

## Thursday: Excursion.

A large number set off on this day's excursion. The first place on the programme was

### Stavordale.

These interesting remains are those of a small Priory of Augustinian Canons. The present Conventual Church was

rebuilt in the time of Henry VI by John Stourton. In the reign of Henry VIII this house was annexed to Taunton Priory. The buildings are now used for a farm-house and barns.

Bishop CLIFFORD observed that the run of the cloisters could still be traced from the north side of the Church across the yard. The building was made into a house of some pretensions after the Dissolution, and had now sunk to be a farm-house. The shell of the Church remained complete. The nave was now a barn; the chancel a dwelling-house. The eastern arch was in good preservation. The level of the chancel was considerably higher than that of the nave, as it would be observed that the bases of the columns were some feet above the level of the barn.

Mr. HUNT thought that this was the effect of the loss of the steps leading into the chancel.

Bishop CLIFFORD said that the remains on the side walls were against this explanation.

Mr. HUNT suggested that the steps did not reach all the way from north to south, but left a procession path on either side.

Bishop CLIFFORD said that the spaces left between the columns of the eastern arch and the walls on either side were too narrow for such a purpose. He could give no explanation of the matter. The present dairy was once a side chapel, with a roof of great beauty. The Conventual buildings, the dormitory, &c., stood on the north side of the Church, and were now turned into barns.

### *Penselwood*

was reached after a steep ascent.

Bishop CLIFFORD said that the Church was originally a Norman building, consisting of a nave and chancel. The lower part of the tower was part of this old building as the Norman doorway and one window remained, the work belonged, he thought, to the twelfth century. The north aisle was of course later. The Church had been badly treated in restoration. No

doubt a Norman arch existed in the south porch, but the present one was a patched-up affair. Scraping and patching had done much harm here; and new noses were added to the faces on either side. There was a small piscina. The sculpture over the south porch was the Agnus Dei.

Mr. WILKINSON, the Rector, read a short paper on the Pits, which were to be next visited. He agreed with Mr. Kerslake that they were the remains of a "British Metropolis" once inhabited by our ancestors.

Mr. HUNT said that, at the risk of being thought captious, he must protest against the use of the word metropolis to describe a big town. In an Archæological Society they should be careful to use words in their right meanings. A metropolis was the mother city of a colony, or the city which contained the mother Church of a country. Canterbury, and not London, was the metropolis of England. He must also protest against the occupiers of Penpits, if indeed the pits were the remains of dwellings, being called our ancestors. We were English, they were perhaps Welsh. As far as we were concerned it mattered not who they were; they were of a different race, Keltic perhaps, and certainly not Teutonic. He understood Mr. Kerslake to say that he believed Penpits to be a primæval city inhabited before the coming of the Saxons into these parts, it was then an evident self-contradiction to talk of these inhabitants being our ancestors.

Bishop CLIFFORD thought that intermarriage prevailed between the conquerors and the conquered, and that they lived quietly side by side in these parts.

Mr. HUNT replied that though no doubt the women were to some extent made the spoil of the conquerors that did not make the race different. The character of our language, the circumstances of our conversion to Christianity, the ignorance of civilization and of the comforts of life, and the manners of our forefathers all point to the destruction of the Welsh, or their flight before the advance of the conquering people.

A visit was then made to

### Pen Pits.

These pits occupy a large space of ground. They vary greatly in size, and are placed close to one another, being only divided by narrow ridges. They are said to have once occupied 700 acres.

Mr. KERSLAKE read some extracts from his pamphlet on Penpits, entitled, *An Early British Metropolis*, in which he endeavours to prove that these pits are the site of *Caer Pen-sauelcoit*.

Rev. Prebendary SCARTH said that he thought that the theory that they were standing on the remains of a city occupied by the primitive inhabitants of the county was well worthy of consideration. He considered that Mr. Kerslake had made out a fair case. It was possible that these remains were coeval with Stonehenge. There had been no systematic attempt made at exploration. Querns and whetstones had been found here. It was very probable that if a thorough examination took place other signs of human habitation would be found. He hoped that Mr. Hunt would do something to forward such an exploration.

