

Mr. THOMAS SEREL read a paper on "St. John's Priory, Wells," of which the following is an abstract :—

"The site of this ancient establishment is on the west side of St. John-street, which leads from the city into another street called Southover. The name of the street is, no doubt, derived from its proximity to the Hospital. The ruins of this once venerable house have recently been entirely swept away.

"This Priory, or Hospital as it is more frequently styled in documents of early date, was founded about the year 1206, for a prior, or master, and ten brethren. The prior used a Common Seal, on which was represented the figure of St. John the Baptist, with this legend :—

SIGILL. HOSPITAL. SCI. JOHANNIS. D. WELLES.

“The Priory was dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and owes its foundation to Hugh de Welles, Bishop of Lincoln, and Jocelyne de Welles, Bishop of Bath and Wells, who (as Godwin informs us) ‘laying their purses together,’ endowed it with considerable possessions, including the parsonage of Evercreech, and lands in Wookey, East Wells, and Southover. Collinson states that Hugh de Welles was the sole founder of the Hospital, and that Jocelyne ‘made considerable additions’ to the institution. The same author, in his memoir of Bishop Jocelyne, expressly says that the Hospital was the joint foundation of the two brothers (Jocelyne and Hugh). By his will, Bishop Hugh gave the Hospital 500 marks; a most liberal donation at that early period. Some persons have been led to suppose, from the language of this bequest, that the Hospital was in fact built *after* Bishop Hugh’s decease, though most of our local historians assume that the establishment was completed in his life-time.

“The two Bishops were natives of Wells, and both men of the greatest eminence, as well as active participators in some of the most important events of the times in which they lived. The names of both appear in Magna Charta, [“Joscelini Bathon. & Glaston. Hugon Linc.”\*] and both have an historical fame from the part they took in opposition to King John, when that monarch refused to recognise Stephen Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury. To Bishop Jocelyne we owe most of our present Cathedral, including its unequalled West Front.

“Besides the estates before referred to, the Hospital

\* Bishop Joceline succeeded to the See in 1206, and took the title of “Bath and Glastonbury,” which had been assumed by his predecessor, Savaric. This title he continued to use until 1218, when he relinquished it for the *valuable* consideration of divers rich manors, &c., given up to him by the Abbot of Glastonbury.

had other possessions in Keinton Mandeville, Babcary, Dinder, and other places. Whether these latter additions formed part of the original endowment I cannot say, but it is clear that they were held by the Hospital soon after its foundation. Several benefactors added to its revenues; among them Edmund Lyons, knt., and Bishop Ralph de Salopia, are named. The latter charged his gift with the duty of maintaining a chaplain to say mass at the altar of St. Edmund, in the Cathedral, for his own good estate while living, and for his soul after his death; and also for the soul of John de Somerton, formerly Abbot of Muchelney, and the souls of all his successors in that Convent. According to the Commissioners' Survey of Chantries, &c., made 1 Edw. VI, the charge on the Hospital estates was £4 per annum, and John Dible, clerk, aged 70 years was the last incumbent.

“According to Dugdale, the income of the Priory at the Dissolution was £40 0s. 2½d., and according to Speed, £41 3s. 6¼d., but neither of these sums must be taken literally, as the real extent of the revenues of the establishment. Collinson and Phelps both give the income as £40 0s. 5d.

“Richard Clarkson was the last Prior, and by him (with three of his brethren), on the 3rd of February, 1539, the Hospital was resigned to the king, in consideration of a pension of £12.

“The act of 27 Henry VIII dissolved and vested in the king all monasteries, priories, &c., having a yearly revenue under £200 a-year. But the Hospital of St. John seems either to have escaped notice, or the prior to have found favour with the king, for it was not surrendered until 1539.

“Soon after the Hospital became vested in the Crown, the site, and possessions belonging to it, were, under a

special licence from the king, granted to the Earl of Southampton, who exchanged the whole with Dr. John Clerk, then Bishop of Bath and Wells, for the manor of Dogmersfield (one of the summer residences of the bishop, which had been granted to the see by Henry I.) subject to a yearly rent to the Crown of £7 5s. The Hospital and its possessions were not fated to continue long in the possession of the Church. In 1548, Bishop Barlow surrendered to the Crown a large portion of the episcopal estates, including this Hospital, with the lands belonging to it, and the rectory and advowson of Evercreech. The Hospital, and the lands attached to it, continued vested in the Crown until 27th January, 1575, when the whole were granted by Queen Elizabeth to Sir Christopher Hatton, but how long they were held by him has not been ascertained.

