

Wednesday.

The weather this day was very unfavourable, for it rained persistently and heavily. Not more than eighty ventured to start upon the excursion, and left the Clarence Hotel at 10 a.m. The first halt was made at

North Petherton Church.

The principal architectural features were pointed out by Mr. HUNT. He observed that the Church was a fine specimen of the local Perpendicular. Its most remarkable feature was the handsome and lofty western tower, of much the same character as the tower of Dundry; it increased in lightness and richness as it ascended. The porch was evidently a later addition, for one of the gargoyles was placed directly over it, which would not have been done had the porch been standing at the time. The interior of the Church was spacious, though without any striking features of interest. The windows were rather ugly, and the heavy transoms marred the general effect. A fine and boldly-executed corbel supported the pulpit, but it had evidently been removed from some other place. Behind the east wall was a vestry or priest's room, an arrangement which seemed especially local, and of which instances might be seen at Martock and Langport. The peculiarity of the arrangement here was that there was only one door, that on the north side of the altar, while in most cases where there is such a room, there was a door on each side. The difference in date of building was marked by the string-course, which followed a different line from the junction of the wall of this vestry with the chancel. There was a piscina in the north aisle belonging to a chapel; this was almost hidden by the high-backed seats, which were still retained in the Church. In the vestry were some interesting monumental brasses, which had been taken from the floor of the Church. One was to Eleanor, wife of William Powlett, daughter of Philip Delamere, son of John Delamere of Nunney, who died April 28, 1413. Another

was to the wife of a former vicar, bearing the inscription, "Here lyth the body of Katherine Morley, wife of John Morley, Vicar of this Parish, whose godly life and death wrote her own epitaph : 1652." The patronage of the Church belonged to the Prior of the Hospital of St. John in England, and the Priory of Mynchin Buckland received an annual pension from it.

A short drive brought the party to

Lyng Church,

which stands on a bank close to the road to Athelney. Here again Mr. HUNT made some remarks on the building. The tower is tall and light, and the gargoyles on its corners are singularly fine. The Church consists only of a nave and chancel. There is a handsome canopied recess in the south wall of the chancel. Mr. Hunt said that he was inclined to think it of the 14th century, but as the chancel had evidently been lately through some considerable repairs he should not like to say that it was not 19th century work, and, although the carving was very fine, he could not say that he liked the shape of the canopy ; he thought that in some ways the recess looked more like a piscina than sedilia, the space was full large for one person and not large enough for two.

The sexton at this point came forward and said that the sedilia had just been put in. A letter has since been received from the Rector, Mr. R. K. Meade King, pointing out that this was a mistake. "The facts," Mr. Meade King writes, "are shortly these. A few years ago I filled two of the chancel windows with stained glass, the work being very creditably executed by Mr. O'Connor, of Berners street, London. At the same time I directed the Ham Hill stone-masons, whom I employed, carefully to scrape off all the plaster and whitewash which defaced the sedilia. In doing so, they discovered that the stone seat was missing, its place being supplied by a quantity of rubble, mortar, and plaster. This I had removed and a new Ham stone seat substituted. Hence possibly the mistake of the sexton. No other alteration

of any kind was made to the sedilia, which is no doubt of very early work, and I was especially careful not to meddle with the canopy, which has been much admired, except to scrape off the whitewash with which it was coated."

There is a fine Norman font. The bench ends, which Mr. Hunt considered to be 16th century work, are carved with boldness and grace. The entrance to the rood-loft has disappeared, but a small piece of wall outside the Church marked the stairs of the former turret, and the door is probably concealed by the plaster.

Mr. DICKINSON was sorry to see that the process of beating off the plaster and exhibiting the bare stones had been already begun.

The VICAR said that he was anxious to carry out a full restoration of the Church. He believed that the ancient roof still existed, and might be opened up.

The PRESIDENT said that the Church did not need that much should be done, and the little that might be done with advantage should be done with great care, so as not to do away with any old and interesting features.

The SEXTON called attention to a very old chest in the tower, scooped out of the trunk of a tree.

