WINGFIELD CHURCH

History & Guide

Foreword

It is nearly 60 years since Canon S.W.H. Aldwell, Vicar of Wingfield from 1910 to 1938 produced his definitive study "WINGFIELD, ITS CHURCH CASTLE AND COLLEGE". We are grateful to Mrs. Sheila Kent for summarising much of Canon Aldwell's material in this Guide.

Wingfield Church is a building rich in history, reflecting the life of nation and village for more than 600 years. As we care for this heritage, we hope you will share with us an appreciation of life in past generations, a past which has influenced so much of what we take for granted around us today.

But the Church is also the people who have worked and worshipped in this place. Here God has been worshipped, His truths have been read from the Bible and preached from the pulpit and His sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion have been administered.

We pray therefore that all who visit this beautiful Church may be touched by the faith which is still proclaimed here week by week and may become aware of the love of God for them and for their families.

November 1999

Tony Lowe

(Revd.) A.R.Lowe
Vicar

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Photographs on pages 4 (Wingfield College) 13 (Font, Lady Chapel + Stall Carvings) Kindly Donated by Ian Bruce Property Consultants. All other Photographs By Mark Bickers, Cyril & Margaret Swains and Tommy Gee

The Village of Wingfield

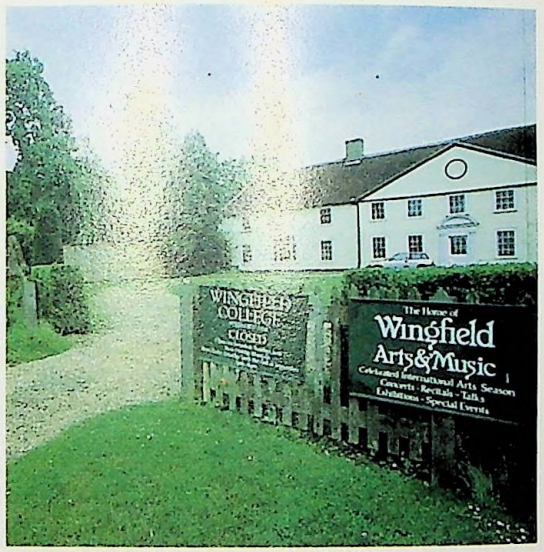
The village of Wingfield lies in the northern part of Suffolk, not very far from the Norfolk border. It covers some 2442 acres, but the houses are widely scattered and the population is consequently small.

It was probably during the Saxon invasion, when the English occupied the greater part of Norfolk and Suffolk, that people came to Wingfield. It seems likely that the first settlement was made somewhere between the Church and the bottom of the valley through which the Strad Brook runs.

These early English settlements were, as a rule, small. An English family - "Winga", perhaps - settled down and after cutting the trees to make a clearing, "feld" or "field" - began to farm and till the land, giving their name to the village which afterwards grew up around this first settlement.

At one time, Wingfield was the seat of one of the most powerful families in England; and the imposing remains of its old Castle are reminders of the days when the de la Pole Earls and Dukes of Suffolk lived here in the Middle Ages.

Wingfield Castle.



Wingfield College

The Church, with its fine monuments and stately Chancel, is one of the most beautiful in this part of Suffolk and fortunately has suffered little at the hands of destroyers or restorers. It was built as the Collegiate Church of Sir John de Wingfield's foundation, Wingfield College, the domestic buildings of which lie to the south behind a Georgian facade. The College has in recent years been wonderfully restored and the Great Hall is once again in use.

The Building of the Church

The building of the present Church was begun in the year 1362 on the site of an earlier Church. The foundation charter states that "the church must be in great part built anew ... and constructed on a larger scale than before ... at very great expence". The Church was dedicated to St. Andrew.

Generally speaking, there are two characteristic features to be found in a Collegiate Church. First, the Chancel is nearly always large and spacious, the reason being that this was where the choir of the College sang the daily services.

View Through Chancel to Early Perpendicular East Window

Secondly, the Chancel usually has folding seats known as misericords, which were the stalls of the College chaplains. Both of these features are in Wingfield Church.

The Church was begun at the close of the period of the "Decorated Style", but the complete structure, as it stands today, was not finished until well into the "Perpendicular Period". The Chancel and adjoining Chapels were probably built first. This part of the work was carried out by the Executors of Sir John de Wingfield (d.1361) - the tomb of the founder would have been erected as soon as possible after his death. The Nave with its aisles and south porch are said to have been built by Michael de la Pole who had married Katherine, the only daughter and heiress of Sir John de Wingfield.

The main purpose for which Sir John de Wingfield founded his College of Secular Chaplains was to ensure that masses and prayers were said daily for his soul and the souls of his heirs - this was becoming an increasing practice in those days and was founded on the belief that "more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of".

The Chapel of the Holy Trinity (now used as a Vestry) was the Wingfield Chantry Chapel. The other and larger Chapel on the south side of the Chancel is the Lady Chapel. Michael de la Pole, second Earl of Suffolk, desired to be buried "on the northern side of the Altar of the Blessed Mary"; and his tomb is still there.

In about 1430, the Chancel and the Lady Chapel were lengthened and the beautiful arches of Lincolnshire stone on the south side of the Chancel were erected and the fine East Window inserted. This work was carried out by William de la Pole, 1st Duke of Suffolk, in memory of his father Michael de la Pole (grandson of Sir John de Wingfield) who died at Harfleur in 1415.

Wingfield Church is still very beautiful, but it must have been far more so in its early days. All the windows would then have been rich with coloured glass, and the walls adorned with pictures and frescoes; and the floors of the Chancel, Lady Chapel and side Chapels would have glistened with many brasses. The Rood screen, with the great carved Calvary above it and the figures of the Virgin and St. John on either side, all in colour, would have extended right across the Church from wall to wall. The High Altar with its lights, would have been rich with silk and lace and jewels and precious stones, the altars of the Lady Chapel and Chancel Chapels decked in colour, and all with their lights and costly ornaments. Here and there would be statues of the Virgin and the Saints, and the monuments and Chancel arches would be all glowing with a hundred tints.

The main benefactors of the Church were, of course, Sir John de Wingfield and the de la Poles; but for centuries the Wingfield people themselves contributed to the upkeep of the Church and in many old Wills much was left to the Church. All this stopped with the coming of the Reformation. Churches were stripped of their treasures; and in 1547 the Crown appointed Commissioners to draw up Inventories of Church goods throughout the country, ostensibly to prevent private destruction. In reality it paved the way for the Crown itself to appropriate a good deal of Church wealth.

