

A PRE-REFORMATION VILLAGE GILD.

The preceding information is extracted from an old and unpublished manuscript volume of memoranda and accounts lying in an iron chest in the vestry of the parish church of Bardwell, a village in the western division of the county of Suffolk, nine miles from Bury St. Edmund's.

It throws light on the social and religious life of an English village nearly four centuries ago, in connection with the constitution and working of the village gild system, and illustrates pre-Reformation life, customs, and manners.

We need not enter here upon a technical description of the make up of our volume, or of its paper, handwriting, mode of entering money payments, &c. One point, however, it may be well to remind our readers of, and to impress upon them. The value of money was very different then from what it is now. Its purchasing power was much larger. There are five entries, in five different pages of these accounts, of the purchase of a cow. In three cases the cow cost eleven shillings, in two cases twelve shillings. If the average cost of a cow may now be put at fifteen pounds, it would seem to follow that the purchasing power of money was then about twenty-four times greater than it is now. However, no such enormous difference existed. The greater cheapness of kine four hundred years ago has also to be taken into consideration; and we may probably estimate the purchasing power of money to have been ten or twelve times greater than it is now.

There existed then in Bardwell, as in so many other country parishes, before the Reformation, a local society,

association, or confraternity, which was called a "gild." In Bardwell it bore the name of the "Gild of St. Peter," that title being no doubt selected because the parish church was (and is) dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul.* We do not know when the gild was formed, or by whom, but we know that it existed and flourished in the first half of the sixteenth century, during the reign of King Henry VIII., and no doubt long before that reign as well.

The volume from which we derive our information does not contain the constitution, or rules, or conditions of membership of the gild, but we can supply some of this information from the gild accounts, and from incidental notices scattered up and down its pages, and some may be inferred from the constitution of similar pre-Reformation gilds in East Anglia; two specimens of which are printed at the end of this paper.

There are three lists of the members of the gild. The first list contains the names of 114 persons, the second of 134 persons, and the third of 70 persons; but the third list is incomplete, a part of the page on which it ends and the whole of the following page being left blank as if for the insertion of more names.

These lists are not dated; but the name which stands at the head of the first and third list is that of Richard Kipping, vicar. Mr. Richard Kipping became vicar of Bardwell in 1504, and died in 1541, and these lists must, therefore, be placed between those two dates.

The first list comprises 30 married couples, thirty men, without specifying whether they were widowers or bachelors; and 24 women, of whom six are described as widows, and the remaining 18 must be presumed to have been single women. Children were not admitted to membership.

The second list comprises the names of 33 married

* The earliest evidence for this conjoint dedication title is in 1538. There are grounds for believing that the still earlier dedication of the church was to St. Peter only. See page 138 n.

couples; 35 men, without specifying whether they were widowers or bachelors; and 33 women, of whom five are described as widows and five as wives. There seem to have been five cases where the wife was a member of the gild, and the husband was not. The remaining 23 must have been single women.

There are no means for ascertaining the exact population of any village nearly 400 years ago, but if we suppose, as seems probable, that the majority of the adult population of the village belonged to the gild, and if we take as our basis the second list numbering 134 persons, then we may put down the population of Bardwell in King Henry eighth's reign at about 300; rather under one half of what it is at the present day, and rather under one third of what it was forty years ago, for the population of Bardwell, like the population of most or all purely agricultural villages in East Anglia, has been diminishing steadily during that time.

The gild included all classes of parishioners. There is "Mr. Richard Kipping the Vicar." There is one "Richard Doo clericus," which may mean a person in Holy Order or the Parish Clerk. There is a "Master Draper and his wife." There are two servants, "Christine the servant of John Ive," and "Nycholas the servant of Master Draper." These are the only titles or designations which occur, over and beyond words describing the sex and the married or unmarried condition of the person named. In the third list, and there only, the names of three non-parishioners are found. They are all of them women, and all of Barningham, a village three miles off. Their names were Jone Owyng, Aves Rastall, and Marram (Miriam?) Barham. They were probably inhabitants of Bardwell who had migrated to Barningham, and who were allowed to continue to be members of the gild after their change of residence.

Mention is made of the following officers or officials of the gild:—

(a) *The Alderman.*: The head or president of the gild was called the "Alderman." He was elected annually. The same person was never elected alderman for two years running. It is worthy of remark that this post was never held by the vicar of the parish, although the vicar was a member of the gild.

(b) *A Chaplain.* The name of the chaplain was Richard Brygtham. We would again call attention to the fact that, though the Vicar was a member of the gild, he never seems to have held the post of chaplain.

