

TRANSACTIONS  
OF THE  
ESSEX ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

THE RECORDS OF THE  
ARCHDEACONRIES OF ESSEX AND  
COLCHESTER.

BY REV. W. J. PRESSEY, F.S.A.

THERE are many documents connected with our Essex churches which are invaluable to the student of parochial history. Hidden away in many an ancient parish chest side by side with the registers, are old books of Churchwarden's accounts and other volumes, belonging to a time when Essex was part of the great Diocese of London, and when the Vestry was the chief centre of parochial activity.

But of all such documents there are assuredly none which are of greater interest and value both to clergy and other students of parochial lore than the records of the two archdeaconries of Essex and Colchester. These records, which, speaking roughly, consist of about 200 and odd volumes—formerly in the parvise of the Cathedral, but now in the Registry at Chelmsford—date from about 1540 to 1707. They are varied in character. Some are merely books of Depositions made by witnesses for legal purposes. Others are largely concerned with matters testamentary. There are also volumes of Visitations which furnish not only minute information as to the state of the different churches and their belongings, but also interesting lists of the clergy, wardens, sidesmen, and others.

It is, however, in the Minute Books belonging to the Courts of the Archdeacons that the chief interest will be found, for in these volumes may be seen, as in a *Camera Obscura*, the actual life of the

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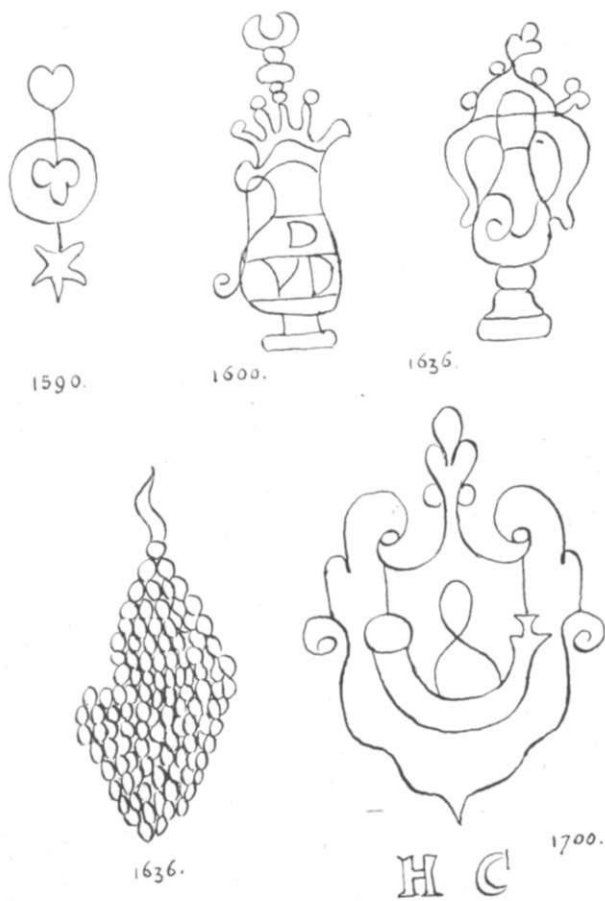
MINUTE BOOK (1590-1592).  
COLCHESTER ARCHDEACONRY.

people of Essex as it was in times long passed away, showing in the most vivid manner the lives, conversation, customs, condition, character, and occupations of those who lived in the towns and villages which we now inhabit, and worshipped in the churches in which we worship to-day. Before taking into consideration the actual contents of these volumes, it may be well to say a word or two concerning the books themselves. Their average measurement is about 11 inches in height by 8<sup>1/2</sup> inches in width though there are some of smaller dimensions, and they vary in thickness from 2<sup>3/4</sup> inches to half-an-inch. Some of these Records have become hopelessly dilapidated by time and damp, but the larger number are in quite a fair state of preservation, and some are excellent examples of their period both with respect to their internal condition and binding.

A note by the late Dr. Andrew Clark, a former rector of Great Leighs, who transcribed many of these volumes, may serve to give some notion as to the method by which most of these books seem to have been compiled. He writes (*Essex Review*, vol. xxxii., p. 132) :

"A record . . . (*i.e.* for the Visitations of 1587, 1588) was made in a very rough and ready fashion by the deputy Registrar of the Archdeacon's Court, John Redstone, a Notary Public. This official wrote rather a microscopic hand with the pen-strokes made very thin by a hard quill, and the lines all but touching each other.

"His method was this : he took a score or so of sheets of thin, cheap, foolscap paper, folded the bundle in the middle, and stitched it with a stout linen thread, thus forming a thin, coverless, quarto note-book. Into this, prior to any Visitation, he wrote in the order of their respective parishes the list of all persons cited to be present. This list was quite out of date, since the citations were based upon the former Visitation, and took no account of changes occasioned by death, or removal, or resignation of office. During the Visitation this list was brought up-to-date by striking out the names which had to be removed, and inserting somehow the names which were to replace them, often with just a brief note of the reason for the change—such as, dead, gone out of the parish—sometimes in English, sometimes in Latin. Round this central tangle he jotted down his memoranda as to the persons concerned, their presence or absence, their presentments or their neglect to make presentments, the excuses offered, or the penalties inflicted, with reference to proceedings in past Courts or Visitations as to steps to be taken in future Courts; and all this in a set of traditional abbreviations partly English, but for the most part in Latin, which served the purpose of shorthand, so that when he had completed his record it



WATERMARKS.

had become so confused as to be altogether repellant to the eye, and extremely difficult to unravel. No clear copy was made. The bundle was simply stitched just as it was, with other similar bundles, into a folded parchment sheet which furnished the cover."

It was then in some such fashion as this that these archdeaconry records were put together, and, in the light of this information, the labours of both Dr. Clark, and the late Mr. R. H. Browne, of Stapleford Abbots—who has left behind him eleven folio volumes of transcripts—will be better understood and appreciated.

It must not, however, be supposed that Dr. Clark's pungent description of the work of the deputy registrar, John Redstone (Notary Public 1586-1603), is applicable to all these volumes. Although the method by which they were compiled was probably the same, yet there are, nevertheless, many examples in which the handwriting is remarkably clear and neat, nor is it greatly disfigured by erasures and interpolations. This is certainly the case with the records left by Edward Tillingham (N.P. *circa* 1639), and also those of William Whetstone (N.P. *circa* 1614). The bindings of these volumes varies. While in some instances they are just encased within a cover of parchment, there are others which are neatly bound with leather back-pieces and fastened by means of a strap and buckle.

