

CLARE, SUFFOLK: BOOK III

CLARE PRIORY

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INTRODUCTION TO CLARE PRIORY.

Clare priory has the most extensive remains of any Augustinian friary surviving in England, and the plan is practically complete. It is also the oldest single house of the order still inhabited by the friars, and comes in the Province of England and Scotland.

The main entrance is along the Ashen and Yeldham road, but there is also easy access from Clare Castle Country Park car park, by crossing the millstream, walking a few paces forward and then entering the small gate down to the left.

The site was excavated by Sir W. St John Hope, F.S.A. in 1904, and by Mr P.G.M. Dickinson, F.S.A., F.R.Hist.Soc., F.R.G.S. in 1958. The main buildings still in existence are the 14th century Prior's House with its magnificent Cellarer's Hall and residential quarters, and also the former Infirmary, now converted to a church. Other remains or identified sites include the old kitchen area with the frater (the refectory or dining room) above, the chapter house, the dormitory, the cloister, the calefactory, the monastic church, and St Vincent's chapel.

Much basic information dating from the early years of the friars is in a collection of deeds now in the British Museum and listed as Harleian MSS 4835. The register for these is printed in Mrs Barnardiston's book. The text of ninety-two late 15th century folios from this collection, with comments on them, is available in book form, as noted in Sources and Acknowledgments above.

The name 'priory' is something of a misnomer in the case of Clare, but the fact that the leader of the community is called a 'prior' (which means 'first man') makes it not inappropriate. The proper name is 'convent', but this word is now assumed by many to mean a house of nuns. The title 'friary' would be appropriate, but the word 'priory' is so strongly linked to the establishment at Clare that it seems out of place and unnecessary to call it anything else. The word 'monastery' continued to be used in connection with the order of Augustinian Friars, despite the fact that the way of life practised in the premises was not the restricted one usually thought of as appropriate to monks. This is because some communities were recognised as being less bustling with activity than others (although still sharing the regular activities engaged in by all the Order's establishments) and therefore especially suitable to receive people wishing to visit for a time of prayer and thought. This led to these prayer centres being called monasteries, and Clare was one of these, as today's visitors can well appreciate. Although a friary can be called a priory (because it has a prior), the converse is not always true: a priory can consist of canons, in which case the word friary would be inappropriate.

PROLOGUE

MORE THAN ANCIENT HISTORY.

*Stands the church clock at ten to three?
And is there honey still for tea?*

The famous question, and the picture of ghosts including many clergymen crossing the lawn of the old vicarage at Grantchester, Rupert Brooke's homesick thoughts from Berlin in 1912, express a sense of timelessness which, for me, found a parallel at the ruined monastic church at Clare Priory one June evening.

It was just what a June evening should be: the air heavy with birdsong, the sight of birds swooping over a glorious array of trees - everyday British birds combining with house martins newly returned from the southern hemisphere bringing home the truth that, despite the continuing killing fields, we are one world.

And the worship was just what it should be. Sunshine bathing a little group of musicians with electric organ, bass guitar, and flute, sitting by the sedilia where centuries ago the friars who ministered to their congregation sat. Twentieth century hymns mixing with the great hymn of creation from the Book of Genesis. Hymns of the earliest Christians as found in the New Testament blending with one by the Hebrew psalmist a thousand years earlier. And a reading from the words of the East Anglian Mother Julian of Norwich - which seemed particularly apt as a woman nonconformist minister stood with a friar and other clerics.

Where friars once assembled to chant their offices, at the place where kings and nobility and the lord of Clare assembled to lay a princess, Joan of Acre, to rest nearly seven centuries earlier, the people of Clare assembled again. Clergy and laity, robed or open-necked; Roman Catholic, Anglican, Baptist and United Reformed, plus a sprinkling of those of Methodist and other traditions; little children, and 'the old who are ready for rest'; the well and the sick - indeed, the catholic, the universal, Church of Christ in Clare.

I hope this description conveys something of the spirit of the pages which follow, which have two objectives. One is to present, in an accessible and readable form, information about Clare Priory, a place which is significant for anybody interested in history - and perhaps particularly appropriate when these words were first written, the 750th anniversary of the foundation of the Order of the Friars Hermits, the group which founded Clare Priory a few years later. The other is to express something of the love for the Priory and that for which it stands, something which I have felt since I first accidentally (and to my ever-continuing delight) discovered Clare.

1. THE AUSTIN FRIARS: WHO THEY ARE, THEIR COMING TO CLARE, AND THEIR HISTORY TO 1538.

A PRIORY AT CLARE BEFORE THE AUSTINS CAME.

A college of secular clerks (clergy who, although in a community, were not confined as were monks in a monastery) was founded by Aelfric, a Saxon earl, father of Wisgar whose son Aluric held Clare Manor before the arrival of the Normans. (Domesday suggests Aluric had a son also named Wisgar). Together with its assets this was seized by the Conqueror but still continued to function under Gilbert, second lord of Clare. In 1090 Gilbert brought in a group of monks and alienated (that is, put under foreign control) this collegiate church of St John the Baptist to the Benedictine Abbey of St Mary at Bec-Hellouin in Normandy, to form a small Benedictine priory within the castle precincts. In 1124 these monks were moved to Stoke-by-Clare by Gilbert's son Richard, third lord of Clare, the church at Clare castle then becoming a castle chapel.

THE AUGUSTINIAN OR AUSTIN FRIARS: A DESCRIPTION.

The full name is The Order of Friars Eremites (Hermits) of St Augustine. The usual shorter name is Augustinian Friars, but in England (alone) they are more popularly called the Austin Friars. The name 'hermit' remained after they had ceased to be hermits solely to distinguish them from the Augustinian Canons. Both share a traditional link with St Augustine of Hippo in North Africa, who lived 354-430 A.D.

THE STORY OF ST AUGUSTINE. (A fuller version will be found in chapter 8).

He had a Christian mother and pagan father - and a brilliant mind. His student days showed excesses. He prayed 'Make me chaste, but not yet'. He searched for meaning in life through philosophers. He grew to admire Bishop Ambrose's oratory, but not his Christian message until a day in 386 A.D. He had already been studying St Paul's epistles. One day he seemed to hear a child's voice saying 'Take up and read!' He chanced on Romans 13. 12-14, 'Give up unrighteous acts...' and became a Christian. From this experience derives the Austin logo showing a Bible, a heart pierced by the arrow of God's love, and the motto 'Tolle lege'. He lived under strict rule and became an outstanding theologian and preacher. He was a prolific writer. As the Roman Empire fell to the Vandals he wrote a great book, still in print, entitled 'The City of God' - about that Kingdom which would outlast all empires. He is recognized as one of the first four 'Doctors of the Church', a great saint and one of the Church's greatest thinkers of all time.

THE FIRST FOLLOWERS OF THE RULE OF ST AUGUSTINE were monks in his monastery at Hippo. As followers grew in number and spread, some to Italy, many ceased to live in a monastery, but became hermits seeking withdrawal from the world in the search for individual salvation, authorised or ordered by the papacy to observe Augustine's Rule. These hermits were later gathered together into orders, pooling their lives and living in simple communities, vowed to chastity and obedience. The largest and most progressive of these orders was the Friars Hermits of St Augustine, founded in 1244, who spread from Tuscany to France before 1256. In 1256 Pope Alexander IV united these orders in one fraternity, the Augustinian Friars. They were now no longer hermits but mendicant friars, travelling widely, living on alms, and committed to working among the populace. (The word friar means brother, as in the French frere).

Although friars' premises might still be termed a monastery, friars are not to be confused with canons. Canons lived the ordinary monastic life and were professed to a specific monastery beyond the precincts of which they could not go without the permission of the superior. Friars were professed to a Province (a whole nation or other large area) which contained a number of establishments of their particular order, and within which they were allowed to travel widely to preach and receive alms. The prior-general was directly responsible to the papacy. The friars' activities were worship, prayer, study of the scriptures, and especially teaching and preaching. They spoke the language of the people (in contrast to monks confined to monasteries, where Latin was the norm) and their preaching to ordinary people in the common tongue brought them close to their listeners. They kept the rule of poverty, having no personal possessions, and lived on others' goodwill (as they still do). They engaged in preaching at a time when many parish priests were busy elsewhere, or poor and ignorant and unable to cope with the needs of their parish (although we do not know how far this was true of Clare). They also worked with the destitute and tended the sick. Their head was tonsured in the way common to monks, and their walking-out dress was black over a white habit.

HOW THE AUGUSTINIANS CAME TO CLARE.

Augustinian friars had spread from Italy to France. Richard, eighth lord of Clare, often went to Bordeaux, and on one occasion invited some Augustinians (almost certainly Italians, from Tuscany) to England. Regarding their foundation at Clare, the famous Augustinian chronicler John Capgrave said *'Alexander the Pope gave us leave for to build convents in these places, Surek, Clayhanger, Clare and Sidingborn and other, but there took no place but Clare and Wodus (Woodhouse in Shropshire). Then had this order leave for to enter and build. But they built not greatly until the year of the Lord 1248'*. Although the priory is traditionally said to have been founded in 1248, the friars may not have arrived until the next year, for Richard did not return to England until June 1249, and it was on September 3rd 1249 that he obtained, on behalf of the friars, a royal welcome from his cousin King Henry III. The king declared that he allowed the friars to remain in his kingdom, that they should be under royal protection, and that all his subjects were required to do well by them. We may assume that it was soon after Richard's return to England that the first friars came to Clare. They were of the Order of the Friars Hermits, this being before the Augustinians had been brought into a united order in 1256. They were probably mostly lay brothers, not priests. In the 11th and 12th centuries Clare lords were eager benefactors of monasteries, abbeys, and priories, helping establish them by granting lands and tithes. After 1140 the lords' keenness to be generous to these institutions ceased (though their wives' aid continued), and Lord Richard did not donate the site when the friars came to Clare - nor, indeed, in the records of the time is there any evidence that he contributed at all. Help came from Roger de Scaccario, who was admitted to the confraternity of the Order in recognition of making available the land on which the first Austins' buildings were erected - although this may not have been their final site. The Countess Matilda, widow of Lord Richard, proved very helpful, negotiating the acquisition of plots of land from local people and transferring these to the friars.

Whether or not he contributed by way of land or money, it is Richard who must be said to have established this settlement on the banks of the River Stour, near his castle, with a footbridge to the town and castle. Later the friars built a gatehouse close to what was then called the Great Bridge of Clare, along what was the main road to London, now the Ashen road.

Clare was the mother house, the first Austin friars' settlement in England of an eventual thirty-four. The settlements grew in number quickly. The house at Woodhouse in Shropshire mentioned by the old chronicler was established in 1250. Others founded in the first ten years were at Ludlow, London, Leicester and Huntingdon. A separate English province was established between 1260 and 1265. From Clare the Augustinians spread also to Ireland, where they remained after the English Reformation. They have had a great missionary tradition from the 16th century, and were the first to circumnavigate the globe in their missionary work. With the rise of the Spanish and Portuguese empires they set up missions in Mexico, South America, China, Japan, the Philippines (where they were the first to arrive, in 1556), Persia, India and West Africa. Today they are found in Scotland, throughout Europe, Australia, Africa including Algeria, Korea, the U.S.A. and Canada, among other nations. They continue their traditional activities, with an emphasis on teaching which includes the running of universities.

The first reference to any building for the friars at Clare occurs in 1265, but this was after the event. The first mention of contributions to the fabric of the buildings is in 1278, but there must have been a chapel from the earliest days, and there is firm evidence of a church in 1279, when Richard had been succeeded by his son Gilbert. By that time it would appear there was a set of buildings comprising a small church, a cemetery, living quarters and a chapter house of some sort. This Gilbert (there were many Gilberts in the family over the years) and his successors were to give much support to the friars. The entire monastery was apparently re-built on a grander scale during the first half of the 14th century. The building of the new church was, in fact, well advanced by 1307, when

Joan of Acre was buried in the chapel of St Vincent, which she had built. The dedication of the new church was probably in 1328. Joan's daughter Elizabeth de Burgh is credited with starting the chapter house (Pevsner credits its doorway to her between 1310 and 1314) and also the dormitory and frater. (For a full account of Elizabeth de Burgh see Book I, Appendix B. The cloister, new chapter house, and a cemetery were dedicated in 1380, although there had been a cemetery since at least 1279. See chapter 6 for a further note on the cemetery. The patrons of the priory were Our Lady, Saints Peter and Paul, and St Augustine.

POINTS FROM THEIR HISTORY UNTIL 1538.

The Cartulary of Clare Priory, a set of two hundred 15th century hand-written documents (of which ninety-two are published) gives much information about the Austins' acquiring of land and their activities.

The brothers soon became familiar figures to the inhabitants of Clare, and worked hard in the local community. The friars' preaching in the people's common tongue was well received, and concern for the sick was one of their strong points. A spring in what was then a field in front of the house gave a supply of chalybeate water (i.e. water containing iron salts) which was reckoned to have curative powers. No hovel was too poor for them to enter. One notable feature of their work was the appeal of their spirituality to women, as is borne out in documents in the cartulary and by the fact that in the 15th century Osborn Bokenham wrote a book 'Legends of Holy Women' for their encouragement. In view of the friars' popularity it is not surprising that they were sometimes accused of encroaching upon the domain of the parish priest.

The friars' vow of poverty meant they needed to beg for a livelihood. The area in which members of particular Houses could practise was clearly defined as years went on, especially after there were disputes between different establishments. Clare's area reached as far as Hatfield, Chelmsford and Mersea, some three hundred towns and villages in Suffolk and Essex being regularly visited by Clare friars.

From the time of their arrival at Clare onwards they certainly found many local patrons willing to support them. Their popularity is indicated by the number of bequests made to them in local wills. There was also payment '*for services rendered*'. One of many examples was in 1278, when a forty day indulgence was granted to those who contributed to the building fund.

In addition to money there were gifts and bequests of pieces of land and meadow. However, these were often very small, for at the Dissolution the friars held only thirty-eight acres (apart from orchards), yielding a net annual income of only £2. 8s. 11d - not much to support an average community of, say, eight, even in those days. The land acquired was often in little plots with buildings on them and sometimes a yard attached, or occasionally a small piece of meadowland. Nearly all these plots bordered each other or were bounded on one side by the land already possessed by the friars, the aggregate ultimately providing a site suitable for the whole of their eventual establishment. Apparently there used to be houses along the Clare end of the present Ashen road whose plots were gradually absorbed into the friars' land. Matilda de Clare and Roger de Scaccario, knight, were responsible for a number of these gifts.

Sometimes a sum of money was paid for the lands but a nominal retaining rent was involved, a few pence a year or one peppercorn, perhaps a kind of tax avoidance for the private owners. In 1349 Michael de Bures gave land on condition that he should receive a rose at the Feast of St John the Baptist. Requests by others included: six pence at Michaelmas and six pence at the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, three cloves of garlic, one rose a year for five years if the lease grantor requested it, three peppercorns at Michaelmas, a ha'penny at Christmas and another at Easter, and a farthing at each of these festivals.

On at least one occasion the way land was acquired appears to have been questionable, for in 1350 the king had to rebuke the friars over their gaining of twelve acres of meadow at Clare, Ashen and Belchamp St Paul. But he was persuaded to relent and eventually they were given a further eight acres.

When the Priory was granted land the grantor sometimes retained right of access to take his hay at mowing-time. Details of these extensions of their site are given in the books by Gladys Thornton and Mrs Barnardiston, who quote the cartulary on this point. Monasteries required large amounts of fish for the monks' eating practices, and acquiring fishing rights was of great importance. In the case of Clare the proximity of the river was an advantage, and there are early references to such rights being given. One lord of Clare granted fishing rights to the monks in exchange for an undertaking from them to pray for the soul of his grandfather on the anniversary of his death. Further help from one of his brothers meant monks had fishing rights along the river from Sturmer to the castle.

