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BY

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THERE is a certain measure of romance about the place in which we are now assembled; and as very little is to be found in the ordinary histories and guide books which concerns either the actual Hall or Church of Bowthorpe, or the families which at one time possessed the estate, I believe it will interest those members of our Society who are present, and perhaps some of those who are unavoidably absent, if I take occasion by our visit here to bring to light some matters which are more or less connected with the former dwellers in this parish, and which have come to my notice during the course of my researches into Norfolk history.

When Queen Mary died in 1558 her prime favourites and chief advisers were those gentlemen of the Eastern Counties who played so very important a part in placing her upon the throne. But for the loyal exertions of Sir Henry Jerningham, Sir Henry Bedingfield, the Petres, the Cornwallises, the Waldegraves, and other powerful gentlemen in Suffolk, Essex, and Norfolk, Mary's chance of the Crown would have been seriously lessened.

But all these gentlemen were staunch Catholics, and some of them earnest, devout, and conscientious Catholics,



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to whom the Roman Creed and the Roman Ritual were as dear as anything upon earth. As they had been true to Queen Mary, so she was true to them, and to the last we find them all high in her favour and bountifully rewarded for their loyalty. On the accession of Queen Elizabeth, the favourites of Mary were, as a matter of course, displaced, and almost all retired from the court and went back to their residences in the country. One of the first Acts passed in the first Parliament of Queen Elizabeth was that one which enacted that the Book of Common Prayer alone should be used; and to "sing or say any common or open prayer, or to minister any sacrament otherwise than is mentioned in the said book . . ." subjected the offender to forfeiture of his goods, and on a repetition of his offence to imprisonment for life. This Act was passed in 1558. In the year 1561, three years after the passing of the Act, information was given to the Council that certain priests had celebrated a mass at the house of Sir Edward Waldegrave, at Borley in Essex, at which there had been present Sir Edward Waldegrave and his wife, Sir Thomas Wharton, Sir Thomas Stradling, Mr. Robert Downes of Melton, and several others whose names are given; and upon this information the whole party were committed to various prisons, Sir Edward Waldegrave and his lady being confined in the Tower.

Sir Edward was in bad health at the time, and his imprisonment killed him: he died in the Tower on the 1st September, 1561, leaving as the heir to his large estates his son Charles Waldegrave, a boy of ten or eleven years old. The lad was entrusted to the guardianship of Dean Nowell's brother, Robert Nowell, who bought his ward (after the fashion of the time) much as a man would buy a sheep or a horse; and when Nowell himself died in 1569, he left his charge to Cecil, afterwards Earl of Salisbury, as a handsome legacy in return for favours received.

Immediately after Charles Waldegrave came of age, viz., on the 25th November, 1571, he obtained a license from Parkhurst, Bishop of Norwich, to marry Jeronyma daughter of Sir Henry Jerningham of Cossey, and thereupon took up his abode at Cossey Hall with his wife's parents. Sir Henry Jerningham died in the September of the following year, and as his son Henry made Wingfield Castle his place of residence, Mr. and Mrs. Waldegrave continued to live with Lady Jerningham till her death in December, 1583. Hereupon Mr. Jerningham settled at Cossey, and Mr. Waldegrave took up his abode at Bowthorpe Hall. Bowthorpe Hall at this time was the property of the Yaxleys of Yaxley, a wealthy Suffolk family, staunch Catholics, and stubborn Recusants. One of these Yaxleys (John) was living at Colney in 1584, and was presented as a Recusant among other people at the sessions held at Dereham on the 30th September of that year.

In 1583 John Waldegrave, son of Charles and Jeronyma, was born at Bowthorpe, his elder brother Charles having been born at Cossey in 1581.

The authority for these dates is to be found in the remarkable series of answers to the questions addressed to the applicants for admission to the English College at Rome, transcripts of which are now among the Rolls MSS. in London. How long the Waldegraves continued to live at Bowthorpe I am unable to say, but it was probably for about six or seven years; for about the year 1590 to 1592 Mr. Waldegrave purchased the estate of Stanninghall, where he lived till his death in 1632.

Mr. Waldegrave, though by conviction and sympathy a Catholic, yet appears *not* to have been a Recusant at the time that he was living at Bowthorpe; he certainly became one, and a very staunch one, afterwards. His son assures us that at the end of Elizabeth's reign his parents were "schismatics," *i.e.*, they did not refuse to attend their

parish church, and so could not be "presented." But the fact is that at this time the Catholic gentry had invented a somewhat shrewd way of getting over the difficulty. *If the parish church was in ruins a man could not attend it.* Accordingly, in a very large number of cases, the churches were deliberately and of set purpose reduced to a ruinous state; and at the close of Queen Elizabeth's reign this church of Bowthorpe was actually a ruin—the nave a barn, the steeple a dovecot. Cossey Church was in ruins; so was Easton, so was Earlham, so was Runhall, so was Stanninghall; so were an incredible number of other churches in the county, where the landlords were Recusants and powerful enough to carry things with a high hand.

