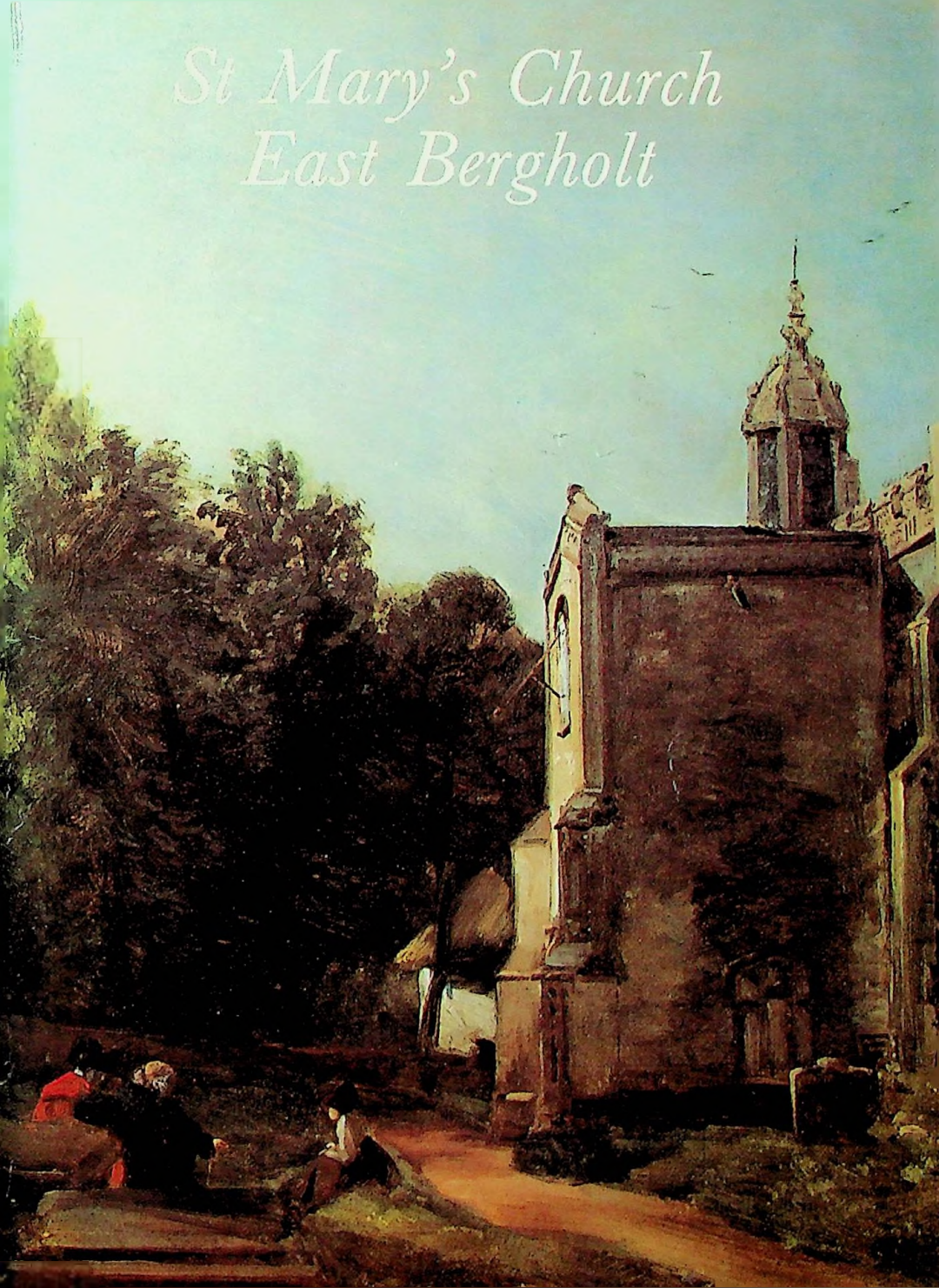
St Mary's Church East Bergholt



St Mary's Church
East Bergholt

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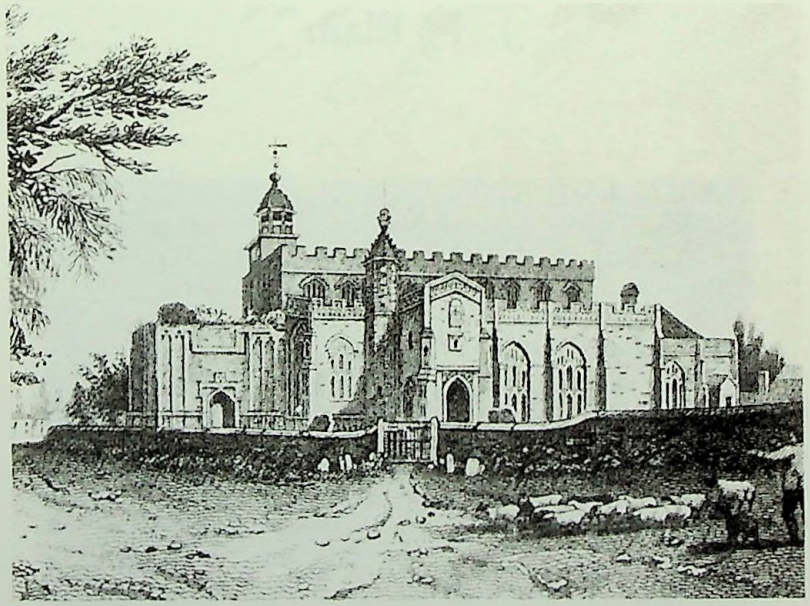
A building and its history

J. F. Elam

To C. J.



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FOREWORD

The people of East Bergholt and visitors to their Parish Church have needed a brief readable history of St Mary's Church for many generations. Now Jack Elam with his precise scholarship, his observant eye, his patient research and his obvious enthusiasm has produced a fascinating history. The book will give joy and new insights both to the visitor and to the people of East Bergholt, who have grown almost too familiar with their fine Parish Church.

Very often it is assumed that history is about politics and wars; it is really about people and their encounters. Parish history tends to be equated with the parson and his ministry; it is really about the people of the village and their common life. Church architecture is so often approached in terms of style and structure; it is really about stone and wood and glass moulded by man's hand and expressing his hopes and aspirations. As you read Mr Elam's book you meet people through the centuries; real people with their problems, disappointments and achievements. East Bergholt, with its Parish Church, its clergy, its community and its individual people, comes to life.

Pictures abound in this book. The visitor will be able to re-live the experience of coming to this Church. The people of East Bergholt will be encouraged to look more closely at their heritage; they will also find new inspiration for stewardship of their fine Parish Church.

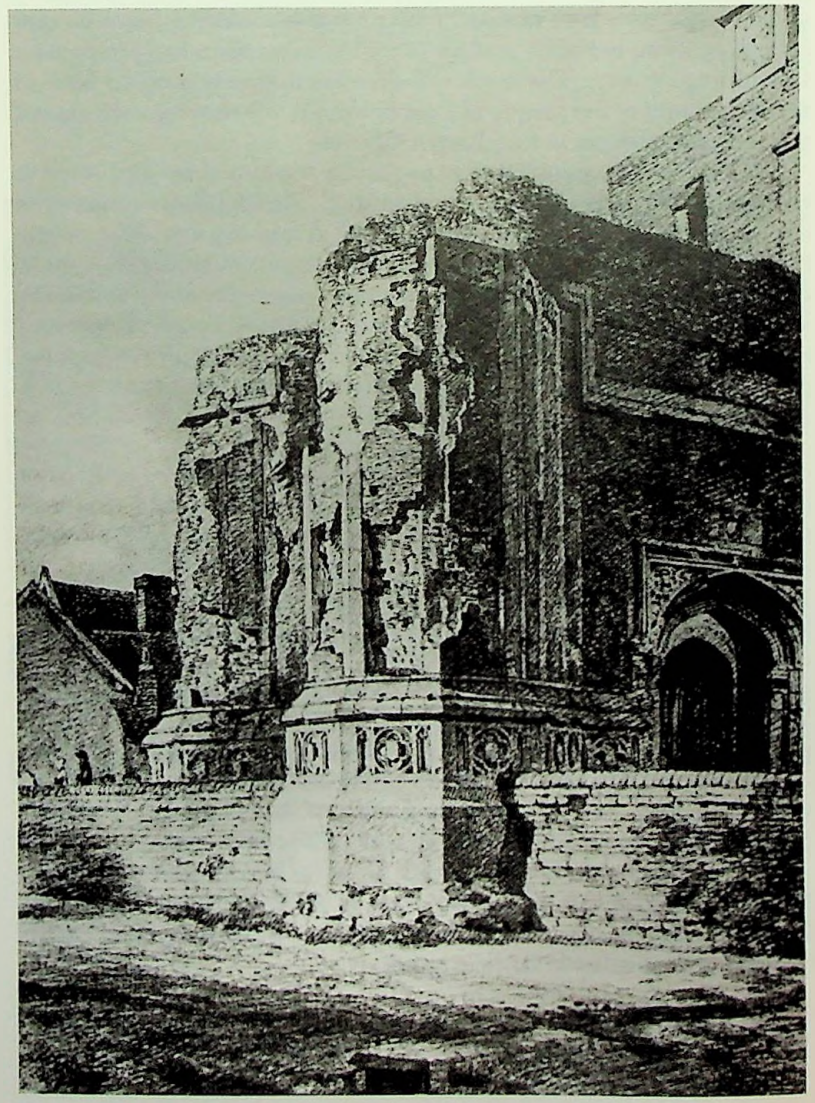
The book is very sensibly divided into two major sections under the headings 'The Fabric' and 'The Church during four Centuries'. The visitor with a limited amount of time might well walk round the Church — both outside and inside — whilst reading the first part of the book. Then later at home, the second part of the book read at leisure will fill in the more detailed information of the history of East Bergholt Church.

My guess is that after reading the whole book at home the response will be, 'I must visit East Bergholt and its Church again'. We shall certainly endeavour to give you our usual friendly welcome.

We owe a tremendous debt to Mr Elam for his absorbing account. Nothing would please him more than to see both visitors and East Bergholt people looking round the outside and the inside of our Parish Church with this book in their hands.

March 1986

Peter Crawford
Rector



The tower from the south-west. John Constable.

THE FABRIC

The Tower and why it stopped

It was a high and noble undertaking. To the greater glory of God? — certainly. For the future salvation of the subscribers? — excusably. In emulation of a rival neighbour? — understandably.

For some years the villagers had been looking down to the valley, watching this great construction at Dedham rise ever higher. What they had built, what they were still building of the main body of their own church, excelled in richness that of Dedham — made it look almost ordinary. But now this tower! Something would have to be done about it, 'and that right soon', as the psalmist said.

Anyone who thinks this suggestion of village rivalry in church building fanciful should look at the history of the great church towers of Somerset, or for that matter others in East Anglia.

There was not much room west of the church, not enough space to build a tower and still be able to walk round the whole fabric within consecrated ground, and that was important, not least for religious processions. But here Dedham had already found a solution that they did not hesitate to adopt — a way *through* the tower. And thus far they succeeded.

It was a splendid start, and they were so completely confident that they proudly carved the date '1525' on a tiny shield at the head of the south tower arch, just below the squared hood-mould. (It is illegible now, but not, apparently, fifty years ago). Immediately above is a stone square containing another and larger shield, or escutcheon. This is very prettily designed and carved, and so thought John Constable, for he made a careful and charming drawing of it in his 1814 sketch book.[1]

The decay of the tower does enable one to look at its method of construction. The core is rubble — rough pieces of flint with some broken stone and plenty of mortar — and occasional horizontal courses of brick for strengthening. (Much the same way as the Romans built walls in east Britain fourteen hundred years earlier.) The external facing is of knapped and smoothly squared flint, so skilfully done that the mortaring is barely visible. This is a beautiful, if laborious, kind of masonry. It is enlivened by flushwork in the form of tall, thin panels with trefoil heads, outlined in dressed stone, on the sides of massive polygonal buttresses.

A comparison of the tower with that of Dedham may give some idea of how it would have looked if finished. The main material of both is

smooth squared flint in regular courses. The passage through the tower was not the only idea we may assume to have been copied from Dedham. Another was the great polygonal buttress at each corner, though neither of these features is unique to Dedham.

A difference in the treatment of the buttresses is that, whereas at Dedham their corners are outlined heavily by large quoins of dressed stone (i.e. 'free stone' or 'ashlar'), at Bergholt the treatment is more delicate. There are tall narrow panels of flint outlined in dressed stone, more like the method adopted in the towers of Eye and Laxfield.

There is a difference, too, in the plinths and bases of the two towers. At Bergholt they are purely of dressed stone and have deeply cut mouldings of shields within quatrefoils, alternating with panels. Dedham has a similar arrangement of quatrefoiled shields, alternating with crowns, but forming a frieze entirely of flint flushwork, not pure stone.