Three Centuries of Neglect

As a result many parish churches were left as bare shells and in some instances they fell into actual ruin. In 1602 Certificates of all ruins and decays of the Ruinated Churches and Chancels of the Diocese of Norwich were returned to Bishop Redman, and in the Returns for the Archdeaconry of Suffolk the ruinous state of the Chancel of Wingfield is mentioned. This is hardly to be wondered at. The chaplains of the College, who had served the Church were all pensioned off when the College was suppressed and the revenues of the College handed over to Henry VIII.

It is unlikely that there was any resident priest here at this time or for long after, since there was a great dearth of clergy and several parishes had to be served by one man. There was thus no one to care for the Church, and what Services there were would have been held in the Nave while the Chancel was allowed to fall into decay.

It must have been even worse in the days of Cromwell when so many of the clergy of the Church of England were turned out of their posts and the Prayer Book Services prohibited. This period also saw the final destruction of Church property. Suffolk suffered especially badly at this time for a certain William Dowsing was appointed under a warrant from the Earl of Manchester to demolish the superstitious pictures and ornaments of churches etc. within the county of Suffolk. In the Eastern Counties the Puritan element was strong and militant and succeeded in fostering a powerful anti-Church feeling in the minds of the people.

From accounts of official visits paid to the Church towards the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, it seems that little repair work had been done up to that time. In 1796 a certain E.G. visited the Church on 5th August.* The visitor speaks of the Church as being in a very indifferent condition. The chief beauties which he noted were that the walls were adorned with sundry Scripture sentences and that " the Church having been lately new pewed, has received thereby much additional beauty". This was about the time that the high box-pews were placed in the nave of the Church and the old mediaeval seats removed and destroyed.

Another visit was paid to the Church on 24th September 1827.** It was noted that nothing had been attempted in the way of restoration and that the structure was still in an uncared for condition. For nearly 200 years the Church had been neglected.

** ADD MSS 19092 British Museum p392.*

*** In Davy's Suffolk Collections ADD MSS 19092 British Museum.*

The Church Restored

In the early part of the 19th century, various restorations were carried out. The Churchyard was planted with trees in 1826; a new school room was built in the Churchyard in 1834. In 1837 the Tower of the Church was repaired, and five years later the South Aisle was repaired and the roof releaded. In 1840 - "this Autumn the Church was cleaned, the accumulated daubings of perhaps two or three centuries were removed from the pillars,

19th Century Pews

arches, windows and monuments, and there were two cart loads of scrapings".

Major restoration work began in 1866 and was completed some 12 or 14 years later. This embraced the repair of the entire roof of the Church, the Chancel, North and South Aisles,the tiling of the floor and stalls, new communion rails and the restoration of the clerestory windows, and windows in the North Aisle and Tower, and the seating in the Nave.

In 1911 the work of beautifying the Sanctuary was begun under the Architect, J.N. Comper. "A fine oak top was placed over the altar table*, beautiful rose silk hangings were placed on the east wall and two brass pricket candlesticks, a copy of an old pattern, on the altar". All these were designed by Mr. Comper, as well as the altar frontals and candle holders for the Chancel stalls. The Lady Chapel was restored and the communion rails replaced by communicant kneelers in the 1920's.

A new piece of ground was added to the Churchyard in 1921 and in the centre a war memorial was set up. The wrought iron gates were erected in 1962.

As mentioned later in the Guide, a major programme of Restoration has been carried out in recent years. Further work is planned.

** In 1960 this oak top was removed and the present table is Jacobean in origin.*

South Porch

This is late Decorated and is said to have been built by Michael de la Pole (1st Earl.) Over the outer doorway is a niche with a canopy which once contained the figure of St. Andrew. The fine entrance doorway has good deep mouldings and on either side are the heads of a knight and his lady (possibly Sir John and his wife Alianore). The hood of mail is typical of 14th century armour.

The Holy Water stoup remains on the east side of the doorway but has been spoilt by modern work.

This is the original main entrance to the Church from the west College precinct.

South Porch

The Nave

The Perpendicular period roof is of open timber work. It was formerly painted in panels at the east end and bore the monogram IHC in foliage, but when the roof was last restored all this work was swept away. The only decorations now left are four corbels of carved angels bearing shields, but here again all colour has been removed. There are five arches on either side dividing the nave from the side aisles; these are late Decorated and quite plain. The ten clerestory windows are Perpendicular, and were fully restored in 1996.

At the east end of the north and south aisles are stone and brick stairs;* leading to the now lost rood screen.

Rood screens were a characteristic feature of the Parish Church in the Middle Ages. The screen stretched the whole breadth of the Church and divided the Chancel and side Chapels from the body of the Church. It had a platform over it called the Rood Loft and on this stood the great Rood or Crucifix with the figures of the Virgin Mary and St. John on either side. The Loft had many uses. The village orchestra played there and later organs were placed there. Nothing is left now except the end of the Rood beam in the north staircase, as it was sawn off. The rest was destroyed in the times of Queen Elizabeth 1; but when entire and painted and gilt, it must have added considerably to the beauty of the Church.

** Brick is rare and unusual for this day (the de la Poles owned one of the first brickyards in Kingston upon Hull c 1320)*

Aisle

The north and south aisles of the Church were originally meant to continue to the extreme east end of the Church. The south aisle structurally remains as it was extended by the de la Poles, but the north aisle has been blocked by the organ and the solid wall which now forms the east side of the Organ Chamber (Chapel of St. Margaret). There used to be an opening in this wall, traces of which are still to be seen, which led through to the Chapel of the Holy Trinity beyond (now the Vestry) and so made a continuous aisle from the west end of the Church to the east.

South Aisle

The windows are typical of late Decorated work but have Perpendicular internal pilasters and mouldings; all have hood moulds terminated by heads. The east and west windows of this aisle have very fine tracery and are both of three lights; the other windows, eight in number, are late Decorated with two lights, with the exception of the three large windows in the Lady Chapel which are Perpendicular. The timbers of the roof in the nave are nearly all modern and belong to the restoration work done in 1866, but in the Lady Chapel there are considerable remains of the old timbers.

North Aisle

The three large windows are all rather late Perpendicular and have good tracery. Like the south aisle roof the woodwork here is practically new, though the corbels which support the brackets belong to the original roof as do those in the south aisle.