Bishop CLIFFORD was of the same opinion. He hoped that the Society would vote a sum of money for the purpose of digging out some of these pits. He thought that it was likely that interesting discoveries would be made. If they had ever been occupied by men, some considerable remains of this occupation would be discovered.

Mr. HUNT said that he could not agree with Mr. Kerslake in believing that these pits were the remains of a vast city. He was sorry to hold an opinion in such a matter which was contrary to that to which Mr. Scarth and the Bishop evidently strongly inclined. He believed that these pits were the remains of a series of quarries, dug for chert and sandstone, with which to make grindstones and other implements.

Bishop CLIFFORD said that, if such were the case, the ex-

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cavations would be carried on with more regularity, and that there would be greater space between the pits.

Mr. HUNT could not agree with that opinion. The very fact that the spaces between the pits were so small was evidence that, taken as a whole, these pits were not the remains of human habitations. The roofs would meet, and where would the streets be? Some of the pits were not very large, but others were far larger than any hut-circles, which he had ever seen.

Rev. Prebendary SCARTH was of opinion that the appearance of the pits, as a whole, denoted human habitation, for he had seen the remains of villages which had been deserted, and they looked very like these pits. He hoped that excavations would be made.

Mr. HUNT said that though he was strongly of opinion that the pits, as a whole, were not the remains of human habitation, he would by no means say that none were so. Indeed his theory that they were quarries in itself implied that there were dwellings for the quarrymen and men who worked the chert and sandstone taken up out of these holes. He should be glad to see an investigation made by digging into some of the holes, taking some large and some small ones, some in one part and some in another for experiment. He did not think that the Society could afford much for such a purpose. He hoped that a subscription would be made and a Committee appointed for the work, and that before anything was touched competent scientific advice would be taken.

Bishop CLIFFORD agreed that this would be the best way to undertake the matter, and said that Mr. Wilkinson would be happy to do anything in his power to forward the scheme. He thought that the Committee should be to some extent composed of gentlemen in the neighbourhood.

Mr. KERSLAKE read several more extracts from his pamphlet.

In accordance with the wishes of the Meeting, a Committee has been formed, consisting largely of gentlemen living near Penpits, with Mr. Wilkinson as Secretary, for the purpose of

exploration, and several subscriptions have been received towards the expense. Some of the Committee wished to begin work in the autumn of 1878, but Mr. Hunt persuaded them to stop until the spot had been visited by Mr. W. Boyd Dawkins, F.R.S., and Rev. H. H. Winwood. Mr. Dawkins kindly made a survey of the pits on Jan. 1, 1879, and drew up a Report, and made some sections, and added a few useful practical hints for the guidance of the workers. The Secretary has not yet received any Report from the Exploration Committee. The Report of Mr. W. B. Dawkins is as follows :

### **Preliminary Report on the Pen Pits at Pen Selwood.**

I. Having been requested by the Rev. W. Hunt, on behalf of the Somerset Archæological and Natural History Society, to undertake the conduct of the exploration of the Pen Pits, I have the honour to lay before the Exploration Committee the following results of a preliminary survey, made on the 1st January, under the guidance of the Revs. H. H. Winwood and T. W. Wilkinson, of the ground to the east and south-east of Pen Selwood Church.

II. The geological structure of Pen Selwood, in the district examined, is noted in the accompanying vertical section.<sup>9</sup> A stiff blue clay (the Kimmeridge) forms the bottoms of the valleys, and the hills are composed of shelly sands and sandstones, containing layers of chert in their middle and upper portions. Out of this have been carved by the streams the two winding spurs or promontories, on which are situated the pits which we visited.

III. The pits are excavated in the upper and middle parts, and not in the lower, where we did not observe any hard sandstone or chert in the sections.

IV. They vary considerably in size and depth, the larger ones being on the higher grounds, while the smaller are centered mainly in the lower.

(9). This section was not intended for publication but for use on the ground by the Committee.

V. From this irregularity it may be inferred that they have not been primarily designed for habitations, for which the larger would be wholly unfitted. In this respect they differ from all the hut circles which have come under my notice, such, for example, as those of Worle hill and Pen Knowle, in Somerset.

