

## CHAPTER V.

### FINCHAM ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH.

#### 1. The BENEFICE.

The number of churches in England, at the time of the Conquest, is believed to have been about 4000. Of these only a few more than 1700 are noticed in Domesday Book<sup>1</sup>, as it was not an object of the survey to ascertain their number. There are 317 of these in the County of Norfolk. The Deanery of Fincham contained 17, and one of them was at Fincham.<sup>2</sup> Among the possessions of Hermerus, as before noticed, there was “the fourth part of the tithes of a Church.” This was most probably St. Michael's Church. In a very old deed, sans date, circa temp. Hen. II, this church is mentioned. The advowson had been in the family of the Talbots, and William Talbot now gave it to the prior of Castle-Acre, “with all things thereto belonging, which he or his heirs had therein, or could give.” This grant was confirmed by Sir Samson Talbot in the reign of Henry III, circa 1250.

In the *Domes-day Book of Norwich*, so called, a beautiful folio MS. in Latin, written about 1360, and copied from one much older, containing an account of

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<sup>1</sup> *Analysis of Domes-day Book for Norfolk*, pp. 80, 81.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 100.

all the benefices in the diocese, the revenues of this church are thus stated :-

Decanatus de Fyncham.  
Fyncham Sancti Michaelis.  
Taxatio Spiritualitatis.<sup>1</sup>

The Prior of Castle-Acre is Patron.  
The Rector has a house, with xxx acres of land.  
The value of the Rectory (besides the Prior's portion) is xvi marks.  
The said Prior's portion in the same is v marks.  
The Rector's tenths xxi<sup>s</sup> iv<sup>d</sup>. The Prior's vi<sup>s</sup> viii<sup>d</sup>.  
Synodals<sup>2</sup> at Easter xii<sup>d</sup>. At Michaelmas xii<sup>d</sup>.  
Procurations<sup>3</sup> v<sup>s</sup>. Peter's pence,<sup>4</sup> xv<sup>d</sup>.

Taxatio Temporalitatis. (Bona.)

The Prior of Castle-Acre	...	...	from rent	xi <sup>s</sup> . viii <sup>d</sup> .
The Prioress of Carhow (Norwich)	...	...	“ lands	v <sup>s</sup> .
The Prior of Shouldham	...	...	“ lands	i <sup>s</sup> viii <sup>d</sup> .
The Abbot of Ramsey <sup>5</sup>	...	...	“ lete	xx <sup>s</sup> .
The Sexton of St. Edmund's (Bury)	...	...	“ rent	viii <sup>s</sup> .
The Abbot of Dereham (West)	...	...	“ rent	xv <sup>s</sup> .
The Prior of Wormegay	...	...	“ lands	v <sup>s</sup> .

We see here symptoms of the early appropriation of Church revenues to the monasteries, introduced by foreign ecclesiastics in the service of the Pope. The monks were grasping at the incomes of the working

<sup>1</sup> The *spirituals* were such revenue as was connected with spiritual duties and the cure of souls, and consisted almost entirely of tithes, glebe lands, and house. The *temporals* were such lands or other property as may have accrued to the church by gift or purchase, and belonged chiefly to the regular or monastic clergy. The system of appropriations, however, gradually invaded this principle, and destroyed in great measure the distinction.

<sup>2</sup> *Synodals*, or *cathedratica*, are payments from each church to the Bishop, in token of subjection to his Cathedral Church, &c.

<sup>3</sup> *Procurations* are the Archdeacon's fees for visitation, originally in proportion to the value of the benefice, but now little more than nominal.

<sup>4</sup> *Peter's Pence* was a very old tax, payable by each family to the Pope, on the feast of St. Peter. It was confirmed by Will. I, and other Kings of England, and abrogated by Henry VIII.

<sup>5</sup> The Abbot had the lete fees, as Lord of the Hundred.

clergy, whilst the duties were to be performed by their nominee, or *vicar*, upon the lowest stipend that would admit of his subsistence. Hence came vicarages, as will appear in St. Martin's Church. Here are seven monasteries taking maintenance out of this church and parish. They are like so many eagles gathered around it ; but still St. Michael's was never reduced to a vicarage. Judgment in time overtook them for their covetousness, indolence, and sensuality. They are not maligned in the application of these terms. The monks of West Dereham, for instance, at the Dissolution, almost every one of them confessed themselves guilty of the most shameful immoralities.<sup>1</sup>

In the *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* of Pope Nicholas, in 1291, the value of St. Michael's Rectory is put down as above, viz. 16 marks, or £10 13s. 4d. In the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, however, of Henry VIII, anno 1535, it is only £7 6s. 8d. How this reduction came can only be explained by supposing some further *appropriations*.

In 1659, as appears from a MS. value of the livings of the diocese at Stow, by one *Gamaliel Townson*, notary public, the value is still £7 6s. 8d., with the following particulars added : “*primitiæ*<sup>2</sup> (first fruits) £6 12s. 0d. -- *decimæ*<sup>3</sup> (tenths) “14s. 8d. -- *synodalia* 2s. -- *proc.* 22d. Patronus Radulphus “Hare. Rector Roger Gunson.”

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<sup>1</sup> *History of Norfolk*, vol. vii, p. 336.

