

## STOWMARKET CHURCH.

THE number of churches in Suffolk before the Reformation is believed to have amounted to near 550. Of these 449 are enumerated as existing when the Norman Survey, known as Domesday Book, was written, being a much larger number than in any other county of corresponding size. Many of these churches must then have been decayed or insufficient, for the same record notices that nearly eighty churches were in process of building. It does not follow that in these eighty places churches were for the first time being erected; as the parochial division had been made at a very much earlier period. It is probable that the old Saxon churches, which it is known were generally built of wood, were then rapidly giving place to structures better adapted to the wants of the more civilized Normans, who, in mechanical and artistic skill, were far in advance of their Saxon predecessors.

At Stowmarket there appears to have been two churches, of which the Domesday Book gives us this interesting account:—

“The church in King Edward the Confessor’s time was free of one carucate (or 100 acres of land). But of this land Hugh de Montfort holds twenty-three acres, and he restores them to a certain chapel, which four brothers, freedmen of Hugh, built in this place near to the cemetery of the mother church. And they were living away from the mother church, which could not contain the whole parish. This mother church has from time immemorial the half of the burial fees, and a fourth part of other offerings which may be made at this chapel by a special deed of exception. And if this chapel was consecrated no one in the hundred knows.”

This curious account of the two churches in Stow (observes Mr. Hollingsworth, in his "History of Stowmarket," p. 39) corresponds with the deeds and old documents in which the living is described as St. Peter and St. Mary in Stow, and with local tradition, which asserts that a small chapel stood near the churchyard at the south corner, where some very deep and massy foundations have been discovered on digging graves.

From what is said in another place Mr. Hollingsworth appears to have been induced to think that there were three churches. He says (p. 71), "So early as the reign of Henry I. the Churches of St. Peter and St. Mary in Stowe, and one statement says of another, called St. Paul, were granted to the Abbey of St. Osith."

The historian does not give us the words of this *one* statement, or tell us where it is to be found, but there is no doubt as to the inference being incorrect. The error has arisen from the fact not being sufficiently known that the mother church was dedicated not to St. Peter alone, but to the Blessed Apostles "Peter and Paul," the patron saints of the Romish Church, whose effigies are always found on the reverse of the papal bulls, and in whose honour many of the most ancient churches in this kingdom were dedicated. The church is so described in the wills of the townspeople, one or two instances of which may be cited.

In 1474 Robert Cosyn\* directed his body to be buried "in eccl'ia beator' ap'lor' Petri et Pauli;" in 1466 Stephen Hammond, of Thorney†, bequeathed 6*s.* 8*d.* to the reparacion of the Church of Peter and Paul; and in 1530 John Kebyll‡ left five marks to the reparacion of "the church of Peter and Powll."

With regard to the second church, dedicated to St. Mary, the historian of Stowmarket hints at the possibility of its having been the church of a monastic establishment. He says (p. 74), "We find Ingulph, Abbot of Croyland, in his history in 1076, stating that twelve monks of St. Mary of Stowe were professed religious, or had received their gown in the Croyland Abbey. This may refer to Stow in

\* Register of Wills, Bury, Lib. Baldwin, f. 565.

† Lib. Hervey, f. 54.

‡ Lib. Brett, f. 125.

Lincolnshire, but it is just as likely that it does not." This supposition is, however, inconsistent with the contemporary authority of Domesday Book, which expressly states that the second church was a subordinate one, and with the fact that no record exists of any monastic house, however small, being in Stowmarket. Twelve monks in one religious house would imply a large establishment—such in truth as did then exist at Stow, or Marie Stowe, in Lincolnshire, to which place the Lincolnshire monk was without doubt referring.

Mr. Page, in the "Supplement to the Suffolk Traveller," says that St. Mary's Church was pulled down when the present church was built; but this is an error, for it was in use in the 34th year of King Henry VIII., when Jone Goslinge\* directed her body to be "buried within the porche of St. Mary Church of Stow." It could not have been "a small chapel," for we find that it had a tower and a porch, and was furnished with a gorgeous rood-loft or candle-beam towards the making of which Jone Ry†, in 1491, left the sum of ten marks.

