

THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY GLASS IN BLYTHBURGH CHURCH.

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On 9th April, 1644, William Dowsing visited Blythburgh. His record is as follows: "There was 20 superstitious Pictures; one on the Outside of the Church; 2 Crosses, one on the Porch; and another on the Steeple; and 20 Cherubims to be taken down in the Church, and Chancel; and I brake down 3 *orate pro animabus*; and gave order to take down above 200 more Pictures, within 8 days." The Churchwardens' Accounts, dated the day before, say that six shillings were paid "to Master Dowson that came with the Troopers to our Church, about the taking down of Images and Brasses off the Stones."* We must take it that at Blythburgh as elsewhere the 'Pictures' were chiefly if not wholly painted glass windows† and here we are fortunate enough to have had recorded for us what some of the subjects of these windows were.

Suckling, quoting Gardner's *History of Blythburgh*, says that in 1457 Robert Pinne left money "to glaze a window on the north side of the church, next the window to S. John the Baptist, and to paint the same with the history of S. Anthony." Five years later John Aleyn left "forty shillings towards glazing a window of the new chancel of Blythburgh on the south side." It is a pity that the subject-matter of the window was not set down. Suckling says, again on the authority of Gardner, that SS. Sigismund, Erasmus and Catherine were also to be seen in the windows.‡ Presumably this meant only figures of the saints. It is not likely that a whole window would be glazed with scenes from the lives of SS. Sigismund and Erasmus.

*Quoted by C. H. Evelyn White in his edition of *The Journal of William Dowsing* (Ipswich, 1885), p. 50.

†"In almost all cases 'pictures' must be taken to mean glass," M. R. James, *Suffolk and Norfolk*, p. 52.

‡Alfred Suckling, *History of the Antiquities of the Hundreds of Blything and part of Lothingland in the County of Suffolk* (London, 1847), pp. 151-2.

At Blythburgh, as, probably, in most of the other churches he visited, Dowsing did not destroy every vestage of the glass. It was enough to break the panels in the main lights and so thoroughly to disfigure the windows.* It was left to subsequent centuries to lose the glass by neglect rather than by iconoclastic zeal.† So the beginning of the nineteenth century could show more ancient glass in the windows of Blythburgh church than the end. In Christchurch Mansion, Ipswich, there is a MS. notebook filled with notes by the artist and antiquarian, Hamlet Watling. His notes on the glass at Blythburgh are worth setting out fully: "In a mutilated window of the Hopton Chantry are many fragments of painted glass and the most perfect of them are the 3 Bishops of Dunwich, St. Felix, St. Alsin, St. Boniface. These are demi-figures." St. Felix holds an open book and crosier and wears a white chasuble and a "superb mitre." "His face is clean without a beard." *S. felix*. St. Boniface is similar and upon a ruby background. *S. bonif.* Alsin's figure "is much plainer executed." St. Bartholomew is noted next. The saint is twenty-three inches high, is dressed in white and blue robes and carries "a very large knife" and a book. Next to him is St. Andrew, with cross and book, dressed in a white garment, decorated with golden roses, and a blue cloak over it. He stands under a canopy and "is the most perfect of many others." St. Bartholomew was found again in a S. window of the S. aisle. He held a large pointed knife with a "small cross Pomée on the blade." Across the figure was "Credo in spiritum sanctum."‡ Another figure represented St. Pancras—"a very youthful figure holding a palm and stones and dressed in pink and white. *Sc. Pancr* . . ." There was also St. Etheldreda, with crown and crosier, and St.

*This, of course, is why in so many churches medieval glass remains only in the tracery lights and heads of the main lights. In many places, where there was no fanatic like Dowsing, the pictured glass was allowed gradually to fall out and was replaced by plain glazing. Glazing windows, even with white glass, was a heavy expense not lightly to be undertaken by the parish.

†The Reverend H. A. Harris tells me that at Blythburgh, in the past, medieval painted glass was kept loose in a box under a seat at the east end of the south aisle. Some of this glass was stolen by visitors and his efforts to make the Church authorities place the glass in safety were long unavailing.

‡The sentence of the Apostles' Creed always attributed to St. Bartholomew.

Fursey. The latter was, as Watling notes, thirty-six inches high; dressed as an ecclesiastic with mitre and crosier, green cope and white albe; stood under a canopy against a red floriated background. Under him *Sc. furseus ab.* St. Helena was in a S. window "with a Roman cross over her left shoulder" and wearing a crown. Presumably in the same window was St. Anthony of Padua "preaching to fishes 3 of which are before him." He was dressed in white. Next, St. Michael is noted. Next, St. Blaise with his emblem—a wool comb. Next, St. Anthony Abbot with purple hood and garment. Watling saw him as a demi-figure and holding a staff terminating in a carved human head. "Next to him is another representation of him holding a T cross in his hand." Lastly Watling notes St. John the Baptist with the "Agnus Dei" and book.

