

First Quarterly Meeting held at Taunton, January 2nd 1850.

The Rev. F. B. Portman, Vice-President, in the Chair.

Morning Meeting.

THE CHAIRMAN congratulated the society upon its present condition and prospects, there being already 250 subscribing, and 25 honorary members, and a suitable room provided for a Library and Museum, to which some valuable presents had already been made.

He suggested, that members at large should take their share in the labour of furnishing scientific information, and not suffer it to devolve on a few ; besides elaborate papers which some might find leisure to prepare, short written notices and oral communications would be useful—meetings would thus sometimes take the form of a debate, and not consist merely of a series of lectures.

The Chairman, in conclusion, dwelt upon the practical advantages likely to accrue from the study of Archaeology and Natural History, as well as the moral and intellectual improvement always attending such pursuits.

The REV. W. R. CROTCH read a paper, the object of which was to encourage a taste for the study of Natural History, by mentioning some of the numerous facts to be observed by those who enter upon so interesting and varied a field of enquiry.

DR. WOODFORDE presented a communication from Mr. Baker, of Bridgwater, containing his remarks on the Ornithology of the county; amongst which was one to the effect that out of 344 species of birds indigenous in this island, 233 have been found in Somersetshire.

Mr. W. D. CROTCH furnished a paper on the Eggs of Birds, the result of his own observations in the immediate neighbourhood of Taunton. It is given *in extenso* in the second part.

The REV. C. P. PARISH followed with a paper advocating the claims of Botany to rank among sciences of practical utility, and at the same time setting forth the facilities for following up this pursuit presented by the varied soil and surface of Somersetshire.

Mr. W. BEADON produced a fine fragment of the horns of an extinct species of Elk. In excavating at the gas-works in the town of Taunton, the workmen had come to what seemed to be the ancient bed of the river Tone, and upon the gravel they had found the trunk of a tree, under which was this specimen.

The Chairman then adjourned the meeting to the evening.

Evening Meeting.

The REV. F. WARRE read a paper on an ancient earth-work on the hill above the church of Norton-Fitzwarren, and presented a plan of the same. Both will be found in the second part.

Roman Remains at Combe St. Nicholas.

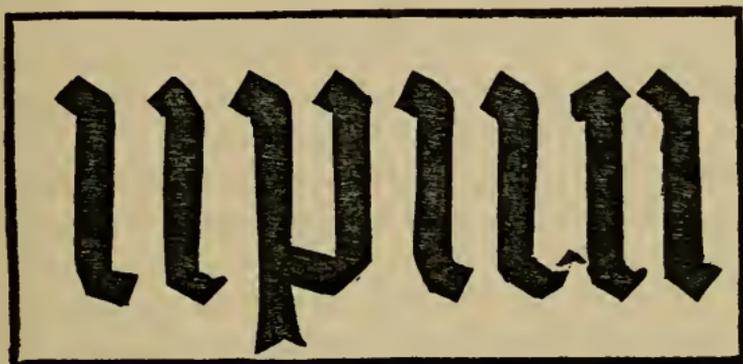
Mr. R. WALTER (of Stoke-sub-Hamdon) read an interesting paper on some Roman remains at Combe St. Nicholas, accidentally discovered about 40 years since ; and exhibited drawings, (of one of which we have given a coloured lithograph) beautifully executed, of two tessellated pavements which had then been excavated. The patterns were tastefully and elaborately worked. The centres of the pavements were composed of tesserae, or cubes, of half an inch square, and the borders of larger cubes of an inch square. The patterns were at first very perfect, and the colours vivid and fresh, but they were soon despoiled by visitors' depredations, and in the first winter the surfaces were lifted by frost, and on the succeeding thaw the whole fell to pieces. Both pavements were bounded by walls of rough stone stuccoed with a very hard cement, on which were some patches of colour. The object of this paper was to record the particulars of these interesting remains, and to direct the attention of the Society to the spot, where it was probable, and nearly certain, that other pavements, and some of greater magnitude, still remained undiscovered. Those mentioned were only six feet wide, and were probably small rooms for baths or sudatories, which it was reasonable to conclude were not the only rooms of the sort, nor constructed in such a spot, far from any known Roman station, without some larger rooms near them. The probability

