

MILDENHALL CHURCH.

[READ JUNE 5TH, 1851.]

To give an accurate description of the many interesting features of this fine church, would require one more qualified than myself, and a more careful observation of its several parts than I have had the opportunity of making. But in the absence of any one more able, I have felt it a duty to intrude myself—not to give a lengthened history of the church with details of names and dates, or to describe the fabric in technical language, which might prove wearisome rather than instructive—but with the simple desire to direct attention to such parts of the edifice as appear to be most worthy of note; and to narrate a few facts which may elucidate and add new interest to what was previously known.

The church, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, affords good examples of the various styles of architecture which succeeded to the Byzantine or Norman. The plan consists of a tower at the west end of the nave, a nave with two aisles and two porches, and a chancel with a side chapel. The tower, nave, aisles, and porches are in the late perpendicular style, and have highly enriched cornices and parapets on the exterior. The tower, which is quite a landmark to the surrounding country, is 112 feet high, 30 feet square at the base, and 27 feet 6 inches square at the top. It contains 6 bells. The 1st bell is inscribed, "John Darbie made me, 1676. I. T., D. P., R. S., R. C., I. W."; 2nd and 3rd bells, "Thomas Newman cast me new in 1732, Norwich"; 4th bell, "Nomen Magdalene Campana gerit melodie"; 5th bell, "In Multis Annis Resonet Campana Johannis"; the great bell, "Jos. Arthy, Tho. Casburn, C. W., Tho. Gardiner, Norwich, Fecit, 1751." "The great bell" in the middle of the 15th century appears to have sadly needed repair, for William Chapman, of Mildenhall, in 1464, bequeathed the then large sum of ten marks "ad reparacione magne campane pendente in campanile ecclesie de Myldenhall." Chapman's

liberality was not however sufficient to save it; and within a few years there was a general talk of making a new one, and talking it would appear was not unlikely to be the end of it, for Henry Pope, Esq., who held large possessions in the town, by his will, dated in 1530, bequeathed "towards the makinge of the grett belle iijl. xs. to be payde by the hands of the sayde Thomas Larke whansoever the towne doo go abowght the makinge thereof."

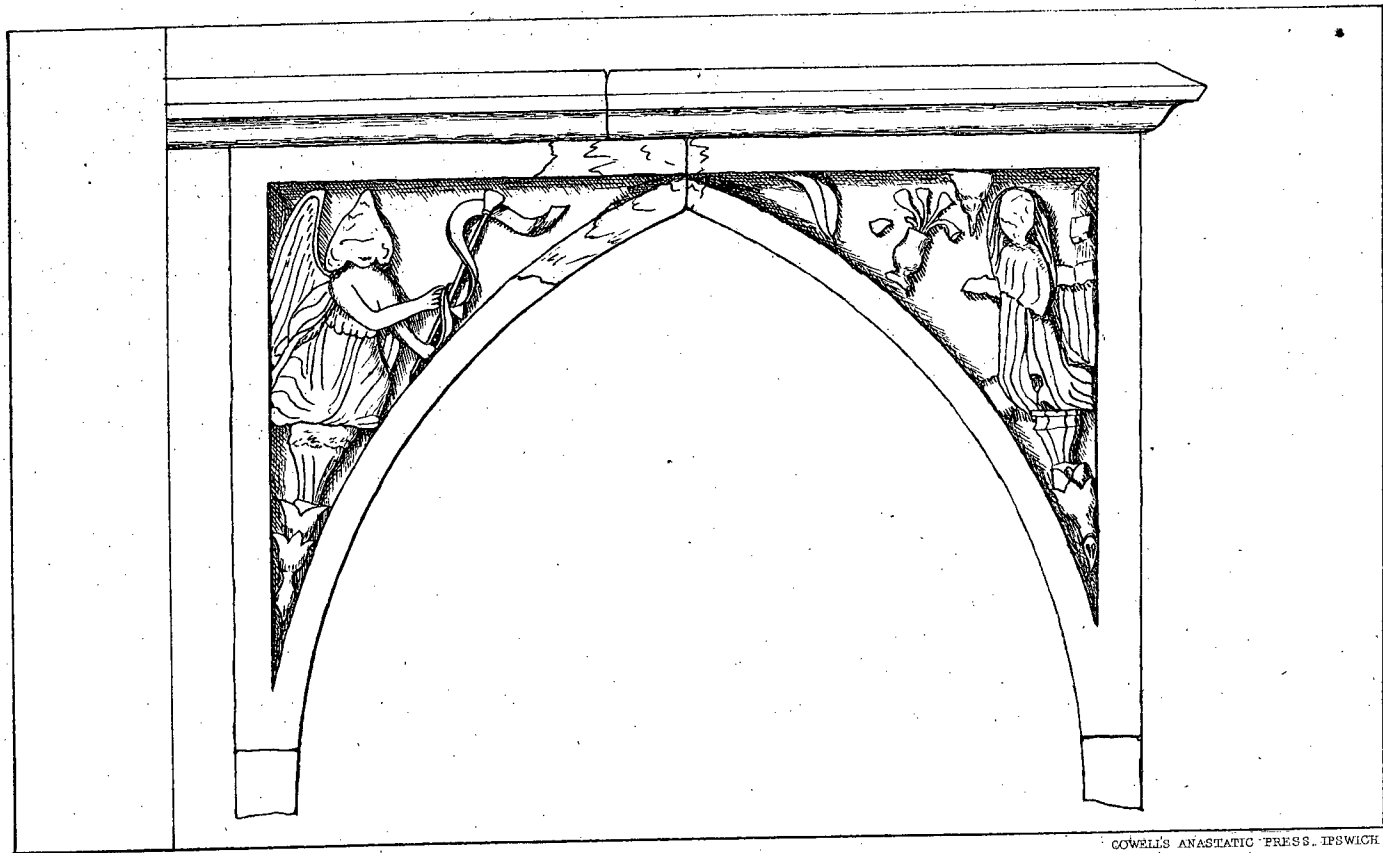
The north porch is spacious and handsome. The ceiling is groined and the bosses are ornamented with figures of angels and roses, which indicate the late period of its erection. The angels have been purposely mutilated. There is a room over the porch, now used as a schoolroom, the present entrance to which is from the churchyard on the west side, but its original entrance was from the interior of the church, a peculiarity we shall presently have occasion to notice.

