THE CARMELITE FRIARY AT SANDWICH

ELIZABETH DEIGHTON

In 1268, or just before, a small group of Carmelite friars came to Sandwich and settled in a small marshy piece of ground in part of which is now called Whitefriars Meadow. The order of Carmelites had its origin in a community of religious hermits who had gathered at Mount Carmel in Palestine. The Brothers of Our Lady of Carmel is their full title, but they were generally known as the Carmelites. From the late thirteenth century they wore long white cloaks and hoods over their brown cassocks and thus also became known as the White Friars. In the early thirteenth century they were driven from their base by the Saracens, and moved in groups west across Europe. Many settled in Cyprus, Sicily and France, but some came to this country, and by 1268 there were fifteen Carmelite Friaries in England and Wales. Two of them were in Kent, one at Aylesford and the other at Lossingham.

It is uncertain why exactly the Carmelites came to Sandwich, but it is probable that they were attracted to the then flourishing port. They had no money of their own and must have been granted the land, another inducement to come, and given some money. Various people are mentioned as being ‘founders’: amongst them William Lord Clinton, who is probably the same Clinton who was later constable of Dover Castle; and Thomas Crauthorne, said by the Sandwich historian, William Boys, to be the founder of St. Bartholomew’s Hospital in Sandwich (Crauthorne and his wife Maud were buried in the church of the Friary), but it is now accepted that Henry Cowfield from Germany gave the land and is referred to in the oldest sources as ‘first founder’.

The first task of the Sandwich Carmelites would have been to build their Friary and we do know something about its location and ground plan. This is due to the archaeological dig on the site in 1936,

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1 K.R. Egan, in Medieval Carmelite Houses, Carmelus, 16 (1969), 217 states that the Friary was founded before 1268, owing to its position in the Carmelite Foundation lists. It is this dating that is now accepted, though other printed sources date the Friary as 1272.
supervised by Mr W.P.D. Stebbing, and the further interpretations in 1963 and 1964 by Mr R.E. Rigold. Their explorations were confined, for the main part, to the central area of the White Friars meadow, and did not extend to New Street to the east, nor to the area to the south, beyond the existing block of flats. These experts traced various buildings from the barely exposed foundations of lime mortar and chalk; they had little to work on and could not positively identify the uses to which all the buildings were put, but have made informed surmises.

The church of the Friary can be clearly identified. It stood about 30 yds. in from what we now term the Cattle Market running from south-west to north-east at approximately right angles, therefore, to both New Street and the Rope Walk. It was a considerable building with a nave of 90 ft. running into a quire of 60 ft., thus 150 ft. in all; it had one aisle extending alongside the nave, and the width of the nave and aisle together was nearly 40 ft., the width of the quire alone 21 ft. It certainly had a bell tower, probably at the end of the aisle; it had two entrances at the south end of the church, one for the use of the congregation of Sandwich, coming from the Cattle Market through Friars Gate, and the other leading to the domestic quarters of the friars (Fig. 1).

The church would seem to have been constructed of flint and brick, and looked very like the 6 ft. high wall which still stands in the gardens of nos. 43 and 45 Cattle Market. This probably was a boundary wall of the Friary site. The excavations revealed a number of roof-tiles, but some of the roof, most probably its frame, must have been made with timber; we know this because in 1402 John Styyle left money to the Friary 'sufficient' as his will said 'for a great roof'. As for the interior, the archaeological dig found traces of floor slabs of Purbeck marble, and pillars of Purbeck and Caen stone; floor-tiles were found, both decorated and plain, very like those in St. Clement's church in Sandwich, and traces of stained glass, both blue and green were found. The walls would most likely have been decorated with religious scenes.

