

# RECENT DISCOVERIES AT ST STEPHEN'S CHURCH, IPSWICH: THE WIMBILL CHANCEL AND THE RUSH-ALVARD CHAPEL

by DIARMAID MACCULLOCH, M.A., PH.D., F.S.A. and JOHN BLATCHLY, M.A., PH.D., F.S.A.  
*with architectural drawings by BIRKIN HAWARD, O.B.E., F.R.I.B.A.*

ST STEPHEN'S IS the smallest of the twelve remaining medieval churches in Ipswich; its scale and plan would grace a country churchyard. Redundant since 1978, the building, unfurnished save for the chancel, is cared for by the Ipswich Historic Churches Trust. If there is any slight compensation for churches becoming redundant, it is the opportunity that may arise for archaeological and historical investigation. The unearthing here of a single grave slab, long since robbed of its brasses, has led us to discover who were the influential families in the parish in early Tudor times, and what additions they made to the fabric and furnishings of the church.

Although a church of St Stephen is mentioned in Domesday, the present building appears all to be in the Perpendicular and Tudor styles. Recent shallow excavation within the nave by members of the Suffolk Archaeological Unit directed by Keith Wade disclosed the foundations of a wall about four feet north of the arcade of the south aisle (Fig 15). Mr Wade has suggested that the nave of the Norman church could have extended south across the present south aisle from the newly discovered wall, in which case the south porch may stand where the early tower stood.

Whether or not this is so, a larger church was built in the 14th or 15th century with its north wall some twenty feet north of the recently excavated wall. A new chancel was ordered by William Wimbill when he made his will in 1485.<sup>1</sup> Son of Robert Wimbill, Notary Publick, who has two brasses at St Mary-le-Tower church, he held borough office from 1478 to 1487, the year in which the will was proved. He was M.P. for Ipswich in the Parliament of 1485. Every church and religious house in the town was remembered in his will, but, having included St Stephen in the commendation of his soul, and directed burial 'in the middys' of the chancel of St Stephen's, he willed that his executors 'do make a newe chancell to the seyd church with myn own propre goods and kover it also'. The church was also to have his 'grayle, processionary and manuell', and he left £5 for a secular priest, not beneficed, to sing masses there for his and other specified souls for five years. The Tower church was remembered in gifts, one to gild 'the chief image of Our Lady in the chancel' there, and 40s. towards the making of a new porch. Wimbill's widow Anne, daughter of John Rever or Rivers, bailiff in 1475, had a brother Augustine, aptly named to become later successively Prior of Woodbridge and Butley, both Augustinian. Augustine was left 40s. and Butley 10 marks.

Anne Wimbill was not long widowed, for she soon married another prominent Ipswich citizen, Thomas Alvard, who was twice bailiff, once in the year of his death, and twice M.P. Acceptance of the provision that he and Thomas Baldry (Wimbill's father-in-law and joint executor) would sit in the 1503 Parliament without wages must have made them popular with the burgesses. In the same year Alvard's status was confirmed by his inclusion among the handful of leading townsmen who acted as feoffees for the great merchant Edmund Dandy.<sup>2</sup> Alvard's fondness for St Stephen's church shows in his will,<sup>3</sup> for he wished to be buried there 'before the image of Our Lady'. He also provided for a four year chantry service for himself and a variety of friends and relations, and made provision for a blue velvet vestment for the church, together with a new tabernacle for the image of the patron saint 'to sett theryn Seynt Stephen lyke unto the tabernakill wherin our lady stand inne'.

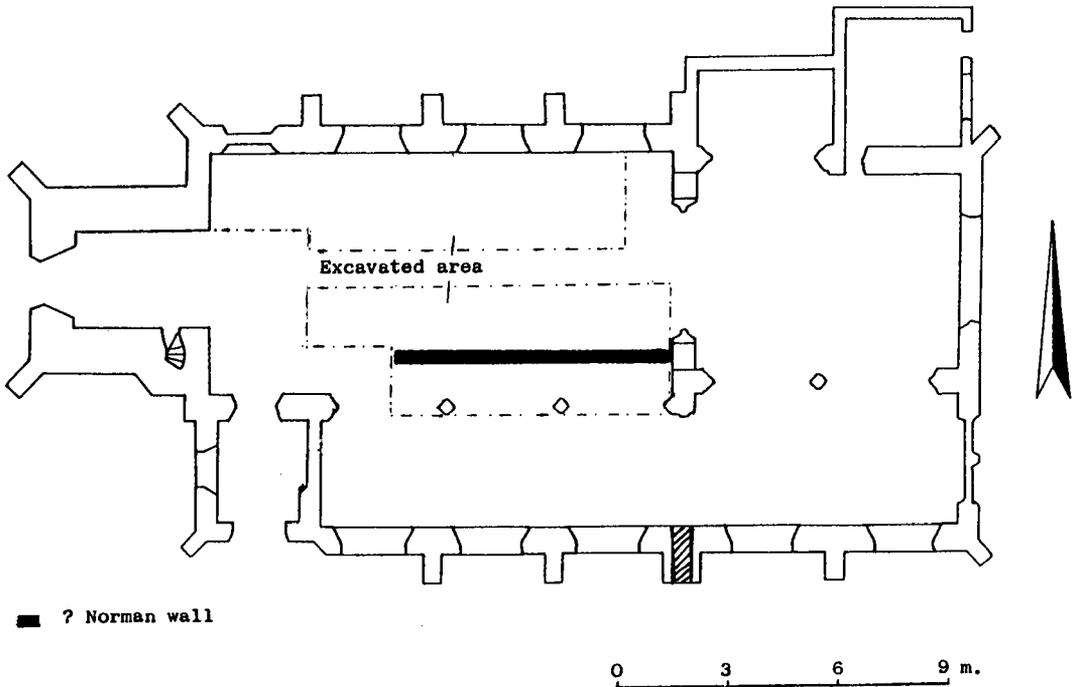


FIG. 15 — Ground plan of St Stephen's church.

