

# Notices, Historical and Topographical,

OF THE

## PARISH OF STOKESBY, NORFOLK,

DEANERY OF FLEGG,

With some Account of the Mural Paintings discovered in  
the Parish Church, 1858.

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THE village of Stokesby is situated at the western extremity of the hyrn or angle,\* formed by the junction of what was once the main arm of the great eastern æstuary of the Norfolk coast, and the subsidiary arm or creek, which, running backwards from this, between Stokesby and Burgh St. Margaret, is now reduced to the chain of inland waters or "Broads" of Filby and Ormesby. These find their outlet by the stream called Muck Fleet,† to the river Bure, which, at Stokesby only, by a sudden bend, touches the high land.

\* Angles of land of this kind are locally termed *Huns*, i. e. hyrns, or horns. The word is *A. S.* *Horncastle, Linc.=hyrn-ceaster.*

† That Muck Fleet was originally of very different dimensions is evident from the term itself, (*fleet* being properly a tidal bay) and this too at by no means a pre-historic date, for according to the Inquisition taken in the third year of Edward I. A.D. 1275 (*Rot. Hund.*, vol. i) Walter de Burgh was accused of unjustly appropriating to himself "the liberty of the water which extends a *Burg' Brigghe' usque ad Stokisby Flech*, which had been always a common fishery of the whole country"—an expression which could hardly apply to the present insignificant channel. The *Flech*, or *Flash*, a shallow pool caused by the overflow of the river at high water, still retains its appellation.

The southern edge of the promontory sharply defines the boundary of the anciently insulated district of Flegg from the marshes which formed the bed of the ancient æstuary, through which now meander the three rivers which marked its lowest levels, making their common exit to the sea at Yarmouth.

The first syllable of the name is evidently the Danish *Stok*,—Ang.-Sax. *Stoc*,—a trunk of a tree, a stake, pile, or stock; and we here get an interesting glimpse of its former occupants.

Cæsar, in his account of the invasion of Britain, tells us that the river which lay between him and the territories of Cassivellaunus could only be passed on foot in one place, and that with difficulty. When he arrived on its banks he perceived a large force drawn up on the other side to oppose him: the bank, moreover, was planted with *sharp stakes*, and others of the same kind were fixed in the bed of the river beneath the water. The place at which the Romans crossed the Thames was fixed by a tradition which existed in the time of Bede,\* when the stakes, said to have been those which defended the river, remained at a place still called *Cowey Stakes*, near Chertsey, in Surrey.

The town of Stockholm derives its name in like manner, from the stockade formed of giant beams driven deep into the holm or island, to protect the boom by which Oluf, surnamed the Seat King, shut in the Norwegian prince Oluf Haraldson, who had penetrated with his ships into the Mälars Lake.—(*Hans C. Andersen, Reise im Schweden.*)

\* The words of Bede are, “the remains of which stakes are to be seen there to this day, and it appears to the observer as though the several stakes—each about the thickness of a man’s thigh, and cased with lead—were fixed immovably in the bed of the river.” “Quarum vestigia sudium ibidem usque hodie visuntur et videtur inspectantibus quod singulæ earum admodum humani femoris grosseæ et circumfusæ plumbo immobiliter hæreant in profundum fluminis infixæ.”—*Hist. Eccl.* i. 3.



In all probability, therefore, a kind of weir or stockade was here formed in the channel which, narrowed between Stokesby point and the high land at Acle,\* ran close to the former, and this might be either for the sake of defending the passage up the country, or for the purpose of affording a means of crossing over. The place is even now an important ferry. The Waveney branch might have had a similar erection near Stockton, where the river is commanded by Dunbury, or Doombury Hill.

The termination, *by*, which Stokesby possesses in common with twelve neighbouring villages, marks even more certainly the Danish occupation of the district. Clusters of villages whose names end in *by* occur in Lincolnshire and other parts of the Eastern coast, which were probably colonies settled by the Danish Vikingr, whose war galleys penetrated up the rivers, and rode at anchor in our present broads. The "bys" here have a peculiarly Danish sound. Rollesby preserves the name of *Rolf* or *Rollo*, and Thrigby of *Triggve*, both common names among the sea kings. I am in correspondence with the distinguished Danish antiquary, Professor J. J. A. Worsaae, of Copenhagen, who fully confirms this view. Some may present us with the names of their vessels, as Ormesby, *Orm*, or *Worm*, a serpent, (*Ormen hin lange*, the sea-serpent, is mentioned as the name of a vessel in one of the Sagas); others, as Ashby and Runham, with local peculiarities.

