

ALDEBURGH.

I. ITS HISTORY.

BY VINCENT B. REDSTONE.

The poet Crabbe commences the first of his "*Letters*," which comprise his poem, "The Borough," with the following lines :—

Describe the Borough—though our idle tribe
May love description, can we so describe,
That you shall fairly streets and buildings trace,
And all that gives distinction to a place?
This cannot be ; yet moved by your request,
A part I paint—let fancy form the rest.

The poet does not wish reliance to be placed upon his words for the History of Aldeburgh ; his picture of the town as it stood in his day is largely the work of "*Fancy*."

The town is now known as Aldeburgh-on-the-Sea, probably to distinguish it from other "Aldeburghs," or "Aldboroughs" in Norfolk, Yorkshire, and Essex. The proximity of the town to the ocean was noticed by early inhabitants, who, in their wills of the 15th century, claimed to dwell at "*Aldeburgh-next-y'-Sea*," or at "*Aldeburgh-at-the-Sea coast*." Great cause have the inhabitants to bewail the ravages of the sea, which destroyed their dwellings and invaded their streets. It is impossible, however, to believe that the destruction of the

Besides these proprietors the monks of Ely claimed possession of 5 acres of land. All these territories, except the 5 acres last mentioned, were given to William Malet, whose rebellion in the year 1100 caused them to form part of the lands of William Martel and his wife Clemence. After the death of William Martel, his widow granted the Manor of Aldeburgh to the Abbot and Chapter of St. John's, Colchester, placing at Snape prior and monks, who were to pay to the Abbot of Colchester half a mark yearly. The Abbot was to visit Snape twice yearly with twelve horses.

The foundation of the religious houses at Snape and Leiston must have furthered the prosperity of Aldeburgh by furnishing greater means for the distribution of the harvest of the sea by which the townfolk chiefly lived. I have been unable to obtain information as to the welfare of the people under monkish rule, but this we know that the curse of "bell, book, and candle" in the days of Edward IV. did not safeguard the town from plunder "by the King's enemies at sea." The fishing fleet of the port was compelled to find a convoy to safeguard it to the fisheries of Iceland.

The extent of the fishing industry is marked in the pre-Reformation wills of the inhabitants of the town, all of whom mention their connection with this calling. The wills abound in phrases which puzzle even the modern fisher-folk. A native considered the following words as strange to him as Latin:—"Manfar," "Sparlyng," "Warrope," "Doggeswayne," "Wadbrekkys," "Dalk," "Ferkyll boat," "Fortyllfare";—words common to all the wills before mentioned. Nor could I discover from him what were "Wadbrekkys," although I have a strong suspicion they were high fishermen's boots, such as are still in use. The names of Aldeburgh boats in earlier days were mainly those of "avowers," or patron-saints:—"The Nicholas," "The Anne," "The Peter," "The Thomas," "The Christopher," "The Clement," and "The Catherine." A new haven was made in 1540.

The Chamberlain's Accounts for 1567 give a list of the vessels comprising the Aldeburgh "Navy" with the tonnage of each :—

| | Tonnage. | | Tonnage. | | Tonnage. |
|--------------|----------|--------------|----------|--------------|----------|
| Ann Francis | ... 34 | James | ... 16 | Jonas | ... 50 |
| Christopher | ... 8 | Mathew | ... 9 | Robert | ... 80 |
| Margaret | ... 35 | Saviour | ... 4½ | Jesus | ... 60 |
| Margery | ... 18 | George | ... 10 | Maryan | ... 36 |
| Mary Fortune | ... 32 | Mary Thomas | 16 | Valentine | ... 36 |
| John Fox's | } 80 | Bence's Ship | 20 | Christopher | 56 |
| Mary Fortune | | Peter | ... 30 | Grace of God | 12 |

The largest, the "Robert" and John Foxe's "Mary Fortune," were 80 tons burthen, the smallest, "The Saviour," only 4½ tons. In the year 1566 the fleet and boats of the town were engaged in a "Mackarel fare," a "Sparlyng fare," and a "Fortyll fare." There were twenty-four ships and seventy boats engaged in catching mackerel, and fifty-seven boats were used in catching sprats. *Free* boats paid a yearly duty of 20d.; boats, "*faren and free*," paid 2s. 8d.; the "*faren*" boat paid 6s. 8d. The dues for freighting varied from a penny to twopence per ton. The goods brought into the port were not varied; mention is made only of salt, coals, bricks, butter, and cheese. No wines or spirits are mentioned; smuggling concealed this traffic. As late as the 17th April, 1730, we find Robert Crabbe, when Deputy Comptroller of the Custom House, Aldeburgh, writing thus :—

Hon^{ble}.