The horizontal area of the two towers over-all is approximately the same. The inner ground floor space at Dedham is, however, longer from south to north. This stage at Dedham has vaulting in stone so flat as to be almost of barrel or tunnel shape; it has very fine and unusual decorative panelling. At Bergholt the intention was to have a ribbed vault, for there are well-carved triple shafts in stone at each corner. Otherwise the internal facing of either tower is brick, at Bergholt in 'English Bond' (alternate courses of headers and stretchers), at Dedham very variable. Both have doorways, of Tudor wide-arched type but without dripstone (being internal), for entry to the nave.

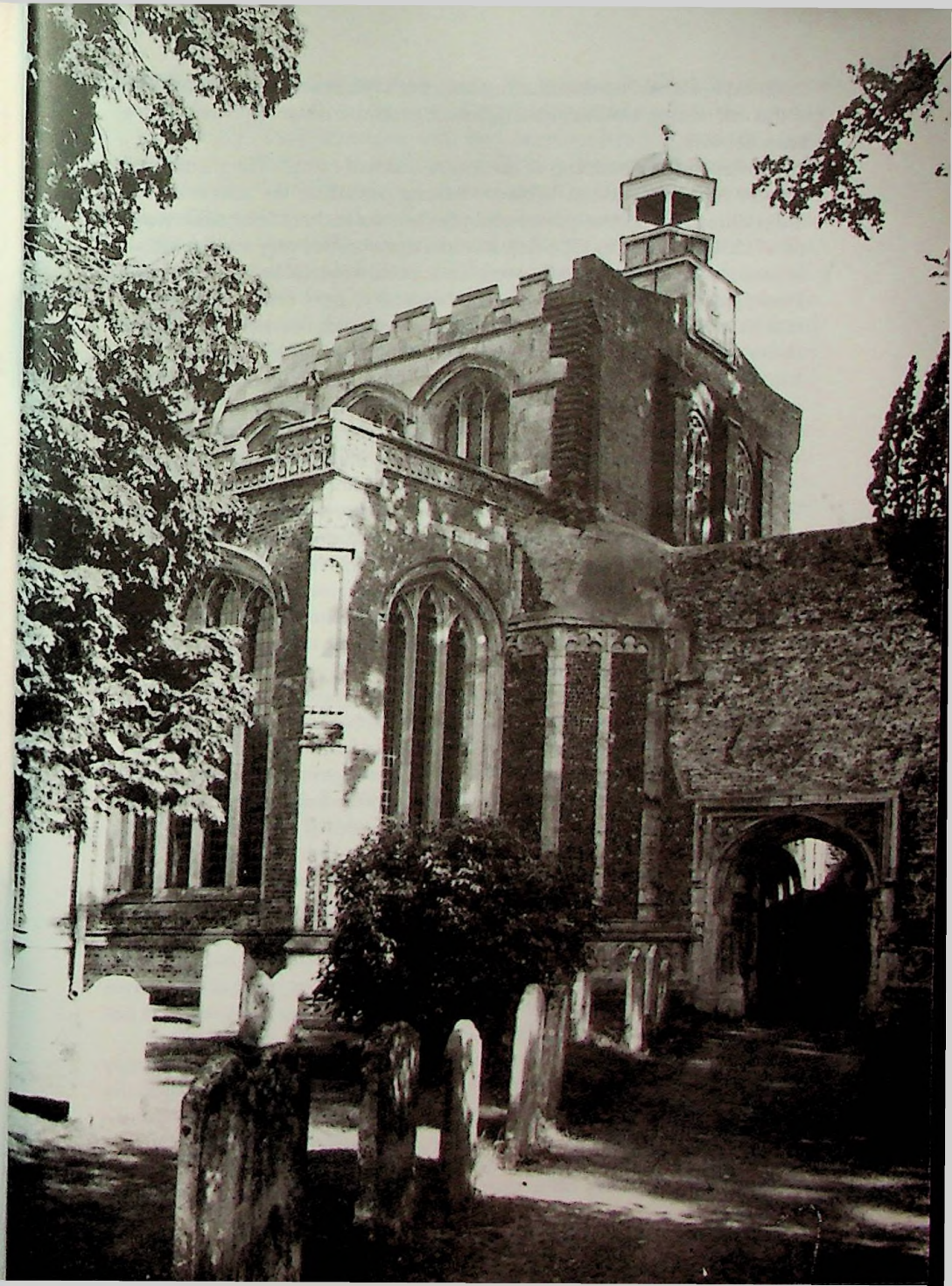
Our west door has linenfold panelling across which runs a puzzling inscription in capital letters:

SEIOFINEFYALA HEIHCMFE

This has been brilliantly interpreted[2] as abbreviated Latin for 'Sanctae Ecclesiae JOhannes FINE Franciscus YAL Aliique In HonorE IHC Mariae FEcerunt' — in English 'For Holy Church John Fine (and) Francis (or Frederick) Yual and others made (this) in honour of Jesus and Mary'. There is no reason to question the general accuracy of this, though in the middle some letters are missing in part or entirely and it is an 1886 copy of a rather faint original. But, sad to say, no other trace of Mr Fine or Mr Yual has so far emerged from the archives.

Looking up from this spot by the door there is evidence of the considerable progress made with the second, belfry stage of the tower. On the east side it has massive clusters of stone-shafted responds (again for vaulting) adjoining the nave wall, and at the south-west corner the entrance to the intended newel stair to the upper stages can be clearly seen.

Our tower would have been much the same commanding height as



Dedham's, rather less dominating and, perhaps, more graceful. In spite of the interesting similarities a different master-mason appears to have been at work.

So why did the building of the tower suddenly stop? The traditional answer is that Cardinal Wolsey, having promised the wherewithal, unfortunately fell from power and possessions and not long afterwards died (1530). He had in 1524-5 dissolved a score or so of very small religious houses, which undoubtedly were in a poor way, including Dodnash Priory, just across the Bergholt parish boundary, and it has been suggested that he may have wished in compensation to build, or help to build, our tower. It is true that proceeds from this mini-dissolution (which gave his master Henry VIII such greedy ideas) did go to Wolsey's two educational foundations, the college at Oxford and the school at Ipswich. That some also was intended for our tower remains pure supposition, without evidence, not quite impossible but highly unlikely.

The story could even be just a folk-lore muddle. One of the prosperous 'clothier' (cloth-merchant) families at the time was called Cardinall, providing churchwardens and later in the century lords of the manors of Old Hall and the Commandery. (The manors remained in the family, through female descent into the Parker, Chaplin and Hankey branches into the nineteenth century.) Can it have been the Cardinalls, and not the Cardinal Legate, who it was thought might complete the tower? A long shot, perhaps.

What of an economic reason for the tower failure? Did a financial crisis remove the resources necessary for continuance? There was distress and even some insurrection in Suffolk caused by Wolsey's heavy exactions, the result of his and Henry's extravagant foreign policy. And 1525 was a particularly bad year. But it may seem unlikely that haphazard taxation at that time quite destroyed the wealth of the richest citizens, any more than sophisticated taxation does today.

That wealth of course came from the woollen industry and built the great Suffolk churches. It has been suggested that a decline in the industry halted the tower. It could well have done so, for a time. But was there in fact any steep or obvious industrial decline for another half-century? The contributors to the tower fund must have been very sure of themselves to plan and to start so richly, and only a major disaster, such as is not discernible, could have permanently dispelled such confidence.

What then is the most likely solution to the puzzle? Briefly and simply that the tower was started too late; the time went out of joint, especially in church matters. Dedham's tower was completed by 1520, Lavenham's by 1525 (having started in 1482, and then finished only after a considerable lapse from 1495 to 1520). In that year 1525, when Bergholt's tower had not long been started, the question of the King's desired

'divorce' was already current gossip. No precise date can be given for the breach with Rome, but by 1534 legislation had made the process irreversible. Protestantism, too, had been infiltrating steadily, from Germany, Zurich, Geneva, especially into the eastern counties. Its teaching at that time opposed all ostentation in worship, all luxury and magnificence in church building and appointments.

In the last years of Henry's reign the spoliation of the churches started, and was to reach its height in the following short reign of Edward VI, 1547-1553. This was the era of appalling iconoclasm, when church sculpture, stained glass, wood-work and indeed all art forms suffered devastation. Bergholt was doubtless hit as hard as others, and perhaps harder than the Puritans managed a century later. It was not a time of certainty or general consent.

Our tower was not the only thing unfinished in the 1530's. The complete rebuilding of the north aisle was still in hand, plus the provision of a clerestory over the nave. No wonder if the village notables at such a time felt that the tower must wait, at least until the body of the church was completed and covered. Nevertheless, that there was every intention, for a good many years, of resuming the building of the tower (or 'steeple' as it was always then called) is shown by wills of 1537 and 1542 (1541 Old Style) giving money specifically for this purpose. In the first Robert Spere willed "to the building of the steeple of East Bergholt beforesaid £20 to be paid in a year when the parish do build the said steeple". And in the second, Thomas Gryth willed "to the making of the steeple one hundred and ten marks" — i.e. £73. 6. 8, a very considerable sum.[3]

This is 1542, but by 1547, at the end of Henry's reign, there was hardly any question of going any further. Helmingham could add a parapet to its tower in 1543, Cratfield a battlement in 1547. These were merely finishing touches. Major church building, with very rare exceptions, was at an end for a very long time to come, and not just in Suffolk.[4]

