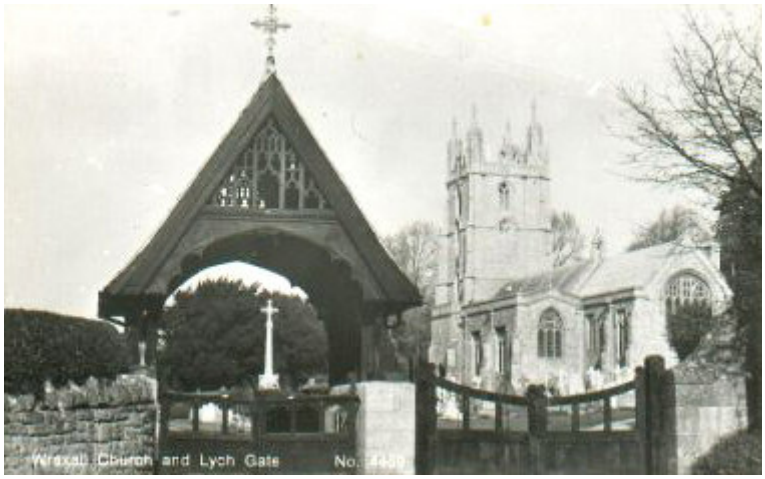
# A Conducted Tour around Wraxall Church

This is a record of a visit to Wraxall Church (All Saints') by members of the Nailsea and District Local History Society on 25th June 1990. **W.L. Rew**

Wraxall CHURCH (before 1855) (from the Vaughan Address)



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Please Note: This article was written in 1990 and changes since then are unlikely to appear

## Introduction

As this is based on a walk around the church and its environs, the items cannot be dealt with in chronological order. It is convenient to start outside the lych gate, and this will make it possible to start with a late 13th century charter, which, although not by any means the earliest information available, will give us an insight into the life in the parish of Wraxall in early years.

It will also introduce us to some of the early families who we shall meet again, and to their influence on the parish.

## The Fair and Market

In the Patent Rolls of 1462 (in a bound volume in the County Record Office at Taunton) we read:

"Inspeximus and Confirmation to Theobald Gorges, Knt., son and heir of Thomas Gorges, son and heir of Theobald Gorges, of a Charter dated at Westminster 11 July 36 Edw.111 (1362), inspecting and confirming to the last-named Theobald, kinsman of Elena de Gorges, a Charter dated at Berwick on Tweed, 30 July 19 Edw. 1 (1290), being a grant to her and her heirs of a market weekly and a fair yearly at her manor of Wrockeshale, co Somerset ….." The market was to be held on Thursdays and the fair on the "Vigil, day and morrow of All Souls and five days next ensuing,"

The Cross Tree, the third at least of these, is planted in the base of the old Market Cross. The first, an elm, died during the outbreak of Dutch Elm disease; it was in a very sick condition for many years before this. It was replaced with a horse-chestnut tree, which only a few years later was also found to be diseased, so that too was replaced with an oak in 1989.

The cross itself has disappeared. Tradition has it that Cromwell's men were responsible for its destruction; one variation being that they destroyed it as a symbol of idolatry or perhaps as a focus for jollifications, another that the Wraxall people got there first, took the cross away and concealed it, some say in the bed of the river.

Very little information is available concerning the market and fair; in fact I had wondered if they had ever 'got off the ground'. However, a short time ago my sister, Phyllis found in the Record office at Taunton a copy of the "Directory for the County of Somerset" for 1840, with a note on Wraxall "A fair is held here at All Hallowstide, which lasts six days." Phyllis queries

if this might have been the market, as the fairs were suppressed in Cromwell's time, while the markets were essential for trade. Still, the entry in the Directory shows that the fair or the market was still in existence in the nineteenth century, so there may be some truth in the suggestion that the market died out because the growth of Nailsea brought shops into the district, and the railways made travel to towns so much easier.

In addition to the cross being the focus for the business of the market, being the place where dues were paid to the owners of the market, it also had another use --- as a place of summary jurisdiction for petty criminals. Dealers found guilty of petty crime such as defrauding the owners of the market could be punished on the spot, often by a flogging. Originally such punishment was inflicted with the criminal bare-backed and strapped to the back of a cart, a woman being permitted to wear a shift while she was being flogged. At a later date, a statute of 1597 substituted the whipping post for the cart, and we find an entry in the churchwardens' accounts for the cost of repairs to the whipping post in 1728.