The Church, dedicated to St. Andrew, is a small unpretending structure, of about fifty feet long and twenty broad, consisting of nave, chancel, and south porch, and has much

\* Almost all towns in whose names Stock, or Stoke, is an element, are situated on or near the water—Bishopstoke, Alder Stoke, Stockton-on-Tees, &c. Blomefield s. v. Stoke-Ferry derives it from "*stow*, a dwelling or habitation, and *ches* or *kes*, by the water!" but he does not tell us *to what language* these words belong: I have not been able to discover it. In early times a stockade of timber must have been the main element of every fortification; and, indeed, what is *bulwark* but a work formed of the boles of trees?



suffered from modern repairs. The tower is square, of two stages, with parapet and graduated battlements of brick. The roofs are of thatch, and in one unbroken line from the tower to the eastern gable.

The tower, which is without buttresses, is early English, and so may be the priest's door in the chancel; but the windows are all of the Decorated period, with the exception of a Perpendicular insertion, on the south side, constructed of extreme width, for the purpose, perhaps, of lighting the pulpit. The font, eastern gable, and porch are modern. The cradle roof of the nave is a copy of the ancient one, though of less solidity; that of the chancel is masked by a ceiling.

Inside the door was a stoup, and an aumbry and piscina in the chancel, the latter decorated with good hood-moulding and cusped arch, a polyfoil drain, and a lodgment for the credence shelf. The sedilia are three graduated seats, cut in the sill of the window.

There is no screen, except what is formed by the return of the modern chancel stalls, which are of oak, well executed.\*

On either wall of the nave was an arched recess, the purpose of which is doubtful, though traces in the plaster of a wooden partition might be indicative of some erection.

The ancient seats were of unusually good pattern; the backs pierced with tracery of four varieties, under a line of Tudor flowers. The elbows of the poppy-heads bore figures of quaint design; a lion supporting a shield charged with the arms of Berney; † a nun, with wimple, kneeling at a faldstool, on which lies her rosary; a talbot; an eagle; a greyhound;

\* The remains of the original screen were once visible among the patching of the old pews.—*Rev. J. Bulwer.*

† Quarterly gu. and az., over all a cross engr. erm. The Berneys of Reedham, one of our most ancient Norfolk families, were formerly patrons of the benefice. They are now represented by Thomas Trench Berney, Esq., of Morton Hall.



and winged monsters difficult to class. I noticed a peculiarity in these bench ends, viz., initials of Tudor pattern carved on them in relief.\* Can these denote the names of benefactors, or merely the occupiers of the pews?

There is now no ancient glass, all the windows having been re-worked and fresh glazed.

In July last, I heard accidentally that some extraordinary mural paintings had been discovered in the church, during the progress of some alterations in the interior; but on proceeding thither, I found they had just been obliterated, and the walls covered with a fresh coat of plaster; which is the more to be regretted, as one of them is considered by our best authority on mural decorations, as likely to have been of unusual interest.

The following imperfect description I took down from the narration of one of the workmen.

On the south wall was a figure on horseback, his cap encircled with three crowns, and at his feet a hare and two hounds. The horse was connected by traces with another immediately behind it, the rider of which was hidden by a panel of later date. On the other side were three skeletons. The horses, according to the men's account, were harnessed, and very spiritedly executed.

Dr. Husenbeth, to whom I transmitted it, considers that this painting probably referred to the history of St. Edward King and Martyr, figures of whom are extremely rare.†

Below this subject and, I should suppose, unconnected with it, was the arch-fiend, with bat-like wings, and clawed pro-

\* E. W. E. W. R. W. The body of the church is now filled with good modern benches in carved oak, but these ancient specimens have been cleaned and fitted as seats for the school children at the west end.

† It is somewhat presumptuous to differ from so accomplished a mediævalist, but I cannot help thinking we had here "Les Trois Vifs et les Trois Morts," a favourite legend. The subject is handled elsewhere in a similar manner. Cf. the plate given in the "Hall of John Halle."



tuberances at each point, holding securely by hook and chain a female seated on a bench. I could gain no information as to details, except that the shoes of the latter were long, black, and pointed.

East of the north door the wall had been scraped and chipped, but not yet re-plastered, and here was a subject which, from a comparison with the Wimbotsham fresco, (*Norfolk and Norwich Archæology*, Vol. II., p. 132) may have been a St. Christopher. Little more than large smears of blue, red, and green were discernible, but the painting, whatever it was, had an arabesque border, and the field was semée of roses and fleurs-de-lys. I fancied I could trace the upper part of the subject and a skeleton; and the workmen assured me they had seen a gigantic leg; but when a mural painting is much decayed, it is difficult to discern the real intention, and not see *too much*.

