

us to pique our curiosity, and to stimulate the endeavours of all who are interested in "the Restitution of Decayed Intelligence" respecting what we now designate the Antiquities of Suffolk; and it will afford me the liveliest satisfaction, if by this very imperfect memoir, I may suggest, or direct any more successful investigations of the history of the *Old Minster*.

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ON THE SITE OF THE BISHOPRIC OF
ELMHAM.

A VISIT I paid some years ago with the members of the Suffolk Archaeological Institute, to a ruined church called the "Minster," in the parish of South Elmham St. George, in the county of Suffolk, brought strongly to my mind some doubts I had long entertained of the accuracy of the generally received account of the location of the sees of the Bishops of East Anglia, and determined me, when opportunity offered, to look further into the subject, and state my views upon it.

I now give the result of my enquiries, and in order to render my observations more intelligible, I think it will be better to subjoin a list of the Bishops of East Anglia, from the latest authority, Mr. J. M. Kemble's list in the Norwich volume of the Archaeological Institute:—

- 1 Felix
- 2 Thomas
- 3 Berhtgild
- 4 Bisi

Elmham.

673 to 693 Beadwine
706 Northberht
731 Heatholac
736 to 742 Æthelferth

Dunwich.

Æcce 674
Æscwulf
Ærdred
Cuthwine

Elmham (continued).

742 Eangerth
 781 Æthelwulf
 803 Hunferth
 814 Sibba
 826 Hunferth
 Humberht

Dunwich (continued).

Aldberht
 Ecylaf
 Heardred
 Ælfhun
 Tidgerth
 Wermund
 Wilred

Athulf sole Bishop of East Anglia, Eadwulf, qu. *Dunwich* 942.

966 Ælfric
 Theodred
 Theodred

996 Æthelstan

1001 to 1021 Ælfgan

1021 to 1029 Ælfwine

Ælfric

d. 1038 Ælfric

“Bishop in East Anglia.”—*A.S.C.*

1038 to 1039 Stigand

1040 to 1044 Grymketel

1044 to 1047 Stigand again

1047 to 1070 Ægelmar, Stigand's brother

1070 Ariast, removed to Thetford, 1075

The first Bishop of East Anglia, Felix, is stated some time or other to have had his see at Dummoc or Dunwich, and he was followed by Thomas, Berghtgild, and Bisi, who are also said to have continued at that place.

Bede, who is the authority for all later historians, says, that about 673, whilst Bisi was yet alive, two bishops, Æcce, and Beadwine, were appointed and consecrated in his place, “from which time that province has had two bishops.”

Camden (quoting Bede as his authority) repeats this, but adds what Bede nowhere says, that it was divided into two sees, one at Dunwich, the other at North Elmham, “a little towne.”

Spelman goes further, and identifies the village of North Elmham, in Norfolk, as the site of the see of Elmham. Blomefield, also quoting Bede as his authority, still further improves upon the original account, and says that one continued at Dunwich and the other at North Elmham, in Norfolk, *whose jurisdiction extended over that county as the other did over Suffolk.*”

Now Bede says nothing of the kind; in every instance in which he speaks of the see of Elmham, it is as Elmham alone, without any addition of "North" or "South," "Norfolk" or "Suffolk."*

Blomefield adds, "these two sees were again united about 870, and Wildred, who was then bishop, resided at North Elmham, and so remained till removed to Thetford, by Herfast the bishop in 1075".....†

He further says that "in 1075, by order of the council held by Lanfranc, which appointed that all bishop's sees should be removed from villages to the most eminent cities in their dioceses: he removed his see from Elmham to Thetford."

North Elmham is a village of some extent in the north of Norfolk, and is the first in the list of the Norfolk possessions of W., bishop of Thetford, recorded in Domesday: there is, however, no allusion on that record to its having ever been the seat of the episcopal see.

Considering the purpose for which the Domesday survey was compiled, the absence of any notice of the kind cannot be taken to be of much importance, but it is rather startling to find Blomefield, in his account of the bishops, stating that Theodred, bishop of East Anglia (who was also bishop of London) by his will, which he extracts from the White Register of Bury, directed that‡ men deal ten pounds for his soul at HOXNE, *at my bishopric*; and simply adding in a note "the bishops of Elmham, Thetford, and Norwich always had a grand palace at Hoxne, until Henry VIII's time." But a palace at Hoxne would not make it "mi bishopric" in 970 or 80.

Further, Ailfric, bishop "in East Anglia," as he is styled in the Anglo-Saxon chronicle, died in 1038, and by his will,

* Neither do any of the early chroniclers after Bede, with one exception, Thomas of Elmham, the Canterbury chronicler, who wrote about 1414, or about three centuries after the removal of the see. He evidently thought the Norfolk Elmham was the site of the see, for he speaks in his chronicle, in recording the appointment of two Bishops in East Anglia, that Elmham

was "seven miles from Walsingham." It might be that he knew no other Elmham than that, his native place; but whether it was simply a conjecture of his, or he had grounds for the statement, he does not say. See *Thomas of Elmham's Chronicle*, by Hardwick, p. 167.

† Blomefield, vol. ix, 487.

‡ Blomefield vol. iii, p. 458.

which Blomefield also extracts from the Bury register, he gives the fen which Thurlac sold him to Elmham, the priests to feed, and to Hoxne to the priests there a thousand "werd fen."

