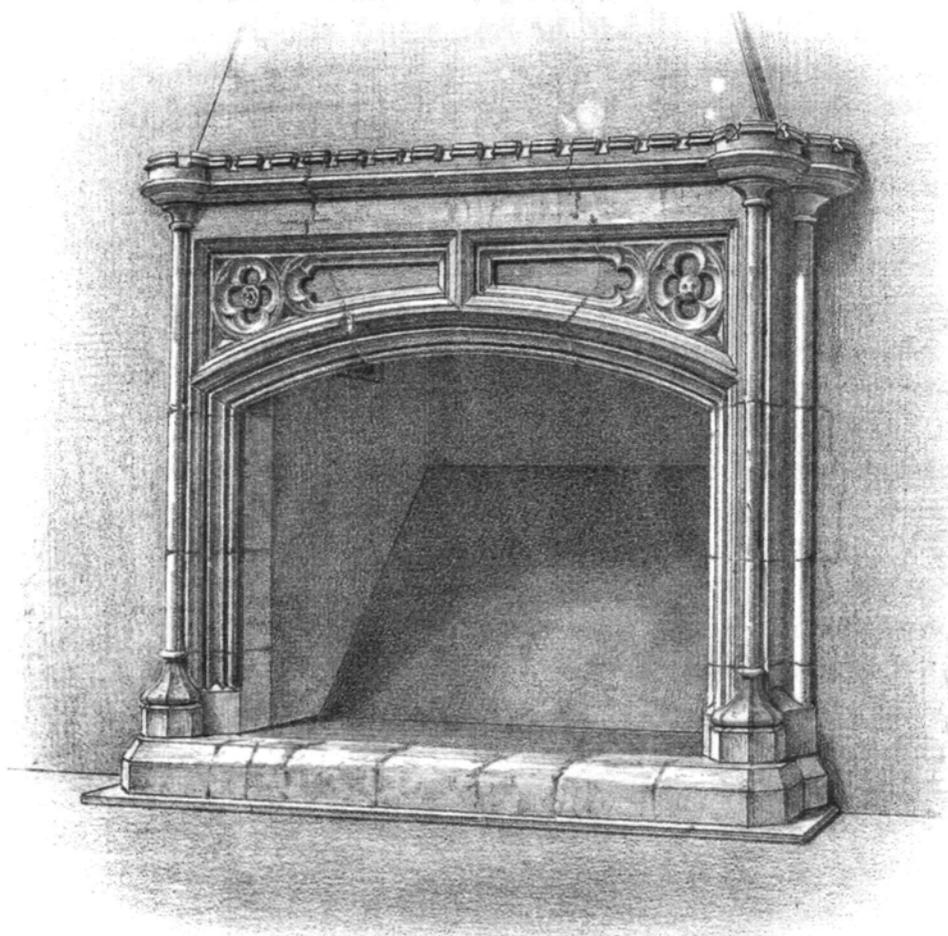
The west wall of the chapel is six feet in thickness, and

the west end of the south aisle projects beyond the nave five feet.

In the interior of the building we see nothing like the architecture of Norman times; the whole appears to have undergone a great alteration at some time towards the latter part of the fourteenth century, when a timber floor was inserted, and divided the building into two stories in height, and at the same time several walls and partitions were erected across the long range of building, to divide it into several apartments.

The ways into the present house thus formed are by doorways of late Gothic forms on the east and west sides of the central compartment, which serves as the present hall, and where a staircase, somewhat in the style of those in use in the time of King James I., has been put up. On the northern side of this hall is a fine large room, where we see the construction of the oak floor, inserted above, the girders, binders, and joists of which are richly moulded, and on the eastern wall we see the moulded corbel table, which supports the chimney jambs of the fire-place in the room above. On the south side of the present entrance hall is a room now used as the parlour, and beyond this room, at the extreme southern end of the Norman building, is the present kitchen, over which the old framed floor is to be seen. This kitchen is separated from the parlour by a timber partition, in which there are two doorways with arched heads; it is constructed with thick and thin planks of oak, framed together alternately, after the fashion of the time when the English throne was occupied by King Henry VI.

The most interesting portion on the upper floor is the large room on the north side of the stairs; this



HORTON PRIORY (Fig. 4)

(From a drawing by R. C. Hussey Esq. F. S. A.)

is a very valuable example of fourteenth-century work, and it is even at the present day in a tolerably perfect state.

