

Thursday : Excursion.

A LARGE party assembled, according to agreement,
at the

Parish Church of Pitney,

but the Members of the Society were not allowed to examine the interior, the doors being locked, and the keys having been taken away. Of this Church, MR. PARKER observed, it has a modern Gothic chancel, in tolerably good imitation of the old style, but not satisfactory; the nave and tower are of the latter part of the fourteenth century, probably of the time of Richard II., the style being a transition between the Decorated and the Perpendicular. The interior of the Church is still disfigured with donkey boxes, in all the bad taste of the last century.

From hence the company proceeded to a field in the occupation of Mr. Chambers, where the foundation of what seemed to be a Roman wall, had been brought to light, and a quantity of pottery, Roman and Romano-British, had been dug up, together with two or three pieces of Samian ware. Here, also, were found some of the large heavy roof tiles, with the nails in them by which they had been made fast. This neighbourhood, commanding a most extensive and magnificent view, would seem to have been thickly populated during the time of the Roman occupation, as in almost every field, fragments of pottery and tesserae are being continually ploughed up.

The excursionists then proceeded to the site of the Roman villa—known as the

Bitney Villa,

explored by Mr. Hasell many years ago, where the Rev. W. A. Jones, in conjunction with the Local Secretaries, had, on excavation, brought to light a beautiful tessellated floor not previously explored. Here MR. JONES gave a brief sketch of the arrangements of the Roman villas, and the details of that one in particular, the pavements and the foundations of many of the walls, of which had been laid open. The elaborate and costly ornamentation which everywhere prevailed in these Roman villas was referred to as a sure evidence of the quiet and peaceful possession which the Romans enjoyed in this country. It was not to be supposed any people would have laid down such elaborate tessellated pavements as that now before them, if they knew they were liable to be disturbed in the enjoyment of them. Mr. Jones also noticed the hypothesis advanced by the late Sir R. C. Hoare, that this villa was occupied by some man of eminence connected with the Mining Works on Mendip. This he did not himself consider at all probable. The distance was too great, and the explanation of the figures delineated in the pavement, on which the hypothesis was based, was described as altogether fanciful and untenable. From an examination of the tiles, of which the roof of the villa was composed, it was evident that while the greater part was covered with the thick heavy tiles from the lias in the neighbourhood, the thinner and lighter slates, which are not to be found nearer to this spot than Wiveliscombe, had also been used. The upper portion of the walls of the villa were no doubt composed of wood-work. Mr. Jones

also referred to the fragments of Ham-hill stone and other things which had evidently been acted upon by great heat, as a proof that the Villa had been destroyed by fire, probably during the time of the Saxon invasion. For more than one hundred years this locality had been the battle-field of the Romano-British, who were Christians, and the pagan Saxons. During that time possibly every vestige of Roman civilization was destroyed.

Before leaving the Pitney pavement, a vote of thanks was carried by acclamation to Mr. Fry, of Curry Rivel, for the zeal and energy with which he had directed and superintended the excavations.

The next point reached was

Low Ham,

with its Church and the ruins of the great manor house of the Stawells.

Low Ham Church is a curious and very perfect example of the revival of Gothic, in the time of James I. It exhibits a singular mixture of details of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, carefully copied and jumbled together as if on purpose to puzzle a tyro; windows with Decorated tracery, and the jambs devoid of all character. Perpendicular patterns, with Decorated scroll moulding in the abacus of the Perpendicular capital, and other anomalies. But it has a good paneled ceiling, and screen, and the general effect is very good. It is remarkable also, that there is not the slightest trace of Italian detail, although in Elizabethan houses, long before the date of this Church, classical columns and details are freely used. The founder and his wife are represented in a tomb at the east end of the north aisle, and their effigies are well preserved, with an inscription recording their good

deeds. The building is rendered peculiarly interesting, on account of its being in one sense, a copy of a mediæval Church. It is an instance of the attempt made early in the reign of Charles I., to revive the architecture of the middle ages. It was, in fact, a page in the history of this country, indicating the tendency of the High Church and Royalist party, as contrasted with the opposite leaning of the Puritan element in the National Church at that time. Without the knowledge, which local history supplied, the age which the architecture would have suggested, would have ante-dated the Church some centuries.

MR. PRANKERD here read an elaborate and detailed account of the funeral procession of Lord Stawell, who had died in this parish and was buried in Cothelstone Church.

