
Ware Priory.

We gather the first particulars of the foundation of this Priory from the Patent Roll, 12, Edward III., 18 February, 1337-8. At this date a licence in mortmain was granted by the King to Thomas Wake, (created Lord Wake, anno 19, Edward II.), then Lord of the Manor of Ware, "to grant to the Friars Minors of Ware for their habitation to hold to them and their successors in free pure and perpetual almoign for ever one messuage and seven acres of land with appurtenances in Ware for newly erecting an oratory house and other buildings then necessary." After the death of Thomas Wake, a further licence in mortmain was given by the King to his widow, Blanche Wake, 46, Edward III., 17 July, 1372, enabling her to grant to the Friars Minors four acres of land in Ware, contiguous to the manse of the Warden and Brethren of the order of Friars Minors of Ware; and from the inquisition *ad quod damnum*, taken 18 May previous, it appears that Blanche Wake purchased this land for the purpose of the grant, and that it was held of the said Blanche, as of her Manor of Ware by the service of a half-penny yearly; but these four acres granted by Blanche Ware

are not comprised in the property of the Priory at the present day.

It may fairly be assumed that Ware Priory remained in the peaceable enjoyment of the Franciscan brotherhood, and that the history of the house was undisturbed till the general suppression of the monasteries. Under date 30, 31, Henry VIII., we find a minister's account of the possessions of the Priory set out by the accountant Robert Byrche, and five years later, in the thirty-sixth year of Henry's reign, the King, by letters patent at Westminster, dated 21 May, granted all the site of the late house, formerly of the Friars Minors, commonly called the Grey Friars of Ware, then dissolved, to the use of Thomas Byrche, a yeoman of the Crown, and to his heirs and assigns.

Prefixed to Leland's *Itinerary*, Vol. V., is a quaint and fanciful poem entitled, "The Tale of two Swannes," written by W. Vallans, a native of Hertfordshire, "a modest man and well versed in records," as Hearne, Leland's editor has it, which was printed in London, 1590, and in 1711 deemed a great rarity and sent to Hearne by Mr. Thomas Rawlinson, of the Middle Temple, with liberty to print it. In this poem, which treats of the state progress of "fortie swannes," headed by their king and queen along the Lea and its tributaries, we catch a glimpse of the "companie passing by the guested towne of Ware, and Byrches house that whilom was the Brothers Friars place." And again, another poet, John Scott, the Quaker, Samuel Johnson's friend, in allusion to the detriment to the navigation of the Lea by the supply of water withdrawn from the stream by the New River, speaks of

"Old Lea surveying
With eye indignant his diminish'd tide
That laves yon ancient Priory's wall, and shows
In its clear mirror Ware's inverted roofs."

The subsequent account of the Priory supplied to Clutterbuck for his history of the county by Mrs. Hadsley, the then owner, may be taken as substantially correct; and Cussans, the latest authority, is right in his conjecture, that the Priory was a foundation quite distinct from that with which it has been confused by Chauncy, Salmon, and others, who assume that it was founded by Margaret, Countess of Leicester, the wife of

Saier de Quincey, circ. 12, Henry III. (1228). This confusion of the two houses has been made worse confounded by Parkinson, who in his "Collectanea Anglo-Minoritica" (1726), by way of reconciling dates and difficulties, throws out as argument, that "admitting Lord Wake to be the founder of the House, Margaret, Countess of Leicester, might yet have been the re-builder or repairer," thus by this unhappy suggestion reversing the entire order of events, and making Lady Leicester re-build and repair that which was not founded till nearly a hundred years after her death. Of the religious house with which the Lady Margaret's name is associated it would be interesting to obtain some reliable particulars, where it was situated, and what became of "the Great Hall, the Great Chamber, the Chapel and other rooms which," as Chauncy tells us, this pious Lady "built for her conveniency," and more especially, what connection this house bore to the Alien Priory for Monks of the order of S. Benedict founded by Hugh de Grantmesnil in 1084, and granted with the tithes of the Church of Ware to the Monastery of S. Ebrulf in Normandy; then according to some authorities seized with other priories, alien by Edward II., and ultimately settled by Henry V. on his new Convent of Carthusians at Shene in Surrey. This much, at any rate, may be taken for granted on the authority of a "Summary of all the Religious Houses in England and Wales, at the time of their dissolution," that an Alien Priory existed at Ware at that time.

Returning again to Ware Priory. From Thomas Byrche the property is clearly traced from his grandchildren, Anne, the wife of Lionel, Earl of Middlesex, and Thomas Byrche through various hands, till in 1685 it was conveyed to Robert Hadsley, of Great Munden, Herts, in whose family, or that of its representatives, it remained for nearly two hundred years, and ultimately, in September 1881, passed into the possession of Mr. Robert Walters, the present owner.

Reformation, in more senses than one, has made such havoc of Ware Priory that there is not much externally to attract the attention of the antiquarian, but eighty years have not materially altered the appearance of the house viewed from the south, as we find it represented in the print drawn and engraved for "The Beauties of England" by James Storer, a draftsman conspicuous for

accuracy of detail. The interior, however, is of marked interest, and a special object of antiquity, thoroughly characteristic of the period, fourteenth century, was—for it is now closed by plaster—the open roof, of which a sketch and description is given in the “Builder,” July 21st, 1849, by Mr. George Godwin, under whose auspices Mr. Martin Hadsley Gosselin (at that time owner of the house) contemplated a reconstruction on extensive lines. The room, of which the roof was the main feature measured roughly 49ft. in length, 26ft. in breadth, and 26ft. in height, from floor to rafters. Necessity has no law, and owing to the conversion of the room into an additional story, with the removal of two of the three king posts and their corresponding tie-beams; what was probably the dormitory of the Franciscan brethren, is now unrecognisable, as represented by a passage, staircase, and five common-place apartments of the early Victorian era. In the hall, the arch, supported by grotesque corbels on the eastern angle of the building, with a corresponding arch at the extremity of the drawing-room, marks the line of the cloisters to the east, and their foundations northward are said to be indicated by a long rise in the ground in that direction. In the lower rooms, the walls of which are very massive and strongly knitted with flint and rubble, are further traces of antiquity, and in many a nook and corner is to be found some note of the old monkish days.

If, in Ware Priory of the present, there is little left of what Thomas Wake founded, and the Gray Brethren built; still there remains solace in the reflection, that when the reforming king laid his hand heavily on their house, there was little gain from the robbery of men whose life was mendicancy, and whose death was martyrdom.

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Ware Priory.