Besides the whipping post near the cross there were also the stocks. Although the use of the stocks was officially abolished in 1837, they continued to be used unofficially by some parish priests. We read of two boys being put in the stocks by the Vicar of Stoke St. Gregory in 1863 for releasing mice in the church, while in the 1840's a girl received the same punishment at West Monkton for "tampering with the organ". Fortunately by the time I was a choirboy here the Rectors were more tolerant of youthful pranks.

Now looking up the hill a little, we see across the road the church car park. This was made in 1989 on a piece of rough ground in the Rectory garden. Further up is the Rectory: tradition had it that it was built in 1661 by Nathaniel Pownell, but this is not so. Evidence in a personal diary kept by Rev. E.P. Vaughan around 1850 says that a Mr. Scarfe, an expert on church architecture, claims that it was much older, possibly 14$^{th}$ century, basing his claim on the style of the chimney at the east end of the building. Nathaniel Pownell may have extended it, of course.

## Wraxall Hill

Originally Wraxall Hill only went a short way; from a point roughly by the entrance to the Rectory it became only a lane or footpath as far as the start of the S-bend, where there was a gate, referred to as the Field Gate. Above this there was a road to the top of the hill as at present, but passing alongside the wall. There was also a road junction to two paths through

the woods, and a quarry. The remains of the quarry can be seen as the cut rocks on the right of the present road, and the spoil ground is the scrub land on the left. The footpath from the Rectory to the Field Gate was known as "Parson's Lane" or "Parsonage Lane". The Rev. James Vaughan was made a grant of £10 by the Surveyors of Highways on Sept. 10, 1813, when the Vestry "agreed to pay James Vaughan for putting the road in order from the cross Tree to the gate on the hill and for keeping in order for one year from the Cross Tree to the direction post on the hill near the Park wall, they will pay to him the sum of £10." They later gave him another £2.

The work involved taking a part of the glebe land above the Rectory and cutting a road by the side of the lane, grading the road to make a more even descent (hence the deep cutting of the road above the Rectory to the S-bend). The remains of the original Parson's Lane are seen as the overgrown path on the top of the bank on the left-hand side.

## The Churchyard and Library

Turning now to enter the churchyard, we see the lych gate. This was built under the supervision of Sir Arthur Blomfield in 1894, as also was the extension of the Lady (or Charlton) Chapel and the reredos there, and the re-building of the Chancel.

Before moving into the churchyard, it is interesting to consider what we have seen so far. We have stood in one spot, and have seen remains of objects of historical importance dating from 1291 (Elena de Gorges), about 1650 (Cromwell), 14$^{th}$ century (Rectory), 1831 (James Vaughan) and 1894 (Blomfield), together with 1989 (car park). This is typical of Wraxall: there is so much history in the village that one can stand in any one of a number of spots and be within sight of centuries of historical interest.

Entering now the churchyard, and taking the right-hand path, we see on our left the triangular piece of ground extending from the lych gate almost to the east wall of the church. Mother always referred to this as the "New Piece"; it was given by Antony Gibbs. That portion nearest the lych gate was to be kept, under the terms of the deed of gift, as a lawn and rose garden, which is why there are no graves at this end. The other part was an extension of the graveyard. Its use as such was restricted to Persons of the parish of Wraxall, "not being persons unbaptised or who have laid violent hands upon themselves". I shall refer to this restriction later.

Moving on, we come to a large monolith of a conglomerate stone, which was erected to commemorate the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897. All this "New Piece" was originally part of the orchard and field of Wraxall Court.

On the left among the gravestones we come to what was unofficially referred to as the "Parsons' or Vaughans' corner". Several of the Rectors of Wraxall and members of the Vaughan family are buried here.

On the right are doors which admit to a room built in the bank. This at one time held the parish bier, used when funeral processions were usually on foot; it now houses the oil tank for the heating system for the church. On the bank above there is a collection of odd pieces of stone, which were taken from the church during restoration. Some of the stone from memorials inside the church has weathered badly: I particularly regret the state of a sandstone memorial built into the wall, which was to commemorate Elizabeth Codrington, the last of the Gorges family in Wraxall, who died in 1740. When I returned to Wraxall about ten years ago I was able to read much of the inscription, and in fact I first realised whose memorial it was by the armorial bearings. This would be impossible today.

Opposite this bank are two doors in the church, the first being the door to the boiler house. The heating system was installed with a coke-fired boiler, in 1890. It can be imagined what it was like for the Verger (Henry Windsor in my young days) whose duties meant getting the heating going in time for the 8 am service on a cold winters Sunday morning! Life is easier with an oil-fired system. The second door is the entrance to the vestry.