The most outstanding features of the interior of the church were the numerous small bays, at least seven in the nave and four in the quire; these would have served as side chapels, where each priest could say his own mass. But they served another purpose as well. They were chapels for private prayer, each devoted to a saint, each most probably

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2 Summaries of Stebbing's and Rigold's findings published in *Arch. Cant.* xlviii (1936), 225–7 and lxxx (1980), 1–27. Additional material is drawn from unpublished (so far as the author can ascertain) notes by Stebbing presented to the author. These notes were to be the base for an extended article on the Friary.
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Fig. 1.
(Reproduced with permission from Arch. Cant., lxxx (1980), 14–15.)
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furnished with an altar and painted statues and 'lights', lighted candles in front of the statues. Amongst the Holy Personages mentioned in the records are Our Lord (probably symbolically represented by a crucifix over the high altar), Our Lady, and Saints, having a statue, altar or light, (probably all three), namely St. Katherine, St. Barbara, St. Antony, St. Ninian, St. Cosmas and St. Damian, St. Crispin and St. Crispianus. Each chapel would certainly contain a statue of the named saint, but there might be another statue as well. In the chapel of St. Barbara there was for instance also a statue of Our Lady. In front of the statue would be the candles, and most likely these would have been tended by the local people, perhaps by small groups known as 'confraternities', who would make themselves responsible for a single light. Here the people of Sandwich would come to pray, and here the famous statues, such as that of Our Lady, would have been objects of devotion to pilgrims. The many wills and bequests\(^3\) of the period leaving money to the Friary, testify to the important part it played in Sandwich life.

The rest of the other buildings stretched towards the south-east, that is towards where the flats in White Friars meadow now stand. There was certainly a cloister to the south, about 50 ft. sq., and this must have been an open cloister where herbs and vegetables would have been grown, and near it a 30 ft. sq. building, most likely a chapter-house where daily meetings of the friars would have been held. The other buildings are less easy to identify exactly. There must have been a kitchen and a refectory near the present flats, as oyster shells were found in that area; and we know that oysters taken from the river Stour in medieval times were not to be offered to strangers, until those who lived in Sandwich had the chance to buy, so the friars had their share. There must have been a dorter (dormitory), which may have been divided into cells so that the friars could pray silently, a necessarium (lavatories) probably behind the dormitory in a 'rere-dorter', and an infirmary; indeed John Dryer, Rector of Ham, left bedding for the infirmary in 1486, and there was most certainly a lavatorium (washing-place). And this washing-place had its own supply of fresh water from the early fourteenth-century, because in 1306\(^4\) John Shelving gave the Friary a 12 ft. sq. piece of land in Woodnesborough, which had a spring and a conduit to the Friary. This is interesting because the rest of Sandwich had to rely for the main part on the dubiously healthy water

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\(^3\) The wills and bequests, cited throughout, are drawn from various printed sources, but also from Fr Copsey's MS., from notes by Mr A. Hussey now lodged in the archives of the Guildhall, Sandwich, and from the appendix to Stebbing's article in the author's possession. See note 2 above.

supply from the Delf stream until the late nineteenth-century, when Sandwich also took its supply from Woodnesborough in 1894. We also know that the Friary had a fish-pond because, rather oddly, the town records state that a fish was caught there by the friars in 1536.

The original small marshy site was augmented in 1280 by John of Sandwich, who gave an adjacent plot of land, and a further two acres was given by a named group of men in 1336. By the mid-sixteenth century it is known from the Dissolution records that the Friary site included orchards, gardens, a barn and a stable. Boys' writing of the Friary recorded\(^5\) that 'between the rampart of the town and New Street stood the house belonging to the Carmelites or White Friars; the buildings must have been of considerable extent and the house, gardens and meadows occupied an area of somewhat more than 5 acres.'

