

Thursday.

On Thursday, the morning opened fine, but about eleven after leaving Hinton St. George the sky became overcast, and the rain came down in torrents throughout the remainder of the day. The programme however was, with one exception—the luncheon under Monmouth's tree, at Whitelackington—completely carried out. Although the weather was most depressing, everybody made the best of it, and the excursion was thoroughly enjoyable.

The party (about fifty) at once proceeded to Merriott, and called at

Court Mills,

in the occupation of Mr. George Lock. Behind the house are the remains of several arches, and the room above is

covered in with a waggon-shaped roof, similar to those found in ancient chantries.

Mr. BUCKLE said the ceiling certainly looked like that of a chapel, but the room was a very tiny one—domestic chapels often, however, were not very large. The question was, however, whether the house ever had a chapel? As he understood it, Court Mills were on one side of the parish, and the Manor House, where one would look for a chapel, on the opposite side.

The Rev. S. E. PERCIVAL, the Vicar of the parish, read the following :—“ I am told that considerable alterations were made here in 1831. The date is on a stone in the end wall of the cart-shed and buildings which were then put up. Human bones were found here when the foundations were being dug, showing that it had once been a place of burial. I am told, moreover that, in days before workhouses or the modern poor laws came into being, tramps and vagrants would come and claim a meal, a night's lodging, clean straw, and simple fare, which had always to be in readiness for them, and that they were passed on hither from the old Abbey House at Crewkerne. This fact would point to this having been once a religious house. The following quotation from George Meriet's last will is given :—⁷ ‘ George Meriet Armiger, Thursday, 28th August, 1410. I give to the fabric of the chapel of St. Katherine of Meryet, *ubi Matill. nup. ux. mea jacet, 40s.*’ May not this building have been S. Catherine's chapel, and the last resting place of George de Meriet's wife Matilda? The name by which it has always been known, of Court Mills, would indicate some close connection with the old Manor Court, the home of the De Meriet's, which once stood near the Church.”

The next halt was at

Merriott Church.

Mr. BUCKLE said that the Church, until a comparatively

⁷ See *Proc. Som. Arch. and Nat. His. Soc.*, vol. xxviii, p. 171.

recent date, was much smaller than formerly. The nave had only three bays, but a fourth bay had been added to it, while at the same time the chancel had been entirely rebuilt. The tower was a good deal older than the body of the Church. It was a curious tower, built plain and square, without buttresses, and having on all sides a considerable batter. The turret, the porch, and aisle were very late specimens of Perpendicular, not far from 1500. The belfry windows led him to think that the tower was built in the fifteenth century. Mr. Buckle then drew attention to a stone inserted outside the south chancel wall, on which were curious figures. It was considered by some that they represented two cocks fighting. He thought that they were a pair of pigeons billing and cooing. The male had a very fine square tail, and the female no tail at all. Above was something very much like a pig, and various small roses filled up the corners. What it all meant he could not say. Mr. Buckle then pointed out the niche within the porch, and the geometrical tracery above. On the north wall of the Church was some zigzag moulding, which looked like early Norman work.

In answer to a question, Mr. BUCKLE said that the tower was originally built without a turret; but the present staircase was erected probably at the same time as some of the later alterations. Its being put in the centre of the tower had a pretty effect. He also pointed out a crucifix inside the Church. It was of very primitive construction, and was clearly very early work, probably Norman.

Mr. ELWORTHY said he would suggest that the stone with carved figures now over the vestry door was a true vestige of heathenism, and in no sense Christian; placed there precisely for the same purpose as horse shoes are fastened over doors and elsewhere. The idea underlying most charms of this kind was that the sign or attribute of a beneficent being worn by a person or placed upon any object, insured the protection of the mighty one typified. Birds, flowers, animals, were all

emblems of pre-Christian divinities whose aid was specially invoked against malignant powers, whether human or supernatural. Although rare in this country, and particularly on a Church, yet in some other countries, carvings of the like character, and whose object was well known were common enough.

The Rev. F. C. PERCIVAL could not agree with these remarks, and read a paper on the Church, part of which had been forestalled in the description by Mr. Buckle. He pointed out some stones with curious herringbone incisions, and said : The story goes that on the north side of the Church once stood the old Manor Court belonging to the knightly family of the De Meriets.⁸ Foundations and some steps have been found. In a table of the assessment of the Manor of Meriet at the death of John de Meriet (1285), besides the Court, gardens and curtilage, mention is made of the park called Eggewonde, Garstune, and Slapusweye—names which still survive in the neighbouring fields and lanes. This old Manor Court is said to have been burnt down, and the stones used for enlarging or rebuilding the Church. If so, it shows where the pink stones, as well as those flat herringbone-marked stones came from. A careful drawing of the Church, as it was sixty years ago, is in the Taunton Museum. The old gurgoyles all round the Church are worth looking at; so is a very pretty niche over the doorway arch, and a curious double triangle design above the door itself. Over the vestry door there is the piece of old work already alluded to. But what does it mean? It has always been called the “Fighting Cocks.” Now a pair of fighting cocks is a known emblem of the conflict between the flesh and the spirit.⁹ It is mentioned in Smith’s *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, but I should say the illustration there given is not in the least like this. We seem to have on the

⁸ See as to this family, *Proceedings*, vol. xviii, paper by Mr. Greenfield.