Athelney

was next visited, the party making a halt below the site of King Alfred's monastery. All traces of the building have entirely disappeared, but in Collinson's time parts of the supports to the roofs and other stone-work remained to mark the spot. A very good crop of wheat was growing over the old monastery site, and the lessee of the farm, to which the grounds are attached, had kindly cleared a portion of this away so that the party might be able to examine the Alfred Monument, which has been put up there. Several of the farm labourers produced portions of the tessellated pavement of the monastery which had been turned up by the plough, and some of the most perfect specimens were secured for the Society's museum.

Bishop CLIFFORD acted as guide to the party here, and pointed out the principal points which he had mentioned in his opening address. He said that the point they were standing on was that mentioned by William of Malmesbury as the only dry part of the island. It gave room for a monastery and a small portion of pasture land; but the island itself, the historian said, was of greater extent, as the whole of the ground between the place where they stood and the Mount was all flat, and at one time must have been a marsh. In the 13th century, Malmesbury says, there was a great island of low marshy ground, surrounded by bogs and marshes, with lakes beyond. It would appear that when Alfred came to the spot he made use of the whole of the place. Here it was that Alfred threw a bridge across the Parret, and on the top of the Mount he built a fort, which Asser praises for the beauty of its construction. Asser says that the bridge had a laborious prolongation, and that it was built between two forts that were on eminences. The most important of these two forts was the one already mentioned as having been erected on the Mount, the other was about a mile distant on the high ground near Othery. The laborious prolongation of the bridge extended between these two forts across the marsh, following the course of the present embankment and the turnpike road to Othery. In Dugdale a charter is mentioned by which the monks of Athelney held the land, on condition that they were to keep the forts and bridge in good repair.

From the site of the Monastery the party drove to

Borough Bridge

and walked to the top of the Mount or, as it is locally called, the Mump. Here are the ruins of a never-finished Church; on the walls is the date of its building, 1724.

The PRESIDENT, having assembled the party at the top, said that they could now see the field, of which he had spoken in his paper, from a different point. He showed how the place they

had left and the spot on which they now stood would correspond, the former with the few acres of rising ground mentioned by William of Malmesbury as the only portion of dry land to be found on the island of Athelney, the latter with the site of the fort of rare construction, mentioned by Asser as having been raised by Alfred to guard the approach to the island. The bridge was thrown across the Parret, near the foot of the Mount, and communicated with what was in Alfred's time the low and swampy portion of the island covered with alders. The prolongation of the bridge mentioned by Asser was a causeway extending from this same Mount in the opposite direction across the marsh till it reached the rising ground near Othery. Once established in this impregnable position, Alfred could at his leisure work out his plans against the Danes, who were encamped in the neighbourhood of Bridgwater. From his fort on the summit of the Mount he could look out on the surrounding country, and choose the most opportune moments for making his sallies on the enemy. The causeway gave him access along the high ground of the island of Middlezoy to the enemy's quarters, so that by constant attacks he could keep them occupied, and draw away their attention from the preparations which were being made some thirty miles distant, on the eastern side of the forest of Selwood, where a large army of Saxons was being assembled by the orders of Alfred. It took seven weeks to collect these forces, during the whole of which period Alfred, say the Chronicles, fought daily with the Danes from the fort of Athelney. It is, therefore, beyond all doubt that the Danish army was in the neighbourhood of Athelney, and not in Wiltshire. As soon as Alfred received information that a sufficiently large force had been assembled to the east of Selwood, he rode thither from Athelney in one night, and placing himself at their head led them to attack the Danes. He led them, therefore, from the east of Selwood to the country near Athelney, where the Danes were; and the first battle and overthrow of the Danes took place at Ethandune, or near Edington on Polden

Hill, opposita Athelney, not at Eddington, in Wiltshire, as it has been supposed. After the overthrow of the Danes, Gothrum, their chief, was baptised at Alre or Aller, which is close to Athelney, that being the nearest Church to the battle field which had not been desecrated by the Danes, owing no doubt to its being situated on an island in the marsh. On the opposite side of Polden Hill lies Wedmore, a royal residence, where Alfred afterwards entertained Gothrum, and where the treaty of peace was signed.

Mr. DICKINSON observed that in old times the river Cary pursued a more northerly course than it now did, and that its channel had been turned for purposes of drainage.

The PRESIDENT said that he had a map, dated 1660, in which the Cary was made to run at the back of the Mount. Phelps, in his *Somerset*, gave an account of the drainage, in which he said that the Cary ran a little above Borough Bridge, and was diverted when the cut was made.

