

A Short History
of
Great Massingham

Its Churches & Priory.

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1. The Earliest Days.

A HOLLOW near the highest points in the tableland of West Norfolk, and a series of picturesque ponds, that is the beginning, far back in the centuries before the Christian era. The primitive peoples required dry uplands, and pasture for their little flocks and herds, and a supply of water. So the ponds became the centre of a primitive village. There were other villages at Castleacre, Castle Rising and Grimston; and scattered over the countryside there were occasional rude habitations. At the time of the Romans the inhabitants were Britons, and their speech was of the same type as that of the modern Welsh. What the names of the places were in those days we are as a rule unable to tell. But there were no such names as Rising and Docking, and none like Grimston, Gayton and Newton, or like Rudham and Fakenham, or Dersingham, Sandringham and Massingham. But Brancaster was then known as Branodunum; and the name Ken was in use, and the name Mink. We should probably also have found in those days the names Setch and Winch somewhat different in form however and the names Creake and Tydd and Lynn, these also slightly altered. Under these circumstances we may well ask when and how the name Massingham came into being. The story is similar to that of scores of places round about. For long years the coasts of Norfolk had been troubled by Saxon pirates. But when the Roman troops were withdrawn about the year 410 a new state of things developed. Great numbers of Angles and Saxons crossed the North Sea, fell upon the Britons, and overwhelmed them. The Angles came in such numbers that for many a generation their own land was desolate. They came to settle down. Sparing few, and those only to make them slaves, they dispossessed the Britons. Then, like the Hebrews of old, they called the lands after their own names. One of their number, a man called Wesa, settled down with his men at the place now known as Weasenham. Not far away a man called Faca settled down, and another called Rudda, and so we have today the names Fakenham and Rudham. At Harpley the chief settler was called Hearpa, which means the harper. But at Massingham the settlers were a group of important people, a sort of family party. We learn this from the name, which means the home of the Macrsings, that is, the home of Maersa's people.' In its early form the name would be written Maersingaham. As for Maersa, the chief of the settlers, he bore a name of some distinction, for its significance appears to be 'the honoured one'; in Old English the word maersian meant to honour.

Most probably Maersa and his people landed during the 5th Century. Most probably they landed in the neighbourhood of Lynn. At that time the roads from Lynn to Gayton and Litcham, from Lynn to Grimston and Massingham, and from Lynn to Hillington and Harpley, all existed in some primitive form. We know this because when the boundaries of the parishes were fixed probably as early as the 6th century sections of these roads were adopted as boundaries. For the same reason we may be sure that many roads in Massingham are of like antiquity the road to Weasenham, the road to Hillington, the road which leads eastward past the old windmill, the road which carries the boundary between Massingham and Congham, and, most important of all, Peddars' Way, the most famous road in Norfolk. The impression we get is clear. Even in those far off days the countryside was able to support a considerable population.

Towards the end of the 9th century, after King Alfred had defeated the Vikings at Ethandune, many of their number settled down in Norfolk. It seems clear from the place names that a Viking called Grim settled at Grimston, another called Ingvald at Ingoldisthorpe, another called Skuli at Sculthorpe.

The Vikings gave us such words as 'carr' and 'thorpe' and 'toft.' They gave us also the word 'gate' meaning a road. And they gave us further many of our personal names, such, for example, as Hammond, Rolf. and Skate. Whether any of the Vikings settled in Massingham we do not know, but we may be sure that one way or another they greatly influenced the whole neighbourhood.

2. The Coming of Christianity

East Anglia became a kingdom early in the 6th century so at least it would seem. But it was not until the 7th century that Christian teachers began their work among the settlers. The first bishop was Felix, appointed in the year 631, and we shall scarcely be wrong if we think of the days of Felix and his immediate successors as the days when the Christian message was first proclaimed in Massingham. We can well imagine the early missionaries as they stood on the eminence where St. Mary's now stands and there set forth the Gospel story. Long before a church could be erected there would be baptisms, and they would take place in one of the ponds. Afterwards a tiny church would be set up - a church of wood; and, later on, its place would be taken by a building of more substantial material partly perhaps of

carrstone, for this could be obtained from quarries within easy reach.

