

The PRESIDENT then read his

Inaugural Address.

IT is not without much hesitation that I have yielded to the flattering desire of your Committee, and accepted the high honour of presiding at your annual meeting this day.

The Members of this Society have heard from time to time addresses on ecclesiastical architecture, and on the ancient history of our country, from authors whose works on these subjects are held in high estimation wherever English literature is known and valued.

It would be invidious to mention individuals where so many, whether from learned leisure or even from among the urgent demands of busy life, have filled our annual volumes with papers full of interest and instruction on archæology, geology, and other subjects of scientific research.

Although a life of professional occupation has not qualified me for such a post as that which I have the honour to fill this day, yet I feel that the Somersetshire Archæological and Natural History Society is one which has claims on every one who, in however humble a way, can promote its continued prosperity and usefulness.

Having for a large period of my life resided in this division of our county, I shall beg leave to offer some information on the objects to be visited, such as may, I hope, be acceptable at least to such of my hearers who have been invited to attend from more distant localities.

The town of Bruton and its neighbourhood have been well chosen for a visit from the Society. Its fine church and tower, the secondary tower, the monuments of the Lords Berkeley of Stratton; the columbary of the Abbot, his old house in the main street with his arms, and those of the De Moyons, the founders of the monastery, the initials and badge of Prior John Henton, the last head but two of the house; the huge

buttressed wall inclosing the vicarage, but not now required to protect the worthy Vicar from Danes, or Thanes, nor yet (if the parish registers are to be believed) from the assaults of his once pugnacious neighbours of Batcombe;—these are objects upon which I hope some special paper may be given; they speak of the importance and antiquity of the town.¹

The neighbourhood also will afford us the opportunity of making several interesting excursions.

Such are those proposed to be made to Witham and Stavordale, to Pen-Selwood, and to Penridge, the field of so many contests between British and Anglo-Saxons, and afterwards between English and Danes.

Such are also the Penpits, the origin of which, whether as hut-circles, the rude habitations of the prehistoric tribes, or as impediments to the charge of cavalry, or simply as quarries, has been the subject of much variety of opinion; and if the weather be fine, the charming views from the ridge over the hills and vales of Somersætia to the west (the “*æstiva regio*” of Gildas), and on the opposite side into the colder region of Dorset towards Shaftesbury, and the vale of Blackmore. These will prove to general visitors agreeable and refreshing objects in the intervals between visits to British camps and ruined or restored relics of architecture.

To-day, immediately after the conclusion of this address, we shall visit a church belonging formerly to a little Carthusian convent, consisting of a Prior and twelve Canons, at Witham. I am old enough to remember the venerable form of this little church, before scarcely any repairs, and certainly before any restoration had overtaken it. It was then a very interesting relic, with a nave, little Norman windows with deep splays, a curiously groined stone roof, a simple bell-turret, and an apse inclosing a table and a chair—this was the little court where

(1). From documents, of which copies may be seen in Vol. XIX. of our *Proceedings*, it appears that between 1221 and 1453 “Bruton” is spelt in nine different ways!

wills were proved and marriage-licenses issued to the inhabitants of Friary (la frarie), and to those of Charterhouse on Mendip, which was a cell attached to this monastery. There was another branch of the same fraternity at Hinton near Bath, which is known to this day as Hinton Charterhouse. Witham is said to have been the *first* position occupied by this monastic order in England; in fact, this convent was founded only about 100 years after the original settlement of this denomination of monks at the *Grande Chartreuse*, in the diocese of Grenoble.² About forty years ago it was found that the little church, the chapel of the old convent, was not large enough to contain the increased numbers of the parishioners; a north aisle was then built, and at the west end, a Georgian tower, not in harmony with the original architecture. Forty years have made a great advance in architectural knowledge. The present restoration has the merit of being an effort to renew the enlarged building, with reproduction, as far as could be ascertained, of the original features and characteristics of the church. In 1181, Henry II gave demesne lands, in this and some neighbouring parishes, to the monastery—a farm belonging to Lord Cork, in Marston parish, which I once served as rector, is called *Monks Ham*, and has traces of fish-ponds which, as tradition reports, belonged in former days to this monastic settlement.

After the dissolution the lands and advowson of Witham were given by Henry VIII to Ralph Hopton, whose descendant was created Lord Hopton by Charles I; they then passed by a female to the Wyndham family. Sir Charles Wyndham, Bart., who became afterwards by patent, Earl of Egremont, sold the estate to William Beckford, Esq., Lord Mayor of London. In a volume, printed for private circulation only, by the late Sir Richard C. Hoare, there is a plan and elevation of a magnificent mansion designed to be built adjoining to the Park of Witham by Mr. Beckford, but never completed. Subsequently the materials

(2). An early Prior of this monastery was St. Hugh, afterwards Bishop of Lincoln.

were removed to build the house in Wiltshire. The eccentric author of *Vathek*, it is well known, preferred the picturesque site near Hindon for his new residence, with its lofty embattled tower and marvellous collection of works of art and vertu.