The party then adjourned to the Borough Bridge School-room, where the Local Committee had most kindly provided a handsome luncheon.

Othery

was next visited, and the Church of S. Michael was much admired.

Mr. HUNT begged the party before they entered the building to have a good look at the tower. In the first place it is not usual to find so lofty a Perpendicular steeple in the centre of the Church. Mr. Freeman pronounces it to be *sui generis*. Its special peculiarity consists in the bold diagonal buttresses, which do not run up to meet the pinnacles, but finish lower down. The handsome window, of which the greater part is filled with traceried stone, seems like an effort after the tower of the Wrington type. The Church is unusually low, and the building seems to belong to the 13th century, though with details both of the 14th and especially of the 15th century. There is a distinct and alarming subsidence on the south side of the tower.

Some of the bench ends are finely carved. There is a curious hole pierced in one of the buttresses on the south side which corresponds with a small window in the chancel. Mr. Hunt was inclined to consider this window as either a leper window or used for an analogous purpose. Lepers, or those who for other causes were forbidden to enter the church, might stand on the other side of these buttresses, protected, probably, by a small roof resting upon the slant of the buttresses, and could there see through these openings the elevation of the Host.

Mr. DICKINSON differed from this opinion. He believed that the window was made to allow light from within to be seen.

Mr. REYNOLDS said that a Belgian gentleman of his acquaintance had told him that he had often been guided at night, when in danger of losing his way, by the altar-light through windows of precisely this character.

The PRESIDENT said that he was unwilling to speak decidedly; that he thought that it was a matter in which they could go no further than probabilities.

Tea and coffee were kindly provided at the Vicarage, and the splendid embroidered cope of the 15th century was there looked at.

Middleton.

Mr. HUNT observed that the details of the building belonged to the Decorated or Geometrical style. The windows were somewhat French in type. The roof was of the 17th century. The first three bosses on which it rested, reckoning from the east, were more elaborately carved than the rest; and this, along with some marks on the walls, marked the extent of the rood-loft. The rood-turret was gone, but a small lean-to on the north side of the Church still showed where the steps went up to the loft. There was a good miserere in the chancel, which had evidently been imported from some church which contained a line of stalls. The chancel arch had been tampered with in a strange way. Underneath the east window of the south aisle was a curious flat buttress. Mr. Hunt said that it was difficult to form any

opinion as to the reason or use of this buttress. He thought it likely that an altar had once stood under the window, with a reredos above it in the window, and resting on its cill, and that the buttress had been built into the wall to resist the extra weight and pressure. The east window of the Church, though singularly fresh, was, he believed, of the 14th century. The tower was plain and massive in order to resist the storms, it was wider east and west than it was north and south.

Mr. N. WELMAN read some curious entries in the vestry book, among these were, "To ringing the bells for the Prince of Wales, 1688, one shilling." "For killing three hedgehogs, one shilling," &c. A brass on the floor of the nave bore the famous "rebel" inscription, "Here lyes the body of Louis Chevalier de Misieres, a French gentleman, who behaved himself with great courage and gallantry 18 years in ye English services, and was unfortunately slaine on the 16th of July, 1685, at ye battle at Weston, where he behaved himself with all ye courage imaginable against ye King's enemies, commanded by ye Rebel Duke of Monmouth."

Weston Zoyland Church

was next visited. The stay here was short, owing to the rain.

Mr. HUNT remarked the fine and lofty Perpendicular tower, from which a good view is to be had of the scene of the battle of Sedgemoor. He said that the nave was of unusual length, as were also those of North Petherton and Bridgwater. A Perpendicular nave of such noble proportions was a fine sight, so many of our Somersetshire churches were disfigured by the nave being cramped—a defect which could be seen in its worst phase at Wrington. Here the line of the clerestory was full of beauty and grace. The Church had evidently been much pulled about, and pieces of the string-course on the south wall, leading nowhere, were puzzling. The rood-turret in this Church also had been cut away, leaving only a round stone column in the wall which once bore the steps. The monogram on the south wall of the

Church was "R. B.," standing for Richard Beere, the last Abbot of Glastonbury but one, who is said to have built the Church, but who probably had it recast with Perpendicular alterations. A recumbent figure of a priest was in good preservation.

