

ST. FRANCIS' ABBEY

THE only portions of the Abbey at present remaining consist of the chancel and belfry tower, with a small fragment of the conventual buildings adjoining the south side of the latter.

The chancel (which measures 73 ft. by 25 ft. 10 ins.) is a very pure example of the early Gothic style. "In its constructive features it affords a curious illustration of a passage in Clyn's Annals, and a strong proof of their accuracy. Under the year 1347, the burial of a benefactress of the abbey, the Lady Isabella Palmer is recorded 'que frontem chori fratrum erigi fecit.' Clyn relates that the new addition to the choir was erected in 1321." "Now it is a curious fact that about 50 feet of the western and of the chancel is very early in style and must have been erected in the early part of the 13th century, as evidenced by its tall and narrow lancet lights with plain chamfered jambs and wide internal splays; whereas about 23 feet of the eastern or forepart (*frons chori*) with the great east window, must have been erected late in the style. An examination of the masonry shows an evident joint or want of proper bond in the wall where the new work had been added to the old."

"The early or western end of the choir is lighted by five lancets on the north side, and two small windows placed high up on the wall on the south. The addition presents a magnificent east window, consisting of a cluster of seven lancet lights, divided not by piers, as in the early period of the style, but by slender mullions and rising one above the other, towards the centre; over all a bearing arch is turned in the wall, to take the weight off the mullions; but there is no hood moulding or ornament."

"In the north wall are the remains of a window of three lights, and on the south side is a perfect one, consisting of two lancets, both adjoining the east end."

While the jambs of these windows are of Caen stone, in the mullions where greater strength and solidity is required, the compact limestone of the district is used.

The sedilia is well worth noting—it is in excellent condition despite the fact that, like the windows, it was filled

up for a long time. In the slabs used to repair the wall under the East window can be clearly seen traces of floriated crosses.

Baptismal Font—"In the basin of the well (St. Kieran's behind Kiteller's Inn) is inserted a baptismal font of Kilkenny marble, through the orifice of which the water of this beautiful fountain is constantly bubbling up" (Hogan). The font dates from the 13th century and is very similar to that in St. Canice's Cathedral. About 1889 it was removed for safety to St. Francis' Abbey.

Large octagonal stone—"which evidently formed the cap-mouldings of the capital of a remarkably large octagonal pillar. My theory is that it belonged to a great pillar which stood in the centre of an octagonal chapter-room, such as may be seen at Elgin Cathedral, the ribs of the groined roof springing from each of the sides of the capital; according to tradition, such a chapter-house existed at the Abbey of Graigue" (J. G. Robertson).

Tower—"Dividing the choir from the nave is the tower. Almost all friary churches in Ireland have towers in this position and usually of the same form and manner of construction. This was to build two strong walls, some six or seven feet apart, within and across the whole width of the building, each wall being pierced by a tall and narrow archway. Upon this superstructure there was then raised a tall belfry tower passing through the room and rising several storeys above it."

Six Curious Figures—"Supporting the groined roof of the tower are six figures, unique in Irish architecture. Each figure represents a subject, differently costumed, in different attitudes, supporting the burden and that not without a touch of humour. No. 1 represents weariness; the subject is 'done up' with hands upon knees; his head inclined. This figure is the most weather-worn. No. 2 depicts the body pressed down, the hands between the knees as a last effort to sustain the burden. No. 3 depicts courage, and a bold effort to take, with the upraised arms, the burden off the shoulders. No. 4 shows the right hand helping the left in a strong effort not to be overborne. No. 5 is almost despair and collapse, the weary head and bowed back, the hands

pressed tight against the knees. No. 6 shows discretion, one hand on knee, the other hand to the head, with a sustained appearance of strength. They are all certainly very human in their symbolic characterisation" (F. J. Biggar). Mr. Biggar states that he used the casts made for him by Michael O'Dwyer of Kilkenny, in supporting the timber beams in the restored banquet-hall of Castle Shane at Ardglass, County Down.

The lintel of the doorway out from the north side of the tower is a tomb slab with floriated cross. Another is to be seen at the tops of the steps leading up to the tower. An ogee-headed doorway leads into the tower at the top of the steps. The corbels in the tower suggest two storeys and a parapet above, but there is no sign of a stairway.

On the north side of the garden is a part of the town wall running along the R. Bregagh to the R. Nore, finishing in a small tower now in a ruinous condition. Near the tower steps lead up to wall. There is a breach in the wall at about the centre which is probably the place where the Cromwellian soldiers tried to break through, March 26, 1650.

St. Francis Well—A large circular spring between the chancel and the R. Nore. No tradition of sanctity now attaches to it.

The following epitaph is now built into the wall in the brewery yard quite near to the abbey:—

I.H.S.

M.A.

HERE LYETH THE BODY OF MRS. AGNES BANCKES
ALIS SMYTH DAUGHTER OF MR. JOHN SMYTH OF
DAMAGH IN THE COUNTY KILKENNY GENTELL AND
WAS MARYED TO MR. WILLIAM BANCKES OF
KILKENNY PEUTEROR. DECEASED THE 8th JANUARY,
1687.

I PRAY GOD BEE MERCYFULL TO HER SOULE.

AMEN.

OKR 1962
St. Francis' Abbey