During reflooring operations in the church in 1985, a softish grey-brown stone slab containing matrices of brasses of *c.* 1500 was found buried about eight inches below floor level in the eastern extension of the south aisle (Fig. 16). As the church was aisleless at that date, this can hardly be the original situation of the memorial, which turns out to have been made for Thomas Alvard sometime after his death in 1504, depicting him, his widow and her first husband Wimbill. Anne was shown wearing a pedimental or a veil head-dress, and all three were in long gowns. From each figure prayer scrolls rose to what appears to have been a representation of the Trinity, and beneath the foot inscription were groups of children, on the dexter side three sons and five daughters, and on the sinister, one of each. Four shields at the corners of the slab completed the composition. The long lost inscription is recorded as a footnote (note C) to shield 90 on the Dandy pedigree<sup>4</sup> made *c.* 1600 and authenticated by Ralph Brooke, York Herald:

This epitaphe is upon a verie faire gravestone in the p'rish of S<sup>t</sup> Stephen in Ipswich: viz' Of your charitie prairie for the soules of Thomas Alvard & William Wimbill late husbands of Anne Alvard which Thomas deceased the vj day of December m.v<sup>c</sup>iiij.

The sinister figure was Wimbill, by whom Anne had a daughter, and a son Thomas whose daughters Christian and Thomasin were the sole survivors of that family when Anne's son Thomas Alvard the younger made his will<sup>5</sup> in 1535. Christian was at the time one of Alvard's servants. The dexter was Thomas Alvard the elder, and the eight children (including Thomas the younger) the fruits of Anne's second marriage.

Before 1509 Anne was married for the third time, to Thomas Rush, who must have had a daughter by an earlier unrecorded marriage, for Thomas Alvard the younger married one to

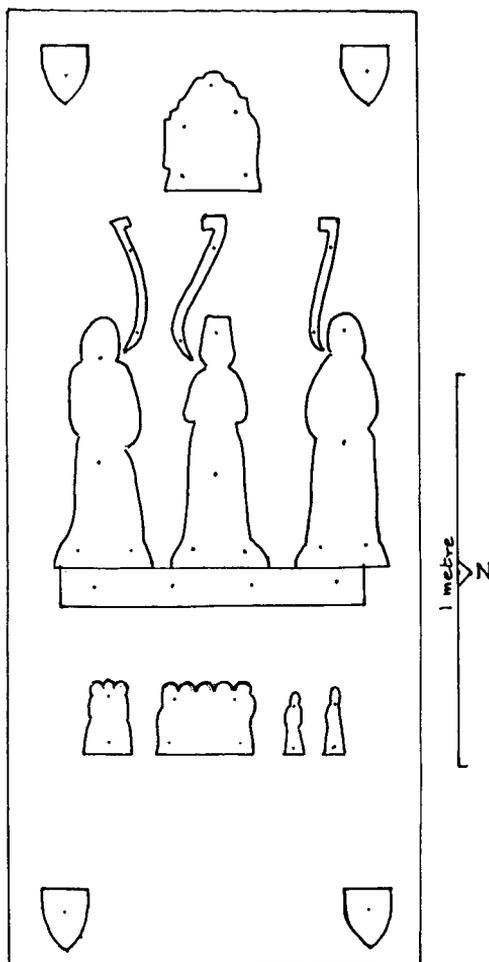


FIG. 16 — The Alvard-Rivers-Wimbill indent, 1504.

become Rush's son-in-law and step-son. Thomas Rush and Thomas Alvard, thus closely related, had a host of other concerns in common, both in London and Suffolk, and to crown all else they went to Westminster as joint representatives of the borough in 1534, but Alvard died the following year and Rush only two years later. By then there was a south aisle at St Stephen's and a chapel at its east end to serve the family as a place of burial. Rush certainly built the latter, and in all probability the former also, for the arcades replacing the south walls of the nave and chancel differ only in certain vertical dimensions. The width of the arch openings and the mouldings are so similar that one scale drawing (Fig. 17) serves to illustrate both by superimposition. The pillars are slender for the period but made of a hard stone some have called Purbeck. The pillar bases are bulbous and the capitals top-heavy with fan projections spreading widely to support openings cut in a thick wall.

Outside on the south, the fenestration can be seen to be uniform save for a change in window height between aisle and chapel. The window widths and the tracery details are the same throughout. The South Prospect of the church drawn for John Ogilby's map of Ipswich in

Nave Arcade has 3 bays & chancel 2, both have similar mouldings.

