

RUMBURGH.

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Several periods in our national history are prominently brought before us in this spot—the Roman occupation, the Norman Conquest, the Early English epoch in architecture, the anti-Italian movement in the fourteenth century, and the days of Cardinal Wolsey.

Two or three miles east of us lies the route No. IX. in Antonine's Itinerary, running from Norwich to London, by Dunwich. A British track, curling as usual along the higher ground so as to avoid water-crossings, ran from the east end of Lake Lothing into this district, terminating in the small earth-work here, from which the village takes its name.

Such inclosures served many purposes. Hither cattle might be driven, and here a small company might be placed to overawe local marauders when some baggage train was passing between *Venta Icenorum* and *Sitomagus*. Other instances are not wanting, as at Mells.

The Monastery was founded between 1064 and 1070 by Brother Blakere, and other brethren from S. Benet-at-Hulme, and given as a Cell to the Abbey of S. Mary at York by Alan le Noir, Earl of Richmond and Bretagne.

The possessions of this powerful nobleman in East Suffolk were not extensive, but in Domesday Book occurs the following:—"Terre Comitum Alani. In Almaham xl acrae, et pertinent ad ecclesiam de Romburc." It looks as though the scribe were asserting right against possession; and the transfer of this infant cell from its mother in East Norfolk to a step-mother in York seems another instance

of Norman high-handedness, for S. Mary's at York was the foundation of Earl Alan the Red, father of this Alan the Black. Materials are not now at hand to add anything to the mediæval history of the Cell, which must have been left to autonomy in a great measure, through the distance of its new quasi-parent. Something, however, of influence from north of the Humber may be recognised in the tower of the church.

In this mere block we have the lower portion of what would have been a grand Early English tower, a style now comparatively rare in Suffolk. No doubt the builders of the Perpendicular period, who were as ruthless as Georgian churchwardens, destroyed much noble work of their predecessors' predecessors, but making all allowances, the preponderance of the early English style in the north is observable. In some recent digging a stone was discovered, bearing part of an inscription to the memory of Prior William Waltham, without date.

Passing to a very different scene, and one which apparently has little to do with Rumburgh: it is 1351, and the nation is just recovering from the awful scourge of the Black Death. Complaints against Italian influence in the disposition of patronage have come to a head, and stern repression is the order of the day. The well-known Statute of Provisors is passed, if not the first, perhaps the most notable "refrenation" (to adopt a Johnsonian word) of power issuing from that peninsula. It is presumed that no record exists of those who were present in Parliament, but looking to the constitution of the Episcopal bench in that year we find that a third part of the Bishops at one time or another held the office of Lord Treasurer, Lord Chancellor, or Secretary of State, while among the others occur the names of those well-known in the history of their Dioceses and elsewhere, Archbishop Islip of Canterbury, Bishop Grandison of Exeter, Bishop Trillek of Hereford, and (last, not least) our own William Bateman, a name especially honoured by members of his foundation, Trinity Hall, Cambridge.

We are not justified in assuming that there was no opposition to the Act of Provisors. It is true that the "Mother of Parliaments" was then young, and had not acquired the art of suffocating her infant offspring by means of hundredweights of amendments in Committee, a wonderful method which has marked her maturity. But though little remains of the debates of those days, debates there were undoubtedly. It can be said, however, with little chance of contradiction, that had the Lords Spiritual, consisting of the bishops and mitred abbots, shown anything like resistance, or even refrained from support, the Bill would never have become an Act. Like many other Acts, it was not an unqualified success. The English lay-patrons were worse than the Italian wire-pullers. The Universities found their graduates passed over. In 1411 a parish close by, Metfield, went straight to Pope John xxiii. with a petition against the Prior and Convent of the Cluniacs at Mendham, alleging that although the Prior took their tithe he would not cause their chapel to be served. In 1416 the Commons approached Henry v. with a petition against the statute, anticipating the extinction of the Christian Faith, "*si hasty remedie ne soit fait en ceste matere si bosoinable.*" No remedy, hasty or deliberate, was found in legislation. The statute remained in the letter, but it was becoming to all appearances a dead letter, till Wolsey's violation of it showed that a terrible power remained in those old sentences, as witnessed by the fall of the man who procured the Bull for the suppression of Rumburgh and other small houses. The Bull is printed in the Transactions of our Institute (see paper on Blythburgh), from Rymer's *Fœdera*.* It expressly relies on the assent of Henry VIII., and transfers all the property of these houses, real and personal, to the projected Ipswich College.

As we learn from the complaint of Abbot Whalley, of S. Mary's, York, quoted hereafter, Rumburgh must have witnessed a strange sight shortly before its spoliation.

* Vol. iv., 238.

