

NOTES ON THE PARISH AND  
PARISH CHURCH OF WALSHAM LE WILLOWS.

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The termination "ham" in the name Walsham denotes clearly enough that, at some early period, the place formed a settlement for Saxon invaders. It is not so easy to account for the suffix "le Willows," with its introduction of the French definite article. The same addition occurs in the name of Newton-le-Willows in Lancashire. A suggestion that this appellation was bestowed to distinguish this parish from some other place of the same name has no geographical evidence to support it. Willows, as a matter of fact, are abundant in the village and its immediate neighbourhood. A piece of land, known as "the osier beds," at the western extremity of the parish supplies, at the present time, excellent material for cricket bats. With regard to the use of "le" before "Willows," I find an illustration in a charter of feoffment; dated at Ashfield Parva, the 16th of January, 15 Henry VIII., in which a piece of land called "le Gravell pett" is mentioned. In a mortgage, dated 29th September, 23rd of Elizabeth, the same piece of land is spoken of as "the gravelpett." Walsham *le* Willows is simply Walsham *the* Willows.

It is always interesting to be able to trace back parochial history to the notices in the Domesday Book.

In the inventory of the lands of Robert Malet, and of those pertaining to the Abbey of St. Edmund at Bury, Walsham is mentioned, and the right of certain freemen to buy and sell their land specified. The great Abbey had extensive jurisdiction in the parish.

Documents of considerable antiquity, extending from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century, and relating to the Town lands of Walsham and the old Guild or Town Hall, are preserved in the Parish Chest. The oldest of these deeds is a Charter of Feoffment, dated at Walsham on Tuesday next after the feast of the Ascension of our Lord in the eighth year of the reign of King Richard the second. Of an earlier date is a deed of release of two acres of land in Walsham, granted by Roesia de Pakenham, widow of Edmund de Pakenham, to Robert, son of Roesia Stronde. This is dated at Ixworth on Monday in the feast of St. James the Apostle, 25 Edward III. It relates, however, to the disposition of private property, and not to the town lands.

The connection between Ixworth Abbey and Walsham, must in pre-Reformation times have been close. As early as the eleventh century Gilbert le Blund or Blunt, gave lands in Walsham to his religious foundation at Ixworth. The present vicarage house at Walsham was formerly called "the Priory," and was probably part of a monastic establishment dependent on the great abbey. In the deeds above-mentioned, names frequently occur with the designation "chaplain" attached to them, while other persons are simply specified as "clerks." The "chaplain" was probably one of the regulars of Ixworth Abbey, who was told off to attend to divine service in this or that parish church, or to celebrate mass within a certain chapel in the church. In a charter of the 20th year of Henry VI. the names of John Potager, chaplain, and George Hawys, chaplain, appear.

The history of the Lords of the manor is obscure. It would appear that from the reign of William the Conqueror to that of Henry III. the le Blunds were in

possession. Roesia, sister and co-heiress of William le Blund (d. 1284), married Robert de Valoines, and the lordship belonged to that family until the reign of Edward III., when another Rohesia married Sir Edmund de Pakenham (d. 1332). His son and heir, Sir Thomas, left the Walsham lands, subject to his widow's life interest, to his cousin Robert de Ufford, Earl of Suffolk, a son of Cecily de Valoines, sister of the second Roesia. The Ufford tenure lasted till 1381. We then find the De la Polés in possession from the reign of Henry VI. down to 1514, when the Earl of Shrewsbury was presented with the lands. In the same year he sold them to Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, the brother-in-law of Henry VIII. The names of Wingfield, Coddington, and Bacon, in the person of Nicholas Bacon, father of the great Chancellor, also appear in connection with the tenure of property in Walsham. The above paragraph has been compiled from notes of the Davy mss. in the British Museum. The entries in the Davy Collection are unfortunately jotted down with little or no regard to order and without comment. The chief interest of the annotations concerning Walsham lies in the connection which they disclose between the past history of the parish and names of high historic interest.

## THE CHURCH.

The Parish Church is dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin. The date of its foundation is unknown, but the architectural evidence shows that a great portion of the church must belong to the end of the 15th century—some portions may be earlier. In many points of detail there is a striking resemblance to the churches of Badwell-Ash and Ixworth. The chequered flint work on the porch fronts, the clerestories, the monograms introduced into the mural work, and the structure of the west towers are



W. S. SPANTON, PHOTOGRAPHER.

WALSHAM-LE-WILLOWS. A—Crant Bracket.

similar. One of the chief beauties in the interior of the church is the ceiling. At one time, richly coloured in vermilion, and bearing on the supports, of the transverse beams alternate emblems of stars and suns in splendour, it must have presented a striking appearance, enhanced by the projecting figures of angels, now entirely gone. It is impossible to say under what circumstances these adornments of the ceiling were removed. Their disappearance has been laid to the charge of William Dowsing, the Roundhead Iconoclast, who wrought much havoc in neighbouring churches. There is no evidence, however, that he ever came to Walsham, although his emissaries may have done so. It is remarkable that there are no signs of violent usage on those parts of the woodwork to which the figures of angels were fastened. When removed, they must have been removed deliberately and carefully.

