

NOTES

Orford Church in 1706. The Rev. J. F. Williams, F.S.A., of Norwich, has very kindly sent transcripts of two petitions for faculties relating to Orford Church at the beginning of the eighteenth century. They were found in the Bishop's Registry at Norwich on a file of similar documents dating from 1675 to 1723; their number in the file is 54. Mr. Williams says 'The petitions deal with a variety of matters for the carrying out of which a faculty had to be granted by the bishop through his chancellor. Some of the churches seem to have been in a bad state at the end of the seventeenth century and many of the petitions are for permission to sell a bell or two, or the lead off the roof, in order to pay for repair of the tower or bits of the church which had fallen down, or for some other catastrophe. The Orford petition is very much more skilfully drawn up than the majority of the others in the file. The mayor and rector seem to have known a thing or two about this sort of thing.' They certainly used some ingenious and specious arguments to further their cause.

The first petition is dated 28 April 1706:

Whereas the parish church of ye Antient Corporation of Orford being of great extent, viz. 170 feet long and 80 feet broad, is so far decay'd both within and without, not withstanding ye great sums wch. the inhabitants have already expended y'ron, that by reason of the great poverty of ye place are no longer able to support so great a charge as it will of necessity require for attending ye service of God: and moreover the Tower of ye said Church (which is very high and lardge), and which by reason of its scituation near Orford-ness is by all accounted ye most considerable Sea Mark in Europe for avoiding many dangerous sands, upon the decay of wch. ye Navigation to Newcastle, and between England and Holland and to all ye Northern parts of ye world be very much endangered and obstructed, and ye said Tower being now decay'd on ye top and crack'd half way down does require speedy care and great expence, to repair and strengthen it wch. the Inhabitants are unable to perform without some farther assistance, it requiring at least ye sum of 500 pounds and upwards for both Church and Tower.

The inhabitants then petition the bishop's assistance and advice, in so good and necessary a work both for the service of God and also for ye publique benefit of this Realm and

all Europe in respect of its Navigation wch. cannot be done by ourselves without some publique assistance joynd with our own endeavours.

Estimates from a plumber, a carpenter and a mason are attached to this.

There is another petition dated 23 May 1708, asking leave 'to demolish ye remains of our old ruinous chancell,' adding 'if it does not consist with your Lordship's affairs to honour this poor and ancient Corporation with a visit, we desire you would be pleased forthwith to grant a Commission to settle what is proper to be done that no opportunity of ye season may be lost. As to other particulars we refer your Lordship to our Rector, Mr. Alsop who waits on you to receive your final instructions and resolutions.'

The petition bears the seal of the Corporation, and is signed by the mayor, the rector, L. Blois and three others. Attached to it is a paper headed, 'Some reasons why the ruinous remains of Orford chancell may be demolished.' It is arranged under three heads, 1. Usefulness, 2. Ornament, and 3. Injuring the dead.

1. *As to Use.* It is wholly useless to any purpose whatsoever for
 - (1) the communion table can not be placed there where ye Minister can neither be seen nor heard by half ye congregation.
 - (2) It can not be converted to any other publique use for ye Church or Town.
2. *As to Ornament.* Such a dark dirty place can add no ornament to ye inside, and as to ye outward ornament it gives none, but is most certainly a deformity because it is a ruinous imperfect building consisting of 2 inside walls, or rather 2 Rows of pillars fill'd up with rubbish, and some old stone irregularly set together. Besides a low Chancel at ye end of a Church is no where found but in ye old Gothique parish churches, for all ye Modern Churches of London, Holland and other parts of Europe, both papist and Protestant are all of ye same height from end to end without any low projection for a Chancell, as are ye 2 best Churches in Xtiendom, St. Paul's at London, and St. Peter's at Rome.
3. *Neither is it an injury to ye Dead.* For there is only one very small Monument and 2 grave stones, which may be placed in ye church with an additionall inscription of their being remov'd, or else ye grave stones may be raised into Tombes in ye same place.