Traces of others had been exposed in various parts, but I could get no intelligible accounts of them.

West of the north door, however, a space was yet untouched, and I lost no time in having the plaster removed from this in my presence, and a monstrous human head with black horns was soon exposed, boldly outlined in black and red. Subsequently I succeeded in uncovering all that remained of the subject, and sketched it on the spot. So peculiar in its design, and in the general character of its symbolism, is this curious example of church decoration, that I was unable to assign to it any probable interpretation. Dr. Husenbeth was kind enough to afford me his opinion, which I give in his own words. "I have no doubt that the figures represented in your sketch, formed part of a series representing the Seven Deadly Sins. We have here *three*. The figure in the lap of a dæmon I take to be the Vice of Sloth. The middle one is evidently *Lust*; the dæmon has especial dominion over the slaves of this vice, and his immense black horns are significant. The cockroaches were most likely intended for scor-



pions, and there is a text in Ecclesiasticus xxvi. 10,\* which the painter may have had in view: 'So also is a wicked woman, he that hath hold of her, is as he that taketh hold of a scorpion.' The third figure of a woman eaten, with iron teeth near her, is probably the Vice of *Envy*. She looks as if she were annoyed at some object, and the iron hoops represent what we often express by being gnawed or racked with envy."

The lower subject on the opposite side, which in some points resembles this, was probably a continuation, and depicted another of the series, the rest being Pride, Covetousness, Anger, and Gluttony. This interpretation, I think, is very probable, and the more so, as the vice symbolized in the principal group would necessarily require a partner in guilt.

Such scenes, though perhaps unsuited to modern refinement, had yet, doubtless, their use in the instruction of the people: the "Dance Machabre" and the "Seven Deadly Sins" read the same lesson to the mediæval rustic, on the vanity of life and the sure punishment which awaits the guilty, that the Pilgrim's Progress, and other religious allegories, afford now to their numberless admirers.

Canon 82 was complied with in this church, by the introduction of square panels, bordered by a slight stone moulding at regular intervals along the walls; these had in some cases been placed over the older paintings. On these were texts of scripture of no very ancient date. The exterior of the walls presents nothing but the flint rubble of the district, interspersed with fused bricks, frusta of cylindrical columns, and fragments of chevron, a peculiar kind of studded trellis, and other Norman mouldings, and indicative, as at the adjoining parish of Runham, of the existence of an earlier church.

\* (Douay Version.) . . . . qui tenet illam quasi qui apprehendit scorpionem.—  
*Vulg. Ed. Sixti v.*



*Herringby*, now a hamlet of Stokesby, once possessed a church of its own, but becoming dilapidated as early as James the First's time, the parish was annexed to this.

Blomefield says it was dedicated to St. Ethelbert, and the patronage of it given in the 8th year of Richard I. to the Priory of Castleacre, by John de Hauteyn, lord of Herringby.

Of Herringby College, or "God's Poor Alms House,"\* founded in 1475 by Hugh Attefenne, I can find nothing to add to Blomefield's scanty notices. It was, doubtless, one of the small foundations absorbed by Wolsey for the endowment of his proposed college at Ipswich.

I must not conclude my paper without a list of the existing brasses, which is the more important, as these are yearly vanishing. †

In the chancel on the south side is a knight in plate armour, and his lady, the latter in horned head-dress, and four shields of the arms of Clere and *Charles*: ‡ the shield in the dexter upper corner is reaved. "Hic jacet Edmund Clere Armiger et Elizabeth uxor ejus filia et heres Thome Charles Armigeri qđm Edm̄s obiit v<sup>o</sup> die Nouembris, A<sup>o</sup> D<sup>ni</sup> M<sup>o</sup>CCCCLXXXviii q̄r aīab<sup>o</sup> p̄p̄ciēt de' "

On the south side of the altar-pace is the matrix of an ecclesiastical brass; the figure gone. "Orate p̄ aīa mađri Thome Gerard in decretis bacallarii quondā rectoris istius ecclie qui obiit XIX<sup>o</sup> die mensis Decembris, anno D<sup>ni</sup> millesimo ccccc vi<sup>o</sup> cui' aīe p̄p̄ciēt de' amen."