The arms in the spandrils on either side of the door leading from the porch into the church, are those of King Edward the Confessor and St. Edmund; the crowns in the latter not being pierced with arrows. These arms are appropriately placed, for it was to the liberality of the Confessor that the Martyr, in the persons of the abbot and convent of Bury, was indebted for the gift of the valuable manor of Mildenhall.

"In the first year of his reign the King came to Bury on St. Edmund's day; and the next morning seeing the young monks eating barley bread, enquired of Abbot Baldwin, why these young men of his kinsman (as he was pleased to call St. Edmund) were no better fed. 'Because,' replied the Abbot, 'our possessions are too weak to maintain them with stronger food.'

"'Ask what you will,' said the King, 'and I will give it to you, that they may be better provided for, and better enabled to perform the service of God.' The Abbot, having consulted with his monks, asked of the King the manor of Mildenhall, with its appurtenances; and the jurisdiction of the eight Hundreds and a half with all the royalties, afterwards called the Franchise. The King observed that his request was indiscreet, because the grant of these liberties would involve him and his successors in continual trouble; that he would willingly have granted him three or four manors, if he had required them; and would, out of respect to his kinsman, grant this request, however indiscreet."*

* Collect. Buriens, quoted by Yates, Hist. of Bury, p. 75.



J. Johnson, del.

COWELL'S ANASTATIC PRESS, IPSWICH.

Mildenhall Church.

Entering into the church, may be seen, in the western corner of the north wall, the upper part of a doorway with a representation of the Annunciation in the spandrils. On one side is the angel Gabriel with outspread wings pointing to a scroll entwined round a staff which he carries in his left hand. On the other is the figure of the Virgin, known by the pot of lilies, kneeling by a faldstool on which is a book. This doorway was the original entrance to the room over the porch*, and the two blocked up windows over the door of the porch were those which enabled the priest who here officiated at the altar of Our Lady to view the processions and be informed of the different stages of the mass at the high altar. That this was the chapel of Our Lady, I am able to prove from cotemporary documents, but I am unable to account for its being placed in so unusual a situation. Northern porches are themselves of rare occurrence; and it has been generally supposed that rooms over porches were appropriated, as now, to scholastic or still more secular purposes. There is only one other instance—at the neighbouring church of Fordham—within my knowledge, of a chapel over a porch, though they are met with beside them; and it is well known that the customary situation of the chapel in honour of one who in Romish times was exalted to an equality with the Deity, was as near as conveniently might be to the chancel. In the year 1519 Thomas Marchanter, of Mildenhall, bequeathed “to the reparacion of the chapell of Owre Lady ovyr the porche, *xxd.*” In the same year Margaret May bequeathed “to ye repa’con of y^e chapell ovyr the porche, *ijs.*” A few years later, in 1525, John Browne gave *3s. 4d.* “to the reparacions of the chappelle ouer the church porche,” and in 1527 Alice Bateman, by her will, gave “to y^e reparacion of the chappell of oure ladie ouer the porche *xijd.*”