The Committee have designed for us on Wednesday an excursion to a fine encampment of the Belgic-British period, known as *Smalldon*. This camp is a remarkable strong-hold on an outlying spur, connected with the Mendip range. I believe it has never been visited by our Society. The declivity of the hill in the front and on the sides is very steep, and is further strengthened by a vallun. On the east, the *only accessible* point, a deep foss and lofty rampart protect the entrances. In one of the barrows, of which traces still exist in the centre of the area, several British remains were found by the late Rev. John Skinner, of Camerton, among which was an urn of good workmanship and form, (of which a drawing is now suspended on the wall.)

This camp "is another instance how judiciously the ancient engineers of this island, before the invasion of the Romans, selected their posts for vigilance, communication, and defence."

In our circuit on the same day we shall hope to see some churches which will well maintain the character of our county for ecclesiastical buildings, particularly Batcombe, Evercreech, and Ditcheat. Evercreech has reminded some of Wrington, the queen of our Somerset churches; and Ditcheat has some very peculiar features. It is a cross church. I had once the pleasure of taking the late Sir G. G. Scott to see it. The choir, with its fine east window, the clerestory lights on the side walls of the chancel, with the cinque-foil architrave over each, interested him much. The introduction of these windows is attributed to the Abbot of Glastonbury, John de Selwood, who was Abbot from 1456 to 1493; his initials are sculptured on the parapet, marking well the period of this addition to the church.

The particulars of this church will be given by Mr. Ferry, jun., who, as representing his father, the diocesan architect, has kindly offered us his services as our guide this day.

The Lordship of the parish of Ditchat is said to have been given to the Abbey of Glastonbury, by Ernulf, a Saxon chief, as early as A.D. 851.

At the dissolution of the monastery the advowson of the living was sold to Sir Ralph Hopton, who resided in the old manor house, near the church, while his new house at Evercreech Park was building. In 1669 Mr. Dawe purchased the manor, with a moiety of the manor of Alhampton; a large portion of which manors was sold in 1726 to the Rev. Thomas Leir, whose descendant, the Rev. W. M. Leir, holds at present the rectory and one portion of the manor. Some remains of the Abbot's residence are still to be seen in the rectory.

Notices of Evercreech Church, and of the church and history of Castle Cary, will be given on the locality of each.

A paper on the history of the Manor of Castle Cary, and an appendix on the church, will be found in the volumes of the *Proceedings* of our Society in the years 1856-7.

I will take this opportunity to mention, which I do with much pleasure, that the Rev. Jas. Bennett, Rector of South Cadbury, has made some diggings on Cadbury Camp, and in company with Professor Rolleston and General Lane Fox, on Sigwell Hill, in the same neighbourhood. I need not enter into the results of this exploration, as Mr. J. Bennett promises to read a paper descriptive of them at the meeting of this evening. Mr. Bennett has also received permission from Captain Hervey Mildmay to examine and catalogue the MSS., autographs, and other papers at Hazlegrove. Some of these memorials are of much interest, many are of the later years of Queen Elizabeth—among them a copy of verses never yet published, which there are grounds for believing to be from the pen of Sir Walter Raleigh. The examination and arrangement of MSS. is a very useful department of archæology, and one which may be well recommended to our members when the opportunity is given them. Thus, in the collection of Lord Ilchester, which may, perhaps, be opened some day to the inspection of our Society,

there is a very perfect cartulary of the Abbey of Glastonbury. You will, doubtless, recollect the interesting account given us by Canon Jackson of his discoveries at Longleat, especially of that remarkable volume of the 12th century, containing a register of Glastonbury Abbey, with the names of the tenants drawn up by order of the Abbot, Henry de Solisaco.

On the wall is a fac-simile of another curious letter discovered by Mr. Jackson in the same archives, viz., a letter from Amy Robsart, dated Cumnor, and showing by the signatures that she was the *wife* of Dudley, Earl of Leicester.