Just past the vestry door is the entrance to the old Gibbs vault under the vestry floor. This is now filled and sealed. The Gibbs arms (three battle axes) can be seen on the stone-work.

Moving along on the left-hand side of the path we are alongside this north wall of the church. This part of the church has been a headache to the parishioners over the centuries, needing continual repairs. Even in 1419 we read in the Will of Agnes Gorges that she left money for repairs to the north aisle, "newly built by the parishioners". We also notice a deep drain, made about 1783-84 and much further work was done around 1892, when structural damage was caused by a falling pinnacle which came through the roof.

We now come to the north door of the church. This has not been opened for many years – I can just remember it being opened by Mrs. Windsor, the

cleaner, when I was very young. If the heads on the stone-work are those of the king and queen of the days, and the door was fixed just before 1419, the king might be Edward 111, Richard 11, Henry 1V, or Henry V.

## The Library

We now arrive at the Library, and we will go inside and rest our feet.

This was the first proper school for the parish. Built by Richard Vaughan in 1809, it was built in the churchyard because at that time no landowner was prepared to give land on which to build a school. It was erected by John Weeks, who told the Rev. E.P. Vaughan that the joists for the roof and floor were made from the timbers of an old man-o'-war which was being broken up at Bristol. The first schoolmaster was named Knight, and James Vaughan, the Rector, sent him away to a school near Bridgwater to be properly trained: previously there had been only a couple of Dames' schools, kept by Betty Bowles and later by Mrs. Dyer. When Mrs. Vaughan asked Betty Bowles what she taught, she was told "only the crisscross and to sit still". The "crisscross" (Christ's Cross) consisted of the alphabet laid out in the form of a cross on a board, which was then covered with a thin sheet of horn, giving the alternative name of a "horn book".

The cottage for the schoolmaster was built in 1827 on a piece of waste ground. As extra schools were needed, and the initial resistance of the landowners seems to have been overcome, the present schools began to be built. Failand school was opened in 1839, Wraxall Boys' in 1856, and the Girls' in 1886. The original school was then converted to a library, and is now used as a general meeting room and for the junior classes of the Sunday Club.

As we leave here, the door on the left as we go out leads into the cloakroom. Some of the pegs on which the pupils could hang their clothes can be seen through the window.

There is one mystery about the schools. In the diary of Rev. E.P. Vaughan he gives a list of the schoolrooms of Wraxall and Failand, and their dimensions. From this list there appears to be two schools in the churchyard, but we cannot see where the other room can have been.

Moving now along the path towards the cottage, we notice first the entrance to the tower. This entrance was made in 1850, replacing the earlier entrance inside the church. The tower is 85 feet high, 21 feet wide at the base. The belfry has a ring of eight bells, three of which are dated

1705. The tenor bell weighs over 23 cwt. Over the west door the statue is reputed to be that of either Henry V1 or Edward 1V.

Across the graves on our right, against the wall of Wraxall Court, there are a couple of rows of tiny graves. Phyllis was told by Mother that they were the graves of babies who were still-born or who died before they could be baptised. According to custom, and remembering my remarks about the burials in the New Piece, persons unbaptised could not be buried in consecrated ground: here we find a parish priest (probably a Vaughan, for they were very kindly Rectors) making provision for a space in consecrated ground within the churchyard for those who for no fault of themselves or their parents were unbaptised.

## The South Path

The gates by the cottage were installed in 1829 (two years after the cottage was built), and cost £12 10. The path then takes us past the graves of the Youd family (my maternal grandparents) and past the wall of the south churchyard. This was opened in late 1923 and was consecrated early in 1924. The pillar at the end marks the grave of the first Lord Wraxall. The War memorial to the fallen in the 1914-1918 war was erected before the church yard was opened.

Further along the path, on the right is a seat, which was given by Mrs. Tweedie in 1934. Admiral and Mrs. Tweedie lived for some years at Wraxall House, and Admiral Tweedie became the Commander of the Naval dockyard at Chatham. While he was there, H.M.S. Snapper was launched by Mrs. Tweedie, and she was presented with the seat commemorating the launching.

The path now takes us past the remains of the old yew tree (damaged in the storms of January 1990), and turns to bring us towards the south door of the church. First, we pass the 15th century Preaching Cross (not to be confused with the Market Cross); this was restored and a new head made and fitted in 1893.