The Chancel

This is still exceedingly beautiful and dignified, although it is said to have been in a ruinous condition in 1602 and despoiled of much of its original ornamentation. It is of considerable dimensions, 43ft 4½in by 17ft 5in, and proportionately lofty. The roof which underwent extensive repair in 1866, has its principals supported between each clerestory window by corbels of angels, some bearing shields and some scrolls and one a chalice, but all the other ornaments have gone. The old returned stalls, with their poppy heads and panelling remain, each one is a miserere and is uniformly carved with foliage beneath.

The stalls are raised on a plinth, which is pierced with quarterfoiled air holes. This is thought to provide a better resonance for the choir.

The large east window is early Perpendicular. It was inserted by William de la Pole when he carried out the extension of the Chancel and Lady Chapel eastwards and heightened the walls. Fragments of the old painted glass remain in the upper tracery

Chancel stalls on plinth showing quarterfoiled holes.

work and there are coats of arms lower down.

The Clerestory has seven large Perpendicular windows on each side.

The two easternmost arches were also built by William de la Pole at the same time, somewhere about 1430.

Both the east window and all seven Clerestory windows were also fully restored in 1996.

Monuments

There are three superb monuments; the oldest in stone on the north wall under a fine ogee canopy is the noble and ancient figure of Sir John de Wingfield (d.1361). This would have been coloured originally and C.A. Stothard gives the following description in his "Memoirs":

"The oldest monument is a single figure of the time of Edward III or Richard II, very singularly painted red, knees and elbow-pieces gold, the surcoat, greaves and helmet silver. On the red thigh pieces are golden spots, placed at regular distances. From what I have seen since, I think these were meant to represent studs. The whole of the arms down to the gauntlets might have been ornamented in the same manner, but as the paint was nearly effaced I could not ascertain the fact".

It is possible that this figure rested on its own monument in the Chantry Chapel (now the Vestry) and that when this was falling to pieces, it was removed to the position where it now rests.

Monument of Sir John de Wingfield.

The next oldest monument is on the south side of the Sanctuary. This is the tomb of Michael de la Pole, 2nd Earl of Suffolk, and his wife Katherine. Round it are thirteen niches, eight on the south side, four at the west end and one on the north side, some which formerly contained images of his children.

These are wooden effigies and were originally coloured. Wooden effigies after the middle of the 14th century are rare. Round the monument are the badges of the de la Poles and Stafffords – the leopard heads and wings (Wingfields).

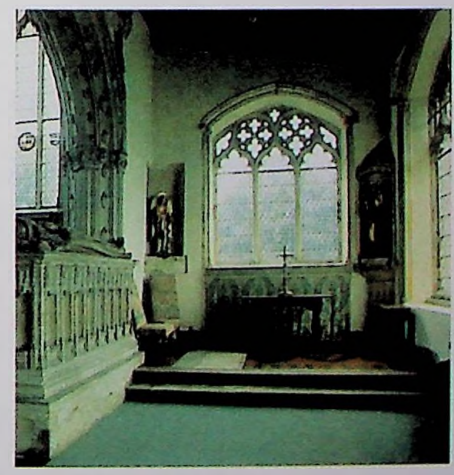
The last of the monuments and the most beautiful is on the north side of the Sanctuary. Carved on alabaster are the figures of John de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk and his wife, Elizabeth Plantagenet, sister of Edward IV and Richard III. This has one of the most perfect representations of amour of that period. Under the Duke's head is a helmet surmounted by a Saracen's head with an earring in the right ear; at his feet is a lion with a forked tail.

The Duchess rests on a cushion supported by angels; very little of these is left. On the arched canopy over the figures is a rose-en-soleil, the badge of the Yorkist dynasty, and the portcullis; and on the wall above the monument is the original tilting helmet with the crest, the Saracen's head, made of wood, on either side of which are supporters.

Tomb of Michael de la Pole 2nd Earl of Suffolk and his wife, Katherine.

Monument of John de la Pole of Suffolk and his wife, Elizabeth Plantagenet. Sister of Edward IV and Richard III.

The Font.



The Lady Chapel.

The Chancel.

Stalls Carvings in Chancel.

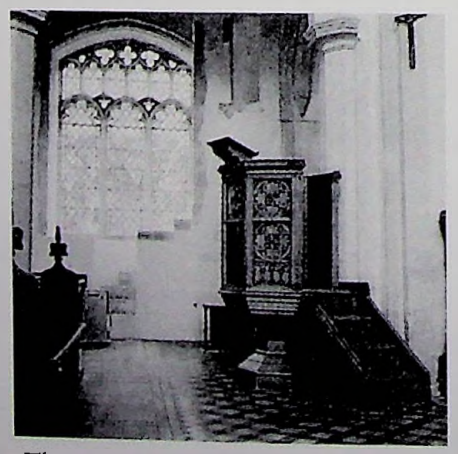
The Lady Chapel

This is on the south side of the Chancel and is separated from it by arches and parclose screen. It is of large dimensions, 44ft 9in by 14ft 7in. An early Master of the College, Stephen Coppelowe, is buried here, along with many others.

Chapel of the Holy Trinity

This is now used as a Vestry. It is 28ft 8in long by 9ft 5in width. The entrance to this Chapel is by a canopied doorway richly carved and ornamented and one of the features of the Church.

There is a curious double screen in this chapel the top part of which forms the east end of an upper chamber which extends over three quarters of the Vestry. The entrance to this chamber is reached by a ladder from the Vestry, but this is a modern arrangement. There are two squints in this chamber looking out on the High Altar and the Lady Chapel, probably used as a watching chamber. The painting of both ground and first floor ceilings is original. The east and north windows contain medieval glass. They too were fully restored in 1996.



The Pulpit.

The Chapel of St. Margaret

This is now used as the Organ Chamber It is 13ft x 11ft 4in . There is a large niche, over which must have been a canopy. Traces of this remain and of the old colouring. There is an arched piscina in good condition also in this chapel.

The Font

The font stands in the middle of the west end of the Nave, exactly facing the Communion Table. It was placed in the Church by Michael de la Pole, 2nd Earl of Suffolk, about 1405 and, like most Suffolk fonts, is octagonal.

On the panels of the bowl are angels holding shields and lions sejant alternately. The shield facing east bears the de la Pole arms quartering Wingfield, that on the west side is similar except that it has a label of three points; on the south side are the Stafford arms, and on the north side those of Wingfield. Part of the old font cover remains.