The tower is open to the church to the height of the nave, and is ascended from the south aisle. The lower floor has a

* Since the meeting of the Institute at Mildenhall another doorway has been found in the wall between this archway and the entrance to the porch; with a quatrefoil opening above it to light the stairs; and remains of a winding staircase

that clearly led to the room over the porch. The two staircases could not have existed together, and the recently discovered one was no doubt the original. It is not easy to assign a use for the arched recess in the corner.

range of stone seats on the north and south sides, and the ceiling is ornamented with fan tracery, the work of the 16th century. It is now used as the manorial pew, but by some has been considered to be the galilee of the church—like that at the west end of Ely Cathedral. At Ely, however, the galilee is a projecting porch, not as this is within the church. May it not have been a baptistery? The font, which stands immediately in front of it, remains where it was originally placed at the beginning of the 15th century.

The font is an octagonal basin on a shaft of the same form, and the whole is of Purbeck marble. The figures or buttresses which ornamented the angles of the pedestal are quite gone, and the quatrefoil panels of the basin are disfigured by many coats of paint. Six of the shields in the centre of these panels are charged with a cross—the sign made in baptism; but those on the east and west faces bear the same arms as those which are found on a brass affixed to the east face of the fine altar tomb which stands east and west in front of the font*, and, like it, is of Purbeck marble. There can be no doubt that the person intended to be recorded by this monument was the donor of the font, and most likely a liberal contributor to the rebuilding of the church in the perpendicular style. It will therefore be interesting to ascertain its rightful owner. The tomb has no inscription remaining, but one appears to have been originally placed in the cornice under the table stone. The arms on the brass before-mentioned are therefore our only guide. They are *Ermine*, on a saltier *Sable*, an *Ermine* spot within a chain *Or*. These arms, I am obligingly informed by Mr. King, the York Herald, were borne by Sir Henry Barton, who served the office of Lord Mayor of London in the years 1416-17 and 1428-29. Sir Henry Barton is stated by Kettell, who was Windsor Herald in the beginning of the last century, to have been the son of Henry Barton of Myldenhall. He was of the Skinner's Company, served the office of Sheriff in 1405, and "was the first that caused lanthorns to be hung out in London in

* The font and tomb have since been removed. The former is now in the s. aisle against the westernmost pier of the nave. The tomb will be placed on one side of the lower floor of the tower so as

not to interfere with the west door: The manorial pew has been done away with, and the west entrance re-opened, to afford a fine view of the whole interior of the church.

the winter evenings between Hallowtide (All Saints Day) and Candlemas*". He also founded, says Stow, "seven proper chambers in an alley on the west side of Little Wood Street, for seven poor people to dwell therein rent free†". He is stated in some lists of mayors to have been buried at St. Lawrence Jewry, and by others "in the charnel house by Paul's in the north side of the churchyard, now pulled down." As there appears so much doubt as to the burial place of this distinguished citizen, Mildenhall may, with such strong evidence in its favour, assign this tomb to him, until some document of sufficient authority shall be found to give it to another member of the family.

And here perhaps it may not be out of place to mention that Mildenhall claims the honour of having contributed two worthy lord mayors to the city of London in the first half of the 15th century. The second, Sir William Gregory, like his predecessor Barton, was a member of the Skinners' Company. He was the son of Roger Gregory, of Mildenhall, and served the office of mayor in 1451-2. Sir William died about the year 1461, and was buried in the church of St. Anne, Aldersgate, London, wherein he founded an obit, leaving by his will, dated in that year, the sum of 19*l.* 17*s.* 4*d.* per annum, arising from the rents and profits of certain lands within that parish which now produce about 200*l.*, and the interest is distributed by the present churchwardens among poor inhabitant householders within the united parish of St. Ann and St. Agnes. A marble tablet has within the last few years been erected in that church to record the gift‡.

