

## St. Mary's Abbey, Old Cleeve :

*An account of some recent discoveries made at Cleeve Abbey.*

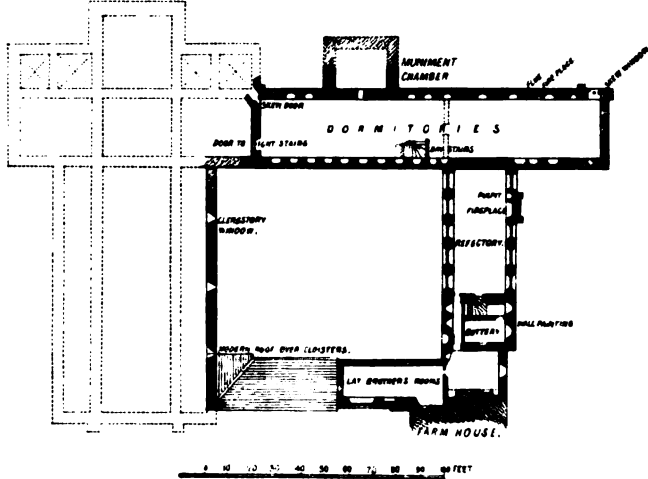
---

BY MR. C. H. SAMSON.

---

I ACCOMPANIED the Rev. Mackenzie Walcott, Precentor of Chichester, to these interesting ruins for the purpose of making a plan of what he considered to be the remains of the church, which until now has been a matter of doubt to many who have visited the spot and written upon the subject. The owner of the property, G. F. Luttrell, Esq., of Dunster Castle, who takes the keenest interest in the matter, at once placed a gang of labourers at our disposal, and in a short time the most important parts of the foundations of walls and columns were exposed to view. I send with this communication a plan of the whole of the buildings, both ecclesiastical and domestic, and the following explanation taken principally from the notes of Mr. Walcott. The church was 161 feet in length, of the purest Cistercian type, consisting of a nave of five bays, with aisles 100 feet by 58 feet 6 inches, a central tower, a transept of 95 feet by 40 feet, with two eastern chapels 13 feet 6 inches square in each wing, and a short eastern presbytery 29 feet by 17 feet without aisles. The pillars of the nave were round ; a beautifully-moulded base nearly perfect was discovered in place, and, like the rest of the stonework found, there was no trace whatever to be seen on the surface of the ground of what lay beneath ; here and there were indications of masonry, but on examination they only proved to be masses of fallen walls ; portions of three other bases were found in their places. The aisles were 11 feet wide, and the central alley 30 feet. A portion of the foundations can be seen on which the stalls and rood

:PLAN OF S: MARY'S CISTERCIAN ABBEY:  
:OLD CLEEVE:



:PLAN OF S: MARY'S CISTERCIAN ABBEY  
:OLD CLEEVE: GEMETRY.



screen stood, the space enclosed is 14 feet by 12 feet 6 inches, and is partly covered with encaustic tiles, evidently on the proper floor level, although not as they were originally laid; a portion of this space is under a huge piece of fallen wall. A large quantity of encaustic tile paving has been found, either dug up out of the earth or built into modern walls, as well as several large patches lying in their original place undisturbed, and in beautiful patterns; the tiles are richly ornamented. There seem to be as many as fifty varieties—heraldic, geometric, and fanciful designs in various colours, black and white, red and white, glazed green, and yellow. Among the heraldic tiles are the arms of Mohun, Clare, Raleigh, Poyntz, Trivet or Treble, Sydenham, Bardolf, Cary, Peverell, Fitz Nicholas, Beauchamp, Furneaux, Palton, Boteler, Montacute, Audley, Aylesford, and Brideport, besides three other arms unknown. Many of these families held lands in the county, and under the Mohuns. Some of the tiles bear capital letters, and nearly the whole alphabet has been found. Many of the same patterns were found in the old chancel of Dunster church. The walls of the south aisle of nave remain, with traces of the two processional doors, and three windows about three feet wide between the inside splays, and about fourteen feet from the floor level; they are at present walled up, and no traces of the outer faces are visible. The west and south walls of the transept also are standing, with a portion of an eastern aisle chapel, 13 feet 6 inches square, with part of a piscina, remains of a vaulting rib, and the foundations of the altar; there are remains of clerestory windows in the south wing. The western jamb of the eastern cloister door remains, with a portion of the outer arch, and the springer of the inner arch. The south wall of transept shows the central door into the sacristy. The cloistral and domestic buildings have already been the subject of an elaborate paper by the late Rev. F. Warre. I need, therefore, merely describe the subsequent discoveries made while clearing out some of the rubbish which has accumulated during the time the buildings

