

Before the erection of a new tower adjoining the new church, troubles, rumoured first, then foreshadowed by the Bull legalizing the forfeiture of the revenues of the Priory for the endowment of Cardinal Wolsey's projected college at Ipswich, broke upon the parish. The Priory was suppressed. If the revenues could be coveted by Wolsey, they could be seized by the King, and when Wolsey failed the King succeeded. In the next century and a half the spoliation of the parish and its church proceeded unchecked. Later, religion became almost entirely defunct. To this day but one service weekly is held in the church. The priest responsible for the duty has been burdened with the charge of one or more other parishes, and no priest has been resident. Neglect and dilapidation brought the once magnificent, still noble, edifice almost to ruin. However, it is now being restored under the skilful treatment of Mr. A. E. Street, and by the energy of Lady Blois, the mother of the present patron, to whom abundant praise is due. May the day be not far distant when the departed glory of Blythburgh shall be recovered; more when the complete plan shall be carried out for the occupation of a site so ancient as the sepulture of Anna and Firminius, so hallowed as its reservation for the worship of God, perhaps from Apostolic times, by a church magnificent for its age and honour, not despoiled and neglected, but loved and enriched as never before.

BLYTHBURGH PRIORY.

BY H. WATLING.

These once picturesque ruins suffered considerably about the year 1850 from the despoilers hands, as a great part of them were carted away to repair the roads, &c. Excavations were made upon the site, and beneath the debris were discovered ancient coins, keys, Encaustic tiles bearing the emblems of the Zodiac, &c., of great interest. These unfortunately passed into private hands; the landlord of the "White Hart Inn," who occupied the land at the time, disposed of them to the highest bidder. When visited in 1837 and 1840, some considerable portion of the ruins were then standing. (There are views of them in Grose's Antiquities, Ancient Reliques by Kirby and Gardner, &c.) The founder of this small Priory is not exactly known, but it is probable that the Abbot and Monks of St. Osyth, to whom King Henry I. had given the tithes of Blythburgh, were in reality the founders of this small priory of Augustines. This Priory was, by Gardner, called a daughter-house and not a cell of St. Osyth, probably correct, for its revenues were valued separately from those of the parent establishment. The spot selected as the site of this monastery occupies a knoll of ground rising from the southern banks of the river Blyth, and

commanding a view of its various windings for several miles. By the appearance, when the debris was cleared away, it was a cross-aisled fabric and dedicated to the Virgin. Some of its ornamentations were evidently Norman. The number of canons resident in this priory was not large. In 1475 there were but three, besides the prior, for in the will of John Waley, of Blythborough, bearing that date; there is this clause:—"Item, Lego Domino Priori et Conventui S. Marie de Blitheburgh 40s. Viz. Domino Priori pro parte sua 20s. et cuilibet canonico 6s. 8d." At the time of the suppression its inmates amounted to but five, though the establishment had very early acquired considerable revenues. During the excavations mentioned several human skeletons were found scattered upon the pavement of the Conventual Church, as if some resistance had been made by the inmates at the time of its suppression, and the buildings rased to the ground over their heads, and thus got entombed beneath the rubbish.

* HOLY ROOD CHAPEL, BLYTHBURGH.

This chapel was erected on the north side of the main street at Blythburgh, leading to the bridge, and some remains of the old walls were standing in 1754, when Gardner published his history. It must have been one of the religious houses mentioned in Domesday Book as then appended to the parochial church, of which Walberswick was unquestionably the other. In 1384 mention is made of some design to remove the house of Black Friars at Dunwich to the town of Blythburgh, as the sea had washed away the shore almost up to the walls of their convent. This might have taken place but no certain evidence exists that the proposed removal ever took place; Gardner tells us that they continued at Dunwich to the Dissolution. This Chapel of Holy Rood is mentioned in the following bequests:—Oct. 5th, 1503, Wm. Collett by will gave to the reparation of the Chapel 20d. Again in the will of Alexander Richardson, of Walberswick, is a legacy to "the good rode at Blythburgh brygge." In another is a donation to the repairs of the "Cawsey in Blythborough, that is to say, from the picture of our Lord so northward to the Cross in Bulkham Streta." So it will be seen that a Chapel did evidently once exist in this locality.

On returning to the churchyard the attention of the excursionists was drawn to the remarkable inscription below the East window. It consists of twelve letters or monograms, in flint work, definitely artistic in execution, and seems unique when its length is taken into consideration. No consistent interpretation has been attempted until lately. Dr. Gowers, F.R.S., of London, has suggested the following as its significance, with his permission it was mentioned to the members,

* Poem on Holy Rood Chapel, by Agnes Strickland, Church of England Magazine, LXI. 16, 48.

but he intends shortly to publish the grounds on which it is based. These are sufficient in range and degree to make it unfair to reject the interpretation until they are considered:—

A N ^{*} I S B ^{*} S t T — M A R I A S t A N ^{*} H K R

Ad Nomina JeSus Beata† Sanctæ Trinitatis (et) MARIÆ Sanctarum ANnæ Honoria Katarinæ Reconstructa.

It should be noticed that the chancel is rebuilt, and that Saints Anne and Katherine are often associated, that to St. Anne was dedicated the corresponding chapel to that of the Blessed Virgin, and that within the Lombardic T, after St., is a shield bearing circular flints, corresponding to the circles of the Pater Filius shield.

Tea was served at the "White Hart Inn," Blythburgh, and the party re-mounted and were driven to Blyford Church, where Rev. John F. Noott, B.A., read the following brief description:—

BLYFORD CHURCH.

The donative of Blyford offers a cordial greeting to the Suffolk Archæological Society, and, although she has not much to be proud of, yet there are a few features of Archæological and Ecclesiastical interest.

As a donative she forms a member of about 300 similar benefices scattered throughout the country, chiefly associated with, and attached to, ancient castles, manors, and proprietary rights.

It is difficult to arrive at a solution of their original foundation. Enquiry has been made at the British Museum for documents, of Ecclesiastical professors at Cambridge, and of an eminent Roman Catholic, but without success, it therefore became necessary to fall back upon tradition derived from an old fellow and tutor of Caius College, Cambridge, who was lord of the manor, patron of the benefice, and owner of a great part of the parish. After careful investigation he said "that the donatives were chiefly founded by a grant of the respective Popes to the various Lords, who agreed to build and endow their respective churches, and in return received the privilege of nominating and presenting their own priest, called the 'patrons donation,' without presentation, institution, or induction by the mandate of the Diocesan Bishop."

The original endowment was fixed at £20 a year, equivalent to £400 a year now.

It appears that the donative of Blyford was appropriated to Blythburgh Priory before the year 1200, temp. Henry II., by Ralph de

* Monograms.

† or Beati.