

After inspecting the monuments and other features of interest in Yoxford Church, referred to by the Vicar, an adjournment was made to the "Tuns" Hotel, one of those large old-fashioned hostelries which point to the time of busy vehicular traffic by road, before the railway effected such a change in rural life. The party, augmented at the other places visited, was here joined by other influential residents in this locality; altogether about eighty sat down to dinner.

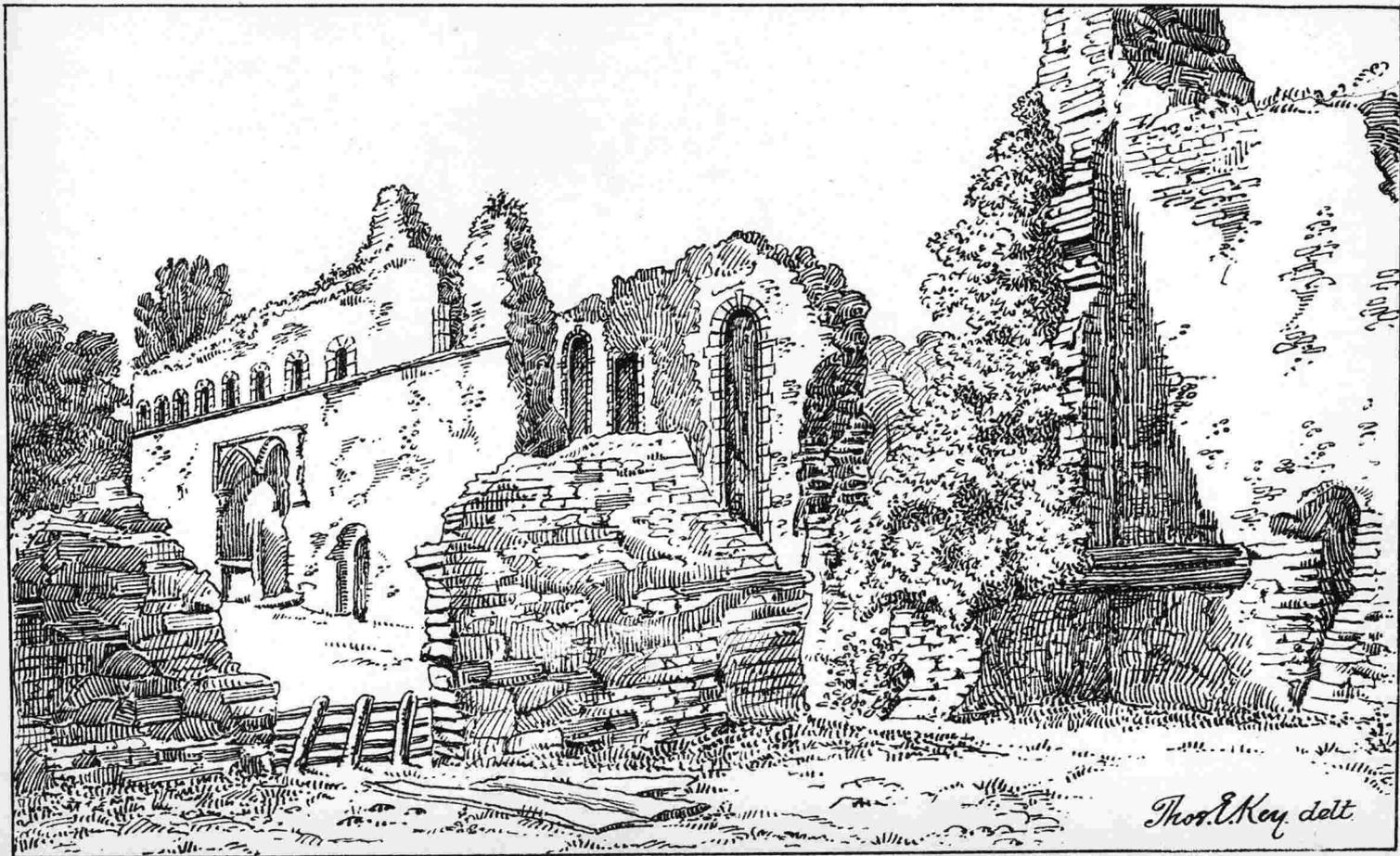
On the proposition of the Rev. M. B. Cowell, a hearty vote of thanks was accorded to Dr. Taylor for his interesting lecture. It was then proposed by the Rev. Francis Haslewood, and seconded by Mr. Sterling Westhorp, that the following ladies and gentlemen be elected members of the Society: The Ven. Archdeacon Gibson, Mrs. Ridley, Mrs. Todd, Miss Key, Rev. George Castleden, M.A., Mr. H. J. Wright, and Mr. C. J. Osborne. Mr. Freeman Wright then moved a hearty vote of thanks to the Rev. Francis Haslewood, the Honorary Secretary. The excursionists then proceeded to Sibton Abbey. The journey lay through more beautiful green roads, and on dismounting at Sibton the visitors were directed to the interesting old ruins of Sibton Abbey, approached by a long narrow lane, with a tall hedge on either side. Coming into the open there were the old ruins, which, with the surroundings, had a charm for the antiquarians. By the courtesy of E. Levett Scrivener, Esq., the ruins of this fine Cistercian Abbey were thoroughly explored.