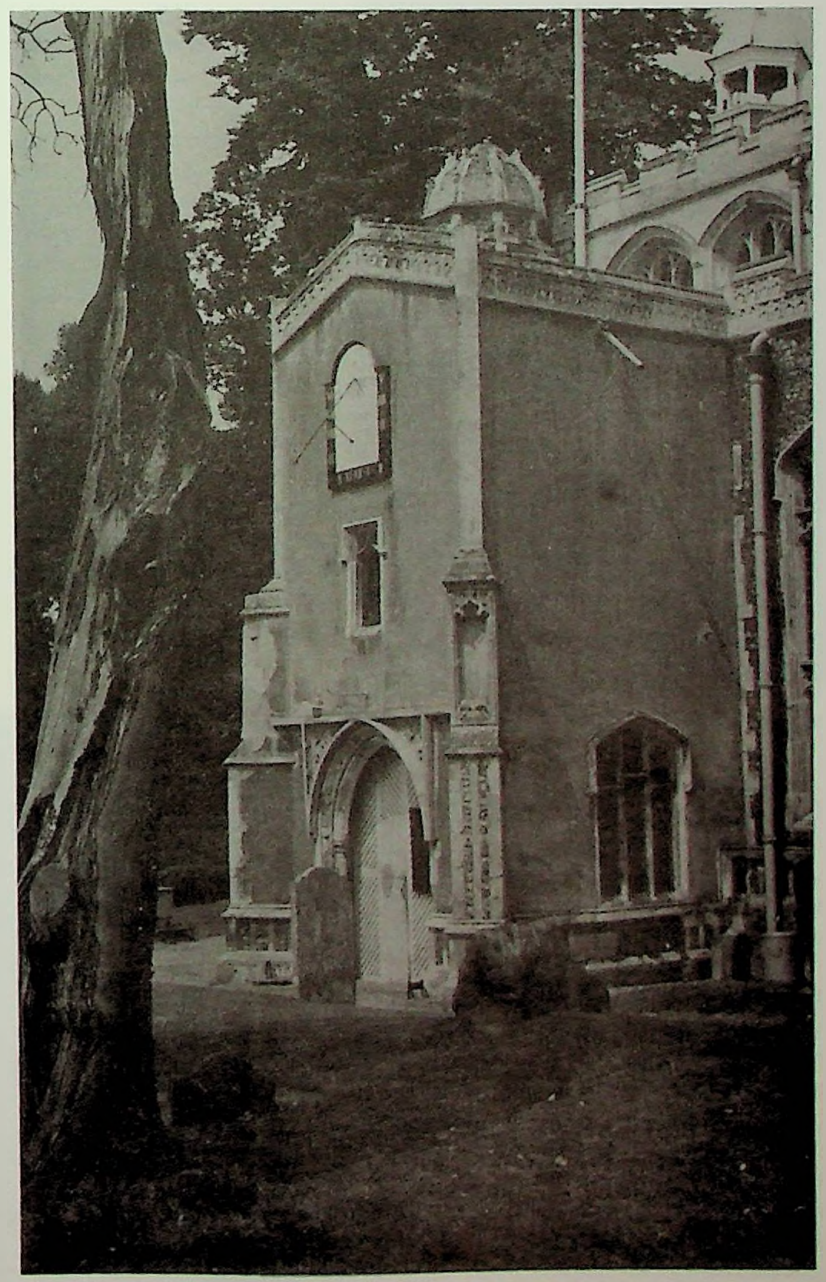
South Side elegance

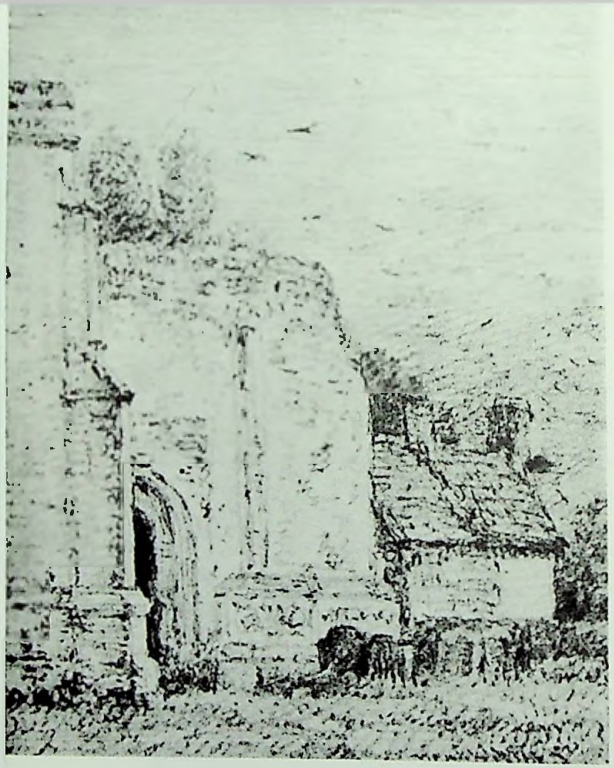
From the Street the features that first catch the eye may be the long clerestory outlined against the sky, the bell turret at its west end, and the tall porch with its gilded sundial and its own prominent turret alongside. At closer quarters the detailing of the south aisle is particularly striking. The wall is faced with cut flint, not quite so regularly squared and coursed as on the later tower, but remarkable enough. Towards the base of the wall runs a continuous frieze of flushwork, with cusped panels outlined in stone, all beneath a stone string-course; along the top a stone battlement, decorated throughout with small shields alternating with other groups of trefoiled panels. What is easy to miss is a concave moulding immediately under the parapet, holding at intervals a variety of decorative carvings — formalized flowers, foliage etc. as good as new in their protected position — small and inevitably hardly noticed, yet typical of the care taken by medieval sculptors even in the least approachable places. The buttresses between the windows are especially fine, each with a stone niche or tabernacle with canopied head. Whether these ever held the intended statues of saints, and subsequently lost them, who can say?

The aisle windows are remarkable. Each has three tall lights, with elaborate tracery at the head of the arches. 'Perpendicular' style windows of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries have never received the same attention or acclaim as those of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. They are often said to be of stock shapes, with only minor variations, rather monotonous and giving almost a mass-produced effect. It is a doubtful criticism, for there are in fact many types, though it is probably true that in this period windows would often be cut and stacked at the quarry rather than on the site. The windows here are by no means stock 'Perp.', but they are variations of a local style: very similar ones are to be found, for example at Bramford. But it is doubtful if the peculiar emphasis on tiny battlemented transoms (horizontals) is aesthetically satisfactory.

The south porch is particularly tall, and stuccoed, but rather plain. It has two diagonally set buttresses, each enriched with a tabernacle, at the base of which is what appears to be an angel's head with flowing tresses. These carvings are very recent (and accomplished) replacements, but the two original angels are to be found lying rather disconsolate in a corner of the church. The doorway to the porch is of wide-arched Tudor type, with yet more shields flowing along the arch moulding, and quatrefoils in the spandrels.

Within the porch, which is lit east and west by triple-light windows, old oak benches either side are resting on sections of clustered stone shafts





From John Constable's sketch books of 1813 and 1814.

The tower from the north-east.

The south porch.

that may well have been rescued from the demolished piers of an earlier aisle arcade. They look to be of fourteenth century date. There are similar blocks borrowed for gravestone support in the churchyard.

The height of the porch is due to its having an upper room, reached by a turret stair in the north-west corner, a striking external feature, attractively capped though it has lost the top bit of its finial shown in Constable's drawings. Upper rooms to porches have been allotted by students any number of possible uses, from anchorites' cells to schoolrooms. These are usually guesses. My guess here is that the chief use of our room may have been as a treasury, for precious vessels and books. Why otherwise should it be lit merely by a tiny slit on the west and a very small rectangular window on the south? Moreover this window has heavy, though attractive, stone tracery, and is further protected by a strong iron grating. It offers no hope whatever to would-be intruders.

There is one window of the south aisle that, unexpectedly, is quite different from the others, and that is the west facing window, at the aisle's end. It is in fact of exactly the same type as the windows of the north aisle and therefore a later addition. It must relate to the business of accommodating the end of the aisle to the projected tower.

The South Chapel problem

At the east end of the south front the chancel is partly covered by a chapel which almost forms a continuation of the south aisle. We now have some teasing detective work to do.

The chapel, being built out from the chancel, is lower than the aisle, and, because its walls are of rubble and not faced with flint, one would take it to be of earlier date. Seeming to support this opinion is the absence of the flushwork frieze above the base of the wall, except on the buttresses, and the simpler and almost certainly earlier type of window in the chapel's east wall. Also, whereas the south aisle wall rests on a brick plinth, the chapel's base is of rubble (except for later repairs in modern brick).

But, in apparent contradiction of this earlier dating, the two south windows of the chapel are of precisely the same type as, though necessarily less tall than, the elaborate aisle windows. Just the same is true of the buttresses, and likewise the battlemented parapet — exactly as on the aisle. It it true that the windows are nineteenth century replacements, but there is reason to believe that they are faithful copies of their originals.

Pevsner's 'Suffolk' says "A new aisle is mentioned in a document of 1442-3", which seems to suggest that dating for the south aisle. But the decorative treatment of the aisle looks at least forty years later than that. At the same time the east window of the chapel, mentioned above, would suit a mid-century date very well, and its type is repeated in the

larger north and south windows of the chancel itself. (The chancel east window is, of course, a bigger and grander affair but of the same general style).

Moreover it is assuredly the new chapel that is referred to in Robert Hague (Hegge)'s will of 1442, where he wishes to be buried "in the new side *(in novo latere)* of the church, opposite the window of the Seven Sacraments."[5]

The upper eastern edge of the aisle is so broken and unfinished as to indicate clearly an original intention to continue the high wall along the chapel, which would have meant heightening and indeed mostly rebuilding it. As a foremost authority on church architecture once wrote: "The tendency to give the whole church aisles of equal width throughout, and extending along its whole length, was irresistible, especially in East Anglia" (in the 15th century).[6] Here the plan was abandoned, but, as the next best thing, new windows, buttresses and parapet were given to the chapel, all in precisely the same new style and detail as the aisle, towards the end of the fifteenth century. So the general south aspect of the church was brought visually into line.

In short my suggestions are: (a) That it is the chapel, not the aisle, that dates from the 1440's. (b) That when the aisle was built, in the 1480's or 90's, it was decided to give new and similar features, as mentioned above, to the chapel. (c) That the chancel windows and buttresses are of much the same date as the chapel, i.e. mid-fifteenth century. This does not necessarily mean that the walls of the chancel are not still earlier, but there is nothing externally to declare it; we must wait to get inside to examine this further.

Having sorted this out to one's satisfaction it may then appear that the theory is completely invalidated by the existence, round the base of the chancel, of a flushwork frieze very similar to that of the aisle. But close inspection shows it to be much newer, and I take it to be a nineteenth century addition, maybe at about the same time as the rest of the chancel walling was given a coat of stucco.

The purpose of adding the south chapel to the chancel we will discuss when dealing with the interior.

North Side genius

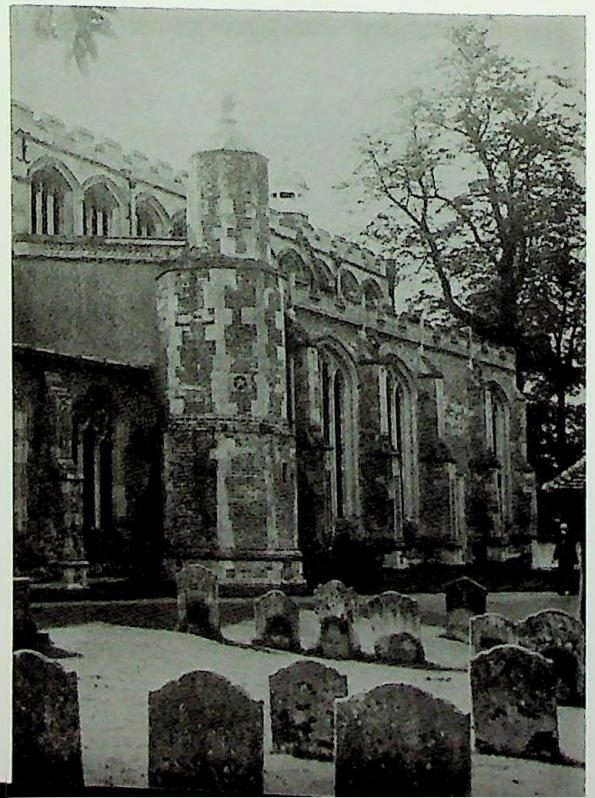
Rounding the chancel, we come to the north side, and immediately see that here also a chapel has been built out, of about the same size as the south one but lacking its added elaboration of detail. It appears to be of similar date, namely mid-fifteenth century.

Then comes a very strong and handsome punctuation mark, the fine

The south aisle.

The south chapel.

The north aisle and turret



hexagonal turret at the junction of chapel and aisle. It contains the newel (circular) stair to the former rood loft within. On one face is carved in stone a five-pointed star, or to use the heraldic term 'mullet', which was a device of the de Vere family, Earls of Oxford. This must indicate an important contribution to the building, perhaps of the turret itself together with the wooden rood loft and screen.

The de Veres were Lords of the chief village manor, Old Hall, from 1425. The fifteenth Earl was also granted the Manor of the Commandery in 1530, when the Knights of St. John lost their title to it and all their property was distributed by Henry VIII. The family connection with the village is important, even if its interest was not so strong as in Lavenham, or Earls Colne and Castle Hedingham. They remained Lords of the two Bergholt manors until 1578. The de Vere who then disposed of them (and also of the Lavenham manor) was the seventeenth Earl, Edward, born 1550 and Lord of the Manors from 1562, dying in 1604. He was also a poet, and well tipped for the Shakespeare stakes by those sceptical of the Stratford-on-Avon runner's credentials; but I doubt his ability ever to be first past the post.

And so to the lovely north aisle. In 1527 Robert Cole of Stratford St Mary willed "to the use and building of the church of East Bergholt as much freestone as shall make up the work there, i.e. the body of the same church with the North Aisle, according to such promise as I have made"[7]. Clearly not much at that date had been done.

There is a remarkable 'find' from an original document dating from about 1540. Some 5 or 6 years previously Thomas Gryth "of Est Barfold co. Suffolk clothmaker" had been concerned about "the church of East Barfold being sore in ruin and in decay and a great part of the church being uncovered for lack of help and the charity of well disposed people". He had agreed with one Philip Hill of Norwich that each would give £28, to which Thomas Reynold, of another prominent Bergholt family, added a promise of £14, towards the building of the church (i.e. of the north aisle and clerestory). With this promised total of £70 Philip Hill went ahead and retained an Ipswich mason, John Barber, to do the work, appointing days and times for instalments of the promised sums to be handed over. According to Gryth his £28 and Reynold's £14 were duly paid in full, but Hill had only paid £21. 6. 8 before his death in 1538. Reynold died soon after. Whereupon John Barber entered "a complaint of debt" to the bailiffs of Ipswich in the moot hall and caused Gryth to be arrested and tried by a jury (of Barber's friends, Gryth implies!) who found him liable to pay the £6. 13. 4 balance, a verdict which had to be confirmed by the bailiffs of Ipswich. But Gryth protested in a petition to the Lord Chancellor that he owed Barber "never a penny", having paid in full the £28 he himself had promised (a very large sum in those

days). The upshot we do not know. Philip Hill, whatever his connection with Norwich, is known to have owned Flatford Mill c. 1530.

This petition of Gryth's was printed verbatim in the 'East Anglian Miscellany' in 1929 as an interesting local and human anecdote. It is much more than that to us. It sheds light on contemporary legal procedure. It gives us the names of some important church benefactors and it should be remembered that Gryth also bequeathed 110 marks for the building of the steeple in his will of 1541-2. It confirms what was surmised earlier, that the church went through a very difficult period in the 1530's and early '40's before the north aisle and the clerestory were completed, when there would be no roofs save over the chancel and south aisle.

But above all it gives us the name of the master-mason, John Barber or Barbour, to whose design and workmanship we owe the splendid north aisle and clerestory, for there were no 'architects' in those days and the working master-mason had full responsibility. Barber had his mason's yard near St. Lawrence Church, Ipswich[8].

This is an important discovery, for very few names of master-masons even of the medieval cathedrals are known, and still fewer of those of parish churches.

(As for the spelling 'Barfold', it is significant how often the village name in earlier centuries, and even as late as the nineteenth, is spelled — however variously — with the letter 'f' taking the place of the more usual 'gh'. Not so extraordinary if you think of 'tough' and 'rough'? But perhaps I have said enough!)