I may mention here the discovery of another paper at Longleat, not indeed so important as those just alluded to, but which occurred under my own eyes. A box of papers was brought to Mr. Jackson to be examined; in turning them over a small document was found, of which the seal had never been broken. It was addressed to the "Master and Scholars of Wells," meaning the Sub-dean (as is afterwards explained), and Canons. It was very clearly written in Latin, and related to an arbitration respecting the Church of "Basslake," now Basselog, near Newport, in Monmouthshire, which belonged anciently to the Abbey of Glastonbury. The Bishop of Llandaff, on behalf of the Abbey of Caerleon, claimed the patronage of Basslake. Lord Bath having given his permission, the seal of this ancient document was broken, and the paper was found to be a citation of the Treasurer and Sub-dean, and Master Robert de Berkeley, canons of Wells, the judges, in the words of the original document, "judicum, a sede Apostolicâ deputatorum, super concordia factâ, inter Abbat^m & Conventum Glaston., et Abbatem et Convent^m Caerleon, de decennis pertinentibus ad ecclesiam de Basslake." It was curious that this ancient document, when *at least* 600 years old, should be opened and identified after so long a slumber, in the presence of a Canon of Wells.

On Thursday it is proposed for us to visit, first, the remains of

Stavordale Priory.³ This sequestered retreat amidst overhanging woods, was founded by a Lord of Castle Cary, who obtained a license to cede certain of his lands to the Priory at Stavordale near Wincanton, that Divine service might be performed in their little church daily. The monks of this Priory are said to have been black friars of the order of St. Augustin. In a manuscript, however, belonging to the Dean and Chapter of Wells, I found that the Prior of Stavordale in the year 1263 is called of the order of "St. Victor." It was a poor priory, and in consequence of their poverty both the rectorial and vicarial tithes of the adjoining town of Wincanton (Wincaleton) were appropriated to them by the King. Hence, at the dissolution, the officiating minister of Wincanton was left with a very small remuneration for his services, and might have reason to lament his vicinity to Stavordale in the well known exclamation of the poet,

"Mantua vae miseræ nimium vicina Cremonæ!"

Your attention at Stavordale will be called to the remains of the Church, now a barn, and in the dairy and upper room to some beautiful brackets, and heraldic sculptures, one, especially, representing the arms of the several founders—the lion, of the Lovell-Percevals, the shield parted per 2 chevrons of the St. Maurs, and the besants with a canton ermine, the shield of the Lords Zouche.

The lords of Castle Cary succeeding to the Lovells, seem to have inherited the charitable interest of the original founders for their priory of Stavordale.

The heights to which we shall mount from the lowlands round Stavordale seem still to be clothed with relics of the Great Forest.

(3). There is some difficulty in respect to the foundation of Stavordale Priory. The notice in the Wells manuscript speaks of a Prior of the order of St. Victor as the head of this Priory in 1263. Phelps gives this as the date of its foundation by Lord Lovell of Castle Cary, but does not give his authority for this statement. Tanner, in *Notitia Monastica*, says that Stavordale was founded by a Sir William Zouche. In 24th Edw. III, 1350, a Richard Lord Lovell gave some lands and a mill to this Priory. In the reign of Richard II, a Lord St. Maur was patron.

In the village of Penselwood the church has a doorway of fine Anglo-Norman work, which would have been more interesting to our Society if its surface had not been cleansed with too much care.

This district will remind the student of early English history of several important battles. At Peonne, Penna, or Pen⁴ in A.D. 658, Ceanwealh, King of the West Saxons, attacked the British on the brow to the south-west of the village, and driving them before him extended the boundaries of his kingdom to the river Parret.

On these heights, too, the gallant Edmund Ironside fought the Danes A.D. 1016, and humbled, for a time, the raven ensign of the invaders before the furious onset of the English.

It was in Selwood forest that the best and greatest of English sovereigns collected his scattered army from various quarters and sheltered them, preparatory to the great battle with the Danes in the year 878.

I will not enter now into a discussion on the point mooted by a Right Reverend Chairman on a former occasion, as to whether the Æthandune, from which this great battle takes its name, is the village under the white horse near Bratton, or whether it is another Edington, situated nearer to the river Parret. However that may be it is impossible to pass through Selwood Forest without a thought upon one of the most memorable and decisive conflicts of English history. And to whose mind has not the picture been reproduced, of the victorious King, standing shortly after the battle as sponsor to the Danish chief at the font of Aller. And on recalling that impressive scene, we may surely be allowed to hope that Guthrum and his hardy fellow-soldiers were persuaded, as much by the character and conduct of Alfred, as by actual stipulation, to embrace the religion of his generous conqueror? And here I must congratulate those Members of our Society who have, with others, commemorated by a successful celebration the thousandth anniversary of the peace signed at

(4). Pen is well-known to signify "a summit."

Wedmore after the victory of Æthandune—a peace which was converted, by the wise policy of the Great Alfred, into a permanent conciliation of races, the Anglo-Danes becoming, by this treaty, fellow citizens with the English, and gradually, like the Normans at another period of our history, being absorbed into one great empire.