We get another small gleam of light from the Domesday survey, where under the heading of "lands of W., bishop of Thetford, in Sudfole," we are told that "Hoxne was held by Ailmar, the bishop in the time of king Edward for a manor," . . . just as in the case of North Elmham, but here it adds, "in this manor was a church, *the see of the bishop of Suffolk, in the time of king Edward.*" Now as the bishop of Suffolk in the time of king Edward, was really bishop of Elmham or of East Anglia, it is clear these bishops had deserted the original site of their see long before the date assigned, viz. 1070.

As there were two Elmhams, one in Norfolk and the other in Suffolk, and as Bede and all the early chroniclers, speak of the place as Elmham, there is something strange and startling in the unanimity of all recent historians, including Camden and Spelman, in fixing the see at North Elmham. But the fact is so—and there is as little warrant for the assertion that the jurisdiction of the bishop of Elmham was coincident in extent with the county of Norfolk, and that of Dunwich with Suffolk.

I am now therefore led to enquire if there be any other evidence to determine the question?

There is a tradition in the neighbourhood of North Elmham that it was the Bishop's See; the palace of the bishops is pointed out a few hundred yards north of the parish church; and in a park a little distance from it, the site of the "Cathedral" is to be seen in particular states of the soil. I am told, however, by a gentleman well acquainted with the locality, that these foundations present no marks of antiquity, and are in his opinion the remains of a range of old cottages; besides which, the designation of cathedral is fatal to a tradition which professes to speak of matters occurring prior to the Conquest. The so-called palace is a very small manor house, belonging to the bishops, built

in the corner of a Roman camp. Bishop Spencer had licence to embattle his manor house here, in the 11th Richard the Second; and probably built it. It has therefore little to do with the times of the Bishops of Elmham.

In the north-east corner of the county of Suffolk, however, is a group of parishes locally known from time immemorial as "The Parishes." They are:—

1. Flixton.
2. South Elmham St. Mary, or Homersfield.
3. ————— St. George, or Sancroft.
4. ————— St. Margaret.
5. ————— St. Peter.
6. ————— St. Michael.
7. ————— All Saints.
8. ————— St. James.
9. Rumburgh.

Other parishes surround them on every side, and no reason can be ever elicited for the remarkable title: you are told that it always has been so, but no one knows why.

In the rolls of Great Yarmouth I more than once met with the name of a row in the northern part of that town, called the "Nine Parishes Row," which appears to allude to these South Elmham parishes.

In one of these, South Elmham St. George, or Sancroft, as I before mentioned, in the interior of a large Roman Camp, is the remarkable ruin called the "Minster." This is a small apsidal church, entirely built of rubble, having a square apartment at the west end, the walls of which do not seem stout enough for a steeple; and which has neither door nor window on the west, north, or south sides; but has two narrow openings into the nave of the church. An excavation might possibly throw some light upon this matter.

I need, however, no further allude to details of the building; it is sufficient to say it is an early Norman church, which does not appear to have been parochial, and has been time out of mind known as the Minster.

Now, I do not know where I could point out more clearly or distinctly the site of a "parochia," or diocese, "in partibus infidelium," than is here developed. The title of "the

parishes," applied to nine out of many hundreds, seems utterly unaccountable on any other supposition than that the ancient term of "parochia," applied to the site of the See, before the division of the land into parishes, has clung to it ever since; and this idea receives confirmation from the fact of the "Minster" remaining there. Not, of course, that I believe the present ruin is of older date than early Norman, but it replaced, I presume, an earlier wooden structure. Nowhere else in the two counties is a Minster to be found; there, alone, has the Saxon title clung to a heap of ruins for many hundreds of years. At no later period than the Saxon era is it possible to suppose such an appellation can have been given it.

Although, as a Norfolk man, I would fain retain the traditionary site in my native county, I can come to no other conclusion than that we have here the original site of the first labours of Felix. Here was a village (Flixton) which received his name: and in *Sancroft*, we have the Saxon "Minster,"—the mother church; and the parishes,—the "Parochia."

To Dunwich he probably afterwards went; but when two bishops were appointed, one went to the old site, and was called after it, bishop of Elmham. Here the bishops of Elmham probably continued until the death of St. Edmund, at Hoxne, induced them to build a "Minster" there, to which they removed the See; and from thence, when the incursions of the Danes into Suffolk, from the eastern coast (which became very frequent and disastrous in the eleventh century), the See was temporarily removed further inland, till the cessation of troubles should allow the intention of fixing the See at Norwich, to be carried out.

It will naturally be asked how it happens that this is now suggested for the first time. To this it can only be replied that doubts have probably—indeed, must—have occurred to many others beside myself, to whom the positive appropriation of the site to the Norfolk Elmham by Camden and Spelman, whose works are themselves antiquities, seemed to have incontestably established the claims of that

place. The sources from which Camden and Spelman drew their information, however, are equally open to us; and on investigation, so far from establishing the conclusion they arrived at, it is clear any other place called Elmham, whether in Norfolk or Suffolk, has quite as much title to be considered the Bishopric, as North Elmham, in Norfolk.

When we have, in addition, the body of evidence furnished by the "Minster" and the "Parishes," by the names of Flixton, Sancroft, Rumburgh; to say nothing of the superior probability of a remove from South Elmham to Hoxne, and from Hoxne to Thetford (for which the incursions of the Danes afford a reasonable explanation), to the strange, inexplicable removal of the See from North Elmham to Thetford; I do not think I can be accused of unwarrantable temerity, in differing from a number of historians, headed by the honored names of Camden and Spelman.

HENRY HARROD.