Thomas Gryth, as we saw, complained of "the lack of help and the charity of well disposed people" in building the north aisle. But he and Thomas Reynold were not alone in their contributions; wills show several other bequests. In 1521 Robert Day's will said "My executors shall do glaze one side of the church at my proper cost". Perhaps they did not get very far, for another Reynold, Robert, in his will made in 1524 but proved in 1529, declared that his son George "shall do glaze all the windows on the nether storey of the north side of the church", i.e. not including the clerestory. And in fact an earlier Reynold, John, had given £20 for a more general "reparation" of the church in 1500. Robert Cole's legacy we have seen.

James Clark gave 40 marks in 1528, Thomas Cockerell £6 in the same year, and Thomas Peverell £10 in 1535 — not the first bequest from that family. And there were other smaller gifts, such as John Baker's forty shillings "to the stoling of the church" as late as 1546. Bequests meant specifically for the tower or 'steeple' have been mentioned earlier. Perhaps the generous Thomas Gryth rather over-stated the lack of "well disposed people" in the village.

However that may be, John Barber did succeed in designing and partly building the clerestory and the north aisle to the nave in the late 1530's and how brilliantly he did it! If the south aisle has splendid craftsmanship, the north aisle shows nothing less than architectural genius. This is a little unusual, for the south side of a church, except where the main approach is from the north, is invariably the show side, leaving the north comparatively plain and economical. This could have been the intention here, since the wall is of small brick, not flint, and there is no over-elaboration of details such as windows. Freestone, however (which, as we saw, Robert Cole had bequeathed) was used for the clerestory in its entirety, and on the aisle for the parapet, windows and, in part, the buttresses. You may perhaps agree that the general effect is finer and more arresting than on the south. A difficulty is to see it all from a sufficient distance.

It is very late 'Perpendicular', indeed the very latest, and it is a triumph partly of excellent proportions, partly of texture, and partly of good combination between aisle and clerestory. Above all it gains from the five very large aisle windows uninterrupted by any transom or tracery until the lights reach the head of the arch, where they are merely cusped or cinque-foiled. This simplicity is quite remarkable, almost the antithesis of what has come to be regarded as typical 'Perpendicular'. The windows echo the intended great stone-outlined panels of the tower, and are echoed in turn by the ten clerestory windows. The latter are, of course, much shorter, and similar to the Lady Chapel windows at Long Melford and south aisle windows at Rougham which are of similar date. But the aisle windows are perhaps unique.

The battlements here are similar to those over the south aisle, but are ornamented with rows of small shields, single on the embrasures, double on the merlons or upper parts, and pierced at intervals by blunted pinnacles rising from the buttresses. This shield motif is so prevalent over the whole exterior that one wonders if it had some significance other than the purely decorative.

As for the buttresses, they are once more made a fine feature, their lower stages providing the only flint flushwork on this north side, with a pattern rising to a lily head, a Marian symbol, while the upper stages have stone panels repeating the foliation of the windows.

Easy to miss, and palpably disturbed by the metal piping now issuing from their mouths, are the stone gargoyle heads for discharging the rain from the roof. Three out of four originals remain, grotesque but rather more decorous than their forebears in earlier centuries.

The north doorway, though without a porch, is very attractive. A flattened arch, yet more shields, and very small tabernacles that could have taken only tiny figures. In the spandrils between arch and hood-

mould are the initials R.D. The 'D' on the east is an old-fashioned rendering of the letter, while that on the west is in the modern style but also looks original. Each has the same merchant's mark above. The initials stand for Robert Darnell, donor of money for the doorway by his will of 1520.[9] Then the double oak doors, with a most elaborately carved centre post, the first sign of Italian Renaissance influence, and linen-fold carving on the panels. Linen-fold pattern had a comparatively short but splendid period of fashion in middle Tudor times. It is repeated on the west door of the church, and again, though this is a modern reproduction, on the south door.

One other exterior detail I would like to include. It is a memorial in the form of a small copper plaque affixed to the buttress immediately west of the north door. The inscription reads: 'Near this place lies the Remains of DANIEL SIMSON, Surgeon, who departed this life April 11, 1786, aged 36 years.' The attraction lies in the beautiful cursive script of the engraved lettering, which schools continued to try to teach in writing lessons for more than a century after. Here at least one understands what is meant, quite literally, by 'copper-plate' hand-writing.

The north door.

The Bell-Cage

Visitors to East Bergholt Church remember nothing more clearly than the detached bell-cage which stands on the north side of the churchyard. Though there are smaller cages in nearby counties none can rival the peal of five bells nor the unique method by which they are rung. The bells are rung by hand, from the rim for starting and finishing, otherwise from the headstock, and are always left in the 'up' position. They are, Mr. Gerald Bacon tells me, of the heaviest ringable size in the country. Skill is more important than strength and women as well as men are now part of the ringers team.

The cage itself is said to date from 1531. It is clear from the bequests for the building of the tower, mentioned earlier, that in 1541 it was still expected that the tower could be completed, in which case the cage would have been intended as only temporary housing for the bells. However, expert opinion on the timber framing suggests that it is work of at least a century later, though the seventeenth century carpenters might well be surprised that their work is still in use three hundred years on.

The cage stood near the east gate until the early years of the eighteenth century when Joseph Chaplin, living at the manorial seat of Old Hall, found the bells too near and too loud for his comfort and had the cage removed to its present position.

The bell dedicated to the Angel Gabriel (to the west) is the earliest, mid-fifteenth-century. In 1601, Richard Bowler, a famous Colchester bellfounder, replaced another, copying the touching latin dedication to the Virgin Mary from the medieval bell; rather surprising in the religious climate of the times. The great tenor bell was recast in 1621 and again in 1727. On the eastern side of the cage, with coins of Charles II's reign embedded in it, is one made by the London bellfounder Christopher Hodson in 1688. The treble was recast by Warner & Sons in 1887.

Both the cage and the bells were thoroughly repaired and overhauled in 1972.

A pamphlet available in the church provides full details of the cage and bells.

Going inside

And so let us enter the church, by the south doorway and the modern door (of which more will be said later). The doorway itself is almost certainly of the fourteenth century, retained and re-inserted when the fifteenth century aisle was built. This was quite a common practice.

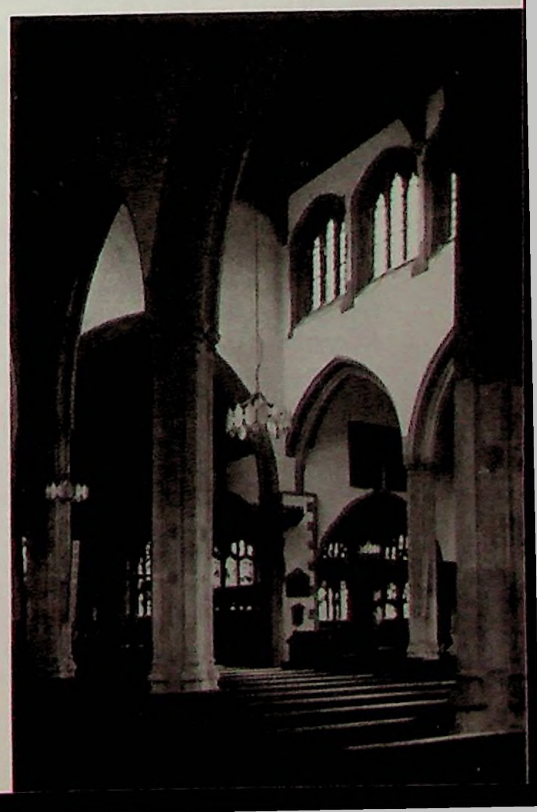
The spaciousness and height, the abundance of light from the great windows and clerestory, the dignity of the lofty arcades, immediately impress. At the same time there may be a nagging feeling that something is missing, some doubt if this interior quite matches the excellence of the fabric outside. If a slight disappointment has to be admitted, the reason for it is not far to seek. Within the walls so much has gone that should ideally have been preserved: not a scrap remains of old glass, there are no original or early benches, no old nave roof, screen, pulpit or font. There are replacements, and they are far from negligible, but inevitably there is a sense of loss.

Let us continue to deal with structural features of the nave, leaving furnishings and monuments for later consideration.

The two arcades, each of five bays, are identical in treatment, and both belong to the latest phase of the building. It was necessary to build both north and south arcades, replacing earlier ones, when the clerestory had been decided upon, and the piers had to be taller. They are of lozenge form, with four engaged shafts, each with an individual plain capital, and hollow mouldings between. Their bases are very tall and prominent, a feature typical of the period.

The south aisle roof is original, and at its west end it is possible to make out the slight extension that we suspected from outside. Here, too, is the door of the stair leading to the room above the porch, but today it is hidden by a high modern vestry screen and not normally accessible. If permission for entry can be obtained, it may also be sought to enter the stair leading to the room above the porch. The little door is the original fifteenth century one, with iron work — studs, shaped lock-plate, key-hole, and a dagger-shaped band — all intact. Its head and that of the doorway round it have Tudor type arches. The newel stair leads first to the room (which retains little of significance), and then continues to the parapet.

It is at the other, the east, end of this aisle that the unexpected occurs (though no less noticeable from outside). The last bay of the aisle wall is blank, without any window. No very convincing reason for this comes to mind. It does not seem that there was ever a window here. To



complicate matters further, there is a deep but not very high recess in the wall (wherein the 1939-45 war memorial now stands), suggesting that once there was some opening to the outside. But there was no obvious need for an entrance in this position. Going outside again to look at the wall there, it is possible to see traces of disturbance and replacement of the flints, together with the use of a different and inferior mortar. Three rather puzzling pieces of freestone still in the flint may have been inserted as part of the support for the rubble wall above while an opening was being made. The history of Hadleigh church provides a possible solution. An early print of that building shows an entrance in a similar position in the south wall, blocked up since the 1850's. It is said to have been made for the route of a guild procession from the guildhall[10]. That, as we shall shortly see, could apply equally to East Bergholt, though we cannot be certain.

At the north-east corner of the nave the doorway and door on the north wall of the stair to the former rood-loft are clearly visible, as is the upper opening (now blocked) to the loft itself, and ledges on either side of the chancel which helped to hold it. It is quite possible that the old rood screen and loft stretched right across the church to the south wall.

The Chancel and its Chapels

Mr Paterson considered that the chancel was of the fourteenth century, with later alterations, and that the chancel arch had piers of the same date. He thought, however, that the capitals of the arch and the arch itself had been rebuilt at a lower height in the fifteenth century, for some reasons connected with the making of the rood loft.

This earlier dating for the chancel is certainly correct. The high-pitching of the roof externally, at something like 45 degrees, would point to it. Also, the internal construction of the roof, which is of double arch-braced type with collars, is more like fourteenth than fifteenth century work. Everything else, especially the windows, as we saw earlier, points to thorough mid-fifteenth century alteration, with one exception.

For it is difficult to accept Mr Paterson's arguments for a rebuilding of the chancel arch. To replace a higher chancel arch with a lower one would be to reverse the usual procedure. Moreover the arch is in fact quite high, and the capitals, though rather deceptive, are not of fifteenth century style and seem properly wedded to the piers below. The whole arch can be regarded as belonging to the fourteenth century.

The attractive piers and arches opening from the chancel into the south and north chapels are, like the windows, very much part of the mid-fifteenth century reconstruction. So is the piscina (with shelf) to the south of the altar; it is conspicuously plain and unadorned, but its arch is of

the depressed or four-centred kind and therefore of the later date. It has a double in the north chapel.

Indeed both north and south chapels appear to have been built at much the same time as the chancel was largely reconstructed, and (as the exterior indicated) this was most probably in the 1440's or 50's.

Both the chapels are likely to have been chantry chapels, built for masses to be said regularly for the souls of the donors. If this was so, it is significant that the north chapel continued to have a semi-private association, after the dissolution of the chantries in 1547, as the chapel of the lords of the principal manor, the site of their burials and monuments throughout the next two and a half centuries. It is even known to have had its sides bricked in for much of the time.

For the south chapel an important possibility suggests itself, even if it cannot be proved. It is clear from wills that one of the several altars in the church was dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and that it was on the south side. In 1455 Robert Florete specifies that he is to be buried 'on the south side. . . before the altar of St. John the Baptist.' In 1458 Robert Wodecock leaves money to the new 'tabula' of the altar of St. John the Baptist — probably meaning the enriched frontal of the altar table, and indicating something rather special. In 1487 Robert Miller wishes to be buried 'in the choir of St. John the Baptist'.[11]

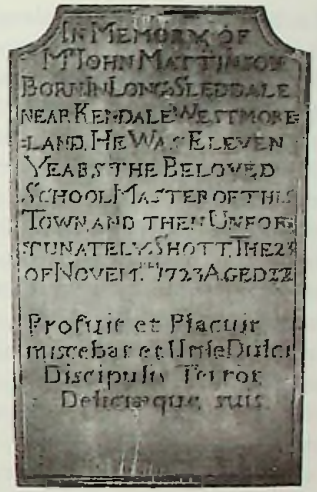
Although there were certainly altars to various saints at different places in the church, to St. Mary of course, and to St. Nicholas, St. Leonard, St. Faustinus, St. Laurence (and maybe others), it does look as if St. John the Baptist's was a very notable one. The suggestion therefore is that the south chapel may well have been a chapel of a social and religious guild of St. John the Baptist. These religious guilds were quite common; they existed for mutual assistance and charitable works, and their chapels were collective chantries. After all, not only was St. John the Baptist the patron saint of the former Knights Hospitallers of the Commandery, one of the village manors, but also of the cloth merchants. This being so, the empty niche on the east wall of the chapel may have held an image of St. John. On the other hand, a will of 1462 appears to refer to another guild, that of St. Mary, and the alternative possibility that it may have been associated with this chapel cannot be ignored[12].

