

CLARE PRIORY.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE BURY AND WEST SUFFOLK, AND ESSEX ARCHÆOLOGICAL
INSTITUTE,

BY REV. H JARVIS,
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PRESIDENT:

LORD JOHN HERVEY.

The Earls of Clare, the possessors of the ancient Castle, now in ruins, were the founders of Clare Priory.

The first of this family that settled in England was Richard, son of Gislebert, surnamed Crispin, Earl of Eu and Brionne, in Normandy. This Richard Fitz-Gilbert—for so he was called—was at the battle of Hastings, and received lands and honours for his services. One of his titles was Richard de Tonbruge, from the town and castle of Tonbridge, in Kent, one of the ninety-four manors said to have been granted to him by the Conqueror. And he was also called Richard de Clare, from his manor in Suffolk, which became the chief seat of his family, and in virtue of which his heirs bore the title of “De Clare.”

This Richard de Clare had four sons,* Gislebert, Roger, Walter, and Robert, of whom Robert was the ancestor of Robert Fitz-Walter, the leader of the Barons in their conflict with King John. But from his eldest son, Gilbert, surnamed the Red Gilbert, the third in descent was Richard Earl of Clare, who married Amicia, daughter and eventually sole heiress of William Earl of Gloucester, who died in the twentieth year of the reign of Henry the Second. A.D. 1173.

The grandson, then, of this Richard Earl of Clare, who was Richard Earl of Hertford—Earl of Clare—and Earl of Gloucester, in right of his descent from the aforesaid Amicia, was the founder of Clare Priory.

He is quaintly described by Matthew Paris as “a very fine gentleman.” But, notwithstanding his devotion in

* Camden's Britannia.

founding the Priory, his life was not a prosperous one. He married Margaret, the daughter of Hubert de Burgh, which so highly displeased the King, Henry the Third, that he compelled him to procure a divorce.*

In the forty-second year of the reign of Henry the Third, Walter de Scoteney, his seneschall and chief councillor, administered poison to him and his brother William. Of this William died; but the Earl with difficulty recovered. However, he also eventually was thought to have died of poison, given to him at the table of Peter de Savoye, the Queen's uncle, in the forty-sixth year of the reign of Henry the Third.

The Monastery, which he founded, was a Friary, of Friars Eremites, of the order of St. Augustine. This order Richard de Clare is supposed to have brought into England. Tanner, in his *Notitia Monastica*, says, "The Friars Eremites were seated at Clare in A.D. 1248, probably by Richard de Clare, Earl of Gloucester, Lord of the Honour of Clare, who brought this kind of mendicants into England." The next date we meet with for the founding of a house of this order is at Woodhouse,† in 1250; after which follows Oxford, in 1252; and it is probable that their first residence in England was at Clare. Their habit was a broad-sleeved white tunic and scapulary, when they were in the house. But in the choir and when they went abroad, they had over the former a cowl and hood, both black, which were girt around with a black leathern thong.

Within the first forty years after the founding of the Priory (1286), considerable grants and gifts of lands were made to the Prior and Brothers of the order. The record of these is found in certain manuscripts in the Harleian collection of the British Museum, bearing the title of "A

* The matter is obscure. Margaret died 1237. Richard married Maud de Lacy 1238, when about 16 years old. The question of a previous marriage is

uncertain, though Henry made it a grievance against De Burgh that he had married his daughter to the King's ward, De Burgh denied this. (Arch. 7, xxxvi. 126.)

† Mackenzie Walcot's *English Minsters*, Vol. ii, p. 250.