What of the lives of the friars themselves? The number of friars in Sandwich had risen to 24 by 1331. At any one time in Sandwich there was a prior, a sub-prior, a bursar, a number of priests, brothers and novices: one of the priests would certainly have been a well-educated man, probably a Doctor or Bachelor of Theology, who would be in charge of giving basic instruction to the novices. After the noviciate, young friars would be sent to Malden or London for further study, and normally go on to priesthood. Afterwards, they might move elsewhere, but they always 'belonged' to Sandwich, their 'domus filialis'.\(^6\)

William Beckley, for instance, joined the order in Sandwich, studied at Malden, was ordained deacon and then appointed prior of Cambridge. He returned to Sandwich to become prior and was buried in the Friary site when he died in 1438. Several of our friars were learned men; the records mention for instance, Friar William Ash, a lecturer in theology, Friar Andrew Canterbury, a Doctor of Theology, and Friar Thomas Legatt who was first a Bachelor and then a Doctor of Theology; like William Beckley, he travelled to study and then returned to Sandwich and was buried there in 1409. This training and travelling was certainly not peculiar to Sandwich because, as is well known, it was the monks and more especially the friars in medieval times who constituted in large measure the learned strata of society.

We know the names of five of the Sandwich priors between the late fourteenth and mid sixteenth century.\(^7\) The prior was responsible for the general running of the Friary, and would be advised by two or three

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\(^5\) Boys, 175.
\(^6\) Copsey unpublished MS, gives brief biographical details of the Sandwich friars, pp. 19-33.
\(^7\) Information about life in the Community is drawn from printed sources, mainly housed in the specialized library in The Friars, Aylesford. This is much augmented by information from Fr Copsey (lately Prior Provincial).
elected 'counsellors'; they in their turn would have appointed friars for certain duties: the cellarer responsible for the provision of food for instance, the infirmarian for the sick; the kitchener for the overseeing of the preparation of food.

As in all Friaries, the routine daily life had to be filled with work. The Carmelite rule states\(^8\) 'you must give yourself to work of some kind so that the devil may always find you busy, no idleness on your part must give him the chance to pierce the defense of your soul'. The friars would be up at midnight for the celebration of matins, and remain praying, or resting until dawn, when they would say Lauds, and to bed at six at night. The day would have been punctuated by their religious offices, matins, lauds, prime, terce, sext, none, vespers and compline; and we can picture the friars walking through the cloister from their dormitory, going in to the church through their own door into the nave, making their way up to the quire, and gathering around a single candle, singing or saying the prayer for the day.

The friars would eat in the refectory, listening to a reading from the scripture. They were vegetarian until 1432, when they were allowed meat three times a week. But the Carmelites had little money to spare for buying food, and their staple diet would have been based on bread and the produce they grew themselves. In the Sandwich Custumal of 1301 it is stated that on market-days the clerks of the mayor would do a spot check to find out if any of the loaves were underweight; if they were they were forfeited; the weighing clerks would take their pick, then the loaves would go to the friars, and if there were then any over, to St. Bartholomew's Hospital.

The Friars would have had various duties; many of them domestic or in the gardens. They would have had to look after the increasing number of pilgrims who came to worship, some probably on their way to Canterbury; care for the sick in the infirmary; if priests, listen to confessions, but only if academically well qualified and having permission of the bishop; look after those who took refuge with them,\(^9\) (for we know in particular of Bernard Manny [1487] who confessed to murder and took refuge in Sandwich). They would have had at least weekly meetings in the chapter house to learn the programme for the week, the possible arrival of distinguished guests, for instance, and to discuss matters of discipline. All this had to be carried out in the general context, common to monks as well as to friars, of poverty, chastity and obedience. When they had no specific duties to perform the Rule of the Carmelites required them to pray in

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\(^8\) Cicconetti, 149.

\(^9\) Boys, 176.
their individual cells, a rule deriving from their eremitical existence in the desert.

But in particular, unlike most of the monastic orders, the Friars were required to preach. This duty, or privilege, was again confined to the highly educated priests. They would certainly have preached in their own church, with many services, both on Sunday and during the week, and preaching not only to the local population but to the numerous soldiers and sailors passing through Sandwich; we have records of mariners leaving bequests to the Friary. But this preaching was not only in their own church, but, with permission, in other churches. Indeed, after dispensation, two of the friars became Rectors of Ham near Sandwich, Thomas Yucke in 1473 and John Dryer in 1478. As a contemporary historian has put it\textsuperscript{10} ‘the Friars were skilfully trained as preachers, to go and hear a friar preach was a recognized holiday attraction, with their racy stories, their direct moral appeal and emotional style’.