Yet in the year 1086, when the Domesday commissioners reported on the parish, they mentioned neither priest nor church. This is the more astonishing because they speak of churches at Appleton, Flitcham, and Congham, as well as at Gaytonthorpe, Pentney, and Castleacre. We may be sure, however, that Massingham was not without its church, though, as the parish was then undivided, there would probably be no more than one. But in the time of Bishop de Turhe, who was diocesan from 1146 to 1174, Massingham had two churches. We know this from an early document connected with the priory at Castleacre. It appears that in the episcopate of Bishop de Turhe the priory of Castleacre owned many acres of land in Massingham, and in lieu of the tithes on this land the prior agreed to pay to the benefice of St. Mary's a sum of 10s. a year. and to the benefice of All Saints a sum of 5s. It is in this way that we know there were before 1175 two churches in the place. Whether there was then a church at Little Massingham we do not know. Yet in the middle of the following century we have precise information showing that there were then three churches in Massingham. The document which gives this information is known as the Norwich Valuation. Its date is 1254, and the values of the three livings as there set forth are as follows:

Great Massingham	£26 -- 13 -- 4
Little Massingham	£10 -- 0 -- 0
Massingham All Saints	£1 -- 6 -- 8

We get figures of a similar kind in a document later on in the century. This document, known as 'Taxatio Ecclesiastica' and dated 1291, has the following figures:

Great Massingham	£26 -- 13 -- 4
Little Massingham	£10 -- 3 -- 4
Massingham All Saints	£1 -- 13 -- 4

We see then that nearly 700 years ago Massingham had three churches. This may well seem astonishing. Yet there were cases even more astonishing, for Congham also had three churches, and so also had Gayton with its hamlets, and so too had Beechamwell.

3. The Church of St. Mary.

Before the Norman Conquest the capital manor of Massingham was held by King Harold, and after the Conquest it was held by the Conqueror, King William I. It is inconceivable that a parish of such importance, with the King for its lord, could have been left without a church. We cannot be wrong in stating that before the Conquest there was at least

one church, While about the middle of the 12th century there were 'two, and in the middle of the 13th century there were three.

As for the earliest church we need not doubt that it was the church of St. Mary. its connection with the capital manor and the size of its endowments make that quite certain.

We proceed to examine the structure in order as far as possible to ascertain by what stages it has reached its present form.

The Twelfth Century.

The oldest work in the existing structure is to be found in the chancel. We learn this from the corner buttresses, which are typically Norman shallow, yet broad, and of uniform projection throughout their height. These buttresses were doubtless erected as part of a complete chancel, and belong to the 12th century.

The Norman chancel occupied the exact site of the present chancel. But its walls were not so lofty as those of today, and its windows were of course quite different, for they were without tracery. The present windows are insertions of a much later date. Good examples of Norman work are to be seen at Castle Rising and Walsoken.

We cannot but ask whether at Massingham the Norman builders erected a nave as well as a chancel. Most probably they did not. They found in existence a Saxon nave and a Saxon Chancel so at least it seems and they decided to substitute for the Saxon chancel one of more dignified proportions, leaving the erection of a better nave to others.

The Thirteenth Century.

When the century opened, the church as we have just seen had a chancel certainly Norman, and a nave probably Saxon. But at a date near the middle of the century, a south aisle was erected in the style of the period, Early English. Let us examine the remnants of this work still left to us.

There is first the South Doorway, with its rich deep mouldings, its arch of two orders, and its two rows of tooth ornament, the best known ornament of the 13th century.

There are secondly the pillars and arches of the South Arcade. Here the pillars are of quatrefoil section, and the capitals are of corresponding form, while the bases are about a foot in height and not of the 'water-holding' kind. We now turn to the North Aisle, only to find ourselves in the midst of serious difficulties. The capitals of the

pillars and the bases are quite different from those of the South Arcade, with a very notable exception, however, for the respond near the pulpit and its partner near the font show bases and capitals half only in each case like those of the South Arcade. Perhaps a start was made with the North Arcade, but nothing more was done until a much later period.

The Fourteenth Century.