## SIBTON ABBEY.

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

An Address delivered at Sibton, on July 7, 1892.

Sibton Abbey, founded in 1150, by William Fitz Robert, for monks of the Cistercian Order, was dedicated to God and in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary. After the Cistercian manner it was colonized from the mother house of Warden. Its further history is an entire blank. Of course there are a great number of records, deeds, and grants of property, etc., but they are not of any particular interest, and we hear nothing more until we get to the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535, when the property of the abbey was valued at £250 a-year, or about £5,000 of our money. It was, therefore, a fairly wealthy



REMAINS OF SIBTON ABBEY  
FROM AN ENGRAVING BY H. DAVY, 1820.

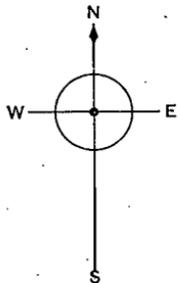
house, and its value being over £200 a-year, it escaped the suppression of the lesser religious houses. Before the suppression the abbot and convent disposed of the whole abbey, its site, and possessions, to the Duke of Norfolk. What he gave for it does not appear in the deed or elsewhere, but the deed was looked upon as good in law, because at the suppression the property of the abbey was finally confirmed by Henry VIII. to the Duke of Norfolk. The Benedictine Order, from which the Cistercian was an off-shoot, was founded by St. Benedict about the beginning of the sixth century, and between that and the 11th it got into a state of decay; all sorts of abuses and laxities had grown up, and the Order had departed very far from the original rule of St. Benet. Thereupon Robert of Molesme reformed the Order, and founded the abbey of Citeaux, where the absolute rule of St. Benet might be observed in its pristine purity. The third abbot from Robert, who became the first abbot, was an Englishman named Stephen Harding, and he, twenty years after the foundation of Citeaux, founded a new Order of Monks, which after Citeaux was named the Cistercian Order. Houses of the new Order rapidly sprang up in all parts of Europe. They were linked by a peculiar chain of discipline, which originated at Citeaux and bound the whole Order together as no other Order was bound. Its principal feature consisted in a regular system of visitation. The abbot of Citeaux, as being the father abbot, was allowed to visit any other monastery of the Order he chose, and he in his turn could be visited by the abbots of the four abbeys next in rank to Citeaux. Each new abbey that was founded was liable to visitation by the abbot of the place from which it started. The abbey of Sibton was colonized from Wardon, and the abbot of Wardon could visit Sibton, but the abbot of Wardon was subject to visitation by the abbot of Fountains, and Fountains in its turn was subject to Clairvaux, and Clairvaux to Citeaux. Besides this, every abbot of the Order was bound once a year to

