

Excursion : Thursday.

A large party started at 10 a.m. from the Guildhall, and drove out of the city in the direction of Barrow Hill, a round knoll, which at a distance looks like a large artificial mound, but which has been formed by natural agencies, and is an outlier of the oolite. To the west of this lies

Englishcombe,

where the first halt was made. Englishcombe was, as Dr. Guest has pointed out, "English as against the Welsh on the other side of the Wansdyke."

The Barn was the first object of inspection. It is a very large and imposing building at the top of the hill, with a fine but simple roof, and a remarkably pretty window at one end.

Mr. HUNT said that the Barn belonged to the Prior and Convent of S. Peter at Bath. The little village was full of historical interest of different kinds. First, as its name showed, it marked for a while the boundary of our forefathers' settlements. When they in their turn were conquered, Englishcombe formed part of the vast property of the Bishop of Coutances. The traces of the architectural skill of the Normans were to be clearly seen in the church. At a later date the great family of the Gournays, the same family whose seat they had visited at East Harptree, raised a castle on the mound below them. As at East Harptree, so here, their estates had fallen to the Crown, and had become part of the property of the Prince of Wales. The barn in which they then stood had belonged to the monks of Bath,

the owners of the rectory and advowson of the church. In it were stored the tithes of their many manors. Among these tithes was one which was worth mentioning, as it marked a loss which we had sustained in cultivation. Here, doubtless, were stored the tithes of the vines of Lyncomb, which were confirmed to the monastery by Archbishop Theobald.

In the courtyard of the farm house adjoining the barn are two yew trees, which have joined and grown into one another.

The parish Church was next visited. It is not known to whom this church is dedicated. It has a Norman doorway, and a fine piece of Norman arcading on the northern side of the choir space beneath the tower, which stands between the chancel and the nave. On the south side is a large chapel, which probably belonged to the Gournay family. There are five bells in the tower; one, the fourth, belongs to the time before the change in religion made in the sixteenth century, as it bears the inscription "Sancta Maria ora pro nobis." There is another, which, as the form of the letters of the inscription and their arrangement are of the same character as on the fourth bell, probably belongs to the same period, and was cast at the same foundry.

Mr. SCARTH remarked that in the villages round Bath they generally found the elements of a small Norman church. Here a good deal of rich Norman work was still left. He thought that the builders took their model from the Abbey Church of Bishop John de Villula, and he had no doubt but that there was a school of architects in Bath who gave plans for these Norman churches in the neighbourhood.

Mr. HUNT spoke of the lamentable state of the building. It was a sad thing to see one of the houses of God in our land, and one which showed that once, in what people were pleased to consider a dark time, wealth and taste had been freely used upon it, thus suffering from wanton mischief and long continued and disgraceful neglect. He believed that a better time was now beginning for the Church in Englishcombe. He called attention to the chancel, with its beautiful piece of Norman

arcading still left on one side, and its Norman piers and capitals ; the arches were of course of later date. There was a good piscina in the chancel, and another small one in the south chapel. On the inside of the west wall of the chancel was a curious figure of the infant Saviour, swathed in swaddling clothes, like an Italian bambino.

The castle of the Gournays is totally destroyed, traces of a mound and ditch only remain upon the site. An old manor house of the sixteenth century once stood in the village, but it is now either destroyed or completely bereft of all its former architectural interest.

The party then went to the grass field between the church and the brook, to see the Wansdyke, which is here clearly marked. Mr. Scarth explained its course as far as it could be ascertained with any certainty. He referred to an account which he had formerly given of it, and which is reported in the *Society's Proceedings*, VI, ii, 101, and VII, ii, 9. It extended from some point near the Bristol Channel, in a continuous course, interrupted at intervals, all the way across Somerset and the Wiltshire Downs, to Savernake Forest, and to beyond Great Bedwyn ; it reached a length of eighty miles, between the rivers Severn and Thames, and marked a territory which had probably been acquired by the Belgæ before the coming of the Romans into Britain. The great ridge on which they stood had its ditch to the north, and this was the prevailing feature of the earthwork, thrown up by a people coming from the south, and marking the quarter from whence they expected an enemy. It was traceable through Newton Park, and near Compton Dando, also at Stanton-bury, and on the northern side of Maes-knoll. Both these last named places were fortified points, and seemed to have strengthened this boundary line. Beyond Maes-knoll it had not been very accurately marked, though there were traditions of its existence ; and a gentleman who, within the last ten years, had given much attention to its course, informed him that he believed undoubted traces of it existed between Maes-