Celia Jennings has long had a strong suspicion that the house just outside the east gate of the churchyard is, from some internal evidence, a guildhall. This would certainly fit, and will be referred to later.

Both chapels have had upheavals in the course of the centuries, but these also will be considered later as will the monuments that are to be found in them. At present, we are considering original features, and a few others remain. There are consecration crosses painted on the plaster in both chapels. In the south chapel the altar rail is upheld in part by

decorative panels probably from the original rood screen.

Much more important is a very attractive fifteenth century piece of fresco painting in a recess on the north side of the chancel, representing the Resurrection from the tomb. It is the backing of an Easter Sepulchre, which played an important part in medieval Easter ritual, and is a more accomplished work of art than most wall-paintings of the period. Having been bricked in for centuries, it was finally re-opened in 1920, and is in a good state of preservation with protective glass. Some of the fresco, however, is still blocked.



Monuments and Memorials

The only remaining brass is that of Robert Alefounder, 1639, in the central passage of the nave. How did this survive, when a very few years later all the other (earlier) brasses were torn up and dumped in the church chest? Well, he was one of the two churchwardens until he died, and his reputation, or the influence of his family, must have proved a sufficient protection a year or two later.

Along the north wall are two small memorial tablets of more than passing interest. One has an anonymous elegy in sonnet form to a wife (?), perhaps of sixteenth century date. It is lugubrious in tone, but with one striking piece of alliteration:

"Here till the sun of glory rise
My dearest darke and dusty lies."

The other tablet is in memory of a master of the Lambe School, "Mr John Mattinson. . . He was Eleven Years the Beloved School Master of this Town, and then Unfortunately Shott, the 23 of November 1723, Aged 32

Profuit et Placuit, Miscebat et Utile Dulci,
Discipulis Terror, Deliciaeque suis."

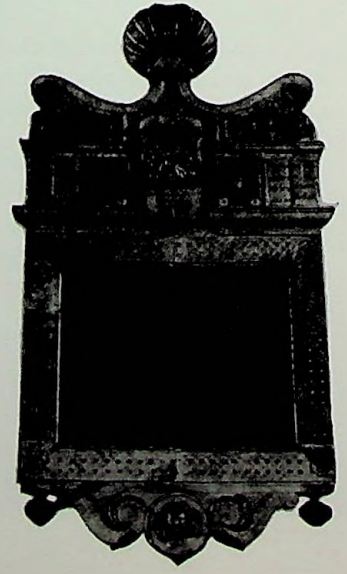
'A terror and a delight to his pupils' seems a fair translation of the last four words, and it will cause no surprise to others of his profession. But who shott him or how he was shott remains a mystery: for 'unfortunately' read 'accidentally'?

The appearance of a camel, of all things, along with a bear's head, on the north aisle wall, always causes surprise. Apparently these animals were part of the heraldic devices of the Parker and Cardinall families, and here they are simply relics of a much broken tomb of Anna Parker, heiress of William Cardinall. Other separated bits appear — a row of shields now blank, and a coat of arms. The tombstone would originally have been in the north chapel along with other tombs and memorials of Lords and Ladies of the manor of Old Hall. Probably it was found to be in the way of the Victorian organ, and was moved inexpertly.

And it is in this area that stands (not a monument, admittedly) the remarkable church chest, which may be as old as any part of the church fabric. Its triple locks were added by Elizabethan injunction, one for the priest and one each for the churchwardens.

Proceeding into the chancel there is, on the north side, a wall monument to the mid-17th century rector, Dr. William Jones, not well lit, but highly worth examining. In design it is typical of the period — alabaster, part painted and gilded, having the customary centre panel, rectangular, with gilt lettering on a black ground. It describes effusively in Latin the life, talents and virtues of the deceased.

All straightforward, but what is much less so is the surrounding decoration. Above the panel is a fire, flaming fiercely, within an arched canopy rather like a Victorian fireplace. Around and above the fire are numerous books — books open, with some writing; books closed, in fine 'red morocco' binding with gilt letters; books shelved in rows, and some showing their spines, some their cut and some their uncut edges. This of course in alabaster.



It is easy to see the symbolism of the books, praising Dr. Jones's scholarship[13]. The writing on the open ones reads (though faintly) on one side 'In statutis tuis me ipsum obl(ecto) Non obliviscor verbi tui' — the Latin version of Psalm 119, verse 16; on the other the Latin version of Proverbs 10, verse 7 (q.v.).

Less easy, perhaps, is the signficance of the fire, but it probably likewise indicates Jones's learning, which is, incidentally, an Islamic use.

There are also early twentieth century alabaster plaques to Halfords on the north side of the sanctuary. Of greater interest historically is the tablet to Maria Constable, John's wife, and to her grandparents, Dr. and Mrs Rhudde. It was made at John's commission by Alfred Stothard, son of his better known artist friend, John Stothard, in 1831. It may seem generous of Constable to include the Rhuddes' names along with Maria's, and rather strange, too, as the former rector and wife are commemorated by oval tablets on the opposite side of the sanctuary, though these may have been placed there later.

The best monument in the church is that of Edward Lambe on the south side of the sanctuary. He was Lord of the manors of Illaries and Spensers, part founder of the school that came to bear his name, and "All his dayes he lived a Bacheler well learned in Devyne and Common Lawes. With his Councell he helped many, yett tooke fees scarse of Any. He dyed the XIXth of November, 1617." It is of typical Jacobean style: alabaster, part coloured, with coat of arms above and inscription below the figure, and elaborate surrounds of cornices, obelisk-pinnacles etc. On two swags at the base are two columns of words starting with his initials, a light-hearted way of describing his virtues.

Edward	Lambe
Ever	Lived
Envied	Laudably
Evill	Lord
Endured	Let
Extremities	Like
Even	Life
Earnestly	Learne
Expecting	Ledede*
Eternall	Livers
Ease	Lament

*sculptor's mis-reading for 'Lewde'?

Lambe is shown kneeling at a prayer-desk, a typical portrayal of the period, but with the Italian touch of curtains being pulled aside by angels, most attractively carved, to reveal him. (This motif occurs also on a

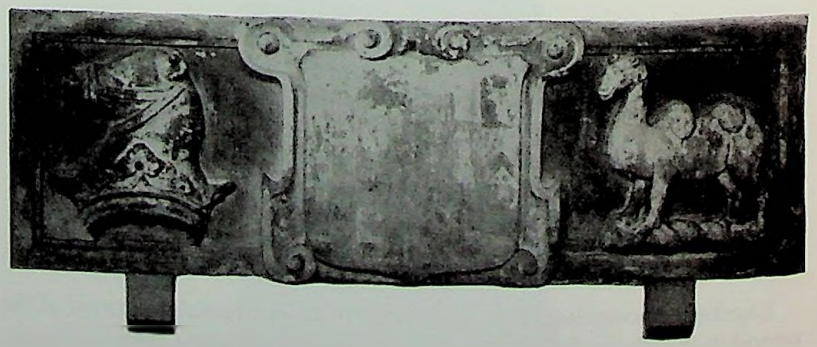
monument at Sproughton, of a lady said to be related to Lambe, 1634.) The sculptor? Not recorded, but the work is much in the style of the Christmas family of East Anglian origin, and could, I suggest, be by John and Matthias Christmas.

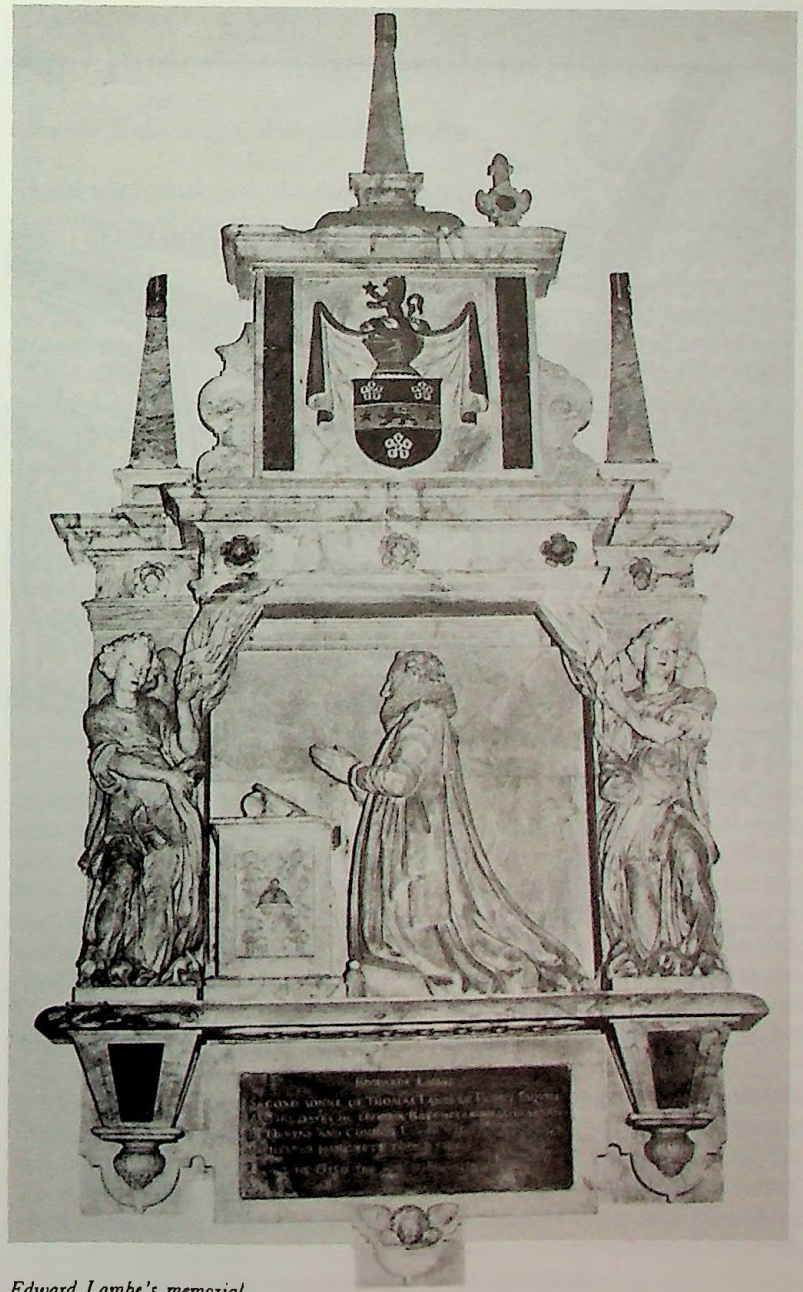
While the north chapel no longer has the array of manorial tombs and memorials with which it was once crammed almost to bursting, it does still have two large and handsome wall monuments, of cartouche type, i.e. oval panels to contain the descriptive wording, with elaborately scrolled edges, and an armorial bearing at the top. One is to Sir Joseph and Lady Hankey (ob. 1769 and 1770), and this has a winged cherub at base. The other and larger one is to Anna Parker, with a very long eulogy in Latin; she died in 1656, but the monument looks to be considerably later, well post-Restoration.

It is easy to overlook two tomb monuments now lying between the chancel and south chapel (but once in the north chapel) commemorating two succeeding and related Lords of the manors of Old Hall and Commandery in the period 1681 to 1728, Henry Parker junior with his sister, and Joseph Chaplin with his three (successive) wives. They are well worth examining for the richness of their sculptured ornament. Near these, but in the south aisle, not far from the War Memorials, is the slab monument to John Reade, barrister, stated to have been Lord of all four village manors, though briefly; he died in 1804.

