EWELME AND THE DE-LA-POLES.

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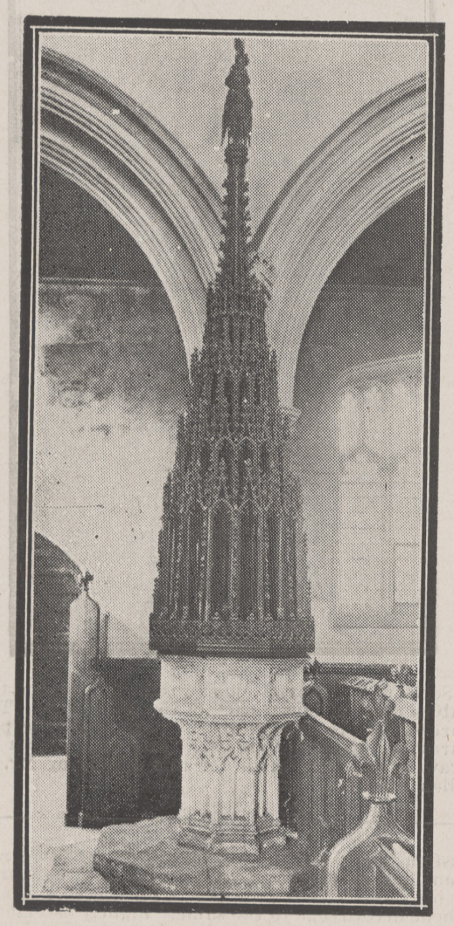
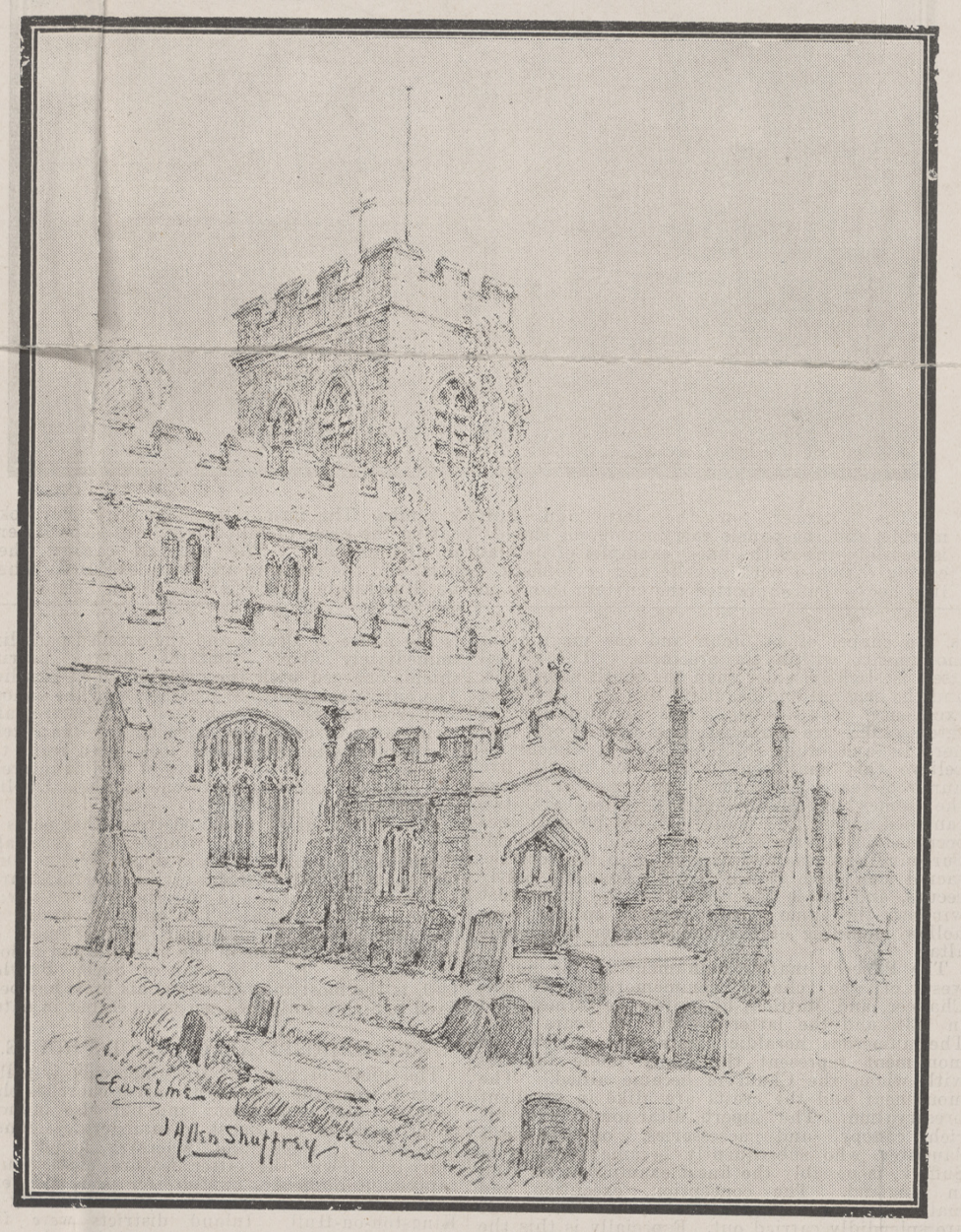
The members of the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society recently visited Ewelme, and inspected the beautiful church and hospital erected by the De-la-Poles in the second half of the fifteenth century. The President of Trinity gave a lucid account of the church and the Master of the Hospital (Sir William Osler) learnedly descanted on the foundation, respecting which he exhibited interesting munimentary information, including several autograph letters of the Duchess of Suffolk herself. Sir William and Lady Osler extended appreciated hospitality to those taking part in the excursion. The Rector of Ewelme's compact handbook to the church and hospital contains useful information relative to those buildings and also to the village and manor. The village of Ewelme is mentioned in the Saxon Chronicle nineteen years later than that of Oxford, and is there designated "Æwylm"—a name signifying a swelling water, or the source of a river, which accurately describes the actual physical features of the village. Late in the fourteenth century the manor was held by Thomas Chaucer, son of the poet, who married Maud, the daughter of Sir John Burghersh, and his only child, Alice, successively married Sir John Philip, Thomas Montacute, Earl of Salisbury, and William De-la-Pole, Duke of Suffolk. In addition to Ewelme, Chaucer held the important manors of Woodstock, Hanborough, Wootton and Stonesfield. He was also Chief Butler of England, Constable of Wallingford and Knaresborough Castles, and Ranger of Knaresborough Forest. Consequently his heiress was the possessor of a long rent-roll, and would be a desirable acquisition to any nobleman who rejoiced in a long pedigree, but was furnished with meagre material resources. Between 1399 and 1430 Thomas Chaucer represented his county several times, and on two occasions was chosen Speaker. In the month of August, 1415, exactly five centuries ago, he accompanied Henry V. to France, taking with him 39 bowmen from Ewelme, who took part in the brilliant battle of Agincourt, fought in October in that year. In that connection it is interesting to know that 90 Ewelme men—nearly 20 per cent. of the entire population—are at present fighting