

CROWMER MONUMENT, YARMOUTH CHURCH.



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Yarmouth Church.

LETTER FROM FRANCIS WORSHIP, ESQ.

TO

DAWSON TURNER, ESQ., V. P.

Great Yarmouth, October, 1847.

MY DEAR SIR,

IN the course of the repairs now going on in our fine old Church many curious things have come to light. If the ancient glories of the edifice have passed away, and be now beyond the reach of imagination, the long-hidden Sedilia prove how large was the staff of priests in this town at a time when the population was not a third of its present amount. The Almeries and other closets for the deposit of sacred utensils confirm the statements of old topographical historians, that our Church abounded in chapels and altars. The faint remains of a Fresco-painting in one of the Sedilia in the south aisle of the chancel display considerable elegance of design. Fastolf's mutilated tomb attests alike the wealth of a benefactor, and the architectural genius of the age he lived in: while the gorgeous Bosses, profusely scattered over the roof of the nave and its aisles, carry us at once to the time of their being placed there—that of the best period of Edward III.—and among them may be seen the coats of that monarch, and of all his sons in their order of birth, as well as the coats of Bishop Spencer and of other contemporary ecclesiastical and lay benefactors—the last being mingled with devices of the most various shapes, either emblems of religious faith or the evidences of playful fancy.



One recent discovery alone must ever be a subject of personal gratification to yourself. At the late annual meeting of the Archæological Institute, Professor Willis delivered a spirited lecture within the walls of our Church, on its age and architecture; and, among the theories which he was *compelled* to have resort to, was one that no part of the original edifice of Herbert de Losinga now existed. Certainly the Professor's lecture did not come within the limits of strict criticism; for his means of inspection had been small, and were of a distant date. I must ever feel grateful for being allowed to be one of his hearers; and I have often wished that, in the present fever-heat for Church-restoration, a little of his true taste and genius could be widely distributed. But to resume. The energy of our friend and your relative, Mr. Gunn, caused him to examine the Tower with persevering care; and from a slight beginning came the gratifying detection of a series of pure Norman Arches, which at once established the antiquity of, at least, a portion of the Church, and carried it to the time of Herbert de Losinga, the first founder.

Another discovery has recently been made, much inferior to the last, but still of considerable interest. It might be better for me to call it a restoration; but it is both a restoration and a discovery; and, as it relates to the history of our town, and brings one of our old Burgesses out of the seeming oblivion into which he had long fallen, I think I shall be pardoned for acquainting the Norfolk Archæological Society, through yourself, with what I have made out concerning it.

Until very lately our Church was split into three distinct parts, of which the chancel and its aisles formed one—while a division of the nave and its aisles into portions of unequal size constituted the two others. These divisions were all made in the time of the Parliament; and, from that period to the end of the Protectorate, each of them formed the place of assembly for a distinct congregation. The chancel portion



was entered by two doorways—one in the north aisle, and the other in the south. The latter was of the most common kind: a portion of the wall had been removed to make it, and there was neither architectural design nor decoration. The northern doorway led into the churchyard, under a canopy of considerable beauty, having in its centre a shield, on which an *engrailed chevron, wavy or undée, between three birds* could be distinctly traced. The canopy had all the appearance of being the remains of a mural monument. If so, its desecration or partial destruction must have been effected in the time of the Parliament, for the sake of entrance into the chancel. To support this idea, there are on the wooden posterns of the door, as you come from the churchyard, certain initials, and the town's arms, and the figures 1650. But, after all, nothing was known of the history of this handsome doorway; and yet it had the benefit of a faint tradition, and went by the name of "Crowmer's Monument."

The style of this canopy and doorway is of the latter part of Henry the Seventh's or the beginning of the following reign. But I need not enter upon description, as my sister has been so good as to make an etching of it as it appeared from the chancel; and she kindly permits me to express a hope that the Society will consider the plate not unworthy of their acceptance.

I must now take your attention to an accidental disclosure, recently made in another and a distant part of the Church, and which, as singularly as completely, not only establishes the tradition I have referred to, but enables our Church-committee to restore the Crowmer Monument to its original state, and, almost entirely, with the original materials.

In the north-west corner of the north aisle stood the vestry; and over the entrance-door was a stone tablet, marking the date of its erection (1650) together with the names of the Bailiffs and Churchwardens of that time. This tablet was an object of general interest. Our town had sided vehe-



mently with the Parliament and the two Protectors; and as vehemently it hailed the Restoration. History does not allow what is done to be undone; but the public monuments are within reach of a powerful majority, and, as Bailiff William Burton continued guilty of old opinions, his obstinacy was punished by the erasure of his name from the tablet. The end in view, like many others of equal wisdom, failed altogether; and I believe I may say that William Burton's name is better known for its absence from the tablet, than are those of the others for being there.