The fine Porch, one of the outstanding features of the church, must be assigned to the year 300 or the years immediately before or after that date. On each side of the Porch there are two triplets of lights, four cusped, and with graceful shafts. The cusps are carefully moulded, and like the capitals point to the period just mentioned. In former days the church Porch had great importance. It was almost an essential part of the church. The Churching Service took place there, and the beginning of the office of Holy Baptism. It was in the Porch that the Marriage Service proper took place old phrase was "marriage at the church door." It was in the Porch that after the ceremony the bride received her dowry. Meetings were held there Meetings of guilds and societies. Payments were made there. The seats were then of real service. And when today we see public notices posted there we must recognize that they indicate something of the way in which the Porch was used in bygone days. But at Massingham the Porch had another use. In its upper room it provided accommodation for a school. Some details about this school will be found later. We pass on to the Font, which comes down to us from the early years of the 14th century. The basin and the shaft that bears it are octagonal. On each side of the basin is the outline of the gable of a niche. The gable itself is straight sided and enriched with crockets of pom pom shape. Within the gable is the outline of a niche, four-cusped, and ogee headed. The whole design is executed in low relief. Another feature due to the 14th century is the Rood Stair. The remains can be seen on the exterior, and show the ogee curve. Inside the Chancel is the doorway which led from the rood stair to the rood loft. Upon this loft, now no longer in existence, stood the Crucifix and the accompanying figures of St. John and the Blessed Virgin. On great festivals the rood-loft was lighted with scores of lights. Perhaps there were singers stationed there, high above the congregation.

The Fifteenth Century and Early Sixteenth

A casual observer, passing by in his car, might well be tempted to exclaim 'Still another of these 15th century churches. The general appearance of the structure would justify the remark, for the influence of the 15th century was very far reaching.

The period was one of great wealth. Many churches were entirely rebuilt, as in the case of St. Nicholas, Lynn, Others were remodelled in accordance with the ideas of the period. This is what took place at Castleacre, Dersingham, and Grimston; and it is what took place also at Great Massingham.

A Clerestory was added to the structure. The work was done on generous lines, and the Clerestory is therefore very lofty. It adds greatly to the dignity of the church. In addition, a Tower was erected. To agree with the general proportions of the church and the loftiness of the Clerestory, the Tower must itself be lofty and dignified, and so we have to-day a fine Tower of great impressiveness. Moreover, the Aisles were reconstructed, and large Windows of the period Perpendicular Windows were inserted. It was at this time that the North Arcade was erected. It was about the same time that Perpendicular windows were inserted on the north and south of the Chancel, and the present piscina and sedilia were constructed.

The changes brought about were very great, and the general appearance of the church was entirely altered. Thus, although the church shows work of the Norman period, as, well as work belonging to the Early English and Decorated periods, its general appearance is that of a Perpendicular structure church of the 15th century.

Internally, there would then be found two side-altars, one at the east end of each Aisle. Perhaps there were other altars. Some may have been connected with guilds, and served by the chaplains of the guilds. Thus in the middle of the 15th century there were among the residents in Massingham three Rectors, one prior, at least two other canons of the priory, and probably one or more chaplains of guilds.

We pass to the 16th century, and note that it gave the Chancel its east window in the days before the Reformation.

Later Changes

The Reformation brought many changes. We have already caught sight of two, the removal of the side altars, and the removal of the rood-loft and its figures. It seems probable that there were no screens to enclose the side-

altars; at any rate there are no signs such as are usually to be found.

We may be sure that there were once paintings on the walls. We may be sure there was colour on the pillars and arches. There would be also a wealth of stained glass, all now disappeared.

It is probably to the Reformation period that we must assign the loss of an important tomb or memorial or Easter Sepulchre which formerly stood on the north side of the sanctuary. And it is certainly to this period that we must assign the loss of vestments and pyxes. and lamps and processional crosses, as well as a rich store of Office Books.

During two centuries or more the fabric of the church passed through a period of neglect. Then came the renewed life and vigour of the 19th century, and with it two important restorations, one in 1862 when Mr. Grenside was rector, and another in 1890 when the rector was Mr. Taft. Though somewhat drastic in character, these restorations secured for many generations of worshippers a church dignified and well seeming, and worthy of its great purpose.