In the absence of the Collector I beg leave to acquaint you that I have seized 45 Gallons of Brandy which were blown ashore, being sunk by smugglers.

We hope your Honour will be pleased to condemn them for the King's use.

Many ships were engaged in piratical expeditions, visiting Lowestoft Roads to plunder Scotch vessels riding at anchor; or, cruising off the French coast for prey, they themselves were captured by Dunkirkers. The "Mary Fortune," belonging to John Foxe when he represented Aldeburgh in Parliament, was twice captured by Dunkirkers. All who are interested in the daring deeds

of seamen in the days of Elizabeth should read the account given by Hakluyt, the Suffolk Rector of Wetheringset, of the release of the prisoners at Alexandria by John Foxe when he himself was a prisoner of the Turks.

Other trades and callings in the town were represented in 1588 by—

| | | |
|----------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 3 Beer Brewers | 1 Hokemaker | 3 Tailors who were Drapers |
| 1 Shipwright | 2 Butchers | 1 Cobbler |
| 1 Barber | 1 Foreign Shoemaker | 1 Foreign Victualler |
| 2 Coopers | 1 Grocer and Apothecary | 2 Mercers |
| 2 Tailors | 2 Bakers | 1 Husbandman |

In the market place there were sixteen stalls held by two land occupiers, nine butchers, and five shoemakers. Doubtless the butchers provisioned passing ships, for we read in the Accounts for the Armada Year that the town provisioned the Queen's Ship with a wether and a lamb; the shoemakers supplied "Wadbrekkys" for the fishermen. Aldeburgh was at all times well supplied with beer, the salt sea makes the fishers thirsty folk. When Queen Mary collected her followers at Framlingham she directed the bailiffs to send to her three brass pieces of cannon which were mounted in defence of the place, and to supply her company with beer. When the Duke of Norfolk, then lord of the manor, sent venison, the Corporation sent in return eight quarters of sack and six quarters of claret to Framlingham. Upon the occasion of local festivities in 1570 the Chamberlain paid for 13 barrells of Woodbridge beer and 26 barrells of local brewing. The new ordnance set up by Robert Day to replace the three brass pieces were, as stated, "*blown off for drink*," to test the strength of the iron muzzles cast by Thomas Smith.

The following entries show what arrangements were made to resist the expected attack of the Spanish Armada, and what an anxious spirit filled the hearts of the townsfolk.

| | £ | s. | d. |
|---|-----|----|-----|
| 1588. | | | |
| For Two empty tar-barrells for the beacons | ... | 2 | 2 |
| Trimming the town calavers | ... | 3 | 0 0 |
| Feathering 3 sheafs & $\frac{1}{2}$ of arrows | ... | 4 | 8 |
| Captain Turner | ... | 2 | 0 0 |
| To Galley for trimming iron cages for the beacons | ... | 1 | 6 |
| To Brymble for bringing up 4 barrels of powder | ... | | 4 |
| To Blakey the Glover for bags to put in shot | ... | 4 | 6 |
| Bringing home the powder from London | ... | | 8 |
| To Blowers for calaver charges | ... | 3 | 4 |
| For setting forth of the ship & pinnace | ... | 4 | 0 |
| Making of a gun | ... | [|] |
| Captain Yorke | ... | 2 | 0 0 |
| Making the Butts | ... | 6 | 0 |
| Great shot for the pieces | ... | | 8 |
| Flags to the Butts | ... | | |
| Orlopp nails | ... | | |
| The North Bulwark | ... | | |
| Bulwark Gate | ... | | |
| Meat sent aboard the Queen's Ships | ... | 12 | 0 |

Among the entries of the Accounts for 1571 are these two statements.

