

## ON THE PRÆMONSTRATENSIAN ABBEY OF SS. MARY AND THOMAS OF CANTER- BURY, AT WEST LANGDON, KENT.

BY W. H. ST. JOHN HOPE, B.A.

THE Abbey of Langdon, near Dover, was founded in 1192 by William de Auberville, in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Thomas of Canterbury, for Canons Regular of the Præmonstratensian Order.

This Order was founded by St. Norbert, Archbishop of Magdeburg, in 1120, on the same lines as the Augustinian, of which indeed it was an offshoot, but with stricter regulations respecting fasting, labour, and silence. It derives its lengthy name from *Præmonstratum*, the Latin form of Prémontré, in the Diocese of Laon in Northern France, where the first Abbey of the Order was founded.

The Præmonstratensians seem to have been the Puritans amongst Canons, as the Cistercians were amongst Monks; and, like them, changed the colour of their habit from black to white on the adoption of their new rule: hence their other name of White Canons. The *Conversi* or Lay Brothers, however, wore grey.

The Order was exempt from Episcopal jurisdiction, and all the Abbots met in General Chapter every year on the Feast of St. Dionysius\* at the mother Abbey of Prémontré.

Abbots were expressly forbidden to wear the mitre and gloves properly pertaining to Bishops. Like the Cistercians, they lived with the brethren and slept in the common dormitory.

Another feature of the White Monks, which existed amongst the White Canons, was the foundation of new houses of the Order by colonies sent from existing Abbeys.

\* October 9th.

Thus Bayham and St. Radegund's were colonized from Prémontré, and Langdon from Leiston.\*

The history of Langdon Abbey is very meagre, and we know very little concerning it for the first three centuries of its existence. A Register or Cartulary of the Abbey is preserved in the Public Record Office, but it contains little else besides the usual transcript of charters. The Peck MSS. in the British Museum also contain copies of a number of letters relating to the business of the Order (which have been exhaustively treated elsewhere†), in which the Abbot of Langdon figures as mediator between the Pope and certain refractory English Abbots of the Order.

The only source from which may be gathered anything referring to the inner life of the Abbey is the Visitation Book‡ of Bishop Redman, Visitor-General of the Order, between 1475-1501. In 1475 there were then in the Abbey, *Dominus Johannes Kentwell, nuper Abbas; Frater Johannes Lyon, supprior; Johannes Chamber, vicarius; Robertus Stanton, vicarius; Johannes Bastor (?); Edwardus Symon; Ricardus Coly; and Johannes Mitchell, non professus.* Similar lists occur for other years. In 1478 it is recorded that—

“*Dominus Thomas Keryell est fundator. § Abbas de Leyston est pater Abbas; vj habent ecclesias; curati sunt canonici sed non perpetui; fundata erat in honore Sancti Thomæ Martiris Anno m° c° [c] xij°.* Dominus Johannes Brondysch Abbas. Frater Johannes Chambyr Vicarius de Tonge,” etc.

At the Visitation of 1482 (August 30) the Bishop describes the canons as being pretty laudable in exterior matters, and that, as Martha, they administer all things. He orders the church to be repaired inside and out, and the brethren to work from morning till night. The then Abbot was Robert Waynfleet. In 1488 Brother John Ramsay was found “*protervum et inter fratres non ydoneum ad concordiam;*” and three years later another erring canon appears, one Edward Simon, who was convicted of incontinency with a married woman. The penalty inflicted was forty days

\* In Suffolk.

† *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, ix.

‡ Bodleian Library, Ashmole MS. 1519.

§ *Fundator* here is equivalent to patron.