Facing the south door, we can see the south side of the tower, and note the clock. The clock face is dated 1730, and the clock of that date was repaired in 1784. A new clock was installed in 1848.

At a vestry meeting in 1852 it was resolved that "the clock be regulated by London Time". The Great Western Railway was now in operation, and while hitherto every town had kept its own local time based on noon being

taken from the time when the mean sun was due south, this was no longer acceptable: the longitude of Bristol being 2 degrees 33 minutes west of Greenwich, Bristol Local time was about 10 minutes slow on Greenwich time. Here we have one effect of the coming of the railway on rural life!

We are now approaching the south porch. There is a sundial above the entrance; I have been given three different dates for this. Alan Rome suggests that the dial would have been installed when the porch was built, 1390 to 1450, another date suggested is in the time of Henry V111 (1509 to1547), while Mr. Greenhill suggests about 1220!

Inside the porch is a flight of steps which used to lead to a gallery used for occasional services; this gallery was removed in 1850. Above the porch is a parvise (priests' room), and in the porch is a stoup for holy water.

We now come to the main door. The stone-work around the door is Norman, the sole visible remains of the original Norman church. Tradition has it that the church was built by the pious family of de Moreville, who were Lords of the Manor from before 1220: the date of the church is probably about 1150. There was an earlier family of de Wrokeshalle, of whom the last in the male line was Richard. His daughter married Eudo de Moreville in 1334. Their only daughter married Sir Ralph de Gorges and the estates passed to him. The first Rector whose name is known was Adam de Moreville, appointed in 1265.

## Inside the Church

To take advantage of the remaining hour of daylight, I propose to take you straight to the chancel, where we can sit and rest our legs again while I point out some of the items of interest, especially the armorial bearings in the tracery of the east window. First, however, we stop at the chancel screen, a gift by the Gibbs family, of particular interest to us as the screen was carved about 1894 by the father of our Stan Phillips, so I suggested he took a bow for his dad, whose work was being admired almost a century after he did it!

Passing into the chancel we can take a seat in the choir stalls, and look at the arms of the various families who were closely connected with the building and maintenance of the church. The tracery windows are a "potted history" of Wraxall church; a few of the windows show the arms of the Gorges (a whirlpool or Gourge), being the arms used before 1341; the arms of Russell, who married into the Gorges ( argent, on a chief gules three besants), and the new arms used after 1341, (lozengy or and azure, a

chevron gules), which was the arms of de Moreville with the chevron added as a "difference". Besides these there are the more recent arms of the Gibbs family, (three battleaxes), and the Vaughan family with the three infants' heads entwined about the neck with snakes! These of course can only be seen while there is daylight outside.

The chancel, out of centre with the nave, has been credited with being Early English on the strength of a double piscina and a priest's door in the south wall, but these have been found to have been put in a wall of much later construction, built from debris of a previous building bearing evidence of having been destroyed by fire.

The chancel is the newest portion of the church. Considerable repair work was carried out in 1851-52, when the north wall was re-cased, and a recess made for the Gorges tomb. This had previously obstructed the way to the altar, as can be seen from one of the photographs shown. These repairs took a year to complete, and half the church remained open for worship for most of the time.

The Rev. Masters, in his "Notes for a Parochial History of Wraxall" says that the first pointed details in the chancel, with the aisle and the south porch, point to a re-building at the Norman period, while another or considerable enlargement must have taken place in the 15th century. We notice in the Will of Agnes Gorges (1419) previously referred to that money was left for repairs to the church. Could this be the work that Masters mentions?

## Repairs and re-building

In 1892 a pinnacle fell off the tower and severely damaged the roof of the nave, narrowly missing the organ, which at that time was at the west end of the church, as also was the choir. The chancel was occupied by four box pews (see photograph).

Repairs were put in hand. The following is quoted from the Faculty of 1892, and will give an idea of the amount of repair work needed:

"Take down and re-set the pinnacles. Take in 214 square feet of ground on the south side of the churchyard and build a new south transept. Take down and re-build the south wall of the chancel. Lower the ground round the church and drain it. Take up and remove any bodies and carefully re-inter as near (as possible) to their present position. Build a new east window in the chancel and raise the roof to the same pitch as the nave. Take down and remove the pews in the chancel and put in new choir

seats. Restore the screens in the chancel. Remove the organ from the west to the east end of the north aisle. Take down and remove the memorial crosses and set on the east wall of the north transept".