then was that these formed a small part of a Roman villa, and that at no great distance some noble remains were still lying under the sod. In the ground plan presented, the position of these two pavements was pointed out. At no great distance, in a N. W. direction, was a mill-pond, from which a small canal (then a ditch) led towards the site mentioned, the bottom of which still retained flat paving stones, intended probably for the supply of water to the baths; a considerable number of tiles, some flat and others curved, for conveying water, were lying mixed with the soil around. A small bronze cast of a left hand, finely modelled, was discovered near this spot, and was thought at first to be part of an entire human figure, probably still remaining there; but from the finish of its termination at the wrist, and from a socket therein, this little relic was evidently not a fragment, but an instrument, not uncommon among the Romans, called *Scalptorium*, or in plain English, a *Scratch-back*. It was then in the possession of Mr. R. Walter of Combe Head. Mr. Walter very properly suggested that previously to any researches being made, funds should be provided for erecting some kind of building for the security and preservation of any pavement that might be laid open; otherwise it would soon be destroyed by wanton depredations, by the action of frost, and by worms lifting from beneath, as many others had been; but if judiciously preserved, those beautiful remains of Roman taste and skill might remain for ages to come. He was led to anticipate that at some future meeting of this Society, an excursion might be undertaken, for the purpose of exploring this interesting spot, which remained, with the exception of the above partial discoveries, still wrapped in the mysterious mantle of antiquity.

The REV. T. F. DYMOCK gave a brief account of the early coinage of this country—British—Roman—and Saxon—and exhibited drawings of some of the most remarkable specimens of British and Saxon workmanship. He also presented a list of all the coins which are known to have issued from mints in Somersetshire, from Edward the Elder, to Henry III. This list, with engravings of the coins, and also the paper, divested of the matters not relating to Somersetshire, are given in the second part.

Mr. C. E. GILES made a few general remarks on Anglo-Saxon and Norman architecture, and suggested that the most sure distinction would be found in the masonry, if Churchwardens could be persuaded to remove the plaster and whitewash, in which the walls are encrusted. He then gave a detailed description of two small Somersetshire churches, in which he had observed considerable portions of Norman work. The portions of this period remaining at Thurlbeer, were the nave, arcades, and northern wall of the chancel. At Ashill, the north and south doorways, the arch between the nave and chancel, and on either side two smaller arches in the eastern wall of the nave. He thought that by the restoration of the chancel arch, and north and south doorways to Thurlbeer, and arcades and corbel table to Ashill, two very similar churches would be obtained, and that the features remaining to be added to each were those which were common to the generality of country churches in the middle of the 12th century. Mr. Giles's paper was illustrated with several water-colour drawings of portions of the churches of Ashill, Thurlbeer, and Stoke-sub-Hamdon. He concluded with a notice of several other early churches, which it would be important to examine, as containing valuable remains of the 12th, 13th, and 14th centuries.

The REV. F. B. PORTMAN exhibited a rubbing of an inscription on one of the bells in the Church of Staple Fitzpaine. He had forwarded it to the British Museum, but no one there had been able to decipher the *second* word in the line, a fac-simile of which is here given.



The inscription runs thus,

✠ Est * * * collatum ihc istud nomen amatum.

The REV. T. F. DYMCK exhibited a letter belonging to Col. Tynte, from one of our Henrys to William Dittisham, of Cannington, directing the appointment of a Prioress to the Nunnery in that village.

The REV. W. F. CHILCOTT signified his intention of proposing that books and other articles should be deposited in the Museum, as a loan, with the understanding that they might be reclaimed in the event of its not being judged expedient eventually to establish a Museum.

After a vote of thanks to the President and Officers the meeting separated.