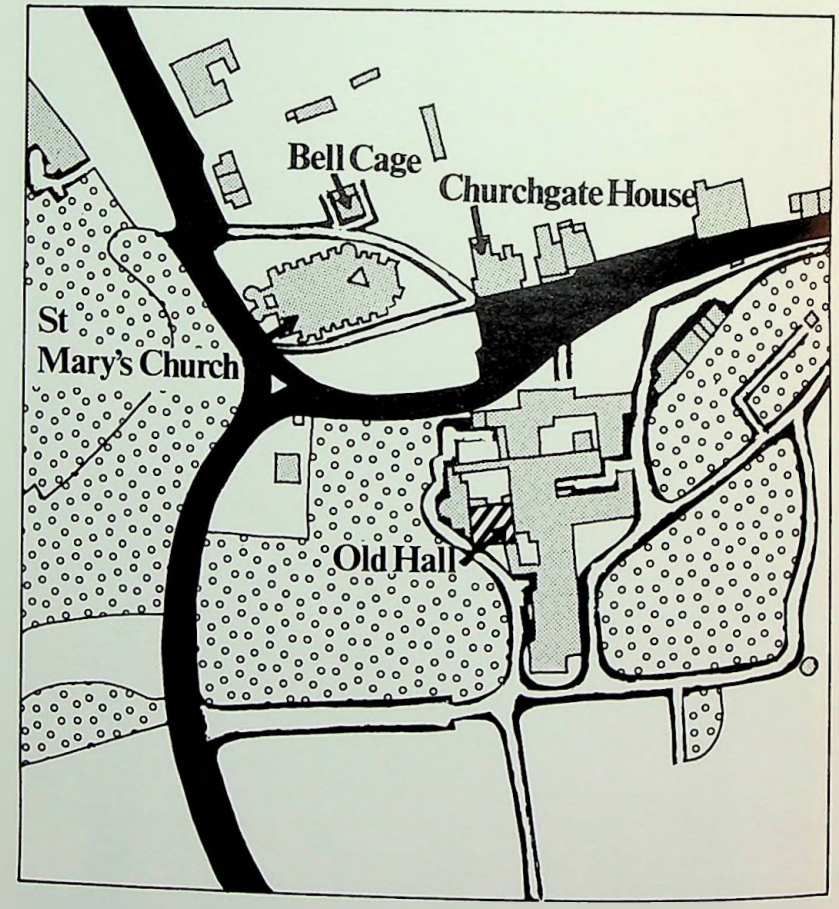
There are other black marble slab memorials, usual but always worth seeing, if only for the quality of lettering of earlier centuries.

The architectural section has also covered what can be known of the history of the church up to 1547, chiefly the great building century from the 1440's to the 1540's. To trace what subsequently happened to the fabric requires further account of the general history of the church.





Edward Lambe's memorial.



THE CHURCH DURING FOUR CENTURIES

After the Reformation: later 16th Century

As already mentioned, the short reign of Edward VI saw an onslaught upon 'Romish' practices and upon any art form that could be designated as 'imagery', which must have had an appalling effect on the church's appearance. How much of this was welcomed, how much of it deplored, by the villagers, who can say? Undoubtedly Protestantism had secured an early and strong hold here, as in other "woollen" villages and towns.

The first signs of royal interest had appeared before Henry's death, as had the method of enquiry by special commission, the concern at first being such valuable possessions as could be moved and, presumably, confiscated. Thus in 1543 a royal commission showed, so far as Bergholt was concerned, chief interest in chalices and bells, finding two chalices (one weighing 8¾ oz.), five 'great bells' and one sanctus bell (the one above the roof). This does not seem to have been followed up immediately, and another commission was set up by the Privy Council in 1547, demanding inventories of plate and ornaments in all churches.

But the interval had given some warning of what was to come. The churchwardens of that year, 1547, Robert Reynold and Hugh Lincoln, in their official response reported that during the previous year and a half they had sold a pair of chalices (probably the same pair), two pairs of censers, a ship (incense-boat) and a pax (a tablet of silver used in the Mass), for some fourteen pounds in all. Also that in 1544 a cross had been sold for twenty-four pounds, but this had been done by "the whole town" (whatever that meant) in the time of earlier churchwardens, Richard Cole and Richard Cardinall. In extenuation they pointed out that they had paid one hundred pounds for roofing in lead and thirty pounds for stooling, glazing and paving[14]. This, by the way, is further confirmation of the vast work on the church still continuing into the 1540's. (Reynold, who was Lord of the two manors of Illaries and Spencers, died the following year, bequeathing the first manor to his wife and the second to his son.)

One can only applaud the churchwardens' foresight. But doubtless other articles were impounded. And there was worse to come. During the following six years immovables also would disappear — all the subsidiary altars, with their furnishings and images of their patron saints, whether in stone, wood or wall-painting. And we have seen that there were several such altars. The rood (cross) too, will have been destroyed, probably with its loft, possibly also with its screen.

Stained-glass representations of saints etc. were also supposed to go, and some may have been destroyed at this time. There may have been a chance, however, of saving them, because of the difficulties and cost of re-glazing. They *may* have remained until the next orgy of destruction a century later, under the Commonwealth, or they may have disappeared in the intervening period under a rector and churchwardens so minded.

There was, of course, a complete reaction during the five years that followed the accession of Queen Mary, 1553 to 1558. The one local event that we know of in this reign is the burning at the stake, at Ipswich, of an East Bergholt parson — not apparently the rector — Robert Samuel, for his Protestant practices.

Under Elizabeth I there was no certainty as to what the Church of England was or where it would ultimately stand. Different parties, all regarding themselves as within the church, not outside it, wanted different degrees of Protestant change and some none at all. The Queen might intend to steer a middle course, but her various bishops and even one of her successive archbishops might and did have quite different ideas. Those clergy who came to be called 'Puritans' wanted no vestments, no semi-Catholic prayer-book, no elaborate ceremony, and usually no bishops — the Presbyterian or Calvinist system, or sometimes the Independence of each congregation.

Puritanism was strong in East Bergholt in the later 1570's and '80's. The local centre of the movement was, however, Dedham, where 'exercises', or meetings of ministers from a fairly wide range of villages met regularly. They did much conferring and discussing, much preaching and advising, much disciplining of both their members and their flocks. 'Lecturers', sometimes rectors and vicars but often quite distinct, were popular, most of them University men, chiefly from Cambridge.

The Struggle over Puritanism: late 16th and early 17th Century

It may now seem strange, but it did not then, that the chief patron of this party in our village became Lord of the manors of Old Hall and the Commandery. It had happened in this way: in 1578-9 the Earl of Oxford, who was busily engaged in squandering a large fortune, sold the two manors to the Derehaugh family of Gedgrave, and by 1582 the property had, by female succession and marriage, come into the hands of William Cardinall of East Bergholt (a surname we have met before!). Cardinall was a strong Puritan. His sister had married Edmund Chapman D.D., a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, who, after being ejected successively from Bedford and Norwich by bishops, was installed as 'Lecturer' at Dedham by Cardinall, who endowed the post.

The Dedham 'Conference', as it was called, attracted several other learned Puritan divines, some beneficed, some not, from Suffolk and Essex, and even allotted them to the various villages. The actual 'Conferring', or 'Prophesying' as it was sometimes called, took place monthly on a Monday at Dedham, in different private houses, and consisted of a sermon or lecture on some biblical or theological point, followed by discussion and criticism. (Sermons were given very great importance by Puritans). Discipline was strong, over personal no less than professional conduct, and decisions of the Conference were binding. (In some ways there is something of a likeness to a twentieth century Communist 'cell'.)

In Bergholt Cardinall supported at one time and another, as preachers and lecturers, Dr. Richard Crick (a fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, whereas most of his confrères were Cambridge divines), Thomas Stoughton, and John Tilney. How far they officiated as Lecturers in church, how far in Cardinall's house, one cannot be sure, but none of them was the village incumbent. Tilney, indeed, fell foul of his Presbyterian fellows by starting a Separatist (or Independent) congregation in Hog Lane (now Orvis Lane), and was for a time expelled from the Conference.[15]

But from about 1589 Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury since 1583, began to use the Court of High Commission to take very strong action against all Presbyterianism and Independency. The Puritans were, if only temporarily, driven underground by hard persecution, though Cardinall was still clandestinely entertaining ministers in 1593.

The Whitgift broom may well be the reason for a local happening that has hitherto been unexplained. In 1591 a new Rector had to be appointed to the living of Brantham with Bergholt (it had from the earliest recorded mention been a joint parish, and remained so until 1855). The advowson belonged normally to the Lord of the manor of Old Hall, yet on this occasion the presentation was made by the Crown. Why? It seems a reasonable suggestion that Whitgift, through the Bishop of Norwich, intervened to prevent a Puritan presentation by William Cardinall.[16]

What visible effect did this early Puritan phase have on the appearance of our church? We have no direct evidence and can only conjecture. The probabilities are that frescoes were uniformly white-washed, the ten commandments written large on a suitable wall, a wooden pulpit prominently placed for sermons, the altar — or rather 'communion table' — brought into the body of the church, chancel seating turned westward, some windows perhaps reglazed with clear glass.

There were still to be see-saw movements between the major religious parties before their differences coalesced with political ones to cause civil war.

The man appointed to the living of Brantham and East Bergholt in 1591 — and presented, as we saw, by the Crown, probably as a deliberate rebuff to the Lord of the Manor and the strong Puritan element in the village — was William Jones. Thirty years old, he was already a scholar of some eminence, a doctor of divinity, and one of the original fellows of the recently founded Emmanuel College, Cambridge.

He may have been accepted grudgingly, but the persecution of Puritanism was so fierce at the time that his position was secure enough. The deaths of Elizabeth in 1603 and Archbishop Whitgift in 1604, and their replacement by James I and Bancroft, hardly did anything to alleviate the Puritans' position. Yet in the later years of James's reign, and still more in the early years of Charles I's, the Puritans were increasing in strength all the time, aided by their growing preponderance in Parliament.

We can guess therefore that Dr. Jones, in his forty-two years tenure of the living, had no easy task at first. Yet the very fact that he lasted so long would seem to point to a policy of moderation and an ability to conciliate likely dissidents.

For one thing, he was a fine biblical scholar, able to meet the Puritan Lecturers on their own ground. The author of commentaries on Hebrews and Philemon, he was unlikely to be put out of countenance in theological disputation with the Lecturers. Indeed, he in due course, became Lecturer himself at East Bergholt, a comparatively rare thing for an incumbent: for one of the reasons for the Lecturer craze was the known inability of so many parish priests of the time to compose and preach a sermon.

That at the time he was able to maintain his orthodoxy is shown by such shreds of evidence as the institution of a new communion table, which he no doubt returned to the eastern position in the chancel, and by the purchase or acceptance in 1619 of a new cloth for it, and in 1622 of "two communion cups and a coffer of silver belonging to them, a communion cloth with a napkin to the same, and a green carpet, with a surplice for the minister." He was in fact doing what Archbishop Laud began to do nationally a few years later, restoring ceremony and sacrament. In 1633 he resigned, and died in 1636.

And if a final testimony to the general appreciation of Dr. Jones is required, surely it is to be found in the very handsome monumental tablet to him, which now resides on the north side of the chancel. This is supposing that the monument dates from soon after his death, for it is possible that it was put up after the Restoration of 1660.

Moreover, he was succeeded as Rector by his son, also William, who had been educated in Bergholt and at Caius College, Cambridge. His attitude to the religious divisions was unlikely to have differed from that of his father. But he was less successful.

At first he at least had episcopal support. In 1636 Bishop Wren of Norwich, an intimate of Laud's, wrote to his Archbishop that a petition had been made for a Lecture and Lecturer at East Bergholt, but added that it was not a market town (market days were also favourites for Lecturers) and that there was no suitable person, "and Dr. Jones, an eminent man, their late Lecturer, having complained often to me of their factious disposition, I took time to consider it." (And almost certainly went on taking time!)

But every year saw the division, nationally and locally, grow ever more serious. Within a very few years the long dispute between King and Parliament, Archbishop and Puritans, led to the outbreak of civil war in 1642.

Barely a year later William Jones junior was ejected from the Rectory by the Puritan faction, and there was no ordained rector in Bergholt for the next seventeen years.

The church was served by Puritan ministers instead of rectors for the period of the Civil War, Commonwealth and Protectorate, to 1660. During most of this time the minister was John Trebeck, until he moved to Stowmarket in 1657 and was succeeded by Stephen Podd. They were no doubt fully acceptable to most of the villagers, and certainly to the Lord of the Manor of Old Hall, Henry Parker, who had succeeded to the position by virtue of his marriage to Anne, only child and heir of the second William Cardinall who had joined the Parliamentary army at the beginning of the war and been killed at Edgehill, 1642. The minister's position was fully recognised by the payment of the customary tithes.

Suffolk was completely controlled by the Parliamentary party, and did not suffer territorially from any of the war's campaigns. How was Bergholt church affected? The commonly held belief that English churches suffered their worst spoliation 'under Cromwell' is not as a rule accurate. It happens, however, to be true of parts of Suffolk, thanks to the nefarious work of the notorious William Dowsing (though his commission as Parliamentary Visitor in 1643-4 came from the Earl of Manchester, Cromwell's then superior officer). Dowsing visited about 150 parishes in Suffolk, and did terrible havoc in destroying 'superstitious pictures', many of them windows, amongst other damage.

But Dowsing apparently did not come to East Bergholt, though disastrously busy at Nayland, Stoke, Little Wenham, Raydon, Shelley and Stratford. Either he was satisfied that there was nothing of the usual sort still left to destroy, or perhaps he felt that Puritan management of the village was strong enough to look after its own affairs. On the other hand he may conceivably have sent some underling, for certainly most of the church plate, communion vessels etc. seems to have disappeared

in this period or not much later. Yet the probability is that any important visitation would have left some record. And in fact Puritan administration showed in 1650 some anxiety for care and repair of the church by instituting a special rate.

