St. Mary's Church, Bridgwater.

Soon after 2 o'clock, the members visited St. Mary's Church, which, in the absence of the Vicar, the Rev. Preb. J. J. Langham, was briefly described by Mr. F. Bligh Bond, F.R.I.B.A., who said that there was little to add to Mr. E. Buckle's account of the Church given in the *Proceedings*, XLIII, i, 15–18.

Mr. Bond was of opinion that the north porch was originally Early English work, the capitals supporting the arch being of this character; but that the rest had been rebuilt some time in the following century. He placed the date of the traceried tympanum at about A.D. 1330, and he regarded the canopied recess in the north wall as being of XIV Century work.

The north wall of the north transept contained the entrance to a crypt now blocked by the heating-apparatus. The canopied recesses flanking this on the outer face of the wall were a curious feature. The remains of figures were those of ecclesiastics, but had not been identified. Their headgear, which had puzzled archæologists, suggested a combination of crown and mitre. In this connection it should be remembered that the Chapel of the Holy Cross was said to have been situated to the north of the north transept and over the 'charnel-house.'

Mr. Bond added that the Vicar of Bridgwater gave the following note on the picture of the "Descent from the Cross" over the altar:—The picture was presented to the town in 1780 by Lord Anne Poulett, member for Bridgwater. He purchased it in Plymouth from the contents of a prize-ship which was then in Plymouth Harbour. It had been taken from its frame, rolled up and carried thus to Bridgwater. This was stated on the authority of a grandson of the man who unpacked it on its arrival. The artist of the picture was unknown, but experts generally assigned it to the Spanish school, and a strong opinion had been expressed that it was a Murillo. This view was shared by Dr. Russell Forbes of Rome, who had also stated his belief that the figure of the

Blessed Mary was painted from the same model as one or two of Murillo's representations of her in pictures at Rome.

The Blake House.

This house, which is situated a short distance from the Cornhill, in a street now called Blake Street, was thrown open by its owner, Mr. W. H. Kitch. A stone tablet on the front of the house bears the inscription, "In this house was born, A.D. 1598, Robert Blake, Admiral and General-at-Sea." This two-storied building is built mainly of blue lias stone, stuccoed on the outside. The interior has some fine oak beams, roughly hewn, and still showing marks of the adze used in shaping them. Some of the ceilings are enriched with plaster mouldings round the beams, which are framed together in panels with Tudor roses in their centre. The room in which Blake was born contains the original fireplace of Ham Hill stone. In restoring the walls a few years ago some interesting sketches were found scratched or cut into the plaster, with figures of ships and a horseman with tall cavalier hat, as seen in the accompanying photograph taken by Mr. Kitch.

Bridgwater Castle.

The members then made their way to the riverside to see the Water Gate of the Castle, under the guidance of Mr. M. E. Page and Mr. H. Corder.

Bridgwater Castle was built by William Briwere in the second year of King John's reign. Its history was uneventful until its fall, but its constable, Sir Humphrey Stafford, was executed at Bridgwater, probably within the Castle walls, during the War of the Roses. It was held for the King during the Civil War, and was considered to be impregnable. Immediately after the Battle of Langport, however, it was invested by Fairfax and Cromwell, and surrendered after an unexpectedly short siege. Treachery, or gross negligence, was alleged by the Royalists, but probably the real cause was the superiority of the Parliamentary artillery captured from the



SCRATCHED SKETCHES ON WALL, BLAKE HOUSE, BRIDGWATER.

From a photograph by Mr. W. H. Kitch.

King at Naseby. The terms of surrender were strictly observed ; they included the destruction of the Castle, and only the water-gate now remains. (See illustration in Powell's "Ancient Borough of Bridgwater," p. 48).

Sydenham Manor House.

This house, 1⅛ miles from Bridgwater, on the Wells road, was visited by the kind permission of Colonel and Mrs. J. H. Lynn. The oldest part of the house now remaining dates from *circa* 1470, and other portions were added a century later. The manor appears in Domesday book as of small size and value. It was a fief of Roger of Arundel. When the house was rebuilt the arms of Arundel and of Perceval were carved on one of the doorways. (Collinson, III, 86–87).