Did these Catholic gentry live like heathen then? Certainly not. In the year 1582 an informer gave intelligence to the Lords of the Council, that at Cossey there were living as Catholics, the Lady Jerningham, Mr. Charles Waldegrave and his wife and Mr. Pratt, a priest. This explains why there are no entries of Waldegrave or Jerningham baptisms in the Cossey register: the priest baptized them. When it came to dying it was another affair. Mr. Pratt himself died at Cossey; his burial is duly recorded. [17 April, 1582.]

I assume that Mr. Waldegrave lived at Bowthorpe Hall till 1590 or 1592. While he lived there he had with him a large family, three were sons: Edward (the ancestor of the present Earl Waldegrave) Charles, and John.

In the autumn of the year 1588, there landed on the coast of Norfolk, a Jesuit priest named John Gerard; from his brother is descended the present Lady Stafford of Cossey. He was a man of very remarkable powers in more ways than one, and his influence upon the Catholic gentry in Norfolk and Suffolk was enormous. There are reasons for believing that he was received as a guest at Cossey. It is certain that he was harboured at Kimberley; it is more than probable that

he was a visitor at Melton and Bowthorpe Hall. Edward Waldegrave—Clarendon's staunch old Royalist—cared little for him or his agents. But the two younger brothers became in process of time powerfully impressed, not by Gerard himself indeed, but by two Jesuit fathers who were closely connected with him, and doubtless duly instructed how to make their approaches.

The result was, that Charles Waldegrave the younger was reconciled to the Church of Rome towards the end of Elizabeth's reign by Father Henry Floyd or Fludd, S.J., and John Waldegrave was reconciled by Father Stanny at the beginning of the reign of James I. Charles actually became a Jesuit father. John received priest's orders, and returned to England to die within a mile or so of his birth-place, being buried at Cossey on the 3rd March, 1616-17.

When Mr. Waldegrave removed to Stanninghall, one of the Yaxleys occupied Bowthorpe Hall. This was Henry Yaxley, Esq. He married Frances,¹ a daughter of Mr. Waldegrave, and was as stubborn a Recusant as others of his family. I am inclined to think that he must have lived with his wife's parents in the old house until they removed to Stanninghall.

In 1614, he, with his wife Frances, five daughters, three men servants, and a tutor named Bullen, were presented to the Bishop as Popish Recusants at Bowthorpe. I have a strong suspicion (though I am not yet in a position to prove it) that this tutor Bullen was none other than that very Father Henry Floyd whom Charles Waldegrave the younger (brother-in-law of Mr. Yaxley) tells us was the instrument of his own conversion to the Church of Rome. Father Floyd certainly went by a number of *aliases*—Smith, Rivers, Seymour, among the number,—and certainly too, some years after this, and when Mr. Yaxley had succeeded to the Suffolk property and removed from Bowthorpe to

¹ Probably in 1600.—Blomefield, ii. 387.

Yaxley Hall, one of the professional spies in a letter to the King, Charles I., asserts that Father Floyd had transported two daughters of Mr. Yaxley to Gravelines in Belgium, "for," he adds, "this Smith [who was undoubtedly Father Floyd] at that time lived with Mr. Yaxley and was his priest."

Unfortunately the last list of presentments of Popish Recusants in the Bishop's Registry is of the date 1616, so that it is impossible to say when Mr. Yaxley removed from Bowthorpe to Suffolk, but it was certainly before 1632; and who then occupied the old hall, or if anyone did, I have not ascertained, but just at this time another incident, of some importance to the parish, is recorded. In the summer of 1635 died Richard Corbet, Bishop of Norwich. To him succeeded, on the 10th November, Matthew Wren, who had been promoted to the bishopric of Hereford not a year before. If Wren were a narrow bigot, and a stiff, uncompromising, and intolerant High Churchman, as the Puritans represent him to have been, he certainly was not a lax administrator of his diocese; and if he were a merciless persecutor of the Puritans, he was not a whit less severe upon the Romanists. On his coming to his diocese, and in fact apparently before he had had time to know much about it, he scared and startled his clergy by the astonishing vigour which he displayed. He found a certain Dr. Rawley to be Parson of Bowthorpe, but the living was a sinecure. Dr. Rawley had held it for twenty-three years, and probably had scarcely ever shewn his face in the parish. The bishop discovered that the church was in ruins, and that there had been no Divine Service in it for forty years at least. With characteristic promptness he seems to have compelled Dr. Rawley to commence a suit in the Court of Chancery against Mr. H. Yaxley, to compel him to put the church in repair, and actually obtained an order from the court in the plaintiff's favour three days after he had himself been formally elected to his bishopric.