By the end of the 13th century their holding was almost co-terminous with the area bounded on the west, south, and east by what some think was then the course of the river Stour, which the friars may have diverted for their purposes. In her book on the Priory Mrs Barnardiston claims (but how justifiably?) '*The new ditch or moat the brothers dug around the priory grounds no doubt is the watercourse which still surrounds the priory and is sometimes called the old river. At the north-east of the priory grounds it runs into the real old river, part of which has been obliterated by the railway, as may be seen by comparing a survey of Clare made since the railway was built with one of an older date.*' Elsewhere it is stated that what the friars built was a long wide ditch, later known as St Anne's river, on the northern side, almost completing the surrounding of their premises by water. When the

friars returned in 1953 they filled in a ditch which had bordered the front lawn of the Priory. The original course of the Stour still remains uncertain.

The original footbridge from the town and castle and over the former ditch has disappeared, but its route is still followed when walking from town to the priory's small entrance gate.

At first the friars kept strictly to their rules of poverty, touring the countryside for alms, preaching, and helping the sick and poor, but this did not prevent their receiving rich and colourful gifts for their foundation.

The cartulary contains a document which refers to Friar John Bachelor and gives a list of seventeen items which were '*procured or acquired by him for himself and for the Order*'. The prior and friars declared that all these objects were to be reserved for use at the altar in the Annunciation Chapel '*which was constructed by his labour and at his expense*' (this may mean it was he who encouraged monetary gifts to meet the cost). The list includes: '*a complete great missal; a chalice worth twenty-eight shillings, with a silver spoon worth eight pence; a chasuble of green velvet, fringed with gold; an alb with parures, with green mascles and gold griffins; an amice adorned with the story of Samson; a stole with a fanon, of green velvet studded with gold; a gold corporal and chasuble woven with a crucifix in gold; two frontals and two other simple altar cloths; a chasuble of silk, with alb, amice, stole and fanon in the same fashion; a scarlet cushion, decorated with gold and silver images; two other cushions of a different design; a green carpet measuring four ells; two gold collars with double beads inserted therein; nine gold rings; a small chest in which are kept four silk veils*'. The documents add '*We also assign a silver veil from the high altar, obtained also by his labours, for the celebration of masses; a chasuble of velvet, with various arms upon it*' and other items.

This list is interesting for its descriptions alone. It is also interesting to speculate that '*the small chest*' was perhaps the 14th or 15th century iron chest which Mrs Barnardiston noted was still on show in the priory in 1914.

Augustinian friars were not (and still are not) allowed to have private monies without permission, but sometimes authorised exceptions were made and by the late 14th century considerable sums were held by some individuals, as some of the Clare documents show. Many Augustinian friars who were granted papal chaplaincies were allowed secular benefices (ordinary church parishes) and thus removed from some aspects of discipline. As regards Clare in particular, by the end of the 14th century local friars were even building private chambers within the priory's enclosure at their own expense for their own use, or to entertain friends, or even have a companion or servant.

In 1296, a year in which Edward I made a visit and when the community may well have been at its peak, there were probably twenty-nine friars and novices, for the king made a present of twenty-nine shillings for the maintenance of the friars, apparently calculated on the basis of one for each member of the community, including novices.

There was a guild associated with the Priory, known as the Guild of St Augustine. This seems to have been similar to the guilds linked to the parish church - not craft guilds whose purpose was to maintain standards of workmanship and promote their members' interests, but parish or charity guilds, existing to raise and use money for charitable objectives.

Clare Priory acquired a reputation for both sanctity and learning. The friars could study the works of the greatest theologians in their library. In 1456 several of this small community had reached the high level of learning required to make them teachers of theology and philosophy in the schools of the Order. Some learned foreign visitors came to Clare, and friars from Clare travelled to the continent on occasion.

John of Clare was the first Augustinian to graduate as a Doctor of Divinity of Cambridge, and may be the same as John of England, associated with outstanding holiness. Another friar, Henry Bederic, became a Doctor of the Sorbonne. Others who became highly regarded were Thomas Winton (adversary of Wyclif), John Lowe (confessor to Henry VI), the Augustinian chronicler John Capgrave, outstanding theologians such as Geoffrey Hardeby and Thomas Penketh, and Osbern Bokenham - traveller, theologian and poet and probably author of the dialogue at the tomb of Joan of Acre (see later). Clare's William Flete was presumably the friar of the same name known as one of the most spiritual friars of the fourteenth century and friend of St Katherine of Siena.

The Lindisfarne Gospels, the Book of Kells, and many beautiful Books of Hours (prayer books) are reminders that monasteries were centres for copying, often with great artistry and using striking decoration. At Clare Priory also, friars were involved in copying and distributing books of prayer, as is shown by the records of the purchase there of some breviaries in 1317. Some of John of Clare's manuscripts, which are beautifully executed, are in the Vatican Library. Clare Priory should not be thought of as an irrelevant or isolated little community.

At times bishops of various dioceses, some abroad and with Augustinian connections, offered indulgences (often giving relief from 40-day penances) to those who assisted Clare Priory in various ways, or made a pilgrimage there, prayed for Joan's and others' souls, and so on.

Individually or collectively the friars had varied contacts over the years.

Two of them, Nicholas Bacon and John Oxeford, took part in the Peasants' Revolt in 1381.

Often people of the town would leave money in their wills for special prayers to be said on their memorial day.

One Clare clothier, John Fen, willed that the friars should '*keep a dirige (dirge) at my moneth day at their owne place with their bell ringing when my dirige ys kepud at the parisshe church.. and every preest of them to have four pence and novices two pence*'. They were also to receive a quantity of salt, and the poor were to be given 6s.8d.

There could be trouble with individual townfolk on issues of this kind. On one occasion the borough court had to demand that a Clare resident should pay the fifteen shillings he owed for masses which had been sung at his request. On the other hand, if friars failed to mark anniversaries of certain deaths by vigils and masses, the heirs of the deceased sometimes had a right to enter the House and '*take away valuables to the value of 20 marks, royal and papal privileges to the contrary notwithstanding*'.

At times friars were well received at the parish church in Clare, but sometimes there was antagonism from the parish priest of the time. During the 13th century the priests' duties probably increased as the friars' popular preaching quickened religious interest and the desire for the confession grew. The presence of the friars offered potential help which bishops used, but which on occasion led to jealousy of the newcomers by the parish priests. Sometimes wills of the deceased made specific requests that mass should be said by the friars in the parish church, and nowhere else, but the possibility that the parish clergy would not be happy with such wishes was recognised. The will of William Davye, made not many years before the friary was dissolved, left the friars ten shillings for a trental, to be celebrated in the parish church '*yf the Curett then beinge will gyve license, and yf the Curat wylnot suffer them to singe in the sayde church, then theye for to singe the sayde trentall in there place*'. (A trental was a mass for the dead sung on thirty consecutive days).

The situation had been faced earlier. A document of 1291 shows that the Bishop of Norwich had received and inspected letters from Pope Innocent IV, with the Bull of 1243 (or 1249) '*attached by silken cord, the letters being not defaced, erased, cancelled, or damaged in any way*', giving this entitlement. The Bull applied to Augustinians in general, and the bishop's note in 1291 makes it clear that it was to apply to Clare. Other popes renewed this entitlement, but controversies still arose occasionally. In 1329 articles were signed between the Clare Prior and Master Richard Shoreditch, Vicar of Clare, in which the vicar recognised the right of the friars to confess and absolve parishioners, it being required that these articles be read out by Friar Geoffrey de Grandfeld during mass in Clare parish church. In addition, the two parties (the vicar and the friars) were to show each other mutual love and honour in future, and the vicar was to lead the friends who had supported him against the friars back to a greater devotion to them. Perhaps the relationship between the two can be summed up by saying that where their areas overlapped they could sometimes work together happily, but inevitably clashes arose occasionally.

One possible cause of conflict might have been that Clare parish church was appropriated by the Benedictine priory at Stoke by Clare, an order very different from the Augustinians, and the fact that the vicar was to some degree tied to them might have had local repercussions. But there could have been a wider reason. Throughout western Christendom there was widespread resentment among the parish clergy that the hearing of confessions by the mendicant friars eroded their authority and threatened their financial security. At least two popes ruled that all adults must confess to their parish priest once a year, even if at other times they turned to the friars, and at times popes declared that a licence to hear confessions must first be gained by friars from the parish priest. It is possible that ripples of this wider conflict reached Clare. Or there could have been a personal issue on the odd occasion. The happy relationship which exists now between the priory and the parish church is described in chapter 3.

There were often contacts with royalty.

In 1262 some friars ran away and became vagabonds. The king got involved and ordered that they be captured and returned to the prior for punishment. It is possible that their absconding was due to disapproval of some features of the recent union of Augustinian orders.

Happier contacts arose when Joan of Acre, daughter of Edward I, resided at the castle. Her funeral was attended by a great gathering of royalty and nobility. Eleven years later Edward II passed through Clare, left some gifts, and had mass sung for her soul.

Relationships with the castle could also be close, involving the friars in the fulfilment of religious duties there, e.g. Elizabeth de Burgh required two friars to sing mass at the castle daily, for which they were given ten quarters of wheat and ten quarters of malt from the mill which stood near the area in which the Castle Country Park car park is now situated.

At the time of the Wars of the Roses the friars mostly sided with the House of York. In 1455, within a month of the start of the fighting, Richard, Duke of York, made a grant to the Priory, and the friars agreed to pray for his soul. The following year Henry VI pardoned them for '*their offences*', but their sympathies remained with the Yorkists. The poem relating an imagined dialogue by Joan of Acre's tomb and written about 1460 shows this loyalty, as does a white rose still to be seen in the window in the small groined lobby of the priory.

There were theological troubles. Around 1460 one Clare friar, John de Bury, Doctor of Divinity and Prior Provincial for England and Ireland, took issue with Bishop Reginald Pecock, who had attacked the friars. In the early 16th century there were signs of the new Protestantism in the neighbourhood. Foxe recorded around forty heretics at each of the nearby villages of Bumpstead and Birdbrook. At least three friars forsook their habit and followed the new teaching, having been persuaded by the priest at Bumpstead and his acquaintance Miles Coverdale. (Coverdale was himself an Austin friar, and was soon to be commissioned by Henry VIII to prepare a version of the Bible in English for installation in all English Churches. He sometimes stayed at Bumpstead). Two friars, William Gardiner and Thomas Topley, were brought before the Bishop of London in 1528. The latter, in his confession, admitted to walking in the fields at Bumpstead discussing doctrine with Miles Coverdale. He also confessed to having spent time on foolish pastimes, '*dancing, tennis, and such other*'. Thomas's brother Robert left the priory and married. He was brought before his bishop and condemned to imprisonment at the priory, but

escaped and returned to his wife. As many as four of the fifteen known Augustinian friars who continued in the new protestant views came from Clare, where in the late 1520s a quarter or more of the community was described as being '*infected by heresy*'.

It is clear, then, that the Reformation found the friars divided. A few became enthusiastic followers of Luther (himself an Augustinian until his excommunication) but some remained traditionalist and clashed with parish clergy. One, Dr John Stokes, had a clash with Matthew Parker, then dean of the college at Stoke by Clare (and later Archbishop of Canterbury). Parker had been very active in reformist circles since his Cambridge days, and was becoming noticed in the highest circles. Under him Stoke became a centre where reformers gathered, and he ensured that priests from the college sometimes preached in all the churches linked with it. When he personally preached a sermon in Clare parish church favouring Luther's doctrines, Stokes challenged him publicly, and in consequence was lodged in jail by order of Thomas Cromwell.

The last recorded gift to the priory was in 1535. When the general suppression of monastic houses occurred the friaries were at first exempted, but in 1538 their extinction also was decreed. Henry VIII appointed one of his own men, George Browne, to be Provincial of the Austin Friars. Clare Priory's fate was sealed through the suffragen bishop of Dover, whose letter on the subject to Thomas Cromwell, Lord Privy Seal, still exists. On November 29th the king's agent, Richard Ingworth, arrived in Clare to receive the surrender of the property from the prior, John Halybred. '*The site, soil and precincts of the late Priory..... together with church, steeple and churchyard of the same, and the lands thereof*' and goods and revenues became the property of the Crown, and so passed into the private ownership of Richard Frende. The site was described as being '*38 acres, arable, pastures and meadow*' and the house '*in much decay*'. The total value was £324. 4s. 1d, and the sale of the implements alone would not, it was said, have raised sufficient to meet the outstanding debts of £33. 2s. 6d.

David L. Edwards, church historian and provost of Southwark cathedral, speaking of the Dissolution in general, says in Volume I of his 'Christian England' 'the spiritual side of many monasteries was low and this was a main reason for accepting, or even offering, dissolution. Few wished to return to that life when it became possible under Mary. Also, the closure crept in bit by bit, and it was claimed that the transferred wealth would go to charitable causes and the defence of the realm'.

The general position at the dissolution of monasteries was that abbots and priors were given a good pension. The religious (that is, those who lived in a community) whose vocation was still strong were allowed to become secular clergy (that is, to move into ordinary parish work). The lands and properties of impressed houses were transferred to the crown. Jewels, ornaments and plate were sent to the Jewel House in London. Lead was stripped from roofs and cast into pigs. Bells were taken from towers, to be sold later. Movable crops and stocks were sold to pay the debts of the houses, and houses and lands were given to farmers or royal nominees who as a rule had to pay for their acquisition on a higher valuation.

As regards Clare, it is probable that the friars meekly subscribed to the Oath of Supremacy and were pensioned off. No one knows what happened to most of them afterwards. One, Stephen Luskyn, having been dispensed from his vows by Cranmer, managed to wear his friar's habit under the cassock of a secular priest, perhaps illustrating the hope of many that the old order would be restored before long, or hedging his bets for the future. He became rector of Borley in 1565. The last prior, John Halybred alias Stokes, Doctor of Theology, was jailed for preaching against the new archbishop of Canterbury, but signed the surrender of the priory and later became a canon of Norwich cathedral. An Austin friar from another settlement, John Stone, was executed in Canterbury in 1539 for refusing to sign the Oath of Supremacy and is now numbered among the forty Catholic martyrs of England and Wales.

A LIST OF THE PRIORS OF CLARE up to 1538.

(Note: these dates are from a variety of deeds and may not provide a complete list nor indicate precisely the date of commencement of office),

1299	Adam de la Hyde
1326	William de Wyrtham
1335	John (de Waldingfield?)
1341, 1344	John de Waldingfield
1349	John (de Waldingfield?)
1365	Robert
1374	Thomas de Edwardstone
1388	John (Samforth?)
1394	John Samforth
1453, 1456, 1464	James Exall
1535	John Halybred

2. THE PRIORY UNDER PRIVATE OWNERSHIP, 1539-1953.

After the Suppression in 1538 the premises went to private ownership. The transfer was through a grant in 1539 from Henry VIII to Richard Frende, who was to describe himself in his will in 1553 as '*Trumpeter to Edward VI*'. The buildings had probably already declined, and much repair was needed. Richard, suffragan bishop of Dover, writing to Thomas Cromwell, Lord Privy Seal, said the jewels were pledged, and the debts would not be covered if the plate and lead were saved for the king. (In a television interview with the prior in 1992 it was claimed the cost of repairs had been £17!) The best parts of the domestic buildings were made into the family mansion, and outer buildings turned into barns. Presumably the church and chapter house were pulled down around this time.