Nor are the watermarks traceable upon the paper which forms the pages of these books, the least interesting feature in connection with them. That much of the paper which was used was of foreign manufacture seems evident from the character of these marks. There is, for example, the pot (or flagon), an old mark which suggests that the paper was probably manufactured in Holland, and is the mark which has given to paper of this character the descriptive title known to the trade as "pot-size." Other watermarks which figure in these volumes are the "dexter hand" (originally a German device), the "bunch of grapes slipped in the stalk" (a French design), and various grotesques known as "agathademons." That the material was of first-class quality is evident, from the fact that where it has been preserved from the effects of damp, and the ravages of vermin, its condition, both with regard to colour and texture—in spite of the wear and tear of some three-and-a-half centuries'—is almost as good as when it first left the mill.

From an entry in one of the minute books belonging to the Essex Archdeaconry, under date 1592, we are given a glimpse of the constitution of the court of the archdeacon of Essex at that period and of the various officials connected with it:

In Capella de Rumford xvij die mensis Jan 1592 omnes quorum nomina et cognomina hie inferius scribentur prestiterunt juramentum de suprema regia auctoritate.

Dominus Dr. W. Tabor, Arch [idiaconus].

Johannes Brathwate, R [egistra] rius.

Jacobus Thwaites, Procu [ra] tor.

Ricardus Stave (or, possibly, Stone), Procurator.

Gulmus Thwaitz, deput Re [gistra] rii.

Thomas Tabor, Serviens &c. Archidiaconi.

Jacobus Brake, Apparitor.

Josephus Haverd, Serviscius.

Georgius Cole, Servus Jacobi Thwaitz.

Then follow the names of such as were precluded from carrying out the duties of their office, until they had taken the oath of supremacy, which they did at a later date, viz. :

In Ecclesia parochiali de Badowe Magna xxlv die mensis Jan 1592 jurati:

Johannes Redstone, Procurator.

Gulmus Boxar, Apparitor.

Thomas Harding, Apparitor.

In Ecclesia parochiali de Ongar Alta xxi Jan 1592 juratus :

Wmus Overall, Mandatorius.

Of these officials the records seem to shew that it was the Apparitor whose duties were most often the cause of friction. He it was who had to cite offenders or suspects to the Court, and to see that they duly put in an appearance on the appointed day, and as a consequence, even the most tactful of his class would not always be able to avoid hard words, or sometimes even actual violence.

*Court at Coggeshall:* Die Martis, 23 Febr 1590.

Fering (Lib lxx., fol 7)—John Warren,

That he did say in Corte "you keep your apparitors to go pricking up and down the country, and that they should cite for your own gains."

*Court at Colchester :* 1587 (Lib. lxxvii., fol. 230).

Weeley—John Saunders,

That he did call . . . Pierpoint the officer of the Court "Knave," and "Rascall." and sayd that yf he had not been gone, he would have "absolved" him, meaning thereby that he would have stroken or beat him.

*Court at Kelvedon :* 1588 (Lib. lxxviii., fol. 112).

Toulsbury—John Pigbone.

For not recg the Comn and his wife, for she wolde have beaten or hurt the apparitor with a bill, when he came to cite her husband to the Court.

*Court at Colchester:* 25 Novbr. 1617 (Lib. xxxi., fol. 118).

Beaumont—William Lyre,

That his wife did beat the apparitor ; he asked the judge if he sent the apparitor to beat men's wives.

Robert Hadman, Similiter.

Robert ffreeman, Similiter.

William Mason, Similiter.

It looks as though in this case there might have been some special act of provocation, leading to reprisals on the part of some of the parishioners.

In one of the minute books of the Essex Archdeaconry commencing 17 July 1570 (fol. 105), a list of the fees payable to the court is scheduled, and the various items are as follows :

For the probate of a will under 40*l.*, 3*s.*, and for the seal 4*d.*, to the Registrar 1*s.* 8*d.*

For the probate of a will over 40*l.*, 2*s.* 6*d.* to the Judge, 2*s.* 6*d.* to the Registrar, and 4*d.* for the seal.

For each bond, 12*d.* to the Registrar.

For the exhibition of each Inventory, 8*d.*

For each citation the fee was 12*d.* ; namely 6*d.* to the Judge and 6*d.* to the Registrar, and there was also a sum of 4*d.* due to the apparitor.

Each excommunication cost 18*d.*, viz : 9*d.* to the Judge, and 9*d.* to the Registrar.

For each final decree in a suit the amount payable was 10*s.* ; the Judge receiving 6*s.* 8*d.* and the Registrar 3*s.* 4*d.* On the passing of an account a similar sum was charged, and divided in a similar manner.

Each induction cost 14*s.* 4*d.*, and in the event of a Benefice being sequestrated the charge was 7*s.* 4*d.*

Churchwardens and others on exhibiting any document of an official nature, in Court paid a fee of 4*d.*

These Records reflect most graphically the various phases of church life and thought from period to period. Thus, on the accession of Elizabeth, the change from the Marian *regime* to that of her successor, was marked by the setting forth of a fresh set of Injunctions, having for their object as stated in the preamble "the suppression of superstition, and the planting of true religion, to the extirpation of all hypocrisy, enormities and abuses."

But underlying these Injunctions was the evident desire on the part of the authorities for anti-papal propaganda, and thus the first clause makes it incumbent upon all ecclesiastical persons having the cure of souls, to preach four times at the least in each year, teaching *inter alia* "that all usurped and foreign power having no establishment nor ground by the law of God, is taken away and abolished, and that therefore no obedience to such power is due from any subject within the Queen's realms." To this end, when the incumbent of a parish was not himself a licensed preacher, he was bound to procure sermons to be delivered by some specially qualified divine. Hence the following :

*Court at Brentwood* : 16 Novbr., 1569.

Rector of Pitsea, but one sermon this 12 monithes.

At a somewhat later date the rector, Mark Simpson, is ordered to procure iiij sermons in the year by some learned preacher, and "for everie Sunday or Holy day that the parishioners miss Service, he shall pay iij' & iiij' to the poor."

*Court at Great Badowe* : 19 June, 1570.

East Hanningfield—they lack the quarter sermons.

*Court at Romford* : 12 April, 1571.

Great Warley—they want quarter sermons.

*Court at Kelvedon* : 1572 (Lib. lxxiii., fol. 74).

Langenho—Baldwin Dereham, Rector )

Lexden— John Price ,, ) they want quarter sermons.

Peldon— Richard Crabtree ,, )

*Court at Colchester*: 1587 (Lib. lxxvii., fol. 289 .

Tendering—Mr. Drewery—No sermon preached sithence Michaelmas.

These are a few out of many such entries for both archdeaconries, which suggest that the chief delinquents were to be found in the country parishes. The records shew, moreover, that the prospect of a sermon was always an attraction, and there are not a few instances of persons cited for non-attendance at their parish church pleading that they went to some neighbouring church in order that they might have the advantage of hearing a sermon. Occasionally it happened that the character of the discourse did not altogether meet with the approval of the hearer, as is shewn by an entry in 1584, stating that Richard Turner and Christopher Lowne, two members of the congregation of St. Mary Magdalene, Colchester, were reported to have said that "they doubted whether their Minister preached sound doctrine or noe."