An important duty of the Friars was to go out and beg. The Carmelites were a mendicant order and relied on bequests and begging for their livelihood. The \textit{Canterbury Tales}\textsuperscript{11} in the prologue describes a friar begging

\begin{verbatim}
for though a widow mightnt have a sou
So pleasant was his holy how-dye-do
He got her farthing from her just the same
\end{verbatim}

(but this is probably a dramatic exaggeration; Chaucer had no love for the friars). The white-cloaked Friars would have been in the Sandwich market-places, in the narrow streets, at the many fairs and on the quayside as the large trading ships came in from the Continent, many on their way to London through the then wide river.

There are few direct references to the Friars in the Sandwich streets; one of interest, however, is that in 1344 two Carmelites were arrested in Sandwich where they had disembarked from France; they were thought to be carrying letters from the Pope prejudicial to the King, Edward III. But in fact, while they had indeed been to see the Pope in Avignon, the purpose of their visit was to be consecrated as bishops by the Pope. When Edward heard of this he ordered their immediate release.\textsuperscript{12} ‘We want’, he wrote, ‘you to know that it was never our intention that any order of ours should instruct you to place under arrest anyone who has been consecrated Bishop’. This was understandable, as

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{10} A.R. Myers, 76.
  \item\textsuperscript{11} N. Coghill, \textit{The Canterbury Tales}, in modern English from Chaucer, Penguin, 1978, 27.
  \item\textsuperscript{12} Calendar of Close Rolls, Edward 111, 1343–1346, 445, 5 April, 1344.
\end{itemize}
relations were uneasy enough at the time between the Pope and the English king.

There is an increasing number of mentions of the Friary after the thirteenth century, probably because the later records have survived. A house in St. Clement's was bequeathed by Ralph Richard, a grocer (1494); a barn donated by Bennett Webbs, who had been mayor in 1488–1489 (1508); a garden in Harnet Street given by J. Sympon (1525). There was also an increase in the number of bequests, some of them fairly small, perhaps half a mark (sometimes referred to as 6/8d.). For example, out of many, Thomas Coleman left one mark 'to pray for mine and all Christian souls' (1494), Margaret Giles half a mark 'to pray for my soul and parents and benefactors' (1474), Jane Aschowe (1524) left 20 marks to the prior Sir John Keate, to sing for her soul for two years, and also rather delightfully, 'my great kettle'. Even John of Gaunt gave the Friary 40s.13 'en oeuvre de charité' (1372). (The only link easily discernible between Gaunt and the Carmelites is that Gaunt had three Carmelite confessors). In 1300, Edward I gave 5s. for one day's food, perhaps because he had visited the Friary after his return from Calais in 1298. But these bequests did not make the Friary rich, they were one-off gifts or bequests.

Knowledge of the Friary and of its church spread.14 In 1370, the Bishop of Exeter, Thomas Brentingham gave 40 days' indulgence for those from his diocese visiting the Sandwich Friary 'in which we have heard a fair image of the Blessed Virgin and martyr Katherine is held in great veneration'.

Provincial Chapters, meetings of representatives from all the friaries in the province, were held in Sandwich in 1398, 1436 and 1482. This must have been an accolade for Sandwich as these were considerable gatherings; as by the fifteenth century there were 39 friaries in the province, and each would have sent the Prior and socius (the delegate to the community). The Prior Provincial, other officers and all Doctors of Theology had the right to attend. So the total would be over 100 friars, some with servants and many with horses. The meetings lasted at least 10 days.15 At the last of the Chapters, the Corporation of Sandwich helped with expenses, giving 5 marks to the Friary. Then, in 1505, the Prior-General, Peter Terrasse from France, toured all the Carmelite Friaries in the province, and stayed in Sandwich on his way back to the Continent, conducting various matters of business, and giving preferment to at least two of the Sandwich friars.

