

FRESSINGFIELD PORCH.

FRESSINGFIELD PORCH AND PEWS.

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Traces of the greater and more stirring events in the history of nations are often found in obscure and remote places. The object of this paper is to draw attention to certain indications of a memorial of Agincourt, as it would appear, in the porch of Fressingfield Church, and likewise to the detail of that almost unique set of mediæval pews which have already attracted so much notice.

The de la Pole family had its principal residence for more than a century at Wingfield, a parish adjoining Fressingfield, Michael, lord de la Pole, afterwards Earl of Suffolk, having married the heiress of Sir John Wingfield. The arms of their son, Michael (*de la Pole* and *Wingfield* quarterly) appear on the south porch of Fressingfield Church, and among the ornaments on the interior of the porch arch is a heart between a pair of wings, a well-known badge of the Wingfield family.

Now this second Michael de la Pole died of dysentery at the siege of Harfleur, in 1415, within a month before the battle of Agincourt, and his son, a third Michael, was one of the two English noblemen who fell in that battle. The wife of the second Michael was Catherine, daughter of

Hugh Stafford, Earl of Stafford. To judge by their son, who left a widow in 1415, they must have been married before 1397, when the outlawry of the first Michael was reversed eight years after his death, so that their marriage, as well as their courtship, must have coincided with the time when the cloud of the father's disgrace hung over the son's name. There is nothing unreasonable in regarding an union which survived disgrace as surviving death. The Stafford chevron and knot are all over Wingfield Church, where the wooden effigies of this attached couple remain, and the presence of palm branches in the spandrels of Fressingfield porch leads to the conclusion that its erection was due to a natural outburst of conjugal and parental sorrow, moderated a little by the thought that spouse and son had died in their country's service.

Within the porch are the emblems of the four evangelists, in excellent preservation; the central boss contains a mutilated representation of the Assumption of the Virgin (there being another at the apex of the arch), and on another boss are the arms of the Abbey of Bury St. Edmund's, connected with the parish through their ownership of the manor of Chepenhall.

But the most important question is the identification of the two heads, in which the arch of the porch is stopped. They are so full of character as to appear to be portraits, and apparently those of the gallant Henry V. and his queen, Catherine of France.

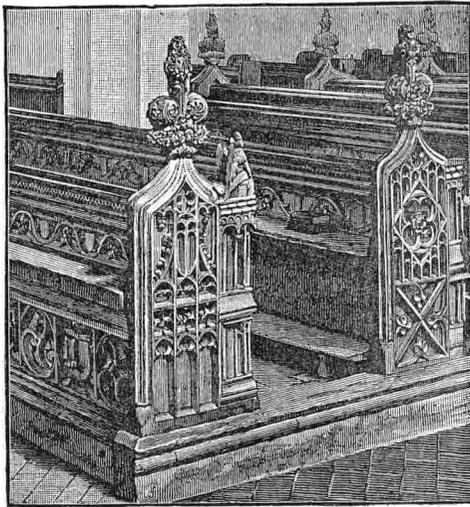
If this be the case they will be second to no other effigies of that King and Queen, and the opinions of experts on this question are earnestly invited.

The Fressingfield Pews are now eighteen in number, of which two are good modern specimens, serving to show that the carver's art is not extinct, and two, with the linen pattern, appear to have been moved from the chancel, as the kerb has been spliced to receive them, so that we have thirty-two bench-ends remaining pretty well *in situ*, or rather thirty-one and a half, as one has been spliced with half a linen pattern end.

The hand of the destroyer has been painfully active, the saw having been ruthlessly applied to many of the figures. The following, a sad monument of the barbarism of other days, is as complete a list as I can make of the original system.

| North block. | | South block. | |
|--------------|----|--------------|-----|
| *1 | *2 | *17 | *18 |
| 3 | 4 | 19 | 20 |
| 5 | 6 | 21 | 22 |
| 7 | 8 | 23 | 24 |
| 9 | 10 | 25 | 26 |
| 11 | 12 | 27 | 28 |
| 13 | 14 | 29 | 30 |
| 15 | 16 | 31 | 32 |

* * * * The front bench ends had no figures.



PEWS IN FRESSINGFIELD CHURCH.