in France. The Duke of Suffolk (Alice Chaucer's husband) was treacherously killed in 1450 when on a journey to France. His son, John, married Elizabeth Plantaganet, elder sister of Edward IV. Of the latter's sons, John was associated with Lord Lovell in Simnels feckless rising, which was crushed at Stoke in 1487, when John De-la-Pole was killed. In 1484 the latter had been actually proclaimed heir-apparent to the Crown. The second son, Edmund, was beheaded in 1513, and twelve years later a like fate befel the third son, Richard, both brothers, in consequence of their close affinity to the blood-royal, having incurred the suspicion of Henry VIII., whose jealousy brooked no opposition and who did not hesitate to destroy all possible rivals. Thereupon the family became extinct and their estates reverted to the Crown. Notwithstanding their brief connection with Ewelme, however, the family left an indelible and beautiful impress on the village, which happily continues to this day, and though the moated palace which, together with a park, occupied a site somewhat west of the church, has long disappeared, the noble church and picturesque "God's House" happily remain intact and practically unchanged, after a lapse of nearly five centuries. Of the original church not a vestige remains except, possibly, the second bell, the exact date of which has not been ascertained. Probably the earlier edifice was entirely demolished to provide space for the new and larger building, which is a typical example of the somewhat rigid style that obtained during the century that immediately preceded the Reformation. The difficulties inseparable from the site were neither few nor inconsiderable, but these were successfully surmounted, and in consequence of the rapid fall in the ground at the western end of the fabric, it was found possible to enhance the dignity and importance of the tower, which, with its great flanking buttresses, forms an important feature in any exterior view of the building. The unsettled character of the times—the Wars of the Roses—finds expression in the building itself, the southern sector being later and inferior in character to the northern, a feature possibly owing to the suspension of building operations. The magnificent font-cover, and its Tudor-Rose counterweight, are also late, both probably being subsequent to the battle of Bosworth.