The Pulpit

The pulpit is plain and modern, but the carved work on it is old and very handsome. In the front are the arms of William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk.

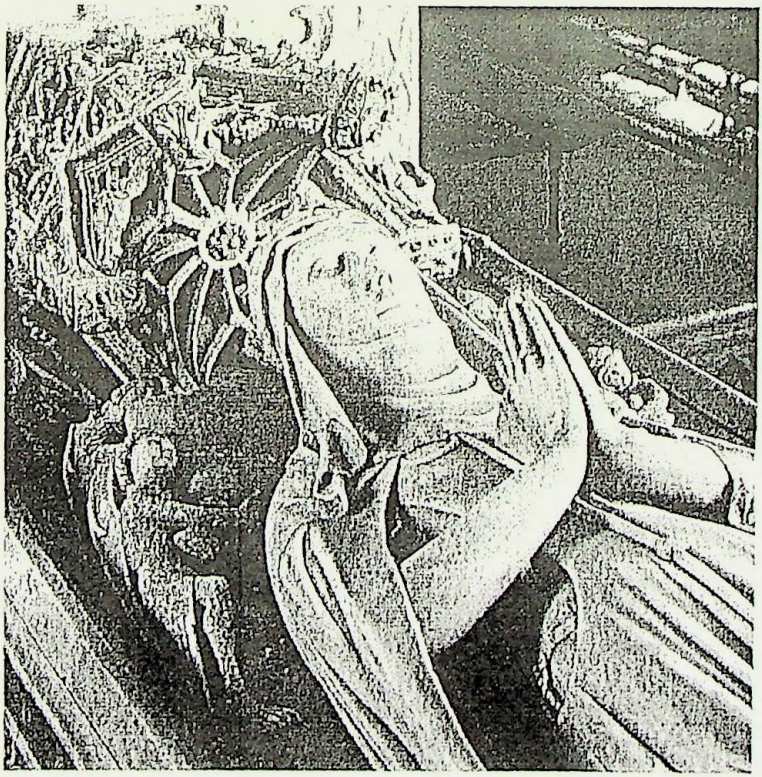
The Tower

This stands at the west end, and has a newel stairway outbuilt on its south side. For such a lofty Church it is very low, only 56 feet in height. There are fifty five stone steps leading to the belfry which contains six bells - the oldest dated 1596.

The wooden "sentry box" is 18th century. It was used at one time for the priest to stand under when taking a funeral in wet weather.

ALICE de la Pole
DUCHESS OF SUFFOLK

Alice Chaucer, was born in 1404 and died in 1475. She lived through a turbulent, dangerous but also a very prosperous time of transition: the Lancastrian Age – an Age preparing for the Reformation. King Henry IV, son of John of Gaunt, was on the throne. The Hundred Years war with France rumbled on and finally came to an end in 1455, leaving the English with Calais as their only possession. The Wars of the Roses – a dispute for the Crown between the Lancastrians and Yorkists sons and grandsons of Edward III - brought chaos to England, while bubbling in the background over all these years was unrest in Scotland and Wales.



Alice, Duchess of Suffolk in prayer. Her head rests on a cushion supported by feathered angels. The garter is wrapped round her left arm and her rosary hangs from the belt at her hip

Feudalism was slowly drawing to a close and the spread of learning was opening up men's minds to question the world in which they lived. Religion was under scrutiny. Wycliff and his followers had been persecuted for attempting reform as the Church garnered profits from all over Europe in the form of Peter's Pence and payment for Indulgencies as a result of the rigid doctrine of Purgatory. The Popes were unwilling to introduce change as long as they were receiving huge grants and endowments for building chapels and paying priests to sing Masses and burn candles for the dead.

Commerce prospered, towns and guilds grew strong with the rise of an enterprising middle class. Wool prosperity came to East Anglia in spite of the general unrest with France. This was the century in which English became the Mother Tongue - and this was partly due to the influence of Geoffrey Chaucer, Alice's grandfather. His decision to use English for his literary work, rather than Latin or French, represented perhaps the most significant moment in our national culture. The wars in France had discouraged the nobility from speaking French as their first language. French was slowly abandoned and Chaucer's English became widely spoken and written.

Into this world Alice Chaucer was born. She was the only child of Sir Thomas Chaucer and Matilda (Burghersh). Sir Thomas was a man of considerable importance and throughout his life held very many high offices of state. The Manor of Ewelme in Oxfordshire had come to Sir Thomas through his marriage to Matilda and Alice probably was born and brought up in the Manor House on the Ewelme Estate.

Being an only child, many aspects of her upbringing would have been carefully supervised to groom her for a marriage of importance. Being the granddaughter of Geoffrey Chaucer, language would have been important. She was most certainly bilingual, she would have studied the classics and would have absorbed estate management by parental example. As a wife of a nobleman, she was expected to become his partner in the running of the household and the many properties for which he was responsible. This was a century of war and husbands went off on campaigns leaving their wives to administer their estates sometimes for a long time.

In 1413 Henry V came to the throne and the battles in France were reignited

At the age of 11 Alice was betrothed and married to Sir John Phelips, a wealthy local Knight. He died at the Battle of Harfleur in 1415. Alice inherited a fortune. At that same battle, Michael de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, died of a fever. His elder son, Michael, died at the Battle of Agincourt not long afterwards and his second son, William, succeeded to the title. William attended his brother's funeral which was held at Ewelme Church and this might have been the first glimpse Alice would have had of him - she still a child, he 19 years old.

In 1422 the King fell ill with fever and died at Vincennes. William, now Earl of Suffolk and the Earl of Salisbury were left in France for the defence of the castles and towns which the English had gained. For five years they were successfully engaged in various sieges and battles and Suffolk's name with that of Salisbury was used as a war-cry. The new King (Henry VI) was nine months old when he succeeded Henry V. He reigned until 1461.

In 1424 Alice, referred to still as Lady Phelips, married the Earl of Salisbury, a literary patron as well as a soldier of great repute. He and William de la Pole had shared many heroic deeds in battle and it is more than probable that she counted William as a friend.

By 1428 Alice was widowed yet again. The Earl of Salisbury was killed at the Siege of Orleans. The Dowager Countess of Salisbury, having no children, inherited enormous wealth. After the Siege of Orleans, William commanded the English army but was forced to retreat and at a battle soon afterwards he was taken prisoner, and released on the payment of a huge ransom of £20,000 in 1430. He returned to England and headed for Alice, marrying her on 11th November 1430. The marriage settlement gave Alice jointure in all the de la Poles estates.