Failing the sermon, the cleric in charge of a cure was ordered to read at least once every Sunday some homily prescribed to be used by the Queen's authority, and it may be in reference to this practice that the following caustic remark was made :

*Court at Colchester* : 1584 (Lib. lxxvi., fol. 104).

Ramsey—John White, Vicar.

O' Vicar ys not able to delyver any doctrine to his parishioners but by bare reading of y' letter, neither do we know yt he is diligent and useth confidence with preachers to grow to ability.

The sixth Injunction orders that in every church a bible of "the largest volume" as it was termed (*i.e.*, Cranmer's bible), and a copy of the Paraphrases of Erasmus upon the Gospel, should be provided and set up in a convenient place in the church. The cost of these books was to be met by the parson or patron and the parishioners in equal shares, and there are many entries notifying that the task



was being gradually surmounted, but, as the entries now and again show, it was not always an easy one.

*Court at Colchester:* 1583 (Lib. lxvii., fol. 43).

S. Giles.—The new Bible is to be of the largest volume.

All Saints.—They lack a Bible of the largest volume.

S. James.—They are to provide the new book which is allowed by the Bishops.

Lexden.—The Bible is torne and defaced. They will provide a large Bible allowed by the Bishops.

S. Nicholas.—Robert Stansted refuses most obstinately to contribute towards a new Bible. . . . He is to pay the amount at which he is ceased (assessed), or shew cause and prove at the next Court (Lib. lxvi., fol. 36).

*Court at Coggeshall:* 1592 (Lib. lxx., fol. 238).

White Colne.—Smith widow.

For refusing to pay ijs towards the buying of a Bible which she was ceased at.

*Court at Ongar:* May 1592 (Lib. xxxv., fol. 69).

Abbas Roding—Wardens of.

For that they want the Parafra<sup>s</sup> (*sic*) of Erasmus. . . . They are to provide a new book of the paraphrases before the feast of S. John.

*Court at Colchester:* 1583 (Lib. lxvi., fol. 19).

East Mersea—Thomas Tyrell, Curate.

That he deteyneth the Paraphrases . . . . He is to deliver the same to the Churchwardens to the end that they may make a desk for it and place y' in a convenient place in ye Church.

*Court at Romford:* 1595 (Lib. xxxvi., fol. 44).

Laindon Hills—William Bett, Sexton.

For that our Book of Erasmus was carried away by Mr. Givyn Minister there at that time placed and appointed by Mr. Edmonds with the consent of William Bett, Sexten (*sic*).

For this irregularity Bett was superseded. It was a grim reflection upon the previous reign, that Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* was also one of the books which it was thought well that each church should possess, so that it might be publicly read, and the following entry is given under date 30 July 16:2 :

*Court at Kelvedon:*

Coggeshall—The guardians state that "they have no Bible in the Church but a Geneva Bible, and they have not a desk for the booke of Martirs "

*Court at Brentwood:* April 1592 (Lib. xxxv., fol. 49).

Brentwood—Thomas Steevens.

That he shall according to his own offer, give unto the Church of South Weald or Chapel of Brentwood, the Book of Martyers to the publique use of the whole parish and before Mr. Coleport and others of the parish acknowledge his fault per incontinentiam suam (and certify) prox apud Ingatestone 3 Maij prox.

*Court at Ingatestone* : May 1608.  
Ramsden Bellus—Robt Boothe.

He keeps our Book of Martyrs belonging to the Church.

Another book which each church was ordered to procure at a somewhat later date, was the volume of Bishop Jewell's works, and these records contain many entries shewing the dates at which the churchwardens of the various parishes either purchased or made excuses for not purchasing the volume (see also *The Essex Review*, vol. xxxiv., pp. 89-93). The book was by no means a cheap one, as the following entry shews, and it is hardly to be wondered at that in the smaller parishes in the country, the authorities should have been reluctant to procure it.

*Court at Ingatestone* : 1615 (Lib. xxxiii., fol. 194).  
Margretting—William Bearman and Henry Matthew, Gards.  
Touching Bishop Jewell's Book which they bought paying xxx.

The Injunctions likewise enforce the continuance of the custom of perambulating the parishes for the purpose of verifying the boundaries and fixing the area, and it is not without interest to note in these minute books some of the entries which bear upon this business. The records shew that there was evidently a difficulty in some of the parishes in getting representative men to undertake the duty, but the following entry discloses what is probably an extreme case :

*Court at Ardlye* : 20 December 1589 (Lib. lxix., fol. 298).  
Colchester, S. James—Gards.

The perambulations were not walked for xxx years by reason whereof our bounds are lost . . . They are to present such of the better sort who will not go the perambulations.

The same difficulty is more fully emphasised in the following :

*Court at Kelvedon* : 1611 (Lib. xxi., fol. 245).  
Langford—John Cracknell.

That there hath bene a general fault in our parish in the walking of the perambulations notwithstanding there hath bene publique notice given thereof by the Minister ; which fault hath been by reason the better and more substantial of the sayd parish hath not anywise bene forward neither by themselves or any of their families, and therefore we present John Cracknell and Edward Harvy, for not goying this yeare with others of the parish to walk the bounds, they being of the better sort of the inhabitants, and likest (*sic*) to be of longest continuance there. . . . That he for his part dyd not walk the bounds this past yeare . . . That hereafter they shall walk the bounds of the parish.

*Court at Great Badone* : 5 Sept. 1626.  
Fobing—

The Minister was readye on the Rogacion dayes to goe the perambulation or circuit of the parishe and gave warninge of it in Church the Sondaie before—but there were diuerse refused to goe who best knowe the bounds of the parish.

Presented on this charge Wm Mott. . . . Pleaded that he did not heare the bell towle to morninge prayer as in former tymes it vsed to be ; which was the cause that he did not goe.

*Court at Ingatestone* : May 1608 (Lib. lxxxiv., fol. 23).

Waltham Magna—John Oughting.

He refuseth to make provision for the perambulation which hath byn done tyme out of mynde, and before tyme his wief and family have very disdaynfully cast water upon the minister, and this tyme of perambulation the said Owting did very desperately offer to strike our Minister with his hedging bill going to his house with the rest to require the customary refreshing.

Some interesting entries in connection with parish boundaries are likewise furnished by the following :

*Court at Rayleighe*: 1614 (Lib. xxxii., fol. 17).

Rayleighe—Richd Standish

For that in the farm of Parker's in Raylegh w<sup>h</sup> Richard Standish holdeth, there is cutt downe this yeare an old oak tree marked wth a cross tyme out of mynd for the Severaltie of the parishes [of Rochford and Rayleigh]—but who cut it down they know not.

*Court at Brentwood* : 1575 (Lib. lxiv., fol. 68).

Bursted Parva—Thomas Hawkins, Detect.