The Organ.

The Organ was constructed by Holditch, a London organ builder, in the year 1877. Its cost was £200, and the organist at the opening ceremony was the builder himself.

The Church Plate.

The oldest portions of the plate belong to the 17th century. They include a large paten which has the year mark for 1658. They include also a very massive flagon with the following inscription: 'To God and ye Church of Great Massingham, Norfolk. for ever, By Charles Calthorpe, Gent., once an inhabitant, who died the 28th day of January 1697 On the chalice, which bears the year mark for 1700, there is the inscription: Massingham Magna 1701. The cover of the chalice stamped EC, the mark of the maker, John Eclairford; but underneath the stem are the letters PA, the mark of Thomas Parr, and the year mark for 1697.

The Church Bells.

There were formerly three bells, one from the 16th century, another from the 17th, and the third from the 18th. The inscriptions read as follows:

1. Thomas Draper made me 1593.
2. Anno Domini 1621.
3. Thomas Newman made mee 1705.

John Carr C. Warden.

The first bell was founded at Thetford, where Thomas Draper was Mayor in 1592. The second and third bells were founded in Norwich.

These three bells were re-founded in 1903, by Taylor of Loughborough. A fourth bell was added at the same time.

4. The Benefice of St. Mary's and its Rectors.

The first rector whose name we know is Ivo, who made the arrangement with the priory of Castleacre, already described, in the days of Bishop de Turbe, 1146 to 1174. Ivo seems to have been rector of both St. Mary's and All Saints.

In 1254 the living of St. Mary's was valued at £26 13s. 4d.

In 1266 Roger de Skerning became rector. He was the nephew of the bishop appointed the same year, and bore the same name as the bishop. They were doubtless connected with Scarning near East Dereham.

Up to this point the patron was the lord of the manor. But in the 3rd year of Edward 1, 1274-5, the patronage was granted to the bishop, and continued in episcopal hands until the Reformation, The only other reference in the 13th century occurs in 'Taxatio Ecclesiastica,' 1291, when the value of the

living was the same as in 1254.

From the beginning of the 14th century our list of rectors is probably complete. The earliest names in the century are

1301 Simon de Ely. 1335 John de Newland.

1312 Simon de Claxby. 1342 John de Etton.

1331 Robert de Usflet. 1346 John de la Mare.

From 1299 to 1325 the bishop was John Salmon, sometimes known as John de Ely. It seems possible then that Simon de Ely, who became Archdeacon of Sudbury in 1311, was his brother. We find mention of Simon de Claxby in connection with the same bishop. When that dignitary went abroad in 1324 'in the kings service,' he was accompanied by seven supporters authorised to make the journey with him, and one of the seven was Simon de Claxby, parson of the church of Massingham. In 1327, when the bishop was William de Ayermin, Simon de Claxby was again called upon to accompany the bishop abroad. The next rector, Robert de Usflet, was nephew of William de Ayermin, and became chancellor of the diocese and archdeacon of Norfolk. It is interesting to note that Airmyn and Ousefleet are West Riding villages near Selby, while Etton, from which John de Etton came, is an East Riding village near Beverley. By his will John de Etton, who died as rector of Great Massingham,

bequeathed funds for the erection of a chapel at Etton. John de la Mare bore a name which comes to notice in the parish nearly a century before his time. In the Patent Rolls for 1267 a certain Richard de la Mare, who belonged to Little Massingham is mentioned. He had been involved in the death of Geoffrey Mereveyle, but was pardoned. We pass on to a series of eight rectors appointed in the second half of the 14th century:

1351 Laurence de Littelton.	1389 John Ingayn.
1354 John Leche.	1390 Walter Eston.
1375 John de Derlington.	1399 Thomas Bradmere.
1375 Thomas de Tunstale.	1399 John Lutterell.