Dr. G. F. SYDENHAM, of Dulverton, gave some account of the family associated with Sydenham Manor from (at latest) the XIII to the beginning of the XVII Century. He said that the Sydenhams of Sydenham traced their descent from Robert, who flourished in the days of King John, and the male line continued to hold the manor till the XV Century when John Sydenham, the heir, died without issue. His sister had married Richard Cave, the son of a prominent Bridgwater burgess, and for three generations the manor was in the hands of the Cave family, but again the male heir died childless, and Thomas Perceval who was the husband of Alice Cave, rebuilt the house. The Percevals continued to hold the property till 1613, when Richard sold it to an ancestor of George Bubb Dodington. But the Sydenham family during these four centuries had spread widely through the county. We could retrace the male line beyond that John Sydenham in whom it had failed, to younger sons ; Simon who founded the Bathealton branch ; Richard, a judge, who founded the Combe Sydenham branch, and Hugh, a most important link and ancestor of all the branches subsisting in the male line. He was that same John's uncle, and came to Pixton, his mother's estate, about 1350. Pixton was thus held by the Sydenhams till a century later. The Brympton branch traced descent

from Richard, the judge, and held the estate till as late as 1730. Many Sydenhams had held high office, and had risen to positions of importance in state and county. Dr. Sydenham expressed his willingness to show pictures and pedigrees to anyone desiring more information. He was himself a descendant in the eldest surviving male line, and felt the keenest interest in standing where the family had received its name so many centuries ago.

On returning to the town the Members were entertained to Tea at St. Mary's Hall by the Local Committee and a number of lady helpers. On behalf of those present they were heartily thanked by Mr. C. Tite.

After tea Pitman's Restaurant, close to the east end of St. Mary's Church, was visited for the purpose of seeing a very fine oak ceiling which had been revealed a few years ago on some plaster being removed. The designs are of great variety, and the carving of excellent workmanship ; it dates from 1483.

Evening Meeting.

Regalia, Charters, etc., of Bridgwater Corporation.

At the Evening Meeting, held in St. Mary's Hall, the regalia, ancient charters and deeds of Bridgwater, the property of the Corporation, were exhibited. They had been kindly lent for the occasion by the Mayor, Town Clerk, and Corporation of Bridgwater, and were described by the Rev. C. E. Pike, F.R.Hist.S. He firstly dealt with the Royal charters, the earliest of which, dated 1318 (Edward II), was an inspeximus referring to King John's charter. The other charters dated from Edward III to Charles II. Mr. Pike informed the members that the deeds belonging to the Corporation, of which there were considerably over 1000, were being deciphered and systematically transcribed by Mr. T. B. Dilks, F.R.Hist.S., of Bridgwater.

The Corporation regalia were also described, and included three very fine maces, one dated 1660, and a large Stuart salt-cellar of silver, presented by the Recorder of Bridgwater in

1638. The mayoral gold chain was also exhibited, and it was stated that it was the custom for each new mayor to add a fresh link to it.

The PRESIDENT, in thanking Mr. Pike, said he would like also to bear testimony to the splendid work which Mr. Bruce Dilks was doing in endeavouring to preserve an accurate record of Bridgwater in ancient days. The borough was extremely fortunate in having as one of its citizens one who was willing to devote so much time and enthusiasm to this work.

PAPERS READ.

Mr. ALBANY F. MAJOR, O.B.E., read an interesting paper on "The Geography of the Lower Parrett in early times, and the position of Cruca," which is printed in Part II of this volume, pp. 56-65.

This was followed by a lantern lecture, given by Captain L. S. PALMER, on a Keltic Cavern discovered on Mendip in 1919, which was being excavated, under his supervision, by the Speleological Society of the University of Bristol. This society, which was formed in the spring of 1919, has been carrying out work on the north side of the Mendip Hills, mainly in the locality of Burrington Combe. There are two outstanding results of the first year's work, which have been described in the first volume of *Proceedings*. One is the discovery of Azilian remains, both human and mammalian; the other is the opening of a cavern, now known as "the Keltic Cavern," which was found to contain remains of the Early Iron Age. The existence of a cave was suspected from geological considerations, and after removing over 20 tons of fallen rock and earth an entrance was effected. The main chamber proved to be about 180ft. in length and is situated 40ft. below the level of the entrance, which faces south under the western end of Mendip Lodge Hill. Amongst the objects of bronze, iron, bone and pottery, are slave-shackles, hub bands of chariot-wheels, spindle-whorls, and two pots of typical Late-Keltic workmanship. Besides these materials of human origin, there are many animal remains and much

charcoal. Three human bones were discovered. These, together with all the other 'finds,' were either lying on the surface or in the layer of black mud which covered the floor to a depth of about 4ins. Below this layer the cave earth was quite barren, whilst so far no evidence of Roman occupation has been forthcoming. From the manner in which the articles were found scattered indiscriminately over the cave floor, from the absence of weapons, from the lack of any sign of industry in the cave itself, and from other evidence which cannot be detailed here, it was concluded that the cave was used by the Brythons as a temporary refuge, possibly during their flight from the Belgae who had reached this part of Somerset by A.D. 50, and who were in all probability responsible for the sacking of Glastonbury Lake Village about this time.

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr. Major and Capt. Palmer for their papers, and Mr. H. ST. GEORGE GRAY compared the antiquities found in the Cavern with some of the remains from the Somerset Lake Villages. He emphasized certain points of similarity, particularly in regard to the scarcity of weapons and the use of wheels. The Rev. W. E. Catlow was also thanked for the loan of his electric lantern.