

RECENT DISCOVERIES ON THE SITE OF THE  
CARMELITE CONVENT OF IPSWICH, AND THE  
OLD RIVER QUAY.

BY NINA FRANCES LAYARD.

Among the religious houses of Ipswich, with which history has made us familiar, the Convent of the Carmelites or White Friars has received the least attention. While fragments of the original walls still mark the sites of the Black Friars, the Grey Friars, and St. Peter's and St. Paul's Priory, and Christchurch Mansion covers the site of Trinity Priory, not so much as a stone of the Carmelite Convent is left above ground to show the space which it once occupied. Its position is only to be gathered from a comparison of the very cursory notices to be found in histories which deal with town or county.

From Dugdale's "Monasticum Anglicanum" we merely learn that it was situated "about the middle of the town in the parishes of St. Nicholas and St. Laurence." Taylor, who is a little more explicit, adds that "it was of considerable extent, reaching, according to Kirby, from St. Nicholas Street to St. Stephen's Lane;" and that "a portion of the building was, after the dissolution, used as the county gaol." As a supplement to these two accounts Wodderspoon speaks of land occupied by this convent, as

reaching "from St. Stephen's Lane to Queen Street at the south side of the Butter Market."

Tracing the boundaries in this somewhat round-a-bout away, a tolerably accurate idea of the situation of the Friary is at length arrived at, and is further established by a reference to old maps which indicate the ground afterwards occupied by the county gaol.

It is not every day that the opportunity of examining such a site occurs, and it was with no common interest that I heard that excavations for building purposes were being carried out on part of the land once belonging to the convent. With the kind permission of the owner, Mr. Walter Cowell, I visited the spot in May last, and spent much time in examining the locality and taking notes of the various objects of interest which the workman's spade brought to light.

Foremost among the discoveries was an old rubble wall of the convent, which was uncovered a foot or two from the surface. It extended southward from the back of the houses in the Butter Market, turning off towards St. Stephen's Lane. Beyond the corner of the wall there appeared to have been an archway measuring 9 ft. across, and opening in the direction of the old market. As this interesting wall was demolished as soon as discovered, I was only in time to see a small portion of it still standing, but quite enough to show the period to which it had belonged. The massive masonry, composed of undressed flints irregularly placed and held together with a great thickness of mortar, spoke of the rude but enduring workmanship of mediæval times. A plan made on the spot shows the position of the wall, and the depth at which various relics were found.

Owing to the depth of the excavation, deposits belonging to many different periods were laid open. A few feet from the surface a small-boled Cromwellian pipe suggested the possible date as somewhere between 1649 and 1659, and a little lower down two fractured Bellarmine jugs, one bearing a coat of arms and crest, brought to



METAL MEDALLION.

*Found at Ipswich, April, 1899. From an enlarged copy by Miss Ada Largent.*

Size of Original, 1 inch by 1.

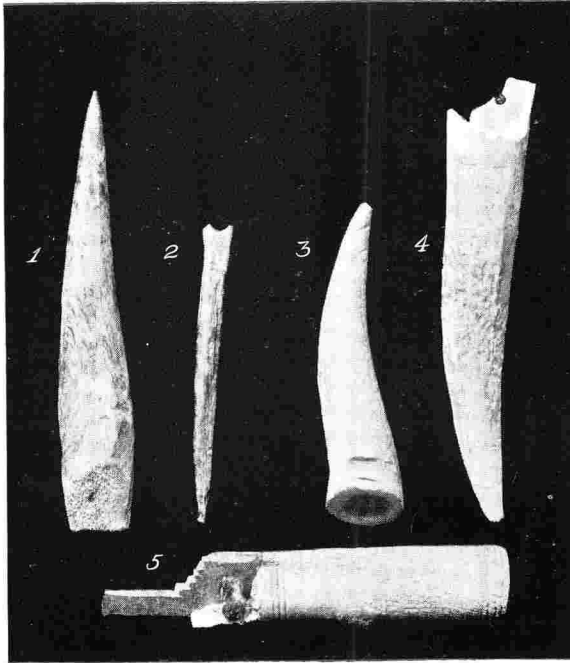
mind the rancour of certain Protestants who condemned the famous Roman Catholic controversialist to appear for ever in caricature on the ale-jugs then in use. An ornamental glazed tile, a broken mug of quaint pattern, and a delicately sculptured figure in white marble, were among the most interesting of the finds that could be distinctly associated with the Convent. The figure is robed in rich garments with girdle and tassels, and is, doubtless, of ecclesiastical design. It is unfortunately fractured, so that all that remains is from the waist downwards. It is now in the possession of the Ipswich Museum. This house of the Carmelites was founded in 1249.