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14 VCH which cites Exeter Epis. Reg. Brantygham (1.223) as the original source.
15 Copsey unpublished MS, p. 7; Bodl: Lib: Bodley m.s. 73 (Speculum Carm: 27635) FO 82.
There was a further link between the Friary and the Sandwich Corporation when in 1502 a play was performed\textsuperscript{16} in the Friary before the mayor, Robert Cobbes. There is no record of what the play was, but a likely surmise is that it was a performance by the friars’ minstrels; the corporation gave 3s. 4d. towards expenses.

As is well recorded, Henry V stayed in the Friary in 1416 on his way to France, perhaps because he had a Carmelite confessor, Stephen Parrington, at the time, He held a meeting in the Friary on September 4th, the day that he sailed, and this meeting was held\textsuperscript{17} ‘in an outer chamber within the manse of the Prior and brethren’. This was quite a considerable gathering attended by the archbishop, two bishops and others. The king supervised the handing over of the Great Seal from his Chancellor Henry, Bishop of Winchester, to a clerk in attendance, who was to take it for safe keeping to the Keeper of the Chancery Rolls, as the bishop was to go with the king to France.

It was very likely that when Henry VIII came to Sandwich in 1531\textsuperscript{18} or 1532, he stayed in the Friary. The corporation records state that in 1531, in view of his forthcoming visit, the corporation decided to give him two couple of fat oxen, two fat wethers and twenty couple of fat capons\textsuperscript{19} ‘for the delection of his honourable household’: moreover the corporation authorized 4d. to be paid to Stylle, his Sergeant, to drive the present to the Friars. So, it would certainly seem that Henry ate in the Friary, and probably stayed there as well. There are two pieces of some corroboration to this. The first is that Henry was in some debt to the Carmelites, because the Prior Provincial, John Bird, wrote a treatise in 1531 defending Henry’s divorce from Katherine of Aragon, so Henry might well have wanted to stay in a Carmelite friary. The second is that on November 16, 1532, Henry gave the Sandwich Friary 15 crowns\textsuperscript{20} though no specific reason for this gift is given.

But this happy relationship between Henry VIII and the Carmelite friars was not to last. The latent but deep-seated antagonism existing between the King in England and the Church in Rome deteriorated in

\textsuperscript{16} Copsey, 9, who cites Fretton who in turn quotes Sandwich Treasurers notes B 1502/3.

\textsuperscript{17} Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry V, 1413–1419, 368, 4 September, 1416. This is of interest as it is the only reference to a ‘manse’ in the Friary.

\textsuperscript{18} The date of Henry VIII’s visit is open, curiously, to doubt. Boys (p. 684) states under the date line 1531 ‘The King expected at Sandwich’, but Henry was in Sandwich on 16 November, 1532, having travelled there from Dover; the gift to the Friary on November 16th makes it likely that he stayed in Sandwich that night before travelling on 17th November.

\textsuperscript{19} Boys, 684. The reference to Stylle is in the Sandwich Corporation Records (The Old Red Book), 57.

\textsuperscript{20} Letters and Papers of Henry VIII, 1531–1532, 761, 16 November, 1532.
the 1530s; as a consequence of the Reformation the Friary, in common with all other Friaries and Monasteries, was dissolved. No longer were white-cloaked friars to be seen in the Sandwich streets, no longer was there to be a beautiful and well attended church in what is now known as Whitefriars meadow.

In 1538, the Bishop of Dover, Richard Ingworth, who had been a Dominican friar and was responsible for visiting the local friaries dissolved the Carmelite Friary in Sandwich. All the friars had already taken the oath of obedience to Henry VIII. The priests were all given 'capacities', that is permission to seek posts as priests elsewhere, some might have become vicars but there would have been few vacancies as the Dissolution affected friaries and monasteries, and so there was a scarcity of posts. Most of the friars were reduced to poverty, leaving the Friary with a change of clothing but little else.