The church of Sts. Peter and Paul, which more immediately engages our attention, is a fine spacious fabric, consisting of a chancel and choir with vestry on the north side; a nave with aisles and porches, and tower at the west end. Except the porches and the clerestory, the work is of the Decorated period, but there are one or two good Perpendicular windows, and some very bad new ones in the true Battley Langley style.

The tower, which is of four stories, is finished by a slender spire, of considerable height, having an open gallery a short distance from its base. The tower has double buttresses at the angles, and the door of entrance is on the south side. The bell chamber is furnished with eight bells, and the ringers' floor has several records of great feats in bell ringing. In 1586, Mr. John Howe, by his will, left a sum of money out of a tenement, in Crow-street, for the sexton, "at the time accustomed to ring the greatest bell in the steeple at Stowmarket, and in the morning also to raise up and

\* Lib. Colman, f. 49.

† Lib. Boner, f. 99.

awaken the artificers there dwelling."\* In the Romish times, the ringing of the morning and evening bell was to excite the people to repeat the *Angelus*, according to the general custom in Roman Catholic countries. The Italians call the *Angelus* bell, *Ave Maria dell Aurora* and *Ave Maria della Sera*†. The utility of the practice for secular purposes caused it to be continued after the religious use had been abandoned. The bell is still rung in the evening at eight o'clock. The spire, although comparatively modern, appears to have been in ancient times an admired feature of the church. In 1674, the old spire, which was 77 feet in height, being in danger of falling, was taken down; and a new one erected, 100 feet high from the tower, with a gallery at the height of 40 feet, all open, wherein hung a clock bell. This was blown down during the great storm of November, 1703; and falling upon the roof and the north aisle, did much damage to the church. The present spire was erected a few years afterwards.‡

The porches are both of squared flints with flush panels in the Perpendicular style, but that on the south side, as we generally find, is the largest and most enriched. The windows are of good design, and even in their sad decay put to shame the sorry specimens of cement with which they are in too close proximity. The front is ornamented with three niches, and on the east side of the door leading into the church is the place for the benitoire or stoup of holy water.

Of the date of the north porch we have an accurate account; for Robert Kent, of Stowmarket, by will§ in 1443, directed his body to be buried in the newly-built porch on the north side of the church of St. Peter. North porches are of comparatively rare occurrence; and instances of porches on both sides are still more unusual. There are not more than sixty-seven churches in the county with north porches; and only one half of that number have two porches; most of these being in towns or places having large populations.

We will now proceed to examine the interior, and entering by the priest's door we observe a fine Decorated east window,

\* Hollingsworth's Hist. Stowmarket p. 79.

† Hist. Stowmarket, pp. 200, 202, 220.

‡ Gage's Hist. of Hengrave, p. 12.

§ Lib. Baldwin, f. 56.

of five lights, having jamb shafts and capitals, and ranges of flowing quatrefoils in the heading. The side windows are also good examples of the same period. The south-east window has the vesica piscis, or symbolic oval, in the centre of the heading. Till the 17th century the chancel was ascended by three steps, but was levelled by order of William Dowsing, the Parliamentary Commissioner appointed to take down and destroy all superstitious pictures, &c. His visit to this church, in 1643-4, is thus recorded in his Journal:— “Stowmarket, Feb. 5. Gave order to break down about seventy superstitious pictures, and to level the chancell, to Mr. Manning, that promised to do it, and to take down two crosses, one on the steeple and the other on the church, and took up an inscription of *ora pro nobis*.” Till the walls of the chancel were covered with cement, one of the buttresses of the Decorated sedilia, where the officiating clergy sat during the intervals of the service, remained against the south wall.

On the opposite side stood the Holy Sepulchre, before which “a common light” was kept burning from Good Friday to Easter. Besides this common light, was another, known as the “Bachelors’ light,” being maintained at the cost of the single men of the parish. Towards this latter light Thomas Cosyne, in 1533,\* bequeathed eight coombs of malt.