The return of the Monarchy: later 17th Century

How far did East Bergholt, with its Puritan leanings, welcome the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660? Perhaps it shared some of the general dissatisfaction with the Protectorate and fear of the near anarchy that had followed Oliver Cromwell's death. Moreover, for a year or two Charles II showed his distinct preference for religious toleration. But he was not strong enough to prevent a wholly Cavalier parliament from passing extreme anti-Puritan measures. Hundreds of ministers were ejected from their parishes (Bergholt would be no exception) and forbidden to live within five miles of them or even visit them. They, and those who still agreed with them, were henceforth 'Dissenters', or 'Non-conformists', outside the pale of the Church. Yet, as Maurice Ashley has written, "The Church, like the country, never entirely lost its Puritan undertone."

Whether such legislation could be properly enforced in country villages is another matter. We know that in 1672 dissenting meetings were being held in the house of Robert Hall in East Bergholt, conducted by Richard Moore and Samuel Foame.

As for the village church, the first of the new rectors, appointed in 1662, lasted only three years, and his successor six. The third, John Welbank, 1672-8, was constantly at loggerheads with his congregation. In 1674 an Archdeacon's Visitation reported 'windows broken, seats decayed, aisles unpaved.'

Four years later complaints were made to the Consistory Court of the Bishop of Norwich. The Rector was said to have refused to read the burial service at a parishioner's funeral, or even to allow the use of the church bier. Also that although he had 'two good livings' (i.e. Bergholt with Brantham) 'of eight score pounds per annum' he refused to keep a curate to supply one of them. 'The number of souls in our parish from sixteen years old and upwards amounting to seven hundred, all ministers that have lived here before him, enjoying the same livings, always kept a curate to assist them.' (It is useful to know what the livings were then worth: still more useful to be given an estimate of the number of the adult population!) Further, that he had for months been neglecting to preach, or to provide a preacher, or to read divine service 'in the fore-noon', and had changed the time for the service and Holy Communion from nine o'clock to the awkward time of six. Worse still, he swore at his parishioners, fought with them even in the churchyard, and appointed so unsavoury a Parish Clerk that it was an 'offence to all that sat near him in the Church'.[17]

We do not know Welbank's side of the story, as he did not attend the Bishop's Court — probably could not, for within three months he was dead. The village overseers did go to the trouble of finding temporary accommodation for his widow and children.

So in 1678 came Edward Alston B.D. as Rector, to start a new and happier chapter in the church's history — and the longest incumbency, forty-four years to 1722, just beating the record of the elder Jones. He was already Rector of Newton in Suffolk, such pluralism being common at that time (and for more than a century to come). Bergholt was certainly his main living, and no doubt he provided a curate for Newton. He was a man of considerable means, judging from his rent book, in his excellent handwriting, that has survived in the family. He was responsible for having a new rectory built (now our 'Old Rectory'), though not it seems until 1714. (How inconvenient the distant 'Old Parsonage' at Flatford must have been!). The various properties he acquired included some in the village and district, such as the White Lion inn at Cattawade, which was not one of the two inns existing there recently. His son, Samuel, later had much more, including land between the rectory and the road, and a house on the heath. He used the same rent book though in less than his father's copy-book style.

A hundred years more coherent historically would be 1689 to 1789, from the English Revolution to the French. For about half of those years England was, on and off, at war, yet paradoxically it was a period of internal calm and recovery compared with the hundred years that preceded it.

Nowhere was this more evident than in church matters. The Toleration Act of 1689, however limited in scope, did give freedom of worship to Protestant Dissenters. The established Church settled down into a peace often indistinguishable from torpor. Excitement and 'enthusiasm' disappeared, at least until the emergence of Wesley. The spread of a rational spirit may have led to something like indifference: on the other hand it avoided fanaticism and bloodshed.

All this would be mirrored in the life of our village. From 1688 Nonconformist ministers — Brinkley, Foxon, Rice Williams are the names up to 1750 — were recognised and held their meetings in or behind the house now called The Old Manse.

At the same date, 1689, Edward Alston had eleven years behind him as Rector, and thirty-three ahead. There is evidence that he concerned himself with charities and poor relief, and he certainly wrote wills and inventories, in his fine handwriting, for illiterate parishioners. The sale in 1701 of 'thirty pieces of brass' found in the Town Chest, in order to provide a salver, is sufficient to tell us what had happened half a century before to memorial brasses, of which today we see only the matrices (or hollowed beds). But most of the evidence that this was a time of recuperation is negative: there just are no tales of trouble.

Clearly the church was made 'decent' again. The Communion table had probably been returned to the east wall immediately after the Restoration, in 1660, the date which is in fact scratched upon it. But Alston may well have been responsible for railing it in on the three sides. John Constable's drawing a century later of the church interior shows, if rather sketchily, wooden rails with twisted posts of 'barley sugar' type; these, from their design, are likely to date from the late seventeeth century. An octagonal font bowl, later discarded, may also have dated from Alston's time.

The exterior of the church in the eighteenth century would look very much as it does today. The cupola or bell-turret over the west end of the roof has a strongly Georgian look. So has the sun-dial over the south porch, though it could be earlier; its periodic re-paintings (including one by John Constable's friend, John Dunthorne, in 1827) may have tended to modernise the lettering. The interior would look very different. And

this not merely because of the absence of stained glass, neo-Gothic woodwork, organ etc.

The same drawing by Constable shows some other of these differences that survived into his day. The most surprising one is a screen, otherwise undocumented, across the chancel arch. The drawing is reproduced in the illustrated catalogue of the Constable bicentenary exhibition at the Tate Gallery in 1976. The commentator writes: "Though undoubtedly a view of the east end of the church, there seems to be no record of a Doric screen such as this ever having existed at East Bergholt. . . Perhaps the parish was considering the idea of commissioning local craftsmen to build a new screen, and, as the local artist, Constable was asked by the council officers to draw out the kind of thing they had in mind."

I think this is highly unlikely. In the first place it is difficult to imagine the Rector, Dr. Rhudde, agreeing to such a proposal, even at the earliest stage (if the drawing is of about 1800) of the artist's attraction to his granddaughter Maria, which he did everything in his power to block. More importantly, Constable never exhibited an interest in classical architectural design as here depicted, and would hardly have plumped for it. And thirdly, neither he nor any other draughtsman would have been likely to choose this particular design around the year 1800.

For what is the design? It is of the Roman Doric order, derived from the Italian Renaissance. It was popular in the first half of the eighteenth century thanks to the manuals of Palladian architecture such as that of James Gibbs, in which it appears pretty exactly. The style was dead well before 1800, when the revived Greek orders were the rage, not Renaissance Roman.

The screen I believe to have been a real, not imaginary, part of the church, introduced perhaps between 1720 and 1740. And very handsome too!

Was the interesting classical screen a replacement for the original, late Gothic rood screen and loft? It is unlikely. The earlier screen had probably been taken down a long time before, possibly in the later sixteenth century, more probably in the Puritan period of the seventeenth.

It is easier to relate changes to the eighteenth century than to give them a precise date — to say whether they happened in the time of Edward Alston or in the times of his successors, William Coyte (1722-1744), Samuel How (1744-1754), and Harry Hankey (1754-1782). Not much is remembered of these three rectors, but Coyte, like his predecessor, had another living, at Hintlesham, while Hankey was related to, and presented by, the Lord of the manor of Old Hall, Mr. (later Sir) Joseph Hankey. Pluralities and nepotism, respectively? Yes, but both so common in that age as hardly to be remarked upon. (Sir Joseph's successor as Lord of the Manor in 1769 was Joseph Chaplin Hankey, who in the previous year had presented a collection of new church plate, which for once proved more lasting).

So, what other differences were to be seen inside the church? Let us take the nave first. The window now at the west end did not exist, nor any other in its place. Instead, there was a gallery over the west door. This no doubt would be the place for the singers and for any instrumentalists with them, a mode which continued in so many churches well into the next century, and is familiar to us from Victorian paintings and Thomas Hardy's novels. The arrangement must be very rare today, but is — or was a few years ago — still to be found at St. Peter's, Colchester.

At the other (east) end of the nave, the pulpit was on the south side of the chancel arch, not as now on the north. And between the head of the arch and the roof was a religious text, painted on the plaster, a relic of Puritan times. A photograph not later than 1867 shows letters still there, half obliterated: 'We Praise Thee, We Bless Thee, We (Worship) Thee, We Glorify Thee'. The photograph also shows four wooden panels with texts, two on each side of the altar. To the south, one is headed 'Lord's Prayer', the other 'Chapter XX' (i.e. of Exodus — The Commandments). The headings on the north side are illegible, but one was The Apostles' Creed, for this, together with the Lord's Prayer panel, is now over the arch leading to the south chapel.

Yet the difference that would most take the eye would be the pews. These 'horse-boxes', as they have so often been called — and they were anathema to Victorian restorers — mostly occupied the central body of the nave, i.e. between the north and south aisle passages, and they were well made of oak, which in our church in their later days is said to have been painted a blueish white. They varied considerably in size, both in length and breadth and occasionally even in height, though that

was usually about four feet six inches. They were allocated mostly to owners and families of the more substantial houses in the village — 'mansions' as they were often called, or 'capital messuages'. It was necessary for the churchwardens to obtain a faculty from the Norwich diocesan court for the right of construction and private use. Once obtained, the right was almost a kind of perpetual leasehold! To quote from the faculty granted to Philip Roberts of West Lodge in 1768: "... seat, when built to be appropriated to Philip Roberts as proprietor ... of his mansion house and his heirs as proprietors. . . of the same, for him and them and his and their families, tenants, occupiers and inhabitants of the said Mansion House, to stand, kneel, sit and remain in during the time of divine Service and Sermons in the said church exclusive of all other persons whomsoever for ever."

It is clear from the words "when built" that these pews were not constructed all at the same time, and in fact they were made over a very long period. A faculty as early as 1715 to Walter Gullifer of 'Branstons' at Gaston End mentions two neighbouring pews already there, and they may well have been there even before 1700. At the other end of the century, 'Golden' (as the faculty miscalled Golding) Constable, John's father, obtained his pew in 1787.[18]

The chancel c. 1890.

The two most important pews, which are clearly shown in John's drawing, were at either side of the chancel arch, beneath the classical screen; the one to the north for the Lord of the manor of Old Hall, the one to the south for the Rector.

As for the household servants, and indeed the humbler inhabitants generally, they would have to occupy such old benches as remained, and increasingly these would be either to the wall sides of the aisle passages or behind the open walk between north and south doors.

What of the two chapels in the eighteenth century? The north chapel had been appropriated to the Lords of the manor of Old Hall, probably from the time it was built. Though the Earls of Oxford had no need to use it as a burial place, their successors — Cardinalls, Parkers, Chaplins, Hankeys, all related through female succession — filled it with tombs and monuments to an increasingly uncomfortable extent. Indeed the chapel was, at some uncertain date, bricked up from both chancel and north aisle, and so was nothing more than a mortuary.

The south chapel also had, or was claimed to have, a sort of family connection, until 1757. In that year, as stated in a document formerly in the old church chest and quoted by Mr. Paterson, 'Mr. Palmer Firmin of Dedham recites that being, as heir of the late Dr. John Bird, the owner of a house for which was "claimed a Right to and to bury in the Isle on the south side of the chancel", he has been called upon by the churchwardens either to repair that aisle, or to renounce his claims in it, and he therefore renounces them. From the map of 1731 it appears that Dr. Bird's house, since pulled down, stood about two hundred yards from the present (old) rectory, towards the church.'

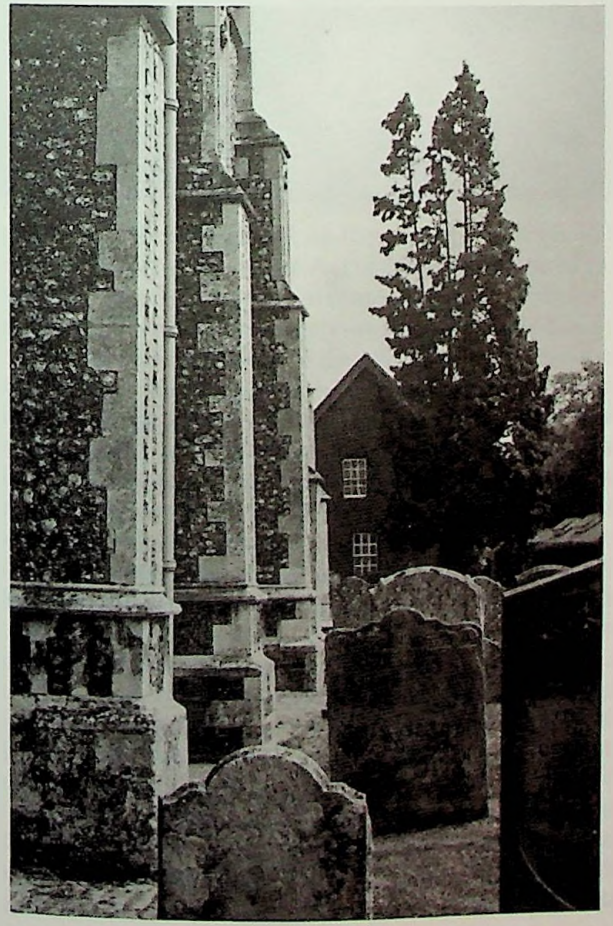
This right to a chapel and to burial within it through possession of a particular house seems at first sight very strange. But did Mr. Paterson pin-point the correct house? Dr. John Bird is already shown on the 1731 map, with its list of properties and owners, as having 'his dwelling house close to the church gate' or more exactly next to, i.e. just east of, what we know today as Church Gate House; this is over 500 yards from the Rectory. (I think Mr. Paterson misread a D on the map for a B, and thought a house on the south side of Rectory Hill, in a position agreeing with his statement, was Bird's; actually it belonged to John Davey, and has since disappeared).