Registry of the Deeds of the Monastery of Clare," and the heading of the first of these is, "Carta mortificationis." It is an alienation of certain lands by the King, and consists of twelve acres of land and meadows, situated in Clare, Ashen, and Belchamp St. Paul, for the benefit of the Prior and Brothers Eremites of the Order of St. Augustine, at Clare, and for the enlargement of the Prior's manse, to be held in mortmain, and is attested by the King at Dover, A.D. 1364. Other deeds are records of grants of lands, made by Matilda, Countess of Gloucester and Hertford, for the repose of the soul of Richard Earl of Clare, her husband. And similar ones are made by other persons, who were inhabitants of Clare. The attestations to these deeds furnish us with an indication of the proportions to which the influence of the monastery at this time extended. According to the custom of the times, some affix to the name is commonly found, descriptive of the calling of the persons attesting; such as Walter le Palmer (pilgrim), Galfrid the Cellarer, Richard Pierres the Chapellar, Richard le Hert, (hermit), &c. Then there was a falconer, a huntsman, a carpenter, a wheelwright, a miller, a keeper of the graneries, &c., showing that at this early time in the history of the Priory, the monks were possessed of a numerous retinue of officers, necessary for the management of a considerable establishment.

But, to return: To this Matilda, before alluded to, it is that the ancient roll refers, when it says:

- Q. "But leterally, who was telle me,
This Richardis wiff whom thou praisest so?"
- A. "The Countess of Hertford and Mauld hight she,
Whiche whan deth the knotte had undoo
Of temporal spousailes, betwixt hem twoo,
With divers parcels encesid our foundatioun,
Liche as our monumentys make declaratioun."

These "whimsical lines," copied by Weever from a roll in the possession of his friend Augustus Vincent, Windsor Herald, are in dialogue, and the pictures of a secular Priest and Friar, are curiously worked on the roll of

parchment. "The rubric, or the title in red letters," says Weever of this roll, "is as followeth:—'The dialoge betwix a Secular askyng, and a Frere answering, at the grave of Dame Johan of Acres, sheweth the lineall descent of the lordis of the honoure of Clare, fro the tyme of the fundation of the Freeris in the same honoure, the yere of our Lord a M. ccxlviii., unto the first of May, the yere a M. cccclx.'"*

Joan of Acres was the second daughter of King Edward the first and Queen Eleanor. She was born in the Holy Land, in the first year of her father's reign, at a city named Ptolemais, commonly called Acres, where her mother remained during the wars her father had with the Saracens. She was married at the age of eighteen, A.D. 1290, to Gilbert, Earl of Clare and Earl of Gloucester, the grandson of Richard de Clare, who founded the Priory. She built the convent Chapel and dedicated it to St. Vincent, as we learn from the aforesaid roll.

" Wherefore in honoure, O Vincent of the,
To whom she had singuler affectioun,
This Chapel she made in pure dévotioun."

Outliving her husband, she made choice for the second time of one Ralph de Monte Hermer, or Mortimer, some time her late husband's servant. She left by her first marriage one daughter, named Elizabeth, who built the Chapter House, the "Dortour" or Dormitory, and the "Fraitour," or Refectory. This daughter Elizabeth married Sir John de Burgh, Earl of Ulster. And it is from her that we may date the founding of Clare College in Cambridge. Or, to speak more correctly, "she rebuilt and endowed University Hall, in Cambridge, after its total destruction by fire, and it has since been called Clare Hall." On her death she left an only daughter named Elizabeth, who was married to Lionel, son of King Edward the third, who, with his lady, was buried in the Priory Church.

We may, therefore, conclude that the convent Chapel

*Weever's Ancient Funeral Monuments, Clare, p. 734

or Church (Ecclesia is the word used in the MS. deeds) was built about the year 1296. And the other buildings from the years 1310 to 1314, a little before the death of Elizabeth, wife of Sir John de Burgh, whose arms, with hers, were to be seen in the windows of the three houses which she built.

“ As shewith our wyndowes* in housis thre,
Dortour, chapiter hous, and fraitour, which she
Made oute the ground, both plauncher and wal,
Q. And who the rofé? A. She alone did al.”

