

Leaflet in St Stephens Chapel was photographed and then OCR software used to extract text from jpg file. Please allow for formatting and other errors

St. Edmund, Bures.

Many details in this brochure are taken from a series of interesting and learned notes on the History by Colonel W. C. Probert, published in the Bures Parish Magazine in 1923 and following years.

It is on Christmas Day in the year 855 A.D. that the known history of Bures begins. Not that this was the date of its origin. The name is Keltic and it is probable the township existed even before the Romans conquered Britain, although story of those earlier centuries has perished.

But we know something of the year 855.AD, a great event happened here on Christmas Day.

There was a royal palace at Bures - they called it Burva then.

The township and the palace stood in the midst of vast forests that covered all this part of Suffolk; only along the banks of the Stour and its tributary streams were there human settlements.

At about three quarters of a mile from the township, to the east of the road which we now call Cuckoo Hill stood a little Church.

Doubtless it was built of wood hewn from the forest and roofed with thatch like many other Suffolk Churches in the ninth century, for East Anglia was a Christian land.

From the palace on that Christmas Day a procession is setting out. Armed men surround it for they are perilous times. In the midst, a lad of fifteen years is riding and at his side is a Bishop in his Canonicals.

Other priests and attendants form the retinue.

In stately order they are riding along the lane that will bring them to the Church - the same lane, maybe, by which your motor car brought you here today

Within, a solemn Service begins. The boy is kneeling before the Bishop who places on his head a simple crown and anoints him with holy oil. He is the king of East Anglia, Edmund or Aedmund by name.

We know the day and the story because Asser, the monk, who lived and wrote in those days, in his 'Life of Alfred' tells us

"Christmas Day 855. On this day was the Holy Edmund crowned and anointed with holy oil King of East Anglia by Humbert, Bishop of Elmham, at Burva which was then a royal residence."

"Humbert, Bishop of the East Angles, anointed with oil and consecrated as king, the glorious Edmund with much rejoicing and great honour, in the royal town called Burva, in which at that time was the royal seat, in the 15th. year of his age, on a Friday, the 24th. moon, being Christmas Day"

A gallant young King was Edmund. He was of old Saxon race, a fair-haired Christian boy whom Offa, the good king of East Anglia, had chosen to be his successor.

Desperate troubles beset the kingdom. Danish warriors invaded the land, at first in marauding bands that sailed into the mouths of the little rivers to ravage the countryside, afterwards in a powerful army. Edmund fought them bravely but his resources were inadequate. In 870 the army of the Danes concentrated at Thetford, then the capital of the Kingdom

To meet them Edward advanced. To meet them the Danes sent an embassy to bring to the king the offer of his lid on condition of his accepting the overlordship of the heathen Danish chieftains.
He refused

"I am trice vowed to God" he said, "for the service of this realm. The heathen promise life, I care not for it, a kingdom, that I have; riches, I do not need them. Shall I serve two masters, I who am pledged solely to the service of Jesus Christ?"

They fought and the Danes prevailed.
At Hoxne(Near Diss) they captured the king, bound him to a tree, riddled him with arrows and finally beheaded him. Edmund was thirty years of age, it was fifteen years since he was crowned in the Chapel at Bures.

In the next four centuries or so our Chapel has no record, it is probable that the original little wooden Church was, like many others in East Anglia, burnt by the Danes.

But in 1218 the story can be resumed. Bures was no longer a royal residence. According to the Domesday Survey this part of the parish belonged to the manor of Tani and was the property of the famous family of de Tani or Tawni had originally acquired it by a grant from William the Conqueror.

In 1218 the manor was possessed by Sir Gilbert de Tani whose mansion was probably situated on the summit of the hill which is now called, as it was then called 'Cuckoo Hill'.

For the service of this house Sir Gilbert (d. 1221) rebuilt the Chapel. The day of its consecration was a great day in the history of Bures for the Prelate who performed the act was no other than Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury and Cardinal of Rome

One can imagine that powerful reasons must have induced the Archbishop to undertake the journey to a small village church in East Anglia. The route lay through forests in which bears and wolves were numerous; rivers and swamps must be crossed; a considerable armed retinue would be needed; several days journey would be required.

What drew the Primate of All England to the little Chapel at Bures? possibly it was a tie of Kinship for the Langton family had held property in the

neighbourhood and the Archbishop may perhaps have been born here. But it can scarcely be doubted that one of the strongest attractions was the fact that the new Chapel was built on the site of the one in which St Edmund was crowned

Whatever were the attractions the fact is certain, the existing Chapel was consecrated by Archbishop Langton who, three years earlier had stood at the head of the barons at Runnymede and compelled King John to sign Magna Carta.

Today the visitor can see some of the Consecration Marks on the walls, three on each of the walls North, South and East inside the Chapel, and some of the tablets of cement which still mark, after seven centuries of weathering, the sites of nine similar markings on the exterior of the walls.

Present in the congregation on that great day was probably the grandfather of the 5th. Earl of Oxford (from Earls Colne close by) whose effigy now lies in the north west corner of the Chapel. Much later we find that Sir William de Waldegrave who built the Waldegrave Chantry in the Parish Church, directs in his Will in 1527, that "Masses may be sung for ever on the Feast of St. Stephen in the Chapel of St. Stephen in Tany Park for the soul of his friend and companion in the War of the Roses, the late Earl of Oxford, the 14th

Other personages too may have worshipped within these walls, among them King Edward I, for when his daughter Princess Joan of Acre made a runaway marriage with her lover, the King returned in haste from his Scottish expedition and spent ten days at Tany Manor while the country was being searched for truants who were later found at Ipswich.

The story of succeeding centuries is obscure. The property of the Manor was in course of dispersed; the Chapel fell into disuse; the sacred vessels disappeared; the sound of prayer and praise was no longer heard within its walls. Different farmers held the land. One of them required cottages for his labourers; he built six inside the Chapel.

Another wanted a large barn; he pulled down the west wall of the Chapel, built on to its western end a large brick and timber annexe, cut out a space of about fifteen feet in the north and south walls so that the wains(wagons) might pass through and added an excrescence for storage purposes on the north side.

At one time it is said, the Chapel was used as a Pest House, at another time as a Smallpox Hospital.

In the 20th. century the property belonged to Miss Isabel Baynes Badcock, a devout and artistic lady, her dearest wish was to restore the Chapel to its pristine beauty and to its sacred use. Her brother-in-law Colonel W.G.C. Probert, the owner of Bevills, well known as a skilled archaeologist (and direct in line from William Waldegrave) eagerly furthered her purpose and devoted time and learning to the work.

In 1931 the restoration was begun.

The roof, which was in holes, was rethatched, the interior ceiled, the west wall was rebuilt, the great gaps in the north and south walls were built up, the windows were filled with beautiful stained glass,

Some from an earlier Earls Colne Priory House which had belonged to the family of Colonel Probert and had been demolished.

The earthen floor was paved, a vault was excavated at the East end, and a stone altar was re-dedicated

The Chapel was re-dedicated in 1940 by the Bishop of Ipswich and St Edmundsbury

R.E.J.

(The Rev. Canon Johnston)