

## LAVENHAM CHURCH TOWER.

BY HENRY C. MALDEN, M.A.

Date of Erection proved by wills in the Courts of  
Canterbury and Bury S. Edmunds.

Rich as Suffolk is in its Churches, few, if any, of the Church Towers can compete with that of Lavenham in grandeur. Rising to a height of 141 feet on walls seven feet in thickness at the base, it is in as good condition as when first built; the lower part is faced with split black flints only, most of which are very small; as the work advanced, however, the builders were not quite so particular as to the materials used.

Weever tells us that Thomas Spring, in conjunction with John de Vere, Earl of Oxford, built the greater part of the steeple, but the following extracts from various wills show that this is not strictly accurate. John de Vere died in 1513, leaving legacies to numerous Suffolk Churches, but nothing, apparently, to Lavenham, probably for the very good reason that he had just completed the building of the body of the Church. Still, at the time of his death, the tower was only half completed, as we shall presently see.

Previously to the year 1486, only small legacies to the "reparation" of the then edifice are found, the most important being one by Thomas Spring, in whose will, dated 16 June, 1440, preserved at Bury S. Edmunds, vol. ii., fol. 19, we read "*Lego summo altari ecclê pro oblatis oblitis £10. Lego fabrico p'dict ecclie c sh.*" But in 1486, Thomas, the eldest son of the aforesaid Thomas Spring, died, and by his will left 300 marks, *i.e.* £200, "*ad edificationem Campanilam in stepyl ecclesie.*" The foundations were

Brasses in Aford Church -

Haines (pub! 1861)

- (i) Curlian ruf 1500
- (ii) Curlian with merchants marks 1570
- (iii) ditto 1510
- (iv) Lady with children "
- (v) Curlian ruf with trunk 1520
- (vi) Curlian 1520
- (vii) Roger Sawyer, Justice, Jas Co, Mayor,  
then W. Bridgett 1580 - female  
after last
- (viii) women
- (ix) John Cooperhall 1660  
wife
- x Fragments c 1440  
kids

You say you spotted no brasses in Aford  
Church - about is the last from Haines.  
Have they been stolen since '61? (1861)



LAVENHAM.

therefore laid about the year 1486. How long the work ceased for want of funds is uncertain, but that it did so is clear from the will of Robert Sexten, dated 1514, and p.c.c. in the year 1517, in which he leaves £40 towards the building of the steeple on condition that they sett thereupon within the space of two years after his death. This was done and a large legacy in 1523 allowed the work to be finished shortly afterwards.

A careful survey of the tower shows that the work stopped just half-way up. Coarser materials were used, stone being freely mixed with flint; and there are no finials in the ornamentation of the buttresses, as in the lower half of the tower. Grand as is the tower there is no doubt that to this day the original design has never been carried out. Local tradition says the architect fell from the top, and his death stopped the work. Be the cause what it may, a visit to the summit shows that the work is incomplete; the parapet is unfinished, and the winding steps, by which the ascent is made, have been carried up some five or six feet higher than at present necessary, and come to an abrupt ending close to the flat roof of what doubtless was intended to be one of four lofty turrets, none of which were built.

The following extracts from wills proved in the Court of Canterbury show that the tower was nearly forty years in building. I have included a few legacies to the rebuilding of the Church, two of which are taken from wills proved at Bury S. Edmunds.

1486 Thomas Spring left "300 marks ad edificationem Campanilam in Stepyl ecclesie." p.c.c. 25 Logge.

1487 Aleyne Sexten left "£40 to makynge of the Stepyll." p.c.c. 7 Milles.

1489 Roger Branch "towards the making of the Stepull £20."  
p.c.c. 24 Milles.

1492 John Fuller "£1 to the reparacion of the Church."  
p.c.c. 21 Dogett.

1493 James Spring (who was killed in a fight between Lavenham and Brent Eleigh) "to makynge of the Steepul £40." p.c.c. 4 Vox.

- 1494 Rose Grome, widow "to the makying of A Arche in the Church £20." Bury S. Edmund<sup>ds</sup>. Vol v., fo. 92.
- 1502 Simon Branch "to the new buyldyng of the Church 20/-." Bury St. Edmund<sup>ds</sup>. Vol. v., fo. 138.
- 1502 Elizabeth Branch, widow "towards the repairs of the Church 100 marks, as I promised my Lord of Oxenford; of which sum I have already paid £10." P.C.C. 11 Blamyr.
- 1502 Joan Sexten, widow "to the new bilding of the Church £10." P.C.C. 20 Blamyr.
- 1502 John Newton "to the Church £5." P.C.C. 20 Blamyr.
- 1504 John Risby "to the making and reparacion of the Church 40/-." P.C.C. 20 Holgrave. There are several wills during the next twelve years, but no bequests to the steeple till.
- 1517 Robert Sexten who bequeathed "to the byldyng of the Stepul, if they will set thereupon within the space of two years after my deth, £40." P.C.C. 6 Aylofffe.
- 1517 Edmund Clogge "£30 to the Church, on such things as are most necessary." P.C.C. 1 Aylofffe.
- 1520 Agnes Sexton "to be bestowed upon the bilding of the Stepyl, £40." P.C.C. 21 Aylofffe.
- 1523 Thomas Spring "to the fynishing of the Stepull £200." P.C.C. 11 Bodfield.

There are no later bequests.

From these extracts it appears that the bequests towards the erection of this noble tower amounted to £580; a very large sum for those days, such as would go far towards the total cost.