The north and south side partitions, which separate this room from the stairs and the adjoining room, are masterpieces of heavy oak framed work, very finely moulded round the plastered panels; this apartment is lighted by two of the fine fourteenth-century windows before noticed; these are two lights wide, and two lights high, with tracery in the square heads (see fig. 6, page 92). In each of the splayed jambs is a stone seat, the whole being very handsome in design. On the east side is a very fine stone chimney-piece, the corbel table of which is seen in the room below, the jambs are moulded, and the frieze is carved with fifteenth-century tracery (fig. 4). The width of the opening is five feet seven inches, and each jamb is one foot, making the total breadth seven feet seven inches; the entire height from the floor is six feet one and a-half inch, but the bottom of the stone curb, in front of the hearth, is raised one and a-half inch from the floor, so that the chimney-piece itself is just six feet high. With the exception of the paper-hangings which now cover the plastered sides of the apartment, the only original feature wanting is the old ceiling. About thirty-five years ago this was in existence, and nearly in a complete state; for some unwise reason it was taken down, and a part of it was carried away to London by an architect who was at that time employed to carry out some works—“*Restorations?*”—at the Church at Smeeth, and this gentleman at the same time carried away a finely carved poppy-head from Smeeth. It is a painful thing to notice such depredations as these,

but at the same time it is the duty of all true archæologists to bring instances of this sort before the Kent Archæological Society, with a view to save all such interesting fragments which we still possess.

This ceiling was of oak ribs, dividing the whole surface into panels (fig. 5), which were boarded, and each

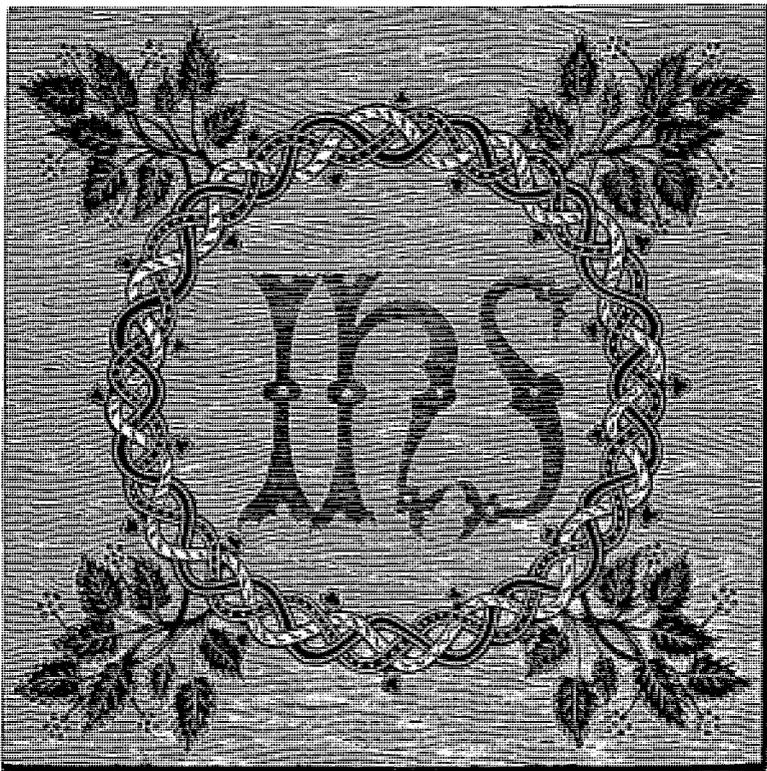


Fig. 5. PANEL OF CEILING AT HORTON PRIORY.

panel was about four feet square, and was handsomely painted, with the Crown of Thorns surrounding the sacred monogram, I.H.S. The crown was formed of three thorn branches plaited together, one was painted white with black spines, the other two were brown, edged and dotted with yellow. The sacred monogram

was in red. The timber heads of the partitions which enclose the room being cambered, shew us that the ceiling was slightly raised along the centre of the room.

At the north-west angle of the building on this floor are two doorways of the time of King Edward III.; the one in the western wall now opens only into a small cupboard, but there is every appearance that it originally led to stairs in the thickness of the wall to the ground floor.

In many of the rooms are doorways of fourteenth-century date, in which hang the oak ledged doors on the original strap hinges, and which still retain the old fastenings.

In dry summer weather some appearances of the foundations of walls of the destroyed buildings on the eastern side of the present remains may be seen. It would be a work of great interest if excavations could be made, so as to ascertain what the extent of the original institution really was.

The Charters of Horton Priory are printed upon a subsequent page, at the end of this volume.