XXXI. *A few Remarks on the Discovery of the Remains of William de Warren, and his wife Gundrad, among the ruins of the Priory of Saint Pancras, at Southover, near Lewes, in Sussex.* By GIDEON ALGERNON MANTELL, Esq. LL.D., F.R.S., &c., in a Letter to Sir HENRY ELLIS, K.H., F.R.S., Secretary.

Read 11th Dec. 1845.

It is not a little remarkable that so few objects of geological, or antiquarian, interest should hitherto have been brought to light, by the excavations and cuttings made, during the formation of the numerous lines of railway, in various parts of England. Extensive as are these operations, the accessions to the collection of the geologist, and to the cabinet of the antiquary, have been comparatively unimportant. The most interesting archæological discovery effected by the railway cuttings, is unquestionably that which took place, about six weeks since, in the ruins of Lewes Priory; namely, of the two leaden coffers, containing the remains of the founder and foundress of that once celebrated religious establishment.

To me, who in early boyhood had so often rambled among those ruins in quest of some relic of the olden time, and, in maturer years, had caused excavations to be made in various places, in the hope of discovering the graves of some of the illustrious dead which history instructs us were buried within the hallowed walls of this priory, the announcement of this discovery was peculiarly gratifying. Having visited the spot, and examined the relics that have been exhumed, it occurred to me that a brief notice of a few particulars that came under my observation, with some account of the Norman pavements which I dug up, many years since, near the place where the coffers were discovered, might, under existing circumstances, possess at least a temporary interest.

It is unnecessary to preface my remarks with more than a passing allusion to the circumstances which led to the foundation of the Priory of Saint Pancras, or Pancrace, by William Earl of Warren, and his wife Gundrad, the

fifth daughter of King William the Conqueror, A.D. 1077—its rich endowments and princely revenues from the pious liberality of its founders and their successors—its long period of prosperity—and its utter destruction at the dissolution of the religious houses by Henry VIII. Of this once celebrated establishment, which for upwards of four centuries flourished in uninterrupted splendour, the history is meagre in the extreme. All that is known was embodied in the account of this priory by my lamented friend, the late Rev. Thomas Horsfield, in his *History of Lewes*.

The letter of Portmari to his employer, Lord Cromwell,^a conveys at once an idea of the magnificence of the original structure, and of the pains taken to render its demolition complete, and convert the materials to the greatest profit.

Fifty years since, there remained a considerable portion of the principal gateway, and of the southern walls of the refectory, some vaulted apartments, and a large elliptical oven, together with a dove-cote or pigeon-house built in the form of a cross, the cells or recesses of which were ingeniously constructed of hewn chalk. These pigeon-holes were formed in a similar manner to those

Ancient Dove-cote of Lewes Priory.

^a See Willis's *History of Mitred Abbeys*, vol. ii. Mon. Ang. ed. 1825, i. p. 10.

described in the notice of the dove-cote at Garway, given in the present volume of the *Archæologia*; they were in number between three and four thousand, and were arranged in parallel rows, extending over the interior face of each wall of the building. The entrances for the pigeons were four in number, one under the roof at each extremity of the cross, as may be seen in the representation here given. The building measured in length, from east to west, ninety feet; from north to south the same; the height of the walls to the roof was thirty feet. This structure was pulled down within my memory, for the sake of the materials.

The ruins of the Priory that were standing in the year 1780 are figured in Watson's *Memoirs of the Earls of Warren and Surrey*, from drawings by Lambert, a self-taught artist of Lewes. Since that period large masses of the walls have been demolished, from time to time, as the materials of which they were constructed—chalk, flint, and limestone—were required by the proprietor for buildings, or roads. The posterns of the gateway, formed of clustered columns of Sussex marble, ornamented with nail-headed quatrefoils, remained in tolerable preservation, and the crumbling arches above, festooned with ivy, formed an interesting object from the main street of the village of Southover. These ruins are well represented in Watson's *Memoirs*; the mound seen within the precincts of the priory, through the gateway, is the Mount Calvary, to which I shall hereafter more particularly allude. The gateway was pulled down a few years since, to widen the road; the historical associations with which it was connected should have saved it from spoliation; for from its walls, six centuries ago, Henry III. with his gallant son Prince Edward, and his brother the King of the Romans, and a numerous band of warriors went forth, headed a powerful army, and marched against the patriot forces then assembled under the command of Sir Simon de Montfort, on Plumpton Plain; hither the discomfited monarch fled for refuge after the battle; and from this gateway was issued the *mise* or treaty of Lewes, which ultimately laid the foundation of our parliamentary representative system, of knights of the shires, citizens, and burgesses.