Now in 1731 the Church Gate House belonged to the pleasantly named Widow Fidget. But I think it is likely that Dr. Bird, a man of substance who picked up a number of village properties, subsequently bought this adjoining house, probably after the Widow Fidget's death, and that Mr. Firmin inherited it.

On an earlier page we have looked at some evidence, not very firm, that this house, today Church Gate House, may have been a guildhall

before the Reformation, and that the guild, a religious and social one (with some resemblance to a modern Friendly Society) dedicated to St. John the Baptist, was associated with the south chapel. The guild's rights in the chapel may well have been regarded by later occupants of the house as passing to them. Hence Mr. Firmin's claim (and after all we have seen that even the right to a pew went with a house!)

This suggested solution of an otherwise mysterious episode not only makes sense; it also gives distinctly strong support to the theory that the south chapel was in the later middle ages the chapel of the guild of St. John the Baptist.



Churchgate House from the churchyard.

John Constable.

Although the Rev. Durand Rhudde served the church from 1783 to 1819, from the end of the American War of Independence to four years after Waterloo, singularly little change in the church took place during this long period. Rhudde was a doctor of divinity and became a chaplain-in-ordinary to George III, had a town house in London, and enjoyed driving luxurious coaches with expensive horses, rather to the amusement of the village ladies. Formidable, though affable, he was held in some awe by his congregation. But almost all that is remembered of him now is his long and obstinate opposition to the engagement of his granddaughter Maria Bicknell to the then impecunious artist of village stock, John Constable. The story is outside our present concern. Dr. Rhudde was known in the village as "The Grand Caesar" declared John Lott, the brother of Willy[19].

The succeeding rector was the Rev. Joshua Rowley, son of Rear-Admiral Sir Joshua Rowley, of Tendring Hall, Stoke-by-Nayland. He already held the livings of Stoke and Holton St. Mary, and had some property in Bergholt itself, on Rectory Hill, bought in 1814 and slightly extended by the Enclosure Act of 1817. He is stated to have nominated himself, which at once raises some puzzling questions, but clues to their solution can be found, partly in the Constable family letters.[20]

How did he come to have the advowson, or presentation to the living, seeing that it had for three centuries belonged to the manor of Old Hall, with the single exception noted earlier when the Crown stepped in? The answer becomes clearer when we find that his wife was the sister of the Lord of that manor, Peter Godfrey. But why did he not ask Godfrey to present him, without going to the trouble of transfer? And why in any case did he wish to make Bergholt his main parish and place of residence, instead of being satisfied with the arguably finer church of Stoke, where he had already been incumbent for thirteen years?

Perhaps it was a desire for independence from overpowering family control at Stoke (though he remained titular vicar there for another thirteen years). But there was something more. Apparently he hoped he might, in due course, be able to present his son as his successor at Bergholt, and partly with that in mind, planned considerable additions to the rectory building.

Why then did he later give away the advowson to Emmanuel College, Cambridge? The answer lies in a tragedy. Rowley had hardly taken up his rectorship when his fifteen year old son fell fatally from a window at Westminster School, in October 1821. The plan died with the boy.

Although the rectory extension was well under way, it seemed for a time that Mr. Rowley might not now take up residence. But in the end he remained, two new wings were completed, and he was Rector for thirty-five years, 1819 to 1854, dying aged 84 on December 28 of that year. He was buried not at East Bergholt but in the chancel of the church of Brantham. This would be because the discontinuance of burials in the East Bergholt churchyard had been decided, and came into force at the end of 1854, within days of his death.

In Bergholt and Brantham Rowley had held 45 acres of glebe, and two moduses, fixed payments in lieu of tithes awarded by the Tithe Act of 1837; these amounted to £820 from East Bergholt and £510 from Brantham. After the separation (see below) the Bergholt figure became £1117.

Again we have seen pluralities and something very like nepotism, but Rowley, if essentially an eighteenth century type, was, with his wife, well liked in the village, as testified by, among others, John Constable. Moreover, his generous disposal of the patronage to Emmanuel, his old College, ended once for all the old-fashioned methods of appointment. Furthermore, it led to the end of the union with the 'mother church' of Brantham, that long-standing anomaly. Emmanuel took steps, through an Order in Council passed in 1843, to arrange to separate the two livings, so that after Rowley's death there were separate appointments to Bergholt and Brantham, though Bergholt was not given the name of "rectory" until 1866. The old conservative ended initiating a revolution.

For suddenly, with this important change, others swiftly followed, and a new and quite different chapter seems to open. The manor of Old Hall had passed from Edward Godfrey (heir of Peter) to his widow, usually known from her previous marriage as the Countess of Morton, and on her death to her relation, Sir John Buller. In 1856 Buller sold the house and estate of Old Hall to a community of Benedictine nuns. At the same time he offered the north chapel, for so long accepted as the property and mortuary of the Lord of the Manor, to the parish and its inhabitants, to become part and parcel of the church. The offer was accepted, on condition that Sir John buried the coffins still there exposed, at his own expense, and put the fabric and floor of the chapel into a satisfactory state of repair. A year later all the enclosing brickwork was removed, the chapel becoming a vestry.

Something should be said of the curates who assisted the rectors during the early part of the century. There were usually at least two and they included some remarkable individuals. Some play lively parts in the Constable family letters, such as the Rev. H. Kebbel and the Rev. B. Wainwright, while the Rev. John Roberson (1811-1819) was a fairly close friend of John Constable; he left to become second master at

Merchant Taylors School but died soon afterwards. Rather later the Rev. G.N. Godwin (1873-1876) wrote about the village in his 'Bits about Bergholt'.

Two curates in particular should not be forgotten. The Rev. William Branwhite Clarke, son of the blind master of the Lambe School, helped Mr. Rowley in the late twenties and also succeeded his father at the school for a short time, 1829-1831. Not only a dedicated parson but a poet and hymn-writer, he became more celebrated as a geologist. In 1839 he emigrated to Australia where, though not relinquishing his duties as pastor and schoolmaster, his geological studies led to finds, of epoch-making importance for that continent, of gold, tin, diamonds, and coal. He is duly recognised as the father of Australian geology.

The Rev. Charles David Badham (1848-1856) had a father and a brother both of much distinction in classical studies and translations. David shared the same interest and gifts, but combined them with medicine — he was a fully qualified doctor — and above all with natural history. He published works on 'Insect Life', 'Esculent Funguses of England' and 'Ancient and Modern Fish-Tattle'. The last is an astonishing combination of zoological anecdotes, verse translations, and deep classical learning, about the Mediterranean littoral. He resigned his curacy in 1856, no doubt through ill health, for he died the following year. A few months later was published his posthumous 'An August at Felixstowe', a lively description of a stay at that place when it was a mere hamlet.

Victorian restoration: later 19th Century

The new rector, Joseph Woolley (1855-1892), Doctor of Divinity in 1870 and in his last years Archdeacon of Suffolk, was to initiate more changes than his five predecessors put together. Not that there was anything exceptional in being a new broom in the 1850's to '90's. Most parishes were then undergoing a thorough 'restoration', and Suffolk was well to the fore. Today there are two opposed judgments on these Victorian church restorations. Some hold that they usually caused immense damage to features and objects of historic and aesthetic importance. Others, that without this dedicated and strenuous purging, repairing and rebuilding many of these old churches could never have survived to this day. Neither view can be called incorrect. There was great necessity for repair, and often there was great absence of imagination and of concern for what should survive. Restorers were guided by the 'Oxford Movement' along with the teachings of the Camden Society which seemed to preach that nothing but a revived Gothic style and a particular liturgical arrangement

should be acceptable in Christian churches. There was competition in the village, too, for in 1856 the large new Congregational Church was opened.

It is perhaps fair to say that St. Mary's, East Bergholt suffered less and gained more during the restoration process than a great many other churches. We can only examine the losses and the gains.

Mr. Woolley would be occupied immediately with, even if he did not initiate, the change that destroyed the isolation of the north chapel (described earlier), and few would quarrel with that. Very soon after, in 1858, he turned his attention to the no less anomalous position of the south chapel. This, as we have seen, had been bricked up and isolated like the other, with a rather ungainly exterior porch enabling it to be used for meetings, complete with fireplace and chimney. All this was now swept away — and surely a good riddance? The more easterly of the two south windows was re-inserted to match its neighbour. Eight years later the chapel was re-roofed and leaded.

The western gallery was taken down in 1861, and the next year a new font, at the west end, was presented in memory of Abram Constable by his friend Jacob Mecklenburgh, with whom he had lived in his last years at the Windmill House. (The font cover is later — 1932). The stone of the font has worn very badly, and one may regret the disappearance of the eighteenth century marble font which, though un-Gothic, would today no doubt be prized. It was removed to the rectory garden, but can no longer be traced.

Nothing changed the internal appearance of the church more than the taking down of all the high pews in the nave in 1867. They were perhaps no great aesthetic loss, and there were other arguments against them: the new seats were all free and open. Unfortunately the replacement, as in almost all churches,was by mass-made benches of varnished pitch-pine, surely the most depressing species of timber, not creating a visual improvement.

What happened to the classic screen? Presumably it disappeared at the same time, though we cannot be sure that it had not gone shortly before. It would certainly have been regarded at that period as something vaguely pagan, lacking the supposed spirituality of the Gothic: more's the pity!

The opportunity was taken to replace the nave floor, an old red-tiled one, no doubt in poor condition, with bricks. A new oak pulpit, presented circa 1873 by Mr. Rimmer of The Gables, helped to complete the transformation of the nave, but we know next to nothing about its predecessor.

The first new stained glass — and there was nothing ancient — was put in the east window of the chancel in 1865, or shortly after, for in

this area dating tends to go by the death of a person commemorated. In this instance it was a memorial from the Halford family of West Lodge. The lower part of this east window had for a long time been bricked in.

Much as in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the families of the more considerable houses in the village played a generous part in the provision of both windows and new furnishings, usually as memorials. Ten windows in all received stained glass in Dr. Woolley's time or in the following twelve months. The three windows of the north aisle, all in the same style, commemorate members of the Hughes family of East Bergholt Lodge, with obituary dates 1862, 1879 and 1889. The north and south windows of the chancel, from the Simpson family of The Hermitage, give dates 1884 and 1891 but were both actually inserted in 1892. Of the same style and date as these are the three windows of the south chapel, two of them given by Mrs. Letitia Densham, one in memory of her brother, Dr. Manning, in 1892 and the other, though showing dates of 1871 and 1873 without explanation, probably inserted in the same year: so too was the third window, a memorial to Archdeacon Woolley himself by public subscription. Mrs. Densham also gave the easterly window of the south aisle as a memorial to her sister, Emma Manning, 1880.

It may be convenient to mention in advance the five later stained glass windows in the church today. The first, in the south aisle, was a belated memorial to John Constable by public subscription, 1897. The west window of the nave was also a subscribed window, in memory of Mrs. Densham, who had given the church so much, in 1905. Two windows in the north chapel are from the Eley family of East Bergholt Place, 1926 and 1949; and the south aisle west window is a memorial to Mr. Barlow, Rector from 1936 to 1950. I am not sure exactly when the plain colouring in the clerestory south windows was put in — probably about 1900 — nor can I think why, except for the story, told me by an old inhabitant, Miss Bryan, that a very influential worshipper found the morning glare of the sun on his pew too strong, and was allowed to provide this new glass. (It is reminiscent of the moving of the bell-cage!)

Victorian stained glass, generally much maligned, deserves rather more study and appreciation than it has received. Our examples are interesting and varied, and there are likely to be different opinions of their respective artistic merits. Some will say that the present century can show an improvement in the art, and point to our west window and the two in the north chapel. (These last two have to hide their light behind, though not under, a bushel, if the organ can so be called. Which reminds me to say that the provision of an organ is another legacy of the Woolley era.) Others may prefer the considerable majesty of the windows of the north aisle. I have a fairly soft spot for the grouping and colours of the