

SOUTH ELMHAM DEANERY.

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Separated from the Wangford Hundred, the parishes of South Elmham, Homersfield and Flixton were constituted one Deanery, and the remaining part of the Hundred the Wangford Deanery. This unique division into a Deanery expresses the existence of some peculiar jurisdiction over the district.

Such a peculiarity is still further seen to exist by the unification of the three said three parishes in the time of Domesday into a division of a Hundred, then known as a Ferthing, or fourth part. Only in this one instance is the term Ferthing applied to any part of a Suffolk Hundred. Its relative size appears from the fact that when the geld levied upon the Wangford Hundred amount to two hundred and forty pence, that paid by the Deanery was sixty pence, or one-quarter of the geld. Further, each of the three parishes constituting the district comprising the Deanery paid twenty pence, or one-third of the assessment levied on the district.

Close examination into the conditions upon which the land was held in 1086 reveals the fact that the whole district, with the exception of one manor, was in the hands of William, Bishop of Thetford. Any peculiar ecclesiastical jurisdiction which may have existed over this Ferthing of the Wangford Hundred, at the time when Elmham formed the seat of the East Anglian Bishopric, must have remained after the dismissal of all ecclesiastical jurisdiction within or over the Hundred Court. For more than five hundred years South Elmham Deanery remained part of the temporalities of the Bishop of Norwich.

In the Norwich taxation, 1254, which was an assessment of the value of ecclesiastical property in England, when a grant was made by Pope Innocent IV. to Henry III. of a tenth of this property, the assessment on the Deanery of South Elmham is not given. An assessment does, however, appear upon the property of the churches within the Deanery in 1291. In this assessment eight churches are mentioned; in Domesday allusion is made to eight churches one-half church, and one-fifth church; the fractional churches comprise most probably, the Church of Flixton, which, in 1291, was held by the Priory.

It is unfortunate that no reference is made in early records to "The Old Minster," which could not have been one of the eight churches already mentioned, and which must have stood before the year 1291. The site was of sufficient importance for Edward II. in 1326 to sojourn at Elmham for a few days on his way from Hoxne to Norwich. He may have resided at the Bishop's Palace, remains of which are still visible. The temporalities of the see of Norwich were then in the King's hands, but in the surveys of the manors of Homersfield and Elmham no notice is made of either the Minster or the Palace, perhaps because in the returns only rents and expenses are given. The name, Henry de Monasto (? Monasterio), within the rental, may allude to the then farmer of the lands of the Minster. Strange it is that a term, applied to a mother church, and to a monastery, should be applied to ruins of which so little, in fact no history is known, or can be ascertained.

It may have formed part of the buildings upon the extensive manorial estate, comprising five carrucates, and containing a vast wood capable of finding sustenance for six hundred hogs, held by Bishop Elmer in the days of Edward the Confessor. There are many

features of the present ruins which point to an existence of the building at that early date. Here the courts of the Ferthing, if not of the Hundred, may have been held.

We may consider, too, that over the nine clergy holding benefices within the South Elmham district a tenth was appointed or elected to control or supervise ecclesiastical and spiritual matters. He would be ecclesiastically the dean, and, temporally, the Bishop's steward over the manors.

An exceedingly interesting and useful paper upon the Norwich taxation, 1254, and the Pope Nicholas taxation, 1291, has been supplied by the Rev. William Hudson to the Proceedings of the Norfolk and Norwich Archæological Society (Vol. xvii., pp. 46—157). In this paper the writer explains clearly the origin of deaneries. It is therein shown that a dean was in the early days of Church extension, the chief of a small body of clergy, nominally ten in number, and that, with the development of the parochial system, the deans may have had a certain number of parishes assigned to their supervision. The mediæval deans exercised ecclesiastical jurisdiction rather than spiritual supervision.

William the Conqueror separated civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction into two distinct departments. He commanded that "no bishop or archdeacon should any longer hold pleas in the hundred court, nor bring a cause that relates to the rule of souls to the judgment of secular men." The bishop and sheriff had sat together in the Hundred Court.

The questions which came before ecclesiastical Courts held within the deaneries were matters connected with marriages and testamentary dispositions. In addition they dealt with breaches of public morality

and Church order or discipline. "As time went on, the decanal courts seem to have gradually given way to those of the archdeacon, and by the time of the Reformation they had died out." This statement in a general sense is correct, but as far as it concerns the Deanery of South Elmham it was otherwise.

