

From Shipston you may go by Alderminster, with its fine Norman and Early English church, nestling among ancient trees on the high ground that slopes down to the Stour. In a most delightful paper on the records of his Court of Arches, Sir Lewis Dibdin, Dean of the Arches, has recently told us that : — " In 1666 the Vicar of Alderminster was charged with a great variety of misdeeds, from desecrating church ornaments and utensils by turning them to domestic purposes, to hunting, smoking, frequenting ale-houses, and playing games on Sunday. But the head and front of his offence was that he ' boasted a friendship with Oliver Cromwell.' " ^ So Alderminster church has historical as well as architectural interest. Indeed the two may well be connected. Let us see. ^ From the full text of Sir L. T. Dibdin's address, in *The Guardian* ^ January 16, 1914. 40 Digitized by Google CHAP. III ALDERMINSTER 41 The church, which had fallen into sad disrepair, was restored and partly rebuilt in 1873 and 1884. For many years previous to the latter date, the nave, minus the greater part of the south wall which had fallen outwards, was supported by props. The interior was disfigured by damp and whitewash, box pews of deal, and a western gallery. There was a fiat ceiling in the chancel dividing the east window. The tiled roofs were low pitched, and soil, in which burials had been permitted, was heaped up, almost to the level of the chancel windows. Perhaps some light has recently been thrown upon the condition into which the church had gradually drifted, by the remarks of Sir Lewis Dibdin at the Authors' Club, which I have already quoted as well as by the untiring researches of the rector of Whitchurch (the Rev. J. Harvey Bloom) whose church we can see from Alderminster churchyard, standing in a field just across the Stour, but in Warwickshire. At any rate Alderminster has not always been fortunate in its vicars. The name of the vicar in 1666 appears to have been Swanne. He was perhaps not so bad as the Gloucestershire parson, also referred to by Sir Lewis, who insisted on keeping a cheese all the winter in the font " to the great discomfort of the parishioners sitting near by it," but Mr. Swanne was certainly not a tactful person, even if he was not himself " perverse and obstinate " as he charged the churchwarden with being. For five years there was difficulty about the church clock (not the present one), and the vicar had a lawsuit over the tithe of wool, as certain letters (unearthed by Mr. Bloom in the Edgar Tower at Worcester) and an entry in the parish register show. We wonder after two hundred and fifty years, whether there was any connection between the alleged malice of the vicar, and the absence of any record in the register of the death of Robert Phipps, who used to be, and possibly is still, commemorated by a stone in the churchyard showing that he passed away on August 10, 1703.