

CHAPTER X.

PARISH REGISTERS AND TERRIERS.

1. The first injunctions to the clergy respecting Parish Registers were issued in the 28th of Henry VIII, anno 1538. But only about 800 were commenced so early, a general dislike and suspicion of their object being entertained. Edward VI repeated the same injunctions. Queen Elizabeth appointed ecclesiastical visitors to enforce attention to the subject, and the 70th Canon orders them especially to be made up from the beginning of the reign of the said Queen ; consequently we find a more regular system of registration commencing in most parishes about the year 1558. The Registers of Fincham are the earliest and most complete of any parish in the Deanery. They date from 1541. There are five books previous to the general registration Act of 1812, all of parchment, and six since that time, of paper. Their contents to the end of 1861 are as follows :

Marriages.	Baptisms.	Burials.
1169	4515	3342

The marriages being about one-fourth, and the burials three-fourths, of the baptisms.

The following table shews the number of books of each church in the Deanery,¹ and the date of the earliest entry in the same :-

¹ Annexed to the *Parliamentary Population Returns* of 1831, which may be found in most public libraries, is a particular account and report of all the parish registers and their contents. On comparing these returns with my own official inspection, I find that Shouldham Thorpe, Wereham, and Ryston have each recovered their oldest book since that date. It is evident still that about 12 other parishes have lost some of their books.

Order.	Parish, or Church.	Books.	Year.
1.	Fincham	11	1541
2.	Beecham-Well	9	1558
3.	Bexwell	9	1558
4.	Dereham, West	10	1558
5.	Shouldham Thorpe	8	1558
6.	Wereham	10	1558
7.	Outwell	10	1559
8.	Stow Bardolf.	12	1559
9.	Stradsett	10	1559
10.	Crimplesham	9	1560
11.	Downham	17	1560
12.	Wormegay	12	1561
13.	Holme with South Runcton	} 11	1562
14.	South Runcton with Holme		
15.	Marham	9	1562
16.	Wimbotsham.	10	1562
17.	Watlington	8	1570
18.	Fordham	7	1572
19.	Hilgay, All Saints	17	1583
20.	Welney	12	1642
21.	Denver	10	1653
22.	Shouldham	10	1653
23.	Tottenhill	11	1679
24.	Upwell ¹	18	1683
25.	Ryston	6	1687
26.	Wretton	8	1693
27.	Barton, St. Andrew	8	1695
28.	Southery	8	1706
29.	Barton, St. Mary	8	1726
30.	Boughton	8	1729
31.	Stoke Ferry	8	1736
32.	Shingham	6	1762
33.	Hilgay, St. Mark's ²	2	1852

¹ There are the remains of an older book at Upwell, but so blackened and disfigured by fire, that it is without much interest, and almost useless.

² Hilgay St. Mark's was only constituted a chapel of ease in 1852, and it registers only baptisms and burials.

Proper books, however, for registration were not in use until after the publication of the Canons in 1603, when it was ordered that “in every parish church shall be provided one parchment book, wherein shall be written the day and year of every christening, wedding, and burial, which have been in that parish since the time that the law was first made in that behalf.” Hence also it is explained how the earlier books are only transcripts and copies of older papers. This is well illustrated by a memorandum on the cover of our oldest book, shewing that the book itself is not so old by 65 years as the date of its first entry, in 1541.

“the 6 of Auguste 1606,
 “payde for xii skynnes of parchement for this booke,
 “to one mr. petersonne of Norwich skynner vi^s. viii^d.
 “and for byndyng the booke and cover xii^d.
 “Thomas Druery.”

2. The following are some further extracts from the Fincham Registers, with a few explanatory remarks added :-

A.D.

1542. “Item : the xiith day October was buryed John ffyncham the son of
 “John Esq.”
 “It : the xxii of January was buryed Mrs. Eyle (Ela) ffincham¹ the
 “wife of John.”
 “It : the last day of Februarie was buryed Mrs. Elle (Ela) ffincham¹
 “the younger daughter unto Mrs. Eyle.”

The prefix “Mrs.” was “the proper title of unmarried

¹ These deaths really occurred in 1540-1, as I have proved in the history of the family. It shews how very cautiously we should receive the testimony of these early memoranda, which were not put into books till many years afterwards. John Fincham, also, in the preceding entry, died before his father, which was in 1540.

“women of genteel condition until within little more than a century ago.” -- See Forby's *Vocab.*, vol. ii, p. 217.

1542. “It : the viiith ---- was buryed Thomas Lovell,² Knight, at Barton.”

All the above entries belong to the same year, which extended to March 25th, when the civil and legal year commenced. This was altered by Act of Parliament in 1752, and the old style ceased at the same time, September 2nd being called September 14th.

1551. “It : the xix of July was buryed Thomas ffyncham Esq.”