In the midst of a long series of brief incumbencies John Leche's tenure of office deserves note. He was rector for 21 years. His successor, John de Derlington, was already chancellor of the diocese, and became archdeacon. The next four rectors were:

1405 John Fermer.	1421 Hugh Knys.
1416 John Skot.	1439 Robert Appulhy, LL.B.

John Fermer was buried in the chancel where there is a grave stone to his memory. When John Skot was appointed he was Only subdeacon, and it was not until 1417 that he was ordained deacon and priest similarly, Hugh Kays was only subdeacon, and was not ordained deacon until 1425. Robert Appulby, who held the living from 1439 to 1444, was afterwards rector of Grimston, namely, from 1444 to 1459. He became Prebendary of Norwich. Of the four rectors who come next, three became archdeacons:

1444 John Saresson	1455 Robert Appulby.
1452 John Selot.	1458 Thomas Mark.

The first of these. John Saresson. became abbot of West Dereham in 1429, and held the post until his death in 1455. The mortuary roll of the abbey pays a striking tribute to his memory, describing him as a man of high discretion, *vir altoe discreciouis*. From the year 1452 he was Archdeacon of Sudbury. John Selot became archdeacon in 1462, and chancellor in 1471. Thomas Mark; became archdeacon in 1476. We have now come to the time when the livings of St. Mary's and All Saints were united. The first rector under the new regime was Thomas Dust. He and seven successors carry us from 1459 to the eve of the Reformation:

1455) Thomas Dust S.T.P.	1494 John Jollys.
1472 John Wylton LL B.	1503 Alexander Soham.
1475 Nicholas Goldwell.	1506 Thomas Hare LL.D.
1478 Thomas Marke.	1520 William Newton.

Nicholas Goldwell was a brother of Bishop Goldwell. It was in his time that the priory of Great Massingham was amalgamated with that of Westacre. He was made chancellor in 1482 and archdeacon in 1483. Thomas Hare was a member of

the West Norfolk family of the name. He was rector of Grimston from 1508 to 1520, and throughout the period was chancellor of the diocese. William Newton, like so many of his predecessors, was made archdeacon. His successor appears to have been John Stele (or Style) who was presented by the bishop, but whose dates are unknown. The next rector was presented by Queen Mary:

1553 Thomas Abhatt S.T.B.

And the next by Philip and Mary:

1556 John Nowell S.T.B.

And after this Sir Thomas Gresham was patron:

1567 Thomas Langton B.A.

1572 William Sole M.A.

The last-named held the living for 48 years, and was succeeded by

1620 Christopher Poolie M.A.

Until 1660 no other appointment is known. It would be interesting to know whether Christopher Poolie did indeed hold the living right through the Commonwealth period.

Succeeding rectors were:

1660 John Beridge S.T.P. 1771 William Trivett M.A

1690 Samuel Harding. 1772 Cock Langford B.A.

1694 Benjamin Squire M.A 1789 Thomas Ball D.D.

1731 John Gardner D.D. 1739 Briggs Cary B.A.

1793 Horace Hamond.

The last-named died at Bath, and is buried in the abbey there. He was a member of a well known West Norfolk family, and there is a memorial to him at South Wootton. We are now brought to the last names on the list four rectors appointed during the 19th century:

1816 Christopher Grenside.

1372 Edward Gladwin Arnold M.A.

1887 John Reuben Taft.

1896 Charles Mortimer McAnally M.A.

There are many members of the community who will remember each of the four. We cannot but note that Christopher Grenside, who died in 1871, was rector 55 years, a longer period than any other rector on our list. We cannot but note further that the present rector was appointed Rural Dean of Rising in 1918, and Honorary Canon of Norwich in 1926.

5. The Church of All Saints.

The earliest reference to this church is in the 12th century, when, as we have seen, the monks of Castleacre agreed to pay to the benefice 5s' a year in lieu of tithes. In the 'Norwich Valuation,' 1254, the living of All Saints is valued at two marks, and in 'Taxatio Ecclesiastica,' 1291, the value is given as two marks and a half.

The patronage of the living was connected with one of the manors, the one known as Feltham's, and from 1315 to 1349 the rector was a member of the family, namely, John de Feltham. It seems probable that this rector was one of the victims of the Black Death, for it was in 1348 and 1349 that the terrible pestilence wrought such havoc throughout the length and breadth of the land.