knoll and the Severn. Looking now in the direction of Bath, they would find distinct traces of it from the Burnt House Turnpike-gate to the Cross Keys public-house (noted in the ordnance map), and again at the back of Prior Park, and over Hampton Down, where were the remains of an early British settlement. It crossed the Avon at a point between Bathford and Warley Manor, and was distinctly to be recognised in Mr. Skrine's property.³⁰ It was lost among the quarryings as it ascended to Farley down; but here, as it passed out of Somerset, it seemed to have been adapted by the Romans to the purposes of a road. This road could be shown to be later than the dyke. It was not needful for him now to trace it further, or to say more than it was one of the most interesting features of ancient Somerset.

The next place visited was

Newton S. Loe,

where the party were most kindly received and entertained by the Rector, the Rev. G. Gore. The village is remarkably pretty, and well cared for. The Church stands upon high ground, and the churchyard, and the trees, and park below it, are most pleasing. The church has been restored—about twenty years ago—and there is proof that no expense was spared in the work.

Mr. FERRY said that the most remarkable thing in the building was the arcade on the south side, and drew attention to the odd ending at the east end. He pointed out the narrow slit or doorway between the chancel and the south aisle, which had been blocked up, but was opened at the late restoration. It served as a squint, and also, perhaps, as a passage for the priest between the high altar and altar in the south aisle. The arcade on the north side was modern, and did not exactly match the old work. The roof, as every one could see, was modern also.

Mr. HUNT observed that, as so much money had been spent, and so many handsome things put into the church, it was a great

(30). For proof of this see the *Proceedings of the Bath Field Club*, vol. ii, pp. 151 and 368.

pity that the effect should be so marred by the cumbrous roof, which was ugly in itself, and entirely out of place in a Somersetshire church.

In the schoolroom a large collection of Roman remains was exhibited. These had been gathered together by the industry and ability of Mr. Glover, the schoolmaster of the parish. Some years ago, in making the railway, the remains of a Roman villa were found in the neighbourhood, and these formed the nucleus of Mr. Glover's collection, which comprised a number of tiles, coins, pottery, &c.

The hospitality of the Rector, the extreme heat, and the many beauties of the place caused a considerable delay, and the Secretary thought it advisable to give up the halt which he had proposed to make at Saltford. The party therefore drove on at once to

Hensham.

The Church is a large and handsome building, but has suffered much from the decay of the stone with which it is partly built.

Mr. SCARTH said that it was always the parish church. He considered that the late restorations had been conducted with care and ability. The chancel was of the Early English period. The tower was only two centuries old, but was very good. He called attention to the monuments of the Bridges, ancestors of the Dukes of Chandos.

Mr. FREEMAN considered that the old tower was on the north side of the church, and that there was then an ornamented west front which was now lost by the tower having been built at the west end.

Rev. J. H. GRAY, the Vicar, said that that was the case, as he could show by documentary evidence. The old tower was struck by lightning and destroyed in 1634, and the present tower was built in the reign of Charles II.

Mr. FREEMAN was glad to find that, what from the evidence of the building he was sure must have been, was thus confirmed by another kind of proof. He asked whether Mr. Gray had

evidence to prove that the elaborate screen which still remained on the south side had ever stretched right across the east end.

Mr. GRAY said that he could show that this had been the case.

Mr. FREEMAN said that this would entitle the screen to be numbered amongst the other seventeenth century screens of the county.

