

# On Married Clergy in Norfolk

IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY.

COMMUNICATED BY

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AT what point the science of archæology, which is chiefly concerned with the study of arts and manufactures in bygone times, passes out of its own domain and crosses the frontier which separates it from the realm of history, is a question often asked, and to which the best answer is the frank admission that there is no answer to be found. The researches of the archæologist are always tending towards definite results; and in proportion as he arrives at certainty in his enquiries, in that proportion is he adding to the conclusions which history at once appropriates. For archæology is concerned with collecting facts which history may use, and when these are accumulated in sufficient multitude, the historian can generalise upon them and draw his inferences, but not till then.

Hence it is not sufficient to say that archæology has to do with unwritten evidence alone, and that history claims the written records of the past as her own, with which archæology has little or no concern. There is always a huge mass of literary evidence which it is the province of archæology to interpret, and which until it has been so interpreted by the specialist is useless to the student of

history. Such evidence is treasured up in coins, inscriptions, fragments of ancient laws, charters, and even monastic chronicles.

The habits of minute investigation which archæological research tends to strengthen sometimes enable the antiquarian to discover clues to the solution of important problems which have escaped the sagacity of the historical inquirer, whose view extends over a wider area, while the other cares little about a distant horizon.

I have thought it needful to say thus much by way of preface to the paper which, at the request of our accomplished Secretary, I have ventured to contribute to our Proceedings, because some may be inclined to demur to the choice of a subject which I have made as not strictly one which concerns archæology. If I were not prepared to defend myself against such an objection I should not trouble the reader with it; but the considerations which I have briefly touched upon will, I trust, shew the Members of our Society that there is much to be said for a different view than that which would place too strict and narrowing a limit upon the range of investigation which an archæological society may legitimately pursue.

The subject which I propose to bring before the Society is, Clerical Celibacy in East Anglia in early times.

It is well known that there arose very early in the Christian Church a strong feeling against the marriage of the clergy, and in favour of celibacy generally as a higher state than the married state.

With the growth of that religious phrenzy which shewed itself in the enormous increase of monachism in Egypt during the third century, and developed all over the Christian world during subsequent ages, there grew up inevitably an exaggerated notion of the merit of abstaining from marriage, until the married clergy began to be looked upon with suspicion, distrust, and scorn.



Let no man mistake me if I say that in our own days we can find a striking parallel to the old movement in favour of total abstinence from marriage in the movement that is going on in favour of total abstinence from alcohol. All of us must have heard language so violent and denunciative on this subject as to make us feel sure that it only requires a little, a very little, additional power to be in the hands of the more unwise and passionate agitators to end in making it extremely difficult, in another generation or two, for I will not say a clergyman only, but for any man who has his bread to earn, to retain the semblance of Christian liberty in this matter. As to marriage the agitators continued to gain ground, and by the middle of the seventh century it is hardly too much to say that over the larger part of Christian Europe a married clergyman was looked upon as a black sheep, to be avoided as much as if he were a drunkard.

It was at the close of this seventh century that the kingdom of East Anglia first began to be greatly affected by the prevailing hankering for the monastic (or as it would be more correctly called the *cœnobite*) life, and just on the borders of the East Anglian kingdom those splendid monasteries were founded which were once the pride of England, and which now must be sought for in the glorious remains of buildings that a subsequent age delighted to raise up to heaven, and which another generation reduced more or less to ruins. For be it remembered that Ely and Peterborough, Thorney and Crowland, were all within or close upon the frontiers of East Anglia; though the desolate fens in which they were set down were so inaccessible and forbidding that no one cared to assert any jurisdiction over such howling wastes. These four monasteries, then, which must be recognised as East Anglian monasteries, necessarily exercised an immense influence upon the religious life of our forefathers, and upon their social life; and for at least

two hundred years the monks were the educators and the civilisers of the little kingdom. The monasteries, too, were the treasure-houses and banks of deposit, the places where deeds and wills and other records were kept, the refuges for the oppressed, the sanctuaries in fact which our East Anglian ancestors, then become Christian, regarded with veneration and, if you will, with superstitious awe. As long as the monasteries flourished and the monks retained their influence, it is probable that the parish priests only married on the sly, and that in fact the country clergy who had wives were tabooed. That there *were* parochial clergy and churches in great numbers too in East Anglia in the seventh, eighth, and ninth century is quite certain, but this I cannot stop to prove.<sup>1</sup>

