

LOCAL NOTES AND QUERIES.

NUMBER CLXXXIII.

THE NUNNERY AT KIRKLEES.

R. V. T., in reply to P. F. E. (CLXXIX.) sends the following particulars of Kirklees Priory, his information being drawn mainly from Whitaker's "Loidis" and Arson's "Leeds":—

The nunnery at Kirklees was founded in the reign of Henry II., by Regner de Fleming, for nuns of the Cistercian Order. In the charter of foundation the place is named Kuthales and Kuthelaya, but in a subsequent confirmation of the charter by Earl Warren, the name is changed to Kirkeleya. It is conjectured by Dr. Whitaker, although in a very random and unsatisfactory manner, that Kuthalay was the original name of the place, but being insignificant, the nuns thought proper to change it to one of similar sound, but expressive of the subsequent destination of the place; and the Doctor adduces in confirmation of his opinion the fact that Kirkstall itself was so denominated, and for the same reason, some time after the foundation of the Abbey. The nuns of Kirklees possessed a considerable estate in Liversedge, Hartshead, and Mirfield, and the rectory of Mirfield belonged to them. Although only one fragment of the house remains among the numerous buildings of the farm-yard around it, yet the dimensions of the building can be ascertained with tolerable accuracy, and prove it to have been of considerable extent. Joan Keps, the last prioress, resigned her charge November 4th, 1540, and the house, according to Dugdale, was valued at the dissolution at £19 8s. 1d. The prioress retired to Mirfield, where she had a pension of two pounds per annum; and a pension of £1 13s. 4d. each was paid to the following surviving nuns:—Isabel Hopton, Agnes Brooke, Isabel Rooles (or Rodes), and Isabel Salterstall. The site and demesnes of the house after the dissolution were granted to the Ramsdens; in the first year of Elizabeth they were the property of Robert Pilkington; and in the eighth year of the same reign they were obtained by John Armytage, in whose family they have continued to the present day. Of this place Dr. Whitaker says, "In the situation of Kirklees Nunnery it is impossible for a practised eye not to discover that peculiar system which prevailed throughout the North of England in the choice of sites for the erection of religious houses. In a warm and fertile bottom, on the verge of a deep brook to the south (hence called Nun Brook), and on an elevation just sufficient to protect the house from inundations, stood this celebrated though not wealthy foundation, of which the outlines can now be traced. Yet these outlines, diligently pursued, prove it to have been of great extent. A square depression in the ground distinctly marks the cloister court, nearly thirty yards square. North of this was the body of the church, and eighteen yards or thereabouts to the east are the tombs of Elizabeth de Stanton and another, protected by iron rails; immediately eastward from which the choir has evidently terminated. The nave, transept, and choir must have been at least one hundred and fifty feet long. From an engraving of this house as it appeared about the year 1670, it seems that a large gateway with corner turrets was then standing. One fragment, and one only, of the offices of the house remains among the buildings of a large farm-yard, which the Armytage family have erected upon the spot. I mention it for one circumstance, very peculiar in a monastic building of this country, that it is of timber. The noble beeches that overshadow the tombs, the groups of deer that repose beneath, and the deep silence that is only interrupted by the notes of wild or the cries of domestic birds, all contribute to excite very pleasing sensations."

That this was a Cistercian House, and not a Benedictine, as stated in the first edition of the "Monasticon," we have the authority of the registers of the See of York. Tanner says it was built in the time of Henry the Second. The founder was Reguems Flandiensis. The edifice was dedicated to the honour of the Virgin Mary and St. James. Regner's charter, with a confirmation from William, Earl of Warren, as his superior lord, will be found in the Appendix to the "Monasticon," together with a general confirmation of the endowments of this Nunnery by King Henry the Third. This Nunnery is not mentioned in the taxation of Pope Nicholas the Fourth, A.D. 1291, probably on account of its small endowment. The church of Mirfield, in Yorkshire, was appropriated to it in 1403. The following are the only names of the Prioresses of Kirklees which have occurred:—

1. ELIZABETH DE STAYNTON, some time in the 13th century. Her tomb, which was found at Kirklees, is engraved in the second volume of Leland's "Itinerary," 96; it had an inscription in old French.
2. MARGARET DE CLAYWORTH, confirmed 4th of October, 1306.
3. ALICIA DE SEREVYN, confirmed 4th January, 1307.
4. CECILIA HILL, upon whose death
5. JOANNA STANSFELD was elected in 1491. On her death
6. MARGARET TARBTON was elected; she received confirmation as Prioress April 24th, 1499.
7. MARGARET FLETCHEER was confirmed March 10th, 1505.
8. CECILIA TOPCLIFFE (or Joan Keps), the last Prioress, was confirmed in her office July 5th, 1527.

At the time of the suppression the Nunnery of Kirklees was valued at £20 7s. 8d. a year gross, and £19 8s. 1d. clear income. The site was granted in the 36th Henry VIII. to John Tasburg and Nicholas Savile. No register of this Priory is known to exist, nor has any seal been met with.

In Stukeley's "Itinerarium," vol. ii., *ad finem*, is a curious drawing or ground-plan, entitled—"The Prospect of Kirkloys Abbey, where Robin Hood dyed, from the Footway leading to Hertishead Church, at a quarter of a mile distance:—*a*, the New Hall; *b*, the Gatehouse of the Nunnery; *c*, the trees among which Robin Hood was buried; *d*, the way up the hill where this was drawn; *e*, Bradley Wood; *f*, Almondbury Hill; *g*, Castle Field. 1776." If the reader inquires for this book at the British Museum he should ask for the copy in Mr. Thos. Grenville's library. The copy in the Museum library consists of the two first volumes; the second volume is wanting.