attend the general chapter held at Citeaux, where all the abbots assembled together and discussed the affairs of the Order, so it is obvious that when such a system was carried out rigidly, as it seems to have been, it was productive of unanimity in the Order, and produced a state of things such as no other Order could have. These facts explain the uniformity of the Cistercian buildings. Not only had they a regular rule which they all obeyed, but they had one particular rule of laying out their buildings. It is so uniform all over the country, that it is easy to tell a Cistercian abbey, simply by means of its ground plan, without knowing anything of its history. The churches were all built on one particular plan, of which Kirkstall is a good normal example, though in later churches certain modifications occur.

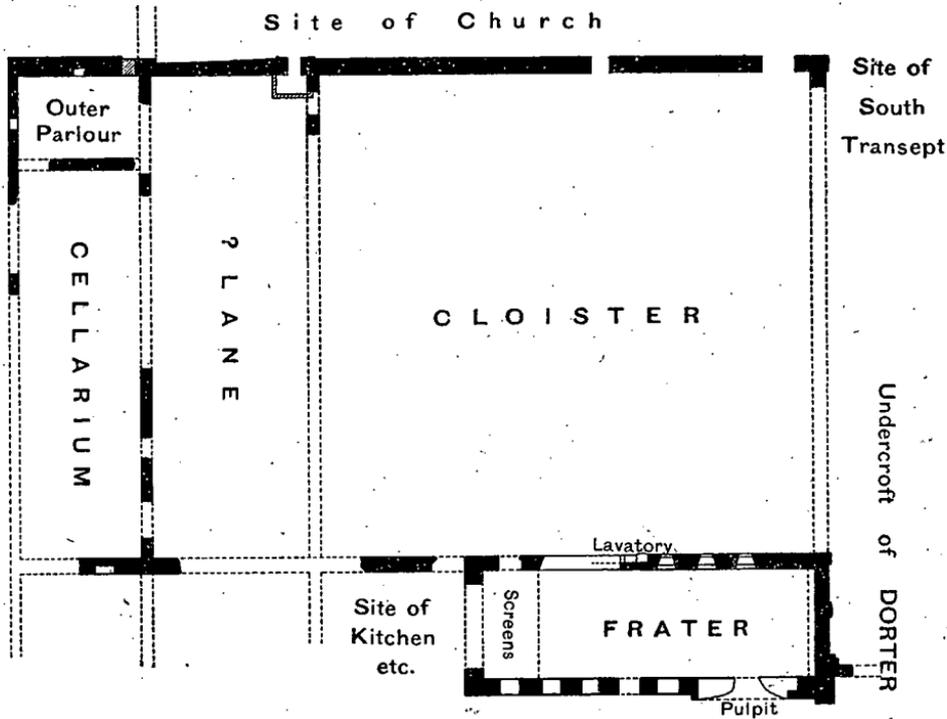
The Cistercian was a wealthy Order, and, looking after their affairs as closely as they did, the monks were able to put up good buildings all over the country. In fact, most of the big ruins we have in this country are those of Cistercian abbeys. That may seem an odd thing, but after all there is nothing extraordinary about it, because one of the first rules in the *Consuetudines* was that, whenever an abbey was founded, it should be in a remote place, and far from the abodes of mankind. As the abbey was to be planted in a lonely spot it can be understood that, when the suppression came, it was easier to go to some house close to a town than to go into the country where the roads were bad and often impassable to fetch away stuff which could be had nearer. That is the reason why the great abbeys of Fountains, Rievaulx, Tintern, etc., are in such a good state of preservation to this day while others are utterly despoiled. In regard to the building here, Sibton abbey has been very much destroyed. The only parts that are really left are a mere shell of a building and a few fragments of walls. (*See plan*). They all, however, tell us something. The great wall on the north formed the south side of the church, and at its east end is the angle of the nave and transept. On the south

SIBTON ABBEY  
SUFFOLK

Plan of existing remains  
measured & drawn  
by Thos. E. Key.  
1892.