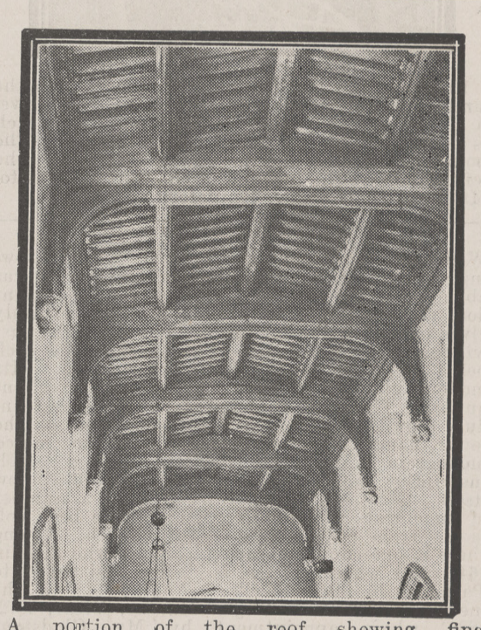
Font and cover, the latter of unusual beauty and excellence, though considerably restored. (From a photo by Mr. F. E. Howard.)



General view of the church and hospital from the north-east, showing the tower, parts of the clerestory, north nave aisle and porch. To the right are picturesque gables of the hospital, with a stepped chimney-stack in the foreground. (From a sketch specially made for this article by Mr. Allen Shuffrey.)

General view of interior from the west, showing the fine roof, the remains of rood-screen, the north and south nave-arcades, and the late east window. (From a photograph by Mr. F. E. Howard.)