Over the country as a whole at the time of dissolution and religious revolution, any potentially useful material lying around as buildings were pulled to pieces was taken and applied elsewhere. Stone altars, despite all their sacred associations, were carted away and used for pathways, steps, walls, or for any other purpose. Today such items are still occasionally found in some dump, and perhaps treasured and brought back into better use. It seems extremely likely that material from Clare priory which was not immediately used for repairs to the continuing buildings would have been put to use elsewhere. There are sure to have been plenty of people tempted to buy or take beams and other building materials. In a corner of number 1 High Street there is a beautiful head carved in a beam. There are other old buildings whose beams have origins about which the owners confess to being suspicious. We cannot be sure of what came from where - but the possibilities exist.

In 1596 the house came into the possession of a younger branch of the Barnardiston family of Kedington, which, with another connected family, the Barkers, held it nearly all the time until the return of the Austins in 1953.

Sir Thomas Barnardiston's ownership of the house by 1604 is marked by a carved panel in one room, and he was probably responsible for much of the conversion into a dwelling house. (For further information about changes made to the house see chapter 4 and Appendix A). Sir Thomas's family had had long connections with Kedington, as the many monuments in the church there reveal, and he himself was buried there. His grandson, Captain Giles Barnardiston, was a Quaker. He was probably the wealthiest man in Suffolk, and was buried in Clare Quaker burial ground in 1680.

In 1715 Mr Poulter, a lawyer, became the owner. He had a bad reputation in the town, and it is claimed he deliberately destroyed the local manufacture of bays and says (an industry producing coarse cloth) leaving many people poor. He was said to be ruthless and held in terror, willing to inflict any injury to gratify himself, and was finally struck off the Rolls. (Yet his memorial stone is as near the altar in the parish church as it was possible to get!)

After this interlude the estate passed to the Barker family, where it continued for the rest of the period of private ownership. The wide range of coats of arms in the windows in what is now the oratory (all with the Barkers' three muzzled bear heads) present an interesting record of the various marriages in which this family was involved.

In more recent years, among other purposes for which the priory was used was as a school between around 1862 until the mid 1880s, at which time the panelling was installed in the infirmary. At one stage during this period there were twenty-five boys aged between nine and fourteen, attended by three masters. The school moved here from Nethergate House. The incoming headmaster, a Mr Joseph B.Gee, felt that the priory offered better premises because '*being isolated, its inmates would be less liable to contagious or infectious diseases; and further, because of the roomy character of the dormitories, and the spacious grounds – six acres – which could be applied to recreative purposes*'. The school's prospectus for November 1873 gives some interesting insights into life at the school. Here are a few extracts. '*The bathroom contains a bath holding above 300 gallons of water. Each pupil is required to take a tepid (80 degree) bath weekly, unless a special request is made to the contrary*'. '*The school attends the parish church twice on each Sunday occupying the whole of a side chapel there, with a private entrance, but a pew is also provided at the Congregational Chapel*' (now the United Reformed Church) '*for those parents who prefer it. College caps are worn on Sundays, and also for walking dress. No holiday is given at Easter unless specially desired*'. A letter from one parent which was included in the prospectus said '*Dear Sir, it is now my pleasure to acknowledge the wisdom manifested in selecting your school at Clare for my second son. You will be pleased to learn that he is now doing well in the City of London. The push, tact and principle manifest in him, evidence wise training. Permit me to rejoice in your well merited success*'. Religious training included daily study of the Bible but no sectarian teaching. As regards Classics, '*The end kept in view is to impart knowledge of Latin and Greek by a thorough grammatical and critical study of standard authors*'. The commercial teaching included an accurate knowledge of counting-house routine. The curriculum also included land surveying when the condition of the fields and weather permitted.

Although the school was well thought of, pupil numbers declined and in the late 1800s it was forced to close.

The years of private ownership drew to a close. Sir George Digby Barker died in 1914 and was buried in the Priory Chapel of the parish church. In 1916 his widow, Lady Barker, married Lt Col. Ernard Barnardiston - of the family who owned the priory in the 16th and 17th centuries.

On Sir George's death the house passed to the elder of his two daughters, Helena Augusta Victoria, widow of Sir Henry May - her husband had only lived at the Priory for a couple of years between 1919 and 1922. Fulfilling his

wish, Sir Henry's ashes were buried at the top of the castle mound, which had long been the property of the Barker family. Helena (Lady May) lived at the priory until 1940. She died in 1945 and her ashes, too, were buried on the castle mound. She was well loved and kindly remembered by the people of Clare, to whom she was a good neighbour. (More glimpses of this and other periods of the private ownership of the priory will be found in a later chapter).

The army occupied the house during the 1939-1945 war as a brigade headquarters. For a time General MacArthur stationed himself there, and just before the invasion of Europe, King George VI visited the Priory to discuss the invasion with him. Later it was let to Sir Campbell Mitchell Cotts for a time, and then became a nursing home until 1953.

An account of the story of developments which followed is recorded in an Augustinian journal at the re-opening of the priory in the following terms:-

'Lady May was deeply religious, though not a Catholic. In 1939 she told her daughter, Mrs Stella de Fonblanque, who had become a Catholic, "I depend upon you to bring about the return of the friars to Clare Priory". She added "Give me your medal of the Blessed Virgin Mary", and buried the medal at the door of the Infirmary, believing that her prayer for the return of the friars would be granted.'

On the death of Lady May in 1945 ownership of the house passed to her daughters, but they had already realised, as had Lady May, that the post-war conditions would make continuation of the house as their family home impossible. The Augustinian Friars had by now returned to England after 300 years of absence and had already founded priories in London and elsewhere.

The account given at the re-opening goes on to say:- *'On the Feast of Our Mother of Good Counsel (a title for Mary revered by the Austins) in 1953, the tenant in possession of the property unexpectedly vacated the Priory, thus making it possible for the friars to return'.*

So Lady May's wish was fulfilled, largely through the very generous act of the two of her daughters to whom the property now belonged - Mrs Stella de Fonblanque (who now lies at rest in the monastic cemetery, the first Catholic buried there since the Reformation), and Mrs Iris Johnston, who remained a Protestant but was still very willing to help. These two sisters decided to let the Friars have the house for a tiny fraction of its value. The transfer was effected, and the Austins eventually returned in 1953.

A LIST OF THE OWNERS OF CLARE PRIORY.

(NOTE: On occasion the actual occupant was a tenant, not the owner).

1248-1538 The Prior and Brothers Eremite of the Order of St Augustine at Clare.
1538-1553 Richard Frende, Trumpeter to King Edward VI.
1553-1576 Richard Frende junior.
1576-1578 Elizabeth, widow of Richard Frende and afterwards wife of William Byssshop.
1578-1589 John Frende.
1589-1596 John Killingworth.
1596-1619 Sir Thomas Barnardiston.
1619-1679 Giles Barnardiston.
1679-1680 Captain Giles Barnardiston.
1680-1685 Frances, widow of Giles Barnardiston.
1685-1714 Edward Johnston and Thomas Sparrow.
1714-1715 Barnardiston Johnston.
1715 Samuel Barnardiston.
1715-1718 John Poulter.
1718-1720 Francis Boteler.
1720-1745 John Poulter.
1745-1750 Joseph Barker.
1750-1758 Martha (nee Barker) wife of William Shrive, and Lydia (nee Barker) wife of Joseph Sayer.
1758-1803 William Shrive junior.
1803-1804 Lt Colonel John Barker.
1804-1848 Caroline (nee Conyers), widow of Lt Colonel John Barker.
1848-1896 John Barker, grandson (a child at the time. The house was let to Lt Colonel George Baker and then to a long succession of strangers).
1896-1914 General Sir George Digby Barker, G.C.B. (= Grand Cross of Bath).
1914-1945 Helena, Lady May, elder daughter of Sir George Barker; widow of Sir Henry May.
1945-1953 Lady May's four daughters, especially Mrs Stella de Fonblanque and Mrs Iris Johnston
1953 The Austin Friars.

3. THE PRIORY SINCE THE FRIARS' RETURN IN 1953.

History turned full circle when the Augustinians came back to Clare in 1953 in that they returned from Ireland, where they had gone centuries before.

The re-opening of the priory as an establishment of the Austin Friars was described in one of their journals in the following terms:-

'On Sunday May 10 1953 Catholics gathered from many places. Crossing the railway lines, they entered the Priory grounds near the place of the friars' cemetery. Then they were guided past the remains of the Monastery Church, taking the path which led them by the ruins of St Vincent's Chapel. An ancient archway in the eastern wall gave them entrance to the cloister. Through the southern wall an open door showed them the altar, made ready for the holy sacrifice of the Mass. After the consecration, the sanctuary lamp was lighted, and the room became an oratory.'

Another photograph in the magazine shows the ledge by the sedilia being used as an altar, with the congregation in the ruins of the monastic church behind. The first prior of the re-established priory was the Very Rev Dr Joseph Curtis, OSA .

The return of the Austins meant that Catholics of Clare and the surrounding villages once again had a local church, and a symbol of the past had come to life again for the whole of Clare. As relationships warmed over the years, the happiness of Christians of other churches grew. The restored local Catholic church works closely with other Christians in Clare, and provides a very attractive centre for inter-denominational services and other activities, indoors and out.

The present close relationship of the Catholic church with other churches has been very vividly illustrated over the years. Members of the different congregations mix together happily, their pastors in turn taking part in united services. But one of the great religious experiences in the life of the present writer - and many others? - occurred on Whit Sunday 1992. The congregations of the Baptist and United Reformed Churches were already sharing a special eucharist with the Anglicans at the parish church. Suddenly the door opened and the prior of the time led the congregation of the Roman Catholic church in, to be present at the eucharist - perhaps one of the most significant visible demonstrations of the unity of the Christian Church in Clare since the Reformation.

The Austin's order is engaged mainly in parish work and teaching, but in recent years and with a staff of up to half a dozen the premises at Clare have been also used for a wider variety of purposes. These include training for students and novices and testing their fitness for the religious life. Today there are priests in England, Scotland, Ireland, Nigeria, Australia, and in Rome, who remember with gratitude peaceful, happy days spent at Clare. The premises also lend themselves to conferences of up to fifty persons, and the doors are open to those of any denomination for Retreats under the direction of their own clergy if desired.

An important use of the priory is the offer to anybody to share the life of the community of friars and laity for a time. Sanctuary is offered to those in special need such as businessmen seeking to get away from the rat race for a few days, mothers in desperate need of rest, couples who have problems to sort out, and people who wish for counselling or spiritual guidance or simply to experience the peace and serenity of the house and its setting.

By 1992 urgent repairs had become essential and extensive renovations were carried out. Taking advantage of this the house has been refurbished and altered so as to provide seven comfortable bedrooms including facilities for the physically disabled, features which will help this practical side of the priory's work to continue. In 1998-9 another block offering further accommodation was built.

The spacious grounds serve several purposes in their own right. Always they invite a quiet walk. An annual giant Craft Fair sees very large numbers of exhibitors demonstrating their skills - blacksmith, candle maker, lace maker, wood turner, and many more, attracting perhaps 10,000 visitors. The grounds are also sometimes enjoyed by caravan clubs for rallies.

4. THE PRIOR'S HOUSE DESCRIBED.

The Prior's house, together with the present church, contains some of the few remaining parts of the 14th century buildings. It may have been built in the days of Elizabeth de Burgh, but was probably a little earlier. Because of Elizabeth's generosity her coat of arms was put in the windows of the house. There was a large fire in the late 15th century, and this led to the need for major reconstruction of the first building, so the majority of older features only reach back to this later date.

It has usually been suggested it was built as a cellarium or cellarer's hall (the cellarer being the official who provided food and drink) converted to a prior's house in early Tudor days to give the prior a residence to entertain guests. There are reports of various visits by bishops, who would bring with them many attendants needing accommodation. It has been said that the residential quarters were created upstairs, the ground floor remaining the

cellarer's hall in the middle, with the parlour at the north end, and the pantry and buttery to the south. However, the fine ornamentation of the main room raises queries - it is hardly the sort of thing to be expected in an area which was mainly a storeroom. Also, it seems a very large space to have been used solely for this purpose in what was a relatively small community compared with other friaries. The elaborate door, the first point reached from the old position of the main gate, may also imply a more noble use. Taken together, these facts raise the question as to whether the main room was not more of a reception area from an early date, perhaps for important visitors - the adjacent smaller areas being sufficient for a cellarer's stores. True, the wall now separating the oratory from the main room is only dated as 18th century, but perhaps this does not preclude an earlier wall there - possibly confirmed by the fact that the ceiling ornamentation does not run into that smaller room.

Further and extensive changes were made when the building became a private house, although it continued to incorporate windows and buttresses of the 15th century and a fine door of the early 14th century in the west wall. Elizabethan times saw additions including a fireplace (whose chimney has three good shafts) in the east wall, and probably the square bay window in the present oratory. The bays towards the cloister vary in date between the 16th and 20th centuries, but two have bargeboards which are original and bear carvings of the vine. These are best seen from inside the cloister.

At various times owners put up partitions in different places to form additional rooms. A later owner would then attempt to rectify such 'disfigurements'.

NOTE: From time to time furnishings etc. may be moved to different positions, so not everything may be found as described here.

THE PRESENT MAIN ROOM is usually thought of as having originally been the cellarer's hall - his office, storage space for food and drink etc. - but see the query above.

Its ceiling is a magnificent late 15th century construction with carved beams. It has been claimed that the carvings are in separate timbers attached to the main beams, but some who have examined them closely have found no evidence for this claim. It is one of several in Clare which all bear a strong family resemblance including carved trails along a central beam, with radiating and stopped rafters. Others in Clare which are suggested as being similar presumably include those in the Bell Hotel, and the ceiling at Church Farmhouse. A similar one also exists in Paycocke's at Coggeshall.

The ceiling's structure consists of two lateral and two transverse beams. On one of each of these pairs of beams the carving finishes six feet from the wall, suggesting that in the days before the carving, a timber screen ran across the hall from the great doorway, perhaps to exclude draughts from the rest of the hall.

The carvings incorporate fine leaf and scrollwork with various figures in between, including a monk's head, some recognisable animals, and what are apparently mythical creatures. They also include, near the window, one scene which a vivid imagination might try to link up with the Clare legend (see chapter 10). It seems to depict the devil fleeing a church somewhat similar in appearance to the present church, formerly the Infirmary. But that building was not a church at the time the beams were carved, and would have looked very different anyway, because the dormitory block ran along its front. Sometimes fonts depicting the Seven Sacraments used a scene of a departing devil to represent Penance: perhaps such a subject is more likely to lie behind this carving on the Cellarer's Hall beam. At the centre there is an intriguing figure. Is it just a decorative monster? But it bears some similarities to a Green Man, having something emerging from each side of his mouth as is typical of that figure. In this respect it is like one which appears in many Christian buildings. A separate note on this feature will be found in Book IV, Appendix A.

The **door to the exterior** is original 14th century, but has been re-set since. It is similar to two at Clare parish church in that each consists of two doors in one (a large door with a smaller one set within), and is called a cat and kitten door. Its exterior has traceried panels which probably once held saints' images but have been defaced, presumably at the time when Puritans and others attacked all images. Of the three central ones, Mary is thought to have been in the middle, Augustine on her right (perhaps with his typical mitred head) and Augustine's mother Monica on Mary's left. The **windows**, at least their mullions, may be 15th century, although Pevsner says Elizabethan. The fireplace is probably a 16th century addition. The present **staircase** is post-Reformation and leads to the upper floors, which are not open to the public. Some **furniture** in this room bears the Barker crest.

The room now used as **THE ORATORY** was created in the 18th century by erecting a party wall between it and the rest of the hall, although presumably this does not exclude the possibility of an earlier partition there, as indicated earlier. When the house was privately owned it was the morning room. Its **fireplace** may be original. The **square bay** was probably built in the Elizabethan period. The **windows** contain the arms of the Barker family, private owners of the house. They form a good example of the way coats of arms change with marriages and different generations, the basic three muzzled bear heads of the Barker family remaining constant while different arms from other families are brought in. An account of coats of arms appears in Book IV Appendix B.