- 3. A wolf guarding the head of St. Edmund, Martyr and King, who was killed by the Danes at Hoxne, about six miles distant.
- 4. A griffin. 5. An ecclesiastic in a chair. 6. A horse bearing a castle, such as S. Barbara generally has.
- 7. A wyvern. 13. Possibly a replica of 3. 15. The Bull of S. Luke.
- 16. The Angel of St. Matthew.
- 21. S. Bernard with his dog.

22. An ecclesiastic, perhaps S. Benedict. He is cowed and bearded, and his head, slightly inclined, rests on his right hand. There is a similar figure at Linstead Parva.
 23. A female saint, crowned, and with hair in plaits, probably S. Margaret.
 26. S. Dorothy, a very elegant figure both in pose and drapery, not much injured.
 27. S. Peter.
 29. S. Cecilia, very much mutilated, but the pose of the figure shows the right arm elevated and extended, and the left arm rounded as though to hold a cithern.
 30. S. Paul.
 32. An ecclesiastic in a chair.
- Nos. 5 and 13 apparently represent different persons. The former is not surcungled, his drapery is loose about him, and at the back of his chair is an object thus shaped :—



The latter is surcungled, and evidently had the right arm uplifted.

Besides these statuettes, the face of each pew-end is carved with a different design, the most remarkable being Nos. 3, 15, and 16, the last named being given in the accompanying woodcut* together with No. 14.

The initials on 3 appear to me to be those of Alicia de la Pole, daughter of Thomas Chaucer of Ewelme, and widow of the murdered Duke William.

On 15 are the Talbot dogs, commemorative, probably, of John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury and Lord Treasurer of England, who fell at the battle of Northampton in 1460, together with Humphry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, nephew of Catherine Stafford already mentioned. The succeeding Earl of Shrewsbury married a daughter of this Duke of Buckingham, which circumstance perhaps is the clue to the occurrence of the Talbot dogs, otherwise unknown in these parts.

The backs of this pew and of its fellow in the south aisle are at once records of the skill and piety of our

* The block has been kindly lent for our use by Messrs. Chambers, the well-known publishers, of Edinburgh. It appears in their new Encyclopædia, Art. *Pew*.

fathers. On the north bench is shown, on a series of shields, the history of Our Lord's Passion, forming a method of instruction for the young of the place in those days:—

- | | | |
|------|--|---------------------------|
| (1.) | The cock crowing. | |
| (2.) | A left hand, raised in buffeting, and the vessel of vinegar and gall. | |
| (3.) | i h s for the Title on the Cross. | The south bench back has |
| (4.) | The pillar, cord, and scourges. | five shields:— |
| (5.) | The cross, crown of thorns, and nails. | (1.) S. Andrew's Cross. |
| (6.) | The ladder, pincers, and hammer. | (2.) An endless cord. |
| (7.) | The seamless coat and the dice board, from which some inept person has chipped the dice. | (3.) The Tiara with p. r. |
| | | (4.) S. Peter's Keys. |
| | | (5.) S. Paul's Swords. |

These pertain to the dedication of the Church to SS. Peter and Paul, (1) and (2) giving the beginning and end of St. Peter's apostolic history "Et" [Andreas] adduxit eum ad Jesum" (S. Joh. i. 42). "Cum autem senueris, extends manus tuas, et alius te cinget, et ducet quo tu non vis. Hoc autem dixit, significans qua morte clarificaturus esset Deum" (S. Joh. xxi. 18, 19.) Other explanations of this symbol are:—(1.) The power of binding and loosing. (2.) Eternity. (3.) *Sanctorum Communio*. I am told that the symbol is frequently found in the Greek Church.

In Dr. Richard Morris's *Legends of the Holy Rood* (E.E.T.S.) No. xiii., is an illustrated poem on the Symbols of the Passion, from which it is easy to see how some little verse would be said by the catechumens as the meaning of each symbol was explained:—

e.g. "*Uas cum felle,*

The vescel with eysel *and* with galle
 Kep me from th sinnus alle,
 That to ye soul is fowl venim,
 That i be not pusond ther-ine."

One remark may be made on the unusually deep cornice in the nave, that the vine-foliage is of open fret-work, pegged with wooden pegs to flat boards.

Other points worthy of notice, such as the Sance-bell cot, with the spout for the rope in the Chancel arch, the seats in S. Margaret's Chapel, &c., may be reserved for another occasion.