This marriage brought together immense wealth. The de la Poles owned many manors up and down the country. They would occasionally stay at Cotton – where William was born – and Huntingfield. There were various London residences where business

was conducted, but the principal homes of the de la Poles were the Courthall in Hull and the Castle at Wingfield.

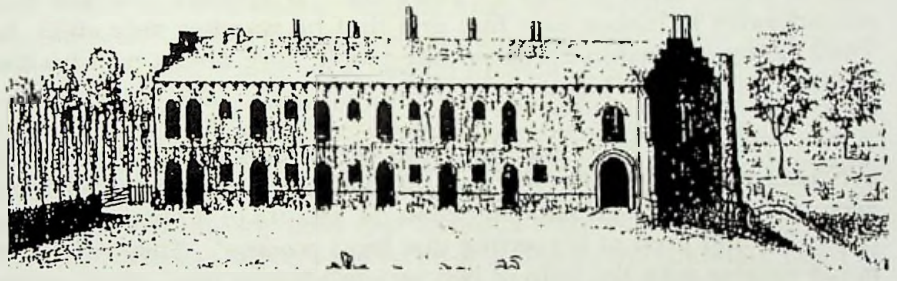
The de la Poles had been probably one of the first of the country's merchant families to be ennobled – a fact that was probably not forgotten and certainly resented by many of his fellow peers and enemies.

Alice not only brought a great fortune to William, she also brought a connection to the Royal family since her grandmother (wife of Geoffrey Chaucer) was Phillipa Roet, whose sister was married to John of Gaunt, the father of Henry IV and grandfather of Henry V.

Their marriage would seem to have been a happy partnership. They had many interests in common. Both were cultured and talented. William wrote poems in French and English, and Alice was a patroness of poetry. Both were builders. Together they were responsible for a great many medieval buildings in Ewelme and Wingfield as well as in Hull. William laid the foundation stone of Kings College Cambridge and oversaw the building work at Eton College, which he endowed with large sums of money himself. Between them William and Alice founded and endowed countless churches, monasteries and other religious foundations. You wonder how they managed to do so much.

Orleans was the turning point of the War. The struggle to hold on to hard won possessions became more and more difficult as the years went by. William became weary of fighting – he had started his soldiering at the age of 15 - but it was not until 20 years later seeing the hopelessness of further resistance that he began tentative negotiations for peace, which was to prove extremely unpopular with the country and contributed eventually to his downfall.

In 1436 Sir Thomas Chaucer died, leaving Ewelme to Alice and William. They were enchanted with it and immediately began extending the Manor House and planning a Foundation on the estate. The house grew into Ewelme Palace. It was described in Henry VIII's reign as "being set within a fair moat and is built richly of brick and stone". An inventory which survives described in 1467 a collection of splendid furnishings. The ceilings were richly painted and the great hall had roofing beams made from solid iron.



Engraving, 1729, of the lodgings of the manor house at Ewelme, built soon after 1430 by William de la Pole, earl of Suffolk, and his wife Alice.

On July 3rd 1437, Alice and William received licence from the King to found an Almshouse in the village. This institution, which they called God's House, built on the lines of the Maison Dieu at Hull, had similarities with Wingfield College, although the occupants of the almshouse were not secular priests, but they had to spend a great deal of time praying for the family's departed relatives. As well as God's House, they also built a two-storey brick schoolhouse whose pupils were drawn from the almshouse estates. The school is still in existence and in its original buildings, which is remarkable. Ewelme Foundation School is one of the oldest of the Church Schools.

The de la Poles became significant favourites of the King. Honours, titles and privileges were bestowed on them – William had become a Knight of the Garter in 1421 and in 1433 he had been appointed Steward of the Royal Household. Alice received the Order of the Garter in 1432 . By the 1440s they had reached the summit of their aggrandisment, only to crash with near devastation in 1450.

In 1444, William headed a mission to France to bring Margaret of Anjou back to marry the King. This would prove to be a highly unpopular move although William hoped that it would hasten the end of the conflict. Alice was appointed the Queen's Lady-in-Waiting. The

new Queen proved to be very self-willed and made herself and her French courtiers generally disliked.

John de la Pole, born on 27th September 1442, was their only son. Wardship of her son was given to Alice in 1444 and she still held this in 1453, when he was 11 years old. It appears that she had considerable influence over him and that he was her only child. In 1462 Margaret Paston declares that people "love not in no wise the Duke of Suffolk nor his mother".

The de la Poles together with their councillors, agents and servants dominated Norfolk and Suffolk. The Paston letters give accounts of their "high handed demands, seizure of property, denials of justice and even of perverting due legal process". They ran their many estates with the help of two very influential men, Sir Thomas Tuddenham of Oxburgh and a lawyer, John Heydon. A strange episode occurred during the 1440s. In the Complaints of the Norwich City the oppressive behaviour of the Suffolks and their servants were referred to; it was stated that Alice, disguised as an ordinary country housewife, together with Tuddenham and Heydon and two other persons "adjourned to Lakenham Woods, to take the air and disport themselves". Unfortunately the keeper, Thomas Ailmer, not recognising them, challenged them. Tuddenham fought with Ailmer and was arrested and imprisoned for a short time. Notably there is no explanation or description of the cavorting that had gone on in the Woods.

The Keeper was imprisoned for 30 days ! The Suffolks retaliated and a royal seizure of the City's franchise ensued. What William thought of this episode is not recorded.

In 1447 William was made Great Chamberlain of England and in the following year created Duke of Suffolk. There is no doubt that he was the King's favourite – and also probably the Queen's – but this advancement only added to his growing unpopularity with his fellow peers and the country. He was blamed for the ending of the wars with France, blamed for the loss of English possessions in France, blamed for bringing over Margaret of Anjou whose influence on the King was deeply resented.

His enemies were determined to destroy him. On 7th February 1450 the House of Commons proceeded to impeach him – they accused him of high treason and demanded a trial. The Act of Attainder was not passed, the King dismissed the impeachment and instead exiled the Duke for five years, hoping that this would save his life. Throughout the Spring of 1450 William and Alice were staying at Wingfield Castle – and what mental turmoil they must have been in with this crushing defeat of all their ambitions! The night before he left for France, he wrote a letter to his son, betraying love for his wife and child and charging John to honour the King and avoid the company of "proude men, of covetous and of flattering men" and "to draw to you and to your company good and virtuous men..." Lastly he charged him "my dear son, always as you be bounden by the commandment of God to do, to love to worship your lady and mother and that you obey always her commandments and to believe her councils and advices in all your works".