The courts were held in the Deanery of South Elmham separately from the Courts of the Archdeacon of Suffolk until the year 1540. Of the many hundreds of wills proved within the courts of the Archdeacon of Suffolk for the Century 1440 to 1540, only one was that of a testator belonging to the Deanery of South Elmham. This single probate refers to the will of Alice Dunston of Southelton (*sic*) who at the time of her death was a resident in Ipswich. All doubt as to the existence of a separate court within the Deanery of South Elmham is set aside by the existence of a book at the Ipswich Probate Office, numbered Book VI. A, and bearing the following title:—

"Tabula Testamentorum Testatorum decedentium infra Maneria domini Episcopi Norwicensis infra Archi'natum Suff' et probatorum coram Officiali dictorum Maneriorum Ab anno domini 1508 usque ad Annum domini 1540."

Upon inspection it may be seen that the book contains not only the registration of wills of testators who died within the jurisdiction of the Deanery of South Elmham, but also records of sentences passed upon persons guilty of immorality, presentments, etc. It appears that the Bishop of Norwich retained the sole right of granting probate in cases where the testator died within his manor, for Book VI. is a similar one to Book VI. A, but refers to various places within the Archdeaconry of Suffolk, and not to one Deanery.

The "Official of the Manors" was the Commissary for the Deanery, as may be seen from the following extract:—

"Chapter held in the parish church of Homersfield, 13 March 1525 by the Venerable Master Wm. Talmach, Commissary for the Deanery of South Elmham."

Within the period of thirty-two years covered by the Book VI.A, fifty-two wills were proved at the above Courts. Extracts from a few of these wills and presentments may prove of interest to the reader. The number refers to the number of the folio in the court book.

2. *Thomas Tye* of St. James, 1510. 'To the painting of the tabernacle of Our Lady of Pity within the church of St. James with *my own proper* goods.' To the gild of St. John and St. James 20s. for brethren to buy land towards the service of a gild priest or else a bell. To the common light, and Our Lady's light 3s. 'A *farnerying* (? weanling) calf.' Sir Robert Magnus, parson of St. James.

3. *Richard Pyke* of St. Nicholas, 1510. 'To the use of a new cloth stayned before St. Nicholas *don by the discrecion* of my wyfe.'

4. *Joan Everard* of Hoxne, 1512. To St. Edmund's chapel in Hoxne 3s. 4d. 'Three silver spoons *ducktayed*.'

5. *Margaret Gooch* of St. Michaels, 1511. To the *eight parishes* within the said town to the repair of their churches, each of them 20d. To the ladies of Flixton, 3s. 4d.

6. *John Brame*, son and heir to John Brame senior of St. Nicholas, 1511, brother, Robert; son, James.

8. *Sir John Peny*, vicar of Flixton, 1515.

9. *Isabel Long* of Flixton, 1517. To Dame Margaret Ponder, prioress of Flixton a spruce chest.

10. *Elizabeth Autell* of the parish of St. George of Sancroft 1515. Witness Sir Robert Burdall, parson of Sancroft.

12. *Simon Fuller* of St. Margaret, 1518. 'To the stepill of St. Margaret a brown cowe.' 'Image of Our Lady in St. Margaret to be painted of my cost.'

13. *William Orlowe* of Flixton, 1518. 'To the painting of a pane of the candilbeame in the church of Flixton, 26s. 8d.

14. *John Harcock* of St. Margarets, 1519. 'To the stepill of St. Margaret 40s. to be paid at 3 times as the workmen thereof doth work.'

15. *Henry Hoode* of St. James, 1519. 'To gild of St. John and St. James 3s. 4d. 'A trental to be song at St. John's Altar in the church of St. James''

19. *John Wright* of Homersfield, 1523. Towards the building of the Vestry, 6s. 8d.

24. *Reginald Hewitt* of St. James, 1527. 'Five masses in the church of St. James by the authority of Boston gild for *scali celi*.'

25. *John Autell* of St. George, 1530. 'To the common light of St. George for this year 17 pounds of wax. Priest to sing 1 quarter year in the church of Sancroft. To gild of St. Margaret 3s. 4d.'

26. *Margaret Horsewrethe* of Sancroft, 1530. Sir Robert Tompson priest to sing masses.

27. *Margaret Autell* of St. George, 1530. 'I bequeath a cowe color *Brown shilled* (cf. word Sheldrake) to the Mayntenance and finding of a light before St. George in the same church. I geve to the halowyng of the same church 20d.'