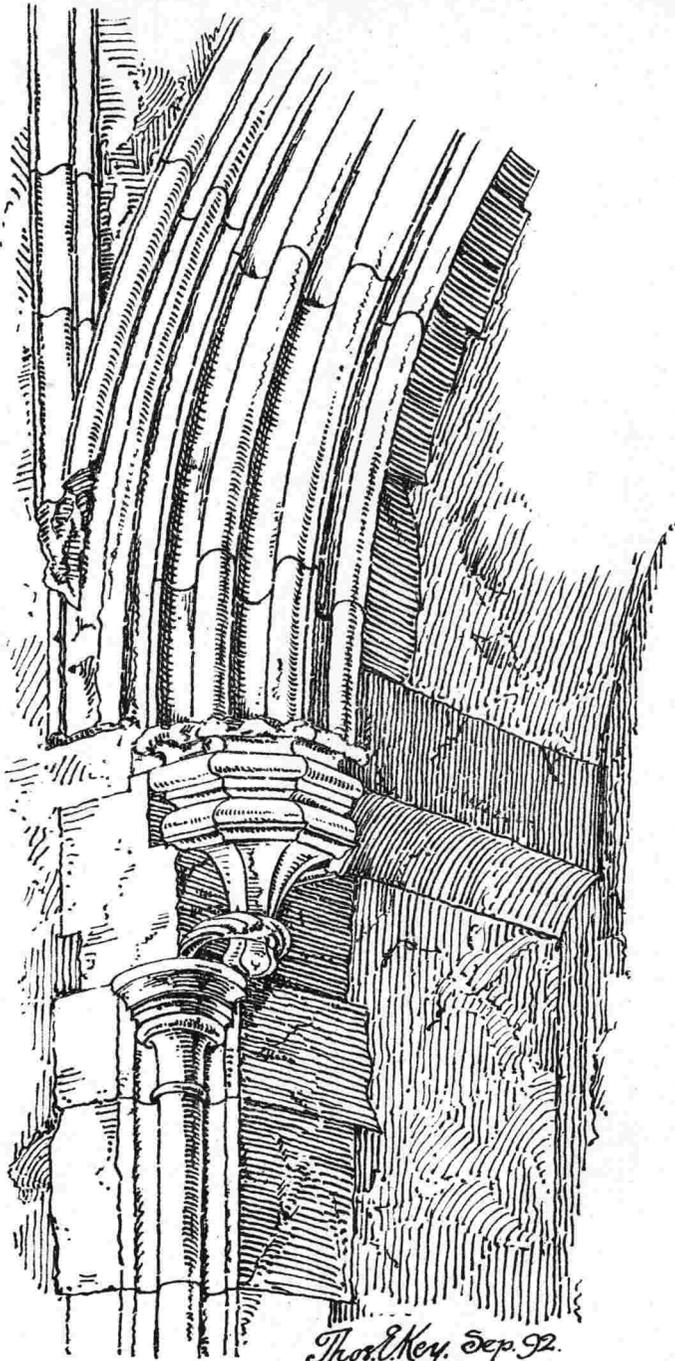


Scale of Feet  
10 5 0 10 20 30 40



side of it is the site of the cloister. Of the church itself there is nothing left, except that south wall. All the early Cistercian abbey churches were built on one set plan, with a long nave with aisles, a short and aisleless eastern arm which was the presbytery, a low central tower, and transepts with two or three chapels on their eastern sides. The quire was under the central tower and extended two or three bays down the nave. The rest of the nave was not a mere open space such is now seen in our cathedral and abbey churches, but was used also as the quire of the *conversi* or working brothers of the abbey. This mention of the *conversi* recalls another peculiarity of the Cistercian Order. This was that the inmates of each house were divided into two great companies, the monks proper, and the *conversi* or working brothers. The working brothers were in no degree socially inferior to the monks, they were generally drawn from the same class, and there was no reason why a *conversus* should not have been of gentle birth. It is still a popular notion that monks were drawn from the lower orders of the people; but such a view is quite erroneous. In the 12th century, when these Cistercian abbeys were in full swing, the men of the upper classes had practically only two courses open to them for living; they must enter some religious order or become soldiers. It was not considered a proper thing then for the son of a gentleman to go into any kind of trade, so it was from the upper classes that both monks and *conversi* were drawn. The chief difference between the *conversi* and the monks was this: that whereas the monk was a man of letters, or in other words one who could read, the *conversus* was a man who could not read. It was expressly enjoined when a man became a *conversus* he was to remain one, and could not go from that grade to the other. That did not necessarily mean he was not to learn reading, but to prevent any ambition on his part, he was supposed to enter this strict life and remain in it all his days, so he had nothing to look forward to but the life he entered upon with full knowledge. It