Possibly the finest exterior view of the church, which is dedicated to St. Mary, is that obtainable from the fine elm nearest the path leading to the north porch. This not only includes the church and tower, but also affords a prospect of the north and eastern cloister-walk of the Hospital. In consequence of the architecture being exclusively of one type, as is also the case at Minster Lovell, the building entirely lacks the diversity of character and irregularity of outline which is so agreeable a phase in most churches. This feature is not enhanced by the long, unrelieved and monotonous sky-line of the nave and choir, which is carried through at one level, slightly broken, indeed, by crennels, but otherwise perfectly level. The same remark applies to the roof of the long north aisle, which extends the entire length of the church, and from which projects the north porch, which has undergone considerable restoration. The stiff lines of the church, however, form a striking foil to the irregular outline of the hospital, the grouping of both buildings being singularly attractive. The clerestory is pierced by seven two-light, square-headed Perpendicular windows, identical in every respect, and three triple-lighted, stilted-segmental windows light the north-aisle. With the exception that these windows are shortened as they extend eastwards, a feature rendered necessary by the rise of the ground, they are also identical as regards detail. The north porch, like other sectors of the building, is composed of flint with stone dressings, and at the eastern end of north aisle the former material has been worked into a square diaper, which also appears on the whole of the eastern elevation of the church. Throughout the building, the tower alone excepted, the crennels are composed of bricks, small in size and excellent in quality. After an exposure of nearly five centuries, the bricks display but slight weathering, though possibly this may be due to rough-cast, which at one time may have protected them. With the exception of a simple two-light opening at the bell-stage, the northern wall of the tower is entirely unpierced. This imparts strength to the elevation, a feature enhanced by the angle buttress, now covered with ivy, which destructive growth should be removed. On the western face the tower carries a characteristic Perpendicular doorway with quatre-foiled spandrils, and good, though not original, doors. Above the two-light depressed arched west window are two openings similar to that on the north, the tower being considerably wider north to south than east to west. A large part of the picturesque timbered south porch is original, and where restoration was essential, happily no attempt has been made to reproduce the ancient mouldings. The entire south elevation is mainly identical with the northern example, and the strings in both are enriched with gargoyles of some merit. The windows on the south, however, are not only later than those in the north wall, but have four-centred arches and wide shallow mouldings, and the rise in the ground is met by raising the entire windows and not by reducing their length, as was done in the earlier work. Allusion has already been made to the flint and stone diaper that covers the eastern elevation. The latter is pierced by three windows; two of these, those in the nave and St. John's Chapel, are original, that in the north choir-aisle is modern and poor. Near the southern window is a label inscribed, "Heare lyeth intered the body of Richard Eyare, who deseased Februari ye 26th, 1644." Possibly this gentleman was the ancestor of the accomplished youth whose many virtues are catalogued on the altar-tomb near the door leading to St. John's Chapel. Entering the building by the north porch, an agreeable impression is at once created by the lofty character of the building and the wonderful condition of the various roofs and stone-work. The former is due in large measure to the rapid fall in the ground, and the latter to the care that has been taken to protect the fabric from the weather. The roofs are apparently as sound as they were 400 years ago, and in no instance has renewing or splicing been necessary. The fine series of corbels that terminate the hood-mouldings of the north arcade appear as sharp as when they left the sculptor's chisel, while the mouldings themselves, and also those of the choir, are remakably good and not unlike those in a similar position at St. Mary-the-Virgin, Oxford. The south arcade is less ornate, the mouldings and corbels being alike inferior. The piers, however, are identical throughout the building. The tie-beams above the screen are coupled, probably for the support of the rood, which was suspended at this point. The bath-shaped openings in the north and south walls that provided access to the rood loft possibly owe their unusual form to a disinclination to disturb the hood moulding of the adjoining arches. The three screens are original, but all have been mutilated. That in the centre has also been considerably lowered. In each case the tracery-bars are composed of iron, placed anglewise, and all bearing traces of vermillion. With the exception of the font cover and choir-screens the other woodwork is not of striking beauty, being of the oak grain variety so dear to early nineteenth century "restorers." The font rises from two steps, and the stem is enriched with deeply-cut panelling of good design. The bowl is girdled by a series of plain shields enclosed in quatre-foils, and crowning the font is the famous cover, heavily restored indeed, but beautiful alike in conception and execution. The counterpoise should also be noticed, and also the ancient heraldic tiles on the font steps. Each of the tower-piers bear small figures enriched with rosaries, one having in addition a cross and the other possibly a relic. These figures were probably lamp-corbels, a surmise strengthened by the leaden plug that still remains above the northern example. Reference has already been made to the fine corbels in the north arcade; that nearest the font is unusually good, and is evidently a portrait, possibly of Edward III. The other corbels, angels rising from clouds, should also be noticed. Those over the screen are wider than the others, in consequence of the coupled tie-beams they support; the figures may possibly be those of workmen engaged in the work.



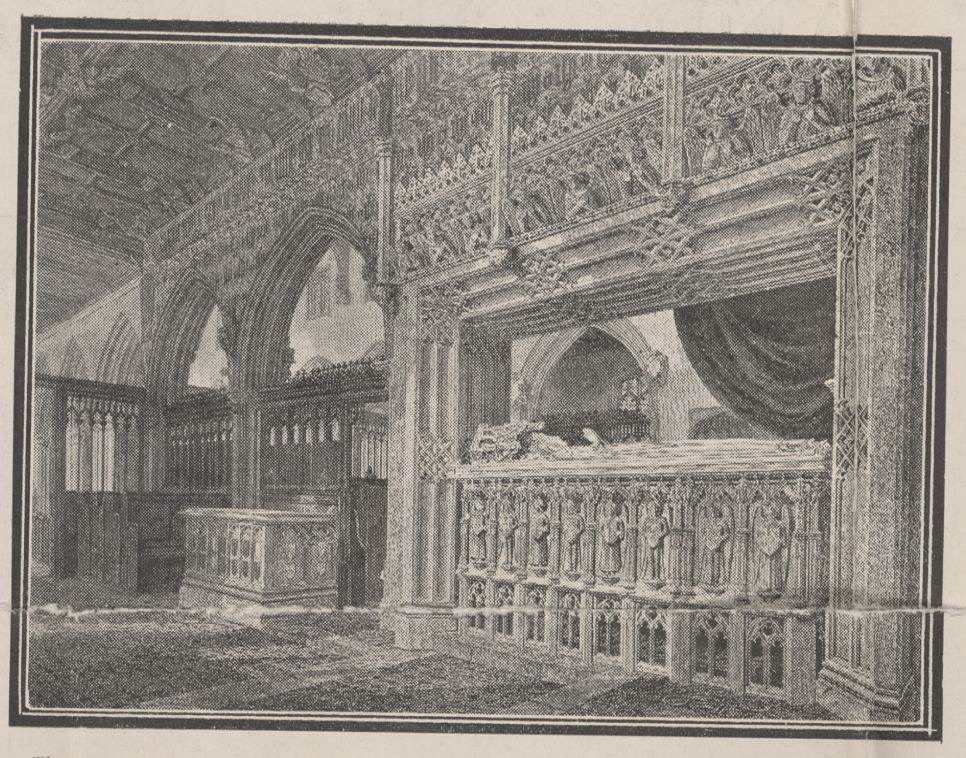
A portion of the roof showing fine scantling and wonderful preservation. The double tie beam referred to in the text is seen in the foreground. (From a photograph by Mr. F. E. Howard.)