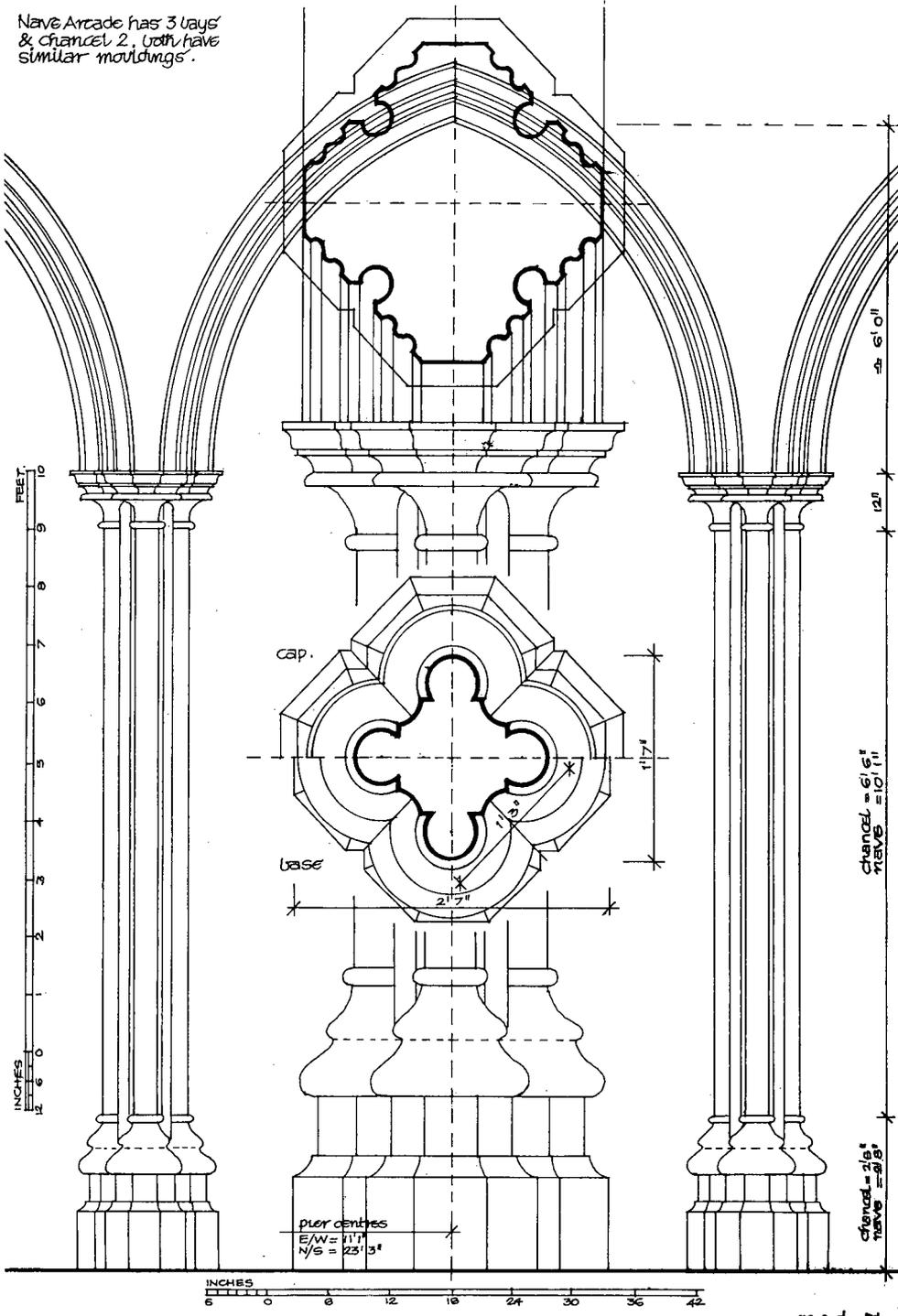


FIG. 17 — The south aisle and chancel arcades superimposed.

m.&d  
22101985

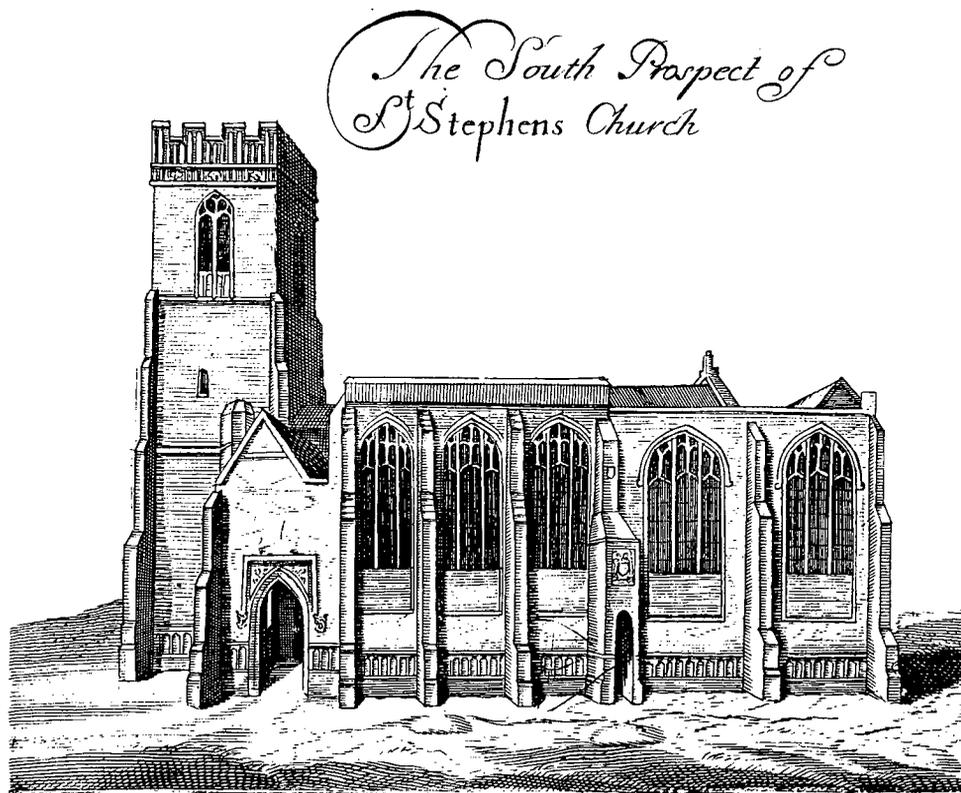
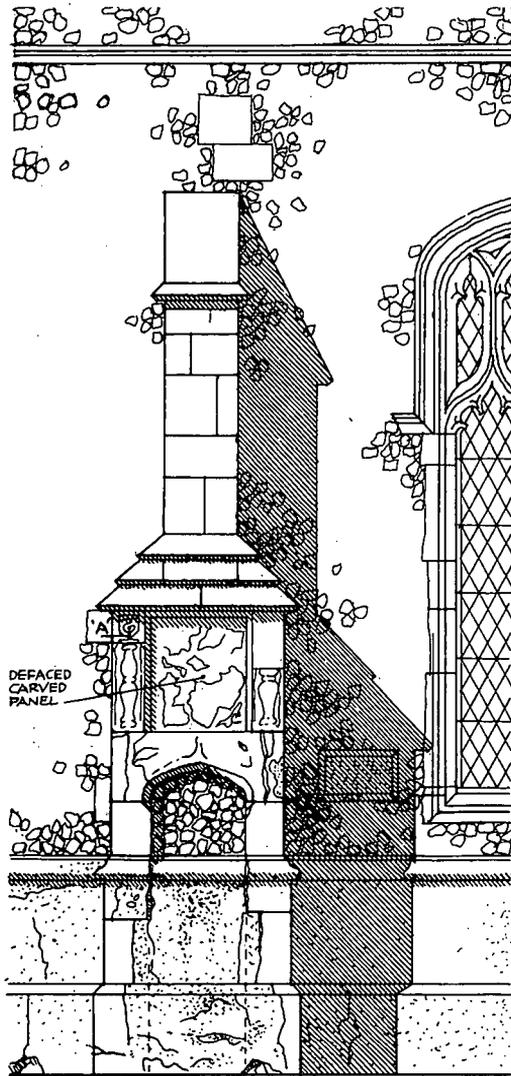


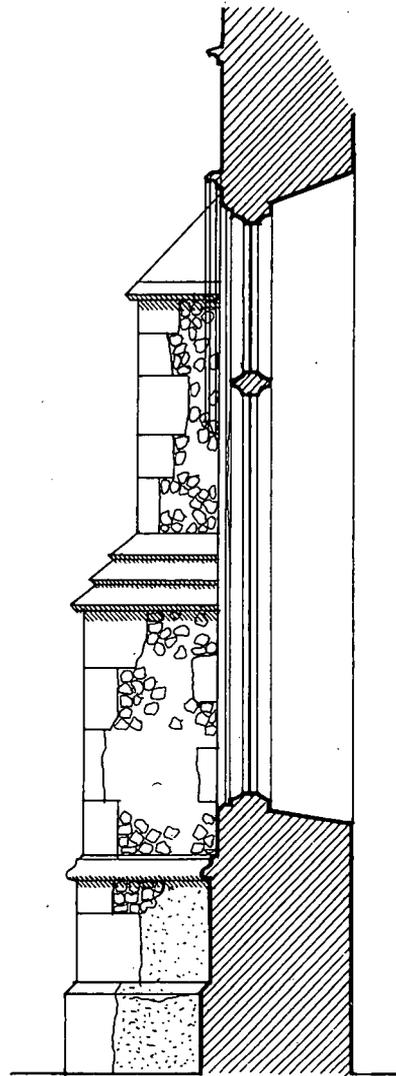
FIG. 18 — The south prospect of St Stephen's church in 1674.