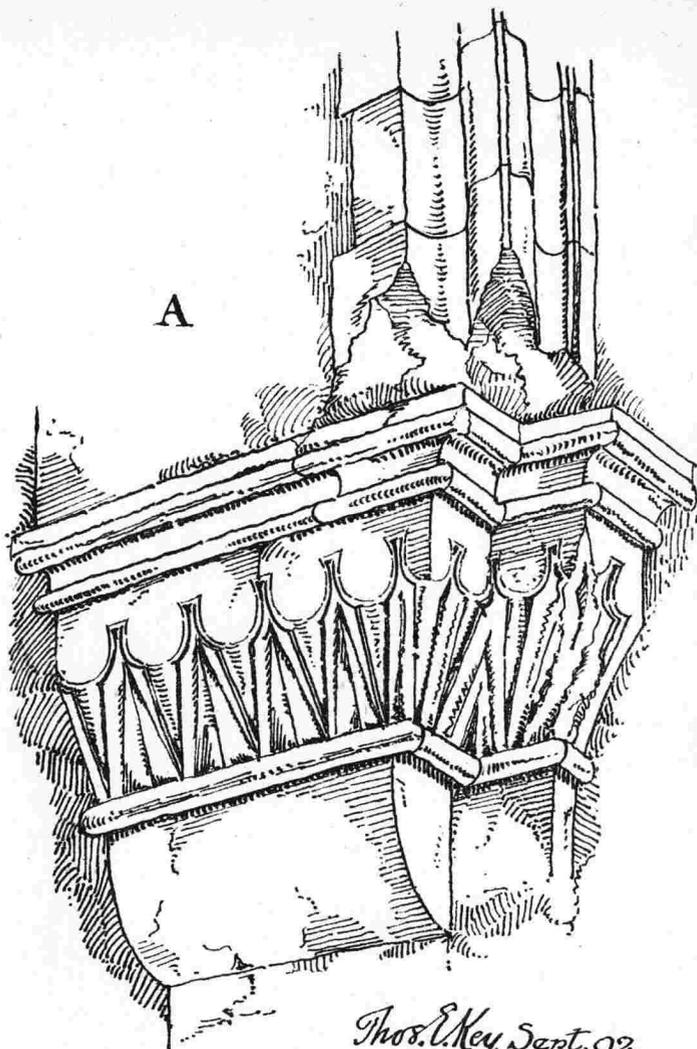
was expressly stipulated that he was to be told plainly the whole of the hardships of the life, and all he would expect, so he entered upon it with his eyes open. These two classes of the community had their own parts of the building. The monks had generally the building on the east and south sides of the cloister, while the *conversi* had their lodgings in the range of buildings on the west side of the cloister. Those who have visited Fountains abbey may remember the great building there, 300 ft. long, which the guides miscall "the cloister." This great building was termed the *cellarium*, because it was under the charge of the cellarer, and under him the *conversi* had to work and take their orders. The whole of the first floor of this building was their dorter, or sleeping chamber, and had a special flight of steps communicating with the church. In one end of the ground-story were kept stores, and in the other end was the frater, or dining hall, for the working brothers. The monks had their own dorter and frater. The dorter of the monks here extended southwards from the transept, and had under it the vestry, chapter house, parlour, and other offices. Eastward of it would be a great block of buildings called the infirmary. This was not necessarily the hospital for sick folk, but was also where the aged and infirm monks and those who had been professed fifty years lived permanently. Here too those who could obtain temporary relaxation from the rule passed their time. There happens to be here, at Sibton, an abnormal arrangement of the buildings on the south side of the cloister which must be noticed. In Cistercian houses of normal plan, the building in which we are assembled, which was the monks' frater or dining hall, would have stood at right angles to the cloister. On the east side of it would have been a square room with a great fire-place, where the monks were allowed to come and warm themselves in cold weather. On the west side was another important building, the kitchen, which always adjoined the cloister. Here for some reason