From the year 1301 to the middle of the following century we have what appears to be a complete list of rectors, twelve for the whole period:

1301 Robert de Stanes.	1371 John de Braklin.
1304 Richard le Mey.	1377 Robert Smith.
1315 John de Feltham.	1381 Paul de Dunton
1349 John Hakun.	1381 William Wrong.
1370 John de Stoke.	1414 Richard Trover.
1371 Robert de Geydingtnn.	1427 William Gamelston.

In 1459 an appointment was made to St. Mary's and All Saints' conjointly, and from that time onward the two benefices have been held together.

According to Blomefield (ix. 12) the church was still in existence in the year 1392.

It is believed that the site of the church was adjacent to the churchyard of St. Mary's, on the south-east side. This land, now occupied by cottages, is glebe. but is known as Chapel Yard. As the word 'chapel' cannot refer to any Nonconformist place of worship, we may well believe its reference is to All Saints'. Being of smaller importance than St. Mary's, All Saints' may have been looked upon as a chapel to that church.

6. The Priory.

The Priory was founded by Nicholas of Massingham, and was originally dedicated to St. Mary. There are many references in the 13th and 14th centuries which speak of it as the hospitium of the Blessed Mary of Great Massingham *hospitium beatoe Marioe de Magna Massingham*. In documents dated 1299 and 1325, however, it is spoken of as dedicated to St. Mary and St. Nicholas.

In the 45th year of Henry III. (1260-61) Nicholas of Massingham made a grant to William, the prior, of exceptional importance. This grant included a messuage and mill in Massingham, a rent of 5s. there, and properties in Setch, Marham, and West Winch. But its most substantial gift was two carucates of land about 240 acres in Massingham. This can scarcely be other than the founders original endowment, for it includes nearly all the properties held in 1291.

The annual value of the properties at that date, as given in 'Taxatio Ecclesiastica,' was £18 2s., divided as follows:

Runcton, rent	£0 - 0 - 0½
West Winch, rent	£0 - 0 - 7½
Little Massingham	£0 - 16 - 0
Great Massingham	£16 - 17 - 0
Weasenham, land	£0 - 5 - 0
Marham, a turbarry	£0 - 0 - 4

The rents at Runcton and West Winch must be identified, one thinks, with the founder's gifts at Setch and West Winch. The turbarry at Marham the right to dig turfs on certain lands was apparently the founder's original grant in that parish. And the properties in Massingham must have been largely those granted by the founder in 1260-61. In fact only one clearly defined addition to the endowments had been made, viz., the land at Weasenham. If, as seems probable, the grant in 1260-61 was indeed the founders original endowment, we may fairly conclude that the Priory was founded either in the year 1260 or within a year of that date.

The founder made his great gift subject to an important condition, viz., that three life annuities should be paid one of £15 to himself, one of £5 to his brother John, and one of £4. to his sister Jeane. We can scarcely doubt that the donor was advanced in years. Moreover the gift, one thinks, was substantially the whole of his property. Between 1291 and 1339 the Priory received a large number of additional gifts. its services were greatly valued, and it won the goodwill of many people. But the gifts were usually small three acres of land, four acres, five roods, one acre, and even half an acre. This, however, has an interest all its own, for in those days the arable land was divided into strips of an acre or half an acre, strips roughly a furlong in length and either a chain in breadth or half a chain. About thirty people are named among the donors. We find such names as William son of Seman le Webbe (Seaman the weaver), John son of Geoffrey son of Emma. Among those who certainly belonged to Massingham were John son of Robert de Holm, William Manning, John de Feltham, Richard de Wynhouse, Ralph son of Matthew, John le Tayllur and Godfrey his son, Ivo Jocelyn who gave a messuage and eight acres, and Laurence de Massingham who gave twenty acres.

In the time of Edward 11 the Priory obtained permission to acquire further properties to the annual value of £10. It does not appear. however, that gifts at all near that value were ever received. A great change was coming over the spirit of the people, and when in 1475 its circumstances were enquired into the Priory was found wasted and the

buildings decayed. In consequence, under a licence from Bishop Goldwell, the Priory was amalgamated with that of Westacre. Possibly we must see in this the hand of the rector, Nicholas Goldwell.

