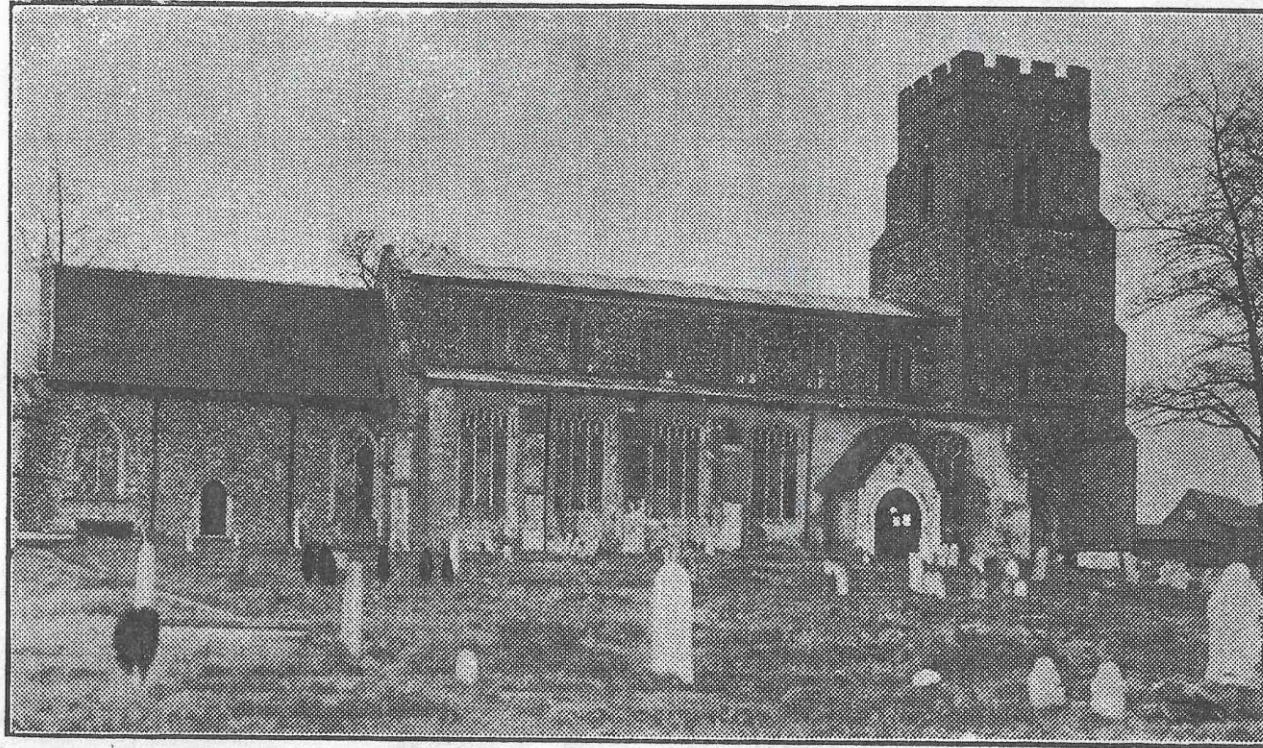


# POCKET HISTORIES OF SUFFOLK PARISHES.

No. 12. —COMBS.