It was in East Anglia that the terrible Danes made their first permanent settlement in the year 866 A.D. While they were away next year, burning and slaying in other parts of England, something like a crusade was organised against them, and when they returned in 869 from their forays the East Anglians rose up against them under their king Edmund the Saint. The Danes were too strong for the wretched Christian people, and then ensued a frightful slaughter and much wasting and sorrow; but in the year 870 the whole Danish host started for a raid upon the fen country and the monasteries. They sacked Peterborough and Ely and Thorney and Crowland: they pillaged them all, and they hardly left a single monk alive. There stood the blackened ruins of the old buildings for many a long day; but the monasteries in East Anglia were suppressed and very effectually suppressed, though not for the last time.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Consult Note F, p. 445, in Bright's *Early English Church History*, and see *infra*.

<sup>2</sup> The main authority for all that is stated above is in the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle*. Young archaeologists will find the volume of *Bohn's Antiquarian*



We hear no more of East Anglian monks for nearly a hundred years; but when the great revival of the monasteries came about in the tenth century, under Oswald Bishop of Worcester, and Athelwold Bishop of Winchester, supported by the great Dunstan, it appears from the entries in the *Chronicle* that the Cœnobites had never recovered from the rough handling they had received, that the great mass of the East Anglian clergy were married, and that the old monastic buildings, which had been destroyed a century before, were occupied by married canons, exactly as the monastic buildings in this city of Norwich are at this moment occupied by married canons living under some lax discipline of their own.<sup>3</sup> How firmly these were settled in their occupation, how completely they were recognized as respectable members of society, may appear from the fact that, strongly as Dunstan wished to back the monks and bring about a different state of things, he never was able to get rid of the canons from his own cathedral at Canterbury, and there they stayed during all his long primacy.<sup>4</sup> It was otherwise with the canons who were settled at Ely. These were summarily driven off with a high hand by Bishop Athelwold. So were those who were living a harmless life at Bury St. Edmund's. So were the Peterborough canons. The married men were treated with very little ceremony, and when King Canute took up

*Library*, which contains Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle*, all that they require, and vastly more interesting than they expect.

<sup>3</sup> Consult Professor Stubbs' magnificent Introduction to *Memorials of S. Dunstan*, in the Rolls Series, p. 118 et seq.

<sup>4</sup> See *Dunstan and his Policy*, in the late Mr. E. W. Robertson's Historical Essays, published by Edmonstone and Douglas, 1872. There are very few volumes printed in the lifetime of the present generation which can compare in solid value for the historian with this wonderful collection, and none that I have ever seen which has been rendered more repulsive by the printer's art.

the cause of the monks, and founded his great abbey of St. Benedict at Hulm among the Norfolk Broads,<sup>5</sup> and sent a dozen fresh monks to colonize Bury St. Edmund's anew, and himself went a pilgrimage to Rome,<sup>6</sup> doubtless bringing with him on his return the last new ecclesiastical fashions, and possibly impressed by the conviction that there was no holiness outside the cloister; the married clergy may have felt that there were anxious times in store for them. The seven years that followed after Canute's death were years of confusion and misery, but with the accession of Eadward, called the Confessor, the influence of the monks once more began to be in the ascendant. While Westminster Abbey was rising up towards heaven, and the vast monastery which was intended to be the glory of all lands was building, there could be little doubt as to which side the court and the great men would take in a struggle between the regulars and the secular clergy.