1674 (Fig. 18) shows a narrow doorway cut in an extra-wide buttress which divides the three bays of the aisle from the two of the chapel, and over it a decorative panel. Today the door is blocked and the freestone above devoid of all traces of carving (Fig. 19) save that a single raised rustic Lombardic letter T remains in a shield in the upper dexter corner. The missing sinister shield would have carried an R, for Thomas Rush, for we are told by D. E. Davy<sup>6</sup> that on a visit in August 1810 he found that the panel displayed the arms of *Rush*: On a fesse between three horses [colts] currant, 3 roundels. He noted 'two angels as supporters' and 'Crest a horses head'. This last was probably a wolf's head, and Rush was not, of course, entitled to supporters, but probably hoped that if these angels bore his arms aloft, others might bear his heavily burdened soul to heaven. On the next buttress (to the east presumably) Davy saw the date [A<sup>o</sup>] D<sup>o</sup> 1535. The doorway gave entrance, therefore, both to aisle and chapel, and the latter at least was built in the year that Thomas Alvard the younger died.

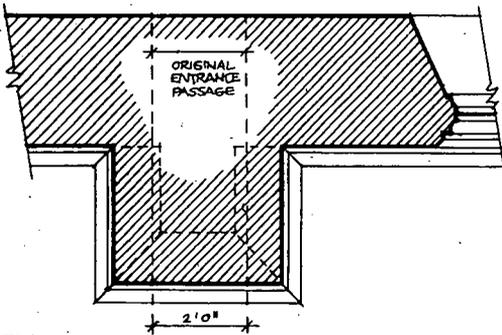
The east window of the chapel consists of four round-headed lights set in a rectangular frame. From inside they appear to be set high up in the wall: outside they are seen to be the upper part of a most unusual composition, for below each pair of lights are two blank rendered panels, the upper smaller than the lower, which latter look most like a pair of doorways, reaching down as they do almost to ground level (Fig. 20). It would be most unusual to have one doorway in the centre of the east wall of a chapel, let alone two. If the panels are blocked doorways of a later period, it is surprising that nothing is shown to the east of the chapel by Ogilby or on Davy's ichnography of 1829. Sir Stephen Glynne, visiting on 10 June 1844 noted



South Elevation



Section



Plan

Shield at 'A'

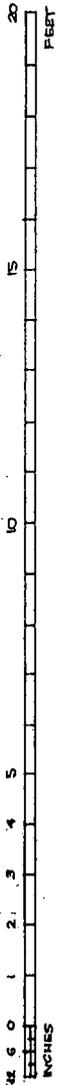


FIG. 19 — The butters doorway to the chapel, 1535.

m&d  
15111985

m&d  
25101985.