Corbel near font, traditionally said to represent King Edward III. (From Skelton.)

The section of octagonal woodwork in floor near the pulpit possibly marks the site of the Jacobean pulpit that is shown in Skelton's well-known view of the church as it appeared in the opening years of the nineteenth century. An ascent of three steps leads to the choir, which is identical, as regards width, with the nave, and, in addition to the sanctuary, consists of two bays, the arcades of which are finely moulded, the sections being the same throughout. The spacious character of this section of the church warrants the supposition that the Duchess of Suffolk's superb monument was originally intended to occupy the centre of the choir, as at Thame church, where Lord

Figure of the Duchess of Suffolk, in which the simple folds of the drapery are extremely effective. A richly-pierced canopy covers the head, which is coronetted, partly veiled and wimpled. The body is enshrined in a mantle of estate, and the left arm bears the insignia of the Garter. (Photo, Mr. Fred H. Crossley, Knutsford.)

Williams's monument was erected in the following century. If such was the idea, however, it was abandoned, though the fact that the monument does not exactly fit its present location certainly gives colour to the tradition. The five-light east window is characteristic of its period, the arch being depressed and the tracery rigid. Its modern glass is of good, though not excellent quality. The scene depicted is also somewhat unduly crowded. Flanking the window, and on the lower flanges of the choir-arcades, the sacred monogram is profusely repeated, and a scroll inscription encircles the upper part of the window itself. The sanctuary walls support a number of memorials which may possibly have been collected from other parts of the church. Among these is one commemorating a youth who died in 1647, and whose corpse is being assisted into Paradise by two angels. Another is to the memory of William Wigan Harvey, Vicar, 1872-1883, whose appointment by Mr. Gladstone created considerable dissatisfaction in the University. The screens under the choir arcades are good and, unlike those at the east of the north and south nave-aisles, are in excellent preservation. The great feature of the church, however,



The Chaucer (on the left) and Suffolk tombs. The former is composed of Purbeck marble, and the panels carry numerous shields bearing the arms of allied families. The latter is possibly one of the finest examples of its class in the country. The panelled canopy, the coving enriched with angelic and ecclesiastic figures, and the cresting are finely executed. The iron hooks that supported the curtain shown in the illustration still remain. (From Skelton).

is the chapel of St. John and the magnificent monuments within its precincts. The chapel itself is slightly wider than the south nave aisle, and the original and beautiful roof is of arresting excellence. The ribbing is well moulded, and the intersections are enriched with figure-work, and heraldic and other emblems. It is difficult to believe this has been in situ for nearly five hundred years, yet such is the case. Flanking the somewhat garish modern altar are two canopied niches, now tenantless, but possibly once occupied by figures of St. John and the B.V.M. Surrounding these and extending to the roof the sacred monogram in a dull red colour constantly recurs, and, as is the case with the great east window, the same device appears on the wide hollow moulding of the window over St. John's altar.

