

## CHAPTER XIII.

### FINCHAM HALL AND THE AYLMER FAMILY.

1. There has existed doubtless from the earliest times after the Norman Invasion a suitable residence for the lord of the principal manor in Fincham. And it was no doubt of a superior character to the houses of the other manors. It would be impossible perhaps now to discover the date of the erection of the first "Fincham Hall," but there exists, however, a very interesting memorial of it, viz., An Inventory<sup>1</sup> of the goods and chattels of John son of Adam de Fyncham, taken A.D. 1340. There are mentioned in this inventory the chapel, the hall, the lord's chamber, the spense or steward's room, the kitchen, the bake-house, and the larder, besides out-houses, and farm buildings. The present mansion cannot possibly have stood from that time. Like the church itself, it is a rebuilding on an old site. It has been considered worthy of a place in *The Beauties of England and Wales*,<sup>2</sup> and the author of that work says : "It was one of those old baronial houses, which were formerly encompassed with moats, and protected by towers and exceedingly strong doors, &c." It is now the property of Sir Thomas Hare, Baronet, of Stow Bardolph.

The Rev. R. Forby, in a letter to the editor of the work just mentioned, describes the hall as having been built about the reign of Edward IV, who died in 1482. I am inclined to think that a few years later is the correct date of its erection. John Fincham, in his Will,

---

<sup>1</sup> This Inventory will be found amongst the Fincham Wills in a subsequent chapter.

<sup>2</sup> *Norfolk*, p. 14.



dated March 10th, 1494, speaks of the chapel of St. Mary as then “being edefied in my maner of Fyncham,” and we know that *manerium* originally signified the *mansion* or *house* of the manor, as well as the manor itself or lordship generally. Mr. F. says that it “exhibits an early specimen of the revived “Grecian style in domestic architecture, especially in its “circular arched entrance, on pillars of the Ionic order, and “bearing some resemblance to the gateway of Caius College, “Cambridge.”

The house fronts towards the north, and presents even now an imposing appearance, with its high-pitched gable roofs and window mouldings. It has lost, however, about one-third of its original elevation, viz., the principal apartments on the right-hand of the entrance-hall, with the hexagonal tower on that side. Modern rooms supply in part their place. On the left-hand, however, these features remain, and the tower especially is in good preservation. It consists of a small ground-floor room with a chamber over it, separated by a groined stone roof, on which are the Fincham arms. The engraving shews the house as it was about a hundred years ago, considerably dilapidated. It is taken from *Excursions in Norfolk*, 1818.

As regards the chapel, its exact position in the house is not known. It is alluded to in some of the Fincham Wills. John Fyncham, who died in 1499, leaves the residue of his goods to Jane his wife for certain uses, “except all such ornaments “of the *chapel*, which my father left me by his last will, on “condition that the said ornaments remain in the chapel,” &c. Thomas Fyncham likewise, his grandson, who died in 1551, says in his Will : “Item to my son William I give at his age of “twenty-one years all the stuffe and utensils *in the chamber* “*above the chapell*, the stuffe in the chamber above the “parlour,” &c. The word “stuffe,” as applied to the furniture of the “best bed room,”

sounds oddly in our ears, but it is thoroughly good old English, as the Bible testifies in Genesis xxxi, 37, and Luke xvii, 31.

Here, then, was the chapel of “our ladie,” and

“ -- the humbler altar, which the knight  
 “And his retainers of the embattled hall  
 “Seek in domestic oratory small,  
 “For prayer in stillness and the chanted rite.” -- *Wordsworth*.

---

2. Before taking leave of the old house, the last object of local interest in the parish claiming notice at our hands, it will be convenient to make allusion to the family who for several generations have dwelt securely under its roof, namely, the AYLMERS, a family as honourable, and even more ancient, than the Finchams. “It is a thing due to worthy “men,” says Strype, in his life of John Aylmer, Bishop of London, “that their names and good works may never die, “nor be forgotten.”<sup>1</sup> It ought, then, to be mentioned that they have done more here for their parish church, than any other family since its foundation by the Finchams. The name itself is pure Saxon, and has been variously written *Ælmer*, *Æthelmer*, *Agelmare*, *Ailmer*, &c. It is derived from the Anglo-Saxon “Æl” -- all, and “Mær” -- *great, exalted*. Hence “Ailmer,” “a man altogether celebrated.”<sup>2</sup> It was the family name of the Earls of Cornwall in early English history.

Dugdale, in his history of the monasteries, says that one Almerus was appointed the first Abbot of Tavistock, A.D. 981, and in his account of him he has Latinized the name and its derivation, which, though

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, by the Rev. John Strype.

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. G. M.

incorrect, as it now seems, I cannot refrain from quoting for its very simplicity. "An honourable man," say's he, "*gentle* "and good (*almus* atque bonus), as his name betokens, and as "all know who understand the Latin and English tongues, is "chosen for the government of the said church, and to feed "the Lord's flock assembled therein with the food of his "divine word." -- Vol. i, p. 997.

I have never seen a pedigree of this family, but I should like to mention a few individual names which have casually presented themselves from various sources.

In the year 1047 *Ailmar* was Bishop of Elmham, prior to the removal of that see to Thetford and Norwich. His name occurs frequently in Domesday, for instance as connected with Gaywood, of which he was Lord.<sup>1</sup> There are, moreover, two entries in this National Record, connected with his name, well worth transcribing as illustrative of Saxon laws and manners. The first, in reference to the law by which a widow could not marry again within twelve months after the death of her husband, occurs under *Plumstead*, in *Blofield* Hundred: "Post quam rex Willielmus "venit in hanc terram, invasit Almarus episcopus per foris- "facturam, quia mulier quæ tenuit *nupsit intra annum post* "mortem viri."<sup>2</sup> The other is remarkable as a record of the marriage of an ecclesiastic in the church of Rome, no other than the Bishop himself: "Hoc manerium accepit Almarus "cum uxore suâ antequam esset episcopus, et postea tenuit in "episcopatu."<sup>3</sup> He had also a considerable manor in *Sedgeford* and *Fring*.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See *Blomefield in Gaywood*.

