

Taunton Castle.

After lunch many of the members proceeded to witness the laying of the foundation stone of the new Technical Institute

for the town, and subsequently a move was made towards the Castle, from the courtyard of which Mr. BUCKLE gave a description of that building.*

Mr. E. SLOPER said the common opinion was that King Ine built a castle there, but the Saxons did not build castles, they founded towns only during the progress of the early conquest, neither, in his opinion, did Bishop Giffard build the castle. The founder of the building was Henri of Blois, Bishop of Winchester, in the year 1138, and the authority for that statement was based on the Cottonian MS. Domit., A. xiii, known as the Annals of the Church of Winchester. The weir which held up the waters of the Tone and conveyed them to the moat was called French Weir, simply because this Frenchman, Henri of Blois, built it for the purposes of the defence of his new castle.

The Council Chamber.

A visit was next paid to the Council Chamber and Municipal Buildings, where the party were received by the Mayor, who showed the visitors the original charter of the borough granted by Chas. I. It was lost at the time of the restoration, but in the year 1677, at the instance of Bishop Mew, the charter was restored. In the year 1792, however, it was again lost, because the town failed to comply with the conditions on which the charter was granted. As they all knew, the charter was restored, and it had been in existence for the past twenty-one years. The Mayor drew attention to the spacious mayoral chair, which, he said, was of Taunton manufacture. It was formed out of an old oak tree found in the bed of the river Tone. The borough arms, in needlework, made from part of an altar cloth in St. Mary's Church, and presented by Dr. Cottle, were next shown; also an address from Taunton, U.S.A., received

* Mr. Buckle's account of the Castle was based upon the papers by the Rev. F. Warre and Mr. G. T. Clark, which have been printed in vols. iv and xviii of the *Proceedings*.

in the year 1885, the frame of which, it was interesting to note, was made out of timbers of the *Hawk*, which ship went out with the *Mayflower*, which took out the Puritan fathers. The present Council Chamber was originally the dormitory of the old Grammar School, and the hall they had met in at the opening of the proceedings was the schoolroom. He mentioned that that was the first meeting held in it since its restoration.

The Old White Hart Hotel.

The party then proceeded to view the façade of the Devon and Somerset Stores, which was originally the "Old White Hart" Hotel, where the notorious Judge Jeffreys lodged during the time of the "Bloody Assize," held in Taunton. A fine group of half-timbered houses adjoining was next inspected. The principal building, now the West Somerset Stores, was originally the town-house of the Portman family, and is in excellent preservation. It bears the date 1578.

St. Mary's Church.

The beautiful old church of St. Mary Magdalene was next visited, and its fine proportions, elaborate decorations and interesting features were much admired. Taking up a position at the lectern, MR. BUCKLE gave a description of the church. Beginning by stating that they would all agree that was an exceptionally fine church, Mr. Buckle went on to say that the plan was rather curious, because on either side of the nave was a narrow aisle, and then beyond that a very wide aisle. The natural assumption, therefore, was that the church originally consisted of the nave and a narrow aisle on each side, but that when it became desirable to enlarge the church it was decided to build other and larger aisles outside the original aisles. Speaking generally, St. Mary's church may be called a Perpen-

dicular church of two dates. Most of the windows belonged to the ordinary Perpendicular of the 15th century, whilst the main arcade and the clerestory are of the rich and elaborate style which developed at the beginning of the 16th century. But the arcade on the north side was of a very much earlier and simpler style, and it had been the habit to describe that as the oldest part of the church. He did not believe that the arcade was genuine; that was to say, it was rebuilt during the Perpendicular period, at one of the times when the church had a great enlargement, and that those pillars and arches were taken from some other part of the church and rebuilt as they saw them now. The bases and capitals, which belonged to a later period than the pillars, seemed to prove this. It was to be observed that there was a difference between the east and west portions of this arcade. The three western arches were slightly wider than the corresponding arches of the nave and opposite aisle, so that the piers supporting them were thrown a little out of line with the other piers across the church; probably, the spacing of the piers was determined by the widths of the old arches which were to be rebuilt. But the remaining piers were truly lined with the other arcades and supported narrow four-centred arches—another sign that the work was actually of Perpendicular date.* The same capital was used here also in the chancel, so that we might fairly assume that this arcade was rebuilt at the same time as the lower part of the chancel was rebuilding, that is to say, at the first of the two Perpendicular enlargements. Other signs of the early church remained in the arch labels of round section and some of the corbels re-used in the narrow north aisle.