31. *Alice Pegeon* of Sancroft 1533. Witness, Sir Alexander Assheworth, parish priest of Sancroft.

36. *Robert Hercoke* of St. Peter, 1530. 'To the church of Sancroft a bushel of wheate and a bushel of malte. I gyf to the byeing of a crosse clothe of Sylke to hange uppon the Crosse Staff in the said cherch of St. Peter on feste full dayes 5s.'

The presentments and verdicts recorded give many points of interest connected with social life.

Court held in the parish church of Homersfield, 1525.

St. James. Dom. Robert Betts, Rector.
Dom. Thos. Applyard, stipendarius.

Sancroft. Magister James Bylyngforth, Rector.
Dom. Robert Saham, parish chaplain.

According to report John Tower badly treated his wife contrary to a husband's affection—henceforth he is to treat his wife as becomes a husband under penalty of excommunication.

Sir Robert Thomson, parish chaplain of Sancroft, appeared in the church of St. Margaret in the presence of diverse men, and exhibited letters of ordination along with a dispensation on account of age.

St. Margaret. Robert Gurnell, Rector.

St. Peter. Wm. Venor (*mortuus est* in margin) presented for incontineny with Isabel Coell. On Sunday next to head the solemn procession with bare feet, legs and head, holding in his hands a candle value 1d. and after the procession to kneel before the principal image in the church until after the offertory, and then to offer the candle into the hands of a priest, after which a certificate of the performance is to be given to him.

Flixton. Margaret Wenyor is presented as a gossipier (*fabulatrix*) in church during time of Divine service. She is to purge herself by four women (*quarta manu*) as compurgators, in the parish church of St. James, 27th July 1525. She brought as compurgators Margaret More, Joan Blanehard, Margaret Hill and others, and thus lawfully purged herself.

Wm. Burgess, a common defamer of his neighbours, is ordered to find three compurgators in the church of St. James: in default the Commissary orders that, on the next Sunday following, he should kneel before the high altar with a candle in his hand of the value of 8d. from beginning of High Mass unto the end of the same with feet and legs bare, then offer the candle to principal image in the chancel, then bring a certificate to the Commissary's Court at Homersfield 9 Nov. 1525 of his performing the sentence as directed.

St. Margaret. John Awers, presented for practising diabolical arts, being unable to find three compurgators, is cautioned by the Commissary under the hope of amending his ways.

Homersfield. John Woodward presented for incontinency is ordered in carrying out his penance on two consecutive Sundays, when heading the procession in church with bare feet and legs, to cover his body with a sheet in lieu of a tunic. 28 Sept. 1525.

John Toftys presented for refusing to pay his portion towards the wages of the parish clerk.

Stephen Legate, charged with adultery receives absolution from the Rector as he had received Correction for the said offence in the presence of the Lord Bishop of Norwich as affirmed by Henry Persy gent., servant of the Bishop.

St. James. It is presented that the rector, Dom. Robert Bettys withdraws a parish custom, viz., "strowing the stolllys with rushes."

St Nicholas. Robert Flykke, rector, permits his chancel and rectory to be in great ruin.

Sancroft. John Autell and Robert Rowse, churchwardens, present that Thomas Bateman, gent. of Flixton, holds the benefice of Sancroft to ferme.

Margaret Hoode presented for incontinency ordered during penance to walk with bare feet and legs in her tunic with a sheet over her head then to kneel before the image in the chancel, saying five times the salutation of the Angels '*cum cimbale*,' and afterwards to retire to her customary place.

All Saints. Dom. Nicholas Weledon, rector, presented for refusing 'to administer the Sacrament of the Eucharist' to Cecilia Ricardys without just and reasonable cause.

St Nicholas. Prior and Convent of Rumburgh, patrons. Dom. Wm. Forest, parish chaplain.

Dom. William Lampelewe, late monk of the house or priory lately suppressed of Rumburgh, of the Order of St. Benedict, in the presence of the lord commissary in the church of St. Margaret, 28 Sept. 1525, produced letters of dispensation under the seal of Richard. Bishop of Norwich, and of Thomas, Cardinal of S. Cecilia (Thomas Wolsey) granting the benefice to him.

Flixton. Margaret Freman asserts that she said to William Chapman of Flixton, "Can ye find in your harte to love me and to marry with me?", and after this manner they contracted marriage between them.