A cade of full herring to the Master of the Requests, Mr. Thomas Seckford.

John Scolde when he rode to London with y^e charter.

This was the year when Aldeburgh first returned burgesses to Parliament, and it is a significant fact that in the following year, 1572, Charles Seckford, nephew to the Master of the Requests, sat in Parliament for the borough.

In 1566 many persons took up their freedom, when Charles Nelson was bailiff. Payment of the fine was made, not all at once, but by three separate payments, varying in amount.

| | s. | d. |
|--|-----|------|
| 1566. | | |
| Robert Almon | ... | 4 0 |
| Robert Lease | ... | 4 0 |
| Richard Baker (3 rd pay of his fine) | ... | 5 0 |
| John Tate (3 rd pay of his fine) | ... | 3 0 |
| Wm. Margate for his fine & all paid | ... | 10 0 |
| Thos. Squyer, bailiff for Thos. Jennour (all paid) | ... | 6 8 |
| John White, mariner for y ^e 3 rd pay | ... | 4 0 |

| | | | |
|-------|---|----|----|
| 1566. | | s. | d. |
| | Robert Calver, mariner for y ^e 3 rd pay ... | 5 | 0 |
| | Alexander Baulkye ... | 20 | 0 |
| | Robert Hynde, for his first pay of his fine ... | 6 | 8 |
| | Peter Pattrycke for his first pay of his fine ... | 3 | 4 |
| 1567. | | | |
| | Hen. Clarke for y ^e last pay of his fine ... | 4 | 0 |
| | John Catts for y ^e last pay of his fine ... | 4 | 0 |
| | Mr. Nelson for y ^e freedom of his apprentice ... | 6 | 8 |

It appears that in many instances the fine was paid at the convenience of the burgess.

Aldbrough is not mentioned as a borough in Domesday ; —it was incorporated in the first year of Edw. VI.—again in the fourth of James I.—and by Charles I., under whose charter it was governed in (1835) by two bailiffs, 10 capital and 24 inferior burgesses, with other officers.

There are few records relating either to its municipal or to its parliamentary rights.

On March 24th, 1689, a petition was presented by Sir Edward Turner, Knt., against the return of William Johnson ; the petition arose from the *power of electing* freemen, exercised by the *select body* of the corporation ; and by their nomination of out-burgesses.

The petition stated that “at the poll there appeared to be 26 freemen and inhabitants for Sir E. Turner, and only 14 for Mr. W. Johnson ; whereupon Sir Hen. Johnson and Mr. Johnson, brought in out of the country several gentlemen, farmers, and others, not inhabiting within the borough, *nor paying scot and lot*, being but lately made free contrary to the usage and custom of the borough, by the procurement of one Alderman Bence, purposely to assist in that election.

Aldbrough was said to have been a borough by prescription (but this is doubtful) ; non-resident freemen subscribed, at the time of admission to this freedom, not to have advantage of the marshes, quay and causeway, belonging to the town.

On May 17th, 1690, the Committee of the House

decided that by the word burgesses was meant the burgage tenants, and not inhabitants paying scot and lot.

Sir Hen. Johnson and William Johnson represented the borough in Parliament from 1688 until their deaths. Sir Hen. Johnson of Friston Hall, Snape, an Elder of Trinity House, died at Bath, Oct. 13th, 1719. He married Lady Martha Lovelace, and their daughter married the Earl of Strafford, patron of Aldeburgh.

In an early 17th century record of the value of the Manor of Snape cum Aldeburgh, it is stated that "*the lord of the manor hath the appointment of a burgess for Parliament.*"

A petition in 1715, stated, that the bailiffs had permitted a number of people called *honorary* freemen and outsiders to poll; and with threats, bribery, &c., and by detaining freemen nine days at Sir Hen. Johnson's house, had procured him and H. Johnson, Esq., to be returned.

An order in the *town-book*, during the Commonwealth, excluded out-burgesses and foreigners from commoning on the town marsh, because they did not contribute to any public charge. Out-burgesses did not do watch and ward.