VI. Their irregularity, however, agrees with that observable in similar depressions resulting from old mining operations, in which a shaft was sunk down to the layer sought for, and when all the material within reach of the bottom of the shaft was removed the shaft was forsaken, and another sunk by its side. This process has covered large areas in the Weald of Sussex with depressions similar to those under consideration. It is, therefore, probable that the latter have had a like origin, and that they are the partially filled up excavations made in search of certain layers of stone.

VII. At the present time the hard siliceous layers of stone in the middle and upper parts are dug for road mending. The largest pits are those in which the thickness of material to be penetrated before the bottom of the chert and sandstone is reached is the greatest, whilst those are the smallest where the superincumbent sand is the thinnest. Consequently the former are on the higher ground, and the latter on the slopes. It is said that querns and grindstones have been found in the neighbourhood, made of material found in these strata. On this point the local committee will doubtless be able to collect valuable information.

VIII. Were these depressions designed for habitation they would be smaller, and more uniform in size and shape. Nevertheless, it is by no means improbable that some of the smaller may have been used for this purpose.

IX. I should, therefore, suggest that the local committee explore one or two of the smaller, which might be done with little expense. One of middle size also should be explored down to the bottom, according to the plan in the appendix.

X. A cursory survey of the fine camp of Castle Orchard, the

outer fosse of which is close to the pits, reveals traces of ancient habitations. Those on the citadel should be carefully explored to the bottom, according to the above-mentioned plan.

XI. It must be noted that this camp may, or may not be, of the same age as some of the Pen Pits. This doubtful question will probably be decided by the digging.

XII. It must also be observed that stones from strata similar to those in which the above pits are sunk have been used by man for various purposes, from the remotest times. The Palaeolithic hunters of Wookey Hole, and the Palaeolithic dwellers round Chard and Axminster, employed chert for their rudely-chipped implements. Querns also and scythe stones have been manufactured at various periods out of the same layers of rock. Since the art of mining was practised in the Neolithic Age, it is by no means improbable that some of these pits may have been sunk for the sake of the chert, just as those of Cissbury Camp, near Worthing, and of Grimes Graves, near Thetford, were sunk in the chalk by neolithic miners to obtain flint for the manufacture of implements.

XIII. The district round Pen Selwood, we must remark, in conclusion, is full of traces of ancient occupation, and those mentioned above are a small fraction only of a large series which claims the attention of the Society.

XIV. In carrying out the exploration it will give me great pleasure to aid the committee by the loan of instruments for making plans, or by any other means within my power.

W. BOYD DAWKINS.

The Society owes Mr. Dawkins great thanks for this able Report, and for the kindness with which, in spite of his numerous important engagements, he agreed to the request of the Secretary.

On arriving at Stourton the party sat down to luncheon in the Inn.

The PRESIDENT, in proposing the health of Messrs. H. Dyne and W. Müller, spoke of the kind way in which these gentlemen



had devoted themselves to the arrangements for the Meeting, and the able manner in which they had filled the office of Local Secretaries.

A few other complimentary speeches were made, and the company then visited

### *Stourhead,*

the seat of Sir H. A. Hoare, Bart. The museum of antiquities collected by Sir R. C. Hoare and Mr. Cunnington had been removed to Devizes. The library contains many rare books. The house is full of fine pictures and costly and beautiful works of art. The most noteworthy things are, perhaps, a picture of Elijah raising the Widow's Son, Rembrandt; a Virgin and Child, by And. del Sarto; a beautiful series of drawings, by Canaletti, of scenes in Venice, and the celebrated "Sixtus V. Cabinet."

In the gardens is the High Cross of Bristol, set up in that city in the 14th century, and taken down in the 18th. It is a rich and beautiful work, and ought to be standing in its own city. Its presence at Stourton adds no beauty to the place, as it is so strangely incongruous; it is a continual reproach to Bristol. A scheme was set afoot a short time ago to restore this exquisite monument to the city, but it has lately been announced that this is abandoned on account of the great difficulty and risk in moving so many small fragments of stone and piecing them together. To any one who has seen the triumph of skill and ingenuity exhibited in the restoration of the shrine of S. Amphibalus in the Abbey at S. Albans, this excuse will seem trivial enough.

After spending some time in the house and grounds, the party returned to Bruton, and the meeting closed.

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