On 1st May 1450 he left Wingfield Castle for Ipswich where he embarked for France. Would Alice have gone with him to bid him farewell? If she did, by the time she returned to Wingfield Castle, a plot hatched, probably by the Duke of York, his bitterest enemy, was being carried out. His ship was intercepted off Dover by a vessel called "Nicholas of the Tower". He was taken on board and a trial of sorts was carried out, he was condemned to death and the next day taken into a boat and 'beheaded with half a dozen strokes of a rusty sword.' His body was thrown on the sands of Dover. It is not known where William is buried, but it is likely that Alice brought him to the Charterhouse at Hull, which had been his wish. The deep anguish which Alice must have felt can only be imagined.

Noblewomen were advised not to overindulge their sorrow but rather to apply their minds to the fulfilment of their husbands' wills. She had to act quickly firstly to seek the protection of the King and then to safeguard her properties and possessions. The Duke of Norfolk seized her manor of Stockton immediately and refused to relinquish it. There was no time for grieving, she had to move swiftly and by the beginning of June, hardly a month since the murder, she was appointing officials to secure the keeping of the de la Pole lands - she could call on Sir Thomas Tuddenham and John Heydon and she had

many others who helped her with administration – even so the main responsibility was hers and she kept the reins firmly in her hands.

She remained in Wingfield Castle for six weeks after her husband's death, packing up what she wanted for the move to Ewelme Palace. An inventory of the furnishings remains detailing exquisite tapestries and fabrics.

The Wars of the Roses erupted in 1453 when the Duke of York rebelled. Political turmoil threw the Court into chaos.

The Yorkist cause gained the ascendancy and in 1461 the King was defeated and deposed at the Battle of Wakefield. The Duke of York was killed in the battle but his son was made King and became Edward IV. For the next ten years Henry tried to regain his throne, but without success and eventually he was imprisoned and murdered in the Tower of London in 1471. The Queen – still very unpopular and suspected of plotting – was sent to Wallingford Castle, near Ewelme and near Alice for four years. Throughout all this tumult, Alice had steered a dangerous course, managing to change sides and become a Yorkist supporter. The prize of her manoevre was the marriage of her son John to Elizabeth Plantagenet, the sister of Edward IV and Richard III.

During the 25 years left to Alice in her widowhood, time was spent in building and carrying on the work which she and William had started, particularly in enlarging Wingfield Church. It bears a remarkable resemblance to the Ewelme Church, St.Mary's, which William and Alice had built in the 1430s.

In 1475 she died at the age of 71. Her son commissioned a magnificent tomb which is in Ewelme Church. The effigy of the Duchess lies under a richly carved alabaster canopy and wrapped around her left arm is the Order of the Garter. Beneath the chest on which she lies, there is a full length figure of the Duchess's withered corpse. It is a hideous sculpture – a reminder of the reality of death.

She was a formidable woman who had lived a turbulent and courageous life in a tempestuous century.

Sheila Kent
2000

THE DE LA POLES

EARLS & DUKES OF SUFFOLK

In England's history there had been many great families who in their generations wielded great powers and influenced the course of history. Some have kept their power up to the present day, some flashed across the skies like shooting stars. The de la Poles were such a family, Earls and Dukes of Suffolk in the Middle Ages. They burned brilliantly and died away in a little more than two hundred years.

At first sight it seems the story of a Yorkshire merchant marrying the daughter of a local East Anglian landowner but nothing is further from the truth.

The story really begins with Sir John de Wingfield, but he was not just a country landowner living quietly on his estates in Suffolk with his wife and child. Sir John was the son of Robert de Wingfield, a wealthy man of a family of Norman origin, who had settled in a small village and built a castle and owned much of the land around it, they called the village Wingfield. Sir Robert left his title and lands to his eldest son John, who was a fighting man of some distinction and already in royal favour as he would have to be to fulfil his other role as confidante and financial adviser to the Black Prince, son of Edward III and heir to the throne.

While at home at Wingfield Castle, Sir John had founded a college for secular chaplins and a small chapel so that masses and prayers could be said daily for the souls of the de Wingfields. He was also lord of several neighbouring Manorships.
During his service with the Black Prince he was often away with the army and an attractive young man named Michael de la Pole became his A.D.C. After the Battle of Poitiers 1355 both were involved in negotiations of the sums to be paid as ransoms for the French prisoners. Sir John probably expected that when his master became King of England he and his family would greatly benefit. Unfortunately the Black Prince

did not come to reign. he died before his father, the King died in 1377. The throne was inherited by the ten year old son of the Black Prince, Richard II.

We know little more of Sir John after this except his plans to build a large Church at Wingfield. In 1361 Sir John de Wingfield lied of the Black Death leaving a widow Alianore and only child Katherine.

Alianore herself was the daughter and heiress of Sir Ranulph de Glanville. On the death of her husband she endowed the Chantry College and Chapel at Wingfield, and in accordance with Sir John's wishes she became Lady of the Manor of Syleham Comitis (the part of Syleham away from the river and what is now top Syleham). In 1362, Alianore along with the College arranged the building of a large Church in memory of Sir John de Wingfield. The Chancel was built first and then the Chapel to the side with the tomb of the founder. In the Chapel a priest would probably live to pray continually for Sir John's soul.

On the death of Lady Alianore 1375 her estates passed to her daughter Katherine. The Black Prince had not forgotten his friendship with Sir John and he paid £57.13s.4d. for his funeral. His daughter Katherine who had married Michael de la Pole, born in 1330, was now 1 st Earl of Suffolk, this being granted for his services to the Crown.

The de la Poles were substantial northern wool merchants and wool was probably the reason for their connection with Suffolk, England's main wool producing area. The family had also served the Crown in various financial positions of highest responsibility. It is interesting to note that Michael de la Pole was involved with the arrangements made for ransoming French prisoners. He was born in 1331 the eldest son of William de la Pole, who was the first Mayor of Hull. The family had connections with East Anglia before the marriage of Michael and Katherine. William had married Katherine of Norwich. the daughter of Sir Walter Norwich of Mettingham Castle and a daughter had married Constantine de Clifton of Buckenham Castle.