⁹ Are the many fighting cocks depicted on the walls of Pompei, and sculptured in pagan Rome, emblems of spiritual conflicts? See plate in *Good Words* for October, 1891, p. 667.—ED.

left a cock bird, representing the flesh, and indicated by a rude pig above it; while the other, apparently a hen, is getting her antagonist under, and is indicated by what we must suppose the artist intended for a dove. It has been suggested that being apparently cock and hen they cannot be fighting cocks; but on the other hand there seems to be a peculiar fitness in representing the gentler yet victorious combatant in the spiritual struggle as a hen. Beyond and to the right is perhaps the star of glory in the victory won at length. It is ornamented with a sort of ball flower. There are four of them to the left and two to the right. There is also a very rude crucifix (referred to above by Mr. Buckle), which stood, I believe, on the gable of the former chancel roof. I unearthed it from the same flower bed in which I found the old font, which is sadly cracked and broken. It once rested on a plain shaft, as may be seen by the accurate sketch of it in the Taunton Museum. The nameless leaden heart case, now in the same Museum, was discovered in a cavity in the old north wall of the Church. It probably once contained the heart of some member of the De Meriet family before 1314.

The next halt was made at

Hinton St. George Church.

Mr. BUCKLE said there was more than one Perpendicular date in the Church, but there was nothing apparently earlier. On the outside he pointed out the tall window in the tower, divided like the similar one at Crewkerne by a string course, carried across it (see *ante* p. 20). Inside he drew particular attention to the small arch which united the nave and chancel arcades, forming a large squint to command the altar in the side chapel. This altar seemed to have been of some importance, as the two windows over it were the richest in the Church. The knight in armour, the date of whose death was unknown, who lay on the north side of the nave, was probably the last of the Denebauds, whose daughter and heiress married



The 'Priory', Hinton St George, Somerset.

Sir William Poulett about 1464, for the eldest son, Sir Amias Poulett was knighted in 1487. This Sir Amias probably built the tower and other parts of the Church. The armour seemed to point to the latter part of the fifteenth century, 1470 or 1480.

Colonel BRAMBLE described the armour on the knight's effigy, and agreed with Mr. Buckle that it was made probably from 1470 to 1480. It had been stated that the armour was similar to that of the Black Prince, but he pointed out in detail the most essential differences.

Some time was spent in examining the fine series of monuments to the Poulett family, one of which was removed from St. Martin-in-the-Fields, when that Church was re-built.

The house occupied by Mr. Palmer, where there is an ancient window, supposed to belong to a domestic chapel, and the

Village Cross

was next visited, then through Hinton Park to

Whitelackington Church.

Mr. BUCKLE described the Church, which is of cruciform shape of the thirteenth century, but the nave has been re-built with aisles in the fifteenth century. The arrangement of the roofs is unusual, for one wide roof covers nave and aisles, and the junction of aisle and transept roofs is effected by a beam resting on corbels, instead of a cross arch. There are two large squints at the entrance to the chancel. In the south transept are two figures, both much mutilated, belonging to the fourteenth century; one a curious figure of a layman. There is also a monument in the north transept to a Speke, who married a Luttrell, and died in 1582.

Colonel BRAMBLE, speaking of the effigies, thought one was of 1370 or 1380, and the other about fifty years later.

The Rev. G. J. GOWRING drew attention to the two swords and the two helmets on the Speke monument. The Spekes had been baptised and buried there for a considerable period. The

registers went back as far as 1578. No trace of marriages of the Spekes could be found. There was a curious memorandum of Anna Maria Speke, who, after the birth of her child, discovered that her former husband was alive. There was formerly a chapel at Atherstone. The last interment of the Speke family was in 1768, of Lady Elizabeth, grand-daughter of Sir George Speke. The families of importance living in the village were those of the Hannings, Halletts, and Crabbes.

The Rev. GILBERT SMITH said that the collections mentioned in the register were made on authority similar to that of the Queen's letter of modern times.

The Rev. G. J. GOWRING said that the best registers in the neighbourhood were to be found at Misterton.

Colonel BRAMBLE took down one of the helmets, and said it was not an heraldic one, but real, and the mark of a heavy sword cut was plainly visible; he should consider it of Henry VII's time. He showed how the vizor was fixed when lifted, by means of a spring, and this was as good now as when made. It weighed about twelve pounds.

Before leaving the Church, Colonel BRAMBLE thanked the Rev. G. J. GOWRING for his reception of the Society, and for the information he had afforded, which

The Rev. G. J. GOWRING acknowledged, stating that he was at all times most anxious to impart any information in his power to all interested in archæology.