*in gravi culpa* and banishment to Wendling Abbey. In 1494 Richard Coley was Abbot, an office he still held at the visitations of 1497 and 1505. At the visitation of October 9, 1497, the church was said to be very ruinous and ordered to be re-edified. Brother John Boston was brought before the Visitor for not rising to Matins, and for punishment put on bread and water every Friday till Christmas.\*

There is a curious circumstantial account of the misconduct of the last Abbot, William Sayer, by one of the King's Visitors, in *Letters relating to the Suppression of the Monasteries*.†

Langdon Abbey was suppressed with the lesser religious houses in 1535. The so-called "Deed of Surrender" in the Public Record Office bears the signatures of William Sayer, Abbot, and ten canons. To it is appended a very good impression of the convent seal, with the Blessed Virgin and Child on one side, and the martyrdom of St. Thomas of Canterbury on the other.

After the Suppression the Abbey was granted to the Archbishop of Canterbury, but has long since passed into lay hands. It is now the property of Benjamin Taylor, Esq.

The site of the Abbey is marked by a substantial red-brick house; in front perfectly plain, but behind with considerable portions of good Elizabethan brickwork. This house I have since found to be built upon the undercrofts of the *cellarium* or cellarer's buildings. They are still used for their original purpose as cellars.

The site of the church and conventual buildings is an orchard behind the house; but, with the exception of a fragment of flint masonry, which we now know to be part of the church, nothing whatever remained above ground when I first visited the spot in 1880. After a survey of the orchard, I found lines of walls indicated in various directions by their tops being just level with the turf, but these gave no clue to the destinations of the buildings. Besides this, nothing could be made out, and I had to be satisfied with Mr. Taylor's

\* For these extracts from the Visitations of Langdon Abbey I am indebted to my friend the Rev. J. T. Fowler, M.A., F.S.A., of Durham.

† Camden Society: London, 1843.

consent to my tracing out the walls by the aid of spade and pick at some future date.

During Eastertide 1882 I paid a second visit to Langdon, and, Mr. Taylor having assented to our excavations, operations were commenced on April 15th by myself and four other amateur navvies.\* The work was carried on more or less regularly until July 29th, by which date we had excavated as much as was practicable.

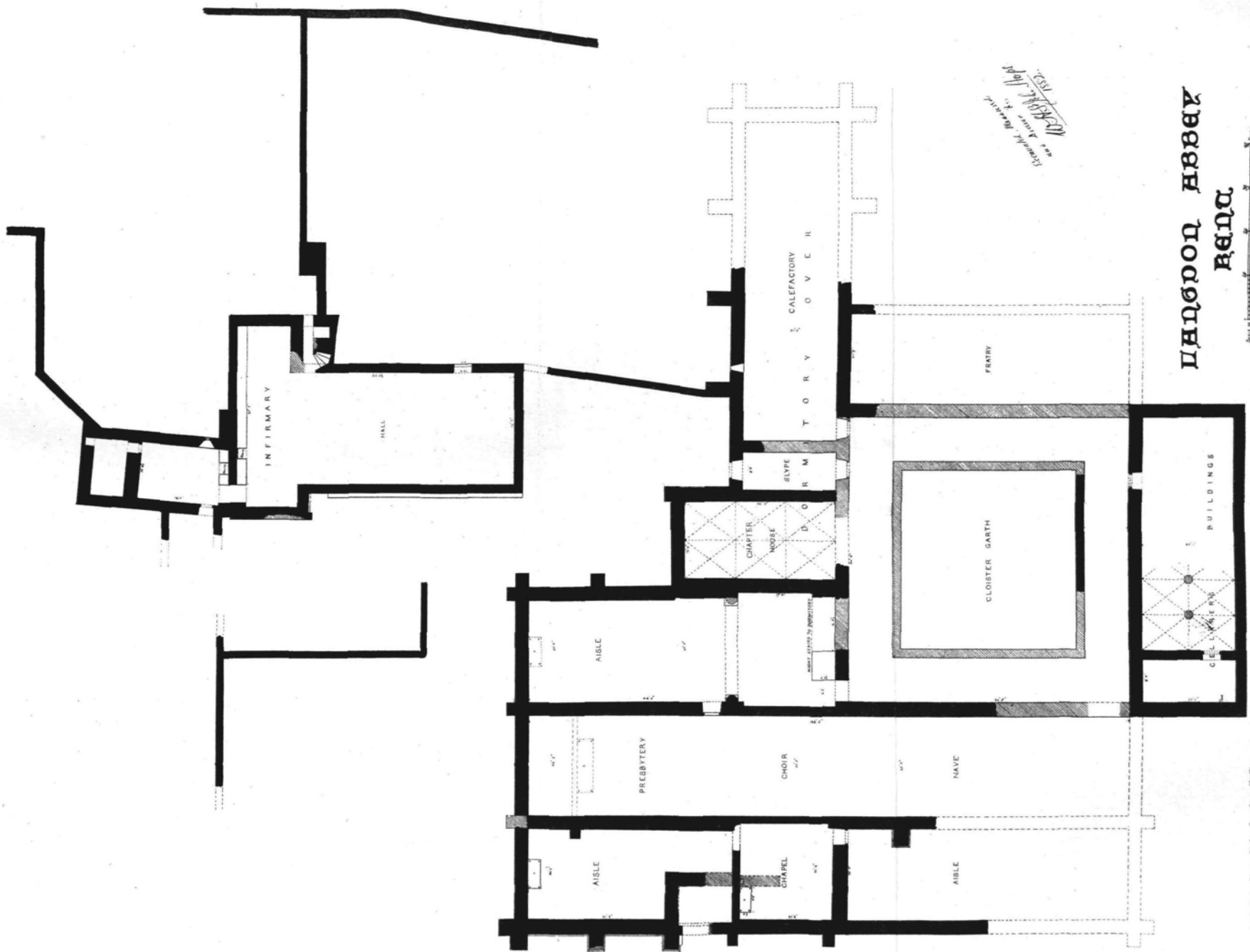
With the assistance of £5 granted by the Kent Archaeological Society, we have been able to trace out nearly the whole of the buildings, including the greater part of the church, the chapter-house, part of the calefactory, and the whole of the infirmary.