On the death of Edward III in 1377 and the accession to the throne of his grandson, Richard II, Michael de la Pole continued in the king's service and loyally supported the young king. He later suffered for his services to the Crown as did some of his successors. The young King was not well advised, financially he was very extravagant, and Michael being involved with these policies, was accused of corruption with others.. He was impeached in 1387, many others were executed, but because of his friendship with the King's late father he was banished to France and died in Paris in 1389 in comparative poverty. We hear nothing of Katherine his wife.

Michael the eldest son of Michael 1st Earl and Katherine, was born in 1361. He became the 2nd Earl after his father was banished. He also served the King and was in royal favour, so the Earldom was restored to him in 1397. His father having forfeited the title.

In 1399 Richard II was overthrown and replaced by Henry IV of the House of Lancaster. The 2nd Earl had married a lady called Katherine who was the daughter of the Earl of Stafford named Hugh. They had five sons and three daughters. Michael accompanied the King, now Henry V and the army to France and at the siege of Harfleur in 1415 the Earl tragically died of dysentery. He was buried in Wingfield Church with his wife in what is now called the Stafford tomb. The eldest son was again called Michael and he became 3rd Earl for a very short time as he was killed at Agincourt quite soon after his father's death. His widow was Elizabeth previously named Mowbray and daughter of the Duke of Norfolk. There were no sons but three daughters, Katherine, Isabel and Elizabeth. After the death of her husband she retired to a Convent at Bruisyard in Suffolk and two of the daughters became nuns.

So no male issue was left by the 3rd Earl and the title passed to his brother William in 1415 who became the 4th Earl.

William spent most of his life fighting with the army much of it being in France. He was rewarded by the king for his services with a Dukedom, so the de la Poles became Dukes of Suffolk. As 1st Duke he married Alice, the daughter of Thomas Chaucer and granddaughter of Geoffrey Chaucer and widow of the Earl of Salisbury. Alice was a powerful and wealthy woman born in 1404 she had inherited large estates in Ewelme in Oxfordshire. During her lifetime she was responsible for building a large Church very similar to the de la Pole Church in Wingfield. She also had almshouses built and founded a school still in use -

the oldest Church school in England. When she became Duchess she ranked 2nd Lady of the Realm. The Chaucer Coat of Arms can be seen on the side of the entrance doorway in the porch of Syleham Church. The Manorship of Syleham Comitis was still in the hands of the de la Poles. The Duke, William, had extensions built to Wingfield Church in 1430 and a fine East Window was put in the Chancel. This was in memory of his father who had died of dysentery at Harfleur.

During the French wars William was captured at the siege of Orleans 1429 by Joan of Arc's forces, but he was quickly ransomed. Later he was sent to France to negotiate the marriage of Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou. He arranged all this but a secret clause was put in the agreement which gave Normandy back to France.

The King rewarded the Duke making him a Marquis not knowing of the clause.

In 1448 the Duke foolishly plotted with the Queen to overthrow the Duke of Gloucester, who was the King's uncle and financial adviser. At a Parliament held at Bury St Edmunds, Gloucester died or was murdered and the secret clause was made public. This caused the Duke to be impeached and charged with treason in 1450. He escaped and set sail for France, but he was captured in a boat while crossing the Channel by his arch enemy the Duke of York William was beheaded and his body thrown overboard. He was later found on the seashore near Dover and the body was brought to a Church in Suffolk for burial, seemingly at the wishes of his wife Alice.

Concerning the burial of William, 1st Duke, there is a tombstone in the floor of the tower at Wingfield, but owing to age it is difficult to find a name except de la Pole. I find it likely that his body would be brought to his home Church and owing to his disgrace he would be quietly buried without ceremony. So there is a possibility that the 1st Duke rests beneath the Tower.

His wife Alice had spent most of her life living on her estates at Ewelme and she was buried in an elaborate tomb in the Church there. She died in 1475.

The 2nd Duke was John, the son of William and Alice. He became Duke in 1450 while he was still very young having been born in 1442. During his early years there were many changes in Royal Circles. In 1461 Henry VI last sovereign of the House of Lancaster was deposed, restored again and finally deposed and murdered.

His reign had left England in a state of lawlessness and confusion. His heir had been killed at the Battle of Tewkesbury. The next King was Edward IV of the House of York. John, 2nd Duke, supported the Yorkists and he married Elizabeth Plantagenet daughter of the Duke of York and sister of Edward IV and Richard III. John and his wife had four sons and three daughters. He was very involved with Court life and a great friend of both kings, Edward and Richard. He carried the sceptre at Richard's coronation. His eldest son also John was given another title, Earl of Lincoln, and at one time it was promised that he would be Richard's heir, so it appeared that a de la Pole could one day become King of England.

John 2nd Duke is believed to have been responsible for the building of the tower of Hoxne Church and for extensions to his mother's Church at Ewelme. He certainly had a magnificent tomb erected for Alice in her church which is known widely as the Duchess' Tomb. John is buried in Wingfield Church with his wife Elizabeth Plantagenet in a tomb of the same name.

Their eldest son John, Earl of Lincoln, followed, he was appointed a Privy Councillor and served the King faithfully and fought for Richard at Bosworth 1485 where the last ruler of the House of York was killed and Henry Tudor took the Crown.

Henry VII was lenient with John of Lincoln mainly because the de la Poles were too powerful a family to drive into opposition until the King had a secure hold on the Crown, so the de la Poles retained their title and estates.

In the years after her husband's death, Elizabeth Plantagenet went to visit her sister in Burgundy who was a Duchess and was supporter of the Yorkists and plotted to restore them to the throne. The Earl of Lincoln departed with others to join the Yorkist forces in France and so

became a traitor towards Henry VII.

The supporters landed in Ireland in 1487 and then invaded England but the uprising was quickly put down. A short time late there was another attempt by the forces of Perkin Warbeck who claimed to be the younger of the two sons of Edward IV (princes it the Tower). The Duchess of Burgundy upheld the claim, and John Earl of Lincoln was recognised as a leader and he fled to Flanders. Again later the rebels once more landed in England and a battle was fought at East Stoke by the river Trent and John of Lincoln was killed in 1487 this being the last battle of the Wars of the Roses.

Edmund de la Pole was Lincoln's next brother and he was allowed by Henry VII to inherit the Earldom of Suffolk but not the Dukedom as he had not the means to support it. The new Earl was a hot headed man with grand designs on the throne of England. He married Margaret, daughter of Sir Richard Scrope and they had one daughter Elizabeth who became a nun.