For that he hath plowed up a "doole" or mere which is y<sup>r</sup> marke of the division of the parishes of Dunton and Burstede, so that no mencion thereof doth remayne for their perambulations.

*Court at Rayleigh* : March 1616 (Lib. li., fol. 99),

Warley Magna—Thomas Drywood.

Presented for baring up (*sic*) the procession ways w<sup>h</sup> hath been open out of memorie.

It may be noted here that the Injunctions laid it down that the perambulations should be observed in connection with the days of Rogation, and that one of the sentences which the minister might repeat was : "Cursed be he which translateth the bounds and doles of his neighbour."

Sometimes the failure to observe "Gang week," as it was called, had to be laid to the door of the parson, as witness the following:

*Court at Prittleweil*: 1592 (Lib. xxxv., fol. 94).

Cold Norton—Mr. Pearson, Rector.

For not going his perambulations and fetched (*sic*) in the bounds of his Pische this yeare; . . . Alleged that he is a lame man and also was appointed to preach at Boreham that day that he should have gone his bounds; but sayeth that he hath the bounds of his pische set down very directly in his Register Book.

Whether the record is still to be seen in the register of Cold Norton seems doubtful, as, although the first book dates from 1539, it is described as having been returned in the Parliamentary

enquiry of 1830 as "very defective," several pages being lost (see *The Essex Review*, vol. ix., p. 161<sup>1</sup>).

The tenth clause of the Injunctions required that in each church and chapel one "book of register" should be kept," in which should be carefully entered and dated the weddings, christenings and burials made within the parish. Associated with this order was likewise the duty of providing a coffer, or chest, with two locks and keys in which the register was to be placed, the parson having the custody of one of the keys and the wardens of the other. Scattered throughout the minute books belonging to each archdeaconry are entries in connection with this clause, which may serve to throw light on the registers and church chests as we have them to-day.

Thus, the following are taken and grouped together from the period during which the church registers were of paper, before the order as to the provision of parchment books had been issued :

*Court at Kelvedon* : A.D. 1585 (Lib. Ixxxviii., fol. 192)

Earls Colne—John Ward.

To (provide) a book for the Register of the said parish of vij quires of paper bound wth lether wth a clasp.

*Court at Colchester*: 1585 (Lib. lxvii., fol. 89).

S. Nicholas—Gards.

They are to prepare a Register book with v quires of paper, for a Register covered with leather.

S. James—Gards.

To buy a new Register book wth clasps and covered with lether.

*Court at Colchester*: A.D. 1588 (Lib. lxvii., fol. 290).

Layer-de-la-Hay—Gards ibm.

The Register boke ys not orderly kept, for that there ys but one lock that ys kept locked with one key wch key ys kept by the Sexton contrary to Hir Majesties' Injunctions.

Anthony Bracket appeared. They are to provide the locks and the Minister to have one key, and that weekly the Church book be orderly kept.

This final sentence refers to the order given in the Injunctions that the parson shall every Sunday take forth and in the presence of the wardens write and record . . . all the weddings, christenings and burials made the week before.

<sup>1</sup> Since the above was written, the following information, kindly furnished by the rector of Cold Norton, has come to hand : apparently the register was sold by mistake with the effects of an incumbent of a later date than Mr. Pearson. It was bought by a shopkeeper, and when eventually it came back to Cold Norton, various pages were found to be missing. It is specially noted by the rector (Rev. J. Hyde Woollaston, afterwards Archdeacon of Essex) under date 7 June, 1815, that pages at the end of the book containing "memoranda" had disappeared. There seems therefore little doubt that these lost memoranda included the notes as to the parish boundaries.

In 1598 came the ordinance of the Convocation of Canterbury that the paper registers were to be copied on parchment, and that all future records were to be kept on parchment. In consequence of this order the visitation list of the archdeacon of Colchester for 1599 has a number of marginal notes of an abbreviated character which furnish a guide as to the provision of parchment registers in most of the parishes of that archdeaconry during the year. The method of procedure seems to have been as follows : the archdeacon probably charged the minister and churchwardens of each parish to provide a book of parchment into which the entries made in the old paper books were to be transcribed. This transcription was to be attested by their signatures or marks being placed on each page of the new register. If this injunction was faithfully carried out, the archdeacon undertook to give his official sanction to the charges incurred for the book and its transcription, so that this expenditure could not be disputed by any parishioner at the next Easter audit, but would be defrayed out of the customary church rate.

Accordingly the note frequently found occurring on the margin of the record "*allocatur liber*," implies that the charge for the book and its transcription is allowed by the Archdeacon in the case of some thirty or more parishes at the Visitation of 1599. Notes are also made in the case of other parishes either that the churchwardens had failed to submit the register for examination as required, or had obtained permission to defer shewing it until the next Visitation, while in other instances the reason for withholding the official sanction is expressly stated to be that the churchwardens have not set their hands to the leaves of the book, and as a consequence the marginal note records "*non allocatur liber*."

Of instances of this kind the following are examples :

*Court at Wadden*: 7 Octbr. 1599 (Lib. xxxv., fol. 366).

Langley—Gards.

Ad exhibendum librum Registrum. Brought in 7 Novbr. 1599, but the Court ordered it to be produced at next synod subscript singulis paginis foliorura ejusdem libri sub manibus ministri et gardianorum.

*Court at Colchester* : 1599 (Lib. lxxxix., fol. 242;.

Bergholt—Gards ibm.

Touching the Transcript of the Register which is to be subscribed by the Minister and wardens to every page.

*Court at Walden* : 17 Octbr. 1599.

Little Chishill—Gards.

Citandi sunt ad ostend librum Registrum. Comparuerunt et quot allocatur liber eo quod suis subscribitur paginis singulis a ministro et gardianis ibidem. To shew it again next Court day.

*Court at Colchester* : (S. Nicholas), 1598 (Lib. Ixxxix., fol. 196).

Ardley—John Lovering, )  
John Pikes, ) Gards.

There is no parchment book for Christenings, Marriages, and buryalls.

*Court at Ingatestone*: xxi. Martii 1598 (Lib. xxxviii., fol. 200).

Bursted Magna—Zachia Bateman

Detect: He went away out of our pish not paing such rate as he was rated at towards O'r Register bookes, and the writing of them wch cometh to ijs vjd.

*Court at Walden*: 1598 (Lib. xxviii., fol. 231).

Chesterford Magna—Wardens of

Item : There is no book of pchment, neyther the names new written, . . . and Richd Baker holdeth the Register Book and will not let the churchwardens have it.

At a little later date, as the subjoined entry shews, the provision of a parchment register was made, but there seems to have been some difficulty with regard to the payment for the transcription :

*Court at Walden* : 18 Decbr 1599 (Lib. xxxv., fol. 374a).

Grt Chesterford—Gards.

Not paying for the writing of the Register book.