There is an uneasy feeling in the cloisters of the north. In the early part of the sixteenth century an Abbot of S. Mary's, William Sevier, had become Bishop of Durham and Chancellor of the University of Oxford, but he died in 1507, and the bond which held the Universities and the Monasteries together was sensibly growing weaker. The previous year had seen Desiderius Erasmus in England for the second time,* encouraged by Archbishop Warham and Sir Thomas More. In 1509 he was again in England. He went to Cambridge, and became in 1516 Lady Margaret's Reader in Divinity, and about the same time Professor of the much-suspected Greek tongue. The cry is all for Colleges. Abbeys with their cells, it is surmised, will have to be destroyed that they may flourish. And who is more to be dreaded than this Suffolk man, potent at Court as well as at Rome? This Thomas Wolsey becomes Archbishop of York in 1515, and Bishop of Durham in 1523. The north is in his hands. There is talk of some great collegiate foundation. Abbeys and priories not alien may share the fate of their alien sisters under the statute of Leicester in 1414. And thus, as it seems, Abbot Whalley and his convent come to the determination of sending off sundry of their muniments and other valuables, and of a surety they could have hardly pitched upon a more secluded place than their cell at Rumburgh. The chests were probably transmitted by water direct from the water-gate at S. Mary's to Dunwich. Here was a Benedictine Cell subordinate to Eye, and hence there was short and easy land carriage to Rumburgh. Thus between 1523 and 1526 probably came the treasures of York to Rumburgh.

Wolsey, with all his faults, was faithful to learning and to the Papacy. He saw clearly that the ignorance and self-indulgence prevalent among the secular clergy, and in the smaller priories would, unchecked, bring about a general upset, coupled, perhaps, with a victory for the Lutheran heresy. Colleges of priests had proved them-

* His first visit was about 1498.

selves at Oxford and Cambridge the great lights of England, while even those in the country had shown their power to educate the mind and train the craftsman. What he planned was little beyond the scope of the Statute of Leicester in 1414, affecting the alien priories, while much more restricted in area. The difference lay in the machinery used, and it was for him a fatal difference, a Papal Bull instead of an Act of Parliament. Had there been no divorce suit pending, the procuring of the Bull of May 14th, 1528, from Pope Clement VII. for the suppression of "*Romboro, Felixtow alias Fylstou, Bromehil, prope Brandenfery, Bliborow et Mountjoy,*" would have effectually brought him under the Statute of Premunire. The houses to be suppressed were of the Benedictine rule, save *Bromehil, Blythburgh,* and *Mountjoy* in Ipswich, of which the inmates were Austin Canons. All this while the great divorce business was trembling in the scales, and the French, acting in Henry's interest, were over-running Italy. When Campeggio started for England, probably carrying this Bull with him, they were dangerously near Rome. The deadly Italian summer brought about a change. On August 21st, De Lautrec, the French commander, died in the midst of his fever-stricken troops. Campeggio, who in compliance with his instructions had been dawdling about on his journey, passed through Paris a few days afterwards, and reached England, to find it in the utmost turmoil, and Wolsey broken in spirit. It was clearly no time to be carrying out the Ipswich College project. Yet it was not abandoned. It was part of his scheme for the reformation of the manners and customs of England, and the day before Lautrec's death he had expressed to the Bishop of Bayonne his desire to do something for this object and for the settlement of the succession, before leaving a world of which he was growing weary. Within three weeks of Campeggio's arrival we find the Cardinal's officers at *Rumburgh*. The cry of the plundered cell goes up to the mother house at York. The Abbot of York complained that on the 11th September, 1528, certain officers of the

Cardinal came to the priory, read the authority of the pope and king, "entered into the same priory and that done took away as well the goods moveable of the said priory . . . and also certain muniment evidences and specialities touching and appertaining unto our monastery which we had lately sent unto our said prior and brethren there." The cell he says had been given to them by Alan Niger, Earl of Richmond, 400 years before, and the abbey was burdened by reason of the gift, with masses, suffrages, and alms. Further as the revenues of the priory do not amount to more than £30 the abbot offers "towards your special, honourable and laudable purpose, concerning the erection and foundation of the said college and school 300 marks sterling which shall be delivered" at once if the cardinal will spare the monastery. The representation was of no avail, and Rumburgh was annexed to the Ipswich college.*

The *bona* of the houses had somewhat varied destinies. At *Rumburgh* they pass into the hands of Wolsey's myrmidons, but at *Blythburgh*, Ryton the prior remained on to the bitter end, and his inventory delivered to the 1536 Commissioners for the Augmentation Office remains in the Record Office.

It certainly looks as though there had been a traitor in the camp at York. Else, why this promptitude at Rumburgh as compared with slackness elsewhere?

It remains to be noted that in the cases of Banham and Wilby in Norfolk, the *advocatio* seems to have been exercised by the Mother Abbey and not by the Cell.

In the Diocesan Registry we find that the Wills of John Abbott and Thomas Spatchett of this parish were proved between 1444 and 1455, and those of John Aldrich and John ffanner between 1458 and 1477.

* Wright, *Suppression of Monasteries*, p. 1. Gasquet, *Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries*, Vol. I., 100.