At the time of which we are speaking—the 14th century—the town of Clare was a place of considerable importance. It was a fortified town, the favoured abode of royalty, with its Castle and two Priories; its upper gate and nether gate, its great bridge and little bridge, and its municipal authorities, one of whom was dignified with the title of seneschal† of the town. But besides these institutions, it had also three churches, and it is important to observe the distinctness with which they are mentioned. There is one which is spoken of under the title of St. John the Baptist, which was the church belonging to the alien Priory of the Benedictine Monks of Bec, within the castle enclosure. This was founded in the beginning of the 11th century, with seven prebends, and removed afterwards to the College of Stoke-by-Clare. The

* A description of these windows, taken from the Lansdown MSS., in the Harleian collection of the Brit. Mus., No. 639, art. 20, fo. 104, is as follows :

In Clare Priory, in the Convocation House :

On the south side, in a window,

Two escutcheons of Bucher, and underwritten, Johannes Bucher, Archidiaconus, Essex.

In the next,

Two escutcheons ermine, charged with three lions rampant, or, underwritten, Dona de Cotterill.

In the next,

Two pendants of shields, a bend of silver, between two cotices, or, dancette,

under an old fashioned helmet, covered with a chappe, parted per pales, or, and sable-lined gules (red), twixt two wings, the one painted or and argent, the other sable and argent downwards, underwritten, William Clopton.

Another,

Argent a chief G. (dexter base), and two crescents, or.

And at the end of this house,

One glazed, with England and France in borders.

Another, with Clare and Ulster.

Another, with Clare, Ulster, and Bar-dulph.

And St. George there pictured.

† MS. deeds, fol. 19b.

Monks of Chipley Abbey, in the parish of Poslingford, Clare; a small Priory of Austin Canons, "dedicated to the blessed Virgin,"* were also assigned to the same College in 1468. In the neighbourhood of this alien Priory, in December, 1866, a gold pectoral Cross was found at a spot known as the Lady's Walk. It has been suggested that this precious relic formed part of the jewels of Edward III., and had probably been given to his grand-daughter Philippa, only child of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, who married Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March, 1368. The Duke of Clarence, who died in the same year, was buried in the Priory Church, and his daughter, heiress of the De Clares through her mother, Elizabeth de Burgh, resided for some time after her marriage at the Castle.

The Cross is appended to a gold chain 2ft. long, and itself measures $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length. It is delicately worked on both sides, and where the links of the cross are conjoined a fine oriental pearl is affixed. On one side is a representation of the Saviour, over the head is a scroll inscribed I.N.R.I. Beneath the plate which bears the crucifix is a small cavity containing a fragment of wood and stone. It has been conjectured that these relics represent portions, the one of the True Cross, the other of the rock of Calvary. The Cross is now the property of the Queen, and is preserved among her Majesty's jewels and relics of ancient art at Windsor. The 25th volume of the *Journal of the Royal Archaeological Institute* contains a paper from the pen of the late Mr. Albert Way, F.S.A., fully describing and illustrating the Cross.

This Church of St. John the Baptist, as I have said, was in the Inner Bailey. Another is evidently referred to as the church of the place, and answers to the present parish church, though not, perhaps, in its present form, which is in a later style of architecture. Possibly the Crypt, or Mortuary Chapel, still existing, may represent the only remains of the ancient

* Tanner's Notitia Monastica.

Church. But the third, which was founded by Dame Joan at the Priory, is always spoken of as the "Church of the Brothers," or the "Convent Church." "*Ecclesiam dictorum fratrum*," or, "in *ecclesia conventuali*." It is with this latter that we are now chiefly concerned. The nearest approach to certainty in regard to its site is contained in Taylor's *Index Monasticus*, in which he says "the Conventual Church in which so many persons of distinction are interred, is situated at the north east side of the Priory;" and by the furniture and vestments which are enumerated in a deed, assigning them to the care of one John Bachelor, the sacristan, to be preserved for the use of the "altar of the blessed Virgin," we obtain an idea of its distinction. These were all laid up in "one great chest" and "one little chest," and after affixing with due solemnity the Convent seal, the deed concludes with the words, "given at our Chapter House on the third day of the month of August, 1361.