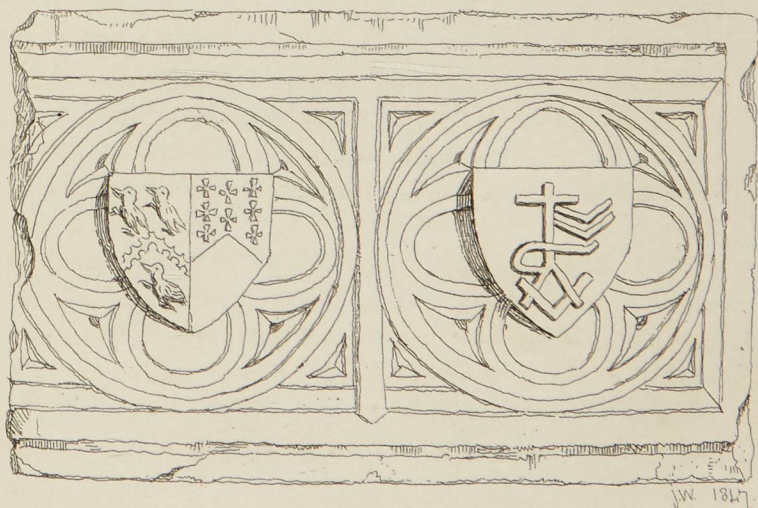
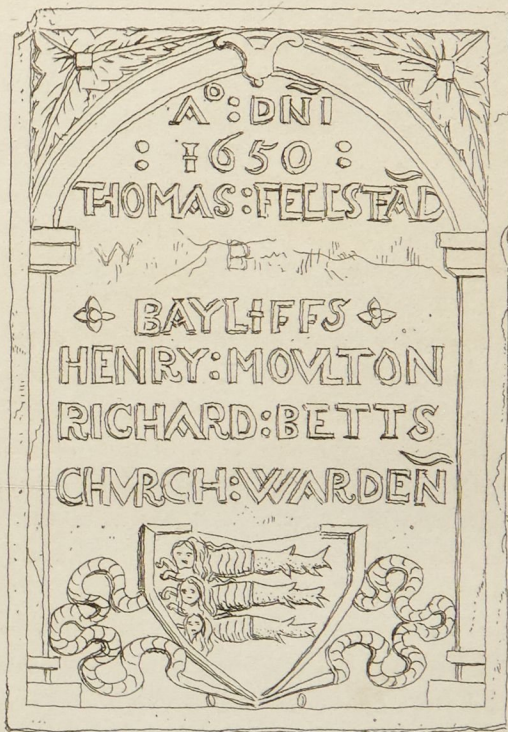
On the recent demolition of the vestry, and the removal of this stone inscription from the place it had occupied for nearly two centuries, a singular piece of sculpture came to light. Some panel-work was visible at the back of the tablet; and, on clearing away the dirt and mortar, two quatrefoils appeared in all their original sharpness. Within one of them was a shield bearing a *chevron engrailed, between three birds*, and impaling *per chevron, with eight crosses formée in chief*, while the shield in the other quatrefoil held a merchant's mark.

I am again under obligations to my sister, whose zeal enables me to present to the Society a second plate she has etched of, first, the tablet as it stood over the vestry-door, and, next, the panel-work and shields just mentioned.

There is no trace of colours on either the shield in the centre of the canopy or that within the quatrefoil; but, as the former differed from the latter only in having the engrailed chevron undée, or wavy, there was at least much resemblance between the two, and a reasonable ground for making inquiry.

First, the name of Crowmer, and the birds (probably crows) in both shields, appeared to support the tradition that the right title had been given to the monument. The date of 1650 on the postern of the south chancel doorway, and on that side of the tablet which held the Bailiffs' names, afforded fair presumptive evidence both of the time when the tomb





TABLET & PANEL. CROWMER MONUMENT OF YARMOUTH.



was desecrated, and of the use made of part of its materials. On referring to good books of heraldry, the man's coat on the panel became clear enough, for it appeared that the arms of Crowmer or Cromer of Kent (the name is spelt both ways) are *argent, a chevron engrailed, between three crows, sable*. Saving that colours were wanting, a more complete identity with a name could not be found. The wife's arms looked like those of Wilshire—but upon that subject I will add a few words presently. On measuring the length of this panel with the width of the tomb, it appeared that one more quatrefoil of the same size would exactly supply all that was needed to restore the monument. So far, therefore, so good.

Then, as to the shield in the canopy. At first there was some difficulty about it; but at length it appeared, on searching at the Herald's College, that on 24th April, 1494, the following arms were granted and confirmed to "Robert Cromer of Yermouthe, in the Counte of Norffolke, to hold to him and his posterity," viz. *gold, a chevron engrailed, unded silver and azure, betwixt three crows sable*, with, for a crest, a crow standing on a wreath, silver. The truth of the tradition attending the monument was thus placed beyond a doubt.