<sup>2</sup> *First fruits* are the net profits of every benefice *for one year*, as valued in the King's books. The Pope first claimed them in the reign of King John. Henry VIII took them to himself as royal revenue. Queen Anne gave them for the augmentation of small livings, hence called *Queen Anne's Bounty*.

<sup>3</sup> *Tenths* are the tenth part of the *yearly value* of a benefice, and are now applied in a similar way. All benefices under the value of £50 per annum were *discharged* from these payments by the said Queen. The number now remaining liable is 4898.

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2. THE PARISH CHURCH Of St. Michael stood west of the Rectory House. It was a fine old building of the Norman and Early English style. It had a handsome square tower, embattled with quoins and copings of freestone, and a pinnacle at each corner. On the north side of the chancel was a *Holy Sepulchre*, and opposite to this three *sedilia*, or stone stalls, for the three orders of the ministry, surmounted by richly carved canopies terminating in stone finials. The nave was spacious, covered by a handsome old oak roof.

This church was suffered to fall into decay during the early part of the last century, and in the year 1744 an Act of Parliament was obtained for the consolidation of the Rectory with the Vicarage of St. Martin<sup>1</sup>; the church itself, "being so "ruinous that it was dangerous to assemble therein for divine "worship," was taken down. The tower at least might have been spared, to mark the sacredness of the spot; but within five years it also was given up to destruction, under the hands of a neighbouring bricklayer, who for the stipulated sum of four guineas levelled it with the ground.<sup>2</sup>

All the old materials, after the fashion of King Henry's time, appear to have been unscrupulously *appropriated* to every kind of common use, as several barns, bridges, cottages, and walls, abundantly testify to this day.

The last service performed in this church, as stated in the Register, was the marriage of the Rev. William Harvey, Rector, to the widow of his predecessor the Rev. Joseph Forby, May 30, 1745. According to a tradition in the village, Mrs. Harvey narrowly escaped with her life as the tower fell, she being among the spectators.

The only stone remaining visibly on the site seems to have been a very old Norman *boss*, probably the

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<sup>1</sup> 18 George II, No. 23.

<sup>2</sup> "1751. Henry Weasenham, for pulling down the steeple, £4 4s." *Old Vestry Book*.

central stone of the porch roof. The font, an extremely interesting specimen of the early Norman (some say Saxon) style, was transferred to the other church, and will be described hereafter. Some monumental tablets also were similarly respected, and removed thither.

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### 3. RECTORS of St. Michael's.

- John de Palgrave, temp. Henry III.
1253. Jeffrey de Derham.
1293. Reginald de Gressenhall, dean of South Malling, in Kent.
1311. Adam de Saxham, presented by the Prior of Castle-Acre.
1313. Jeffrey Brian, by the Prior, &c., of Castle-Acre.
1317. Stephen de Kettle-burgh, by the Prior, &c.
1320. Edmund Gulafre, provost of Castle Culby, Bangor.
1330. William de Monte-acuto (Montague), by the Prior, &c.
1335. John de Faloniis, on the resignation of Montague.  
Richard Markaunt.
1349. William Roche, by the Prior of Castle-Acre.  
William de Happepon.
1352. Thomas Atte-lathe, also Rector of Runcton Holme.
1356. Thomas Buxkin, on the resignation of Atte-lathe.
1393. John Sekerstein, by the Prior, &c., of Castle-Acre.
1409. Edmund Pevys, of Wiggenhale, by the same.
1409. Jefferey Schavere, of Thuxton, exchanged with Pevys.
1412. John Wormegeye, of Newton, Rector of Ickworth.
1420. William Atte-mylle, or Atte-wood, Rector of Munford.
1421. Thomas Marshall, also Rector of Bexwell and Southery.
1434. Richard Domys-day, Rector also of Caldecote.
1436. John Walpole, by the Prior, &c., of Castle-Acre.  
Robert Lety.
1454. William Wright, on the death of Lety, &c.
1460. William Ray, on the resignation of Wright.
1477. John Shawe, on the death of Ray, by the Prior, &c.
1485. Nicholas Barker, on the resignation of Shawe.  
William Langland, on the death of Barker.

1493. Henry Sharpe, on the death of Langland.
1502. John Edmunds, prior of Shouldham.
1504. Christopher Wynde, on the death of Edmunds. He left money for a new "ruffe" to the Chancel. By the Prior of CastleAcre.
1525. James Coole, on the death of Wynde, &c.
1530. Thomas Coltman, on the resignation of Coole. This was the last presentation by the Prior and Convent of Castle-Acre.
1539. John Alowe, by Thomas, Duke of Norfolk, to whom the advowson was given by Hen. VIII.
1545. Thomas Freke, vicar of St. Martin's, by the Duke of Norfolk.
1587. Robert Gunson.
1587. Roger Gunson, by Robert Gunson and John Edgeley.
1617. John Collin, on the death of Gunson, by Lord Rich.
1658. Francis Power. Collin died in 1658. (*Fincham Register.*)
1661. Daniel Gardiner, on the death of Power.
1682. Daniel Baker, by Sir Thomas Hare, Baronet.
1723. Joseph Forby, by Thomas Forby, Gent, "ultimus Rector," dying August 14, 1744. (*See his monument.*)
- This Church was then (1744) consolidated with the vicarage of St. Martin.