In 1501 Edmund and his brother Richard went into exile in Flanders hoping to obtain the support of Maximillion, Duke of Burgundy for their claim. On the way they visited Sir James Tyrell who had known them as children during Richard III's reign. He offered them assistance in overthrowing Henry VII. This of course was high treason but the King at first refused to believe the report of the de la Poles seeking to gain the Crown.

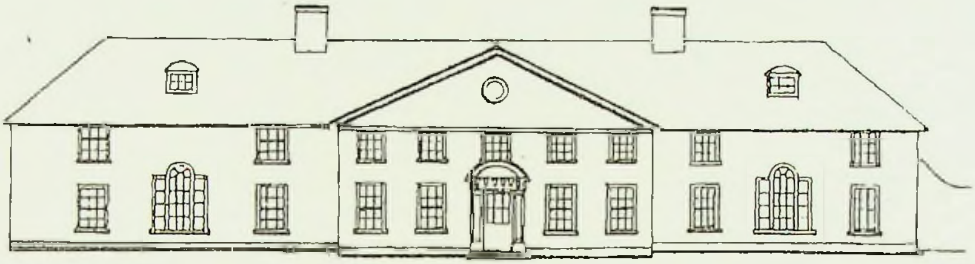
He later found there were others involved in the plot including the Earl's other brother, William de la Pole. Henry ordered the arrest of all concerned. The Earl Edmund and brother Richard were out of reach in Flanders, but William was caught and imprisoned in the Tower of London where he remained for thirty eight years. It was said he lived in comfort for the rest of his life, he died without issue.

The Earl Edmund was eventually extraditioned and back in England he was tried for treason and executed in 1513. The youngest brother Richard remained abroad, a thorn in the flesh of the Tudors, in France he was recognised as the rightful King of England.

In France he entered the service of Louis XII and later Francis I. He won fame in the King's army as a General and on at least two occasions he prepared to invade England via Scotland to obtain the Crown. Nothing came of these plans as Richard was killed in the Battle of Pavia in 1525. No issue was left by these de la Pole brothers, so this would seem to be the end of the family but it was just the end of their influence on English history.

Many of the original family never left their home area, they remained in Hull. The genealogy of the de la Poles shows many sons and daughters but playing no part in history. The Wars of the Roses and the Hundred Years War cut a swathe through English families from the highest to the lowest. Survivors who lived continued to live on their estates and families were reared. It is interesting to think that the blood of the de la Poles and the de Wingfields can be found in families today. Recently Wingfield Church was visited by a gentleman whose attention had been drawn to the Church by the fact that his wife's maiden name was de la Pole.

Joan & Elizabeth Brown
Wingfield 2000



WINGFIELD COLLEGE

Wingfield College was founded in 1362 under the will of Sir John Wingfield. A close friend of the Black Prince, with whom he fought campaigns in France, he tragically died in 1361. It is clear from the foundation charter of the College of St. Andrew that Sir John had already decided to establish a college before his sudden death. His wife Alianore carried out the instructions of his will. The College Charter was sealed on 8th June 1362.

One of the commonest institutions of the Middle Ages was the secular college. In various forms these colleges sprang up throughout Europe over a thousand years ago. At Wingfield the original foundation provided for a Warden or Master and two Chaplains. This number was increased up to nine Chaplains and three Choristers, as endowments came in. The priests of the College lived together in a

community under a common rule. The Master was responsible for the administration and management of the College. He had to account to the Bishop of Norwich. From the Bishop's point of view, the advantage of a college was that he was assured of that parish and others nearby (in this case Syleham, Stradbroke and elsewhere) having resident priests, when all too many of the clergy were non-resident. From the neighbourhood's point of view, there was a school to do what otherwise only the distance monasteries did: prepare candidates for university. A further provision in the founders' charter was to erect the parish church of St. Andrew into a collegiate church.

The Fellows of the College would process towards the south door of the chancel and into the handsome church to pray at one of the five altars of the church. There would be masses for the dead to be said and the High Mass to which all members of the College would be present.

The Master and Chaplains had to wear white surplices and black gowns, like the Canons in Cathedral Churches, when in Church and out of Church they wore "decent clerical clothes" as arranged by the Master.

The College priests were secular clergy like our parish priests today – not monks. Collegiate priests differed from monks in nearly every way except that they lived together under a common rule. Monks were obliged on entering a Monastery to surrender all their worldly possessions and to take life-long vows. A College priest was not forced to do either of these things, he was free to resign when he wished and he could keep whatever worldly wealth he possessed.

Monks were mostly confined to the Monasteries in which they lived, but the College priest was at liberty to walk abroad like other men nor was he is any way under the strict discipline of a Monastery.

The Act for the Dissolution of Chantries, Hospitals and Free Chapels was passed by Parliament in 1545 and in effect destroyed nearly 3000 foundations. Wingfield College was surrendered to the Crown by Robert Budd on 2nd June 1542, after 180 years' existence.

Not only were all Colleges and Chantries destroyed, but all lands which were held for so-called "superstitious purposes, masses, obits and the like" were now forfeited to the Crown. After the Dissolution, the Master and Chaplains were pensioned off, in many cases the pensioners suffered a good deal of hardship.

The destruction of the Colleges must have been a great loss to the villages in which they flourished, and from this time the parishes were left without proper spiritual help and guidance.

The property remained in the Bishop of Norwich's hands for many years and then it appears to have passed backwards and forwards between the Crown and the Church – and during the Protectorate, Parliament seized it.

The Living of Wingfield was in the gift of the Bishop of Norwich until the formation of the Diocese of St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich (1919). The College had many owners and it seems possible that eventually a Mr. Buck bought it when the rectory tithes and parsonages were sold in 1780. He is responsible for the present 18th century façade. However, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners owned it again between 1862 and 1951 – thinking it to be a farm house.

The present restoration was supervised by the Historic Buildings Council from 1974 to 1980

LIST OF MASTERS OF WINGFIELD COLLEGE

1362	Thomas Skeet Rector of Asketon (Hasketon) First Master, Peter Brown resigned
1372	Stephen Coppelowe
1375	John Lef
1396	Robert de Bolton
1428	John Burthan
1433	Henry Trevilian
1471	William Baynard
1520	Thomas Day
1531	Robert Budd

Extracts taken from **WINGFIELD ITS CHURCH, CASTLE AND COLLEGE**
By Canon S.W.H. Aldwell