

## ANNUAL EXCURSION.

SOUTHWOLD, WALBERSWICK, BLYTHBURGH, BLYFORD,  
MELLS CHAPEL.

The Annual Excursion took place on Thursday, July 5th, 1894. The weather proving delightfully fine, the whole proceedings passed off successfully. The ramble was in the neighbourhood of Southwold, and the villages which derive their name from the river Blyth. Parties arrived in Ipswich, and joined the contingent of that town in time for the 10.8 a.m. train to Halesworth. Thence they embarked in the American-car-like carriages of the Southwold Company, whose resources were somewhat severely taxed, and arrived at Southwold at 11.30. The visitors, under the guidance of the Honorary Secretary, at once made their way to the remarkably fine church dedicated to S. Edmund. The Vicar welcomed the party, and regretted that as he had been very recently instituted to the benefice, he was unable to give them a history of the building drawn from personal research. Under these circumstances he had asked Captain Grubbe to be kind enough to read a paper. Captain Grubbe accordingly gave the following résumé of facts which had been collated with much care and judgment:—

## SOUTHWOLD CHURCH.

By the style of architecture, the period to which Southwold Church belongs is recognised as about the middle of the 15th century. Its completion is usually attributed to the year 1460–1. Unfortunately there are no documents forthcoming concerning its actual building, but two memoranda concerning the porch exist; one stating that in 1488 Thomas Wright, and the other, that in 1489 Joan Cawnteler bequeathed towards the building of it.

The style of this porch, with its groined ceiling and windows differing somewhat from the body of the church, seems to indicate a slightly later period for its erection. The exterior shows a body with clerestory, and a square tower rising at its west end, two aisles, and a porch added to the west end of the south aisle. The angles of the tower body and porch are buttressed, also the angles and sides of the aisles, the whole being elaborately decorated in the Perpendicular style.

Prior to the 15th century there was another church here, occupying a portion only of the same site. The history of the building of this original church, which was much smaller and probably very humble in appearance compared with the present edifice, I quote from Gardner, as it concerns the present building as well:—"The Abbot and Convent of Bury S. Edmund's, being lords of the manor of Southwold; and the Prior and Monks of Thetford being, in right of their cell at Wangford,

patrons of the church at Rissmere (or Reydon), to which Southwold was only a hamlet; there was for some time a great contest between them about erecting a chapel here: but it being about A.D. 1202 referred by Pope Innocent III. to John Grey, Lord Bishop of Norwich, he determined that the Prior and Monks of Thetford, and their dependents at Wangford, should cause a chapel to be built in a convenient place at Southwold (which should be set apart and given for that purpose by the Abbot and Monks) for the daily celebration of Divine Service by a proper chaplain; that the Abbot and Monks of Bury should have no right or power over the said chapel; but that it should be wholly subordinate to the church of S. Margaret of Rissmere, which belonged to the Prior and Monks of Thetford; that the said Prior and Monks should have the sole nomination of the chaplain; and towards his maintenance and support should receive of the Abbot and Convent of Bury, whose tenants the inhabitants were, 40s. yearly, by two equal payments. And that the said church of Rissmere might not be a sufferer by this chapel, it was provided that the inhabitants of Southwold should nevertheless receive baptism, the eucharist and penance, have their marriages celebrated, their women churched, and their dead buried at Rissmere; and should resort thither for divine service on the festivals of Christmas, Candlemas, Easter, Whitsunday, the Assumption and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, and the day of the Saint to which the said church of Rissmere is dedicated." Some of the older inhabitants to this day attend Holy communion at Reydon on certain occasions in the year, and others baptize their children there, but whether from traditional custom or for what other cause is unknown.

The episcopal decision promulgated by Thomas, Bishop of Norwich in 1336, shows that the Priors and Monks of Wangford were invested with the full possession, title, and retention—the patronage, tithes, and rights of the chapel thus erected at Southwold, as well as the parent church of Reydon, and the neighbouring ones of North Ales, Stoven, and Easton Bavent. The original Southwold church was destroyed by fire about 1430. In 1758 the foundations were laid bare in digging, and found to measure 72 feet East to West.

As to the dimensions of the present church, the entire length is 144 feet, the width 56 feet. The tower is over 100 feet high, internal diameter 15 feet by 14 feet, and its walls 5 feet thick, built of rubble, bound with excellent cement, and faced with an ashlar of freestone. It will be seen that the exterior is adorned with squared flint panels, a style that seems to have become common about the latter half of the 15th century, both within and without buildings, as in King's College, Cambridge, and Henry VII.'s chapel at Westminster. It is possible, of course, that this panel ornamentation was added to Southwold somewhat later than the buildings. It has been frequently restored.