Before describing the Abbey buildings, a few words are necessary on the plan and arrangements of the Præmonstratensians.

Of the thirty-six English Abbeys of the Order, I have been able to get together more or less reliable information respecting seventeen. With the exception of one feature, there is no marked deviation from the normal Benedictine plan, which cannot be accounted for by difficulty of site, and as the White Canons were not their own masons there is no uniformity of plan in their Abbeys, and in fact I know of no two even similar ones. The one peculiar feature, which they share with the Secular and Black Canons, is the plan of their churches. The limits of this paper forbid my entering into the case more fully; but it is a well-ascertained fact that most canons' churches† were originally cruciform and aisleless, and that when at a later period it was deemed advisable to enlarge their churches by the addition of aisles, it was only possible, owing to the cloister and conventual buildings abutting against the nave, to add to it *one* aisle, on the side remote from the cloister. With regard to the choir, no such obstacles intervened, and there was nothing to prevent two

\* My brother navvies were Messrs. Richard Ussher, Charles Barrow, W. Miller, and Tim . . .

† The case has been very ably gone into by my friend Mr. J. T. Micklethwaite, F.S.A., in a paper on *Bolton Priory* for the *Yorkshire Archaeological Association*, and in one on the *Growth of Parish Churches* in *Archæological Journal*, vol. 37.



*1852.  
 W. R. L. J. P.  
 and Son's Esq.  
 Architects, Newcastle.*

ΛΗΠΟΔΟΝ ΗΒΒΒΛ  
 ΡΕΙΩ



aisles being built, as was done at Kirkham, Bridlington, and Breedon.

The plan of the church at Langdon fully confirms this view. We have a nave, apparently once without aisles, but now with one to the north—the cloister being on the south; and a choir with an aisle on each side of almost equal width with itself.\* There is some evidence that each of these is an addition. The choir-aisles are both continued westward to form quasi-transepts.