Ordered to pay and satisfie to Mr John Baker late Curate there, for the writinge of the said book.

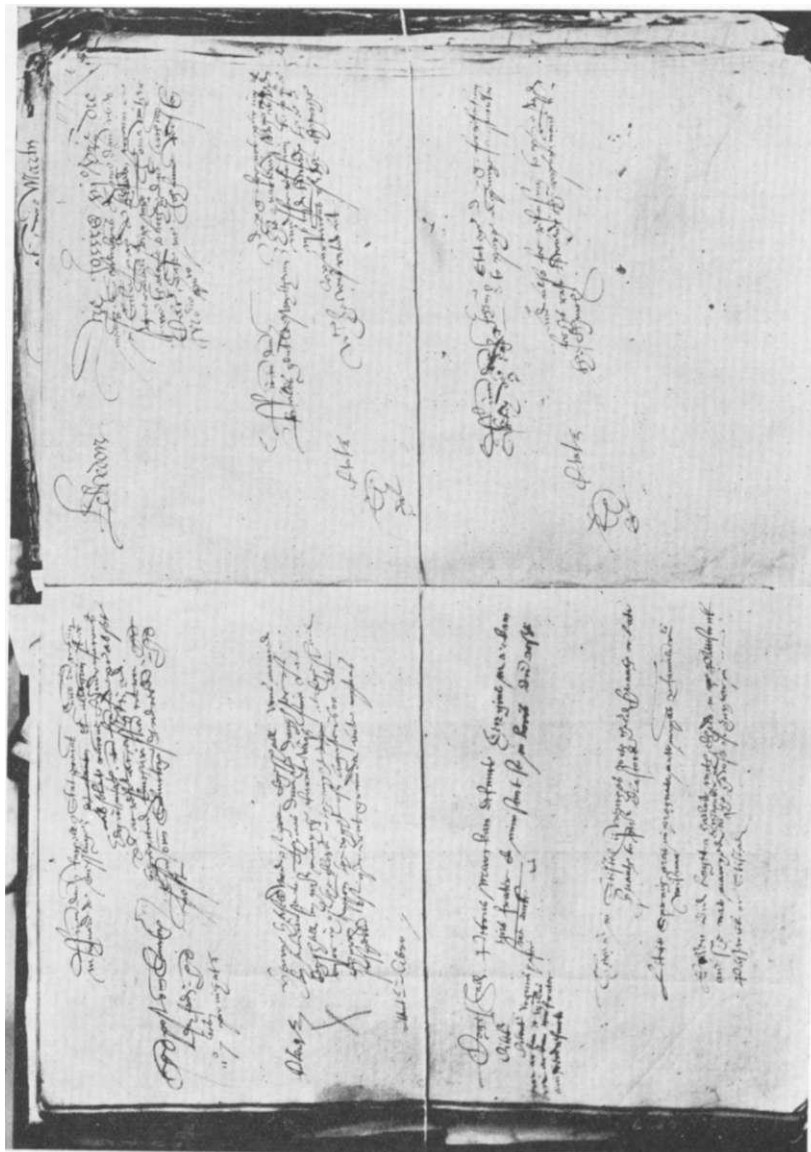
Unfortunately the record is mutilated at this point, and although the MS. indicates a sum of 5s., this may be only a payment made on account.

Of the actual cost of the parchment books however, the record leaves no doubt. The deputy registrar brought with him to the Visitation, parchment volumes of five different sizes :

Books containing	100 leaves,	were sold at the price of	12	6
"	"	80	"	"
"	"	60	"	"
"	"	50	"	"
"	"	40	"	"

The record for the archdeaconry of Colchester shews that of the 100 page volume, one copy went to "Manitree" and one to Dedham. Of the books with 80 leaves, Witham obtained a copy. Kelvedon purchased a copy with 60 leaves, while Elmstead, Messing, and Wakes Colne, each procured a book containing 50 leaves. Of the books with 40 leaves, one copy went to Cressing, and one to Inworth.

It would be a matter of some interest to ascertain in each of these cases, whether the old parchment volume then procured is still in existence, and if so, whether its condition shews it to have been in any way mutilated, or added to.



MINUTE BOOK (1590-1592).

COLCHESTER ARCHDEACONRY.

That the mutilation of registers, however, was not to be entirely the work of some future generation, the following entries will testify :—

*Court at Colchester:* 1587 (Lib. lxvii., fol. 198).

Colchester (S. Peter)—John Smith.

Notat: That he did cut leaves out of the Register Book there. He tore and defaced the Register taking out his own name.

John Smith, janitorem of the parish of St. Nicholas. He carried the said Register Book to the said John Smith of S. Peters to cut out the same leaves.

*Court at Coggeshall :* 1591 (Lib. lxx., fol. 30).

Goldhanger—John Knight, Rector.

That he had the Register Book at his house and rent out of the same one leaf and writ another in the same place thereof, but whether it be agreeing to the leafe that he rent out we know not.

The seventieth canon of 1603 re-affirmed the ordinance of 1598 with the additional *proviso* that once in every year the churchwardens shall within one month after the five-and-twentieth day of March, transmit to the bishop of the diocese . . . a true copy of all the entries made the previous year. This will explain the following entry:—

*Court at Colchester:* 1604 (Lib. xc, fol. 4).

Lexden—Mr. Searles, Rector.

For that he doth not rede publicly in the Church the Register of Marriages, Christenings, and Burials, as is prescribed in the Articles, and that he hath kept the said Register that we cannot have it to send the transcript into my Ld Bp. of Londons' Office as we should do . . . To be delivered to the churchwardens when yt is mended and to certifie.

Among the articles of enquiry at the Visitation of Archbishop Parker in 1569, was the following, *viz.*:—

Whether youre churchyardes be well fenced and cleanly kepte ?

There are many entries in the records touching this question of the care of the churchyards, from which the following may be quoted as examples :—

*Court at Colchester:* Primo die mensis Decembris 1587 (Lib. lxvii., fol. 243).

East Mersea—Williamffield.

The Churchyard through his negligence in not repairing the pale is greatly rooted up by the hoggs shamefully.

West Mersea—Thomas Bowlton (*Ibid.*, fol. 255;.

We present great defects in the fences of Wm. Field and Thomas Bowlton, through whose neglect the hogges do shamefully root up the Churchyard

*Court at Colchester :* 1588 (Lib. lxxix., fol 248).

West Mersea—Wm. Field.

He affirmed that the hogges rooting in the Churchyard "were well and sufficiently filled."



What he meant was that they had been amply fed, and that there was, therefore, no excuse for them rooting in the churchyard. It was, of course, simply begging the question and quite ignoring his neglect in allowing his fences to dilapidate until they had become useless.

*Court at Kelvedon* : Monday, 18 Septbr. 1587 (Lib. Ixviii., fol. 20).

Braxted Magna—Gards of.