While carefully watching the earth as it was being thrown out by the workmen, I picked up several Nuremberg tokens, and among them a metal medallion of very beautiful anywhere at this depth without coming upon ever fresh indications of the use to which the ground had been put. device and evidently of great antiquity (see illustration). The design which is a pieta, represents the Virgin seated or kneeling with the dead Christ upon her knee. A nimbus encircles her head, and her attitude is suggestive of deep and reverend sorrow. The rigid appearance of the prostrate body is finely portrayed. In the back-ground is seen the cross with scroll and nails, and the medallion is surrounded with a cable-patterned margin.

A medallion similar to this, though not identical in design, was found when removing the stalls of St. Mary's Church, Bury, and is now in the Bury Museum. A copy of it may be seen in the Proceedings of the Bury and Suffolk Archæological Institute for Dec. 14th, 1848. The custom of seeking burial within the precincts of the Convents, which must have often resulted in considerable overcrowding of the burial grounds, finds an illustration on this site, where a very large number of human remains were discovered. Besides two orderly rows of skeletons, about ten in number, which were lying undisturbed seven feet below the surface, many others irregularly placed as

though interfered with after burial were found a few feet deeper down, and it was impossible to turn over the soil. In other parts pits could be traced filled with alternate layers of lime and black mould, suggesting the adoption of a more speedy method of disposing of the dead. The pits were of large size, one of them being 17 feet deep, and measuring 20 feet by eight at the upper part, and narrowing at the base to eight feet by five. As the work of excavation proceeded it became evident that earlier folk than the White Friars had at one time occupied the same situation, for at depths varying from 10 to 23 feet, large quantities of broken pottery appeared, rudely ornamented and of coarse material. Among the fragments were many rims of vessels of gray and blackish pottery, two of these having spouts,\* besides innumerable fragments of other household utensils, mostly urn-like in shape. Many of these were found in very dark mould immediately below a layer of oyster shells, accompanied by horns of *bos longifrons*, jaws and tusks of pigs, &c., but below the foundations of the Convent wall two graves had been dug in the gravel, both of which contained a large quantity of similar pottery. These graves measured respectively six feet by two, and four feet by two. Their outlines could easily be distinguished by removing the dark mould with which they were filled. Among the fragments contained in them the stem of a somewhat massive vessel was found, also a roughly shaped leaden weight. A weight of a similar kind is mentioned as having been discovered among Roman remains at Wilderspool, near Warrington. As to the period to which these interesting relics belong it is difficult at present to speak with any certainty. I have compared many of the specimens with incontestably Roman pottery in Colchester Museum, but found nothing corresponding exactly to them. While a few are evidently hand-made and point to a very early date indeed, others are appreciably heavier and coarser than most Roman ware, though showing marks of the wheel.

\* See Fig. 1.



### HORN AND BONE IMPLEMENTS.

*Found at Ipswich, April, 1899, at a depth of 23 feet.*

- 1.—Awl.                      2.—Needle or bodkin.                      3.—Horn Handle.  
4.—Tine, hollowed and shaped with holes bored to receive a thong.  
5.—Bone comb with six teeth, five of which are broken, the sixth being three times as broad as the rest and sharpened to a fine edge. Held in handle by iron pin.

*Found at a depth of 4 feet.*

A section of the excavation examined where the pottery was discovered, shows 12 feet of made up earth resting upon two feet of loamy sand, below which is soft gravel to a considerable depth, with here and there a substratum of clay.

At the other side of the cutting and nearer to the surface, a bone knife or comb was found at a depth of four feet, lying near to a skeleton, but here the ground did not appear to have been made up.\* This is apparently of Saxon origin. A stag's antler with several of the tines sawn off was found in close proximity to it.