There is a singular arrangement of walls on the north side of the choir, not easily explained. One of them turns at right angles and passes underneath the cross wall against which the altar stood.†

At the west end of the south choir aisle is the broad first step, with its edge worn by constant tread of feet, of the night-stairs to the dormitory, which were carried over a wide arch, whose jambs remain; these stairs were 5 feet 3¼ inches wide. The extent of the nave westward and the position of the campanile are both unknown. Nor are they easily ascertainable, owing to modern buildings on the possible sites.

There is one point one would wish to see cleared up, and that is the apparent absence of doorways. There is a door from the cloister into the choir aisle, but no trace of the usual and universally found door from the cloister into the nave. There is likewise a door on the south side of the presbytery, but no trace of any north doors except the one out of the north choir aisle into the nave-aisle. This is all the more curious, since the walls are mostly left to a sufficient height‡ to have shewn the doors themselves, or the gaps where the ashlar jambs stood, had they existed.

It is to be noted that the walls of the choir proper, which extended westward as far as the east cloister-alley, are solid, as at Rochester Cathedral and the sister Abbey of Bayham. Perhaps the thin side walls of the choir are the bases of screens carried above the stalls, as at Canterbury, so as to

\* The lighting of the eastern arm must have been effected by a clerestory, as at Rochester and St. Alban's.

† See Plan.

‡ On the average about 3 feet, but nearly twice that height in the chapter-house.

enable sick canons in the choir aisle to hear the service. From the perfect condition of the wall-plaster it appears that the canons' seats, at any rate at first, were only movable benches.

As the area was not excavated, we are in ignorance as to the ritual arrangements. We found, however, the base of an altar, with its tile footpace, in the western division of the north choir aisle, beside which is a small floor-drain. Another altar base was found at the east end of the same aisle.

The length of the church does not seem to have exceeded 137 feet; its central width averaged  $22\frac{1}{2}$  feet.

Immediately adjoining the church on the south is the *capitulum* or chapter-house. This was a vaulted apartment,  $34\frac{1}{2}$  feet long by  $17\frac{3}{4}$  feet wide, lighted by three lancet windows on the east, and perhaps a single light on the south. It projects a severy eastward of the rest of the range. The west wall could not be followed. The walls are still covered with a most perfect coating of plaster.

Next the chapter-house is a slype, 8 feet 8 inches wide, which possibly served the double purpose of a passage to the infirmary and cemetery, and the *locutorium* or regular parlour, where conversation was permissible on certain conditions.

Extending southward is the *calefactorium* or calefactory,\* which, as its name denotes, was the place where the canons could go to warm themselves. It was 21 feet wide, but unfortunately its length is unascertainable. The interior is blocked up in part by later walls, apparently of post-Suppression date.

Over the whole of the range formed by chapter-house, slype, and calefactory was the dormitory.† It was usually divided into cubicles, and furnished with night and day stairs. The position here of the latter is not known; but the former, as usual, led down into the church, to enable the canons to descend to Matins without passing through the cold draughty cloister. I think that the Abbot had for his use the portion of the dormitory which extended over the east

\* Called the Common House at Durham.

† The floor of the basement of the eastern range was of lower level than of the church and cloister, owing to the fall of the ground, and the existence above of the dormitory.

end of the chapter-house, and that in it were also kept the muniments and treasure-chests.

Of the cloister, which was  $64\frac{1}{2}$  feet square, we have a portion of the inner wall on the west, but much altered. Nothing remains to shew the arrangements, and the only doors out of it, of whose existence there can be no doubt, are three on the east, opening into the church, chapter-house, and slype respectively, and one on the west, into the *cellarium*. There must have been one on the south, into the fraternity; but its site is not known. Of the fraternity itself we were only able to recover the width, 20 feet 7 inches at the east end.

I have previously mentioned the existence of the sub-vaults of the *cellarium*. The smaller is an oblong room, 21 feet 1 inch by 9 feet 8 inches, with a well-constructed barrel-vault made of chalk blocks. There is a blocked doorway\* towards the west end of the north side, which could hardly have opened into the church. The latter seems therefore to have terminated westward in a line with the east wall of the *cellarium*.

