



St. Margaret's Church

I P S W I C H

St Margaret's, the Withypoll family and Christchurch Mansion

In 1545 Paul Withypoll¹ (1487-1547) and his son Edmund bought the priory and lands of Holy Trinity, also known as Christ Church, which had been closed by Henry VIII in 1536. Thus began the link to Ipswich of the Withypolls and their Devereux heirs, which lasted until 1736. Their importance to the life of St. Margaret's was considerable as this purchase gave them the right, as patrons, to propose the only candidates to be vicars of St Margaret's to the Bishop, and the obligation to maintain the chancel.

Paul Withypoll is an example of the social mobility of able younger sons to move from the land to trade and, when wealthy, buy back into the landed class; a process helped by the sale of the monastic lands of the church confiscated by Henry VIII. John, his father was a third son and moved to Bristol, then the second city in England, and engaged in trade to Spain and Portugal, a risky business. He co-owned a ship, the Marie Grace, seized by the French in July 1474 and held for a ransom of 1,250 marks; piracy was an ever-present threat to English merchants. However he prospered and his family intermarried with the Thorne family who founded Bristol Grammar School and were said to have discovered Newfoundland before Cabot.

Paul, also a third son, followed John into this Spanish trade and became a Member of the Guild of St John the Baptist, the Merchant Taylors' Company of Bristol. In 1510 he moved to London and also married Anne Curson, the twice-widowed daughter of Sir Robert Curson of Brightwell, Suffolk who gave him four children.

In 1514 he commissioned Antonio da Salario (dated and signed by him) to paint a triptych showing him in profile kneeling on the right, praying to the Blessed Virgin Mary and Child.

A pale-faced, clean shaven man, with a strong nose, brown jaw-length hair with a fringe, dressed plainly in a fine dark cloth robe with brown fur at neck and cuffs with a white shirt just visible, he gazes expressionlessly ahead - his is the first contemporary picture we have of any person connected to St Margaret's.



Virgin and Child with Saint Joseph and Donor, centre panel of the Withypoll Triptych, 1514 (oil on canvas on panel), Salario, Antonio da (fl.1502-14) / Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, UK / Purchased with the assistance of the National Art-Collections Fund (now The Art Fund),

¹ More recently known as Withipoll

He joined the Merchant Taylors in London becoming Master 1537/8. He spoke Italian, had a bank account in Genoa and was appointed to mediate in a dispute between Italian and English merchants. In 1532 he was praised as knowing more about trade with the Netherlands "than any merchant belonging to the Adventurers". Both Wolsey and Henry VIII used his services. He became MP for the City of London in 1529–35 and again in 1545. His wisdom and discretion was so prized that in 1539 he was permitted to be present at all Common Councils of the City and at the elections of the Mayors and Sheriffs.

His beliefs were traditional, untouched by the rise of reformist thinking. He bought "Postilla sive expositivo epistolarum et evangelorum dominicalium", written by the theologian, William of Auvergne, the C13th Bishop of Paris, first printed in Lyons in 1500 by Guilielmus Parisiensis. On its flyleaf is written "Thys boke is Powle Wythypoll's bought in Sevyl in Almoneda for 11s". His wife Anne owned a Book of Hours inscribed with her name. In his will of 1542 he asked to be buried in St Lawrence Poultney Church in London "in aneant fashion" with torches and tapers. However, he had no qualms about utilising his vast mercantile wealth to establish himself in the Suffolk gentry by the acquisition of the lands of the Catholic church with whose practices at least he seems content.

Edmund, the heir of Paul and born between 1510 and 1513, built a great house to reflect his wealth calling it initially Withypoll House. We know it now as Christchurch Mansion. St Margaret's became the family's church and preferred place of baptism, marriage and burial. His son Peter was the first christened there on 20 March 1549. Edmund had been educated by a leading humanist scholar, Thomas Lupset who gave him a life-long love of Latin and learning in general. In 1529 Lupset dedicated to Edmund a long letter of advice "*An Exhortation to Yonge Men*" (published 1535).



Edmund Withypoll from medal
by Steven van Herwijk

In 1544 he participated in the siege and capture of Boulogne where, on 25 September he took from the church of Notre Dame a copy of Cicero's *Epistolae*. In December 1545 he was pardoned at Queen Catherine Parr's request for the manslaughter of William Mathew, a serving man of Lowhall, Walthamstow. This may have influenced the Withypoll move from their Walthamstow estate to Ipswich. He continued to make money by both trade and money-lending.

In Ipswich he was clearly neither an easy neighbour to church or town. He was accused of demolishing a priest's house and a churchyard wall, to have stolen materials from a church window and banned entry to the churchyard. He was ordered to pay money to the parishioners. He allowed the chancel to become ruinous despite the fact that it was the site of his proposed great tomb.

He quarrelled bitterly with the Town Council over the Holy Trinity Fair, the rights to which he had inherited with the purchase of the Priory. The lawsuits which arose from this forced the Town to raise loans and taxes.

Nevertheless, friends called him kind and genial.

He was elected a MP for Ipswich in 1558. He was a Justice of the Peace for Suffolk from 1561 to his death and was appointed High Sheriff for Suffolk 1570-1.

In his will of 1st May 1582 he left instructions for his burial in St. Margaret's, and divided his property, the bulk of which went to his 18 year-old grandson, Paul, as his eldest son had predeceased him. He died at Christchurch on the 16th May and was buried five days later.

In 1635 Bishop Wren objected to the way the high table prevented people from seeing the minister at the communion table and ordered it to be lowered and the altar raised. The tomb was removed in 1754; a stone in the chancel floor marks the central site and the fine black marble slab with his monogram and the bold assertion in Latin: "Mortui sine hoste" - "They died without an enemy" - stands against the west wall of the north transept.

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