The reign of Eadward the Confessor extends over a period of twenty-three years and five months, viz., from the 8th June, 1042, to the 5th Jan., 1066. It was a period of transcendent importance in the history of religion and civilisation in Europe. Ecclesiastical life had become miserably tainted with venality and corruption, and it seemed to the earnest and enthusiastic spirits of the time, with Peter Damiani and Hildebrand at their head, that the only hope for the reformation of society and the Church lay in denouncing and forbidding the marriage of ecclesiastics. A crusade against the married clergy was carried on accordingly throughout Europe, and notwithstanding all the

<sup>5</sup> John of Oxnepe, p. 19 (Rolls Series.)

<sup>6</sup> Cnut was present at the ceremony of Conrad the Salic's coronation at Rome, 26th March, 1027, and therefore witnessed the riot that took place on that occasion, and the penance that was exacted from those that took part in it.—Milman, Bk. v. chap. xvi. On the date of Cnut's pilgrimage to Rome see Freeman, *Norman Conquest*, vol. ii. note n n n.



stubborn resistance of the parochial priests in north Italy, the protests of German bishops, and the silent but not less effective opposition of others in France, England, or Lorraine. The decree of the Lateran Council of 1059, which forbade any ecclesiastic living in wedlock from celebrating mass or discharging any sacred office became the law of all Churches in communion with the See of Rome, and has continued to be accepted as law from that day to the present.<sup>7</sup> It is quite certain, however, that this law took a long time before it could be generally enforced. Wherever the monks were the stronger party, there the married clergy had to bear a pitiless persecution; where they were too weak to carry out their designs, the parish priests continued to live unmolested, and there is good reason to believe that in some districts they were to be found quietly settled with their families much longer than has been generally supposed.

In East Anglia, at the time of the Norman Conquest, the parochial or secular clergy were numerically a far larger body than the regulars. The fashion had indeed come in and had prevailed for some time of bestowing large tracts of land upon the revived monasteries, insomuch that even in the Confessor's time the abbots of Ely, St. Bennet's at Hulm, and Bury St. Edmund's appear by the Domesday Survey to have severally possessed almost as many manors as the Bishop of East Anglia.<sup>8</sup> But the number of the country parsons was out of all proportion to those of the monks, and though they were too scattered a force to shew any-

<sup>7</sup> The Canon is given in Neander, vi. 157. There is a remarkable array of original passages on the subject to be found in a note of Giesler, vol. ii. 436. The disturbances which broke out at Milan, and generally through North Italy are well narrated by Milman, Bk. vi. chap. iii. Everything that Mr. Freeman writes is suggestive and instructive, and his remarks on the marriage of the clergy are peculiarly so, cf. vol. iv. 425, and vol. v. 223.

<sup>8</sup> I have counted seventy-seven manors as belonging to the abbot of St. Benedict at Hulm alone which are noticed in the *Domesday Book*.

thing like the same compact front and unity of action as the better disciplined regulars, they were too formidable to be assailed without caution, and they hung together in their own interest in that desultory fashion which has characterised and still does characterise all their proceedings.

The *Domesday Book* shews us that there were certainly as many as three hundred and seventeen churches in Norfolk alone at the time of the Survey,<sup>9</sup> and as certainly these do not comprehend all that then existed. The churches in Suffolk mentioned in the Survey have not been counted with the same minuteness as Mr. Munford brought to his careful *Analysis*, but a somewhat protracted examination has convinced me that not less than seven hundred, great and small, are specified as existing at the time of the Conquest in Norfolk and Suffolk alone. This implies the existence of a large body of clergy; for the endowments in many instances are considerable, and in the majority of cases these churches in the year 1081 are credited with a much larger extent of glebe than those same benefices enjoy in the year 1881.<sup>1</sup>

But a body of parochial clergy too strong for the monks would be found almost always to mean a body of country parsons who would not consent to give up their right to be fathers of families and to enjoy the inestimable blessing of companionship in their homes.

Hence it can hardly be doubted that the new Church law of the Lateran Synod of 1059 must have been received with anything but equanimity in East Anglia, and it is no wonder that when half a century after this time Anselm

<sup>9</sup> Munford's *Analysis of the Domesday Book of Norfolk*, p. 88. See too pp. 99 et seq.