In this church Joan of Acres was entombed. She died in her Manor of Clare, the tenth day of May, 1305, "when Edward the Second and most of the nobility of England were present at her funeral."* And in deeds bearing date 1307 and 1308, mention is made of suffrages "for the soul of Dame Joan, once Countess of Gloucester, daughter of our most serene Prince Edward, the illustrious King of England, whose body rests buried in the Church of the Brothers, of the Order of St. Augustine, at Clare." "In the Church," says Kennet, "is still seen the carved railing that surrounded her burial place," and some have supposed that this railing is the beautiful screen, adorned with monograms, which now encloses a pew on the south side of the Parish Church.

Here also, says Weever, in the Austin Friars by his mother, was interred the body of Edward Monte Hermer, eldest son of Joan of Acres, and her second husband.

Next we learn that Lionel, Duke of Clarence and Earl of Ulster, in Ireland, was buried in the chancel of this

* Grose's Antiquities.

Priory Church, together with his wife Elizabeth, daughter and heiress of Sir Wm. de Burgh. She “departed this world, in the year 1363, and he about five years afterwards.”*

Lionel, Duke of Clarence, died at Alba Pompeia, in the Marquisate of Montferrat in Piedmont, on the vigil of St. Luke the Evangelist, A.D. 1368, in the forty-second year of his father’s reign.† First he was buried in the city of Pavia, hard by Augustine the Doctor; and afterwards interred at Clare, in the Convent Church of the Austin Friars, in England. Lionel bequeathed, by his will, his body to be buried in England, in the aforesaid Church, before the high altar; and gave thereto a black suit, with all belonging thereto, as also his black cloth, embroidered. Accordingly, in one of the Harleian MS. deeds, bearing date 1377, mention is made of the expenses of his funeral obsequies, and ‡ “ten marks were appointed to be paid in complete discharge of all the expenses incurred for the aforesaid funeral.” The deed concludes with the words, “In the year of our Lord 1377, on the 12th day of the month of September, in the chapter-house of the aforesaid Convent.”

The following extracts from a volume of Robert Aske’s collections, written in the reign of Henry VIII. furnish us with the names of the distinguished persons whose remains rested in this Church.

“In Sir Thos. Phillips’s Library (Fol. 94b). The names of the nobles buried in the Freere Augustyn’s, of Clare. Sir Richarde Erle of Clare, Lionell Duke of Clarence, Dame Joane of Acres, Sir Edmond Monthermer, son of the said Joane; John Weyburgh, Dame Alice Spencer, Willm. Goldryche, Sir John Beauchamp, Knight; John Newbury, Esq.; Willm. Capel, and Elianor his wyfe; Kempe, Esquire; Robert Butterwyke, Esquier;

*Stow.

† Camden’s Annals of Ireland.

‡ MS. deeds, fol. 42b.

The Lady Margarete Scrope, daughter of Westmereland ; Joan Candyssle, daughter of Clopton ; Dame Alianor Wynkeperry, Sir Edmund last of the Mortimers, Erle of Marche, Sir Thomas Gily, and his furste Wyfe ; Lucy, Wife of Water Clopton ; Sir Thomas Clopton, and Ada his Wyfe."

Whether, at the dissolution of the Monastery and destruction of the Church, these remains of the illustrious dead were exhumed and removed, and, if so, in what spot they now rest, I have been unable to determine. During the late restoration however a handsome monumental slab recording the death of one of the Priors has been brought to light.

Upon what may be called the domestic history of the Priory, little is recorded. The Prior evidently occupied a position of dignity and influence, whilst there are instances of individual monks who rose to considerable eminence.

Henry Bederic, a native of Bury St. Edmund's, who was a monk of Clare Priory, it is said, shewed so ready a capacity and zeal after learning, that his superiors sent him to the English, and afterwards to foreign universities, where he acquired such distinction that he became a Doctor of the Sorbonne at Paris. After his return to England he became greatly renowned for the eloquence of his preaching. His great reputation raised him eventually to be Provincial of his Order throughout England. He was also author of several works on Theology, and flourished in the reign of Richard the second. John of Bury, also a Monk of Clare, is mentioned in Kennett's history among the men of learning in the reign of Henry the seventh.

Thus far of the pre-Reformation history of Clare Priory. It has been brought down to the year 1389.