The Purbeck marble monument at the north-west of the chapel commemorates Thomas Chaucer, and Matilda, his wife; the former died in 1434, and the latter nearly two years later. The numerous heraldic crests that enrich the monument represent the many noble families with whom the Chaucers became allied. The monument and the crests are alike in excellent preservation. The superb altar-tomb, with its rich canopy and accessories, of Chaucer's daughter, who subsequently became Duchess of Suffolk, is possibly the finest example of its kind in England. The conception, execution and material is of the highest order, and the details are splendidly carried out. Especially is this the case with the figure of the Duchess, whose features convey an impression of strength and fixity of purpose that cannot escape the most casual observer. Over the coronetted head, which is "wimpled well," is a pierced canopy of great beauty, the hands are clasped in the attitude of devotion, the body is attired in kirtle, cote-hardi, and a loose mantle of estate. The left arm bears the Garter, and her feet repose on a lion, the emblem of fortitude. The figure is composed of alabaster, and was probably sculptured at Nottingham, which was a great centre for similar work in the Middle Ages. In the under section, as is the case with the Tanfield monument at Burford, is the figure of Death, and the arcaded panelling immediately above contains figures bearing shields charged with the arms of allied families. The entire composition, together with the canopy and cresting—the latter broken by pilaster-shafts terminated by curious wooden figures—the angelic and ecclesiastic heads that look down from the hollow coving, are all features of abiding interest, and worthily commemorate one to whom Ewelme owes so much.

The ancient glass, collected from other parts of the church, in the east window, and especially the heraldic blazonry in the upper section—some 14th-century, and therefore earlier than the church—should be noticed, and also the memorials with their quaint epitaphs. The church contains no less than sixteen memorial brasses, most of which were laid down in the fifteenth and following century. Possibly that of Simon Brayles, 1469, is the most interesting, as his brass has been fixed to a slab fully two centuries earlier in date.

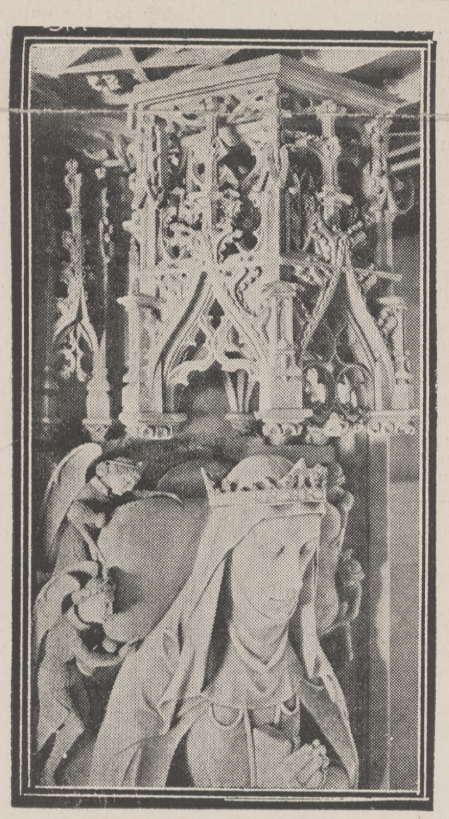
EWELME HOSPITAL, OR "GOD'S HOUSE."