The **Stations of the Cross** depicted in this room now number fifteen instead of fourteen as has been traditional since they were finalised by Pope Clement XII in 1731. The fifteenth, the resurrection, is represented here by an icon of that scene. The original fourteen are: 1) Jesus is condemned; 2) He receives the cross; 3) He falls for the first time; 4) He stops to console his mother; 5) Simon of Cyrene helps carry the cross; 6) Veronica wipes his face and receives an impression of his image; 7) Jesus falls again; 8) He speaks to the women of Jerusalem; 9) He falls for the third time; 10) He is stripped of his garments; 11) He is nailed to the cross; 12) He dies; 13) He is taken down from the cross; 14) He is laid in the sepulchre. The incidents numbered 1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 are found in the Gospels; 3, 4, 6, 7 and 9 are based on old traditions which arose after the Gospels were written. The

word 'stations' is used as in 'stationary', meaning 'stopping-point', The origin of stations of the cross lies in locations in Jerusalem where the events which took place between the condemnation of Jesus and his being placed in the sepulchre were traditionally said to have occurred. When the Franciscans were granted custody of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem they erected images of these events, called 'stations', in their churches in Europe, so pilgrimages could be carried out in spirit by those unable to travel to Jerusalem.

A copy of the picture **the Tree of Lecceto**, which may have a link with Clare, was in this room previously, although missing at the time of writing, The original is in the sacristy of the monastic church of Lecceto near Sienna, and was painted apparently in the 17th century, although the artist has not been identified. It shows the ilex tree (ilex is the English for leccio) and in general form is reminiscent of the familiar Tree of Jesse, but has faces in the branches of the tree where that has figures. The faces are those of thirty-two beati, figures whose special sanctity the church has acknowledged, and are shown as the fruits of sanctity under the patronage of St Augustine. The possible connection with Clare is that the name of one, William Flete, was also the name borne by a friar at Clare in 1296. Also depicted is a cardinal (with a red hat at the side of his head) and an archbishop (with a green hat).

Manuscripts at the British Museum describe **stained glass windows** which were previously at Clare Priory. These documents came from the Barnardiston family in 1638, so it seems possible the windows were still there at that date. (The editors of the cartulary state that the friars sometimes included the arms of benefactors in windows).

Some of the details are:-

'In a window (possibly the chapter house): Two escutcheons of Bucher and under written John Bucher, Archidiaconus, Essex (named in the cartulary as a benefactor). In the next: Two escutcheons ermine charged with three lions rampant or, under written Dona de Cotterill. In the next: Two pendants of shields, a bend of silver between two cottices or, dancette under an old fashioned helmet, covered with a chappe, parted per pale, or, and sable lined gules twixt two wings the one painted or and the other sable and argent downwards, under written William Clopton. In another window: Argent a chief g. and two cressants or. At the end of this house: Glazed with England and France in borders, another with Clare and Ulster (perhaps these representing Elizabeth de Burgh) another with Clare, Ulster and Bardolf St George there pictured.' (Reminder: the word 'or' in this connection means 'gold')

THE PASSAGE ADJACENT TO THE LIBRARY was restored in 1992 by the insertion of a partition to return the room to more practical use. The **image of St Augustine** here is probably 17th or 18th century, from Germany.

THE LIBRARY was formerly the buttery and pantry area, and then became the dining room. It was formed as a kitchen by Francis Boteler in 1720 from part of the hall, as indicated by a piece of wood taken down late in the 18th century when the partition was repaired. Upon this was written *'F.B. Esqr 1720 made by A. Constable A.20'*. It has been suggested that the carpenter was of the family of the famous artist but this cannot be confirmed, although it is known the latter had many relatives in this Stour valley. The room was still a kitchen around 1870. One reference suggests it was in use as a dining room by 1884, but another says it was Sir George Barker (who did not become the owner until 1896) who removed the passage which had been built through it and restored the room, perhaps in 1902.

The **arcaded mantelpiece** is of interest. It is an old oak beam from a demolished passage wall, re-used and carved by a Cambridge woodcarver, J. Whitaker, early in the 20th century. It carries details of the Clare legend, which Mr Whitaker had heard in the town (details of the story are given in chapter 10) and carvings of Sir George studying the long bill for repairs, his wife (later to be Mrs Barnardiston, author of the book on the Priory) and himself - although these portraits are not in the order described by Mrs Barnardiston in her book.

THE UPPER FLOORS.

The first floor was originally just one great hall for entertaining, and a small apartment. The area was later divided by the private owners into a corridor and five rooms, and now consists of a series of guestrooms. One of these rooms, now sometimes spoken of as the **panelled room**, was once known as the Brown Room. It has very fine panelling which includes a carving with the date 1604 and the initials T.B., presumably representing Sir Thomas Barnardiston who lived in the house 1596-1619 and therefore likely to have been responsible for this panelling. Sir Thomas is also remembered in the parish church of SS Peter and Paul, Clare, because he was the builder of the oak gallery known as the priory pew which projects from what has sometimes been called the priory chapel in that church. That gallery has in its carvings the crosses crosslet, the head of an ass (horse) head and a bittern (both in heraldic form so not true to nature), all of which are parts of the arms of the Barnardiston family. His arms are also in the east window of the parish church. The panelled room formerly had a south window. Colonel Baker (sic), who lived at the priory from 1840 to 1850, moved the fireplace from the east wall to its present position, which unfortunately blocked out the sunshine and cross lighting which would have come from the south window. The panelling in the gallery outside the room is also dated around 1840, but signs of patchwork indicate it is not now in its original position. An old watercolour drawing shows the hall was once lined with panelling to the height of almost two metres. There is no panelling at all there now, so perhaps that is where the present panelling in the gallery originated. Colonel John Barker (sic), who was in residence in 1803, had already put a large Gothic window in the north end of the gallery. Graffiti on some panelling reads *'1719 T.R. hic habitavit et non infeliciter'* (TR lived here and not unhappily).

THE SMALL GROINED PORCH OR LOBBY, AND THE COURTYARD BEYOND.

This vaulted chamber is described in one guide to Suffolk as being the most interesting feature of the priory, and is one of the most complete parts of old work left.

The **starfish vaulting** is most unusual. The **doorway leading from the library passage** into the area was perhaps originally an exterior door, suggested by the fact that it has a dripstone (a curved ledge around the arch to protect the door from rain), the porch perhaps having been enclosed by the year 1500. **The stairway** from this lobby was originally 14th century, though now renovated and half its earlier width. It was previously an external feature, running only to the present first floor level, and formed the friars' approach to the prior's lodging and the frater (the refectory or dining room) - and the place where Brother Hugh fell?! (See The Legend of Clare in chapter 10). Originally there were two windows, but one was cut down to the ground and made into a doorway. The remaining one is a two-light traceried window whose 14th century mullions contain fragments of original 15th century medieval stained glass, now disarranged. Some are from pictures of a building, and it is interesting to try to guess the original scene. Another piece of glass, like a blue horseshoe, is thought to be the nimbus from a head of Jesus, although the face has disappeared. The words '*anno dm*' but without a date also appear. Another feature is a white rose, symbol of the House of York which the friars supported. Among fragments of later glass inserted in the window are the initials 'T.B.', although these have been upended so are not at once recognisable. They presumably stand for Thomas Barnardiston, who was at the Priory 1596-1619. Nearby are some geometric symbols, which Mrs Barnardiston describes as trade marks. They have close similarities to marks used by stonemasons to identify their work, or perhaps are some other identification signature. The **figure of Mary situated in the porch** is a reminder that Mother of Good Counsel is a favourite name for Mary in the Order of St Augustine and is observed by a Feast Day on April 26. The name may arise from the fact that Mary must have been a good teacher of the baby Jesus, and suggests that Christians should, in the same way, follow what Jesus teaches.

One suggestion about **the irregular wooden corridor** beyond the stone lobby is that it was there before the present house. Another is that it was added fairly soon after the lobby was built. The corridor apparently led to an entrance before the construction of the present one opening into the small cobbled courtyard. It led straight through to the old kitchen area, so was almost certainly a kind of tradesmen's entrance. The wooden corridor together with the stone lobby form the west and north sides of this courtyard. Pevsner claims there was also a range to the east, later widened to form a kitchen, and that this provided an east wall for what he thinks was a small cloister. He suggests that this cloister was changed in the 16th-17th century into an inner courtyard, with an entrance and back door being constructed through the south range. However, the suggestion that this was an actual cloister seems most unlikely.

The **font-like object** in the wooden corridor has been identified as one part of an ancient mortar and pestle, dated perhaps around 1300 AD.

The 750th anniversary of the Augustinian friars' coming to England, and to Clare in particular, was marked on May 3rd 1998 by the unveiling of a shrine in this ancient timbered corridor. Proceedings began with a pilgrimage, with visitors from other parts of England and from Scotland, after which the **shrine to Our Mother of Good Counsel** was dedicated by a visitor from Rome, the Very Rev Thomas Cooney OSA, assistant general of the Order of St Augustine. The relief of Mary at the heart of the shrine is by the well-known religious artist Mother Concordia, OSB, and is based on a fresco in the Augustinian church at Genazzano, near Rome. That fresco, which has been an object of devotion since 1467 by ordinary people and by a number of popes (including John XXIII just before the 2nd Vatican Council) is where the name Lady of Good Counsel originated. The painting dates from the time of an influx of refugees to Italy from Albania, and one charming legend says it was miraculously wafted across the Adriatic Sea from that country. Later experts think it may have been painted by an artist of the Venetian school. Although painted on a wall, the plaster became partly detached and for centuries has been more of a relief than a straight painting.

The Shrine contains a sculpture which blends a number of concepts. It is the work of Francine Plunkett from a series of her work entitled The Light within. The origin was an arched doorway with stone steps in Bethlehem, but as the artist proceeded, images emerged of the cave stable in the Church of the Nativity (to which it certainly looks similar) and of the sepulchre and resurrection, with the theme of new life also being implied by the likeness in shape to a womb. The sculpture has been used, often with votive lights, for prayer vigils and on other occasions, especially at Candlemas and Easter.

On the same day as the dedication of the shrine an open air mass attended by upwards of 800 people took place in the ruins of the old monastic church.

THE WING OF THE MAIN HOUSE RUNNING OUT FROM THE SMALL GROINED PORCH leads to the site of the original frater, which had a kitchen at ground level and a refectory above. Pevsner asserts one doorway from the cloister to the refectory is 14th century. The wall on the left of the passage in this part of the present building is the original wall between the cloister and the frater block, although much altered. Part of the lavatorium arcading (which is more fully described a few pages on) can be seen in the roof of the entrance to a room on the left of the passage. Another small section of the old wall can be seen further down the passage, along which are now various domestic rooms. At the end of the passage is the parish or conference room, built in 1908 as a billiards room. It has a modern east window and is nicely panelled. The recess in the south wall is matched by a projection measuring ten feet by three feet outside at the eastern end of the southern wall of the block. It indicates the position of a shaft leading to the locality of a former lectern on the floor above. From this lectern a friar read aloud to the others during meals. The foundations of this shaft were discovered when the room was being built and now form the basis of the chimney corner. Mrs Barnardiston says '*New walls have been built on the old foundations, leaving the old plinth in place*'. It has been suggested that the fireplace may have been that of the monastic kitchen, perhaps moved from its original position.

The plan drawn by one archaeologist shows the site of a former fireplace in the present passage. The ogee roof of this room is in the Netherlands style, which was much copied in East Anglia in Renaissance times, and popular again in the early 20th century, when the room was built.

THE STABLE HOUSE ACCOMODATION opposite the side entrance to the Prior's House is a new block of buildings which was developed from the remaining wall of an old stable in 1998/9 and was designed in keeping architecturally with the existing buildings. It provides a series of en suite rooms, and also incorporates a kitchen and counselling and quiet rooms. It was blessed and opened by the Very Reverend Tom Cooney OSA, assistant general of the Order of St Augustine, who came from his base at Rome for the purpose.

CLARE PRIORY FARMHOUSE lies beyond the boundary south of this block of buildings. This is now a private domestic residence. It is basically a mid or late 16th century building, with extensions made early in the 19th century and also about 1965, and has fine interior beams.

5. THE PRESENT CHURCH, PREVIOUSLY THE INFIRMARY.

There have been various guesses at the original purpose of this building, which was erected in the 14th century. Some have thought it was a library, but it is now generally believed that it was the farmery hall, the infirmary, possibly with a library above. Barnardiston states that until Sir William St John Hope's excavations (1904) it was always called the Chapel Barn, and was believed to be the church of the friars. White's directory in the mid-nineteenth century affirms this, and claims that Joan of Acre was buried there. (White also erroneously has Lionel Duke of Clarence buried in the parish church). However, it never was a chapel or church as such, but as an infirmary it could well have contained a small chapel where mass would have been said for the sick and infirm, and the name 'chapel barn' may have derived from this, and lingered on.

After the Dissolution the building was badly neglected and left derelict, but it was sometimes used as a barn or outhouse, and probably it was potential usefulness such as this which helped to save it from complete destruction. It was used by the school which occupied the house during the second half of the 19th century, and the panelling probably dates from that period.

In the porch (which is a later addition) the **stone artifact** which supports the holy water pan has an uncertain origin. One interesting conjecture is that it could link up with the spring of chalybeate curative water in the field to the front of the house, mentioned earlier. It has an aperture in its basin, and the suggestion has been mooted that it might originally have been embedded in the ground at the site of the spring in order to facilitate the extraction of the water. It has also been suggested that it could have been used in the market for washing coins at the time of the plague, when it was thought that coins carried the disease.

The present entrance to the church is an **original doorway** with a modern head and jambs.

The superb and remarkably well preserved **original 14th century roof**, with collar beams, is reckoned to be one of the best examples of such craftsmanship to have survived. At their thickest part the beams measure a hundred centimetres (forty-two inches) around.

The building was originally of **two storeys**, as it still is at the rear, but the intervening floor has been removed from most of the area. The lower floor was probably the infirmary. There are **five windows close to each other high on the north side** (the left on entering), **one complete recess and part of another on the opposite (south) wall**, and **two small rectangular ones at the eastern end of the building**. The existence of these suggests separate cubicles on the upper floor and perhaps a small dormitory at the east end, these possibly being for the infirmarian or scholars, or novices and their master. The rooms were probably separated by a central passage, which also gave access from the friars' dormitory as described later. The place where the dormitory joined the infirmary can be identified from outside - above the porch the left hand window can be seen to have been reduced from doorway size where the two sets of buildings joined.

The east wall with its blocked up window behind the present high altar is part of the original structure, and beyond it there are still two storeys. Although some suggest there may have been a pharmacy here, the main upper area at this eastern end is thought to have served as a reredorter (literally meaning 'rear of the dormitory', a euphemism for what we know as a toilet). The arcading visible at ground level at the rear of the building, although now blocked in the position where a stream flowed past, doubtless used for cleansing purposes in connection with the reredorter. The rear area of the ground floor of the infirmary may have also offered a room suitable for the infirmarian or visitors, and now serves as the sacristy.

Some **pew ends** include the Austin friars' logo and motto *Tolle lege* ('take up and read'), a reminder of St Augustine's conversion. A **picture of Mary as Our Lady of Good Counsel** has an explanation of this representation. The **stations of the cross** along the walls were carved by a modern artist.