(c) *A Cook.* The election of John Bally as cook, is mentioned in 1511. A few years later William Persun became cook. The salary attached to the post was one shilling and four pence per annum. The cook was also free from the payments usually made by members of the gild, and he had charge of the dishes, plates, and other gild property of that kind.

(d) *A Minstrel.** William Blomefield was the minstrel of the gild in 1512. A little later on the names of two minstrels are given on one page, viz., Nicholas Plowman and Crystofer Cage. Their wage was one shilling and four pence per annum, and an allowance of cheese. The duties of the office are not specified, but they must have included the enlivening the feasts of the gild with strains of music.

(e) *Guardians of the Lights.* Two persons were elected annually to fill the office of "Guardians of the light of St. Peter." They were allowed six shillings and eightpence per annum for the purchase of wax. A married couple generally held this office, but occasionally two men, and on one occasion two women were elected. In 1521

* Music is frequently mentioned in gild ordinances, e.g. in those of St. Elene (T.S., p. 148) and St. Mary (T. S., p. 149) at Beverley. See also pp. 289, 294. Payment of minstrels; as part of the cost of a gild entertainment, is mentioned in the rules of the gild of St. George, Norwich, founded in 1385 (T.S., p. 447). The Mayor of Bristol also had paid minstrels (T. S., p. 423).

Mr. Richard Kipping, the vicar, held this office together with Robert Bete.

Two persons were also elected annually to be "guardians of the light of the sepulchre." They were always men. They did not have a fixed salary, but it is recorded each year how much the sepulchre men, as they were called, received from their predecessors, e.g., in 1533 they took over 9s. 11d. in money and 114 lbs. weight of wax, together with wicks. The guardians of this light were elected on various days in January or February or March, and once on May 8. This fact is of interest, because the Bardwell fair, which is still kept up, takes place on the eighth of May. There is, evidently, some connection between Bardwell and the early part of May, the origin of which is now lost. A village feast is usually in close connection with the dedication festival of the parish church. Bardwell church is now, and was in A.D. 1538, dedicated to SS. Peter and Paul (June 29),* but can there have existed an earlier dedication to some saint whose festival occurred early in May? If any one knew the derivation and meaning of the word "Bardwell," some light might possibly be thrown upon this obscure point:†

The gild possessed a considerable amount of property of different kinds. We find mention of the following:—

(a) *Kine*. These were usually seven in number. They were let out to parishioners by the year. The annual charge for one cow was nineteen pence, or if the cow was 'farow,' that is to say, if no calf was produced, fifteen pence. A surety was always required, and the name of the surety was always entered in the accounts.

* But before the 16th century the church was called the "Church of St. Peter" only, not "the church of SS. Peter and Paul." *Extent of the Manor of Wykes in Bardwell*, edited by the Rev. W. Hudson, for the Norfolk and Norwich Archæol. Soc. Vol. xiv., p. 51. Date, c. 1290.

† The earliest known mention of Bardwell is in the Domesday Survey, A.D. 1086, "In Beordewella ecclesia de viii acris liberæ terræ." The dedication of the church is not given.

(b) *A Flock of Sheep.* These, like the cows, were let out to one or more parishioners by the year. In a list of the property of the gild there is this entry (we have here, as elsewhere, modernized the spelling) :—

“Memorandum. Delivered to Thomas Cage and John Sefferay in ewes thirteen shillings, in wethers three shillings, in lambs eight shillings.”

These sums do not represent the capitalized value of the flock of sheep, but the price at which the flock was let out for a year.

On another occasion (in 1513) the flock was let out at the rate of fifteen shillings a year, as appears by the following entry :—

“Memorandum. That the brethren have let to John Brendwood^e 13 ewes, 9 lambs, and 8 wethers, and he to pay for the farming of them for the third of the year five shillings, and he to deliver again the whole stock as he received it.”

A few years later we find that for some unexplained reason the whole of the flock was sold off, and that the Vicar of the parish was the purchaser.

“Memorandum. That the brothers and sisters of the gild of St. Peter have sold to the Vicar of Bardwell all the flock sheep and lambs belonging to the gild for thirty-six shillings to be paid at the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel next following.”

Mr. Kipping, the vicar, must have been something of a farmer as well as of a parish-priest; though the ordinary idea of the pre-Reformation clergy does not associate them with farming.

There are other items of property which illustrate the social and festive side of the gild's character.