He was son and heir of John and Ela Fyncham. -- See his Will, &c.

“It : the iiiii of July was christened An ffincham the daughter of “Thomas.”

She married Charles Cornwallis, Esq., who purchased the Fincham estate of her brother William in 1572, and the old family left the village. -- See the *Pedigree*.

1562. “It : the xxi ---- was buryed Sir Roger Walker, preste.”

1576. “Ite : the xvi of October was christened Charles Cornwallis, the “sone of *Edward* Cornwaleis and Ann his wife.”

This family now possessed the Fincham estate, and resided here. But Edward is here written by mistake for Charles. -- See next two extracts.

1584. “Imprimis the xxviii of Aprill were maryed Edward Cornwalles “Gent, and Elizabeth his wife.”

² Lovell was a very ancient family name at Barton. Sir Thomas Lovell and his heirs were Lords there from the time of Henry II. -- See Bl., vol. vii, in *Barton*.

- “ “It : the xxix of July was buryed Mrs. Ann Cornwalles the wife of
 “Charles Cornwalles Esquier.”
1599. “William Pyke being slayne at the muster at Narborough was
 “buryed Aug. 4th.”
- “ “A child of Hickes being perished in a well was buryed.”
1600. “June 11th a boy of Mr. Gunson's (Rector) being slayne with a cart
 “was buryed.”
1615. “Bridget ffincham the daughter of John ffincham gent was bapt^d
 “xxvi of September.”
1616. “Bridget ffincham filia Johannis et Christianæ¹ bur. July xix.”
1644. “Mildred Cobbe the wife of Henry Cobbe was buryed the 16th of
 “May anno predicto.”

I notice this to introduce an extract from the Court Rolls of the Manor, relating to her husband : “1644. “felo de se. the presentment of the jury is that Henry “Cobb, a free tenant of this manor, since the last court, “not having the fear of God before his eyes, but “instigated by a diabolical temptation, hanged himself “at Fincham.”

1654. “A child left in ower town and died December sixt.”
- “ “Thomas Garrett of London Esq. and Mrs. Ann Drury of Fincham
 “were marryed the 30th March, upon the Thursday, by Sir Ralf
 “Hare, Bart. Nathl. Drury, Reqr.”

This is one of those marriages which were *solemnized* before a magistrate and the parish registrar, during the disorderly times of the Commonwealth. There are several similar entries in the Stow and other registers of the Deanery. At Watlington there are fifteen, with this note prefixed to them :

“Hic finiunt nuptiæ per ministrum } solemnizandæ.
 “Hic incipiunt nuptiæ per magistratum.”

¹ A branch of the family from Outwell.

An Act of Parliament was afterwards passed, to entitle persons so married to such legal rights as attended marriages duly solemnized.

1661. "July 7th, gathered on a brief for ye distressed inhabitants of "Scarboro in ye county of York, for the rebuilding of St. Marys "church the sum of seven shillings and nine pence."

There were ten other similar collections this year. Church briefs were abolished in 1829.

1696. Six persons of one family named Sutton were buried in five months, having died probably from small pox, that disease being previously mentioned.
1746. "Mem : all those with this mark X before then, dyed of the small "pox [about 12] when upwards of 90 had it in the town, as "witness my hand. W. Harvey."

This loathsome disease was very prevalent at this time, and was increased and propagated by the practice of inoculation. Some of the parishioners still hold to the old sentiments of their forefathers very pertinaciously on this subject, and it is probable that a hundred years will intervene between the discovery of vaccination and its universal adoption, with legislative sanction on its side, and a £10 penalty against a contrary practice.

1754. This year there were many deaths from small pox, and amongst its victims was "*Lebèurfeverèlla* daughter of "Thomas and *Lebèurfeverèlla* Lock," a very outlandish name truly, of the origin of which I am ignorant.
1788. This year small pox had gained such an alarming ascendancy that a vestry was summoned,

whose collective wisdom resolved that no one in the parish should escape. “It was agreed unanimously to “inoculate the poor inhabitants of this parish at the “public expense,” and Mr. Bayfield was forthwith employed, and his bill was £14 14s., for spreading a filthy disease and plague in the village.

1802. The same thing was done again this year, and the sum of £21 15s. 6d. paid for like results, with many deaths. Let the striking contrast presented by our own times have its proper influence in the cause of health and medical science. Inoculation is *illegal*, and vaccination *compulsory*, effected by the overwhelming evidence in favor of Jenner's great discovery in 1770,¹ and fatal cases of small pox are comparatively rare. Just eight years more will complete the centenary of experimental vaccination, and we trust that by that time we may be permitted to see, in God's Providence, its complete triumph.

One more extract from the Registers shall complete the series :-

1856. “March 16th, these three infants, baptized on the same day, and all “under six months old, are the son, the grandson, and great “grandson of one man, and the great grandson is the oldest of “the three !”