Near to the altar, the accustomed situation for the saint in whose honour the church was dedicated, was an image of St. Paul, to the painting of which, in 1469, John Lee† bequeathed 6s. 8d., and, in 1474, John Cryspin‡ gave 12s. There was without doubt also an image of St. Peter; but no allusion to this figure has been met with.

The vestry door on the north side is an interesting example of 15th century work. It is a remarkable fact, that while sacristies in most cathedral churches were placed on the south side, in parish churches they were generally built on the contrary one; but the reason for this is unknown. Over the vestry is a chamber for the priest whose duty it was to celebrate perpetual or daily mass at one or more of the mortuary chapels, or altars. At the Reforma-

\* Lib. Longe, f. 171.

† Lib. Baldwin, f. 427.

‡ Ib., f. 513.

tion there were two chantry priests, who were allowed a pension of four marks yearly whilst they lived. Their names were Sir Robert Denham and Sir — Gild. The way to the priest's chamber is through a small doorway in the south-west corner of the lower room; and the staircase, as we saw at Mildenhall Church, might have served for the ascent to the rood. The richly-carved canopy on which the rood rested still remains, but has been raised from its proper position to a place over the chancel arch. This arch is a fine specimen of the Decorated period.

The nave is separated from the aisles by arcades of seven arches, having good Decorated piers of four-clustered columns. The arches have hood-mouldings springing from small pointed corbels, enriched with elegant foliage. In the nave, near to the chancel arch, is a grave-stone to the memory of Dr. Thomas Young, the tutor of the poet Milton, who was Vicar here for many years, and died in 1655. A portrait said to be of the doctor is preserved at the vicarage, in the grounds of which is a tree pointed out as Milton's mulberry tree.

The aisles were known, the one on the south side as St. Mary's aisle, and that on the north as St. John the Baptist's aisle, and were so named from the chapels to those saints which occupied the respective east ends. The north aisle is of much larger dimensions than the south. The chapel at the east end was dedicated to St. John the Baptist, but is now known as the Tyrell chapel, various members of this ancient family having been interred here since the year 1400;\* and the spot being still appropriated as sittings to Gipping Hall, the seat of that family. It was enclosed by a screen or perclose, of rich design, in the Perpendicular style. The principal part of this screen, which is described as new in the will of William Kyng, of Thorney†, 1452, still remains. There are here several good monuments to the Tyrell family, of the Jacobean period. The most remarkable is that of Margaret English, who died in 1604. The canopied altar tomb of stone, forming the south side of this chapel is said to be that of an Abbot of St. Osyth, in Essex. It is of the Decorated period. The

\* Hist. Stowmarket, p. 124.

† Lib. Baldwin, f. 129.

slab on the top of the tomb is of Purbeck marble, a material extensively used in ecclesiastical decorations from the 12th to the 15th century. It was inlaid with brasses representing the effigies of a mitred abbot, with twelve small figures ranged on either side and beneath it, and three shields above it.\* These brasses have all long since disappeared. There is but one brass remaining in the church, a small one at the entrance to this chapel in the aisle, representing Ann Tyrell, who died in 1638, aged eight years, a young girl wrapped in a woollen shroud. This aisle was formerly paved with marble. In 1461 William Schelton† bequeathed 26s. 8d. towards mending the pavement in the aisle of St. John the Baptist; and in 1474 Robert Cosyn‡ directed all the aisle called "Le Seynt John's heele," and the space between the south and west doors of the church, to be paved with marble similar to the then existing pavement in the other parts of the church.

The south aisle was called St. Mary's aisle from the chapel of St. Mary at the east end of it. This chapel was enclosed by a screen of like work to that of the Baptist's chapel on the opposite side. This has been removed within a few years. A part of it now decorates the front of the organ gallery and the cover for the font. The pulpit and reading desk are also compilations of carved work found in different parts of the church. The chapel of our Lady was furnished with a candle-beam and an image of the Virgin in a niche of tabernacle work. To the making of the latter Margaret Wetherard§, in 1457, bequeathed the sum of 40s.; and to the mending of the candle-beam, which was not, however, completed in 1491, Ed. Dilhoo|| left 3s. 4d. The same pious parishioner directed a vestment or suit of robes to be provided for the priest who officiated at Our Lady's altar. Another vestment for Our Lady's altar was provided in 1521, out of a bequest for that purpose left by Margaret Goddard¶. Towards upholding the mass of Our Lady at this altar Jone Ry, in

\* Hist. Stowmkt., p. 73.