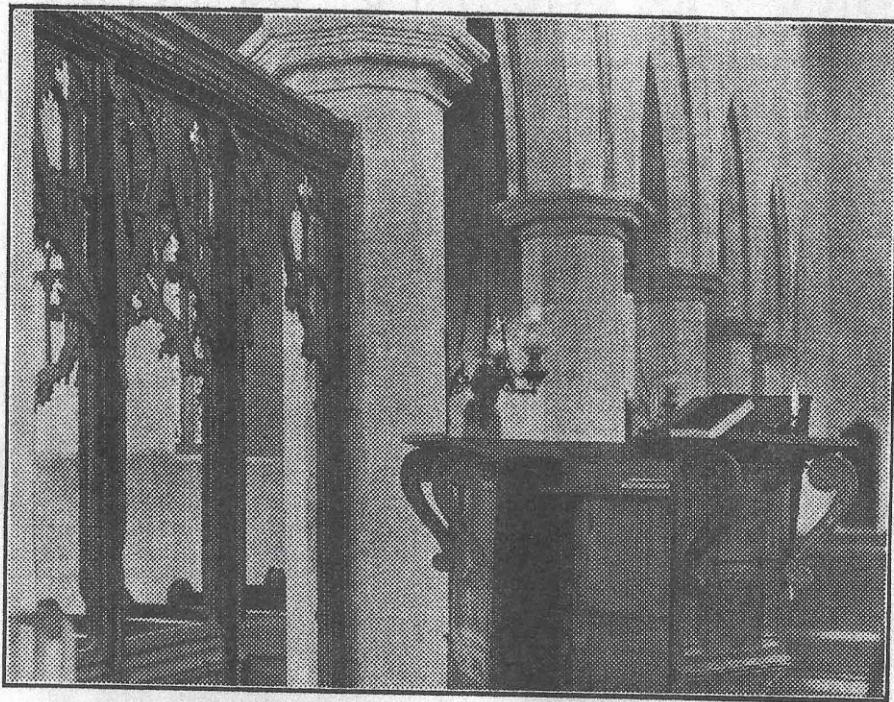


ST. MARY'S CHURCH, COMBS.

"On the rising ground southward from the point where the high road between Ipswich and Stowmarket turns sharply at the entrance to the last-named town, the traveller discerns the noble fabric of Combs Church (dedicated to St. Mary), picturesquely embosomed in sylvan beauty, surrounded by verdant pastures and fields of waving corn." This fairly de-

scribes (in Summer-time) the north-eastern portion of the straggling parish of Combs, the more exact description being furnished by the interpretation of the Saxon:—"Camb: a comb or crest, the crests of Cambas," the parish presenting a series of rising crests. At the period of the Conqueror's survey, the Count of Moreton, a Norman earl, was the chief pro-

prietor. Sub-tenants were numerous, and apparently rather tenacious of purpose. "Osgot was the freedman, or farmer, actually living on the land," runs the quaint old chronicle, "having one cottager, one plough, eight swine, nine sheep, and one acre of meadow, and paying 12s. rent (equal to £27)." Under him, as copyholder, was Ulnoth, a freeholder of the



THE JACOBEOAN PULPIT AND PART OF ANCIENT SCREEN.

King's, a Saxon esquire of some rank. He had submitted and kept possession of his land: he had been a freeholder under Edward. He was a copyhold tenant under the Count, and had 50 freeholders, with many cottages, maids (slaves), villans, and male slaves. He kept 200 acres in his own hands; men, ploughs, two mills, 721 sheep, and 16 wild swine formed part of his stock; he kept also two horses, and this furnished two men-at-arms to his lord for the King, armed with lance, sword, and full armour." The freeholders of Combs were sturdy, and when an increase of rate (or tax) was proposed they resisted, "so that it could not be collected without a disturbance." Count Robert also declined to pay dues to the hun-

dred Court, and there is a further record that one Nigell, a servant of Count Robert (described as "a sad fellow"), took away 12 socmanni, or small farmers, who were before this time parishioners of the church of Stow, and they were attached to the church in Combs." This was duly affirmed to the Commissioners, and it is believed "these are the ancestors of the present small village near the bridge at the boundary of the two parishes."

Coming to the 13th century, the conjunction of hall and church is very definite. Sir Robert de Creke, the owner of the hall, says the analyst, "much augmented his estate by marrying one of the heiresses of the Glanvilles," a lady who (about 1233) possessed the manor of Combs, and was a great benefactor to the

Church. The next benefactors were Roger Fitzpeter and his lady, and after them Robert le Thiring, who was rector in 1349. At this period, it is known, the greater part of the very beautiful stained glass which formerly adorned the windows was given. Then in succession the manor passed to the famous family of Ufford, to the Willoughbys, lords of Eresby, and to Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, the second husband of Mary Tudor.