Of the sumptuous mansion which Lord Stawell began to build but never completed, only bare walls and mounds of rubbish, covering a considerable extent of ground, remain to point out the site.

The Church of High Ham

was the next point of interest. High Ham Church is a fine structure in the usual Perpendicular style of the district, in good preservation, and is rendered more than usually valuable by having the date recorded in an inscription on the tomb of the rector, who re-built it, which gives the date of 1474. Dated examples should always be carefully sought for and recorded for the purpose of comparison with others, and as tests of the accuracy of the received chronology of architecture. Their details should also be closely examined, to endeavour to find more distinguishing marks between early and late Perpendicular than are at present recorded. We may say generally that

the older work is bolder and more masculine, the later work more shallow and feeble ; but this by no means holds true in all cases.

Before descending from the high ground the Natural History section of the Society explored the extensive excavations carried on in the marls of the New red sandstone for gypsum, found here in great quantities, and conveyed to Bridgwater to be manufactured into cement, &c.

A steep descent down Beer Hill brought the party into the alluvial plain, where the

Church of Othery,

lately restored at the expense of the Rev. Dr. Shipton, excited much interest and admiration.

Othery Church is a very remarkable one—cruciform in plan with an octagonal central tower ; originally built in the thirteenth century, but with great alterations in the fourteenth and fifteenth. The lower part of the tower is part of the original work, with the arches which carry it, and the very singular diagonal buttresses in the angles, formed by the junction of the transepts, with the church and chancel. On the south side of the chancel, close to the transept, is the well known and very singular low side window, which some people call a Lychnoscope, but as this name implies a theory now exploded, and as no three people ever can agree which is the Lychnoscope and which the Hagioscope, the use of these names only causes confusion. Opposite to this low window an opening is made through the buttress, which certainly might be to enable people to see a light placed in this window, but very few people, only those in a direct line with it could do this, for the transept comes in the way on the west side, and the

buttress on the east. It seems far more probable that it was the leper's window, to enable lepers to communicate without danger of infection to the congregation or to the priest who administered the consecrated wafer at the end of a cleft stick, the whole space from the window, through the opening to the outside of the buttress is only one foot. It must be remembered also that the faithful can communicate by the eye as well as by the other senses, and that lepers, congregated in the churchyard, could see the elevation of the host through the opening, provided that the priest stood there for that purpose. In some other examples there is a stone desk for a book by the side of the opening, and there was, no doubt, a chantry altar at that spot. In Othery Church there is also a squint, or oblique opening, from the south transept, directed to the same spot, and which does not appear to be directed to the high altar, though it might perhaps serve for that also; or if we must use the fanciful and newly invented technical names, this is an instance of a Hagioscope and a Lychnoscope combined in one; if this renders the description more intelligible.

The Saxon hamlet of

Aller,

the scene of the Danish viking, King Guthrum's baptism, after his defeat by King Alfred, when that monarch stood sponsor at the font, was next visited; and the way that led to it was indeed a delightful one, and the view especially from Turn Hill was surpassingly beautiful. Before the travellers lay Athelney, the great Alfred's retreat, when doubt and uncertainty, perplexity and misfortune, clouded his path. Of the Abbey that he founded there hardly remains a stone that can be identified, saving a few frag-

ments of encaustic tiles, and some sculptured bosses. On arriving at Aller the whole company was invited to partake of the sumptuous and abundant hospitality of Mrs. Hyde, which was thankfully accepted and duly acknowledged by the President and the Officials of the Society.

Aller Church.

Of this Church Mr. Parker observed that it was an interesting small Church, with two remarkable turrets; the nave is under repair, but the original open-timber roof of the end of the fourteenth century has been preserved. The most remarkable feature is, however, the western tower, which has very narrow aisles or wings, with roofs of solid ashlar stone, instead of the usual timber and slate, and flying buttresses to connect the two eastern angles with the arch of the nave; the western angles are strengthened one by the stone turret, the other by a bold diagonal buttress. The object of all this ingenious arrangement seems to be to widen the base of the tower, and enable it to carry a spire, although no spire has been built. The old font, of the twelfth century, is preserved in the garden of the rectory, and part of the rectory-house is of the fifteenth century, but much modernised. The font was pronounced by some to be even of as early a date as the Saxon period.

Here the proceedings of the Annual Meeting were formally brought to a close, votes of thanks having been unanimously passed to the General Secretaries, the Local Secretaries, Mr. Prankerd and Mr. Munkton, and to the President.
