

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE ELMHAM
CONTROVERSY.

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The *Antiquaries' Journal* for October, 1926, Vol. VI., No. 4, contains an able article, the joint work of Mr. A. W. Clapham, F.S.A., and Mr. W. H. Godfrey, F.S.A., entitled "The Saxon Cathedral of Elmham." Read in conjunction with the late Richard Howlett's article on "The See of Elmham," in Vol. XVIII., Part 2, of *Norfolk Archæology*, it supplies a formidable array of arguments in favour of the Norfolk site.

The evidence with regard to the excavated ruins at North Elmham is thus summed up by them: "The church must be earlier than the earth work which partly covered it, and this earth work can at the latest estimate be of Norman date. The doorway, without a rebate, in the north arm of the transept is a definitely Saxon feature. The form and structure of the towers cannot be dated before the tenth century. The homogeneity of the structure forbids us to assign an earlier date to the east end, though this may rest on foundations of the age of Theodore." On page 407 they state: "Taking first the *form* of the east end, the "Tau-cross" plan belongs originally to the earliest period of building after the Peace of the Church . . . The plan, then, by itself would lead us to suppose that this part of the church at Elmham dated from 673, when Archbishop Theodore divided the East Anglian diocese, thus creating the See of Elmham."

With the views thus expressed as to the antiquity of the ruins at North Elmham should be compared those of the late J. T. Micklethwaite, F.S.A., Surveyor to Westminster Abbey, as to the antiquity of the ruins at South Elmham. In Vol. XVI., page 29 (1918) of the *Suffolk Institute of Archæology* Proceedings is to be found his reasoned conclusion, based on an examination of the ground-plan and of the existing remains, that the foundation of the "Old Minster" went back to the time of the partition of the diocese, an opinion shared by Sir W. St. John Hope, F.S.A., who wrote that the remains are "those of an undoubted 7th century church." The peculiarity of the "Tau-form" at North Elmham finds a counterpart in the peculiarity of the narthex at South Elmham. The ground-plans of the two can be compared with the aid of the diagrams prepared by T. Butterick, facing page 110 of Howlett's article in the *Norfolk Archæology*; and a more detailed plan of the North Elmham church is to be found on page 403 of the *Antiquaries' Journal* article. The advantage in length and area is in favour of North Elmham.

While Mr. Clapham and Mr. Godfrey dispel any doubts as to the antiquity of the ruins at North Elmham and deal fully with its architectural features, they are less happy in their preliminary reference to the controversy as to the site of the See. The arguments in favour of the Suffolk site do not rest "solely" on the name of the "Old Minster," but arise out of a number of considerations scattered in various articles in the *Suffolk Institute of Archæology's* Proceedings, from the papers by Harrod and Woodward to Mr. Redstone's paper on the South Elmham Deanery (Vol. XIV., page 323). Moreover, when they say that by the South Elmham hypothesis "the statesman Theodore was credited with the inconceivable stupidity of splitting up the East Anglian See by establishing two bishop's

stools within thirteen miles of one another," they forget that the "stupidity" with which sees had been located was pointed out by Bede in his letter to Egbert, but attributed by him to royal, not to archiepiscopal action: "Et quidem novimus quia per incuriam regum præcedentium, donationesque stultissimas factum est, ut non facile locus vacans, ubi sedes episcopalis nova fieri debeat, inveniri valeat." (Plummer's Bede, I., page 413). In view of Bede's own comment ("sed de hac re ad præsens siluimus") on chapter eight of the Council of Hertford (673), which dealt with the increase of the episcopate and was the immediate precursor of the division of the East Anglian See, it is probable that Elmham furnished the instance—or at least the principal instance—he had in mind.

Howlett's view, though strongly in favour of North Elmham, is far less uncompromising. He concedes (page 107) "that we have at South Elmham the ruins, or the beginnings of a small Anglo-Saxon church of venerable antiquity; and let us further agree that this small church, the centre of the nine parishes forming the district now called South Elmham, might have been for a time, if it was ever finished, the ecclesiastical home of the successors of Felix, driven inland from Duñwich to seek a place less accessible to the wild Northmen. But Mr. Woodward decides that the Minster was never finished."

The question whether the "Old Minster" was ever completed is of minor importance in comparison with that of the original site of the new see, and the Elmham from which the designation was derived. And on this point the name of the South Elmham parish, in which the "Old Minster" is situated, must not be overlooked. "St. Cross," or "Cross Croft," or "San-croft," taken in conjunction with the fact that Theodore of Tarsus, familiar with Eastern ways, was

the Archbishop by whom the new see was established, appears to enshrine the memory of the *Stauropolegion*. The importance attached by him to this ceremony, even in the case of ordinary churches, is shown in Book II., chap. 1 of his *Penitential*: "Aecclesiam licet ponere in alium locum, si necesse sit, et non debet iterum sanctificare tantum presbiter aqua aspergere debet et in loco altaris crux debet componi." (Haddan and Stubbs, III., p. 190).