The Committee of the House resolved that the right of election was in "the bailiffs and burgesses resident within the borough, marking the original fact that burgesses were inhabitants of the place."

In 1816 the number of voters was about 35; the patron was Sir Claude Champion de Crespigny, Baronet.

The following extracts from letters now in the Library of the British Museum, will show the truth of Crabbe's statements in his fifth letter, entitled "Elections." A George Crabbe was in 1754 in the service of the Earl of Strafford, then patron of the borough, receiving a yearly salary of £12; of this £6 was returned for rent.

(a) *To Sir Hen. Johnson, Member returned 1698.*

"Sir,

The occasion of our present request is so obvious that we need not trouble you with explanation other than that we are unwilling to meet with a surprise after the fatigues of a tedious war. We therefore

crave that you will be pleased to lend us fifty, or rather one hundred pounds, for a year or two, for which we will allow you due interest. That space of time (we hope) will enable us to make A grateful Return of the Money & Commemoration of the favour done to

Sir your most humble servants,

John Maggs, senr.,
John Browne,
Thos. Wall,
Edmund Wall,
Thos. Osborn."

(b) *From Parson Benett, chaplain to the Earl on local politics in 1733.*

"The Scrubby Corporation must be purchased at a very high rate when so many hungry curs have to have their monstrous jaws cram'd with hundreds and thousands"

(c) *The election of Conelly and Purvis, 1734.*

"My Lord,

Notwithstanding we are in the height of our jollity you yourself will suppose I am not in a very good condition to make compliments."

G. Purvis.

(d) *To the Earl of Strafford, 1734.*

"My Lord,

Our election is now over Your own most Noble Family fixed in this Borough, which you ought justly to claim as a right of inheritance. Mr. Purvis is most complaisant to me and desires to consult with me on all steps that shall be taken in Corporation Affairs. I am much obliged to him for it, but I must still act for your Lordship's interest. In my last I acquainted your Lordship with the death of honest Owen Smith: What I have now to urge is that your Lordship would secure yourself in the Choice of Such a 24 as will not swerve; for it will not be of any advantage to your Lordship or our Country's cause to have our Bench filled up with Admiralty Captains & Lieutenants, or indeed Ministerial Vermin of any Sort. Purvis I am persuaded will be ready to comply with your Lordship's Commands. Let him therefore not say, your Lordship did not lay your Claim in time; in all my talk with Mr. Purvis he has not yet so much as mentioned either to Mr. Aldrich or myself how he intends to dispose of the vacant 24.

I have gone through the duties of the day by drinking to the future success of the Strafford Interest.

Your Lordship's most dutiful Servant and Chaplain,
J. Bennett."

In a letter dated Feb. 19th, 1738-9, John Aldrich thanks the Earl of Strafford for sending newspapers, and

asks leave when he had read them, to send them to his tenant Cracknall, at the White Lion in the Market Place, for the use of such company as frequent his house, he minding to keep them clean and returning them every Monday morning, for some dealers, traders, and others had occasion to read the News a second time, or at least they liked to read it again whether they had occasion or no.

II. THE CHURCH (S. PETER AND S. PAUL).

In his "Letter," No. 11, the poet speaks of the Church and—

"Its old foundation—but it is not clear
When it was laid—you care not for the year ;
On this, as parts decayed by time and storms,
Arose these varied disproportioned forms."

He subsequently points out—

"Yon noble Gothic arch," "That Gothic door" :

where such stand it is impossible for any one now to point out.

It is more than probable that on some spot within the present building stood the earliest foundation of a church whose invocation was to the Apostle S. Peter, and that the present walls would entirely enclose the first erection if it were now standing.

Upon approaching the church from the sea every one is struck by its conspicuous tower, the walls of which are marked by "the effect of five slow centuries." It is without doubt the oldest part of the church, and, like the towers of all Suffolk churches, stands out prominently as a landmark. For this purpose was it mainly erected, as well as to form a stage for the four bells which hung within it in pre-Reformation days. The tower was attached to a low-roofed church occupying the site of the