

THE TURNOUR CHAPEL AT LITTLE WRATTING

By C. E. WELCH

There is in the County Record Office at Chichester a small group of letters which give the details of the destruction of the Turnour chapel in Little Wrattling Church at the beginning of the eighteenth century. They are amongst the letters of Sir Edward Turnour which Lord Winterton deposited there some years ago.¹ The letters were written to Sir Edward Turnour by the incumbent of Little Wrattling, Thomas Rant, and by James Macro² of Blunts Hall, Sir Edward's tenant. Rant had been given the benefice by Sir Edward towards the end of the seventeenth century on condition that he resided on the benefice. Such a condition is somewhat surprising at this period when ecclesiastical discipline was weakening and non-residence was not yet frowned on, but it is not uncharitable to suppose that Rant acted as an unpaid agent for the Turnour estates in the district. Sir Edward spent most of his time in London at his chambers in the Middle Temple and many of Rant's letters are concerned with the payment of taxes, the felling of timber and similar estate matters. However when in 1692 Rant was offered the rectory of Sturmer in Essex 'but two miles distant at the furthest from Wrattling', Sir Edward allowed him to dispense with his promise so far as to obtain a licence to hold it in plurality with Little Wrattling.³ Less is known of James Macro who appears to have been a fairly prosperous farmer with only a moderate education.

From the present appearance of Little Wrattling church and these letters it seems fairly certain that the Turnour chapel stood to the north of the chancel.⁴ Inside the north wall of the chancel there are still signs of an arch which led to the chapel. The outside wall is covered with shingle which makes it impossible to see anything, but the buttress at the north-east corner of the nave has been repaired with bricks of approximately this period and probably formed part of the west wall of the chapel. James Macro measured it just before it was pulled down and found it 'from East to weste 24 foote and from Sowth to North 13 foote'.⁵ Because of Sir Edward's

¹ I am most grateful to Lord Winterton who has allowed me to use these letters.

² It seems certain that he was a member of the family of Macro of Bury St. Edmunds and Norton (see *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, vol. II, p. 281 and vol. III, p. 375). In the letters, however, the name is spelt indiscriminately 'Macro' and 'Marco'; in this paper the former spelling has been used throughout.

³ Turnour letter, no. 930.

⁴ My thanks are due to Mr. & Mrs. A. B. Clarke for their hospitality and advice when I visited the church.

⁵ Turnour letter, no. 944.

absence from the village the chapel had not been used for many years and had fallen into considerable decay. In one of the earliest letters Rant reveals that it had already been proposed to pull it down—‘If you please to recollect with your self I believe you will remember that I some years since told you that nothing could be done in relation to pulling down your Chappel without a Petition to the Bishop and then you was utterly against it because it was Dr. Moor, which I hope you will excuse my being supinely careless in the business of your Chappel.’⁶ John Moore had been Bishop of Norwich (in which diocese Little Wratting then was) since 1691, but in 1707 he was translated to Ely. His successor was Charles Trimnell who was consecrated in February 1707/8, but did not begin his primary visitation of his diocese until the following year. The disrepair of the chapel was probably presented at this visitation by the churchwardens as it is unlikely that Rant would have risked Sir Edward’s wrath by doing so. Already presentment at the bishop’s visitation was not the weapon that it had been less than a century ago, and apathetic incumbents and churchwardens usually avoided trouble by presenting ‘omnia bene’. However on this occasion the chapel was presented and the bishop ordered that it must be repaired. On 2 August 1709 Thomas Rant wrote the first letter about this matter while the bishop was still visiting Suffolk. ‘On the 20th ult. I waited on the Lord Bishop of Norwich and his Chancellor at Bury, and did accordingly acquaint the Latter with what Mr. Holland told me you desired, viz. that leave might be granted for the demollishing of your Chappel wholly, He told me he did not doubt but his Lordship would grant you leave upon your Petition to him provided the Commissioners He appointed to veiw it (which are to be neighbouring Clergy men) approved of its pulling down and that nothing can be done in the matter but by this way of proceeding except by repairing of it which in the mean time they have enjoyn’d Mr Macro forthwith to go about, who is very uneasie at it.’⁷

Sir Edward evidently replied that he would petition for a faculty to pull down the chapel because Rant’s next letter is concerned with the exact form for the petition. ‘I have made it my business to advise and consult with my Neighbours about the usual form of a Petition and can get but very little information about it we havinge not had the like case in our neighbourhood, but if the Petition be accepted the Charge of a Faculty upon yt will be three pounds or thereabouts. The Form you will find on the other side, the stateing the case is left to your Worship who knowes better what to incert than any body else which is all I can possibly do in this affair at present.’⁸ It is not surprising that

⁶ *ibid.*, no. 936.

⁷ *ibid.*, no. 935.

⁸ *ibid.*, no. 936.