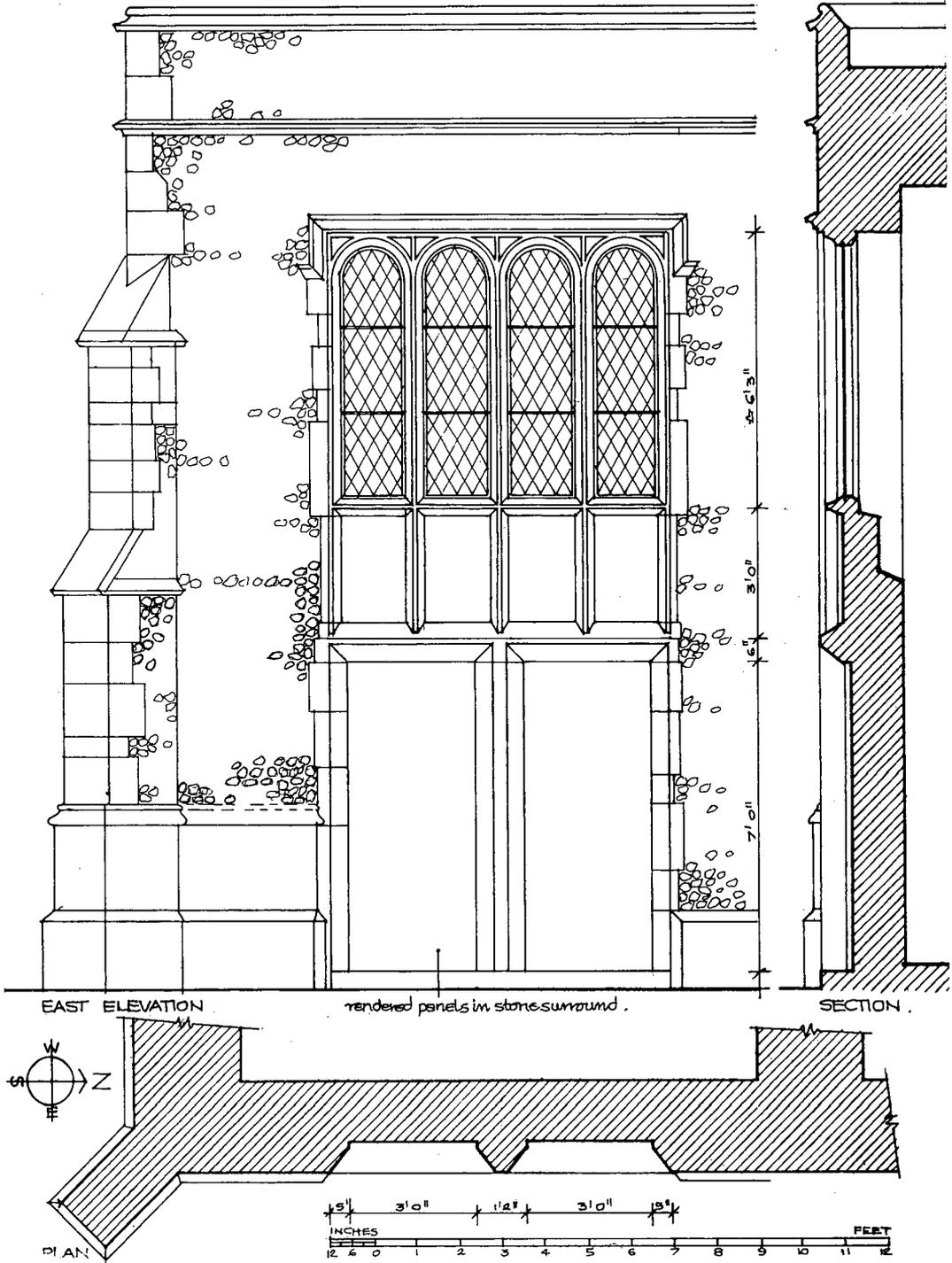


FIG. 20 — The east end of the chapel.

that the window 'at the east end of the aisle is square headed'.<sup>8</sup> Thus the window had its present form before the Victorian restorers began their work; a strong indication of authenticity. Can this all be the outward show of a reredos for the chapel altar? The panels inside and out may have held some sort of decorative stonework; perhaps they were merely painted. The path from Brook Street to St Stephen's Lane is older than Speed's map of 1610, so that Rush may have provided something here by which passers-by might remember him.

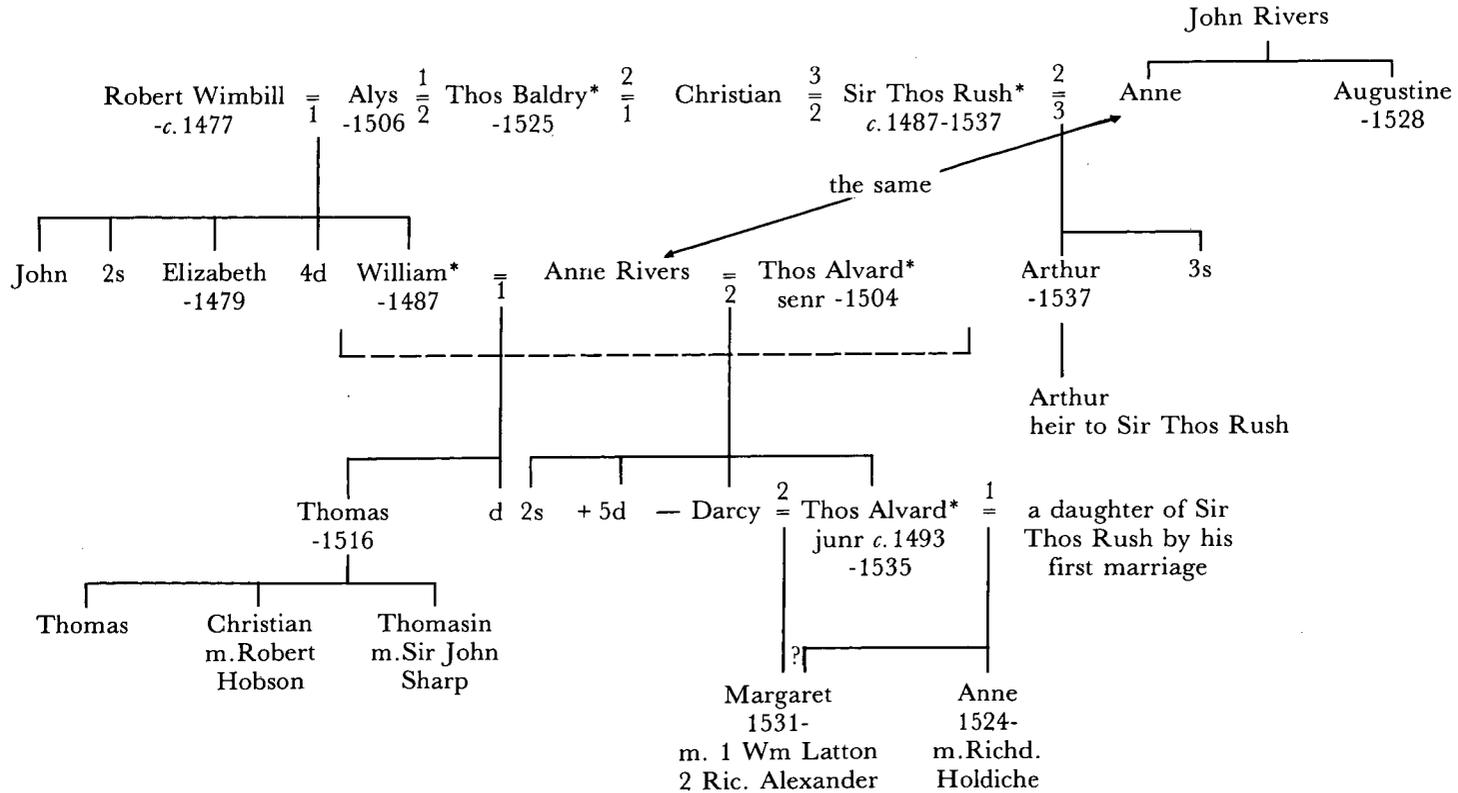
The genealogy of the Alvards and Rushes is complicated enough, but once one starts examining their affairs, a picture of equal complexity emerges, of connections administrative, commercial and official, among layman and cleric, amid town and country. If Anne Rivers' first two husbands had careers which were conventional enough, Thomas Rush's was of quite a different sort. His pedigree's significant silence about his origins indicates that they were obscure; he probably came from Lincolnshire, for his career was founded on his service to the Lincolnshire and Suffolk aristocratic family of the Lords Willoughby of Eresby, who brought several Lincolnshire families to live in south-east Suffolk. He was among Christopher Lord Willoughby's servants when Willoughby made his will in 1499, and he would be William Lord Willoughby's executor in 1526; he made his home at Sudbourne near the Willoughbys' Suffolk headquarters at Orford, and had much to do with the nearby monastery at Butley, which had strong Willoughby connections.<sup>9</sup> It was probably through his influence that his brother-in-law Augustine Rivers moved from being Prior of Woodbridge to become Prior of Butley (a much larger Augustinian house) in 1509; Rush and his son-in-law the younger Thomas Alvard would remain close associates of Rivers' successor, the Sudbourne boy Thomas Manning, last Prior of Butley. Rush was steward of both Woodbridge and Butley Priors in 1535.<sup>10</sup>