During this re-building, the east and south walls were re-built from the ground, so with the re-casing of the north wall, the entire chancel is practically new. The sanctuary door is in its original position, and the piscina is now in the Charlton chapel.

Taking a last look round before we leave the chancel to return later, we will notice, besides the memorials to the members of the Vaughan family, some little wall plates commemorating the ordinary people who gave their work to the church. We notice in particular the plates to Henry Windsor, verger and sexton for many years, and his wife the church cleaner. At the back of the choir stalls is one to Elliott Armstrong, a chorister for many years. Apart from his service, (and that of his son Howard), he was affectionately remembered by my generation of choirboys as the man who bequeathed a sum of money on trust to pay the choirboys. Hitherto the honour of singing in the choir was the only attraction, but from then on a choirboy would receive, for attending a choir practice and one Sunday service, sixpence. This, I might add, was a very acceptable sum to a poor family, and it was paid quarterly.

We will return to the chancel after we have been round the church, so if we move on into the nave again, we notice the list of Rectors on the brass plate behind the Rector's stall, and see that the first Rector whose name we know is Adam de Moreville, 1265.

Turning left, we pass to the Charlton chapel, and see first the war memorial to the fallen in the second world war, and then on the left a squint which allowed the priest in the chapel to synchronise his movements with those of another priest at the main alter in the chancel. This chapel was originally much smaller than it is now: it was almost transeptual until in 1893-94 it was extended eastwards under the supervision of Sir Arthur Blomfield, who was also responsible for more work at that time in the chancel. There is a model of the church at that time (before its alteration) to be seen under a glass cover, and it will be seen how much smaller the chapel was.

The east window in the chapel is one of the best examples of the work of Charles Eamer Kempe, who was responsible for most of the windows in this church, and elsewhere in the world. This is perhaps the best place to mention the artist and his work.

Kempe joined the firm of Clayton and Bell as a pupil in stained glass work in 1864, and the next year he produced the design for an important work for them, in Gloucester Cathedral. By this time he had already decided he would set up his own company. He was later joined by a young man, Alfred Edward Tombleson, who remained with Kempe throughout Kempe's life, as the manager of the glass works. After Kempe's death in 1907, Tombleson continued with C.E.Kempe & Co. until the firm closed in 1934.

It is the custom of artists to sign their work, perhaps with a mark rather than a name. Kempe at first used the arms of his family, up to 1895, "gules, three garbs or on a bordure engrailed of the second, eight hurts", that is, three golden wheat sheaves on a red ground: this can be seen at the top of this east window. By the side of this can be seen another window bearing the initials AET for Alfred Edward Tombleson.

Kempe decided after 1895 that he should not use the family arms for business, so after that date he registered as a Trade Mark a simpler one consisting of one golden wheat sheaf on a red ground; two of the windows in the north wall of the church use this design.

The windows in this chapel are often criticised for being very dark. This is a valid criticism, but Alan Rome considered that if the windows with their leads and bars are not looked upon as paintings on glass, but as a view of the brighter life hereafter as seen through the bars of our earthly prison, we may get another outlook! It's a novel approach!

Apart from some of the memorials on the walls, the only items of note are the piscina (removed from the chancel during re-building) and the reredos, designed by Kempe. The subject is the Annunciation, and the details are laid out on the photograph on the wall.

As we leave the chapel and return to the nave, we see on the pillar on our left a small memorial in Latin to John Tynte, who died in 1616. This is rather difficult to read as it is very dark: we feel it must be a plate from a coffin or a grave, as it reads: "Here lies the body of John Tynte, Esquire …..!

On our right is the lectern, given by Henry Vaughan in 1891, and the pulpit given in 1851 by William Gibbs. Originally these were on opposite sides to where they are now, and the height of the pulpit has been reduced as will be seen in one of the photographs. Moving down the aisle towards the west, we can see more of the arms carved on the screen of the chapel, those of the Gibbs, Gorges and Berkeley families.

Passing the south door, we note the stones in the floor. The specification for these reads: "Pennant Sandstone, cut from a grey seam and laid in diamonds". Opposite this, against the other part of the transept, are two of the oldest pews in the church, of the pattern of those which were removed when the new pews were installed in 1894. It is interesting to see the detail in the carving on the heads of the new pews: the detail is very good, for example the carving of acorns even include some showing where the acorn has been shed, leaving only the cup.

We come now to the font. This is octagonal, probably 15th century, with a stone book-rest. We read in the churchwardens' accounts of a new stone basin supplied in 1822, costing 14/-.