The great depth of the excavation, which was carried down 23 feet below the present surface, makes it possible that ground undisturbed since prehistoric days was opened up; and I have the best authority for believing that several bone and horn implements, which were found embedded in the gravel at a depth of 23 feet, belong to that remote period. These relics consist of a bone needle or bodkin with broken eye, a horn awl, another horn implement partly hollowed and grooved probably the handle of a weapon; and a horn implement through which two holes have been bored, and which may have been used for making the meshes of nets.† Associated with these were fragments of bone, which appeared to be far older than any of those found in other parts of the excavation. These were found in clean gravel at a considerable distance from the pottery, and without any of the black mould which invariably surrounded it.

While these discoveries were being made behind the Butter Market, I paid occasional visits to College Street in St. Peter's, where some old houses had been removed\* to make room for other buildings. The site was an interesting one, from the fact that the quay at one time extended as far as College Street, so that it was not surprising when in digging the foundations the old river bed was at length reached.

Here the workmen came upon the skull and other

\* See Fig. 5.

† See Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4.

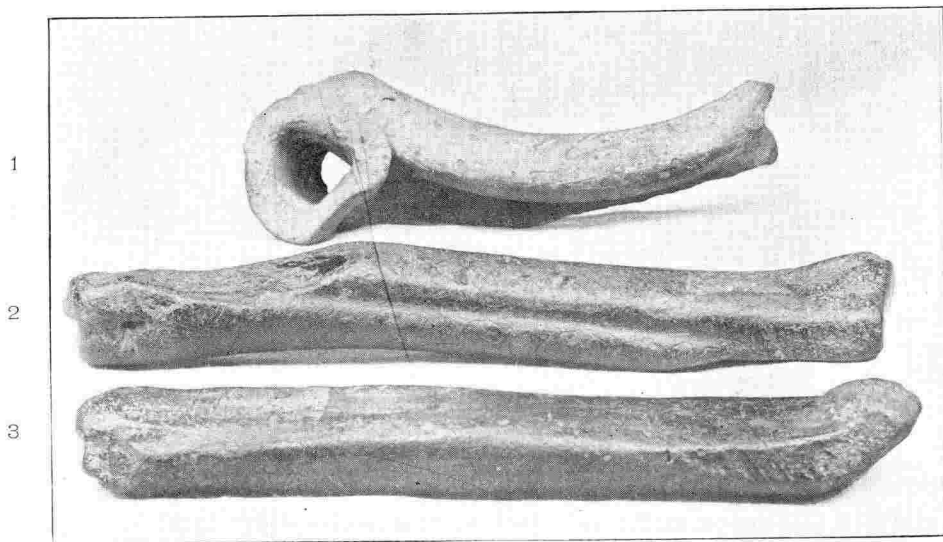
bones of a female skeleton, and lying among them I noticed two bones of very different appearance, which showed signs of having been roughly shaped, though for what purpose it was hard to conjecture. By the kind help of Dr. Laver and Mr. Spalding, Curator of Colchester Museum, I have since been able to identify them as bone skates.\* Such primitive implements were in use in England in Henry II. time, and even considerably later, and an interesting account of them is given by Fitz Stephen in his "History of London." They are also found in Holland, Scandinavia, and Sweden, and are still in use in Iceland. Specimens have been dredged up from the bottom of the Thames, and are, I believe, to be seen in the Guildhall Museum.

Bone-skating was a well-known accomplishment in Holland, and Chamber's "Book of Days," gives a quaint picture of a child using the jaw bones of a horse as a kind of sledge.

The sites from which these interesting relics of the past were obtained are now both built over. A high red brick structure already covers that part of the Convent area which for too brief a space was laid open to the eye of the antiquary, and above the bed of the old river quay, where some unfortunate ancient skater dropped his skates, large business premises have arisen, shutting out for ever that temporary glimpse of old Ipswich.

\* See Figs. 2, 3.





1.—RIM OF VESSEL WITH SPOUT.

*Found at Ipswich, April, 1899.*

2 & 3.—BONE SKATES  $8\frac{1}{4}$  INCHES LONG.

*Found below the foundation of old houses in College Street, Ipswich, April, 1899.*