“Phelps, in his *History of Somerset*, traces the ownership from Sir Christopher Hatton, through Sir William Dodington, the Godwins, Nutleys, and Edwards, and states that the property was purchased of the last-named owner, in 1732, by Peter Davis, Esq., the ancestor of the late owner, John Davis Sherston, Esq. But it is certain that this account is inaccurate. In 1667, Robert Lord Brooke was the owner of the site of the Hospital, and a portion, if not all the estates that appertained to it; but by what means, or at what time he, or his ancestors, obtained the property, is unknown. In 1667, his lordship conveyed the dissolved Hospital and its estates in strict settlement, after his own death, to his son and heir apparent, Francis Greville, with remainder to his brother Fulke Greville. Francis Greville, the son of Lord Brooke, died an infant, unmarried, in the life-time of his father, There were only two daughters, who married respectively the Earls of

Kingston and Manchester, and, under the provisions of their father's settlement, received £15,000 as their portions out of the family estates, which in 1676, by virtue of the entail in the same settlement, on the death of Lord Brooke, descended to Fulke Greville, who became Lord Brooke. This Fulke Lord Brooke died in 1710, and was succeeded by his second son, William. In February, 1721, William mortgaged the Hospital and lands held with it, and in 1722 made a further charge on the property, the entire debt being £10,000. He died 26th July, 1727, and by his will gave his estates to his son Francis, who subsequently became Earl of Warwick, and, after several intermediate dealings with the property comprised in the mortgage of 1721, the whole became released from that mortgage in 1751, and were absolutely vested in the then Lord Warwick, who, about 80 years ago, sold the Hospital and lands then appertaining to it, to the ancestors of the present Mr. Sherston.

“The Hospital itself, as might be expected, underwent many changes and alterations, to suit the convenience and taste of its different possessors. Considerable portions of the original buildings, however, remained until they were finally removed a short time ago to make way for the new schools; other parts were taken down in 1812, when the late Mr. Peter Sherston generously gave a site for building the late central school. A cursory examination of the interior of the building, when in course of being pulled down, showed clear indications that the Hospital had, subsequent to its dissolution, been used as a dwelling-house. New ceilings had been added, which were highly ornamented, and a fireplace made in the best apartment, over which were the arms of James I. in bold relief. Since the old building ceased to be used as dwelling-house, it has

been turned into a manufactory for knit-stockings, and subsequently for the wood portions of brushes.

“In making the necessary excavations for the new schools, old foundations were found extending far beyond the walls shortly before taken down, and below the surface large quantities of freestone were discovered, in confused heaps, at considerable depths, which appeared to have once formed parts of massive arches, door-ways, window-mullions, &c. Besides these, numerous fragments of delicately sculptured stone were turned out, apparently portions of an altar screen, of a most elaborate and elegant description, most of which had been richly gilt and illuminated.

[Many interesting relics were found in the ruins of the Hospital, and a few of them were produced by Mr. Serel. An old spoon turned out from one of the ancient sewers; three keys, found buried in rubbish below the floor of one of the apartments; a leaden bull, or bulla, of Pope Pius VI, in a remarkably perfect state.]

“It is not possible to define the ancient precincts of the Priory, but there is ground for believing that they extended to Bull-lane, adjoining the Railway station. Indeed the field in which the station is built belonged to the Hospital, as did other land to the west of it, including an ancient mill, now held by Mr. S. Fry, which, within the last 60 years, was always known as “Prior’s Mill.” The Hospital inclosure was intersected by the stream which flows directly from St. Andrew’s well, a sure indication that, even at the early date when the Hospital was founded, such an accessory to cleanliness and health was well understood and appreciated.

“Though the old Hospital will soon be swept away and forgotten, its name will be perpetuated to posterity by the

present appellation of the street adjoining its site, which has long been known as "St. John's Street." The site is now occupied by a new building, consisting of schools for imparting a sound religious education to the young of coming generations. For this the inhabitants of Wells have, in the first place, to thank the late owner, Captain Sherston, whose munificence deserves a more public acknowledgment than it has yet received; and in the next place to the committee and subscribers, (among the more active of whom were the Very Rev. the Dean, Vicar of St. Cuthbert's, and his Curates, the Rev. H. E. Ravenhill and the Rev. J. Troutbeck) whose efforts and liberality have combined to rear and complete the new schools, which are intended to serve as models for subsequent structures of a similar nature in this diocese. The foundation stone of these schools was laid July 16th, 1858."

There was an Ordinary in the afternoon, which was well attended, and in the evening the proceedings of the Society were resumed.

The Rev. T. HUGO, M.A., read a paper on "Taunton Priory," which is given in Part II.