The site of Keynsham Abbey was next visited. The ruins of the building have been lately discovered and excavated by Mr. Irvine. Unfortunately business engagements prevented this gentleman from attending the meeting, and no one present was able to give any satisfactory explanation of the remains. The bases of several columns and a large quantity of interesting and beautiful tile pavement are exposed to view, and many more tiles and pieces of carved stone are to be seen in the garden of Mr. Cox, the owner. It is much to be regretted that there is no kind of protection raised against the effects of the weather and the pilferings of visitors. Before it is too late, something should be done to guard these beautiful and precious relics.

Mr. SCARTH showed some diagrams made by Mr. Irvine of the ground plan and bits of the stone work.

Mr. HUNT said that the Abbey was founded by William, Earl of Gloucester, and was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, S.S. Peter and Paul. It was an Abbey of Canons Regular. Jasper Tudor, Duke of Bedford, half brother to King Henry VI, was buried here. At the time of the dissolution, Thomas Bridges got the Abbey granted to him by Edward VI. There was another religious house in Keynsham, the remains of which could be seen in the street of the village. It was called the House of S. John the Baptist; it was perhaps used to receive strangers in, and probably belonged to the Abbey.

From Keynsham the party went on to

Bitton,

a prettily situated village, with a large paper mill belonging to Mr. Somerville, which has lately suffered from a disastrous fire.

At the vicarage, the Rev. H. Ellacombe showed a collection of Roman tiles, and other relics found in the garden and neighbourhood. The house contains many curious and beautiful works of art, and especially some fine pieces of old Venetian glass. The garden is a perfect school of botany, and is a triumph of science and skill.

At the Church, Mr. Ellacombe read a carefully prepared and interesting paper on the building, by his father, the Rev. H. T. Ellacombe, of Clyst S. George, the great authority on matters of campanology. The paper itself could not be obtained by the Secretary, but the Vicar of Bitton has kindly made the following abstract of it.

“The Church of S. Mary, Bitton, is a handsome building of somewhat remarkable construction. It consists of a chancel, nave, north aisle, and western tower. The measurements of the present church are—chancel, 27 ft. ; nave, 93 ft. 6 in. ; and tower, 17 ft. 2 in. ; the whole length being 137 ft. 8 in. The nave is the oldest part ; it was originally longer than at present, and consisted of a single aisle. Of the most ancient parts there remain the abaci of the chancel arch, originally of a wider span than the present arch ; the remains of an arch in the north wall which led either into a transept or into a tower, this arch is formed of very large stones and is without any sort of moulding ; and the square string course above the chancel arch, on which rest the remains of what is supposed to be the rood. Of the same date probably are also the three square-headed windows of which traces remain in the north wall, and which have been long blocked up. What the exact date of this early work is, it is not easy to say, but it is certainly what is commonly called Saxon or more correctly pre-Norman. Of distinct Norman work, of a later date, there are the north and south doors, the corbel-table on the north and south of the nave, and the chancel arch. This arch, as now seen, is not ancient, but occupies the exact place of the Norman arch.

The Chantry of S. Catharine on the north side is the next in

date. It was built by Thomas de Button,³¹ Bishop of Exeter, over the bodies of his father and mother, and was consecrated in 1299. The deed of consecration still remains in Worcester. It is an elegant building with three very rich sedilia, a piscina, an east window of three simple lights without cusps, two six single light windows with trefoil heads and good internal mouldings. There is a western doorway with a small window on either side, but it is doubtful whether there was ever an outside door.

The only Decorated work is a two-light window on the north side of the church.