The first Perpendicular church included the wide north aisle, with its windows, the lower part of the chancel with its chapels, and the eastern half of the wide south aisle. There was a great rebuilding at a subsequent period. On the right

* Curiously enough Wilton church has early piers of precisely the same rebuilt at the same period with similar caps and four-centred arches over.

hand side of the south porch there was a date, 1508, and the greater portion of the church as it now stands was erected then—including the nave and clerestory, the angel capitals and the numerous niches, and the very handsome roof. And not only so, but the tower was rebuilt at the same time, as appeared from a will discovered by Mr. W. George, which shows the tower was building in 1503, and provides for a timber cross in the churchyard set upon a stone base.*

In regard to the chancel, it was remarkable that there was no provision for a rood screen, and there was no doubt that this part of the church was raised at the time of the great rebuilding. The east window was curious in regard to the arrangement of the tracery, the three centre lights and the tracery above forming in themselves a complete window and the other tracery filled in all around. The section of the piers supporting the chancel arch was changed at about five feet above the floor, and the change of design was artfully hidden by converting the original hollow mouldings into niches; but there was much confusion and apparent change of plan about the carrying up of these piers. And the same was true about the cross arches springing from these piers. The fragments of painted glass in the windows were mostly of fifteenth century work, and in the centre light of the west window were the initials "R.B.," with a merchant's mark underneath. In the tower there were also four initials—"R.B.," "A.S."—which had given rise to considerable conjecture as to what they meant. There were two persons of note living at that period—Richard Bere, Abbot of Glastonbury, whose initials were to be found on St. Margaret's Hospital, just outside Taunton; and Sir Reginald Bray, about whom there was a tradition that he was architect to Henry VII, by whom it was thought by some the great towers of

* See vol. xxx. i. 94. The description of the cross is inaccurately printed, and should run—"It: I will that myn executrice make a newe crosse of tree pformed wt stone in the foote set and wrought in churchyard of Mary Magdalayn nygh the procession wey."

Somerset were built. But St. Margaret's Hospital was in the parish of West Monkton, and the Abbot of Glastonbury had nothing to do with Taunton, and it was extremely improbable that a great soldier like Sir Reginald Bray was also a great architect. He (Mr. Buckle) thought they might put down the initials to two benefactors, and the shield with the merchant's mark made it clear that "R.B." was a merchant of Taunton. When the tower was rebuilt, only four ancient stones were re-used, the two canopies over the stoups for holy water, on either side of the western entrance, and the elaborately carved spandrils over the doorway, which, however, had been very much restored. The subject of the one appeared to be the miracle of St. Gregory's Mass, and the other represented the appearance of our Lord to Mary Magdalene in the Garden of Gethsemane. In the latter there appeared outside the garden fence a kneeling figure of a benefactor in civil dress. The carving had been so much restored that no confidence could be placed in the dress of this figure, but, so far as it went, this carving supplied a further argument that the tower was built by the tradesmen of the town, rather than from a royal grant.

The late parapet round the south aisle furnished another clue to the benefactors of this date in the coat. *A bend between two leaves, impaling A fret within a bordure, with, apparently, a dog for crest.* As to the tower it was one of the grandest in the county. It was said to be 131 feet high and the pinnacles 32 feet, making a total of 163 feet high. It was covered with elaborate carving from the bottom right up to the top. It was emphatically built in the Somersetshire style, an argument against Sir Reginald Bray having had any hand in its design, and a vast amount of money and effort must have been spent upon it, but not with such complete success as they could wish. There was no growth of richness towards the top, so that the tower lacked unity and proportion, and perhaps on that account it was a pity that Hammet-street had

been opened up so as to expose the whole of the tower to view. On the north wall of the church was a life-size figure of Robert Gray, the founder of the Almshouses in East-street, and under it the quaint lines—

“Taunton bore him, London bred him,
Piety train'd him, virtue led him ;
Earth enrich'd him, heaven cares't him,
Taunton blest him, London blest him.
This thankful town, that mindful city,
Share his piety and his pity.
What he gave, and how he gave it,
Ask the poor, and you shall have it.
Gentle reader, heaven may strike
Thy tender heart to do the like ;
And now thy eyes have read the story,
Give him the praise and heaven the glory.”