The party then returned to Bridgwater, and dined together that evening. After dinner Mr. Hunt, the Secretary in charge of the excursion, said that he was sorry to have to desert his post, but that he was obliged to return home that evening, and, expressing his regret for the absence of Mr. Freeman and others, who were wont to help them by their explanations and comments, he begged leave to hand over his charge to the Rev. F. Brown, one of the former Secretaries of the Society.

The Evening Meeting

was fairly attended, and the President, who was again in the chair, called upon Mr. Surtees to read a paper on Barrington Court, by Mr. Bond, who was unavoidably absent.

Mr. SURTEES explained that he was there as deputy for Mr. Hunt, who was anxious that the paper should be printed in the Transactions of the Society, but who was not able to read it for Mr. Bond, as he had hoped to have done. He then read the paper, which is printed in Part II. of this volume.

Mr. WELMAN said that it might be interesting to add that Barrington Court was occupied by Mr. Phillips, the Solicitor-General, at the time of the Gunpowder Plot, and that the depositions of Guy Fawkes were still at Montacute, the seat of his descendant.

Col. PINNEY, the High Sheriff, observed that all who had seen Barrington Court must have been struck by its beauty. He always understood that it had been built by one of the Phillipses, who afterwards built Montacute. He had heard the paper of Mr. Bond read with great interest, and thought that

the thanks of the Society were due to him for illustrating, as few were able to do, the history of so important a mansion.

The Rev. J. E. ODGERS next read a paper on "M.S. Accounts of the Commonalty of Bridgwater," which is printed in Part II.

On the proposition of Mr. DICKINSON, a vote of thanks was passed to Mr. Odgers for his valuable and amusing contribution.

Mr. W. L. WINTERBOTHAM then read a paper on "The Geology of Otterhampton," which had been sent to him for that purpose by the Rev. T. WOODHOUSE, formerly Rector of that parish, who much regretted his inability to attend the meeting of the Society. In this paper, which will be found in Part II, Mr. Woodhouse gave several interesting reminiscences concerning the inroads of the sea in the neighbourhood of Otterhampton, and especially at Steart.

Mr. DICKINSON said there could be no doubt that the shingle had been removed from the coast outside Steart very largely of late years, as Mr. Woodhouse had stated, and great mischief had resulted from it. How it was to be prevented, he knew not, for a representation had already, he believed, been made to the Admiralty respecting it, without effect. The material brought from Steart was very good for road-making and repairing, for which it was largely used; but the removal of this protection against the inroads of the sea was a very serious matter.

Mr. J. PARSONS said he thought he could throw a little light on this matter by stating, as one of the Commissioners of Sewers, that a great deal of litigation had gone on respecting the removal of these pebbles, the damage caused by which had been excessive, and that their removal was now entirely stopped, persons being no longer allowed to cart them away.

Mr. J. TREVOR added that, when this question was brought before the Commissioners of Sewers, a committee was appointed to view the spot. Sir A. Hood was chairman of that committee, and he (Mr. Trevor), as a member of it, accompanied him there. He had not seen the beach for some years before, and was greatly surprised to perceive the alteration which had taken place.

He recollected the farm-house and gate referred to by Mr. Woodhouse, but these were all gone ; and, owing to the pebbles having been taken away in barges and sent to Bridgwater for the repair of the roads, the sea had made a very great encroachment. The opinion of counsel was taken on the point, and he advised that parties had no right to interfere with the protection which the bank afforded, and in consequence notices were sent out that those who persisted in removing the stones would be proceeded against. Very few complaints were now made of such removals, and, he believed, the stones were again accumulating. With regard to the island referred to, which had now almost disappeared, he recollected, when his uncle was curate of Burnham, going across to it, and at that time a public-house was standing there.

Colonel RAWLINS remarked that 57 years ago, when he was one year old, he was taken to lodgings at Steart for the benefit of his health, and a very healthy spot it was. With regard to the encroachments of the sea spoken of, he did not believe these pebble ridges were as efficacious as they were supposed to be, for the sea frequently broke over them. He remembered, when in the Madras Presidency, that, as such a ridge was found to be an ineffectual bulwark, a plan was contrived of throwing out rows of stone about three hundred yards apart, and as the intervening spaces got filled up with mud, sand, &c., a great deal of land was gained from the sea. He thought it possible that some plan of the same sort might be adopted at Steart with much advantage.