Certain remarks must be made about this description of the glass. Who was "St. Alsin"? There still remains a tracery light of the fourth window from the east in the N. aisle a fragment of the name . . . *Imus*. Dr. M. R. James has suggested to me (*Sc Aldhe*) *Imus*. He seems a very much more likely saint than "Alsin." SS. Michael and Blaise have both disappeared, but fortunately Watling's water-colour copies of the figures have survived. It is worth remarking that St. Michael's shield is charged with rays and not with the cross of St. George, which was so often set upon St. Michael's shield. Over "St. Anthony preaching to the fishes" there was at one time some controversy. The panel showed "three yellow fishes, ranged in order side by side, listening attentively apparently to a sermon preached to them by one in a red tunic and cap and blue mantle, but without nimbus."* James Fowler argued that this figure represented St. Anthony, but failed to explain away a Franciscan friar in such a costume and the absence of the nimbus. Westlake, a greater authority than Fowler, writes thus: "Pl XXXII.c is a figure which has been the subject of our article by Mr. Fowler in the *Proceedings of the Society of*

*Communication by James Fowler to *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London*. Vol. VII, 2nd S: (1882), pp. 136 f. The panel is illustrated on p. 137.



Figures of St. Blaize and the Archangel Michael, formerly in Blythburgh Church. From water colours by Hamlet Watling.

Antiquaries. In the drawing which Mr. Watling sent to him, the figure appears with three fish stuck on to the end of his finger, and the legs of a bird upon them. The fish gave Mr. Fowler the notion that this was St. Anthony, the Franciscan, preaching to the fishes. I had the privilege of seeing Mr. Fowler's contribution in MS., and to this title I at that time objected; that the figure was draped as a Prophet, and had no attribute whatever of St. Anthony! What is more, I do not now think the fish belonged to the figure. In the drawing which I have given, also taken from one by Mr. Watling, they are omitted. Anyone, however, who is interested in the question should read Mr. Fowler's article. Mr. Fowler is one of the most learned and interesting writers upon these subjects, but in this case I think his argument is strained beyond reasonable tension. Far more likely is it that it is a figure from a Jesse Tree."* While agreeing with Westlake that the figure represents a prophet (the presence of a portion of a bird strengthens the suggestion that the fishes are interpolated from elsewhere) I doubt whether the figure comes from a Jesse Tree. It seems to me more likely that it comes from a series representing the ancestry of our Lord, such as still remains in the windows of the south aisle at Combs.

It does not seem likely that there would have been two figures of Anthony, Abbot, side by side. The T staff (rather than "cross") is an usual emblem for him to hold,† but I cannot find that the staff with the head at the top is an emblem appropriate to St. Anthony. Perhaps the head was an interpolation from elsewhere. Nevertheless, Watling must have had some reason for considering the figure to represent this saint.

*N. H. J. Westlake, *A History of Design in Painted Glass*, Vol. III, pp. 46-47.

†According to Husenbeth, *Emblems of Saints* (3rd Ed., 1882), p. 18, there were other figures of St. Anthony in Norfolk and Suffolk, but his list is not satisfactory. He notes the figure in glass at Great Hautbois, Norfolk; another at "Blythorpe." I can find no such place and take him to mean Blyford in Suffolk; another at Sparham, Norfolk. The figures do not now exist in any of these churches. He is to be seen on the screen at Westhall, Suffolk, in alabaster at East Rudham and on a screen panel at Tacolneston—these two places being in Norfolk.

To these names Dr. M. R. James adds the names of popes—Stephen, Eleutherius, Paul and Marcus.* Of these the first three are to be seen (see "Window 4" below), but I could not find Marcus.

Before passing on to what may be seen in the windows to-day, we may note that Watling made a water colour of St. Jude holding a boat as his emblem, and pencil sketches of St. Andrew, the two figures of St. Anthony and that of St. Boniface of Dunwich. The colours are noted.

To examine the glass as it now remains in the windows of the church we may begin at the east end of the north aisle and proceed westwards, omitting the windows that now contain only plain glass.

Window 1. Two tracery lights contain figures dressed in blue and white robes. Another has a bearded man mixed up with fragments. Another has fragments only.

Window 2. Tracery lights. (i). A headless bishop with crosier. (ii). A young bishop with crosier and book. (iii, iv, v). Very fragmentary remains of ecclesiastics. (vi). The greater part of a figure of a female saint. Main lights. In the heads of these lights are angels done in yellow stain, with wings stained with bands of white and yellow (of a pronounced orange colour). They are set upon blue and pink backgrounds.†

Window 3. A roundel, done in yellow stain, set upon blue glass.

Window 4. The top row of tracery lights contain formal foliage done in white glass and black enamel, and a mitred figure with a fragment of an inscription, *Step* . . . A third window has a shield of the Holy Trinity.‡ The next row has figures as follows: (i). A

**Suffolk and Norfolk*, p. 105.

†The use of this pale red colour was of necessity and not of choice. No ruby glass was obtainable from the Continent owing to the war which broke out between England and the Hanseatic League in 1468. See J. A. Knowles, "The Source of the Coloured Glass used in Medieval Stained Glass Windows," *Glass*, Vol. III, No. 5 (April, 1926), pp. 201 ff. This manganese pink glass is to be seen in a number of Norfolk churches, e.g., Wiggenhall St. Mary Magdalen, Emneth, Stratton Strawless, West Rudham and Outwell.