Some of the windows also belong to the early 14th century, but the **stained glass pictures in the west windows** are post-1953, and depict Mary and Joseph and some of the favourite saints of the Order, Clare of Montefalco, Nicholas of Tolentino, Rita of Cascia, and Thomas of Villanueva. See chapter 9 for some details of their lives. From the exterior a **niche or blocked squint** can be seen near a window towards the east end of the north wall. Its origin or purpose is unknown. A guess is that it might have contributed towards the name 'chapel barn' mentioned above, and tie in with the likelihood of there being facilities for religious observances for inmates of the infirmary. **The arcading at the rear** of the premises, visible from outside, has already been mentioned as being associated with the reredorter (toilets).

6. THE RUINS AND OUT TO THE SMALL BACK ENTRANCE.

THE FORMER BLOCK OF BUILDINGS ABUTTING AND AT RIGHT ANGLES TO THE PRESENT CHURCH.

As mentioned in the last chapter, excavations have revealed that there used to be a block of buildings attached to the present church at its western end, i.e. by the door. This contained the dorter, chapter house, and auxiliary areas. The **dorter**, the community's dormitory, was at upper storey level, starting above the entrance lobby of the present church and running towards the monastic church, thus virtually joining the church and the infirmary on this higher level. It ran east of the cloister wall, but not quite parallel to it. There was an open space about four metres (twelve feet) wide between this block and the cloister, forming an oddly-shaped courtyard. Below part of the dormitory stood **the chapter house**, which stretched out beyond the dormitory wall's bounds to its own entrance door in the cloister wall. The **calefactory** (warming room) with its constantly burning fire for the use of the friars in the winter, stood in the further end of this block, where remains of its fireplace have been excavated.

When walking along the path today, **the first doorway and two windows seen on the left** used to lead from the cloister to the chapter house, where spiritual and temporal affairs were attended to. The fact that deeds were dated from a chapter house from 1360 onwards indicates one was in use then, although the dedication of one, along with that of the cloisters and cemetery, is recorded as being in 1380 - a late dedication or perhaps a replacement building.

Although **the opening in the long wall** at the end of the present path now gives a view of the castle keep when the trees are bare of leaves, its original (and more important) function links up with features near the sedilia inside the monastic church, to be described later.

The arch to the cloister which stands at the right-angle between the two walls, formerly led from the cloister (and therefore from the choir of the church) to the calefactory and the stairway to the dormitory above, 'night stairs' which would have been used by friars to enter the church to chant their offices in the middle of the night. A hinge pin remains.

A window can be seen high in the wall.

Excavations showed there was probably a small court between the chancel wall and the dormitory stairs in this area. However, the fact that the interior corner of the walls here is rounded off, not square, suggests to some that a spiral staircase stood by the chancel wall. The lay-out of the area therefore remains uncertain.

INSIDE THE CLOISTER.

Originally there would have been a walk around this area. A spur which could have supported vaulting exists at one point, hinting that this walk might have been covered, but the extent of any such roof cannot be proved. The purpose of cloisters was to give space for exercise, private prayer, and work on manuscripts such as copying breviaries, or just sitting. The cartulary shows that leading was carried out in 1361, proving the cloister was in existence by that date.

Along the east wall (i.e. moving left from this entrance arch) **a door now blocked** possibly gave access to a passage running between the warming room and the chapter house, under the dormitory, and through to the exterior – see later note on the cemetery. There is a good view from here of **carved bargeboards** on the incline of the apexes of two of the bays at the rear of the house. The **outer bays** were built between the 16th and 18th centuries, but the bargeboards with their fine carvings of an endless vine are original.

Next come the **open doorway and windows** which led to the chapter house. The windows are of the original building, but the doorway is a replacement. There is a puzzling opening above the doorway, although this might have made sense as part of the original doorway.

The south wall of the cloister (the wall along the ogee-roofed building) is the original wall, much altered, of a two-storied wing consisting of the refectory above and the kitchen below as described in chapter 4. **The first door on the left** (the east) end of this wall opens into the parish room. Moving to the right, the position of **another door** is indicated although now **set in a buttress**, and possibly a **window** to its left. This door apparently led through to a passage in the kitchen area. Pevsner says one doorway to the refectory is 14th century.

The bricked-in arcading at the west end of the block (the end nearest the house) was the **lavatorium**. A lavatorium was a trough, often with running water, usually found near the frater in just such a corner of a cloister as here. It was a place where monks could wash their hands when passing from the cloister to the refectory for their meal. Half of the end arch of the feature at Clare is now incorporated in the later extension of the house, and can be seen in the passage inside the house. It seems there was **another door** further to the right of the lavatorium, which is likely to have given access to the first storey dining room by means of the small groined porch and its stairway, to which reference was made in chapter 4. One of these doors was blocked when a late 16th century window had a fireplace built against it at the time the wing projecting into the cloister garth was added in the 17th century. **Across the cloister**, on its north side, **the doorway** still in use is the friars' entrance to the choir or chancel, their end of the church, with a **holy water stoup** set in the wall at the entrance. In this arch the remnants of pegs may have supported the **hinges of the original door**.

The cloister was dedicated in 1380 by William Edmund OSA, auxiliary bishop of London, who also dedicated a new chapter house and the cemetery.

THE MONASTIC CHURCH.

There was a smaller church on the site originally. Judging from the date when many large financial contributions began pouring in it would seem that the building of the large church probably started in 1279. Later benefactions were specifically related to repairs and additions. The church was dedicated in honour of the Blessed Virgin on 26th August 1338. The south wall is the only original one remaining, and even this has been much rebuilt from time to time. However, an idea of what the church used to be like can be gained from the present Clare parish church of SS Peter and Paul whose date, style, size and proportions are similar.

The width and shape of the monastic church is indicated by the wall on the south side and flowerbeds on the north. It was approximately 50 metres long (168 feet), the south wall still standing for what is likely to have been the church's full length. A buttress near the end of the wall marks the probable junction with the west front of the church, although it has been suggested the building may have extended beyond the front of the Prior's House.

The present open area surrounded by walls incorporates a former **cemetery** which ran around the north (the further side) of the church. One document in the cartulary reports that in 1381 the bishop of London dedicated *'the cemetery at Clare which lies outside the walls of the church, extending from the west door to the footbridge leading to the castle.'* However, other documents in the cartulary indicate that the first cemetery was licensed by the bishop of Norwich a century earlier, in February 1279, and consecrated by the exiled bishop of Bangor two months later. This was specifically stated to be for the interment of deceased friars. The editor of the published version of the cartulary suggests that the 1381 dedication might have been either an extension of the original cemetery, or a second one, possibly for local benefactors. Under a system known as confraternity, sometimes lay benefactors were enrolled in a monastery as their life was ending, and were created as members of the community when they died. A sketch plan by Dickinson, who excavated part of the ruins, suggests a cemetery to the east of the church, and a passage to it between the calefactory and chapter house, as mentioned in the note on the cloister.

A double screen wall ran forward from the position of the doorway we now use, separating the nave on the left and the chancel on the right. These walls supported a slender central bell tower of a type favoured by Austin friars. The existence of this tower is confirmed by documents which state that a large gift was made in 1363 for the building of a new bell tower. Its position was proved by the mass of foundations found at this point by Dickinson in his excavation of 1958. The friars used the choir for their daily services. It has been suggested that parts of one, or possibly two, choir stalls finished up in Belchamp St Paul church. One still there has an interesting carving of a monk's head. The nave was used by the public, perhaps in preference to going to the parish church because of the friars' friendliness and popular preaching - although attendance at the parish church was still essential for some purposes including weddings. The nave and choir are not in line with one another. Their different axes suggest either that they were influenced by earlier buildings on the site or that they were built at different times from each other (which is the reason many churches show a different alignment of these two features).

The nave had a north aisle (i.e. on the further side, across the site) of five or six bays. The eastern two of these bays were made wider to create a Chapel of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which is known to have existed at least from 1361. The outlines of these bays are marked out by flowerbeds. A **blocked-in space** to the left of the entrance arch might originally have been a shrine. Nearby in the south wall is a **double piscina** (a stone basin used with the vessels required for mass) probably serving the nave's altar on the west side of the screen wall separating the nave from the chancel.

The chancel or choir (to the immediate right of the entrance) was of six bays and did not have any aisles. Moving along to the right, the **blocked doorway** in the wall led to **St Vincent's chapel** and the sacristy. The other side of this doorway can be seen from the outer side of the wall.

Further along there are ruins of some **magnificent sedilia** - the seats for the chief ministrants at High Mass. Invariably there are three sedilia, but here the arches of only two remain. Masonry from what presumably would have been the third appears to have been re-used, now forming the memorial recess. At either side three holes suggest there were hinges here, which seems to imply the former existence of two doors, guarding the opening. In writing about the priory, Mrs Barnardiston suggested that a memorial tomb to Lionel Duke of Clarence and Elizabeth de Burgh, his first wife, was made in the south wall of the chancel. The opening here has carved pillars each side which could well have been part of such a tomb, and on the other side of the wall there are remains of a stone support at both edges, which further strengthens the theory. Mrs Barnardiston suggests the possible appearance of the tomb, with a decorated canopy above and perhaps recumbent figures of the couple. Did such a tomb also have incorporate the third sedila, whose omission was noted above? If not, a mystery surely remains.

In the space near the sedilia is the **Joan of Acre** tablet. a memorial installed in the 1920s. The date it records is wrong, being two years before her actual death. Joan, popularly called Joan of Acre, was Joan Plantagenet, the second daughter of Edward I and Queen Eleanor, born at Acre in Palestine during a crusade. She married Gilbert 'the Red' (Gilbert and Richard were recurring names of Clare lords) and later Ralph Monthermer. She was buried in 1307 in **St Vincent's chapel**, which opened out from here. Many royalty and nobility, including her brother King Edward II, attended her funeral. It was Joan who had set in motion the building of St Vincent's Chapel, perhaps so-named because she spent her early childhood in Spain, where St Vincent was a popular saint. Austin chroniclers record miraculous events after Joan's death. Capgrave states that fifty-two years after the burial the grave was opened and her body was found to be incorrupt. Osbern Bokenham speaks of the body *'lying whole and incorrupt on the south side of the friars' choir'* and of the many miracles *'wrought by God's grace through her, especially in the cure of toothache, back-ache and fever'*.

Joan of Acre's daughter Elizabeth, widow of Sir John de Burgh (and widowed twice more in quick succession) is credited with initiating the building of the chapter house, dormitory and refectory. She also took over University

Hall at Cambridge, which had collapsed financially, and in its place founded Clare Hall, now Clare College. A full article on her will be found in Book I Appendix B.

Elizabeth's granddaughter, another Elizabeth, and her husband Lionel (the third son of Edward III) were others of royal descent who were buried in the monastic church. (Their memorial tomb was mentioned above, and their burial is described below). These were followed in turn by their daughter, who had married into the Mortimer family and whose descendants ultimately included King Edward IV.

There is a very interesting and ancient poem associated with this area. It recounts an imagined **dialogue at Joan's tomb**, and is entitled *'Dialogue betwix a seculer askyng and a Frere answering at the grave of Dame Johan of Acres'*. The poem's object is to relate the lineal descent of the Clare lords from the foundation of the Priory until 1460, and was written around the latter date. It also gives some information about the buildings, and ends with praise of Richard, Duke of York, whose royal descent through the de Clares the poem may be proclaiming - see also article iv in chapter 10 'Some Stories associated with the Priory in Earlier Days'.

The **present altar**-like construction marks the assumed site of the original high altar.

The slabs in the turf in front of the high altar remind visitors of the area where Sir William St John Hope found remains of Lionel Duke of Clarence and his wife Elizabeth when excavating in 1904. Lionel was a great patron of the Clare Austin friars, and tried to found a university at Dublin under their direction. After his wife died he travelled to Italy, where he married the daughter of the Prince of Pavia. This lady was the heiress of two million gold florins and many towns and castles, and her father badly wanted a connection with the English throne. Wild rumours in England suggested Lionel might become a king, or even emperor, in Italy. More realistically, he could have carved out some kind of Mediterranean principality for himself, but he died within a few months of this marriage. Lionel was buried in Italy, in the company of St Augustine and others. However, he had always yearned for Clare, and his dying wish was that he should be brought home and buried before the high altar of Clare Priory church. His heart and bones were accordingly returned to England in 1375, and buried with the remains of his first wife, whom he had married when he was four years of age. Mrs Barnardiston points out that the reason a monumental tomb to this couple was set in the chancel wall (see above) instead of here would have been to avoid obscuring the view of the altar. Funeral expenses of Lionel were so high that nine years later a covenant had to be made to cover the outstanding expenses by the financial proceeds of special masses. Fuller, the historian, said of Lionel: *'Happy had he been, if either nearer to the throne, so as to enjoy the honour thereof, or further off, so as not to be envied and suspected for his title thereunto by king Henry IV.'* The old poem to which reference has already been made says:

*'King Edward the Third's son was he,
Sir Lionel, which buried is hereby;
And for a prince too simply.'*

A brief explanation of all this is that Lionel was the third son of Edward III, but it was descendants of Edward's fourth son, the Duke of Lancaster, who held the throne. Henry Bolingbroke had been crowned as Henry IV after usurping Richard II, whose subsequent death has often been thought to have been by murder. Thus the more senior line was by-passed. When the usurper Henry IV died, his son was crowned Henry V, still leaving the more senior branch of the family on the sidelines. Lionel's daughter Philippa married into the Mortimer family, and subsequent generations attempted to assert their regal rights, several times acknowledged by Parliament. Anne Mortimer (Philippa's granddaughter) married Richard, who was Earl of Cambridge and of the York line, thus strengthening the family's claim to the throne. Their son, also Richard, inherited the title of Duke of York, and in turn fathered that Edward who was to become King of England as Edward IV. So, after following a lengthy path, the offspring of the Clare family came to the throne of England.

Near the exit from the monastic church there are **two wall tablets**. One was installed by the **Richard III Society** in 2002 and lists his ancestors and relatives buried at the priory. These are named as Joan of Acre, Edward Baron Monthermer, Elizabeth de Burgh, Lionel Duke of Clarence, Edmund Mortimer Earl of March and Lady Margaret Neville. The other is to a **gardener**. It is good to note that the lowly are remembered as well as the great.

THE PRESENT LITTLE CEMETERY near the small gate dates from the time when the house was privately owned. Burials here in addition to those of friars have included Stella de Fonblanque and her son Tony, of the family which owned the priory in earlier years and who so much to restore it to the Austins. One of the friars buried here (in 1994) was from Nigeria. He had served his novitiate at Clare and was one of the first Austin friars to be ordained in Nigeria. He had come to England for medical treatment, but sadly died though still a young man. His burial at Clare makes a fitting link with a country where two Augustinian priests from the British Isles are buried.

THE HOLLOW just outside the small gate and running along the wall might be one of the ditches dug by the friars. Mrs Barnardiston says the railway ran between a ditch here and the millstream. But the earlier course of the River Stour may also have been somewhere near here. From Saxon days and mentioned in Domesday there was a corn mill at the end of Malting Lane which presumably needed a flow of water. (This became a horse-driven malt mill when the new millstream, the present waterway, was cut, which was by the 14th century). There is a little arch at ground level here. Although the wall is newer, could this arch indicate the position of another stream, one which

flowed along the rear of the Infirmary to service the reredorter, possibly eventually linking up with the ditch still found by the Priory Farmhouse?

7. SOME CONNECTIONS WITH THE PRIORY TO BE FOUND IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF SS PETER AND PAUL.

There are a number of features in the parish church which reflect the connections of centuries ago. More information on some of these will be found in the course of the text of Book IV (Clare Parish Church) but brief mention of some is appropriate here.

The **pew gallery** at the entrance to the south chapel. This is sometimes called the Priory pew because it was the family pew when the priory was a private residence.