By this order of the 13th November, 10 Chas. I., the impropriate tithes and glebe lands of the parish were put in sequestration for three years, to defray the expenses of the necessary repairs. Competent workmen were to send in an estimate of the cost of such repairs, and the work was to be completed by Midsummer, 1639. The estimate is as follows :

The opinion of Workmen for y^e repairing of y^e Church and Steeple of Bowthorpe, and Fencing in of y^e Church-yard, taken y^e 28th day of May, 1636, by y^e appointment of Mr. Chancellor, who was there present with y^e workmen y^e same day.

For y ^e Fencing in of y ^e Churchyard with Riven Pale, conteyning about 28 Rod in compass . . .	} £14
For Repairing y ^e Walls of y ^e Church, putting in 4 Windows in y ^e Church and one window in y ^e Steeple	} £13
For a door into y ^e Church and a Porch full finished	} £20
For paving, ceiling, and whitening y ^e Church . . .	£15
For Finishing y ^e Steeple with Mason's work within	} £2
For covering the Church with reed, with all charges belonging to it	} £20
For ironwork about y ^e Church and Steeple . . .	£10
For glazing the 4 windows in y ^e Church and one window in y ^e Steeple	} £8
For a Font in y ^e Church	£4
For a desk and pulpit and seats in y ^e Church . .	£12
For a bell and a frame	£13 6 8
	<hr/> £131 6 8

Richard Starling, Carpenter.
John Mixar, Mason.
Ambroze Jerenige, Smith.
Thomas B. Biggott, Mason.
Paffreamare Sheffield, Carpenter.
William W. Foster, Glasier.
Thomas † Chaplyn, Reeder.
John Brend, Bellfounder.

It seems that Mr. Yaxley paid no attention to the order; and in the spring of 1637 the bishop sent down a peremptory letter to his chancellor, calling upon him to summon Mr. Yaxley to appear in his court, and on pain of excommunication to proceed at once with the repairs, and make due provision for the celebration of Divine Service in the church once a month at the least. The order appears to have been complied with, and for another century Bowthorpe church was used as a place of worship, and the churchyard as the burying-place of the Yallop family.

But how did the estate pass to the Yallops? The answer to that question appertains to the realm of the undiscovered, though I do not despair of being able to throw light upon that matter, too, some day.

Blomefield tells us that the Yaxleys made over Bowthorpe to one Browne of Colney, but that one of the family afterwards conveyed it to Sir Robert Yallop for his good services in recovering Mr. Yaxley's estate from the aforesaid Browne.

Now it is a well-established fact that in those hard times, when no Roman Catholic could make a will or own a horse worth more than £5, and could hardly hold or inherit property at all, the persecuted Recusants managed to retain their estates by every kind of device which they could invent for defeating the hard pressure of the law. It was a very common practice for them to make over their lands, not only to trustees for their own use—for in that case the statutes still could be enforced and their rents impounded—but they conveyed them to friends or kinsfolk who were themselves conformists, and to whose honour and good faith they trusted themselves absolutely. I believe that one of these days I shall be able to prove that such was the case with this estate of Bowthorpe,—that it was made over to Brown in honourable trust, and that he violated or attempted to violate that trust, and tried to keep the

estate to himself; that Sir Robert Yallop managed to defeat his roguery, and that the gift of Bowthorpe was the price paid for the recovery of that and other lands.

When Sir Robert Yallop obtained possession of Bowthorpe he appears to have rebuilt or very considerably added to the old hall. The present house is of the seventeenth not the sixteenth century.

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At this point I close my small contribution to the history of Bowthorpe. It would be easy to say more. It has been difficult for me to confine myself to saying so little in saying anything at all.

[I have printed this Paper exactly as it was read before the Members of the Society at Bowthorpe. I have not thought it necessary to support the assertions by referring specifically to my sources of information. In fact it would be idle to do so, inasmuch as they are accessible to very few. The *Recusant Rolls* in the S. P. O., the *Presentments of Recusants* in the Bishop's Registry, the *Tanner MSS.*, the *Marriage Licenses* in the Registry, the *Sessions Books* for the County of Norfolk, in the custody of the Clerk of the Peace at the Shirehall, and other MSS. in the S. P. O. and Rolls House, are my chief authorities, and they will be found referred to by chapter and verse in my forthcoming work, "*One Generation of a Norfolk House.*"—A. J.]