Quite early in his career, however, Rush's Willoughby links seem also to have given him an entrée into royal service. He was already described as the King's servant in 1508, when he was made serjeant at arms; in 1513 he was seeing service in the first of Henry VIII's absurd French military adventures, and he would continue to serve in the wars. From 1517 he was enjoying a shilling a day from the Crown for life.<sup>11</sup> He was made a Knight of the Sword at Anne Boleyn's coronation in 1533. It was probably his familiarity with the Court which introduced his stepson and son-in-law Thomas Alvard to the service of Cardinal Wolsey, perhaps appealing to the belated sense of affection for his home town which the Cardinal discovered after his visit of 1517; the Wolsey connection brought them an invaluable future investment in the shape of the friendship of Wolsey's servant Thomas Cromwell. When Wolsey's credit collapsed in 1528-9, Alvard and Cromwell would hasten into the King's service, and they would continue to have a fruitful relationship; Alvard and Rush, with their friend Prior Manning of Butley, would be Cromwell's most valuable contacts in Suffolk during the 1530s.<sup>12</sup>

The way in which Rush and Alvard followed Cromwell into the royal service is neatly illustrated by their involvement in both the creation and the destruction of Cardinal College, Ipswich. Rush served as attorney for the College with William Bamburg (his nephew and Alvard's brother-in-law), and he was naturally prominent among those giving presents to the College on its opening in 1528; equally naturally he was the recipient of College leases.<sup>13</sup> However, when Wolsey's crash came and the lands of his foundation were dispersed to suit the King, Rush and Alvard could offer the royal administration their inside knowledge of Wolsey's affairs in supervising the carve-up, and could also do themselves a good turn in picking up some of the spoils; Rush was on the county commission to enquire into Wolsey's late lands in 1530, and both he and Alvard did well out of the Crown leases in this property.<sup>14</sup> Why not? It was too late to save the College, and their old master the Cardinal was past harming.

Why did Rush decide to make an alliance with the Ipswich Alvards rather than among the Suffolk county gentry? Perhaps his Lincolnshire origins and their obscurity meant that he was not acceptable in county society, and so he chose to make his way into the very separate world of

PEDIGREE OF RUSH AND ALVARD



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ST STEPHEN'S CHURCH IPSWICH

+ Includes:

- Agnes m. 1 Wm Dandy of Cretingham
- 2 — Scott of Earl Soham
- 3 — Webster
- 4 Roger Austen of Soham
- Alice m. Edm. Burwell of Sutton
- Elizabeth m. Wm. Bamburgh of Rendlesham

\* M.P. for Ipswich  
 Numbering of marriages:  
 2 his second  
 3 her third

Triple brass at St Stephen's

the merchants of Ipswich; in the event, both his wives would be the widows of wealthy Ipswich merchants. His marriage to Anne Rivers meant that he inherited the elder Alvard's capital messuage in St Stephen's parish, to which in 1518 he added a garden of the parsonage leased from Thomas Paccarde the incumbent.<sup>15</sup> It would be natural for him to mark his steadily more successful career by building on Alvard's foundation of a temporary four-year chantry service in the church to create a family aisle fit for the dignity of a Knight of the Sword. It is worth noting that he handed over the office of customer at Ipswich to his associate John Valentine (another Wolsey servant) in 1528; presumably by this time he felt that such a local commercial association was not appropriate to his status.<sup>16</sup>

By this time, of course, Rush was fully integrated into the county elite outside the town of Ipswich, having become a county J.P. some time between 1520 and 1524; his son joined him on the Bench in 1534 — a mark of the family's unusual status, for the Crown was normally reluctant to allow father and son to sit together as justices. This was a mark of Cromwell's high trust that the Rushes would serve his and the King's purpose in the county. By now family marriages were beginning to reflect this enhanced status: matches were arranged with Suffolk gentry families with Court links like those of the Rushes themselves, bringing in daughters of Sir Anthony Wingfield and the Duke of Suffolk's servant Nicholas Cutler.

The younger Alvard and Rush were both buried in St Stephen's; Rush's will is lost, but Alvard in his requested a marble stone showing his arms in the church. No doubt the monuments of the Rush and Alvard families were of the highest quality as befitted wealthy and powerful people. That Anne Rivers had a second memorial is indicated by the fifth coat of arms noted by William Tillotson in the church *c.* 1594.<sup>17</sup> Of ten coats the relevant ones are 4 *Alvard*; 5 *Rush* impaling *Rivers*; 7 *Alvard*; 9 *Alvard* impaling two coats: *Rush* and *Darcy*. The ninth coat will presumably have been on Alvard's marble stone; he must have married a Darcy before predeceasing Rush in 1535.

Although Rush seems to have been buried in the aisle which he had so lavishly created, there is no surviving evidence of a memorial for him. This may be because his eldest son Arthur died only a month after him in July 1537 and left a son and heir who can have been little more than a baby; Thomas Cromwell was Sir Thomas's chief executor, and it is likely that the political excitements of the next three years, culminating in his own fall and execution in 1540, distracted him from providing a monument. It may have been in the confusion of his fall that Rush's will disappeared from his papers; there is no evidence of probate.<sup>18</sup> William Bamburgh of Rendlesham, one of the other executors and another old Willoughby servant from Lincolnshire, was preoccupied with disputes over the earlier will of the younger Thomas Alvard (his brother-in-law), and he also became entangled in a dispute with Sir Thomas's grandson Anthony over the administration of Sir Thomas's goods which dragged on as late as 1561, resulting in Bamburgh losing the administration.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile Sir Thomas's second wife Christian was caught up in the years after his death with her own set of testamentary disputes over the will of her first husband, the Ipswich bailiff and M.P. Thomas Baldry; in any case she may not have taken much interest in a chapel associated with Sir Thomas's first wife Anne.<sup>20</sup> With such a combination of mishaps, it is hardly surprising that the Rush chapel at St Stephen's seems like an enterprise still-born. No later members of the family appear to have taken any interest in it.