(c) *The Gildhall.* This building is still standing, about ten yards south-east of Bardwell churchyard. It has been converted into an alms-house, though it still bears its old name of “the Gildhall.” Except the church, it is the only surviving and connecting link between the village of to-day, and the Bardwell gild of St. Peter of nearly four hundred years ago. It was an expensive building to

keep in repair then, as it is now, and there are many entries of sums laid out upon its reparation. In this gild-hall the Gild of St. Peter transacted all its business. Here was the large banqueting hall, the dimensions of which are obscured by the modern division of it into apartments, in which the members of the gild could all sit down together for their annual feast or feasts, for which they were well supplied with the necessary articles for the table. It is recorded that—

(d) In 1511 the gild possessed 108 dishes, 48 platers, 24 saucers, 2 spits.

In 1517 it possessed 135 dishes, 39 platers, 24 saucers, 3 iron spits.

In 1528 it possessed 30 dishes, 75 platers, 18 saucers, 12 cups, 12 quart pots, 18 pint pots, 6 pots the capacity of which is not mentioned, 72 spoons, 48 trenchers, 36 salts, and three dozen other articles, the precise nature of which is not mentioned.

These articles were, with the exception of the spits; gifts to the gild, the name of the donor being mentioned in each case.

A "roasting house, a caldron, keys," and a "gemewe," are also mentioned as belonging to the gild. There is also record of the purchase, evidently in connection with the gild, of silver plate of large value—

"Item, bought of Robert Jolly, Robert Bete, and Robert Cage, 44 ounces and 3 grains of silver plate, at five shillings the ounce. Paid £10 19s. 0d."

But for this entry one would have thought it incredible that a village gild could have owned silver plate to the value, according to the present value of money, of over one hundred pounds. What sort of plate was it? In all probability this entry refers to the purchase of a standing loving cup, which it was the ambition of social gilds to possess. The general weight of these standing loving cups, with covers; was from 25 to 100 ounces, and 44 ounces would be quite a normal weight. The old

leather case at Sweffling, recently illustrated in our Proceedings (Vol x., pt. 3, p. 366), was probably used for the conveyance of such a gild cup.*

There are other items of property which illustrate the religious side of the gild and its work.

(e) The gild possessed three banners or banner-cloths of St. Peter. They were bought at different dates, at prices ranging from 12s. 4d. to £2 14s. 4d.

(f) Torches, or large wax candles. There are various entries relating to the purchase, or to the amount held in stock, of these articles.

By the aid of the above items and entries, coupled with what is known from other sources, about such gilds, we are able to construct answers to various questions which will naturally rise to the minds of readers of this paper.

1. What was the object of such an institution as the gild of St. Peter at Bardwell?

Its object was threefold.

(a) *Beneficial.* The property of the gild, so far as it consisted of cows and sheep, was let out annually to parishioners at such a rental as would on the one hand bring in an income to the gild, and on the other hand enable the parishioners who hired the animals, to make a profit for themselves out of the transaction.

There is no mention of sick pay or death pay in these accounts, which are confined to the receipt and expenditure of gild property in kind, but we know from other sources that it was customary in such gilds for a member to be buried at the gild's expense, all the brothers and sisters of the gild attending the funeral, a levy of a small sum all round being made, if necessary, to meet or help meet expenses. It was also customary to help a brother or a sister fallen into pecuniary difficulties through misfortune,

* Local gilds were often rich in plate, possessing chalices, patens, candlesticks, mazers, spoons, etc. See Pigot's "History of Hadleigh," p. 266; and Palmer's "Perustration of Great Yarmouth."

and not through his or her own fault. Thus such a gild as the gild of St. Peter answered in some way to the Odd-fellows, the Prudential Assurance Company, and other such societies in the present day.

Secondly, the object of the gild was social. Certainly once a year, on St. Thomas' day,* probably more frequently, the members sat down to a banquet, or if that is too grand a word, to a common meal in the gildhall. It is evident from the large number of plates, cups, spits, &c., owned by the gild, that all its members could be catered for at the same time, and the present gildhall at Bradwell, if the walls which now divide it into rooms were taken down, would accommodate from 100—150 guests.

The third object of the gild was religious. The fact that it appointed a chaplain indicates this. We have referred to its possession of banners. They were used in the procession of gild members at funerals and on other occasions; also to its purchase of torches and wax and wicks. The Bardwell gild provided certain lights for religious purposes. Three different sorts of such lights are mentioned in the accounts.

1. The light of St. Peter, the patron saint of the gild. This was kept perpetually burning before the reserved sacrament. Two persons were elected every year for the purpose of keeping this light, and they received annually the sum of six shillings and eight pence for so doing.