There are good examples of Perpendicular work in the chancel, the tower and the windows of the nave. The chancel and tower were probably built at the end of the fourteenth or the beginning of the fifteenth century. The chancel is small compared with the extraordinary length of the nave. It has a large east window of five lights, somewhat like the east window of S. Mary, Redcliff, three sedilia of good proportions, but not so highly ornamented as those of the north chantry, and a groined roof of two bays of peculiar construction. The whole work in the chancel has been very carefully done, even to the external roofing, which is of stone, but this was found not to be weather-proof, and it therefore had an external roof of slate. North of the chancel is a vestry of the same date, also with a stone roof. The tower is in three stages, with a staircase turret on the north, capped with a small spire. The whole of the tower is of good workmanship, and the proportions are excellent. The buttresses are diagonal, with crocketed pinnacles springing from the set-offs of the buttresses in each stage, and the upper stage is battlemented, with smaller pinnacles springing out of the battlements. The west door has the heads of King Edward III

(31). The family of Button took their name from this place. Thomas Button, or de Button, was chosen Dean of Wells, 1284, and was promoted to the see of Exeter, 1292. Mr. Irvine considers that the figure on the right side of the north porch of the Cathedral Church of Wells represents him as Bishop. Vol. of *Proceedings*, xix. ii. 31. His uncle, William Button, was Bishop of Bath and Wells, 1248-1264, and so was his brother, another William Button, the Saint, 1267-1275.

and Queen Philippa at the termination of the hood moulding. There are some fine monuments in the church of ancient date. One, half raised and half incised, represents a knight, cross-legged, with shield bearing the arms of De Button. Another similar stone, with a floriated cross, is to the memory of Emmote de Hastings. In the north aisle are two small effigies, supposed to be of Canons of the Church of Wells. There are also many fragments of other monuments.

Of late years the nave has been entirely re-roofed with a hammer-beam roof of oak with cedar panelling, and has been re-seated with open seats of solid oak and richly carved bench ends, each end having a different design. Several painted windows have also been put in."

The Norman nave of the church is of twelfth century work, and is of unusual length. A corbel-table is carried the whole way along it. There are indications that the present nave has taken the place of something considerably earlier. On the north side, the corbel-table has evidently been carried along regardless of an earlier arch, of which the remains can be seen. On this side the masonry is of large square stones, and is most distinctly primitive in character. The nave is longer than would have been built by the Normans, had they not been following old lines. Bits of Roman brick and tile have been found round the church. Inside the building, the perfectly square string-course, above the present elaborate chancel arch, is pre-Norman. All these features point to an earlier church which must have been very narrow, and together with the smallness of the chancel and the vast length of the nave, they mark the remains of a true Roman basilica. Underneath the walls may yet be stumps of Roman columns. The Roman building may have been turned into a church, or a church may have been built upon its foundations and out of its materials; this was built again by the Normans in the twelfth century and recast in later times.

The date of the chantry, 1299, agrees well with the building itself. There is evidence that part of the tower was built in

the reign of Edward III, and this confirms the opinion of Professor Willis, that the Perpendicular style came in earlier than many people are inclined to think. Mr. Ellacombe considers that the carving which rests on the square string-course above the chancel arch is meant for the feet of the Lord upon the Cross, it may however be a symbolical representation of the Ascension. The church owes much to the liberality and good taste of the present Vicar and his father. The carving of the bench ends and the foliage work of the corbels, which uphold the roof, are very beautiful. Some fault may be found with the structure of the roof, as the large hammer-beams are out of place and are quite contrary to the characteristics of the west-country roofs. There is much to admire and even more to study in this remarkable building.

From the church some of the party went to the camp spoken of by Bishop Clifford in his paper on Roman Roads, which will be found in Part II of the present volume. This brought the Proceedings to an end. The weather during the visit to Bath was exceedingly hot, and perhaps for this reason the attendance was not so good as usual, especially at the Evening Meetings. The President, Mr. Jerom Murch, and Admiral Paynter, the Mayor of the city, did all in their power to forward the objects of the Society. But with these and some few other exceptions, the Bath people seemed to take little interest in the Meeting. The thanks of the Society are due to the Rev. H. H. Winwood, the Secretary of the Bath Field Club, and to Mr. C. Moore, who both acted as Local Secretaries of the Society, and who much helped the Secretary in charge of the Excursion. The absence of Mr. Winwood, who was on the Continent at the time of the Meeting, was a great loss, especially as he had done much in fixing and arranging the Excursions.

The Committee of the Bath Literary and Scientific Institution kindly threw open their building for the use of the Members of the Society.
