

**DIOCESAN  
HISTORIES.  
NORWICH**

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Diocesan histories. Norwich by Augustus Jessopp

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**AUGUSTUS JESSOPP**

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## P R E F A C E .

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WHEN I undertook to draw up a brief history of the East Anglian Diocese, I was living within a stone's throw of the archives of the see and of the archdeaconries of Norfolk and Norwich. By the great kindness of the keepers of those treasures I had, in the course of years, acquired some familiarity with them, and in a vague manner I had been making notes and extracts which had accumulated upon me. I thought it probable that I could write my book, *currente calamo*, in three months. Alas ! it is one thing to know something, or even a great deal, *about* your subject, and quite another to know the subject itself. It ended by my going through all the early episcopal registers, page by page, and by my filling many volumes with notes, each of those volumes more bulky than the little one to which they have served as apparatus. It is not likely that the result of my labours—if they deserve such a grand name—will ever interest any one else as much as the research itself has interested me. I have laid under contribution a very large mass of original sources

which are easily accessible to any one who has *served his apprenticeship*, but which, it must be confessed, are in a somewhat chaotic condition ; the most important of them I may perhaps be allowed to indicate for the benefit of others.

- I. The principal Records in the Bishop's Registry were noticed in the first Report of the Historical MSS. Commission, but there is a huge mass of documents unarranged and little known which sorely need to be set in order. Perhaps the most valuable of these would prove to be the *Evidence Books* containing the depositions of witnesses in Causes Ecclesiastical. Students of our social history would find here a mine of information which has hardly been looked *at*, certainly not looked *into*, and which would yield a rich return to intelligent research.
- II. The Documents belonging to the Archdeaconry of Norfolk are now most carefully preserved, but they have not always been under such conscientious custody. I have some reason for believing that the records, when Tanner was archdeacon, went back as far as the thirteenth century. Now they contain nothing anterior to the sixteenth, not much so early as that. They are comparatively of little value or interest.
- III. The Archives of the Archdeaconry of Norwich

are far more extensive and far more valuable than those of the Archdeaconry of Norfolk. Indeed, they are so voluminous that it would be impossible to arrange them until a suitable depository could be provided for them. The extreme kindness and courtesy of Mr. Overbury has enabled me to do something at this important collection, but it is hopeless to think of making any real impression upon it as long as every hour that the student bestows upon it he feels that he is imposing upon the good-nature of a friend on whose hospitality he has no claim.

- IV. The Archives of the Archdeaconry of Suffolk, I am told, are even more rich than those of the Norwich archdeaconry. I have hitherto been deterred from visiting them; but they, too, must contain an immense store of materials requiring to be calendered and arranged.
- V. Of the Documents belonging to the Archdeaconry of Sudbury I can give no account. The greater part of this archdeaconry was handed over to the see of Ely in 1837, and I presume that the bulk of the documents relating to it passed away from us at that time. I happen to know, however, that *all* the documents did not so pass, and that they are

occasionally to be found where they ought not to be.

VI. The Parochial Registers throughout the diocese have been wonderfully well preserved, whatever may be said to the contrary. When a man has taken notes from parish registers by the hundred, and extracted entries by the thousand, he is qualified to pronounce an opinion upon a question of this kind. He knows how much he has to be thankful for.

VII. On the other hand, the enormous destruction of such books, accounts, and other records which were in the custody of the churchwardens is past all reckoning. What remain are but very insignificant fragments, and rarely of any value.

All such sources of information require to be utilised—besides a great many others—by any one who hopes to get any intimate knowledge of the history of a diocese. Unhappily that which has been the case elsewhere has been the case in East Anglia, the Records have at various times suffered very unfair usage, sometimes from mere ignorant carelessness, but sometimes from downright pillage. Foxe, the "Martyrologist," wrought us very grievous wrong. He was an intimate friend of Bishop Parkhurst, and he evidently had from the bishop the loan of the



old Registers of the see. He extracted from them largely, but he never returned them. At least one of them—and how many more I know not—is by a strange freak of fortune now in the custody of Cardinal Manning. But by far the most shameless plunderer of the see, as far as its ancient evidences are concerned, was Bishop Tanner. During the eleven years that he was Archdeacon of Norfolk he seems to have treated the Records of the archdeaconry as if they were his own, and whenever he got an original document into his hands he kept it and added it to his collection. That he used his documents well, nobody disputes; but the Tanner MSS. and the invaluable Charters and Rolls which he bequeathed to the Bodleian tell their own tale. The incomparable catalogues of these collections would certainly never have been made if they had not found their way to Oxford; but it is a serious consideration to the local antiquary (who is likely to bring to his researches more special knowledge and more enthusiasm than is to be looked for in the Cosmopolitan) that he must incur the inconvenience and expense of a journey to Oxford, and perhaps a long sojourn there, before he can consult documents which have been removed from their proper home. Historical research in the provinces need not be, and ought not to be made unnecessarily difficult. Local antiquaries are in some sense specialists, and to

centralise all historical documents, and gather them all together into one colossal *tabularium*, is going the right way to extinguish the local specialist altogether.

It may be said—and with some justice—that this little volume is a ridiculous little mouse to come out of years of research. Yes, it may be so. But, as one of my correspondents observed to me, *some people have microscopes.*

That there are no blunders—perhaps silly blunders—in the little book I do not at all hope. Of only one writer of history that I ever heard of, can it be said that he has never been convicted of making a mistake; but the Bishop of Chester is not as other men are.

If any students, other than East Anglians, should happen to take up this book, let me suggest to them that there are two matters which deserve much more attention than they have yet received, and which a very little original research would throw great light upon. First, the course which the Black Death ran and the violence of its incidence upon the clergy in the fourteenth century; and, secondly, the extent to which the married clergy were ejected from their livings in Queen Mary's time. There is yet another matter which the records of the Archdeacons' Courts in the various dioceses throw great light upon, viz., the moral condition of the people and the status of the clergy relatively to their flocks. But let me

warn inquirers in this field of research not to be hasty in coming to conclusions, and not to be deterred by the dreary monotony and repulsive character of too much that will come before them. The picture we get of country life, for instance, in the sixteenth century, from these records, first startles, then perplexes the student; by-and-by he sees the absolute necessity of withholding his verdict, and that a superficial examination would tempt him to construct almost any theory he set himself to support. The fact is that any one can be an Old Bailey advocate. The judicial faculty—the faculty of weighing and sifting evidence, of suspending judgment till the whole case has been laid before us, of gathering up the clues and testing the strength of every strain, - that is a very precious faculty indeed: it is granted to few. Meanwhile hasty generalisation can only land us upon ground where we can never be sure that we have a firm foot-hold.

It will give me great pleasure to correspond with such intelligent inquirers as may wish to be referred to the authorities for any statements I have made in the volume. There is one statement the truth of which I cannot yet substantiate to my satisfaction, though I am persuaded of the truth of it.

I should be very ungrateful if I did not acknowledge my deep obligation to my old friend Dr. Luard, Registrar of the University of Cambridge. His