We present our Churchyard pale is in decay, and by reason that our Book is lost, we know not who should make the defaults.

Appeared—Thomas Ramstall, Gard, and Henry Weldon.

The names of those whose duty it was to keep in repair the portions of the church fencing allotted to the various properties which they held, were not infrequently entered in the parish register (see Nettleswell, *Essex Review*, vol. xxxv., pp. 37-40). From the following entry it would seem that there was a periodic enquiry on the part of the court as to the fencing of the churchyard :

*Court at Walden*: 1543 (Lib. vol ix., fol. 131).

Braxted Magna—

Johannes Sunford

Johannes Waght

William Felyx ) Thes kepe there fense in the Churchyard.

William Porter )

Robert Carden )

Here, on the other hand, is a list of the defaulters given in another parish :

*Court at Romford* : 1636 (Lib xxiv., fol. 140).

Childerditch—Lewis Sparrow.

For not rayling in his parte of the Churchyard :

James Dickenson )

Francis Hodgskins ) Similiter

Will Gladwyn )

A complaint very similar to the following was made by the parishioners of Toppesfield at their vestry on 7 January 1711 (see *The Essex Review*, vol. xxvii., p. 130).

*Court at Dunmow* : 1668 (Lib. xlviiii., fol. 7).

Thaxted—Edward George.

For taking away the ground in the Churchyard and laying it on his own land.

The following is a somewhat exceptional entry, and as such may be mentioned here :

*Court at Romford*: 1636 (Lib. xxiv., fol. 186).

Nazing—Elizabeth Tayler.

For abusing our Churchyard with making a "drifte" way through our Church (*sic*) and abusing of it with her cattle, and for pulling up o'r fence in o'r Churchyard into their ground.

Chignall S. Jacobi—Mr. Peacock.

He hath not done the fencing that belongeth to him in the Churchyard.

The two following entries may be quoted as showing the complications that might sometimes arise in the matter of personal liability for fencing :

*Court at Baddowe*: 1595 (Lib. xxxvi., fol. 20).

Horndon—Matthew Pake.

Detect—There is a piece of the Churchyard un-fenced against a barne which Thomas Slaterford doth hold and use which is in strife between Matthew Pake and Benjamin Ponde. We know not who should mend it.

*Court at Romford* : 1595 (Lib. xxxvi., fol. 106).

Thorock Pva—Edwd Dauby.

Detect -that he doe not kepe a good and sufficient fence in and against the Churchyd as he owte to do by the right of his howse. Sayeth that he hath lett out the ground with the fence to one Gill.

Some interesting entries are found in connection with the following enquiry issued by Archbishop Parker in his Visitation articles in 1569, viz: whether the rood-loft be pulled downe according to the order prescribed ?

*Court at Ingatestone* : Tuesday 18 Janry 1613.

Rochford—Robert Grasop, alias Waterman.

He hath made w'h the lofte belonging to the parish a place for incontyntent persons to stand in.

This man who was the parish clerk and is described in the record as "aquibagilus," reminiscent of the times when the sprinkling with holy water was observed, seems to have been obnoxious to some of the officials of the church, and they took this opportunity of citing him before the court, for dealing thus with the property of the church, without authority to do so. A few months later the clerk is cited again, the reason given being as under :

*Court at Ingatestone* : 1 July 1613.

Rochford—Robert Grashopper alias Waterman.

A sheete newe bought is gone out of the Chest in the time of Robert Waterman the Clarke, which was commanded to be kept for the punishynge of incontynent persons.

Is it possible that there may be some connection between these two entries, and that the disappearance of the sheet may perhaps be accounted for by the fact that the pillory was intended by its maker to act as a substitute ?

Another instance of the adaptation of the belongings of the rood-loft to other purposes is furnished by the following entry:

*Court at Kelvedon* : 1583 (Lib lxxvi., fol. 41).

Wicken Bonant—John & William Howland, Gards.

The parson's wyff lacketh a place to sit in, for her, and her children and family.

This difficulty was met by the following arrangement:—

*Court at Walden: 1583 (Ibid., fol. 78).*

Wicken Bonant—John & Wm Howland, Gards

They are to pull down the stayers near the Rode Loft, in the Church, and shall assist Mr. Swinse in making a seat for his wife at his own charge at the lower (part) of the said stayers, and to certifie.

The following entries, made in reply to an enquiry as to the condition of the church, shew the terrible state into which, in some cases, the fabrics had been allowed to drift:—

*Court at Colchester: 1615.*

Fratinge—Gards.

The Chancell is wonderfull out of repacions and we se(e) cleane threw and threw it.

*Court at Colchester : 1583 (Lib. Ixvi., fol. 105).*

S. Buttolph—The Churchwardens.

Yt the glass windows of the Church and Chancell are so broken yt ye Church is more like to a dovehouse than a place of prayer. For wch cause both the preachers and others have made great complaint. The Comn table is nought, and certain stoles are broken all a peces and throwne about.

*Court at Great Baddow : Tuesday 8 June, 1630.*

North Shobury—

The Chancell lyeth uncovered wth the glass windows broken, so that the parishioners cannot sitt drye neither at Service nor at the Communion table.