2. Five lights before our Lady of Pity. This was a favourite representation, either in sculpture or painted glass, of the dead body of our Lord, after the crucifixion, lying across the lap of the Blessed Virgin. She gazes down on the lifeless form of her divine Son, with a tender and pitiful expression. There is a fifteenth century stained glass representation of this subject at the present time in the west window of Bardwell church. These five lights were not kept burning perpetually, but they were ordered

* See p. 119, n. 1.

to be lit at every principal great feast of our Lady. These feasts at that time would be Feb. 2, The Purification. Mar. 25, the Annunciation. Aug 15, the Assumption. Sep. 8, the Nativity. Dec. 8, the Conception. They were also to be lit at every anthem (or antiphon) of our Lady. These were the final anthems in honour of our Lady, four in number, varying with the seasons of the Christian year, viz., 1 Alma Redemptoris, 2 Ave Regina, 3 Regina cæli lætare, 4 Salve Regina; (or else they were the anthems to the Psalms and Canticles, which occur in the little office of the Blessed Virgin Mary).

3. There was a third light called "the sepulchre light," or "the sepulchre light of St. Peter." Two members of the gild who had charge of this light rendered a yearly account, and were called "sepulchre men." This was a light set upon the grave in the churchyard, after the interment of any member of the gild, where it was kept burning for at least the first month, and sometimes for a whole year after the funeral. The object of this light was to remind passers by to pray for the soul of the person lately deceased, that it might soon be brought out of the valley of the shadow of death, into the brightness of the presence of God.

We will now answer some further questions which obviously suggest themselves.

From what sources did the gild derive its income and obtain its property?

(a) From the gift of private individuals. It is on record, as has been mentioned, that the large stock of dishes, plates, &c., for feasting purposes, were the gifts of different people, whose names have been preserved.

(b) From the profit derived from the annual letting of cows and sheep. The gild does not seem to have possessed any land. Parishioners who hired these animals pastured them either on their own property, or on the large open or common lands then existing in the parish. (c) We infer from the analogy of other gilds that a sum was paid

down as entrance money by every person on first joining the gild; that fines were imposed for the violation of the rules and for misbehaviour; and that a general levy might be made when money was required for any special purpose. But there is no mention of entrance money, fines, or levy, in the Bardwell volume of accounts.

Next, what became of the property once possessed by the gild of St. Peter at Bardwell, and by the many similar gilds that existed in a large number of parishes in England, and especially in East Anglia, before the Reformation?

The answer is sad, but instructive. Partly under the specious plea (which may have been true in a few places and to a limited extent) that the intentions of pious founders and benefactors had been widely departed from, and partly on the ground that superstition was encouraged by some of the practices of the gilds (which was true enough), the whole of the property of these gilds was confiscated, and swept into the royal exchequer, or squandered away among the statesmen and courtiers who surrounded the English throne in the sixteenth century. This spoliation was partly effected by an Act of Parliament of Henry VIII. in 1545, and more completely by an Act of Parliament passed two years later, in the first year of Edward VI. It would be impossible to draft, or even compose in imagination anything more drastic than the latter Act: It is too long to quote *in extenso*, but it may be judged of by the following extract:—

“The King our Sovereigne Lorde shall from the feaste of Easter next comminge, have and enjoye to him, his heires and successors for ever, all fraternities, brotherheddes, and guyldes, being within the Realme of England and Wales, and other the Kings Dominions, and all Mannors, Landes, Tenementes, and other heredytaments, belonging to them or any of them . . . and [they] shall by vertewe of this Acte be judged and deemed in actuall and real possession of our Sovereigne Lorde the King, his heires and successors, from the saide feaste of Easter next comminge for ever, withowte any inquisicions or office thereof to be had or founde.”*

* 1. Edw. VI. cap. 14, sec. vii. Statutes of the Realm, 1817, Vol. IV., p. 27.

No loophole of escape existed, except for such gilds as could prove that they existed solely or mainly for trading. The London gilds escaped in this way.

No doubt there was some need of reform in the country parish gilds, just as there was need of reform in the Church itself. But to make such need an excuse for plunder; to commit wholesale robbery because there was some superstition in certain gild usages; to spoil country villages of their cups and saucers in order to enrich an extravagant monarch like Henry VIII., or the needy or greedy courtiers who afterwards surrounded a boy-king's throne, these things form a by no means pleasant episode in the history of the English Reformation.