The piety of our ancestors not only impelled them to rear the wonderful parish churches that beautify and ennoble our land, but also induced them to do their utmost to minister to sickness and want, "when and wherever found." In maritime towns the latter feature often found expression in houses of alms for poor mariners, as was the Fraternity of the Blessed Trinity at Kingston-on-Hull Inland districts were frequently provided with similar shelters by the local magnate, and this was the case at Ewelme. The buildings themselves are quadrangular in form, built of brick, and are cloistered throughout. They are two storeys only, the upper being lighted by the quaint dormers which, together with the gabled lights that centre each walk, impart so picturesque an appearance to the buildings. The central courtyard is cobbled. The ancient laver has been replaced by a modern arrangement for drawing water, which, although extremely efficient, can hardly be described as harmonious with its surroundings. Of special interest is the moulded-brick arched doorway, with its traceried tympanum, on the north front. The mouldings and the bricks themselves are in splendid preservation and quite sharp in outline. The tall, thin chimneys are not unlike those similarly positioned at St. Cross Hospital, Winchester. Ewelme Hospital was founded in 1450, the year that William De-la-Pole met his untimely and ignominious death. Happily his spirited wife had the will and the means to complete the work. In this she displayed extraordinary wisdom and foresight. She declared "We will and ordeyne that the minister and pore men have and holde a certeyn place by them self within the seyde howse of almesse, that is to sayng, a litye howse, a celle or a chamber with a chemency and other necess-arys in the same." That the pious foundress was a convinced believer in the efficacy of intercession is strikingly manifest from the reference in the statutes to "prayoure, in the whiche we have grete trust and hope to our grete relefe and increce of oure merite and joy fynally." Recognising the universal tendency to "take things easy" and become "slack," the inmates were enjoined to clean the courtyard, weed their gardens, and regularly attend service. In case of default fines were inflicted for "absence fro prime, terce, sext and neyuth, for ich of thayme 1d." The Master was to be "an able and well-disposed person in body and soul, one who could counsel and exhort the poor men to their comfort and salvation." He was also to be continuously resident, and not to omit any service unless "if he be let by sekenesse or prechyng of the worde of God, or by visitacion of Fadyre and modir." Every day at 6 a.m. the almsmen attended prime, went to Mass at 9, bedes at 2 p.m., and evensong and compline at 3. Finally, at 6 p.m., they all assembled around their Founders' tombs and repeated "God have mercy of the sowle of the noble prince Kyng Harry the Sext, and the sowles of my lord William sum tyme Duke of Suffolke, and my lady Alice Duchesse of Suffolke his wyfe, oure first fownders, and of their fadyer and modyr sowles, and all cristen sowles." This pious

Section of hospital cloister showing one of the gables that surmount each of the four walks. The three-light opening above the portal and the picturesque barge-boards are original. (From a drawing specially made for this article by Mr. J. Allen Shuffrey.)

custom was doubtless continued to the Reformation, and as the old men, attired in "a tabarde of his owne with a rede crosse on the breste, and a hode accordynge to the same," nightly assembled round the tomb of their benefactors, the chapel dimly lighted, and the "shadows of departing day" struggling through the richly diapered windows, the scene must have been singularly impressive. As early as the fifteenth century it was noticed that churches and hospitals fell into decay in consequence of lack of adequate and constant reparation; and that "for defaute of dew execucion of the same and dew uisitacion and correccion of the brekers of them (the rules regarding repairs), such dede howses hauve bene by mystyuyng and negligence ybrought to grete heuynesse and at the last to grete desolacon." Consequently visitors were appointed to see that neccessary repairs were duly executed. Provision was also made that young men should not be recipients of bounty intended for older persons, though it must be confessed the "age limit" was not unduly stringent, while the Master himself was to be "a degreed man passed thirty winters of age."

In addition to the church and hospital, the Duchess, who died in 1475, having survived her unfortunate husband twenty-five years, founded and endowed the picturesque grammar school, at which, however, grammar was only to be taught to a select few, and should there at any time be no more than four "childer that actually lernes gramar, besides petettes (beginners) and reders," the master was to assist at matins and evensong, and he was also to take care that his pupils were not "tedious, nois-ome, or troublous" to the almsmen. With the exception of a door inserted in the north elevation, the grammar school, including its fine roof, is in its original condition, and though in recent years the curriculum and control has undergone considerable and necessary modification, the work originated by the good Duchess nearly five centuries ago, survives in unabated activity, and her bedesmen are still enjoined so to live "that aftyr the state of this dedely (mortal) lyf they mowe come and inhabit the kyngdome of heven, the which with our Lordes mouth is promysed to all men the which bene pore in spirit."



Enlargement of canopy and head, showing magnificent detail and accurate facial representation. The figure is carved from a single block of alabaster and was probably produced at Nottingham. (Photo, Mr. Fred H. Crossley, Knutsford.)

The Grammar School, founded about 1450. Built of small but very hard bricks, with stone-dressings, the entire structure, including the roof, is in its original condition and in a wonderful state of preservation. The well-proportioned chimneys should be noticed. These project from the main walls, as was customary at the period. The angle-buttress admirably breaks the rigid contour of this section of the building, and is also of great constructional importance. The doorway in staircase-porch, the bell-cot, and the window above are modern. (From a photo by Mr. F. E. Howard.)