Tradition says that the niches at the West entrance were formerly occupied by stone figures of angels with outstretched wings, and that over the porch was a figure of the patron, Saint Edmund. The

spandrels of the Western doorway under the tower are charged with dragons, one of those on the north door with a rose en soleil, and of the West door a couple of lions support the dripstone, all badges of Edward IV.

Viewed from a distance this church has one failing. The tower, excellent so far as it goes, with its graduated buttresses and stories, finishes abruptly. Various opinions have been expressed on the subject: considering the amount of skill and taste lavished on its sides, one would certainly think it must have been originally intended to support a parapet or battlement, both to be in keeping with the other parts, and as a crown to the whole. Yet some consider that such an addition was never contemplated, others suggest want of funds, others that the body is not strong enough to support much additional weight.

Above the porch is a chamber with a groined ceiling. This chamber, now the receptacle for old carved pews, &c., at one time served as the town arsenal.

As to the churchyard, the original grant of land from the ecclesiastical authorities at Wangford and Thetford allowed only for the chapel and residence—an allowance of 407 feet. It is evident there was no burial ground, but as the inhabitants were obliged to bury their dead at Reydon so that none of the fees should be lost to the parent church, it was not wanted. The first notice of a burial ground at Southwold is one recording the enlargement of it in 1458, probably the period when the present church was erected.

It will be seen that the aisles differ but little in appearance internally, though they are slightly different in size. The exterior of the south is battlemented, while the north has only a parapet: the south is separated by buttresses into seven divisions, one being occupied by the porch, the others each by a mullioned window of three lights. The north aisle has eight divisions, the east being blank, the western containing a door opposite the porch. The windows of both are surmounted with a fine cornice of grotesque figures and heads and quatrefoil, a species of ornamentation that abounds everywhere in a more or less mutilated condition, both internally and externally.

Both aisles have a hexangular turret at their West end, surmounted by battlements and crosses: these turrets may be ascended from within to the roof the aisles. Some of the crosses, however, have succumbed to time, or to one or other of the many fierce storms that have assailed them, or possibly to that greatest enemy of the beautiful, human fanaticism.

The clerestory is in height rather more than half the aisles, and has a pair of windows to each of the aisle windows, producing a very beautiful effect outside when the church is lighted up.

One object of special interest in the church must be the carved wood work of the chancel and screen. Some think that it is Flemish work. In the days when Southwold was a port a good trade was done with the Low Countries opposite, communication being easily open this

may possibly have been the case, but this may be questioned. Of the paintings on this screen, which has been rudely disfigured, presumably in Cromwell's time, some were kindly restored some twenty years ago by Mr. Richmond, senior, R.A. The names of the prophets on the screen are:—Baruch, Hosea, Nahum, Jeremiah, Elijah, Moses, Daniel, Amos, Isaiah, Jonah, Ezekiel. Ezekiel's vision of angel and lion and eagle. Annunciation and holy rood. Saviour and beloved disciple. S. Nicholas and Lady of Pity.

They portray prophets and the twelve Apostles, and various emblematical accompaniments best understood by inspection. Tradition ascribes the chapel in the South aisle to the altar of S. Nicholas, and that in the North aisle to the lady chapel. The Jack in armour now over the screen in the North aisle, formerly stood on a bracket over the Western arch, and was connected with the clock to strike the hours in the church.

The church, as before stated, was annexed originally to Reydon vicarage. The taxation of Pope Nicholas IV., amounting to £17 6s. 8d., is entered "Reydon cum Capella."

The curacy of Southwold having been augmented by Queen Anne's bounty, was formally severed from the mother church by a deed bearing date Aug. 18th, 1752. The patronage was then vested in Sir John Rous and his heirs, and afterwards bought by the Simeon Trustees.

On leaving Southwold church the archæologists adjourned for dinner at the Swan Hotel. After the repast was over members were driven to the floating bridge over the Blyth, where they dismounted, and walked to Walberswick church. The vicar, the Rev. T. H. R. Oakes, read the following paper:—

#### WALBERSWICK.

Walberswick is a name of Saxon origin; it is derived from *Wald*, a wood, *Berige*, a hiding-place, and *Wye*, a winding river. The river Blyth was, in fact, still more tortuous in former days than now, for its outlet to the sea was at Dunwich, and its course lay almost entirely round the site of the town. Its present outlet is artificial, cut by the men of Walberswick in 1590; the present north pier being built 1749, the south, 1742.

The situation of the town originally was indicated by the position of the ancient church, which stood on the border of the marshes to the south of the site of the present church. Robert Blackmore, senior, in order to cultivate the ground, carried away the last visible remains of the old church in 1728. Probably the town spread in an eastward direction from this point and northwards to the common. The proportions of the ruins of the present church are evidence of a large population and some wealth, especially when it is remembered that it was built at the cost of the townsmen.