#### THE DANDYE FAMILY.

In the reign of James I. it was in possession of Thomas Dandy, or Daundy, a scion of a famous Suffolk family, of whom the church contains very interesting memorials. Thomas Dandy, gentleman, of Cretingham (described in the annals of Combs as a "descendant of Edmund Dandy, Esq., of Ipswich") removed to Combs Hall and died there, being interred in the church on August 15th, 1607. When the restoration of the church was carried out in 1885-6, at the east end of the north aisle, under the stone containing a brass to the memory of Thomas Dandy, was discovered a brick vault: this was opened, and was found to contain the coffins of four adults and an infant. The outer wooden coffin had in every case quite rotted away: the inner leaden coffins were found to be formed of thin sheets of lead, which had warped and given out to some extent: undoubtedly one of these coffins contained the remains of Thomas Dandy. Although the early history of this family could not be discovered by the late Mr. Hamlet Watling, much was found indicative of the important position many scions held in the county for several generations. Thomas was the nephew of Edmund Dandy, who was contemporary with Cardinal Wolsey: he is well known in the annals of Ipswich as the founder of the market cross and for numerous charitable bequests. In the Rev. Richard Cobbold's novel, "Freston Tower," it is affirmed that "Lord de Freston married a niece of the elder Daundy, one of the wealthiest and most enlightened of the inhabitants of Ipswich, and had become connected with the female

branch of Wolsey's family, for Joan, his mother, was sister to Edmund Daundy." This and other matrimonial alliances brought the Dandyes into close relation with many leading Suffolk families. Thomas Dandy, whose remains lie in the vault in Combs Church, married Martha, daughter of John Poley, of Badley, the female half of a shield of arms still hanging in the church, it has been suggested, may be intended to represent Poley of Boxted and Badley, but this is uncertain. The second daughter of Thomas Dandy and Martha Poley, named Catharine, became the wife of Thomas Sotheby, pastor of Combs, and a memorial in the church records that "after she had borne eight sons and five daughters" she died on September 13th, 1624, in her 33rd year.

After the death of Thomas Dandy, Combs Hall was for some time the seat of the Bridgemans. Richard Bridgeman, Bishop John Bridgeman's youngest surviving son, after trading as a merchant at Amsterdam, settled at Combs. His son and successor, William Bridgeman, was secretary to the Admiralty and Clerk of the Privy Council to Charles II., James II., and William and Mary. The next in succession, Orlando Bridgeman, was elected M.P. for Ipswich in 1713. His association with Combs is particularly noteworthy from the fact that during his lifetime the hall was rebuilt. One of the four coffins in the vault already referred to bears a leaden plate, with a coat of arms beautifully engraved thereon, and the name "Orlando Bridgeman." The vault, it may be mentioned, was left undisturbed by the preserver-restorers—it was bricked up, the large brass was replaced, and a new organ (presented by Mr. John Kirby Moore) was placed above. The head of the Bridgeman family to-day is the Earl of Bradford, the lineal descendant of the erstwhile owners of Combs Hall; the eldest sister of the Earl is the wife of Mr. E. G. Pretyman, M.P., of Orwell Park.

After the demise of Orlando Bridgeman, Combs Hall was sold to the Crowleys (or Crawleys); the structure was demolished about

1730; "and thus," says the chronicler of Stowmarket, "its ancient honours came to an end; we sorrow over its ruins." The building stood on the rising ground southward of the church; the pleasure area attached is now a wilderness, traces of the ancient foundations of the hall, covered with wild flowers and mantled with creeping bramble, alone marking the spot where it stood. The manor and patronage of Combs passed into the possession of the Earl of Ashburnham, and with this nobleman's successors it remains.

#### ST. MARY'S CHURCH.

There is substantial ground for the belief that a church has existed on this site since the year 1100, or even earlier. In the Domesday record of 1086 there is mention of "one church at Combas"; a church is again mentioned in Pope Nicholas's valuation of the churehes in the Stow Hundred in 1291; the "King's Remembrancer" in 1316 gives the names of the Lords of "Combes" as follows:—Rob. de Ufford, John de Thorp, Wm. de Boyton. The reason for the erection of the sacred edifice on what would now appear to be an isolated site is, of course, found in its proximity to the ancient hall. The hall has disappeared—it was, for some inscrutable reason, demolished after coming into the possession of the Crowleys; the church, the centre of spiritual life, remains. As it would appear to the casual visitor to-day the church is much more accessible to the denizens of Combs wood than to the populace of the parish; only a farmhouse is to be found in the immediate vicinity, and the approaches to the church at certain inclement seasons must be rather uninviting; but the church, as the result of wise and well-directed "preservation" efforts, stands as a monument of the zeal and devotion of successive generations, extending over more than seven centuries. The "preservation" work was carried out in 1885-6, during the incumbency of the Hon. and Rev. A. C. Baillie-Hamilton; the churchwardens at that time were Mr. Thomas Southgate and Mr. George Tidmarsh, who, with other members

of the Committee, entered very heartily into the undertaking. The structure is of flint; the chancel and nave are decorated, the aisles and clerestory good Perpendicular work, with three-light windows. The aisles are divided at the east end from the nave by ancient screens. During the "preservation" operations discovery was made of a handsomely-carved sedilia and piscina; these had been covered and to a great extent demolished, brick, mortar, and rubbish filling the spaces: a modern partition



THE FONT.