Howlett is right in pointing out the slip by which Harrod attributed the use of the name Elmham to Bede, who, in writing of the election and consecration of Æcci and Beaduwine, merely says "ex quo usque hodie provincia illa duos habere solet episcopos." He is right also in drawing attention to the lateness of the post-Conquest distinction between North and South Elmham. It is difficult, however, to agree with the inference he draws (in common with Suckling) from the alternative spelling of the word in Domesday—"Almaham" as well as "Elmeham"—that (South) Elmham meant Bishop Ælmar's home: the name could hardly have originated as late as the lifetime of Stigand's brother; and Skeat agrees with Carthew in holding that Elmham, in each case, meant merely the "home near the elm." All the known episcopal signatures to Councils and Charters give "Elmham" without further specification, and the three much discussed passages—from Theodred's will, from Ælfric's will and from Domesday—cannot be regarded as decisive one way or the other; nor have we any evidence as to the boundaries of the See, the statement that one was for Suffolk and the other for Norfolk being of much later date. The proximity of (South) Elmham to Hoxne is, on the whole, an argument in its favour, as, although Hoxne was at one time the *sedes* of the Bishop, in the sense of residence, there is nothing in Ælfric's reference to "preostas" to show

that St. Ethelbert's, Hoxne, was at any time the *sedes*, in the sense of the cathedral church of the diocese; and the question has still to be answered, To what "minster" could Theodred have bequeathed the hide of land at Mendham, if not to (South) Elmham? (On the meanings of "Minster" see Venables' article in Notes and Queries, 7th series, VIII., page 350). In view of the twofold use of the word *sedes*, future historians might wonder whether St. Edmundsbury or Ipswich is the *sedes* of the twentieth century Bishop, much in the same way as we wonder whether Elmham or Hoxne was the *sedes* of the tenth century Bishop. In any case the earliest known attribution of the See of Elmham to North Elmham is in the report addressed in 1336 to Bishop Anthony Bek, a report discovered by Jessopp and quoted by Howlett, and in the early fifteenth century reference by Thomas of Elmham, the basis of subsequent statements by Camden and others.

The truth is that, apart from the identity of the names, certain coincidences between the Suffolk Elmham and the Norfolk Elmham are too striking to be regarded as merely accidental. (1) In both cases the foundation of the church is traced back by experts to the end of the seventh century. (2) In both cases it was built in the midst of an enclosure of older date, forming at North Elmham a square of about 300 feet (A.J. VI., 4, pages 403-4) and at South Elmham what Raven describes as apparently "a Roman camp of about $3\frac{1}{2}$ acres (5 jugera) bounded by a low vallum and correspondingly shallow fosse; with square angles" (S.I. of A., X., page 3). (3) In both cases there was an episcopal residence, rebuilt at South Elmham St. Margaret by Bp. Herbert de Losinga, and embattled at North Elmham by Bp. De Spencer. (4) In both cases the episcopal property existed before and after the Conquest, the special jurisdiction over what was

variously called the liberty, manor, township, or soke of South Elmham, with its Nine Parishes, continuing until the reign of Henry the Eighth.

These coincidences do not, however, mean that the past fifty years of controversy must end in a "stalemate." To carry on the simile of a very imperfect game of chess, the enclosures round the ruins at North Elmham and South Elmham supply each side with a Castle; each side claims a Queen, if the dominant and ubiquitous figure of Theodore can be likened to that piece; the Knights (if earldomen are knights) have been relegated to the seven Ilketshalls, which were as lay in their ownership as the nine Elmhams were episcopal; and the Pawns are off the board. There remain the Bishops and the Kings; and the controversialists, intent on the moves of the former, have rather overlooked the moves of the latter, in spite of Bede's hint "*per incuriam regum præcedentium.*" The charter which must have been granted by King Ealdwulf, when the division of the diocese took place, is unfortunately lost. We have, however, references, in the confirmatory gift of the manor of Elmham to the See of Norwich in the time of Bp. Herbert de Losinga, as well as in documents of later date, to an earlier grant by Sigebert, King of the East Angles, to Bishop Felix. Whatever may be the authority for this earlier grant, these documents are all classed as Suffolk records. The Hundred Roll II., 191, at the P.R.O. relates to the "*Manerium de Suthelmham,*" as also the Quo Warranto Roll 733. And, although I am informed that Cotton MS. Augustus II. 103 (copy) and Cotton Roll II., 21 (1) (not Cotton II, 21 (11) as stated by Copinger in "*Suffolk Records and MSS,*" II, page 294 and "*Suffolk Manors*" VII, page 171,) do not appear to mention the earlier grant, they too are included in the British Museum Index to the Charters and Rolls under the head of "*Elmham, South, Co.*"

Suffolk. Gift of the manor to the see of Norwich (1103-6?).” A grant by Sigebert (631-4) to Bishop Felix would supply an adequate motive for the selection of the Suffolk Elmham in 673 as the first site of the new See, though only thirteen miles from Dunwich; in which case the name of the Bishopric of Elmham, whatever its subsequent vicissitudes may have been, would be derived originally from (South) Elmham, though the site may have been abandoned, at any rate temporarily, at a subsequent date owing to Viking raids.

This hypothesis does not, however, exhaust the possibilities. If Mr. Clapham and Mr. Godfrey are right in holding that the foundation of (North) Elmham church goes back to the last part of the seventh century, the date would synchronize with that of (South) Elmham, and a further explanation may suggest itself. The terms arranged by Archbishop Theodore and King Ealdwulf are unknown to us, but it is possible that Bishop Beadwine was authorized to select an alternative *sedes*, much in the same way as Theodore allowed Eata in 678 to have his see either at Lindisfarne or at Hexham, if not at both. Just as the name of St. Cross at South Elmham recalls the custom of the *Stauropogion*, so too an Archbishop of Greek birth may have been influenced by Eastern analogies, some of which are to be found in the fifth-century history of Sozomen, with regard to the simultaneous establishment of two mother-churches in the same diocese. This would go far to account for the subsequent resemblances and coincidences; but for reasons stated it leaves untouched the probability that the Suffolk Elmham was the Elmham where the Bishop's cross was first planted, and from which the new See derived its name and much of its chequered history.