<sup>1</sup> Thus the 80 acres of glebe which Burnham Thorpe possessed at the earlier date have shrunk down to 25 in our own time, the 73 acres of Shouldham to 4, the 100 acres of West Barsham to 12, and the 100 acres of Langley to *nil*!



began his efforts to carry out that law to the letter he found much difficulty and possibly much more active opposition than has been recorded.<sup>2</sup>

As far as East Anglia was concerned how could it have been otherwise? I shall shock the prejudices of some worthy people if I dare to express my suspicion that Herbert de Losinga himself had a wife, but yet I do entertain such a suspicion.<sup>3</sup> Whether the fact were so or not it is all but demonstrable that his three immediate predecessors in the East Anglian See were married men. These were Aelmar, brother of Archbishop Stigand, who, by fair means or foul, obtained the See of Elmham through his brother's influence in 1047,<sup>4</sup> Herfast or Arfast, who was appointed to replace him as bishop by the Conqueror in 1070, and by whom the see was removed to Thetford, and William de Beaufeu, who was consecrated to that see in 1086 and held it till his death in 1091.

Of Aelmar it is expressly said in the *Domesday Survey* that he obtained the manor of Blofield with his wife, whom he married after he was bishop, and that (in default of issue I suppose) the manor came to his successor in the bishopric as to the heir in the bishop's see.<sup>5</sup>

The same record informs us that Bishop Arfast, Aelmar's successor, had two or more sons, who managed to get

<sup>2</sup> The Decrees of the Synod of London, A.D. 1108, given in Florence of Worcester, *sub anno*, imply that the marriage of the clergy was at least common. It is not a little curious to note that Thomas, Archbishop of York, under whose name, in conjunction with that of Anselm, the decrees of the synod were promulgated, was himself the son of a priest.—Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum* (Rolls Series), § 42, p. 66. Eadmer, *Hist. Norv.*, lib. I., p. 7 (Selden.)

<sup>3</sup> I cannot read Losinga's letters in the original Latin without more than agreeing with Mr. Spurdens in regarding them as "suspiciously paternal." I can hardly understand any man not a father writing to the boys in the strain made use of.

<sup>4</sup> Stubbs, *Regist. Sacr. Brit.* Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontif.*, p. 150.

<sup>5</sup> *Domesday Book*, vol. ii. 194 b.

possession of the church of St. Mary at Thetford, and that they were actually in possession when the commissioners made their survey.<sup>6</sup>

The marriage of William de Beaufeu is not established with such absolute certainty, nor is there sufficient proof of that which Blomefield asserts unhesitatingly, viz., that Richard de Bellafago, Archdeacon of Norwich in 1107, was the bishop's son; but I think few who turn to Mr. Rye's short paper in the first volume of his delightful *Norfolk Antiquarian Miscellany*, will doubt that William de Beaufeu was a married man, and left offspring behind him.

It is not conceivable that, with this remarkable series of precedents in the persons of their bishops, the East Anglian clergy should have failed to follow the example set; and though Lanfranc and Anselm were both of them, and especially the latter, vehement declaimers against the married parsons, and though the monks continued to howl them down, and such fanatics as Eadmer, Anselm's panegyrist, denounced them as worse than infidels, yet the married clergy continued to hold their own for a surprising length of time. Thus, on the 9th November, 1194, a remarkable cause was tried at Westminster, the particulars of which are to be found in Sir F. Palgrave's *Introduction to the Rolls and Records of the King's Justiciars from the 6th Richard I. to the Accession of King John*, in which it appears that the parsons of Dunston near Norwich had always held the benefice from father to son until the death of the last parson without apparently male issue.

