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Heading: The Carmelite convent for English ladies, near Chichester

Visitors to Chichester by rail have, no doubt, noticed the pile of buildings on the right hand, midway between Drayton and Chichester stations, which had been in the course of their erection for some time past. This building has been constructed for the reception of a body of Carmelite nuns, an order which claims considerable antiquity in the Roman Catholic Church. The works were begun in the month of July 1870, and are now thoroughly competed. The comment is based on a pleasant sight, facing the ancient city of Chichester, and from the windows is obtained a fine view of the cathedral, the Downs, and the surrounding district.

The history of this Carmelite order embraces a period of a couple of centuries, and it is remarkable that a peaceful society of this kind should have been disturbed by the influence of war, but such is the fact. The Carmelite convent, we understand, was founded in the year 1678, for English ladies, at Hoogstraet, in Brabant, by the Lady Mary Gabriel Rheingrave, Princess of Salm Salm, and Duchess of Hoogstraet; and her eldest daughter, Mary Teresa, was the first superior of the convent. The order flourished, but during the troublesome times of 1793 to 1794, when war raged in the low countries, the ladies withdrew to England and resided at Canford house, Dorset. Here they resided until the 1825, when they exchanged that private residence for a conventual establishment offered them at Valognes, near Cherbourg. From that date until 1870, they resided at Valognes, when the Franco-Prussian wall induced them to hasten their departures for England, where the building we now speak of was being erected for them. A little screw steamer left Cherbourg in September, 1870, and conveyed the fugitive ladies, with their household goods, to Dell Quay, near Chichester. The ladies were temporarily accommodated at the catholic school at the Broyle, and afterwards they took up their residence at the pretty village of North Mundham, where they [k?]new sojourn, waiting for the completion of the convent now being got ready as their future home. On the Sunday following their arrival in Old England the ladies, many of them of gentle birth, attended Divine service at the catholic chapel at Southgate, Chichester, the Rev V W Duke officiating.

The ground on which the convent stands comprises about three acres, the whole being enclosed by a wall about 10 feet high. The building is in the 13th century Gothic style, of brick, with white brick dressings, stepped gables, and presents a very nice appearance. Over the front entrance door is a fine statue, in Caen stone, of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel, the work of Mr Earp, of Hampstead Road. The convent form a quadrangle, with an open place in the centre, called a “garth”, which will be made into a flower garden, with little plots for the use of every inmate. On the right, or West Wing, is a pile of buildings, containing the kitchen, laundry, and other domestic offices, fitted with every convenience, all enclosed within the wall, admission being obtained by large gateway on the right front. To the left, the carriage drive runs in from the highroad, and it is intended to erect the chaplain’s house and porter's lodge here. Outside the wall, on the west, is a little building, intended for the gardener's house, piggery, stable, etc. The whole area occupied by the convent and the surrounding land is about ten acres; and accommodation is designed for 20 nuns, that being the number allowed by the noble founder.

The visitor, on entering, is shown into the hall, a lofty room, 12ft 4in by 15ft; and on the left hand is the visitors’ parlor, a cheerful room, where the friends of the nuns are ushered into. From thence the visitor passes into a corridor, running along the entire front, and lighted at each end by window. It is now seen that a wall divides the interior of the building from the chaplain’s and the visitors’ rooms, which are all on this side of the dividing wall. To the right are two rooms -- the chaplain's parlor and private servants’ kitchen and pantry. On the extreme right is a private entrance, where goods will be brought for the use of the inmates. The tradesmen, or their servants, who supply these goods are ushered into the corridor, and crossing it enter a small lobby. A covered-in box, on a turntable, receives the commodities brought, which are placed in the box, wheeled around, and taken out on the other side by the portress, who cannot see the person bringing the goods. A similar box is placed at the entrance to the kitchen and laundry department, for their requirements the other rooms on this side [of] the enclosure are those set apart for the chaplain and his servants, and visitors. All the windows of these apartments open onto the front, so as not to overlook the nuns’ apartments or ground.