The Advantages and conveniences are many.

1. Hereby will be gained a great quantity of Lead, together with Stone for many uses for ye church and Tower, and save about 150 *li.* . . .
2. Hereby will be given an opportunity for an East Window to enlighten the body of ye church, under wch. ye Communion table may be decently and conveniently placed. Or a small part or nich of ye chancel may be reserved in wch (after ye manner of an Alcove) the Communion table may be placed.

It is then pointed out that 'the demolishing ye remains of ye chancell is no kindness to ye present incumbent, it being sufficiently repair'd for his time.'

Then follows a list of 'things necessary to be done to Orford church and Tower, agreed on by ye Trustees and Mr. Lamb, surveyor, and severall workmen.' This includes 'a new communion Table railed in, with an Alter peice' and a suggestion that the church should be new seated throughout.

There is also a paper giving details of the articles to be inquired into by the Commissioners—for the bishop evidently appointed a Commission to look into the matter. Among other things they report that a Brief will probably bring in £450. And they agree that 'the Chancell is most certainly a darke ruinous, indecent building, wholly useless, and is not Represented worse than it is.'

The six commissioners who sign are—'Edmund Palmer, vicar of Rendham, John Barker, gent. of Campsey Ash, Frederick Keller, rector of Ike, James Carter, rector of Melton, Thomas Hammond, gent. of Ufford, and Philip Candler, rector of Hollesly.'

The following is an extract from *Oxford-nigh-the-Seas*, published in 1935 by Dr. Roberts, who was then rector's warden. The book is now out of print and the extract has been kindly furnished by the present rector's warden, Major J. Steuart-Gratton,

The decayed condition into which a sacred edifice might be allowed to fall in the closing years of the seventeenth century, even when there were both rector and curate as officiating ministers, is shown by the record of the Arch-deacon's visitation in 1686:—'Tenor bell broken, Leads decayed; rain in several places. Floor of south aisle sunk. Great bell split. Seat at south side, belonging to Gedgrave, required to be new paved and mended. Partition of church and chancel over the King's arms (affixed 1676) decayed. South side of churchyard walls in ruins. . . ' ¹ When the Rev. Josiah Alsop became rector in 1700, it was natural that he

¹ A fragment of the 1686 visitation book, including the Orford entry, is in the East Suffolk Record Office (50/2/154.1).

should turn his attention to the remedying of the state of affairs which he found awaiting him and sought how he might get together the necessary money for some kind of restoration. He appears to have obtained a 'brief' for appealing to neighbouring parishes for assistance, and from Westerfield in 1707, he did get two shillings and eightpence, and possibly similar or larger sums elsewhere.²

It was at this time that the Norman choir was finally abandoned, the Rev. Francis Mason's monument (1599-1621) brought in and placed in its present situation, with a suitable inscription below, though misleading as to the original dates,³ and the interior of the church confined to its present compass. It is to the operations during Mr. Alsop's incumbency that two lists 'Benefactors to the seats and inward ornaments of this Church' now attached to the south wall on either side of the south door, belong.

It is evident, therefore, that the fine Norman chancel or choir was abandoned sometime between 1708 and 1720 (when the Mason monument was set up in its present position). Luckily, in spite of the second petition, it was not demolished and the arcades still remain, although much mutilated. Some idea of what they once looked like can be gathered from Plate XXVIII, which is from a drawing by Isaac Johnson in 1788. They exhibit what is generally considered to be some of the richest 12th century work in the country, the spirals and other decorations on the pillars, carved in high relief, being almost unique.⁴ Whether or not the tower was repaired as a result of these petitions, it finally collapsed in 1830 and has never been rebuilt. It is impossible to say what has been the effect of this upon 'ye Navigation to all ye Northern parts of ye world'.