The east ends of both aisles were fitted up as chapels; that on the north was probably dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and that on the south to St. Margaret. John Rolf, in 1520, bequeathed "to y^e hy alter of Seynt Margarett, to by an altar clothe iij*s.* iiij*d.*, and to by an other altar clothe for Seynt John's altar iij*s.* iiij*d.*" In the north aisle§ the

* MS. list of Mayors *t. Jac. I.*, in possession of R. K. Kelham, Esq., of Great Gonerley, in Lincolnshire.—Stow's survey, edit. Thoms. p. 191.

† Stow's survey, edit. Thoms. p. 112.

‡ From information obligingly communicated by S. Gregory, Esq., of the

Lord Mayor's Court office.

§ Since the visit of the Institute, a stone coffin, having a place rounded for the head, has been found in the north aisle. It was about 2 feet below the present surface, and contained the remains of a skeleton.

pedestal for a statue remains in front of a cinquefoiled recess with a small look-out into the nave in front of the rood screen. A small ambry exists in the east wall of the south aisle; and other remains* will, I think, be discovered, on the contemplated removal of the present unsightly box-pews. The altar-stone of one of these chapels is now at the foot of the pulpit staircase†, which rests upon it. Three of the five crosses by which such stones are marked, are still to be seen.

The open timber roofs of the nave and aisles appear to have been put up at different periods in the 15th century. The nave and south aisle are of later date than the north. In the latter the figures of saints and patriarchs in the helms have this peculiarity, that they are in niches, canopied or overshadowed by the outspread wings of the angels of the corbels. They have been very much mutilated; but the heads of the angels in the nave roof appear to have escaped the axes and hammers of the zealous Dowsing. The spandrils of the south aisle are filled with grotesque masques, devices, and figures, boldly carved. Those in the north aisle exhibit some design—as that of St. George and the dragon in one; a dog playing on the organ in another; the Baptism of Christ; the salutation of the Virgin; Abraham offering up Isaac; a huntsman with horn, dogs, and stag, &c., &c.; the details of which are deserving of close inspection.

The arms of St. Edward the Confessor and St. Edmund appear again on the shields held by the angels carved on the corbels of the roof over the rood.

The arch between the nave and chancel is a fine example of the Early English style‡. The bold well-cut foliage of the capitals can only be seen by going into the organ gallery§, which occupies the place of the rood loft, and is

* A lattice opening to the chancel, formed by bars of clunch, has been found in the north wall of this chapel.

† The pulpit, which was nearly in the centre of the nave, in front of the organ gallery, has been removed, and the altar stone has been taken to the west end of the nave and relaid, about the spot where Sir Henry Barton's tomb used to stand.

‡ The canopied niches, at the angular buttresses at the end of the chancel, on

the outside, are also good examples of Early English work.

§ Since removed. This alteration led to the singular discovery of three openings or doorways one above another from the rood stairs; the lower one being the entrance from the nave, and the others the doors on to the rood, which must have been one of two stories. Some remains of stairs were found on the corresponding, or south side, of the rood.

reached by the rood staircase. The dog-tooth moulding of the arch is continued down each side. Above this arch is a small oblong aperture, which may have served to light the rood.

The east window of the chancel is of Decorated work. The tracery in the heading is very rich. The centre is filled by the symbolic oval, or elliptic aureole; and is a fine instance of its introduction.

By the side of the altar was the Holy Sepulchre and an image of the Virgin. In 1477 Thomas Chylderston bequeathed "picture imaginise glo'issi'e v'g' m^e iux' dict' altar' vjs. viij*d*."; and in 1488 Robert Pachett bequeathed "ad factura noue Sepulcr' in ecclesia de M. xx*d*."

The double piscina on the south side of the communion table is Early English. It has a cinquefoiled heading springing from shafts with capitals like those of the chancel arch. The drain holes are quatrefoils. By the side of the piscina are the sedilia or seats for the three orders of officiating priests, and a small trefoil headed ambry. In the centre of the choir is a small square recess in the south wall. This may have been an ambry or a "low-side window," as it is called. These low-side windows are not unfrequently met with in churches; but as they occur in every part of the church, and take every variety of form and dimensions, it is difficult to arrive at any certain conclusion as to their use. A score or more theories have been advanced by many antiquaries, some of them strongly supported by reference to documents as well as remarkable instances; but the majority of these apertures are in situations that would not be convenient for any of the uses assigned to them. In this instance, as there is no appearance of an exterior opening, and the recess is placed in the centre of the choir, there can be but little doubt of its being an ambry or cupboard for books or other objects.

