

Mural Painting

DISCOVERED

AT BURLINGHAM ST. EDMUND, NORFOLK.

COMMUNICATED BY

A. W. MORANT, ESQ.

IN the month of July, 1856, a very interesting and well-preserved mural painting was discovered upon the south wall of the chancel of Burlingham St. Edmund, in this county, representing the murder of Archbishop Thomas à Becket. The figures about three-fourths life-size, and outlined on the stucco.

On the left hand of the picture is the archbishop kneeling before an altar in a cruciform church with round tower and spire, intended no doubt to represent his Cathedral Church of Canterbury. Upon the altar is a chalice and host; on the south side stands his cross bearer, Edward Gryme, holding in his left hand a processional cross, and his right uplifted in an attitude of horror.

The archbishop is vested for mass. His chasuble has a border of quatrefoils; the maniple is on his left arm, and his albe has its apparel; his hands are joined in prayer, and his head slightly turned towards his murderers.

The tragedy has already commenced: four armed knights are around him, of whom the foremost is stabbing him in the head with sword and dagger; the stroke of the second has severed the bleeding scalp, while the mitre falls to the ground.



C. J. W. Winter del.

MURAL PAINTING. SOUTH BURLINGHAM CHURCH, NORFOLK.

Day & Son, Litho to the Queen.

This one bears a shield charged with a bend engrailed between two crescents, all within a bordure engrailed, (which coat I cannot identify with any of the families of the four murderers): his left hand is on the hilt of his dagger.

The third assassin holds in his right hand the carpenter's axe, with which, according to the chroniclers of the period, he had previously broken open the doors of the church: his shield is charged with the cognizance of Reginald Fitzurse,—a rampant bear.

The fourth figure is represented in the act of drawing his sword, and holds the scabbard in his left hand. At his left side is what appears to be a small round buckler. At the extreme right of the picture is a tree.

The whole painting is remarkably well executed. The knights are shown in the style of armour in use in the early part of the reign of Richard the Second (i. e. about 1380), at which period, no doubt, the painting was executed.

Upon their heads are pointed bascinets; two have vizors, and two are without. To the bascinet is attached the camail, and the hauberk of mail shows beneath the tight-fitting jupon, with its vandyked, or scalloped edging. The arms have rerebraces and vambraces of plate, and elbow pieces; and the legs, cuissarts and jambarts: the feet are protected by long-pointed solerets, or steel shoes; and the hands, by gauntlets. The swords are suspended to richly-ornamented baldricks, and all the details are most carefully represented.

The subject of Becket's murder was at one time a favourite one; but Henry the Eighth endeavoured to exterminate all the representations in his power, so that but few are extant. It is to be seen upon the seals of several of the archbishops of Canterbury, and upon those of Beauchief, West Langdon, and Arbroath Abbeys.

A most detailed and interesting account of the murder, compiled from contemporary chronicles, is given in Stanley's *Memorials of Canterbury*. (London, Murray, 1855.)

The church of Burlingham St. Edmund is of an interesting character: it has two Norman doorways, a richly-carved oak pulpit of the date of the early part of the fifteenth century, upon which the painting and gilding remain perfect; attached to it is the Jacobæan hour-glass stand, with its original glass. There is a richly-carved rood-screen, which, as well as the pulpit, is engraved in Blackburne's "Decorative Painting of the Middle Ages." There are several finely-carved oak benches and a few remains of stained glass; the bells also are of early date.

Another painting was found upon the north wall of the chancel; but, not being perfect, was unfortunately thought nothing of, and coloured over before I was able to see it.