Nevertheless, what had been erected in the Rush Chapel probably remained in a reasonable state up to the Civil War. Tillotson was able to note the heraldry of the monuments in the 1590s; Blois saw the main Alvard stone apparently intact on his visit, but in October 1657 Candler recorded sadly that 'the brasse hath been taken of from all the old monuments for lucre thereof in the times of the late unhappy warres'. His phrase seems specific enough to suggest that the brasses were removed for money before the visit of William Dowsing, a supposition

strengthened by the fact that Dowsing found only one ‘popish inscription in Brass, pray for the Soul’, on his visit on 30 January 1644.<sup>21</sup> The Alvard — Rivers — Wimbill matrix remained to be drawn by Davy in August 1829,<sup>22</sup> so its burial must have taken place during the last century restorations. It lay in 1829 where it was found buried in 1985, near the centre of the western bay of the chapel. Today, this slab and the single Lombardic letter T on the external aisle buttress are the only remains to testify to this mausoleum of a remarkable trio of men of affairs, their much-married spouses and their uniquely labyrinthine genealogies.

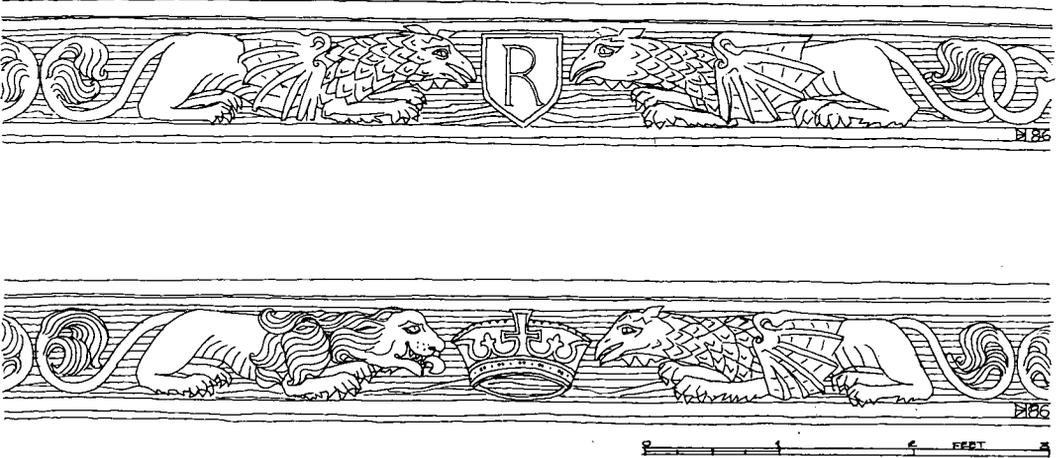


FIG. 21 — Two sections of a carved bressumer beam (c. 1520) from the street frontage of the Rush message in Upper Brook Street.

## APPENDIX

### THE RUSH-ALVARD MESSAGE

In Vol. VII of our *Proceedings*, the Revd Francis Haslewood<sup>23</sup> described No. 32 Upper Brook Street, stated by John Shewell Corder<sup>24</sup> to have been the residence of Thomas Rush. Corder gave no evidence but was right. Haslewood illustrated the overmantel from a ground floor room in the house which has since 1965 been in store at Ipswich Museum. It is ornamented with two carved blank coats of arms of unequal size; no doubt they formerly bore painted charges. The larger, on the right, has dragon and lion supporters and was therefore probably the Royal arms; the other has winged horses, likely to be a reference to the colts courant on Rush's arms.

It was in 1970 that all the buildings on the west side of the street from St Stephen's Church Lane southward (Nos. 28 to 40) were demolished, and the present C. & A. and Sainsbury's premises were built on the site. Only the elaborately carved bressumer beam from the street front of No. 40 (next door but one to No. 32) was saved; it is now mounted on the west wall of C. & A. facing the east end of St Stephen's church (Fig. 21). The beam has on it three shields which carry, separately, a merchant's mark, a chevron, and a letter R, also a Royal crown with dragon and lion supporters. There are winged beasts, probably gryphons, on either side of the R. Rush's badge as serjeant-at-arms to the King would have been the Royal crown, and that and the R on the beam point to him.

Using a modified section of Ogilby's map of 1674 (Fig. 22) it is now possible to show the extent of the Rush premises. The property (p) became 32 Upper Brook St., and both Haslewood and Woolnough<sup>25</sup> who were able to examine the buildings more than half a century ago, suggested that one or two adjoining properties to the south were once part of the same building. The carved bressumer was formerly on No. 40 (u), and it is entirely reasonable that the Rush frontage ran the whole distance represented by the dotted line. The indenture of 1518<sup>15</sup> by which Rush leased the parsonage garden from the incumbent for 99 years at an annual rent of 4 shillings defines the plot precisely as (r) adjoining Rush's garden (q) to the east and the parsonage itself (s) on the west. William Neve, wheelwright, was the occupier to the south. From his extended grounds Rush could then survey the entire south side of the church to which he was to add so much. It is appropriate, though coincidental, that today his bressumer at