In the same volume we find, p. 401, among the Pleas of 20th June, 1199, one which complains of the disseising of a certain Roger, a cleric, and Nicholas his son, in respect

<sup>6</sup> *Domesday Book*, vol. ii. 118 b. The names *Osbern filius Arfast*, *Ranulphus frater ejus*, occur among the signatures to a charter printed by Dacher at the end of Lanfranc's *Works* (fol. Venice, 1745, f. 251), but I am not so bold as to build much upon their occurrence.



of a tenement at some place in Suffolk; and five years before a case is reported between Robert de Selton or Shelton on the one part, and Robert son of the priest of Shelton on the other, in a question of homage. So again among the Chancery Rolls of the 3rd John we meet with the names Absolom son of the priest, William son of the priest, Robert son of a cleric, and all these in East Anglia.

But the fact is, instances of the mention of the sons of clergy in the records of the twelfth century occur plentifully enough, and the fact of the marriage of the clergy during this period hardly requires proving. It is when we get down to the thirteenth century that married parsons are not to be met with so frequently. Indeed they were diminishing in number as the monks were increasing in repute and power. Nevertheless there is no doubt that there were married clergy in Norfolk down to the reign of Edward I. at least, and I should not be surprised if further inquiry gave us many more examples than I am able to produce.

Among the small collection of early charters relating to Keswick printed by Mr. Hudson Gurney in 1841, there are no less than three which make mention of a certain clergyman named Henry de Norwich and his wife Katherine, who together buy land at Keswyk; while amongst the witnesses to another of the deeds occurs the signature of Walter filius Presbyteri; so that at least two clergymen were married within a mile of Keswick towards the close of the thirteenth century.

It is, however, among the remarkable muniments in the possession of Mr. North at Rougham that the most curious evidence of the existence of clerical marriages in Norfolk during the thirteenth century is to be found, and that evidence is probably unique. Not only does it appear that by far the greatest landowner in Rougham during the first half of the reign of Edward I. was a certain Thomas of

Rougham, whose grandsire had been a parson, possibly the parson of the parish, and who is repeatedly named,<sup>7</sup> but one of these thirteenth century charters is actually a grant in which Herbert Buzum of Wissingsett bestows his lay fee in Yelverton, together with 20s. annual rent and his daughter Emma's hand, upon William the son of Josceline the priest of Yelverton. The remarkable part of this transaction being that the Bozuns were at this time not only the chief people in the parish, but actually the patrons of the advowson, and it is more than probable that they had given the benefice to Josceline the father as they bestowed their daughter upon William the son.

So far as I have as yet been able to discover, this is the latest instance of a perfectly well authenticated marriage; but as I have remarked, it is not likely to remain the last if gentlemen who have access to ancient charters would take the pains to examine them with care.

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[As the eleven deeds of the times of Henry III. and Edward I., which Mr. Hudson Gurney printed in 1841, are rarely to be met with, I have thought it advisable to print one of them here. (I.) The clause "*contra omnes gentes, tam Judeos quam Christianos,*" is sufficient to prove that the date must be set before 1290, in which year the Jews were banished from England. Before the statute of *Quia Emptores* (A.D. 1294) charters are rarely dated; but fortunately No. 12 of the Keswick deeds is actually dated at Intwood on the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin, "Anno R. R. Edwardi filii R. Henrici septimo," *i.e.*, 25 March, 1279. Five of the witnesses to this charter are also witnesses to the one I print below, which must therefore be assigned approximately to the same date.]

<sup>7</sup> Among the witnesses to the charters of this period, too, I find frequently the names of *Galfridus*, described as *clericus*, and of *his two sons* William and Alan. All three appear as persons of some consideration in the village community.