Dowsing's methods were rough and ready. During the restoration of the church in 1874 a piece of woodwork, representing a wing, was found and is preserved in the vicarage. It is the only relic, if it be one, of the lost carvings.

The chancel screen is also fifteenth century work, with graceful fan work and cornice. The ancient colouring, was somewhat roughly restored many years ago, but fortunately without impairing the beauty of the screen. Other most interesting memorials of the past have fared less happily. Up to the spring of the present year the surface of the chancel arch on the west side, bore distinct traces of one of those old wall paintings which were, from their subject, called "the Doom." On the space next the south aisle the figure of a kneeling angel, amply robed and holding out a censer, was plainly traceable. On the opposite side another companion figure was discernible, but less distinctly. At the end of the south aisle on the east wall, some curious fragments in blue and black, of an architectural design were also preserved. These were objects of great interest and appealed to that sentiment for the past, which in the case of our old churches, it is

so desirable to cherish and uphold. In the course of the Spring cleaning in the present year they were ruthlessly swept away, under orders, for which I was in no way responsible, and are now, I fear, irrecoverably lost.

Of much later date, is the pendant memorial to Mary Boyce. This is a round lozenge-shaped medallion hanging from the end of an iron rod fastened to the south wall of the nave, near the west end of the church. On the side facing the chancel is the name Mary Boyce, above a heart pierced by an arrow and surmounted by a death's head. On the reverse side is the date of her burial, Nov. 15th, 1685. According to the registers she was the daughter of William and Mary Boyce, and was baptised on October the 29th, 1665, dying presumably at the age of 20. Old stories were once current in the village about her. She had died, it was said, of a broken heart, and on the anniversary of her death this "garland" was decorated with wreaths of flowers by the village lads and girls. There are "garlands," I believe, in Dorsetshire and Hampshire churches. An allusion to the practice of thus decorating has been seen in the grave-digger's words in Hamlet, Act v., Scene 1, "She shall have her virgin crants." The "crant" being obviously connected with the German word "kranz."

The east window contains a collection of fragments of fine old stained glass. The broken pieces were found in a box in [ . . . ] wrapped up in an old newspaper containing the gazette of the battle of Trafalgar. How long they had been hidden away before 1805 is not known. The colours are rich, yellow predominating, and the design must have been chiefly heraldic and architectural. The arms of France and England appear on one pane. On another there is a coat of arms resembling the "manche" or sleeve of the family of Hastings. The appearance of the royal arms may be connected with the period of De la Pole ownership in Walsham, or with that of Charles Brandon.

Among minor objects of interest are some curious

wood carvings, one representing the head and body of a man protruding from under the teeth of a portcullis—one of the grotesque freaks of some carver's imagination. In the north porch on the right hand side is a wooden bench, with the unintelligible inscription "Ejus ne fueris curiosus," rudely cut into it. On the opposite bench are the words, "God's will be done in heaven and earth."

In the south aisle are very perfect remains of a side chapel. The piscina, the recess, in which there was probably an altar tomb, and the niche for a sacred figure are in good condition. Near to this on the floor a stone-coffin lid has been inserted. It is unusually narrow, and bears emblems of abbatial rank.

The Church registers are old, dating from 1539, the year of the suppression of the greater religious houses by Henry VIII. It remains to say a word about the Vicarage or "Priory," as it was called, before being attached to the living. An old house now occupied by Mr. John Stevens, blacksmith, is said to have been the "Priest's house" in ancient days. In an old map of the parish it is marked as "the Church House."

In the drawing room of the Vicarage some curious carvings are preserved. A large beam crosses the ceiling. In the centre on each side is a shield. One bears an open hand with a heart displayed on the palm. The other, a heart pierced by an arrow. At each end of the beam there is also a shield. On one are the following letters in a gothic character :—

S W R  
R I C H  
A R D

On the other

A L D  
R I H ' C  
H A N V'

It is difficult to decipher the inscription accurately. Richard is plain enough on the one shield. On the other

the name Aldrich has been read conjecturally. A Richard Aldrich was canon of Ixworth in 1534, and accepted with sixteen others the declaration of royal supremacy. Another Richard Aldrich was, at least a century earlier, among the members of the Ixworth body. Spelling was a fortuitous business in the hands of our forefathers, and if Richard Aldrich's name is contained in this collection of letters, it must be worked out by aid of the "higher criticism" in matters of orthography.

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