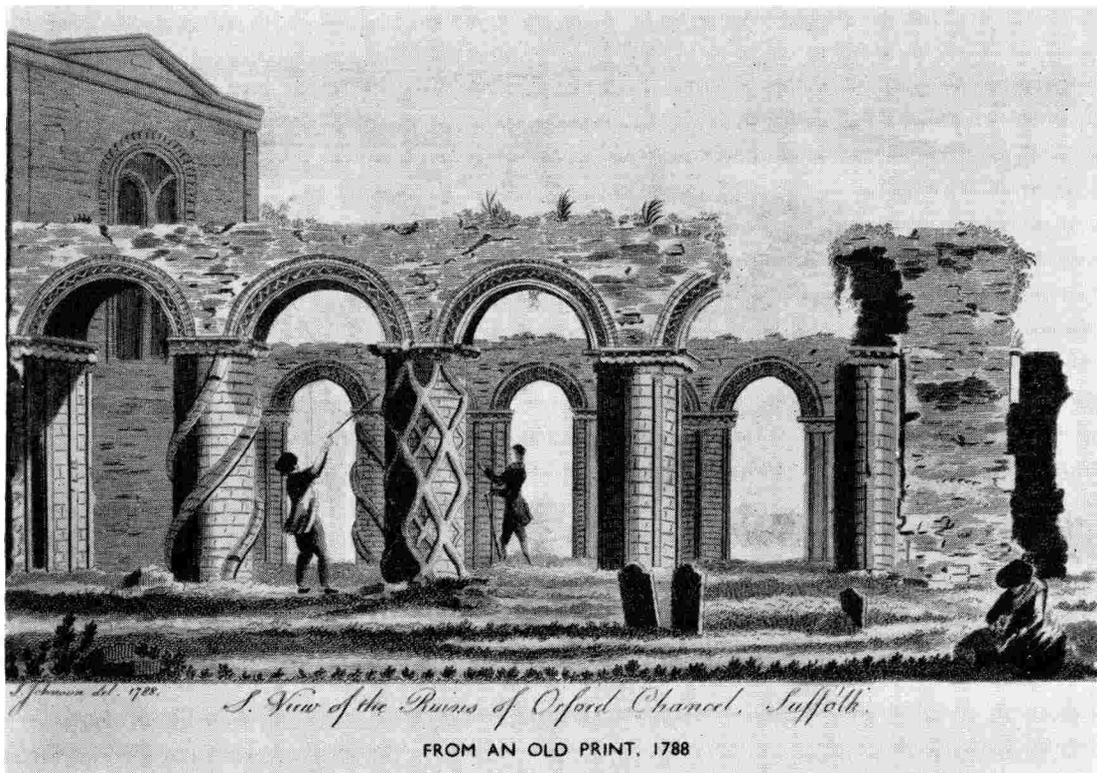
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² Mr. Williams has come across references to a brief for Orford in a Hampshire parish, where 7/8 was collected, and at Syderstone, Norfolk, where it was only 6d. Both were in 1707.

³ The inscription referred to is on a tablet immediately below the monument and reads 'In Justice to ye memory of so great a man who was Rector here 80 years and above 110 years old. This Monument was removed from ye ruinous Chancel and repair'd and set up here at ye charge of ye present incumbent JOSIAS ALSOP B:D Anno 1720'. In Grose's *Antiquities*, 1786, is the following comment, 'In this inscription there are two great mistakes, one respecting the age and the other the time that Mr. Mason held the Rectory of Orford. In Wood's *Athenae Oxoniensis* there is an account of him; he is there said to have been born in 1566 and made Rector of Orford Anno 1597. Now, according to the Monument, he died in the year 1621, which on reckoning makes his age only 55 and his Incumbency 24 years; by what means these errors crept in seem unaccountable'.—J.S.G.

⁴ For an account of the Norman work at Orford, see *Archaeologia*, xii, 141, 168. The chancel was excavated about 1932 and an account will be found in *Ant. Journ.*, xiv. See also *Arch. Journ.*, cviii, 148; *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, v, 122 and x, 87.

PLATE XXVIII



S. View of the Ruins of Oxford Chancel, Suffolk.

FROM AN OLD PRINT, 1788