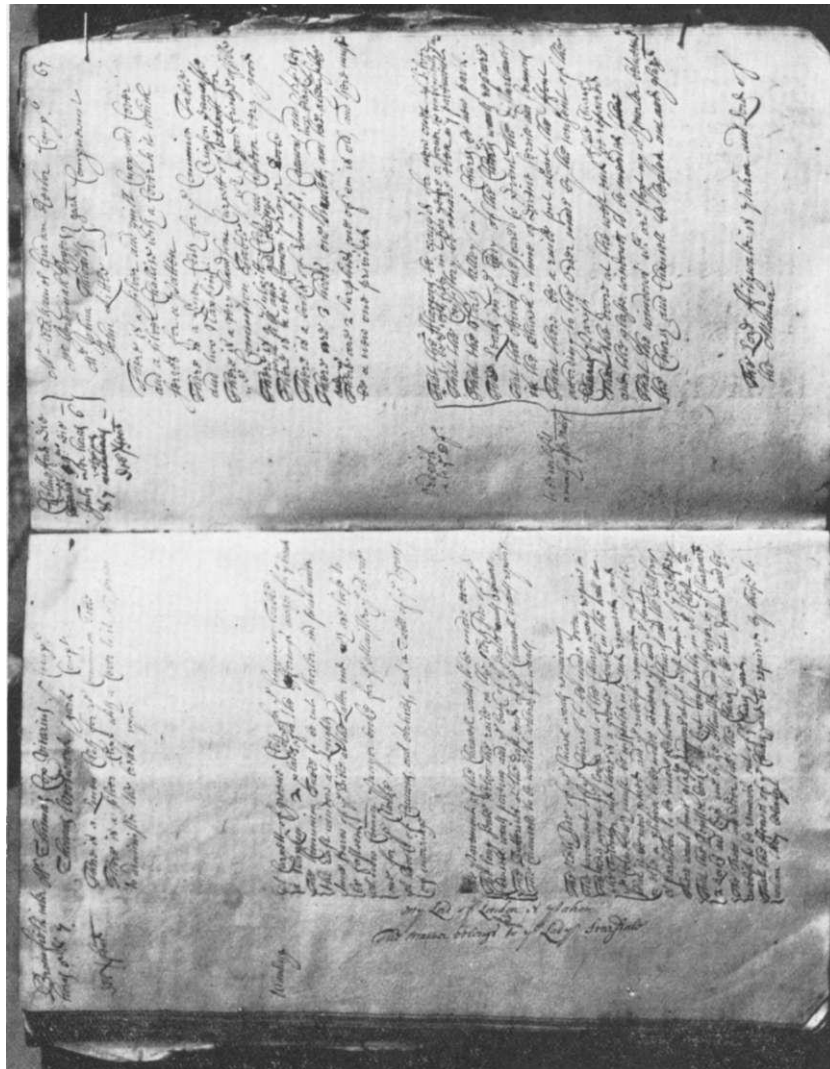
Perhaps, however, of all the various entries recorded in these old volumes, those which deal with "Penance" read most strangely in the light of modern thought and ideals. In the first place there appears to have been no approximately fixed standard according to which the penalties were meted out to the offenders. Whether the penance which had to be undergone was a heavy or a light one, appears to have rested entirely with the presiding judge. Then again, as time went on, it became customary for people of substance to purchase exemption from the performance of the more humiliating portions of the sentence, and it is one of the many indications of the marked poverty of Elizabeth's reign, that ecclesiastical judges are found readily assenting to "commutation" of penance.

The following examples will serve to emphasise the marked difference there was, between the treatment measured out by the law to people guilty of the same form of crime, where the one was fortunate enough to be able to pay, and the other was not:—

*Court at Ingatestone : 1592 (Lib. xxxv. fol. 133).*

Downham—Humfry Garrowld, suspect incont.

On Sundaye next he shall come to Downham Church at the last peale to Servyce, and there stand in a white sheet at the Church Porch till the second lesson be redd, & then shall goe into the said Church and there stand & presentlie confesse his fault & offence et to certyfie under the hand of the Minister and Wardens apud Badow.



BOOK OF VISITATIONS. ARCHDEACON OF ESSEX.

Broomfield and Chelmsford, July, 1686.

*Court at Colchester* : (S. Peter) 1581 (Lib. lxxv., fol. 27).

Dedham—William Cock.

That upon Saturday next, he shall in a white sheet about him, about xj o'clock in the forenoon and so walk the length of the Market Place, holding a white rod in his hand, and a paper on his head, describing the cause and then stand so apparellyd at the Moot Hall Door by the space of an hour after till xij of the clock and then confess openly his fault (*re*) Alice Chase and shall likewise apparelled stand in the middle alley of Dedham Church the Sondag following by the time of the Morning Prayer shall meekly kneeling ask forgiveness, & c. & c. . . .

*Court at Ingatestone* : 1591 (Lib xxxv., fol. 35).

Woodham Walter—Marian Woolward

She appeared and petitioned for absolution.

On Saturday next, she shall stand at the Bull-ring in Maldon Market, with a white sheet about her, and a wand in her hand, from ix of the clock in the forenoon untyll two of the clock in the afternoon, and on Sunday shall come at the beginning of Morning Prayer and stand in the Porch.

*Court at Billericay*: 1589 (Lib. lxxvij , fol. 153).

Waltham Magna—Silvester Dennis et Margery Uxor.

Incont ante nuptias : They submit to correction. It is ordered that they and eyther of them immediately after public prayer to be said in the chapel commonly called Black Chapel belonging to Much Waltham in the forenoon on Sondag next in their usual apparel confess their fault, & c. . . .

*Court at Romford* : 13 Decbr 1569.

Layton—Roger Durant.

That he shall stand in Romford Markett the next markt daye, *more penitentis*, all the markt tyme in a whyte sheate and a rodde in his hande, et *in parochia sua de Layton* on the following Sunday, and there shall acknowledge his offens penitently.

But on the culprit's appeal, backed by the entreaty of some of his friends and neighbours, *quia dixit se velle seipsum jugulare* the judge excused him the penance, commuting the sentence to a money payment, *viz.*: that he should pay 10s. each to three poor scholars of Cambridge, and likewise contribute 10s. towards the repairs of his parish church at Leyton.

*Court at Billericay* : 1662 (Lib. xlvi, fol. 29).

Buttsbury—Thomas Finch.

Appeared, and alleged that he was ordered to do penance in the Church, which, if he did, he being a married man, would much impair his credit among his neighbours; and excepting the act by him committed, he was never detected for any such crime, and therefore humbly desires the Judge of the Court to comute his said penance, and to that purpose offers to the Judge a *desideratum* of Ten pounds to be bestowed on charitable uses.

The Judge abovesaid did accept and decree his letters to be made for his discharge.

It may be readily understood that in these times, when education was but scarce and not easy to come by, and when people seldom journeyed far from home, superstition ran rife, and as a consequence there are many entries in the records which treat of witchcraft and sorcery. There are instances of people having recourse to some reputed witch, or "Cunning Man," in order to obtain assistance in recovering things that have been lost, or cattle that have strayed away, or maybe to secure a "love-potion" to repair the inconstancy of some errant swain. That such practices were illegal, and visited with pains and penalties, will be evident from the questions that from time to time found place in the "articles to be enquired of" at the Visitations, thus: "Whether there be any among you that use sorcerie, or inchauntment, magike incantations, or nigromancie, or that be suspected of the same ? "

It was in the last few words of this enquiry, however, that the really serious consequences of the question lay, for these records have many entries showing that upon the merest suspicion, and upon even the most trivial grounds, or possibly to gratify some private feeling of spite, men and women might be dubbed "Witche" and haled before a court of justice and heavily mulcted in costs, even though found innocent of the charge preferred against them.

*Court in West Ham Church : 12 July, 1591.*

Widow Coppres of Woodford.

She hath of long tyme been suspected for a Wiche, and more of late by John Poole.

*Court at Romford : 2 May, 1592.*

Romford—John Grave junr *de eadem*.

He doth goe and seeke after witchery. Denied it for himselfe, but said that his wife without his consent dyd goe to father Perfecte to leme of him some medycyne for some cattell that he has sicke, but he knoweth not that he is a witche and his wife as he verely beleveth did never thinke him to be a witche and went not to him desirouse to obtaine any help for his cattell by any suche meanes.

Admonished and dismissed. Court fee 2*s*.

*Court at Colchester (S. Peter) : 1597 (Lib. lxxv., fol. 45).*

S. James—Catherine Reve.

That she is vehemently suspected of witchcraft.

