

POLSTEAD CHURCH.

The next place at which the party alighted was Polstead, for the Church and the "Gospel Oak." Here the Coronation was being celebrated in the Park, and the Church was still bedecked with Coronation colours. Several people left the Park and came to the Church. Mr. E. B. Cooke (from the Hall), Col. the Hon. H. W. L. Corry, Mr. C. H. Daking, and others, attended. The rector, Rev. F. J. Eld, F.S.A., received the members at the Gospel Oak. He said that there were more than 100 Gospel Oaks still standing in England; the oak at Polstead, as far as he could ascertain, was the only one of them that stood in the centre of the parish, and close to the church. This agreed with the old tradition that, long before the church was built, the oak had been used as a station by the Culdee missionaries, circa A.D. 640, at which to preach to the heathen Saxons. One Suffolk historian (Houldsworth) said that missionaries had preached to the Britons from it; this would carry the date back three or four hundred years further. He had consulted the best authorities, Strutt, Evelyn, Loudoun, &c., as to the life of trees, and he thought that it was possible for a tree to live for 1,500 years. The Polstead Oak was stated to be the oldest oak in Suffolk, and possibly the oldest in England; if this were so, it would have been a grand tree, 200 years old, and in full vigour, when used by the Culdees as a preaching station. All the other Gospel Oaks were on the borders of their parishes, not at the centre, and were so called because, at the annual perambulation or beating of the bounds, they were used as stations at which a portion of the Gospel was read. In appearance the Polstead Oak was very much like the Cowthorpe Oak in Yorkshire, which was the largest oak in England, and which claimed

to be the oldest, but the Polstead was smaller, measuring 32 ft. in circumference at the height of 5 ft. from the ground, whereas the Cowthorpe oak was 43 ft. at the height of 4 ft.

The village itself was a good example of what Dr. Maitland would call the Celtic or sporadic, as distinguished from the Teutonic or concentrated. These latter were generally built at cross-roads, the Squire's hall occupying one corner, the church another, and the houses of the farmers and labourers the others; there were very few outlying houses. But Polstead, like other villages in the neighbourhood, was scattered into hamlets or "Tyes," the Celtic or Welsh word for hamlet. Thus in Polstead itself there is "Boar's Tye," and close by "Stoke Tye," "Kersey Tye," "Semer Tye," &c., and further off "Mark's Tey," "Geat Tey," &c. "Boar's Tye" would mean the hamlet of independent peasants, who were not bound to render service to the Hall, from the old English word as it appears in "neighbour," or in the East Anglian "bor," or in modern high German "bauer," or the Dutch "Boer." There are many Celtic or Welsh names still to be found in this part of Suffolk, Bret, Stour, Box, Pwl, Tye; and possibly the surname Bugg (Pugh).

Polstead belonged to Queen Ethelfleda, the second wife of King Edmund, grandson of Alfred the Great, who was murdered in the most tragic manner in his own hall at Pucklechurch in Gloucestershire, A.D. 946. In her will she left Polstead and eight other manors to Stoke. Her will, and also the Anglo-Saxon borders of Polstead, are given in Birch's *Cartularium Saxonicum*, Nos. 1288, 1289. In Domesday it is stated that eight "equi" or saddle horses were kept at the hall, an unusually large number.

The Church is mostly Late Norman. The semi-circular brick arches of the nave, square-edged and of one order, and the fluted capitals and square indented bases of the columns might be supposed to point to the earlier period of that style; but the semi-circular shafts almost detached from the pillars, the free use of the zig-zag