The family of Crowmer, or Cromer, was an old and important one in the County of Kent. One of them, Sir William Crowmer, was Lord Mayor of London in 1423.\* His son William married the only daughter of Lord Saye and Sele, the Lord Treasurer, and was Sheriff of Kent in 1450, when the rebellion headed by Jack Cade broke out. The Sheriff and his father-in-law were tried and convicted of treason by the rebels, and then executed; and their heads were cut off, and fixed on poles, and finally set up on London Bridge, having first been made "to kiss one the other at every street-corner."† Another of the Cromers married a daughter

\* Stow's *Chronicle*, p. 619.

† Stow's *Chronicle*, p. 660. Weever's *Funeral Monuments*, p. 279. Grafton, p. 612. Shakspeare's *Henry VI*. Cade instituted a commission of Oyer et



of Sir John Guilford, "the Controller to the House to King Edward IV." ‡ John Crowmer, Esq. and *Jone* his wife, lie buried at Sittingbourne, under the date 1539. § The daughter of Sir John Cromer was interred at Tunstall in Kent. || Weever, in his work on Funeral Monuments, spells the name Crowmer or Cromer indifferently, and on the same page. In one place, under the head of the Diocese of Canterbury, he styles the family as "of prime and principal note in these parts;"\* and in another, as being "of knightly descent, and of ample revenues." † How *our* Robert Crowmer came to Yarmouth, there are now no means of ascertaining: his name does not appear in our town records before his own time. That he was of this Kentish family, and had the heraldic benefits of their pedigree and connections, there can be little doubt. Probably he was a younger son, and it might be needful for him to be the maker of his own fortune. Perhaps he came hither in the intercourse between this town and the Cinque Ports, which in his time was important and incessant. That he was a prosperous man, his tomb bears ample testimony: that he was a Burgess of great worth, is shown by the fact that he was nine times Bailiff, ¶ viz. in 1470, 1471, 1479, 1481, 1482, 1483, 1489, 1490, and 1497. He might fairly regard himself as the founder of a new family; and thus I am inclined to explain the variation in the blazon of his arms, while it will be observed, that the *fashion* of the paternal coat (which he would seem to have preserved on the

Terminer, under which Lord Saye and Sele was tried at Guildhall, and executed. Ritson believes that the Sheriff Crowmer was also tried under the same commission; but it seems probable that he was killed at Mile-end without trial the day after Lord Saye's execution.

‡ Weever, p. 235.

§ Ibid. p. 279.

|| Ibid. p. 279.

\* Ibid. p. 235.

† Ibid. p. 279.

¶ Swinden's *History of Yarmouth*, pp. 933, 934, and 935.



quatrefoil for the sake of old family connexion) is strictly adhered to. In the absence of dates, it becomes possible that the canopy arms were granted, not only after Robert Crowmer's marriage, but while he was a widower.

Now as to the wife's arms impaled on the panel-shield. On referring again to heraldic books, the arms of Wilshire of Stone in Kent are given as *per chevron azure and argent, in chief eight crosses formée or*. Colours, as I have said, are wanting; but, in their absence, words cannot describe the coat in question more correctly than these words do. To complete the description and identify the whole, Weever gives the names of certain persons buried in Yarmouth church for whose souls prayers were made, and among them appears "Jone, the daughter of John Wilshire, wife to Robert Cromer."\*

The Wilshires must have been people of much note in Kent. I shall only trouble you by stating that Sir John Wilshire was Controller of the town and marches of Calais in Henry the Seventh's reign, and that he was buried in a chapel of his own foundation within Stone Church in 1526. He resided at Stone Castle; and his only daughter and heiress, Bridget Wilshire, married Sir Richard Wingfield, K.G., Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and Ambassador from Henry VIII. to Spain, where he died. † Failing all family pedigree, I may venture to deem it possible that *Jone* Crowmer of Sittingbourne was the only child of our Robert Crowmer and *Jone* Wilshire his wife, and that she married a Kentish cousin, and so carried her name back again to the county from whence I consider both her father and mother to have sprung.

I regret extremely that no trace of our Bailiff's will is to be found either at Doctors' Commons, or in the Ecclesiastical Courts at Norwich. Farther inquiries must be made. His

\* Weever, p. 863.

† Ibid. p. 334.



name seems to have been spelt as irregularly as that of his family was. In the grant of arms he is called Cromer, while in our Corporation lists he is always called Crowmer.

And now, my dear Sir, my long letter has come to a close. For the sake of our antiquarian friends living far away, I have thought right to tell my story at length, rather than to tell it briefly. I have described the confusion and uncertainty in which the subject first presented itself. I have narrated the little things which, step by step, and one by one, came to light. The name of Crowmer disappears from our Town Records after 1497. In the sad absence of every kind of local information respecting our Bailiff and his lady, I have told all that I could learn of their families; and I have now only to hope, that the monument of Robert Crowmer and Jone his wife will be speedily restored in good taste, and be never desecrated or mutilated more.

With an anxious hope that our Church itself may be treated as well as this monument can easily be, and that the means may not be wanting to treat it as justly,

I remain,

Ever truly yours,

FRANCIS WORSHIP.

To Dawson Turner, Esq.