A CARVED PEW-END.

covered the whole, extending behind the communion table and as far as the chancel door on the north side. This splendid piece of work was restored by competent workmen, every piece of the ancient stone being utilised. A niche in the south side of the east window was also revealed on the removal of disfiguring brickwork and plaster; this was also restored, and a niche to correspond placed on the opposite side: in these were placed the Ten Commandments. A doorway leading to the rood loft was discovered when dealing with the Dandy vault. At the west end of the south aisle an ugly brick vault has been built above the floor level, in which were nine coffins of

members of the Freeman family, successive generations of which resided at The Cedars. Authorised by a faculty, and with the sanction of the present representative of the family (Mr. George Brooke Freeman, of Lincoln's Inn), the tomb was removed; the remains were reinterred in the churchyard, at the south-west corner of the south aisle, in which was placed a handsome brass to their memory. The ancient carved oak poppy-head seats (probably 500 years old), many of which were in a good state of preservation, were sufficiently numerous to almost re-seat the nave: the quaint carving—representations of flowers, mythological creatures, etc—were carefully preserved and are of especial interest. The screens were restored, and the Jacobean pulpit was thoroughly cleaned and placed on a new base, near the screen, on the south side of the nave. The lower part of the chancel screen was boarded up to form the sides of pews. The octagon font, the basin of which is decorated work, is remarkably curious, being placed upon a perpendicular dado, the panels of which are not perpendicular, but stand in an acute angle with the base.

#### THE CHURCH IN EARLIER CENTURIES.

"This venerable fabric, in its primitive days," wrote the late Mr. Hamlet Watling, when in October, 1875, he commenced his series of articles on "The Fine Arts Long Ago," "must have been a glorious and magnificent pile, with its numerous windows glowing with the figures of saints, angels, prophets, bishops, and kings, from Biblical history, clad in the richest colours of a decorated period; but nearly all these have vanished, either by the hand of the despoiler of churches of the seventeenth century or by the Goths of a later period." Undoubtedly the superb splendour of earlier days has passed away—by whose hand the spoliation was wrought is not clear. Will Dowsing's diary, which carefully records the destruction wrought at Stowmarket Church, makes no mention of a visit to Combs, although what he would have called "the superstitious

objects" to be found in the church there must have been peculiarly inviting to the Parliamentary zealot. The greater part of the fragments remaining of that beauty which adorned the sanctuary centuries ago were, about the middle of the last century, carefully collected by a gentleman who was at that time curate of the adjacent village of Creeting, and placed in one of the south aisle windows; this window is still the distinctive feature of the church. Many of the windows suffered severely from the gun-cotton explosion at Stowmarket in 1871; this accounts for the existing east window and other deformities.



The principal figures in the window referred to are thus described by Mr. Watling:—"In the centre light, in the upper part, is one of the three scenes in the persecution and martyrdom of St. Catharine. It represents the apprehension of that holy lady by Maximinius, who is gorgeously attired on horseback, in company with two other persecutors. The figure of the saintly Catharine is kneeling in a devotional attitude, supplicating assistance from Heaven, and from the clouds are seen descending upon her saintly rimbed head rays of light, and an angel supporting her in her great trial of faith. In the foreground are trees of Oriental foliage and sheep that were peacefully grazing are startled at the sight. In another compartment we see Catharine interrogated by the tyrant himself, who is giving her into the charge of a rough-looking soldier to be tortured. In the niche of a turret above is perched his Satanic Majesty, prompting her persecutors; in his claw is a spear, his wings are expanded, and his ears erect and large; two horns crown his head, and his countenance is the personification of ugliness. In the next compartment is delineated the Holy Virgin, conveyed to the external walls of the city, where she is undergoing extreme torture by having a spiked collar thrust over her head and fastened with a ponderous chain to the turret of the city gate; immediately behind her is the Emperor Maximinius Galerius Valerius, in a great rage, as seen by the contortions of his countenance, while both his hands are thrust into his girdle. One of the soldiers in front holds a golden sceptre in his hands, and another above holds uplifted the gleaming sword of martyrdom, ready to descend upon her fair neck.