In this case (fol. 46) Catherine gives a long explanation in which she speaks of learning from goodwife George of Much Tey, now of Abberton, that if she or her cattle were "forspoken" she should say "she believed in the Third Person of the Trinity," which prayer she hath used to herself, and to a cow at the Hithe, and they dyd get well after it.

Catherine was ordered to perform the usual penance, which must have tended somewhat to confuse her ideas of theology.

To refute a charge of this nature the accused person might produce written testimony of good character, as in the following case :

*Court at Romford* : 1592.

Barking—Alice uxer Willm Foster eadem.

That she is suspected by comon fame to be a Witche. She brought a certificate of her innocency under the hands of the churchwardens there.

The case was consequently dismissed, but the accused had to pay the court fee, of 12*d.*, as well as the apparitor's fee 4*d.*, and to meet the expenses of the journey to and from Barking to Romford. There were numerous instances, however, in which the court refused to allow an accused person to clear himself except by the tedious and cumbersome process of compurgation. In cases of this kind a deed was drawn out to be publicly read on a Sunday, in the church of the parish where the offence was alleged to have been committed, announcing that at a court to be held at a stated day, time, and place, the accused proposed to purge himself of the charge by taking oath of innocence, and inviting all who objected to such purgation to attend the court, and give evidence against the accused. On the appointed day the accused, together with his compurgators (to the number of four, six, or eight, as fixed by the court), attended, and exhibited his parish priest's certificate that the "Intimacon" had been duly published. Objectors were then invited to come forward, and if any attended, they were heard, and the case was adjourned.

If no objectors appeared, then the accused made oath openly that he was innocent of the charge, and each of his compurgators also took his oath that he believed the accused to have spoken the truth. On the strength of these oaths, the accused was acquitted, and granted a certificate to prevent any future proceedings on the same charge.

It will be realised that the attendant expenses were considerable, namely :—for the *Intimacio* 2*s.* 6*d.*, for each oath taken 4*d.*, for the certificate 13*s.* 4*d.*, and, in addition, the customary court fees and the fees to the apparitors. Moreover, it may be reckoned that the expenses of those who appeared as compurgators would also have to be met by the accused, and all in order to refute an accusation which ought never to have been brought.

*Court at Maldon* (All Saints) : 5 May, 1592.

Maldon—Margaret Wiseman, per Gards.

For that she is suspected by common fame of witchcraft. She claimed and was allowed purgation.

On 5 July, of the same year, she appeared in court with her *compurgatrices* (Judith wife of John Cowrtool, Margaret wife of Thomas Carter, Agnes wife of George Warner, Agnes wife of Robert Brierly, Agnes wife of Richard Flude, and Elizabeth wife of John Pratt—all of Maldon). Margaret Wiseman then took oath that she is "altogether guyltless of the facte of witchcrafte and also of all occasion of suspicion of witchcrafte." Her six *compurgatrices* then made oath that Margaret Wiseman hath sworn a just and true oath, and that she "hath not geven any cause of suspicion of witchcrafte." Her purgation was then admitted, and the testimonial of its acceptance signed ; but the judge of the court solemnly admonished her to be most careful in future to give no cause in any way for like suspicion.

There are many other matters in connection with the aforesaid Visitations concerning which entries are found in these records ; and which reflect, in a very striking way, the various changes of thought and opinion in church affairs through which the country passed during the periods covered by them ; but lack of space forbids dealing with them now. It must suffice just to conclude by quoting a few extracts which may serve to illustrate in some measure the every day life and doings of the people, recounted now and again with a quaintness of humour, which suggests the thought that the writer must occasionally have chuckled to himself as he penned them, little thinking that he was writing facts by which future generations would picture to themselves the world in which he lived, and form their estimate of the men and women of the Essex of his day.

*Court at Romford* : 8 Feby 1613.

Shelley—Samuel Cover.

Advisinge James Westwood in the sermon tyme to go forthe of the Church into the Churchyard and to tell the preacher "that his roast meate dyd burne," where upon Westwood dyd disturbe the preacher and congregation in sermon tyme.

Whether the plan had the effect of shortening the discourse as it was probably intended to do, must be left to the imagination, but on the 3 March following, the Rector, James Stow, stated that Cover was innocent, and the fees were paid, viz : to the court 12d. and to the apparitor 4d.

*Court at Waldon* : 25 May, 1620 (Lib. xv., fol. 128).

Walden—Aroniam Bayly.

For ringing and tinging of a pan in devine Service upon a Saboth Day.

Aaron was evidently a bee-keeper, and even though it was a Sunday, he did not intend to lose the proverbial "swarm in May worth the load of hay," and accordingly "tanged his bees," to establish his right to pursue them even on to other people's property.



*Court in Capella de Romford: 1580.*

East Ham—Thomas Kinge.

Detect—for contracting himself to three several wemen : Mrs. Pulliver's mayd, Goodman Barrett's mayd, Onyon's daughter. One of these he hath married, and to the others he hath given money to be discharged of them.

Tis always "best to be off with the old love before you are on with the new." The matrimonial affairs of Thomas must have provided much food for comment among the ladies of East Ham.

*Court at Colchester : 19 March, 1594.*

East Mersea—There went many parishioners to cart the same Saboth Day, to a wreck happening at sea.

*Court at Billerica : Novbr 1596 (Lib. xxxvi., fol. 226).*

West Hanningfield—Gards.

The Steple is not repaired for the parishioners cannot agree whether it is to be repaired by every man's ability, or by every man's lands, or by every man's devocion.

The dilemma was a serious one, for those who considered themselves poor would be sure to say "by every man's ability to pay"; while those who had no land would say "by every man's land"; while those whose church views were uncertain would say that "devotion to the church" should repair the church.

The following entry shews how the alienation of church property of which the story of our church is so full, dates back to a period much earlier than is generally supposed :

*Court at Brentwood : 1589 (Lib. lxxvii., fol. 100).*

Horndon—Thomas Goodwin.

Detect—for withholding an old Bible which belonged to the parish, and will not deliver in the same. . Alleged—he hath a Bible which he bought of one Shipwright late Churchwarden for vijs but he is now dead.

The book in question was probably one of the early copies of the bible which had been laid aside when the order came to introduce into each church the "Bible of the largest volume" (Cranmer's edition), and thus, like other forms of church property, had been regarded as a churchwarden's perquisite and sold away.

It has not been possible within the limits of a single article to do more than present just a surface view of the wealth of historic data that lie enshrined within these time-worn volumes. But enough has been said to enable the reader to realise that they contain material which is priceless to the student of parochial history, and to enable him as he contemplates the rapidly-changing features that are evident on all sides in the Essex of to-day, to reconstruct from these old records a not unfaithful picture of the ecclesiastical, social, and industrial life of the Essex of the past.