ornament, and the incipient arcade in the clerestory, all distinctly point to the Later period. Very probably the church was built after 1164, when the hall and manor passed into the possession of a new family, and new owners are very apt to begin improvements upon their property. The aisles and the tower are Decorated, and must have been built before A.D. 1362, as the Lambourn family, whose coat of arms is carved over the north door, died out in that year. The former Norman aisle or aisles must have been pulled down to make way for the new, as is shown by the many pieces of moulded stonework embedded in the walls. The fine west door of the Norman church was ruthlessly blocked up by the Decorated tower being planted right against it, as can be seen at the present day. The spire is remarkable for being the only stone spire in this part of Suffolk. Of the Perpendicular style, "the mark of the beast" as Lord Cobham calls it, nothing is to be seen except in the actual windows; they simply displace the smaller windows of the earlier styles, the string-courses and wall mouldings being left undisturbed; thus the rude Norman triplet at the east end of the chancel, and the Decorated windows of the north aisle have been more or less destroyed, and large Perpendicular windows inserted in their place. The object of this change was to obtain a larger window area for the display of the gorgeous stained glass which was then in the height of fashion, and which had superseded the mural colouring of the earlier styles. Our great Suffolk Churches, which are mostly Perpendicular, e.g. Lavenham, Melford, Stoke, and Hadleigh, must have been grand indeed, when every window presented a picture of some sacred subject that glowed with colour. But now they have lost most of their stained glass, owing partly to decay and neglect, but principally in Suffolk to the destructive energy of a Parliamentary Commissioner named Dowsing. On April 15th, 1643, he visited Polstead Church, and broke down 45 superstitious pictures, as he is pleased to term the glass in the windows; St. Peter with keys and a bishop with mitre

are specially mentioned by him; every window in the church must then have been filled with stained glass, for there are now only 42 lights in the windows of the ground floor of the church, the other three must have been either in the clerestory or in the tower. Dowsing did his work thoroughly; only one square inch of the old glass, a bit of ruby, now remains in the church, and that was unknown till two or three years ago when the plaster fell off that had covered and protected it. And to add insult to injury Dowsing ordered the parish to pay 6s. 8d. for the expenses of this piece of wanton vandalism. There are no chancel steps here and in many churches in the neighbourhood; where they existed Dowsing gave directions that they should be removed.

The Rector drew attention to a little coloured monument, now placed near the pulpit, to the first Brand who owned Polstead Hall, 1620, kneeling, with his son by his side also kneeling. There is a tradition that the boy lost his life by falling out of a window at the Hall on to some stone steps leading into the garden, and that his ghost can still at certain times be heard wailing on the steps. But he believed that the Squire had never yet heard it.

The Registers are remarkable for two reasons:— First, the original paper Register, commencing 1538, has been preserved, and is in admirable condition, owing to the care of Mr. Nance, a former rector; there is also the usual vellum transcript. Very few parishes in England have the original paper, fewer still have that and the vellum copy as well; he believed there were only two others in Suffolk, two in the St. Alban's Diocese, two in the Worcester Diocese, and a few elsewhere. And secondly, they are remarkable for the large number of names contained in them which are frequently to be found in America. The two principal authorities on American surnames are Bowditch's Suffolk Surnames, *i. e.*, of Suffolk County in Massachusetts, and Hotten's Originalia or Lists of Original Emigrants. It cannot indeed be proved that any emigrants went from Polstead, though it is probable

that many did; very many certainly went from the immediate neighbourhood, like the Winthrops from Groton. The first two Polstead Registers range from 1538 to 1688, a period that more than covers the great emigration to America, and they contain 643 separate surnames; of these 643, 499 occur in Bowditch, and 379 in Hotten; 14 too in the small number of those who sailed in the Mayflower. Very many of the names that are found both in the Polstead Registers and in the American lists are common and indistinctive, such as Brown, Clarke, Cook, Gardiner, &c.; but many are strange and uncommon, so much so that one is inclined to imagine that the families on either side of the Atlantic that bear such remarkable names must be branches of one and the same family which was originally settled somewhere in East Anglia, and possibly even in Polstead; such names as Aplegate, Aplewhite, Berdil, Doudal, Fedam, Hawnerd, Orrice, Plampin, Scotchmer, Tarball, Winterflood, Yell, and many others.