From the Penpits we shall proceed to Stourhead, where, by the courtesy of Lady Hoare, the gallery of paintings, and the gardens with the cross once belonging to Bristol, will be opened to the Society. This cross was first erected, with effigies of King John and Henry III at the close of the 14th century; it was afterwards enlarged, and figures of other Sovereigns added at later periods.

As to the geology of the district in which we are assembled, I will only say that Bruton is situated upon that line of oolite which runs across England from the N.E. to the S.W., or as some have described it, which accompanies a line of lias passing in that direction, of which the inferior oolite forms the eastern boundary, and the red marl the western.

Not many yards from the place in which we are met, a very remarkable fossil was found, which is now in the British Museum. It was the large cone of a fir; the side which was not attached to the matrix, being protected in a cavity by the covering stone, was in a perfect state of preservation, so that Dr. Hooker, to whom it was sent, could pronounce it to be identical with the recent cones of the *Pinus Norfolkensis*, the fir-tree of Norfolk Island.

Among the specimens of organic remains which I have sent to the Local Museum you will see some from the chalk of Berks and Wilts, and some from the upper and lower green sand which forms the ridge of hills immediately above us. I may especially notice the beautiful little fossils from Shute farm, near Horningham, where the echinoderms, corals, bivalves, &c., were turned up in abundance whenever the fields were ploughed. At Steeple Ashton, not far from Edington, there seems to have

been an atoll, or coral island; in the Local Museum you will see some good specimens from this locality; as well as, from the Bradford clay, of pear encrinites (apicrinites). There are also some of the fossils from the inferior oolites, particularly a fine pair of chambered ammonites from Shepton Montague; fossils from the lias; with ferns and reeds, &c., from the coal measures.

But I must detain you no longer with descriptions of localities. Let me, however, as one of the oldest members of this Society, take this opportunity to say that some of the happiest days of my social life have been passed in the friendly gatherings of this Institution, and, under its guidance, in excursions to various objects of interest in this county.

During the 20 years which have elapsed since I last attended a meeting of the Society in this town, several valued Members have been removed from us. These friends, however, have not passed away without leaving their marks in our annals, in the shape of literary contributions of great interest and merit.

Permit me then to commend this Society to the continued patronage of this county—let me commend it especially to the cordial support of my brethren of the clergy. No positions are more favourable than theirs for contributing usefully to local history and topography; geology too, natural history and botany, are subjects for which the rural clergy have facilities beyond those who inhabit populous towns; and on these subjects new features will not fail to present themselves, or new testimonies to old truths in every place; and in return, connection with the Society and its Museum will place its members "au courant" with many of the most interesting discoveries and inventions of the age.

It is among the advantages of institutions such as ours that they encourage the formation of scientific habits; I mean by this the habit of noticing all that we see or hear, and of comparing one thing with another. One may well think that Shakspeare had such a case in view when he describes the contemplative man as finding

“Tongues in the trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything”

To a man, says Sir John Herschel, who “accustoms himself to trace the operation of general causes where the unenquiring eye perceives nothing of novelty or beauty, every object which falls in his way elucidates some principle, and impresses him with some new sense of the order and harmony of the universe.”

We would have none content to walk about in a state which that remarkable man, The Scotch Naturalist, calls “a daylight somnambulism,” “that is a state when people have their eyes and ears open, and yet neither see nor hear anything which interests them in the marvellous works of God in nature.”⁵

The subjects with which your Society is conversant open an exhaustless store of recreation and improvement, and will lead its members, whether of the clergy or the laity, and, let me make no exceptions, of ladies also, whose auspicious presence it is always gratifying to us to welcome on these occasions, to constant sources of rational entertainment. Concerning which I know not that I can conclude in more appropriate words than those of the accomplished Roman, “Hæc studia adolescentiam alunt, senectutem oblectant, secundas res ornant, adversis solatium et perfrugium præbent, delectant domi, non impediunt foris, pernoctant nobiscum, peregrinantur, rusticantur;” *i.e.*, if I may venture to render into English the elegant Latin of Cicero, “These pursuits are the food of our youth, and the delight of old age, they are an ornament in prosperity, a resource and solace in adversity, they are among the charms of home which we may take with us abroad, sweet companions by night and by day, in foreign travel, and in rural retirement.”

Bishop CLIFFORD proposed, and Colonel PINNEY seconded, a vote of thanks to the President for his comprehensive address, which was carried unanimously.

Mr. H. DYNE kindly entertained the numerous party at luncheon at his house. After this the Members of the Society, and others, left for Witham by rail.

(5). See Smiles's *Life of Thomas Edward*.