

This is the sixth of an occasional series of articles by David Stone about incidents in the history of Swanton Morley and its church

THOMAS DE KYNYNNGHAM

Thomas is almost our first recorded rector (c.1306-1333) but, strangely enough, we do know quite a bit about him.

The international diplomat

Firstly, we know that he featured in a well-documented dispute between the friars in Cambridge and the University. This would not appear to be an unusual event because there was apparently an almost contemporary, and rather better known, quarrel between the friars and the University of Oxford. The quarrel in Cambridge began on 15th November 1303 owing to certain new statements and amendments made to existing statutes, or customs, that were made by Stephen de Haselingfield, Chancellor of the University. What happened is not quite clear, but it was the definite refusal of the masters of the Friars Preachers (Dominicans) and Friars Minor (Franciscans) of Cambridge, Nicholas de Dale and Adam de Hoden, to swear to these statutes that eventually caused the case to be sent to Rome for a papal judgement.

However, proceedings at the Roman Curia were delayed by the death of Pope Benedict XI in July 1304. This resulted in an interregnum which lasted until June 1305 when Pope Clement V was eventually elected. The Curia was then moved to Bordeaux. (In March 1309 the entire papal court moved to Avignon, where it remained until 1377.) Anyway, it was for this reason that the case was eventually tried in Bordeaux.

The university sent to Bordeaux as their representatives Stephen de Segrave, who was now the chancellor, and Thomas de Kynyngham, “..rector ecclesie de Swanton Norwicensis dioceses...”, i.e rector of the church of Swanton in the diocese of Norwich. You may perhaps wonder why Thomas was chosen for this important task. However, those of you who read my first article in this series, which talked about William of Beverley, may remember that in the 14th century being rector of a parish didn’t mean that you had to live in the parish and take services there. The appointment was a sign of status and a source of income, but the rector usually appointed a vicar to look after the day-to-day running of the parish. So it is likely that Thomas, as well as being rector, also had some important appointment in Cambridge, possibly at the university.

The university appears to have known that it had a rather weak case and they were so eager for peace that they accepted as arbitrator Thomas de Jorz, despite the fact that he was not only cardinal priest of Santa Sabina the Dominican college in Rome, but had also previously been prior of the convent of Dominican friars at Oxford. Then, when Stephen and Thomas got to Bordeaux and presented themselves as the representatives of the university, the friars raised doubts as to whether they had full powers to treat and a mandate had to be sent for. All of this took time and put pressure on the university. As expected, the agreement was substantially in favour of the friars, but it was cleverly designed to save the face of the university.

The details of the case are given in various legal documents dated between April and June 1306, so it would seem that these events occurred not long after Thomas's appointment to Swanton Morley.

His death in London

We also know that Thomas died in about 1333 because there is documentation available regarding property in St Mary le Bow and neighbouring parishes belong to a Richard de Elsing (Norfolk) citizen and mercer. The executors of his will, which was proved in 1332, sold this property in favour of his brother William de Elsing, and in 1334 William granted it to 'Elsing Spital' in support of a priest to pray for the souls of William de Carleton and Master Thomas de Kynyngham. Why he chose these two individuals, I do not yet know, but there is presumably some sort of a Norfolk connection. Thomas himself was buried in the church of the Grey Friars (Franciscans) of London.

A Postscript

In view of the intriguing name, I decided to try to find out a little more about Elsing Spital. It turns out to be a hospital founded in about 1329 on the site of St Mary's Cripplegate by William de Elsing. The name is presumably an abbreviation for "Elsing's Hospital" (just as Spitalfields takes its name from the fields of the hospital and priory known as St Mary's Spital). Some say that it was for one hundred blind men, others that it was for blind beggars of both sexes. It was later turned into a priory, consisting of four canons regular (Augustinians) to minister to the blind, with William de Elsing as its first prior. Elsing Spital and Holy Trinity Priory surrendered to Henry VIII during the first stage of the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536. What became of the blind inmates is not known. After the Reformation the congregation of the old St Alphage's church, which was in a ruinous state, decided to move into the chapel of Elsing Spital, which was renamed St Alphage's. Most of the rest of the site was used for the construction of Sion College in about 1630. The church was one of the few to survive the Fire of London. It was partially rebuilt in 1777, but was demolished in 1924, although part of the original tower still remains in London Wall.