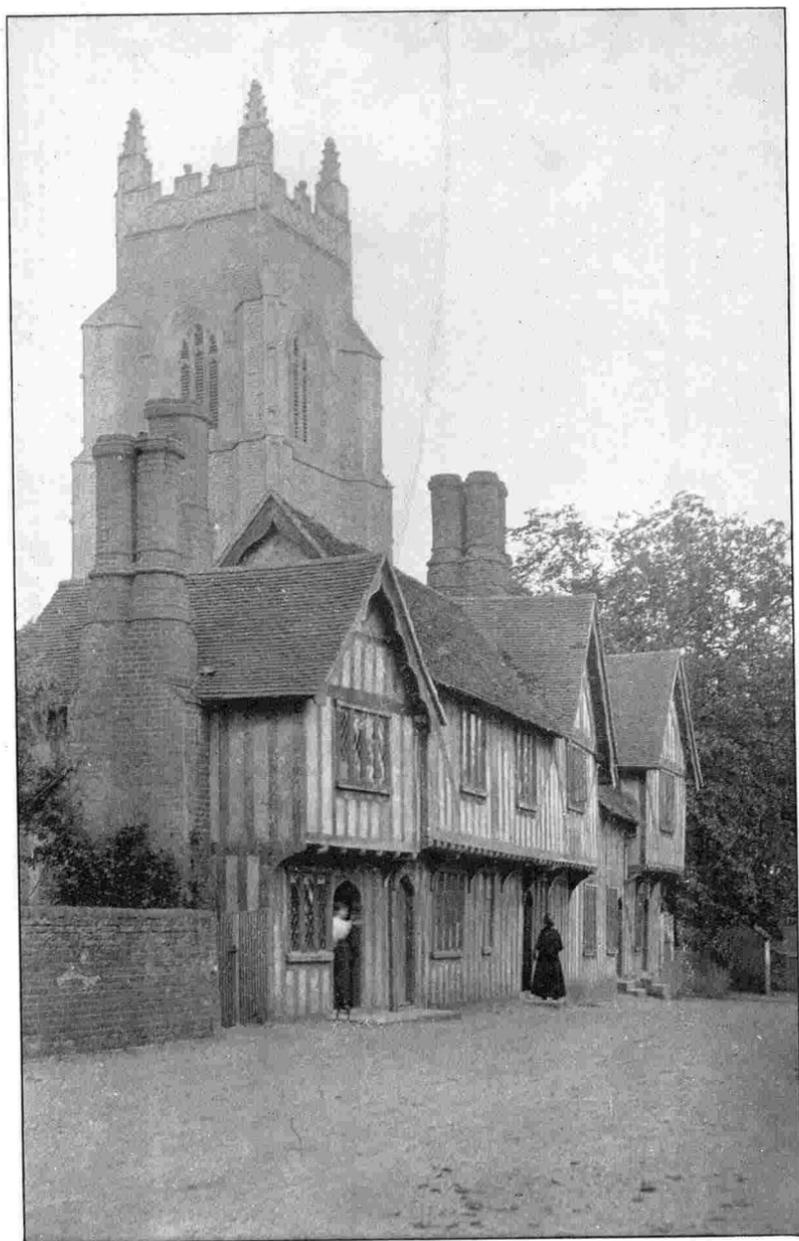
The Parish Registers, and a small collection of celts, coins, and fossils, found in the parish, were laid out for inspection in the Vestry.

STOKE-BY-NAYLAND.

A short stay was made at Stoke-by-Nayland, the fine church being visited. There are some handsome monuments, one being a recumbent figure of Sir Francis Mannoek, Bart., "whose ancestors long since derived from Denmarke." The church has a beautiful font, and with some exceptions, very fine stained glass windows, the colours in one or two (the east for instance) being somewhat obtrusive and glaring; the others are more subdued.

The Ipswich visitors left, for that town, and paid a visit on the way to Wenham Castle, which has been restored so much in keeping with its original character by Mr. G. E. Crisp of Playford Hall. The state of the parish church was then referred to, but it is now in course of complete restoration, thanks to the liberality of Miss Crisp, to whom a hearty vote of thanks was accorded.

The Ipswich party reached home about nine o'clock. The weather continued fine throughout, and the meeting passed off most enjoyably and successfully.



From a Photograph by G. Calver Mason, Esq.

OLD GUILD HALL. STOKE-BY-NAYLAND.