Opposite the font on the south wall of the church are the lists (on brass plates) of the benefactions made over the years giving rise to the Charities, and in the wall is a small door leading (up a very narrow staircase) to the parvise or priest's room above the porch. It is suggested that only a few people go up at a time: the ventilation is not good, and I understand that the floor is now suspect. There are examples of early stained glass (15th and 16th century) in this room.

Moving now to the west end of the church, we come first to a memorial stone in the floor under the seats on the left: this is the memorial to Theobald (Tibbot) Gorges who died in 1468 – the numbering system is strange, with the 4 written as half an eight. It was he who took the name of Gorges. This is the third resting place for this stone; it was first in the chancel, then at the east end of the north aisle, and now at the west end of the nave. Other memorial stones here are to Edward Ancketyl and his son-in-law Samuel Still, both Rectors. They are chiefly remembered, especially the latter, for their persecution of the Quakers for non-payment of tythes; our John Whiting is particularly critical.

Above the west door are the Royal Arms. These have recently been restored by Dick Alvis and his wife (Ella) as a thank offering for fifty years of marriage.

By the stones of these two priests is another for Gen. Kemyss of Naish House, and there is a door into a cupboard. This was the original entrance into the tower, and is now blanked off.

Moving along the west wall, we find two memorial plates to members of the Lucas family (of Nailsea glassworks), and then the first in the series of windows illustrating biblical stories; this one is the story of the Annunciation. On the north wall we have two more of Kempe's windows,

these bearing the later trade mark of the single wheat sheaf, and then we come to the north door. At the end of this wall we come to the entrance to the stairs to the organ, which is now on what was the Rood loft.

The organ, moved to this place while the repairs were being made in 1892-93, is a two-manual instrument with a label "Vowles of Clevedon". I had been told by a man who had been the organist here that it was not a Vowles, and I have not been able to contact him since, so I must accept the inscription on the label. In my young days the organ was manually blown, but since the electricity supply was brought to the church (in 1924 the organ has been overhauled, the old blower replaced with an electrically driven, and changes made to the organ, including a pedal swell control. The organist tells me that it is unusual for an organ of this size to have a double swell box system.

From here we enter the Davey chapel, which is now used as the ladies' robbing room for the choir, and we see the unusual memorial tablet for one of the Davey sons who died of his wounds in the first world war. He was buried in France, and the usual temporary wooden cross was erected on his grave. When the permanent stone replaced this, the wooden cross was brought home and is mounted on this memorial.

Through the vestry we pass once more into the chancel, and turning left into the Sanctuary we see the tomb of Sir Edmund Gorges (died 1512) and his first wife, Anne, the daughter of Lord Howard, Duke of Norfolk. The tomb is of interest, in that the figure of his wife is apparently on his wrong side: this is no mistake, as she, the daughter of a Duke, is of higher rank than he, a mere knight.

Sir Edmund's father died while Edmund was still a minor. He was placed in ward with Lord Howard, and obviously was popular with the family. In the Patent Rolls of 1462 (bound volume at Taunton Record Office) we find on Page 527:

"Grant of custody of lordships etc. possessions late of Walter Gorges co Norfolk dec. and Mary his wife during the minority of Edmund, son and heir – which will come into the King's hands on the death of Theobald Gorges, knt., grandfather of the said heir".

His wife was great aunt to two of Henry VIII's Queens, Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard. The tomb, as I have mentioned before, was in an awkward position, where it obstructed the way to the altar, and when the re-building of the north wall of the chancel was put in hand the opportunity was taken to make a special recess to house it.

Finally, we return to the east window. This is Kempe's best work in Wraxall church, and represents our Lord in Majesty. The reredos of Bath stone depicts the Transfiguration.

I feel we have had a long tiring walk around the church. There is much more that could have been said, but perhaps you can see some of the reasons for my interest in the church. Its work continues now as it did in the 14th, 15th and 19th centuries. We still have to watch the condition of the building: I can remember in 1951 repairs to the roof on account of the ravages of the death watch beetle. But with such a beautiful church and such a wonderful history it would be a shame to neglect it.

My thanks are due to the people who have helped me in preparing this visit, especially to our churchwarden, Jacqui Ewens, to the Rector and hit wife, Anne, and to my sister, Phyllis Horman, who have taken much of the routine work off my hands, leaving me to get on with the preparation of the walk itself.

Tea and coffee are available at the west end of the church!

W.L. Rew