The pillars and arch of the porter's lodge have been re-erected near the site of the gateway, and now form the entrance of a footpath that leads to the priory grounds.

Many unavailing attempts to ascertain the situation of the ancient chapter-house, had been made at various times by myself and others; and the search had long been abandoned as hopeless, till the projected line of railway revived the curiosity of the local antiquaries. The railway now in progress from Brighton to Lewes enters the western boundary wall of the Priory grounds, and traverses the area occupied by the ruins in an oblique direction, leaving unmolested, on the right hand, the walls of the refectory, the ruinous archway called the "Dungeon," and the Mount Calvary. Nothing of interest was met with in the deep trench required by the railway, till the high ground on the left of the "Dungeon" was opened; and there, on the 28th of October, at the depth of several feet beneath the turf, were laid bare several compartments formed by low walls, which once evidently supported a stone or paved floor. These compartments were each about six feet-square, and two of them were covered over by slabs of freestone; these were carefully removed, and in each cell was found a leaden coffer or cist, about three feet long, one foot wide, and eight inches deep, containing the bones of a human skeleton. On the cover of one of the cists was engraven the name GVNDRADA, on the other, WILLELM'. Here then was probably the site of the chapter-house, and these were the remains of the founder and foundress, William de Warren and his countess Gundrad, which Portmari had either intentionally, or accidentally, left unmolested. The cists were carefully removed to the adjacent church of Southover, and are now placed under glass cases, in such manner as to exhibit their contents to the observer.

The coffer inscribed GVNDRADA contains almost the entire series of the bones of a female skeleton; from a careful examination and admeasurement of the bones by Mr. Pickford, a surgeon of Brighton, the stature of the original is estimated at five feet seven inches. The bones in the other cist, inscribed WILLELM', are more decayed, and many are wanting; the estimated stature of the Earl is six feet two inches.

I noticed several bones of a foetus, but could not ascertain with certainty that they had been found in the cist with those of Gundrad; this however seems highly probable, for it appears that this unfortunate lady died in child-bed (*vi partûs cruciata*, register of Lewes Priory), at Castle Acre, May 27, 1085, and probably undelivered.

These leaden cists are without any ornament, except that the outer surface is divided into lozenge-shaped compartments by beaded ridges. From the small size of these coffers it is clear that they were constructed to receive the bones long after the first interment, in consequence of the decay of the original coffins; and it seems probable that this took place temp. Henry II. when a new church superseded the old and humbler structure, and to which the remains of the founder and foundress were transferred. The fine, richly-sculptured, sepulchral stone of Gundrad, discovered in Isfield Church by Dr. Clark, and removed to Southover Church in 1775, at the expense of Sir William Burrell, is too well known to require particular description.^b

For many years past this memorial had been sadly neglected, and in a great measure concealed from public view, from the pew in which it was placed being enclosed within a partition, for a closet or vestry.^c It has lately been placed in a more eligible situation; but I regret to state that the stone tomb on which it was mounted by Sir W. Burrell has been lowered, so as to render the inspection of the slab far less convenient; and it stands in a position that exposes it to injury.

A subscription is being raised for the erection of a proper receptacle and monument for the coffers; and it is much to be wished that some able antiquary should be consulted, and suitable tombs erected. The size of the monumental slab of Gundrad, which is five feet long, two feet wide at the head, and twenty inches at the other extremity, seems to prove that it was coeval with the cists, for it is too small for a tomb of ordinary dimensions.