The next compartment in this really beautiful window represents a distressing scene in the torture of St. Cecilia, one of the four Latin female martyrs, and four others are still tolerably perfect; the fourth is St. Margaret and St. Euphrasia chastising dragons within the precincts of a castle; the scenes depicting the sufferings of St. Margaret are especially in-

teresting. The window may be justly described as one of the most beautiful of the earlier art to be found in the county.

#### A REMARKABLE CHEST.

A remarkable oak chest stands in the South porch—a brick structure, now adapted to the purposes of a vestry. The date 1599 is carved on the front, and there is a slit in the lid, through which in former days, it is presumed, the coins of the charitable were dropped. The chest is now the depository of a number of ancient books, including a collection of Elizabethan Homilies (1640), the Book of Common Prayer, with Psalter of Psalms, printed in London in 1710; the Oxford Book of Common Prayer of 1788, and a similar volume dated 1770, which contains "The Service of Healing." In addition there is a copy of the "Vinegar Bible" (1717), so-called from the heading of Luke xx. appearing "The Parable of the Vinegar," instead of "vineyard." The church, with its embattled western tower, containing four bells, is of fine proportions and striking architectural beauty, notwithstanding the disappearance of many ancient characteristics. The plate includes a pair of very fine tankard-shaped flagons, engraved with scenes from the Old Testament, figures, animals, foliage, and fruit. These remarkable pieces are of Dantzic manufacture, of early 18th century date, and were given by Mr. Orlando Bridgeman, M.P., who died in 1731. The lightest of the four bells is thought to weigh about 15 cwt., the second about 18 cwt., the third about 21 cwt., and the tenor about 24 cwt. The first bears the name of John Darbie (1662); the second that of John Draber (1627); the third has a Latin inscription; upon the fourth appears the name of Miles Graye (1619).

The register, dating from 1568, contain some remarkable features. The old Combs name of Southgate (with such variations as Sowgate and Suggate) runs continuously through the series from 1570 to the present time. Some entries bear definitely painful testimony to the ravages of plague (1604); and an entry bearing date June 7th, 1659, records: "Felo-de-se—buried in high-

way." It is clearly stated in a memorandum attached to the burial of Mr. Edmund Denny (October 1, 1707) that "he had made such a collection of walking staffs and tobacco stuffers that every man that came to his burial (to the number of 200 or 300) had a staff and a stuffer." In the annals of Combs, as collated and well preserved by Mr. George Tidmarsh, a former churchwarden (now resident at Lowestoft), appears this memorandum:—"In 1822, the senior churchwarden of this parish, Mr. R. Jarrold, attended the tithe audit in perfect health, at the age of 84, he never having been absent in any one year, or from that of the adjoining parish of Little Finborough, since the year 1762."

Apart from the historic features which are to be found in the church, Combs is one of



the most notable villages in the county. This distinction is mainly due to the existence of the tannery. Presumably this distinctive feature of the parish dates from about 1717: a codicil of the will of a parishioner named Thomas Denny, dated October 21st, in that year, recites the gift of £100 "to plant a tannery to the value of that sum." In the middle of the last century the owners of the tannery (Messrs. Webb and Sons) bored an artesian well, going to a depth of over 900 feet in the search for "soft" water,

and extracting in the boring process many interesting geological specimens. To-day the firm employs a large number of hands in tanning, currying, fellmongering, glove and gaiter leather dressing, and the manufacture of leather belting, fire buckets, and hose; and in addition to this large business they have established a model farm, the products of which have attained distinction. The bleak hill between the Ford and the tannery was much improved (somewhere about 1850) by a former rector for 27 years, the Rev. Richard

Daniel, who erected a row of model cottages, neat in appearance and quite commodious in comparison with the cottages in country districts 65 years ago. The tannery, by the large employment of labour, contributes greatly to the maintenance of the population of (according to the 1901 census) 1,226 in the civil, and 1,188 in the ecclesiastical parish. In 1841 the enumeration showed 1,064 inhabitants, while in 1881 the number was 1,174. The area of Combs is 2,814 acres of land and eight of water.

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