‡Illustrated in *Emblems of Saints*, Appendix II, p. 3.

fragmentary bishop, . . . *teri epc.* (ii). *Sc. paulus epc.* (iii). An angel. (iv). A bishop in a very fragmentary state; . . . *lmus.* (v). *S. felix.* The tops of the main lights have demi-figures of angels on blue and pink backgrounds.

Window 5. One tracery light has fragments including small angels playing upon lutes: also green drapery from a larger figure.

Window 6. Tracery lights. (i) and (iv). Remains of figures of ecclesiastics once set below canopies. (vi). Blue drapery and head of an apostle. Main lights. (i). Angel with a shield of arms, *azure, a bend or,* for Scrope. (ii). A canopy top. (iii). Angel with a shield of arms, *argent, a fesse between five cross crosslets, gules* for Bocking.*

Window 7. Contains many fragments including angels and a shield of arms, *argent, a chevron azure,* for Swillington.

There are also fragments of glass in the tracery lights of the easternmost window in the south clerestory of the chancel.

Where was the glass painted? I believe it—or what we see of it now—to have originated in King's Lynn, where there was a flourishing school of glass-painting from the end of the thirteenth century onwards. I believe, also, that we have left, in certain churches in the Lynn district, and in one Norwich church, glass from the same workshop and of about the same date. In support of this theory I may quote from a previous paper of mine upon the subject.† There are in the churches of Wiggenhall St. Mary Magdalen and Sandringham extensive remains of a series of most uncommon saints set in the tracery lights. Keyser has described both these series fully, if not quite accurately.‡ At Wiggen-

*Whose arms are also held by an angel in the nave roof.

† "Schools of Glass-Painting in King's Lynn and Norwich in the Middle Ages." *Journal of British Soc. Master Glass-Painters*, Vol. V, No. 1 (April, 1933), pp. 4 ff.

‡ "Notes on Some Fifteenth Century Glass in the Church of Wiggenhall St. Mary Magdalene," *Norfolk Archaeology*, Vol. XVI (1907), pp. 306-19, Plates 5-12. "Notes on Some Ancient Glass in Sandringham Church, Norfolk," *ibid.*, Vol. XIX (1916), pp. 122-32, Plates 1-3.

hall are such rare saints as St. Samson, St. Hippolytus (*Scs ipolts*), St. Medard (*Scs medardar*), St. Victor and St. Calixtus (*Scs Kalixtt*) as well as many others. At Sandringham, together with more usual saints, occur *Sc' Ffrauncesc'* and *Sca Erasmu*.* The Wiggshall glass appears to have been given to the church by Isabel de Ingaldesthorp about 1480.

Closely allied to these figures are those of ecclesiastics, including SS. Thomas of Canterbury, Blaize and Wilfrid in the west window of Harpley church. Still more closely connected are the figures at Blythburgh. G. A. King, in a paper on the glass in St. Peter Hungate, Norwich, drew attention to the similarity between the figures at St. Peter Hungate and Blythburgh: "The last-mentioned Patriarch stands with hands somewhat extended, as if in animated conversation, and is an almost exact reproduction of a corresponding figure at Blythburgh."† This last figure is, of course, Watling's and Fowler's "St. Anthony." The "almost exact reproduction" applies also to a series of prophets at Oxborough. There Haggai and *Baruc* wear turbans of the kind seen at Blythburgh and Hungate; the attitude of the figures and the general colouring are unmistakably the same.

Again, Wiggshall and Sandringham have saints not only rare, but some apparently not represented elsewhere, in glass or any other media, in existing medieval art. The figure of St. Pancras at Blythburgh suggests that other rare Saints existed here. At Wiggshall are Popes Leo and Silvester; at Blythburgh, as has been said, Popes Stephen, Eleutherius and Paul. This surely greatly strengthens the theory that the glass in these churches was of the same origin, the more so since, in the realm of painted glass at any rate, by the end of the fifteenth-century subject-matter had become stereotyped. It cannot now be said who had the idea of

*As has been mentioned above, the figure of St. Erasmus was once to be seen in a window at Blythburgh.

†G. A. King, "On the Ancient Stained Glass still remaining in the Church of St. Peter Hungate, Norwich," *Norfolk Archaeology*, Vol. XVI (1907), pp. 205-18.

putting these comparatively obscure saints into the windows of Blythburgh, Wiggshall and Sandringham churches. They seem to follow no known Calendar. Dr. M. R. James has suggested that some chaplain was responsible for the series at Wiggshall. If that is so, then, as I see it, he may have been responsible for the series at Blythburgh and Sandringham as well.