The Decorated insertions would appear to have been the work of Richard Wichforde, one of the vicars, whose gravestone, denuded of its brass—a richly floriated cross of Calvary—still remains in the chancel, with this inscription:

HIC : IACET : RICARDVS : DE : VVICHFORDE : QUONDAM :
VICARIVS : ECCLESIE : DE : MILDENHALE : QVI : FECIT :
ISTVD : NOVVM : OPVS.

The timber roof of the chancel, of the 16th century, is an instance of the disregard which every age appears to have paid to the works of its predecessors. Being placed so low it partially conceals the tracery of the east window, and entirely destroys the effect of its elegant design. The faces of the rafters have inscriptions painted thereon.

The small brass of a man, on the stone to the north of Wichforde's grave, marks the spot where was buried Sir Henry Warner, of Wamhill. His lady lies beside him, and his brass records the death of his profligate son within a few months after the father.

A small door on the north side of the chancel opens into a well-proportioned Early English chapel with lancet windows and ribbed ceiling. The east window is an elegant triple lancet opening with Purbeck marble columns and foliated capitals. A small lancet aperture gives light to the rood stairs*. This chapel was probably known as "the chantry," and was endowed with several pieces of land in the parish, some of which are still distinguished by that name. Richard Morley, in 1522, bequeathed "to the chawntre vjs.," and William Allen, in 1536, a sum of 4*d*.

In the chancel and in the south aisle are some interesting memorials to the Norths and Bunburys—the former and present lords of Mildenhall. One of them, in the south aisle, is a specimen of the cumbrous style which came into vogue after the revival of a taste for classic architecture.

The names of the following persons buried in the church, derived from their respective wills, deserve to be recorded.

1464. John Bakhot de Mildenhall; in le Sowth ele.

William Chapman de Mildenhall.

1478. William Coots, ante ymagine s'c'i Leonard.

1524. Thomas Hopper, "w'in the northe yle."

1530. Henry Pope, Esq., "by my father."

To proceed to the churchyard. On the north side are two masses of masonry which have hitherto baffled the conjectures of local antiquaries, but a careful examination of the registers in the Will Office at Bury—an invaluable storehouse of archæological and topographical information—enables me to assert that they are the remains of the chapel of the chancel. The chancel-house, it is well known, was a

* A second aperture, below the other, has been since found; with an entrance to the rood stairs within the arch separating this chapel from the north aisle.

place erected for the reception of whatever bones might be thrown up by repeated disturbance of the soil; and was more needed formerly than now, as the practice of burying in coffins of any kind is comparatively of late introduction. To wrap the corpse in a winding sheet and inter it but a foot or so below the soil, was the ordinary custom. Over the charnel-house, as at Bury and other considerable places, was a chapel in which a priest, through the voluntary liberality of the living, continually said masses for the dead. The earliest mention of this charnel is in the will of William Bray, dated 1503, from which it would appear to have been founded by a member of the Walsham family. The item is:—"Also I bequethe to the charnell of Ros' Walsham a rodye of lond lying be Swath Crosse, on this condicion that the preste remembyr my sowle in his bede roll."

In 1520, John Morley and John Rolf each bequeathed "to y^e repa'con of y^e charnell xijd."; and in 1527 Alice Bateman, widow, bequeathed 4*d.* to the like purpose. The will of Syr Wylliam Reue, "charnell preste of the towne of Myldenhall", dated 1545, still remains. It bears evidence of the progress of those opinions which so soon after led to the entire reformation of the Church of England.

In primis, I comend my sowle to allmightie god, my Sauior and redemor, trusting onelie on hym and in hys mercye to haue the euerlasting inherytaunce whereunto he haue purchased me by theffusyon of hys precyous bloode. Item, I wyll that my bodye shalbe buried in the queere of Myldenhall, before the parrysshe prests stooll.....

Item, I wyll that myne executors shall finde one lawfull preste that canne preache and helpe in the quere to serue god, shall singe for me and for all those that I am bounde to praye for, and for all Xpen soules, one quarter of a yeare ymedyatlie after my dethe, in the parysshe church of Myldenhall, and the sayd preste to make one sermon openlie in the church of Myldenhall when they thinke moost people in the sayde church be p'sent.

In connection with the church of Mildenhall, it may be as well to mention that there were as many as six gilds, which commemorated their anniversaries and kept the church's festivals therein. They were known as St. John the Baptist's gild; St. Katharine's gild; St. George's gild; Our Lady's gild; the Corpus Christi gild; and the great gild of the Trinity. Bequests of money and land to these fraternities frequently occur in the old Mildenhall wills.

SAMUEL TYMMS.