

Pykenham's House over Ten Centuries

The Ipswich and Suffolk Club still has 'The Archdeacon's House' on its letterhead despite that fact that archdeacons ceased to live here early in the eighteenth century. The great convenience of this urban residence was that the Archdeaconry Court was held in the south aisle of the Tower Church almost next door. There, wills were proved and cases where ecclesiastical law was involved were heard. The greater grandeur and idyllic situation of the Deanery Towers at Hadleigh which William Pykenham built for himself after improving his Ipswich residence was part of the lure which took some later archdeacons eight miles west.

The Norman King Henry I in about 1130 and the first Plantagenet King Henry II in about 1160, both founded Augustinian Priors in the town: the senior, St Peter and St Paul based on a six-acre site with St Peter's church at its southwest corner and the junior, Holy Trinity or Christchurch on a similarly large area stood where the mansion with that name is today. The secular black canons of the order did not live enclosed monastic lives but took pastoral responsibility for groups of parishes in the south and north of the town respectively, for eight of the then fifteen town parishes.

When King John gave the town its first charter on 29 June 1200, the burgesses received it in the Tower churchyard, and met in the church several times in the next month to draw up the constitution of the town and received their new seal on the following 12 October, the Ipswich Ship on the obverse and the west front of the then Tower church, their current town hall, on the reverse.

Until 1914 the Diocese of Norwich covered almost all of Norfolk and Suffolk, and to assist the bishop in governing such a large area, the four archdeacons of Norfolk and Norwich, Sudbury and Suffolk took about a quarter each. The archdeacon of Suffolk lived in what was called Brocstrete, much later Northgate Street. One surviving Holy Trinity rental (rent-roll) for 1245 shows 'Archidiaconus' paying 2s 6d every Michaelmas for the residence (he was Roger le Boteler) and in another nearer the end of the century, 'D'n's [My lord] Archidiaconus' seven pence each quarter, totalling 2s 4d per annum, a small reduction.

Before the battle of Crecy which was fought in August 1346, Edward III mustered the English fleet at Kingsfleet, an inlet north of Felixstowe Ferry. The Archdeacon of Suffolk, Michael Northburgh, was recruited as royal clerk; he was literate and numerate and could keep the score. His eyewitness account in a newsletter from the English camp, gave the French casualties as 1,542 'without reckoning the commons and foot-soldiers'. Northburgh later became bishop of London and Lord Privy Seal.

In the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 senior clerics were targets for the wrath of mobs after the taxes they had imposed. Simon of Sudbury, archbishop of Canterbury, was beheaded on Tower Green. There was unrest in Ipswich and the house in Northgate Street was attacked. The archdeacon at the time, a Cardinal with an Italian bishopric, was almost certainly safely abroad at the time, but the high wall along the street frontage is a reminder that defence was important at some points in history.

The archdeacon whose name is still associated with the house, William Pykenham, held the office from 1472 to 1497 when he died and he is likely to be the occupant of the Easter Sepulchre tomb in Hadleigh church. The indent of a small kneeling figure brass on the east facing wall no doubt showed him in his vestments. On his first arrival he improved the Ipswich house and built the gatehouse, the upper chamber perhaps holding his library. If he was an ambitious cleric his hopes died with Richard III's death and the Yorkist cause at Bosworth in 1485. Perhaps instead he built the Deanery Towers at Hadleigh as a country

residence where he could also hold the living, a Canterbury peculiar, the deanery of Bocking.

The next archdeacon, John Dolman, founded Pocklington School, and then it was Wolsey's illegitimate son Thomas Wynter. As he was only 16, unordained and living it up in Paris at the time, it is unlikely that he ever visited the house. Fifteen archdeacons later the Royalist Laurence Womack and the antiquary John Battely may have lived here, but David Wilkins the orientalist preferred Hadleigh where he also held the living from 1724-45.

"The Doctor's House" would have been a more appropriate name for the building from the 1740s when a succession of physicians and surgeons lived and practised there, but the name was not changed. The first, Jonathan Hammond died in 1744, and his successors in the house included the Quaker surgeon James Brooke, tall and heavily built. he separated from his wife with considerable unpleasantness and was the last doctor in Ipswich to wear a pigtail. He also used a high awkward gig on long journeys. At the Public Dispensary he was very fond of bleeding, purges, cupping and leeches.

Dr William Henry Williams was the only man to establish himself both as a fashionable and effective physician in early 19th century Suffolk. He was short and robustly active, his dignity of manner verged on the pompous. He was remarkably complacent and professionally pugnacious, touchy and vain, and a staunch Tory. The physician Dr Edward Beck JP came to the house in 1845, lost heavily in railway speculations and ran up debts of £25,000. Barrington Chevallier of the Aspal Hall family ran madhouses here and at the Grove in Grove Lane.

The last private owner before the premises became the Ipswich and Suffolk Club in 1885 was the lawyer, Peter Bartholomew Long. He was four times mayor, a liberal and a churchman. Less parochial than most of his fellow Ipswichians, his interests were far broader.

Dr Ted Cockayne's online version of Dr David van Zwanenburg's 'Suffolk Medical Biographies' supplied the amusing details of the doctors living and working in the house.

Dr John Blatchly

[No portrait of Archdeacon Pykenham is thought to have survived.]



Above: Archdeacon Pykenham's house, watercolour by Ipswich artist Leonard Squirrell (the original hangs inside the Ipswich & Suffolk Club), showing the lawn/bowling green which once stood on the site of the current car park off Tower Street.