Rant's fellow clergymen were unable to assist him with the form of the petition since the practice of obtaining faculties for major structural alterations to churches appears to have developed in England only some twenty or thirty years previously.⁹ The proper course would have been for Rant to have engaged the services of a proctor, the equivalent of a solicitor in the ecclesiastical courts, but this would undoubtedly have cost several pounds more—more than Sir Edward was prepared to pay. Nothing more happened for two months and Sir Edward took no steps to complete his petition, probably hoping that the bishop, like his predecessor, would let the matter drop. But on 5 November James Macro wrote to him to say that the bishop's chancellor was now at Bury St. Edmunds to dispose of those matters left over from the visitation. 'I shew him your Letter', Macro writes, 'and tould him you were willing to relinquish all maner of claime to it. He said the question was whether it ever did belong to or was repaired by your Family or not, which you must, if you please appeare by a Procter and trye . . . Now I have since inquired whether it has been repaired by any of your family and I find by Mr. Smyth and Argent the Carpenter that it was repaired by my Lady Turner your Mother, soe that I feare if you trye it it will goe against you and if you reparaire it it will cost a great deal of money . . . Sir I humbly beg your order and directions speedily what to doe for I am very uneasy about it.'¹⁰ Macro, having been cited to appear in the court at Norwich in three weeks time, was so uneasy that he wrote again on 22 November repeating the information and asking for a speedy answer.¹¹ Although Macro said he was threatened to be 'excomungate out of the Church',¹² nothing happened until the following February when he was again 'in truble a bought the Chapel which you rote to me that I should have no more . . . Dockter Burull doe testifie that a bought 52 years ago the Lord Turner sate thare when he came to Church in that time of hes and sence it is prued thefore in all prability the Chapel do belong to your Worship and if you dont be plased to take some spedy care I must quite your farme for I shall bee rente in peeses.'¹³

This long delay is partly accounted for by the Christmas vacation when the chancellor did not sit and partly by Macro's appearances in court, for so long as it appeared likely that something would be done the judge would be quite content to adjourn the matter from court day to court day. But Macro's threat to leave his farm finally moved Sir Edward and the completed petition was sent down to Thomas Rant to get it signed by all the farmers in the parish. All signed except 'your Tenant Wade,

⁹ At least that is the period at which records of faculties begin to be preserved in England. There is no trace of a regular system of faculties before 1660.

¹⁰ Turnour letter, no. 942.

¹¹ *ibid.*, no. 943.

¹² *ibid.*, no. 944.

¹³ *ibid.*, no. 946.

who was gone to his other Farm. I thought it expedient not to stay for him not knowing when He would return, and therefore I ventured to set his hand, besides he has divers times before intimated to me when I have been discorsing with him upon this occasion his willingness to comply as the rest of his neighbours did. I believe we should not have had one word in opposition had not the Chancellor put them to between 30 and 40 shillings Charges the weeks before, but how ever they have now consented and set every man his hand as you will find by the enclosed, and humbly beg the favour of you, that you will take all possible Care that the Chancellor or his Officers may with all speed be prevented from proceeding against us which He menaces us with if he does not hear of your Intentions in a very short time.¹⁴ At the end of this letter Rant begged the materials of the chapel to use in rebuilding the chancel, the cost of which would fall on him as incumbent. He argued that 'the Chappel has in a great Measure been the Cause of the Decay of the Chancel, the Roofe is so ruinated that it must be wholly taken off and a new one set up. There is not one Spar that will do again.'

Macro's last appearance in this correspondence in March 1710 expresses the hope 'that you have settled the chapel and the Corte at Clare that I may have no more truble in that Case.'¹⁵ On 21 April the bishop's commission to certain neighbouring clergymen was issued and Rant with remarkable speed managed to get them all at Little Wratting on the 25th and forwarded their favourable certificate to the chancellor 'by the first opportunity'. The chancellor was in no hurry and it was not until the end of June that he sent the faculty to pull down the chapel and sell the cracked bells to pay for the repair of the chancel.¹⁶ This last was the usual practice in the eighteenth century when church bells were not considered as important as they are now. Rant must have set to work almost immediately for on 1 August he could write that the chapel 'is almost down, the Partition Wall is almost built up again and we are a goeing on as fast as we can and hope to finish according to our injunctions, which is to be by Michaelmas, but in the meantime we are in hopes you will be pleased to honour us with your Company.'¹⁷ It would be pleasant to end with this letter, but there is still one more left, undated but presumably later. Sir Edward Turnour had failed to pay some debt to Rant—possibly the fees of the chancellor's court. The letter refers to Rant's distant kinship to the Turnours, recites the assistance he has always given to Sir Edward, and concludes, 'Pray Sir consider this and then if I should run about the streets especially when I see your selfe it may not be wounded at, though I thanke God I am not yet madd notwithstanding this usage is enough to make me soe, but restless I must be till satisfaction is made to those it is due, I am, Sir, Your Injured Friend, Tho: Rant'.¹⁸

¹⁴ *ibid.*, no. 938.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, no. 940.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, no. 947.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, no. 939.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, no. 941.