A large grey **sepulchral slab** may be seen in front of the chancel underneath the aisle carpet. It has a partly defaced inscription in Latin '*HIC JACET MAGISTERUS DE GODAWYK QUONDAM PRIOR PROVINCIALIS ORDINIS MOSTRI CUIUS ANIMA PROPITETUR DEUS. AMEN.*' ('Here lies Master us de Godewyk, sometime provincial prior of our order, on whose soul may God have mercy. Amen'). A friar named Robert was Provincial (head) of the Augustinian friars in 1450. All that remains of the Christian name on the inscription are the final two letters of a word '*.....US*' which could well be the end of 'Robertus', so tends to confirm this as Robert de Godewyk. By its size it would seem that the slab had originally lain before an altar. It is assumed it was taken from the priory to the parish church, although the reason for doing so is not apparent. Certainly after the dissolution of monasteries and priories useful stones were often taken and re-used elsewhere, but in this position, leading up to the chancel, perhaps a better guess is that he was a well-loved local figure whose memory was cherished. But this must remain a guess.

Two earlier **altar dedications** in the parish church were to a St Nicholas and a St Katherine, and among the several saints bearing each of these names there was a pair who had connections with the Augustinians. One of the Saints Nicholas was Nicholas of Tolentino, who was an Austin friar and is described in chapter 9. He was canonised in 1446.

One of the Saints Katherine was Katherine of Siena. Her letters reveal her as a fiery church politician. She helped bring the papacy back to Rome from Avignon and reconciled warring factions in the church. Pope Urban VI often consulted her for advice. A woman of great personal faith and holiness, she was a mystic who was also a very practical worker, doing indefatigable work among the sick and poor especially during the time of the Black Death. She had a passionate concern for the salvation of all mankind, and died aged thirty three. Among her disciples was a William Flete, who was almost certainly the Austin friar of that name who came from Clare. Another local contact lies in the fact that she corresponded with Sir John Hawkwood, a soldier who came from near Clare. She died in 1380 and was canonised in 1461.

The dates on which both of these figures were canonised come immediately before the time of intensive alterations in the parish church which were in progress from 1460 onwards. It therefore seems reasonable to suggest that these characters were the ones whose names were commemorated by those altars, thus providing a possible link between the parish church and the priory

Relationships between the parish church and the friars in earlier centuries were described in chapter 1 and can be summed up by saying that where their areas overlapped the two parties often worked together happily, but nevertheless clashes sometimes arose. The present happy relationship, in which Clare's two nonconformist churches also share, is mentioned in chapter 3.

8. THE STORY OF ST AUGUSTINE, HIS RULE, AND A FAMOUS PRAYER.

The Austin friars have a traditional link with St Augustine of Hippo, who lived 354-430 AD.

St Augustine was a native of what is now Algeria, son of a pagan father and a Christian mother, St Monica, and was brought up as a Christian although not baptised in his earlier years. He was too concerned with enjoying himself to take his mother's teaching seriously.

At the age of sixteen he went to the university at Carthage in what is now Tunisia. This proved a door to new and dazzling pleasures, the thrill of gladiatorial and other shows. It was said of the theatre of those days that '*evil bubbled up like a frying-pan*'. He later described how the sins of those days stained his life for ever - but that all the time he was conscious of a sense of shame.

He began living with a young woman quite early on at Carthage, and remained devoted to her for fourteen years. They had a son when Augustine was 18, and named him Adeodatus, 'The gift of God' and Augustine always cherished him. This stage of his life was to end sadly. His mother had come to recognise his potential and knew this required marriage. His present partner was deemed unsuitable in Roman law - perhaps she was not a free-born Roman, so of lower social class. The bride chosen for him was still a child, below marriageable age. Years later, when he had become a bishop (which makes the account even more surprising) he wrote of his first partner '*She*

was torn from my side, and this was a blow which crushed my heart to bleeding, because I loved her dearly. She vowed never to give herself to another man, and left me with the son. I was too unhappy and weak to follow her example'. Augustine said of his son at the age of sixteen 'His intelligence leaves me spellbound'. But sad to say this son died while still a young man.

To revert to the main story. - In the midst of his life of pleasure Augustine had bouts of hard study, and gained recognition as a brilliant and earnest student. One day he picked up the Hortensius, a book by Cicero, the famous Roman orator and philosopher. This proved a turning-point in his life - he discovered a passion to find the truth about life, and began to seek true wisdom, trying to find the answer to questions like 'Who am I?' 'Why am I?' He alternated between wanting to indulge his pleasures and this earnest quest, and for nine years (374-383) was attracted to Manichaeism - a belief that there are two basic and opposing principles or gods, good and evil, light and darkness: evil is identified with matter so an ascetic life is essential; knowledge of the good comes from interior illumination and association with others who share this knowledge.

In the year 383 he went to lecture in Rome. His mother and some African friends went there to pray for him and try to help him. Soon he received an appointment in Milan as a professor of oratory. It was here that he came under the influence of Neoplatonism and also the preaching of St Ambrose, with whom he eventually became a friend. For eleven years he had been seeking peace of mind and true happiness, and kept believing he would find it the next day. He had faced agonising inward conflicts between honours and wealth on the one hand, and the call of a life dedicated wholly and directly to God on the other. At first he was drawn to Ambrose by his eloquence, while still disagreeing with his message. Eventually he came to say not only '*How eloquently he speaks*' but also '*How truly he speaks*', and began to reject other teaching to which he had been attracted. His mother came again from Africa, hoping to bring him to an acceptance of Christianity.

His decision was made in a garden one morning in 386 AD. He had been studying the letters of St Paul and admired Christianity, but had not got the will to break with his old ways. He was weeping in anguish under a fig tree, crying '*How long, how long? Tomorrow and tomorrow. Why not now, this hour?*' He heard a voice like a child's from a nearby house repeating '*Take up and read, take up and read*'. What did these words mean? He could think of no game in which they had a place. He accepted the experience as a word from God, opened his New Testament at random, and his eye fell on Romans 13:12-14, '*Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in debauchery and evil, not in strife and envying, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh*'. He stopped reading. His mind was made up, and he found peace. Describing this experience later in his 'Confessions', and coupling his feelings with those of friends who were Christians, he wrote '*You had pierced our hearts with the arrows of your love, and we carried your words with us as though they were staked to our living bodies*'. It is this experience which is depicted in the Austins' logo and motto - the open Bible ('God's words'), an arrow piercing a heart which is afire and transfixed to that Bible, and the phrase 'Tolle lege' ('Take up and read'). He was baptised by Ambrose, together with his son and a friend, on Easter Eve 387.

He returned to Hippo in North Africa and, having been greatly impressed with monasticism, shared in founding a monastic establishment there which also served as a training school for clergy. One day in church the bishop announced that another priest or presbyter was needed. Recognising Augustine in the congregation, people shouted for him then and there, although he was a layman, and reticent. He was ordained and soon made assistant bishop. When the bishop died five years later, Augustine was appointed to succeed him as bishop. He held this post for thirty-four years and became one of the greatest of bishops, showing true fairness and sympathy in his very genuine concern for the welfare of others. He built a hospice for strangers and sold church plate to ransom slaves. He lived in a community with his cathedral clergy, under strict rule, intensely busy with the conduct of worship, preaching, preparing catechumens, and looking after the material needs of the church and of the poor, and was also busy in civic affairs.

He wrote whenever he could. He wrote against the Donatists (a schismatic group) and on other topics to meet the needs of local people. In the interests of a wider audience he challenged the Manichees (see above) and Pelagianism (a heresy, voiced by a British monk, which denied the concept of original sin). He wrote books of great length. His output was immense - well over a hundred books and treatises, over two hundred letters, and more than five hundred sermons still survive.

Two of his longest works, 'Confessions' (an autobiography of the earlier phases of his life) and 'The City of God' have been read universally, and both are still re-published from time to time. 'The City of God' was prompted by the capture of Rome by Alaric the Goth in 410 AD. Heathen citizens had believed that while Rome worshipped the old gods she could rule the world. Now that men had turned to Christianity, Rome had fallen to conquerors. As Roman civilisation was collapsing in the West, St Augustine sat down and between the years 412 and 426 wrote this book, his description of a greater city and of God's eternal kingdom and rule. When he was on his deathbed in the year 430 the Vandals were at the gates of Hippo - but his book 'The City of God' and its author's spirit have survived the fall of many empires.

Sadly, some aspects of his teaching were interpreted in such a way as to lead to contention in the Church. One example is the case of the Jansenists in the seventeenth century. Although admirers of Augustine, these were assumed by Jesuits to have turned to Calvinism (because of their belief in predestination) and this led to strife within the Church.

Perhaps Augustine's life can be summed up in famous prayers of his from two different stages of his life - '*Oh Lord, make me chaste, but not yet*' and '*You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you*'.

His monastic rule has been adopted and adapted by numerous orders of men and women, notably by the canons regular and the friars who bear his name, the Augustinian Canons and Friars.

THE RULE OF ST AUGUSTINE - A SUMMARY.

The purpose and base of common life.

The basis is love of God and neighbour, shown by living harmoniously in the community. Call nothing your own, but let everything be yours in common. Food and clothing shall be distributed by your superior, not equally, for all do not enjoy equal health, but to each according to his need. Those who owned something in the world should be cheerful in wanting to share it in common now. Those who owned nothing should not now look for those things, but should be given what they need. Nor should the latter be proud if they now associate with some whom they dared not approach in the world - they must not be puffed up with pride even while the rich are being made humble. The rich should not look down upon their brothers who have come from a condition of poverty, nor take a pride in sharing out their riches.

Prayer.

Be assiduous in prayer at the times appointed. When you pray in psalms and hymns, think over in your hearts the words that come from your lips.

Moderation and self-denial.

Subdue the flesh, as far as your health permits, by fasting and abstinence from food and drink, but if someone is unable to fast, he should still take no food outside mealtimes unless he is ill. Listen at what is read out during the meal, so that not only do your mouths take nourishment but your hearts receive the word of God. If those in more delicate health are treated differently in the matter of food, this should not be thought of as unjust by those in stronger health, but rather they should consider themselves fortunate for having the good health which others do not enjoy. If something is given by way of food, clothing and bedding to those who have come from a more genteel way of life which is not given to those who are stronger, the latter ought to consider how far these others have come in passing from their life in the world down to this life of ours even though they have been unable to reach the level of frugality common to the stronger brothers. When the sick have recovered they should return to their former way of eating, not become slaves to the enjoyment of the food necessary in their illness.

Safeguarding chastity, and fraternal correction.

There should be nothing about your clothing to attract attention. Do not seek to please by your apparel, but by a good life. In your walk and all actions, let nothing occur to give offence to anyone who sees you. Although your eyes may chance to rest upon some woman, do not fix your gaze on her. It is sinful to desire her, the unchaste eye reveals an impure heart. If you notice wantonness of the eye in one of your brothers, admonish him. If he continues, let two or three more add their witness. Just as it is cruel to remain silent when someone is suffering a bodily wound, so it would be cruel not to make known a wound of the soul. If he fails to correct the fault he should be brought to the attention of the superior for correction, punishment, or, if he refuses to submit, expulsion - not out of cruelty but from a sense of compassion so that others may not be lost through his bad example. So too with other offences, find them out, ward them off and punish them, all out of love for man and a hatred of sin.

The care of community goods and treatment of the sick.

Keep your clothing in one place in charge of one or two to care for them and to prevent damage from moths. Receive your clothes from this common wardrobe. Do not worry if you are given something different from before. If someone complains because he has received poorer clothing he shows he is lacking in that holy and inner garment of the heart. Work not for your own benefit but for the common good. If anyone brings anything for their relatives in the monastery this must be placed at the disposal of the superior - to keep it secretly is to be guilty of theft. Your clothing should be cleaned as the superior determines so that too great a desire for clean clothing may not be the source of interior stains on the soul. A brother must not deny himself the use of the bath when his health requires it, but not just for the pleasure it gives him. Books are to be requested only at a fixed hour each day, but the issue of clothing and shoes should not be delayed but issued when there is need of them.

Asking pardon and forgiving offences.

Avoid quarrels altogether or put an end to them as quickly as possible, or anger may grow into hatred and turn the soul into a murderer. Whoever has injured another by insult or abusive language must repair the injury as soon as possible by an apology, and the injured person must forgive. One who is often tempted to anger yet is prompt to ask pardon from the one offended is better than one who though less given to anger finds it too hard to ask forgiveness. A brother who is never willing to ask pardon, or who does not do so from his heart, has no reason to be in the monastery even if he is not expelled. Avoid being harsh with words, and if such escape your lips, do not be ashamed to heal the wounds they have caused.

Governance and obedience.

The superior should be obeyed as a father with the respect due him. It is the superior's task to see that all these precepts are observed, and not to overlook transgressions but punish and correct them. But he should not think himself fortunate in his exercise of authority, but as one serving others in love. Although he holds the first place among you by dignity of his office, in fear before God he shall be as the least among you. He must show himself an example of good works towards all, and strive to be loved rather than feared, ever mindful that he must give an account of you to God.

Observance of the rule.

The Lord grant that you observe these precepts in a spirit of charity as lovers of spiritual beauty - not as slaves living under the law but as men living in freedom under grace. In order that you may see yourselves in this little book as in a mirror, have it read to you once a week so as to neglect no point through forgetfulness. When you find you are doing all that has been written, give thanks to the Lord. When you find you have failed, pray for forgiveness and that you should not be led into temptation.

A FAMOUS PRAYER OF ST AUGUSTINE
(From 'Confessions')

You have made us for yourself, O Lord,
and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

I strove towards you, but I was driven back from you, that I might taste death.
I held back from you, fearing to fall headlong, and died from that suspense.
Only your works, and not you yourself,
- and not even the chief of your works -
were brought to me
while I hungered for **you**.
But I did not know how to love you.

Who will give me help so that I may rest in you?
Too narrow is the house of my soul for you to enter it:
let it be enlarged by you.
It lies in ruins: do you build it up again.

Little by little, O Lord, you touched and calmed my heart.
I heard your voice from on high:
I am the food of adults, grow, and you shall feed on me.
I heard, as one hears in his heart:
There was no further room for doubt.

I marvelled that now I loved you, and not a phantom in your stead.
May I continue to love you most ardently,
May I cling to you with all my heart.
Too late have I loved you,
O Beauty, so ancient and so new,
too late have I loved you.
You have made us for yourself, O Lord,
and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

9. SAINTS IN THE WEST WINDOWS OF THE INFIRMARY/CHURCH.

In addition to **Mary and Joseph** the figures portrayed in 20th century glass are:-

Nicholas of Tolentino, Italy, 1245-1305. Canonised 1446. Feast day September 10.

Legend has it that when Nicolas was thinking of becoming a friar, his uncle, who was prior of a wealthy religious house, did not want his nephew to live the austere life of the friars and tried to persuade him to join his own monastery. Nicholas then had a dream in which a choir of twenty young men dressed in white sang 'Your end will be in Tolentino. Remain where you have been called, for there you shall find your salvation'. He joined the Order of Friars of St Augustine and was stationed at Tolentino from 1275 until his death. His life was mainly spent in tireless pastoral work. He was famous for his devotional dedication, his effective preaching, and his love for the poor and sick. But became known mostly through the numerous miracles attributed to him - although it must be admitted that many of these seem to have been influenced by the legends of the more famous and much earlier Nicholas of Myra, to whom there was a shrine fairly near.

Rita of Cascia, Italy, 1381-1457. Canonised 1900. Feast day May 22.

Rita wished to be a nun, but deferred to her parents' wishes and married at 18. For nearly twenty years she lived with exemplary patience with a husband, a watchman in the town who was often involved in party conflicts, and judged by some to be rough, ill-tempered and profligate. He died in a violent ambush. A short time afterwards her twin boys died from natural causes. After much difficulty Rita gained admittance to a convent of Augustinian nuns, and lived a life of compassionate love and service for the rest of her days, dying at the age of 76. When the story of her life was recounted some years after her death, it included a number of supernatural happenings which were said to have occurred in her latter days.