I. Sciant presentes et futuri quod ego Johannes filius Ricardi le Moyne de Gonthorpe, concessi, dedi, et hac presenti carta mea confirmavi *Henrico de Norwico clerico et Katerine uxori sue*, pro homagio et servicio eorum, et pro quadraginta et sex solidis argenti quos mihi dederunt in gersumam, unam acram et unam rodam terre arrabilis cum pertinenciis jacentes in campo de Kesewyke, quarum predicta acra jacet ad capud de Wetelondes versus orientem, et juxta terram Ricardi de Humilyerd versus occidentem, cujus caput australe abuttat super terram Ade filie Gode de Intewode, et caput aquilonale super terram Simonis filii Simit de Kesewyke; et predicta roda terræ jacet in Wetelondes inter terram Thome Pocok versus austrum et terram Ricardi de Gauthorpe versus aquilonem, cujus capud orientale abuttat super terram quondam Johannis Nichol de Kesewyk, et capud occidentale super predictam acram, sive plus sive minus, in illis peciis terre contineatur; Habendum et tenendum de me et heredibus meis vel meis assignatis predictus *Henrico et Katerine et eorum heredibus ex eis conjunctim et legitime provenientibus*, aut cuicumque et quibuscumque vel quandocumque predictus Henricus vel predicta Katerina, seu eorum heredes prenominati dictam terram dare, vendere, vel assignare voluerint et heredibus assignatorum suorum, libere, quiete, bene, in pace, et hereditarie inperpetuum; reddendo inde annuatim mihi et heredibus meis vel meis assignatis tres denarios ad duos anni terminos, videlicet ad Natale Domini tres obolos, et ad festum Sancti Johannis Baptiste tres obolos, pro omni servicio, consuetudine, secta curie, et seculari demanda. Et ego predictus Johannes et heredes mei vel mei assignati warantzabimus, defendemus, et adquietabimus predictam terram cum suis pertinenciis, sicut predictum est, predictis *Henrico et Katerine et eorum heredibus prefatis* vel eorum assignatis et heredibus assignatorum suorum, *contra omnes gentes, tam Judeos quam Christianos*, inperpetuum per predictum servitium; Et si contingat predictos Henricum et



Katerinam sine herede ex eis legitime procreato in fata decidere, tota predicta terra cum suis pertinenciis proximis heredibus predicti Henrici absque alicujus retenemento seu contradictione remaneat. In hujus rei testimonium presenti scripto sigillum meum apposui. Hiis testibus, Domino Jolano de Vallibus. Gregorio de Oldhaghe. Johanne de Tyvill. Willielmo le Moyne. Willielmo de Dunstone. Willielmo de Carleton. Eustachio de Curzon. Georgio de Merkesdale. Willielmo de Thweyt. Rogero de Swerdeston. Ricardo le Clerk de Swerdestone. Ada Urry. Laurentio de Jakesham. Johanne le Lef. Willielmo de Manegrene. et aliis.

II. Notum sit tam presentibus quam futuris. Quod ego Herbertus Buzun de Wichigsete concessi et dedi et hac presenti carta mea confirmavi *Willō filio Gocelini sacerdotis de Gelvertune totum Laicum feodum Cum Emma filia mea* quod predictus Gocelinus tenuit in Gelvertunia silicet In pratis. in nemoribus. et in marisco. Et etiam in aliis omnibus pertinenciis. tenendum de me et de heredibus meis. illi vel cuicumque dare vel assignare voluerit. bene et in pace. Libere quiete et in jure. atque hereditarie scilicet census viginti sol. annuatim. et ad hos terminos. ad Natale Dñi dimidiam marcam. et ad Pasca dimidiam marcam. ad festum sancti Michaelis dimidiam marcam. Pro omni servicio. consuetudine et exactione. et pro omnibus querelis. et omnibus causis. et quando ego predictus Herbertus de Wichigsete ad exercitum dñi Regis tres libras dabo ille predictus Will<sup>us</sup> quadraginta denarios dabit. ad plus plus; ad minus minus; Hiis testibus. Rogero Buzun. Durando Estrange. Hamundo filio Burd. Roberto de Humo. Radulfo de Nethetun. Gocelino de Gatele. Willō Pichot. Radulfo Albo. Radulfo Camerario. Willō Brien. Galfrido de Kirkeby. Philippo de Framingham. Willō de Hauton. Ricardo de Boytun. et multis aliis.—From *Rougham Muniments*, No. 19.