† Lib. Baldwin, f. 342.

‡ Ib. f. 565.

§ Lib. Baldwin, f. 532.

|| Ib., p. 530.

¶ Lib. Brydone, f. 332.

1491\*, left 33s. 4d., and the wills of the parishioners contain many bequests for providing candlesticks for the candle-beam of this chapel. The window at the east end of this aisle was the gift of John Fenkele, of Gypping Newton,† whose widow in 1446 left 40s. to the reparation of “le heele s’c’e Marie.”

Mention is made of the chapel of St. Margaret de Stowmarket, in the will of Robert Leech‡, 1470, but where it was situate, whether in the church or not, is unknown. There was also an altar to the Holy Cross, with a perclose around it of the value of five marks, made in pursuance of the will of Margaret Wetherard, 1457. One or other of these may have stood in the north aisle, one of the windows of which—the second from the west—still retains a small niche in one of the jambs.

There was, too, somewhere in the church a representation of the Holy Trinity, in a rich housing of tabernacle work.

The font, which is poor indeed, originally stood in the aisle; and near to it was a stage for torches and a poor box.

The organ was erected soon after Charles the Second’s restoration, by the celebrated Father Smith,§ for the church of Walsall, in Staffordshire. “This,” says a correspondent of the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, in February, 1800, “had a very handsome case, though not large, being adorned with a profusion of carving and gilding. Over the centre was a large shield of the King’s arms; and over the wings were the lion and unicorn sejant and regardant. Each supported a small shield: on the one was painted the bear and ragged staff, and on the other Or, a chevron Gules, charged with a Stafford knot. This organ was repaired in 1726, but about 1772, it being through age somewhat worse for wear, was sold to Mr. George Hill, an inhabitant, for the small sum

\* Lib. Boner, f. 99.

† Lib. Baldwin, f. 72.

‡ Ib., f. 473.

\* Bernard Smith, according to Burney, commonly known as “Father Smith,” brought with him from Germany two assistants, Gerard and Bernard, his nephews, and to distinguish him from them, he received the name of “Father.” His first organ in this country was for the Chapel Royal, Whitehall, which, being

hurried in the construction, was a partial failure. He afterwards made a vow never to accept work at short notice or under price! The excellence of his organs is attested by their long duration and sweet tone; and his works included some of the finest organs in the kingdom. He held the appointment of “Organ maker in Ordinary” to the King, and had apartments assigned him in Whitehall.

of 12*l.* 10*s.*, and he built a large room in his garden for its reception, and finally sold it to the churchwardens of Stowmarket, in Suffolk, for 50*l.*, who had it repaired and enlarged; and it now (1800) stands in that church."

There are some well carved poppy heads and bench-ends of Perpendicular work in the seats under the organ gallery, with two church chests of spruce, having massy semi-circular lids, of a very much earlier date. They are five feet long, and hollowed out of solid pieces of wood. One of these chests formerly stood in the chancel,\* and one of them was a few years since discovered to be full of old papers, the contents of which furnished many curious facts to Mr. Hollingsworth's history of Stowmarket.

As intimately connected with the church, it may be mentioned that there were one or more guilds of brethren. One of them, the only one of which we have any record, was in honour of the worship of the Virgin; celebrating mass on their anniversaries and feasts in the Lady chapel. The "common arle," called the guildhall, stood near to the churchyard; and was in existence so early as 1460, when we find John Cowle bequeathing 6*s.* 8*d.* to its reparation. A similar sum was bequeathed to the same purpose in the following year by William Schelton; and in 1635 "the guildhall yard" was surrounded by new palings and a hedge, and the building was new tyled, and had new doors and windows.†

SAMUEL TYMMS.

\* Hist. Stowmkt., p. 159.

† Hist. Stowmarket, p. 160.