“Ætatis sue 65. Anno Domini 1635.”

At the invitation of the Vicar, the Rev. Preb. ASKWITH, the party proceeded to the vestry to inspect the registers and the old plate. There were two old registers on view, the one belonging to Queen Elizabeth's reign, and the other used during the time of Monmouth's rebellion. A note in the latter records the fact that burials were interrupted during the rebellion, and it was interesting to observe that Monmouth's followers are invariably called “rebels” in the registers. The holy vessels which are still in use, consist of two silver-gilt flagons, presented in 1639, two silver-gilt chalices, given in 1630 and 1639, and a silver salver, with a Latin inscription surrounding an engraving of the Castle. These vessels were, after the landing of the Prince of Orange at Torbay, buried, to preserve them from the hands of spoilers.

The party next proceeded to St. James' Church, passing on their way through St. Mary's Vicarage grounds, where they had an opportunity of seeing the only remains that are left of the earth-work that was raised round Taunton during the siege.

St. James' Church.

This church Mr. BUCKLE described as a very great contrast to that of St. Mary's. It was, however, a straightforward example of a Perpendicular church of about the 15th century. The nave and the aisles appear to have been entirely re-built about that time, but the chancel was entirely modern. It was a type of church which was rather unusual in Somerset, with its three wide barrel roofs. The enormously wide arch at the east end of the arcade was a very remarkable feature, and the purpose presumably was to enable a larger number of people to see into the chancel. There was a very elaborate font under the tower, which, he was sorry to say, had been restored, so that it was difficult to say what parts of the carving were original and what parts modern. It was octagonal in shape, with three figures on each side, so that altogether there were twenty-four figures, including the twelve Apostles. Above the font they saw the fine vault of the tower. It was a singularly beautiful tower, and was almost identical with the one at Bishop's Lydeard, but the latter was in one sense, more perfect because it had the original parapet and pinnacles on the top. The outline and general effect of the tower were remarkably beautiful, and deserved to be looked at from many points of view, particularly from the bridge over the Tone. In his opinion that tower was a considerably greater work of art than the great tower of St. Mary Magdalene, although nothing like the same amount of money had been spent upon it.

The Priory Barn.

A move was next made to what is known as the Priory Barn, one of the old farm buildings belonging to the Priory at Taunton, which, in olden times, stood at the end of the town. Little or nothing of the original building remains.

Mr. E. SLOPER gave some few particulars of the old Priory, from which it appeared to have been founded in 1125. An earlier monastery existed at Taunton, before the Norman Conquest. He said it had always been a puzzle to him where that monastery stood. In the town there was a street called Paul Street, and further on there was a farm called Pool Farm, where ancient remains and a pitched paved way were to be seen on the west side of the farm buildings. The former he regarded as the site of the earlier monastery, and it was known that many of the lesser monasteries were absorbed by the greater ones, prior to the Conquest. It was not mentioned in Domesday, but was alluded to in charters, and specially mentioned in connection with rendering certain customs to the king in the 11th century. The word Pool in regard to Pool Farm he considered was a corruption of Paul, to which saint the monastery was probably dedicated. This saint's name was spelt Poole, Poule, and Powle, in mediæval times.

Gray's Almshouses.

A visit was next made to Gray's Almshouses in East Street, Taunton, which were founded, as a tablet on the façade records, in the year 1635, by Robert Gray, whose virtues are described on a tablet to his memory in St. Mary's church. The quaint old rooms were inspected with interest, and the chapel in particular attracted much attention. Here is still preserved the old Bible, printed in 1634, which was used at the foundation of the almshouses, and the various readers who are appointed by the inmates utilize the blank pages of the book for the purpose of inscribing their names therein. The building, both interior and exterior, is in an excellent state of preservation. The inspection of this place concluded the first day's tour.