F. E. WARREN.

*Bardwell Rectory,
Bury St. Edmund's.*

As the rules of the gild of St. Peter at Bardwell have unfortunately not been preserved, it will help our readers to understand the gild accounts if we place before them the rules of two other early gilds of St. Peter in the eastern counties, as printed by Mr. Toulmin Smith in his work on English Gilds.

GILD OF ST. PETER, LYNN.*

FOUNDED A.D. 1329.

These are the statutes of the gild of the holy apostle St. Peter, begun in the town of Lynn, in the worship of God, and of our Lady saint Mary, and of the holy apostle St. Peter, in the year of our Lord 1329.

This gild shall have four morning meetings a year. The first shall be after the midsummer drinking; the second shall be the Sunday next before Michaelmas Day; the third shall be the Sunday next before Candlemas Day; the fourth shall be the Sunday next before St. Austin's day in May [May 26.]

At every morning meeting, every brother and sister who belongs to this gild shall pay a halfpenny, to maintain withal a light burning in the Church of St. James, before the image of St. Peter, while divine service is said on festival days.

Whosoever is summoned to any morning meeting, if he is in town, and will not come, nor send a proxy, he shall pay a penny towards the light; and if the dean fail to summon, he shall pay one penny for the light for every one not summoned.

The alderman shall call up four men of the gild, every year, to choose an alderman, stewards, and a dean, who are profitable to the gild. And if any of those chosen refuse office he shall pay to the light, that is to say, the alderman one pound of wax, each steward half a pound of wax; and the dean a quarter [of a pound of wax.]

And if any brother or sister of the gild die, the dean shall provide candles for the Dirige, and shall summon all the company to go to the Church and offering with the corpse.

And if anyone, being in health and in town, will not come, he shall pay twopence at the next morning meeting, for alms for his soul. And every brother and sister of the gild shall have twenty masses for his soul when dead. The alderman and stewards shall have the masses sung within three days after his death on the peril of their souls.

And it is ordained that the alderman shall deliver the property of the gild to the stewards, sufficient surety being given for bringing it again to the general morning meeting, before the alderman and gild brethren, under the penalty of two pounds of wax.

* T. S., p. 62.

The alderman shall have every day as long as the general drinking lasts, two gallons of ale for his fees; each steward, one gallon; and the dean, one potal; and the clerk, one potal.

And whoever shall join this gild shall promise to the alderman to keep these statutes, and also pay the rights of the house, that is to say, to the alderman, one penny; to the clerk, one penny; to the dean, a halfpenny; and for the wax, a halfpenny; also to pay his entrance fee, if the company and he are agreed, or else find surety to pay within certain days. The dean shall have sixpence per year for his trouble.

And it is also ordered that if any brother or sister wrong another, and it can be proved they belong to the gild, they shall pay half a pound of wax for the keeping up of the light.

Any brothers or sisters becoming poor, and unable to help themselves, shall be helped by the alms of the brethren and sisters.

This is a true copy of the statutes of the gild of St. Peter the apostle, held in Lynn, as aforesaid, written on the festival of St. Hilary A.D. 1388.

GILD OF ST. PETER, OXBURGH, NORFOLK.*

FOUNDED A.D. 1378.

To the honour of God, of His mother Mary, and of St. Peter, a gild is founded in the second year of the reign of king Richard II.

This is the ordinance of the gild, that the alderman, and the beadle, and the brethren and sisters of the gild shall come at the second bell of evensong on St. Peter's Day, and shall carry before them a burning torch, consisting of six pounds of wax, and that every gild brother and sister be at the evensong and mass of St. Peter, and at the second evensong, under the penalty of a pound of wax for the light of St. Peter, or if he be five miles distant, of half a pound; and on their gild-day every man is to offer a farthing at mass, and another for alms.

And also, at the death of a brother, each couple shall pay three-pence, and the alderman and beadle shall, with the consent of all the brethren, collect it.

And if any brother or sister fall into trouble he shall have four (?) yearly.

And if any brother or sister betray the secrets of the gild, they shall pay a pound of wax for the light of St. Peter.

Account of the goods of the gild of St. Peter in Oxburgh. Five quarters of barley. Price of a quarter, twenty pence.

Willelmus Mark, Alderman.

Johannes Skultoun, Beadle.

The Editor desires to express his indebtedness to Lord John Hervey and to Mr. Henry C. Casley for several helpful suggestions and interpretations.

* T. S., p. 121.



From a Photograph by G. Calver Mason, Esq.

CLOTH WEAVER'S HOUSE, KERSEY.