Adjacent to this is the brass of a lady in Elizabethan dress and ruff, with two groups of children on smaller plates below:

\* W. Waters, Esq., in building a mansion here, found great numbers of skeletons; and fragments of rich semi-Norman mouldings are built in the garden wall, probably the only remains of the church, unless those in the nave walls of Stokesby are others.

† Two from this district have lately disappeared: a fragment of an orate from Runham, and a heart-shaped brass from Martham, described in my paper, *Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Papers*, ante, p. 176.

‡ *Charles*. Erm. on a chief gu. three lozenges of the first.



“Here lyeth the body of Mrs. Anne Clere, the wife of Thomas Clere of Stocksby in the County of Norfolk Esq<sup>r</sup>. daughter and heire of Thomas Heigham of Denham in the County of Suff. Esq<sup>r</sup>. who died xxii of March, anno D<sup>ni</sup> 1614.”

The brass of Lady Anna Cleere, (née Gygges) engraved by Cotman, is now further despoiled of its upper portion and one of the shields.\* Next to this is the matrix of another ecclesiastical brass, but both legend and figure have been pillaged.

A more modern inscription completes the row. “Johannes Hole Sacræ Theologiæ baccalaureus, Quondā Rector Huius Ecclesiæ hic Sepultus iacet, qui diem obiit, Feb. v. A° Salutis 1616, Ætatis suæ 65.”

The removal of the pulpit disclosed another inscription in brass to the last of the Cleres, probably never before published. “Here lyeth Interred y<sup>e</sup> Bodyes of Charles Clere of Stokesby Esq<sup>r</sup>. who died y<sup>e</sup> Second day of Novemb<sup>r</sup>. A° D<sup>ni</sup> 1636, and Elizabeth his wife y<sup>e</sup> . . . . Day of . . . . A° Domini 16 . . . .” This was probably an anticipatory statement, for the dates were never filled in. Blomefield says she was the daughter of William Drury, Esq., of Brett’s Hall, at Tendring in Essex, LL.D., and Judge of the Prerogative Court.

A square enclosure, lately discovered in making a drain in the Herringby marshes, has been conjectured to have been one of the much discussed Salinæ of Domesday; and in digging the foundations of a draining mill near this, a submerged thicket was discovered, with roots *in situ*, but the branches, &c. broken in small pieces: the wood was alder, ash, &c.

On a spur of high land, jutting into the marshes which once formed the subsidiary arm of the æstuary, is Hilborough Hole, the gravel store of the district, excavated in a crescent-shaped hill of large size. Drift fossils occur in it, *Gryphæa*

\* *Gygges*. Sa, a fret erm. a chief checquy arg. and of the first.



*incurva*, *Terebratula globosa*, several *Echini*, and a peculiar acicular sulphate of lime, which might be taken for asbestos.

The name *Hilborough* is singular, especially as it is opposite to *Burgh St. Margaret*. Can these be the forts to defend the inner bay [Burgh= $\pi\upsilon\gamma\gamma\omicron\epsilon$ ], or are they of a sepulchral character? \*

Such are the particulars which I have been enabled to glean up relating to this obscure village, and I have stated these somewhat at length, as Blomefield's History, for this district, is merely a crude collection of notes, hardly worthy the rest of the work.

\* The Britons, Romans, Danes, and Saxons, all buried their slain under tumuli or barrows, which the latter called *hlæw* [Derbysh. "low"] *beorh*, *beorg*, or *beorw*,—terms signifying a mound or hillock. In Sussex they are still called *burghs*. So Leland *In Assertione Regis Arthuri*: "Saxones gens Christi ignara . . . . . foris et bella occisi, in egestis per campos terræ tumulis (quos *burgos* appellabant) sepulti sunt." Large isolated barrows are often found on elevations near the sea. In the poem of *Beowulf*, the hero's dying request to his people is "to make a mound Upon the nose of the promontory, Which shall for a memorial To my people Rise high aloft On Hronesness; That the sea-sailors May afterwards call it Beowulf's barrow, When the Brentings Over the darkness of the floods Shall sail afar."—(*Beowulf*, line 5599.) The character of the articles generally found in or about the barrow, will alone determine to what people it belongs. Nothing of a manufactured description, however, has been found here to my knowledge; but such may have been passed by unnoticed. Cf. *Sir Thos. Browne's Reply to Dugdale: Miscellany Tracts*, No. ix. At *Burgh St. Margaret* a circular foundation was some years ago discovered in a plantation belonging to the Rev. W. Lucas, who, however, considers it the vestiges of a moated manor-house.