Thomas of Villanueva, Castile, Spain, 1488-1555. Canonised 1658. Feast day September 22.

Thomas was born in Don Quixote's La Mancha region. His parents set a very good example of virtuous living and generous alms deeds. After university he joined the Augustinian friars at Salamanca, and soon after ordination in 1518 was made prior, a post he held for twenty-five years. He was a very effective preacher, and led an intense inner life of prayer, often being rapt in ecstasy. He had a bad memory and was absent-minded, yet was made archbishop of Valencia. In this he was distinguished by his poverty of life and free use of the resources of his wealthy see for the relief of the needy of all ranks, with no differentiation between the 'deserving' and 'the undeserving,' saying '*Anticipate the needs of those who are ashamed to beg, for to make them ask for help is to make them buy it*'. He was especially concerned to help orphans and abandoned children. He worked very hard to restore order among clergy and laity in a diocese which had long been neglected, but did it with tact and discretion, not by authoritarian methods. He found a particular problem with the Moriscos, Moorish people who had been forcibly converted to Christianity. Many stories are told of his power of healing and other spiritual gifts and the quietness and straightforwardness with which he carried out his duties.

Clare of Montefalco, Italy, 1268-1308. Feast day August 17.

Clare was born in Montefalco and spent her whole life there. At the age of six she went to live with her sister Joan who, with other close companions, formed an enclosed religious community. In 1290 the community moved to a new house and set up a regular convent. Clare moved with the sisters, and made a profession of vows under the Rule of St Augustine. Joan died in November 1291 and Clare became the abbess, and ruled the convent until her death. Both in her personal life and in her office as abbess she was a model of the community life as delineated by the Rule. She counselled the sisters on the need of self-denial and dedicated personal effort in the pursuit of holiness. She was wise, and defended the truths of faith powerfully. Clare was deeply devoted to the Passion of Christ, and her heart was filled with love of the Cross. During her last days she said that she carried the impression of the cross of Christ in her heart. After her death the sisters were anxious to verify the truth of her assertions and the story is told that when her heart was examined they did find depicted there symbols of Christ's Passion. In her picture in the Infirmary window it is presumably her heart she is holding in her hand, symbolically presenting this story. Her body is venerated in the Augustinian convent church at Montefalco.

10. SOME STORIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE PRIORY IN THE EARLIER DAYS.

i) *THE CLARE LEGEND*. (This article also appears in Book I)

This story and its alleged origin is told at length in Mrs Barnardiston's book on the Priory, and is depicted in the 20th century carving on the mantelpiece in the library.

Hugh of Bury, the sacristan, had pawned some of the church treasures and was desperate to find money to repay moneylenders, not only because the prior might find out, but especially because a papal messenger who was visiting the Abbey of St Edmund might decide to extend his journey, visit Clare, and wish to inspect the treasures.

Several of the fraternity had been fishing in the nearby River Stour. Hugh was deep in thought over his problem, and stayed on after the others had left - until dark, in fact. A figure in the dress of a monk wearing a cowl and with his feet covered by his habit, approached him. He chatted pleasantly, revealing that he could see that the sacristan had problems, and reminisced about his own feelings when he had held the same office and felt the wish to borrow money - only borrow, of course - for a short time. He went on to suggest an answer. Hugh should hide his stock of candles, say they had been eaten by mice, and ask for a new supply. When they were replaced he could raise money for himself by selling the surplus ones. Also, when money had been paid for votive-offering candles, he should recover them after the worshipper had left and re-sell them several times over, keeping the proceeds. The only condition was that Hugh should always retain the very first candle: if that ever burned down, the visitor would claim him for ever. Hugh agreed to the scheme. When he returned from the river he passed through the passage under the dormitory, turned into the cloisters, and so into the church. He felt somebody was there, and heard a strange clink behind him. Was it the monk? But would he have metallic sandals? When he approached the high altar the sense of that strange presence quickly disappeared - he knew he was alone in the church. He prepared the books and candles for the midnight service, lit the four great cressets, entered the sacristy and removed and hid the stock of candles.

For a time the plan worked and Hugh's financial position improved. Then some of Hugh's other misdemeanours and mismanagement of priory affairs were discovered, and he was put on bread and water and confined to the

premises. Late one day, as it began to get dark but the others were still away hunting, he suddenly remembered the need to get salt for their evening meal. Remembering at the last moment that it was dark enough to require light, he grabbed a candle - which happened to be that very first one, the one he had been told never to allow to burn away. Whilst seeking the salt he saw a cooked fowl, and was tempted. His hunger was great, so he ate it. Then he heard the others returning from the hunt and fled, leaving the candle burning. When the prior was served with the bare bones of the carcass instead of a satisfying dish, he committed Hugh's soul to the devil. At that moment the candle guttered out. The other friars heard a ghastly scream, and found Hugh at the foot of the stairs with a look of horror on his face and his flesh seared as if it had been touched by a great fire. There was a smell of sulphur in the air, and a glimpse of a dark shadow departing with the metallic clink of a shod cloven hoof.

The friars could never scrub away the bloodstain on the stairs, not even with holy water. 'It is there to this day' said the story as told in 1902. Lady Barker had to amend this phrase when she wrote the story down because the tread, having become too worn, had recently been replaced. But some have no doubt the stain is still there, under the bottom stair of the replacement stairway which leads from where the refectory used to stand, a stair which can still be seen by visitors to the Priory in the ancient groined porch.

It is claimed that this story came to the family then in residence at the priory from an old woman in the town. The man who eventually carried out the early 20th century carving in the present library was the first to hear the story. He told Lady Barker, and she then called upon the woman. The storyteller couldn't read or write, but in the manuscript which Lady Barker subsequently wrote the old woman corrected any deviation from the story, which, it is claimed, had been passed down from generation to generation. The words, phrases etc are obviously the old woman's, not being in Lady Barker's style. The full story she told contained details which could not have been familiar to local people for hundreds of years past. They included descriptions of the ceremonies in the old church, the night office, and even the night boots, all of which were most unlikely elements to find in a Clare tale in 1902. The doors through which the characters in the story passed and the route they followed just did not fit in with what was then believed to have been the plan of the priory. Yet when the buildings were excavated later, their layout proved quite contrary to what had long been believed, and was in keeping with the details the old woman had passed on! Thus told, the story could be taken as an interesting example of oral history, a story passed on - for centuries? - with correct details which could not have been known 'on location' at the time the story was eventually written down.

Sceptics say it is all a modern hoax. If only one could forget the cold facts given in chapter 4 one could imagine that the carving on the ceiling beam near the window in the cellarer's hall, a scene of a devil departing from a church very much like the present one, hints at a 15th century origin for the story. What a pity such an idea is completely unacceptable for the reasons given in that earlier chapter. (But I can vouch for having once heard clanking chains when showing people around the priory grounds at dusk. The fact that it was a party of councillors, and that the mayors from surrounding districts were wearing their ceremonial chains during the tour, may not be completely irrelevant. D.H.)

ii) A MIRACLE IN CLARE.

The editor of the published edition of the cartulary (see the bibliography) includes this story, which illustrates the impact of mendicant friars. It was taken from the *Chronica Maiora* of Matthew Paris, a monk at the Benedictine monastery of St Albans who wrote a journal of events in England and Europe. He died in 1259 so was a contemporary witness - but no friend of the friars. In 1235, before the Austin friars came to Clare, a friar of another order, a Franciscan or Dominican, was preaching a crusade. A woman who had lost the use of her limbs for three years struggled along to hear his message. The friar, moved by her lamentations, sought to comfort her. When he discovered that she was a cripple *'he healed her before the eyes of all the people, and the woman returned home, praising God for having bestowed such power on His servant'*. Mrs Barnardiston, who uses the story, points out that Earl Richard was a boy of 13 at this time, and raises the interesting conjecture that not only did this friar's work influence the ordinary people, but it might also have affected the young Richard, and perhaps therefore played some part in the Earl's later encouragement of the founding of the Augustinian priory.

iii) A STORY OF THE HUMILIATION OF SOME KNIGHTS.

The following incident is recounted in a document in the cartulary.

At the hour of Vespers on a Sunday before lent in 1385 a small procession came down what is now Malting Lane and over the arched bridge to the priory. Leading it was a knight, Thomas de Mortimer, walking barefoot and bareheaded, and carrying a cloth of gold of £3 value and a large candle weighing three pounds. His six adherents (John de Nuport, Thomas Marrishall, Griffith ap Llewlyn, Matthew Maybrook, John Mull, and Simon Domvill) also walked barefoot and bareheaded, each carrying a candle weighing one pound. Together they entered the monastic church and offered their candles and the cloth at the high altar. This humiliation was a penance whereby the knight and his followers avoided excommunication for breaking the sanctuary of the church. A man named John de Quintone had stolen goods from Sir Thomas, and then fled for refuge to the church. Sir Thomas and his companions, *'instigated by the Devil,'* violently dragged him from the church, cut off his ears, and then threw him back into the church, earless. Later they pleaded for absolution, *'weeping bitterly over their nefarious acts'*, and were granted forgiveness by the Bishop of London on the condition that they made this act of penitence.

iv) THE DIALOGUE AT THE GRAVE OF JOAN OF ACRE.

This is a curious old poem showing the lineal descent of the lords of Clare Honor from the foundation of the friary in 1248 until 1460. It also gives some information about the buildings. It ends with praise of Richard, Duke of York. The poem was almost certainly written by Osborn Bokenham, who was a friar at Clare and who presided over the Austin chapters of the English province in 1461 and 1463.

Various thoughts have been expressed about an ulterior political motive behind the writing of the poem. Mrs Barnardiston says on page 19 of her book on Clare Priory *'The Wars of the Roses were just beginning, and it seems likely that the poem was in reality a 15th century political pamphlet, written with the intention of advertising the royal descent of Richard Duke of York, through the de Clares, and raising enthusiasm for him by praising the good works of his ancestors. Although not mentioning his claim to the throne, the poem ends with the pious wish that God will advance him in virtue and victory over all his enemies. The poem is the kind of weapon of political intrigue as might be passed through the land with great effect by the friars and merchants, pilgrims and wanderers who in those days acted also as news-carriers and political agitators'*.

Mrs Barnardiston's daughter, in preparing her mother's material for publication, does not think an assumption of this political motivation is necessary. She believes the desire to present the history of their principle benefactors in a form easily remembered by the brethren was a sufficient motive for writing it, and that the fact of a Latin version may confirm this.

11. SOME STORIES OF THE PRIORY WHEN IT WAS PRIVATELY OWNED.

i) A LOVELY DOLLS' HOUSE.

A charming dolls' house was made for Colonel and Mrs John Barker around 1803. It was very large and had a front identical with that of the Priory complete with buttresses, dormers, and front door. The interior included a copy of the panelled room, a panelled gallery, a kitchen with roasting jack in place, a hall, a drawing-room and bedrooms. Even the furniture was true to the original: there were Gothic revival chairs and benches *'as still exist'* (i.e. in 1914) a spinet, a four post bedstead and a tiny picture.

ii) THE COMING OF THE RAILWAY.

In 1864 the Great Eastern Railway Company were building a railway line along the Stour valley from Sudbury to Haverhill. In passing through Clare they cut through the castle mounds and built a railway station in the bailey. The line then proceeded westward, cutting off part of the priory gardens and passing close to the house. A level crossing and railwayman's cottage were built in the Ashen road by the present bridge over the river, which is where the old entrance gate to the priory had been. The feelings of residents of the priory at the time were expressed in a letter from William Baker to his sister Sophia. This is what he wrote:

'And now I take up my pen to give you some account of the present lamentable state of affairs at your birthplace, the poor old Priory to which I have already paid two visits. It is most sad to see the wholesale havoc that has been committed with the timber there. All those fine trees between the moat and the mill stream have been felled, these certainly are to give way to the railroad, but there are others in front of the house that have in my opinion been wantonly and quite unnecessarily cut down. The house is as open as can be from the town. The railroad is to run within sixty yards of it, close past the tulip tree which just escapes the axe and over the present entrance gateway. The railway seals the doom of the house as a private residence, at least to any persons who have taken an interest in the place like ourselves. The garden is the most melancholy spectacle, the wall fruit trees not having been pruned for years, the greenhouse fast decaying from damp, the Abbey cloister-garden decked with cabbages, nay if I told you all, I should have to fill a dozen sheets, so in order not to tire you I must stop my tale of woe.'

A later owner, Sir Henry May, made the best of a bad job. It is said he had a little platform built outside the small entrance to the Priory so that he could dismount from the train without having to go into the station and start walking home from there!

iii) A CHILD MARRIAGE, AND THE REASON FOR IT.

Sir Thomas Barnardiston had a granddaughter Anne, baptised at Clare church 2nd March 1612 and heiress of the Clopton family's fortunes. Her mother died three years later and little Anne was brought up by her grandmother at Clare Priory. She was married at the age of fourteen to Sir Simonds d'Ewes, who describes in his autobiography his courtship and his pleasure at the prospect of his marriage to such a wealthy little bride.

He describes at length the cautious steps by which he approached the subject of a match with the child, and set down the advantages to himself of such a marriage, the chief of which was that she was a *'female inheritrice of great estates'*. She was ten years and two months younger than himself, which, he considered, made it less likely he would grow weary of her. Also, she was related to most of the gentry in Suffolk, which would bring him into alliance with them - for as yet he was not thought of as *'belonging to the county'*. And she was well educated. Having weighed it all up, *'nothing now remained but our mutual consents and likings upon an interview.'* After the interview he said *'her person gave me absolute and full content as soon as I had seriously viewed it: for though I*

had seen her twice or thrice some seven years before' (when she would have been seven years of age) *'I did then little observe her but do remember she was a pretty little one'*.

A temporary snag arose when Simonds's father revealed he had other plans for his son's marriage, but when Simonds found that the face of the chosen woman was *'rough and unpleasant'* his father agreed to the marriage to little Anne Clopton.

The next difficulty was persuading her grandmother at the priory. Simonds was in a hurry for he feared some great offer might be made which would tempt the old lady *'who was naturally, as most of her sex, marvellous inconstant'*. On 31st August 1626 he sent a servant to Clare with a diamond necklace for Anne and the following letter, the only one he sent her during the courtship:

'Fairest,

Blest is the heart and hand that sincerely sends these meaner lines, if another heart and eye graciously deign to pity the wound of the first and the numbness of the latter: and thus may this other poor inclosed carcanet, if not adorn the purer neck, yet lie hidden in the private cabinet of her whose humble sweetness and sweet humility deserves the justest honour, the greatest thankfulness. Nature made stones, but opinion jewels; this, without your milder acceptance and opinion, will prove neither stone nor jewel. Do not but enhappy him that sent it, in the ordinary use of it, who, though unworthy in himself, resolves to continue your humble servant,

Simonds d'Ewes'.

They were married at Blackfriars Church, London, on 24th October 1626. She died of smallpox sixteen years later, leaving one daughter, who inherited the Kentwell Hall estates. Her first child, a boy named Clopton, had died an infant, and the pathetic little brass to his memory in Lavenham church is often noticed by visitors. He is shown wrapped in his chrysom and looks like a little chrysalis lying in the chancel.

iv) LIFE AT WENTFORD, POSLINGFORD.