The rain was now pouring down in streams, and the visit to

Monmouth's Tree

was abandoned.

The company repaired to Mr. Culverwell's wagon house, where a capital luncheon was much enjoyed. After which, in spite of the rain, all started for

Barrington Church,

which, as Mr. BUCKLE showed, has an octagonal tower in the

centre of a cruciform Church. Octagonal towers were not uncommon in Somerset, for they were found at South Petherton, North Curry, Barton St. David, Bishop's Hull, and West Bampfylde. The date of the Barrington tower, as well as that of South Petherton, was very early, before 1200. The north transept was very nearly as early as the tower, and its window was filled with early geometrical tracery, but the south transept was much later. The window in this transept was clearly a copy of that opposite, but the detail was very different. The piscina in the south transept was late Decorated.

The Rev. F. W. WEAVER said that South Petherton was the mother Church, and the builders at Barrington wanted to copy the South Petherton tower. The South Petherton Church was looked upon as a sort of Cathedral.

Mr. BUCKLE considered that the towers of South Petherton and Barrington were built by the same man and at the same time. The nave roof was a modern reproduction of the old one, and contained two coats of arms which were presumably upon the original roofs, viz: *3 roundels, a label of three points*, for Courtenay, and *7 mascles, 3, 3, and 1*. One curious feature in the tower was that, instead of having four or eight windows, the builders inserted six.

Barrington Court

was the next halting place. It is situated close to the village of Barrington, and the exterior is in a good state of preservation.

Mr. BUCKLE said that it was pure Gothic and the date of the house could not be later than the reign of Henry VII. Some attribute it to Lord Daubeney. It is remarkable that a house of such importance should be absolutely destitute of any carvings symbolical of the owner—without heraldry, initials, or date.

The party went into the great hall, now converted into a cider cellar. Here the wainscoting is in a sad state of decay.

Other rooms were inspected, but they have been very much altered to meet the requirements of modern times.

A drive of a mile brought the party to

Shepton Beauchamp Church.

This was restored some years ago, under the direction of the late Mr. Street, when both nave and chancel were pulled down and re-built. The tower, however, remained.

Mr. BUCKLE said that the tower was very similar to those at Crewkerne and Hinton St. George, but this one was the finest of the three. On one of the bosses of the tower vault is carved a shield encircled by a garter. A boss of a like character is to be found in a similar position in Muchelney tower, there however the shield is not only carved with the Daubeney arms below the garter, but with their badge of bats' wings above. The Muchelney boss undoubtedly refers to Giles, Lord Daubeney, who became K.G. in 1487, and died in 1507. It seems very probable that the Shepton boss had the same signification; and if so the date of the tower is fixed to within the twenty years above mentioned.

The party then went direct to

King Ina's Palace,

the residence of the PRESIDENT, who entertained the Members at tea. Before separating,

The DEAN OF WELLS proposed a vote of thanks to the President for his acceptance of the office, and for the admirable paper he read to them, to the Secretaries and other Officers, to the owners of houses, and the clergy for the welcome they had given the Society.

Colonel HOSKINS was much obliged to the Dean for his kind expressions. To himself no thanks were due. These were due to the working Committees, and to the Honorary Secretary—Colonel Bramble, for the excellent manner in which he had conducted all the details of the meeting, by his courtesy,

kindness, and forbearance. He got everybody into their places, and drove a very willing flock. Nothing but the persistent attention of Aquarius had interfered with the success of the meeting. He called upon the Secretary to acknowledge the vote.

Colonel BRAMBLE replied; that his first attempt to appear as leader of the Association was such that he should have much pleasure in driving as good tempered a flock on some future occasion. He had not heard a harsh word, and he hoped the meeting had been a successful one. If that success had been ensured it had been owing largely to the excellent arrangements made by Mr. W. B. Sparks, the Honorary Local Secretary, and the Members of the Local Committee, amongst whom he could not resist mentioning the name of Dr. Norris. They would have had many difficulties to cope with had it not been for those gentlemen. He must also refer to the excellent descriptions they had had from Mr. Buckle. It was not a question of going into a Church and making an off-hand description of it, which Mr. Buckle was always able to do, but he had taken a great deal of trouble in the matter. He went through the neighbourhood beforehand, and carefully examined the Churches and houses they had visited, in order to give them the very valuable descriptions they had heard during the past three days.

Dr. NORRIS felt that he was not entitled to thanks. He took a little trouble with regard to the Museum, but that was a labour of love. If he had contributed in any way to the well-being of that Meeting he was amply compensated.

Mr. W. B. SPARKS also acknowledged the vote of thanks. If in any shape or form he had been instrumental in putting forward that Meeting he was fully rewarded by that successful gathering.

Mr. BUCKLE also said a few words, and the 1891 Meeting closed.