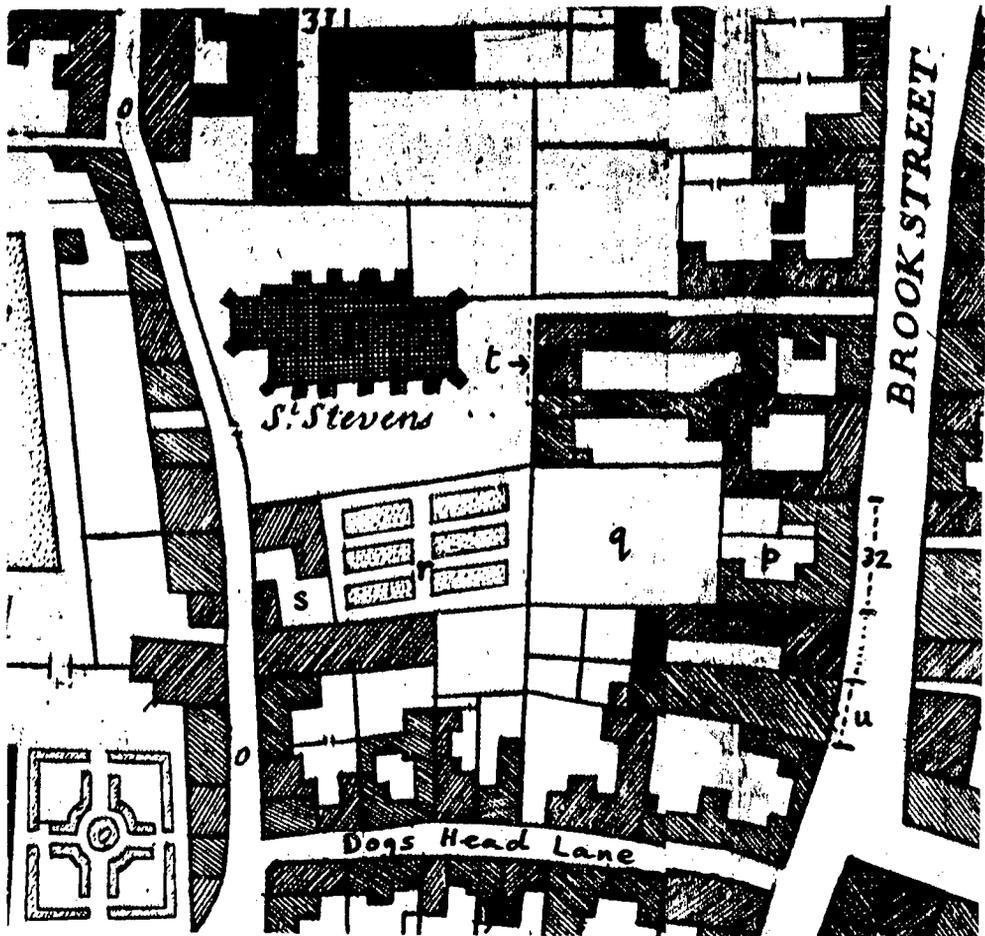


FIG. 22 — Modified section of John Ogilby's map of Ipswich, 1674.

(t) overlooks the family chapel, and that each bears one initial to make up T.R.

In the Town Library of Ipswich, in a copy of Lyndwood's *Provinciale* (1505) which is known to have belonged to John Thetford, canon of Butley and later last Prior of Holy Trinity, Ipswich, there is in the margin of f. xii the impression of a wood block stamp. The design is a florid crowned 'R' (perhaps with a 'T' implied), and we suggest that this was applied by or for Sir Thomas Rush as one of the commissioners at the dissolution of both these establishments. The book came to the Library through the founding bequest of William Smarte in 1599; no other volume in the collection is so marked.



### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank Miss Joan Corder for helpful discussions of genealogical and heraldic matters, Peter Northeast for a transcript of the will of William Wimbill, and Keith Wade and the Suffolk Archaeological Unit for permission to reproduce Fig. 15.

### NOTES

- 1 P.C.C. 5 Milles.
- 2 Wage provision: Richardson 1884, 176. Dandy feoffees: *C.C.R.*, *Henry VII*, II, no. 202.
- 3 P.C.C. 30 Holgrave.
- 4 Steer 1957, 142.
- 5 P.C.C. 22 Dyngeley.
- 6 D. E. Davy, B.L. Add. MS 19094, f. 166v.
- 7 *Op. cit.*, f. 173r.
- 8 Pollard 1970, 79.
- 9 Willoughby wills: P.C.C. 35 Horne, 28 Jankyn.
- 10 Thomas Alvard the elder referred to 'my brother the prior' (i.e. Rivers) in relation to some of his Woodbridge property in his will. Stewardships: *Valor Ecclesiasticus* III, 419, 423; and on the Manning relationship, see MacCulloch 1986, 228.
- 11 *C.P.R.*, *Henry VII*, II, no. 605 (1508); *L.P.* I pt i, no. 2480 (1513); *ibid.*, no. 2825 (1517); on military service, e.g. *L.P.* III, no. 2823; XII, no. 1199.
- 12 On this relationship, see MacCulloch 1986, 228-29, and on Wolsey and Ipswich, *ibid.*, 145-46, 227-28.
- 13 Attorneys: *L.P.* IV pt ii, no. 4598. Opening: B.L., Cottonian MS Titus B I, ff. 281-82 *L.P.* IV pt ii, no 4778). Lease: P.R.O., STA. C. 2/29/67, answer of Anthony Rous.
- 14 *L.P.* IV pt ii, no. 6516; *ibid.*, no. 6803/21.
- 15 Richard Percyvale's Great Domesday of Ipswich, Lib. IV, f. 178 r (S.R.O.I. C4/4).
- 16 *L.P.* XXI pt ii, no. 773 i/26; on Valentine, see Bindoff 1982, III, 513 — he was M.P. for Orford in 1523, probably thanks to Rush's electoral influence.
- 17 Soc. Antiq. MS 4, ff. 87 and 293.
- 18 On Sir Thomas Rush's death and will, see letter from Arthur Rush to Cromwell, P.R.O., S.P. 1/121/115 (*L.P.* XII pt ii, no. 88). It is likely that Cromwell started acting as executor; he seems to have begun collecting Rush's debts, which caused confusion later — see P.R.O., C. 1/1193/12.
- 19 Alvard's will: P.R.O., C. 4/100, rejoinder of Robert Downes to replication of William Hale; C. 4/126, answer of Bamburgh to Hale; C. 4/136, replication of Hale to Bamburgh. Rush will: P.C.C. 9 Lofts, Sentence. Bamburgh witnessed the will of William Lord Willoughby with Rush in 1526: P.C.C. 28 Jankyn.
- 20 P.R.O., S.P. 1/132/87 (*L.P.* XIII pt i, no. 983); P.R.O., S.P. 7/1/39 (*L.P.* XIII pt i, no. 982); P.R.O., REQ. 2/10/154-5; P.R.O., REQ. 3/11/2, bill of Robert Hobson, Christian his wife and others *v.* Christian Rush and Thomas Manser.
- 21 Blois MS, S.R.O.I., GC 17: 755, III, 350. Candler, B.L. Add. MS 15520, f. 8v. Dowsing: White 1888, 252.
- 22 Davy, *op. cit.*, f. 174r.
- 23 Haslewood 1891, 366-67.
- 24 Corder 1895, 14-15.
- 25 Woolnough 1923. The title of this article about No. 32 is totally misleading, for Brandon's house was on the east side of the street.

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(All genealogical details are from Corder 1981 and 1984.)

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*Primary sources: abbreviations*

- C.C.R. *Calendar of Close Rolls.*
- C.P.R. *Calendar of Patent Rolls.*
- L.P. J.S. Brewer *et al.* (eds.), *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII, 1509-47* (21 vols and 2 vols addenda, 1862-1932. London).

*Abbreviations for MSS*

- Add. MSS Additional Manuscripts.
- B.L. British Library.
- P.C.C. Prerogative Court of Canterbury, probate copies of wills, by volume (P.C.C. PROB. 11).
- P.R.O. Public Record Office (with piece number).
- S.R.O.I. Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich Branch.