were used as a farm homestead, which is now, happily, no longer the case ; in a short time Mr. Luttrell intends to remove the modern walling, and other unsightly innovations, now no more needed for cattle sheds. On the east side of the cloister garth, which is 78 feet square, is the dormitory on the upper storey ; it is a magnificent room, 137 feet 6 inches by 24 feet 5 inches. The north wall contains the door opening on the night stairs to the transept, and a skew door probably for watching the church lights. In the eastern wall at the south end is a remarkably curious doorway ; it is 6 feet wide, the jambs are reversed, and a socket hole under the point of the head shows that the doors were hung upon a centre pivot, and opened half inwards and half outwards. The substructure includes—(1) The sacristy, 22 feet 4 inches by 12 feet, with a round window, the hood or label moulding only remaining ; a large double aumbry in the west wall, which had shelves and wooden doors ; an aumbry and water drain on the south, and to the north another locker and the door into the transept. (2) A chamber, 22 feet by 10 feet 6 inches, lighted by a single lancet ; the original large entrance arch has been filled in with one of smaller dimensions. (3) The chapter-house vaulted in two spans, on which traces of wall-painting are visible, some original tile paving remains on the floor, as well as the foundations of seats along the walls ; the foundations of the eastern end are now laid bare, which shows the whole building to have been 46 feet 10 inches in length, by 21 feet 4 inches in width. (4) Day stairs to dormitory. (5) Parlour, 16 feet 11 inches by 11 feet 7 inches, lighted by a double lancet window, and having a locker on the north, and a deep recessed arch at the side of the door. (6) The slype to the cemetery, 29 feet 8 inches by 6 feet 2 inches, with two double aumbries in the north, and a pair with a door in the south wall, opening into the (7) day or common room, 60 feet by 22 feet 6 inches ; it was vaulted in two spans, with a central arcade resting upon three pillars. In the east and west walls at the south end are two doorways opposite to each other, the original

floor level is several feet deeper than the present, the doorways are at least seven feet high. The south side of the garth is principally occupied by the refectory over an Early English substructure, which includes (1) the tresaunt to the conventual garden, 30 feet 8 inches by 6 feet 3 inches, with a south door and loop, and bench where the porter of the cloister sat. (2) The calefactory, divided into three chambers, the first, 22 feet 8 inches by 8 feet, contains a window with seats and a wardrobe. The central compartment, 22 feet 2 inches by 15 feet 4 inches, is entered by its special door, and also by a skew door pierced in the partition wall on the west, and adjoining the entrance to the next chamber, 22 feet 2 inches by 16 feet 5 inches. Each of these two divisions has a fireplace set between two windows. At the south-west corner there is a door opening into a passage, 6 feet 6 inches wide, under the hall stairs, which contains a window and wardrobe. Next is the (3) entry to abbot's kitchen, with a door opening on the lower steps of the hall stairs, and having a corresponding door opposite to it. Outside the refectory stairs are traces of a large porch, with a gabled front over the door; and a second building forming a serving-room, with a five-light window of timber work, which connected it with the conventual kitchen. The foundations of a wall about 3 feet thick were also laid bare running east and west about 10 feet from the face of main building. The western alley of the cloister shows a buttressed front, with an upper range of chambers occupied by the converts or lay brothers, much mutilated. It is pierced by a gateway porch with woodwork, retaining some carving on the south, and a panelled perpendicular arch on the north. Southward of it is the conventual kitchen, 33 feet 11 inches by 13 feet 6 inches. The arches which enclosed its window remain; they resemble the west side, which were filled with perpendicular windows of four lights, and portions of this tracery remain; these four bays formed carols for study; at the north end is a straining arch. The north alley has been entirely swept away. In the centre of the south wall of nave is

a trefoil-headed seat for the abbot or claustal prior in cloister time. The foundations of another wall 4 feet 2 inches thick were found under the surface of the ground running north and south, on the west side of cloister walls it is 22 feet 4 inches from the west wall and might have formed the "Domus Conversorum." The remains of the octagonal base of a cross are visible and it is curious to observe a huge sycamore tree growing and flourishing exactly in the centre of it.

Several small pieces of painted glass have been dug up out of the rubbish. On the east wall of buttery are traces of wall painting in distemper representing three human figures with monsters and fishes.

---