Proceeding through a doorway facing the entrance hall and the visitor finds himself in a similar corridor to the one he left, lighted like it I windows at both ends. This corridor runs round the four sides of the building, on the ground floor, and is known as the cloisters, the windows opening onto the “garth”. To admit air, sun, and light into the “garth”, there is no corridor on the south side (the back) on the second floor. Immediately before the hall is a broad and well-lighted staircase, leading to the second floor. Turning to the left, and passing one or two rooms, used as store rooms, etc, the visitor comes to the east wing. The first room is the parlor, to which the friends of the nuns are admitted from a doorway in the public corridor. This parlor is divided by wire screen, so that nuns may hold from conversation with the nuns, but no other key indication can take place. A little sliding drawer at the side of the screen serves as a means of conveying parcels from the outside to the interior. The whole of the east wing, on this floor, is occupied, with the exception of the parlor, by two spacious rooms, the “preparatory room” (47ft by 20ft), for assembling for chapel, and the "chapter room" (35ft x 20ft). The convent chapel is to be erected on the space of the ground within the wall, and the “preparatory” will at present serve for chapel. The burying ground will adjoin the chapel. Passing on, we enter the south cloister, in which are doors leading into the “garth”, and also to the kitchen and fruit gardens. Taking a peek outside, we observe that the “garth” is being made ready for its flower beds, and in the ample kitchen garden fruit trees (the majority brought from the French convent) are already nailed to the walls and budding. The upper a mould is also spread, and the gardens will prove a pretty place. The ground floor of the west wing, like the opposite side, is occupied by two spacious rooms, the "recreation room" (30ft by 20ft), and the "refectory" (40ft by 20ft) in a refectory wall, which immediately adjoins the kitchen, is placed a turntable for the speedy conveyance from the kitchen of the food for the inmates seated in the refectory .

Proceeding up the staircase we enter the second floor corridor. On the second floor, on the west side, are the cells of the nuns, cheerful little rooms, 12ft by 10ft, with a window in each, but no fireplaces. Along the front of the building are placed the lady superior’s sitting and bedroom, and three cells for the noviciates. In a room opening onto the corridor is an iron tank, capable of holding 2000 gallons of rainwater, and pipes lead from this tank into a reservoir in the “garth”. On the east side is the "noviciates’ day room" (24ft by 18ft), the "oratory" (20ft by 15ft), a library, and a suite of runs for an "infirmary", all arranged in a most convenient manner for the nurses and patients.

The other floor, or garrett, extends throughout the entire range of buildings, and may be utilised for many objects, as lumber rooms, drying room, or other purposes. On the east, and immediately over the portion where the chapel will be erected, is a bell tower, containing the bell which was brought from the French convent.

The whole edifice is substantially built, and throughout every attention has been paid to giving a light and cheerful appearance to the various rooms. The interior is plain and simple but not at all rude or gloomy. The very reverse is the case. The entire woodwork is varnished, and the walls plastered and covered with white distemper. In the larger rooms there are two or three neat windows, in keeping with the design of the building, and so fixed as to open inwards and prevent a minimum admission of wind or rain. Ventilation has been carefully attended to, and water is plentifully supplied throughout by wells, tanks, and service pipes. The frontage is 107 feet and depth 121 feet; the height up to the gables being 50 ft and 30 ft to the eaves. The rooms throughout are over 12 ft high. There is no heating apparatus and few fireplaces in the building. Within the dividing wall, or enclosure, the only rooms in which fires can be lit at those in the infirmary.

The Rev M Gravey is the priest who had accompanied the ladies in their flight from France and seen to their accommodation in Mundham, since their landing at Dell Quay, and as chaplain has rendered every assistance. The Rev Canon Brown, of Carmel House, Darlington, who was for eleven years head of the English College at Valladolid, has also been of great service in assisting with his counsel and advice the ladies [sic] in adapting the Convent to their requirements. The designs were supplied by Mr C A Buckler, of London, and Messrs. Cheesman, of Brighton, have executed the work in a most satisfactory manner.

The Convent, until its completion, is open to inspection, and Mr Denman, the manager, or the foreman of the works, Mr Durrant, are pleased to show visitors round.

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