<sup>2</sup> "After that King William came into this country, Bishop Ailmer took "possession [of certain lands] by forfeiture, because the woman who held them "married within the year after the death of her husband." -- Bl., in *Plumstead*. See *The Anglo-Saxon Home*, by J. Thrupp, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> "This manor Ailmer received with his wife before he was Bishop, and "continued to hold it during his episcopacy." -- *Domesday*, vol. ii, fol. 195.

<sup>4</sup> Bl., in *Sedgeford*.

The following also may be added :-

1086. Ailmer, son of Godwin, held lands in *Runham*. -- *Domesday Book*.
1260. Roger, son of John Aylmer, purchased lands in *Toimeres*, an ancient and extinct village near Stradsett.<sup>1</sup>
1317. John, son of Reiner Ailmer de Schouldham. -- Deed 10 Edward II, at *Stow*.<sup>2</sup>
1349. John Aylmer, Rector of Waxham and Lesingham, which latter he exchanged for Ingworth in 1353. Rector of Crownthorp in 1355. -- *Bl.*
1396. Matthew Aylmer, Rector of Stockton. -- *Bl.*
1402. The same, Rector of Fincham St. Michael's, by exchange. -- *Bl.*
1426. } Robert Aylmer, Vicar of Eaten, near Norwich ; Rector of  
1430. } Mundham ; and Rector of Carlton. -- *Bl.*
1481. } Robert Aylmer, Mayor of Norwich, buried in St. Andrew's church  
1492 } in 1493. -- *Bl.*
1489. Olive Aylmer, daughter of Robert Aylmer, of Tattington, in Suffolk, Esquire, married Thomas Brampton, Esquire, of Brampton, Norfolk. -- *Bl.*
1507. Lawrence Aylmer, Lord Mayor of London, unjustly imprisoned by Henry VII. -- *Hume*, vol. iii, p. 385.
1509. William Aylmer, yeoman of the Crown to Henry VIII. -- *State Papers* of said King, No. 572. *Record Office*.
1511. Richard Aylmer, Mayor of Norwich, buried in St. Peter's church in 1512. -- *Bl.*
1513. John Aylmer, Serjeant at Arms, at 12d. per diem. -- *State Papers*, Henry VIII, No. 4189.
1515. John Aylmer, Rector of Sengham, or Tattersett, All Saints. -- *Bl.*
1538. George Aylmer, Prior of St. John's of Jerusalem, in London. -- *Strype*.
1577. John Aylmer, Bishop of London, to 1594. Born at Aylmer Hall, in Tilney, Norfolk, and younger brother to Sir Robert Aylmer. -- *Strype's Life of the Bishop*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There are still fields in Stradsett called *great and little Tumblers*, -- so called from *two meres* that were here ; thus, Two-meres, Toimeres, Tomers, Tumers, and Tumblers. -- See old map, &c., of *Stradsett*.

<sup>2</sup> The seal to this deed is a ridiculous caricature of hunting -- a hare mounted on a dog and blowing a horn. The letters of the motto though legible are utterly unintelligible, and are purposely omitted here.

<sup>3</sup> "In the reign of Queen Mary, he fled beyond sea, and was saved by

1586. Samuel Aylmer, High Sheriff of Suffolk. -- *Ibid.*  
 1621. Sir Gerald Aylmer, created an Irish Baronet. -- *Burke.*  
 1669. Jane, daughter of Richard Aylmer, of Birdham, in Sussex, married Jeffrey Le Neve, of Aslacton, Norfolk, Esquire. -- *Bl.*  
 1686. Francis Aylmer, Gent., buried in the church of St. George Tombland, Norwich, aged 58. -- *Bl.*  
 1718. Admiral Lord Aylmer, made a peer for naval services. -- *History of England.*  
 1718. Thomas Aylmer, Fellow of C.C.C.C., and afterwards Vicar of Lavington, Wilts. -- *Lamb's History of the College.*  
 1722. Francis Aylmer, Fellow of the same, and Tutor, and afterwards Rector Of Fulmodeston, Norfolk. -- *Ibid.*

At the present time considerable estates in Fincham are held by Mr. John Aylmer, and his cousin Mr. George Aylmer. These are principally the sites of the ancient manors of Talbot's and Bainard's Hall, with much of their demesne lands.

The village of Aylmerton, near Cromer, presents in its name collateral evidence of the comparative antiquity in England of the families of Aylmer and Fincham. In the former instance the *Saxon gives name to* the town which he built, or possessed ; in the latter the *Norman invades* the abode of his predecessor, and *takes his name from it.*

The Aylmer Arms are "Argent, a cross sable, between four "Cornish choughs of the same." Sometimes there are five *bezants*, or *roundlets*, upon the cross, as in the tower window in Fincham church. They occur in various places in the county, but in the History of Norfolk the birds are variously called *choughs*, *martlets*, and *magpies*, an instance of the defects of that noble work, of which a new edition is so much wanted. -- See vols. i, 210 ; iv, 363 ; vi, 434.

---

"the ingenuity of a merchant, who put him into a wine butt, which had a partition in "the middle ; so that Master Aylmer sat in the hind part thereof, whilst the searchers "drunk of the wine which they saw drawn out of the head, or other end "thereof." -- Fuller's *Worthies* -- *Norfolk.*