As to the site, in 1540 the land was put into the custody of Thomas Pache, who had been mayor in 1539, and was appointed as Collector of rents for the Carmelite property. Some land was bought from the crown by individuals in Sandwich; some was held by the Corporation as trustees for the crown and many plots rented out.

The Friary buildings were sold to the controversial Arden of Faversham in 1540; there is then a gap in the records; the buildings came up for sale in 1570 for 100 crowns, and the Corporation considered buying them, but it is unclear whether it did in fact do so. There is no evidence whether the Friary site was ever inhabited after the Dissolution. Probably not; even though some post-Reformation tiles and coins were found there, the evidence is insufficient. It is possible that some of the stones and flints were taken for the rebuilding of Sandown Castle, near Deal, which took place between 1538 and 1540, and that the ornaments and books and furnishings were vandalised. There is then a further gap in the records of sale until 1614, and after that William Boys in his History records a complicated series of owners until the end of the eighteenth century, but does not give his sources, and there is no clear indication of what exactly was involved in deeds of sale or relevant wills. What is known is that by the middle of the nineteenth century the house in New Street in Sandwich known as White Friars, and the land known now as Whitefriars meadow were in the hands of a single owner, various plots having been bought in, or willed to the owner of White Friars house.

21 Title Deeds of White Friars (house). In possession of present owner of the house.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the great courtesy shown to me by Father Richard Copsey, formerly Provincial and Prior of The Friars at Aylesford and now serving in Rome, especially for giving me advice as to the daily life of the friars, and for allowing me to consult the specialized library at Aylesford; my thanks also to Mr Charles Wanostrocht, sometime Chairman of the Sandwich Local History Society for invaluable advice; to Mr Brian Kennett, sometime Lecture Secretary of the Sandwich Local History Society, and to my daughter, Dr Anne Deighton of St. Antony's College Oxford, for meticulous script reading.

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Castlelyons Friary is a former Carmelite Priory and National Monument located in County Cork, Ireland.[1] YouTube Encyclopedic.

Originally the friary had just a small church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Later it was extended westwards by a nave, cloister and tower. It was dissolved in 1541 during Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries and annexed to the crown in 1561. The medieval Friary was discovered on a site that has long been called Friars' Ground, but Andrew Armstrong explained that historic sources had all suggested the friary was located next to Market Parade, and this was actually a swerve ball that has served only to confuse historians and archaeologists, until now. Now that the shells of the ancient buildings have been excavated, Andrew Armstrong told The BBC that further archaeological investigations will now dig deeper into the foundations of the buildings, hoping to improve the archaeological understanding of how this intriguing religious site functioned during different periods. The shells of the medieval Friary buildings have been excavated. (Cotswold Archaeology).

The first Carmelites lived on Mount Carmel for about a hundred years. They settled near a spring called the fountain of Elijah at the entrance to the wadi, which ran about a thousand metres east and west being open to the Mediterranean Sea. At the beginning of the 13th century, the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, St Albert (+ 1214) gave the hermits a simple, scriptural-based Rule of Life. Based on this Rule they lived solitary lives in small cells on Mount Carmel where they prayed and contemplated in the spirit of Elijah. They built a chapel amidst their cells and dedicated it to Carmelite friars established Whitefriars in 1270, but the religious site was destroyed during the Protestant Reformation. Archaeologists unearthed the friary's ruins beneath the site of a demolished parking garage. (Courtesy of Cotswold Archaeology). By Livia Gershon.

Established around 1270, the Carmelite friary known as Whitefriars was all but demolished during the 16th century. Historians had long been aware of the house of worship's existence, but they didn't know exactly where it was located. Researchers from the Gloucester City Council and Cotswold Archaeology took advantage of a redevelopment project in the city's King's Quarter neighborhood to investigate.