Like that of Westacre, the Priory at Massingham was one of Augustinian Canons, one of the most popular of religious orders. The members were commonly spoken of as 'Black Canons' on account of their dress, which included a black cloak and hood worn over a black cassock. We can readily picture them. They must have been one of the most striking features in the old-time life of the village. Perhaps it will help us more clearly to realize their character, if we remember that they held an intermediate place between ordinary monks and parish priests. They have been described as very much like a community of parish priests living under rule. They were pledged to poverty, obedience, and chastity; they lived and worshipped together; and they laboured among the people. If a parish church was in their patronage, they undertook the pastoral care, and served the church. We know that the Priory at Massingham held the patronage of a church at Warham near Wells; the Canons became patrons in 1339.

We know the names of twelve priors, William, who was prior at the foundation, Geoffrey of Fakenham, who was appointed in 1299, and the ten following:

1325 John de Lenne.	1405 Robert Bate.
1354 John de Wesenham.	1420 John de Hegham.
1372 John de Reynham.	1420 Nicholas Felhrigg.
1378 Roger de Brisele.	1456 John Gedney.
1395 Stephen Helgeye.	1467 John Cousyn.

Almost all were Norfolk men as their names bear witness. They were connected with Fakenham and Lynn, with Weasenham and Raynham and Brisley, with Hilgay and Heigham and Felbrigg.

Perhaps the most interesting references to the Priory are those which speak of it as a *hospitium*'—a place where provision was made for the sick and needy—a place moreover where pilgrims and other travellers could obtain hospitality without charge. Such houses had usually an almoner, and according to the rules of the order the almoner should be 'pityful and God-fearing.' and 'old men who are decrepid, lame, and blind or bedridden, he should often visit and suitably supply.

As settled after the amalgamation in 1475 the Priory had in residence two Canons and two poor brethren. But in previous years it was of course larger. We know that in 1299 it had its prior, its subprior, and its brethren, one of them the cellarer. We may be sure that the villagers had real cause for gratitude to the Priory, some for alms, and some for

hospitality. We may be sure also that an almost ceaseless stream of pilgrims found shelter and refreshment under its roof as they made their way to Walsingham.

Among the pilgrims who visited Massingham on their way to Walsingham we must count one of the greatest of our early kings, Edward I. It was in the year 1302. The King had been in Scotland, and in March we find him in Yorkshire. On the 26th of the month he was at Peterborough, and on the 29th at Great Massingham. He had travelled no doubt by Lynn and Grimston, and he was housed, we may well believe, in one of the Manor Houses, while some of his people were provided for at the Priory. We know something of his further movements. On the 30th he was at Walsingham; on the 1st of April at Swaffham; on the 3rd at Bury; on the 4th at Newmarket. As he traversed the country in this way, he was called upon to sign various documents; thus the records given us in the Patent Rolls make the King's movements plain. At the Dissolution the annual value of the Priory was £24 16s. There is an 'elaborate survey and rental,' dated 1540, at the Public Record Office.

And now a word as to the site and buildings.

The site is now occupied by the residence of Mr C Dewar, C.C., J.P., who purchased it from the Marquis of Cholmondeley. It lies some distance north-west of the church, and faces the green.

In the year 1302, as we learn from the Patent Rolls, the Canons were given permission to close a footpath. They desired to enlarge their premises, but the way was blocked by a path on the west side. This agrees with the site as we know the west side looked out on the open country. It agrees moreover with the plan on which the smaller Augustinian houses were erected, for they consisted of a long narrow range of buildings terminating toward the east in a chapel. Such a building could obviously be best enlarged by continuing it toward the west. In this way the chapel and its east window would be left untouched.

6. Miscellaneous Notes.

The parish formerly had a market. According to the Charter Rolls a grant was made to John de Norwich. Knt and his heirs, of a weekly market on Friday at their manor of Great Massingham in Norfolk. This was in 1334. At the same time a grant was made to the same persons of a yearly fair in the parish to be held 'on the vigil, the feast, and the morrow of St. Simon and St. Jude, the Apostles.