The present remains of this once noble foundation now claim a brief notice in conclusion.

Part of the buildings is said to have been burnt down and rebuilt in the reign of Henry the seventh, and the

present front is supposed to be of that date ; but the hall door and the little court at the south eastern end of the present building, with its handsome groined roof and window, in which, not long since, in ancient stained glass, was a representation of a head of our Saviour, now destroyed, and the stone staircase ascending from it, are without doubt a part of the original building. So are the windows of the Chapter House, lately opened out on the Eastern side of the Cloisters. Of the Cloisters themselves, now in ruins, certain arches are still remaining on the South side, and the record remains, that they, with the Chapter House, were dedicated by William Bishop of London on the 19th February, 1380. Leading from the Cloister Court are three doors. One of these opening to the North, led into the Church.. On the eastern side of it still remains the stoup for holy water for the use of those entering from the Cloisters. The Church itself extended nearly east and west, along the northern side of the Monastery, and, judging from the only existing remains, must have been of fine proportions. All visible trace of it has now been lost, with one exception. An exception, however, sufficient to indicate with certainty its locality, and affording a significant representation of its character. On removing a coating of old plaster on what was the south wall of the church, some very interesting and beautiful stonework was exposed to view, which proved to be the sedilia of the church, with pointed arches and capitals in the early English style of architecture, the seats still remaining in solid oak. At the time it was discovered, these retained their ancient position, but being hopelessly decayed, as soon as they were exposed to the outer air, the whole of the woodwork crumbled into dust. The stonework, however, still remains, and has been rendered as secure as possible, by the present proprietor.

The door adjoining, and opening from the cloisters to the east, probably led to the Chapter House and dormitory spoken of in the "roll," and in all likelihood situated contiguously to the church, as was usual for the con-

venience of the monks, at the midnight services. At the south eastern corner of the Cloister-garth, or court, is a third door of similar character and dimensions. This is supposed to have led to the Refectory, which almost invariably skirted the southernside of the Cloisters, as the Chapter House and Dormitory did the eastern, and the Church the Northern.* There are still ruined walls and buttresses in this locality, which are the remains of these buildings, but the fabrics themselves have long since disappeared.

The infirmary, however, remains still further to the south-east in the fine building which has recently been restored. Here, then, we must rest, until further light can be thrown upon the subject. In the reign of Henry the Seventh, the 20th day of January, 1493, Roger Drury, Esq., of Hawstead, in Suffolk, left, by his will, to the Friars of Clare, thirteen shillings and fourpence, showing that the Monastery continued to be occupied by the Friars in this reign, and there is no reason to doubt that it continued to be a Friary till the dissolution of the Monasteries, when it was granted by King Henry the Eighth to Richard Friend. At his death it passed, through his sister, Thomasine, wife of Thomas Barker, into the family of that name. In the year 1604 we find the Priory the property of Thomas Barnardiston, Esq., who wainscotted the large room at the south end of the gallery. And amongst the carvings over the fireplace in that room we find his initials and the date of the year, as above stated. In 1655 it was the property of Sir Thomas Barnardiston, Knight, who was created a baronet in the fifteenth year of the reign of Charles the Second, in 1663.

It continued in this family for many years, until, in the year 1745 we find it again in the possession of a member of the Barker family, viz., Joseph Barker, of Clare. He, at his death, left it to his sisters, Martha and Lydia, jointly. The former married William Shrive, Esq.; the

* Mackenzie Walcot's English Minsters, vol i, p. 551.

latter, Mr. Sayer, afterwards Serjeant-at-Law. After the death of Mr. and Mrs. Shrive, their moiety descended to their only son, William Shrive, as heir-at-law, who, in the year 1778, purchased Serjeant Sayers' moiety, and became the sole proprietor ; bequeathing it, at his death, to John Barker, Esq., in 1803, in whose family it has continued down to the present time.

PEDIGREE OF BACON OF HESSETT,

SET OUT AND PROVED FROM THE WILLS OF THE BACONS AND FROM THE PARISH REGISTERS OF HESSETT.

