

# CASTLE ACRE PRIORY

AN 800-YEAR-OLD MASTERPIECE

## AN ELEVENTH CENTURY FOUNDATION

The Priory of Castle Acre, near King's Lynn, which is the subject of Mr. Hanslip Fletcher's drawing on this page, has a history that stretches back to the eleventh century.

Although its early years are involved in obscurity, it is practically certain that it was founded, about 1090, by William de Warenne, second Earl of Surrey and a son of one of the companions of the Conqueror.

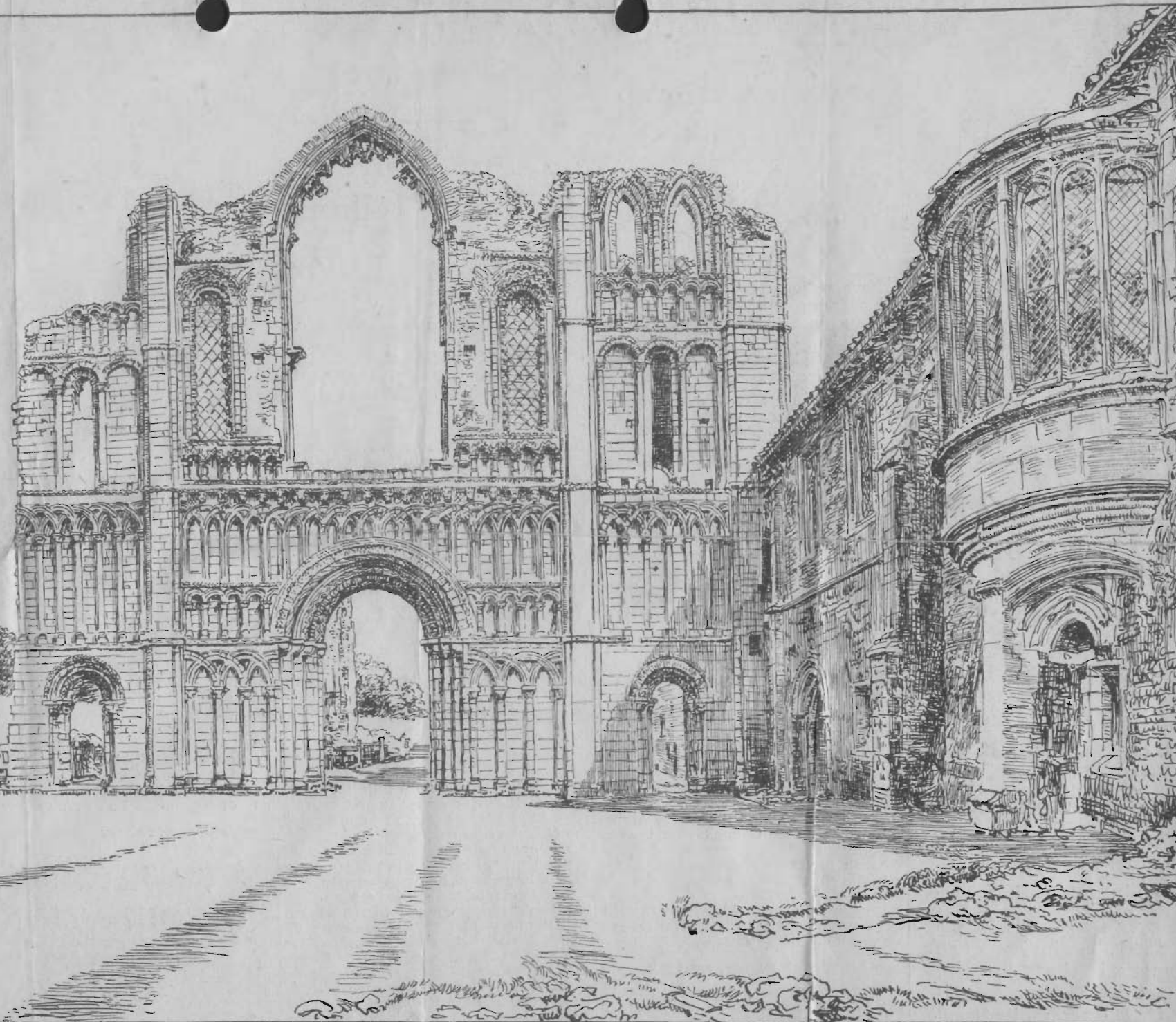
It was established as a Priory of the Order of Cluny, and was an offshoot of the Cluniac Priory of Lewes. The relationship between the two houses was not always amicable, for it is recorded that in 1283 William of Shoreham, Prior of Castle Acre, fortified the monastery against the Prior of Lewes, defying efforts to dislodge him in favour of Benedict of Cluny, who had been appointed in his place.

### EARLY PERSECUTION

During the wars between England and France, Castle Acre suffered for its connection with the alien Monastery of Cluny. It was persecuted and plundered by Edward I, Edward II, and Edward III, and it was not until 1373 that the English Cluniac houses were legally accepted as "denizens and not aliens."

The last Prior was Thomas Malling, who surrendered the Priory and manor to Henry VIII. The property was granted to Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, and passed in turn to the Gresham and Cecil families.

It was sold by William Cecil, Earl of Exeter, to Sir Edward Coke, whose descendant, the Earl of Leicester, is the present owner. In 1929 Lord Leicester appointed the Commissioners of Works guardians of the ruins under the Ancient Monuments Act.



Hanslip Fletcher 1937

(Specially drawn for the SUNDAY TIMES by Hanslip Fletcher.)

The west front of Castle Acre Priory, Norfolk, a superb example of Norman architecture. The principal doorway has elaborate mouldings, and is set in a triple