The earliest of all the references to the school formerly held in the church porch occurs in the will of Charles Calthorpe. The date of the will is May 5th, 1676, and the testator bequeathed thereby the sum of £20 a year for the

erecting of a free school in Massingham, for the free teaching and instructing of twenty-five children, &c. In the latter part of the will he requested the church wardens and Overseers to 'stir up the inhabitants of the town to put their children to be taught'; he also requested 'that they would make fit the schoolhouse over the porch by repairing and glazing the same and setting up and suitable seats. (Report of Charity Commissioners, 1834).

It seems then that in 1676 the school was no longer in use. It was indeed seriously dilapidated. But in former times it had been a flourishing institution. We can scarcely doubt that the school was founded in pre-Reformation days, and we may be sure that the teacher was then a chantry priest or the chaplain of a guild.

Among the scholars there was one who afterwards became Prime Minister, namely, Robert Walpole. Daily, we are told, he rode over from Houghton on a pony. This must have been as long ago as 1685, when the teacher was probably a curate.

(See *Norfolk Archeology*. viii 35 and 255). Within living memory a large room was still in existence over the porch. It was reached by a staircase entered from the nave. According to Ladbroke's drawing, made about a hundred years ago, there were two small windows on the east side, and we may assume that there were similar windows on the west.

The school was continued until 1837, when it was consolidated with the National School.

Monastic houses in west Norfolk were at one time very numerous. Not only had Massingham its Priory, but several adjacent parishes had Priories also. There were the great foundations at Castleacre and Westacre. There was a notable house at Coxford in Rudham. And there were houses of smaller importance at Flitcham and at Well Hall in Gayton. Several houses had possessions in Massingham. From the *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* of Pope Nicholas we learn that in 1291 the following religious houses had interests in Great Massingham:

Castleacre, annual value	£7-1-1
Westacre, annual value	£0-3-6
Wymondham, annual value	£0-13-7

and the following had interests in Little Massingham

Castleacre, annual value	£2-11-11
Creake Annual Value	£0-6-8

To these we must add the interests of

St. Mary of Massingham	£17-13-0
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and we then get a total of £28-9s-9d. Add to this the amount of the three livings in 1291,

£38-10s-0d., and we find that the material support given to religious purposes reached the annual sum of £66-19s-9d., a Sum strikingly large.

In 1533, John Leland, the famous antiquary, was commissioned by Henry VIII. to search the records of antiquity in the Cathedrals, Colleges, Abbeys, and Priories of our Country. with unwearied diligence he traversed England from end to end during the next six years. and Collected a whole world of things very memorable.' In the course of this tour he visited Massingham, and this is how he speaks of the place - Massingham a praty Tounelet, a 4 miles from Westacre Northeast. He describes the Priory as a 'Cell' belonging to Westacre, and he enumerates the inmates as two Canons and two poor brethren, '*duo canonici et duo oratores pauperes*'.

In the third quarter of the 18th century there was resident in the village a surgeon and apothecary of great distinction, William Bewley, sometimes spoken of as the Philosopher of Massingham.' He came to the parish apparently from the North in the year 1749, and continued to reside there for the rest of his life, save that on the approach of death he made visits to friends which led to his demise far away from home, viz', in London, where he was buried in 1783 at St. Martins in the Fields. His death took place on September 5th, the anniversary of his birthday and the anniversary also of his wedding day. William Bewley died at the house of Dr Burney, formerly of King's Lynn, one of his greatest friends; and he had just visited at Birmingham another of his greatest friends, Dr Priestley. As we might gather from these friendships, his interests were centred chiefly on Music and Natural Science.

He was a valued contributor to the 'Monthly Review,' and wrote for that periodical important notices of Priestley's 'History of Electricity' and Hawkin's 'History of Music. Many of his papers were inserted in volumes published by Priestley, with whom he was continually in correspondence. As a professional man he was greatly respected, but he was chiefly honoured as a thinker, where he was little inferior to the most notable of his contemporaries. He was not only a wise and great man, hut a man of real goodness of heart, a beloved physician.