When first married, Colonel John Barker and his wife spent much time (when his naval duties allowed) at Wentford Hall, near Poslingford. Mrs Barker's diary tells of days of country activities, long summer days spent in the fields with the haymakers at work, ending with a walk to Clare or along the river meadows in the cool of the evening. Sometimes *'We dined in the garden'* or *'took tea under the filberts'* - *'rooted up thistles and nettles in the Croft'* - *'watered the flowers till dark'*. On 27th June 1801 *'We all dined under the old oak in the hayfield - a most joyous happy party - dear little Johnny making one of it.'* When they moved into the priory in 1803 they carried out many renovations.

Some extracts from Mrs Barker's diary of 1801:-

June 3rd 1801. Set out early with my darling husband in our tax'd cart - took a hack-chaise at Melford - saw Lavenham Church - walked about Hadleigh and Ipswich. Dined at Wickham Market and arrived at Mr Goldings at Thorington Hall at ten, where we were hospitably received by the old gentleman.

June 4th. Left Thorington Hall after breakfast -went thro' the beautiful village of Yoxford - saw the noble ruins of Framlingham Castle - ate eggs at the Cherry Tree at Debenham. Dined at Mr Hill's and got home at half past ten -where I had the happiness to find my darling baby quite well.

Journeys which we imagine might have been difficult in those days were apparently tackled with ease. Mrs Barker wrote to her daughter to say that 'dear George' had arrived in high spirits from Bayford Bury for the wedding of his brother-in-law, having ridden the forty or fifty miles on horseback. That evening he unpacked his wedding present, a round mahogany table which was allegedly still in use in the dining room at the priory a century later. A granddaughter revealed that after the wedding in London of her grandparents, Colonel and Mrs Barker, her grandmother *'changed her dress in the vestry for a riding habit and went down to Wentford in a post-chaise with Mrs Ince her maid on the box'* - a distance of at least sixty miles.

Some more diary entries, from 1817:-

January 1st. John at home for Xmas holidays. Weather wet and mild - continual floods. Having danced out the old year, danced in the new at Mrs Territt's. At noon took our annual gala of elder wine with Mrs Shelly.

Jan. 2nd. A very pretty dance and supper at Mrs Sadlers.

Jan. 3rd. John dined and slept at Mrs Jardine's.

Jan. 4th. Mr Raymond dined, and stayed here on account of high floods.

Jan. 6th. John went out with the foxhounds from Stoke. Floods began to subside.

Jan. 7th. Floods gone - clear frost and bright sun. At night to the Melford Ball.

Jan. 8th. Fine clear frost bright and still. Walked about the town with our neighbours.

Jan. 9th. A delightful dance at home, my dear children and sister and everybody appearing pleased and happy. Supped at 12. Ended with Sir Roger de Coverley between 3 and 4.

Jan. 10th. A host of visitors, all speaking with gratitude and pleasure of last night.

The following week records more of the same Christmas and New Year festivities, and friends who could not come because of the floods.

I gladly acknowledge my debt to Mrs Barnardiston's book for these stories.

v) *THOUGHTS AND MEMORIES OF ONE OF THE LAST PRIVATE RESIDENTS AT THE PRIORY..*

Tony de Fonblanque writes:

The May family.

Henry May, who married Helena Barker, was the youngest of ten children of George Augustus Chichester May, the son of an Irish Peer. He took up Law and became Lord Chief Justice of Ireland, a position which led to his family always calling him 'The Chief'. His departure from this high post was very dramatic. During the famous trial of Parnell, he awoke one morning with the dreadful realisation that at dinner the night before, in front of several political friends, he had 'expressed an opinion' as to Parnell's guilt or innocence, something unforgivable in his position. That very day he tendered his resignation to the Viceroy of Ireland, although in fact at no time did he or any of his dinner guests reveal what view he had actually expressed about Parnell's guilt or otherwise.

His sons might be said to be monotonously worthy and successful. All achieved knighthoods, and all had large families. When my mother was about twenty years of age in 1914, she had a large number of first cousins – many of them boys. By November 1918, all but two of the boys were dead. George May, one of the survivors, had two daughters. The other, Arthur May, distinguished himself in 1940 in Norway, and then commanded the first Commando Company. He had no children. Thus the May family, like many others, was virtually wiped out in Flanders and at Jutland. It is a daunting thought that but for the first World War I might have had about eighty cousins!

George Digby Barker.

George Digby Barker descended from a long line of Barkers, most of them called John. He lived in Clare and married in Poslingford. He was a little man - only five feet two inches - pompous and irascible, and I have always wondered how he came to father a daughter who was so much his opposite. However, he must have been a good soldier, for he was adjutant of his regiment. He campaigned in Persia and fought in India in the Mutiny in 1857-8. He was the first man into Lucknow at the famous relief of that city, having got through a hole which was too small for anyone else. His colonel recommended him for a VC but when the Commander-in-Chief rationed each regiment to one such decoration, a ballot was held, and it went to the medical officer.

Years later he became a General and was in Hong Kong when the Governor died. He was appointed acting Governor and moved into Government House. He must have done a good job because after he left he was sent to Bermuda to govern that colony. There his wife died. Fearful that in his need for a partner to share his duties he might marry his housekeeper, his young cousin Katharine Elwes was sent out to act as Governor's hostess. She was fifty years his junior, so it was thought the arrangement would be safe - but he married her, which led to the unusual position of a step-mother much younger than her newly-acquired step-daughters Helena and Carrie. Katharine was always known as 'Donna', and lived until the late 1950s. She was the author of most of the book on Clare Priory published in 1928. (See the bibliography to this present volume).

George Digby Barker, known as 'Baba' to those close to him, retired to Clare Priory with his young wife in 1902, and they - especially Donna - made an excellent job of bringing the house and garden up to a high standard. He died at the Priory in 1914, by which time Henry and Helena May had moved back into Government House, Hong Kong, and an interesting story relates to his death. In Government House there was a long drawing room adjoined by a small ante-room. One evening Helena entered the house, went into the drawing room and, instead of going straight out to the balcony, went through the ante-room which her father had used as an office when, some thirty years earlier, he had been there as governor. Henry May was having tea on the balcony, and she greeted him with 'Hal, something has happened to dad - I've just seen him sitting at his desk'. An hour later a telegram arrived from Clare saying that 'Baba' had died.

Henry May.

Born in Ireland, Henry was a typical youngest son of a typical Anglo-Irish Protestant middle-class family. He was sent into the Colonial Service and became a Cadet in the Hong Kong Civil Service. Almost his first appointment was Aide de Camp to the Governor, George Digby Barker, living in with the family. Governors and Generals would be well advised to choose their ADCs with care - they tend to marry the master's daughter. And so it was. In Government House there was such a daughter, Helena Barker, and in due course young Henry May enticed her onto the balcony, which then offered a wonderful view over Hong Kong harbour. There he proposed and she accepted him. (Thirty years later, when he himself was governor, his ADC, young Philip de Fonblanque, proposed on exactly the same spot to Stella May, my mother. In 1970 Ginny and I were given tea on the balcony by the Governor's wife so that we could see where it happened, but by then the view had gone - hidden by a hundred skyscrapers).

Henry May was a most competent and hard-working man. He learned no less than three Chinese dialects - Mandarin, Cantonese and Habba, as different as French, Italian and German. He rose fast in his career and was quite young when he was made Colonial Secretary for Hong Kong, an appointment mainly concerned with foreign affairs. It was from this desk that he negotiated the treaty with China which came to an end in 1997. He was given a knighthood for this, and perhaps authorities thought there was not room for two knights in one small colony, for he was sent to Fiji as Governor and High Commissioner for the South Pacific. Here he made at least one lifelong friend, the King of Tonga, whose granddaughter Queen Salote stole the show at Queen Elizabeth's coronation. I'll risk a little story, even though in today's jargon it would not be considered 'politically correct'. Salote, like all Tongans, was enormous. Beside her in an open carriage sat the tiny Sultan of Perak. Watching from a balcony was Noel Coward. 'Who' asked someone beside him 'is that tiny man?' 'Her lunch, perhaps?' came the reply.

After less than two years Henry May was back in Hong Kong as Governor, and stayed until 1919. He was probably better qualified for the job than anyone else before or since. Early in his career he had spent several years in Shanghai, and knew more of Chinese people and how they think than is given to most Englishmen (or Irishmen) to know. He was a great sportsman - fishing, polo, sailing. I have often wondered why his children were so totally un-athletic. Admittedly my mother was so good a helmsman that the Hong Kong Yacht Club barred her after she had won the Monthly Cup twelve times successively. All his married life he had looked forward to retiring to Clare Priory, but lasted less than two years after getting home, dying in 1922.

Clare Priory after the second war.

When Helena May died in 1945 the Priory was still occupied by the army. It was left to her four daughters, Stella de Fonblanque, Phoebe Whitworth, Iris Johnston and Dione Kinchin Smith. When it was handed back to the owners it was first let to a millionaire called Sir Campbell Mitchell Cotts, who fancied himself as an actor and had many theatrical friends. Peter Ustinov was a frequent visitor to the priory in those days. After Sir Campbell left, the house was an old people's home for a while. Then my mother and Mrs Johnston (who was by then living at Clare Hall) bought out their two sisters to facilitate day to day administration of the house.

1953 brought to fruition a thought these two ladies had long had in mind - to let the priory pass back to the Order of Augustinians, and the transaction took place at about 5% of its market value. This was generous of my mother, but at least she was a devout Catholic: it was much more generous of my aunt Iris Johnston, for she was an equally devout member of the Church of England. This left Clare Hall and what was left of the farm (after Highfields estate and what is now the Middle School had been built on much of it) in the hands of Iris Johnston, while the Priory Farm House and the castle and baileys went to my mother, who left them to me. Finally I gave the castle and baileys to the County Council to help make Clare Country Park.

Helena May.

I have always thought that Helena May must stand high in the running as the best grandmother that ever was. Always happy, never cross, never irritated, devoted to seeing that everyone had or did what they wanted to have or to do. A perfect wife for my grandfather who loved fishing, riding, sailing and shooting, she was herself a keen fisherman, sailed well, and was a deadly shot with a 28-bore, particularly at snipe, the most difficult of all game. She was also a perfect wife in his career in Hong Kong. Twice when he was near the top but not actually there he was made acting Governor and moved into Government House. And twice he made way for a new Governor. It was said that Lady May 'steps down with as much grace as she steps up', and that sums her up - she was gracious, but never patronising. This must have been noticed in high circles because she was paid what was probably a unique compliment for a Governor's wife - she was made a Dame in her own right, although she never used the title, thinking that 'dame May' sounded like something out of a pantomime. She loved Clare and lived happily at the Priory from 1919 until 1940, when the army commandeered it as a Brigade headquarters and she had to move out to live with one or other of her daughters until her death in 1945.

A fuller account of the change back to the Augustinian ownership appears in chapter 2.

BOOK III APPENDIX

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT ROOM ALTERATIONS AT THE PRIORY.

Some of these have already been briefly mentioned in notes on the appropriate part of the house, but are now copied more fully from Barnardiston's book (to which page numbers refer) out of possible interest to the reader.

pp 38-39. In the year 1718 Francis Boteler bought the Priory from Mr Poulter. He divided the house into two, inhabiting one part himself and leaving the other for the bailiff who farmed the land. He was probably responsible for the innumerable partition walls which so greatly disfigured the house until their removal when Sir George Barker repaired the house in 1902-3. The manuscript history written by Thomas Walford says Francis Boteler formed a kitchen from part of the hall in the year 1720. This fact was indicated by a piece of wood taken down by William Shrive when the partition was repaired. Upon this was written the phrase '*F.B. Esqr 1720 made by A. Constable A.20*'. Francis Boteler was ruined by the failure of the South Sea Company and sold the priory back to Mr Poulter, who possessed it till his death in 1745, when he bequeathed it to Joseph Barker. The room concerned was in use as a kitchen until about 1870, and is on the right as one enters the priory by the main (west) door. It was used as a dining room after 1902, and contains the overmantel on which are carved scenes from the legend of Clare. It is now the Library.

pp 39ff. Joseph Barker took on the house in 1745, after which relatives held it. Colonel John Barker, who had mainly lived at Wentford, moved in in 1803 and did much work. The house and gardens were repaired, the Gothic revival, which was popular at the time, influencing some of their work on the house and on the furniture they made. A wall in front of the priory was pulled down. A large Gothic window was put in the north end of the gallery, and some benches and chairs bear the arms of the families of Barkers and Conyers (his wife), but the most charming addition they made was the dolls' house (concerning which see chapter 11).

pp 47-48. Sir George Digby Barker became the owner of the house in 1896. When he moved in in 1902 on his retirement from the army the lower rooms of the house had all had passages and smaller rooms built inside them,

spoiling their proportions and making the house not unlike a rabbit warren. The floors of these rooms were also in an unsatisfactory condition. The hall was partly paved with brick and partly with an older flooring of white stone and black marble laid straight on the bare earth and the joints were so large that grass and weeds could grow up between them. He carried out extensive alterations in a sympathetic way. In the ground floor rooms earth was dug out to a depth of two feet and replaced by dry rubble, with cement on top and a wood floor above. The beautiful Elizabethan window which had long been bricked up was opened out again, and the pantry sinks, beer cellar and passage which separated it from the drawing room, were swept away. At the other end of the house a dark draughty passage which had been built through the dining room (formerly kitchen) was removed and the room restored to its proper proportions. Both in this room and in the drawing-room the old fire-places were opened out and once more took their rightful place of dignity and importance in the design of the rooms. He used an old oak beam from a removed passage wall as a mantelshelf for the dining room. A Cambridge woodcarver J. Whitaker was authorised to carve it as he liked. He carved the version of the Clare legend (see chapter 10) which he had heard in Clare, together with carvings of Sir George studying the long bill for repairs, his wife, later to be Mrs Barnardiston and authoress of the book on the Priory, as described in the note on the library in chapter 4.

p 49 states the dignified and beautiful billiard room was built under Sir George Barker between 1902 and his death in 1914. (Elsewhere the year 1908 is specifically mentioned).

EPILOGUE

*What is this life, if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare?*

The pensive poet's words still sound
So true to those whose daily round
Brings din and bustle all the hours -
A fev'rish rush which Life devours.
We need a place where noises cease,
An oasis of quiet and peace.

The poet Yeats was yearning for his Isle of Innisfree.
John Whittier sought his peace beside the silent Syrian sea.
For Aidan and for Cuthbert it was Holy Lindisfarne,
And Wordsworth's calm was daffodils beside the lake or tarn.
Columba crossed from Ireland to Iona's friendly isle -
Each one of these had felt the need to pause and rest awhile.

John Bunyan's pilgrim once was told 'You see yon wicket gate?'
His trek towards it led him to a strong yet peaceful state.
And Clare has got its wicket gate, beside the old millstream,
It leads directly to a place where tranquil treasures gleam.

For here, in winter, life comes new: snowdrops with darkness vie,
And o'er the river in the spring, the swifts and swallows fly.
Greenswarded paths here amble past the old monastic walls
And flowering beds and towering trees where thrush or blackbird calls,

A cool secluded church where once the ailing friars found rest,
A loiter in a cloistered square, with many roses blest -
The place where once the Austins read their breviaries and prayed,
A place where folk today may go when troubled or dismayed.

The prior's house, too, with noble rooms, enriches seekers, who
May feel its prayer-soaked walls affirm *'My peace I give to you'*.
The nearby great monastic church, bereft, but not forlorn,
For sometimes, still, believers' prayers and hymns the site adorn.

King Edward and the knights of Clare came here to make their vow,
With servants, pomp and circumstance, and fuss galore - but now
The tumult and the shouting dies, captains and kings depart
And nought is left to breach the peace for any searching heart.

Not in the earthquake, wind or fire, Elijah found God's balm,
But in the quiet of mountain's height, a still small voice of calm.
The mountain top is here laid low, brought down upon the plains,
And in the priory's homely grounds the peace of God remains.