The remains of several other skeletons were dug up near the same spot; one of these was in a cell formed of several pieces of Caen-stone placed in the shape of a coffin; and some of the cerecloth that enveloped the body, and of the hair of the deceased, were preserved. The only other discovery of interest was that of an earthen jar inclosed in a leaden vessel, and containing the viscera, lungs, stomach, &c. of a human being. These remains have, with some probability, been ascribed to William the third Earl, who went with the King of France to the Holy Land in 1147, and was slain by the Turks; his heart was sent to England, and interred in the Chapter House of Lewes Priory.

^b A faithful representation of it is given in Watson's Memoirs.

^c See Horsfield's History of Lewes, vol. i. p. 116.

A few fragments of sculptured columns, corbels, and capitals, have been thrown up by the workmen, but none of any interest. Certainly nothing of this kind has been discovered at all comparable with some formerly in my collection at Brighton, and now in the British Museum. One of these is a Norman capital, sculptured in four compartments; one representing the miraculous draught of fishes (*fig. 1*); another, the temple (*fig. 2*); the third, the delivery of the keys to Peter (*fig. 3*); the fourth, a group of three figures (*fig. 4*).

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.

Fig. 4.

The artificial mound, the *Mount Calvary* of the Priory, and which was constructed from the earth excavated from the field hard by, is the only

monument of the labours of the monks of Saint Pancras that remains unimpaired. Fortunately, it stands just beyond the reach of the railway cutting, which passes close by ; it is fifty feet high, and 600 feet in circumference at the base. It is to be hoped that this interesting memento of the religious zeal of their forefathers will be preserved by the inhabitants of Lewes in its present state, and that its sides will not be planted with shrubs, nor a building of any kind be erected on its summit, as some have proposed.

Norman or encaustic pavements. So thoroughly did Portmari fulfil his commission of destruction, that all the pavements of the Priory were broken up and removed : fragments of figured tiles, and occasionally a single tile tolerably perfect, are the only remains. A great quantity of fragments have been dug up during the excavations now in progress, and are doubtless the ruins of the pavements of the Chapter House. Among them I observed two worthy of attention ; one bearing a small shield with square markings, in a quatrefoil, that may perhaps be intended to represent the checky *or and azure* of the Warrens ; on the other are three lions or leopards passant : these tiles, together with the other relics, are carefully preserved, by Mr. Figg, at Lewes.

The tiles which I now submit to the notice of the Society, were dug up by me when a youth, most of them near the spot where the leaden cists were discovered ; consequently, these once formed part of the pavement of the Chapter House ; the others were from above the archway, called the "Dungeon," which is figured in Watson's *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 43.

I will only add that there were in my possession four tiles^d which were dug up by a friend of mine in another part of the Priory ; these differ, both in their material and manufacture, from the usual Norman paving tiles ; their size, thinness, and fineness, and the brilliancy of their colours, indicate a different purpose ; and they more nearly resemble the Dutch tiles that ornamented the sides of our ancient fire-places. I should have doubted the antiquity of these specimens, and referred them to the mansion of the Duke of Dorset, called the "Lord's Place," which was erected within the precincts of the Priory, soon after the dissolution of the latter, and destroyed by fire,

^d Now in the British Museum.

had I not discovered a fragment of a similar tile, with others of undoubted monastic manufacture. Of the four tiles to which I allude, one bears the crest of the Fitz-Alans; another may be intended for the *checky or and azure* of the Warrens: a third is also probably an armorial bearing.

As connected with the subject before us, I transmit for the inspection of the Society some specimens and drawings of pavements from Castle-Acre Priory, in Norfolk, which was also founded by William de Warren.

Amongst various minor relics discovered from time to time at Lewes, now in my possession, are the two objects here represented, of the same dimension as the originals. They are small bronze pyxes, intended, as it has been conjectured, to contain the chrism, or possibly some of the pigments used by the monastic scribes. The lid of one of them only has been preserved; it is slightly convex, and marked with a cruciform ornament.

G. A. M.

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