¹ It was in the year 1770 that Dr. Jenner first discovered the art and value of vaccination, and communicated the same to Dr. Hunter. Twenty-six years, however, elapsed before he made an experiment upon a human subject, which he first did upon a boy named Phillips. The boy went favourably through the disease. This was in 1796. He was six weeks afterwards inoculated with small pox, which had no effect upon him as anticipated. The feelings of Jenner on this occasion are thus described by himself : “While the vaccine discovery was progressing, the joy I “felt at being the instrument destined to take away from the world one of the “greatest calamities, was often so excessive, that on pursuing my favourite object I “have found myself in a reverie. It is pleasant to recollect that those reflections “always ended in devout acknowledgments to that Being from whom this and all “other blessings flow.” -- Taken from *A Lecture* given at St. George's Hospital in 1856, by *Dr. Lee*.

3. The Parish Registers are the only sources from which can be gained materials for illustrating the family history or local ancestry of the “rude forefathers of the hamlet,” except perhaps the “clodger” (Anglo-Saxon) of the family Bible. Uninterrupted residence of any family from an early period possesses a certain degree of interest. We have one such instance running through the whole course of our Registers from their beginning. In 1542, “Ela the daughter of William “Compling was buried.” Eleven successive generations of this family supply 97 baptisms, 25 marriages, and 60 burials. For 200 years their position was that of the independent yeoman and farmer, holding the various parish offices from time to time. But whether through misfortune, or their own fault, some how or other, they have lost the paternal acres. The present generation are all families of labourers. Let us hope they may possess those better things which do not “make themselves wings and fly away.”

Subjoined are extracts from the Will of the above-named William Compling, illustrating the form and fashion of such documents at that day :

“I gyve and bequeathe to the Vicare of Sainte Martens Chirche in Fyncham, for tythes and offerings negligentlie forgotten xii^d item to “every one of my god-children being alive at my departyng xii^d apiece. “item to Jane my wife my mille and two horses and her cheise. item to the “poor people within the towne of Fyncham vi^s viii^d, to be distributed and “payde where most nede is, within iiij years, that is xx^d a yeare. to the “reparacion of the high waie fyve shillings, that is for to bye callow¹ and “laie it by the dykes between beldames bridge and the crosse, to be “bestowed the next somer *after my departyng*.² The

¹ “Callow” is the loose alluvial soil or gravel which lies over any solid stratum of chalk or limestone, &c., and which must be removed to reach them. The same is more commonly called in this county “uncallow,” and its removal “uncallowing.” -- See Forby's *Vocab.*, in voce.

² This touching expression of St. Paul (Acts xx, 29,) I have not met with in any other will.

“residue to myn executors Jane my wife and Richard my sone, these being
 “witness Roger Watson and John Mildenhall.” Proved March 16th 1560.
 Reg. Archd. Norf.

4. TERRIERS are so called from the French *terrier*, and that from the Latin *terra*. They are an inventory of the Glebe *lands*, and other temporalities of the Church, made under the provision of the 87th Canon. Their proper place of custody is at the Bishop's or Archdeacon's Registry, and a copy ought to be kept in the parish chest.

There are now extant in the Registry of the Bishop, at Norwich, about 25 Terriers of this parish. The date of the earliest is 1678, written on paper. The next is for the year 1706, also of paper. The others up to a recent date are all of parchment. Down to the year 1747 there is a Terrier for each church, afterwards but one for the consolidated benefice. Their contents are quoted in other parts of this book, and I shall only notice here some incidental entries respecting the number of communicants in connexion with the church, first stating that in 1603, as appears by certified returns from the clergy to King James, Roger Gunson being then Rector and Vicar, &c., there were 253 in the two churches here. “No
 “Popish Recusants, nor Protestant Dissenters.”

In the year 1709 there were 209 communicants.

“	1723	“	170	“
“	1740	“	130	“

Comparing these numbers with the communicants of the present time, we are led to enquire how has come this gradual falling away ? Some say that the returns to King James included all who were of age to

communicate, so constituting a kind of census of the adult population. But the truth lies probably in the circumstance that in the Romish church all persons not absolutely excommunicated were held to be in communion. The nearer therefore we approach the times when that church was dominant in this country, the more nominal communicants we shall find ; for at the Reformation, when the great bulk of the people came out from her, they brought with them much of their habits of religious worship, and continued the profession at least of an outward communion. And as in most places in the country so here, the whole population *protested*. There were “no Popish Recusants.”

But with regard to the subsequently diminishing number of communicants, the reformed religion in the Church of England, abhorring indiscriminate communion, warns the wicked to repent, and change their lives, or else “not to come “to that holy table.” And so by degrees many ceased to do so, until these proportions appear but as “a little flock,” in vital and personal communion with Christ, compared with the world around them.