The rest of the western range, which was 21 feet wide, was vaulted with quadripartite groins springing from a central row of octagonal columns. The wall-springers rest on corbels. This vaulting was unfortunately taken down by the father of the present owner.

The site of the kitchen and accompanying offices is uncertain.

We now come to the buildings beyond the cloister. The singularly planned edifice to the south-east of the abbey church is the *infirmatorium* or infirmary, that is the abode of sick and infirm canons. It consists of a large hall, nearly 61 feet long, shaped like a T, with an eastern appendage divided into two apartments. The hall has but one door, on the south. It had an upper floor, which was gained by an octagonal stair on the south side. This stair has an external entrance, but from the broken state of the wall it is not possible to ascertain whether, as was probable, it had a door

\* Not shewn on the Plan. This is not visible externally, owing to the accumulation of soil and debris.



opening from the hall. In the east wall of the large chamber is an almery with pointed head.

From the north-east angle of the hall a short passage leads eastward through the curious triple wall into the smaller appendage. This is not built in the same straight line with the hall, but has a decided inclination towards the south. The western of the two apartments into which it is divided has a north door, with a one-light window opposite, and in its west wall an almery. The window was not glazed, but closed by a shutter, one of the hooks for whose hinge still remains. On the sill, when first uncovered, we found a number of lengths of jamb-shafts, a twin-base of Early English date, and a fine Perpendicular cap with circular bell and octagonal abacus. In the south-east corner is a doorway, leading into the eastern apartment. The only feature in this is a recess in the angle opposite the entrance which is carried down to the floor and provided with a drain.

The Statutes do not mention an infirmary chapel, and those inmates of the *infirmitorium* who were able had to go to the church for the Hour-services. Still an order, that when Lauds was sung in the church, Matins was to be sung *in infirmitorio*, may imply the existence of an infirmary chapel.

It is difficult to see how the infirmary was reached from the cloister. The obvious way is through the slype, but one would expect a more direct route than round the south-west angle of the hall to the door near it. There may have been a door from the calefactory, with a pentice along the wall of the latter, and along the skew wall to the south door of the infirmary hall.

The various outlying walls shewn on the Plan are the boundaries of the infirmary court and garden, and of the cemetery.

Of the buildings of the outer court only a few unimportant fragments remain. The gatehouse stood north-west of the abbey church, and its basement may still be traced on each side of the road which leads northward to West Langdon.

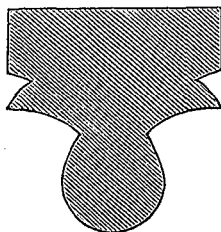
If the result of the excavations may seem unsatisfactory in some respects, such as the want of information as to the

arrangements of the church and other buildings, it must not be forgotten that the necessary research would have been both costly and of detriment to the many valuable trees in the orchard, which forms the site. As it is, it is impossible to speak in too high terms of the liberal manner in which Mr. Taylor afforded us every facility in our researches, and suffered his fair orchard to be cut up and disfigured by ugly trenches and mounds of debris. Owing to the nature of the place and the value of the ground, it was not possible for the works to be left open permanently, but here again we were relieved from much expense by the owner offering to fill them in again at his own cost.

The value of the results, from an archæological point of view, is very great, for not only has the plan of another Kentish Abbey been rescued from oblivion, but the plan itself exhibits a singular disposition of the buildings. Out of my own collection of upwards of one hundred monastic and conventual plans, there is not one which may be described as even approximately similar.

The numerous tiles, bases, pieces of mouldings, etc., discovered during the excavations have been carefully preserved by the owner. It would seem from these fragments that the majority of the work was of late Transitional or Early English date, which agrees very well with the date of the foundation.

The accompanying Plan was drawn by me from measurements taken during the excavations.



Section of Vaulting-rib, from the Chapter House.