*Thos. Key. Sep. 92.*

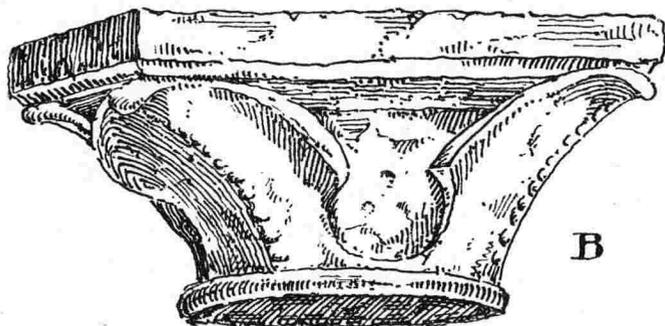
SIBTON ABBEY.

REMAINS OF CORBEL AND ARCH OF LAVATORY.



A

*Thos. E. Key, Sept. 92.*



B

SIBTON ABBEY.

- A. DETAIL OF CORBEL OF FRATER ARCH.
- B. CAPITAL FOUND DURING EXCAVATION IN 1692.

which is not quite clear, the frater stands east and west, and does not abut upon the cloister as it ought to do according to the normal Cistercian arrangement. The east end has a blank wall because it here stands against another building. Before it stood the high table. It will be noticed that the jamb of the window immediately to the south comes down to the floor, whereas the sills of the other windows are four feet from the floor, and outside there is a projection in the wall. These arrangements mark the place of the reading pulpit, from which, during meals, one of the brethren read a portion of Scripture, or an extract from some good work. The western-most bay of the frater was cut off by a partition, and formed what is called the "screens." To the west of the frater was the kitchen and its adjoining offices. Of the western range here, nothing is left but a few scraps of walls, and without further examination its extent and arrangements cannot be definitely ascertained. Here, however, should be the long building for the use of the *conversi*. In the south wall of the cloister are some interesting remains of the lavatory where the monks washed before meals. Above the lavatory the frater windows are cut off by the string course for the cloister roof.

In reply to a question as to the presence of a font there, Mr. Hope said: "I was asking myself what business that font did here, because the Cistercian houses did not possess the right of baptism. One of the rules of the Order forbids baptism, except in cases of necessity when no priest was present, and even enjoins that if an abbot, or any member of the Order, should presume to stand as god-father, he should from the day of his offence until the next general chapter (which, of course, might be nearly a year), every Friday have nothing but bread and water in expiation of the offence."

Mr. F. W. Brooke explained that the font was once in Darsham church, but how and why it came to Sibton was not known.

The present font in Darsham church is said to have been presented early in the 16th century.