

WITHERSFIELD CHURCH.

THERE are as many as thirty churches in the Deanery of Clare; twelve of these are dedicated to the Virgin Mary. All of them retain interesting details either in fabric or furniture; and as is almost universally the case in Suffolk, the wood work of the roofs, screens, and seats, is excellent.

The church of Withersfield is dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin. In plan it consists of a chancel, nave with north aisle, chapel on south side, south porch, and square west tower.

The chancel is Early English, but has Decorated and Perpendicular insertions, with some fragments of old glass. A low-side window has been stopped up. The chancel arch and wood screen are good Perpendicular. The screen towards the west has been repainted and gilded; but the carved work is very much fuller and richer in detail on the eastern face. Over this screen was the rood, to which the following entry in Dowsing probably refers:—"Withersfield, Jan. 6, 1643. We brake down a crucifix and 60 superstitious pictures, and gave orders for the levelling the steps in the chancel."

The south chapel is good early Decorated, but much altered. It was in so ruinous a condition, says Cole, vol. v, MSS. Brit. Mus., 5806, that it was pulled down and contracted about ten feet, but the old dimensions may easily be perceived by the different colour of the grass. Part of the carved parclose remains.

The north aisle appears to have been built by one Robert Wyburgh, or Whybrow. A small brass set in a wooden frame, and inserted in the wall near the east end, bears this inscription:—"Orate p' animabus Rob'ti Wyburgh & h'nfactor' suar' q' ista glam fieri fecer't." From the repetition

of the mullet on the roof of this aisle, Cole suspected that the Veres, Earls of Oxford, had to do in this parish.

The rest of the church is Perpendicular work. The nave roof is good, as are also a number of seats. The latter have some fine poppy heads; one of them represents St. Michael weighing souls; another St. George and the Dragon. The pulpit is Jacobean.

The tower is square and plain; it has a peal of five bells—1, 3, and 5, are modern, being made by Robert Taylor, of St. Neots, 1804; No. 2, the oldest bell, has on it, Richard Bowler made me, 1603; and No. 4 has the maker's name, John Thornton, Sudbury, fecit, 1718.

The porch is very good. The iron ring handle to the door, leading from the porch into the church, is deserving of notice and of careful preservation.

The font is octagonal, having three of its panels enriched by geometrical tracery, and the five others charged with shields, bearing—1, a pall. 2, a chevron between three trefoils slipped. 3, a mullet of six points within a border, charged with eight (?) pateræ. 4, quarterly—1, a patera (Davy calls it a lozenge in a square); 2, a rose; 3 and 4, a chessrook or mill-rind. 5, quarterly—1, a mullet; 2, a rose; 3 and 4, chequy. The delineations of these coats in Cole's MS. differ considerably from the shields as they now appear.

The Parish Registers begin as early as 1558, that is within twenty years of the time when they were first enjoined to be kept by Cromwell, the King's vicegerent in spiritual affairs (just upon the dissolution of religious houses), and within three years after they were ordered by the national synod; they are tolerably perfect.

Among the rectors of Withersfield was Vincent Peirse, Prebendary of Norwich, and Chaplain to Charles the Second, and James the First, who died in 1673, and was buried in the choir of Norwich cathedral. He was sequestered, and his case may be seen in *Walker's Sufferings of the Clergy*, part 2, p. 334.

Another rector was Bardsey Fisher, Master of Sydney

College, Cambridge, 1703-4, and Vice-Chancellor. He died rector, and was buried in his own College chapel, though without any memorial: neither (says Cole) is his interment entered in the parish register as usual on such occasions. On his death the living was presented to Dr. Oakes.

Another of the rectors was the Rev. Thomas Barnard, Master of the Grammar School, at Leeds, and a King's Chaplain. He died in 1782, and was interred in the churchyard of Withersfield, on the north side. He was a man of great learning, but greater modesty. Having forbidden any epitaph to be placed over his remains, an affectionate friend and parishioner, who desired to be interred near him, directed an inscription to be added to a memorial of himself (see *Nichols's Ill. Lit. History*, i, 763.) The inscription, written by Dr. James Nasmith, the learned editor of Tanner's *Notit. Monas.* may still be seen on the east face of the base of a stone pyramid in the north west corner of the churchyard. It is as follows:—

Oppositos intra Cancellos
Reconduntur Reliquiæ
THOMÆ BARNARD, A.M.,
Hujus Ecclesiæ Rectoris;
Doctrina, Pietate, Modestia
Insignis.

Ne talem premat Oblivio Virum,
Quòd nullà, ita enim ipse jussit,
Decoretur Tumulus Ἐπιγραφή
Justo amicum ornari Encomio
Atque illius juxta Cineres
Suos deponi voluit
Antonius Oldfield.

There was formerly another inscription on the slab, which formed the south front of the pyramid, but the stone has been for some years broken to pieces.

The rectory house, at the west end of the church, was built by Sir John Jacob, Baronet, of West Wrattling, for his son-in-law, the Rev. Dr. Abraham Oakes, L.L.D., of Trinity College, Cambridge, who held this rectory jointly with that of Long Melford; and was the author of many

valuable religious tracts. Sir John Jacob, whose mother was daughter to William Lord Alington, of Horseheath, was executor to Hildebrand, the last Lord Alington, by whose death he got, it is said, near forty thousand pounds; and although, as the epitaph on his own monument records, "he buried him according to his own order in the chapel of this church, belonging to his family," he did not (which Cole says "*is a little odd*") put up any memorial to him more than what is on his own tomb. But then, it is added, Sir John "was a humourist and very covetous." The monument of Sir John Jacob is a large black marble slab, within the altar rails. Underneath a large coat of arms is the following inscription:—

"Here lyeth the Body of S^r John Jacob, of West Wrating, Baronet, son of S^r John Jacob, of Gamlingay, both of y^e County of Cambridge, & of Catherine, Daughter of William Lord Alington, of Horseheath, in the same County, and Grandson of S^r John Jacob, of Bromley, near Bow, in Middlesex; where y^e interr'd was born, & being Executor to Hildebrand, y^e Last Lord Alington, he buried him* according to his own order, in y^e Chappel of this Church belonging to his family. Sir John Died March 31st, 1740, † in y^e 74 year of his age."

There is an account of some Roman antiquities found at Withersfield in Davy's Collections, 19,103, copied from Cole's MSS. xxxi, p. 91, 92, where are drawings of nine articles found in 1759.

SAMUEL TYMMS.

* "1722. The R^t Hon. Hildebrand Lord Alington, Baron of Killard, in the Kingdom of Ireland, was buried Feb^r

25th."—*Parish Register*.

† "1740. Sir John Jacob, buried April 4th."—*Parish Register*.